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Political Leadership and Decision-Making in Times of Crises: A Case Study of the Ramaphosa Administration 2020-2021

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Political Leadership and Decision-Making in Times of Crises: A Case Study of the Ramaphosa Administration 2020-2021

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This research project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in Governance and Management at the University of the Witwatersrand in the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management

Year Submitted: 2023

DISCLOSURE

I confirm that the study Political Leadership and Decision-Making in Times of Crisis: A Case of the Ramaphosa Administration 2020-2021 is my original work in design and execution. The study has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at the University of Witwatersrand's Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management. All materials included in the study from other scholars have been duly acknowledged.

Signature: 

MINENHLE RELEBOGILE MATELA

Date: 14 April 2023

ABSTRACT

This qualitative and exploratory case study investigated the perceptions of academic experts and political actors on President Ramaphosa's political leadership and decision-making processes during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. The study found that political leaders must demonstrate control, critical thinking, effective communication, composure, and methodical crisis response during pandemics to inspire confidence in their populations. President Ramaphosa exhibited some of these crisis leadership traits during the pandemic, such as maintaining visibility, communicating openly, and incorporating medical experts' advice into his decision-making processes. However, the study found that the president fell short in some areas, such as his perceived lack of consistently resolute and decisive political leadership.

The establishment of structures such as the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC) was found to be in accordance with both the Disaster Management legislation and the Constitution of South Africa. However, the study found mixed reactions from the populace, with some perceiving the decision-making and response measures guided by this legislation as being methodical, coordinated, and systematic, while others viewed the same decisions as being excessively cumbersome, and disorderly.

The study highlights the importance of political leadership during pandemics and the need for methodical crisis response. The findings have implications for future public health emergencies and the selection of appropriate legislative frameworks, while also making recommendations for future research.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research project to my late mother, Nkosingiphile Precious Matela, who instilled in me an unyielding appreciation for the pursuit of knowledge. Her invaluable lessons have illuminated that no one can ever deprive me of the wealth of education and wisdom I have acquired. I have felt her love, light, guidance, and support throughout this academic journey. Ngiyabonga Mama Wami.

I proudly dedicate this project to my younger self, the little girl who always knew she was destined for greatness. Let us continue to rise higher and higher, my love!

Lastly, I dedicate this report to all those who came before me, oMacingwane, oPhakade baseNgonyameni oNyanda Yemikhonto. NoMatela Lekhoakhoa la Selimo, nthole!

Makwande Kukhanye Kuvuleke!

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I am grateful to the following role players in my academic journey:

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- My mentor Professor Ndangwa Noyoo, for being a wonderful guide throughout my academic journey from my undergraduate studies until now. Thank you for your patience, your guidance and constant support.
- The Office of the Presidency for granting me permission to be the first external academic researcher to engage with staff members within the Office.
- The City of Johannesburg for granting me permission to conduct the study at the municipality.
- All participants in this research, from the Office of the Presidency, the City of Johannesburg Municipality, the Gauteng City-Region Observatory, and the Government Communication and Information Systems. Thank you for graciously agreeing to participate in the research interviews and thank you for your enthusiastic and insightful input.
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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANC: African National Congress

AI: Artificial Intelligence

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

CDC: Centre for Disease Control

COVID-19: SARS Coronavirus

COGTA: Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs

COJ: City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality

DA: Democratic Alliance

DMA: Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002 amended, Act 16 of 2015

DRC: Democratic Republic of Congo

EFF: Economic Freedom Fighters

FDR: Franklin Delano Roosevelt

FOSAD: Forum of Director Generals

GCRO: Gauteng City-Region Observatory

GCIS: Government Communication and Information Systems

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

GEAR: Growth, Employment and Redistribution policy

GPG: Gauteng Provincial Government

GTAC: Government Technical Advisory Centre

HIV/AIDS: Human Immuno Virus/ Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome

IMF: International Monetary Fund

IGR: Intergovernmental Relations

JLM: Justice and Equity Movement

KZN: Kwazulu Natal

MAC: Ministerial Advisory Committee

MERS:

NATJOINTS: National Joint Operation Intelligence Structure

NCCC: National Coronavirus Command Council

NEC: National Executive Committee

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organisations

NCOP: National Council of Provinces

NRF: National Research Fund

NUM: National Union of Mineworkers

POPIA: Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013

PPE: Personal Protective Equipment

RDP: Reconstruction and Development Plan

SAA: South African Airways

SLA: Sudanese Liberation Army

SOEs: State-Owned Entities

SONA: State of the Nation Address

TB: Tuberculosis

UJ: University of Johannesburg

UN: United Nations

US: United States

WHO: World Health Organisation

WITS: University of the Witwatersrand

ZANU-PF: Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front

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CHAPTER 1: POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING AMID CRISES, AN INTRODUCTION.

1. Introduction

This study explored political leadership and decision-making during crises, focusing on President Cyril Ramaphosa and his political administration in South Africa over the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic as a case study. Existing studies on political leadership and decision-making point out that, during tumultuous periods, societies have greater expectations of their political leaders, such as councillors, members of parliament, ministers and the president or prime minister, to provide guidance and solutions in response to emergencies arising. Boin and Hart (2010) propose that effective political leaders are expected to anticipate and prepare for potential crises and be capable of taking decisive and appropriate action to manage and resolve a crisis timeously. Here crisis is regarded as an occurrence that causes intense difficulty or danger and requires urgent decision-making from political leaders. What remains unknown is how President Ramaphosa and his administration responded to the recent COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa, a period when the global community experienced a health threat that disrupted various aspects of people's lives, including the economy, governing processes and ways of being. Hence, this study sought to understand the decisions and actions taken by Ramaphosa and his administration and their impact on governing processes that emerged as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

South Africa is a society marred by a brutal political history of racial segregation and discrimination. Dating back to colonial times, the nation was under an oppressive regime that intentionally excluded and disadvantaged the black population in the broad sense (Black, Coloured and Indian) (Du Pisani, Broodryk & Coetzer 1990). It was during this time that inequalities and separatist development initiatives that still pervade the nation were invented. Currently, South Africa is considered a developmental state, defined by Bond (2006) as a state that tries to balance economic growth and social development. In a developmental state, public resources and government influence are used to fight poverty and expand economic opportunities (Bond, 2006). Presumably, the state plays a crucial role in shaping economic output and societal livelihood outcomes. However, the former South African president, Thabo Mbeki, once described the country as a dual society, referring to the existence of two nations in one (Lubinga, 2020). The vast

differences in people's socio-economic status recognise the dual society, though they are located in the same territory and governed by one administration (Lubinga, 2020). Duality in South Africa is resembled by high levels of inequality, poverty and unemployment, which regrettably affects most of the black population who were grossly marginalised by the apartheid system. Dauntingly, when a nation riddled with so much volatility experiences a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of demand for decisive political leadership is required to mitigate the gross effects of pandemics.

Against this background, the decisions and actions of political leaders carry considerable weight on how societies progress and are protected against vulnerabilities be it at the local, national or global scale. Ali (2020) states that political leadership is not only crucial during times of certainty, but it is even more critical when 'politics as usual' is abruptly interrupted by unexpected adversity. In times of crises such as natural disasters, financial calamities, conflicts, terror, technological invasions, and health pandemics, political leadership is put to the test. There is a societal expectation that leaders are prepared and equipped to utilise crisis management strategies to minimise the effects of the catastrophe (Ali, 2020). As mentioned earlier, South Africa has dealt with different crises before including, oppressive colonial rule and apartheid. Recent struggles facing the country include violent protests, shortages in energy supply, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, Gender-based violence (GBV), high crime rates as well as high levels of unemployment (Devermont & Mukulu, 2020). All of these encounters have negatively affected people's livelihoods creating pressure on the government to take action to protect its citizens by providing robust solutions.

Since political leaders are the face of government with the ability to influence how the state develops and implements policies and legislation to govern society, they carry a big role in decision-making and political action (Day, 2012). As such, a leader's character, philosophies, principles and beliefs are crucial and they inform their leadership style and actions. Additionally, the tenets mentioned above also play a vital role in the kind of decision-making processes that they choose to follow. Therefore, political leadership and decision-making are intertwined concepts important in understanding their influence on each other. Serrat (2012) points out that decision-making is a critical component of political leadership because the key strategic governance decisions are made in the president's office. This is especially true during periods of uncertainty.

Political leaders are expected to implement crisis management strategies that protect the populace and avert harm (Boin & Hart, 2010). Krasteva (2019) describes crisis management as the process by which nations deal with significant events that threaten to harm the general public. It involves various activities, including risk assessment, incident response, communication and recovery. Hence it is important in this study to understand how a leader's character, philosophy, principles and beliefs, in this case, Ramaphosa and his administration, play a critical role in decision-making and political leadership during times of crises.

In a quest to gain insights into Ramaphosa's political leadership and his administration's decision-making during the COVID-19 crisis, the researcher chose to use proxies who are functionaries of the state. The former included people who worked for the government under President Ramaphosa and his administration at the national, provincial, and local government levels. Additionally, expert opinions and acuities were sourced from public intellectuals, researchers and academic experts to analyse the political leadership and decision-making which had been exhibited by President Ramaphosa and his administration in response to this global calamity. To carry out this exploration, the researcher used a qualitative and exploratory research design in the form of a case study. To collect data, semi-structured interviews were used which were later analysed using a thematic analysis. The aforementioned research methodology was selected because it offered the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of how individuals give meaning to their social reality.

The research established that in the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa, President Ramaphosa and his administration used a number of response measures to avert harm, including a range of restrictions some of which were necessary but later on were viewed as draconian actions by the general populace. The study further revealed that political leadership during a pandemic requires careful thinking, visibility, constant and effective communication, and methodical crisis response. President Ramaphosa demonstrated some of these traits, receiving praise for maintaining visibility, incorporating expert advice, and dealing with the pandemic systematically. However, he faced criticism for a perceived lack of consistent and decisive leadership, accountability, and consequence management within his administration. The study also highlighted mixed reactions to legislative measures and commended Ramaphosa's negotiation

skills in vaccine acquisition. Overall, the findings underscore the complexity and challenges of political leadership in a pandemic context.

1.1. Research Problem

SARS-Cov-2, a Coronavirus commonly known as COVID-19, was first identified in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China, and it was first reported on December 31, 2019 (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2020). Consequently, the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a Global Public Health Emergency in January 2020 (WHO, 2020). By March 2020, most countries in the Northern Hemisphere had implemented harsh measures of nationwide lockdowns usually coupled with an almost total closure of national borders. In South Africa, a similar situation unfolded after President Ramaphosa announced the National State of Disaster in March 2020. During this period the country implemented a nationwide lockdown for almost three months. The implementation of the lockdown measures resulted in decreased economic activity, leading to increased unemployment, poverty, and inequalities across the globe, including in South Africa (Haffajee et al., 2020). The deepening of socio-economic vulnerabilities in the republic during COVID-19 pushed the public to raise questions about the capabilities of the regime to govern (Suttner, 2021). Debates on the state's scope and strength created a gap for this study as it focused on exploring the processes informing the regime's response to the pandemic as well as ascertaining the forms of leadership exerted by the government as it stirred the state through COVID-19.

Existing studies on governance, leadership, and crisis management have established that political actors play a crucial role in crisis responses. The literature on crisis leadership emphasises the importance of proactive and coordinated measures, as well as effective communication, in managing crises successfully. The level of public trust in government institutions and leadership also significantly influences compliance with crisis-related measures and overall outcomes (Walker et al., 2016; Jong et al., 2016; McGuire et al., 2020). These studies have also examined the effectiveness of political leaders, their communication styles, and their competencies in conflict management. However, the COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique and emergent crisis that affected various aspects of society, including public health, social, economic, and political

spheres. This unprecedented crisis posed new challenges for governments worldwide, including the South African government. Therefore, there was a need to investigate how political leadership and decision-making were demonstrated by the South African President and his administration in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. By analysing the perceptions of the citizenry towards the administration's actions and decisions, this study aimed to gain insights into the nature of political leadership and decision-making that emerged during the pandemic. Understanding these intermediary processes, practices, characteristics, and guidelines is crucial for comprehending the complex nature of Ramaphosa's political leadership and the decisions made by his administration in response to the COVID-19 crisis in South Africa. Such understanding is essential for gaining insights on how political actors govern amid challenging situations and the impact of their actions on society and governance outcomes.

1.2. Research Question

This research study was guided by the following main research question:

How do citizens perceive President Cyril Ramaphosa's administration, political leadership and decision-making in relation to government actions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic over the period 2020-2021?

Subsequent questions ensuing from this main question are:

1.2.1. What characterizes President Ramaphosa's leadership and decision-making during the first two of the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.2.2. What processes informed the president's and key cabinet ministers' leadership and decision-making during the first two years of the pandemic?

1.2.3. How does the political leadership and decision-making exerted by the Ramaphosa administration during the Covid pandemic broaden our understanding of crisis management?

1.2.4. What is the interplay between the policy framework for crisis management in South Africa and actions taken by the Ramaphosa administration during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.3. Research Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to explore how citizens perceived President Cyril Ramaphosa and his administration's political leadership and decision-making during the COVID-19 crisis in 2020-2021.

1.4. Research Objectives

Based on the above-mentioned purpose, the specific research objectives for this study were:

1.4.1. To establish the characteristics of political leadership and decision-making demonstrated by President Ramaphosa's administration in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic during the period 2020-2021.

1.4.2. To determine the underlying processes informing leadership and decision-making undertaken by President Ramaphosa and key cabinet ministers in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.4.3. To broaden understanding of crisis management drawing on political leadership and decision-making exerted by the Ramaphosa administration during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.4.4. To ascertain the interplay between the policy framework for crisis management in South Africa and actions taken by the Ramaphosa administration during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.5. Defining Key Concepts of the Study

1.5.1. Political Leadership

Political leadership can be defined as the process by which individuals or groups influence the behaviour and decisions of others within the political system to achieve a common goal or vision. According to Rotberg (2014), political leadership is characterised by the ability to mobilise resources, build coalitions, and navigate complex political environments to achieve policy objectives. Similarly, Boin, Hart & McConnell (2009) define political leadership as the ability to

create and manage social change through the use of power, persuasion, and influence. Northouse (2007) further adds that effective political leadership is critical for achieving political stability, economic growth, and social development, and is closely linked to issues such as democracy, governance, and public policy.

This study explored the perceptions of various academic experts and political actors on the leadership and decision-making processes undertaken by President Ramaphosa and his administration during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.5.2. Decision-Making

Decision-making refers to the process of selecting a course of action from multiple alternatives based on a set of criteria or objectives (Serrat, 2012). According to Sweeny (2008), decision-making is a fundamental human activity that is involved in all aspects of life, from personal choices to complex organizational decisions. In the political context, decision-making refers to the process by which political leaders and decision-makers evaluate policy alternatives and make choices about how to allocate resources and address societal challenges (Murawski, 2011).

This study explored decision-making in the political context, taking into account the complex and multifaceted nature of the political environment, especially during a crisis.

1.5.3. Crisis Management

Crisis management refers to the process of preparing for, responding to, and recovering from a crisis or emergency situation that threatens an organization, community, or individual (Ulmer, 2001) Crisis management involves a coordinated and proactive approach to identifying potential crises, developing strategies to mitigate risks, and implementing measures to minimise the impact of a crisis if and when it occurs (Stein, 2008). The Covid-19 pandemic is the crisis identified in this study.

1.6 Outline of the Research Report

This research report consists of six chapters; chapter one begins with the introduction, which includes the research questions and objectives, along with the research problem and purpose.

Chapter two includes the literature review, which explores the debates surrounding political leadership and decision-making in governance, with a focus on identifying the different trends and practices that have influenced various regimes throughout history. The review also examines how crises and leadership have evolved over time.

Chapter three describes the research approach and design, as well as the research tools, sampling method, ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Chapter four comprises the presentation of research findings generated from the fieldwork process. This chapter provides insights into the research participants' perceptions of political leadership and decision-making during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chapter five contains the data analysis, interpretation and discussion of findings identified in chapter four. This part of the research analyses the findings in line with the research questions and objectives outlined in the first chapter.

Chapter six is the final chapter of this report, it therefore provides the research conclusion, recommendations for future pandemics as suggested by the research participants and recommendations for future research.

1.7 Conclusion

In the first chapter of this research, the foundation for the study's intent was established. The research problem, research purpose, and research questions that guided the inquiry were outlined. Furthermore, the context in which the research was set to unfold was described, together with the definition of key concepts. The chapter concluded by providing an overview of the structure of the

different chapters to be found in the research report. The next chapter, namely the literature review, explores the conceptual framings and contextual underpinnings of political leadership and decision-making during crises that inform this research study in greater depth.

CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING IN TIMES OF CRISIS.

2. Introduction

Political leaders are frequently openly judged on their ability to respond to unexpected or disastrous societal events. During these unforeseen circumstances, their leadership, decision-making and crisis-management abilities are tested (Hart and Tindall, 2010). When nations face crises, citizens expect their political leaders to act quickly and decisively, to arrest the situation and this sustains confidence in the government (Demirtas & Mustafa, 2020; Rotberg, 2014). In this chapter, the focus is on examining the varying debates that shape the discourse of political leadership and decision-making in relation to governance to establish the different trends and practices that have shaped different regimes in our society. The review also looks at how crises and leadership have changed over time. A literature review aims to summarise and evaluate existing literature that informs research (Bryman, 2016; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). As a result, this chapter covers six main themes drawing from the fields of political leadership, decision-making, and crisis management.

After this introduction, the chapter is divided into six sections. First, it describes the nature of political leadership and decision-making in human societies. Thereafter, it looks at political leadership and decision-making in post-apartheid South Africa, delving deeper into the different post-apartheid leaders and the crises they faced. Then, the lessons from historical accounts of political leadership and decision-making during crises are outlined. The chapter proceeds to explore political leadership and decision-making during the global Coronavirus pandemic. Next, it presents the theoretical framework that informs the study, and finally, it closes with a section on leading in the midst of the pandemic. This section introduces Ramaphosa's administration, which is the main focus of this study.

2.1. The Nature of Political Leadership and Decision-Making in Human Societies

Political leadership and decision-making have been a part of human society since time immemorial, and the former plays a critical role in the functioning of civilisation. In order to understand the nature of political leadership and decision-making in human societies, it is essential to make a clear distinction between leadership and political leadership. After that, it is crucial to unpack decision-making and how it relates to this study. The subject of leadership has been studied for centuries, and due to its intricate and domain-specific nature, there is no single definition of the concept. Demirtas and Mustafa (2020) hypothesise that innumerable amounts of "leadership" definitions exist; however, there is a general consensus that the term refers to the act of directing people toward an intended goal (Yukl, 2009). Leadership refers to guiding and inspiring others to achieve a common objective. It involves setting a direction, creating a vision, inspiring and motivating others to work toward that vision (Demirtas & Mustafa, 2020). Leadership can occur in any context, including the workplace, schools, sports, and other areas.

Furthermore, leadership can be a private company's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), a priest in a church, a village or community elder, a sports coach, or a school principal. For the purpose of this study, the researcher was interested in exploring a particular category of leadership, that is, political leadership. Neustadt (1990) defines political leadership as the leadership of political organisations or governments. Political leaders are accountable for making decisions that affect citizens' lives while also shaping the direction of their society. These leaders include elected officials like presidents, prime ministers, and legislators and appointed officials like cabinet members and heads of government agencies. The process of political leadership involves setting policy agendas, making decisions that affect citizens' lives, and representing the interests of the people they serve (Northouse, 2007; Paige, 1977).

While leadership and political leadership share common elements, such as the ability to inspire and guide others, political leadership is distinguished because it occurs within the context of a political system and involves the exercise of power and authority over public policy and decision-making (Neustadt, 1990). Taken further, decision-making is the process of choosing between two or more options or courses of action (Serrat, 2012). It involves identifying a problem or challenge, gathering information about possible solutions, evaluating the potential consequences of each option, and selecting the option that is most likely to achieve the desired outcome. Decision-

making can potentially be influenced by various factors, including personal values, knowledge, experience, and the context in which a decision is being made (Sweeny, 2008). Some authors have argued that effective decision-making involves considering all available options, weighing the pros and cons of each option, and then making a choice that aligns with the goals and values of the individual organisation (Albright & Winston, 2017; Serrat, 2012; Yukl, 2009). While, others argued that timing plays a critical role in effective decision-making (Pious, 2001; Sweeny, 2008). Decision-making can be a complex process, and it is often necessary to balance competing considerations and trade-offs (Sweeny, 2008). Good decision-making skills are essential for individuals and organisations to make informed, effective choices that lead to success and progress (Pious, 2001).

It can be argued that political leadership and decision-making are closely interconnected because political leaders are responsible for making decisions that affect citizens' lives and shape their society's direction (Pious, 2001; Yukl, 2009). Usually, political leaders are elected or appointed to positions of power and authority and are able to influence policy directives, make laws, and allocate resources. But this is not always the norm as some leaders impose themselves on societies, for instance, through military coups d'état. Political leaders face a wide range of complex and often competing demands and challenges, and they must make decisions that balance the needs and interests of different stakeholders (Hart & Tindall, 2010; Yukl, 2009). For example, a political leader might need to decide how to allocate resources between education, healthcare, and infrastructure or how to respond to a natural disaster or a public health crisis. Boin and Hart (2010) rightly point out that to make effective decisions, political leaders must gather and analyse information, consult with expert advisors, and consider the potential consequences of their actions. They should also be able to communicate their decisions to the public and justify their choices based on the needs and values of the people they serve (Boin & Hart, 2010).

Sir Winston Churchill, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, also known as "the Great Briton," is a historical example of effective political leadership and decision-making (Addison, 2005). During WWII, he rallied the British people and led his country from the brink of defeat to victory (Addison, 2005). During the war, Churchill formed a powerful alliance with the Soviet Union's and the United States political leaders, Joseph Stalin and Franklin D. Roosevelt,

respectively. In this regard, he shaped the Allied Strategy, which resulted in World War II victory through coordinated action and combined military forces (Nicholas, 2022). German troops led by Adolf Hitler fuelled this war; it is also worth noting that the German combatants possessed a plethora of weaponry and militia. Churchill, as a political leader, was able to act decisively, organise morale, and instil confidence in his people (Nicholas, 2022). He is described as a charismatic leader famous for his world-famous speeches in which he vowed to fight in the war until victory was achieved (Addison, 2005). Churchill led the House of Commons and took over the Ministry of Defence during the war, demonstrating proactive political leadership during a life-changing crisis.

In the early 19th century, Shaka Zulu, a powerful and influential political leader, rose to power in present-day South Africa (Deflem, 1999). He is believed to have revolutionized warfare and mobility in Southern Africa (Noyoo & Sobantu, 2022). He founded the Zulu Empire and implemented military and political reforms that consolidated power and expanded territory through successful conquests. During the Mfecane (Zulu) or Difaqane (Sotho), a period of heightened military conflict in the 1800s, people were forced to walk approximately 4000 kilometers from South Africa to other parts of the region, including Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and even Tanzania, to escape Shaka's violent conquests (Noyoo & Sobantu, 2022). Shaka's political leadership, decision-making, and actions potentially contributed to the dispersal of people from different parts of South Africa to other parts of the African region.

The historical examples mentioned above demonstrate how political leaders have the power and ability to engender social change processes, impacting not only the countries they lead but also surrounding areas within their regions or subcontinents. Essentially, political leaders have the potential to build up or destroy a nation. While they can respond to or create crises, it is worth noting that political leaders operate within political environments, where complexities and varying interests can influence their leadership and decision-making abilities. Furthermore, the interconnectedness between political leadership and decision-making is evident in the choices made by political leaders, which have far-reaching consequences for their societies and surroundings. As a result, effective political leadership requires strong decision-making abilities,

the ability to balance competing interests, and the ability to communicate and justify decisions to the public, especially during times of uncertainty (Boin & Hart, 2010; Hart & Tindall, 2010).

2.2. Political Leadership and Decision-Making in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Mandela to Zuma

Once apartheid was dissolved and the first democratic elections were held in 1994, South Africa's democratic leadership system resulted in five distinct leaders. All of them belonged to the African National Congress (ANC), the biggest political organisation on the African continent. One of these leaders was Nelson Mandela, who presided from 1994 to 1998. From 1999 to 2008, Thabo Mbeki was his successor. Thereafter Kgalema Motlanthe took over in 2008, and Jacob Zuma succeeded him from 2009 to 2018. It is worth noting that both Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma were recalled from office before the end of their second terms as presidents, and all four leaders faced various crises, to which they each responded differently.

2.2.1. The Era of Nelson Mandela 1994-1998

President Nelson Mandela was South Africa's first black democratically elected president. Mandela was a visionary leader who emphasised inclusive nation-building, forgiveness, and reconciliation. He has been described as a highly charismatic person with a supernatural ability to persuade others to support his vision (Feinstein, 2009). During his presidency, Mandela faced one of the most challenging crises of his time, the transition from an authoritarian and racially segregated apartheid regime to a democratic state (Lodge, 2008). Under his leadership, the black majority achieved political and social liberties. To understand the veracity of this transformation agenda, one must consider apartheid's duration and the level of segregation imposed on non-whites by this political regime. Apartheid lasted 46 years, during which time various policies and legislation were implemented to separate different racial groups (Kagiso, 1995). This included policies concerning separating economic opportunities, land, public facilities, schools, healthcare facilities, and residential areas, among other things (Kagiso, 1995). Unfortunately, segregation harmed the black population while the white population continued to enjoy their liberties. Apartheid had an impact on people's psychological awareness and overall worldview, in addition

to their physical and social well-being. Apartheid created a superiority versus inferiority complex among South African black and white people due to its discriminatory and violent nature, fueled by extreme fear and brutal violence against black people. Because the white apartheid state wielded military and financial power to oppress black people, they were regarded as superior beings and saw themselves as such (Kagiso, 1995).

Black people were considered inferior and treated as such; unfortunately, they believed this to a greater extent. This is consistent with Paulo Freire's concept of oppressed consciousness, which refers to a psycho-existential crisis brought on by decades of oppression (Freire, 2005). Because the oppression occurred over several decades, Mandela faced an arduous task. He had to not only instil societal transformation through policy and legislative reform, but he also had to reassure the black majority that freedom was their social right and that by integrating black and white people in public places and educational institutions, he was driving an egalitarian societal agenda. Mandela was a peacemaker and nation-builder, and his decision-making was reconciliatory and inclusive. He has also been described as a charismatic but firm leader who commands respect and fosters robust political debate. Nelson Mandela will always be remembered as the most iconic political leader South Africa has ever had (Calland & Sithole). Because without his outstanding political leadership during a turbulent period in the country, South Africa could have taken a turn for the worse.

2.2.2. The Thabo Mbeki Period 1999-2008

Thabo Mbeki succeeded Nelson Mandela as president in 1999. Mbeki has been described as a very academically inclined visionary who strongly believed in the African Renaissance (Noyoo, 2015). He was renowned for his intellectualism as well as his innovative policy-making. Noyoo (2015) describes him as someone with a strategic outlook, someone who pays very close attention to detail, and with an ability to analyse complex issues. Noyoo (2015) further commends his tight control over the government and his ability to make evidence-based decisions. Mbeki is also known for his focus on international relations and his efforts to build South Africa’s relationships with other countries (Calland & Sithole, 2022; Noyoo, 2015). He was active in regional and international organisations and was widely regarded as a strong advocate for Africa on the

international stage. As South Africa's president, he faced a number of challenges, the most prominent of which was the HIV/AIDS pandemic. South Africa was severely impacted by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and still has the highest number of HIV infections worldwide (Feinstein, 2009). Mbeki was heavily chastised for his handling of the crisis, and he was accused of denying the link between HIV and AIDS, as well as failing to provide adequate resources and support to those suffering from the disease (Gilbert & Walker, 2002). Furthermore, Mbeki's presidency was marred by significant economic challenges such as high unemployment, inequality, poverty, and a global recession. In response, he implemented a number of economic policies, including the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) and the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) policy, to address these challenges (Gevisser, 2009).

Unfortunately, these policies faced criticism, and they were not always successful. Moreover, Mbeki faced a number of challenges in international relations, including strained connections with other African countries and controversy over his handling of the situation in neighbouring Zimbabwe (Lodge, 2005). In response to the crises he faced, Mbeki engaged in ongoing dialogue and negotiation both domestically and internationally. He worked to build relationships with other countries to find common ground on issues such as HIV/AIDS and economic development. As a leader, Mbeki was visionary, strategic and goal orientated, and his leadership has been described as highly astute and forward-thinking. On decision-making, Gevisser (2009) asserts that Mbeki encouraged robust debates in his cabinet and after these debates, he would make well-thought-out and evidence-based decisions. While some of his former cabinet members describe him as a consensus-driven and diplomatic leader, others describe him as an indifferent and domineering leader (Feinstein, 2009; Gevisser, 2009). Notwithstanding the challenges, he faced during his presidency, his effectiveness as a political leader cannot be overstated, as evidenced by the fact that the country’s economy was in surplus when Mbeki resigned (National Treasury, 2008). It is also important to note that this was the country's last fiscal surplus (National Treasury, 2008).

2.2.3. The Kgalema Motlanthe Presidency 2008

Kgalema Motlanthe, South Africa's third president, is often referred to as “the "caretaker president" because he was only in office for eight months (Calland & Sithole, 2022; Twala, 2014). Be that as

it may, during his tenure, he had a significant impact on society. Former President Nelson Mandela described him as a quiet but firm and principled leader. This was precisely what the country needed during his presidency; there were high political controversies following a fallout between Mbeki and Zuma, to which he needed to bring stability and continuity (Twala, 2014). Soon after his appointment, he responded quickly and decisively to the ongoing HIV/AIDS pandemic by appointing a new minister of health who proved to be a marked improvement over the previous minister. She successfully drove a rapid response to HIV/AIDS by obtaining funding for treatment acquisition and robust health promotion initiatives (Harvey, 2012).

Furthermore, Motlanthe's tenure coincided with the global financial crisis, which necessitated immediate attention in the midst of the ANC's political calamity. To that end, he retained Trevor Manuel as finance minister and asked him to stay even after his resignation to maintain sustainability. Although his term was brief, it can be argued that he was measured, reasonable, and decisive during his time in office. He maintained stability in South Africa during a turbulent political period, which is highly commendable (Harvey, 2012).

2.2.4. Jacob Zuma's Rule 2009-2018

While former President Thabo Mbeki's personality has been described as distant and aloof, Jacob Zuma's personality is described as a direct contrast. Zuma has been described as a very charismatic and charming individual (Calland, 2013). Some South Africans regard Zuma as a man of the people. He is well-known for his dancing and singing, as well as his overall brand of entertainment, rather than for his policy-making or political ideology (Fogel & Jacobs, 2018). Although there were societal challenges such as economic decline, rising poverty, and rising unemployment before Zuma's presidency, it can be argued that these challenges were exacerbated during his presidency.

Furthermore, some of Zuma's critical decisions during his presidency have resulted in a number of current crises (Jagarnath, 2016). One could even argue that the former president contributed to some of the nation's current problems. For example, as confirmed by the Zondo Commission's State Capture Report, the former president and the Guptas used State Owned Enterprises (SOEs)

for acts of corruption that had a long-term impact on society (Zondo Report, 2022). Given their deep pockets and proximity to state power, it's no surprise that these SOEs were prime targets for corruption. In this regard, billions of rands were diverted from companies like Eskom, Denel, Transnet, and South African Airways (SAA) (Zondo Report, 2022). Concurrently, the institutions tasked with overseeing these SOEs were captured, preventing them from carrying out their oversight and accountability functions through political appointments to key leadership positions (Jagarnath, 2016).

Unfortunately, due to the capture of the SOEs mentioned above, citizens are forced to bear the brunt of their former political leader's bad decisions. Although the country has an abundance of minerals such as coal, ongoing rolling blackouts have become the norm. Eskom is an entity inherited from the apartheid era, and unfortunately, its infrastructure was neither improved after the country transitioned to democracy nor were the existing arrears paid up; instead, when Zuma came to power, he and his goons used the entity to drain billions of rands in public funds for personal enrichment (Calland & Sithole, 2022). As a result, South Africans are subjected to rolling blackouts several times daily. Ominously, the current energy crisis requires urgent intervention, and this responsibility has now fallen on the shoulders of the current presidential incumbent Cyril Ramaphosa. As a leader, Zuma has been described as a charismatic and decisive leader. And although his decisions did not align with the public's interest at times, he still had loyal supporters who wanted him to remain in power regardless of his performance as the head of state (Maserumule & Bradlow, 2015). In popular discourse, Zuma's presidency has been summarised and labelled as "the nine wasted years" in the nation's democracy (Calland, 2013).

2.3. Lessons from Historical Accounts of Political Leadership and Decision-Making During Global Crises

It can be argued that crisis situations publicly test political leaders' leadership and decision-making abilities. These catastrophes do not take the same form; they can range from regional conflicts, global conflicts, natural disasters, industrial accidents, violent political conflicts, financial calamities, and health crises or pandemics, to name a few (Hart and Tindall, 2010). Crises challenge the status quo and force political leaders to take action(s) through policy formulation

and law enactment (Hadley, Pittinsky, Sommer, and Zhu, 2009; Karkoszka, 2005). These calamities force leaders to look at society's preparedness to respond to such challenges, as well as the mitigation strategies and their recovery from the crisis (Karkoszka, 2005; Pious, 2001). In such cases, decisive, visible, and forthcoming political leaders who act in the best interest of their country's needs are considered effective in crisis management (Serrat, 2012; Stein, 2008). In political leadership, crisis management refers to the strategies and actions taken by leaders to address and resolve significant events or crises that threaten to harm the nation or its citizens. According to Krasteva (2019), the goal of crisis management is to minimise the event's negative impact and restore normal operations as quickly as possible. As part of crisis management, political leaders are responsible for making critical decisions in a timely manner, communicating with the public, and coordinating with other government agencies and international partners to mitigate the impact of the crisis. Effective crisis management requires strong leadership, clear communication, and making difficult decisions under pressure. It can further help to protect a nation's reputation and prevent long-term damage to its financial, operational, and legal standing (Krasteva, 2019).

The world has experienced many crises over the years, and due to developments in information technology, globalisation, and deregulation, the world has become closely knit (Hart & Tindall, 2010). Resultantly, a crisis occurring in one nation affects neighbouring regions as well. One such example is the Rwandan 1994 genocide, from which more than 800,000 Tutsis were massacred. This led to decades of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and ongoing conflict between the DRC and Rwanda (Clapman, Herbst & Mills, 2006). Moreover, crises are better managed when political leaders and governments respond swiftly, apply sound decision-making and share clear and accurate information during unprecedented times. For example, in Australia during the peak of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the federal government's rapid and decisive response under Prime Minister Bob Hawke arguably resulted in decreased infections (Densham, 2006). Although HIV is still a prevalent disease globally, Australia has one of the lowest rates of HIV infection to date.

Globally, the Haitian earthquake of 2010 and the subsequent Cholera epidemic in 2014 provided an opportunity to examine the various aspects of political leadership during crises. These events aligned with existing literature (Domercant et al., 2015). In 2010, a catastrophic 7.0 magnitude

earthquake struck Haiti, resulting in an estimated loss of 220,000 lives and leaving 1.5 million people homeless (Domercant et al., 2015). The devastation was worsened by Haiti's already fragile infrastructure, lack of building codes, and overcrowding (Domercant et al., 2015). René Préval led during the 2010 earthquake, demonstrating a proactive and composed leadership style (Fatton, 2011). René Préval's leadership after the 2010 earthquake reflected the literature's emphasis on immediate relief efforts and collaboration with international entities (Fatton, 2011). Préval prioritised the swift mobilisation of aid and emphasised international cooperation to address the catastrophe. His calm communication effectively kept the Haitian populace and the international community informed and coordinated in their response efforts (Fatton, 2011). Préval's leadership exemplified the need for practical and collaborative leadership during immediate crisis response.

On the other hand, Michel Martelly assumed leadership of Haiti during the 2014 Cholera outbreak. In his position as the head of state, he exhibited a charismatic leadership style (Domercant et al., 2015). As a former popular musician, Martelly used his charismatic public persona to raise awareness about the Cholera outbreak and rally support for response efforts. He directly engaged with affected communities, healthcare workers, and survivors to convey empathy and solidarity, aligning with the literature's emphasis on empathetic leadership (Domercant et al., 2015). Furthermore, Martelly advocated for increased international assistance and held the international community accountable for introducing cholera to Haiti (Domercant et al., 2015). His charismatic leadership during the cholera outbreak exemplified a hands-on and compassionate approach to addressing the crisis and advocating for his country's citizens.

The distinct leadership styles showcased by Préval and Martelly during different crises highlight the dynamic nature of political leadership in crisis management and recovery. Préval's proactive and collaborative approach emphasised the need for swift and coordinated action in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, while Martelly's charismatic and empathetic leadership style resonated during the Cholera outbreak, demonstrating the importance of adapting leadership approaches to the unique challenges faced during different crises. The lesson learned from this example is the importance of adapting leadership styles to address the unique challenges presented by different crises. Préval and Martelly demonstrated the effectiveness of their leadership styles in their respective contexts, showing that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to crisis leadership.

Leaders need to assess the immediate needs, engage with affected communities, and prioritise actions accordingly. Furthermore, effective crisis leadership extends beyond providing immediate relief; it involves advocating for long-term recovery and holding those responsible for the crisis accountable, as exemplified by Martelly's approach. Ultimately, the impact of leadership in crisis situations underscores the crucial role that political leaders play in shaping outcomes and the well-being of their nations.

There is no denying that even in the 21st century, crises still require strong leadership to guide nations. Ultimately, the leadership determines a country's course during and after a crisis. Different leaders have responded to crises in various ways over time, and it is because of these varied responses that other nations have presented different outcomes. Zimbabwe, for example, has struggled with humanitarian crises since the early 2000s under the leadership of the Zimbabwe African Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) political party, which was led by the late President Robert Mugabe (Booysen, 2022; Campbell, 2021; Erasmus, 2022). Notably, some of these crises were caused by climate change challenges, which occasionally resulted in droughts or floods. From 2002 to 2020, the climate change issues mentioned above caused food shortages, resulting in increased rates of famine and deprivation (Elekwa & Eme, 2011).

Other crises were caused by the political climate in the country, unfortunately, Zimbabwe's political environment has been unfavourable to growth and development. Robert Mugabe's leadership in Zimbabwe spanned from liberation hero to authoritarian ruler, revealing a complex and controversial legacy. Initially celebrated for his role in achieving independence from colonial rule, Mugabe's leadership evolved into a centralisation of power within the presidency, marked by political repression, economic decline, and a controversial land reform program. His tenure saw the erosion of democratic institutions, allegations of electoral irregularities, and a stifling of political opposition. Despite facing domestic and international challenges, Mugabe displayed resilience and a determination to maintain his grip on power, leaving a legacy that underscores the intricate relationship between political leadership and a nation's trajectory, blending both positive and negative elements in its narrative (Chitiyo, 2017). The economy has struggled to survive due to a lack of investor and donor relations, particularly in the agricultural farming sector (Chitiyo, 2017). As a result, Zimbabweans have been forced to flee their homeland for opportunities and

refuge in neighbouring countries such as South Africa and Botswana. They frequently work for wages that are less than the minimum wage to send remittances home to help families survive in a complex political, economic, and environmental climate while also experiencing high levels of xenophobic and Afrophobic behaviour (Chitiyo, 2017).

It is worth noting that different crises require different skill sets and leadership characteristics. On the one hand, for instance, conflict-driven crises require autocratic and combative leadership as well as accelerated decision-making. On the other hand, financial crises require agility and integrity, while health crises require clear and trustworthy communication, scientific knowledge, and decisiveness (Hart & Tindall, 2010). Some common characteristics apply to all crises, including good coordination, agility, and decisive leadership. Indeed Acemoglu and Robinson (2013) appropriately suggested that political leaders' decisions can lead a country toward prosperity or destitution, even more so during and after crises. The aforementioned instances serve to illustrate the intricacies of political leadership, rooted in the leader's attributes and leadership style as exhibited during times of crises. To put it succinctly, suboptimal political leadership and decision-making processes can culminate in adverse national consequences. Conversely, sound political leadership typically yields favourable outcomes for the nations under their stewardship. Evidently, political leadership and decision-making constitute pivotal components of any nation's developmental trajectory or lack thereof. Furthermore, it is imperative to grasp the implications of globalisation trends on political leadership and decision-making within the context of our increasingly interconnected world, often likened to a global village.

2.3.1. The Globalisation Effect of Health Crises or Pandemics

By definition, globalisation refers to the interdependency and interconnectedness of countries around the globe. It is the integration and interaction among people, businesses, and global governments (Bran, 2022). This interconnectedness is manifested by the movement of people for labour and travel, as well as knowledge generation and transfers through technology and the global trade of commodities and raw materials (Bran, 2022). Global trade is no new phenomenon; transcontinental trade and people on the move have been existential since time immemorial (Troto, 2022). According to existing literature, capitalism and the free market have been identified as the

main driving forces of the globalisation phenomenon (Bran, 2022; Fushimi, 2021; Katsutoshi, 2021; Troto, 2022). Food, commodities, capital, economic powers, and decision-making are easily exchanged within this marketplace.

Historically, the movement of people resulted in the trade of spices and the discovery of mineral resources, however, it also resulted in the spread of infectious diseases (World Health Organisation [WHO], 1999). Between 165 and 180 AD, smallpox annihilated millions of Roman citizens. A few centuries later, the Bubonic plague struck Europe around 542 AD and later re-emerged as the Black Death that struck Asia (Institute of Medicine, 2006). Additionally, the resurgence of dengue fever, the emergence of HIV, the West Nile virus and muti-drug-resistant Tuberculosis (TB) are examples of the profound effect of globalisation and its role in the emergence and spread of infectious diseases (Institute of Medicine, 2006). Nowadays, human antibodies move around the world largely unobstructed, whether through a knowing carrier or an unknowing traveller, and no nation is immune to the growing global threat of outbreaks and infections, even in remote areas. What would previously be considered a local outbreak can easily transcend into a global epidemic in days. This has been evident throughout the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic that brought the world to an abrupt halt. Concurrently, outbreaks also present an opportunity for innovative, multinational efforts to address the bourgeoning crises (Domercant et al., 2015).

The global propagation of information technology strengthens the global public health capacity to prevent, control, and trace the spread of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases (Chen et al., 2021). The globalisation phenomenon impacts different facets of society: it impacts aspects of culture, politics, economics, and ecology (Katsutoshi, 2021). Culturally, globalisation refers to the ideas, ideologies, and social behaviours adopted by a particular group of people (Troto, 2022). For instance, an elite group of Africans in post-colonial Senegal, a former French colony, adopted more Westernised social behaviours that emulated the French to exhibit a sense of sophistication (Sembène, 1976). Regrettably, the Senegalese were not the only Africans to adopt Westernised social behaviours. This trend is displayed across the African continent as a symbol of accomplishment.

Additionally, the political aspect of globalisation is depicted by the interconnectedness of global politics, relating to the adopted policies and the overall manner in which countries are governed (Katsutoshi, 2021; Troto, 2022). An example of political globalisation is the democratisation of countries across the globe. It was not until the 19th century that democratisation became a norm, although it was the minority form of government at its inception. It gained momentum throughout this century, with some countries adopting democratic governance faster than others (Fushimi, 2021).

Globalisation offers increased opportunities for global development to take place. While aided by information technology, this development, unfortunately, tends to uncover existing inequalities between and within nations (Bran, 2022). Some countries assimilate into the world economy more rapidly due to adopting outward-orientated trade policies, such as those in Asia (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2002). While other countries, such as those in Africa and Latin America, adopted more inward-orientated trade policies, thus stifling their integration into the world economy, resulting in economic decline, stagnation, increased inflation, poverty, and disparity (IMF, 2002). Global interdependency and connectedness can bring both negative and positive implications; for instance, the ease at which commodities, foods, and other goods are exchanged brings positive yields for the marketplace and the global populace (Farok, 2022). On the other hand, the ease of travel and the economic and political connectedness can potentially lead to regional conflict and the spurring of violence (Farok, 2022). Additionally, globalisation allows rapid access to information transactions and easy access to foreign knowledge through information technology mechanisms such as mainstream and social media. Generally, these platforms are used to connect and share information. Still, in contemporary times, they are also used to promulgate misinformation and drive political propaganda, even more so during crises.

2.3.2. The Impact of Mainstream and Social Media on Political Leadership and Decision-Making During Crises

Different political leaders around the globe utilise various aspects of mainstream and social media to share information, communicate with their population, and drive political campaigns. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, these platforms were critical in sharing relevant health

information by different world leaders. In contrast, other world leaders utilised these platforms to reduce the veracity of the pandemic (Anwar et al., 2020). The mainstream or social media's overarching role is to keep people informed, entertained, and connected (Anwar et al., 2020). However, the speed at which news travels globally has increased significantly over the years. An event can occur in a particular country, even a remote country, and could end up being a global trend within hours on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. Consequently, it is no surprise that when crises emerge, they become part of popular discourse in a matter of hours. And it is because of the ease and speed at which information is received and disseminated discretion should be applied when using media platforms.

The manner in which news about crises is reported significantly impacts the behaviours that people will adopt and their attitudes toward the crisis (Anwar et al., 2020). For example, the way the H1N1 influenza epidemic of 2009 was reported in the media increased both fear and awareness among the global population. While the awareness resulted in people taking precautions to protect themselves from the virus through hygiene and protective measures, the anxiety led to stigmatising those who were already infected with the virus (Anwar et al., 2020). A similar demonstration occurred during the 2012 H7N9 MERS outbreak. Yet again, people responded by paying attention to public health measures and stigmatising infected members of society (Institute of Medicine, 2006). Unfortunately, the response to the Covid-19 pandemic was similar; during this time, both social and mainstream media played essential roles, with mainstream media disseminating critical virus information as reported by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) (Anwar et al., 2020).

In addition, mainstream media shared the views and messages of various world leaders. Some referred to the pandemic as a political tactic, while others referred to it as the "Chinese virus," causing confusion among the global population and discrimination against the Asian population (Anwar et al., 2020). Meanwhile, social media pioneered a slew of conspiracy theories, with claims that the virus originated in a 'Chinese'Lab' as a means of population control (Anwar et al., 2020). Furthermore, some prominent figures and social media users shared home remedies and indigenous medicine recipes to 'cure' the virus (Anwar et al., 2020). Unfortunately, conspiracy theories and misinformation spread faster than accurate news, creating unexpected boundaries and

impediments to the collaboration of scientists working to solve the crisis. Furthermore, spreading misinformation causes psychological and emotional turmoil for its recipients, resulting in an even more significant disparity between reality and fake news (Anwar et al., 2020).

The news and information shared through media platforms had positive and negative connotations. Political leaders, for example, former US President Donald Trump, initially made a number of public remarks about how the pandemic “was "totally harmless" and that the US population should not be concerned because they were at low risk and the virus would disappear (Holmes, 2020). However, soon after being infected with the virus, his tone shifted; he again used mass media and social media platforms to emphasise the importance of Covid regulations and the severity of the virus (Holmes, 2020). Trump also stated that the anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine effectively prevents Covid-19 (Bosely, 2020). Unfortunately, studies have linked this drug to increased deaths among COVID-19 patients receiving the medication in hospitals (Bosely, 2020). A similar result was observed in the United Kingdom with former Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who initially did not believe the virus posed a severe societal threat. He was also downplaying the virus’s severity on social and mass media platforms until he was infected (Head, 2022). Soon after, he became more adamant about following the various COVID-19 regulations.

Interestingly, videos of Johnson and his Cabinet violating lockdown regulations at 10 Downing Street were widely circulated on social media platforms. This, among other things, ultimately cost him his position as Prime Minister (Head, 2022). Given the activities and influence of both of the aforementioned political leaders on social media, their statements influenced how millions worldwide responded to the pandemic. There is no denying how vital these various media platforms were in keeping the global community informed (or misinformed) of the various developments and regulations implemented worldwide.

Furthermore, to assist public health officials, these platforms provided information on proper guidelines for recognising, diagnosing, and managing the disease (Chen et al., 2021). Daily updates on the number of cases, deaths, and recoveries were provided on websites such as Bloomberg, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and the World Health Organization (WHO). What's more, mainstream media was used to broadcast the various public healthcare responses

around the world. These platforms increased public awareness of preventative measures such as hygiene, social distancing, and mask use (Chen et al., 2021). Moreover, media platforms aided global governments in predicting the trajectory of the virus in their countries. At the same time, global leaders held virtual meetings via social media platforms to discuss various initiatives aimed at limiting the spread of the virus and protecting residents, such as quarantines and lockdowns (Anwar et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2021). Furthermore, mental health professionals used social media to share information about mental well-being amid ambiguity, and those in need received psychological services online. In a nutshell, mainstream and social media are platforms that demonstrate the tremendous progress made by information technology, and these platforms played a critical role during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The latter was also true for South Africa; shortly after the first COVID-19 case was identified in the KwaZulu Natal province, President Ramaphosa began making frequent appearances on national television, which were broadcast to millions of television screens across the country. During this period, the president began a continuous series of television updates known as "family meetings" (Jacobs, 2021). These were weekly or biweekly public media briefings held by Ramaphosa on the South African Broadcasting Company (SABC) and other national news outlets to share information and updates on the virus's progression as well as the government's response to various aspects of the illness and other existing social ills that were exacerbated by the pandemic. He used his lauded communication skills during these "family meetings" to provide comfort and reassurance that he and his administration had things under control (Calland & Sithole, 2022). Throughout these engagements, the president remained cool, calm, and collected, giving citizens confidence that they had a leader they could rely on. Furthermore, the citizens thought that their leader was accompanying them on their journey.

During these "family meetings," he always began his speeches with the words "my fellow South Africans," implying a sense of camaraderie and togetherness. However, one significant shortcoming of President Ramaphosa's family meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa was the absence of a meaningful opportunity for direct public engagement and questions. These gatherings essentially functioned as one-way broadcasts, with the President delivering prepared statements but lacking a structured mechanism for public interaction. This deficiency

became particularly evident during a crisis when citizens had urgent concerns and needed clarity on various issues. The lack of a robust Q&A session undermined the effectiveness of the communication, preventing South Africans from seeking clarification on government decisions, policies, and the rationale behind specific measures. It also hindered the government's ability to gauge public sentiment, address specific worries, and ensure that its strategies were well-understood and accepted. Furthermore, this absence of open dialogue potentially contributed to a perception of a disconnect between the government and the populace. Effective two-way communication is vital during a public health crisis as it fosters trust and transparency, and the limited avenues for questions and feedback left South Africans without a critical channel for expressing concerns, seeking clarifications, and participating in the collective response to the pandemic.

Nevertheless, these engagements gave South Africans some reassurance during such an unexpected and dangerous period. Intriguingly, these family meetings are comparable to US President Franklin D. Roosevelt's (FDR) "fireside chats" with the American people during the 1930s Great Depression crisis (Tindall & Shi, 1992). These "fireside chats" were also a series of public media briefings in which the president provided ongoing updates on the progression of the Great Depression crisis and how his administration dealt with it (Calland & Sithole, 2022). FDR also began his speeches with "my friends," demonstrating a sense of togetherness and personification to his messaging, as if he were speaking to and addressing each and every person in his country individually. During the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa, health experts such as Professor Salim Abdool Karim used social and mainstream media to share pandemic trends, progress, and other information that kept the population informed. Professor Abdool Karim led South Africa's response to COVID-19, providing scientific evidence and advice to the public and government on the Coronavirus, how it caused COVID-19, and how to avoid infection (Mail & Guardian, 2020). He thoroughly explained terms like "flattening the curve," which referred to reducing the rate at which people were infected by the virus, to the general public in such a way that they understood their role in containing or spreading the epidemic.

While identifying the role of media platforms in information sharing, it is also essential to recognise the geopolitical environment and its role in influencing the political decisions made by

various world leaders during this period. Because of the world's interconnectedness and because the COVID-19 pandemic was a crisis that affected different parts of the world, international relations were critical during this pandemic. This global connectivity can be traced back to the initial decisions to implement lockdowns that affected various countries and the hygiene measures implemented globally.

2.3.3 Geo-Political Influences on Decision-Making During the COVID-19 Crises

Geopolitics studies worldwide geographical influences on power relationships (Boswinkel & Gaub, 2020). The geopolitical context is considered when political leaders decide on global crisis responses (Boswinkel & Gaub, 2020). Although sovereign states decide how their territories are governed, it is essential to note that they do not operate in a vacuum and that the global political body significantly impacts domestic decision-making. Crises are frequently so unsettling that they expose existing vulnerabilities; conversely, crises reveal existing strengths, creating opportunities for modification both during and after the crisis. (Boswinkel & Gaub, 2020; Chen et al., 2021; Dixon & Schafer, 2014; Domercant et al., 2015). It is also worth noting that when a global pandemic occurs, the country that first detects the virus faces significant challenges due to the novelty of the disease and a lack of available information to guide relevant response efforts to contain the outbreak (Chen et al., 2021).

China was the first country to bear the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic, and they were the most affected right from the start. However, given the country's history of epidemics and abundant technological resources, this novelty worked to their advantage. Their wealth of information technology put them strategically positioned to anticipate the pandemic and implement appropriate public health responses (Bran, 2022). Furthermore, due to the virus's global unfamiliarity, China served as a model for the COVID-19 response worldwide, introducing rapid pandemic responses such as active case finding, case management, and contact tracing. Furthermore, China implemented border and travel restrictions, infection control, the mask mandate, social distancing (including stay-at-home orders and nationwide lockdowns), sanitisation, and social mobilisation (Chen et al., 2021). Because China was the first country to implement the aforementioned pandemic response measures, all other countries were forced to follow suit, making China the

global role model of COVID-19 crisis leadership and decision-making. Because China is a communist country, citizens had little say in imposed response measures (Chen et al., 2021).

In contrast, before restrictions were imposed in democratic states such as South Africa, the United States, some European countries, and some African states, there were numerous consultations, deliberations, and awareness campaigns (Boswinkel & Gaub, 2020). To some extent, these consultative displays of leadership were required to prevent uncontrollable increases in the outbreak and potential insurgencies caused by the unsettling restlessness induced by lockdowns. Unfortunately, communist states like China and Russia criticised these democratic or participatory decision-making processes during the pandemic. The Chinese and Russian leaders made inflammatory statements about the communist system being superior to the democratic system due to the communist system's quick, autocratic, and non-negotiable response measures (Boswinkel & Gaub, 2020). Chinese officials also used communication channels such as social media to influence the pandemic's narrative, sowing doubts about the virus's origins while highlighting China's efficiency and aid during the pandemic. This had a significant impact on specific European countries' perceptions of China. For example, perceptions of China improved in Italy and Serbia, with both countries viewing China as their most important ally during the pandemic (Boswinkel & Gaub, 2020). Furthermore, this rhetoric differed in other parts of the world, such as the United States and India. For example, President Trump of the United States repeatedly referred to the pandemic as the China virus, prompting a ban on certain Chinese products, including specific cell phone models and applications such as TikTok (Bran, 2022).

On the other hand, Russia praised China's response to the pandemic and launched a criticism campaign against European states and their response to the pandemic (Boswinkel & Gaub, 2020). President Xi Jinping and Putin banded together during the pandemic, demonstrating a shared ideology. In addition, like other countries, Russia imposed various restrictions that limited people's freedoms. However, some regulations were made permanent, such as the prohibition and criminalisation of any news deemed fake by the government and the criminalisation of journalists, bloggers, or politicians disseminating information deemed fake by the government (Boswinkel & Gaub, 2020).

The African continent was already struggling to correct past societal ills caused by the colonial era and was expected to disintegrate in the face of the unknown Coronavirus. This expectation stems from the continent's severe lack of healthcare resources and high poverty and inequality rates. However, despite the continent being severely challenged, the outcomes were unexpected. Some political leaders responded slowly, while others promoted bizarre indigenous medicines and home remedies to 'cure' the virus (Bran, 2022; Boswinkel & Gaub, 2020). Unfortunately, lives were lost, and already overburdened healthcare systems were strained. However, the death toll did not reach the predicted levels; the United States and Europe were the most affected at the pandemic's peak, despite their world-class healthcare systems. As a side effect, while the pandemic tested world leaders' abilities, it also allowed them to band together and learn from one another in response to the pandemic (Bran, 2022).

2.4 Political Leadership and Decision-Making During the Coronavirus Crisis

Political leaders are under increased pressure and psychological stress during a crisis to make decisions under adverse conditions (Hadley et al., 2009). Political leaders face internal decision-making processes congruent with their political environment (Hadley et al., 2009). Furthermore, national decisions in a democratic country are not made solely by the government and politicians. It involves a wide range of actors, including legislative groups, institutional groups, civil society organisations, and opposition political parties, each with its own goals and objectives (Serrat, 2012). During the COVID-19 pandemic, political leaders and their abilities were tested, as various world leaders were forced to take decisive action to prevent the virus from spreading among their populations. As previously stated, COVID-19 was discovered in late 2019 in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. The virus had already infected Chinese citizens at the time, spreading like wildfire throughout the country. Soon after, the virus began spreading across neighbouring nations, necessitating immediate attention and decisive leadership to halt the virus's spread (Jung & Nguyen, 2022). South Korea was one of the first countries to be affected, and their experience is instructive in this study. Compared to other countries, it can be argued that the nation handled the pandemic well because it did not implement any severe lockdown measures as other countries did. This country demonstrated decisive leadership and commendable crisis management during this terrifying period.

The first COVID-19 case in South Korea was reported in early January 2020. Given the country's proximity to China, it's not surprising that it was affected from the start. Fortunately, this country had previously experienced the MERS pandemic in 2015, so it had a well-functioning and well-capable healthcare system and highly equipped healthcare facilities when the pandemic struck. It also had an established Disease Control and Prevention Agency, which aided in the rapid response to the outbreak (June-ho, 2020). Furthermore, under Moon Jae-in's political leadership, the country was able to manage the pandemic through the use of information technology effectively. During this time, South Korea's president took decisive action, and his government imposed immediate travel restrictions to and from China, and other countries deemed dangerous (June-ho, 2020; Jung & Nguyen, 2022). Public facilities and private corporate residences were converted into temporary isolation zones to curb the virus.

Furthermore, information technology and human resources were used to track individuals who had contact with a COVID-19 patient. Many epidemiologists were immediately trained and hired for this task to implement aggressive contact tracing (Schalk & Nardon, 2020). In addition, healthcare professionals constantly monitored healthcare facilities and smartphone apps that citizens used to report their symptoms. Moreover, the South Korean government had a Quarantine Safety Protection App linked to electronic wristbands used by healthcare professionals to locate those who were supposed to be in quarantine (Schalk & Nardon, 2020).

People who violated their quarantine requirements faced a penalty. What's more, information technology was used to entertain those in quarantine and provide virtual psychosocial counselling. Commendably, the state's social security measures aided in reducing the financial strain caused by the pandemic, as all households in South Korea received a Disaster Relief payment regardless of income, with amounts varying depending on the number of people in a household (June-ho, 2020; Jung & Nguyen, 2022). As a result, South Korea's immediate and decisive political leadership and decision-making resulted in a recovery rate of more than 90% and a death rate of less than 2% by June 2021. (Schalk & Nardon, 2020).

A similar situation occurred in Vietnam, where the government responded quickly and decisively during this time under the political leadership of Nguyễn Phú Trọng (Nguyen, 2020). Contact tracing, social distancing, and isolation measures were implemented right at the pandemic's start, and travel restrictions were imposed, particularly to and from China and other high-risk countries (Jung & Nguyen, 2022). Additionally, when cases were discovered in cities such as Da Nang and Hanoi, immediate lockdown measures were implemented to prevent the virus from spreading to other areas. Like South Korea, Vietnam used information technology to prevent the virus from spreading (Diep, 2020). The government created a website where citizens could report their symptoms and quarantine schedules. The citizenry understood the importance of the regulations and regular reporting of symptoms and quarantine routines due to the government's robust and informative awareness campaigns, which used mainstream media and social media outlets (Diep, 2020). Further, the government enacted various regulations, policies, and laws in response to the pandemic.

In contrast to the aforementioned Asian countries' COVID-19 responses, some African countries experienced disparities in population discipline and government support. In Zimbabwe, for example, when the pandemic was identified, the country was led by President Emmerson Mnangagwa. When the first case was identified in Victoria Falls, and the first death occurred in Harare in March 2020, the president and his administration implemented lockdown measures (Jaji, 2020). Unfortunately, when the pandemic was discovered in Zimbabwe, the country's healthcare system and infrastructure were already in shambles. As the pandemic spread, the country saw intermittent protests by medical personnel due to difficult working conditions in under-resourced public healthcare facilities (Jaji, 2022). The onset of the pandemic exacerbated these difficulties; other difficulties encountered during the pandemic included citizens who did not follow crisis regulations and quarantine requirements. As a result, the government dispatched law enforcement and security personnel to enforce the lockdown (Marima, 2020).

During the early days of the pandemic, media reports indicated that a number of people who had been tested positive and placed in quarantine were fleeing due to poor living and sanitary conditions. These people were later apprehended for fleeing these facilities, and to prevent the virus from spreading further, the government partially banned international travel (Marima, 2020).

Regrettably, public health information and pandemic awareness may not have been as aggressive as in the Asian countries mentioned above. Unfortunately, because a large portion of the population lives in rural areas without internet or print media access, they had to rely on religious leaders and the opinions of others to learn about the pandemic and its progression (Jaji, 2020; Marima, 2020). As a result, there was a lack of adherence to COVID-19 regulations and incorrect application of specific rules, such as the mask mandate, with some people wearing their masks around their necks and others only covering the mouth and exposing the nose (Fischer et al., 2020). Therefore, it can be argued that the president's and his administration's political leadership and decision-making did not prioritise health promotion and health education, particularly in rural areas. Furthermore, the government lacked the health infrastructure to respond to the pandemic (Jaji, 2022). The following section outlines the theoretical framework that informs the study and guides the framing of concepts such as political leadership and decision-making during crises.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

The research objectives were carried out using an inductive research approach, which focuses on understanding the meaning and significance of events and phenomena within their specific context (Lisha, 2016). This method helped the researcher understand how political leadership and decision-making manifested during South Africa's COVID-19 crisis. The primary theoretical foundation for this research is Crisis Leadership Theory. Furthermore, Leadership Theories by various authors and the different leadership characteristics of Demirtas and Mustafa (2020) were used as a framework to demonstrate how leadership has evolved over time. In addition, the Decision-Making Theory was used in the study to better understand how decision-making unfolded in South Africa during the COVID-19 crisis.

2.5.1 Leadership Theories

As previously stated, leadership is broadly defined as the process of influencing and guiding individuals, groups, or organisations to achieve specific goals or objectives. It involves the ability

to inspire, motivate, and mobilise others, often in pursuit of a shared vision or common purpose. Leadership encompasses a range of qualities, behaviours, and skills that enable individuals to provide direction, make decisions, and facilitate the collective efforts of a team or community (Yukl, 2013). Political leadership, on the other hand, is a specific subset of leadership that pertains to individuals who hold positions of authority and influence within the realm of government, politics, or public administration. Political leaders are responsible for making decisions and setting policies that impact a nation, state, or community (Paige, 1997; Boin & Hart, 2010). They navigate complex political landscapes, collaborate with various stakeholders, and often work towards achieving both short-term and long-term objectives that align with their political ideology and the interests of their constituents. Political leadership is characterised by its focus on governance, policy formulation, diplomacy, and the management of public affairs.

In an attempt to better understand leadership, and political leadership in particular, there are a number of theories that can be considered. These theories offer diverse perspectives on what constitutes good leadership, and they each bring unique insights into the qualities and behaviours that leaders should embody. In a democratic context, the application of these theories reveals why certain values are crucial for good political leadership, supported by illustrative examples.

Trait Theory and the Value of Integrity: Trait theory, which focuses on inherent leadership qualities, highlights the importance of integrity as a fundamental value for good political leadership. Integrity ensures that leaders are honest, ethical, and principled in their actions, thereby earning the trust and respect of their constituents (Allio, 2013). For instance, Nelson Mandela's unwavering integrity as South Africa's leader during the transition to democracy exemplified this value. His commitment to reconciliation and justice, even after years of imprisonment, garnered global admiration and paved the way for a peaceful transition to democracy.

Transformational Leadership and the Value of Vision: Transformational leadership underscores the significance of a compelling vision for leaders (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In a democratic context, this translates to the value of articulating a clear and inclusive vision that resonates with the aspirations of the people. Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand's former Prime Minister, provides an excellent example. Her empathetic and visionary leadership, especially during crises

like the Christchurch mosque shootings and the COVID-19 pandemic, garnered international acclaim. Her communication of a shared vision for unity and recovery demonstrated the power of this leadership theory in practice.

Situational Leadership and Adaptability: Situational leadership theory emphasises adaptability based on the specific context. This theory underscores the importance of leaders possessing the flexibility to adjust their leadership style as circumstances evolve (Waters, 2013) Angela Merkel, Germany's former Chancellor, exemplified this value through her measured and adaptable approach to leadership during the European financial crisis and the refugee crisis. Merkel's ability to navigate complex situations while adjusting her leadership style to meet evolving challenges is illustrative of the situational leadership theory in action.

Servant Leadership and the Value of Service: Servant leadership underscores the value of leaders serving the needs of others. In democratic governance, this means prioritising the well-being and interests of the public (Hanse et al., 2016). Mahatma Gandhi's leadership during India's struggle for independence serves as a powerful example. His commitment to nonviolence and selfless service to the Indian people inspired a nation and ultimately led to the realisation of India's democratic aspirations.

Path-Goal Theory and Supportive Leadership: Path-goal theory highlights the leader's role in removing obstacles for followers (House, 1971). In a democratic context, this aligns with the value of supporting citizens in achieving their goals. Nelson Mandela's leadership, once again, provides an instructive example. His unwavering support for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa demonstrated a commitment to removing barriers to national healing and justice.

In essence, leadership theories shed light on the qualities and behaviours that underpin good political leadership in a democratic context. Integrity, vision, adaptability, service, and support are among the values that emerge as critical in effective leadership. Real-world examples from leaders like Nelson Mandela, Jacinda Ardern, Angela Merkel, Mahatma Gandhi, and others illustrate the practical application of these values, showcasing their importance in fostering democratic governance and serving the best interests of the public.

Furthermore, there are various discussions on political leadership that encompass a wide array of themes and dimensions, with relevance extending to the unique South African context. One enduring debate revolves around the choice between democratic and authoritarian leadership styles. While democratic leadership promotes inclusivity, accountability, and citizen participation, South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy marked a shift toward this model (Inman & Rubinfeld, 2013). However, ongoing discussions probe whether subsequent leaders have genuinely upheld democratic values or veered toward centralisation of power. Charismatic leadership represents another area of contention, with scholars exploring its potential for both positive transformation and institutional erosion. The charismatic leadership of Nelson Mandela played a pivotal role in uniting a deeply divided nation during South Africa's transition. Yet, the charisma of later leaders, including Jacob Zuma, raised concerns about corruption and the undermining of democratic institutions, sparking debates regarding the influence of charisma within South African politics (Calland & Sithole, 2022). Ethical leadership and the persistent issue of corruption form another critical discourse. Ethical leadership, predicated on honesty and integrity, is viewed as indispensable for political leaders to maintain the credibility and legitimacy of their roles. High-profile corruption scandals, particularly during Jacob Zuma's presidency, have ignited debates about their impact on South Africa's political and economic stability, emphasising the pivotal role of ethical leadership in addressing these challenges (Maserumule & Bradlow, 2015; Jagarnath, 2016).

The emergence of youth leadership in politics constitutes yet another dimension of debate, challenging established political hierarchies and giving rise to discussions on intergenerational politics. South Africa has witnessed the ascent of young leaders like Julius Malema, sparking debates about their potential to drive political change versus concerns regarding confrontational tactics and radical policies (Booysen, 2009; Sarakinsky & Fakir, 2015). Finally, the decentralisation of power to local leaders and municipalities has spurred discussions on citizen engagement and service delivery. South Africa's decentralised governance system has faced criticisms for corruption and inefficiencies at the municipal level, leading to debates on enhancing local leadership and governance to address pressing issues such as service delivery and economic development (Simeon & Murray, 2001; Bailluch et al., 2017; Corrigan, 2017). In sum, these

debates underscore the dynamic and multifaceted nature of political leadership discussions within the South African context, reflecting the nation's intricate political landscape and ongoing challenges. Furthermore, there are various characteristics ascribed to political leaders as outlined in the next section.

2.5.2 Leadership Characteristics

According to Demirtas and Mustafa (2020), there are 18 leadership characteristics/styles to consider: ethical leadership, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, participative leadership, servant leadership, charismatic leadership, authentic leadership, spiritual leadership, implicit and explicit leadership, autocratic leadership, democratic leadership, resonant leadership, digital leadership, cross-cultural leadership, paternalistic leadership, and complexity and coaching leadership. Due to the leader's decisive nature and ability to motivate and influence followers, charismatic and autocratic leaders have been lauded for their effectiveness in crises and chaos (Demirtas & Mustafa, 2020). The literature consistently demonstrates numerous leadership definitions and characteristics (Fiedler, 1967; Antonakis et al., 2004; Hadely et al., 2009; Day, 2012). However, Demirtas and Mustafa (2020) have condensed the infinite number of leadership descriptions into the 18 listed above. These leadership characteristics are used as a framework in this study to present how leadership has been understood over time, with the goal of uncovering and examining how leadership in relation to President Ramaphosa and his administration was portrayed and understood during South Africa's Coronavirus crisis.

2.5.3 Crisis Leadership Theory

Since crises can only be overcome if managed, the concept of crisis management has been extensively researched throughout history. The primary goal of crisis management is to devise strategies to stabilise and assist societies in returning to normalcy following an unexpected disaster (Boin & Hart, 2010; Hart & Tindall, 2010). Goal development, environmental analysis, strategy development, implementation, control, and evaluation are all common crisis management strategies. It is also worth noting that crisis management research has been chastised for overemphasising processes rather than the overall aspect of crisis leadership (Jacques, 2012). As

a result, scholars such as Jacques (2012) have broadened the scope of crisis research to include the role of the leader. Correspondingly, crisis leadership theory played a more prominent role in research conducted during times of uncertainty. Crisis leadership theory is a set of principles and practices that leaders use to guide their actions during times of crisis. Given the precarity of crises and people's reliance on political leaders to mitigate damage and restore stability, this theory focuses on how leaders act during times of crisis (Northouse, 2007).

Crisis leadership theory emphasises clear communication, collaboration, and decision-making. It implies that leaders should be proactive in anticipating and preparing for potential crises and that they should have an emergency response plan in place. Crisis leadership entails communicating clearly and concisely with the public and critical stakeholders. It also entails gathering and analysing information to make informed decisions and working with relevant agencies and organisations to coordinate a response (Demiroz & Kapucu, 2012). In addition to providing assistance and resources to those affected by the crisis, crisis leadership entails remaining calm and up to speed in the face of uncertainty. This theory is significant because it enables leaders to effectively navigate difficult situations and make decisions that safeguard the well-being of their organisations and communities (Demiroz & Kapucu, 2012; Northouse, 2007). This is especially true for political leaders, who are frequently responsible for coordinating crisis responses and making decisions with far-reaching consequences for their societies (Jin et al., 2017).

Influential crisis leaders demonstrate various characteristics and behaviours, such as clear communication, collaboration, and decision-making, as well as garnering the necessary support and resources (Ulmer, 2001). During an emergency, political leaders must be able to communicate clearly and concisely with the general public and other stakeholders. They must provide information about the disaster, explain the steps to address it, and reassure the public that they are actively working to alleviate the situation (Rotberg, 2014). In terms of collaboration, political leaders confronted with a crisis must collaborate with a diverse set of partners and stakeholders, including other government agencies, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, and international organisations, as needed. They must be able to establish and maintain effective working relationships, as well as effectively coordinate response efforts.

Furthermore, during a crisis, political leaders must be able to make quick decisions (Boin & Hart, 2010; Hart & Tindall, 2010; Rotberg, 2014). They must be able to gather and analyse information, weigh the benefits and drawbacks of various options, and then make decisions likely to result in the desired outcome. Regarding assistance and resources, political leaders must ensure that those affected by the crisis receive the assistance and resources they require. This could include financial assistance, coordinating the delivery of essential goods and services, or providing mental health care (Jin et al., 2017). Effective crisis leadership is a critical component of political leadership because these turbulent times cannot be predicted, and leaders must be able to navigate these disasters and mitigate their societal impact.

2.5.4 Decision-Making Theory

Another theory that informs this study is Decision-Making Theory. According to Schwartz (2016), decision-making theory is a field of study that investigates how people make choices and decisions. It seeks to comprehend the factors that influence decision-making and to identify strategies and techniques that can assist people in making better choices. Furthermore, it employs a variety of theories and methods to comprehend decision-making processes, such as cognitive psychology, behavioural economics, and game theory, among others. Decision-making theory is applicable to a wide range of fields and contexts, with practical applications in areas such as business, government, and personal decision-making (Farnham, 2004; Schwartz, 2016). This theory can assist individuals and organisations in better understanding the factors that influence decision-making and developing strategies for making better choices (Farnham, 2004). The role of emotions and biases in decision-making, the impact, context, and framing of issues requiring decision-making are some themes that emerge from decision-making theory (Petersen, 2009). It also emphasises the significance of considering a variety of alternatives and using decision-making tools and techniques to reach a final decision. For the purpose of this research, decision-making theory is considered in the context of political leadership during crises.

Petersen (2009: 117) identifies four themes to this effect, beginning with the importance of gathering and analysing information. This shows how political leaders confronted with a crisis should clearly understand the situation and available options. Firstly, to make informed decisions,

they must gather and analyse information about the crisis, including its causes, impacts, and potential consequences. Second, the role of emotions and biases must be considered. Emotions and biases can influence decision-making during a crisis, and political leaders must be aware of these influences and work to reduce their impact. Third, when confronted with a crisis, political leaders must frequently weigh competing interests and consider the trade-offs and consequences of various courses of action. As a result, decision-making theory can assist leaders in understanding potential trade-offs and making choices that are most likely to result in the desired outcome. Finally, decision-making theory provides various tools and techniques that can assist political leaders in analysing and evaluating various options and making more effective decisions. Among these tools and techniques are cost-benefit analysis and scenario planning (Petersen, 2009; 117).

In a nutshell, decision-making theory can assist political leaders in effectively navigating crises by providing a framework for gathering and analysing information, weighing trade-offs and alternatives, and employing effective tools and techniques to make effective and informed decisions.

2.6. Leading in the Midst of a Pandemic: Ramaphosa's Administration

President Ramaphosa has been in office since 2017 and has recently been re-elected as the ANC president while awaiting national elections in 2024. He has been described as Nelson Mandela's right-hand man and a strong negotiator with exceptional business acumen (Butler, 2019). He has had numerous leadership experiences, from his days as a political activist during his college years to his leadership in the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and business leadership (Butler, 2019). His political career began when he was appointed chairperson of the National Reception Committee, which coordinated efforts to receive Rivonia trialists and further coordinated arrangements for Nelson Mandela's release. Following the ANC's unbanning in 1991, he was appointed Secretary General, and after South Africa's first democratic election, he was elected to parliament. He was then elected chairperson of the Constitutional Assembly, overseeing the creation of the country's first democratic constitution (SAGov, 2022). President Nelson Mandela

endorsed him as his successor, but Thabo Mbeki was elected the second democratic president in 1998.

Soon after, he went into business before returning to politics as the Deputy Chairperson of the National Planning Commission in 2010. Under Jacob Zuma's leadership, he was elected ANC Deputy President and then Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa. Then, in 2017, he was elected ANC President, and in 2018, he was sworn in as President of the Republic (SAGov, 2022). Ramaphosa's rise in politics is noteworthy, given that, unlike his predecessors, he could not be deemed an ANC stalwart. He could be described as an outsider because he did not go to Robben Island and was never in exile. During his university years in Turfloop, however, he was a freedom fighter actively involved in the resistance. As a result, he was imprisoned for 11 months at Pretoria Central Prison, followed by another six months at the John Vortser Square Detention Centre (Butler, 2019; Calland & Sithole, 2022).

Cyril Ramaphosa took over the presidency on February 15th, 2018, and this happened less than 24 hours after Jacob Zuma resigned. South Africans rejoiced with relief that Zuma's 'nine wasted years' in power were finally over. Ramaphosa, who was very well-spoken, inspired the nation during his first State of the Nation Address (SONA), which he delivered on February 16th, 2018. According to Calland and Sithole (2022), during this speech, the president was eloquent and refined; he was realistic about societal issues but also instilled a spirit of hope that the populace desperately needed at the time. In his speech, he described a new dawn and urged the electorate to take action through collective responsibility in the new era. Using his beloved Hugh Masekela song and political campaign slogan, "Thuma Mina," he demonstrated his willingness to lead the country into this new dawn (SONA, 2018). This slogan was intended for the president, those who wanted to volunteer to be sent as part of the renewal, and those who wanted to support his renewal plans within the ANC (Mathekga, 2018). Ramaphosa faced a plethora of challenges upon taking office as president. First, he had to deal with the long-standing issues of unemployment, poverty, and high levels of inequality that his predecessors had not reduced or eliminated (Calland & Sithole, 2022).

A few months into his presidency, Ramaphosa was also confronted with the historic call for land reform, fuelled by factionalism and opposition parties such as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). Not long after, the country was challenged by the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic, which devastated nations and put political leadership to the test. No country was prepared for the COVID-19 pandemic, and world leaders were left scrambling for answers while millions died. President Ramaphosa's initial response to this crisis demonstrated decisive leadership based on scientific evidence obtained through consultations with various experts (Devermont & Mukulu, 2020; Haffajee et al., 2020; Matela & Maaza, 2022; Nemutandi & Matsea, 2022). The president began by declaring a National State of Disaster, followed by lockdown measures and international travel bans. Furthermore, health education and health promotion efforts were quickly implemented to inform the population of the risks posed by COVID-19 and the hygiene measures they needed to take to prevent the virus from spreading (Haffajee et al., 2020).

Notably, Ramaphosa and his administration implemented social security measures such as the Special COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant to soften the blow of income loss in the informal economy and job loss in the formal economy, as well as anyone else who was without an income during this period (National Treasury, 2021). Several measures were put in place during this time. It has been claimed that President Ramaphosa and his administration responded in a way that prioritised human lives at a time when it was necessary. Additionally, some concerns have been raised about President Ramaphosa's use of consultations with key stakeholders, highlighting that the process often obscures the source of influence shaping government decisions. This lack of transparency led to questions about the extent of influence wielded by powerful interest groups, particularly business, and other stakeholders in shaping policies (Tandwa, 2020). The absence of clear information on how stakeholder input impacts decision-making can erode public trust and raise doubts about whether policies primarily serve the broader population or specific interest groups. Additionally, the lack of transparency can fuel speculation and conspiracy theories, further undermining public confidence in the government's intentions. However, more is needed to better understand how political leadership and decision-making were demonstrated and perceived during this period. Therefore, using President Ramaphosa and his administration as a case study, this research investigated South African perceptions of political leadership and decision-making

during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021 through academic experts and political actors' interactions.

2.6.1. Public Participation and Decision-Making in Democratic South Africa

When the country is not facing an unprecedented crisis, Cabinet Lekgotla (a Tswana word meaning village assemblies) meetings are used to drive public participation and decision-making in South Africa. These are government-called meetings for strategic planning based on a Public Participation Model used in decision-making. The Presidency and Cabinet involve the public in national decision-making in the latter process (Sebola, 2016). This is accomplished through public policy and other legislative consultations with civil society organisations and key stakeholders. Additionally, policy documents are also published for public comment via the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) before finalisation (Sebola, 2016).

Furthermore, the media is invited to Parliamentary Committee meetings, and the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) launches initiatives such as Taking Parliament to the People and Provincial Week to encourage public participation in certain decision-making processes (Sebola, 2016). However, in times of crisis, the National Disaster Management Act (DMA) of 2002 provides a legal framework for managing any disaster that cannot be managed within the scope of a specific government department. The DMA directs national decision-making and crisis response, and it also allows for the declaration of a National State of Disaster to allow the national executive to implement measures to protect and assist the populace (Ngeleza et al., 2021).

During the COVID-19 crisis, however, decision-making was viewed as opaque; the public was only informed of decisions after consultations had already occurred. Some argue that the government's decision-making processes during this time were questionable and that the overall decisions made during the crisis did not achieve their goal of preserving human life and halting the spread of the virus (Reichel, 2021). Others contend that the president's decisions violated human rights and constitutional rights under the guise of COVID-19 management (Reichel, 2021). Although this may be the case, it can be argued that it was necessary to prevent higher infection rates, deaths, and overcrowding in already overcrowded hospitals (Msomi, 2020; Matela & Maaza,

2022; Nemutandi & Matsea, 2022). Others argue that the government should have been better prepared for the pandemic by improving public healthcare facilities when democracy was first established (Mayosi & Benatar, 2014; Nyalusu & Pandya, 2020). This argument is irrefutable because, sadly, public healthcare facilities have deteriorated over time. According to Nyalusu and Pandya (2020), public healthcare facilities in South Africa are under-resourced, under-equipped, and overcrowded. Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital, one of the larger tertiary hospitals in South Africa's Gauteng Province, burned down and will not be rebuilt until mid-2022. As a result, all patients from this hospital were redirected to nearby Gauteng hospitals, further overcrowding hospitals already struggling to meet societal healthcare needs.

2.7 Conclusion

This literature review examined the evolution of political leadership in human societies. It also looked into historical accounts of political leadership and decision-making during times of global crisis. The review also investigated the impact of globalisation on health crises or pandemics and the impact of mainstream and social media on political leadership and decision-making during crises. Furthermore, the review focused on the geopolitical influences on crisis decision-making, political leadership and crisis decision-making. Given that the study was conducted in South Africa, the review also considered the country's post-apartheid leadership over time and the challenges each leader faced. Followed by an outline of the theoretical framework that summarises the theories that informed this research study. The following chapter describes the methodology and research tools used to conduct the study.

CHAPTER 3: A CASE STUDY ON RAMAPHOSA'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING DURING SOUTH AFRICA'S COVID-19 PANDEMIC

3. Introduction

This study considered Cyril Ramaphosa as not only the President of South Africa but also a businessman, a unionist, and a politician whose multifaceted identities shaped his administration and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, amongst other internal and external dynamics. The study sought to understand how political leadership and decision-making were perceived by various academic experts and political actors during the COVID-19 crisis in South Africa, as exhibited by the president and his administration. In this chapter, the research approach and design are unpacked, as well as the research tools, sampling method, ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

3.1. Research Approach

The study employed a qualitative approach (Bryman, 2016) to explore the perceptions of various people in South Africa regarding political leadership and decision-making related to President Ramaphosa's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A qualitative inquiry was selected because it provided an opportunity to understand how individuals perceive and give meaning to their social reality (Bryman, 2016; Patton, 2015; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). This reality entails understanding people's opinions of political leadership, decision-making, and crisis management in South Africa. An exploratory methodological thrust further underpinned the qualitative research. Therefore, an exploration was carried out by probing the diverse set of respondents' views and perspectives on various aspects of leadership to uncover the interpretations they embody surrounding the conduct of the Ramaphosa administration during a crisis posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This included probing for insights on the characteristics and prescripts that defined political leadership from the standpoint of research participants, along with a brief inquiry into and comparison of political leadership in times of crisis based on the conduct of past post-1994 administrations.

Further, this research unearthed the intermediary processes, practices, and guiding legislation used for decision-making in South Africa by the head of state in consultation with the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC), Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC), National Joint Operation and Intelligence Structure (NATJOINTS), and Cabinet, to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. Examining these elements offered insights into how decisions taken by the Ramaphosa administration affected the perceptions of various South Africans regarding the actions implemented by the government during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa

3.2 Research Design

The qualitative research design adopted for this study was an exploratory case study. Exploratory research is a methodology that investigates a phenomenon with a dearth of information. Therefore, this methodology allowed for an in-depth and multi-faceted inquiry into complex issues in real-life settings (Crowe et al., 2011; Bryman, 2016; Patton, 2015). This study examined South Africa's political leadership and decision-making processes during the COVID-19 pandemic as a time of crisis faced by Ramaphosa's Administration, focusing on 2020 and 2021.

A case study design was best suited for this research because it was driven by a need to explore a particular phenomenon in a more naturalistic fashion (Crowe et al., 2011; Patton, 2015). COVID-19 is ongoing, although many countries have lifted their State of Emergency surrounding the pandemic. It still exists and continues to re-emerge at different rates across the globe. Recently, in January 2023, there was a resurgence of COVID-19 infections in China after they lifted their quarantine and restrictions on mobility (Bloomberg, 2023). Therefore, it was critical to explore this pandemic during its most perilous time in 2020, when it emerged with many countries adopting emergency responses, and in 2021 when the world had become more accustomed to the pandemic, and the initial urgency had subsided. The case study design offered rich insights that led to an in-depth analysis of multifaceted aspects of political leadership and decision-making that impacted the administration's response to the pandemic as perceived by select key actors in the country.

3.3 Research Tools and their Application

Data required to understand the perceptions of various people in South Africa was generated by drawing from primary and secondary sources. Primary data for this research was gathered using semi-structured interviews, which offered flexibility and open-ended engagements. Secondary data was gathered using a qualitative desktop research approach. Using multiple data sources enabled the researcher to gather rich insights to answer the research questions and objectives.

3.3.1 Primary Data Sources: Semi-Structured Interviews

The study used semi-structured interviews to collect data; see **Annexure 3** *Interview guide*. The interview guide was formulated with the research questions and objectives in mind. This interview style was selected to allow for a more flexible approach to data gathering. The researcher used predetermined interview questions while also leaving room for further questions to arise during the interview process. Indeed, a number of questions arose as the research progressed, and a need to make additions and amendments to the questions based on the various roles assumed by the respondents became necessary. Bryman (2016) acclaims that semi-structured interviews combine structured and unstructured interview styles, allowing further insights to arise during dialogue. Most of these interviews were conducted with the identified sample using online platforms such as Microsoft Teams, and a few were conducted in person.

During this period, the standard modes of in-person communication were altered, and online platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom gained prominence during 2020 and 2021. While the world experienced different lockdown measures, social distancing and isolation regulations became more prevalent, and these online platforms were used increasingly by employers, academic institutions, and social groupings. During the pandemic's peak, people stayed in contact using online platforms, and as the pandemic progressed, blended approaches to engagements also began to increase (Hameed, 2021). Blended or hybrid approaches include online and in-person modes of communication, which have now formed part of what is termed '*the new normal'*.

Consequently, this research study also adopted a blended approach to data gathering. To this effect, three respondents agreed to in-person interviews, while eleven preferred online interviews.

3.3.2 Secondary Data Sources: Desktop Research

Furthermore, secondary data was gathered using a qualitative desktop research approach. Some critical documents used include biographies, academic textbooks, newspaper articles, presidential addresses and briefings (colloquially referred to as family meetings), and interview videos and notes. Additionally, policy documents, journal articles, reports, legislation, and further documentation from the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) and Government Technical Advisory Centre were also used to deepen the researcher's understanding of South Africa's Executive Leadership and Political Landscape. These documents were available and accessed online using official government websites, and academic literature was accessed using the Wits Library databases website.

3.4. Sampling Procedure

This research study used non-probability purposive sampling, in particular, the research used snowball sampling to identify study participants. The researcher did not seek to sample participants randomly but rather to sample participants strategically to gain the necessary information relevant to the study (Patton, 2015; Bryman, 2016; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). Due to the challenging nature of accessing respondents in the political sphere, the selected sample of respondents made further referrals to other respondents who shared similar expertise. For this research, key informants in politics and public engagement were sampled to gain insights into their perceptions of political leadership and decision-making exhibited by the Ramaphosa administration in the first years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The selected sample included two categories of respondents: political actors and academic experts. For this research, the term political actor includes anyone in a position of official authority conferred by the state at the national, provincial, or municipal level, within and outside the governing party. These are "individuals who have obtained at least some measure of political

power and/or authority in a particular society who engage in activities that can have a significant influence on decisions, policies, media coverage, and outcomes associated with a given conflict" (Wolfsfeld, 2015:1). For this research, the political actors were sampled from a local government entity, in particular, the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality (COJ). The political actors' sample was limited to the Gauteng Province, specifically within the Johannesburg Metropolitan because this is where the researcher is located, and this fits the scope of the study.

Furthermore, the Johannesburg metropolitan was selected because it is a diverse metropole that operated under a coalition government led by the Democratic Alliance (DA) political party. This, therefore, allowed room for differing opinions and perceptions of the political leadership and decision-making processes undertaken by the Ramaphosa Administration during the COVID-19 pandemic. The political respondents were chosen because they possessed a unique understanding of the political environment, including its leadership and decision-making processes. These respondents were part of the COVID-19 responses during 2020 and 2021, therefore, the researcher found it pertinent to get their insights on the political leadership and decision-making demonstrated in response to the pandemic. At the time of data collection, the political environment within the COJ municipality was volatile, where political contestations for leadership positions were on display. The City's mayor, a representative of the DA political party was removed through a vote of no confidence carried out by the coalition partners and the opposition parties, thus giving way to an ANC mayoral candidate who led the metropolitan for a 25-day period (Madisa, 2022). The DA mayor was reinstated into her position following a High Court ruling that concluded the vote of no-confidence assembly unlawful. Although this political volatility did not directly affect this research study, it is essential to note that these contextual realities existed at the time of data collection. It is also interesting to note that the researcher gained access to respondents beyond the COJ municipality through snowball sampling.

Additional respondents included those from the Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO), which is an entity that was established as a partnership between the University of Johannesburg (UJ), the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), and the Gauteng Provincial Government (GPG), with local government in Gauteng also represented on the GCRO Board. This institution is mandated to provide direct policy support to the government in leading the development of the city-region, but also to use the rigorous peer-reviewed academic scholarship for reflections on the

city-regions developments. Additionally, the researcher interviewed respondents from the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) and the Office of the Presidency. In summation, the sample of political actors included respondents from the COJ Municipality, the GCRO, which falls under the COJ Metropolitan, the Office of the Presidency and GCIS, which falls under the Office of the Presidency. The researcher interviewed officials from the COJ municipality in the strategic operations division in the Mayor's office. In the GCIS, the researcher engaged with officials who played a pivotal role in media engagement during COVID-19, while in the GCRO, officials involved in the strategic management of the entity were interviewed. Additionally, the researcher engaged with various officials in the Office of the Presidency involved in Legal Services, Communications, Governance, and Policy Analysis and Cabinet, all of whom played a critical role during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021.

Upon inception of the data collection journey, the researcher found it very challenging to access political actors at the national level and therefore saw it more feasible to interview officials at a more local level. However, finding respondents from the COJ after having been granted the necessary permission was just as challenging. Fortunately, an official from the municipality showed interest and participated in this research. Interestingly, after engaging with this City official, the respondent provided further reference to another study participant from the GCRO, from whom more referrals were made. It is also worth mentioning that as data collection continued, the researcher received permission to interview the Office of the Presidency members. This permission request was sent during the initial phase of the research. Regardless of this permission letter, getting officials in the Presidency interested in participating in this research study was still challenging. However, after obtaining an interview with one official, the researcher secured more interviews from officials in this Office. Therefore, the snowball sampling method proved really useful for a study of this nature (Bryma, 2016; Patton, 2015). The sample of political actors is outlined below; here, members of the City of Johannesburg and GCRO have been placed under the COJ respondents, while respondents from GCIS have also been included under The Presidency.

3.4.1 The City of Johannesburg Respondents:

Two male respondents were interviewed from the COJ. These respondents were best suited to participate in this research because they had more than ten years of experience in their roles.

Additionally, they were well-versed in political leadership and decision-making, considering their experience and strategic leadership positions in the political environment. Within these positions, they have to make tough decisions driven by the political context in which they operate. Therefore, their perceptions are not only driven by personal opinion but are also driven by experience.

3.4.2 The Presidency Respondents:

Six male respondents were interviewed from the Office of the Presidency. All of them had worked in the office for more than ten years, and some had spent over 20 years working there. They were best suited to participate in this research because of their extensive experience working in close proximity to the previous and current heads of state. In addition, these respondents represented different departments within the presidency, including legal services, governance, communications, policy analysis, and cabinet. Through these interviews, the researcher gained insight into how decision-making unfolds, how political leadership is experienced and perceived, and the legislation that guides decision-making in a country like South Africa.

Furthermore, the researcher sampled academic experts who had published or commented on the government's actions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These academic experts were targeted by drawing a list of those who had been featured commenting on the subject within mainstream media, journal articles, and contributing to the COVID-19 reports compiled by the National Research Fund (NRF) and the Government Technical Advisory Centre (GTAC).

3.4.3 Academic Expert Respondents:

Six respondents from the academic expert sample group were interviewed, including two female senior lecturers, three male senior lecturers, and one male lecturer. Most of this sample had over ten years of academic experience and were passionate about the subject. They were selected because they had shared their perceptions on the COVID-19 pandemic's leadership on various platforms, such as mainstream media, and journal articles, and some had contributed to the COVID-19 reports compiled by the National Research Fund (NRF) and the Government Technical Advisory Centre (GTAC). Additionally, these intellectuals had previously written on various topics related to public administration, politics, governance, public policy, and the ANC.

The research respondents were contacted through email, telephone, and face-to-face communication. All participants received the participant information sheet, consent forms, and relevant permission letters as necessary. The researcher initially requested participation from 30 respondents. Unfortunately, five declined the request, and an additional eleven did not respond. Of the 30 respondents, 19 requests were made to male respondents and 11 requests to female respondents. Only 14 respondents agreed to participate in the study. Of these respondents, two were female and 12 were male, it was also interesting to note that only six were academic experts while the remaining eight were political actors. This was unexpected, as it was assumed that it would be more difficult to find willing political actors than academic experts, but the opposite was true.

3.5 Limitations, Feasibility, and Positionality

3.5.1 Limitations and Feasibility

During the course of this study, the researcher encountered challenges related to time constraints and accessing key informants who could provide valuable insights into the phenomenon under investigation. Some of these informants were high-ranking political actors, and due to the researcher's lack of political affiliation, it was difficult to secure interviews with them. As a result, the researcher focused on interviewing a broad spectrum of political actors as defined in the sampling procedure section 3.4. Although gaining access to these critical informants was still challenging, the researcher found it more feasible. Interestingly, during the data collection period, the researcher received a positive response from respondents who were not anticipated at the time of proposal writing. The use of snowball sampling presented an opportunity to interview a broader spectrum of political actors. Additionally, the anticipated limitations related to COVID-19 restrictions did not pose a significant threat to the research processes. However, based on experience, the researcher remained prepared for any changes concerning restrictions that could resurface. As a result, most of the research interviews were conducted using online or telephonic platforms to overcome potential limitations. Research participants also preferred online interviews due to their busy schedules.

It is also important to acknowledge a notable limitation regarding gender diversity within the study's sample. While every effort was made to ensure a balanced representation, it's worth noting that despite outreach to 11 female potential participants, only 2 females ultimately agreed to participate, whereas 12 out of the 19 potential male participants consented. This outcome reflects the real-world challenges researchers may encounter in securing gender-diverse participation, which can be influenced by various factors such as availability, willingness, and engagement. While this gender disparity is a limitation of the study, it also underscores the broader challenges researchers face in achieving diverse representation in certain contexts. The constraint of limited gender diversity within the research sample has several consequences. Firstly, it may restrict the generalisability of the study's findings, as the overrepresented gender could dominate the results, limiting their applicability to broader populations. This imbalance in representation also poses the risk of introducing bias into the conclusions, potentially skewing recommendations and perpetuating gender-related stereotypes. Moreover, the study may not sufficiently capture vital gender-specific nuances in political leadership and decision-making during crises, which can hinder a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Despite these challenges, this research strives to offer valuable insights into crisis leadership and decision-making, drawing from the available participant pool while remaining cognisant of this limitation.

3.5.2 Positionality

Researchers' positionality indicates their worldview or perception of the world in any given context (Patton, 2015). As a researcher new to the field, it can be challenging to express a definitive position about the research. Consequently, an interpretive lens was employed to view the world, as it was believed that reality was socially constructed and had multiple meanings to different people. Research is used to better understand people's perceptions of a particular phenomenon in a particular context. For instance, leadership has multiple meanings to different people, depending on their experience, environment, and context. The researcher, a 28-year-old fluent in English, isiZulu, Tswana, Sotho, Xhosa, and an intermediate Afrikaans speaker, conducted interviews with participants of an older generation. English was used as a communication medium, but the

researcher also engaged in the four vernacular languages mentioned above, depending on what the participants preferred.

Furthermore, the researcher attended mixed-race educational institutions and could communicate with members of any race without any inferiority complexes, which aided in information gathering, objectivity, and decreased systematic or conscious bias. However, Patton (2015) notes that there will always be some sense of bias and subjectivity. Therefore, the researcher aimed for empathetic neutrality, meaning that data collection, interpretation, and analysis should be as neutral as possible.

3.6 Ethics

3.6.1 Informed Consent

In order to ensure informed consent, the researcher shared the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (Annexures 1 and 2). The form outlined what consent meant for the research participant. Furthermore, the respondents were allowed to remove themselves from the study if the need arose and informed that no penalty or punishment would be imposed. The researcher also explained what signing the consent form meant and that the individual agreed to be part of the research study by doing so.

3.6.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Considering the nature of the political environment, keeping the participant's identity private was a top priority for the researcher. Confidentiality was further guaranteed to the participants in alignment with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPI) no. 4 of 2013. If the respondents were interested in reading the research findings, they were made available after the data gathering and analysis process was concluded.

3.6.3 Permission

The researcher obtained ethical clearance from Wits University, following proper protocol. Participants were contacted by email to request their participation in the study, and telephone calls

were also used to obtain permission from relevant participants, given that emails sometimes result in delayed responses.

3.6.4 Data Protection

The data collected from participants will be stored on an online Cloud Drive for five years and protected using a password for safety and security. In the interest of abiding by the Protection of Personal Information Act no. 4 of 2013, the researcher sought to ensure that this sensitive information was stored safely on a Cloud drive (One Drive/ iCloud) rather than a laptop or computer, which faces the risk of theft or damage. This data will be stored to ensure the credibility and confirmability of the research study. The raw data will be used to analyse themes that emerge from the research findings to draw conclusions to reach an outcome.

3.7 Validity, Reliability, and Dependability

3.7.1 Validity and Reliability

Different from quantitative research, which is highly generalisable, exploratory case study research may pose a challenge in generalising results (Bryman, 2016; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). To observe reliability and validity, the researcher read, conceptualised, identified, and organised themes that emerged from the data. It is worth noting that the themes that emerged from the study were in alignment with the research objectives which could potentially enhance the validity and reliability of the study. The researcher interviewed political actors and public intellectuals to draw diverse insights regarding Ramaphosa's unique leadership characteristics and decision-making mechanisms during the COVID-19 crisis. Regardless of the heterogeneity in the selected sample, the researcher identified some common themes, which then revealed the reliability and validity of the results. Furthermore, the researcher used data triangulation to increase the study's credibility. The former refers to the fit between the respondents' views and opinions and the researcher's articulation of this information in the data analysis (Patton, 2015).

3.7.2 Dependability

The dependability of research is contingent on the quality of its presentation, which should be logical, clearly documented, and traceable (Bryman, 2016; Patton, 2015; Leavy, 2017). To ensure these standards are met, the researcher provided a detailed account of the research methodology, including information on when, where, and with whom the research was conducted. The research interviews were transcribed to ensure that all respondent insights were well-documented, and the researcher engaged with a supervisor for auditing purposes. The aforementioned process allowed for the confirmability of results, at which point the researcher explained how conclusions were drawn, themes emerged, and interpretations were made.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the methodology used in the dissertation, including the research approach, design, sampling, and limitations of the selected methodology. The section also explains the steps taken to ensure the integrity of the methodology. The researcher opted for a qualitative research approach because it provided an in-depth understanding of the phenomena being studied. The primary objective was to gain a nuanced understanding of political leadership and decision-making during crises, particularly in South Africa. This would enable the production of a content-rich research report.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

4. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from primary data collected from 14 research participants. These participants included two groups of respondents: political and social actors, particularly public intellectuals. The chapter outlines the demographic profile of the respondents while using pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and to protect the participants' identities. The pseudonyms PA 1-8 are used to represent the Political Actors' (PA) category of respondents and PI 1-6 represents the Public Intellectual (PI) category of respondents. This chapter also delineates the codes and themes identified in the study while sketching the steps followed in the qualitative thematic analysis. This research sought to explore the perceptions of research participants around how the Ramaphosa Administration undertook political leadership and decision-making between 2020-2021 in response to the Coronavirus pandemic.

4.1. Participant Profile and Demographic Information

The table below depicts the participants' profiles, providing their pseudonyms, level of education, gender, race, level of employment, and respondent category. The researcher collected this demographic information to generate a holistic picture of the sampled participants.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Research Participants

	Pseudonym	Level of Education	Gender	Race	Level of Employment	Respondent Category
1	PA1	Master's	M	Black	Senior Management	Political Actor
2	PA2	Master's	M	Black	Senior Management	Political Actor
3	PA3	Hons	M	Black	Senior Management	Political Actor
4	PA4	Master's	M	White	Senior Management	Political Actor
5	PA5	Master's	M	Indian	Senior Management	Political Actor
6	PA6	Master's	M	Black	Senior Management	Political Actor
7	PA7	Master's	M	Black	Senior Management	Political Actor

8	PA8	Master's	M	Black	Senior Management	Political Actor
9	PI1	PhD	M	White	Senior Lecturer	Public Intellectual
10	PI2	PhD	F	Coloured	Senior Lecturer	Public Intellectual
11	PI3	Master's	M	Black	Lecturer	Public Intellectual
12	PI4	PhD	M	Indian	Senior Lecturer	Public Intellectual
13	PI5	PhD	F	White	Senior Lecturer	Public Intellectual
14	PI6	PhD	M	Indian	Senior Lecturer	Public Intellectual

The research respondents included 12 males, two females, and no respondents who identified as genderqueer or non-binary. Although the researcher would have liked a more gender-diverse representation of research participants, it is worth considering that perhaps fewer female, non-binary, and genderqueer individuals can be found in academia and even fewer in key decision-making positions within the political environment. A 2020 study found that only 30% of women and even fewer non-binary and queer individuals were represented in academia, and the political environment, the picture does not look very different (Macupe, 2020). When examining the racial profile of the respondents, while using the South African racial categories (Black, White, Indian, and Coloured), the study had seven Black respondents, three White respondents, one Coloured respondent, and three Indian respondents. Although the respondents' race does not affect the data gathered, it is worth mentioning this fact to demonstrate the diversity of the research participants. In regard to the level of education, five of the respondents had a PhD qualification, eight of them had a Master's qualification, and one respondent possessed an Honours qualification. In terms of employment level, eight respondents were in senior management positions within local, provincial, and national governments. Five of the respondents were senior lecturers in public universities, and one of the respondents was a lecturer at a public university.

4.2. Data Analysis Process

This research used a thematic analysis to analyse the primary data which was collected from the research participants. To gather and analyse primary data generated from the research interviews, this study used an online software called Delve. Delve is an online qualitative data analysis tool

that enables researchers to develop codes and themes that assist in data analysis. The software is highly recommended for its efficiency and simplicity when conducting any qualitative research analysis. Document analysis was utilised to analyse secondary data and to generate further information relating to the themes identified in this study. Braun & Clarke (2006) outline six steps to be followed by researchers to generate themes from the data which has been collected. These steps were used as a framework to guide data collation, analysis and interpretation by the researcher. The data analysis process is described below:

4.2.1. Data Analysis Process: Generation of Codes and Themes

The researcher used the thematic analysis approach because it provided the ability to identify patterns and trends in the data while giving insights into the study subject. Below are the steps which were undertaken to generate codes and themes responding to the research problem:

Step 1: Familiarisation with data

During the interviews, research data was captured in audio form and first had to be transcribed to text form using Microsoft Word. Once transcribed, the researcher spent a few days reading the data transcripts, getting familiar with the conversations, and checking for any errors and gaps in the data. Once the data had been cleaned and edited, it was uploaded onto Delve, the analysis tool, to initiate coding.

Step 2: Creating Codes

After familiarisation with the data, the data was coded using Delve. The software then generated a codebook, a document that records and stores different codes. To this end, frequent excerpts were highlighted and coded based on their relevance to the subject matter. The research questions, objectives and theories highlighted in the literature review generated these initial codes. This was done using both an inductive and deductive approach to thematic analysis.

Step 3: Grouping Codes into Themes

Once the initial codes had been developed, they were re-analysed, and those that presented similarities were combined. After this exercise, themes were generated from the remaining codes. Provoking themes was a straightforward process because they were in line with the research questions. Additionally, the Delve software was very efficient in packaging the codes that generated themes.

Step 4: Reviewing and Revising Themes

After establishing an initial set of themes, their relevance to the research questions was assessed; additionally, the researcher had to review whether each theme had enough data to be analysed. Upon review, the researcher identified similarities in some initial themes, which were subsequently merged, and others were revised into sub-themes. The sub-themes were based on their relevance and relation to the central theme. The codes, themes, and sub-themes are presented in the table below:

Table 2: Codes, Themes, and Sub-themes That Emerged from The Data

Codes	Themes	Sub-Themes
Political leadership characteristics, Nelson Mandela's characteristics, Thabo Mbeki's characteristics, Jacob Zuma's characteristics, Kgalema Motlanthe's characteristics	Unpacking the Characteristics, Prescripts and Understanding of Political Leadership in Post-Apartheid South Africa According to Political Actors and Academic Experts	- Debunking societal expectations of political leaders during crises
Cyril Ramaphosa's election into the presidency, Cyril Ramaphosa's leadership exhibited during the COVID-19 crisis 2020-2021, Cyril Ramaphosa characteristics, Phala – Phala scandal, consequence management	The Characterisation of Cyril Ramaphosa's Style of Leadership Before and During Crisis	
Crisis preparedness, COVID-19 response measures by the president and his administration, NCCC & MAC, Provincial COVID-19 response, Decision-making during the crisis, decision-making at a local level, Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002	South Africa's COVID-19 Crisis Management, under the Ramaphosa Administration: Progress or Regress?	
Relationship between political leadership and decision-making, professionalisation of the public sector framework, ANC leadership	The Nexus Between Political Leadership and Decision-Making in the South African Political Party System	

Below is a list of themes that were generated from the thematic analysis and a brief description of the meaning of each theme:

Theme 1: Unpacking the Characteristics, Prescripts and Understanding of Political Leadership in Post-Apartheid South Africa According to Political Actors and Academic Experts
Theme 2: The Characterisation of Cyril Ramaphosa's Style of Leadership Before and During Crises
Theme 3: South Africa's COVID-19 Crisis Management under the Ramaphosa Administration: Progress or Regress?
Theme 4: The Nexus Between Political Leadership and Decision-Making in the South African Political Party System

Theme 1: Unpacking the Characteristics, Prescripts and Understanding of Political Leadership in Post-Apartheid South Africa According to Political Actors and Academic Experts

This refers to the varying characteristics, prescripts, and features used to define political leadership based on the perceptions of the different academic experts and political actors. Some respondents observed these features from different political leaders over time, while other respondents shared their perceptions based on their experience working close to political leaders. The responses under this theme seek to help the reader understand how political leadership has been understood in post-apartheid South Africa.

Sub-Theme:

- **Debunking Societal Expectations of Political Leaders During Crises**

  This refers to societies' expectations of their political leaders during crises.

Theme 2: The Characterisation of Cyril Ramaphosa's Style of Leadership and Decision-Making Before and During Crisis

This theme takes a closer look at Cyril Ramaphosa and gives an account of how the respondents characterised his leadership style before and during the COVID-19 crisis. It also introduces aspects of decision-making which are further expanded in theme three.

Theme 3: South Africa's COVID-19 Crisis Management under the Ramaphosa Administration: Progress or Regress?

This theme recounts how President Ramaphosa and his administration responded to the COVID-19 crisis in South Africa. Taking into account factors such as crisis preparedness and response measures instituted by the president and his administration during this tumultuous period. The theme also outlines the respondents' perceptions concerning COVID-19 decision-making while gaining different insights regarding the guiding legislation used.

Theme 4: The Nexus Between Political Leadership and Decision-Making in the South African Political Party System

Under this theme, the respondents shared their perceptions of the nexus between political leadership and decision-making.

4.3. Presentation of Findings

4.3.1. Unpacking the Characteristics, Prescripts and Understanding of Political Leadership in Post-Apartheid South Africa According to Political Actors and Academic Experts

Under this theme, the researcher uncovered the respondents' understanding of political leadership. Here, the varying characteristics ascribed to political leaders were identified. These features were deemed relevant because they can help the reader understand how political leadership has been understood over time. From this comprehension, the researcher verified existing meanings of political leadership using definitions provided by South Africa's academic experts and political actors. When participants were asked to define the concept of political leadership, they highlighted several characteristics that represented the phenomenon. They identified terms such as charisma, servitude, empathy, and competence among other features. The definitions provided by the respondents are captured below:

Participant PA7 stated:

"Political leadership is about leading a country and serving the interests of citizens. One is a public servant as a political leader, which is why the servant leadership characteristic is pertinent for political leaders. Through this kind of leadership, the best interests of the populace are put forward. So, when you say you have demonstrated political leadership, it means you have acted in the people's best interest."

This view was echoed by Participant PA2, who shared that "Good political leadership is the embodiment of servant leadership. Someone who is a servant to his people, someone who listens, and someone people can look up to. Someone empathetic and, actually, has a heart for the people that they are working with. A political leader should also be committed to the growth of the people, they should have foresight, awareness, and persuasion."

This view from Participant PA7 and Participant PA2 aligns with the definition of servant leadership as described by Demirtas & Mustafa (2020). These authors define servant leadership as the embodiment of listening and comprehension skills, it includes the ability to take initiative and have empathy, intuition and foresight. Servant leadership also includes having an awareness and perception of the citizens' experience, persuasion skills, conceptualisation skills and the will the improve and build communities.

In contrast, participants who fall in the category of intellectuals did not offer distinct characteristics, instead, they provided more generalised meanings of the phenomenon. Participant PI3 for example, shared that political leaders ought to be people-centred, competent, and trustworthy, features that proffer a veracious public appearance that gives an excellent outlook to the country:

> "First and foremost, a political leader should be people-centred, secondly, the leader should be task-centred, and possess technocratic skills that are required to lead an organisation or country. So, a leader must be people orientated because, obviously, you must be able to positively influence the people you lead toward the intended goal. If you are people-centred, you are able to work with people, communicate with them, get them to understand your mission and strategy, and they feel as though they are part of your mission and strategy, so you have their buy-in.

Participant P13 further noted:

> On the technical side, a leader needs to have the required skills to run an institution. They must also be open to ideas because political leadership is a shared responsibility between politicians and the populace, especially in a democratic country. Political leaders must possess good integrity because if you are a leader with integrity, then you fully understand that whatever you do, the actions you take must be something that will reflect positively on your image. Because your image is not only your personal and individual image but a national one, it is an image that is portrayed externally to attract investors to invest in your country. And as soon as that integrity is compromised, then people start to lose confidence in such leaders."

From these engagements, vision and foresight were brought forward as the cornerstone of political leadership. To emphasise this point, 80% of respondents raised the importance of vision in political leadership.

Participants PA1 and PA2 articulated this point:

> "Political leadership is also about having a clear vision for where you want to take the country."

> "If you are a politician, you need to know where you want to take the country, so you must have a vision for the country."

Participant PA4 further asserted that political leadership requires strategic vision and long-term plans for the nations they lead,

> "Political leadership should be able to envision the future and develop strategic plans, in other words, they need to have long-term plans for the future, and the leader should have a long-term view of the direction they seek to take the country. They must be able to handle multi-disciplinary teams and linkages for effective communication; otherwise, one ends up with a very silo type of approach.

Participant PA4 also observed:

> "Additionally, they must set goals and understand the outcome they seek to achieve. They must also monitor and evaluate progress. They must be able to anticipate risks and uncertainty, and they must be able to deal with precarious situations. Good political leadership must be able to forecast financials and garner financial support, and all this requires a forward-looking strategic plan. And leaders must be able to make strategic choices because one cannot implement everything at once."

The definitions of political leadership provided by Participants PI3, PA1, PA2, and PA4 align with the abovementioned definition of servant leadership as posited by Demirtas & Mustafa (2020).

However, there is also an alignment with ethical leadership which is defined as a type of leadership that prioritises morality, truthfulness, integrity, sympathy, and a high devotion to basic rules and regulations (Demirtas & Mustafa, 2020). This was further expanded by Participant PA5 below:

Participant PA5 defined political leadership as a mandated role:

> "My understanding of political leadership is that as a leader you are given a mandate by the society you represent. And this society expects you to represent their interests. They expect you to care for their well-being and quality of life. They also expect you to be selfless. You need to be decisive and ethical, political leaders should definitely be beyond reproach. Even though we are human beings, we are fallible, but for me, political leadership entails that people must follow you, they must believe in your views, your ideas, and your vision, and they should practically see your ability to realise your vision."

While defining political leadership, participant PI5 noted three critical components that exacerbate the complexity of this leadership in a country like South Africa,

> "So, there are three components to leadership: strategic thinking, pragmatic thinking, and the ability to inspire others to follow you through people management capacities. And when we link this to political leadership, we need to consider that political leaders have multiple constituencies to whom they account. They account to the administration because they are the head of the administration, and so all the pragmatic leadership, strategic vision, and communication is their role as well as getting the administration to do what is required. But they are also accountable to a political constituency, a political party, the party has its own set of goals and ideas. In our political setup, the leader is appointed by the party and that limits the scope of leadership and some of the decisions or the kinds of decisions that one can make because of that accountability to what has already been decided at a party level and is then communicated to the leader. Thirdly, political leaders have a constituency which is their community, their voters.

Participant PI5 concluded:

> I think it is important to understand the difference between a community at large and those who are actually voting because the political leader's accountability should be to the community. But in the political setup it becomes 'who are the voters, what do they want, and how do I win their votes?' And if I am unable to satisfy the voters, then my political career can be at an end … So I think those are the three different things that make being a political leader especially complex."

Participant PA1 emphasised empathy and emotional intelligence as central to political leadership:

> "As a political leader, one should be emotionally intelligent, they must also be empathetic, they should be able to put themselves in other people's shoes. A good political leader is also charismatic, they are able to influence people into following them."

As the respondents described the different features of political leadership, 45% of the participants made reference to charisma as an essential character a political leader should possess. When defining this characteristic, some respondents personified it by sharing their perceptions of 'charismatic' former heads of state.

For example, participant PA2 defined a charismatic leader as "someone who attracts respect and admiration, someone who is authentic."

This was echoed by participant PA1 who described a charismatic leader as "someone that is just born a leader."

Participant PA1 further noted:

> "By just being who they are, the way they handle themselves, the way they speak, and the leadership they exude that is what makes them charismatic. The posture they adopt makes them command respect from their constituency".

Participant PA1 went further to say the following: "Nelson Mandela was an example of charismatic leadership." As a long-time member of the presidency, this participant is reminiscent of how 'Madiba' (clan and fond name for Mandela) would enter a room and command respect through his demeanour. The respondent shared how Madiba would come and greet all of them individually by shaking their hands regardless of their seniority in the office. Participant PA1 smiled while ruminating over this moment, adding, "Mandela's hands were so soft, you would think he did not do manual labour in prison (chuckles)." Participant PA1 shared this memory to demonstrate Madiba's charisma as a political leader.

Participant PI1 describes another former head of state, Jacob Zuma as a charismatic populist leader:

> "Uhmm I guess Jacob Zuma was a charismatic populist leader, a patronage leader in kind of a more classical sense."

Participant PI3 summed up the charismatic leader definition by saying: “When people want to look at you for direction, that makes you a charismatic leader.”

It was interesting to observe the diverse characteristics ascribed to political leadership by the study's respondents. Equally intriguing was the alignment of these definitions with the existing literature on various leadership styles (Dermirtas & Mustafa, 2020). This finding underscores the respondents' profound understanding of leadership and political leadership's attributes and principles. Furthermore, it highlights that President Ramaphosa and former heads of state demonstrated and embodied characteristics associated with established leadership styles.

4.3.1.1. Debunking Societal Expectations of Political Leaders During Crises

As the conversations continued, the respondents revealed their expectations of President Ramaphosa and his administration during the COVID-19 pandemic and what they believed to be some of the social expectations placed on political leaders during crises generally.

Participant PA1 shared how information management, time frames, and turnaround times were critical during crises,

> “The expectation is that the president should show leadership, leading from the front. I suppose it's the management of information and uh, how quickly you are able to act as information about the crisis is received. So, the turnaround time, I suppose a good leader will have clear time frames to respond to a number of issues that are happening during the crisis.”

Participant PI5 endorsed PA1’s point, stating that it is of critical importance to have the relevant updated information as a crisis progresses because this contributes to the decision-making that the political leader has to undertake,

> “As a political leader, the role that is critically important is ensuring that you have up-to-date information as it emerges and interrogate conflicting information sources because a crisis requires your immediate decision-making. So I think as a leader in such a situation, your first thing is just to kind of get access to the right information. Because things change very fast, the information from one moment to the next may be different. And then the second thing, which is really hard for a political leader is that you need the ability to make decisions when you are faced with contradicting information

> and be a bearer of that responsibility, so managing a crisis situation in a democratic fashion, it's probably going to be a lot harder. And I think in Cyril's case he tried really hard to do this in a democratic way."

Considering the precarity and volatility of crises, participant PA4 shared how crisis leaders should provide stability to citizens through constant communication and moral leadership,

> "It's about how you stabilize your society, whatever you need to do, you need to provide that sense of stability, communicate on a regular basis, and basically tell people what is going on. Then there's also moral leadership you know, people need to actually believe it when their leader says their actions are for the benefit of the public good and not for personal gain or anything. Political leaders also need to be rational, and take responsibility for actions and also for consequences at a later stage. You know as a leader in a crisis situation, you need to take certain decisions, and some of those will be right and some of those will be wrong."

Participant PI2 briefly stated that during crises, "political leaders need to be present and direct", while PI4 shared the importance of an institutional response to crises and that leaders need to be calm and measured,

> "There has to be some kind of concrete institutional response that exists and is then gonna be deployed to deal with the crisis. Also, during this time, political leaders are expected to be calm and measured in their utterances, and they need to communicate how they are dealing with the crisis."

Participant PA5 reiterated the importance of effective and clear communication during crises,

> "They need to show leadership by communicating effectively and also making sure that they counter uh fake news because you know we are in the era of fake news so the expectation is really to, uhm reassure citizens that the situation is under control because that's what they're looking for and of course uh especially the most vulnerable in society, they look up to the government to be assisted with whatever needs so that they can be able to survive because at times it is about survival, so effective communication is key."

From these interactions, it has become clear that during crises, it is vital to communicate clearly and succinctly and that leaders must show they are capable of handling catastrophic situations to inspire trust in their societies. These responses demonstrate an alignment with existing crisis

management literature as stated by scholars such as Ulmer, 2001; Boin & Hart 2010; Krasteva, 2019, on societal expectations of political leaders during crises. These scholars agree that Societies expect their leaders to effectively manage crises by communicating openly and honestly, showing empathy, relying on expertise, and providing guidance. Leaders are also expected to foster unity, allocate resources fairly, adapt to changing circumstances, plan for the long term, instil stability and confidence, and be accountable for their actions. Notably, these expectations can vary based on cultural and historical factors, and the effectiveness of leadership during a crisis is often assessed retrospectively.

4.3.2. Characterisation of Cyril Ramaphosa's Political Leadership and Decision-Making Before and During Crisis

The overarching goal of this research was to explore the various academic and political actors' perceptions of political leadership and decision-making processes undertaken by President Cyril Ramaphosa and his administration during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021). First, it was prudent to comprehend some of the societal expectations that befall political leaders amid crises to understand the research aim fully.

When participants were asked to describe Cyril Ramaphosa's characteristics, they provided a variety of interpretations. Some respondents described him as overly cautious, while others regarded him as very consultative. Additionally, some respondents said he was a decisive leader who makes informed decisions, contrarily, others declared him indecisive. One of the respondents described Ramaphosa as a process man, and another added that he was a stickler for the law and therefore wanted to ensure that his decisions aligned with legislation. These diverse perceptions of the president's leadership and decision-making provided interesting insights into his enigmatic character.

Participants PA2 and PI5 described President Cyril Ramaphosa as a very cautious individual, who wants to unite the governing party, they perceived him as someone who wants to prevent internal conflict while gathering in-house support:

> "I think he is very cautious, he uses a cautious approach to leadership and in my view, I think he is overcautious. And if you understand his position within the ruling party, he won by a very narrow margin, and so his view was to bring everyone into the kraal and not upset them. I think he always says his main goal is to unite the ANC, unite the ruling party. But unfortunately, people still continue to undermine you even if you try to bring them together. And perhaps this was one of his weaknesses."

> "I think he is a very detailed planner and I think he understands how things connect, but he plays like a chess player, very cautiously, very careful, and making any move very sure that when he makes this move he is not going to lose any players or pieces that he needs to finish the match. And so it is a very back foot way of playing and I think changes are generally very slow under such a system."

When asked to expand on the "narrow margin" comment, participant PA2 shared a passionate recall of how president Ramaphosa was elected to the presidency by a narrow margin compared to his predecessor Jacob Zuma, and how this affects the level of influence he carries within the ANC:

> "He definitely won by narrow margins because when compared to Jacob Zuma, Zuma received 75% support from the electorate, so that actually gave him a lot of support. That is why he was in control, he could easily reshuffle people the way he wanted to and he moved people around as he pleased. But the current president wants to actually keep them where they are and not disturb the balance. So, I think his purpose in the first five years was more to be cautious and to win people over to him, but that is at the expense of consequence management, at the cost of being ineffective as a leader, at the cost of holding people to account, and that is one big mistake actually.

Participant PA2 further qualified his points in this way:

> I mean also with the Thuma Mina speech in Parliament people were actually looking forward to the greater things that he was going to do … but from my view he just became indecisive you know, I mean you can make very good promises and you can also project a very good vision of what you want to do and where you want to take the country, but if there is no follow-through…(shrugs shoulders)… And I think even with cabinet, he can actually ask people what they have done, how far they are with their deliverables, and have them provide him with solid explanations, hold people to account you know… but now people can just provide any excuse and it goes … he just takes it and accepts it."

Participant PA2 also shared perceptions on possible drivers of the president's leadership style and decision-making processes,

> "I think yena (a local phrase which means "him") he is a business person and even though he does not say it, I think he believes the market should be given a chance to actually grow, the private

sector must flourish. And yeah, I think it is a market-driven economy that he believes in. And so, we should actually give the private sector a chance to flourish, and the government must create the environment for this to happen. He wants the private sector to grow the country and to grow the economy … but then he also belongs to the tripartite alliance and there are communists there who believe in the opposite, and so I think one of the biggest challenges we have even with previous presidents is the macroeconomic policy. There are conflicting interests and agendas at play."

Participant PI6 describes Ramaphosa as someone who tries to accommodate everyone:

> "Look, I think Ramaphosa is a nice person, I think he tries to accommodate everyone which is good, I also think he's trying his best to incorporate the youth into his inner circle. And when people say he is not decisive, behind the scenes he's actually done decisive work. Eskom for example, uhm people say that he hasn't done anything, but he flies back home when there are issues … behind the scenes, he's very focused on the boards, he's focused on the problems and he's focused on understanding the problem and I think he came out at the right time in saying look, this is how we're going to address the issues ... secondly, I think he's changed the board completely, so I think while people might think he is indecisive. I think he spends a lot of time first thinking and analysing before making a decision. But whether that's good for a political leader is the issue, I think for a normal leader that's the right way to do things. But for a political leader, citizens are not patient and maybe that's where he needs to improve."

Participant PA7 describes the president as a process man: "I think the president is a process man, well, he has said it himself, and I subscribe to that thinking."

Participant PA8 shared his thoughts on how the president gained the necessary skills to deal with difficult situations during the struggle against apartheid. He also shared how this has benefitted him in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic:

> "President Ramaphosa, is a product of the struggles of this country, and I think that has equipped him to know what to do when we are in a difficult situation. Let me give an example of what I am referring to. President Ramaphosa had to bring in the miners during the difficult times of apartheid. He had to get them to be organized for their livelihood, but also to launch a struggle against unfair labour practices. So, he has that experience, secondly, President Ramaphosa became part of a team of negotiators for the transition of this country during a very difficult time. He was able to sit across a table with the worst regime on the planet. You know apartheid was the worst one and remember we had to negotiate with people who had an army that was one of the best armies in the continent if not also in the world. So those negotiating skills assisted him and also, and he went with leaders of structure. I'm talking about the late Nelson Mandela and other leaders so that has equipped him with the know-how to say when faced with a life and death situation, how do you come out of that

and with those negotiating skills at that level, I think it's equipped him to take us through this stormy period of COVID-19."

Participant PA3 went further to describe President Cyril Ramaphosa as a consensus-building and conversational president:

"Cyril Ramaphosa also taking from Mandela is a consensus-building president. He's the kind of person who would like to hear all the views before he even makes his decision, or he utters a word. It's basically his style of operation which is why some people will criticize him that he forms committees and consults but that's his style of leadership, he wants to make sure that there is no one that's left behind before he makes a decision because when he makes a decision, he will stick to it. So he's also conversational, president Cyril Ramaphosa will sit with you and say 'so how are you, so what do you do in the presidency' you know, and once you've spoken about all that then he will also share his vision, 'I want a person like you because my vision is to have a presidency that's like this and this and this'."

Furthermore, participant PA3 reiterated:

So even in the manner of speech he's very conversational, even in his speeches he's not into rallies and shouting, you can tell that his training is that of a lawyer, or a negotiator, he's more interested in discussions, resolutions, and proposals, that's the kind of person he is. His style of leadership and his style of decision-making is one that is based on first as I said hearing the views of others, he values especially the opinions and insights of professional bodies. He's the kind of person who says that this needs a lawyer, this needs a doctor. Not only a doctor but a specialist in microbiology, let's get people who can give us advice on this. This sounds to me like a military thing, let's get the people in the military who can assist with this. Second, he is a stickler for the law. He wants to see if the correct policies and laws were followed before he acts. Which then gives the criticism that he's slow and he does not ever decide. But he does."

Furthermore, 42% of the respondents commented on Ramaphosa's business acumen and a ubiquitous societal expectation when he was elected to the presidency that he would turn things around for the people of South Africa. Two of these insights are captured below:

Participant PA4 describes Ramaphosa as an astute political leader who had to live up to high societal expectations about changing the trajectory of the country's socioeconomic development:

> "Ramaphosa came in with a lot of expectations, especially after the Zuma era. Considering that he is a self-made man you know, a businessman, I think people believed that with his business skills, his business contacts, and overall business acumen, he would basically get South Africa on the right path. But I also think that when you are the head of a political party and the president there are other factors at play, where a leader cannot necessarily be a leader in his own right. But I think Ramaphosa comes across as an astute political leader, especially during Covid."

Participant PA5 describes the president's business acumen as the characteristic that sets him apart:

> "With our current president, you know what sets our president apart, I think it is his business acumen. You know he did something that I believe Mbeki or Zuma could not have done, that was to quickly build our manufacturing capacity, we were able to manufacture our own uhm what do you call them, the shots, COVID-19 vaccines. I think he saw himself as a very critical player within the continent who could advocate our message, he saw himself as more like the president of Africa. But I think it also had to do with his AU role, you know during those times, and he played that role very well. At that time he was talking with other presidents on the continent, but also international leaders, he would speak to leaders in America, and the UK, you know, and ask them to donate vaccines to Africa, he would also condemn rich countries for hoarding the vaccines, yeah things like that. And I think this was very philanthropical in a way."

During these engagements, the respondents provided various perceptions about the president and his characteristics. Some identified his business acumen, while others identified his communication abilities and consensus-building capabilities. President Ramaphosa's political leadership during the COVID-19 crisis in South Africa exhibited resonant, complexity, and participative elements, as described by the research participants. He engaged in resonant leadership by empathetically addressing public fears and fostering a sense of unity. His approach recognised the complexity of the pandemic, emphasising adaptive strategies and data-driven decision-making. While his leadership is primarily centralised, he incorporated participative aspects by consulting with diverse stakeholders and encouraging individual responsibility. This multifaceted leadership style aimed to build trust, adapt to evolving circumstances and engage both emotionally and practically with the challenges posed by the pandemic. These characteristics align with the definitions of resonant, participative and complexity leadership characteristics provided by Demirtas & Mustafa (2020)

4.3.3. South Africa's COVID-19 Crisis Management under the Ramaphosa Administration: Progress or Regress?

When respondents were asked how they felt about the president's and his administration's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, they had a variety of opinions. While some of them argued that the reaction lacked coordination, others believed creating structures like the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC) and Ministerial Advisory Council (MAC) was essential and improved collaboration. Others disagreed and identified this move as a replication of cabinet clusters, which they deemed unnecessary. Nonetheless, some respondents believed that using legislation like the Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002 amended, Act 16 of 2015 was essential to coordinating the pandemic response. In contrast, others claimed that it was not the appropriate legislation for doing so. Moreover, while some respondents stated that it was unclear who was in charge of this pandemic, others felt that the president was present, visible, and in control during this difficult period.

Participant PA2 shared how he thought the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic was the first time that the Ramaphosa administration was in charge of the country,

> "That is one time when I can say that government was in charge. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, I think that is the only time in the history of this administration or the new government where I felt that the government was in charge of the country, was in charge of the decision-making, was in charge of the lives of the people and was taking the future and the lives of the people seriously at that time. But then there were also disadvantages, serious disadvantages. In the sense that, you know, I think the lockdown measures became a bit too harsh. And too stringent to the extent that they cost jobs. People lost their jobs and yeah, I think maybe they were over the top compared to other countries. But at the same time, I think the extensions were a problem because it was over-extended for quite a long time. And then as a result people lost patience."

Participant PI4 shared some sentiments about the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC) and its membership, the respondent believed the NCCC was confusing and unnecessary,

> "Uhm … I felt that there were a number of ways in which we replicated what we tended to do for previous issues in the response to Covid. Firstly, it seems to me that there was no need for an NCCC because what eventually happened was that all of Cabinet became a part of the NCCC. Yeah, so we have these things called cabinet clusters. We've had them since the Mbeki years. And so the NCCC

was quite confusing to people. Was it a new Cabinet cluster? Was it overlaying existing Cabinet clusters? Uhh … was it legal? And then when all of Cabinet became part of it, it basically became redundant and there was this confusion around who's supposed to be taking the lead is it Health, or is it CoGTA? And maybe for the next pandemic, Health really should be recognised as taking the lead."

Participant PI1 also shared his perceptions about the use of legislation such as the Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002 and the formation of structures such as the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC):

"Regarding the disaster management legislation that was used, it's not entirely clear why still. And it actually wasn't designed for something like Covid. Uhm, so if you're in a country that has planned more fully for a potential pandemic, you may have a different set of instruments available to you. So, the disaster management frameworks were turned to the task quite well, but they weren't really ideal. Uhm, but inevitably, the public health specialists took on a very different approach to the lockdown issue. And also, to other responses, and most notably and predictably, there was some rather disastrous rush to ban alcohol in addition to the cigarette ban, and both of those had very predictable consequences. And at first, with the alcohol ban, you could see the impact justification for it which really was quite narrow, it was that a large part of the emergency capacity of the health system is made up of alcohol-related violence, drunken accidents, and so on. And in the time of Covid, that capacity had to be protected. So there was a bit of an argument there for some kind of alcohol control.

Participant PI1 further pointed out:

There was really no argument for the tobacco ban, so basically the public health people kind of piled into this opportunity to push their favoured agendas, I would say. I think. Uhm … but there are a number of things that went wrong, one of them was, there wasn't really an NCCC, so it was basically all of the Cabinet members, maybe a couple of people were left out but basically everybody was in there, and you know what Cabinet is like when it comes to a particular issue, most of them know nothing, they know nothing. So, what they're there for is to offer broad political guidance and you really need the decisions to be taken on the basis of particular departmental expertise, and where possible, uhm multi-sectoral collaborations of different kinds. I mean you can see, that Covid was a kind of a whole of government challenge. And of course, it depends on how people were selected. And I think always the problem with ministerial advisory bodies is that ministers and the president, where the president is involved, tend to select people who tell them what they want to hear and to remove people who tell them what they don't want to hear."

Participant PI5 reiterated participants PI4's and PI1's discontented sentiments about the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC), and the pandemic response's leadership:

"So, they established the National Coronavirus Command Council … Horrible, horrible military terms for a social crisis, it's completely inappropriate. But anyway, you had this command council which basically included every single minister that he had. Which kind of defeats the purpose, but opens up a democratic space, and by moving it from Cabinet to a command council, it meant that he bypassed all the niceties and the rules of Cabinet which enables this council to meet and make quick decisions.

He then enforces those decisions without the normal checks and balances in place. And unfortunately, without the normal transparency… and that's where it's going to come back to haunt us for many years still. It's not the fact that someone made the decision as a dictator or in this case as a team of the council and said that this is what we decided to do. It's the fact that they didn't share the information that informed that decision. Yeah, so we can say that it's Ramaphosa in the leadership position, but the question was often asked whether he *is* in the leadership position and who is actually calling the shots and making the decisions. Between himself and the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) and the Minister of Health, there were basically three bodies that had the right to call certain shots because it's a health pandemic."

Participant PA7 shared their perceptions of how the coordination efforts were not streamlined:

"There was no proper coordination as far as I'm concerned, one was saying it's the responsibility of A and A was saying it's C instead of ABC, working together to deal with this once and for all. I think that's where the shortcoming was."

Participant PA5 added that the response efforts were not inclusive of all necessary role players:

"Okay, uhm, my perception of them I think it was not inclusive, by that I think it was biased towards health experts without involving uhm socio-economic experts I could say also sociology in understanding uh you know, our socialisation, our culture, cultural practices. I think that was missing, so everything was just health, health, health, so you could see the livelihood sort of came later. So, for me uhm that was an issue, and also the so-called experts… yeah, I think for me it's something that we should move away from. I don't think we really have experts, no one can really say I am an expert in this particular field because you can't know it all, you may know a particular area, you know. But it doesn't mean you have qualified to be an expert, so there was this tension that I've seen from some of the members, where some members felt like maybe their views were not taken into consideration."

Participant PI2 shared sentiments about the hygiene requirements and how the context in which these requirements were imposed really matters in relation to how people abide by them:

"Uhm, we had the water crisis, you know, 2018-2019. A lot of our, water tap system's pressure has been slowed enormously. So, you see all these beautiful videos of washing your hands under copious amounts of water. And our water just doesn't ripple that fast because since we were so close to day zero, people are much more aware, of water consumption. So, they made these decisions, but, yet there's a history of a water crisis in some parts of the country. So, I think that taking context and taking history into account in all decision-making is critical. I mean if you're going to make a decision like uhm level 5 and you want everyone to stay at home, and you want everybody to social distance you clearly don't have a good sense of the social dynamics and social systems of this country because 80% of our population lives in poverty, abject poverty and how do you social distance in that case? It's ridiculous to make those demands. And then there are so many informal parts of the economy where

> uhm saying people can't work is just detrimental to certain sectors. So, I think that uhm, I know, it's obviously much much easier said than done but you know when you understand the complexity one is not quick to often just replicate decisions that other people have made and think that it's gonna work in this context. Uhm because what might have worked for lockdown in New York or Italy, uhm might not work here. So, I think one has to understand that you can't replicate a decision if a context is so completely different."

In addition to political leadership, the research aspired to uncover how decision-making unfolded during the COVID-19 pandemic when President Cyril Ramaphosa and his administration had to make hurried and challenging decisions. The respondents' perceptions of how this process unfolded are captured below:

Participant PI6 commended Ramaphosa's performance during this period:

> "So, there was no risk assessment done, there was a decision made and I mean we knew the economy was gonna be affected, we knew people were gonna lose jobs but I think it was a measured response. And taking cognizance of evidence-based research, and taking cognizance of experts internationally and locally, he consulted with his people and his people said chief we the experts know what we're doing, you need to lockdown. So, I think it was done in the right way and I think up to today the World Health Organisation still thinks Cyril performed very well in terms of addressing Covid you know."

As someone who was part of the decision-making structures during this period, participant PA5 recalled how they had worked briskly when coming up with regulations:

> "So, we had to come up with the regulations because the focus was on the need to protect lives of course balanced with economic benefits. But for me that was encouraging because usually, we take longer to come up with regulations, we take 2-3 years to come up with regulations. Even if it is the prerogative of the executive, meaning the minister can actually enact the regulation, it still takes longer, usually with legislation we understand because it involves parliament they have their own processes to follow, and they must also do public policy planning. But for me, that showed me that the government was agile and there was sound leadership demonstrated by the president during this period."

Additionally, participant PA2 shared how turnaround times were fast-tracked, and decision-making processes had to be evidence-based,

> "Well, decisions were made within a week actually because sometimes tasks had to happen within a week, that's when you must come up with a report to say what Covid alert level we are going to on a given week. I think the risk management issues were handled quite well, data collection was quite good in terms of where we are with the numbers, how many people are dying, the trends, and how we were managing the pandemic. The Disaster Management Act also helped a lot because now in terms of disaster management, you can take quick decisions, also in terms of procurement as well, you don't have to follow the procurement procedures such as the PFMA and so forth, we could take quick decisions and then provide a motivation why this decision had to be taken and it's the goal as it is taken. So generally, the turnaround times were quite long, but now during Covid, it took less time. And with our current president, there was a lot of consultation because he believed that evidence-based decision-making processes must be followed and we must actually get all the evidence, and then when he speaks to the nation, whatever he is saying to the nation must be backed by evidence. That's why government officials had to work very hard to come up with evidence, data, statistics, and so forth. And also, the Ministerial Advisory Committees and so forth, they were actually instrumental and helping."

Participant PA1 recalls how extensive research could not be conducted due to the hurried turnaround times, stating that decisions had to be made and implemented instantaneously:

> "Uhh because the turnaround times were very quick, there wasn't much time to bring issues to the table and then go back and do extensive research during the crisis. Issues had to be discussed there and decisions had to be taken there and then and be implemented thereafter, everything was moving fast."

Participant PA7 delineates how the Constitution of South Africa is the country's supreme law and how all decisions made during this period had to align with this legislation. Additionally, the Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002 was also utilised as a guiding document during this period:

> "There were two key legislations that were involved in decision making, that is the Constitution, which is the supreme law, so whatever you do, you need to take into account the rights of people and the Disaster Management Act which clearly states what should happen in the event of a disaster, this Act is under the control of the Minister of CoGTA. The Act provides the broad guidelines for the president to put systems in place and so everything that was done was done in accordance with that act."

> "Under the circumstances, the president put together various bodies or structures to advise him, so the Act broadly guided him to put systems in place. And so, he brought in bodies of experts who provided advice. He did not make decisions on his own, it was a very informed consultative process which I think under the circumstances was the proper way to address this."

Participant PA6 critiqued some of the decisions that were made in response to the pandemic:

> "Some of the decisions were patently stupid OK, and particularly the ones about smoking. I think the president should have called Nkosazana (the Minister of CoGTA) to order on that one because it made no scientific sense and it only drove people into the black market. But I also think the president had to make a balancing act, he was trying to balance things out you know. But if you look at the big decisions like lockdowns for example these decisions had a profound impact."

Participant PI5, on the other hand, spoke of a dual leadership system in relation to COVID-19 decision-making:

> "You had Minister Dlamini Zuma, who was the head of the Disaster Management Act, the custodian and the signing Minister for this Act. She also became the leader and face of this crisis response. And then you had Cyril Ramaphosa, who is the President of the country. And so, I don't think we had one leader, I think we had multiple leaders that at times contradicted each other and said different things on different days, and then one day later being overruled by their party. So that clear differentiation of roles and responsibilities wasn't there. I don't think we only had one leader, I think we definitely had many different leaders with different ideas on how to best manage the pandemic."

Participant PI4 reaffirmed participant PI5's sentiments on the perplexing locus of authority and further added that decision-making during this period was " slow and cumbersome":

> "I suppose as an outcome of overly complex institutional arrangements, it appeared slow, not very agile uhh cumbersome. And it also created confusion and one of the things that I've observed is that you know it was sometimes unclear to establish where the locus of authority was in the institutional setup and that can create slow, incoherent, confusing decision-making and it could also create excessively hierarchical layers of decision making where you know before a decision is made you have to pass it through various channels and various actors and you have to consult excessively. You know there's value in consultation, but when you're dealing with a crisis situation, whether it's a conventional crisis or a health pandemic, you need more agile decision-making, and quicker response times, to some extent you need to sacrifice consultation for the speed of the response."

Participant PI3 felt that the decision-making processes followed during this period were disorganised and chaotic:

> "Uhm for me I will say mostly it was arbitrary, haphazard, not well thought to be quite honest, people's livelihoods were just cut off in the middle of nowhere. So, the people were stranded because of the wrong decisions that were made, and the whole management of Covid itself was just in disarray. Yeah, a lot of things were not making sense to the ordinary citizens who wanted to go back and carry on

with their lives, you see. So, they were not prepared, you can see across the world everyone was caught off guard. But countries like Germany were able to manage it very well, Singapore was able to manage it very well, and here, not well enough. Because in the beginning what made people agree to the lockdown was that they were promised a lie of 21 days then it was perpetuated for almost 2 years. And then they just decide 'let's ban alcohol, let's ban cigarettes' and then you saw there was a boom in terms of illegal cigarettes and illegal alcohol, so people were still accessing those things. So, I think in a way some of the decisions were draconian, they were too draconian."

While participant PI6 shared his sentiments on the use of the Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002, and how this legislation could be amended:

"I think the Act basically assisted in terms of the lockdown procedures etc., it also assisted in terms of you know how we move the goalpost, so, for example, we address Covid and then people say the lockdown alert levels are coming down so perhaps they could take off their masks, etc. So, I think it probably gave some direction, but it didn't totally guide the way we address this pandemic, because I think the Disaster Management Act was more geared toward natural disasters. I don't think that Covid was a natural disaster. Uh, but I think someone should look at this Act in terms of saying how can it specifically be used to respond to pandemics because in this case we were not faced with a hurricane or a tsunami you know. So maybe that kind of adaptation in terms of the additional gazetted policies and regulations that came into effect could be beneficial to this legislation and responding to pandemics in the future."

Participant PI4 shared how the COVID-19 response should have been guided by the National Health Act 61 of 2003 and coordinated by the Minister of Health instead of the selected adoption of the Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002 led by the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs. PI4 believed that this created unnecessary confusion and gave way to a blunt response:

"They should have put in place more common-sense regulations into the National Health Act, that would have made sense. You know, if I'm saying it needs to be a health-led response, that means health needs to take the lead and health needs to liaise with its counterpart departments at various levels as well as other line departments and share how they need to be assisted. Then it makes sense for the National Health Act, to be one of the pieces of legislation to map out how that will work. The most critical observation I made was that the Minister of Health and his department were basically copying and pasting some of the very blunt regulations that applied under the DMA. So if that can change based on what we've learned from dealing with Covid, we ought to use health legislation and legislative instruments within the health domain.

PI4 also observed:

I think that makes sense, and the National Health Act should take the lead because the DMA is not really written for a health pandemic and as soon as you invoke the DMA then you are also mobilising

> a whole other network of disaster management agencies across the state at a national, provincial and district level. Now you're basically grafting that onto an already fairly well-established, complex institutional architecture for intergovernmental relations, and horizontal coordination and it just makes an already busy network a lot busier, and I think what happened is that when you invoke the DMA, you're also empowering CoGTA to take the lead which created confusion and enabled a fairly blunt response.

It can be deduced from the responses above that the research participants had varying perceptions about the Ramaphosa administration's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, some positive and others negative. The existing literature on political leadership, decision-making, and crisis management (Ulmer, 2001; Boin & Hart 2010; Krasteva, 2019), provides critical insights applicable to South Africa's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It emphasises the significance of proactive preparedness, data-driven decision-making, transparent communication, and adaptive leadership styles. In the South African context, President Ramaphosa and his administration faced the challenge of balancing public health imperatives with socioeconomic considerations, necessitating difficult decisions and political manoeuvring. Lessons from past crises, international collaboration, and an understanding of public behaviour were instrumental in shaping the country's response. South Africa's ability to effectively integrate these principles into its crisis management strategies played a pivotal role in mitigating the impact of COVID-19 within the nation and can serve as a case study for evaluating the broader application of crisis management principles in diverse contexts.

4.3.4. The Nexus Between Political Leadership and Decision-Making in the South African Political Party System

Throughout the data collection period, the connection between political leadership and the decisions made by President Ramaphosa and his government was also explored. When discussing their views on the undeniable connection between political leadership and decision-making, some respondents offered anecdotes to emphasise the significance of political factors that affect decision-making.

Participant PA7 shared how political leaders largely influence the capabilities and performance of their administrations:

> "Any government and administration have political leadership. And now, as a political leader, you determine the political posture that your government will take and that political posture then finds reflection in your administration, then that's how other administrations work. So, if you have a bad political leader, that would be reflected in how bad the administration would be, but if you have an astute and good political leader, then they will be able to take their administration to a higher level. South Africa now, we are punching above our weight. Why? Because of our political leader. So, the quality of a political leader, the vision of that political leader would influence how the administration of that political era navigate and drive their policies and the direction of that country."

Participant PA8 shared how the political party system in South Africa influences a political leader's capabilities because these leaders are mandated by their political party to drive specific mandates and not others. Therefore, this influences their ability to lead society in a particular direction:

> "In the South African context, we have a party political system and in that, the ruling party determines the policies of the administration. But then the ruling party would have a political leader who would champion all those policies. Then those policies will find reflection in the administration. So that's the importance of politics. It's unlike in other countries like for instance America where you have a two-party system that is very effective, but anyone can use whatever means he has necessary to say I want to be a leader and then they will be a leader. In South Africa, we have this strong party political thing and out of that rigorous process of the leading party, then a leader is chosen out of that particular party.

Participant PA8 further asserted:

> Then when the leader has been chosen, they champion the policies of that ruling party, like for instance South Africa, the ruling party is the African National Congress and all the policies that we have are mainly championed and led by the African National Congress. But the African National Congress doesn't rule as a hegemonic party. President Ramaphosa leads a collective, and the quality of a leader is about how you lead a collective. So, at the present moment, he is leading that collective of the ANC. And the beauty of it is that he is the president of the country and the president of the ANC, which means that he is using that leadership of the party to influence the policies of the government, and up to thus far he has led his term correctly, to an extent that he is reaching the end of his term, then he has to get another mandate to lead into the second term."

Participant PI5 echoes the abovementioned sentiment on how the political party's electoral system has a severe impact on political leadership and decision-making:

> "I think in the African National Congress and in our electoral system, you vote for a party and the party votes for a leader. And in the end, the leader has the title of president. Bringing the accountability back to the party and to the NEC specifically. But now even during the pandemic, we saw cases where a minister that ultimately accounts to the president can actually call the shots, and make certain decisions, and the president needs to go back and say yes, you're right and I concur that is actually what we need to do, which is abnormal. That's not what we would expect in a leadership case.. in a leadership case the leader is one person and everybody else needs to say, OK, whatever you say, we will support. I don't think it's necessarily political leadership generally, it's the way our electoral system works that the political party, through the executive, appoints a president and also has the right to recall that person as president to say no, we're going to put somebody else there and that means that your ticket to be the president is dependent and very strongly influenced by the constituency and that's the top six, which I think limits your decision making power.

Participant PI5 further commented:

> So, I think political leadership is much more constrained when you have an electoral system where the president needs to constantly check with the party whether what they're doing is fine or not fine, and it's fine if the party itself internally agrees and has a shared agenda. But I think within the ANC we have not seen a shared agenda since about 2007. So, from 2007 already we started to see the splitting off and we saw it with COPE splitting off. We saw others splitting off and now we see past presidents that are very vocal in stating that this is not what's supposed to happen. They have been very vocal about the ANC not representing what it stands for in its manifesto, and not living its norms. So, I think in the party itself there's a lot of differences in what is the vision for the party and that's probably the spillover effect that you see right to the top of the political leadership."

When asked about the relationship between political leadership and decision-making, participant PA5 also added to the foregoing reactions, stating that because Ramaphosa is a political leader under South Africa's political system, he does not only represent himself but his party. Therefore, he is mandated to make certain decisions. These are what participant PA5 calls political decisions:

> "There is definitely a relationship between political leadership and decision-making because political leaders have to make political decisions. So, political decisions are the decisions that are taken by the governing party, meaning, even if I'm a bureaucrat, if the decision is taken, I may not have a say because I will be told that this decision comes from the top 6, that is the ANC's executive. They're the governing party and remember they must also give policy direction to the government on how they should do their things, remember, even the president, doesn't represent himself, he will also meet with the top 6 and get their views on a matter and then obviously they'll make up their minds on that matter. So, he will also carry a mandate, so sometimes when we talk about making a political decision, we're just saying, the decision that you make is a mandated decision, you were told to implement that particular decision so it's not like you got some advice

> from a scientist and then you went to implement, no, it was purely political ... As a political leader, Ramaphosa must also make political decisions, and those decisions are not administrative."

Participant PI3 asserted that if there were a boundary between decision-making and politics, there would not be so many existent societal challenges:

> "Uhh obviously the politics that we operate in if it is toxic politics, decision-making will be toxic, and it won't yield any results and then we are not gonna progress anywhere. But if then you've got politicians who understand their role of taking the country forward definitely then we will be very far as a country so for me, these decisions are made on the basis of uh Luthuli House (the building where the ANC's Headquarters is located) . Because if decisions were made to take the country forward or if there was a boundary between politics and decision making, we wouldn't be sitting with the issue of load-shedding today. Resources were made available, and political decisions derailed the whole project. So, it will always depend on the context. If the context you are operating in is a good political environment with the interest of the people and the country at heart, then definitely the interface between decision making and politics will always lead to progressive decision making."

Some respondents also brought in the challenge of cadre deployment and the lack of professionalisation within the public sector, which poses further challenges and toxifies the relationship between political leadership and decision-making.

Participant PI3 shared his perceptions of cadre deployment and how there is nothing wrong with this concept as long as it is meritocratic:

> "So, when politics overpowers the role of administrators then you are definitely going to have a lot of problems. Then you start to have issues of cadre deployment, putting people without the requisite skills in key leadership positions in important institutions. But again, there's nothing wrong with cadre deployment, I mean you go to China, and they use a cadre deployment policy, it is there, and it is very firm, but the reality is that their cadre deployment is based on merits."

Participant PI4 shared how the complex relationship between political leadership and decision-making in South Africa's political system requires the professionalisation of the public sector to rectify the politicisation of key public sector institutions potentially:

> "I think one of the big concerns I have is that a lot of our departments over the years have become susceptible to politicisation, starting with recruitment, right where appointments are made on the basis of political networks between politicians and administrators. And when you have that sort of scenario, if there are allegations of corruption, you're unlikely to have officials who are willing to discipline

> individuals in their networks. So perhaps the required response might not be better corruption legislation, it might be, you know, if we can truly professionalise the recruitment of officials, uuh to make it less partisan. It might be a more effective way of enforcing those codes of conduct."

Participant PA5 endorsed PI4's statement sharing the belief that there is a need to move away from cadre deployment towards the professionalisation of the public sector to move forward:

> "We need to move away from cadre development, and I am happy that there was a framework that was approved by cabinet uh a few weeks back on a national framework towards the professionalisation of the public sector. I think it will help us; it will move us forward in that way."

In this section, the respondents shared their perceptions of South Africa's political party system and the impact this kind of environment has on decision-making. The linkage between political leadership, and decision-making in the South African political party system necessitates a delicate balancing act between safeguarding party interests, navigating internal power struggles, and addressing the expectations of a diverse citizenry. Moreover, the practice of cadre deployment, aimed at advancing party agendas, introduces complexities related to impartiality and accountability within government institutions. According to the data collected, these dynamics profoundly impact consequence management by the president, as decisions regarding issues such as corruption and governance entail navigating political implications, power dynamics, and public perception in a multifaceted leadership landscape. The respondents further stressed the need to professionalise the public sector to improve the lack of primary service delivery and increase accountability.

4.4. Conclusion

This section presented the primary data captured through research tools which elicited responses from the research respondents. These engagements showed some similarities and differences in perceptions relating to political leadership and decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were also some personal recollections of this tumultuous period from the different respondents, thus strengthening the depth of the data collected. The following chapter will analyse the findings that emerged from the research interviews, the documents reviewed and the literature

that informed the study. The data will be analysed using thematic analysis to interpret meanings, identify gaps, and draw conclusions which will be expanded on in chapter six.

CHAPTER 5: ASSESSING PRESIDENT RAMAPHOSA'S LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN SOUTH AFRICA (2020-2021) THROUGH THE EYES OF ACADEMIC EXPERTS AND POLITICAL ACTORS

5.1. Introduction

The study explored the impact of political leadership and decision-making in times of crises drawing on the response undertaken by the Ramaphosa administration in the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus of this study was to understand the perceptions and expectations of the South African society on its political leadership, during a time that presented huge challenges to the livelihoods of the citizenry. A focus on political leadership and decision-making during this period, was crucial because existing literature points out that political leaders have a significant influence on how societies respond to and recover from crises.

This chapter focuses on discussing, analysing, and interpreting the research findings presented in chapter four. It is divided into four sections that cover the unpacking of political leadership in post-apartheid South Africa, including the debunking of societal expectations on political leaders during crises. The chapter also characterises Cyril Ramaphosa's political leadership and decision-making during crises. It provides an understanding of the perceptions of academic experts and political actors of crisis management and decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. Finally, the chapter explores the interplay between political leadership and decision-making in the South African political party system.

5.2. Discussion, Analysis, and Interpretation of Research Findings

Based on the research questions explored in this study, four subthemes emerged from the data. This section will discuss each of these subthemes in further detail. All of the subthemes that emerged from the data are related to the primary research question, as well as the subsequent research questions outlined in Chapter 1. The following topics and subthemes presented findings that addressed these research questions.

5.2.1 Unpacking the Characteristics, Prescripts and Understanding of Political Leadership in Post-Apartheid South Africa According to Political Actors and Academic Experts

The research participants shared their opinions, comprehension, and first-hand experiences of working alongside political figures. The respondents described political leadership as an act of service, a resource for improving society, and a means of prioritising the needs of the people. Based on these interactions, a political leader is defined as someone with empathy, who cares about the people they serve and acts in the population's best interests. Another definition of a political leader is an individual with foresight, a distinct strategic vision, and a goal for where they want to lead the country. These definitions of political leadership align with those provided by Northouse (2009) and Paige (1977), who argue that political leaders are responsible for making decisions that affect citizens' lives and shaping the trajectory of their society. A person is seen as a leader if they can provide direction and guidance. As Demirtas & Mustafa (2020) correctly noted, leadership refers to a process, but a leader is a person who carries out this process. Following these engagements, a leader is defined as someone who establishes a vision, inspires followers, gathers and provides resources, instils the notion that everyone has something to offer to achieve the common objective, and has the power to direct the course of events that produce results (Demirtas & Musata, 2020; Paige, 1977).

Influential political leaders are distinguished by their people-centeredness, trustworthiness, and ability to project a positive public image as ambassadors for their country. In addition, political leadership is distinguished from other forms of leadership by its societal mandate or social contract (Murawski, 2011). Political leadership is viewed as a mandated role, in which the leader is given a directive by the society they represent. In this context, the elected political leader is expected to represent the populace in a charitable and morally upright manner, while prioritising their interests (Yukl, 2009). However, in the South African political context, this mandate is not solely derived from society, but also from the political party, creating a dual command structure that can at times generate conflicting demands. This further exemplifies the intricacies associated with political leadership, particularly within a political party system in which the leader assumes a dual role as both the president of the political party and the head of state. According to Smith (2018), these intricacies can have significant implications on the leader's decision-making process and their

ability to effectively govern. It is noteworthy that respondents who are classified as academic experts emphasised the importance of competence, technical skills, management abilities, and strategic thinking as essential qualities for political leadership. Conversely, respondents under the political actor category focused more on the mandates, services, and strategic vision associated with political leadership.

The concept of charismatic leadership was frequently used to characterise political leadership, it was also used to describe several former leaders in post-apartheid South Africa. The definition of charismatic leadership in the literature includes having exceptional skills, a high sense of self-esteem, and the capacity to persuade others to make certain sacrifices (Bryman, 1992; Yukl, 2006). A charismatic leader uses his or her charisma to compel followers to go above and beyond the call of duty, especially in times of crisis. When traditional leadership and management tactics fail during times of crisis, people tend to look favourably upon a leader who appears to impact their surroundings. These people are viewed as the most powerful within a specific group (Demirtas & Mustafa, 2020). According to the research respondents, a charismatic leader is someone who is naturally born as a leader, someone who draws admiration and respect, someone who is authentic and naturally commands followership; they are the person from whom people seek guidance and direction. Significantly, former Presidents Nelson Mandela, Jacob Zuma, and Cyril Ramaphosa have all been described as charismatic political figures because of their impressive ability to garner continuous support regardless of performance.

5.2.2. Debunking Societal Expectations of Political Leaders During Crises

Political leaders are expected to take the initiative during a crisis, offer guidance, and provide crisis-resolution strategies. Given that people become frightened during tumultuous periods, leaders cannot act frightened; instead, they must remain composed and level-headed under pressure (Hart & Tindall, 2010). People require assurance that the issue will be resolved during this time, which is why the role of the head of state is enhanced. When political leaders are present and actively attempting to respond to and recover from the crisis, residents have faith in their leader's abilities because they need to believe that someone is in charge.

According to the research respondents, their expectations of President Ramaphosa and his administration during the COVID-19 pandemic included successfully handling information. They expected the Ramaphosa administration to be able to sort through ever-changing information and discern what was pertinent. Furthermore, they expected them to act quickly during this period, with consistent, competent, and moral leadership. Ramaphosa and his administration were required to maintain societal stability, be visible, and have some institutional response that offered defined principles and procedures for resolving the COVID-19 crisis. Communication was also one of the fundamental concepts respondents highlighted concerning what they expected from Ramaphosa and his administration amid the crisis. Boin & Hart, 2010 as well as Hart & Tindall, 2010, confirm that during tumultuous periods, political leaders must communicate eloquently, honestly, and effectively. They must communicate their decisions, actions, justifications for those decisions and activities, and information on how the crisis develops.

5.2.3. The Characterisation of Cyril Ramaphosa's Style of Leadership Before and During Crisis

Cyril Ramaphosa's political leadership during the COVID-19 crisis in South Africa showcased qualities of resonant, complexity, and participative elements (Neustadt, 1990; Northouse, 2007; Demirtas & Mustafa, 2020). Ramaphosa demonstrated resonant leadership by effectively addressing public anxieties and fostering a sense of cohesion among citizens. Furthermore, his approach acknowledged the intricate nature of the pandemic, prioritising adaptive strategies and evidence-based decision-making. Although some respondents argued that his leadership style leaned towards centralisation, he incorporated participative dimensions by actively engaging with diverse stakeholders and promoting individual accountability. This multidimensional leadership style aimed to cultivate trust, adapt to evolving circumstances, and effectively address the emotional and pragmatic complexities presented by the pandemic.

When respondents characterised political leadership, the incumbent President, Cyril Ramaphosa, was described as well-versed in legislation and always sought to align with the law. He has also been described contrarily as both decisive and indecisive. During the data collection process, some of the research respondents described President Ramaphosa as a people pleaser who does not want

to be disliked by any members of his political party, even though this is inevitable. In contrast to the ANC leadership status quo, Ramaphosa was publicly contradicted and disrespected by his cabinet ministers at some points during the COVID-19 pandemic and conceded. This took a stronger foothold within the decision-making structures he had set up within the government. Even then, he failed to reprimand these ministers, which has projected a vulnerable leadership image.

Additionally, he has yet to be able to hold ministers accused of corruption and crime to account; therefore, consequence management is almost non-existent under his leadership, even though he ran a presidential campaign on a transparency and anti-corruption ticket. He appears incapable of acting in a manner that displeases the masses within the governing party. The respondents further described Ramaphosa as a leader who wanted to unite the governing party, even if it was at the expense of his governance. Often, these people-pleasing characteristics come at the cost of being decisive and showing leadership of his political party. To the extent that it appears as though the ANC is leading their leader. Former leaders such as Mbeki appear to have led the party and the country but did not succumb to party pressures to a point where some respondents felt he neglected the people of Luthuli House (ANC Headquarters) is why he was recalled. Adversely, Jacob Zuma gave too much power and loyalty to Luthuli House and neglected the Union Buildings (The official seat of the South African government), which was also to his detriment because he, like Mbeki, was recalled from his presidency. These conclusions drawn by the research respondents are also considered by Calland & Sithole (2022) as some of the reasons that these former heads of state did not complete their full terms in office. It is also worth noting that Mbeki and Zuma had very high votes for the presidency nationally and within the ANC. However, Ramaphosa was elected into the presidency by minimal margins compared to the former leaders; Ramaphosa just made it over 50%. Notably, 40% of the research participants felt that this might be why he wants to please everyone in his party, even during such a precarious period in the country.

In light of the aforementioned lack of consequence management, it is important to consider the environment in which the president operates. In the South African political context, the interconnection between political leadership, decision-making processes, and the dominant party system, as exemplified by the African National Congress (ANC), highlights the intricate interplay between party interests and the collective will of the public. This intricate relationship necessitates

a nuanced balancing act between safeguarding party interests, navigating internal power dynamics, and addressing the varied expectations of a diverse citizenry. Moreover, the implementation of cadre deployment, which aims to advance party agendas, introduces complexities pertaining to impartiality and accountability within government institutions. These dynamics significantly influence the president's ability to manage consequences, as decisions pertaining to issues such as corruption and governance require deft navigation of political implications, power dynamics, and public perception within a multifaceted leadership landscape.

However, it is worth noting that his inability to act affects not only his image as a political leader but also his image as an African man leading an African nation. There is a universal expectation that African men are leaders and considered the "heads of the household". This was further confirmed by how the African male respondents spoke about Jacob Zuma. They may not have agreed with all his decisions and actions, but they expressed bounds of respect when they spoke about him. They described him as charismatic, charming, and persuasive. One of the participants went so far as to describe him as "ubaba wasekhaya" meaning man of the house. This demonstrates a high level of respect for him as a leader, regardless of his flaws. In the same breath, Mbeki was described as a leader under whom a person needed to be at their best; he commanded excellence and respect through his demeanour and style of leadership. Therefore, he was also highly respected, and even though Mbeki and Zuma were recalled from office, they still had a large support base. It is worth noting further that the respondent pool was dominated by male participants, therefore, this could be a view that is biased towards gender stereotypes from a predominantly male positionality.

One respondent mentioned that under Ramaphosa's leadership, there is no need to come up with a valid excuse for underperformance. He is willing to accept any explanation provided by key cabinet ministers. They will not be punished, so people are not pressured to meet expectations. A mere 30% of the respondents felt that Ramaphosa was a decisive leader. However, they felt that his decisiveness was only exhibited during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic, and this perception changed as the pandemic progressed. There was consensus amongst the respondents that he takes far too long to act if he does act at all, and that he was very slow in action. These perceptions are interesting because he was described as a steadfast, decisive and action-

orientated leader during his time as a union leader (Butler, 2019). The respondents also shared their perceptions of the president as a businessman who believes the market should flourish. They further expressed that perhaps it is not that he cannot act or decide; it may be that he wants to drive the privatisation of certain state-owned entities and create an environment where the private sector can grow the economy. The respondents added that his business acumen benefited the country when vaccine acquisition and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) procurement were challenging. He was able to lead the advocacy for access to the necessary medical supplies not only for South Africa but for the African region at large.

5.2.4. South Africa's COVID-19 Crisis Management under the Ramaphosa Administration: Progress or Regress?

Decision-making processes in South Africa are designed to be conducted through the Intergovernmental Relation structures (IGRs) at a national, provincial and local government level, as outlined in the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act 13 of 2005. These intergovernmental relation and policy coordination structures are depicted in figure 5.2.1 below:

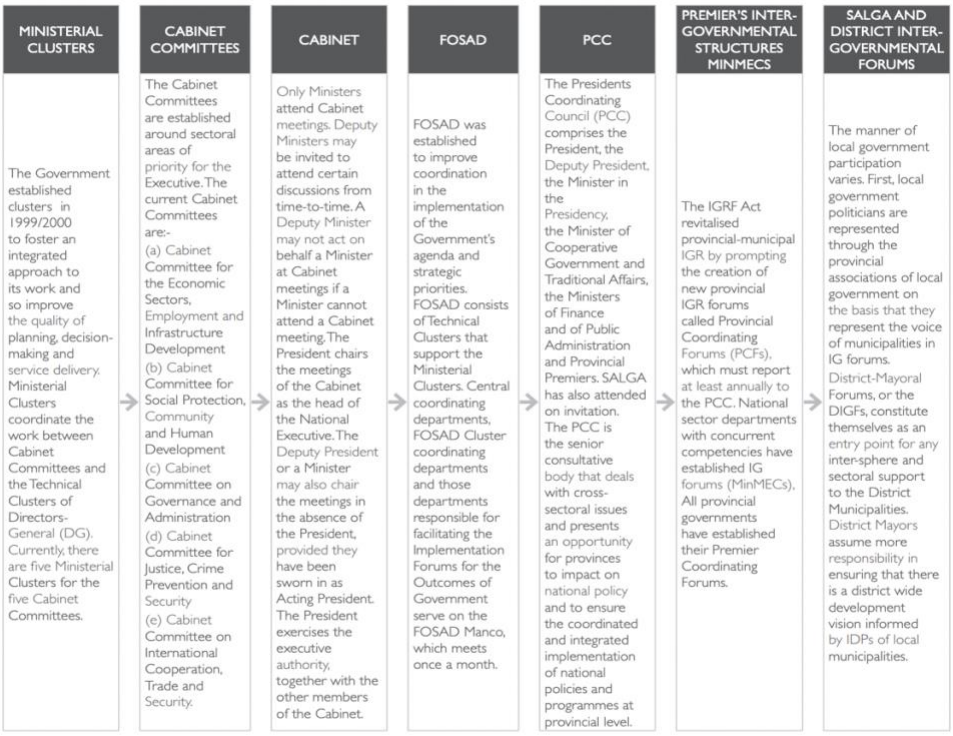

Figure 5.2.1: Policy Coordination and Inter-governmental Relations Structures (The Presidency, 2020).

At a national government level, when a decision needs to be made, it usually starts within a particular governmental department. From there, it is taken to FOSAD (the forum of Director Generals). After that, it is taken to Ministerial Clusters, which is the structure that coordinates work between Cabinet Committees and Technical Clusters of Director Generals. Thereafter, it is taken to Cabinet Committees, which represent various sectors such as the economic sector, the social protection sector, and more. After all that, the matter is then tabled to Cabinet, the highest decision-making structure within the government. This decision-making process is outlined in the process flow entitled Figure 5.2.2 below:

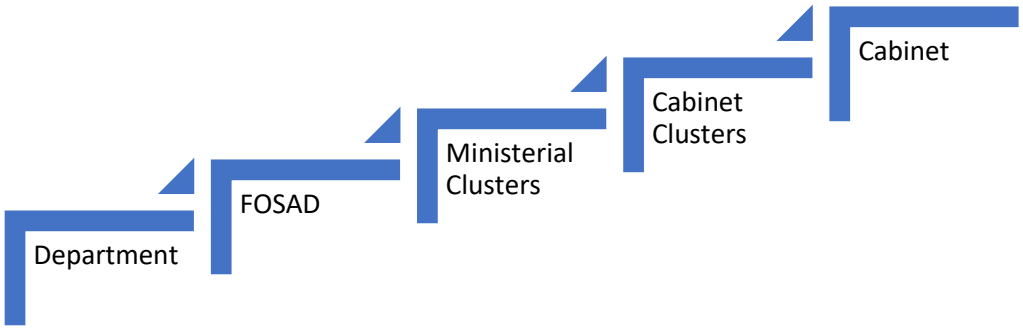

Figure 5.2.2: National Government Decision-Making Process Flow.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, decisions were tabled within the newly formed structures, namely the Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC), which included scientific experts and medical advisors, the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC), which included all of Cabinet, and the National Joints Operational Structure (NatJoints) which formed the technical backbone of the NCCC during this period. The Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002, amended Act 16 of 2015 guided decision-making during this period, and these decisions were implemented through the Command Centres across the different spheres of government as depicted in Figure 5.2.3 below:



Source: CoGTA, 2020a

Figure 5.2.3: National, Provincial and District Institutional Arrangements During COVID-19 (CoGTA, 2020).

Research participants shared that the traditional approach to decision-making often took a long time for political actors to make decisions, sometimes stretching several months or even years. This is due to the internal rules and regulations that control decision-making procedures within the cabinet, which take time. However, due to the operational nature of the NCCC, during the COVID-19 pandemic, decisions were made and implemented instantaneously, bypassing the usual bottlenecks and red tape. Regarding decision-making, some respondents felt that the processes followed during the pandemic were inclusive and streamlined. Other respondents shared discontent over the establishment and functioning of the NCCC. Notably, 45% of the respondents said such a structure was necessary for streamlining and coordinating the pandemic's response and that it aligned with the DMA. They praised the DMA's application by the administration and noted that it was consistent with the National State of Disaster proclamation. Thus they reckoned that the Act had been used in accordance with the demands of the threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic to South Africa's populace.

However, 55% of respondents pointed out that the NCCC was superfluous and confusing. Their displeasure was informed by the idea that it was an ambiguous structure as it seemed to be duplicating roles meant to be performed by existing cabinet ministers and their clusters. They also questioned the legality of the structure citing the South African Constitution Act 108 of 1996. More so, most participants pointed out that the government did not apply the Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002 appropriately, which created room for corruption and flaunting of crucial procurement restrictions. The DMA states in sections one and two that it is unnecessary to enact the legislation if there is already sufficient law to address a hazard (RSA, 2002). Only when there is no alternative legislation can it be utilised to address the calamity. In this sense, a disaster is a risk that has grown so large that the available resources can no longer handle it. Only when a disaster reaches the point where it exceeds people's capacity to cope is this response necessary.

The respondents expressed their concerns about using the DMA, considering that it was created in light of natural disasters and not pandemics. Therefore, it was an inappropriate piece of legislation to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. They felt that Ramaphosa and his administration could have better prepared for volatile periods by preparing various instruments to respond to different crises. After the HIV/AIDS epidemic and tuberculosis outbreaks, other participants discussed how legislation, such as the National Health Act, may have been changed to prepare for upcoming pandemics. Some respondents also discussed how not all role players were involved in decision-making, claiming that organisations like the NCCC and MAC favoured health professionals and excluded socio-economic role players. They received criticism for not having a sociological comprehension of the activities that are cultural and contextual to the nation. This relates to the high levels of poverty, lack of water and sanitation, informal settlements, and the inability to wash hands multiple times a day.

Moreover, due to their congested living arrangements, most South African communities needed help with social distancing (Nemutandi & Matsea, 2022). Therefore, some respondents felt that the blanket replication of decisions made in highly resourced countries in South Africa without considering context was outlandish.

Furthermore, respondents shared how it was difficult to discern who was steering the ship at some points in the pandemic's response. Was it Ramaphosa, or was it the Minister of Health or the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA)? People were perplexed by public discrepancies and the unsubstantiated restrictions implemented. Certain limitations were viewed as unnecessary and unjustified because they were poorly thought out. At one point, wearing sandals was prohibited without justification, and at other times, prohibitions against gatherings were applied inconsistently. Several respondents also believed that decisions were made carelessly and without doing risk assessments. Other participants thought this time was characterised by arbitrary and chaotic decision-making. Several respondents observed that this period's decision-making was lengthy and laborious because of excessively intricate administrative structures and numerous discussions. One respondent who was part of the decision-making structures during this period recalled how they worked rapidly to develop regulations. Due to the hurried turnaround times, decisions had to be made and implemented instantaneously, frequently at the cost of conducting extensive research. Academic scholars who have written about crisis management contend that during these turbulent periods, political leaders have to make difficult decisions rooted in reliable data and evidence, these leaders need to be agile and act rapidly (Ulmer, 2001; Jaques, 2012; Hart & Tindall, 2010; Boin & Hart, 2010; Krasteva, 2019).

Indeed, President Ramaphosa and his administration had tough decisions to make with speedy turnaround times in a country already struggling with a myriad of social issues. The respondents who were part of the decision-making structures during the pandemic shared their experiences of how President Ramaphosa and his administration worked tirelessly to respond to the pandemic. They recalled the late nights and early mornings spent finding evidence-based solutions to the pandemic and facing the risk of infection daily. They also recalled how intergovernmental relations were streamlined and well-functioning. As they shared their experiences, they glistened with pride, and in the same breath, they also shared their disappointment at how quickly things went back to "normal" after COVID-19 infections decreased. The efficiencies and collaborative efforts developed during the pandemic disintegrated, decision-making became slow and cumbersome, things went stagnant, and intergovernmental silos re-emerged.

5.2.5. The Nexus Between Political Leadership and Decision-Making in the South African Political Party System

Here the respondents shared their perceptions of the relationship between political leadership and decision-making. They discussed how political leaders' decisions are significantly influenced by the environment in which they operate. Respondents emphasised the interdependence of political leadership and decision-making. Because political leaders in South Africa are required to advance specific agendas by their political parties, the political party system significantly impacts their competencies as stated by Booysen (2009). Their political parties expect them to put the party first once in office, which is particularly clear within the ANC. Another illustration is that the National Executive Committee (NEC) must be consulted and agreed upon before the president approves a course of action. In other words, his decision-making is limited because he cannot decide independently. The president is held accountable and does not make impulsive judgements, which could also be seen as a benefit for democracy. However, the fact that this decision-making authority belongs to the same political party raises serious concerns because there is no impartiality or accountability, only political party loyalty. Once more, there is nothing wrong with allegiance to a party as long as it has a common objective that serves the populace's interests, as the ANC did during the liberation struggle. Nonetheless, there are internal struggles and differences in the ANC of the twenty-first century, and factionalism is pervasive and openly apparent (Sarakinsky, 2015). These divisions exhibit a chaotic organisation without a common goal or strategic direction.

Political leaders in South Africa have a dual accountability spectrum since the people choose the party, and the party selects the president. Under ANC directives, they are first responsible to the party and then to the nation. The question of cadre deployment was also brought up concerning South African politics. However, the cadres deployed to critical positions lack the necessary skills to fulfil the expected national mandate because the cadre deployment policy is based on personal and political relationships. Sadly, this comes at the expense of service delivery, which aggravates the country’s population. Notably, cadre deployment is not always bad, especially when it is based on merit. It became clear from the interactions with respondents that political leadership and

decision-making have a close relationship. Also, the person in charge influences whether this relationship is negative or positive.

5.3. Conclusion

The study found that political leaders should possess qualities such as charisma, servitude, empathy, persuasion, strategic vision, and foresight. The research also indicated that during the COVID-19 pandemic, President Ramaphosa displayed some of these crisis leadership traits, such as maintaining visibility, effective communication with the public, and incorporating the advice of medical experts while dealing with the pandemic systematically. However, he received criticism for his inconsistent, indecisive political leadership and for not holding his administration accountable. Additionally, the research participants disapproved of the president's failure to explain the reasoning behind certain decisions. Despite this, he was praised for his adept negotiation and networking skills, as well as his prioritisation of people's lives during the pandemic. The establishment of structures such as the NCCC aligned with the prescribed Disaster Management legislation and the Constitution of South Africa but received mixed reactions from the population. Overall, the study found a strong connection between political leadership, decision-making, and the impact of political leaders on their administrations' performance.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore perceptions of political leadership and decision-making during the COVID-19 crisis in South Africa. A qualitative exploratory case study methodology was employed to compare descriptions of political leadership provided by various academic experts and political actors to available literature in order to identify common themes. The findings suggest that political leaders need to possess a range of qualities, including charisma, servitude, empathy, persuasion, strategic vision, and foresight, as well as honesty, technocratic ability, trustworthiness, and a positive public image. During pandemics, political leaders are expected to be skilled in effectively managing people, thinking practically, taking control of the situation, being transparent in their communications, and communicating openly and frequently with the public. They should maintain a calm and composed demeanour to inspire confidence and respond to crises systematically.

The research findings of this study highlighted both strengths and weaknesses in President Ramaphosa's crisis leadership approach. Specifically, Ramaphosa demonstrated certain key qualities of effective crisis leadership, including maintaining high visibility and open communication channels with the public through his regular "family" meetings. These meetings served to instil a sense of calm and assurance among citizens during a time of great uncertainty. Additionally, he was praised for including medical professionals in his decision-making processes, thereby ensuring that his actions were informed by the latest developments and advice from experts. Furthermore, the president exhibited confidence in his administration's response to the pandemic in his public media appearances, by commending his cabinet ministers and their ministries for their hard work and dedication during this period. However, the research also identified areas where Ramaphosa's leadership fell short of expectations. For example, certain structures developed by his administration, such as the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC), were criticised for being confusing and duplicative of existing Cabinet Clusters. Additionally, Ramaphosa was characterized as being overly cautious and indecisive in his approach to the pandemic, which led to slow and cumbersome turnaround times in his decision-making. It is important to note, however, that the president's response to the pandemic was in line with prescribed legislation. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of his approach remains a subject of ongoing debate and analysis. Overall, while Ramaphosa's leadership demonstrated some strengths

during the COVID-19 pandemic, there were also areas where improvements could have been made to his crisis leadership approach.

In addition, the research respondents disapproved of the president's failure to explain why certain decisions were made. More critically, they criticised his lack of resolute leadership. While he began the year 2020 with strong, level-headed, and decisive leadership, later in 2021, during the latter part of the pandemic, he became less decisive and his leadership abilities were scrutinized. His cabinet ministers publicly overruled and disrespected him, and it was unclear where the locus of control lay. Furthermore, his health minister was implicated in a vast corruption scandal involving Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), yet the president imposed no visible consequences. Instead, he allowed the minister to resign politely while maintaining an acceptable public image.

The study revealed that the president and his administration made decisions during the pandemic consistent with the Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002, amended Act 16 of 2015 and the South African Constitution Act 108 of 1996. These pieces of legislation influenced a variety of actions made during this period. Participants thought that, on the one hand, the legislation above aided in organising and coordinating the pandemic response and provided direction for creating institutions like the NCCC and Ministerial Advisory Council (MAC). On the other hand, because of the constant discussions within these structures, decision-making was also seen as slow and complicated.

Regarding the nexus between political leadership and decision-making, it has been found that a strong relationship exists between these two concepts, as substantiated with examples of how they apply to the South African political environment. Through research engagements, it has been confirmed that political leaders significantly impact the performance of their administrations. They are accountable for their administration's delivery of essential services and overall performance. Based on research findings, it appears that President Ramaphosa does not hold his administration to account. Officials in critical positions are not afraid to underperform because they know there is a lack of consequence management in this administration. They can get away with offering weak justifications, and the President does not challenge them. As a result, service delivery has declined under his leadership, and he appears to have difficulty holding important ministries accountable.

He also seems powerless to take action against the ANC. This was made clear during the pandemic, when the president allowed his ministers to override him and go unchallenged. Consequently, it can be said that in a party system like the one in South Africa, the connection between political leadership and decision-making is even more prominent.

6.1. Reflections on President Cyril Ramaphosa's Political Leadership During Crises

The results of this study led to the characterisation of Ramaphosa as a cautious individual who considers things carefully before acting. He has been characterised as a process man who gives the law significant thought and bases his choices on the legislation. He is also portrayed as a people-pleaser who, at the expense of successfully running the nation, is attempting to unify the divided and fragmented governing party. He is not seen as the party's leader but as someone led by the ANC. He is also regarded as a businessman who supports expanding the market economy. The *thuma mina* (which means "send me" in local parlance) leader brought high expectations and a feeling of hope when he assumed office. The people of South Africa were optimistic when he took office, as this was after the chaos of corruption wrought by his predecessor. Ramaphosa entered office with the vision and promise of a new dawn for South Africa. However, as the *Rama-phoria* (Ramaphosa euphoria) subsided, the people were forcefully awakened to the glaring decline in their civilisation during the previous few years.

At the time of writing, the nation was going through a serious energy crisis (also known as load-shedding), the worst one ever since it was implemented in 2007. In 2023, the country has continuously undergone various stages of load-shedding, which is a period of widespread rolling blackouts lasting eight or more hours on average every day. In addition, because of the loss of business caused by this load-shedding, the already high unemployment rate has kept rising. Whereas 120 business liquidations were reported in January 2022, 81 were reported in January 2023. These figures demonstrate that the energy crisis led to more than 200 enterprise liquidations in a year. The figures are also anticipated to be higher, given that the banking, insurance, real estate, trade, catering, business services, and lodging sectors are included in these liquidation statistics. They do not consider small firms in other industries, townships, or the informal economy. As it stands, South Africa's unemployment rate sits at 32.7%, while the youth

unemployment rate stands at 66.5% (Statistics South Africa [Stats SA], 2022). The diminishing Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and lack of economic growth are reflected in the unemployment rate. The president rightly asserts that no society can expect to flourish or thrive when most young people are unemployed. South Africa has a working-age population of 40 million people, and over 50% comprises the youth who are vastly unemployed.

Furthermore, although the president‘s statement is true, the citizens need more than words to regain confidence in his leadership. They need jobs, a growing economy, electricity, and a constant water supply, which has also become scarce. People need safe roads without potholes and immediate service delivery to increase their standard of living to meet the country's constantly increasing cost of living.

6.2. Reflections on the Conceptual Framework as it Applied to the Study

The theoretical framework is important because it provides a lens through which the researcher can view, analyze, and interpret the research results. For this research, the central theoretical frameworks were crisis leadership and decision-making theory. These frameworks provided an understanding of how leaders should respond to crises. By using these frameworks, the researcher examined President Ramaphosa's leadership and decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic as a case study and drew pertinent conclusions about political leadership during crises. Moreover, the theoretical framework enables identification of gaps in knowledge and informs future research. In this case, the study highlighted the need for further research on political leadership during crises and suggested areas where future research could be conducted. By reflecting on the theoretical framework, the researcher made recommendations as outlined in section 6.4 below.

6.3. Recommendations for Future Pandemics

The research respondents recommended better institutional arrangements for future crises starting with legislative guidelines. They proclaimed that, for pandemics, the National Health Act needs to be amended and structured in a way that responds to health crises. In contrast, the health minister becomes the primary implementor of the response measures instead of CoGTA and the DMA,

because the DMA was created for natural disasters and warfare, not pandemics. Also, based on the pivotal role played by NGOs and social service professionals, they need to be more involved in crisis response measures.

Additionally, cadre deployment must be based on merit or not used at all. The professionalisation of the public sector is of critical importance so that competent people are in relevant positions when crises emerge. Therefore, the recently approved Professionalisation of the Public Sector Framework needs to be implemented accordingly.

Lastly, better preparation is necessary for the next crisis, political leaders should be clear and demonstrate an ability to initiate the pandemic response. This requires improvement in the healthcare sector, healthcare facilities need to be improved, and human resource capacity should be increased. Additionally, healthcare resources must be intact before a pandemic emerges. Even though political leaders may not know when or what the next pandemic will be, they stand better chances of effectively responding to it if they have a well-functioning healthcare system.

6.4. Recommendations for Future Research

This research study was insightful in demonstrating the complexity of political leadership. It demonstrates numerous perceptions, opinions and experiences concerning politics and decision-making, especially during crises. The study's research topic, however, should be further explored with the additional knowledge and understanding of the South African political party system and existent decision-making processes. It would be interesting to delve deeper into the relationship between political leadership and decision-making as it relates to national governance. Perhaps from a political and administrative roles perspective, with further detail on how these functions are carried out during tumultuous periods.

It would also be intriguing to explore the National Health Act and its regulations, along with suggested amendments on how it could be tailored to respond to future health pandemics. This legislation could have been an acceptable alternative to the Disaster Management Act. Therefore,

it would be interesting to gather insights on this statute and its potential implementation for future pandemics.

6.5. Conclusion

This research study explored the various academic experts and political actors' perceptions of political leadership and decision-making processes that President Ramaphosa and his Administration undertook during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021). The study used qualitative and exploratory case study methodology to carry out this task. Through this exploration, the study came to the following conclusions:

During pandemics, political leaders must exhibit control over their societies by thinking critically and communicating effectively with their population, while also demonstrating a composed and measured demeanour to inspire confidence. Additionally, they must respond to crises in a methodical manner. This study found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, President Ramaphosa displayed some of the aforementioned crisis leadership traits, although he fell short in some areas. Specifically, his "family" gatherings reassured residents and provided them with the comfort and peace of mind they needed. For this reason, he was applauded for maintaining visibility and open lines of communication. Moreover, he was commended for incorporating medical experts' advice, who continually provided vital data as the pandemic progressed, into his decision-making processes. Throughout his public media appearances, he exuded confidence in his administration's response to the pandemic, and it was found that the president and his administration dealt with the pandemic systematically.

The study found that the establishment of structures such as the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC) was in accordance with both the Disaster Management legislation and the Constitution of South Africa. However, this move elicited mixed reactions from the populace, with some perceiving the decision-making and response measures guided by this legislation as being methodical, coordinated, and systematic, while others viewed the same decisions as being excessively strict, cumbersome, and disorderly. Additionally, the findings of this research indicate

that alternative legislative frameworks, such as the National Health Act, might have been better suited for a public health emergency of this nature.

President Ramaphosa received criticism for his perceived lack of consistently resolute and decisive political leadership during a critical period for the nation. On one hand, he was scrutinized for failing to hold his administration accountable and initiate consequence management without bias when it was most needed. Conversely, he was commended for his adept negotiation and networking skills, which had positive impacts on South Africa and the African continent's COVID-19 vaccine acquisition efforts. Additionally, he was lauded for his initial swift and decisive decision-making, which prioritised the preservation of human life during a turbulent period marked by uncertainty and volatility.

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8. ANNEXURES

8.1. Annexure 1: Participant Information Sheet

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Minenhle Matela I am a Master of Management student in the School of Governance at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Ruth Murambadoro, I am conducting a research study about political leadership and decision-making in times of crisis. The study title is Political Leadership and Decision Making in Times of Crises: A Case of the Ramaphosa Administration 2020-2021.

I am inviting you to take part in a once-off interview, that will take place virtually either on Microsoft teams or Zoom, whichever platform you prefer, at a time you prefer, if you would prefer a telephonic interview, I will be happy to oblige. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about one hour (60 minutes) and with your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. This data will be stored on a password-protected cloud drive (iCloud/ One Drive) and will be deleted after five years, only the researcher will have access to the data. During the research activity, I will need to ask for some personal information about you, including your role and experience in your field. The interview will be confidential and anonymous, and although all efforts will be made to protect your identity, there may be a possibility that you may be identifiable. Please note that when I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decided not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study. The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life.

This research study will be written up as a research report, if you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,
Minenhle Matela

Researcher:
Name: Minenhle Matela **Email:** 2515556@students.wits.ac.za **Cell:** 0731131205

Supervisor:
Name: Dr. Ruth Murambadoro **Email:** rmurah21@yorku.ca

8.2. Annexure 2: Consent Form

Project Title: Political Leadership and Decision Making in Times of Crises: A Case of the Ramaphosa Administration 2020-2021

Name of Researcher: Minenhle Matela

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YESNO	
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study	YESNO	
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report	YESNO	
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report)	YESNO	
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on	YESNO	

…… (signature)
…… (name of participant)
…… (date)

…… (signature)
…… (name of researcher)
…… (date)

8.3. Annexure 3: Interview Guide

Political Actor Guide
1. What are the expectations that fall upon political leaders when a country is faced with a crisis? 2. What kind of leadership did the President exhibit during the COVID-19 crisis (2020-2021)? 3. In the South African context, what decision-making processes do political leaders have to follow on a day-to-day basis? In addition, do these processes differ in times of crisis? 4. What pieces of legislation are relevant when making decisions that respond to crises in South Africa? 5. What decision-making practices did President Ramaphosa use during the Covid-19 crisis? 6. Does being a political leader have any effect on decision-making? If so, what effect does it have?

Public Intellectual Participant Guide
1. Can you please tell me a bit about yourself and your current role, or the different roles you currently assume? 2. You are a leader in different spaces in your life, what kind of characteristics make up a leader? 3. What are the expectations that fall upon political leaders when a country is faced with a crisis? 4. How would you describe President Ramaphosa's leadership between 2020 and 2021? 5. In your view, how did decision-making unfold during the COVID-19 crisis? 6. Do you think the decision-making processes followed by the president were in line with any legislation? If so, which legislation? 7. Do you think there is any relationship between political leadership and decision-making? If so, how do these two relate?

8.4. Annexure 4: Ethics Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Matela

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H22/06/22**
PROJECT TITLE	Political Leadership and Decision Making in Times of Crises: A Case of the Ramaphosa Administration 2020-2021
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Miss M Matela
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Wits School of Governance/
DATE CONSIDERED	24 June 2022
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Risk Level: Minimal
EXPIRY DATE	31 July 2025

DATE 23 August 2022 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Professor J Watermeyer)

cc: Supervisor : Professor R Murambadoro

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.**

_____ _____/_____/_____
Signature **Date**

8.5. Annexure 5: Permission Letter Office of the Presidency

THE PRESIDENCY
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Ms Minenhle Matela.
University of the Witwatersrand
2 St. Davids Place
Parktown
Johannesburg
2050

Dear Ms Matela

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE PRESIDENCY AS A REQUIREMENT FOR MASTERS' DEGREE

This letter serves to acknowledge receiving your letter requesting permission to conduct research in The Presidency under the title:

"Political leadership and decision-making processes in times of crisis"

It is with pleasure to inform you that permission has been granted for you to conduct a research study in The Presidency. The Presidency has taken cognisance of the fact that the study entails the collection of information from The Presidency, Presidency officials and participants from communities through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, observation participation and other fora of the office.

This approval grants you permission to approach any employee of the Presidency to participate in the research study. However, the participation of The Presidency employees should be voluntary, with the option to decline participating if they deem it necessary to do so.

In conducting your research study in The Presidency, you must comply with the following terms and conditions:

- Submit proof of registration and letter signed by the academic supervisor to The Presidency annually;
- Employees of The Presidency should not be subjected to any risks and their names and responses to your research questionnaire should remain confidential and anonymous;

8.6. Annexure 6: Permission Letter COJ

City of Johannesburg
Department of Corporate & Shared Services
Office of the Group Head: Group Human Capital Management

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www.joburg.org.za

18 August 2022

Minenhle Matela.
Master's in Management
University of the Witwatersrand

Ref: Permission to conduct research study

This letter serves to acknowledge receiving the letter requesting permission to conduct research in the City of Johannesburg under the title:
"Political Leadership and Decision-Making: A Case of the Ramaphosa Administration 2020-2021"
I am aware that the study entails the collection of information from the City, city officials and participants from communities through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, observation participation and other fora of the city.

The research study is promoted by the City of Johannesburg because it helps both students and practitioners to gain an understanding of the sociology of the City, as it evolves and contributes towards the building of developmental local government.

I, Tersia Johanna Groenewald, as delegated authority of the City of Johannesburg Municipality (the City), hereby give permission to the primary researcher, Minenhle Matela. The following:

To collect and publish information about the City is publically not available, for the research project titled:
"Political Leadership and Decision-Making: A Case of the Ramaphosa Administration 2020-2021"

- This authorisation is based on mutual understanding that the City's name can be revealed in her/his project; and
- The researcher contacts the relevant department for arrangements pertaining to the research; and
- The information provided by the employees or any other means (such as company's archived documents or reports) of the City is purely for academic purposes and cannot be used for any other purpose.

Please note that on completion of the study, a copy of the research report should be submitted to the City of Johannesburg in honour of your commitment.

I urge you to present this letter of permission whenever you come across officials and participants in the research study. I thank you for choosing the City of Johannesburg to conduct the study.

Kind Regards

