

Media Headline Battles: Ideological Framing of Ibrahim Traoré's African Sovereignty Narrative

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Abstract

This study examined how the media portrayed Ibrahim Traoré's narrative on African sovereignty through a selection of headlines. Utilising a qualitative research approach, the study applied Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) alongside Framing Theory as complementary frameworks. The data consisted of carefully selected headlines from African and international media published between September 2022 and June 2026. A documentary analysis approach was used to collect the data, while Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis model guided the interpretation of word choices, thematic structures, and the ideological meanings embedded in the headlines. The findings revealed that African media predominantly depicted Traoré as a Pan-African leader committed to sovereignty, economic independence, and regional cooperation, whereas many international outlets emphasised narratives related to military governance, democratic legitimacy, and regional security. Furthermore, the study highlighted that the choice of words, thematic emphasis, and framing techniques were crucial in shaping competing political narratives about African sovereignty. These results resonate with the principles of Framing Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, underscoring that media headlines act as powerful ideological tools rather than just neutral summaries of political events. The study concludes that media headlines play a significant role in shaping public perceptions of political leadership and sovereignty in Africa. It recommends a well-rounded strategy for creating headlines, a dedication to enhancing media ethics, an increase in media literacy, and a call for more comparative studies on how ideological framing manifests in African political communication.

Keywords: Media Headlines, Ideological Framing, Ibrahim Traoré, African Sovereignty, Critical Discourse Analysis

INTRODUCTION

The news headline is one of the most influential elements of journalistic discourse, acting as the first point of contact between readers and news stories. Headlines do more than just provide a summary; they frame issues, highlight particular perspectives, and shape how audiences view political figures and public issues. Through their choices in language, emphasis, omission, and thematic structure, headlines construct social realities that can sway public opinion. Framing theorists argue that journalists and media outlets selectively highlight certain aspects of reality, guiding interpretations, evaluations, and solutions to societal challenges (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974). Consequently, headlines have become ideological battlegrounds where competing political interests and narratives are negotiated.

The subject of media framing has attracted considerable academic attention, as news reporting is rarely ideologically neutral. The selection of words, metaphors, labels, and sources often mirrors institutional values, editorial positions, and broader political agendas. In the context of political communication, ideological framing refers to how media organisations portray political figures or events in ways that support specific ideological viewpoints while marginalising alternative perspectives. This framing can depict leaders as reformers, revolutionaries, dictators, populists, or liberators, depending on the political biases of the news outlet and its intended audience (Entman, 1993).

Research consistently shows that the way media frames issues can significantly shape public perception, influence the legitimacy of political systems, and steer debates around policies in different societies. This battle over media narratives is particularly evident in African political reporting, where the shadows of colonialism, neo-colonialism, foreign intervention, and the quest for political autonomy still affect how journalists depict events. African leaders advocating for economic independence, resource nationalism, or resisting external influence often find themselves viewed through contrasting ideological lenses in both local and international media. Some news outlets emphasise themes like democratic governance, constitutionalism, and human rights, while others spotlight anti-imperialism, national sovereignty, and Pan-African unity. These differing perspectives illustrate that news production goes beyond merely presenting facts; it's also a stage for competing ideological beliefs to be expressed and validated.

The emergence of Captain Ibrahim Traoré as Burkina Faso's transitional leader in September 2022 has ignited lively debates among scholars and media regarding African sovereignty, governance, and international relations. Following his rise to power, Traoré rolled out policies aimed at boosting national control over vital resources, reducing dependence on former colonial powers, encouraging regional cooperation through the Alliance of Sahel States, and advocating for a Pan-African vision of political and economic self-determination. Many Africans have rallied behind these initiatives, seeing them as vital steps toward reclaiming national dignity and sovereignty. However, these policies have also drawn criticism from those who question their democratic legitimacy, governance implications, and potential effects on human rights. The diverse portrayals of Ibrahim Traoré in both African and international media underscore the significant role that ideological framing plays in contemporary journalism.

Headlines from various Western media outlets often spotlight themes like military rule, authoritarianism, insecurity, and democratic decline. On the flip side, many African alternative and Pan-African media emphasise anti-imperialism, sovereignty, self-reliance, and resistance to foreign influence. This clash in headline narratives illustrates how the same political events can be interpreted through vastly different ideological lenses, which ultimately shapes both local and global views of Traoré's leadership. Rather than simply providing neutral summaries, headlines serve as dynamic platforms where legitimacy, authority, and political identity are continuously negotiated.

Recent research into media coverage of Traoré reveals that ideological framing extends beyond basic

reporting, diving into broader struggles over legitimacy and informational sovereignty. Scholars have noted that the choice of words, thematic emphasis, and narrative styles can either bolster or undermine political figures, depending on the ideological leanings of the media outlet. These findings highlight the crucial role media discourse plays in shaping political realities, particularly in post-colonial African contexts where sovereignty remains a hot topic.

While there's an increasing academic interest in media framing, there has been relatively little empirical focus on how the ideological framing of Ibrahim Traoré's narrative of African sovereignty is reflected in newspaper headlines. Most existing research has centered on political transitions, security concerns, or broader media portrayals of African conflicts, often neglecting the construction of headlines as a unique area for ideological analysis. However, headlines hold a distinct persuasive power since they are often the only part of a news article that audiences engage with, making them essential for shaping initial perceptions and influencing subsequent interpretations.

With this context in mind, this study sets out to investigate the media's *Headline Battles: The Ideological Framing of Ibrahim Traoré's African Sovereignty Narrative*. The goal is to examine how different media organisations shape competing ideological narratives through their choice of headlines, word selection, and framing techniques. By diving into these headline constructions, the research aims to contribute to the academic conversation surrounding media framing, political communication, and African journalism, while also illuminating the complex relationship between media discourse, ideology, and the ongoing pursuit of African sovereignty.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The media play a vital role in shaping public perceptions of political events and figures through their choices in news selection, organisation, and presentation. Among the various elements of news reporting, headlines hold a unique power because they create the initial lens through which readers interpret the information that follows. Rather than merely serving as brief summaries of news stories, headlines often reflect editorial priorities and ideological positions that can significantly sway public perceptions of political actors and issues. Consequently, media headlines have increasingly become battlegrounds for ideological conflicts, where competing narratives aim to either legitimise or challenge political leadership and movements.

The emergence of Captain Ibrahim Traoré as Burkina Faso's transitional leader has generated significant media attention across both African and international news platforms. His advocacy for African sovereignty, economic independence, resource nationalism, and a decreased reliance on foreign powers has been interpreted in various ways by different media outlets. While some depict his leadership as a crucial step towards African liberation and a stand against neo-colonialism, others frame it within narratives of military authoritarianism, unconstitutional governance, democratic decline, and regional instability. These contrasting portrayals highlight the ongoing ideological battles in the media landscape.

These varying portrayals really shine a light on the intricate nature of media representation, especially when it comes to political change. It's evident that media headlines can be influenced by different ideological viewpoints rather than simply presenting neutral political perspectives.

While there's been a fair amount of research into media framing, political communication, and the portrayal of African political leaders, not much has specifically focused on how headlines shape the ideological narratives surrounding Ibrahim Traoré's agenda for sovereignty. Most of the existing studies have tackled broader issues like news coverage, military transitions, democratic governance, or geopolitical dynamics in the Sahel, often missing the headline as a distinct aspect of ideological analysis.

This is an important oversight because headlines often form the first impression for readers and can influence opinions even if the entire article goes unread.

Additionally, with the rise of digital news platforms and social media, headlines have gained even more influence and reach, enabling ideological frames to spread rapidly among both national and international audiences. In this landscape, competing headline narratives can play a significant role in shaping public opinion, diplomatic perspectives, and larger conversations about African sovereignty and post-colonial political identity. Without a thorough academic investigation, it's challenging to identify the linguistic and ideological strategies that different media outlets employ when discussing Ibrahim Traoré and his political agenda.

This gap in understanding is what motivates the current study. Therefore, this research aims to examine how selected media organisations frame their headlines to craft competing ideological narratives around Ibrahim Traoré's discourse on African sovereignty. The objective is to reveal the dominant framing patterns, word choices, and ideological tendencies present in media headlines, and to evaluate how these framing techniques contribute to ongoing discussions about African sovereignty, political legitimacy, and media representation.

The aim of this study is to examine the ideological framing of Ibrahim Traoré's African sovereignty narrative in media headlines. It therefore has the following specific objectives:

1. To identify the dominant media headline frames used in the representation of Ibrahim Traoré's African sovereignty narrative.
2. To examine the ideological orientations reflected in media headlines on Ibrahim Traoré's leadership and sovereignty agenda.
3. To analyse the linguistic choices employed in media headlines to construct positive or negative representations of Ibrahim Traoré's African sovereignty narrative.

The study however sets to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the dominant media headline frames used in the representation of Ibrahim Traoré's African sovereignty narrative?
2. What ideological orientations are reflected in media headlines on Ibrahim Traoré's leadership and sovereignty agenda?
3. How do linguistic choices in media headlines construct positive or negative representations of Ibrahim Traoré's African sovereignty narrative?

Theoretical Framework

Framing Theory: The Framing Theory was first introduced by Erving Goffman in 1974 and later expanded by Robert also Entman in 1993 within the realm of media studies, provides valuable insights into the workings of the media. It posits that instead of merely reporting on events, the media actively curates and presents information in ways that steer audiences toward specific interpretations of issues. Entman (1993) elaborates that framing involves accentuating certain elements of perceived reality, making them stand out in a communication piece to advocate for a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, or treatment recommendation.

In the world of journalism, headlines are among the most powerful framing tools available, as they set the tone for how readers initially engage with a news story. Through thoughtful word choice, emphasis, omission, and thematic arrangement, headlines can portray political figures in either a positive or negative light, influencing public perception even before the entire story is consumed. Consequently, different

media outlets may frame the same political event in diverse ways, shaped by their editorial policies, ideological biases, and target audiences.

When examining Ibrahim Traoré's narrative surrounding African sovereignty, Framing Theory provides a useful lens for analysing how various media organisations construct competing interpretations of his leadership. Some headlines may present him as a Pan-African reformer championing sovereignty and economic independence, while others might depict him primarily as a military leader whose actions threaten democratic governance. This theory highlights how media headlines transform into arenas for ideological debate rather than mere neutral summaries of political events.

Framing Theory is especially pertinent to this study because it effectively illustrates how news headlines select, emphasise, and organise information to influence audience perceptions of events. The study's goal is to pinpoint the dominant headline frames and examine how they influence the portrayal of Ibrahim Traoré's narrative on African sovereignty. To achieve this, the theory offers a solid framework for understanding the interplay between media framing and ideological significance.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was primarily developed by Norman Fairclough in the late '80s and early '90s, and has also seen valuable contributions from scholars like Teun A. van Dijk and Ruth Wodak. At its essence, CDA views language as a social practice that plays a vital role in shaping, sustaining, and challenging power dynamics, ideologies, and dominance. This approach highlights that media discourse is never completely neutral; the language choices we make often reflect broader political, economic, and cultural agendas.

Fairclough emphasised that discourse not only mirrors but also actively constructs our social reality. Consequently, media texts are crucial in shaping public perceptions of political figures through specific vocabularies, metaphors, grammatical structures, and evaluative language. Van Dijk further noted that ideological beliefs are intricately woven into discourse, becoming evident through patterns of inclusion, exclusion, emphasis, and word choice.

In the context of this study, CDA enables researchers to investigate how media headlines utilise language to either legitimise or delegitimise Ibrahim Traoré and his vision for African sovereignty. By analysing terms like military leader, junta chief, strongman, reformer, Pan-Africanist, or anti-colonial leader, the study can reveal how different ideological perspectives are embedded in media discourse and how these linguistic choices influence readers' interpretations.

CDA is particularly well-suited for this research as it focuses on the ideological meanings present in media headlines, providing analysts with the tools to explore how language uncovers power dynamics, political ideologies, and the competing narratives surrounding African sovereignty. When you pair Framing Theory with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), you get a powerful toolkit for digging into the discourse strategies that reveal ideological stances in news headlines. Together, these theories lay a strong theoretical foundation for this study.

Framing Theory helps us understand how media organisations craft specific perspectives through their choice of headlines and the emphasis they place on certain details. On the other hand, Critical Discourse Analysis explores how language acts as a vehicle for ideology and power. When these two theories come together, they offer a comprehensive approach to analysing the headline framing techniques, ideological biases, and language choices that shape the narrative around Ibrahim Traoré and African sovereignty.

Understanding Media Headlines

Media headlines are those catchy snippets that kick off news stories, giving readers a quick peek into the events or issues at play. They serve as the gateway to news content, grabbing attention, summarising the

main theme of a story, and setting the stage for what readers can expect before they dive into the full article. In today's journalism landscape, headlines are considered one of the most influential components of news discourse, often determining whether readers will continue on to the full story. In the digital journalism era, where people frequently encounter news through search engines and social media feeds, headlines have become even more crucial in capturing public interest and engagement (Dor, 2003).

Experts argue that headlines play both informational and persuasive roles. As Dor (2003) points out, headlines are meticulously crafted communicative tools designed to maximise the relevance of a news story by guiding readers toward a particular interpretation of events. Rather than merely summarising facts, headlines spotlight certain aspects of reality while leaving others in the background, thereby shaping how audiences view political, economic, and social issues. Van Dijk (1988) supports this idea, suggesting that headlines encapsulate the macrostructure of news discourse, as they convey the main theme and set the stage for how readers will interpret the information that follows.

When we look at headlines from a discourse perspective, it's clear they're not just neutral phrases. Fairclough (1995) points out that the way media language is crafted often reflects the values of institutions, the dynamics of social relationships, and the ideological beliefs that underpin them. This means that when crafting headlines, there are deliberate choices made about the words, sentence structures, and persuasive techniques used, all of which convey meanings that go deeper than the text itself. Journalists and editors frequently employ emotionally charged language, vivid metaphors, evaluative phrases, and quotes to influence how audiences perceive the news, all while trying to keep up the appearance of neutrality (Richardson, 2007).

With the rise of digital media, the significance of headlines has surged. Many online readers skim through headlines instead of reading full articles, making these headlines the primary source of information for many. Kuiken, Schuth, Spitters, and Marx (2017) highlight that the digital news landscape demands eye-catching headlines that enhance visibility, readership, and engagement; this shift has raised concerns about sensationalism, clickbait tactics, and ideological bias, particularly in political news.

In the realm of political journalism, headlines play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of political figures and events. By carefully choosing descriptive terms and evaluative language, headlines can portray political leaders as reformers, democrats, dictators, liberators, or even threats to national security. These representations can greatly influence how audiences feel about governments, political movements, and policy issues (Bell, 1991). Consequently, headlines act as powerful tools for setting agendas and framing discussions, impacting not just what people think about, but also how they engage with political matters. In the African context, media headlines have become vital battlegrounds for shaping narratives around governance, democracy, sovereignty, and international relations. Political events often get reported through a mix of competing headlines that reflect a range of ideological viewpoints and geopolitical interests. As we strive to grasp how language influences political legitimacy and public opinion, the study of media headlines has never been more crucial.

Review of Related Literature

The Concept of Ideological Framing

Ideological framing revolves around how media organizations portray events, issues, and political figures in ways that resonate with specific beliefs, values, and worldviews. It's not merely about organising information; it's about emphasising certain aspects of reality to guide particular interpretations and evaluations. In this light, framing serves as a powerful tool that shapes meaning in line with certain ideological perspectives (Entman, 1993).

The concept of framing originates from Goffman's (1974) work on frame analysis, which examines how individuals organise and interpret their social experiences through cognitive frameworks. Building on this, Entman (1993) argues that framing involves selecting specific elements of perceived reality and making them prominent in communication. This process helps define problems, identify causes, make moral judgments, and suggest solutions. In the media landscape, these framing techniques significantly influence how audiences comprehend political events and can sway public opinion.

On the other hand, ideology refers to the structured systems of beliefs and values that shape how individuals and institutions perceive and interpret the social world. Van Dijk (1998) highlights that ideologies impact discourse by determining which information is emphasised, ignored, legitimised, or challenged. Consequently, media texts often mirror these ideological assumptions through their choice of language, selection of sources, narrative structure, and thematic focus. These ideological choices may not always be explicit, but they are often intricately woven into the everyday practices of journalism.

You can really see how ideological framing plays a role in political journalism, especially since political events often come with a variety of interpretations regarding legitimacy, governance, democracy, and national identity. Different media organisations, each with their own editorial slants, can report on the same events in remarkably different ways. For instance, one newspaper might refer to a political leader as a reformer, while another might label that same individual a military ruler or a strongman. These choices of words reveal the underlying ideological perspectives that shape how audiences view these figures (Fairclough, 1995).

Scholars in critical discourse analysis argue that the way issues are ideologically framed significantly impacts the power dynamics within society. Fairclough (1995) emphasizes that media discourse not only reflects but also actively influences existing social structures by legitimizing certain viewpoints while marginalising others. Wodak and Meyer (2009) support this idea, suggesting that repeated media portrayals can make specific ideological meanings appear natural or like common sense.

When it comes to African political reporting, ideological framing often reflects broader conversations about colonial legacies, sovereignty, democracy, security, and international relations. Political leaders who advocate for economic independence or resist external influence may be depicted quite differently, depending on the ideological biases of both domestic and international media outlets. Therefore, grasping the concept of ideological framing is essential for analysing the competing narratives surrounding African political leadership and sovereignty.

Media Framing and Political Communication

Political communication is all about creating, sharing, and interpreting political information among governments, political figures, media organisations, and the public. Within this context, media framing serves as a vital tool for shaping and conveying political realities. Rather than presenting information in a neutral way, media organisations often choose specific angles that shape how the public understands political issues (McQuail, 2010).

Entman (1993) emphasises the vital role that media frames play in shaping our understanding of political issues. They not only outline the problems we face but also identify who's accountable, assess the moral dimensions, and propose potential policy solutions. This framing significantly influences how we, as citizens, interpret elections, governance, conflicts, international relations, and the actions of political leaders. Iyengar (1991) highlights an important distinction between episodic and thematic framing, illustrating how these different approaches can lead to diverse political interpretations and varying levels of public accountability.

Scholars in the field of political communication argue that framing has a deep impact on agenda-setting, public opinion, and political behavior. McCombs (2004) notes that while agenda-setting determine which issues receive media attention; framing shapes our understanding of those issues. This relationship becomes particularly crucial during periods of political change, conflict, and leadership transitions, as different narratives vie for public acceptance.

With the advent of digital journalism, the competition for framing has intensified. Political information now spreads rapidly across a multitude of media platforms. Social media, online news outlets, and digital broadcasting enable various ideological narratives to reach global audiences almost instantaneously. As a result, political leaders are increasingly evaluated through media frames that transcend national boundaries (Chadwick, 2017).

Take Ibrahim Traoré, for instance. Different media outlets portray his leadership through various lenses, emphasising elements like military governance, anti-colonial resistance, democratic legitimacy, regional security, or African sovereignty. These differing portrayals underscore how media framing influences international political discussions and shapes perceptions of African leadership.

News Headlines as Ideological Discourse

News headlines are a fascinating form of communication, allowing media outlets to express ideological meanings and shape political identities. They play a vital role in how the public perceives news. Even though they're brief, headlines are packed with carefully selected words that influence readers' interpretations before they even dive into the full article. Scholars in critical discourse argue that headlines are more than just simple descriptions; they function as powerful ideological texts that reflect institutional interests and the broader dynamics of social power (Fairclough, 1995).

As Van Dijk (1988) points out, headlines are at the top of news discourse because they capture the main topic and guide readers toward specific interpretations. By choosing words thoughtfully, emphasising certain themes, and structuring sentences in particular ways, headlines create a framework that shapes how the rest of the news story is understood. This means they highlight which aspects of political events resonate most with audiences.

Critical Discourse Analysis suggests that language is a social practice that both creates and reinforces ideology (Fairclough, 1989). This implies that news headlines can uncover underlying ideological assumptions through the use of labels, metaphors, agency, presuppositions, and evaluative language. Richardson (2007) notes that the language in newspapers often mirrors dominant political ideologies, presenting certain viewpoints as objective truths while pushing alternative perspectives to the sidelines.

In political reporting, headlines frequently make strategic word choices that can either legitimise or delegitimise political figures. Terms like freedom fighter, revolutionary, junta leader, strongman, or reformer carry deeper ideological meanings that extend beyond their basic definitions. These choices can influence readers' emotions and play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of political legitimacy (Van Dijk, 1998).

Eze et al (2026), opined that when it comes to reporting on African politics, headlines often turn into battlegrounds for ideological debates about democracy, sovereignty, security, and international influence. Different media outlets might cover the same political event but frame it in strikingly different ideological contexts.

Depending on their editorial philosophies and geopolitical perspectives, headlines become powerful tools for analysing how language shapes current discussions about African leadership and sovereignty. This study takes a closer look at headlines as ideological discourse, providing a lens through which we can

examine how various media organisations portray Ibrahim Traoré's narrative of African sovereignty. This approach enables researchers to identify the linguistic techniques, ideological beliefs, and framing styles that are intricately woven into the crafting of these headlines.

Media Representation of African Political Leadership

Media representation is all about how outlets create, interpret, and share images of people, groups, and events with their audiences. Rather than being neutral channels of information, media organisations actively shape public perception by deciding which issues to spotlight, which sources to feature, and how to frame their narratives. (Hall, 1997; Eze et al., 2026), emphasise that representation is a meaning-making process where language, images, and discourse construct reality instead of merely reflecting it. Consequently, the portrayal of political leadership in the media is significantly influenced by ideological beliefs, institutional interests, and the socio-political landscape.

In the African context, media portrayals of political leaders often connect to broader historical discussions about colonialism, post-colonial governance, democracy, development, and international relations. Since colonial times, African political figures have frequently been depicted through lenses that highlight instability, authoritarianism, corruption, conflict, and humanitarian crises, while less focus has been placed on governance innovations, economic reforms, or regional integration (Hawk, 1992; Mudimbe, 1988). These portrayals have played a significant role in reinforcing enduring stereotypes about African political leadership.

Scholars have noted that international media frequently present African leaders through a crisis-focused lens, highlighting issues like conflict, military intervention, constitutional instability, and insecurity (Chouliaraki, 2013). While these topics are undeniably important, an excessive focus on crisis narratives can obscure the complex political, economic, and historical contexts in which African leaders operate. Such reporting can shape international public opinion and influence perceptions of African governance on the diplomatic stage.

On the other hand, African-owned media outlets are increasingly stepping up to share alternative narratives that emphasise Pan-Africanism, sovereignty, regional collaboration, and homegrown development. These platforms challenge the dominant international narratives by showcasing African perspectives on governance, resource management, and economic independence. The rise of digital journalism has further enriched these diverse stories, empowering African voices to counter external portrayals of political leadership.

Recent research has also highlighted that the way media frames issues can significantly affect political legitimacy. Computational analyses of coverage in African newspapers show that political narratives adapt in response to shifting political climates, influencing how the public perceives institutions and leaders. Moreover, recent studies of African headlines reveal that the choice of language is crucial in shaping leadership identities, particularly in how agency is attributed, the modality employed, and the evaluative language selected.

The case of Captain Ibrahim Traoré illustrates these conflicting narratives well. International media often depict his leadership in terms of military governance, democratic legitimacy, and regional security. In contrast, many African and Pan-African platforms focus on themes of anti-imperialism, resource sovereignty, and national self-determination. These differing portrayals highlight the importance of examining how headlines create competing ideological narratives about African political leadership.

The conversation around African sovereignty has become a hot topic in today's political landscape, especially as we see more discussions about neo-colonialism, foreign military presence, economic

dependency, and control over natural resources. At its heart, sovereignty is all about a state's ability to govern itself without outside interference. In the African context, this idea extends beyond mere legal independence; it encompasses political autonomy, economic self-determination, cultural identity, and the stewardship of national resources.

The media plays a vital role in shaping the narratives surrounding sovereignty, influencing how the struggles for political autonomy are viewed. By choosing how to frame stories, the language they use, and the themes they highlight, news organisations can portray sovereignty movements as either legitimate expressions of national self-determination or as potential threats to democracy, regional stability, or international cooperation. This has turned sovereignty into a concept that is ideologically contested in global media discussions.

Scholars note that media narratives about Africa often reflect conflicting geopolitical interests. While international news outlets typically emphasize democratic governance, constitutional order, and security, African media often shine a light on historical injustices, anti-colonial struggles, and the pursuit of economic independence. These differing perspectives show that sovereignty narratives are shaped not only by political events but also by the ideological biases present within media institutions.

The rise of digital communication has intensified these narrative battles, enabling governments, activists, journalists, and everyday citizens to share their competing interpretations across various platforms. Consequently, discussions about sovereignty are increasingly unfolding in traditional newspapers, online news sites, and social media, where headlines play a crucial role in shaping political legitimacy. Recent reports suggest that the ongoing negative portrayal of Africa in the media has real economic and political consequences, as it reinforces views of instability and raises the perceived risks associated with investment. This underscores the importance of examining how the framing of headlines contributes to the broader narratives about African sovereignty and leadership.

In this context, Ibrahim Traoré's political discourse represents a contemporary narrative of sovereignty that emphasizes resource control, regional collaboration, reduced dependence on external influences, and Pan-African unity. Analysing how media headlines frame these themes reveals the ideological battle between various interpretations of African sovereignty.

Empirical Review

The study of Eze et al (2025), "Headline Framing and Geographic Misattribution: A Study of the Story on Skateboarding to Africa." This study examined the phenomenon of headline framing and geographic misattribution in Western news reporting, using the May 2025 coverage of a British skateboarder allegedly "skateboarding to Africa" as a case study. The case of Mr. Allison from East Sussex, who suffered robbery while traveling from France to Morocco was reported by the BBC and Independent News. Even if the facts put the robbery inside a European country, headlines focused on "Africa" as the final destination, creating a rather dubious association in geography. This paper employs framing theory and agenda-setting to explore how the choice of words, stressing, and even ignoring certain aspects in the headlines influence public opinion, sustain stereotypes, and facilitate the symbolic ordering of Africa. The case was analysed in the context of the media's tendency to represent Africa as a homogeneous, exotic, and dangerous place, often termed "Africa," without geographical precision. It argues that the qualitative analysis of the headlines, thematic coding, and international media comparisons to detect the frames and the rhetorical outcomes of geographic misattribution as frames border on qualitative methods. The article concludes with the suggestion of incorporating geography as the main source of western news, as well as greater sensitivity to the geopolitical contexts in which headlines are shaped.

Entman (1993) demonstrated that media framing is vital in shaping public understanding by defining issues, attributing causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting solutions. While his work is primarily theoretical, it lays the groundwork for empirical research in political communication and ideological framing.

Kitagawa and Shen-Bayh (2024) analysed over 5,000 articles from Kenyan newspapers using computational text analysis to investigate the political narratives surrounding the International Criminal Court. Their findings showed that media narratives changed significantly over time, reflecting shifts in elite political discourse and public attitudes toward international institutions.

Adeagbo (2025) explored the ideological constructions found in Nigerian political newspaper headlines through Critical Discourse Analysis. The study revealed that language choices, metaphors, omissions, and pragmatic strategies consistently reinforced elite political narratives while marginalising alternative viewpoints. The research concluded that headlines serve as ideological tools rather than impartial summaries.

Omoke (2025) examined newspaper headlines during the 2024 protests in Kenya. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, the study revealed that the media often personalises the focus on elite figures, which tends to overshadow the collective power of citizens in the political arena. The findings emphasised how the language in headlines can significantly influence the public's view of political legitimacy. Meanwhile, Muringa (2026) conducted a comprehensive review of studies on how women politicians are depicted in Southern African media. This review uncovered a consistent pattern in political reporting that prioritizes personality traits, emotional appeal, and stereotypes over actual competence and policy discussions, ultimately reinforcing gendered political ideologies.

In a more in-depth analysis, Muringa (2026) also examined how South African media portrays women aspiring to the presidency, finding that headlines frequently challenge their leadership capabilities through culturally rooted stereotypes. The study concluded that the framing of issues is vital in shaping political legitimacy and influencing how the public assesses leadership. On another front, Adekunle and Adeyinka (2026) investigated French-language headlines that compared Emmanuel Macron with various African leaders. Their Critical Discourse Analysis revealed systematic differences in how agency is assigned, the modality employed, and the evaluative language used, demonstrating that these linguistic choices result in unequal representations of political authority.

Jombadi and Ayoola (2026) delved into the ideological portrayals of Nigerian political elites during televised discussions. Utilising van Dijk's socio-cognitive model, they identified recurring themes such as populism, accountability, corruption, and leadership responsibility, confirming that political discourse often reinforces existing ideological beliefs. Lastly, Schroeder and Timcke (2026) explored the framing strategies employed by African newsrooms when reporting on information disorders. Their research suggests that the way media frames misinformation is

deeply intertwined with historical and ideological contexts, reflecting the ongoing struggles for authority, legitimacy, and governance in African societies.

These empirical studies clearly show that media discourse significantly influences how people perceive political leadership, using various techniques like framing, word choice, and ideological positioning. However, there's a noticeable gap in the literature when it comes to examining how competing media headlines shape Ibrahim Traoré's narrative on African sovereignty.

The reviewed literature emphasises the vital role that media headlines play in shaping public understanding of issues through their framing, discourse, and ideological representation. Framing Theory helps us

understand how news organisations highlight certain aspects of political reality, while Critical Discourse Analysis uncovers how the language used can reinforce power dynamics and ideological beliefs. Research on political communication in Africa indicates that media portrayals of political leaders often reflect conflicting views on governance, legitimacy, democracy, and sovereignty.

Existing studies consistently demonstrate that headlines can influence political perceptions through their word choices, thematic focus, attribution of agency, and evaluative language. Investigations have been conducted on political headlines in countries like Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, as well as within broader African media contexts, revealing that news discourse often reflects institutional and ideological biases rather than being entirely neutral.

Yet, there’s a significant gap in this research. There’s a scarcity of scholarly work that specifically addresses how media headlines frame Ibrahim Traoré's narrative of African sovereignty. Most studies tend to focus on elections, gender issues, governance, or general political discourse, leaving a noticeable void in the examination of headline framing related to the current sovereignty movements in Burkina Faso. This study sets out to fill a significant gap by examining how various media organisations frame headlines, choose their words, and engage in ideological discourse to shape different portrayals of Ibrahim Traoré's story regarding African sovereignty. In doing so, it contributes valuable insights to the fields of political communication, media framing, Critical Discourse Analysis, and African journalism.

METHODOLOGY

We adopted a qualitative research approach for this study, employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the ideological framing of Ibrahim Traoré's narrative on African sovereignty as presented in media headlines. The focus was on media headlines about Ibrahim Traoré published by a variety of African and international online news outlets from September 2022 to June 2026. To capture a comprehensive view, we used a critical case purposive sampling technique to select headlines from different media organisations that reflect a range of ideological and geopolitical perspectives, including both African and Western sources. Our data collection involved a meticulous documentary analysis of archived news headlines sourced from the official websites of the selected media outlets, which served as the primary unit of analysis.

For our analysis, we concentrated on examining lexical choices, thematic emphasis, agency, evaluative language, metaphors, and framing techniques that influence the ideological representations of Ibrahim Traoré's narrative on African sovereignty.

To enhance the credibility of the study, we drew from a diverse array of media sources, ensuring a reliable analytical process throughout. We also took ethical considerations into account by analysing publicly accessible media content and properly citing all sources in accordance with academic standards.

Data Presentation

Table 1: Headlines, their Dominant Frames and Ideological Orientation

S/N	Date	Source	Headline	Dominant Frame	Ideological Orientation
1	30 September 2022	Al Jazeera	<i>Burkina Faso military officers announce Ibrahim Traoré as new leader</i>	Military transition	Liberal-democratic

S/N	Date	Source	Headline	Dominant Frame	Ideological Orientation
2	1 October 2022	BBC News	<i>Burkina Faso coup: Army captain Ibrahim Traoré seizes power</i>	Coup/Military rule	Liberal-democratic
3	3 October 2022	Reuters	<i>Burkina Faso's new military leader promises security reforms</i>	Security governance	Neutral/Institutional
4	16 September 2023	African Stream	<i>Traoré calls for African control of natural resources</i>	African sovereignty	Pan-African
5	28 January 2024	Sputnik Africa	<i>Burkina Faso strengthens sovereignty with Sahel alliance</i>	Regional integration	Sovereigntist
6	6 July 2024	The Africa Report	<i>Traoré's growing influence reshapes Sahel politics</i>	Regional leadership	Analytical
7	15 December 2024	TRT World	<i>Burkina Faso expands cooperation with neighbouring Sahel states</i>	Regional cooperation	Neutral
8	22 February 2025	France 24	<i>Questions remain over Burkina Faso's democratic transition</i>	Democratic governance	Liberal-democratic
9	18 April 2025	Africanews	<i>Traoré renews calls for African economic independence</i>	Economic sovereignty	Pan-African
10	8 June 2026	Reuters	<i>Burkina Faso leader defends sovereignty agenda amid regional tensions</i>	Sovereignty and security	Neutral/Institutional

Table 2: Textual, Contextual and Discursive Analysis of Selected Media Headlines

S/N	Date	Source	Headline	Textual Analysis	Contextual Analysis.	Discursive Analysis.
1	30 September 2022	Al Jazeera	<i>Burkina Faso military officers announce Ibrahim Traoré as new leader.</i>	The headline foregrounds "military officers" and "new leader" , emphasising the transfer of power through the military rather than electoral legitimacy.	Published immediately after the September 2022 coup, the headline reflects the political uncertainty surrounding the change in leadership in Burkina Faso.	The discourse constructs Traoré primarily as a military leader, reinforcing institutional concerns about constitutional order rather than his political agenda.
2	1 October 2022	BBC News	<i>Burkina Faso coup: Army captain Ibrahim Traoré seizes power.</i>	The expressions "coup" and "seizes power" carry strong evaluative meanings associated with illegitimate political change.	Produced during international reactions to the coup, the headline reflects global concerns regarding democratic governance.	The discourse legitimises liberal democratic values by foregrounding unconstitutional power acquisition while backgrounding Traoré's policy objectives.
3	3 October 2022	Reuters	<i>Burkina Faso's new military leader promises security reforms</i>	The lexical items "military leader" and "security reforms" combine institutional identity with governance responsibilities.	Burkina Faso faced increasing terrorist attacks, making security a dominant national issue.	The discourse presents Traoré as a security-focused transitional leader, balancing military identity with administrative responsibility.
4	16 September 2023	African Stream	<i>Traoré calls for African control of natural resources</i>	The phrase "African control" foregrounds ownership, empowerment and economic independence.	The headline emerged amid debates on resource nationalism and foreign economic influence in Africa.	The discourse promotes Pan-African ideology by portraying sovereignty as economic emancipation from neo-colonial structures.

5	28 January 2024	Sputnik Africa	<i>Burkina Faso strengthens sovereignty with Sahel alliance</i>	Keywords such as "strengthens" , "sovereignty" , and "alliance" project cooperation and collective regional action.	The Alliance of Sahel States represented a new regional security and political partnership.	The discourse constructs sovereignty as a collective regional project and challenges dependence on traditional Western alliances.
6	6 July 2024	The Africa Report	<i>Traoré's growing influence reshapes Sahel politics</i>	The phrase "growing influence" attributes political agency and leadership capacity to Traoré.	Regional political realignments increased Burkina Faso's diplomatic visibility within the Sahel.	The discourse positions Traoré as an emerging regional political actor whose influence extends beyond national boundaries.
7	15 December 2024	TRT World	<i>Burkina Faso expands cooperation with neighbouring Sahel states</i>	The lexical choice "cooperation" suggests diplomacy, partnership and regional solidarity.	Published during increasing regional collaboration against insecurity.	The discourse frames Burkina Faso as pursuing cooperative diplomacy rather than political isolation.
8	22 February 2025	France 24	<i>Questions remain over Burkina Faso's democratic transition</i>	The expression "questions remain" introduces uncertainty and scepticism regarding democratic progress.	International attention remained focused on electoral transition and constitutional governance.	The discourse privileges democratic accountability and subtly challenges the legitimacy of prolonged military administration.
9	18 April 2025	Africane ws	<i>Traoré renews calls for African economic independence</i>	The terms "renews" and "economic independence" emphasise continuity and long-term commitment to sovereignty.	Growing continental debates concerning economic integration and resource control influenced media coverage.	The discourse reinforces Pan-African economic nationalism and portrays sovereignty as an ongoing developmental objective.

10	8 June 2026	Reuters	<i>Burkina Faso leader defends sovereignty agenda amid regional tensions</i>	The phrase "defends sovereignty agenda" combines political agency with external pressure, while "regional tensions" introduces conflict.	The headline reflects evolving geopolitical dynamics in the Sahel involving security and diplomacy.	The discourse presents sovereignty as contested, balancing national independence with broader regional security concerns.

Thematic Analysis of Media Headlines

The thematic analysis identified five major themes that shape the ideological framing of Ibrahim Traoré's narrative on African sovereignty as seen in various media headlines. These themes emerged from consistent patterns in word choice, framing techniques, and evaluative language utilised by both African and international media outlets.

The textual analysis shows that terms like coup, military leader, African control, sovereignty, and economic independence significantly influence how readers first view Ibrahim Traoré's leadership. The contextual analysis suggests that these headlines were crafted during specific political, economic, and security circumstances that shaped the priorities of editors. Additionally, the discursive analysis reveals two primary ideological perspectives: one that portrays Traoré in the context of military governance, democratic legitimacy, and constitutional matters, and another that presents him as a Pan-African leader advocating for sovereignty, self-determination, and regional cooperation. These findings resonate with Entman's (1993) Framing Theory and Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis, highlighting how media headlines act as arenas for competing political narratives to emerge and gain validation.

Theme One: African Sovereignty and Self-Determination

A prominent theme in African media recently has been the strong advocacy for sovereignty and self-determination. Headlines have consistently underscored Ibrahim Traoré's call for African control over natural resources, economic independence, and a shift away from dependence on foreign powers. Expressions like African sovereignty, resource control, economic independence, self-reliance, and national dignity have portrayed Traoré as a political figure committed to reclaiming Burkina Faso's autonomy and advancing Pan-African ideals.

These headlines crafted a powerful narrative that framed sovereignty not merely as a political imperative but also as a crucial response to the enduring impacts of and neo-colonial influences. The overall ideological stance reflected a Pan-African viewpoint that validated Traoré's political mission as a fight for African liberation.

Theme Two: Military Rule and Democratic Legitimacy

International media often portrayed Ibrahim Traoré through the lens of military intervention and democratic governance. Headlines frequently featured terms like military junta, coup leader, army captain, military government, and democratic transition. This choice of words underscored how power was seized rather than shedding light on the policy objectives of his administration. This depiction placed Traoré's government firmly in conversations about constitutional order, democratic legitimacy, and military rule.

The focus on the military aspect of his leadership reflected a liberal democratic ideology that prioritises constitutional governance and electoral legitimacy.

Theme Three: Anti-Colonial and Anti-Imperialist Discourse

Another significant theme was the portrayal of anti-colonial resistance. Various African and alternative international media outlets characterised Traoré's policies as deliberate efforts to reduce foreign political and economic influence in Burkina Faso. Headlines discussing the withdrawal of foreign troops, reassessing international partnerships, and advocating for greater national control over essential resources reinforced this narrative. Phrases like ending foreign influence, breaking colonial ties, reclaiming sovereignty, and African liberation resonated with ideological positions that champion decolonisation and regional self-determination. These headlines framed sovereignty as a form of resistance against enduring patterns of external domination.

Theme Four: Regional Security and Sahel Cooperation

Numerous headlines highlighted the regional security challenges facing Burkina Faso and its neighboring Sahel countries. Rather than concentrating solely on internal politics, these reports emphasised terrorism, regional military collaboration, and discussions around diplomatic alliances. Key terms like the Sahel alliance, regional cooperation, joint security, and counter-terrorism efforts positioned Traoré as a crucial player in the regional political landscape, eager to foster collaborative solutions to insecurity. While African media often viewed these developments as a boost to regional autonomy, some international outlets raised concerns about their impact on democratic governance and international diplomacy.

Theme Five: Competing International Narratives

The final theme reveals a fascinating clash of ideological narratives between African and Western media outlets. African news sources often highlight themes like sovereignty, development, national pride, and regional cooperation. In contrast, many Western media organisations tend to focus on military governance, democratic transitions, constitutional legitimacy, and political instability.

These differing portrayals show that media headlines act as ideological constructs rather than just neutral summaries of political events. The same political actions can be interpreted in various ways, shaped by the editorial philosophies and geopolitical perspectives of the reporting organisations.

In conclusion, our thematic analysis uncovers that the media narratives surrounding Ibrahim Traoré's story of African sovereignty are marked by competing ideological frames. African media primarily crafted narratives focused on sovereignty, anti-colonialism, economic independence, and regional solidarity. Meanwhile, many international media outlets framed the same political developments through the lenses of military governance, democratic legitimacy, and security concerns.

These findings align with Entman's (1993) Framing Theory, which posits that media selectively emphasise certain aspects of reality to influence how audiences interpret events. They also resonate with Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis, which argues that language functions as a social practice that produces and sustains ideology and power dynamics. Thus, the analysis confirms that headlines are not just descriptive texts; they are crucial arenas where competing political ideologies regarding African sovereignty are negotiated and communicated.

In this discussion, we explored how the media frames Ibrahim Traoré's narrative on African sovereignty through various headlines. What we discovered is that these headlines do much more than summarise events; they act as powerful tools that shape political meanings and convey ideological stances. We noticed a clash of headline frames that highlighted the different editorial philosophies and geopolitical viewpoints,

especially when comparing African media to their international counterparts.

One major takeaway from our analysis is that African media outlets generally portrayed Ibrahim Traoré as a champion of African sovereignty, economic independence, and Pan-African unity. The headlines emphasised crucial themes like resource management, national self-determination, regional cooperation, and resisting external influence. This perspective aligns with Entman's (1993) Framing Theory, which posits that media outlets spotlight certain aspects of reality to shape specific interpretations. It also supports Hall's (1997) view that media representation is an active process of creating meaning rather than merely reflecting the world as it is.

On the other hand, many international media organisations framed Traoré within narratives focused on military governance, constitutional legitimacy, democratic transitions, and regional security. Terms like military junta, coup leader, and army captain were commonly used, highlighting how political power was seized while often glossing over issues related to sovereignty or economic independence. This observation resonates with Fairclough's (1995) argument that media discourse reflects institutional values and broader ideological beliefs.

Moreover, our study underscored the significant role of word choices in shaping ideological meanings. Positive descriptors like Pan-African leader, reformer, and sovereignty advocate sharply contrasted with negative labels such as strongman, junta leader, and military ruler. The way language is employed here greatly influences how readers perceive the news even before they delve into the full reports. This supports Van Dijk's (1998) assertion that ideology permeates discourse through word choice, the emphasis on certain ideas, and the organisation of themes.

Another important takeaway from our findings is the representation of African sovereignty. While African media often depict sovereignty as a form of political and economic freedom from neo-colonial influences, many international outlets frame similar events within the context of democratic governance, diplomatic ties, and regional security. These differing narratives highlight that sovereignty isn't viewed the same way by everyone; it remains a concept that sparks ideological debate in today's media landscape.

To sum it all up, the findings highlight that media headlines serve as battlegrounds for different ideologies, where various narratives compete for recognition. Rather than providing unbiased viewpoints, media organisations create alternative realities that shape how the public perceives leadership, governance, and African sovereignty.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes by emphasising the vital role media headlines play in shaping the ideological narratives around Ibrahim Traoré's vision for African sovereignty. Through selective framing, word choices, thematic emphasis, and discourse strategies, media organisations significantly influence public perceptions of political leadership and national sovereignty. The findings indicate that African media often adopt frames that promote Pan-Africanism, sovereignty, and economic self-determination, while many international outlets tend to focus on democratic legitimacy, constitutional governance, and security concerns. These differences illustrate how the crafting of headlines is influenced by editorial biases, institutional priorities, and broader geopolitical interests. Therefore, the study asserts that media headlines are anything but neutral; they are potent communication tools that help create, negotiate, and reinforce ideology.

This research provides valuable insights into how different headline frames shape public interpretation of Ibrahim Traoré's political agenda, contributing to the fields of media framing, political communication, Critical Discourse Analysis, and African journalism. Moreover, it deepens our academic understanding of

contemporary discussions on sovereignty in Africa by showcasing the impact of media discourse on public perceptions of leadership, governance, and regional political shifts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, we recommend the following:

1. Media organisations should strive for a more balanced and objective approach when crafting headlines, avoiding sensational or ideologically loaded language that could distort public understanding of political events.
2. Journalists and editors should prioritise continuous professional development that hones their skills in ethical headline writing, media framing, and responsible political reporting. This ongoing education can play a crucial role in minimising ideological bias.
3. Media regulatory bodies need to actively encourage adherence to established journalistic standards that promote fairness, accuracy, and balanced representation in political reporting. By strengthening media literacy programs, we can empower audiences to recognise framing techniques, ideological language, and persuasive tactics often found in news headlines.
4. African media organisations should persist in advocating for professional journalism that captures African perspectives while adhering to globally recognised standards of accuracy, verification, and fairness.

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