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Swazi media and political journalism: a textual analysis of the representation of political parties in elections coverage

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ABSTRACT

When Swaziland went to the polls in 2013, the world cast its eyes not just on the elections being free and fair, but more importantly if they were democratic. Responding to a wave of protests from banned political parties and civil society, the international community called on Swaziland to allow for political inclusion. King Mswati III's response was to rename the system of governance a "Monarchial Democracy", which he described as a marriage drawn between the monarchy and the ballot box. The media is central to society, not least for deepening democracy, but also for the role it plays in the political process – a primary reason freedom of the press has been thought a necessary safeguard in a democratic society. This study analysed the representation of political parties in the media, assessing whether or not the Swazi press legitimises royal hegemony through its coverage of political party issues and to what degree it is independent from state influence. A qualitative research method was used, employing a meta-analysis approach to contents obtained from both the *Times of Swaziland* and the *Swazi Observer* of the coverage of the 2013 national elections.

The general findings of the study indicated that the print media privileged the ideology of the ruling regime's Monarchial Democracy, while marginalising alternative or counter political ideologies. It concluded that there was not much difference between the commercial independent media and state-owned media and that the usual critical political economy and liberal pluralism debates and analysis don't really apply to countries such as Swaziland where there is no complexity of the economy of developed nations.