

30 YEARS OF DEMOCRACY UNVEILED



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

BRIEF

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Written By:

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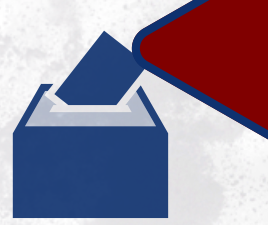
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ELECTIONS



1. INTRODUCTION



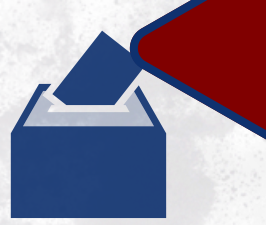
Over 27 million South Africans are gearing up to cast their votes on May 29, 2024, marking three decades since their first democratic vote. The Electoral Commission (IEC) reports that this record-breaking number of registered voters is the highest in South Africa's democratic history. With such significant participation, it is crucial for voters to access reliable information from the media whose role becomes even more important during an election period in any democracy. Beyond electoral engagement, active involvement in debates and discussions in media coverage of the National and Provincial Elections (NPE) is essential for all citizens.

Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) is closely observing how South African media covers the NPE this year. Our analysis focuses on the prioritisation of issues, political party dominance, and potential biases in coverage across various media outlets, including the public broadcaster SABC, community media, and other news media. Post-election, MMA will produce three separate reports evaluating media performance.

This brief examines media coverage from 29th March to 11th April, 2024. A total of 642 stories were analysed working to an average of 46 stories per day. In the previous monitoring period, a total of 494 stories were analysed. The increase in stories recorded indicate heightened media attention on the NPE.



2. FINDINGS



ARTICLE COUNT OVER TIME

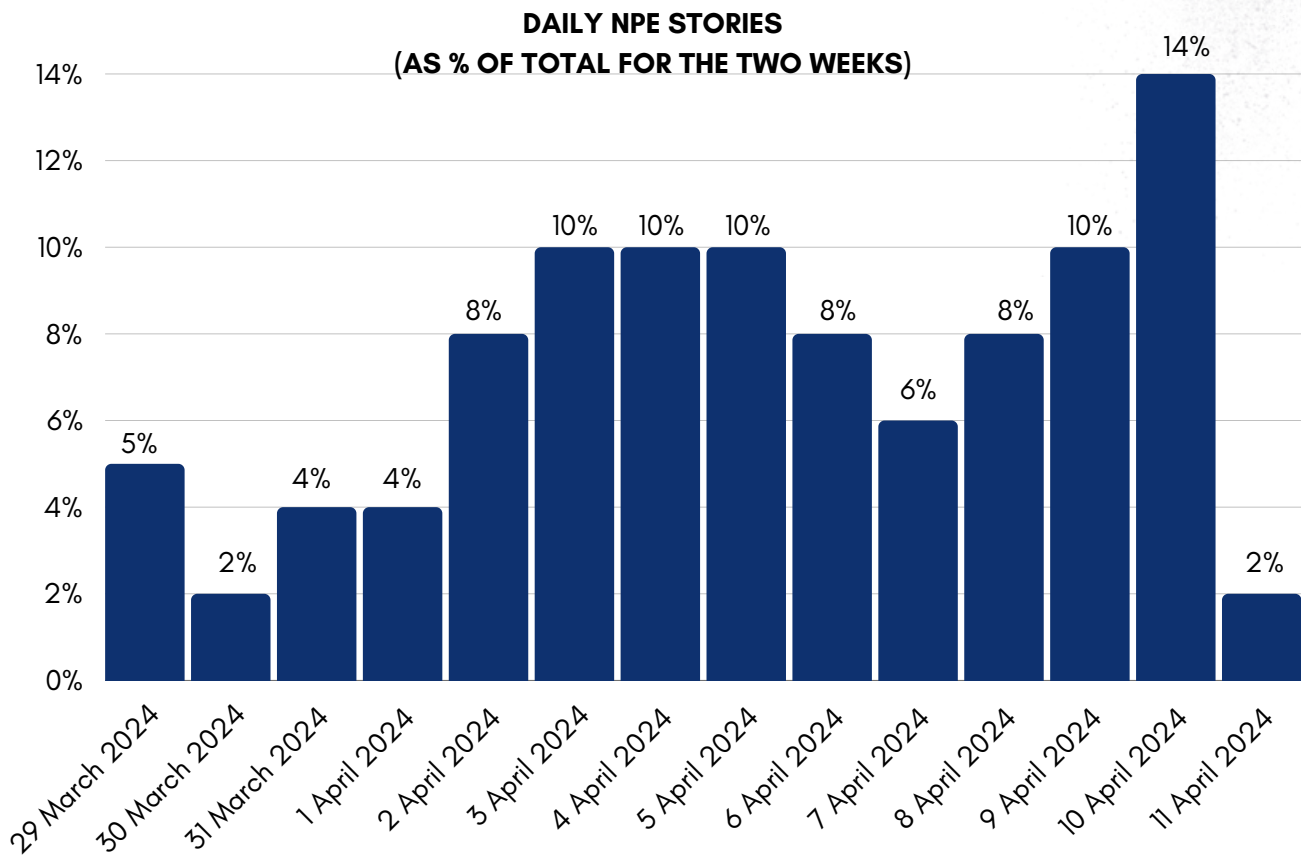


Figure 1: Daily percentage of stories on NPE

The graph above shows the amount of coverage in percentage for each day during the monitoring period. The period includes weekends when coverage is often minimal. However, and commendably so, the 6th and 7th of April recorded a higher percentage than the amount for the other weekends. This could be attributed to the consistency in coverage seen from the 2nd of April through to that weekend.

From the 2nd to the 5th of April, where coverage was at a consistent 10%, stories dominating were mostly on the IEC's decision to bar former president, Jacob Zuma from contesting the NPE, Jacob Zuma's [plans to appeal](#) the decision and his [subsequent application](#) in the Electoral Court. The Electoral Amendment Matters Bill was also in the news during these three days with 10 opposition political parties [reportedly petitioning](#) President Cyril Ramaphosa not to sign the bill into law citing that the bill is unconstitutional.

Visvin Reddy, MK Party politician who also features on the party's candidates list was in the news during this three day period with a consistent 10% coverage. Reddy was in the news after a video of him "[inciting violence](#)" if Zuma is not allowed to contest the elections went viral. Stories on this were focussed on the charges brought on Reddy by the National Prosecuting Authority as well as his actual appearance in court. Other news on this was on the [MK Party serving Visvin Reddy a warning](#) for his utterances.

The [release](#) and [signing](#) of the Electoral Code of Conduct by political parties was also in the news during this three-day period.

The biggest spike during the monitoring period can be seen on the 10th of April at 14% and stories dominating media coverage then were on the [Electoral Court's ruling](#) on Jacob Zuma's eligibility to contest the NPE. The court found that there were no grounds to bar Zuma from contesting. Other news stories on this day were on the firing of Bonginkosi Khanyile as the MK Party's interim youth leader. Khanyile is [reported to have](#) "threatened disruption of the elections should former president and MK Party leader Jacob Zuma's name not appear on ballot papers".

Another [ruling by the Electoral Court](#) in favour of the Democratic Alliance (DA) to have embassies, high commissions and consulates as voting stations was also in the news on 10th of April. The DA had taken the IEC to court over this.

TOP 5 TOPICS

TOP 5 TOPICS (WHICH IS 66% OF ALL CODED TOPICS)

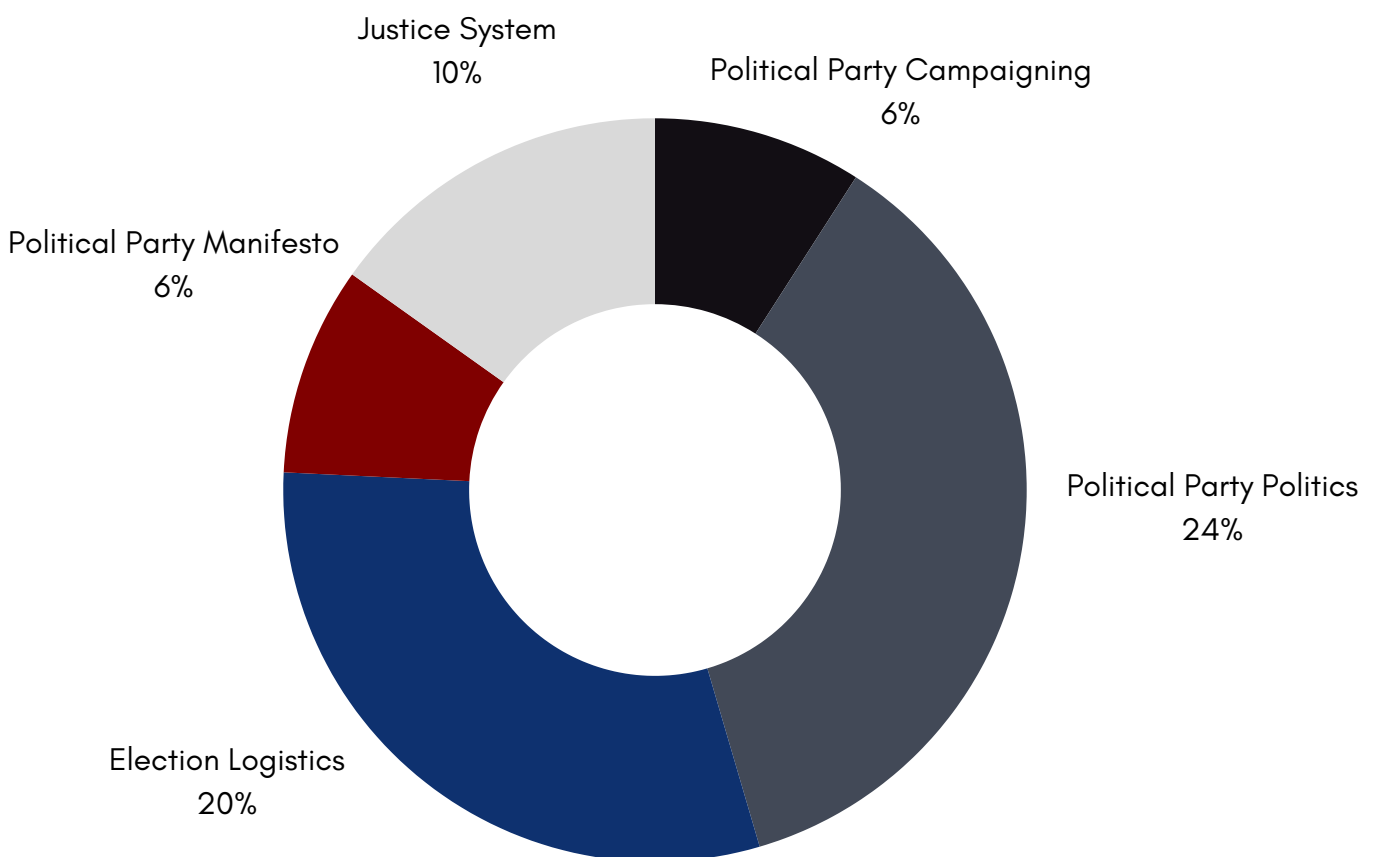
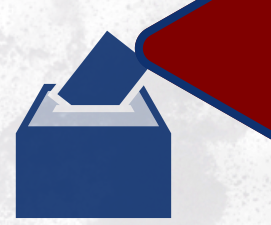


Figure 2: Top 5 topics in coverage



MMA has 14 coded election-related topics. That the top 5 topics shown in Figure 2 above garnered a combined coverage share of 66% means that the other 9 topics only had 34% to share. These 9 topics include voter education, corruption, crime, service delivery, etc.

Voter education has not featured on the top 5 topics since MMA started monitoring media's coverage of the NPE. This important topic that is crucial to the over 27 million registered voters has not even featured on the top 10 list yet, signalling a gap in media coverage of issues potentially more important to the electorate.

Of note from the figure above is the replacement of the topic, 'election logistics' by the topic, 'political party politics' from the top spot. Since the first monitoring period, 'election logistics' has been topping the list of dominating topics in media coverage of the NPE.

The top 5 list shown above has a new topic featured in the form of 'justice system' and this can be attributed to all the stories reporting cases heard and concluded in the Electoral Court during the monitoring period. These include the case and ruling for Jacob Zuma to be allowed to contest and, the DA's win to have South Africans outside of the country to vote at embassies, high commissions and consulates.



TOP 10 PARTY & ELECTIONS RELATED GROUP COVERAGE

TOP 10 PARTY & ELECTIONS RELATED GROUP COVERAGE

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

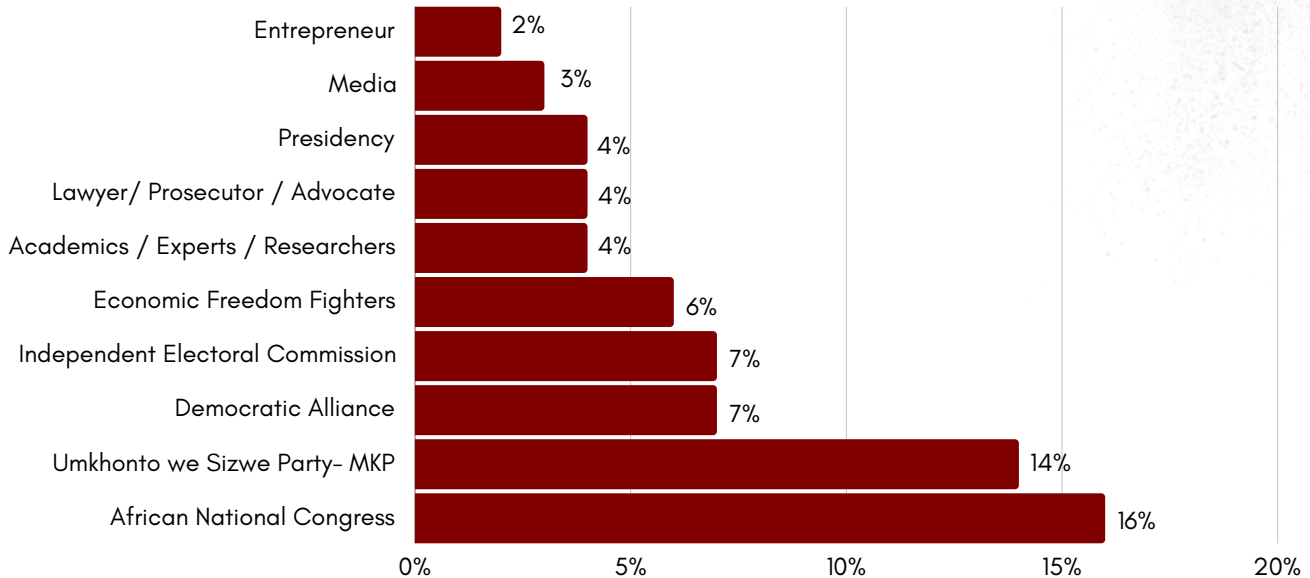


Figure 3: Top 10 political party/group coverage

In analysing media coverage, MMA assesses the prominence of voices by identifying who actively speaks, is mentioned, or appears in photographs. This helps determine which voices dominate news narratives. Throughout the monitoring period, 420 sources were identified in media coverage of the NPE. Among these sources, the majority originated from the top 10 political parties and groups, as illustrated in Figure 3. Together, these top 10 entities accounted for 65% of the overall voice share.

From the graph above, it can be seen that the ANC (16%) and MK Party (14%) are dominating followed by the DA and IEC at 7% each. The dominance of these voices is as a result of all the media coverage of the Electoral Court applications and outcomes mentioned in the sections above.

Of note on the graph above is the feature on the top 10 list of dominating voices in NPE coverage of the affiliation, 'lawyer/prosecutor/advocate' and 'media'. Figure 2 shows that the topic, 'justice system' featured on the top 5 topics and this could be the reason why 'lawyer/prosecutor/advocate' is debuting on the top 10 list shown above in Figure 3. MMA has found that there is a link between topics covered and types of sources featured.

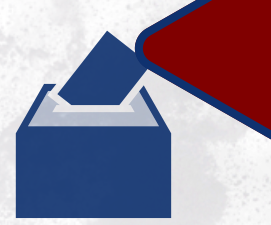
The Press Council's ruling in favour of ActionSA who had lodged a complaint about Rapport, City Press and News24 running a poll that "seemed to favour" the DA could have contributed to the affiliation, 'media' featuring on the top 10 list above at 3%. According to [media coverage of this issue](#), the "poll was deemed untrustworthy and dishonest due to some inconsistencies and irregularities such as the lack of transparency, biased reporting, and misleading information, and in its approach and execution" by the Press Council".

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

Number 5 - Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) at 6%: Former EFF provincial chair, Jossey Buthane's [reported return](#) to the ANC, the EFF's firm [stance against coalition negotiations](#) with other parties, particularly the ANC, emphasised by treasurer-general, Omphile Maotwe; the EFF's involvement in [municipal politics](#), particularly in the City of Ekurhuleni; EFF Secretary-General, Marshall Dlamini's call for [occupation of white-owned farms](#) despite legal injunctions; EFF's participation in public protests [against political killings](#) in KwaZulu-Natal, alongside other parties like the National Freedom Party; [Julius Malema's statement](#) about potentially supporting the ANC under certain conditions, specifically proposing Floyd Shivambu as minister of finance; the announcement of an [EFF-hosted jazz concert](#) featuring party members, including Members of Parliament like Mbuyiseni Ndlozi, and, the ranking of MP [Naledi Chirwa on the party's candidate list](#) and controversies surrounding gifts to political figures like [AbaThembu King Buyelekhaya Dalindyabo](#) contributed to the EFF featuring at number 5 on the top 10 list of most sourced political parties/groups during the monitoring period.

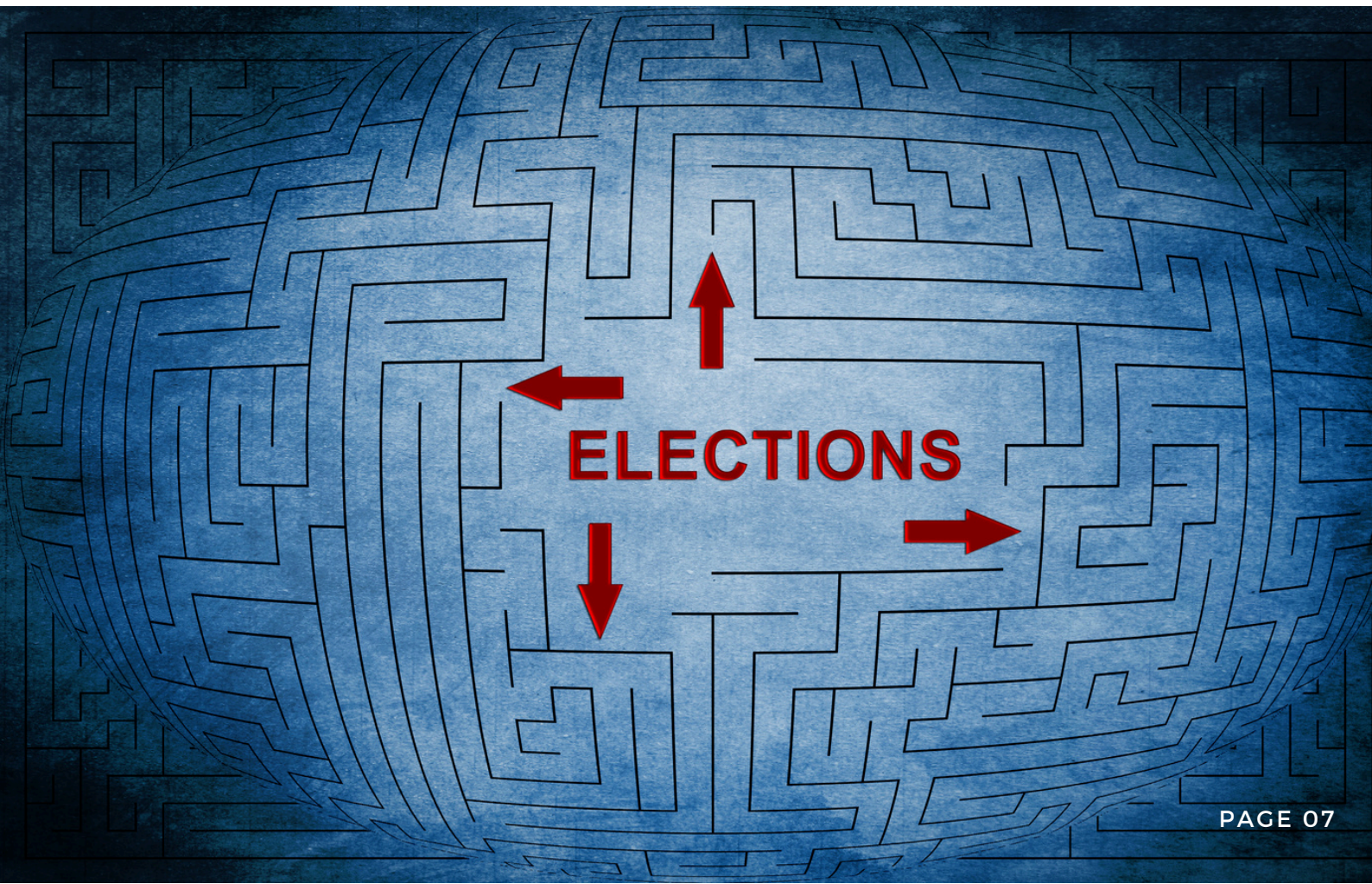
Number 4 - IEC at 7%: The IEC was mostly in news around its decision to [bar former president, Jacob Zuma](#) from contesting the NPE, Zuma's [appeal](#), subsequent [win](#) and having his name back on the IEC candidates list. The commission was also in news around its [loss in the Electoral Court](#) where the court ruled in favour of the DA to have embassies, high commissions and consulates turned into voting stations and, the release of the [Electoral Code of Conduct](#) by the IEC and the Code's signing by political parties. Other stories that could have contributed to the IEC featuring on the top 10 list above were around the entity's sentiments on [violence, intimidation and spreading misinformation](#), and, its announcement on being [ready for the elections](#) and [measures put in place](#) to ensure the smooth running of the elections.

Number 3 - DA at 7%: The majority of stories with the DA as the main source was on the [party's win](#) in the Electoral Court against the IEC to have embassies, high commissions and consulates turned into voting stations and, the [party's reaction](#) to the win. There were also a number of stories where the DA was [campaigning](#) and generally [politicking](#) including its launch of the [provincial party manifesto launch](#) in Western Cape and these contributed to the DA taking the third spot on the list of top 10 most covered political parties/ groups.

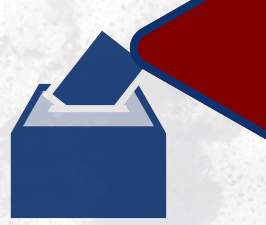


Number 2 - MK Party at 14%: The MK Party was mostly in media coverage of the [IEC's decision to bar](#) its party leader, former president, Jacob Zuma from contesting the elections as well as the [party's plans to appeal](#) the decision in the Electoral Court and [subsequent win](#). There was also a significant amount of coverage of one of the party's leaders, Visvin Reddy who was in the news after a video of him "[inciting violence](#)" if Zuma is not allowed to contest the elections went viral. Other stories that could have contributed to the MK Party featuring on the top 10 list above were on the [axing of the party's Bonginkosi Khanyile](#) from the youth leadership as well as Jacob Zuma's [car accident](#).

Number 1 - ANC at 16%: ANC Secretary-General, Fikile Mbalula's [confirmation of talks with the EFF](#) regarding governance issues in the City of Ekurhuleni; the [return of former members](#) to the ANC in the Fezile Dadi District; the ANC [Women's League's mobilisation](#) efforts and statements regarding its role in the upcoming elections; reports on the [ANC's financial status](#); ANC Member of Parliament, Boy Mamabolo's legal challenge regarding [his removal from the party's candidate list](#); the rejection of ANC's objection to the [registration of the MK Party](#) and court cases related to cadre deployment; Fikile Mbalula's public activities, including social media posts; the ANC's internal discussions regarding the [inclusion of individuals implicated in state capture in its candidate lists](#) and, general [politicking](#) are some of the major stories that contributed to the party scooping the top spot on the list of most covered political parties/groups in media coverage of the NPE.



GENDER REPRESENTATION OF SOURCES



Gender representation of sources

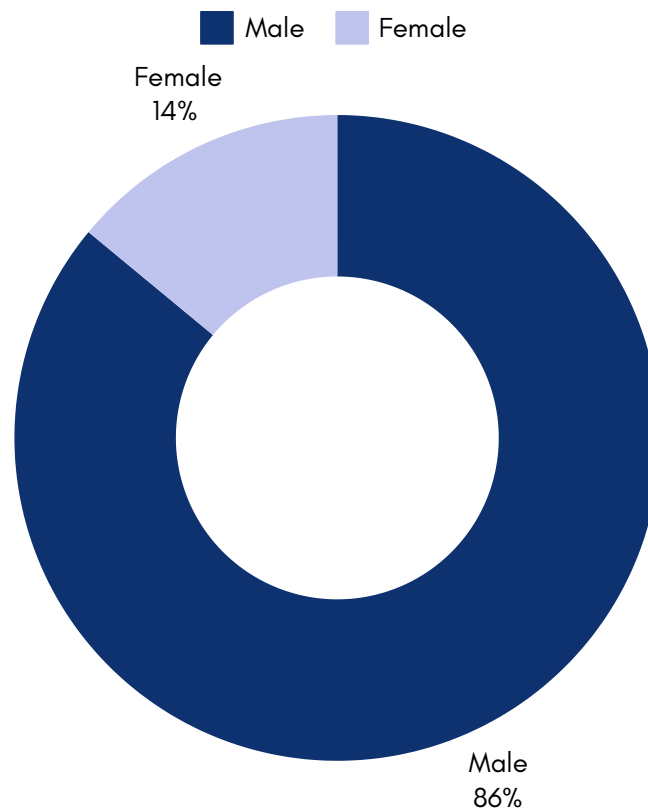


Figure 4: Gender representation of sources in coverage of NPE


Women have been speaking less in media coverage of any issue or event of national importance for the longest time. MMA has continuously highlighted this in all our analyses. During the monitoring period under analysis, women spoke in media coverage at only 14% as can be seen in Figure 4 above. Seeing as this is a very small percentage compared to the male voices' percentage, we have a few questions for the media;


1. What specific challenges do you encounter when seeking out female sources for coverage of the 2024 South African elections?
2. Are there any systemic or structural barriers within your organisation that may be limiting the inclusion of women as sources in election reporting?
3. What strategies or initiatives could be implemented within media organisations to actively encourage and facilitate the inclusion of more women as sources in reporting on the 2024 elections in South Africa?

MMA welcomes engagement on this so, please write to us!

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