

THIRD MEDIA MONITORING REPORT OF THE 2014 MALAWI TRIPARTITE ELECTIONS

(23 April - 18 May 2014)



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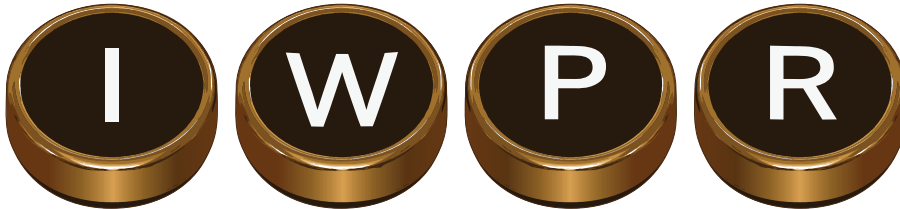
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Third Media Monitoring Report of the 2014 Malawi Tripartite Elections

(23 April - 18 May 2014)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This is the third interim report of the IWPR/NDI/USAID/DFID media monitoring project. It covers the final period of the campaign from 23rd April to 18th May, the last day of campaigning.
- No significant differences are being reported here compared with the trends we revealed in the first and second monitoring periods, apart from a continued incremental improvement – in terms of balance between the parties – detected in the coverage provided by MBC TV. We found that in this period, of MBC TV's positive coverage, 67% of it went to the ruling party (PP), compared with an overall figure for the 2009 election when 98% of the broadcaster's positive coverage went to the then ruling party, the DPP.
- In this monitoring period no similar change was detected in the coverage of MBC Radio 1 and 2, both of which were overwhelmingly biased towards the ruling party in terms of party balance and tone.
- The tone of coverage found in the two newspaper groups, the private radio stations and on most of the news websites, was broadly neutral.
- The tone on the social media, especially Facebook, was either positive or negative but rarely neutral. Social media is an uncontrolled space for discussion where no party received overwhelming support (unlike the controlled state media). And apart from providing a general space for discussion, Facebook Groups also provided an unrestricted space for parties and others to establish sites where they were free to propagate their own ideas and to castigate their opponents. However, even these sites are unable to prevent a relatively free discussion taking place, as non-aligned contributors join in the argument.
- The main issues preoccupying the media in this monitoring period were found to be the fairness of the electoral process, public security, Cashgate, and the state of the economy. The News Websites discussed and interrogated a broader range of issues compared with the mainstream media. Understandably, in this third report, issues concerning the electoral procedure were dominant as Election Day drew near.
- As reported in our first and second report, in this tripartite election the media has continued to give far and away the most coverage to the presidential race rather than the parliamentary and local government contests. Part of the explanation for this lies in the role of the First Past the Post electoral system and part lies in the fact that the incumbent president consistently turned development initiatives into party election rallies. But the main cause was because in any democratic system, it is the role of the opposition parties to criticise the incumbent government (and for the government to defend itself); and, in the case of Malawi, criticism of the government is usually personalised as criticism of the President.
- A comprehensive media monitoring report covering the whole of the campaign period will be released in due course.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This is the third report of the IWPR/NDI/USAID/DFID Media Monitoring Project. It covers the final three weeks of the election period, 23rd April -18th May 2014. This report includes outputs of thirteen radio stations (including the two state radio stations), two television stations, two newspaper groups, seven news websites, eight Facebook groups and Twitter. In total 5860 news items were collected and analysed from the various media. A report covering the media coverage of the election for the whole of the official campaigning period will be issued in due course.

The issues under investigation and methodology remain the same.

2.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1 RADIO

13 radio stations were monitored during this period: MBC 1 & 2, Power 101, Capital FM, Galaxy, Joy, MIJ, Matindi, Islam, Zodiak, Star, Ufulu and Maria, from which 2252 news items were collected and analysed.

Coverage of Tripartite Elections

Coverage patterns are similar to those noted in the 1st and 2nd Media Monitoring Reports. Of the constituent parts of the tripartite election, Local Government elections continued to receive the most minimal coverage. Figure 1 below illustrates the differences:

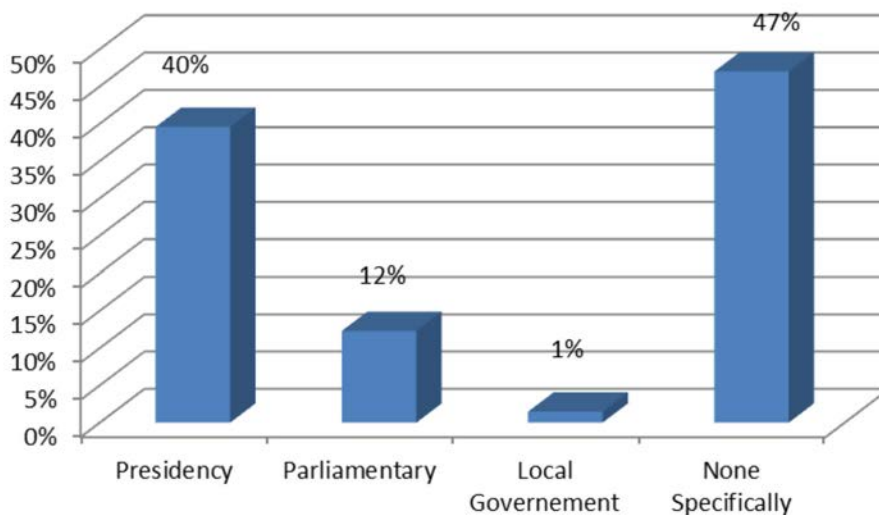


Figure 1: Radio Coverage of Tripartite Elections (%)

Figures 2 and 3 show the distribution of the coverage between the presidential aspirants from the four main political parties. Figure 2 shows that the majority of the presidential coverage was given to the PP aspirant. On MBC 1 this rose dramatically between the last two monitoring period from 77 to 154 items. Radio 2's coverage of the ruling party candidate fell from 70 to 40 items but this was in the context of a significant reduction in the station's overall coverage of the election.

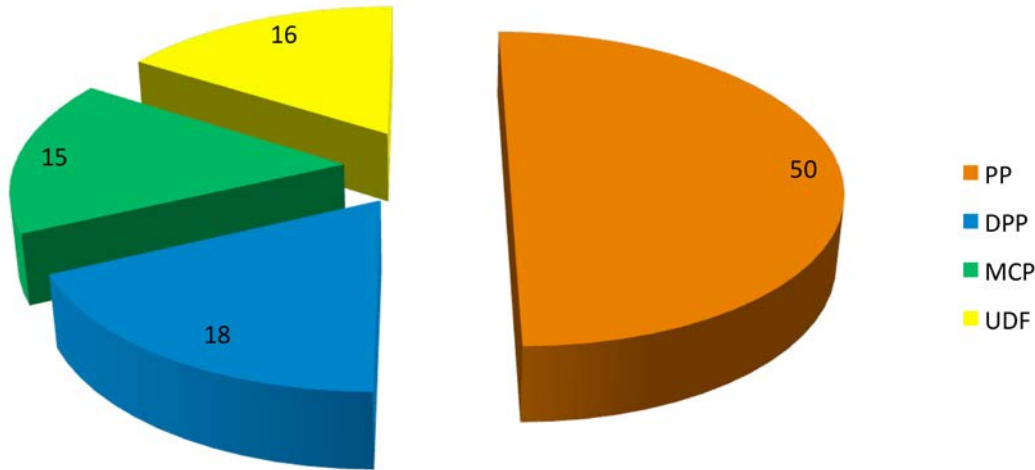


Figure 2: Radio Coverage of Presidential Aspirants by %

Figure 3 represents coverage of the presidential aspirants from the four main parties across the individual radio stations. Apart from the overwhelming coverage in favour of the PP candidate demonstrated by the state broadcaster, we see significant amounts of coverage for the PP candidate, compared with other candidates, on Ufulu and significant coverage of the DPP aspirant on Galaxy, compared with the other stations. Zodiak gave significant, and roughly equal, coverage to all four aspirants.

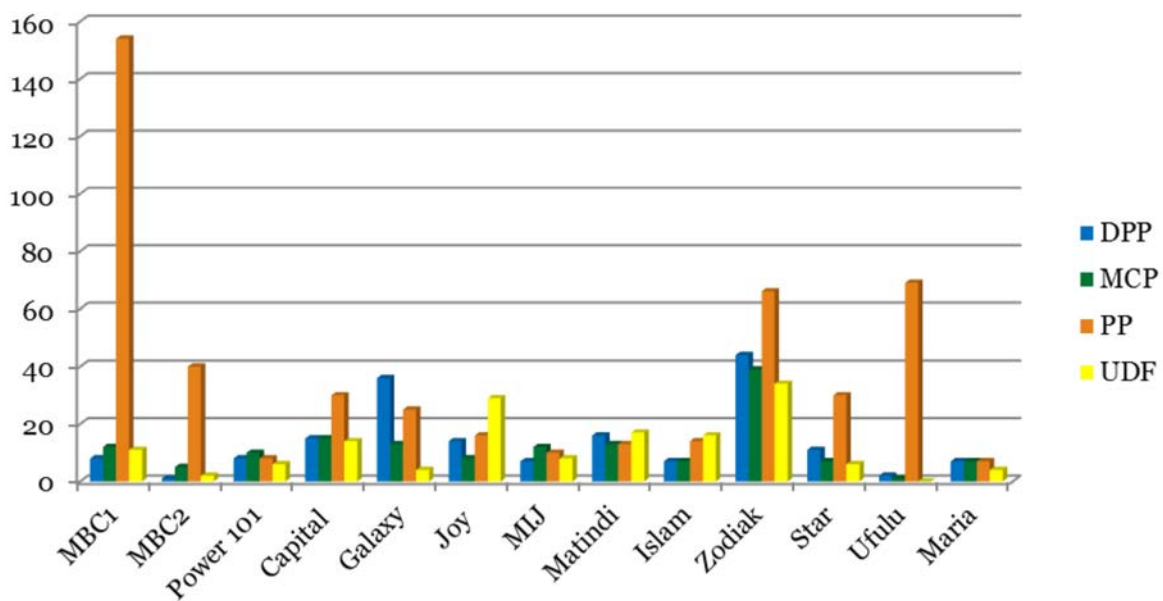


Figure 3: Coverage of Presidential Aspirants by number of items broadcast

Tone of Coverage

Across all radio stations, the overall tone of the coverage still remains mostly neutral at 52%. Of all the items recorded 38% were detected as being broadly positive tone, compared with 31% in the previous monitoring period, whilst negative items were down from 18 to 10%.

As figure 4 demonstrates, of the positive coverage, most was about the PP at 52% (compared with 51% in the previous period). But as Figure 5 shows this positivity was overwhelmed by the fact that, of the negative coverage on the radio, 81% (compared with 82% in the previous period) was about the PP (although as the incumbent party this preponderance is to be expected, though not necessarily at such levels).

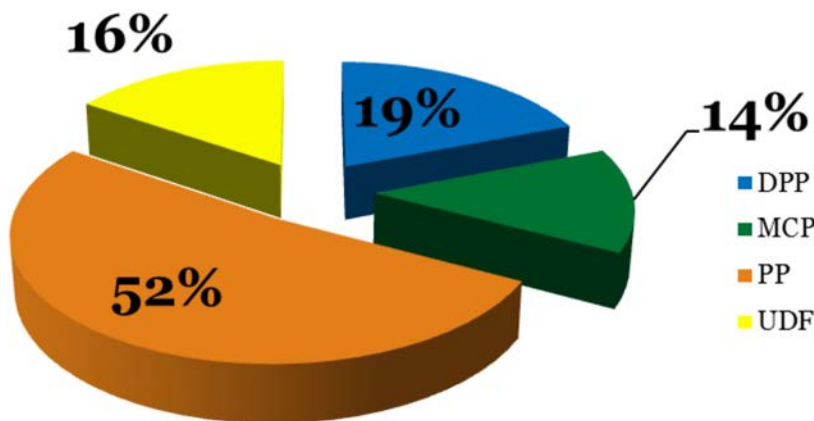


Figure 4: Positive Tone of Coverage by Radio (%)

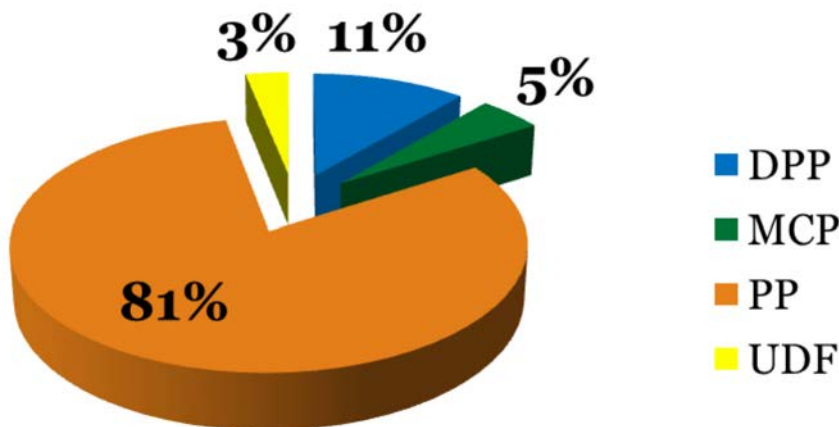


Figure 5: Negative Tone of Coverage by Radio (%)

The breakdown of tone of coverage by individual radio station indicates that the vast majority of the coverage on radio was analysed as having a neutral tone. Zodiak with 62% of its output being so designated had the highest percentage. MBC 2 ran the fewest at 12% but this was on a significantly reduced number of election items compared to the other stations, 63% of Capital’s output was judged neutral as was 47% of Galaxy’s. The figure for of MBC1 was 43%.

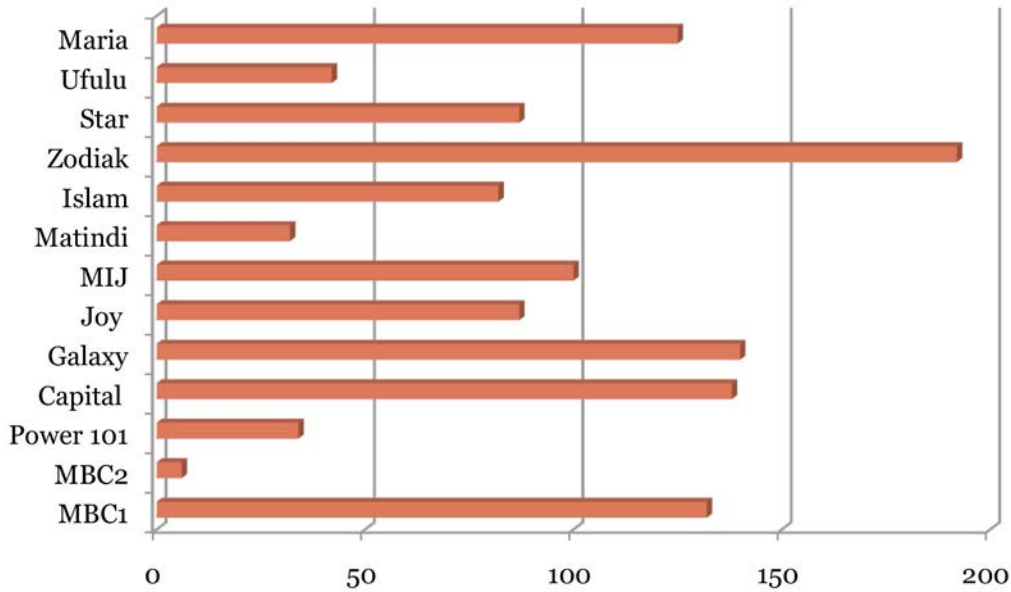


Figure 6: Neutral Tone according to Radio Station (N)

In looking at the individual stations' coverage that was deemed positive, it is striking the extent to which the coverage of the presidential campaign on MBC 1, designated as positive favoured the ruling party's candidate, constituting 89% of all its positive coverage, MBC Radio 2, with less coverage hit 99% and that figure was equalled by Ufulu which also gave 99% of its positive coverage to the PP. No other station came anywhere near these figures in terms of positivity, the nearest being Galaxy with 56% of its positive coverage going to the DPP candidate.

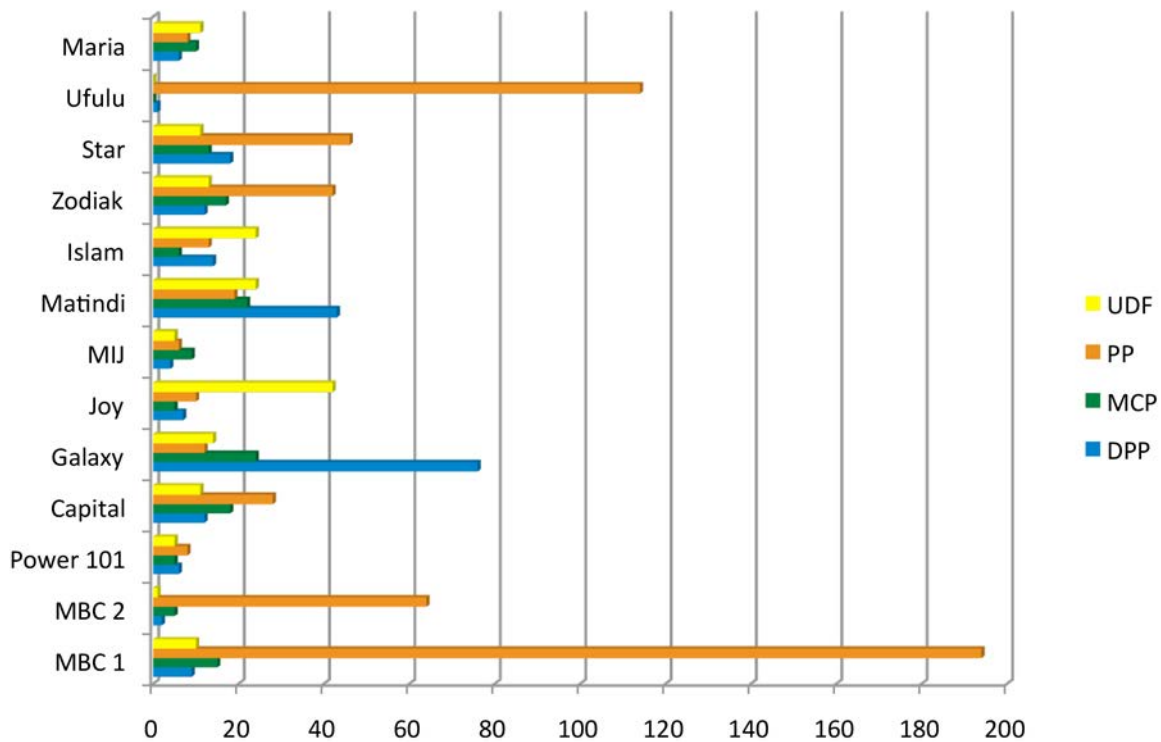


Figure 7: Positive Tone of Coverage by Radio Station (N)

Very little of the state broadcasters' coverage, on either station was deemed negative. Of the private stations 92% of Galaxy's negative coverage was aimed at the ruling party, as was 87% of both Capital's and Galaxy's and 67% of Star's negative coverage.

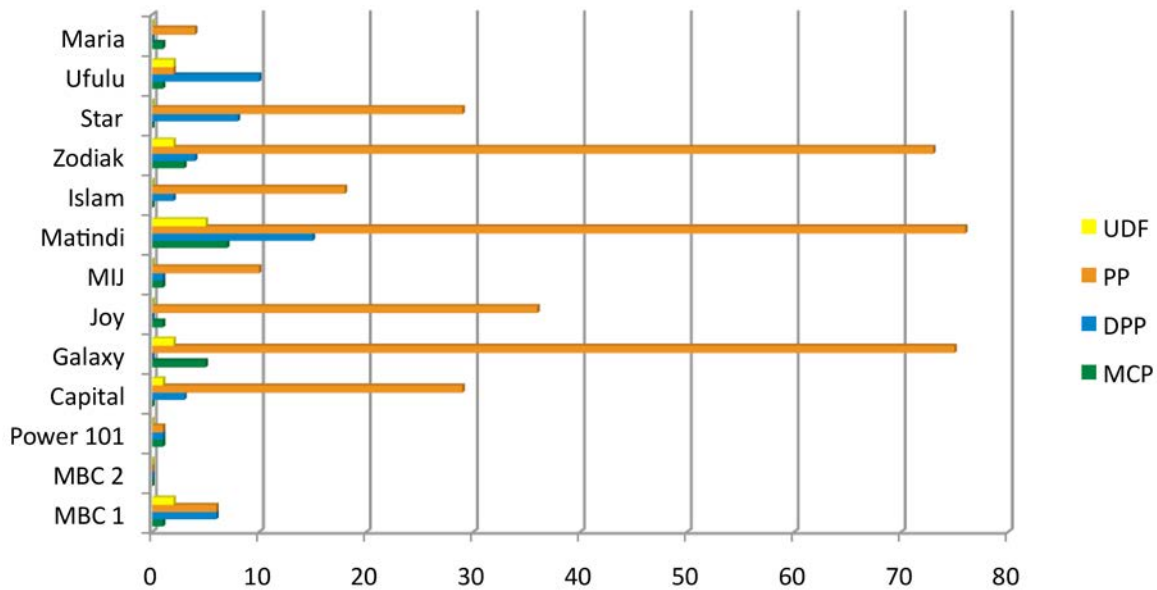


Figure 8: Negative Tone by Radio Station (N)

Topical Issues

Of those items that were classified as covering election issues, other than specifically about parties or candidates, there was some shift from the previous period, although as polling day approached, the fairness of the vote remained the most important accounting for 38% of all issue-based items, compared with 33% in the previous period. It was followed by Law and Order and the Economy, both on 8%, Agriculture on 7% and Gender, Youth and Disability accounting for 5% of the issue coverage.

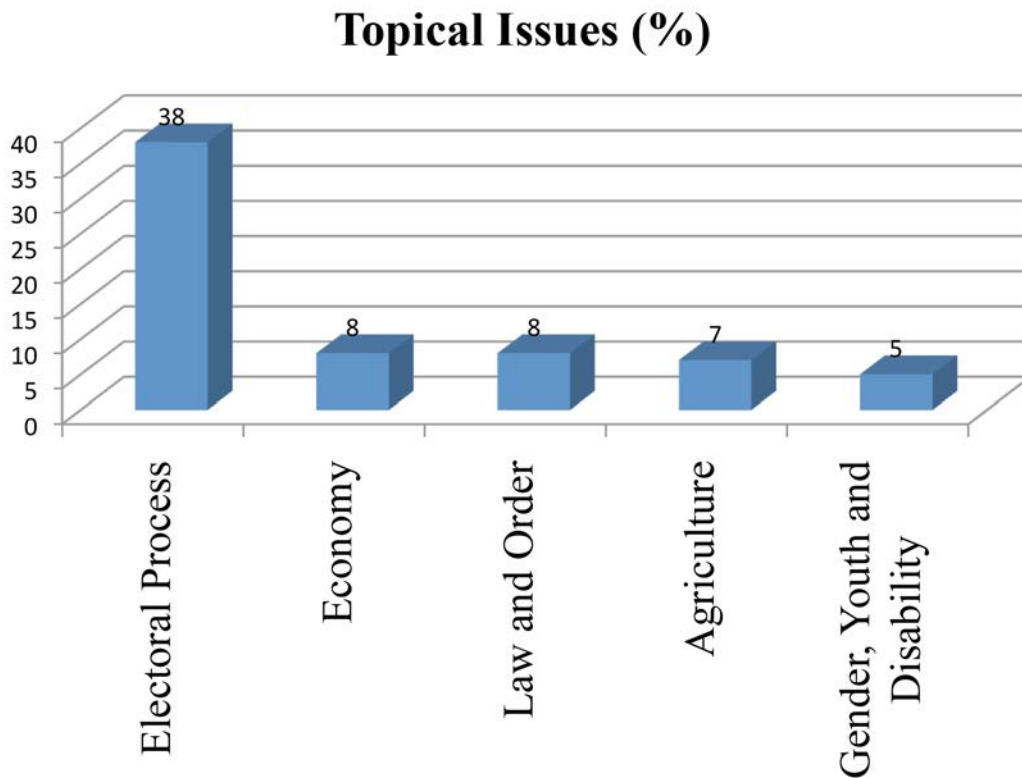


Figure 9: Radio Coverage of Topical Issues (%)

2.2 TELEVISION

The project monitored two television stations: MBC TV and Times TV. 657 news items were collected and analysed.

Coverage of Tripartite Elections

The trend continues to be much the same as reported in our previous reports. As the figure below illustrates, the majority of the television coverage was given to the presidential elections (66%) and the least coverage was given to the local government elections (4%). Although it is worth recording that TV is the only medium which has been giving any serious coverage of the parliamentary election – in this case comprising 23% of all its election coverage.

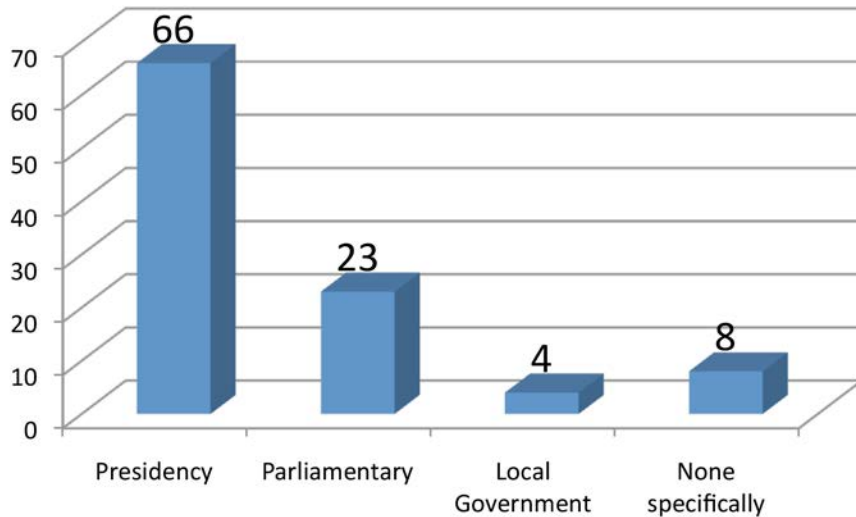


Figure 10: Coverage of Tripartite Elections (%)

Similar to observations made in our previous reports, Figure 11 below shows that the majority of the overall coverage of the presidential aspirants on MBC TV went to the PP candidate at 67%, but this was a significant fall from the 73% we reported in the previous period. The MCP received 14% of the coverage (compared with 5%), the DPP 10% (compared with 13%) and the UDF candidate got 9% on both occasions.

Times TV gave almost equal coverage to all presidential aspirants (See Figure 11).

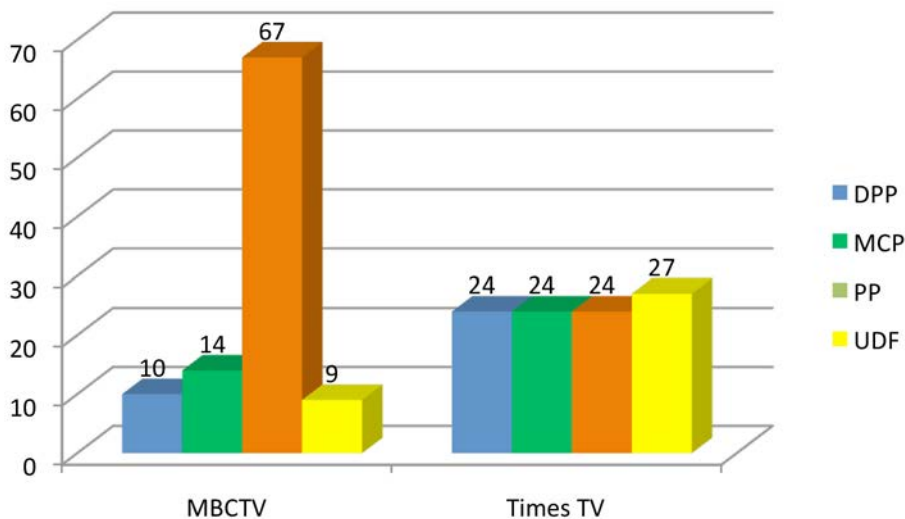


Figure 11: Coverage of Presidential Aspirants on MBC TV and Times (%)

Tone of Coverage

The overall tone of coverage on TV was mostly neutral but there was a significant reduction in the number of items with a negative tone, (down from 12% to 1%) between this and the previous monitoring period.

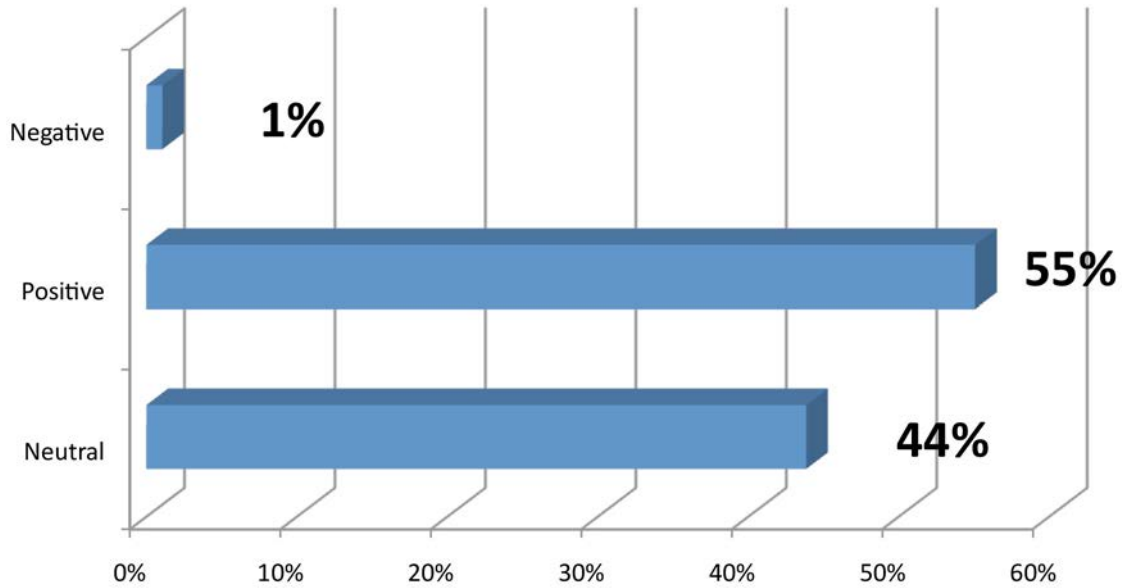


Figure 12: Tone of coverage on TV

In terms of the distribution of positive coverage, as the figure below demonstrates, most of MBC's positive coverage, 72%, went to the candidate from the ruling party, and although this still demonstrates extreme bias, this is a great improvement on the figure of 98% positive coverage recorded during the 2009 election campaign. The remainder of MBC's positive coverage was distributed more or less evenly between the other three main parties. In terms of the negative, perhaps unsurprisingly they broadcast no negative items about the ruling party, and perhaps more surprisingly, none about the UDF: instead they confined their negativity, in exactly equal proportions, to the DPP and MCP, at this stage seen as the main challengers to the ruling party.

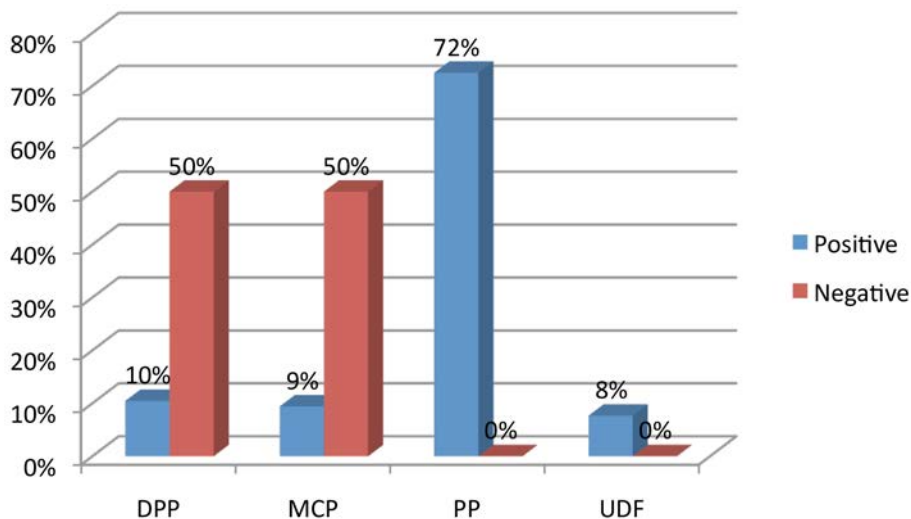


Figure 13: Tone of Coverage on MBCTV

The striking aspect of Times TV's coverage is that 80% of the negative coverage was about the incumbent, the remainder covered the DPP, but none was detected covering the UDF or the MCP. In terms of the positive, the station only gave positive coverage, again equally shared, to the DPP and MCP candidates with no positive coverage of the other two parties.

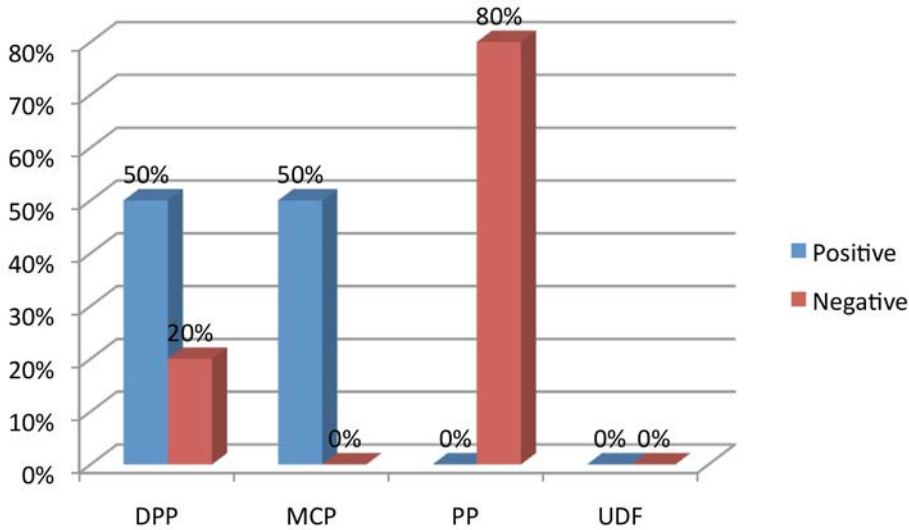


Figure 14: Times TV Negative Tone of Coverage (%)

Topical Issues

Of the issues covered MBC TV, like the rest of the media, devoted most time to stories about the fairness of the electoral process, which constituted 29% of its issue-based coverage. The only other topics that received significant coverage were Education (mainly Higher Education) at 8% and Agriculture (mainly subsidy issues), Health (mainly the Lilongwe mortuary saga and drug shortages) and Transport (the condition of the roads) all at 7%. At no point in the campaign has MBC TV devoted any significant time to reporting issues surrounding Cashgate and corruption more generally.

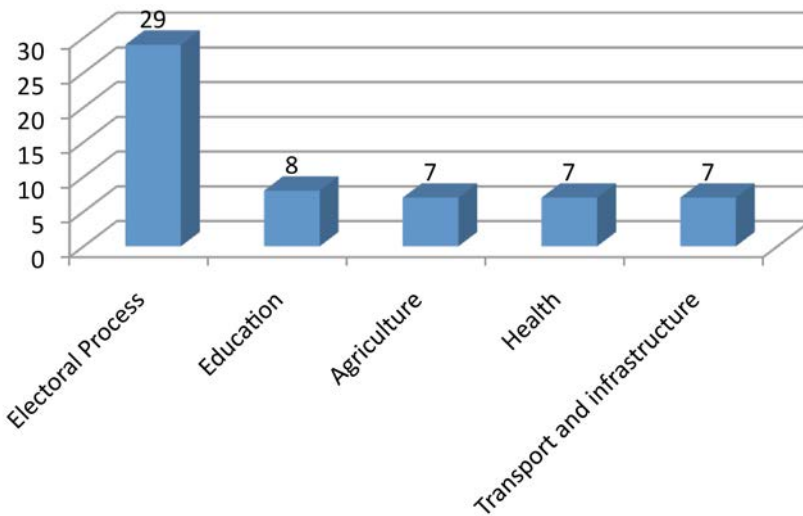


Figure 15: Topical issues on MBCTV (%)

Figure 16 below indicates that Times TV also gave considerable proportion of its issue-based coverage (39%) to the electoral process. Interestingly, unlike any other mainstream media, they also gave coverage (10%) to the debates about the role of councillors in the new local government dispensation. Other issues that received significant coverage included Law and Order (18%), Cashgate and corruption more generally and the Economy both at 5%.

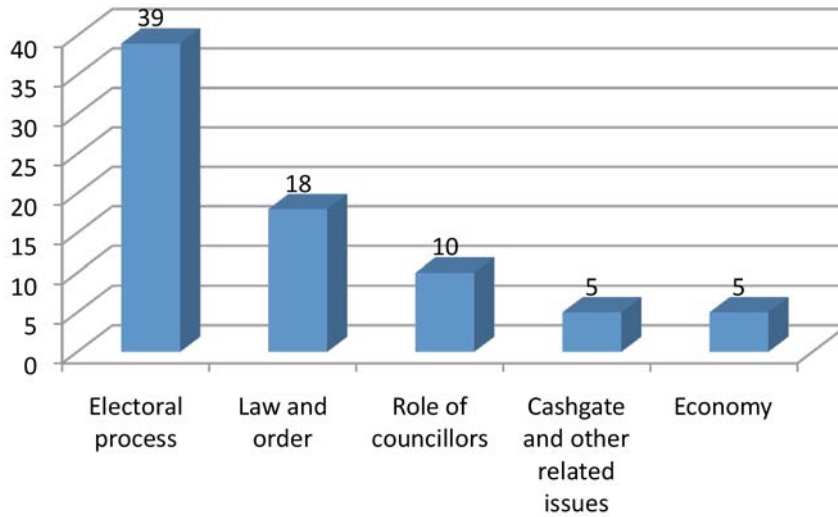


Figure 16: Topical issues on Times TV (%)

2.3 NEWSPAPERS

In this third phase the project monitored and analysed a total of 788 articles from the two print media houses.

Coverage of Tripartite Elections

As before, most coverage was given to the presidential election (32%), followed by parliamentary (14%) and least coverage to the local government campaign (4%). Although almost half the items (49%) did not specify a particular election.

Newspaper coverage of Tripartite Elections (%)

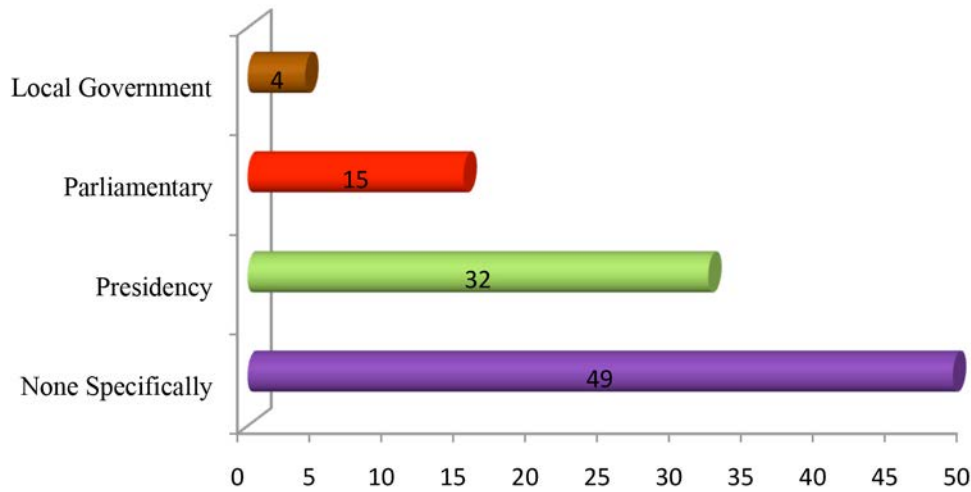


Figure 17: Newspaper coverage of Tripartite Elections

Presidential Coverage in Newspapers

As the figure below demonstrates, as expected, the ruling party’s candidate received most newspaper mentions – positive and negative (33%), followed by the candidate from the MCP (20%) then the DPP (20%) and then the UDF (16%). Presidential candidates from a range of other parties received 11% of the coverage, a new factor, possibly resulting from the newspapers covering the televised presidential debates.

Party Presidential Candidates mentioned in Newspapers (%)

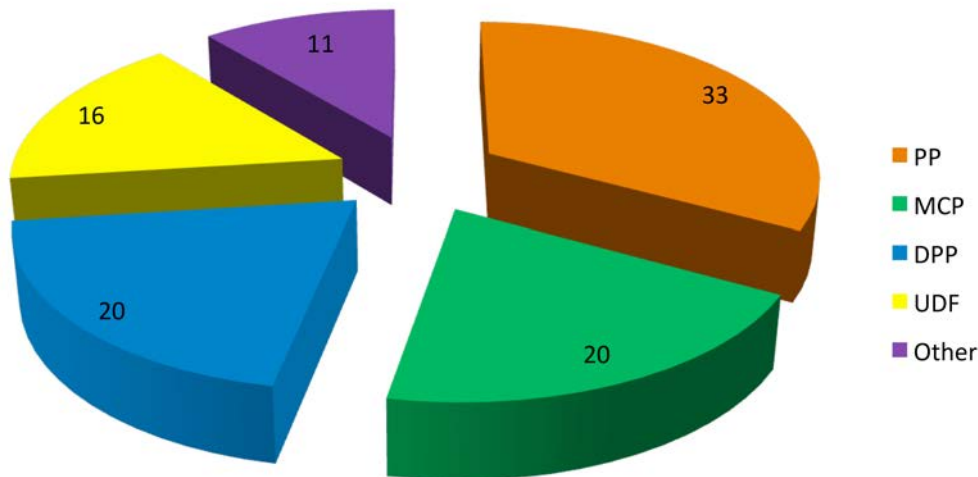


Figure 18: Party presidential candidates mentioned in the newspapers

Tone of Coverage

As the figure below demonstrates, the majority of the coverage of the presidential aspirants by the two newspaper groups was neutral (60%) with 27% items deemed positive and just 13% negative in tone.

Newspapers Overall Tone of Coverage

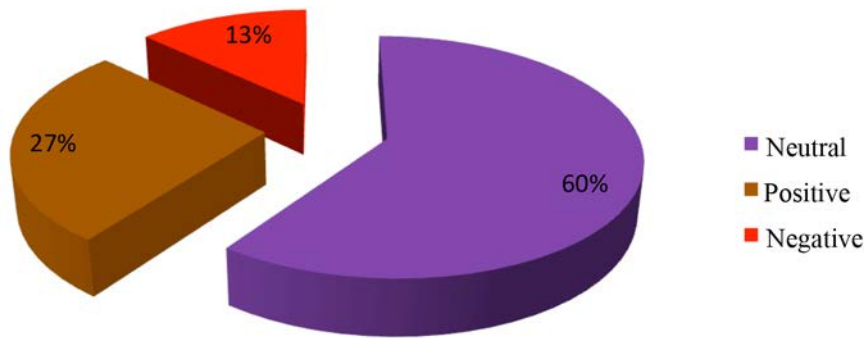


Figure 19: Newspapers Overall Tone of coverage

Of newspapers' positive coverage most went to the PP candidate (31%) followed, by 23% - a significant figure - going to candidates from other than the four main parties with the PPM the largest single beneficiary (this was probably the TV debate effect); this group was followed by the MCP (20%), DPP (15%) and the UDF (11%).

Newspapers Overall Positive Party Coverage (%)

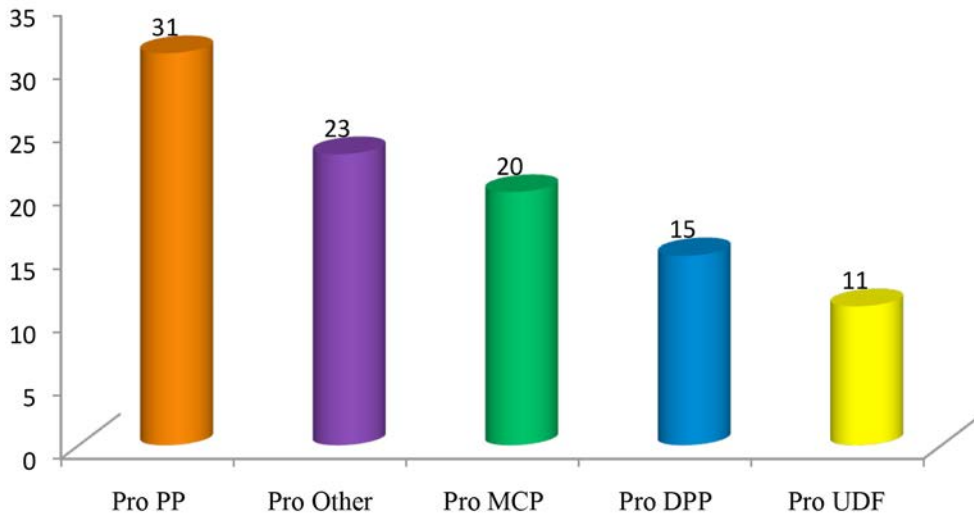


Figure 20: Newspapers Overall Positive Party Coverage

However, any advantage that the ruling party might have gained from having the largest share of positive coverage was more than wiped out by having, overwhelmingly, also the largest share of the negative coverage at 72%, dwarfing the negative coverage handed out to the other parties; these were at 15% for the DPP, 7% for other parties, 4% for the UDF and just 2% for the MCP.

Newspapers overall Negative Party Coverage (%)

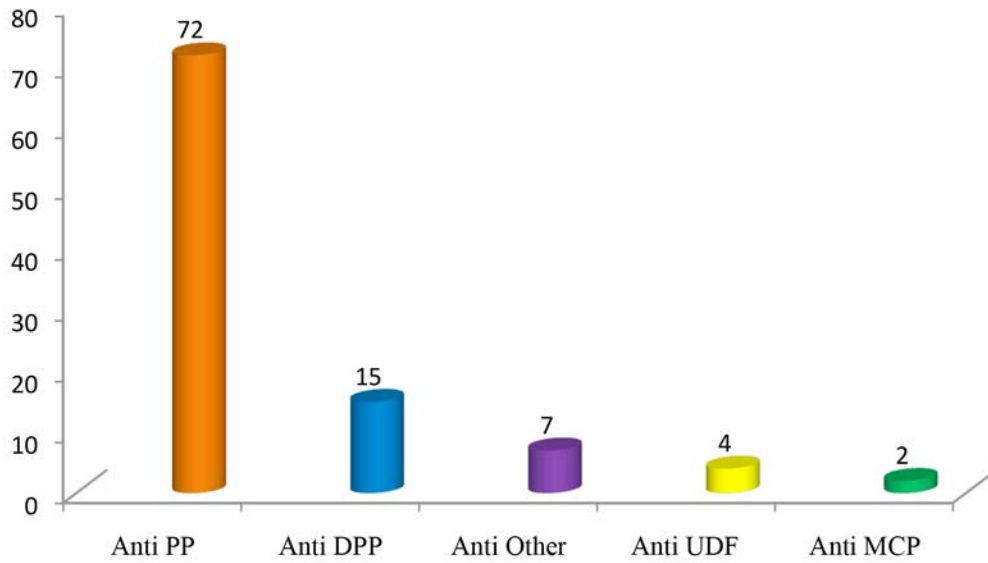


Figure 21: Newspapers’ overall Negative Party Coverage

Times Group: Positive Party Coverage.

The Times Group gave most of their positive coverage to the PP candidate (the incumbency effect) but at 28%, it was just one point ahead of the favourable coverage the paper gave to the MCP aspirant (27%), perhaps reflecting the paper’s historic party allegiance. Also noteworthy is that the Group gave almost one quarter (24%) of its coverage to candidates from other parties, reflecting coverage of the TV debates, 15% of its positive coverage went to the DPP and just 6% to the UDF.

Times Group Positive Party Coverage (%)

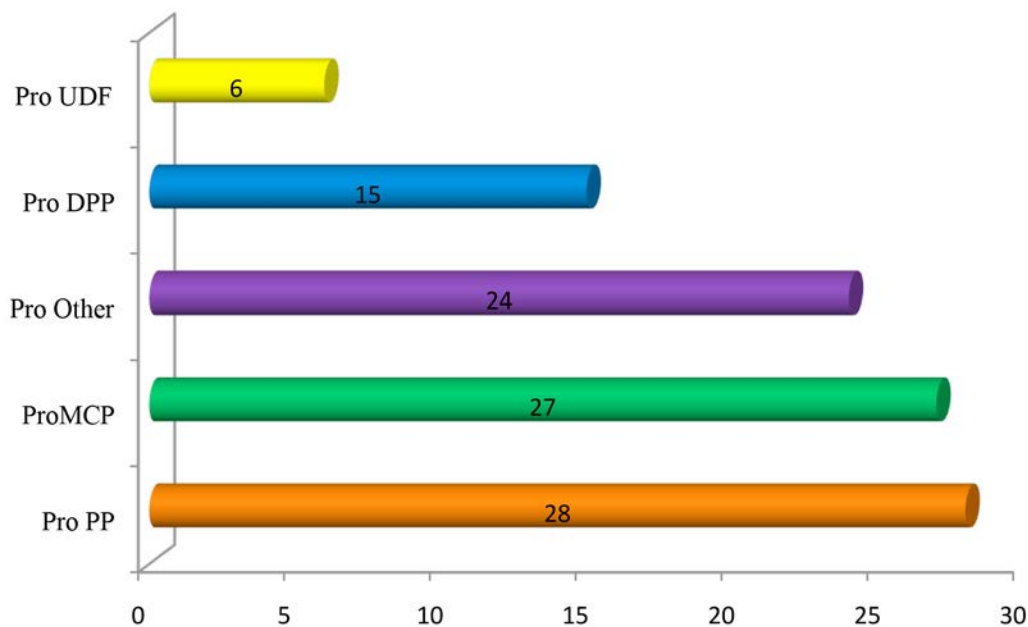


Figure 22: Tone of coverage by The Times Group

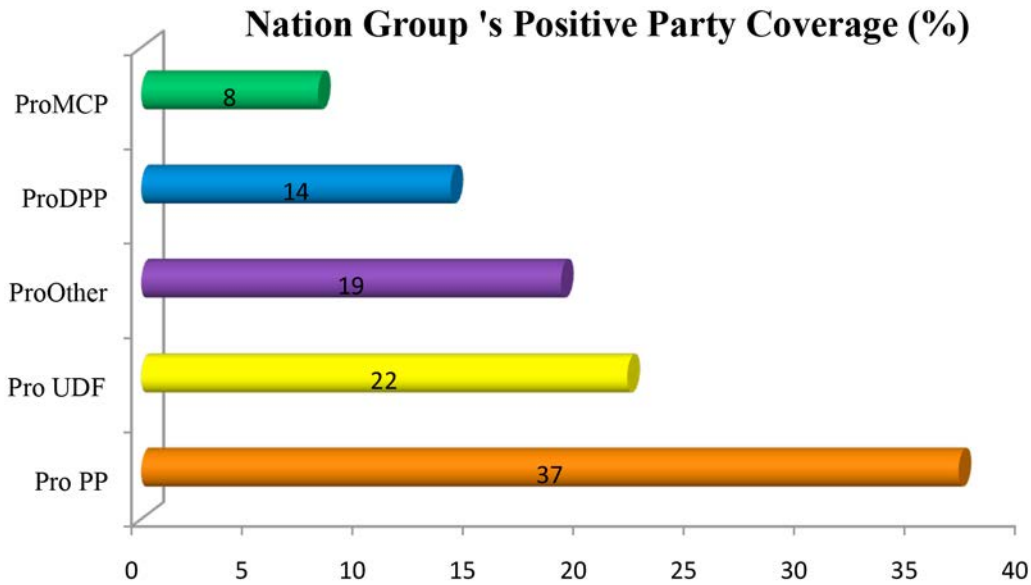


Figure 23: Nation Group Positive Party Coverage

On the negative side, the Times Group carried overwhelmingly more negative coverage directed against the PP candidate (81%) whilst only devoting 3% of its negative coverage against the MCP and UDF aspirants; 12% was directed against the DPP.

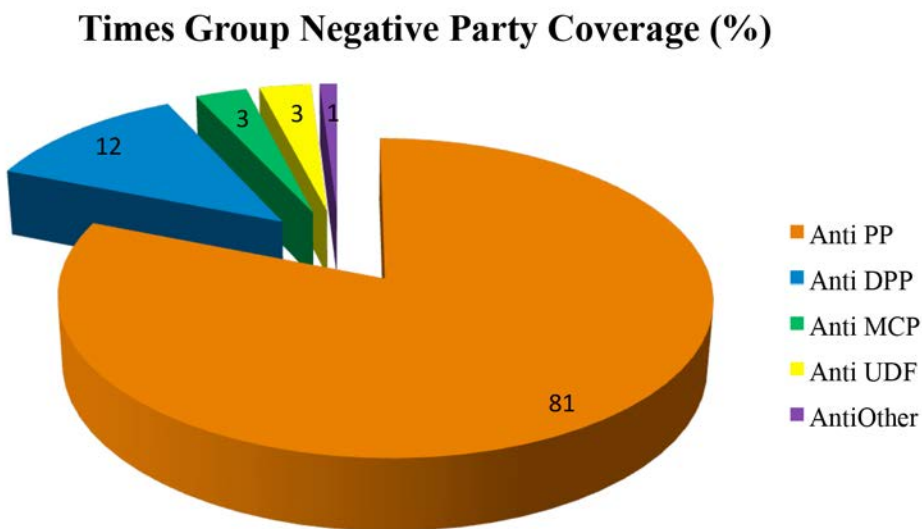


Figure 24: Times group Negative party Coverage

The Nation Group was less anti PP than its competitor newspaper group at 56%, with 21% of its negativity directed against the DPP. Other parties attracted 18% of the negative coverage and the UDF 5%. Surprisingly no negative coverage of the MCP was detected in National Group newspapers in this monitoring period.

Nation Group's Negative Party Coverage (%)

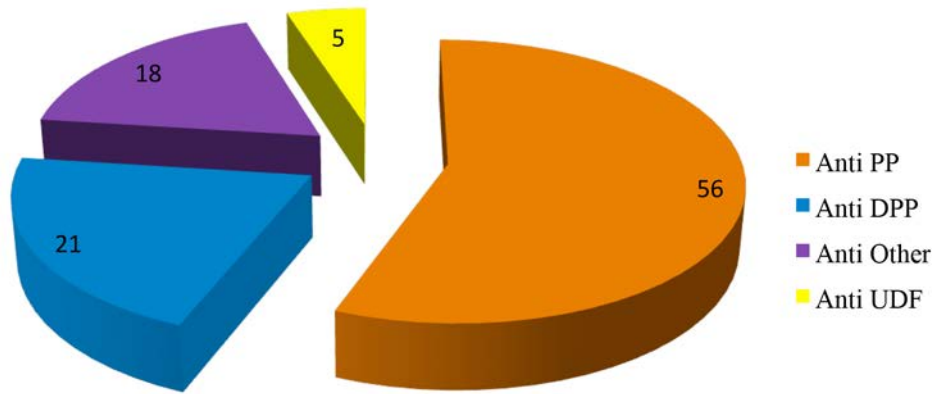


Figure 25: Nation Group's Negative Party Coverage

Topical Issues

Of the topical issues covered by the two newspaper groups, the Electoral Process received most coverage (54%) this compares with the previous period when the topic received half as much coverage (28%), this was followed by issues around the Rule of Law (16%), Education, (12%), Economy (10.9%), Transport and Agriculture, (10.7%), Health, (10.5%), and Gender, Youth and Disability (10%). The trend is not substantially different to that which we found in our second report covering 2nd to 22nd April, although Education, Health and Transport issues, featured more strongly in this monitoring period compared with the previous one.

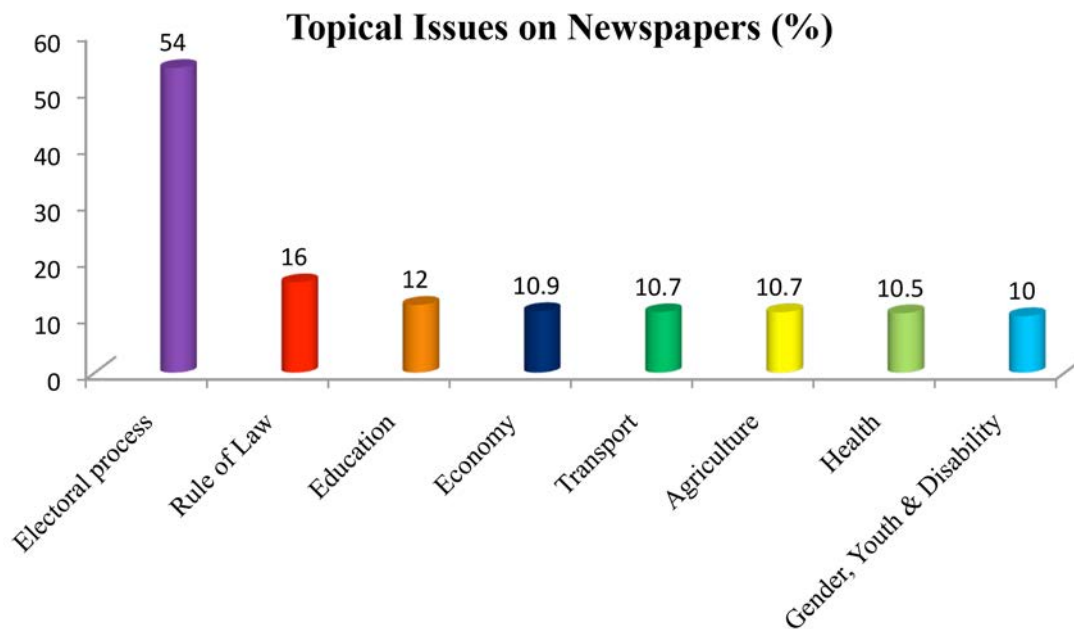


Figure 26: Topical Issues Covered by Newspapers

2.4 NEWS WEBSITES

The project monitored seven news websites. In total 878 entries were obtained, a slight increase from the previous report. Figure 28 shows that most entries came from Nyasa Times (30) followed by Malawi Voice (20%), Maravi Post (13%), Mana Online (13%), The Oracle Times (13%), Malawi24 (10%) and Banthu Times (2%).

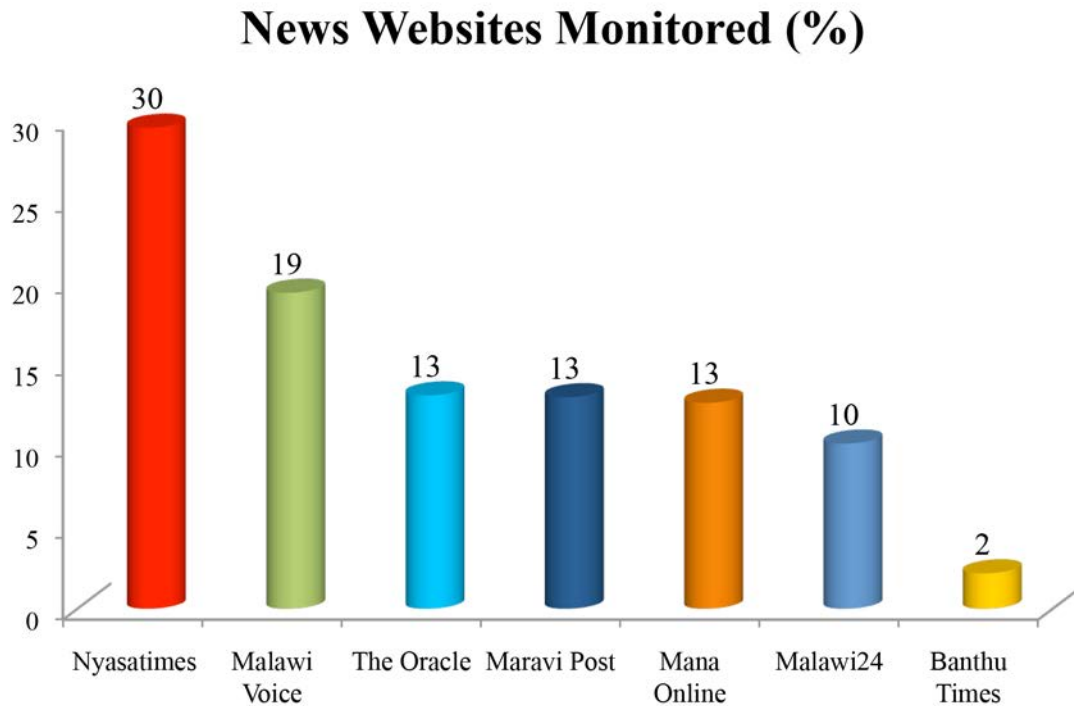


Figure 27: News Websites Monitored

The figure below shows that News Websites – like the rest of the mainstream media – gave most coverage to the presidential race (60%) rather than the parliamentary contest (12%) and local government elections which received just 1%. Election coverage which did not specify which election it was referring to accounted for 26% of the coverage.

Coverage of Tripartite Elections by News Websites (%)

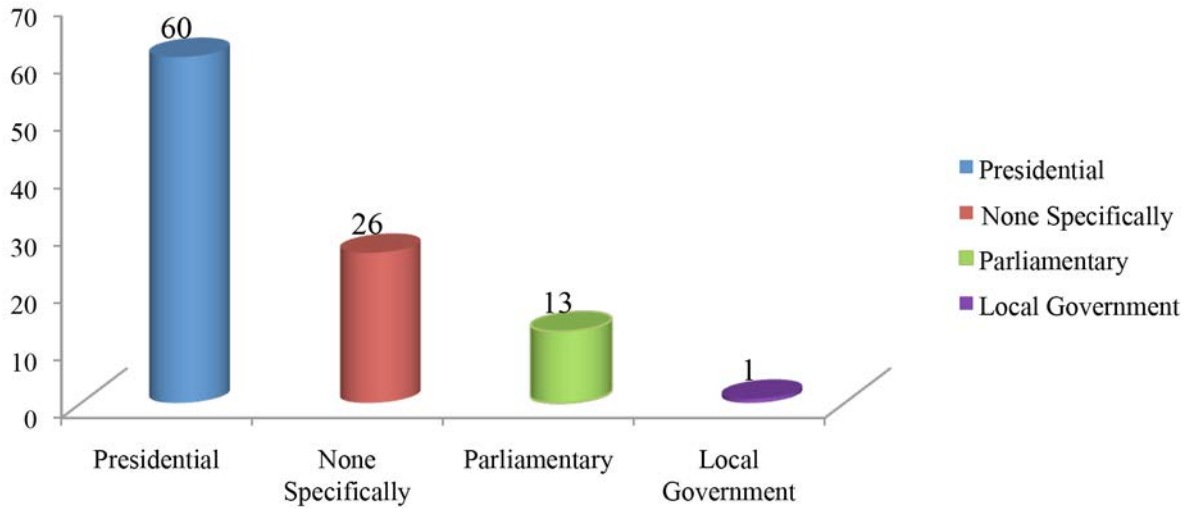


Figure 28 : Coverage of Tripartite Elections by News Websites

The PP presidential candidate received the most coverage on the News Websites (42%), the DPP candidate received the next most (20%), followed by the MCP on 17% and the UDF on 16%; candidates from other parties received 5% of the coverage on news websites.

Presidential Aspirants mentioned on News Websites (%)

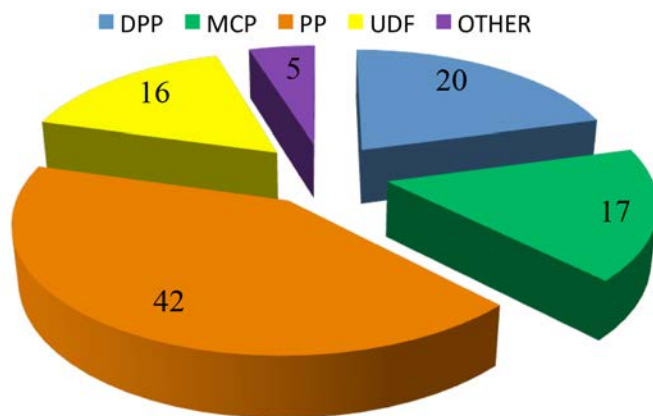


Figure 29: Presidential aspirants mentioned on News Websites

The figure below demonstrates that the balance between postings about the presidential and parliamentary elections was similar, across all News Websites monitored.

Coverage of Tripartite Elections by News Websites (N)

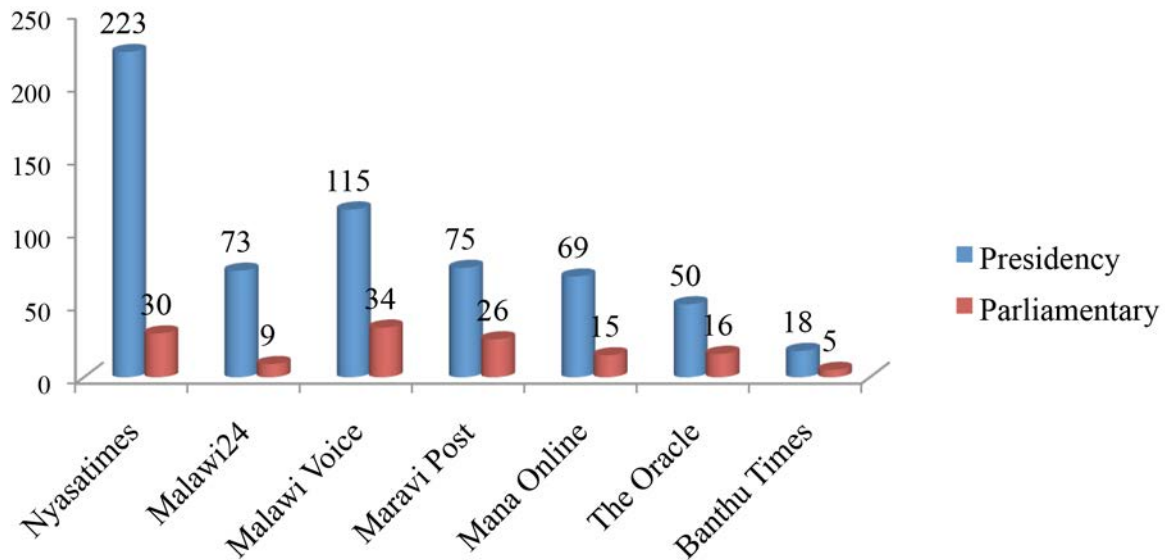


Figure 30: Coverage of Tripartite Elections by News Website

Looking at the overall tone of the coverage on the news websites we can see that the majority was deemed neutral at 44%, positive coverage accounted for 33% of the coverage and negative 23%

Overall Tone of Coverage on News Websites (%)

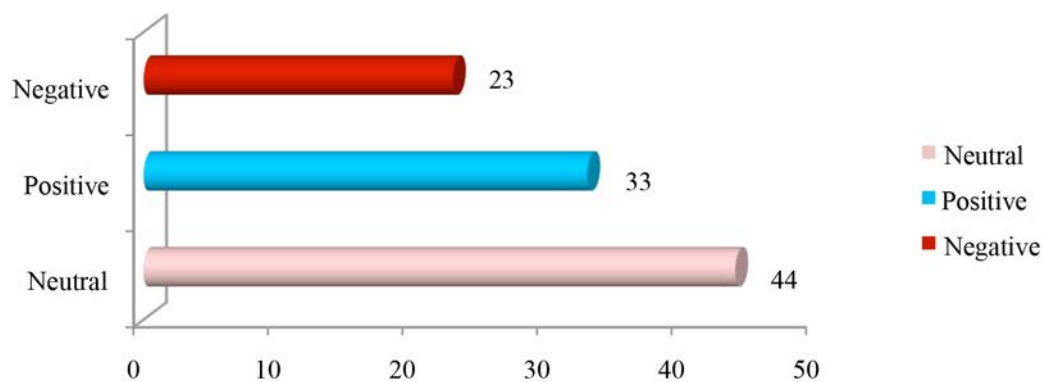


Figure 31: Overall tone coverage on News Websites

As with the other media the websites gave most of their positive coverage to the incumbent candidate at 44%, the DPP received the second most favourable coverage at 21% followed by the MCP and UDF both on 13% and other parties on 9% - indicating that there was less of a TV debates effect on the news websites than on the other media which overall gave greater coverage, in this period, to parties other than the main four.

Positive Tone on News Websites (%)

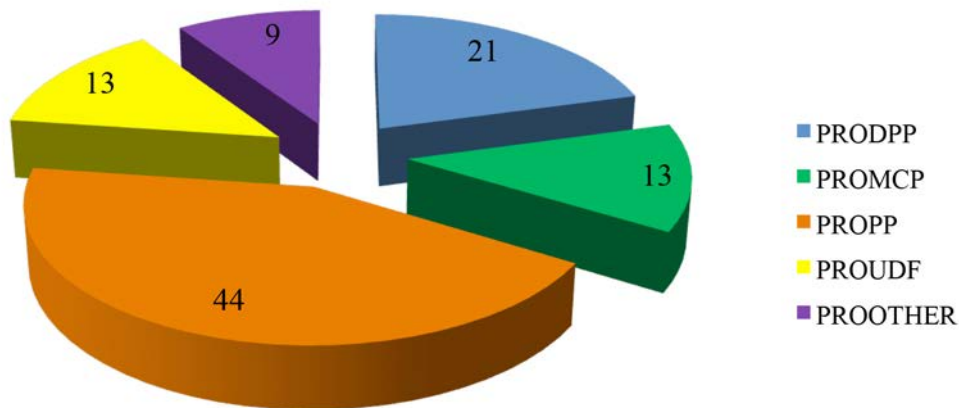


Figure 32: Positive tone coverage on News Websites

When we look at the breakdown of positive coverage by website we can see one or two distinct trends. Mana Online, the Government news agency, gave far more positive coverage than any other of the sites to the PP and gave virtually no positive coverage to the UDF. Nyasa Times gave positive coverage to all parties, including those outside the main four, but virtually none to the ruling party. Malawi 24 and Malawi Voice both appeared to favour the DPP, whilst the Maravi Post and the Oracle both appeared to favour the UDF in terms of their positive coverage.

Positive Tone by News Websites (%)

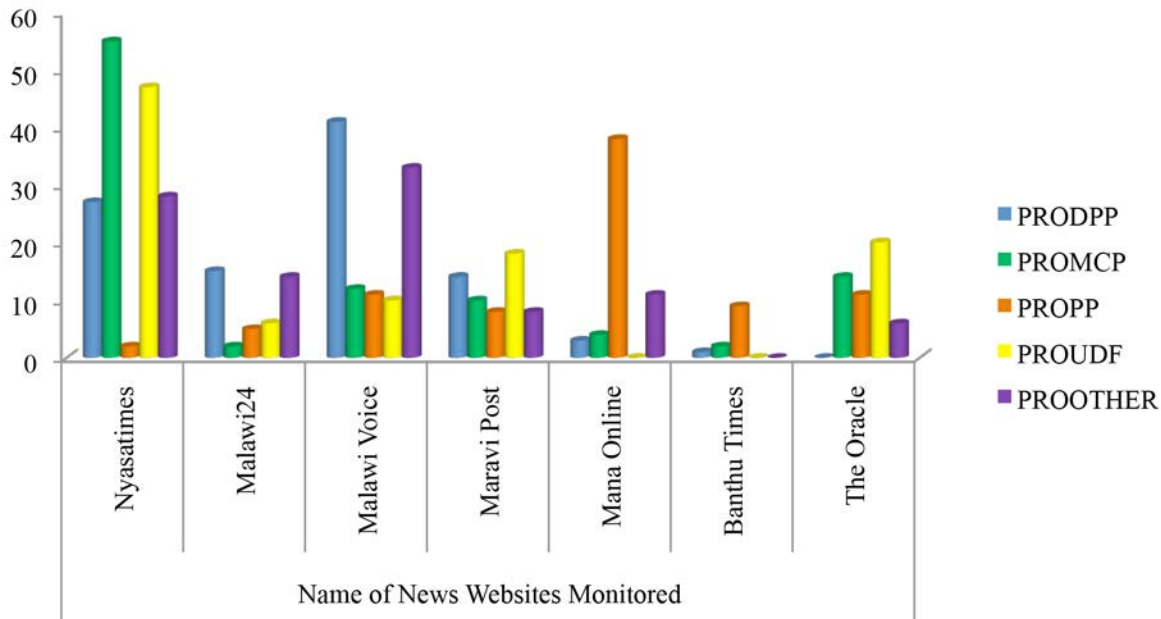


Figure 33: Positive tone by News Websites

However, as with the other media, any advantage the PP might have seen to have gained by having the most positive coverage, on the websites, was more than outweighed by the fact 60% of the negative coverage was against them; 24% of the negative coverage was aimed at the DPP, 9% against the MCP and 7% against the UDF. No negative coverage was detected against any other parties.

Negative Tone on News Websites (%)

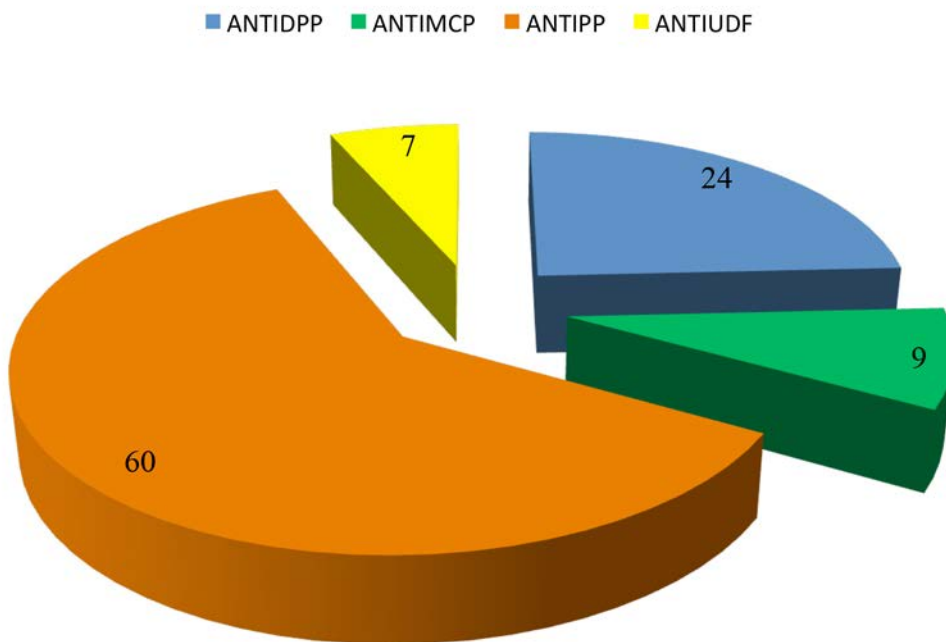


Figure 34: Negative tone coverage on News Websites

Looking overall at the news websites one or two observations emerge. Most notable is that the Oracle site contained far more negative coverage of the UDF (in proportion to its total amount of coverage) than did any other site. Conversely the Nyasa Times carried virtually no negative stories about the UDF as did the Banthu Times. In terms of equity of negative coverage, Malawi Voice and Maravi Post scored best. It is also worth observing that the Government-owned Mana Online news agency carried the smallest amount of negative material and that covered all parties.

Negative Tone by News Websites (N)

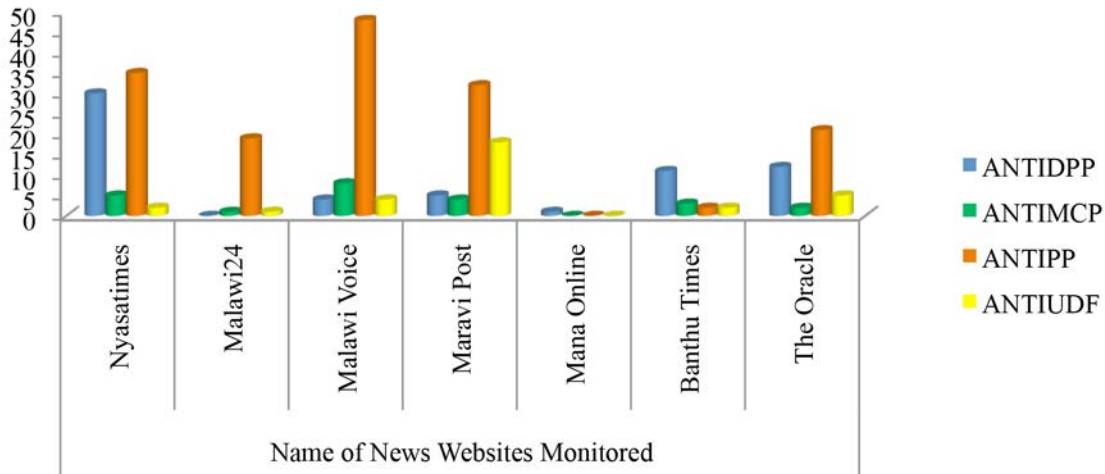


Figure 35: Negative tone coverage by News Websites

Topical Issues

As reported in the second report, News Websites – freed from the constraints of time and space – were able to discuss a wider range of topics than the other media. Issues surrounding the fairness of the electoral process dominated coverage at 61%, other issues which attracted significant coverage were: Cashgate (27%), Agriculture (18%), Law and Order (18%), an issue not covered elsewhere - Media Freedom (16%), Economy (15%), Gender, Youth and Disabilities (12%), Transport (13%), Education (13%), another issue not found elsewhere was Foreign Aid and Relations (11%) and finally Health (11%).

Topical Issues on News Websites (%)

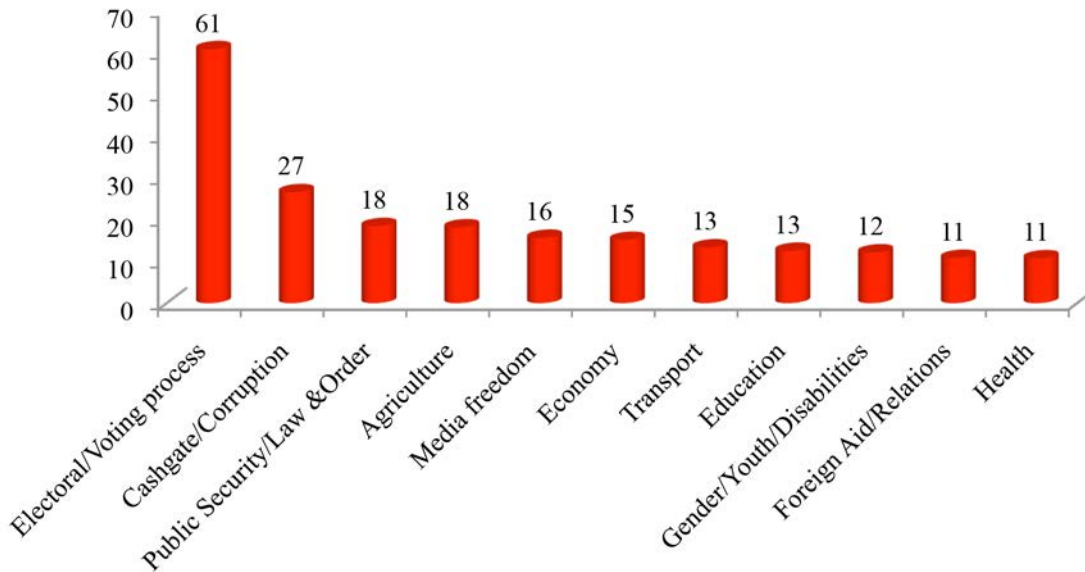


Figure 36: Topical issues on News Websites

2.5 FACEBOOK

During this monitoring period, eight Facebook groups were monitored. 1075 entries were collected but they came overwhelmingly from My Malawi My Views (71%), and the Malawi Freedom Network (19%); other sites monitored included, Kusanthula Zakukhosi Pa Malawi (4%), My Malawi My Land (3%), Malawi Breaking News (2%), Malawi Daily (1%), Malawi @50 (0.3%) and Malawi Breaking News and Gossip (0.2%).

Facebook Groups Monitored (%)

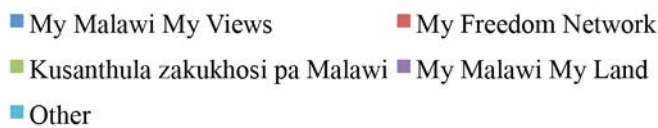


Figure 37: Facebook Groups monitored

Coverage of Tripartite elections on Facebook

Like the other media, Facebook conversations were overwhelming about the presidential race accounting for 1023 posts out of a total of 1,075 (95%). It is interesting to note, where views rather than news predominates, that postings that did not specify which election was being referred to accounted for only 29 posts – less than 3% of the total.

Coverage of Tripartite Elections on Facebook (N)

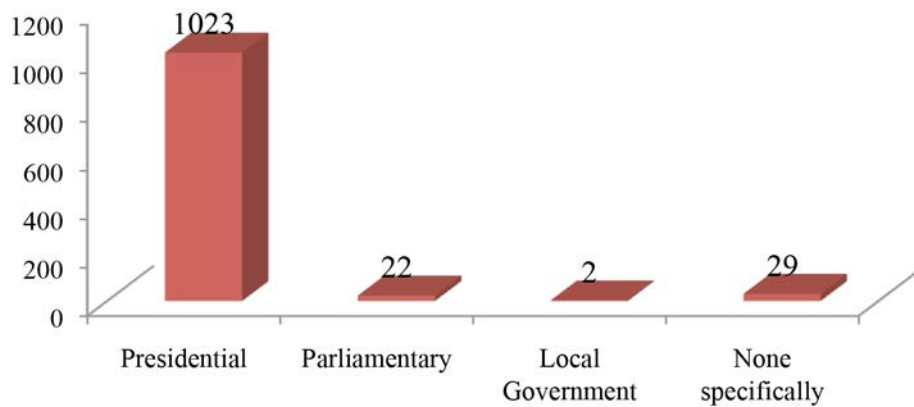


Figure 38: Coverage of Tripartite elections on Facebook by number of posts

As in our previous reports, the PP presidential aspirant gained most mentions on Facebook at 45%, she was followed by the DPP aspirant (38%), followed by the MCP at 23% and the UDF at 18%. Candidates from other parties attracted less than 3% of the Facebook mentions. (This sums to more than 100 because of multiple coding).

Presidential Aspirants Mentioned on Facebook Groups (%)

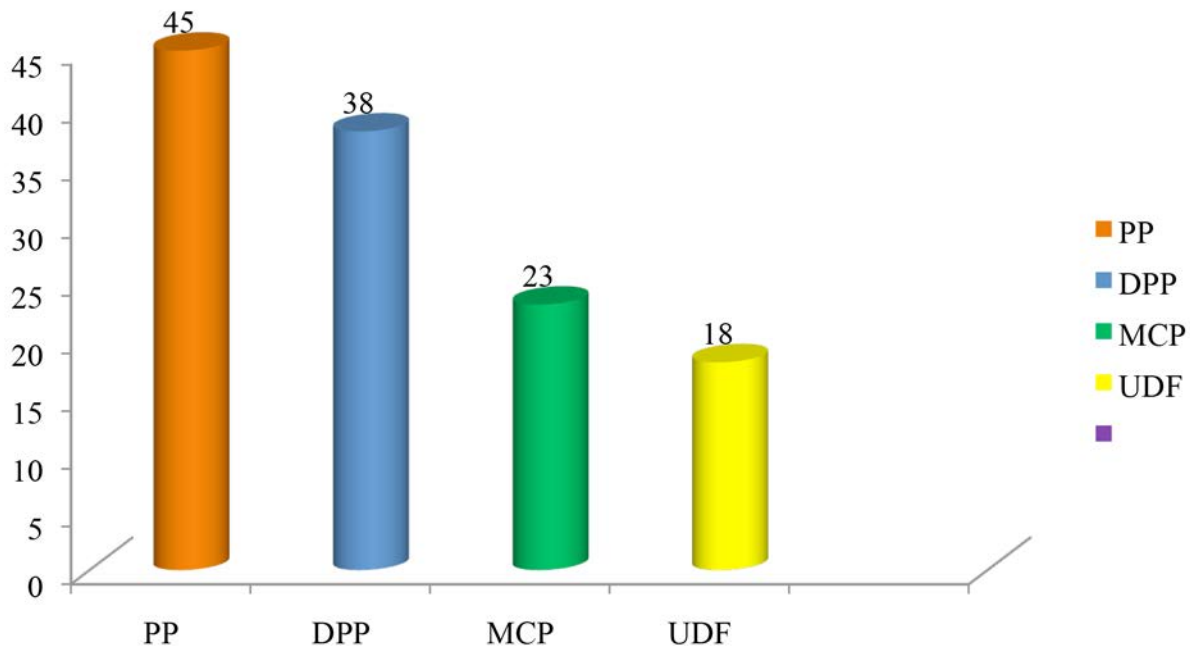


Figure 39: Party presidential aspirants mentioned on Facebook

Tone of Coverage

Data on tone of coverage on Facebook is presented below. It shows that only 7% of the posts could be described as ‘broadly neutral’ – a figure in sharp contrast to the other media, again demonstrating the preponderance of Facebook to be a site of argument rather than information. But the overall tone was marginally more positive at 49% of posts than negative (46%)

Overall Tone of Coverage on Facebook (%)

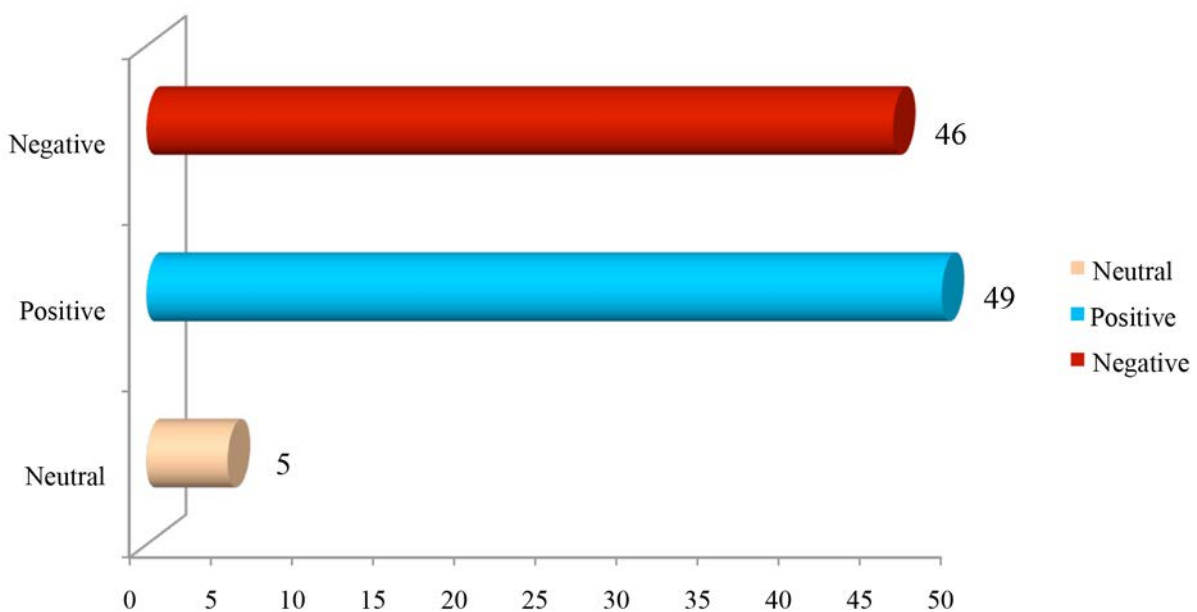


Figure 40: Overall tone coverage on Facebook

In terms of positive postings, DPP supporters appear to have been the most active, recording 33%, they were followed by the PP at 31%, the MCP at 20% and the UDF at 14%.

Positive Tone Coverage on Facebook (%)

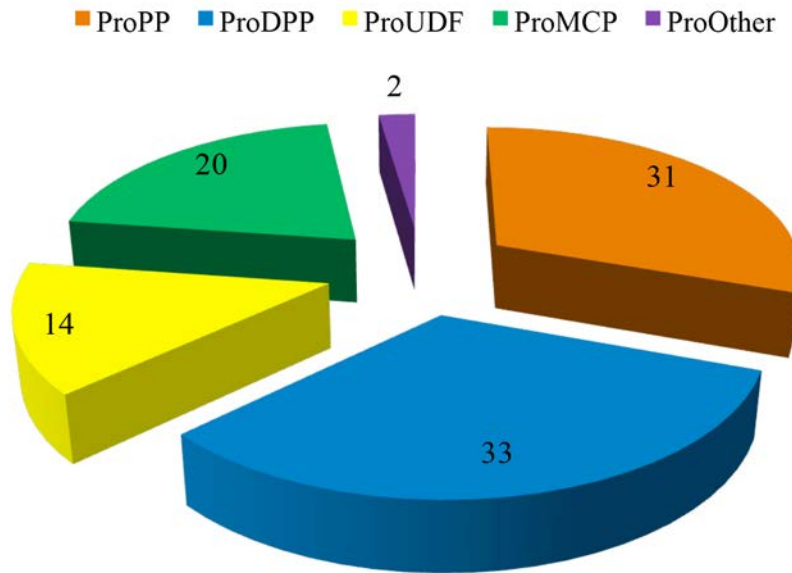


Figure 41: Positive tone coverage on Facebook

However, as well as attracting the most positive posts, the DPP at 42%, also attracted the most negative, suggesting that a barrage of positive postings attracts an almost equal barrage of negative postings. Second in terms of negativity was the PP at 28% followed by the MCP at 15% and the UDF at 14%. Other parties attracted only 1% of the negative posts.

Negative Tone Coverage on Facebook

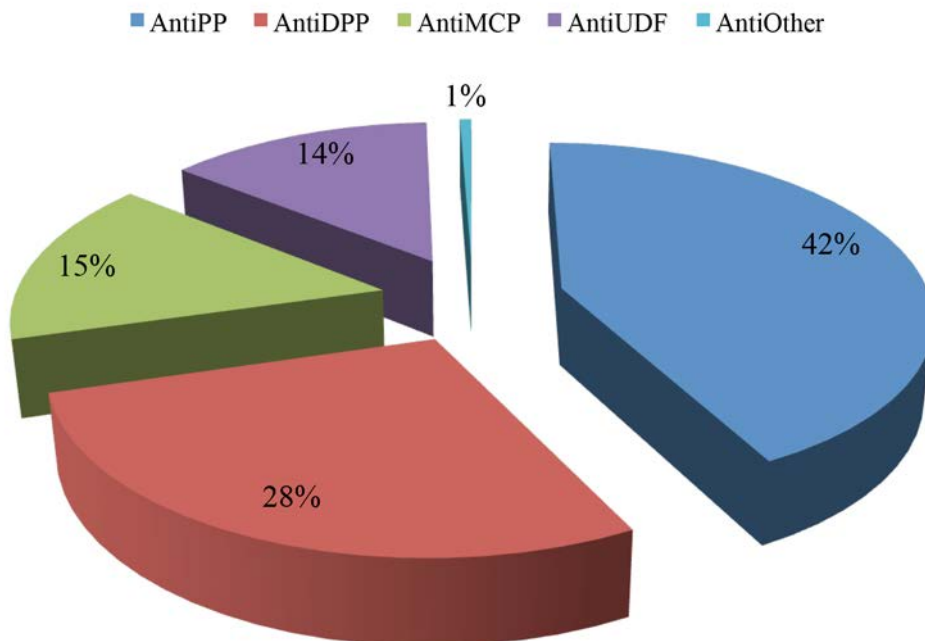


Figure 42: Negative tone coverage on Facebook

The breakdown of the two main Facebook Groups shows that My Malawi My Views attracted far more positive posts – particularly for the DPP – than did Malawi Freedom Network. For example, of the pro DPP posts on both sites, 86% could be found on My Malawi My Views, a similarly large percentage can be found for ProMCP posts. Pro PP posts ran at 66% and pro UDF at 63%. What this suggests is that this site attracts more positive posts than the Malawi Freedom Network which, by its very name, suggests a site more attuned to campaigning and argument and therefore less likely to attract positive posts.

Positive Tone by Facebook Groups (N)

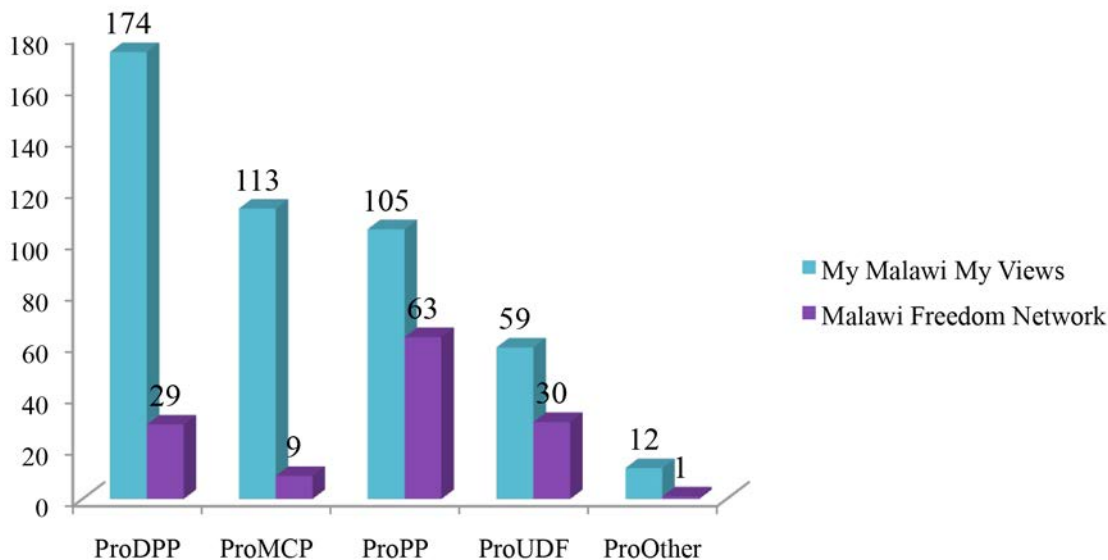


Figure 43: Positive tone by the two leading Facebook Groups

There is a similar story when looking at the negative posts – far more being found on My Malawi My Views than on the Malawi Freedom Network. The figures being 87% of all anti-PP posts, 80% of all anti DPP posts, 87% of all anti MCP posts and 69% of all anti UDF posts, which suggests that more argument and debate (both in actual numbers and in percentage of posts) on My Malawi My Views than on the Malawi Freedom Network.

Negative Tone by Facebook Groups (N)

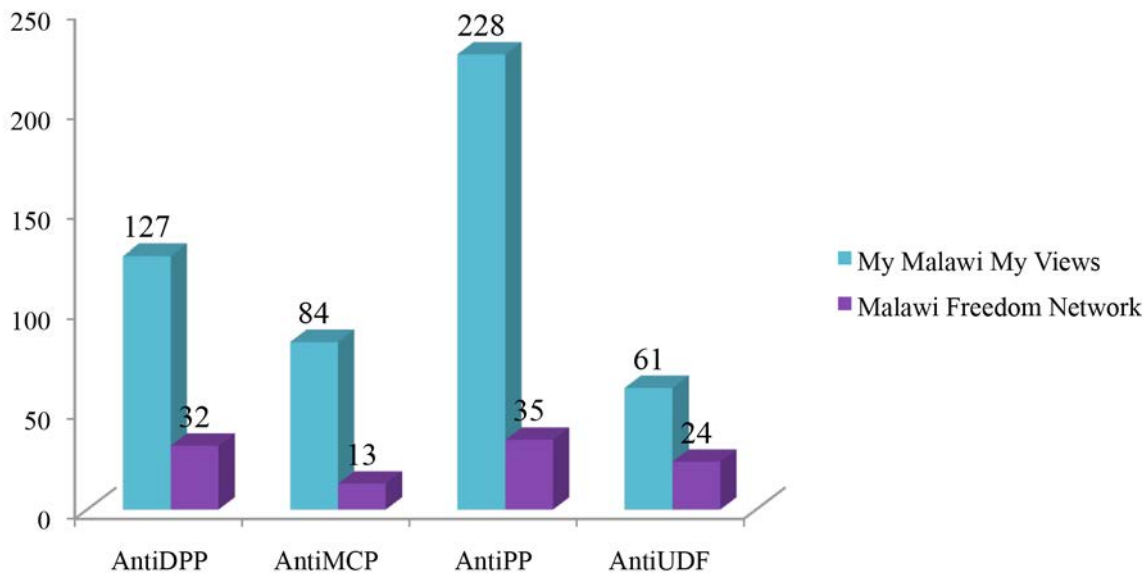


Figure 44: Negative tone by two leading Facebook Groups

Topical Issues

Four issues dominated Facebook chats. The Electoral Process was first with 53%, followed by the Economy (12%), Cashgate and other corruption issues (7%), Law and Order (8%).

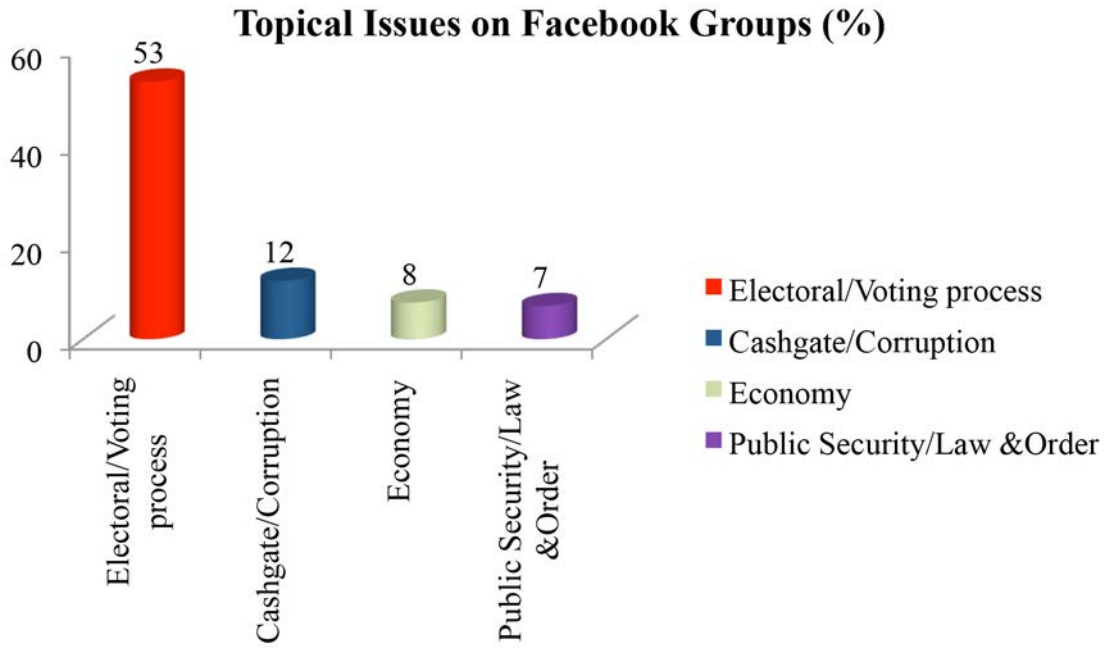


Figure 45: Issues discussed by Facebook Groups

2.6 TWITTER

The project monitored 210 entries on Twitter relating to the election.

Coverage of Tripartite elections

At 98% Twitter postings were overwhelmingly about the presidential contest.

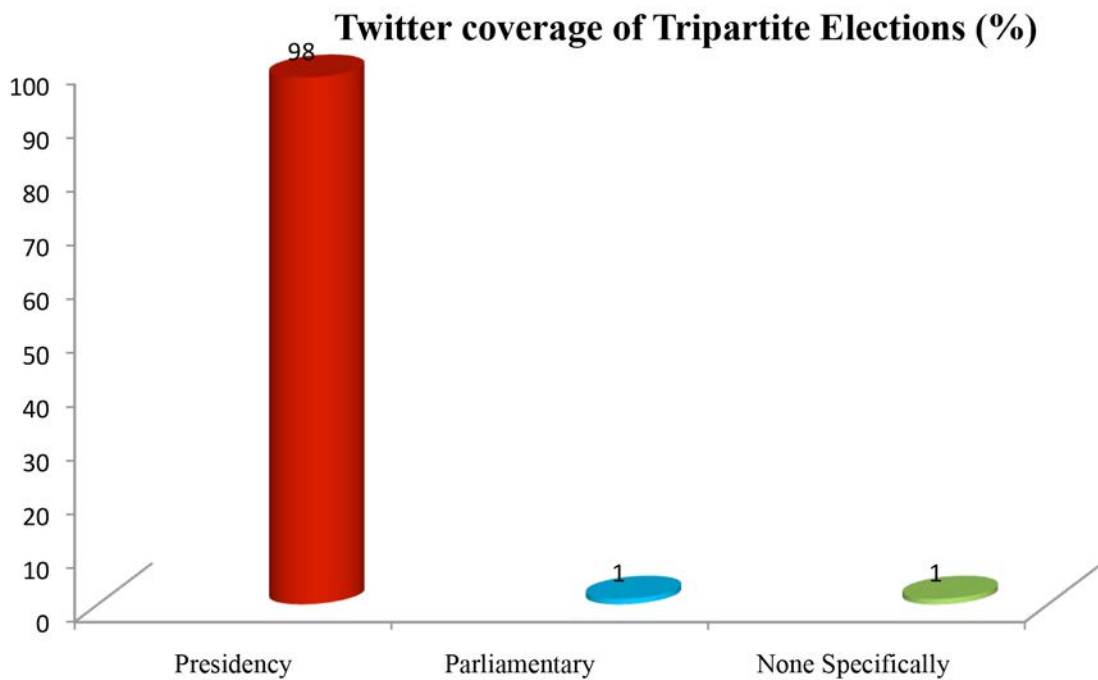


Figure 46: Coverage of Tripartite Elections on Twitter

In terms of the presidential aspirants the PP incumbent received most posts at 33%, followed by the aspirants for the UDF (23%), the MCP (22%) and the DPP (20%). Candidates from other parties received just 2% of postings.

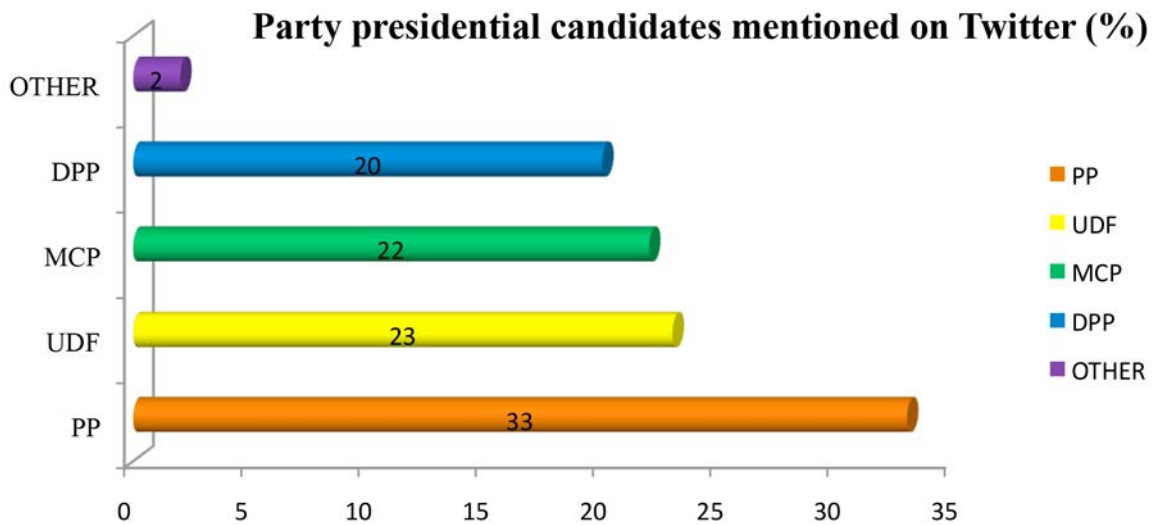


Figure 47: Party presidential candidates mentioned on Twitter

Tone of Coverage

In contrast to the postings on Facebook, more Twitter posts were neutral in tone, rather than positive or negative. This is probably indicative of the fact that Twitter, which has far fewer followers in Malawi than Facebook, tends to be more about straightforward news postings rather than emotive political discussion.

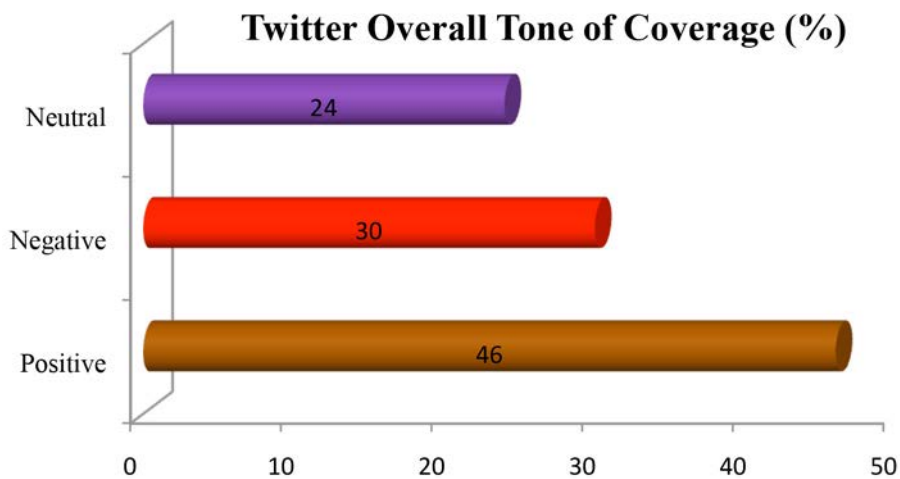


Figure 48: Twitter overall tone coverage

In contrast to the other media, where coverage tended to be mostly about the PP, on Twitter most positive posts concerned the MCP (32%) which suggests that this particular party’s supporters targeted this medium more than its opponents; the MCP was followed by UDF and PP on 24% DPP on 19% and finally other parties just 1%. A similar pattern was found in the previous monitoring period.

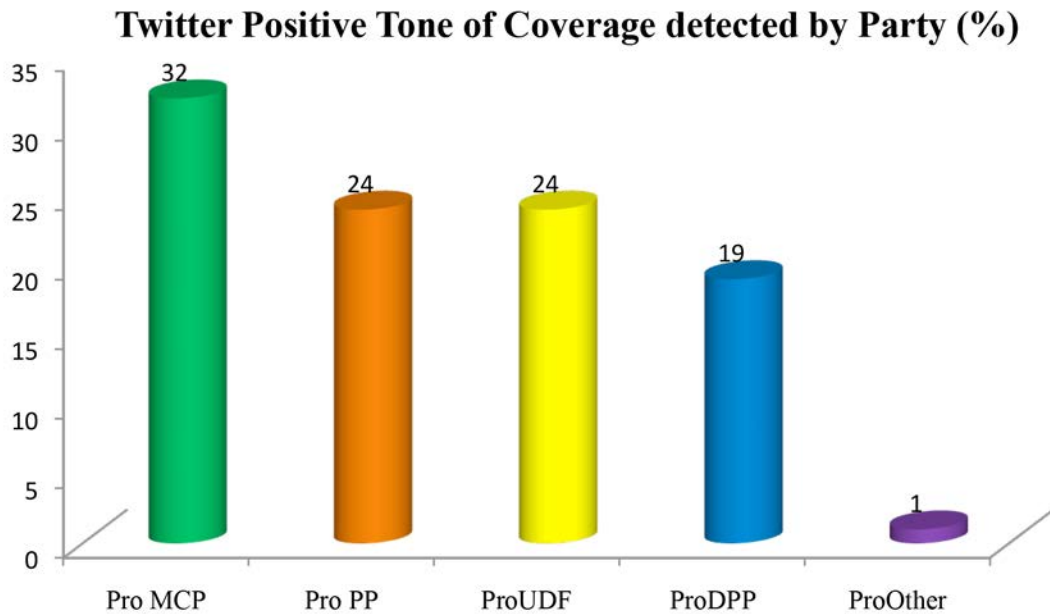


Figure 49: Twitter positive tone coverage of political parties

In terms of the negative posts, Twitter demonstrated the same trend as the other media with negative comments about the PP, at 53%, dominating. Negative posts about the other parties were PP (18%) and the MCP and UDF on 13%. Other parties attracted 3% of negative posts on Twitter

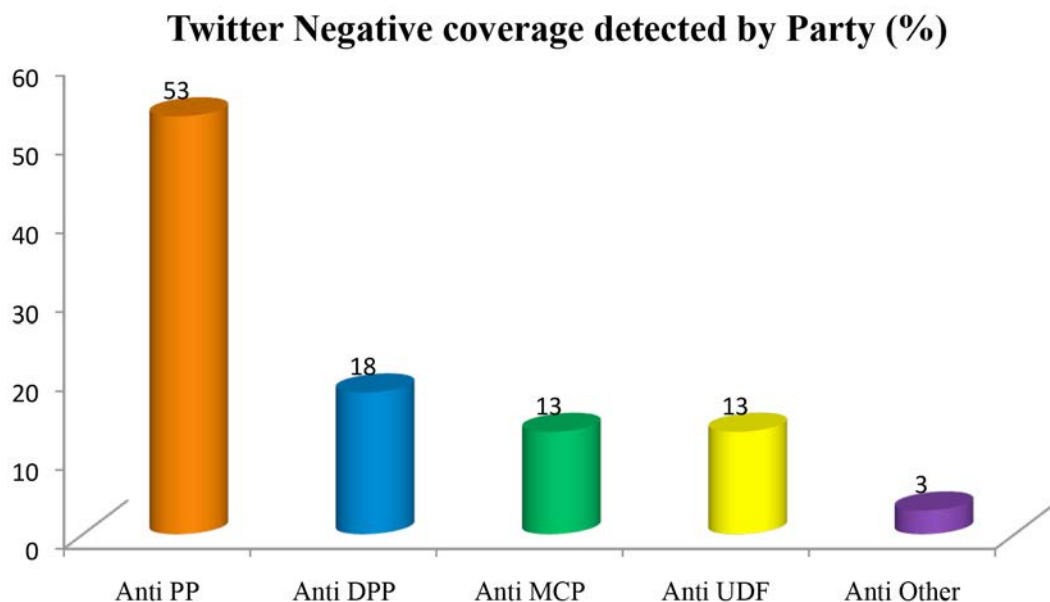


Figure 50: Twitter negative tone coverage of political parties

Topical Issues

Looking at the coverage of topical issues on Twitter, the Electoral Process was far and away the largest topic for discussion garnering 44% of the issue coverage. It was followed by Education at 6%, Economy at 5% and finally Health at 4%.

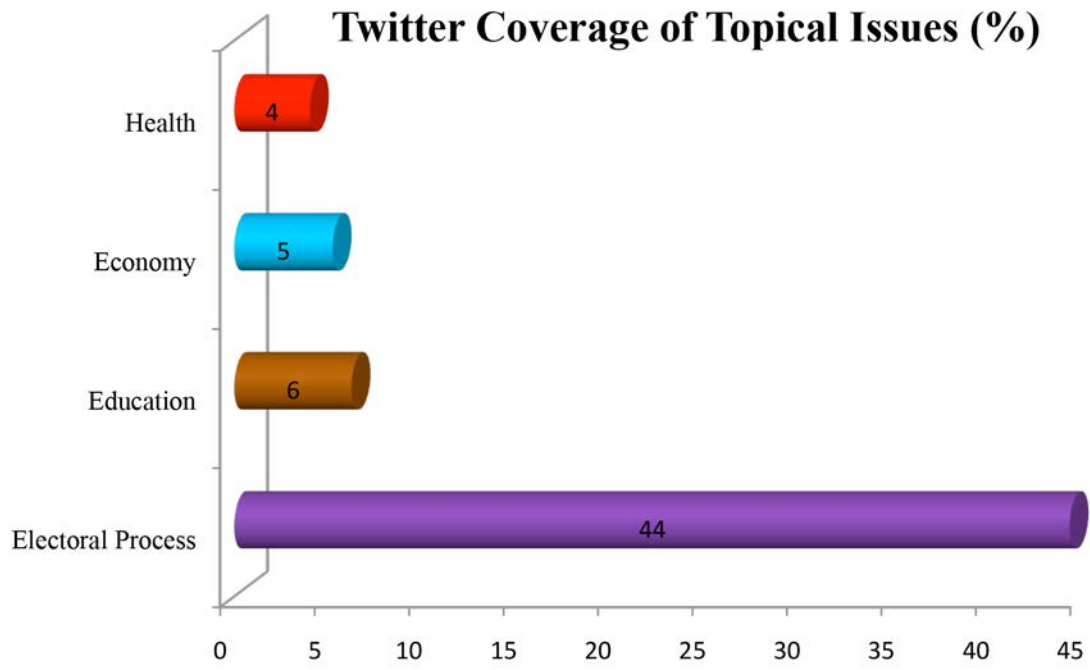


Figure 51: Topical issues onTwitter