BUILDING A CASE FOR THE ADOPTION OF AN E-VOTING ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN ZIMBABWE BASED ON THE NAMIBIAN EXPERIENCE

Article · December 2018

CITATIONS
2

READS
239

2 authors:

Cowen Dziva
Great Zimbabwe University
31 PUBLICATIONS **120** CITATIONS
SEE PROFILE

Percyslage Chigora
Midlands State University
25 PUBLICATIONS **171** CITATIONS
SEE PROFILE

BUILDING A CASE FOR THE ADOPTION OF AN E-VOTING ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN ZIMBABWE BASED ON THE NAMIBIAN EXPERIENCE

C Dziva
Great Zimbabwe University, Zimbabwe
P Chigora
Midlands State University, Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT

Zimbabwe is politically known for disputed elections often marred with allega-tions of violence, fraud and vote rigging. The main contentions surround the run-ning of the election itself, that is, voter registration, voting processes, ghost vot-ing, and overall counting and tallying processes. As the technological revolution continues to change, some countries have adopted electronic voting to curb vices of vote rigging associated with the archaic paper based systems of con-ducting elections. This article builds a case for the rationale and opportunities of adopting electronic voting as a lasting solution to Zimbabwe's tainted electoral history based on the Namibian experience, Africa's first-ever nation to conduct electronic voting during its 2014 Presidential and National Assembly elections. The research findings point to the fact that, though not an ultimate answer to all the electoral problems, electronic voting, which comes with less overhead costs, easy voting, more accurate counting and tabulation of results, can substantially help Zimbabwe in its search for fairness and credibility in elections.

Keywords: Democratic elections, Elections, Electronic voting, Fraud, Namibia, Zimbabwe

1. INTRODUCTION

The call for the transition from paper based systems to electronic voting is a product of dynamic electoral challenges bedevilling Zimbabwe since the year 2000. In the first decade of the 21st century, the following electoral contests took place in Zimbabwe: the 2000 Parliamentary Elections; 2002 Presidential Elections; 2005 Parliamentary Elections; 2008 harmonised elections of Senate, Parliament, President and Local Authority and the run-off elections in June 2008. In all these contests, civil society organisations and opposition parties were not content with the outcomes mainly due to alleged rigging and politically motivated violence before, during and after elections.The various rigging techniques which continue to be cited by losing parties and civil society include manipulation of the voters' roll, unilateral proclamation of electoral dates, unequal access to media, vote buying, disfranchisement

of eligible voters in opposition's stronghold, increased incidences of assisted voters, ghost voting, and tempering with ballot boxes, papers and election results (Zamchiya, 2013; Solidarity Peace Trust, 2013; Masunungure, 2013). Amid these allegations of undue influence on the electoral process by the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) formations and civil society have always been rejecting the election results.

Unlike all the electoral contests held in the new millennium, the 2013 harmonised elections in Zimbabwe recorded few instances of politically motivated violence. Political parties and supporters can therefore be applauded for taking heed to the repeated calls for peaceful co-existence by the Government of National Unity. Even with this favourable environment, the MDC formations and civil society rejected the legitimacy of the 2013 results claiming electoral fraud (Dziva & Chigora 2013; Raftopoulos 2013).

Similarly, observer missions, notably the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), the African Union (AU) and UN Observer Missions concluded that the elections were free, fair but withheld the credibility notch. Observer mission reports cited several noted electoral problems including the chaotic special voting process, inadequate voter registration and education processes, the unusual high numbers of assisted voters amid allegations of forced voting, voters being "frog marched" to polling stations, manipulation of the voters roll, printing of excess ballots papers; disfranchisement of urban voters and abuse of voter registration slips (SADC Election Observation Mission 2013; AU Election Observation Mission 2013; UN 2013). These irregularities created an unlevelled playing field for political parties and electorates to democratically participate in the 2013 elections, thus compromising the credibility of the contest.

Amid claims of gross irregularities, President Mugabe of the ZANU PF was declared the winner of the 2013 elections. This did not go well with the losing Movement for Democratic Change – Tsvangirai (MDC-T) party who rejected the results and resolved to boycott Parliament. Repeated efforts by the MDC-T faction to challenge the results at the Constitutional Court hit a snag due to lack of evidence.

The MDC withdrew the filed case since Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) refused to supply details of presidential voting patterns by constituency and polling station (Masunungure, 2013). An attempt by the MDC to approach the courts worsened the situation as the High Court ruled that ZEC was not compelled to provide the MDC-T with the final voting patterns (Masunungure, 2013; Solidarity Peace Trust, 2013).

For this case, and other electoral rulings, the Zimbabwean judiciary remains criticised for being impartial and kowtowing to the executive and ZANU PF path. To the opposition, the judiciary has largely failed to function as an

independent arbiter of justice.

To some extent, the 2013 elections taught many that there is more to democratic elections than the calm and peaceful voting environment. History is littered with examples of elections being manipulated in various means other than violence to influence their outcome (Olusola, Olusayo, Olatunde & Adesina, 2012; Dziva & Chigora, 2013). An election passes the free, fair and credible test after a wider consideration of democratic electoral processes: before, during and after the election.

Electoral contests in Zimbabwe have exhibited diverse irregularities since 2000, including vote buying, unfair access to media and voting material, printing of excess ballot papers for the purposes of rigging, partisan electoral body and application of law, intimidation and violence, and errors in counting and tallying of results (Dziva & Chigora, 2013; Masunungure, 2013; Raftopoulos, 2013; Zamchiya, 2013). While some of these problems point to the need for comprehensive electoral reforms, some decipher challenges with the paper based voting, hence the need to possibly adopt the electronic voting (hereinafter referred to as e-voting) system for smooth, fast voting, error free processing, counting and tabulation of results.

Already, Zimbabwe has taken steps towards modernising the electoral system through the adoption of biometric voter registration ahead of the 2018 elections. The biometric system is likely to offer high quality and accurate election data, and the ultimate curbing of electoral irregularities if effectively implemented. Indeed, this is a positive step towards cleaning the voters' roll and ensuring free, fair and credible elections. The adoption of biometric voting is important to this article and gives an impetus that Zimbabwe might opt for electronic voting in future.

Methodologically, this article relies on literature review and opinions from people on elections in Zimbabwe. Literature by scholars and institutions on e-voting in other countries was utilised, with a special reference to the experiences of Namibia during its 2014 electronic elections. Civil society organisations in the election field in Zimbabwe were targeted and interviewed on their views concerning the paper based system and adoption of the e-voting system.

Fortunately, most respondents had the chance to monitor and observe the Namibian poll, representing their organisations and some in their own capacities. Though the researchers did not get the chance to neither monitor nor observe the Namibian polls, the researchers observed Zimbabwean elections in 2008 and 2013. Participation at a workshop organised in Harare, Zimbabwe by Crisis Coalition in Zimbabwe and the Election Resources Centre to discuss the experiences of e-voting in Namibia offered useful insights on the topic and motivated the researchers to write this article.

The article comprises of five sections starting with the introduction. This is followed by a conceptualisation of election conduct in the digital era. The third section argues a case for electronic voting by way of showing the shortcomings of the paper based voting and the rationale for electronic voting. The fourth section highlights the opportunities for adoption of electronic voting in Zimbabwe. The last part of this article is the conclusion and recommendation section.

2. CONDUCTING ELECTIONS IN A DIGITAL ERA

E-voting is a mechanical voting system that uses mechanical means during elections. According to Iwu (2008) e-voting system is one of the several forms of automated voting methods which employ computer technology devices to improve several aspects of the electoral process. As opposed to the traditional use of ballot papers and boxes, electronic voting largely incorporates paperless voting methods. Generally, two main types of e-voting can be identified:

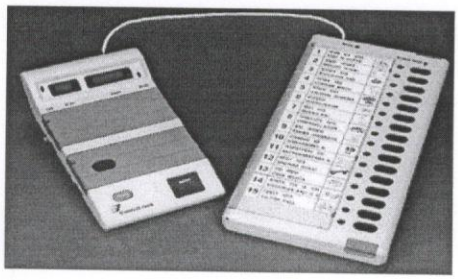
a) E-voting supervised by the physical presence of representatives of independent electoral body, e.g. e-voting machines (EVMs) at poll sites like the ones which were used in Namibia; and

b) E-voting within the voter's role influence (remote e-voting), not physically supervised by representatives of governmental authorities, e.g. voting from one's own or another person's computer via the internet, by mobile phones (including the Short Message Service, SMS), or via digital television (Parakh & Kak, 2010).

Of these two, EVMs are the most prominent used system of e-voting. The system was used in Namibia during the November 2014 elections and in many other parts of the world. The e-voting process in Namibia was conducted in the following way according to the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR):

> Voters would enter the voting booth and find a grey EVM with pictures and logos of the parties and candidates, and a green button next to each one. For voting, the electorate was required to make a choice of who they wanted from the listed ones and then press two buttons that is the green button corresponding to the party or candidate of choice, and then the red button at last to confirm the vote. After that, a beep sound from the EVM signalled to the voter that the vote had been recorded. If a voter made a mistake and pressed the green button next to a wrong candidate or party, there was a chance to correct the mistake by pressing the green button again to release that choice and start afresh. However, if the red button was pressed the vote could not be changed (IPPR, 2014).

Figure 1: The EVM used during Namibian Elections of November 2014



Source: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2014.

Varied reasons have been put forward by countries to explain their reasons for adopting e-voting. In populous nations such as India, manual voting systems were abandoned due to major logistical challenges faced in moving ballots around the country (Mourine & Ruhonde, 2013). In the Philippines, e-voting was adopted to deal with issues of fraud related to vote counting process (Mourine & Ruhonde, 2013). Zimbabwe's neighbour Namibia implemented e-voting in its efforts to ease voting, counting and tabulation of the election results and to boost the legitimacy of the electoral process (Julia, 2012).

In addition, the system provides for increased efficiency, anonymity, scalability, speed, audit and accuracy, which are major attributes of a democratic electoral system (Iwu, 2008).

Several studies give impetus to automate elections as the answer to the electoral problems (Alverez et al., 2004; Iwu, 2008; Olusola et al., 2012). Indeed, European, South American and Asian countries where e-voting systems have been piloted and/or implemented (Estonia, Belgium, Norway, the Philippines, Pakistan, Venezuela, and Switzerland) cited the need to ensure that citizens democratically exercise their right to vote free and fair (Alverez et al., 2004). If carefully designed, e-voting enhances polling and votes' security, confidentiality, sincerity and increased cost savings on reduced manpower, logistical materials and tools; and above all, instant analysis and reporting of outcomes (Olusola et al., 2012).

The electronic system, if done well, does not give room for ballot stuffing and multi-voting for eligible voters due to an independent verification of all voters. To avoid ballot stuffing during the Namibian electronic elections, Namibian officials did a pre-test session in the presence of observers and agents of parties to ensure that EVMs showed zero votes before the actual polling (ERC, 2014). To avoid double voting, the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) used hand held voter verification devices at all polling stations to verify and authenticate all voters before voting (ECN, 2014).

E-voting can deal with some of the electoral challenges faced in Africa, including the use misleading and confusing ballots, misreporting of votes, destruction or invalidation of ballots and the prolonged time that electoral bodies take to count and tabulate the

votes (IPPR, 2013). This is most important for Zimbabwe where counting and announcement of the 2008 Presidential elections took 5 weeks (ZESN, 2008), amid allegations for manipulation of results. The delay in the announcement of results creates anxiety among the public and political contestants. This can result in incidences of election-related violence and reduced general confidence in the electoral body.

EVMs improve voters' turnaround as the process flexibly allows one to vote from any workstation (Allan et al., 2005) or to vote at mobile polling stations. Probably it is due to this flexibility that 45.5% of Namibian voters were young people as they were fascinated with technology and presence of 2 711 mobile stations (ECN, 2014). By nature, mobile voting facilities reduce the distance to be travelled to a polling station by an electorate. As a result, electronic based voting technologies would expand the reach and range of potential voting population to include the vulnerable and disadvantaged voters due to flexibility that comes with mobile voting stations.

The movement from paper based to the e-voting systems has not been without problems though. In 2013, Kenya introduced the biometric systems to streamline voter registration process and electronic tallying of results. The process was however, abandoned mid-way of elections due to operational and technical problems faced, and the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission of Kenya was forced to revert to a hand count (IPPR, 2014). The manual process took five days and threatened to destabilize the entire electoral process. The biometric voter identification was re-introduced and utilised during the 2017 elections in Kenya. However, the main opposition leader, Raila Odinga challenged the results, citing hacking of the system and accusing the electoral body for failing to verify the results before declaring Uhuru Kenyatta the winner of the vote held on 8 August 2017 (Matu, 2017). The Supreme Court of Kenya took a bold decision to nullify the results and called for fresh elections by 17 October 2017. This is a milestone ruling with the potential to significantly impact on the rule of law and judiciary independence of Kenya and Africa at large. For this study, the ruling clearly proves how electronic systems can also be subject to controversy in Africa.

Some countries have adopted and later moved away from e-voting technologies, including Germany and Netherlands, citing several reasons including the legal and technical challenges. In 2008, Netherlands, after several years of using e-voting, decertified all its machines and moved back to paper balloting due technical challenges faced (Mourine & Ruhonde, 2013). In Germany, 39 voting districts used electronic voting machines during the federal election of 2005 instead of paper ballots (Parakh & Kak, 2010). The voting system was abandoned after the German Federal Constitutional Court ruled on 3 March 2009, that electronic voting was unconstitutional and discouraged its use in future elections (Parakh

& Kak, 2010). The decision against the use of this system came after the court had realised how particular voting machines used in the election did not live up to the constitutional principle of transparency, which requires that voting machines be safeguarded against potential manipulation or error through procedures that are understandable to the average citizen (Parakh & Kak, 2010). The mixed experiences characterised in the adoption, non-adoption and abandonment of electronic voting explain how the electronic systems must be subject to scrutiny before adoption.

3. SHORTCOMINGS OF MANUAL VOTING AND RATIONALE FOR E-VOTING IN ZIMBABWE

Issues of vote rigging and fraud have been cited as the most callous order of the day when it comes to Zimbabwean elections since independence in 1980 (ZESN, 2005; Zamchiya, 2013; Masunungure, 2013). The opposition and civic organisations queried the credibility of the 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2013 elections based on claims of organised violence against opposition and gross electoral fraud.

The ZANU PF party has been accused of manipulating the impartial electoral body, ZEC, and the paper system among other unscrupulous means to allow under-age and multiple voting, counting errors, distract or invalidate votes, and the excuses for the absence or late arrival of election materials, ballot stuffing and use misleading or confusing ballot papers among others to confuse and tilt the results in their favour. The polarised media and gerrymandering of constituencies and wards ahead of elections amongst other various electoral flaws have also been repeatedly raised.

In some countries, the ever-increasing population gives impetus for countries to consider a more robust and efficient voting mechanism that quickly processes elections in a fair, transparent and credible manner. In India and the USA, the use of e-voting mechanism during their 2014 elections allowed the electoral bodies to effectively manage and tabulate results from the 814.5 million and 100 million registered voters, respectively (Solov & Suchetka, 2004; Aljazeera, 2014).

Zimbabwe's population is also growing, and during the March 2013 referendum, the country saw an increase of voters from 1 312 738 during the February 2000 referendum to 316 082 in 2013 (ERC, 2013). During the 2013 elections, registered voters increased to 6 435 061 from 5, 934,768 in March 2008 (RAU, 2013). With this increase of registered voters, it is apparent that ZEC will find it difficult to effectively handle democratic elections using the paper based voting.

The incentive for electronic voting is further strengthened by Zimbabwe's decision to harmonise elections for the President, Parliament, Senate and local government. Although the move is economic in various ways, it also means cumbersome work for ZEC to manually process the elections.

With e-voting, there comes an easy, fast and effective voting, counting and tabulation process. The adoption of e-voting mechanism proves a means to end the long electorate queues during an election and the timeous announcements of results. In adopting this mechanism, Zimbabwe would have avoided the 29 March 2008 election scenario when elections were announced on 2 May 2008, five weeks after the polls (ZESN, 2008; Raftopoulos, 2013).

The delay in announcing the 2008 presidential results was largely blamed on the difficulties faced in physical counting and tabulation of results by the election body. This was utter disregard for the principles of democratic elections requirements which call for prompt declaration of results and the promulgation of laws preventing the incumbent government from delaying or nullifying results (Smith, 2007). Withholding of the election results increased tension in Zimbabwe and exacerbated the reign of terror in rural areas. Altogether, the delay in announcement of the results raised lethargy and disillusionment with the efficacy of voting and the whole electoral processes in Zimbabwe.

E-voting voting systems can make error free counting and tabulation of results. Using the paper based system, the 2005 Parliamentary elections in Zimbabwe recorded discrepancies in a number of votes announced by ZEC during the voting night and the final results announced. For instance, the final results announced by ZEC at 2 am on 1 April 2005 had suddenly gone up by 62% from 15 611 to 25 360 when the final results were announced in Goromonzi constituency (ZESN, 2005). Similarly, ZEC announced 14 812 to have casted votes at the close of polling in Manyame constituency. However, the results catapulted by 72% to 23 760 when the final results were announced in the same constituency (ZESN, 2005). In a majority of cases, the discrepancies have become the basis for the loosing opposition party, MDC to reject results, thereby questioning the credibility of results and capacity of ZEC as an efficient electoral body. Indeed, discrepancies in election results as a result of the paper based system reduce the credibility of an election, the confidence of electorate and legitimacy of an election.

Errors that come with the paper based system results in costly recounts. As political parties reject results, they approach the courts for nullification of results which often results in costly recounts and in some cases fresh elections. In Zimbabwe, during the March 2008 elections political parties failed to agree and accept election results resulting in filling of election petitions in terms of Section 167 of the electoral act (Electoral Act 2008). In accordance with the electoral law, ZEC ordered recounts in all constituencies where parties queried results. This process could be costly for most developing countries such as Zimbabwe.

Importantly, the election recounts in 2008 proved crucial in confirming the fears of paper based voting results.

The recounts confirmed inconsistencies in constituencies such as Chiredzi North, where a total of 184 ballots were reportedly unaccounted for (ZESN, 2008). At Chigonono polling station, 7 houses of the assembly ballots were reportedly discovered in the senate ballot box and another seven senate ballots found in the house of assembly box (ZESN 2008). This mix-up of ballot papers, inconsistencies and differences in figures raises questions about the integrity of the paper based system of voting as an effective system to fair and credible elections.

Electronic voting can be an answer to the financial woes bedevilling most developing countries as it reduces the election administration costs. Authorities in Zimbabwe have always failed to disburse adequate funds for effective running of elections since the new millennium. For the 2013 harmonised elections, ZEC had a deficit of US$4 260 819.00 to adequately administer elections (ZESN, 2013).

In fact, the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe were held amid claims of bankruptcy by the treasury who disbursed money to ZEC in batches with the last batch of US$5.5 million disbursed on the 30th of July 2013 a day before the voting (ZEC, 2013). Late disbursement of funding affects planning by the electoral management body, and the effective running of elections. Being accustomed to e-voting increases efficiency and thus reduces the cost in a range of ways for electoral bodies. In Namibia, during the 2014 elections, the cost of purchasing EVMs was US$ 181 000 as compared to the US$ 1.81 million spent on ballots in the previous elections (Roelf, 2014). There is, however, need to take into consideration the long-run costs when using e-voting, including costs for repair and replacement of equipment, its storage, salaries for skilled maintenance workers and trainers amongst other running costs. These costs are considered minimum compared to funds needed in every paper based election to produce, print and transport ballots around the country. All the same, there is need for longitudinal studies to confirm these projections.

The confusion that comes with paper based system can lead to error voting and effective disenfranchisement of voters with special needs such as the disabled, illiterate and the elderly. During the June 2013 harmonised elections in Zimbabwe, 2% of the ballots were rejected as spoiled or blank (ZEC, 2013; ZESN, 2013), while in 2005 it was 60 427 (ZHLR, 2005). High numbers of spoiled papers are ridiculous in best electoral practice and are mainly a result of inadequate voter education and confusing paper based systems.

During the 2004 presidential election won by the incumbent Chen Shui-Bian in Taiwan, the Central Election Commission declared 337 297 ballots invalid, which was 11 times more than the margin of victory (Bradsher & Kahn 2004). E-voting offers the promise to reduce such figures by making spoiled ballots impossible and unintentionally null voting difficult. In Namibia, the blind and visually impaired voted with-

out assistance as there was a braille signage on EVMs. The Caltech and MIT Voting Technology Project (2001) has argued the electronic voting can minimise "lost" votes in a variety of ways, as it allows for more sophisticated voter interfaces, potentially resolving many voter access problems for those with disabilities or those using minority languages. Visual interfaces may also be useful for illiterate and elderly voters.

With the e-voting system, there will be no incidences of ballot shortages and delay in delivering of papers resulting in delayed voting. In Zimbabwe, during the March 2008 elections ZESN (2008) reported about 2% of incidences of voting materials shortages including at Gatche Gatche polling station in Kariba which ran out of ballot papers twice. A similar situation occurred during the special voting exercise on the 14th and the 15th of July 2013, when voting materials were delivered late with some applicants failing to receive their envelopes (ZESN, 2013). In some instances, envelopes were being sent to wrong centres altogether. Consequently, only 40% of those registered for special voters casted their ballots (ZESN, 2013). Such logistical problems faced during the process could be curtailed by using the e- voting system.

Another bone of contention during the Zimbabwean elections has been the printing of extra ballot papers which is against the best electoral norms. In Zimbabwe, during the March 2008 elections, 9 million ballot papers were printed against an estimated 5 million voters for each of the four types of election (President, Parliament, Senate and local authority), with a total number of 5 934 768 registered voters (CCJP, 2008; EISA, 2008). During the 2013 elections ZEC printed 35% extra ballots (ZESN, 2013) against the international and regional standard which calls for 5-10% (AU, 2012) extra ballots per registered voters. This caused panic and mistrust among contesting parties and candidates who feared that the extra ballots would be used fraudulently. More so, there has been controversy concerning the secrecy in the procurement of the material, printing and distribution of the papers. Therefore, adoption of the e-voting will deal with these ballot paper loopholes in Zimbabwe.

The electronic system is widely believed to be a viable tool in combating and preventing electoral fraud. The Election Commission of India assets that e-voting combats common Indian electoral fraud problems such as capturing polling places or stealing ballot boxes (Associated Press, 2004).

The spokesman of the Superior Electoral Tribunal further stressed that Brazil's e-voting systems are "100% fraud free" in contrast to paper procedures which produced charges of uncounted ballots or tampered ballot boxes (Associated Press, 2004). There is however no empirical evidence to prove that the system is free of fraud. In India, cases were reported of strong local politicians who seized voting boots and voting material before the coming of the e-voting. This as well can happen whereby powerful politicians may seize

the voting machines or manipulate the system on the way to command centres and vote as many times as they can thereby render the system useless.

4. OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADOPTING E-VOTING IN ZIMBABWE

High literacy rates ease the successful adoption of technology. In this case, the high literacy rate of Zimbabwe can prove to be an important factor in the adoption and implementation of e-voting. Considering that e-voting was successfully implemented in Namibia, a country with an adult literacy rate of 89% (UN Statistics Division, 2012), there is nothing that can stop Zimbabwe with 92% (World Bank, 2012) literacy rate for adults, from successfully implementing the e-voting system.

Majority of Zimbabweans are enlightened enough to easily embrace technology as can be proved with the adoption of mobile phones where more than 74% of the country's population own mobile phones with close to 10 million lines having been registered with the Postal and Telecommunications Authority of Zimbabwe (www.bulawayo24.com). The widespread use of mobile technology, e-banking and Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) are enough proofs of citizens' knack for technological innovations.

The new Constitution of Zimbabwe contains a Bill of Rights which provides for elaborated rights of people including the right to effectively participate in free, fair and periodic elections (Constitution of Zimbabwe 2013). It also provides for the rights of disadvantaged groups of society (especially those living with disabilities under section 22 and 83) to effectively participate in national affairs. The constitution further directs the State and all its institutions, including the ZEC to adopt innovative and favourable ways for the full participation of all human beings in public affairs. As a national institution, ZEC is therefore, empowered by the constitution to adopt innovative ways such as the e-voting to ensure democratic elections and the participation of all citizens, including those with disabilities. Indeed, electronic voting has the ability to improve the participation of disabled people who are usually less likely to vote than individuals who have similar demographic characteristics (Barker & Moon, 2005). With the paper based system, disabled persons, especially those with visual impairments, have been finding it difficult to vote secretly without the help of sighted individuals. Therefore, the adoption of e-voting comes with conveniences such as different text sizes, colour and audio voting which are crucial for people with various forms of disabilities to exercise their voting rights secretly.

Electronic voting is likely to receive support from the 3 to 4 million Zimbabweans abroad (UNDP, 2010). The diasporas, other than those stipulated under Section 72 of the Electoral Act [Chapter 2:13] have been lobbying for voting rights since the year 2000 but in vain. Section 72 of the Electoral Act [Chapter 2:13] stipulates that persons who may vote by post are those who are registered as voters on the roll

for that constituency shall be entitled to vote by post in terms of this Part if, on all polling days in the election, he or she will be outside Zimbabwe - (a) on duty in the service of the Government; or (b) as the spouse of a person referred to in paragraph (a); and so unable to vote at a polling station in the constituency Denying them the right to vote is a violation of Section 67 of the Constitution which protects the right of adult citizens to vote in all elections (Constitution of Zimbabwe 2013). The failure to come up with provisions in the Constitution and legal statutes to extend voting rights to general members of the diaspora was probably a result of the absence of mechanisms to manage their paper votes. The adoption of e-voting therefore, increases the capacity of the electoral body to effectively handle diaspora votes. E-voting will even benefit those in diaspora allowed to vote in terms of Section 72 of the Electoral Act [Chapter 2:13].

A majority of the registered postal voters have not been exercising their constitutional right due to logistical problems faced which prevent a smooth application and sending back of the postal votes as defined in Section 72. Consequently, of the 489 eligible postal voters during the 2013 elections only 92 postal voters managed to return their envelopes within the time frame prescribed by the law (ZEC, 2013). The 81.2% disfranchised eligible voters during this process and many diasporas could have exercised their constitutional right to vote with the use of electronic voting system.

The presence of a legislative framework that allows for the holding of by-elections in Zimbabwe is an opportunity for the electoral body to pilot the e-voting system before adopting it as a national system. In Namibia, efforts to sensitize people about e-voting started in batches, as early as October 2012 when the ECN exhibited the machines and a Voter's Registration Kit (VRK) at the Windhoek Show, thereby providing members of the public with an opportunity to view electronic machines. From that time onwards, experts from Indian Bharat Electronics who designed the EVMs had an intensive training with Namibian officials and the general populace countrywide on how to use the machines (IPPR, 2014). Mock elections were also held in which the ECN targeted small locations and tertiary institutions to ensure the smooth working thereof and make people accustomed to the new operation (IPPR, 2014).

The machines were also used in by-elections before rolling them out on a national scale for the 2014 elections. Zimbabwe can also take a leaf from Namibia to exhibit the proposed machines at their agricultural shows and by piloting their use during by-elections ahead of the general elections.

In Zimbabwe, electoral reform is one of the most debated political subjects and e-voting will likely receive buy-in from civil society, donors and opposition political parties that have been looking forward to improved democratic elections. In 2016, more than 15 political parties in Zimbabwe came

together and formed the National Election Reform Agenda (NERA) to petition ZEC and the government to embark on electoral reforms and effective systems such as the electronic systems ahead of the 2018 elections. The impact of NERA's advocacy work resulted in the adoption of biometric voter registration which has gained widespread coverage from the print and online media.

Additionally, civic organisations including ZESN, Election Resources Centre (ERC) and many others are proving to be crucial ZEC partners in educating people on the biometric voting and any other voting systems to be opted in Zimbabwe. The above organisations use their websites, weblogs, and other organisational structures that create a strong online community, filled with a wealth of information about electoral processes, and will be of importance in the event of e-voting being adopted. Tertiary institutions will also be of importance for this endeavour to yield results. For instance, Midlands State University and Great Zimbabwe University have e-voting facilities for their student representation elections. Lessons learnt by these institutions in relation to electronic voting would be important in the process of adopting e-voting.

5. CONCLUSION

The successful adoption and use of the EVMs by Namibia in 2014 was applauded by regional and international election monitoring and observing groups, and they encouraged the adoption of the same mechanism by other African member states. The electronic voting system has the potential to enhance citizen participation in elections. The method ensures that voters cast their votes easily, probably from anywhere other than their home area poll site as well as facilitate and widen participation options to disadvantaged citizens. This article suggested that the implementation of this system can increase voter turnout, reduce the overall cost of running an election and delivers reliable results. It is apparent, therefore, a electronic voting system can contribute significantly to the achievement of efficacy and bring credibility to Zimbabwean elections. Although the system is not an answer to all the electoral problems facing Zimbabwe, the system has the potential to deal with some of the problems that have been emanating from the paper based voting in Zimbabwe since 2000 thereby better ensuring electoral processes guarantee citizens' desired political outcomes.

LIST OF REFERENCES

African Union (AU). 2013. 'African Union Election Observation Mission to the Harmonised Elections of July 31, in the Republic of Zimbabwe: Preliminary Statement', 2 August.

Barker, P. M. A. & Moon, N. W. 2005. "Getting out the vote: Assessing Technological, Social and Process Barriers to E-Voting for people with Disabilities", The Twenty-Seventh Annual APPAM Research Conference, Washington, DC, 3-5.

Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP). 2008. *A Report on the Harmonised Elections in Zimbabwe: The effects of party-state on Democracy and Human Rights*, Harare: CCJP, 20.

Constitution of Zimbabwe. 2013. Constitution of Zimbabwe [Amendment (No.20) Act 2013. Harare: Fidelity Printers and Refiners.

Dziva. C. & Chigora. P. 2015. Voter Registration and Education: The Critical Variables during the 2013 Harmonised Elections in Zimbabwe, *OSSREA Bulletin*, 12(1): 28-46.

Election Resource Centre (ERC). 2014. *Africa's virgin gateway to e-voting: Whither Zimbabwe? Special Namibia Elections Brief*, Windhoek: ECN.

Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN). 2014. *Press Release on Progress of the Polling Process*, Windhoek: ECN.

Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA). 2016. Electronic Voting and the 2014 Namibian General Elections: A Brief Assessment Report, EISA: Johannesburg.

Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA). 2008. EISA Interim Report EISA Regional Election Observer Mission to the 2008 Harmonised Elections in Zimbabwe, Harare: EISA, 31 March.

Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR). 2013. *Election Watch: Electronic Voting Machines*, Issue No.3, Windhoek: ECN.

Iwu, M. M. 2008. "Electronic Voting and the Future of the electoral system in Nigeria", Windhoek: *The Namibia Newspaper*, 28.11.

Iwu, M. M. 2008. Electronic Voting and the Future of the electoral system in Nigeria. *The Nigerian Electoral Journal*, 2 (1): 1-29.

Masunungure, E. V. 2013. The 'menu of manipulation' and the 2013 Zimbabwe elections: Towards explaining the 'technical knockout. *Journal of African Elections* 13 (2): 94-121.

Matu, P. 2017. Preparing for a 'fresh' election: implications of the Supreme Court's nullification of Kenya's presidential election results. Available at: https://www.addleshawgoddard.com/globalassets/insights/africa-2017/kenyan-elections-preparing-for-a-fresh-election.pdf.

Mourine, A. & Ephas, J. 2013. The Adoption and Challenges of Electronic Voting Technologies within the South African Context. *International Journal of Managing Information Technology (IJMIT)* 5 (4): 1-12.

Olusola, O.O., Olusayo, O.E., Olatunde, O.S. & Adesina, G.R. 2012. A Review of the Underlying Concepts of Electronic Voting. *Information and Knowledge Management*, 2(1): 8-20.

Parakh, A. & Kak, S. 2010. 'Challenges Facing Electronic Voting', Stillwater OK: Computer Science Department,

Oklahoma State University, (Unpublished Research).

Raftopoulos, B. 2013. The 2013 Elections in Zimbabwe: The End of an Era. *Journal of African Elections*, 13 (2): 971-988.

Research Advocacy Unit (RAU). 2013. *"Numbers out of Tune? An examination of the vote in Harmonised July 2013 Election. "A Brief Report. Governance Programme"*, Harare: RAU.

Roelf. 2014. 'Namibia's ruling party seen winning Africa's first electronic vote', Windhoek: *Reuters*, 28, 11.

SADC. 2013. 'Summary Statement of the SADC Election Observation Mission to the Harmonised Elections in the Republic of Zimbabwe held on July 31 2013.

Solidarity Peace Trust. 2013. 'The End of a Road: The 2013 Elections in Zimbabwe'. Johannesburg: Solidarity Peace Trust.

Solov, D. & Suchetka, D. 2004. Odd Vote Results Point to Mix-Ups at Some Precincts. *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. December 10.

Smith, B.C. 2007. *Good Governance and Development*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

UN. 2013. 'Statement Attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on Elections in Zimbabwe', New York, 2 August.

Zamchiya. P. 2013. 'The MDC-T's (Un) Seeing Eye in Zimbabwe's 2013 Harmonised Elections: A technical Knockout. *Journal of African Elections*, 13 (2): 955-962.

Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN). 2013. *Report on the 31 July 2013 Harmonised Elections*. Harare: ZESN.

Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN). 2008. *Report on the Zimbabwe 29 March 2008 Harmonised Elections and 27 June Presidential Run-Off*. Harare: ZESN.

Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN). 2005. *Report on the Zimbabwe's 2005 General Election*. Harare: ZESN.