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The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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Contents

TOP STORIES

A STRIKE by Air Zimbabwe pilots, which resulted in the cancellation of most of the airline's international flights, leaving thousands of travellers stranded, made headlines in all the media this week.

While the government media reported this strike in isolation of simmering labour unrest in other economic sectors, the private media viewed it as "a tip of the iceberg".

In other stories the government media carried a significant number of reports propping up President Mugabe's image, without providing any context. The private media, on the other hand, paid attention to the intensifying debate on national elections, following weekend reports that Mugabe had directed Finance Minister Tendai Biti to budget for the polls, and revelations by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai that he and Mugabe had agreed to hold them next year.

Although both the government and private media highlighted endless confusion in the constitutional outreach consultation programme, the government media paid lip service to incidents of politically motivated violence, which the private media argued undermined the credibility of Zimbabwe's constitutional reforms.

Fig 1: Top stories in the media

Media	Labour unrest	Constitutional reforms	Election talk	Human rights
Public Media	25	26	11	3
Private Media	29	12	19	13
Total	**54**	**38**	**30**	**16**

Air Zim strike 'tip of an iceberg'

THE strike by Air Zimbabwe pilots, which exposed decay at the national airline, formed most of the government and private media's coverage of growing labour unrest in Zimbabwe.

They devoted 39 (72%) out of 54 stories to the Air Zimbabwe strike [government media (20), private media (19)]. The remaining 15 stories highlighted discontent in other sectors of the economy such as banking, municipal workers and the civil service.

The state-run media largely reported the strike from the perspective of the Air Zimbabwe management, which discredited it as unjustified and illegal without providing convincing reasons. These media failed to consider the strike as a consequence of neglect and interference by the former ZANU PF government, or mismanagement. Neither did they view it as an indication of the failure by the inclusive government to revive the airline or question the sufficiency of measures taken by its management to avert the strike.

All the media reported the strike as having been caused by Air Zimbabwe's failure to pay pilots their allowances since February 2009. Although *The Herald* (9/9) reported the strike as having caused ***"chaos"*** and ***"paralyzed operations"*** at Harare International Airport, it failed to seek comment from the striking pilots. Instead, the paper exclusively reported the strike from the perspective of the AZ's management and an unidentified source. ZBC (8/9, 8pm) and *The Herald* (9/9) quoted AirZim board chairman Jonathan Kadzura describing the strike as ***"unfortunate"***, as the parastatal could not ***"afford'*** to pay the allowances. He described their monthly pay of more than $1,200 as ***"outrageous"*** on the grounds that most workers were earning approximately $200 owing to the prevailing economic situation.

ZTV (9/9, 8pm) & *The Herald* (10/9) reported the strike as having cost the national airline over US$500,000 a day, damaging the country's image and affecting tourism, in a report in which the Air Zimbabwe board gave the striking workers a 24-hour ultimatum to return to work, or face dismissal. However, they failed to view the ultimatum as having the potential to worsen the situation. Neither did they question the truth of Kadzura's claims that the strike was ***"illegal"*** and ***"ridiculous"***.

The government media's coverage of labour unrest in other sectors of the economy was much better.

For example, these media publicized teachers' intention to strike if government failed to improve their working conditions and similar threats by Marondera municipal workers (*The Herald*, 8 & 11/9), a move they argued that would erode efforts to revive Zimbabwe's dilapidated socio-economic sectors.

The private media gave the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), and labour experts space to express their views on labour-related issues.

The Standard (12/9) quoted ZCTU secretary-general Wellington Chibebe warning that the AirZim strike ***"could mark the beginning of work stoppages"*** across most sectors of the economy. He cited the ***"collapse of wage negotiations"*** and government's failure to address workers' concerns as the major cause of this. They also reported on a possible strike by teachers (*New Zimbabwe.com* & *The Financial Gazette*, 9 & 11/9) and similar problems in the banking industry (*Zimbabwe Independent*, 10/9).

State media ignore election talk

REPORTS that President Mugabe had directed Finance Minister Tendai Biti to budget for national elections and revelations by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai that the country's two main coalition principals had agreed to hold them next year, renewed debate over Zimbabwe's readiness for the polls.

While the private media discussed the issue freely, the government media turned a blind eye to the debate. Instead, they promoted Mugabe's image in 12 reports. Although the government media did not disclose reasons for such favourable publicity, the private media quoted political commentators speculating that it could be part of the build-up to next year's elections.

The *Zimbabwe Independent*, SW Radio Africa & *New Zimbabwe.com* (10 & 11/9) quoted Finance Minister Biti revealing that Mugabe had ordered him to set aside US$200 million for the elections in the 2011 national budget.

These media criticized Mugabe for allegedly insisting on elections despite the prevailing political and electoral environment, which analysts argue was not conducive for elections. They quoted Biti describing the plans as ***" a disaster"*** for the country's cash-strapped fiscus.

Similarly, *The Standard* (12/9) cited the prevailing climate of fear and violence and advice by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) that it needed 18 to 24 months to prepare a credible voters' roll as evidence of Zimbabwe's lack of capacity to conduct a smooth and credible election next year.

The government media however, preferred to report Mugabe as a successful farmer (*The Herald*, 11/9) and humble leader who earned a meagre salary of $400 until it was recently increased to $1,750 (*The Sunday Mail*, 12/9). They also emphasized his denial of rumours of ill health during a rare interview with Reuters news agency, in which he reiterated his willingness to normalize relations with the West and his determination to implement his party's controversial indigenization plans (*The Herald*, 10/9).

ZimOnline (10/9) quoted political commentator Eldred Masunungure interpreting Mugabe's comments that he was ***"still fit enough to fight sanctions and knock out"*** his opponents as a subtle indication of his willingness to remain in office.

Distortions, fabrications contaminate media

MMPZ has noted a proliferation of factually inaccurate reports, fabrications and ethical misconduct in both the government and private media.

MMPZ identified four reports in *NewsDay* (14/9) and one in *The Herald* (16/9) as testimony to this. In its story: *Tsvangirai tipped to win next poll*, advertised on its front page, *NewsDay* published the findings of a survey on the voting intentions of Zimbabweans by the Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI), showing that Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai was likely to win the next general election with 32 percent of the vote. *NewsDay* commissioned MPOI, which it wrongly referred to as the Public Mass Opinion Institute, to conduct the survey last August, using a nationally representative sample of 1 062 people. The paper claimed that the results, which came out last week, showed that ***"40% of the electorate might not vote"*** in the poll in which ZANU PF would come second with 18 percent, while the revived ZAPU would finish a distant third with two percent.

However, it turned out in the survey itself that the 40 percent was a proportion of voters who ***"refused to reveal their voting intentions"***. *NewsDay* did not even clarify how Tsvangirai would win the poll if voting preferences of such a significant number of the electorate were unknown. It also dishonestly ignored the plummeting fortunes of the MDC-T's popularity by 17 percent and an increase of ZANU PF's popularity by five percent compared with the results of the previous MPOI survey, conducted in November 2009. That survey showed that 49 percent of voters would have voted for the MDC-T at that time, while 13 percent would have voted for ZANU PF.

NewsDay also distorted the meaning of a Press statement: *ZANU PF: The Unstoppable Machine*, written by ZANU PF's national chairman, Simon Khaya Moyo.

Basing a story on this Press statement, which appeared in *The Sunday Mail* (12/9), *NewsDay* claimed that ZANU PF had ***"launched a fresh terror campaign"***. In an attempt to give credibility to its fabrication, the private daily quoted the two MDC formations, MDC99 and ZAPU describing the alleged campaign as an attempt by Mugabe to ***"instill fear"*** into the electorate in a ***"desperate bid to cling on to power"***.

It remained unexplained how ZANU PF's defence of its controversial land reforms and indigenization policy and vilification of its opponents through this Press statement amounted to a "terror campaign".

A court report headlined: *Serial robbers appear in court* summed up a bad day at the office for *NewsDay* (14/9).

The paper violated ethical guidelines governing court reporting by describing three men who appeared in court on robbery charges as ***"serial robbers"*** before the court had found them guilty.

The Herald (16/9) weighed in with an equally exaggerated front-page story: *Kaseke, models in horror crash*. The report stemmed from a road accident that occurred near Banket, involving the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority chief executive officer Karikoga Kaseke and three beauty queens who were traveling to Chinhoyi to attend a World Tourism Day public lecture. It remained a mystery why *The Herald* chose to describe the accident as a ***"horror crash"***, considering that it did not claim any life, as the four sustained ***"minor injuries"*** according to ZTA spokesman Sugar Chagonda.

MMPZ urges the media to desist from exaggerating and fabricating issues and publishing factually incorrect stories in line with internationally accepted journalistic standards and ethics.

THE MOST POPULAR VOICES

THE government-controlled media broke with tradition by giving ZANU PF and the MDC-T equal opportunity to express themselves on various national issues.

The private media continued to favour the MDC-T compared to its coalition partners. However, both media discriminated against the views of the smaller MDC formation as shown in Fig. 2. Most government voices in the public and private media belonged to Air Zimbabwe board and management. The private media widely quoted political commentators and civil society questioning the prudence of holding national elections next year and attributing labour unrest in Zimbabwe to poor planning and inadequate government intervention.

Air Zimbabwe board chairman Jonathan Kadzura was the most quoted individual in the public media.

He was heard 15 times criticizing his pilots for going on strike and threatening them with dismissal. President Mugabe and Copac co-chairman Douglas Mwonzora followed. They were quoted 11 times each. Most of Mugabe’s comments emanated from his interview with Reuters news agency, in which he spoke about various personal and national issues, while Mwonzora was quoted on the constitutional outreach programme. Another Copac co-chairman Paul Mangwana and Air Zimbabwe chief executive officer Peter Chikumba also competed for attention. They were heard six times apiece. Mangwana talked about constitutional reforms, while Chikumba urged Air Zimbabwe pilots to return to work.

Mugabe was the most frequently quoted individual in the private media.

He appeared 11 times, mainly about his interview with Reuters. Kadzura followed (eight), Chikumba (seven) and Finance Minister Tendai Biti (six) trailed. Kadzura spoke about the strike at Air Zimbabwe, while Biti expressed misgivings over President Mugabe’s directive on elections.

Fig 2: Sourcing patterns in the media

Media	Govt	ZANU PF	MDC-T	MDC-M	Alternative	Unnamed
Public Media	28	20	20	4	5	4
Private Media	18	11	21	2	24	5

Human rights abuses

THE media recorded 12 new incidents of human rights violations in 16 stories.
Eleven of them appeared in the private media while one featured in the official media.
Six of the incidents were related to Copac's outreach programme.
Among the incidents were:

- Clashes between ZANU PF and MDC-T supporters during Copac's meetings in Nyanga. One person, an MDC-T supporter, Samunda Bvuma, was arrested in connection with the violence (*The Manica Post*, 10/9).
- The sentencing of Gift Mafuka for a year for ***"insulting"*** President Mugabe (SW Radio Africa, 6/9).
- The alleged assault of a Copac team leader by youths at an outreach meeting in Nyamaropa in the presence of police, who took no action (*NewsDay*, 8/9).
- The alleged assault of another Copac team leader, Bednock Nyaude (MDC-T MP for Bindura South) by a ZANU PF rapporteur, Beauty Lily Zhuwawo, during a dispute over the replacement of an absent Copac member (Studio 7, 7/9), and
- Allegations that the police were selectively applying the law in Nyanga by arresting MDC-T supporters only in clashes involving ZANU PF supporters (*NewsDay*, 8/9).

What they said…

These people *(Air Zimbabwe pilots)* ***are the most well-paid people in the country…and for them to take such a ridiculous action against the airline beats any reasonable person's thinking"*** – Air Zimbabwe board chairman Jonathan Kadzura (*The Herald*, 10/9).

"Boys and girls get back to the cockpit. Zimbabwe does not have another airline. Do not hold the shareholder and our customers to ransom…" – Air Zimbabwe chief executive Peter Chikumba pleading with striking pilots to return to work (*The Herald*, 11/9).

"Workers are firing warning shots and government should take heed. There is simmering unrest that if not addressed will spread nationwide" – ZCTU secretary-general Wellington Chibebe (*The Standard*, 12/9).

Ends/

The MEDIA REVIEW was produced and circulated by the Media Monitoring Project
Zimbabwe, 9 Knight Bruce Road, Milton Park, Harare, Tel: 263 4 741816 / 778115, E-mail:
monitors@mmpz.org.zw