

Political economy influence on media content in Zimbabwe: The pre-2018 election discourse.

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Abstract: The right to freedom of choice, expression and information are fundamental principles of democracy and good governance. However, these concepts are applied differently from country to country and they can be easily identified through free press reportage as to whether they are upheld or not. Democracy in essence breeds good governance and the free press has to act as watchdogs to the systems that are responsible to ensure and enable democracy. The first step to democracy in Zimbabwe and many other countries is believed to be the electoral process which ushers in new governments after every given time frame. In Zimbabwe the term of office of an elected government is five years after which elections are conducted. Before the elections are physically conducted they are usually played in the media. Thus, political parties vying for positions to be the next government use the media as tools to rally support from the electorate. Zimbabwe held harmonised elections in 2018. The political parties in the country got into an election mood ahead of the polls and the media diverted its attention from other issues to focus much on election related reporting. In their reportage two major influences shaped their content and these are the political economy (ownership and funding) and agenda setting. In Zimbabwe there are two folds to media ownership, namely the state and private media. However, their role of setting public agenda usually influences their content at a larger extent.

Key words: Political economy, democracy, election, agenda setting, Zimbabwe, media.

I. INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe held general elections in July 2018 after the incumbent government of ZANU PF was given a five year mandate to rule the country since 2013. The five year term of government ended in 2018 and the country was gripped by electioneering rhetoric by various political parties who since June 2017 launched their political campaigns. Several new political parties emerged especially since the beginning of 2017, but the most prominently featured names of political parties in the media land scape were the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) at the start of the campaigns which was led by late former President Robert Mugabe and during polls it was led President Emmerson Mnangagwa who emerged a winner of the 2018 presidential polls and Movement for Democratic Change (MDC T) at the time which was led by now late Morgan Tsvangirai and later became MDC Alliance led by Nelson Chamisa who took second place to Mnangagwa. Other parties relatively covered by the media are the MDC T led by Thokozani Khupe, National People's Party (NPP) led by Joice Mujuru and Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) then

led by now late Dumiso Dabengwa. But this article will focus on ZANU PF and MDC Alliance. Political parties started political rallies where their top officials made political remarks in relation to the 2018 elections. The media was covering those political statements. This academic paper seeks to explore the manner in which local weekly newspapers, *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard* reported the pre-election politicking. It is also necessary to explore the influence of ownership and funding (political economy) in the pre-election discourse reportage by the two publications. It has to be established as to whether agenda setting influenced their content production.

Background to the study

Zimbabwe's electoral processes are guaranteed in the Zimbabwe's National Constitution (2013: 32) under the Political Rights. The Constitution in Chapter 1 Section 67 clause (1) (a) and (b) highlights that "every Zimbabwean citizen has the right to free, fair and regular elections for any elective public office established in terms of this Constitution or any other law and to make political choices freely." Clause (2) of the Section from (a) to (d) states that "every Zimbabwean has the right to belong to any political party, campaign freely, take party in political gatherings, those aged 18 and above are free to vote in any election or referendum and stand for election for public office." Section 158 (1) (a) (P. 67) states that 'general elections must be held so that the polling takes place not more than 30 days before the expiry of the five year period which according to Section 143 clause (1) (p. 62) runs from the date on which the President elect is sworn in and assumes office." The term of office of ZANU PF government started in April 2013 and ended in March 2018 after which elections were held. Thus, the democratic process as enshrined in the national Charter prescribes an election for the next government to be given a five year mandate to rule the country.

As the general election year drew closer, this set the election campaign trail on motion in Zimbabwe. Political parties started jostling for political support through political statements and political rallies in 2017 when Mugabe and Tsvangirai were still alive leading ZANU PF and MDC-T respectively. In the campaigns, the freedoms of expression, press, information and association mattered to ensure democracy and good governance. Thus, the political leaders of various political organisations must be free to sell their policies and ideologies to the electorate particularly through the press as it is highlighted in the Constitutional clauses

quoted earlier on in this academic article. This started to happen with the politicking intensifying especially from the beginning of July 2017. The media plays a significant role in the democratic processes and freedom of expression. Thus, for Habermas in Copeland (2006: 181), “the press is the public sphere’s prominent institution” which he says “finds freedom of the press necessary to engage rational critical debate.” In the rise of pre-election political statements by or about political parties mostly, ZANU PF and MDC-T, *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard* contributed in the popularisation of their activities about the 2018 elections. However, issues of ownership and funding usually influence the positions adopted by the media in their reportage, hence this article has to explore the ownership and funding of the two publication titles used in this study.

The Sunday Mail is a State owned newspaper under the Zimpapers stable. African Media Barometer (AMBZ) (2010) states that the Zimpapers Group is majority owned by Zimbabwean government with 51, 09% shares. AMBZ says the South African owned Old Mutual has 23, 80% shares and the remaining 25, 11 % is owned by private companies. It also says the Zimpapers operates under the Information media Broadcasting Services Ministry and the publications under the stable are mandated to protect the interests of the government in power. In view of the ownership and funding details given, it is possible that *The Sunday Mail* could have been influenced by their political economy in their pre-election discourse. Curran et al (1982: 21) argue that, “the political economy of the media leads them to produce false consciousness in the interests of a class which owns and controls them.”

The Standard is a weekly publication owned by Alpha Media Holdings (AMH). *NewsDay* (December 11, 2017) says AMH is 100% owned by Trevor Ncube who “assumed the stake after his former partners Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF) disposed of their equity interest from Zimbabwe’s largest independent media house.” MDIF is a New York-based non-profit investment fund for independent media in emerging markets. AMH and MDIF’s parting came after 14 years of partnership in which Ncube used to have 61% stake, while the MDIF had 39% stake in AMH. It remains to be established if *The Standard* newspaper’s ownership and funding influenced the pre-election political discourse in them. Graber (1989), and Davis (1992) say the media play a powerful role as intermediaries between political leaders and the public. Thus, the media act as public spheres that Habermas (1989) says are platforms for discussion.

Statement of the Problem

There has been an increase in the number of political rallies and statements made by or about political parties and leaders particularly in ZANU PF and MDC-T in July 2017. This resulted in the State and private newspapers, *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard* escalating their reportage more on issues focusing in the 2018 elections. Thus, the newspapers almost every week carried some stories to do with the then approaching polls and that triggered this study. The elections

in Zimbabwe and world over determine the future governments hence they are of public interest. In a sense this study is located in the democratic strand of the media studies seeking to explore ways in which the media contributes or assist in the promotion of democracy to expose what hinders it to operate democratically.

Purpose of the Study

- ❖ To unmask if ownership and funding of the media contributed to the pre-election discourse in *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard* newspapers.
- ❖ To suggest possible solutions to media problems hindering their freedom in covering electoral processes.

Objectives

- ❖ To establish the influence of political economy in media content in election reportage in Zimbabwe
- ❖ To examine how the political economy influenced *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard* content in the pre-2018 election reportage
- ❖ To unravel the construction of pre-election discourses by political parties within media representation.
- ❖ To expose positions adopted by the two titles in covering ZANU PF and MDC-T pre-election rallies and statements.
- ❖ To establish their interests in taking the positions they took during their coverage.

Research Questions

- ❖ How does the political economy influence media content in election reporting in Zimbabwe?
- ❖ How did the political economy influence *The Standard* and *The Sunday Mail* content in the pre-2018 election political activities in Zimbabwe?
- ❖ What are *The Standard* and *The Sunday Mail*’s pre-election discourses?
- ❖ What are the positions adopted by *The Standard* and *The Sunday Mail* in covering the pre-2018 election events and statement by ZANU PF and MDC-T?
- ❖ What were their interests in taking the positions they took during their coverage?

Assumptions of the Study

- ❖ The study assumes that *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard* newspapers are influenced by journalism cultures of their news gathering, in house editorial policies and regulatory environment.
- ❖ The study assumes that the media’s ownership and funding influenced the pre-election discourses represented in the newspapers.
- ❖ The study assumes that findings will help expose media polarisation and equip authorities with ideas to reform media operations in Zimbabwe.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant to Zimbabweans interested to observe if freedoms associated with the media, democracy and elections are observed. Elections are the only get way for citizens to change governments in Zimbabwe. Since ZANU PF has been in power for over 42 years now, the study is significant to citizens and political parties who are eager to see the electoral processes influencing change of government in future elections. Researchers on elections and media in future can use this study as a background in their researches.

Justification of the Study

This study is justified to establish if *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard* newspapers managed to play their public sphere role or their ownership and funding influenced their content reporting about the 2018 elections. Thus, Habermas (1989) says media are some of the public spheres which are platforms for public discussions. Habermas' envisioned public sphere is supposed to be a 'free for all the people' to debate. The study seeks to expose if the newspapers set the pre-election agenda or they reported reality on the ground. The study is a yardstick to measure media's role in giving impetus to pre-election discourse. Furusa (1998) says the media and journalists must provide information, entertainment, education, promote democracy and convey culture. The need to unravel if these functions were fulfilled justifies the need for this study to be conducted.

Theoretical Frame Work

The article is influenced by three major theories which are the public sphere, Agenda Setting and the Political Economy. Habermas (1989) defines public sphere as a forum for discussion hence the newspapers under study are some of the public spheres which political parties used as platforms for pre-election politicking. Agenda setting theory refers to capabilities of the media to influence the acceptance and adoption of topics on the public agenda. McCombs and Shaw (1972) in Scheufele and Tewksburg (2007: 11) say "agenda setting refers to the idea that there is a strong correlation between the emphasis that most media place on certain issues based on relative placement or amount of coverage and the importance attributed to these issues by mass audiences." The frequency featuring of pre-election politicking by or about ZANU PF and MDC-T in the newspapers emphasise the agenda setting by the media. Political economy of the media is described as the funding and ownership of the media underpinning their operations. Curren et al (1982: 21) argue that "the political economy of the media leads them to produce false consciousness in the interests of a class which owns and controls them." Thus, political economy of the media may determine the content produced hence this study has to expose if the two publications were influenced by ownership and funding in their content production.

Delimitation of the Study

The study focuses on the *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard* newspapers' eight combined number of articles published

within the month of July 2017. Only articles about ZANU PF and MDC-T are selected for this study. The target period of publications is important because it's the time when the parties launched their interface rallies, coalition and meetings.

Ethical Considerations

The study acknowledges all sources of information used in it. Chirimuuta et al (2013: 82) say "ethics...are systems of moral principles that govern or influence the conduct of individuals. There are a set of moral principles that guide and control the researcher in all research stages." The author upholds honest and truthfulness as vital ethical consideration in the study.

Organisation of the Study

This article opens with an abstract highlighting the components of the study focusing on the election discourse, political economy, freedom of expression, press and information and democracy. Next is an introduction, background of the study and other components which provides a brief overview of the study's purpose. The study presents a review of literature related to the political democracy and good governance, freedom of expression, press and information. The study also gives details on the research methodology, data collection techniques, research design, sampling method, data presentation and analysis procedure. Data collected is presented and analysed through critical discourse analysis. This then leads to the summary, conclusion and recommendations of the study. Biography anchors the study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical conceptualisation in this section deals with sub-topics such as the political economy, democracy and good governance, freedoms of expression, press and information and discourse analysis. These seek to expose the link between the political parties under study (ZANU PF and MDC-T) with the media, (*The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard*) as to how they related during the period under study. Thus, the literature review ponders on the theoretical perspectives and influences underpinning the positions adopted by the two publications in their reportage of election related statements by or about ZANU PF and MDC-T. The study seeks to fill the gap left by previous studies on pre-election coverage, weighing them against the then pre-electioneering narrative that gripped the nation's political landscape. Langa and Heiss (1994) say literature review introduces the researcher to new approaches in solving a problem and help to avoid errors in the planning of the research. Thus, the study seeks to fill the gap left by Waldah (2000)'s research titled *Political journalism the Zimbabwean way: Experience from the 2000 Election Campaigns.* Waldah's research focuses on the coverage of election campaigns in the run up to 2000 elections by radio stations, television, newspapers such as the Zimpapers titles, AMH titles which are *The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Standard*, and the *Daily News* of Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe group (ANZ).

There are several gaps left by the research considering that it only focused on previous elections which had differing dynamics to the 2017 situation, in which new ways of campaigns such as Mugabe's Youth Interface Rallies and the coalition of opposition parties backing the candidature of MDC-T Morgan Tsvangirai for the 2018 election. Thus, Dearing and Rogers (1996) argue that political influence is to some extent dependent on the ability of politicians to put their causes on the political agenda to attract voters' attention. ZANU PF and MDC-T intensified their campaigns especial in July 2017. *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard* become tools of disseminating their political ideologies. Thus, Chuma (2013: 15) says "Zimbabwean journalists and the media operate in an environment that both enhances and impedes their work."

Media's Political Economy

Media's political economy entails issues of ownership and funding. These usually have a great influence on the media's content. Most media in Zimbabwe carries characters of their owners and funders in their content. Thus, the aspect of who owns funds and control a certain media house determines the content that the media house produces. This means that media houses operate under the ideologies of those who fund, owns and control them to a larger extent. Elliot (1977) argues that political economy of the media entails that "content of the media and the meanings carried by their messages are primarily determined by economic base of the organisations in which they are produced.

Commercial media organisation must cater for the needs of advertisers and produce audience maximising products, while those media institutions whose revenue are controlled by the dominant political institutions or by the state gravitates towards a middle ground or towards the heartland of prevailing consensus," (Gurevitch et al (1982: 13). This confirms the understanding that media produce content in the interests of a class which owns and controls them. In this instance, it is highly possible that *The Sunday Mail* owned by the State and *The Standard*, privately owned, in their coverage of ZANU PF and MDC-T related pre-election events and statements, they were influenced by the interests of those who own, fund and control them. This study examines the relationship between the two publications' ownership and their coverage of the pre-election events and statements. Thus, Wang (2003: 14) argues that "not only editorial and columns but also the coverage of news and features would reflect the political beliefs or interest of the owners." Shoemaker and Reese (1991) say newspapers prop up the political candidates with their owners or publishers' political attitudes. In this academic paper ZANU PF and MDC-T's pre-election discourses as portrayed by *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard*, forms the basis of the study.

Democracy and good governance

Most nations in the world and Zimbabwe in particular are governed through authorities elected into office for a certain time frame before the next government is elected into office

again. This is considered to be a democratic process. Campbell (2008) says "the essential idea of democracy is that the people have the right to determine who governs them. In most cases they elect the principal governing officials and hold them accountable for their actions. Democracies also impose legal limits on the government's authority by guaranteeing certain rights and freedoms to their citizens," (Sodaro 2004: 5). Thus there are electoral processes set as means in which the citizens decides who to rule them and in a proper democracy the citizens are supposed to as well detect the way they want to be ruled.

Zimbabwe is one of the many nations that adopted the elections as the only way for governments to be elected into power since independence in 1980. The term of office for the elected government is five years before the next government is chosen. Thus, democracy varies from nation to nation. "The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote," (Schumpeter, 1975 [1942]: 269). This is what Sartori (1987) labels "electoral democracy", which points to the fact that elections are normatively essential. It is during elections that the "political candidates or parties compete for the support (votes) of the electorate," (Stromback 2005: 334).

Zimbabwe when gearing towards the 2018 harmonised elections, the ruling ZANU PF and MDC-T started campaigning for the elections in 2017, in which most of their campaigns were played in the media. Thus, for democracy to be visible, the media is the best instrument for the dissemination of information to do with the elections. In this case, for people to exercise their right to choose leaders they want, they must be given enough information about who they are and what they can offer when elected into office. In an ideal situation elections are seen as a proper gateway to good governance as much as they are the most appropriate thermometer to measure the level of democracy in a nation. The aspect of good governance is measured through the way how an election to install that government was conducted.

According to the United Nations, governance means the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). Governance can be used in several contexts such as corporate governance, international governance, national governance and local governance. Graham et al (2003: 1) defines governance as "a process whereby societies or organizations make their important decisions, to determine whom they involve in the process and how they render account." Good governance is a normative conception of the values according to which the act of governance is realized, and the method by which groups of social actors interact in a certain social context. Thus, to achieve good governance the democratic processes such as elections are the core as they are believed to make those in leadership positions accountable to the electorate. Good governance is based on the transparency of the decision-making process, which ensures that information is freely available and accessible to those involved or affected by the

decisions taken. The study explores as to how *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard* covered the pre-electoral process by or about ZANU PF and MDC-T which may ensure future good governance.

Freedom of expression, press and information

Freedom of expression, press and information are intertwined concepts meaning that they all work hand in glove. Thus, the freedom of expression can be exercised in an environment where the press is free and information also flows freely within the society. Previous studies in attempts to establish facts about the state of the media and journalists' freedoms in Zimbabwe by media activists' organizations namely the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Zimbabwe (2004), the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ) (2013) and the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (MMPZ) all point to a frustrated, muzzled and gagged media and journalists. Studies conducted by the three organisations on varying periods from year 2000 to 2013 on the operation of media and journalists in Zimbabwe exposes media polarisation and infringement of journalistic ethics, principles and freedoms.

As I earlier on highlighted that issues of ownership and funding can be the major factors contributing to the manner the media behave, (MMPZ) (2000: 4) referring to the state media argues that "when the media receive money out of the public purse, they have obligation to provide information impartially to every member of the public," and this compels them to be true watch dogs of the government and society. Thus, the lack of freedoms of the media and journalists was blamed on the application of some sections of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) of 2002 which restricted the extent to which the media and journalists could exercise their freedoms in covering particularly politics.

de Nelson (2007: 1) says "the right to freedom of information and responsible journalism are fundamental to economic and human development. Media and Journalists freedoms are their abilities to access information and publish it without being intimidated, victimised through violence and litigation." Chuma (2013: 15) says "Zimbabwean journalists operate in an environment that both enhances and impedes their work." Thus, Chibwe (2012) says the state media in Zimbabwe are criticised for being pro-ZANU-PF while MMPZ (2002), Chari (2008), Nyamanhindi (2008), Chimedza (2008) and Waldahl (2004) note that the private media in Zimbabwe were believed to be pro-Morgan Tsvangirai and Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T). The media's allegiance to certain political parties, show that they are not free but their stance is influenced by the powers behind them. This necessitated the study to examine how *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard* newspapers covered pre-electioneering discourse by or about ZANU PF and MDC-T in July 2017 alone.

However, freedoms of expression, press, and information are guaranteed in the Zimbabwean constitution. Section 249 seem to be promoting freedom of the media through clause (1) (a) which states that Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC)'s

functions are to promote and develop freedom of the media, (f) to ensure that people of Zimbabwe have fair and wide access to information, (j) to conduct research into issues relating to freedom of the press and of expression and in that regard to promote reforms in the law. However, arguments presented in this part of the study expose that there are varying factors which to some extent curtail the freedom of expression, press and information. These factors possibly influenced the manner in which *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard* reported about ZANU PF and MDC-T election related news. de-Nelson (2007: 173) notes that "the right to freedom of information is generally accepted as necessary to participatory democracy around the world." This study seeks to unravel whether the freedom of expression, press and information are upheld through the discourse analysis in which the articles in the two publications in reference form the basis of the study.

Discourse analysis

Data gathered from the selected newspapers' articles through thematic framing is analysed through the discourse analysis. The discourse of election is analysed with the focus on how *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard* represented the pre-election discourse about or by ZANU PF and MDC-T during the period under study. Briggs and Cobley (2002: 13) say "discourse analysis is the recognition of the features of language which identify those discourses." Thus, Howarth (2000) describes a kind of Marxist inflection to the understanding of discourse when he writes that: "the task of discourse analysis is to examine this dialectical relationship' between discourse and social systems 'and to expose the way in which language and meanings are used by the powerful to deceive and oppress the dominated," (Briggs and Cobley (2002: 13). They note that "discourse analysis is the analysis of a text through identification of language, so as to reveal its discourses and to comment on their meanings. It is also about the revelation of the ideology behind the text. It is about certain understandings of the subject of the discourse," (p.14). This study analyses the pre-election reportage of or about ZANU PF and MDC-T assessing whether their ownership and funding have a bearing in the positions they adopted in the coverage through the identification of themes.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on a qualitative methodology influenced by the critical theory perspectives. Thus, "qualitative research is grounded in the assumption that features of the social interpretations by different individuals vary and these interpretations tend to be transitory and situational, that is they are dependent on the changes in time and setting in which the research is carried out" (Borg and Gall (1996: 28). The study uses discourse analysis of *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard* articles to bring out qualitative meaning of the phenomenon. These two newspapers differ in ownership and funding while they compete for the same market and are published weekly every Sunday. As the study is influenced by critical theory, Harvey (1990: 1) says "critical social research is underpinned

by a critical-dialectical perspective which attempts to dig beneath the surface of historically specific, oppressive, social structures.” Thus, the background ownership and funding of the publications is possibly likely to influence the positions they adopt in their coverage which then informs this study.

The strength of the study is the election mood that the political parties already had ahead of 2018 elections. Thus, Schudson (1991: 228) argues that “if contemporary social conflicts are increasingly acted out in a complex cultural domain, it becomes crucial for critical research to explore how the “campaigns” of “communities” may be, and are in fact, processed through the media.” This study will rely on purposive sampling of articles published by both *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard*'s editions in July 2017 alone focusing on political statements made by or about ZANU PF and MDC-T over the 2018 elections. Thus, Singleton et al (1988) describes purposive sampling as the selection of elements which have the most characteristics, representative or typical attributes of the population being investigated. Basing on the sampled articles, the study comes up with themes which guide the discourse analysis in the study and the study units are the articles published.

Method

A case study of *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard* focusing on articles published in July 2017 guides the study. Thus, Creswell (1994: 12) defines case study as a “type of qualitative research in which the researcher explores a single entity or phenomenon bounded by time and activity and collects detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period.” Bell (1993) says a case study enables researchers to concentrate on instances hidden in large scale surveys crucial to success or failure of systems or organisations. Pre-election related articles published by the two publications are the objects of the study. ZANU PF and MDC-T are regarded as subjects in which the objects of analysis can be identified and analysed.

IV. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPERS ARTICLES

Discourse analysis of *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard* newspapers' articles published in July 2017 covering the pre-election statements by or about ZANU PF and MDC-T in relation to the 2018 elections managed to identify elections and regime change as major themes in the coverage. There are two strands of reporting which the study established to have been adopted by the two publications in their reporting of either ZANU PF or MDC-T. *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard* in their editions from July 2 to July 30 2017 either de-campaigned or campaigned for either of the two political parties. This study's questions, although interrelated, are answered through this analysis in such a way as to build up a composition of how speech acts are used to portray different realities. Thus, speech acts in the articles, their implications for readers and political position of the newspapers is established through the analysis below organised into themes.

Theme 1: Election Campaign and De-campaign: Regime Change and Misrule

Through *The Sunday Mail* and *The Standard* both ZANU PF and MDC-T campaigned and de-campaigned each other through portraying each other as western sponsored regime change agents and monumental failure regime due to misrule. *The Standard* in its July 2 to 8, 2017 on page 4 in an article authored by Tatenda Chitagu titled, “*Mugabe opulence leaves sleepy Masvingo in awe*” adopted a deliberative reporting approach which stirred more debate as to what is the fact about the issue. The story was a coverage of Mugabe's Youth Interface rally which was held in Masvingo obviously as a campaign for the 2018 election, but the story carried a lot of negatives about the now late veteran leader which proved to be purely a de-campaign for him. Even the title of the story portrayed him as wealthy, yet visiting the poverty stricken province which was blamed on his government. Thus, the title of the story leaves the readers pondering as to whether Mugabe was really wealthy or it was just a figment of the reporter's imagination. The discourse in the story is purely 2018 election and regime change in relation with Mugabe's incumbent government that was portrayed as having failed to develop the country and the questions are whether those people were going to vote for that failure. The story presented an analysis of the problems faced by Masvingo residents who were struggling to get cash from the banks and get just disturbed by Mugabe's convoy passing through to the venue of the rally. The deliberative narrative is quoted below:

“*Just a stone's throw away from Mucheke Stadium, ...venue of the youth interface rally is Mucheke - one of the oldest residential areas built a long back by...white settler regime... with houses that resemble domes, popularly known as misana yenzou due to the arch shaped roofs. The opulence shown by the president is in stark contrast to the lives that people of masana yenzou in Mucheke A suburb are living as well as the rest of Zimbabweans where there is glaring unemployment and poverty.”(The Standard- July 2-8: 2017: 4 para 6)*

This narrative leaves readers having to deliberate on who is responsible for the setback in a Masvingo suburb as it remained poor under Mugabe's 37 years rule then, yet he just visited the area displaying his wealth through the flashy cars entourage. This part of the article seems to justify the reason why people of Masvingo would not vote for Mugabe and ZANU PF in the 2018 election. The words such as ‘Zimbabwe has glaring unemployment and poverty’ insinuate misrule and poor governance by ZANU PF regime. Hall (2012: 22) says “quoting opinions is itself a deliberative act” and argues that “doing so elevates the newspapers to the status of arbitrator of arguments, allowing them to frame what they believe relevant and necessary.” In this case *The Standard* quoted opinions of the residents against Mugabe and ZANU PF. One resident said;

“*ZANU PF promised 2, 2 million jobs in 2013 and this is only showing that they have dismally failed to deliver on*

their electoral promises. The youth should give a serious hiding to ZANU PF in the next elections for lying to them...Mugabe is a monumental failure and it is time Zimbabweans tried a different leader to take us out of this mess and this leader is none other than the tried and tested Morgan Richard Tsvangirai."(The Standard July 2-8 2017:4-para 18-21).

The Standard reporter in this part of the story uses historical evidence of failure by the ruling ZANU PF as presented by the sources who are in discontent with its rule. Guerin and Hallas, (2007: 10) argue that these are cases "when the newspapers provide a testimony to happenings...in order to confirm them: bearing witness affirms the reality of the event witnessed...[and] produces 'truth.'" Testimonies given against ZANU PF and Mugabe exposes their categorical failure to govern and this is used as a reason for the party not to be voted for in the 2018 elections. The publication presents Tsvangirai as an alternative to Mugabe. The story itself is littered with negatives about Mugabe and ZANU PF in a way that present the regime change ideology then preached by the MDC-T and then its leader Tsvangirai as the only option. There is no single sentence which speaks well of Mugabe and ZANU PF but all portrays angry and dissatisfied residents verbally attacking ZANU PF. Thus, the agenda as to what the interviewees in the story should talk about was set by the reporter to a point where not even a single person talks good about Mugabe and his party. This presents an argument as to whether *The Standard* played its perceived public sphere role or not.

In the contrary *The Sunday Mail* of July 2 2017 in a story on page 2 titled, "Mbeki consults President Mugabe" authored by Kuda Bwititi toned down all the emotions displayed in *The Standard* report. Thus, the article shifted focus to the South African Ex-President Thabo Mbeki having expressed concerns over the relentless onslaught on former liberation movements by the Western powers angling for regime change. The article states that then President Mugabe told supporters during the youth interface rally in Masvingo. Thus, it ignores the concerns of the citizens over obvious failures by ZANU PF government which landed the country into serious economic problems affecting everyone. The article uses the informing speech act in which only a point of view of Mugabe and his party are projected and validated by the assertion that even former SA President Mbeki feared for ZANU PF facing onslaught of regime change agenda. Quoted part of the story reads;

"At the Presidential youth Interface rally in Masvingo... President Mugabe revealed that Dr Mbeki was concerned about the relentless onslaught on former liberation movements. The President said Mbeki had singled out ZANU PF among the few remaining movements with strong ideological and liberation leanings." (The Sunday Mail July 2, 2017: 2- para 3 & 4).

The story is framed in a manner that portrays any non-liberation political parties aspiring to assume power from

ZANU PF as illegal. Thus, "framing is considered a narrative structure within journalism; a regulative technique intended to 'prioritise some facts or developments over others, thereby promoting one particular interpretation of events,'" (Norris et al 2003: 11). The words onslaught and regime change used insinuate bad approach to change of government while the article in this part also ignores the fact that the purported regime change could be as a result of ZANU PF government's misrule. The story further quotes Mugabe verbatim gravitating his call for resistance against regime change as cited below;

"The president implored youths to be wary of the west's regime change agenda." "Maintain the position that we had in the past vis-a-vis imperialism and the onslaught on us to have regime change. Europe is not accepting anyone who is not their choice. They would want to choose or get into position of influence through their own people in our political systems," Mugabe is quoted as saying in the story. (The Sunday Mail July 2 2017: 2- para 11 &12).

Mugabe in the story make no mention of home grown opposition political parties as legitimate to change his government, but insinuate that what the opposition parties are doing in Zimbabwe is not their own making but an influence from the west, hence the need for serious resistance by the patriotic citizens. These remarks were made at a rally where obviously Mugabe was campaigning for re-election in the 2018 elections. He sought to justify his hold on to power after 37 years of rule, through condemning regime change agenda which he claimed is instigated through some local political systems. The whole article by this state owned weekly newspaper is littered with condemnation of the west's ploy to reverse Zimbabwe's liberation gains. Mugabe did not admit failure by his government to be the result of opposition formation. Thus, the article serves to impose ZANU PF's ideology that the liberation movements are the only eligible and legitimate organs to rule Zimbabwe, anything else is an agent of an evil regime change agenda sponsors.

Theme 2: Mistrust and Enmity between ZANU PF and MDC-T

The analysis of *The Standard* of July 9 to 15 2017 and *The Sunday Mail* of July 9 2017 exposes serious mistrust and enmity between ZANU PF and the MDC-T as portrayed by the publications. In a story on page 4 authored by Obey Manayiti, titled, "ZEC's BVR saga in new twist," *The Standard* reported that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) was set to stir another controversy after it emerged that it was likely to use an old server for the biometric voter registration (BVR) exercise ahead of 2018 elections. Thus, the report states that opposition parties among them MDC-T have mistrust on ZEC that it is working with the ruling ZANU PF to rig the elections. The newspaper took a critical stance against ZEC and seemed to be pro-opposition political parties. Aspects of mistrust portrayed by the newspaper in the story are quoted as follows;

"Opposition and civil society organisations have been raising concern over the manner ZEC is conducting itself

in terms of voter registration. They fear ZANU PF which is electronically updating its structures will try to manipulate the data storage system and crowd it with its supporters.”(The Standard July 9-15 2017: 4 para 13 &14).

The Standard in this case portrayed the mistrust the opposition political parties have on ZANU PF. This is because since ZEC leadership is appointed by President Robert Mugabe, they were suspected to be likely to push for the whims of the ruling party. Thus, basing on the fact that ZANU PF was already in charge of the state institutions, there was so much mistrust on all state institutions expected to ensure a free and fair election. The publication seemed to be exposing the negatives associated with ZANU PF’s advantages ahead of other parties in controlling the electoral body. Björklund (1991) in Wadahl (2000: 28) say “in countries where freedom of the press is not restricted, the media can adopt three main positions in their relationship to political parties and politicians.” Wadahl argue that “the first is to serve as loyal channels for particular parties and politicians, acting as reliable partners and enabling them to exercise a high degree of control over their political messages. Parties in such a position can feel sure that their political message will reach the voters and that their positions will be defended in the struggle for their favour. The second position is for the media to function as an independent arena, making broadcasting time and column space available to political actors of different shades of opinion.”

In the aspect of enmity, *The Sunday Mail* of July 9 2017 on page 2 in a story titled, “New date for HE’s Mat North rally” reported that ZANU PF Matabeleland North Chairman Richard Moyo declared MDC-T and its leader as enemies whose dream of winning election against Mugabe and ZANU PF were never to come true. The story was covering Mugabe’s youth interface rally which was earlier on scheduled for July 14 but got rescheduled to another date as the then President had other commitments. Moyo declared MDC-T and Tsvangirai as enemies instead of referring to them as competitors. His remarks are quoted below;

‘The youth requested the interface (rally) but as their parents we have to accompany them and besides we are talking of our President - he would also like to see us, so please come in your numbers. We want to show the enemy how powerful our party is as we approach the 2018 elections. Let MDC-T leader Morgan Tsvangirai be stressed and anyone who is dreaming of defeating us next year would be awoken from their slumber and face reality.’(The Sunday Mail July 9 2017: 2- para 12 & 13).

In this article *The Sunday Mail* adopted a ZANU PF liaison department approach where only the ruling party’s views and emotions are vented in which the MDC-T is made to appear as an enemy not a political contestant for power. Thus, only ZANU PF is portrayed as good and strong enough to retain power after the 2018 election without even consideration what citizens may view as monumental failure to run the country by the same party.

Theme 3: Coercing Church voters and Opposition Coalition

Accusations were arising from the opposition MDC-T and Civic groups that ZANU PF was secretly registering members of the Johane Marange Church as voters ahead of 2018 elections so as to capitalise in their numbers to win against the opposition. *The Sunday Mail* of July 16 2017 on page 2 in an article titled, “200 000 pilgrims for Marange Passover” authored by Cletus Mushanawani was defensive of ZANU PF through quoting then Information Media and Broadcasting Services Minister Christopher Mushohwe dismissing the opposition parties claims over parallel voter registration. Thus, allegations of coercing pilgrims for 2018 elections through facilitating their secret registration as voters created an impression that the whole process of registration and the elections was flawed. Mugabe was scheduled to address the pilgrims thereby creating the suspicions of a foul play. However, the option for ZANU PF to defend itself from the claims was through *The Sunday Mail* story thereby confirming the view that media can be used as a sphere for contestation. Thus, Dearing and Rogers (1996) quoted in Wadahl (2000: 20) argue that “political influence is to a large extent dependent on the ability of politicians to put their pet causes on the political agenda, focusing voter attention on areas where they stand to make political gains.” Wadahl (2000: 20) says “in modern society this can only be done with the assistance of the media.” In ZANU PF’s defence Minister Mushohwe as quoted in the publication said;

“These utterances come from ideologically bankrupt people. Why is it they are already running scared well before the elections? People should not listen to perennial under achievers who always look for scapegoats for their poor showing in any election. The opposition should continue with their daydreaming and that will not stop us from engaging everyone including churches. We will continue working with churches that support government programmes.”(The Sunday Mail July 16 2017: 2- para 13 & 15).

The political stand point advantage of ZANU PF that it was and is in charge of government which controls the state media, *The Sunday Mail* being one of them accorded it with all the space to rant against opposition parties who were not given a right to reply in the same story. Only ZANU PF’s side of the story was given more attention without opposition. Thus, Iyengar and Kinder (1987) in Wadahl (2000: 20) state that “matters given priority by the media appear more important than matters to which they pay little attention, and politicians rarely win a public hearing for their favourite causes if they do not arouse media interest. The focus the media give particular social problems is therefore important for the criteria in which the voters base their assessments of political life and its actors.” This means that if only State media is available ZANU PF would be at an advantage of selling its policies and ideologies to the electorate and win the elections with a wider margin.

The opposition MDC-T had *The Standard* as an alternative voice where issues of grand coalition against ZANU PF which has ruled Zimbabwe since 1980 were sold out to the audience. The idea was that opposition parties should contest the elections as a combined force in 2018 in efforts to win against ZANU PF. In that regard MDC-T leader was touted as most eligible candidate for the coalition named MDC Alliance and the media were seen as tools of information dissemination about political manoeuvres. Thus, “Modern media are society’s major source of political knowledge. It is not possible for voters to form considered opinions on political issues without relevant and credible information from the media, and according to liberal theory, media should act as an information agency facilitating the functioning of democracy,” (Curran 2002: 225). In this regard *The Standard* of July 16 to 22 2017 on page 2 in an article authored by Obey Manayiti titled, “*Tsvangirai gets a coalition boast*” reported that at least 10 political parties under the United Citizens Alliance (UCA) threw their weight behind Tsvangirai to be the candidate to challenge Mugabe in the 2018 elections. The story relied on various politicians to buttress the point that they supported Tsvangirai’s candidature. The discourse here was regime change through a coalition strategy. Some of the quotes picked from the article read;

“Our preferred candidate is Dr Morgan Tsvangirai. Suppose we put Mai Mujuru (Joice) of National People’s Party, she is only two years in opposition. We have to go for Tsvangirai because he has managed to stand the test of time against ZANU PF,” (UCA Chair Jeolson Mugari).

“We can’t afford to split the votes again come 2018 elections. As the ...youth forum we are saying lets rally behind only one candidate who is Morgan Tsvangirai.” (National Electoral Agenda youth Chair Twanda Kalonga). (*The Standard* of July 16- 22 2017: 2- Para 7, 8 & 13).

The use of words such as ‘preferred candidate and stand the test of time’ in reference to Tsvangirai’s political life and activism insinuate his overhaul endorsement by opposition political parties, the point that stood to be challenged by other members as imposition. Thus, some political parties’ members challenged Tsvangirai’s candidature. The framing of the story was a clearly card staking and glittering generality form of propaganda in which certain value and character was associated with Tsvangirai. This concurs with Norris et al (2003: 11)’s assertion that “framing is considered a narrative structure within journalism; a regulative technique intended to ‘prioritise some facts or developments over others, thereby promoting one particular interpretation of events.’”

Theme 4: Bootlicking, hero worship and threats

The Standard of July 30 to August 5 2017 on page 3 carried a story titled, “*ZANU PF officials are donkeys: Chipanga,*” in which the then ZANU PF Youth leader Kudzayi Chipanga was reported as having taken his bootlicking of Mugabe to higher levels by likening him to Jesus. Thus, Chipanga reportedly made the remarks during Mugabe’s Youth interface

rally at Chinhoyi University of Technology Stadium. Chipanga likened all ZANU PF leaders to donkeys carrying Mugabe just like the one which Jesus rode on. While *The Standard* interpreted Chipanga’s remarks as purely bootlicking, ZANU PF used Chipanga’s words to portray Mugabe as a righteous man who saved everyone and who should be supported to remain in power as long as he lives. Chipanga’s remarks were quoted as follows;

“Let me tell you this, we are all donkeys, just like the one which carried Jesus and this includes every ZANU PF member, ministers, politburo members and vice presidents. You can only get recognition if you have Mugabe...He is our Jesus, you can only get a ministerial post if you have Mugabe... without which you are nothing.” (*The Standard* July 30 -August 5 2017: 3 paragraph 3 & 4).

In narrating the alleged bootlicking *The Standard* stated that Chipanga who made a habit to quote the scriptures in his bootlicking of Mugabe said the then 93 year old ruler must be honoured for liberating Zimbabweans. This was as if he was the only person who went to war to liberate Zimbabwe. The publication quoted metaphors and similes such as ‘we are all donkeys- like the one which carried Jesus and he is our Jesus.’ All this was said by Chipanga as a campaign for Mugabe’s candidature in the 2018 election. However, interpretation depicted from *The Standard* reportage could be that Chipanga did that only to earn a position from Mugabe, while ZANU PF’s point of view of the remarks were to exhibit the unshaken and unwavering support that Mugabe had, such that opposition parties were to forget thinking about defeating him in the 2018 elections.

In what appears to be hero worshiping for Mugabe, *The Sunday Mail* of July 30 2017 in story authored by Levi Mukarati that starts on front page and spills to page 5, heaped a lot of praises for the veteran leader. The publication described how he was welcome by the supporters as an iconic leader at Chinhoyi University of Technology during his youth interface rally. The large chunk of the story most of it in a Shona language was just a narration of events highlighting the arrival of Mugabe and how he was received. First paragraph of the story reads;

“President Mugabe was yesterday given a reverberating homecoming in Chinhoyi with tens of thousands of people turning out for his interface rally with youths in his birth province of Mashonaland West. The province showed why it has been dubbed “Mashonaland Best” as people came out in droves for the opportunity to hear the president address them. (*The Sunday Mail* July 30 2017: 1& 5- para 1 & 2).

This part of the article clearly seem to be seeking to portray Mugabe as having a great following such that opposition had no chance to challenge him in the 2018 election. Thus, the crowds at the rally may tend to even discourage voters to vote for opposition parties thinking that their votes will be a waste of time. The same article further reported on Mugabe relating

historical events involving the liberation struggle emphasising on the need to preserve the gains of the struggle. He sought to instil fear on supporters, that allowing enemies to take over the country was detrimental to the future of the country. The story quoted Mugabe relating about the battle of Chinhoyi where several liberation fighters were killed by the colonial soldiers during the war and said they did not die to have the nation taken by the enemy. Mugabe's quoted remarks reads;

"They shed their blood. They left us therefore a legend and that legend meant that we too must be prepared to fight to the end for our country. If it meant sacrificing ourselves in the same way shedding our blood let it be. If it meant being thrust into prison and being tortured let it be." (The Sunday Mail of July 30 2017:5- para 24).

This part of the story is instilling fear to the audience to refuse change of government. This was used as a campaign strategy to keep ZANU PF in power for ever in the view that it is the one that brought independence. The Sunday Mail in this case was used as a conveyor of information and in doing so the MDC-T which has for many cases been described as western sponsored purveyors of the regime change agenda was not given publicity and mentioned in the story.

V. FINDINGS

Discourse analysis of the news articles published in *The Sunday Mail* shows that the publication gravitated towards supporting Mugabe and ZANU PF as the best leader and entity to be retained in power in the 2018 elections. The publication fully endorsed Mugabe and his party as already possibly successful contenders in the country to continue in power after 2018 elections. It would seem as if there were no any other political parties and candidates in the country except ZANU PF and Mugabe. The publication also hero worshiped and over exaggerated Mugabe's welcome at interface rallies especially in Chinhoyi. In the four stories that were analysed from the publication's four editions published in the month of July 2017, the study established that all the articles reported positively about ZANU PF and Mugabe. However, the publication in the four articles seemed to be labelling the opposition MDC-T as not home grown, but as pushing for the regime change to bring back former colonisers and even described MDC-T and Tsvangirai as enemies instead of political competitors.

The position adopted by *The Sunday Mail* in its reportage exposes that since it is state owned under the Zimpapers group, this could have influenced the manner its content was framed and produced. The analysis of the stories found out that the publication took a clear bias approach towards propping up the ruling ZANU PF, its leader Mugabe then and marginalising the opposition MDC-T's voice, as not even a single official was quoted in the stories except ZANU PF officials attacking them. Thus, Stevenson and Greene (1980:115) define bias as "the systematic differential treatment of one candidate, one party or one side of an issue over an extended period of time and a failure to treat all voices in the marketplace of ideas equally." Below is a table

representing the number of stories with attacks and praises either to MDC-T or ZANU PF as made in the articles published by *The Sunday Mail*. Three stories attacked the MDC-T and its leader, while all the four stories never attacked ZANU PF and Mugabe but praised the party and its leader.

Table 1. Representation of attacks and praises on both the MDC-T and ZANU PF as reported in The Sunday Mail articles analysed.

Party/ leader names	Attacks	Praises	Total
MDC-T/Morgan Tsvangirai	3	0	3
ZANU PF/ Robert Mugabe	0	4	4
Total stories analysed			4

Discourse analysis of news articles published in *The Standard* established that the publication's articles averagely gravitated towards propping up the opposition MDC-T views and highly criticised ZANU PF and Mugabe. The study unravelled that the publication portrayed Mugabe and his party as being in love with flashy and opulent life and not caring about the suffering masses but being concerned with staying in power. Thus, Mugabe's visit to Masvingo's poverty stricken area in flashy cars is portrayed as an insult to the poor residents yawning for success in life. The publication recorded the attacks on Mugabe by residents who describe him as a monumental failure but however goes on to record the same people opting for the leadership of Tsvangirai whom they describe as tried and tested. In two of the articles analysed, Tsvangirai was portrayed as the only leader who can take the nation out of poverty imposed on people by ZANU PF. However, some fears of possible rigging through clandestine voter registration process by ZANU PF are raised in the publication by MDC-T. One of the articles criticises ZANU PF youth leader Kudzayi Chipanga as Mugabe's bootlicker after he was quoted as saying Mugabe is their Jesus and saviour. All in all *The Standard* had three articles among the analysed which attacked Mugabe and ZANU PF officials and two stories which praised Tsvangirai. This shows that the publication in its overall reportage was against Mugabe and ZANU PF but was aimed at projecting the opposition MDC-T's views as valid and substantial when the electorate make choices of leaders they want for the next government after the 2018 elections. Below is the table explaining the reportage dynamics in the *Standard*.

Table 2. Representation of attacks and praises on both the MDC-T and ZANU PF as reported in The Standard articles analysed.

Party/ leader names	Attacks	Praises	Total
MDC-T/Morgan Tsvangirai	0	2	2
ZANU PF/ Robert Mugabe	3	0	3
Total stories analysed			4

The findings above mean that the owners and funders of *The Standard's* interests were angled towards the change of government in Zimbabwe through the support of MDC-T ahead of 2018 election by criticising the government in

power. Shoemaker and Mayfield (1987) say the news content in newspapers is under the control of those who fund the media.

VI. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary of the overall findings, this article unravelled that *The Sunday Mail* out rightly supported Mugabe and his ZANU PF in its all four articles analysed and in those four articles three of them attacked MDC-T and its leader discrediting them as not worth to govern because they were being used by the former colonisers in a regime change agenda. The study also established that *The Standard* out of its four articles analysed, three of them seriously criticised Mugabe and ZANU PF as the destroyers of citizens' life and future, while two articles portrayed MDC-T and Tsvangirai as the most suitable party and leader to be in the next government after 2018 elections. Thus, basing on the aspect of political economy of the media (ownership and funding) the two publications are highly influenced by their owners and funders interests in framing and producing their content in terms of political allegiance. Thus, *The Sunday Mail* since it is owned by the state which at the moment is run by ZANU PF, is mandated to pursue and project the interests of the ruling government. *The Standard* has its niche market of the anti-government citizens and companies who assist through advertising and sales revenue gains. This means that in its coverage of the pre-election statements and events by ZANU PF and MDC-T it was influenced by its clientele and the interest of those who fund or owns it in its coverage.

In conclusion, the two publications' positions in their reportage of the pre-election rhetoric were based on agenda setting influence by the same political economy of the media. Thus, it is assumed that those who fund and own the two publications influenced the editorial staff to adopt a position where their reportage was biased either towards ZANU PF and Mugabe or Tsvangirai and MDC-T. The findings are that both publications were too bias with *The Sunday Mail* bias towards Mugabe and ZANU PF and attacked Tsvangirai and MDC-T. *The Standard* was highly bias against ZANU PF, though a bit average towards supporting Tsvangirai and MDC-T. Thus, two articles out of four analysed seemed to be supporting Tsvangirai and MDC-T.

In recommendations this study emphasise that as long as the media's owners and funders have a lot of say on what their content must be, there will be no balanced and objective media coverage of politics. There is a need for government authorities particularly the legislature to craft laws which will ensure autonomy of the media through compelling the media owners not to interfere with their media content and forcing the government to refrain from abusing the state media. Even those media houses which are state owned have to be kept away from the political or politicians' control, they must be allowed to operate as independent entities. Also the journalists and management of the media houses must not be political appointees who will take advantage of their positions to use

the media to prop up their political parties and leaders. It is recommended that both the state and private owned newspapers must be free to operate as purely public spheres where all citizens are accessed with equal opportunity to use them for their own opinions and interests. In all essence, the print media must exercise their watchdog function to safeguard the misgivings of the government, corporate world and society at large.

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