

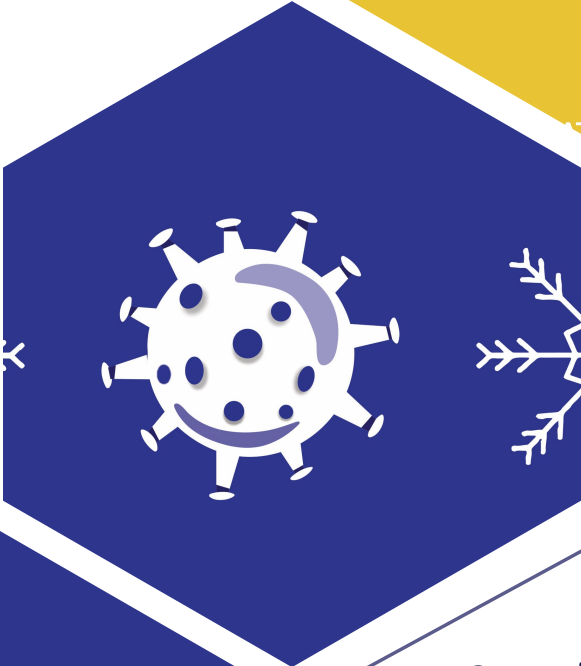
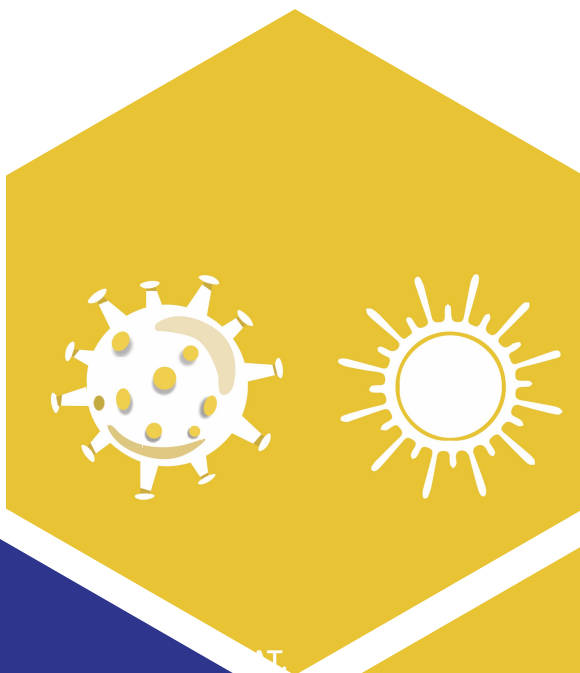


# ANALYSIS OF COVID-19 MEDIA COVERAGE



## BRIEF

Number: Six



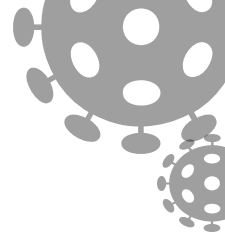
Compiled by  
**Azola Dayile & Msizi Mzolo**

Edited by  
**Lister Namumba & Thandi Smith**

Designed by  
**Nomshado Lubisi**



# Introduction



Since the first positive case of Covid-19 was reported in South Africa in March, 2020, journalists have been hard at work reporting on the pandemic, providing the public with related and relevant information. At the same time, the media have been dealing with their own challenges in an incredibly volatile environment. Most credible media seem to have experienced significant increases in audience, but also huge decreases in advertising[1]. Small commercial media, already struggling with sustainability have been pressed even further with some no longer able to operate.[2]

These challenges notwithstanding, it is still expected that the media not just report on the daily rates of infections, recoveries and deaths, but to further unpack and help the public stay safe as well as understand the ongoing shifts and changes relating to the virus, including the psychosocial and socio-economic impact it has had on the people. All this without neglecting their duty of holding the powerful accountable.

In efforts to uncover the trends in this coverage, [Media Monitoring Africa](#) (MMA) has already produced five analyses looking at trends around who gets to speak on what issues or whose voice is amplified in the coverage, undercurrents on gender and race representations and the collective number of Covid-19 related articles published over different days in a monitoring period. This is done to arrive at a data-driven view and understanding of how the media has and continues to report on the Coronavirus pandemic and the South African national lockdown, and who the agenda setters are.[3]

In the analyses we have undertaken thus far, some of the findings were that according to race and gender demographics, it was black male personalities that spoke or were accessed the most in media coverage. The results further reveal that these personalities were mainly prominent South African government officials occupying high office, 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, the Minister of Police. It was found that this was due to the ongoing communication and public engagement by the government in relation to the virus, whether it be on new infections or recoveries and general lockdown regulations.

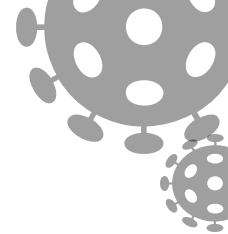
A further recurring trend is that there is a disproportionate share of voice between males and females, with females consistently being covered at a lowly average of 20% while males take up the rest of the 80% share of voice.

[1] See: [https://journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/State-of-the-Newsroom-report-2018\\_updated-20190709.pdf](https://journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/State-of-the-Newsroom-report-2018_updated-20190709.pdf)

[2] See: <https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/opinion/covid-19-last-straw-for-some-media-in-sa-47653018>

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

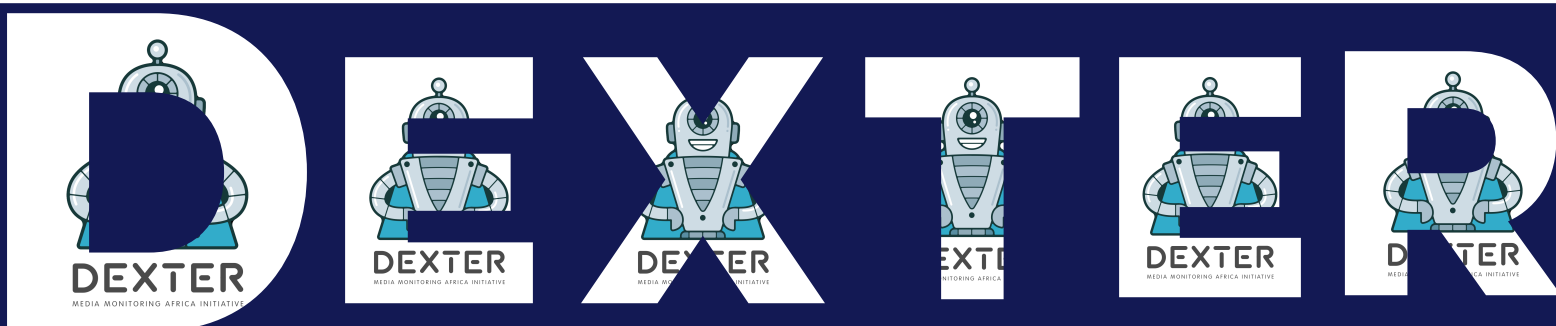
# Methodology



The monitoring period covered for this brief is 28 days, from the 28th of June until the 26th of July, 2020. [Dexter](#),[4] an in-house online monitoring tool was used to gather and analyse data using keywords, “Coronavirus”, “Quarantine”, “Lockdown”, “Covid-19” and “Pandemic”. The tool scraped media content from the websites of over 50 news media sites.[5] 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. 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 four-week period where a total number of 7, 540 articles were collected and analysed, an increase of 27 articles on the 7, 567 recorded in the [previous](#) monitoring period of four weeks .

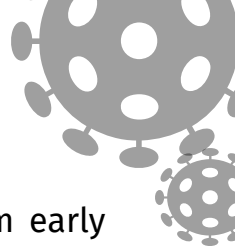
This brief also includes a graph that has both values for the total number of news articles published versus the number of articles published on Covid-19 during the monitoring period. The idea is to gauge the amount of coverage for Covid-19 out of the total coverage.



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

[5] 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

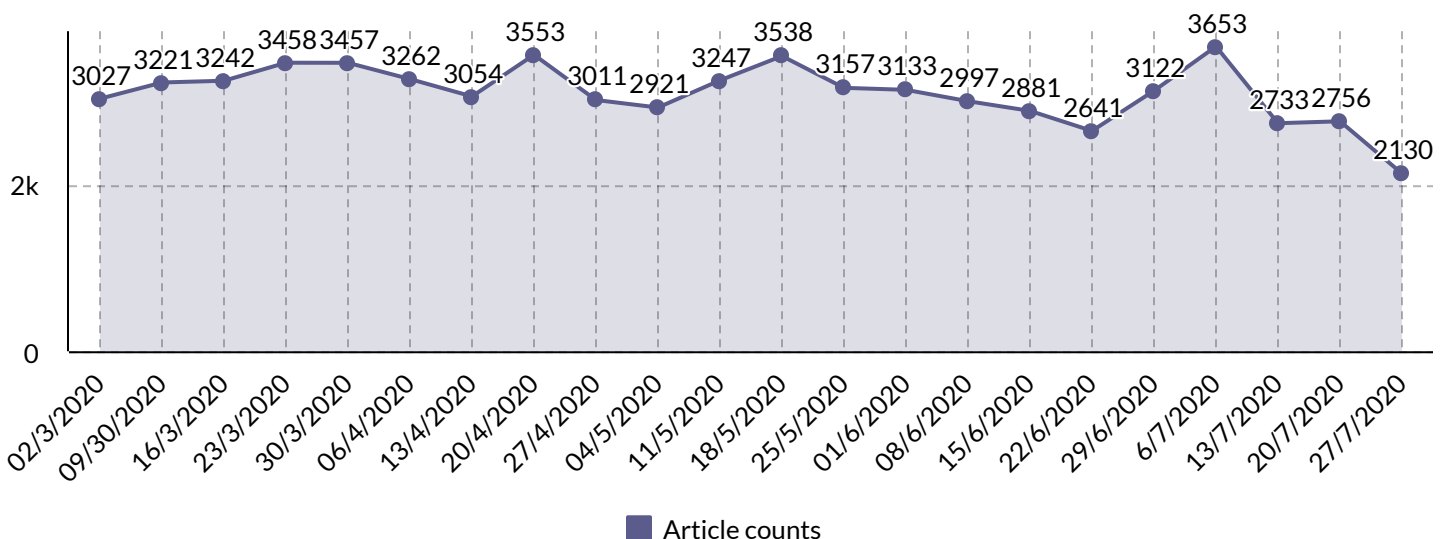


In order to determine broader trends of coverage, we zoom in at coverage from early March, 2020. The benefit of a longer review period such as this helps visualise the peaks and troughs. March was when the Covid-19 pandemic began to feature in South African mainstream news publications, after a positive case of Covid-19 was confirmed in the country. The graph below shows a continued increase in coverage of Covid-19 the whole month of March. This could be attributed to the fact that the South African government began a vigorous campaign of distributing messages about staying safe, informing the public about new cases and trying to get ahead of the pandemic by imposing the nationwide lockdown.

A continued dip in coverage of the Covid-19 crisis by South African news media over a four week period, could be attributed to the fact that there were other issues covered by the media. Other issues, for examples, include SAA and its business rescue,[6] the alleged criminal conduct at the Department of Water and Sanitation,[7] George Floyd's death which led to the Black Lives Matter protests and subsequent coverage of this and racial issues[8] in South Africa. Further issues that took up space in the media and stole focus from Covid-19 coverage during this four week period were the Africa Day and Youth Day commemorations.

From the 29th of June to the 6th of July, there was a sharp increase in Covid-19 related reportage, which could be related to the lockdown level three announcement and what the new regulations would mean for citizens, trade and industry.

### Weekly Article Count

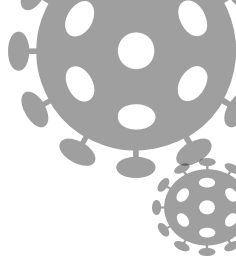


Please note that there may be a slight difference in the overall article count comparison to the previous briefs. This is due to the nature of the data collection and the slight difference does not have an impact on the overall trends seen over the period.

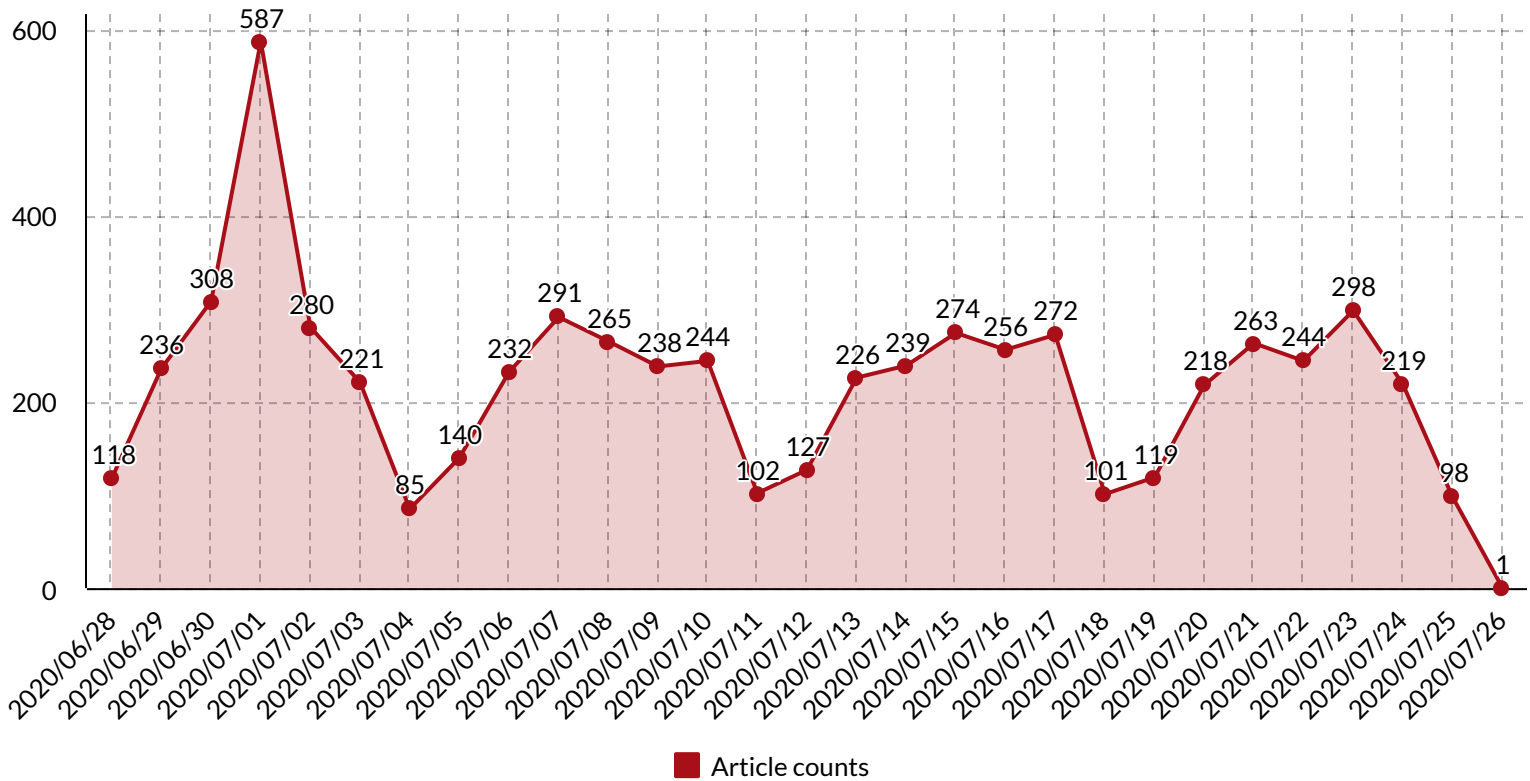
[6] <https://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/dispatch/scavenging-for-gains-in-saas-ashes-49736697>

[7] <https://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/news/hawks-investigate-alleged-criminal-conduct-in-department-of-water-and-sanitation-49702757>

[8] <https://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/analysis/being-non-racial-is-just-not-enough-anti-racism-action-is-the-way-to-go-49365559>



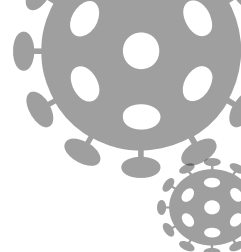
## Daily Article Count



The following chart covers the 28-day period only. It reveals a similar trend found in the previous brief analysis where there are peaks and troughs in the daily coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic by the media in South Africa. On the 28th of June, South Africa recorded 118 articles published on or related to the Covid-19 pandemic and attendant lockdown, and steadily rose throughout the week to its highest recorded figure, a total of 587 articles published on the 1st of July. Some of the contributing factors and events that led to the sharp incline in Covid-19 related news coverage on the 1st of July were labour and health stories,[9] with strikes[10] and job cuts grabbing the headlines. Other stories were around Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) tenders and the flouting of procurement regulations for the personal benefit by those in prominent positions in government.

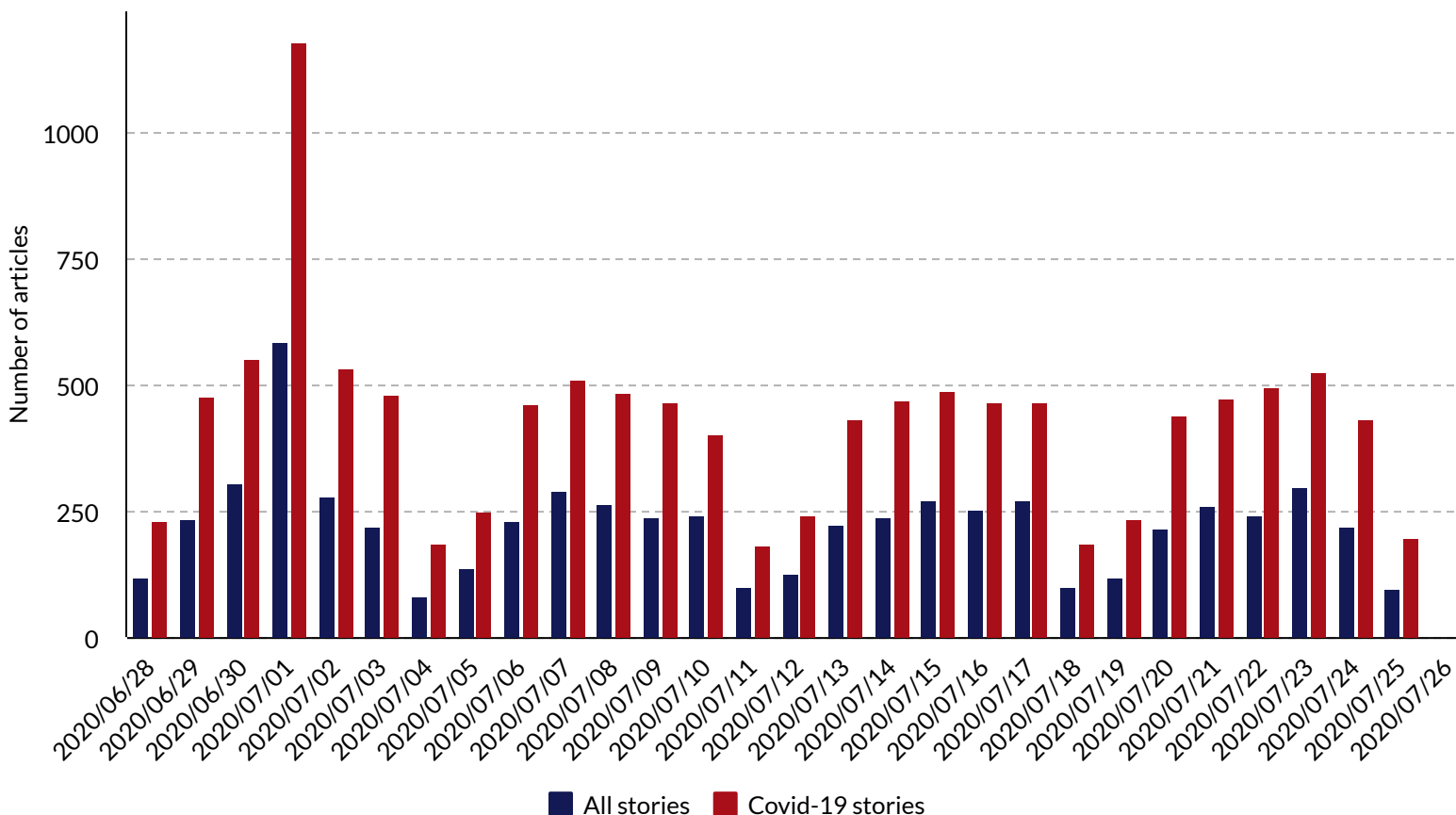
[9] See: <https://www.enca.com/news/union-prasa-not-ready-resume-services>  
[https://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/airbus-announces-widespread-job-cuts-to-deal-with-effects-of-covid-19-crisis-2020-07-01/rep\\_id:4136](https://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/airbus-announces-widespread-job-cuts-to-deal-with-effects-of-covid-19-crisis-2020-07-01/rep_id:4136)  
<https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/outcry-over-langa-clinics-covid-19-protocols-50222737s>

[10] See: <https://www.groundup.org.za/article/protesters-demand-jobs-DUT/>



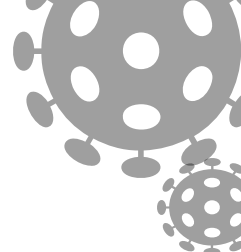
# All stories versus Covid-19 stories

## All stories versus Covid-19 stories



The graph above shows all stories versus Covid-19 stories with the idea of gauging the amount of media coverage afforded to these respectively each day of the monitoring period. This data allows us to understand the proportion of Covid19 coverage out of the overall news cycle for the day, giving insight into what proportion of the news is dedicated to the coverage of Covid-19, versus other news items.

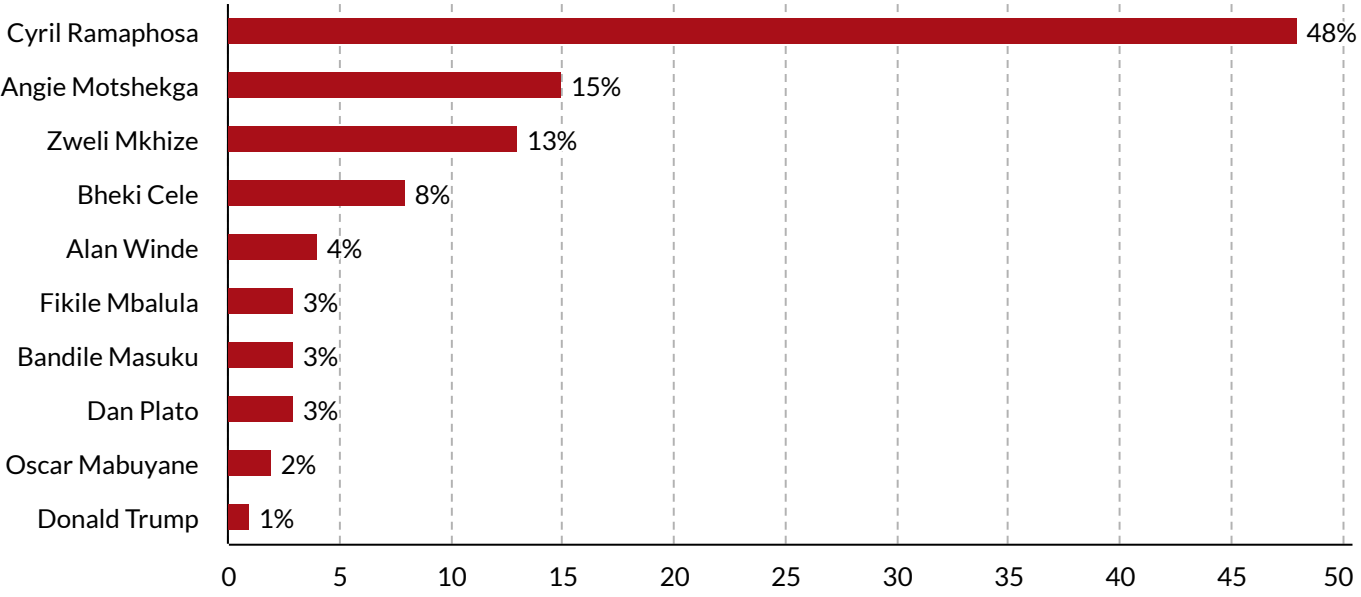
Like the trend observed in the previous brief, on most of the days monitored, Covid-19 stories made up over 50% of the news stories for each day, suggesting a consistent/uniform focus of the news cycle for the 28-day period. Given the challenges currently engulfing the journalism fraternity, this consistent reportage on the pandemic suggests a capable and enabled media environment. However, this also means that there was little or less focus on other pressing issues such as climate change and environmental issues, migration, xenophobia as well as other human rights issues and/or violations.



# Whose voice do we hear in the media?

In this section we will look at source's names. The reason behind our research on this is to see whose voices are most and less dominant in the media coverage during the Covid-19 pandemic period. 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 dictate. 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.

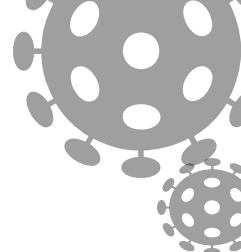
Top 10 Sources



Despite recording a dip in voice share (from the 51% recorded in the previous analysis to the 48% in this brief), President Cyril Ramaphosa has been on top of the list of sources throughout our research. This means the President was quoted or mentioned the most in all the articles related to Covid-19 in South Africa during this and previous monitoring periods. While it is not surprising that the President is the top source in this and previous analyses, the fact that he is leading by a huge margin means that other sources that should equally be getting a significant voice share are not, sources such as scientists, experts, academics, ordinary citizens and children.

Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga (15%) has increased in voice share when compared to the previous analysis where she was at 12%. This was due to the debates about school closures.[11] The debates during this monitoring period were rife with many stakeholders calling for the immediate closure of schools as the Covid-19 infection rate soured. The President later announced this closure.[12]

[11] <http://www.dispatchlive.co.za/news/2020-07-15-teachers-fears-limit-learning-pupils-share-views-on-school-during-covid-19>  
[12] <https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/419309/ramaphosa-announces-closure-of-all-public-schools-in-south-africa/>



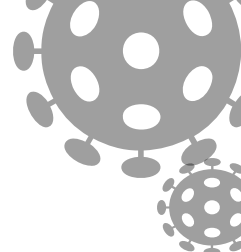
The inadequate share of voice of medical experts, academics and scientists in coverage of Covid-19 has been a major concern as these play a huge role in helping combat Covid-19. From the graph above, no source from this group made it to the top 10. Western Cape government's Dan Plato who is the Mayor of Cape Town and Gauteng health MEC Bandile Masuku made it to the top 10 sources for the first time, each getting 3%.

Dan Plato featured in media coverage due to protests in that province that resulted in a Covid-19 facility being burnt down in Makhaza.[13] Bandile Masuku was in the media mostly because there was concern regarding the rise in infections in Gauteng during this monitoring period.[14]



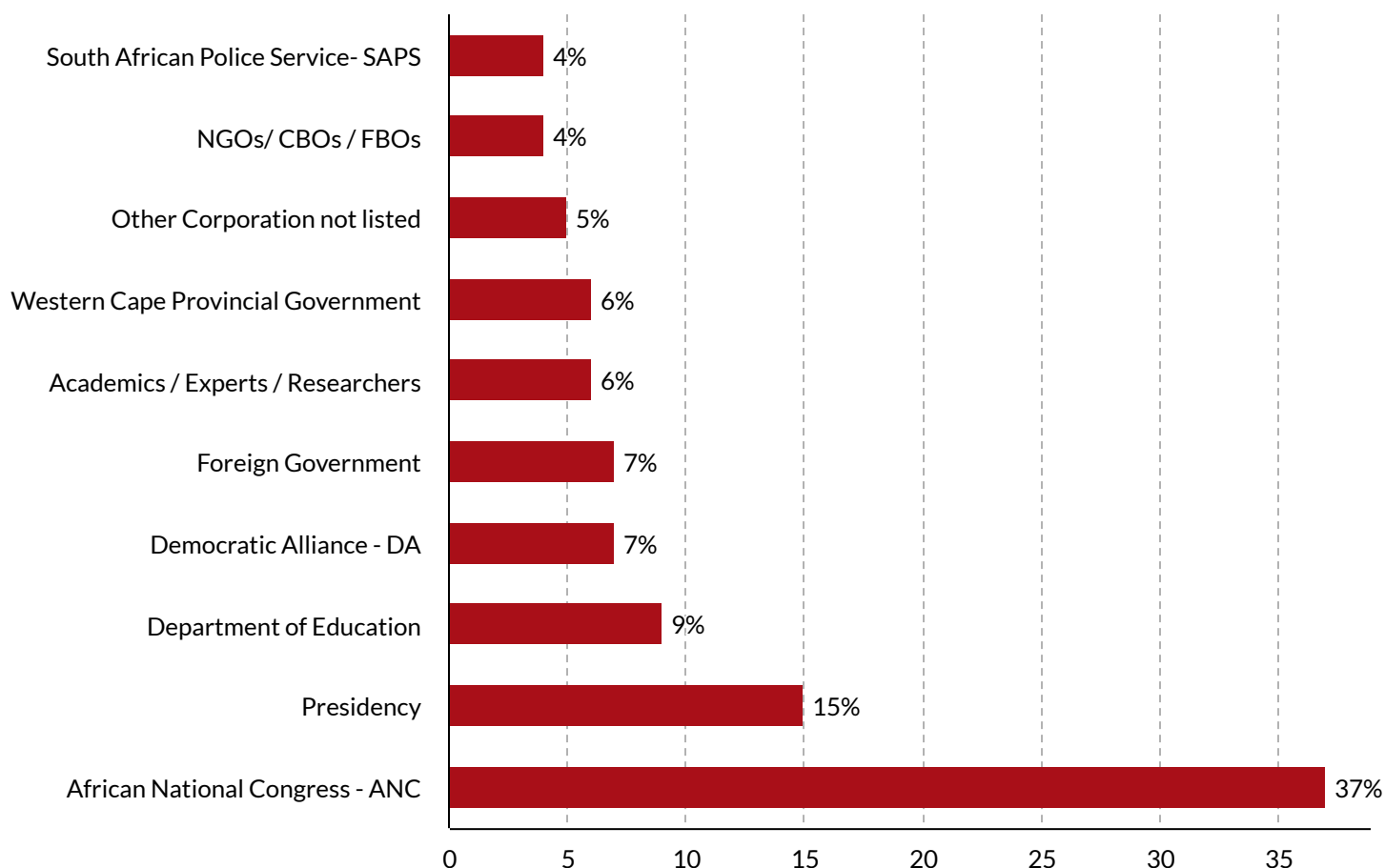
[13] <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/burning-of-covid-19-clinic-in-khayelitsha-suspects-in-court-20200721>

[14] <https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/411263/gauteng-is-now-looking-at-an-intermittent-lockdown/>



# Affiliations

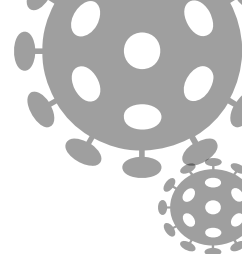
### Top 10 Affiliations



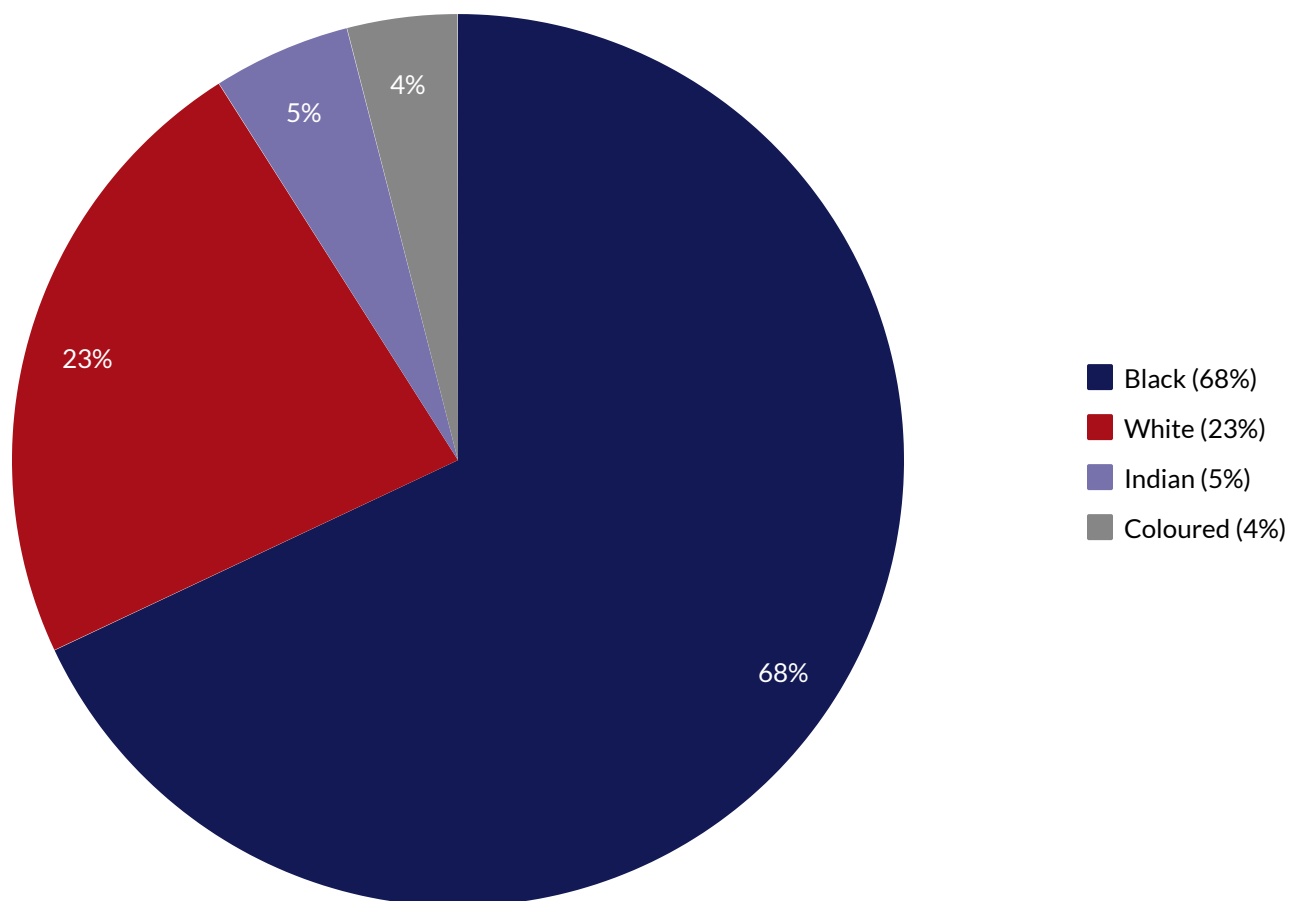
In order to ascertain which groups speak the most in media coverage of Covid-19, we looked closely at the affiliation of the sources quoted or mentioned in coverage during the monitoring period. The graph above shows the African National Congress (ANC) in the lead at 37%, an increase from the previous 32%. The lead is not surprising as the ANC is the ruling party and majority of the sources, including those on the sources' list are ANC members. The South African Police Service (SAPS) made it to the top 10 due to a reported 5000 officers having contracted the virus while 36 others succumbed to Covid-19-related illnesses.[15] This news got a considerable amount of coverage during the monitoring period. It is also for this reason that Police Minister, Bheki Cele featured in the top 10 sources' list above.

The affiliation, 'Academic/Expert/Researchers' (6%) decreased by 1% from the previous 7% recorded, the fact that this affiliation's voice share has been constantly low is concerning because experts and researchers should be commanding a significant share of voice due to the nature of the pandemic the world is facing.

[15] <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/police-urged-help-weather-covid-19-storm>

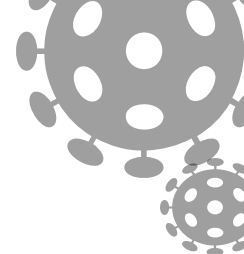


## Race Representation

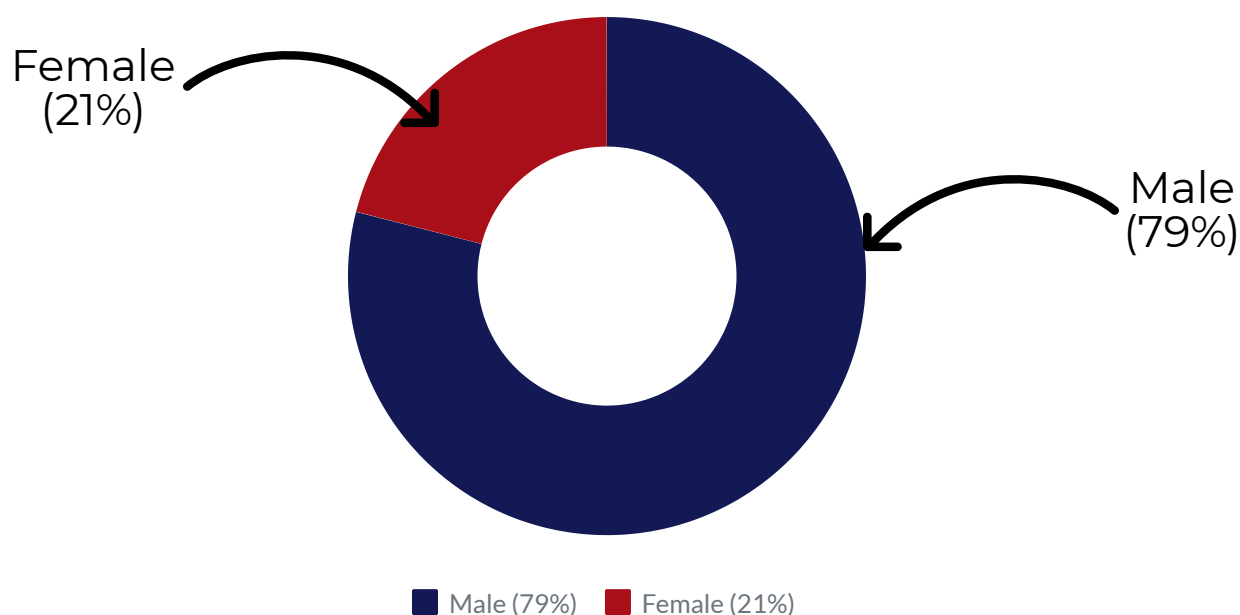


According to the graph above, black people's voices were the most accessed at 68%, an increase from the previous research (64%). This is not surprising as we had a majority of sources accessed or quoted being government officials and ANC members, who are mostly black. No major difference with Indians' voices at 5%, a percent increase from previous research and Coloured people's voices at 4% which has remained the same as the one recorded in the previous research. It is problematic that Indians' and Coloured's voice shares are always low despite the fact that these two groups respectively account for 7% and 9%<sup>[16]</sup> of the South African population. Western Cape government's Dan Plato who is the Mayor of Cape Town was the only coloured person who made in the top 10 source's name above. This speaks to a deeper issue of inequality in South African media in terms of race representation.

[16] <https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/331843/population-in-south-africa-now-at-58-8-million/#:~:text=The%20black%20South%20African%20population,Asian%20population%20at%201.5%20million.>



## GENDER REPRESENTATION

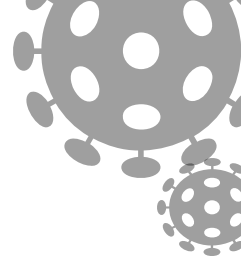


The graph above displaying results of the breakdown of sources by gender (females at 21%) shows that there was no increase or decrease in voice share from the previous research. Females are still under represented in the media even though they account for 50.5% of the population in South Africa according to Statistics South Africa.[17] Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga was the only female source that interviewed or mentioned that made it to the top 10 list of sources, as shown in the graph of sources by name. This was because the minister was in coverage related to the closing of schools which dominated media coverage. Having women get such a low share of voice in coverage of Covid-19, or indeed any other coverage perpetuates the stereotype that women are not important enough to make the news, despite them being among the groups most impacted by Covid-19 and the Lockdown in South Africa. [18]

Additionally, it shows media's bias when it comes to gender representation in coverage. This is a trend observed by MMA in this and other monitoring exercises. The implication of the continued underrepresentation of women in coverage of Covid-19 is that women will continue to be viewed as citizens not worthy of coverage or inclusion in matters of national importance. Further, the minimal sourcing of women in media coverage does little to nothing to help the fight against gender inequality in society.

[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](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] <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/so-africa-three-million-south-africans-have-lost-their-jobs-as-a-result-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-women-most-affected/>

# Conclusion



While newsrooms continue facing mounting challenges as a result of Covid-19 pandemic, news related to the pandemic continues to dominate coverage, with the number of articles peaking at over 3000 for a sustained period as shown on the graph representing total coverage of Covid-19. From the brief study conducted, the findings are that the greatest number of people interviewed for opinions on the matter were mainly government officials, possibly as a result of government's efforts to constantly and consistently communicate with the public on new infections and recoveries as well as on the different regulations for the different Lockdown levels. It would do well then for the media to be more pro-active and creative going forward when reporting on the pandemic and related issues, not forgetting the important mandate of including more voices from ordinary members of the public, especially women and children, as well as medical experts and scientists.

In concrete terms, this would mean that the media must, notwithstanding its challenges, rely less on official press statements, conferences and briefings but rather this data allows us to understand the proportion of Covid19 coverage out of the overall news cycle for the day, giving insight into what proportion of the news is dedicated to the coverage of Covid-19, versus other news items. would include seeking out health, labour and socio-political economy experts to opine on the implications of the pandemic and lockdown on people's lives holistically. It also would further mean conducting deeper research on the pandemic, states of disasters and lockdowns to supplement or challenge the official narratives from government as means of keeping them accountable.



KNOW THE SYMPTOMS - HELP FLATTEN THE CURVE