SABC: emerging from the darkness

Presentation

to SABC Editorial Inquiry

With SANEF and SOS Support Public Broadcasting Coalition

5 September 2018

About Media Monitoring Africa

- MMA is a registered non benefit trust operating since 1993. Celebrate 25 years this year;
- MMA's vision is a just and fair society empowered by a free, responsible and quality media;
- Through a human rights-based approach, MMA aims to promote the development of:
  - Media that is transparent, diverse, ethical and accountable to its audiences;
  - Critical and constructive communications by the powerful, and;
  - Informed, engaged and connected citizenry.
- Funded by range of local & international donors – audits – high levels of accountability.

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About MMA

- MMA has monitored media coverage of all democratic elections, including being commissioned by SABC to cover 2014 elections;
- MMA has presented to range of public bodies on a range of issues, including:
  - Cyber Crimes Cyber Security Bill
  - POSIB Bill
  - SABC editorial review processes
  - Film & Publications Amendment Bill.
  - Press Council & Press Freedom Commission

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About SOS

- SOS is The SOS Support Public Broadcasting Coalition (SOS) is a civil society coalition
- Advocates for the presence of robust public broadcasting in the public interest to deepen our constitutional democracy.
- SOS represents trade unions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), community media, independent film and TV production sector organisations; academics, freedom of expression activists and concerned individuals.
- SOS campaigns for an independent and effective public broadcaster.
- SOS promotes citizen friendly policy, legislative and regulatory changes to public and community broadcasting public broadcasting

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Introduction

- Thanks and commend the SABC senior management for launching the inquiries. Both critical steps in rebuilding credibility of the SABC
- Thank the Chairperson for his support and opportunity to present
- Our submission comes as critical outsiders - we are strongest supporters and critics.
- We hope it will help ensure that we know what happened, that those responsible will be held accountable, that practical steps are implemented through the editorial policies
- Critically We hope those responsible for threats against SABC8 and deaths of Suna Venter and Sizwe Vilakazi are brought to justice.

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Overview of Presentation

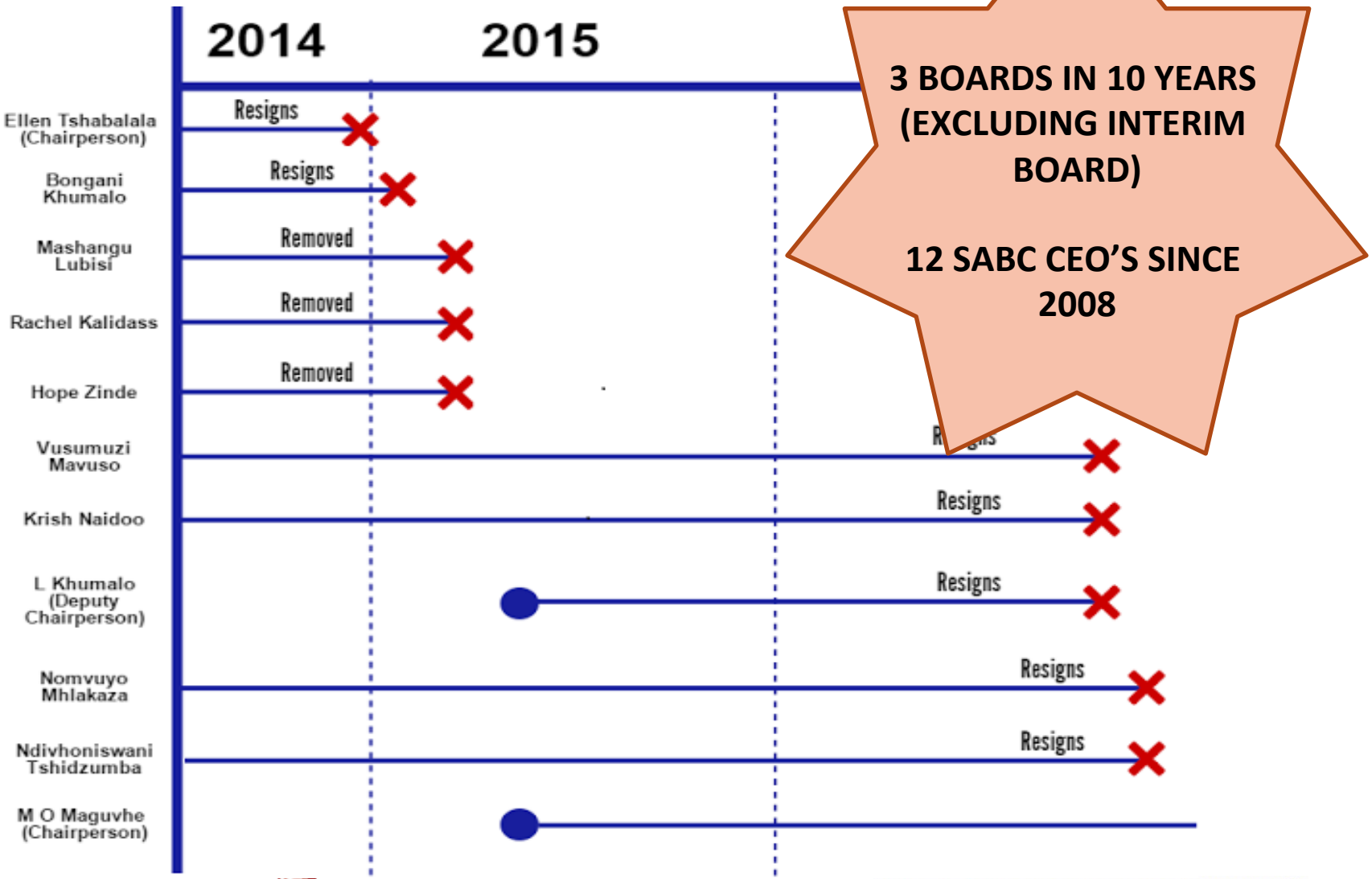
Four parts:

- Crisis at the SABC: How did we get here?
- Research conducted by MMA:
  - Failing the people, undermining democracy: Bias and SABC coverage of the South African local government elections
  - Motsoeneng Rogue Protocol: Monitoring of the SABC protest ban coverage
- Personal experiences and reflections
- Conclusions & Requests.

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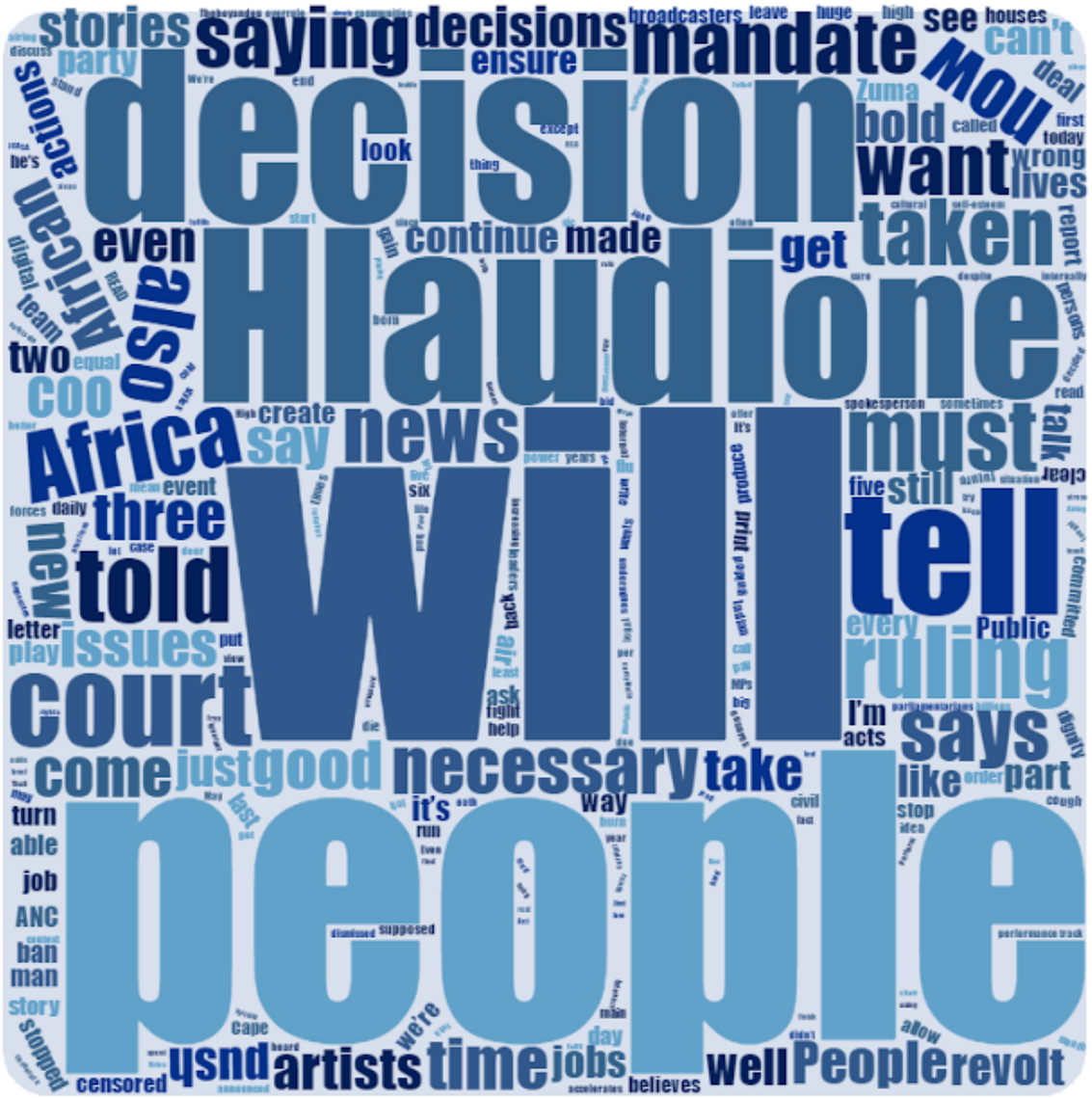
Remembering the Crisis 2016



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Crisis what Crisis?



Hlaudi Cloud
2016

Back in time.. The rebirth of a fascist



SABC Local Election Coverage

- Monitoring period: 1 June – 10 August 2016;
- 73 media monitored:
  - including print, broadcast and online
  - including SABC and it's competitors;
- Attention is on how SABC performed during the period;
- Critical that SABC adheres to highest standards, in diversity, equitable and fair coverage.



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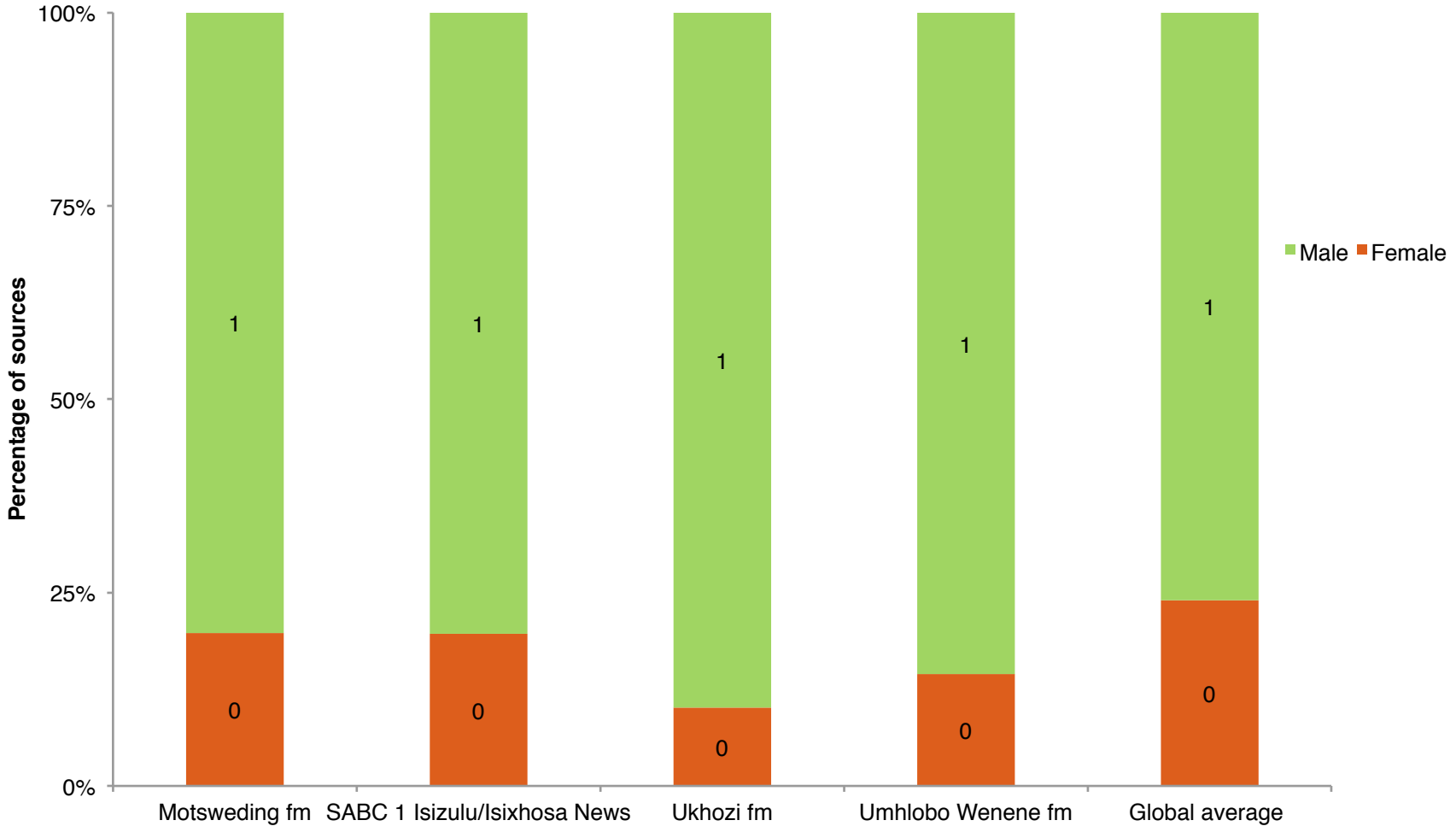
Key Findings: Whose voices?

- NB: gender - whose voices do we hear?
- SABC has great responsibility to ensure more equitable coverage and more women's voices heard;
- We already know SABC failed in respect of issues
  - e.g. GBV didn't feature
- In voice we see - on par or worse than other media;
- Entrenches unconscious bias
- Failed to meet their public service mandate.
- It is a violation of policies

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Key Findings: Whose voices?



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Key Findings: Was coverage fair?

- Fairness in coverage is key determinant of elections coverage and role of media in elections period
- Fundamental importance that SABC performs well - fair coverage - or may impact overall nature of elections.
- SABC credibility was already low after 2014 elections, and existing and deepening crises thanks to: SABC Board, senior management, Minister of Communications, Parliament and failure to act by ICASA.

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Analysing Bias

- Bias is determined via a range of factors:
- Democracy threatening bias occurs as a pattern over time;
- Bias is a clear and deliberate attempt to favour or disfavour a particular party person or group.
- We look at three levels – language, presentation and omission. Language bias: where language used clearly and distinctly favoured one party over another, or substantially disfavoured or damaged the image of a party or parties.
- Presentation bias: when it was clear that one or more parties were favoured by virtue of how they were reported on in the overall news bulletin or the entire elections programme.
- Bias by omission: where a party not given the opportunity to respond to substantial allegations or to an issue of substantial importance to that party.
- All these elements combined to determine bias, together with voice of parties.

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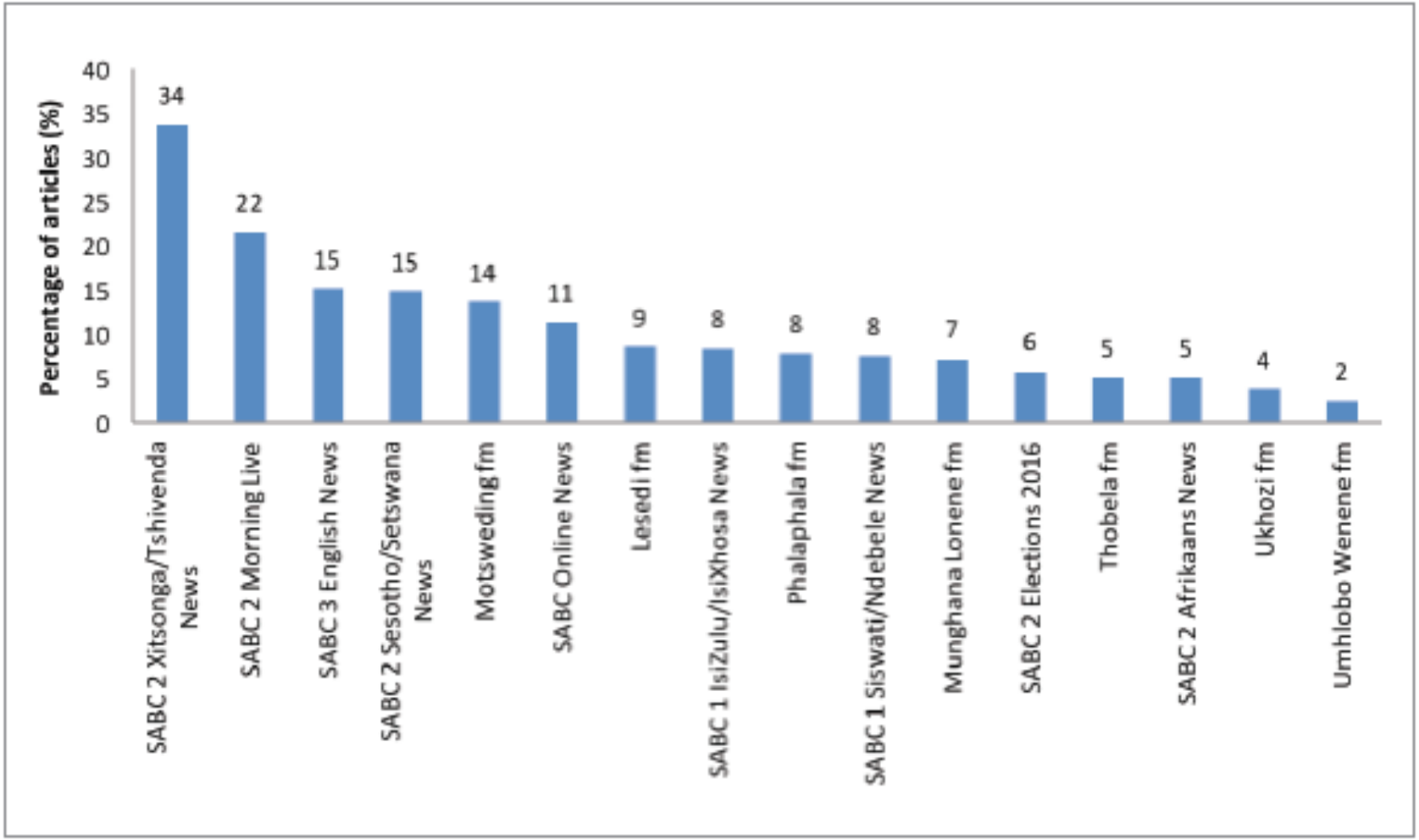
Key Findings: Was coverage fair?

- For the first time since becoming a democracy we found systemic bias in three programmes
- Seriousness cannot be overstated. As to achieve it required not just violation and abuse of editorial policies but:
  - Violation of structures, practice and basic governance
  - Required clear political will
- National tragedy
- Failed to meet their public service mandate & threatened our democracy.

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Was coverage fair? Biased items

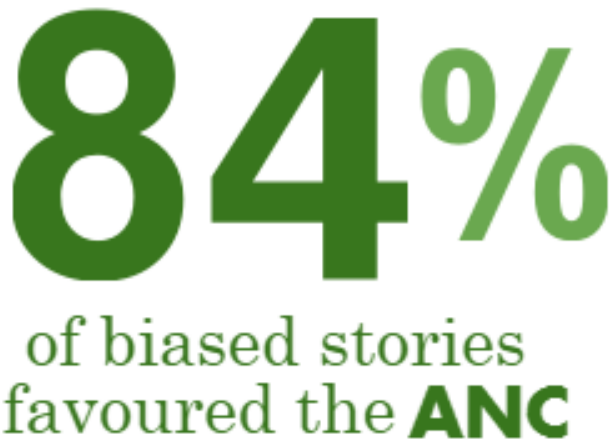


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Key Findings: Was coverage fair?

- SABC 2 Xitsonga/Tshivenda News - 34% biased items
  - *for every three stories put forward in their 17h30 news bulletin, at least one of them, on average, was identified as biased*

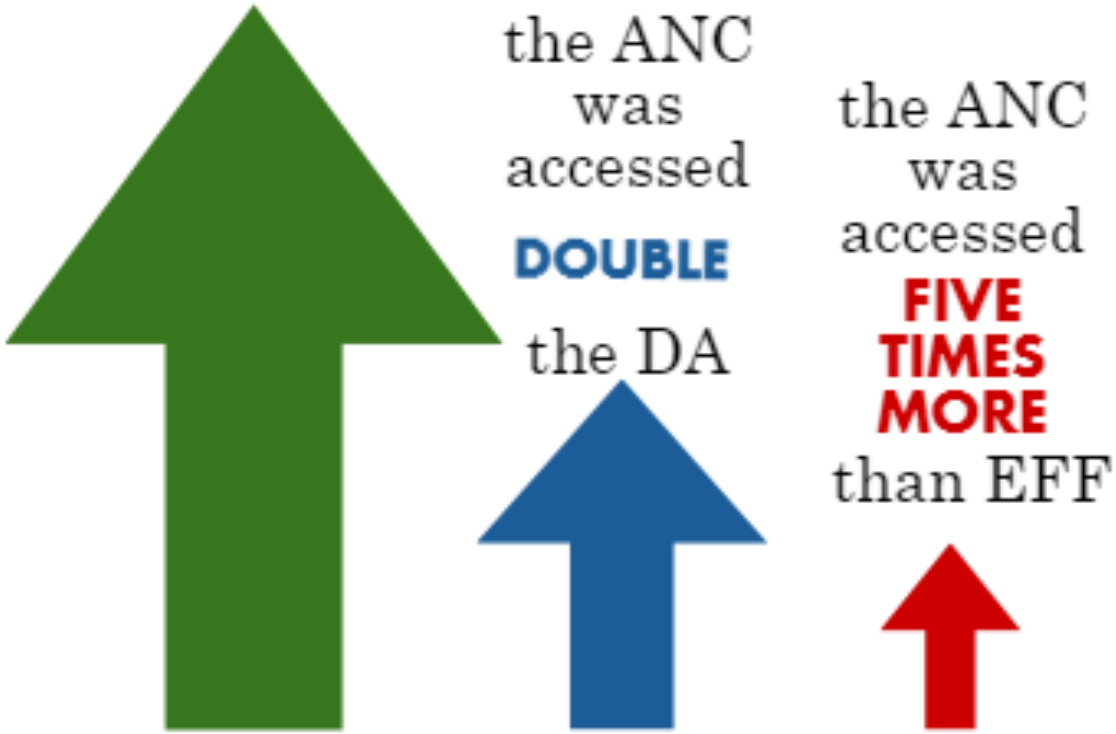


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Key Findings: Was coverage fair?

- SABC 2 Morning Live - 22% biased items



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Key Findings: Was coverage fair?

- Seriousness cannot be overstated. As to achieve it required not just violation and abuse of editorial policies but:
  - Violation of structures, practice and basic governance
  - Required clear political will
- National tragedy
- Failed to meet their public service mandate & threatened our democracy.
- What makes it even worse is that we warned SABC in 2014 of bias.

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We warned the SABC in 2014

- "Overall the SABC content of news items was monitored as fair. Critically however, the **impact of the banning of advertisements**, as well as other stories relating to comments about editorial interference, as well as the **clear bias in presentation** all served to **deeply undermine not only the credibility of the SABC but also gave, in some respects justified support to allegations of unfairness by political parties**. While we do not believe the findings serve to undermine the democratic nature of the elections process in South Africa **these are issues, which must be addressed constructively in the run up to the local government elections in 2016.** If these issues are not urgently addressed, not only will the credibility of the SABC be further undermined, but it will also be an issue that the regulator, ICASA, as well as the Independent Electoral Commission will have to examine in order to asses if the elections themselves have been undermined."



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Motsoeneng Rogue Protocol:Protest Ban

“No one will dictate to us.

We know what we are doing here.”

Hlaudi Motsoeneng in response to ICASA Ruling on protest ban.

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Motsoeneng Rogue Protocol:Protest Ban

- 26 May 2016: Mr Motsoeneng announces ban of coverage of violent protests - came hot on heels of violence in Vuwani;
- Decision published via press release, disseminated to staff via instruction from top; clear violation!
- SABC journalists fired for doing their job;
- Supported by Minister - despite being clear violation of freedom of speech;
- MMA, SOS, FXI took case to ICASA, CCC - we won;
- SABC Ordered to reverse decision & send Board resolution. We decided to see if complied.

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Protest Ban Policy: Research

- We set out to see if SABC had indeed complied with the order by ICASA
- Given the attitude of arrogance with which ruling was met - and that no communication issued to staff seemed likely not adhered;
- We found in run up to elections protest ban was in place - chilling effect on news.

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Protest Ban Research

- Monitoring period over 3 separate weeks:
  - 23 – 30 July 2016
  - 8 – 13 August 2016
  - 1 – 6 September 2016

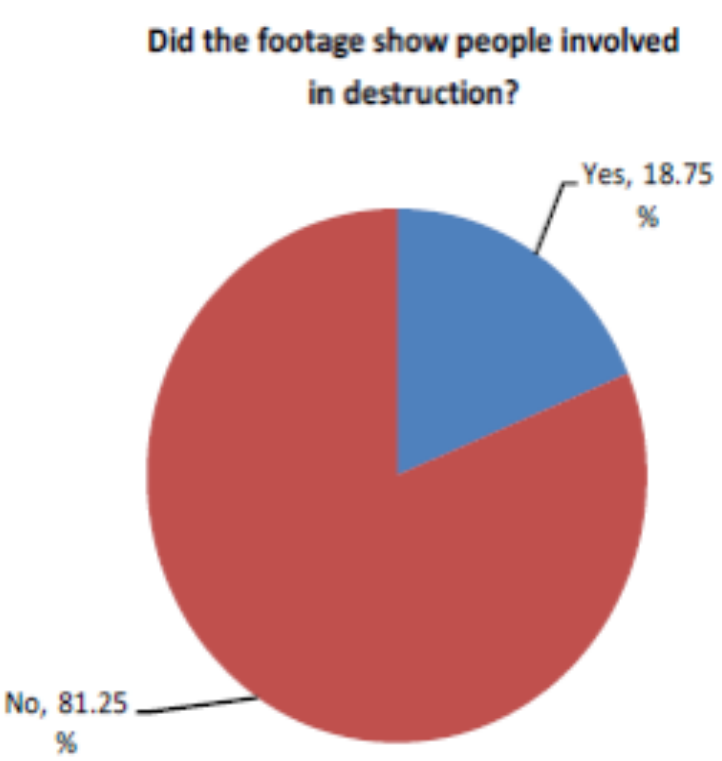
- 95 news bulletins with a combined total of 950 news stories were monitored

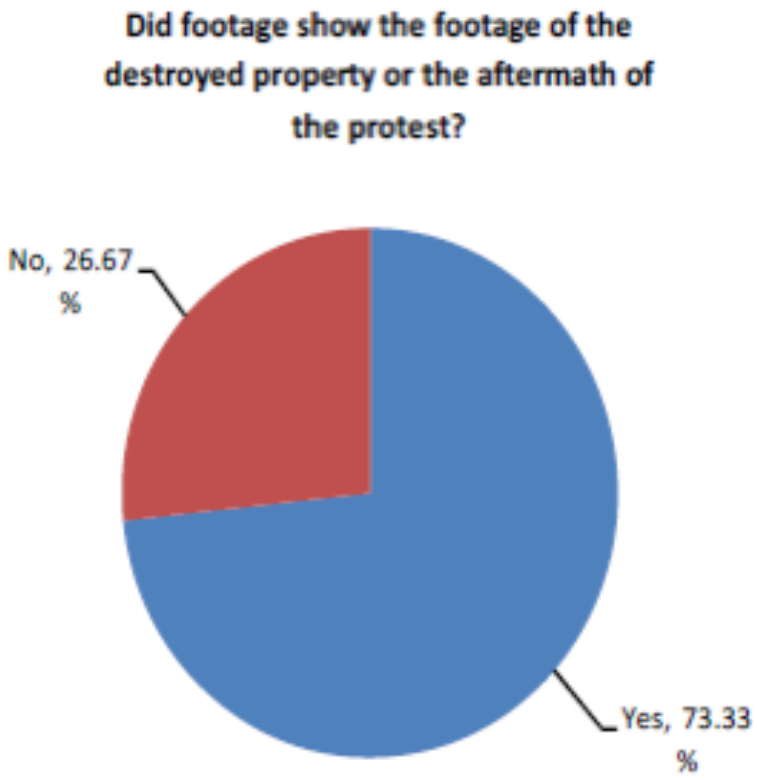
- 6 SABC television news channels monitored:
  - SABC 1 IsiZulu/IsiXhosa
  - SABC 1 SiSwati/Ndebele
  - SABC 2 Xitsonga/Tshivenda
  - SABC 2 Sesotho/Setswana
  - SABC 2 Afrikaans
  - SABC 3 English

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Key Findings: Violent Footage?





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Protest Ban Conclusion

- Protests were covered on SABC TV
  - BUT violent protests < non violent protests both in terms of prominence and number of stories (despite several violent protests taking place)
- Footage was used in reporting of violent protests
  - BUT in all but one item, NO images of actual violence were shown
  - AND footage of aftermath was shown
- These findings are in line with the SABC protest ban and demonstrate that the SABC was in violation of the ICASA order.
- SABC did not adhere to the Order, and deceived SABC staff, the regulator (ICASA), parliament and the people of South Africa.

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Protest Ban Conclusion

- To best of our knowledge nobody has been disciplined for the violation of the order - nor for supporting it.
- Critical element of editorial interference is that it is encouraged by zero accountability.

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Commercial Interference

- Currently subject of CCC complaint with SOS – about payment for programming where not clearly spelled out to viewers and processes not followed.
- In December 2017 Three talk carried two paid for programmes with Minister B. Dlamini.
- Elements subject of case but shows editorial interference across commercial grounds as well.

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Personal Reflections

- Chair will have heard more detailed evidence, these are useful to the extent they support our own research.
- In addition to being banned from SABC interviews, we had numerous staffers approach us to share their stories and fears.
  - Stories of victimisation;
  - Of exclusion from processes and denial of interviews
  - Of direct interference in small to large decisions
  - Of people being parachuted in with no experience but a direct line to Mr Motsoeneng
  - The absence of paper trail by Mr Motsoeneng
  - Culture of self censorship and fear
  - Each of these elements, collectively and individually facilitated deliberate bias and violation of basic journalism ethics.

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Personal Reflections

- SABC 8 perhaps most stark, offensive, anti-democratic and repugnant examples of editorial interference
- We together with others met and supported, especially SOS and some from R2K.
- Their experiences must be recorded, researched, those responsible brought to justice, and concrete steps taken to prevent recurrence of similar actions. But there is another aspect.
- The silence from any of those who should have been shocked, outraged and taking action was deafening
- Neither Minister nor ICASA, and majority of parliament came out in strong defence or condemnation of the acts.
- The absence of protection being seen to protect and failure to protect is also editorial inteference

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Personal Reflections

- In November 2016 we commented on the SABC statement issued by Kaiser Kganyago:
  - *"our message is very clear that this is a matter of the police, if anybody receives death threats, they must just report the matter to the police and the police will know what to do, and this has got nothing to do with the SABC"*
- "*The darkest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crisis*." Dante Alighieri
- The absence of protection being seen to protect and failure to protect is also editorial interference

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Conclusion & Requests

- Research shows how SABC has failed to meet its public service mandate and routinely violated policies in such egregious manner and to such an extent they served no functional purpose. All this in one of the most crucial periods ie. run up to democratic local elections

- Systemic bias on SABC programmes is a clear threat to our democracy, not just violation of editorial policies and interference.

- Failure and/or refusal to obey ICASA order to reverse public protest ban shows SABC board & senior management not accountable to public

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Conclusion & Requests

- The fundamental violations point to an institution that was not just in crisis - but one that had gone rogue. It was facilitated by failure at ALL levels of accountability.
- Those responsible must be fired & held accountable
- Absolutely essential for any future process to have credibility that those responsible for actions against the SABC 8 are brought to justice AND
- That those responsible for the deaths of Suna Venter and head of legal affairs Sizwe Vilakazi are caught and brought to justice. Each day that passes where no action is taken our democracy is undermined.

- Future looking brighter but - need findings from the inquiry to be built into the editorial policies
- New attitude and approach within the SABC corridors – credibility and trust will take years to rebuild. The inquiry is an important step in that process.

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Thank You

"***No Pressure, no diamonds***"

Thomas Carlyle

William Bird (MMA, Director)

williamb@mma.org.za

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Key Findings: Political Party Coverage

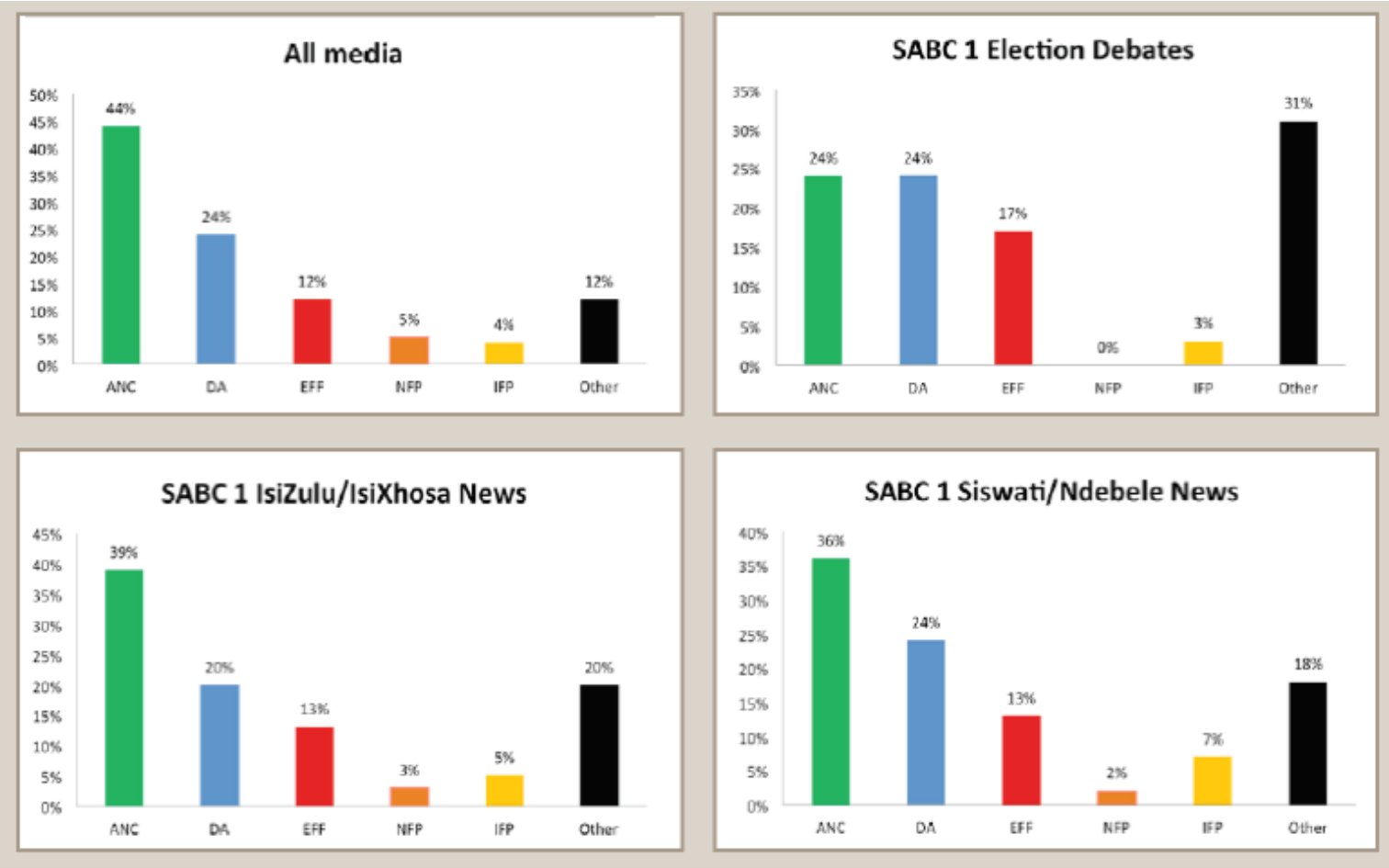
- How did SABC cover political parties?
- Have a greater mandate to cover more and greater diversity;
- Some positive exceptions in elections dedicated programming - where greater diversity covered;
- Generally however - in line with other media, or not as diverse -i.e failed to meet their public service mandate.

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Key Findings: Political Party Coverage

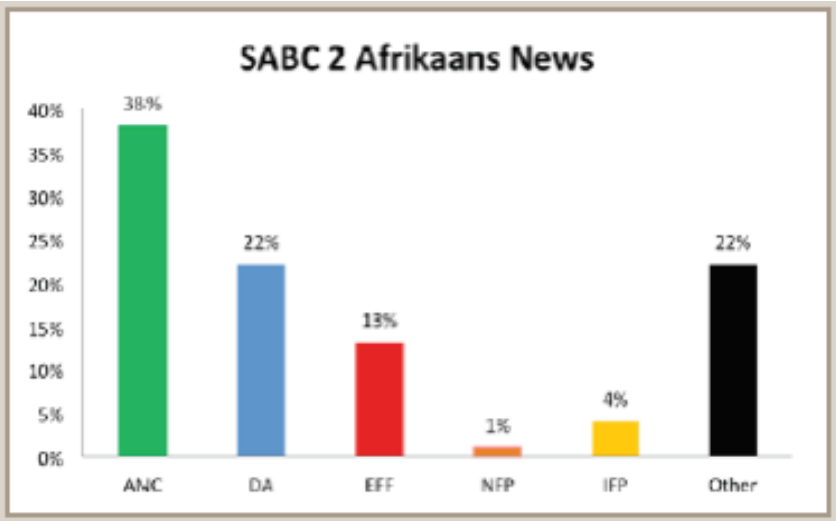
By focusing on bigger political parties, the SABC covered the local elections as if they were national elections

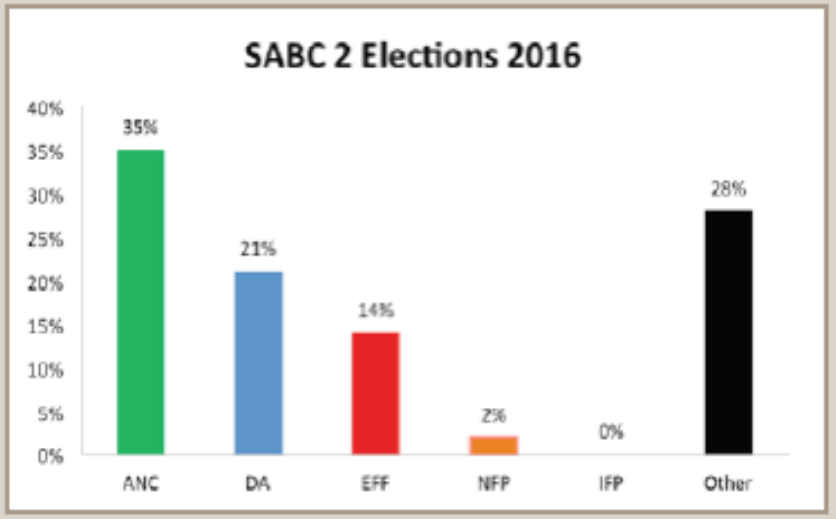


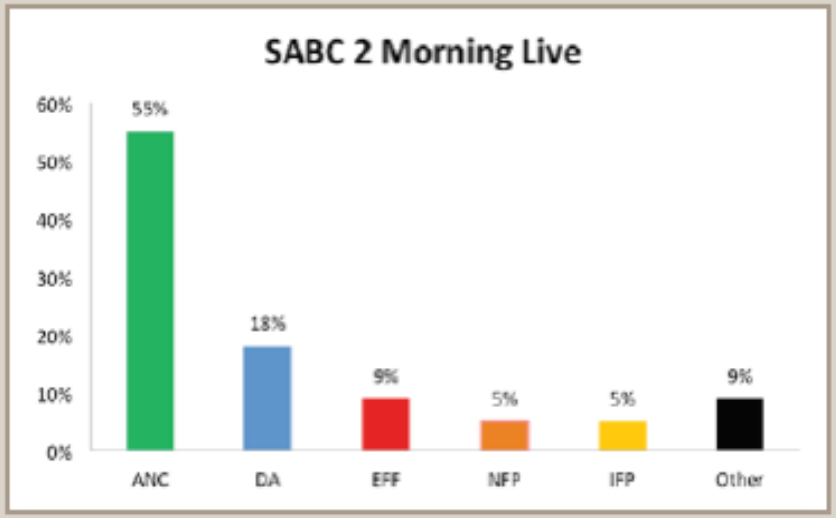
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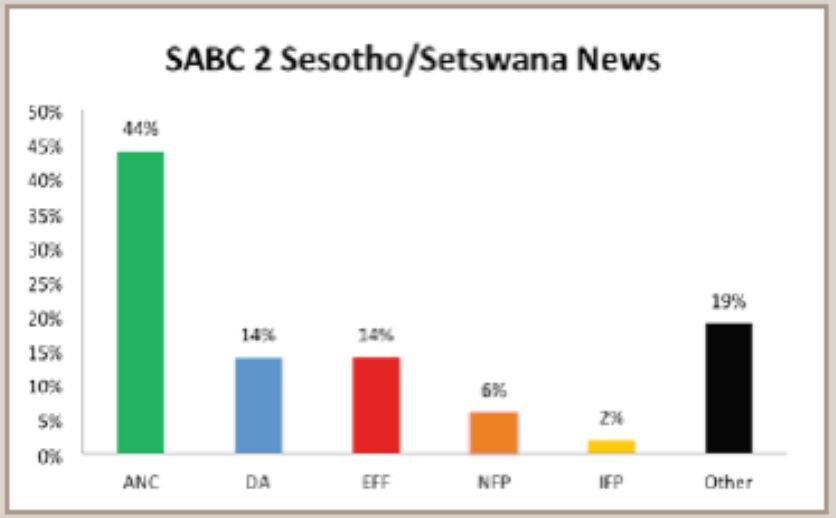
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Key Findings: Political Party Coverage









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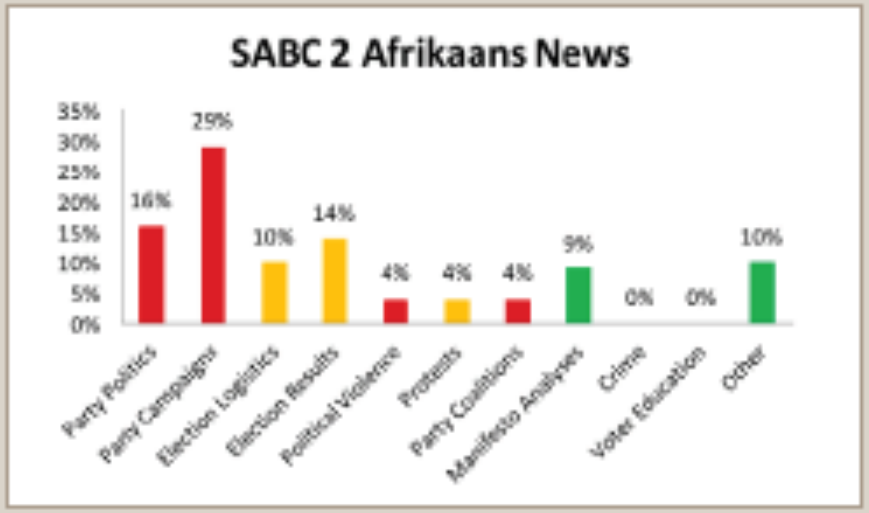
Key Findings: What were stories about?

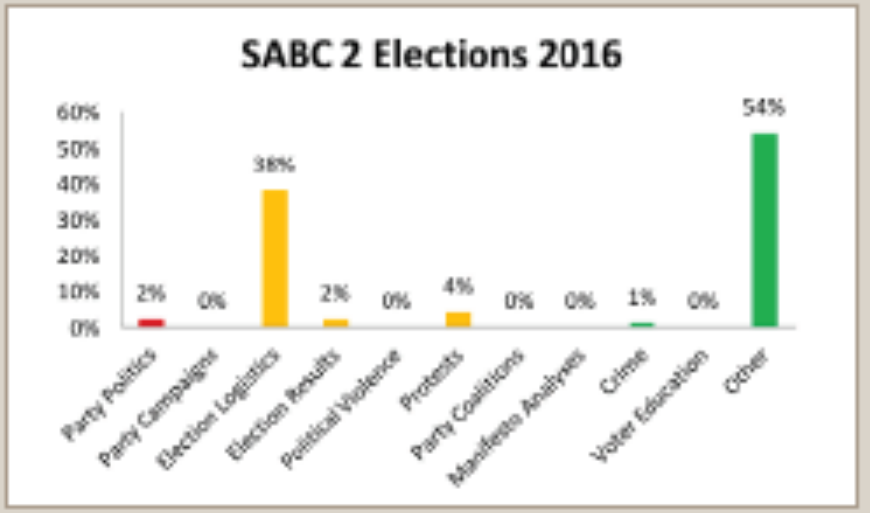
- What was election coverage about?
- This helps us understand diversity but also to see if core issues covered;
- Again some exceptions with dedicated elections programming where greater diversity of topics but;
- In general followed same trends - follow the leader - events not issues;
- Failed to meet their public service mandate.

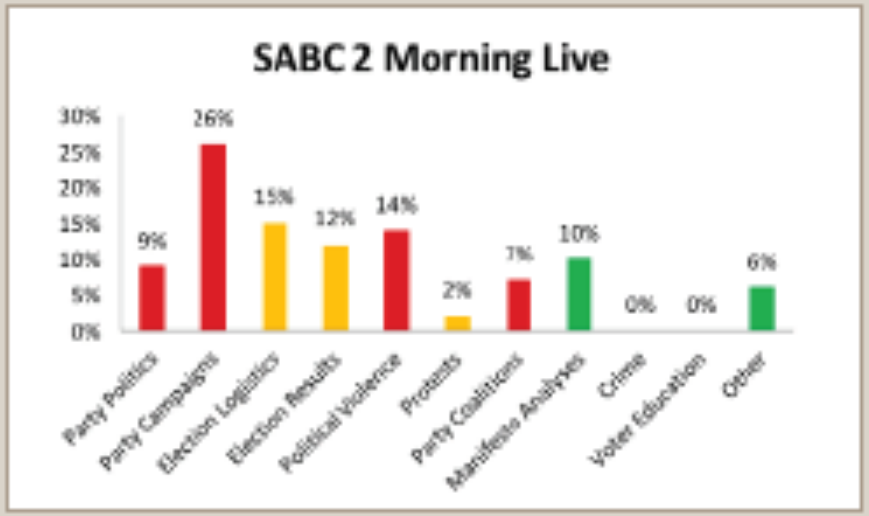
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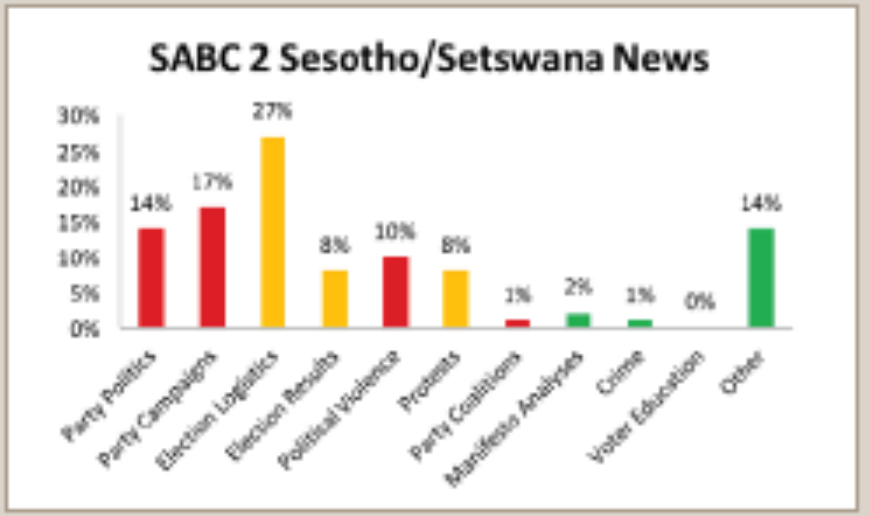
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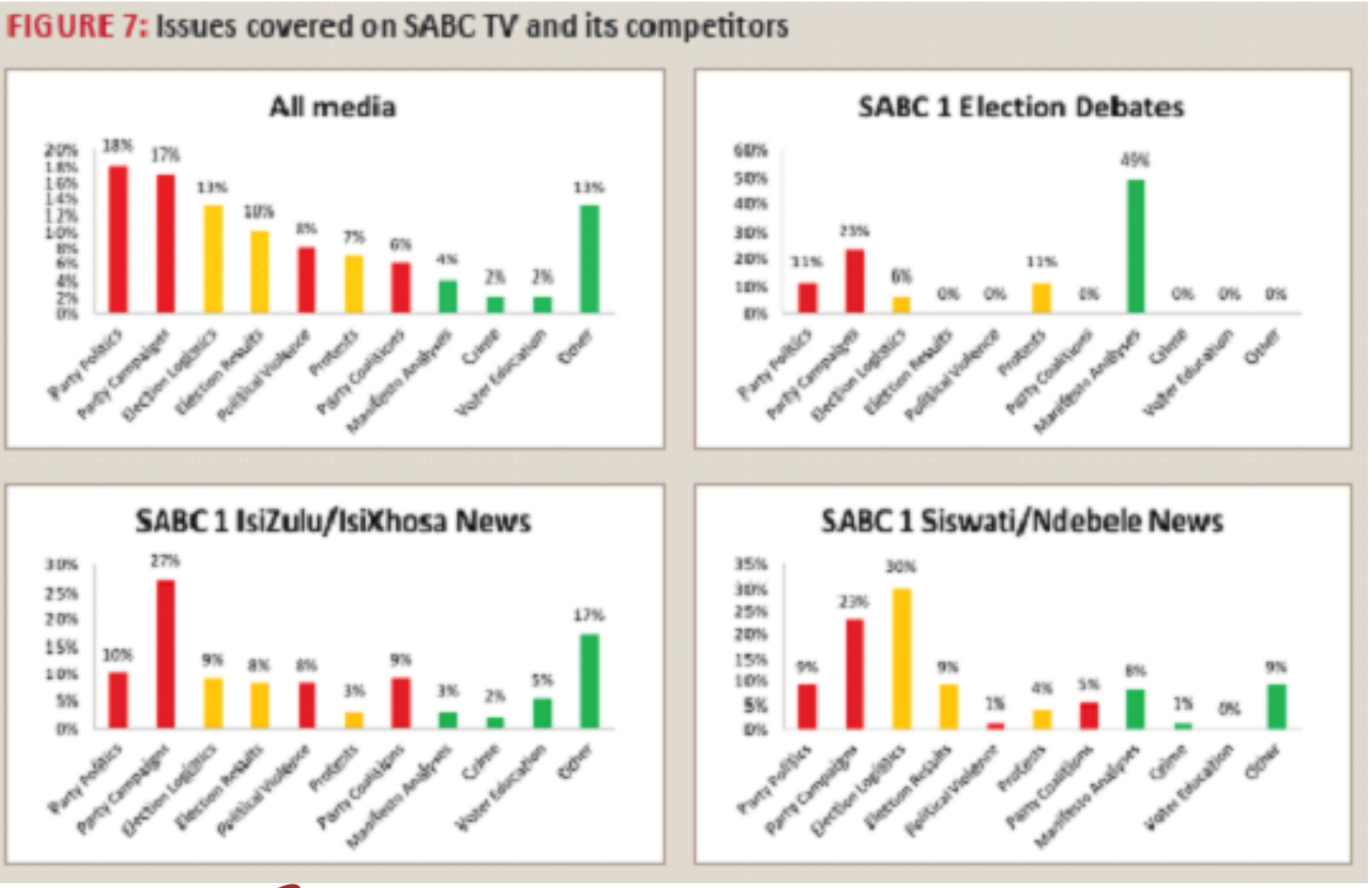


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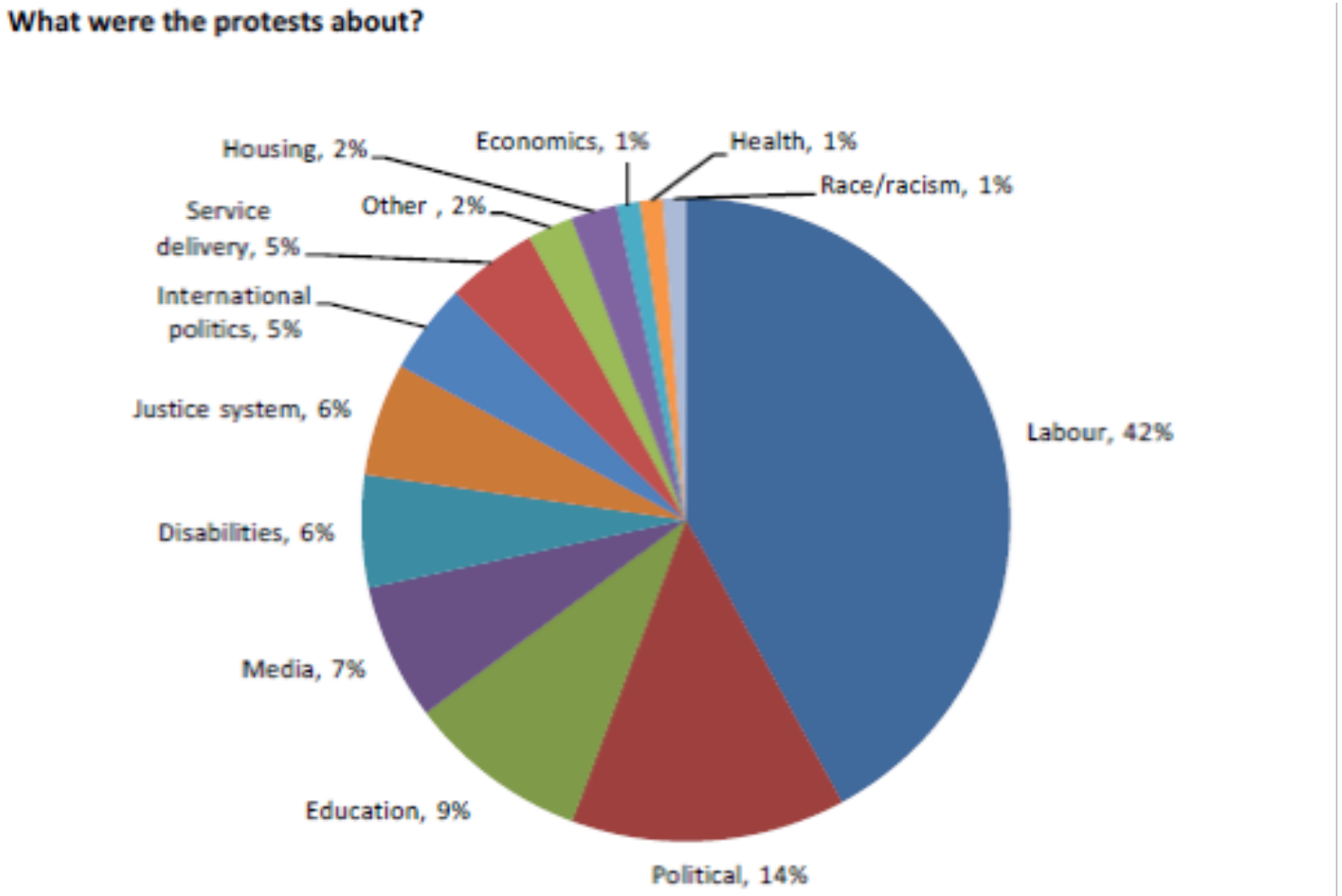
FIGURE 7: Issues covered on SABC TV and its competitors



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Key Findings: Topics



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