



**Media must be non-partisan and professional, Say Media Stakeholders**



**Electoral majority could choke Zanu-PF – Masunungure**

**Media must be non-partisan and professional, Say Media Stakeholders**

HARARE – AS Zimbabwe emerges from the political tussle of the July 31 election, public concerns linger that the state media overtly fought in the electoral corner of the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF) in violation of national laws and tax payers’ expectations, which has scaled up the volume on calls for public media reforms.

Consequently, the public has expressed the need for reportage by the state media to be more inclusive of other parties, or highlight public criticism of the ruling party where it is warranted in the future.

A report of the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ) of July 2013 did not mince its words in asserting that the state media houses, Zimpapers and Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) had been biased towards Zanu-PF, while denigrating its opponents such as the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T) during the recent elections.

*“The government-controlled state media fulfilled its role as the propaganda arm of Zanu-PF by giving widespread and favourable publicity to the party’s campaign activities at the expense of other parties in violation of domestic and international regulations governing the media’s coverage of elections,”* the MMPZ Election Watch Issue No. 20/2013 read.



During the elections 64% of stories in the State-run media were on Zanu-PF, while 29% were on the main opposition MDC-T, the report revealed. Of the 278 stories in which the State-run media reported on Zanu-PF, 91 % were positive with the rest being neutral and by comparison, of the 126 stories on the MDC-T, 89% were negative with the rest being neutral, the report revealed.

But at the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ) Annual Conference of Media Stakeholders held in Harare on September 5, Gabriel Chaibva, who desperately emphasized that he is a non-aligned political analyst, spoke glowingly of the State media arguing:

*“They don’t lie. They just spin and that is acceptable.”*

Rejoice Ngwenya, a political analyst and writer, said he had been airing his opinion on radio for 10 years, but it appeared that the State media would not invite his ilk to be on air because of his perceived allegiance to the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

*“We want an opportunity to express ourselves in the public media because the public media is not owned by Zanu-PF, it is owned by the people of Zimbabwe. So we also want an opportunity to sit down with Mupeperekwi and Chivaura (ZTV social commentators) and explain to them that the MDC was formed by Zimbabweans for Zimbabweans,”* he said.

Professor Eldred Masunungure, a researcher and Political Science lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ), however noted that the state media was taking sides and he roped in the private media as being similarly biased before recommending that the media should shun partisan politics and abide by the ethical dictates of its profession.

*“The tragedy of the media has been its embeddedness in partisan politics,”* Masunungure argued.

Masunungure suggested that the situation of a media viewed with suspicion by the public could be salvaged only through a change of editorial policies.

*“I will assert that the role of the media is critical in a society with one-party hegemony. With the opposi-*

*tion on its knees, the media both state and private need to stand up to fill the gap,”* he said.

While the private media has been faced with the equal accusation of political bias, it is a commercial sector unlike the state media which is funded by the taxpayers and for which the new Constitution and international policies require non-partisanship as the norm.

The Southern African Development Community Observer Mission (SEOM), which released its final report on the July 31 harmonized election on September 3 admitted that there was bias in the State media and recommended that there should be a departure from the malpractice.



*Douglas Mwonzora*

MDC-T Spokesperson – and former Constitutional Parliamentary Select Committee (COPAC) co-chairperson – Douglas Mwonzora, who spoke at the MAZ Conference pointed to provisions in the new Constitution, which seek to guard against state media bias going into the future.

*“The Constitution goes on to say the State media must be impartial and it must afford fair opportunity to divergent views and dissenting opinions,”* Mwonzora said.

Meanwhile, many commentators at the MAZ conference said these constitutional provisions and statutes that are available could only make a difference if they start being implemented.

## Electoral majority could choke Zanu-PF – Masunungure

HARARE – AS Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF) prepares to pilot the government for the next five years, a political researcher has said there is need for the party to conduct itself with care as its two-thirds electoral majority could weigh it down with total responsibility for what the next government does.

Speaking at the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ) Annual Conference for Media Stakeholders in Harare on September 5, Professor Eldred Masunungure, a Zimbabwean researcher and University of Zimbabwe Lecturer of Political Science forewarned that Zanu-PF's unassailable control of national affairs could work against the party if there was no self-control.

*“Super majorities can result in arrogance and indiscipline in the party,”* Masunungure said.

Amid allegations of electoral fraud and observer reports from SADC and AU admitting unfairness in the recent election, Zanu-PF walked away with 160 parliamentary seats out of 210, and is set to constitute the next government with full governance power and unhindered leeway to implement its policies.



*Professor Eldred Masunungure*

But Masunungure said Zanu-PF's power came with responsibility.

*“Those who rejoice in the victory are filled with expectation. They expect the best, will they get the best?”* he said.

Masunungure attributed the loss of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change partly to its complacency during the lifespan of Inclusive Government, when he incidentally hinted that there could be a similar problem of complacency with Zanu-PF's rule after its disputed election landslide victory.

In reference to the MDC-T's allegations of vote fraud and supposed complacency, Masunungure said:

*“If there was rigging it begets the question -where was the MDC when these shenanigans were being rolled.*

*“It was basking in the glory of its historic and momentous victory of March 2008.”*

Masunungure said the next Zanu-PF government had the challenge to prove that it can do better than the GNU – which all the three political parties that constituted it blamed for derailed progress in implementing their public policies and manifestoes from the 2008 elections.

*“With this scapegoat gone, Zanu-PF has to demonstrate that it can do better,”* Masunungure said.

However Masunungure was optimistic that the new government may depart from some of its extremist policies, saying that governments usually do not strictly follow their manifestoes, but move towards more moderate policies after elections.

Masunungure said Zanu-PF might consider *“de-radicalising its policies”*.

*“There will be continuation of reform in some policy areas,”* Masunungure said. *“I think (Zanu-PF) is likely to seek normalization of the country's economy.*

*“I think a Zanu pf led government would seek to out perform the GNU.”*

However Masunungure admitted that not every one was enthusiastic about Zanu-PF disputed electoral victory and incoming government.

*“Indeed, most Zimbabweans were traumatized by the result and most Zimbabweans are in the post-traumatic disorder,”* he said.

Masunungure said he thought “President Mugabe will go into a reconciliation mode” by showing “magnanimity in victory” and seek to put his enemies closer to him, arguing that the precedent of that happening had been shown in the Unity Accord of 1987 signed between Zanu and Zapu to end armed hostilities between the two parties.