

30 YEARS OF DEMOCRACY UNVEILED



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

BRIEF

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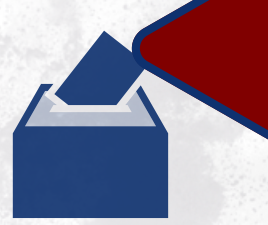
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ELECTIONS



1. INTRODUCTION



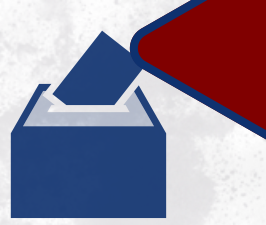
South Africans will cast their vote on the 29th of May, 2024, 30 years after they first cast their vote in a democratic South Africa. According to the Electoral Commission (IEC), there are [27,723,820](#) registered voters in the country. This number of registered voters is [reportedly](#) “the highest since the dawn of democracy in South Africa”, which means that these voters and indeed all other South Africans and those that live in it need credible, well packaged information to make informed decisions about who to vote for. Importantly, these voters and other groups of people in South Africa need to be involved in debates or discussions in media and other avenues – beyond being involved in the electoral process. This means that the media, one of the most important tools during an election in a democracy, should report elections news in a manner that will not only involve the electorate but also empower them and, while equitably representing gender as well as the different political parties.

It is for this reason that Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) is monitoring how the South African media is reporting this year’s National and Provincial Elections (NPE). We are analysing what issues are prioritised in media coverage, which political parties dominate and whether there is bias in coverage, among other elements. MMA is monitoring the public broadcaster, South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)’s coverage, community media and other news media. Post voting day, MMA will analyse the collected data in three separate reports – SABC performance report, community media performance report and, other news media performance report. To ensure that the monitored media improve their coverage and fulfil their mandate, MMA will release by-weekly reports sharing identified gaps in coverage and recommendations.

This second brief analyses media coverage for the period, **15th to 28th March, 2024**. [The first brief analysed coverage for the period, 29th February to 14th March, 2024](#) and where necessary, we will make comparisons to show improvement or the lack thereof. In the first brief, we highlighted that there was a total of 308 stories in the first monitoring period. In this current monitoring period under analysis, **a total of 494 stories were collected and analysed – working to an average of about 35 stories per day**. The **increase in coverage by 186 stories** suggests the media is more focused on reporting the NPE.



2. FINDINGS



ARTICLE COUNT OVER TIME

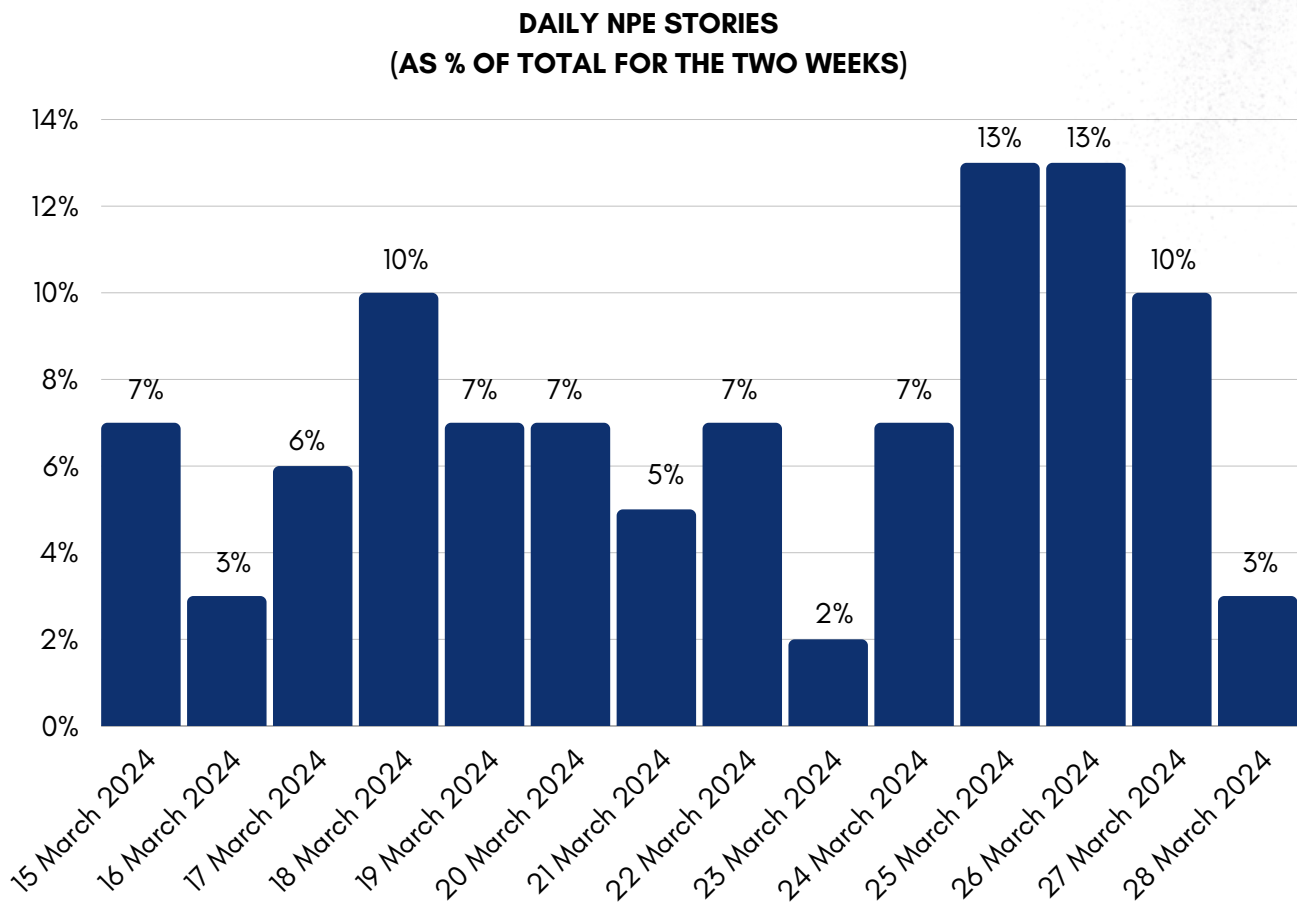


Figure 1: Daily percentage of stories on NPE

The number of stories on the NPE collected and analysed shows how the elections are prioritised and to what extent by the media. Figure 1 above shows the percentage of media coverage during the monitoring period.

As can be seen from the graph, Saturdays (16th March with 3%; 23rd March with 2%) recorded the lowest amount of coverage. The 28th of March also recorded low coverage despite being a Thursday and this can be attributed to the Easter weekend.

The 25th and 26th of March, 2024 recorded the highest amount of media coverage on the NPE at 13% on both days. Stories dominating coverage over these two days were mostly on the [African National Congress \(ANC\)'s application](#) to have uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MK Party) deregistered as a political party. The ANC's argument was that the MK Party unlawfully submitted their application with fraudulent signatures. Other coverage on this issue was the subsequent dismissal of the ANC application by the [Electoral Court finding](#) that "there is nothing unlawful about registration of MK party".

Other news dominating during the spike covered the deputy speaker of the National Assembly, [Lechesa Tsenoli being appointed as acting speaker](#), and the Democratic Alliance (DA)'s [candidates list](#) for the 2024 NPE with the DA talking about how diverse the list is in coverage. More stories that dominated coverage alongside the already mentioned stories during the 25th and 26th of March were on the [GOOD party sacking former Springbok coach, Peter De Villiers](#) from the party after he was found guilty of sexual misconduct; the IEC reportedly needing a new National Results Operation Centre after the current one which is reported to have been used since 1994 was found to have been "[neglected and vandalised that it is unusable](#)". Senegal was also in the news during the spike with [Bassirou Diomaye Faye, a former prisoner winning the presidency](#) in the country's elections.

While not the biggest spike, the first spike at 10% was recorded on 18th March, 2024 and one of the big stories dominating on this day was on the clash between Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and ANC in Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN) in which at least [16 people are reported to have been injured](#).

TOP 5 TOPICS

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

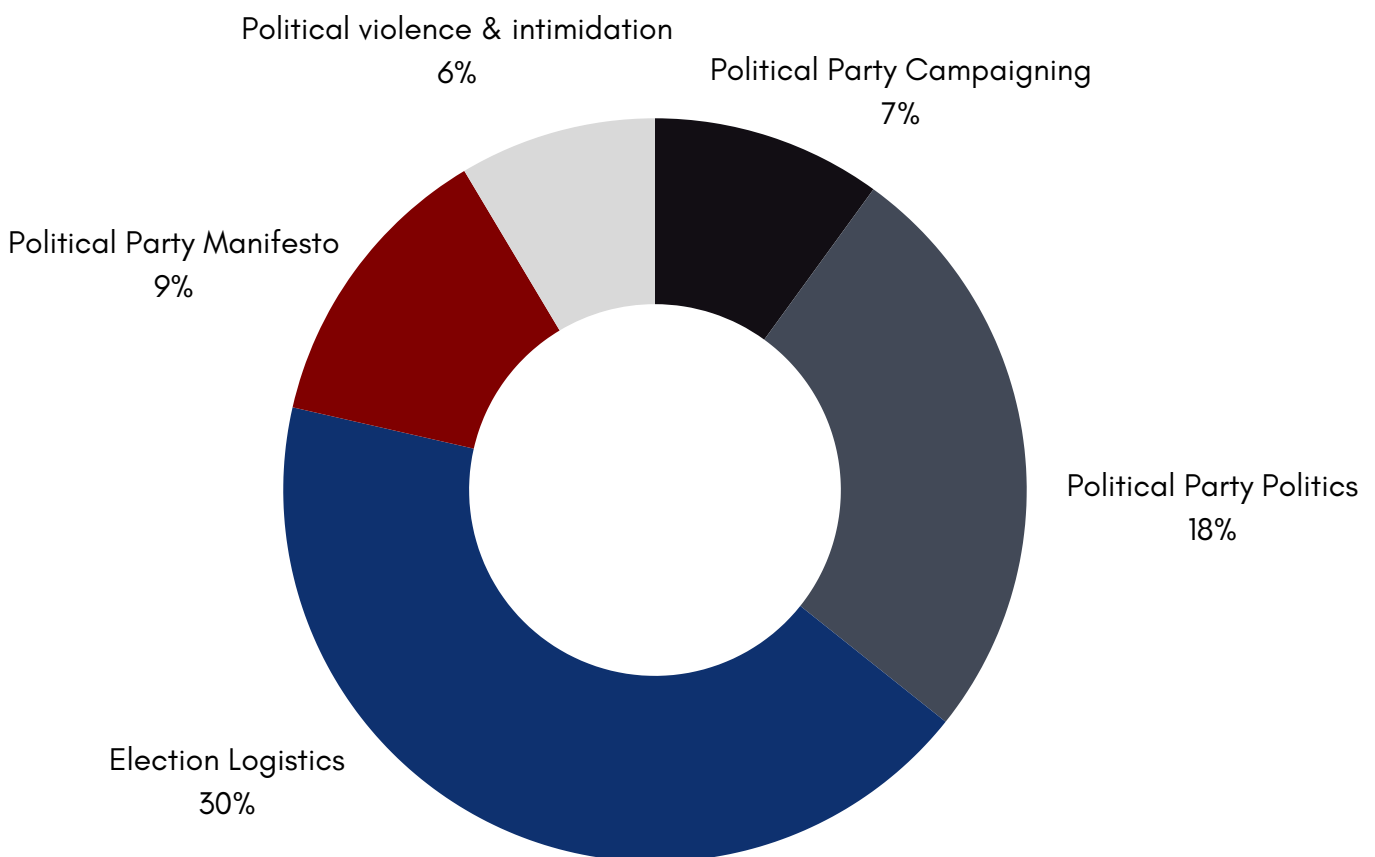


Figure 2: Top 5 topics in coverage

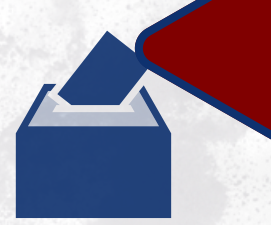


Figure 2 above shows which topics were prioritised by the media during the monitoring period. As can be seen, the top 5 topics garnered a combined coverage share of 70% leaving only 30% to be shared among the 9 election related topics which include voter education and service delivery. During the previous monitoring period, the top 5 topics had a combined coverage share of 77% with 'election logistics' leading at 30%, just as is the case during this monitoring period where 'election logistics' is leading at 30% still.

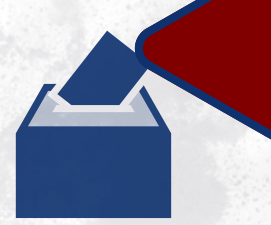
Of note in Figure 2 is the topic, 'political violence & intimidation' at 6% which has replaced the topic, 'election funding' which occupied the last slot on the top 5 topics in the previous monitoring period. Coverage of the [clash between ANC and IFP](#) in KZN where at least 16 people were left injured could have contributed to the topic, 'political violence & intimidation' featuring on the top 5 list of dominating topics in coverage. The clash is reported to have been as a result of ANC KZN chairperson, Siboniso Duma grabbing a microphone from Zulu prime minister, Thulasizwe Buthelezi.

The dominance of the topic, 'election logistics' during this and the previous monitoring period suggests that media coverage is focussed on the logistics being put in place by both the IEC and the political parties and candidates as they prepare for May, 29th. MMA submits that coverage of the NPE should be more issue-based than event-based in order to empower the over 27 million people who have registered to vote, and more people.

TOP 10 PARTY & ELECTIONS RELATED GROUP COVERAGE

There are reportedly 350 political parties that have been registered to contest in this year's elections. While the actual list of candidates is yet to be released, this number, coupled with the fact that in this year's NPE, Independent candidates are allowed to contest, means that the media has a tougher job in ensuring every political party and candidate gets equitable representation in coverage. It is given though that there will be some political parties that will dominate in media coverage.

Figure 3 below shows just how much some political parties are dominating. The graph shows which political parties, which elections-related groups and which sectors including the public featured on the top 10 list of most reported political parties/groups.



TOP 10 PARTY & ELECTIONS RELATED GROUP COVERAGE

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

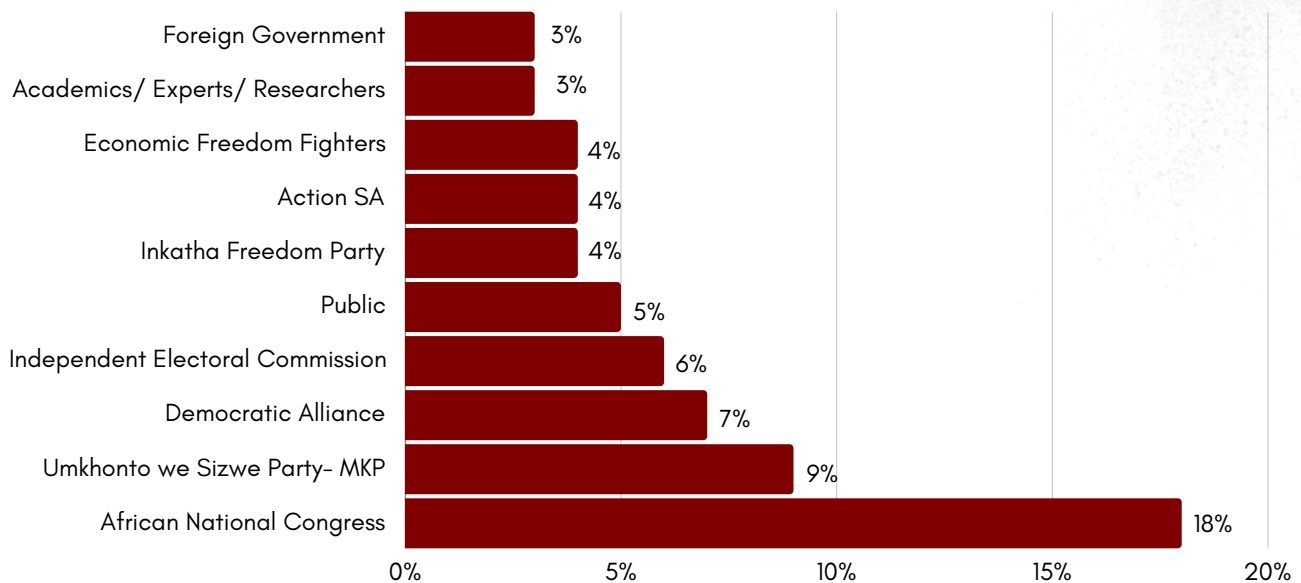


Figure 3: Top 10 political party/group coverage

As can be seen in the graph above, the ANC dominated coverage at 18%. Following behind with half the ANC's coverage share is the MK Party with a 9% coverage share.

The affiliation, 'Academics/Experts/Researchers' garnered a coverage share of 6% in the previous monitoring period and sadly, this figure has dropped to 3% in this period as can be seen in the graph above. The decrease in the voice share for academics, experts and researchers could be attributed to the fact that there was more event-based reporting (political party campaigning, political party manifesto launches, and political violence and intimidation shown in Figure 2 above) in this monitoring period compared of the previous one. MMA has found that when coverage is event-based, experts rarely feature as sources. Additionally, in the previous monitoring period, the topic, 'election funding' featured on the top 5 list of topics and experts were featured in that coverage as sources than in any other issue save for the coverage on the National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill.

MMA emphasises the need to have more academics, experts and researchers in media coverage of the NPE as this would help with unpacking several topics/issues and, providing expert views to issues prioritised by political parties and candidates and, the media.

MMA commends the media for featuring the public in the election discourse during this monitoring period, albeit only at 5%. Voices from the general public were not featured on the top 10 list in the previous monitoring period. The affiliation, 'public' has been used in this case to inclusively represent South Africans and all who live in it. Previously, 'ordinary citizens' was used.

Below is the countdown of the top 5 sources for the period of monitoring;

Number 5 - Public at 5%: Voices from the general public featured on the top 10 list of most reported political parties/groups largely due to the [clash between ANC and the IFP](#) in KZN where at least 16 people were injured. Members of the public were featured as sources in the coverage. This, together with the few other instances where ordinary voices were accessed as sources in coverage, could have contributed to this crucial voice featuring on the top 10 list above. MMA submits that in coverage of the NPE, the public should be featured as sources to not bring diversity to who speaks in coverage but also to empower the public to participate adequately and effectively in the NPE discourse. After all, elections should be about the people.

Number 4 - IEC at 6%: The IEC was mostly featured in news around the ANC's court application to have the MK Party [deregistered](#) and the [Electoral Court's decision](#) on this. In this story, the IEC argued that the MK Party registration was not unlawful. The MK Party is reported to have initially submitted fraudulent signatures in its first application to the IEC with the IEC rejecting the application. The MK Party reportedly submitted correct details the second time and was registered. Other news in which the IEC featured that could have contributed to the entity featuring on the top 10 list above was around the Independent and political party [candidates list](#) where [42 candidates were found to be on multiple party lists](#). Other news stories where the IEC featured were on the [90 million ballot papers](#) to be printed by the entity for the upcoming NPE, the entity commenting on [election violence](#) and, the entity [reportedly](#) needing a new National Results Operational Centre, among other big stories.

Number 3 - DA at 7%: The [DA's letter](#) to the United States of America, the European Union and reportedly other countries as well as other political parties' reaction to this could have contributed to the party featuring third on the top 10 list shown above. Media reports suggest that the DA wrote to these foreign governments requesting for resources for independent domestic observers ahead of the NPE. Other news stories that could have helped catapult the DA from the 8th slot in the previous brief with 4% of coverage to 3rd slot in this brief were around the party's candidates list which the DA says is diverse in "[race, gender and skill](#)". Another story with the DA featuring as a source was on the party's threats of legal action after [the expropriation bill passed](#) in the National Council Of Provinces.

Number 2 - MK Party at 9%: Coverage that could have contributed to the MK Party featuring second on the top 10 list of most reported political parties/groups in NPE coverage was mostly centred on ANC's court application to have the party deregistered and barred from contesting the NPE, the [Electoral Court's judgment](#) on this, the MK Party's [reaction to the judgment, sentiments](#) on the party, the [ANC planning more legal action](#) against the party and, the MK Party's [election campaigns](#) gearing up for 29th May.

Number 1 – ANC at 18%: The ANC got the majority of the coverage share on the top 10 list of most reported political parties /groups due to dominating stories on the party’s [court application](#) to have the MK Party deregistered, the [ANC’s plans for more legal action](#) against the MK Party, its [clashes](#) with IFP in KZN, calls for the ANC’s KZN provincial chairperson’s [disciplinary action](#) after he grabbed the microphone from the Zulu prime minister and, the party’s released [candidates list](#).

GENDER REPRESENTATION OF SOURCES

Gender representation of sources

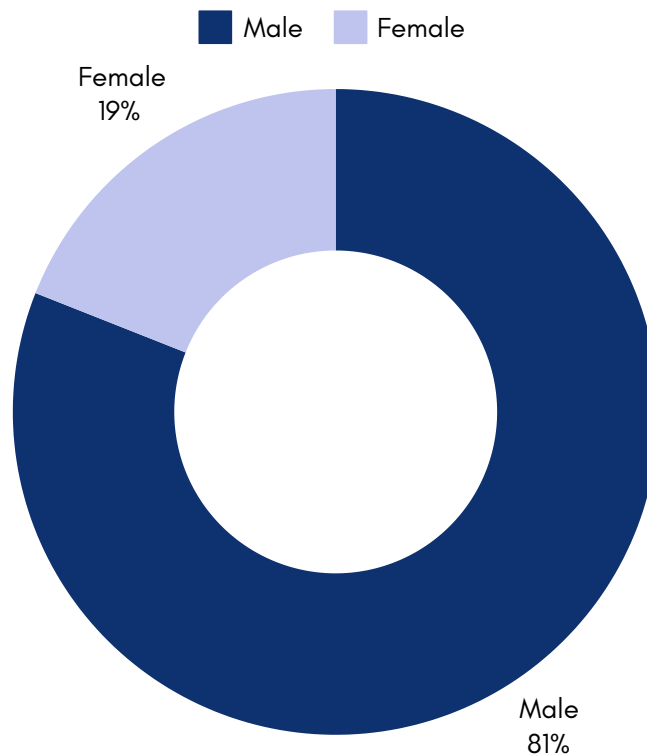


Figure 4: Gender representation of sources in coverage of NPE


There has been a 3% increase in female voices in media coverage of the NPE from the 16% recorded in the previous monitoring period to the 19%, as shown above. While this is noted as a slight increase, it is still far from being adequate to be considered significant and equitable representation of women in media coverage of this year’s elections. It also is still too small a percentage to help bridge the existing gap in media representation of women in South Africa.


According to [IEC data](#), there are more women registered voters in this year’s elections. A deeper dive into the data reveals that in all the different age groups registered to vote, women are the majority. Additionally, there are more women in South Africa with a population [percentage of 52](#).

With all these statistics, why then are women marginalised in media coverage of the NPE? Further, what could be done to raise the representation of women in this year’s elections coverage? MMA welcomes views on this.

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