Chapter Seven

Framing the 2000 Elections

7.0 Introduction
This chapter focuses on the coverage of the 2000 parliamentary elections by the selected private and public newspapers under study. The focus is on both editorial comments and front page news stories as sites of political framing of electoral contests in the ‘third’ transition.

The discussion in this chapter places the press into three categories namely the ‘patriotic’ press, the ‘oppositional’ press and the ‘independent nationalistic’ press—terms which we discussed and explained in Chapters Two and Six.

In cases where news brings a different dimension or nuance to the editorial coverage, the themes apparent in the news genre are treated separately, as is the case with the Zimbabwe Mirror. In the case of the ‘patriotic’ press, the stories are also treated separately because they broaden the range of topics (in particular the land issue), although the thrust of coverage remains similar to that of editorial comments.

Prefacing the analysis of the coverage is a brief contextual discussion of the importance of the 2000 elections to the Zanu PF-controlled state, capital and civil society. The manner in which the press framed the elections is viewed in light of its relations with these centres of power.

7.1 Background to the 2000 Elections
The June 2000 parliamentary elections were a watershed event in Zimbabwe’s history. As the most fiercely contested elections in post-independence Zimbabwe, they drew profound regional and international attention. The phase of political fatigue that had characterised the high levels of voter apathy in the mid 1990s gave way in 2000 to a wave of renewed interest in politics, almost comparable to the first democratic elections of 1980. The elections came against the formation of the opposition MDC with a broad labour, capital and civil society political base; as well
as the government’s controversial decision to implement a fast-track land redistribution programme spearheaded by liberation war veterans.

As discussed in Chapter Six, the elections also came against the background of tense relations between the state and civil society, which had been building up since the 1990s. The constitutional referendum in February 2000, which split the nation between the ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ votes, became the first formal contest between the state and a coalition of civil society organisations and the opposition. The triumph of the ‘No’ vote was therefore interpreted by both contestants as a political victory against President Mugabe by the opposition MDC (see Hammar & Raftopoulos, 2003). With political stakes high for both parties, the June 2000 parliamentary elections were fiercely fought, and were preceded by a wave of political violence which claimed many lives. The media were actively involved in framing these elections. A noticeable feature in editorial comments and news articles carried by the newspapers under study was the extent to which the media became active participants in the polarised political contest, with the private commercial press generally endorsing the MDC, while the public press endorsed Zanu PF.

7.1.2 The State and Capital: What did the Elections Mean?

An analysis of the significance of the 2000 elections for the Zanu PF government and different fractions of capital is important for purposes of locating the role of the press in the electoral contest. It provides a context for a discussion of how each of the two (i.e., the state and fractions of capital) sought to influence the outcome of the election through building strategic alliances with sections of the press.

For fractions of black capital associated with the state and major beneficiaries of the state’s ‘indigenisation’ programme initiated in the early 1990s, victory for Zanu PF in 2000 was most desirable because of possibilities of continued privilege. Many of these local capitalists acquired farms from white farmers under the controversial land redistribution programme, and it was unlikely that they would support the MDC, which threatened to reverse the occupations if it got into power. In fact, some

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1 MDC president Morgan Tsvangirai promised to carry out an ‘audit’ of land reform if the MDC assumed power (see Bond & Manyanya, 2003: 80). A year later the MDC Shadow Minister of Education, Fidelis Mhashu, told the BBC Hardtalk programme that the party would reverse the
elements within this camp, including businessmen Philip Chiyangwa, John Makamba, Ray Kaukonde among others actually joined the ruling party and contested the elections. Sections of black capital aligned to the state therefore shared the ruling Zanu PF’s agenda for the elections. At the core of this agenda was an enunciation of land reform as a critical historical and emotional programme that the ruling party had the task of carrying to its logical conclusion. The party resorted to the politics of “scriptualised memory” to underscore the links between its role in the liberation struggle and the legitimacy of its land programme (Sylvester, 2003:31). The threat by war veterans that they would ‘return to the bush’ if Zanu PF lost the elections (Herald, 16/5/2000) should be seen in the context of Zanu PF being perceived as the only party that could take the country into the future.

The other fraction of capital consisted of ‘self-made’ black businesspeople who accumulated wealth outside state patronage (Raftopoulos & Compagnon, 2003). This faction included, among others, Strive Masiyiwa, who later bought a controlling stake in ANZ, publishers of the Daily News and Trevor Ncube, who bought the Zimbabwe Independent, the Standard and the South African-based Mail & Guardian. The fraction consisted of successors to a formidable class of pre-independence local capitalists who, although they supported the struggle, were not given any attention by the state at independence (Moyo, 2005). Although this fraction was not anti-Zanu PF, it was concerned about the government’s failure to resuscitate the economy. They were also against the violence and land reform programme insofar as they hampered opportunities for local and international business activity. The more politically-oriented in this fraction, like Nkosana Moyo—who later became Minister of Trade and International Trade—wanted a government of national unity incorporating both Zanu PF and the MDC in the aftermath of the elections\(^2\).

The third fraction of capital, which has been discussed throughout the previous chapters, was local white capital, which along with international capital controlled the mainstream postcolonial Zimbabwean economy. According to Moyo (2005), while Zanu PF shut the door for black business at independence, it “grudgingly opened the

same business doors to the white community, former Rhodesians, whom it did not want to see anywhere near in politics where doors were shut”.

As mentioned in Chapter Five, active white participation in mainstream electoral politics was curtailed by the Constitutional Amendment (No.6) Act (No. 15 of 1986) which abolished the whites-only voters’ roll. However, while the scrapping of the 20 seats reserved for whites in the Lancaster House constitution had the effect of removing both white capital and the general white community from the arena of electoral politics, Moyo (1992) argues that this constituency reviewed their style of political participation and opted for special interests groups which exercised considerable influence on state policy. Moyo argues that:

…[whites] eventually managed to [participate] through special interest groups such as the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI), the Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce (ZNCC), the Employers’ Confederation of Zimbabwe (EMCOZ) and the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU). These interest groups…with the advent of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), emerged to become the most powerful and influential lobby structures on policy issues to a degree to which [Ian] Smith’s CAZ could not have dreamed of achieving through parliamentary representation (Moyo, 1992:22).

The reorganisation of white capital away from mainstream politics into special interest groups made them an effective economic policy constituency for the state, and by 1990, white capital-dominated interest groups “were much more powerful and much more influential at the level of policy inputs than Zanu PF itself, let alone other black groups, such as the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU)” (Moyo, 1992:22).

However, the harmonious alignment between the state and white capital lasted as long as the latter stayed off electoral politics. By the late 1990s, state-aligned black entrepreneurs began to assume vocal positions against the state’s alleged soft hand on white capital. Local businessmen such as Roger Boka ran full-page adverts in the

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public press castigating white businessmen for being ‘predators’, for uncompetitive behaviour, and for sidelining blacks.⁴ Arguably, this was one of the initial steps towards the eventual alienation of the white capitalists from the Zanu PF-controlled state.

Perhaps the most profound reason for the collapse of the relationship was state’s sanction of the invasion of white-owned farms. Given the centrality of agriculture as the mainstay of the Zimbabwean economy, the effects of the farm occupations were not confined to individual farmers, but also to the manufacturing and financial services industries, where white capital was predominant. At this point, the formation of the MDC provided an opportunity for white capital’s re-entry into mainstream politics in Zimbabwe. And the Zanu PF-led state realised this, and responded accordingly. A Zanu PF Member of Parliament, Isaac Mackenzie, told a group of white businessman ahead of the 2000 elections:

Let me assure you whites here, that once you support MDC, Zanu PF is not going to treat you as business people, but as politicians. Then if you are treated as politicians, it is like signing your own death warrants. The political storm will not spare you. Let you be informed that our reserve force, the war veterans, will be set on you (Daily News, 23/3/2000).

According to Bond and Manyanya (2003), the MDC’s neo-liberal policy agenda made it a logical political sanctuary for white capital⁵. Five months after its launch, the MDC appointed deputy president of the CZI as its powerful economic secretary. Bond and Manyanya (2003) have argued that this appointment “was the decisive signal that [MDC leader, Morgan] Tsvangirai and his core leadership allies aimed to ally with big business” (p.93). The MDC’s promise of post-nationalist politics, rule of law and good governance (including the protection of private property) also further endeared it to the business and farming communities which were reeling under the spectre of

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⁵ Notwithstanding its working-class/trade union background, the MDC’s economic policies have tended to oscillate between social democratic and neo-liberal. The party’s 2004 economic blueprint, “Restart: An agenda for social justice”, for example, contains strong elements of both the belief in the supremacy of the markets and the argument for increased state intervention in selected areas of health, education and job creation.
farm occupations and threats of wholesale seizure and redistribution of white-owned business firms by the state.⁶

The parliamentary elections of 2000 therefore presented a profound and unprecedented contest for control of the state by fractions within capital and state. In that contest, the media—perhaps more than ever before—were sucked into the fray. Ahead of the elections, control of the media agenda was strategic for the main protagonists. This was arguably inevitable. McNair (2003) argues that given that modern political contests are largely mediated experiences, “an understanding of the contemporary political process is inconceivable without an analysis of the media” (p.14).

Below is an analysis of the coverage of the elections by Herald, Sunday Mail, the Daily News, the Zimbabwe Mirror, the Zimbabwe Independent and the Financial Gazette.

7.2 The ‘Patriotic’ Press and the 2000 Elections

Full mobilisation of the public press for purposes of defeating the MDC in both the 2000 and 2002 elections was part of the government’s strategic electoral agenda⁷. Although this section of the press had throughout the transition actively endorsed the candidature of the ruling party around election time, the presence of both the Daily News and the MDC heightened the stakes in the both the 2000 and 2002 contests. Both Herald and Sunday Mail were fully deployed to ensure that public debate in their pages was heavily cast in favour of the ruling party. The outright, if extremely uncritical, support of the ruling party was buttressed by a concomitant media blackout of the opposition MDC except for events that cast the latter in bad light. Writing a month ahead of the 2000 elections, Herald editor Bornwell Chakaodza admitted that his paper had “exercised its democratic right and press freedom and took the political decision to support the majority shareholder in Zimbabwe Newspapers—the government of Zimbabwe, in its election campaign” (Herald, 4/5/2000). However, the

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⁶ See, for example, The Zimbabwe Mirror story: “Mugabe says British firms will be given to Africans”. 16/06/2000.

⁷ See Zimbabwe Independent, “Editors have duty to back govt views—Chimutengwende”, 28/4/2000. See also discussion in Chapter 6.
government—and not the ruling party—owned 51 percent of Zimpapers. In the same editorial, which was curiously placed on the front page, the editor blamed the private press for setting the tone and benchmarks for the conduct of the press in the elections by engaging in “no holds-barred, bare fist brawls against their opponents and [showing] extreme hatred, irreverence and an obsession with the ouster of the government by any means” (Ibid). The paper’s decision to endorse the ruling party was therefore portrayed as a kind of moral and political response to unprofessional conduct by the private press, especially the Daily News. Importantly, the paper acknowledged that the primary victims of the polarised media coverage were the readers: “Only readers who can afford to sacrifice $20 a day get a fuller picture by buying both Herald and the Daily News” (Ibid). Acknowledging the extent to which media reports in the run-up to the elections had become so subjective as to be questionable, Sunday Mail wrote that election observers coming into Zimbabwe ahead of the poll “should not use media reports as the basis of forming any opinions about the situation in Zimbabwe” (Sunday Mail, 21/5/2000).

The editorial positions taken by Herald and Sunday Mail were also adopted, with varying degrees, by all newspapers under the Zimpapers stable in the coverage of the elections. An analysis of the major themes apparent in the editorials and news reports on the elections is important for purposes of illustrating the manner in which the elections were framed.

**7.2.1 Opposition as Stooges of Neo-Colonialism**

Delegitimising the opposition, in particular the MDC, was a key editorial strategy in the public media’s framing of the elections of 2000 (see MMPZ election report, 2000). The opposition was portrayed as not only incapacitated politically and technically to form a new government; it was depicted as the foreign-controlled ‘other’. The rationale for ‘othering’ in a political context characterised by extensive use of binaries as labels was to cast the opposition in the least favourable light before the electorate. The Sunday Mail was particularly consistent in its depiction of the MDC as foreign-sponsored puppet party. Sometimes describing the party as “MDC (plc)” to stress its perceived status as a convenient political investment by the West, the paper constantly appealed to its readers to mobilise and vote for the ruling party to stop the disguised colonial reincarnation assuming political power in Zimbabwe.
A month ahead of the elections, Sunday Mail predicted that the MDC was “faced with the inevitability of an emphatic defeat,” and this explained the opposition’s and the international community’s condemnation of political violence ahead of the polls (Sunday Mail, 7/5/2000). The same paper argued that the international media, particularly the South African—which it described as “white” and “apartheid”—and British press, were party to the neo-colonial project bankrolling the MDC. These media were accused of “following every rally held by the MDC, looking for the slightest skirmish which they (could) project as evidence that it is not possible to hold free and fair elections in Zimbabwe” (Sunday Mail, 21/5/2000). In the same editorial cited above, entitled: “Proper to bar Britons,” the paper commended President Mugabe’s decision to exclude British nationals from the list of invited foreign observers because of Britain’s support for the MDC.

7.2.2 Zanu PF as Custodian of National History and Identity
Ahead of the 2000 elections, both Herald and Sunday Mail depicted the contest between the MDC and Zanu PF in Manichean terms: as essentially a fight between good and evil, between a patriotic ruling party with impeccable credentials and an upstart, foreign-funded and foreign-driven opposition. The practice of “revisit(ing) the realm of anti-colonial memory” as a way of “managing an unpopular present” was part of the ruling party’s broader campaign strategy to “write a ticket to the future” (Sylvester, 2003:30). The media were central to this election strategy. The land reform programme, around which much election debate was premised, was portrayed by the two papers as an essentially Zanu PF historic achievement which, given the chance by the electorate, the party would take to its logical conclusion.

Most editorials calling for the re-election of the ruling party cited the land issue and the growing ‘regional solidarity’ around the same issue as an endorsement of the leadership of Zanu PF. In introducing a regional and pan-African dimension to their framing of the issue, the papers were consistent with the ruling party’s diplomatic strategy of marketing the land issue as a colonial/historical African issue, just as the...
British had allegedly marketed it internationally as one of human rights and bad governance (Raftopoulos & Hammar, 2003). Three weeks ahead of the elections, Herald called on “true and patriotic Zimbabweans, regardless of race” to close ranks and “support the government’s efforts in redressing colonial and land imbalances” (Herald, 5/6/2000). Voting for the ruling party was, in the paper’s view, the expression of support for the government and a duty of a responsible patriot. The same editorial warned that the current economic difficulties in the country were a result of “the machinations of the big powers” whose aim was “to bring the suffering of Zimbabweans to such a peak that they blame everything on the government and, thus, vote for the MDC” (Ibid). This attribution of blame and liability to the ‘other’ was consistent with the political and cultural context in which the election was being contested.

As previously, both papers endorsed the candidature of the ruling party, as a legitimate political organisation that carried the people’s history, identity and future. Voting Zanu PF into power was portrayed as the citizen’s contribution to a much bigger phase of the liberation struggle. A day before the elections, Herald ran an editorial entitled: “Zanu PF poised to smash opposition, fulfil manifesto” (Herald, 23/6/2000). In the editorial, the ruling party’s victory was portrayed as a foregone conclusion: “Once Zanu PF has smashed the opposition this weekend and banished the foreigners who want to regain control of the country, it can get down to fulfilling its manifesto” (Ibid). The same editorial reminded voters that the ruling party had waged a liberation war to give them the vote, and this was the time to give that party another mandate. Voting Zanu PF was also depicted as a vote for land and progress, while simultaneously shaming “Britain and its pawns in the MDC and the private press” (Ibid).

7.2.3 Appeal for National Unity under Zanu PF
A related sub-theme running through some editorials, especially Herald editorials, was a call for national cohesion of different races and social interests under the ruling party. At least four editorial headlines in the period under study were prefaced by the phrase “let us…” These include the following: “Let’s jealously guard attempts to reverse gains of independence” (Herald, 18/4/2000); “Let’s frustrate all efforts to recolonise Africa” (Herald, 29/5/2000); “Let us all close ranks and correct land
imbalances” (*Herald*, 5/6/2000); and “Let’s all vote for land, peace and a democratic future” (*Herald*, 12/2/2000). In these editorials, the ruling party was presented as the guarantor of national cohesion and unity. The argument was that sectional concerns of particular interests and racial groups would be addressed after the elections, but only under the overall leadership of the ruling party.

In line with this appeal, *Herald* assured white commercial farmers that “no white farmer (would) be deprived of farming…all that is wanted is co-operation, not foolish resistance, in land redistribution” (*Herald*, 23/6/2000). The paper also condemned violence on farms as “criminals masquerading as war veterans” and encouraged white farmers and settlers to “come to the table as Zimbabweans and equitably distribute our land to guarantee our country’s future” (*Herald*, 19/5/2000). In a few other editorials—in a striking contrast to its sister *Sunday Mail*—*Herald* attempted to veer away from the politics of exclusion towards an inclusive, conciliatory approach.

In a comment on the country’s 20th independence celebrations, the paper called on “Zimbabweans, black and white, all ethnic groups” to “rise above their differences and reassert their commitment to peace, security and the development of this country” (*Herald*, 18/4/2000). The same editorial appealed for a surpassing of hitherto prevailing racial tensions and a return to the policy of reconciliation. A week after the elections, the paper welcomed the election of the MDC into parliament and called on the party to “think, speak and act nationally” (*Herald*, 30/6/2000). The arrival of a strong opposition was viewed by the paper as an important ingredient of democracy which could keep the governing elite under check. In these conciliatory editorials which resembled those of the *Zimbabwe Mirror* discussed later in this chapter, *Herald*—wittingly or unwittingly—challenged the limitations of the prevailing political discourse predicated on binaries. However, there was a sense in which the same editorials imagined national cohesion and unity possible *only* under the leadership of the ruling party. As stated earlier, there was no editorial anticipation of any possibility of the MDC legitimately winning the elections outside the context of foreign, neo-colonial intervention.
7.3 News Stories in the ‘Patriotic’ Press

Compared to editorials, news reports in Herald and Sunday Mail were less pointed and partisan. Although the ruling party and government featured prominently in the stories as sources of news in the election season (see Figure 7.2), there were also other—albeit fewer—reports which centred on the opposition and other aspects of the electoral contest. The news reports carried a range of issues related to the elections, from opinion surveys and election manifestos, to the land reform programme and international relations. The news coverage of both papers can be categorised as follows.

7.3.1 Reports about the Land Reform Programme

The Herald and Sunday Mail paid significant attention to the developments in the land reform programme. The general thrust of the stories was to cast the land occupations that started in March 2000 in positive light. This was arguably consistent with the ruling party’s 2000 election manifesto which ran with the motto: “The land is the economy and the economy is the land”. The accompanying violence on the farms was presented as a logical consequence of agrarian reform.

7.3.1(a) The Legitimacy of Land Reform

News reports that legitimated the land reform were arguably an attempt to counter the criticism from both the opposition parties and the West that the programme was an election strategy by Zanu PF. These stories quoted regional leaders and opinion makers “endorsing” the programme and in some cases calling upon the SADC region to “emulate” Harare for its bold decision on an issue that was so politically sensitive.

As shown on Table 7.1 overleaf, the sources of news in most stories on land reform were either political leaders friendly to Zimbabwe or academics or analysts—named and unnamed—who generally endorsed the programme. In this category of stories, other stakeholders in the land reform process, namely farmers and farm workers, were not quoted at all. In Sunday Mail story “Nothing strange in land redistribution” (18/6/2000), a Rhodesian document outlining resettlement procedures for World War 11 veterans was widely quoted as the basis to justify the Zimbabwe government’s land redistribution programme.
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<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Story title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Main source/s</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herald</td>
<td>Land issue more than mere electioneering</td>
<td>23/6/2000</td>
<td>-Prof. Sam Moyo (Local researcher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Mail</td>
<td>Commercial farming demystified</td>
<td>21/5/2000</td>
<td>-Villagers, newly-resettled farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herald</td>
<td>‘Neighbours facing land problems can emulate Harare’</td>
<td>27/5/2000</td>
<td>-President Mugabe -President Sam Nujoma (Namibia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herald</td>
<td>Mbeki sources funds for Zimbabwe’s land redistribution</td>
<td>01/6/2000</td>
<td>-Rev. Frank Chikane (Mbeki’s DG) -Zim government spokesman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herald</td>
<td>Farm occupations bring to the fore land imbalances in the region</td>
<td>29/5/2000</td>
<td>-Namibian Prime Minister -Delegates from Kenya &amp; Tanzania supporting President Mugabe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Mail</td>
<td>Nkomo’s dream to be realised</td>
<td>25/6/2000</td>
<td>-Late VP Joshua Nkomo -Unnamed “political analysts”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herald</td>
<td>Farm debts will be repaid: banker</td>
<td>29/6/2000</td>
<td>-Isaac Takawira, Barclays Zimbabwe MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Mail</td>
<td>Nothing strange in land redistribution</td>
<td>18/6/2000</td>
<td>-Rhodesian resettlement document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herald</td>
<td>Mbeki endorses land reform</td>
<td>06/5/2000</td>
<td>-President Mbeki</td>
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</table>
7.3.1(b) The Situation on the Farms

Both papers covered the situation on the farms, including violence and truce negotiations between war veterans and commercial farmers. In the stories on violence, actions of war veterans were cast as reactions to offensive behaviour by commercial farmers or their workers. In its report of the murder of Macheke commercial farmer, David Stevens, *Herald* wrote that the farmer had been “allegedly shot dead by war veterans who abducted him” (*Herald*, 17/4/2000). The paper quoted a police spokesman alleging that the farmer had provoked the fight by arming himself and his workers before attacking the war veterans. The story also quoted the spokesman of the war veterans, supporting the police version. However, neither the farm workers nor the neighbouring commercial farmers who were reported in the story as having survived the shootings while trying to rescue Stevens, were quoted in the story.

In another story on farm murders, *Herald* wrote: “A second commercial farmer was shot dead in Nyamandlovu by war veterans yesterday morning after he allegedly shot and wounded two of them when they went to his farm to discuss the land issue” (*Herald*, 19/4/2000). The story quoted both the police and war veterans’ spokesmen, alleging that the dead farmer, Martin Olds, had provoked the fight. However, in the second last column, the story also quoted the Matabeleland Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) president, Mac Crawford denouncing the murder and complaining about the late response of the local police.

In stories dealing with truce negotiations between war veterans and commercial farmers, both papers avoided attributing blame for violence on any of the two parties. In the stories President Mugabe, who ‘brokered’ the ‘peace talks’ between the parties, was quoted widely condemning violence and asking both war veterans and farmers to co-exist peacefully (*Herald*, 20/03/2000). However, he also constantly chided commercial farmers to withdraw their court applications contesting compulsory acquisitions as a precondition for the removal of war veterans on occupied farms. In a story entitled “Conditions set for end to invasions”, *Herald* quoted Mugabe urging farmers to withdraw their legal challenges, and promised that government would not acquire land from farmers owning only one property.
7.3.2 The ‘Patriotic’ Press on Electoral Campaigns

The news stories about the general electoral process including campaigns and results of opinion surveys were also consistent with the two papers’ coverage of other aspects of the election. Out of the eight sample stories below, six (75 %) were generally presented in favour of the ruling party or government (see Table 7.2). At the same time, stories that mentioned the MDC were generally framed in negative terms, e.g., the headline “MDC develops violent streak” (*Sunday Mail, 6/2/2000*)

**Table 7.2 Sample reports on election campaigns and events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Story headline</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Main source/s</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Herald</strong></td>
<td>Free, fair elections possible in Zimbabwe—McKinnon</td>
<td>17/5/2000</td>
<td>-Don McKinnon, Commonwealth Sec. General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sunday Mail</strong></td>
<td>MDC develops violent streak</td>
<td>06/2/2000</td>
<td>-Prof. Jonathan Moyo, Zanu PF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Herald</strong></td>
<td>Zanu PF still dominant party: survey</td>
<td>13/2/2000</td>
<td>-Bureau of Strategic Studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Herald</strong></td>
<td>Zanu PF hoping for a clean sweep of parliamentary seats</td>
<td>15/05/2000</td>
<td>-Unnamed “analysts”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Herald</strong></td>
<td>War vets threaten war if Zanu PF loses election</td>
<td>16/05/2000</td>
<td>-Andrew Ndlovu, war vets leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Herald</strong></td>
<td>Opposition parties embark on strategies to contest polls</td>
<td>09/3/2000</td>
<td>-Learnmore Jongwe, MDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Herald</strong></td>
<td>President still ahead of Tsvangirai—survey</td>
<td>11/3/2000</td>
<td>-Probe Market Research survey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In respect of the general news coverage of the both *Herald* and *Sunday Mail*, it has been observed that there was a concentration on the activities of politicians, mainly Zanu PF, launching their manifestoes, on campaign trails, or attacking the opposition.
(see Figure 7.1 below). There was generally no coverage of policy issues around which the electoral contest was fought, except for the land issue.

**Figure 7.1: Sources of information in election campaign in Herald.**

![Pie chart showing sources of information in election campaign in Herald]

**Source:** MMPZ Report, 2000:62.

Issues that dominated the MDC election agenda, such as the economy, corruption, good governance and the rule of law, were generally shunned by the public press as election topics. The papers were also silent on other contentious issues related to elections, like the ban on civil society participation in voter education, the plight of displaced farm workers, or the use of the military to run the elections.\(^8\)

A typical news story in either *Herald* or *Sunday Mail* was pegged at what the ruling party politician had said—in the majority of cases attacking either the MDC or its alleged Western ‘handlers’—and ended without affording the MDC the opportunity to respond.

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\(^8\) For a comprehensive discussion of these issues, see Raftopoulos and Savage, Eds., 2004. *Zimbabwe: Injustice and Political Reconciliation.* Cape Town: IJR.
7.4 The ‘Opposition’ Press and the 2000 Election

In its report on the media coverage of the 2000 elections, the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ) noted that readers were presented with a choice that was “sharply polarised between the privately owned commercial press and those publications produced by the government-controlled publishing company, Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980)” (MMPZ, 2000:12). Although the report accused the public press for bias in favour of the government, it acknowledged that the private press and especially the Daily News, provided readers “with daily information about the activities and statements of the opposition, particularly the MDC” (Ibid:14). The Daily News approached both the 2000 and 2002 elections from the perspective of being “voices of the voiceless” (Bill Saidi, Interview, April 2004). In a context where the public press shunned coverage of civil society, the political opposition and even dissenting sections of the ruling elite, the Daily News along with other private commercial newspapers Financial Gazette and the Zimbabwe Independent viewed their role as that of providing alternative perspectives from Zanu PF. The three papers are analysed simultaneously because they adopted a broadly similar editorial position in their framing of the elections.

The papers’ selected stories and editorial comments published ahead of the 2000 poll constantly portrayed the state as violent and oppressive, while depicting the political opposition as victims of a belligerent state, but nevertheless the country’s political hope for the future. This editorial framing of the political process was consistent with the papers’ coverage of the February 2000 referendum, which was premised on a dismissal of the state’s constitutional commission and support for the rejection of the draft constitution (see Chuma, 2000). Even earlier than this, the Daily News in particular had declared that year 2000 was “a perfect time for real political and social change” (Daily News, 22/12/1999). The paper imagined a new millennium in which “the people” would triumph over the “political dinosaurs who would not accept that change was good, that the past in which everything hinged on ‘how we fought the war’ could be a millstone around development’s neck” (Ibid).

7.4.1 The State as Villain

The Daily News consistently identified the state as the principal architect of pre-election violence and as disposed towards electoral malpractice. When President
Mugabe barred British nationals from observing the election in early June 2000, the paper argued that the government was “cooking up its usual brew of subverting the already flawed electoral process” by limiting the number of international observers (*Daily News*, 12/6/2000). Calling on observers to act as a “catalyst for change,” the paper challenged those observers who were likely to give the government “a clean bill of health for reasons of political alliance with Zanu PF” to consider the prospect of being associated with a sad legacy of “an election in which most of the voters (were) brutalised into voting for something they would rather not vote for” (*Daily News*, 13/6/2000).

The paper’s distrust of the Zanu PF government emanated from what it termed a “monumentally inept governance” (*Daily News*, 5/6/2000). The impending election was viewed as an opportunity for the citizenry to vote out an incompetent ruling elite and usher in a new democratic dispensation. Removing Zanu PF from power through the ballot was seen by the paper as the political agenda of “most Zimbabweans,” whom, it argued, would want complete change to “assuage the hunger that has gnawed at their bowels since Mugabe’s trail of broken promises began after the elections of 1980” (*Daily News*, 23/2/2000).

The *Zimbabwe Independent* also framed the state as the architect of pre-election violence. The paper viewed the electoral contest as one between democratic and authoritarian forces. The opposition symbolised the former, while the ruling party stood for the latter. Editorials in the paper presented the ruling party as both deceptive and violent. In April, two months before the elections, the paper attributed “widespread anarchy and violence” to President Mugabe. The same editorial, entitled “Where are our real friends?”, argued that “Mugabe’s rhetoric that he can take on the might of the British empire in war should not fool anybody” (*Zimbabwe Independent*, 7/4/2000). Two weeks later, in an editorial entitled “Mugabe the real enemy of the people”, the paper again accused Mugabe of creating an increasingly repressive state in a fraudulent attempt to steal the forthcoming election (*Zimbabwe Independent*, 20/4/2000).

The predominant theme of state-sanctioned violence was carried throughout the pre-election period. On May 5th the paper coined a highly critical editorial entitled “Road
to the polls littered with corpses”. Here Mugabe was accused of ordering state security agents and war veterans to kill innocent victims. The editorial specifically mentioned two white commercial farmers who were murdered allegedly by ruling party agents, and equally blasted the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) for “colluding” with the war veterans to buy temporary peace. In the editorial, the Zanu PF manifesto is dismissed as a “threadbare manifesto”, while Mugabe’s claims that the opposition MDC was behind the violence are dismissed.

7.4.2 The Opposition as Victims

The Daily News constantly presented the opposition as victims of a rogue state. Leading the crusade against the opposition were identified as “marauding war veterans,” who were spearheading the ruling party’s campaign. By election time, about 30 people had been killed in the violence. The Daily News argued that all the casualties were opposition members. On 12 June, the paper wrote that those who had lost their lives in campaign-related violence since February 2000 “did not invite violence upon themselves by provoking it in any way, unless joining a political party is now an internationally accepted reason for deliberately placing your life in danger” (12/6/2000).

At the same time, the paper urged the opposition to mobilise effectively for total victory, which would ensure an abrupt discontinuation of 20 years of “Zanu PF corruption, cronyism and arrogant misgovernance” (Daily News, 23/2/2000). The same editorial, citing the success of the advocates of the ‘No’ vote in the constitutional referendum, argued that with careful planning, “this Goliath of Zimbabwean politics can be felled by a David armed with the slingshot of mobility and a tenacious focus on the job in hand” (Daily News, 23/2/2000).

Hardly two weeks before the elections, the Daily News published the results of a survey predicting a “massive” MDC victory at the impending polls (Daily News, 16/6/2000). The survey, which was conducted by a local research organisation, the Mass Public Opinion Institute, predicted an MDC victory of over 70 parliamentary seats out of the 120 contested ones. The story quoted the Institute’s principal researcher, Professor Masipula Sithole, saying the survey had an error margin of 10 percent, and was therefore highly credible. However, the Daily News’s principal
competitor, Herald, dismissed the survey results as mere wishful thinking. Herald responded to the survey a day later with the headline: “Chimutengwende slams ‘unprofessional’ survey published by the Daily News”, dismissing Sithole as a biased and known anti-government activist, as well as predicting a clean Zanu PF victory (Herald, 17/6/2000). This was the second time the two dailies had clashed over the authenticity of surveys and opinion polls ahead of crucial plebiscites. In January 2000, the Daily News conducted its own readers survey which, although methodologically flawed, correctly predicted victory for the ‘No’ vote. At the time, Herald called the survey “a terrible piece of misinformation,” and “a very shoddy piece of journalism” (Herald 21/1/2000). Neither did the use of opinion polls end with the 2000 election. In the presidential elections of 2002, they also became a subject of media and academic debate and ‘wars’ across the political divide.

The survey predictions of the 2000 elections poll were, however, proven wrong when the MDC failed to register a “massive” victory but nevertheless performed well grabbing 57 out of the 120 contested seats. After the results were announced, the Daily News published a dramatic headline entitled: “History is made”, congratulating the MDC for a sterling performance despite the fact that “Zanu PF supporters and war veterans (had) terrorised opposition supporters in many rural constituencies where thousands of opposition supporters fled their homes” (Daily News, 27/6/2000).

Although most of its stories and editorials were either sourced from or were about Zanu PF (Figure 7.2 overleaf), the Daily News generally framed the ruling party and its government in negative terms. The MDC, which constituted only 19 percent of the election stories in the paper, received most favourable coverage as illustrated above. Like other publications in the ‘opposition’ press category, the Daily News also gave prominence to ‘alternative’ sources (16 percent), mostly representatives of civil society organisations which identified with the broad opposition coalition. However, smaller political parties, ordinary people and independent candidates received the least coverage from ‘oppositional’ journalism (see Figure 7.2 overleaf).
Besides delegitimising the ruling party ahead of the poll, the *Zimbabwe Independent* also framed the opposition MDC as both a victim of ruling party violence and deception, but nevertheless the country’s only hope. The opposition party was portrayed as a victim of what Horace Campbell (2003) described as “executive lawlessness” in Zimbabwe. In a piece entitled “No milk and honey, but Tsvangirai promises to deliver on economy” the *Zimbabwe Independent* presented the MDC leader in terms befitting a kind of Biblical Moses figure. The writer, who drove with the MDC motorcade to an election campaign rally, wrote: “Even desultory strollers and those quaffing their beer on a sunny Saturday morning stood to watch the MDC supporters as they arrived in grand style” (*Zimbabwe Independent*, 14/4/2000). As for the substance of the leader’s electoral message, the paper added: “In his hour long address, Tsvangirai did not disappoint. He rose to the occasion and spoke about various pertinent issues; poverty, unemployment, corruption, inflation, the state of the economy and the land” (*Zimbabwe Independent*, 14/4/2000).

In its last issue before the elections, the paper called on voters to boot out Zanu PF from power. In an editorial entitled: “Voting for change”, the paper wrote:

> Essentially Zimbabweans will be making a choice between change on the one hand and national stagnation and decay on the other. We simply cannot afford the cost of making the wrong decision...The MDC represents the future. It stands for democracy, human decency. (*Zimbabwe Independent*, 23/5/2000)
The same editorial argued that so much was at stake in the election that “this newspaper can simply not afford to stand on the sidelines as a disinterested observer” (Ibid). The paper therefore made the conscious decision to endorse the MDC in the election. In so doing, the paper was consistent with the general editorial thrust of the ‘opposition press’ in its championing of the cause for change under the political leadership of the opposition.

The *Financial Gazette* also framed the cause of political change—an integral component of the MDC’s campaign discourse—as a necessary way out of the country’s economic and political crisis. Like both the *Daily News* and the *Zimbabwe Independent*, the paper repeatedly outlined the ruling party’s litany of political ‘sins’, from orchestrating political violence to mismanaging the economy, and urged the electorate to use their votes to effect political change. The land reform programme, which constituted the core of Zanu PF’s campaign agenda was presented in the paper as a mere campaign gimmick.

In the run-up to the elections, the *Financial Gazette* told its readers the choice ahead of them was a simple matter of selection, “between the forces of violence and economic ruin and those who possibly could bring back sanity and democratic values that are cherished by all civilised nations” (*Financial Gazette*, 15/6/2000). Describing Zanu PF rule as a catalogue of disastrous policies, the paper argued that the party was also responsible for “state-orchestrated mayhem” in which several opposition supporters had lost their lives (Ibid). The impending elections were viewed by the paper as “the most momentous elections since independence,” and an opportunity for voters to “overwhelmingly show their displeasure against those in power” (Ibid).

The week after the election, in which Zanu PF won 62 of the contested seats while the MDC won 57, the *Zimbabwe Independent* celebrated the opposition’s historic performance. In an editorial entitled “Just the beginning”, the editor wrote:

> While the first prize in last weekend’s election was an outright victory for the opposition in the battle for the contested seats, the outcome is a tremendous victory for democracy and the will of the people. This is moreso considering the level of intimidation and the orgy of state-ordered violence. The MDC’s
inroads in the rural hinterland speak volumes of the people’s determination to liberate themselves from Zanu PF tyranny (Zimbabwe Independent, 30/6/2000).

7.4.3 The Voices of Civil Society

The ‘oppositional’ press provided the voice to a swathe of civil society organisations seeking to challenge state hegemony ahead of the electoral contest. These civil society groups, including the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) as well as academics, had all participated in the launch of the MDC and continued working closely with the main opposition.

Among the coterie of preferred academics were law professors Welshman Ncube (who doubled up as MDC secretary general and top NCA official), Lovemore Madhuku (also NCA top official), as well as political scientists Admore Kambudzi and Alfred Nhema. Harare lawyer and NCA spokesperson Brian Kagoro was also extensively quoted in most news reports, and authored a weekly column: “Countdown to 2000 elections” in the Financial Gazette. The columns buttressed his views expressed in other stories, with a predominant theme being the failure of the Zanu PF-led state and the need for a political alternative.

Most of the stories sourced from civil society groups generally painted a pessimistic view regarding possibilities of a free and fair election. The Financial Gazette, for example, gave prominence to the National Democratic Institute (NDI) report (01/6/2000 and 24/5/2000) for two weeks—a report which alleged that the flawed election administration, violence, the abuse of the media by the state and restricted access of civil society to monitor the elections all rendered the poll neither free nor fair.

Some of Brian Kagoro’s pieces include: “Should we vote for ‘snakes, witches’ again?” (30/3/2000); “A chance to say ‘goodbye’ to preachers of political violence” (18/5/2000); “Curious fascination with bloodshed and pain” (01/6/2000). These pieces, among others, framed the election in terms of what he viewed as Zanu PF’s belligerence and electoral malfeasance.
Table 7.3 ‘Opposition press’ sample election stories based on civil society groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story headline</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hopes of convincing world on poll dim</td>
<td>15/6/2000</td>
<td><em>Financial Gazette</em></td>
<td>Two UZ academics, NDI and Amnesty International reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-awaited poll thrown into turmoil</td>
<td>18/5/2000</td>
<td><em>Financial Gazette</em></td>
<td>NCA spokesman, two UZ academics, MDC spokesman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political violence, intimidation escalate</td>
<td>28/4/2000</td>
<td><em>Zimbabwe Independent</em></td>
<td>“Eye-witnesses” in rural areas, and MDC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New poll regulations rejected</td>
<td>08/6/2000</td>
<td><em>Financial Gazette</em></td>
<td>NCA, ZUD, MDC spokespersons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zanu PF subverts electoral process</td>
<td>26/5/2000</td>
<td><em>Zimbabwe Independent</em></td>
<td>-MDC, ZUD and ZIP (opposition parties) spokespersons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, the story in the same paper entitled: “Hopes of convincing world on poll dim” (*Financial Gazette*, 15/6/2000) asserted that “the government’s hopes of convincing the world that the June 24-25 elections will be free and fair are getting slimmer”. The story cited the withdrawal of the UN team from participating in the election process after the government had rejected its offer to co-ordinate the activities of international observers as a dent on the integrity of the electoral process. Civil society groups, including the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) were quoted in the story (see Table 7.3).

In the *Zimbabwe Independent*, news stories before and after the elections sourced from civil society groups were largely consistent with the paper’s editorials. A central
theme of the coverage was the need for political change. Reports of pre-election violence and allegations of state-orchestrated electoral fraud were presented as evidence of a failing political order created by Zanu PF, an order which had to be rejected and vanquished at the polls.

In lead stories like: “Delimitation Zanu PF’s last weapon” (26/3/2000); “Doubts mount on free election” (23/6/2000); and: “Condemnation of violence grows” (19/5/2000), the *Zimbabwe Independent* gave voice to civil society groups and the opposition who raised alarm over alleged state involvement in violence and attempts to rig the elections. In the first story cited above, the paper extensively quoted the MDC secretary general, while the second and third stories quoted from the MDC spokesman and civil society groups including the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC). Zanu PF was not quoted in the stories and where police spokespersons were quoted, they denied the allegations of state-sponsored violence.

### 7.5 Between the State and the Market: The ‘Independent Nationalist’ Press and the 2000 Elections.

In the dichotomous terrain of post-2000 Zimbabwean electoral politics and the media, the *Zimbabwe Mirror* constituted a lean but arguably dispassionate site of debate. With a predominantly urban circulation fluctuating between 10,000 and 15,000 copies per week, the paper approached the 2000 elections with an editorial perspective vaguely premised on what Ronning calls “a form of radical nationalism” (Ronning, 2003:207).

The *Zimbabwe Mirror* was the only publication in the study which devoted the most space to a contextual discussion of the events and issues around which the election contest was being fought. In both the paper’s editorial comments and regular column: “The Scrutator”—the latter penned by the editor-in-chief—the ‘land question’ featured prominently as the source of much political disquiet prevailing in the country ahead of the parliamentary elections. The unresolved ‘land question’ was closely linked to what the paper viewed as an ambitious British and generally Western neocolonial project in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa. The editorials were conspicuous in
their support for the incumbent ruling party, which was legitimised as the nationalist liberation movement that the country so badly needed to complete an unfinished national programme. Meanwhile, the opposition MDC was often dismissed in editorials as lacking in both technical and political capacity to assume the reins of the Zimbabwean state. Underlying some of the editorials about the opposition was an assertion that the party was not ‘Zimbabwean’ enough to be entrusted with the national political office. However, there was a clear distinction between the paper’s endorsement of the ruling party in editorials and its informative and impartial coverage of the electoral contest in the news. Below is a thematic discussion of the paper’s editorial representation of elections of both elections.

7.5.1 Pre-election Violence

The *Zimbabwe Mirror* editorials generally avoided singling out individuals or political parties as responsible for the spate of violence that characterised the run-up to the 2000 elections. Rather, it occasionally made blanket appeals to both the ruling party and the opposition to stop the violence. Violence was also sometimes explained as part of a larger crisis pitching the nationalist elite and the former colonial master, Britain. The unresolved ‘land question’ was also consistently cited to explain the violence. In its April 7th, 2000 issue, the paper lamented that the escalating violence was “a frightening reminder of the fragility of twenty-year-old Zimbabwean transition”. It appealed to President Mugabe to “take the initiative to put an end to the current madness, restore confidence in the law enforcement agencies of the state, and ensure that every citizen enjoys protection and security” (Ibid).

The paper argued that individuals—both black and white—who continued to lose their lives in the orgy of violence that accompanied the farms occupations, were “caught up in (the) crossfire over the land question and the white settler colonial legacy in Zimbabwe” (*Zimbabwe Mirror*, 14/4/2000). Compared to both the *Zimbabwe Independent* and the *Daily News*, the *Mirror* devoted less attention to a discussion of violence outside the broader issue of land reform. That way, it avoided outright condemnation of the perpetrators of pre-election violence, which claimed 30 lives in Zimbabwe ahead of the elections. Occasionally, however, the paper implied that the ruling party was largely responsible for the violence. On May 12th, 2000, the paper posed a rhetorical question: “If...the MDC is not a real threat to the Zanu PF
status quo, why then did the latter have to resort to such harsh methods”. The same editorial lamented that no-one was being prosecuted for the violence—implying possible state complicity—and added: “The carnage continues and we all appear helpless if not also indifferent as the rule of law collapses around us” (Ibid). Pity, said the same editorial: “the MDC can no longer take the heat”. Consistent with its ‘indifferent’ approach to the question of violence, the paper expressed its exasperation, certainly surrounded by things it could neither change nor openly condemn: “...In the meantime, can we hope for an end to the violence before the general elections? We can’t wait for the latter to come and go” (12/5/2000).

7.5.2 MDC as an Incapable Political Alternative

If the *Zimbabwe Mirror* was somewhat ambivalent and dispassionate in its treatment of pre-election violence, the same cannot be said about the paper’s consistent portrayal of the MDC as incompetent, foreign-informed and therefore ‘un-Zimbabwean’. In most cases the language was selected carefully to create the impression of an ill-fated, upstart opposition with very little support at home. In an editorial entitled “Longing for life after elections”, the paper dismissed predictions that the MDC could upstage Zanu PF if patterns of voting in the referendum were considered, arguing such analyses emanated from “MDC zealots and their international supporters” (*Zimbabwe Mirror*, 12/5/2000). The paper predicted an outright victory for Zanu PF at the polls. Spelling doom for the opposition, the editorial cited above argued that the MDC would “disintegrate after the general elections, in bitterness and acrimony”. While acknowledging that it was “too early to write an obituary of the MDC,” the editorial nevertheless argued that the party faced an imminent decline. To explain why “the beautiful ones are not yet born,” in postcolonial Zimbabwean opposition politics, the same editorial argued that the opposition had either cast itself right of Zanu PF, or allowed the ruling party sole ownership of the leftist pedestal (Ibid). The MDC’s birth out of a labour movement was also occasionally cast as a kind of betrayal of the workers by the paper. In fact, the paper viewed the formation of the party as politically ironic because “the labour leadership...decided to commit class suicide, in pursuit of the state, and in alliance with capital and imperialism” (*Zimbabwe Mirror*, 16/6/2000).
The delegitimisation of the MDC was also carried in the “Scrutator” columns, which were penned by the *Zimbabwe Mirror* editor-in-chief. In an instalment entitled “The elections: What is at stake?” the paper argued that the MDC appeared “to be the vehicle through which external factors might be seeking to advance their agenda in (the) country or sub-region” (*Zimbabwe Mirror*, 2/6/2000). While the writer stated that he was not “attributing blame” to the MDC for perceptions about its links with external forces, the column repeated and attempted to give legitimate expression to, the ruling party’s allegations about the same links. In a two-part series on election outcome possibilities, the paper created post-election scenarios where the MDC was massively defeated by the ruling party. The first prediction had the MDC grabbing only 10 out of the 120 contested parliamentary seats, while the second, more “generous” scenario had the MDC bagging a maximum of 32 seats. The last scenario was however unlikely, argued the “Scrutator” columnist (*Zimbabwe Mirror*, 24/6/2000).

The *Mirror* argued that votes in favour of the MDC were more of Zanu PF protest votes than a genuine expression of any confidence in the opposition party. For most voters, argued the paper:

> It is not that they expect an alternative out of the MDC; on the contrary, most people accept that the MDC has hardly the capacity to change anything economic, not least because of the alliances they have had to clinch with those historically opposed to change and transformation” (*Zimbabwe Mirror*, 16/6/2000).

In the same editorial, the paper saw voting for the MDC as an indication of a depoliticised urban youth. It lamented that one of the “tragedies” of post-independent Zimbabwe was a depoliticisation of a new generation, “away from the reality of imperialism and neo-colonialism, to the abstract notions of “democracy” and “human rights” (Ibid).

After the elections—in which the MDC garnered 57 seats and Zanu PF 62—the paper maintained its argument that the outcome was a protest vote for the ruling party rather than an endorsement of the MDC. The editorial entitled: “The people have spoken” lauded the ruling party for its performance “in the circumstances”, and appealed to it to do some soul searching, resolve its succession issue and “mobilise all those leftist
forces most of whom the party has deliberately marginalised over the last two decades” (Zimbabwe Mirror, 30/6/2000). The paper celebrated the MDC’s loss, arguing that its electoral victory would have “spelt disaster at the hands of a fledgling party which does not have the capacity or expertise to form a viable cabinet” (Ibid).

7.6. The Zimbabwe Mirror News Stories

One of the major differences between the Zimbabwe Mirror and other publications under study is the link between editorials and news stories. In both the ‘patriotic’ and ‘oppositional’ press, for example, most editorials were constructed around issues raised in the news stories and stories themselves were also constructed almost strictly around professed editorial endorsement or dismissal of the major political players. The link between news stories and editorials in the Zimbabwe Mirror was less visible; in fact sometimes one got the impression of an editorial ‘conflict’ between the two genres within the same paper. Another observation about the Zimbabwe Mirror concerns the diversity of its sources. The average election story in the paper had three sources. These sources ranged from spokesmen of little-known political parties and independent candidates to the presidents of Zanu PF and MDC; from University of Zimbabwe (UZ) academics to civil society groups complaining about late accreditation of election observers. The selected election stories in the Zimbabwe Mirror covered the following themes:

7.6.1 Struggles within Political Parties

A number of stories in the Zimbabwe Mirror captured internal struggles within the major political parties, the MDC and Zanu PF ahead of the election. The Bulawayo bureau of the paper produced most of these stories, especially on Zanu PF internal squabbles. On 2 June, 2000, the paper led with a piece entitled: “War vets beat up top Zanu PF officials”. The story related an incident in which war veterans, who actively campaigned for Zanu PF, assaulted the Bulawayo Zanu PF provincial chairperson and two other senior officials after they failed to provide transport for the war veterans’ campaign team. The story quoted the physician who treated the victims, the police, and the leader of the local branch of the war veterans. In another story from Bulawayo, the paper reported that Zanu PF supporters had rejected Thenjiwe Lesabe, the national chairperson of the party’s powerful Women’s League, as the
parliamentary candidate for the Gwanda North constituency, “following accusations that she was imposed by the party’s politburo” (Zimbabwe Mirror, 9/6/2000).

The story gave a detailed account of a “stormy eight-hour inter-district meeting” of the ruling party and quoted from the participants, including Lesabe, as well as opposition MDC candidate for the area, Paul Nyathi. The story also quoted a local Zanu PF councillor, Petros Mukwena, saying: “Our party’s so-called politburo has turned Zanu PF into a private company. They think they have the right to nominate candidates at will. This is unacceptable…” (Ibid).

On 9 June, 2000, the paper reported that a 10-member gang had raided the offices of Zanu PF candidate Shambambeva Nyandoro. The paper quoted Nyandoro alleging that the gang was led by Joseph Chinotimba, a powerful war veterans’ leader and ruling party provincial deputy chairman for Harare. The police spokesperson was quoted confirming the incident. The paper also reported on 23 June, 2000, of MDC “renegades” coming back to the fold after their initial decision to stand as independent candidates following their unsuccessful bids to represent the party in the elections. The selection process was presented as lacking in transparency. The story quoted some of the candidates and MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai, confirming the decision to build fences ahead of the election.

7.6.2 Coverage of Smaller Parties and Independents

The coverage of the 2000 election by the mainstream press generally tended to focus on the activities of Zanu PF and the MDC as the major political actors. Not much space was devoted to smaller parties and independent candidates. According to the Zimbabwe Mirror, which carried more stories or comments from parties other than Zanu PF and MDC than any other paper under study, a total of 15 political parties and 89 independent candidates contested the 2000 elections. The paper carried a few constituency-specific stories giving profiles of the contestants, including independent candidates. In “Battle for supremacy looms in Makokoba” (16/6/2000), the paper showcased “an array of candidates…promising to give Zanu PF candidate Sithembiso Nyoni a run for her money” (Ibid). The paper profiled candidates from smaller parties
including Patrick Ndlovu of Zapu\textsuperscript{10}, Thokozile Mbewe of the Liberty Party of Zimbabwe (LPZ) and Rachel Munetsi of the United Parties (UP). None of these parties featured in the major reports in the other papers.

Similarly, in a story entitled: “Seven candidates eye Nkulumane seat”, the paper profiled contestants from Zanu PF, the MDC, the UP, Zapu, LPZ and independent candidates (\textit{Zimbabwe Mirror}, 16/6/2000) Similar constituency stories were also published for Zvishavane, Chitungwiza and Masvingo South, where little-known parties and candidates were quoted and profiled. In some constituencies, e.g, Mberengwa East and Buhera North, the paper carried stories about how close family relatives belonging to different political parties were squaring up for the elections. In the Mberengwa story, where cousins Sekai Holland (MDC) and Rugare Gumbo (Zanu PF) were contesting, the paper quoted a local pastor urging the two to rein-in their supporters and use their ties as relatives to stop the raging violence (\textit{Zimbabwe Mirror}, 16/6/2000).

Fiery former independent MP for Harare South and leader of the Zimbabwe Union of Democrats (ZUD) Margaert Dongo—whom most media ignored after her refusal to join the MDC at its inception in 1999—was also quoted several times in the \textit{Zimbabwe Mirror}, including in a front page piece where she was reported to be taking court action against the Minister of Home Affairs for not stopping farm invasions (\textit{Zimbabwe Mirror}, 2/6/2000).

\textbf{7.6.3 Other Dimensions of the Elections}

The \textit{Zimbabwe Mirror} also focused on other dimensions of the electoral contest, including anticipatory pieces on post-election scenarios. The lead story entitled: “Constitutional crisis if MDC wins poll” (24/6/2000), quoted constitutional experts and leaders of both Zanu PF and the MDC to discuss the possibilities of a constitutional crisis in the event of an MDC majority in parliament but not being able to form a government. The story discussed at length the provisions and limitations of

\textsuperscript{10} Acronym for “Zimbabwe African People’s Union”. This is different from “PF Zapu” which merged with Zanu PF in 1987 under the Unity Accord. The new Zapu emerged out of disgruntlement with the way the “old PF Zapu” had been ‘swallowed’ by Zanu PF.
the Lancaster House Constitution, which some of the sources quoted said had been designed with the view of perpetual Zanu PF rule.

The paper also ran several pieces ranging from the concerns and travails of civil society organisations whose local election monitors had their accreditation delayed by the Registrar-general’s office (30/6/2000), to analysis pieces about the waning popularity of Zanu PF and the merits of proportional representation in parliament (07/7/2000). Post-election stories in the paper were a kind of ‘mixed bag’, with pieces focusing on allegations of “massive foreign funding” of the MDC (14/7/2000), public response to the constitution of the MDC shadow cabinet (7/7/2000), as well as analyses of how Zimbabwean politics would “never be the same again” after the elections (30/6/2000).

*Table 7.4. Sample of election stories in the Zimbabwe Mirror*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story headline</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Battle for supremacy looms in Makokoba</td>
<td>16/6/2000</td>
<td>Candidates for Zanu PF, MDC, Zapu and United Parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War vets, collaborators promised gratuities if they join farm invasions</td>
<td>16/5/2000</td>
<td>Unnamed sources, Vice Chairman of the War Veterans Association.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 7.4 illustrates, the *Zimbabwe Mirror* stories were generally a mixed bag covering a wide array of issues related to the electoral contest. Sources were drawn from a variety of people and institutions. This differed from the editorials, which were
consistent in their articulation of the issues at stake in the election and their contempt for the major opposition MDC.

**Figure 7.3 Sources of Election Stories in the Zimbabwe Mirror**

![Source distribution chart]

Source: MMPZ (2000)

As Figure 7.3 above shows, the *Zimbabwe Mirror*’s source base was broader than that of both the ‘oppositional’ and ‘patriotic’ press. The paper gave almost a third of its coverage to smaller political parties and independents, which were generally given little attention by the other publications. Another noteworthy aspect of the paper was the relatively smaller gap between Zanu PF and MDC sources in the stories. In Herald, for example, the gap is wider, with 69% for Zanu PF and 8.3% for the MDC. Even more, the smaller parties and independents were quoted in just over 3% of the election stories carried by the paper. The same applied to the *Daily News*, where smaller political parties were sources in just 4% of the coverage, with Zanu PF and MDC getting 30% and 19% of the coverage respectively.

**7.7 Framing the 2000 Elections in Zimbabwe: A Discussion**

Saunders (1997) has argued that the “jarring cross-class linkages” that had defined private press-civil society-capital relations prior to the early 1990s underwent a litmus test with the formal introduction of ESAP in 1991 (p.14). The economic adjustment
programme resulted in the fraying of these social alliances, with the private media supporting capital and the state on the programme, while civil society groups, including women’s organisations, churches, civil servants and university students protested against it.\footnote{See Chapter 5 for a discussion of the effects of ESAP on the Zimbabwean polity and civil society.} However, as argued earlier in this chapter, there was a realignment of relations between the private press, sections of civil society and the predominant fractions of capital ahead of the 2000 elections. This alignment was constructed around consensus about the failure of the Zanu PF-led state to address issues of democracy and economic management, and the need for a change of government.

With the exception of the Zimbabwe Mirror, the private press under study foregrounded the case for political change in their framing of the elections more than any other aspect of the electoral process. Stories on political violence, for example, generally focused on the ruling party as the harbinger of violence, and opposition politicians were the predominant sources in these pieces. Implicit in the text of the stories was that it was time to ditch a ruling party that visited untold violence on the opposition and the citizens in general.

As argued in the analyses of individual newspapers, the MDC, NCA, UZ academics, international organisations (e.g., the UN, NDI, EU in the case of the Financial Gazette) were the major sources of stories for the private press ahead of the elections. Although the MMPZ (2000) cited the Daily News as having generated 30 percent of its stories from Zanu PF sources (see Figure 7.2), most of these stories made passive references to Zanu PF politicians either quoted in the public press or addressing political rallies, rather than speaking to the Daily News.\footnote{According to former Daily News editor-in-chief, Geoff Nyarota, Zanu PF made a decision ahead of the 2000 elections not to ‘speak’ to the Daily News nor to advertise in the paper. The police were also generally unwilling to comment on Daily News stories arguing that the paper was biased anyway. (Nyarota, interview, May 2004).} In the financial weeklies, not only did prominent civil society activists dominate mainstream stories as sources, they also authored opinion pieces expanding on their views, as discussed above with reference to the Financial Gazette. The same was also true of the Zimbabwe Independent. In his analysis of media coverage of the 2000 elections in Zimbabwe, Ragnar Waldahl (2004) noted that both the Zimbabwe Independent (and its sister
publication, *The Standard*) were “clear in their opposition to the Zanu PF regime, and their support for the opposition” (p.117). Waldahl explained this editorial thrust as an attempt to provide an important corrective to the public media’s one-sided support for Zanu PF in the run-up to the 2000 elections.

Unlike the ‘oppositional’ press, the ‘patriotic’ press relied heavily on Zanu PF as sources of election news. Where the private press focused on the administration of the elections and gave prominence to allegations of electoral fraud, Herald and *Sunday Mail* paid significant attention to the land reform programme as an electoral issue, while simultaneously projecting the Zanu PF view to the questions of free and fair elections, pre-election violence and predictions that the ruling party was set to lose the poll. Also, where the private press mostly drew their stories from ‘named’ analysts and experts from civil society including the academia, the public press occasionally cited ‘unnamed’ analysts supporting the ruling party.

The *Zimbabwe Mirror*’s model of ‘independent nationalist’ journalism distinguished it from both other private newspapers and the public press. While the paper’s editorials were unambiguously supportive of Zanu PF and dismissive of the MDC and the rest of the opposition, the paper’s news stories were a mixed bag. Although both the ruling and the main opposition parties made the bulk of the news, smaller parties ignored by other papers also got substantial coverage in the paper’s news pages. The source pool for the *Zimbabwe Mirror* was wider than other papers; it included civil society and academic ‘experts’, a raft of opposition spokesmen, independent candidates, ordinary people as well as Zanu PF. It was interesting to note that, unlike in other private newspapers where they were cited generally as “Zanu PF insiders”, disgruntled Zanu PF officials who criticised their party offered to be identified by their names in the *Zimbabwe Mirror*.

7.8 Conclusion

Wober (2002) has argued that media framing of issues and events can be interpreted through the prism of what he calls ‘agenda-cutting’. He defines the term as:

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13 See earlier reference to the case of Zanu PF officials in Gwanda North rejecting Thenjiwe Lesabe’s candidature, or the story about the raid on Shambambeva-Nyandoro’s premises in Harare by alleged ‘thugs’ hired by Joseph Chinotimba.
a name for a variety of ways and instances in which a topic or an actual or potentially significant news story either finds itself low on the news agenda, or even out of it; in some ways it may be present, but with a negative rather than neutral or perhaps deservedly positive tone (p.64).

Agenda-cutting is the corollary of agenda-setting, where the media foreground particular issues as the most newsworthy ones deserving a place on the public agenda (Severin & Tankard, 1992; McCombs & Shaw, 1995). With reference to the 2000 parliamentary elections in Zimbabwe, both agenda-cutting and agenda-setting processes were simultaneously employed by the press under study in their coverage. The ‘patriotic’ press employed agenda-setting to project the ruling party’s campaign agenda, including the land issue, as the most worthwhile aspects of the electoral contest. It simultaneously played down or cut altogether issues around human rights abuses allegedly promoted by the state, a flawed election administration regime, among others. The ‘oppositional’ press, on the other hand, gave prominence to a civil society-white capital-Western ‘international’ community perspective of the election, which centred on state responsibility for violence, human rights abuses and election rigging. In the case of the financial weeklies, the issue of economic mismanagement by the incumbent government also came up as an electoral issue in the news pieces, arguably to justify editorial calls for a change of government. This press—with the exception of the Zimbabwe Mirror—simultaneously played down the importance of the land issue as an electoral topic and possibilities that opposition parties could have also incited, if not actively participated in, pre-election violence.

The framing of the elections by both the ‘patriotic’ and ‘oppositional’ press was informed by the existing binaries which were part of the political discourse in Zimbabwe at the time. On the one hand, this discourse attributed the agency of democracy and a quality national future to the opposition, while Zanu PF was presented as agents of mayhem and bad governance. On the other, the discourse featured a patriotic ruling party as the custodian of the nation’s past and future, pitted against an upstart local opposition party sponsored by the West, in particular Britain. In this context, ownership of the press became a powerful agency through which to participate in—if not attempt to influence the outcome of—a decisive election.