



Defending free expression and your right to know

The mass media are assigned an important role in political campaigns on popular votes. As the holding of a referendum on a new constitution on March 16 2012 approaches, the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (MMPZ) would be carrying daily media updates on this momentous event until March 15, the eve of voting. This is aimed primarily at establishing whether the media is communicating pertinent information to the public during the final referendum campaigns. For any views and comments, you can either email us at monitors@mmpz.org.zw or sms us on our dedicated hotline cellphone number 0774 432 509.

**The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
Daily Media Referendum Watch – 1
Monday, March 10th 2013**

SUMMARY

THE media carried 25 reports on the constitutional referendum, scheduled for Saturday March 16th.

Of these, 11 appeared in the official state media [ZBC (6)], while the remaining 14 were contained in the private media.

Ten of the 25 reports were on the ongoing 'Yes Vote' campaign by Zimbabwe's main political parties and some civic groups such as Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe. Two were on those with reservations with the draft, particularly the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA).

Eleven were on the administrative aspect of the referendum. The remaining two were on calls for Zimbabweans to observe maintain peace during voting.

CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

Media promote 'Vote Yes' campaign

THE ongoing campaign by Zimbabwe's main parties for the public to vote for the draft constitution in Saturday's referendum appeared to resonate with the media.

The media carried 10 stories on these campaigns, four of which were in the government media. The remaining six appeared in the private media.

All media reported President Mugabe's ZANU PF and the MDC of Prime Minister Tsvangirai as having taken the campaign to all the country's provinces, with the MDC-T going as far as South Africa, urging Zimbabweans to support the draft.

The private media gave more publicity to the MDC-T's 'Vote Yes' campaign. It was a subject in four of the six stories these media carried on political parties' promotion for a 'Yes' vote in the referendum. The remaining two reports were on joint rally held by the three coalition parties in Harare's high-density suburb of Mbare.

In contrast, the official media ignored the individual campaigns for the adoption of the proposed constitution by the MDC, preferring only to publicise the joint rally held by the coalition parties in Mbare, a development that seemed to expose the extent of media polarisation in the way they report pertinent national political developments in the country.

For example, while the official state media gave emphasis to senior ZANU PF officials claiming that the new constitution served the party's interests and accusing the MDC-T of having been opposed to it; the private media reported the MDC-T making counteraccusations.

None of these media tested the veracity of such claims for the benefit of their audiences.

In one such case, ZBC (10/3, 8pm) and *The Herald* (11/3) passively reported ZANU PF's deputy secretary for finance Charles Tavengwa telling party supporters in Mbare: ***"The draft is pro-people and ZANU PF should endorse it to set the tone for a resounding victory in the impending elections. All our rights are contained in the draft and there is no need for going against it. Some retrogressive people have tried blocking it, but they have failed."***

Tavengwa was also reported explaining why ZANU PF supporters must support the draft: ***"The document also safeguards the values of the liberation struggle and states that we should be masters of our destiny through empowerment programmes"***.

He added: ***"The President has got his powers in the draft and it is also important to note that the document is a victory for women"***.

In another, the *Daily News* (11/3) approvingly reported MDC national organizing secretary Nelson Chamisa telling party supporters in Kuwadzana,

Harare yesterday that the draft ***“is a product of the MDC”***, claiming, ***“ZANU PF was actually against the draft charter”***. NewsDay (11/2) reported Tsvangirai as having made similar claims at a rally in Karoi.

Chamisa urged Zimbabweans to vote for the draft on the basis that the new constitution ***“gives free education to primary schoolchildren and gives women access to power and authority”*** (Daily News, 11/3).

NewsDay (11/3) reported Chamisa telling the same gathering to support the draft because it had ***“good things like the Bill of Rights that is second to none on the African continent”***.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Outrage over ZEC's media accreditation demand

REPORTS on the rejection of calls by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) for journalists to apply for accreditation to cover the referendum and the arrival of SADC observers to observe the general vote were the highlights of the media's coverage of the administration of the vote.

But it was ZEC's demands for accreditation fees from journalists to cover the referendum that raised serious questions about the commission's competence to steer Zimbabwe into holding credible elections.

The *Daily News* (11/3) reported editors from both the state and private media and MPs as having objected to ZEC's demand at a workshop in Gweru last Friday. The workshop was organized by the Zimbabwe Editors' Forum (Zinef) in collaboration with the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Media, Information and Communication Technology.

The basis of their objections was that it was ***“baffling”*** for ZEC to accredit journalists who are already accredited by the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZEC). One of the participants, Settlement Chikwinya, who is also the Portfolio committee chairman, was reported expressing outrage over ZEC's demand: ***“I would have thought that if journalists are accredited by ZMC they are at liberty to write news events happening anywhere, including covering elections”***.

He added: ***“They are not coming to cover the election as observers; they are just there to write news as they always do. I am surprised why ZEC should demand its own accreditation”*** (Daily News, 11/3).

Another, Takura Zhangazha, director of the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ), said it was ***“unfortunate”*** for ZEC to accredit the journalists again: ***“This means that journalists covering the elections would be wearing two tags everywhere they go”***.

While the private media was raising doubts over this particular administration blip by ZEC, the official state media generally painted a rosy picture on the preparations for referendum.

In one such case, ZBC (11/3, 8pm) and *The Herald* (11/3) led with approving reports on the arrival of the SADC electoral observer mission, comprising between 80 and 100 members, in which they reported the head of the mission Bernard Membe imploring Zimbabweans to participate peacefully to ensure the exercise is democratic. Membe **“hailed”** the inclusive government and Copac in particular for working together in coming up with the draft.

ZBC and *The Herald* also reported Membe commending government **“for fulfilling the bulk of the Global Political Agreement issues”** without asking him to be specific or assess the truth of his claims.

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