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ELECTION: WERE SOME PARTIES
MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS?**

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Democracy in Africa Research Unit

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Media Coverage and the Election: Were some Parties more equal than others?

Abstract

Debates over the role of the media in a democratic South Africa remain as fierce as ever. The African National Congress (ANC) and its adherents routinely criticise the independent press for insufficiently transforming itself and, as a result, producing press coverage that tends to be anti-government. Opposition parties question the independence of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), claiming that the public broadcaster is fast becoming an instrument of ANC propaganda. This paper asserts that these arguments have been overstated by political actors and some commentators. Data collected during the 2004 election campaign suggests that the ANC get the lion's share of news coverage, followed by the Democratic Alliance across all broadcast and print media. It is thus more appropriate to ascribe the media dominance of these two parties to their ability to generate publicity through superior resources, funding and organisation than media bias.

Introduction

Citizens in democracies the world over rely increasingly on the media and less on family, community and other intermediary organisations as a primary source of political information (Mughan and Gunther 2000). South Africa is no exception to the growing importance of the media in political life. This is why the main political parties in South Africa have dedicated media strategists and allocate a great deal of money to get their party covered prominently. It is also why the media remains a site of struggle in South African politics, particularly during election campaigns.

Section 1 of this paper considers how the mass media covered the 2004 election. It is found that historical divisions in the media still influence which parties are covered by different media groups, but that increasing media diversity is leading to a less partisan media. In general, parties received coverage because of their ability to generate 'news' and not because sections of the media were bent on promoting 'their' party. The second, shorter section of this paper discusses how

the parties themselves used the media to get their message across to voters. Evidence suggests that the well-resourced and well-supported parties increase their dominance of media coverage through their ability to advertise extensively in print, radio and the outdoor media.

1. How the Media covered the 2004 Election

Questions of media ownership and the demographic profile of newsrooms are raised regularly by those who view the media transformation process as too slow. Some argue that the South African media (particularly the print media) is inherently elitist and will therefore, by its very nature, serve reactionary interests (see for example Jacobs 1999). This argument is echoed in political circles. In 1999, an ANC MP told the National Assembly that the “liberal media” (i.e. the English language press) were “racist and unpatriotic” and they “suppressed and distorted the truth, encouraging a negative mood in the country” (Valentine-Burgess 2000: 121). In 2001, the ANC still noted a tendency for the media to “oppose the government at every turn,” blaming newsrooms that did not reflect a diversity of perspectives and experiences among journalists, editors, sub-editors, managers and photographers (ANC Press Statement 2001). ANC criticism of the independent press has led to concerns among the opposition that the ruling party will begin to use the state-owned South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) as an ANC mouthpiece. An IFP spokesperson recently recalled remarks allegedly made by an SABC spokesperson on radio that the SABC had to “compensate” for the “Mbeki-bashing” characteristic of other sections of the media (IOL 2004a). This paper will deal with the broadcast and print media in turn and attempt to ascertain whether either exhibited any bias in their coverage of the 2004 election campaign.

1.1 Broadcast Media

The broadcast media is the main source of election information for most South Africans. A 1997 report by the Community Agency for Social Enquiry found that 52% of South Africans listen to the radio on a daily basis, 44% watch television while only 16% read newspapers (Kola and Everatt 1997). In 2004, over 23 million South Africans watch television at least once a week and over 27 million listen to the radio. The number of television sets in homes has grown from 5.9 million in 1994 to 8.2 million in 2004, while radio sets have tripled from 10.4 million to 33.7 million (Allerman 2004).

The radio sector has diversified markedly since 1994 when radio broadcasting was the sole preserve of the SABC and the former Bantustan-based broadcasters (Marcowitz 2004). The sale of six SABC stations to private shareholders in 1996, the rapid growth of community radio stations, as well as the arrival of E.TV, an independent channel with its own news service, in 1998, has allowed for the emergence of new and independent voices. However, it is true that the SABC still dominates broadcasting. Seventy-seven percent of radio listeners still listen to SABC stations and 65% of total radio listenership is accounted for by the SABC's African language services (Crowe 2003; SAARF). With regards to television, the SABC is responsible for most free-to-air television programmes through its three channels: SABC 1, 2 and 3.

During apartheid, the SABC was "an instrument of unbridled apartheid propaganda" (Tomaselli 1989). Questions of control, racial composition, news content, language policy and ideology thus became paramount in the run-up to the first democratic election in 1994 (Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli 1994). In their assessment of the SABC's role in that election, Silke and Schrire (1994: 128) found that radio and television had been "able to steer a reasonably impartial ship" and that it seemed that "the SABC had shed its shackles of overt or covert government control and was ready to enter into a new era of impartiality even if it was just for the duration of the election" (*Ibid*: 142).

Since 1994, the SABC has come under considerable fire for perceived bias towards the ANC government. The appointment of known ANC loyalists to the SABC board has fuelled perceptions that transformation has simply meant the replacement of one set of political masters by another (Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli 1994). Last year, allegations concerning attempts to sway the Communications Portfolio Committee in its nominations for the SABC board were leveled against the ANC (Msomi 2003). Recent utterances by SABC board member Thami Mazwai that the SABC could not afford to be "driven by old clichés, such as objectivity or the right of the editor" were interpreted by opposition parties that he was linking SABC news to the ANC government's objectives (Bell 2003).

The SABC's role in the 2004 election was certainly controversial with disputes arising as early as January after the SABC provided live coverage of the ANC's launch of its election manifesto in Pietermaritzburg, a privilege not granted to any of the other parties. SABC spokesperson Paul Setsetse defended the broadcasting of the event on the grounds that the SABC was not favouring the ANC but recording the "first important presidential speech of the year" (Louw 2004). However, there could be no doubt that the meeting, which ANC president Thabo Mbeki began with a cry of "Viva, ANC, Viva," was a party political

rally. The DA said that covering the event indicated that “increasingly the SABC is acting as a public platform for the ANC government,” while UDM leader Bantu Holmisa accused the SABC of consistently favouring the ANC over the last five years. The IFP claimed that the decision was made because new SABC board chairperson, Eddie Funde, had been in charge of the ANC’s party list selection process (Phahlane and Madlala 2004). Media analysts Mandla Seloane and Simon Ndungu agreed that the SABC had given “undue advantage” to the ruling party (Khangale 2004).

The matter was taken to the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) which ruled in favour of the SABC on the grounds that the ‘election period’ had not yet commenced, since the date had not yet been set by the president. The UDM reacted by calling ICASA’s independence into question, while the DA’s Dene Smuts opined: “The SABC seems to be settling into the role of state broadcaster, perpetuating ANC rule instead of serving democracy” (IOL 2004b).

Meanwhile, it emerged that Diane Kohler-Barnard, a well known talk show presenter on SABC radio station SAfm was a candidate on the DA’s party list for a seat in the National Assembly. The ANC’s condemnation of the DA for ‘infiltrating’ the SABC was vociferous (ANC Press Statement 2004a). The SABC swiftly relieved Kohler-Barnard of her duties at the station, justifying the action on the grounds that “we must be seen to be objective and impartial and not be motivated by party political things in what we do” (Sole 2004). For analyst Guy Berger, the decision to broadcast an ANC election event, together with the dropping of Kohler-Barnard smacked of double-standards on the part of the public broadcaster (Berger 2004).

The controversy continued when the ANC refused the request of DA leader Tony Leon to conduct a televised debate with Thabo Mbeki. An ANC press statement justified Mbeki’s refusal on the grounds that “The DA’s challenge to President Mbeki to engage in a televised debate with Tony Leon is nothing more than a transparent attempt by the DA to elevate the profile and stature of its leader” (ANC Press Statement 2004b). DA Communications Director Nick Clelland-Stokes interpreted the unwillingness of the SABC to interfere as a sign that it wished to “protect its political master, President Mbeki.” He claimed that the SABC chief operating officer Solly Mokoetle, as the former head of Radio Freedom, was simply bowing to orders from his ex-boss, Thabo Mbeki, who had been head of the ANC’s information and publicity department in the 1980s (IOL 2004c).

1.1.1 Television Coverage

Despite accusations of SABC bias, analysis of television and radio news coverage did not indicate that the ANC or any other party enjoy undue coverage by the public broadcaster. Data released by the *Media Monitoring Project* (MMP) indicated that the ANC did get the lion's share of the coverage but received a greater proportion of coverage on E-TV than on the SABC (see table 1).

Table 1: Television News Coverage of Parties (%) - Media Monitoring Project¹

	<i>ACDP</i>	<i>ANC</i>	<i>DA</i>	<i>FF+</i>	<i>ID</i>	<i>IFP</i>	<i>NNP</i>	<i>UDM</i>	<i>Others</i>
SABC	3.3	31.7	16.3	3	6.7	10.3	8.7	2.7	17.7
E.TV	4	47	14	4	4	16	0	0	12

The DA and the IFP received a good proportion of television coverage, while the NNP and UDM did not feature at all on E-TV during the period covered by MMP. *Media Tenor* (table 2) found that the ANC enjoyed marginally more coverage on the SABC Nguni news than the Afrikaans and English news and slightly more coverage on E.TV than the Nguni broadcast. Again the DA received a higher proportion of coverage on the SABC than on E.TV.

Table 2: Television News Coverage of Parties (%) – Media Tenor²

	<i>ACDP</i>	<i>ANC</i>	<i>DA</i>	<i>FF+</i>	<i>ID</i>	<i>IFP</i>	<i>NNP</i>	<i>UDM</i>	<i>PAC</i>	<i>Others</i>
SABC (Afrik.)	4.5	26.1	14.4	6.7	4.6	10.7	10.1	5.1	5.5	12.3
SABC (Eng.)	5.6	22.8	14.1	3.8	4.9	14.1	9.6	6.3	6.7	12.1
SABC (Nguni)	3.4	29.3	14.0	3.7	3.0	15.1	9.2	6.0	5.9	10.4
E.TV	3.8	28.9	8.7	6.1	4.4	11.2	4.9	5.2	5.5	21.3

¹ Data provided by the *Media Monitoring Project*. The MMP data on coverage refers to the amount of mentions a party received and therefore does not give any indication as to whether the coverage a party received was its own voice or through being mentioned by another party or a journalist. MMP monitored media coverage from 22 March 2004 until 16 April 2004 and the sample, especially for weeklies, is small.

² Data provided by *Media Tenor*. MT measured coverage in terms of whether a party was the source of a statement- an indication of 'own voice' coverage. MT monitored the media from 1 January 2004 until 14 April 2004.

Media Tenor also measured how favourable television news coverage was to each party.³ They found that coverage of all parties was mainly neutral, if not slightly favourable to all parties. The SABC aired proportionally less favourable ANC coverage than E.TV and coverage of the ANC was less favourable on the Nguni news than the English and Afrikaans news. Coverage of the DA tended to be negative on SABC news, but positive on E.TV.

1.1.2 Radio Coverage

As with television, the ANC got most of the coverage on radio news and this was not confined to the SABC or the African language stations. The radio stations in table 3 represent a cross-section of South African radio stations. Umhlobo Wenene (isiXhosa), Ukhozi (isiZulu) and Motswedding (seTswana) are all African language stations broadcast by the SABC. SAFM has a diverse listenership and is broadcast in English by the SABC. Yfm is an independent station that targets young, urban blacks, while Algoa, Ofm and Radiosondergrense are all commercial stations with a predominantly white listenership.

Table 3: Radio News Coverage of the Election (% of total airtime)⁴

	<i>ACDP</i>	<i>ANC</i>	<i>DA</i>	<i>FF+</i>	<i>ID</i>	<i>IFP</i>	<i>NNP</i>	<i>UDM</i>	<i>others</i>
U. Wenene	0	40	23	0	3	10	10	3	13
Ukhozi	1	45	10	1	2	24	5	5	7
Motswedding	4	45	12	3	3	7	4	4	17
Yfm	2	32	24	2	9	17	8	4	13
SAFM	1	39	16	3	4	15	9	3	10
Algoa	7	43	21	0	5	2	7	14	0
Ofm	9	33	24	4	4	9	11	4	2
RSG	1	35	21	4	8	14	11	4	2

Coverage of the ANC was high on all stations, but highest on Ukhozi, Motswedding and Algoa and lowest on Ofm, RSG and Yfm. The DA received the second most coverage on all stations analysed here, except Ukhozi, which provided a great deal of coverage of the IFP, no doubt because this station

³ MT measure whether coverage is favourable or unfavourable to the party concerned based on an explicit reference in which a clearly negative or positive judgement is expressed, as well as implicitly i.e. based on whether the content is embedded in a positive or negative context.

⁴ *Ibid.*

broadcasts in isiZulu and mainly in Kwazulu-Natal. The ID made a strong showing in this medium as well, especially on RSG and Yfm.

Parties also receive coverage on the radio through radio talk shows and radio advertising. While there has been no systematic study of radio talk shows, there is evidence that the ANC and the DA get by far the most exposure through radio advertising, both in terms of paid adverts (dealt with later) and Public Election Broadcasts (PEBs). A PEB is a free two-minute advertising slot for all political parties contesting seats in the National Assembly during prime listening time on all national radio stations. The extent of coverage allocated to each party was calculated on a formula that considered the amount of seats each party currently held in national and provincial legislatures and the amount of candidates fielded by each party. ICASA defend this policy by referring to the “international convention” that “the public is entitled to hear more from and about political parties more likely to influence policy decisions affecting the electorate, nationally and provincially” (ICASA undated). The ANC obviously enjoyed the majority of PEB coverage based on this formula.

The ANC clearly receives the most coverage on the airwaves, but this is most likely because the ANC is the largest party and therefore generates the most news. As the ruling party, the ANC tends to receive substantial media coverage through being mentioned by other parties and journalists. *Media Tenor* found that only 23% of the ANC’s coverage (across all media) could be considered ‘own voice’ coverage, while the DA, IFP and NNP enjoyed 42%, 32% and 39% of ‘own voice’ coverage respectively.⁵

1.2 Print Media

Newspapers may not have the reach of the broadcast media, but they are important for at least three reasons. First, newspapers are likely to be the media of choice among ‘opinion-makers’ who may influence others in their community. Secondly, newspapers provide a deeper analysis than is often possible on radio and television. Thirdly, the press has an investigative capacity unrivalled by the broadcast media – major stories often ‘break’ in the press and are then taken up by broadcast journalists.

In 1994, the mainstream newspaper industry was dominated by the pro-apartheid Nasionale Pers and the Anglo-American Corporation (AAC) who

⁵ Data provided by *Media Tenor*. See: www.media-tenor.co.za/index1.html.

were supportive of the parliamentary opposition. Nasionale Pers owned the Afrikaans press and the AAC controlled the English ‘liberal’ press through the Argus Group and Times Media Limited (MDDA 2000). At this time, the print media was viewed by the ANC government as reflecting “the perspective and interests of a small group of South Africans” that “are almost totally exclusive of the experiences of black South Africans” (ANC Press Statement 1995). This perception was fuelled by the fact that most of the English language press endorsed the DP in the 1994 election (Silke and Schrire 1994).

Table 4: Ownership and readership of mainstream newspapers

<i>Title</i>	<i>Ownership^a</i>	<i>Readership^b</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Coloured</i>	<i>Indian</i>
Beeld	Media 24	319 000	91%	8%	0.6%	0.3%
Volksblad	Media 24	118 000	86%	7%	7%	0%
Rapport*	Media 24	1 652 000	64%	5%	30%	0.2%
East Cape Weekend Post*	Johnnic	163 000	56%	23%	21%	0%
Mercury	Independent	189 000	47%	21%	3%	30%
Cape Times	Independent	270 000	44%	13%	41%	3%
Business Day	Johnnic	117 000	46%	40%	9%	6%
Witness	NWP	159 000	42%	31%	0%	27%
Isolezwe	Independent	339 000	0.3%	99%	0.3%	0%
Sowetan	Johnnic	1 853 000	0.3%	98%	1%	0.4%
City Press*	Media 24	2 211 000	1%	98%	1%	0.3%
Daily Sun	Media 24	1 755 000	0.7%	96%	3%	0.6%
Daily Dispatch	Johnnic	230 000	23%	73%	5%	0%
Pretoria News	Independent	97 000	31%	64%	1%	4%
Mail &Guardian*	M&G	237 000	30%	61%	8%	2%
Sunday Times*	Johnnic	3 440 000	24%	58%	9%	9%
The Citizen	Caxton	493 000	34%	55%	6%	5%
The Star	Independent	618 000	37%	53%	5%	5%
Sun. Independent*	Independent	230 000	29%	48%	11%	13%
Cape Argus	Independent	390 000	33%	11%	53%	4%
D. F. Advertiser	Independent	50 000	26%	34%	40%	0%
Die Burger	Media 24	577 000	44%	1%	55%	0.2%
The Post (Fri)*	Independent	144 000	3%	3%	0%	94%
Daily News	Independent	291 000	25%	23%	6%	46%
Sunday Tribune*	Independent	693 000	29%	27%	4%	40%
Independent on Sat.*	Independent	308 000	31%	25%	5%	39%

Notes:

* Weekly newspapers.

Sources:

^a Figures provided by Print Media South Africa.

^b Figures provided by SAARF.

Media ownership has diversified a great deal since 1994 (see table 4). In 1996, the black empowerment group, the National Empowerment Consortium (NEC), acquired a controlling stake in Anglo-American's Johnnic, owners of Times Media Limited. Johnnic now owns the *Business Day*, *The Herald*, *Daily Dispatch*, *East Cape Weekend Post* and the *Sunday Times*. Johnnic have recently acquired the black empowerment company, New Africa Publications with its popular titles, the *Sowetan* and *Sowetan Sunday World*. The emergence of Johnnic, particularly after its recent acquisition of the *Sowetan*, has effectively broken the ING and Media 24 duopoly. In 2004, approximately one third of South African newspaper readers read black-owned newspapers.

In his assessment of the role of the media in the 1999 election, Jacobs (1999) argued that the mainstream print media has little influence on voter preferences because whites make up the bulk of the readers of mainstream newspapers and most journalists and editors are white. It is true that senior management in the print sector is still dominated by white males, even at black-owned Johnnic (MDDA 2000). However, the demographic profile of editors has changed substantially since 1994 when editors were almost without exception white males. By June 2000, there were twelve black editors out of thirty of the country's major daily and weekly mainstream newspapers (MDDA 2000). In 2004, out of the 8 million newspapers read daily in South Africa, over 5 million are read by black South Africans. Whites account for 1.7 million, coloureds 879 000 and Indians 339 000 (SAARF). As table 4 shows, the only newspapers that have a near exclusively white readership are the Afrikaans-medium newspapers, *Beeld* and *Volksblad*. *Isolezwe*, *Sowetan*, *City Press* and the *Daily Sun* all have an almost totally black readership and *The Post* is read mainly by Indians. Otherwise, the other newspapers have very diverse readerships.

1.2.1 Editorial Endorsements

Editorial endorsements provide some vital clues about where newspaper interests lie. A survey of some of the main newspaper editorials indicated that most newspapers were less willing to appear partisan than in previous elections. Only the *Sowetan*, *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian*, all newspapers with a high proportion of black readers, endorsed any particular party. They all cautiously endorsed the ANC.

The *Sunday Times* (2004) bemoaned the state of opposition in South Africa and grudgingly endorsed the ANC as "the only party capable of governing and seeing the country past the transition phase". The *Sowetan* (2004) stated: "(There is) no credible alternative to the ANC. With all its failings, we believe

strongly that South Africans should tomorrow give the ANC another five-year shot in governance”. The *Mail & Guardian* (2004) bemoaned the “cancer of corruption” and “culture of sycophancy” that has emerged in the ruling party, but their vote went to the ANC who was “still closest to the newspaper’s core values of constitutionalism, social democracy and non-racialism”. The *City Press* (2004), a newspaper with an almost exclusively black readership, declined to endorse any political party in this election but praised Mbeki “who not only knocked on people’s doors, but sat down on the floor, refusing to displace the elderly from their seats”.

Newspapers owned by the Independent group uniformly chose not to endorse a party in this election. The *Sunday Independent* (2004) ran an editorial calling for America to withdraw its troops from Iraq. The *Cape Argus*, *The Star*, *Cape Times*, *Weekend Post* and the *Sunday Tribune* urged readers to not shirk their civic duty and vote for the party of their choice.⁶ Only the *Pretoria News* (2004) appeared willing to indicate its preferences and tried to convince readers to go to the polls and vote against the ANC: “Every non-vote is in effect a vote for the ruling party – and that’s not good for democracy”.

The Afrikaans newspaper *Volksblad* (2004) took the decision not to prescribe any one party, as did the *Witness* (2004) who told readers to “go out and make your mark according to your preference”. *The Herald* (2004) made no mention of an editorial endorsement, but did postulate whether the DA would “achieve its goal of uniting minorities in one party and laying a platform for a serious assault on the African constituency”. The *Daily Dispatch* (2004) provided a balanced assessment of the ANC government’s record but cautiously endorsed the “promiscuous” DA, the “pugnacious” UDM and the “fledgeling” ID because “our democracy needs them”. *Business Day* (2004) did not endorse any party but gave a balanced assessment of the ANC and the DA.

That most of the ‘liberal’ and Afrikaans newspapers chose not to endorse any party is a sign that the print media is less partisan than is sometimes suggested. The cautious endorsement of the ANC by ‘the black press’ indicates that, if anything, it is the ANC that enjoys the most support in the press.

⁶ *Cape Argus*, *Cape Times*, *The Star* April 13 2004; *Sunday Tribune*, April 11 2004; and *Weekend Post*, April 10 2004.

1.2.2 Party coverage in the Press

Tables 5 and 6 below indicate how much coverage each party received in the press as measured by the *Media Monitoring Project* (MMP) and *Media Tenor* (MT).

Table 5: Newspaper coverage of the election - MMP (%)

	<i>ACDP</i>	<i>ANC</i>	<i>DA</i>	<i>FF+</i>	<i>ID</i>	<i>IFP</i>	<i>NNP</i>	<i>UDM</i>	<i>Others</i>
Star	1	36	22	3	14	9	6	3	6
Citizen	1	40	22	1	8	10	8	5	5
Bus. Day	2	45	17	0	12	10	8	1	3
Cape Times	3	40	19	2	9	6	10	2	8
EP Herald	1	47	23	3	5	7	5	3	6
Mail & Guardian	6	28	13	4	7	11	7	5	19
Sunday Times	2	57	15	2	7	13	4	0	0
Sowetan	2	42	18	1	13	10	4	3	7
Daily Sun	10	40	10	0	0	20	10	10	0
Ilanga	2	35	5	2	0	51	0	2	4
Isolezwe	1	49	6	0	0	33	0	6	4
City Press	3	43	14	3	3	19	7	4	5
Beeld	4	31	17	6	9	13	10	4	9
Die Burger	3	34	18	5	8	7	14	3	8
All	2.9	40.5	15.6	2.3	6.8	15.6	6.6	3.6	6

Table 6: Newspaper coverage of the election – MT (%)

	<i>ACDP</i>	<i>ANC</i>	<i>DA</i>	<i>FF+</i>	<i>ID</i>	<i>IFP</i>	<i>NNP</i>	<i>UDM</i>	<i>PAC</i>	<i>Others</i>
Star	3.8	36.5	21.2	1.8	3.9	9.6	8.2	3.5	4.6	6.9
Citizen	2.2	36.0	30.0	2.2	2.3	7.4	11.6	2.1	1.8	4.4
Business Day	1.7	42.9	24.0	1.0	4.5	10.0	7.8	2.6	1.9	3.6
Pretoria News	4.2	36.2	21.4	4.1	4.1	11.8	9.9	2.3	2.7	3.3
Sunday Ind.	1.9	52.0	20.5	0.6	1.5	6.1	5.0	2.1	8.5	1.8
Sowetan	1.1	46.7	22.1	1.0	2.9	10.9	5.4	2.5	3.9	3.5
City Press	2.8	39.4	15.2	0.6	1.8	17.4	2.9	3.8	10.3	5.8
Sunday Sun	3.8	40.0	8.8	1.7	7.1	9.2	7.1	10.9	4.2	7.2
Mail & Guardian	2.4	52.4	18.0	1.4	1.8	9.7	7.4	1.6	3.6	1.7
Sunday Times	1.6	55.6	15.4	0.5	1.0	11.1	7.0	2.1	2.5	3.2
Beeld	2.5	36.7	21.5	4.5	3.0	13.3	10.0	2.5	2.5	3.5
Rapport	4.0	28.8	23.6	6.9	3.0	6.8	17.6	2.0	0.9	6.4
All	2.7	41.9	20.1	2.4	3.1	10.3	8.3	3.2	4.0	4.3

According to MMP, the ANC received the most coverage in all newspapers except the Zulu-medium Ilanga which devoted more space to the IFP. ANC coverage was highest in the *Sunday Times* and *Isolezwe*, both publications with

a large black readership. It was lowest in the *Mail & Guardian*, *Beeld* and *Die Burger*. The *Mail & Guardian* gave the most coverage to very small parties (contained in ‘others’) and therefore the proportion of space devoted to the ANC (as well as other main parties) was low. It is significant that two major Afrikaans dailies devoted the least space to the ruling party and the most to the FF+ and the NNP. The DA received a good deal of coverage across the board with the exception of *Ilanga* and *Isolezwe*. The IFP’s extensive coverage in these two newspapers, as well as the Daily Sun, meant that it averaged the same proportion of coverage as the DA overall, but this was less evenly spread.

According to *Media Tenor*, the ANC enjoyed the most coverage across all newspapers and particularly in the *Sowetan*, *Sunday Times*, *Sunday Independent* and the *Mail & Guardian*. All of these papers have a significantly high black readership. Coverage of the ANC was lowest in *Beeld* and *Rapport*, the only two Afrikaans newspapers analysed. The DA enjoyed a good deal of coverage in all papers except the *Sunday Sun* which devoted most of their coverage to black-led parties, the ANC, UDM, IFP and PAC. Again the FF+ and the NNP were covered more prominently in the Afrikaans press than elsewhere.

Newspaper coverage was generally neutral, but, unlike on television, parties received a great deal more negative than positive coverage in newspapers. One exception was the NNP who enjoyed a positive rating in most titles monitored by *Media Tenor*.⁷ Only the *Sowetan* gave the ANC a good deal more positive than negative coverage and only the *Sunday Independent* were positive about the DA, indicating that the two main parties were critically received in the press. The IFP received a negative rating in most of the ‘black’ and ‘liberal’ press and were covered positively only in *Rapport*. The FF+ struggled to get good publicity, although indications were that they were most favourably covered in the *City Press* and *Beeld*. Coverage of the PAC was favourable only in the *Mail & Guardian* and *City Press*.

The ANC’s dominance across all media and the DA’s ability to get more coverage than other opposition parties is less an indication of media bias than a sign that it is these two parties that generate the most news. These two parties are the most active on the campaign trail and have high profile leaders that attract the media to cover their election events. *Media Tenor* found that out of all politicians, Tony Leon received the most media coverage (30%) followed by Thabo Mbeki with 26%.⁸

⁷ Based on data from *Media Tenor*. See: www.media-tenor.co.za/index1.html

⁸ Data provided by *Media Tenor*.

The advantage of a high profile leadership was encapsulated in a remark made by UDM spokesperson Siviwe Nzwelini: “We would organise a rally and then the ANC would organise a rally nearby with a high profile speaker. The media would then be more concerned in covering the ANC than the UDM.”⁹ The ID’s Media Officer Marlon Kruger believes that the ANC and the DA got a lot of coverage because Thabo Mbeki is the president and the DA are effective in getting publicity.¹⁰ The next section will show how the ANC and the DA are able to boost their media profile further through paid advertising.

2. How the Parties used the Media

The main parties all have media strategists and departments that aim to get their party covered in the media through writing press releases and alerting the media to the movements of the leaders on the campaign trail. In addition, parties can be assured of a good deal of media exposure through paid advertisements, whether on posters, billboards or through newspaper and radio adverts. This section provides a brief assessment of the extent of party advertising, and how and where they advertised. The ANC and the DA’s unrivalled access to resources through public and private funding mean that they enjoy a great deal more coverage than other parties through paid advertising.

2.1 Outdoor Media

Most parties waged a national poster campaign with little variation from province to province in terms of content. The ANC urged voters to vote for the ANC in order to help the ruling party create work and fight poverty. Some ANC posters simply read “Vote ANC 14 April”. A great deal of ANC posters featured a smiling and benevolent-looking Thabo Mbeki, accompanied by the election slogan: “Vote ANC: A better life for all.”

The DA’s posters were the most issue-based, promising to put 150 000 cops on the street, to convict corrupt politicians, to provide free Aids drugs and to create 1 million *real* jobs. A common DA poster featured a picture of a smiling Tony Leon with the slogan: “South Africa Deserves Better.” This was a significant departure from the 1999 DA poster depicting a grim-faced Tony Leon, with his

⁹ Interview with Nzwelini conducted by the author May 6 2004.

¹⁰ Interview with Kruger conducted by the author May 6 2004.

arms folded, urging South Africans to “Fight Back”. Another prominent DA poster in 2004 urged voters to “Vote DA for Real Change.” One DA poster, prominent in the Western Cape, simply read: “The NNP and ANC are the same – Vote DA”. The black and red colours of the poster was not consistent with the DA’s usual yellow and blue posters, indicating that the DA was not altogether comfortable with associating itself with the negative and perhaps *swart gevaar* undertones of this poster.

The NNP responded to the DA’s red and black posters with its own black posters. One variation read: “Stop DA race politics” and another: “The DP + right-wing = DA” – both attempts to paint the DA as the party of white privilege in the minds of black and coloured voters. The NNP was the only party out of the main parties to project itself as specifically Cape-based party with posters declaring: “Keep the Cape NNP” and “Marthinus for Premier”. The NNP’s strategy of minority protection through co-operative government was apparent in posters that read: “You deserve a fair share”, “It’s your country too” and “The NNP- Your key to government.”

The Freedom Front pleaded with voters to “*Se Nee vir die ANC*”¹¹ and told disaffected minorities that “*Daar is weer hoop.*”¹² The UDM called for the “arrest of arms-deal crooks” and declared that “ten years of unemployment undermine the people’s freedom.” The Independent Democrats (ID) posters predictably sought to bank on the popularity of their leader by featuring a large picture of Patricia de Lille giving the thumbs-up sign and telling prospective ID voters that they would get more voice for their vote. The IFP urged people to come together and vote for the IFP, featuring Mangosuthu Buthelezi surrounded by female IFP members of all races. A PAC poster consisted of a picture of party leader Motsoko Pheko with the rather cumbersome caption: “Together restoring the dignity of the African people through an equitable distribution of wealth.”

Research conducted in the Western Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal suggested that the ANC and the DA had the most prominent poster coverage. Poster placement by all parties tended to correlate well with the strategic imperatives of each party. The ANC dominated African townships, although the DA also placed posters in what was largely ‘unchartered territory’ for the party. The DA, NNP and FF+ dominated in the white suburbs, while coloured and

¹¹ “Say No to the ANC”

¹² “There is hope again”

Indian areas were targeted by a broad range of parties who no doubt viewed these voters as ‘swing voters’.¹³

In the white middle-class suburb of Edgemoor in the Western Cape, the FF+, the NNP and the DA were the most prominent and there were very few ANC posters. Lamp-posts in the white upper middle-class area of Houghton and the Afrikaans-speaking suburb of Florida, both in Gauteng, were dominated by the DA. The DA was again the most prominent party in the white working-class area of Oribi village in KwaZulu-Natal, although researchers reported a dearth of DA posters in the white middle-class suburb of Berea where the ANC and the NNP dominated.

The African townships of the Western Cape were saturated with ANC posters, billboards and painted murals of Thabo Mbeki. UDM posters were few and far between and the occasional PAC poster was evident. On Klipfontein road between Guguletu and Nyanga, there was approximately one DA poster for every three ANC posters. A great deal of these DA posters were in Xhosa. One read: “Umzantsi Afrika Ufanelwe Zizonte Ezingcono” (South Africa deserves better), while another stated: “Isigidi semisebenzi eyiyo” (one million *real* jobs). Along Masithandane street in Kayamandi township near Stellenbosch, just over 55% of the posters were ANC, including two large ANC billboards. The UDM also had a fairly strong presence in this township accounting for roughly a third of the posters. Imbali, a black working-class township outside of Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal was dominated by ANC billboards and posters. 63% of posters counted were ANC, while the DA accounted for about 30% of the posters. Only ANC posters could be seen in the black rural area of Willowfontein, although there were a few DA posters at the intersection leading into the area. In Richmond, roughly 60% of the posters were ANC and only 4% were IFP. The ANC also dominated poster coverage in Alexandra township in Gauteng. Along Roosevelt road, there were 40 ANC posters to the DA’s 22 and the PAC’s 18. Three ACDP posters were seen and 6 IFP posters. Along Lombardy street in Richmond, a researcher counted 22 posters each for the ANC and the DA, but none for any other party.

In the predominantly coloured area of Athlone in the Western Cape, the ANC, the NNP and the DA had a fairly equal amount of posters. Along Klipfontein road in Athlone, approximately 36% of the posters were ANC, 28% NNP and

¹³ Alexandra Paddock, Sarah Meny-Gibert and Gavin Davis carried out the poster research in KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng and the Western Cape respectively. The results are based on direct observation and a quantitative assessment. Researchers measured a distance of one kilometre and then counted the number of posters for each party along that stretch.

32% DA. The Peace and Development Party, African Muslim Party, Moderate Independent Party and the African Christian Democratic Party all enjoyed some coverage. Peter Marais' New Labour Party posters represented a blatant wooing of the 'coloured vote', with a smiling Marais urging these voters to "Come Home." Poster coverage was also heterogenous in the coloured working-class suburbs of Newlands, Montclare and Westbury in Gauteng where the ANC, DA and NNP featured most prominently.

The Indian working-class area of Chatsworth in KwaZulu-Natal proved to have a wide array of posters. The Minority Front, a party that unashamedly targets the Indian vote, was the most prominent, with 36 posters out of 83 along the Higgenson Highway in Chatsworth. The DA accounted for roughly a quarter of the posters and their red and black "NNP and ANC are the same" posters featured strongly. It is interesting that this poster was not observed in other parts of the province, indicating that the DA's strategy in Indian areas of KwaZulu-Natal was similar to its strategy in the coloured areas of the Western Cape. The ACDP, ANC and IFP had 12, 9 and 5 posters respectively, while the NNP had none. In the predominantly middle-class Indian area of Westville North, ANC and DA posters were the most prominent, each occupying 35% of the coverage along Dawncliffe Road. The MF followed with 25% of the posters and the ACDP had four. As in the Indian areas of KwaZulu-Natal, Lenasia in Gauteng featured a good variety of posters. Here ANC and DA posters dominated, although Azapo and the NNP were well-represented.

One should be cautious in generalising from this data, but it appears that poster placement is a good indicator of party strategy. The ANC has an unrivalled dominance in the black townships, although there were indications that the DA did put up posters in the townships. For all its bluster as a non-racial, catch-all party, the NNP did not target black areas. All three parties featured prominently in coloured and Indian areas indicating that these residents were regarded as 'campaign fodder' by most parties. The IFP, UDM, PAC, ID and others were far less prominent and were most likely hampered by a lack of resources. The ANC made the most extensive use of other outdoor media, spending R12 million on billboards, murals and moving media (such as adverts on taxis, buses and trucks). The UDM spent R1.4 million on outdoor media, while the DA spent R200 000, IFP R15 000 and the UCDP R11 990.¹⁴ It is likely that most other parties, such as the NNP, did not use billboards because of their expense.¹⁵

¹⁴ Data provided by AC Nielsen.

¹⁵ Interview with Carol Johnson, NNP Media Director, May 7 2004.

2.2 Radio Advertising

In addition to Public Election Broadcasts, parties were allowed to place paid advertisements on the radio (but not on television). Adspend data calculated by Nielsen Media Research revealed that in the period January to the end of March 2004, political parties collectively spent over R12 million on radio advertisements.¹⁶

The DA spent R5.9 million on radio advertisements, outspending the ANC by R1.1 million. According to DA Director of Communications, Nick-Clelland Stokes, “The DA wants to get every South African. We focus on radio because it is the most effective way of targeting people” (Monare 2004). The DA spent over R2 million on stations with a predominantly black listenership, spending R775 000 on the isiZulu-medium station Ukhozi alone. The DA spent R1.3 million advertising on stations with a white listenership such as 5fm, Cape Talk, Highveld, Ofm and Radiosondergrense. The remainder was allocated to stations with a more diverse listenership such as East Coast Radio, Jacaranda, Radio 702 and SAFM. Common themes on DA radio adverts were assertions that the DA, with its partners, would win 30% of the vote; that Thabo Mbeki’s biggest ally was Robert Mugabe; that the NNP and MF had betrayed their supporters by joining with the ANC and that a vote for the ID was a wasted vote.¹⁷

The ANC spent R4.75 million on radio advertising. Like the DA, the ANC advertised on a wide range of stations, although it spent over 80% of its radio advertising budget on stations with a predominantly black listenership. The ANC flighted eight types of adverts around the following themes: A people’s contract to fight poverty and unemployment; job creation; fighting poverty; fighting crime; fighting corruption; improving service delivery and building a united nation.¹⁸

Other parties spent far less than the DA and ANC on radio advertising and tended to target a niche market through their radio advertising campaign. The FF+ spent just under R450 000 advertising on KFM, Jakaranda, OFM and Radiosondergrense, all Afrikaans stations with a mainly white listenership, as well as Afrikaans-medium university campus radio stations - Matie FM (Stellenbosch), Radio Tuks (Pretoria University) and Radio RAU (Rand

¹⁶ AC Nielsen measured adspend for 43 commercial and 70 community radio stations.

¹⁷ Transcripts supplied by the DA

¹⁸ Transcripts supplied by the ANC

Afrikaans University). The NNP spent R1.1 million and only advertised on radio stations with a predominantly white, coloured and Indian listenership. The UDM and the IFP spent R300 000 and R490 000 respectively, both choosing to advertise mainly on the African language stations. The ID and ACDP spent a meagre R70 000 and R23 000 respectively.

2.3 Newspaper Advertising

The ANC spent R3.8 million, far more than any other party on advertisements in the print media and advertised in nearly every title, spending over R700 000 on the *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Rapport* and only R550 000 advertising in ‘black’ newspapers, *City Press*, *Sowetan* and the *Daily Sun*. The DA spent much less advertising in the print media than on radio, allocating only R790 000 to newspaper advertisements. This figure was five times less than the ANC and R115 000 less than the UDM which allocated over R900 000 to newspaper adverts. Unlike its ‘catch-all’ advertising on radio, the DA targeted newspapers with minority readerships such as *Beeld*, *Die Burger*, *Cape Argus*, *Daily News* and *Rapport* and did not advertise in *City Press*, *the Daily Sun* or *Sowetan*. The NNP and FF+ spent R550 000 and R115 000 respectively, both advertising mainly in the Afrikaans press. The IFP and the ACDP only advertised in community newspapers, and, along with the ID, cited a lack of funds for not advertising extensively in the print media.¹⁹

3. Conclusion

This analysis points to the increasing media dominance of the ANC as the ruling party and the DA as the voice of opposition. Both parties have dedicated teams ensuring their party’s presence in the news media through the prodigious writing of press statements and op-ed pieces, as well as leadership figures that are considered newsmakers by the media. Disparities in public and private funding also give the ANC and the DA an unrivalled ability to ensure a strong media presence in the run-up to the election. Both parties can afford to run extensive and sustained advertising campaigns in the press, on the airwaves and on posters and other outdoor media.

¹⁹ Interview with Selby Khumalo, National Media Director of the ACDP, Marlon Kruger, Media Officer of the ID and Musa Zondi, IFP Director of Communications, May 6 2004.

The extensive coverage given to the DA and the ANC has little to do with media bias. These parties enjoyed the most coverage across *all* media – in the ‘liberal’, ‘Afrikaans’ and ‘black’ press, as well as on an assortment of SABC television and radio stations. Having said this, coverage of the ANC was comparatively higher in the black press and the ruling party was endorsed, if somewhat cautiously, in black-owned publications. The DA also tended to be covered slightly more in the ‘liberal’ press, while Afrikaans parties and the IFP enjoyed comparatively more exposure in the Afrikaans and the isiZulu media respectively. We can conclude that, in general, the South African media is less partisan than it has ever been, but that there remains a sufficient plurality of media voices to act as a counterweight against the development of an uncritical or biased media.

Of course, this is not to say that debates over the role of the media will not and should not continue. While the media is far more diverse in 2004 than 1994 in terms of ownership, personnel and audience, there is still some way to go until media transformation will be considered complete. The SABC’s broadcasting of an ANC rally in this election, coupled with the recent senior appointment of ANC loyalist Snuki Zikalala at the SABC is an additional cause for concern. Time will tell whether the DA’s prophecy that “the SABC is set to become Mbeki’s broadcaster outright” will prove correct (SABC 2004).

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