

Glowing press for Zuma's SONA

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SA President's State of the Nation Address (SONA) gets fair to positive coverage from local newspapers accused by the ruling party of normally being critical to government.

If the South African press was a report card, President Jacob Zuma would have passed his state of the nation address with flying colours, said local media analyst, Oresti Patricios, CEO of Ornico. "The ruling party often complains that the SA press is very critical of government in general and the ANC in particular, but on SONA the coverage was more than fair," said Patricios.

Brand and reputation research and analysis company Ornico tracked local newspaper coverage of SONA, and then scrutinised coverage to see if it was positive, negative or neutral. "Commentary from analysts or the opposition party that was critical was deemed negative, whereas factual, unopinionated coverage on the address was deemed neutral. Where Zuma was praised, these stories were considered positive. Lastly in stories which carried a balance of positive or negative views, these too were considered neutral," Patricios said, explaining the methodology to determine the dipstick survey.

"Ornico's survey of some 50 stories in national and regional papers only showed that the response was really good, and where journalists were critical of the address they largely used multiple sources such as political analysts, economists or members of the opposition, who reacted to the address," Patricios said.

Papers surveyed included *Beeld*, *Business Day*, *Business Report*, *Citizen*, *Daily Dispatch*, *Daily News*, *Mail & Guardian*, *Natal Witness*, *Pretoria News*, *Rapport*, *Sowetan*, *Sunday Independent*, *Sunday Times*, *Sunday World*, *The New Age* and *The Star*.

"After his address to the nation, President Zuma's SONA will now be taken to parliament where it will have to bear the scrutiny of opposition parties. It is likely that they will give Zuma's address a much harsher grilling than the media, which were extremely fair in their reporting of this key political speech," Patricios said.

"What's interesting to note about the coverage is that *The New Age* was predictably positive about the speech and covered the address from multiple angles, dissected key issues of the government's plan and reinforced governments strategy going forward with almost exclusively glowing responses from political experts and even people on the street," said Patricios. "*The New Age* had a pre-SONA interview with Zuma and together with SABC2 hosted a post address talk by the president in Cape Town, where the speech was unpacked. It's interesting to see here that *The New Age* is almost playing a supplemental role to the national broadcaster and is de facto the government's developmental press partner, after a fashion.

"The SA business press were also almost uniform in its response to Zuma's SONA. Business newspapers focused on infrastructure growth, state spending, the president's commitment to fight crime, and Trevor Manuel's obvious hand in this address. The Afrikaans press and newspapers allied to Naspers (excluding *City Press*), also were more neutral to positive than other papers.

"At *City Press* the influence of former *Mail & Guardian* editor Ferial Haffajee is very obvious, as the paper dedicated a large amount of space to the SONA, and offered critical opinion, insight and analysis of the event. However they also followed this with an in-depth interview with the president," he added.

"The *Mail & Guardian* took a fairly similar route, and the reporting here too included critical analysts and political observers. However the paper, which is normally extremely analytical and at times disparaging of government, gave praise where praise was due," Patricios said.

"In the paper's analysis "[The State of the Nation speech decoded](#)", Rapule Tabane and Lynley Donnelly wrote: 'President Jacob Zuma on Thursday delivered one of his better State of the Nation speeches since taking office in 2009. The speech, while barren of any poetry or great quotes, was strong on detail and provided a sense of the earnestness and planning being put into efforts to unlock economic potential and create jobs.' The remainder of the analysis is impartial and a dispassionate investigation of Zuma's SONA," said Patricios.

The CEO of Ornico said that regional papers predictably focused on the benefit for their province, while the *Sunday Times*, which has long been at logger heads with the government and the ruling party stuck to their guns and told readers "[we've heard it all before](#)" in the paper's analysis of the address.

"In summary when it came to the state of the nation address, the government and ruling party should be more than pleased with the publicity it has achieved. Even global coverage was encouraging with the likes of Voice of America, Sky, *Washington Post*, Reuters, Bloomberg and *Financial Times* focussing on the growth and infrastructure aspects of the talk, and highlighting Zuma's efforts at righting perceptions about nationalisation."

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