

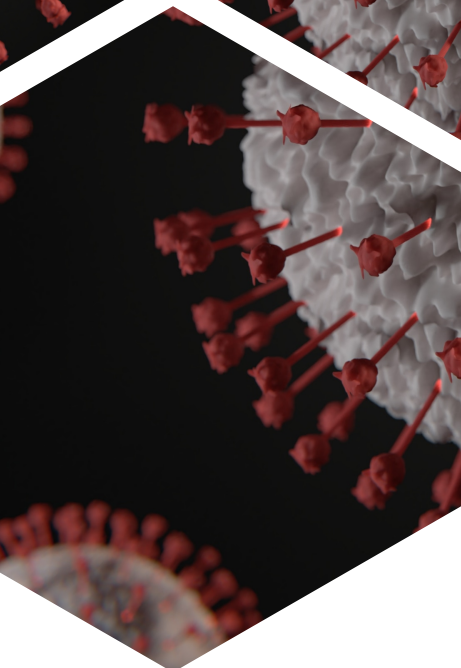
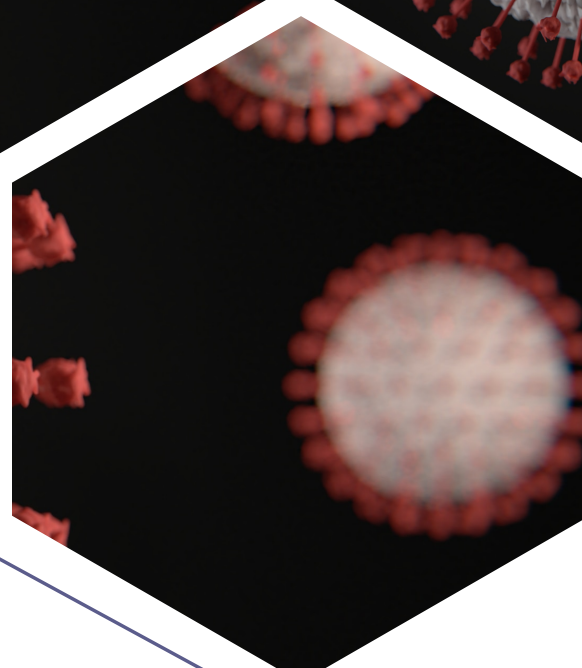
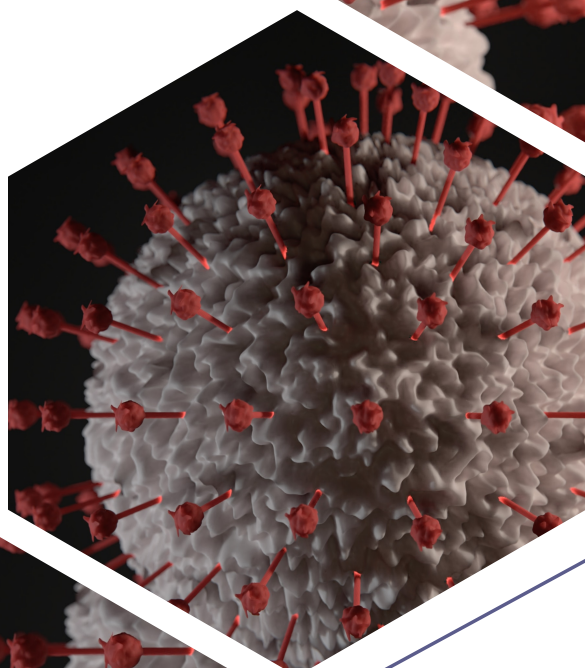
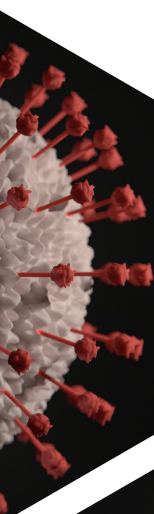
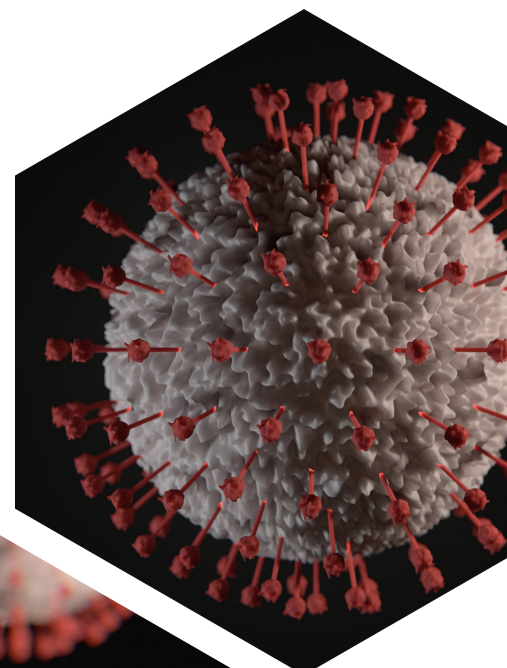
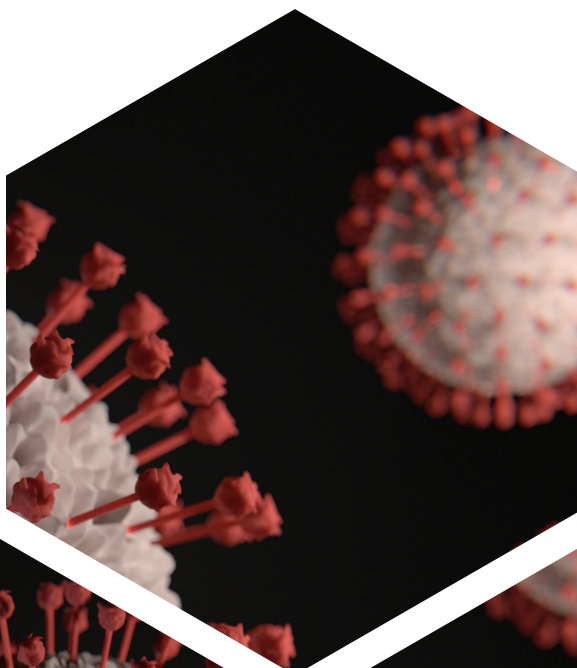


ANALYSIS OF COVID-19 MEDIA COVERAGE



BRIEF

Number: Seven

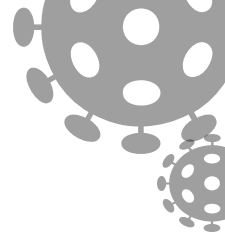


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When the Covid-19 pandemic exploded, we were not sure how long it would last, nor were we clear on its full implications. It did however place an extraordinary responsibility on our media to cover it. The pandemic was soon deemed a national state of disaster and the media had to find ways of reporting under new circumstances, having to practice a brand of public journalism in educating the public about the pandemic and regulations relating to the state of disaster. The media had to fulfil these central responsibilities as well as carry out their usual task of keeping tabs on the executive arm of the state and, consequently exposing corruption and malpractice.[1] While doing this, the news media has been dealing with other challenges relating to producing quality news such as job losses, including the departure of senior journalists (with experience and institutional memory) from newsrooms, loss of advertising and the rise of disinformation (at a time when newsrooms have far fewer fact-checkers) among other related challenges. Additionally, the news media, according to the State of the Newsroom 2019-20, has been hit with declining newspaper sales and the restructuring of some companies “in response to readers migrating to digital news”, both of which led to job losses.[2]

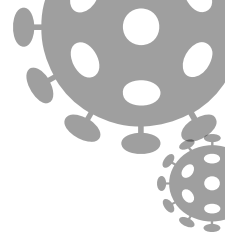
Challenges notwithstanding, it is still expected of the media to move beyond mere repetition and coverage of reports by the government on the daily rates of infection, recoveries and deaths, but to further ensure the public are informed about the pandemic, which would mean unpacking the information in ways that the public will easily understand the ongoing shifts and changes relating to the virus, including the psychosocial and socio-economic impact it has had on people.

In efforts to uncover the trends in this coverage, Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) has at this point produced six analyses looking at aspects ranging from who gets to speak on, and 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 subsequent lockdown, and who the agenda setters are and what it means for South Africa’s democratic ideals.

In the analyses we have undertaken thus far looking at the trends in coverage, we have found that those whose voices were accessed the most and consistently 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, who is the Minister of Police.

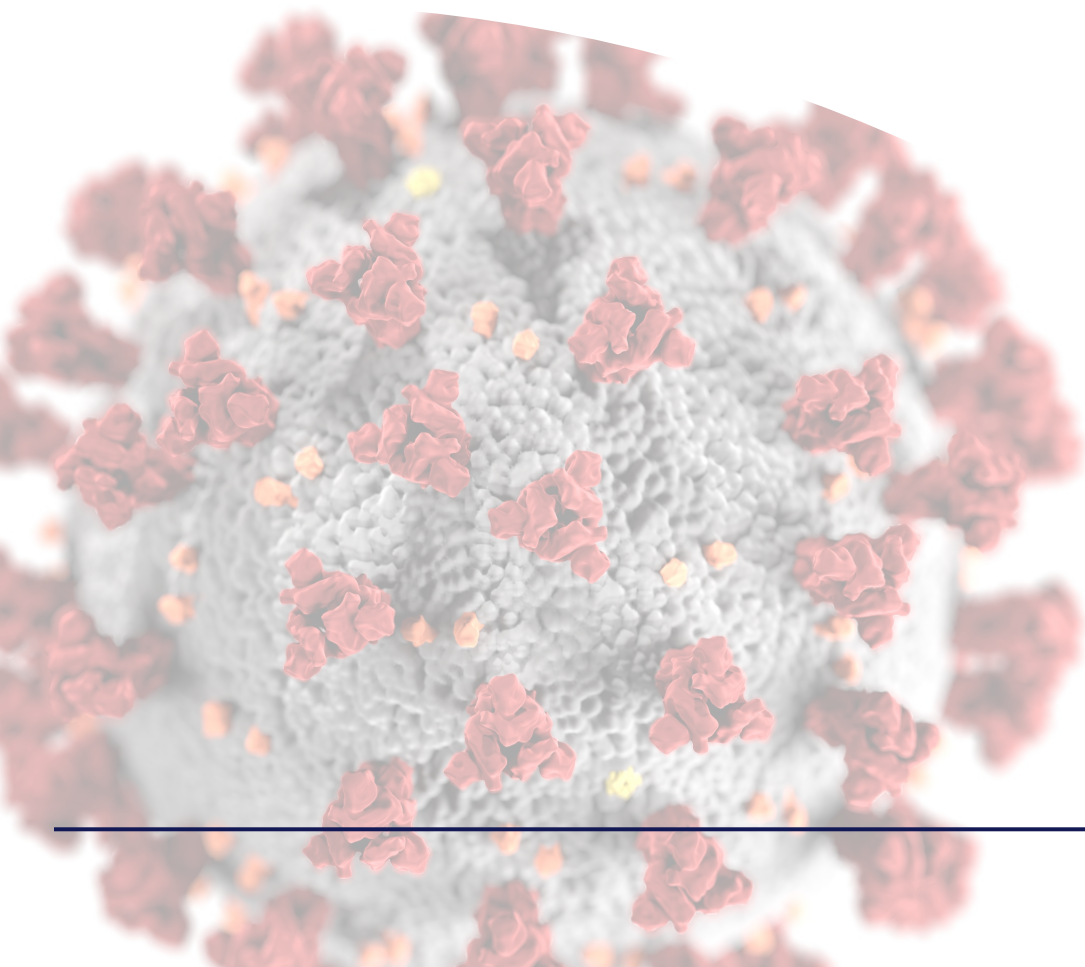
[1] See: <https://www.corruptionwatch.org.za/covid-millions-lost-to-greed-carelessness-and-mismanagement/>

[2] Available here: https://journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/State-of-Newsroom_2019_2020_30112020.pdf

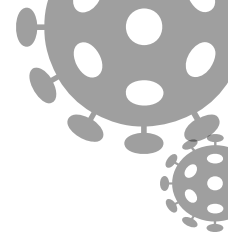


It was found that this was due to the ongoing communication and public engagement by the government in relation to the virus, whether it be on new infections or recoveries and general lockdown regulations. The lack of voices by health and other such experts has also been attributed to a concentration on official government communications in the place of innovative journalism practice that seeks all possible views and explanations. 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.

This seventh brief will look at whether these trends have continued as well as discuss the events that could have led to the increase, or the lack thereof recorded on certain days of the monitoring period. Further, implications of underreporting or underrepresentation of certain groups of people will be explored.



Methodology



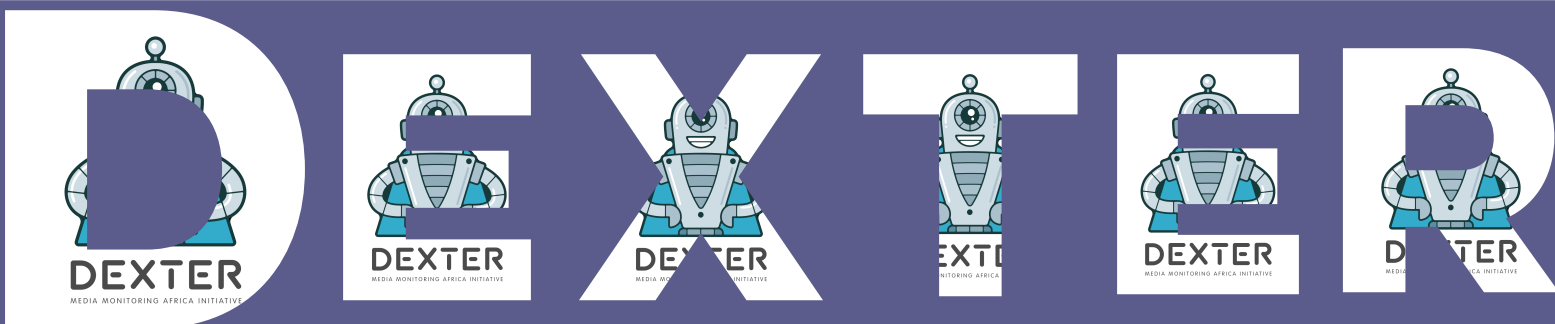
The monitoring period covered for this brief is eight weeks, from the 27th of July until the 20th of September, 2020. Dexter, an in-house online monitoring tool was used to gather and analyse data using keywords, “Coronavirus”, “Quarantine”, “Lockdown”, “Covid-19” and “Pandemic”. The tool scraped media content from the websites of over 50 news media sites.[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 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.

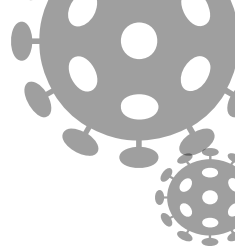
Importantly, we excluded any items that discussed similar topics but were not related to the coronavirus, and more particularly Covid-19.

The results in this brief are an analysis of the dataset in the eight-week period where a total number of 9, 861 articles were collected and analysed. The previous monitoring period of four weeks recorded a total of 7, 540 articles. What might seem as an increase in the number of articles at first glance is only because of an extended monitoring period and not necessarily an increase in the volume of articles per day.

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.



[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, Zoutpanserberger, 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



The overall count of articles assists us in looking at the peaks and troughs of Covid-19 coverage in South Africa since the first time the story of the first positive case in the country broke. From here on in, Covid-19 news began to feature prominently in South African mainstream news publications, competing with issues that are usually reported on such as maladministration, corruption, and internal party politics among other issues. To push back on the rapid spread of the virus, the government further went on a campaign of distributing messages about staying indoors, informing the public about symptoms of the virus, where to get tested and generally trying to get ahead of the pandemic by imposing a nationwide lockdown^[4] and thus from there on in went to dominate the news agenda for months to come.

In the previous briefs, we noted the continued dip in news coverage afforded to the Covid-19 for over four weeks between the 25th of May and 22nd of June, 2020 as can be seen below, and attributed this to a possible Covid-19 news fatigue as well as other issues that compete for the media's attention.^[5]^[6] Furthermore, we noted a sharp increase in Covid-19 reportage from the 29th of June to the 6th of July, stating that this being the consequence of lockdown level three announcement and what the new regulations would mean for ordinary citizens, workers as well as trade and industry.^[7]

In the graph below which has been extended for the purposes of this monitoring period, we find that after there was an increase in Covid-19 reportage post the lockdown level three imposition, news coverage on the pandemic steadily declined according to the recorded weekly figures. This was from the 13th of July, where 1, 493 articles on Covid-19 were recorded that week compared to the previous week's 1, 855 articles. It remained at a steady average of over 1, 000 articles per week for the following six weeks, recording its lowest figure of 944 articles in the week of the 24th of August. This is a curious case, given that this was the period of the peak in Coronavirus cases.^[8] However, other competing news relating to opening the economy were at play. As such, it was at this period that some concessions were made relating to restaurants, travel, and sports.^[9] For these same reasons, the number of articles published the following weeks decreased, fluctuating between to totals of 550-950 articles per week.

[4] See: <https://health-e.org.za/2020/03/23/lockdownsa-ramaphosa-announces-sa-lockdown-to-curb-covid-19-spread/>

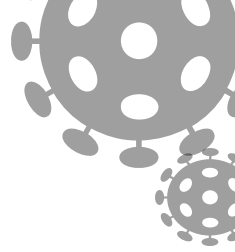
[5] See brief report: <https://mediamonitoringafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/COVID-19-Analysis-Brief-5.pdf>

[6] See brief report: <https://mediamonitoringafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/COVID-19-Analysis-Part-4.pdf>

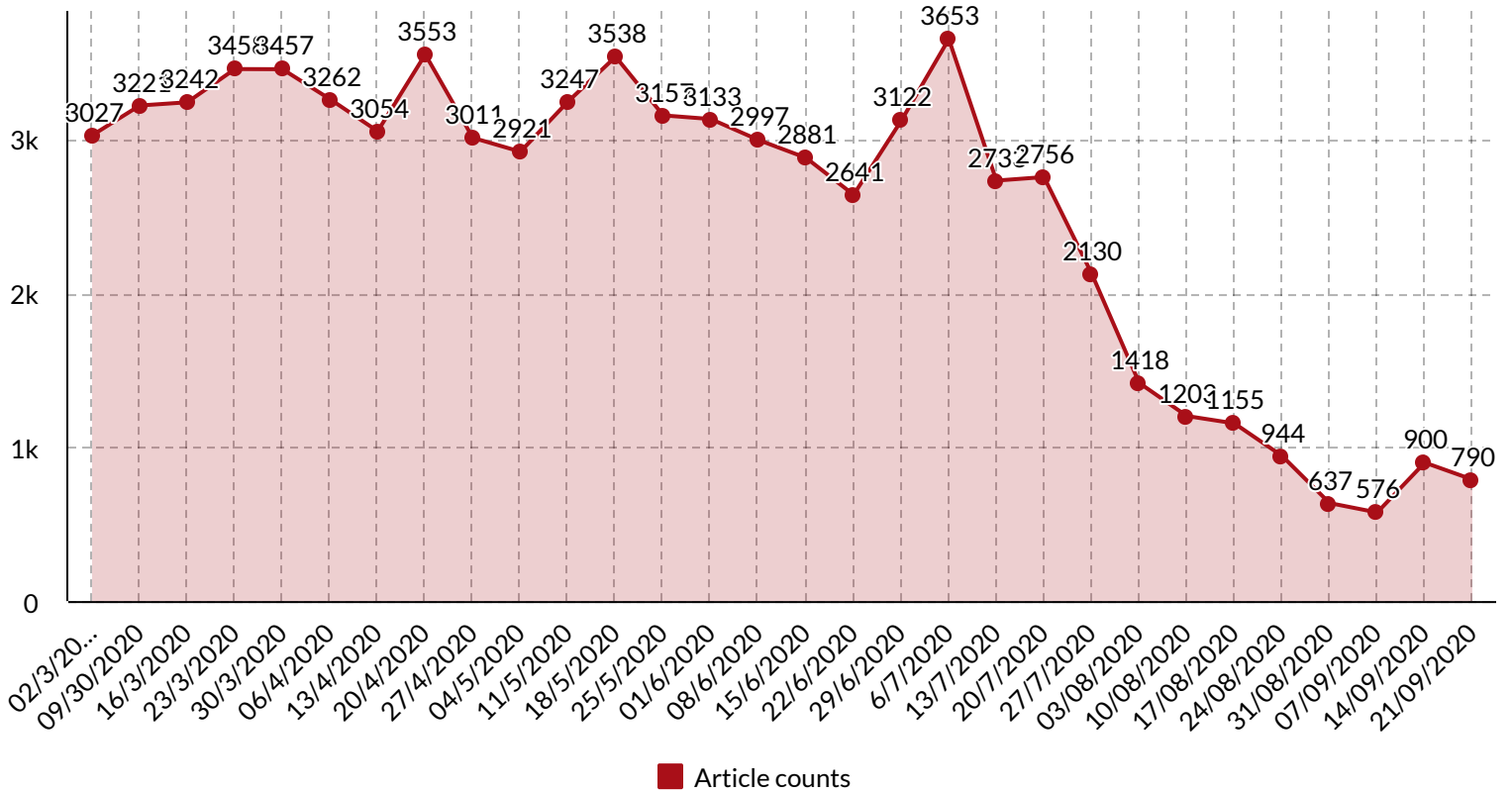
[7] See brief report here: <https://mediamonitoringafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/COVID-19-Analysis-Brief-5.pdf>

[8] See: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53795339>

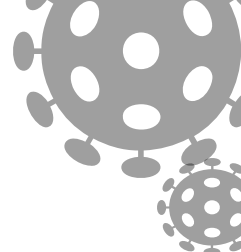
[9] See: <https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/421956/5-lockdown-changes-for-august-that-you-should-know-about/>



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.

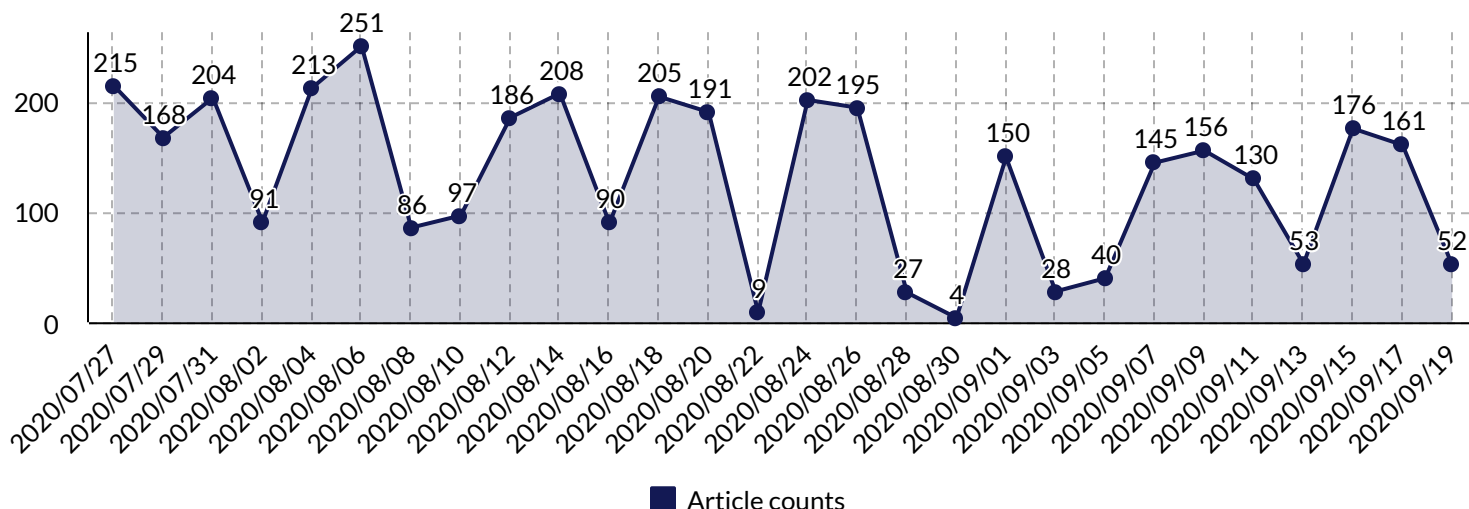


Daily Count

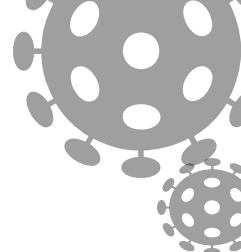
Looking at the daily article count is important in assisting us in better understanding the news cycle, especially during a pandemic and national lockdown where a number of things are restricted. The daily article count for this brief covers an eight-week period and reveals a similar trend found in the previous analysis where there are peaks and troughs in the daily coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic by the media in South Africa.

On the 27th of July, South Africa recorded 215 articles published on or related to the Covid-19 pandemic and attendant lockdown. This count though fell on the next day but rose throughout the week to its highest recorded figure with a total of 278 articles published on the 1st of August. Interestingly, the 1st of July also recorded the highest number of Covid-19 articles published in the monitored period of the previous brief. This went on for the following days, where Covid-19 reportage fell and then rose again in the same week. We noted elsewhere that the contributing factors to this may be news reportage on Covid-19 related though to labour and health,[10] with strikes[11] and job cuts grabbing the headlines. Other stories were around the level one lockdown announcement by President Cyril Ramaphosa on the 16th of September, explaining why we saw an increase in Covid-19 news coverage a few days before and a few days after the announcement. This signals the fact that the peaks recorded during this and other monitoring periods were all centred around events such as addresses by the President and announcements or easing of restrictions.

Daily Article Count

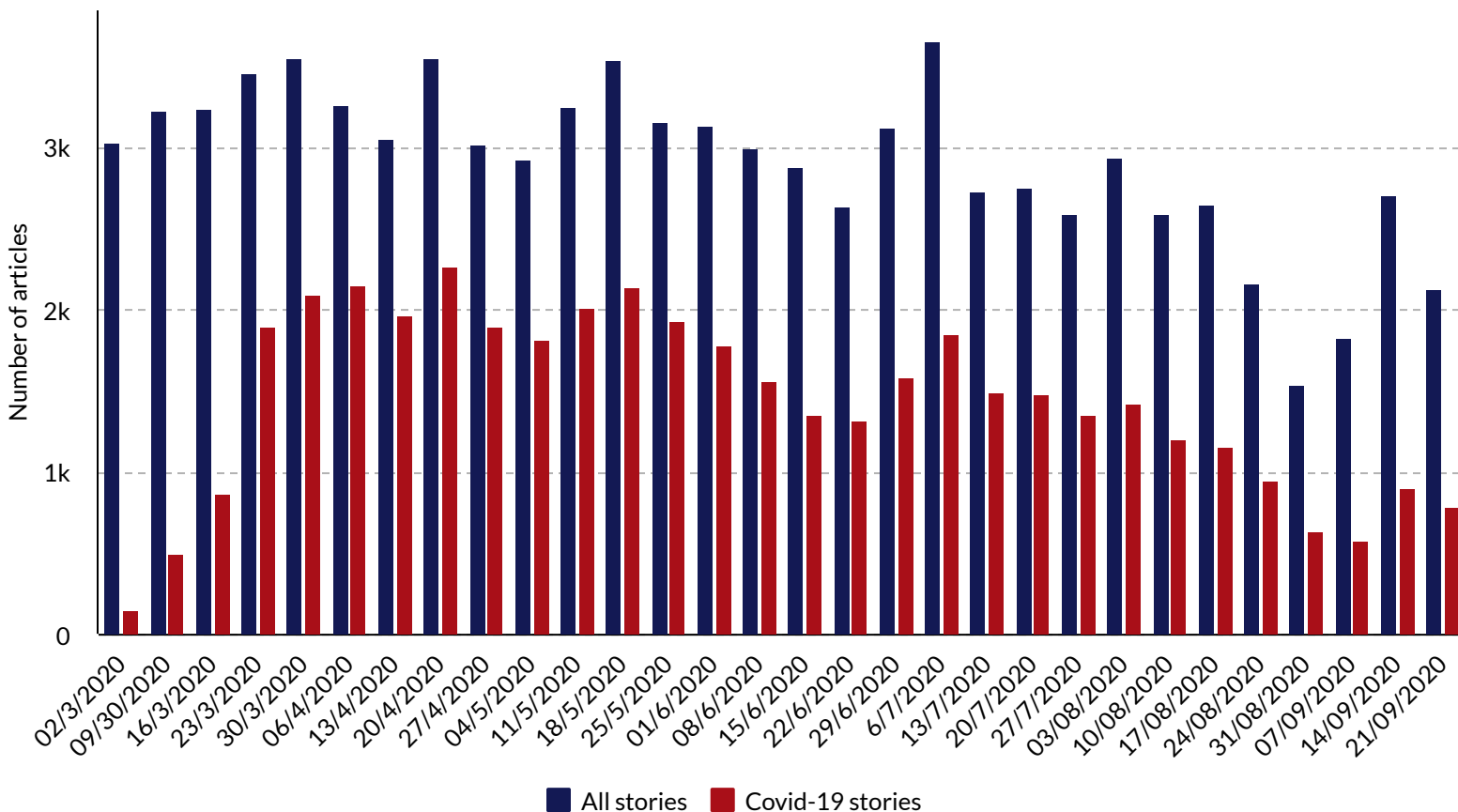


[10] See: <https://www.enca.com/news/union-prasa-not-ready-resume-services>
https://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/airbus-announces-widespread-job-cuts-to-deal-with-effects-of-covid-19-crisis-2020-07-01/rep_id:4136
<https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/outcry-over-langa-clinics-covid-19-protocols-50222737s>
 [11] See: <https://www.groundup.org.za/article/protesters-demand-jobs-DUT/>
<https://www.groundup.org.za/article/protesters-demand-jobs-DUT/>



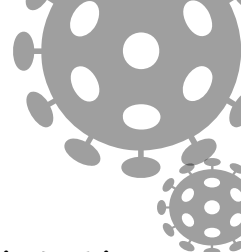
All stories versus Covid-19 stories

All stories versus Covid-19 stories



The inclusion of All Stories versus Covid-19 Stories graph is done in an effort to gauge the amount of media coverage afforded to these in the monitored period. As such, the graph reveals an ongoing trend we have noticed from this graph in previous analyses where on many of the days/weeks monitored, Covid-19 stories took up just over 50% of total news coverage for a given week, alluding to a consistent reportage of Covid-19. As we noted previously, news productions and entities are facing a myriad of challenges, the pandemic adding to these already ongoing woes, but they have according to this graph, reported adequately (in the quantitative sense) on the pandemic.

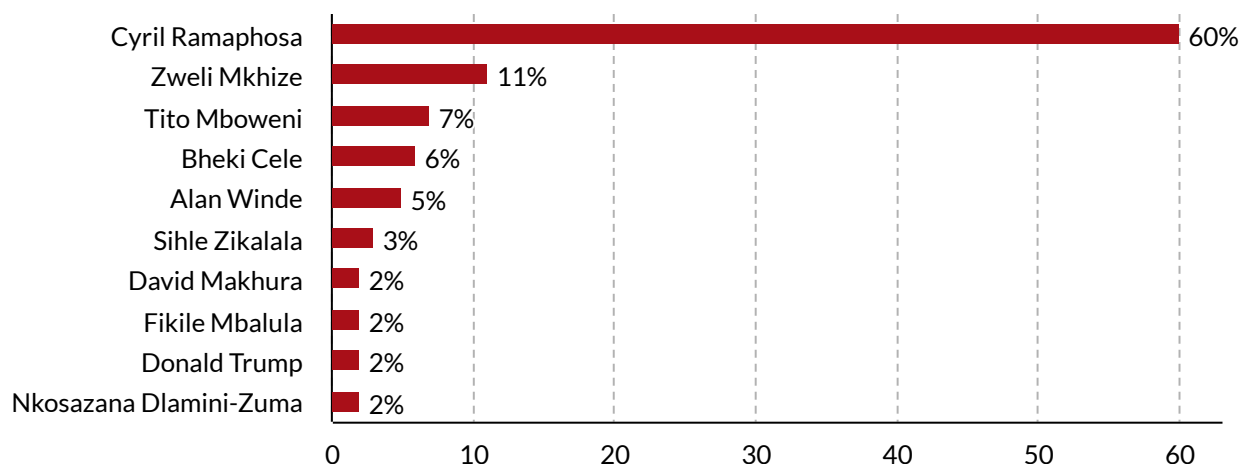
Given that August is commemorated as Women’s Month in the South African calendar, it bodes well for us to look at the gender dynamic of the data and whether or not it being Women’s Month had an impact on the number of Covid-19 articles recorded, the type of articles produced or, whether there were more women as sources in this coverage. Looking at the All Stories versus Covid-19 Stories graph, there isn’t any indication/evidence that suggests its impact on the number of articles produced as the trend, since the 6th of July has been that of a decrease in the number of Covid-19 stories produced thereby suggesting that the decrease in Covid-19 stories cannot be attributed to media shifting focus to gender issues in August. A further analysis on gender, Women’s Month and Covid-19 is explored below.



Whose voice do we hear in the media?

We will be looking at the names of sources that dominated during the mentioned period. This will give us a glimpse of who is mentioned and who has the loudest voice in the Covid-19 media coverage. Understanding who has the loudest voice or mentioned in the media has always been a critical part of the work we do at MMA as it reveals to us who holds the most power because in most instances, the louder the voice in media coverage, the more power that individual or affiliation holds.

Top 10 Sources



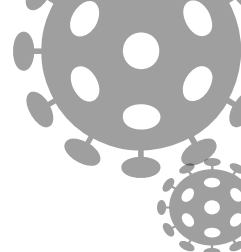
The findings above show President Cyril Ramaphosa commanding the largest share of voice at 60% of the top ten voices, a large increase from the previous report which showed 48%. The President has been top of the list of sources since the first analysis, raising the question of why he is the person mostly interviewed or mentioned in coverage of Covid-19. This is not to undermine the President’s role, but to highlight the importance of having diverse voices during this pandemic in media coverage. The fact that the President is always at the top of the list of sources is because he is mostly the person who announces lockdown regulations and/or their easing. Cyril Ramaphosa’s voice did not just dominate because of his lockdown announcements but also because of the allegations of corruption relating to the R500 billion Covid-19 relief fund.[12] President Ramaphosa was quoted extensively over the period on this corruption allegation.

A look at other sources such as Health Minister, Zweli Mkhize at 11% reveals a decrease compared to the previously recorded 13%. Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma at 2% almost did not make the list of sources for the second time in a row. The reason she made the list this time could have been because she extended the Covid-19 national state of disaster by a month.[13] KwaZulu-Natal Premier, Sihle Zikalala made into the top 10 for the first time due to the increasing number of Covid-19 infections in the KZN province overtaking the Western Cape.[14]

[12] <https://www.iol.co.za/the-star/news/siu-goes-after-r500bn-covid-19-relief-fund-looters-2a05576b-d800-402a-96ec-fee6964bc748>

[13] <https://www.dailysun.co.za/News/dlamini-zuma-extends-national-state-of-disaster-by-a-month-20200815-3>

[14] <https://www.dispatchlive.co.za/news/2020-08-12-zikalala-pleads-for-end-to-irresponsible-and-reprehensible-behaviour-as->



Source breakdown by gender

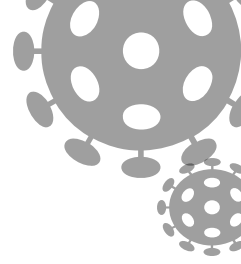
One of the key roles of the media is to fairly represent the diverse members of the society. This is important because it ensures no one is underrepresented or marginalised in coverage and that everyone gets a fair chance to exercise their rights to participate and/or speak in matters affecting them. In this case, we looked at how the media sourced men and women in the Covid-19 coverage during the monitoring period. This allowed us to analyse the amount of attention given to the two genders in the media. We also looked at whether the fact that the monitoring period included August, which is Women’s Month had any impact on the amount of coverage women received in relation to Covid-19.

Looking at the graph below, a heavy concentration of male voices at 79% can be seen with female voices receiving a mere 21%. These are the same results (with a percentage or so difference) as those recorded in previous analyses. The continued underrepresentation of women in coverage of the pandemic further marginalises women. A report titled, “[The Missing Perspectives of Women in COVID-19 News](#)” by Luba Kassava^[15] reinforces our view on women being marginalised in coverage of the pandemic. This report looked at South Africa including five other countries namely India, Kenya, Nigeria, the UK and the US and showed that women are marginalised globally.

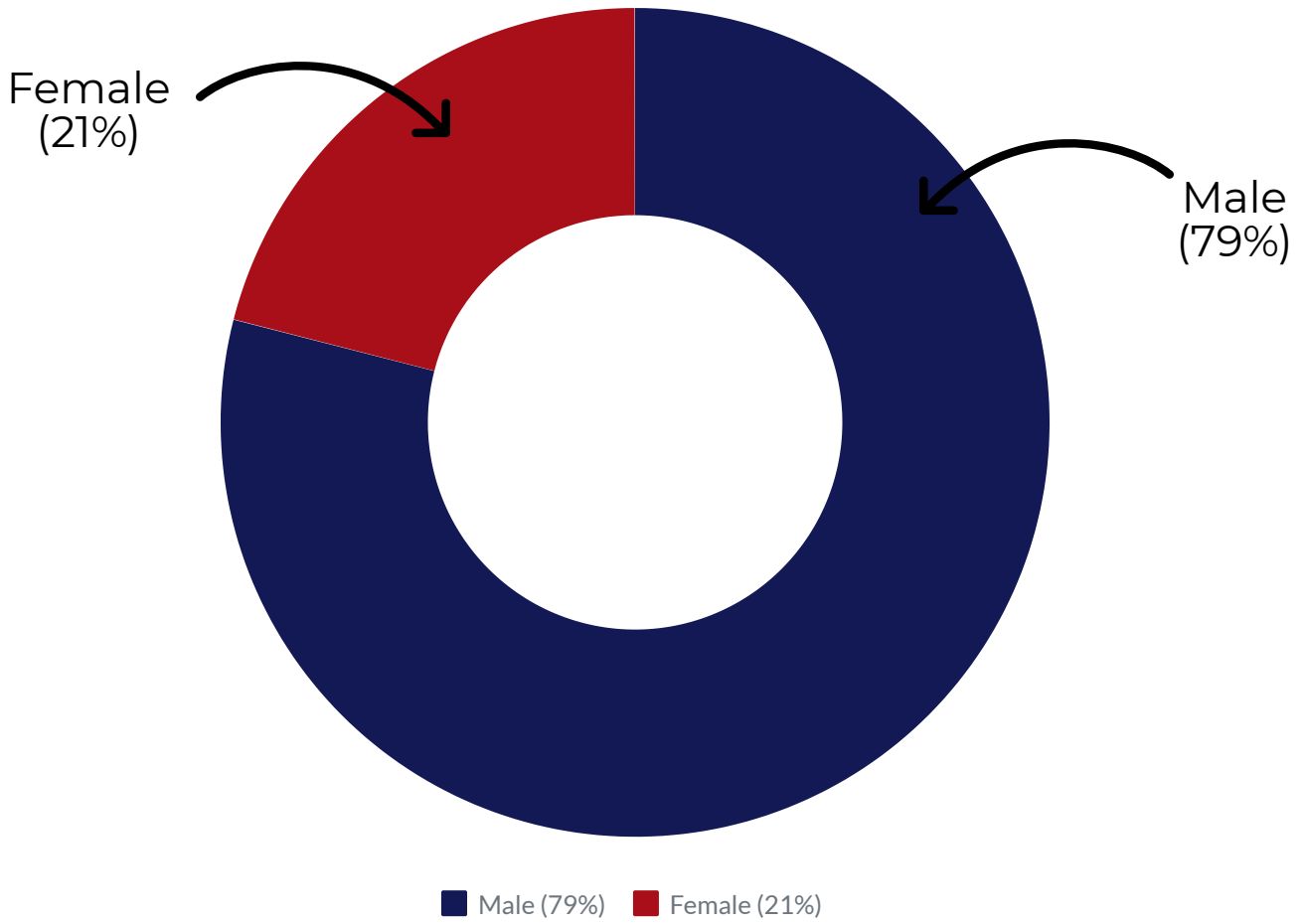
One of the author’s recommendations in the report is to ‘give voice to women protagonists and experts who are highly trusted by many: doctors, scientists and paramedics, who typically tend to be men, as well as nurses and schoolteachers, who tend to be women’.

As has been mentioned, August was Women’s Month and not many women were featured in Covid-19 coverage as has been seen in the graph showing names of sources. From that graph, the only female to make the top 10 list of sources is Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. The majority of women that were interviewed or mentioned during the monitoring period were mainly government officials who still did not make it to the top 10 list of sources. Some of these women are Faith Muthambi, Mmamoloko Kubayi-Ngubane, Thandi Modise, Tina Joemat-Pettersson and Bongive Mbinqo-Gigaba. The lesser the media sources women in media coverage, the more the women will be viewed as citizens whose voice is not worthy in matters of national importance. MMA believes that more needs to be done to close the gender gap in the media.

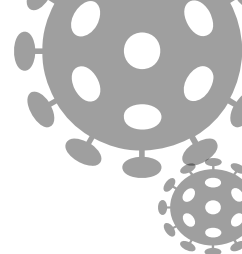
[15] <https://www.iwmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020.09.23-The-Missing-Perspectives-of-Women-in-COVID-19-News.pdf>



GENDER REPRESENTATION



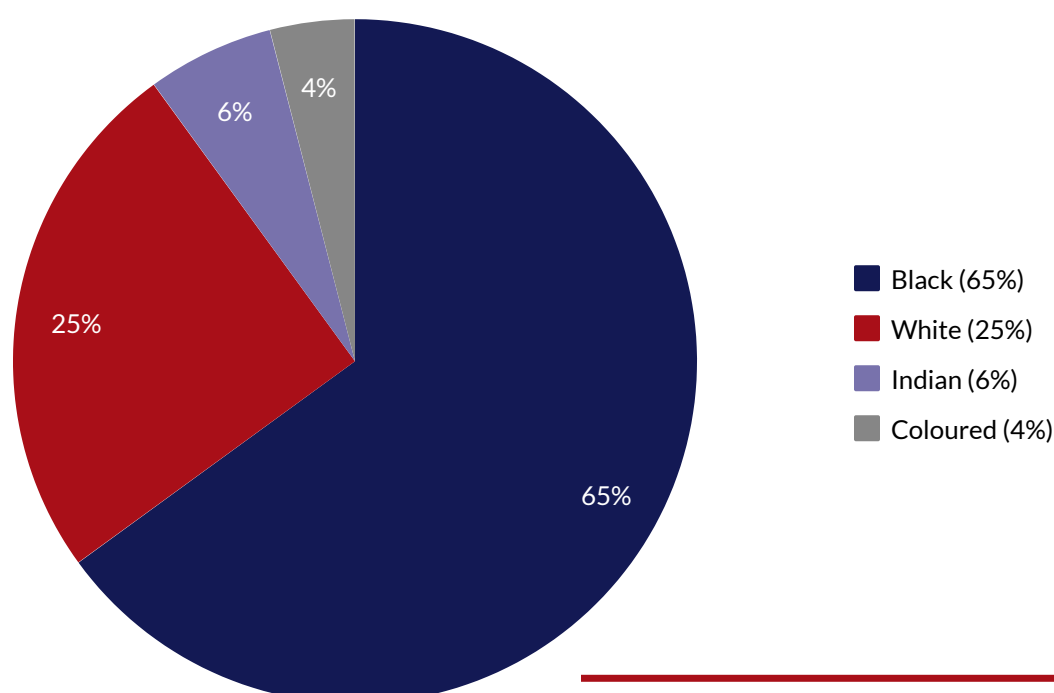
Source breakdown by race



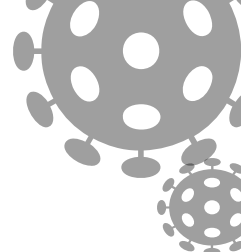
With South Africa's history of racial segregation, it is important to see how the media operates in terms of how they report on different racial groups. Does the media seek out different voices from across the racial spectrum or do they focus on one group at the expense of another?

Black people make up 81% of the population and the findings below reveal that black people received 63% of quotes over the period. This was because the majority of sources who are mainly government officials such as Bheki Cele, Cyril Ramaphosa, Tito Mboweni, Fikile Mbalula are black. White people's and Indians' voices respectively made up 25% and 6% of media coverage of Covid-19. These two make up 8% and 3% of the population respectively according to Statistics South Africa's community survey of 2016.[16] The white people speaking here include the President of the United States of America, Donald Trump who is representing a foreign government and Western Cape government's Alan Winde. Coloured people's voice share made up 4% while making up 9% of the national population. These results show a grim reality that Coloured people are not being accessed adequately in coverage of Covid-19 despite them being more than Indians and white people in South Africa. The implication of the continued underrepresentation of Coloured people in the coverage of Covid-19 is that Coloured people's experiences, opinions and expectations will continue to be neglected and missing in the media. Furthermore, the less sourcing of Coloured people in the media coverage does nothing in helping fight equal representation in terms of race. The media needs to close the gap between disproportionate media coverage and the national demographics of the diverse people of South Africa.

Race Representation



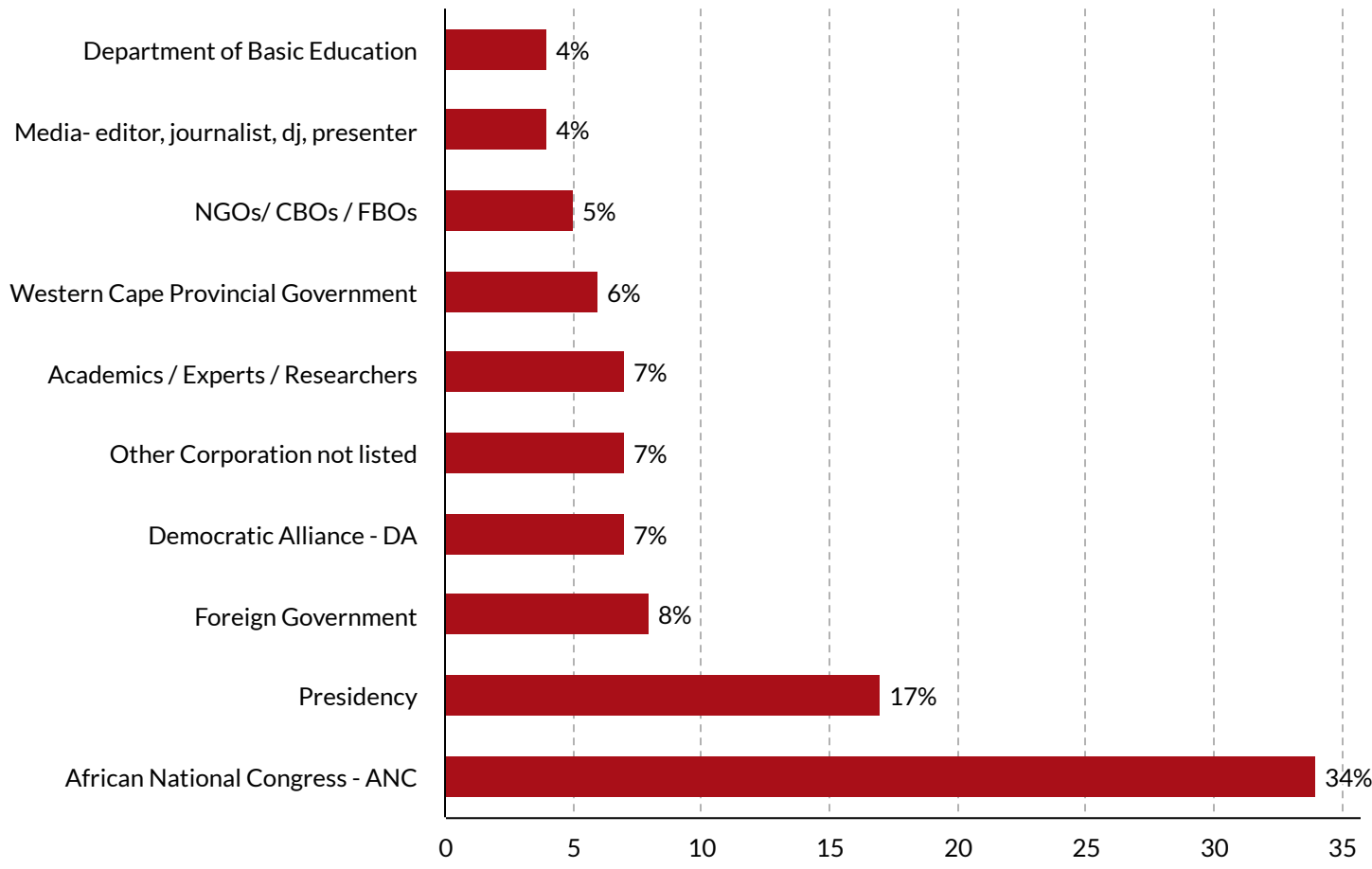
[16] http://cs2016.statssa.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/NT-30-06-2016-RELEASE-for-CS-2016-_Statistical-releas_1-July-2016.pdf



Affiliations

In this section, will look at which groups are interviewed and mentioned the most in media coverage during this pandemic. Looking at the graph below, we can see that the ANC at 34% is the leading group. This is not surprising as they are the ruling party and the majority of the top 10 sources are ANC members. In addition, this was also due to the media coverage about ANC members allegedly being linked to corruption.[17] It would be fair to see other political parties being interviewed and mentioned during this pandemic as to what role they are playing in fighting Covid-19. This would also be a great chance for political parties to showcase their role as South Africa will be having local elections in 2021. Making it in the top 10 for the third time in this series of analyses is the affiliation, 'Media - editor, journalist, dj, presenter, critic, public relations'. This was mostly due to the Sunday Times being interviewed or mentioned because it broke the news on the corruption surrounding the R50 billion Covid-19 emergency health budget.[18]

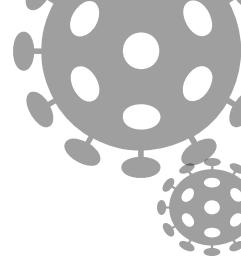
Top 10 Affiliations



[17] <https://www.politicsweb.co.za/documents/let-this-be-a-turning-point-in-fight-against-corru>

[18] <https://www.politicsweb.co.za/opinion/pandemic-profiteers>

Conclusion



The coronavirus pandemic and its attendant consequences, including the announcement of the national state of disaster and lockdown has been a lasting and salient feature of news reportage in South Africa. This comes at a time where newsrooms are facing mounting challenges to keep afloat and practice quality journalism. Notwithstanding these, the local news production houses, and their journalists, as seen in this and previous briefs, continues to cover the Covid-19 pandemic. In some instances, there are excellent reports and in others, the coverage is driven by foreign actors like President Donald Trump in the United States of America.

Given that the monitoring period for this brief covered the period of Women's Month, we had anticipated both more senior women's voices being accessed but also more women's voices in general. Instead there was only one woman in the top 10 sources. Men were again overly accessed and/or quoted. This remains a major recurring challenge within the media sphere. As such, the public would benefit further and immensely if the media were to perhaps be more inclusive of female voices – be it Women's Month or not – and also more innovative in their thinking and coverage of the pandemic and related issues by going beyond the scope of government and seeking both expert and ordinary voices, including women and children – to speak on the pandemic. In concrete terms, this would mean that the media must, notwithstanding its challenges, rely less on official press conferences and briefings but rather return to investigative reporting which 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 would also require conducting deeper research on the pandemic, states of disasters and lockdowns to supplement or challenge the official narratives from government as a means of keeping them accountable and the public more knowledgeable.

