

CLIMATE CHANGE IN MEDIA COVERAGE:

A PRIORITY DURING BRICS SUMMIT?



By Jacques Ndong

Edited by Lister Namumba

Designed by Kgothatso Baatile Mohale

MEDIAMONITORING
• • • • • **AFRICA**

1. INTRODUCTION

Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) undertook a concise yet comprehensive investigation to assess the prominence of climate change discourse within South African media in the lead-up to, during, and following the BRICS summit convened in Johannesburg from August 22nd to August 24th, 2023. The BRICS acronym denotes the collective of the five largest emerging market economies, encompassing Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, constituting a significant 27% of the global Gross Domestic Product and representing 42% of the world's population. Originally composed solely of these founding nations until recent expansions, the BRICS platform holds substantial influence on global economic and political dynamics.

MMA's commitment to monitoring media coverage of climate change since 2020 provided a foundational backdrop for this investigation. With a critical awareness of climate change's pressing urgency, MMA aimed to discern whether this critical issue received the warranted attention from both leadership and media during the 2023 BRICS summit. The analysis delved into the quantity of coverage, the prominence of various sources within the discourse, and the prevailing themes surrounding climate change throughout the monitoring period. By scrutinising a comprehensive dataset comprising over 690 articles gleaned from more than 60 [1] South African print and online media sources, MMA employed its internal monitoring tool, Dexter, to meticulously collect and analyse pertinent news stories. To ensure the integrity of the findings, a rigorous manual quality control process was implemented by the MMA team. This methodological approach afforded a nuanced understanding of the evolving narrative surrounding climate change in conjunction with the BRICS summit, spanning from the 22nd of July, 2023 to the 15th of September. This scope facilitated a coarse examination of the ebbs and flows in media coverage, illuminating shifts in attention and emphasis before, during, and after the summit proceedings.



[1] Some of the media monitored: Daily Maverick, Fin24, Eyewitness news, News24, SABC online news, Daily Dispatch, The Citizen, Sowetan, Daily Sun, The Herald, Politics web, Sunday World, Business Day, eNCA online, The Conversation, City Press, Mining Technology, Mail & Guardian, The Witness, Daily News, Ground-Up

FINDINGS

Article count over time

- Prior to the BRICS summit, climate change media coverage remained consistent, with an average of about 91 articles weekly between July 22 nd and August 18 th . This is shown in Figure 1 below.
- During this period, the focus predominantly centred on climate change governance and adaptation, with mentions of G20 climate governance possibly setting the stage for summit discussions.
- However, during the summit week, while media coverage rose to 257 articles, politics and economics dominated discourse, indicating that climate change may not have been a top agenda item despite some coverage, particularly on topics like Green Energy.

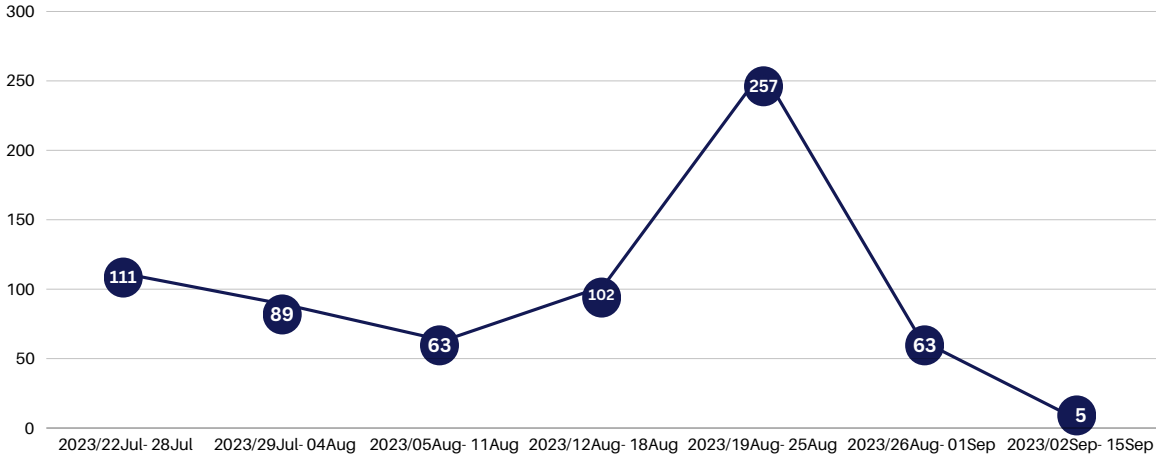


Figure 1: Amount of media coverage

Top 5 topics

Top five topics
(which is 87% of all coded topics)

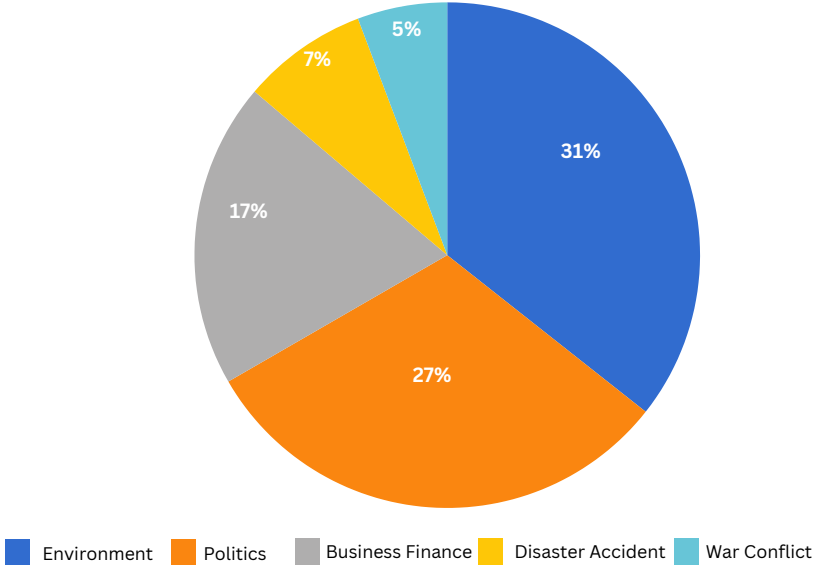


Figure 2: Top 5 topics in media coverage

- Figure 2 above shows that environmental issues (31%) and political considerations (27%) dominated media coverage of climate change during the summit, comprising 58% of the discourse.
- Discussions within the environmental discourse revolve around governance strategies, including policies related to climate regulation and sustainability initiatives.
- Political narratives predominantly address renewable energy policies and governmental approaches to mitigating climate change impacts, highlighting the intersection between environmental concerns and political decision-making processes.

Affiliation of sources

- Affiliation of sources is crucial for nuanced understanding in climate change discourse, ensuring diversity in coverage.
- Foreign governments are the most accessed source, comprising 25% of voice share, aligning with focus on heads of states during the monitoring period.
- The Presidency closely follows with 17% of voice share, while media/journalists lag at 3%, indicating a need for enhanced climate change journalism.
- Academic/researchers which also includes experts, with only 5% coverage, underscore the importance of including scientific perspectives, emphasising the need for greater representation from varied stakeholders for a comprehensive understanding of climate change.

**Affiliation of sources
(which is 76% of all sources)**

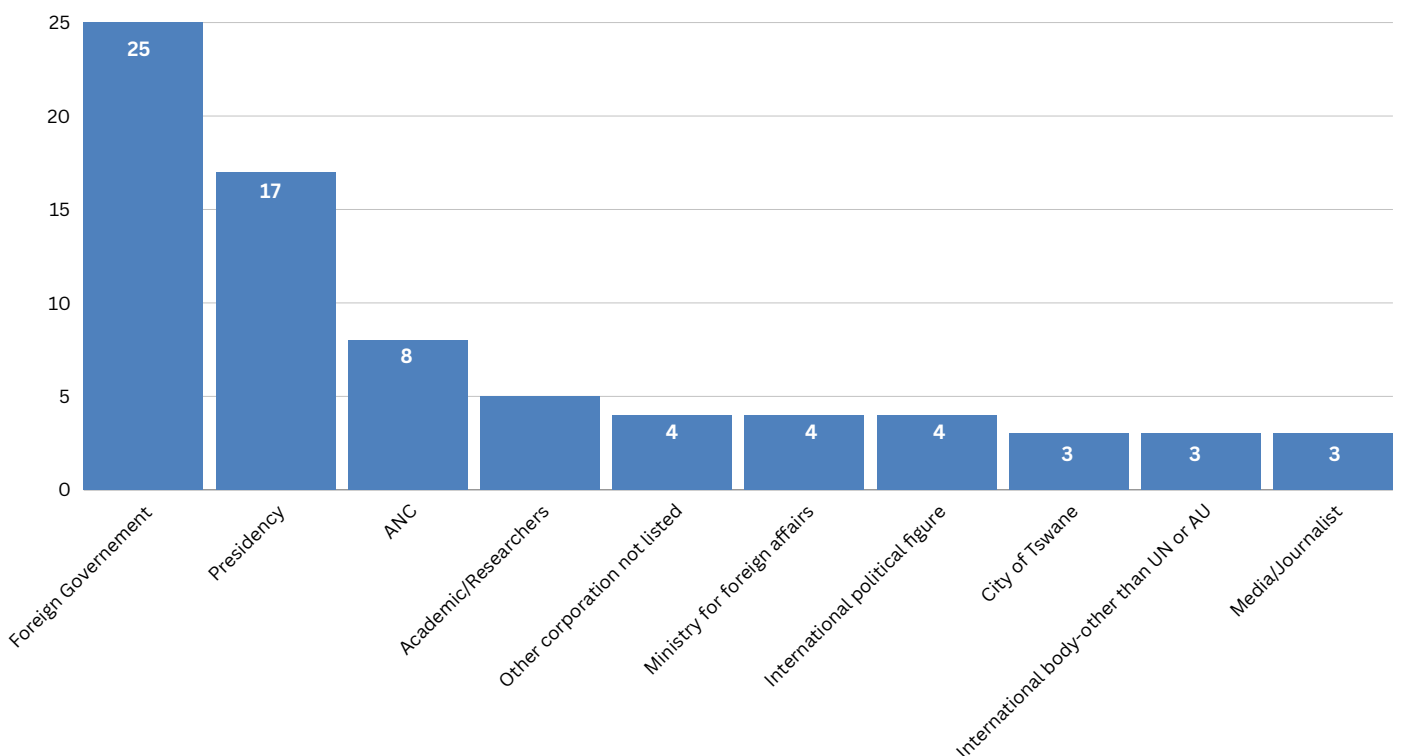


Figure 3: Affiliation of sources in media coverage

Gender breakdown of sources

- Gender inequality persists in media coverage of climate change, with women significantly underrepresented compared to men, comprising only 14% of sources as shown in Figure 4 below.
- Increasing women's representation as sources in climate change media coverage is essential for promoting balanced representation and challenging gender stereotypes.
- By amplifying women's voices in climate change discourse, the media can contribute to breaking down biases, fostering inclusivity, and enriching the diversity of perspectives, ultimately leading to more effective solutions for addressing climate challenges.

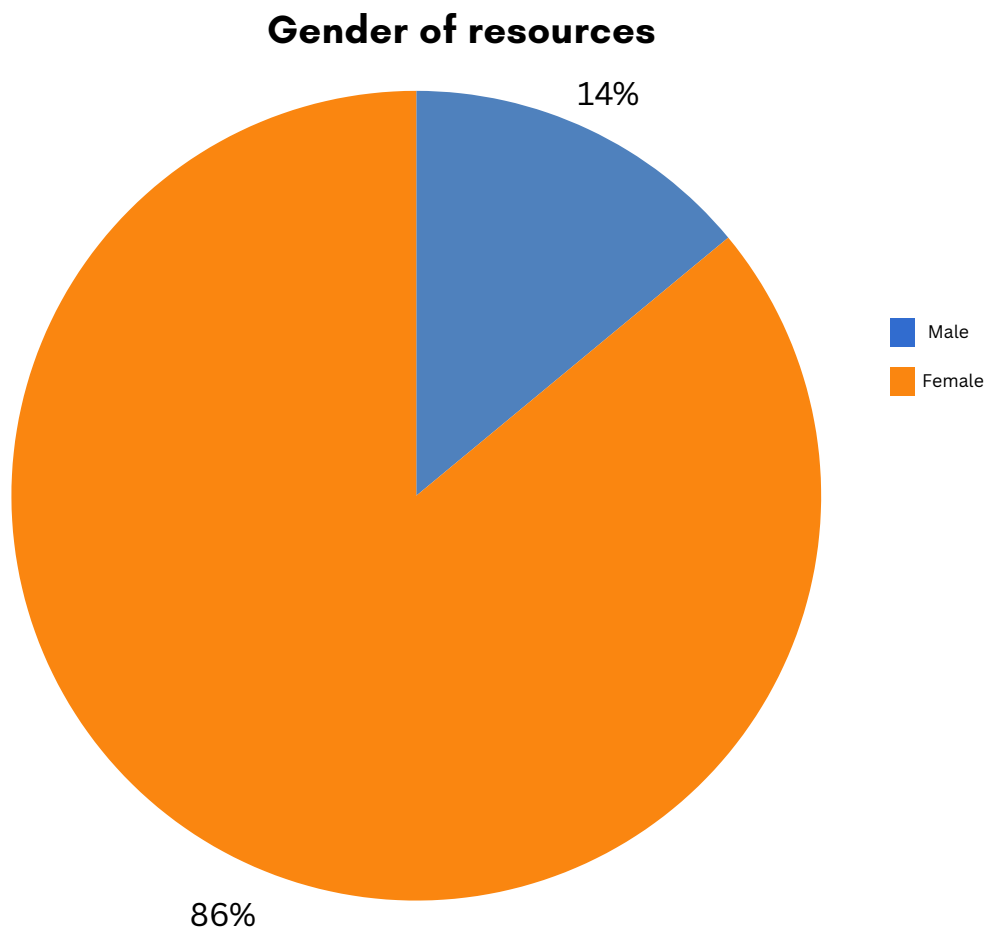


Figure 4: Gender breakdown of sources in media coverage



Racial breakdown of sources

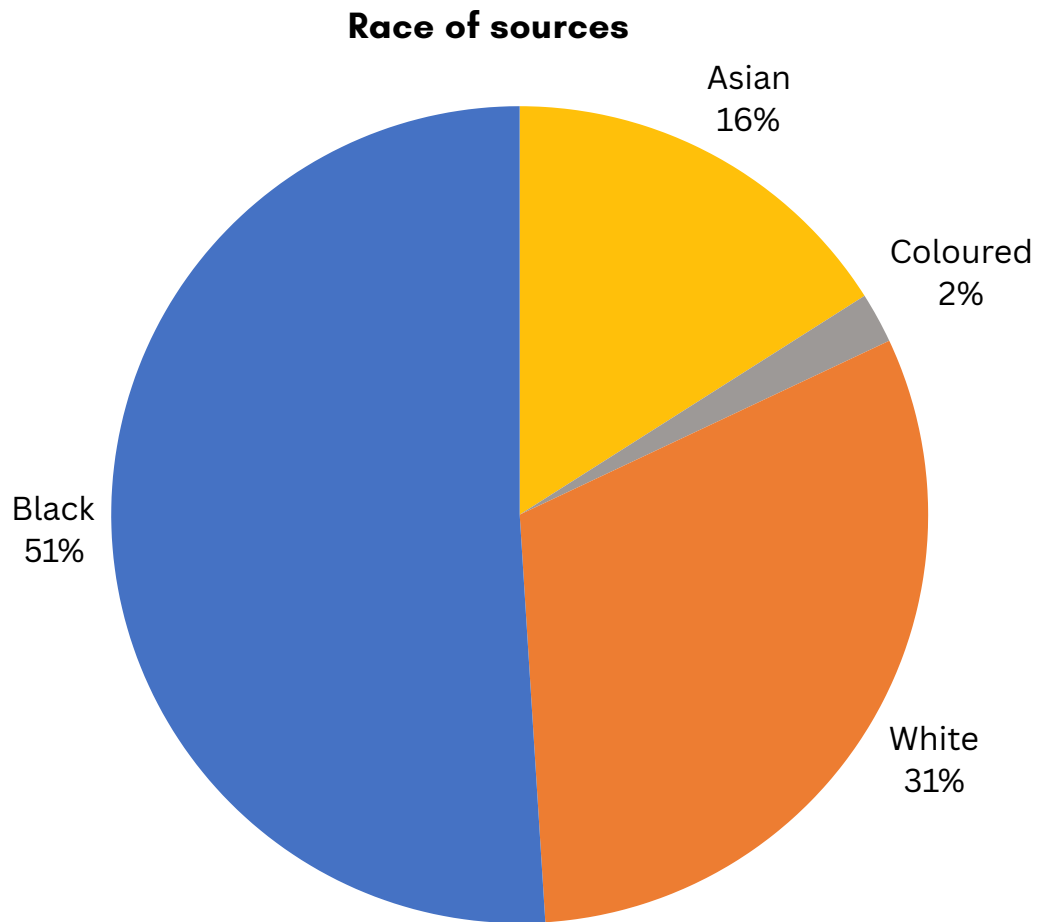


Figure 5: Racial breakdown of sources

- Monitoring race representation in climate change coverage in South Africa reveals that black voices dominated at 51% of sources. The increased coverage of the presidency and South African politicians during the BRICS summit likely contributed to the rise in black voices, signaling a positive trend towards diverse representation in climate change reporting.
- While progress is evident, disparities persist, with white voices at 31%, Asian voices at 16%, and coloured voices significantly underrepresented at 2%. Despite reflecting population demographics, this disparity underscores the ongoing need for equitable representation of all races in media coverage of climate change to ensure diverse perspectives inform decision-making processes.

Top 10 media with most coverage

Top 10 media (which is 71% of all coverage)

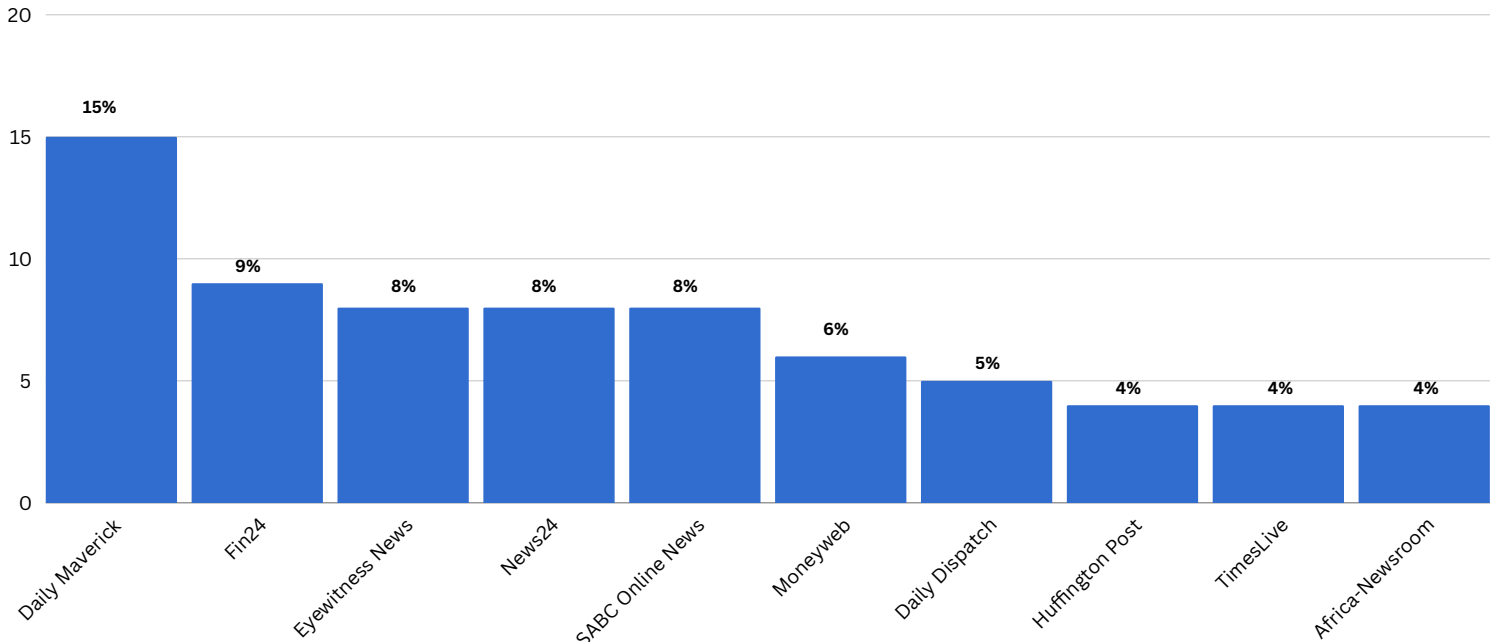


Figure 6: Top 10 media with most coverage

- Figure 6 above provides an overview of climate change coverage by over 60 monitored media outlets during the BRICS summit, highlighting the Top 10 media with a combined coverage share of 71%.
- Notably, *Daily Maverick* leads with 15% coverage, followed by *Fin24* (9%) and *Eyewitness News* (8%), consistent with previous climate change reports, suggesting a trend in these media outlets consistently prioritising climate coverage.
- While there is a significant disparity in coverage percentages among the Top 10, the consistent appearance of the same media names indicates a need for broader engagement from other media outlets to elevate climate change coverage.
- MMA urges other media outlets to increase their coverage of climate change. This is imperative, given the media's critical importance in addressing issues like rising global temperatures and sea levels, which, if left unaddressed, could lead to more devastating effects in South Africa and worldwide.

CONCLUSION



Based on the findings highlighted above, climate change did not emerge as a top priority in media coverage during the BRICS summit. While there was a notable surge in coverage during the summit week, particularly regarding politics and economics, climate change received less attention and was not the primary focus of discourse. This is evident from the fact that environmental and political considerations collectively constituted the majority of coverage, with governance strategies and policies related to climate regulation and sustainability taking precedence.

Furthermore, the analysis revealed disparities in the representation of sources, with foreign governments and the Presidency dominating the discourse, while media/journalists and academic/researchers/experts were notably underrepresented. This imbalance suggests a potential oversight in providing diverse perspectives on climate change issues, which are essential for a comprehensive understanding and informed public discourse.

Moreover, gender and racial breakdowns of sources also underscored existing inequalities in media coverage, with women and minority voices significantly underrepresented compared to their male and white counterparts. While some progress was evident, particularly with an increase in black voices, disparities persisted, highlighting the ongoing need for equitable representation of all races and genders in climate change reporting.


In conclusion, while the media covered various aspects of the BRICS summit extensively, climate change did not receive the warranted attention, indicating a potential gap in addressing this critical issue.


Moving forward, efforts should be made to enhance climate change journalism, amplify diverse voices, and promote balanced representation to ensure comprehensive coverage of climate-related issues and facilitate informed public discourse.



Contact us.



 listerra@mma.org.za

 011 788 1278

 www.mediamonitoringafrica.org

 @Mediamattersza

 @Mediamattersza

 Media Monitoring Africa

 Media Monitoring Africa