Chapter Three

Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This is a study of both media texts and contexts. First, the research focuses on media representation of national elections in Zimbabwe during a 24-year long, multi-faceted transition. This is done through a predominantly qualitative content analysis of selected media texts. Particular focus is paid to editorial comments during the first two ‘transitions’, i.e., during the first and partly second decades of independence. The selection of editorial comments stems from the fact that these are a significant reflection of the official editorial position(s) adopted by a newspaper on a particular topic, and is often reflected in news and other genres. In the ‘third’ transition, however, the analysis broadens to include front page news stories. This was necessitated by the fact that this period, which is covered by Chapters Six to Eight, was the most intensely politically contested, with the press becoming—more than ever before—sites where the contestation played itself out.

Secondly, the research examines linkages between the patterns of media representation of elections and the broader relationship between the media and economic and political hierarchies in Zimbabwe. This constitutes the context of media production. The context consists of two dimensions: the broader (macro) context and the organisational (micro) context. The former consists of larger political and economic forces shaping media practice, such as national laws and policies as well as the influence of advertisers and fractions of capital. The latter includes organisational constraints and opportunities within the media organisations, including factors like ownership influence, editorial policies and journalistic norms and values, which also shape the news production process (Manning, 2001).

In the study of the organisational context, the research applies an institutional analysis of media organisations buttressed by in-depth and qualitative interviews with members of editorial, management and advertising teams of selected newspaper organisations. Interviews with government, business and civil society officials,
supported by document analysis are applied in the study of the macro context of media production.

3.1 Content Analysis

Analysis of the coverage of elections and related topics by the selected newspapers under study constitutes an integral component of the study. This takes the form of a qualitative content analysis of the manner in which issues and debates pertaining to the electoral process are framed at election time. The analysis of media’s representation of elections—which are a key ingredient of the democratic process—can illuminate and form the basis for theorising the role of the press in relation to the public sphere within the context of an African society in postcolonial transition.

Although content analysis has traditionally been used as a quantitative method allowing researchers to look across a large number of texts and involving “counting and measuring quantities of items such as words, phrases or images” (Hesmondhalgh, 2006:120), it has also evolved into a repertoire of methods which include qualitative analyses. Qualitative methodological approaches to content analysis are rooted in a variety of theoretical approaches including literary studies, symbolic interactionism, Marxist approaches, British cultural studies and feminist theory (Krippendorff, 2004). These approaches are generally interpretive and hermeneutic, with researchers being concerned with, among others, “the study of socially situated human action and artefacts” (Lindloff, 1995: 22). Where quantitative approaches have traditionally sought to rest their evidence on the logic of statistical analysis, qualitative approaches take greater interest in exploring the latent, rather than manifest meaning of texts.

When applied to media and communication research, content analysis has often been aimed at “examining how news, drama, advertising and entertainment output reflect social and cultural issues, values and social phenomena” (Hansen et al, 1998: 92). In its traditional quantitative identity, especially when applied in social science research, the method has involved identification, systematic counting of occurrence of specified dimensions or characteristics of texts and then generalising or drawing conclusions about the relations of the texts to the wider society. However, one problem with this approach, which has necessitated the adoption of triangulation of methods, is the question of “how far quantification is taken in content analysis and to what degree the
quantitative indicators...are read or interpreted in relation to questions about the intensity of meaning in texts, the social impact of texts, or the relationship between media texts and the realities which they reflect” (Ibid: 95).

The idea of qualitative content analysis is an attempt to address the shortcomings of quantitative analysis through infusing qualitative-interpretive steps to analysis, while simultaneously preserving its advantages of systematic examination of texts (Mayring, 2000). According to Klipperndorff (2004), qualitative content analysis is characterised by the following: the use of known literature to contextualise readings of texts, re-articulating the meanings of texts (whose holistic qualities researchers acknowledge) in view of assumed contexts as well as the search for multiple interpretations of texts by considering diversity of voices (i.e. alternative, dominant, oppositional) (p.88). Qualitative researchers also support their interpretations by “weaving quotes from the analysed texts and literature about the contexts of these texts into their conclusions, by constructing parallelisms, by engaging in triangulations, and by elaborating on any metaphors they can identify (Ibid: 88). This study generally identifies with the characteristics identified above, and buttresses content analysis with other qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews to explore the research questions.

A key aspect of qualitative content analysis as applied in this study is the practice of media framing¹. Frames are “principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters” (Gitlin, 1980: 6). Given the centrality of the media as sources of both entertainment and political and cultural pedagogy in society, it is highly arguable that their manner of framing issues and debates plays a role in shaping and guiding the national discourse. In media studies, framing analysis is concerned with identifying specific themes within media texts. In its basic function, it seeks to show “how the language and structure of news items emphasize certain aspects (and omit others)” (Billig et al, 2005:2). An analysis of such framing and its broader context can therefore contribute to the debate about the role of the media in societies in transition.

¹ See Chapter Two for a more comprehensive discussion of media framing.
Given that the research selects to deal with the coverage of a key political issue by six newspapers over a period of 24 years, the breadth, scope as well as the theoretical framework informing the study render qualitative, rather than strictly quantitative content analysis more feasible and appropriate for the study. Qualitative analysis is complemented by two other methods, namely qualitative interviews and document analysis.

For the selected newspapers, the study adopts discourse analysis paying particular attention to headlines, the choice of vocabulary and the attribution of agency towards certain actors (see Willems, 2003). Attention is also paid to the assumptions made in the texts as well as the legitimisation or delegitimisation of particular social and political actors or worldviews in the stories and editorials. Finally, the analysis also takes interest in the diversity (or lack thereof) of perspectives and interpretative frameworks that are presented through the texts. The importance of the latter is that in thinking through the relationship of the media and the democratic process, the question of whether the less powerful are disadvantaged in the scramble to secure access to the news media is of fundamental importance to a critical political economy of the media study (Manning, 2001).

Because this study’s primary concern is not to highlight the linguistic and discoursal nature of media power, discourse analysis will not take the form of what Fairclough terms “an arid, formalist analysis of language, in abstraction from the social context” (Fairclough, 1995:16). Rather, attention will be paid to how particular issues are framed, cognizant of the fact that in representation, inclusion and exclusion as well as foregrounding and backgrounding are important factors. How the patterns of representation apparent in the selected texts either manifestly or latently reflect the broader media-society relationship is a key object of inquiry for this study.

One advantage of qualitative content analysis is that it allows researchers to decipher the latent meaning of media texts as indicated above, allowing an insight into the general ideological trends—or zeitgeist—of a given period (Larsen, 1991). It looks at the media text as “an indeterminate field of meaning in which intentions and possible effects intersect” (Larsen, 1991:122). As stated above, editorials and news articles during the different periods are treated in relation to broader editorial policies and
practices of the organisations involved, as well as the relations between these media organisations and other socio-political institutions.

This is not the first study of contemporary media premised on a political economy of the media approach. Methodologically and theoretically, it builds on a number of studies, including Herman and Chomsky’s book, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Media* (1988; 2002), and Gitlin’s book *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (1980). The former book analyses the representation by five selected US major print news media, of foreign events and issues with a bearing on the US administration’s foreign policy. The analysis of media representation is carried out within a framework that explains media performance in terms of institutional structures and relationships within which they operate, a framework the authors refer to as the “propaganda model” (see my discussion in Chapter Two). In the latter book, Gitlin selects two news media—a national daily newspaper and a television station—to analyse the representation of a social movement, the Students Democratic Society, during a period marked by intense anti-war protests. Again, media framing of the activities of the social movement is analysed in the context of relations between the media and the political and economic centres of power in the US.

The importance of the texts referred to above, among other works premised on the political economy of the media approach, is the extent to which they treat media texts not as explaining the whole story of representation on their own; but rather as manifestations of a complex, dialectical and sometimes contradictory relationship involving media, politics and capital. This study treads a generally similar theoretical and methodological path although differing on the assumptions about the role of capital and state on patterns of media framing of events and processes. Both organizational/institutional and document analyses help the study examine the constraints and opportunities created by the structure on the agency, while content analysis helps us explain the agency’s response and whether (and how) this enhances or constrains the public sphere.
The researcher made use of data from professional media monitoring organisations such as the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ) for analytical purposes. In addition, newspaper archives from the media organisations under study were also used. The National Archives in Zimbabwe as well as the Zimbabwe Inter-Africa News Agency (ZIANA) libraries were invaluable sources of back issues of newspapers under study, especially issues that came out in the 1980s.

### 3.2 Institutional Analysis and Interviews

To study the internal dynamics defining the constraints and opportunities of journalism practice within the press, the research applied institutional analysis of the selected media organisations. This comprised in-depth interviews as well as scrutiny of accessible documents, including editorial policies or charters, media industry reviews and circulation data, as well as any correspondence that was of interest to the study. The primary strength of interviewing as a method is its capacity to range over multiple perspectives on a selected topic. As Jensen (2002) observes, in-depth interviewing, with its affinities to conversation, “may be well suited to tap social agents’ perspective on the media, since spoken language remains a primary and familiar mode of social interaction” (p.240). Qualitative interviews—both formal and informal—were held with editors, reporters and financial and advertising managers of the newspapers.

As for the broader macro context of journalism practice, the study also applied interviews with government officials and civil society groups such as the Zimbabwe union of Journalists (ZUJ) and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA). Similarly, interviews were also conducted with representatives of the corporate sector, including advertisers and advertising agencies for purposes of exploring the politics of media funding and financing during the period under study.

The study also analysed government laws and policies on media practice and media investment. Attention was paid to the varying distinctions and contradictions of policy, both codified and incremental during the 24-year period under study. Analysis is made of both the specific policies and the complex forces that come into play in the conception and implementation of these policies. The analysis of media policy tied in with the research’s primary concern, which was an inquiry into the media’s
representation of a key national issue, and how such representation related to the
culture and patterns of media ownership and control as well as media-state-capital
relations in postcolonial Zimbabwe. Also, from a theoretical standpoint, it is
important to note that issues of media policy constitute a central locus of analysis in
critical political economy of communication research. In broad terms, media policy
analysis examines “the ways in which policies in the field of communication are
generated and implemented, as well as their repercussions or implications for the field
of communication” (Hansen et al, 1998: 67). Because media policies can be visible
and codified or incremental, analysis of what constitutes policy is not a
straightforward exercise. It requires “searching various sources of information as well
as looking into the relationships between interested parties, connections between
events, and the context within which all this takes place” (Ibid:68). In its analysis of
media policy in Zimbabwe, this study relied on document analysis of specific codified
policies, newspaper articles for ministerial/official policy pronouncements, secondary
literature for historical-political context for policy, as well as in-depth interviews with
both policymakers and policy constituents such as journalists.

The use of triangulation of methods for this research is necessitated by the fact that
media studies is a field rather than a discipline, and therefore often produces problems
for both theory and method if approached from parochial and exclusive traditions
(Hansen, 1998). Also, the research faces the methodological challenge—one that
confronts most political economy of the media studies—of where to place the media
text in relation to the broader context. An attempt was made to avoid “reducing the
text to simply the cultural expression of economic class interests…as traditional
Marxists and political economists did” (Manning, 2001:42). At the same time, care
was also taken to avoid the temptation to be media-centric; to preoccupy oneself
totally with media texts and neglecting the context in which those texts are produced.
In selecting content analysis, institutional and document analysis as well as
interviews, the underlying concern was to address both the content (mode of
representation) and the context (relationships, controls and processes influencing
content production).
A historical analytical approach was also adopted by the study, focusing on broader changes in ownership structures in the arena of the press during the various phases of the transition, paying attention to how these shifts had traceable consequences for the performance of the press. In this regard, both content and institutional analysis were not viewed in isolation, but as part of an attempt to explain how the macro issues of changing power relations in both politics and the economy impacted on media as sites of cultural production and debate.

3.3 Selected Media Organisations
Having discussed the methods applied in this research, it is important to delineate the specific media organisations under study. The selection of newspapers and media organisations was based on maximum variation sampling. This sampling strategy “aims to capture as wide a range of ‘qualities’ or phenomena as possible” (Jensen, 2002:238-9). My intention was to pick a sample that provided a bigger and holistic picture of the print media in Zimbabwe during the period under study. Table 1 shows the selected newspapers. Three of the newspapers selected were launched prior to 1980, while the other three were established during the second decade of independence. All the papers selected for analysis were the largest circulation titles in their categories throughout the period under study.

Table 1: Selected Newspaper Titles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Circulation *</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Herald</td>
<td>Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980) Ltd</td>
<td>80 000</td>
<td>Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Daily News</td>
<td>Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (Pvt) Ltd</td>
<td>90 000</td>
<td>Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe Mirror</td>
<td>Southern Africa Printing and Publishing Company</td>
<td>15 000</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe Independent</td>
<td>ZimInd Publishers</td>
<td>35 000</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sunday Mail</td>
<td>Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980) Ltd</td>
<td>120 000</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Gazette</td>
<td>Financial Gazette (Pvt) Ltd.</td>
<td>35 000</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The circulation figures shown are average figures over the period under study. Circulation statistics during specific periods are outlined in the different chapters where necessary.
The selected newspapers constituted a fair representation of the spectrum of newspapers in terms of ownership, circulation, readership, frequency and editorial orientation in Zimbabwe during the period under study.

The two predominant patterns of media ownership in Zimbabwe are state and private ownership. *The Herald* and *Sunday Mail* are majority-owned by the state, and fall under the Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980) Ltd—commonly known as Zimpapers—stable. The *Daily News*, the largest circulating daily at the time of researching for this study was owned by Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ), a local private company. [Note: the paper was closed down by the state on 12 September 2003 for failing to comply with a new law that required media organisations to be accredited by a government media commission to operate legally]. Both the *Herald* and *The Daily News* are general daily publications while *The Zimbabwe Mirror* (general publication), the *Financial Gazette* (business/politics) and *Zimbabwe Independent* (business/politics) are weeklies. The *Sunday Mail* is a state-owned weekly whose editorial orientation has, since the late 1980s, been largely similar to that of its sister publication, the *Herald*2. Both papers, along with other Zimpapers titles, have since the establishment of the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust, been editorially controlled by the government through the Minister of Information (see Saunders, 1991; Rusike, 1990). The levels of government interference have varied at different times and in different circumstances, but whenever any of these papers crossed the state’s path by reporting critically of government policy, the Minister would take punitive action against the editors (Saunders, 1991). This kind of government-public press relationship of coercive control existed throughout the period under study. Private newspapers enjoyed relative autonomy in relation to the state during the ‘first’ and part ‘second’ transition, but the post-2000 era saw the state adopting legislative and other policy mechanisms to repress the private press. For the public press, the relationship with capital remained largely subtle until the ‘third’ transition when land reform programme and the controversies around it caused a re-alignment of the

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2 During the early 1980s, the *Sunday Mail* under the editorship of Willie Musarurwa, was generally supportive but also sometimes highly critical of the state. Its editorial orientation at the time, according to senior journalist and former editor at Zimpapers, Bill Saidi, was generally leftwing, which often resulted in conflicts with sections of the ruling political elite. However, after the sacking of Musarurwa, the *Sunday Mail* became a more or less similar to the *Herald* in its highly partisan editorial thrust. See Chapter Four for a discussion of state-public media relations.
relationship between the state and fractions of capital. For the private press, the influence of capital was strongly felt after the liberalisation of the economy which started in 1991. Before then, that influence was largely limited to the Financial Gazette, hitherto the only mainstream privately owned newspaper.

The selected newspapers were the major ‘national’ publications in terms of circulation (see Table 1). The newspapers also represented the predominant media editorial positions on political and socio-economic issues and debates during the period under study. For example, while the public press has remained almost consistently pro-government in its reporting, the private press has also been, in broad general terms, pro-opposition politics, pro-civil society and pro-business/capital. There are however, exceptions within the latter category such as the Zimbabwe Mirror, whose ‘independent nationalist’ model of journalism defied the two predominant categories and in some cases—like the 2000 elections—became arguably the most analytical and dispassionate source of electoral news.

It should be noted that ownership of some of the newspapers changed at different stages during the period under study, although the newspapers remained among the major publications in terms of circulation, capitalisation and market share. These changes are important for this study and they are explored in the different chapters for their impact on the representation of electoral issues and debates by the selected newspapers. Also, while in some cases flagship titles from groups which publish several titles were selected, in others the selected newspapers were the only titles published by the company. This represents the differences in terms of the sizes of print media organisations in Zimbabwe.

3.4 The Unit of Analysis
Scholars are generally agreed that the role of the media in relation to the public sphere is synonymous with their role in the constitution of citizenship (see, for example, Dahlgren & Sparks, 1991). As forums of debate, the media ideally have a critical role in representing all possible perspectives from different interest groups that make up society, in their articulation of national issues and debates, including national elections. How well the media in particular societies live up to this ideal is to a large extent a manifestation of the democratic character of that society (Dahlgren & Sparks,
This research operates on the premise that the subject of periodic national elections selected for analysis represents a key issue of debate in the national transition. This is so because not only are elections a critical component of the democratic process, their coverage inevitably also touches on broader issues and debates such as the management of the economy, human rights, corruption among others.

During the 24-year period under study, Zimbabwe held several elections: in 1985, 1990, 1995, 1996, 2000 and 2002. This study focuses on four general elections and the presidential elections of 2002. Elections in Zimbabwe attracted both local and international media coverage as well as some academic debate, evidenced by a thin body of literature on the subject (see, for example, Mandaza, 1987; Moyo, 1992; Makumbe and Compagnon, 2000). In a democratising country such as Zimbabwe, elections constitute an integral element in citizens’ right to representation, and an analysis of the media’s coverage of elections therefore can help us explain their role in the political transition.

The analysis of elections also inevitably covers a range of related political and economic issues that become foci of debate during election time. One such issue is the debate on the one-party state in Zimbabwe, which received substantial media coverage in the run-up to both the 1985 and 1990 general elections. The idea of a legalized one-party state was officially abandoned by the ruling Zanu PF in late 1990.

Another issue related to elections—in particular the 2000 and 2002 polls—is the land reform programme, formally launched by the government in July 2000. During the ‘third’ transition, the land reform programme became arguably the most extensively debated issue in the political history of Zimbabwe. Contesting versions of the success of the programme played themselves out in the media especially at election time. The official view emphasized the ‘historic’ nature of the process in which 11 million hectares of land were allegedly redistributed to landless peasants, while the opposition, fractions of capital, some civic society groups and sections of the international community stressed the chaos, violence and patronage that accompanied the process.
A third issue related to elections is the debate on economic policy and economic management. From the early 1990s, debate around the merits of centralized planning versus neo-liberal policies became part of national discourse following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. In the run up to the 1990 elections, there was considerable media debate about the challenges of economic policies for the government following a decade of relative economic growth but with a rather gloomy forecast (Bond & Manyanya, 2002; Mlambo, 1997; Chipika et al, 2000). Similarly, the debate about the effects of ESAP which the government adopted in 1991, informed the media’s framing of the 1995 parliamentary elections. In the general elections of 2000 and the presidential elections of 2002—held amid unprecedented economic crisis characterized by high unemployment and inflation—national debate focused predominantly on the question of economic management and mismanagement.

3.5 Reflections on Methodology
As noted above, this study applied a repertoire of predominantly qualitative approaches to explore both specific media texts and the socio-economic and political contexts informing and influencing the production of such texts, including media and communication policies. Critical political economy of the media provided the theoretical premise for the research. Processes of formatting the field, sampling, interviewing and content analysis were therefore structured and executed in ways which were consistent with the study’s theoretical and conceptual framework.

Research initiatives of this nature and scope can bring to light many interesting results and possibilities, but also inevitably confront a number of challenges, both methodological and logistical. The application of a variety of complementary methods to explore the ‘mediation’ of Zimbabwe’s transition over a 24 year period in the context of press-state-capital relations yielded insightful results in terms of both patterns of media framing of events as well as the broader political economy of media policy, ownership and control.

Maximum variation sampling allowed the researcher to select those newspapers and media organisations which provided a credible representation of the general print
media picture in Zimbabwe during the period under study. It therefore became possible to analyse and then generalise press-state-capital relations as well as patterns of media framing based on the selected media. One of the interesting findings of this study, namely the evolution of three competing models of “patriotic”, “oppositional” and “independent nationalist” journalism in Zimbabwe speaks to the validity of the sample. Analysing media policy and state-press relations was also enhanced by the selection of media organisations and media products from a spectrum of state-owned, commercially-owned and quasi-non-market (Zimbabwe Mirror) media. The same applied to the analysis of press-capital relations. Getting access to back issues of all the newspapers under study was less difficult because the National Archives in Harare had many files, although the painstaking task was getting the appropriate news articles because the filing system did not follow any particular theme. It was a matter of scrutinising every issue during a specific period of time, an arduous exercise.

In-depth interviews with journalists, editors, policymakers in government, civil society groups, advertisers and captains of industry provided invaluable insights into a number of issues which strengthened this research. Interviews with news personnel across the media organisations yielded useful perspectives on institutional dynamics of media production, including the role and influence of external players in shaping the media products. Government policymakers, civil society groups and representatives of capital provided highly insightful information on the political economy of media policy and control, funding and financing. Interviews with the journalist unions also provided interesting dimensions on journalistic agency. Further, document analysis of various codified laws and policies, industry reviews and correspondence complemented the media and communication policy analysis.

Finally, this study’s use of qualitative content analysis—consisting of a combination of thematic/frame and discourse analysis—provided a nuanced reflection of the patterns of media framing of political contestation in Zimbabwe over a three-phased period of transition. Analysis of media texts was not done in abstraction from the political-economic and social context; rather connections were drawn between the use of language and the exercise of power (Hesmondhalgh, 2006; Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1991). Framing and thematic analysis made it possible to identify the three models of journalism identified above. The analysis of sources and interpretive
frameworks, which was part of framing analysis, also added value to the study’s findings on the ‘mediation’ of the transition.

The many benefits of this study’s methodological path notwithstanding, certain challenges were faced. Some of these are traditionally associated with qualitative approaches, such as questions of subjectivity and validity of results, the merits and demerits of maximum variation sampling, and the strengths and shortcomings of in-depth interviews. Although my sample was meant to be as representative as possible, critics from a background of purely quantitative approaches could view it as too wide and therefore unlikely to yield results deep and objective enough to be generalisable. My sample can also be faulted because it consists of only mainstream newspapers and no representation of alternative, community and entirely non-market newspapers. One issue though, in mitigation of my sample, is that the community print media sector in Zimbabwe generally evolved under the auspices of the state and its functions were therefore generally similar to those of the mainstream Zimpapers publications (see Mamutse, 1986). But still, another researcher could focus on exceptions to the rule, like the non-state, non-market Catholic Church-owned Moto magazine.

Another sampling challenge this study faced had to do with the specific genres of analysis as well as the periods of analysis. As indicated earlier in this chapter, I analysed front page news stories and editorial columns during electoral seasons, i.e., the period before, during and after the election. Most of my analysis covered media reports over a period of two months for each paper for each election. For the ‘first’ and ‘second’ transition, predominant focus was on editorial columns because in my assessment there was a systematic continuity between editorials and news items during a period that was not as politically contested as the ‘third’ transition. The close analysis of news and editorials for elections in 2000 and 2002 added a rich nuance to the study. The key challenge I faced was to select the most appropriate samples of media genres in a study spanning 24 years and involving six newspapers. Critics could argue that other genres left out, such as cartoons, feature articles or inside news pieces may have provided better samples.

One of the difficulties of interviews, whether in-depth or not, is that people “do not always say what they think, or mean what they say” (Jensen, 2002:240). During
interviews for this research, I found that both journalists and government officials sometimes repeated problematic and often vague references to their ‘objective’ reporting or their ‘democratic’ media policies. Follow-up questions which probed these assertions in light of evidence to the contrary were often rebutted with conspiracy theories: state officials accused critics of harbouring a regime change agenda, state journalists levelled similar accusations against the private media and sections of civil society, while some private media journalists placed the blame on state repression and bad journalism within the state media. The situation was worsened by the fact that during the interviewing period Zimbabwe was a highly polarised society experiencing economic decline, political repression and violence. Media policy and practice at the time had become theatres of struggles to control the state in Zimbabwe. During interviews, I got a sense that in many cases people had to look over their shoulders before giving information.

Another challenge regarding interviews was the status of the researcher/interviewer as a former journalist in Zimbabwe. I had done an internship at the *Herald*, worked as a reporter for the *Daily News*, and moved to the *Zimbabwe Mirror* as News Editor. On the one hand, this background helped the researcher to exploit existing networks and relations with erstwhile workmates to secure interviews and access to important documentation. In some cases journalists were able to express themselves freely to me and provide important and ‘sensitive’ information on an off-the-record basis. On the other hand, previous conflicts, disagreements and/or rivalries with fellow media industry personnel also counted against the researcher. Some senior editors within both the private and public media refused to grant interviews because of their previous encounters with the researcher, while others who gave interviews offered suspiciously little information. The same applied to a number of senior government officials who, despite concerted efforts to get their audience, either turned down the requests or delegated their junior officers who revealed little during the interviews.

A third challenge related to interviews was the relocation of many senior Zimbabwean journalists into the diaspora following the rapid decline of the economy and increased state repression of the media since 2000 (Moyo, 2006). The closure of the *Daily News* and its sister Sunday paper in 2003, followed by the closure of the *Tribune* newspapers increased the outbound journalistic trek. Getting into contact with these
journalists spread across the globe for research purposes was a key challenge. For those whose email contact details I managed to get, many responded to my questions but only after months of prodding. Among those who responded to questions, a number of them did not have time for elaborate responses, so they answered open-ended questions with one word responses. There was evidence of tight time limitations and impatience in many responses by email. Another challenge was to get some of the senior journalists to reflect on their previous experiences as practitioners in Zimbabwe—in some cases for periods spanning decades. It was not always an easy task. Many of the respondents gave sketchy responses and sometimes details that were already in the public domain.

All these challenges and limitations notwithstanding, this study’s employment of the different methods discussed in this chapter was consistent with my theoretical and conceptual premises and yielded significant results as the different chapters, including the conclusion, show. The key research questions, namely the manner in which the press framed the ‘transition’ in Zimbabwe through coverage of political contestation, as well as the extent to which the press-state-capital relations limited or liberated the public sphere in the post-colony, were adequately addressed, thanks to the methods applied in this study.

3.6 Conclusion
As stated earlier in this chapter, the selection of elections and related topics was premised on the argument that they are integral components of the democratization process as much as they also constitute an important part of the national discourse in any democratizing country. How the media system in Zimbabwe framed these events and issues and how such representation mirrored press-state-capital relations is the subject of this study.

The decision to apply a triangulation of methods was an attempt to address the fundamental argument that James Halloran (1998) makes:

Ideally, the media should be seen not in isolation, but as one set of social institutions, interacting with other institutions within the wider social system. The failure to recognise the relevance of context and interaction between institutions
has resulted in a neglect of the part played in the communication process by non-
media institutions, and an underestimation of the importance of mediation, support
factors, follow-up activities…The media do not work in isolation, but in and
through a nexus of mediating factors (Halloran, 1998:19).

This chapter has presented the methodological approaches applied in the study. A
combination of methods, including qualitative content analysis, interviews and
document analysis were applied in the study, and the chapter provided justification for
their adoption and use. The next chapter discusses the coverage of the 1985 elections
and provides a contextual discussion of press-state-capital relations during
Zimbabwe’s first decade of independence from colonial rule.