

**Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe**  
**Monday July 1<sup>st</sup> – Wednesday July 31<sup>st</sup> 2013**  
**Election Watch 2013-20**

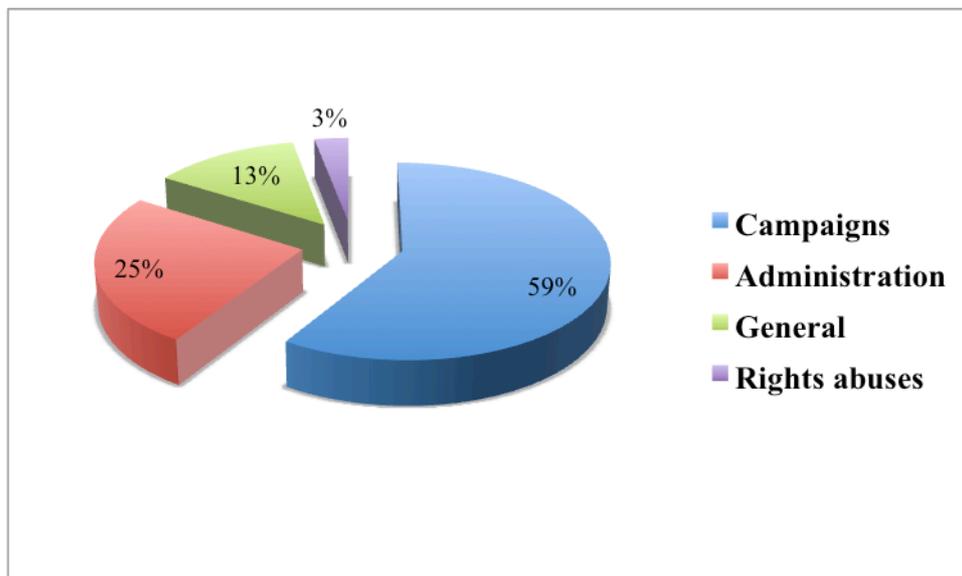
**SUMMARY**

REPORTS on preparations for the July 31<sup>st</sup> harmonized elections by Zimbabwe’s electoral authorities, including campaigns by Zimbabwe’s main parties, overshadowed any other issue in the mainstream media in the period under review.

The media carried 1 416 reports on elections, 735 (52%) of which appeared in the official state media. The remaining 681 were contained in the private media.

Of the 1 416 reports, 835 (59%) were on the campaign activities of the parties. Three hundred and fifty-four (25%) were on the administration of the elections. This was followed by general reports (179) on the elections. These reports, which constituted 13 percent of the media’s election stories, mostly comprised calls by a cross-section of the Zimbabwean society appealing to the public to observe peace during the elections. The remaining 48 (3%) were on election-related rights violations.

**Fig 1: Distribution of Election stories in the media**



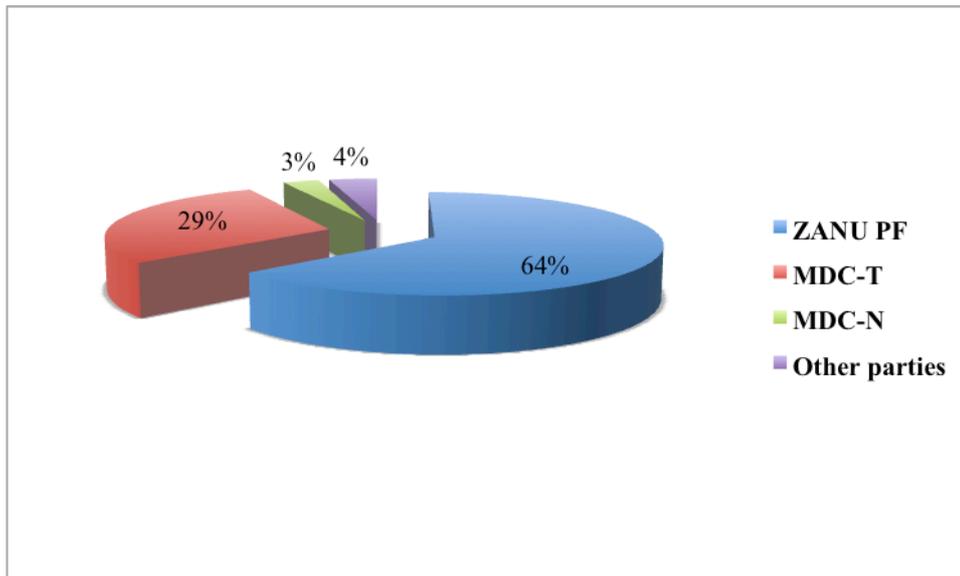
## PARTY CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

# State media denigrates MDC-T and the West

THE government-controlled state media fulfilled their role as the propaganda arm of ZANU PF by giving widespread and favourable publicity to the party's campaign activities at the expense of other parties in violation of domestic and international regulations governing the media's coverage of elections.

Of the 436 stories these media carried on party activities and campaigns, 278 (64%) were on the activities of President Mugabe and his ZANU PF party. One hundred and twenty-six (29%) were on the MDC-T and its leader, Morgan Tsvangirai. Fifteen (3%) were on the other MDC formation led by Industry Minister Welshman Ncube. The remaining 17 (4%) were on small parties. These included Dumiso Dabengwa's ZAPU; the Zimbabwe Development Party, led by Kisinoti Mukwazhe; Simba Makoni's Mavambo/Kusile; Ndonga; and the newly formed United Movement for Democracy. Fig 2 illustrates this.

**Fig 2: Distribution of Campaign stories in the official media**



Of the 278 stories the State-run media carried on ZANU PF, 253 (91%) were positive. The remaining 25 (9%) were neutral.

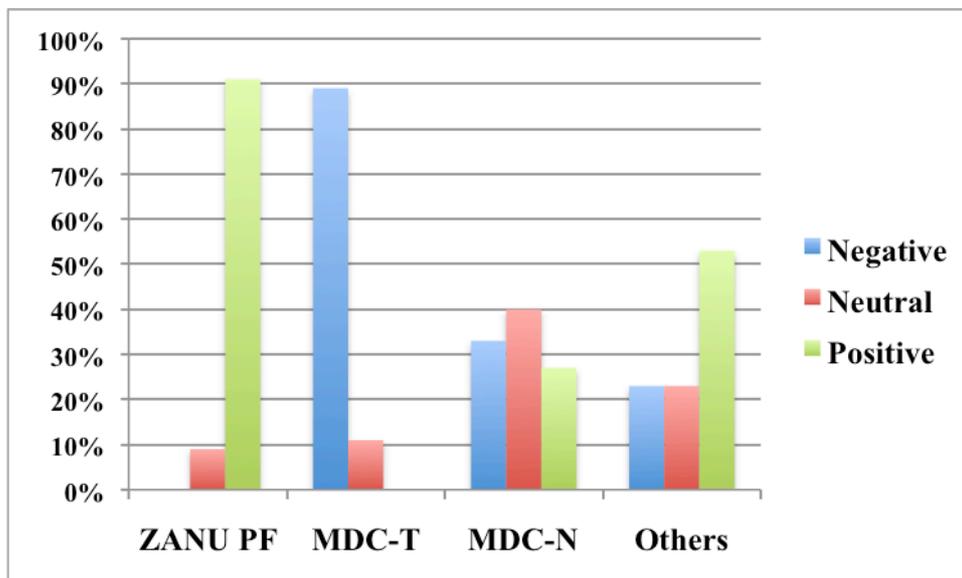
One hundred and twelve (89%) of the 126 stories on the MDC-T were negative, while 14 (11%) were neutral.

Six (40%) of the 15 reports on the MDC-N were neutral, while five (33%) were negative. The remaining four (27%) were positive.

Nine (53%) of the 17 reports on other parties were positive, while four (24%) were negative. The remaining four were neutral.

The neutral reports on the MDC-N and other parties were about the parties' direct campaign activities. Notably, these parties, particularly the ZDP and UMD, received positive publicity when they were reported expressing support for Mugabe and his party, or castigating Tsvangirai and his party for, among other issues, **“corruption”**, exhibiting **“dictatorial tendencies”**, and **“lacking policy direction”**. But these parties, especially Ndonga and Mavambo/Kusile, were attacked when they were reported expressing support for Tsvangirai and his party. Fig. 3 illustrates this.

**Fig 3: Qualitative analysis of the campaign stories**



The state media reported Mugabe and ZANU PF as having effective and lasting solutions for Zimbabwe's problems, citing the land and indigenization programmes, and hailed their stance against perceived Western imperialism.

Apart from praising Mugabe and ZANU PF, the state media denigrated ZANU PF's opponents, in particular Tsvangirai and his party.

This was illustrated in both their news reports and editorial pieces.

For example, in a second news report on Mugabe's rally at Mucheke Stadium in Masvingo, where the ZANU PF leader claimed his party had done the most to promote women's interests, *The Herald* (26/7) seized the opportunity to remind its readers of the MDC-T leader's questionable morality.

And, of course, neither the state newspapers nor the state broadcaster's television and radio bulletins missed an opportunity to magnify the attacks and criticism levelled against ZANU PF's political adversaries by the party's presidential candidate, his wife and senior officials.

In one such case, *The Herald's* front-page splash on Mugabe's star rally at Mucheke Stadium (26/7), reported Mugabe taking a swipe at the MDC-T for

being the **“brainchild of the British”** that didn’t have any ideas of its own.

Earlier, *The Herald* (16/7) reported Mugabe **“blasting”** the MDC formations at his rally in Marondera for petitioning the AU to push for a poll delay after their unsuccessful attempt to have SADC call for its postponement.

At the same event the paper gave wide publicity to Mugabe’s wife, Grace, and senior party officials, such as Sydney Sekeramayi and Ray Kaukonde, also addressing supporters, extolling the President as a **“God fearing”** and **“selfless leader”** (*The Herald*, 16 & 18/7).

The government media’s inequitable coverage of the political parties’ campaign activities not only violates regional principles and protocols on providing fair and unbiased coverage of all contesting parties, but it also contradicts Section 160J of the Electoral Amendment Act, which guides the media’s conduct in covering elections.

Although the State-run media also covered the activities of ZANU PF’s opponents, this was mostly hostile.

For example, in its reports on MDC-T rallies in Kariba and Karoi, *The Herald* (15/7) presented Tsvangirai and his party as **“inconsistent”**, **“confused”** and on the verge of collapse due to **“divisions”** and **“defections”**.

The official media also repeatedly portrayed the MDC-T as collaborating with their alleged **“Western masters”** to sabotage the country’s progress, especially economic empowerment programmes.

For example, instead of giving fair details of Tsvangirai’s speech at his Gokwe rally, *The Herald* (18/7) seized the opportunity to accuse Tsvangirai of making an **“incredible somersault”** when he stated that his party was ready for the elections, when, up until then he had been arguing for its postponement. The unprofessional editorial comment in the intro of the news story claimed his statement **“will shock even his handlers from Western countries”**.

In another case, *The Sunday Mail’s* report on the MDC-T’s White City Stadium rally in Bulawayo was characterized by editorial intrusions attempting to discredit the MDC-T (21/7). Instead of reporting on what was said at the rally, the weekly claimed that **“MDC-T yesterday all but admitted that it was behind the economic strangulation of Zimbabwe”** without substantiating this claim. The paper’s opinion pieces and editorials further attempted to ridicule the MDC-T, as reflected in an opinion piece entitled, **“Tsvangirai’s miracle money from imaginary friends”**.

While the private media’s political sentiments clearly lay with the MDC-T as illustrated by their pre-election editorial comments, the biggest difference from the state media was the fact that they were significantly more balanced in their coverage of the political parties’ activities and campaigns.

Even their analysis and opinion pieces were more about rational criticism of a political system rather than personality assassination and specious allegations that characterized the state media’s reports of ZANU PF’s opponents. Only the *Daily News* indulged in this form of criticism and allowed editorial intrusions into its news columns, though this by far lacked the intensity and

“dedication to duty” displayed by the state media in defending a political party at the expense of the truth and accuracy.

They also carried more impartial information collectively about the smaller political parties and their candidates than the state media, whose duty it is to report fairly, accurately and completely on all facets of Zimbabwe’s political dynamics.

## **ELECTION ADMINISTRATION**

### **It’s all sunshine and roses for ZEC**

REPORTS on the chaos and confusion that characterized the two-day special voting exercise for members of the security forces and civil servants; allegations of ZANU PF attempts to rig the July 31<sup>st</sup> vote with the help of a shadowy Israeli company; updates on the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission’s preparations; and debate over its readiness to conduct the elections, formed the highlights of the media’s coverage of the administration of the elections.

The state media presented a picture that all was well with regard to ZEC’s election preparations, while censoring or discrediting those expressing reservations over its electoral preparations. These included the MDC-T, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and other CSOs, as well as some political analysts and sections of the international community.

Although the state media prominently reported the problems that characterized ZEC’s special voting process, including delays in the opening of polling stations and shortages of ballot papers, they suppressed the extent of the problem. Neither did it view the troubles as an indictment on ZEC’s ability to conduct a credible vote on July 31<sup>st</sup>.

ZTV (14 & 15/7, 8pm) and *The Herald* (15/7) mostly relied on comments by ZEC officials who attributed the problems, especially the late printing of ballots, on the filing of cases by some losing candidates – mainly from the MDC formations – contesting the results of the Nomination Court.

As a result, a day before the special voting started on July 13<sup>th</sup>, the commission was reportedly still not clear which candidates to put on the ballot papers.

The state media reported that while voting started on time at most polling stations in Harare, interruptions in the delivery of additional ballot material in the afternoon affected the smooth flow of the process (ZTV, 15 & 16/7, 8pm and *The Herald*, 16/17). These logistical challenges resulted in voters leaving the polling stations before casting their votes, the official media reported.

But instead of presenting a balanced perspective to these problems, the official state media used known ZANU PF sympathisers and “insiders” to accuse the MDC-T for the chaos, basing its claims on unsubstantiated allegations.

For example, in an unusual front-page comment, *The Herald* (18/7) claimed that ZEC's failure to run the ballot successfully was due to deliberate attempts by the MDC formations to **"frustrate the special vote to abet their selfish campaign for poll postponement..."**

The paper ignored the MDC formations' claims (and those from civil society) that the hurried election declaration had not given ZEC enough time to run all the pre-election processes successfully before Voting Day. And *The Herald* resorted to using the unsubstantiated facts in its news story of a previous day to reinforce its allegation that **"the MDC formations went on to connive with some elements in ZEC...to sabotage the chain of command by issuing conflicting statements that fomented confusion in the deployment of ballots and the conduct of the vote."**

These specious claims attempted to deflect the debate away from the real question about whether ZEC was ready to oversee the much larger harmonized elections.

The state media also backed up its wide coverage of official statements from electoral authorities stating they were ready for the main elections with prominent reports of others endorsing these sentiments, including senior ZANU PF government officials, such as Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa, pro-ZANU PF analysts and some sections of the international community.

In one such case, *The Herald* (20/7) splashed news that the AU's Peace and Security Council meeting in Addis Ababa the previous day, had endorsed Zimbabwe's electoral preparations.

In another, *The Herald* (23/7) quoted Register-General, Tobaiwa Mudede dismissing allegations that the voters' roll was seriously flawed or that his office was using this to allow the elections to be rigged. He was quoted saying: **"We have invited political parties to come and inspect our system, they have come, (and) they have gone without queries"**. The report used this to dismiss claims from the MDC-T and a civil society organization, the Research and Advocacy Unit, that it was flawed. The paper's editorial comment demanded the MDC-T substantiate its claims despite the fact that the proof appeared in the RAU report – which it didn't publish.

*The Herald* (25/7) also celebrated the AU's endorsement of ZEC's preparations in its front-page lead: **"AU happy with Zim poll preps"**. The report was based on AU chair Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma's statement that **"all was well and as of now everything is proceeding well"**.

The following day, *The Herald* again prominently reported Dlamini-Zuma dismissing vote-rigging claims. In response to a question asked by a journalist from the London-based *Guardian* whether the commission had received evidence of a ZANU PF rigging plot, her response was **"none of them** (the political parties) **mentioned any document; none of them even used the word rigging"**.

The private media's coverage of Zimbabwe's electoral preparations was more balanced and informative.

Not only did they report electoral authorities and the ZANU PF arm of government and its allies expressing Zimbabwe's readiness and ability to hold smooth and credible elections, they also questioned such a possibility.

The private media cited ZEC's chaotic special voting exercise; the "**shambolic**" state of the voters' roll and the failure by the electoral authorities to make the roll publicly available in good time before the elections as violations of Zimbabwe's electoral laws and factors mitigating against the likelihood of holding free and fair elections in the country.

The private papers (notably the *Zimbabwe Independent*) and the private radio stations broadcasting into the country (Studio 7 and SW Radio Africa) also reported widely on the murky role of an Israeli company, NIKUV Projects International, allegedly hired to rig the elections in ZANU PF's favour; the printing of more than eight million ballot papers – 35% more than the 6.4 million registered voters; and the printing of ballot papers by different companies, as deepening public suspicion over the motives and transparency of the electoral authorities' preparations.

They also reported on comments by Lindiwe Zulu, a member of the team set up to assist South African President Zuma to fulfil his role as SADC facilitator to ensure Zimbabwe held an undisputed election. She was reported saying the "situation on the ground" did "**not look good**" for the conduct of credible elections; an observation that elicited an insulting response from Mugabe, whose threat to pull out of SADC was also widely reported in the private media.

*The Herald* and ZTV reported this confrontation too, but mainly in the context of threatening the credibility of the SADC facilitation efforts and Zuma's apparent lack of control over his international relations adviser. The subsequent "apology" from the South African presidency tended to corroborate this view, which the private media was less enthusiastic to portray.

The private media also largely missed the opportunity to compare serious criticisms of the electoral process raised in the "official" reports from the SADC and AU observer missions with the "free and peaceful" verdicts given by their heads of mission at the end of the election. But it was these "unofficial" statements of approval by the AU's Olusegun Obasanjo and SADC's Bernard Membe that was used by all the state media (*The Herald*, ZTV and ZBC's radio broadcasts) to drown out any doubts cast by the findings in the African observer mission reports and those from civil society.

The alleged discovery of special vote ballot paper in a dustbin at ZEC's headquarters also attracted considerable media attention. Although the MDC-T's Morgan Komichi had handed over the paper to ZEC officials, he was eventually arrested, detained and charged with electoral fraud. This led the private media to report him being a "victim" of a pernicious prosecution, while the state media viewed him as an offender.

## POST-ELECTION ANALYSIS

### State media celebrate ZANU PF's 'landslide victory'

THE media carried 510 stories from August 1<sup>st</sup> to August 5<sup>th</sup> on the July 31<sup>st</sup> harmonized elections, which were “resoundingly” won by President Mugabe and his ZANU PF party.

Of the 510 stories, 258 (51%) appeared in the private media [private papers (137) and private radio stations (121)].

The remaining 252 appeared in the official media [ZBC, 158; and *The Sunday Mail* and *The Herald*, 94].

According to ZEC, Mugabe garnered 2,110,434 votes, while his main presidential challenger, the MDC-T's Morgan Tsvangirai polled 1,172,349 votes. Welshman Ncube of the MDC came a distant third, with 92,637 votes. Dumiso Dabengwa of ZAPU was fourth with 25,416 votes, while Kisinoti Mukwazhe of the Zimbabwe Development Party obtained 9,931 votes.

ZANU PF won 160 parliamentary seats, while the MDC-T won 49. An independent candidate, Jonathan Samukange, clinched the remaining one.

Even before ZEC began announcing the results on the evening of August 1<sup>st</sup>, social media networks were already abuzz with news of a “landslide” ZANU PF victory.

So it was no surprise for the millions of “connected” Zimbabweans on August 2<sup>nd</sup> to read headlines reflecting these predictions.

*The Herald* (2/8)'s front-page lead celebrated ZANU PF's “**landslide victory**” and “**clean sweeps**” of entire provinces as being a reflection of the people's will. In the accompanying editorial comment it could not help making an intolerant jibe at ZANU PF's main opposition: “**We are glad Zimbabweans showed their disdain by resoundingly rejecting the MDC-T's quisling politics**” and expanded on ZANU PF's mantra of how the MDC-T and their “**Western handlers**” had been snubbed by the people.

But it was in a page three news story entitled, ‘*Winning Candidates Celebrate*’ that the paper really tore up the professional journalism rule book by indulging in an uncouth editorial comment to describe the MDC-T as an unwanted deflowered virgin: “**...the popularity the opposition seemed to enjoy among urbanites in the last three general elections had more to do with its virginity; once it was deflowered in the inclusive government it became the village bicycle no suitor took seriously**”.

The private media however, while reporting the election results led with news that the MDC-T leader had declared the elections “**null and void**” as a result of the alleged fraud and electoral irregularities that characterized the exercise.

These media quoted Tsvangirai citing a list of these, starting with ZEC's refusal to provide the contesting parties and observers with a consolidated

voters' roll, as provided for by the electoral laws.

And the private media also reported the findings of the civic election watchdog, ZESN reporting the poll as being **"seriously compromised"**. They all reported ZESN's allegation that up to three-quarters of a million voters had been unable to vote in urban areas as a result of various electoral shortcomings, including a faulty voters' roll and an deficient voter registration exercise that denied thousands the chance to register for this election.

By comparison, coverage in ZBC's main evening news bulletins (1/8, 8pm) and *The Herald* (2/8) was dismissive. For instance, under a story headlined, 'Tsvangirai's poll stance rapped', *The Herald* reported a former ZANU PF veteran, Margaret Dongo, describing his move as being a U- turn on his initial faith in the election and **"a clear sign of a man who has no clue what to do next after suffering such a crushing defeat"**.

Instead of reporting Tsvangirai's complaints in this story, the paper hid them towards the end of its story on ZANU PF's impending victory.

The paper also reported ZEC chairperson Rita Makarau, dismissing concerns raised over the validity of the voters' roll. Regarding the **"alleged irregularities in the voters' roll..."** she said: **"...the voice of the people should be given preference as opposed to irregularities in a roll"**. She blamed the parties for not following up on the irregularities that they had found in the document.

The state media then embarked on a campaign to brush aside concerns of irregularities with a barrage of preliminary statements of the various African election observer missions and some sections of the domestic and international community, which all commended the peaceful environment in which the poll was conducted and urged Tsvangirai to accept defeat.

These included the SADC Electoral Commissions Forum (SADC-ECF), SADC Parliamentary Forum observer mission, COMESA observer mission, AU's observer missions, most SADC and African countries, the December 12 Movement, Pacific and Caribbean countries, Russia, China, and the UN.

Contrary to the buoyant reportage in the state-owned media, the private media presented a gloomy mood, which endorsed their claim that Mugabe's victory had cast a cloud over Zimbabwe's future.

For example, *The Daily News on Sunday* (4/8) quoted Tsvangirai saying the country was in **"mourning"**, while *The Standard* conducted a snap survey, which showed that Bulawayo was in a **"sombre mood after Mugabe's victory"**.

Instead of celebrating Mugabe's victory, the private media focused on the implications of the result of the poll and continued to expose electoral irregularities that were "rampant" during the polls.

The private media also enlisted the opinions of economists who reflected on the significance of Mugabe's victory and how it would impact on the country's economic future. *The Daily News on Sunday* quoted renowned economist, John Robertson saying it would **"indeed bleed the economy"** and **"discourage investors"**. In another report, entitled **"ZANU PF's policies will**

*derail economy,* ‘The Standard reported that if the shortcomings of the indigenisation policy were not addressed, a liquidity crisis would ensue due to a lack of foreign direct investment.

These media also gave prominence to some sections of the domestic and international community, particularly Britain and America, expressing serious concern over the manner in which the elections were held.

Studio 7 (3/8), for example, reported the US complaining that the election results announced by ZEC **“do not reflect the will of the people”**.

In a statement, the US State Department said the people of Zimbabwe should be commended for rejecting violence and showing their commitment to the democratic process.

**“But make no mistake. In light of substantial electoral irregularities reported by domestic and regional observers, the United States does not believe that the results announced today represent a credible expression of the will of the Zimbabwean people”**, read part of the statement.

It added: **“There were irregularities in the provision and composition of the voters’ roll. The parties had unequal access to state media. The security sector did not safeguard the electoral process on an even-handed basis. And the government failed to implement the political reforms mandated by Zimbabwe’s new constitution, the Global Political Agreement, and the region”**.

The Election Watch was produced and circulated by the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, 9 Knight Bruce Road, Milton Park, Harare, Tel: 263 4 741816 / 778115, E-mail: [monitors@mmpz.org.zw](mailto:monitors@mmpz.org.zw)

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