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Monitoring the media since 1993

Delivering Service: Local Government Elections 2006 and the Media

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Abstract

The 2006 Local Government Elections demonstrated many of the patterns from past of election coverage, with the elections attracting much media attention, but event-based reporting predominating. The majority of the coverage was national, rather than local, as may be expected in a local election. Beeld was the exception in this regard. The fairness of coverage was compromised by media not setting their own agenda, but in allowing national party figures to do so. While national political figures featured largely, local issues only made the news mainly through public service delivery protests. Women featured during this period in the media as a result of party manifestos to promote women within their ranks, not from a media strategy to seek out and discover female sources. Race featured narrowly in the media, based on party announcements and perceived race-based voting.



1. Introduction

March 2006 saw South Africa hold its third Local Government Elections since the advent of democracy in 1994. It was crucial for these elections to be seen to be both free and fair and as a precursor to further democratic development and consolidation. A free and fair election process requires an informed, educated, and knowledgeable electorate; able to understand electoral the choices and procedures. It was also imperative that the Local Government Elections took place within a secure and viable political climate.

Local Government Elections are close to people's hearts. This is because local government is situated closest to the people and is responsible for basic service delivery. Local government is also responsible for implementing a number of measures to facilitate participatory democracy and the framing of integrated development plans, through mechanisms such as ward committees. However, local government faces a range of challenges, including lack of capacity and skills, especially in small or rural areas.

In such a context, the media has a role to inform people of democratic rights and procedures of citizens to strengthen and entrench democracy. Especially in a country like South Africa that is arguably still coming to grips with its undemocratic past. The role and responsibility of the media is even greater during an election period, where the media's primary function is to inform and educate voters on a range of critical election-related issues. It is expected that election coverage should include critical and independent in-depth analyses of party policies and promises, basic voter education, and paid-for political advertisements. In such circumstances, the media often acts as a watchdog in order to ensure the accountability of politicians and government officials. Reporting the elections is also more than merely a one-day affair, and the media have the time needed to report on an election process in all of its diversity. From the moment the election date was announced by President Mbeki in Parliament to the immediate post-election period.

As indicated by previous Media Monitoring Project (MMP) election monitoring, the need for monitoring the media for the quantity and quality of reporting around the election, goes beyond the broadcast media, to the print media sector. In addition, monitoring must go beyond merely quantifying the amount of coverage deemed to be fair, to assessing and analysing the quality of such election-related coverage. In recognition of the excellent analysis of MMP's report on the democratic elections of 1994, it was included in the then Independent Media Commission's final reports on the elections. MMP has established their place as an excellent, independent election media monitoring concentrating on the human rights debates, which may, otherwise, go unheard.



2. Project Rationale

Media inform voters on election-related matters such as manifestos and local government candidates. While it is crucial for the media to engage in critical interrogation of issues during any election campaign, it is even more critical during the run-up to Local Government Elections, which are contested on the basis of the “bread and butter” issues; those of immediate and direct relevance to the local communities concerned. For these reasons, the MMP monitored the South African media for the coverage of the Local Government Election process.

With this in mind, the 2006 Local Government Election monitoring project aimed to:

- Ascertain the attention provided to the debates which arose during the election period;
- Determine the extent and nature of coverage surrounding key human rights related issues within the context of the Local Government Election Process, most particularly with respect to concerns surrounding gender and race;
- Educate the media about their role in election reporting;
- Assess the extent to which the media provided fair, balanced and equitable party coverage of the 2004 national elections; and
- Inform public bodies, civil society, other stakeholders, and media themselves about the performance of the media during the election period.

3. Method

The election research involved content analysis of television and print news media around the election period. This research technique is referred to as media monitoring. In implementing the media monitoring project, the MMP adapted the methodology successfully utilised in its previous election monitoring projects. A project-specific user-guide and the necessary research materials were developed, and monitors trained in a consistent manner, ensuring inter-monitor reliability.

Print and broadcast media were thoroughly and consistently monitored and analysed on a daily basis for the eight-week period from the 15th January until the 10th March, inclusive of the election run-up, the day of the election and the immediate post-election period, in order to ascertain the central themes, patterns and trends noticed during the election period.

The following media were monitored:

- e-tv news and election programming;
- SABC 3 news and election programming;
- The Citizen;
- Daily Sun;
- Sowetan;
- The Star; and
- Sunday Times.

Furthermore, Beeld, SABC 1 and SABC 2 and the City Press were included in the qualitative analysis, but had regrettably to be excluded from quantitative results. This is further explained under Limitations below.

The information gathered during the monitoring was then captured into a database. The database was designed to store the captured monitoring information, and permitted the running of specific queries and the production of results.

The media monitored were scrutinised for the following aspects:

- **Item number:** Each item was numbered in relation to where it occurred in a bulletin;
- **Summary:** A brief summary of each item was captured;
- **Sources:** A breakdown of the type, gender, occupation and where evident the race of the sources utilised in the media monitored;
- **Topics:** The most frequently accessed topics, or central subject of each item was captured using a set list to ensure accuracy and reliability;
- **Origin:** The provincial geographic breakdown of the stories;

media

The logo for the Media Monitoring Project features the word "media" in a red, serif font. To the right of "media" is a blue graphic consisting of a curved line with several small circles, resembling a stylized eye or a signal. Below "media" is the text "monitoring project" in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font.

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- **Journalists:** A breakdown of the journalists who compile the items;
- **Fairness/Bias:** The degree of bias favouring and/or opposing the respective political parties. A critical function of the monitoring lay in determining the overall fairness of the reporting. One of the most controversial areas for political parties and the media, it is also one of the most difficult to monitor. The MMP's method for monitoring fairness ensured that where there was any doubt it always favoured the media in terms of fairness. Where items were monitored as biased, the MMP's method ensured that the monitor provided clear reasons for monitoring it as such; and
- **Information:** The depth of information provided in each item monitored.

To ensure optimal functioning of the systems, the methodology, database and queries were piloted, tested and debugged prior to the implementation of the project.

3.1. Limitations

Financial and personnel constraints necessitated that only Gauteng-based commercial print media and the three channels of the SABC and e-tv were subject to scrutiny. Furthermore *Beeld*, *City Press*, and the broadcasts on *SABC 1* and *SABC 2* had to be excluded from quantitative analysis, as the entire period was not available. In such circumstances, the limited range of media monitored would obviously have some effect on the findings. The reader is cautioned against generalising from these findings to the broader media sector in South Africa.

However, the media that were monitored do represent the media products with the highest circulation, as both the *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Times* are included. All of the print media that were used in the quantitative analysis are Gauteng-based. As such, this may have an impact on the figures in this monitoring report. In addition, because this was a Local Government Election, the lack of smaller commercial media and community media is a limitation, as local media are likely to carry news of relevance their audience. In this regard, the fact that the *Beeld* was excluded from the quantitative analysis is also regrettable, as the *Beeld* did run a series on local candidates for the election.

In addition, because of the substantially smaller sample used for the project, in terms of the fewer mediums monitored, the results of this monitoring are not directly comparable to previous MMP elections research.

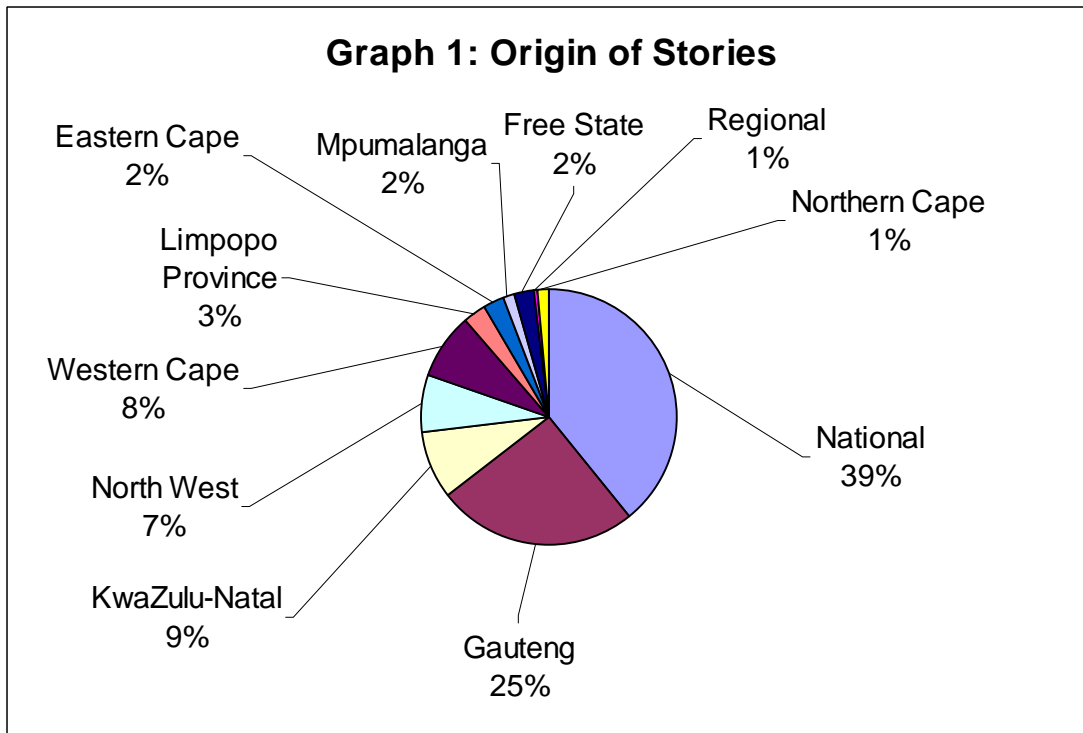
4. Findings

In keeping with the MMP's human rights focus, the findings of the Local Government Election monitoring project presented here relate particularly to the vital issues of:

- The tendency of the media to nationalise rather than localise Local Government Election coverage;
- The socio-economic rights of the South African populace as represented in concerns over and attention provided to service delivery;
- Gender within the context of electioneering, party lists and who gets sourced; and
- The racialisation of election coverage apparent in the run-up to the Local Government Elections.

4.1. Where did the stories come from?

The South African Constitution clearly outlines the set of competencies required from local government, under Schedule 5 it is up to the politicians and the media to ensure that these are the issues being represented and debated by the media. However, previous monitoring has shown that local issues are often neglected during election campaigns by both politicians and the media. Similar patterns have continued to characterise the coverage of the 2006 Local Government Elections.



As illustrated in graph, nationally focused stories accounted for more than a third (39%) of all stories. Furthermore, in keeping with previous patterns of coverage, when coverage did filter down to the local level, this was primarily in the provinces containing the three major Metropoles - Gauteng (25%), KwaZulu-Natal (9%) and the Western Cape (8%). As most of the monitored media included in the quantitative analysis are Gauteng-based, the figure for Gauteng is not surprising.

4.1.1 Focus on national political figures

Monitoring revealed the ongoing tendency of the media to focus on the movements of national political figures, to the detriment of local candidates. MMP found that the media provides extensive coverage on national campaigning and launching of manifestos at the expense of local issues and concerns. It is evident that the media, perhaps as a result of accessibility issues, focused on the events addressed by the leaders of the major political parties, most specifically Thabo Mbeki of the ANC and Tony Leon of the DA. Mangosutho Buthelezi of the IFP and Patricia de Lille of the Independent Democrats also received some attention.

Table 1: Most Prominent Sources		%
Citizen		19
ANC (African National Congress)		9
DA (Democratic Alliance)		6
IEC (Independent Electoral Commission)		4
Thabo Mbeki (Leader)		4
Tony Leon (Leader)		4
Community/Residents Associations		3
Policeperson		3
Brigalia Bam (Chairperson)		2
SACP		2
Academic		2
Voter		2
ACDP (African Christian Democratic Party)		2
Mangosutho Buthelezi (Leader)		1
IFP (Inkhatha Freedom Party)		1
Pansy Tlakula (Chief Electoral Officer)		1
Patricia de Lille (Leader)		1
PAC (Pan African Congress)		1
ID (Independent Democrats)		1

In this regard, as seen in Table 1, the DA leader, Leon was sourced 4% of the time, while ANC president Mbeki, was accessed in slightly more cases (4%). Buthelezi provided his opinion in 1% of the stories, while de Lille's voice was heard 1% of the time.

The concentration on prominent people represents a possible threat to fair coverage as smaller parties could potentially have received less coverage as they lack celebrity persons. It would, in this context seem unfair to hope that local community and small commercial media with less resources gave fair coverage to candidates contesting their wards.

4.1.2 National issues vs. local issues

MMP's monitoring of the 2000 Local Government Elections pointed to the tendency of the media, to take their lead from political parties in covering Local Government Elections. During the run-up to the 2006 LGE, it would appear as if the media failed to actively set the agenda in directing coverage towards concerns at the heart of local communities. Aside from the dramatic and immediate coverage provided by events in Khutsong and other volatile protest-hit areas around the country, it would appear as if the media, with a few notable exceptions, merely reiterated the perspectives of national political party officials, without the necessary levels of examination and debate relating to the local applicability of such views. The situation in Khutsong, did however ensure a greater than expected concern for events in the North West Province. In a sharp rupture with previous patterns of news coverage, the North West Province accounted for a little under a tenth (9%) of all election related stories monitored.

A clear indication of the extent to which the media focused on the national at the expense of the local, is provided by the respective figures for the number of national and provincial and local governmental officials and spokespeople sourced for their views and opinions. Table 2 shows that representatives of national and provincial authorities combined were more than twice as likely to be accessed for comment than their counterparts at the local level. Of all government sources, only 29% are of local government. In this regard, local government officials accounted for 4% of all sources utilised by the media monitored, while the proportion for national and provincial authorities stood at 10% combined.

Table 2: Government Sources		
	Relative %	Absolute %
National government	50	7
Provincial government	21	3
Local government	29	4

While the focus on national political figures was primarily a consequence of political parties themselves rolling out their big guns in their bids to win over voters, such developments should nonetheless have been covered and interrogated from the perspective of local communities and grassroots concerns.

Some media did however, focus on individual wards in towns, cities and villages, constituencies, suburbs or towns. The coverage provided in the *Beeld* was

The logo for the 'media monitoring project' features the word 'media' in a red, serif font. Below it, the words 'monitoring project' are written in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font. A blue swoosh with several white dots curves under the text from the right side.

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perhaps the most advanced in this regard. Throughout the course of the coverage in the run-up to the election, the *Beeld* included on a daily basis a regular focus on a featured ward, in a number of municipal authorities across the country. While the majority of these wards examined were in the major metropolitan areas of Johannesburg, Tshwane (Pretoria) and Cape Town, the *Beeld* did include some towns in Limpopo, North-West, the Free State, and the Eastern Cape in their analysis.

Each of these full-page features presented a socio-economic, demographic, and political overview of the area under discussion, as well as the viewpoints, wishes and perspectives of a number of local residents. These items also named and provided photographs of the candidates standing in the respective wards, as well as a summarised version of the central points of their manifestos their plans to improve their constituency and their standpoints on politics in their chosen ward.

Throughout such coverage, each of the parties contesting the individual wards in the metropolises and smaller towns, cities and villages were provided with equal space to present their major arguments, without any undue editorialising and commentary from the journalists responsible for the stories.

In the week prior to voting day, the *Star* did provide some local focus for Johannesburg in presenting a run-down of the candidates' lists in the various wards and on the proportional representation lists of the various parties contesting the election in the city.

The immediate post-election period also saw a number of the print media provide the results of the election contests across the 286 municipal entities that comprise the country. Such lists of results were forthcoming, for example, in both the *Star* and the *Beeld*, which included a 20 page supplement of all election results in Gauteng.

Media coverage seems to show that the 2006 election process, Local Government Elections have indeed become another battleground for national political parties. However, it is critical for policies in this domain to be tailored to the local government levels, and for the media to critically engage with such concerns. In failing to set the agenda, most media monitored failed to provide smaller parties and independent candidates the necessary coverage. Media has also neglected to challenge political parties and figures on their failure to adapt their messages to local communities and people at the grassroots levels, and to provide information, debate, discussion and analysis of relevance to the concerns of local communities. This constitutes a failure on the part of media to fulfil their role in supporting democracy and represents a serious challenge to the fairness of the election coverage.

4.2. Service delivery

Public service delivery by local government authorities is particularly important for socio-economic rights. In covering processes such as service delivery, the media should operate within the framework provided by their role in support democracy. In this context, the media acts as public entity according to in the public interest of the entire South African society. Accordingly, the primary obligation of the media is to provide content that is both educative and informative, that is balanced, fair and equitable, and that provides the audience and readers with the opportunity to come to their own conclusions. This role becomes more important around elections.

It is also important for the media to ensure coverage of a range of topics, to ensure utilisation of a diversity of opinions and views, and to reflect and represent the lives of all South Africans. In particular, media should pay particular attention be provided to marginalised and disaffected sectors of the South African community.

Within the context of ongoing debates surrounding the role, function and efficiency of current municipal structures, it was expected that the media would foreground the service delivery question, and thus choose to cover delivery in addition to the election campaigning of the various parties contesting the 2006 Local Government Elections in the 286 municipalities across the country. Service delivery is, after all, a key matter in the practical application of the South African Constitution.

4.2.1. Service delivery and socio-economic rights

Access to adequate levels of health, housing, water, sanitation, electrification, community facilities, environmental protection and improved livelihood and poverty reduction opportunities are clear socio-economic rights issues. With such concerns at the heart of local government service delivery competencies across the municipal jurisdiction, local government entities are in essence servicing the basic socio-economic rights of all their inhabitants.

In this regard, the South African Constitution guarantees residents a number of such socio-economic rights, in addition to the civil and political rights. It is crucial for all South Africans to be provided with adequate and affordable housing, sanitation, water, and electricity.

According to Section 26 of the Bill of Rights, for example, relating to housing, "(1) Everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing".

Section 27 points to a similar position in referring to health care, food, water and social security.

“(1) Everyone has the right to have access to:

- (a) health care services, including reproductive health care
- (b) sufficient food and water”

The provision of such basic services falls squarely within the mandate of local authorities. Therefore, municipal officials and councils should be held accountable when basic needs are not met. It is therefore necessary for media to recognise the existence of and consciously promote such rights, particularly when reporting on local government.

Human rights considerations necessitate a media, which not only reflects upon societal events, but also actively sets the agenda in ensuring and improving delivery of socio-economic services and rights. Coverage on municipal service delivery in the run-up to the Local Government Elections illustrated some instances of acknowledging and acting in accordance with human rights concerns. A large proportion of the items monitored tended to represent service delivery positively in its affects on people. The media discourses utilised have also often indirectly pointed to the right of all South African residents to access, enjoy and take advantage of basic services, as guaranteed under local and international human rights standards.

Table 3: Issues raised		%
The report is factual and event based i.e. not analytical/critical		52
Issue of Socio-Economic rights raised		7
The report is educative and informative		7
Issue of Civil-political rights raised		6
The report is explanatory		6
The report has accessed a variety of sources		4
Issue of human rights is broadly raised		4
The report is balanced, fair and critical		3
Issues of race/racism/xenophobia are raised		3
Issues of gender and gender discrimination is raised		2
The report is biased		1
The report is unbalanced in terms of sources		1
No explanation offered		1

As illustrated in Table 3, overall, 7% of the stories monitored raised the issue of socio-economic rights, while 6% provided some attention to civil and political rights, 4% gave space to human rights in general.

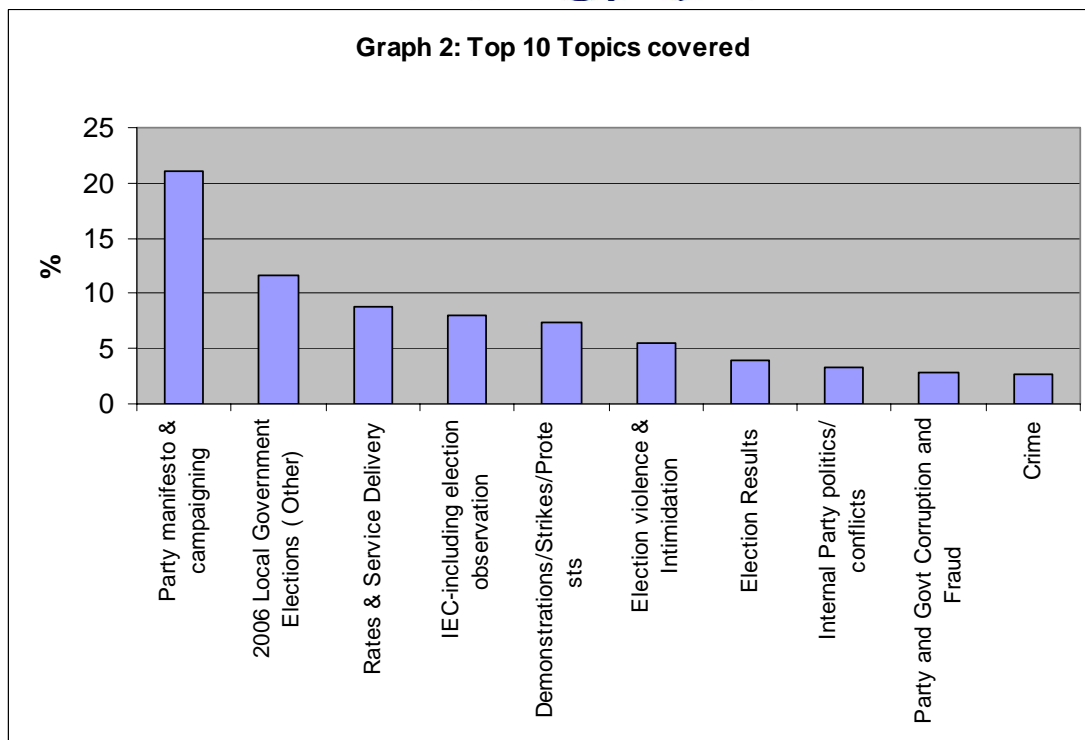
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Such discourses were noted in stories reporting on the “Council Manager with no matric,” employed by the Elundni Municipality in the Eastern Cape (*City Press*, 12/02/2006, p. 4), and on Pretoria “residents fed up with promises” of elected officials (*Daily Sun*, 15/02/2006, p. 5). Human rights considerations also informed the coverage of the court case surrounding the evictions of 300 residents from three buildings in the Johannesburg CBD, which was covered in the *Sunday Independent* (“Judge, counsel in the bowels of Jozi”, 12/02/2006, p. 5). The item presented the arguments of the Johannesburg Metropolitan Council for the evictions, as well as the counter arguments in favour of guaranteeing the basic socio-economic rights of the evictees. The article clearly operated within human rights agenda, as it foregrounded the struggles of the evictees to secure their rights. Thus, media have on occasion raised Socio-Economic and Civil and Political human rights focused issues and concerns during their coverage of the 2006 Local Government Elections.

With Local Government Elections primarily about human rights concerns and issues, it could have been expected for a higher proportion of stories to have raised human rights considerations, than noted here. It is thus necessary for the media to improve on current patterns of coverage during election periods, and to infuse a greater percentage of stories with human rights elements.

4.2.2 Service delivery protests

As illustrated by Graph 2 below, Local Government Election coverage was dominated by coverage of party manifestos and campaigning (21% of all stories), service delivery issues (9%), as well as demonstrations, strikes and protests, relating to the election process (7%).



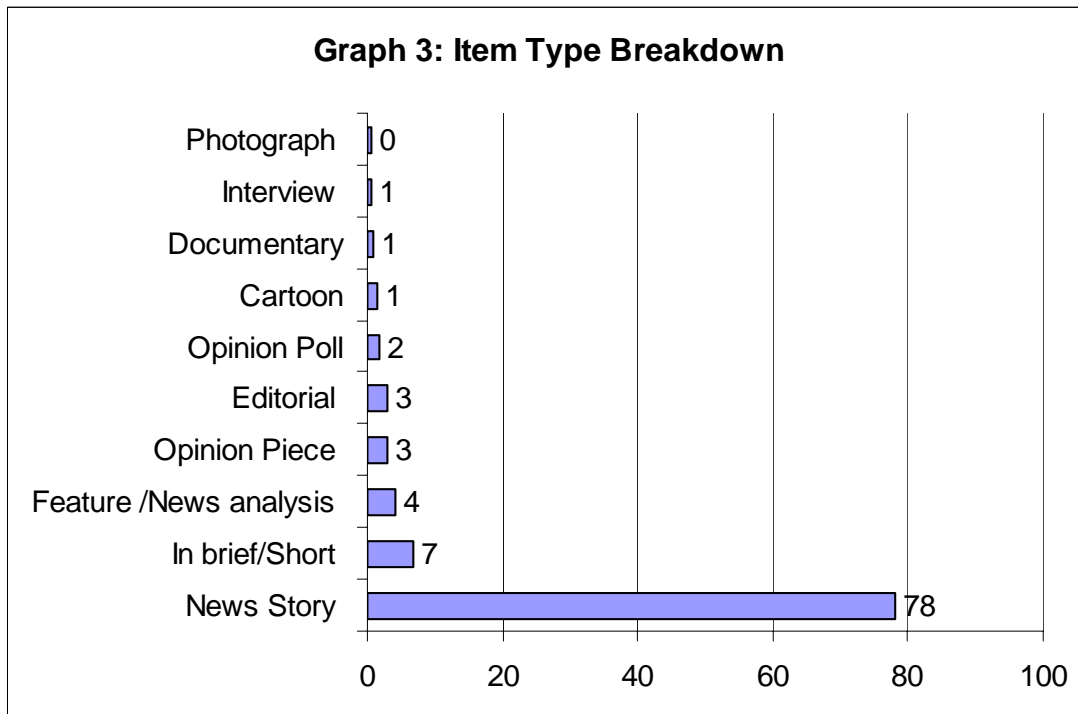
The increase in coverage surrounding service delivery challenges in the run up to the 2006 Local Government Elections seems partly related with parties' election agendas relating to service delivery. In addition, events a few months prior to the election placed more topical interest than ever before on Local Government Elections. Pre-election coverage of the local government sector highlighted the spate of protests against perceived poor service delivery and the incorporation of some municipalities into different provinces. Particular coverage was provided to service delivery protests in Khutsong and Matatiel.

Previous MMP research has pointed to media's tendency to focus on dramatic events. At the same time, the media have tended to neglect more in-depth discussions of pertinent issues. The dramatic, event-based nature of much of the pre-election protest activity would seem to have provided the media with ready-made news stories. Stories on election manifestos, campaigns, promises and service delivery issues were generally covered in similar event-based fashion, as were those stories relating to logistics, organisation and management of the election process.

In this regard, 55%¹ of all stories monitored were identified as event-based reporting, without the levels of analysis and critique, necessary to inform voters of the cause of problems. Furthermore, as illustrated in Graph 3, the vast majority of stories (78%) were classified as being news stories, in comparison to

¹ This figure is based on the total number of stories monitored, and the number of times, "event-based" was reported as an issue, in analysis. Hence the disparity from the percentage, when the report deals with issues.

longer, more in-depth and more analytical features, which comprised only 4% of stories.



Coverage of events in Khutsong was possibly the most prominently covered demarcation protest. The other prominently-covered instance was Matatiel. Demonstrations surrounding the incorporation of this municipality into the Northwest province from Gauteng were apparent across the media spectrum.

The event-based nature of coverage was apparent in the *Beeld*, "Khutsong se kinders oorweeg booiokot" ("Khutsong's children consider boycott", 03/02/2006, p. 4), and the *Sowetan*, "Pupils march in Khutsong" (03/02/2006, p. 5). The *Citizen* included the announcement by the premier of the Northwest province of her intention to hold an "Indaba to tackle service delivery" in municipalities in the province (01/02/2006, p. 3).

However, it would appear as if the media, in some instances, went further than merely reporting on such protests. It seems as if at least some of the media utilised the opportunities provided by the protests to question the reasons behind the demonstrations. Examples of such in-depth coverage appeared in the *City Press*, the *Daily Sun*, the *Beeld*, *The Star*, *The Citizen*, and on *SABC* and *e-tv* news and current affairs programmes.

The *City Press* described the "litany of rot in Mangaung council" (12/02/2006, p. 5), while *The Star* included a feature on the positive role that protests play in the democratic South Africa by holding government accountable for the lack of delivery on previous election promises (06/02/2006, p. 10).

In-depth analytical coverage of the potential conflicts that arise in setting local and provincial boundaries was provided in a feature in the *Beeld*: "Mense, grense & wense" ("People, limits and wishes", *Beeld*, 25/01/2006, p. 19). The "failure" of local authorities to meet the basic needs of their communities was also the focus of an opinion piece written by the leader of the DA, Tony Leon. The article, published in *The Citizen*, presented the major focal points of the DA's election manifesto ("DA blueprint to stop corruption" (01/02/2006, p. 12)). According to Leon, the DA's solution to perceived poor service delivery was to introduce free basic services and help those people who are too poor to pay.

The performance of municipal institutions in meeting the needs of its communities and promises of improved service delivery from political parties were covered extensively across the broadcast and print media in highly critical discourse. On broadcast media, both *e-tv* and *SABC 3* covered the efforts of political parties to win over voters in Cape Town (eg. 24/01/2006, 19:00 and 05/02/2006, 19:00).

While many of these items covered service delivery generally, some stories focused on individual municipalities. In this regard, the *Daily Sun* expressed "concern over voting" in Khutsong (15/02/2006, p. 36). The *Beeld* repeated the contention of the leader of the national opposition, Tony Leon, that local government in South Africa has shown that when "Corruption blows in, service blows out" ("Korrupsie waai in, diens waai uit" 27/01/2006, p. 5). The *Sowetan* focused on the poverty-stricken residents of Kliptown and their desire to vote in order to improve their lives in "Election fervour" (10/02/2006, p. 9), while *The Citizen* detailed the fact that "the people of Mandelaville are still waiting" (04/02/2006, p. 4). This article presented the plight of residents of this informal settlement in Roodepoort and the delay of municipal officials in meeting their permanent housing needs.

The coverage also tended to highlight local government service delivery failures, although some coverage has been noted on a few "exceptions" to the norm of service mismanagement, incapacity and failure. For example, the SABC current affairs programme, *Fokus*, focused on the performance of three municipalities that have succeeded in effectively and efficiently providing the necessary services to its citizens (*SABC 2*, 12/02/2006, 18:30). Within the context of a developmental local government, as articulated through the Integrated Development Plans², service delivery at the local government level primarily aims to satisfy the socio-economic rights of all people in South Africa.

The media has presented public dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs. Such attention was probably a consequence of the dramatic and high profile nature of the service delivery protests. However, different media have played a role in enlightening, informing, and educating the public on the essential functions

² Such plans are required of all Municipalities in the Municipal Systems Act.

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of municipal government. Through coverage of protest actions, the media have also provided the public with some indication of the rights to which they are entitled, especially at the local government level.

4.3. Race and elections

After 11 years of democracy, and three national and Local Government Elections, race and racism still feature prominently in social and public discourse in South Africa. In this regard, national and local election periods have often witnessed an increase in debate and discussion in the media amongst politicians and other public figures over government race-based economic and social policies such as affirmative action and Black Economic Development. Although such concerns present as essentially national rather than local concerns, previous experience has illustrated that some political parties and leaders have nonetheless utilised the Local Government Election process to highlight such elements of government policy. This year was no different, as race was prominently covered, in keeping with past patterns.

With the focus on service delivery strikes and protests centred in Black communities governed by the African National Congress (ANC) presented above, there was bound to be a race element to the 2006 local election coverage. Similar to patterns evident in previous MMP election monitoring, the major political parties played the race card during their 2006 campaigns. In this regard, the electioneering of the ANC and the Democratic Alliance (DA) were particularly marked by racial attacks, with both parties accusing each other of racially discriminating policies and of being racist.

Although, in similar vein to previous elections, these Local Government Elections were represented as being racially polarised by the media, the issue of racism itself and the related issue of xenophobia received minimal coverage as subjects in their own right in the media. Stories identified as primarily relating to race, racism and xenophobia in the elections comprised only 2 %. Given the instances of racism and xenophobia that continue to plague South Africa, and especially at community level, it is surprising that more was not made of these as election issues.

4.4. Gender and local elections

Gender seemed off both the media and political parties' agenda. The topic code dedicated to gender equality within the context of the LGE, only received 1% of all coverage. Moreover, at a more general level, the issue of gender was similarly only identified as an issue in 2% of the stories monitored.

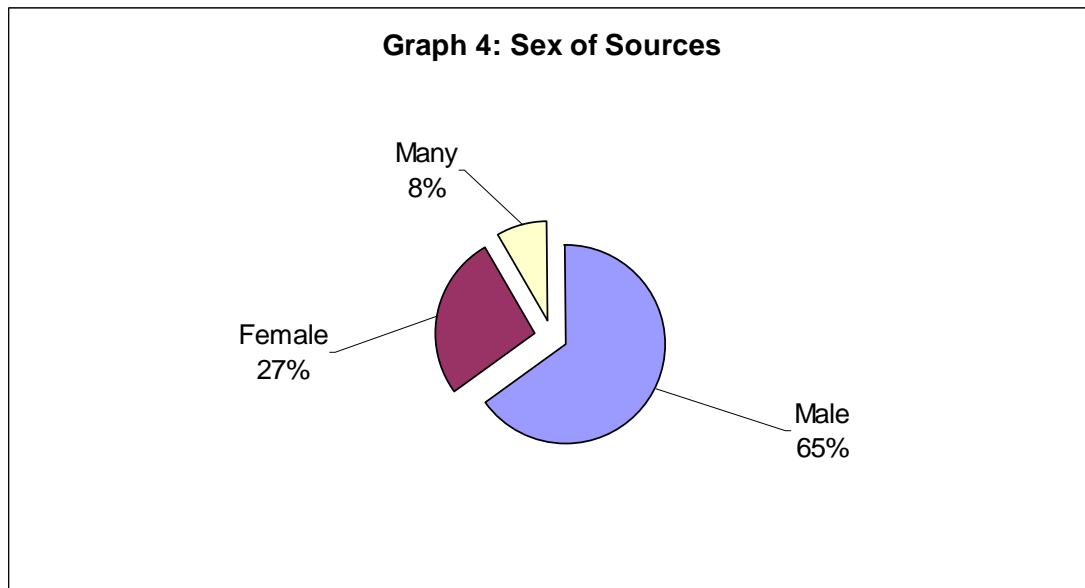
In the run-up to the Local Government Elections on the 1st of March 2006, it was evident that the media's performance in highlighting gender concerns and in engendering election coverage has been largely mixed. It is clear that the media have not adequately fulfilled its mandate to inform and educate the public about the relationship between gender issues and the Local Government Elections.

Gender inequalities continue to exist in the social, economic, physical and institutional environment of many municipalities. Key issues at the local government level including poverty, unemployment, primary health care and HIV and AIDS have gendered patterns of impact. Levels and patterns of participation in municipal structures, such as ward committees are also differentiated by gender. In such circumstances, it could have been expected of the media, through the utilisation of experts in the fields of gender, society and the social and political realm to raise, discuss and debate such issues. The monitoring has, however, revealed limited progress in this regard.

Previous monitoring has illustrated that when women are covered, they tend to be represented in a limited range of roles and occupations. Past experience has furthermore shown the tendency of the media to focus on exceptional and remarkable women at the top of their fields. Coverage of the Local Government Elections has foregrounded women in positions of authority. While no obvious stereotyping of women leaders has been evident in most of the stories monitored, there does not seem to have a conscious effort on the part of the media to challenge the commonly held erroneous perceptions surrounding women.

4.4.1. Women's voices

As illustrated in Graph 4, with a few exceptions, media have not actively sought out the views and opinions of women politicians and the female voting public. Female sources, in fact, just more than a quarter (27%) of the people accessed. This is despite the often-stated objective of the government and political parties for a 50% female compliment in public office and parliament, and the fact that women make up more than 50% of the voting public.



Some media have, however, made a deliberate effort to seek out and present the views of ordinary women in South Africa on election issues. The most notable attempt in this regard was from *The Star*. This daily newspaper, as part of its efforts to assess the views of "ordinary" South Africans, created a women's panel, comprising a mixed age and racial group of ten women, drawn from different walks of life. Yet, despite the effort to actively include the views of women in its election coverage; it would appear as if these women themselves do not raise any gender concerns. It would seem that none of the issues presented as affecting South African society are particularly gendered in nature, or perceived to be gendered in nature.

4.4.2. Gender representation on party lists

One of the major gender focuses of parties' candidate lists has been on gender equity. Most of these stories focused on the well-publicised commitment of the ANC to appoint more women as mayors in the major metropolises, and the intention of securing 50% representation of women in all spheres of government, including at the municipal level.

Most of the items represented these moves as positive developments in achieving gender equity and in improving the position of women in South Africa. The *Sowetan* reported that the "ANC puts more women on candidates' list" (20/01/2006), and the *Daily Sun* maintained that the "ANC [are] keeping their promise, half of its list of candidates for municipal elections are women" (20/01/2006, p. 4). However, a few items presented some criticism of the decision taken by the ANC National Executive Committee. *Beeld*, for example, presented the dissatisfaction of party officials in KwaZulu-Natal that their right to choose their own representatives was being seriously impinged by having the quota forced upon them by national party interests: "The ANC's focus at national level that 50% of the party's candidates should be women, has caused

widespread unhappiness in KwaZulu-Natal and also elsewhere in the country" ("ANC skop 23 uit oor lys, Verset, maan ander," (27/01/2006, p. 5)).

Gender parity in party lists was also the subject of an editorial in *The Citizen*. While commending this commitment to gender parity, *The Citizen* was quick to point out that "in striving for overdue gender equality the ruling party should not lose sight of the main objectives of local government" (21/01/2006, p. 8), identified as service delivery. According to the editorial, "the main criterion in choosing candidates should really be the ability to get things done on a local government level. It should not matter whether councillors are male or female".

From *The Citizen's* comments, it would appear as if this newspaper believes that while gender equity is important, the quest for more women in high political office might lead to window dressing rather than an honest search for the most competent and most effective local government representatives, chosen for their ability rather than their gender.

The *Sowetan* included an opinion piece: "Raising the ceiling" (15/02/2005, p. 13), which praised the ANC for its efforts at ensuring more gender equitable party lists. They also criticised other parties for failing to implement more gender-oriented policies.

The concern of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) over the domination of party lists by men, and the concurrent lack of female representation, was also covered by *SABC 2* and *SABC 3* (01/02/2006, 19:00). Although e-tv also covered the IEC press conference, the station excluded any comment on the gender of party representatives.

In general, the gender make-up of the party lists could have been analysed more by media, rather than merely responding to statements from the IEC and ANC.

4.4.3. Women mayors

The issue of women as mayoral candidates received widespread coverage across the media. Virtually all of this coverage focused on the decision of the ANC to appoint women as mayors in at least three of the major metropolitan councils in the country. Some of these items also highlighted the fact that the DA's mayoral candidate for the Cape metropole was a woman. In most of these items, specific reference was made to the sex of the candidates. Most of the items also implied that the appointment of female mayors was a major breakthrough for gender equality in South Africa.

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The discourses utilised tended towards the dramatic, as illustrated by the following headlines: "Watch out for the metro matriarchs!" (*The Citizen*, 20/01/2006, p. 6) and "Fiery female duel for Cape Town – Mfeketo", "Zille engages in blazing battle for control of mother city" (*City Press*, 05/02/2006, p. 4).

In "ANC wil vroue as burgermeester in drie metrorade he", the Beeld presented the comments of the ANC Secretary General on the party's wishes that at least 3 of the 6 urban metropolises in the country would have women mayors if the ANC did well in the elections. The Beeld coverage also pointed to the rumours, later denied that Gwen Ramokgopa, the Gauteng health MEC, would become the mayor of Tshwane, if the ANC were to win the election there.

SABC 1 tackled the issue of women in political leadership admirably on their talk show, the Chat room (01/02/2006, 18:30). While the programme did not make direct reference to the Local Government Elections, it made use of high-ranking women political officials and gender experts to debunk stereotypes about women in the public realm. In presenting the views of Independent Democrats leader, Patricia de Lille, ANC deputy secretary general, Sankie Mthembi-Mahanyele, and Gender Links director, Colleen Lowe Morna, the programme illustrated that women have a major role to play in public life and that politics is not only the preserve of men.

Coverage of female mayoral candidates was greater than coverage of the gender make up of party lists. This was, however, mostly driven by the election race in Cape Town, as well as statements by the ANC. With the exception of the *SABC 1* talk show, the phenomenon has received no analysis.

4.4.4. Election manifestos

Pre and post election media coverage showed that gender concerns were largely absent in the party manifestos and campaigns undertaken by the major political parties, with the exception of the mayoral issue. Such silence can be considered a serious omission, in light of the highly uneven gender power relations that still exist in South Africa. The media, in general, did not highlight this absence or discuss gender despite the lack of it in party manifestos.

The mandate and role of the media necessitates in-depth, critical, and analytical coverage of party policies surrounding gender-based violence, gender rights, and children. It could be expected that the absence of any gender focus in the campaigns of most of the major political parties would be vigorously discussed and debated in the media. It is nonetheless apparent that the media largely ignored gender concerns in debating election manifestos and broader election issues. There were however, some notable exceptions in this regard, mostly as a result of cues taken from political parties themselves.



The Star, included an article that detailed: "IFP leader has urged women to play a leading role in local government, especially HIV/AIDS and poverty. He said they should pledge themselves to live honourably" (The Star, 30/01/2006, p. 6).

In keeping with previous patterns of coverage foregrounding extraordinary women, the *Sunday Times* included a highly positive personality profile on the head of the IEC, Pansy Tlakula: "'Quiet' Pansy proves she is no shrinking violet" (12/02/2006, p. 17). While the article focused on her numerous achievements as an advocate, human rights commissioner, and most recently at the IEC, the item did not include any gendered discourse surrounding her professional performance or personal life. In fact, the article admirably focused almost entirely on her professional life. This was probably as a result of her own insistence "that she did not want to discuss anything about her personal life".

The election coverage was in keeping with previous patterns of coverage, which show that personality profiles of women tend to foreground their personal lives in disproportionate measure to prominent male figures.

Analysis of gender make-up of party lists and of female mayoral candidates would admirably seem to run counter to previous patterns of coverage. The media, it seems, through their event-based coverage missed the chance to inform their readers more broadly.

5. Conclusions

As far as the 2006 Local Government Election process is concerned, there does seem to have been a concerted effort on the part of the media to educate and raise awareness surrounding socio-economic rights in particular. However, it is unclear whether such concerns were the consequence of a deliberate agenda and plan of action by the media or whether the media merely reflected the agenda established by the political parties themselves.

It is crucial for the media to set their own agenda in covering the Local Government Elections, rather than merely reflecting the course of action and following the lead of political parties, and their leaders. As presented above, it would seem as if the media tended towards following the lead of political parties and political figures. Such developments seem to be indicated in the trend towards over coverage of national political leaders and national concerns, probably as a direct consequence of the parties themselves utilising national political figures, to garner votes and support. It could, however, be expected of the media to interrogate and challenge political parties on the relevance of such messages at the local government level.

With respect to race, the findings would seem to point to the continued utilisation of racialised voting blocks and patterns. While such coverage could again be seen as the consequence of developments within and between political parties, it is again expected of the media to challenge such racial stereotyping and race-based reporting. In similar vein, the media furthermore, largely failed to challenge the continued reliance on the race card by political parties, most specifically the ANC and the DA.

The Local Government Election process would have seemed an ideal opportunity for the media to illustrate their commitment to gender transformation and to challenging gender stereotyping and misconceptions surrounding gender, through a more equitable utilisation of female commentators, experts, participants, politicians, business and professional people, and residents of affected communities. The monitoring, however found disturbingly that men's voices predominated to an excessive extent, with women's voices accounting for slightly more than a quarter of all people sourced for comment.

In conclusion, media coverage of the 2006 Local Government Election process can be characterised as being mixed in success, with some major achievements, some efforts in the right direction and a few challenges that should be overcome with further effort and application. While the media did not fully cover the elections in all its complexity and diversity, there was the realisation of the fact that the elections was more than just a one day event, but rather the culmination of a process involving a multitude of events, issues and concerns.

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