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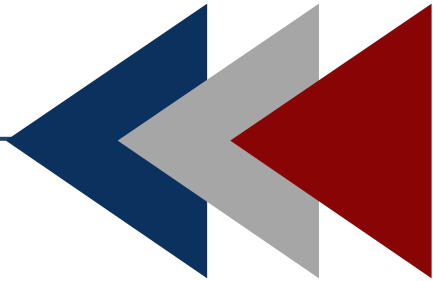
PRIORITIES IN SONA

An analysis of media's coverage of 2023 SONA

Written by Lister Namumba

Edited by Thandi Smith

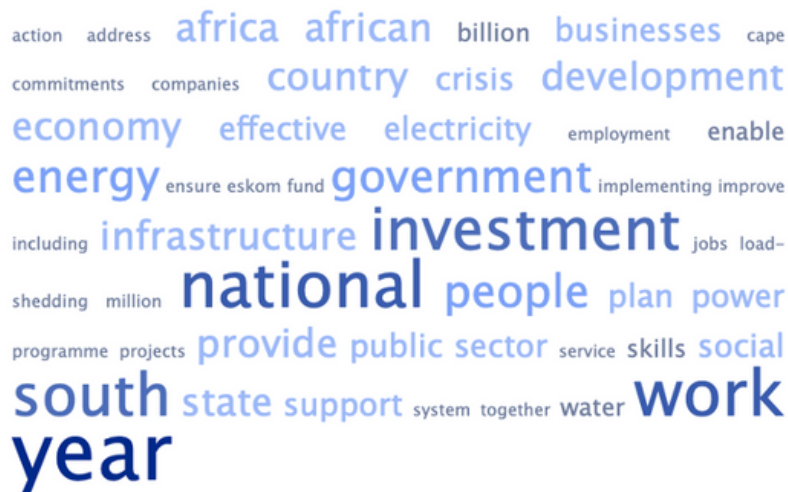




1. INTRODUCTION

On the 9th of February, 2023, President Cyril Ramaphosa delivered the state of the nation address (SONA) – an address made yearly to communicate government’s commitments to developing the country and improving the lives of South Africans.

Load shedding, unemployment, poverty and the rising cost of living, crime and corruption are listed as “issues that concern South Africans the most” in President Cyril Ramaphosa’s 2023 SONA.[1] Indeed, these are issues that South Africans are grappling with. The Bureau for Economic Research lists unemployment and corruption among the top issues the country is facing[2] and a look at the crime statistics suggests crime is also among the top issues being faced in the country. Loadshedding, one of the topics that dominates media coverage, is also a large issue in the country.



Word Cloud: SONA 2023

Given that the issues listed above are considered important to the public, it is equally important to analyse and understand media’s coverage of SONA to determine the extent to which news media covered the issues, and what they didn’t cover.

Other than issues being prioritised in media coverage, it is also important to analyse the sources including dynamics such as gender, race and affiliation to not only draw a conclusion as to who holds the most power but to also determine whether ordinary citizens are speaking as sources in coverage of SONA, especially that ordinary citizens bear the brunt of the listed issues.

[1] <https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/speeches/state-nation-address-president-cyril-ramaphosa%2C-cape-town-city-hall>

[2] <https://businesstech.co.za/news/trending/575280/top-10-problems-in-south-africa-that-need-governments-urgent-attention/>

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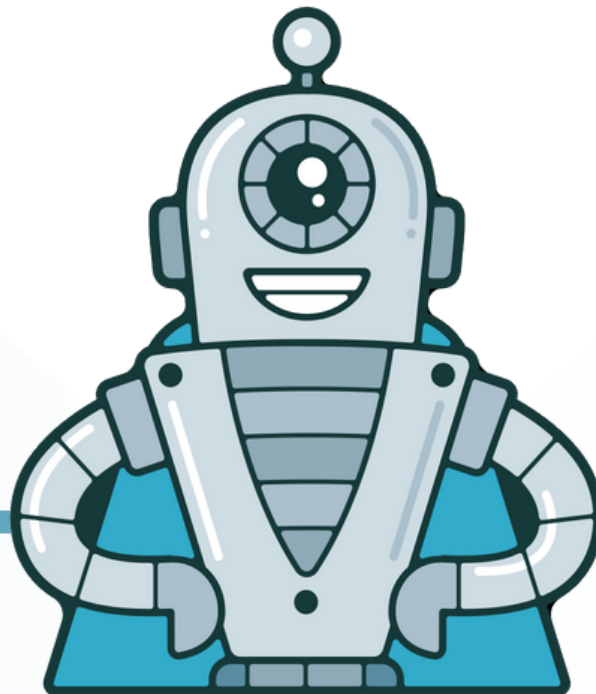
Media Monitoring Africa (MMA)'s analysis report presents data that looked at South African news items published over a period of 15 days starting on the 6th and ending on the 20th of February, 2023. The aim of the analysis is to ascertain trends in media's coverage of SONA in terms of issues and voices prioritised. The idea is to be able to show how certain issues and voices are prioritised at the expense of other equally important issues and arguably more important voices.



2. METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

Using Dexter, an in-house monitoring tool, news items reporting on SONA were scraped from 48 South African online and print media during the 15-day monitoring period. The keyword “SONA” and key phrase “state of the nation address” were used to collect the articles. A total of 840 news items were collected and further analysed for aspects such as topics and sources, among others. Findings from this monitoring are being analysed in this report.

In terms of limitations, the major one was the inability to monitor and analyse content from broadcast media and this is because Dexter, the tool used to collect the data, can only currently scrape from online and print media. However, media such as SABC Online and eNCA Online were among the 48 media monitored.



DEXTER

MEDIA MONITORING AFRICA INITIATIVE

3. FINDINGS

a. Article Count

The number of articles mentioning SONA was analysed to determine how media prioritised SONA in the over two-week monitoring period. Thirty one percent of all media coverage was dedicated to SONA during the reporting period. Figure 1 below shows the count of recorded articles from the monitored media.

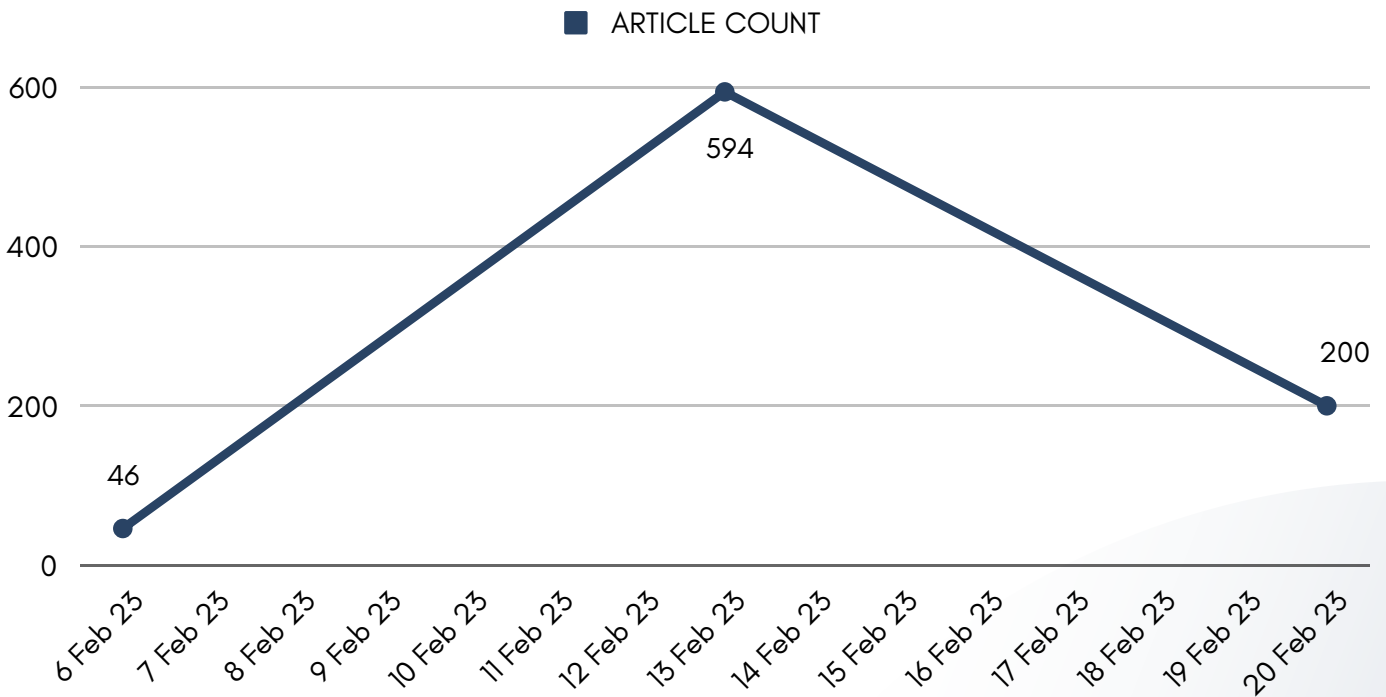


Figure 1: Amount of coverage on SONA

As can be seen in the figure above, the week of the 13th of February, 2023 recorded the most coverage on SONA. This was the week of the actual day for the delivery of the address, the 9th of February.

The idea of the article count is also to be able to show how the story grew from the start to the end of the monitoring. In the figure above, the huge jump from 46 articles to 594 articles can be seen - showing that the week prior to the week of the address, the media rarely reported on SONA. This might suggest that coverage of SONA was event-based and not issue-based. Findings from Section 3 (b) where politics as a topic dominates might also support this - that coverage of SONA in 2023 particularly, was event-based. This is not only special for SONA as most issues and events of national importance monitored by MMA show that coverage is event-based.

One of the downside to event-based reporting on issues of national importance is that such coverage does tend to rob the issue of utmost attention. In this case, reporting SONA as an event robs the issue of the needed attention which becomes difficult to track implementation of commitments made thereby enabling an environment where government is hardly held accountable by the people of South Africa.

b. Topics

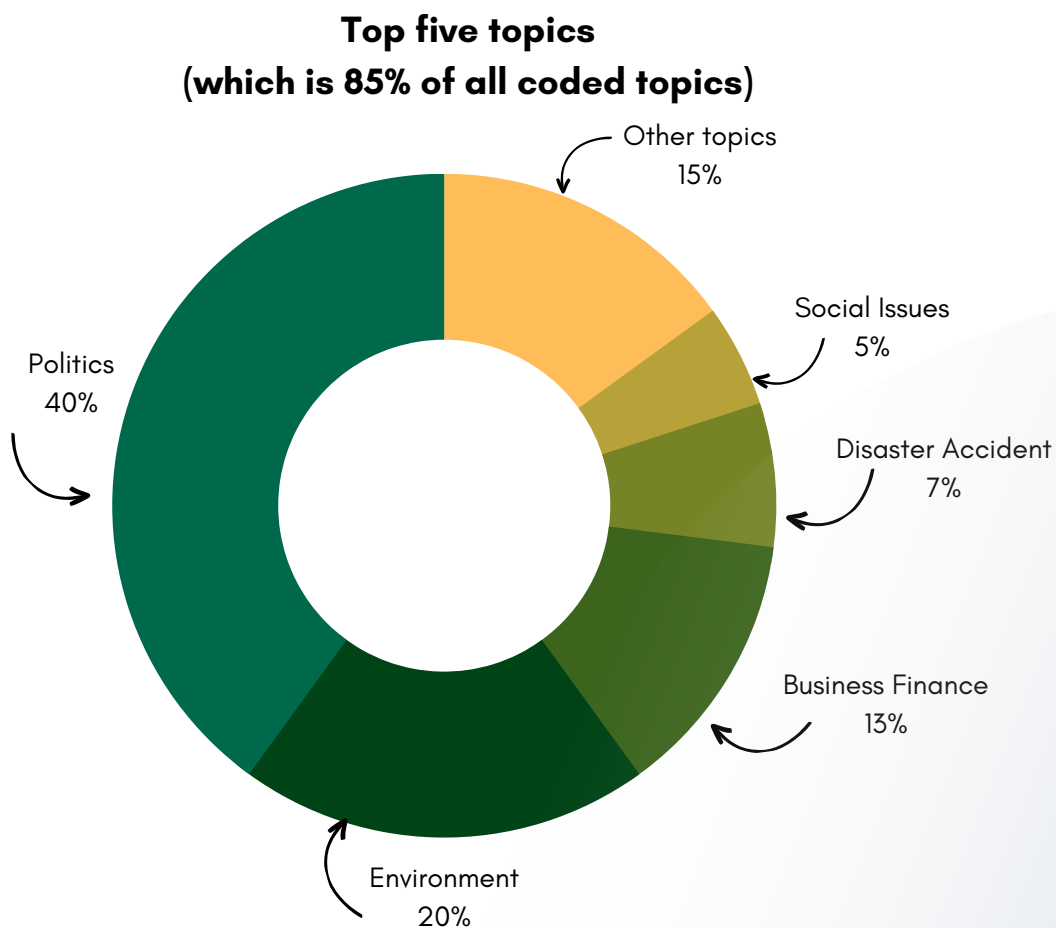


Figure 2: Top 5 topics in SONA coverage

As can be seen in Figure 2 above, politics took a bigger chunk of the media coverage of SONA at 40%. This was almost half of both the overall coverage of all coded topics as well of the top 5 topics. This might suggest that most coverage of SONA was on the politics of the event. This topic was made up of stories such as the planned [3] and actual disruption [4] of the event by Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and, the members' subsequent removal from the event venue [5] as well as talks of their plan to sue the Speaker of the National Assembly, Nosiviwe Noluthando Mapisa-Nqakula for "booting them" [6] from SONA. Other stories that could have contributed to the topic, politics, topping the list in coverage of SONA were on political parties outlining their expectations from SONA [7] and the subsequent failure, reportedly, by President Ramaphosa's speech to impress "opposition parties." [8]

Stories that fell under the topic code, environment, were mostly on calls for President Ramaphosa to address the electricity crisis in his speech, [9] the state of disaster declared during SONA over the energy crisis, [10] and the creation of the ministerial position for electricity [11] as well as reactions to this. [12]

The topic, business finance at 13%, had stories such as those calling on President Ramaphosa to tackle the economic crisis [13] the country was facing. The state of disaster declared over the energy crisis also formed part of the coverage under the topic code, disaster/accidents (7%). Under the topic code, social issues (5%), stories such as calls by the LGBTQIA+ for Ramaphosa to address [14] them during SONA, ensure their safety [15] and the community's demand "to be included and heard" [16] dominated.

"Improving education" features under one of the SONA priorities, "building better lives" on the SONA website. [17] In his 2022 SONA, President Ramaphosa announced "an innovative delivery mechanism for school infrastructure" [18] but according to one of the very few stories on education in this year's SONA coverage, the president "made no mention of the programme" in his 2023 address. Sadly, only a couple of stories reported on this (part of the 1% on education). This means that the media missed an opportunity to report on education and question why it was not significantly part of the president's address – this, despite a program to tackle the infrastructure challenges being announced in the 2022 address.

[3] <http://www.iol.co.za/the-star/the-star/news/cyril-ramaphosa-will-not-address-that-parliament-peacefully-says-the-eff-67d66d80-d939-4261-a1c0-77d368b8103e>

[4] <http://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2023-02-09-effs-malema-disrupts-ramaphosas-state-of-the-nation-address>

[5] <http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2023-02-09-da-questions-legality-of-eff-mps-removal-after-they-stormed-sona-stage>

[6] <http://www.citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/parliament/eff-legal-action-mapisa-nqakula-sona-2023>

[7] <http://www.channelafrica.co.za/sabc/home/channelafrica/news/details?id=cac35178-dc7d-49a5-99a6-15044a2d9f10&title=SA%20opposition%20parties%20outline%20their%20expectations%20for%20SONA>

[8] <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/news24/politics/parliament/sona-2023-ramaphosas-speech-fails-to-impress-opposition-parties-20230209>

[9] <http://www.iol.co.za/sunday-tribune/mercury/news/electricity-crisis-expected-to-top-sona-agenda-say-economists-energy-expert-04b73487-c3b2-4060-a1b3-6ff2a362b7f5>

[10] <http://sundayworld.co.za/news/politics/sona-state-of-disaster-declared-over-sas-energy-crisis>

[11] <http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2023-02-09-ramaphosa-declares-state-of-disaster-over-power-crisis>

[12] <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-02-10-dangerous-and-mad-not-everyones-sold-on-ramaphosas-electricity-minister-and-another-state-of-disaster>

[13] <http://www.iol.co.za/business-report/news/politics/cosatu-calls-for-urgent-steps-to-fix-economy-during-sona-Bed6ced1-de92-4610-bb1d-231ceacf73ef>

[14] <http://www.iol.co.za/the-star/the-star/news/we-want-president-ramaphosa-to-address-the-lgbtqia-community-in-his-state-of-the-nation-address-says-organisation-7a70fa5c-74c5-44d7-a7dd-fc2dd61b8083>

[15] <http://www.iol.co.za/the-star/news/politics/queer-org-calls-on-ramaphosa-to-ensure-safety-of-lgbtqia-community-during-sona-b6f6526a-8ea8-4755-b6e9-fea634ef7ff5>

[16] <http://ewn.co.za/2023/02/08/lgbtqia-community-on-ramaphosa-s-sona-we-want-to-be-included-and-heard>

[17] <https://www.stateofthenation.gov.za/priorities/building-better-lives/improving-education>

[18] <https://sundayworld.co.za/news/education/president-remains-mum-on-his-2022-school-infrastructure-plan/>

Education is but one of the many issues that the media could have reported on significantly even if only to question implementation of existing policy or creation of new policy to tackle the many challenges that the sector faces. Furthermore, the media could have used the opportunity presented by SONA to highlight significantly other issues listed as crucial issues facing South Africans in the president's speech – issues such as unemployment, poverty, the rising cost of living and crime etc. Here, the media could have unpacked the issues adequately and accessed experts as sources in such coverage for ordinary citizens to be informed and engaged and, for such issues to be on the agendas of policy makers.

c. Sources

The sources monitored were sources quoted, mentioned or referenced to as well as the subjects of the stories. Figure 3 below shows the top 10 of the sources – sources with a combined voice share of 50%. This means that of the over 270 sources, the top 10 got a voice share that was half of the total voice share, leaving the other half to be shared among the over 220 sources that spoke in SONA coverage. This is a huge percentage to be shared only among 10 and this means that the media gave more prominence to these sources at the expense of others.

A further look at the sources in the figure below shows that they were all either politicians or government officials. This dominance of the voice of politicians or government officials in media coverage of SONA can be attributed to the fact that the topic, politics, as shown above in Figure 2, dominated. In MMA's research of different issues and events, there is often a link between the topics and issues covered and the sources accessed in coverage.

The dominance of government or political voices in issues and events of national importance is a trend observed by MMA in all of our research. It is known that the sources with the loudest voice in media coverage hold the most power. This then begs the question, shouldn't the media be deliberately diversifying voices in media coverage to ensure that it is not only a select few that continuously hold this power but that other voices are amplified as should be the case in a democracy and indeed as one of the roles of the media?

**Top ten sources
(which is 50% of all coded sources)**

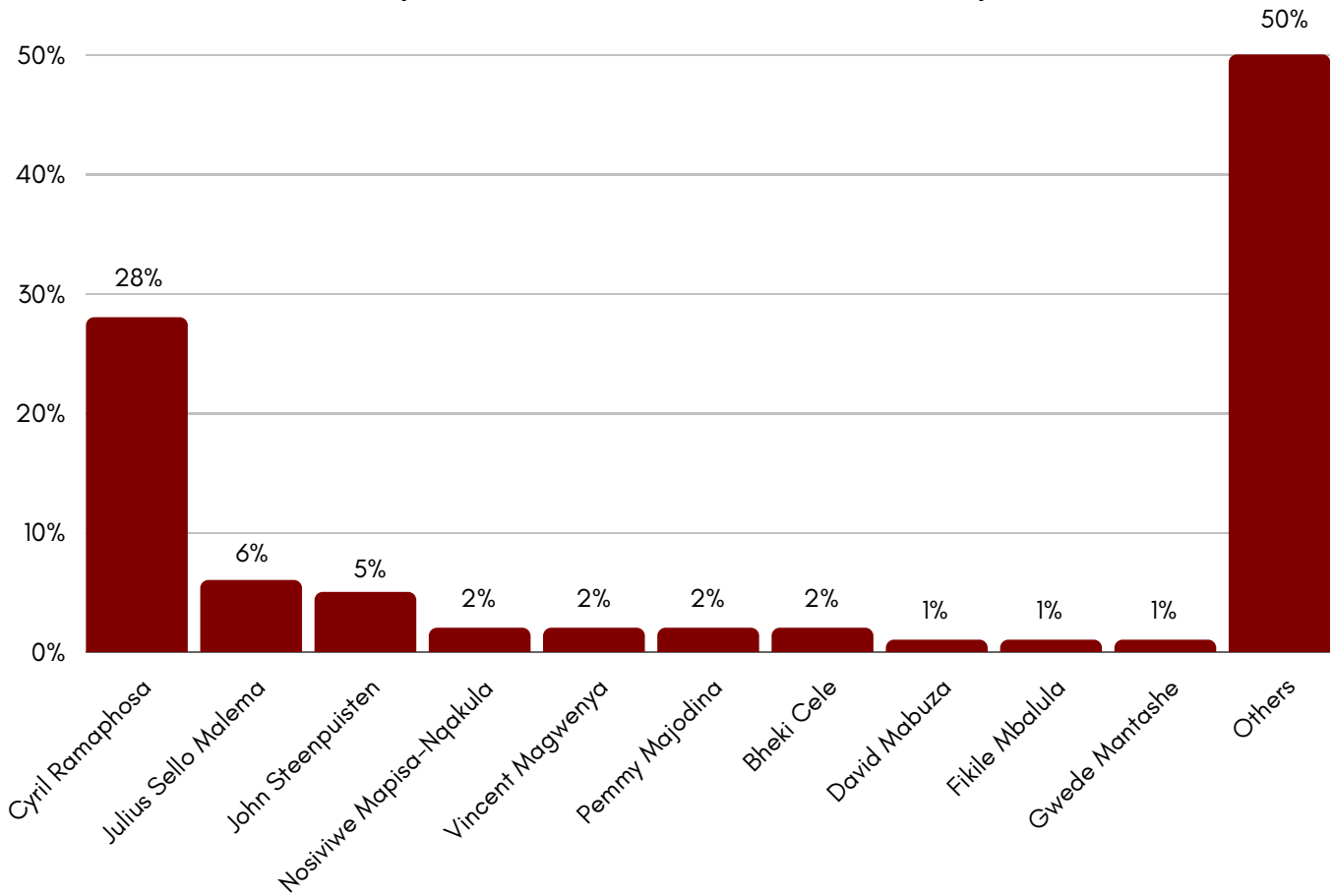


Figure 3: Top 10 sources in media coverage of SONA

d. Affiliation

The affiliation of sources is monitored to determine which groups of sources are prioritised by the media in coverage and/or which sources set the agenda. In this case, the affiliation of sources was monitored to analyse who set the agenda in coverage of SONA and who, arguably had the most power. As has been alluded to in Section 3 (c) above, the media has an important role to ensure that a diverse list of sources are represented in coverage of any issue or event of national importance. This, to ensure that more voices, especially those usually marginalised in debates and discussions of issues of national importance are represented in coverage.

Figure 4 below shows the top 10 affiliation of sources in media coverage of SONA. As can be seen, the top 10 received a combined representation share of 74%. By comparison, 68 other key affiliations ('Others' in Figure 4) had a combined representation share of only 26%.

**Top ten affiliation
(which is 74% of all coded affiliations)**

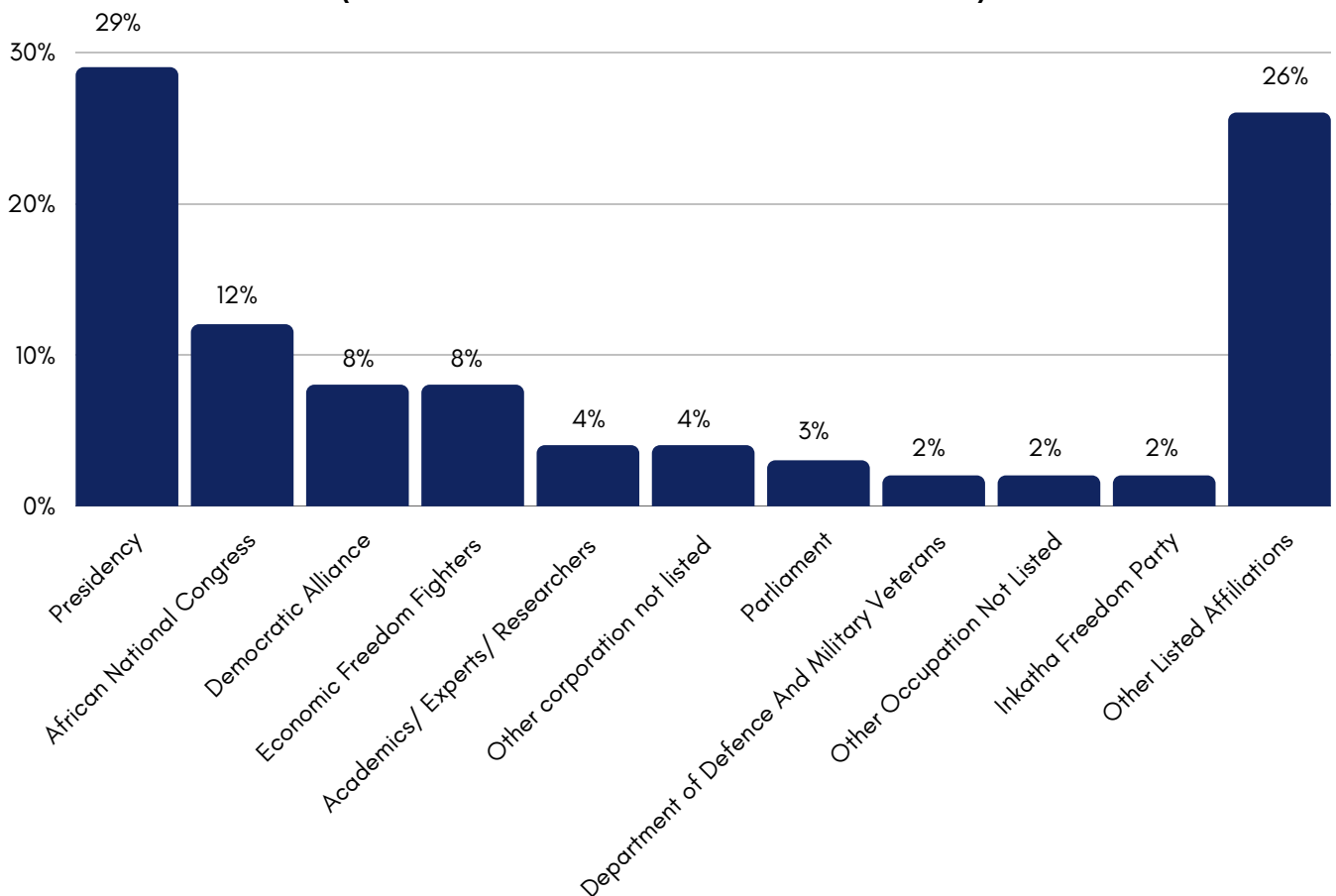


Figure 4: Affiliation of sources in media coverage of SONA

Ordinary citizens were among the affiliations that did not feature in the top 10. The brunt of the crucial issues facing South Africa is borne by ordinary citizens – issues such as unemployment, poverty and the rising cost of living as listed by the president in his SONA.

Since this is the case, why then were ordinary citizens not accessed adequately as sources to share their views on SONA? Ordinary citizens spoke in coverage of SONA at less than 1% – 0.14% to be exact. Why did the media ignore the voice of ordinary citizens in coverage of SONA in favour of those featuring on the top 10 list of sources in Figure 4?

In a democracy, and particularly when the government is communicating the state of the nation and its commitments to addressing identified issues, media coverage of this should be inclusive of ordinary citizens. Ordinary citizens should have been accessed as sources to not only articulate needs, but also to hold the government to account especially on past commitments made and the progress made thus far.

It is unclear what could have led to the exclusion of ordinary citizens in coverage of SONA but the media is commended for including the voice of academics, experts and researchers, another voice that is usually neglected in media coverage of issues and events of national importance including in media coverage of issues such as Gender-Based Violence.^[19]

[19] <https://mediamonitoringafrica.org/wordpress22/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Lens-on-Gender-Based-Violence-Report.pdf>

e. Gender Representation Of Sources

Over the years, MMA has analysed the portrayal, representation and accessing as sources of the different genders with a particular focus on women. This has always been done in order to determine how much voice in media coverage is allocated to women and whether there were deliberate efforts by the media to include women in the news.

Sadly, findings reveal that women are neglected in the news. Women's issues have always been marginalised and worse, their voices have always been inaudible. For instance, in media coverage of the 2021 elections, women spoke as sources at 19%.

The neglect of women's voices in media is not only special to elections coverage, monitoring of media's coverage of climate change showed that women were accessed as sources at 22%. Similarly, in media coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa, women spoke as sources at 21%.

What is more concerning is that even in media coverage of issues that mostly affect women, issues such as Gender-Based Violence, women are still marginalised and their voices are still neglected. In an analysis of media's coverage of Gender-Based Violence between 2015 and 2020, women featured as sources at 43%. While the figure shows that women speak more in coverage of Gender-Based Violence than other studies mentioned above, the representation is still not equitable and worse is the fact that not all the women sources were speaking in this coverage. The majority were merely mentioned mostly as subjects of the story being reported.[20]

Figure 5 below shows the same trend – marginalisation of women's voices in media coverage of SONA. Women were represented as sources at only 12% compared to their male counterparts who were featured at 88%.

Featuring on the top 5 list of topics in media coverage of SONA in Figure 2 above is social issues at 5% and as has been indicated in Section 3 (b), stories under this topic had the LGBTQIA+ community featuring significantly. Therefore, it is concerning that despite this dominance in such stories, the voice of the LGBTQIA+ community was missing in media coverage of SONA.

[20] <https://mediamonitoringafrica.org/wordpress22/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Lens-on-Gender-Based-Violence-Report.pdf>

Gender Representation Of Sources

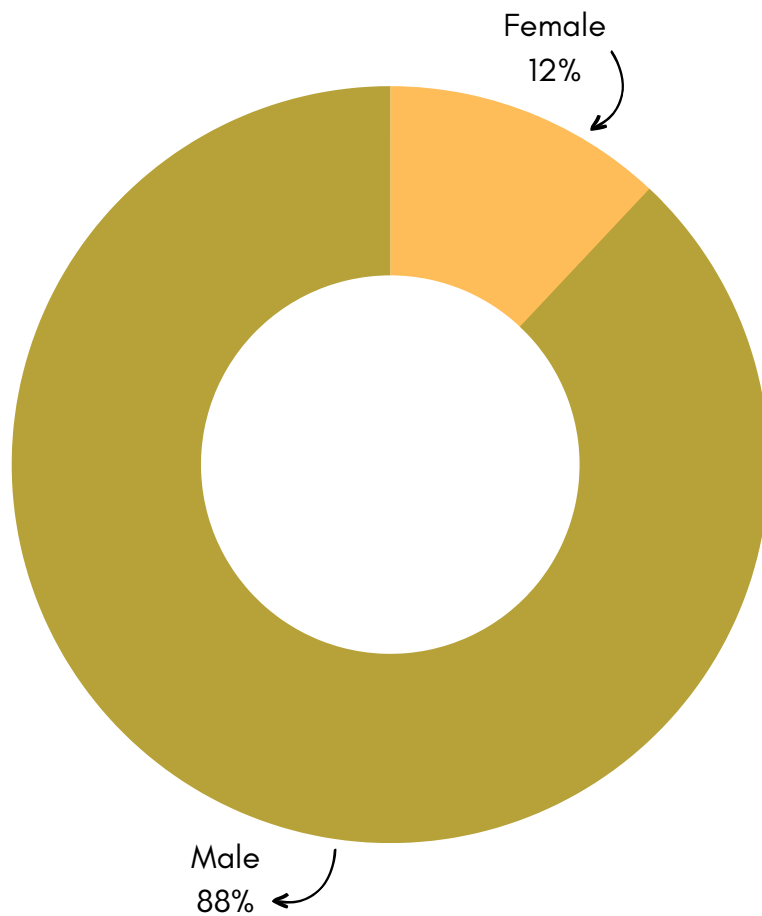


Figure 5: Gender representation of sources in media coverage of SONA

Women and members of the LGBTQIA+ community are marginalised in society, even now when the fight for gender equality has been going on for decades. The media needs to deliberately seek the voices of women and members of the LGBTQIA+ community in order to achieve equitable representation in media and aid in achieving gender equality and equity in society.



f. Race Representation Of Sources

Figure 6 below shows how the different races in South Africa were represented in media coverage of SONA. As can be seen, black people received the most representation at 75%.

While the data below might seem disproportionate, when compared to the population figures for the different race groups (Black: 80.9%, Coloured: 8.8%, White: 7.8%, Asian: 2.6%),[21] all races were almost equitably represented save for the Coloured race that was severely underrepresented in coverage at 1%. This trend has been observed in the majority of monitoring and research activities by MMA – where the Coloured race is underrepresented in media coverage.

The media needs to strive for equitable representation of all races especially that race and racism is one of the major issues the country grapples with.

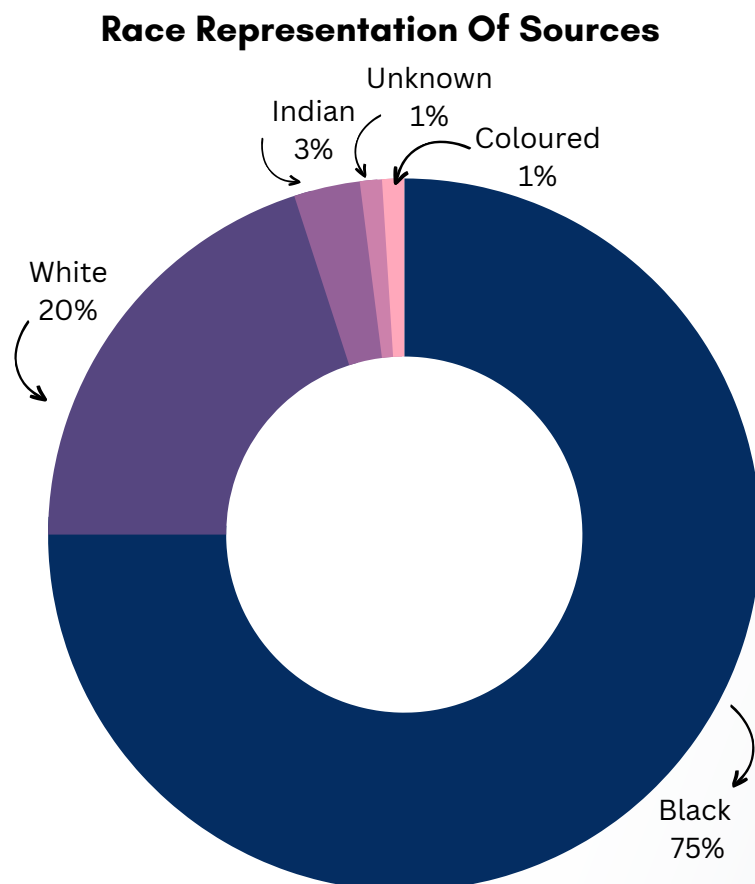


Figure 6: Race representation of sources in media coverage of SONA

[21] <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022021.pdf>

4. CONCLUSION

As has been shown, media coverage of SONA had many gaps. The findings indicate that while the event featured significantly on media's agenda during the 15-day monitoring period at 31% of all media coverage during the period, the topics and sources featuring left much to be desired.

The topic that got the most coverage was politics at 40% at the expense of arguably more important topics like education which only received a coverage share of 1%. The dominance of the topic, politics shows media's bias towards event-based reporting as the majority of the stories under this topic were on the SONA disruption.

Further, the findings have shown the dumbing down of the crucial voice of ordinary citizens in media coverage of SONA. Featuring in coverage at less than 1% shows media's bias towards more formal and seemingly more prominent voices which are mostly politicians and government officials.

A similar trend has been shown in gender representation where there is a clear bias towards male voices (88%) at the expense of women and other genders. Further, in terms of race, the findings have shown that in coverage of SONA, the Coloured race was significantly underrepresented.

The continued neglect of important topics and equally important voices in media coverage of SONA robs journalism of diversity which can improve quality. Additionally, the exclusion of certain voices especially that of ordinary citizens enables an environment where citizens are robbed of an opportunity to communicate their needs and, hold the government to account especially in the delivery of commitments made. The media are implored to diversify their topics and voices and deliberately seek out the voice of women and ordinary citizens to ensure no group is further marginalised in coverage.



Contact Us

 listeremma.org.za

 011 788 1278

 www.mediamonitoringafrica.org

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