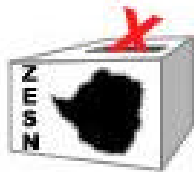


# Zimbabwe Election Support Network



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## **USE OF TRADITIONAL LEADERS BY POLITICAL PARTIES A MAJOR CONCERN SAYS ZESN**

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) which fielded 68 accredited observers in the Lupane by-election noted with concern a major disturbing occurrence, which happened at most polling stations, that voters were passing through their village or kraal head to register or have their names ticked before proceeding to cast their ballot.

ZESN strongly deplors this development, which has become a common feature in rural elections, because it is intimidatory in nature and designed to influence voters to cast their ballots for a particular party.

For example, at Gegema Polling Station a headman and seven other people were strategically positioned, though outside the 100m range, ticking names of people who were entering the station to cast their ballots. The group, which was seated on chairs, ran away and hid behind some shrubs upon noticing that they were the focus of attention of observers.

Though people were voting peacefully at Kanyandavu Polling Station, a sub-chief from the area identified only as Khumalo was seated just outside the station together with another person, who was marking a register of people that were going to vote.

While others were voting, ZESN observers noticed youths loitering around shopping centres. The voter apathy portrayed by youths in Lupane could point to lack of voter education while the high turn out by elderly people could be as a result of fear instilled into their hearts and minds by traditional leaders and political leaders. In addition those who also needed assistance were the elderly, reasons being illiteracy and visual impairment because of old age.

However, the opposition Movement for Democratic Change Party (MDC) lost its Lupane seat after its candidate Njabuliso Mguni lost to his closest rival Martin Khumalo of ZANU PF by 883 votes. Mguni polled 9 186 and Khumalo got 10 069.

A significant number of voters was turned away during the two days of polling for various reasons including lack of proper identification, names not appearing on the voters' roll while some were under the age of 18. For example, about 42 people were turned away at Mgijima Polling Station by 1420hrs on the first day of voting because they had no identification cards.

Generally, voting was conducted in a peaceful atmosphere during both days of polling, but there were some isolated cases of clear intimidation as well as harassment of observers by war veterans and senior Zanu PF party members. A ZESN observer was harassed at Mgijima School by 10 war veterans believed to be from Binga, Nkayi and

Tsholotsho. They detained him for about 1 hour and 45 minutes, accusing him of being an agent of America.

Also of concern was intimidation of European Union accredited observers by Zanu PF Deputy Political Commissar, Dr Sikhanyiso Ndhlovu, who accused them of writing negative reports on Zimbabwe. Such behaviour marred otherwise what could have been one of the most peaceful elections to be conducted in the country.

At almost all the polling stations, our observers also noted with concern that some police officers were manning ink detectors, which should not have been the case under normal election circumstances. Ink detectors should be manned by the polling officer/s.

ZESN would also like to condemn the prevalent use of state resources for party business. ZESN observers identified several vehicles with government registration numbers being used by Zanu PF officials during the two-day voting period.

However, the ZESN was disturbed by the presence of neatly pinned up Zanu PF campaign posters at some polling stations as well as offices of the Electoral Supervisory Commission (ESC) at Lupane business centre. The ESC is supposed to be an independent and non-partisan institution.

That apart, some of the presiding officers were not co-operative with observers and at times, declined to release voting statistics referring them to their command centre in Lupane.

ZESN would like to re-emphasise the urgent need for electoral reforms, in particular, the establishment of a fully-fledged Independent Electoral Commission to conduct elections in Zimbabwe.

We commend the sense of maturity of refraining from violence, which was shown by voters, candidates and party supporters during the two days of polling.

ENDS////