

MEDIA MONITORING AFRICA

CLIMATE CHANGE

Agenda Setters in Media Coverage

COMPILED BY

Jacques Ndong

EDITED BY

Thandi Smith & Lister Namumba

DESIGNED BY

Nomshado Lubisi

MEDIAMONITORING AFRICA

1. INTRODUCTION

Climate change and what has been called the climate crisis, has increased in its dominance of political and environmental discussions. Various interest groups have articulated and driven different angles of this discussion and often the sense is that the debate should be driven by scientists and environmental experts. However, the trend we have seen is that these debates have often been dominated by policy makers.[1] Climate change is currently a key issue for both developed countries but more importantly, as research suggests, for underdeveloped nations.[2]

Defined as “a long-term shift in global or regional climate patterns”[3], climate change refers to the rise in average surface temperatures on earth. Over the last few years, we have seen an increase in media coverage of this topic, including an increase in the number of articles in the South African media.
Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) has conducted research analysing the coverage of climate change over the last five years. The aim of the research is to unpack media patterns in the coverage of the issue, how it has been covered, who dominates the coverage in terms of sources accessed, and who is represented by these sources.



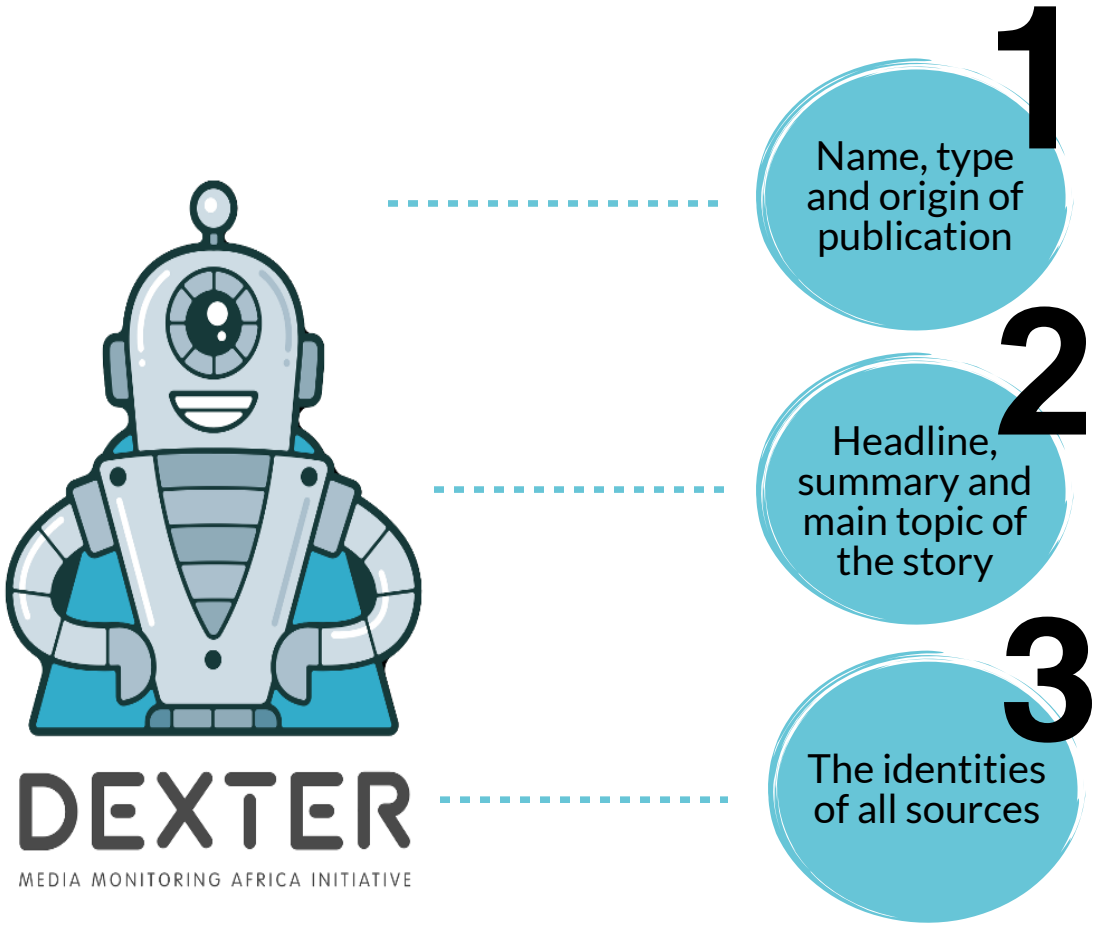


[1] Accessed: https://www.scribd.com/document/248187197/From-science-to-policy-developing-responses-to-climate-change
[2]Accessed: https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/fast-facts/english/FF-Climate-Change-in-Least-Developed-Countries.pdf
[3]Accessed: https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/climate-change/

2. METHODOLOGY

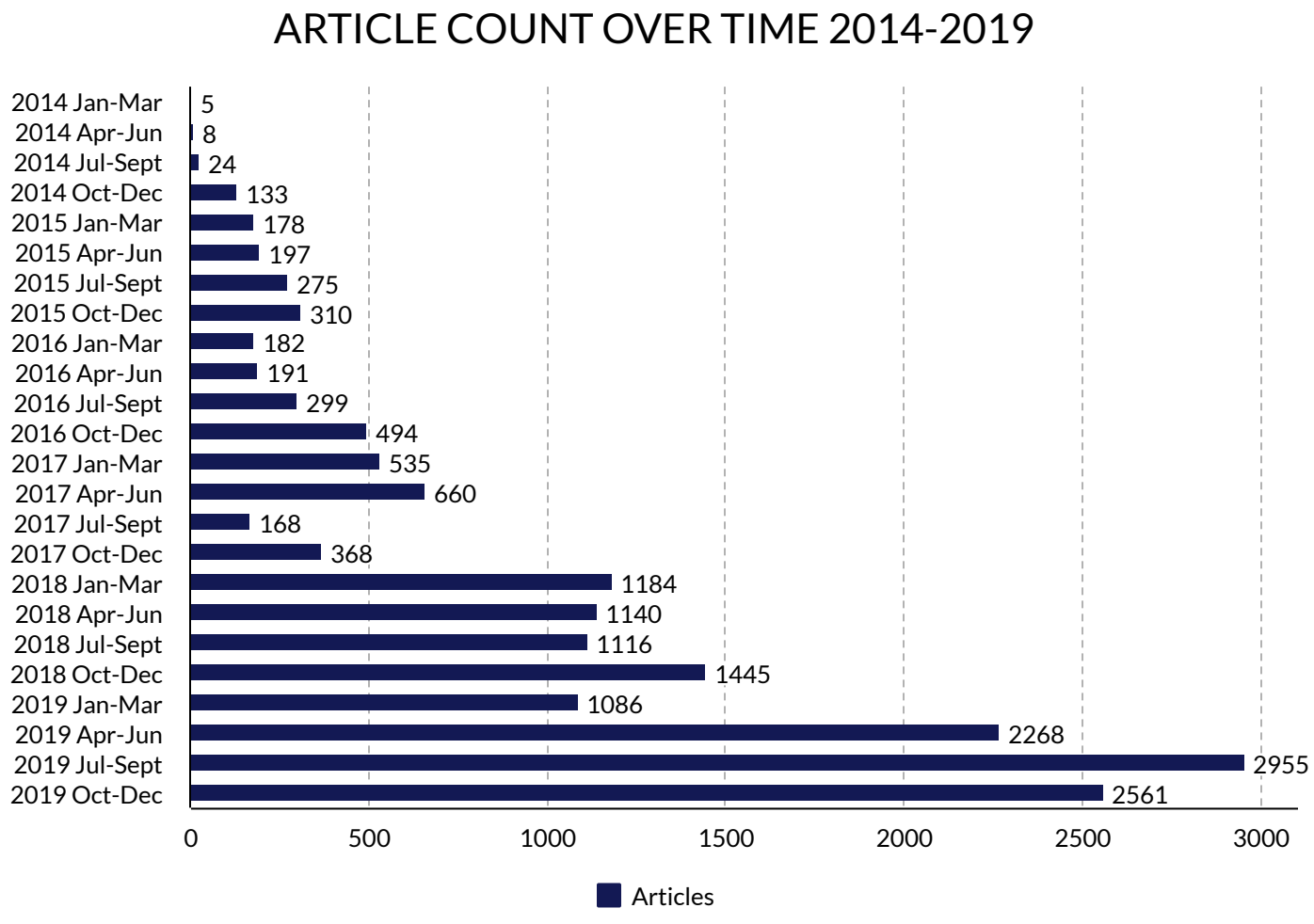
A total of 17,780 articles over a period of five years, from January, 2014 to December, 2019 were collected and analysed. MMA's internal online monitoring tool, Dexter,[4] was used for data gathering and initial analysis. Using the keyword "climate change", Dexter pulled up content from a number of different international and local online news media, which were then stored in a searchable database. For each story, Dexter used machine learning to extract important information, which was supplemented by human analysis including (1) name, type and origin of publication; (2) headline and summary; (3) main topic of the story and (4) the identities of all sources (including name, race, gender and affiliation).

As a key element in quality control, MMA media analysts reviewed each news item in Dexter to ensure that all data from each story was correctly captured in the system.



[4] Access to Dexter can be granted upon request.

3. FINDINGS



The findings from the research show that since 2018, there was a significant increase in the number of articles written on climate change. The year 2019 alone, had a total of 8,870 articles published, which was a substantial increase from the 4,885 recorded in 2018. On the other hand, the article count for the years 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 did not exceed 1000 articles per year.

This exponential increase in the number of articles seems to coincide with a marked increase in the coverage of young activists in environmental issues. This statistic shows that young activists were a big part of putting climate change on the agenda and getting the cause to be covered by the media. The sense is, as one author puts it in an article with the same name, 2018 is the year that the “young activists proved critics wrong”. Victoria Rodriguez says that “the young activists made it clear that they care about issues like immigration rights, climate change, and LGBTQ equality, too. Young people have often been at the forefront of social movements, but in 2018, they dominated social media conversations, news coverage, forced politicians to respond, and made headlines when they voted at historic rates”[5]

[5] Rodriguez, V. *The youth activists who proved critics wrong in 2018.* (2018). Accessed on http://www.mashable.com/article/youth-teen-activist-2018/

These activists also organized climate change protests which can be said to have played a key role in increasing the coverage. Our research shows that, the peak of increased reporting between January and March, 2018 is a demonstration of that view. The three young activists who shot to prominence are Greta Thunberg, India Logan Riley and Hilda Nakabuye. For instance, the world will always remember Greta Thunberg's speech at the World Economic Forum annual meeting in 2019.[6]

Furthermore, the trend shows that the climate change coverage in the media increased during major events such as conferences, summits etc. For instance, in 2019, South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa received a lot of coverage when he addressed the climate change issue during the August, 2019 G7 Summit, again at the 7th Tokyo International Conference on Africa and during the African Union summit. Most of these events took place in the last few months of 2019 and there is corresponding spike in the number of articles during that period (2,268 articles in June, 2,955 in September and 2,561 in October) support this.

Finally, it can perhaps also be argued that climate change made it onto the media agenda after President Trump's decision to withdraw from the2015 United Nations (UN) Paris Climate Agreement.[7] The Paris Climate Agreement aims to strengthen countries' ability to deal with the impact of climate change and support them in their efforts. In July, 2017, Donald Trump officially announced for the first time his intention to withdraw from the agreement.[8] The first talks around the process and protocols regarding that withdrawal started in 2018 and received a substantial amount of coverage until 2019.

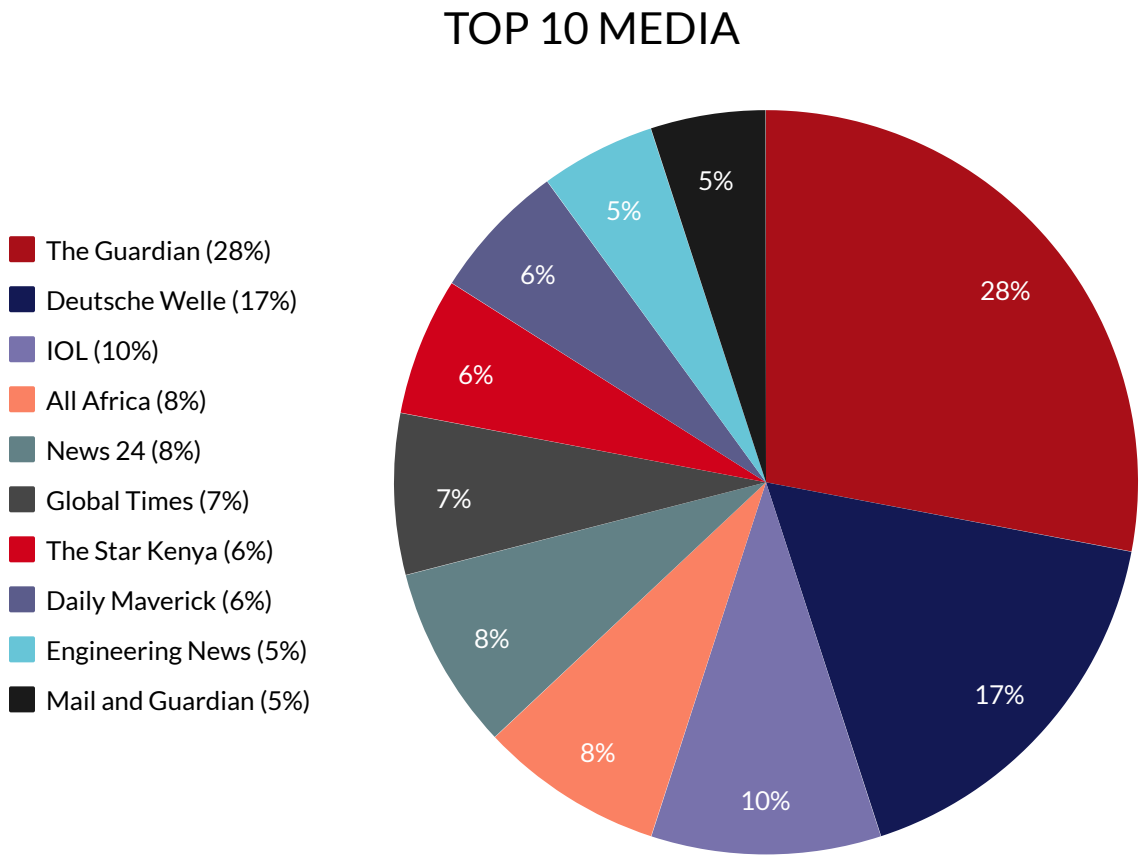


[6] Accessed :https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/01/our-house-is-on-fire-16-year-old-greta-thunberg-speaks-truth-to-power/

[7]Accessed: https://assets.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/paris-agreement-climate-change-2017-ib.pdf

[8]Accessed: https://www.climatechangenews.com/2019/11/04/trump-begins-formal-us-withdrawal-paris-agreement/

Climate coverage per medium



The analysis of coverage per medium is important as it gives an understanding of which specific media are reporting on the climate change topic. The 'type of medium' analysis, covered both local and international outlets and publications.

At the top of the count are two international media, namely The Guardian (UK) and Deutsche Welle (Germany). For the Guardian, the coverage stands at 28% of the total articles analysed, and Deutsche Welle came in at 17%. In terms of the graphic, these two outlets account for 45% of the total coverage. In the African media, the top media that focused on climate change are IOL and All Africa at 10% and 8% respectively. This shows a significant gap between the percentage of coverage for European media and that of African media. This could be attributed to the fact that as detailed by the findings outlined earlier in this report, articles tended to slant towards the international as opposed to originating locally.

For example, the conferences and summits referred to above as well as the focus on the Paris Agreement have a distinctly international focus.

Climate coverage per medium

The data collected shows that all the African media monitored when consolidated, published 55% of the total articles thereby neglecting to empower their readers with information on climate change. The report also shows that Daily Maverick accounts for 6% of the coverage, Engineering News, 5% and Mail and Guardian (M&G) also at 5% over the monitoring period. It is important to note that these three media together account for less than 17% of stories.

In order to have an adequate understanding of how a global issue like climate change impacts the daily lives of all, local media have a responsibility to localize the issue for ordinary people to understand in their local contexts. This is made even more important and necessary because there is mounting evidence that suggests that Africans are the most affected by climate change[9] and yet they are the least covered and informed. [10]

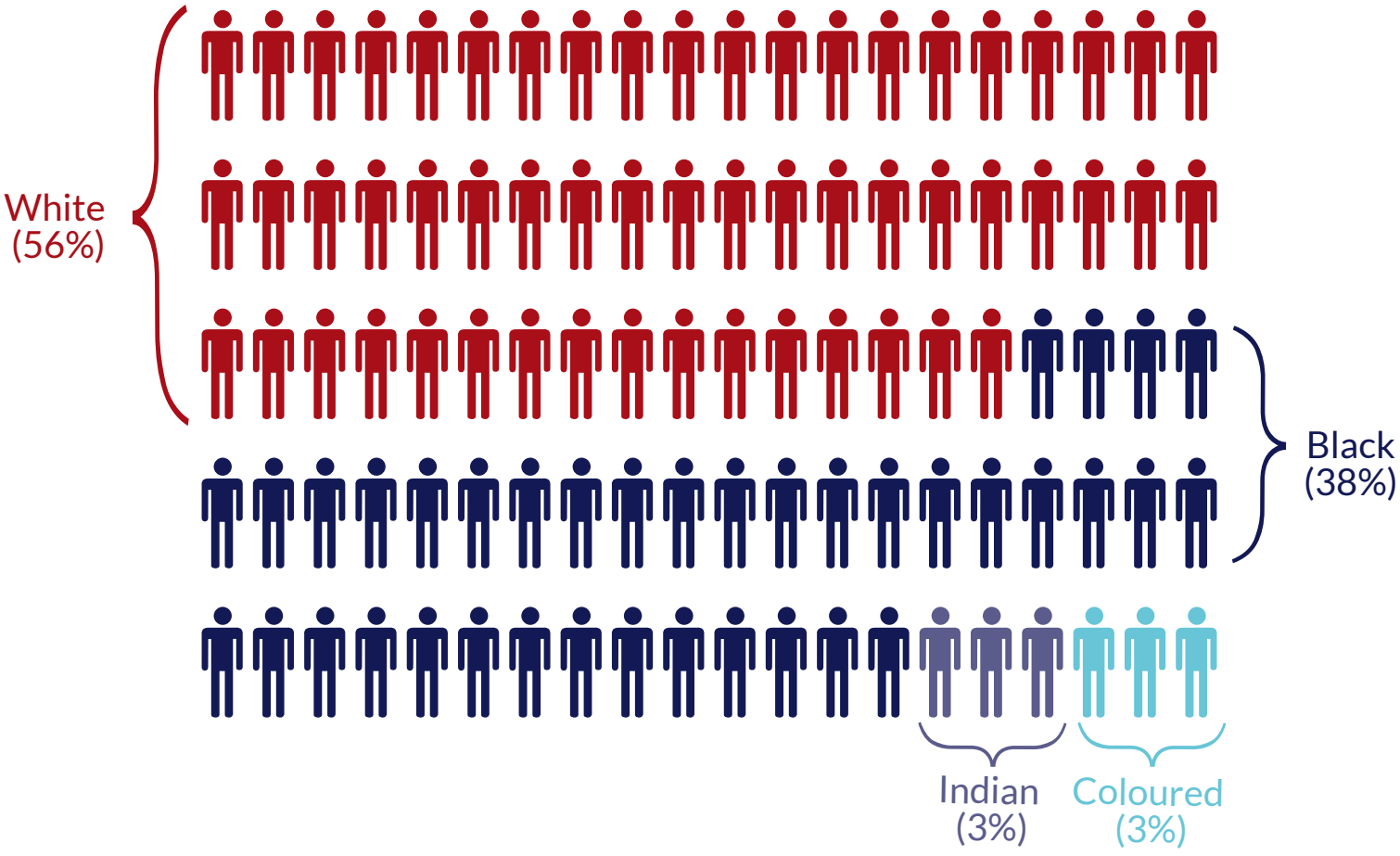


[9]Accessed:https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S2405880719300536token=36018AF51DAA5BB5EA552FF301BDB89F71D1A6E20955D6DD4205A9B967C2FDCC5C1C48C28BFA6C197839F93C85818DF3

[10] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08b34ed915d622c000b81/AfricaTalksClimateExecutiveSummary.pdf

Race

RACE OF SOURCES

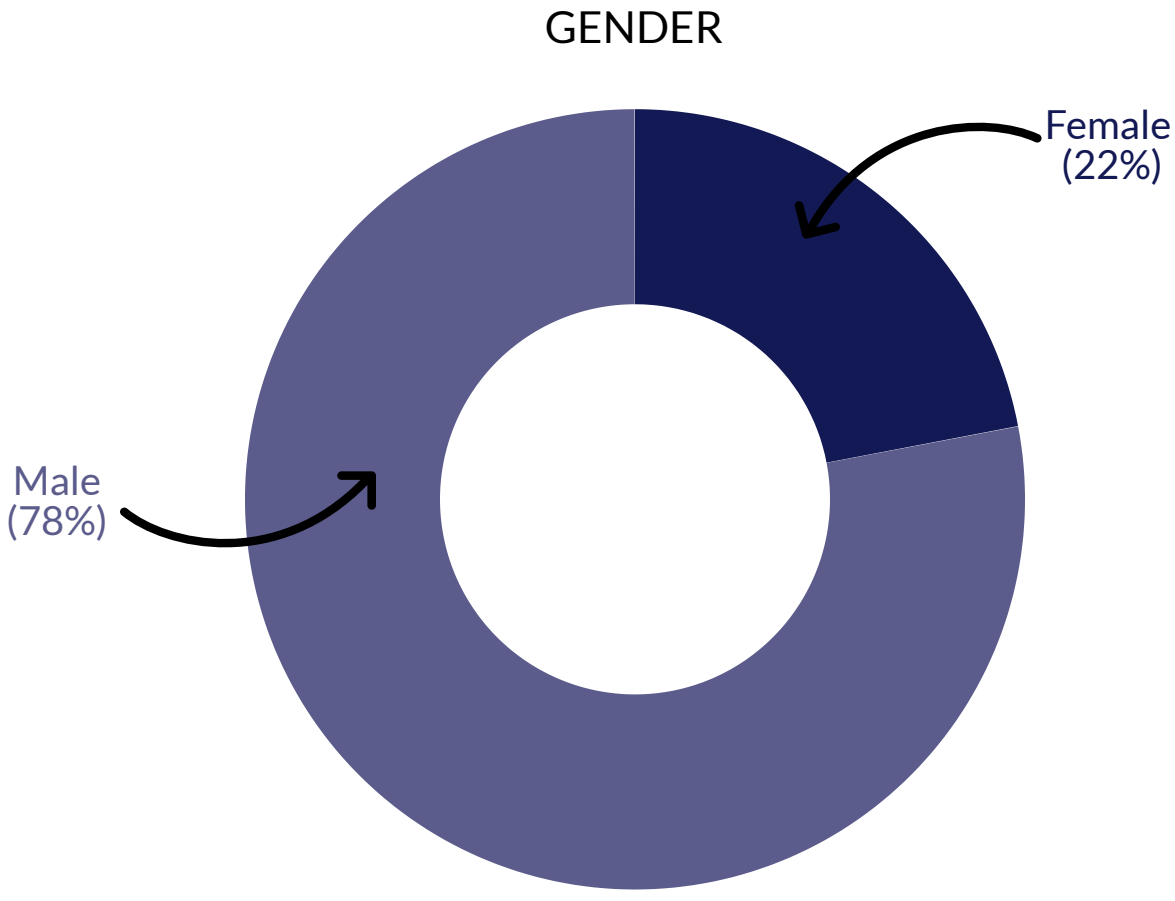


When it comes to the race of sources quoted directly and indirectly, the findings show that there is a disproportionate representation in the media along racial lines, a trend long-observed by MMA in various monitoring research projects.[11] The monitoring reveals that white voices dominate the media coverage on the climate change debate.
The results show that white voices dominated the sources accessed by media (56%) compared to other races. This is not necessarily surprising as during the monitoring period, international media (European media specifically) covered the topic the most.

As can be seen in Figure 2, The Guardian and Deutsche Welle topped the list in terms of quantity of coverage at a combined 45% (28% and 17% respectively). Black people's voices stood at 38% of the total coverage. At the bottom of the table are Coloureds and Indians, who were both at 3% each.This racial breakdown is somewhat interesting when seen in the context of growing concern from experts, that African communities are the most vulnerable as far as climate change is concerned.[12] There is recognition that few studies have examined the effects of race or ethnicity and explored ways in which race, ethnicity, class, and gender may interact to influence climate change engagement.[13]

[11]Accessed: https://mediamonitoringafrica.org/2019/02/05/reporting-on-land-reform-a-path-riddled-with-pitfalls/
http://mediamonitoringafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019electionsFinal_v2.pdf
[12]Accessed: https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2018-march-2019/global-warming-severe-consequences-africa
[13] Accessed: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312067281_Race_class_gender_and_climate_change_communication

Gender

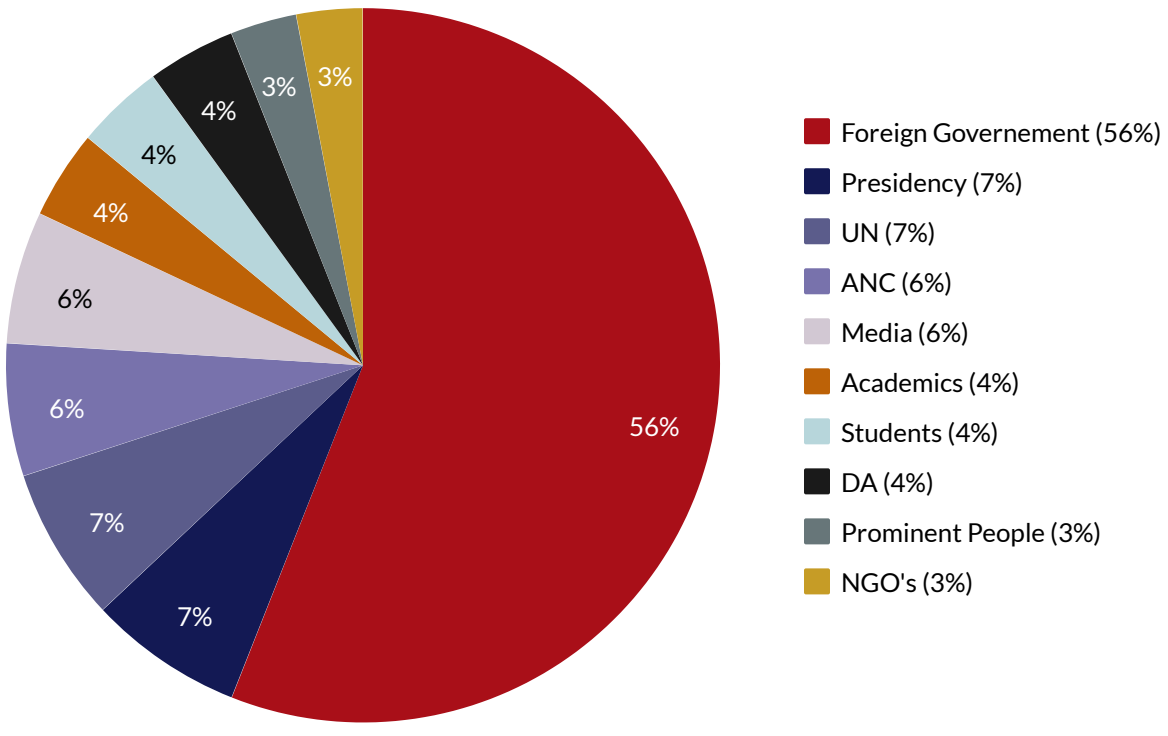


MMA's work in monitoring the media has continuously showed how those sourced often reflects dynamics of power in society. Sources accessed in media reveals those who drive the public discourse and narrative on certain issues. This insight makes gender analysis important and necessary, as MMA has in previous research projects largely found a gross overrepresentation of male voices across a range of topics. In this analysis of the reporting of climate change, a similar observation of overrepresentation of male sources was found.

According to the findings, the voices were largely unequal with men being heard in 78% of the total articles compared to the 22% for women. Such an imbalance between men and women in media coverage remains a challenge as it perpetuates the stereotype that women are not active in real and substantive issues, like climate change. MMA for instance advocates for an equal share of voices in coverage in a country where women make up 51% of the population[14] and 49.6% of the world population.[15]

[14]Accessed: http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022019.pdf
[15]Accessed: https://countrymeters.info/en/World

Affiliation



In the analysis of representation, MMA also includes an analysis of the affiliation of sources accessed by the media. Unpacking this allows us to gauge the type of views the media focuses on; is it only political views, or expert analysis, or citizens views that are sourced? This deeper analysis is important to assess the balance of the reporting. The findings show that 'foreign government' is the main affiliation of most of those accessed sources, at 56%. What then follows is the United Nations and the South African Presidency, that receive equal representation at 7% each, followed by the ruling party (ANC) at 6%. Finally, NGOs and Prominent People are accessed the least. The affiliation of Prominent People is mainly made up of environmental and climate activists, celebrities, and artists.

The low ranking of NGOs and Prominent People, at 3% each, should be of concern because their voice is often important. Furthermore, the low ranking is a surprise because there are a number of international NGOs whose agenda includes climate change. Some of these are the Climate Group, the World Meteorological Organisation, World Wide Fund, Green Peace, amongst others. A possible reason for the low ranking of these affiliations, including that of Academics could be because most of the coverage is driven by events, where governments tend to announce and/or report country- specific climate change interventions and programmes.

4. CONCLUSION

Experts inform us that the climate change discussions are pivotal for the whole world especially for the next generation. As a result, everyone needs to be educated about it, including its effects and the implications of ignoring it and the media is instrumental in achieving that. The coverage by the media on climate change must not only adequately but also equally represent all the relevant voices as expressed through race, gender, and affiliations.

Climate change is now undoubtedly newsworthy as can be seen from the increasing amount of media coverage. This demonstrates that journalists and media houses recognize the high stakes if climate change as a as a series of critical issues is ignored.
The key finding of our analysis is that climate change reporting has increased in the last few years. But it also shows that the media still has some work to do in terms of representation, so that when it reports on climate change, balanced coverage is given to Africans, NGOs and broader civil society, women and experts, to mention a few.

Since the media plays a dominant role in society, it must ensure people, regardless of their age, race, gender, affiliation, and background have their voices included in such coverage. Additionally, the media should ensure that they give coverage to the plethora of voices, both individuals and institutions across sectors as these are known to contribute substantively to these discussions and the media must give them a fair amount of coverage.

MMA will continue to pay attention to how this topic is reported with the aim of improving both the quantity and quality of reporting.

