

# **MEDIA PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

**National and Provincial  
Elections 2024**

**Prepared By**

***Media Monitoring Africa***

**MEDIA MONITORING  
• • • • AFRICA**

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## Executive Summary

The South African 2024 National and Provincial elections took place at a time when news media are struggling for survival.<sup>1</sup> The public broadcaster, the SABC, is also facing a deep financial crisis.<sup>2</sup> The financial challenges meant many media, particularly smaller independent commercial media, struggled to devote committed resources to covering the elections. Despite this, news media made concerted efforts to help their audiences prepare and be aware of the various parties and key news events ahead of the elections.

To make matters more challenging, an electoral amendment act meant that not only could independent candidates stand for national and provincial elections, but also that there would be a third ballot. The need for voter education was key. In addition to that the political scene saw further fracturing of the ANC with the formation of the uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) Party led by former President Jacob Zuma. The MK Party soon proved to be particularly litigious.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the legal cases brought by the MK Party, they soon proved themselves to be masters at manipulating the media agenda with a combination of threats<sup>4</sup> and deeply controversial claims,<sup>5</sup> including about dismantling the Constitution.<sup>6</sup> This saw the MK Party garner a disproportionately high level of coverage. As if these splits weren't enough, the range of new parties posed challenges for how media would provide equitable coverage.

With only a few weeks to go before the elections, there were moves to seemingly interfere with the editorial independence of the SABC through efforts to compel the Head of News to undergo a polygraph test as part of the Head's conditions of employment.<sup>7</sup> Adding to all these challenges the threat of mis- and disinformation meant media would also have to devote considerable efforts to challenging, explaining and fact checking the various claims being made. There were also clear

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://wan-ifra.org/2024/04/daily-maverick-shuts-down-to-flag-global-crisis-in-journalism/>

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/2024-04-01-sabc-plans-to-go-it-alone-without-state-funding/>

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/court-set-to-issue-order-in-mk-party-vs-iec-case-on-tuesday/>

There were numerous other cases involving the MK Party, including where the ANC took the MK Party to court over the use of its name, (See: <https://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZAKZDHC/2024/13.html>) and then where MK sought to block parliament from convening (see: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/zumas-mk-party-seeks-stop-south-african-parliaments-first-sitting-after-election-2024-06-11/>), and most recently the MK Party has sought to challenge the outcome of the elections in the Constitutional court (see: <https://www.news24.com/news24/politics/political-parties/mk-party-asks-electoral-court-to-set-aside-elections-20240616>).

<sup>4</sup> See: <https://elections.sabc.co.za/elections2024/live-blog/threats-to-iec-by-mk-party-leader-unfortunate-prof-zwelinzima-ndevu/>

<sup>5</sup> This claim would see pregnant teens being sent to Robben Island see: <https://www.citizen.co.za/news/jacob-zuma-mk-party-election-exile-teenage-parents-robben-island-manifesto-latest/>

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-04-22-the-king-am-i-mks-incendiary-manifesto-manifests-grinding-contempt-for-sas-democracy-and-constitution/>

<sup>7</sup> The Head of News, Mr Moshoeshoe Monare was employed in June 2022, (<https://www.sabc.co.za/sabc/media-statement-sabc-appoints-mr-moshoeshoe-monare-as-the-group-executive-for-news-and-current-affairs/>) the timing of the security vetting could not be more suspicious and was condemned by key media freedom bodies, including, SANEF, MMA, CFE, SOS. (<https://www.mediamonitoringafrica.org/media-release-condemnation-of-state-security-agencys-attempt-to-vet-sabc-head-of-news/>)

efforts to undermine the integrity and credibility of the IEC<sup>8</sup> and some of its Commissioners, Deputy Chair Janet Love in particular.

All these factors combined to ensure that in addition to the regular anxieties, tensions, difficulties, errors, and hiccups that accompany any election process, the news media environment was constricted as never before due to having to cover with limited resources one of the most uncertain and complex elections in South Africa's three-decade democratic history.

Why the Media Performance Review (MPR)?

There is little doubt that media play a critical role in the elections process. Unlike social media which has no standards for accurate, balanced reporting, news media need to ensure balanced, accurate and fair coverage to ensure voters can make informed decisions about who to vote for. The media is recognized as having a central role in various human rights frameworks, including the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa and the SADC election observer guidelines. What isn't always clear is how, or the criteria that should be considered when determining the role of media in the lead up to elections. One of the central goals therefore of this report is to provide a standardised means of assessing the role media have played in contributing to, and/or undermining free, fair, and credible elections. By media, we mean specifically news media, and in South Africa, those that subscribe to the codes of the Press Council or the BCCSA.

To help with a quick overview and relying on MMA's three decades of expertise in monitoring and analysing media's coverage of elections, we have provided the following ratings:

- Not Achieved
- Partially Achieved
- Achieved
- Exceeded
- Far Exceeded

### Equitability of Coverage

Rating: **EXCEEDED**: Most media houses demonstrated a conscious effort to provide equitable coverage of political parties. That said, smaller parties and new parties, particularly under-resourced ones, may feel justly aggrieved at the lack of coverage afforded to them.

### Diversity of Coverage and Plurality

Rating: **ACHIEVED**: Trends in coverage are very similar to those of previous elections, despite the context and political parties being very different. The top three issues covered had a combined share of 56% of the total election's coverage for the period.

### Inclusion of Women

Rating: **PARTIALLY ACHIEVED**: The dominance of selected male politicians from the biggest parties are largely responsible for the very low number of women sources in media coverage. That said, the levels are significantly below South Africa's usual average in an election period and undermine efforts towards greater gender equality.

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<sup>8</sup> While most of the attacks took place on social media, (see MMA's report on online harms and Real411) some were repeated in news media like IOL, see: <https://www.iol.co.za/the-star/news/how-much-do-we-trust-the-iec-0275d508-bbc5-4ca9-8050-eb59f25bc2e9>.

### Credibility of Information and Critical Analysis

Rating: **EXCEEDED**: It is a unique strength of South African media, that despite differences in region, format and ownership, there is an overwhelming level of fairness in coverage.

### Reasonableness and Compliance

Rating: **ACHIEVED**: Overall it is clear that the established complaints mechanisms for the Press Council and the Complaints Compliance Committee (CCC) are fully functional and reliable. The Press Council put in place an expedited mechanism to deal with direct election related cases, highlighting a greater commitment towards credibility, unfortunately in the case of the CCC, the duration of the process meant that the impact of the outcome of the urgent complaint was limited.

## Introduction

The purpose of this report is to offer comprehensive data analysis and findings on the performance of South African news media during the election period, from 29 February to 24 June 2024. A total of 10,483 items were monitored across print, online, and broadcast media using a combination of dedicated human media monitors, especially for small community media and African language content, and semi-automated monitoring using MMA's media monitoring tool, Dexter. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of May, MMA [released interim findings](#) which analysed data between 29 February and 29 May 2024. Some of the findings in this report are compared to data in the interim report. A credible and pluralistic media landscape is inescapably critical to any democracy. This has been consistently affirmed by our courts and other constitutional bodies: in exchange for the constitutional protection afforded to the media, they in turn bear constitutional obligations to act with integrity and responsibility. This is even more heightened in the context of elections where the news media, as primary disseminators of information, are at the frontline of providing credible information, creating platforms for different opinions, and opposing views, countering the proliferation of false information, and ensuring an engaged and informed electorate.

Against this backdrop, this Media Performance Review (MPR) is underpinned by two key facets:

- (i) to safeguard the media's ability to perform their duties in an enabling environment without undue hindrance; and
- (ii) to reflect on the way these duties are conducted in accordance with legal and professional ethical standards.

Any assessment of the media landscape must be responsive and multi-faceted, given the wide range of elements that factor into this. This also calls for different methods of data gathering, analysis and reporting. Accordingly, the MPR is structured in two parts:

**Part 1: Analysis of media coverage:** The first part of the report is essentially geared towards a consideration of the media's performance in the elections based on their journalistic obligations to ensure fair and balanced coverage. This assessment is underpinned by certain pre-identified indicators and the data collection informing the indicators is quantitative in nature, relying on the data collection tools referred to below. In simple terms, this is a comparative analysis that can be graphically represented in terms of the conduct of different media organisations.

**Part 2: Assessment of the media landscape:** The second part differs from the first in that it is geared towards the broader enabling environment in which the media operates during the elections. This part of the report is qualitative in nature, providing a narrative description and reflections on what has been experienced both in what fostered and what hampered the media in their work. While this too will comprise certain indicators reflecting different types of conduct, there is currently no baseline data on which to undertake a comparative analysis. (This however may be an aspect that is developed in future reports once further data has been collected.)

The MPR is fundamentally underpinned by certain key factors, including for instance the following:

- (i) a data-driven approach through a public interest lens;
- (ii) openness, fairness and transparency;
- (iii) reliance on credible information and resources;
- (iv) a commitment to diversity and plurality; and
- (v) a resource that is of use to electoral stakeholders, not only for the upcoming election, but also for future elections.

## PART I INDICATORS // ASSESSMENT OF MEDIA COVERAGE

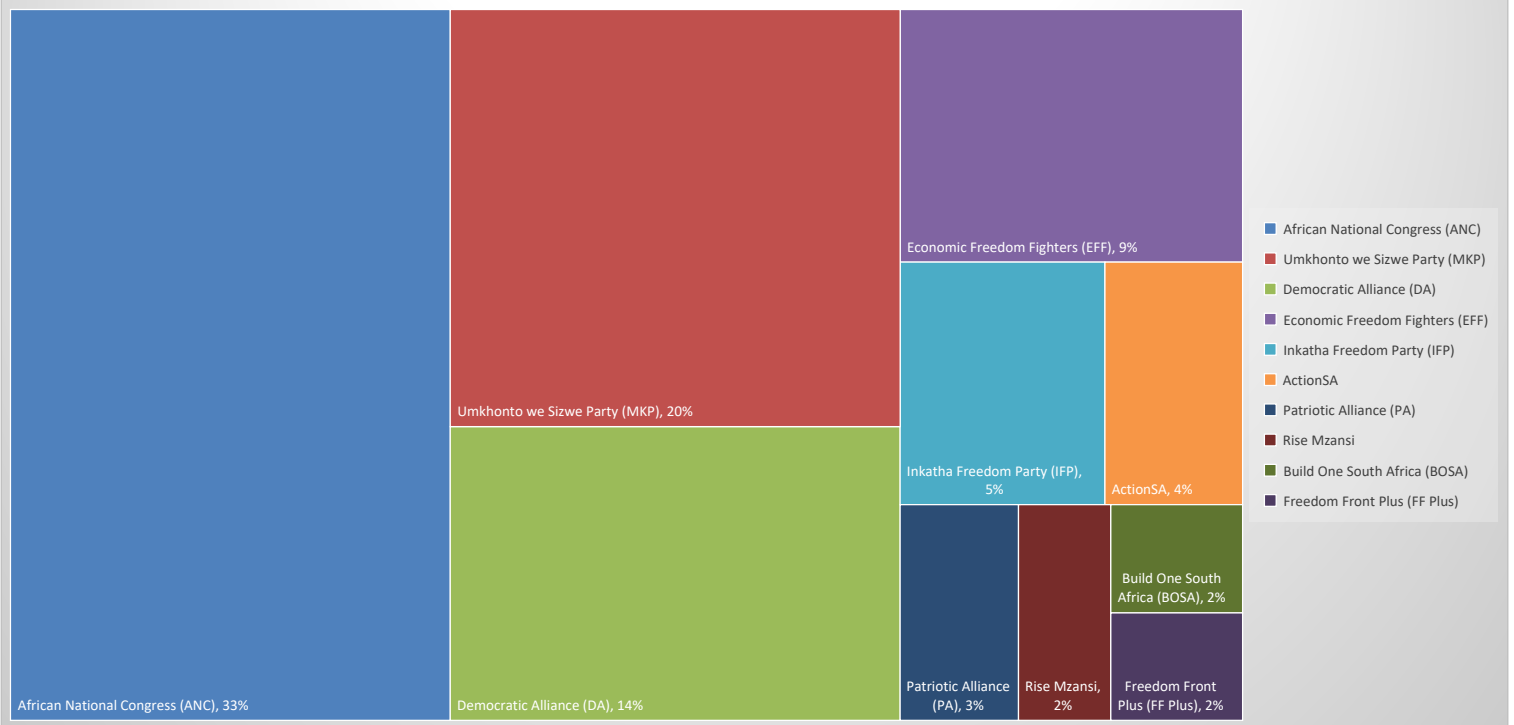
To assess the conduct of the media and fairness of election coverage in line with relevant regulatory standards and journalism practices

### Equitability of coverage

Rating: **EXCEEDED**

Media have a responsibility to provide equitable coverage during an election period. Equitable coverage ensures diverse coverage of political parties and politicians, and as a result, media contribute towards potential voters' ability to make an informed decision on voting day. Due to a high number of new political parties participating in the national and provincial elections, media had a challenge balancing equitable coverage with public interest news.

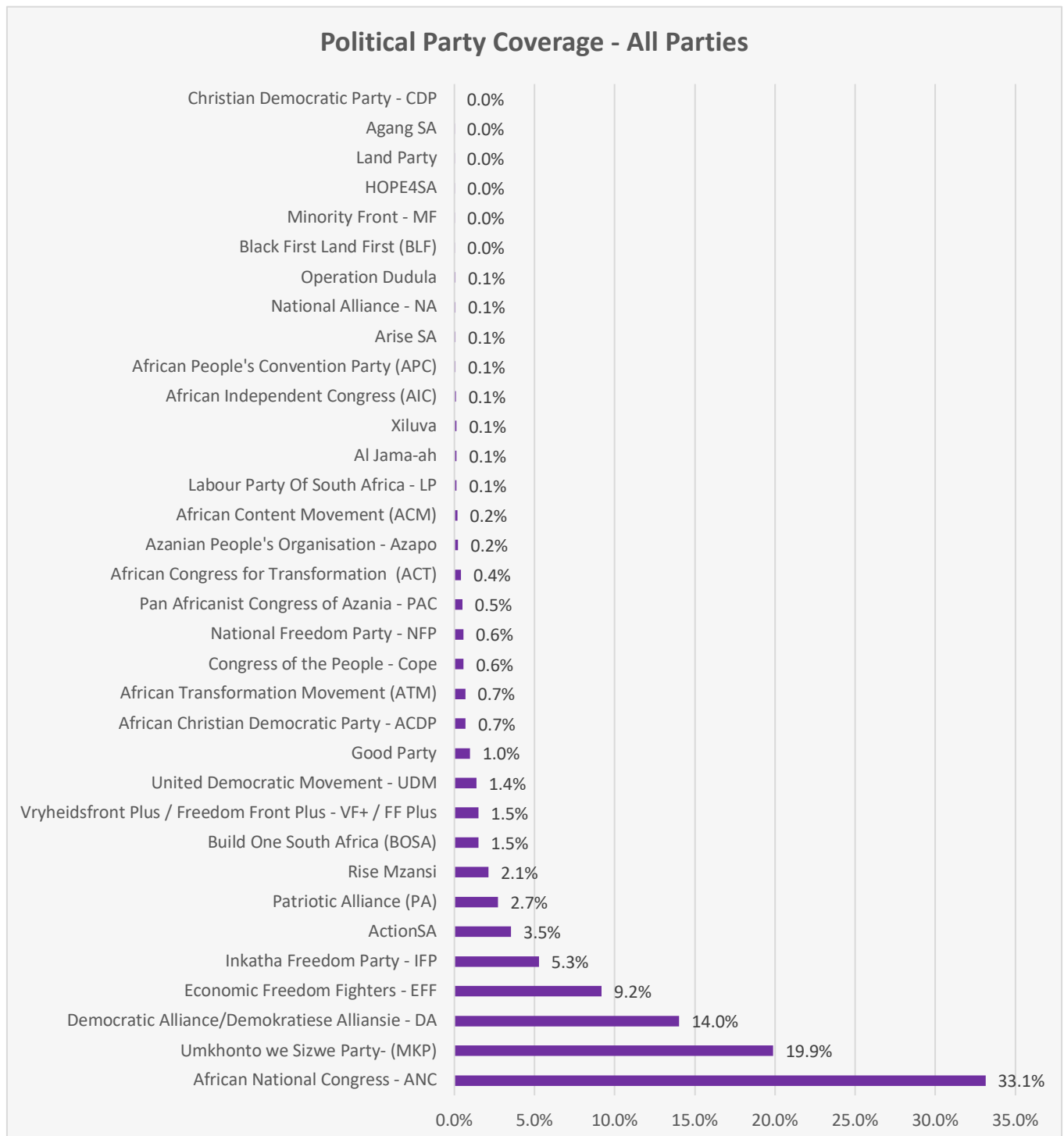
**Party Coverage: Top Ten Political Parties (n = 16199, 93% of all sources)**



The graph above shows which of the top ten political parties were given the most media coverage during this period. The data indicates that the ANC received the majority share, at 33%. The assumption is that media follow equitable coverage guidelines, however, the data shows that MK Party received the second highest amount of coverage, at about 20%. This is a significant share of the coverage, especially for a new political party not represented in parliament. Given the controversy and public interest issues around the MK Party, and the legal challenges between MK and the IEC, it is not surprising that the party garnered significant media coverage.

Other political parties that received a large portion of media coverage include the Democratic Alliance (DA) (14%), Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) (9%), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) (5%), Action SA (4%) and Rise Mzansi (2%). While the coverage can be said to be equitable, there is also little

doubt that smaller, new parties and independent candidates would feel legitimately aggrieved by the minimal coverage they received across the media. Even the SABC, which tends to offer greater diversity of party coverage, struggled to give sufficient coverage to smaller parties and independent candidates. The reality is that with fewer resources in the media, some parties will miss out.



The graph above shows the media’s coverage of all political parties mentioned in elections related coverage during the monitoring period. Generally, all parties represented in parliament received coverage relatively in line with party representation. However, the new parties, including Rise Mzansi, Build One SA and MK Party have dominated coverage in relation to their short track records.



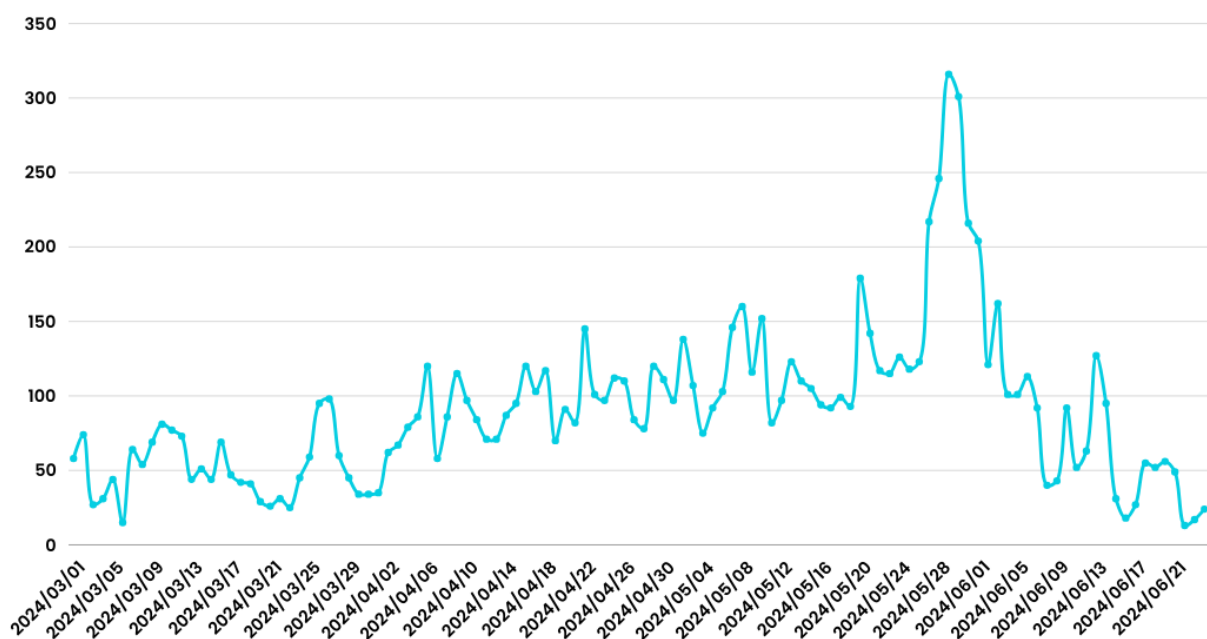
## Diversity of coverage and plurality

Rating: **ACHIEVED**

During an election period one of the important elements in media coverage is the amount of coverage given to election related issues. One of the critical roles of media is to hold political parties and politicians accountable, and one of the ways to do this is to unpack which issues are important to people, and whether these issues are given attention by political parties.

The graph below indicates the number of election related stories media produced during the period.

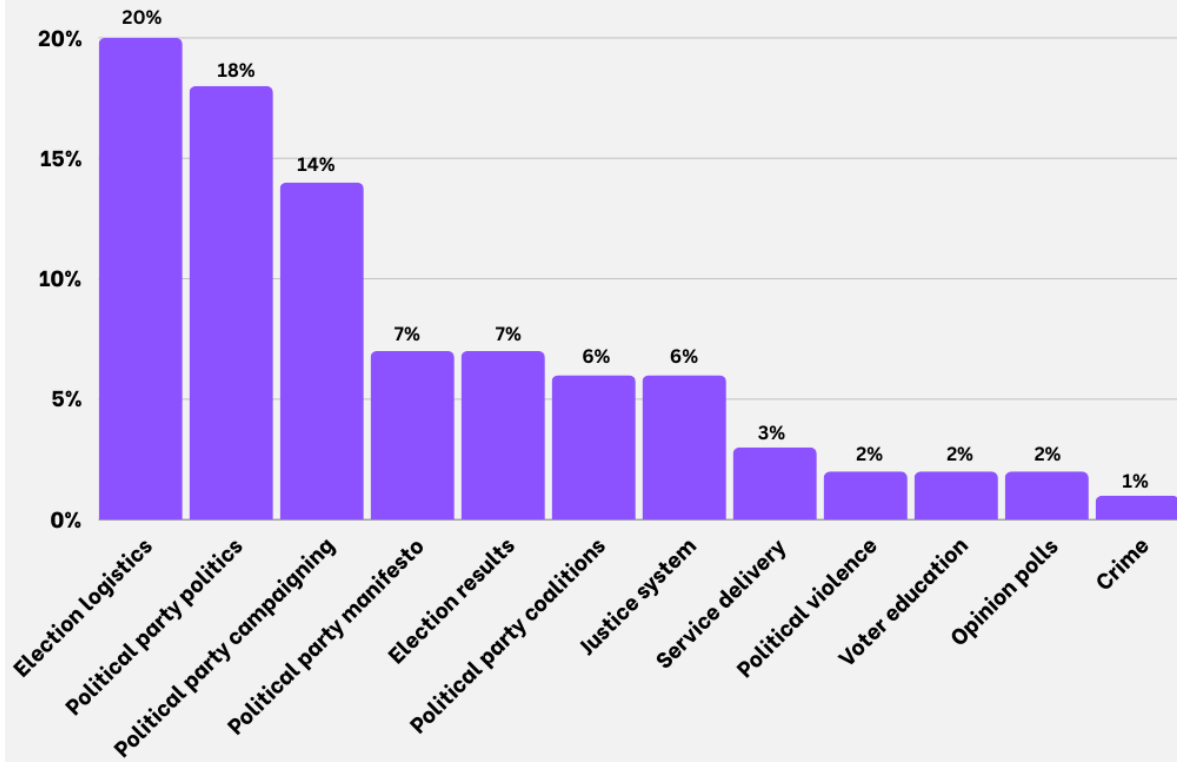
### COUNT OF ELECTION ARTICLES PER DAY



There are three clear peaks in coverage, on 20 May, and again on 29 and 30 May. On 20 May, international voting commenced and the first ballot of the 2024 national elections was cast, with media coverage focused on election logistics and reports on voting around the globe. Coverage on 20 May also focused on the Constitutional Court ruling on the eligibility of former president Jacob Zuma to stand for office representing the MK Party.

Voting day was on the 29 May, and so it would be expected that news media would focus almost all its coverage on voter turnout, election logistics and the voting process. Overall, the average number of election related stories gradually increased over this period, as would be expected, and we see a significant drop in election related coverage within two weeks post voting day.

**WHAT WAS THE COVERAGE ABOUT? BREAKDOWN OF TOP TEN TOPICS IN %  
(N=9258, 88% OF ALL ARTICLES)**

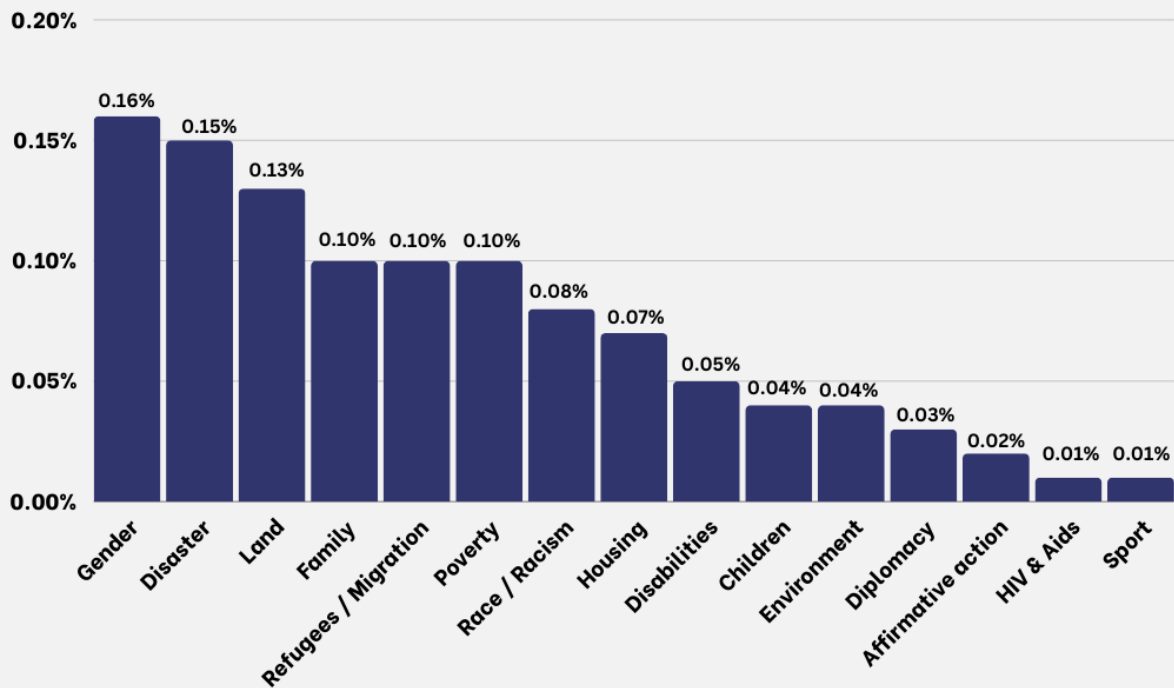


It is important to consider the different topics that media cover, as these issues shape the narrative of the election period. The top three topics covered include election logistics, political party politics and political party campaigning. These three topics alone account for 52% of all coverage. It is interesting to note that party politics overtook political party campaigning, if we compare the findings to the interim report. (Political party politics remained at 18%, however, political party campaigning decreased to 14% in the overall findings, compared to 19% in the interim report. This could be attributed to the internal conflict within the MK Party, and the large amount of media coverage given to the leadership battles leading up to and post voting day.

It is not surprising that these topics dominated coverage, however, it is disappointing that media did not offer more analysis on issues that are of concern to the public (the issue of media giving insufficient attention to critical rights-based issues is the [focus of this brief here](#)). The data shows that media allowed political parties to set the agenda, focusing on the narratives driven by politicians. Political party internal politics was one of the dominating topics, and this overshadowed key human rights-based issues, or service delivery concerns. It is worth noting that ‘service delivery’ issues featured in the top ten most covered topics (at eighth place) with 3% of coverage.

The graph below indicates the topics that were largely left out of media’s coverage of the elections, creating an obvious gap in reporting on critically important issues. Topics such as children, climate change and housing were afforded less than 1% of coverage, even though the climate crisis is one of the biggest global risks currently. Gender, education, and development were also largely ignored as key issues during the election period.

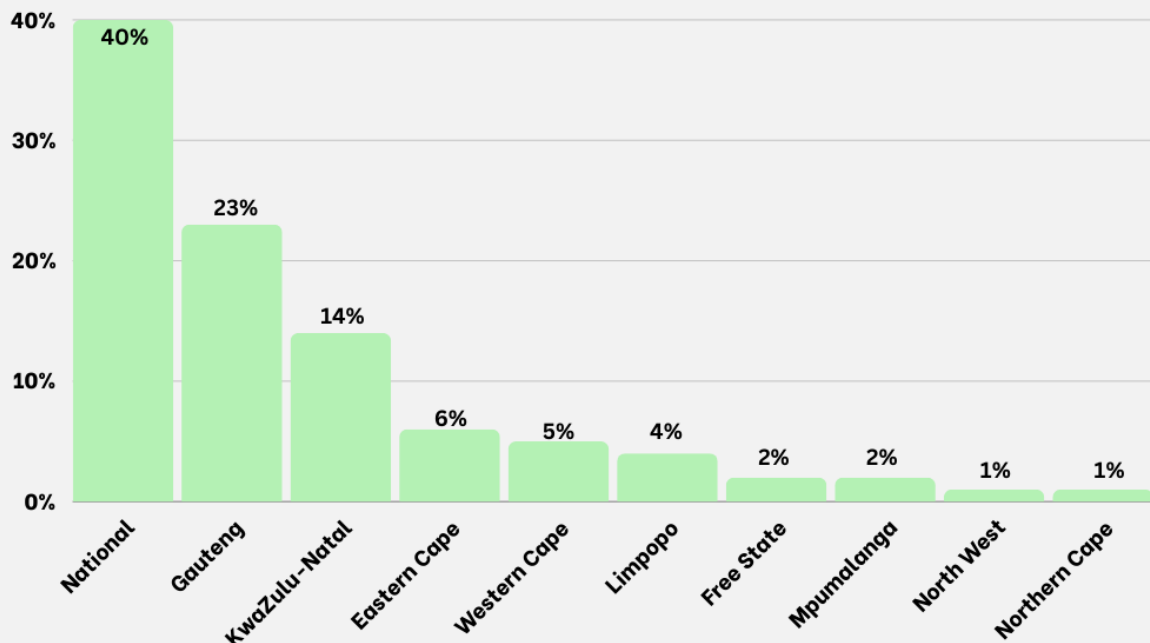
## WHAT WAS THE COVERAGE NOT ABOUT? (N=115, 1.1% OF ALL ARTICLES)



The regional spread of coverage during national and provincial elections should also enable the public to understand the issues and ensure that key areas are not being marginalised or left out. While it may be expected that the spread of coverage would largely represent the geographic breakdown of the country, a high percentage of national coverage will take place during national and provincial elections. Data shows that coverage was predominantly focused on two provinces, Gauteng (23%) and Kwa-Zulu Natal (14%). This finding represents an important change in media coverage, as the Western Cape is usually the second or third most covered province. Unusually, for the first time in our elections monitoring, the Western Cape (5%) received less coverage than the Eastern Cape (6%).

The reason for the increase in focus on the Eastern Cape could be the protests around voting stations on voting day in the Eastern Cape, and protests preventing voting stations from opening. While in line with trends observed historically, this finding indicates the need for more efforts at diverse local news coverage in marginalised areas. The remaining six provinces shared only 14% of the total coverage.

## WHICH AREAS WERE REPORTED ON? BREAKDOWN OF COVERAGE PER PROVINCE (N=9522, 98% OF ALL ARTICLES)



### Inclusion of women

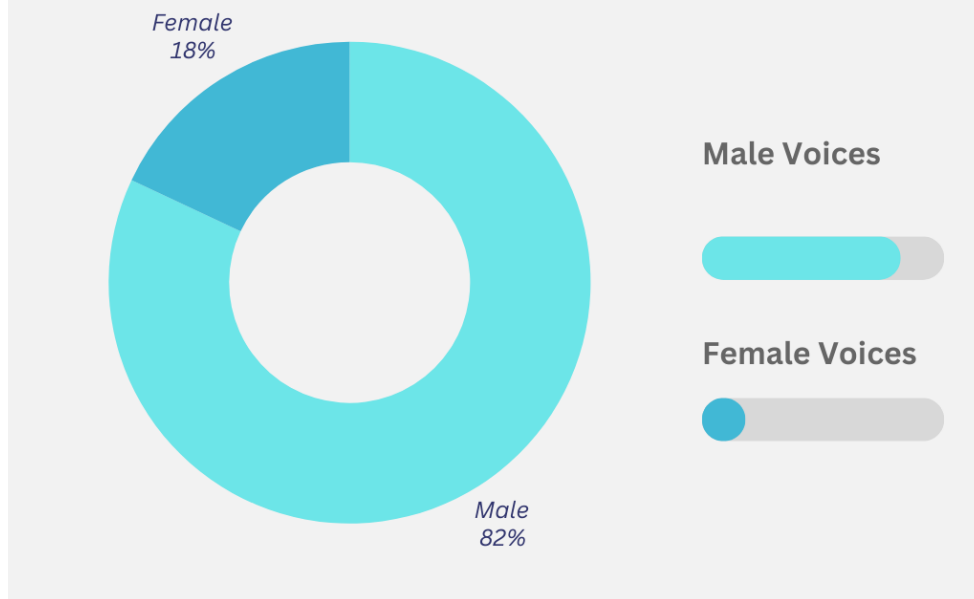
Rating: **PARTIALLY ACHIEVED**

To determine the voice share in the media (who is sourced and quoted the most) data is gathered on the spread of male versus female sources. Women's voices have been grossly underrepresented in the media during this election period with only 18% of voice share, while male voices dominate at 82%. It should be noted that the percentage of women's voice has increased (the interim report findings indicated a 16% share), which may be attributed to the engagement with journalists and editors around MMA's interim findings on voice representation. Although the under-representation is still highly problematic, the slight increase is a positive finding.

Given that the political landscape is predominantly male, with few parties being headed by women, the under-representation of women's voices reiterates the analysis that media appeared to allow the political parties and politicians to set the agenda. Generally, MMA's monitoring has found that women's voices are heard approximately 19 – 22% in the media. While news media in South Africa are usually in line with the global average (currently at 24%) of women's voices in the media, the result for these elections are below the average. In a society where there are more women, where more women vote,<sup>9</sup> and where we have near pandemic levels of gender-based violence, inequality, and patriarchy, it is essential that deliberate and consistent efforts are made to ensure more women's voices are heard.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://elections.sabc.co.za/elections2024/news/sa-women-participation-in-the-2024-election/>

## WHO HAD THE LOUDEST VOICE?



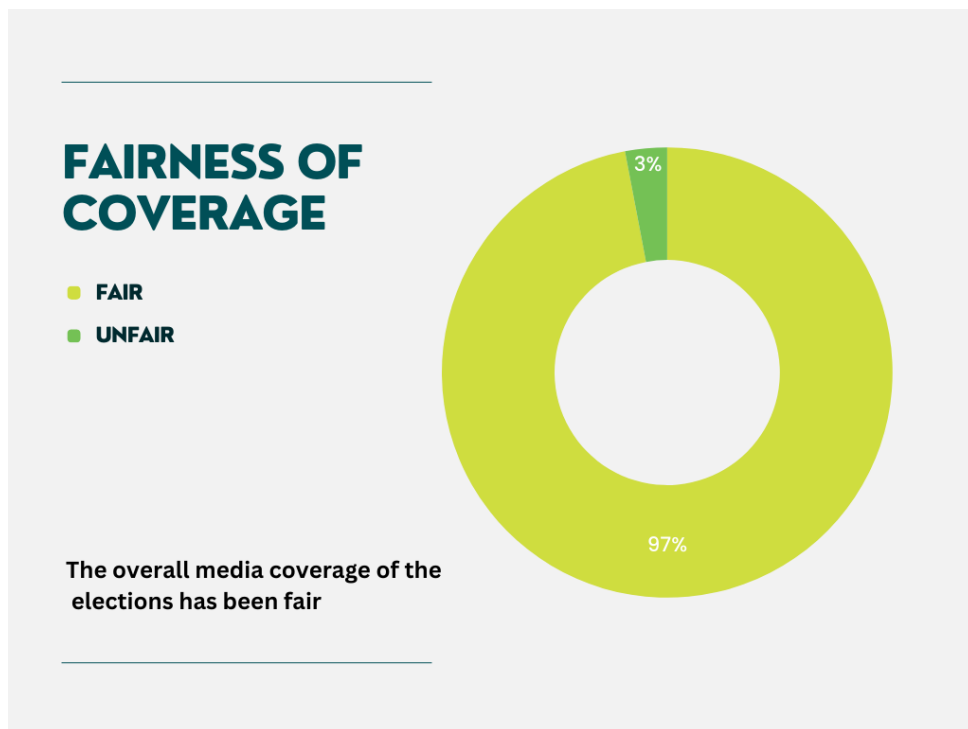
Media may to some degree argue that if the parties mainly offer male voices, that's who will be interviewed. However, we also know that gender equality isn't just good for women, but generally leads to better and balanced coverage. Media need to be more assertive in requesting interviews with women, and if the parties don't offer them, then media can ensure they make every effort to give prominence to women experts and candidates to try and achieve gender equality in their coverage.

### Credibility of information and critical analysis

Rating: **EXCEEDED**

A critical element in determining media performance during elections is looking at whether media's coverage was biased, or generally fair. Each elections related article is analysed according to the following criteria:

- Language:
  - o Language bias by exaggeration
  - o Language bias by generalisation
  - o Language bias by trivialisation
- Presentation
  - o Bias occurs when it is clear that one or more parties are favoured by virtue of how they are reported on.
- Omission
  - o Bias occurs where a party is not given the opportunity to respond to substantial allegations or to an issue of substantial importance to that party.



The data clearly indicates that the overall media coverage of the elections has been fair. It is one of the strongest findings that all media, from small community to commercial media and the public broadcaster, covered the elections in an overwhelmingly fair manner. That 30 years later we should be in a space where media are overwhelmingly fair is a credit to our journalism. That said, it is worth noting that there were some stories, like some published in The Star newspaper, that actively sought to give credence to mis- and disinformation on whether the IEC can be trusted. These stories undermine the integrity of all news media and should be condemned.

While coverage was overwhelmingly fair, a core concern that undermines the media's overall fairness and accuracy relates to challenging those who are interviewed. It was concerning how seldom journalists, interviewers and presenters challenged many of the controversial statements made by politicians. While it is difficult to fact check live, it is important to hold politicians accountable when they make claims that are unverified, unsupported, or patently false, or for example challenge the legitimacy of our constitution, perpetuate negative stereotypes including xenophobic utterances or seek to discredit key public bodies like the IEC without evidence. It is important for the media to be able to hold politicians accountable when making claims that are broadly anti-democratic and patently false or unsubstantiated. Allowing parties to get away with such statements undermines the critical role that journalism plays.

### Reasonableness and compliance

One of the elements of media performance during elections is linked directly to their compliance with codes and ethical conduct set out in the Press Code for Print and Online Media as well as the ICASA election regulations and BCCSA Code<sup>10</sup> for broadcasters. During the elections period, the Press Council and ICASA Complaints and Compliance Committee dealt with the following cases.

<sup>10</sup> Note that during election periods, the ICASA Complaints and Compliance Committee has jurisdiction to deal with election related complaints against broadcasters, and not the BCCSA.

## **Press Council: EXCEEDED**

The Press Code has a specific clause dealing with elections, and it is noted that all complaints below were either resolved amicably through mediation by the Press Council's Public Advocate or adjudicated by the Press Ombud, in record time, taking into consideration Section 1.5 of the Press Council's Complaints Procedures:

*1.5. Recognising the importance of democratic elections at national, provincial, and local levels of government, the Press Council will give top priority to finding speedy resolutions to complaints related to those elections when they are being held to secure free and fair elections.*

Press Council complaints during the election period:

### **30735 ActionSA vs Rapport**

The complaint was that the authors of an election poll were not identified in the article. The respondent stood by their story, as they had received the poll from a confidential source, with the request that the authors should not be identified. The Deputy Press Ombud upheld the complaint and directed the respondent to at least give some clarification about the authors of the poll, without naming them.

*Outcome: The respondent's application for leave to appeal was declined by the Chair of Appeals*

### **30738 PAC vs Daily Sun**

Daily Sun reported that the "PAC President" Narius Moloto claimed that the PAC had failed to meet the IEC's requirements to stand for the upcoming elections. However, the PAC stated in their complaint lodged with the Press Council that Mr Mzwanele Nyhontso was in fact the PAC President and that the PAC was registered with the IEC to participate in the elections.

*Outcome: The PAC accepted Daily Sun's offer to publish a retraction and an apology.*

### **30750 Eugene Mthethwa (EFF) vs Sunday World**

The Sunday World published an article based on a leaked EFF "candidates list" for the upcoming elections, stating that the complainant was not in the party's top 100. When the complainant lodged a complaint with the Press Council, the publications had already published a retraction and apology, as the list was found, after publication of the article, not to be the party's final list.

### **30751 Referendum Party vs Daily Maverick**

The complaint was about the publication's "Fact Check" article, in which it was stated that the Referendum Party's call for a referendum on Cape independence was "selling voters pipe dreams". The party complained inter alia that their views had not been sought. The Press Ombud dismissed the complaint as it was an opinion piece.

*Outcome: The Chair of Appeals declined the application for leave to appeal.*

### **31811 Helen Zille (DA) vs Sunday World**

The complainant stated that MS Helen Zille had been misquoted with regards to the DA's view on a possible coalition with the ANC.

*Outcome: Ms Zille accepted the publication's offer to publish a retraction and an apology.*

The Press Council dealt with 5 cases in the period, indicating that the process functioned efficiently, and that redress was provided.

## **Broadcast complaints during the period:**

## **ICASA Complaints and Compliance Committee: ACHIEVED**

Outside of an elections period, complaints about broadcasters are heard by the Broadcast Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA), but during an election period such complaints are directed to the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) and its Complaints and Compliance Committee (CCC).<sup>11</sup> As a Chapter Nine body, ICASA is mandated to address elections complaints against broadcasters. During the period the CCC dealt with three matters, all of them related to the same issue. They focused on a political advert produced by the Democratic Alliance (DA) in which a moving image of the South African flag was burned.

The three cases were:

### **Democratic Alliance (DA) Complainant Vs South African Broadcasting Corporation Soc Ltd (SABC)**

In this case the DA argued that the SABC should not have banned their advert from running.

*Outcome: the CC ruled in favour of the DA and the SABC was instructed to run the advertisement and the SABC was fined.*

### **Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), SOS Support Public Broadcasting Coalition (SOS); and Campaign for Free Expression (CFE) Vs South African Broadcasting Corporation Soc Ltd (SABC)**

In this case civil society also sought to raise freedom of expression issues about the decision of the SABC to ban the DA advert. The CCC ruled against the civil society bodies on the basis that civil society had no locus standi to bring a complaint. The civil society bodies are currently seeking to take the decision on review.

### **Bertha Kgokong Vs SABC SAfm**

This complaint was in relation to a listener of a show on SAfm. The complaint in question was also in relation to the DA advert, however, the complainant was of the view that SAfm afforded too much coverage of the controversial issue, and as a result, afforded the DA unfair elections coverage.

*Outcome: The complaint was dismissed.*

While only three cases were dealt with by the CCC, it again highlights that the systems functions. Some deep concerns however remain. In the case of the DA advert, the DA had lodged the complaint some two weeks before the case was heard – in the end the delay by the CC meant that even though the finding was in favour of the DA, the SABC could not no longer broadcast the advertisement. There is a clear need for the processes of the CCC to be speeded up to avoid any future pyrrhic victories.

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<sup>11</sup> See: [https://www.icasa.org.za/pages/complaint-and-compliance-committee?TSPD\\_101\\_R0=086f0ac93aab2000960c2512082e42959d25350d82d1c1a49f3dac94a7fcc8d6c2f4b1802e8daa6608dd8b7db61430002868654b9e9da2ad5a92abc3b29f7d35e08c083d8e1c229cfb863801581c347864f2b5defd7db2bbd236de992c9edab7](https://www.icasa.org.za/pages/complaint-and-compliance-committee?TSPD_101_R0=086f0ac93aab2000960c2512082e42959d25350d82d1c1a49f3dac94a7fcc8d6c2f4b1802e8daa6608dd8b7db61430002868654b9e9da2ad5a92abc3b29f7d35e08c083d8e1c229cfb863801581c347864f2b5defd7db2bbd236de992c9edab7)



## PART II INDICATORS // ASSESSMENT OF MEDIA ENABLING MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

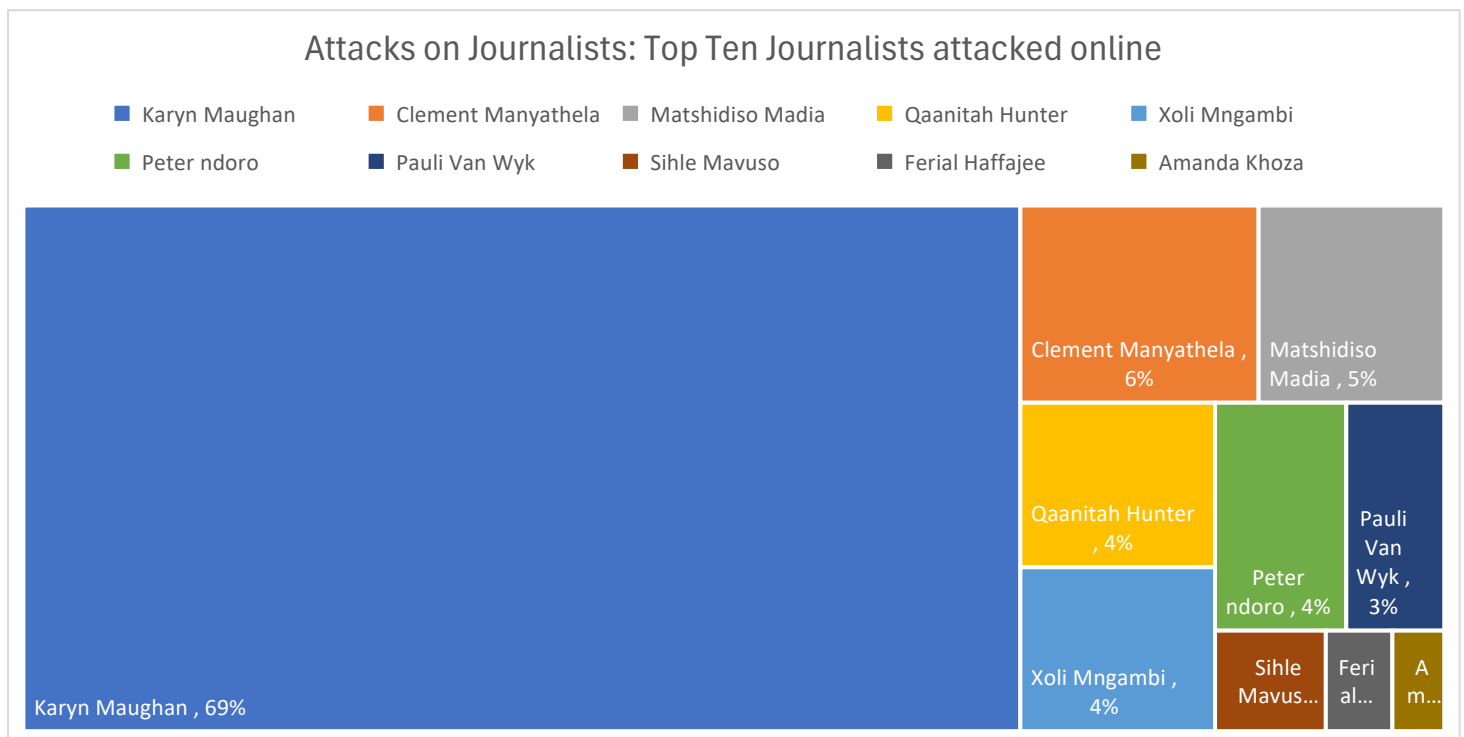
To assess the enabling environment for the media to operate during the election period and its conduciveness to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections

A key element for a conducive environment is whether journalists can do their jobs. We saw some instances where journalists were harassed at an MK rally.<sup>12</sup> Outside of that it has become common practice for journalists to be attacked and harassed simply for being online, and this is even more egregious for women journalists. This research highlights some of the attacks against journalists.<sup>13</sup>

MMA has been working on a tool called Media Attack Reporting System (MARS) where attacks against journalists online can be tracked. Two MMA monitors were asked to upload attacks against journalists online.

### Number of recorded incidences

A total of 1 025 online attacks against journalists were recorded on MARS during the period. This is an increase from the 793 attacks recorded in the interim report results, showing that even after the results had been declared attacks against journalists continued unabated.



<sup>12</sup> See: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-05-20-electoral-code-and-protection-of-journalists-parties-take-note/>

<sup>13</sup> See: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-05-22-sexualised-silenced-and-labelled-satan-horrific-levels-of-online-violence-targeting-women-journalists/>

What is clear from the chart above is that Karyn Maughan continues to be one of the focal points for online attacks. Interestingly there are several male journalists, Clement Manyathela, Peter Ndoro and Xoli Mngambi who are subjected to attacks. The nature of attacks against women journalists are however more frequently based on their sex, they draw on sexualized terms and misogynistic tropes and seek to demean.

The word cloud that follows depicts the type of language used in attacks against Karyn Maughan. Almost anything Maughan posts will be subjected to abuse and ridicule. Common words and phrases included calling Maughan a racist, insulting her appearance, and instructing her to 'voetsek' and undermining her ability to do journalism.

While the list of journalists who are subjected to attacks is relatively small, we see that the list of attackers is almost one-insult-one user, meaning that in most attacks each comment tends to come from a unique user. Thus, instead of there being a clear pattern of abuser accounts, there is a list of over 500 different accounts where attacks emanate from. The diversity of attacker identities makes it harder to track and block. While there may well be a small group responsible, they make sure to cover their tracks by using an almost unending list of attacker accounts.



### Nature of threats

The word cloud below shows a visual representation of the words and phrases used the most in the attacks on journalists.



Wena madagweni le phalaphala defender le bua masepa
Your satanic views will come back to haunt you, moloi, madagweni
White supremacy 🤡👹👹
Hatred can develop a bad odour from the evil soul 🤡
Got you little devil 🤡
When you say "we know" you are referring to whites who knows everything including what works and what doesn't or journalists
You hate Zuma so much may be you dream every night about him. I can't wait black pan Africanist have full control of this country and kick your type out of this country
You're a sick and twisted bad woman. Your job is to character assassinate real black leaders. This is to fail black people's independence. That's why you post Ace's picture in a sentence talking about someone else. Failure is what you're awaited.
Wena only fools still think of you as a journalist, the way you're obsessed with our president you can even intelligently try to spew bile against him 🤡🤡🤡
Maybe if you can stop with your biased reporting on these people you don't like, you would see that the consistent division you talking about is in your head because you use emotions to report of issue. Our problem is journalists like you have no shame
Fuck you and your DA leave Zuma alone
She's patriotic at heart. Unlike your evil self.
We will be there only to watch @XoliMngambi being cooked live on TV as he will be posing questions based on lies and not evidence or facts 🙌👉👉👉👉 And we demand 45 minutes for the interview so that DP @FloydShivambu can clearly articulate issues without hiding behind " I'VE RAN OUT OF TIME" nonsense 🙌👉
Luck you btch
Voetsek. [There's an offensive image attached]
Pink racist
U won't rest racist. U better run to Europe after 29 may
You are such an ANC puppet. Sad really. We are just going to hear lies.
I put it to you Karyn that President Zuma will prosecute you and Downer when ANC is voted out of power on 29 May 2024. You, Downer, Jamnandas, Phalaphala Protector, Cyril and Zondo will be arrested for all the nonsense u have been doing. Enjoy while it last, clock is ticking
You are crazy in the head.
Aai voetsek wena
Bloody agent Karyn
Satan
anything loved by you is rotten exactly like you
Uyanya 🙌
Wena nje voetsek
You are disgusting
Jou racist poes...
Hows your depression going?
Lap dogs will always defend their owners. Focusing on yourself is the best option.
I hate everything you personally stand for.
It's long way to go for you , that won't happen. Sit down and watch the game wena 🤡🤡
When you are a useless journalist

You b*tch stop reporting about Zuma and report ant you white brother
Votsek wena with chocolate teeth
The new stratcom
You are disgusting
Wanya wena ur hate on black will never make u rich
You're in pain Satan 😊😊
Fokof
We will vote for MK...call us whatever you like...and whether you like it or not sf****
You a very Biased and factional journalist. your journalism is very questionable , as a journalists your credibility was compromised when you accepted payola to write bad stuff about people, every time your name comes up I see corrupted journalists, try another career.
She's called Satan
FK U
VOETSEK SFEBE!!! #VOTEMK2024
VOETSEK
VOETSEK JOU MASE POES!!!
FK U EVIL RACIST WHITE BTXH
VOETSEK RACIST BTCH
Masimbenu!!!! Your hatred towards @AdvBMkhwebane stinks
So the DUSTBIN FAKE LEGAL Politician wrote an article ABOUT HERSELF? 🤔
It is rude for you to address Advocate Ngcukaitobi but when it comes to Adv Mpofu you address him ,by his surname, it's shows how biased you are ,and you can't control yourself for hating black people bloody racist.
Go fuck yourself leave Zuma alone 😊
And you still fat! 😊
Zuma right were violated Wena Gogo
You guys are modern day witches. You have very dark hearts. Voetsek!!!
This user posts an offensive image in response to a post made by the journalist related to a legal matter involving former president Jacob Zuma.
They say Karyn feed people 'bullshit' everyday.
U are a slut don't forget that
This woman is such a bitter narcissist. Honestly mkhwebane should be embarrassed at how she is so entitled to Sans hard earned taxes.@CyrilRamaphosa@MbalulaFikile here's another economic failures cause it ain't ever greedy anc cadres.
You sound like a witch
U are anti black moron u white racist
Bese ukhala Ngo bullying wena sdakwa sehunters
Wena karyn with fake tears your days will come the sooner the better
The good thing about Karen is that when she dies is that the will be nothing to remember her with.
The dog Karen has been sent out!!!
Only retards will listen to the mantanyula liar.
Oh voetsek wena and go bleach your yellow teeth.
You're disgusting, your day will come.
Did u brush your brown teeth?

You arr getting very close to meeting your maker, usijwayela amasimba manje!
You can't even hide it that you're a witch.
I am sure you are not happy because the judgement does not serve the white agenda you represent.
I used to respect this little witch @karynmaughan. What a waste of respect msuzo
Trash, Kaak, and fake news journalism by yellow teeth and News24. The mouthpiece of unreliable newsfeed. Sies 🤔🤔🤔
They say she must be probably drunk by the statement she made
Voetsek, wena dirty teeth 🤢
Did you 🍬🍬 perhaps before posting this?
Pink 🍷 are so disrespectful to us Africans yoh 🤔
This user disparages the journalist for commenting on a legal matter.
Fat cat
Wena unesidina nje kwaphela.always reporting negatively about MK...ungumSoon uyezwa
Wena unesidina nje kwaphela.always reporting negatively about MK...ungumSoon uyezwa
You must keep quiet sometimes Racist
Like your teeth
You just gotta shut your white mouth
You must be having an orgasm now
U Are Disgusting @karynmaughan U Are A Filthy Human Being
Ey umubi nawe Karyn, qala mlungu omubi kanje
Your problem is you are a resist who doesn't hide her mentality towards black people.go to hell President Zuma will never pay for that forget
Mazinyo ka Curry when are you updating us on Markus Jooste???
The hate you have will kill you one day.
Go brush your teeth with baking soda first wena
Futsek sfebe
"ADVOCATE" JOU SWINE
I thought that Indian racist left journalism 🤔🤔🤔
You bloody hypocrite, Pravin sold SAA state capture style you have made no comment you bloody hypocrite
Tsek wena msunu wakho
Nizizinja shame dogs 🤢🤢🤢🤢 Tomorrow you crying journalism blah blah shutdown yokunya nibe nibhala ukunya 🤔🤔
Go to hell
She's attracked using a picture
Her reporting is always biased, how did the become a journalist? What an evil woman
You are struggling with chest pains wena FAKE LEGAL JOURNALIST
Keep trying Cinderpink
She's being called Cinderpink and to also bring out her 'pom poms'
Karyn o satane ya motho
Go fix the wrinkled neck

Die poes afrikaaner racist
@karynmaughan is evil. Why on earth would a reporter consciously misrepresent the truth.
Karyn, you are a disgrace. Bias reporting
They say she's a "gogo"
You are just a hopeless clown 🤡
So it must be white racists that must be given bursaries 🤔
Voutsek Wena everyday it's Zuma can you speak about the white racist company and the DA that has killed people in George. We want to know the owners of all those companies involv
Always thinking about Zuma even you boyfriend fucking you scream Zuma Zuma Zuma 🌀
😂😂😂 I wonder when Zuma passes away what will you report on?? I guess your career will also go to the grave 😂😂😂
So you care for Zuma your arch enemy,Zuma WMC your masters enemy ,you eat ,you sleep ,you dream Zuma ,wherever you are kuduma uZuma in your big Dunder head ,next thing you complain of abuse in the social media all started by your hate in anyone hated by your masters
You bloody thief you talk as if you are inocebt mxm
Are you still an alcoholic???????
You racist thing.
Here fotsek wena Meno a gold O bua nonsense. Tsek
And journalists are paid propagandists and are destroyers of nations. When a journalist speaks, don't listen to her. She's not human but an evil entity.
U look like shit
Msunu
Fuck you and your racist DA.
Puppet, racist and biased journalists.
You witch, you will cry when we treat you like the propaganda you are spreading. Indeed you deserve all the things you are crying about
You are kak
You're not a journalist wena. You're a paid mouth piece. A propaganda machine, a liar, a criminal, a jail bird in waiting.
Go fuck yourself
Clown
Voetsek wena
Stop irritating us you ugly face
Who cares about your cockeyes
Stop drinking and twitting
You need a boyfriend, clearly the dildos don't work anymore
Wena nje always reporting rubbish, no one takes you seriously, bloody propagandist nx
Wena nkare o moloi. You said nothing when she was mishandled by parliamentary "men". Today, "she is one of the most hardworking females". O moloi!! 😂😂😂😂😂
No wonder Soweto smells like sulphur
Bullshit drunkard blabbering, TSEK. 🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷
Nonsense, what you have in common is racist and hate towards black people, all of you combined, Msoonu yenu
Futsek qgwirha
Futseka msunu wakho, nyamao

Stupid racist bastard
Yellow journalist! Sies
Tsek wena msunu wakho
This white girl is dom
Fokof wena
Coz you there for negative reporting since ya'll his enemy!! Ofcos they won't bow to your nonsense msunu yenu!!
Sies, I hate this woman.
Vintage @PaulivW spewing 🗨️ in the administration of her paid propagandist duties. SA is cursed with fools running around with a fancy accent calling themselves journalists . It worked 5-6 years ago, make no mistake our eyes are wide open this time around!
Evil sadistic Narcissist racist.
Go back to Palestine
Tsa monyaaaa
F U drunkard
You drunkard

## Platforms used

A trend that continued over the period is that most of the reports of the attacks originate from Twitter/X. This is a similar finding to what we see on Real411 where many of the complaints originate on Twitter/X.

## Responsiveness

As outlined in the section on attacks against journalists, the dominant platform where attacks were reported, was X/Twitter. Looking at Real411 complaints over the period, we find similar trends where the majority of the complaints also originated from X/Twitter. Given X's withdrawal of their Trust and Safety team from South Africa, and indeed the continent, it is unsurprising that we find X/Twitter as the dominant platform for mis/disinformation and attacks against journalists.



## Recommendations

### Attacks on Journalists

As the online attacks against journalists show, there is a clear need for greater and more meaningful commitment to protecting journalists.

*The recommendations are:*

- that the IEC consider adopting the [draft code developed by SANEF](#) for the next local government elections.
- MMA also recommends additional focus and commitment to the protection of journalists is given when political parties pledge their adherence to the legislated Electoral Code of Conduct.

### Role of News Media

Having access to accurate, verifiable and fair coverage is an essential component of free and fair elections. All stakeholders have a positive responsibility to demonstrate what actions, processes and concrete steps are being taken to develop, protect and promote the role of news media in elections.

*The recommendation is:*

- in addition to the inclusion of the draft code developed by SANEF, the recommendation is that the Framework of Cooperation is expanded to encourage greater commitment from social media to protection, promotion and development of news media.

### Innovation

Innovation demonstrated by a range of media including the SABC in their coverage, where they hosted social media live streaming events, as well as an Elections Pop Up channel and the SABC's own election results dashboard, showed what could be done with limited resources.

Other innovations were the various fact checking initiatives, manifesto analyses, (including a quiz style option through News24). Many media also sought to offer summaries of party manifestos. Other bodies like SANEF set up an elections portal with extensive resources.

*The recommendation is:*

- for the IEC to recognise and commend all such efforts in order to ensure that they can be repeated, and where possible replicated and expanded.

### Journalist Training

It is important that voter education goes broader than the voting process and also includes how the IEC functions, mechanisms to ensure and protect free and fair elections, how vote counting works, and how votes are translated into representation in parliament.

While such programmes have been run in the lead up to elections, it is important that longer term approaches are taken to ensure broader take-up, retention and application of the content and key issues. There were important training and briefing series run covering the entire elections period, from preparation to vote counting and results declaration. *In this regard, IEC, SANEF and partners should be commended running such training leading up to the 2024 elections.*

*The recommendation is:*

- As journalist resources continue to dwindle, and as early career entrants join the industry, the IEC and partners carry out in-depth, consistent, election and voter education with media.

## Development of Masterclasses

In addition to voter education, there is also a need to ensure journalists are trained in covering elections, from the perspective of voters, so that there can be more issue based coverage. There is also a need to ensure that the concept of equitable coverage is unpacked and understood.

*The recommendation is:*

- the development of a master class/course on reporting in elections in lead up to local elections, to target producers, journalists and editors.

## Online Harms, Literacy and Skills Development

In another first this year, MMA with the IEC and the Mandela Institute ran a master class on online harms. The class offers an exciting opportunity to ensure greater understanding of online harms.

*The recommendation is:*

- the course is run on an ongoing basis, not just around elections as the issues will continue to impact and undermine democratic institutions.

## Supporting Media Regulators

While the ICASA Complaints Compliance Committee (CCC) is well established, there is an urgent need for issues to be dealt with quickly and with a significant reduction in time taken to hear and adjudicate matters.

Given the escalated tensions, it is essential that urgent issues are addressed as speedily as possible, ensuring respect for due process, but also ensuring that public confidence in the system is built. It is important that the role of the CCC is highlighted, commended and supported by all stakeholders. The Press Council system demonstrated its efficacy in the lead up to elections.

*The recommendation is:*

- for the CCC's role to be acknowledged and commended and for it to be supported by stakeholders.

## Countering Threats to Democratic Institutions

An emerging threat to democratic elections are efforts to undermine the credibility of critical public institutions. It is essential to distinguish legitimate, evidence based critiques against public bodies from those that seek to undermine public trust with no evidence.

Attacks against the IEC, news media, journalists and the judiciary undermine free and fair elections. All stakeholders in elections have an essential responsibility to challenge such attacks, and to explain and unpack the role each stakeholder has in ensuring free, fair and credible elections.

*The recommendations are:*

- that educational material setting out the role and purpose of core democratic institutions is developed and disseminated in the lead up to elections, and that,
- where institutions are subjected to unwarranted attacks, such attacks are condemned by all stakeholders.

## Mainstreaming Gender Equality

Gender equality is central to democracy. As highlighted in the MPR assessment, media contribute to perpetuating gender inequality through the patently inequitable use of women's voices.

*The recommendation is:*

- it is essential that the media masterclasses mentioned above, as well as voter education, all address issues relating to gender to ensure journalists include more women's voices and that political parties are also strongly encouraged to promote women's voices in public discourse.