

# South African media's framing of the terrorist insurgency in Mozambique

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## Abstract

This paper investigated South African media's framing of the terrorism insurgency in Mozambique. It specifically sought to understand how South Africa's flagship online publications: *News24*, *TimesLive*, and *IOL*, framed the insurgency. Methodologically, the study employed a qualitative content analysis with the framing theory as our theoretical lens. Our findings show that South African media's coverage of terrorist attacks in Mozambique is informed by five prominent frames: the social consequences frame, the morality frame, the economic consequences frame, war against Islam militants frame and the national interest frame. We argue that the use of these frames in the construction of the terrorism attacks in Mozambique limit the South African media's ability to provide a nuanced picture of the complex and multi-faceted nature of the terrorist insurgency in Mozambique. Our findings show that the reliance on official lines tends to influence the manner in which the terrorist attacks in Mozambique are framed by the three South African publications. We also argue that the use of these five frames in the reportage on the terrorist insurgency in Mozambique limit the South African media's ability to provide the South African public and policy makers with a balanced perspective on the insurgency in Mozambique. In conclusion we recommend that future news reportage as well as future studies consider looking at the complexity surrounding the socio-economic status of the regions experiencing terrorists activities. Such studies and future news stories could be enhanced by looking at multiple stakeholders, including affected communities, to get a broader understanding of the causal effects and possible solutions to terrorism.

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## Keywords

Mozambique, conflict, framing, Al Shabaab, terrorism, Peace Journalism

## Introduction

The recent emergence of terrorism in Mozambique poses a serious threat to the stability of that country and the entire Southern African Development Community (SADC) region (Makonye, 2020). Geneologically, the terrorist insurgency in Mozambique can be traced back to 5 October 2017, when 20 armed members of the Ansar al-Sunna attacked three police stations (a police command, a natural resources and environment police patrol station, and a police post) in a pre-dawn raid in Mocimboa da Praia, a coastal district in Cabo Delgado Province (Vhumbunu, 2021). The terror group Ansar al-Sunna was formed in 2012 with its emergence appearing to be orchestrated by local social discontentment due to poverty and economic deprivation (Mutasa, & Muchemwa, 2021). The attackers, as Vhumbunu (2021) argues, spoke Portuguese, Kiswahili, and Kimwani, languages largely spoken along the coast of Cabo Delgado Province.

It is now seven years since the first terrorist attack in Mozambique was launched by Islamist militants. Militants have among others used explosives, machetes, and firearms to conduct lethal attacks, including attacks on vehicles. In June 2019, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for an attack for the first time. Most recently, there was a large-scale attack on Palma in March/April 2021, also claimed by the Islamic State, in which dozens of people were killed. This is why some organisations have claimed that the disgruntled militant group in Mozambique has ties with other terrorist groupings. Although the Government of Mozambique continues to make concerted efforts to fight and subdue the terrorist insurgency through its national defense forces, the Forças Armadas de Defesa de Moçambique (FADM), a series of battles with the terrorist militants has resulted in widespread violence, insecurity, the death of over 2 400 people and the displacement of over 500 000 civilians by the end of November 2020. It has also disrupted economic activities, especially farming, thereby worsening food insecurity.

Some of the areas affected by the terrorist insurgency in Mozambique include the districts of Mueda, Nangade, Palma, Mocimboa da Praia, Muidumbe, Meluco, Macomia, Quissanga, and Ibo in Cabo Delgado Province, including the islands off the coast (Human Rights Watch, 2023). The groups behind the terrorism are argued to have links to Islamic extremists (ibid).

South Africa is of interest considering its super power status in the continent and being the biggest economy in the SADC region. The country has consistently ranked in the top three biggest economies in the continent over the past decade (World Population Review, 2023) which comes with political leverage when it comes to mediating conflicts in the sub-region and continent (Butts, & Thomas, 2019). South Africa, a neighbor of Mozambique, plays a bigger role in conflict mediation and taming insurgences in the region and other conflicts internationally. At the time of revising this article, South Africa had deployed its military, the South African National Defense Forces (SANDF), to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), to fight rebels (SABC News, 2024). Mozambique has been under incessant attacks from terrorists dating back to January 2017 (Makonye, 2020)

South African media's framing of the terrorist attacks in Mozambique has fundamentally shaped the way in which the public and policymakers perceive the causes, consequences, importance and possible solutions to the insurgency and by extension where the country's diplomatic and material resources should be committed (Evans, 2010). The frames employed by the media also determine whether the public will identify with one of the sides involved in the insurgency or feel indifferent to the events taking place in Mozambique.

In light of this background, this study expands on existing literature on media framing by examining how South Africa's biggest online publications: *News24*, *TimesLive*, and *IOL*, have been framing the terrorist insurgency in Mozambique. The paper specifically sought to identify the frames used by the selected South African media to report on the terrorism insurgency in Mozambique and the implications of these frames on the public and policy makers.

## **Literature review**

*The social and political context surrounding the terrorist insurgency in Mozambique*

The media plays a critical role of constructing and defining political issues and conflicts for its audiences (Nelson et al., 1997; Matsilele, 2013; Chuma et al., 2020; Tshuma et al., 2022). The frames used by the media assist the public and policymakers to make sense of complex conflicts in a coherent manner. The South African media has been at the heart of attempting to construct and define the conflict in Mozambique on behalf of its publics and policy makers since 2017. Terrorism in Mozambique is complex and has taken many shapes and forms over the years (Vhumbunu, 2021). As Vhumbunu (2021) argues, the terrorist insurgency in Mozambique has both religious and inequality dimensions to

it that makes it an interesting case for media framing. With a population of approximately 28 million (INE, 2017), of which 68% live in rural areas and 60% live along the coastline, livelihoods in Mozambique depend, to a large extent, on natural resources such as rain-fed agriculture and fishing. Mozambique is on the southeastern coast of Africa, bordering South Africa, Eswatini, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, and Tanzania, with an Indian Ocean coastline of 2,700 km. The country is endowed with important natural resources, such as arable land, forestry, water, energy, and mineral resources (Swatuk, 2010).

The country's vast resources include the third-largest reserves of natural gas in the continent, recently discovered in the Rovuma river basin, bordering Tanzania, in the northern province of Cabo Delgado (Brownfield, 2016). In addition, three strategic seaports in the cities of Nacala (north), Beira (centre), and Maputo (south), as well as regional transport corridors serving its neighboring landlocked countries offer many opportunities for regional trade and economic growth. Despite having one of the fastest growing economies in Sub-Saharan Africa from 2000-2015, job-creation, poverty reduction, and human capital accumulation were limited, with most of the substantial wealth generated benefiting limited sections of the economy (World Bank, 2022). Poverty remains high, with up to 46.1% of the population living below the poverty datum line. The World Bank's (2023:1) Poverty and Equity Brief noted that "the proportion of the population living below the poverty line, measured by the US\$2.15 per day poverty line (2017 PPP), surged to 74.4 percent in 2019/20, up from 64.6 percent in 2014/15". According to Statista (2022), in 2022, 60% of the population in Mozambique lived in extreme poverty, with the poverty threshold at 1.90 U.S. dollars a day. That corresponded to roughly 20 million people in absolute poverty. By 2025, the extreme poverty rate is projected to decrease to 49%. More recently, as the World Bank (2022: 1) observed "in the period 2020-2021, poverty averaged 64% and is estimated to remain at that level in 2022. This macro environment of Mozambique is a mirror of challenges faced by residents of the province of Cabo Delgado. In addition to the aspects mentioned above, which also affected wellbeing, another reason for the stagnation in poverty reduction include also macroeconomic volatility during this period".

According to the report by the Embassy of Sweden in Maputo (2019), Mozambique continues to trail regional peers and the country remains in the lowest category for the Human Development Index (HDI) ranking 180/189 in 2017 – lower than DRC and Sudan – driven by one of the lowest levels of educational attainment in the world, high communicable disease burden and

low GDP/capita. Notwithstanding the reduction in poverty incidence from previous poverty assessments, in absolute terms, the number of poor people in Mozambique has remained relatively unchanged.

Since 2016, Mozambique's economic performance has experienced a sharp reversal, with a slowdown in economic growth, a worsening of the government's fiscal position, and rising debt levels, mainly due to falling global commodity prices, the impact of the El Nino drought, and spiraling debt. More recently, in 2019, Mozambique has been heavily affected by two tropical cyclones, Idai and Kenneth, that resulted in significant loss of life and widespread damage to crops and infrastructure.

A study by the Institute of Security Studies (2022) found that some of the contributing factors to the province of Cabo Delgado's insurgency include the regional inequities, with ethnicity, being a major grievance, discovery and poor governance of natural resources such as rubies and liquefied natural gas, this has often been dubbed the 'resources curse'. Writing on the resource curse, Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) intimated that various factors contribute to this phenomenon, including weak institutions that fail to distribute resources for the benefit of all citizens. The insurgency being experienced in this region has culminated in a lack of economic opportunities, reduced access to skills development, lack of community experience and disruption in information and public services (USAID, 2022).

### *Conceptualising framing*

Our examination of the frames used by the South African media on its reportage of the terrorist insurgency in Mozambique is guided by the concept of framing. Framing was first introduced by sociologist Erving Goffman (1974) who argued that social frameworks provide important background information that helps members of society to understand the world around them. Later research applied Goffman's frame analysis to the media and their role in agenda-setting (see e.g. Cohen, 2002; Entman, 1991, 1993). As Entman (1993) explained, to frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (Entman, 1993: 52). News frames are important in how these events are reported, as they reflect a process of recurring selection and emphasis in communicating perceived reality (Entman, 1993; Gitlin, 1980; Matsilele, & Mpofu, 2022). Frames present a central part of how individuals cognitively comprehend and file events, and as such, are

an important determinant of how a news story is told, especially in times of conflicting accounts and factual uncertainty. Framing presents a meaningful, yet in Entman's (1993) words, fractured paradigm for communication scholars, as it integrates influences from various disciplines. Frames can be in four places in the communication process; within the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture itself.

*Media framing and public opinion*

According to Evans (2010) media frames are manifest in the amount of coverage directed at particular conflicts or terrorist insurgencies and the language employed to describe the actors and events in that conflict. The frames used in reporting shape the public and policymakers perceptions of the conflict or terrorist attacks (Evans, 2010). Consequently, the public and policy makers rely on the media and the frames it employs to form opinions on the causes of the terrorist insurgency or conflict, the actors involved, its significance as well as the most viable solution. Thus, the news items reported to the public and policymakers influence the public and policymakers to understand events from a particular perspective, or frame, advanced by the media. Entman (2004) contends that media framing influences government decision-making by providing certain perspectives about conflict or terrorist insurgencies to policy makers directly and indirectly through public opinion (Entman, 2004).

The media's choices, as to which stories to cover and which facts to include, demand a certain amount of discretion. This process of selection of stories and how to cover them is what is regarded as media framing. Research on framing elucidates the ways in which media reports select and highlight particular elements of an issue in the process of bringing it to the public (Entman 2000). Writing on this, Nelson et al. (1997: 221) posit that "consequently, news reporting entails 'framing', 'the process by which a communication source constructs and defines a social or political issue for its audience'". In organizing an article around certain ideas or themes, particular aspects or angles are emphasized and made more 'salient' (Dimitrova et al., 2005). This process help organize concise and coherent news summaries (Nelson et al., 1997; Tshuma, 2023).

The effects of framing have been studied in communications, psychology and political science (Nelson et al., 1997; Druckman, 2001b; Esser, & D'Angelo, 2006; Nelson, & Oxley, 1999; Ruhanya, & Matsilele, 2022). For example, Druckman (2004: 671) studied how 'different, but logically equivalent, words or phrases cause individuals to alter their preferences' on policy issues. Entman's (2004) model illustrates the function of framing in defining the effects of a problem

or condition, identifying its causes, endorsing a remedy and conveying a moral judgement. This work takes a similar approach, analysing the content of media reports of these two conflicts in terms of the events that took place, the actors involved and the moral judgement conveyed.

*Problematising inconsistent framing*

There are various explanations for the inconsistent framing of different conflicts. As Galtung and Ruge (1965) assert, cultural proximity in the structure of foreign reporting plays an important role. These scholars add that the proximity of the home audience to either of the sides in the conflict affect the portrayal of elites and common people in narratives and quotes. The inverse is true where there is distant inculture. In such cases, Galtung and Ruge (1965: 81) intimate that “the greater the tendency to stereotype and reduce complexity, presenting events and people in ‘ideal types’”. The case in point regarding the the differences in the Jenin and Nahr al-Bared reporting offer interesting insights. *The New York Times* correspondents were Americans reporting on a clash between two cultures distant from theirs, and may have had more of a tendency to report in a simple stereotyped way – the weak versus the strong – than the Arab journalists who had much greater proximity to the sides in the fighting in Lebanon. As Galtung and Ruge (1965) and Hess (1996) observed, the American journalists visiting the region in the case of Jenin employed a caricature-like framing of the weaker side as the valiant underdog that was not seen with the Arab journalists in Lebanon. Beyond the issue of cultural proximity, news reporting is also affected by business pressures to bring more sensationalist stories that will attract larger audiences (Philo, & Berry, 2004; Seib, & Fitzpatrick, 1997). Hess (1996) and the Reporters Without Borders (2007) observed that reporting is also limited by a myriad of obstacles in various countries, legal, political and physical which prevent or discourage journalists from covering events in particular places. Journalists may also be deterred from covering events in countries where physical conditions, such as lack of communications infrastructure, electricity or transportation, are prevalent (Hess, 1996). While these factors may explain the limited coverage of conflicts in more remote areas of Africa and Asia, they do not explain the difference in the framing of the two conflicts studied in this work.

*Media and terrorism*

Abraham Miller (1981: 1, emphasis in original) explains that “Terrorism and the media are entwined in an almost inexorable, symbiotic relationship.

Terrorism can write any drama – no matter how horrible – to compel the media's attention. Terrorism, like an ill-mannered enfant terrible, is the media's stepchild, a stepchild which the media, unfortunately, can neither completely ignore nor deny". Media are naturally "drawn to stories that suggest conflict and the potential for what is shocking and sensational" (Tuman, 2010: 196). Since terrorism, by definition, is shocking and sensational, it draws the media's attention. For example, Schaefer (2003: 103) examined local, national, and international coverage of two terrorist attacks – the U.S. embassy bombing in Kenya and Tanzania, and the 9/11 attack in the United States – and found the prevalence of the "local angle" and "domestication" of distant news by both African and American press. More recently, a comparative review of 137 international terrorism news stories covered by media in China and the United States revealed Chinese newspapers' frugal coverage and social value-oriented news framing, contrary to the more prevalent politicized framing in the United States, due to the political distance China maintains with most foreign terrorism events (Zhang et al., 2013).

## Methodology

This qualitative case study relied on news articles published in South Africa's three leading online publications: *IOL* also known as *Independent Online*<sup>2</sup>, *TimesLive*, and *News24*<sup>4</sup>. Qualitative methods can be used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods (Matsilele et al., 2021; Matsilele, 2021; Matsilele, & Mututwa, 2021). The researchers collected data from the *Media24* aligned media entity, *News24*, the *Arena Holdings* (formerly *Times Media Group*) aligned media, *TimesLive*, as well as the *Independent News and Media24* aligned, *IOL*. The three media entities were chosen because of their market dominance and being flagship online platforms for the three biggest media houses in the country: *IOL* for *Independent Media*, *TimesLive* for *Arena Holdings*, and *News24* for *Media24* group. These three also hold the highest unique online views. The Witwatersrand's State of the Newsroom Report (2022) observed that as of the end of 2021, *News24* led with just above 12 million views, *IOL* being second at 5.7 million unique views and followed on third by at *TimesLive* at 4.9 million unique views. This paper deployed a qualitative content analysis design to identify how the selected

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<sup>2</sup> [www.iol.co.za](http://www.iol.co.za)

<sup>3</sup> [www.timeslive.co.za](http://www.timeslive.co.za)

<sup>4</sup> [www.news24.com](http://www.news24.com)

media outlets covered the ongoing terrorism and insurgency activities that have engulfed the southern African nation. We use the framing theory to make meaning of the coverage.

The articles selected for this study were featured between April and August 2021. The researchers identified 17 articles published by *TimesLive*, 18 articles from the *IOL*, and 11 from *News24*. The study purposively selected stories that focused on the terrorist attacks in Mozambique. The period selected was chosen considering that it includes a high concentration of events such as major disruptions in mining operations, killings of a number of civilians, interventions by foreign troops, Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) summits conducted to try and resolve the crisis, and finally, the recapture of regions that had fallen into the hands of insurgents.

After identifying the 46 news articles for analysis using purposive sampling, the researchers employed qualitative content analysis to search out for the frames and themes in the news stories as advised by Bryman (2004); Makwambeni (2013); Makwambeni, & Sibiya (2022). The object of qualitative content analysis in the study were the news articles. The research method assisted the researchers to interpret and put the news stories into categories or frames. The study employed a summative and inductive qualitative content analysis. First we selected the unit of analysis for the study which included the 46 news stories that focused on the terrorist attacks in Mozambique during the study period. We first read through each article, openly coding texts. This process involved writing notes and headings in the news stories while reading them. We read each story several times making as many headings as possible describing all aspects of the news stories. We then collated the headings from the news stories onto the coding sheets while freely generating categories at this stage.

The researchers then proceeded to formulate preliminary codes. The emergent codes were then revised leading to the development of categories or news frames. We created categories or news frames in order to provide a means of describing the news stories. As advised by Dey (1993), we arrived at the categories in terms of what to put in the same news frames through interpretation. Each category or news frame was named using content-characteristic words. Ultimately, the frames that emerged were then coded (see *Tables 1* and *2* below). The themes and frames identified through qualitative content analysis were further related back to the literature review and the theoretical framework of the study as advised by Matsilele (2013) and Makwambeni (2018).

## Results and discussion

This section of the study presents and discusses the findings of the study. It begins by presenting the five frame themes that emerged from the coding process and the meanings of each frame. It proceeds to present frame themes and their occurrence in the news stories analysed before discussing in depth how the frames are employed by the three South African publications: *IOL*, *News24*, and *Times Live* to mediate the conflict in Mozambique.

Table 1

**Frame themes and their meaning**

Frame themes	Meaning
Social consequence frame	The frame gives prominence to the vicious nature of the Islamic militants. It provides graphic details on how the terrorist insurgency has destabilized society
The morality frame	The frame focuses on explaining the religious and moral context of the terrorist insurgency
The economic consequences frame	The frame gives salience to one aspect of the conflict. It gives prominence to the economic toll that the terrorist activities have on economic development. The frame also foregrounds the economic cost of tackling the terrorist insurgency
War against Islamic militants	The frame consists of two clusters of news articles that frame terrorists or Islamic militants as outliers who are engaged in a senseless conflict. It also focusses on describing the strategies employed to contain the terrorist insurgency
The national interest frame	The frame speaks to the media's interest in providing citizens with unbiased information in order to make rational political choices. It also speaks to how the media performs its watchdog role over the executive

Table 2

**Frames and their occurrences in news stories analysed**

Frame themes	Number of occurrence in stories
Social consequence frame	35
The morality frame	38
The economic consequences frame	40
War against Islamic militants frame	42
The national interest frame	25

News frames are critical in providing important background information that helps members of society to understand the world around them (Goffman, 1974). They inform how the media select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient than others (Entman, 1993). The findings of the study show that there are five frames that are used by the three South African publications to mediate the conflict in Mozambique. These frames consist of the social consequences frame, the economic consequences frame, the morality frame, the war against Islamic militants frame, and the domestication or national interest frame. The five frames identified in the cluster of stories analysed play a key role in how the South African media set the agenda by framing the causes of the conflict, defining the conflict, possible solutions to the conflict, as well as providing causal interpretation and moral evaluation on the conflict (Entman, 1993). The chapter contends that South African media's coverage of the conflict in Mozambique, which is underpinned by the five frames, focuses more on the theatre of war and falls short of providing a nuanced picture of the multi-faceted nature of the conflict as recommended by the peace journalism approach. Consequently, the five dominant frames limit the South African media's ability to mediate the conflict by accurately identifying what the conflict is about, and who is involved in the conflict. Other questions are related to the underlying causes of the conflict, people affected by the conflict, and more importantly how the conflict should be resolved.

#### *The social consequences frame*

Media frames should be understood as strategic uses of descriptions, sources, and alternative perspectives to convey a message to the audience (Gitlin, 1980). The data analysed in the study shows that the social consequences frame guides how the three South African media institutions mediate the conflict in Mozambique. News articles in the social consequence cluster give prominence to the mainly vicious nature of the Islamic militants operating in northern Mozambique. They provide graphic details on how the insurgency has destabilized Mozambican citizens as well as foreign nationals working in Mozambique. As argued by Bennett (1983) and Seib (2002) the media tend to use depictions of horror in testimonies and images to increase the news value and frame stories surrounding the conflict. Consonant with this observation, news articles that employ the social consequences frame to mediate the conflict in Mozambique across the three publications are replete with horrendous acts perpetrated by the Islamic militants. Stories such as "*Over 40 South Africans*

affected by Mozambique attacks”<sup>5</sup> and “Dozens killed in Islamist attacks on Palma – Mozambique government”<sup>6</sup> which were published by IOL and News24 respectively employ the social consequences frame to show how the Islamist militants have destroyed infrastructure; killed civilians and foreign nationals; and destabilized business in Mozambique. The news articles that employ the social consequences frame depict the Islamic militants as the villains in the Mozambican crisis and are sustained through the media's use of official sources such as the government spokesperson and the military to mediate the Mozambican conflict. This framing of the conflict resonates with Gitlin's (1980) observation that the media tend to overuse officials as sources, emphasize one side of the argument and focus on events as opposed to larger issues when framing issues (conflict).

In the Mozambican conflict, the South African media employs the social consequences frame to depict Islamic militants as outliers engaged in a senseless conflict that has resulted in a humanitarian crisis in northern Mozambique. This coverage of the conflict in Mozambique falls short of meeting the key tenets of peace journalism where journalists are expected to provide varied viewpoints that will help a large section of the citizenry to make informed decisions about a conflict (Hyde-Clarke, 2011). Rather, news articles in the social consequences frame confine themselves to reflecting the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Mozambique through the lenses of officialdom. Stories across the three publications give prominence to how thousands of civilians are stranded and displaced in towns such as Palma after their towns were besieged by jihadists. News articles in this cluster further provide detailed accounts of human rights violations by the Islamic militants. By providing prominence to the transgressions of the Islamic militants, the social consequences frame limits the media from ventilating alternating views on the conflict on the role played by the Mozambican government forces and South African private military company, DAG, in fermenting the conflict and the humanitarian situation in the country. Thus, as observed by Gitlin (1980), the overuse of officials as sources in framing the Mozambican conflict has resulted in a partial representation of the conflict.

#### *The morality frame*

News frames play a very important role in understanding conflict (Goffman, 1974). The data analysed in this study shows that the morality frame is one

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/over-40-south-africans-affected-by-mozambique-attacks-sa-high-commission-57f9b183-4f9d-57f9-a583-4c867176c6df>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/dozens-killed-in-islamist-attacks-on-palma-mozambique-government-e3204667-3c9b-443c-a7aa-acb027f201b7>

of the major frames used by the South African media to assist their readers to make sense of the conflict in Mozambique. The morality frame consists of a cluster of stories that identify militants in the Mozambican insurgency as Islamic fundamentalists whose aim is to seek to establish a caliphate. By constantly referring to the militants as jihadists, the three publications consistently project the activities of the insurgents as expressions of the Islamic faith. The morality frame which is widely used by the global media to report on global terrorism is used by the three publications to explain the religious and moral context of the activities of the militants in the Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique. De Vreese (2005), contends that the morality frame interprets an event or issue, in this case, the conflict in Mozambique, in the context of religious or moral prescriptions. It fundamentally plays a role in the creation of us and them in a conflict situation (Shinar, 2002). By doing so, traditional journalism inadvertently perpetuates violent conflict instead of encouraging peace (Bratic, Ross, & Kang-Graham, 2008).

The morality frame consists of news articles that project the militants as people who subscribe to radical views and have contempt for ‘civilized’ life and values and campaign to spread extremist Islamist ideas across Mozambique through violence (Ette, 2016). Stories in this frame link the militants to radical extremist Islamic groups. The news articles, “*Adrian was a hero of Mozambique attacks*”, and “*Dozens killed in Islamist attacks on Palma*” are examples of news articles that employ the morality frame by linking the militants to Al-Shabab and the Islamic State. The three publications’ framing of the militant attacks in Northern Mozambique deploy the same hegemonic frames used by global media to mediate conflict in countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. In this light, the labeling of the militants in the Mozambican conflict is part of newspaper framing that categorizes people involved in the news into either good or bad. This practice indirectly apportions blame on one group and relatively exonerates the other (Galtung, 1998). The narrow use of the morality frame in the coverage of the conflict in Mozambique does not assist the media in explaining and capturing the magnitude of the conflict. As argued by Kothari (2010), the coverage and framing of conflicts in Africa, such as the one in Darfur, needs to engage with the underlying causes of conflict.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.iol.co.za/ios/news/adrian-was-a-hero-of-mozambique-attacks-e8e39fb1-9929-4ecf-be9a-1555e2d323f1>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/dozens-killed-in-islamist-attacks-on-palma-mozambique-government-e3204667-3c9b-443c-a7aa-acb027f201b7>

*The economic consequences frame*

The media industry in South Africa has always been part of an elite consensus that subscribes to the principles of liberal democracy, and neoliberal economics (Wasserman, & De Beer, 2005). This nexus between the media and capital is reflected in how the *IOL*, *TimesLive*, and *News24* mediate the conflict in Mozambique using the economic consequences frame. The economic consequences frame is employed by South African journalists to give salience to one aspect of the conflict. An analysis of news stories in the economic consequences frame reflects two dominant strands. One variant of stories in the economic consequences frame gives prominence to the economic toll that the activities of the Islamic militants have had on the oil and gas industry as well as economic development in Mozambique. The other variant of stories in the economic consequences frame foregrounds the colossal economic cost of tackling the insurgency in Mozambique by SADC countries and other allies assisting in curbing the conflict. However, the stories analysed in this frame show that the economic consequences frame is shaped by both the media's predilection to view reality through neo-liberal economic lenses (Wasserman, & De Beer, 2005) as well as the tendency to quote officialdom and political actors as news sources. Consequently, news articles premised on the economic consequences put emphasis on the economic damage suffered from the insurgency which has impacted the flow of investment in oil and gas production. The consequence of this economic frame is that it trivializes alternative perspectives on the multi-faceted consequences of the Mozambican insurgency on the country (see Gitlin, 1980).

The story by *IOL* entitled "*Adrian was a hero of Mozambique attacks*" metonymically represents the cluster of stories that constitute the economic consequences frame. News articles in this cluster give prominence to the economic cost of the Mozambican conflict on big business, especially French oil giant Total 'which has invested \$20 billion (16.9 billion euros) in the Mozambican project'. News articles in this frame give salience to how the insurgency has disrupted the operations of international firms like ExxonMobil that have invested in the gas project. The framing of the articles reinforces the dominant view in the political economy approach to the study of the media that media are first and foremost businesses and therefore tend to see reality through the lenses of capital. This position is reinforced through stories such as "*Total declares force majeure on*

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.iol.co.za/ios/news/adrian-was-a-hero-of-mozambique-attacks-e8e39fb1-9929-4ecf-be9a-1555e2d323f1>

*Mozambique LNG project*<sup>10</sup> which frames the economic consequences of the conflict in Mozambique in blunt economic terms that quantify the impact of the insurgency on the natural gas projects and the Mozambican economy.

Unlike other stories that employ the economic consequences frame, this story provides a graphic and dramatic picture of how the insurgency has set back the development of gas projects near the coastal Mozambique town of Palma that are worth \$60bn (about R856bn). More emphasis is put on how the suspension of the LNG and Afungi projects will hamper further economic development in Mozambique by stalling *'the construction of a two-train liquefaction plant with capacity of 13.12 million tonnes per annum'*. In tandem with other frames discussed so far in the chapter, the economic consequences frame and its attendant discourses are also shaped by journalists' unquestioning endorsement of the views espoused by trusted official sources (Philo, & Berry, 2004). Studies by Boykoff and Boykoff (2007) have shown that reliance on existing official sources is a common practice in contexts such as Mozambique where foreign journalists from Anglophone countries face language and access barriers.

The economic consequences frame is also prominent in stories that focus on military interventions by South Africa and other SADC countries involved in the conflict in Mozambique. Stories in this frame focus on the cost of military intervention in the conflict and tend to take on a domestic national and public interest perspective. News articles run by the three South African publications using this frame give prominence to the expenditure associated with South Africa's intervention in the conflict in Mozambique. The stories *"Ramaphosa confirms deployment of soldiers to Mozambique - at the cost of nearly R1bn"*<sup>11</sup> and *"McBride suspended after Ramaphosa left red-faced over botched covert operation in Mozambique"*<sup>12</sup> are a case in point. They give prominence to the fact that the expenditure to be incurred in the deployment of the SADF in Mozambique will amount to R984 368 057. As argued by Gitlin (1980), media frames tend to trivialise alternative perspectives on issues. In this instance, by focusing on the astronomical cost of South Africa and SADC forces' intervention in Mozambique, the economic consequences frame overlooks other cascading

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.news24.com/fin24/companies/total-declares-force-majeure-withdraws-personnel-in-northern-mozambique-over-security-concerns-20210426>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2021-07-28-ramaphosa-confirms-deployment-of-soldiers-to-mozambique-at-the-cost-of-nearly-r1bn/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/mcbride-suspended-after-ramaphosa-left-red-faced-over-botched-covert-operation-in-mozambique-20210709>

non-economic benefits associated with having a peaceful Mozambique. From a peace journalism perspective, reporting on conflict should be broadened to promote news that favours dualism (Lynch, & McGoldrick, 2005). This dualism is patently absent in the cluster of stories in the economic frame that employs a narrow economic and domestic lens to mediate the conflict in Mozambique. This finding resonates with Schaefer's (2003) observation that local and national coverage of conflict tends to provide a 'local angle' to distant news.

*War against Islamic militants*

The study's findings further reflect the prevalence of a fourth frame that we dub 'war against Islamic militants' in the coverage of the conflict in Mozambique by the three selected South African publications. The use of this frame clearly shows how the media in South Africa selects some aspects of reality about the conflict in Mozambique and makes them more salient. Consequently, the 'war against Islamic militants' frame tends to promote a problematic problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and solutions to the conflict in Mozambique (see Entman, 1993). The frame consists of two clusters of news articles: the first cluster of stories that frame the Islamic militants as outliers who are engaged in a senseless conflict. The second cluster of stories in the 'war against Islamic militants frame' describes the strategies employed by Mozambique and its allies to contain the 'senseless conflict'.

The 'war against Islamic militants frame' provides a narrow causal interpretation of the conflict in Mozambique. By relying on official sources to authenticate the cause of the conflict, stories in this framing project the Islamic militants as outliers with no coherent and unified reasons for engaging in the conflict. Consequently, the reporting of the conflict misses crucial information on the militants' motivations for engaging in terrorist activities. News articles that employ the 'war against Islamic militants do not provide the context on the underlying causes of the conflict. They provide stories that capture the 'senseless' acts and barbarism of the insurgents: how they mindlessly 'attack shops and banks', 'behead residents', and 'ransacking buildings' for no justifiable reasons. The militants are framed as a group of people with no 'unified aim' who are engaged in 'senseless crime' that is having a continual and horrific impact on innocent parties such as children in Cabo Delgado province.

Unlike the peace journalism approach that seeks to provide a balanced narrative informed by both sides involved in the conflict (Adebayo, & Makwambeni, 2019, 2020), the stories analysed in the study reflects only one side of the conflict that aligns with the government's official position. An

alternative frame and narrative that views the militants as disgruntled locals who legitimately feel marginalised by the government of Mozambique is silenced. This alternative frame also contends that the militants are linked to IS and al-Shabaab as spurious and speculative. It argues that the Cabo Delgado province has been characterised for years by absolute and complete corruption, negligence, and, most recently, brutal oppression by the Mozambican government. According to Lynch and McGoldrick (2005), news stories that belong to the ‘war against Islamic militants’ fuel violence by overtly favoring official sources; favoring dualism in reporting conflict; trivializing actions of opposition groups; focusing on events instead of larger issues; and emphasizing one side of the argument.

Entman (1993) posits that news frames tend to promote solutions to problems. The news articles analysed under the ‘war against Islamic militants frame’ give prominence to strategies and solutions for containing and resolving the conflict in Mozambique. Unlike the peace journalism approach that promotes non-violent ways of resolving conflict (Adebayo, & Makwambeni, 2019, 2020), news articles in this frame, across the three publications, are unified in advocating for military intervention as the solution to the conflict in Mozambique. Evidence of this frame is found in the following news articles: “*More SADC inaction on Mozambique terror attacks disappointing*”<sup>13</sup>, “*SADC postpones Troika summit on terrorism in Mozambique*”<sup>14</sup>, “*Ramaphosa joins SADC leaders to consider response to ongoing terrorism in Mozambique*”<sup>15</sup>, “*Southern African bloc to send troops to insurgency-hit Mozambique*”<sup>16</sup>. The stories frame the insurgency as a regional threat that needs a concerted regional military response. Thus, stories in this cluster celebrate any developments that further violent military interventions and military success against the Islamic militants. This framing of news goes against the key tenets of peace journalism (Adebayo, & Makwambeni, 2019).

News stories that give prominence to the military intervention in Mozambique in the South African media include *Botswana sends soldiers to Mozambique to*

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/africa/2021-05-27-more-sadc-inaction-on-mozambique-terror-attacks-disappointing/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2021-04-28-sadc-postpones-troika-summit-on-terrorism-in-mozambique/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2021-06-23-ramaphosa-joins-sadc-leaders-to-consider-response-to-ongoing-terrorism-in-mozambique/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/cabo-delgado-insurgency-southern-african-leaders-moot-fixed-deployment-of-troops-20220512>

*fight terrorism* by IOL, "[Rwanda deploys 1 000 troops to Mozambique](#)" by News24 and "[Rwanda says it has killed 14 insurgents in Mozambique](#)" by News24. The news stories within the 'war against Islamic militants frame' depict the military intervention as a resounding success. They rely largely on official sources such as the Rwandan military spokesperson to validate their claims. What is notably absent from the media reportage of the conflict in Mozambique is a balanced coverage that gives voice to alternative sources that question the efficacy of a military approach in delivering a sustainable solution to the insurgency in Cabo Delgado which is arguably driven by local discontent.

#### *The national interest frame*

Running concurrently with the other frames used by the South African media to mediate the conflict in Mozambique is the national or public interest frame. Wasserman and De Beer (2005) posit that this frame speaks to the media's interest in providing citizens with unbiased information in order to make rational political choices. It also speaks to how the media performs its watchdog role over the executive. The cluster of stories in the 'national interest frame' mediates the Mozambican conflict from a South African national interest perspective. This form of reportage corresponds with Schaefer's observation that (2003) local coverage of the conflict in other countries tends to become 'domesticated'. There is a cluster of stories across the three publications that reflect 'domesticated' reporting. News articles like "[Body of South African man killed in Mozambique attacks repatriated](#)"<sup>20</sup> and "[Over 40 South Africans affected by Mozambique attacks](#)"<sup>21</sup> give prominence to developments that affect South African citizens who are caught up in the Mozambican conflict. The news articles provide coverage on local casualties of attacks, missing and distressed citizens, evacuation of South African citizens, and repatriation of South Africans who are caught in the conflict among other issues. News stories in this cluster focus on the impact of the Mozambican conflict on South African citizens. News articles in this frame also seek to keep the South

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/botswana-sends-soldiers-to-mozambique-to-fight-terrorism-73707ddc-c790-5c5a-8d08-7ce247d0e71c>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/rwanda-deploys-1-000-troops-to-northern-mozambique-20210709>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/rwanda-says-it-has-killed-14-insurgents-in-mozambique-20210729>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/body-of-south-african-man-killed-in-mozambique-attacks-repatriated-5294b8b7-dc85-56f9-ae7-2d547c8cc142>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/over-40-south-africans-affected-by-mozambique-attacks-sa-high-commission-57f9b183-4f9d-57f9-a583-4c867176c6df>

African government accountable by ensuring that the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) provides assistance to South African citizens who are caught up in the conflict.

Notably, the second cluster of stories that fall under the national interest frame seeks to provide regular information on issues such as the regularization and authorization of the military intervention by parliament, updates on the number of troops deployed to the regional mission to combat the conflict, and the cost of the deployment to South African taxpayers. Consonant with the national interest frame, stories in this frame can be viewed as seeking to maintain the South African government's accountability to its citizens. Stories such as "*Ramaphosa confirms deployment of soldiers to Mozambique – at the cost of nearly R 1bn*" and "*McBride suspended after Ramaphosa left red-faced over botched covert operation*" in Mozambique fall into the national interest frame. The above stories provide citizens with factual information on the deployment of South African soldiers deployed to Mozambique as well as the cost of this deployment to the South Africans. They further reflect the media's watchdog role in ensuring that the South African government complies with the constitution in so far as the deployment of the military in a foreign country is concerned.

*Implication of media frames on the public and policy makers*

Media frames play a critical role in structuring the public and policymakers' perception of reality (see Evans, 2010). In the case of the Mozambican conflict, media reports are more often the only reference the public has to the terrorist insurgency. Thus, the five frames identified in the study arguably shape how the South African public and policymakers perceive the terrorist attacks in Mozambique. We argued in this paper that the five traditional frames used by the South African media in their reportage on the terrorist attacks in Mozambique promote a partisan and partial perspective of the complex and multi-faceted terrorist attacks in Mozambique. The frames employed engender a limited one on the public and among policy makers on what the terrorist insurgency is about, and who is involved in the insurgency. Other questions are related to the underlying causes of the terrorist insurgency, people affected by the terrorist insurgency, and more importantly how the insurgency should be resolved.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2021-07-28-ramaphosa-confirms-deployment-of-soldiers-to-mozambique-at-the-cost-of-nearly-r1bn/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/mcbride-suspended-after-ramaphosa-left-red-faced-over-botched-covert-operation-in-mozambique-20210709>

The use of the social consequence frame promotes the official side of the Mozambican government by foregrounding the horrendous acts perpetrated by the Islamic militants while casting a blind eye on the underlying issues informing the insurgency. As a result, the public and policy makers are not provided with varied viewpoints on the underlying causes of the terrorist insurgency (see Hyde-Clarke, 2011). Rather, news articles in the social consequences frame limit the media from airing alternating views on the conflict on the role played by the Mozambican government forces, and other role players like the South African private military company, DAG, in fermenting the conflict and the humanitarian situation in the country. Similarly, the use of the morality frame to mediate the terrorist insurgency in Mozambique shapes public opinion by influencing the South African public and policymakers to apportion blame on the terrorist insurgency on one group while exonerating the Mozambican government and other stakeholders (see Galtung, 1998). The morality frame results in the 'othering' of the Islamic militants while depriving the public and policy makers of critical information on the magnitude and complexity of the terrorist attacks in Mozambique

As argued by Gitlin (1980) the implications of the economic consequences frame on the South Africa public and policy makers is that it trivializes alternative perspectives on the multi-faceted consequences of the terrorist attacks in Mozambique by giving salience to one aspect of the conflict. The fixation with economic consequences leads the public and policy makers to perceive the conflict through a narrow economic lens. On the other hand, the war against Islamic militants frame shapes public opinion in South Africa by advancing a narrow problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and possible solutions to the terrorist insurgency in Mozambique (see Entman, 1993). The frame presents a narrow perspective of Islamic militants as outliers with no coherent and unified reasons for engaging in the terrorist attacks. Consequently, the reporting deprives the public and policy makers with a crucial perspective on the militants' motivations for engaging in terrorist activities. As a result of this frame, the media does not provide the context on the underlying causes of the conflict. The public are not provided with a balanced narrative informed by both sides involved in the conflict (Adebayo, & Makwambeni, 2019, 2020). Alternative frames on the terrorist attacks that capture the disgruntlement of locals who legitimately feel marginalised by the government of Mozambique is silenced. Thus, the use of the frames by the South African media invariably promotes a narrow perspective on the terrorist attacks that follows the official lines. This provides the South African public and policy makers with a very limited view of the complex and multi-faceted insurgency.

## Conclusion

This study investigated how the South African media covered and framed the terrorist attacks in Mozambique. Critically, the study sought to understand how the South African media frame the terror activities in Mozambique. The findings of the study show that there are five major intersecting frames that are used by the three South African publications to mediate the conflict in Mozambique. These frames consist of the social consequences frame, the economic consequences frame, the morality frame, the war against Islamic militants frame, and the domestication or national interest frame. Ultimately, the chapter contends that the South African media's coverage of the conflict in Mozambique, which is underpinned by the five frames, focuses more on the theatre of war and falls short of providing a more nuanced picture of the multi-faceted nature of the conflict as recommended by the peace journalism approach. We conclude that the five dominant frames that are used by both publications limit their ability to mediate the conflict by accurately identifying what the conflict is about, and who is involved in the conflict. Other questions are related to the underlying causes of conflict, people affected by the conflict, and the ways to resolve conflict.

For future studies, we recommend further research that can triangulate content analysis with in-depth interviews to get more nuanced views informing the kind of frames the media take when covering terrorism. Interviews can also shed more light on the nature of coverage the media adopts and the kind of resources they commit when covering terrorism in neighboring countries. We also recommend that future news reportage and future studies consider looking at the complexity surrounding the socio-economic status of the regions experiencing terrorists activities. Such studies and news stories could be enhanced by looking at multiple stakeholders, including affected communities, to get a broader understanding of the causal effects of terrorism.

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