

LESOTHO ELECTION 2015

Media Monitoring Interim Results

MEDIA MONITORING
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PROMOTING MEDIA DIVERSITY •
PLURALISM • SELF-SUFFICIENCY
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 **OSISA**
Open Society Initiative
for Southern Africa

Preliminary Report – February 2015

1. Introduction



Since attaining its independence from Britain in 1966, Lesotho has undergone more than one coup and has been engulfed in several political mayhems resulting in killings, looting and property destruction involving the press which is caught in a quagmire adversely affecting its quality and existence¹... The events of August 30 2014 in Lesotho's capital city Maseru; which saw radio stations including the government owned Radio Lesotho, going off-air, several police stations being taken over and the residence of the Prime Minister and one of the three coalition leaders were surrounded by the army have their roots in the genetic formations of Lesotho's post-independence political landscape.

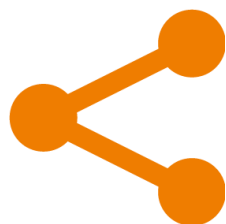
¹ Read more about the History of Lesotho Media here: <http://www.pressreference.com/Ky-Ma/Lesotho.html>

Free and fair elections can play a significant role in stabilising societies emerging from conflict. In order to be able achieve this; a number of elements within the electoral process must be adapted to the specific context of individual country. One of the key elements is a media that is able to cover the elections and all election processes freely, without interference or an unreasonable restriction imposed by the authorities. A free press has a critical function in democratic societies.

Media in Lesotho operate under strenuous conditions and the continual threat to free press poses serious challenges in covering crucial events like elections, particularly in ensuring that media carry the citizens agenda and ask the rights questions so that citizens become informed voters. While the Lesotho Constitution² does not directly mention press freedom, it guarantees freedom of expression and information exchange.

However, multiple laws, including the *Sedition Proclamation No. 44* of 1938 and the *Internal Security (General) Act* of 1984 prohibit criticism of the government, provide penalties for seditious libel, and endanger reporters' ability to protect the confidentiality of their sources³ These laws and incidents where journalists and their media houses have been attacked and threatened poses a major restriction to the ability of media in Lesotho to report elections to their optimum ability.

In light of this, Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) in partnership with the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA Lesotho) analysed the media coverage of the 2015 elections in Lesotho. The analysis in this report was made with considerable care, and with full understanding that the media in Lesotho does not operate in an environment that enables (both financially and legally) a strong, independent media. The analysis is aimed to encourage the media to improve their reporting on elections in terms of salience, visibility and quality. In doing so the Interim Report will look at four areas of election reporting only:



- Political Party Coverage
- Sources (Is there diversity of voices and opinions?)
- Gender
- Topic Coverage
- Is the Coverage Fair?

These interim results are based on very limited number of elections stories. There are a number of reasons why there are few elections stories, amongst the reason are that most radio stations have only one news bulletin a day and there are no daily newspapers in Lesotho. The results are based on over 125 articles/news bulletins published from 28 January 2015 to 20 February 2015

² See the Constitution of Lesotho , accessible from: http://www.parliament.ls/joomdocs/lesotho_constitution.pdf

³ See Freedom House's 2014 *Freedom in the World* rankings for Lesotho, accessible from: <http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/lesotho-0#.VFDEBDSUdmN>

by 10 different media⁴. **These results are by no means final**, they reflect how Lesotho media covered the elections thus far

2. Which political party received the most coverage?

The coverage of political parties during the election is very important as it presents the political parties with an opportunity to disseminate information and provides citizens with a chance to receive information. In order for citizens to make an informed vote, they need not see one political party but a diversity of political parties. This has, over the years in different countries, become a much contested issue. The key question being who decides what diversity is and how they decide, as well as when will it be spread across different media.



In most instances, equitable coverage has been best practice, it had (especially in South Africa⁵) given the smaller parties and new entrants in the political sphere, significant media coverage. It should also be noted that equitable coverage does not determine the results of the election; it however, gives citizens a clearer picture of what the different political parties are offering.

In the 2015 general elections of Lesotho the Independent Electoral Commission registered 23 political parties⁶.

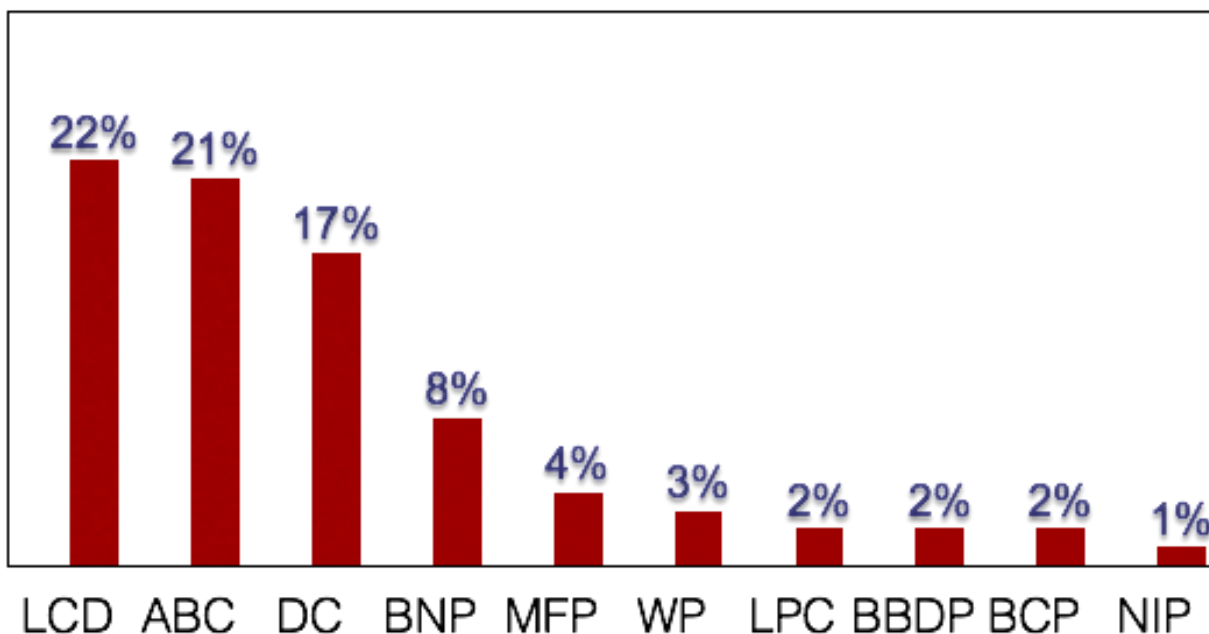
Figure 1 below reveals the most covered political parties across all the media whose content was examined. We determined the amount of coverage given to political parties by the media through the number sources accessed from the political parties. We only captured the voice, that is, where a party source speaks directly or indirectly in the story. The following top 10 political parties were covered by the media

⁴ The 11 media whose content was analysed are: Harvest FM, People's Choice FM, Radio Lesotho, MoAfrica FM, Ts'enolo FM, Thaha-Khuhe, Lesotho Times, Informative, Public Eye, The Post, Sunday Express

⁵ See Media Monitoring Africa South African media coverage of 2014 Elections Report here: <http://elections2014.mediamonitoringafrica.org/>

⁶ To see all Political Parties contesting the 2015 Lesotho elections visit the IEC website here: www.iec.org.ls

Figure 1: Top 10 Political Parties Covered



The Lesotho political parties' coverage presents an intriguing perspective on the election coverage. In total there were only 89 party sources out of the 249 sources accessed by the media. Out of the 89 sources, 60 percent of the sources were from the parties that were part of the coalition government. Only 40 percent of the other sources were from the other parties. Amongst the members of the coalition government; Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) and All Basotho Convention (ABC) received the most coverage, 22 percent and 21 percent respectively.



What is also interesting to note is that the Democratic Congress (DC) won the most votes in the 2012 elections but it only received 17 percent of the election coverage. The coverage difference between members of the coalition government is something to be noted with interest. In 2014 election in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) as a ruling party received 38 percent coverage and Democratic Alliance (DA) received 25 percent.

It is clear that Lesotho media reported these elections differently from other countries such as Zambia and South Africa. However, the only difference between Lesotho and these countries is that the political party that received the most votes in the previous election did not receive the most coverage for these elections. But then again, how much coverage should each political party be afforded? This often depends on the media laws, regulations and policies, which may

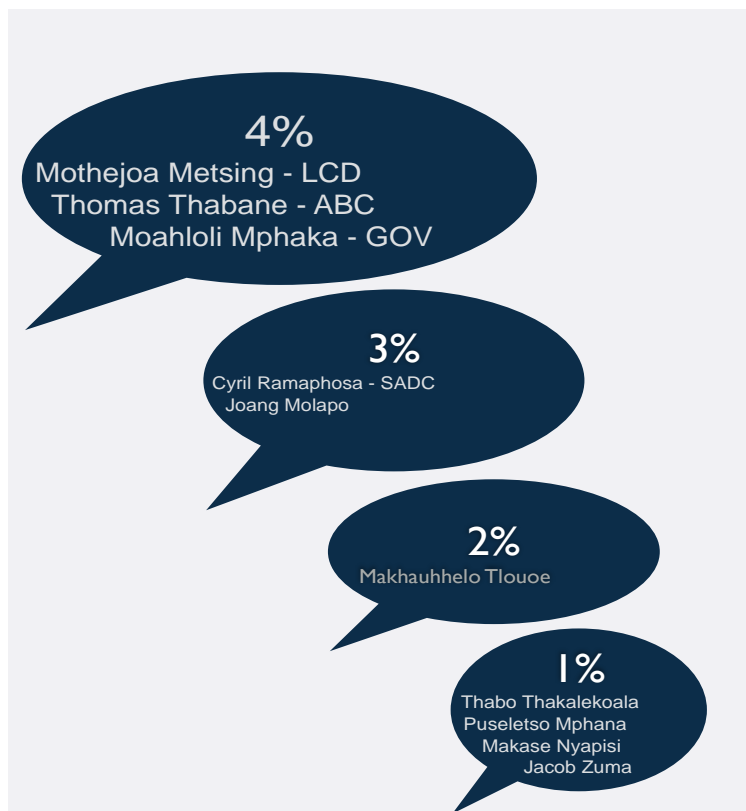
differ from country to country. However, media should always seek to cover political parties in a fair and balanced manner. Whilst affording all political parties a better campaigning platform and an opportunity to engage with the citizens.

3. Who spoke the loudest?

An important role of media in a democracy, and particularly during an election is not only to inform the public, but to ensure that a variety of voices and opinions are heard. A diversity of voices means not just different political players but other groups including citizens of various genders, ages and backgrounds.

Sources were classified as people who were accessed (directly or indirectly). **Figure 2** below shows the top 10 individual sources and indicates that the political players were the majority of sources accessed by the media in Lesotho when covering elections. This trend was seen in both South Africa and Zambia.⁷

Figure 2: Top 10 of people who spoke the most



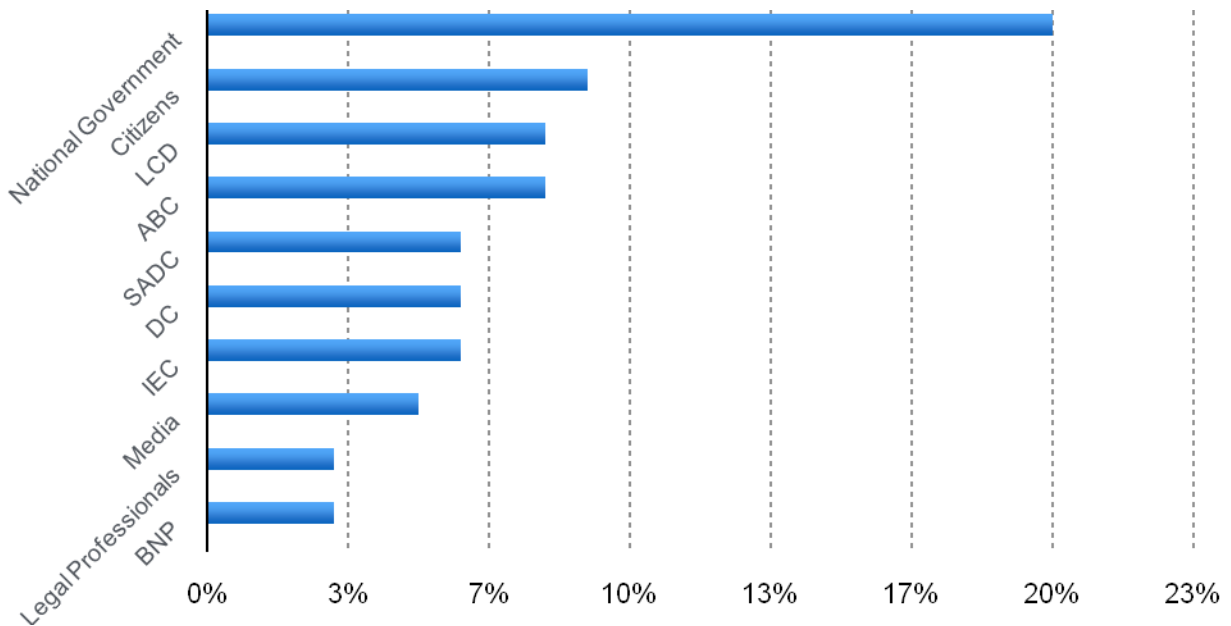
Thomas Thabane (ABC), Mothejoa Metsing (LCD) and Moahloli Mphaka (Government Speaker) received the most coverage with 4% and the other prominent voices were all government sources with a couple of exceptions such as Cyril Ramaphosa (Southern African Development Community - SADC) and Mamatlere Pontšo Matete (Independent Electoral Commission - IEC)

These figures are concerning as they indicate that a diversity of voices and views were not represented by the media in Lesotho when reporting about the 2015 election.

⁷ See MMA elections media monitoring reports - South Africa: <http://elections2014.mediamonitoringafrika.org/>
Zambia: http://www.mediamonitoringafrika.org/index.php/resources/entry/zambian_elections_media_monitoring/

In addition to the individuals who received the most coverage, MMA also looked into which organisations or groups received the most coverage. **Figure 3** show that 51% of coverage was from government and political party sources. This is of particular concern when measured against other groups that were given coverage.

Figure 3: Top 10 organisations accessed



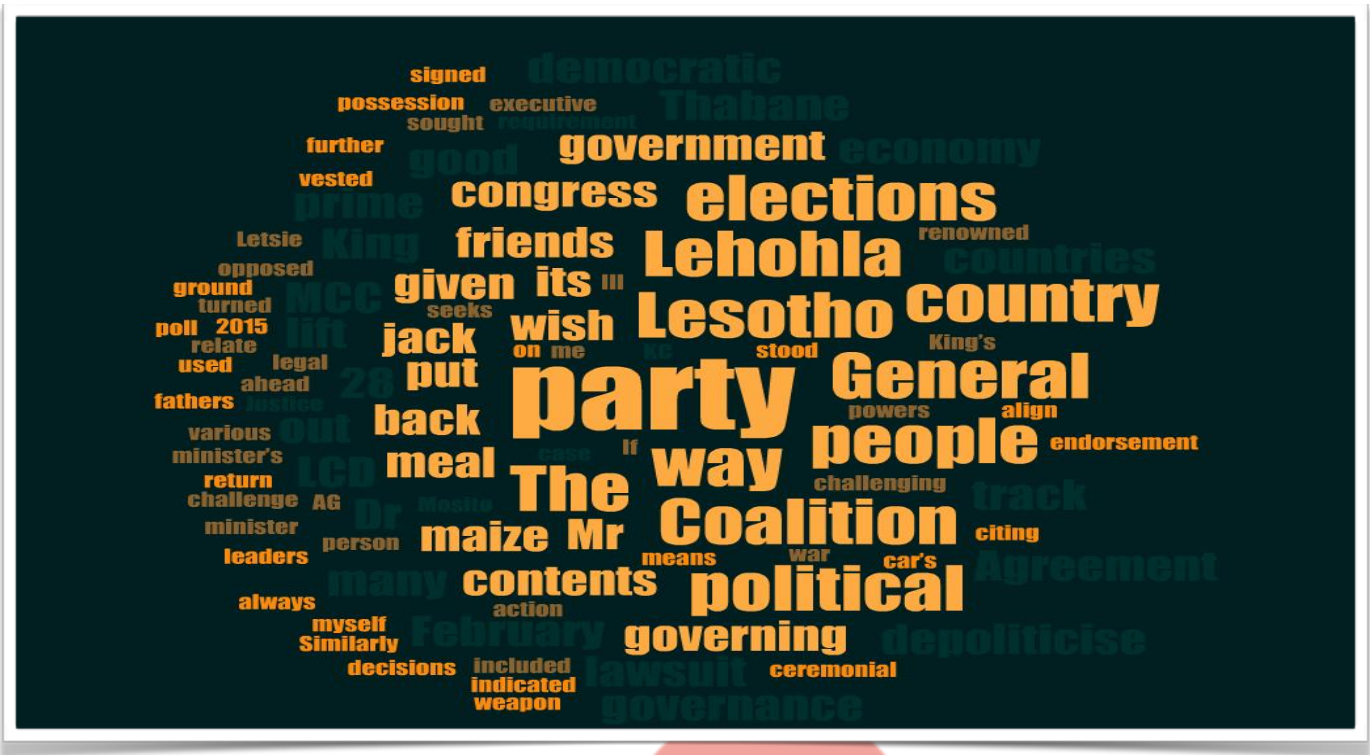
The results (**Figure 3**) show that the voices of citizens received less than half the coverage afforded to government sources. There is no doubt that political parties and government officials will dominate media coverage during an election period. However, the lack of citizens' voices raises the question about the issues the media is driving and to whose benefit? This in turn raises questions such as – Did the media adequately address issues that are important to the voting public and not just to the political parties? Does the lack of diversity in sources indicate that the media has not performed well in its role to inform the public and assist them to participate in the democratic process?

4. What did political parties say?

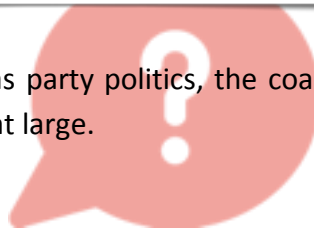


Given that political parties rightly or wrongly dominated the coverage, we sought to find out what the politicians were actually quoted saying. We achieved this by amalgamating all the direct and indirect quotes from political parties into word cloud.⁸In this report we present the word clouds of the parties that formed the coalition government in order to show what these parties' campaigns looked like.

Figure 4: What the LCD campaign looked like



The LCD clearly focused on issues such as party politics, the coalition and elections, with very little said about issues affecting Basotho at large.



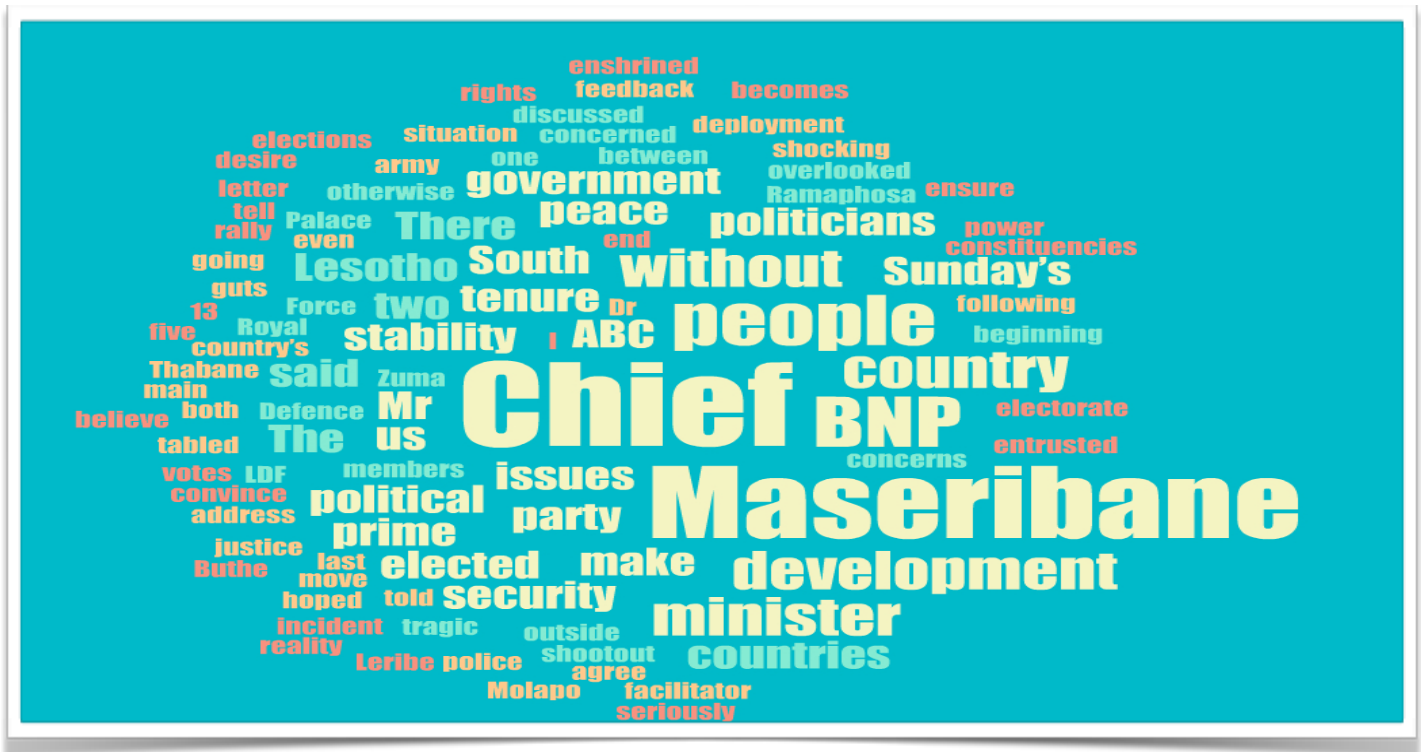
⁸ A word cloud is essentially “an image composed of words used in a particular text or subject, in which the size of the word indicates its frequency”

Figure 6: What the DC campaign looked like



The DC word cloud is most interesting in that it shows that the DC was more focused on issues around development, business and enterprises. It did speak of government and its own political party but it gave prominence on economic issues. It also placed some emphasis on employment opportunities.

Figure 7: What the BNP campaign looked like



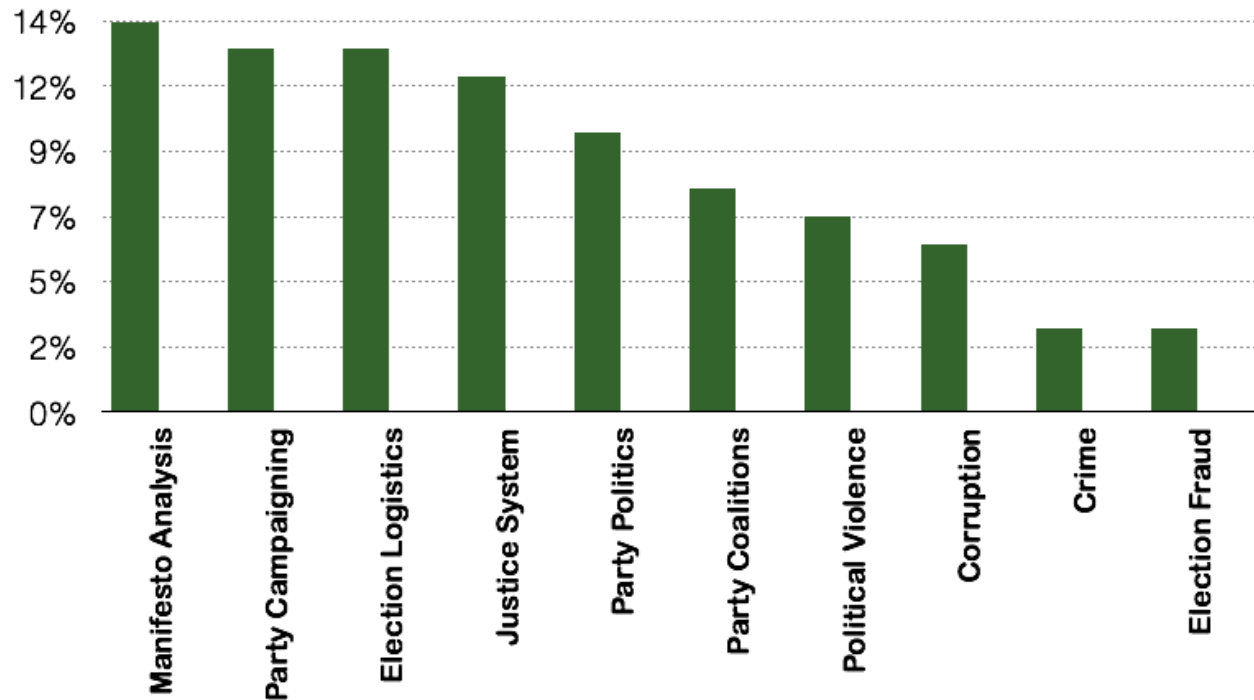
The BNP word cloud was mostly focused on Chief Maseribane who is the leader of the BNP and little focus was awarded to stability, security and peace.

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 that 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 8** below shows the overall top ten topics covered by all media reviewed.



Figure 8: Top 10 topics covered

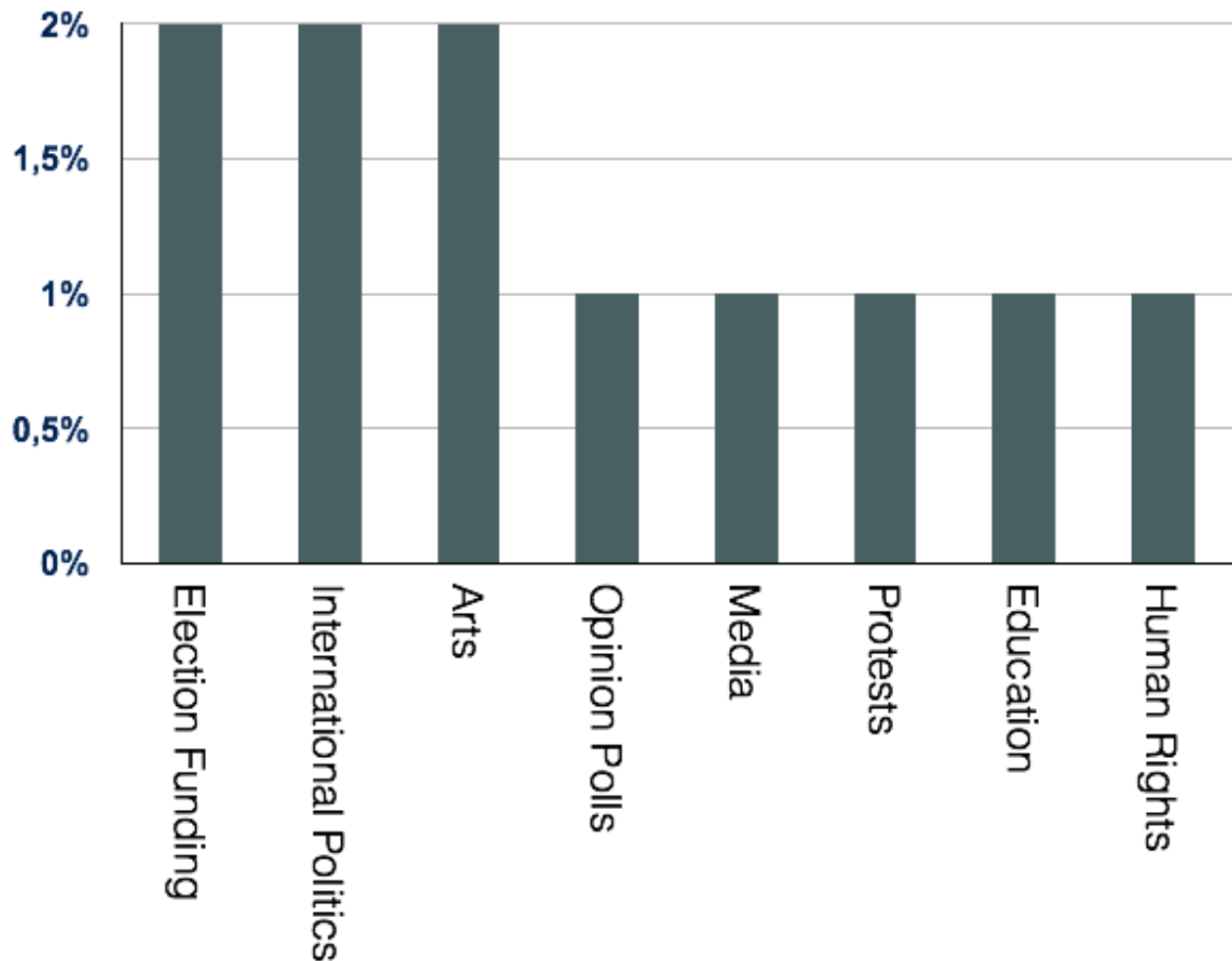


Unlike in South Africa and Zambia⁹ where the election coverage focused more on party campaigning, Lesotho media focused on party manifestos and party campaigns. The effort made by the media to provide information around the parties and their promises is noticeable. There was also a lot of focus around the justice system, purely because of cases involving prominent people. Like in South Africa and Zambia, IEC received some coverage.

Given the economic, development and unemployment crises and how all these directly contribute to poverty, one anticipated seeing these issues put on the agenda for the elections by the media. **Figure 9** below highlights the 'other' issues not sufficiently covered by the media.

⁹ See MMA elections media monitoring reports - South Africa: <http://elections2014.mediamonitoringafrica.org/>
Zambia: http://www.mediamonitoringafrica.org/index.php/resources/entry/zambian_elections_media_monitoring/

Figure 9: Issues that did not make it



It is disappointing that issues such as human rights and education only received 1 percent of the coverage. What is more disappointing is that issues around employment, voter education, health and service delivery received no coverage. Does that mean that Lesotho does not grapple with those issues? It is known that the Lesotho economy is an important issue that needs to be debated. The question is then, where are these stories and why are these issues not discussed? Perhaps like other countries there is more event based reporting rather than issue driven reporting.



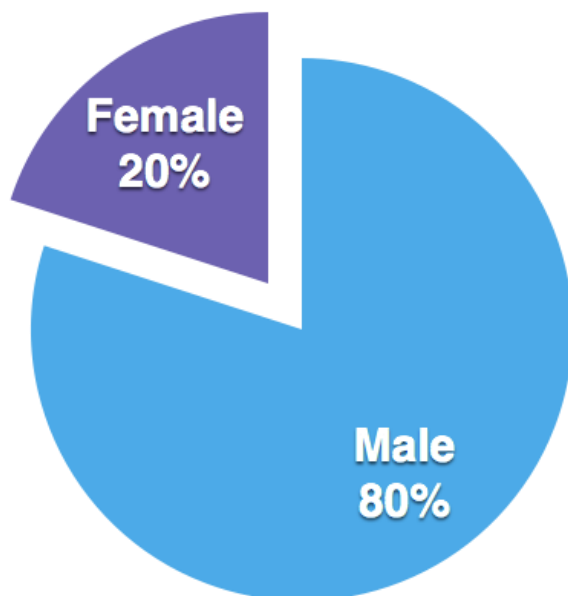
6. Where are the women of Lesotho?

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. Lesotho like other countries is still male dominant, with issues such as gender based violence a concern. Although there have been efforts made, such



as a "political discourse analysis to measure political will as well as an assessment of media coverage of gender based violence"¹⁰ to combat gender based violence and enhance the awareness around gender equality The current situation around gender equality in the media in Lesotho is not particularly a positive one. According to a Gender and Media Progress Study (GMPS) conducted in 2010¹¹, it seems that women are more likely to be seen than heard. This finding can be re-confirmed by examining the data collected from the media monitoring during the run up to the national elections in Lesotho. However, this does seem to be a common trend as seen in Media Monitoring Africa's monitoring of both South Africa's elections coverage as well as Zambia's elections coverage.

Figure 10: female versus male sources accessed



The figure above shows that 20 percent of the sources in the media monitoring were female and 80 percent of sources were male.

According to SADC Gender Protocol Barometer (2012) Lesotho has the highest proportion of female employees in the newsroom, at 73 percent. This makes these findings interesting as one would assume that there is a correlation between female employees and female sources in the media. This indicates that there external factors influencing who is sourced by the media and why. Do the findings indicate that although there is definitely female representation in the newsroom, this does reflect female roles in

¹⁰ Media Information and Communication: SADC Gender Protocol 2012 Barometer, Lesotho.

¹¹The study, Southern African Gender and Media Progress Study, 2010, was conducted by Gender Links, Gender and Media Southern Africa Network (GEMSA), Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and other partners. It examined the "underlying gender dynamics within the institutional structures of the media".

broader society?

The disparity seen between percentage of women in the newsroom and the low percentage of female sources accessed may be attributed to the fact that female voices are sourced more for 'soft' ¹²topics that may not necessarily be considered election issues by the media. These include topics such as religion, health, sex and sexuality, topics which were not focused on during this elections period.

7. Was the coverage fair?



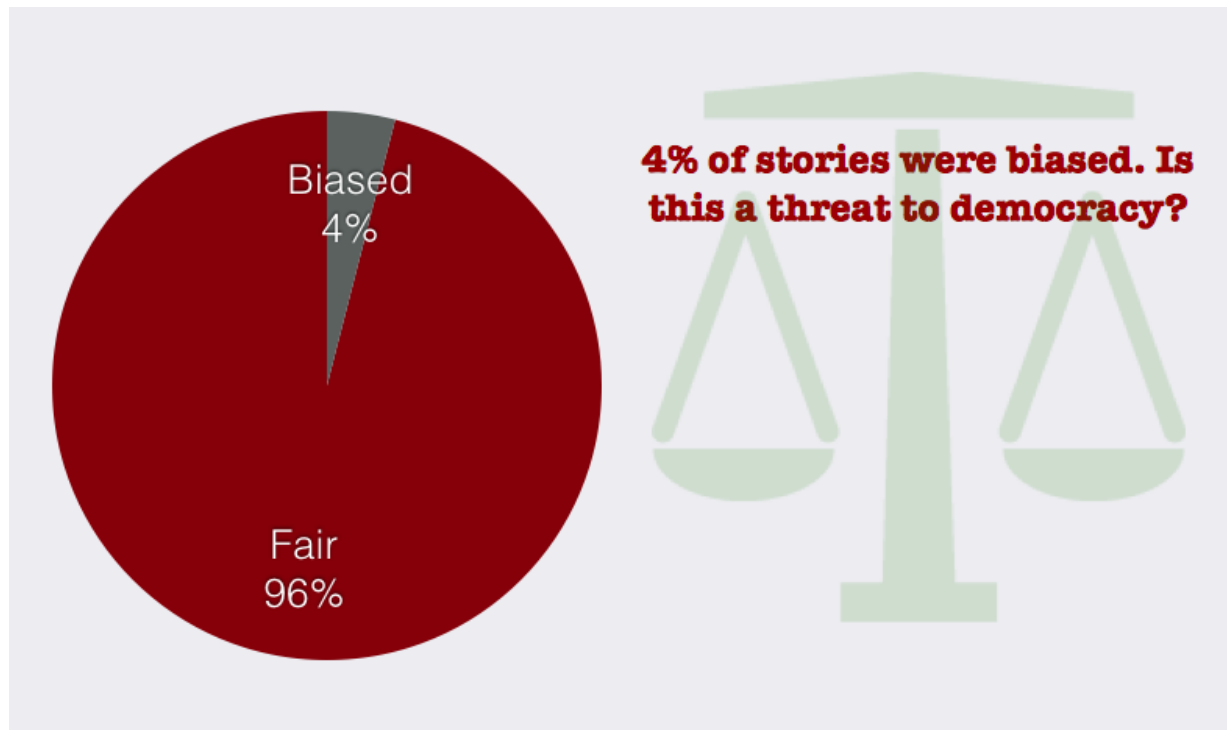
During an election period, it is essential that media coverage is fair in order provide citizens with an unbiased view on political candidates, which informs citizen opinion and thus, may influence their voting decision. The media, especially public or state media, cannot be seen to be favouring one 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 what they report on and how they report it. They also try to be fair by balancing stories. For example by covering a story that favours the LCD today and then covering a story that favours the CD 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 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.

¹²Media Information and Communication: SADC Gender Protocol 2012 Barometer, Lesotho.

Figure 11: Biased stories versus fair stories



What is evident is that the majority of reporting has been fair. Out of a total 11 media whose content was analysed, 4 percent of the stories were considered as clearly biased. While the number of biased articles is considerably low, it is important to note that due to the restricted media environment in Lesotho, it and also due to the low number of items it does not mean that there was diversity in media coverage. The fairness of the media has to be considered amongst a lot of factors.

The stories are fair and not biased but to whose favour? By looking at the results in their entirety, an argument can be made that the media avoided controversy and reported in fair manner and ignored critical issues that are important to the nation of the Basotho people.

8. Conclusion

Overall, there are serious concerns about the media environment in Lesotho. It does not only lack resources but it operates in a legal framework that does not encourage a free and independent media environment.

The events of August 30 2014 in Lesotho's capital city Maseru; and other incidents involving political violence and intimidation can be traced back to the period prior to the 1970 elections, 1970-74, 1993-98, 1998-2007, and 2007-12; however the 2007 election outcome and the period leading to the 2012 election has more to do with the current fragile state of Lesotho's politics. All these factors need to be considered when addressing the challenges facing the media in Lesotho

At this point, the media is doing its best with what it has. However, there is a bigger debate around Lesotho's democracy. Is it really democracy, if there are such threats? Is it really democracy when people who hold different opinions to those in power are attacked when they voice their concerns? Is it really democracy, when all the media can be shutdown at any point and this matter is not addressed? Is it really democracy when journalists fear that they can be attacked at their workplace and is that not a serious offence?

In comparison to South Africa, it is chalk and cheese. South Africa, with its faults, has a free media and the media is protected not only by the Constitution but also several laws in the country. Basotho deserve a free and independent media. They have the right to a media that offers a diversity of views and opinions and reflects the rich diversity and unique issues facing the Basotho people. Accordingly, not only do we need to address media regulation and legislative issues but we also need to look urgently at building the capacity and economic models of media in Lesotho. If we do not do so, not only will democracy and the elections be deeply compromised but people's ability to participate as citizens will be undermined.