



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.12

Friday, 26th July 2013

COMMENT

HIGHLIGHT of the day as the election countdown enters its final few days was the extraordinary news that the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (Potraz) had imposed an arbitrary ban on the transmission of all bulk text messages until after the elections (see ‘Media’ section in the print section of this report).

Bulk text messaging by several civic organizations has served as an important source of contemporary information for thousands of ordinary people in recent months. But this repressive move by Potraz clearly violates Zimbabweans’ constitutional rights to receive and impart information without hindrance and will deprive large sections of the electorate of the opportunity to be informed about current events.

Such a blatant violation of Zimbabweans' right to freedom of expression as guaranteed in the new constitution just a few days before national elections, places Potraz at the centre of a controversy that will certainly contribute to undermining the credibility of those elections.

In a comment condemning Potraz's ban, the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA-Zimbabwe) observes that ***“this cowardly fear of the free flow of information is a stark reminder of the fact that the credibility of these elections should not only be measured against the prevailing peaceful environment, but a range of freedoms available to Zimbabweans to make informed choices as enunciated in the new constitution’s Bill of Rights and regional protocols on the conduct of democratic elections”***.

MMPZ endorses this observation unreservedly and, like MISA, calls on Potraz to immediately rescind this anti-democratic and unconstitutional attempt to gag the nation.

Electronic media report for Thursday, July 25 2013

SUMMARY

TODAY'S electronic media output was again characterized by the all-too-familiar pomp and fanfare associated with ZANU PF 'star rallies' as the party's campaign drive arrived in Masvingo province. The state broadcaster, ZBC, demonstrated its commitment to the party by devoting 2 hours 30 minutes of live coverage to the event.

Throughout this election campaign ZBC has demonstrated its blind loyalty to ZANU PF by not giving other parties' activities and campaigns a single minute of live coverage, while reporting on their events only in a negative context.

The privately owned radio stations also reported more on ZANU PF's activities but from a more neutral perspective, and endeavoured to strike a balance between campaign trail news and election administration issues.

THE STATS...

The electronic media reported on 39 election-related stories (Party campaign rallies, 19; administrative issues, 13; party politics, two; political violence, three; and two reports on ZBC stations announcing Election Day a public holiday).

ZTV led the way with 17 election-related stories. Nine covered party campaigns, seven of which were reports on 13 ZANU PF rallies countrywide, while two reports covered three MDC-T rallies in Wedza, Mahusekwa and Hatfield. ZTV covered the administration of elections in six stories.

The remaining two stories on ZTV included Election Day being declared a public holiday, and an interview with an independent candidate, Elvis Muzambwa for Epworth, who attacked incumbent MDC-T MP, Elia Jembero for not developing the area.

Spot FM reported three election-related stories two of which were on the ZANU PF rallies in Masvingo and Matebeleland South. The other story was on the African Union giving Zimbabwe's election preparations the green light.

Studio 7 and SWRA each ran five stories (one each on ZANU PF rallies), while Star FM and ZiFM each carried four stories on election news. Of these ZiFM carried two stories on ZANU PF rallies and one each on the MDC-T and MDC-N, while Star reported on ZANU PF's Masvingo headline rally.

ZTV allocated 33 minutes 36 seconds to seven ZANU PF campaign stories in its 50-minute news section, while the MDC-T received 6 minutes 39 seconds in two reports.

CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

ZANU PF campaigns dominate electronic media coverage

News of ZANU PF's campaign trail rallies received attention on all the radio stations and inundated ZTV's news coverage, which led its bulletin with President Mugabe's Muccheke Stadium rally in Masvingo.

It was not difficult to see why as the station prominently reported Mugabe continuing his diatribe against his arch rival, Morgan Tsvangirai: ***"We had to hold Tsvangirai by the hand so he could sign the inclusive government before going to his handlers"*** Mugabe was quoted saying in reference to the arduous task of creating the inclusive government.

Ironically, MDC-T's rallies in Wedza, Mahusekwa and Hatfield today only got a mention, albeit negatively, on ZTV; although ZiFM also reported news of the MDC-T's Sessil Zvidzai in Hatfield responding to local government minister Ignatius Chombo's declaration scrapping all residents' debts to councils.

ZiFM was also the only station to report any campaign activity of the MDC-N. The station reported party leader, Welshman Ncube telling a Gweru gathering that ***“the country’s judiciary is under the captivity of ZANU PF”***.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

AU gives poll process the thumbs-up

The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission’s chairperson, Rita Makarau, was widely reported in the electronic media assuring Zimbabweans that her organization was capable of holding a credible election despite the chaos surrounding its special voting exercise earlier this month.

Studio 7 reported this, as well as ZEC confirming that it had received sufficient funds – US\$96 million – from treasury to run the elections.

The African Union observer mission’s vote of confidence for the country’s election preparations was also widely covered across all electronic media platforms.

In its five-minute report on this, ZTV quoted AU Commission chairperson, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, saying, ***“We are hopeful that the election, if everything goes according to plan, will be credible”***.

SWRA also reported that ***“Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, has reportedly expressed optimism about Zimbabwe’s election next week”***.

ZTV also reported the Common Market for Eastern and South Africa (COMESA) observer mission also approving the electoral environment and ZEC’s preparations. ***“The COMESA Observer Mission says it is confident the environment is conducive for the holding of credible, harmonized elections next Wednesday”***, ZTV reported.

The electronic media conveyed the message that the country was ready to hold the July 31 elections without investigating whether the situation on the ground was as reported. The media merely accepted the word of the officials and reported it without verifying the claims.

Political violence

Only Studio 7 and SW Radio Africa carried reports of political violence.

Studio 7 reported that the MDC-T’s Mberengwa North candidate, Takavafira Zhou claimed that more than 50 ZANU PF youth militia attacked him. Zhou is also president of the Progressive Teacher’s Union of Zimbabwe.

SWRA reported two cases of political violence in Chegutu and Buhera West.

“The town of Chegutu was on virtual lock-down on Thursday as ZANU PF supporters forced the closure of all shops, market stalls and schools”, the station reported. While in Buhera West, SWRA reported that ***“former police spokesperson Oliver Mandipaka, the ZANU PF candidate, threatened to shoot an MDC-T polling agent”***.

The ZANU PF campaign was so dominant; other reports around the elections took a back seat.

POLITICAL ADVERTISING

ZTV flighted two 30-second MDC-T advertisements on three occasions during the five-hour prime-time period monitored. It also carried three ZANU PF ads, two of which are one minute long, on five occasions in the same period.

In addition, ZTV and Spot FM repeatedly aired pro-ZANU PF continuity jingles throughout the five-hour prime-time period monitored. Spot FM went further in promoting ZANU PF by broadcasting a 5-minute 40-second ZANU PF praise song by the Mbare Chimurenga Choir.

Spot FM aired two 30-second MDC-T advertisements.

Star FM alternated MDC-T advertising and ZANU PF adverts at regular intervals.

ZiFM carried five advertisements during prime-time: Two MDC-T ads, one inserted by the Organ on National Healing Reconciliation and Integration, one X1G ad encouraging the youth to vote, and one ZEC voter education advert.

Current affairs Programmes

ZTV, carried two current affairs programmes during prime-time evening viewing:

The Manifesto – This 16-minute programme broadcast the election manifesto of the Zimbabwe Organized Open Political Party (ZOOPP) and had the president of the party Gibson Paul Gotora.

Retracing the Footsteps: A repeat of an hour-long current affairs production chronicling the path and events taken by Robert Mugabe and Edgar Tekere on their way to join the liberation struggle in Mozambique.

ZiFM: ***16/35 with Ruveneko Parirenyatwa*** – A 30-minute programme, featuring three members of COMESA discussing the regional body’s role in observing elections.

Print Media report for Friday, July 26th, 2013

SUMMARY

The state-owned press censored stories concerning the credibility of the electoral process, openly favoured ZANU PF and poorly portrayed that party's political rivals.

NewsDay summed up the activities of the competing parties with an incisive editorial comment stating that **"...when Zimbabweans go and vote on Wednesday, they will be voting on the back of entertaining campaigns which are bankrupt on policy detail...resorting instead to personality clashes and abusing religious groupings."**

THE STATS...

The print media carried 64 election-related stories.

Of these, 45 (70%) appeared in the private dailies, *NewsDay*, the *Daily News* and the weekly *The Zimbabwe Independent*. The remaining 19 (30%) were captured in the state-owned daily, *The Herald*.

Thirty-nine (61%) of the 64 stories were on party political activities, and 15 (23%) were administrative issues. The remaining reports were general election reports.

In total, the private papers carried 14 advertisements. *Newsday*, the *Daily News* and *The Zimbabwe Independent* each had three political party adverts; two were from the MDC-T and one from ZANU PF.

Today only *The Zimbabwe Independent* carried an informative ZEC voter education update. Both *Newsday* and the *Daily News* carried adverts and statements from civic organisations encouraging free and fair elections.

CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

We know war, paper reports Mugabe saying

The state-owned *Herald* carried 14 stories on party activities. Out of these, 11 gave favourable publicity to ZANU PF; three negatively portrayed the MDC-T.

Collectively, the state-owned and private Press carried 39 reports on party activities; *NewsDay* (three), the *Daily News* (six), *The Herald* (14) and *The Zimbabwe Independent* (16).

The Herald's front-page story on Mugabe's Mucheke star rally in Masvingo reported the ZANU PF presidential candidate taking another swipe at the West and the MDC T at the same time, saying his political rival was the **"brain child of the British"** that didn't have any ideas of its own.

The Herald also seized an opportunity to remind its readers of the MDC-T leader's questionable morality in a second story of the same rally where Mugabe claimed his party had done the most to promote women's interests.

Despite reporting MDC-T leader Morgan Tsvangirai saying he was not against land reform, *The Herald* story simply contradicted him in one of its numerous editorial intrusions. This appeared in its news story of his Chikomba rally, with the inaccurate headline, *'Tsvangirai attacks resettled farmers'*.

The private media was more balanced and non-partisan in their coverage of party activities. For example, the *Daily News* gave equal space to the activities of ZANU PF and the MDC-T as well as interviewing an aspiring ZAPU parliamentary candidate.

Only *NewsDay* reported that although Mugabe urged his supporters to remain peaceful, **"he made a veiled threat to go back to war if provoked"**. The paper quoted him saying: **"We know war. We can fight very well. So no one can threaten us. These boys (MDC youth), who say the police will be attacked, they did not get advice from their parents; we will just slap them in the face."**

Notably, in its last edition before the watershed elections *The Zimbabwe Independent* encouraged the electorate to vote without fear. The paper noted: **"Most of the time polls are just a charade to give the dictator a veneer of legitimacy, but people must, next week, seize the opportunity to push the frontiers and horizons of change"**.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Media silent on election funding source

The highlight of the day in the print media was the announcement by Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa and Finance Minister Tendai Biti that government had secured sufficient funding for Wednesday's elections. This was reported in all three daily papers monitored. Only the *Daily News* reported that Biti **"declined to disclose the source of the money"**.

However, *The Herald* reported Chinamasa politicizing this development when he said: **"You knows the MDC-T's uncontrollable love for foreigners...we have said 'no' to their machinations to have foreigners run our internal processes."** But the paper still didn't investigate the source of the funds.

The private media continued to raise red flags on issues to do with the voters' roll. *The Zimbabwe Independent* quoted Home Affairs Minister Theresa Makoni stating that the final voters' roll should have been out, and that the delay might mean that a lot of people might find their names missing from the roll. *NewsDay* also quoted Prime Minister Tsvangirai's advisor, Alex Magaisa, expressing the same concern.

NewsDay reported the German Embassy's counsellor, Peter Primus, noting that the election process **"is not transparent enough"**, while *The Herald* preferred to focus on the observations of the South African International Relations Deputy Minister Ebrahim Ebrahim commending Zimbabwe for the peaceful pre-election environment.

But the *Daily News* also captured the concerns of the MDC-T's leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, telling African Union and COMESA observers that there were still some **"electoral malpractices"**, including a biased public media, insufficient polling stations in urban areas and some rural polling stations situated on ZANU PF owned farms.

The Zimbabwe Independent questioned the legality of allowing the unsuccessful special voters to vote on July 31. It cited a recent Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU) report questioning **"why...the Electoral Act (must) be strictly applied, frustrating would-be voters from registering, but not applied if it will frustrate the security sector."** This was in reference to ZEC's application to the Constitutional Court that was due to be ruled on today.

All the dailies carried Mugabe's official announcement declaring July 31 a public holiday.

Political Violence

Although today there were no reports of political violence, *The Herald* quoted police chief spokesperson Charity Charamba dismissing reports of intimidation and the establishment of "torture bases".

MEDIA ISSUES

Potraz bans bulk text messaging

Only *NewsDay* reported the extraordinary decision by the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority to ban the transmission of all bulk text messages via mobile phones until after the July 31 elections.

The paper quoted the online human rights and information project, Kubatana.net, which makes extensive use of bulk text messaging to keep its subscribers informed about contemporary events.

The organization explained that its service provider, Econet, had informed them of Potraz's ban to block their service and all bulk messaging by mobile phone.

NewsDay reported the organization condemning the ban: ***“Kubatana.net believes Potraz is acting unconstitutionally...Zimbabweans have a right to receive and impart information, as enshrined in the constitution’s guarantee of the right to freedom of expression. Kubatana.net views the interference in our work as obstructive, repressive and hostile”***

All three dailies reported President Mugabe taking a swipe at the private media for carrying reports raising concern over the feasibility of staging the July 31 polls successfully. He insulted the private media and linked them to the MDC when he said: ***“They say Mugabe rushed us to polls, yet we do not have a Parliament. That is the MDC and their stupid supportive media”***.

MMPZ comment - Although Mugabe described the private media's journalists as being ***“blinded”*** by their own “mistakes”, he in turn, appears blind to the state-owned media's blind loyalty to ZANU PF.

Circulated by the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, 9 Knight Bruce Road, Milton Park, Harare, Tel: 263 4 741816 / 778115, Whatsapp: 0776 739 522, E-mail: monitors@mmpz.org.zw

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