

Elections and media - the truth and nothing but the truth?



By [Marion Scher](#)

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With all the media converging on the Pistorius murder trial many people have forgotten or not even realised that in fact in just under two month's we have a national election!

Normally electioneering would dominate the headlines and airwaves at this time - but let's face it, Oscar's trial is far more interesting.

Perhaps it was bought a little closer last week when political parties (old, new and ridiculous) had to pay their registration deposits and we all saw a grinning Julius as he grudgingly paid over his deposit (made up of monies made from selling berets)...

Again with *the trial* happening many newsrooms are depleted in terms of staff, so election stories are thin on the ground. But slowly over the next few weeks more pages and airtime will be devoted to swaying our hearts and minds on who to place our cross next to on the ballot paper.

Enough said

Election-related headlines this week have been sparse with Agang using the listing of forensic investigator Paul O'Sullivan as one of their candidates to make the news and the ACDP pushing their stance on abortion. And of course the ANC nominating some of their more infamous members such as Dina Pule to stand for them.

So just what is the media's role when it comes to responsible reporting on elections? And does our current media landscape lend itself to free and fair reportage? We more or less know the answers to this already. The SABC??? The New Age and sister ANN7, the Sowetan... And of course the new ownership of Independent (term loosely used these days) Group - enough said!

From 1994 everyone was given the power and freedom to vote. What people need is the knowledge and information to use that vote correctly from an informed position on the choices they have.

The watchdog

We have to know how to read between any biased lines and to question why a particular party is on the news every night pushing their own agenda? Real freedom of the press in an election involves the media acting as a watchdog - making sure every part of the process is transparent.

Historically in elections worldwide, particularly in the United States, the rich guys dominate. The parties with the money and power to buy advertising and airtime. But is that enough these days? What about social media? In the last US elections, Barack Obama had 22.7 million followers and 32.2 million likes against Mitt Romney's 1.8 million followers and 12.1 million likes.

Did that sway the vote or was it more?

All the top players are online and yes, that will make a difference here and there but it will still be a case of the big media guns making the difference.

Coming soon... the mudslinging

And then there are the dirty tricks. Oh yes, you can't have an election without it. I can't wait to see what mud each of our top parties is saving to sling for the crucial couple of weeks immediately before the election. This is where many politician's past and dodgy family members come galloping out of the cupboard, found by an intrepid journalist who just happened to be tipped off by an 'anonymous' source...

It wouldn't be an election without mudslinging and let's face it sensationalism sells and again I reiterate previous articles where I mention 'media is first and foremost a business'...

But seriously let's hope sanity prevails and that the media is used for the better good in leading the electorate to a successful election. Whatever your party preference you deserve to be informed!

ABOUT MARION SCHER

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