

ZIMBABWE'S DEMOCRACY: quantifying the impact of electoral maladministration

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The two most recent elections in Zimbabwe were replete with reports of state-sponsored violence, systematic campaigns of intimidation, abductions, beating and rape of opposition supporters. Election observers also documented the misuse of state resources by the ruling party, etc. Despite the pervasiveness of the accusations several observers, including those representing the South African government (the SAOM), chose to ratify the results as being representative of the "will of the people".

"Based on our observations, it is the view of the SAOM that the outcome of the 2002 Zimbabwe presidential elections should be considered legitimate."

By contrast other observers using similar standards to the SAOM (including those from SADC) condemned the elections as not "free-and-fair", denounced the conduct of the electoral authorities and that of the ruling party in particular. Much of the divergence in these responses is due to the way in which elections are monitored and the resulting difficulty in quantifying their impact on election outcomes. While every act of intimidation may contribute to a certain number of voters not registering, shifting their vote etc. quantifying the effects may be difficult or impossible. However until this can be done assessments of controversial elections will be subjective as abuses are dismissed as insubstantial or offset by other (also unmeasured) activities.

While it is difficult to conclusively measure the impact of, say, violence and intimidation on participation it is often possible to measure the impact of administrative actions. Moreover, there is much to be gained by doing this whenever possible. One such opportunity is presented by an examination of voter participation and registration rates in the two Zimbabwe elections. These elections are examined below.

The 2000 parliamentary election.

The 2000 election marked a massive decline in the fortunes of the ruling ZANU (PF). Still smarting from their rebuff in the referendum on constitutional reform in 1999 ZANU (PF) saw its parliamentary monopoly of 1995 drastically cut. ZANU (PF) managed to "win" the election with less than half (48.6 percent) the votes cast and with slightly more votes than that cast for the main opposition group, the Movement for Democratic change (MDC). The MDC received 46.9% of votes cast. Simply put, for every 100 votes the MDC garnered ZANU (PF) managed to get 103. Despite this ZANU (PF) continues to dominate parliament as only 120 of the 150 seat parliament are contested on a constituency basis.



In addition to the 120 constituency based Members of Parliament there are 30 other appointments to parliament: 8 provincial governors, 12 non-constituency MPs appointed by the president, and 10 chiefs. A simple majority by an opposition party would be enough to prevent changes to the constitution but not sufficient to stop legislation from being passed. To be able to pass legislation not favoured by ZANU (PF) the opposition would have, at the very least, have to get enough votes to offset the twelve presidential appointments to parliament. Nevertheless being able to prevent constitutional amendments is an important milestone in the political history of the country.

The electoral system

While it is argued that violence, intimidation and the abuse of state resources contributed to reduced support for opposition parties estimating how big the reduction was has never been attempted. Such an exercise is probably only possible in open societies where electors can participate in opinion surveys and speak freely about abuses. The object of this paper is to measure the extent to which election (mal) administration contributed to the performance of the two main contenders. It thus concentrates on issues that supersede the violence etc. It examines consequences of administrative actions as if there were no consequences to the violence and intimidation. The latter would thus affect the election in additive ways. The administration of the election, for example, ensured that electors in opposition constituencies counted less than electors in constituencies more supportive of the ruling party.

The impact of administrative actions can be measured by comparing the age profile to the number of people registered to vote (under the assumption that the voters roll was reasonably accurate). At provincial level such a comparison shows that less than 36

percent of Harare residents of voting age registered to vote. By contrast in the Midlands 54 percent of the VAP were registered. This means that (assuming everyone who was registered was equally likely to vote) that a voter in Harare counted only 60 percent that of a voter in Matabeleland South. Put differently, in Harare the average size of a constituency was 56000, while in the Midlands province the average size was 39000. Thus for every ten 10 votes needed to elect an MP in the Midlands 14 were required in Harare. The discrepancy in the weight of votes was even larger in other areas, in Manicaland province less than a third (less than 32.4%) of the estimated voting age population was registered.

The disparity in the weight of votes was a product of the delimitation of constituencies which was, in turn, based on the number of names on the voters roll in each province. Despite extensive electoral activity between 1999 and 2002¹ the voters roll was not made available for public scrutiny. In their analysis of some of the rolls the Helen Suzman Foundation (HSF) estimated that up to 30 percent of names on the roll should be removed from the register as the individual had died, migrated or was no longer eligible to vote.

Despite these reservations the voters roll was used by the Registrar General to delimit constituencies prior to the election. This gave rise to anomalies illustrated by the comparison of the increases in the size of the voting age population with changes in the voters roll. The most extreme example (at provincial level) is presented by Harare which, between the delimitation of 1994 and that of 2000, had an increase in voting age population of about 35 percent. According to the registrar during this period the number of people on the roll declined by about 5000 (i.e. about one percent). The number of seats allocated to Harare was correspondingly reduced from 20 to 19. The other major urban center, Bulawayo, suffered a similar fate. In the subsequent election both of these urban centers proved to be strongly supportive of opposition parties.

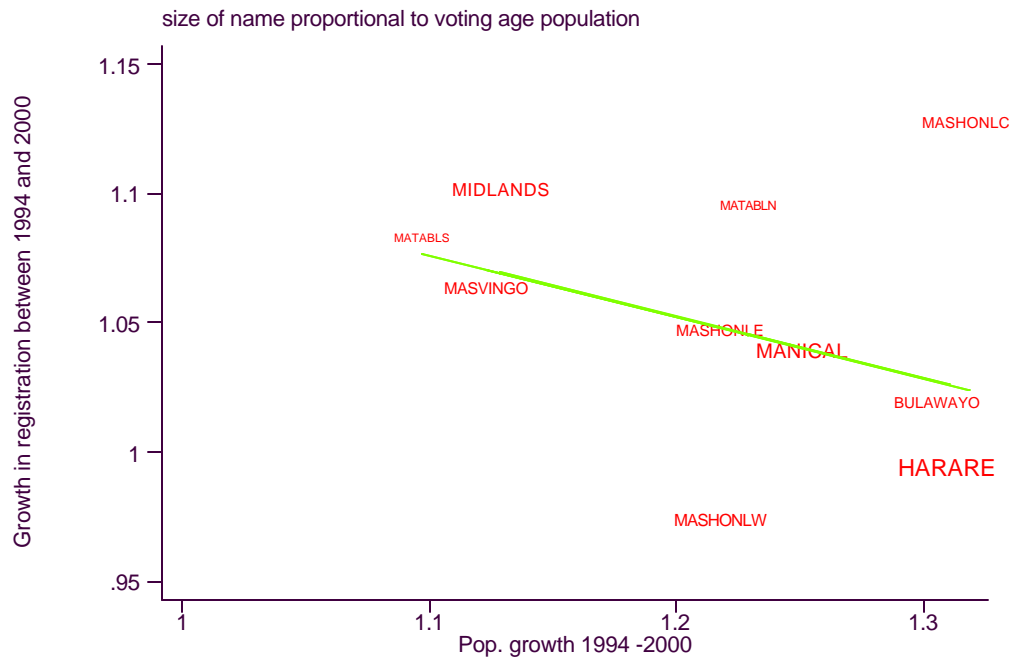
The graph below plots the growth in the voting-age population of each province² against the proportional change in the number of registrations. It clearly indicates that those areas with the highest population growth enjoyed the smallest rates of growth in registered voters. This is clearly against the mandate of the delimitation commission:

For election purposes, Zimbabwe is divided into geographical areas known as constituencies, each returning one member of Parliament. There is established under the Constitution a Delimitation Commission which is convened by the President and whose function is to ensure equitable representation by defining constituency boundaries

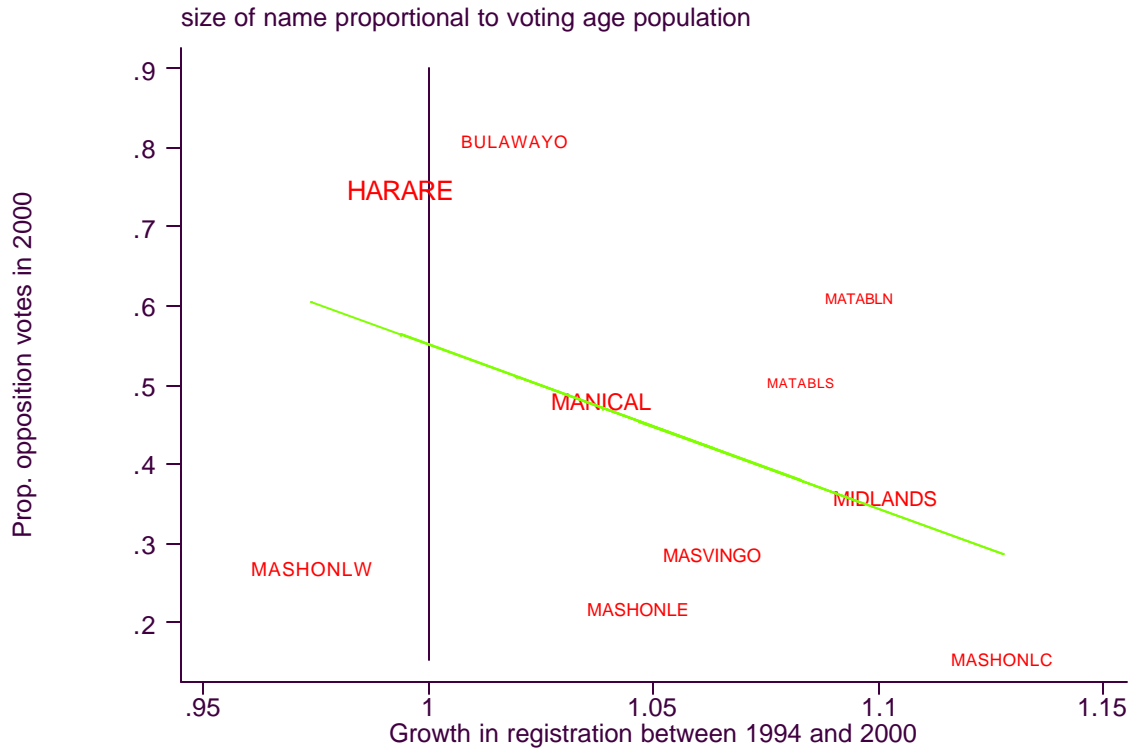
¹ Elections included the 1999 referendum, parliamentary elections in 2000, presidential elections in 2002 and various by and local elections

² Data regarding provinces have been used as reliable population estimates for smaller geographic entities (other than towns) not available. However had such information been available at constituency level been available the discrepancies would undoubtedly have been more pronounced. This is due to the aggregation of different constituencies involves "averaging" of support levels. For example, several areas in both Matabeleland South and Matabeleland North show support for ZANU(PF). The averaging of the trends across the province conceals such anomalies. The provincial figures conceal more marked differences in registration rates within the province.

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Given that urbanisation ensures that the population of urban areas grows faster than that of rural areas and that opposition support tended to be greater in urban areas, registration (and delimitation) had serious consequences for opposition parties. The graph below plots the growth in registration against the (subsequent) level of support for opposition candidates. It is clear that (with the exception of Mashonaland West) areas more heavily in favour of opposition candidates were typified by lower rates of growth in the voters roll.



Mashonaland West is anomalous in that it has low levels of support for the opposition yet had negative growth in registrations in the period under review. It was the third (and last) of the provinces to lose a parliamentary seat. This low growth in new registrations was remedied before the presidential election of 2002. The Mashonaland West anomaly aside, the data shows how the growth in registrations conflicted with population growth and that the growth in registration prejudiced opposition constituencies.

Alternative scenarios for 2000

A simple arithmetic process of casting observed party support levels onto different bases yields some insight into the effect of the registration changes. For example, one informative basis is the estimated voting age population. By basing party support patterns in each province not on the total number of votes cast but on the eligible population it is possible to see what the effect of an unbiased register would have been. Such a projection illustrates election results if the support received by contending parties remained unchanged but the weight accorded each district properly reflected each province's voting age population.

In such an election the 2000 election would have ended very differently. Most importantly, the MDC would have obtained more votes than ZANU (PF). However the MDC would still have garnered less than 50 percent of all votes cast - the balance would have been held by other opposition parties. However greater support for the MDC *vis-à-vis* ZANU (PF) is clear. For every 100 votes cast for the MDC, ZANU (PF) would have managed only 96. The ZANU (PF) victory can thus be attributed to flaws in the

registration and delimitation process which ensured that a vote in a pro-MDC constituency counted less than that of a vote in a pro-ZANU (PF) constituency³.

Criticism of the above method could dwell on the use of estimates of the voting age population and the underlying assumptions on which the extrapolations are based. For example, estimates of voting age population are based on projections of past demographic trends. The method usually provides a robust estimate of mid-year population sizes (often disaggregated by age and sex) within known confidence intervals. Given that recent rates of mortality, fertility and migration may have changed as a result, *inter alia*, of HIV/AIDS and rapidly declining economic conditions the veracity of the estimates can be questioned. To address these concerns it is helpful to base the scenarios on alternative measures.

Above it is argued that it was changes in registration between 1994 and 2000 that cost the MDC a simple majority in parliament. Had the registrar worked towards greater equity in the delimitation and registration processes the MDC would now be the single largest bloc in parliament. An alternative scenario is to explore what would have happened if changes in registration had not aggravated the situation but simply maintained the *status quo* of 1994. Using the same method it becomes apparent that the MDC would still have won the election albeit by a smaller margin. Re-weighting the 2000 support patterns on the 1994 registration profile shows that the ZANU (PF) would have received 98.5 votes for every 100 cast for MDC (compared to 95.8 if the profile is cast on the voting age population). The registrar thus presented the ruling party with an additional 3.3 votes for every 100 garnered by the MDC.

The above scenario is premised on the assumption that opposition supporters and supporters of the ruling party were - within any province or constituency - equally prejudiced by the flaws in the registration process. This is an unlikely assumption. It is certain that opposition supporters within any constituency were less likely to vote and/or register than supporters of the ruling party. Registration differentials would have risen from a myriad of factors including the disenfranchisement of people with dual citizenship, the domination of the state media by the ruling party and the actions of the youth militia and the "war veterans". All of these would discourage opposition supporters more than they would supporters of the ruling party from expressing their preference. The above scenarios, by making the assumption of equal prejudice, underestimate the impact of the registration and delimitation on the opposition. The model is thus extremely "conservative" relying as it does on official figures while assuming not partisan impact of violence. It gives the ruling regime the benefit of any doubt at every turn. Despite this it concludes that the administration of the election resulted it being "stolen" from the opposition.

Conclusion

The above scenario points to the likelihood that MDC would have got more votes than ZANU (PF) had the 2000 elections been based on a registration process that treated all eligible voters equally (or was less biased than in 1994). The partisan nature of

³ These estimates are based on the total number of votes cast nationally and not on an analysis of each constituency. Doing the latter could alter the number of seats won in minor ways.

delimitation was signaled early when delimitation in 2000 reduced the number of constituencies with the fastest growing populations (Bulawayo and Harare) while increasing the number of seats in areas growing less rapidly but more sympathetic to the ruling party⁴.

While it is tempting to attribute these anomalies to partisanship on part of the Registrar General, to do so requires an understanding of his motives - something that is not revealed in the data. What the data does do is measure the effect of the actions.

The 2002 Presidential election.

Two years after the narrow defeat of the MDC in parliamentary elections there was an election to select the president of the country. Although the outcome of this election was not dependent on how constituencies were delimited it did prove to every-bit as controversial as that of 2000. Somewhat less controversial than the violence and the partisanship of state bodies was the margin with which the ZANU (PF) candidate won. The ZANU(PF) candidate, Robert Mugabe, received 14 percent more votes than his main rival Morgan Tsvangarai of the MDC. For every ten votes garnered by the MDC candidate (Morgan Tsvangarai) the ZANU (PF) candidate (president Robert Mugabe) garnered 13. Perhaps the SAOM thought that the size of the margin was too large to offset the effects of violence and intimidation. The election gave the appearance that ZANU (PF) had reversed the massive decline in popularity heralded by the 2000 election.

However there was further activity regarding voter registration in the period leading up to the 2002 election. During this period an additional 600 000 voters were registered – a 12 percent increase over the number of voters registered in 2000. Whereas in 2000 party support patterns were still to be revealed those constituencies in which opposition support was strong could easily be identified before the 2002 election.

⁴ Recall that regional party support patterns were largely unknown prior to the 2000 election

REPUBLIC OF ZIMBABWE

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 9-11 MARCH 2002

Source: Zimbabwe Mirror website

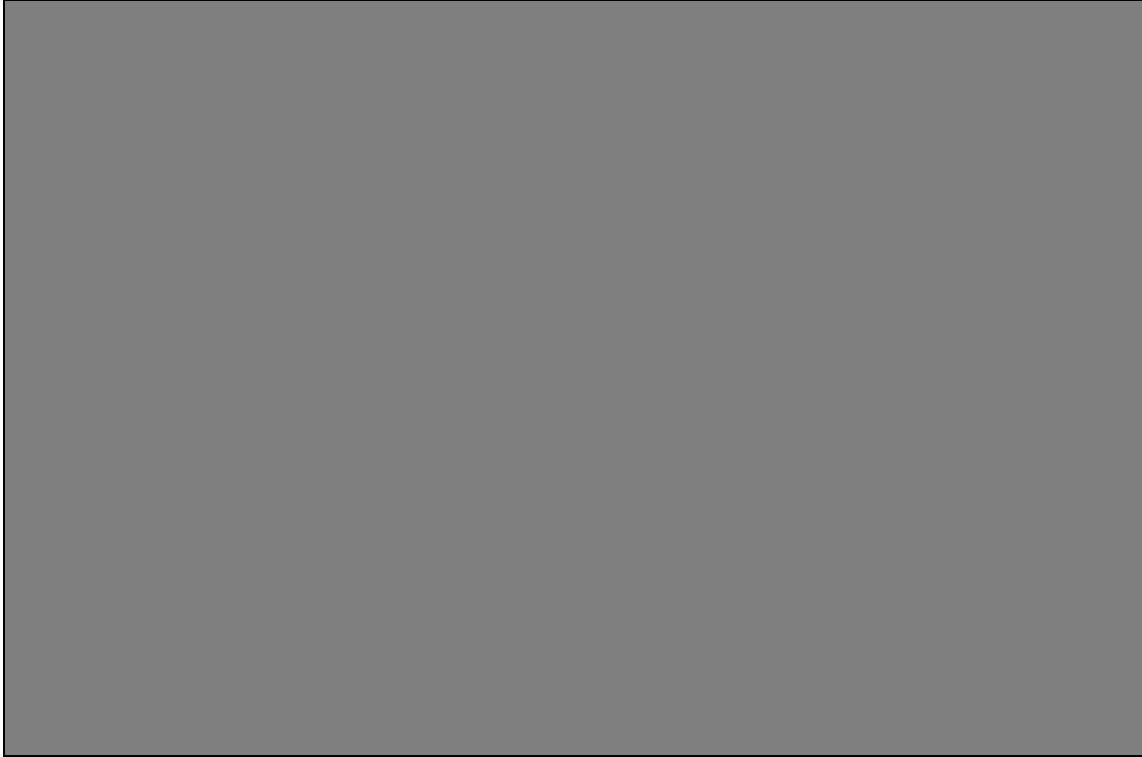
Parties

- * MDC - Movement for Democratic Change
- * NAGG - National Alliance for Good Governance
- * ZANU - Zimbabwe African National Union
- * ZANU-PF - Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front

NATIONAL SUMMARY

Candidate	Party	Votes	%
Wilson Kumbula	ZANU	31,368	01.0
Shake Maya	NAGG	11,906	00.4
Robert MUGABE	ZANU-PF	1,685,212	56.2
Paul Siwela		11,871	00.4
Morgan Tsvangirai	MDC	1,258,401	42.0
Total		2,998,758	

It is reasonable to assume that those who registered after the 2000 election intended to (or could be persuaded to) vote in the presidential elections. Registering to vote (or persuading someone else to register) with no intention of voting (or not being able to persuade the other to vote) would be meaningless. The increase in registrations can thus be compared to the changes in party support (as expressed by votes cast) over the same period. The additional 601 629 names on the register contributed to the ZANU (PF) being able to increase the number of votes cast for it by 476 000. The MDC, on the other hand, benefited with an increase of only 106 000 votes. The ZANU (PF) was thus more than 4.5 times more likely to benefit from increased registration and (and thus from increased participation). The political landscape thus changed noticeably between 2000 and 2002 with substantial inroads being made into MDC constituencies (compare the map below to that on page two).



The graph below illustrates the relationship between the increase in registration between the two elections and the level of support for the opposition MDC. It shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between opposition support and increased registration despite the fact that registration tended to increase across the board. Registration increase most in ZANU(PF) areas, on average for every ten percent of votes ZANU(PF) got above the MDC registrations increased by an extra one percent. The average opposition-held constituency would typically have an increase in registrations 13 percent lower than equivalently sized constituencies held by the ruling party.

“red handed” the process is assumed to be fair. However an analysis of registration and voting rates can signal blatant abuses.

Early indications of ballot stuffing can be given by anomalously high turnout rates in (usually) uncontested wards or in wards in which monitoring by rival parties and external agents is minimal. Unfortunately party agents and external monitors concentrate their efforts where competition is most heated and ignore those in remote and poorly contested areas. Trolling for signs of ballot stuffing is complicated when, as in the case of Zimbabwe, the voter’s roll is in disarray. Inferences as to the veracity of the totality of votes cast then have to be based on the “reasonableness” of available data.

Correlating the increase in registration to changes in the voting age population brings the quality of the rolls into question lending credence to the idea that up to thirty percent of names on the roll should have been removed. For example, in three provinces the number of people on the register exceeds the estimated population of voting age⁵. While such problems are certainly not unique to Zimbabwe, they point to a distinct limitation in using the registration figures to identify unsound electoral conduct.

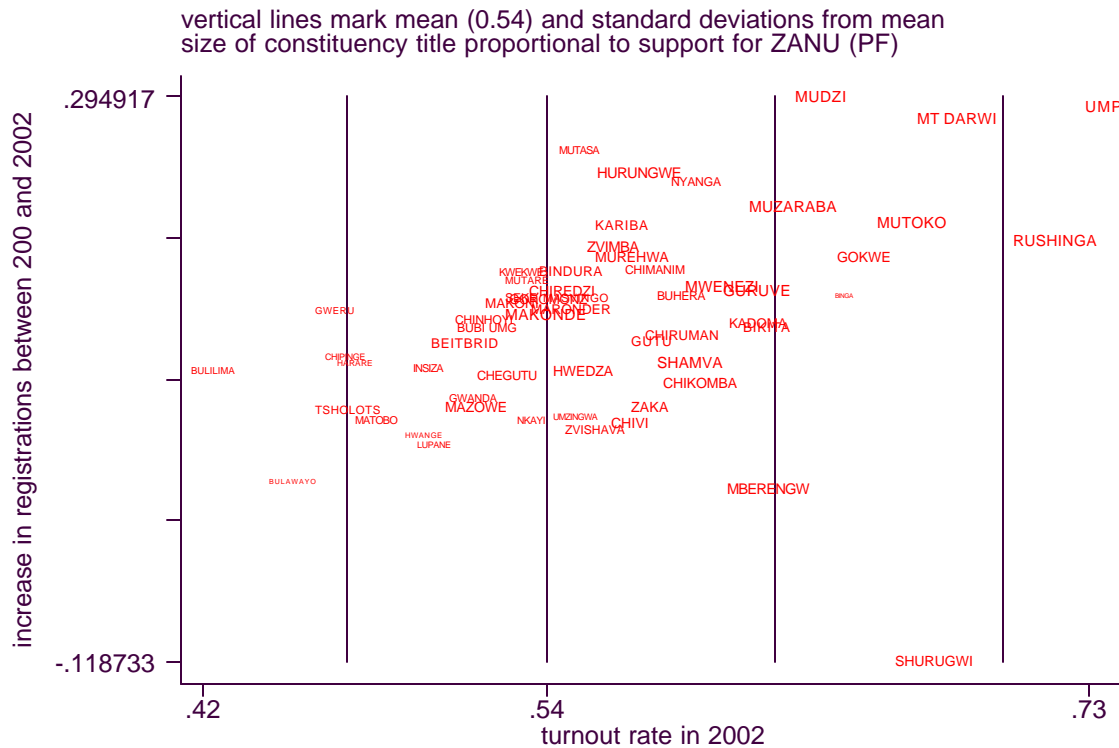
Examining the relationship between registration rates and voting rates is nevertheless instructive as the former can be taken as an index of the quality of the roll. Voting rates should reflect the quality of roll – i.e. as the voting rate is calculated by dividing the number of votes cast by the number of registered voters a poorer quality roll should result in lower voting rates and high registration rates. As the number of incorrect entries (names of the dead etc.) on the roll increases a lower participation rate ensues. Drives to register first time voters and others who move into the area only reduce the proportion of votes that are “stale”.

A cleaner voter’s roll would, *ceteris paribus*, also be indicated by relatively low growth rates as the names of invalid entries are removed from the register. This should be used as an index of roll quality only with caution as a lower growth rate can also be the result of administrative error and the failure to place new voters on the roll. Either way, a very high registration rate suggests a larger proportion of incorrect entries and thus a poorer quality roll. Wards and constituencies with a very high registration rate (and rapid growth in the register) AND high voter participation rates should consequently be treated with some suspicion – particularly in uncontested and remote areas.

Unfortunately some constituencies in Zimbabwe demonstrate this trend. For example, the “UMP” constituency had the highest participation rate in 2002 almost three quarters (73 percent) of registered voters cast their vote in that election. The voting rate in this area is more than two and a half standard deviation off the mean rate for all constituencies. A voting rate this high qualifies as very unusual given the norm set in the country as whole. Between 2000 and 2002 there was a 30 percent increase in the number of people on the roll. Growth of this magnitude suggests that the expansion of the roll was not accompanied by the systematic removal of redundant names and, consequently, that the roll was in a relatively poor condition. The last statement in borne

⁵ The factors affecting the veracity of demographic projections would, under the specified conditions, over-estimate the voting age population thereby making it less likely that registrations can exceed the estimates.

out by the fact that UMP is located in one of the provinces in which the total number of people registered to vote exceeds the estimated voting age population – a prime indicator of an inflated voter's roll.



If we postulate that the voters roll in this areas was in no worse condition than that suggested by the Helen Suzman Foundation for the country as a whole – i.e. 30 percent of names should be removed then the turnout in the constituency is in excess of 100 percent. Similar, albeit less pronounced, voting rates can be see in other areas – all of which are geographically remote and heavily supportive of the ruling party. While there is no “smoking gun” the evidence suggests that the some of the dead voted in these areas. The high registration rate could be explained away by the registrar cleaning the roll before 2000 (removing lapsed names). There is however little evidence of this as the delimiting process resulted in the reduction of the number of urban constituencies.

On the face of it the patterns above are consistent with that of biased election administration. In particular those areas favouring the ruling party demonstrate:

- No cleaning of the voters roll prior to delimitation. The reduction of the number of seats in opposition areas of Bulawayo and Harare may be explained by the removal of lapsed names. However as this was the basis for delimitation an unbiased administrator would have “cleaned” the rolls in other areas as well.
- Greater growth in the numbers of new registrations. This high growth rate points to a maldistribution of registration facilities and to the failure to clean the roll taken after the 2000 elections. Cleaning the roll after 2000 was partly redundant as delimitation had been completed and the president is elected on a first past the post system. The high growth rate nevertheless points to poor roll quality and limits on the plausible voting rates.

- Despite having a poor quality roll these areas show a higher voting rate than opposition areas where there is more evidence of the rolls having been cleaned. This suggests that ballot stuffing or double voting may have taken place – particularly in those areas where voting was in excess of registrations less a reasonable estimate of roll error.

These dynamics ensure that the least accurate rolls should be found in constituencies favouring the incumbent party. Anomalously these areas also enjoyed the highest voter participation rates bringing into question the nature of election monitoring in general. Monitoring tends to be placed on "hotspots" where gross violations of rights and procedures are anticipated as well as in areas of more widespread violence. This shifts the focus of observers into areas in which the competition is greatest. Conversely, little attention is paid to politically homogeneous areas in which the potential for conflict is minimised. Given their focus observers and monitors are unable to answer questions as to:

- a) How there was a high turnout in areas where the roll quality was most questionable
- b) whether or not the turnout in these areas was "real" or the product of ballot stuffing and
- c) whether the integrity of the administrative process was maintained in these areas.

Given the geographical isolation of the areas with these anomalies coupled to poor support for opposition candidates (in the areas described above less than 10 percent of votes were cast for opposition parties) it is possible that much went unobserved by competing candidates observers.

By being silent on such issues observers are able to neither ratify the result nor dispel aspersions regarding the integrity of those elections. It is thus doubtful that the SAOM was ever in a position to declare the 2002 poll legitimate. At best they may have indicated that it was not demonstrably illegitimate. However the actions of the election administrators as presented above suggest that even this finding is dubious.