



Constituency Electoral Environment Review

Chimanimani West Constituency By-Election.

1. Introduction

A by-election is set to take place in Chimanimani West Constituency on Saturday 26th November 2016. The constituency fell vacant after the expulsion of Engineer Thomas Munacho Mutezo from ZANU PF in August 2016 over his links with the opposition party, Zimbabwe People First (ZimPF). ZimPF is led by former Vice President Dr. Joice Mujuru who was expelled from ZANU PF in 2014. Mutezo was elected into the seat in 2013. In 2008, he was also the ZANU PF candidate for the national assembly elections for the same constituency but lost to Lynette Karenyi (MDC T) . This report is, therefore, a review of the constituency's electoral environment. It identifies the constituency's past electoral environment, violations and predicts possible scenarios in the upcoming elections.

Chimanimani West is made up of 11 wards and the ruling ZANU PF currently controls the majority of them. These are ward 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 17, 18, 19. The opposition Movement for Democratic Change has one Councillor for ward 20. Contesting candidates for the November 26th 2016 by-elections are; Edmore Mtetwa (Independent Candidate), Nokuthula Matsikenyere (Zanu PF), Peter Gudyanga (Renewal Democrats of Zimbabwe), and Pesanai Musakanuka (National Constitutional Assembly).

2. Chimanimani West Constituency

Chimanimani West constituency is found in Chimanimani District in Manicaland Province and it is composed of 11 wards and 48 polling stations. The constituency has a total

population of 134 940 people, 70 195 of them being females (ZimStats, 2012). About 28 849 of the total population were registered voters in the 2013 election (RAU, 2013).

The constituency is located 60km South West of Mutare town along Birchenough Bridge highway. The constituency stretches approximately 60km from Wengezi River, to Changadzi River and it shelters about 5 growth points including Wengezi, Chakohwa, Nyanyadzi, Tonhorai and Biriwiri shopping centres, giving it a peri-urban outlook. Geographically, the constituency is surrounded by five different constituencies; separated by Mashonjowa River is Mutare South Constituency in the North Eastern side, Mutare West Constituency occupying the North West-West belt of the constituency, Chimanimani East Constituency in the Eastern side stretching to the Zimbabwe-Mozambique borderline, Buhera South in the South West belt (separated by Changadzi and Save River confluence, and Chipinge West Constituency on the South bank of Changadzi River.

The community is largely dominated with cash crops production namely tomatoes, beans, wheat and maize most of which are produced under irrigation - Tonhorai, Chipiro and Nyanyadzi Irrigation Schemes. There is also a lot of small to medium entrepreneurs, flourishing from mostly mat knitting and weaving. The trade is dominant in this area because of baobab trees which has its bucks used as raw materials.

3. Historical Electoral Environment

Chimanimani West constituency is a political hotspot in Chimanimani District. Since 2002 the constituency often witness violent conflicts ahead of elections. High incidences of political violence were most experienced in -Nyanyadzi, Biriwiri, Hot Springs, Wengezi, and St Patricks. Violence and torture camps recorded in the year 2008 March and June 27 elections were at Nyanyadzi Training Centre, Nhedziwa Creche and Chakohwa. Several NGOs in the area suspended work in 2008. The Centre for Research and Development also notes that in 2008 Chimanimani people, particularly those in the Cashel Valley area “lost their sources of livelihood in the form of cattle, land dispossession and resource deprivation

on political grounds; some have lost their homes and have been forced out of their communities and driven to neighbouring countries like Mozambique.”¹

4. Violence Actors

Actors in perpetuating electoral related violence between 2008 to date include both ruling and opposition members, the security forces such as the Central Intelligence Organisation, the Army and the Zimbabwe Republic Police. In 2008, Lt. Col Murecherwa² was reportedly deployed to manage electoral campaigns for ZANU PF in Chimanimani constituency operating from Nyanyadzi Training Centre together with Major Mabvuu³. They also worked with Muhlabu, Kuhthante and Mrs Shalimi (ZANU PF supporters). In 2008 again, ZANU PF youths led by Tendai Gurenje axed to death eight cattle belonging to MDC Chimanimani West district treasurer, John Neshiri.⁴ In the same district, Israel Mureyani an MDC activist from Nedziwa Village was also admitted at Mutambara Mission Hospital after being attacked by ZANU PF youths.⁵ The Zimbabwe Peace Project, in September 2014, noted that “in Chimanimani West at Ngangu Village known Central Intelligence Operatives Melusi Sibanda, Gwekwerere and others travelling in a vehicle with registration number ABT 7752 moved around intimidating people telling them not to attend MDC-T meeting the following day.” Monica Mutsvangwa, Janet Knight, Samuel Udenge and Munacho Mutezo, himself, were the chief architects of the violence. In the process, state resources including government vehicles especially one with registration number GWRD 0228 was used during the campaigns to ferry ZANU PF members to and from rallies. State assets might also be used in the upcoming elections despite calls by VP Mnangagwa for government institutions to shun corruption and misuse of state resources.⁶

¹ Centre for Research and Development: [Online] Available at: <http://www.crdzim.com/programmes1.html>

² Rupiya, (2010) The Military Factor in Zimbabwe’s Political and Electoral Affairs: <http://www.swradioafrica.com/Documents/The%20Military%20Factor%20in%20Zimbabwe.pdf>

³ Channel Zim (15 March 2016) Bhasikiti Spills the Beans: Mugabe Ordered Deployment of Army to Crush Opposition in 2008 Polls. [Online] <http://channelzim.net/home/16-featured/8542-bhasikiti-spills-the-beans-mugabe-ordered-deployment-of-army-to-crush-opposition-in-2008-polls>

⁴ Zimbabwe Situation (2011) Scores of Youth Picked Up By Police: http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/old/mar29_2011.html

⁵ Zimbabwe Peace Project (23 July 2011) Report of Politically Motivated Violence. http://archive.kubatana.net/docs/hr/zpp_summary_hr_food_violations_110728.pdf

⁶ The ZimDaily (2014) Frequent Board Meetings Destroying Parastatals. <http://www.thezimbabwedaily.com/news/94275-frequent-board-meetings-destroying-parastatals-mnangagwa.html>

5. Nature of Electoral Related Violations Experienced.

The nature of violence and other electoral related cases experienced in the area was pretty much uniform with violence practiced in other parts of the country. In Chimanimani West violations involved were mostly committed by political parties. For instance, there were 8 bases established by ZANU PF members in the constituency in both 2008 and 2013 elections⁷. The bases established were Muonde bases in wards 4 and 6, Nyanyadzi Training Centre and Dirikwe Primary School bases in ward 8, Zimunda Primary School in ward 9, Mhakwe Primary School in ward 18, MDA Building in ward 17 and Garikai Chambara's homestead in ward 3. Mostly torture, intimidation and various other forms of violence were committed in these bases. Below are some of the specific violations recorded in 2008 and 2013;

- Harassment and Intimidation
- Physical harm through assault.
- Sexual abuse
- Denial of free political choice by being forced to vote behind traditional leaders.
- Malicious damage to property.
- Arson
- Unlawful detention
- Displacement
- Partisan distribution of Aid.

See Zimbabwe Peace Project Reports for more data on the nature of violations⁸

6. November 26th Upcoming By-Election: What to Look Out For

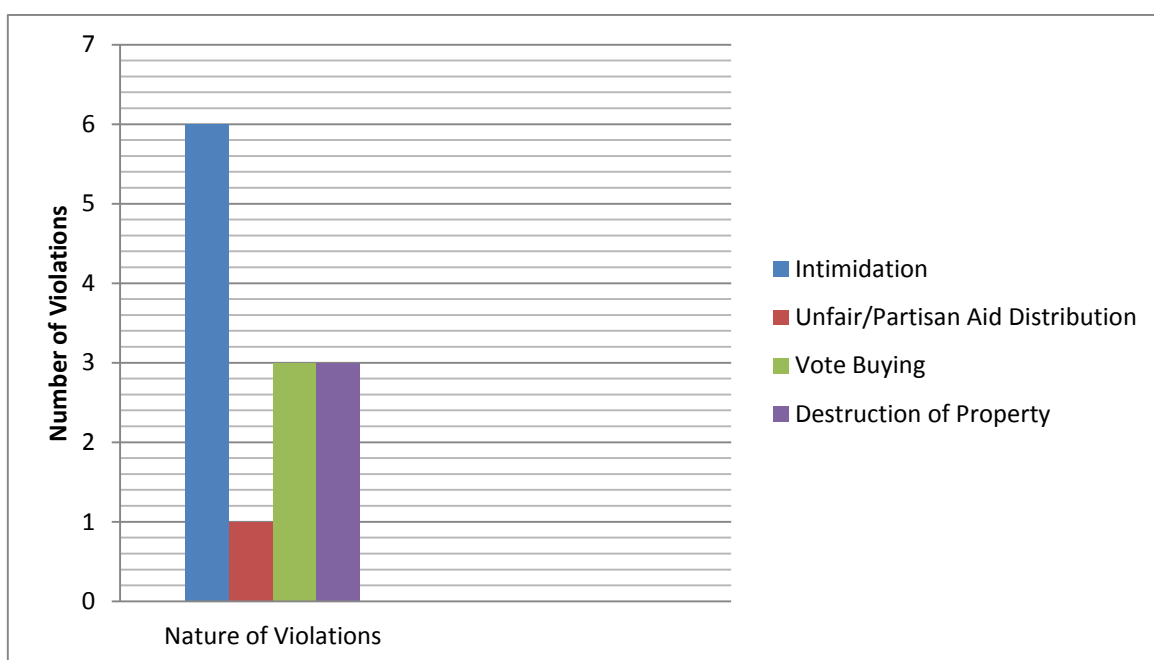
As the by-election is drawing nearer, electoral related violations are increasing. Most violations observed are perpetrated by both perceived and known ZANU PF supporters.

⁷ Human Rights Watch (2008) They Beat Me Like A Dog. "Political Persecution of Opposition Activists and Supporters in Zimbabwe.

⁸ Zimbabwe Peace Project- <http://www.zimpeaceproject.com/>

Currently, there have been reports of unfair food aid distribution, threats of violence, intimidation and assault cases. Village Head Zvekuitirwa of Nechitima Village, Ward 3 is distributing food aid on partisan basis, skirting opposition supporters. There is also an increase in the number of strangers found in most wards which is scaring community members with some participating in the destruction of opposition candidates' campaign material. In addition, traditional leaders are taking an active role in political communication and campaigning. For example, during the week ending 13/11/2016, Village Head Zvekuitirwa served a notice at a funeral at Chidhakwa family homesteads, clearly instructing all registered voters to bring their voters' slips to his house so that he, together with Elizabeth Karasau (ZANU PF Ward Chairlady) count them as true ZANU PF supporters before poll date. In some cases, traditional leaders have issued instruction for their subjects to go and vote in groups and to remember their ballot paper serial numbers.

Given that the Norton by-election was relatively peaceful, there is a possibility of low level overt violence in the upcoming Chimanimani West by-election. However, the fact that upon the electoral loss of ZANU PF candidate, Ronald Chindedza, in Norton, the ZANU PF leadership pledged to win any upcoming by-elections by any means possible. This gives room to violence and intimidation especially if among the contesting candidates, there is a skewed vantage against ZANU PF's designated candidate. In the past, if ZANU PF loses an election, as was the case in 2008 March, the remedy involves intimidation, force and harassment of the electorate as was the case in the 2008 June presidential runoff.



NB: Vote buying means any distribution of material benefits meant to influence the voting behaviour of local citizens.

7. Conclusion

Violence and other forms of violations are expected to be less in Chimanimani West comparatively to the 2008 and 2013 cases. However, it is worrying that unorthodox covert means can be used by the ruling party in a bid to win the elections while in the process violating the people's right to vote peacefully. ZANU PF's loss in the Norton by-elections has a high potential to make the Chimanimani election a must win thereby leaving the Party with no option but intimidation and violence. It is therefore, advisable to voters to be watchful of any possible provocations, threats of or actual violence against them. All candidates participating in the Chimanimani West by-election are urged to denounce violence, cooperate with law enforcement agencies to unearth any shenanigans that violate our Zimbabwean electoral laws as well as the SADC Guidelines on the Conduct of democratic, Free Fair and Credible Elections.