

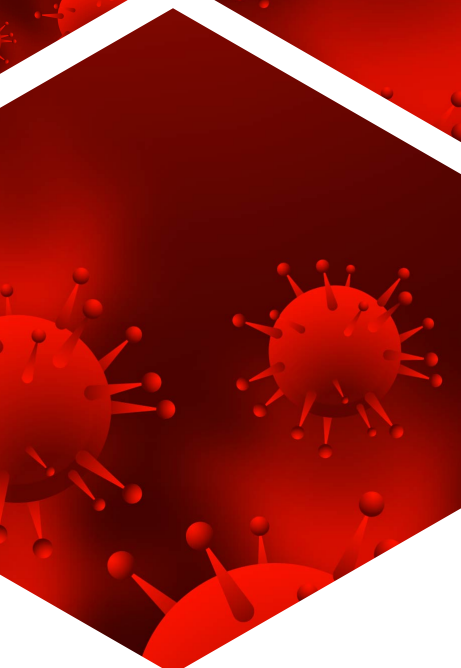
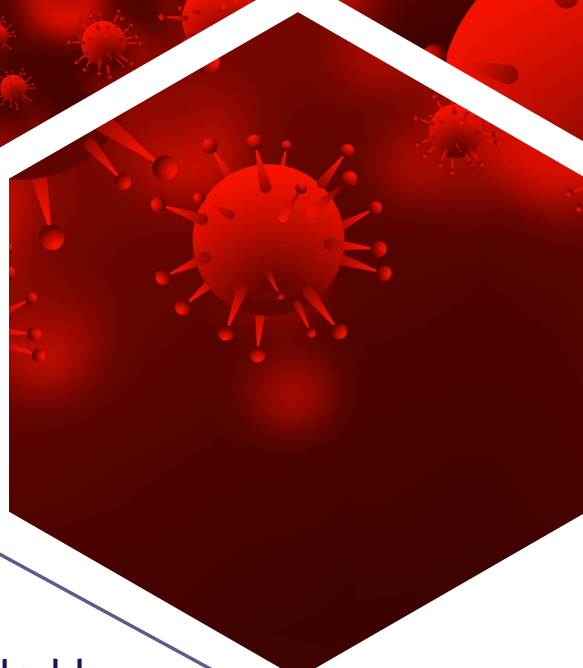
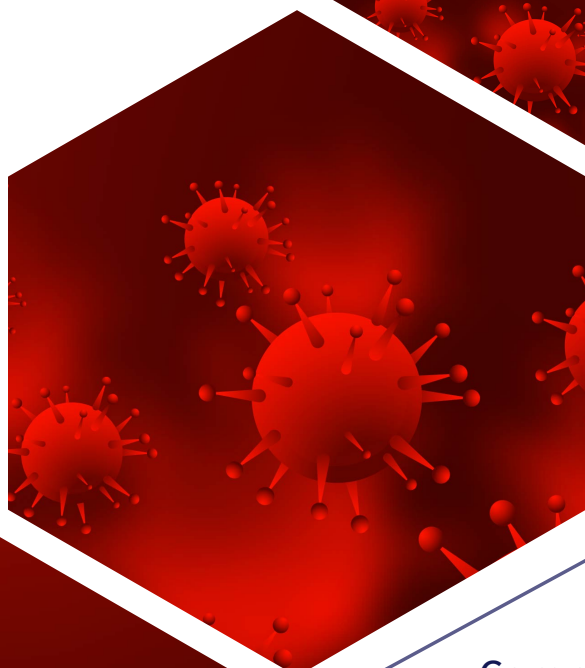
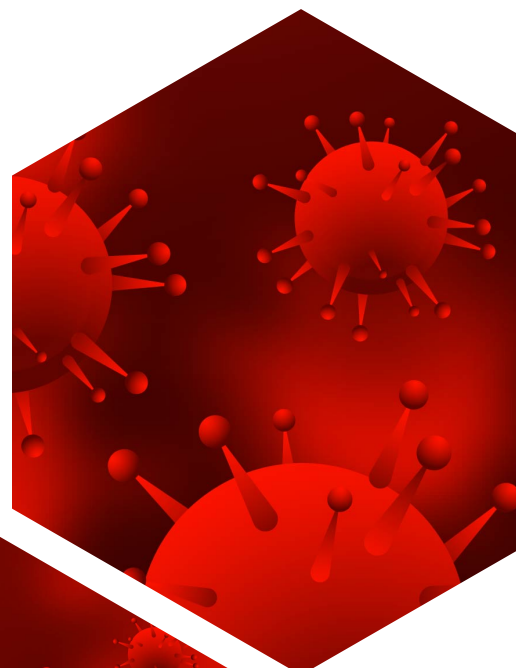
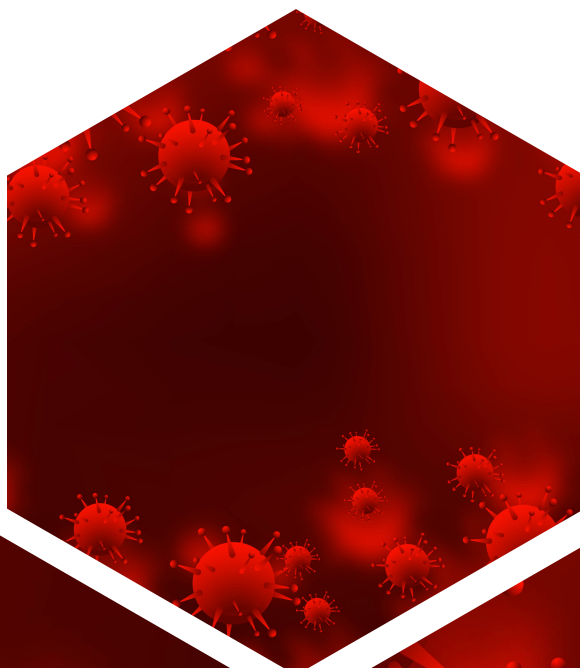


ANALYSIS OF COVID-19 MEDIA COVERAGE



BRIEF

Number: Three



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MEDIAMONITORING
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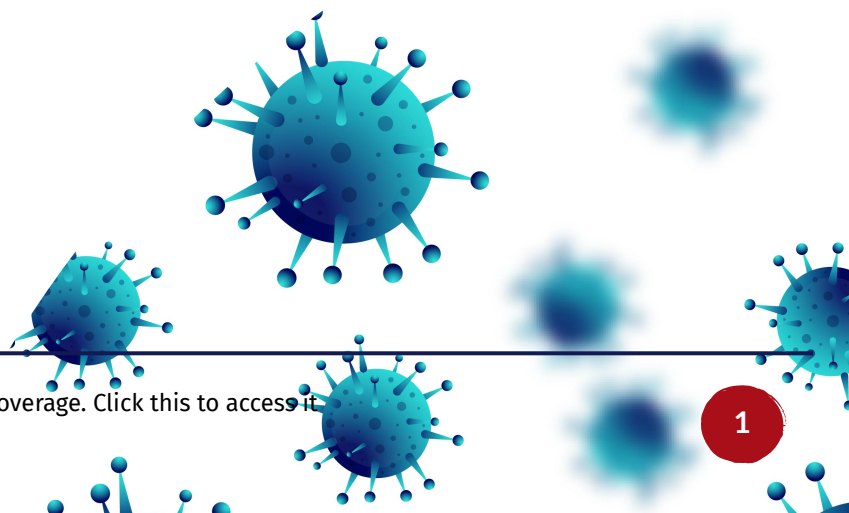
Introduction



In a time of crisis and anxiety in South Africa as a result of the coronavirus and subsequent lockdown, the media ought to play an important role in being the communication link between the government and citizens; keeping the citizens informed of government's response and initiatives to controlling, curbing and combatting the virus, including other important issues and government functions during such a time of a pandemic. Rightfully, the public also expects the media not just to report on the daily rates of infections and recoveries, but to further unpack and help people understand the ongoing shifts and changes relating to the virus, including the psychosocial and socio-economic impact it has had on the people.

To determine the trends in the coverage of Covid-19, Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) is undertaking bi-monthly brief analyses, mainly looking at aspects including who gets to speak or whose voice is amplified in the coverage, undercurrents on gender and race representations and the collective number of articles published over the different days. 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]

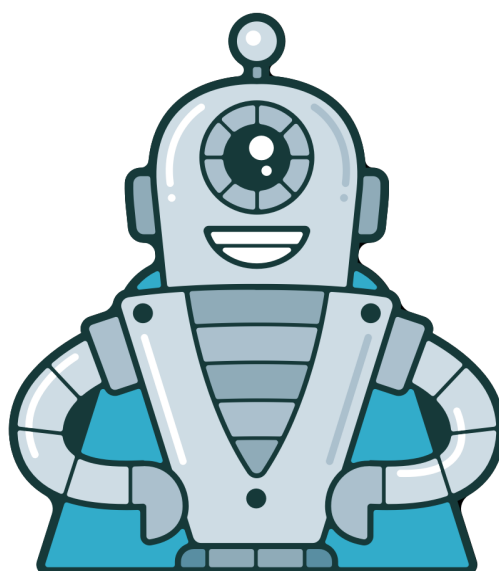
In the two previous analyses undertaken by MMA looking at the trends in coverage, part of the findings were that out of 2,368 articles in a period of five-days for the first analysis and 3,876 articles over 14-days for the second, it was mainly male personalities that spoke or were accessed in media coverage. The results further showed that these male personalities 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. This was due to communication related to the virus, whether it be on new infections or recoveries and general lockdown regulations, and that the government leaders responsible for portfolios relating to these are predominantly black and male. Interestingly, very little was heard from experts and ordinary citizens on the ground who are most affected by the pandemic and lockdown in this period.



[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 3rd of May until the 16th of May, 2020. Dexter,[1] 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 50 news media sites.[2] 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 then identified the relevant stories as all those that related to the pandemic, particularly in 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 4, 130 articles were collected and analysed.



DEXTER

MEDIA MONITORING AFRICA INITIATIVE

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

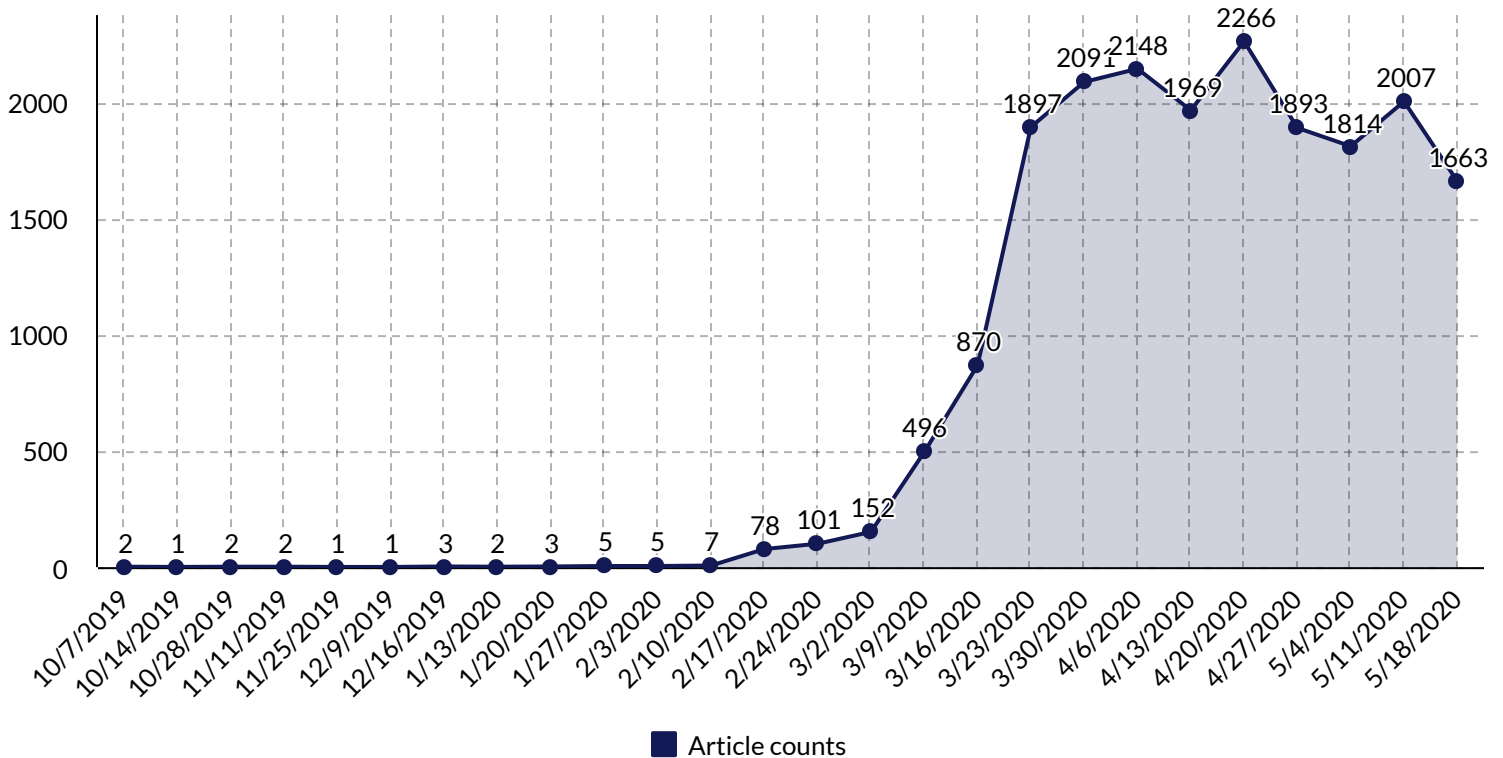
[3] Business Day, Cape Argus, The Citizen, City Press, Daily Dispatch, Daily Maverick, Daily Sun, Die Burger, The Herald, Grocott's Mail, IOL, M&G, News24, Saturday Star, Sowetan, The Sunday Independent, Sunday Times, Sunday World, The Times, Weekend Argus, Weekend Dispatch, Cape Times, The Mercury, The Post (SA), Sunday Tribune, The Witness, Sunday Sun, SABC Online News, Fin24, Eyewitness News, eNCA Online, Moneyweb, The Daily Vox, Ground Up, The Conversation, Die Laevelder, Zoutnet, Zoutpansberger, Engineering News, Financial Mail, Polokwane Observer, Politics Web, Biz Community, Construction Review, Mining Review, Mining Technology, Mining Weekly, My Broadband, Rand Daily Mail, SA Construction News, Business-Tech, RNEWS, Africa-Newsroom, Channel Africa, amaBhungane, New Frame, The Media Online, Pretoria Live

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 story grew.

Overall Article Count



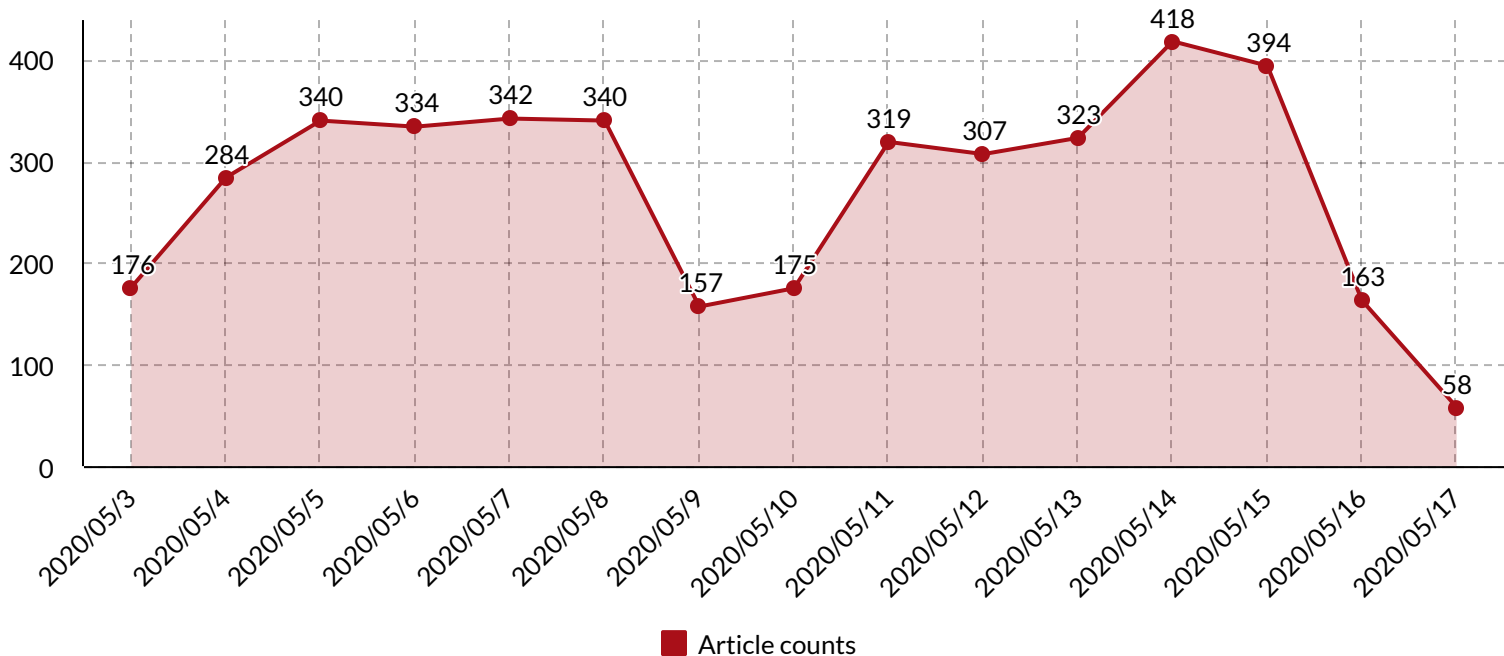
"Please note that there may be a slight difference in the overall article count comparison to the previous briefs. This is due to the nature of the data collection and the slight difference does not have an impact on the overall trends seen over the period"

The graph shows the continued extensive coverage afforded to the Covid19 crisis. While the trend suggests a slight decrease from the week of the 23rd of March at 1,897 stories to 1,663 in the week of the 18th of May, that it is nearly two months of sustained high intensity coverage is really remarkable.[4] With fewer journalists, however, we are not seeing generally greater coverage of everything. Rather, then questions as to which stories, and which issues are not being told are really important. Within this of course, there are peaks and troughs which is the focus of the data that follows.

[4] As noted previously, 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



Daily Article Count



Unlike with the previous analysis, where in only a space of two days we saw a 45% spike in the number of articles about the pandemic, the graph above shows a fluctuation with a difference of 131 stories between May the 3rd (176 stories) and 13th May, 2020 (307). Prudent to highlight is that similarly to brief two, most of the articles published on the first day of the spike, the 4th of May, focused much on the lockdown regulations,[5] labour and the economy,[6] and socio-economic relief initiatives by government to citizens and struggling businesses.[7] The latter was in response to some of the devastating effects the pandemic and lockdown has had on trade and industry.

Additionally, local media has also been reporting on international issues relating to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the United States of America has been the one international context privileged by South African news. This is likely to do with the country having the highest number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 and the controversial utterances by the president, Donald Trump in relation to the pandemic.[4] This has also contributed to the rise of articles on and about the pandemic by South African publications

[5] Nkgweng, T. (2020) Changes to regulations as more South Africans go back to work under lockdown level 4. *SABC News Online* [Internet], 4 May 2020. Available from <<https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/changes-to-regulations-as-more-south-africans-go-back-to-work-under-lockdown-level-4/>> [Accessed 29 May 2020]

[6] Omarjee, L. (2020) Lockdown | New vehicle sales plummet 98.4% in April. *News24* [Internet], 4 May 2020. Available from: <<https://www.fin24.com/Companies/Industrial/lockdown-new-vehicle-sales-plummet-984-in-april-20200504>> [Accessed 29 May 2020]

[7] Staff Writer. (2020) South Africa's banks have coronavirus finance relief options – but don't expect a debt write-off. *BusinessTech* [Internet], 4 May 2020. Available from: <<https://businesstech.co.za/news/banking/395092/south-africas-banks-have-coronavirus-finance-relief-options-but-dont-expect-a-debt-write-off/>> [Accessed 29 May 2020]

[8] Heavey, S. & Caspani, M. (2020) US states plow ahead with reopening; Trump warns death toll could hit 100,000. *DispatchLive* [Internet], 4 May 2020. Available from: <<https://www.dispatchlive.co.za/news/2020-05-04-us-states-plow-ahead-with-reopening-trump-warns-death-toll-could-hit-100000/>> [Accessed 29 May 2020]



during this period. The number of articles fell again to 163 on the 16th and again to a lowly 58 on the 17th of May, 2020. This is due to the fact that these days fell on a weekend (Saturday and Sunday respectively), a period where many of the local online publications, save a few, do not publish news stories. Of note though is the fact that on the 16th of May, news broke of a “top scientist” and chairperson of the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), a Dr. Glenda Gray criticising the South African government’s lockdown regulations, calling them “nonsensical and unscientific”.[9] This news, covered by a few media, potentially contributed to the 163 stories recorded on that weekend where coverage on Covid-19 is usually very low compared to other days. This story developed and will be analysed in the next monitoring period.



[9] 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> [Accessed: 15 May 2020]

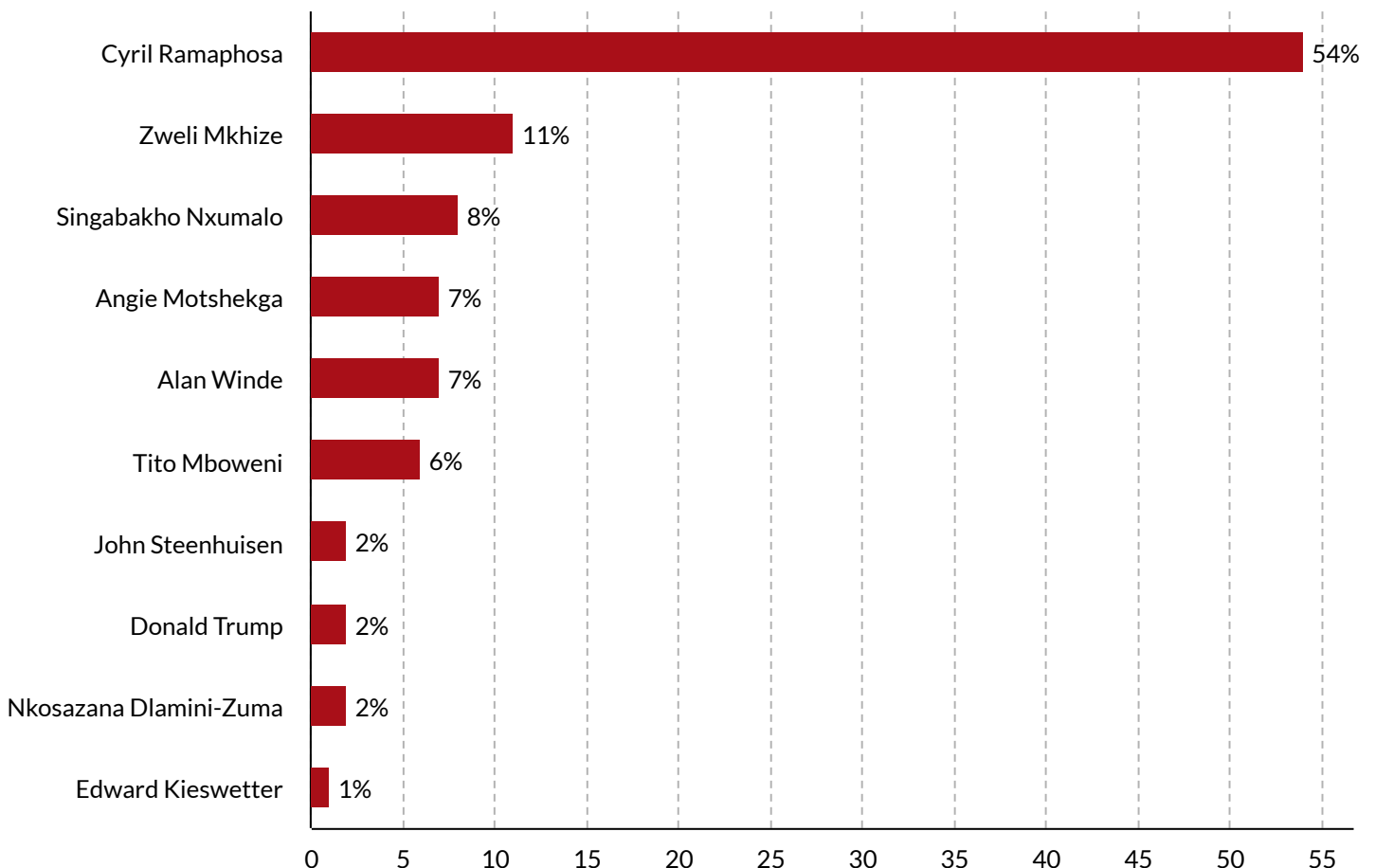


Whose voice do we hear in the media?

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 been erased, silenced, overlooked and/or misrepresented to tell their stories themselves.

From the source breakdown on the graph below (these 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 54% of the overall share, 2% down from the results in the previous analysis. He is followed by Health Minister, Zweli Mkhize (11%) who was previously at 7%. Correctional Services spokesperson, Singabakho Nxumalo is in third place at 8%.

Top 10 Sources





Interesting to note that the latter, Singabakho Nxumalo is featured for the second time higher up on the sources list, having appeared at position six in the previous analysis (6%). His inclusion in this data and at such a high position is as a result of the news about a special parole that some convicted inmates would be granted as a measure of curbing and controlling the spread of the coronavirus,[10] a large number of inmates testing positive for Covid-19 in East London[11] and the passing of a Correctional Services official due to the virus.[12]

Moreover, unlike with the top 10 sources list of the previous analyses, the Trade and Industry Minister, Ebrahim Patel and Police Minister, Bheki Cele do not feature on the top 10 list for this study. This indicates that them and their respective departments were not newsmakers in the studied period, overtaken by other government departments such as Correctional Services and Basic Education, the latter because of the ongoing debate about the re-opening of schools amid the pandemic.

The issues in this study appear to relate to education, health and socio-economic relief initiatives as opposed to labour and economic issues as well as lockdown regulations and laws seen in the previous study. Again, Alan Winde (7%) and John Steenhuisen (2%), leaders of and in the opposition party, Democratic Alliance (DA), come in at number five and seven respectively, a jump from the previous data where they occupied places 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. The trend of very little being heard from experts and ordinary citizens on the ground who are most affected by the pandemic and lockdown continues as the data reveals.

[10] Listen here: <http://www.702.co.za/podcasts/110/the-best-of-early-breakfast/177706/singabakho-nxumalo-correctional-services-spokesperson-to-talk-about-parole-from-correctional-service-point-of-view>

[11] News24 Wire. (2020) Nearly 100 inmates in East London test positive for covid-19. *The Citizen* [Internet], 12 May 2020. Available from: <<https://citizen.co.za/news/covid-19/2282865/nearly-100-inmates-in-east-london-test-positive-for-covid-19/>> [Accessed 27 May 2020]

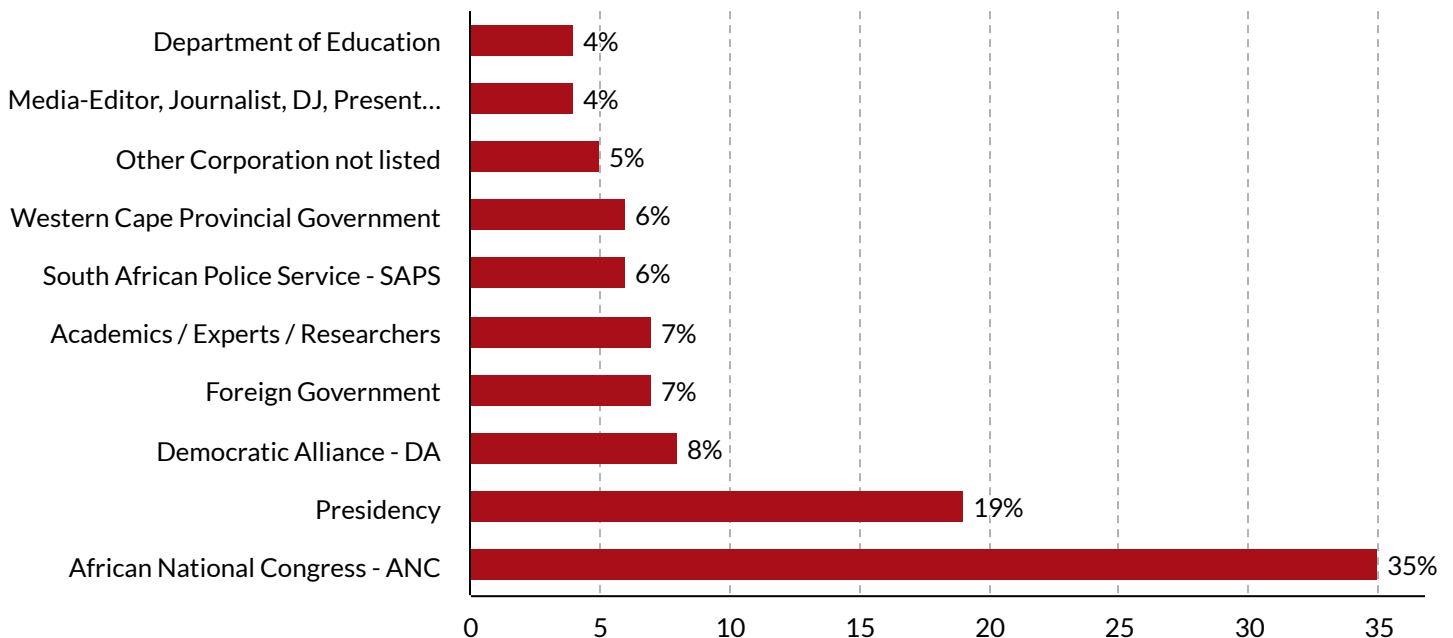
[12] Shange, N. (2020) Prison official dies from coronavirus in Western Cape. *SowetanLive* [Internet], 15 May 2020. Available from: <<https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2020-05-15-prison-official-dies-from-coronavirus-in-western-cape/>> [Accessed 27 May 2020]



Affiliations

From the sources' affiliations represented on the graph, the top five identified affiliations remained partly the same as the previous analysis, with the percentage share-breakdown as follows: African National Congress (ANC) (35%), The South African Presidency (19%), Democratic Alliance (DA) (8%), Foreign Governments (7%) and Experts (including academics and researchers) (7%). The slight difference is that Democratic Alliance affiliation grew, seeing it climb to second on the list with a 2% increase while articles featuring foreign governments remained at 7% but dropping down on the top 10 list.

Top 10 Affiliations



The Democratic Alliance appears in the top five out of the represented top 10 affiliations list mainly because of its leader John Steenhuisen, the increasing number of Covid-19 positive cases in the Western Cape province that is governed by the DA. Outside of government institutions, the media, which is made up of journalists, media organisations and practitioners were the only group to make it to the top 10, with 4% representation. This is a result of the public debates around how the media has been covering the pandemic, with media analysts commenting on the issue in some of the publications.[13]

[13] Roper, C. (2020) Something is rotten in the state of enca. *News24* [Internet], 17 May. Available from:

<<https://www.news24.com/news24/analysis/analysis-something-is-rotten-in-the-state-of-enca-20200517>> [Accessed 30 May 2020]

[14] Pillay, V. (2020) Stop using the lockdown as a political football. *Eyewitness News* [Internet], 18 May. Available from:

<<https://ewn.co.za/2020/05/18/verashni-pillay-stop-using-the-lockdown-as-a-political-football>> [Accessed 30 May 2020]

[15] Kondile, U. (2020) 23 March 2020 the day SA journalism died. *Independent Online* [Internet], 24 May. Available from:

<<https://www.iol.co.za/news/opinion/23-march-2020-the-day-sa-journalism-died-48449392>> [Accessed 30 May 2020]

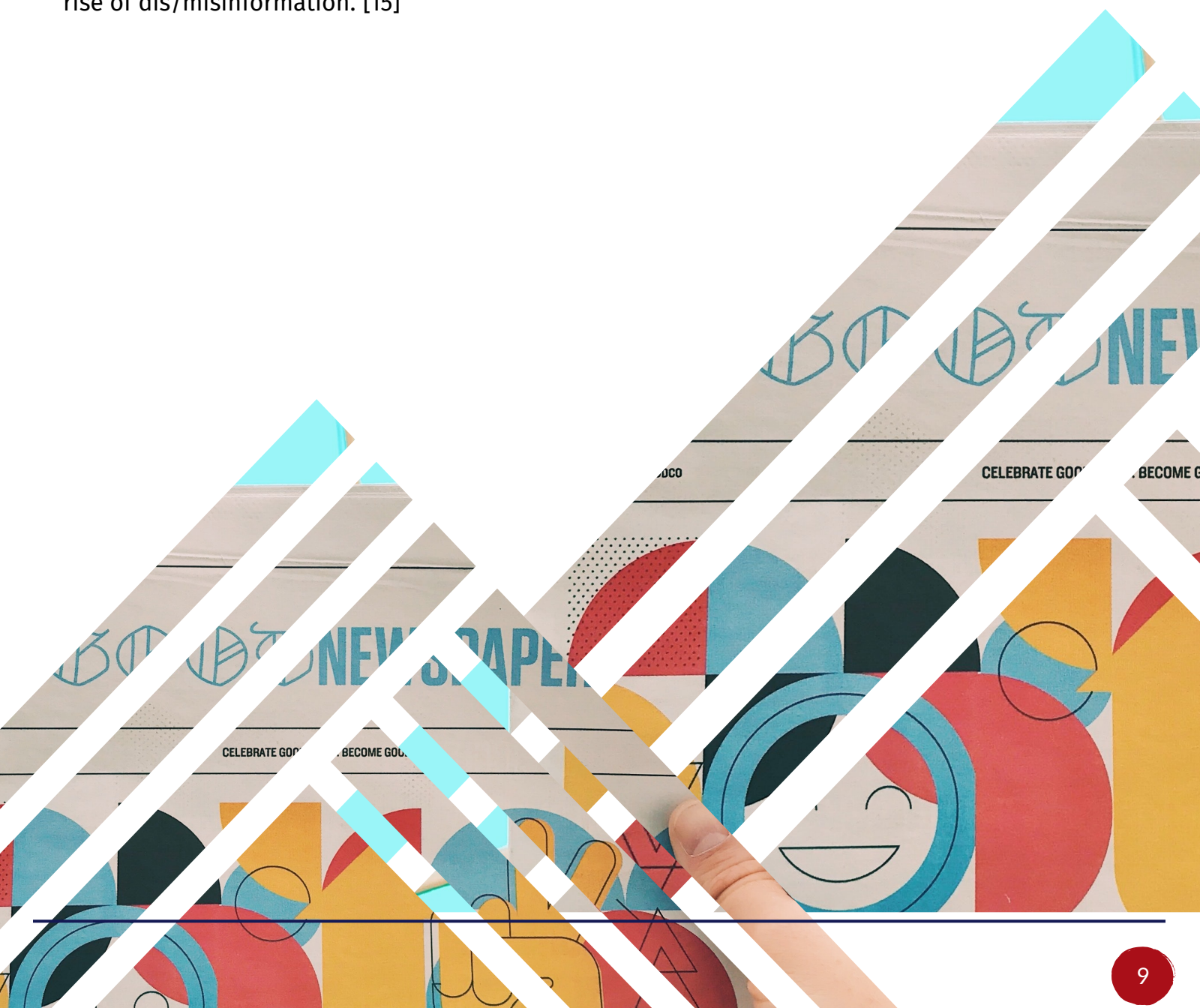


Affiliations

More examples of stories where media practitioners were either the authors, interviewed and/or quoted include former *Mail and Guardian* editor, Verashni Pillay's opinion piece on Eyewitness News.[14]

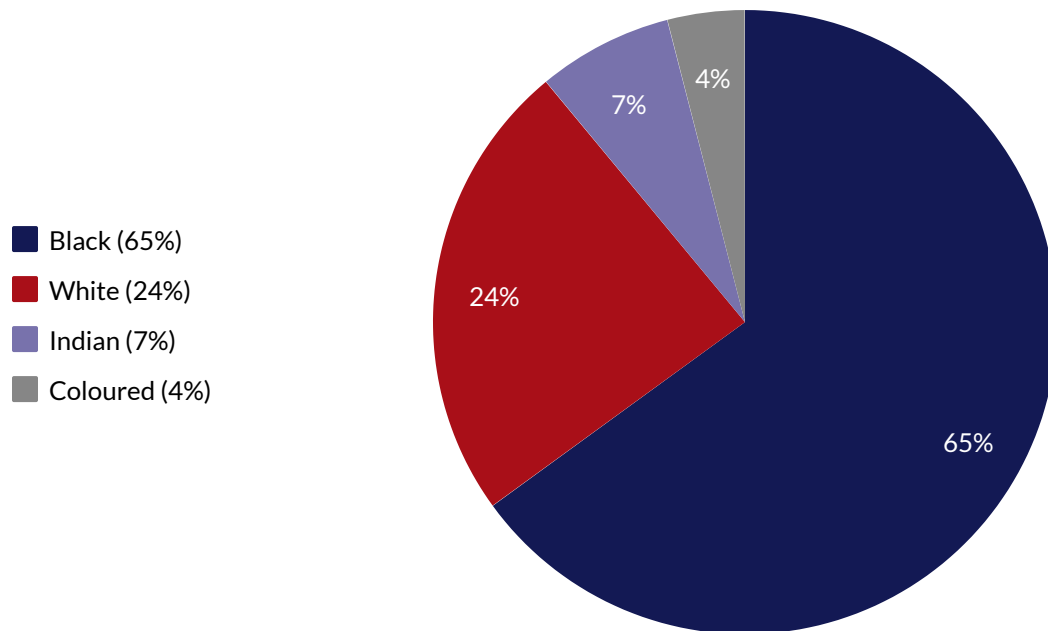
The data further reveals that the go-to institutions for most of the news media are government departments and entities. This could be ascribed to the measures by government to centralise official communication around the virus and lockdown in order to minimize the proliferation of dis/misinformation.

Moreover, it could also be, as according to former *Isolezwe* editor, Unathi Kondile, "the media [has] conceded to being sitting ducks that wait for government announcements before making any virus pronouncements, leading to a dearth of alternative Covid-19 breaking stories and a rise of dis/misinformation." [15]





Race Representation



According to the graph below where race representation is shown, black people's voices were the most accessed at 65% on matters pertaining to Covid-19 and the lockdown in the period studied, a 10% dip from the previous 75% obtained in the previous analysis. This is as a result of a rise in the voices of the white population from 15% to 24%, with prominent voices including leaders of the opposition party (DA) and Western Cape government, John Steenhuisen and Alan Winde respectively. Donald Trump, the President of the United States of America, also adds to the share of voice of the white population.

Similarly, the share of voice of the black population were mainly government officials who were speaking on these related issues, with prominent leaders such as Cyril Ramaphosa, Zweli Mkhize, Angie Motshekga, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and Singabakho Nxumalo making the top 10 sources list. This indicates an imbalance of voice in media coverage, as the black and white population make up 80% and 8% of the population respectively, according to Statistics South Africa's Community Survey of 2016.

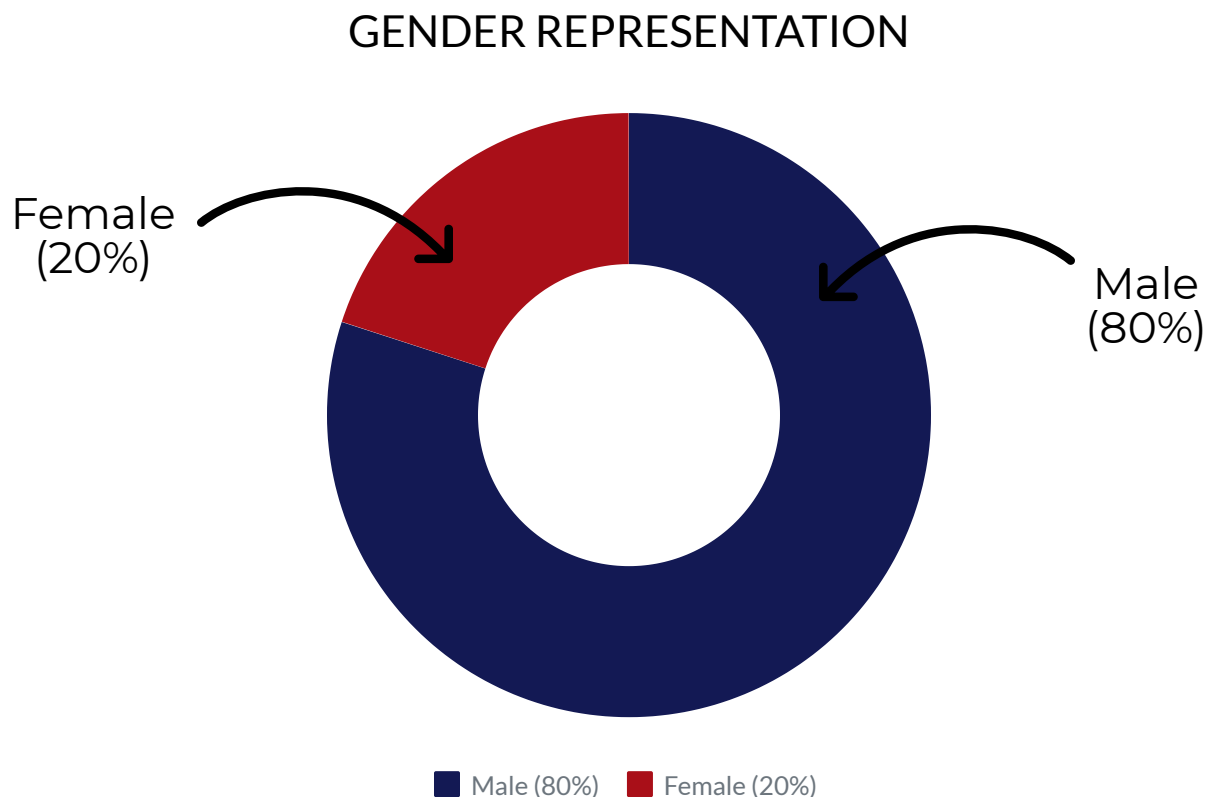
Additionally, there are no significant changes in Indian population's share of voice at 7%, having had 8% of the share in the previous analysis, and in both instances having the leading voice of Professor Salim Karim who is the Chief Covid-19 advisor. Notably, sources from the coloured population were up by 2% for the period in question, taking up 4% of the spoils while making up 9% of the total South African population.[1] This may be due to the inclusion of SARS commissioner, Edward Kieswetter in the top 10 sources list, having made the news a couple of times during the period studied. Though this spread of voice is to be commended, it does however speak to a deeper issue of inequality in South African media in terms of representation.

[16] 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> [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 80% of the count and females 20%. This is a minor but significant jump in female representation in coverage, from the 16% recorded in the previous analysis.



This is brought about by Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga making the news recently regarding the contentious issue of schools reopening and some of the teachers' unions opposing the motion. This corroborates the sources graph above, where in the list of the top 10 most accessed voices regardless of gender and race, there only appears two females, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma at position nine with 2% and Angie Motshekga at position 4 with 7%. 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. [17]

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.[18] For the 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.

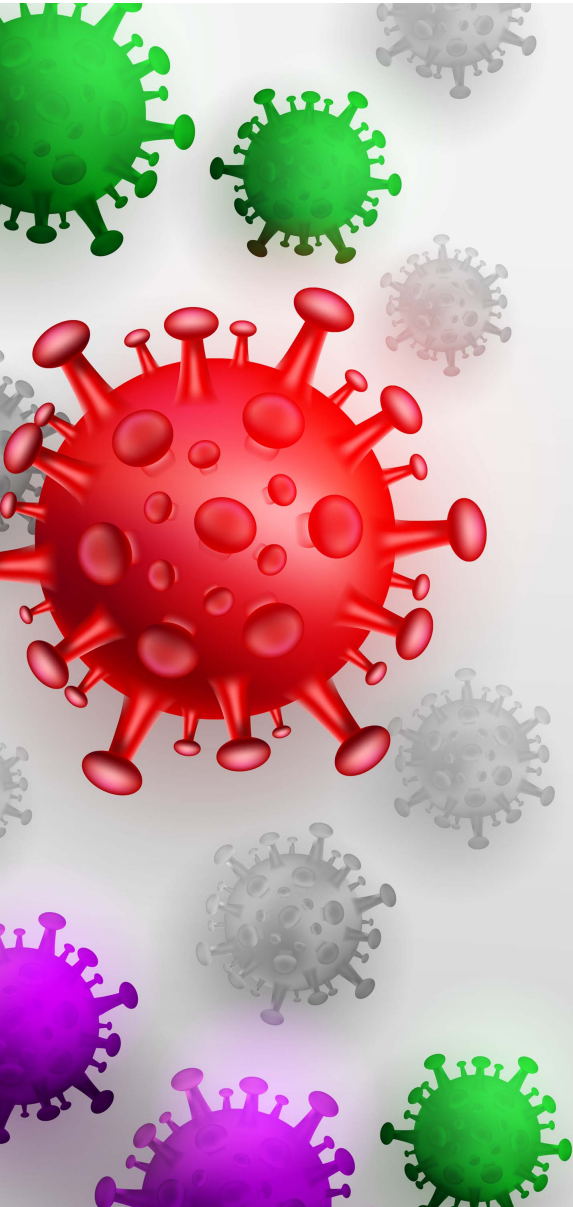
[17] Community Statistics (2016), *Statistical Release P0301* [Internet]. Statistics South Africa. Pretoria, Available from: <http://cs2016.statssa.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/NT-30-06-2016-RELEASE-for-CS-2016-_Statistical-releas_1-July-2016.pdf> [Accessed: 15 May 2020]

[18] 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]

Conclusion



While news on the Covid-19 pandemic and the national lockdown continues 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 people interviewed for views on the matter were mainly government officials, 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. Other possibilities to the lack of diversified voices and stories have also been explored in the analysis. In closing, 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.



COVID-19

CORONAVIRUS