



Promoting Credible Elections and
Democratic Governance in Africa

ELECTION • TALK

A monthly newsletter from EISA

No. 23, 24 June 2005

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THE FORTHCOMING ELECTION IN MAURITIUS, 2005

Bertha Chiroro

Introduction

Mauritius has held democratic elections since independence from Britain in 1968. It is considered one of the most stable and democratic countries in Africa. Its economy has undergone remarkable transformation since independence, with an annual growth rate of 5% (2004 estimates) and a GDP per capita rate of \$11 400 (2004 estimates). Mauritius goes to the polls on 3 July 2005 and nomination day has been fixed for 30 May. Parliament was dissolved on 23 April in preparation for the election. Mauritius has an acceptable constitutional and legal framework, a largely satisfactory electoral system, a sound and transparent electoral process and legitimate and credible electoral management bodies (EMBs). Mauritius' only democratic deficit lies in its failure to put in place mechanisms that enhance the increased participation of women in politics.

Mauritius has the lowest representation of women in the SADC region with only 5,6% of women in parliament. This frustration has caused a number of women to form a political party called the Parti de la Majorite (PDM)¹ in a bid to increase the number of female parliamentarians.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

According to the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC region (PEMMO), an acceptable legal framework is fundamental to the holding of democratic elections. The constitution of Mauritius provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully and citizens exercise this right in practice through periodic free and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage. According to local observers, free and fair national elections were held in 2000 and the opposition Mauritian MSM/MMM alliance defeated the governing Labour Party/Parti Mauricien Xavier Duval coalition. The constitution provides for freedom of speech, press and assembly and the government generally respects these rights in practice. The

constitution of Mauritius sets out the management, structure for the organisation and conduct of elections. The Representation of the People Act, the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act, and the Local Government Council Elections Act are the principal instruments governing the organisation and conduct of elections. In preparation for the 2005 elections, the Representation of the People Act has been amended to provide for the presence of international observers who were previously not allowed for constitutional reasons².

Electoral System

The electoral system used in Mauritius is the first past the post block vote (FPTP-BV) system. The present National Assembly comprises 62 elected members who are elected by party list from 20 constituencies returning 3 members each. Each voter has to vote for three candidates of their choice. If the voter chooses two candidates (for example), the ballot becomes invalid. The only exception to this rule is the island of Rodrigues, which returns two members to parliament. Furthermore, 8 additional seats are allocated to the best losers who represent ethnic groups that would

¹ *Mauritius News*, April 2005
<http://www.mauritiusnews.co.uk/frontpage.asp>

² The Representation of the People (Amendment) Act 2005
Act No 6 of 2005

have been missed by the elected parties. The advantage of the block vote system is that it allows voter preference for individual candidates. The disadvantage is that if voters cast all their votes for candidates from the same party the BV system produces highly disproportional results³. The independent Electoral Supervisory Commission (ESC) and the electoral commissioner determine how the ethnic and political balance of the National Assembly will serve minorities by naming a maximum of 8 best losers.

However, there has been talk of possible electoral reforms which were supposed to take place. These included an increase in the number of legislative representatives from 70-80, a mixed first past the post and proportional representation system, issues around public funding for political parties, and the need to ensure more balanced gender representation. These reforms were raised by the Sachs Commission Report on Constitutional and Electoral Reforms (2001). A select committee of parliament made up of opposition and ruling party members was set up to recommend the best model of FPTP and the best loser seats as well as the number for the PR seats. Disagreements arose over the proposed model to follow between the two partners in the ruling coalition⁴. This has stalled the reform process as it is apparent that the 2005 election will be conducted prior to the consideration of any electoral reforms.

The Electoral Management Body (EMB)

Mauritius' electoral system is well anchored in electoral law. Mauritians express full confidence in their electoral management bodies and the electoral process in a manner unprecedented elsewhere in SADC⁵. An independent Electoral Supervisory Commission and an Electoral Boundaries Commission are set up under the constitution which also creates the post of electoral commissioner. The electoral commissioner is a public officer appointed by the Judicial Service Commission. The electoral commissioner is responsible among other things for the registration of voters under the supervision of the ESC. The electoral commissioner and the ESC are fully able to perform their duties and no blame has ever been ascribed to them despite instances of

dissatisfaction by opposition parties⁶. The Electoral Boundaries Commission delimits and reviews constituencies and the ESC supervises the registration of voters and the conduct of elections. The officials in both commissions are appointed by the president, who acts after consultation with the prime minister and the leader of the opposition.

Conflict Management

Election related conflicts are quite prevalent in Africa. However, Mauritius has been fortunate in that in its more than 36 years of holding elections the country has never fallen victim to serious electoral conflict. This has led to its becoming renowned as one of the most stable and democratic countries in Africa with its citizens enjoying political and civil rights comparable to citizens in Belgium or Germany. Any electoral challenges are managed through the judicial process. There have been a few cases of electoral challenges, such as that of 1976, when two candidates disagreed over how the ballots were marked either with a stroke or a cross. The Supreme Court resolved the conflict, however. Mauritius has been committed to upholding the fundamental rights and freedoms embodied in its constitution and legal framework as well as to holding free and fair, credible elections. However it needs to substantially improve on its status in terms of the representation of women with measures such as affirmative action and quotas for women.

REGISTRATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE MAURITIUS 2005 ELECTION

Bertha Chiroro

Mauritius is a functional, multiparty democracy with a culture of organising regular, democratic elections. After independence in 1968 the country established a track record of holding free and fair, multiparty, competitive elections. The regulations for the registration of political parties which include party names, coalitions, signatures of electors, logos, and the nomination of candidates are well spelt out in the National Assembly Election Regulations of 1968. The Constitution of Mauritius clearly states that every political party must register itself with the Electoral Supervisory Commission at least 14 days prior to the nomination of its candidates. There are no restrictions on registration. Political parties are also free to hold public and private meetings anywhere but they must obtain the authorisation of the police in the case of public meetings. However, smaller parties and

³ Mauritius Election Observer Report 2000, EISA

⁴ Amedee L. Darga, Mauritius Electoral Reform Process, EISA Occasional Paper Number 24, September 2004

⁵ SADC Parliamentary Forum Observer Mission Report, September 2000

⁶ Amedee L. Darga, Mauritius Electoral Reform Process, EISA Occasional Paper Number 24, September 2004

independent candidates face the problem of raising adequate resources as there is no public funding of political parties in Mauritius.

The Competing Political Parties 2005

According to the Electoral Commissioner's Office, 71 parties are registered in Mauritius and 37 will be participating in the 2005 election (see Table 1). A total of 664 candidates will be participating in the elections, of which 416 belong to political parties and 248 are independents. Within this mass of political parties, the real parties that have dominated Mauritius politics are the Labor Party (LP), the Movement Militant Mauricien (MMM) and the Mouvement Socialiste Militant (MSM). In the last thirty years these parties have undergone several coalitions and splits. All Mauritian governments since 1970 have been alliance governments involving two or three parties⁷. The real contest in the July 2005 election is going to be between two main blocks, namely the MMM-MSM-PMSD alliance and the Social Alliance (made up of LP-PMXD-MMSM-MR-LesVerts). The parties have seriously started on their campaign trails and the MMM-MSM alliance is highlighting the achievements of government from 2000-2005. These include the concept of a duty free island and the removal of customs duty from commonly used articles⁸. The Social Alliance, spearheaded by the Labor Party, is attacking government's failures which include its inability to fight corruption, deteriorating law and order and poor economic performance. They promise to tackle unemployment and the democratisation of the economy⁹.

There is a general feeling that there is not much to choose from between the two main contending alliances because of the same mix of party candidates. Many of the candidates from the two alliances have previously worked together in other alliances. What is new in these elections is an effort deployed by registered political parties to mobilise more women candidates. However, the number of women candidates fielded by the parties is less impressive. Out of a total number of 664 candidates, only 63 are women (9,5%). The strongest contender for the election, the Social Alliance, has fielded only 6 women candidates out of the total of 60. The ruling MMM-MSM-PMSD alliance fielded 10 out of their 60

candidates. In contrast a small party, Lalit, that has fielded only 32 candidates, has fielded 14 women candidates¹⁰. Nine of the women candidates are independents and the remaining 13 are split amongst the remaining smaller parties. With this small number of women candidates Mauritius will still not be able to achieve the SADC 30% gender representation as required by the 1997 SADC Declaration on Gender and Development.

History of Party Alliances

Mauritian political parties have a history of forming alliances either as a post electoral coalition as in 1969 and 1976, or as a pre-electoral arrangement in 1982, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995 and 2000¹¹. The political landscape of Mauritius has been dominated by three main parties, namely Labor, MMM, and MSM.

Table 1 – List of Participating Registered Political Parties/Party Alliances

Party/Party Alliance	Candidates		Total
	F	M	
1.Alliance MSM/MMM	10	50	60
2.Alliance Sociale	6	54	60
3.Comite D'Action Musulman Mauricien (CAMM)		3	3
4.Conservative Party		3	3
5.Democratie Mauricienne		1	1
6.Democratie Union Socialist Mauricien (DUSM)		3	3
7.Ekta Party		3	3
8.Front Progressiste du Peuple Rodriguais (FPPR)		1	1
9.Front Solidarite Mauricienne (FSM)	1	54	55
10.Front Populaire Musulman FPM		28	28
11.Group de Cinq	1	5	6
12.Independent Forward Block (IFB)		1	1
13.L'Alliance Pour La Justice	1	7	8
14.Lalit*	14	18	32
15.Majority Party Party de la majorite	4		4
16.Mauritius Party Rights		1	1
17.MDN Raj Dayal Movement	4	22	26
18.Movement Democratique Mauricienne (MDM)		5	5
19.Movement National Mauricien		3	3
20.Mouvement Rodriguais		2	2
21.Mouvement Socialiste Independent	2	7	9
22.MSTMRA		1	1
23.Mouvement Travailleurs Mauriciens		4	4
24.MTS		1	1
25.Movement Populaire Lendroit		3	3
26.OPR		2	2
27.Parti Du Peuple Mauricien (PPM)	5	46	51
28.Party Malin	3	7	10
29.PRO		1	1
30.RRR		1	1
31.Rassemblement des Travailleurs Sociaux		1	1
32.RSM		2	2
33.Rezistans ek Alternativ	2	9	11
34.Tamil Council	1	8	9
35.Top Dhamaka Vrai Rouge		1	1
36.Union Mauricien		3	3
37.Union Patriots Ilois Mauricien		1	1
38 Independents	9	239	248
TOTAL	63	601	664

⁷ Amedee L. Darga, Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy in SADC countries, Mauritius Country Report, SAIIA, 2005

⁸ *Mauritius Times*, 3 June 2005, <http://www.mauritiustimes.com>

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ LALIT party with most women candidates, 5 June 2005, <http://www.lalitmauritius.com/news.asp?newsid=582>

¹¹ Amedee L. Darga, Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy in SADC countries, Mauritius Country Report, SAIIA, 2005

Of note has been the development of ethnically motivated parties like Hizbullah, the MDN and Les Verts that claim to represent the Muslim, Hindu and Creole communities respectively. The Labor Party was instrumental in bringing about independence from the British government in 1968. Labor's support base was garnered from the Hindus, Muslims and Tamils whilst the PMSD represented the Creole community.

In the 1976 election Labor entered into an alliance with the PMSD to form a government. In the 1982 elections the Labor party coalition government was defeated by the MMM-PSM alliance. The PSM was a splinter party from the Labor party. The MMM-PSM formed a new government in 1982 with Anerood Jugnauth, the MMM president, as Prime Minister and Paul Berenger, MMM secretary general, as Minister of Finance. However a major split occurred some months later as Paul Berenger resigned, taking with him the MMM. Prime Minister Jugnauth and a number of MMM dissidents formed a new party, the MSM, in 1983. The MMM has undergone three splits since its inception – in 1973, 1983 and 1993 – and produced other parties such as the RMM, created in 1983. The MSM underwent its first split in 1994 with the creation of the MMSM. The MMSM is now in alliance with the Alliance Sociale for the 2005 election. The MMM and the MSM have been in alliances three times before and they seem to be clinging firmly together in the 2005 election.

Political Parties: Code of Conduct

According to the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC Region (PEMMO), political parties should be required to sign an electoral code of conduct upon registration. In Mauritius there are no specific rules or codes of conduct for either the ruling party or the coalition parties although there are various informal practices and unwritten rules by which parties have to abide. It is because of the democratic culture that prevails in Mauritius that a code of conduct was found to be unnecessary. However, with the increasing accusations of the abuse of public resources by the incumbents, there may be a need to revisit this issue of a code of conduct by all parties. Issues of political violence and intimidation have been minimal in Mauritius. There was a fair amount of violence in the election of 1976 but as the years have gone by, the electoral commission, the police, the candidates and their agents

have ensured that a peaceful electoral environment prevails¹².

VOTER REGISTRATION IN MAURITIUS **Grant Masterson**

The purpose of voter registration is to identify those persons who are eligible to cast a ballot on election day¹³. An updated and accurate voter's roll is an essential tool in assessing the validity of polling station turnout, results and voting behaviour patterns. As such it is an important asset in refuting claims of vote rigging and electoral fraud. It is also essential that the voter registration process itself is transparent and is widely accepted by political parties and civil society. In order to promote a transparent and legitimate registration process, the task of conducting voter registration is normally delegated to the country's electoral management body (EMB). The two most common methods of voter registration adopted in SADC states are the continuous registration method and the periodic registration method¹⁴. Mauritius favours the periodic registration method, with an option for late amendments.

Electoral Management Bodies

There are two bodies which are responsible for overseeing the voter registration process in Mauritius; the Electoral Commissioner's Office which is responsible for the overall coordination of the country's elections, and the Electoral Supervisory Commission (ESC) which is specifically responsible for and supervises the registration of electors and the conduct of elections¹⁵. The ESC consists of a chairperson appointed by the president and 6 other members appointed after consultation between the president, the prime minister, the leader of the opposition in Parliament and other significant leaders of political parties in Parliament. The president is required to remain unpartisan in his/her selection of the ESC's members. Members of the ESC are not allowed to be either a member of, or candidate for election to, Parliament or any other public office¹⁶.

¹² Amedee L. Darga, Mauritius Electoral Reform Process, EISA Occasional Paper Number 24, September 2004

¹³ The Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC Region, Electoral Handbook 13, EISA/SADC-ECF, 2003, p.15

¹⁴ *ibid.* p.15

¹⁵ The Electoral Commissioners Office website, <http://www.gov.mu/mbodies.html>, 2005

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 2005.

Table 1: Composition of Electoral Supervisory Commission

<i>Chairperson:</i> Mr Y. H. Aboobaker, C.S.K, S.C
Mr D. Basset, S.C
Mr. P. Bissessur
Mrs. N. Bundhun
Dr. C. Yip Tong
Mr O. D. Cowreea
Mr G. A. Robert
<i>Secretary:</i> Ms M. Madhub

Source: <http://www.electoral.gov.mu/election.html>

The Registration Process

The voter's roll is updated on an annual basis through a house to house enquiry which is usually conducted in January. Officers from the Electoral Commissioner's Office visit every household after office hours and during weekends and collect voter registration forms. The dates of these visits are publicised widely in the media. The data collected from the enquiries is collated and made available in its provisional form in April and May of that year.

Once the provisional roll has been made available, comments and amendments from the public are accepted for a two week period at registration centres throughout the country. Eligible voters can at this stage register their names if for some reason these do not appear on the registration form, and can also note corrections to their personal details such as a change of residential address or surname. A final voter's roll comes into force on 16 August of each year, and is kept at the Electoral Commissioner's Office and municipal and local councils. Given that the new voter's roll will not be available for 2005 by the date of the election in July, the 2004 voter's roll will be used, which according to the Electoral Commissioner's Office will exclude approximately 5000 eligible voters who turned 18 during the past year.

This system of voter registration is a somewhat unique method in the SADC region, and has proved extremely successful in Mauritius given the country's relative size and geography. Although there are no major concerns regarding the voter registration process in Mauritius, there are a couple of recommendations that are proposed in the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation (PEMMO) which bear consideration. PEMMO recommends that voters be provided with a continuous and accessible voter registration facility in order to register and amend their details, which is not possible under the present system of voter registration in Mauritius.

Given that the date of an election can occur prior to the August 16 finalisation of the voter's roll, it would be advisable to make some accommodation for new eligible voters should the election occur before this date. PEMMO also recommends that the process should be cost effective, which relates to the comparative costs of an annual door to door enquiry. It might be more effective to conduct such enquiries only in the year in which an election is due to take place. In the majority of cases however, Mauritius has successfully established a track record of efficient and equitable practices in the conduct of voter registration, in line with the recommendations outlined in PEMMO.

Conclusion

Mauritius conducts voter registration on an annual basis by means of a door-to-door enquiry of households and a subsequent review process which includes a two week period of open scrutiny by the public. A final voter's roll is kept at various local and national offices, and is open to scrutiny in line with good electoral practice. The country's registration process is supervised by the Electoral Supervisory Commission and the Electoral Commissioner's Office, appointed by the president of the state. The process is widely accepted by all major role players as transparent and legitimate, and is generally the cause of little controversy or concern.

MAURITIUS: CAMPAIGN PROCESS

Sydney Letsholo

Introduction

The Parliamentary Election in Mauritius on 3 July 2005 will provide an opportunity for aspirant parties to gain entry into Parliament. This article will examine the issue of the campaign process for the 2005 election in comparison with the political campaigns in the run-up to the 2000 Parliamentary Election. The aim is to see whether or not there are any major differences in the campaigns. This article will also discuss important recommendations made in the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC Region (PEMMO).

Campaign Process in 2000

The period between the conclusion of candidate nomination and election day is used by political parties to mount heightened political campaigns. Mauritius is no exception. In the 2000 election, 21 political parties

and alliances fielded a total of 345 candidates and 181 people stood as independents¹⁷. Two major alliances that dominated the electoral scene in the 2000 election campaign were the ruling PTr/PMXD (Alliance Parti Travailleiste) and MSM/MMM. In an effort to retain its status as the ruling alliance, the PTr/PMXD made various claims about its performance in government and made further promises to the electorate. The alliance promised to create 70 000 new jobs in the next five years, introduce a flexible tax system to stimulate foreign investment and emphasise human resources development through the building of new tertiary education institutions¹⁸.

The MSM/MMM alliance was also engaged in vigorous campaigning. The MMM and MSM have been in an electoral alliance three times previously¹⁹. As expected, vigorous political campaigns took place. Overall, the campaign was dominated by the accord between the MMM and the MSM, and more specifically by the proposed constitutional amendments to bring about a balance of power between the prime minister and the president, and the possibility of Paul Berenger becoming the prime minister in 2003²⁰. Furthermore, the alliance promised to reconsider the country's electoral model. What is more significant about the campaign process in the 2000 election is that the political climate was calm, resulting in an environment conducive to peaceful campaigning.

Campaign Process in 2005

Election time means serious business for party leaders who have to present able, dynamic and competent leaders in order to obtain popular support²¹. After having secured electoral victory in the 2000 election by obtaining 54 seats, the MSM/MMM alliance wants to remain in power. Together with various contesting parties, the alliance's main focus has been to undertake a vigorous electioneering process. Political leaders, candidates and the media have all joined in the fray to provide support for one party or another²².

As was the case in the 2000 election, the situation remains relatively calm and stable. Again, as in the 2000 election, the main focus is on the two alliances;

the PTr/PMXD and the MMM/MSM. The ruling alliance of MMM/MSM continues to advocate continuity, highlighting the number of important and positive changes it has brought in the country²³. Another notable party contesting the 2005 election is Lalit. Its election slogan is "equality, liberty, humanity, feminism, ecology". Election campaigns were launched on May Day with the announcement of the date of the polls, but do not seem to have really taken off, with both alliances taking a long time to compile their official lists²⁴.

In Mauritius no alliance or party is guaranteed victory as electoral support is often unpredictable. Mauritians rarely hold party allegiances from one five-year election to another, often changing their loyalties mid-term and on occasion throwing the ruling party (or coalition) out after one term²⁵. The stage is set for what promises to be a vibrant electoral contest between the country's political parties.

However, apart from the diehards, a good proportion of the electorate is still undecided about who to support in the forthcoming election²⁶. Adding to the electorate's uncertainty is the fact that parties/alliances rely heavily on posters rather than election manifestos. This significantly reduces the chances for citizens to make well-informed electoral decisions. As if this is not enough, political parties in Mauritius resort to public mud-slinging rather than providing voter education.

Conclusion

There are no major differences between the campaign processes of 2000 and 2005 in Mauritius. Both campaigns have taken place under peaceful and stable environments. As is the norm in the country, alliances still remain the order of the day. The July 2005 election will reveal whether Mauritians will continue their culture of voting for different parties/alliances with each election.

¹⁷ EISA website, <http://www.eisa.org.za/WEP/mauritius.htm>

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ *ibid*

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ *Mauritius Times* website, <http://www.mauritiustimes.com>

²² *ibid*

²³ *L'Express* website, <http://www.lexpress.mu>

²⁴ *allAfrica.com* website, <http://www.allafrica.com/stories>

²⁵ SARDC website, <http://www.sardc.net>

²⁶ *L'Express*, <http://www.lexpress.mu>

THE MEDIA IN MAURITIUS

Selby Matloga and Maureen Moloji

Introduction

Mauritius is one of the most stable democracies in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. Most SADC constitutions guarantee freedom of the press as a fundamental right, but in practice this freedom is not respected in many countries. Mauritius is among the few countries that enjoy political security and media freedom in practice²⁷. Mauritius possesses a vibrant media, predominantly presented in French although there are a few English media outlets. Though Mauritius has a diverse and dynamic media, it is still suffering from state control and manipulation. This is a common trend in many countries in SADC. This paper examines the state of the media in Mauritius, and its impact on elections.

Regulations Governing the Media Environment

The constitution of Mauritius guarantees freedom of expression and of the press (stipulated in Article 12 (1))²⁸. In August 2000, the National Assembly passed the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act (IBA). The main objective of this Act is to regulate and license all private radio and television broadcasting and it also provides for private ownership of broadcasting stations. The IBA is supposed to be an independent body. Its structure comprises representatives of several government ministries and is chaired by an appointee of the Prime Minister²⁹. This has resulted in the establishment of a number of private radio stations which enjoy considerable independence. The fact that the IBA only regulates the private media has raised many doubts about its impartiality. There is no body that regulates the public media and oversees its operation. This has left the public media squarely under the control of government. This may be the reason why the public media has been criticised for its lack of impartiality in its news coverage. The public media in Mauritius enjoys a monopoly in broadcasting local news that generally reflects the official viewpoint. As such, if not properly monitored, the public media could be used to favour one group to the detriment of others, especially during elections. The IBA only recently

issued guidelines setting down the rule for private broadcasting covering the current election in July 2005³⁰. This has raised many questions about the intention behind the introduction of new rules for private media a month before the election.

Throughout the political history of Mauritius, the media has always been accused of being biased in favour of the ruling party. However, since the creation of the IBA, the emergence of private media has played a significant role in broadcasting the views of the opposition. Some observers think that this situation has also contributed to strengthening the opposition.

One impressive aspect of the media in Mauritius is the existence of an influential and independent print media. This includes a number of private daily and weekly publications. Daily and weekly newspapers offer balanced coverage in several languages. They are often critical of both the government and the opposition parties³¹. More than a dozen privately owned newspapers present varying political viewpoints and express partisan views freely. However, the government has the ability to counter press criticism by using strict libel laws. These measures to inhibit the press freedom have been perceived as undemocratic, since the state can constrain critical views of the government.

The Media and Elections

The media in Mauritius is predominantly under the government's control. The state-owned Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) owns a large stake in radio and TV services, therefore making the public radio and TV channels unofficial news media of the government³². Privately run radio stations were introduced in 2002 (see Table 1).

The media is a critical stakeholder in helping the electorate to make a well informed choice. Prospective candidates use newspapers, radio and TV to influence voters. Of these, TV is the most powerful electoral apparatus, followed by radio. It is estimated that around 80% of the population tune in for the 19h30 news broadcast by the MBC every night. The publicly funded MBC enjoys an absolute monopoly in the Mauritius media structure. The monopolistic status and the broad audience that the MBC enjoys combine to

²⁷ D. Kadima, Mauritius Election Observer Mission Report, EISA, 2000, p.3

²⁸ Article (12) (1) Constitution of Mauritius

²⁹ United States Department of State website, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/af/857.htm>

³⁰ *Mauritius Times* website, <http://www.mauritiustimes.com>

³¹ *BBC* website, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1063172.stm#media

³² *ibid*

make them the most powerful tool in the management of public opinion, especially during the election period³³. Although the legal framework of the MBC stipulates a degree of impartiality, it is exploited by every government as a political propaganda machine³⁴. For instance, in 1999 the then opposition MSM/MMM brought a judicial challenge to the results of a September 1999 by-election, formally accusing the MBC of providing biased coverage favouring the government's candidate during the by-election campaign. The MBC rejected this charge. The unfairness of news coverage during the election is constantly raised by the opposition parties. During the 2000 election the opposition alliance and many independent analysts consistently accused the MBC of bias in favour of the ruling Mauritius Labour Party Alliance (PTTr/PMXD) in its coverage of the news. Many critics of the MBC acknowledge that the public broadcaster has been favouring the ruling parties or alliances throughout the history of the country³⁵. However it should be noted that newspapers, namely *Le'Mauricien* and *L'Express*, are mainly supportive of the opposition parties and vocal about their opinions. The new government, however, stated that in the 2005 election the MBC would be depoliticised. However, this tendency for politicians, especially those in power, to manipulate the media has developed as a culture that will take time to eradicate.

region. The public media is closer to the ruling party and the private media is fairly balanced. In this regard it would be important to ensure that a more open, free and unbiased public media be installed. In order to expedite this, it would be necessary to put in place a media code of conduct which will also affect the public media and not only the private media as is the current position. The existence of a code of conduct will go a long way towards decreasing biased reporting during election time. In addition, the IBA should not be under government control. This media regulation authority must become a totally independent body run by people who are not government officials, as is the current position. IBA independence is crucial as the country moves towards the election. If its independence cannot be assured in this election, at least steps must be taken in the post-election period to change its status. It is critical for the IBA to ensure that all contesting parties and candidates have equal access to the public media, and this is still problematic as the state owns most of the public radio and TV channels, thus offering them an unfair advantage over the opposition. Equally important, civil society in Mauritius must open the debate on the issue of public media independence and autonomy. However, regarding the forthcoming election, it is encouraging that the already independent private press is determined to deliver impartial coverage of the election despite the new guidelines enforced by the IBA.

Table 1: Radio Stations and Television Networks

National Television Networks		State-owned	Independent
1	Canal+	✓	
2	Mauritius Broadcasting Corp. MBC1, MBC2, MBC3	✓	
3	Rodriguez TV	✓	
4	SuperSports	✓	
National Radio Networks		State-owned	Independent
1	Radio Maurice 1	✓	
2	Radio Maurice 2	✓	
3	Kool FM	✓	
4	Taal FM	✓	
5	One World FM	✓	
6	Radio Rodriguez	✓	
7	FM Rodriguez	✓	
Newspapers		State-owned	Independent
1	L'Express		✓
2	Le'Mauricien		✓
3	Journal Star		✓

Source: <http://www.tvradioworld.com/region3/mau/>

Conclusion

Despite its vibrancy, the media in Mauritius presents the same characteristics as other media in the SADC

³³ *Mauritius Times* website, <http://www.mauritiustimes.com>

³⁴ *ibid*

³⁵ Kadima, D., Mauritius Election Observer Mission Report, EISA, 2000, p.29