

The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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Weekly Media Review 2010-41

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TOP STORIES

NEWS that the Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC) was **“ready for elections”** (*The Herald* 20/10) following President Mugabe’s calls for the fast tracking of the constitutional reform programme so that elections can be held next June intensified debate over the country’s capability to hold credible polls.

Mugabe and ZEC’s pronouncements coincided with perceptible ZANU PF electoral campaign activity (see Fig 1) in which ZANU PF officials, especially the party’s youth and women’s leagues were reported endorsing Mugabe as their candidate in the election. Also noticeable was a 83 percent rise in stories on human rights violations published in the media – up from 24 stories recorded last week to 44 this week – some of which were linked to President Mugabe’s calls for national elections next year.

The on-off Harare constitutional outreach programme, abandoned due to violence and finally pencilled for this weekend, and other related developments, attracted media attention too. So did the remarkable feat of Zimbabwe’s representative in Africa’s reality television *Big Brother Africa* show, Munyaradzi Chidzonga.

Fig 1: Topical stories in the media

Media	Election debate	ZANU PF campaigns	MDC activities	Constitution	Munya’s BBA feat	Human rights
Official Press	5	26	1	6	4	2
ZBC	10	30	6	10	21	0
Private Press	27	4	4	13	6	28
Private radios	9	0	4	3	0	13
Online agencies	4	1	1	1	0	1
Total	55	61	16	33	31	44

State media promotes ZANU PF's electoral talk

THE state media passively latched onto President Mugabe's call for early elections to embark on a campaign to depict conditions in the country as conducive for the holding of the plebiscite. No shred of evidence was given to support this.

The most blatant example of this was the state dailies' (20/10) attempt to rope-in the Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC) to perpetuate this notion under their misleading front-page headline: *ZEC ready for elections*. The report, based on an interview with the electoral body's acting chair, Joyce Kazembe, claimed but did not directly quote her saying the body **"would have no problems conducting the elections"**. They merely distorted Kazembe observations that **"our mandate is to implement Presidential proclamations as and when they are made"**, adding: **"If a proclamation is made, we implement it"** to mean all the logistics were in place.

And instead of independently assessing how ZEC would conduct the polls given its obvious lack of adequate resources, the dailies reported Kazembe as having said, **"that would not matter"**, as the commission was **"bound to implement any presidential proclamations"**. Notably, the papers failed to reconcile Kazembe's statements with her boss, Simpson Mutambanengwe's admission last August that ZEC had no capacity to hold the polls (*The Zimbabwean*, 26/8).

Further, *The Herald* and *Chronicle* quoted unidentified **"officials"** from the Registrar-General's office claiming that **"everything was in place"** despite their alleged reluctance to **"discuss matters of the voters' roll in the media"**.

Views contrary to the President's electoral calls were ridiculed. For example, the papers accused the MDC-T of trying to **"scupper"** the holding of elections, with the support of **"Western-funded"** civic groups on the pretext that political conditions in Zimbabwe were not yet conducive.

In fact, the government media favoured the political interest of ZANU PF over that of the MDC in their coverage of the elections issue. While they reported approvingly of ZANU PF in 56 stories, 30 of which were on the party's electoral campaign activities, they only reported on MDC activities seven times. Even then, this was to depict them as clueless, unfit to govern and shameless Western puppets or at each other's throats.

In one of the reports, ZTV & Radio Zimbabwe (21 & 22/10, 8pm) reported Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara expressing his party's readiness for the election and **"scoffing at"** those who were allegedly **"developing cold feet"** over the polls, in apparent reference to Prime Minister Tsvangirai's faction of the MDC.

In contrast, ZTV (19/10, 7am) quoted leaders of the Johanne Marange Apostolic Church praising Mugabe, saying they **"valued"** his **"leadership qualities"** and those of his party, adding that his **"ascendancy to power was prophesied in the 1930s"**. The same station and Spot FM (24/10, 8pm) also recorded ZANU PF national chairman Simon Khaya Moyo bragging that **"revolutionary parties"** like ZANU PF **"will never be removed from power and replaced by non-revolutionary parties"**.

Reservations about the logic of fast-tracking the elections, especially when the country was still smarting from its inability to hold smooth constitutional reforms, only appeared in the private media.

Other proof the private media cited included inadequate resources, the alleged shambolic state of the voters' roll, ongoing political intimidation and violence in constitutional reforms and delays in implementing electoral reforms and the SADC electoral roadmap.

Studio 7, SW Radio Africa & the *Zimbabwe Independent* (20 & 22/10) quoted Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai telling party supporters in Mabvuku that Mugabe had no authority to unilaterally determine the lifespan of the inclusive government.

Fresh controversy hits Copac outreach

AS we went to Press, the 52 Harare constitutional outreach meetings, abandoned due to political violence on the weekend of September 18-19 this year, had finally been rescheduled for this weekend.

Though the media reported on the reconvening of the disrupted meetings, including the insertion of supplements and adverts by Copac in both the print and electronic media identifying venues for the public hearings, the mechanics of the exercise remained largely unaddressed. Crucially, there was no effort to establish whether the primary causes for the outbreak of the violence, which allegedly claimed the life of MDC-T activist Chrispen Mandizvidza, had been addressed.

Although a Copac Press Release published in *The Herald* (29/10) on the eve of the outreach meetings listed seven pre-conditions for the outreach, it offered no assurances that these had been, or would be complied with. Neither did the media make a follow-up analysis on the issue.

News of the Harare outreach process came against the backdrop of reports that data collected during Copac's discredited outreach consultation programme might have been tampered with.

It also coincided with revelations by Copac that it might not be able to wrap up the controversial constitutional reforms by March 2011 in line with President Mugabe's sentiments, expressed at separate meetings of his party's Youth and Women's leagues.

None of the government media interpreted Mugabe's demand for the acceleration of the constitution-making exercise as tantamount to interfering with Copac's work or questioned its prudence in light of the financial and logistical problems facing the process.

While the government media publicized Copac's decision to suspend its national co-coordinator, Peter Kunjeko, on allegations of tampering with information gathered during the outreach programme, they downplayed the fact that this had further damaged the

credibility of Zimbabwe's constitutional reforms (*The Sunday Mail*, 24/10). The allegation stemmed from Kunjeko's alleged decision to move the data from Copac's head offices to the National Archives of Zimbabwe in Harare without the knowledge and consent of his superiors.

ZTV (25/10, 8pm) quoted Copac leaders **"dismissing"** the reports saying that they had **"since verified"** that all the information was **"intact"**. Earlier, the *Chronicle* (23/10) quoted ZANU PF Copac co-chairman Paul Mangwana saying his committee might fail to conclude constitutional reforms before the expiry of the inclusive government owing to funding shortages. Said Mangwana: **"We do respect President Mugabe's sentiments. But the problem is that at the moment there is no activity because we do not have funds..."**

The private media viewed the alleged mishandling of Copac data as another blow to its outreach programme, whose credibility is already tainted by reports of political violence and intimidation by suspected ZANU PF supporters and state security agents.

A group of civil society organizations monitoring Zimbabwe's controversial constitutional reforms under the banner of the Independent Constitution Monitoring Project released a report identifying other factors that undermined Zimbabweans' ability to freely express themselves during the outreach phase (*ZimOnline & The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 24 & 25/10).

Among these was the use of hate speech during outreach meetings, coaching of participants on what to say and the bussing in of participants to venues that were perceived to be strongholds of rival parties.

As a result, these organizations argued the country's constitutional reforms were most likely going to reflect **"short-term political interests"** of Zimbabwe's coalition parties, instead of being a true Zimbabwean charter.

Did you know that...

- One person died due to suspected swine flu in Tsholotsho (*The Sunday Mail*, 24/10).
- There was an outbreak of rare meningitis in Beatrice, which reportedly claimed the lives of two students at Beatrice primary school and affected 14 others (*The Sunday Mail*).
- The Zimbabwe's civil society reportedly told the South African facilitation team during a meeting in Harare that Zimbabwe's coalition government had not done enough to ensure the holding of credible elections (*The Standard*, 24/10).
- Government has allegedly targeted eight foreign-owned banks for indigenization (the *Independent*, 22/10).
- Finance Minister Tendai Biti reportedly failed to convince global moneylenders to provide financial support to Zimbabwe during the annual general meeting of the Bretton Wood institutions in the US (*The Zimbabwean*, 21/10).

Rights abuses remain cause for concern

The media recorded 15 fresh incidents of human rights violations [government media (two) and private media (13)], a 67 percent increase from last week's nine cases. Notably, some of the cases were elections-related following President Mugabe's calls for the holding national elections in June next year.

Those that appeared in the private media identified ZANU PF and state security agents as the perpetrators, while those that featured in the official media blamed the MDC-T.

These included:

- The murder of a senior ZANU-PF official, Maneru Ncube, by a suspected MDC-T supporter in Bulawayo (*Chronicle* 20/10);
- Alleged attacks on MDC-T supporters in Chimanimani by ZANU PF youths. A civic organization operating in the area attributed the attacks to President Mugabe's call for elections (*The Zimbabwean*, 21/10);
- Alleged deployment of soldiers at Mutoko Business Centre to intimidate villagers ahead of polls (SW Radio Africa, 18/10); and
- The prohibition of MDC-T from holding a constitutional consultative meeting at Cyril Jennings Hall in Highfield, Harare, by the police (SW Radio Africa & *NewsDay*, 20 & 22/10).

THE MOST QUOTED

LEADER of the smaller MDC formation, Arthur Mutambara, was the most frequently quoted person in the official media.

He was quoted 11 times. President Robert Mugabe (eight) and two senior ZANU PF officials, Simon Khaya Moyo (national chairman) and Dixon Maphios (Mashonaland West chairman) followed. Moyo and Maphios were heard seven times each.

Mutambara was quoted defending Mugabe's unilateral re-appointment of ambassadors and provincial governors. Mugabe praised Zimbabwe's representative in *Big Brother Africa*, Munyaradzi Chidzonga, and called for the holding of national elections next year. Moyo and Maphios campaigned for ZANU PF ahead of the elections and gave updates on the party's preparations for its congress in December this year.

MDC-T spokesman Nelson Chamisa stole the limelight in the private media.

He was quoted nine times, followed by presidential spokesman George Charamba (six) and MDC-T treasurer Roy Bennett and Mugabe (five times apiece). Charamba was quoted defending Mugabe's unilateralism, while Chamisa criticized it. Mugabe called for early elections and castigated the MDC formations for allegedly being Western stooges. Bennett accused the ZANU PF arm of government of persecuting him.

What they said...

“We cannot continue with this thing called the inclusive government forever and the only exit strategy is to go for elections soon after the expiry of its legal lifespan” - pro-ZANU PF political commentator Maxwell Hove (*The Herald*, 20/10).

“The whole purpose of the GNU was to secure stability that would lead to democratic elections, but up to this day, we have failed to secure civil liberties and violence and tension are still rife” – MDC-M secretary-general Welshman Ncube (*The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 24/10).

“Violence is our nemesis. Over the past six months, co-operation among the political parties has been undermined, especially by ZANU PF, which is confrontational, and this has resulted in the deterioration of relations...” – Ncube (*The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 24/10).

Ends/

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