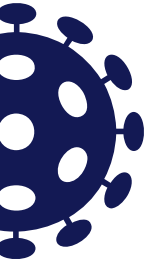


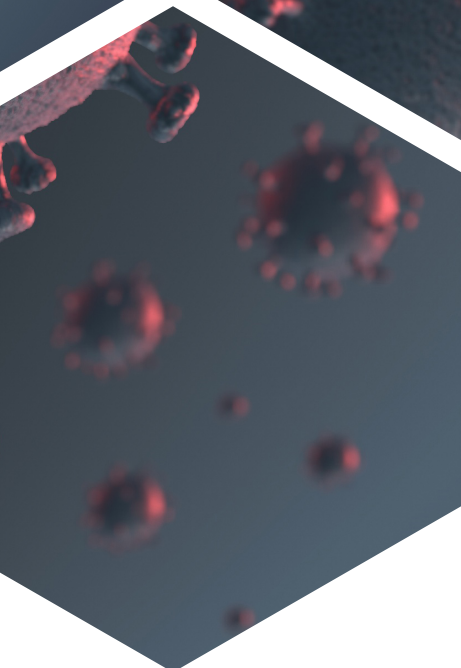
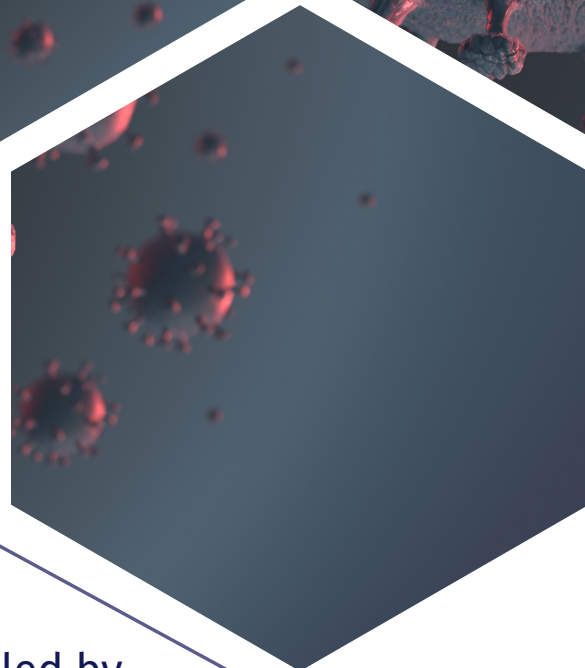
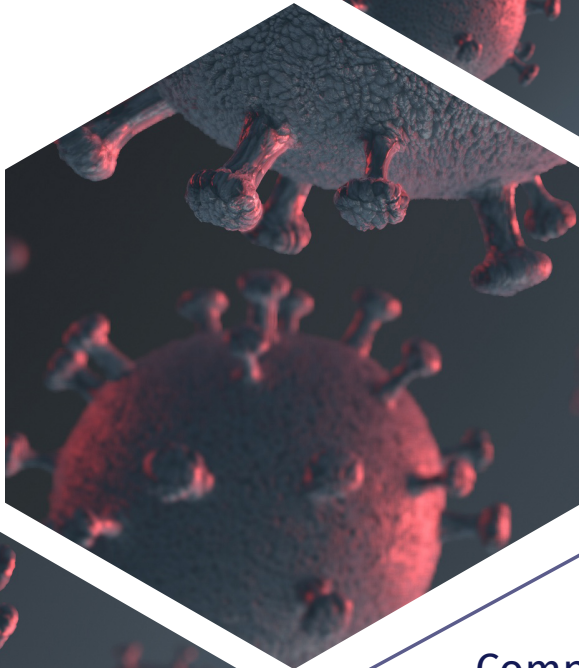
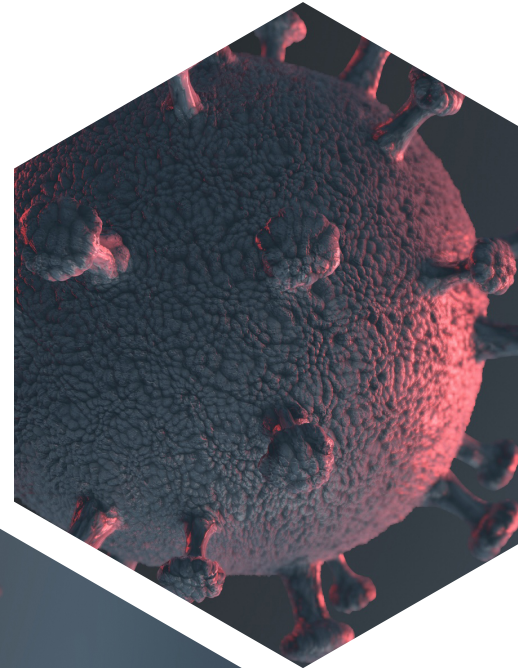
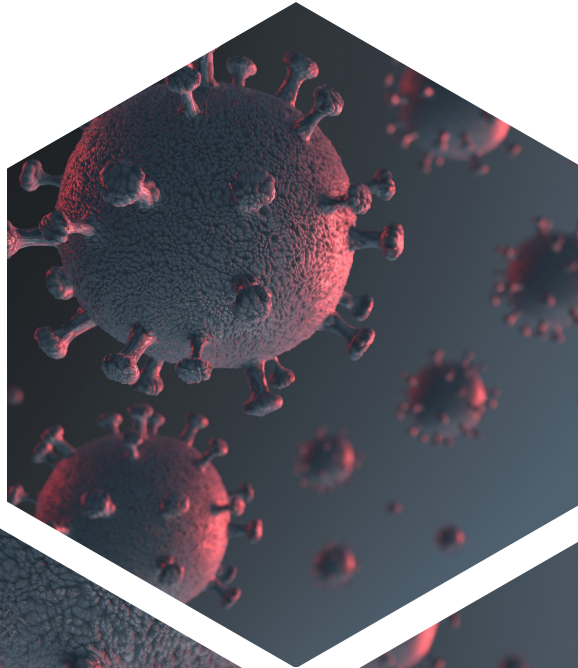


# ANALYSIS OF COVID-19 MEDIA COVERAGE



## BRIEF

Number: Two



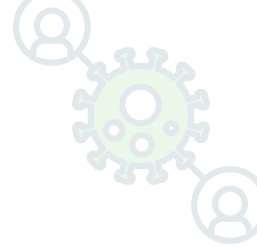
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Edited by  
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Namumba**

Designed by  
**Nomshado Lubisi**

**MEDIAMONITORING**  
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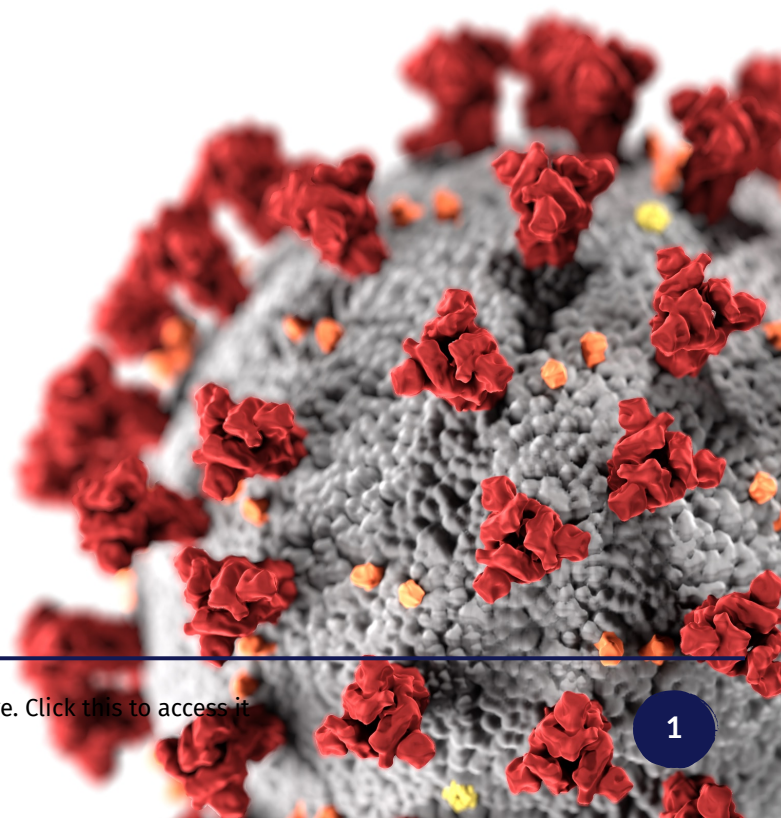
# Introduction



From the time of the first positive Covid-19 test in South Africa, the virus has been extensively covered on an ongoing basis. It is of paramount importance and expected of the media, as the fourth estate and communication line between a government and its citizens, to keep these citizens informed on the functions of government and other important issues, including national disasters and pandemics. The public expects the media not just to report on the daily rates, but also to unpack and help people understand the ongoing shifts and changes relating to the virus.

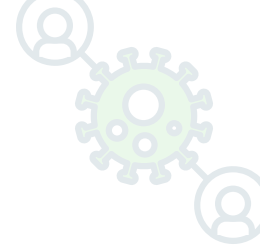
In efforts to ascertain some of the trends in this coverage, Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) is undertaking bi-weekly brief analyses, mainly looking at aspects including who is speaking in coverage, dynamics on gender and race representations and the collective number of articles published. This is to arrive at a data-driven view and understanding of how the media has and continues to report on the coronavirus pandemic and subsequent lockdown and, who the agenda setters are.[1]

In the first analysis we undertook in this series of Covid-19 analyses, some of the key findings were that out of 2,368 articles in a period of five days, it was mainly male personalities that spoke to or were accessed by the media. The results further show that the male personalities that spoke were mainly black South Africans who are in prominent government positions, including among others, the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, the Minister of Health, Dr. Zweli Mkhize, the Minister of Finance, Tito Mboweni and Bheki Cele who is the Minister of Police.



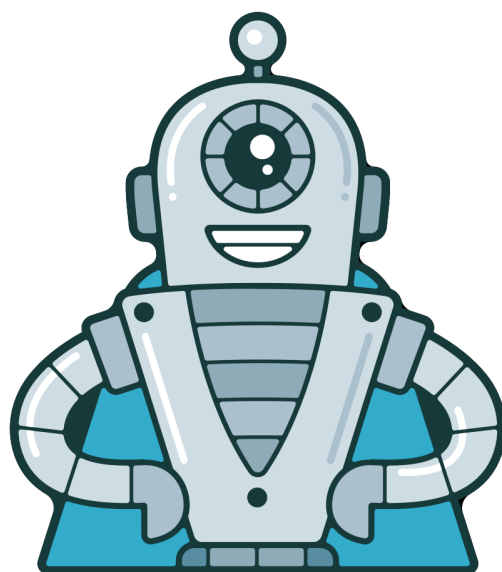
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[1] MMA has a tool to determine who sets the agenda in media coverage. [Click this to access it](#)



For the purpose of this brief, the monitoring period covered 14 days, from the 18th of April until the 2nd of May, 2020. Dexter[2] an in-house online monitoring tool was used. This tool gathered and analysed the data using keywords, “Coronavirus”, “Quarantine”, “Lockdown”, “Covid-19” and “Pandemic”. The tool scraped media content from the websites of over 40 news media sites.[3] Using machine learning, we then worked with the data to help extract key indicators, including sources and entities. The data is searchable across a range of parameters.

We identified the relevant stories related to the pandemic, focusing on South Africa (where a national state of disaster has been declared). These were, but not limited to, items that specifically spoke to Covid-19 and the lockdown. Importantly, we excluded any items that discussed similar topics but were not related to the coronavirus, and more particularly Covid-19. The results in this brief are an analysis of the dataset in the two-week period where a total number of 3,876 articles were collected and analysed.



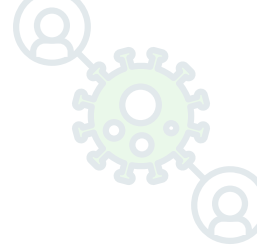
## DEXTER

MEDIA MONITORING AFRICA INITIATIVE

[2] Access to Dexter can be granted upon request.

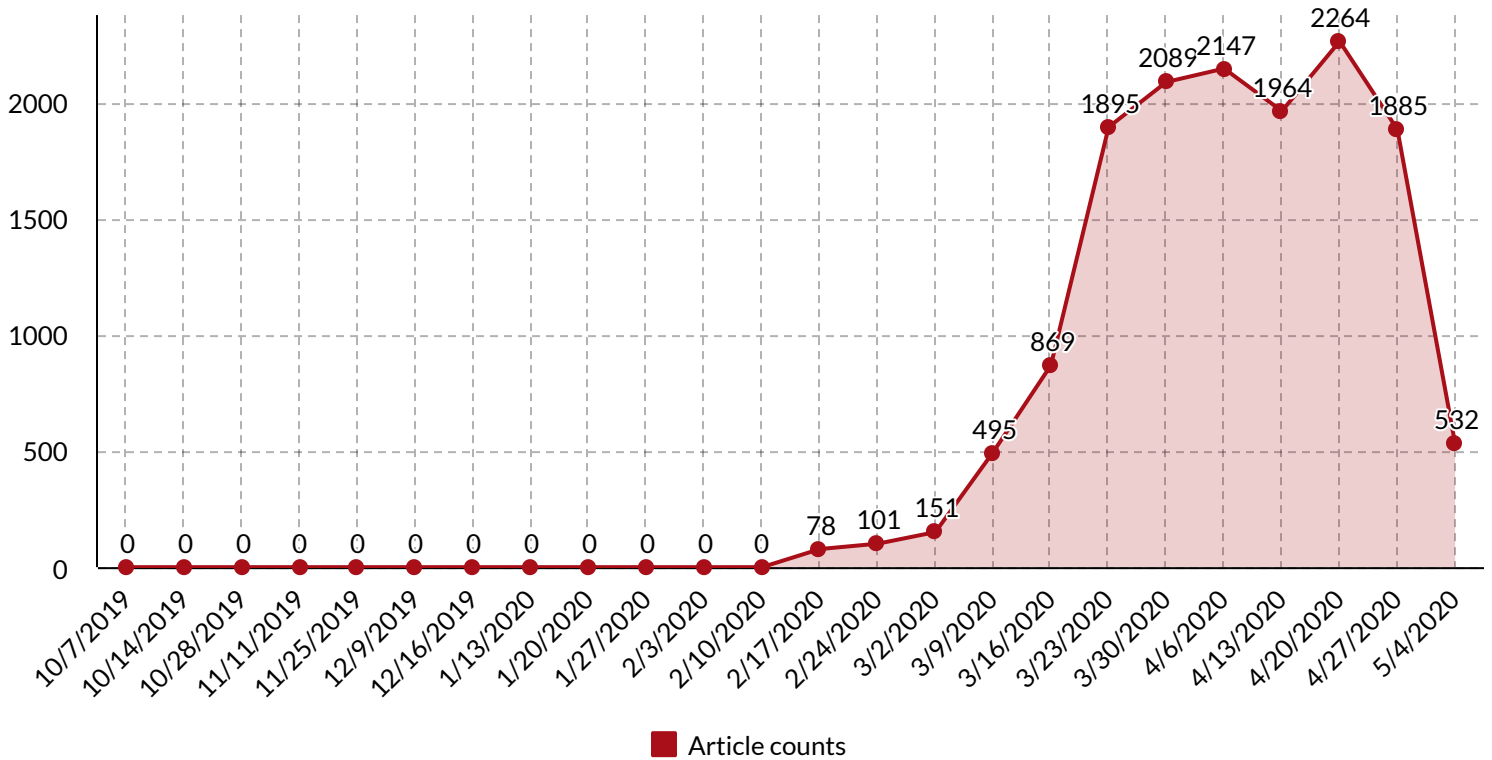
[3] The Times (TimesLIVE), The Conversation, SABC Online News, RNEWS, Politics Web, News24, New Frame, My Broadband, Moneyweb, Mining Weekly, Mining Technology, Mining Review, Ground Up, Grocott's Mail, Eyewitness News, Engineering News, Daily Sun, Daily Maverick, Daily Dispatch, City Press, Channel Africa, Business-Tech, Business Day, Biz Community, Africa-Newsroom, The Media Online, Polokwane Observer, Zoutnet, Construction Review, Sowetan, The Daily Vox, Zoutpansberger, Financial Mail, Martiz Publishing, Africa Check, Brand South Africa, Business-Tech, Tabloid Media, Die Laevelder Doc, Fin24, SA Construction News, The Citizen, The Herald, eNCA Online, Cape Time, Cape Argus, IOL, M&G

# Article Count

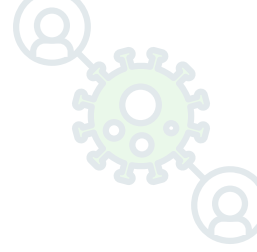


In addition to pulling data from the specific period for this report, we also looked at the data from the last quarter of 2019 to help demonstrate how the media coverage grew.

## Overall Article Count



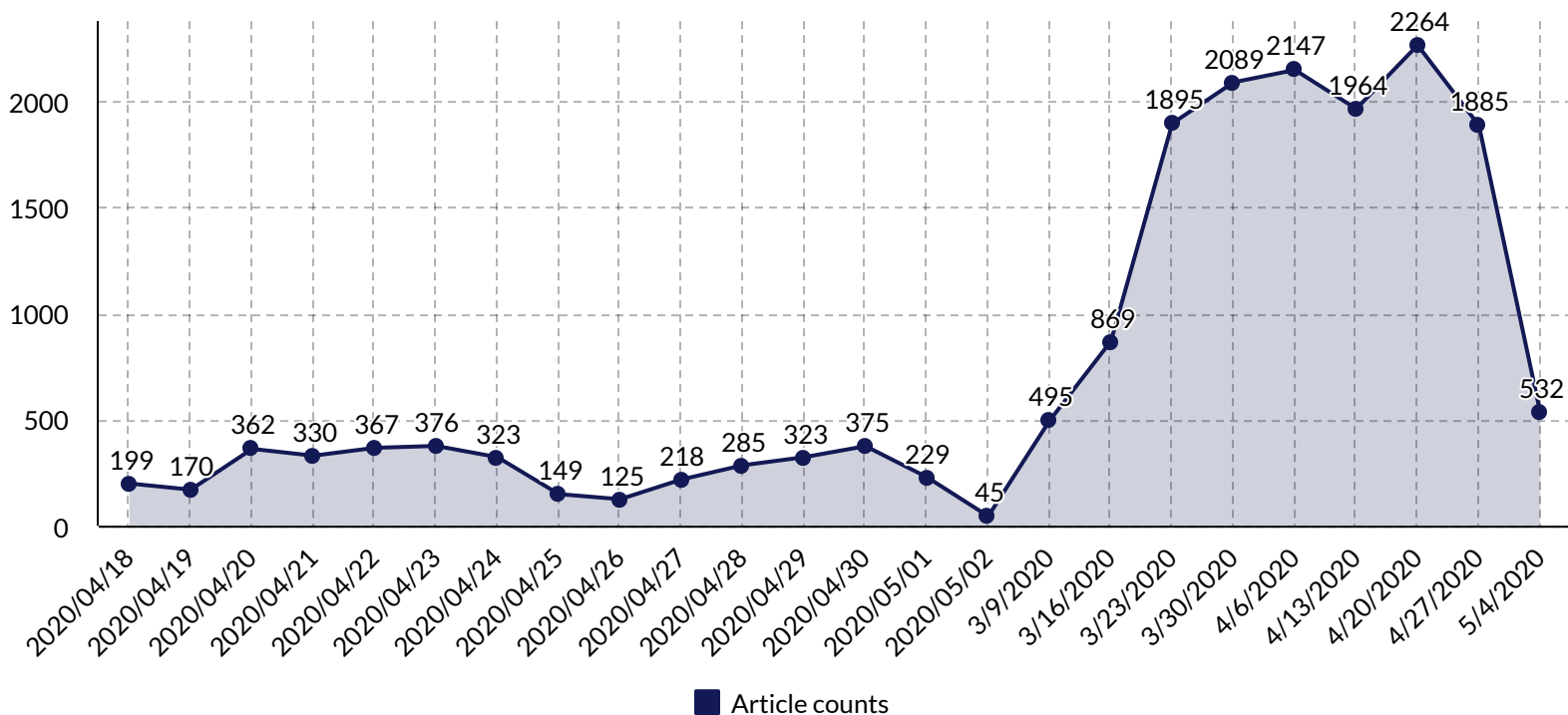
As expected, as the impact of the virus increases, so do the number of stories. Ordinarily with big stories or events, there tends to be a typical bell curve, whereas the story breaks, there is a sharp increase in the number of stories, then it peaks, and we see a generally sharp decline. This is typical for big issues like national elections where the coverage peaks around the day of voting and then declines sharply once results are announced. The shape of the graph above is therefore indicative not only of the scale of the crisis but also how it continues to dominate coverage with a steady and ongoing high level of stories. Within this of course, there are peaks and troughs which is the focus of the data that follows.



# Daily Count

In only a space of two days, from 18th to 20th April, 2020, the number of articles about the pandemic increased by 45%, from 199 to 362 articles. Noteworthy to mention is that most of the articles published on the day of the spike, the 20th of April, focused heavily on labour and the economy, lockdown regulations and socio-economic relief initiatives by government to citizens and businesses both public and private. The latter was in response to some of the devastating effects the pandemic and lockdown has had on trade and industry. Another reason for the spike is that on the same day, the 20th of April, the President released a statement on hunger alleviation during lockdown which was carried by some of the major online publications and trended fourth on social media according to South Africa's 24-hour trend report - 20 April ,2020[4] by the Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change.

### Daily Article Count



From the articles monitored and analysed, the results reveal that the top five news media that carried these stories on the 20th of April were *News24* with 42 stories, *Sowetan LIVE* (38), *The Citizen Online* (38), *Daily Maverick* (33) and *Times LIVE* (33). From the 20th until the 24th of April, there was a steady number of published articles that were related to the pandemic, averaging about 300 articles a day. However, on the 25th of April, there was a sharp decline in the number of published articles related to the pandemic, with a total of 149 articles on the day from all articles collected and analysed. This could be attributable to the fact that the day fell on a Saturday where news content is less serious, entertaining and more sports focused.

[4] See here: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-04-21-south-africas-24-hour-trend-report-20-april-2020/>



Consequently, some publications do not at all produce news on a Saturday, thereby decreasing the number of articles one would often get on a week-day. This is a common trend, as the number of media and stories drops significantly over weekends.

Looking at the overall article count in the 14-day period according to news medium/publication, the *SABC News Online* as a public institution accountable to the citizens of South Africa was at number two on the list of news media that carried the most stories related to the pandemic with 452 articles, coming after *News24* (493). The high levels by both these media houses is indicative of their greater capacity compared to other newsrooms.

There were also labour and business-related media in the top 20 out of the over 40 media monitored, such as *Moneyweb* (185), *Engineering News* (172), *Business-Tech* (167), *Fin24* (138) and *Mining Weekly* (88). The reason may be that government, which the media often relies on for official comment on socio-economic and political news, were focusing on the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic during the monitoring period. It can be expected that there may be an increase in the number of articles on the impact of the virus on the national and global economy.

Looking at the overall article count in the 14-day period according to news medium/publication, the *SABC News Online* as a public institution accountable to the citizens of South Africa was at number two on the list of news media that carried the most stories related to the pandemic with 452 articles, coming after *News24* (493). The high levels by both these media houses is indicative of their greater capacity compared to other newsrooms.

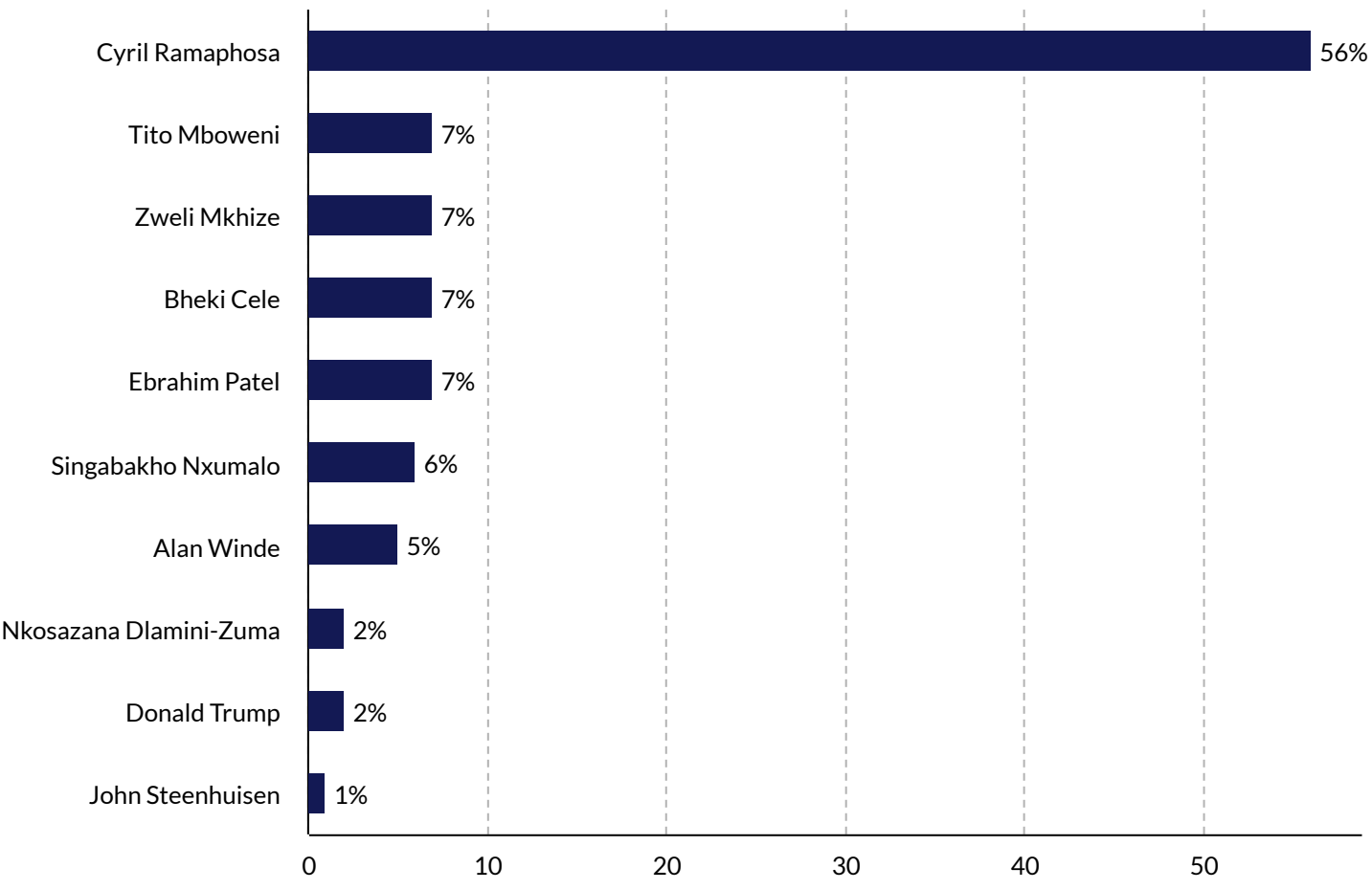




# Whose voice do we hear in the media?

A good indicator in showing who gets to speak and on what issues, is by looking at the sources accessed by journalists and media practitioners in their news coverage. As such, looking at who speaks is important in that it shows how in-depth, balanced and fair a news story is and whether there is a greater diversity of views and perspectives as principles of ethical journalism. It further provides the opportunity to empower by giving voice to those who have erased, silenced, overlooked and/or misrepresented to tell their stories themselves.

Top 10 Sources





The graph above indicates the source breakdown, which are instances where the person is quoted directly or indirectly. What becomes apparent is that the people who have been interviewed and/or quoted the most by the media are high-ranking government officials, with President Cyril Ramaphosa leading the charge with 56% of the overall share. He is followed by Finance Minister, Tito Mboweni (7%), Health Minister, Zweli Mkhize (7%), Trade and Industry Minister, Ebrahim Patel and Police Minister, Bheki Cele (7%). This is to be expected as President Cyril Ramaphosa together with ministers in the economic, health and security clusters have been in ongoing communication with the public through scheduled media briefings, reporting on important matters related to the coronavirus and the respective responses to it by the departments they lead.

The issues, as mentioned above, relate to socio-economic relief, labour and economic issues as well as lockdown regulations and laws. Alan Winde (5%) and John Steenhuisen (1%), leaders of and in the opposition party, Democratic Alliance (DA), come in at number seven and 10 respectively as the most accessed voices in the media for this specific timeframe. This is due mostly to calls by their party for President Cyril Ramaphosa to end the lockdown and open the economy.

Very little was heard from experts and ordinary citizens on the ground who are most affected by the pandemic and lockdown in this period.

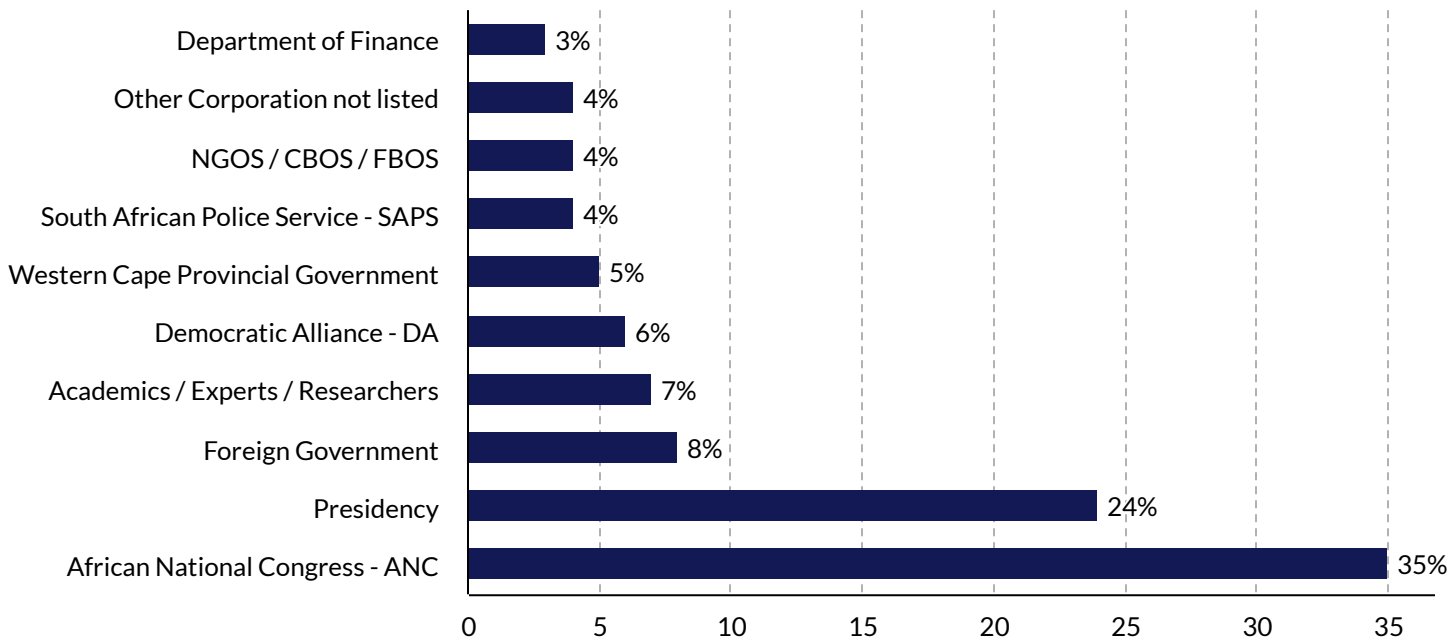


# Affiliations

The top five identified sources' affiliations are the African National Congress (ANC) (35%), The South African Presidency (24%), Foreign Governments (8%), Experts (including academics and researchers) (7%), the DA (6%) and the Western Cape provincial government (5%). The Western Cape government appears in the top five mainly because of the increasing number of Covid-19 positive cases in the Western Cape province. Outside of government institutions, non-governmental and civil society organisations were the only group to make it to the top 10, with 4%.

Some of the major stories where Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were accessed include the United Nations quoted for instance, in an article condemning South Africa's militarisation of the lockdown.[5] More examples of stories where NGOs were interviewed and/or quoted include prisoners protesting for safety against coronavirus[6] and the Human Rights Commission's report on the situation in Strandfontein.[7] The data also reveals that the go-to institutions for most of the news media are government departments and entities. This could be ascribed to the measures by government to centralise official communication around the virus and lockdown in order to minimize the proliferation of dis/misinformation.

### Top 10 Affiliations



[5] News24 Wire. (2020) UN Human Rights Office highlights 'toxic lockdown culture' in SA. *Citizen* [Internet], 28 April. Available from: <<https://citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/crime/2275717/un-human-rights-office-highlights-toxic-lockdown-culture-in-sa/>> [Accessed 14 May 2020]

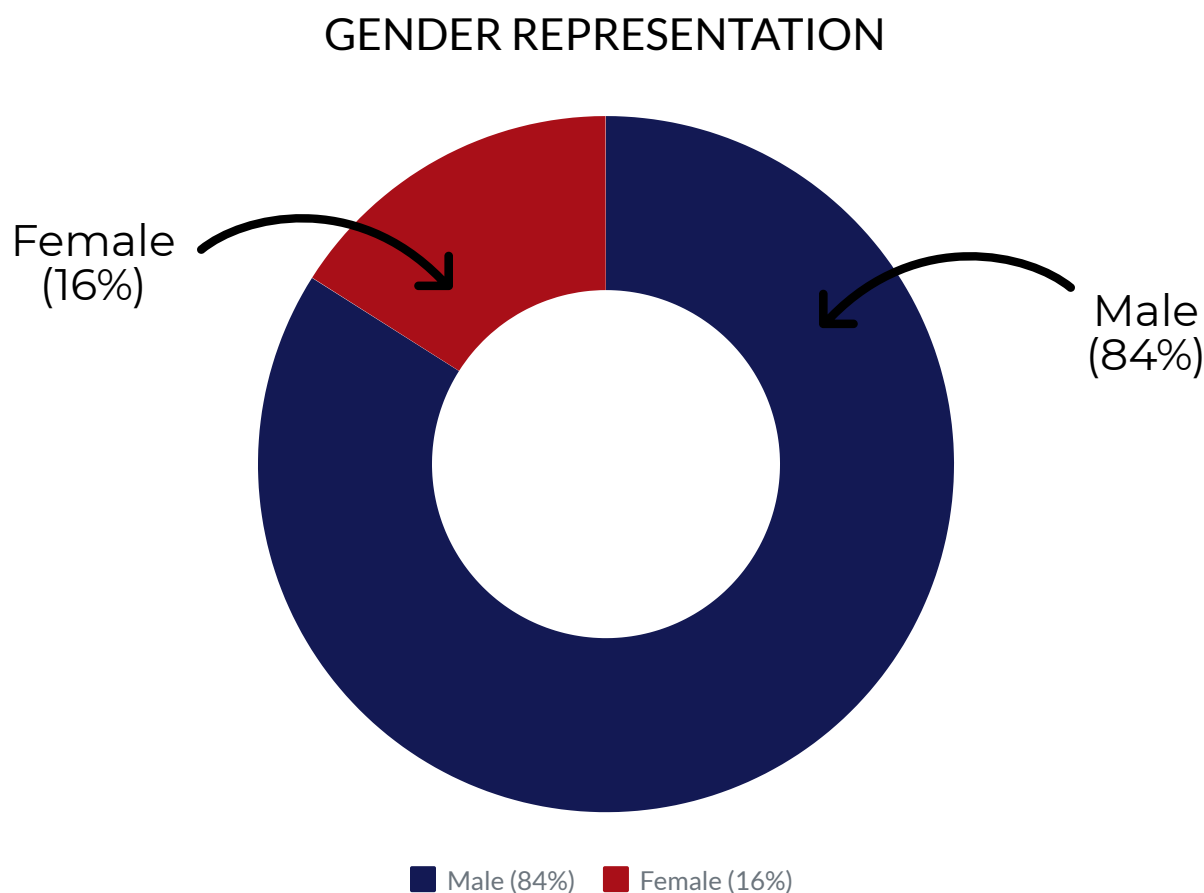
[6] Mdakane, B. (2020) Prisoners go on rampage in protest over Covid-19, overcrowding. *City Press* [Internet], 20 April. Available from: <<https://city-press.news24.com/News/prisoners-go-on-rampage-in-protest-over-covid-19-overcrowding-20200420>> [Accessed 15 May 2020]

[7] Payne, S. (2020) Human Rights Commission report flays Cape Town's Strandfontein relocation site. *Daily Maverick* [Internet], 29 April. Available from: <<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-04-29-human-rights-commission-report-flays-cape-towns-strandfontein-relocation-site/>> [Accessed 15 May 2020]



# Gender Breakdown

On source representation by gender, the share of voices remained largely unequal, with males on average being accessed four times more than females. Males accounted for 84% of the count and females 16%.



This speaks to the previous sources graph above where in the list of the top 10 most accessed voices regardless of gender and race, is only one woman, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma at number eight. Dr. Dlamini-Zuma is South Africa's Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Minister. These results are totally disproportionate to the gender spread in South Africa where the female population (50.5%) eclipses the male population by 1% according to official statistics.[8] This also speaks to the government's seeming reluctance at having more women in major leadership positions, even though recently cabinet has reached the 50% mark of women within its ranks.[9] For our media, it indicates an ongoing struggle to give voice to those who carry a disproportionate burden in society, and to a degree complicity in recreating existing power dynamics of male dominance.

[8] Community Statistics (2016), *Statistical Release P0301* [Internet]. Statistics South Africa. Pretoria, Available from: <[http://cs2016.statssa.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/NT-30-06-2016-RELEASE-for-CS-2016-\\_Statistical-releas\\_1-July-2016.pdf](http://cs2016.statssa.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/NT-30-06-2016-RELEASE-for-CS-2016-_Statistical-releas_1-July-2016.pdf)> [Accessed: 15 May 2020]

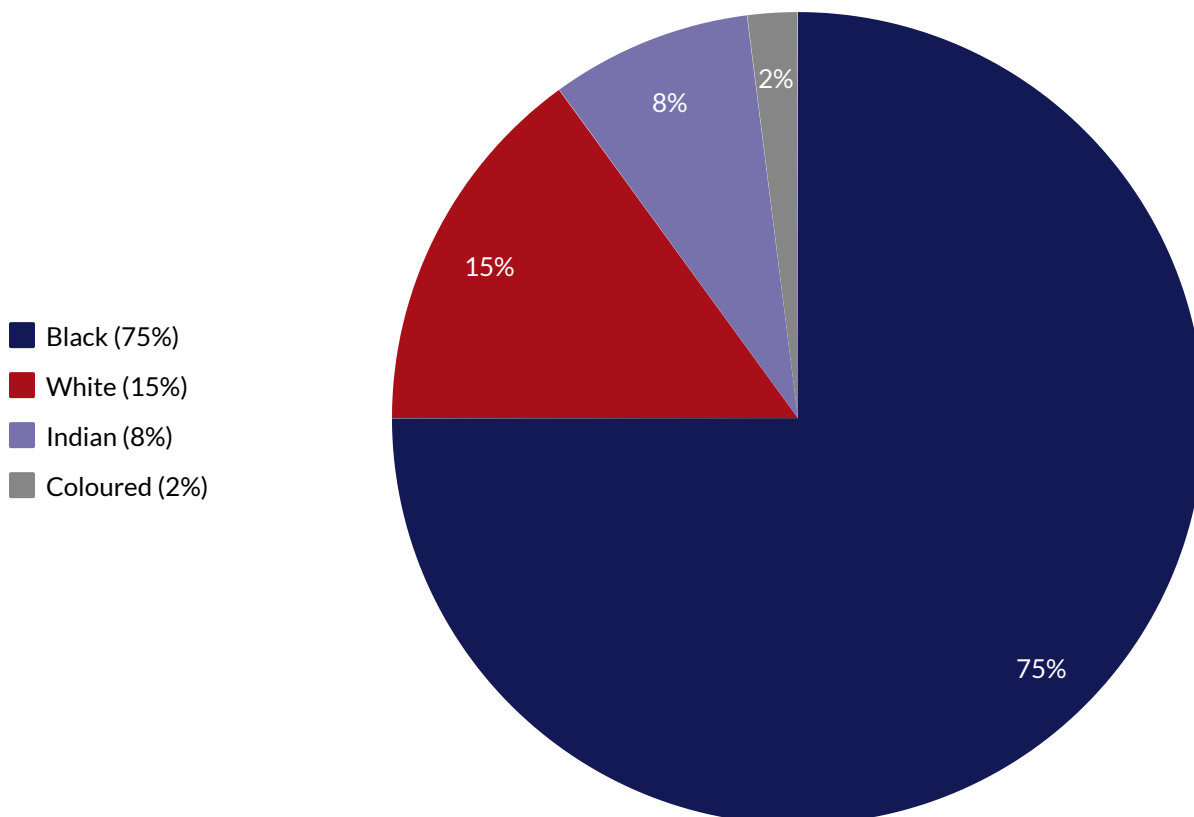
[9] Fleming, S. (2019) South Africa's cabinet is now 50% women for the first time ever. *World Economic Forum* [Internet], 04 June. Available from: <<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/06/south-africa-s-cabinet-is-now-50-women-for-the-first-time-ever/>> [Accessed 15 May 2020]

# Race Breakdown



According to the graph below where race representation is shown, black people's voices were the most accessed at 83% on matters pertaining to Covid-19 and the lockdown in the period studied. This has much to do with the fact that it was mainly male government officials who spoke on the issues and these included Cyril Ramaphosa, Zweli Mkhize, Bheki Cele and Tito Mboweni.

### Race Representation



Furthermore, black South Africans make up almost as much in terms of population size, with the total sitting at 81%. White people's and Indians' voices respectively made up 15% and 8% of the share of voice in media coverage. These two make up 8% and 2% of the population respectively according to Statistics South Africa's Community Survey of 2016.[10] The white people speaking here include Alan Winde and President of the United States of America, Donald Trump (representing a foreign government), while the total share of voice for the Indian population is 6% with the leading voice being Professor Salim Karim who is the Chief Covid-19 advisor and as such was widely sourced. Notably, sources from the coloured population remain marginalized during the period in question, sharing only 2% of the spoils while making up 9% of the total South African population.

[10] Community Statistics (2016), *Statistical Release P0301* [Internet]. Statistics South Africa. Pretoria, Available from: <[http://cs2016.statssa.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/NT-30-06-2016-RELEASE-for-CS-2016-\\_Statistical-releas\\_1-July-2016.pdf](http://cs2016.statssa.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/NT-30-06-2016-RELEASE-for-CS-2016-_Statistical-releas_1-July-2016.pdf)> [Accessed: 15 May 2020]

## Conclusion



While news on the Covid-19 pandemic and the national lockdown continue to rise dramatically, it is evident that the media responded rapidly in reporting and covering stories related to these since the first positive test was confirmed in South Africa. In these efforts, the many number of the people interviewed for views on the matter were mainly official government voices, possibly as a result of government's efforts to constantly and consistently communicate with the public and possibly curb and avoid dis/misinformation during this time of uncertainty and anxiety. Going forward, it would be prudent for the media to seek to include more voices from both ordinary members of the public, especially women and young people but also more medical experts on the issue of Covid-19 and its consequences.

A large, stylized graphic of a virus particle, likely representing the COVID-19 virus, with a grey, textured surface and numerous red, spiky protrusions. The text "COVID-19" is overlaid in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the virus particle.

COVID-19