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Democratic Governance in Africa

## ELECTION • TALK

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## WAS THE SECRECY OF THE BALLOT RESPECTED DURING THE 2005 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS?

*Maureen Maloi and Selby Matloga*

### Introduction

Zimbabwe's parliamentary elections took place on 31 March 2005. One of the issues raised by the opposition was the level of intimidation that accompanied the electoral process. There was fear that voters could be intimidated if measures to ensure that votes could be cast in secret, were not in place. The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent to which the secrecy of the ballot was respected during this year's Zimbabwe parliamentary election.

The secrecy of the ballot is critical for the credibility of an election. PEMMO argues that the secrecy of the ballot is one of the great pillars on which free and fair, credible and legitimate elections rest.<sup>2</sup> It is always important to ensure during the voting process that the vote cast is truly a personal choice. This becomes even more important in conflict-ridden societies such as Zimbabwe. In these societies, citizens could be intimidated to make a different choice should the secrecy of the vote not be respected. Fear of political retribution and victimisation of voters make it imperative that each vote is secret.

### What Does the Legislation Say?

According to the Zimbabwean Electoral Act [Chapter 12], in terms of Section 57(C), when the person claiming the vote has received the ballot paper he/ she shall take the paper to the compartment provided... and then signify the candidate...by secretly placing a cross...; then fold the ballot paper...so that the cross is not visible.... And Section 59 (1) stipulates that those illiterates and disabled voters, who cannot read or write, shall in the presence of the monitor and a police officer on duty be voted for according to his or her wishes.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Electoral Act No 25/2004

### Secrecy of the Ballot

During the 2005 parliamentary elections efforts were made by the two main political parties Zanu-PF and MDC to create an environment conducive to a free and fair election. Logically the secrecy of the ballot was also to be ensured. Indeed, most requirements for secrecy of the ballot seemed to have been in place. Reports from observers refer to correct arrangements of both polling stations and booths. For the first time Zimbabwe used transparent ballot boxes. The use of translucent boxes gave more confidence on the fairness of the electoral processes, especially when there were adequate well sealed boxes.<sup>3</sup>

The verification of ballot boxes in front of all polling officers and political party' agents preceded the opening of polling stations. This was to ensure that all ballot boxes were indeed empty. Secrecy of the ballot in the 2005 parliamentary elections involved free voting procedures, more laid out ballot papers and use of booths which were well covered to ensure the free exercise of one's right. The ballot papers ensured that no manipulation would take place to compromise the secrecy of the ballot. The ballot papers had photographs, name of candidates and symbols, to make it simple for voters. There were also mechanisms to assist the disabled and illiterate in a

<sup>2</sup> See PEMMO, p24

<sup>3</sup> ZESN, *March 2005 Parliamentary Elections Preliminary Report* Volume 1. p26

transparent manner. The process of casting the vote inside the polling station was also clear.

For instance, when the voter received the ballot paper she/ he took the paper to the booth provided, placed a cross in the rectangle provided then folded the ballot paper so the official mark was visible but the cross and the name of the candidate voted for was not. The voter would then hold up the ballot paper to the Presiding Officer who would recognise the mark before the voter dropped the ballot paper in the ballot box. If the voter noticed that they had spoiled the paper they would then proceed to go back for a second ballot paper. The spoiled paper was then retained by the Presiding Officer who immediately cancelled it.

The presence of international observers and local monitors in Zimbabwe elections was also an important element in building voter confidence and ensuring the integrity of the voting system.<sup>4</sup> Counting is complementary to vote secrecy and is very important in the electoral processes as it ensures that credible and original vote casts should not be rigged. In this regard, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) presided over the counting process guaranteeing that no legitimate vote was rejected, accuracy was adopted and stuffing of the ballot was left out.<sup>5</sup>

### **Irregularities**

Despite a good performance by the Electoral Commission in ensuring that the secrecy of the

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, p2

<sup>5</sup> *Eisa Election Update 2005: Zimbabwe*, number 3, 25 April 2005. p5

ballot was respected through out the electoral process, there were reports of intimidation, ballot stuffing and other irregularities that may have negatively affected the principle of secrecy of the ballot.

During the 2005 Parliamentary election, most registered voters were able to cast their vote irrespective of their race, colour, political affiliation and sex or otherwise, which proved adherence to the Electoral Act. However, minor cases of voter intimidation reported during the polling day might have affected the secrecy of the vote.

For example, in Glendale, an opposition supporter was attacked by a ruling party supporter in full view of the police and polling agents after explicitly expressing his party preference.<sup>6</sup> Intimidation was most rife in the rural constituencies because a clear political bias was exhibited by many chiefs. (For example, chiefs' threatening behaviour towards the people voting for oppositions was expressed in terms such as 'those who vote for the opposition would be known and their land would then be subsequently confiscated'. This then resulted in thousands of rural voters being forced to vote for ZANU-PF<sup>7</sup>).

This is not consistent with the secrecy of the ballot. The very presence of chiefs at polling stations precluded many voters from freely exercising their political preferences. Illiterate voters in rural areas were very susceptible to threats from chiefs that the ballot was not secret and that it would be easy to identify how people voted.<sup>8</sup> The use of translucent boxes was also used to undermine freedom of preference as many electorate were intimidated by ruling party factions who stated that they 'were able to see how one has voted', resulting in many people fearing to express their autonomous vote of choice.<sup>9</sup> The issue of people needing assistance such as illiterates and the disabled voters, who were assisted jointly by the Presiding Officer, a police officer and a monitor, was of great concern. This is due to the fact that many believed that this segment of population should actually get help from people with whom they feel comfortable, such as their immediate relatives.<sup>10</sup>

### **Postal Ballot**

The postal ballot created confusion and doubt that it would be managed in a fair manner to all the Zimbabweans (2 to 3 million) living in the diaspora who were expecting the same voting rights extended to those in the uniformed services and diplomatic services. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) then opened the postal ballot only to all civil servants working outside the country as well as the local army and police. Those in the armed forces within the country were also allowed to choose to vote by postal ballot or to go to their own registered polling station on 31 March 2005.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Op cit*. 25 April 2005

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.kubatana.co.zw>. Zimbabwe: Election Fraud Report, 18 April 2005

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*. p26

<sup>10</sup> Report of the African Union Observer Team on the Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Zimbabwe, 31 March 2005

<sup>11</sup> Zimbabwe Election Support Network, Observer Mission. Final Report April 2005.

However, some reports states that the postal voting had not been transparent enough resulting from poor administration in a manner that accentuated the lack of accountability, transparency and secrecy of the ballot.<sup>12</sup> For instance, MDC spokesman Paul Themba Nyathi claimed that they had not been invited to monitor the postal ballot voting processes, which posed a “high possibility that the secrecy of the vote has been compromised”.<sup>13</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Secrecy of the ballot seems to have been respected to some extent but there were still some concerns and discrepancies. Overall, the 2005 Zimbabwean parliamentary elections adhered to the principles stated in the Electoral Act. However, concerns were raised over postal voting and the right of Zimbabweans living in the diaspora to vote in the election as not having been transparent enough.

For future elections, Zimbabwe should ensure that postal voting system is administered in a manner that ensures accountability, transparency and secrecy of the ballot. For instance, there should be details with respect to the number of postal applications made and the constituencies to which these relate. There are a significant number of potential voters amongst the 2 to 3 million living in the diaspora. They have a democratic right to participate in their home country’s elections: the same right of postal voting that those in the uniformed

services and diplomatic services possess should be extended to them.<sup>14</sup>

Above all, voting stations were laid out in such a way that no one was able to see how voters were marking their ballots papers but due to lack of voter education, most were intimidated by the ruling party supporters’ claim that they could see for whom they voted due to the transparency of the ballot boxes. However, the secrecy of one’s vote was respected to a large extent.

## **VOTE COUNTING IN THE ZIMBABWE 2005 ELECTIONS**

*Bertha Chiroro*

### **Introduction**

The vote counting process is a crucial moment in the election phase as it begins to put into reality the will of the people by way of producing results in the form of winners and losers. It is a decisive moment for both candidates and the voters. Therefore a transparent counting process is critical to this final phase of the electoral process, especially in Zimbabwe where the elections were already prematurely judged to be not free and fair by the opposition and several civic groups as well as some western countries. This paper raises concerns that affected the reliability of the counting process.

### **The Counting Process**

The procedure for counting is well spelt out in the Electoral Act No 25/2004. Under section 62 of the Act, votes are to be counted at polling stations in the presence of polling officers, monitors, observers and candidates and their election agents. The constituency registrar is responsible for managing the counting centre for the constituency. The counting is divided into two phases the verification phase and the counting phase. During the verification phase each ballot box is opened individually and number of ballots are sorted and counted according to the spoilt ballots and the used ballots by the presiding officers. After everyone including the candidates and his agents are happy with the verification exercise then counting continues. Everyone attending the sorting process and the count are required to stay inside the counting centre during the whole count in order to avoid leaks of the result before the actual count is finished.

### **The Count**

After what was regarded in general as a peaceful voting day, voting ended at 7 pm on 31 March 2005. Counting started at almost 7.30 pm. However voter turnout was calculated at 42% and ZESN alleges that 10 to 25% of the voters were turned away in some of the constituencies for lacking proper identity documents or being at the wrong voting centre. The official results centre was based at the Harare International Conference Centre. A number of developments took place during the night of the count that put the whole counting process into disrepute. Before the election count was complete, the ZEC official started to read out the initial results of votes cast and the number of those turned away was announced, and not the final totals for

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, April 2005

<sup>13</sup> Felix Njini, Opposition MDC cries foul as . . . Soldiers vote, *MDC News*, 24 March 2005 [www.mdczimbabwe.org](http://www.mdczimbabwe.org)

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<sup>14</sup> Report on the Zimbabwe’s 2005 General Election, Zimbabwe Election Support Network, April 2005, pg. 7

each party. When 72 constituencies out of the 120 were read out it is alleged that the announcement stopped mysteriously “almost in mid sentence”<sup>15</sup>. No further results of votes cast were ever announced.

In a poll where suspicions of vote rigging were running high, this became ample proof for the opposition that the rigging was taking place and which led to the loss of confidence in the result. There is now rumour and gossip circulating that a message was relayed over police radio ordering the naïve ZEC officials to stop announcing the vote casts.

The MDC has now refused to accept the poll results, alleging massive rigging. The MDC has alleged vote rigging in 30 constituencies.<sup>16</sup> In submissions to the ZEC they have found discrepancies in these constituencies. They have found out that the total number of people who had voted as per the ZEC announcement, the figure was either more or less than the actual ballot papers cast. For example, the ZEC had said that 23-896 people had voted in Chimanimani, but according to the results, the total number of ballot papers cast was 27-642, in Goromonzi total vote casts were announced as 15-611 but they suddenly went up to 25-360.<sup>17</sup> The MDC collected all the

information and cried foul and claimed massive fraud through ballot stuffing in the 2005 parliamentary elections.

The opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirayi gave evidence of what they called “serious and unaccountable gaps” with more than 200 000 votes unaccounted for in the announcement of the official results before and after counting the ballots.<sup>18</sup> To support the argument that the counting process was not transparent, the opposition also allege that their agents were denied entry to the polling and counting booths especially in the rural constituencies. In the urban constituencies they managed to challenge these illegal restrictions.<sup>19</sup> In Insiza constituency, it is alleged that ZANU-PF thugs entered the polling station when counting started and chased away the opposition agents.<sup>20</sup> This also happened in Lupane where counting continued when the opposition agents were chased away by the youth militia.<sup>21</sup> MDC agents allege that they were locked up after the count for several hours and they were banned from using cell phones and all other means of communication.

Another important factor which undermined transparency in the counting process is the allegations that police and ZANU-PF agents were counting votes in polling stations and communicating results to regional centres and Presiding Officers confiscated notes from MDC polling agents and independent observers.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore section 64 (2) of the Electoral Act was violated by the Presiding Officers when they failed to post the results of the count in each polling station on public view.<sup>23</sup> Failure to display results at some polling stations heightened the suspicions and reduced transparency and accountability.

Even so, the opposition’s claims were dismissed and not taken seriously. Commenting on the opposition’s claims that the poll was rigged, Chairperson of the ZEC, George Chiweshe argued that the ZEC had conducted the poll in a “transparent and credible manner” and the discrepancies in ballot tallies in at least 30 constituencies were “neither here nor there”. Such a casual response to a serious accusation to electoral fraud by the major opposition seriously erodes the credibility of the EMB and the confidence in the electoral process as a whole.

## Conclusion

The counting process alone can do very little to alleviate the lack of confidence in Zimbabwe’s electoral process. A free political environment is a must for the holding of free and fair elections. There seems to be evidence that collated results show a wide range of discrepancies between votes recorded as cast and signed for by the polling agents, and the totals released by the electoral authorities. Any undue delay or discrepancy concerning counting or aggregation of results raises suspicions in any election. In the interests of peace and stability in Zimbabwe, it is paramount

<sup>15</sup> Sokwanele Special Report, What Happened on Thursday Night: An Account of how ZANU-PF Rigged the Parliamentary Elections. 5 April 2005

<sup>16</sup> MDC Report on the March 2005 Parliamentary Elections, How the Elections were Rigged, 12 April 2005 p51

<sup>17</sup> MDC Report p52. Zimbabwe Election Support Network Report on the Zimbabwe General Elections. Final Copy April 2005.

<sup>18</sup> *Mail and Guardian* SA 7 April 2005.

<sup>19</sup> *The Star* SA 6 April 2005

<sup>20</sup> Sokwanele Announcement 1 April 2005 11am Early Zimbabwe Election Results. [www.sokwanele.com/articles/sokwanele/earlyzimelectionresult](http://www.sokwanele.com/articles/sokwanele/earlyzimelectionresult)

<sup>21</sup> Sokwanele announcement, 1 April 2005.

<sup>22</sup> MDC Report p 45

<sup>23</sup> ZESN Final Report April 2005

that these allegations of electoral fraud and discrepancies be given the attention they deserve.

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## POLLING STATIONS

*Grant Masterson*

### Introduction

The location and number of polling stations is an extremely practical consideration during an election, yet it can have a substantial effect on the outcome of the election results. There are a number of key aspects to consider when assessing the adequacy of a country's polling station lay-out, such as the number of polling stations and their location *vis-à-vis* the populace. According to the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC Region (PEMMO), it is important for the selection of polling stations to consider: "the number of voters per station, the proximity of the station to voters, adequacy of lighting and communications, transport and other logistical considerations"<sup>24</sup>. PEMMO also

<sup>24</sup> *The Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and*

notes the importance of making sure that the polling stations are accessible to the elderly, infirm and disabled. An efficient plan and lay-out of polling stations nationally is important in preventing log-jams and long queues of voters, which can impact on both voter turnout and the overall results of an election. Zimbabwe's 2005 parliamentary elections highlighted the need for greater attention to be paid to this important election issue, with a number of irregular practices and difficulties experienced prior to and on election day.

### Numbers

There were a far greater number of polling stations in the 2005 Parliamentary Elections held in Zimbabwe than in the previous parliamentary elections held in 2000. During the two-day elections in 2000, 4117 polling stations were opened for voting. In the 2002 presidential elections, this number was increased slightly to 4548 polling stations. With an estimated 5 million eligible voters on the roll, the 2000 figure translated to 1215 voters per polling station, and in 2002, approximately 1100 voters per polling station. The 2005 elections opened 8300 polling stations, nearly double the 2002 total. It should be noted however, that the election was held on a single day as opposed to the two-day period allocated during the 2000 elections. This negated the need for security arrangements for ballot boxes overnight during a two-day election period, reducing opportunities for fraud and vote rigging. However, the single-day period doubled the number of voters each polling station was required to process in the election period, explaining the increase in polling stations from 2002.

### Urban/Rural Ratio of Polling Stations

Although it is specifically noted in PEMMO that there is a tendency for the number and density of polling stations in rural areas to be lower than the same in urban areas<sup>25</sup>, and that urban areas are better serviced than rural areas, Zimbabwe contradicts this assertion. The density of polling stations in urban areas has been decreased<sup>26</sup>, and the density in polling stations in rural areas has been increased since 2000.

In the 2000 and 2002 elections, polling stations in some urban areas closed whilst long lines of voters still waited to cast their votes. Similar problems were not reported in rural areas, despite high voter turnout in many rural districts<sup>27</sup>. One way in which future elections in the country could be improved would be to increase the number of polling stations in urban areas.

### Locations

A number of concerns were raised about the allocation of polling stations in various constituencies. The Electoral Act 2004 recommends that where

*Observation in the SADC Region*. Electoral Handbook 13. EISA/ECF. 2003.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*. p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> For the 2005 elections, Harare was allocated an additional 167 polling stations, to its existing 400. This figure was not consistent with the national average of doubling the number of polling stations in each constituency.

<sup>27</sup> *Zim doubles polling stations*. News24 Special report – Zimbabwe. 12 March 2005.  
[http://www.news24.com/News24/Africa/Zimbabwe/0,,2-11-1662\\_1675516,00.html](http://www.news24.com/News24/Africa/Zimbabwe/0,,2-11-1662_1675516,00.html)

possible, public buildings such as schools and community halls are to be used as polling stations<sup>28</sup>, but reports indicated that a number of rural polling stations were established at the private residences of rural chieftains despite the proximity of suitable alternate public buildings<sup>29</sup>. The tribal chieftains are largely supportive of the ruling ZANU-PF party, casting further doubts on the suitability of these residences as polling stations. Additionally, some polling stations were allocated to areas in which population density is virtually nil, for example, the Mutuko Ruins was allocated as a polling station in the Mutuko North Constituency<sup>30</sup>. The Mutuko Ruins are commonly believed to be deserted, again raising questions about the process of allocating the locations of the polling stations<sup>31</sup>.

undoubtedly the lack of clear rationale or explanation for the allocations given. In the interests of greater accountability, transparency and trust, clear reasons for the locations of polling stations would go a long way towards creating a freer and more open electoral playing field.

## Conclusion

The allocation and distribution of polling stations on Election Day appears to favour rural areas more than urban areas, whilst the increase in the number of polling stations can be offset by the reduced voting period from two days to one day. Additionally, the location of polling stations, in particular in sparsely populated rural areas has been called into question during these elections. However, the most pressing deficiency in the present allocation and distribution process of polling stations during the 2005 elections was

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<sup>28</sup> *The Zimbabwe Electoral Act 2004.*

<sup>29</sup> Crisis for Zimbabwe Coalition. *Analysis of the 2005 Zimbabwe Parliamentary Elections Polling Stations.* Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition statement. March 24, 2005.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.* p. 16.

## **ELECTION MATERIAL: BALLOT BOXES AND BALLOT PAPERS IN ZIMBABWE**

*Sydney Letsholo*

### **Introduction**

Elections are a critical ingredient for democracy. The integrity of elections, however, maybe questioned if the logistics are not properly put in place. Election materials - type, the procurement and distribution - are indeed crucial in any electoral process and if not properly handled may generate conflict. The primary intention of this article is to examine on the importance of election materials, specifically the ballot papers and ballot boxes during the 2005 parliamentary elections in Zimbabwe.

### **The Importance of Election Materials**

The majority of SADC member states, including those that have electronic voting systems, use ballot papers and ballot boxes (see PEMMO). More often than not, these election materials are normally the sole mandate of the EMB/s; and Zimbabwe is no exception. The Zimbabwe Electoral Act of 2004 elaborates on the manner in which the Presiding Officer should exercise his/her duties when dealing with the ballot box especially before voting is due to take place. Article 53 (1) (a) of the Electoral Act clearly states that no more than thirty minutes before the commencement of the poll at any polling station, or before the commencement of the poll on the first polling day where voting is to take place over two or more days, the Presiding Officer shall satisfy himself or herself that the

ballot box to be used at the polling station is empty.

According to Ndoro<sup>32</sup> the following was recorded as election material for the 2005 general election:

- Indelible ink;
- Voters' Roll;
- Ballot paper;
- Booth;
- Candle, matches and lanterns;
- Ballot boxes;
- Locks for ballot boxes;
- Seals;
- Posters giving directions to polling stations; and
- Stamp and pads.

In an effort to avoid multiple voting and other malpractices, an indelible ink was used mark those who had voted. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace Zimbabwe (CCJPZ) was among the civil society groups that highly commended this move. In the 2005 general election, the indelible ink used was visible to every eye and lasted for 21 days until it disappeared<sup>33</sup>. In previous elections, an invisible ink was used. This change was in accordance with SADC Principles and Guidelines governing the conduct of democratic election. It is also imperative to note that Zimbabwe is the first country to hold an election after the SADC Principles and Guidelines were drafted in Mauritius.

However, concerns were raised about the use of the indelible ink. It is alleged that when using a concoction of brake fluid and lemon, the ink takes about seven minutes to be removed<sup>34</sup>. Furthermore, allegations were that the partisan official would let people vote more than once since only one official would check through the UV<sup>35</sup>. On that deficiency, PEMMO recommends that election material should be procured in a transparent manner.

The handling of ballot boxes was also under fierce criticism in Zimbabwe. A total of 50, 000 translucent ballot boxes were dispatched to the provinces for onward delivery to the constituencies<sup>36</sup>. However, after counting at the polling stations was completed, issues were raised over security measures in the handling of the ballot boxes. Even though locks and seals were used to protect ballot boxes, serious allegations have been noted. Although there were stringent measures put in place to account for ballot papers and boxes, seven ballot boxes and papers were discovered at the home of Zaka District Administrator's house<sup>37</sup>. Similar allegations were made elsewhere. To avoid such costly occurrences, PEMMO recommends that sensitive election

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<sup>32</sup> Ndoro, C. 2005. *Election Update 2005: Zimbabwe*

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.sardc.net> "Zimbabwe Flooded with Election Observers and Journalists."

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*

material such as ballot boxes and ballot papers should be stored and delivered under strict security in order to prevent electoral fraud.

On the other hand, measures were made to avoid electoral fraud at the constituency level. There were three voting queues, each containing at least one ballot box, allocated for the use of voters whose surnames began with letters A-L, M and N-Z according to the Electoral Act<sup>38</sup>. Furthermore, it has been noted the positioning of booth was in a manner that did not comprise the secrecy of the ballot. Despite concerns by the country's various interest groups on the security measures concerning ballot papers and ballot boxes, various observer missions including the South African Observer Mission asserted the outcome of the election as the will of the citizens. To eradicate unfair practises, each constituency had a ballot paper which had its own unique stamp to reduce chances of stuffing ballot papers<sup>39</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

This article has explained the critical contribution that election materials make in the running of elections. Furthermore, it has alluded on the recommended principles for best electoral practices in Zimbabwe. With the majority of the various international observer missions satisfied with the conduct of the elections, interest groups are, however, adamant that there were some discrepancies in the handling of the election materials.

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid*  
<sup>39</sup> *ibid*