Working for Democracy
ANC Elective Conference News Media Coverage

01 January - 27 November 2022
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Introduction

The ANC is less than a week away from its 55th elective conference, when the party will elect the top six candidates to form part of its National Executive Committee. While each of the six positions is important in its own right, closer attention is paid to the candidate(s) seeking to become/remain president of the ANC.

Common curiosity when power changes, South Africans are questioning what makes a candidate better or less suited than their counterparts to take on the role of ANC president. The media, which is either criticised or praised depending on audience perception, has played an instrumental role in informing the public about the candidates' achievements and failures, as well as the controversies arising around them.

As part of our Defending Democracy project, this report analyses the South African media's coverage of the four candidates contesting the position of ANC president. The period of the analysis is between 1 January and 27 November 2022.

Part 1 of this report looks at the overall media coverage of four candidates that emerged as potential presidents of ANC in 2022. They are Lindiwe Sisulu, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Zweli Mkhize and President Cyril Ramaphosa in News24, Daily Maverick, TimesLIVE, IOL, SABC, eNCA and Mail and Guardian. Hereinafter these candidates will be referred to as Sisulu, NDZ, Mkhize and Ramaphosa respectively.

Part 2 zooms in on the coverage of these four candidates in News24, TimesLive and IOL. These publications were selected as the main focus of the research. This was based on the percentage of mentions (articles) that were returned by the brand monitoring tool that was used to collect the data.

Research Methodology

In order to obtain the data points (online news articles) that were reviewed in this report, we started off with a broad set of articles that were first categorised by the names of each candidate. This returned more than 9 000 mentions/articles across the seven media houses mentioned above. This information is discussed in Part 1. The articles in the dataset were then filtered by keywords like "ANC Elective Conference" and variations of these words.

This brought the total number of articles across the 7 media houses that were assessed down to 826. Analysing the content in each article is a manual process that requires reading each article and using that information to further categorise the data. Due to time and resource constraints, we decided that based on the contribution to the total number of articles, the media houses with the highest percentage volume of articles would form the focus of this report. News24 and Daily Maverick contributed the first and second-highest volume of articles (24% and 23% respectively). IOL and TimesLive combined contributed 26% to the

conversation. Rather than look at the two media houses with the highest volumes, we decided to review three media houses - i.e., News24, IOL and Times Live. This allowed us to gain a broader understanding of the online conversations around the key ANC leadership candidates.

We noted that the final nominations list did not include Sisulu and NDZ. However, from early on in the year until the last vote in November, both were positioned through social media and traditional news media as candidates that had aspirations and showed promise of becoming the next president of the ANC. Based on a recent social media report on the candidates for the ANC presidency that the CABC recently released, Mkhize and NDZ campaigned with posters and hashtags, just like Ramaphosa, for election at the national elective conference.

In Part 2 of the report, we conduct a discursive analysis of the sentiment towards the candidates as reported across the three online media sites that were selected for the study. In order to compare the content of the discourses across the media houses, where a candidate's name was returned, we manually selected the candidate that was mostly spoken about in each article and then subjectively assigned a sentiment of either positive, neutral or negative to each. The subjective analysis is based on a closer reading of the content in the articles and is done by interpreting key linguistic and symbolic signifiers in the language used in each article. If an article didn't have at least one of the names in them, we still assessed them for content to help us understand the type of reporting per media house because they formed part of the data that was returned from keywords like "ANC elective conference".

All the articles that were returned were further categorised if they contained a prominent talking point that we have been covering in the Working for Democracy project this year. These include: Ramaphosa's Phala Phala incident; Mkhize's Digital Vibes saga; the Constitution of South Africa - a primary point of discussion for Sisulu; corruption; state capture; and Eskom as the ruling party struggled to keep the lights on.

Summary of findings:

- Ramaphosa was the most covered candidate by all media houses. The second most covered candidate varied across the seven media houses;

- Internal squabbles, factionalism and endorsements of specific candidates were prioritised ahead of the elective conference; and

- Corruption received the most mentions, followed by state capture, the constitution, Eskom, Phala Phala and Digital Vibes.

- While News24 and TimesLive articles showed a balance of positive and negative articles toward candidates, IOL articles were heavily skewed negatively toward Ramaphosa and positively toward Mkhize and to a lesser extent, Sisulu and NDZ.

Part 1: Overall coverage

There were a total of 9445 mentions for Sisulu, Mkhize, Ramaphosa and NDZ across the above-mentioned media houses (see Figure 1). These are general mentions of the candidates' names across a variety of discourses, not only the ANC's provincial and national elective conferences.

Total mentions		Unique authors		Total reach	
	⬊ 46%		⬊ 28%		⬊ 51%
9445	Previous period: 17.35k	**1334**	Previous period: 1856	**12.56m**	Previous period: 25.72m

Fig. 1: Overall candidates mentions between 1 January - 27 November 2022

Filtering the conversation so that we could focus on articles that related to the provincial and national elective conferences, our search returned just over 800 mentions across the seven publications that we initially assessed (see Figure 2).

Total mentions		Unique authors		Total reach	
	⬈ 105%		⬈ 59%		⬈ 94%
826	Previous period: 403	**194**	Previous period: 122	**1.05m**	Previous period: 540.16k

Fig. 2: Conference-related candidate mentions between 1 January - 27 November 2022

Ramaphosa dominated the coverage, garnering more than 80% of the mentions across selected media houses (see Figure 3).
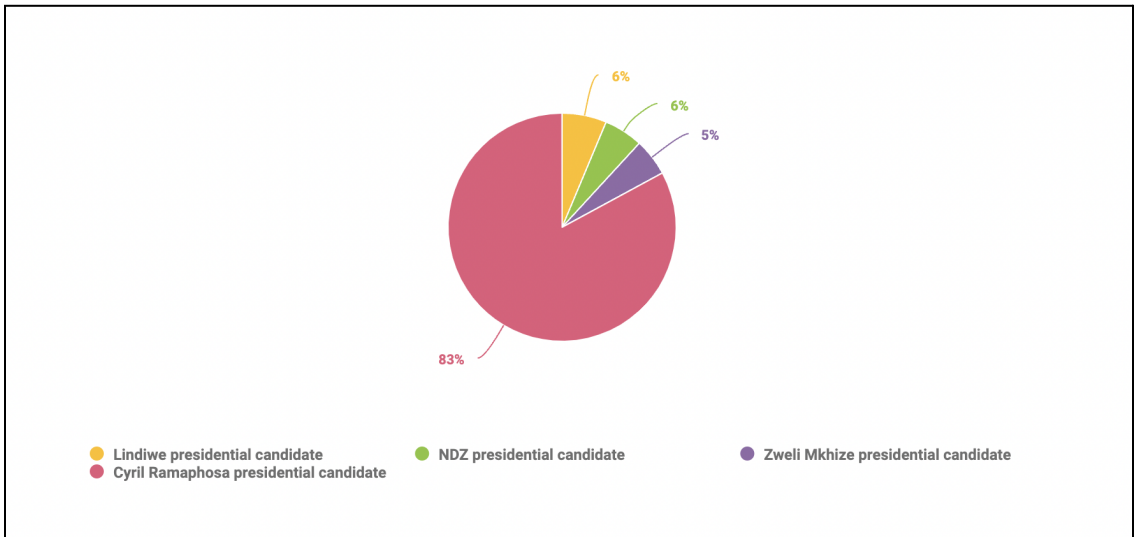
Figure 3: Overall coverage percentages of the four candidates

Figure 4 shows how Ramaphosa also dominated coverage around the elective conference, garnering more than 60% of the mentions between 1 January and 27 November 2022.

General coverage around the candidates (see Figure 3) shows that Sisulu and NDZ received the second and third-highest mentions in South African media when we didn't filter for articles related only to the elective conference and other ANC conferences that took place this year.

Mkhize, who received the lowest percentage of mentions without the filter, moved up to become the second most mentioned candidate (see Figure 4) after Ramaphosa as soon as we isolated the conversation on the candidates and filtered the data for only mentions that related to ANC conferences.
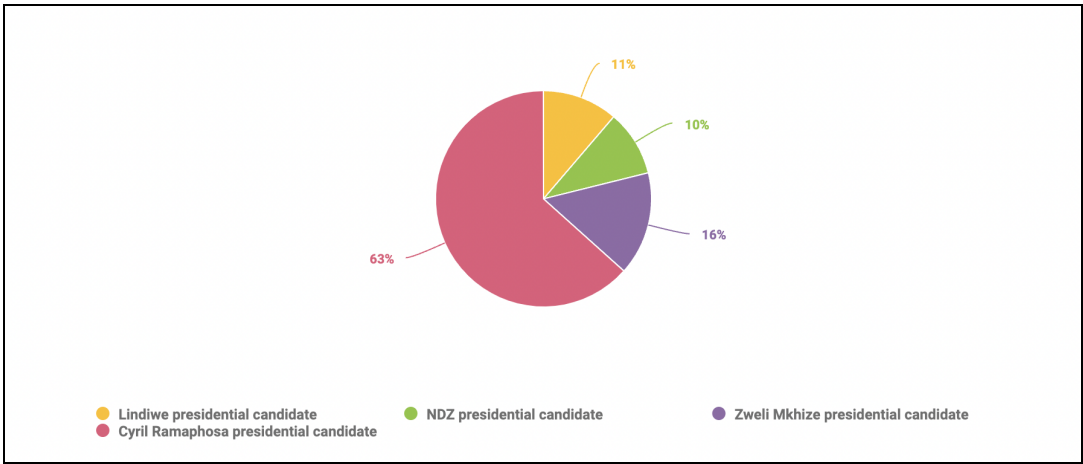

Figure 4: Percentage of conference-related mentions for all candidates

As shown in Figure 5, the second most mentioned candidates differed across media houses. Sisulu became the second most mentioned candidate by IOL, eNCA (where she tied with NDZ and Daily Maverick (where she tied with Mkhize).

Mkhize also became the second-most mentioned candidate by Mail & Guardian and News24, while NDZ received the second-highest number of mentions from TimesLIVE and SABC News.
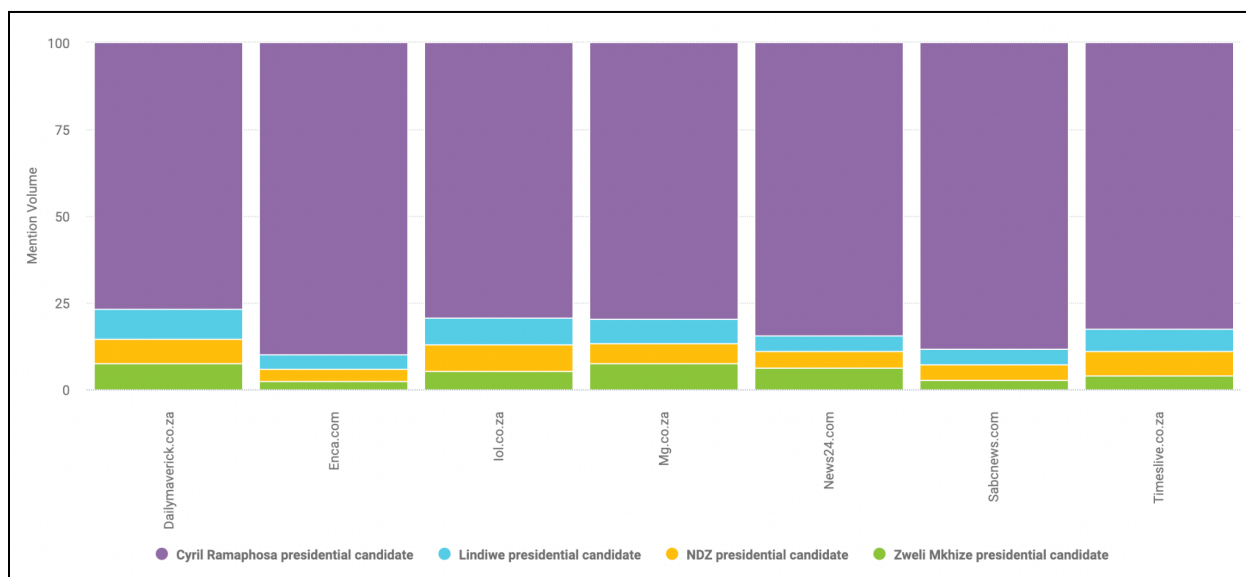

Fig. 5: Candidate mentions per media houses - general conversation.

Table 1 below summarises the percentage of mentions per candidate, broken down by news media houses between 1 January and 27 November 2022.

	Daily Maverick	eNCA	IOL	M&G	News24	SABC	Times Live
Ramaphosa	77%	90%	79%	79%	84%	88%	83%
Lindiwe	8%	4%	8%	7%	5%	4%	6%
NDZ	7%	4%	7%	6%	5%	5%	7%
Zweli Mkhize	8%	2%	6%	8%	6%	3%	4%

Table 1: Numerical representation of data volumes that correspond to the graph in Figure 5.

A slightly different perspective is obtained when coverage around the conference is analysed. Ramaphosa continued to receive the highest percentage of mentions, with some increases for the other candidates (see Figure 6).
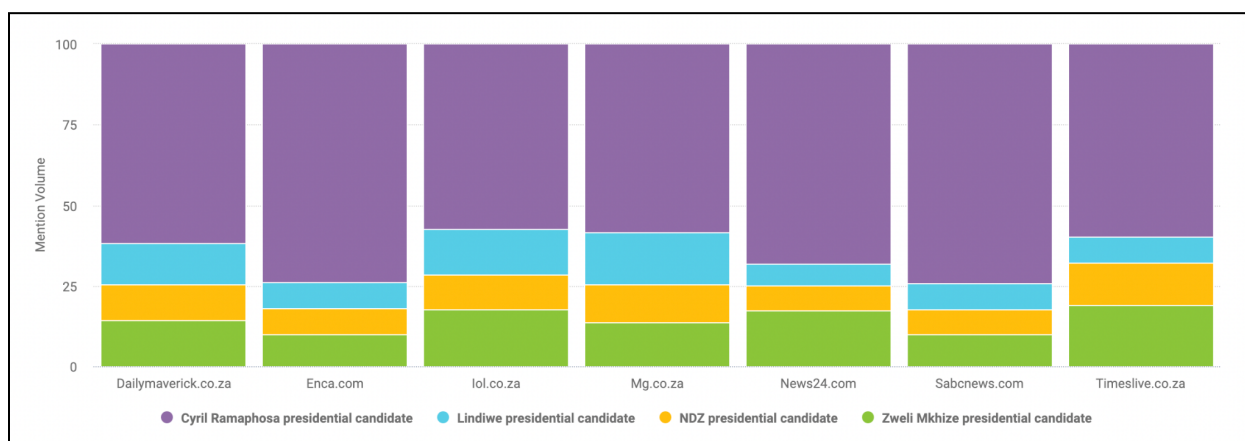

Figure 6: Candidate mentions per media houses - Conference related conversation.

Conference-related coverage around Ramaphosa steadily declines across selected media houses, Mkhize receives the second-highest coverage on eNCA, IOL, SABC and TimesLIVE, where he had previously received the lowest coverage compared to the other candidates. These increases are attributed to, among others, coverage around different branches endorsing different candidates for the position of ANC president, as well as the controversies (which form part of the next point of analysis in this report) surrounding the candidates.

	Daily Maverick	eNCA	IOL	M&G	News24	SABC	Times Live
Ramaphosa	61%	73%	57%	58%	68%	74%	60%
Lindiwe	13%	8%	15%	16%	7%	8%	8%
NDZ	11%	8%	11%	12%	8%	8%	13%
Zweli Mkhize	15%	11%	17%	14%	17%	10%	19%

Table 2: Numerical representation of data volumes that correspond to the graph in Figure 6

As previously mentioned in this report, controversies and scandals are often highlighted at a time when new leaders are to be elected. The lead-up to the ANC's elective conference has not been different, with both the public and the media scrutinising the eligibility of hopeful candidates to hold office.

Ramaphosa is currently weathering the storm of the [Phala Phala](#) robbery, Mkhize was implicated in [corruption](#) pertaining to the Digital Vibes scandal and Sisulu continues to receive criticism for her remarks on the [judiciary](#) and the Constitution.

The CABC has used these, along with Eskom, state capture and corruption, to further understand the media content around the four candidates.

As highlighted in Figure 7 below, corruption is the most popular topic in the media coverage around the four candidates, followed by state capture, the Constitution, Eskom, Phala Phala and Digital Vibes.
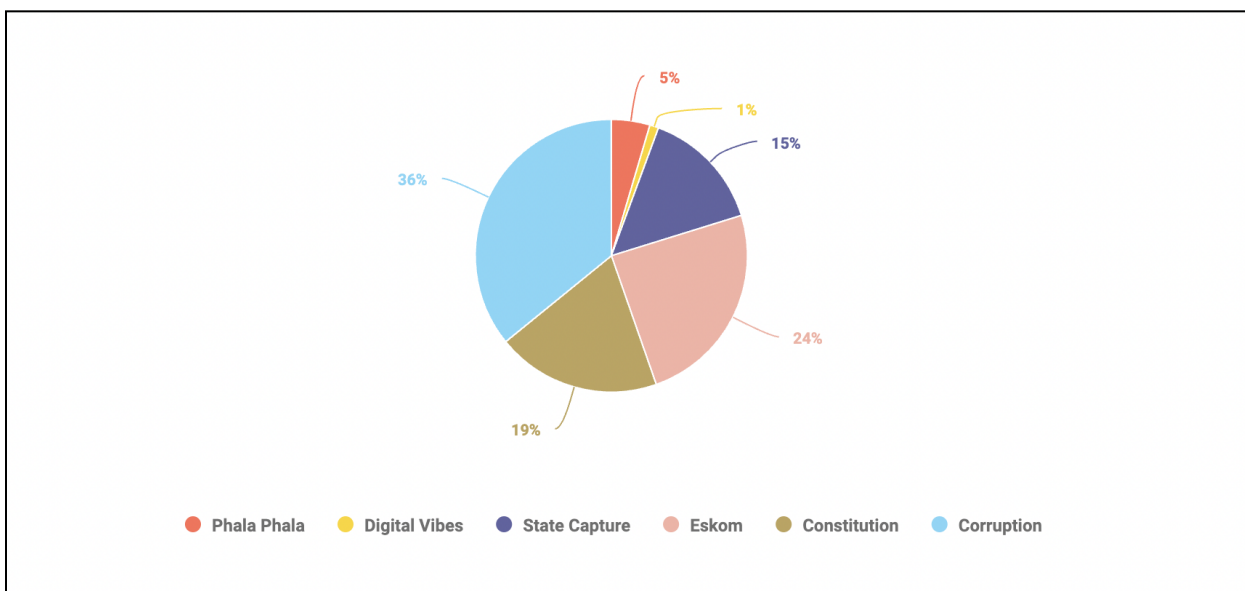

Figure 7: Overall coverage around various topics in relation to the candidates

A similar perspective is obtained when coverage around the candidates, in relation to the conference, is analysed.

As shown in Figure 8, corruption leads the percentage of mentions, with Phala Phala coverage increasing from 5% in Figure 7, to 12% in Figure 8. Digital Vibes remained the least mentioned topic, with a slight increase from 1% to 4%.
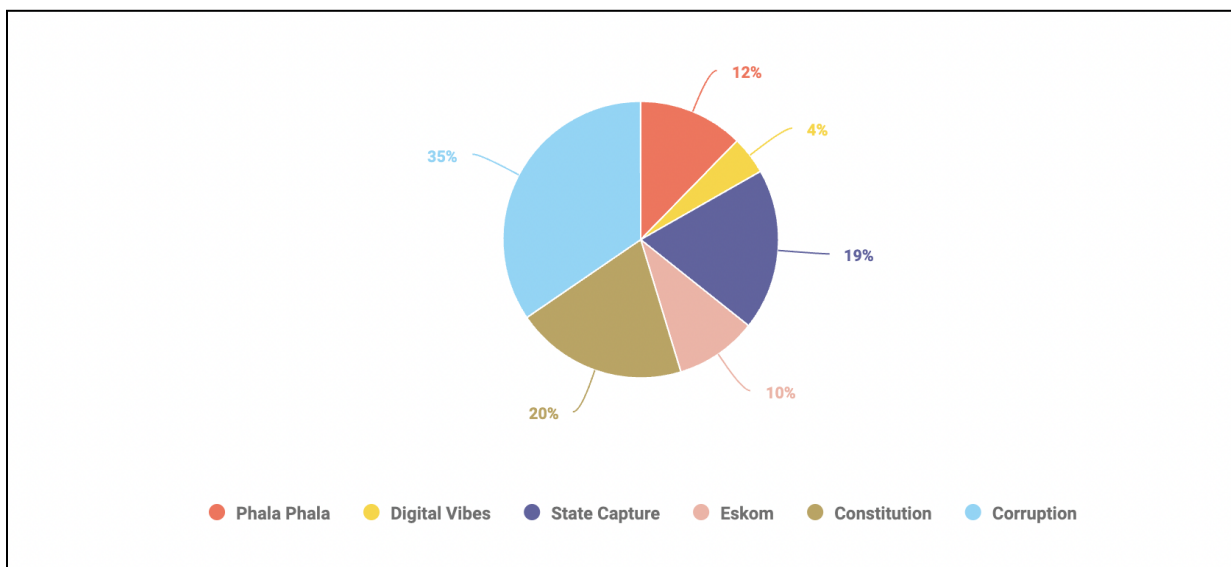
Figure 8: *Conference-related coverage around various topics in relation to the candidates*

Part 2: Zooming in on three media houses

This section of the report focuses on the three media houses with high coverage around the candidates and the elective conference that we decided to focus on. These are News24, TimesLIVE and IOL (see Figure 9). Although Daily Maverick returned the second-highest volume of articles, we decided not to review the articles returned by this media house so that we could analyse two more media houses, with a higher combined contribution than Daily Maverick alone, alongside News24. This allowed us to gather broader insights on how different media houses reported on candidates in the build up to the 2022 ANC Elective Conference.
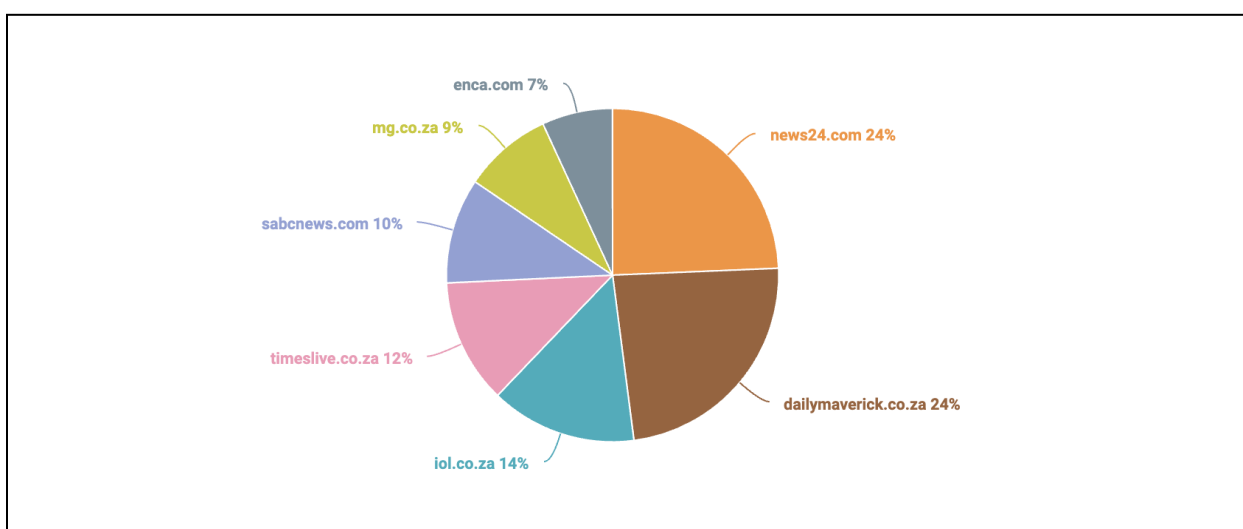

Figure 9: *Percentage of coverage per media house*

News24 summary

An analysis of News24's coverage revealed that the four candidates garnered almost 2500 mentions between 1 January - 27 November 2022. Ramaphosa received the highest number of mentions, followed by Mkhize, NDZ and Sisulu.

As shown in figure 10, more than 200 mentions of these mentions were recorded for the conference-specific coverage of the candidates and the related subtopics.

Total mentions		Unique authors		Total reach	
266	↗166% Previous period: 100	72	↗67% Previous period: 43	682.02k	↗166% Previous period: 256.4k

Figure 10: Conference-related coverage of the four candidates and selected topics between 1 January - 27 November 2022

The CABC then manually analysed the articles to eliminate repetitions, compare the number of opinion pieces over news articles for each media house, assess the frequency of each candidate and subjectively assign a sentiment (i.e., either positive, neutral or negative) towards the candidate that featured most heavily in the article.

After the elimination process, 210 articles were analysed for News24 between 1 January 2022 and 27 November 2022. Around 17% of these were classified as opinion pieces or analyses. Around 7% of these were a series of articles consolidated into one. Examples of these include *'What's in City Press'* and *'Friday Briefing'.*

As shown in Table 3, Ramaphosa was the most mentioned candidate in 148 articles that were analysed. Mkhize became the most mentioned candidate 18 times, Sisulu 11 times and NDZ four times.

Candidate	Article focus	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Ramaphosa	148	38	81	29
Mkhize	18	5	10	3
Sisulu	11	5	5	1
NDZ	4	0	2	2

Table 3: News24 coverage of the four candidates

The coverage around News24 was mostly centred around the events taking place across the country, either in relation to the candidates, or the upcoming elective conference.

Among these are the provincial conference in KZN, North West, Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and Limpopo respectively, candidates being endorsed by various branches for different positions within the NEC, State Capture, as well as (especially in the second half of 2022) coverage around the Phala Phala scandal which made headlines towards the end of May.

With more than 70 mentions, corruption became the most covered topic around the candidates and the elective conference. This was followed - in descending order - by the Constitution, Phala Phala, State Capture, Digital Vibes and Eskom.

TimesLIVE summary

As shown in Figure 11, 130 mentions of the candidates in relation to the elective and/or provincial conferences were recorded between 1 January and 27 November 2022 (fig. 11). Our elimination process led to one article removed, leaving 129 articles for the analysis.

About 7% of the articles were classified as opinion pieces, editorials or analyses. Six other articles were classified as polls.

Total mentions		Unique authors		Total reach	
	↗ 71% Previous period: 76		↗ 59% Previous period: 17		↗ 71% Previous period: 102.07k
130		27		174.59k	

Figure 11: Conference-related coverage of the four candidates and selected topics between 1 January - 27 November 2022

Ramaphosa remained the most mentioned candidate during the time period and was classified as the most focused candidate in 84 articles. As depicted in table 4 below, Mkhize was the primary candidate 12 times, Sisulu seven times and NDZ eight.

Overall, the sentiment towards each of the candidates was predominantly neutral. Similar to News24, TimesLive's coverage is predominantly news-led, with most of the articles referring to either speeches or political events that took place during the time period.

Opinion-led articles are clearly stipulated as such, ensuring that readers are not confused about the type of content they are engaging with. Corruption and state capture were the main topics in articles which also mentioned Ramaphosa, with Phala Phala and the Constitution joining the list around June.

Candidate	Article focus	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Ramaphosa	84	26	32	26
Mkhize	12	5	3	4
Sisulu	7	3	4	0
NDZ	8	1	5	2

Table 4: TimesLive coverage of the candidates

Coverage around the former focused on various issues including the state capture reports, mentions of party members implicated in corruption as well as the State of the Nation address.

Coverage into the second half of the year circulated around the Phala Phala robbery and whether the President had violated the Constitution. A few articles mentioned Eskom and load shedding as part of the issues that the government needed to address.

The Constitution was also the most mentioned topic in articles where Sisulu was the primary candidate, with Digital Vibes being the most mentioned topic in the 11 articles where Mkhize was the focus candidate. The CABC did not identify a dominant article in articles where NDZ was the focus candidate.

IOL summary

Across popular digital papers like Pretoria News, Cape Times and Daily News, 153 articles were returned from the IOL site that matched our filtered criteria. This number is shown in Figure 12 below, which also returns a number of 39 unique authors.
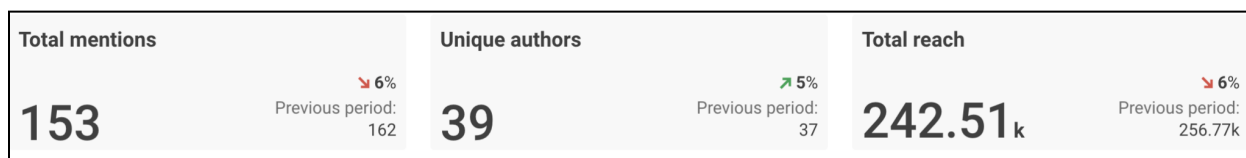

Total mentions		Unique authors		Total reach	
	↘ 6%		↗ 5%		↘ 6%
153	Previous period: 162	39	Previous period: 37	242.51k	Previous period: 256.77k

Figure 12: The number of IOL articles that match the filtered criteria for this project

The number of "Unique Authors" shown here isn't an accurate representation. This is because some IOL articles that were returned didn't have the writer's name on the part of the page that is dedicated to displaying the name of the writer. Some showed as "Written by: Opinion" and others appeared to contain simply "staff writer" with no further details confirmed. In Figure 13 below, we have placed three articles from IOL sites next to each other to display this inconsistency in the appearance of names of the author on an article.
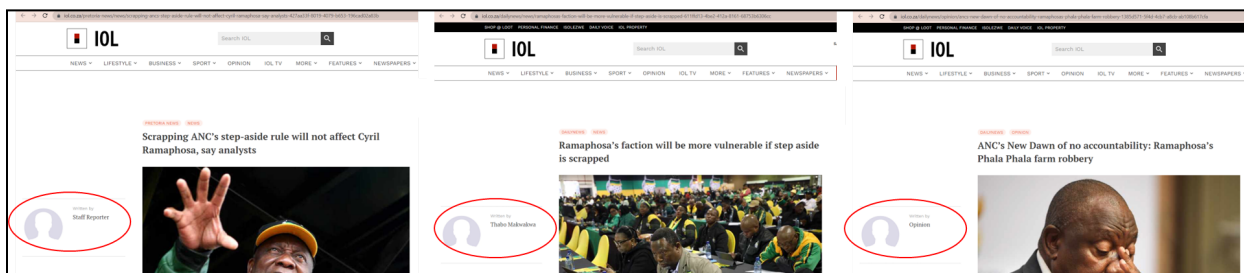
Figure 13: three different articles published on IOL.

Only the screenshot of the article in the middle shows a name under the heading "written by". With regard to the "staff reporter" article and the opinion piece, one has to scroll down to find the author's name. This is problematic for readers when one considers that most people don't scroll beyond the fold (the part of a web page that appears before you scroll). In an age where news and information are shared at great speed and in large volumes, accountability is extremely important. This becomes very difficult to ensure when extracting information (e.g., an author's name) is either left out or not easy to find above the fold.

Reviewing other opinion pieces within our dataset from IOL we noticed that sometimes, like when a well known person writes an opinion, a name does appear where it should. An example of this can be seen in Figure 13 below where Professor Saths Cooper name can be seen below the "written by" section of his opinion piece.
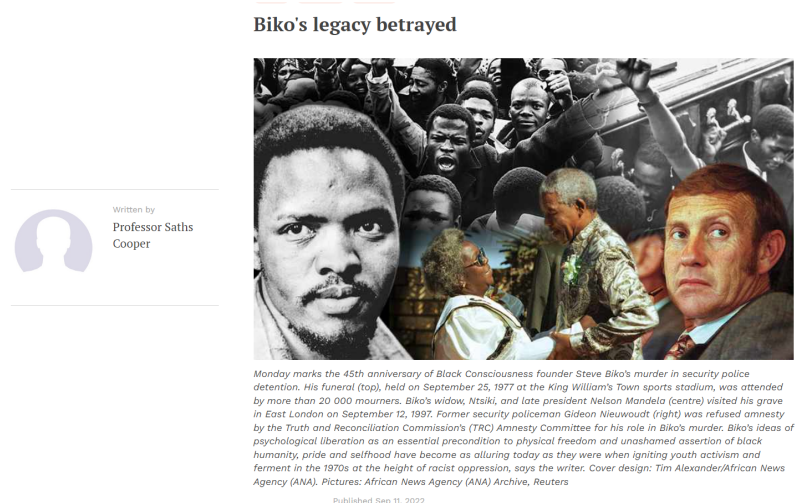

Figure 13: example of an opinion piece which shows the name of the person who wrote the article.

The number of opinion pieces that we found on IOL that included the presidential candidates and the elective conference also stood out. The mentions for IOL in February, for example, are shown in Figure 14 below. In this snippet of a spreadsheet, opinion pieces can be seen highlighted in yellow. This shows that of the 11 articles that were returned, 7 of them were not standard news articles, i.e. an article that is written to inform

readers about events where the author reports essential information to the public. 64% of the articles were opinion pieces, i.e. articles that allow people to voice their opinions on recent events and not news articles based on clear facts.

Date	Title	Snippet	Url
2022-02-01 17:02:08	LETTER: Fatal cracks evident in ANC architecture	Are our national key points under siege? Or is	https://www.iol.co.za/dailynews/opinion/letter-fatal-cracks-evident-in-a
2022-02-02 13:25:00	Opinion: Lindiwe Sisulu is a serious contender against Cyril Ramaphosa's failed regime	As the ANC heads into its much-awaited elect	https://www.iol.co.za/dailynews/opinion/opinion-lindiwe-sisulu-is-a-ser
2022-02-09 18:26:21	Showtime folks! But what will become of it all this time?	Here you'll see our pot-bellied leaders – the y	https://www.iol.co.za/dailynews/opinion/showtime-folks-but-what-will-
2022-02-11 11:13:48	ANC 'party members will have to choose wisely' over ruling party's top position	While Lindiwe Sisulu and Dr Zweli Mkhize hav	https://www.iol.co.za/mercury/news/anc-party-members-will-have-to-c
2022-02-14 10:48:34	CR 'throws in towel on job creation'	In his State of the Nation Address (Sona) on T	https://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/news/cr-throws-in-towel-on-job-creat
2022-02-16 9:07:14	Credit-neutral Budget set to stay the course of Medium-Term Budget policy statement	Key will be the debt projections, and the asse	https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/opinion/credit-neutral-budget-se
2022-02-17 16:25:42	MPs hold the key to nudge Ramaphosa into active mode	This unconstitutional and mischievous rule pr	https://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/opinion/mps-hold-the-key-to-nudge-ra
2022-02-18 18:57:51	Time for Parliament to amend secret ballot policy	On February 16, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, th	https://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/opinion/time-for-parliament-to-amend
2022-02-21 13:55:13	ANC dissolves its biggest Western Cape region	The Dullah Omar Region is the ANC's biggest	https://www.iol.co.za/weekend-argus/news/anc-dissolves-its-biggest-w
2022-02-24 12:38:56	Cosatu wants new working class movement to assert leadership in the national democratic revolution	Cosatu has also resolved that the working cla	https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/cosatu-wants-new-working-class-m
2022-02-27 7:42:07	The ANC's renewal agenda: Prospects and challenges for the ruling party	The phrase "ANC renewal" has been making t	https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/opinion/the-ancs-renewal-agenda-

Figure 14: Seven out of all 11 articles returned in February were opinion pieces

Opinion articles are usually written by subject-matter experts. However, this is not always the case with IOL opinion pieces. The second article shown in Figure 14 for example was written by Modibe Modiba, a UNISA student who was sued by the Daily Maverick and who has been ordered by a court to pay the publication R100,000 for writing fake stories.

Once we developed an understanding of the type of articles that were being returned by the publication, we wanted to understand the focus or narratives in the content. As you can see from Table 5 below, like with the other two publications that were assessed, Ramaphosa was the most mentioned candidate, with more than 54% of the articles in the IOL dataset focussing on him.

What was very interesting to compare with the other publications is the ratio of articles that express a negative sentiment toward the candidate that an article focussed on. These figures can be seen in Table 5 below.

Candidate	Article focus	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Ramaphosa	83	46	29	6
Mkhize	18	2	1	15
Sisulu	11	3	1	7
NDZ	6	0	1	5

Table 5: IOL Coverage of the 4 candidates

Assessing the numbers in Table 5, we see that for TimesLive there is a negative:positive ratio of 1:1 ratio for Ramaphosa. This means that for every article that referred to the candidate and their abilities to be President in a negative light, as we manually assessed, there was another article that spoke positively about Ramaphosa. Looking at News24, the ratio was almost 1:1 (38:29). Assessing IOL however, the ratio of negative to positive is completely different to the other publications that were analysed. With 46 articles that expressed Ramaphosa negatively, the content of only 6 articles made some sort of positive reference to the president. That is a ratio of around 7:1 i.e. for every 1 positive article that was published on the IOL site about Ramaphosa, there were 7 articles that portrayed the president as negative or expressed him in a negative light within content that referred to ANC conferences.

If one were to assess only the numbers in Table 5 above, it is clear that the RET candidates (Mkhize, Sisulu and NDZ who were named as such by media publications see example 1 and 2) were favoured for the top spot of the presidency with the number of positive articles about them within our dataset far outweighing the number of neutral and negative articles. Of the 11 articles in which Lindiwe Sisulu was the focussed on candidate, 10 of them were opinion pieces.

While it is important that diverse views prevail in the media landscape, when media outlets engage in overtly one-sided or biassed reporting, legitimate concerns can be raised regarding the veracity of their reporting. From this preliminary study, it appears that IOL has not given the South African public a balanced view of each candidate in the run up to the ANC elective conference.

Conclusion

Topical focus of campaigns: Our analysis on how the four candidates were covered reveals that internal squabbles, factionalism and endorsements of specific candidates were prioritised ahead of the elective conference, with these topics featuring heavily in our dataset. Surprisingly, discussions about policy, which should form the basis of a candidate's campaign, appear to have taken a back-seat (i.e., apart from the step-aside rule). South Africans are confronted with the daily realities of poverty and unemployment, load shedding, service delivery challenges, high unemployment, high inequality and low economic growth. However, these themes do not appear as prominently as would be expected.

Media coverage of campaigns: Ramaphosa was the most mentioned candidate across all media houses. However, the thoughts, words and ideas used to describe each candidate and help us to assess the sentiment of a media house towards a candidate, varied across the three publications. While TimesLive and News24 returned a balanced view of positive and negative sentiment towards Ramaphosa, IOL skewed heavily on the negative side. The neutral sentiment was returned most across all mentions for News24 and TimesLive, while

negative sentiment was returned the most for IOL because of the volume of negative articles towards Ramaphosa. Mkhize, Sisulu and NDZ were discussed positively more often in IOL than the other two media houses. Moreover, IOL puts out the highest proportion of opinion pieces relative to the other two publications. This is perhaps a reflection of the editorial stance that IOL has adopted on the race for the ANC presidency - dubbed "Operation Hlanza" - which is decidedly anti-Ramaphosa.

Disclaimer:

The CABC, Daily Maverick and City Press are currently involved in legal proceedings initiated by Sphithiphithi Evaluator (@_AfricanSoil), Thabo Makwakwa (@ThaboMakwakwa), Modibe Modiba (@mmodiba10) and Izwe Lethu (@LandNoli) who seek to review and set aside two reports: Online RET Network Analysis; and The Dirty Dozen & the Amplification of Incendiary Content during the Outbreak of Unrest in South Africa in July 2021. These proceedings are opposed and the CABC, Daily Maverick and City Press seek to have them set aside with costs