

Zimbabwe Election Project 2008

Background

Elections were going to be held in Zimbabwe in March 2008 (Wikipedia entry : http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zimbabwean_presidential_election,_2008)

Incumbent, Robert Mutgaba ZANU-PF party were going to rig the election

Opposition party, MDC, splintered in two groups; Morgan Tsvangirai and Arthur Mutambara (AM).



Figure 1: Arthur Mutambara at the World Economic Forum

Action

Mark Turrell (MT) designed a plan to ensure fairer elections with practically zero cost, and zero risk to individuals, that could be implemented almost instantly.

At WEF Davos in Jan 2008, MT met AM. AM asked MT to design a plan that AM could implement with his local resources. The constraints were:

- 5 weeks before the elections
- no budget available
- no one could know the plan (laws against 'harming Mutgaba', plus AM was also 'fighting' Morgan T)

The plan was based on “**crowdsourcing election monitoring**”.

Elements of the Plan

1) Understanding of the 2008 Election Process

- 45 minute interview with AM at Davos
- learned that there would be 4,000 polling stations, 26M total inhabitants (smaller voting population)
- one party needed half the vote to get parliament, and 55% of vote to get President
- there was a moment of transparency – the votes would be counted at local polling stations, and the results posted on the front door of local stations for 30 – 60 minutes to allow local people to see their local vote was honest
- the most likely way of cheating the vote was to invent the final results, irrespective of the local vote
- the main independent election monitoring group was the SADC & African Union. It was expected that local monitoring would be honest, whilst the final report would be rigged.

2) Creation of the Plan

Using the “Science of Spread” techniques developed by MT (now included in his new marketing & strategy company, Orcasci – www.orcasci.com) , MT designed the plan based on the following core elements:

- **history analog** – 2006 Afghan elections had been crowdsourced using SMS text messaging, with monitors typing in the results (some error rate)
- **power of abundance** – if we had 1,000 helpers, we are at less risk than just 100
- **power of instant transfer of information** – if we can get information instantly, the bad guys cannot respond fast enough to stop it
- **moment of transparency** – all systems have a moment – and place – of transparency

- **power of pre-existing networks** – use a network of people who already exist and who already are conditioned to receiving and acting on messages to scale any response
- **power of visuals** – more proof if actually have pictures, rather than just numbers from the monitors
- **fault tolerant system** – we assumed that the MDC group had been infiltrated, so we would design the entire program as a need-to-know program. This would also protect people on the ground as they would not know what they were supposed to do until the last moment – or why.
- **Power & credibility of global communication hub** – once we had tallied up the results, we would release an anonymous press release to the global press who were likely to carry the news and add credibility to the results

3) Outline of the Plan – as Originally Designed

Get 1,000 people with camera phones on the ground standing outside the polls

- cover the largest polls to count the most votes

Use the existing MDC network of supporters to get 1,000 people

- over 15,000 supporters
- most using text messaging to coordinate
- over 1,000 had camera phones or could carry one
- they were used to receiving messages and could be trusted to do what they were told

Confirm with 1,000 people to stand next to their appointed station, with a charged up phone

Text message them on close of the polls to take a picture of their local result

Upload it instantly via MMS to a web site in South Africa

Team of 10 people (students) reviewed each picture and turned it into a shared spreadsheet

- use sampling techniques to ensure quality of

visual-to-number translation

- could request a picture retake if blurry

Upon completion of count, create press release with the results

Share the press release with main news agencies (AP, Reuters) and main news services (CNN, BBC, etc)

4) Implementation of the Plan

In the 5 weeks from the original plan to the vote, AM secured support from 1,000 MDC supporters to be involved in the plan (without telling them what it was).

AM received a large number of additional camera phones from USAID locally

A tech team was set up in SA with a web site to handle the pictures and review process

A student team was gathered in SA to review the photos

On the day itself, a text was sent at the last minute asking for the photos to be taken.



Figure 2: Local results - Source AP

Results of the Plan

I hereby certify that the above is a correct statement of all ballot papers received by me. (Signed)..... *[Signature]*
 Presiding Officer

Dated this..... 29..... day of..... MARCH..... 2008.....

PART B: RESULT OF COUNTING		
Names of Candidates	Party/Independent	Votes received
¹ MAKONI HERBERT STANLEY SIMBA	INDEPENDENT	23
² MUGABE ROBERT GABRIEL	ZANU (PF)	122
³ TOWUNGANA LANGTON	INDEPENDENT	1
⁴ TSVANGIRAI MORGAN	MDC	480
⁵		
⁶		
TOTAL VOTES RECEIVED		629
TOTAL VALID		3

I hereby certify that..... station (Signed)..... *[Signature]*
 Dated this..... 2.....

Figure 3: Harare, March 30: A voter looks at election results taped onto a wall in the suburb of Mbare (Source: The Guardian)

From Wikipedia:

On 30 March, [Tendai Biti](#) claimed victory for the MDC at a news conference, saying that the party held the lead based on partial and unofficial results and that the trend was "irreversible".^[59] According to the MDC, results from 35% of polling stations (as posted on the doors of the polling stations) showed Tsvangirai with 67% of the vote. Leaders of the security forces and government officials had warned the opposition against announcing unofficial results.^[1]

About the count:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vote_counting_for_Zimbabwean_presidential_election,_2008

According to projections issued by the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) late on 31 March, Tsvangirai was ahead with 49.4% to Mugabe's 41.8%; Makoni had 8.2%, and Towungana had 0.6%.^[6] On April 1, MDC Vice-President [Thokozani Khupe](#) said that, based on results from all but 27 constituencies, Tsvangirai had 56% of the vote and Mugabe had 37%.^[7] On the same day, the Electoral Commission invited the presidential candidates or their election managers to be present as results are collated,^[8] and Tsvangirai said that he would not declare victory until the Electoral Commission announced official results. Tsvangirai

also denied rumors that the MDC was engaged in talks with Mugabe.^[9] The Electoral Commission said that some ballot boxes were still arriving from the provinces.^[10]

The results released by the 'freedom fighters' showed that the MDC had achieved enough votes to stop Mutgaba winning the presidency and the parliamentary elections.

Following this transparency, there was a dialogue around the next phase of elections (which did not work out so well).

Lessons Learned

The tactics applied worked extremely well – a world first.

The budget was basically zero cost.

The time to implement, according to AM, was less than 10 hours of work.

The project could have produced better results with more people on the ground

- 1,300 people would have counted a larger share of the vote, leading to a 55% majority of the votes for the MDC and an immediate change in the presidency

Morgan Tsvangari was not aware of the project, and so was surprised by the outcome. This lost some momentum in being able to gain control of the key elements of power.

Notes

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