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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 cell phone number 0776 739 522.

**The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
Daily Media Referendum Watch – No.9-2013
Tuesday, March 19th 2013**

The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission today (March 19th) announced the results of the National Constitutional Referendum. It reported that more than three million people cast their vote, more than half the registered electorate. The results were, ‘Yes’ (approval of the Copac draft constitution): 3,079,966; ‘No’ vote: 179,000; Spoilt papers: 56,627. This, of course, was headline news in all the domestic radio and television news broadcasts and throughout the online agencies.

Electronic media report for Monday, March 18th, 2013

SUMMARY

THE private electronic media carried 20 reports on the constitutional referendum, held last Saturday.

Of the 20 stories, 12 appeared on private radio stations. The remaining eight featured on the national broadcaster, ZBC [ZTV (six) and Spot FM (two)].

Fourteen of the 20 stories comprised congratulatory messages from regional observers and sections of domestic civil society and the international community who believed the referendum was 'credible' despite a few reported irregularities.

Three stories were updates by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) on the counting process, including its announcement that the results would be out today.

The other three were updates on the arrest of four MDC officials and human rights lawyers Beatrice Mtetwa, which the private electronic media linked to the just-ended referendum.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Zimbabweans endorse referendum

AS this report was being compiled, the national broadcaster, ZBC, gave live coverage to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) announcing the official results of the constitutional referendum at the Harare International Conference Centre today (Tuesday, March 19th).

The event, which started at 14:40hrs, was preceded by the broadcast of pro-ZANU PF songs by the Mbare Chimurenga Choir praising President Mugabe's leadership and policies, such as the land reform programme.

At the Press conference, ZEC chairperson Rita Makarau praised the people of Zimbabwe for conducting a peaceful referendum and expressed happiness that ZEC had successfully ***“completed the final processing of the referendum results”***.

The commission's Chief Elections Officer, Lovemore Sekeramayi, announced the results.

Prior to this, ZBC had continued to give more coverage to those commending ZEC and the government and people of Zimbabwe for holding a ***“credible”*** and ***“peaceful”*** referendum (ZBC, 18/3, 8pm).

Among those reported **“endorsing”** the referendum were; the European Union; the Russian Institute on African Studies; the SADC Parliamentary Forum; co-chairpersons of the Constitutional Parliamentary Select Committee (Copac); Women’s Coalition of Zimbabwe; and ordinary members of the public (ZBC, 18/3, 8pm).

In one such case, the national television station, ZTV, reported EU ambassador Aldo De’Il Ariccia saying: **“I have to say that the referendum was conducted in a professional way without major incidents reported”**.

In another, the station reported leader of the SADC Parliamentary Forum Guduza Dhlamini saying: **“The 2013 Zimbabwe constitutional referendum was on the whole a credible reflection of the will of the people of Zimbabwe”**.

One of Copac’s co-chairpersons, Douglas Mwonzora, was also reported expressing similar views: **“The referendum was free and fair, showing free and fair elections are possible in Zimbabwe”**.

These expressions of support for the manner in which Zimbabwe held its referendum appeared to take a propaganda spin in three of the eight stories ZBC carried on the referendum.

One of them recorded the Director of the Russian Institute on African Studies Alexey Vasilyeve telling ZANU PF national chairman Simon Khaya Moyo: **“In Japan three years ago, a strong movement against Zimbabwe emerged and was led by the British, Americans and Canadians to try and impose G8 decisions on Zimbabwe”**. Vasilyeve said this while paying a courtesy call on Moyo at ZANU PF’s headquarters in Harare.

The other cited **“political analyst”** Edward Tome: **“What Zimbabweans demonstrated on Saturday is that of oneness. There were no skirmishes as the prophets of doom had predicted”**.

While the private media reported these people and groups expressing their satisfaction over the way in which Voting Day had been managed, they also gave significant publicity to their reservations over the management of the process as a whole.

These included complaints about poor voter education; intimidation of voters in some parts of the country; logistical problems that ZEC faced; and the post-referendum crackdown on ZANU PF’s perceived opponents (Star FM, Studio 7, ZiFM and SW Radio Africa, 18/3).

Print media report for Tuesday, March 19th, 2013

SUMMARY

THE print media carried 15 reports on the constitutional referendum that was held at the weekend.

Of these, seven appeared in the private papers, while the remaining eight were contained in the state-owned daily, *The Herald*.

Five of the 12 reports were congratulatory messages from regional observers and other sections of the international community who believed the referendum was a “credible” exercise, despite a number of minor irregularities.

Four were on the announcement by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) that the electoral authority would release the referendum results in the afternoon today.

The remaining six stories were on the media debate about whether or not there was voter apathy in the referendum.

Propaganda pollutes *Herald's* report

THE print media's coverage of the referendum today was again marred by *The Herald's* continued partisan use of preliminary voting patterns in last Saturday's poll to promote ZANU PF's political interests at the expense of its coalition partners, the two MDC formations, ahead of proposed harmonised elections due later in the year.

While all three parties in the inclusive government formed a united front in championing a 'Yes Vote' in the referendum, the official daily – for the second day running – polluted its front-page news story on the referendum with speculative propaganda attempting to analyze the **“voting trends”** in the referendum according to political affiliation.

It claimed: **“With voting trends showing most ZANU PF strongholds in rural areas recording high turnouts to drive the “Yes Vote” with MDC-T-dominated urban areas recording low endorsement in some areas, analysts say if the referendum results mirror the impending harmonized elections then ZANU PF is poised for a landslide victory”**

Accompanying the story was a graph of the estimated votes cast by province (based on **“information reaching us”**) linked to a country map of the three parties' provincial domination in the 2008 harmonised elections. However, no proper context was given to the paper's interpretations, especially given that the results of the 2008 elections had not resulted in **“a landslide victory”** for ZANU PF, but a hung parliament and a disputed presidential poll leading to the formation of the current inclusive government.

However, the paper pursued this line of divisive political speculation with the help of unnamed “analysts”, claiming: **“The view by analysts dovetails with several recent surveys that have given the revolutionary party the edge over its coalition government partner, the MDC-T”**.

It cited comments by the UK-based pro-democracy group, Zimbabwe Vigil, and poll surveys commissioned by Afro-barometer and the US-based Freedom House, which reportedly predicted that President Mugabe would win the next elections ahead of his main rival, the MDC-T's Morgan Tsvangirai.

On the referendum vote, *The Herald* reported Zimbabweans as having overwhelmingly endorsed the draft – by as much as 90 percent – courtesy of **“information filtering through from our news crews, bureaux and correspondents deployed at various stations countrywide”**.

The Herald reported that **“our figures indicate”** that over three million votes were cast nationwide, almost three times the 1,282,302 votes cast in a similar constitutional referendum in the year 2000 **“contrary to claims of widespread voter apathy from civil society organizations and some sections of the media”**.

If officially confirmed, *The Herald* noted, the voting total in the referendum would outstrip the 2,696,670 votes cast in the general election of 2005; the 2,421,973 votes that were cast in the March 2008 harmonized elections and the 2,514,750 votes cast in the presidential election run-off of June 27 that year.

The paper made no attempt to provide a source for its **“unofficial collation”** of the voting figures, which, compared with the official results, looked suspiciously like “leaked” information from ZEC’s offices. In the 2008 elections the announcement of “unofficial results” ahead of ZEC’s official announcement resulted in threats of prosecution.

While *The Herald* reported a high voter turnout, the private Press claimed there had been significant **“voter apathy”**, and that just over two million people had voted (*The Daily News & NewsDay*, 18/3).

The private papers stated as a matter of fact that **“over two million Zimbabweans out of an estimated six million people”** had voted, a development, the dailies argued, that reflected poor voter education and the public’s reluctance to vote for something they knew little about.

The remaining reports were mostly on Zimbabwe’s coalition parties; some church leaders; and the SADC Parliamentary Forum commending ZEC and the government for holding a ‘credible’ and peaceful referendum; and ZEC promising to release the referendum results today.

MMPZ regrets to announce that due to a violent storm today, its Internet and email connections have been badly damaged. We are doing all we can to restore our connectivity to the outside world as soon as possible.

Ends/

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