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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 2013 approaches, the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (MMPZ) will be carrying daily media updates on this momentous event until the day after the referendum results are announced. 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 email us at monitors@mmpz.org.zw or sms us on our dedicated hotline cellphone number 0776 739 522.

**The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
Daily Media Referendum Watch – No.7-2013
Sunday, March 17th 2013**

Electronic media report for Saturday, March 16th, 2013

SUMMARY

THE electronic media carried 20 reports on the constitutional referendum, held yesterday.

Of these, 12 appeared on the national broadcaster television station, ZTV, while the remaining 10 featured on private radio stations.

Seven of the 17 reports were on the administration of the referendum.

The remaining 10 (59%) were general reports on the holding of the referendum and how Zimbabweans voted.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

ZBC downplays alleged voter apathy

The national television station, ZTV, gave more prominence to reports suggesting that yesterday's referendum had been conducted successfully across the country, while downplaying reports of voter apathy in some parts of the country.

ZTV mostly relied on statements by the coalition principals, SADC observers, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), and some voters expressing satisfaction with the voting process, turnout, and prospects of a new constitution for the country.

In one case, ZBC reporter Judith Makwanya was reported giving an update on voting proceedings in Harare. She said: ***"There was history when the polling stations opened. Generally, voter turn-out was impressive"***.

In another, ZTV reported ZEC retaining officer Bright Nyabako informing the public on what was transpiring in Chitungwiza: ***"People are still trickling in and things are going on peacefully"***.

ZTV also reported SADC Executive Secretary and a member of the SADC Observer team, Tomaz Salamao, saying: ***"I am very happy with what I saw myself and my team. Zimbabweans are coming in their numbers to vote"***.

A cross section of voters ZTV interviewed in Harare suburbs such as Kambuzuma, Rugare, Glen View, Kuwadzana, Glen Norah, Mabvuku, Tafara, Epworth, Hatfield and Budiriro, and satellite towns of Norton and Domboshava, also ***"expressed satisfaction at the voting process"***.

So did MDC-T's national organizing secretary, Nelson Chamisa, whom ZTV quoted expressing the same views: ***"The people have heeded the call of the various leaders and we are happy with the turn out."***

The private radio stations gave more emphasis to alleged voter apathy; irregularities in the voting process; and reports of ZANU PF supporters attacking MDC members in some parts of the country.

They sought comment from those Zimbabweans who boycotted the poll. These were reported arguing that it did not make sense to them to vote for a constitution whose contents they knew nothing about (ZiFM & SW Radio Africa, 16/3).

Studio 7 (16/3) also reported suspected ZANU PF supporters as having ***"asked voters to submit their names after casting their votes"*** in some areas like Rushinga and Chakari (a development also raised by private papers and the independent election watchdog, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network. See Print section of the media update below).

MDC-T secretary-general Tendai Biti also cited these incidents when he told a Press conference in Harare that his party was worried about the ***"abduction***

and intimidation” of MDC-T supporters on the day Zimbabweans were expected to decide the fate of the draft constitution.

Allegations of the abduction emanated from an incident in which an MDC-T activist, Samson Magumira, was allegedly kidnapped from his Headlands home by **“three unknown men and a woman driving a white truck”** (SW Radio Africa).

The circumstances and the motive of the abduction remained unclear. Neither did the private radios establish whether the incident was linked to the holding of the referendum.

Print media report for Sunday, March 17th, 2013

SUMMARY

THE print media carried 17 reports on the constitutional referendum that was held yesterday.

Of these, 14 appeared in the private weeklies, *The Standard* and *Dailynews on Sunday*, while the remaining three were contained in the state-owned weekly, *The Sunday Mail*.

Seven of the 17 reports were on the administration of the referendum.

The remaining 10 (59%) were general reports on the holding of the referendum and how Zimbabweans voted.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Mixed signals over voter turnout

ALL the print media reported some parts of the country as having experienced high voter turnout in yesterday's historic constitutional referendum, while others witnessed low voter turnout.

The total number of voters who had cast their votes by end of polling in the referendum last night could not be established with *The Sunday Mail* (17/3) reporting the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) as not having been **“readily”** in a position to give national statistics by last night. Neither could the commission provide an indication of voting trends, according to the private weekly, *The Standard*.

However, *The Sunday Mail* reported **“thousands of Zimbabweans”** as having voted in a **“peaceful”** vote across the country, saying information it gathered countrywide showed that **“most polling stations recorded high voter turnouts in the morning and towards the close of polls”**.

Among the areas that reportedly **“drew huge voter volumes”** were Uzumba-Maramba-Pfungwe; Muzarabani; Kariba; Beitbridge; Mutare; Gokwe; Zhombe; Chipinge; Zaka; Bikita; Buhera; and some parts of Harare and Bulawayo (*The Sunday Mail*). In Harare and Bulawayo, high voter turnout was reported in the city centre and some high-density suburbs such as Mbare and Nkulumane.

Those that experienced low turnout included: Harare’s low-density suburb of Borrowdale; Mutoko; Gutu; and some parts of Bulawayo and Matabeleland provinces.

The Sunday Mail reported people in these areas mostly attributing voter apathy to lack of voter education, particularly knowledge about the contents of the draft.

It also reported on other problems, including administrative ones, which affected the voting process.

These included delays in opening some polling stations; late delivery of voting materials; the running out of ballot papers; the turning away of dual citizenship holders and those below the age of 18 or without required documents; the turning away of some locals who sought to observe the poll without accreditation; inaccessibility of some districts by road; bad weather; and fuel shortages and communication breakdown.

The private weeklies also reported similar problems.

Low voter turnout mars referendum hype (*The Standard*) made a case of general low voter turnout in areas such as Harare, Bulawayo, Mutare urban and surrounding areas, Norton, Chegutu, Kadoma, Lupane, Hwange, Binga and Victoria Falls, among others.

The paper and the *Dailynews On Sunday* reported some Zimbabweans who chose not to vote saying they did so because they were **“fed up”** with politics and that they did not know what they were voting for. Reportedly, those who showed little interest in voting were mostly **“youths”**, especially in Bulawayo and some parts of Matabeleland and Midlands provinces (*The Standard & Dailynews On Sunday*).

The *Dailynews On Sunday* quoted one such person, Mnelasi Mnguni of Lupane: **“How can I vote when I have not seen the draft constitution. I just heard it is a booklet but I don’t know about it.”**

Another, Themba Ndlovu from Mpopoma, Bulawayo, told *The Standard*: **“What we want is an election because this referendum thing will not change anything.”**

RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Irregularities mar poll as voting ends peacefully

ALL the weeklies reported Zimbabweans as having voted “**peacefully**” during the referendum, a position that was also confirmed by ZEC chairperson Justice Rita Makarau.

Despite all the papers reporting voting as having been under generally peaceful conditions, Prime Minister Tsvangirai’s MDC party was reported alleging that its supporters had been victims of ZANU PF violence in Mbare, Hurungwe, Chakari, Headlands, Kariba, Bindura and Zvimba (*The Standard*, 17/3).

The party’s secretary-general Tendai Biti made these claims at a Press Conference in Harare yesterday.

However, the private weeklies reported some poll irregularities that marred voting yesterday. These included recording of names of voters in areas such as Block 1, Nenyere Flats and Matute business centres in Mbare by ZANU PF youths (*The Standard*) and an incident in Bulawayo where some ZANU PF youths “**defied electoral regulations prohibiting the wearing of distinctive party regalia**” by going into a polling station at City Hall dressed in party colours (*Dailynews On Sunday*).

The private weeklies observations appeared to be corroborated by independent local election watchdog, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN). In its constitutional referendum update last night, the organisation noted several electoral anomalies during voting yesterday such as:

- Recurring incidents of political party representatives “**systematically**” recording details of voters after they had cast their ballots, a development which ZESN felt could be perceived as a clear intimidation strategy ahead of proposed harmonised elections later in the year;
- Presence of police officers inside polling stations, which is in contravention of Section 19 of the Electoral Act as read with Schedule 2 of the Electoral Regulations 2005 as amended by Statutory Instrument 32 of 2008, which states that only members of ZEC, electoral officers on duty, election agents and accredited observers are allowed within the polling station;
- Police assisting the public to vote in the case of assisted voters, instead of being assisted by someone of their choice; and in one case at a polling station in Masvingo where an elderly man was reportedly assisted to vote by six officials;
- People helping assisted voters shouting the voters’ choice and violating the secrecy of the ballot; and
- The involvement of police in checking voters’ identity documents, an activity reportedly outside their mandate of providing security of the polling process.

Ends/