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West's 'puppet regimes' blamed for revolution in Africa

A NATIONAL uprising by the Egyptian people against their leader, President Hosni Mubarak, attracted the attention of all the media at the weekend.

This historic event followed a similar "peoples' revolt" in Tunisia, which forced its president, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, to flee the country three weeks ago.

The political unrest in North Africa comes at a time when the continent was still gripped with another protracted political crisis in Ivory Coast where incumbent president, Laurent Gbagbo, claiming electoral fraud, refused to concede defeat to his political rival, Alassane Quattara, who was pronounced the winner in that country's presidential election last November.

According to MMPZ's research, the government media carried 60 stories on these political crises between January 1st and January 31st 2011. Fifty-seven of them were biased, while three were neutral.

Although the official media admitted that protests in North Africa were popular, they gave the impression that the uprisings were exclusively a reflection of Arab anger against Western-sponsored puppet regimes – rather than the undemocratic and repressive nature of these regimes.

For example, *The Sunday Mail* (30/1)'s editorial: *People's power will always triumph over puppet govts*, trivialized these popular Arab protests against authoritarian rule as an uprising against Western imperialism. It gloated: "***The Tunisian government's pro-Western stance...could not save it from popular anger. The puppet-master relationship has its serious limitations and, for such client states, the moment of reckoning is always a heartbeat away***".

The government media's bias was more evident in their coverage of the Ivory Coast crisis, as they openly supported Gbagbo, while expressing outright contempt for Quattara, whom they dismissed as being a puppet of the West.

These media all but ignored the fact that Quattara enjoyed widely popular support, as reflected in the election whose result was endorsed by that country's own electoral commission, West Africa's regional bloc, ECOWAS, the UN and the West, led by France.

Notably, the government media's hostile treatment of Quattara appeared to stem from their apparent dislike of candidates from opposition camps, the same way they treat Zimbabwean Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and his party.

The Herald (26/1)'s columnist Alexander Kanengoni equated Quattara to Tsvangirai, arguing: **"...As it is with the Ivory Coast, we also have our own Alassane Quattara, people who are prepared to be used as proxies to defend and further the interests of our former colonisers. We have Morgan Tsvangirai and the MDC here"**.

Earlier, *The Herald* (24/1) quoted ZANU PF Senator Guy Georgias accusing France of creating a **"political mess"** in Ivory Coast and arguing that the West no longer had any moral ground to **"lecture us on good governance"**.

ZBC adopted the same stance. It likened Gbagbo to Mugabe and viewed him as a victim of Western imperialist machinations because of his principled stance against Western interference in his country's affairs (ZTV, 20 & 27/1, 8pm).

While the official media viewed Tsvangirai's observation that Zimbabwe could experience similar political upheavals if government, especially the ZANU PF side of it, continued to disrespect the peoples' rights (ZTV, 20/1, 8pm & *The Sunday Mail*, 30/1), the private media argued that such action was highly unlikely as Zimbabweans allegedly lacked the capacity to do so (Radio VoP & *NewsDay*, 2/2).

Anti-sanctions campaign targets foreign business

AN upsurge in stories in the government media in recent days advocating severe punishment for those who allegedly support perceived Western sanctions against Zimbabwe has given rise to grave concern in many sectors of Zimbabwean society, not least the business sector.

These media appeared to be amplifying ZANU PF's resolution during its conference last December "directing" government to **"enforce the law of treason against any individual, corporate body or entity which calls for the imposition and/or maintenance of sanctions or any other measures harmful, injurious or deleterious to the welfare of the people of Zimbabwe"** (*The Sunday Mail*, 18/12/10).

The party also resolved to urgently **"launch...a worldwide anti-sanctions campaign agitating for the immediate and unconditional lifting of the illegal sanctions imposed against the country"**.

Both the government and private media subsequently quoted several ZANU PF officials such as Rugare Gumbo and Defence Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa reinforcing the determination of their party to carry out these threats.

In the two weeks between January 17th and January 30th the official media carried 63 stories on this campaign. Most of the stories (50) appeared on ZBC, while the remaining 13 featured in the official Press over the 14-day period.

For example, the *Chronicle* (24/11) quoted ZANU PF's Bulawayo provincial chairman Isaac Dakamela echoing Mnangagwa's earlier threat that companies allegedly **"working against Zimbabwe"** risked losing **"90 percent of their shareholding"** when he addressed a party meeting in the city.

Dakamela said the money realized from the seized shares would be deposited into a proposed anti-sanctions fund that would finance an aggressive campaign against sanctions and that all foreign-owned companies would be **"compelled to assist"**. He was never asked what effect the threatening and selective nature of his threat would have on the business community and investment opportunities.

Another senior ZANU PF official, Sikhanyiso Ndlovu, told the same meeting that his party was mobilizing **"seven million"** Zimbabweans to sign an anti-sanctions petition aimed at lobbying the West to lift sanctions.

The private media viewed this as having the potential to fuel political tensions and severely undermine the country's efforts to lure investment.

ZimOnline (17/1) quoted Economic Planning and Investment promotion Minister Tapiwa Mashakada criticizing ZANU PF's threats as **"unhelpful"**, as they bordered on **"hate speech"** and potentially damaged the country's image.

SW Radio Africa (27/1) reported ZANU PF supporters as having taken advantage of this campaign to commit politically motivated violence. It cited as proof, incidents in areas such as Gokwe, Rusape and Masvingo, where traditional leaders were reportedly coercing villagers to sign the anti-sanctions petition.

A selection of what some ZANU PF officials said on the issue appears here:

"We are not begging anyone, the resources are ours. It is time to assert control, we have got that right, and we do not need to ask for permission. It will not take us three months to destroy the conservancies...After all, what is a conservancy?" - ZANU PF Politburo member Stan Mudenge at a Masvingo meeting expressing his party's plans to seize all wildlife conservancies in the Lowveld, many owned by foreign investors. (*NewsDay*, 27/1).

"We did not go to war to remain poor and dispossessed. We fought to take control of our resources, these are not empty promises we mean business" – Indigenization Minister Savior Kasukuwere speaking at the same occasion with Mudenge (*NewsDay*, 27/1).

“We have been far too good for malicious people, for countries which seek to destroy us. Why should we continue to have 400 British companies here operating freely with Britain benefiting from us? – President Mugabe addressing his party’s conference last December (New Zimbabwe.com, 17/1).

State media pampers ZANU PF

THE official media continued to give ZANU PF widespread favourable coverage compared with its partners in the inclusive government.

This not only violated the provisions of the Global Political Agreement, but also professional journalistic standards, which demand fair, balanced and accurate coverage of the country’s main political parties.

Out of the 90 stories these media carried on the activities of Zimbabwe’s coalition parties, 56 were on ZANU PF. Another 20 were on the MDC-T, while the remaining 14 were on the smaller MDC formation.

Almost all their reports on ZANU PF portrayed the party in positive light. They portrayed it as the “people’s party”, which was concerned with the welfare of the nation’s poor and dispossessed. This was reflected by their publicity for the party’s black economic empowerment agenda and its distribution of farming inputs and residential stands to poor Zimbabweans (ZTV, 26 & 27/1, 7am & 8pm and *The Herald & Chronicle*, 24 & 27/1).

Their reports on the two MDC formations were mostly negative. They focused on factionalism and accused them of sabotaging the constitution-making process and being unpatriotic (ZTV’s current affairs programme, *Media Watch* (31/1), ZTV, 26 & 29/1, 8pm and *Chronicle*, 27/1).

The government papers also continue to give members of the ZANU PF arm of government massively more front-page pictorial coverage than those from the two MDC formations.

The Herald, for instance, published nine pictures of ZANU PF officials [President Mugabe and Vice-President Joice Mujuru (three apiece), Defence Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa (two) and Information Minister Webster Shamu (one)].

In contrast, the daily carried just one picture of MDC-M’s Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara. Officials of the MDC-T formation never appeared.

But while the private Press appeared to be balanced in their coverage of these parties, the private electronic media exclusively portrayed ZANU PF as corrupt, violent and unpopular.

Fig 1: Print media coverage of the coalition parties' activities

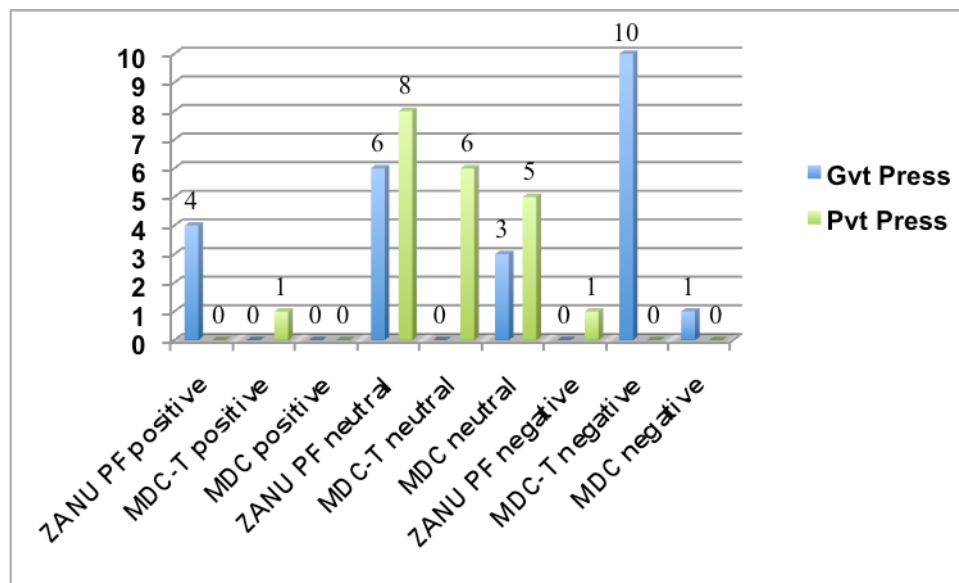
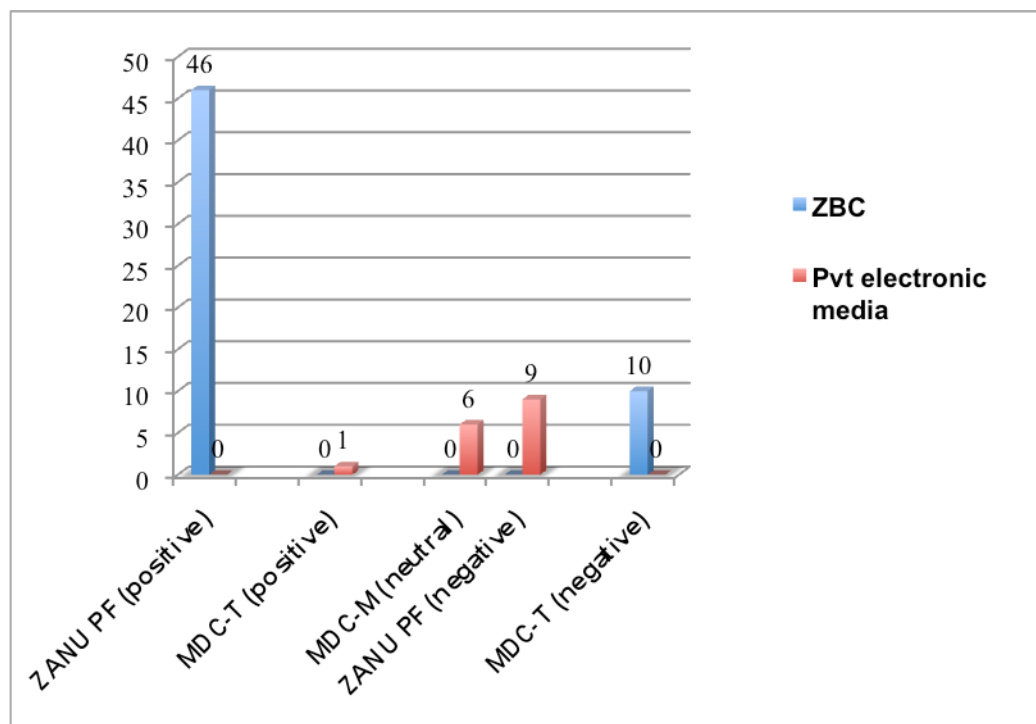


Fig 2: Coverage of the parties in the electronic media



State media blame violence on MDC-T

REPORTS that the police arrested about 36 MDC-T youths, who allegedly took part in violent clashes between ZANU PF and the MDC-T supporters in Harare's high-density suburbs of Mbare and Budiro, appeared to lend credence to the widely held belief that the police are partisan and selectively applied the law.

Although *The Herald* (24/1) reported the arrests, it did not explain why only MDC-T youths were arrested, when both parties were involved.

The same paper (1/2) also reported the arrest of another seven MDC-T supporters after the eruption of further incidents in Mbare. It quoted Harare provincial police spokesman James Sabau confirming the arrests without challenging him to explain why only MDC-T youths were arrested, despite his admission that both groups had clashed.

While Sabau confirmed this fresh outbreak of violence to *The Herald* (1/2), he told the same edition of *NewsDay* that he was not aware of it.

These incidents were among 19 reports of rights violations the media carried this week, 17 of them in the official media.

Among them were:

- Alleged invasion of a Budiro housing co-operative meeting by about 200 suspected MDC-T youths, who vandalized property and attacked members of the public (*The Herald*, 24/1).
- Alleged shooting of an MDC-T activist, William Mukuwari, in Budiro and the harassment and assault of Piniel Denga (MDC-T Mbare MP) and Emmanuel Chiroto, Harare's deputy mayor (SW Radio Africa, 24/1).

SMS us with your feedback

MMPZ is anxious to hear from our readers. We would love to get your feedback about our weekly media reviews. Do you enjoy what you read? Is it helpful? Are there issues that you think we overlook? If there is anything you think we can do that will improve our product, we would like to hear from you.

You can contact us either by email at monitors@mmpz.org.zw or you can even sms your comments on our dedicated hotline cell phone number: **0774 432 509.**

Comments on the stories themselves are also welcome. We look forward to hearing from you.

AND HERE'S THE FIRST OF YOUR COMMENTS...

Excellent reviews, guys! Any chance finding out what the Min of Roads is going to do about Harare's appalling + dangerous roads? Freda.

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