

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)

It was clear that the incumbent, Robert Mugabe, and his ZANU-PF party were going to rig the election.

The opposition party, MDC, was splintered into two groups which were lead by Morgan Tsvangirai and Arthur Mutambara (AM) respectively.



Figure 1: Arthur Mutambara at the World Economic Forum (WEF)

Action

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

At the World Economic Forum (WEF) Davos in January 2008, MT met AM. AM asked MT to design a plan that AM could implement with his local resources.

The following constraints had to be taken into account:

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

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

Elements of the Plan

1) Understanding the 2008 Election Process

- MT did a 45 minute interview with AM at Davos.
- There would be 4,000 polling stations in this country of 26M total inhabitants (the voting population would be smaller).
- The party would need just over half of the vote to dominate parliament, and 55% of the vote to be able to choose the President.
- There was a key 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 that 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 and championed by Orcasci, MT designed the plan based on the following core elements:

- **Learn from history:** The 2006 Afghan elections had been crowdsourced using SMS text messaging, with monitors typing in the results manually (generating some errors).
- **The power of abundance:** If we have 1,000 helpers, we are at less risk than if they number just 100.
- **The power of instant transfer of information:** If we can share the correct information instantly, the bad guys cannot respond fast enough to stop it.

- **The moment of transparency:** All systems have a moment – and place – of transparency.
- **The power of pre-existing networks:** In order to scale any response, use a network of people that already exists and who already are conditioned to receiving and acting on messages.
- **The power of visuals:** Your proof counts for more if you actually have pictures, rather than just using numbers from the monitors.
- **A fault-tolerant system:** We assumed that the MDC group had been infiltrated, so we would design the entire program on a need-to-know basis. 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.
- **The power & credibility of a global communication hub:** Once we had tallied up the results, we would make 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 polling stations. Make sure you cover the largest polling stations to count the most votes.

Use the existing MDC network of over 15,000 supporters to get these 1,000 people. Most were already using text messaging to coordinate their efforts. 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 that they would stand next to their appointed station, with a charged-up phone.

Send a text message to them on close of the polls asking them to take a picture of their local result. They would then upload it instantly via MMS to a web site in South Africa.

A team of 10 people (students) was to review each picture and turn it into a shared spreadsheet. Use sampling techniques to ensure the quality of the visual-to-number translation. Request a picture retake if it is too blurry.

Upon completion of the full count, create a press release with the results.

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



Figure 2: Local results (Source: AP)

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 South Africa with a web site to handle the pictures and the review process.

A student team was gathered in South Africa to review the photos.

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

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 VOTES RECEIVED		3
TOTAL VALID		629

I hereby certify that
 Dated this 29 day of MARCH, 2008
 (Signed) *[Signature]*
 Presiding Officer

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:

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

“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”. 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.”

[...]

“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%. 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%. On the same day, the Electoral Commission

invited the presidential candidates or their election managers to be present as results are collated, 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. The Electoral Commission said that some ballot boxes were still arriving from the provinces.”

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

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

Lessons Learned

The tactics applied worked extremely well – a world first.

The budget was practically zero. 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.

Contact

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