MEDIAMONITORING
AFRICA

30 YEARS
OF DEMOCRACY
UNVEILED

**AN ANALYSIS OF MEDIA'S COVERAGE OF
THE 2024 SOUTH AFRICAN ELECTIONS**

BRIEF   1
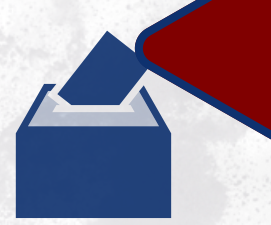
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ELECTIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) is monitoring selected media's coverage of the run up to the 2024 South Africa National and Provincial Elections (NPE). Analysis will examine what issues are considered a priority by the media, whether political parties and Independents are represented fairly and without bias as well as unpacking representation of racial and gender groups, among other elements.

Every fortnight, we will publish a report analysing trends in media coverage. An interim report with findings from a four-week monitoring period will be published monthly. After the elections, MMA will publish three separate reports analysing how the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), other news media and, selected community media reported the 2024 NPE.

The following brief analysis shows what and who dominated media coverage from the **29th of February to the 14th of March, 2024**. A total of **308 stories on the National and Provincial Elections** were analysed during this monitoring period. The **308 stories recorded during this monitoring period** works out to an average of 21 stories per dayincluding weekends where there are often fewer stories.

2. FINDINGS
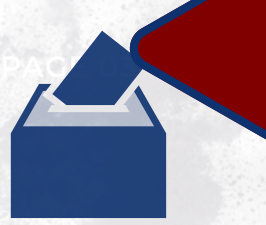
ARTICLE COUNT OVER TIME

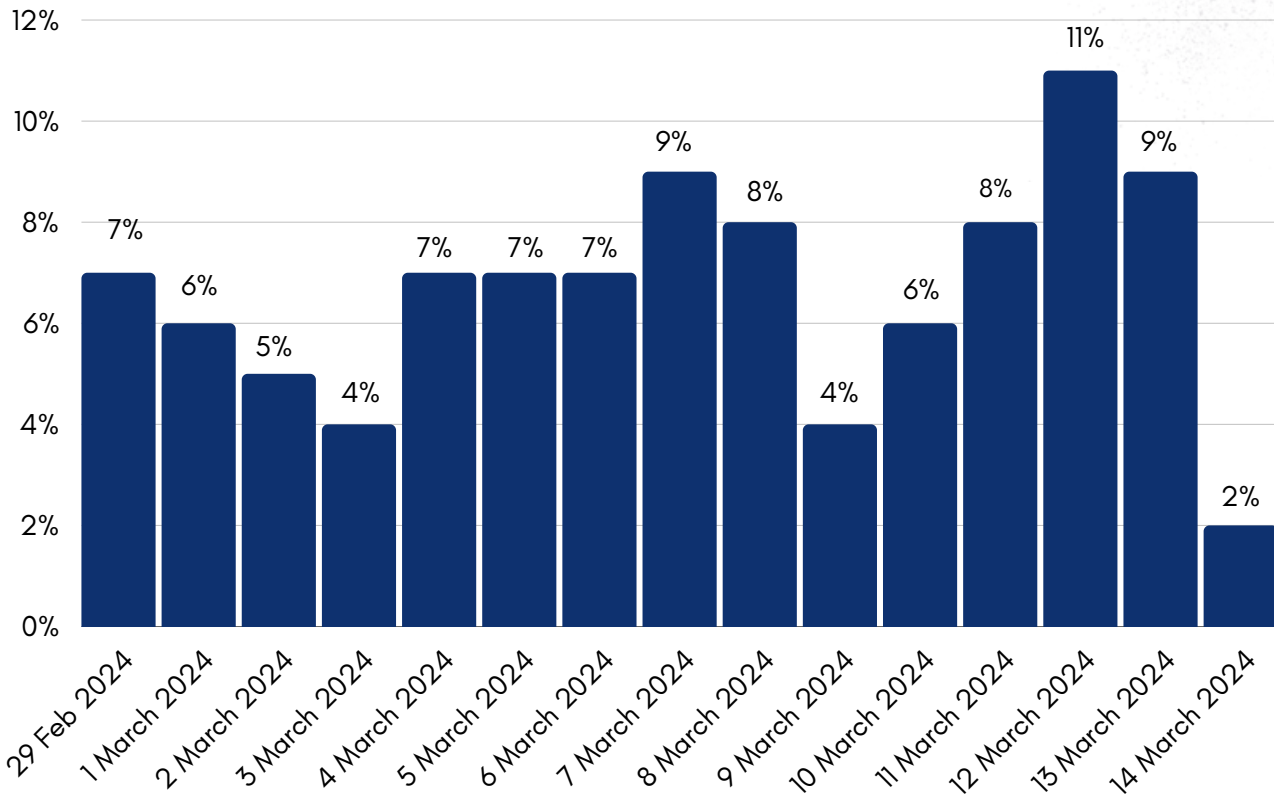**DAILY NPE STORIES**
(AS % OF TOTAL FOR THE TWO WEEKS)

Figure 1: Daily percentage of stories on NPE

The figure above shows that media coverage of the NPE remained largely consistent with slight decreases during weekends as can be seen from the dips in Figure 1.

The biggest spike can be seen on 12th March at 11%. Stories on this day were mostly on the leaked African National Congress (ANC) and MK party candidates lists and the subsequent firing of the IEC employee who distributed the lists. Other stories that dominated media coverage on this day were on the Electoral Matters Amendment Bill and the National Assembly passing it. According to Daily Maverick, the "Bill seeks to amend the Political Party Funding Act of 2018 and align various pieces of legislation with the Electoral Amendment Act of 2023, which enables independent candidates to contest in elections for seats in the National Assembly and provincial legislatures. It also makes provision for independent candidates to declare their funding sources."

Haiti and the resignation of its Prime Minister, Ariel Henry was also in the news on the 12th of March. News reports also focused on President Cyril Ramaphosa expressing disappointment over the Democratic Alliance (DA)'s letter to the United States government to "deploy election observers to South Africa".

During the monitoring period, the first spike was recorded on 7th March at 9%. The same percentage was recorded on 13th March. Stories that dominated media coverage on the 7th of March were mostly on the MK party and threats of "anarchy and civil war" if not allowed on the ballot. Other stories that dominated were on the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)'s required signatures of support with Mmusi Maimane commenting on fairness and the Labour Party reportedly struggling to garner enough signatures. A movie titled, "Bobi Wine: The People's President" was also in news on the 13th. Bobi Wine is a Ugandan politician and singer whose participation in the 2021 Ugandan elections dominated media coverage globally then.

Stories dominating media coverage on 13th March were on the MK party and Jacob Zuma with stories on the latter reporting that Jacob Zuma had been appointed as the MK party's presidential candidate. Other stories that dominated on this day were on Russia, attacks on its oil refineries and its elections.

TOP 5 TOPICS

TOP 5 TOPICS (WHICH IS 77% OF ALL CODED TOPICS)

- Election Funding 6%
- Political Party Campaigning 6%
- Political Party Politics 13%
- Election Logistics 30%
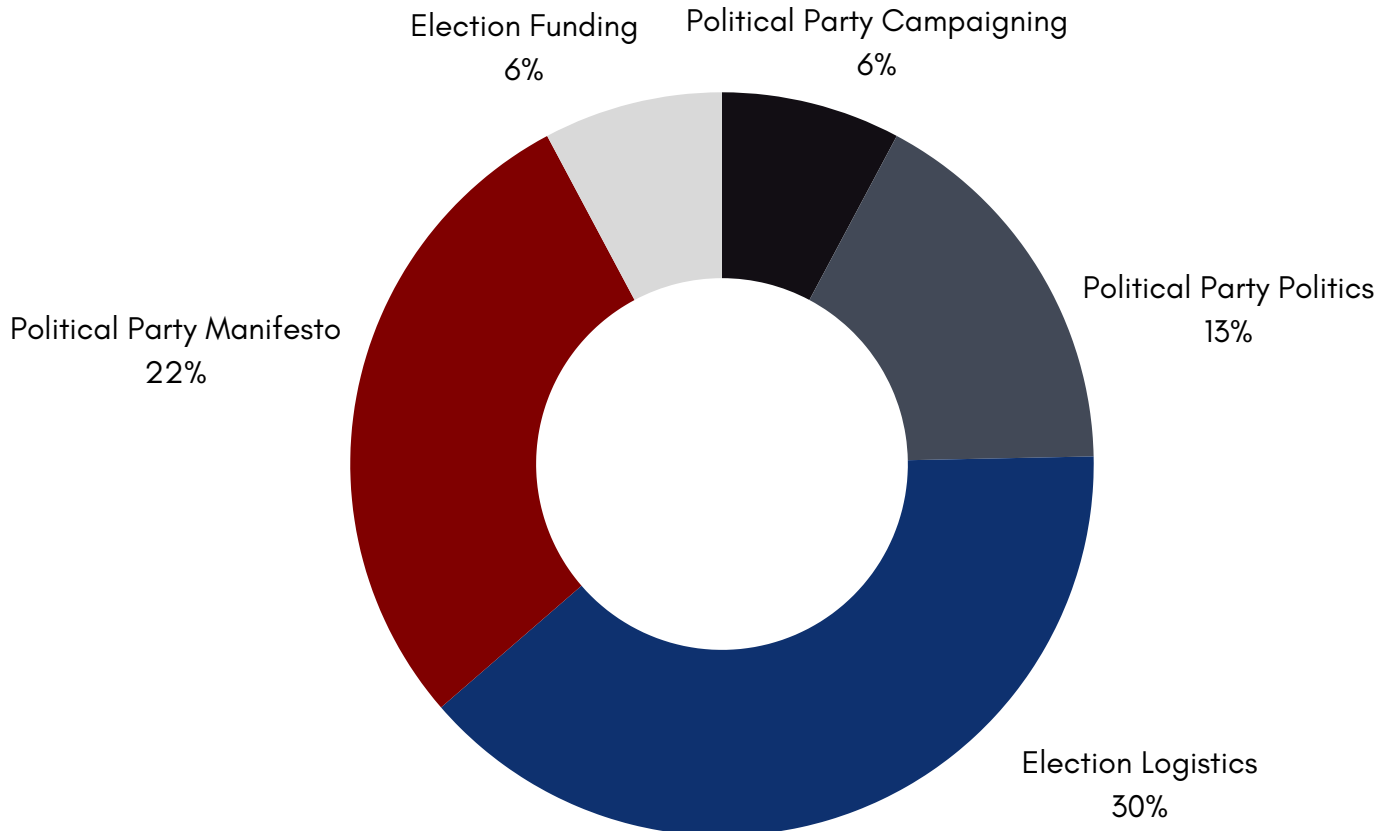- Political Party Manifesto 22%

Figure 2: Top 5 topics in coverage

The IEC signatures of support, the IEC leaked ANC and MK party's candidates lists as well as the MK party's appointment of Jacob Zuma as its presidential candidate dominated media coverage during the three biggest spikes as shown previously in Figure 1. All these contributed to the topic, 'election logistics' dominating on the top 5 topics at 30%.

MMA has 14 coded election related topics. The top 5 topics garnered a combined coverage share of 77% as can be seen in Figure 2 above. This means that 9 election related topics which include topics such as voter education and service delivery only had the remaining 23% of coverage to share. MMA submits that while it is given that some topics will dominate depending on political parties' and candidates' agendas, a more deliberate effort by the media should be given towards reporting equally important topics such as voter education as well as issue-based topics like service delivery, to empower citizens. The media missed an opportunity to highlight service delivery as an issue important to South Africans especially that some political parties were launching their manifestos during the monitoring period.

TOP 10 PARTY & ELECTIONS RELATED GROUP COVERAGE

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POLITICAL PARTY/GROUP COVERAGE (WHICH IS 70% OF ALL CODED POLITICAL PARTIES/GROUPS)

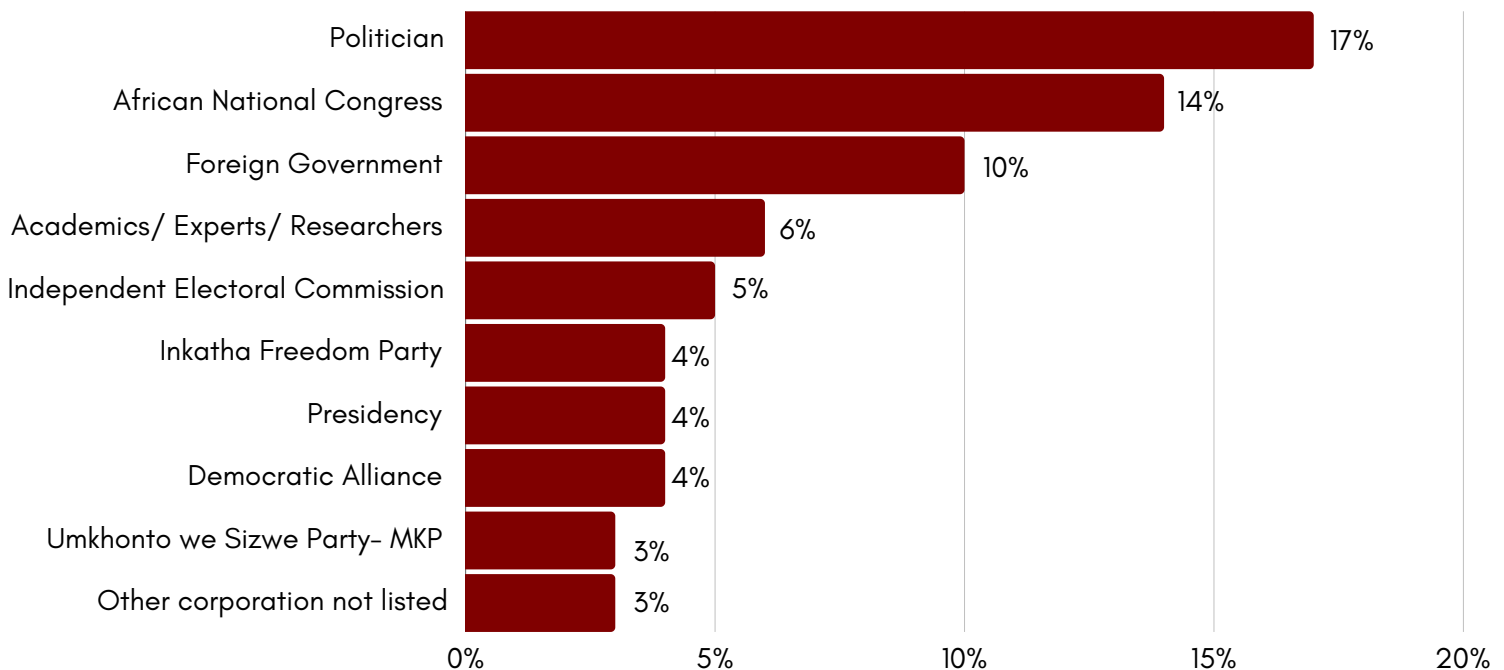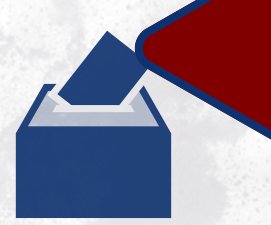| Group	Coverage
Politician	17%
African National Congress	14%
Foreign Government	10%
Academics/ Experts/ Researchers	6%
Independent Electoral Commission	5%
Inkatha Freedom Party	4%
Presidency	4%
Democratic Alliance	4%
Umkhonto we Sizwe Party- MKP	3%
Other corporation not listed	3%

Figure 3: Top 10 political party/group coverage

According to the [IEC](#), there are 115 political parties and 16 Independents who successfully made submissions to contest seats in the National Assembly. The media has a tough job of ensuring that all these political parties and Independents are equitably represented in media coverage. These, on top of other election related groups such as the IEC.

In monitoring which group has the loudest voice in media coverage, MMA analyses who is speaking in coverage, who is merely mentioned, or photographed in order to determine voices that dominate news coverage. During the monitoring period, there were 411 sources who were featured as sources in media coverage of the NPE. Of these 411 sources, the majority came from top 10 political parties and groups shown in Figure 3 above. The top 10 political parties and groups garnered a combined voice share of 70%.

The group, politicians, topped the list with a voice share of 17% followed by the ANC with 14% voice share. It is encouraging to see the group, academics, researchers and experts featuring on the list above albeit only at 6%. In previous studies, MMA has found that this is one of the neglected groups in media coverage of elections or other events or issues of national importance. We submit though that the media could use the opportunity presented by academics, researchers and experts to unpack with them issues important to South African voters such as voter education or service delivery.

Number 5 – Independent Electoral Commission at 5%: The IEC was in the news during the monitoring period mostly in stories on the signatures of support required of political parties wishing to contest the elections. Other stories were around the MK Party threats of "anarchy and civil war" if not allowed on the ballot. The majority of stories where the IEC featured as a source, however, was on the leaked IEC candidates lists for ANC and MK Party.

Number 4 – Academics, researchers and experts at 6%: The majority of coverage where experts were featured as sources was around the National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill and the R1.4 billion set aside for the scheme, expert commentary around political and business leaders needing to work together for the common good, and the DA launching legal proceedings against the ANC in order to get a court to find ANC in contempt of court and compel it "to hand over a "crashed" laptop with cadre deployment records to an independent IT expert". There was other coverage were political experts were also sharing their views on different elections related topics.

Number 3 – Foreign governments at 10%: Foreign governments were in the news mostly in stories such as those reporting on Russia, attacks on the country and it's elections. United States of America also featured on the list in coverage around the country's State of the Union address, Joe Biden, its President securing the Democratic Party nomination, the country's new set of sanctions against Zimbabwe, and, its response to the Haiti violence from gangs seeking to overthrow the government. The Israel-Palestine war and coverage on that could have also contributed to foreign governments featuring significantly.

Number 2 – African National Congress at 14%: Stories that could have contributed to the ANC featuring second on the top 10 list of political parties/groups were around the leaked candidates list and other news relating to the party's candidates. The ANC provincial manifesto launch in Eastern Cape was also in the news.

Number 1 – Politicians at 17%: As this is an election period where for the first time, Independents are allowed to contest, the voice of politicians dominating is not surprising. It must be noted, though, that these are sources represented in a story as politicians in coverage – which might include those affiliated to political parties or otherwise. Where an affiliation to a political party was explicit, including where a source was clearly speaking on behalf of a political party, then such a source would be classified under a relevant party.

GENDER REPRESENTATION OF SOURCES
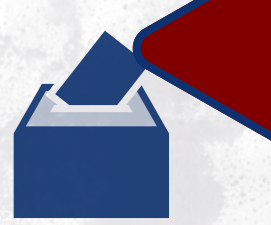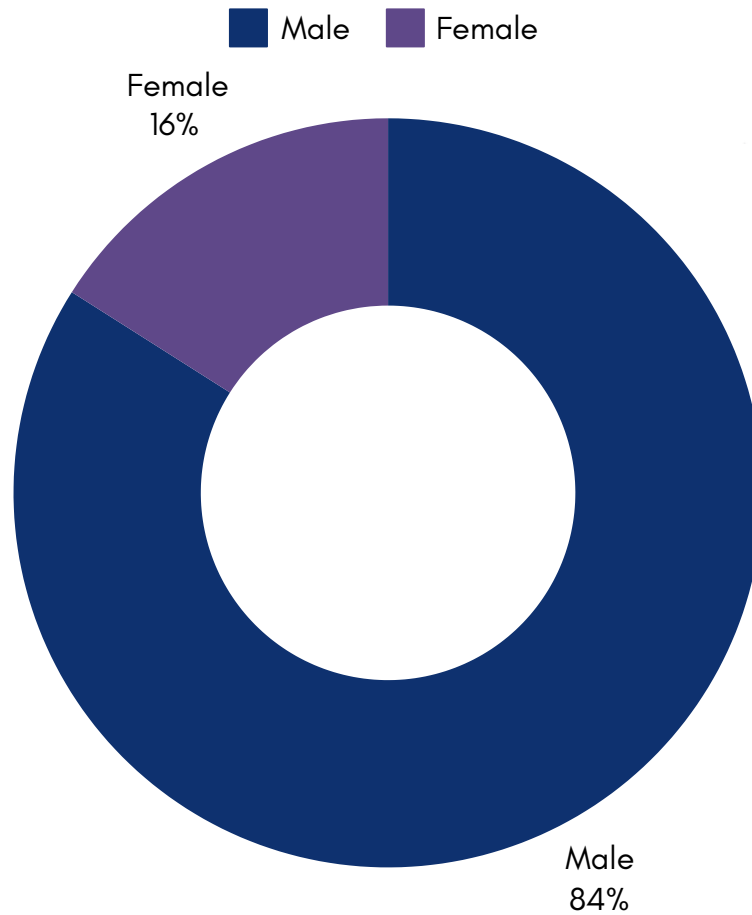
Gender representation of sources

Figure 4: Gender representation of sources in coverage of NPE

The lack of representation of women's voices in media coverage of events and issues of national importance is deeply concerning. MMA has found that women continue to be marginalised as sources in news coverage and so far, this is no different in coverage of the 2024 NPE. At 52% of South Africa's population, both women candidates and the female electorate should be fairly and equitably represented in the media. During this monitoring period, women spoke in coverage of the NPE at only 16%. Male voices remain dominant, at 84% during the monitoring period.

If women's voices are not adequately represented, relevant issues will continue to be neglected and marginalised. In addition, the omission of women's voices helps perpetuate the stereotype that women are not prioritised to speak on issues, or that they simply do not have the expertise.

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