



Defending free expression and your right to know

The mass media have a critical role to play during “election periods” acting as the main sources of information for the public about the prevailing political environment, the preparations for holding the elections, and about the political contestants themselves. As the holding of harmonised elections on July 31st 2013 approaches, the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (MMPZ) will be carrying daily media updates on this momentous event until the day after the election results are announced. The daily media updates monitor the output of the mainstream domestic print and electronic media relating to coverage of election issues. This is aimed primarily at establishing whether the media is communicating the information the public needs to make informed decisions when they go and vote – and whether they can vote freely. For any views and comments, you can email us at monitors@mmpz.org.zw

The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe

Daily Election Report – No.16-2013

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Print report for Tuesday, July 30, 2013

SUMMARY

WITH only hours to go before the nation goes to the polls, all the papers missed news of concerns raised by SADC’s chief elections observer and Tanzanian foreign minister, Bernard Membe, that the voters’ roll to be used in Zimbabwe’s harmonized elections tomorrow had still not been released. His comments were carried by BBC News Africa on Monday after an interview with the corporation’s Focus on Africa programme.

Membe is reported saying the voters’ roll was not a **“top secret document”** and should have been released to the electorate.

“It has to be made available for the people to see; for the people to verify their names, for the people to know where they are going to vote”, he was quoted as saying.

The private papers also followed up reports on the arrest of MDC-T chief elections officer Morgan Komichi on allegations of fraud and contravening the Electoral Act after he handed in to the authorities a “special vote” ballot paper that had allegedly been found in a dustbin.

THE STATS

THE print media carried 40 reports on the harmonized elections, scheduled for tomorrow.

Of these, 16 (40%) were contained in the state-owned daily, *The Herald*. The remaining 24 (60%) appeared in the private newspapers, *NewsDay* and *The Daily News*.

Twenty-six were on party political campaigns, and 13 on the administration of elections, while the remaining report was on political violence.

The papers also carried 13 political party advertisements. *The Daily News* carried five MDC-T ads and two from ZANU PF, while *NewsDay* carried two ZANU PF ads, three from the MDC-T and one for the MDC-N.

The Herald carried no political party adverts, although it carried one from the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission calling on the public to report any human rights violations during the elections.

The private papers carried 11 adverts inserted by various civic groups on election-related issues.

CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

***Herald* buries news of huge rally**

THE Press carried 26 reports on the campaign activities of all the parties, 12 (46 %) of which appeared in *The Herald*.

The private Press published the remaining 14: *NewsDay* (six) and *Daily News* (eight).

Of the 12 reports in *The Herald* six were promotional stories on ZANU PF's campaigns, and six attempted to discredit the MDC-T.

For example, it ran an unsubstantiated front-page headline, ‘*Key allies dump Tsvangirai, give poll preps thumbs up*’, briefly quoting US ambassador to Harare, Bruce Wharton, and his Swedish counterpart commending the prevailing peaceful environment. But it provided no evidence that either ambassador had endorsed the election preparations being conducted by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC). Instead, this heavily editorialized

story reported the National Constitutional Assembly's Maddock Chivasa **"slamming"** the MDC-T for making unsubstantiated allegations against ZEC and quoted Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa dismissing the MDC-T's claims: **"The spirit of the gallant heroes who fought for this country's independence will conspire...to deliver a humiliating defeat to the neo-colonialist forces here masquerading as the MDC formations."**

Another contrived and distorted story gave space to the paper's partisan **"political analysts"** castigating Morgan Tsvangirai for allegedly **"threatening"** war veterans and traditional leaders.

Even in the paper's brief and buried page two report on the MDC-T's last star rally in Harare, party leader Morgan Tsvangirai is described as having continued with his **"vitriolic"** attack against ZEC, calling on staffers at the commission to resign. But it was silent on the huge numbers of people who attended and on the other issues he addressed.

The paper's lead story, *'US blocks poll survey'*, reported that the US had **"gagged"** an American democracy and governance "think-tank", Freedom House, from releasing a survey indicating a **"crushing victory"** for ZANU PF.

Such distorted and inequitable coverage of the political parties' campaign activities by the state-owned newspaper reinforced its habit of violating regional standards and protocols providing for fair and balanced coverage of all contesting parties during an election period, as well as section 160J of the Electoral Act, which guides the media's conduct during elections.

In contrast, the private media's reports on the campaign activities of the parties were generally fair. *NewsDay* and the *Daily News* gave front-page status to the huge turnout at the MDC-T **"cross over"** rally in Harare where Tsvangirai was quoted saying he was confident of winning tomorrow's elections despite evidence that ZANU PF was planning to rig the result in **"connivance"** with ZEC.

But if there was any need for confirmation, *The Daily News* was unequivocal in its support for the MDC-T in its editorial entitled, *'Mugabe Must Go'*.

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

Voters' roll still a secret

Despite the unreported concerns of SADC's chief elections observer, Bernard Membe, that the release of the voters' roll was long overdue, *The Herald* confined itself to reporting the official comments of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, insisting that it was ready for tomorrow's election.

Commission chair Rita Makarau was passively reported in one of the paper's three stories relating to the administration of the elections, stating that ballots and copies of the voters' roll had been dispatched to all of the country's provinces. But the paper made no attempt to ask her to respond to concerns by observers and the MDC-T why the voters' roll had still not been made publicly available in time for them to inspect it before the election.

But this issue was at the centre of the private press' 10 stories on the administration of the election.

For example, *NewsDay* reported on MDC-T secretary-general Tendai Biti complaining that they had not been able to obtain a copy of the voters' roll, ***"With virtually a day to go to the election, no political party in Zimbabwe, other than ZANU PF perhaps has got a copy ..."***.

The paper reported Biti saying that ZEC was refusing to release the roll because voter registration was still continuing in some areas, such as Manresa, Harare East and Mashonaland West.

The Daily News reported Makarau admitting that there had been ***"mistakes"*** made in the printing of ballots that had led to their duplication. But she was reported assuring journalists at the press briefing ***"that those ballots will not be used in the harmonized election."***

She was also reported admitting that because of this error her commission was obliged to print 8.7 million ballots – 35% more than there were registered voters – to compensate for this. She was also reported saying that because one of the printers had encountered ***"challenges"***, some of the numbering of the ballots had been outsourced to the police printers. But an explanation for this and an answer to how many ballots had been affected was not provided.

Political Violence

The Herald carried one incident of political violence where MDC-T supporters allegedly burnt a hut belonging to ZANU PF Goromonzi district treasurer Jestina Machila.

For statistical evidence of the media's coverage of political party campaigns, please feel free to contact us or view MMPZ's daily reports on the media's coverage of the election process on our website <http://www.mmpz.org/>

The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (MMPZ) was founded to promote freedom of expression and responsible journalism in Zimbabwe.

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