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# DEMOCRATISATION AND SECURITISATION OF ZIMBABWE'S NATIONAL ELECTIONS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF BIOMETRIC VOTER REGISTRATION

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## ABSTRACT

*This article discusses opportunities and challenges of Zimbabwe adopting the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) given the long history of teething problems with the security, integrity, credibility and legitimacy of national elections. Zimbabwe has had disputed elections since the emergence of competitive electoral politics in 2000. Perennially, the losing opposition parties, mostly MDC-T party, has rejected election results and, on several occasions, approached courts of law seeking for the nullification of elections citing allegations of irregularities including flaws in voter registration, double voting and fraud. The general view held by the opposition has always been that there exists a grey area that the ruling ZANU-PF party has historically manipulated. This article asserts that some of the challenges appear to have stemmed from the Zimbabwean Electoral Commission's (ZEC's) reliance on an archaic voter's roll, whose shortcomings justified calls for the adoption of the BVR in 2017 to possibly clean the defective voters roll and to improve the integrity, credibility, acceptability and legitimacy of the electoral process. This article relies on existent literature to investigate opportunities and challenges for adopting the BVR as a modest voter registration system meant to bring about political democratisation through securitisation of Zimbabwean elections. Accordingly, the article holds that the improvement of voter registration system should enhance democracy in Zimbabwe.*

**Keywords:** Biometric data, Democracy, Elections, Voter registration

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The ability of citizens to freely vote during an election remains a cornerstone of modern democracy. For citizens to vote in an election, they have to be properly and correctly registered as voters in accordance with electoral laws. It is therefore paramount for responsible authorities to establish comprehensive and robust systems that afford eligible citizens an

opportunity to register and inspect the correctness of their details ahead of a plebiscite. This process of voter registration entails the practice of registering eligible voters, while the voters' register or roll becomes the outcome of this process (Evrensel, 2010). Both the process of voter registration and the end result (voters' roll) need to be accurate, sustainable and politically acceptable to various electoral stakeholders (Evrensel, 2010). A desirable

and acceptable standard of the voter registration process has to be fair, transparent, effective, comprehensive and inclusive so as to produce a secure and reliable register in the eyes of all interested parties. Thus, the voter registration process and the resultant voters' roll should not advantage nor disadvantage other contestants over others. Any voter registration process that falls short of these integral democratic principles often affects the credibility of an election and put the legitimacy of the winner on the spotlight.

Considerable attention has been given to the adoption and efficacy of BVR technologies the world over. In some instances, the BVR system is portrayed as the most efficient and effective system for making the voter's roll "accurate" and "fool-proof" (Dziva & Chigora, 2017). Dziva & Chigora (2017) further note how political will and effective implementation of the BVR has the potential to offer high quality and accurate election data, and ultimately curb electoral irregularities that come with a flawed voters roll register. Contrariwise, pessimists dismiss the claim highlighting the difficulties that limit the BVR system from being a perfect system, including the constant capturing of deaths, movements of populations, and other challenges that may affect the efficiency of the BVR in a nation. Studies also reveal how the utility of BVR systems can be affected by limited political will, misconceptions, mistrust and limited resources (Evrensel, 2010; Harley & Zubrinich, 2015; Piccolino, 2015). Specifically, Evrensel's (2010) argues that countries adopting the BVR should consider their own socio-eco-

nomic and political contexts, resource limitations and specific needs. This article discusses the adoption of the BVR to include the opportunities and challenges that come with this new system to Zimbabwe's electoral democracy. An article of this stature directs other emerging democracies' planning to adopt biometric and to consider critical issues surrounding BVR methodologies, and make the most informed and sustainable choices possible.

Methodologically, this article relies on review of books, articles, institutional reports, and newspaper articles related to voter registration and elections. Also, it draws opinions of political analysts, and key individuals within government, political parties and civil society organizations in Zimbabwe's electoral politics. The article comprises five sections starting with this introduction, followed by brief background to voter registration. The third section discusses the opportunities brought by the adoption of the BVR in Zimbabwe. A discussion of the challenges faced in implementing the BVR in Zimbabwe is presented in section four. Conclusion and recommendations are offered in section five.

## **2. BACKGROUND TO VOTER REGISTRATION**

The quality of the voter registration process and the product (that is the voters' roll) can determine the outcome of an election and consequently the stability of a country's democracy (Evrensel, 2010). In Zimbabwe, voter registration problems and the existence of a defective voters' roll remained a callous issue that saw losing parties and ob-

server missions rejecting results and withholding the credibility of the 2000 and 2005 Parliamentary Elections, the 2002 Presidential Elections as well as the 2008 and 2013 harmonised elections of Senate, Parliament, President and Local Authorities (Sachikonye, 2009; RAU, 2013; ZESN, 2013; Mapuva & Mapuva, 2014; Dziva & Chigora, 2015). Some emerging issues pertaining to voter registration and the voters' roll queries and contestations included deceased persons, missing names of eligible voters in opposition party strongholds, duplication of voter names and other details inter alia. An audit of the voters' roll by RAU (2013) demonstrated large numbers of duplications, of more than 800,000 voters. When the voters' roll was updated in 2010, it was found that of the 350 000 new names added in the voters roll since 2008, almost 1500 were over 100 years old (Johnson, 2011).

A flawed voter's roll that included the names of deceased persons and duplicate entries engendered the system to be amenable to forgery, fraud and vote rigging. As noted by Bratton (2014: 168), "an inflated roll provides an alibi those who would print extra ballots, stuff ballot boxes, vote more than once, or otherwise inflate the count". Thus, the continued use of the old voters' roll allowed for double voting, fraud and disfranchisement of potential voters in Zimbabwe. Such irregularities created an uneven playing field for political parties and electorates to democratically participate in elections, thus compromising the credibility of the contests (Dziva & Chigora, 2017).

Amid these glaring challenges, elec-

toral stakeholders in Zimbabwe, including the main and long-time opposition party (the MDCs), continuously called for electoral reforms that pave way for credible and democratic elections in accordance with the international standards. In 2016, more than 15 stakeholders, including political parties and civil society organizations came together and formed the National Election Reform Agenda (NERA) to petition Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and the government to embark on electoral reforms and effective systems to ensure that citizens may exercise their fundamental right to vote (Dziva & Chigora, 2017).

The impact of NERA's advocacy work resulted in the adoption of Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) by ZEC in terms of Section 36 A of the Electoral Act [Chapter 2:13] through Proclamation No. 6 of 2017, as a modest system to continuously register potential voters in Zimbabwe ahead of the 30 July 2018 elections and beyond. The adoption of the BVR was further necessitated by the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013) which bestowed ZEC with powers to compile and maintain the voters register. Prior to 2013, the register was manned by the office of the Registrar General, which was largely seen by many critics as neither impartial nor autonomous. The Registrar himself was viewed by many as a member of the ruling ZANU PF party, who often manipulated the old cycled voters roll and hidden evidence by restricting public audit to the roster (Bratton, 2014).

The BVR entails the use of technology

that captures unique biological and behavioral features of a registrant, including finger prints and/or facial scans. Captured biometric features of the potential voters are stored in a database alongside the demographic data, date of birth and location details found on one's national identity (ID) card. The ZEC also used the Automated Finger Print Identification System (AFIS) to expunge duplicates or multiple registrations. Captured information will be of use to uniquely identify a registered voter during voter identification and verification processes, including on the voting day.

The BVR process started in 2017 and ended on 1 June 2018, in line with section 26 A of the Electoral Act, providing that registration for impending elections ceases two days after its proclamation date (GoZ, 2018). Once created, Zimbabwe's BVR voter's registers were used for voter verification processes, which took place between 19 and 29 July 2018, ahead of the 30 July 2018 elections, and beyond. Unfortunately, the BVR was not be of use to verify voters on the Election Day, as ZEC will resort to the verification of voters by comparing the voter's details in the voters' roll against those on their identity cards. By so doing, Zimbabwe joined many countries that adopted BVR and decided not to use the system for verification purposes on the Election Day.

Gelb & Diofasi (2016) show that few African countries, inclusive of Kenya in 2013, Ghana in 2012, Namibia in 2014 and Nigeria in 2015, have attempted to use (or used) the BVR voter identification on polling days.

### **3. OPPORTUNITIES OF THE BVR IN ZIMBABWE**

This section discusses the opportunities that Zimbabwe drew from the adoption of the BVR, which include cleanliness and accuracy of the voter's roll, effectiveness and efficiency as well as improved voter participation.

#### **3.1 Clean and accurate voter's roll**

The use of biometric features for registering voters is exemplary of global efforts to produce a sound voter's register and to verify registered voters on the voting day. Basically, biometrics are used for two main purposes: de-duplication or registries, that is, finding multiple occurrences of the same person in a register; and, verification and identification of voters on the polling day (Harley & Zubrinich, 2015). The ability of the BVR to clean the voter's roll was strategic for Zimbabwe, a country that had allegations of archaic voter's roll with irregularities which resulted in election results being rejected by competing political parties. Some of the allegations raised in relation to the voter's roll included the alleged multiple and dead registrants thereby leading to credibility issues which were difficult to rebut (ZEC, 2018).

An unclean voter's register allowed for double voting, ghost voting and the printing of excess ballots that were manipulated for fraud and rigging purposes. Thus, ZEC adopted BVR as a secure system to clean, and come up with a comprehensive and credible voter's roll with no duplicate names to curb malpractice and multiple registrations.

Evidence from other African countries that adopted the BVR, including Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Kenya, Namibia and Ivory Coast, have shown that the system can produce a comprehensive and credible voter's roll, free of duplicates or multiple registrations that create room for malpractice, fraud and human error (Evrensel, 2010; Harley & Zubrinich, 2015; Piccolino, 2015).

During Sierra Leone's 2012 elections, the BVR fixed duplications and multiple registrations caused by political parties that imported foreigners to vote in constituencies they do not belong (NEW/IRN, 2012). Similarly, the adoption of the BVR in Ivory Coast proved useful in cleaning irregularities, including multiple registrations in the voter's roll. Upon comparing the BVR data and the previous voter's roll in October 2009, the electoral management body of Ivory Coast found about 1 033 985 names that were neither in the previous voter's roll nor national registries (NEW/IRN, 2012).

In a similar way, ZEC used the AFIS and other BVR identifiers to do data decryption, discovered and expunged duplicates or multiple registrations. This exercise put to rest fears for double or multiple voting ahead of the 30 July 2018 harmonized elections in Zimbabwe. In a way, the BVR improves the trust and confidence of election stakeholders, thus enhancing the prospects of fair and credible elections. Regarding Ghana, Piccolino (2015) shows that the adoption of the BVR in 2002 improved electorate's confidence, and that about 75% of registered Ghanaian voters agreed that the new system

represented an improvement over the old one while 87% perceived it as a useful tool for ensuring a clean voter's roll as well as fair and credible elections.

### **3.2 Citizen participation, efficiency and effectiveness**

The adoption of BVR enhances people participation, and it has increased the efficiency and effectiveness of ZEC in running democratic elections. With the BVR system, ZEC managed to register voters and come up with a new voter's roll within a limited space of time. Unlike the cumbersome, slow, inefficient and discouraging paper registration exercise, the BVR system was faster and fascinating to many, especially the youth. Using the BVR system, ZEC officials scanned the registrants' and other biometric data before storing them in a data base. This article notes that the BVR registration system took less time than the paper based system. ERC (2018) estimates the registration process took between 5 to 10 minutes.

Undeniably, the short time spent by a voter to register through the BVR system fascinated many hesitant potential voters to register through this system. ZEC slightly surpassed its projected 5 million voters and registered more than 5.5 million voters ahead of the July 2018 harmonized elections (ZEC, 2018). This article supports the results of studies by Gelb & Diofasi (2016) which show that countries which adopted the BVR innovatively increase the speed of voter registration processes, lure and increase the number of registrants. With the BVR system, Bolivia expanded the number of reg-

istrants from 3 million to 5 million by enrolling previously undocumented citizens (Gelb & Diofasi, 2016). In Ghana, about 14 million people registered to vote in 40 days. The same happened during Tanzania's 2015 elections, where 23.2 million were registered within 4 months compared to 2.4 million for the National ID program over four years (Gelb & Diofasi, 2016). The ability of the BVR to increase citizen's participation in an election enhances and builds the legitimacy of the winning government post elections.

### **3.3 Smooth voter verification**

The adoption of BVRs allowed the ZEC to innovatively devise ways for citizens to easily and conveniently verify the accuracy of their registration details during the public voter inspection period, 19 to 29 May 2018. Above and beyond the physical public voter inspection, ZEC introduced other innovative ways for registrants to inspect their details courtesy of the BVR created voter's roll. Commendably, ZEC introduced online voter's roll inspection for registrants. In a drive to sensitize citizens about this innovation, ZEC's voter education teams distributed flyers with information regarding ways in which individuals can verify their registration details online.

One of the devised platforms included the online link which could be used for continuous inspection of registration details, even outside the legally gazetted timeframes. Another platform included the dialing of \*265# and entering one's personal details using all registered mobile networks (Telecel,

Econet and Netone) in Zimbabwe. In addition, ZEC sent SMS to registrants, with their captured voter registration details, including their polling stations. Close to 3 256 440 SMS messages were sent to registrants around the country, while 916 001 people are estimated to have verified their details through the \*265# platform (ZEC, 2018). The process of opening up various platforms for voter verification exercises created opportunities for registrants to easily and conveniently verify their details without the inconveniences that come with being physically present at ZEC's established inspection centers. The requirement for one to physically inspect the voter's roll posed challenges to registrants who face mobility challenges as some of the centers are inaccessible for people with disabilities, and are located far away from their homesteads.

Overall, a comprehensive voter verification process contributes to accuracy of registration details and informs registrants of their voting stations well before the Election Day. This has the potential to immensely reduce the number of voters turned away on the election day, especially for reporting to wrong stations and mismatching details. Indeed, this was one of the callous issues in Zimbabwe's 2013 plebiscite, when over 750 000 urban voters who were turned away for various reasons, including reporting to wrong stations and mismatching details (ZESN, 2013).

### **3.4 Speedy and timeous production of the voter's roll**

The adoption of the BVR allowed ZEC to promptly avail the voter's register

to interested parties for scrutiny. In previous contests, the credibility and democratic nature of the Zimbabwean contests was questioned on several grounds, including the basis that ZEC failed to issue the voter's roll in time for scrutiny by interested parties. During the 2013 elections, ZEC and the Registrar General's office failed to provide interested parties with an electronic voter's roll in time, even after they had paid the exorbitant fees charged for one to access the register. Instead, the register was only issued a few days before the election in hardcopies, against section 21 of the Electoral Act of Zimbabwe and the SADC Guidelines for Democratic Elections, which stress the need by ZEC to timeously avail electronic and hard copies well in time for easy and precise scrutiny (ZDI, 2017).

With the BVR system, the voter's roll was released on 15 June 2018, well before the harmonized elections slated for 30 July 2018. Although some political parties complained that ZEC took long to release the roll, this article argues that 15 June 2018 was an improvement for 30 July 2018 compared to the 2008 and 2013 elections, when the roll was only issued out 5 days before the voting day. Thus, ZEC's release of the voters roll 46 days before the 30 July 2018 election day, is within a reasonable time as provided in the Constitution. Additionally, ZEC gave itself 17 days after closure of the voters roll on 2 June 2008, to clean the voter's roll. Thus, the adoption of the BVR has ensured timely production and release of the voter's register for scrutiny by interested parties. Such a move will go a long way to ensure openness, transparency

and credibility of electoral contests.

#### **4. CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED IN THE ADOPTION OF THE BVR**

The adoption of the BVR in Zimbabwe was not an uncomplicated exercise because there were serious challenges that included financial constraints, procurement procedures, storage, politics and the absence of overarching reforms of the entire system.

##### **4.1 Financial constraints**

The adoption of the BVR has been viewed by many as costly and unnecessary exercise for an already financially impoverished nation. Zimbabwe's economy has been ailing since 2000, and ZEC has always been a recipient of donor's financial and technical support for its election programs. This financial predicament of Zimbabwe was indeed a challenge for the easy adoption of the costly BVR. Evidence from African countries that decided to go biometric, including Tanzania show that they spent over 298 billion shillings (US\$180 million) for BVR re-registration only (Baile, 2014). In Papua New Guinea, after the adoption and implementation of the BVR, the election cost over US\$60 per voter (TEMCO 2016).

The adoption of the BVR comes with costs associated with the purchase of BVR kits. In addition, the BVR equipment are procured from foreign countries, and most African countries adopt the process as only end-users who may only know how to operate without much knowledge or expertise in maintenance and repairs, hence



the need for training and retraining of BVR operators. The costs may also include a competitive per diem given to trainees and operators of the BVR kits. Failure to give BVR operators competitive per diems can hamper the adoption and successful implementation of the system. Evidence from the Tanzanian experience clearly shows how BVR kit operators decided to terminate their engagement after completing registration only in the first zone citing low pay that did not cushion them against the exorbitant living costs that nullified the benefits of being engaged (TEMCO, 2016).

This costly nature of the BVR system was a headache for Zimbabwe until the UNDP offered to complement the government to fund the procurement of BVR kits and other implementation processes. With financial support from the UNDP, ZEC managed to purchase BVR kits and to successfully train and dispatch BVR kit operators for voter registration process (UNDP, 2017). The UNDP's involvement was however, questioned by some election stakeholders as something which weakened and compromised the ownership and independence of ZEC. Nevertheless, the UNDP support enabled Zimbabwe to successfully adopt the BVR process. With adequate trainings courtesy of the UNDP, Zimbabwe recorded a few cases of incompetent BVR operators. This was opposed to Tanzania, where BVR kit operators often failed to handle minor hardware and software challenges (TEMCO, 2016). Incompetent staff reduces the public's confidence and makes mistakes that can disfranchise a majority of potential registrants.

## **4.2 Disagreements on procurement procedures**

The main contentious issue in Zimbabwe's adoption of the BVR system revolved around the procurement processes and procedures of BVR kits. Many political players, including the main opposition party called for a transparent and open tendering process to choose the supplier for the BVR kits. In the view of the MDC T party, the tendering processes and procedures, which resulted in the selection of Laxton Group, a Chinese company to supply BVR kits was not only unprocedural but also suspicious. The opposition suspected the ruling ZANU PF party had influenced selection of the Laxton Company, well known ZANU PF friends as a result of their look East policy. Amid these allegations, ZEC proceeded to engage Laxton but under fire from opposition political parties, who would have wanted to be involved or rather at least the engagement of UNDP, an independent institution as a risk-mitigating mechanism.

## **4.3 Technical challenges**

Some of the minor technical challenges faced by BVR operators in Zimbabwe included the failure of the BVR kits to read some fingerprints, especially those of people who work in mines and construction companies. This challenge was also experienced in other African countries that adopted the BVR, including Zambia, where fingerprints of more than 10% of eligible voters could not be captured by the machines (Evrensel, 2010). Another survey in Ghana revealed how BVR kits failed

to capture registrants' finger prints at 19% stations. To make matters worse, these faults were being experienced in the absence of technicians to quickly rectify the faults (Golden et al. 2014). Unlike in the Ghanaian experience, ZEC technicians were always on standby to repair the malfunctioned machines and rectify other related challenges within 24 hours. The presence of technicians in Zimbabwe reduced the time the affected registrants had to wait in order to register as voters. It was also commendable to note that ZEC had power backups and solar power in remote and other areas without electricity. As a result, incidences where potential registrants were frustrated and their precious time wasted while they waited to register were reduced.

#### **4.4 Unholy alliance between ZEC and the ruling party**

The adoption of BVR has been shrouded with suspicion by electoral players in Zimbabwe. The ZANU PF party has always had comfort in the use of the chequered Mudede voter's roll. For these reasons, ZANU PF was always against the adoption of the BVR system. However, this stance changed at last minute as ZANU PF supported its adoption. Despite their repeated complaints against the shambolic voters roll and calls for electoral reforms, the MDC and the general public remain suspicious that ZANU PF can use its proximity to ZEC to hijack and manipulate this new system to their advantage.

While the general public's resistance to advanced systems stems from their limited understanding of technology and

personal shortcomings thereof, civil society and opposition parties resist new system due to fear that the ruling party can take advantage of the general public's shortcomings to their advantage. Evidence from other countries that adopted the BVR, including Nigeria, support the view that the general public and non-state actors in elections cautiously give in to the state's sudden change of electoral systems or reforms due to suspicion and mistrust in emerging democracies. Yakubu (2017) claims that Nigerians, generally, find it difficult to shift from their comfort zones with the result that the introduction of technology to the electoral process met with brick walls at some quarters.

#### **4.5 Suspicion over the storage and after use of BVR data**

Electoral stakeholders in Zimbabwe were also concerned with the storage of BVR kits and data after the registration process. The opposition parties suspect that the proximity of ZANU PF to ZEC places them at an advantage to access BVR data, and being positioned to tamper with the database or equipment as part of the election rigging process. The general public also suspect that the information collated maybe used for other purposes including infringing their rights to privacy and secrecy of the ballot. The BVR system captures the iris, face or fingerprint for recognition purposes. Unlike the fingerprint and iris, the face can present some fears and a challenge to the right to privacy. Facial recognition can be used without the knowledge of the subject. This outcry increased especially after ZEC issued a voter's

roll without the captured faces of voters on 15 June 2018, which left many wondering about the purpose of including voters' faces in the BVR data.

The collation of biometric data is worrying in the context of political and civil liberties where the ability of governments to identify protesters against their right to freedom of expression. This article notes that the presence of political party leaders peddling falsehoods to unsuspecting electorates in rural Zimbabwe that the BVR data has made it easy for them to trace who would have voted for the unwanted party during elections. While these falsehoods can be dispelled by a comprehensive voter education, the threats linger in those areas which once suffered violence as reprisals for voting non-dominant parties. When this happens, electorates' political choices are blinkered towards a political party of the feared purveyors of political violence instead of the voters' choice.

Some sections of the society believe that the BVR system will be used by government departments, including the police to hunt down criminals on the run. Consequently, some criminals on "wanted lists" for various crimes did not register with the BVR system. The suspicion and worry that the government may overstep and use BVR data for other purposes in the post-election era is augmented with experience from other African countries that adopted the BVR before Zimbabwe. In Benin and the DRC, BVR cards became applicants' first official identity documents and were used for other purposes after the elections (Gelb &

Diofasi, 2016). According to TEMCO (2016), similar problems were also experienced when Tanzania adopted the BVR, as people at Geita and Simiyu thought the adoption of the BVR was necessitated by the need to capture killers of people with albinism (TEMCO, 2016). The same applies to Tunduru area, where people claimed that BVR kits had multiple intentions to register voters and to test HIV/AIDS (TEMCO, 2016). In Kenya, communities avoided the BVR due to rumors that it caused health problems including cancer, infertility and erectile dysfunction (TEMCO, 2016). With the widespread use of social media, pessimists to the change, including interested politicians intentionally, spread false information about the BVR and its intended uses. In some communities, the voter registration slips were used to select beneficiaries of food aid. This abuse of voter registration and collection of serial numbers of the slips was later on condemned by ZEC. Thus, limited explanations on the aim and ultimate usage of the BVR data affected some people's understanding and support for the BVR adoption in Zimbabwe.

#### **4.6 Failure to bring encompassing reforms**

The general sentiment about the BVR has been that it does not resolve the broader electoral challenges of Zimbabwe in the 21st century. Indeed, Zimbabwe has been facing many electoral challenges in the pre-election, during and after the election, including the bloated voter's roll, the alleged impartiality of ZEC, gerrymandering of constituencies, violence, vote buy-

ing and assisted voting (Sachikonye, 2009; Mapuva & Mapuva, 2014; Dziva & Chigora, 2015). Some of these challenges are far beyond the scope of the BVR but rather speak to the need for broader reforms. European Commission/United Nations Development Programme (2013) notes that technologies are not the solution on their own, for they are typically not the problem alone. As long as there are no broader reforms and efforts to make ZEC a partial and independent institution, the influence of the BVR in ensuring democratic elections remains minimal. This explains why the MDC Alliance continued to cry foul of the uneven electoral ground ahead of July 30 Elections even with the BVR in place. On 5 June 2018, the opposition party alliance organized a massive demonstration and petitioned ZEC for reforms that included an external audit to the BVR register, demilitarization of rural areas, equal media coverage, and access to BVR servers amongst others.

The positive impact of the BVR as a solid system to deal with impersonation, multiple voting and ensure democratic elections is likely to be affected by Zimbabwe's decision not to use the system on the Election Day. One of the main purposes of the BVR system remains the need to identify, verify voters and eliminate double voting on the polling day (Harley and Zubrinich, 2015). The use of the BVR on the voting day has the potential to eliminate impersonation and multiple voting (Gelb & Diofasi, 2016). Empirical studies in Ghana also showed that the use of the BVR authentication machines was likely to significantly

reduce cases of multiple voting and ballot stuffing (Golden et al., 2014).

The use of the BVR on the voting day also reduces the number of voters turned away for mismatching details. Due to human errors, a large number of voters find their details incorrectly registered on the voting day, and were turned away in numbers without exercising their right to vote. This was a result of ZEC's over reliance on the ID number and ID picture for purposes of authenticating the potential voter. Problems emerged when the picture or some details on the ID were found impaired, something which resulted in the voter being turned away. Countries that adopted the BVR and used it on election day, including Namibia, Kenya and Nigeria, managed to dispel fears of double voting and reduced the numbers of voters turned away for mismatching details as other biometric features were resorted to verify a voter in case of mismatching details.

The use of the BVR system to verify voters on the Election Day means limited reliance on the questionable indelible ink by ZEC, which sometimes create room for double voting and disenfranchisement of potential voters. Suspecting electoral stakeholders alleged that some fraudulent voters washed the ink away with strong chemicals in order to vote multiple times. In Parkistan, the use of ink to verify voters on the Election Day revealed massive fraud, including a case of one man voting over 300 times from a voting facility reserved for women (Malik, 2014). Reliance on the indelible ink also disenfranchised many workers who work with related

inks in their trades in Zimbabwe. These include mine workers who were denied the chance to vote because their hands would be soiled with chemicals which look like the ZEC ink whilst they go through their everyday industrial work. Consequently, these potential voters are denied their right to vote election officials as they will appear as if they are trying to vote more than once. The use of the BVR, however, can minimize these problems and ensure all eligible voters exercise their right to vote as other biometric features can be resorted to verify and confirm doubts.

Furthermore, the use of the BVR on Election Day would have given ZEC an opportunity to consider doing away with the somewhat undemocratic polling station based voting and opt for ward, constituency or other democratic systems of voting. In Zimbabwe, the constituency-based voting system was used from 1980 up to 2005 and was scrapped in favor of the polling and ward-based system amid suspicions of political parties that were abusing the prerogative for fraud, impersonation and multiple voting. Due to fears for double and multiple voting, ZEC has been traditional switching between ward and station based voting which disfranchise many potential voters working outside the station or ward on the voting day. This exclude those who will be polling officials and members of the security services and diplomats oversees entitled to vote by postal votes under sections 22A(3), 56(1) and 72 of the Electoral Act. Those often disfranchised included medical doctors, nurses, ambulance drivers, prisoners and patients amongst many others

who are always away from their polling stations. Even with law guaranteeing postal and special votes to those who will be on national duty on election day, only 22 222 of the 60 000 special voters cast their ballots while the rest failed to vote due to logistical hurdles they faced (ZESN, 2013). While the 2018 election will be polling station-based, this article contends that the adoption of the BVR system provides an opportunity for the adoption of a constituency or other democratic voting systems, whereby one is able to vote at any polling station without compromising the one-person one-vote principle.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This article holds that the BVR system is an internationally accepted innovation that has the potential to deal with some of the callous issues in Zimbabwean elections, including the sham-bolic voters' roll. For Zimbabwe, the adoption of the BVR is desirable, timely and necessary to provide a more meddle-proof electoral process that has the potential to bring efficiency, effectiveness, accuracy and integrity in the running of elections, security of voters' data, and ultimately the credibility and legitimacy of election results. Important as the BVR has become, its successful adoption and implementation requires adequate planning, awareness raising, funding and above all, political will from election stakeholders. It also ought to be understood that the BVR system on its own will not deal with all the electoral challenges of Zimbabwe, some which are rooted in mistrust

and lack of political freedoms. As long as ZEC remains impartial and there are no wider electoral reforms, the legitimacy of the election results will remain questionable in Zimbabwe. After all, electoral contests by their nature are a political process, and resemble the struggles for power. Even a technically perfect electoral contest cannot necessarily result in the political acceptance of the results by the losing parties. For the enhancement of electoral democracy, this article recommends that the ZEC institutes broader electoral reforms that guarantee equality, fairness and participation of all citizens. The ZEC would also be challenged to move beyond adoption of BVR in order to embrace implementation of the system on the Election Day to mitigate the irregularities associated with voter identification and verification. For other countries considering the adoption of the BVR, this article recommends mobilisation of resources, adequate planning, and awareness raising and political will of all election stakeholders.

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