

ZAMBIA DATA DIGEST PAPER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Zambia's 2026 General Elections take place in the context of recent constitutional reforms, constituency delimitation, and a rapidly growing youth population. The country has achieved a voter registration rate of approximately 81.9% (with 8.79 million registered voters), which is relatively high; however, up to 2 million eligible voters remain unregistered, which highlights ever-present structural barriers, including limited access to registration services and the expansion of the voting-age population.

Women and youth make up the majority of the electorate but remain underrepresented as candidates. While the introduction of reduced nomination fees for women, youth, and persons with disabilities is a positive step, the overall cost of participation remains inaccessible to many. Constraints such as limited access to finances, political networks, and party support continue to restrict broader inclusion in electoral competition.

Regionally, Zambia's registration rate places it in the mid-range within SADC, but the decline from previous election cycles signals emerging challenges. While the electoral process remains stable, the data indicates growing gaps between population dynamics, voter inclusion, and political representation, requiring targeted interventions to sustain participation and inclusivity.

INTRODUCTION

The 2026 Zambian General Elections are scheduled for 13 August 2026 and will take place under a revised electoral framework introduced in 2025¹.

The reforms establish a mixed-member majoritarian system, with 226 single-member constituencies and 40 proportional representation seats, including reserved seats for women, youth, and persons with disabilities. The President may also nominate up to eight additional members of Parliament².

The Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) launched the electoral cycle in 2025, with mass voter registration held from 13 October to 29 November. It has since completed the delimitation of 70 new constituencies and certified the final voters' register. Although the 2026 elections are notable for the expanded National Assembly and reserved seats, Zambia has held regular elections since the return to multiparty democracy in 1991. Recent elections have included disputes, notably the 2016 presidential petition, followed by Hakainde Hichilema's decisive victory in 2021. This digest examines voter registration trends, SADC comparisons, and women and youth participation as candidates.



2026 GENERAL ELECTIONS

On 13 August 2026, Zambians will vote for a president, National Assembly members, councillors, and council chairs³. The ECZ has urged all eligible voters to participate actively in the democratic process.

Since launching the electoral cycle, the ECZ has undertaken key processes including voter register inspection, voter transfers, candidate nominations, submission of papers, and official campaigning from 21 May 2026 until 48 hours before polling. Zambia has also invited local monitors and international observers to apply for accreditation.

¹ <https://elections.org.zm/wp-content/uploads/2026-Elections-Timetable-14-August-2025-30-days.pdf#1#1>
² <https://www.parliament.gov.zm/sites/default/files/documents/acts/ACT%20NO.%2013%20OF%202025%2C%0T%20HE%20CONSTITUTION%20OF%20ZAMBIA%20%28AMENDMENT%29.pdf>

³ <https://elections.org.zm/wp-content/uploads/2026-Elections-Timetable-14-August-2025-30-days.pdf#1#1>

The key dates, as published in the ECZ's 2026 General Election Roadmap, are as follows:

Phase	Activity	Date	Status
Preparatory	Delimitation of Constituencies (70 new, total 226) ⁴	April 15, 2026 (announcement)	Completed
Voters Register	Physical Inspection of Provisional Register	March 2 – 8, 2026	Completed
	Online Inspection of Register	March 8, 2026	Completed
	Certification of Final Register	April 30, 2026	Completed
Candidacy	Presidential Nomination Fee Payment Begins	April 15, 2026	Completed
	Nominations (All)	May 18 – 19, 2026	Completed
Campaign	Official Campaign Period	May 21 – August 12, 2026	Ongoing
Voting	Election Day	August 13, 2026	Upcoming
Results	Publication of Results	August 17 – 24, 2026	Pending

REGISTERED VOTERS FOR THE GENERAL ELECTIONS

TOTAL POPULATION



According to the 2022 Census Revised Population Summary Report published by the Zambia Statistics Agency (ZamStats), the total population of Zambia as of 8th September 2022 was **19,693,23**. Of this total, **9,657,260** were male, and **10,036,163** were female⁵.

ELIGIBLE VOTERS



The legal voting age in Zambia is 18. According to the 2022 Census, the population aged 18 years and older was **9,973,631**, representing 50.6% of the total population. Of this population, **4,834,690 (47.47%)** were male, and **5,138,941 (52.53%)** were female⁶.

⁴<https://www.parliament.gov.zm/node/13025>
⁵<https://www.zamstats.gov.zm/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/2022-Census-National-Analytical-Report.pdf>
⁶<https://www.zamstats.gov.zm/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/2022-Census-National-Analytical-Report.pdf>

REGISTERED VOTERS

Following the mass voter registration exercise in late 2025, and subsequent inspection and deduplication processes, the ECZ certified the final register of voters on 4th May standing at **8,786,300** registered voter⁷. During inspection and verification of provisional records, **101,439** duplicate applications were identified and excluded, and **1,172** records of deceased voters were removed from the register⁸.

TABLE: REGISTERED VOTERS BY GENDER

Gender	Number	Percentage
Female	4,665,431	53.1%
Male	4,120,869	46.9%



YOUTH REGISTRATON

The ECZ further reported that **4,066,423** registered voters are young people, representing **46.3%** of the total register.



REGISTERED VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES

A total of **20,162** persons with disabilities are registered to vote in the 2026 general elections. Among them, **7,584** are visually impaired voters, **6,072** are voters with hearing impairments, **4,153** use crutches, and **2,353** are wheelchair users⁹.

ANALYSIS OF VOTER REGISTRATION AGAINST PROJECTED POPULATION

Based on projections from ZamStats National Population Projections 2023–2047, Zambia's total population was expected to grow at an average annual rate of 3.5%, reaching about **23 million** by mid-year 2026¹⁰. Considering the 2022 Census voting-age population of **9,973,631** and applying the intercensal average annual growth rate of **3.5%** recorded between 2010 and 2022, the projected eligible voting population for 2026 is approximately **10.5–10.7 million**. The final register of **8,786,300** represents about **81.9%** of eligible citizens. Although much of this was captured during the 2024 mass registration exercise, about **1.8 – 2 million** eligible citizens remain unregistered. This gap may be attributed to several factors, including:

KEY CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

- Uneven access to registration services, particularly in rural and remote areas;
- Administrative and documentation challenges;
- High mobility among young and informal sector populations;
- Limited participation during the voter registration period.

Simultaneously, the ECZ's data cleaning process demonstrates efforts to enhance the integrity of the voters' roll. The reduction indicates procedures implemented to improve accuracy and credibility. Female voters make up 53.1% of the register, reflecting the 2022 Census finding that women slightly outnumber men among Zambia's voting-age population.

The high proportion of youth voters (46.3% of the register) is notable, given that the 2022 Census recorded the youth population aged 19–34 at 5,145,361¹¹, representing 26.1% of the total population. This figure indicates strong youth registration, which further suggests effective mobilisation of younger voters, with more entering voting age each year. This dynamic, however, places additional pressure on registration systems to continuously capture voters at a parallel rate.

Low registration figures for persons with disabilities (20,162, which is approximately 0.23% of the register) indicate a significant gap in electoral inclusion. Addressing this gap requires targeted outreach and accessibility measures to ensure that persons with disabilities can register and participate in the political process.

Overall, while registration remains relatively high, the gap between eligible and registered voters shows the need for stronger continuous registration, targeted outreach, and improved accessibility to support fuller voter inclusion.

⁷<https://www.facebook.com/electioncommissionofzambia/posts/2026-certified-register-of-voters-youth-and-persons-35-years-and-above-by-provin/139471628269589/>

⁸<https://www.openzambia.com/politics/2026/5/4/87-million-zambians-certified-to-vote-in-august-election>

⁹<https://www.openzambia.com/politics/2026/5/4/87-million-zambians-certified-to-vote-in-august-election>

¹⁰<https://www.zamstats.gov.zm/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/National-Projections-2023-2047-1.pdf>

¹¹<https://www.zamstats.gov.zm/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/2022-Census-National-Analytical-Report.pdf>

NOMINATION FEES

Beyond voter participation, inclusivity of the electoral process is also shaped by its accessibility. The cost of political participation is one of the most significant barriers. Nomination fees can exclude candidates and parties, which has led the ECZ to restructure these fees for 2026¹².

Position	Male Candidate	Female Candidate	Youth (under 35)	Person with Disability
President	K100,000	K80,000	K60,000	K60,000
National Assembly/ Mayor	K17,000	K14,000	K10,500	K10,000
Council Chairperson	K4,000	K3,500	K3,000	K2,500
City/Municipal Councillor	K1,700	K1,200	K1,200	K1,000
Town Councillor	K800	K700	K700	K500

Position	Female Reduction	Youth Reduction	PWD Reduction
President	20%	40%	40%
National Assembly/ Mayor	~18%	~38%	~41%
Council Chairperson	~13%	~25%	~38%
City/Municipal Councillor	~29%	~29%	~41%
Town Councillor	~13%	~13%	~38%

¹²<https://www.lusangazicouncil.gov.zm/?p=4724>

INCLUSIVITY ASSESSMENT

The tiered fee structure materially lowers barriers for women, youth and Persons with Disabilities. Despite this, the absolute amounts remain substantial for many people. While reduced, they represent a significant sum in a country where the majority of the population works in the informal sector.

Nonetheless, the ECZ’s differentiated fee structure represents a best practice in the Southern African region, mirroring inclusive strategies observed in countries such as Malawi and South Africa. The reductions are a tangible measure to ensure the electoral process is more equitable and accessible.



CSOs warn that parties may use reserved seats instead of fielding women in competitive constituencies. While training helps, party reforms are needed. Youth face similar barriers, including limited finances, weak networks, and exclusion from party leadership. By the time this report was compiled, the ECZ had not yet published the final nomination list.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF REGISTERED VOTERS AGAINST SELECTED SADC COUNTRIES

There exists a significant variation in electoral engagement across SADC. Namibia achieved a 91% registration rate in 2024¹³. After deploying mobile technology to reach additional voters, Mozambique similarly surpassed its projections in 2024 and achieved a registration rate above 90%¹⁴.

Botswana achieved 41%¹⁵ and South Africa 41%¹⁶. At 81%, Zambia sits mid-range regionally, but its decline from 93.6% signals a widening gap between population growth and voter registration. Namibia’s use of mobile technology, youth engagement, and stakeholder collaboration offers useful lessons for closing this gap.

CONCLUSION



Zambia’s 2026 electoral cycle is functional but under pressure from demographic growth and structural constraints. Although registration rates remain high, the gap between eligible and registered voters underscores the need for more sustainable registration systems.



Women and youth remain underrepresented despite comprising most of the electorate. Reduced nomination fees help, but broader reforms may help address persistent barriers to participation.



For future elections, sustaining electoral inclusivity will require improved access to registration, stronger civic engagement, and greater political commitment to diverse candidates.



ANALYSIS OF WOMEN AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION AS CANDIDATES

Although women and youth make up most voters, they remain underrepresented as candidates and officeholders. With only one woman contesting the 2026 presidential election, barriers to women’s political advancement remain clear.

¹³<https://nbcnews.com/news/106670>
¹⁴<https://www.newtimes.co.rw/article/16217/news/africa/mozambique-registers-over-90-of-target-voters-for-general-elections>

¹⁵<https://www.thegazette.news/news/over-one-million-voters-for-2024-elections/>
¹⁶<https://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/198/>