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The Election

As Zambia prepares to vote, political claims are racing through phones faster than many voters can verify them. MakaanDay examined allegations of foreign interference and found something more complicated: real events, unsupported claims and sophisticated political messaging increasingly occupying the same digital space.

From page 1

Part 1

By Charles Mafa

When Nathan Banda voted in Zambia’s historic 1991 election, he knew where most political messages came from.

Candidates stood before crowds. Political arguments played out on radio. Newspapers carried identifiable headlines and bylines. Rumours travelled through markets, workplaces and neighbourhoods — often taking days to move from Lusaka to places such as Mansa, Chipata or Solwezi.

Thirty-five years later, the 56-year-old is preparing to vote again.

But this is an election he barely recognises.

Political claims now arrive on his phone throughout the day. They appear in WhatsApp groups, Facebook posts and videos, sometimes stripped of their original source and forwarded repeatedly before anyone establishes whether they are true.

“Sometimes you don’t know what to believe anymore,” Banda says. “Everyone claims they have the truth.”

For 22-year-old University of Zambia student Mary Mwala*, there is no earlier election to compare it with. She is voting for the first time, and the digital contest is simply part of politics as she knows it.

Political videos and messages regularly reach her through WhatsApp and TikTok, she says, often forwarded by friends and relatives with little indication of who created them.

“Someone sends you a video and says, ‘This is what happened,’ but you don’t know who made it or whether it’s true,” Mwala says. “Sometimes people forward things so quickly that by the time someone corrects it, everyone has already believed it.”

The two voters, separated by a generation, are confronting the same problem as Zambia prepares to vote on 13 August: How does a voter know what — and whom — to believe?

Professor Nic Cheeseman, Professor of Democracy at the University of Birmingham, says the way elections are contested has “fundamentally changed” since 1991, with social media allowing political messages to travel faster and reach voters without rallies or direct contact with candidates.

“What we then see is a kind of cycle or web of information in which digital technology plays a critical part,” Cheeseman told MakaanDay.

Professor Stephen Chan has another vantage point.

The Professor of International Relations at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, lived and worked in Zambia in the 1980s and later became an Honorary Professor at the University of Zambia. In 2010, Chan was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) “for services to Africa and higher education,” and also the title of Eminent Scholar in Global Development by the International Studies Association. Chan was also awarded Zambia’s Presidential Insignia for Meritorious Achievement in 2022.

Now back in the country to observe the 2026 election, he has been watching the wider environment in which the campaign is taking place.

One thing struck him while travelling around Lusaka.

“Basically, what I have learnt just driving around Lusaka is that the only billboards you see are for the President and his party,” Chan said. “You have to look really hard to see even small posters for opposition parties, and even then, they tend to be from minority parties.”

Some of those parties, he said, were unfamiliar to him.

“Some of them I have not heard of before. I don’t know what their agendas are or what their manifestos say.”

President Hakainde Hichilema has campaigned on economic recovery, while opposition parties and voters have questioned who has benefited from it.

Ordinarily, such competing claims would form the substance of an election campaign: a government defending its record, opponents challenging it and voters deciding between them.

But beneath the rallies, manifesto launches and campaign promises, another contest is unfolding.

It is taking place on smartphones, in WhatsApp groups, Facebook feeds and TikTok videos, where genuine political debate competes with rumours, anonymous allegations, misleading information and increasingly sophisticated campaign messaging.

And the source of a message is not always obvious.

Neither is who paid for it, who helped create it or whose interests it ultimately serves.

What MakaanDay found

For the past three months, MakaanDay has been examining this less visible side of Zambia’s election — tracking political content, testing claims and investigating what can be established about some of the organisations and interests seeking to shape political narratives ahead of polling day.

What emerges instead was more complicated.

Genuine facts are being mixed with unsupported allegations. Foreign political consultants are operating alongside domestic campaigns. Claims of corporate political influence are being fiercely contested. And institutions responsible for safeguarding electoral integrity have spent much of the campaign disputing online rumours while providing limited public information about how they are responding to emerging threats.

For voters such as Banda and Mwala, the effect is the same: distinguishing legitimate political persuasion from manipulation — and established fact from speculation — has become increasingly difficult.

One Facebook post examined by MakaanDay illustrates the problem.

Israel, Pegasus and an allegation without evidence

Published by The Candidate, a Facebook page created in May 2021 with more than 78,000 followers and which regularly publishes content supportive of the opposition Patriotic Front (PF), the post alleged that Israeli operatives were working with the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) to manipulate the election.

It also alleged that the government had acquired Pegasus spyware for US\$5 million to rig the vote and suppress dissent.

MakaanDay found no credible evidence supporting either allegation.

Some elements woven into the post’s wider narrative were based on real events.

Israel reopened its embassy in Lusaka in 2025. Zambia has previously featured in international research concerning the use of Pegasus surveillance technology during the administration of the late President Edgar Lungu. The country’s cybersecurity laws have also prompted concerns about surveillance and privacy.

But those facts do not establish that Israeli operatives are involved in the 2026 election, that anyone has gained access to ECZ systems or that the government made the alleged US\$5 million Pegasus purchase.

ECZ did not respond to MakaanDay’s request for comment but has publicly rejected allegations that its systems are being manipulated.

The Election

Zambia Police has also warned about false and misleading information published by The Candidate.

The episode demonstrates one of the defining characteristics of the election’s information environment. A persuasive story can be constructed from genuine facts without the central allegation itself being true.

Misinformation is not necessarily foreign interference. Nor is every piece of election misinformation evidence of foreign interference.

Cheeseman says Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference — FIMI — requires something more specific: evidence that an operation has been purposefully orchestrated from outside a country to influence political outcomes or undermine confidence in democratic processes.

“The critical point is that it’s being purposefully designed from outside of the country,” he says.

Establishing that requires investigators to go beyond examining what a suspicious post says.

They need to determine where it originated, which accounts first circulated it and how it entered the country’s information ecosystem, Cheeseman says.

That distinction is particularly important in Zambia.

Despite the country’s growing strategic importance because of copper and other natural resources, Cheeseman says his research has not identified Zambia among the African countries experiencing the highest levels of FIMI.

“Zambia’s natural resources do mean that it has a degree of geostrategic importance, but it hasn’t so far in my research been often identified as one of those countries that sees the highest levels of FIMI,” he says.

But foreign interference is only part of the picture.

Because while MakaanDay could find no credible evidence supporting some of the most dramatic claims circulating online, it found evidence of something much easier to establish: Foreign political consultants have played a role in Zambian election campaigns.

And that raises a different question.

Not whether foreigners are secretly controlling Zambia’s election — but who is helping shape the messages Zambians receive, who is paying for that work and how much voters are entitled to know about it.

Part II: The Foreign Consultants Behind Zambia’s Political Campaigns.

Names changed to protect the identities of the voters interviewed.

Photographs from the area showed voters gathered under trees as they waited for the polling station to open.

Kasama district electoral officer John Mwanza attributed the delay to the driver transporting election materials losing his way.

Mwanza said the driver had subsequently found his way and was heading to the polling station.

It was not immediately established when the election materials eventually arrived or when voting began.

Elsewhere in Kasama North Constituency, a different picture emerged at Misambo and Chafwa polling stations in Ituna Ward, where turnout was reported to be low during the morning.

Luapula Province Kawambwa voters queue from 03:00

Large numbers of voters were reported at polling stations in Kawambwa district, with some arriving several hours before voting was due to start.

In Pambashe Constituency, some voters were already queuing at Mushota Primary School by 03:00, according to a field report.

Returning Officer Derrick Kapesa opened the Mushota Primary School polling station at 06:00, with a crowd already waiting to vote.

Among those in the queues were elderly people, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, young people and first-time voters.

Long queues were also reported at Chibanyana polling station, where some voters arrived carrying their own pens as they prepared to cast their ballots.

Voting at the polling stations monitored in Kawambwa was reported to be proceeding smoothly.

Eastern Province High turnout reported in Chama Central

In Chama Central, turnout was reported to be high during the morning, adding to the contrasting picture emerging from polling stations across the country.

In Chipangali, voting was also underway, with a voter photographed casting

a ballot at an Electoral Commission of Zambia voting booth.

No difficulties with the voting process had been reported to MakaanDay from the Chipangali location at the time of the update.

Copperbelt Province Low morning turnout reported in Luanshya and Roan

On the Copperbelt, the field reporter described morning turnout in Luanshya Constituency and Roan as low.

In Masaiti Constituency, voting at Council Chamber 1 and Council Chamber 2 polling stations started at 06:00 and 06:13 respectively, according to a field report.

Central Province Long queues at Kapiri Mposhi

Substantial numbers of voters were observed at a polling centre in Kapiri Mposhi.

Photographs from Kapiri Mposhi Primary School showed a long, orderly queue outside polling rooms, while other voters gathered around the school grounds.

The images provide evidence of substantial voter presence at the polling centre at the time they were taken, although this alone cannot be used to determine overall turnout in Kapiri Mposhi.

North Western Province

Five queues at Kimasala

Large numbers of voters were reported at Kimasala Ward polling station in Solwezi North, which opened at exactly 06:00.

Five queues had formed at the polling station, with women and young people reported to have turned up in large numbers.

At Kyawama polling station, also in Solwezi, sizeable numbers of voters, including women and young people, were reported during the morning. Photographs showed large crowds around the polling area.

Kyawama has particular significance following violence associated with the 2021 general election. Jackson Kungo, who was then the Patriotic Front’s North-Western Province chairperson, was killed near Kyawama polling station during the 2021 election period.

ELECTION WATCH | Contrasting scenes as Zambia votes: Long Queues, Low Turnout & Delays

By MakaanDay Team

Voting in Zambia’s 2026 general election has presented contrasting scenes at polling stations monitored by MakaanDay’s network of reporters, with long queues in some parts of the country, relatively few voters at others, and delays in the start of voting at some stations.

Field reports and photographs from Northern, Luapula, Eastern, Copperbelt, Central, North-Western and Southern provinces show that the experience of voters varied considerably during the morning.

Some voters were in queues several hours before the scheduled 06:00 opening, while elsewhere voters who arrived early were still waiting to cast their ballots several hours later.

Northern Province Driver loses direction, delays voting in Kasama

One of the most significant delays reported by the MakaanDay team was at a polling station in Ndoloka Ward in Kasama, where voters were still waiting for voting to begin at about 10:00.

ELECTION WATCH | Contrasting scenes as Zambia votes: Long Queues, Low Turnout & Delays cont..

The peaceful scenes reported at Kyawama on Thursday provided a notable contrast with events five years ago.

Elsewhere in North-Western Province, His Royal Highness Chief Mumena XI (Dr Jonathan Eshiloni), traditional leader of the Kaonde people in Kalumbila, cast his ballot at Mumena Polling Station.

Southern Province

Voters wait for hours in Livingstone

In Maramba Constituency in Livingstone, a voter complained of a lengthy delay in the start of voting, saying some voters had arrived at about 04:00 but had still not cast their ballots by 09:10.

“The polling station was supposed to open at 06:00. The presiding officer was supposed to be here before 06:00 to make sure the polling station was in order,” the voter said. “But by this hour, 09:10, we haven’t voted. We came here around 04:00.”

The voter attributed the delay to preparations at the polling station starting late.

MakanDay had not immediately established from electoral officials what caused the delay or the exact time voting eventually began.

In Mazabuka, Nakambala Training School 01 polling station opened at 06:00. The polling station has over 950 registered voters, and the situation there was reported to be calm.

Contrasting picture from polling stations

The reports gathered by MakanDay show a sharply contrasting picture during the first hours of voting.

In Kawambwa, voters were queuing as early as 03:00, while Kimasala in Solwezi had five queues and photographs from Kapiri Mposhi showed substantial numbers of voters.

At the other end of the spectrum, low morning turnout was reported at Misambo and Chafwa in Kasama North and in Luanshya and Roan on the Copperbelt.

There were also contrasting experiences with opening times. Several polling stations were reported to have opened at or close to the scheduled 06:00 start, while voters in Ndoloka Ward in Kasama and Maramba Constituency in Livingstone faced significant delays.

Low turnout reported at Nalwei

In Nalikwanda Constituency, Western Province, low voter turnout was reported at Nalwei Primary School during the late morning.

The polling station has 1,127 registered voters, with women reported to constitute the majority of those registered.

At 11:05, MakanDay’s reporter at the station observed relatively few voters compared with the number registered, although people were continuing to arrive.

Some voters interviewed at the polling station said low turnout had also characterised previous general elections in the area, but MakanDay had not independently verified that assessment against official historical turnout figures.

EDITORIAL NOTE: These observations reflect conditions at specific polling stations at particular times and should not be interpreted as representative of overall voter turnout nationally, provincially or across entire constituencies.

Journalists who are part of the MakanDay network across Zambia continue to monitor voting, turnout, polling-station operations and other developments as the election progresses.

Contributors: Vincent Phiri (Eastern Province), Malacki Ndhlovu (Chama, Eastern Province), Esther Nkhoma (Chipata –

Eastern Province), Joseph Kapandula (Itezhi-Tezhi, Southern Province), Kebby Sianjame (Kalomo, Southern Province), Marvis Muchiya (Mazabuka, Southern Province), Edna Mupila (Livingstone, Southern Province), Sikuka Situmbeko (Mongu, Western Province), Pride Nyirenda (Luanshya, Copperbelt Province), James Mwape (Ndola, Copperbelt Province), Beverly Subeti (Chingola, Copperbelt Province), Peter Masongo (Kitwe, Copperbelt Province), Bertha Kachasa (Kasama, Northern Province), Christian Kasonde (Kasama, Northern Province), Gift Sanjimba (Solwezi, North-Western Province), Hegar Chola (Mansa, Luapula Province), Precious Mwambula (Kapiri Mposhi, Central Province), Terence Katiki (North-Western Province), and Sanjimba Kanganja (Solwezi, North-Western Province).



Photographs from Chafwa showed relatively few voters around the polling station at the time of observation.

The Foreign Consultants Behind Zambia’s Political Campaigns

PART II | Foreign advisers are nothing new in politics. But an investigation into Zambia’s election raises a more difficult question: how much should voters know about the consultants, companies and interests helping shape political campaigns?

From page 1

By Charles Mafa

Foreign consultants advising political parties are not necessarily interfering in an election. Professor Stephen Chan, a veteran observer of African politics who has longstanding ties to Zambia, puts it more simply.

“You have to give consultants a very clear agenda: we want you to focus on A, B, C and D,” he said. “And you publish that to the general public — these people are here to advise on this, this and this.”

That distinction lies at the heart of the second part of MakanDay’s examination of the less visible forces surrounding Zambia’s 2026 election.

Foreign participation in a political campaign, foreign influence over political strategy and foreign interference in a democratic process are not necessarily the same thing, experts say.

Consultants can provide polling, communications, research, media advice and campaign strategy without covertly manipulating an election.

The more difficult questions arise when voters cannot establish who is paying for political messaging, whose interests lie behind it or whether material presented as independent information is actually part of a political campaign. In Zambia, those questions have become particularly relevant.

A consultancy and a long relationship

A Global Witness investigation published weeks before Zambia’s August election alleges that foreign political consultants and mining interests have played a significant — and at times largely invisible — role in the country’s political campaigns.

One of the organisations it examined was SABI Strategy Group, a British political and corporate consultancy founded by Henry Sands.

Sands, a former British Army officer turned political strategist, has advised President

Hakainde Hichilema and the UPND across several election campaigns. He has also been associated with the Brenthurst Foundation, while SABI previously worked on Britain’s Vote Leave campaign.

Global Witness, citing sources familiar with the campaign, reported that Sands is again involved in Hichilema’s 2026 campaign.

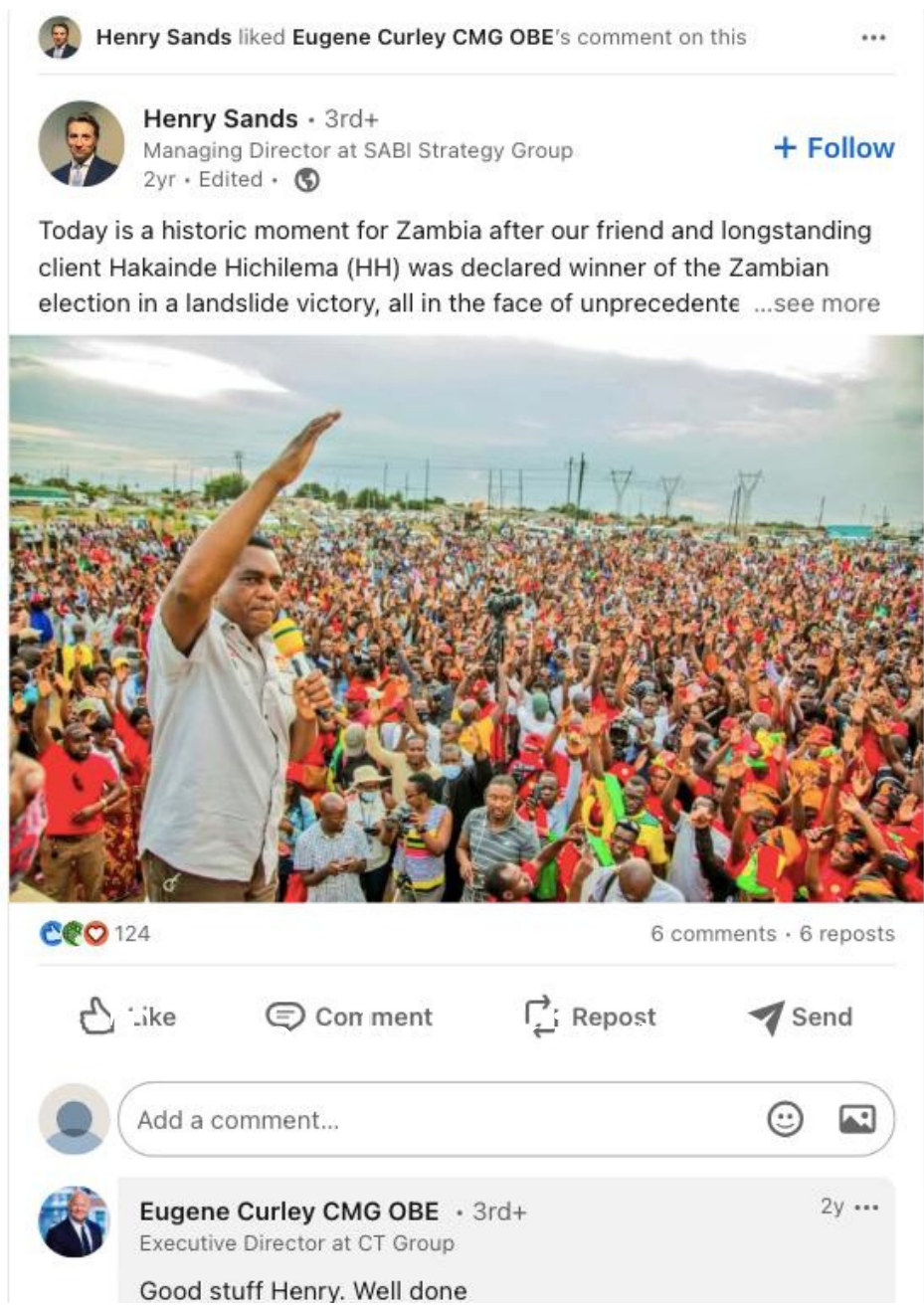
MakanDay conducted its own checks, and established the depth of SABI’s historical involvement in Hichilema’s campaigns.

A now-removed page from SABI’s website, recovered through the internet archive’s Wayback Machine, states that the consultancy had worked with Hichilema since 2015, forming a “central part” of UPND campaign support during the 2015, 2016 and 2021 elections.

According to SABI’s archived account, its work included polling and focus groups, campaign messaging, content production, media engagement, voter mobilisation and efforts to “protect the vote”.

It also said it helped mobilise “a network of civil society and diplomatic actors, both domestic and international”. The page containing that account is no longer available on SABI’s current website.

MakanDay found further evidence of the relationship in an archived screenshot of a LinkedIn post attributed to Sands and provided by a British journalist.



Following Hichilema’s 2021 election victory, Sands described the incoming president as “our friend and longstanding client”. That post is also no longer publicly available on Sands’ LinkedIn account.

MakanDay’s checks uncovered another connection between SABI and Hichilema’s inner circle. One of his senior advisors at State House, was listed on an archived version of SABI’s website as a member of the consultancy’s advisory committee. The page, captured by the Internet Archive in 2019, is no longer available on SABI’s current website.

SABI did not respond to MakenDay’s questions about the nature and extent of the relationship.

Consultancy or interference?

None of this, however, establishes foreign information manipulation. MakenDay’s interviews with experts, examination of documents and independent research found no basis for treating the use of foreign campaign consultants, on its own, as evidence of improper interference in an election.

Cheeseman says the practice is widespread.

“Most political parties that I’ve engaged with have at some point engaged with advisors and consultants from outside the country as well as those from within the country,” he says.

The more important questions, he argues, concern transparency and conduct.

“I think it is good for citizens to have a clear idea of who is engaging with and providing election services for political parties.”

Some international consultants provide legitimate professional services, Cheeseman says. Others have advised authoritarian governments on tactics ranging from manipulating social media to demobilising opposition supporters and radicalising political bases.

“In some ways I would say the location of the advisor is less important than what is the advisor willing to do,” he says.

“The key question should be: are they operating according to key democratic norms?”

Chan reaches a similar conclusion from another direction.

The issue, in his view, is not simply whether a consultant comes from Zambia or abroad, but whether the public knows the consultant’s mandate. That brings the investigation back to transparency.

When political messaging looks independent

Global Witness alleges that SABI was involved with Open Zambia, a website that presented itself as an independent Zambian media platform while, according to the organisation’s investigation, supporting Hichilema’s campaigns and publishing negative stories about political opponents.

Global Witness reported that documents leaked to The Guardian appeared to show that the website was funded by an unnamed mining-industry client.

A former SABI employee told Global Witness that managing Open Zambia became a core part of the consultancy’s work.

Global Witness further reported that Sands and former Brenthurst Foundation head Greg Mills are involved in Hichilema’s 2026 campaign, working alongside a team established by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (TBI).

Again, these relationships do not, by themselves, establish FIMI. But they raise a question that runs throughout MakenDay’s investigation. When political communication reaches a voter, can that voter tell who is actually behind it?

Political scientist and former University of Zambia lecturer Dr Neo Simutanyi takes a more critical view of foreign involvement. He argues that concerns extend

The Foreign Consultants Behind Zambia’s Political Campaigns cont....

beyond election campaigns to international organisations and advisers working around the Presidency.

“The problem is that we have a President who has turned State House into [an avenue for foreign influence] by allowing foreign investors, foreign interests, in the name of the (Tony) Blair Institute [and] the (now defunct) Brenthurst Foundation, to take over the role of advising the President,” he told MakaanDay.

He pointed specifically to the Presidential Delivery Unit (PDU), arguing that externally supported advisory structures risk creating parallel centres of influence alongside established government institutions.

“He has created two parallels of advice: one is funded by donors, another by taxpayers,” Simutanyi said.

Simutanyi further argued that this arrangement could influence which economic policies receive priority, citing debt restructuring and government spending choices as examples.

TBI rejected any suggestion that its work in Zambia extends to political campaigning. In a response to MakaanDay, a TBI spokesperson said the not-for-profit organisation advises the government on strategy, policy and delivery, but does not engage in political campaigning, polling, campaign communications or voter targeting.

TBI said the Presidential Delivery Unit (PDU) is a government-owned mechanism designed to strengthen the systems, structures and processes through which government priorities are translated into implementation and results for citizens.

The US\$50 million allegation

Global Witness says four sources with inside knowledge alleged that First Quantum Minerals had become the UPND’s largest funder ahead of the election and was prepared to spend up to US\$50 million supporting Hichilema’s re-election.

Global Witness explicitly says it does not allege that such financial support would breach Zambia’s domestic electoral laws.

In response to MakaanDay’s pre-publication questions, FQM strongly disputed the central allegations contained in the Global Witness investigation.

The company’s position is that it has neither funded the UPND in the past nor promised to fund its 2026 election campaign. It also denies telling Hichilema or his representatives that it was willing to spend up to US\$50 million to secure his re-election.

FQM says it remains politically neutral and engages with whichever government holds office in its capacity as a long-term investor.

It acknowledged having had a professional relationship with the Brenthurst Foundation and using paid media as part of its corporate communications.

But it denied that Brenthurst acted as its agent to influence government policy or that its media activities constituted covert political campaigning.

MakaanDay has not independently established that FQM provided the alleged campaign funding.

Who is watching the watchers?

Determining where legitimate consultancy ends and inappropriate influence begins also depends on Zambia’s institutions.

MakaanDay sought answers from State House, ECZ, the Financial Intelligence Centre, Drug Enforcement Commission, Zambia Police Service and Zambia Cyber Security Agency about political financing, foreign interference, coordinated online influence operations and the safeguards in place to protect the election.

State House was separately asked whether the Presidency or governing party had received financial, logistical, strategic or advisory support from FQM or entities acting on its behalf, and whether foreign firms or advisers had been engaged to provide political or strategic communications advice.

None of the institutions had provided substantive responses by the time of publication. DEC acknowledged MakaanDay’s questions and said it would respond.

Their silence is not evidence that Zambia lacks safeguards against political manipulation. But days before voting, it leaves unanswered questions about how those safeguards work in practice — and whether authorities have identified attempts, foreign or domestic, to covertly influence the election.

Before the ballot is cast

For Cheeseman, electoral integrity cannot be measured only by what happens on polling day.

“An election isn’t free and fair if the vote counting is done perfectly, but all of the parts of the election until then were not conducted freely and fairly,” he says.

Which brings [Nathan Banda](#) back into the picture.

He does not speak about FIMI, algorithms, political consultancies or opaque campaign financing. His question is much simpler. What can he believe?

On Thursday, Banda will once again walk into a polling station and make the same fundamental choice he has made since Zambia returned to multiparty democracy.

But the journey to the ballot box has changed.

In 1991, much of the battle for his vote happened in public — at rallies, in newspapers, on radio and in conversations with neighbours.

In 2026, some of it has happened in the palm of his hand.

And as Zambia’s 8.7 million registered voters prepare to choose their next government, experts say protecting the integrity of the election depends not only on what happens to their ballots after they are cast, but also on the information that shaped their choices before they entered the polling station.

INVESTIGATION | Voter's Cards Collected in Eastern Province as Zambia Heads to the Polls

A CWAC official has confirmed collecting residents’ NRCs and voter cards in Chasefu District, as allegations emerge of similar activity ahead of Zambia’s general election. But who authorised the collection — and why?

By Esther Nkhoma

With Zambians heading to the polls, MakaanDay examines allegations that residents in parts of Eastern Province were asked to surrender their National Registration Cards and voter cards.

In Chasefu, some residents allege the collection was linked to promises of inclusion on the Social Cash Transfer programme.

MakaanDay has not independently established that the exercise was authorised by the UPND or that surrendering documents was genuinely connected to the programme.

However, Chaboli Ward CWAC Chairperson William Mushanga confirmed collecting NRCs and voter cards, saying they were held for two days to establish the number of people in the ward.

Zambian electoral law prohibits possession of another person’s voter card or NRC during the campaign period and also prohibits inducing someone to surrender the documents.

Watch Esther Nkhoma’s investigation:

[Watch Esther Nkhoma’s investigation:](#)

ELECTION WATCH | Volunteers Seek Clarity After Employment Announcement at UPND Rally

By Pride Nyirenda | Luanshya, Copperbelt Province

When President Hakainde Hichilema addressed a UPND campaign rally at Mikomfwa Stadium in Luanshya recently, loud cheers erupted after he announced employment opportunities for volunteer teachers and health workers.

Addressing supporters, President Hichilema said:

<https://youtu.be/1TvL-u3mNtg?si=0Y4Flf51KWe51Ibx>

The announcement has become one of Hichilema’s recurring messages on the campaign trail. For volunteers who have spent years waiting to be recruited into the public service, his words appear to offer something more immediate: hope that their long wait for formal employment could finally be coming to an end.

But after the cheering subsided, a more practical question emerged: what exactly had been announced?

Interviews conducted by MakanDay after the rally suggest that many attendees left uncertain about what the President’s remarks meant for them.

Several volunteer teachers and health workers told MakanDay they initially understood Hichilema’s remarks to mean they had secured employment.

But after the celebrations, many began asking when appointment letters would be issued and whether they had been formally recruited or were still expected to go through the government’s normal recruitment process.

Most requested anonymity, saying they feared possible repercussions for speaking publicly.

“When the President spoke about employment, we celebrated because we thought we had finally been considered. But after the rally, we started asking ourselves when we would receive appointment letters and what the next step would be,” one volunteer teacher said.

A volunteer health worker expressed similar uncertainty.

“We have been waiting for employment for a long time. We just want to know whether this means we are already employed or whether we should continue waiting for the official recruitment process,” the volunteer said.

MakanDay also examined how some of the volunteers came to attend the rally.

Interviews with attendees indicate that volunteer teachers and health workers travelled from several districts, including Mpongwe and Masaiti, to Luanshya. Some said they travelled approximately 64 kilometres from Mpongwe.

A UPND district official, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to comment publicly, said the party arranged transport for volunteers attending the rally. The official also said mobilisation funds were channelled through UPND provincial structures to support preparations for the event.

Several volunteers interviewed by MakanDay confirmed that transport had been organised for them.

However, the more significant question emerging from MakanDay’s reporting is what understanding volunteers took away from the rally.

While many interviewed believed the announcement meant employment had been secured, none was able to explain when recruitment would formally begin, whether appointment letters would follow immediately, or what administrative process remained before employment could be confirmed.

MakanDay has not independently verified whether the President’s remarks constituted an immediate offer of employment or an announcement of future recruitment. Questions have been sent to the relevant government authorities seeking clarification on the recruitment process, timelines and whether the volunteers who attended the rally are among those expected to be employed.

For thousands of volunteer teachers and health workers who have waited years for government jobs, that clarification may be as important as the announcement itself.



Photo Credit | North Western My Home

OPINION | What Do Zambians Want?

“What do Zambians want?”

We have been told that President Hakainde Hichilema has repeatedly asked this question within his inner circle ahead of the August 13 vote.

We have been told that President Hakainde Hichilema has repeatedly asked this question within his inner circle ahead of the August 13 vote.

As partial results from the election emerge, perhaps it is a question the rest of us should be asking too.

What do Zambians want?

If Zambia’s choice were determined principally by political stability, order and the preservation of peace, Hichilema would have a compelling case for another term. Whatever criticisms can be made of his administration, Zambia today is markedly different from the country he inherited five years ago.

But the results of this election make one thing clear. Elections are not held to survey stability. They are expressions of frustration, identity, economic experience and expectations that governments have either met or failed to meet.

And the results emerging from this election appear to be reminding us of exactly that.

At parliamentary level, the prospect of a more competitive political landscape may be healthy for democracy. No government should operate without meaningful scrutiny. But voters must also ask what kind of opposition they are returning to Parliament.

Some familiar political figures are re-emerging. Their return may strengthen scrutiny of the executive, but it could also revive the confrontational politics that many Zambians had hoped the country was leaving behind.

That is democracy. Voters are entitled to make choices that those in government — or those of us observing politics — may not necessarily understand or agree with.

But those choices also tell us something.

Regional and ethnic voting patterns remain difficult to ignore in Zambian politics.

Political allegiance has long intersected with geography, ethnicity and perceptions of inclusion. This election appears unlikely to have completely broken that pattern.

Hichilema himself cannot escape scrutiny on this question.

His government has repeatedly faced criticism over the regional composition of appointments to senior positions in the public service, particularly within the police and security services. Whether every allegation is justified or not, perceptions of exclusion matter politically. A President who wants to build a genuinely national coalition must ensure that government not only is inclusive, but is widely seen to be inclusive.

Still, Hichilema’s record deserves to be judged in context.

He inherited a heavily indebted country whose government had defaulted on its external debt in 2020. Public finances were under enormous pressure, relations with international lenders had deteriorated, and the political environment had become increasingly confrontational.

Party cadres had acquired extraordinary influence over public spaces and institutions, while political violence and intimidation had become disturbingly familiar features of Zambian politics.

Five years later, Hichilema’s government can point to significant achievements. Zambia has made substantial progress in restructuring its external debt and rebuilding relationships with international lenders and creditors. The political environment has also been comparatively calmer.

We have not seen political cadres exercising the same level of power over markets, bus stations and public spaces, nor the same scale of organised political violence associated with previous election cycles.

For a country that values peace deeply, that matters.

Indeed, for much of the campaign, the election was remarkably quiet. Many Zambians — ourselves included — wondered whether it would become a one-man show, with Hichilema facing a relatively straightforward path to re-election.

As the campaign progressed, what initially appeared predictable became increasingly competitive, with opposition candidates tapping into frustrations that macroeconomic statistics cannot easily capture.

And therein lies perhaps the biggest contradiction of Hichilema’s first term. Economic recovery on paper is not the same thing as recovery at the kitchen table.

For many ordinary Zambians, the economic gains cited by the government have not yet translated into noticeable improvements in everyday life. Experts may argue that economic recovery takes time to filter down to households, but ordinary Zambians are asking much simpler and more immediate questions: Can I afford food? Can I pay my rent? Can I find a job? Can I afford transport? Is my family actually better off than it was five years ago?

That gap — between what the economic indicators suggest and what people actually experience in their pockets — may prove to be one of the defining lessons of this election.

If Hichilema ultimately wins and secures another term, he should resist interpreting that victory as an endorsement of everything his government has done.

The results should instead provide a map of where his administration has fallen short.

One area demanding much greater attention is the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), arguably one of Hichilema’s administration’s most ambitious programmes. The dramatic expansion of CDF has moved unprecedented resources closer to communities and has the potential to transform local development.

But MakaanDay’s reporting over several years has also exposed a troubling side of the programme.

Our investigations have documented allegations of political favouritism in the allocation of grants, loans and bursaries, questionable procurement and project decisions, stalled or unfinished infrastructure, concerns over value for money, and weaknesses in oversight and accountability. In Mufulira, for example, our investigation found that just two driving schools received 542 of the 589 students selected for CDF-funded driving lessons, raising questions about how beneficiaries and service providers were selected. The institutions denied political affiliation.

Elsewhere, we found more than 200 CDF-sponsored students enrolled at a Ndola training institution that TEVETA said had been deregistered, while investigations in Solwezi found classrooms, clinics and market shelters that remained unfinished months — and in some cases years — after they were approved and financed. In Kapiri Mposhi, MakaanDay reported allegations that residents were being asked for money or livestock to access boreholes already paid for through CDF.

These are not arguments against CDF. If anything, they demonstrate why the programme is too important to be allowed to fail. But despite the issues MakaanDay has repeatedly exposed through its CDF Portal, we have seen little evidence of a systematic government response to the problems our reporting has identified.

If Hichilema secures another term, strengthening oversight of CDF should therefore be one of his priorities. The government must demonstrate that public money reaches the communities for which it is intended, that contracts and bursaries are awarded fairly, that projects deliver value for money, and that access to CDF opportunities is determined by need and merit rather than political connections.

OPINION | What Do Zambians Want? cont...

If Hichilema secures another term, strengthening oversight of CDF should therefore be one of his priorities. The government must demonstrate that public money reaches the communities for which it is intended, that contracts and bursaries are awarded fairly, that projects deliver value for money, and that access to CDF opportunities is determined by need and merit rather than political connections.

If CDF is to remain a flagship programme, the government must demonstrate that access to its benefits is determined by community need rather than political connections.

Hichilema must also confront perceptions of tribalism and regional imbalance in public appointments. Zambia cannot credibly condemn ethnic politics among voters while appearing indifferent to concerns about ethnic or regional representation within government itself.

Perhaps that brings us back to the President’s question. What do Zambians want?

The answer may be more complicated than any election result can capture. Zambians appear to want peace, but they also want prosperity they can feel. They want economic stability,

but they also want food they can afford. They want development, but they want to see it in their communities. They want democracy, but they also want political leaders who can disagree without dragging the country back into chaos.

And perhaps, above all, they want to believe that whichever part of Zambia they come from, government belongs to them too. That may be the most important message emerging from this election — not only for Hichilema, but for whoever seeks to govern Zambia next.



from the

EDITOR

**MakanDay**
FACTS. FIRST.

This week in the Bulletin & Records Archives

Powerful, often drunk, the “Jimbos” are now a major cause of increased political violence

Politics is often as much about myths and illusions, smoke and mirrors, as it is about policy-making. One such myth often repeated in Zambia is that we have peaceful elections. We do not. The recent presidential election is a case in point. Charles Mafa reports.

Political violence is not new in Zambia's history, but there is an alarming trend of increasing political violence spearheaded by youth cadres for hire – sometimes more bluntly referred to as “hire-a-thug”. It is a serious concern.

In the January presidential election there were violent clashes mainly between elements favouring the ruling Patriotic Front (PF) and the opposition United Party for National Development (UPND). Police reports show that a majority of people arrested for these clashes, and those appearing before the courts as a result, were from the ruling Patriotic Front (PF).

It is not difficult to notice the many young people who have flooded political parties in Zambia. They are powerful and very often drunk. In some circles they are known as “Jimbos”.

‘Jimbos,’ is a short form for Gym Boys, meaning muscle men, young men who are out to take action against anyone standing in their party’s way. They constitute an unofficial militia of political parties, and certain leaders within those parties pay them “wages”. They can often be identified

by the way they dress. Their “uniform” is either green overalls and a green beret or the same attire but in black. Their style of dress and political harassment is similar to that used by followers of Julius Malema, now leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters party in South Africa after his expulsion as leader of the ANC Youth League.

An example of the “new” violence often cited is that which occurred in Shiwa Ng’andu constituency, when PF supporters stoned a helicopter carrying supporters of the UPND.

Other cases of violence that took place during the campaign period and resulted in court appearances included:

- Eight suspected PF cadres armed with machetes and stones attacked a Mahogany luxury coach bus in Lusaka.
- Seven suspected PF cadres armed with machetes and stones attacked and assaulted fellow cadres who were lodging at Garden House Motel in Lusaka.
- 11 suspected PF cadres were accused of damaging a Toyota Spacio using planks as well as assaulting the driver who was dressed in UPND regalia.

- Nine PF cadres were found in possession of 11 machetes and two axes along Kasangula Road in Lusaka’s Mandevu area.
- One UPND cadre was accused of stealing K10,000 from a vehicle that was being used by PF cadres after a fight ensued between the two groups in Chipata.
- Four PF cadres were accused of assaulting UPND cadres who had gone to receive their campaign team, which included Maureen Mwanawasa among others.
- Three UPND cadres were found in possession of offensive weapons in Kasama.

There were many such incidents, most of which did not receive court attention. The nasty rivalry between supporters of the two political parties continued even after the election and it cast a shadow over the entire process.

It seems that some members of the political elite pay cadres to threaten and actually engage in violence. Poor enforcement of the law enables them to get away with it.

Many Zambians believe that a root cause of such political violence is poverty and lack of

opportunities for youths, and unless these are addressed the problem will continue. The cadres are, after all, paid to be disruptive. It becomes their job, presumably in the absence of any other work. But who are their paymasters?

Antonio Mwanza, spokesperson for FDD (1) says it is difficult to deal with political violence because it has become part of the political institution. He said violence is being used by some politicians to prolong their stay in power and scare off opponents.

“Violence is sponsored and orchestrated by senior members of political parties. It is not because of these young people overzealously believing in the ideals of their political parties.”

Mr Mwanza believes that violence in Zambia has become an economic activity because people get paid to be involved in violence.

“They become tools of violence because they are vulnerable and they can use violence to raise money to sustain themselves.”

“Those young people are being mentally militarised. You make them believe that their job is to be militia members of the party.

Powerful, often drunk, the “Jimbos” are now a major cause of increased political violence cont...

Their job is to harass and intimidate people. That is their job. Even when you meet them, you realise that even the way they carry themselves, it is in a brutal manner.”

The former student union leader recalled a youth day celebration in 2013, when a group of cadres from the ruling party marched in front of army officers, wearing military uniforms. He said that to this day, police had taken no action to arrest violent youths. He charged that ruling party cadres had infiltrated police, thereby rendering law enforcement ineffective.

The police, however, say there is no basis for these allegations. “I would say no,” said Mrs Esther Mwaata Katongo, police assistant spokesperson. “For how long has the PF been in power and how many times have we recruited?” she asked. “Unless maybe, they say, they’re coming from MMD because MMD was in power for a long time.”

She said the failure by individual police officers to act did not represent the position of the institution as a whole. “We’re not saying that this (failure to act) is common to the police, because if it were common, there was not going to be peace in this country.”

Official statistics from the Zambia Police indicate that between November and January, 98 people were arrested from 30 cases reported to the police. The cases covered ranged from assault, malicious damage to property, possession of offensive weapons, theft, destroying campaign materials and conduct likely to breach the peace. Among the reported cases during that period, just seven were taken to court.

“The challenge we have in dealing with these cases is that people don’t want to give evidence in court,” said Mrs Katongo “It is up to the people who are complaining to take the lead. People would just come and report and they would go without coming back.”

Mr Mwanza said this country needs to take serious examples from Kenya, from Libya and the entire Arab Spring for what happens to young people who are trapped in poverty,

unemployment and lack of opportunities. They were a danger to society, and “there are no levels of appeasement that the current government is going to do to please these youth.” They need to deal with real issues affecting the youth,” he says.

He observed that young people, both educated and uneducated, have let the country down. Those who have been to school, he said, use their education to obtain favours for appointments. “They use their education for blind loyalty. The uneducated use their muscles. They can be hired to beat up people, chant slogans and cause confusion.”

Experts say political violence has deep roots in Zambian history. They say some of the earliest forms of youth cadres appeared shortly after independence in 1964, and began moving throughout the Copperbelt and the separatist Barotseland area of Western Province, attacking groups and individuals perceived to be part of the opposition.

Through the Youth League of the United National Independence Party (UNIP), these cadres were known to attack and burn down houses of people it suspected as being members of the opposition Zambian African National Congress (ZANC). This intimidation caused many citizens, especially those perceived to be supporting the opposition, to hide out and sleep in the bush.

The churches are worried too. Catholic bishops have called for legal reforms that would give the Electoral Commission of Zambia and police the powers necessary to deal with offenders. “In this regard, the police service must be above board in their non-partisan and professional conduct, thereby engendering and sustaining public confidence in the electoral process,” the Zambia Episcopal Conference said through a statement.

It all comes down to what kinds of signals are given to party supporters – what is encouraged, tolerated, rewarded, and condemned. Mr Mwanza notes that as long as the critical issues of youth unemployment, poverty, and delinquency are not addressed, the violence will not end.

“And as long as these politicians who hire young people are not named and shamed. This violence will never end,” he said.

1. Smart, intelligent, amiable

Antonio Mwanza, 35, spokesperson for FDD, appears to be that rarity – a young politician with the ambition and vision to succeed. He is smart, intelligent and amiable. His boss, FDD leader Edith Nawakwi, spotted his talent early on and made him the party’s spokesperson, and he is also FDD’s youth leader.

During the recent election he was busy on social media, posting and tweeting campaign messages for FDD. It seems that this paid off. Although the vote was small,

FDD actually beat MMD – which ran the country for 20 years – into 3rd place behind PF and UPND. Furthermore, FDD was spared the violence that rocked the major parties.

Mr Mwanza’s interest in politics dates back to his days as student union leader at UNZA. Regarding the violence carried out by disaffected young people he observed “it doesn’t matter whether you have six points or not, you’re going to be equally worse off as any other person who doesn’t have education because both of you end up on the street. They (young people) become tools of violence because they’re vulnerable and they can use violence to raise money to sustain themselves.”



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