



Revealing Race:

An analysis of the coverage of race and xenophobia in the South African print media

Summary Report

The Revealing Race Project is a research based media monitoring project focusing on the representation of race, racism, ethnicity and xenophobia in the South African media. The Media Monitoring Project (MMP) recognises that these issues are different and need special attention; however, all are forms of discrimination based on stereotypes and myths about the 'other'. These issues may also constitute human rights violations, which serve to undermine a person's right to equality and dignity. This report forms part of the broader "Revealing Race Project" of the Media Monitoring Project (MMP) funded by the Mott Foundation. The report reveals the results of the monitoring of a sample of Gauteng-based print media undertaken by the MMP from January to May 2006 on the representation of issues of race, ethnicity and xenophobia in the selected media.

The objectives of the project are to:

1. Monitor, analyse, and raise awareness about how race and racism is dealt with and reported in the South African media;
2. Offer guidelines for journalists reporting on race;
3. Hold presentations and face-to-face meetings with editors, journalists, and other key stakeholders on the findings and recommendations; and
4. Publish and disseminate the findings and recommendations for a wider and more diverse audience.

What we did and why

This component of the Revealing Race Project came about as a result of different studies undertaken by the MMP that had race as a key factor. These studies include monitoring of the representation of gender, children, local and national election processes, amongst others. The findings from these studies highlighted the need for a focused monitoring project that would analyse the representation of race and xenophobia in the South African media after 12 years of democratic rule in the country.

A sample of print media was monitored for the duration of 5 months, i.e. from January to May 2006.	Media Monitored <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Daily Sun• Sowetan
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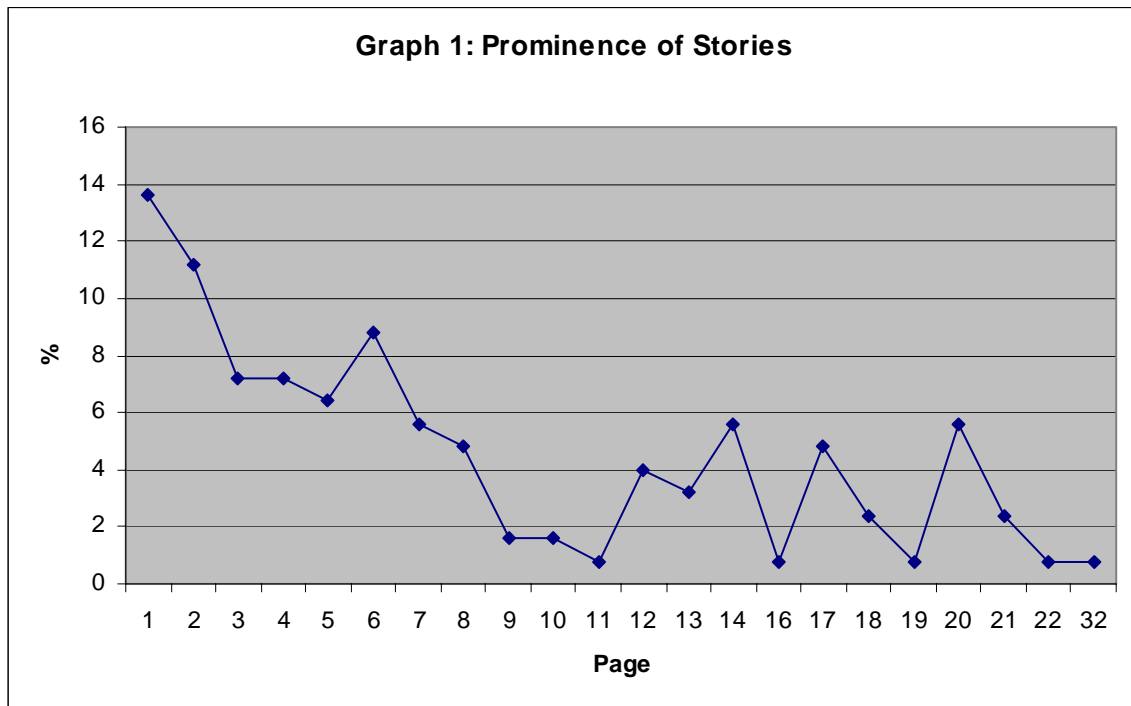
Articles that mentioned and dealt with issues of race, ethnicity, and xenophobia were monitored. A monitoring tool was tailor made and monitors received specialised training on its use and application to accuracy and standardisation.

- The Citizen
- The Star
- Business Day
- Beeld
- Sunday Independent
- Sunday Times
- City Press
- Mail and Guardian

Key Results

The aim of the project was to study and analyse key issues including the prominence given to articles dealing with issues of race, racism, ethnicity and xenophobia; the themes under which these issues were discussed; the main propositions in the articles monitored; the origin of the articles; the people who speak on these issues; and the nature of the articles.

Where were the stories?

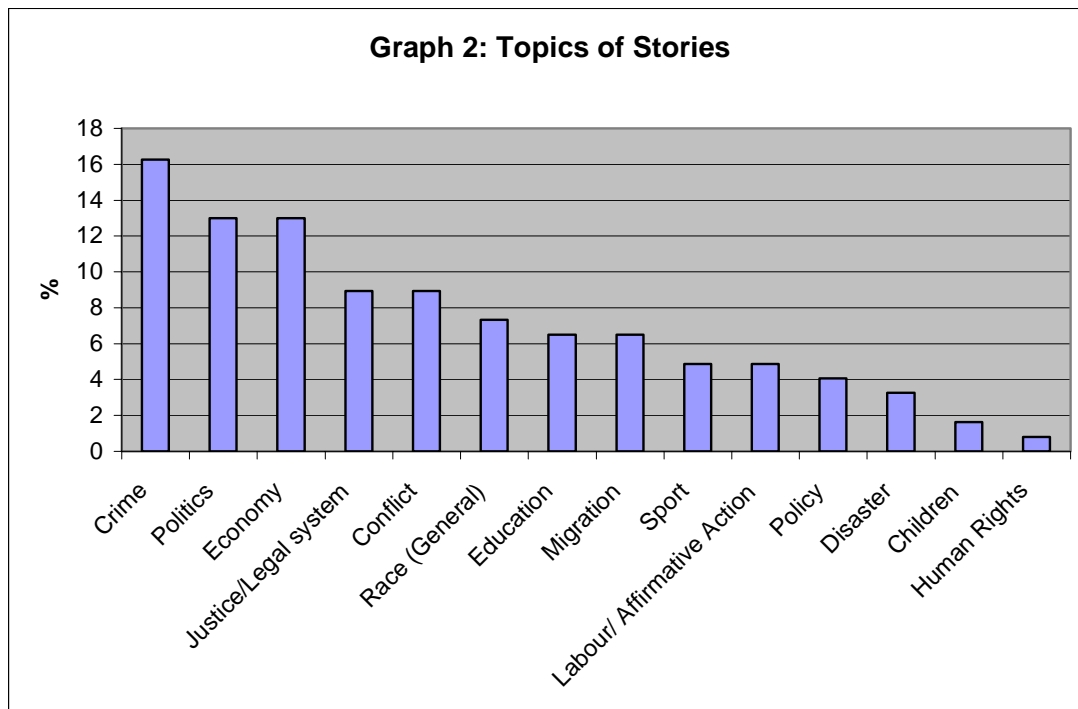


Graph 1 illustrates that issues of race, racism and xenophobia are clearly considered to be important and are afforded great prominence. The graph shows that issues of race and racial identifiers received prominent coverage, with 14% of the articles appearing on page 1, and 11% on page 2. The rest of the coverage was spread throughout the monitored publications with most of it in the form of commentary and opinion pieces on the editorial pages.



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What were the stories about?



Topic refers to the overall subject of an article. Graph 2 shows the most common themes under which issues of race, racism, ethnicity and xenophobia were reported. The monitoring found a degree of diversity in topics covered. It is, however, evident that a handful of subjects provided the majority of stories in this regard. Items on crime, politics, economy, justice/legal system, and conflict together comprised 60% of the coverage where issues of race and xenophobia were discussed.

Most of the reports on crime (16% of all stories monitored) were about crimes committed by non-nationals which made headline news particularly in the *Daily Sun*. All of the publications monitored, however, tended to mention the nationality of the people committing incidents of crime particularly if they were not South African citizens, without explaining the relevance of this information to the story. This form of reporting tended to perpetuate the stereotype that non-nationals were more predisposed to commit crime than nationals

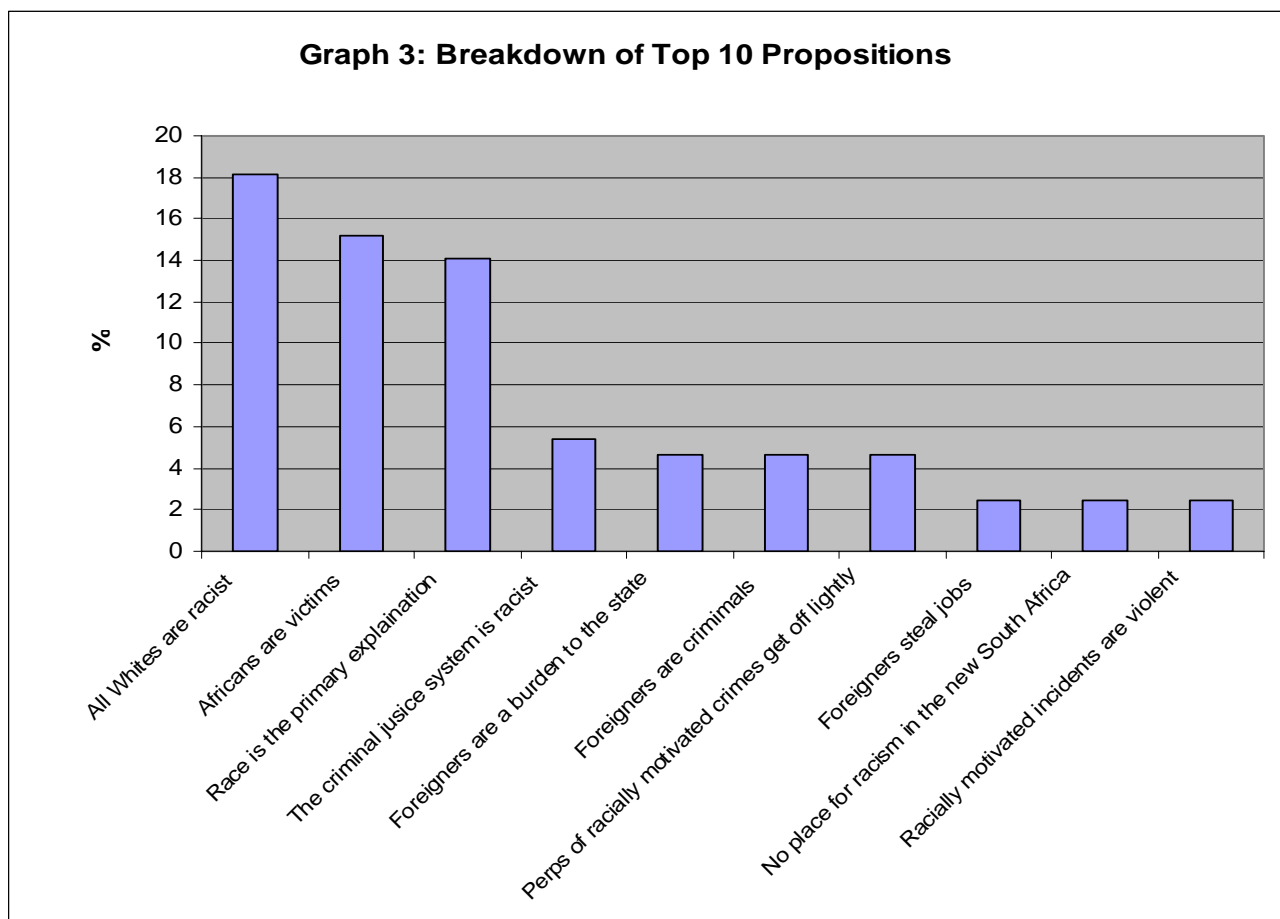
Another key finding on crime reportage is the representation of crime involving people of different races. When crime is committed by a 'White' person against a 'Black' person, the race is likely to be mentioned. When a 'Black' person is the perpetrator, however, the media tends to ignore the race. This leaves one with the impression that it is common for 'Black' people to commit crime, therefore there is no need to mention the race of 'Black' perpetrators. At the same time it stereotypes 'White' people as racists who attack other people just because of their racial identity. These issues are discussed further in the report.



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Other topics that dominated the coverage reflected the issues that arose during the monitoring period. This period coincided with the run-up to the local government elections. Election-focused articles therefore led to a high percentage of stories of political nature. Politics accounted for 13% of stories monitored. The results concur with previous studies on election report monitoring which found that the media tend to report uncritically on the racial polarisation by political parties. It is also the one sector of the society where grouping of people by race is reported uncritically. Policies on Black Economic Empowerment and Affirmative Action received prominent coverage (5%), with most articles appearing as features and opinion pieces. Most of these articles were critical of the manner in which people are categorised by their race in the labour market. The central argument of such coverage tended to support the contention that there needs to be other ways of identifying disadvantaged people; as the current one based on race tends to discriminate against other groups. The formation of the Native Club also received quite prominent coverage and debate in the editorial pages. Transformation in terms of gender and race in the judiciary also received prominent coverage.

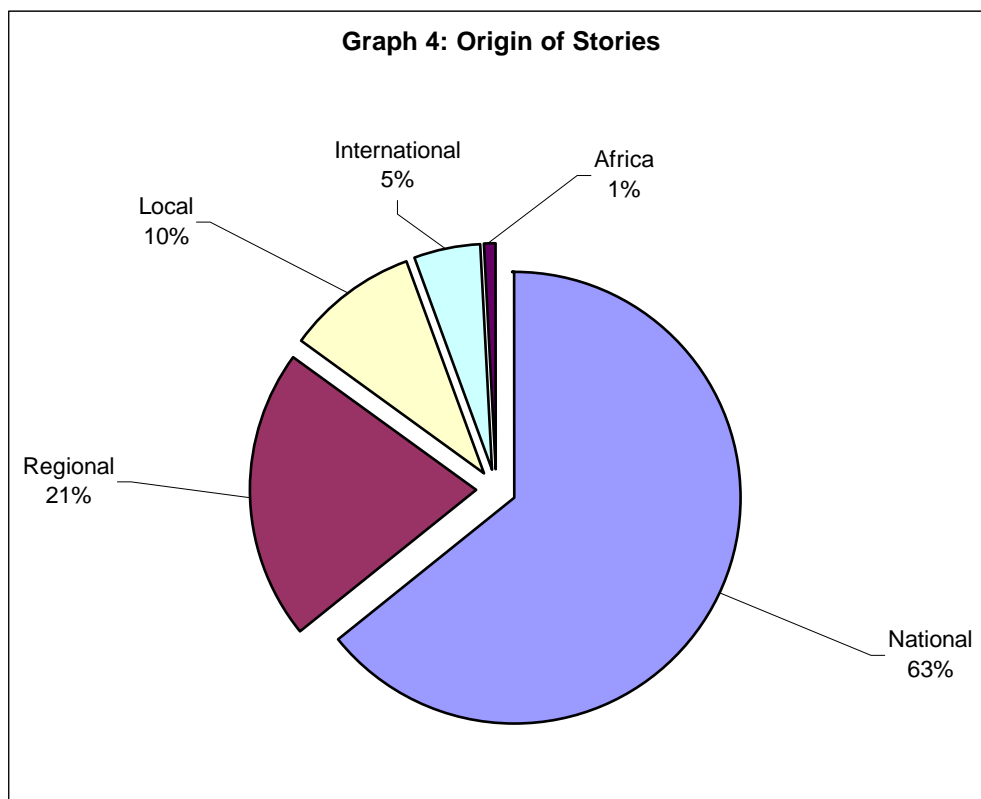
What key messages were clearly evident in the stories?



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Through a participatory workshop prior to the monitoring, a list of propositions focusing on the central messages contained in race-related articles was designed. As shown in Graph 3, propositions that were clearly identified in the articles monitored were negative. These represent the 'White racist' and 'Black victim' messages sent out by the reports on crime involving people of different races. Another key message that came out strongly is the notion that 'Race is (the) primary explanation' for events. This is often identified when no other reasons are given for the crimes other than the race of the people involved, and no explanation of the incident is provided. Also a number of negative messages came out regarding non-nationals. These include the ideas that 'foreigners are a burden to the state; foreigners are criminals; and foreigners steal jobs'. These findings are not unique to this study. The concern however is that after 12 years of democracy such messages still come through the media, notably in tabloid media, which it may be argued should be playing a key role in challenging xenophobic attitudes.

Where are the stories from?

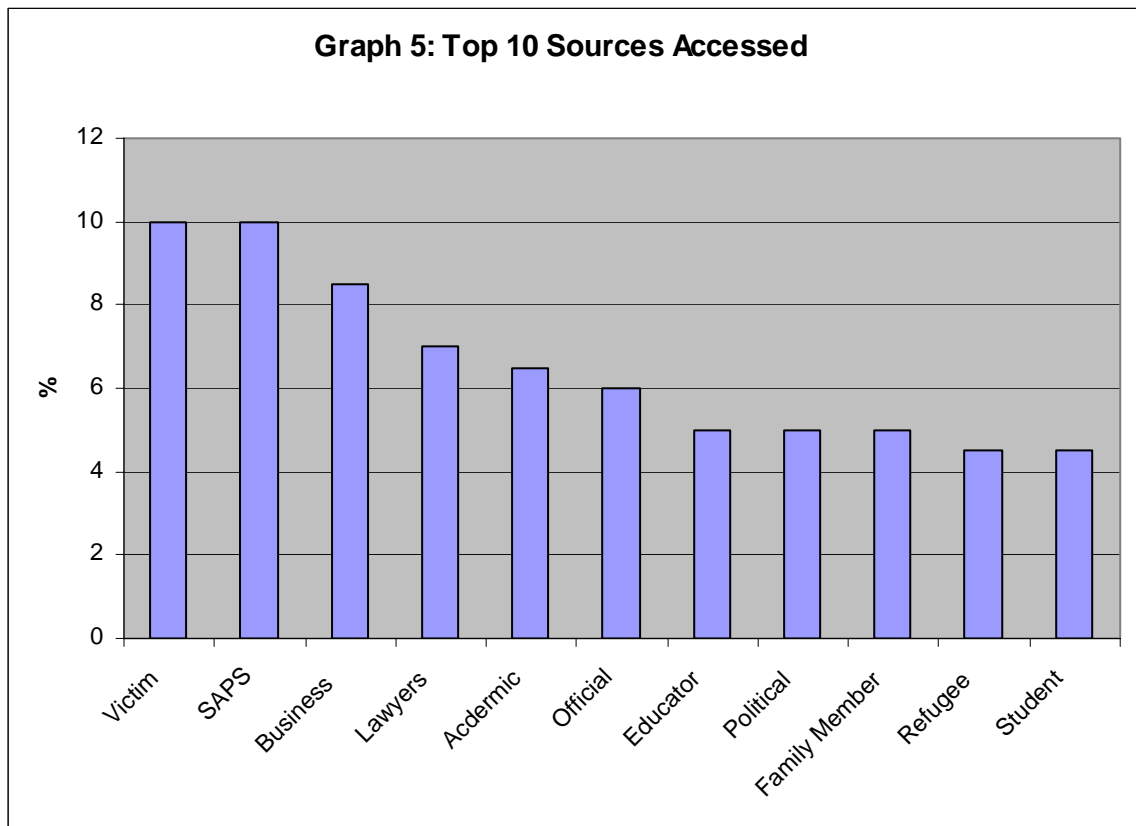


Another element of the research involved establishing whether issues of race, ethnicity and xenophobia were limited to local and provincial areas or whether they were discussed and represented as affecting the nation. As the graph above illustrates, 63% of articles were national, with regional at 21% and 10% for local stories. The importance of monitoring the origin of the story is that when issues are represented outside one's area they tend to lack the urgency they deserve. It is therefore important that the media represent issue of race and racism as being of national importance.



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Whose voices were accessed?



People who were directly and indirectly accessed were monitored as sources. Because a high percentage of the articles monitored were opinion and commentary pieces, relatively few people were accessed. A key function of monitoring who speaks (or the sources of items) is to help determine whose views are accessed the most in the news media. These views tend to shape how people perceive and understand events.

The findings show that people who were directly involved in the stories were accessed as victims. These were in most instances victims of racially motivated crimes. The reason for this could be the fact that most of these reports were based on court cases where the sources were often readily available to journalists for comment. Other than people directly involved in the stories and officials, other civil society members accessed included the family members; refugees; and student. Issues of refugees were highlighted during the refugee day and articles sourced refugees to tell their stories.

Sourcing people who are directly affected by an issue suggests good journalism as it gives voice and power to those who otherwise cannot get their voices heard. Consideration must however be exercised so as to ensure that these



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groups do not have their rights further violated and that they are not merely victims but, also survivors.

Way forward

It is hoped that by highlighting trends and issues on race, racism, ethnicity and xenophobia reportage, and by working with the media, these issues would be presented in a manner that promotes good journalism, encourages tolerance, respect, dignity and understanding amongst peoples. It is through the media that people form, shape and make sense of their world; therefore the media has a key responsibility to educate and challenge stereotypes that exist in the society.

As part of the project, the MMP will be hosting round table discussions to deliberate on the findings of this research study with media practitioners, partner organisations and all interested stakeholders. The objective of the discussions are to come up with mechanisms and ways of ensuring that messages from both media reports and non-governmental organisations do not perpetuate prejudicial or negative stereotyped messages. A resource guide will be developed by MMP that will assist authors and journalists in presenting issues of race, racism, ethnicity and xenophobia in a manner that aims to build a tolerant society that embraces its diversity.

Media policies and ethics on Race

Media practitioners and institutions are governed by the policy and legislative frameworks of the country in which they operate, as well as by a complex set of self-regulated ethical principles. In South Africa, the Constitution and a set of legal instruments, including the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa, the Press Ombudsman, and the various acts including the Equality Act, the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act, and the Broadcasting Amendment Bill, govern the role played by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (Icasa) and guide the media in its reporting and editorial approaches.

In addition, there are various international governance institutions, including the United Nations, which have set out declarations pertaining to the media and the ways in which the media should conduct themselves. Many of these declarations deal with the principles of freedom of expression, media access, and principles of fair reporting. Notably, there is very little specific attention or focus on issues of racism or guidelines for non-racialised reporting. One document that does have direct relevance is the Unesco Declaration of 1978. The declaration addressed fundamental principles concerning the contribution of mass media to strengthening peace and international understanding to the promotion of human rights and to combating racism, apartheid and incitement to war.

The Unesco Declaration tasks the mass media with the crucial role of promoting peace, human rights and anti-racism in both national and international contexts. Moreover, the mass media is expected to consciously encourage diversity and freedom of expression, while condemning hate speech or incitements to violence. Most importantly, the media is given the responsibility of adopting anti-racist messages and discourse in its coverage, as suggested by Article 5 of the Declaration:



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The mass media and those who control or serve them, as well as all organised groups within national communities, are urged – with due regard to the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particularly the principle of freedom of expression – to promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among individuals and groups, and to contribute to the eradication of racism, racial discrimination and racial prejudice, in particular by refraining from presenting a stereotyped, partial, unilateral or tendentious picture of individuals of various human groups.

Key issue to ponder:

- Discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity and nationality is a human rights violation. For South African society to embrace and promote a culture of human rights, it is vital that any such violations are highlighted in the media. In so doing, the media should avoid language that tends to support or perpetuate stereotypes which are based on myths and very often perpetuate discrimination of the 'other' based on unfounded and unfair judgement;
- The monitoring revealed that articles which appeared on the commentary and feature pages tended to engage and analyse issues extensively, compared to the event based coverage on the news pages;
- The monitoring also revealed that there needs to be context and explanation when events are reported, as simplistic reports tend to perpetuate stereotypes;
- Identification of people by either race or nationality needs to be within the context of the story reported. The research has shown that it is not standard practice for the media to identify people according to their race or nationality but this tends to be the principle when stories focus on conflicts. Where it is necessary, there should be clear explanation why race or nationality is important to mention. Left unchecked, this tendency gives an impression that people commit crime based on their race or nationality.

The full report of this summary is available upon request to the MMP or on our website www.mediamonitoring.org.za.



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