

2021 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS MEDIA COVERAGE

WEEKLY TRENDS

13th October 2021 - 24th October 2021

By Lister Namumba



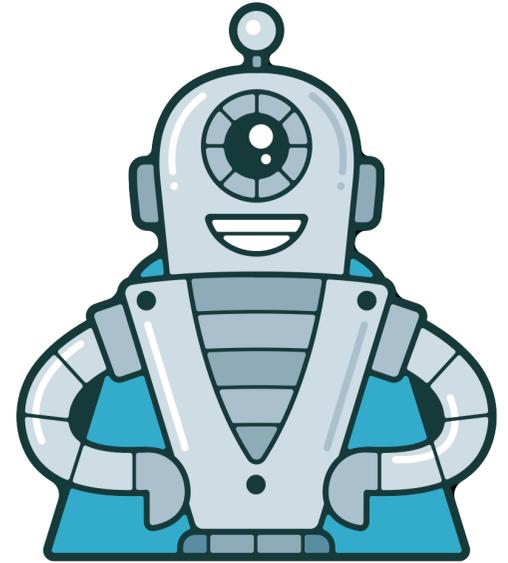
INTRODUCTION

Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) is monitoring selected media's coverage of the run up to the 2021 Local Government Elections (LGE) to determine what issues are considered a priority by the media, check whether political parties and/or their candidates are represented fairly and without bias and, whether there is an equitable representation of the different racial and gender groups, among other things. An [interim report with findings](#) from a 31 day monitoring period has already been published and an in-depth overall analysis will be written at the end of the election monitoring period.

The following brief analysis shows what and who dominated media coverage from the 13th of October to the 24th of October, 2021.

A total of **957 stories on local government elections** were recorded in this monitoring period. The **last monitoring period had a total of 570 stories averaging to 71 stories per day** including weekends during that period. The **957 stories recorded during this monitoring period works out as an average of 80 stories per day** including weekends where there are always significantly less stories.

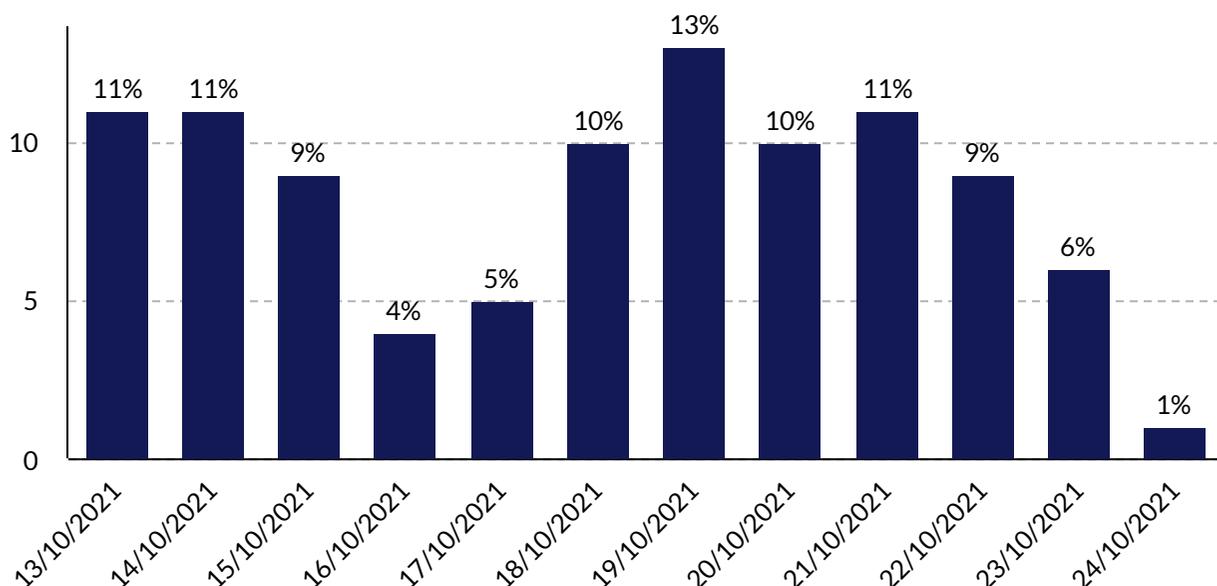
Even though this data is from a longer monitoring period of 12 days compared to the previous period of eight days, the average calculated above indicates clear emphasis on elections by the media and this increase in elections stories is typical of media trends at this time.



DEXTER
MEDIA MONITORING AFRICA INITIATIVE

DAILY LGE STORIES ARTICLE COUNT

1. Daily LGE Stories (as % of total for the two week)



With only a few days to voting day, the media coverage of the 2021 local government elections has increased tremendously. One likely cause of the increase is the frantic efforts by parties and candidates to campaign all over South Africa in an effort to convince the electorate to vote for them. This is evident in the type of stories that are dominating media coverage as shown in figure two. Figure one shows that coverage during the entire 12 day monitoring period has been consistent and only dropping to a low of four or five percent during weekend days.

The 19th of October, 2021, according to the graph above, recorded the highest amount of coverage on or relating to the 2021 local government elections. A deeper analysis of the stories that made the news on this day reveals that coverage of the [R255 million tender corruption case against suspended African National Congress \(ANC\) Secretary-General and former Free State Premier, Ace Magashule](#) could have contributed to the spike. Magashule is accused along with others of theft, corruption and money laundering. He and the others face over 70 charges according to the coverage.

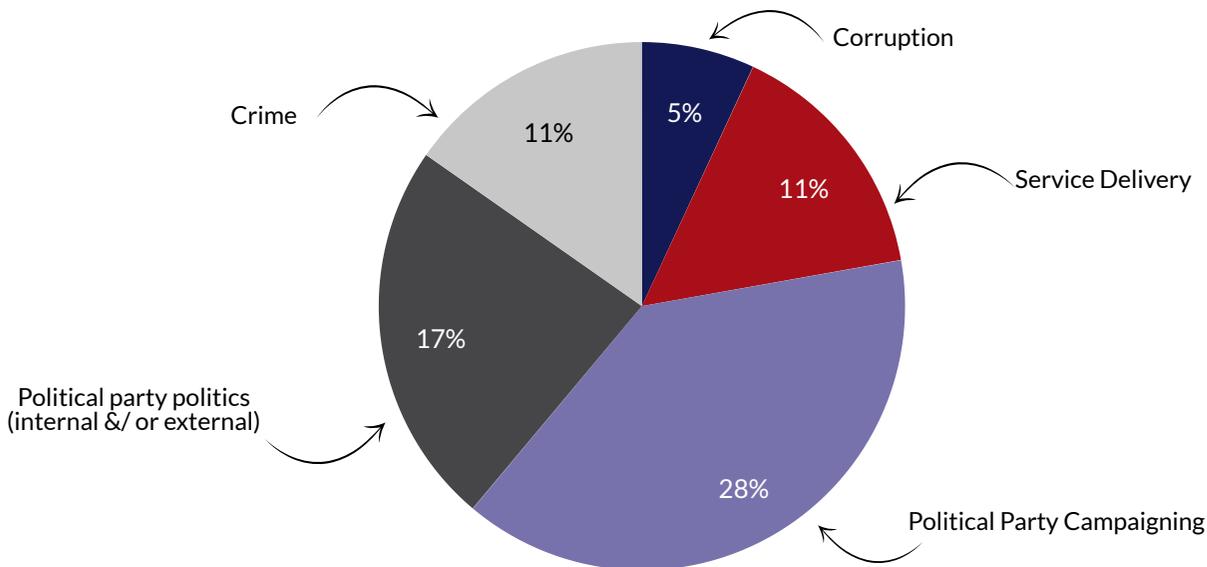
Other coverage on the 19th of October was on the [killing of ANC candidate for ward 101 in Kwa-Zulu Natal \(KZN\), Siyabonga Mkhize](#) and more on the [killing of Economic Freedom Fighters \(EFF\) councillor for ward 20 in Msunduzi in KZN, Thulani Shangase](#). More coverage on political killings were on [“convicted murderer and political hitman”, Fisokuhle Ntuli](#). According to coverage of this, Ntuli killed ANC councillor, Thami Nyembe in 2016 and is also linked to 10 other cases.

The [murder case involving Mpumalanga MEC](#) for agriculture, Mandla Msibi and his subsequent release on bail was also in the news on this day.

These stories above not only contributed to the spike on the 19th of October but also helped in getting topics like crime and corruption on the list of top five topics as will be shown in the next section. Despite the 19th of October also being [Black Wednesday](#), it seemed the parties and the media missed an opportunity to focus on and highlight the importance of media and media freedom in an election period.

TOP FIVE TOPICS

2. What are the stories about? (Top 5 which is 72% of all coded stories)



As per the graph above, the top five coded topics on or relating to the 2021 local government elections had a combined coverage share of 72% with the topic, political party campaigning dominating coverage at 28%.

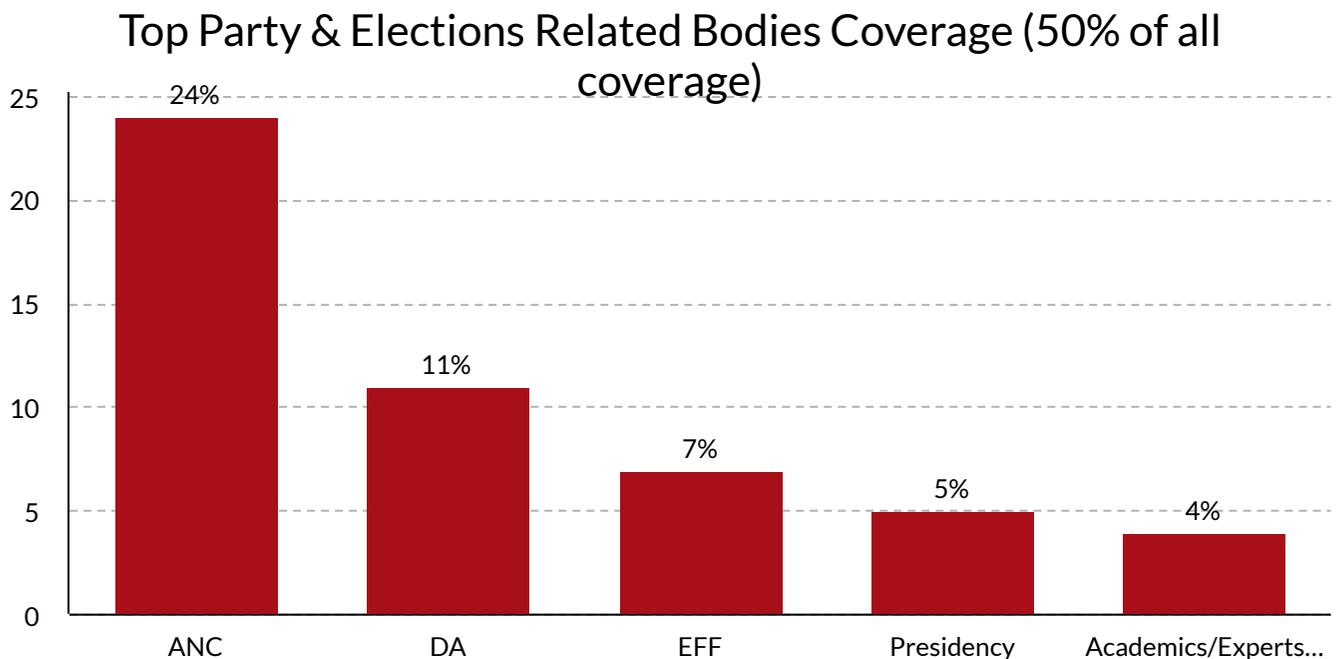
In MMA's recently released interim report of media's coverage of the local government elections and indeed in previous briefs such as this one, the topic service delivery did not feature on the top five list of topics. However and possibly influenced by the recommendations made by MMA and included in the widely distributed report, some media appear to have made a greater effort to report on service delivery related issues as can be seen from the graph above. As a result service delivery focused stories accounted for 11% of the coverage. The featuring of service delivery on the list of top five topics could also be due to political parties and candidates focusing on service delivery in their campaigning. As MMA's previous monitoring exercises have consistently revealed, the media agenda tends to be synonymous with what features on the political parties' agenda. Whatever the case, the greater attention on service delivery related issues is encouraging. While MMA appreciates that the topic is featuring on the top five list, we find it concerning that citizens and especially women are not speaking in this coverage, as is highlighted in figures below.

[R255 million tender corruption case against suspended ANC Secretary-General and former Free State Premier, Ace Magashule](#)

Just as is the case with service delivery, it is also positive that issues such as crime and corruption albeit negative, are featuring on the list of top five topics at 11% and five percent respectively. What is concerning, however, about the appearance of the two topics on the list is the fact that they are not featuring in media's coverage because political parties and candidates are discussing ways of addressing the two once voted into power. Crime featured on the list mostly because of coverage of the killings of [ANC candidate for ward 101 in Kwa-Zulu Natal \(KZN\), Siyabonga Mkhize](#), of [Economic Freedom Fighters \(EFF\) councillor for ward 20 in Msunduzi in KZN, Thulani Shangase](#) and of [ANC's former deputy chairperson, Zibuse Mlaba](#). All these killings occurred within the space of a week.

Stories that could have contributed to the topic, corruption to feature on the top five list were mostly on the [R255 million tender corruption case against suspended ANC Secretary-General and former Free State Premier, Ace Magashule](#)

TOP FIVE PARTY & ELECTIONS RELATED BODIES COVERAGE



The total number of parties sourced (i.e. where they speak or were mentioned) in the media monitored during the monitoring period for affiliation of sources was 1,504. The graph above only shows the top five affiliations and as can be seen, the top five affiliations dominated media coverage as sources with a combined total voice share of 51%.

Out of the [325 political parties contesting the 2021 local government elections](#), only the ANC, the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the EFF seem to be enjoying significant media coverage with these three political parties commanding a combined coverage share of 42%. While it is expected that the top three political parties get a bigger coverage share as they have the majority seats in the national assembly, it is concerning that smaller political parties will really struggle to secure adequate coverage, which is a concern given that these are local government elections. While these political parties and others that did not make the top five list were in coverage of specific events related to the local government elections, majority of the coverage was on the parties on campaign trails.

What is also concerning is that the voice of citizens continues to be neglected by the media in coverage of the 2021 local government elections. Since the beginning of our monitoring, citizens have never featured on the top five list of groups and parties speaking in media coverage of the elections. Our interim report with findings from a 31-day monitoring period showed that during that period, citizens only spoke at six percent.

In the same interim report, MMA highlighted the need and importance of having sources such as experts speak in coverage of the local government elections. It is encouraging that for the first time since this monitoring began, the voices of experts are significantly higher in these weeks' monitored items albeit at only four percent.

Below is the countdown of sources for the period of monitoring:

5 **Number 5 – Academics/Experts/Researchers at 4%:** Appearing for the first time on the list of top five groups and political parties speaking in media coverage of the local government elections, academics, experts and/or researchers mostly spoke in media coverage where they were weighing in on [coalition governments](#), [Covid-19 vaccinations](#) and on the court case involving the over [50 military veterans accused of holding three government officials hostage](#). Other coverage where experts were speaking was on the [killings in KZN, many of which are believed to be political](#).

4 **Number 4 – The Presidency at 5%:** At five percent, the Presidency is quoted or mentioned mostly in coverage where he is called on to fire Minister of the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy, [Gwede Mantashe who is believed to be “a climate denier”](#) and therefore not a suitable person to be in charge of a ministry that is tasked to fight climate change. President Cyril Ramaphosa was also in coverage where [he was being blamed for the taking hostage](#) of the Minister in the Presidency Mondli Gungubele, Defence Minister Thandi Modise and her deputy, Thabang Makwetla by veterans.

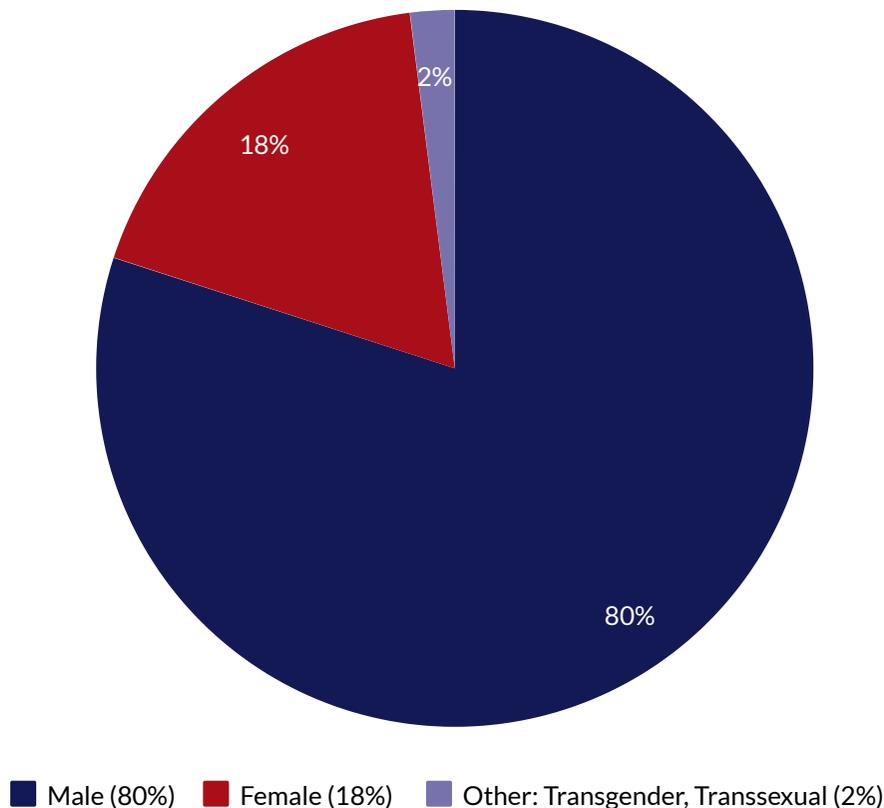
3 **Number 3 – The EFF at 7%:** The EFF has featured constantly on the list of top five groups or political parties speaking in coverage of the local government elections even though the party’s position has varied from third to fifth. During this monitoring period, the EFF was in coverage of its party’s councillor for [ward 20 in Msunduzi in KZN, Thulani Shangase](#) who was killed in KZN. The EFF was also in coverage of the [Cape Town high court case against the City of Cape Town who had told the EFF to remove its election banner](#) as it was against city by-laws.

2 **Number 2 – The DA at 11%:** The DA has maintained its second spot on the top five list save for the previous monitoring period where the party topped the list of sources. In this monitoring period, the DA was mostly in coverage revealing that its mayoral candidate for Central Karoo, [Derick Welgemoed owed the municipality more than R600 000](#) in arrears. Other coverage with the DA as a source was on the remarks made by its leader, John Steenhuisen on [people not voting for smaller political parties as that would “split the opposition vote”](#). The stories on the [sexual harassment case against the DA’s Ekurhuleni council caucus chairperson, Shadow Shabangu](#) “finally” making it to court could have also contributed to the DA commanding a voice share of 11% and so could have the coverage on the willingness by the [DA to enter into a coalition with a party if the party does not get the 51% of vote to govern Johannesburg](#).

1 **Number 1 – The ANC at 24%:** The ANC dominated coverage of the 2021 local government elections during this monitoring period with stories such as those on the killing of its [candidate for ward 101 in Kwa-Zulu Natal \(KZN\), Siyabonga Mkhize](#) and the [R255 million tender corruption case against suspended its Secretary-General and former Free State Premier, Ace Magashule](#). Other news with the ANC as a source was on the continued [murder case involving Mpumalanga MEC for agriculture, Mandla Msibi](#) as well as the holding [hostage of Defence Minister, Thandi Modise, her deputy, Thabang Makwetla and Minister in the Presidency, Mondli Gungubele by military veterans](#).

GENDER OF SOURCES

Gender of sources



It is greatly concerning that with only a few days to elections, women are still not heard enough in coverage of the 2021 local government elections. At 52% of South Africa's population, both women candidates and the female electorate should be fairly and equitably represented in the media. However, this is not so as can be seen from the graph above. During this monitoring period, women spoke in coverage of the local government elections at only 18%, showing that the media seems to be favouring men as sources at 80%. What is also concerning is that the media seems to have put sources in brackets of either male or female by continuously neglecting the voices of those that identify as transgender or transsexual etc.

MMA is concerned that if women do not speak in media coverage on critical local government issues, issues facing them will continue to be neglected and marginalised. In addition the omission of women's voices helps perpetuate the stereotypes that women are not important enough to speak on issues or do not have the necessary expertise.

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