



# MEDIA WATCH

## An Analysis of Coverage of the Electoral Period By the Media in Zimbabwe

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## 1.0 Introduction

The media have an ethical obligation to be impartial in their coverage of electoral processes; this requires fairness and balance in their representation of the political players. Through this report, Media Monitors tracks the local media's adherence to these standards. Electoral integrity is difficult to measure, hence the need to make use of the media's election coverage. Monitoring is informed by sections 160 E - J of the Electoral Act which make provision for fair, free and balanced access to the media by all political parties and candidates; fair political advertising, as well as the general conduct of the media in an election that ensures that:

- all political parties and candidates are treated equitably regarding the extent, timing and prominence of the coverage accorded to them;
- election reports are factually accurate, complete and fair;
- a clear distinction is made in the news between factual reporting on the election and editorial comment on it;
- inaccuracies are rectified without delay and with due prominence;
- political parties and candidates are afforded the right of reply;
- the news media do not promote political parties and candidates that encourage violence or hatred; and
- The news media avoid language that encourages prejudice or hatred, incites violence, and may lead to public contempt against any person or political player.

### 1.1 Methodology

In the report, mixed methods were used to analyse various aspects of the election administration process. The analysis focused on several key factors which include:

**Monitoring the agenda setting** – aimed to identify the main election related issues covered by the main news programmes of the media houses, paying close attention to coverage of different aspects of electoral processes.

**Media monitoring of adherence to journalistic standards in election reporting** – verified to what extent and how election reporting by the monitored media respected professional journalistic standards focusing on tone of coverage, framing, fairness and balance as well as representation issues.

## 1.2 Context

The week from 26 August was dominated by the announcement of results and the releasing of preliminary reports by Election Observer Missions (EOMs). After the conclusion of voting on 24 August, the election cycle shifted to the post-election phase, in which administrative issues such as results, reports on election observation and swearing in take place.

### 1.2.1 Administrative Issues

- The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) began announcing results on the 25th of August, for the National Assembly and local authority seats, with the Presidential results being announced on 26 August 2023. The Presidential election was won by ZANU PF's Emmerson Mnangagwa over closest challenger Nelson Chamisa of CCC. ZANU PF won 103 National Assembly seats, and CCC won 76.
- The election result was disputed by CCC who claimed that ZEC had announced inaccurate results to favour ZANU PF.
- ZEC said it was in the process of compiling results sheets for local authority and proportional representation seats.
- On 26 August, persons with disabilities voted for two Senators (one male and one female) to represent their constituency.
- On 25 August 2023 ZEC issued a late night press update claiming that it was not captured by any political

force or entity, claiming that the reports on social media were false, misleading and ridiculous.

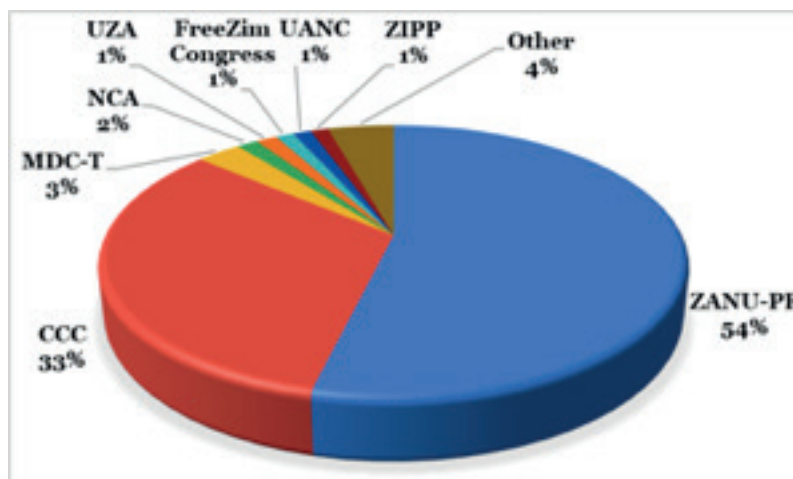
### 1.2.2 Other environmental issues

- SADC, AU-COMESA, EU and Commonwealth were some of the EOMs to release reports which emphasised that the election did not meet set local, regional and international standards.
- CCC and ZANU PF both conducted press conferences where each party was advancing its position on the election outcomes. CCC said the Presidential result was manipulated, while ZANU PF said it was a true reflection.
- Unconfirmed reports circulating on social media were that ZEC was summoning back agents of political parties to re-sign new VII forms.
- CCC addressed a press conference in Harare highlighting that despite reports from EOMs that the elections were peaceful, there were over 100 acts of violence in Uzumba, Mashonaland East and other rural areas. Traditional leaders and other state security agents were reported to have led ‘command voting’ forcing the electorate to vote for ZANU PF.
- The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) issued a warrant of arrest against CCC spokesperson Promise Mkhwanazi for allegedly defaulting court proceedings and inciting public violence, a case reportedly pending from 2020. The Herald reported that ZANU PF candidate for Chirumhanzu Zibagwe constituency Babra Rwodzi was physically attacked by CCC supporters in Harare.
- SADC announced the imminent visit of the Panel of Elders to Zimbabwe at the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to address the negative reaction by Zimbabwe’s government and ruling party to the SADC EOM Report.

## 2.0 Pluralism

This section focuses on the pluralism and visibility of political parties in the media during the monitored week.

Figure 1: Overall coverage of political parties



ZANU-PF emerged with the highest overall media coverage, obtaining 54% of the total coverage. CCC secured the second position with 33%. The remaining 13% was distributed among the other political parties, with minimal coverage observed for most of them. This trend can be largely attributed to the announcement of election results, wherein ZANU-PF secured the largest number of seats in both the local authority and National Assembly elections, along with winning the Presidential election. CCC’s second-place performance across all three tiers of the election contributed to their relatively high share of media coverage.

Table 1: Percentage coverage of political parties per sector

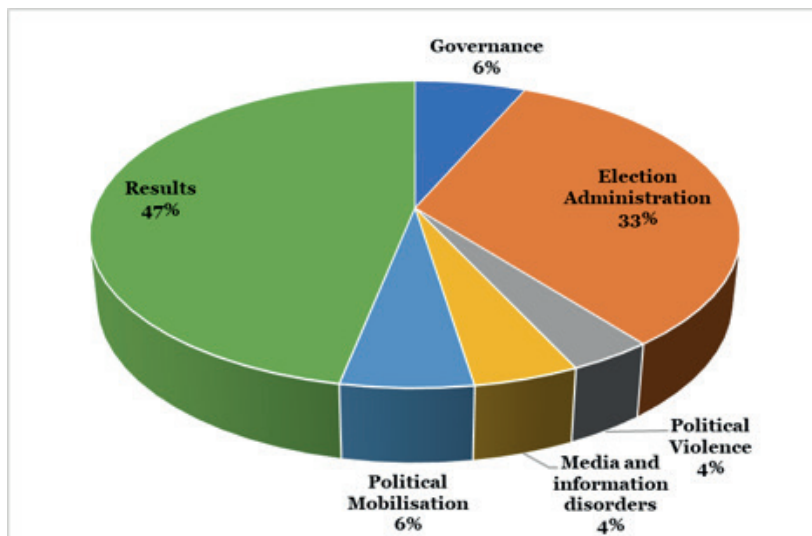
Political Party	Public Print	Private Print	Public Broadcast	Private Broadcaster
FreeZim Congress	2%	1%	1%	1%
MDC-T	2%	5%	4%	1%
DOP	2%	0%	0%	0%
UZA	2%	1%	0%	1%
CCC	31%	37%	33%	29%
ZCPD	2%	1%	0%	1%
Independent	0%	0%	0%	3%
ZIPP	2%	1%	1%	1%
Kasukuwere	0%	1%	0%	1%
NCA	0%	1%	1%	3%
ZANU-PF	53%	50%	59%	56%
NPC	2%	1%	1%	0%
UANC	2%	1%	0%	3%

### 3.0 Agenda Setting

#### 3.1 Key issues in the media

In the week from 26 August to 1 September, politics and governance issues accounted for 6% of issues, dropping from 13% in the previous week. This drop is attributed to the end of voting and the heightened attention on election results as they were announced. The analysis is reflected in the chart below.

Figure 2: Key issues in the media



- Governance issues focused on the provision of adequate and modern health care, and international relations between Zimbabwe and South Korea. Other governance issues included adjustments to the higher education sector, availability of electricity and the calls to strengthen government accountability.
- Election administration issues included the delays in voting and how they had affected the delay in issuance of results. EOM preliminary reports also focused much on election administration inadequacies and how they

influenced the negative experiences of voters on voting day. However, the media did not fully explore questions around the non-availability of local authority ballot papers.

- Media and information disorders were mostly prevalent in online media spaces, in particular social media. These included fake news and sensationalised news about election results from across constituencies. There were reports about ZEC summoning presiding officers and election agents back to polling stations to correct irregularities, which ZEC rejected. Some information disorders were gendered targeting political candidates, citizens and ZEC administration such as misogyny, defamation of characters and threats of physical harm.
- The announcement of results generated significant coverage, especially Presidential elections won by ZANU PF. Media reports focused on congratulating the winners, while some focused on the margin of the results, with some claiming the results were manipulated by ZEC. On social media the agenda was on how a pressure group application named “Mandla” could provide a different narrative. Results of National Assembly and local authority elections were also announced in periodic intervals by ZEC which generated most coverage during daytime broadcasts. The validation and invalidation of the election results by players was also of significant coverage.
- Incidents of post-election violence, intimidation and harassment were reported in privately owned print media, online news media and Twitter, where FAZ members were allegedly harassing and beating party activists, election agents, and intimidating citizens.
- Political mobilisation issues included calls by the CCC for its supporters to remain vigilant and ‘defend’ the election result through rejecting the outcome of the Presidential election. Other news included warnings from the police against political supporters mobilizing protests. The police also called upon political parties to celebrate results without taunting other parties.

Table 2: Key issues in the media

	Public Print	Private Print %	Public Broadcaster (%)	Private Broadcaster (%)	Online (%)
Governance	42.17	88	46.23	38.10	71.32
Election administration	1.20	6	3.77	5.56	3.68
Violence	-	-	0.94	2.38	8.82
Media and information disorders	-	-	-	-	1
Political mobilisation	12.05	6	20.75	7.94	-
Results	44.58	-	28.30	46.03	16.18

## 4.0 Professionalism

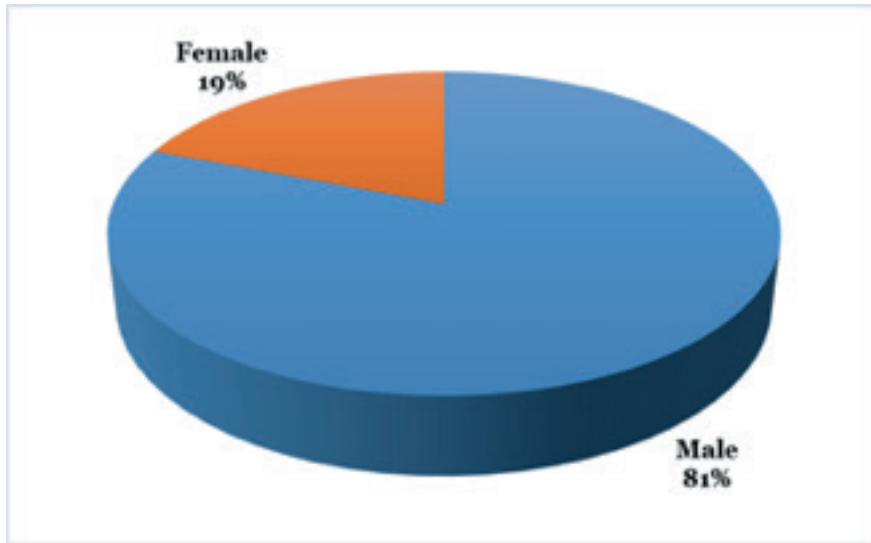
### 4.1 Professional election reporting

- Right of reply - public owned print media did not give the SADC EOM the right of reply when reporting about the government and ZANU PF rejection of the SADC EOM Report. Public owned print media was critical of SADC EOM Head of Mission Dr Nevers Mumba, saying he had exposed himself and was compromised.
- The news articles relied on speculation, hearsay and had unverified claims. NRTV also carried the same approach when reporting about ZANU PF press conferences in which CCC was not accorded the right to reply.
- Inflammatory language - public owned media was engaged in inflammatory language when reporting about the CCC’s non acceptance of the election results, the SADC EOM Head of Mission Nevers Mumba and the EU EOM.

## 4.2 Gender representation

### Sourcing patterns

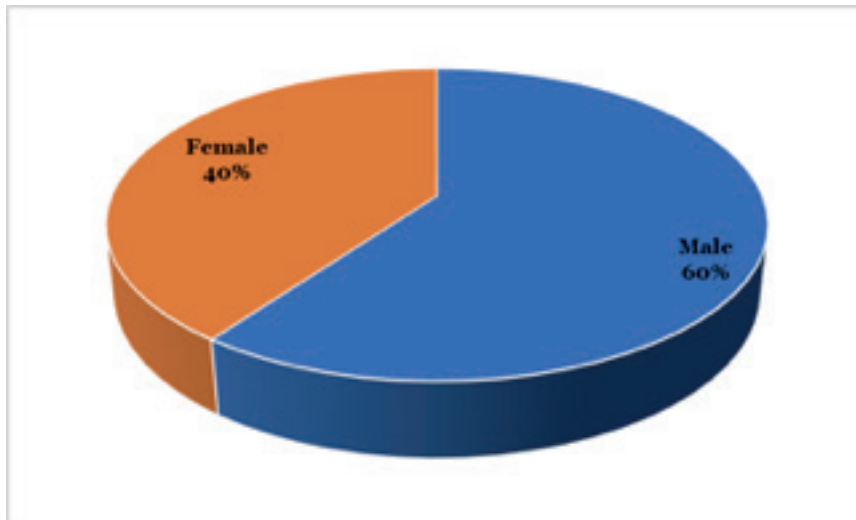
Fig 5: Gender of sources



Women constituted 19% news sources, while men were 81%. This trend continued from the previous week and reflects the low participation of women in election issues. The media should create a platform for women to participate in election related issues because it diversifies the political landscape and strengthens democracy by increasing the representation and participation of all members of society including women.

### Gender of journalists

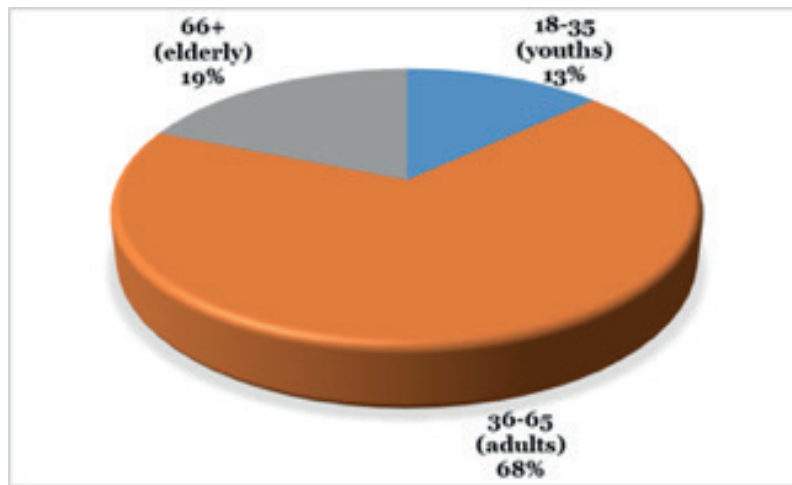
Fig 6: Gender of journalists



Male journalists reported the most stories (60%), compared to female journalists (40%). However, it is commendable that there is a fairly significant number of women reporting elections. Female journalists covering elections can contribute to a more diverse and inclusive media landscape where women's viewpoints and voices are considered.

### 4.3 Age of Sources

Fig 5: Age of sources



The majority of the sources were from adults (36–65), who gave 68%, and the elderly (65+), who provided 19%. The lowest contribution came from young people (18 to 34), who made up just 13% of the population, reflecting their underrepresentation in the media and in politics. This has detrimental effects on the youth population, which is the greatest in the nation and whose participation in elections is crucial. Youth participation can encourage civic engagement and participation and lead to a more representative and inclusive democracy that ensures that all citizens’ demands and interests are taken into account.

### 4.4 Tone

Privately owned print and online media were negative in their tone towards ZEC and ZANU PF, claiming the party’s victory was ‘rigged’. The two media sets were also critical towards ZANU PF’s reactions to the EOM reports, while public owned media and private broadcasters were positive towards ZANU PF and ZEC in the same matter.

Tone for CCC was negative in public owned media which urged the party to accept the results and ZANU PFs popularity, while privately owned print and online media had a sympathetic tone to the party.

### 4.5 Framing of key flashpoints

- Election results - The Sunday Mail reported that ‘the people have spoken’ in reference to the Mnangagwa victory while privately owned, The Standard, went with the position that Mnangagwa wins ‘disputed election’. Online media reported the election outcomes from the aspect of voter suppression and how failure to vote had affected the results.
- Political violence - Private wound print media such as The Standard reported that Harare residents were being attacked by law enforcement in leisure spots under the guise of an unannounced curfew. Election agents were also being victimised. On the other hand, publicly owned print media said that the ZRP was running a pre-emptive security operation against suspected opposition supporters who might disturb peace and cause political violence.
- Election observers - Public print, public owned and privately owned broadcasters framed the EOM reports as being authored by the country’s enemies, while privately owned print media and online news platforms reported that the EOMs had flagged gross electoral violations, which made the election defective.

### 4.6 Information disorders

Media Monitors recorded information disorders in the media, including inflammatory language by politicians in news reports and hate speech by journalists.



Table 3: Information disorders

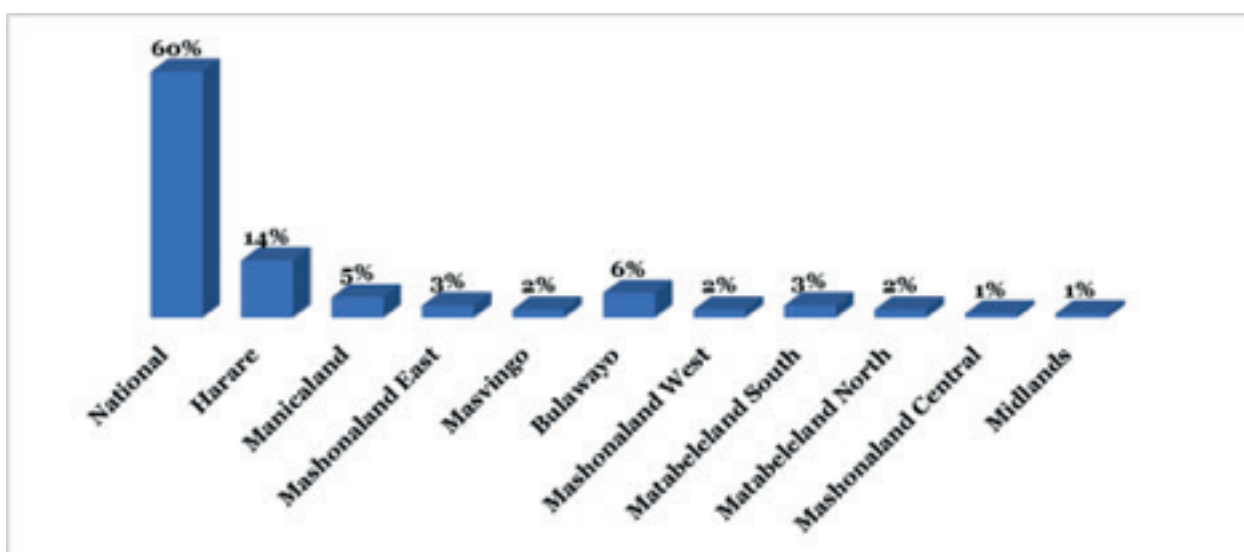
Platform/Date	What was said	By Who?	Classification
Herald 29/8 Sadc urged to trash Mumba's biased report	Dr Mumba held several meetings with the country's opposition CC and EU representatives with the submissions from the opposition finding their way into his scandalous report. The reporter described the report as hyperbolic nonsense.	Reporter	Opinionated reporting
Herald 07/9 CCC dumped the law for Tajamuka tactics	"What is however worth noting is that when CCC took this bizarre stance the spokesperson of the party was quickly changed from the respected advocate of the law to a much feared former leader of a violent pressure group"	A reporter from the elections desk	Unverified claims
Social media	ZEC dismissed VII allegations, rejecting claims in social media that the commission was recalling agents to sign new VII forms.	Social media users	Fake news
Social media	Priscilla Chigumba the ZEC Chair was attacked based on false claims of prostitution with online users spreading false claims that she was dating senior government officials	Social media users	Defamation of character
ZimEye	An online news platform, Zimeye, ran a defamation character campaign against the incoming ZANU PF Harare Youth Quota MP Charlotte Mukarati, body shaming and outing her based-on suggestions that she was not qualified for office and had 'weird' clothing choices	Zimeye.com	Defamation of character
Social media	Fake news about electoral defeats against Fadzayi Mahere, Joanna Mamombe and Maureen Kademaunga of CCC, who were accused of being 'Chamisa's girls'	Social media	Fake news
NRTV 4sept	Victory against neocolonialism and detractors	E.D.Mhangagwa	Unverified claims Sensationalism

## 4.7 Geographical distribution of news

This section assesses the importance of distribution of news by location. Geographical distribution of news was crucial as it reflected the way people perceived events and issues during elections. Media houses had a broader reach to cover election issues, influence public opinion and shape the political discourse in the different regions. Additionally, different regions had different perspectives and priorities, and media houses catered for those differences that provided a more nuanced understanding of events during elections. Moreover, the geographical distribution of news also reflected the level of media freedom and diversity in the country.

In instances where the media was not restricted in any way as it had the mandate to cover every political player in the election race and in turn therefore, ensuring a diversity and promoting a free and informed society to capture the voices of the people nationwide.

Fig 6: Geographical distribution of news



The reportage of election issues such as results announcement and election observer mission reports accounted for National news (60%). News on Harare (14%) focused on voting from the province, police reactions to threats of political violence, Bulawayo generated 6% of the publicity drawing from updates on voting, and the expectation in the second largest city. In Manicaland (5%) the media reported about voting day updates and results from the different districts in the area.

Table 4: Geographical distribution of news

Given that the primary concerns revolved around election preparedness, the majority of election related coverage was national. It is worth noting that state media exhibited bias towards the ruling party, providing extensive coverage of their rallies. This bias was equally evident in national news reporting. Conversely, the private broadcaster maintained a more balanced approach by covering political developments from both major parties, ZANU PF and CCC. However, in Harare, the focus was primarily on CCC's court battles concerning the voter's roll. The public broadcaster's coverage of Elisabeth Valerio's campaign tour in Masvingo contributed to 6.92% of the overall coverage. Unfortunately, other provinces fared poorly due to a lack of significant political events and limited media attention towards other political parties. This raises concerns about media impartiality as it predominantly focused on prominent political figures while neglecting fair reporting on smaller parties. Such a situation clearly reflects the prevailing political polarization in Zimbabwe.

Geography	Public broadcaster	Private broadcaster	Public print	Private print	Online
National	26%	16%	26%	12%	20%
Harare	32%	29%	4%	18%	17%
Manicaland	24%	21%	21%	17%	17%
Mash East	15%	5%	50%	20%	10%
Masvingo	31%	15%	23%	16%	15%
Bulawayo	22%	3%	36%	28%	11%
Mash West	39%	15%	16%	15%	15%
Mat South	5%	22%	28%	17%	28%
Mat North	9%	9%	46%	27%	9%
Mash Central	30%	10%	40%	10%	10%
Midlands	50%	10%	20%	10%	10%

## 5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

In light of these observations Media Monitors makes the following recommendations.

- Media houses should strive to present unbiased and balanced coverage of election-related news. Media must avoid sensationalism and focus on providing accurate information to the public.
- ZEC should ensure that information is released promptly, to counter speculation which leads to information disorders.
- ZEC Media Monitoring Committee should be proactive and work to rectify unprofessional reportage of elections by the media and provide mechanisms for rapid fact checking by citizens.



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