



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.17-2013
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Print media report for Wednesday, July 31, 2013

SUMMARY

AS Polling Day dawned on Zimbabwe’s harmonized national elections, a furious dispute over the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission’s refusal to hand over an electronic copy of the consolidated voters’ roll, according to the provisions of the Electoral Act, was last night taken to the Constitutional Court by the MDC-T, one of the contesting parties in the election.

While all the papers reported this, only *NewsDay* carried a story that for the second day in a row, ZEC admitted that the electoral process was seriously flawed. In a meeting with members of the multi-party liason commission in Harare, ZEC deputy chairperson, Joyce Kazembe was reported saying the electoral register was “...**now under ZEC and there is no way we can recall all the vote registers from the 9 760 polling stations**” She was reported saying that the Registrar-General responsible for the roll had experienced “**challenges**” producing an electronic copy.

Even a ZEC advertisement in most of the papers today admitted to a “**heated debate**” about the fate of the voters’ roll, an essential instrument in the

exercise of a credible election. But in the end, *NewsDay* reported Kazembe saying it was too late to correct the register now, while ZANU PF's representative, Sydney Sekeramayi was reported agreeing; the MDC-T's complaint, he said, "**was flogging a dead horse**".

This dispute compounded concerns raised the day before by the SADC chief elections observer, Bernard Membe, over the effect this would have on the credibility of the election.

While all the papers carried news of President Mugabe's election eve press briefing, each one carried different angles gleaned from his comments.

THE STATS...

THE print media carried 37 reports on the harmonized elections being held today.

Of these, 16 (43%) were contained in the state-owned daily, *The Herald* and the remaining 21 (57%) appeared in the private newspapers, *NewsDay* and *The Daily News*.

Twenty-seven stories reported the parties' political campaigns, eight were on the administration of elections, while the remaining two were on political violence.

Only *NewsDay* carried two political party advertisements, both for the MDC-T, although a double-page spread sponsored by 'The Heritage Trust' using material from a ZANU PF advertisement, reminded readers that they were voting for their economic independence, and listed ZANU PF manifesto objectives.

POLITICAL PARTY ACTIVITIES

Press offers Election Day advice

IF voters needed any guidance about who to vote for in today's elections, there was plenty of advice on offer in all three daily newspapers this morning.

Both *The Herald* and the privately owned *NewsDay* featured seemingly rational front-page comments advising their readers to "vote wisely", but offering completely different solutions to Zimbabwe's future. *The Daily News* also carried a convincing front-page editorial but was more forthright in its lead story entitled, '*89 reasons why Mugabe must go*'.

Both *The Herald* and *The Daily News* most evidently reflected their political sympathies in the remaining news and opinion columns of their papers.

For example in the 12 stories *The Herald* carried relating to the activities of the political contestants, five focused on disparaging Mugabe's greatest threat, the MDC-T and its leader, Morgan Tsvangirai. This was reflected in stories such as, '*MDC-T running scared*', '*UMD rallies behind Mugabe*', and, '*MDC-T faces massive backlash*', all of which wrote-off the MDC-T's chances of surviving today's election.

By comparison, *The Daily News* carried an interview with Morgan Tsvangirai himself, and a "story" authored by the MDC-T leader in its "news" columns entitled, '*Destiny is in our hands*'. These were two of the 10 stories carried in the paper relating to political party activities.

NewsDay's five stories on the topic were mostly useful insights into Zimbabwe's political future, as reflected in their headlines too. Stories such as, '*D-Day for Tsvangirai, Mugabe*', and, '*Will Mugabe or Tsvangirai accept defeat?*' provided readers with balanced and rational observations about the immediate prospects for Zimbabwe and the leadership of the country's two main political parties.

Of course, all the dailies reported Mugabe's jovial eve-of-election press briefing at State House where his humour and willingness to answer any questions delighted the attendant journalists.

But while the two private dailies picked on his welcome reassurance that he would "**surrender power**" if he is defeated in today's elections, *The Herald* was more predictable; '*President confident of emphatic victory*', declared its front-page lead story – one of six reports that bolstered ZANU PF's fortunes.

And instead of sticking to the wealth of material offered by the President's comments, the state-owned daily spoiled its story with unprofessional editorial intrusions to convince its readers of ZANU PF's dominance: "**The president is widely tipped to romp to victory, with ZANU PF grabbing a two-thirds majority**" was the most notable example.

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

ZEC fails to deliver

The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission's ability to preside over credible elections was called into question after *NewsDay* reported the commission admitting that it had sent a defective voters' roll to all polling stations in the country.

NewsDay and *The Daily News* also reported that ZEC had failed to comply with the electoral laws compelling it make a copy of the consolidated voters' roll available for public inspection and to provide copies to the contesting parties within a reasonable time before the elections, which had resulted in the MDC-T approaching the courts for recourse.

Even *The Herald* reported this appeal to the Electoral Court, but hid it in another story about the MDC-T withdrawing its challenge over the special vote exercise earlier this month.

And in an effort to disguise ZEC's blundering, the state-owned daily also hid news of the commission's meeting with members of the national multi-party liason committee in another story entitled, 'AU, SADC endorse poll preps'.

In the report ZEC chair Rita Makarau is narrowly quoted dismissing claims that the roll could be manipulated, as all parties had been accorded "**equal access to the electoral register**". She was quoted saying, "**The voters roll does not work in anyone's favour. There is no party that can claim that it was disadvantaged because of the voters roll... The best way was now to move forward and accept this voters' roll**".

The report did not carry concerns raised by other parties who attended the meeting.

This only appeared in *NewsDay*, which quoted ZAPU vice-president Emilia Mukaratiwa calling on the commission to accept that it has failed, "**...You must now own up that it is no longer possible to hold a free and fair election**".

The Daily News also reported the MDC-T's application to the Electoral Court compelling ZEC and the Registrar-General to provide them with a copy of the voters' roll. In the application Biti submits, "**without access to the voters' roll, there is no way a credible election can be conducted**".

Political Violence

The Herald and *The Daily News* each carried one report of political violence, which included the alleged killing of a ZANU PF supporter.

- This appeared in *The Herald*, which reported that "unknown assailants" had allegedly killed NewMan Munyanyama, of Doriyo village in a suspected politically motivated attack.
- *The Daily News* reported that party supporters aligned to ZANU PF's official candidate for Bikita West, Elias Musakwa, allegedly attacked expelled aspiring ZANU PF candidate, Munyaradzi Kereke.

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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