

Zambia Election 2015

Media Monitoring Interim Results

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 **OSISA**
Open Society Initiative
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Preliminary Report - January 2015

1. Introduction

With every election, there is always a need for media to critically engage with politicians, political parties and their policies, and ask the right questions to enable the electorate to cast informed votes. To become informed voters, the electorate requires a variety of information on government and political parties, and the democratic system itself. The information comes from a variety of sources. However, media coverage must be balanced, equitable, fair and accurate, in order to contribute to free and fair elections. This is a significant and certainly demanding responsibility that makes it essential for the media's coverage of elections to be explored. In light of this, Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) in partnership with the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA Zambia) analysed the media coverage of the 2015 Presidential by-elections in Zambia.

The analysis aimed to encourage the media to improve their reporting on elections in terms of salience, visibility and quality. In doing so the research sought to answer the following related questions:

- What was covered in terms of political parties, election-related topics?
- Was the elections coverage fair and balanced?
- Did the media amplify the voices of 'ordinary' citizens in the elections coverage?

To answer these questions, we present the following interim results on the following key issues:

- Political party coverage;
- Sources coverage;
- Gender;
- Issues coverage; and,
- Fairness.

These interim results are based on over 500 articles analysed between 5 January 2015 and 20 January 2015 across 14¹ online, print and broadcast media in Zambia. **They are by no means final** but they reflect how Zambian media covered the elections thus far.

2. Which political party received the most coverage?

One of the most significant aspects of elections coverage is how political parties are covered by the media. This is because the media have the ability to increase or decrease the visibility of political parties - a situation that may have a bearing on the outcome of the elections. In this presidential by-election there were 11² presidential candidates

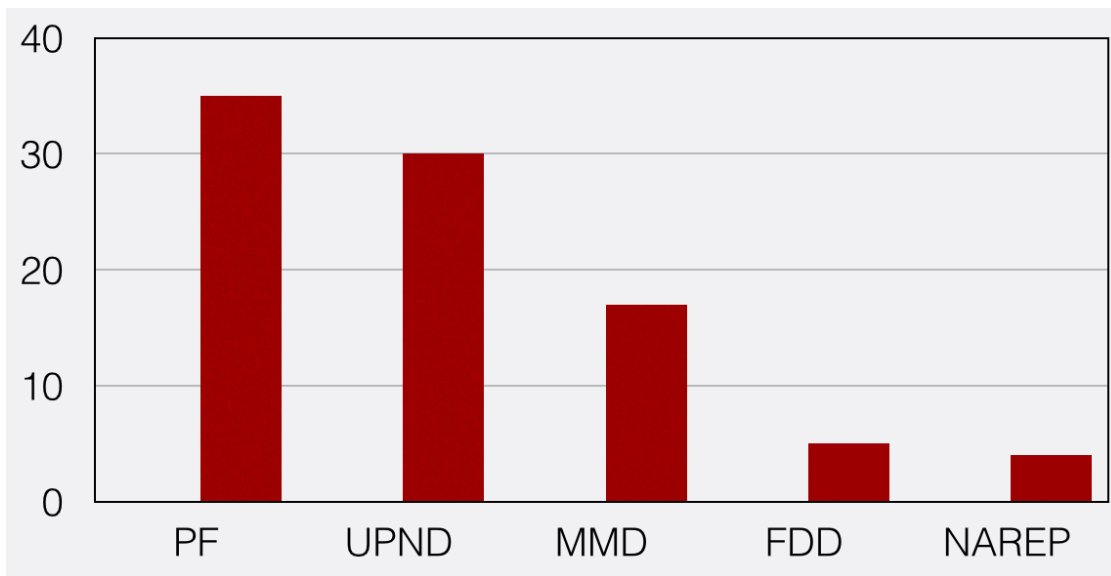


¹The 14 media whose content was analysed are: 5 FM, Daily Nation, Hot FM, Lusaka Times, Muvi TV, O FM, Radio Christian Voice, Radio Phoenix, The Post, Times of Zambia, ZNBC TV, Zambia Daily Mail, Zambia Reports and Zambian Watchdog.

²These were the presidential candidates and the parties they were representing in alphabetical order: Danny Pule (Christian Democratic Party), Edgar Lungu (Patriotic Front), Edith Nawakwi (Forum for Democracy and Development), Elias Chipimo (National Restoration Party), Eric Chanda (Fourth Revolution Party), Godfrey Miyanda (Heritage Party), Hakainde Hichilema (United Party for National Development), Ludwig Sondashi (Forum for Democratic Alternatives), Nevers Mumba (Movement for Multiparty Democracy), Peter Sinkamba (Green Party), and Tilyenji Kaunda (United National Independent Party).

representing 11 political parties. As such, MMA sought to find out which political parties received the most coverage with the idea of comparing the coverage to the proportion of votes each party ultimately received. This is not to suggest that there is a correlation between the amount of coverage a political party receives and the political party's performance. While media coverage may have a bearing on how the political parties perform, it is certainly not the only variable that affects the parties' performance. **Figure 1** below reveals the most covered political parties across all the media whose content was examined. We determined the amount of coverage given to political parties by the media through the number of sources accessed from the political parties and not through the time or space allocated to the political parties. In other words, we only captured the voice, that is, where a party source speaks directly or indirectly in the story. The following top 5 political parties were covered by the media.

Figure 1: Top 5 political parties covered

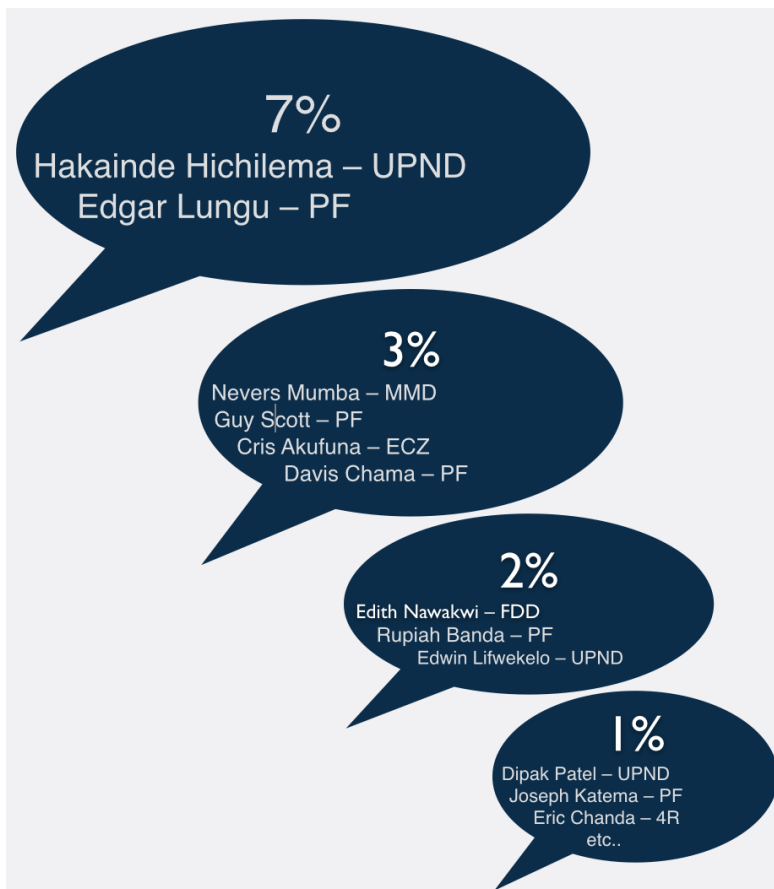


These parties received 91% of the total media coverage meaning that the remaining six parties shared only 9% of the media coverage. That the PF and UPND received the most coverage at 35% and 30% respectively is not surprising because the PF is the biggest and “incumbent” political party and the UPND is the biggest opposition party in the country. This trend is not unique to Zambia but also the case in South Africa where the African National Congress (ANC) always gets most of the coverage followed by the leading opposition, which is currently the Democratic Alliance (DA). For example, in the 2014 South African general elections, the ANC received 38% whilst the DA received 25%. Although, it is important to be aware of the different contexts the media in the two countries operate, it is however worth noting that the tendency to focus on bigger political parties is not only detrimental to smaller parties but also to the electorate who do not get to hear or read more about smaller parties and what they represent. This has an effect on how the electorate can make an informed vote when they do not have enough information to base that decision on. But then again, how much coverage should each political party be afforded? This often depends on the media laws, regulations and policies, which may differ from country to country. For us the greater the diversity of political parties covered the better as it gives the electorate more information to make an informed choice on voting day.

3. Who spoke the loudest?

A key element of any media in a democracy is not only to provide news but to also ensure diverse and equitable sourcing, not only of political parties but also of ordinary citizens across age, gender, ethnicity and any other applicable demographics. Like political party, sources were determined by counting the number of times people were accessed directly or indirectly by the media whose content was analysed. **Figure 2** below shows the top 20 individuals who received the most media coverage. These results are also similar to what we observed in the previous South African general election.

Figure 2: Top 20 people who spoke the most

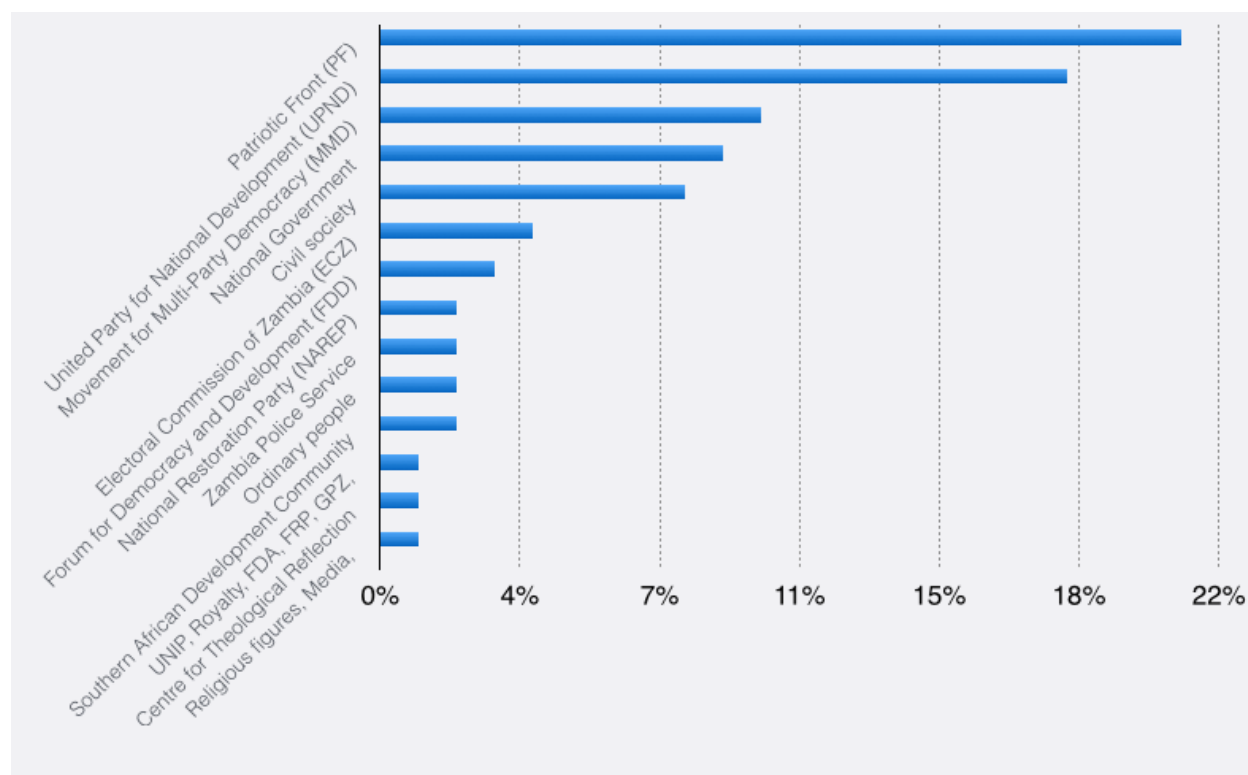


It is clear that PF had more voices amplified followed by UPND and then other parties. Interestingly, with the exception of Edith Nawakwi, all the other sources are male. Secondly, only two of the top 20 sources are not necessarily politicians, that is, Cris Akufuna (ECZ) and Boniface Cheembe (SACCORD). In the previous general elections in South Africa, 6 of the top 20 sources were women and only three sources were not necessarily politicians. While there can be no doubt that it is important to hear the voices of politicians in an election period, it is crucial that there is a balance of different voices whereby other groupings in society are given space to air their views.

**** 1% also includes: Daniel Munkombwe - PF, Mwansa Mbulakulima - MMD, Boniface Cheembe - SACCORD, Tilyenji Kaunda - UNIP, Douglas Siakalima - UPND, Chishimba Kambwili - PF, Elias Chipimo - NAREP, Andrew Banda - PF**

If we consider the voices of various groupings as shown by **Figure 3** below we notice that political parties dominate to the detriment of other groups.

Figure 3: Top 20 organisations accessed



As highlighted earlier, while it is expected for political and other officials to dominate media coverage during an election period, the lack of ordinary people’s voices raise the question about the issues the media were driving and to whose benefit? The fact that ordinary people’s voices only constituted 2% of the coverage raises a number of challenges. For example, what is equitable or acceptable sourcing? How much of politicians, civil society or ordinary people should be sourced by the media? Which voices are more important than others? How do we ensure diversity of voices and citizens’ perspectives are put forward? Does it necessarily mean that if ordinary people’s voices are amplified then media would have encouraged healthy debates about a country’s democratic processes?

4. What did political parties say?

Given that political parties rightly or wrongly dominated the coverage, we sought to find out what the politicians were actually quoted as saying. We achieved this by amalgamating all the direct and indirect quotes from political party officials into word clouds.³ In this report we present word clouds of the top 5 political parties in order to show how these parties’ campaigns looked like.

³A word cloud is essentially “an image composed of words used in a particular text or subject, in which the size of each word indicates its frequency”.

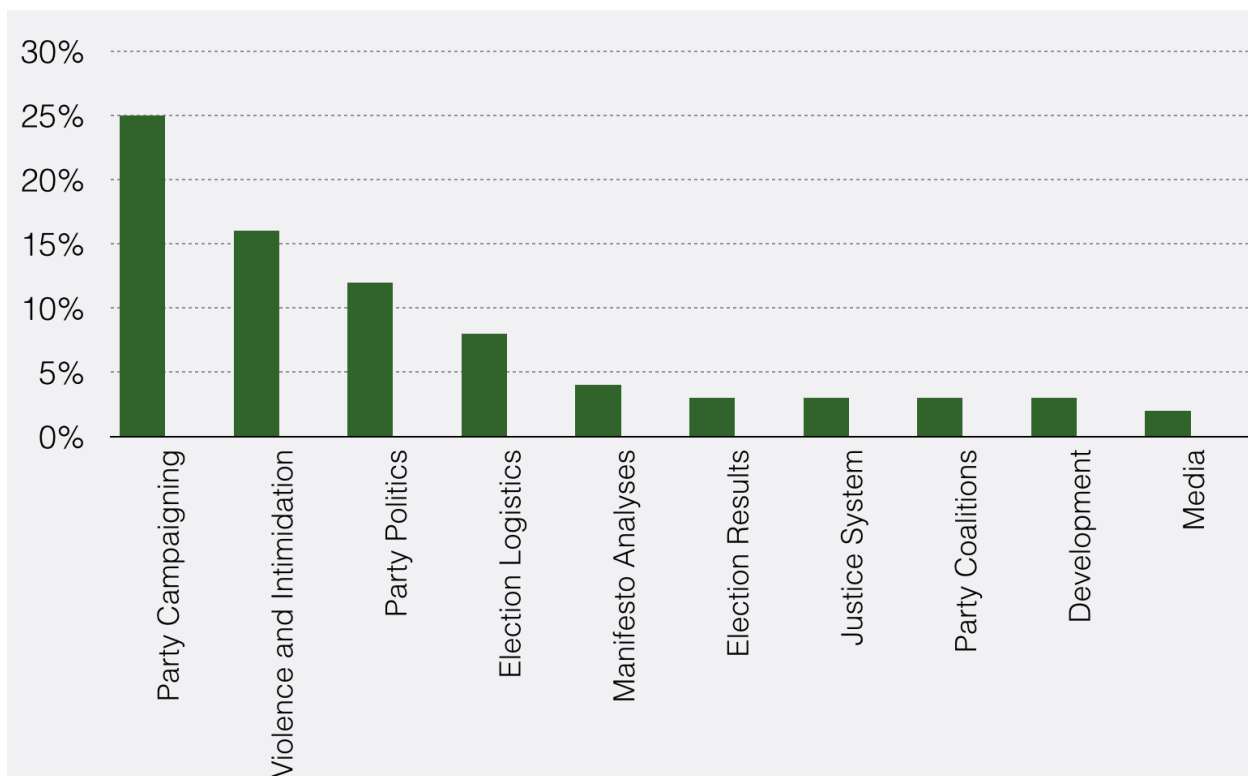


5. Which issues were covered?

Elections present an opportunity for media to hold politicians to account on issues affecting people and how they plan to solve people's problems once they are elected. Hence we looked at the topics that media covered as a way of determining whether media put people's issues on the elections agenda. As such each story was assigned a topic based on the issues the story or article focused on. Given that media seldom cover one topic in each story, the topic 'Party Campaigning' was allocated as the last resort, only in those circumstances where politicians were reported to be campaigning in a particular region and the focus of the story was on campaigning only, and not about any other issue. **Figure 9** below shows the overall top ten topics covered by all media reviewed.



Figure 9: Top 10 topics covered



On issues covered, Zambia is no different from South Africa in that party campaigning, party politics and election logistics always feature in the top five topics. What is disappointing though is that party campaigning received the most coverage despite the fact that the topic was allocated only in those instances where politicians were reported to be campaigning in a particular region and not reportedly saying anything valuable other than just campaigning. However, what is impressive is that manifesto analyses and issues of development made the top 10, something that seldom happens in the South African context.

Given the economic crisis in Zambia, and how it contributes to poverty, unemployment and other ills, one would have expected media to put these issues on the agenda for elections. But **Figure 10** below highlights the other issues that did not quite make it.

Figure 10: Issues that did not make it

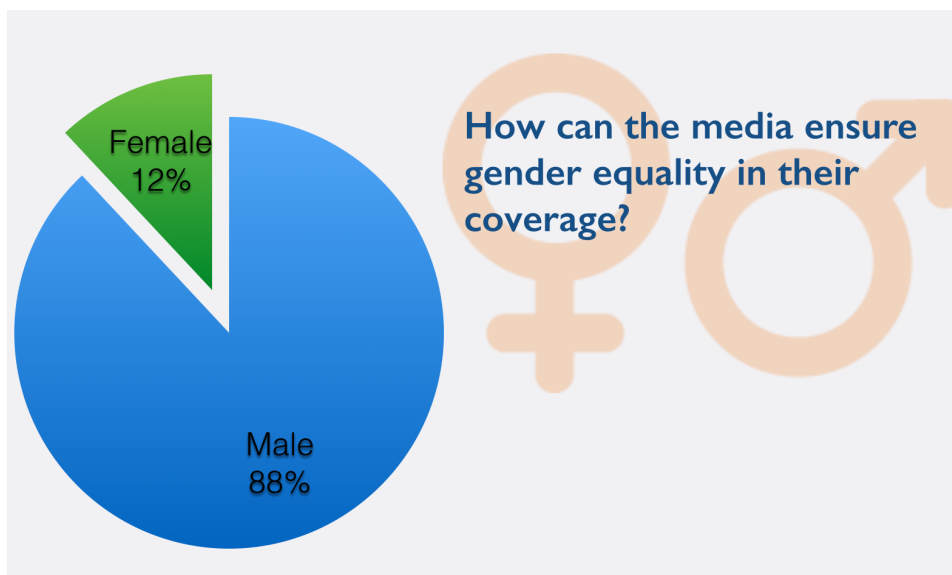


What is clear is that voter education did not seem to matter despite this being an election period. Education is a serious issue affecting Zambian youth yet it only received a flippant 1% of media attention. Service delivery, crime and corruption received mere 1% each. Does this mean that Zambia does not grapple with these issues? The country's healthcare system is broken yet only 2% coverage was dedicated to health issues. That media focused their attention to issues like party campaigns, violence and intimidation, and party politics suggests that the election coverage was about political parties, and not about what Zambia's citizens needed from their leaders. Despite these challenges, if we compare the coverage of issues that do not usually make it in the South African media, we notice that Zambian media performed better. The issues in **Figure 10** constitute almost 18% yet for South Africa they make up only 12% of the media coverage.

6. Where are the women of Zambia?

As a key source of information, especially during elections, the media should cover the key priorities of women and men, girls and boys differently and give equal attention to the voices of both male and female sources. However, according to Sampa (2014), Zambian tradition instructs women to follow men in public and not to lead.⁴ Perhaps that explains why there is a huge gap between female and male sources accessed in this election.

Figure 11: Female versus male sources accessed



The sex of the sources accessed as depicted above were determined by looking at the gender of all the sources that were accessed. Even though women make up over half the population of Zambia,⁵ only 12% of the sources accessed were female. This then raises the question: Were female voters and more broadly, women and girls,

given a voice in the media in the lead up to the election? As at 2010, the global average is 23%⁶ female sources and in the 2014 general elections, South Africa achieved 29%⁷ female sources. The figures for Zambia are concerning as they indicate that the views of women and girls on election issues were not heard by the media and therefore by the voting public. The media can and do play a role in setting the

⁴Sampa, cited in Raicheva-Stover M & Ibroscheva E (eds), 2014, *Women in Politics and Media: Perspectives from Nations in Transition*, Bloomsbury Academic, London.

⁵See http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/2010_phc/Zambia/PreliminaryReport.pdf

⁶See <http://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp/gmmp-reports>

⁷See <http://elections2014.mediamonitoringafrica.org/>

agenda during an election. Balance and depth to coverage is necessary in order for citizens to make an informed vote. So the question is: How can media bring this balance and depth by ensuring that they access more women even though society says otherwise?

7. Was the coverage fair?

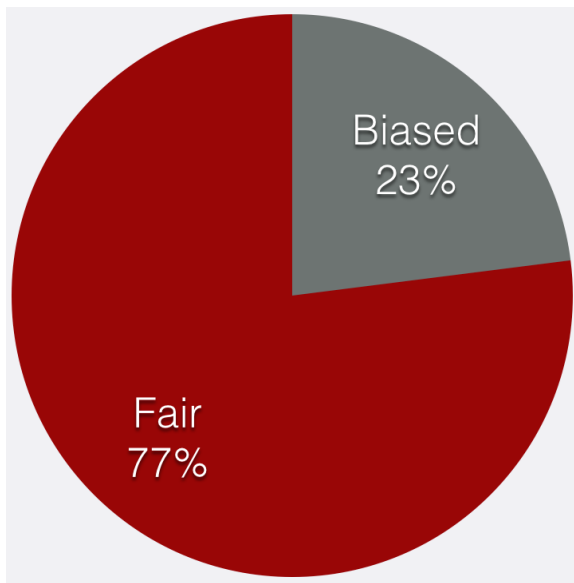


During an election period, it is essential that media coverage is fair in order to provide citizens with an unbiased view on political candidates, which informs citizen opinion and thus, may influence their voting decision. The media, especially public or state media, cannot be seen to be favouring one party or candidate over another. Our assumption is that media have the intention to be fair especially during election time when they know full well that a lot of constituencies are watching how and what they report on. They also try to be fair by balancing stories, for example by covering a story that favours the PF today and then cover a story that favours the UPND tomorrow. However, it is also the case that, during elections, media have a propensity to be biased for several reasons hence we determined fairness using the following criteria:

- Looking at the number of stories that were identified as clearly favouring or disfavouring a candidate or party;
- Looking at the spread of party coverage, that is, the amount and of coverage given to individual candidates or parties. This is also linked to equitable coverage;
- Comparing the number of biased stories against each other to see if they balance each other. For example, if one candidate or party was clearly favoured more often than another, it stood out.

These criteria were weighted and combined to give an overall score out of 100 as shown below.

Figure 12: Biased stories versus fair stories



What is evident is that the majority of reporting has been fair. Out of a total 14 media whose content was analysed, 23% of the stories were considered as biased. While this does not indicate any clear democracy threatening bias or patterns of bias, the final results will look into individual media houses and see if there were any clear trends across the different media. If we look at the recent elections coverage in South Africa, we see that 15% of the coverage was biased. This means that Zambian media have room for improvement.



8. Conclusion

Overall, these results show trends that indicate that the *Zambian media is clearly not doing enough to report elections in a way that enable the electorate to participate as fully informed citizens. Event-based coverage has led to some of the key issues such as health and education being sidelined, and despite being over 50% of the population children's issues were also nearly invisible. The poor performance around gender both in terms of sources and gender focused coverage is indicative of media that marginalise the backbone of the Zambian economy. That nearly a quarter of items were identified as biased is also cause for concern, but the relatively high number of election stories overall demonstrates a media keen and willing to engage on the crucial issue of elections. It would appear with the exception of FDD, media and political leaders spent more time on their personalities and their opponents than on reporting the issues central to Zambian citizens. For media to fulfill their democratic responsibilities it is critical that they give voice to the voiceless and adopt a citizens' perspective to their stories. It is citizens after all who are the majority consumers of the media.*

In comparison to countries like South Africa, which have a better resourced media industry, the media in Zambia on key parameters performed better. Even though issues that affect citizens were minimal, they were covered more extensively. Also, Zambian media appear to have covered a greater diversity of issues central to the nation's development. The issue of gender is also a critical aspect, which the media in Zambia needs to concentrate on and improve. Elections are an opportune moment for the candidates and their political parties to be tested on their gender equality programs. We see these results as a call for real and long term investment in the media environment of Zambia, especially around issues of freedom of expression and media independence.

