

A Comparative Analysis of the Media Representation of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma's Leadership Qualities in the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian.* A Pre-During and Post-2024 General Elections Study.

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To my beloved parents,

Through the trials and tribulations of co-parenting, you have both demonstrated unwavering dedication and unconditional love, ensuring our success in our individual pursuits. Your selfless sacrifices, perseverance, and commitment to our well-being have been my guiding light, illuminating my path to this milestone. I am forever grateful for your unrelenting support and encouragement, which have enabled me to reach this pinnacle of achievement.

To my precious daughter, Andiswa,

May this accomplishment serve as a testament to your limitless potential and a reminder that no dream is too ambitious, no goal too lofty. You are a shining star, capable of conquering the world and achieving greatness. May your heart be filled with courage, your mind be open to knowledge, and your spirit be ignited with passion and purpose.

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ACRYNOMS

(AU)- African Union

(ANC)- African National Congress

(B. Proc)- Bachelor of Procuration

(COSATU)- Congress of South African Trade Unions

(CUSA)- Council of South Africa

(DA)- Democratic Alliance

(GNU)- Government of National Unity

(GMG)- Guardian Media Group

(HIV/AIDS)- Human Immune Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

(IEC)-Independent Electoral Commission

(IFP)- Inkatha Freedom Party

(IOL News)- Independence Online News

(KZN)-KwaZulu-Natal

(MK)- Umkhonto We Sizwe Party

(NHI)- National Health Insurance

(NUM)- National Union of Mineworkers

(PA)- Patriotic Alliance

(SASO)- South African Student Council

(SACP)- South African Communist Party

(ZANU-PF)-Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front

Abstract

The online press plays an important role in shaping public discourse and representations of political leaders, particularly during periods of electoral contestation. Existing research has demonstrated the significance of media framing in constructing public representations of political actors and their leadership qualities. However, less attention has been given to how culturally constructed frames are used to represent leadership qualities and how these representations change across different stages of an electoral process. This study therefore examines the media representation of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma in the *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times* during the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 South African general elections.

The study draws primarily on Van Gorp's constructionist approach to framing and Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse, power and knowledge to examine how culturally available meanings are incorporated into media representations of political leadership. A qualitative research approach was adopted, using a comparative case study design and qualitative analysis of online news articles. An initial search identified 119 relevant articles, of which 59 met the established inclusion criteria and were retained for analysis. The data were analysed through thematic analysis, framing analysis and critical discourse analysis to identify recurring patterns in the representation of the two political leaders.

The findings identified six broad culturally constructed frames: Tolerance and Zero-Tolerance to Corruption, Constitutional Accountability, Authoritarian Leadership, Collaborative Leadership, Electoral Representation and Unity. The study found that the *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times* employed broadly similar frames in their coverage, although differences were evident in the emphasis, tone and contextual application of these frames to Ramaphosa and Zuma. The findings further demonstrate that the representations and prominence of particular frames changed across the pre-election, election and post-election periods as the political context developed.

The study contributes to scholarship on media framing, political leadership and media representation by demonstrating how culturally constructed meanings are used to make particular leadership qualities salient within political news discourse. It further contributes to understanding the relationship between media, political leadership and democratic discourse in contemporary South Africa by showing how the representation of political leaders is shaped by the interaction between political events, cultural meanings and journalistic discourse.

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Chapter One

Background and Introduction to Research Report

1.1 Introduction

News media play an important role in democratic societies by providing citizens with information through which political actors, institutions and events are interpreted. Election coverage is particularly significant because the media do not merely transmit information about political actors; through processes of selection, emphasis and interpretation, news organisations contribute to the construction of meanings around political candidates and their leadership. Framing theory provides an important conceptual basis for examining this process. Entman (1993) argues that framing involves selecting aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient within a communicating text, thereby contributing to particular problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations and proposed solutions. A constructionist approach to framing extends this understanding by emphasising the relationship between media frames and culturally available meanings through which audiences interpret political events and actors (Van Gorp, 2007).

This relationship between media framing, culture and political leadership is particularly important in the South African context, where political leadership is shaped by historical, social and cultural discourses concerning democracy, liberation, race, ethnicity, accountability, corruption, economic transformation, governance and national identity. Political leaders are therefore not represented only through their policies or political positions; their leadership qualities may also be interpreted through culturally familiar narratives concerning authority, credibility, morality, competence, trustworthiness, loyalty and political legitimacy.

The 2024 South African general elections provide an important context in which to examine these processes. Held on 29 May 2024, the elections represented a significant moment in South Africa's democratic development because the African National Congress (ANC) failed to secure a parliamentary majority for the first time since 1994. The ANC received approximately 40.18% of the national vote, while the newly established uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) Party, associated with former president Jacob Zuma, obtained approximately 14.58%. The election consequently produced a significant reconfiguration of the country's political landscape and resulted in the formation of a Government of National Unity.

The election was also significant because of the contrasting political positions occupied by Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma. Ramaphosa contested the election as the incumbent president and

leader of the ANC, while Zuma returned to the centre of national electoral politics as the leading figure associated with the MK Party. The media therefore encountered two political leaders with different political histories, leadership identities and relationships to the governing party. Their competing political positions provide an opportunity to investigate how leadership qualities are constructed through news discourse during a period of political contestation.

Existing scholarship demonstrates that the South African media have previously played an important role in constructing representations of political leadership. Nkomo (2017), for example, examined press coverage of Jacob Zuma between 2007 and 2013 in the *City Press*, *Mail & Guardian*, *Sunday Independent* and *Sunday Times*. The study identified recurring themes concerning the personalisation of leadership, definitions of leadership, debates about how the country should be led, and representations of Zuma's leadership traits in relation to societal expectations. Other research has similarly examined the media construction of Zuma through issues such as corruption, Nkandla, morality, traditional identity and polygamy. Geertsema-Sligh (2015), for example, found that reporting on Zuma's polygamy involved competing interpretations of traditional culture, presidential modernity and gender rights.

Research has also examined the role of culturally constituted frames in South African political reporting. A doctoral study of coverage of the ANC's 54th National Conference examined how News24 and IOL constructed frames around Cyril Ramaphosa and Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and found that media representations were influenced by prevailing social, political and economic discourses. These studies demonstrate the usefulness of examining political leadership through framing and culturally embedded meanings.

However, there remains a need to extend this scholarship to the 2024 electoral context. Existing studies have largely examined Zuma during his presidency, earlier political controversies, or earlier leadership contests involving Ramaphosa. They have not provided a comparative examination of how the leadership qualities of Zuma and Ramaphosa were constructed across the pre-election, election and post-election phases of the 2024 general elections in the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian*. This is significant because the political identities and positions of the two leaders changed considerably by 2024. Zuma was no longer an incumbent president but had become the central political figure associated with the newly formed MK Party, while Ramaphosa was seeking to retain political authority as both president of the country and leader of the ANC.

The study therefore focuses specifically on how culturally constructed frames are used to represent the leadership qualities of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma. Rather than assuming that media coverage is inherently biased or that one newspaper favours one political actor, the study investigates the frames that emerge from the newspaper texts and examines how these frames construct particular

meanings around leadership. It further considers whether the same culturally available meanings are applied to both leaders, whether different frames are associated with each leader, and whether these representations change across the different phases of the electoral cycle.

The comparative analysis of the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* is important because newspapers do not operate independently of wider political and cultural discourses. Their reporting may reproduce, contest or reinterpret culturally available understandings of political leadership. Examining these processes can therefore contribute to a deeper understanding of how political leadership is mediated during elections and how news discourse participates in the construction of political legitimacy and delegitimisation.

Accordingly, this study contributes to existing body of research in three ways. First, it extends research on media representations of South African political leadership into the 2024 electoral context. Second, it provides a direct comparison between the media construction of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma rather than examining either leader in isolation. Third, it applies to a cultural framing perspective to examine how culturally available meanings and narratives are mobilised in the construction of leadership qualities across the pre-election, election and post-election periods.

1.2 Background to the research

The 2024 general election in South Africa was marked by intense media monitoring of political leaders, with reporting and relationship between media, politics, and public opinion, the media's varying representations of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma in the two newspapers. Seeing the difference in leadership of both political leaders and how the media portrays them as different leaders where one leads with authoritarian tendencies of leadership. Jacob Zuma's audience is based more in the rural parts of the province of KwaZulu Natal where most of his followers are based. He is a man who holds beliefs that are stricter and has a certain kind of lifestyle which is different from what President Cyril Ramaphosa envisions for South Africa; Ramaphosa speaks of the '*New Dawn' a* South Africa that is free from corruption and state capture. He is strategic in his leadership and communication; he is described as the man that will save South Africa. Personally, growing up in a society where the media's narrative frequently changes and affects public opinion, I recognised the need to understand how media representation influences our collective understanding of leadership. The 2024 general elections, with their unique blend of continuity and change, offered an opportunity to explore this question.

The topic is driven by a passion for understanding the complex dynamics of media, politics, and leadership. I believe that this research has significant implications for our understanding of democratic processes, public opinion formations and the role of media in shaping political discourse. Conducting this research stems from a desire to contribute to the existing literature on media representation, leadership and politics. I am particularly interested in understanding how the media shapes public perceptions of leaders and their qualities. By examining the media representation of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma, I aim to provide insights into the ways in which media narratives influence public opinion and political engagement. This can inform strategies for effective communication and public engagement, ultimately contributing to a more informed and engaged citizenry.

1.3 Research problem to the study

The central problem addressed by this study is the manner in which news media construct and communicate meanings about political leadership during periods of electoral contestation. Although journalism is expected to provide citizens with credible and fair information, news reporting necessarily involves processes of selection, emphasis and interpretation. Consequently, political actors may be represented through particular frames that influence how audiences understand their competence, credibility, morality, authority and political legitimacy (Entman, 1993; Van Gorp, 2007).

In the South African context, this problem is particularly important because political leadership is interpreted through historically and culturally embedded discourses concerning liberation, democracy, accountability, corruption, traditional identity, economic transformation and political loyalty. Such culturally available meanings can become resources through which journalists and commentators construct interpretations of political leaders. Cultural framing therefore provides a means of examining not only what newspapers say about political leaders, but also the wider meanings and assumptions through which those representations become intelligible.

Previous research has established that South African newspapers have constructed distinctive representations of Jacob Zuma's leadership, particularly around questions of governance, morality, accountability and political character. Nkomo's (2017) analysis of newspaper coverage of Zuma demonstrated that political leadership was frequently personalised and evaluated against expectations of how a national leader should behave. Research has also demonstrated the importance of cultural meanings in the framing of Zuma, including representations concerning traditional identity and

polygamy. Similarly, research on political reporting surrounding Cyril Ramaphosa and Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma demonstrates that culturally constituted frames can be used to construct and legitimise or delegitimise political leadership.

The limitation in the existing scholarship is therefore not the absence of research on media framing or culturally constructed frames. Rather, there is limited comparative research examining how culturally constructed frames were deployed to represent two contrasting South African political leaders, Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma, throughout the different stages of the 2024 general election. This gap is particularly important because the 2024 elections represented a major transformation in the country's electoral landscape, with the ANC losing its parliamentary majority and the MK Party emerging as a significant political force.

Furthermore, existing election-media research indicates that South African election coverage in 2024 was strongly focused on major political parties and political personalities. Mare (2024) found that mainstream media coverage concentrated heavily on the major political parties and personalities, while citizen concerns and policy issues received comparatively less attention. Bird and Smith (2024) similarly found that the media generally achieved equitable coverage, while noting continuing concerns about the dominance of major political actors and limited diversity in election coverage. These findings reinforce the importance of investigating not only how much political actors are covered, but how their leadership qualities are constructed within that coverage.

The research problem, therefore, concerns the ways in which the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* constructed culturally embedded meanings around the leadership qualities of Ramaphosa and Zuma during a politically transformative election. The study seeks to determine which frames were used, what cultural meanings informed those frames, how the frames differed between the two leaders and between the two newspapers, and whether these representations changed before, during and after the 2024 general elections.

By addressing these questions, the study seeks to contribute to scholarship on political communication, media framing and South African democracy by demonstrating how culturally available meanings can become part of the mediated construction of political leadership during an important moment of electoral change.

1.4 Research purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate and comparatively analyse how the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* represented the leadership qualities of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma during the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 South African general elections. The study is particularly concerned with identifying and examining the culturally constructed frames through which the two political leaders were represented in news coverage.

The study is informed by scholarship on media framing and political communication, particularly the work of McCombs and Shaw (1972), Entman (1993) and Van Gorp (2007), which demonstrates that the media play an important role in determining the salience and interpretation of political issues and actors. By examining how culturally available meanings are incorporated into the framing of political leadership, the study seeks to understand how particular leadership qualities, such as competence, credibility, accountability, morality, authority and political legitimacy, are constructed in media discourse.

The study further seeks to compare the representations of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma within the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* and to examine similarities, differences and changes in their representation across the three phases of the 2024 electoral cycle. This comparative approach is intended to contribute to existing scholarship on political communication, media framing and political leadership in South Africa by extending research on the media representation of these leaders into the context of the 2024 general elections.

Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between culturally constructed media frames and the representation of political leadership in a democratic and electorally contested South African context. Rather than assuming that media coverage is inherently biased, the study will examine the textual evidence to determine how particular frames construct, reinforce, legitimise or delegitimise meanings associated with the leadership qualities of Ramaphosa and Zuma.

1.5 Research objectives

1. Identify and analyse the culturally constructed frames used by the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* in representing the leadership qualities of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma during the 2024 general elections.
2. Compare the representation of the leadership qualities of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma in the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian*.

3. Examine changes in the representation of Cyril Ramaphosa's and Jacob Zuma's leadership qualities across the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 general elections.

1.6 Key research questions

1. What culturally constructed frames were used by the *Sunday Times* and *mail & guardian* in representing the leadership qualities of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma during the 2024 general elections?
2. How did the *Sunday times* and *mail & guardian* differ in their representation of the leadership qualities of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma?
3. How did the representation of Cyril Ramaphosa's and Jacob Zuma's leadership qualities change across the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 general elections?

1.7 Significance of the study

The study is significant because it contributes to the existing body of literature on media representation, political communication and framing in the South African context. It explores how the press evokes cultural discourses when reporting on political leaders and how these discourses may provide audiences with particular ways of interpreting political issues and leadership. The study focuses on the culturally constructed frames used by the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* in representing the political and leadership qualities of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma during the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 general elections in South Africa.

The study contributes to an understanding of the relationship between media, culture and society by examining how newspapers operate within, and contribute to, wider social and political discourses. News discourse is shaped by the cultural and social contexts in which it is produced, while media representations can simultaneously contribute to the construction and reinforcement of meanings within society (Van Gorp, 2007; Chambwera, 2016). Examining culturally constructed frames therefore provides an opportunity to understand how existing cultural and political meanings are incorporated into representations of political leadership. The comparative analysis of the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* further provides an opportunity to identify similarities and differences in the ways these newspapers represented Ramaphosa and Zuma during a significant period of political and electoral change.

The study is also theoretically significant as it applies and extends Van Gorp's (2007) constructionist approach to framing in the analysis of political leadership. Van Gorp's approach is particularly relevant because it emphasises the relationship between media frames and culturally available meanings. The study also draws on Michael Foucault's (1980) concepts of knowledge, power and discourse as a complementary perspective for examining how political meanings and representations are produced and circulated through discourse. Together, these perspectives provide a framework for examining how culturally constructed frames may shape the representation of political leadership and how particular meanings surrounding political actors may be reproduced, challenged or reinforced through news discourse.

The study is further significant in relation to existing scholarship that has raised concerns about ethics, bias and the representation of political actors in the South African media (Guha, 2018; Cukier et al., 2016; Mavin et al., 2016). Rather than assuming that media coverage is inherently biased or unethical, this study examines the newspaper coverage empirically to determine how Ramaphosa and Zuma are represented and whether the coverage demonstrates patterns of balance, emphasis, cultural framing or political representation. This approach allows the study to contribute to the ongoing debate about the role and responsibilities of the media in democratic societies without presupposing the findings.

Methodologically, the study is significant because it combines a case study approach, thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis to examine the media representation of Ramaphosa and Zuma during the 2024 general elections. The combination of these approaches allows the study to identify recurring themes and frames within the newspaper coverage while also examining the broader cultural, political and discursive meanings associated with the representation of the two leaders. This provides a comprehensive approach to analysing media representation and framing across the pre-election, election and post-election periods.

The study may further contribute to scholarship on political communication, journalism, media studies and South African politics by providing a contemporary examination of the representation of two prominent and politically contrasting South African leaders. By focusing on Ramaphosa and Zuma within the context of the 2024 general elections, the study provides an opportunity to extend existing research on political leadership and media framing into a period characterised by significant electoral and political change.

Finally, the study may contribute to broader discussions about the role of news media in a democratic society. By examining how political leadership is constructed through culturally embedded media frames, the study may provide insights into the ways in which journalistic

discourse contributes to public understandings of political leaders and leadership. It may therefore provide a basis for further research into the relationship between media representation, culture, political discourse and democratic political communication in South Africa.

1.8 Background of the 2024 general elections in South Africa

The South African national and provincial elections were held on 29 May 2024, marking the seventh national and provincial elections since the country's transition to democracy in 1994. The election was particularly significant because, for the first time since the advent of democratic government, the African National Congress (ANC) failed to secure a majority in the National Assembly (Electoral Commission of South Africa [IEC], 2024; Mare, 2024). The election therefore represented an important development in South Africa's post-apartheid political trajectory and created a new political environment in which political parties were required to negotiate new forms of cooperation and governance.

The political histories of former Presidents Jacob Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa were particularly relevant to the 2024 elections. Zuma resigned as President of South Africa in February 2018 following sustained political pressure and the ANC's decision to recall him. His presidency had been associated with extensive political controversy, including allegations concerning corruption, governance and state capture. Ramaphosa subsequently succeeded Zuma as President in February 2018 (The Presidency, 2024a; Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, Corruption and Fraud in the Public Sector and Organs of State, 2022).

The political relationship between Zuma and Ramaphosa subsequently became increasingly contested. Their political differences were reflected in public disagreements and legal disputes, including litigation involving Zuma's allegations concerning the disclosure of information relating to him by Ramaphosa (*Mail & Guardian*, 2022). These developments contributed to broader political narratives concerning the relationship between the two former ANC leaders and competing interpretations of political leadership within the ANC.

Zuma's political return became particularly significant in the period preceding the 2024 elections. He became closely associated with the newly established uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) Party, which emerged as a significant political force during the election campaign. The party's support was particularly strong in KwaZulu-Natal, where it obtained 45.93% of the provincial vote, compared with the ANC's 17.62% (IEC, 2024). The strength of the MK Party in KwaZulu-Natal was significant because the province had historically been an important source of electoral support for the ANC and because Zuma had longstanding political and social connections in the province.

The 2024 general elections consequently represented a significant turning point for both Ramaphosa and Zuma. The ANC received 40.18% of the national vote and secured 159 seats in the 400-member National Assembly, compared with 230 seats in the 2019 election (IEC, 2024). The Democratic Alliance (DA) obtained 21.81% of the vote and 87 seats, while the MK Party obtained 14.58% of the national vote and 58 seats, making it the third-largest party in the National Assembly (IEC, 2024). The emergence of the MK Party therefore contributed to a significant redistribution of political support and formed part of the broader transformation of South Africa's electoral landscape.

The electoral performance of the ANC meant that it could no longer form a national government on its own. Rather than simply forming a bilateral coalition with the Democratic Alliance, the ANC entered into negotiations with several political parties that ultimately resulted in the establishment of a Government of National Unity (GNU). Ramaphosa was subsequently re-elected President by the National Assembly on 14 June 2024. The formation of the GNU marked a significant departure from the political environment that had characterised the first three decades of democratic government, in which the ANC had maintained a parliamentary majority (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2024; The Presidency, 2024).

The emergence of the MK Party also reflected divisions within the broader ANC political tradition. Zuma's political return through the MK Party provided an alternative political vehicle for voters who were dissatisfied with the ANC and, in particular, with the direction of the party under Ramaphosa's leadership. However, the relationship between Zuma, the MK Party and the ANC should not be reduced solely to a personal conflict between Zuma and Ramaphosa. The 2024 election reflected wider political developments involving voter dissatisfaction, the changing electoral environment, party competition and debates concerning governance and political leadership (Mare, 2024).

The eligibility of Zuma to stand as a parliamentary candidate also became an important feature of the 2024 election. The MK Party included Zuma on its National Assembly candidate list submitted to the Electoral Commission on 8 March 2024. The IEC subsequently upheld objections to his candidacy on the basis of section 47(1)(e) of the Constitution, which concerns persons convicted of an offence and sentenced to more than 12 months' imprisonment without the option of a fine (Electoral Commission of South Africa v *uMkhonto Wesizwe Political Party and Others*, 2024).

The MK Party and Zuma appealed the IEC's decision to the Electoral Court. On 26 April 2024, the Electoral Court upheld the appeal and set aside the IEC's decision, thereby allowing Zuma to remain on the candidate list at that stage (*uMkhonto Wesizwe Political Party and Another v Electoral Commission of South Africa and Others*, 2024). The matter was subsequently taken to the Constitutional Court.

On 20 May 2024, the Constitutional Court overturned the Electoral Court's decision. The Court held that Zuma had been convicted of an offence and sentenced to more than 12 months' imprisonment without the option of a fine and was therefore disqualified from being a member of, and from standing for election to, the National Assembly until five years had elapsed after completion of his sentence (Electoral Commission of South Africa v *uMkhonto Wesizwe Political Party and Others*, 2024).

Despite Zuma's disqualification as a parliamentary candidate, his political influence remained significant during the election campaign. The MK Party subsequently secured 14.58% of the national vote and 58 seats in the National Assembly, while achieving its strongest result in KwaZulu-Natal, where it became the largest party with 45.93% of the provincial vote (IEC, 2024). The party's electoral performance demonstrated the significance of Zuma's political return and contributed to the broader restructuring of South Africa's political landscape following the 2024 election.

The relationship between Zuma and Ramaphosa therefore provides an important context for examining media representations of political leadership during the 2024 electoral cycle. Ramaphosa entered the election as the incumbent President of South Africa and leader of the ANC, while Zuma participated as a former president and prominent figure associated with a new political party that challenged the ANC's electoral dominance. Their contrasting political positions created opportunities for the news media to construct different representations of leadership, political legitimacy, accountability, political experience and the future direction of South Africa.

For this study, the 2024 election is therefore significant not only because of its electoral outcome but also because it provided a period of substantial political contestation in which the leadership qualities of Ramaphosa and Zuma could be represented through different culturally constructed frames. Examining media coverage before, during and after the election provides an opportunity to determine whether these representations remained consistent or changed as the political context developed

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.9 Background to the *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times*

The South African news media have played an important role in documenting political and social developments, particularly during the country's transition from apartheid to democracy. Newspapers have historically provided spaces for political debate, investigative journalism and public scrutiny of political institutions and leaders. Against this background, the *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times* provide relevant cases for examining the representation of political leadership in South African news discourse.

1.9.1 The Mail & Guardian

The *Mail & Guardian* is a South African weekly newspaper and digital news publication with a history dating to the apartheid period. The publication was established in 1985 as the *Weekly Mail* by a group of journalists who had been retrenched following the closure of the *Rand Daily Mail* and *Sunday Express*. The founding journalists sought to establish an independent publication that would provide serious reporting on political, economic and social developments at a time when South Africa was experiencing political repression, censorship and increasing political unrest (*Mail & Guardian*, 2010; *Mail & Guardian*, 2024).

The *Weekly Mail* developed a reputation for challenging apartheid-era restrictions on journalism and reporting on issues that were subject to political pressure and censorship. The publication was warned and subsequently closed for a month in 1988 under the apartheid government's emergency regulations (*Mail & Guardian*, 2010). The newspaper's historical development therefore occurred within a political environment in which press freedom was significantly constrained.

The publication underwent a number of changes during the transition to democracy. In 1995, the *Weekly Mail* became the *Mail & Guardian*. The same year, the Electronic *Mail & Guardian* was launched, which the publication describes as South Africa's first news website (*Mail & Guardian*, 2010). The publication subsequently developed its digital operation, with *Mail & Guardian Online* becoming an important component of its news operation.

The original version of this study incorrectly identifies Matthew Buckland as the current editor of *Mail & Guardian Online*. This requires correction. Buckland was an important figure in the development of the publication's digital operation and served as publisher of *Mail & Guardian Online* during the 2000s (Buckland, 2006). The *Mail & Guardian*'s historical record identifies

several editors over the publication's history and records that the newspaper took full control of its website in 2008 (*Mail & Guardian*, 2010). Buckland should therefore be discussed in historical rather than current terms.

For the purposes of this study, the significance of the *Mail & Guardian* does not depend on the identity of a particular editor. Rather, its relevance lies in its established history of political reporting, investigative journalism and political analysis. The publication describes its contemporary focus as including investigative journalism, political analysis, Southern African news and current affairs (*Mail & Guardian*, 2024). Its historical development during apartheid and the democratic transition also makes it relevant to examining the relationship between political discourse and media representation.

The *Mail & Guardian* has previously been included in academic research examining representations of political leadership. Nkomo (2017), for example, analysed coverage of Jacob Zuma in the *Mail & Guardian*, *Sunday Times* and other South African newspapers. This previous research provides an important foundation for the present study, while the current research extends the analysis by comparing the representation of Zuma with that of Cyril Ramaphosa during the 2024 electoral cycle.

1.9.2 The Sunday Times

The *Sunday Times* is one of South Africa's longest-established Sunday newspapers. It was first published on 4 February 1906 and has subsequently developed into a national newspaper distributed throughout South Africa and neighbouring countries. The newspaper describes itself as South Africa's biggest Sunday newspaper and identifies political reporting, investigative journalism, analysis and national and international news among its principal areas of coverage (*Sunday Times*, 2024). The newspaper is based in Parktown, Johannesburg, and is published by Arena Holdings (*Sunday Times*, 2024).

From its early years, the *Sunday Times* developed a distinctive public-facing style. Its historical account records that founding editor George Kingswell sought to establish the publication as independent of political parties and encouraged journalism that challenged political and institutional power (*Sunday Times*, 2017). The newspaper subsequently developed a reputation for political reporting and investigative journalism.

The *Sunday Times* has been involved in reporting on several major political controversies in South Africa. Its coverage of Jacob Zuma provides a particularly relevant example. In 2005, the newspaper reported on allegations of rape involving Zuma. Zuma was subsequently charged with rape and was

acquitted by the High Court in Johannesburg in May 2006. These events became part of the wider media and political discourse surrounding Zuma's leadership. Because the matter involved allegations, criminal proceedings and a subsequent acquittal, it is important that the events are represented accurately and that allegations are not presented as established facts.

The newspaper has also previously been examined in academic research concerning the media representation of political leadership. Nkomo (2017) included the *Sunday Times* in his study of representations of Jacob Zuma between 2007 and 2013. The newspaper is therefore relevant to the present study both because of its established role in South African political reporting and because its coverage has previously formed part of scholarship on political leadership.

1.10 Background of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma

1.10.1 Background of Cyril Ramaphosa

Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa was born on 17 November 1952 in Johannesburg. His family was moved from Western Native Township to Soweto in 1962, where he attended Tshilidzi Primary School. He completed his secondary education at Mphaphuli High School in Sibasa in 1971 and enrolled at the University of the North in 1972 to study law. During his university years, he became involved in student politics and joined the South African Students' Organisation and the Black People's Convention (The Presidency, 2024a).

Ramaphosa experienced political detention during apartheid. According to the Presidency, he was detained in solitary confinement for 11 months in 1974 under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act in connection with organising pro-Frelimo rallies. He was detained again in 1976 and held for six months following the Soweto student uprising (The Presidency, 2024a).

The distinction between detention, arrest and imprisonment is important when describing Ramaphosa's political history. The Presidency describes the 1974 and 1976 episodes as periods of detention rather than simply describing them as arrests followed by imprisonment (The Presidency, 2024a). The original version of this study therefore requires correction where it states that Ramaphosa was "arrested for six months" in 1976. The more accurate formulation is that he was detained for six months in 1976.

This distinction does not mean that Ramaphosa was never arrested. Historical records document a separate arrest in November 1984 in Lebowa in connection with organising or planning to participate

in a meeting that had been banned by the local magistrate (South African History Online, 2024). The study should therefore distinguish between the documented periods of detention in 1974 and 1976 and the later arrest in 1984.

After continuing his studies through the University of South Africa, Ramaphosa obtained a Bachelor of Procurationis degree in 1981. He subsequently joined the Council of Unions of South Africa as a legal adviser. In 1982, he became the first General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), helping to develop the organisation into one of South Africa's most influential trade unions (The Presidency, 2024a).

As General Secretary of the NUM, Ramaphosa became an important figure in organised labour and participated in the broader political struggle against apartheid. He was also involved in the establishment of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and became involved in negotiations surrounding South Africa's transition to democracy (The Presidency, 2024a).

Following the unbanning of the ANC, Ramaphosa was elected ANC Secretary-General in 1991. He became head of the ANC's negotiating team at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) and subsequent multi-party negotiations. Following the country's first democratic elections in 1994, he became a Member of Parliament and was elected Chairperson of the Constitutional Assembly, where he oversaw the drafting process of South Africa's new Constitution (The Presidency, 2024a).

After completing the constitutional process, Ramaphosa moved into the private sector. In 2001, he established Shanduka Group, a black-owned investment holding company. He later returned to formal ANC politics and was elected ANC Deputy President in December 2012. He became Deputy President of South Africa in May 2014 and was elected President of the ANC in December 2017. Following Jacob Zuma's resignation, Ramaphosa was sworn in as President of South Africa on 15 February 2018 (The Presidency, 2024a).

Following the 2024 national and provincial elections, Ramaphosa was re-elected President of the Republic by the National Assembly on 14 June 2024 (The Presidency, 2024a). His political trajectory therefore encompasses student activism, political detention, trade union leadership, participation in the democratic transition, constitutional leadership, business leadership, ANC leadership and national executive leadership.

These different aspects of Ramaphosa's political history are relevant to the present study because they constitute historically available meanings through which his leadership may be represented in news discourse. However, the study does not assume that these characteristics constitute fixed

leadership qualities. Instead, it examines how such qualities are selected, emphasised and constructed through media framing.

1.10.2 Leadership and Political Qualities of Cyril Ramaphosa

Previous biographical and political literature contains different representations of Ramaphosa's leadership. Butler (2007) presents him as a political figure associated with pragmatism, negotiation and discipline, while Moodie (2008) examines his political development and character. Mathekga (2018) similarly considers Ramaphosa's political trajectory and his significance within the ANC.

These descriptions should be understood as interpretations rather than objective measures of leadership ability. For example, descriptions of Ramaphosa as a "visionary", "pragmatist", "negotiator" or "natural leader" constitute particular representations of his political identity (Butler, 2007; Moodie, 2008). Conversely, other commentators have criticised aspects of his leadership and have questioned his decisiveness and effectiveness (Mathekga, 2018).

The coexistence of these positive and critical representations is relevant to the present research because it demonstrates that political leadership can be constructed through competing narratives. Rather than determining whether Ramaphosa is objectively a particular type of leader, the study examines how leadership qualities are represented through culturally constructed media frames.

1.10.3 Ramaphosa's Political Leadership and the 2024 Election

Ramaphosa's leadership became particularly significant during the 2024 general elections because he entered the election as both President of South Africa and President of the ANC. His record in government and his leadership of the governing party consequently formed part of the broader political debate surrounding the election.

The 2024 election also followed Ramaphosa's emphasis on political renewal, institutional reform, economic growth and addressing corruption. These themes formed part of the political discourse surrounding his presidency. However, whether and how these themes were incorporated into newspaper representations of his leadership is an empirical question for this study rather than an assumption.

1.10.4 Background of Jacob Zuma

Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma was born on 12 April 1942 in Nkandla, KwaZulu-Natal. He became involved in the ANC during the apartheid period and subsequently joined uMkhonto weSizwe (MK), the ANC's armed wing. According to South African History Online, Zuma was recruited into MK in 1963 and was arrested in the same year while travelling with other recruits who were attempting to leave South Africa for military training. He was subsequently sentenced to ten years' imprisonment on Robben Island for conspiring to overthrow the apartheid government (South African History Online, 2024).

The original background incorrectly states that Zuma "joined the ANC in 1959 as its military wing" and subsequently joined MK in 1962. This conflates the ANC with its military wing and does not accurately reflect the chronology. The ANC and MK were distinct organisations, and the available historical record identifies Zuma's recruitment into MK in 1963 (South African History Online, 2024).

Following his release from Robben Island in 1973, Zuma became involved in rebuilding ANC underground structures in Natal. He subsequently went into exile and worked in ANC structures in Swaziland, Mozambique and Zambia. He held senior positions in the ANC's underground and intelligence structures before returning to South Africa following the unbanning of the ANC in 1990 (The Presidency, 2024b).

During the transition to democracy, Zuma participated in political negotiations and subsequently held political office in KwaZulu-Natal. He was elected Deputy President of the ANC in 1997 and appointed Deputy President of South Africa in 1999. He became President of the ANC in 2007 and President of South Africa in 2009. He was re-elected as President in 2014 and resigned from the presidency in February 2018 following sustained political pressure and the ANC's decision to recall him (The Presidency, 2024b).

1.10.5 Leadership and Political Qualities of Jacob Zuma

Zuma's political leadership has been represented in markedly different ways in academic literature and public discourse. Some accounts have emphasised his political accessibility, personal charisma, ability to connect with particular constituencies and association with popular and traditional forms of political identity. Other representations have focused on controversies surrounding his presidency, including questions concerning governance, accountability, corruption and state capture (Jacobs, 2010; Mathekga, 2018).

These competing representations are important to the present study because they demonstrate that political leadership does not possess a single universally accepted meaning. Zuma's leadership has been interpreted through both positive and negative narratives, making him particularly relevant to an investigation of media framing.

The original background contains several statements that present contested political claims as established facts. For example, it states that Zuma "contributed to some of the nation's current problems" and that he and the Gupta family "used State Owned Enterprises for acts of corruption." Such formulations should not be reproduced without qualification. Where the study refers to the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, Corruption and Fraud in the Public Sector and Organs of State, the findings of the Commission should be cited directly and clearly distinguished from allegations, political commentary and subsequent legal proceedings (Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, Corruption and Fraud in the Public Sector and Organs of State, 2022).

The distinction between an allegation, an investigative finding and a judicial finding is particularly important for this research because the study examines media representation. The research should therefore analyse how newspapers represented these controversies rather than reproducing contested representations as established facts.

1.10.6 Zuma's Political Return and the 2024 General Elections

Zuma remained an influential political figure following his resignation from the presidency. His political position changed significantly in the period preceding the 2024 elections when he became associated with the newly established uMkhonto weSizwe Party, commonly known as the MK Party.

In December 2023, Zuma publicly announced his support for the MK Party in the 2024 elections. His involvement subsequently became central to the party's electoral campaign. The MK Party submitted its candidate list to the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) in March 2024, with Zuma included as a candidate for the National Assembly.

Zuma's eligibility to stand as a candidate became the subject of legal proceedings. The Constitutional Court ultimately upheld the objection to his candidacy on the basis of the constitutional disqualification relating to persons sentenced to imprisonment without the option of a fine. The judgment considered Zuma's 2021 conviction for contempt of court and the resulting 15-month sentence (Constitutional Court of South Africa, 2024).

This legal and political history became relevant to media representations of Zuma during the 2024 election because it brought together questions concerning his political legitimacy, accountability, constitutionalism and return to electoral politics. The study therefore examines how such issues were represented rather than assuming a particular interpretation of them.

1.11 The 2024 South African General Elections

The 2024 national and provincial elections were held on 29 May 2024. They represented a significant development in South Africa's democratic political history because the ANC failed to obtain a majority in the National Assembly for the first time since 1994. According to the Electoral Commission's final results, the ANC received 40.18% of the national vote and obtained 159 seats in the National Assembly, while the Democratic Alliance received 21.81% and 87 seats. The MK Party received 14.58% and obtained 58 seats (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2024).

The election therefore resulted in a significantly more fragmented National Assembly and altered the political environment in which national government would operate. The emergence of the MK Party as the third-largest party nationally was particularly significant for this study because the party was closely associated with Zuma's political return (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2024).

The election also altered the political circumstances surrounding Ramaphosa. Following the election, the National Assembly elected him President of the Republic on 14 June 2024. He was subsequently inaugurated for another term as President (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2024; The Presidency, 2024).

The post-election environment resulted in the formation of a Government of National Unity involving several political parties. This represented a significant departure from the political environment in which the ANC had previously governed with a national parliamentary majority. The political developments following the election therefore created an important context for examining how representations of political leadership changed after the election.

Media Coverage of the 2024 Elections

Recent research on the 2024 elections reinforces the importance of examining media representation. Mare (2024) found that South African mainstream media coverage of the election placed considerable emphasis on major political parties and political personalities. The study also raised questions about the extent to which citizens and policy concerns received attention in election coverage.

Bird and Smith (2024) similarly examined the performance of South African media during the 2024 elections and considered issues including fairness, equitable coverage, diversity and the visibility of political parties. Their work provides an important contemporary context for examining the role of the media during the 2024 election.

These studies are relevant because they demonstrate that election coverage should not be examined solely in terms of the amount of coverage received by political actors. It is also important to examine how political actors are represented and what meanings are attached to their leadership.

The present study therefore does not assume that the *Sunday Times* or *Mail & Guardian* were biased either in favour of or against Ramaphosa or Zuma. Instead, the study examines the newspaper texts to identify the culturally constructed frames through which the leadership qualities of the two political leaders were represented.

1.12 Rationale for Comparing Ramaphosa and Zuma

The comparison of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma is significant because the two leaders have overlapping but substantially different political histories and leadership identities. Both emerged from the ANC and the anti-apartheid struggle, but their subsequent political trajectories developed in different directions.

Ramaphosa became a prominent trade unionist, constitutional negotiator, businessman, ANC leader and President of South Africa. Zuma became an ANC activist, MK operative, political negotiator, provincial politician, ANC leader and President of South Africa before later becoming associated with the MK Party. Their different political histories provide a range of culturally and politically available meanings through which their leadership may be represented.

Ramaphosa may, for example, be represented through discourses concerning negotiation, constitutionalism, institutional reform, economic leadership, renewal and incumbency. Zuma may be represented through discourses concerning liberation credentials, political resilience, traditional identity, populism, accountability and political return. These categories are not predetermined findings of the present study. Rather, they provide contextual possibilities that the research will investigate through the analysis of newspaper texts.

Previous research demonstrates the relevance of such an approach. Nkomo (2017) examined representations of Zuma's political leadership in the *Sunday Times*, *Mail & Guardian* and other South African newspapers, identifying themes relating to the personalisation of leadership and expectations of political leadership. Other research has also demonstrated the relevance of culturally constituted frames to South African political reporting.

The present study extends this scholarship by comparing the media representation of Ramaphosa and Zuma in the context of the 2024 general elections. It focuses specifically on the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* and examines three periods of the electoral cycle: the period before the election, the election period and the period following the election.

The study is therefore concerned not simply with whether either leader was portrayed positively or negatively. Instead, it examines the culturally constructed frames used in their representation, the leadership qualities associated with those frames, differences between the two newspapers, and changes in representation across the three periods of the 2024 electoral cycle.

This background establishes the historical, political and media context for the study and provides the basis for examining the relationship between culturally constructed frames and the media representation of political leadership in South Africa.

1.13 Chapter Outline

The study is organised into the following chapters:

1.13.1 Chapter One: Introduction and Background to the Study

This chapter introduces the study and provides the background to the research on the media representation of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma's leadership qualities in the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* during the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 South African general elections. The chapter presents the research problem, purpose of the study, research questions, research objectives and significance of the study. It also provides an overview of the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the study and introduces the key concepts relevant to the research.

1.13.2 Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter reviews existing literature on media representation, political communication, media framing, political leadership and culturally constructed frames. It examines previous studies on the representation of political leaders in South African media and identifies the gap that the present study seeks to address. The chapter also discusses the theoretical framework guiding the study, with particular attention to Van Gorp's constructionist approach to framing and Foucault's concepts of knowledge, power and discourse.

1.13 .3 Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This chapter explains the methodological approach adopted for the study. It discusses research design, research approach, study population and sample, data collection procedures, data analysis methods and ethical considerations. It also explains the use of the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* as the selected media sources and describes how the pre-election, election and post-election periods were determined.

1.13.4 Chapter Four: Data Presentation and Analysis

This chapter presents and analyses the data collected from the selected *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* articles. The analysis focuses on the frames, themes and representations used in reporting on Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma and examines how their leadership qualities were constructed across the three periods of the 2024 electoral cycle.

1.13.5 Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings

This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the research questions, objectives, existing literature

and theoretical framework. It compares the representations of Ramaphosa and Zuma and considers the role of culturally constructed frames in shaping the meanings attached to their leadership qualities.

1.13.6 Chapter Six: Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter presents the overall conclusions of the study based on the findings and discussion. It highlights the study's contribution to knowledge, discusses its limitations and provides recommendations for future research and, where appropriate, for media practice and political communication.

1.13.7 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the study by providing the background and context for examining the media representation of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma's leadership qualities in the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* during the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 South African general elections. It established the research problem and identified the need to examine how culturally constructed frames are used in the representation of political leadership.

The chapter also presented the purpose of the study, research questions, research objectives and significance of the research. In addition, it provided an overview of the theoretical and conceptual foundations that inform the study and introduced the key concepts relevant to understanding media representation, framing and political leadership.

The chapter has therefore established the foundation for the study and clarified the focus of the research. The following chapter reviews the relevant literature and develops the theoretical framework through which the media representations of Ramaphosa and Zuma will be examined.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the study of the media representation of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma's leadership qualities in the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* during the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 South African general elections. The chapter examines literature on media representation, political leadership, leadership qualities and the relationship between political leadership and news media.

The chapter begins with a discussion of media representation and considers how political leaders are represented through news discourse. It then examines political leadership and distinguishes between leadership qualities and leadership styles. Particular attention is given to the qualities through which political leaders are evaluated in media coverage and how these qualities can be identified in news texts. The chapter subsequently reviews literature on political leadership in the media and the framing of political leaders, with particular attention to newspaper coverage.

The literature review then considers research on media framing of political leaders in South Africa and internationally. This includes studies examining the representation of Jacob Zuma, Cyril Ramaphosa and other political leaders. The chapter concludes by considering news values and discursive practices as factors that may influence which aspects of political leadership receive media attention.

2.2 Media Representation

Media representation is central to understanding how political leaders are constructed in news discourse. Representation does not simply involve reproducing an event or person as they exist in reality; rather, it involves the production and communication of meaning through language, images and other symbolic forms (Hall, 1997). In political communication, this means that the media do not merely report on political leaders but participate in constructing particular understandings of who those leaders are and what they represent.

Murdock (1999) distinguishes between representation as a process through which something is described or portrayed and representation as the act of speaking or acting on behalf of another person or group. The present study is concerned primarily with the first meaning because it examines how the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* construct representations of Ramaphosa and Zuma and their leadership qualities.

Political representation in the media is particularly important during elections because citizens often encounter political leaders through mediated communication rather than through direct interaction. News reports, political interviews, photographs, headlines and commentary provide audiences with information through which political figures can be interpreted (Henderson, 2017). Media representations can therefore contribute to the construction of political identities and influence how political leaders are understood within the public sphere.

Fursich (2019) argues that media representations are embedded within wider systems of meaning that contribute to the construction of norms and common understandings about people, institutions and social issues. From this perspective, representations of political leaders are not isolated descriptions but are connected to broader social and cultural meanings.

This is particularly relevant to the present study because Ramaphosa and Zuma have accumulated different political identities over time. Their histories, political affiliations, controversies and public performances provide journalists with a range of meanings through which their leadership can be represented. The research therefore examines how these meanings are selected and organised within newspaper coverage rather than assuming that the representations are neutral reflections of the leaders themselves.

Nkomo (2016) similarly argues that news reporting on political leadership is influenced by the political context in which journalists and news organisations operate. Political leaders are represented through their relationships with political institutions, opponents, colleagues and members of society. This suggests that representations of political leadership need to be understood in relation to the wider political environment.

2.3 Political Leadership

Political leadership is a contested concept because its meaning varies according to institutional, historical, social and cultural contexts. Paige (1977) conceptualises political leadership in terms of the behaviour of persons in political authority and their interactions with competitors and other members of society. This approach extends the study of leadership beyond presidents and other

senior political office holders to include political party leaders, legislators and other actors within political institutions.

Masciulli, Molchanov and Knight (2013) similarly argue that political leadership is a complex phenomenon involving processes of goal setting, motivation and influence. Political leadership is therefore not limited to occupying a position of formal authority. It also involves the ability to influence political actors, establish goals, make decisions and mobilise support.

Political leadership is consequently different from simply holding political office. A president may possess formal authority, but leadership also concerns how that authority is exercised and perceived. Political leaders can be evaluated in relation to their ability to make decisions, communicate political goals, respond to citizens, manage political relationships, negotiate competing interests and exercise authority (Paige, 1977; Masciulli et al., 2013).

This distinction is important for the present study because the research does not seek to determine whether Ramaphosa or Zuma is objectively a "good" or "bad" leader. Rather, it investigates how particular leadership qualities are represented in newspaper coverage.

2.4 Leadership Qualities and Leadership Styles

A central concern of this study is the representation of leadership qualities. Leadership qualities refer to characteristics, competencies, behaviours and attributes associated with the way leadership is exercised or evaluated. These may include competence, decisiveness, integrity, experience, communication ability, accountability, responsiveness, collaboration, strength, charisma and the ability to manage political challenges.

Leadership qualities should be distinguished from leadership styles. A leadership style refers to a relatively recognisable pattern or approach to exercising leadership, such as democratic, transformational, transactional, participative, charismatic or autocratic leadership. A leadership quality, by contrast, refers to a particular attribute or characteristic through which leadership may be evaluated.

Demirtas and Mustafa (2020) identify a broad range of leadership approaches, including ethical, transformational, democratic, transactional, participative, servant, autocratic, charismatic and authentic leadership. Their work demonstrates the difficulty of reducing leadership to a single model because different leadership approaches emphasise different characteristics.

However, the present study does not treat all of these leadership styles as predetermined categories that must appear in the newspaper coverage. Instead, they provide a conceptual background for understanding how leadership may be described.

More directly relevant to this study is research examining how leadership qualities are represented in news coverage. Aaldering and Vliegenthart (2016) developed a framework for measuring political leadership images in newspaper coverage and demonstrated that leadership can be operationalised through identifiable characteristics in media texts. Their research identified multiple leadership images, including political craftsmanship, consistency, integrity, responsiveness and other character-related dimensions.

Aaldering, van der Meer and van der Brug (2018) subsequently examined how newspapers represented party leaders through positive and negative leadership images. Their study found that mediated representations of leadership could affect support for political parties, particularly during election campaigns. Importantly for the present study, their approach demonstrates that leadership representation can be studied systematically rather than being treated as an abstract concept.

Wagner et al. (2021) provide a particularly relevant contribution because they directly examined representations of political leadership qualities in news coverage of government leaders in Australia and Canada. Their study found that political leaders were evaluated in relation to qualities such as competence, intelligence, level-headedness, experience and strength, while collaboration and other interpersonal qualities also featured in evaluations of effective leadership.

This literature is particularly useful for the present study because it demonstrates how leadership qualities can be identified through language used in news texts. For example, a leader described as "experienced", "knowledgeable" or "competent" may be associated with a competence or experience frame. A leader described as "decisive", "strong" or "firm" may be represented through a decisiveness or strength frame. Similarly, descriptions of a leader as "consultative", "inclusive", "consensus-seeking" or willing to negotiate may indicate a participative or collaborative leadership representation.

Accordingly, the present study treats leadership qualities as discursively identifiable attributes rather than objectively established characteristics. The analysis will examine how journalists, political actors and quoted sources describe the two leaders and how these descriptions are organised into broader frames.

This distinction is important because a media text may represent a leader as "strong" without establishing whether the leader is objectively strong. Similarly, describing a leader as "corrupt", "decisive", "democratic", "weak", "experienced" or "transformational" constitutes a representation that can be analysed as part of the media discourse.

2.5 Political Leadership in the Media

The relationship between political leadership and the media has received considerable scholarly attention. Political leaders rely on media visibility to communicate with citizens, while news organisations use political leaders as sources of information and as subjects of political reporting (Bittner, 2011).

Political communication has increasingly become personalised, with news coverage often focusing on individual political leaders rather than exclusively on political parties or policy programmes. McAllister (2007) identifies personalisation as an important characteristic of contemporary political communication, while Bittner (2011) argues that party leaders can become important electoral forces because voters evaluate political parties partly through their perceptions of individual leaders.

Personalisation is particularly important during elections because political leaders become central figures through whom parties and political programmes are communicated. However, personalisation does not necessarily mean that political coverage is concerned only with personalities. Leaders may also become symbolic representatives of particular policies, political values, historical traditions and political factions.

Aaldering et al. (2018) provide empirical evidence that the media representation of leadership characteristics can have electoral consequences. Their study of Dutch newspapers found that positive mediated leadership images were associated with increased support for leaders' parties, demonstrating the relevance of leadership representations to electoral politics.

More recent research also demonstrates that political personalisation can occur through different forms of media. Egea-Barquero and Zamora-Medina (2023), for example, examined the visual framing of political leadership on Instagram and demonstrated how personalisation can be used to construct political leadership through visual communication.

Although the present study focuses on newspapers rather than social media, these studies demonstrate that political leadership is increasingly communicated through representations of individual political actors. This provides a basis for examining how Ramaphosa and Zuma were represented as political leaders during the 2024 electoral cycle.

2.6 Politics and News Media

The relationship between news media and politics is particularly important during election periods. News organisations provide citizens with information about political parties, candidates, political

issues and electoral events. At the same time, the media select which political events receive attention and determine how those events are presented.

Research on political communication has therefore examined the role of news media in election campaigns, including the representation of political candidates, political issues and campaign strategies (Dunaway & Graber, 2022; Gaber & Fisher, 2022).

In the South African context, this relationship is particularly important because the news media operate within a democratic system in which citizens depend on political information to participate in elections. Media Monitoring Africa's assessment of the 2024 elections found that most media organisations made conscious efforts to provide equitable coverage of political parties, although smaller and newer parties experienced challenges in gaining comparable visibility. The review also found that the dominance of major male political figures contributed to the low visibility of women as sources (Bird & Smith, 2024).

Mare (2024) similarly examines South African media coverage of the 2024 elections and provides contemporary evidence concerning how political parties, candidates and electoral issues were represented during the election period.

These studies are important to the present research because they establish the broader media environment in which representations of Ramaphosa and Zuma occurred. However, they do not specifically examine the leadership qualities attributed to these two political figures in the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian*. This provides an important point of departure for the present study.

2.7 News Framing

News framing is an important concept for understanding how political leadership is represented. Framing research examines how media select, emphasise and organise aspects of reality in ways that promote particular interpretations of events and actors.

Entman (1993) provides one of the most influential conceptualisations of framing, arguing that framing involves selecting aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient in communication. Frames can therefore contribute to the definition of problems, identification of causes, moral evaluation and suggestions concerning appropriate responses.

Although Goffman (1974), Tuchman (1978) and McCombs (2014) provide important foundations for understanding how media construct social reality, their detailed theoretical contributions are more appropriately addressed in the theoretical framework chapter. In this literature review, the focus is

instead placed on empirical studies that demonstrate how framing has been applied to political leadership.

Van Gorp (2007) advances a constructionist approach to framing by emphasising the cultural context within which frames acquire meaning. This is particularly relevant to the present research because the study is concerned with culturally constructed frames. Political leaders are not represented in isolation from society; their representations can draw on existing cultural understandings, political histories and social expectations.

Framing therefore provides a useful connection between media representation and leadership qualities. A news report may not explicitly state that a leader possesses a particular leadership style, but its selection of events, quotations, descriptions and evaluations can construct a particular leadership image.

For example, repeated reporting about a leader's ability to negotiate political agreements may construct an image of a collaborative or pragmatic leader. Repeated emphasis on unilateral decision-making may construct an image of an authoritative or decisive leader. Similarly, repeated attention to corruption allegations, accountability and ethical controversies may construct a leadership representation centred on integrity or its absence.

This is the point at which framing becomes particularly useful to the present study: leadership qualities are not simply counted as isolated adjectives but are interpreted through recurring patterns of meaning within news coverage.

2.8 Framing of Political Leadership in Newspapers

Research has increasingly examined how newspapers construct political leadership through recurring images, characteristics and evaluations. Aaldering and Vliegenthart (2016) demonstrate that political leadership images can be systematically identified in large volumes of newspaper coverage. Their study developed a measurement framework for examining leadership images and demonstrated that newspapers regularly evaluate political leaders through identifiable characteristics.

Aaldering et al. (2018) subsequently demonstrated that these mediated leadership images can have implications for electoral support. Their findings suggest that positive representations of leadership can increase support for a leader's party, while negative representations can reduce support, particularly outside the campaign period.

Wagner et al. (2021) provide further evidence that newspaper coverage evaluates political leaders through specific leadership qualities. Their analysis found that competence, intelligence and level-headedness were important criteria through which political leaders were evaluated, while experience

and strength were also emphasised. Collaboration was additionally identified as an important leadership quality.

These findings are directly relevant to the present study because they demonstrate that leadership qualities can be identified from news discourse without assuming that the media explicitly use formal leadership terminology.

Consequently, this study will examine both explicit and implicit representations of leadership. Explicit representations may include direct descriptions such as "decisive", "experienced", "corrupt", "democratic", "strong" or "competent". Implicit representations may be constructed through the selection of events, sources, quotations and descriptions. For example, reporting that repeatedly presents a leader negotiating with political opponents may construct an image of collaboration even when the word "collaborative" is not used.

2.9 Framing of Political Leaders in South Africa

South African research provides important evidence of how political leaders have been represented through news framing. Muringa and McCracken (2022), for example, examined how Independent Online (IOL) and News24 framed Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma during the ANC's 54th National Conference. Their study analysed 100 online news articles and found that the media employed culturally constituted frames in representations of her political and leadership qualities. The study is particularly relevant because it demonstrates how political leadership can be analysed through culturally constructed frames within South African media.

The study by Muringa and McCracken (2022) provides a useful methodological and conceptual precedent for the present research. However, its focus was Dlamini-Zuma's leadership contest during the ANC's 54th National Conference rather than the 2024 national elections. It also focused on IOL and News24 rather than the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian*. The present study therefore extends this body of research by examining two different South African newspapers and comparing representations of Ramaphosa and Zuma across three periods surrounding the 2024 general elections. Previous South African research has also examined the representation of Zuma in the media. Masemola (2017), for example, investigated the representation of Jacob Zuma in *Sunday Times* political cartoons. The study examined how visual representations constructed particular understandings of Zuma's leadership and identified representations associated with incompetence, selfishness and a lack of authoritative leadership. Although the study focused on satirical cartoons

rather than conventional news articles, it demonstrates that representations of Zuma's leadership have previously been constructed through media discourse.

Research on South African political leadership also demonstrates the importance of considering the relationship between political context and leadership representation. Studies of the transition between Mandela and Mbeki, for example, show how media representations of political leaders can differ according to the political expectations and social meanings attached to individual leaders.

These studies demonstrate that media representations of South African political leaders cannot be separated from wider political and cultural contexts. However, there remains limited research comparing the leadership representations of Ramaphosa and Zuma in the same media outlets and within the same electoral period.

2.10 Media Representation of Ramaphosa and Zuma

The political trajectories of Ramaphosa and Zuma provide an important basis for comparative analysis. Both emerged from the ANC and the anti-apartheid struggle, but their subsequent political careers and public representations have developed differently.

Ramaphosa has frequently been associated with political negotiation, constitutionalism, economic leadership and institutional renewal, while representations of Zuma have often focused on political resilience, liberation credentials, populist appeal, controversy, accountability and political survival. These descriptions should not be treated as objective characteristics of the two leaders. Rather, they represent the range of political meanings through which their leadership has been discussed.

Recent scholarship examining South African political media provides further evidence that Ramaphosa's leadership has been associated with particular political and economic narratives. A recent study of South African presidential election discourse, for example, found that media coverage constructed Ramaphosa through narratives of economic stability and pragmatic leadership while contrasting these representations with alternative political agendas.

This is important for the present research because it demonstrates how leadership qualities may be embedded within broader political narratives. A description of Ramaphosa as a "pragmatic" leader may simultaneously communicate an evaluation of his competence, political moderation and economic approach. Similarly, descriptions of Zuma may connect his leadership qualities to broader narratives concerning liberation politics, populism, accountability or political legitimacy.

The present study therefore examines leadership qualities within their discursive context rather than treating individual words as isolated indicators.

2.10 Leadership Qualities as Represented Through Media Frames

The literature reviewed above suggests that leadership qualities can be examined through recurring patterns of representation. This provides an important basis for answering the question raised by the present study: How can leadership qualities be distinguished within media texts?

The first dimension is competence, which refers to representations of a leader's ability, knowledge, experience and capacity to perform political responsibilities. References to policy expertise, governing experience, problem-solving ability and administrative effectiveness may therefore constitute representations of competence (Aaldering & Vliegenthart, 2016; Wagner et al., 2021).

The second dimension is decisiveness and strength. Media descriptions of a leader as firm, strong, decisive or capable of making difficult decisions can contribute to a representation of authoritative leadership. Conversely, references to indecision, weakness or inability to act can construct the opposite representation (Wagner et al., 2021).

The third dimension is integrity and accountability. References to honesty, corruption, ethical conduct, transparency and responsibility may construct representations of a leader's integrity. Importantly, the presence of allegations in a news report does not establish that a leader lacks integrity. The study must therefore distinguish between the media representation of an allegation and the establishment of wrongdoing.

The fourth dimension is democratic and participatory leadership. Representations of consultation, inclusion, consensus-building, negotiation and responsiveness to citizens may construct an image of democratic or participative leadership. Wagner et al. (2021) found that collaboration is an important criterion through which political leadership is evaluated.

The fifth dimension is transformational or visionary leadership. References to political renewal, reform, transformation, long-term vision and the ability to mobilise citizens around a future political project may contribute to representations of transformational leadership.

The sixth dimension is charisma and personal appeal. References to popularity, public connection, emotional appeal, confidence and the ability to mobilise supporters may construct charismatic leadership. However, personal visibility or popularity should not automatically be interpreted as effective leadership. Aaldering and Vliegenthart (2016) demonstrate the importance of distinguishing between the visibility of a political leader and the qualities attributed to that leader.

These dimensions provide a useful analytical basis for the present study. They do not constitute fixed categories that predetermine the findings. Rather, they provide sensitising concepts that can assist in identifying how leadership is represented in the newspaper texts.

2.11 South African Election Media and the 2024 Context

The 2024 South African elections provide an especially important context for studying political leadership representation because the election substantially changed the country's political environment.

Mare (2024) examined South African media coverage of the 2024 elections and assessed the extent to which news media provided coverage of political parties, independent candidates and electoral institutions. Bird and Smith (2024) similarly assessed media performance during the election period and found that most media organisations made efforts towards equitable coverage, although smaller parties and new political formations faced difficulties in securing comparable visibility.

The 2024 election is particularly relevant to this study because Ramaphosa entered the election as incumbent President and ANC leader, while Zuma returned to electoral politics through the MK Party. The contrasting political positions of the two leaders created a distinctive environment for media representations of leadership.

However, existing studies of the 2024 elections have largely focused on media performance, equity, party visibility and broader election coverage rather than systematically comparing the leadership qualities attributed to Ramaphosa and Zuma. The present research addresses this gap by examining the leadership representations constructed by two prominent South African newspapers across the pre-election, election and post-election periods.

2.12 News Values and the Selection of Leadership Representations

News values are relevant to this study because they help explain why certain political events and aspects of leadership receive media attention. News values refer to the criteria journalists and news organisations use in determining what becomes newsworthy (Caple & Bednarek, 2016; Harcup & O'Neill, 2017).

Galtung and Ruge (1965) identified factors such as frequency, proximity, negativity, conflict and unexpectedness as influences on news selection. More recent work by Harcup and O'Neill (2017) demonstrates that news values have developed in response to changes in contemporary journalism.

For the present study, news values are relevant because political conflict, controversy, prominence and unexpected events may increase the likelihood that particular aspects of Ramaphosa's and

Zuma's leadership receive attention. For example, political disputes, election results, legal developments or leadership controversies may generate greater coverage than routine political activities.

However, news values should not be treated as a primary theoretical framework for this research. They provide contextual insight into why certain events become newsworthy, while framing analysis provides the principal basis for examining how those events and leaders are represented.

This distinction is important because the study is concerned not simply with which events were reported but with how the reporting constructed meanings around Ramaphosa and Zuma's leadership qualities.

2.13 Synthesis of the Literature and Research Gap

The literature reviewed demonstrates that media representation plays an important role in the construction of political leadership. Existing research shows that newspapers evaluate political leaders through recurring leadership images and characteristics, including competence, experience, strength, integrity, collaboration and other personal and political qualities (Aaldering & Vliegenthart, 2016; Aaldering et al., 2018; Wagner et al., 2021).

Research also demonstrates that political leadership is increasingly personalised within news coverage and that mediated leadership images can become relevant to electoral politics. This is particularly important during election campaigns, when citizens encounter political leaders through highly concentrated forms of political communication.

South African research has examined media framing of political leaders, including Zuma and Ramaphosa, and has demonstrated that culturally constructed frames can influence how political and leadership qualities are represented. Muringa and McCracken's (2022) study of IOL and News24 is particularly relevant because it demonstrates how cultural frames can be used to construct representations of political leadership in the South African context.

However, several gaps remain. First, much of the existing South African research focuses on individual leaders or particular political contests rather than directly comparing Ramaphosa and Zuma. Second, existing research does not sufficiently examine how the leadership qualities of these two leaders were represented in the same newspaper publications during the same electoral period. Third, research on the 2024 elections has examined media performance and electoral coverage but has not sufficiently addressed the comparative construction of leadership qualities in the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian*.

Fourth, although previous studies refer to political and leadership framing, there is a need for greater attention to how leadership qualities are operationalised within media texts. The literature demonstrates that qualities such as competence, strength, experience, collaboration and integrity can be identified through recurring descriptions and evaluations of political leaders (Wagner et al., 2021; Aaldering & Vliegenthart, 2016). However, there remains scope to examine how these qualities are culturally constructed and framed within South African political journalism.

The present study addresses these gaps by comparatively examining the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* and analysing how they represented the leadership qualities of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma during the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 general elections. The study therefore connects three areas of scholarship: media representation, political leadership and framing.

2.14 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed literature relevant to the study of media representation and political leadership, with particular attention to the representation of leadership qualities in news coverage. The review established that political leadership is a multidimensional concept and that leadership qualities can be represented through characteristics such as competence, experience, decisiveness, integrity, accountability, collaboration, responsiveness and charisma.

The literature also demonstrated that political leaders are not represented in isolation from their political and cultural contexts. News media select and organise information in ways that can construct particular leadership images, while culturally available meanings can influence how political actors are understood.

The review of South African and international studies further demonstrated that leadership images can be systematically identified in media texts and that such representations can be particularly significant during election campaigns. Recent research on the 2024 South African elections provides important context concerning media coverage and fairness, but a specific comparative examination of the leadership qualities attributed to Ramaphosa and Zuma in the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* remains limited.

The chapter therefore identified the gap that the present study seeks to address: the need to examine how culturally constructed media frames are used to represent the leadership qualities of Ramaphosa and Zuma across the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 South African general elections.

The following chapter presents the theoretical framework that guides the study, focusing specifically on framing theory and the role of culture, discourse, knowledge and power in the construction of media representations.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework underpinning the study of the media representation of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma's leadership qualities in the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* during the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 South African general elections. The theoretical framework provides the conceptual basis through which the study interprets how political leadership is represented in news discourse. The study draws primarily on media representation theory and framing theory, with particular emphasis on Van Gorp's (2007) constructionist approach to framing. Foucault's (1980) concepts of knowledge, power and discourse are also incorporated as a complementary perspective for understanding how representations of political leaders may be connected to wider political and cultural discourses.

The selection of these theoretical perspectives is directly informed by research questions. The study seeks to identify the culturally constructed frames used to represent the political and leadership qualities of Ramaphosa and Zuma, compare how their leadership qualities are represented in the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian*, and examine whether these representations change across the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 general elections. The theoretical framework therefore does not seek to determine whether either politician objectively possesses particular leadership qualities. Instead, it provides a basis for examining how particular qualities are constructed, selected, emphasised and given meaning within news discourse.

3.2 Theoretical Orientation of the Study

The study adopts a constructionist understanding of media representation and framing. From this perspective, media texts are not understood as transparent or entirely neutral reflections of political reality. Rather, meaning is produced through language, selection, emphasis and the use of culturally available understandings (Hall, 1997; Van Gorp, 2007). This perspective is particularly appropriate for the present study because political leadership can be represented through both explicit descriptions and implicit associations. A newspaper may describe a political leader as competent, decisive, democratic, authoritarian, experienced, corrupt or collaborative, but these meanings can also be constructed through the selection of events, quotations, sources and political contexts without the use of these exact terms.

The theoretical orientation therefore enables the study to move beyond simply asking what the newspapers reported about Ramaphosa and Zuma. Instead, it allows the researcher to examine how particular meanings about their leadership were constructed through journalistic discourse. This is important because the same political event may be interpreted differently depending on the aspects of the event that are selected and emphasised. The theoretical framework consequently provides the basis for examining not only the content of the news reports but also the meanings produced through their representation and framing.

3.3 Media Representation Theory

Media representation provides one of the principal theoretical lenses for this study. Representation concerns the production and communication of meaning through language, images and other symbolic systems (Hall, 1997). Hall (1997) argues that representation is central to the production of meaning because individuals and social groups understand the world partly through systems of representation. In the context of political communication, representation is therefore important because citizens frequently encounter political leaders through mediated communication rather than through direct interaction.

The media do not simply reproduce political leaders as they exist independently of media discourse. Journalists make choices about which political events to report, which statements to include, which sources to quote and which characteristics of political actors to emphasise. These choices contribute to the construction of particular representations of political figures. This does not necessarily mean that media representations are false. Rather, it means that representations constitute particular constructions of political reality and provide audiences with particular ways of understanding political actors (Hall, 1997).

This perspective is directly relevant to the present study because Ramaphosa and Zuma have developed complex political identities over several decades. Their histories, political affiliations, leadership positions, controversies and public performances provide journalists with a range of meanings through which their leadership can be represented. The study therefore does not assume that Ramaphosa is inherently a competent leader or that Zuma is inherently a charismatic or controversial leader. Instead, it examines how such qualities are represented in the selected newspaper texts.

Representation theory is particularly relevant to the second research question, which asks how the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* represent the leadership qualities of Ramaphosa and Zuma and what similarities and differences emerge between the two newspapers. The theory allows the study to

examine how meanings associated with leadership are constructed through descriptions of political actions, decisions, relationships and controversies. For example, repeated references to Ramaphosa's negotiations with political parties may contribute to a representation of him as pragmatic or collaborative, while repeated references to Zuma's political resilience or ability to attract supporters may contribute to a representation of him as politically influential or charismatic. These representations are therefore examined as constructions within media discourse rather than as objective assessments of the two leaders.

3.4 Framing Theory

Framing theory constitutes the primary theoretical framework for this study because it provides a means of understanding how news organisations select and emphasise particular aspects of political reality. Entman (1993) argues that framing involves selecting aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient within a communicating text. Through this process, frames can influence how problems are defined, causes are interpreted, moral evaluations are made and possible responses are understood.

Framing is particularly relevant to this study because the research is not concerned simply with whether Ramaphosa or Zuma received positive or negative coverage. Instead, it seeks to identify the interpretive patterns through which their leadership qualities were constructed. A particular political event can therefore be framed in different ways, resulting in different interpretations of the same leader. For example, Ramaphosa's negotiations with other political parties could be framed as evidence of democratic, collaborative and pragmatic leadership, while the same negotiations could alternatively be presented as evidence of political compromise or weakness. Similarly, Zuma's continued political influence could be framed as evidence of political resilience and popular support or alternatively as evidence of populism and resistance to political accountability.

The importance of framing to the present research is therefore that it connects media selection with political meaning. The study examines which aspects of Ramaphosa's and Zuma's political conduct were emphasised, how those aspects were connected to particular leadership qualities and how these meanings were organised within broader interpretations of political leadership. Framing theory consequently provides the principal conceptual basis for identifying and comparing the frames used by the two newspapers.

3.5 Van Gorp's Constructionist Approach to Framing

Although Entman's (1993) conceptualisation provides an important foundation for understanding framing, this study gives particular attention to Van Gorp's (2007) constructionist approach because it places culture at the centre of the framing process. Van Gorp (2007) argues that frames are connected to culturally available meanings and that media frames operate within broader cultural contexts. From this perspective, frames are not created entirely by journalists in isolation but draw upon existing cultural understandings through which events and political actors become meaningful.

This approach is particularly relevant because culturally constructed frames are central to the research problem. The political identities of Ramaphosa and Zuma are embedded within South Africa's political history, including the liberation struggle, the ANC, the transition to democracy, corruption and accountability debates, economic inequality and contemporary party politics. These historical and political contexts provide culturally available meanings that may influence how their leadership is represented in news discourse.

For example, concepts such as "liberation credentials", "renewal", "corruption", "accountability", "strong leadership", "economic transformation", "political resilience" and "democratic leadership" carry particular meanings within South African political discourse. Van Gorp's (2007) constructionist approach allows the researcher to examine how such meanings become incorporated into the representation of political leaders.

This theoretical perspective is directly connected to the first research question, which asks what culturally constructed frames are used by the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* to represent the political and leadership qualities of Ramaphosa and Zuma during the 2024 general elections. The study therefore does not simply classify articles as positive or negative. Instead, it seeks to identify recurring frame packages and the cultural meanings associated with them. These frames will be derived from patterns emerging from the newspaper texts rather than imposed upon the data before analysis.

3.6 Framing and the Representation of Leadership Qualities

The relationship between framing and leadership qualities is central to the theoretical framework because the study specifically examines how leadership qualities are represented in news discourse. Leadership qualities refer to attributes, characteristics, competencies and behaviours through which political leadership may be evaluated. These can include competence, experience, decisiveness, integrity, accountability, responsiveness, collaboration, strength and political communication (Aaldering and Vliegenthart, 2016; Wagner et al., 2021).

Research on mediated political leadership demonstrates that leadership qualities can be identified systematically within news coverage. Aaldering and Vliegenthart (2016) developed an approach for measuring political leadership images in newspaper coverage and demonstrated that leadership representations can be examined through recurring characteristics attributed to political leaders. Similarly, Wagner et al. (2021) found that news coverage of political leaders evaluated qualities including competence, intelligence, level-headedness, experience, strength and collaboration. These studies are particularly relevant because they demonstrate that leadership qualities do not have to be expressed through formal leadership terminology in order to be identified in media texts.

For the present study, leadership qualities will therefore be understood as discursively constructed attributes rather than objectively established characteristics. For example, a newspaper article that describes Ramaphosa as an "experienced negotiator" may construct a representation of experience and collaboration. Similarly, an article describing Zuma as capable of maintaining political support despite political controversy may construct a representation of political resilience. Conversely, descriptions of indecision, failure, controversy or inability to act may contribute to negative representations of competence or decisiveness.

The context in which these descriptions occur is important. A reference to a leader as "strong", for example, may be positive if the article associates strength with decisive leadership, but negative if strength is associated with authoritarianism or unwillingness to compromise. Framing theory therefore enables the study to examine the meaning attached to leadership qualities rather than treating individual words as fixed indicators.

3.7 Leadership Qualities and Leadership Styles

A distinction must also be made between leadership qualities and leadership styles. Leadership qualities refer to individual attributes or characteristics associated with leadership, such as competence, integrity, decisiveness, experience and responsiveness. Leadership styles, by contrast, refer to broader approaches through which leadership is exercised, including democratic, participative, transformational, transactional, charismatic and autocratic leadership (Demirtas and Mustafa, 2020).

This distinction is important because a newspaper may represent a particular leadership quality without explicitly identifying a leadership style. For instance, repeated references to consultation, negotiation, inclusion and consensus-building may contribute to a representation of democratic or participative leadership. References to political renewal, reform, long-term vision and transformation

may contribute to a representation of transformational leadership. References to firmness, control and decisive action may contribute to a representation of authoritative leadership.

These categories will not be treated as predetermined findings. Instead, they provide conceptual guidance for identifying recurring patterns within the newspaper texts. The study will examine the language, descriptions, events and sources through which these qualities and styles are constructed. This approach responds directly to the need to establish how democratic, participative or transformational leadership can actually be distinguished within media texts.

3.8 Media Representation and Political Leadership

The relationship between political leadership and the media is particularly important because political leaders rely heavily on mediated communication to communicate political positions, policies and identities to citizens. Political communication has increasingly become personalised, with news coverage often focusing on individual political leaders alongside political parties and policies (McAllister, 2007; Bittner, 2011).

Personalisation means that political leaders can become symbolic representatives of political parties, policies and broader political identities. During elections, this can become particularly pronounced because political competition is often communicated through the personalities, performances and leadership qualities of political figures. Aaldering et al. (2018) found that mediated leadership images can influence electoral support, demonstrating that the ways in which leaders are represented in news coverage can have implications for how political parties are perceived.

This literature is relevant to the present study because Ramaphosa and Zuma entered the 2024 election from markedly different political positions. Ramaphosa was the incumbent President and leader of the ANC, while Zuma was a former President associated with the newly established MK Party. Their contrasting positions provided different political contexts through which their leadership qualities could be represented.

The study therefore examines political leadership not simply as an individual characteristic but as a mediated construction that is produced through interaction between political events, journalistic practices, cultural meanings and political discourse.

3.9 Framing of Political Leadership in News Media

Studies of political leadership demonstrate that news organisations can construct recurring leadership images through patterns of description and evaluation. Aaldering and Vliegenthart (2016) show that political leadership images can be systematically identified within newspaper coverage, while

Aaldering et al. (2018) demonstrate that these mediated leadership images can have implications for electoral support. Wagner et al. (2021) similarly demonstrate that news coverage evaluates political leaders through qualities such as competence, experience, strength, intelligence, level-headedness and collaboration.

These studies provide an important basis for the present research because they demonstrate that leadership qualities can be studied through media texts rather than relying solely on biographical or political assessments of leaders. The present study extends this approach by placing leadership qualities within a culturally constructed framing perspective and applying it to the South African political context.

For example, the repeated presentation of Ramaphosa as a negotiator, reformer or economic manager could contribute to a particular leadership frame, while repeated references to Zuma's liberation history, political resilience, popularity or controversies could contribute to different leadership frames. The purpose of the analysis is therefore to identify patterns rather than to assume that individual descriptions automatically constitute a particular frame.

3.10 Foucault's Concepts of Knowledge, Power and Discourse

Foucault's (1980) concepts of knowledge, power and discourse provide a complementary perspective within the theoretical framework. Foucault understands knowledge and power as interconnected, with discourse contributing to the ways in which societies establish particular forms of knowledge and understand social and political realities.

This perspective is relevant to the study because news discourse can contribute to the production of particular understandings of political leaders. Through selection, repetition, quotation and description, newspapers can contribute to discourses through which political leaders are associated with particular qualities and political meanings. Repeated representations of a leader as corrupt, incompetent or unstable may contribute to a discourse that questions the leader's legitimacy, while repeated representations of competence, reform or constitutionalism may contribute to a discourse that reinforces political legitimacy.

Foucault's perspective therefore provides an additional interpretive lens through which the study can consider the relationship between representation, discourse and political power. It enables the study to consider not only how Ramaphosa and Zuma are represented but also what broader political meanings may be reproduced through those representations (Foucault, 1980).

However, Foucault's concepts will remain complementary rather than the primary framework. Van Gorp's (2007) constructionist framing approach provides the principal theoretical basis for

identifying culturally constructed frames, while Foucault assists in interpreting the relationship between discourse, knowledge and power within those representations.

3.11 Episodic and Thematic Framing

The distinction between episodic and thematic framing, developed by Iyengar (1991), distinguishes between coverage that focuses on individual events or cases and coverage that places events within broader political and social contexts. Episodic framing may focus on a particular political event, statement, controversy or individual action, whereas thematic framing situates an event within broader political, social or institutional issues.

Although this distinction is relevant to political news, it will not constitute a primary theoretical framework for the present study. Its relevance lies in assisting the researcher to determine whether the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* represented Ramaphosa and Zuma primarily through individual political events or through broader narratives concerning their leadership and political careers.

For example, a report focusing exclusively on a particular legal dispute involving Zuma could constitute an episodic representation, while a series of reports connecting that dispute to broader questions of political accountability, constitutionalism and leadership could reflect a more thematic approach. Similarly, an article focusing on a specific statement by Ramaphosa may provide an episodic representation, whereas coverage connecting the statement to broader questions of governance and political renewal may be more thematic.

The episodic/thematic distinction is therefore retained only as a secondary analytical concept because it can assist in understanding the context in which leadership qualities are represented. It does not replace framing theory because the central concern of the study remains the identification of culturally constructed frames.

3.9 Why Agenda-Setting Is Not a Primary Theory

Agenda-setting theory is concerned primarily with the salience of issues and the ability of the media to influence which issues audiences consider important (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; McCombs, 2014). Although agenda-setting is relevant to political communication generally, it does not directly address the principal questions of this study.

The present research is not primarily asking which political issues the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* made most prominent. Rather, it asks how the two newspapers represented Ramaphosa

and Zuma and what culturally constructed frames they used to represent their leadership qualities. These are questions of representation and framing rather than primarily questions of issue salience. Agenda-setting may therefore be acknowledged as part of the wider literature on media effects, but it does not need to function as a central theoretical framework. Removing it from the main framework strengthens the alignment between the theory and the research questions.

3.9 Application of the Theoretical Framework to Research Questions

The theoretical framework is directly connected to the three research questions of the study. The first research question asks: **What culturally constructed frames are used by the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* to represent the political and leadership qualities of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma during the 2024 general elections?** Van Gorp's (2007) constructionist framing approach provides the principal theoretical basis for answering this question because it enables the researcher to examine how culturally available meanings are incorporated into media frames.

The second research question asks: **How do the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* represent the leadership qualities of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma, and what similarities and differences emerge between the two newspapers?** Media representation theory and framing theory provide the theoretical basis for this question. Representation theory assists in examining how meaning is constructed around the two leaders, while framing theory allows the researcher to identify and compare the interpretive patterns through which their leadership qualities are presented (Hall, 1997; Entman, 1993).

The third research question asks: **How do the representations and culturally constructed frames associated with Ramaphosa and Zuma change across the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 general elections?** Framing theory provides the basis for examining changes in representation across time. This allows the researcher to consider whether the leadership qualities associated with each leader remain consistent or change as the political context develops before, during and after the election.

For example, the representation of Ramaphosa before the election may emphasise campaign leadership, economic performance or ANC renewal, while coverage following the election may emphasise coalition-building, governance and political stability. Similarly, Zuma's representation may shift from political campaigning and electoral influence before and during the election to political legitimacy, electoral performance and the future of the MK Party following the election. These possibilities are not treated as predetermined findings; rather, they demonstrate how the theoretical framework can be applied to changes in the empirical data.

3.10 Relationship Between Representation, Framing and Culture

The theoretical framework can therefore be understood as a relationship between representation, framing and culture. Representation explains how meanings about political leaders are constructed and communicated, while framing explains how particular aspects of political reality are selected, emphasised and organised into particular interpretations (Hall, 1997; Entman, 1993). Van Gorp's (2007) constructionist approach extends this understanding by demonstrating that frames draw upon culturally available meanings.

Applied to this study, a political event involving Ramaphosa or Zuma constitutes the starting point. Journalists select particular aspects of the event, sources and quotations, which contribute to a particular representation of the leader. These representations may then form part of a broader frame concerning competence, accountability, democratic leadership, political resilience, transformation or another leadership quality. The frame may draw upon existing cultural and political understandings within South African society.

The same political event can therefore produce different representations depending on how it is framed. This relationship is central to the comparison between the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian*. If the two newspapers report on the same event but select different aspects of the event or use different language and sources, they may construct different leadership representations.

3.10 Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The theoretical framework provides the concepts through which the findings will subsequently be interpreted; it does not describe how the research will be conducted. The original theoretical framework contains discussion that moves into methodological issues, but these should be removed from this chapter.

The research design, selection of newspaper articles, sampling procedures, data collection, coding, thematic analysis, framing analysis, critical discourse analysis and ethical considerations belong in the methodology chapter. The theoretical framework should instead explain why the concepts and theories selected are appropriate for interpreting the data.

This distinction ensures that the study maintains a clear separation between theory, which explains the conceptual lens through which the phenomenon is understood, and methodology, which explains the procedures used to investigate the phenomenon.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter established the theoretical framework for examining the media representation of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma's leadership qualities in the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* during the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 South African general elections. The framework places media representation and framing theory at its centre, with particular emphasis on Van Gorp's (2007) constructionist approach to framing.

Representation theory provides a basis for understanding how meanings about political leaders are constructed through media discourse, while framing theory explains how particular aspects of political events and political actors are selected, emphasised and organised into particular interpretations (Hall, 1997; Entman, 1993). Van Gorp's (2007) constructionist approach is particularly important because it connects media frames to culturally available meanings, thereby providing a theoretical basis for examining the culturally constructed frames associated with Ramaphosa and Zuma.

The framework also establishes that leadership qualities should be treated as discursively constructed attributes rather than objective characteristics. Qualities such as competence, experience, decisiveness, integrity, accountability, collaboration and responsiveness can be identified through recurring patterns of language, descriptions, events and evaluations within news texts (Aaldering and Vliegenthart, 2016; Wagner et al., 2021). Broader leadership styles such as democratic, participative and transformational leadership can similarly be examined through the recurring representations through which these styles are constructed.

Foucault's (1980) concepts of knowledge, power and discourse provide a complementary perspective for considering how these representations may contribute to broader political discourses and understandings of legitimacy and authority. Agenda-setting has been excluded as a primary theoretical framework because the research questions focus on representation and framing rather than primarily on the salience of political issues.

The theoretical framework is therefore directly aligned with the three research questions. It provides the conceptual basis for identifying culturally constructed frames, comparing the representations produced by the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian*, and examining changes in those representations across the pre-election, election and post-election periods. The following chapter explains the methodological approach through which these questions will be investigated.

Chapter Four

Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to investigate the media representation of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma's leadership qualities in the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* during the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 South African general elections. The methodology is designed to answer the three research questions concerning the culturally constructed frames used to represent the two leaders, the similarities and differences in their representation across the two newspapers, and changes in these representations across the three periods.

The chapter discusses the research paradigm, methodological approach, research design, cultural studies approach, case study strategy, unit of analysis, sampling, data collection, data selection and exclusion, data analysis, the use of MAXQDA and ChatGPT, trustworthiness and ethical considerations. Particular attention is given to explaining how each methodological decision was applied to the present study. This is important because qualitative research requires the researcher to demonstrate not only which methods were selected but also how they were implemented and how they contributed to answering the research questions (Deacon, Pickering, Golding and Murdock, 2021). The third edition of *Researching Communications* is particularly relevant to this study because it addresses methodological issues specific to media and communication research, including sampling, analysis of texts, news analysis, comparison and computer-assisted research.

4.1 Research Paradigm: Interpretivism

The study adopts an interpretivist research paradigm because it seeks to understand how meanings are constructed through media discourse rather than to establish a single objective measurement of political leadership. Interpretivism is concerned with understanding how social actors construct and interpret meaning within particular social contexts (Neuman, 2014). In this study, the focus is not on determining whether Ramaphosa or Zuma objectively possesses particular leadership qualities but on examining how those qualities are represented through newspaper discourse.

The interpretivist position is appropriate because the study treats news articles as texts through which meanings about political leaders are constructed. The *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* do not

merely provide information about political events; their reporting involves choices concerning language, sources, quotations, events and emphasis. These choices contribute to the construction of particular meanings about Ramaphosa and Zuma. An interpretivist approach therefore allows the researcher to examine these meanings within their political and cultural context.

The choice of interpretivism is also consistent with the study's constructionist understanding of framing. The research assumes that representations of political leadership are socially situated and that their meanings can only be understood in relation to the political and cultural contexts in which they are produced. The 2024 election provides a particularly important context because Ramaphosa was the incumbent President and ANC leader, while Zuma was a former President associated with the MK Party. Their different political positions created different contexts through which their leadership could be represented.

It is important, however, to distinguish interpretivism from constructivism and social constructivism rather than treating the concepts as interchangeable. Interpretivism refers primarily to the philosophical orientation of the research and its emphasis on understanding meaning and interpretation. Constructivist approaches concern the ways in which knowledge and meaning are produced rather than simply discovered, while social constructionist approaches emphasise the role of social interaction, language, culture and discourse in the production of social realities (Creswell and Poth, 2018). In this study, interpretivism is the overarching research paradigm, while the constructionist understanding of framing informs how media representations are interpreted.

This distinction is important because the study does not attempt to investigate the private experiences or perceptions of journalists or audiences. Instead, it examines published media texts as socially produced cultural artefacts. The focus is therefore on the meanings constructed within the texts and the cultural and political discourses through which those meanings become intelligible.

4.3 Cultural Studies Approach

The study draws on a cultural studies approach because its focus is on the relationship between media, culture, representation and power. Cultural studies approaches examine how cultural texts contribute to the production of meaning and how these meanings are connected to wider social and political relations (Hall, 1997; Turner, 2003).

This approach is particularly appropriate for the study because the research examines culturally constructed frames through which Ramaphosa and Zuma's leadership qualities are represented. Political leadership does not exist independently of cultural meanings. Concepts such as liberation

credentials, accountability, corruption, democratic leadership, political resilience, economic transformation and renewal acquire particular meanings within South Africa's political history.

The cultural studies approach therefore complements the theoretical framework discussed in the previous chapter. It allows the newspaper texts to be examined as cultural products that participate in wider processes of meaning-making. As Deacon et al. (2021) note, media research requires attention not only to media content but also to the contexts and processes through which that content is produced and interpreted.

The approach also supports the study's attention to power. Hall (1997) argues that representation is involved in the production of meaning, while Foucault (1980) demonstrates the relationship between knowledge, discourse and power. In the present study, these perspectives assist in examining how representations of Ramaphosa and Zuma may reproduce or challenge particular understandings of political legitimacy, authority and leadership.

Cultural studies is therefore not being used as a second research paradigm. Rather, it functions as a substantive methodological orientation that complements the interpretivist paradigm and constructionist framing approach.

4.4 Qualitative Research Approach

The study adopts a qualitative research approach because the research questions require an interpretation of language, meaning, representation and framing within newspaper texts. Qualitative research is appropriate when researchers seek to understand meanings, patterns and relationships within textual or social data rather than reduce the phenomenon exclusively to numerical measurement (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

The qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for this study because the research questions ask what culturally constructed frames are used, how leadership qualities are represented, and how these representations change across different periods. These questions require close engagement with the content and context of individual news articles.

The study therefore treats the newspaper articles as qualitative textual data. The analysis focuses on headlines, subheadings, article text, quotations, descriptions of political actors, references to political events and the broader context in which leadership qualities are discussed. Rather than simply counting how frequently words such as "strong", "competent" or "corrupt" appear, the study examines how such terms and descriptions acquire meaning within the article.

Reese (2007) argues that qualitative framing analysis is particularly useful because frames are not always reducible to individual words or easily measurable categories. Framing involves broader

patterns of meaning that can emerge through the organisation of a text and its relationship to cultural and political contexts. This makes a qualitative approach appropriate for the present study.

4.5 Research Design

The study employs a qualitative comparative research design within a bounded case study. The comparative element is important because the research examines two newspapers, the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian*, and compares their representations of two political leaders, Ramaphosa and Zuma, across three defined periods.

Comparative research is appropriate where the purpose is to identify similarities and differences across cases or media sources (Deacon et al., 2021). In this study, the comparison is structured around two dimensions. First, the study compares how the two newspapers represent Ramaphosa and Zuma. Second, it compares representations across the pre-election, election and post-election periods.

The case is bounded geographically, institutionally and temporally. Geographically, the study is situated within South African political journalism. Institutionally, it is limited to the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian*. Temporally, the study examines articles published between 1 January and 31 July 2024. This period was selected to capture political developments before the election, the election itself and immediate post-election developments.

The case study should therefore not be understood as an attempt to generalise statistically to all South African news media. Rather, it provides an in-depth examination of a specific media and political context. The boundaries of the case enable the researcher to examine the relationship between political events and media representations within a defined period.

4.5 Case Study Strategy

The study uses a qualitative case study strategy to examine the representation of political leadership within the specific context of the 2024 South African general elections. While case study research has traditionally been associated with a range of disciplines, the present study uses it specifically as a strategy for examining media texts within their political and cultural context.

The justification for the case study is not simply that the study investigates a "complex phenomenon". Rather, the case is defined by the interaction between the 2024 election, two political leaders and two news organisations. The study therefore examines how representations of Ramaphosa and Zuma developed within a specific electoral context.

The case has clear boundaries: the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* constitute the selected media organisations; Ramaphosa and Zuma constitute the political subjects; and 1 January to 31 July 2024 constitutes the temporal boundary. This bounded design enables the researcher to examine changes in media representation across the three periods rather than treating the election as a single undifferentiated event.

The case study strategy is therefore aligned with the third research question because it permits the researcher to examine how representations changed as the political context developed before, during and after the election.

4.6 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis is the individual online news article published by the *Sunday Times* or *Mail & Guardian* between 1 January and 31 July 2024 that substantially addressed Ramaphosa or Zuma in relation to political leadership, the 2024 elections or political developments directly relevant to their leadership.

The decision to use individual news articles as the unit of analysis is consistent with media research in which published texts are treated as cultural and communicative artefacts (Deacon et al., 2021). Each article was treated as a complete textual unit, while specific passages, headlines, quotations and descriptions within the article were used as evidence during analysis.

The study included straight news reports and journalistic analysis where the article formed part of the publication's editorial news output. Opinion columns and clearly labelled opinion pieces were excluded because they represent explicitly argumentative forms of commentary and therefore differ from the news reporting that forms the focus of this study.

However, the exclusion of opinion pieces does not mean that the study assumes that news reports are completely objective. News reporting itself involves selection, emphasis and interpretation. The exclusion was made to establish a consistent dataset rather than on the assumption that professional journalists are necessarily neutral.

4.7 Data Collection

The data consisted of publicly available online news articles published by the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian*. The articles were collected from the online archives and search functions of the two publications, supplemented by targeted Google searches where necessary to locate articles within the specified period.

The search strategy was developed from research questions and the political events identified as relevant to the 2024 election. The researcher used combinations of the names of the two political leaders and election-related terms rather than relying on broad searches alone. Search terms included combinations such as "Cyril Ramaphosa" and"2024 elections", "Cyril Ramaphosa" and leadership, "Jacob Zuma" and "2024 elections", "Jacob Zuma" and leadership, "Ramaphosa" and ANC, "Zuma" and MK Party, "Ramaphosa" and manifesto, "Zuma" and manifesto, "Zuma" and IEC, "Zuma" and Constitutional Court, "Ramaphosa" and GNU, as well as terms relating to significant electoral developments.

The search strategy was designed to capture articles relevant to the research questions rather than merely articles mentioning the two politicians. An article was therefore considered potentially relevant when the political leader was a substantive subject of the article and the content addressed leadership, political performance, political legitimacy, electoral competition, political decision-making or another issue capable of contributing to the analysis of leadership representation.

This is an important correction to the original methodology. The previous statement that a "thorough and specific search" was conducted did not provide enough information about how articles were identified or excluded. The revised procedure makes the search reproducible by identifying the publications, date range, search terms and substantive inclusion criteria.

4.8 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The study used explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria to establish the final dataset. Articles were included if they were published by either the *Sunday Times* or *Mail & Guardian* between 1 January and 31 July 2024; concerned Cyril Ramaphosa or Jacob Zuma as a substantive political subject; and addressed the 2024 elections, political leadership, political performance, political legitimacy or political developments directly relevant to the representation of their leadership qualities.

Articles were excluded where the leader was mentioned only incidentally and was not a substantive subject of the article. Articles published outside the defined period were excluded, as were duplicate versions of the same report. Clearly labelled opinion columns, opinion pieces, letters and other explicitly editorial commentary were excluded because the study focuses on journalistic news and analysis rather than personal opinion.

Articles were not excluded simply because they appeared favourable or unfavourable towards either leader. The study retains articles irrespective of whether the representation is positive, negative or mixed. The orientation of the representation becomes part of the analysis. This approach prevents the

researcher from determining the findings before analysing the data and is more consistent with the interpretivist and framing-oriented design of the study.

4.9 Sampling

The study used purposive sampling because the research required articles that met specific substantive and temporal criteria. Purposive sampling is appropriate when researchers deliberately select information-rich material that can contribute directly to answering the research questions (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Deacon et al., 2021).

The sample was not intended to represent all South African news coverage statistically. Instead, the objective was to construct a focused corpus of relevant news texts from two selected newspapers. The two newspapers were selected because they are established South African publications with significant histories of political reporting and because comparison between them enables the study to examine differences in media representation.

The sampling period extended from 1 January to 31 July 2024. The pre-election period captures political developments leading up to the election, including party campaigns, manifestos, candidate lists and disputes concerning Zuma's eligibility. The election period captures coverage surrounding 29 May 2024 and the immediate announcement of results. The post-election period captures developments following the election, including the ANC's loss of its parliamentary majority, the formation of the Government of National Unity and the political implications of the election results.

The temporal division was therefore determined by political events rather than an arbitrary division of the seven-month period into equal segments. This is important because the purpose of the three periods is to examine how representations respond to changes in the political context.

4.10 Composition of the Dataset

The study identified 119 potentially relevant articles, comprising 69 articles from the *Mail & Guardian* and 50 from the *Sunday Times*. Following the application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, duplicate removal and screening for substantive relevance, the final corpus consisted of 59 articles.

The final dataset was organised according to newspaper, political leader and electoral period. This organisation enabled both within-case and cross-case comparison. Within-case analysis examined how each newspaper represented each leader, while cross-case analysis compared Ramaphosa and Zuma and the two newspapers.

The distribution of articles across the three periods was recorded during the data management process to ensure that the researcher could identify whether changes in representation corresponded with changes in the volume and composition of the dataset.

4.11 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis in conjunction with qualitative framing analysis and elements of critical discourse analysis. These approaches were not treated as three separate and competing methodologies. Instead, each served a distinct analytical purpose within the overall research design.

Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns across the newspaper texts. Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasise that thematic analysis is a flexible qualitative method for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning within a dataset, but they also stress the importance of clearly specifying the particular approach to thematic analysis being used. The present study therefore adopts a reflexive thematic analysis approach, rather than presenting thematic analysis simply as a general technique for "finding themes".

The analysis followed the broad six-phase process associated with Braun and Clarke's approach: familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, construction of candidate themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the analytical account (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2021). Contemporary literature emphasises that these phases are not necessarily rigidly linear and that the researcher moves recursively between the data, codes, themes and research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2019; Braun and Clarke, 2021).

In the present study, familiarisation involved reading and re-reading the selected articles and recording initial observations about how Ramaphosa and Zuma were described. Initial coding focused on passages relating to leadership qualities, political behaviour, political legitimacy, accountability, competence, experience, decisiveness, collaboration, democratic leadership, transformation, political resilience and other recurring representations. The researcher then examined relationships between these codes and grouped related codes into broader patterns.

The themes were generated through an iterative process combining deductive and inductive attention. The research questions and literature on political leadership provided sensitising concepts, including competence, experience, strength, collaboration and integrity (Aaldering and Vliegenthart, 2016; Wagner et al., 2021). However, the researcher did not assume that these categories would

necessarily constitute the final findings. Additional codes and themes were generated from recurring patterns in the newspaper texts.

This distinction is important. The literature review informed the researcher's initial conceptual sensitivity to leadership qualities, while the empirical texts determined whether and how those qualities appeared in the dataset. The themes therefore emerged from an interaction between the theoretical framework, previous research and close reading of the newspaper articles.

4.12 Framing Analysis

Framing is the central analytical concern of the study, thematic analysis alone was not sufficient. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns of meaning, while framing analysis was used to examine how those patterns were organised into culturally meaningful interpretations of political leadership.

Reese (2007) conceptualises framing as a way of examining organising principles that structure social meaning within communication. This is particularly relevant to the present study because a frame is more than a recurring word or topic. A frame connects different elements of a text and provides an interpretive pattern through which an issue or political actor can be understood.

The framing analysis therefore proceeded by examining how individual codes and themes were connected within the articles. For each potential frame, the researcher considered the problem or issue being presented, the political actor associated with it, the leadership quality implied or explicitly attributed, the language used, the sources quoted, the political context and the broader cultural meaning being invoked.

For example, where articles repeatedly associated Ramaphosa with negotiation, coalition-building, compromise and consultation, the researcher considered whether these elements collectively constructed a frame of collaborative or democratic leadership. Where articles repeatedly associated Zuma with political survival, electoral support and continued influence, the researcher considered whether these elements formed a broader frame of political resilience or populist leadership.

These labels were not assigned solely because a single article contained a particular word. A frame was considered analytically meaningful where several elements of representation were connected across multiple texts or within particularly significant texts and contributed to a coherent interpretation of leadership.

The framing analysis therefore addressed the first research question by identifying the culturally constructed frames used to represent Ramaphosa and Zuma.

4.13 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis was used as a supporting interpretive approach rather than as a second complete methodology. Its purpose was to examine how language within selected articles contributed to the construction of political leadership and how representations could be connected to power, ideology and legitimacy.

Fairclough (1995) conceptualises discourse as a form of social practice and emphasises the relationship between language, ideology and power. Similarly, Wodak and Meyer (2016) demonstrate that critical discourse studies provide a range of approaches for examining how discourse constructs and reproduces social and political meanings, including within written and online texts.

In the present study, CDA was applied to selected articles that were particularly significant to the emerging frames. The researcher examined lexical choices, descriptions of political actors, metaphors, quotations, attribution of responsibility, contrasts between political actors and the construction of legitimacy or illegitimacy.

For example, the analysis considered the difference between describing a political decision as "decisive action" and describing the same type of action as "political stubbornness". Both descriptions refer to political behaviour, but they construct different meanings about leadership. Similarly, describing Zuma as a "former president" foregrounds his political history, while describing him primarily through controversy or legal disputes may construct a different leadership identity.

CDA was therefore used to deepen the interpretation of the frames rather than to replace framing analysis. The relationship between the methods was consequently:

Thematic analysis identified recurring patterns - framing analysis identified organising interpretive frames - critical discourse analysis examined how language, power and ideology operated within significant representations.

This provides a clearer methodological relationship than simply stating that thematic analysis and discourse analysis were both used.

4.14 Coding Procedure

Coding was conducted in several stages. During the first stage, the researcher read each article in full and recorded initial observations. During the second stage, relevant sections of text were coded according to their relationship with the research questions. Initial codes included references to leadership qualities, political performance, political legitimacy, accountability, competence, experience, decisiveness, collaboration, political resilience, transformation and other qualities emerging from the data.

During the third stage, related codes were compared across articles and grouped into broader categories. The researcher then examined whether these categories appeared consistently across the two newspapers, across the two political leaders and across the three electoral periods.

During the fourth stage, candidate themes were reviewed against the original articles to determine whether they accurately represented the data. Articles that appeared to contradict a developing interpretation were retained and considered rather than discarded. This is particularly important because the objective of the study is to analyse media representation rather than confirm a predetermined assumption about either newspaper.

During the final stage, the themes were interpreted in relation to the framing theory and research questions. The researcher considered how individual representations combined to produce broader culturally constructed frames and how those frames differed between Ramaphosa and Zuma, between the two newspapers and across the three electoral periods.

4.15 Use of MAXQDA

MAXQDA was used as a data management and coding tool, rather than as an automated analytical decision-maker. The software was used to organise the corpus, create and manage codes, attach codes to relevant sections of articles, retrieve coded segments and compare coded material across categories.

The use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software does not constitute analysis itself. Rather, it assists the researcher in managing large quantities of textual material and maintaining an auditable record of coding decisions. This distinction is important because the interpretation of frames and themes remained the responsibility of the researcher.

The use of MAXQDA was particularly useful given the size of the dataset and the comparative structure of the research. Codes could be grouped according to newspaper, political leader and electoral period, allowing the researcher to revisit the evidence supporting particular interpretations.

This approach is consistent with the broader use of computers in contemporary media research, where software can assist researchers with organising and retrieving textual data while leaving the interpretive work to the researcher (Deacon et al., 2021).

4.16 Use of ChatGPT

ChatGPT was used only as a supporting research tool during the coding and data-management process. It was not treated as an independent coder, source of findings or substitute for the researcher's interpretation.

The original methodology states that coded segments from MAXQDA were exported to ChatGPT for language analysis, pattern identification, suggestions for categories and identification of synonyms. All suggestions generated by the tool were treated as provisional and were independently reviewed against the original articles by the researcher. No theme, frame or conclusion was accepted solely because it was suggested by ChatGPT.

The researcher retained responsibility for reading the original articles, making coding decisions, evaluating competing interpretations and determining the final themes and frames. The use of ChatGPT therefore did not replace independent analysis. This distinction is essential to demonstrate researcher involvement and methodological independence. It also acknowledges a limitation: generative AI can produce plausible but inaccurate interpretations, flatten contextual differences or introduce categories that are not sufficiently grounded in the source material. Its outputs therefore require verification against the original texts and should never be treated as evidence in themselves.

4.17 Researcher Reflexivity and Independent Analysis

Because the study adopts an interpretivist and constructionist approach, the researcher recognises that qualitative analysis involves interpretation. The researcher therefore maintained responsibility for decisions concerning inclusion, coding, theme development and frame interpretation.

This is particularly important because the researcher is analysing politically sensitive representations of two prominent political leaders. To reduce the risk of allowing personal assumptions to determine the findings, the researcher returned repeatedly to the original articles when developing and reviewing themes. Contradictory or ambiguous evidence was retained rather than excluded simply because it did not fit an emerging interpretation.

The researcher also distinguished between the representation contained within a news article and the researcher's own assessment of the political leader. For example, if an article represented Ramaphosa as "competent", the researcher coded and interpreted that representation but did not treat it as

evidence that Ramaphosa was objectively competent. Similarly, if an article associated Zuma with corruption allegations, the analysis examined how the allegations were represented rather than converting the allegation into an established fact.

This reflexive approach is consistent with qualitative research in which interpretation is understood as part of the research process rather than as a completely neutral procedure (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

4.18 Quality and Trustworthiness

The study sought to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings through transparency, consistency and close engagement with the source material. In qualitative research, credibility depends partly on demonstrating a clear relationship between data, analytical process and conclusions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Credibility was strengthened by reading the selected articles repeatedly, retaining the original texts throughout the coding process and checking developing themes against the underlying data. The researcher also compared representations across the two newspapers and three electoral periods rather than relying on a single article or isolated quotation.

Dependability was supported through documentation of the search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria, coding process and development of themes. Confirmability was supported by grounding interpretations in the actual newspaper texts and maintaining a distinction between what the article represented and what the researcher inferred from that representation.

The use of MAXQDA also assisted in maintaining an organised record of codes and coded passages, while the researcher retained the original articles so that interpretations could be checked against the source material.

4.19 Ethical Considerations

The study analysed publicly available newspaper articles and did not involve interviews, surveys or direct participation by human subjects. The research therefore did not collect personal information from participants. Nevertheless, ethical considerations remain important in the interpretation and presentation of political media content.

The researcher took care not to present allegations as established facts and distinguished between statements made by political actors, claims reported by journalists and findings established by authoritative institutions. This is particularly important in relation to politically sensitive issues involving corruption, legal proceedings and political misconduct.

The researcher also accurately attributed quotations and representations to the relevant newspaper articles and avoided manipulating quotations in ways that could alter their meaning. The analysis focused on the published texts and did not attempt to infer journalists' private intentions unless such intentions were explicitly supported by the source material.

4.20 Limitations of the Methodology

The study has several methodological limitations. First, the analysis is restricted to two newspapers and therefore cannot be used to make generalisations about all South African media. The *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* represent particular editorial traditions and audiences, and other newspapers, broadcasters and digital platforms may have constructed different representations.

Second, the study is limited to the period from January to July 2024. Although this period captures the pre-election, election and immediate post-election environment, it does not capture longer-term changes in the representation of Ramaphosa and Zuma.

Third, purposive sampling means that the dataset was constructed according to the researcher's inclusion criteria. This provides depth and relevance but also means that some potentially relevant articles may have been excluded. For this reason, the search and exclusion procedures are documented explicitly.

Fourth, qualitative interpretation inevitably involves researcher judgement. Although reflexive procedures and repeated checking against the original texts were used to reduce unsupported interpretation, another researcher could interpret some passages differently. This does not invalidate the qualitative approach but reinforces the importance of transparency regarding the analytical process.

Finally, the use of ChatGPT introduced an additional methodological limitation because generative AI can produce suggestions that are linguistically plausible but analytically inappropriate. The researcher therefore treated AI-generated suggestions as provisional and independently verified them against the original texts. The final coding, framing and interpretation remained the responsibility of the researcher.

4.21 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodological approach used to investigate the media representation of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma's leadership qualities in the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* during the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 South African general elections.

The study adopts an interpretivist paradigm supported by a constructionist understanding of media representation and framing. A qualitative comparative case study design was used to examine online news articles from the two selected newspapers within the defined period of 1 January to 31 July 2024. Purposive sampling was used to identify relevant articles, while explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to establish the final dataset.

The study initially identified 119 potentially relevant articles and, following screening and application of the selection criteria, retained 59 articles for analysis. The analysis combined reflexive thematic analysis, qualitative framing analysis and supporting critical discourse analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns of meaning, framing analysis was used to identify the broader interpretive frames through which leadership qualities were constructed, and critical discourse analysis was used to examine language, power and ideology within significant representations.

MAXQDA was used to organise and manage the coding process, while ChatGPT was used only as a supplementary tool for preliminary linguistic and organisational support. The researcher retained responsibility for coding decisions, interpretation and the final identification of themes and frames. This methodological approach provides the basis for the presentation and interpretation of the findings in the following chapter.

Chapter five

Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the selected news articles from the *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times* concerning the representation of the leadership qualities of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma during the 2024 South African general elections. The news articles constituted the units of analysis, while thematic coding was used to organise the data and identify recurring patterns within the texts. The analysis resulted in the identification of six broad frames through which the leadership qualities and political conduct of Ramaphosa and Zuma were represented. These frames were tolerance and zero-tolerance to corruption, constitutional accountability, authoritarian leadership, collaborative leadership, electoral representation and unity.

Both newspapers used these broad frames in their coverage of the two political leaders, although the emphasis and manner in which the frames were applied differed. The analysis therefore adopts a comparative approach, examining how the two newspapers represented Ramaphosa and Zuma and how these representations related to the political context of the 2024 general elections. The findings are organised around the research questions concerning the similarities and differences in the representation of the two leaders, the framing of their leadership qualities, and the factors evident within the coverage that may have contributed to differences in framing.

The analysis combined thematic analysis with discourse analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and meanings within the data, while discourse analysis was used to examine how language and broader meanings contributed to the construction of political leadership within the news texts. The analysis was informed by the study's constructionist orientation and framing theory, while the identification of themes and frames remained grounded in the selected newspaper articles.

5.2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns of meaning within the selected news articles. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that thematic analysis can be approached inductively, allowing themes to emerge from the data, or deductively, where analysis is informed by existing theoretical or conceptual interests. The present study primarily adopted an inductive approach to coding, while

recognising that the researcher's theoretical framework and research questions necessarily informed the interpretation of the data.

The use of an inductive approach does not mean that the researcher approached the data without any prior knowledge or theoretical understanding. As Braun and Clarke (2006:84) point out, researchers cannot completely separate themselves from their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum. The research questions, literature review and theoretical framework therefore provided a conceptual orientation, while the specific codes and patterns were developed through engagement with the newspaper articles.

In this study, the purpose of using inductive coding was to avoid imposing a fixed set of leadership frames on the data before the articles were examined. Instead, the researcher read the selected articles and identified recurring descriptions, issues, actions, statements and representations relating to Ramaphosa and Zuma. These initial observations were then developed into codes and subsequently grouped into broader categories and themes.

This approach was appropriate because the study sought to identify the culturally constructed frames used by the two newspapers rather than assume in advance which frames would appear. The theoretical framework provided concepts through which the emerging patterns could subsequently be interpreted, particularly in relation to representation, framing and culturally available meanings.

5.3 Semantic and Latent Analysis

The thematic analysis considered both the explicit meanings of the newspaper texts and the underlying meanings that could be interpreted from recurring patterns. Boyatzis (1998) distinguishes between different levels at which themes can be identified, while Braun and Clarke (2006) distinguish between semantic and latent approaches to thematic analysis.

At the semantic level, the analysis focused on what was explicitly stated within the articles. This included descriptions of the two leaders, quotations from political actors, references to their actions and decisions, and the language used to describe political events. Semantic analysis therefore enabled the researcher to establish what the newspapers explicitly communicated about Ramaphosa and Zuma.

At the latent level, the analysis considered the underlying assumptions and meanings associated with these representations. Braun and Clarke (2006:85) explain that latent analysis goes beyond the surface content of the data to consider the ideas and assumptions that may inform the semantic content. This was relevant to the present study because the research was concerned not only with

individual descriptions of the two leaders but also with the broader meanings constructed through recurring representations.

For example, repeated references to consultation, cooperation and collective responsibility could be examined beyond their literal meaning to determine whether they contributed to a broader representation of collaborative leadership. Similarly, repeated references to legal disputes, institutional conflict and resistance to judicial decisions could be examined to determine whether they contributed to a broader representation of political authority or authoritarian leadership.

The latent analysis was therefore used cautiously. The researcher interpreted recurring patterns within the texts but did not assume that such patterns demonstrated the private intentions of journalists or editors. The purpose was to examine the meanings constructed within the discourse rather than to establish why an individual journalist selected a particular phrase.

5.4 Thematic Analysis Process

The thematic analysis involved several stages. The researcher first assembled the relevant articles published between 1 January and 31 July 2024, which constituted the temporal boundaries of the dataset. The articles were reviewed for relevance to the unit of analysis, and material that did not meet the established selection criteria was removed from the dataset. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe the resulting collection of relevant material as the dataset from which coding and theme development can proceed.

The researcher then read and re-read the articles to become familiar with the content. This process enabled recurring descriptions, political issues, leadership qualities and patterns of representation to be identified. Initial codes were assigned to relevant sections of the articles. The codes were used to organise material that referred to similar ideas or characteristics and to facilitate comparison across the articles.

The initial codes were subsequently grouped into categories. Related categories were then considered in relation to broader themes and potential frames. The themes developed during this stage were treated as candidate themes and were reviewed against the original articles. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise the importance of reviewing candidate themes to determine whether they accurately represent the dataset.

During the review process, some codes were moved between categories where their meaning was better represented elsewhere, while categories that lacked sufficient supporting evidence were reconsidered or removed. This process ensured that the final themes were grounded in the data rather than simply reflecting the researcher's initial expectations.

5.5 Coding and Categorising the Data

Coding involved identifying and labelling meaningful sections of the newspaper articles. Corbin and Strauss (2008:66) describe coding as a process through which data are broken down, organised and grouped into categories and subcategories, allowing related material to be brought together and compared.

In this study, the researcher used emergent coding. The articles were read and reviewed repeatedly, and codes were developed from recurring features of the data rather than from a fixed list of predetermined codes. Braun and Clarke (2006:76) note that coding allows researchers to identify interesting features of the data and organise them into meaningful groups.

The coding process focused on representations relevant to the research questions, including references to leadership qualities, political conduct, accountability, competence, experience, decisiveness, collaboration, political authority, electoral influence and political unity. These were not treated as predetermined findings. Rather, they were identified where they appeared in the data and were subsequently examined in relation to other codes.

The purpose of coding was therefore to establish a systematic connection between the newspaper texts and the broader themes developed during the analysis. Each article could contain multiple codes because a single article could represent a political leader through several different qualities or frames.

5.6 Development of Themes and Frames

The codes generated during the initial coding stage were compared and grouped according to recurring patterns of meaning. These groupings were then developed into candidate themes and subsequently examined in relation to the study's theoretical framework.

An important distinction is made between codes, themes and frames. Codes are labels assigned to specific pieces of data; themes bring related codes together into broader patterns of meaning; and frames represent broader organising patterns through which particular aspects of political reality and leadership are made meaningful (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Entman, 1993; Van Gorp, 2007).

The original analysis stated that every code became a frame. This has been revised because a single code does not necessarily constitute a frame. Instead, several related codes may contribute to a theme, and recurring themes and associations can subsequently be interpreted as a broader frame. This approach is more consistent with the constructionist understanding of framing adopted in this study.

The analysis resulted in six broad frames: tolerance and zero-tolerance to corruption, constitutional accountability, authoritarian leadership, collaborative leadership, electoral representation and unity. These frames were subsequently examined comparatively across the two newspapers and in relation to Ramaphosa and Zuma.

5.6.1 Frame One: Tolerance and Zero-Tolerance to Corruption

The first frame identified in the analysis concerns corruption and accountability. References to corruption appeared in the coverage of both Ramaphosa and Zuma, but the context and meaning attached to the issue differed between the two leaders.

In reporting on Ramaphosa, references to corruption were frequently connected to accountability, political renewal and the need to address corruption within political institutions. Where the articles reported Ramaphosa's statements concerning corruption, these statements contributed to a representation of his leadership in relation to addressing corruption and strengthening accountability.

The representation of Zuma differed in that references to corruption and accountability were more frequently connected to his previous presidency, allegations of wrongdoing, legal proceedings and questions concerning political accountability. In this context, corruption became part of a broader representation of Zuma's political history and leadership.

The frame therefore did not operate simply as a positive representation of Ramaphosa and a negative representation of Zuma. Rather, the same issue of corruption was used in different contexts to construct different meanings about political leadership. This distinction is important because the study examines media representations rather than making an independent determination about the ethical character of either leader.

The frame can therefore be understood as a pattern in which corruption and accountability became significant resources through which the leadership of the two political figures was interpreted.

5.6.2 Frame Two: Constitutional Accountability

The second frame identified in the analysis is constitutional accountability. This frame was particularly evident in coverage concerning the rule of law, judicial decisions, institutional independence and Zuma's eligibility to participate in the 2024 elections.

The newspaper coverage connected political leadership to constitutional institutions and the responsibilities of political actors within South Africa's democratic system. In the case of Zuma, legal proceedings and decisions concerning his electoral eligibility provided an important context through which questions of political accountability and constitutional governance were represented.

Ramaphosa was also represented through constitutional discourse, particularly in relation to the independence of democratic institutions and the rule of law. This demonstrates that constitutional accountability was not exclusively applied to Zuma. Rather, it functioned as a broader frame through which political leadership and political conduct could be evaluated.

The frame therefore demonstrates the connection between political leadership and institutional accountability. It also illustrates how the same constitutional principles can be used to construct different representations depending on the political event and the political actor involved.

5.6.3 Frame Three: Authoritarian Leadership

The third frame concerns authoritarian leadership. This frame emerged primarily in relation to representations of Zuma's political conduct, particularly where the articles discussed political authority, institutional conflict and his responses to legal or political challenges.

The articles reported statements and political actions that could be interpreted as contributing to a representation of Zuma as a leader who challenged or resisted institutional constraints. However, the analysis does not establish that Zuma is objectively an authoritarian leader. Rather, the term refers to the representation constructed through the news texts.

This distinction is necessary because the study investigates media framing rather than conducting an independent leadership assessment. The frame was therefore identified where recurring representations of political authority, institutional conflict, resistance or confrontation contributed to a broader interpretation of Zuma's leadership.

The use of the authoritarian leadership frame should consequently be understood in relation to the language and political context of the articles. Where such representations occurred, they were examined alongside the sources quoted, the events being reported and the broader discourse surrounding Zuma's political activities.

5.6.4 Frame Four: Collaborative Leadership

The fourth frame identified was collaborative leadership. This frame appeared particularly in representations of Ramaphosa, where the coverage referred to consultation, cooperation, collective responsibility and engagement with different political or social stakeholders.

The use of inclusive language and references to cooperation contributed to a representation of Ramaphosa as a leader operating through consultation and collective political action. However, this frame was not treated as evidence that Ramaphosa was objectively a collaborative leader. Instead, the analysis examined how the newspaper texts constructed this representation.

The frame was also considered alongside coverage that presented disagreements or challenges concerning Ramaphosa's policies. This is important because a collaborative leadership frame does not necessarily mean that all reporting was positive. Reporting can represent a leader as consultative while simultaneously questioning the effectiveness or consequences of particular decisions.

The collaborative frame therefore reflects a pattern in which cooperation, consultation and collective responsibility were associated with Ramaphosa's leadership within the selected coverage.

5.6.5 Frame Five: Electoral Representation

The fifth frame concerns electoral representation. This frame emerged from coverage of the 2024 electoral contest, including campaign activities, party support, electoral competition, Zuma's association with the MK Party and Ramaphosa's position as ANC leader.

The electoral context was particularly significant because the 2024 elections represented a major change in South African party politics. The ANC lost its parliamentary majority, while the MK Party emerged as a significant political force, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal. These developments provided the political context within which the newspapers represented the leadership and electoral influence of Ramaphosa and Zuma.

Zuma's representation within the electoral frame was strongly connected to his role in the MK Party, his electoral influence and the legal controversy surrounding his eligibility to stand for election. Ramaphosa's representation was connected to his position as ANC leader and incumbent President and to the electoral prospects of the ANC.

The electoral frame therefore demonstrates how leadership representation was connected to the political competition of the 2024 elections. The analysis focuses specifically on instances where electoral developments contributed to representations of the two leaders rather than treating all election-related reporting as evidence of leadership framing.

5.6.6 Frame Six: Unity

The sixth frame identified in the analysis is unity. The frame was evident particularly in representations of political cooperation, national stability, collective responsibility and the divisions occurring within and between political parties.

Ramaphosa's political discourse was frequently associated with calls for cooperation, stability and collective action. These representations contributed to a construction of leadership that emphasised unity and collective responsibility.

In relation to Zuma, the unity frame operated differently because coverage of his political activities also involved discussions concerning divisions within the ANC and the emergence of the MK Party. His political influence was therefore represented within a broader context of political competition and fragmentation.

The unity frame demonstrates that the concept of unity could be used in different ways within the coverage. It could represent a desired form of political cooperation or, alternatively, provide a context for discussing political divisions. The analysis therefore considers the meaning of unity within each article rather than assuming that the presence of the term automatically represents a positive leadership quality.

5.7 Comparative Analysis of the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian*

The analysis indicates that the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* shared the six broad frames identified in the dataset, but the frames were not necessarily applied in identical ways. The similarities demonstrate that both newspapers reported on common political issues surrounding Ramaphosa and Zuma, while the differences emerge from the emphasis, language, political context and sources used in particular articles.

Ramaphosa was frequently represented through frames involving accountability, collaboration, institutional governance and unity, while Zuma's representation more frequently involved constitutional accountability, electoral controversy, political authority and institutional conflict. These patterns should not, however, be interpreted as evidence that the newspapers consistently supported one leader and opposed the other.

The analysis also identified instances in which Ramaphosa's leadership and policies were questioned. Similarly, coverage of Zuma included attention to his political influence and electoral significance rather than focusing exclusively on negative aspects of his political record. The findings therefore indicate complex and sometimes contradictory representations rather than a simple positive-versus-negative distinction.

This is significant because framing does not necessarily operate through a uniformly positive or negative portrayal. Different frames may coexist within the same newspaper and even within the same article. The comparative analysis therefore considers the relative emphasis and context of the frames rather than assigning each newspaper a single overall position.

5.8 Discourse and the Construction of Leadership

The discourse analysis complemented the thematic and framing analysis by examining how language contributed to the construction of political leadership. Critical discourse analysis is concerned with the relationship between discourse, power and wider social structures (Richardson, 2007). It therefore provided an additional means of examining how political actors were described and how particular meanings were constructed through language.

In this study, attention was given to descriptions of the two leaders, quotations from political actors, the attribution of responsibility, references to political actions and the broader context in which statements appeared. These elements were examined to determine how they contributed to the identified frames.

For example, describing a political action as "decisive" may contribute to a representation of competence or strength, whereas describing a similar action as "stubborn" may construct a different representation. The meaning therefore depends not only on the individual word but also on the surrounding language and political context.

The discourse analysis was consequently used to strengthen the interpretation of the frames rather than to establish the intentions of journalists. The analysis focuses on what the texts construct and communicate, rather than claiming to know why individual journalists selected particular expressions.

5.9 Factors Associated with the Framing

The third research question examines how the representations and culturally constructed frames associated with Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma changed across the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 general elections. The analysis considers the changing political context within which the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* reported on the two political leaders. This is consistent with framing theory, which understands frames as organising principles through which particular aspects of social and political reality are selected, emphasised and made meaningful (Entman, 1993). Van Gorp (2007) further argues that frames are connected to culturally available meanings, making it important to consider the wider political and cultural context in which media representations are produced.

During the pre-election period, the representations of Ramaphosa and Zuma were largely situated within the context of electoral competition and the anticipated outcome of the election. Ramaphosa was represented in relation to his position as ANC leader and incumbent President, while Zuma's representation was increasingly associated with his political role in the MK Party and the potential

implications of the party's emergence for the ANC. The frames of electoral representation, accountability and leadership were therefore particularly relevant during this period. The coverage also reflected the political and legal developments surrounding Zuma's eligibility to contest the election, bringing questions of constitutional accountability into the representation of his leadership. Political events and institutional developments can become particularly significant in news framing because the selection and emphasis of certain events provide audiences with particular ways of interpreting political actors (Entman, 1993; Reese, 2007).

During the election period, the representations became more closely connected to electoral performance, political competition and the ability of the respective political actors and parties to attract support. The electoral frame became particularly significant as the media reported on the performance of the ANC, the emergence of the MK Party and the broader implications of the election for South African politics. The representation of Ramaphosa was consequently linked not only to his personal leadership but also to the performance and future of the ANC, while Zuma was increasingly represented in relation to the electoral significance of the MK Party. In this respect, the meaning attached to leadership was connected to the immediate political circumstances surrounding the election rather than being presented as an entirely fixed characteristic of either leader.

The post-election period introduced a different political context following the outcome of the election. The ANC's loss of its parliamentary majority and the subsequent negotiations concerning the formation of a Government of National Unity created new circumstances through which Ramaphosa's leadership could be represented. Issues of collaboration, political negotiation, governance and unity consequently became more prominent. Similarly, the representation of Zuma shifted towards the electoral significance of the MK Party, its position within the changing political environment and the implications of the election for the relationship between Zuma, the ANC and other political parties. This demonstrates the importance of examining framing as a process that operates within changing political contexts rather than treating media representations as fixed or independent of political events (Reese, 2007; Van Gorp, 2007).

The changes across these three periods indicate that the frames identified in the study were not necessarily static. The same broad frame could acquire different meanings depending on the political circumstances in which it appeared. For example, the electoral frame during the pre-election period concerned campaign competition and electoral prospects, while during and after the election it increasingly concerned electoral performance, political influence and the consequences of the election results. Similarly, the unity and collaborative leadership frames became more relevant to Ramaphosa's representation in the post-election period as political parties negotiated new forms of

cooperation and governance. This reflects Entman's (1993) argument that framing involves the selection and salience of particular aspects of reality, thereby encouraging particular interpretations of political events and actors.

The analysis therefore suggests that the representations of Ramaphosa and Zuma changed as the political context surrounding the 2024 elections developed. However, these changes should not be interpreted as evidence that the newspapers deliberately altered their frames in response to particular political events. The study can establish changes in the content, emphasis and representation evident in the newspaper texts, but it cannot establish the private intentions of journalists or editors. Such intentions would require additional evidence concerning journalistic decision-making and news-production practices. This distinction is important because framing analysis examines patterns of meaning within media texts rather than providing direct access to the intentions of individual journalists (Reese, 2007).

The changing representations can also be understood through the constructionist approach to framing adopted in this study. Van Gorp (2007) argues that frames are culturally embedded and that media framing involves the interaction between media texts and culturally available interpretive packages. Similarly, Hall (1997) conceptualises representation as a process through which meaning is produced and circulated within particular cultural contexts. In the present study, the political circumstances of the 2024 elections provided the context within which particular aspects of Ramaphosa's and Zuma's leadership became more salient at different points in time.

5.10 Themes and creating the coding sheet

The development of themes and the creation of the coding sheet formed an important stage in the analysis of the selected newspaper articles. Following the initial reading and familiarisation with the dataset, the researcher developed codes to identify recurring meanings, descriptions, issues and representations relating to the leadership qualities of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma. Coding provided a systematic way of organising the textual data and identifying similarities and differences across the selected articles (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The coding process was primarily inductive, allowing codes to emerge from the newspaper texts rather than applying a predetermined set of frames to the data. However, the research questions and theoretical framework provided a conceptual orientation for the analysis. This approach recognises that qualitative researchers do not analyse data entirely independently of their existing knowledge and theoretical assumptions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The researcher therefore remained attentive to

the research focus on leadership qualities, media representation and culturally constructed framing while allowing patterns within the articles to inform the development of the codes.

A coding sheet was created to provide a consistent structure for recording and organising the analysis. The coding sheet included information such as the newspaper, date of publication, political leader discussed, electoral period, article title, relevant text or quotation, initial code, category, emerging theme and eventual frame. This enabled the researcher to trace the development of the analysis from the original newspaper article to the broader interpretation.

The coding sheet was not used to determine the findings in advance. Instead, it provided a record of the analytical decisions made during the coding process. Where an article contained more than one representation of a political leader, more than one code could be assigned. This was necessary because a single article could discuss several leadership qualities or political issues simultaneously.

The initial codes were then compared to identify relationships and similarities between them. Codes referring to related aspects of leadership were grouped into broader categories. For example, codes relating to consultation, cooperation, collective responsibility and engagement with stakeholders could be considered together because they referred to related representations of leadership. Similarly, codes concerning corruption, accountability and political responsibility could be grouped into a broader category concerning accountability.

The categories were subsequently examined to determine whether they represented recurring patterns across the dataset. These patterns were developed into candidate themes and reviewed against the original articles. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise that themes should be reviewed against the dataset to determine whether they provide a meaningful representation of the data. The researcher therefore returned to the articles during the development and refinement of the themes rather than relying only on the initial codes.

An important distinction was maintained between codes, themes and frames. A code refers to a specific feature or idea identified within a section of data. A theme represents a broader pattern of meaning developed from related codes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A frame, in contrast, refers to a broader organising pattern through which particular aspects of political reality are selected, emphasised and made meaningful (Entman, 1993). Van Gorp (2007) further argues that frames are connected to culturally available interpretive meanings. Therefore, a code did not automatically become a frame.

Themes	frames	Problem description	Causal interpretation	Moral evaluation	Treatment Recommendation	Linguistic Expression
Corruption & Accountability	Tolerance to corruption Zero-tolerance approach to Corruption Constitutional Accountability	***M&G*** Jacob Zuma's corruption and state capture allegations—lack of transparency and accountability. Cyril Ramaphosa's failure to effectively address corruption and state capture ***Sunday Times*** Jacob Zuma's corruption and state capture allegations Cyril Ramaphosa's failure to address corruption and hold perpetrators accountable	***M&G*** Jacob Zuma-erosion of public trust and institutions, violation of the constitution caused damage to democratic institutions. Ramaphosa's lack of engagement raises questions about accountability ***Sunday Times*** Jacob Zuma's actions and corruption/abuse of power caused harm to the country, and corruption and economic issues caused further damage to the country. Cyril Ramaphosa's slow pace of reform caused delay in addressing corruption and economic issues.	***M&G*** Despite their concerns and reservations, the business leader felt "blindsided" by Ramaphosa's decision to sign the NHI bill. The lack of engagement and consultation with stakeholders raises questions about the government's commitment to accountability. Zuma's denial of corruption despite evidence and accusations, refusal to accept accountability for his actions instead blames others. ***Sunday Times*** Zuma refuses to accept accountability for his actions and instead blames others. Ramaphosa's dismissive response about the NHI bill.	***M&G*** The implementation of the 'step aside rule against those charged with corruption pending outcome of their cases. Ensure electoral process is fair, transparent and in line with the constitution. ***Sunday Times*** Ensure legal argument are based on merit and prevent manipulation of the legal system for political gain. Ensure accountability and address corruption to restore trust in government.	***M&G*** "Ramaphosa, we admit we made mistakes as the ANC, with some members and leaders undermining institutions of the democratic state and advancing selfish personal interests." "Zuma was found guilty of contempt for defying an order of the apex court…" ***Sunday Times*** "The people who are certain authorities in South Africa have decided to tell a lot of lies about me…they have never produced any evidence as to what it is that I did wrong." "We must defend IEC's independence: Ramaphosa on its legal battle with the MK party." "Ramaphosa 'open' to more NHI talks."

Leadership & Governance	Authoritarian Leadership Collaborative Leadership	***M&G*** Ramaphosa criticized his leadership style and decision-making. Efforts to delegitimise Jacob Zuma ***Sunday Times*** Zuma's divisive and destructive leadership style. Ramaphosa with high expectations to deliver on promises and restore public trust.	Zuma's corruption and state capture caused erosion of public trust a violation of the constitution caused damage to democratic institutions. Ramaphosa's leadership is indecisive and ineffective causes concerns about his ability to lead and unite the ANC ***Sunday Times*** Zuma's actions of corruption and abuse of power caused harm to the country. Concerns about his ability to unite the ANC and address internal divisions.	Acknowledgement of ANC mistakes and weaknesses. The IEC's decision to disqualify Zuma from running ***Sunday Times*** Ramaphosa's actions are morally questionable. Zuma is defiant and refuses to take responsibility for his actions	ANC commitment to seriousness and hard work in addressing the country's challenges. Zuma should work to build positive relationships ***Sunday Times*** Zuma should prioritize the public interest and well-being of the country and its people. Encourage Ramaphosa to demonstrate decisive leadership by providing clear guidance.	"President Cyril Ramaphosa delivered the manifesto- a pared-down version of the 2019 edition dealing with six key areas of focus for the next five years." "Zuma is a wolf in sheep's clothing." ***Sunday Times*** "I decided I will continue fighting in different ways to convince everyone I am right, and the learned friends are not." Jacob Zuma "The MK Party is a revenge party that will wreak havoc on the ANC, and it could damage it much more than it has so far." "Ramaphosa struck a conciliatory tone, indicating the phasing in of NHI would be a consultative process in with big business could raise its concerns."

Electability	Electoral Unity	***M&G*** There is a possibility that the ANC will lose the election and no longer have a majority. Zuma's eligibility ***Sunday Times*** Efforts to delegitimise Jacob Zuma Efforts to endorse the campaign.	ANC's performance in the elections. IEC removed Zuma from the list of candidates. ***Sunday Times*** Challenged due to corruption allegations and prison sentence. ANC declines in the polls	The ANC is confident in winning the elections despite predictions of a reduced majority. Zuma's sentence disqualifies him from running for office. ***Sunday Times*** Zuma's desired revenge against Ramaphosa. Ramaphosa signing the NHI bill is a sign of desperation	Gauteng and KwaZulu Natal are the provinces with the most voters in the country. The court's decision on Zuma's eligibility ***Sunday Times*** Zuma is not eligible to stand for elections. Ramaphosa urges continuous support	"Ramaphosa said his party was confident it would win the elections and that he would come back after 29 May as president of the republic." "The rule of law requires that courts give fully motivated reasons for their decisions." ***Sunday Times*** "The apex court ruled on Monday Zuma was ineligible to stand for elections because in 2021 he was found guilty of being in contempt of court and sentenced to a 15-month jail term without the option of a Fine." "The polls tell us we going to have an outright victory…"

Table 5.10.1

5.11 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis focuses on dominance, discrimination, power, and control relations by elite groups and institutions as they are enacted, legitimated, or reproduced by text and talk (Chambwera, 2016; Braun and Clarke, 2006; and Van Dijk, 2007). According to Van Dijk (2006:252), critical discourse analysis is primarily interested in and motivated by the endeavour to understand pressing social issues. McGregor (2010:2) argues that critical discourse analysis challenges us to move from seeing language as abstract to seeing our words as having meaning in a particular historical, social, and political condition. Discourse analysis presupposes the "study of the relations between discourse, power, dominance, and social inequality, and the position of discourse analysts in such a relationship" (Chambwera, 2016:95). Critical discourse analysis is a type of

discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. It is also argued that critical discourse analysis seeks "an effect social practice and social relationship, dominance, prejudice, and discrimination (Richardson, 2007:26). Critical discourse analysis for many scholars features ideas such as power, dominance, hegemony, ideology, class, gender, race, discrimination, interests, reproduction, institutions, social structure, or social order, besides the more familiar discourse analytical notions (Van Dijk, 2001:375).

Critical discourse analysis was a useful analytical tool in this study because the study aimed to understand power, dominance, and social relations that characterized the news reports that were published by the *Sunday Times* and *Mail and Guardian* in their reporting on the political qualities and leadership abilities of Ramaphosa and Zuma. The study aims to reveal the underlying discourses that were presented throughout the media texts that were given to the public to think about Ramaphosa and Zuma from the period before the 2024 general elections, the 1st of February to the 28th of May.

Critical discourse analysis challenges us to move from seeing language as abstract to seeing our words as having meaning in a particular historical social and political condition. (McGregor, 2010:2). According to Locke (2004:1) critical discourse analysis aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between discursive practices, events texts, and wider social and cultural structures, relations, and processes, to investigate how much practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles overpower. It aims to reveal the motivation and politics involved in arguing for or against a specific research method, statement, or value. Locke (1996:13) states that because texts are moments of inter-subjectivity, that is, the social and discursive relations between human subjects, they involve writers and readers, speakers and listeners, individuals whose intentions are neither self-evident nor recoverable without recourse of another text. Critical discourse analysis is a tool to help members of a profession understand the message they are sending to themselves and others and to understand the meanings of spoken and written texts by others. The words of those in power are taken as "self-evident truths" and the words of those not in power are dismissed as irrelevant, inappropriate or without substance (McGregor, 2010:2). Language can be used to represent speakers' beliefs positions and ideas in terms of spoken texts like conversations as well as written texts. Analysis of the underlying meanings can assist in interpreting issues, conditions, and events (Mogashoa,2014:105). Most scholars agree critical discourse analysis can make a significant and

specific contribution to critical social or political analysis if it can provide an account of the role of language, discourse, or communicative events in the production of dominance and inequality. According to Richardson (2007:26), the main objective is to establish the relationship that exists between text and its social conditions, ideologies and power relations. “Critical discourse analysis engages with analysis and critiques social power and how this is represented and both explicitly and implicitly, reproduced in the news” (Richardson, 2007:29). This study used Richardson’s definition emphasising that “Critical Discourse Analysis involves analysis of a text at three levels, that is the text level, the discourse level, and the social practices level” (Richardson, 2007:29). Using Richardson’s model, the text level analysis and thematic analysis were done at the same time in this study. The text level of Critical discourse analysis is defined as or referred to as the discursive practice level (Richardson, 2007:29). A discursive practice is the process that informs and shapes the journalistic creation of text as well as how the audience use and comprehend text (Richardson, 2007:26). “News discourse fulfils particular functions; has been created in accordance with particular production techniques and in specific institutional settings, is marked by particular, relationships between other agencies of political, judicial, and economic power, is characterised by particular interpersonal relationships between writer and reader, and is consumed, interpreted and enjoyed in ways that are specific” (Richardson,2007:76-77).

Consequently, the study briefly examined how professional and institutional factors shaped how the *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times* framed Ramaphosa and Zuma’s leadership qualities. The goal was to understand how these influences could impact the portrayal of their leadership, and so the study also considered the target audience of these newspapers, recognising that audiences significantly influence how journalists present news stories (Chambwera, 2016:67). The audiences’ characteristics and preferences can shape the news's tone, content, and overall narrative. This could affect how the public perceived Ramaphosa and Zuma by legitimizing or delegitimising their leadership. By analysing the discursive practices of the *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times*, the study aimed to explore how institutional factors, such as editorial policies and journalistic standards, could contribute to the framing of these leaders. This approach helped to identify any biases or patterns in the media’s representation of the two leaders. The South African news industry is highly competitive, significantly impacting on how news is presented, especially when it comes to political leaders like Ramaphosa and Zuma (Chambwera, 2016; Jackson, 2019; Jere and Borain, 2018; and Richardson, 2007). This competitiveness raises important questions about the factors influencing news framing. To address this, scholars have examined various aspects, including media ownership and control, journalistic ethics and practices, social context, audience and advertising considerations.

Media ownership and control, for instance, play a crucial role in shaping the portrayal of leaders, with outlets like *Mail & Guardian,* and *Sunday Times* potentially reflecting the interests of their owners (Chambwera, 2016:69). The social context in which journalists operate is equally important, with their relationship with their audience and social surroundings shaping the news (Wadok, 2011:345). Scholars highlight the relationship between journalists and their social world, where opinion in return, influences journalists' works (Wadok,2011:345). By analysing these connected factors, we can gain a deeper understanding of how news is constructed and how it impacts public perceptions of South African leaders.

The role of journalism in shaping public opinion and reinforcing social values can be overstated. In the South African context, scholars have examined how these factors impacted the portrayal of leaders like Ramaphosa and Zuma (Chambwera, 2016; Jackson, 2019; Jere and Borain, 2018; Richardson, 2007). Newspapers and media outlets, such as the *Mail & Guardian,* and *Sunday Times* hold significant power in shaping public perception and this study argues that their framing of Ramaphosa and Zuma – or indeed, any political leaders - can either legitimize or delegitimise their leadership, potentially influencing the country's economic state. By examining all these factors together, rather than in isolation, this study aims to uncover how the *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times* used framing to shape public opinion about these leaders. This holistic approach helps reveal how news presentation reflects and influences the broader social and economic context.

Corruption and Accountability Themes
Tolerance and Zero-Tolerance to Corruption and Constitutional Accountability Frame

5.12 Overview of the Tolerance and Zero-Tolerance to Corruption Frame

Tolerance and zero-tolerance frames were used by both the *Mail & Guardian* and the *Sunday Times.* In both newspapers, this frame served to legitimize Ramaphosa's leadership by presenting him as a leader who has zero tolerance for corruption, while sampled data showed that there was an opposite trend in the way Zuma was portrayed. There was strong evidence that showed Zuma's corruption cases. This was often reported on, presenting Zuma's leadership as one that tolerates corruption. The use of similar frames by both the *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times* indicates that reporters used frames that were purposefully and logically equivalent. According to Kahneman and Tversky (2013), logically equivalent information is presented in a certain way that either encourages or discourages certain interpretations of meaningful context.

Tolerance and Zero-Tolerance Frame: *Sunday Times*

The linguistic expression on Tolerance and Zero-Tolerance

- "We will work harder and be serious like never before. When the ANC works the country moves forward." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in *Sunday Times,*2024)
- "We've seen what coalitions can do. That will be the danger zone for our country." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in *Sunday Times,*2024)
- "We must defend IEC's independence…I do not buy this notion that the IEC is venturing into politics. The IEC is inherently non-political and independent- and we must defend its independence, just as we should defend the independence of our courts." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in, *Sunday Times,*2024)

The *Sunday Times* framed Ramaphosa as a leader who has no tolerance for corruption. When contrasted with Zuma's corruption scandals, this lends a positive endorsement to Ramaphosa's portrayal. He is seen as someone who can bring stability with emphasis on the need for a strong government to avoid coalition instability, suggesting that he is committed to fighting corruption. Evidence from the data suggests that Ramaphosa's campaign drive focused on anti-corruption, aimed at Zuma and his corruption scandals. In reports, Ramaphosa is portrayed to the readers as a leader who is determined to continue to fight against corruption. Emphasis was placed on the need for a strong government to avoid coalition instability, implying that he is committed to fighting against corruption. "We have seen what coalitions can do. That will be the danger zone of our country." Ramaphosa uses language of urgency and warns of the "danger zone" if his party loses majority status. By deliberately quoting Ramaphosa's speech, the reporters were deliberate in endorsing his leadership, reinforcing his position as a leader. Ramaphosa distinguishes himself from Zuma's corruption and promotes a reform agenda while using metaphors to create a clear image of a potential "danger zone". Ramaphosa is also portrayed as a defensive leader who recognises the importance of maintaining the IEC's independence, implying a commitment to preventing corruption. "We must defend IEC's independence. I do not buy this notion that the IEC is venturing into politics. The IEC is inherently non-political and independent, just as we should defend the independence of our courts". He is framed as a leader who distances himself from any accusations of political interference. More evidence reveals Cyril Ramaphosa's commitment to eliminating corruption and ensuring accountability. "We will work harder and be serious like never before…When the ANC works, this country moves forward". Ramaphosa consistently uses

the language of accountability, transparency, and zero tolerance for corruption, and is thus represented as a champion of anti-corruption.

Tolerance and Zero-tolerance Frame: *Mail &Guardian*

The Linguistic Expression on Tolerance and Zero-tolerance

- "Those that want to come in to steal and continue with corruption, have no place in the ANC" (Cyril Ramaphosa cited in*, Mail & Guardian*,2024)
- "We will ensure that NHI implementation is transparent, accountable, and free from corruption". (Cyril Ramaphosa cited in *Mail & Guardian*,2024)."
- We admit we made mistakes… and commit renewal". (Cyril Ramaphosa cited in *Mail & Guardian,* 2024)
- "Achieving equity was what the struggle against apartheid was all about, and it continues to be about that." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in *Mail & Guardian,*2024)

Sampled reports point to the fact that how Ramaphosa was presented in the *Mail & Guardian* resembles how he was portrayed in the *Sunday Times* in the zero-tolerance to corruption frame. Ramaphosa being presented as a leader who does not tolerate corruption is mirrored in the *Mail & Guardian's* sampled reports. For example, an article by Mandisa Ndlovu (2024) quoted Cyril Ramaphosa: "Those that want to come in to steal and continue with corruption, have no place in the ANC". This statement suggests that Ramaphosa is not tolerant of corruption and is determined to deal with those found guilty of corruption. And this confirms the findings that the press reports during this time were not isolated from that of other newspapers. Chambwera (2016) suggests that media operating within the same social and political context are likely to borrow frames from the context of their functioning. This also proves that the efforts to endorse Ramaphosa as a leader who has zero- tolerance for corruption confirms the arguments that the media was largely in support of a pro-Cyril Ramaphosa ideology. Iyengar and McGrady (2007:55) argue that the dominant groups of society maintain the status quo through their use of mass media; mass media is used as a tool that represents the dominant ideology and, in the process, helps constructs conformists' identities. For instance, Ramaphosa continues to be portrayed as a committed leader who will continue to fight corruption and is show active support by both newspapers. This also displays tacit support for capitalism. Ramaphosa himself is a wealthy man, and the media in South Africa continues to be largely controlled by a few individuals who own a variety of printing and publishing companies. Their establishments are profit-driven and consequently they want to ensure that their interests are

protected. As a result, they are likely to support the leader whose ideology resonates with their publication policy and agenda.

Constitutional Accountability Frame

5.13 Overview of the Constitutional Accountability frame

The constitutional accountability frame was used by both the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian*. This frame served to downplay Zuma's leadership qualities: he is presented as a problematic leader with many controversies, and his legal troubles and corruption allegations questioned his leadership. Ramaphosa is shown as a strong leader fighting corruption and working for economic growth. This frame highlights the importance of leaders following the Constitution and being accountable. Zuma's conviction and sentencing raised questions about his eligibility, emphasizing the need for accountability. Ramaphosa's commitment to upholding the constitution and promoting transparency is seen as an important tool for democratic governance.

Constitutional Accountability Frame: *Sunday Times*

The Linguistic Expression on Constitutional Accountability Frame

- "Zuma's recusal application has significant constitutional implications." (Mabuza, 2024)
- "Zuma's actions undermine the rule of law and democratic governance." (Ralph Mgjima cited in*, Sunday Times*, 2024)
- "The judiciary must ensure separation of powers and hold Zuma accountable." (Moepya cited in *Sunday Times*,2024)
- "Zuma's conviction is a victory for accountability and the constitution." (Madisa, 2024)
- "The next ANC-led administration will purge thieves and 'lazy deployees." (Cyril Ramaphosa cited in, *Sunday Times,*2024)
- "The bill directs the transformation of SA's healthcare system and will overcome the socioeconomic imbalances and inequities of the past." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in *Sunday Times,*2024)
- "The financial hurdles facing the NHI can be navigated with careful planning, strategic resource allocation, and a steadfast commitment to achieving equity." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in *Sunday Times*, 2024)

The *Sunday Times* framed Jacob Zuma as a problematic and controversial figure, with a history of legal troubles and allegations of corruption. The *Sunday Times* highlights the constitutional implications of Jacob Zuma's candidacy, questioning whether his conviction and sentencing disqualify him from running. Their tone is critical, analytical, questioning, and warning, reflecting concerns about Jacob Zuma's candidacy. Evidence reveals that the *Sunday Times* stresses the need for accountability, emphasizing Zuma's past controversies and ongoing legal issues: "The judiciary must ensure separation of powers and hold Zuma accountable". This newspaper focused on individual accountability, regularly quoting politicians that Zuma must take accountability for all his actions. Overall, he is portrayed as someone who undermines accountability and the rule of law: "Zuma's actions undermine the rule of law and democratic governance". This quote also acts as a warning and gives a cautionary tone to Zuma's actions. Dominant power structures are reinforced through pointing out that the judiciary's role is to hold executives accountable. To support this, one of Zuma's statements was a headline in the *Sunday Times:* "I'm right, the learned friends are not". This suggests that Jacob Zuma may not respect the rule of law or the balances that are put in place to ensure accountability. Articles regularly used legal terminology to legitimise criticism of Zuma as well as the repetition of words like "accountability" and "the rule of law". Zuma's actions are consistently contrasted with democratic principles and politicians and analysts use logical reasoning to argue against his recusal applications. The *Sunday Times* questions the IEC's decision to allow Zuma to contest, raising concerns about the commission's independence and effectiveness. Furthermore, it uses public opinion polls as a form of scepticism about Zuma's fitness for running in the elections.

Ramaphosa's leadership is framed as a departure from Zuma's era, with emphasis on reform and adherence to constitutional principles. He is portrayed as someone who separates himself from Zuma's authoritarianism and corruption, promoting a reformist agenda. The *Sunday Times* depicts Ramaphosa as someone who has a confident and urgent tone, his association with business leaders reinforces his pro-economic growth image, and his commitment to accountability is consistently highlighted. Ramaphosa uses the promise of purging corrupt officials to create a sense of accountability; he positions himself as a champion of constitutional accountability. "The next ANC-led administration will purge thieves and 'lazy deployees." By employing the language of accountability and transparency, he emphasized the importance of adhering to constitutional principles such as equality and access to healthcare, reinforced by his efforts to use the signing of the NHI as a symbol of commitment to constitutional principles.

However, here he was met with huge disapproval from business leaders: "The legislation in its current form is unworkable, unaffordable, and not in line with the constitution" (CEO Cas Coovadia in the *Sunday Times,* 2024). This led to concerns about the NHI's alignment with constitutional provisions and further led to distrust and concerns about Ramaphosa's leadership. However, even so his strategy to use the signing of the NHI as a symbol of his commitment to constitutional principles did not stop the *Sunday Times* from reporting about him neutrally and positively. Much emphasis was placed on his commitment to upholding the rule of law and his efforts to promote accountability within the ANC government. The *Sunday Times'* tone on Ramaphosa is informative and neutral, focusing on reporting his actions and statements.

Constitutional Accountability Frame: *Mail & Guardian*

Linguistic Expression for Constitutional Accountability Frame

- "Zuma's recusal application sparks constitutional crisis." (Ferreira, 2024)
- "Zuma's actions erode democratic norms and rule of law." (Harper, 2024)
- "Zuma's conviction demonstrates the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms" (Tandwa, 2024)
- "The judiciary must maintain independence and hold Zuma accountable." (Ferreira, 2024)
- "We will ensure that NHI is implemented in a manner that is consistent with our constitution." (Cyril Ramaphosa cited in, *Sunday Times,*2024)
- "We have a rule of law in South Africa that governs us. Once the constitutional court has decided, that is it." (Cyril Ramaphosa cited in, *Sunday Times,*2024)
- We will ensure that our seventh administration has skilled, educated and serious people serving the country." (Cyril Ramaphosa cited in, *Sunday Times,*2024)
- "We admit we made mistakes…and commit to renewal." (Cyril Ramaphosa cited in, *Sunday Times,*2024)

The *Mail & Guardian* framed Jacob Zuma as 'barred' from running due to his criminal record. Zuma's conviction and sentencing to 15 months in prison raised questions about his eligibility to run for office. The electoral court's decision highlighted the importance of separation of powers, explaining that the president's remission of Zuma's sentence did not erase his conviction. The *Mail & Guardian's* framing of Zuma's situation emphasized the need for accountability, especially considering his previous presidency and ongoing legal cases. Jacob Zuma is often depicted as a symbol of broader systematic issues; therefore, the *Mail & Guardian* highlights his failures and

social justice through consistently emphasizing systematic accountability and conveying the need for transformative change by challenging dominant power structures. Reporters often use a 'forceful' and 'direct' tone when reporting on Zuma, for example, "Zuma's conviction is a victory for accountability." They also use thought-provoking and introspective tones for readers to reflect on. For instance, "the Zuma saga: a test for South Africa's democracy." Sometimes urgent tones are used to give readers a sense of urgency concerning his court cases, by being empathetic and pressing: "The judiciary must act to prevent a constitutional crisis." These kinds of tones were the most striking to be revealed. Interestingly, the *Mail & Guardian* did not focus on issues of policies or campaign messages when they were reporting on Zuma, Instead the reportage was founded on personality reporting. This observation corresponds with previous studies that argue that the print media does not focus on the ideological priorities of political candidates and their parties but is more disposed to report on their economic pledges and personalities (Kostadinova, 2017:636). When referring to Zuma in their reports, reporters did not only consistently contrast him with Ramaphosa, but reports on Zuma were accompanied by explanations or reasoning of how much damage the leadership of the ANC and government has destroyed the economy and the lives of poor South Africans. This representation allowed readers to consider Zuma's leadership in the context of seeing how much damage they suffered under his presidency. Moreover, reporters appear (consciously or unconsciously) to hand-pick common statements about Zuma from several political discourses of readily available frames (Van Gorp, 2007).

Both the *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times* consistently report on Ramaphosa's commitment to upholding the rule of law and taking accountability. The *Mail & Guardian's* tone is positive and critical - he is framed as a champion of anti-corruption and willingness to take accountability, therefore highlighting his role in investigating state capture. And Ramaphosa is constantly shown as struggling to address issues relating to Zuma's state capture, for example: "Continuing the fight against state capture and corruption". The *Mail & Guardian* does question some of Ramaphosa's decisions, placing emphasis on the NHI's potential impact on healthcare access and equality, with criticism of opposition parties' policies, potential corruption, and concerns about lack of transparency in NHI funding and implementation. In spite of this, Ramaphosa's policies were still viewed as more effective compared to Zuma's policies and autocratic leadership. Reports on Ramaphosa highlight his efforts to promote accountability. They reveal his respect for the separation of powers and engagement with other branches of the government. Reports in the *Mail & Guardian* emphasize careful planning, strategic resource allocation and transparency: "We will ensure that NHI is implemented in a manner that is consistent with our constitution." In their use of metaphorical

language, “All knocks and no drop” resilience and perseverance are suggested, even though the point being made is that Ramaphosa continues to make an effort on taking constitutional accountability but with little success. This metaphor, in tandem with the article, also implies that through continuous attempts, perhaps lessons may be learned.

The use of metaphors in all the articles analysed is fairly consistent. According to McCracken (1986:7) metaphors work because they allow the media and its readers to use language (making sense of something) that they are both familiar with. Metaphors are taken from a broader context in society, where the meaning is understood with those who operate that discourse. Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli (2007:7) argue that the use of phrases and metaphors inspires certain types of interpretation of the issue by the reader. Images, frames and catch-phrases that are laden with signifiers can act as raw materials the readers use to conform, modify or negate their already existing interpretation of the issue at hand. Apart from the use of metaphors, the *Mail & Guardian* reports factually, with no evident bias and emotive language.

Leadership and Governance Themes

Authoritarian Leadership and Collaborative Leadership Frame

5.14 Overview of the Authoritarian Leadership Frame

Both the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* criticized Zuma’s leadership for its authoritarian leadership tendencies, Zuma’s presidency being marked by allegations of state capture and consolidation of power. His administration was criticized for its handling of protests and opposition to his leadership was characterized by allegations of corruption and nepotism; therefore, his authoritarian style has been criticized for undermining the constitution and democratic institutions. This framing of Zuma’s leadership is identified as being problematic, while it also emphasizes the negative consequences. It highlights the divisions within the ANC and society, and questions Zuma’s legitimacy as a leader.

Authoritarian Leadership Frame: *Sunday Times*

Linguistic Expression of Authoritarian Leadership Frame

- **“**Among laws former president Jacob Zuma wants to change should Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK) party set into governance in 2024 elections is to decriminalise spanking of children…” (Schrieber, 2024)

- "He said the face of the ballot paper in respect of the MK party will be that of Jacob Zuma because the party has given the electoral commission notice that it has changed its leadership structure." (Mamabolo, cited in *Sunday Times,* 2024)
- "MK is the one that will liberate us… The laws we have are weak." (Jacob Zuma, cited in *Sunday Times,* 2024)
- "There is no child aged 12-16 not married that will be pregnant." (Jacob Zuma, cited in *Sunday Times,* 2024)

Analysing Jacob Zuma's Leadership Style under the authoritarian leadership frame reveals some concerning trends. His presidency was marked by numerous scandals, including 15 months in prison for contempt of court in 2021. This incident showcased Jacob Zuma's disregard for accountability and his tendency to prioritize personal interests over the nation's. Jacob Zuma's leadership style was characterized by a tight grip on power, and often at the expense of democratic institutions. Criticism of Jacob Zuma's administration including reporters and opposition party leaders faced intimidation and censorship. *Sunday Times* employed a critical, skeptical, and analytical tone when reporting Jacob Zuma's authoritarian tendencies. It questions Jacob Zuma's motives and the impact of his policies; reports also raise concerns about Jacob Zuma's commitment to democracy and human rights. The party also accused the commission of bias but acknowledged lacking concrete evidence. Instead, they rely on "reasonable apprehension of bias and conflict of interest" to challenge the decision. Sunday Times uses metaphors to emphasize conflict and competition 'legal shutdown' and 'barred from contesting' which implies restriction and obstruction of the constitution. Jacob Zuma's language and tone convey a sense of self-righteousness and disregard for institutional balances. "I decided I will continue fighting in different ways to convince everyone I am right, and the learned friends are not." Jacob Zuma is convinced that the judges he refers to as his learned friends have wrongly judged him and he is willing to fight for his rights until the country acknowledges that freedom should be absolute, not selective. In his refusal to accept the Constitutional Court decision. In his belief that the ConCourt's decision has prevented him in his quest to fight for ultimate freedom for black people. The continuous use of metaphors "fighting tooth and nail" and "tackled by the legal people" emphasize conflict, resistance, and opposition. Some of the discourses surrounding Jacob Zuma's authoritarian leadership can be grouped into concerns about Jacob Zuma undermining democratic institutions, the impact of Jacob Zuma's policies on vulnerable populations, such as children and women, and his resistance to criticism and transparency. According to reports in the *Sunday Times,* it suggests that Jacob Zuma's leadership was authoritarian, marked by a disregard for

accountability, disagreement with the Constitutional Court, and corruption. The tone used by reporters and the discourses surrounding his presidency reflect a deep concern about undermining democratic values and institutions during this time.

Authoritarian Leadership Frame: *Mail & Guardian*

Linguistic Expression for Authoritarian Leadership Frame

- "I can tell you that the country is waiting with bated breath for those reasons." (Deputy Judge Mandisa Maya, cited in *Mail & Guardian,*2024)
- "The drafters of the constitution would have known that direct access would not trump any other provision in the constitution." (Justice Leona Theron, cited in *Mail & Guardian,*2024)
- "I didn't finish my term, there's still something I need to go and finish." (Jacob Zuma, cited in *Mail & Guardian*, 2024)
- "Zuma is disqualified… The president did not change Zuma's sentence." (Advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, cited in *Mail & Guardian*, 2024)
- "Here we are dealing with a wolf in sheep's clothing." (Thabo Mbeki, cited in *Mail & Guardian*, 2024)

The *Mail & Guardian's* reporting emphasized the moral implications of Zuma's actions framing them as a betrayal of the public's trust and the principles of democracy. Their reporting suggests that Zuma's leadership style was increasingly authoritarian, with a focus on maintaining power and control rather than serving the public's interests. The articles' tone is neutral and objective, reporting facts and quotes without emotional language, but remains critical in highlighting Zuma's controversial past and the IEC's concerns. Reports from this newspaper suggest that Zuma's authoritarian tendencies are evident in his eligibility despite the court rulings, his disregard for institutional authority, and his attempts to undermine the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) decision. To support this, he is quoted as saying: "I didn't finish my term, there's still something I need to go and finish", despite the Constitutional Court ruling that he's not eligible to stand for elections due to his conviction and sentence. On the disregard for institutional authority, Zuma's statement "The Nkandla boy did not finish his two terms; if they say go back, no one will stop me", demonstrates a disregard for the rule of law and institutional authority. He also undermined the IEC's decision according to his Advocate Dali Mpofu's statement, "the IEC does not have the authority…to implement section 47." (Dali Mpofu, in the *Mail & Guardian,*2024). Zuma's language

generally reinforces his authoritarian tendencies. Mbeki's criticism of his leadership style and decisions suggest that his actions were authoritarian and counter to democratic principles, specifically in regard to his alleged deliberate actions to compromise electricity supply. Mbeki is quoted as saying: "The practical reality is that this failure contributed directly to the counter-revolutionary objectives to compromise the supply of electricity." (Mbeki, in *Mail & Guardian,* 2024). This implies that Zuma prioritized personal or factional interests over the well-being of the country. Mbeki's strong language such as "wolf in sheep's clothing" suggests that Zuma's leadership style was deceptive and harmful. The *Mail & Guardian* use Mbeki as a credible voice, using the language of authority. Although the newspaper's tone is neutral and objective, the *Mail & Guardian's* reports criticized Zuma's style as one that is a threat to democracy, undermining the law and targeting those who don't agree with him.

Collaborative Leadership Frame

5.14 Overview of Collaborative Leadership Frame

While Cyril Ramaphosa's collaborative approach has been praised in both *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times* for promoting stability and growth, Cyril Ramaphosa has been known to engage with various stakeholders, including opposition parties, civil society, and business leaders. Cyril Ramaphosa has emphasized the importance of addressing social and economic inequalities in South Africa. Reports have legitimised his leadership through inclusive language. He is reported as someone who identifies challenges and seeks collective solutions.

Collaborative Leadership frame: *Sunday Times*

Linguistic Expression of Collaborative Leadership Frame

- "The IEC is inherently non-political and independent… we must defend its independence." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in *Sunday Times,* 2024)
- "Difficult to generate additional funding for NHI by raising taxes." (Treasury Mark Blecher, cited in *Sunday Times,*2024)
- "The NHI is a commitment to eradicating the stark inequalities." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in *Sunday Times*, 2024)
- "None of us have a choice. We need to fix and address defects…" (Martin Kingston, cited in *Sunday Times,*2024)
- "Overcome the socioeconomic imbalances and inequities of the past." (Cyril Ramaphosa,

cited in *Sunday Times*, 2024)

- "The decision is based on bringing clarity to the law." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in *Sunday Times*,2024)
- "We must defend the IEC's independence…Just as we should defend the independence of our courts." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in *Sunday Times*,2024)

The *Sunday Times* portrays Ramaphosa's collaborative approach as a strength-based leadership style emphasizing his ability to bring stakeholders together to address complex challenges. However, some reports criticize his approach as too accommodating and ineffective in addressing specific issues. Ramaphosa emphasized unity and collective action through inclusive language: "We must work together to build a South Africa that is driven by the interests of its people." He stresses cooperation with various stakeholders, using a partnership tone: "We will work with businesses, labour, and civil society to create jobs and grow the economy". He seeks common ground through consensus building: "We must find a common purpose and work towards a shared vision for our country's future." Some linguistic features that are often used are modal verbs like "Must", "Will" and "Can" to emphasize collective responsibility. For example, "We must work together…"; and the use of first-person plural pronouns, "We are committed to building a better future." To describe his visions, he makes use of positive adjectives like "new", "inclusive" and "sustainable". The *Sunday Times* reports were neutral and objective highlighting critical concerns and potential challenges and controversies. In his approach to implementing the National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill, Ramaphosa's commitment to universal health coverage through the NHI demonstrated inclusive decision-making. His emphasis on addressing socio-economic imbalances and inequities shows his consideration for diverse population needs. However, concerns around the implementation of the NHI Bill were raised as opposition parties stated that this was a tactic to win the elections and were against signing the bill. Discussion of funding models including potential financial challenges, and Treasury's Mark Blecher (cited in Sunday Times, 2024) stated that it would be "difficult to generate additional funding for NHI by raising taxes". This revealed gaps in Ramaphosa's collaborative approach as many business leaders, according to various news articles, were against the signing of the bill. However, the same articles also showed that regardless of the potential challenges, Ramaphosa continued to use an accommodating tone, which opened engagement with business, labour, and social partners. Metaphorical language like "olive branch" to symbolise his extension of cooperation to business leaders: "We have noted the concerns… and are open to engagement," which the researcher argues demonstrates a willingness to cooperate. Articles also revealed his commitment

to protecting the IEC's independence and impartiality ensuring a fair and electoral process, as he said: "The IEC is inherently non-political and independent… and we must defend its independence." Ramaphosa's focus on understanding and resolving issues becomes clear due to his use of the language of authority to show his commitment to institutional independence, and his collaborative approach in promoting institutional integrity, and the defence of the IEC's independence fosters trust in the electoral process and encourages cooperative problem-solving.

Collaborative leadership frame: *Mail & Guardian*

Linguistic Expression for Collaborative Leadership Frame

- "We admit we made mistakes as the ANC…with some members and leaders undermining institutions of the democratic state and advancing selfish personal interests." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in the *Mail & Guardian,* 2024)
- "Fear not… it will be phased in." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in *Mail & Guardian*,2024)
- "We cannot have a situation where a portion of the population lives under a poor system, and another under a privileged system." (Cyril Ramaphosa cited *Mail & Guardian*,2024)
- "Achieving equity was what the struggle against apartheid was all about."
- "We are very resilient people; we are a very resilient country." (Cyril Ramaphosa cited in *Mail & Guardian*,2024)
- Serving the people of South Africa with the best that I can give the remaining years of my life." (Cyril Ramaphosa cited in *Mail & Guardian*, 2024)

Ramaphosa's leadership style in the *Mail & Guardian* is characterized by collaborative and inclusive traits. His approach appears preferred over others in the ANC, emphasizing the need for discussions about South Africa's transformation. His leadership has been described as "consulting" and "caring" rather than charismatic, which is evident in his efforts to unite the country and promote social justice. Ramaphosa uses language that acknowledges the diversity of South African society and encourages collective ownership and responsibility of the national vision. He uses a narrative or storytelling technique to paint a common goal. For example, "We are very resilient people, we are a very resilient country" (Ramaphosa, cited in the *Mail & Guardian*, 2024), portraying South Africa and its citizens as a united front. He repeats key phrases and ideas to emphasize their importance and create a sense of rhythm, making his message more memorable and engaging. The repetition of "**we** are" engages with people and emphasises getting the message across. Metaphorical language is used both in the *Mail and Guardian* and *Sunday Times* as Ramaphosa uses them to convey a complex idea and

inspire emotional connection such as describing the constitution as the "birth certificate of the nation," and "transform" and "stagnate" which implies an urgent need for change. Ramaphosa's reassuring leadership style comes across in his addressing concerns about the NHI's implementation: he uses the language of equity to emphasize reducing poverty and inequality and presents the NHI as a tool for social justice. He highlights the need for equity and equality, underscoring the need for universal access to quality healthcare. "We cannot have a situation where a portion of the population lives under a poor system and another under a privileged system." (Ramaphosa, cited in *Mail & Guardian*, 2024). Ramaphosa shows a willingness to acknowledge past mistakes and commit to change showcasing accountability and transparency. To support this, "We admit we made mistakes as the ANC…with some members and leaders undermining institutions of the democratic state and advancing selfish personal interests." He uses the language of renewal, acknowledges past mistakes, commits to change and takes accountability. This separates him from Zuma's resistance to taking accountability and a separation of ideologies.

Electability Theme

Electoral and Unity Frame

5.15 Overview of the Electoral Frame

The period leading up to the elections was marked by controversies, including concerns about electoral fraud and irregularities. A significant controversy surrounded Jacob Zuma's eligibility to contest the elections. The IEC initially barred Jacob Zuma from the MK party list due to his prison sentence, but the electoral court later overturned this decision. Concerns over Cyril Ramaphosa and his sudden implementation of the National Health Insurance (NHI) raised questions about whether it was a tactic to gain votes and questioned his ability to lead. The *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* focused on the electoral process, controversies, and key players. They both highlighted the IEC's effort to ensure a smooth electoral process despite challenges and disputes.

Electoral Frame: *Sunday Times*

Linguistic Expression of Electoral Frame

- "MK Party is a revenge party that will wreak havoc on the ANC." (Booysen, cited in Sunday Times, 2024)
- "Zuma's purpose is about vindicating himself." (Naidu, cited in Sunday Times,2024)
- "Section 47 and 106 of the constitution set out eligibility criteria." (IEC chairperson

Mosotho Moepya, cited in Sunday Times,2024)

- "The IEC lacks the power, jurisdiction, and/or authority." (Sunday Times,2024)
- "We are certain of victory" (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in Sunday Times,2024)
- "Our polls tell us we are going to have an outright victory." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in Sunday Times, 2024)
- "You see, comrades because of you, the volunteers, we are in every corner of this country, because of your presence on the ground and hard work we will show those who predicted an ANC loss who we are because together, they will not conquer us." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in Sunday Times,2024)

Reports concerning Zuma in the *Sunday Times* were marked by controversy and uncertainty. Zuma had announced his departure from the ANC and established his party, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), just six months before the elections. This move was seen as a significant challenge to the ANC's dominance. Zuma's eligibility to contest the elections was initially barred by the Electoral Commission due to his previous criminal convictions, but the decision was later overturned by the electoral court. The *Sunday Times'* tone was critical of Jacob Zuma's motivations and actions and ran some analytical articles concerning the MK party's influence. Booysen (*Sunday Times* 2024) stated that the formation of the MK party "is a revenge party that will wreak havoc on the ANC." The use of metaphors like "revenge party" to imply destructive intentions and "wreak havoc" emphasizes the potential damage that Zuma and the MK party might cause. Articles printed display repetition to emphasize Zuma's perceived wrongdoings; reports look at the power dynamics and reveal a struggle of power between the MK party and the IEC. They highlight the constitutional provisions governing eligibility and explore the political implications of Zuma's potential return to parliament and the consequent significant implications for South African politics, potentially altering the balance of power. In short, the *Sunday Times* reporting reveals the electoral implications of Zuma's potential return to parliament. The MK party in reports is shown challenging the IEC's decision, setting the stage for a legal battle with significant electoral consequences. To reveal this the articles, continue to use metaphors like "block" to imply obstruction, and use "lack of power" to signify the IEC's decision as a barrier to Zuma's return, and this emphasizes the IEC's limitations, underscoring the MK party's argument. Zuma's recusal application was revealed as a strategic move to potentially delay or influence the outcome of the Electoral Commission's appeal. His legal battle with the IEC for his candidacy for parliament hinges the Constitutional Courts interpretation of section 47 (1)(e). To support this statement, his application was driven by political interests rather than legal merit. See

"Zuma's recusal application, more about politics than law" (Rabkin, 2024). The metaphor of "Ghost of the unprecedented manner" evokes the controversy surrounding Zuma's recusal application was framed as a problem, questioning its legitimacy. Some language features include the use of modal verbs, for example "may" and "could", to express uncertainty about Zuma's application. The use of euphemisms to avoid saying unpleasant or unoffensive words - for instance, "unprecedented manner" - downplays the severity of Zuma's past actions. Reports also used technical vocabulary legal terms like "recusal" and "impartiality" to create a formal tone. The articles reflect a pro-rule-of-law, an anti-populist ideology. They may reinforce existing divisions between Zuma's supporters and opposition. The articles may influence public opinion about Zuma's candidacy and electability.

Reports on Ramaphosa in the *Sunday Times* convey his confidence in the ANC's victory and give off a positive tone. Ramaphosa's quoted language emphasizes the ANC's commitment to winning elections, such as: "We will show those who predicted an ANC loss who we are." He opposed critics for undermining the ANC's strength and emphasized resilience: "Campaigning for elections is about making sure you reach as many people as possible." The ANC's focus on community engagement and downplaying reliance on advertising media was consistently highlighted. Ramaphosa's influence on the ANC's campaign as the president and his words carry significant weight - his confidence may boost support morale. In his quest to win the elections, reports about the ANC showed that Ramaphosa used job creation, infrastructure, and healthcare to reflect the ANC's commitment to social welfare and economic development. This may appeal to voters seeking practical solutions. Racial and ethnic dynamics were the ANC's strongest appeal in KwaZulu Natal's diverse population, where the ANC's message could resonate with various ethnic groups and may have helped maintain the ANC's broad support base. However, some articles revealed that the ANC may lose their absolute majority in the KZN which indicated a competitive electoral environment, the MK party's rise as a challenger to the ANC represented a significant threat to the ANC's dominance and which may force the ANC to reevaluate its strategy. The articles showed the use of repetition in ANC's electoral efforts. The use of emotional appeal, and Ramaphosa's connection with supporters to establish a personal connection with voters in efforts to increase loyalty. The competition with the MK party intensified electoral rivalry and led to negative campaigning. Criticism of the ANC's past performances dropped supporter confidence and created an opportunity for opposition parties. The *Sunday Times* shows Ramaphosa's use of modal verbs to ensure certainty, for example, "we are certain" -conveying confidence and determination and inspiring supporter optimism. Euphemisms were also used to downplay corruption allegations to avoid confrontation and criticism of "Lazy deployees", which could have undermined the ANC's credibility. The ANC's ideologies emphasize

social welfare and economic development, which could have appealed to voters seeking progressive policies.

Electoral Frame: *Mail & Guardian*

Linguistic Expression for Electoral Frame

- "There is absolutely no debate that South African law contempt of court is a crime like any other crime." (Advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, cited in Mail & Guardian,2024)
- "The commission only acts on the instruction of the registered leader of the party. In the present case, Mr. Jacob Zuma is the registered leader." (IEC, cited in Mail & Guardian,2024)
- "We agreed on the order and thought it was important to provide the order urgently." (Ngcukaitobi, cited in Mail & Guardian,2024)
- "I will be voted back into power… and serve the people of South Africa with the best I can give." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in Mail & Guardian, 2024)
- "We will inject R15 billion into skills development programs." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in Mail & Guardian, 2024)
- "We admit we made mistakes the ANC, with some members and leaders undermining institutions of the democratic state and advancing selfish personal interests." (Cyril Ramaphosa cited in Mail & Guardian, 2024)

Reports in the *Mail & Guardian* highlighted the IEC arguments that Zuma's criminal record made him ineligible for standing for parliament. Zuma's lawyers disputed the conviction's competence in law, thus raising questions about the Constitution's provisions and the separation of powers. Reporters used a critical tone to report Zuma's lawyers' arguments and highlight its potential flaws. A balanced representation of both sides' arguments was presented to maintain a neutral stance. Metaphorical language to present the arguments includes "Travesty of Justice" where Zuma's lawyers emphasize the viewed unfairness of his imprisonment, and "Absurdity" highlighting potential implications of Zuma's arguments. These arguments could influence election results and the political landscape. The Constitutional Court independence was asserted to reveal power dynamics. The tensions between the rule of law and political interests are evident to show a significant social ideology. Legal terminology dominates, emphasizing the formal institutional nature of the disputes in the language used in the reports. The development of the ongoing drama with the MK party, which had faced allegations of fraud, in its signature collection process, is discussed.

Other articles included details of Khumalo's expulsion and Zuma's takeover, sparking internal conflicts. Khumalo cites Zuma's misconduct, including suspending him as party president without following constitutional procedures. Khumalo asks the IEC to remove Zuma from the parliamentary list, questioning Jacob Zuma's legitimacy as party leader. The articles maintain a neutral tone, with subtle criticism aimed at Zuma's actions and MK party infighting. The critical undertone as the *Mail & Guardian* reports on his actions highlights flaws of his leadership. The Khumalo vs Zuma case for control of the MK party reflects tensions between different factions. The reports also reveal tensions between the ANC loyal members and the MK party's deeper ideological divisions. The language used is formal and accusatory language, for example, 'hijacking' to highlight conflict to show Zuma's alleged takeover of the party. Reports also show the Electoral Court's decision on Zuma's eligibility despite his 15 months prison sentence - the electoral court's delayed explanation sparked national interest, while the IEC objected to Jacob Zuma's candidacy. The Electoral Court's decision challenged the IEC's authority and tension between the rule of law and political interests.

Both the *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times* report on Ramaphosa the same in terms of electoral frames. He was seen as an optimist with confidence in his election victory, including his confidence in South Africa's democratic stability, his assurance of democracy resilience, and the ANC's re-election. The *Mail & Guardian* uses election prediction outcomes to show polls and the ANC's share below 50% (40.2%). So Ramaphosa's confidence in the ANC's victory may be viewed as a strategy, aiming to boost party morale and voter confidence. However, predicted outcomes suggest a potential decline in ANC dominance. There is subtle criticism as reporters subtly critique Ramaphosa's optimism. The tone of reporting maintains a balance between reporting facts and subtly questioning Ramaphosa's confidence. Both the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* employ metaphors to his confidence in the country's democratic institutions. His confidence asserts the ANC's dominance while his social ideology reveals tensions between democratic stability and potential electoral upheaval. The *Mail & Guardian's* language use is like the *Sunday Times'* employing political terminologies to emphasize institutional aspects. The ANC's victory on KZN and Gauteng reveals a significant drop. Ramaphosa's action to admit to past mistakes highlighted the balance of accountability and progress. He focused his campaign on economic empowerment and education is prioritised. Reports subtly criticized Ramaphosa's promises and questioned whether they would be fulfilled, or that his speeches are more about electioneering rather than delivering on promises.

Unity Frame

5.16 Overview of the Unity Frame

Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma have been portrayed differently in the Sunday Times and Mail & Guardian. Cyril Ramaphosa is often framed as a unifying leader having played a key role in the country's transition and serving as the president of the ANC. Jacob Zuma has been described as a divisive leader highlighting his alleged involvement in corruption scandals and the divisive rhetoric controversy surrounding his presidency has contributed to national division.

Unity Frame: *Sunday Times*

Linguistic Expression on the Unity Frame

- "The laws we have are weak. The government says parents cannot raise children the way they were raised." (Jacob Zuma cited Sunday Times,2024)
- "We will stop the exporting of raw mineral resources, gold and silver because it makes Western countries rich, and we are left poor." (Jacob Zuma cited in Sunday Times,2024)
- "Zuma feels wronged by corruption allegations and is out for revenge against his successor President Cyril Ramaphosa." (Susan Booysen, cited in Sunday Times)
- "I get the sense we'll have to deal with security now more than ever before in this election." (Sanusha Naidu, cited in Sunday Times)
- "We've seen what coalitions can do... That will be the danger zone for our country." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in Sunday Time,2024)
- "I go into this election without fear and without doubt that the ANC will emerge victorious." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in Sunday Times, 2024)
- "Because of you, the volunteers, we are in every corner of this country... together they will not conquer us." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in Sunday Times, 2024)
- "Our polls tell us we are going to have an outright victory... We are certain of victory." (Cyril Ramaphosa cited in Sunday Times,2024)

The *Sunday Times* reports suggest that Zuma's uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MKP) is driven by a desire for revenge against President Cyril Ramaphosa, rather than unity. According to expert Susan Booysen, MKP is a "revenge party" aimed at wreaking havoc on the African National Congress (ANC). This implies a divisive approach, putting Zuma's supporters against Ramaphosa's faction. In his election campaign at a church, Zuma's comments received a lukewarm response from the congregation, but his singing of his electioneering song *Umshini Wami* garnered a more enthusiastic reaction. He reiterated his plan to send unmarried pregnant teenagers to Robben Island to continue

their studies, along with the boys who impregnated them. Articles quote people who argue this plan is “pregnant with ignorance” and reflects Zuma's primitive views on gender matters. Zuma's speech emphasized economic changes, promising to stop exporting raw mineral resources and build firms to process gold and silver in South Africa. This rhetoric aims to appeal to his base, leveraging African spirituality and traditional leaders to unite his supporters. The tone of the articles, however, is critical, with the reports implying Zuma's views are outdated and divisive. Expert opinions label Zuma's plan for Robben Island as ignorant and harmful. However, the language used to describe Zuma's motivations - “out for revenge” and the party's potential impact “wreak havoc” - implies criticism. The phrase “revenge party” used by Booysen serves as a metaphor, emphasizing MKP's primary motivation. This metaphor suggests a destructive and retaliatory approach, rather than a constructive or unifying one. The *Sunday Times* reveals underlying power dynamics and social tensions within the ANC. Zuma's perceived wrongdoing and subsequent revenge narrative highlight the personalized nature of South African politics. Sanusha Naidu's comment on security concerns due to MKP's court battles with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) underscores the potential for instability: “Zuma feels wronged by corruption allegations and is out for revenge against his successor President Cyril Ramaphosa.” (Susan Booysen, cited in Sunday Times, 2024). The Unity Frame highlights Zuma's divisive approach, putting his supporters against those opposing his views.

President Ramaphosa's speech in KwaZulu-Natal emphasized unity and collective effort, urging supporters to vote and bring their undecided friends and family along. He acknowledged the importance of volunteers, stating, "Because of you, the volunteers, we are in every corner of this country... together they will not conquer us." Ramaphosa's language promotes social cohesion and national unity, framing the ANC as a force for progress. Ramaphosa's speech framed the ANC as the sole guarantor of stability and effective governance, emphasizing the risks of coalition governments. He positioned the ANC as the best option for South Africa's progress. The tone of the article is neutral and objective, presenting Ramaphosa's speech without emotional language. However, the reporter's choice to highlight the ANC's challenges in KwaZulu-Natal and the rise of Zuma's MK Party creates a sense of tension and competition. Ramaphosa used the metaphor "Together they will not conquer us," emphasizing the power of collective action and unity. This metaphor suggests a sense of resilience and determination. The *Sunday Times* reports frame Ramaphosa's speech as a strategic attempt to rally support and counter the challenge posed by Zuma's MK Party. By emphasizing job creation, infrastructure development, and healthcare, Ramaphosa appeals to the

material interests of voters. His anti-corruption rhetoric aims to differentiate the ANC from its internal critics and opposition parties.

Unity Frame: *Mail & Guardian*

Linguistic Expression of the Unity Frame

- "The ANC pulled a massive show to strength but offered very little new to voters at the 2024 election manifesto launch in Durban on Saturday." (Sunday Times, 2024)
- "We will develop more subsided human settlements." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in Mail & Guardian,2024)
- "We will continue building subsided housing for vulnerable groups." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in Sunday Times, 2024)
- **"**The democracy that we have crafted has enough shock absorbers… to get our people and our country through the challenges." (Cyril Ramaphosa, cited in Sunday Times, 2024)
- "You have purported to suspend me as the president of the party without following the procedures prescribed by the constitution." (Khumalo, cited in Sunday Times, 2024)
- "Mr Zuma announced that I had been removed as the president of the party and he would henceforth become the president." (Jabulani Khumalo, cited in Sunday Times,2024)
- "The proviso cannot undermine the controlling section." (Advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, cited in Sunday Times, 2024)

The *Mail & Guardian* reports reveal Jabulani Khumalo's move to suspend Zuma and request his removal from the MK party list highlights internal conflicts within the party. This power struggle undermines unity and potentially damages the party's reputation. The reports highlight divisions within the judicial system, with Justice Leona Theron's minority judgment and Zuma's counsel arguing against the IEC. The case's outcome could impact national unity, as Zuma's eligibility could influence election results.

Zuma's unity approach in the *Mail & Guardian* in reports was portrayed as divisive, particularly due to his involvement with the uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) party. This development has sparked concerns about potential divisions within the African National Congress (ANC) and the broader South African political landscape. The *Mail & Guardian's* overall portrayal of Zuma's candidacy highlights tensions within the electoral system. His suspension from the ANC and subsequent expulsion from the party have contributed to the divisive narrative surrounding his political ambitions. Furthermore,

Zuma's decision not to attend the announcement of the election results has been interpreted as a sign of his intention to challenge the outcome.

Ramaphosa's unity frame in the *Mail & Guardian* articles is portrayed as a key aspect of his leadership, particularly in promoting national unity and cooperation. During the African National Congress (ANC) election manifesto launch in Durban, he emphasized the party's commitment to creating jobs, boosting industrialization, and tackling the high cost of living. Ramaphosa's statements emphasize national unity and stability, reassuring South Africans that the country will not experience a crisis if the ANC loses the elections. His language promotes unity, stability, and confidence in South Africa's democracy. By downplaying potential chaos, he reassures voters and reinforces the ANC's commitment to democratic principles. Ramaphosa's statements demonstrate his leadership and confidence in the ANC's ability to govern, while also acknowledging potential electoral challenges. His emphasis on democracy, resilience, and national unity reflects the ANC's commitment to democratic values and inclusive governance. The articles highlight his efforts to promote unity and cooperation within the ANC and across South Africa. However, it also critiques the lack of new policies and concrete targets in the manifesto, suggesting a potential disconnect between Ramaphosa's unity rhetoric and the party's actual plans.

5.17Conclusion

In this chapter the study identified the frames used by *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times,* in reports of the 2024 general elections in South Africa and analyzed the frames.

Chapter Six

Analysis of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings of the study on the media representation of the leadership qualities of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma in the *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times* during the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 South African general elections. The discussion is organised around the three research questions and considers the findings in relation to the literature and theoretical framework of the study.

The study identified six broad frames through which the leadership qualities and political conduct of Ramaphosa and Zuma were represented: Tolerance and Zero-Tolerance to Corruption, Constitutional Accountability, Authoritarian Leadership, Collaborative Leadership, Electoral Representation and Unity. These frames were identified from recurring patterns within the selected newspaper articles and were subsequently compared across the two newspapers, the two political leaders and the three electoral periods.

The chapter first discusses the culturally constructed frames identified in the coverage, followed by a comparison of the representations of Ramaphosa and Zuma in the *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times*. It then examines how the representations and frames changed across the pre-election, election and post-election periods. The chapter concludes by discussing the contribution of the study, its limitations, implications, recommendations and overall conclusion.

6.2 How did the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* represent the leadership qualities of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma through culturally constructed frames during the 2024 general elections?

The first research question sought to establish the culturally constructed frames used by the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* to represent the leadership qualities of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma. The findings identified six broad frames: **Tolerance and Zero-Tolerance to Corruption, Constitutional Accountability, Authoritarian Leadership, Collaborative Leadership, Electoral Representation and Unity**.

The identification of these frames demonstrates that the newspapers did not represent leadership only by explicitly describing Ramaphosa or Zuma as having particular qualities. Leadership was also constructed through the selection and emphasis of political events, statements, controversies, institutional relationships and electoral developments. This is consistent with Entman's (1993) understanding of framing as the selection and salience of particular aspects of perceived reality. It also corresponds with Van Gorp's (2007) constructionist approach, which emphasises that frames are connected to culturally available meanings.

The findings therefore suggest that leadership qualities were represented within broader political and cultural discourses. For example, accountability became connected to corruption and constitutional governance, collaboration became connected to consultation and unity, while political authority became connected to institutional conflict and political controversy.

6.2.1 Tolerance and Zero-Tolerance to Corruption Frame

The Tolerance and Zero-Tolerance to Corruption Frame was evident in the coverage of both Ramaphosa and Zuma. However, the frame was applied differently according to the political leader and the context in which corruption was discussed.

Ramaphosa was frequently represented in relation to efforts to address corruption, strengthen accountability and improve governance. References to his statements concerning corruption contributed to a representation of his leadership as being associated with addressing corruption and political accountability.

In contrast, Zuma was more frequently represented in relation to his previous presidency, allegations of corruption, legal proceedings and questions concerning political accountability. Corruption therefore became connected to his political history and previous controversies.

The findings demonstrate that the same broad frame could produce different representations of political leadership. This supports Entman's (1993) argument that framing involves making particular aspects of an issue more salient, while Van Gorp (2007) highlights the role of culturally available meanings in the construction of frames.

The findings also provide a point of comparison with previous research on the media representation of political leaders. Chambwera (2016), for example, argues that political framing can contribute to the legitimisation or delegitimisation of political actors. However, Chambwera's findings are not treated as evidence of the present study's conclusions. Rather, they provide a basis against which the findings of this study can be compared.

6.2.2 Constitutional Accountability Frame

The Constitutional Accountability Frame was particularly evident in reporting concerning the rule of law, judicial processes, institutional independence and Zuma's eligibility to participate in the 2024 elections.

The coverage represented Zuma's legal and electoral disputes within a broader discourse of constitutional accountability. His relationship with judicial and electoral institutions became part of the representation of his political leadership.

Ramaphosa was also represented through constitutional accountability, particularly in relation to institutional independence, governance and the rule of law. Consequently, the frame was not exclusively associated with one political leader.

The findings indicate that constitutional accountability operated as a shared frame through which the newspapers represented different aspects of the two leaders' political conduct. The meaning of the frame depended on the political event and the actor to whom it was applied. This is consistent with framing theory, which recognises that the selection and emphasis of particular aspects of an issue can encourage particular interpretations (Entman, 1993).

6.2.3 Authoritarian Leadership and Collaborative Leadership Frames

The Authoritarian Leadership and Collaborative Leadership Frames provided one of the clearest contrasts in the representation of Zuma and Ramaphosa.

Ramaphosa was frequently represented through references to consultation, cooperation, collective responsibility and engagement with different stakeholders. These representations contributed to the construction of a collaborative leadership frame.

Zuma, on the other hand, was more frequently represented through political confrontation, institutional conflict and questions concerning authority and accountability. These representations contributed to the authoritarian leadership frame identified in the study.

These findings should be understood as representations rather than objective assessments of the two leaders. The study does not establish that Ramaphosa is objectively a collaborative leader or that Zuma is objectively an authoritarian leader. Instead, the analysis demonstrates that the newspapers constructed these meanings through recurring descriptions, events, quotations and political contexts.

This distinction is particularly important because the purpose of the study is to examine media representation of leadership qualities, rather than independently assess the actual leadership styles of the two politicians.

6.2.4 Electoral Frame

The Electoral Frame was evident particularly in the coverage of the 2024 election campaign and the political competition surrounding the ANC, MK Party and other political parties.

Both leaders were represented in relation to electoral prospects and political support. Ramaphosa's representation was connected to his position as ANC leader and incumbent President, while Zuma's representation was strongly associated with the MK Party, its electoral prospects and the legal controversy concerning his eligibility to contest the election.

The electoral frame therefore connected leadership to electoral competition and political legitimacy. This demonstrates that the representation of political leadership was not separated from the political parties and electoral institutions with which the two leaders were associated.

6.2.5 Unity Frame

The Unity Frame was also evident in the coverage of both political leaders. Ramaphosa was frequently represented through themes of cooperation, political stability and national unity, while Zuma's representation was more frequently connected to political divisions, particularly those surrounding the ANC and the emergence of the MK Party.

The concept of unity has particular cultural and political significance in South Africa, where ideas of reconciliation, nation-building and democratic stability form part of the broader political discourse (Hall, 1997; Van Gorp, 2007).

The findings therefore indicate that unity functioned as a culturally meaningful frame through which different approaches to political leadership could be represented.

6.3 What similarities and differences emerged between the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* in their representation of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma?

The second research question examined the similarities and differences between the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian*. The findings indicate that the two newspapers employed broadly similar frames when reporting on Ramaphosa and Zuma. The six frames identified in the study were evident across the coverage of both newspapers.

However, this similarity in the broad frames does not mean that the two newspapers represented the two leaders identically. Differences were evident in the emphasis, language, tone, political events and contextual application of the frames.

This distinction is important because the original statement that there was "no significant difference" between the newspapers created a contradiction with the subsequent analysis. The more accurate interpretation is that there was substantial similarity in the broad framing structures, while differences occurred in how those frames were applied to particular political actors and events.

For example, both newspapers used the corruption frame, but the frame was more frequently associated with Ramaphosa's efforts to address corruption and with Zuma's political history and allegations concerning corruption. Similarly, both newspapers used the constitutional accountability frame, but the particular events and political circumstances through which that frame was applied differed.

The findings therefore suggest that the newspapers shared a number of culturally available political frames. This is consistent with Van Gorp's (2007) argument that frames can draw upon culturally shared interpretive resources. At the same time, the different ways in which the newspapers selected and emphasised particular aspects of political events demonstrate that the application of a frame is not necessarily identical across media organisations.

The study therefore does not conclude that the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* were completely identical in their reporting. Rather, it finds that their broad framing patterns were similar, while their representations differed in emphasis and contextual application.

6.4 How do the representations and culturally constructed frames associated with Ramaphosa and Zuma change across the pre-election, election and post-election periods?

The third research question examined changes in the representation of Ramaphosa and Zuma across the three periods of the 2024 electoral process. The analysis demonstrates that the prominence and application of the identified frames changed as the political context developed.

6.4.1 Pre-election period

During the pre-election period, the representation of Ramaphosa and Zuma was strongly connected to political positioning, electoral competition and the anticipated outcome of the election.

Ramaphosa was represented primarily in relation to his position as ANC leader and incumbent President, while Zuma's representation increasingly focused on his association with the MK Party and its potential electoral impact.

The legal and constitutional developments surrounding Zuma's eligibility to participate in the election also contributed to the prominence of the Constitutional Accountability Frame. Electoral competition, political positioning and questions concerning accountability were therefore important elements of the pre-election representation.

6.4.2 Election period

During the election period, the coverage increasingly focused on electoral performance, political support and competition between political parties.

The Electoral Frame became particularly prominent as the newspapers reported on the performance of the ANC, the emergence of the MK Party and the implications of the election for the country's political landscape.

Ramaphosa's representation became increasingly connected to the electoral performance of the ANC, while Zuma's representation was connected to the electoral significance of the MK Party.

The leadership qualities of the two politicians were therefore represented within the immediate context of electoral competition rather than solely through their individual political histories.

6.4.3 Post-election period

The post-election period introduced a different political context following the results of the election. The ANC's loss of its parliamentary majority and the subsequent political negotiations created new circumstances through which Ramaphosa's leadership could be represented.

The Collaborative Leadership and Unity Frames consequently became more relevant to the representation of Ramaphosa as political parties considered cooperation and the formation of a Government of National Unity.

Zuma's representation also changed as attention shifted towards the electoral significance of the MK Party, its position within the changing political environment and its relationship with the ANC and other political parties.

The findings therefore demonstrate that the representation of political leadership was not static across the electoral period. Instead, particular frames became more or less prominent as political circumstances changed. This supports Entman's (1993) argument that framing involves the selection and salience of particular aspects of political reality.

The findings can also be understood through Van Gorp's (2007) constructionist approach, which emphasises the relationship between frames and culturally available meanings. As the political context changed, different aspects of leadership became more salient and were connected to different political events.

Overall, the pre-election period placed greater emphasis on political positioning, electoral prospects and questions of eligibility and accountability; the election period emphasised electoral competition and party performance; while the post-election period placed greater emphasis on governance, political cooperation, unity and the consequences of the election outcome.

6.5 Contribution to Research

The study contributes to existing literature on media framing and political communication by examining how culturally constructed frames were used to represent the leadership qualities of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma during the 2024 South African general elections.

The study contributes specifically by identifying six broad frames—Tolerance and Zero-Tolerance to Corruption, Constitutional Accountability, Authoritarian Leadership, Collaborative Leadership, Electoral Representation and Unity—through which the two leaders were represented.

The study also contributes to research on political leadership by demonstrating how leadership qualities can be constructed through media discourse. Qualities such as accountability, collaboration, authority, political influence and unity were not simply presented as objective characteristics. They were represented through political events, language, quotations, institutional relationships and electoral developments.

The study further contributes through its comparison of the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian*. While the newspapers employed broadly similar frames, the findings demonstrate differences in emphasis and contextual application. This provides a more nuanced understanding than simply categorising a newspaper as either supportive or critical of a political leader.

The study also contributes to the application of Van Gorp's (2007) constructionist framing approach within the South African electoral context. The findings demonstrate how culturally available meanings can provide interpretive resources through which political leaders and political events are represented.

In this respect, the study addresses the research problem identified at the beginning of the thesis. Rather than merely identifying whether political leaders were legitimised or delegitimised, the study examines the culturally constructed frames through which particular leadership qualities were made meaningful.

6.6 Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, the analysis was restricted to the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian*. The findings therefore cannot be generalised to all South African news media. Other newspapers, broadcasters, community media and digital platforms may have constructed different representations of Ramaphosa and Zuma.

Second, the study focused on online news articles relating to the 2024 general elections. The dataset therefore does not include all forms of media content, such as television, radio, social media and

audience-generated content. The original study also recognises that the sample was limited to online news articles and privately owned outlets.

Third, the study did not investigate audience responses. Consequently, it cannot establish whether the frames identified influenced readers' perceptions, political attitudes or voting behaviour. Such conclusions would require audience research.

Fourth, the study analysed published texts rather than the internal processes through which journalists and editors produced those texts. It therefore cannot establish whether particular representations resulted from editorial policy, ownership interests, audience preferences or individual journalistic decisions.

Fifth, qualitative analysis involves interpretation. Although the researcher used systematic coding and repeatedly returned to the original articles, another researcher could interpret some passages differently.

Finally, the study focuses on the 2024 electoral period and therefore reflects the political context of that period. The frames identified may change as political circumstances and relationships between political actors develop.

6.7 Implications of the Findings

The findings have implications for journalism, political communication and democratic discourse in South Africa.

For journalism, the findings demonstrate the importance of recognising how the selection and emphasis of particular political events and leadership qualities contribute to broader representations of political actors. Even where individual reports provide factual information, the cumulative effect of repeated representations can contribute to particular understandings of political leadership (Entman, 1993).

For political communication, the findings demonstrate that leadership representation is closely connected to political context. Ramaphosa and Zuma were represented not only through their individual qualities but also through their relationships with political parties, institutions, electoral competition and broader political events.

For democratic discourse, the findings highlight the importance of media plurality. Although the two newspapers employed broadly similar frames, differences in emphasis demonstrate why examining more than one media outlet is important when studying political representation.

However, the findings do not demonstrate that media framing directly determined electoral outcomes. The study examined media texts and did not measure audience responses or voting behaviour. Any claim concerning a direct relationship between the identified frames and electoral choices would therefore require further research.

6.8 Recommendations

Future research should expand the number and range of media organisations examined. Including public-service broadcasting, community media, television, radio and digital-only platforms could provide a broader understanding of political leadership representation in South Africa.

Future studies should also examine how audiences interpret culturally constructed frames. Audience interviews, focus groups or surveys could establish whether different audiences interpret the representations of Ramaphosa and Zuma in similar or different ways.

Further research could investigate the production of political news by interviewing journalists and editors. Such research would help establish how editorial decision-making, sourcing practices and newsroom routines contribute to the construction of political frames.

Longitudinal research could also examine whether the six frames identified in this study continue to appear in media representations of Ramaphosa and Zuma beyond the 2024 elections. This would establish whether the frames were primarily associated with the election period or form part of longer-term patterns of political representation.

6.9 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the media representation of the leadership qualities of Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma in the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* during the pre-election, election and post-election periods of the 2024 South African general elections.

The first research question sought to identify the culturally constructed frames used to represent the two leaders. Six broad frames were identified: Tolerance and Zero-Tolerance to Corruption, Constitutional Accountability, Authoritarian Leadership, Collaborative Leadership, Electoral Representation and Unity.

The second research question examined similarities and differences between the two newspapers. The findings demonstrate that the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* employed broadly similar frames, although differences were evident in their emphasis, language and contextual application. The newspapers therefore cannot be described as completely identical in their representations.

Rather, the broad framing structures were similar, while the application of those frames to Ramaphosa and Zuma produced different representations.

The third research question examined changes across the pre-election, election and post-election periods. The findings demonstrate that the prominence and application of particular frames changed as the political context developed. The pre-election period emphasised political positioning, electoral prospects and accountability; the election period emphasised electoral competition and party performance; while the post-election period brought greater attention to governance, political cooperation, unity and the consequences of the election outcome.

The findings therefore address the research problem by demonstrating that the media representation of political leadership is not limited to direct descriptions of political candidates. Rather, leadership qualities are constructed through culturally available meanings, political events, institutional relationships, language and electoral discourse. This extends the existing literature by examining not simply whether political leaders are legitimised or delegitimised, but how culturally constructed frames contribute to the meaning attached to their leadership qualities.

The study concludes that the *Sunday Times* and *Mail & Guardian* drew upon broadly similar culturally constructed frames when reporting on Ramaphosa and Zuma, but that the application of these frames produced contrasting representations of the two leaders. The representations also changed as the political context moved from the pre-election period, through the election itself, and into the post-election period. The study consequently demonstrates the importance of examining political leadership representation within its specific cultural, political and temporal context.

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