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# Artificial Intelligence and Voter Education in Zimbabwe: Perceptions, Impact and Integration Challenges

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## Abstract
This study investigates the impact, challenges and opportunities of integrating AI-based voter education in electoral processes in Zimbabwe, where turnout has averaged 50%. The study further examined how AI-powered tools can increase accessibility, transparency and engagement, addressing challenges like voter apathy and misinformation. Using qualitative research methods, including interviews and focus group discussions with Zimbabwean electoral experts, this study explored effective integration strategies for AI-powered voter education into existing programs and electoral processes. The study provides insights into the potential impact of AI-powered voter education on electoral participation. Findings highlight AI's role in enhancing existing voter education programs and its advantages in the electoral processes. The study contributes to the literature on technology in democratic governance, offering practical recommendations for policymakers and electoral authorities to strengthen electoral processes. The study recommends investing in digital infrastructure and literacy programs to address the digital divide, ensuring equitable access to AI-powered voter education.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence; elections; electoral participation; voter education; Zimbabwe.

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## Introduction
Zimbabwe's electoral landscape has faced significant challenges, including voter apathy, misinformation, and inadequate voter education (Mhuru, 2023; Mwonzora, 2023). Apart from the 1980 elections, which received a whopping 94% voter turnout (Zimbabwe Election Support Network, 2023), the rest faced a sharp decline in voter turnout. The 2002 election had an overall 59.38% turnout, the 2008 elections had two rounds, the first round with 42.37% and the second round with 42.75%; the 2013 elections had 49.24% and the 2018 elections registered 86.45%, which declined in 2023 to 68.9% (Institute for Electoral Education, Zimbabwe, 2023). This clearly shows a growing tendency for voter apathy, which has since been identified by several scholars in Zimbabwe (Mhuru, 2023; Mwonzora, 2023; Gwenzi, 2023). From 2018 to date, Zimbabwe

has made strides in institutionalizing electoral inclusion. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) has implemented measures, such as biometric voter registration and voter education initiatives (Transparency International, 2020; Chifamba, 2020). Despite these efforts, challenges persist, including accessibility issues for voters with disabilities and uneven voter education coverage across the country, especially in hard-to-reach areas, such as Gokwe North, Kanyemba and Binga, due to difficult terrain to navigate and limited network coverage.

At the core of the voter education debate is the imperative to strengthen voter education in Zimbabwe, widely regarded as essential for ensuring informed and meaningful participation, particularly among newly registered voters (Chifamba, 2020). However, with the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI), there is potential to revamp voter education and boost electoral participation through reaching to a wider audience in a short space of time (Matějka & Tabellini, 2020; Noy & Zhang, 2023) defines voter education as an activity that increases knowledge of the electoral process, including the prerequisites and protocols for voter registration, voting and other aspects of the electoral process. AI-powered voter education can provide citizens with personalized and accurate information, enhancing their understanding of the electoral process and encouraging active participation (Avdienko & Deepfake, 2024a). This study examined the potential of AI-powered voter education to enhance electoral participation in Zimbabwe. By analyzing both the benefits and challenges associated with the use of AI-driven voter education tools, the study aimed to contribute to ongoing efforts to strengthen democratic processes and promote inclusive elections through more effective voter education strategies. The findings are expected to benefit organizations engaged in voter education, political parties and other legally registered and government-recognized institutions in Zimbabwe.

## Literature Review

The intersection of AI and electoral processes has garnered significant attention in recent years, with scholars (Avdienko and Deepfake, 2024a; Bahri et al. 2024; Stevenson, 2024; Hasan & Ahmed, 2025) and practitioners exploring the potential of powered tools to enhance voter engagement and participation. As Zimbabwe seeks to strengthen its democratic institutions and increase electoral turn out, the integration of AI to voter education initiatives warrants careful examination.

### The Legal Framework

The right to vote in Zimbabwe is enshrined in Section 67 (3) (a) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013, which clearly states that every Zimbabwean citizen has the right to vote in all elections if they attain 18 years of age (Mhuru, 2023). Zimbabwe is a signatory to international agreements that firmly establish the democratic right to vote in elections, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966 and entered into force 23 March 1976). According to Article 19(2) of the ICCPR (1966), everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek out, receive and disseminate ideas and information of any kind, across all boundaries, whether orally, in writing or print, through art or through any other medium of his/her choice. Article 25 of the ICCPR (1948) speaks directly to the rights to participate in public affairs, to vote and to be elected. Voter education and registration drives are equally important under Article 19 so as to guarantee that an informed public can effectively exercise its right to participate as explained under its Article 25 rights. The above-cited conventions, which Zimbabwe ratified, require political parties and electoral bodies to ensure that the public is aware of electoral procedures.

The ZEC oversees elections in Zimbabwe under the provisions of Chapter 2.13 of the Zimbabwe Electoral Act. The Zimbabwean Constitution's Section 239(h) empowers the Commission with "conducting and supervising voter education" (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013., p. 89). As a result, Electoral Management Body (EMB) can oversee others performing the same task while simultaneously exercising the authority to undertake voter education. Section 239(c) gives ZEC the authority "to register voters", which means that voter registration is solely within the Commission's purview. The Commission is also empowered to supervise Voter education efforts by other players like political parties and other civic organizations. The Commission is required by Section 40B of the Electoral Act to offer sufficient, truthful and objective voter education. Additionally, the Commission is required by Section 40B(1)(b) to guarantee that the voter education offered by others is sufficient, truthful and objective. With most nations turning to AI-powered voter education

systems, the push to improve voter education has become so loud against this legal backdrop.

## Electoral Participation

With a 94% turnout, the 1980 general election recorded Zimbabwe's highest voter turnout (Zimbabwe Election Support Network, 2023). This was mostly due to election laws that were loosened and made simpler, enabling voters to cast ballots with few restrictions, such as merely presenting personal identification (Gwenzi, 2023). Since the early 2000s, voter turnout in Zimbabwe and the SADC area has been alarmingly declining. The turnout for past electoral contests was as follows: 2002 (59.38%), 2008 (42.37%) for March first round and (42.755%) for June 2nd round, 2013 (49.24%), 2018 (68.45%) and 2023 (68.9%) (IFEZ, 2023). In the 2023 elections, 68.86% of voters cast ballots in the general elections, which is a sharp drop from the 86.45% turnout in 2018 (IFES, 2023). Apathy is caused by a variety of factors, including a lack of voter education and information accessibility. Many citizens are ignorant of the voting process or the significance of voting (Gwenzi, 2023; Chifamba, 2020; Ndlovu, 2020). Continued voter apathy has made the need for voter education more pressing in many nations, including Zimbabwe. Voter apathy is the lack of enthusiasm and desire among eligible voters to cast ballots (Gwenzi, 2023). It may be a result of the absence of sufficient instruction and easily available information on election procedures, candidate programs and importance of casting a ballot (Yoldaş, 2015).

Zimbabwe recorded its highest voter turnout (94%) in the 1980 elections, largely due to simplified voting procedures (Zimbabwe Election Support Network, 2023; Gwenzi, 2023). However, turnout has generally declined since the early 2000s, with fluctuations across elections: 2002 (59.38%), 2008 (~42%), 2013 (49.24%), 2018 (86.45%) and 2023 (68.86%) (IFES, 2023). The drop from 2018 to 2023 highlights growing voter apathy, often linked to limited voter education and poor access to electoral information (Gwenzi, 2023; Chifamba, 2020; Ndlovu, 2020). Voter apathy, defined as a lack of interest in voting, is frequently driven by insufficient understanding of electoral processes, candidate platforms, and the importance of participation (Yoldaş, 2015).

The way voters see the electoral system is related to their level of confidence in election results (Makumbe & Compagnon, 2000; Sokwanele, 2013; Chigora & Chilunjika, 2016). This is not just a Zimbabwean issue, but a worldwide phenomenon. In representative democracies like Zimbabwe, voter apathy occurs when voters show little interest in or passion for voting (Mwonzora, 2023; Agu et al., 2013). This contributes to poor voter turnout in elections since a far smaller percentage of eligible voters cast ballots (Okafor et al., 2025; Schöll & Kurer, 2024; Chigora & Chilunjika, 2016).

## Voter Education

Voter education is an activity that increases knowledge of the electoral process, including the prerequisites and protocols for voter registration, voting and other aspects of the electoral process (Amaechi et al., 2018). It entails disseminating crucial information regarding a specific election (Odigbo & Okafor, 2019). It describes how political knowledge, abilities and attitudes are passed down and acquired to participate in the political process with knowledge (Amaechi et al., 2018; Bagaskara & Rajagukguk, 2024). Since the beginning of elections, the public has learned about their options in national elections from the media and their mobilization campaigns in addition to direct interactions with politicians (Dobbs, 2021). Given this, the main source of voter education has been news coverage in the mainstream media (Okon, 2014). Voter education improves a person's capacity for reasoning and processing complicated political information, which allows them to engage in politics reasonably (Amaechi et al., 2018; Bagaskara & Rajagukguk, 2024). As such, it is an essential indication of political involvement (Norris, 2014). This contains details on who may vote, where to register, how to verify voter lists to make sure they are listed correctly, what kind of elections are being held, where to vote, when to vote and who the candidates are (Dobbs, 2021). Voter education is essential to democratic regimes because it gives people the information and abilities, they need to take part in elections successfully (Bahri et Al., 2024).

Voters are usually given timely access to pertinent information about a particular political process through short-term programs that concentrate on that information (Schöll & Kurer, 2024). Voter education aims to educate voters on the "who, what, where, when and how" of voter registration and voting. Nonpartisan voter education is promoted in Zimbabwe by electoral management bodies (Gwenzi, 2023). Voter education, according to Bukusi (2022), helps people understand topics,

such as why they should vote and what safeguards are in place to ensure their right to do so. Notably, Dobbs (2021) argues that voter education ought to be available to everyone in society, irrespective of their literacy or language proficiency. According to Dupuy and Prakash (2022), political parties have a strategic campaign interest in making sure that pertinent information reaches their prospective voters. Over the years, Electoral Management Body (EMBs)have been using traditional methods to ensure proper voter education. Main programs involve road shows, social media campaign, door-to-door canvassing, workshops and seminars, civic education in schools, SMS and mobile alerts, among others. However, these traditional voter education programs continue to face several challenges, hindering their effectiveness in empowering citizens to participate in the electoral process.

## Artificial Intelligence-powered Voter Education

The adoption of AI has the capacity to enhance voter education through the ability to reach to a wider audience in real time. According to Pislaru et al. (2024), there have been increasing worries about low voter turnout in electoral processes. Most voters feel ignored and uninterested in the democratic process, and low voter turnout persist in many nations despite technological developments (Pislaru et al., 2024; Odigbo, 2015). According to scholars, artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to reverse this trend and improve voter involvement and education, using various platforms that most potential voters use, such as WhatsApp and Facebook (Odigbo & Okafor, 2019; Antun et al., 2020). AI has the potential to completely transform election-related education by delivering tailored and focused content via a variety of avenues, such as social media, mobile apps and websites. This is through easy access as well as easy navigation to get more information through chatbots. Based on their voting history, geography and other pertinent variables, voters can use AI to receive information that is specific to their needs and interests (Andriani & Escudero Loaiza, 2021). Additionally, by evaluating intricate data sets and giving the public objective facts, AI can assist in addressing the issue of voter deception (Gromping, 2020).

Voter education and information accessibility can be enhanced by AI-powered solutions, particularly in areas with limited resources. Citizens can be informed about elections, government policies and civic rights through chatbots and voice-activated software (Atkeson et al., 2015). Public awareness and transparency are raised as a result. AI tools provide several solutions and access to citizen information. Interest in using AI technology to promote voter involvement and education, especially during elections, has grown in recent years. AI can assist in ensuring that every vote count by giving people the information they need and boosting their engagement (Koenecke et al., 2020). As technology has developed, several sectors, including politics, have embraced new developments to improve their operations and interact with their constituents. Artificial intelligence is one such technology that can significantly impacts voter education and engagement (Beardsworth et al., 2019).

Bridging the gap between citizens and the democratic process is becoming more and more crucial as we move closer to the digital age (Tenove, 2020). Diverse groups, including those with limited internet access, disabilities or language problems, can benefit from accessible and personalized voter education delivered by an AI system (Hasan & Ahmed, 2025). AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants offer immediate assistance and respond to voters' questions about registration, absentee ballots and early voting. In addition to voter education, AI has been used to analyze voters past behavior and preferences (Matějka & Tabellini, 2020; Stevenson, 2024). Specifically, AI is currently being used to promote voter education and involvement, a move that has the potential to revolutionize politics (Mudau, 2022). AI-powered apps are leading the way in delivering quick and easy access to reliable political information as people's dependence on smartphones and other mobile devices grows (Stepien-Zalucka, 2021; Bahri et al., 2024; Stevenson, 2024).

## Advantages of Artificial Intelligence

AI-powered tools, such as chatbots, SMS and mobile apps deliver real-time, context-specific voter information at scale, including remote and rural areas that traditional canvassing and roadshows fail to reach (Zimbabwe Election Support Network, 2024; Bleck & van de Walle, 2018). This overcomes geographical barriers to voter education. AI enables tailored and customized messages that address individual voter needs, preferences and concerns (Avdienko & Deepfake, 2024b). Machine translation capabilities allow integration of all 16 constitutional languages, promoting inclusivity for diverse linguistic groups in Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe Election Support Network, 2024). Equally, AI provides real-

time updates on voting procedures, candidates and polling locations, reducing information asymmetry (Bukusi, 2022; Levy, 2021). By linking to verified sources, AI platforms help reduce misinformation and increase public trust in electoral institutions (Atkeson et al., 2015). Natural language processing and predictive analytics allow AI systems to detect flag disinformation and deepfakes, providing voters with verified information from credible sources (Grandia, 2025; Monteith et al., 2024). This helps protect electoral integrity. AI automates data deduplication, verification and validation processes, improving the accuracy of voter rolls and minimizing fraudulent registrations (Antun et al., 2020). This enhances the credibility of the electoral process (Zimbabwe Election Support Network, 2024).

AI-driven analytics identify voter preferences, concerns and behavioral patterns, enabling EMBs and stakeholders to design targeted voter education campaigns (Avdienko & Deepfake, 2024). This increases engagement, especially among marginalized communities. While initial investment is required (Odigbo & Okafor, 2019), automation of outreach, registration checks and information dissemination reduces long-term personnel, printing and logistics costs compared to traditional methods. Adoption of AI in electoral processes aligns with Zimbabwe's National AI Strategy 2026-2030, which aims to leverage AI for improved service delivery, innovation and job creation while curbing negative effects (Government of Zimbabwe, 2026).

### Theoretical Framework

The Rational Theory, the Social Cognitive Theory and Heutagogy Theory are used to explain low voter turnout and the push to use AI for voter education and engagement. People acquire actions through social context-based observation, imitation and modelling, according to a psychological theory known as Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977a; Bandura, 1998). Learning is emphasized as a dynamic and reciprocal process that involves environmental influences, behaviors and personal elements like beliefs and self-efficacy. These factors all interact and have an impact on one another (Bandura, 1977b; Bandura, 1998). According to Bandura (2003), the Social Cognitive theory emphasizes that individuals are not merely passively formed by their surroundings, but are also active agents with the ability to affect their surroundings and make decisions based on cognitive processes. As a result, most people in a community who witness others not casting ballots also believe that voting is pointless. Although this may be the case, the Rational Choice Theory, which was proposed by Downs in 1957(Bandura, 1977a, provides more insight into people's behavior. According to this idea, people consider the advantages and disadvantages of different options to maximize their own self-interest (Suttmann-Lea & Merivaki, 2024).

According to Lawrence and David (2008), voters are viewed as logical agents who weigh the advantages and disadvantages of taking part in the democratic process. Their decision to vote or not is influenced by several factors, including how effective they believe their vote to be, how likely they believe their favorite candidate will win and how they believe the election will affect their life. Although the "paradox of voting", the fact that many individuals vote even if it is irrational to do so, has long been noted by academics, Rational Choice Theory predicts that voter apathy is a logical result of large-scale elections (Boudon, 2003). By extending the theory to take into consideration social advantages, group dynamics and emotion, contemporary rational choice models try to address this dilemma (Thapa, 2024; De Jonge, 2012).

Heutagogy is a self-determined learning approach that emphasizes the learner's autonomy, agency and capacity to take ownership of their learning journey. Coined by Hase and Cairns (2000), heutagogy extends beyond andragogy (adult learning theory), focusing on self-directed learning, where learners set their own goals, identify resources and assess their progress. Heutagogy, a self-directed learning approach, can be a game-changer for voter education in Zimbabwe. By empowering citizens to take ownership of their learning, heutagogy can increase engagement and motivation to participate in the electoral process (Hase & Cairns, 2000). Citizens can access and learn about electoral processes, candidates and issues at their own pace, using resources like online platforms, community radios and printed materials (Brown et al., 2024).

## Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach. This section highlights the methodological ingredients in this paper, including the design, population and sampling and ethical considerations.

### Design

The study used a case study design, which explores phenomena in depth within real-world contexts.

This design was selected since it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex factors influencing voter education in Zimbabwe.

### Population and Sampling

This study targeted 50 electoral experts in Zimbabwe with direct involvement in Electoral Management Board processes. Purposive sampling identified 30 participants based on their role, expertise and experience in managing election technology and adjudicating electoral disputes. Snowball sampling identified an additional 20 participants referred by initial respondents, including ZEC ICT officers, electoral court legal officers, political party tech agents and CSO election monitors. Electoral experts were selected because the study's objective is to design an institution-level AI Framework for Voter Education, which requires specialized knowledge of electoral technology, legal procedure and dispute patterns. While citizens experiences on the impact of AI in VE is important, electoral experts aggregate citizens' grievances and concerns through petitions.

### Ethical Considerations

Several ethical safeguards were observed. First, informed consent was ensured by obtaining voluntary participation based on clear explanations of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential implications. Second, confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained by safeguarding participants' identities and responses, which was particularly critical given the politically sensitive context. Finally, issues of bias and representation were addressed by acknowledging potential biases in both participant selection and AI-driven tools, and by making deliberate efforts to incorporate diverse and representative perspectives.

## Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings and discussion derived from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with electoral experts regarding the potential of AI-driven voter education to enhance electoral participation in Zimbabwe. The analysis synthesizes these expert insights to examine both the opportunities and challenges associated with deploying AI-powered tools in electoral contexts.

**Research Question 1:** How did the participants perceive the role of AI-powered voter education on voter confidence and trust in Zimbabwe's electoral process?

AI-powered voter education refers to the use of artificial intelligence technologies, such as chatbots, natural language processing, predictive analytics, and personalized content delivery, to inform, educate and engage voters about electoral processes, voter registration procedures and civic responsibilities. Unlike traditional methods, AI systems can provide real-time, context-specific information in local languages and scale outreach to remote areas. The study sought to determine whether AI-powered voter education could positively impact voter confidence and trust in electoral processes in Zimbabwe. Data from in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions with electoral experts revealed largely convergent findings regarding the adoption of an AI-powered voter education system. While participants acknowledged the transformative potential of AI to improve access and accuracy of voter information, they consistently highlighted key challenges that must be addressed. One participant, for instance, argued, "AI tools like chatbots, mobile apps or SMS can reach voters in remote areas, providing accurate information on voting processes."

Similarly, the majority of the participants felt that AI-powered voter education yields positive impact on voter confidence and trust in the electoral process in Zimbabwe by providing citizens with accurate and reliable information about voting procedures, candidates and related issues. One participant argued, "AI-driven platforms share real-time updates, reduce misinformation and increase trust." Participants held that adoption and implementation of AI increases voter participation and engagement. One participant, for instance, had this to say: "AI powered voter education offers tailored education, addressing specific voter concerns." Most participants posited that AI has the potential to increase transparency in the electoral process by providing clear, understandable information. Some pointed out that AI-powered voter education can be employed to detect and counter misinformation by providing information from credible sources. They went on to suggest that misinformation and disinformation are proving a serious threat in the electoral space and hence by actively combating false narratives, AI can help bolster public trust in the electoral system. This was summed up by a respondent who explained, "AI can help identify and address gaps in voter understanding."

Based on the findings above, AI-powered voter education influences voter confidence and trust. This is in line with the views of Bleck and van de Walle (2018), who indicated that AI powered voter education helps in reaching remote areas with accurate voting information via mobile phones. A study by Bukusi (2022) confirmed that AI powered voter education enhances transparency by offering real-time updates, thereby reducing misinformation. This is consistent with Zimbabwe Election Support Network (2024) that AI enhances voter registration, making it easier for more citizens to participate. Literature further shows that AI can enhance voter registration by automating data deduplication, verification and validation processes, thereby improving accuracy, reducing errors, and minimizing fraudulent registrations (Almansor & Hussain, 2020b; Antun et al, 2020). Additionally, AI-powered chatbots provides voters with real-time information about polling locations, candidate platforms and voting procedures, making the electoral process more transparent and accessible (Atkeson et al., 2015; Levy, 2021).

**Research Question 2:** How does AI-powered voter education address voter apathy among citizens in Zimbabwe?

In response to this question, the researchers started by asking respondents about their understanding of voter apathy. Generally, participants pointed out that voter apathy refers to lack of interest, engagement or participation in the electoral process. For instance, one of the participants explained, "It can manifest as none registering to vote, not voting on election day and lack of awareness about candidates or voting processes." The majority of the participants pointed out that AI-powered voter education reduces voter apathy as it enhances personalized engagement, focusing on individual needs and preferences. One of the participants pointed out, "AI generates customized messages that resonate with different segments of the population." This was supported by another participant, who pointed out that "personalized approach motivates citizens to participate, thereby reducing apathy." In support of these views, other participants noted, AI-powered voter education potentially reduces voter apathy and disillusionment by increasing accessibility to information. Another participant went on to explain, "the ability of AI to provide information and resources to citizens in remote or hard-to-reach areas is very crucial in reducing voter apathy by providing effective education." Participants viewed AI-powered voter education as feasible due to improved internet connectivity across Zimbabwe. They noted that the introduction of Starlink, alongside providers such as Econet, NetOne, TelOne and Telecel, has expanded network coverage, thereby enhancing the reach of AI-powered voter education programs.

Overall, the discussions confirms that AI possesses a huge role in reducing voter apathy because of its ability to reach out to people. Participants were of the view that AI-powered chatbot and virtual assistants had the capacity to provide voters with easy access to information. Participants observed that AI facilitates voter registration and outreach more effectively than traditional voter education methods. They further attributed increasing voter apathy to inadequate tailor-made voter education, consistent with findings from earlier studies (Mwonzora, 2023; Gwenzi, 2023; Odigbo & Okafor, 2019).

**Research Question 3:** What are the opportunities and challenges of integrating AI-powered voter education into Zimbabwe's electoral processes?

In response to the third research question, findings show that by integrating AI-powered voter education with existing programs and processes, Zimbabwe enhances the effectiveness of its voter education efforts, increase voter participation and promote a more informed and engaged citizenry. One of the experts explained that "the Commission is utilizing various methods for voter education, including the multilingual approach, road shows, targeted programs, social media campaigns, door-to-door canvasing, workshops and seminars, SMS mobile alerts, civic education and collaboration with other stakeholders." Thus, with the full adoption of AI, it becomes easy to make sure that all 16 languages in the Constitution are integrated. By incorporating these features, AI-powered voter education platforms can effectively cater to diverse linguistic groups, thereby promoting inclusivity and accessibility in the electoral process. Participants explained that they were integrating machine translation capabilities to translate voter education materials, websites and chatbots into various languages. Thus, participants pointed out that the user-selected language option allows users to select their preferred language for voter education content, ensuring they can access information in their native language.

AI-driven analytics can help identify voter preferences, concerns and behaviors, enabling targeted and personalized voter education campaigns. This approach can increase voter engagement, especially among marginalized communities and encourage informed decision-making. However, concerns about AI's potential misuse emerged, such as spreading misinformation, manipulating voters and biases in AI algorithms (Almansor & Hussain, 2020a; Antun et al., 2020). To mitigate these risks, it is essential to establish clear ethical guidelines, ensure transparency and implement robust data protection measures. By harnessing AI's potential and addressing its challenges, Zimbabwe can increase electoral participation, promote democratic governance and strengthen its electoral processes. AI can also spread misinformation, which can undermine electoral integrity (Zimbabwe Election Support Network, 2023; Matějka & Tabellini, 2020; Noy & Zhang, 2023). Participants acknowledged that voter apathy was real in Zimbabwe, citing the huge drop in voter participation across the 3-tier elections of 2023 (Presidential, National Assembly and Local Authorities elections). One participant explained that "it appears the bulk of Zimbabweans are not so keen to participate in elections as numbers of voters are way below the registered voters and much so for the eligible to vote." Voter turnout in 2018 was 86. 45% and in 2023 was 68.86% (IFES, 2023).

The decline in terms of voter turnout has created a need to ensure a swift implementation of AI-driven, sensitive voter education. Any efforts to leverage AI in electoral processes is in accordance with Zimbabwe's National AI Strategy 2026-2030 (Government of Zimbabwe, 2026). Another respondent explained that "the strategy aims to position Zimbabwe at the forefront of technological innovation, leveraging AI to improve service delivery, boost innovation and create jobs. The strategy aims at harnessing the positive dividends of AI, at the same time curbing its negative effects." Findings also show that AI Chatbots, if adopted, can analyze public sentiment through social media, news and forums to gauge voter feelings about candidates or issues as well as the general election outlook. This, according to participants, was crucial to ensure that voters receive proper information and education. In turn, the potential to increase numbers was deemed high with the availability of the information.

As mentioned earlier, electoral experts raised concerns that the rise of AI-generated deepfake videos, images and audios that are misrepresenting political candidates and events is already influencing the information ecosystem (Monteith et al., 2024). Over time, the misuse of these tools is eroding public trust in elections by making it harder to distinguish facts from fictions, intensifying polarization and undermining confidence in democratic institutions (Mutunga, 2021). Similar concerns emerged around elections worldwide. In India's 2024 general elections, AI-generated deepfakes showed celebrities criticizing Prime Minister Narendra Modi and endorsing opposition parties, which went viral on platforms such as WhatsApp and YouTube (Hasans & Ahmed A, 2025a). During Brazil's 2022 presidential election, deepfakes and bots were used to spread false political narratives on platforms including WhatsApp. In January, thousands of New Hampshire voters picked up their phones to hear what sounded like President Biden telling Democrats not to vote in the state's primary, just days away (Bleck & van de Walle, 2018). This shows that the adoption of AI has its own challenges, which may warrant massive scrutiny, hence may fail to solve the voter apathy concerns.

Research indicates that Artificial Intelligence is already being used in the election information environment, especially on social media (Berlinski et al., 2023; Levy, 2021). It is being used by political campaigners and their allies to create campaign products, such as online political advertisements, voter outreach materials and candidate avatars. This can help scale outreach to voters and reach them in their own language or vernacular, a benefit one official in the electoral ecosystem identified (Berlinski et al., 2023; Levy, 2021; Mann & Bryant, 2020). Altogether, these education efforts promote the democratic "goods" of self-determination, enabling citizens to understand how to formally contribute to giving themselves rules (such as a right to vote in fair elections) and have confidence in the representation resulting from elections, as pointed out by Tenove (2020). AI was considered the best option given that the main challenges causing voter apathy have been uncertainty and lack of trust in the process. With the increase in voter education and awareness, most people would have access to real-time information, other than relying on speculation, which resulted in the majority following public opinion shared in WhatsApp groups, even if

it's not real information (Berlinski et al., 2023; Levy, 2021; Micheal, 2018).

A participant pointed out that "AI had the capacity to increase bias and manipulation. AI algorithms can be biased or manipulated, potentially influencing voter behavior and undermining the integrity of the electoral process." This is explained by fake predictions through fake online research claimed by some research companies and institutes (Brown et al., 2024; Mara et al., 2025). Such manipulated data was deemed to affect the integrity of the process; hence, some people viewed elections as already rigged before the actual plebiscite. Through consistent trust-building communications, election officials further increase voter exposure to accurate information about voting procedures and security measures while reinforcing their dedication to maintaining election integrity (Brown et al., 2024; Gerber et al., 2014; Merivaki et al., 2024). To mitigate these risks, participants pointed out that it was essential to ensure accuracy and reliability. Given that AI-powered voter education tools prioritize accuracy and reliability, they provide citizens with trustworthy information. If correctly safeguarded, it becomes easy to provide accurate information free from human errors. Participants also pointed out that promoting transparency and accountability by AI powered voter education is essential since information can be easily saved, verified and be available at one's fingertips. Electoral authorities should be transparent about the use of AI-powered voter education tools and ensure accountability for their impact on the electoral process (Atkeson et al., 2015; Suttmann-Lea & Merivaki, 2022). Finally, it was suggested that efforts should be made to address the digital divide and ensure equal access to information for all citizens, regardless of their geographical location or socioeconomic status (Brown et al., 2024; Gerber et al., 2014; Merivaki et al., 2024).

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study concludes that AI-powered voter education has the potential to influence voter confidence and trust in Zimbabwe's electoral process. AI improves access to accurate and real-time information, enhances transparency and counters misinformation. However, realization of these benefits is contingent on addressing challenges of data reliability, algorithmic bias and public trust in AI systems. AI-powered voter education reduces voter apathy by enabling personalized, accessible and multilingual voter engagement. AI chatbots and virtual assistants address key drivers of apathy, particularly information gaps and lack of tailored outreach to remote areas. Feasibility is supported by expanding internet connectivity, though digital literacy gaps remain a constraint. Finally, the primary advantages of AI voter education lie in scalability, language inclusivity and targeted analytics. AI enables integration of all 16 constitutional languages, identifies voter concerns through data analytics and scales outreach beyond the limitations of traditional methods. Nonetheless, advantages are offset by risks of AI misuse, deepfakes and exclusion of digitally marginalized groups.

The study recommends that Electoral Management Bodies consider integrating AI-powered voter education into existing voter education programs, leveraging digital media platforms and mobile technologies to reach a wider audience. The government should invest in digital infrastructure and digital literacy programs to address the digital divide and ensure that all citizens have access to AI-powered voter education. The electoral stakeholders should develop and implement inclusive, culturally and gender sensitive AI-powered voter education programs.

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