



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.18 2013

Thursday, August 1st 2013

ELECTION DAY MEDIA REPORT

Daily Electronic media report for Wednesday, July 31, 2013

SUMMARY

The private radio stations reported a variety of irregularities in Zimbabwe’s “watershed” parliamentary and presidential elections today.

Chief among these was the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission’s failure to hand over a consolidated electronic copy of the voters’ roll to the contesting political parties and election observers as required under Zimbabwe’s Electoral law.

These stations recorded 24 incidents of electoral irregularities in 21 reports. The incidents revealed acts of fraud at various polling stations across the country that might have tainted the plebiscite.

Predictably, the national public broadcaster, ZBC, painted a picture of a smooth process characterised by reports of “**a high voter turn out**” and a peaceful environment. All reports on ZBC celebrated the country’s election by carrying both news stories and live updates in which various stakeholders and members of the public were quoted endorsing the elections as a success.

THE STATS...

THE electronic media carried a total of 35 election-related stories. [Administrative issues, 30, and five reports on human rights abuses].

Of the 35 reports, the public broadcaster aired 14 [ZTV; 13, and Spot FM; one]. The private radio stations carried 21 stories - [SW Radio Africa; 10, ZiFM; five, Studio 7 four, and Star FM; two].

There was only one current affairs programme on Star FM. ZTV allocated 56 minutes 29 seconds in its stories covering election administration issues in its evening main news bulletin in addition to 12 minutes 43 seconds of afternoon live coverage for the ZEC live election update at the Harare International Conference Centre (HICC). Spot FM devoted 24 minutes of its evening news bulletin to administrative issues.

Private stations report numerous violations

Despite numerous reports of a high voter turnout and peaceful voting, the private media suggested that this did not reflect a credible election since it had been affected by so many irregularities.

For example, SW Radio Africa reported the Centre for Community Development in Zimbabwe (CCDZ) claiming that large numbers of voters, especially in rural areas like Chegutu and Murehwa, were instructed by traditional leaders and police to pretend they did not know how to vote so as to allow the traditional leaders and policemen to ‘**assist**’ them to vote.

Studio 7 also reported that thousands of people in Mudzi, Uzumba, Maramba-Pfungwe and other areas in Mashonaland Central, were forced to declare that they were illiterate in order to be assisted by ZANU PF youths and war veterans to vote for President Mugabe and ZANU PF.

SW Radio Africa quoted the Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum claiming that fewer polling stations were established where higher levels of support for the MDC-T was expected and these stations were taking much longer to process voters. For example, at Greengrove polling station in Harare a queue of 55 people took more than 120 minutes to process 20 voters.

Other reports indicated a heavy police presence at, and even inside, polling stations. For example, at Mufakose High School polling station as many as 15

police officers were reportedly in the polling station, some seated beside the Presiding Officer. SW Radio Africa noted this was a clear violation of the electoral law and represented an attempt to intimidate voters.

Other irregularities reported on SWRA included:

- Scores of South African-based Zimbabweans, who had travelled to Zimbabwe by bus on Wednesday, were left stranded at the border, after police at Beitbridge impounded at least six coaches they were travelling in.
- Various cases of intimidation of people queuing to vote
- Groups of ZANU PF supporters campaigning within 200m of polling stations in violation of the electoral laws

In contrast, ZBC stations ignored these developments except for the arrest of MDC-T officials ***“intending to rig elections”***, and focused instead, on the smooth voting process and large turnouts around the country

In addition to broadcasting a live ***‘cross-over’*** to the ZEC command centre at the Harare International Conference Centre, the state media carried other reports endorsing the elections. These included statements by stakeholders, such as the Africa Union observer mission and the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in (CCJP) endorsing the elections. For example the head of the AU observer mission, Olusegun Obasanjo said, ***“For now I don’t see anything serious enough to doubt the (election’s) credibility if it continues like this”***.

ZBC stations, ZiFM and Star FM also carried round-ups of the election progress in various provinces, districts and wards. Other reports castigated the MDC-T. For example, ZTV reported that the police had ***“unearthed a rigging scam in which some MDC-T officials were attempting to discredit the electoral process by stealing the voters’ roll and SV 11 forms”***. The report quoted chief police spokesperson Charity Charamba saying, ***“No wonder why the MDC-T leader Morgan Tsvangirai during the campaign, indicated that he was going to announce the results himself and has been singing this rigging tune all along. Contrary to his utterances, indications and evidence on the ground seem to suggest that it is MDC-T that is intending to rig these elections”***.

Human rights violations

The electronic media reported three incidents of human rights abuses;

- Star FM reported that about 120 people were arrested in election related incidents across the country. It quoted police spokesperson; Charity Charamba saying the number included 111 ***“border jumpers”***, MDC-T election agents and an MDC-T council candidate.
- Star FM also reported that some officials from JOMIC were barred from observing elections in Raffingora after it was discovered that they were not accredited to the electoral commission.

- SWRA reported that a Chegutu man was arrested for allegedly sending obscene messages to numbers found on the popular Baba Jukwa Facebook page, including Police Commissioner-General, Augustine Chihuri and ZANU PF parliamentary candidate for Chegutu West, Dexter Nduna. They cited *The Herald* as the source of the story.

Current affairs programmes

Star FM carried a special edition of its 2013 election programme entitled ***Zimbabwe Decides***. The discussion assessed Zimbabwe's ability to administer and fund its elections in a peaceful manner. The guests were all officials from the station's sister newspaper titles, and included Sifelani Tsiko, *The Herald's* Assistant News Editor, and *The Sunday Mail's* business editor, Darlington Musarurwa, its features editor, Levy Mukarati, and Tendai Manzvanzvike, the Zimpapers Group Foreign editor.

Print Media report for Thursday, August 1, 2013

SUMMARY

ON the morning after Zimbabwe's watershed elections, MDC-T declared the exercise ***"null and void"***, while the independent civic election watchdog, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) also reported that it had been ***"seriously comprised"***.

Of course, these findings did not appear in the papers this morning, but the front pages of both the privately owned dailies presented strong evidence of rampant vote-rigging in favour of ZANU PF and other administrative irregularities.

The Herald, on the other hand, restricted itself to reporting the high turnout, approval by election observers of the process, and a "conspiracy" story on the MDC-T's alleged collaboration with ***"Western think tanks and financiers"*** about unilaterally announcing the election results.

THE STATS...

The print media carried 34 reports, on the just-ended harmonised elections.

Of these, 20 (59%) appeared in the private dailies, *NewsDay* (six), and *The Daily News* (14), while the rest appeared in the state-owned daily, *The Herald*.

Ten of the 34 reports were on electoral irregularities, 20 were on general updates of the elections, while the remaining stories were on other administration issues.

Private dailies report electoral fraud

Zimbabwe's electorate woke up on the morning after they had voted to alarming reports in the private dailies, *NewsDay* and *The Daily News*, alleging electoral fraud.

Both papers reported on a case in Hatfield where the MDC-T parliamentary candidate, Tapiwa Mashakada had discovered 20 youths in possession of **"thousands"** of voter registration slips, which they were distributing **"to unemployed youths, vagrants and many other youths bussed (into the constituency from) other high density suburbs around Harare"**, according to *The Daily News*.

These were then being used as a "passport" to voting, since the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission's declaration that anybody in possession of a voter registration slip would be allowed to vote.

However, while *NewsDay* reported MDC-T secretary-general Tendai Biti announcing this fraud and explaining that it had been reported to the police, *The Daily News* claimed **"our investigations team lifted the lid on electoral fraud that ended with a team of 20 ZANU PF youths being detained at Hatfield Police Station for distributing fake voter registration slips"**.

It was only *NewsDay* that quoted Senior Assistant Commissioner Charity Charamba insisting that just one person had been arrested for possessing six voter registration slips.

Both papers reported Zimbabwe Electoral Commission deputy chairperson Joyce Kazembe, confirming the incident, but playing down its significance: **"But the issue of credibility, 20 (voters) out of the millions who have voted? I think you have to figure (that) out for yourself"**.

However, only *The Daily News* quoted one of the youths involved saying, **"They recruited us from across Harare while some were shipped from nearby farms and rural areas. Buses spent 24 hours since Tuesday bringing in youths... They spent the whole night issuing the slips, but we do not know whether they are fake or genuine but the bottom line is they had thousands of them"**.

The paper also had news of an incident at a polling station in Gunhill where hundreds of police recruits were seen being bussed in to vote. The paper carried a picture of people disembarking from a Zupco bus and hiding their faces to support its story.

In other stories *NewsDay* reported MDC-T expressing suspicion over the high numbers of voters being turned away and being **“forcibly assisted”** to vote.

The Daily News quoted ZEC chairperson Rita Makarau, expressing concern over this issue too, and carried another report about traditional leaders in Hurungwe who had **“shepherded”** their subjects to vote, ordering them to cram the serial numbers on their ballot papers.

The same paper reported on 300 ballot papers containing irregular serial numbers that were dispatched in Zvishavane, and reported concerns that security forces that voted in the special vote in mid-July might have voted twice because their names had not been deleted from the electoral register.

The private dailies also had news of organizational irregularities, such as ballots running out in a number of areas.

But *The Herald* gave the impression that this problem was an indication of the large numbers that had turned out to cast their vote.

The Herald and *NewsDay* reported chief police spokesperson Charity Charamba accusing the MDC-T of **“intending to rig the elections”**, after its election agents in Harare, Masvingo and Manicaland had been found in possession of SV11 forms used by ZEC to collate the election results. Only presiding officers should be in possession of these forms, she explained.

They also reported Charamba revealing that more than 100 people suspected to be MDC-T supporters arriving from South Africa in 40 buses, had been arrested at Beitbridge. She was quoted saying, **“It is suspected that the border jumpers who are coming from South Africa without travel documents do not intend to cast their votes, but to cause chaos and pandemonium for reasons best known to their organizers.”**

The Herald had its own angle of the electoral process. Many of its reports focused on discrediting the MDC-T. In six of its 12 stories *The Herald* aimed to portray the MDC-T as confused and disorganised, and a client party of Western nations.

In a story headlined, *‘Biti fails to substantiate rigging claims’*, the paper alleged that, **“Mr Biti...failed to validate the litany of over 20 allegations that he had levelled against ZEC”**. This was despite the fact that the paper quoted Biti explaining the irregularities in the voters’ roll in the same report.

The paper also distorted Biti’s reference to a civic organization’s research revealing a badly flawed electoral register by claiming he had **“conceded that his party was working in cahoots with Western-backed NGOs to gather ‘evidence’ of electoral fraud...”**

And an editorial intrusion in the same story claimed, ***“USAID had been sponsoring the Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (ZESN) to come up with a negative report on the harmonised elections in anticipation of an MDC-T defeat”***. But nowhere does the paper provide evidence to validate its claims.

Another “conspiracy” story on the state-owned daily’s front page claimed that ***“Western think tanks and financiers are behind MDC-T’s plans to violate the Electoral Act by announcing contrived results ahead of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission with a view to drive supporters onto the streets for premature celebrations to set the stage for running battles when ZEC announces contrary results. This — sources close to developments say — is designed to set the stage for Egypt-style uprisings.”*** However, the report lacks any credible source to corroborate this fanciful claim.

The Herald censored all reports relating to allegations of electoral fraud levelled against ZANU PF and the electoral authorities by MDC-T.

Instead, the paper focused on the various African election observer teams praising the peaceful conduct of the election and a situational report of the high turnout characterized by ***“long winding queues”*** at polling stations.

In particular it quoted head of the African Union’s observer team, Olusegun Obasanjo saying everywhere his observers went the election was ***“peaceful, orderly free and fair”***.

It also reported the head of SADC’s observers, Tomaz Salamao saying he was ***“impressed with the way the polling process had been conducted”***.

This news did not appear in the private papers

All the papers however, updated readers on the electoral process. They reported that there had been high voter turnout, with both the main presidential candidates, Morgan Tsvangirai and Robert Mugabe expressing confidence that they would win the election.

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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