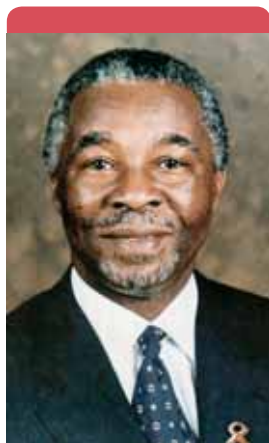


The South African Presidential Race

Are we seeing a careful manipulation of reports to ensure a sensational run-up?



Thabo Mbeki



2007 marks an important watershed in South African politics: It is the first year in South Africa's new democratic history that leadership of the African National Congress (ANC)—also the majority political party in South Africa with nearly 70% representation in parliament—is heavily contested. And with it, the presidency of the state must also be considered, though it should be stated that the elected ANC president will not necessarily become president of the state. Currently nothing prohibits an ANC president from running for a third term as president of the party, but the constitution of the country clearly prohibits the state president from doing the same. It is within this context that the succession battle for the ANC presidency must be carefully weighed against the perceptions that may be created in the media.

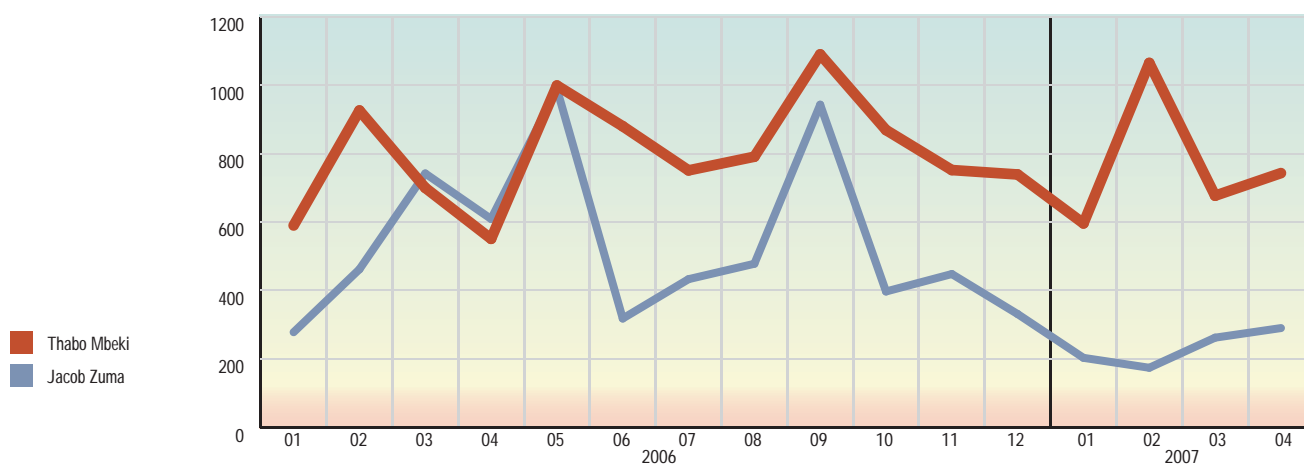
Before Tokyo Sexwale's abrupt announcement on BBC's Hard Talk that he will run for the ANC presidency in June, the main contenders as portrayed by the media were Jacob Zuma, former deputy state president and current ANC deputy president, and Thabo Mbeki, the current state president and also president of the party. Jacob Zuma, who was fired from his state office in 2006 amidst bribery allegations linked to the French company Thint and subsequently charged with the rape of a family friend but later acquitted, has been clear about his candidacy. Thabo Mbeki, however, has not officially stated that he will be available for a third term as ANC president, though it

is said that some in the party have approached him on the issue. The following graphs describe the candidates' position in the media thus far (**graph 1 & 2**):

1) For a large part of 2006, volumes of coverage on Jacob Zuma were on par with those of the country's most powerful figure, peaking in May during his rape trial. The volumes of coverage he received increased again in September, when his advisor Shabir Shaik was found guilty on charges of fraud and corruption. Following these events, his presence in the media declined sharply at a time when coverage on Thabo Mbeki was again on the increase. In February, at the time of the President's annual State of the Nation address, the media openly attacked Mbeki for neglecting burning issues such as crime and HIV/Aids, and over the government's quiet diplomacy approach to Zimbabwe. **Graph 2** rates Mbeki's and Zuma's performances in the media:

2) The overall decline in Mbeki's ratings after the State of the Nation address can also be attributed to allegations of increasing centralisation of power in government, espoused by the ANC's allies Cosatu and the SACP. His aloof and intellectual leadership style has also not won him favour with media or the masses. It may appear that Zuma gained some ground against Mbeki in this period of heightened criticism, but this increase in ratings could simply be attributed to his remaining largely out of the public eye. The moment volumes on him increase, as they did in March 2007, his ratings drop again. From the

1) Volume of coverage on Mbeki & Zuma



Number of citations
Basis: 20,076 citations in 30 opinion-leading South African media
Timeframe: 01/2006 - 04/2007

above evidence, a clear leader, or at a least media favourite, appears not to have emerged.

Professor Adam Habib, Executive Director of the Human Sciences Research Council's Democracy and Governance Research Program reminds us that "any succession is difficult, whether it is the South African race for the ANC presidency or the transfer of power from Tony Blair to Gordon Brown. It is nothing new, and for the most part, the issues that are being debated now in the ANC have always been there.

A leader's approach to the nature of development in South Africa has always been at the heart of any leadership battle in the ANC. How to better service delivery, how to reduce poverty while providing strong business conditions, how to sustain the emergence of a black middle class, these are the issues that the ANC is tackling in-house, and it is on the basis of them that leaders are eventually elected."

To this end, lobbying delegates with voting power at the December ANC National Executive Committee (NEC) elections—Mbeki's tactic—appears critical, while the benefits of a strategy that lobbies grassroots general election voters—a tactic Zuma appears to be pursuing—are not immediately evident.

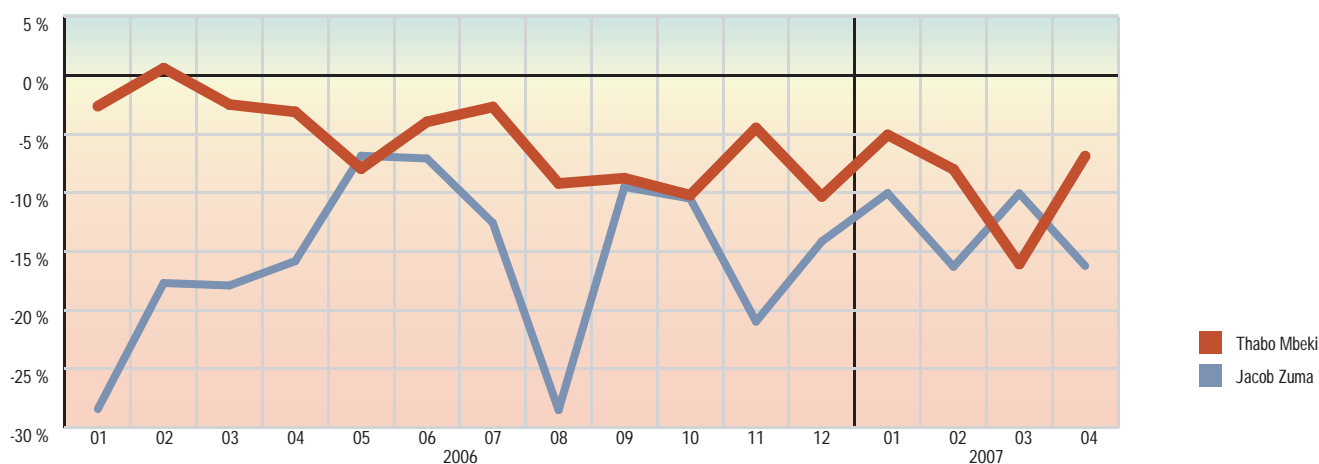
Personalities may play a large role in who eventually wins this race for the hearts of ANC voters. The **Mail & Guardian** characterises the battle between Mbeki and Zuma as a match between the wily and the warm: Mbeki is discretely lobbying for the interests of an intellectual fraternity known as the Mbeki camp, while Zuma has come out fighting with

a warm populist approach, which marks him as a friend of the people when media often depict Mbeki as cold and distant. Both candidates have elements that weigh for and against them. Says Professor Habib: "Zuma has immense support amongst grassroots voters, especially for his role in negotiating an end to the bloody battles between the United Democratic Front and Inkatha in the run-up to South Africa's first general elections; he has strong allies in the ANC Youth League, the trade unions, the SACP; the fact that he is a Zulu with widespread support amongst various ethnic groups puts to bed the debate that Zulus will vote for Zuma and Xhosas will vote for Mbeki. What also stands in his good stead is that so far he is simply the strongest alternative to Mbeki for ANC members who are disgruntled with the president's leadership style and propensity for centralising power.

But in the face of the ANC's long history of selecting leaders with a shining reputation (e.g. Albert Luthuli, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela) Zuma's greatest and most important challenge is his public image. It has been sullied by the conviction of his advisor Shabir Shaik, his own rape trial, and the charges he may face for corruption, if the National Prosecution Authority chooses to take that avenue closer to the December NEC elections."

Thabo Mbeki is widely lauded in the media for his macro-economic policies and international relations initiatives, but counting heavily against his re-election is the party's caution about a third term, which is echoed by its allies in Cosatu and the SACP.

2) Rating of Mbeki & Zuma



Share of all citations
Basis: 20,076 citations in 30 opinion-leading South African media
Timeframe: 01/2006 - 04/2007

“The ANC does not like to have two centres of power, which is what a third-term re-election will eventually create: a state president who is matched by the president of the ANC. There is caution about Mbeki maintaining control of the country’s political agenda, as can be seen in Namibia.”

With two centres of power on the horizon in the battle for succession between Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma, a niche has been created for compromise candidates who can garner significant support from both camps. It is here that strong speculation periodically appears in the media.

Compromise candidates and their reception

Tokyo Sexwale, former inmate of Robben Island, close ally of Nelson Mandela, Premier of Gauteng until 1998, successful businessman, and Apprentice television show host, first emerged as a possible compromise candidate along with Cyril Ramaphosa in June last year. Whereas Sexwale left the ANC NEC in 1999 to focus on business over and above politics, Ramaphosa, a very successful businessman himself, has remained on the ANC NEC since leaving politics in the nineties. He has thus maintained a strong political presence, whereas some critics of Sexwale feel he has lost touch with the ANC. Other possible candidates that were initially mentioned were ANC secretary general Kgalema Motlanthe, and Joel Neshitenzhe, the government spokesperson and a man accepted by many as Thabo Mbeki’s very influential right-hand man. The graph below depicts the media’s favourites

as hot topics for debate, namely Cyril Ramaphosa and Tokyo Sexwale.

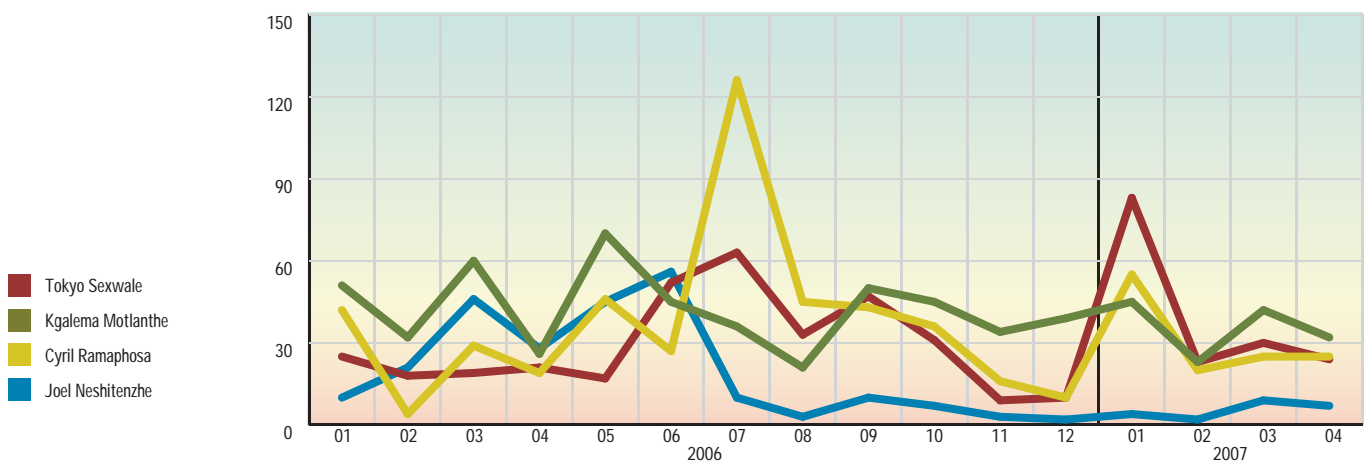
Though both candidates stated that they will not run when speculation surfaced in July last year, Tokyo Sexwale volunteered himself as a candidate in what is perceived as a bold and uncharacteristically independent statement for an ANC member, when he first made it clear on **BBC**’s Hard Talk that he was available for the ANC’s presidency.

So far it appears that his strategy is to create credibility in the media, before tackling caution within the ANC: he engages actively with the media, much like Zuma, and in June he was prevalent at the World Economic Forum Summit in Cape Town and also spoke to the Arab-African Initiative for the United Nations Development Goals in Cairo. But he also faces numerous challenges. “Tokyo Sexwale is appealing as a compromise figure because he is an independent figure, unaligned with the Mbeki or Zuma camps.

“He is also very popular with the business fraternity,” says Professor Habib. “But his disadvantage is that he is perhaps too ostentatious for a reserved party like the ANC. And though his reputation has stayed relatively clean compared to Jacob Zuma, his name was implicated in last year’s oil for food scandal, though nothing ever came of that allegation. Compared to Ramaphosa, there is a perception within the ANC that he has not been in touch with the realities of a dynamic party.”

Though Cyril Ramaphosa has not yet changed his initial statement that he will not run for the ANC

3) Volume of coverage on other candidates



Number of reports
Basis 1,987 reports in 30 opinion-leading South African media
Timeframe: 01/2006 - 04/2007

presidency, speculation still abounds. With this in mind, the two candidates, Sexwale and Ramaphosa are very similar in their profiles, especially when it comes to appealing to business. How, then, are they performing in South Africa's leading financials, in terms of garnering media presence?

Tokyo Sexwale was already the most talked-about candidate in the first quarter of 2007—and his announcement to run for the ANC presidency is sure to further increase the lead he has in terms of garnering media attention. The question is thus whether he can maintain this media interest all the way to the December election, and effectively use it to increase his reputation. Can his early emergence aid him, or will it weigh against him?

Professor Habib feels that it may have been too early for him to announce his candidacy. "A compromise candidate would need the blessing of both the Mbeki and Zuma camps in order to be successful at the NEC elections, and with an early announcement Sexwale may have positioned himself as Zuma's direct contender, which may cost him dearly.

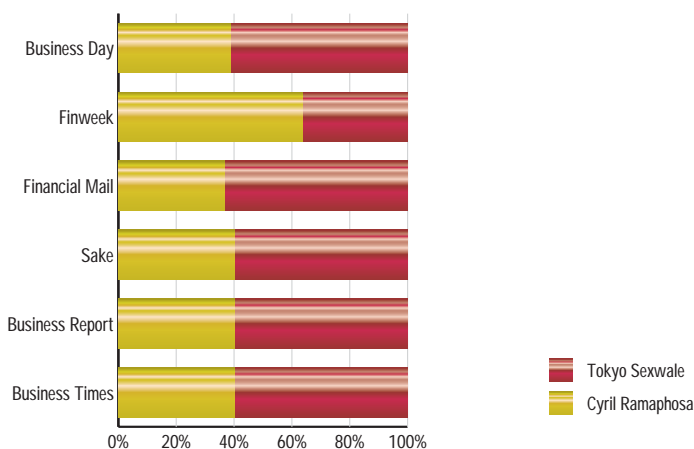
sident of South Africa. "Though this would no doubt make some in the business sector happy, the truth is that it would have very serious ramifications for the country. All sorts of uncomfortable questions will abound both locally and internationally if the constitution is re-written by the ANC for his benefit."

Mbeki's denial that he will run for a third term as president of the state is not a guarantee that he will step down; instead, notes Professor Habib, one should look at his personality for an answer to this question. A re-writing of the constitution for a third-term at the helm of the country does not speak to his personality. Thabo Mbeki is a nationalist of old. It is of great concern to him to prove to the West that Africans can be both modern and African; that they can embrace the values entrenched in democracy. To rewrite the constitution and to have himself re-elected would go against all the ideals he has espoused as an African statesman. (kd/rk)

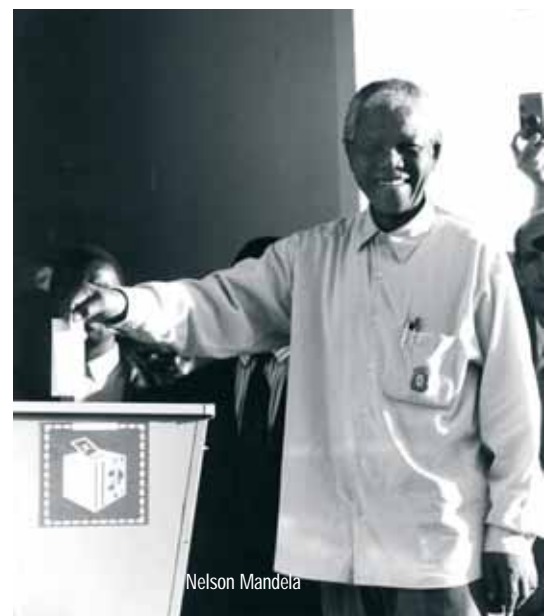
Presidency of ANC and the South African State

Though some confusion has been bred about the difference between the presidencies of the ANC and the country in the media, particularly by the DA, it appears that political insiders do not consider a third-term state presidency for Thabo Mbeki an issue. Professor Habib notes that Mbeki has never shown any inclination to secure himself a third term as the Pre-

4) Business Media 2007



Share of all articles on Sexwale and Ramaphosa
Basis 102 articles in 6 South African media
Timeframe: 01 - 04/2007



Nelson Mandela