

Electoral Commissions of SADC Countries (ECF)

2018 Briefing

Shastry Njeru
Research and Advocacy Unit

Historical and Political Contexts of Zimbabwe

1. Introduction & background

The 2018 elections will be the 11th since Independence in 1980. The consistency and steadfast timing of these elections suggest the existence of forms of advanced democracy enjoyed by a happy family who rely on clear rules of engagement. Yet out of these seemingly choreographed processes, elections have been disputed. The 2002 and the 2008 elections were historically and extremely violent and many people were killed, raped, tortured, displaced, etc. Property was destroyed and billions worth of investments were lost. From 2002 Zimbabwe has become a pariah state. The effects were felt in the economy as well as social life, in which the poor and the ordinary were the major losers. It is arguable that the global political agreement of 2009 between MDC formations and ZANU PF, and the government of national unity that followed, rescued the country from the certainty of collapsing into a failed state.

There are people who argue that, at the core of Zimbabwean politics, is a sustained ability to trade off elections against bad governance.¹ Elections result in serious allegations of electoral fraud, violence, rape, murder and displacement of people; all done to win the elections at all costs. While this has haunted the political terrain, this has also created the image of the electoral system as designed to steal elections on behalf of the incumbent. From the Registrar-General of Elections era to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, elections in Zimbabwe are deeply distrusted, both nationally and internationally.

This briefing paper reviews the political and historical context of the Zimbabwean election with a view of determining the contribution of this past to the electoral outcomes. We hypothesize that the 2018 electoral outcome will be a function of its immediate past and the broader national historical context. It is also evident that Zimbabwe, in common with other Southern African countries suffers under the

¹RAU (2012), *Bucking the Trend: Africa, Zimbabwe, Demand for Democracy, and Elections*. May 2012. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit.

legacy of Liberation Movements,² as well as been the most violent of the Southern African countries when it comes to elections.³

2. Historical context to elections in Zimbabwe

Never mind the shades of democracy purported in Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe conforms to what has been termed “dominant power politics”.⁴ Elections are used as a ‘procedural minimum’ strategy to legitimate regimes. During the liberation and height of the nationalist movement “one man one vote” was the mobilizing battle cry. Jonathan Moyo makes similar remarks on the importance of elections as a right. “*The right to vote has a historical significance in Zimbabwe which dates back to the struggle against colonialism for independence. How that right is being exercised in post- colonial Zimbabwe is a matter which should not be taken for granted.*”⁵

The system of elections in Zimbabwe are as old as the state itself. What is only different is the ways the right to participate in elections was extended to the generality of the people and gender. It started as a white privileged male vocation, which was then extended to white women, then to few propertied blacks and finally to the black majority-no wonder the “one man one vote” battle cry. The negotiated political settlement in 1979 ushered the generality of Zimbabwean population into an electoral winter season. Every election was considered as critical to the changing of their political fortunes. Thus in Zimbabwe elections, no matter how small, have been cut throat.

A review of the history explains why Zimbabwe is not a different a country from Rhodesia before it. The seizure of power by a white minority in 1965 in Rhodesia was to have long term effects on the current political system and the question of power. It would shape the next leader in the independent Zimbabwe, Mr. Robert Mugabe, to be a “quintessential purveyor of power politics”, capable of using his presence at the apex of state power to deploy either the “bullet as well as ballot” in the shaping the way the country was subsequently governed. Thus, Mugabe then took all the power upon himself and solely had absolute discretion on political

² Bratton, M., & Masunungure, E (2011), *The Anatomy of Political Predation: Leaders, Elites and Coalitions in Zimbabwe, 1980-2010*. January 2011. Research Paper 09. Development Leadership Program.

³ RAU (2016), *Are former liberation movements inherently violent as governments?* February 2016. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit

⁴ Carothers, T (2002), *The End of the Transition Paradigm*, *Journal of Democracy*, 13:1, 5-21.

⁵ Moyo, J (1992), *Voting for democracy: a study of electoral politics in Zimbabwe*, University of Zimbabwe Publications

decisions. Mugabe would be seen “surrounded by a phalanx of uniformed security forces...and when challenged he did not hesitate to apply his self-proclaimed “degrees in violence” against his real or imagined enemies”.⁶ Up to 2008 Zimbabwe experienced a litany of political violence, characterised by electoral violence in 2000, 2001, 2002, and the 2008 delivering the most violent election in the history of elections in Zimbabwe.

From 2000 onwards, Mugabe’s regimes were most militant and relentless in their violent pursuit of their goal of power. In 2002, even Mugabe described his cabinet as a “political war cabinet” during swearing in. One of Mugabe’s minister in 2008 told the electorate that the “bullet is mightier than the ballot”. Mugabe himself made electoral choices impossible when he remarked during a rally that “Only God, who appointed me, will remove me - not the MDC, not the British. Only God will remove me!”. This shaped the context and possibly the electoral outcomes as the individuals and institutions jostled to please Robert Mugabe, even when it meant to rig an election or pulverization of the opposition through violence.

The power politics in Zimbabwe provided the tenor of violence in the country during the period leading to any elections. The ruling elite learnt to deploy coercive methods to deal with opposition, which the opposition counteracted, often resulting in violence. In practice, ZANU PF and its political allies have been the major purveyors of violence as a tool.⁷ “The main perpetrators have been ZANU-PF supporters, so called “war veterans,” youth militia and state security forces, including the police and the army”.⁸ In a similar way, the military was deployed in the 1980s to Matabeleland and Midlands provinces to destroy ZAPU of Joshua Nkomo and its supporters.⁹ The emergence of Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) as a strong contender for power shifted attention to them, increasing the intensity of violence. Human Rights Watch reports that the “overwhelming majority of victims of violence during the country’s most recent elections in 2000, 2002 and 2005 were officials and members of the MDC, their supporters and anyone perceived to support the party, including ordinary Zimbabweans and civil

⁶ Bratton. M (2014), *Power Politics in Zimbabwe*. London: Lynne Rienner.

⁷ CSVr (2009), *Subliminal Terror? Human rights violations and torture in Zimbabwe during 2008.. June 2009*. Johannesburg: Center for Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

⁸ Human Rights Watch (2008), *All Over Again. Human Rights Abuses and Flawed Electoral Conditions in Zimbabwe’s Coming General Elections*. A Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper. March 2008. NEW YORK: HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH.

⁹ CCJP & LRF (1997), *Breaking the Silence-Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and Midlands 1980 to 1988*, HARARE: CATHOLIC COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE IN ZIMBABWE & LEGAL RESOURCES FOUNDATION.

society activists”.¹⁰ At the same time, civil society organisations and international organisations report also of “extrajudicial executions, torture, beatings and abductions—the vast majority committed by supporters of the ruling party or government agents” .¹¹ These political challenges were reported to the SADC and international community.

The years preceding to the 2008 elections were characterised by relentless intimidation of citizens by an intolerant regime. In the same breath the economy essentially collapsed and the popularity of the MDC grew. As Human rights Watch commented, “*Attacks on opposition politicians, civil society activists and journalists, use of unnecessary or excessive force by police forces in quelling peaceful demonstrations, and the use of repressive legislation have remained serious human rights concerns*”¹².

So many things happened from 2007 to June 2008. However, the pre-March 2008 elections conditions were comparatively less violent. What became a serious cause for concern were “the serious flaws that marked those elections and the ...partisan and inadequately prepared electoral commission, concerns about pre-poll rigging, unequal access to the state media, and government restrictions on the rights to freedom of association, assembly and expression...ZANU-PF supporters were implicated in serious incidents of violence and intimidation against MDC activists, and the use of food and agricultural inputs as political tools against the opposition” (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Despite the violence, ZANU-PF lost both in the House of Assembly and presidential elections, but the MDC-T however failed to secure the constitutional 50+1% and a run off was called in terms of the law.

Zimbabwe Electoral Commission set the election on 27 June 2008 and ZANU PF put in motion a military style *Operation Makavhotera Papi?* (Where did you place your vote?). The countryside was cordoned off, torture bases set up, and ZANU-PF supporters, government officials, “war veterans” and state security forces conducted brutal daily “re-education” meetings in which they beat and at times tortured local residents to force them to denounce the MDC and swear allegiance to ZANU-PF. Eldred Masunungure writes “*by all accounts, the inter-election period was one of the most traumatic and abnormal political situations in the country*”. Richard Joseph’s observation in February 2008 that “*the notion of an electoral process in Zimbabwe with Mugabe at the controls can only be described as Orwellian*” was more apt in respect of the run-off election. Terence Ranger sums up the ‘abnormal’ period:

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch (2008) *ibid* p11

¹¹ Human Rights Watch (2008), *ibid* p10.

¹² Human Rights Watch (2008), *ibid* p11.

It is hard to comprehend how abnormal the situation in Zimbabwe has been between the March and June elections. Zimbabwe has had no parliament although all the MPs have been elected. The new parliamentarians have not met to elect a Speaker. Several MDC MPs have been arrested on charges ranging from child abduction to organising violence; many others are in hiding¹³.

This is further described by Craig Timberg:

In three months between the 29th March vote and the June 27 runoff election, ruling-party militias under the guidance of 200 senior army officers battered the Movement for Democratic Change, bringing the opposition party's network of activists to the verge of oblivion. By election day, more than 80 opposition supporters were dead, hundreds were missing, thousands were injured and hundreds of thousands were homeless. Morgan Tsvangirai, the party's leader, dropped out of the contest and took refuge in the Dutch Embassy¹⁴.

ZANU PF did this as a result of its first experience of defeat and the narrow victory even in its stronghold areas such as Mashonaland central. The inroads of MDC-T into ZANU PF strongholds needed to be curbed and violence was the only way. A review of the violence that took place in 2008 pointed to organised violence and torture.¹⁵ Eyewitnesses implicated by name local headsmen, ZANU-PF councilors, MPs and supporters who worked closely with senior ranking army officers, police and prison officers, and agents from the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO). In fact, government institutions, particularly the security services under the auspices of the Joint Operations Command (JOC), saw increased presence of the Zimbabwe National Army and other security wings of government deployed in rural areas and worked with “war veterans” who they armed with shortguns and rifles and the rural Zimbabwe became the “coming of anarchy” with no-go areas for opposition created in Mashonaland East, West and Central. The police followed by arresting, beating and torturing members of the opposition and the MDC-T supporters were not spared. ZANU PF pursued an

¹³ Rnager T. (2008), *Will normality return to Zimbabwe?* *The East African (Kenya)* 7 July 2008.

¹⁴ Timberg, C. (2008), *The Washington Post*, 5 July 2008.

¹⁵ See again CSVV (2009), *Subliminal Terror? Human rights violations and torture in Zimbabwe during 2008.. June 2009. Johannesburg: Center for Study of Violence and Reconciliation.*

scorched-earth policy to rid the rural areas of any real or imagined supporters of MDC-T. Tsvangirai had to withdraw from the race, but ZEC went ahead and conducted the election which Mugabe won “resoundingly”.

The extent of violence alarmed the regional organisations, including the SADC and the AU, who saw the need to address the political crisis and violence in Zimbabwe. The then Zambian President Levy Mwanawasa was forthright in his condemnation of political violence in Zimbabwe; while other regional leaders like former South African President Mbeki refused to acknowledge the crisis in Zimbabwe even after receiving a revealing report about the extent of violence from his own generals.

However, it is when reports of concern about the political crisis started coming from different quarters, including the United Nations, the pressure on the government to find a lasting solution to the Zimbabwean crisis increased. The result of these efforts was the Government of National Unity (GNU) between ZANU PF and the MDC formations which was consummated in 2009. Notwithstanding its weaknesses, the GNU blew a breath of fresh air to a beleaguered nation with a battered and wounded society and its economy. The GNU provided the political parties the possibility of working with others and to be tolerant, but it also allowed ZANU PF time to recover and in the elections that came after the expiry of the GNU it was able to stage an unbelievable landslide come back. However, many still think that 2013 harmonised elections were a master rig, even though the elections were conducted in a peaceful manner.¹⁶

The 31 July 2013 harmonised elections in Zimbabwe included presidential elections and elections for both houses of parliament (the National Assembly and the Senate), provincial councils, and local councils. This is the second time all elections were held on the same day, the 2008 elections being the first. The practice has now been written into the 2013 constitution. The partially directly elected province councils were first introduced by the new Constitution and the electoral system was changed by the introduction of elements of proportional representation¹⁷. The elections were conducted in terms of the Electoral Act, which Mr. Mugabe amended using presidential powers even when the parliament

¹⁶ Matyszak, D.A (2013), *Odd Numbers? June 2013. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit; Matyszak, D. M (2013), Fairly Fair. The 2013 elections. November 2013. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit; Matyszak, D. A (2014), An examination of the Performance of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) in Managing the 2013 Elections in Zimbabwe. December 2014. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit;*

¹⁷ Vollan, K. (2014), *The Elections in Zimbabwe on 31 July 2013. A NORDEM Special Report,*

was still in session. The amendments were not controversial though. The harmonised elections needed to elect a senate, house of assembly, the councils and the president of the republic.

The voter registration process and the voter register itself were subject to heavy criticism. In its transitional articles the new Constitution left the responsibility for the voter register to the Registrar General for this first election before transferring it to the ZEC. The ZEC would supervise the process but in practice the work was carried out by the Registrar General. The Constitution stated that there should be a one month special registration drive ahead of the election. This was carried out from 10 June to 9 July 2013. The process was criticised for the slow performance in the cities and for a lack of transparency. 6,187,003 names were on the voters roll for the 2013 elections, but there were serious criticism of the roll¹⁸

The political environment appeared to have significantly improved compared to the previous years. More so, there were no areas where certain candidates could not move freely or where candidates were not previously permitted to campaign. However, the state media remained patently partisan. State TV and radio were extremely biased in their coverage of the campaign and the State TV had in practice monopoly on political reporting. There were newspapers supporting both ZANU PF and the MDC formations. The Herald, a government newspaper, was mainly a spokes channel for ZANU PF and not the government as a whole. The media situation as a whole did not provide for a level playing field for all contestants in the elections.

Political violence had been considerably reduced in the period leading up to these elections compared to other elections held after 2000. All observer missions agreed that the campaign and the elections were held in a peaceful environment. A Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee (JOMIC) had been established by the GPA as a tool for reconciliation and for creating an environment conducive for future elections. They were able to build up capacity in all provinces before the elections and the three main parties operated in joint teams in order to resolve political tension and prevent violence. This probably contributed to a calm election environment.

The harmonised elections of 2013 were won by ZANU PF resoundingly and SADC's accepted the outcome, therefore marking the end of the brand of

¹⁸ RAU (2013), *An Audit of Zimbabwe's 2013 Voters' Roll. July 2013. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit; RAU (2013), Key statistics from the June 2013 Voters' Roll. Governance Unit, Research & Advocacy Unit. 5th July 2013. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit;*

opposition politics that had played out since the 1990s. The ZANU(PF) victory in the 2013 elections was intimately linked to the remaking of state institutions and political parties, and the increasing importance of patronage economies. Explanations for the result offered in the immediate aftermath of the elections focused on the extent to which they were considered ‘fair’ – most observers agreed they were ‘free’ in the sense that there was little in the way of overt violence. Clearly there were extensive violations of the Constitution and the Electoral Act, though, even this does not tell the whole story.

The most detailed analysis of voting patterns shows just how difficult it is to read the effects of fraud of various kinds on the results, and cautions against any direct equation of abuses with ZANU(PF)’s successes .¹⁹ The information available is inconclusive, though some patterns are nonetheless clear: substantial numbers of voters were turned away and bussed in in the MDC- T stronghold of Harare; ‘assisted voting’, amounting to coerced voting for ZANU(PF), occurred in some rural constituencies; and very substantial increases in voter turnout correlate with ZANU(PF) victories in rural Mashonaland .

ZANU(PF)’s success was in part owed to its ability to block reform, use ideological appeals, and unite what had been a divided party, as well as its intimidation of civic activists and use of the memories of past violence. ZANU(PF) actuated its ‘social base’ well, which was rooted in ‘a combination of the ideological legacies of the liberation struggle, the persistent memories of colonial dispossession, and the land reform process’, and as having been ‘renewed and expanded within context of the radical changes in Zimbabwe’s political economy since 2000’. In addition key elements of this social base was found among smallholders who received land under the *Fast Track* land reform programme, the fast- growing informal mining sector, and the urban informal sector. Weaknesses in the MDCs were also profound. They included ‘underdeveloped organisational structures, lack of leadership accountability, and a growing culture of intra-party violence’, alongside ideological weakness owed to too easily ceding a radical redistributive agenda and the discourses of sovereignty and patriotic history to ZANU(PF).

3. 2018 elections

The 2018 elections in Zimbabwe have been described in many ways: “watershed elections”, “elections in our lifetime”, “apocalyptic elections” and so forth. This

¹⁹ RAU (2014), "Numbers out of Tune? An examination of the vote in Harmonized July 2013 Election." Full Report. Governance Programme, Research and Advocacy Unit [RAU] 10th April 2014, Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit

points to the depth of the interest in the elections among Zimbabweans. The rallies turnouts and the intensities of campaigns point to the zero-sum-ness of these elections. The 2018 Harmonised elections are less ordinary and lot different from the rest of Zimbabwean elections since independence. Thus, these elections have several potential outcomes, including of turning the clock of democratization and throwing the country back to the Hobbesian state of nature of “war of all, against all”, or ushering the country into the bliss of democracy.

Given, everyone in Zimbabwe who believes in elections thinks that at the end of the 2018 elections, the elections’ sanctity would rule and democracy would win. There are promises though. The incumbent President promised a new dispensation in which he has “preached peace” in some quarters. By percentage points, Mr. Mnangagwa’s regime is starkly different from Mr. Mugabe’s. The cases of overt violence have been surprisingly low, but covert-nocturnal ones have been reported widely. Various factors are driving the electoral process in Zimbabwe at this time including the parties and party system, voter participation and turnouts, electoral trends and dynamic, issues and controversies emerging in the preparations for these elections. Zimbabwe is a typical multi-party society where traditional parties usually are joined by “elections” parties-those that emerge during elections seasons and disappear immediately after the results are announced. In theory, the system in Zimbabwe is such that any party has an equal chance of controlling the government separately or in a coalition. This has caused a mushrooming of parties and this election has 127 parties and independent candidates and 22 presidential candidates registered. As time ticks towards 30 July the figures of those attending at main political parties’ rallies have been increasing, reducing the election to two-horse race. However, the election controversy has been around the technical side of delivering the elections, not on the “politics” of the process.

4. Political context of Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe’s 2018 harmonized elections will take place against a backdrop of 18 years of political crisis. These were the years of severe and constrained political space; a series of elections characterized by violence, and widely judged as flawed. The national institutions were weakened and the public confidence in the credibility of the electoral system to deliver a democratic outcome was weakened. The elections will also take place following a coup leading to the removal of Robert Mugabe from power after 37 years and the appointment of Emmerson Mnangagwa as president.

There is a message of hope for a new future from all the Zimbabweans. The country's political climate changed erratically since last November. But it will take a lot of effort to confidence in the people that these elections can usher in a new democratic dispensation. Thus, efforts will be required to restore the public's faith in the country's institutions. This required the 2018 harmonized elections the courage of breaking with the past. ZEC needed to be inclusive, transparent and accountable and this it could do if it allowed reforms and adhere to the letter of the law and create a result of a peaceful election "consistent with the SADC guidelines, which call for elections to be peaceful, but also "free and fair, transparent, and accountable". The signs to date are not encouraging.

There are important improvements in the political environment, but the fairness questions of the process still linger. In addition, the questions about trust need to be addressed beyond mere promises. Zimbabwe's history has been characterised by violence. The current government assumed power not through a normal election process but through a coup, and hence a lot is required to address the widespread perception of fairness. This should be premised on the credibility of the upcoming elections and that responsibility is squarely of political parties and candidates running for office, the institutions mandated to provide oversight, and all those who vote on election day.

However, there are several positive developments have occurred since the last polls to vote in a national election in 2013.

- **Committing to Credible Elections** – President Mnangagwa has publicly and repeatedly committed to holding credible elections. He signed the AU Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. These represent important departures from the past and the conduct of the former president when it came to elections.
- **Improvements in the Political Climate** –Zimbabweans claim that the country's political climate has improved, with opposition parties already holding rallies around the country and citizens expressing their political views more freely. E.g. Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Alliance held a June 5 rally in central Harare and at the same time the police denied a permit on the same day for a competing ZANU-PF rally to avert clashes.
- **Welcoming International Observers** – President Mnangagwa has allowed a broad range of international organizations to observe elections in Zimbabwe, including many that were previously prevented from doing so. Some organisations received accreditation

to observe the May 19-29 inspection process when the law does not require accreditation of international observers prior to the proclamation of elections.

- **Creating a Fresh Voters Roll** – ZEC prepared a fresh Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) process, which resulted in more than 5.3 million Zimbabweans registering to vote. Notwithstanding its accuracy, this was a good move. A review of the 2013 voters roll shows a clear pattern of over-registration in rural areas, under-registration in urban areas and among young voters, and the presence of a large number of names of deceased persons still registered. The reputation of the ZEC could have been enhanced by the successful administration of this process.
- **Enhancing Citizen Access to the Inspection Process** –the ZEC established a mechanism by which registered voters can verify their registration information via mobile phones and a website in addition to in-person visits to inspection centres.
- **ZEC Outreach and Communications** – The ZEC is engaging constructively with both political parties and civic organizations. It meets with political parties on a regular basis and civil society organizations
- **Barring Traditional Leaders from Partisan Politics** – Traditional leaders have been accused of engaging in partisan politics to benefit the ruling party. The 2013 Constitution prohibits partisan politics. The High Court ruled on May 16 that all traditional leaders must refrain from engaging in partisan politics.
- **Reducing Opportunities for Multiple Voting** – There were concerns about individuals voting multiple times in Zimbabwe. Under the previous ward-based voters roll system, every voters' name appeared on the voters roll for each polling station in the ward. The new polling station-based voters roll system, mandated by the 2013 Constitution, requires voters to cast their ballots at assigned polling stations. Implementation of the system will not allow voter's name to appear on the voters roll not more than one polling station and the number of ballot papers supplied should tally with number of voters for that polling station.
- **Enacting a Political Party Code of Conduct** – Members of the ruling and opposition parties represented in parliament, together with ZEC, agreed to strengthen the existing code of conduct, which was included in the Electoral Amendment Act, enacted on May 28, 2018.

Political parties are required to inform their members about the code of conduct and to initiate disciplinary measures against members who fail to comply with the code. Both national and provincial multiparty liaison committees have been tasked with monitoring and resolving disputes related to the code of conduct.

- **Improving the Integrity of Assisted Voting** – The issue of assisted voting was a serious problem during the 2013 harmonized elections. Under the Electoral Amendment Act, voters can now select a person of their choosing to assist them, as opposed to being required to have the police and election officials do so, reducing concerns that the secrecy of their votes will be compromised.

Nonetheless, there are still many issues outstanding.

1. This includes the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the Electoral Act and other legislation on the administration of electoral processes. The legislative framework must provide clear guidelines on the conduct of elections. In addition, the legislative framework should be aligned and admissible in the courts of law. The law must allow for the exercise of bill of rights without conflict.

Laws pending Alignment or Reform

1. Enabling law on diaspora vote - Section 67 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe provides the right to vote to all Zimbabweans regardless of their location.
2. Law on the enforceability of the Code of Conduct for Political Parties and Candidates.
3. Law on the role of traditional leaders in electoral processes and governance.
4. Law on voter education that allows for continuous voter education and civic education by ZEC and other stakeholders.
5. Laws inhibiting ZEC independence, i.e., Section 192(6), 9, 12.
6. Laws on access to justice through the Electoral Court, Section 160 of the Electoral Act. Section 183 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe demands the court to be an independent court.

The environmental framework

The political environment refers to a conducive operating space for the Election Management Body (EMB), political parties, candidates and citizens in general. The political environment should guarantee fundamental freedoms, intimidation and violence should be absent. ***The state-society relations***

Freedom of movement is essential for a neutral political environment. The November 2017 military intervention in Zimbabwe has created questions on whether freedom of movement and association can be guaranteed. It created uncertainty. The presence of the military in civilian life limits the freedoms of citizens. The State has not guaranteed citizens that the military will refrain from interfering in civilian affairs before, during and after the harmonised elections.

Equal Access to Media

An independent, impartial media that affords equal access to all political parties and candidates is necessary for a free and fair election. Even with few days before the elections, the state media continues to show bias on behalf of the ruling party.

Preparedness of ZEC

ZEC has a 5year strategic plan which details objectives, targets, gaps and opportunities. ZEC's strategic plan (2016- 2020) has not been fully achieved. As the 2018 elections approach, questions arise regarding the extent to which ZEC has achieved some of the objectives defined in its strategic plan. ZEC has failed to adequately plan for factors influencing the electoral environmental. Section 155(1) mandates the State to ensure elections are peaceful, free and fair.