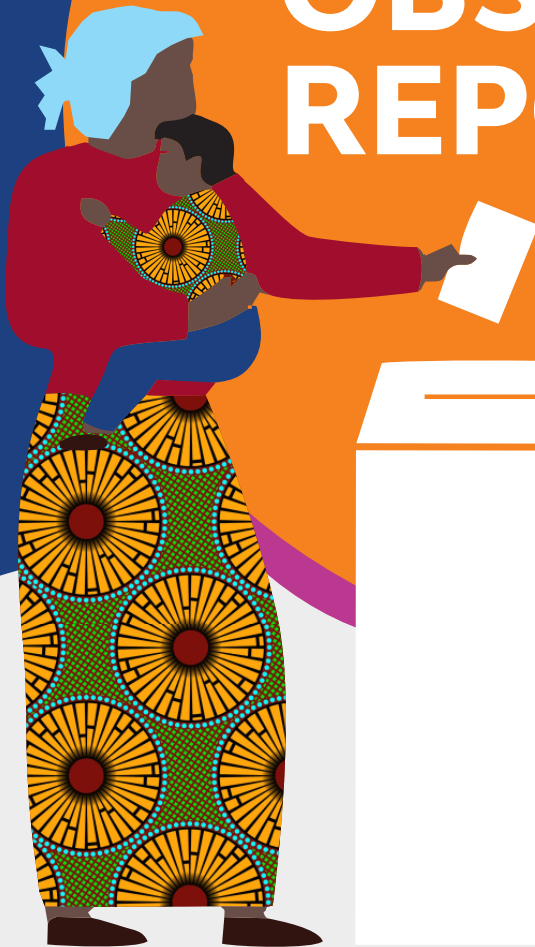




Zimbabwe
Gender
Commission



2023 ELECTIONS GENDER OBSERVATORY REPORT



December 2023



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Acronyms

BVR	Biometric Voter Registration
CCC	Citizens Coalition for Change
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CPRW	Convention on the Political Rights of Women
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DEO	District Elections Officer
GBV	Gender Based Violence
IEC	Information Education and Communication
LA	Local Authority
MDC-T	Movement for Democratic Change
NA	National Assembly
PR	Proportional Representation
PWDs	Persons With Disabilities
PO	Presiding Officer
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
ZANU PF	Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front
ZEC	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
ZESN	Zimbabwe Election Support Network
ZGC	Zimbabwe Gender Commission
ZHRC	Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republic Police

Contents

Executive Summary	5
Foreword	7
1. Introduction and Background	8
2. Methodology and Scope	9
3. Gender and Zimbabwe's 2023 Elections: The Legal Framework	10
4. Pre-electoral findings	11
4.1. National mobile Biometric Voter Registration	11
4.2. Voter Education	12
4.3. Gender assessment of political party processes	15
4.4. Nomination Process	15
5. Council of Chiefs Elections	17
6. Polling Day	18
6.7. Gender Observatory Call Centre	23
7. Post-election monitoring findings	24
8. Gender analysis of election results	24
9. Recommendations	25
9.1. Zimbabwe Electoral Commission	25
9.2. Registrar General's Department	25
9.3. Civil Society Organisations	27
9.4. Political Parties	26
9.5. Parliament of Zimbabwe	26
9.6. Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission	27
9.7. Zimbabwe Gender Commission	27
10. Gallery	28

Executive Summary

The Zimbabwe Gender Commission, through the 2023 Gender Observatory conducted a long-term election observation exercise from March 2023 to August 2023. The Gender Observatory serves as an institutional mechanism that monitors the fulfilment of gender equality goals throughout the electoral cycle, ensuring equitable participation for all demographic groups. Findings from this report reveal that despite having a robust legal framework supporting equal opportunities in politics, the path to achieving true gender equality in Zimbabwe's political realm remains intricate.

The methodology employed for the 2023 Gender Observatory involved long-term electoral observation, field visits, structured data collection tools, and one-on-one interviews with relevant key informants. The work covered all electoral processes, including the Biometric Voter Registration Process, Primary elections, Nomination Court Process, Campaigns, Voter education, the Polling process and the pre-election phase.

Monitoring of the National Biometric Voter Registration exercise revealed that the process was beneficial especially to those communities in rural hard-to-reach areas. However, challenges noted included power issues, registrants being turned away due to lack of required documentation, shortage of stationery and limited availability of disability-friendly infrastructure.

The work of the 2023 Gender observatory further assessed internal political party process such as the candidate selection process. Findings revealed that candidate selection processes utilised by different political parties were not conducive for increasing women's participation as political parties did not have measures in place for facilitating increased women participation.

The nomination court process saw lower levels of participation by women, youths, and persons with disabilities compared to the previous election, which could be attributed to the high nomination court fees disproportionately affecting these vulnerable groups. With regards to political party campaigns, it was noted that political party campaign messages were gender neutral. Furthermore, the demanding nature of political party campaign periods was found to disadvantage women due to their multiple roles in society. Female candidates faced several challenges during the campaigning stage which included resource challenges, sexist language from male opponents, lack of financial support from political parties for campaigning and security concerns due to threats and intimidation.

The Council of Chiefs elections, marked the first elections for the 2023 electoral period with findings revealing that the process was male-dominated, and the selection process, which heavily relies on social capital and consensus among Chiefs, posed a challenge for potential female chiefs due to their lack of social networks and traditional views questioning their legitimacy as community leaders.

The harmonised elections were conducted on the 23rd of August 2023 and one of the major findings from the election monitoring exercise was the delays in the opening of polling stations

due to non-availability of the ballot papers, resulting in night voting which had negative implications on vulnerable groups such as women and persons with disabilities. Also of note was the establishment of a Call Centre for receiving and responding to gender related complaints during the election process.

This report provides recommendations to ensure future elections are conducted in a gender responsive environment. Some of the recommendations include alignment of the Electoral Act to the Constitution, amendment of the Political Parties Finance Act to provide a framework that encourages participation of women through financial support to female candidates, reduction of nomination fees, as well as the need to provide proper sanitation and living conditions of electoral staff among others.



Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I present to you the 2023 Gender Observatory report. The Zimbabwe Gender Commission as part of its monitoring mandate undertook an exercise to monitor gender issues in the electoral cycle leading to the 2023 Harmonised Elections. The 2023 harmonised elections were the third elections to be held under the new Constitution of Zimbabwe which explicitly provides for equal participation of men and women in all spheres of life including politics and decision making. Sections 17, 56, 67 and 80 of the Zimbabwean Constitution provide elaborate provisions to this effect. However, findings from this report reveals that the 2023 elections reflected lack of compliance with these constitutional provisions.

The findings detailed in this report are part of an extensive long-term monitoring of the 2023 Electoral processes that the Zimbabwe Gender Commission undertook covering Biometric Voter Registration, Nomination Court, Pre-election monitoring, polling and post-polling monitoring. This report therefore offers valuable insights into the gender issues which surrounded the electoral processes and political landscape in the run up to the 2023 Harmonised Election.

Through a meticulous analysis of the 2023 Harmonised Elections, we are confronted with alarming truth that women continue to face significant barriers in their pursuit for political office. Despite the considerable progress made in recent years, gender equality in electoral processes remains an elusive goal. The findings also highlight the need for immediate action to address the myriad of challenges that hinder women's participation in electoral processes.

Targeted measures to bridge the gender gap are therefore imperative. Moreover, this report serves as a call to all stakeholder's; political parties, civil society organisations and public institutions to unite in their commitment to dismantling the various persisting barriers to women's political participation and creating an enabling environment for women in politics. The need for political will by political parties in taking deliberate efforts to increase women's participation in line with the Constitution can never be over emphasised. This report will therefore serve as a useful tool and catalyst for dialogue, advocacy and action on gender and elections in Zimbabwe.

Key to this report are the policy recommendations proffered to multi-sectoral actors. I therefore call upon each one of us to take these recommendations seriously and ensure their full implementation as we work towards ensuring gender equality in political decision making.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to UN Women and UNDP through the ZIM-ECO partners (Embassies of France and Japan) for financial and technical support rendered towards the full operationalisation of the 2023 Gender Observatory. Without the support rendered, the Commission and the Gender Observatory's work around election monitoring and observation will not have been possible. I also extend my sincere appreciation to the members of the Gender Observatory for their insightful contributions and dedication throughout the electoral cycle. My heartfelt appreciation also goes to the Zimbabwe Gender Commission Commissioners and secretariat whose tireless efforts ensured the smooth running of the observatory and the production of this report.



M. Mukahanana-Sangarwe
Chairperson of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission

1. Introduction and Background

The Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) is one of the five Independent Commissions supporting democracy and established in terms of Section 245 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe. The Commission is further operationalised through the Zimbabwe Gender Commission Act (Chapter 10:31). Section 246 of the Constitution and the Zimbabwe Gender Commission Act outline the mandate and specific functions of the Commission and chief amongst these functions is to monitor gender issues and ensuring compliance with gender equality provisions espoused by the Constitution as well as regional and international normative frameworks on gender.

The Zimbabwe Commission takes a keen interest in elections as this is one of the many ways in which gender equality can be actualised. Therefore, electoral processes are key in the realisation of inclusive governance. Recognizing the importance of electoral processes in the fulfilment of gender equality commitments, the Zimbabwe Gender Commission, in fulfilment of its monitoring mandate, established the 2023 Gender Observatory to monitor gender issues in the 2023 electoral cycle. This marked the second election cycle where the Commission has established a Gender Observatory following the inaugural 2018 Gender Observatory.

Conceptualized as an institutional mechanism, the Gender Observatory monitors the fulfilment of agreed gender equality goals, targets and commitments throughout the entirety of the electoral cycle. Its overarching aim is to ensure equitable participation and representation for all, encompassing women, men, persons with disabilities, youth and other vulnerable groups within the democratic and governance landscape. Therefore the 2023 Gender Observatory was implemented with the following specific objectives;

- Provide an accountability mechanism for gathering evidence and producing disaggregated data on gender issues that is critical for informed policy advocacy.
- Capture and document women's experiences throughout the electoral cycle in the 2023 harmonized elections.
- Avail a responsive institutional mechanism on electoral violence against women as voters, candidates and election officials across the electoral cycle
- To offer a clear platform for coordination amongst various actors including the National Gender machinery, Chapter 12 Commissions, Government, Security sector and CSO's on gender responsive electoral processes.
- To uncover gaps, recommend to policy makers interventions and strategies to address identified gender disparities and monitor the implementation of these strategies.
- To carry out a gender analysis of the electoral process as part of strengthening democracy and governance processes.

To fulfil these objectives, the 2023 Gender Observatory was constituted from a cross section of key actors comprising Chapter 12 Commissions, Government Ministries, Civil Society Organisations, the Security Sector and Development Partners showing a collaborative commitment to achieving equitable and gender-responsive electoral processes in Zimbabwe.

2. Methodology and Scope

Long-term electoral observation was utilized to assess gender issues during the 2023 electoral period. It is critical to note that the Zimbabwe Gender Commission utilises the electoral cycle approach to monitor gender issues throughout the electoral cycle. To this end, pre-electoral processes were monitored on the basis of the Commission’s Constitutional mandate to monitor gender issues, however, election observation was employed during the polling process.

Monitoring and Observations of various electoral processes was conducted through field visits during the various electoral processes. Structured data collection tools were designed to identify pertinent gender issues throughout each electoral process. The data collections tools gathered both qualitative and quantitative data so as to have a holistic gendered analysis of the electoral process. One-on-one interviews were conducted with candidates from various political parties so as to understand internal political party dynamics with relation to equal participation of men and women in political processes. A total of 15 female candidates were interviewed drawn from Zanu-PF, CCC and MDC-T. These candidates were selected from the pool of women who were trained under the Gender Commission’s flagship Women Rise in Politics Programme. The 2023 Gender Observatory work covered the following electoral processes; Biometric Voter Registration Process, Nomination Court Process, Campaigns, Voter Education, Pre-Election environment, the Polling process and the pre-election phase. The table below shows coverage for these electoral processes-;

Election process	Provinces reached	Districts reached
National Mobile Biometric Voter Registration	Masvingo, Manicaland, Midlands, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, Mashonaland West, Bulawayo, Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South.	26 Districts and 115 BVR Centres
Nomination Court process	Matabeleland North, Manicaland, Midlands and Mashonaland West Provinces.	8 Districts
Pre-election monitoring	Masvingo, Manicaland, Midlands, Mashonaland East and Matabeleland North provinces.	10 Districts
Pre-polling, polling and post polling observation	All Provinces	35 Districts and 78 Polling Stations

3. Legal frameworks that support gender equality in electoral processes

International, Regional and National legal instruments are clear on the need for gender equality in electoral processes. Internationally, gender equality in electoral processes originates in the principles of non-discrimination and equal enjoyment of political rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Article 21 of UDHR states that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights enshrines the rights of all citizens to take part in the conduct of public affairs and to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors.

The Convention on the Political Rights of Women (CPRW) provides that women are entitled to vote, are eligible to stand for election, and may hold public office, all on equal terms with men. Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) calls upon State Parties to take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of a Country and, in particular to ensure women participate, on equal terms with men, the rights to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies.

On the regional front, Zimbabwe has ratified the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, of which article 13 states that every citizen shall have the right to participate freely in the government of his country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives in accordance with the provisions of law.

The Constitution of Zimbabwe also enshrines the principles of equality and non-discrimination in Section 56. Section 56 (2) states that "women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres." Section 56 (3) goes further by articulating that no individual should be treated unfairly or discriminated against based on political affiliation, sex, gender, age, among others. Section 67 of the Constitution clearly articulates Political Rights and these rights are also guaranteed for women.

However, despite the existence of a strong legal framework supporting gender equality in electoral processes, challenges still remain as glaring gender gaps continue to persist with women's participation in political decision making still below the 50% benchmark. Bridging the gap between legal provisions and lived experience is therefore crucial for Zimbabwe to realize its full potential.

4. Pre-electoral findings

During the pre-electoral period, various electoral processes were monitored which include the National Biometric Voter Registration process, Political Party processes, Nomination Court, and monitoring of the general pre-election environment. The following findings were obtained during the aforementioned processes.

4.1. National mobile Biometric Voter Registration

In preparation for the 2023 Harmonised Elections, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission conducted a nationwide mobile Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) exercise. In the Mobile BVR process, ZEC deployed BVR teams to areas that do not have a permanent election offices. The monitoring teams used the ZEC published list of BVR centres to identify BVR centres in the various provinces. Mobile BVR processes prove to be beneficial to communities especially those in rural hard to reach areas where people do not have easy access to permanent elections offices, thus making electoral processes inclusive.

The mobile BVR exercise was initially scheduled from the 12th-21st of March 2023, however due to demand of services, the exercise was extended up to the 26th of March 2023. The BVR centres were opened throughout the aforementioned dates, including weekends from 0700hrs-1700hrs.

The following key observations were made during the BVR monitoring process;

- Obsolete BVR equipment particularly malfunctioning solar system which resulted in the registration process taking long.
- Ablution facilities, access to water remained a huge challenge especially in rural centres. Registration centres which were located on open spaces or business centres had little to no sign of water and sanitation facilities.
- Some of the centres did not have accessible infrastructure such as ramps to enter buildings posing a challenge for persons with disabilities.
- Provision of special priority services varied across the BVR centres monitored as some centres clearly gave first priority to vulnerable groups, other centres would provide priority services in circumstantial scenarios, while other centres did not give any preferential services.
- Limited participation of Civil Society Organisations to complement ZEC in voter education for BVR.
- Several BVR centres monitored were located near drinking pubs, a scenario which could expose women and PWD's to harassment/intimidation. Notwithstanding this, the location of these centres makes it more prone to incidents of electoral violence.
- Presence of political party affiliates recording every registrant at BVR centres was observed in most of the registration centres visited. This had the potential to stir political violence, create a sense of intimidation and fear whose effects can disproportionately affect vulnerable groups like women, PWD's and the elderly.

These challenges were noted throughout the provinces and need to be addressed to ensure that they may not pose as a barrier for the full participation of some registrants.

4.2. Voter Education

4.2.1. Voter education for voter registration and nomination court

The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission deployed voter education officials throughout all the electoral processes and the efforts of voter educators was complemented by voter education through multi-media platforms. The Zimbabwe Gender Commission managed to closely monitor voter education for BVR and for the nomination court process. The Voter Education officials used a number of strategies to raise awareness for voter registration which include targeting community meetings/gatherings, flyers, posters and one on one interactions. Further, it was noted that apart from voter education officers, political parties and community leaders also assisted in voter education. Traditionally Civil Society Organisations also assist in voter education however limited participation of Civil Society Organisations in complementing ZEC in this role was noted. The monitoring teams only encountered WCoZ in Manicaland and ZESN in Midlands Province during the BVR process. Civil Society Organisations Interviewed highlighted that their absence during voter education was due to late accreditation of CSO's by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission which made it difficult for them to fulfil this role.

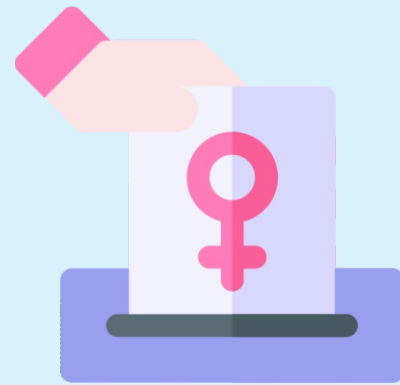
Zimbabwe Electoral Commission is commended for the significant efforts in distributing information, education and communication material in both rural and urban areas to ensure a wider reach. The presence of Information, Education and Communication materials was highly observed throughout the Provinces visited during the monitoring exercise. Information Education Communication materials observed in communities were predominantly posters. These posters relayed various information with regards specific electoral processes eg BVR, Nomination Court and Polling.



Voter Education Poster depicting women as electoral staff



Voter Education Flyer in Shona



ZEC Voter Educators affixing a poster on a tree in Shurugwi, Midlands Province.

Zimbabwe Electoral Commission is further commended for producing gender inclusive voter education materials during the electoral process. This was evidenced by information education and communication materials with targeted messages for vulnerable groups such as women and persons with disabilities. In addition, the material encouraged women to participate in electoral processes by using pictures that demystified gender roles.




WE ARE ENCOURAGING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES

Women are encouraged to participate in the nomination of candidates for the 2023 Harmonised Elections.

The nomination courts will sit on the **21st of June 2023** to consider candidates for the General Elections. All Nomination Courts open at **10 am and close at 4 pm.**

National Assembly and Party-lists Nominations can be lodged in advance at ZEC Provincial Offices while Local Authority Nominations are advance lodged at District offices.

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 Website: www.zec.org.zw | ZecZimbabwe | @ZECzim

IEC material encouraging women to participate in the nomination court process



ZEC Posters encouraging participation of vulnerable groups in elections

It is however critical to note that different findings were obtained from a farming community in Marondera district, Mashonaland East province. The monitoring findings among the farming community revealed that most of the community members did not receive any voter education from ZEC, they however acknowledged that they obtained information on the voting process largely through radio programmes and their peers. Findings also revealed that 20% of people interviewed within this farming community contemplated on the lack of documentation. Furthermore, polling day observations indicated significant deficiencies in voter understanding of the voting process. The most prevalent deficiency observed across all provinces was the voters' unfamiliarity with the protocol for depositing ballot papers into their respective ballot boxes.

There was a noticeable lack of awareness among voters regarding the colour coding system implemented for ballot papers. This issue was compounded by inadequate labelling of ballot boxes and ambiguous colour codes on the ballot papers.

Also of note was voters being redirected to their appropriate polling stations across all provinces. This suggests a widespread lack of understanding among the electorate about their designated polling stations, despite the availability of remote services for verifying one's assigned polling station. This underscores the need for enhanced voter education initiatives to address these knowledge gaps and ensure a smoother voting process.

These challenges were noted throughout the provinces and need to be addressed to ensure that they may not pose as a barrier for the full participation of some registrants.

4.3. Gender assessment of political party candidate selection processes

Political Parties act as gatekeepers to women's political participation and are important in determining who participates and who does not participate. During the 2023 Harmonised Elections it was noted that most contesting candidates were fielded through political parties with a few contesting as independent candidates. In facilitating one's participation in electoral processes, candidate selection processes employed by different political parties had a gendered impact.

The monitoring exercise engaged with 15 candidates from various political parties in a bid to holistically understand internal political parties' candidate selection processes. It was noted that different Political Parties used different candidate selection processes with some using primary elections whilst others used consensus.

4.3.1. Gendered implications of candidate selection systems employed by political parties during primaries

The voting systems implemented by political parties during their candidate selection processes had the following gendered implications-;

- Primary elections proved to be antagonistic in nature and not conducive for women candidates as the process requires one to engage in extensive campaigning. Women usually lack the resources required to undertake campaigns and as a result, some women candidates may be susceptible to sexual exploitation as they look for resources to fund their campaign. The tension that usually characterise Primary elections usually leave a lot of aspiring female candidates with deferred dreams of being politicians.
- The open voting system/ candidate selection by consensus is also a cause for concern especially in a patriarchal society like Zimbabwe. This system requires an aspiring candidate to have strong support networks, which female candidates might struggle to obtain in a patriarchal society as they have limited access to political networks and resources, making it harder for them to compete against male candidates. Furthermore, due to longstanding stereotypes and cultural norms that view women as subordinates to their male counterparts, it can be difficult for other party members especially men to openly support a female candidate as that would go against the long standing discriminatory cultural stereotypes.

4.4. Nomination Process

The Nomination process is the process of officially selecting or choosing prospective candidates for an election and registering them for ballot paper inclusion. In Zimbabwe, the nomination process serves as a crucial step in the selection and validation of candidates for various political offices. It ensures that candidates meet the necessary legal requirements and adhere to electoral regulations.

During the nomination court monitoring, the following key issues were noted :

- Exorbitant nomination court fees: Aspiring candidates had an outcry on the high nomination court fees which were US\$20 000 for Presidential candidates and US\$1 000 for aspiring Members of Parliament. This led to some political parties fielding less candidates as desired, a situation which greatly disadvantaged female aspiring candidates as they were further sidelined.
- Some aspiring candidates faced challenges with electronic payment systems due to transaction limitations and delays in electronic payment systems. This challenge led to the disqualification of some aspiring candidates due to late payment/non-payment of nomination court fees.
- Centralisation of nomination courts particularly for the National Assembly and Presidential level presented unwarranted extra logistical costs such as accommodation and travel for candidates that resided in peripheral constituencies.
- Lack of adequate knowledge on the Nomination court process and requirements: some aspiring candidates did not have adequate knowledge about the nomination court process as evidenced by the frequent back and forth which was evidenced at most of the court venues visited. Some aspiring candidates were also not aware of their nomination court venues.
- The time frame on the announcement of results posed a security challenge for candidates. With most of the nomination courts announcing their results around midnight, this rendered a serious risk to candidates who claimed that they could be ambushed by their opponents, a scenario which also posed greater risk for female candidates.

Through the 2023 Nomination Court sitting, only 1 female Presidential candidate was duly nominated after a court appeal as her nomination was initially denied her. This is in stark contrast to the 2018 elections where four female presidential candidates were on the ballot. This reflects a regressive trend.

At the National Assembly level, women constituted 11% of the nominated candidates whilst at Local Government level, women constituted 15% of the nominated candidates.

Election Year	2023		2018	
	F	M	F	M
Presidential	1	11	4	19
NA	70	563	243	1409
LG	735	4122	1155	5641

5. Council of Chiefs Elections

As part of election monitoring, the observer teams also observed the conduct of the Council of Chiefs Elections in Manicaland, Midlands and Matabeleland North. The Council of Chiefs Elections marked the first step of the 2023 elections and it set the tone for the conduct of peaceful and smooth elections.

The National Council of Chiefs is a statutory body that plays a significant role in the governance of the country, particularly in areas with a significant rural population. The council is made up of traditional leaders from all ten provinces of the country, and its primary role is to advise the government on a range of issues affecting rural communities. Observations made at the National Council of Chiefs elections on the 3rd of August showed that the traditional leadership system in Zimbabwe is deeply rooted in a patriarchal structure and the participation of women in the traditional leadership system is still largely limited. The following key observations were made regarding to gender issues in the conduct of elections-;

- The election is highly male dominated as there was no female Chief present in the 3 provincial elections observed even in provinces where there are female chiefs.
- The selection process is by consensus and requires a Chief to have social capital for them to be nominated. This poses a challenge for female chiefs as they lack the social networks.

6. Polling Day

The 2023 Harmonised Elections were conducted on the 23rd of August 2023. On polling day, a total of 78 polling stations were visited in 19 districts across all the ten provinces in Zimbabwe. The following issues were observed across the provinces on polling day-;

6.1. Staffing

Observations around the polling stations revealed that there were more female polling and security officials deployed across the provinces as shown in the chart below. It is also commendable to note that there was balance in the appointment of presiding officers in the majority of polling stations visited. The situation was however different at Command Centres where positions such as constituency and district elections officer were mainly occupied by men.

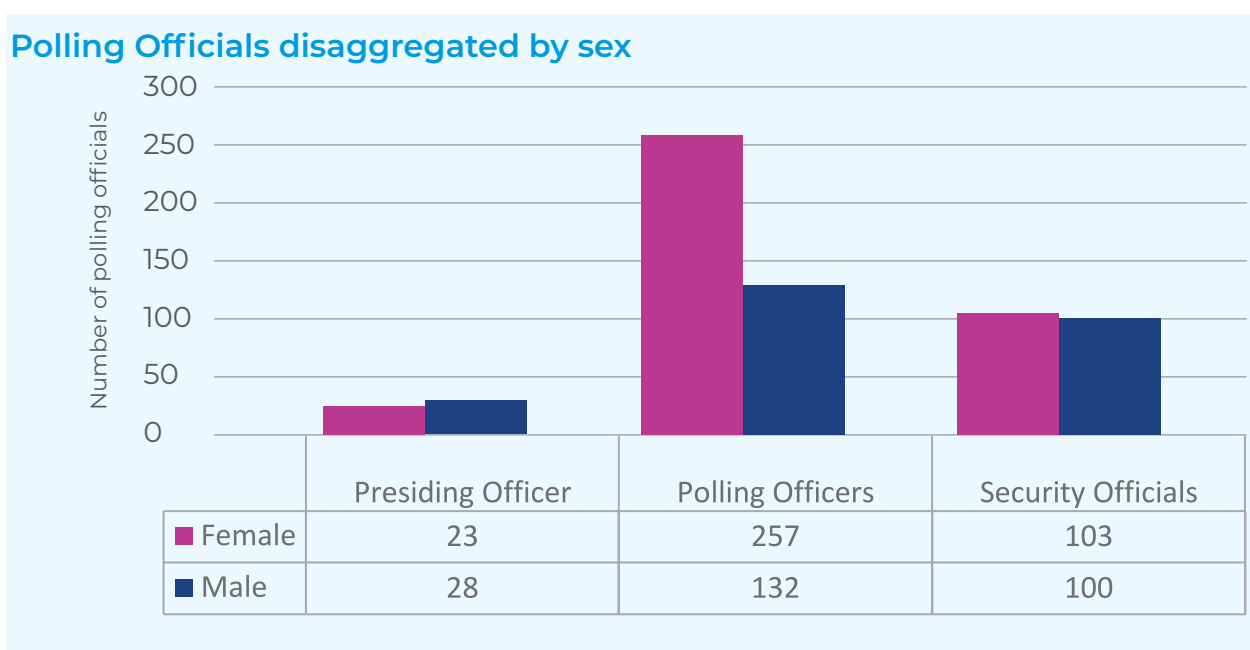


Figure 1: Table showing sex-disaggregated statistics of Polling Officials in 51 Polling Stations around Zimbabwe

6.2. ZEC State of Preparedness

The deployment of polling and security officials was executed timely and efficiently across all the polling stations visited, with the majority of electoral officials having been deployed two days before the polling day. Most of the non-security items, such as polling booths and ballot boxes were also deployed in time. However the observation teams witnessed delays with the deployment of security items such as ballot paper and indelible ink. Provinces such as Harare, Bulawayo and Manicaland were seriously affected resulting in the extension of voting hours.



Figure 2: ZGC Election Observers interacting with ZEC Officials during the pre-polling phase.

6.3. Status and Accessibility of Polling Stations

The majority of polling stations were situated at accessible sites such as schools, church halls, shopping centres, and training centres. Nevertheless, it is important to note that long distances to polling stations were a source of concern in some rural areas. In particular, women in the Tongogara Shurugwi North constituency raised concerns over long distances to polling stations, especially when combined with their household chores.

The location of some polling stations was a cause of concern as some were prone to risks as evidenced in most urban areas where polling stations were set very close to the roadside, while others were situated in areas with a high risk of veld fires, of note were tent polling stations in the Matope area in Mashonaland Central an area prone to veld fires. Additionally, the general surroundings of some polling stations posed safety and security risks as there was long grass.



Polling Station located very close to the road.

6.4 Sanitation facilities at polling stations

Regarding sanitation, the availability of ablution facilities at polling stations was generally fair. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission made commendable efforts in availing mobile toilets at tent-based polling stations, while polling stations situated at schools utilized already available facilities. However, there is room for improvement, as observed by the absence of separate toilets for men and women which would reduce the risk of GBV/sexual harassment and to uphold the dignity of both sexes.

6.5 Welfare of Election Officials

Observations revealed that the welfare of election officials was a cause for concern around the provinces. While separate sleeping arrangements were available in polling stations housed in schools, at most polling stations, male and female polling officers were observed sleeping in the same room, which poses a threat to sexual harassment and gender-based violence.

In some polling stations, particularly mobile polling stations, the observation team noted that election officials only had one place to take a bath. This situation compromised the human dignity of the election officials. However, the provision of water supplied by way of containers in mobile polling stations was commendable.



Personal belongings of Polling Officials in a Polling Station.

6.4. Electoral Misconduct

The observer mission also witnessed electoral misconduct in the form of de-campaigning of a female National Assembly candidate of Mwenezi West Constituency, through the circulation of a fake post that alleged that the candidate had been disqualified.

In Harare, Midlands and Matabeleland Provinces, observers identified the proliferation of misinformation early on the 23rd and 24th of August. Fliers were scattered along roads leading to polling stations that discouraged people to go and vote, an electoral misconduct that could have posed voter apathy.



Figure 3: Fake Post which circulated on social media



Figure 4: Flier misinforming the electorate

In addition, the presence of political party affiliates recording every voter was observed across all the provinces visited.

However, with the exception of one political party observed conducting some form of campaigning in Mashonaland Central Province, most political parties across the provinces adhered to the Political Parties Code of Conduct that does not allow campaigning 24 hours prior to polling day.



Figure 5: Voters checking their Polling Stations.

6.5. Gendered Impacts of night voting

The logistical delays in the printing and distribution of ballot papers in polling stations across the provinces resulted in delayed opening of polling stations, resulting in a spillover of the voting process into late hours of the night. This situation created gendered implications, particularly for women, and introduced additional barriers to their participation in the electoral process. It was observed that nursing mothers, among other vulnerable groups, endured unfriendly conditions, including frustrated babies, inadequate sanitation and child care facilities, as they awaited to exercise their constitutional right. Observations made at polling stations that experienced night voting revealed the following gendered impacts of night voting:

- i. **Safety and Security:** Night voting increases the vulnerability of vulnerable groups, such as women, the elderly, and people with disabilities. These groups face challenges in traveling to and from polling stations and night voting exposed women and vulnerable groups to risk of harassment or violence during late hours.
- ii. **Caregiving Responsibilities:** Women often bear a disproportionate burden of caregiving responsibilities within households. Night voting presented challenges for women with caregiving responsibilities, as it conflicted with their duties and routines. This can result in lower voter turnout among women, limiting their representation and influence in the political process.
- iii. **Increased the working hours** of election officials.

6.6. Inclusivity of the Polling Process

The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission demonstrated efforts to ensure that the polling process was inclusive. Separate lines for men and women were provided for, with vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, sick, nursing mothers, pregnant women, and persons with disabilities, given first preference. Nonetheless, the observation team noted that some polling stations offered preferential treatment as an afterthought, while others did not provide such services at all.



Figure 6: Polling station offering preferential treatment for the elderly.

While most polling stations had disability friendly polling booths, the observation team noted some polling stations did not have polling booths for persons with disabilities, compromising the secrecy of their vote. The absence of a voter's roll and ballot papers in Braille for visually impaired voters and sign language interpreters for voters with hearing impairment was another significant barrier to the electoral participation of persons with disabilities throughout the voting process.

Furthermore, the absence of disability friendly infrastructure such as ramps for wheelchairs was noted in some of the polling stations visited. There was no standard size for polling stations, with some polling stations having very limited space that posed challenges for ease of movement for voters who were in wheelchairs.

6.7. Gender Observatory Call Centre

As part of the 2023 Gender Observatory, the Zimbabwe Gender Commission established a Call Centre for the 2023 Harmonised Elections with three toll free lines (Telone, Netone and Econet). The Call Centre was fully operational 24hrs a day during the election period. A total of 17 cases were recorded during the period with the majority of cases being referred to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission and the Zimbabwe Republic Police. Out of the 17 callers 15 were male and 2 were female. It was also noted that the ZEC toll free lines were not functional on polling day. Therefore, people resorted to utilising the Zimbabwe Gender Commission lines when they failed to get through the ZEC call centre.



Figure 7: ZGC Official operating the Gender Observatory Call Centre during the elections.

7. Post-election monitoring findings

The post-election monitoring phase started from the end of polling up to the announcement of presidential results. Although this period was generally peaceful, a significant number of cyber bullying incidences were observed towards female members of parliament and councillors on various social media outlets.

8. Gender analysis of election results

An analysis of election results revealed that very few women successfully won the elections as shown in the tables below.

Contested Seat	Female	Male
Presidential	-	1
National Assembly	23 (11%)	186 (89%)
Local Authority	244 (12.6%)	1719 (87.4%)
TOTAL	267 (12.3%)	1906(87.8%)

It was however observed that the constitutionally mandated quota for women using proportional representation (PR) System at least ensures that women's participation in the National Assembly is not rendered completely obsolete. Furthermore, the extension of the women's quota to the local authority increased the level of women's participation as local government councillors.

While there were commendable efforts to increase the representation of young people in parliament through the Youth Quota, out of 10 reserved seats for young people, only 3 young women were elected. In terms of Persons with Disabilities, a mere 2 seats were reserved for PWDs, 1 woman and 1 man. The table below shows the gendered representation based on electoral system.

Electoral System	PR/ Quota System	Female	Male
Proportional Representation	Senate PR	36	26
	Provincial Councils PR	55	44
	Representatives for PWDs	1	1
Quota	N A Women's Quota	60	-
	N A Youth Quota	3	7
	L A Women's Quota	602	-

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings from the election monitoring processes, the Zimbabwe Gender Commission proposes the following for consideration to ensure gender responsive future electoral processes:

Zimbabwe Electoral Commission

In line with the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission Gender and Inclusion Policy, ZEC to:

- Strengthen systematic collection of sex, age and disability disaggregated data on voters, candidates and other election related statistics.
- Ensure proper sanitation and living conditions for Electoral Officials especially those deployed in rural centres.
- Ensure compulsory implementation of Special Priority Services to vulnerable groups (The elderly, the sick, people with disabilities, pregnant and nursing mothers) throughout all the electoral processes.
- With regards to voter education the following could be adopted-;
 - Upscale the production and distribution of IEC material in vernacular languages.
 - Ensure timely accreditation of civil society organisations especially those targeting vulnerable groups to conduct voter education and ensure wide coverage in all the communities.
- Identify BVR centres and Polling Stations with disability inclusive infrastructure.
- Avoid setting-up voter registration centres and polling stations at or too close to drinking pubs and by roadsides as it poses a huge safety concern.
- Deploy at least one ZEC Official at each BVR centre or polling station with specialised training to assist Person's With Disabilities.
- Ensure inclusive deployment processes of ZEC official including PWD's during all electoral processes.
- Nomination Courts should be decentralised to reduce logistical costs for aspiring candidates.
- Develop a disaster management plan

Registrar General's Department

- Ensure mobile registration exercise precedes the BVR process to ensure that communities can acquire the requisite documentation before the BVR process.
- Address issues raised in the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission National Inquiry on Access to Documentation which include but not limited to the following-;
 - Conduct regular and well-resourced mobile registration programmes
 - Formulate gender sensitive policies which take into consideration the gender dimensions of access to documentation, to address gender disparities in registration as women bear the burden of registering children in the majority of cases

Political Parties

- Enhance the internal democracy systems so that they ensure 50% representation by women in party leadership positions.
- Align political party constitutions to the National Constitution to provide for 50/50 representation of men and women.
- Create a level playing field for women of all ages and abilities to freely campaign and contest for leadership through offering capacity building on leadership development.
- Adopt institutional gender policies to ensure that party processes are inclusive and responsive to the various needs of men and women.
- Adopt sexual harassment policies with clearly laid out mechanisms and pathways in addressing issues of sexual harassment within political parties and ensure that party members are well trained on them.
- Implement strategies to address sexual harassment and violence against women.
- Provide clear guidelines or clarity for internal candidate selection processes.
- Identify and implement measures to support aspiring candidates who are less privileged and part of an excluded group.

Parliament of Zimbabwe

- While acknowledging the rationale behind the rise in nomination fees, the level to which the nomination fees were raised was exclusionary to vulnerable groups such as women, youth and persons with disabilities who do not have the financial muscle. There is need to review downwards the nomination fees to allow more aspiring candidates especially women and PWD's to contest for political office.
- Amend the Political Parties Finance Act to provide for the following:-
 - Establish tiered campaign finance limits based on the position being sought, such as presidency, national assembly and local government, to level the playing field for candidates and reduce the undue influence of money in politics.
 - A provision that encourages participation of women in politics through the provision of financial support to female candidates and incentives for parties to promote and support women outside of the quota.
- Amend the Electoral Act to align with Constitutional provisions on gender equality to provide for the following;
 - Disqualification of all political parties whose internal Constitutions do not comply with the provisions on gender equality in the Constitution.
 - Replace the First Past the Post Electoral System with Proportional Representation
 - Regulation and registration of political parties
- Bring clarity on the implementation modalities for the Quotas (Provincial Council Quota/Youth Quota system) ensuring a balanced representation of both men and women.

Traditional leaders

- Explore the implementation of a gender-balanced quota system in the National Council of Chiefs, aiming for equal representation of men and women.

Civil Society Organisations

- Complement the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission in conducting voter education, in particular targeted voter education across the provinces, especially in rural communities
- Strengthen capacity building efforts for aspiring female candidates
- Intensify voter education efforts especially for voters to be aware of their polling stations.
- Strengthen capacities to observe elections.

Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission

- Conduct extensive civic education especially in hard-to-reach communities such as farming and religious communities as they lacked basic knowledge on their right and obligation to participate in electoral processes.
- Strengthen monitoring of civil and political rights within the electoral period.

Zimbabwe Media Commission

- Review or scrap accreditation fees for female media practitioners during election time so that they can access and disseminate information to other women especially in marginalised communities where access to media is a challenge.
- Equip female journalists with the skills and knowledge to effectively cover elections, focusing on issues relevant to women.

Zimbabwe Gender Commission

- Lobby the Executive and Parliament to enact a Gender Equality Act which will provide a provision on 50% for women's representation.
- Conduct targeted public education and awareness programmes for vulnerable groups like women, the elderly and PWD's on their right and obligation to participate in electoral processes.
- Work closely with the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission to ensure integration of gender issues throughout the electoral processes. For example, assist in training of election management staff and Zimbabwe Republic Police on gender issues in electoral processes.
- Conduct community dialogues on gender in provinces with low women representation in order to address negative social norms which perpetuate women's subordination
- Continuous capacity building workshops for women in politics and aspiring candidates.
- Strengthen the Gender Observatory so that it is timeously responsive to gender issues during electoral period.
- The Gender Observatory should be active throughout the election cycle
- Follow up with stakeholders on implementation of recommendations.



Figure 1 - ZGC Chairperson Commissioner M. M. Mukahanana-Sangarwe (seated first far right) posing for a picture with an aspiring female candidate (second from right) trained under the ZGC Women Rise in Politics Programme.



Figure 2 - ZGC Commissioner S. Mauye (second from right) visiting the Harare South District Command Centre.



Figure 3 - ZGC Commissioner N. Chimbetete (third from right) and ZGC team posing for a picture with Bindura ZRP Officials during a courtesy visit.



Figure 4 - ZGC Commissioner Dr. N. Nyangulu (third from right, front row) posing for a picture with the ZGC Mashonaland West election observation team.



Figure 5 - ZGC Vice Chairperson Commissioner N. Matshalaga (fourth from right) posing for a picture with ZEC Officials in Matebeleland South Province during a courtesy visit.



Figure 6 - ZGC Commissioner P. Mawonera in Midlands Province posing for a photo with a ZRP Official during a courtesy visit.



Figure 7 - ZGC CEO Mrs V. Muwanigwa (centre, standing) and ZGC team in Masvingo Province, posing for a picture with ZRP Officials during a courtesy visit.



Figure 8 - ZGC Gender Equality Promotion Director, Ms. C. Matizha (standing) operating the Gender Observatory Call Centre.



Figure 9 - Training of Gender Observatory Election Observers.



Figure 10 - Gender Observatory members posing for a group photo during the Gender Observatory Sensitisation meeting with ZEC Officials in Matebeleland South Province during a courtesy visit.



Zimbabwe
Gender
Commission

2023 ELECTIONS GENDER OBSERVATORY REPORT

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