



# AN ANTHOLOGY

Reflections on Democracy,  
Politics, Elections, and Coalition  
Governing in South Africa

Series Editors:

Paul Kariuki Ph.D

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An Anthology:  
Reflections on Democracy, Politics,  
Elections, and Coalition Governing in  
South Africa

Paul Kariuki, PhD and Thelma Nyarhi



Democracy Development Program NPC

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*Reflections on Democracy, Politics, Elections, and Coalition Governing in South Africa*

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*Adebimpe Esther Ofusori*



# List of Acronyms

ACC	Alliance of Citizens for Change
ACDP	African Christian Democratic Party
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ANC	African National Congress
ASGISA	Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa
AU	African Union
BLF	Black First Land First
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DA	Democratic Alliance
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
EWG	Expropriation Without Compensation
FF+	Freedom Front Plus
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
GNU	Government of National Unity
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IDASA	Institute for Democracy in South Africa
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
MEC	Member of Executive Council
MKP	uMkhonto we Sizwe Party
MMA	Media Monitoring Africa
MPC	Multi-Party Charter
NEDLAC	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NDR	National Development Revolution

## Democracy, Politics, Elections, and Coalition Governing

NEC	National Executive Committee
NDR	National Democratic Revolution
NFP	National Freedom Party
PA	Political Alliance
PAC	Pan-Africanist Congress
RDP	Redistribution and Development Programme
SALGA	South Africa Local Government Association
SACP	South Africa Communist Party
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UDM	United Democratic Movement
VOA	Voice of Africa
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front

# List of Contributors and their Biographies

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**Dr Adebimpe Esther Ofusori** is an innovative researcher and a lecturer. She gained her PhD from the University of Kwazulu-Natal,

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**Ms Amara Galileo** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science & International Relations at the University of Delaware in the United States. Her dissertation interrogates whether democracy is eroding in South Africa and Ghana through comparatively assessing areas such as civil liberties, elections, political parties, and civil society. Amara aspires to work for the US Department of State and advocate for stronger US–Africa diplomatic relations.

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**Dr Lizzy Oluwatoyin Ofusori** is a researcher with a specific interest in information systems and technology. She taught at the University of KwaZulu–Natal, Durban, South Africa. She has also conducted extensive research on security frameworks in the Nigerian banking sector. She holds a PhD in information systems and technology from University of KwaZulu–Natal, South Africa. She is presently a postdoctoral researcher at the University of KwaZulu–Natal, specialising in information security, BYOD, mobile security, Big Data and E-governance. She is the Editorial Assistant to the African Journal of Computing & ICT.

**Dr Stanley Osezua Ehiane** is a senior lecturer in the Department of Political and Administrative Studies at the University of Botswana. Ehiane is also a Research Fellow, Department of Development Studies, School of Social Sciences, University of South Africa (UNISA), Pretoria, South Africa, and a Senior Research Associate in the School of Public Management, Governance and Public Policy, University of Johannesburg, South Africa. He was a Research Fellow at the University of Fort Hare, South Africa. Ehiane was a lecturer



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**Mr Stef Terblanche** has been an independent political analyst and consultant for some three decades. He specialises in political intelligence, risk forecasting, analysis and interpretation of all things political, covering Southern Africa and more particularly South Africa. His past and present clients include large corporate entities, governments, research institutions, foundations, universities and more. He started working life as a journalist at the Cape Town Afrikaans newspaper, Die Burger, before moving on to the national Sunday paper Rapport, followed by stints at a large international advertising agency and the University of the Western Cape, before returning to fulltime journalism at The Sunday Times in Johannesburg, and eventually venturing fulltime into being an independent political analyst. Apart from his political work, he still also works part-time as a freelance journalist and editor, having regularly contributed to prestigious publications such as Leadership, BBQ, De Kat and many others, and also finds time to be the freelance/contracted editor of the quarterly magazine Mzanzitravel. Stef is based in Cape Town, South Africa.

**Prof Steven Friedman** is Research Professor in the Faculty of Humanities, University of Johannesburg. He is a political scientist who specialises in the study of democracy. He researched and wrote on the transition to democracy and on the relationship between democracy, inequality and economic growth. He has stressed the role of citizen voice in strengthening democracy and promoting equality. He is the author of Building Tomorrow Today, a study

of the trade union movement and its implications for democracy, and the editor of *The Long Journey* and *The Small Miracle* (with Doreen Atkinson), which presented research on the South African transition. His study of South African radical thought, *Race, Class and Power: Harold Wolpe and the Radical Critique of Apartheid*, was published in 2015. His study of democratic theory, *Power in Action: Democracy, Citizenship and Social Justice*, was published in 2019 and his analysis of post-1994 South Africa, *Prisoners of the Past: South African Democracy and the Legacy of Minority Rule* in 2021. He writes regularly for *New Frame* and has written numerous journal articles and book chapters.

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*List of Contributors and their Biographies*

SRCs, Student forums and societies. She further worked with the United Nations Population Fund Agency in the Adolescent and Youth portfolio focusing on establishing relations with stakeholders and develop programs for Youth and Adolescents. Recently she worked at the University of Pretoria, Centre for Human Rights at the Pan African Parliament in the Committees Unit. Currently she consults with the DDP. Yelokazi has published papers with national newspapers on politics, governance, and development, provides political commentary, and serves in youth-focused boards across the continent.



# Foreword

A significant turning point in South Africa's history was the country's 1994 democratic transition, which put an end to decades of apartheid and ushered in a period of equality and freedom. In 2024, South Africa celebrates 30 years of democracy, making it an appropriate time to consider the country's history as it has traversed from triumphs and tribulations to progress and setbacks. The nation is still struggling with long-standing issues like economic inequality, which keeps millions of people from benefiting from economic expansion. The widespread problem of unemployment is especially worrisome since it disproportionately impacts young people and jeopardises democratic gains. In addition to endangering democracy's viability, ignoring the problems will exacerbate social divisions and erode the country's chances for inclusive progress and prosperity.

The 2024 General Elections will be remembered as a turning point in South African politics that elevated the country to a new level of prominence. It is possible to consider the African National Congress's (ANC) declining electoral support as a sign of the party's degeneration due to its moral standing being diminished, its integrity being compromised, and disenchantment with its performance as a ruling party. This apparent dissatisfaction with the incumbent ANC did not present an opportunity for opposition political groups to capitalise. Opposition parties were unable to successfully raise their share of the vote and win over the disenchanted and undecided voters because they were mired in their own internal conflicts and corruption scandals. Numerous events took place before, during, and following the 2024 election. Several legal cases that caused the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to postpone printing the ballots that were used for the first time were among these occurrences. Second, there were a lot of political parties running in the election. Additionally, independent candidates were allowed to participate in this election – something unprecedented. The establishment of the uMkhonto we Sizwe Party (MKP), headed by former President Jacob Zuma, was another significant event. Some brushed this off as a minor factor when it occurred. However, others were right to anticipate that the MKP would be a formidable force, unlike other new political parties, and that its rise would have a detrimental impact on other parties as well, not only the ANC.

However, the ANC must share power with parties it has long characterised as its ideological rivals after the 2024 elections, which were the most competitive in the nation's history. The major political parties have so far avoided the crisis of a cabinet not being created by joining a coalition, which it has decided to call a 'Government of National Unity'. Economic sentiment against the nation has been further strengthened by the coalition's exclusion of populist parties. South Africa's attractiveness as an investment market has been further strengthened by the elections, in which a long-standing dominating party has admitted electoral defeat. While coalition agreements are a relatively new idea in our political discourse, they are often poorly implemented, which makes it difficult for local governments to run effectively. A major argument is that South African coalition agreements would have benefited the public if they had been driven by a genuine desire for efficient government and service delivery.

Indeed, the book is of very high quality. It is compelling and well-informed and offers a healthy synthesis to critically balance achievements and shortcomings of democracy, politics, and coalition governing in South Africa, with the vexing questions of the past and the present. It is ground-breaking and theoretically and methodologically well-grounded.

**Stanley Osezua Ehiane, PhD**

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# Introduction

A change in administration following an election often serves as a test for both the effectiveness and quality of a government. Within the African context, it further tests the extremities and possibilities of democracy. Although democracy is a contentious reality in most African states, there is still hope of establishing it. Of importance is citizen sentiments around elections and the constitution, particularly regarding term limits. As much as it is a remarkable feature, the Constitution has at times come under pressure in some African nation-states. Some states have struggled to deepen and institutionalise democracy, as seen in recent calls for third terms, highlighting the delicate balances between term limits and the greedy desire for leadership. Furthermore, voter sentiments have played a huge role when it comes to the democratic exercise. Although, in some countries, administrations have abided by their constitutional term limits, others have used the legislature to back up decisions to remain in power. Moreover, the lack of accountability regarding promises made during electoral or government administrative seasons have often affected voter sentiments negatively. For democracy, resilience, respect, and integrity play a significant role. The absence of any of these elements would result in political apathy, thereby stalling the democratic exercise.

It is important that we establish a clear definition of democracy. As a signifier of order, the constitution raises questions and concerns about democracy and power. What does democracy look like? What are the mechanics, nature, and focus of democracy? What is a 'good' democracy? While some understand it as the ability to exercise ones vote in making decisions, it goes beyond this. Politically, some scholars posit it as merely being suggestive of a free and competitive regime. Additionally, it bears fair and recurring elections, provides more than one political party choice, and allows for uncensored information. Although there are institutional hybrids of democracy, understanding what makes a good democracy is essential. It can be said that a good democracy realises equality amongst its citizens and satisfies them. In this case, citizens would have a satisfactory level of freedom and power to voice their concerns regarding the government. Additionally, they would then monitor, evaluate, and call for accountability of the elected government officials. The 2024 South African elections offer insights into challenges and opportunities for democracy. There are growing concerns over AI-

driven misinformation, influence of the elites on policy formations, corruption, social inequalities and injustices, political apathy amongst eligible voters, particularly the youth, and debates around policy and proposed solutions by the different parties. Hence, there is still a need to safeguard democracy. The South African case reveals the potential for social cohesion and the collective efforts of a multi-party state.

### **Chapter 1: Democracy in Africa: Social Cohesion and Citizen Agency**

This section evaluates the state of democracy in South Africa, considering the roles, challenges and opportunities concerning voting. It discusses the transitional justice and reconciliation challenges and opportunities and how they have come to shape democracy in the country. Furthermore, it discusses the challenges around democracy that include youth participation, social cohesion, inclusion, nation building, and political polarisation, amongst other issues. To mitigate these challenges, this section suggests strategies of empowerment centred around voting. This is realised through political tolerance.

### **Chapter 2: Electoral Politics and Voter Behaviour in South Africa**

This section traces the efforts of political parties leading up to the May 2024 elections. South Africa entered the final phase of intensive campaigning, which found citizens bombarded with a plethora of party manifestos and campaigning strategies such as sloganeering. According to the IEC, 380 parties had lined up to contest the national election. The section further outlines the challenges faced by voters in not only deciphering the content but also discerning the authenticity and feasibility of the manifesto proposals and solutions put forward.

### **Chapter 3: The Use of Technology in Elections**

This section discusses the potential effects of digital technology, with a particular focus on AI and media. Political apathy and passivity have become global concerns when it comes to the exercise of democracy. While some research has revealed non-voter or spoilt ballot behaviour as being a protest of some sort, other observations reveal that there are underlying issues requiring attention. The increased use of digital technology has shown the political power of the media by revealing deep-seated issues. This chapter further explores the opportunities for freedom of speech and political activism on social media, and the implications for voter behaviour.



#### **Chapter 4: Women's Political Leadership**

This section examines the involvement of women in government. One line of inquiry explores the participation of women in electoral politics. Is it good for democracy? It also traces the challenges faced by women in politics as well as revealing the transformative effects of women's presence on coalition governing.

#### **Chapter 5: Coalition Governing in South Africa: Electoral Outcomes, GNU and Democracy**

This section uncovers the electoral outcomes and resultant governing practice in South Africa post-election. It focuses particularly on the 2024 elections and how they reshaped politics and democracy in the country. With particular focus on the government of national unity (GNU), this chapter explores the implications of coalition government on the country. While coalition governing might be seen as a convenience amongst political parties, it also reflects the voice of the people and suggests a potential future of social cohesion and post-election nation building.



# 1. Democracy in South Africa: Social Cohesion and Citizen Agency

## **Will South Africa's Democracy Survive 2024 Unscathed?**

**Stef Terblanche**

In a worrying article, the Financial Times poses the uncomfortable question: can democracy survive 2024? It notes that a historic number of elections will take place around the world this year, but that autocracy is spreading, and young people are rejecting the democratic status quo.

With about half the adult population of the world casting their votes in elections this year, the Financial Times notes that “these elections take place against a backdrop of spreading illiberalism around the world, the weakening of independent institutions in a number of big democracies and a creeping disillusionment among younger people about the very point of elections”.

To some extent, some of these trends also apply to South Africa, one of the record number of countries that will go to the polls in the year 2024. Most certainly, growing disillusionment with the democratic status quo among South Africans, especially the youth, seems to apply, at least over the last few years up to this point.

But could there, hypothetically, be a bigger, more sinister threat that could end or severely dent the three-decade-old South African democratic project in 2024? Or, on the other hand, will South Africa's democracy reach a defining maturity milestone in 2024?

I shall return to these hypothetical, speculative questions shortly; but let's first look at the broader global context of the status of democracy in a mega election year and how South Africa is affected. With more elections in one year than ever before, one would imagine that democracy was entering a golden age. However, the sobering reality is that elections don't equal democracy. Correctly administered, free and fair, and well supported though, they should be an important fundamental part of any well-functioning democracy. But that's certainly not always the case. And various research projects around the world have found that democracy is actually on a downward slide.

A case in point is neighbouring Zimbabwe, where elections have regularly taken place since independence. But they have seldom been free and fair, thus significantly annulling their democratic value. Zimbabwe today is probably considerably less free, fair and democratic than it was several decades ago when Robert Mugabe and his Zanu-PF first came to power.

And yet elections have regularly been held there with much fanfare since then – accompanied by threats, police violence, disappearing opposition candidates or supporters, disruptions and banning of opposition rallies, harassment and jailing of opposition figures, election irregularities, and more. And of course, a ruling party that always wins. Is that democracy? One can only wonder, where have the AU and SADC been? – institutions that should jealously be guarding democracy in the region and continent.

### *Democracy in retreat*

Nonetheless, the Financial Times' article goes on to lament that despite more than 70 nations going to the polls this year and some praiseworthy democratic advances in some parts of the world, "overall, surveys chart a retreat in the democratic spirit after a high-water mark in the decade after the end of the Soviet Union and apartheid in the 1990s".

Also noted are the findings of the V-Dem Institute, which assesses democracies' health on the five principles of electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative and egalitarian, that the quality of democracy enjoyed by an average citizen in the world in 2022 has receded back to the levels of 1986. And Sweden's International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, in its Global State of Democracy Initiative, found that 2023 marked the sixth consecutive year in which democracy declined in half of all countries – the longest retreat since their records began in 1975. A number of other research entities around the world have also similarly noted the decline of democracy.

According to the Financial Times, democracy's difficulties will play out this year in four distinct electoral cultures. The first is a "tyrannical group" of countries – including Belarus, Russia and Rwanda – where rulers jail opponents and run a charade of an election culminating in 90-per cent majorities or higher. A second group comprises performative democracies such as Iran, Tunisia and Bangladesh, where leaders may just about allow the opposition to

compete, but not to win. Zimbabwe probably belongs to a hybrid of these two groups.

In the third group, to which the article assigns South Africa, the erosion is more subtle, it says, with leaders winning power in genuinely free and fair elections but then overseeing non-liberal policies, as has happened in Hungary under Viktor Orbán, and institutions taking strain. The fourth group encompasses the older democracies, where the centrist establishment is threatened by further gains of populists at the ballot box.

However, the article singles out the possible re-election of “the demagogic (Donald) Trump in November’s American elections that would threaten the most damage to democracy”. For South Africa, there could be a parallel phenomenon to Trump and his understanding of and approach to democratic elections should a specific hypothetical scenario play out here, to which I will return.

### *Declining youth support*

But for the Financial Times an even bigger threat than Donald Trump is the decline in youthful support for democracy. “Possibly the most arresting finding in polls about democracy is how younger voters are increasingly tolerant of autocracy,” it says. That certainly is also a factor that has taken shape in South Africa where in general, voter participation in elections has consistently been falling while young people have turned their backs on elections in even greater numbers.

South Africa’s democracy can be said to be threatened from a number of different angles. But one overriding angle is that after 30 years of rule by the same party, many, if not the majority of citizens, have seen no improvement in their lives. Instead, based on a wide variety of indicators, opinion polls, public protests, and other events, many have arguably experienced deterioration. At the same time, governance became increasingly tainted by corruption, self-enrichment of a small political-business elite became widely evident, South Africa remained one of the most unequal societies in the world, massive crime and corruption continue worsening and impacting lives, unemployment and poverty levels are among the highest in the world, and the commitment to the lofty democratic ideals of 1994 appear to have waned.

This undoubtedly has undermined trust in and support for South Africa’s constitutional democracy and its political systems and institutions, especially among younger people. It is also perhaps

the single biggest factor that played a role in the destructive riots of July 2021 in KwaZulu–Natal (KZN) and Gauteng.

That trust in our democratic system and institutions is on the decline, has been borne out by a survey conducted in 2018, just ahead of the 2019 elections, by the University of Johannesburg’s Centre for Social Development in Africa. It found that 58% of South African youths believed meeting their basic needs (such as finding jobs, income, housing) was more important than voting, or having access to courts, or enjoying freedom of speech and expression. Only 27% out of the 3,431 young people surveyed believed democratic rights were more important.

Similarly, an Afrobarometer survey in 2021 found that South Africans’ trust in a variety of institutions was at its lowest since first being measured by Afrobarometer in 2006. Trust in elected representatives was especially weak, and two-thirds of respondents would be willing to forego elections if a non-elected government could provide improved security and better services. An Ipsos survey conducted in 2022 also indicated that fewer than half of South Africans in all adult age groups had favourable impressions of political parties and elections, resulting in low voter turnouts.

Despite a successful voter registration weekend held by South Africa’s Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) in early February, more than 14 million South Africans of voting age, mostly young people, were still not registered for the 2024 national general elections. These are highly worrying trends that could also have a profound impact on the outcome of our own elections this year. Our last elections, the local government elections of 2021, may have set the stage for what will follow this year. Those elections recorded a record-low voter turnout of 45.87% and an ANC majority slashed down to 55%, the ruling party’s worst performance since coming to power.

It is clear that the idea of democracy is already under considerable pressure in South Africa. It therefore should not be a surprise that already in 2022, The Economist Intelligence Unit rated South Africa a “flawed democracy”, while some analysts and commentators argue that South Africa represents a dysfunctional state, with others calling it a failing or failed state. None of that bodes well for the democratic ideal.

*What happens next?*

Meanwhile, while the Financial Times reminds us of that South Africa's ruling ANC is facing its first truly competitive election race in 30 years, it poses the question: "Are free elections, for all that they are worth celebrating, an insufficient guide to a democracy's health? And is what happens next its real test?" And therein lies the crunch.

What happens next? It is common cause that a number of leading opinion polls have over the past year been recording a downward trajectory in the anticipated election fortunes of the ANC. Most of them expect ANC support to fall below 50%. Adding its voice of doom for the ANC to previous polls, the latest poll of 9,000 respondents by University of the Witwatersrand Professor of Urban Governance David Everatt, conducted for the Change Starts Now movement and just released, gives the ANC only 39% of the vote if elections were held now. If correct, that could open up a Pandora's box of possibilities that could blow our democracy out of the water, or, on the flip side, celebrate its true coming of age.

Assuming all these polls are correct, and depending on the size of the ANC's anticipated defeat, it would introduce one of two scenarios: a major loss could see the ANC ousted from power and replaced by a coalition of opposition parties, while a defeat with a smaller margin could see the ANC entering into a governing coalition either with the Democratic Alliance (DA) or Multi-Party Charter for SA (MPC) on the centre-right, or with the populist/radical extreme left Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), or with a host of smaller parties.

It is in this context that South Africa's young democracy may experience a defining moment as it faces its first real test of maturity. The ANC may gracefully accept defeat and continue either in the opposition benches or as a partner in a coalition government. But even in the latter case there may, speculatively, be another test in store for the future of our democracy, should the ANC partner with the EFF in a coalition.

While the EFF currently is a vigorous participant in our democratic system and institutions, it arguably does so because it has no choice. It is compelled to function within this system by a progressive Constitution – one of the best in the world, that is robustly upheld, so far, by the ruling party, opposition parties, the judiciary, and the various political and constitutional institutions. Even dictators like Hitler once first had to work within and through a

democratic system before they could fully seize power and abandon their democracy.

Given the EFF's radical socialist policies, its ambition to nationalise everything of any value, its distinct form of pan-Africanist racial nationalism, its aggressive intolerance towards anyone with whom it disagrees, its militancy and militarist makeup and structures, and the autocratic style of its leader, it may well be an autocratic wolf in democratic sheep's clothes for now. Should it rise to power alongside the ANC in a coalition, are there any guarantees that it won't start attacking or even dismantling our democracy from the inside? To date, the likelihood of this happening is very slim as the ANC seems to be resisting the idea of partnering with the EFF.

Note that I pose this purely as a speculative hypothesis of a potential possibility and there is no evidence that the EFF will indeed follow such a path. There is, however, also no distinct evidence that it won't. But in the same vein, there is another speculative hypothesis that identifies a potentially even bigger risk for democracy in South Africa, based on real, unfolding manifestations, the speculated outcome of which has not yet been proven or materialised. In this case, the ANC may well be the party that selects an undemocratic option.

An uncomfortable question we should be asking

Here we come to the big 'what if' ... the question we should be asking ourselves before critical elections in a world and country in which democracy is on the retreat and the ruling party is fighting with its back to the wall. Everyone has an opinion on how the ANC is likely to lose power; but no-one is interrogating what the ANC's response to such a loss of power might be. So, what if the ANC loses the election but refuses to accept defeat? What happens next?

Various leading figures in the ANC have acknowledged that their party may be in trouble come this year's elections. And all the ANC's current actions point to this. Unable to show a convincing track record of success, the ANC has embarked on various strategies targeting specific audiences.

It has been radicalising much of its recent policy and legislative content around a reinvigorated embracement of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) focused on socialist economic transformation; it has driven specific legislation and policy initiatives in a populist campaign designed to recapture broad support; and with its genocide case against Israel at the International Court of



Justice (ICJ), regardless of what other good intentions and motives it arguably may have had, it sought to deflect attention from its failures and at the same time elevate itself back to the moral high ground on a justice and human rights ticket, a position the ANC last held under Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki. In the intervening period, the gallery of international rogues and genocidal murderers the ANC chose to befriend or support spoke for itself.

Are there any signs or evidence that the ANC may refuse to give up power if it loses the elections? There is of course no conclusive, concrete evidence of any such intention and one's opinion would depend on how one interprets the little blips of concern that have lately appeared on the domestic political radar screen.

Enter the Trump playbook. In the run-ups to both the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, Trump fostered an advance atmosphere of public distrust and suspicion around his possible election defeat by claiming that if he lost, it would be as a result of election rigging and the election being stolen from him. The dangerous aftermath following his defeat in 2020 around his false "stolen election" campaign is well-known. He desperately sought unconstitutional, undemocratic ways of staying in power.

After South Africa brought its case against Israel at the ICJ, several commentators expressed concern that President Cyril Ramaphosa was delegitimising political activity that did not support the ANC's position on Israel, painting anyone who did not support the ANC as being supporters of an illegitimate and immoral Israel; and that the ANC was weaponising the ICJ case in order to cling to power. But one could ask whether Ramaphosa has perhaps gone further than that.

The worrying speck on the radar screen may have come in the form of a warning by Ramaphosa – since repeated – at the end of the ANC's recent National Executive Committee (NEC) *lekgotla* and the launch of the ANC's election campaign, that South Africa's genocide case against Israel would have domestic political repercussions. According to the SABC, Ramaphosa warned that the ANC was "on high alert for possible attempts of regime change in South Africa by Israel". Ramaphosa, reported the SABC, expected a full-blown fightback from the Israelis that may also focus on South Africa's domestic politics and "our electoral outcomes, in order to pursue a regime-change agenda". There have been a few more niggly little things in this vein since then.

It may be nothing. Or it may simply be a case of utilising a classic populist propaganda strategy to deflect attention by blaming all ills on a nefarious foreign actor. That has happened before in the ANC. Or could it perhaps be something closer to the Trump model? After all, one could argue that a future dictator already has ample “justification” to discard our constitutional democracy: voters who increasingly prefer delivery results over elections; the youth who increasingly turn their back on our democratic system; and now a nefarious foreign actor who allegedly seeks regime change by undermining the integrity of our elections.

In this dangerous year of many elections amidst retreating global and domestic democracy, with a ruling party in trouble after 30 years of never having been challenged, shouldn't we at least be asking ourselves: what if the ANC loses but refuses to accept defeat? What then happens next?

## Why are we in the Era of Democratic Fatigue Syndrome?

**Yanga Malotana**

There is something explosive about an era in which interest in politics grows while faith in politics declines. What does it mean for the stability of a country if more and more people warily keep track of the activities of an authority that they increasingly distrust? How much derision can a system endure, especially now that everyone can share their deeply felt opinions online? These are some of the questions I have been asking myself while South Africa, along with a few other democratic countries, heads to the 2024 election.

Trust in democratic institutions has been visibly declining over the last few years. Everywhere in democratic states, political parties bear the brunt of distrust when it comes to democratic institutions. Although a certain scepticism is an essential component of citizenship in a free society, one is justified in asking how widespread this distrust might be and at what point healthy scepticism tips over into outright aversion.

If we look at the dawn and peak of democracy, fifty years ago – thirty for South Africa – the world was characterised by greater political apathy and yet greater trust in politics. Now there is both passion and distrust. These are turbulent times. And yet, for all this turbulence, there has been little reflection on the tools that our democracies use. It is still heresy to ask whether elections, in their current form, are a badly outmoded technology for converting the collective will of the people into governments and policies. Take, for example, the modern way of engaging with referendums. The Brexit referendum is a prime example of how our referendums today focus on the discussion and debate of its outcome instead of the discussion of its principles. This should be surprising. Technically, in this format, in a referendum, people are directly asked what they think when they have not been obliged to think – although they have certainly been bombarded by every conceivable form of manipulation in the months leading up to the vote. Arguably, the problem is not confined to referendums: in an election, you may cast your vote, but you are also casting it away for the next few years. This system of delegation to an elected representative may have been necessary in the past – when communication was slow, and information was limited – but it is quickly becoming outdated with the way citizens interact with each other today. Jean-Jacques Rousseau had already observed in the 18th century that elections alone were not a guarantee

of liberty: “The people deceive themselves when they fancy, they are free; they are so, in fact, only during the election of members of Parliament: for, as soon as a new one is elected, they are again in chains and are nothing.”

Referendums and elections, in their current format, are becoming arcane instruments of public deliberation and if we refuse to update our democratic technology, we may find our system beyond repair. We are in an era of democratic fatigue syndrome. Symptoms may include referendum fever, declining party membership and low voter turnout. Or government impotence and political paralysis – under relentless media scrutiny, widespread public distrust and populist upheavals.

But democratic fatigue syndrome is not so much caused by the people, the politicians or the parties – it is caused by procedure. Perhaps democracy is not the problem; the way of voting is. It is understandable when young people believe their vote would not make a difference because it can sometimes feel like “where is the reasoned voice of the people in a vote?” Where do citizens get the chance to obtain the best possible information, engage with each other and decide collectively upon their future? Where do citizens get the chance to shape the fate of their communities? For some, the voting booth is not the place. We have reached a point where the words ‘election’ and ‘democracy’ have become synonymous. After all, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 states as much: “The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.”

The words “this will shall be expressed” are typical of our way of thinking about democracy: when we say ‘democracy’, we only mean ‘elections’. But isn’t it remarkable that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights contains such a precise definition of how the will of the people must be expressed?

Furthermore, it would appear that the fundamental cause of democratic fatigue syndrome lies in the fact that we have all become electoral fundamentalists, venerating elections but despising the people who are elected. Electoral fundamentalism is the unshakeable belief in the idea that democracy is inconceivable without elections and elections are a necessary and fundamental precondition when speaking of democracy. Electoral fundamentalists refuse to regard

elections as a means of taking part in democracy, seeing them instead as an end in themselves, as a doctrine with an intrinsic, inalienable value. This blind faith in the ballot box as the ultimate base on which popular sovereignty rests can be seen most vividly of all in international diplomacy. When Western donor countries hope that countries ravaged by conflict – such as Congo, Iraq or Afghanistan – will become democracies, what they really mean is this: they must hold elections, preferably on the western model, with voting booths, ballot papers and ballot boxes; with parties, campaigns and coalitions; with lists of candidates, polling stations and sealing wax, just like the West. And then they will receive money from the West.

Local democratic and proto-democratic institutions (village meetings, traditional conflict mediation or ancient jurisprudence) stand no chance. These things may have their value in encouraging a peaceful and collective discussion, but the money will be shut off unless the Western own tried-and-tested recipe is adhered to.

If you look at the recommendations of Western donors, it is as if democracy is a kind of export product, off the peg, in handy packaging, ready for dispatch. “Free and fair elections” become a furniture kit for democracy – to be assembled by the recipient, with or without the help of the instructions enclosed. And if the resulting piece of furniture is lopsided, uncomfortable to sit on or falls apart? Then it’s the fault of the customer.

The fact that elections can have all kinds of outcomes in states that are fragile, including violence, ethnic tensions, criminality and corruption, seems of secondary importance. That elections do not automatically foster democracy, but may instead prevent or destroy it, is conveniently forgotten. We insist that in every country in the world people must traipse off to the polling stations. Our electoral fundamentalism really does take the form of a new, global evangelism. Elections are the sacraments of that new faith, a ritual regarded as a vital necessity in which the form is more important than the content.

Elections are the fossil fuel of politics. Whereas once they gave democracy a huge boost, much as oil did for our economies, it now turns out they cause colossal problems of their own. If we don’t urgently reconsider the nature of our democratic fuel, a systemic crisis awaits. If we obstinately hold on to a notion of democracy that

reduces its meaning to voting in elections and referendums, at a time of economic malaise, we will undermine the democratic process.

## 30 Years of Democracy in South Africa: Lessons Learned, Challenges and Opportunities

Adebimpe Esther Ofusori

South Africa's journey toward democracy began in the early 1990s with the end of the apartheid era. This era marked a significant shift in the country's political landscape, with the setting aside of racial segregation and the acceptance of multiracial democracy. In 1994, the first democratic elections were held and Nelson Mandela, who was the leader of the African National Congress (ANC) then, became the first black president. This election was the first in which citizens of all races were allowed to participate. During Mandela's tenure, he made efforts to reconcile the nation's divided communities and to promote national unity. Since then, South Africa has held several democratic elections. The ANC has remained the dominant political party in the country, winning the majority of votes in each election. 2024 marks the 30th anniversary of South Africa's first democratic elections and these 30 years have been a period of profound transformation, marked by both successes and challenges such as corruption, inequality, unemployment, and service delivery. Up to 2023, South Africa struggled with these challenges while striving to strengthen its democratic institutions and ensure that the promises of freedom and equality are fulfilled for all its citizens.

### *Lessons Learnt from 30 years of democracy in South Africa*

Over the past 30 years of democracy, several lessons have been learnt from South Africa's experience with democracy. Here are some of them:

- **Cooperation among races:** South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy emphasised the importance of cooperation among races. The negotiations that led to the end of apartheid involved a wide range of stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organisations, and leaders from various racial and ethnic groups. This cooperation laid the foundation for a more representative and participatory democracy.
- **Respect for human rights:** Upholding human rights is fundamental to a thriving democracy. South Africa's Bill of Rights, preserved in its Constitution, guarantees a wide range of civil, political, and socioeconomic rights. Protecting and promoting these rights is essential for ensuring the dignity and well-being of all citizens.

- **Vigilance:** Democracy requires vigilance because the emergence of democracy did not automatically resolve all the problems encountered in the country. Therefore, democratic institutions need to be continuously strengthened, and citizens must be fully engaged and vigilant to hold their leaders accountable. South Africa's experience underscores the importance of robust democratic institutions, including an independent judiciary, a free press, and an active civil society.
- **Inequality:** Despite political independence, South Africa still struggles with deep-rooted economic and social inequalities inherited from the apartheid era. Effective democracy requires addressing these disparities through policies that promote inclusive growth, equitable access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.
- **Combating corruption:** Strong anti-corruption measures, transparency, and accountability are essential for a healthy democracy. In South Africa, corruption has been a challenge to its democracy. Efforts to combat corruption must be prioritised to ensure that public resources are used for the benefit of all citizens.
- **Social cohesion and nation-building:** Building a cohesive society requires deliberate efforts to bridge gaps and foster a sense of national identity. South Africa's diverse population presents both challenges and opportunities for nation-building. Promoting social cohesion through inclusive policies, cultural exchange, and dialogue can help overcome divisions and build a stronger sense of unity.

*What are the opportunities derived from democracy in South Africa?*

The 30 years of democracy in South Africa have provided valuable insights into the complexities and variations of democratic governance. While significant progress has been made, challenges remain, and the journey toward a more just, inclusive, and prosperous society continues. Despite these challenges, South Africa's democracy has also created various opportunities for the country's development and progress. These opportunities are highlighted as follows:

- **Social inclusion and diversity:** Democracy has provided an opportunity to embrace South Africa's rich diversity and promote social inclusion. The country's democratic institutions and processes allow for the representation and participation of diverse



communities, fostering a sense of belonging and unity among citizens from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

Growth and economic development: Democracy provides a conducive environment for economic development and growth by promoting stability, transparency, and accountability. South Africa's democratic institutions, such as an independent judiciary and free press, help ensure the rule of law and protect property rights, encouraging investment and entrepreneurship.

- **Promotion of human rights and civil liberties:** Democracy has enabled the protection and promotion of human rights and civil liberties in South Africa. The country's Constitution preserves a wide range of rights, including freedom of expression, association, and assembly, which provide individuals with the opportunity to voice their opinions, advocate for change, and hold their government accountable.
- **Strengthening institutions:** The transition to democracy has led to the establishment and strengthening of democratic institutions in South Africa, including Parliament, independent electoral commissions, and watchdog offices. These institutions play a crucial role in upholding the principles of democracy, safeguarding citizens' rights, and ensuring the accountability of government officials.
- **International cooperation and diplomacy:** Democracy enhances South Africa's standing in the international community and opens up opportunities for diplomatic engagement and cooperation. As a democratic country, South Africa can build alliances, negotiate trade agreements, and participate in international organisations to advance its interests and contribute to global peace and development.
- **Youth engagement and empowerment:** Democracy encourages the active participation of young people in civic and political life, offering them opportunities to engage in decision-making processes, advocate for their rights, and contribute to social change. South Africa's youthful population represents a significant demographic dividend, with the potential to drive innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development.
- **Transitional justice and reconciliation:** Democracy provides a framework for addressing past injustices and promoting reconciliation. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), established in the aftermath of apartheid, exemplifies the country's commitment to healing wounds,

acknowledging historical wrongs, and building a more just and inclusive society.

- **Environmental sustainability:** Democracy enables citizens to participate in environmental governance and advocate for sustainable development practices. South Africa's democratic processes allow for public input and oversight in environmental decision-making, fostering conservation efforts, and promoting the responsible management of natural resources.

### What are some of the challenges for democracy in South Africa?

Despite the significant progress made since the beginning of democracy in South Africa, there are still numerous challenges faced by the country. Below are some of the major challenges encountered during the past 30 years of democracy:

- **Political polarisation:** Political polarisation and factionalism within the ruling ANC and among opposition parties have sometimes hindered effective governance and policy implementation. Divisions within the political landscape can impede consensus-building and undermine efforts to address pressing socioeconomic challenges.
- **Unemployment:** Unemployment rates, particularly among young people, are still high. Limited job creation, skills mismatches, and structural barriers contribute to the persistence of high unemployment rates, exacerbating social and economic inequalities.
- **Corruption:** Corruption continues to be a significant challenge in South Africa, undermining democratic institutions, eroding public trust, and diverting resources away from critical public services. High-profile corruption scandals involving political leaders and public officials have highlighted the need for stronger anti-corruption measures and greater accountability.
- **Education:** While significant strides have been made in expanding access to education since the end of apartheid, the quality of education remains uneven, and many schools lack basic infrastructure and resources. Educational outcomes continue to be influenced by socioeconomic factors, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality.
- **Crime and violence:** High levels of crime and violence, including gender-based violence, pose a threat to South Africa's democracy. Inadequate law enforcement, socioeconomic factors,

and historical legacies contribute to the persistence of crime, undermining citizens' sense of security and trust in the state.

- **Land reform:** Land reform remains a contentious issue in South Africa, with persistent calls for the redistribution of land to address historical injustices and promote inclusive economic development. However, progress on land reform has been slow, and debates over land ownership, tenure rights, and compensation continue to be fraught with political and legal challenges.
- **Xenophobia and social cohesion:** Xenophobic attacks and tensions between South Africans and foreign nationals pose challenges to social cohesion and the inclusive nature of democracy. Addressing xenophobia requires concerted efforts to promote tolerance and respect for human rights.

In conclusion, South Africa's democracy presents numerous opportunities for advancing social, economic, and political development, empowering citizens, and building a more inclusive and prosperous society. However, there are challenges, but when these challenges are addressed, South Africa can continue on its path towards realising the full potential of democracy for the benefit of all its citizens. This can be made possible by the collective efforts of the government, civil society, and the private sector to promote inclusive growth, strengthen democratic institutions, and advance social justice and equality.

## **Strategies for Empowering Citizens to make Informed Decisions at the Ballot Box 2024 Elections in South Africa**

**Stanley Ehiane**

The survival of the voting process is dependent on citizens. They must be able to make informed decisions about their lives and futures. Citizen involvement is becoming more important to the functioning of democracies in the twenty-first century as public participation develops and deepens on a global basis. In today's complex and interconnected world, citizen engagement is critical to allowing individuals to play an active and involved part in society. It entails a detailed understanding of political systems, governmental institutions, and citizens' rights and duties. Empowerment is essential to every country's sociopolitical development. Four essential strategies are critical for empowering impoverished people and increasing their freedom of choice and action in a variety of settings. These mechanisms – local organisational competency, accountability, inclusion and participation, and information access – are interrelated and function together.

Empowering citizens encourages them to participate actively in public affairs and identify with political institutions. When public decision-making bodies and government entities actively seek out and share community objectives, concerns, and values, it can lead to better outcomes for communities. When public decision-makers are involved in decision-making processes, they become more aware and capable of satisfying community needs. A thorough grasp of political procedures and voting systems is critical to empowering individuals. This includes understanding the workings of political parties, as well as the nomination and voting procedures. Citizens who understand the importance of elections and participate in the democratic process may vote, express their opinions, and assist elect good leaders.

Elections substantially impact a country's capacity to govern itself. The most fundamental assumption of credible elections is that they reflect the free expression of the people's will. To accomplish this, elections must be inclusive, transparent, and trustworthy for both the electorate and the elected. Genuine political competition and equitable election possibilities are important. The apparent crisis of democracy, worsened by increasing public anger and a reduction in political confidence, has increased in people who are more interested and empowered.

Citizen science is widely recognised as having the potential to significantly improve education, public participation, and environmental awareness. This understanding is vital for achieving the aims of, for example, the alien species policy. Individuals should be included in decision-making to increase agreement and reduce conflicts of interest in the control of invasive alien species.

Following the end of apartheid in South Africa, academics are focusing their attention on the consolidation and transition of democracies. They have been increasingly visible and pronounced since the establishment of democracy, particularly in South Africa's most important election since 1994. The historic event on April 27, 1994, allowed previously oppressed, disenfranchised, and underprivileged black South Africans to exercise their democratic rights for the first time in their lives.

Even now, people cherish citizens in democracies. To ensure consistent levels of accountability and responsiveness to their needs, citizens must get more involved in governmental operations and remain vigilant. Citizens must take the initiative in sustaining a democracy via their participation. As a result, citizen engagement has become a major priority on South Africa's national agenda, with democratic governments increasingly expecting individuals to participate in the process of constructing sustainable democracy.

The Republic of South Africa's Constitution (Act 108 of 1996), passed in 1996, provided the basis for the country's democratic government. In addition to the constitution, the government's Redistribution and Development Programme (RDP) of 1994–1996 aimed to mobilise all South Africans and the nation's resources in support of the building of a democratic society. The Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) was established in 1987 to enhance South Africa's democracy and facilitate its integration with other countries. IDASA has initiated an effort to empower communities and citizens. Its purpose is to empower communities and individuals via participation in social and political processes, therefore enhancing their quality of life. Citizens must be informed and educated on certain procedures before they may successfully contribute to and participate in South African democracy. IDASA's community and citizen empowerment programme aims to empower communities and people while also improving their quality of life via community involvement in social and political processes.

Elections are an important component of a successful democracy since they help shape the political climate and define a country's destiny. Elections are critical to democracy beyond the basic act of voting, and they have a substantial impact on a society's effectiveness and integrity. Furthermore, elections affect a country's overall growth and governance by empowering individuals, fostering accountability, and promoting transparency. Since 1994, South Africa has held multiple elections. Although these elections have been held regularly and are widely regarded as legitimate by both domestic and foreign observers, there are still some concerns about the electoral process's integrity and transparency, including low voter turnout, emphasising the importance of increased voter education. To ensure accountability, transparency, efficacy, and high-quality public service delivery to the populous, the roles of the government and the people of South Africa must be combined.

Elections are more than simply a legal right; they are powerful tools with the potential to transform society and steer a country's direction. Every citizen's vote in South Africa, a country where democracy has been fought for, demonstrates the people's resilience and resiliency. Elections are an important component of democracy in South Africa, where the battle for independence and equality has moulded the country's history. They allow inhabitants to actively determine the country's fate. As such, voting is especially important.

The South African government believes that citizen participation is the cornerstone of democracy and service delivery. Democracy is primarily based on informed and engaged citizens. The democratic values of transparency, responsibility, and equal representation may be compromised when voters lack proper knowledge, jeopardising the political process's legitimacy. Citizen science may be used to inform decision-making by integrating a variety of complementary options. Effective approaches for empowering voters to make informed decisions during the election are urgently required to ensure the democratic integrity of the 2024 elections. Public relations efforts, instructional programs, and increased access to digital education can help citizens make decisions that affect the survival of democratic values.

Citizen engagement and participation are the foundations of active citizenship, allowing individuals to actively participate in democratic processes, understand their rights and responsibilities, and improve their communities. Gaining a full grasp of political systems, governmental institutions, and social concerns will allow

us to advocate for change, make informed decisions, and contribute to a more inclusive and equal society.

Prejudices and assumptions constantly affect us, since we are only human. This is how our minds are wired. However, while making vital judgements, we must set aside our biases and depend on objective, solid evidence. To achieve public programmes and policies that primarily benefit specific groups and create social change, it is important to act and persuade stakeholders with governmental, political, or financial power. This explains why citizen empowerment is so important.

To defend the process of democracy, all parties must commit to strengthening democratic consolidation. South Africa can safeguard itself from the negative impacts of electoral apathy by providing its citizens with greater control, ensuring that elections continue to accurately represent the will of the people.

## **Promoting Tolerance and its Implications for Electoral Outcomes in South Africa**

**Dr Adebimpe Esther Ofusori**

Tolerance is the readiness to allow the expression of ideas and respect the rights and freedoms of others contrary to one's opinion. In South Africa, tolerance in terms of electoral outcomes should be promoted as it is the central tenet of a liberal democracy. Since South Africa has overcome the era of apartheid and has now been transformed into a democratic system, the implications of tolerance for electoral outcomes are significant. When tolerance is promoted in electoral outcomes, citizens feel encouraged and eager to actively participate in the democratic process. This will ensure a continuous cycle of representation and accountability. Embracing individual's rights and freedoms can bring about new ideas and beliefs that will promote the political growth of the country. In addition, tolerance reflects the commitment of the country to democratic principles and contributes to its positive image on the global stage. This plays a significant role in shaping the political landscape of the country.

### *Implication of tolerance for electoral outcomes in South Africa*

Tolerance for electoral outcomes in South Africa is crucial because it helps to promote good and stable governance, which in turn enhance the overall well-being of the nation. Below are the implications of tolerance for electoral outcomes:

**Embracing diversity:** South Africa comprises various ethnic groups, cultures and languages. Promoting tolerance can help to welcome and embrace these diversities. It will also create an environment where people from various backgrounds can live together peacefully and foster a sense of unity within the nation.

**Education and awareness:** Promoting tolerance requires ongoing efforts in education and awareness. Civic education programmes that emphasise the importance of tolerance, diversity, and inclusivity can have a long-term impact on shaping the attitudes of citizens.

**Social cohesion:** Tolerance promotes social cohesion, which is essential for stability and progress. A society that embraces tolerance will work together towards common goals, leading to a positive impact on electoral outcomes. When tolerance is lacking, there may be division, especially during political campaigns, which may lead to



divisions in society. Voters are more likely to support candidates and parties that promote unity and cooperation.

**Democratic values:** Tolerance is a fundamental democratic value that underpins the principles of free and fair elections. In a society where tolerance is embraced, citizens are more likely to respect the electoral process, accept diverse political opinions, and engage in peaceful political participation. This will enhance the legality of electoral outcomes and strengthen the democratic foundation of the country.

**Consolidation of democracy:** Tolerance for electoral outcomes is essential for the consolidation of democracy in South Africa. It reflects a commitment to the principles of free and fair elections, where the will of the people is respected, regardless of the political party or individual in power. This will go a long way in ensuring the full support of South Africans.

**Trust in democratic institutions:** Tolerance for electoral outcomes builds trust in democratic institutions. When citizens believe that their votes are counted fairly, and the electoral process is transparent, they are more likely to have confidence in the political system and institutions.

**Cooperation among groups:** Tolerance can bring about cooperation and understanding, which in turn can promote good communication among different groups. In an atmosphere of tolerance, political parties are more likely to engage in constructive debates that focus on policy issues rather than resorting to disruptive tactics.

**International investment:** Tolerance contributes to a positive international image for South Africa. A nation that is perceived as tolerant is more likely to attract foreign investment, build diplomatic relationships, and participate positively in regional and global affairs. This positive image can indirectly influence electoral outcomes by garnering support from the international community.

**Political stability:** High levels of tolerance can contribute to political stability. Tolerance helps to prevent post-election violence or unrest and brings about a peaceful environment for the development and progress of the country.

### *Challenges of tolerance for electoral outcomes*

Most of the time, tolerance brings about positive changes in electoral outcomes; however, there may negative impact of tolerance.

Tolerance in electoral outcomes in South Africa, as in any other society, faces several challenges. Some of the challenges that may arise in electoral outcomes are presented below.

**Historical grievances:** There has been a history of deep-rooted divisions, particularly along racial lines, due to the apartheid era in South Africa. Although there has been progress since the end of apartheid, historical grievances and inequalities can still influence electoral outcomes and create tensions.

**Lack of accountability:** It is essential to strike a balance, where tolerance coexists with mechanisms for holding leaders accountable for their actions. Ensuring democratic values are upheld can influence their electoral choices and preferences, thereby affecting accountability.

**Economic inequality:** Despite political changes, economic disparities still persist in South Africa. Unequal access to resources and opportunities can lead to frustration and resentment among certain groups, potentially affecting their tolerance of electoral outcomes.

**Racism:** Political parties in South Africa often mobilise support along ethnic and racial lines. This can sometimes result in a zero-sum game mentality, where one group perceives electoral victories by another group as a threat to their own interests, undermining tolerance.

**Perceptions of fairness and transparency:** Fairness and transparency in the electoral process are crucial for maintaining trust in the democratic system. Concerns about electoral fraud, irregularities, or bias can undermine confidence in electoral outcomes and decrease tolerance among the electorate.

**Misinformation on social media:** The proliferation of social media platforms has provided avenues for the spread of misinformation and the manipulation of public opinion. False narratives and propaganda can deepen divisions and decrease tolerance toward electoral outcomes perceived as unfavourable by certain groups.

**Weak institutions:** Weaknesses in South Africa's democratic institutions, such as the judiciary or electoral commission, can undermine the credibility of electoral processes. Without robust institutions to ensure free and fair elections, trust in the legitimacy of electoral outcomes may erode, leading to decreased tolerance.

**Party loyalty and polarisation:** Loyalty to political parties can be strong in South Africa, sometimes overshadowing broader national interests. This loyalty, coupled with political polarisation, can make

it challenging for individuals to accept electoral outcomes that favour opposing parties.

In conclusion, promoting tolerance in South Africa is not only a moral imperative but also has practical implications for electoral outcomes. A tolerant society is more likely to experience fair and inclusive elections, fostering a political environment that reflects the values of democracy and respects the diversity of its people. In addition, addressing the challenges of tolerance requires sustained efforts to promote social cohesion and trust in democratic institutions. This can be achieved by strengthening accountability mechanisms, fostering dialogue across diverse communities, promoting civic education, and ensuring that electoral processes are transparent and fair. Lastly, addressing underlying socioeconomic inequalities and historical grievances is essential for building a more tolerant and resilient democracy in South Africa.

## **Factors Influencing Consensus Building and their Implications on Multi Partyism in South Africa**

**Adebimpe Esther Ofusori**

Consensus building is a crucial process in multi-party-political systems, particularly in a diverse and complex society like South Africa. It is a complex and dynamic process influenced by the country's unique historical, social, and political contexts. It is a conflict-resolution process used mainly to settle complex, multiparty disputes which guarantees that all parties' interests are protected. This is possible because participants make final decisions themselves, and each party has a chance to make sure their interests are represented in the agreement and are part of signing off on the agreement. In South Africa, consensus building has an historical background determined through the theory of declaration, will, and reliance. Consensus building is important in the society because many problems exist that affect diverse groups of people with different interests. As the problem increases, the organisations that deal with society's problems come to rely on each other for help; they are interdependent with each other as well as with the parties affected by decisions. It is therefore difficult and often ineffective for organisations to try to solve controversial problems on their own. Consensus building offers a way for individual citizens and organisations to collaborate on solving complex problems in ways that are acceptable to all.

### *Historical context of consensus building in South Africa*

Consensus building in South Africa has been a significant aspect of the country's political and social landscape, particularly in its transition from apartheid to a democratic society. Given its diverse population and history of apartheid, consensus building is essential for maintaining social cohesion and democratic stability. The transition from apartheid to democracy in the early 1990s is one of the most notable examples of consensus building. Key figures like Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk engaged in negotiations to dismantle apartheid and establish a new democratic framework. These efforts culminated in the 1994 democratic elections. Some institutions, such as the TRC, established in 1995, aimed to address the human rights violations that occurred during apartheid. The TRC emphasised restorative justice and aimed at building a national consensus on the need for reconciliation.

The National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), formed in 1995, is another platform where government, business, labour, and community organisations negotiate and reach consensus on social and economic policy issues. It plays a crucial role in shaping labour laws, economic policies, and social initiatives. The negotiation process that led to the adoption of South Africa's 1996 constitution involved a broad range of stakeholders, including political parties, civil society, and interest groups. The inclusive nature of these negotiations helped to build a broad consensus on the principles of the new democratic state. Despite the efforts of these institutions, there are factors which influence consensus building. Below are some of the factors:

### *Factors influencing consensus building in South Africa*

Several factors influence consensus building, each with implications for multi-partyism in South Africa. Below are some of the factors that influence consensus building in South Africa include:

**Political culture and history:** The history of apartheid has left deep social and economic divides, impacting trust levels among different racial and ethnic groups.

**Reconciliation and nation-building efforts:** Efforts such as those of the TRC have influenced political culture, emphasising the importance of dialogue and reconciliation.

**Ethnic and racial diversity:** South Africa's diversity requires inclusive dialogue and representation to ensure all groups feel heard and respected.

**Socioeconomic inequality:** High levels of inequality can create barriers to consensus, as different groups have varying priorities and interests.

**Electoral system:** The proportional representation system encourages a multi-party landscape but also requires coalition-building and negotiation.

**Parliamentary procedures:** Structures that facilitate or hinder debate and negotiation affect the ability to reach consensus.

**Leadership styles:** Leaders who prioritise collaboration and consensus can foster a more cooperative political environment.

**Political will:** The commitment of political parties to work together for the common good is essential for effective consensus building.

**Active civil society:** A vibrant civil society can facilitate dialogue and hold parties accountable, promoting consensus.

**Role of the media:** Media can play a dual role by either fostering informed debate and understanding, or by exacerbating divisions through biased reporting among different political entities.

**Economic stability:** Economic stability or instability significantly affects consensus building. It can either drive parties to work together or exacerbate divisions.

**Resource allocation:** Decisions on resource distribution can significantly impact consensus efforts, particularly in a resource-constrained environment.

### *Implications of consensus building on multi-partyism in South Africa*

The implications of consensus building for multi-partyism in South Africa are highlighted below:

**Coalition governments:** In a multi-party system like South Africa's, coalition governments are often necessary. Effective consensus building is crucial for stable and functional coalitions, preventing frequent government collapses and ensuring policy continuity.

**Policy formulation and implementation:** Consensus is vital for creating and implementing policies that reflect the interests of diverse groups. Lack of consensus can lead to policy gridlock and ineffective governance.

**Political stability:** Strong consensus-building mechanisms contribute to political stability by reducing conflicts and fostering cooperation among parties. This is particularly important in a country with a history of division.

**Democratic consolidation:** Consensus building supports the consolidation of democracy by ensuring that all political voices are heard and considered. This inclusivity strengthens democratic institutions and processes.

**Public trust and engagement:** Effective consensus building enhances public trust in political institutions and encourages civic engagement. When citizens see their leaders working together for the common good, they are more likely to participate in the democratic process.

**Social cohesion:** Building consensus among political parties can contribute to broader social cohesion by bridging divides and promoting a sense of national unity.

In conclusion, consensus building in South Africa is an ongoing process that requires continuous effort from all sectors of society. It is essential for addressing the country's complex social, economic, and political challenges and for fostering a stable and inclusive democracy. Consensus building is also influenced by a complex interplay of historical, socioeconomic, institutional, and political factors. Effective consensus building is essential for the stability and functionality of multi-partyism, fostering democratic consolidation, public trust, and social cohesion. By addressing the factors that hinder consensus building and leveraging those that promote it, South Africa can strengthen its democratic processes and ensure more inclusive and effective governance.

## **Democracy Requires so much more than just our Vote**

**Stef Terblanche**

As we head towards our national and provincial elections, now is as good a time as ever to reflect on what 'democracy' means, the implications of our vote, and how we might contribute to strengthening and improving what we so glibly refer to as 'our democracy'.

Because one thing is certain: democracy depends on so much more than just casting our vote once every five years, important as that may be. Especially in a country like South Africa. Surprisingly, for many, in South Africa there is a vibrant, dynamic alternative that gives practical credence to this, to which I will return.

First however, what South Africans have come to appropriate as some kind of God-given right, is really a privilege that resulted from years of hard struggle and selfless sacrifice by many that liberated the country from a repressive political system reviled by the rest of the world. The essence of this may be lost on a born-free generation who never experienced the hardships of apartheid. Meanwhile, many of their parents may have settled into a delusionary comfort-zone, albeit one filled with complaints, believing that since liberation has been achieved, they should now vote in every democratic election and the government must take care of the rest. The same applies to those who evolved from a system that gave them privilege to one where this advantage is still retained.

For the first decade and a half, things went pretty well, until blind ideological intervention cut that short and crooks and political charlatans seized the opportunity to step into the void. From there it was all downhill and still continues as such.

It has now become a national pastime to complain about how the government is failing us on every front; how it is not delivering the services and protection we believe we are entitled to as promised by our constitution. Trying to capitalise on this, every two-bit politician is promising us Nirvana if only we would vote for them. At the same time, we have become a welfare state with around 50% of all South Africans living on social welfare grants that costs the state more than 11% of its national budget each year. While people certainly haven't volunteered for poverty and unemployment, this nonetheless translates into the hard reality of no economic or social contribution from a sizable part of the population; only an immense drain on scarce national wealth and economic resources.



The response to all of this has been electoral erosion with fewer people retaining faith in our democratic systems and institutions, as research has shown. Some still believe they are religiously doing their democratic duty by voting in every election, but others are increasingly giving up, and participation in elections has steadily been declining. That is a worldwide phenomenon, ironically in this year in which more countries than ever before are holding elections.

Perhaps this has something to do with the populations in so many countries – as in South Africa – growing at alarming rates, putting untenable pressure on dwindling economic resources, accompanied in many instances by worsening unemployment, poverty and crime. Governments in many parts of the world are struggling to deliver on popular expectations or make ends meet as their abilities and resources are stretched well beyond the comfort paradigms of bygone years. Within such frameworks and alongside the rapid explosion of technology and the social media it spawned, social values have also changed for the worse, adding to these pressures.

In South Africa, increasing numbers of eligible voters are no longer registering or voting, believing their votes count for nothing and won't change anything. In some respects, they may even be right. Others believe they should do their duty and cast their vote once every five years, and then sit back and wait for change or results without doing anything more than that. The sad news is that it doesn't work like that.

This brings sharply to mind the inaugural address of former US president John F Kennedy on 20 January 1961, when he uttered the memorable phrase, "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country." These words were spoken to inspire Americans to see the importance of civic action and public service and challenged every American citizen to contribute in some way to the public good. More than 60 years ago, in a changing world, Kennedy already recognised the urgent need for that.

And that truly is the valuable fibre that supports and holds together every successful democracy since then, perhaps arguably even more so than casting one's vote, but certainly in tandem with it.

In similar vein in the South African context, President Cyril Ramaphosa, in his State of the Nations Address on 16 February 2018, cited the "send me" refrain of the Thuma Mina song by Hugh Masekela to mobilise the voluntary patriotic service and resourcefulness of South Africans to create a better future for all. Sadly, many South

Africans ignored this deserving call, and still demand more while giving little or nothing in return.

In another instance, someone in a local podcast discussion raised the idea that South Africa's constitutional bill of rights should be supplemented with a bill of obligations. While rights certainly also imply obligations, codifying them as such may be too authoritarian to ensure positive or successful compliance. It should be a voluntary thing.

Yet in South Africa, it has become all too easy and common to demand and complain, instead of seeking out that which is positive and building on it. In his 2024 State of the Nation address Ramaphosa brought up the case of the fictitious Tintswalo, the child of democracy.

"The story of the first 30 years of our democracy can be best told through the life of a child called Tintswalo born at the dawn of freedom in 1994. She grew up in a society governed by a Constitution rooted in equality, the rule of law, and affirmation of the inherent dignity of every citizen," said Ramaphosa.

For so many of us our response was to ridicule and condemn Ramaphosa for stating this, citing the many problems, challenges and failures we are confronted with each day. And, make no mistake, while we should raise concern over these and hold our government accountable, we should also not fail to recognise any progress made, or to act upon the inherent opportunities that arise. Many of us failed to see, or deliberately wouldn't see that perhaps Ramaphosa was not trying to distort reality but was merely trying to show that not all was bad, that South Africa had changed for the better in many respects despite the many remaining problems, and that the country now offered its young people better opportunities than were available to their parents. Instead of ridiculing and rejecting his narrative, would it not have been better to rather explore ways of extending these opportunities to the majority of South Africans who still do not share in them? Shouldn't we be asking ourselves whether constructive engagement is not better than destructive rejection?

Be that as it may, so where and what is this dynamic alternative South Africa, I alluded to at the outset, this South Africa where instead of rejecting and criticising all the time, people are actually rolling up their sleeves and getting things done for themselves and their communities? Where people aren't simply sitting back waiting for their five-yearly vote to bring change, or for government to

provide, but where they are proactively bringing about change and improvement themselves.

It's all around us if we cared to look, and it's making a difference. It's in the selfless charitable work of entities like Gift of the Givers who have brought relief in so many disaster situations; in the uplifting work of organisations like AfriForum and Solidarity across communities and races; it's the students who sacrifice weekends to clean up beaches, streets and other public places; it's the residents of communities voluntarily filling up potholes and fixing other broken infrastructure; it's the Neighbourhood Watch volunteers who spend nights patrolling our streets to make our neighbourhoods safer; it's the small Free State town where residents are managing their own affairs instead of the politicians; it's in the hard work of decent folk in a place called Orania who are creating the kind of ideal 'state' they want to live in without prejudice or harm to others; it's the savings or investment societies known as stokvels benefitting their members in townships and rural areas; it's the business leaders and businesses assisting government to bring about improvements in critical areas like energy, transport and fighting crime; it's the volunteers of the National Sea Rescue Institute who risk their lives to save others at sea; it's the young volunteers who help people in rural areas build homes for their families; it's the multiple organisations who are running job-creation programmes especially for young people or providing study bursaries; and so the list goes on.

I mention AfriForum, Solidarity, and Orania here because they provide models worthy of emulating. It's far too easy to criticise and reject them as being racist or serving narrow elitist interests, whether out of ignorance or for mischievous political expediency, when they are nothing of the kind. Strikingly, a growing number of public figures who are neither white or Afrikaans, ranging from popular podcaster Penuel Lungelo Mlotshwa to political party leader Gayton McKenzie, have lately made the effort to find out more about these organisations, their work, and their aims. All came back with changed views and positive reviews, saying they wished more South Africans would emulate them.

AfriForum and Solidarity, through the fees paid by their thousands of members, incidentally of all races, provide charitable assistance to people in need across the racial, social and economic spectrum. Where the state may have failed its citizens, they have created their own university, colleges, creches, old-age homes, neighbourhood watches and more. These entities have created a

kind of ideal state within a state where the latter has been unable to provide adequately.

However, apart from these organisations, there are hundreds if not thousands more. Entities such as StayAfrica that provides affordable travel opportunities for South African students; the Via Volunteers with community, childcare, and wildlife conservation projects; COPESSA (Community-based Prevention and Empowerment Strategies in South Africa) which works to prevent violence against women and children; or Habitat for Humanity South Africa whose volunteers not only build houses but generally help communities address, improve and self-manage their development to sustain their economic futures, currently in 34 communities around the country.

There simply are too many to mention them all. The point is that all of these organisations and individuals are making a difference, securing the viability of our democracy without just criticising and waiting for government to provide, or waiting for their vote to bring about the magic. These are the people and organisations that have answered the call of Thuma Mina and are doing for their country what they can instead of the other way around.

Where government or the state fail to do so, they step in to fill the critical gaps in service delivery and make South Africa a better place for all, to create happy and thriving communities and the kind of society we aspire to. This is what adds critical value to our democracy, more than just a five-yearly vote. It is a self-governing culture worthy of wider exploration, development and application. It means that to be successful, democracy requires so much more than just our vote.

## Democracy does not need to be a Horse Race

**Steven Friedman**

If we think court cases are only about who wins and who loses, we will not know how the courts apply the law. If we think politics is only about who wins and who loses, we will never discuss the issues democracies need to address.

Media reporting and public discussion of two 2024 electoral court cases show clearly that the mainstream view in this country is that court judgments and politics really are only about who wins and who loses. In both, aspects of the court's decision that reflect on how democracy ought to work here, were ignored. And so, there was no discussion of important issues which affect democracy's health.

In the first ruling, the court rejected an attempt by the ANC to overturn the IEC decision to register the MKP as a political party. It gave full reasons for its decision.

Media coverage and debate fixated on the court's finding that the ANC did not object to the MKP's registration in the time allotted by the law. (The ANC either didn't notice MKP's registration when it happened or didn't think it was a problem until the party turned out to be a vehicle for former President Jacob Zuma).

It is true that the court said the ANC had no standing because its objection was late. But this is not all that it had to say. It also said that it had the power to overlook the lateness of the ANC's objection. Its reasons for not doing this became clear when it discussed the principle which it believed was at stake in the case.

### *A basic right*

The court declared that "at the heart" of the section of the law which deals with registering political parties "are the political rights enshrined in section 19 of the Constitution." The section was "aimed at ensuring that every citizen can form and register a political party. That, therefore, means that the said section should be interpreted in a way, which facilitates the formation and registration of political parties as against hamstringing it."

In other words, when there is a dispute over whether to register a party, both the IEC and the court should assume that it should be registered if this is at all possible within the law – the purpose of the

law is to allow parties to register, not to create obstacles, because forming a party and contesting elections is a right.

This view – that it should be as easy as possible for parties to contest elections – is shared by the Constitutional Court, which recently sharply lowered the number of signatures parties who have never won seats must gather to make it onto the ballot paper.

On one level, this makes an important democratic point – that everyone has the right to form or support a party and that suppressing parties is not only undemocratic but counter-productive. The people who support the party will not change their view if it is not allowed to contest elections – they will simply find other ways to express it which may be more damaging than allowing the party to stand. Parties should not be able to use the law to suppress opposition.

The IEC seems to agree. One of its problems is parties who adopt logos and names very similar to other parties, presumably in the hope that supporters of the party they are mimicking will vote for them in error. This seems to be a sound reason to prevent a party contesting. But the IEC has chosen rather to separate parties with similar names or logos on the ballot paper in the hope that this will ensure that voters do not mistake a rival party for the one they support. So, the party stays on the ballot and steps are taken to prevent voter error.

But court rulings designed to make it as easy as possible to contest may make democracy more difficult. The country already has well over 300 registered parties. A ballot paper with that many names would be unmanageable for voters who would find it hard to make their choice. So, some way must be found to limit the number of parties who contest. Ideally, it should exclude parties which have no reasonable hope of winning a seat.

There are two ways of doing this – insisting that parties and candidates pay a deposit which they lose if they do not have enough support, or requiring them to show support by collecting signatures from voters. Both are used in this country. So far, courts have reduced the number of signatures parties need but not the deposit they must pay.

This sends an undemocratic message – that whether you can contest depends on how much money you have, not how many people support you. It seems unlikely that this is what courts want

to say but the effect is that money, not support, is the key to making it onto the ballot.

These are among the issues for debate raised by the ruling. They have been ignored because the debate was far more interested in who was winning or losing a race.

### *All Power to the president*

The second judgment overruled the IEC's decision to ban Zuma from contesting the election because the Constitution does not allow anyone to stand if they have been sentenced to a prison term of one year or more. The sentence – fifteen months in jail – was imposed by the Constitutional Court.

We don't know why the court decided this because it has not given reasons. But exchanges between the judges and lawyers during the hearing suggest that it may have decided that Zuma was not sentenced to fifteen months because the president decided to order his release after three months. This, Zuma's lawyers said, meant that he had been sentenced only to three months and so was entitled to contest.

If that was the court's reason, we should be worried, whatever our view on Zuma and the MK Party. The court would then be saying that the president is entitled to override the Constitutional Court by changing a prison sentence it had imposed from 15 months to three months. Presidents are allowed to reduce prison terms by ordering a prisoner's release. But that does not mean they are changing the sentence – they are simply deciding that, for some reason, it should not be implemented. The section of the constitution in question says people are not eligible to stand if they have been sentenced to more than a year in prison, not that they must serve more than a year. So, if that is why the court overturned the IEC's decision, it is saying that a president can change a sentence imposed by our highest court.

If presidents can change Constitutional Court judgments, why stop at changing prison sentences? Why not allow them to ban opposition parties or lock up their opponents, whatever the court says? If the ruling is allowed to stand, does this not open the way to the end of constitutional democracy?

Given how much is at stake, we should expect the debate to be demanding that the court give its reasons and to be warning that, if it does believe the president can override the Constitutional Court,

democracy here is in deep trouble. But this issue has been entirely ignored – again the only issue is who won and who lost. Who cares whether constitutional democracy is threatened when the debate is busy tipping a race?

The reaction to the two court decisions is a problem for democracy, but is not a great surprise, because it is not only court judgments that our media and the debate reduce to a horse race – it is everything.

The country is in the midst of what we are told is the most important election since 1994. While that may well be an overstatement, this is the first election since democracy began here whose result is in doubt. Given this, we should expect a campaign in which the issues facing the country and what parties will do about them is hotly debated.

That is not what we are getting. As usual, there is much talk of who will win or lose but very little on what needs to change (besides the party in government) and how it would be changed. It is usual in elections to ask on which issues the battle is being fought. The only issue in this election seems to be whether we should trust one group of politicians or another.

As long as that persists, the country will not debate the problems it faces and policy on all issues will be what a few politicians decide it should be. Until the debate moves beyond the horse race, the people will not be part of the discussion on what the country needs to do.



## **There is no better Time for South Africans to Exercise their Right than Now!**

**Yolokazi Mfuto**

More than 70 nations, home to more than half of the world's population, will have elections in 2024. According to observers, "each of these elections is crucial to the citizens involved, and cumulatively they will have an enormous impact on the world." Analysts are calling this the "biggest election year in history".

South Africa is no exception; the country will be heading to the polls on the 29th of May 2024 for the seventh time since the dawn of democracy. However, one of the most worrying issues is that, over the years, the IEC has seen plummeting voter turnout, which is daunting for democracy. Voting is one of the most important channels in democratic processes through which to share views and contribute to decision-making. When participation is low, there is doubt in the legitimacy of the government. This has the potential to undermine the citizens' faith in democratic processes and may lead to cynicism and disillusionment.

For South Africa, Freedom Day, 27 April is deeply ingrained in history and culture, marking a turning point in the country's transition to a democratic and more inclusive society. The purpose of this day is to commemorate the first democratic elections after many years of discrimination. It is also a day to honour the sacrifices made by activists, freedom fighters, and other people who fought against apartheid. Additionally, it upholds the principles of equality, harmony, tolerance, and reconciliation – all of which are necessary to create a progressive democratic state.

This is a day marked to celebrate the triumph of democracy over oppression and the realisation of the dreams of millions of South Africans who have dedicated their lives to the pursuit of justice and equality. It signalled the beginning of a new country in which all people have equal rights and opportunities, regardless of race. On that election day in 1994, approximately 87% of the eligible voters went to cast their vote.

Prior to 1994, the apartheid government enforced institutionalised racial discrimination and segregation, dividing South Africa along racial lines. Basic human rights, including the right to vote and involvement in mainstream politics, were denied to the majority black population as well as other ethnic groups. After

decades of struggle, resistance, and international denunciation of apartheid, the country gained freedom.

The concept of the right to life, liberty, and property as conceived by philosopher John Locke are fundamental to the liberal ideas that has ushered democracy. Therefore, it is important that the ideals of democracy are kept alive and for democracy to survive, it needs participation.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) as ratified by South Africa in 1998 protects the right of everyone to hold opinions without interference. It further established the right to freedom of expression. The right to freedom of opinion and expression is a central pillar of democratic societies, and a haven for free and fair electoral processes. Therefore, freedom of expression is the cornerstone of democracy.

Voting is essential to ensure the legitimacy of the government. Elections also allow people the choice of being represented by people who they trust in decision-making, interests and beliefs. Furthermore, voting provides a direct avenue for individuals to participate in democratic processes and the freedom of expression to advise on how society is developed. It gives people the ability to use their civic rights and participate in the decision-making process.

It is worth noting that there are apathetic voters. The majority of these people believe that their vote won't matter or that politicians don't reflect their interests, which makes them feel disengaged or uninterested in the political processes. In the same breath, there those who are disillusioned. They have lost faith in the political system because of perceived corruption, unfulfilled promises, or a lack of significant change.

The declining voter turnout has been worrisome. From 1994, out of the 18 million eligible voters, approximately 87% turned out to vote. In 2004, 20 million people registered to vote, and 76% cast their vote. In 2009, 23 million people were registered to vote, and 77% of them voted (the voter turnout increased by 1%]. In 2014, 25 million people were registered to vote, and 73% voted. In the previous National and Provincial elections in 2019, 26 million people were registered and only 66% came out to vote.

Currently, the IEC has published that more than 27 million people have registered to vote, with a plea to all who have registered to honour their commitment and vote on election day. The vote is

not only important for candidates, but it crucial to keep the lifeline for our democracy.

## **The Importance of Safeguarding our Democracy**

**Bongiwe Khumalo**

In 2024, South Africa will be celebrating 30 years of freedom from a terrible political dispensation that limited the rights of citizens and their privileges. Therefore, citizens must take the time to reflect on how far we have come as a nation. While the government has taken significant strides in setting up laws and institutions to safeguard our hard-won rights, our democracy has faced threats that seek to undermine the constitution and the institutions meant to protect it.

In previous years, our nation has experienced tremendous “political events” that have shaken our democracy to its core. The reality is we are still deeply divided as a nation, not just by race but also by class, socioeconomic status, employment, religion, gender, political ideologies, and affiliations. The division is so intense that the ideological war among the ruling political elite has shifted the government’s attention from service delivery to political survival. Moreover, the state has become the site of contestation, not for ideas but for positions, privileges, and power, further deepening the divisions.

Moreover, the triple challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment continue to weigh heavily on our nation, largely because the vestiges of inequalities and divisions imposed on society over some three centuries persist almost three decades after the country’s democratisation. This impact reverberates across the land and, if left unattended, threatens to destabilise our hard-fought-for democracy.

Furthermore, while the constitution and its Chapter 9 institutions have laid the foundations for an inclusive and viable social contract between the public and the state at different levels of government, the ongoing energy crisis facing the nation threatens our social stability. Economic analysts claim that the problem costs South Africa four to six billion rands a day, pushing more and more people into poverty, unemployment, and crime, and driving away investment. While the government is doing all it can to resolve the crisis, the reality is that if not resolved urgently, it will create conditions threatening our hard-won democracy.

Against this background, what can be done to ensure the next 30 years are different and filled with hope? Firstly, our democracy must be protected by all citizens from all forms of threats. Secondly,

the government, in partnership with all social partners, must work speedily to address the triple challenges that undermine our social stability and interrelationships. There can never be peace among citizens as long as income inequalities remain at the same level that they are present. There can never be peace as long as racial challenges are left unattended or as long as unemployment remains at the current levels.

Secondly, the increasing economic marginalisation of the poor and disadvantaged constitutes the biggest threat to forming a cohesive national identity in South African society. And the list goes on. The time to act decisively and speedily is now.

Thirdly, our political discourse must be about collaboration amongst political parties for the interests of the public. The time to jostle for power, privileges, and positions is over. One of the many reasons why there are high levels of pessimism among citizens is the lack of interest by politicians to serve their interests. Politicians have long shown that their personal interests are more important than those of the electorate. It is time that they realise their political capital is waning. Come the next elections in 2024, citizens will exercise vote wisely, informed by their realities, and elect political parties that have demonstrated interest in their plight.

Fourth, the government, at all levels of governance, must prioritise better service delivery and work tirelessly towards improving the delivery of these services efficiently and effectively. While delivering essential services sustainably and equitably is a daunting task, citizens in many parts of the country have lost patience with the government and have increasingly embarked on protests over the past decade. A few years ago, the government embarked on a “back to basics” strategy aiming at addressing some of the most pressing problems, such as the lack of managerial skills in most municipalities, too much party-political interference, financial problems, corruption, and a tradition of non-payment for services to mention just a few. Sadly, the situation has improved only slightly in most municipalities and communities. This situation needs urgent attention; otherwise, it will continue undermining social stability and democracy.

In conclusion, it is crucial that we collectively safeguard our democratic gains and protect our fundamental rights and institutions from being abused and eroded. Doing so will honour the legacy of our forefathers and mothers who laid down their lives and made

sacrifices for the rights we celebrate. We must ensure that these rights and the freedom they brought us are preserved so future generations will enjoy them.

## 2. Electoral Politics and Voter Behaviour in South Africa

### Allowing the Wealthy to Rule Us

**Steven Friedman**

If there is one thing South Africa's politicians prefer to winning votes, it is raising money. Which is why even very limited efforts to ensure that they are not told what to do by donors is under threat.

A justified storm of protest is beginning to build around sections of the Electoral Matters Amendment Bill that could ensure that South Africans again have no control over one of the most important dangers to democracy here, the effect of money on politics. It would also give bigger parties an unfair advantage over smaller rivals.

For nearly a quarter century after democracy arrived here, there were no rules governing political party funding. Anyone could give as much money as they liked to political parties and neither they nor the party had to tell anyone about it. This made it very difficult to check whether government decisions – in all three spheres of government and regardless of which party was in charge – were taken because politicians felt they would help voters or because party donors wanted them.

After much pressure by lobby groups, Parliament passed the 2018 Political Party Funding Act which, for the first time, imposed some control. It included measures forcing parties to tell the public of any donation above R100 000 and limiting the amount to R15m that any one donor can give to a party.

### *Undoing progress*

The bill would allow the government to undo these measures – without even needing a parliamentary vote. It is, ironically, a response to a Constitutional Court judgment ruling which was hailed by some as a democratic advance – that independent candidates must be allowed to contest national and provincial elections. Political parties are entitled to funding from public money and the change meant that a formula was needed to govern the money independents can claim.

But the bill reacts to the arrival of independent candidates by giving a boost to the biggest parties – the new rules would give the ANC and DA a larger share at the expense of smaller parties and independents. Unsurprisingly, smaller parties are unhappy and are warning the government not to pass it before the election. It does not take a seer to predict that a Constitutional Court challenge may be in the works.

But important as this is, it is overshadowed by the Bill's proposal that the president should have the power to decide the size of donations below which parties don't have to tell us that they received the money as well as the upper limit for donations. The decision would not need a parliamentary vote – the head of government would need only to consult Parliament's home affairs committee and the minister.

You don't need to have studied law and politics to work out that this will enable a governing party to undo the controls on funding. It could, if it wanted, decide that all donations below one billion Rand need not be disclosed and that donors can give up to one hundred billion. To avoid the fuss of a parliamentary debate, the president can ask the home affairs committee its view and rush the change through.

Anyone who questions the motives behind the bill will not be assured by Home Affairs minister Aaron Motsoaledi's defence. He said the change was warranted because the president has never abused his powers, the new arrangement would not be a conflict of interest and parliament would be consulted through the portfolio committee. It is no surprise that an IEC official was unimpressed and insisted that the present arrangement should stay.

It is not clear whether the minister maintained a straight face when he said there was no conflict of interest if the head of a party which may not want to disclose funding could decide whether it should. But, if he did, it must have been difficult. And there is surely no weaker argument for giving a president powers than the claim that the person in the post has never abused their authority – besides the obvious point that the president may not have abused his powers because there were clear rules limiting what he could do, what if this president is replaced by another with less respect for fairness? The weak justification sounds like just the thing politicians come up with when they don't want to discuss the real reason for the change – which is clearly what is happening here.



### *Feeling pain*

For some time, the governing party has been threatening to change the rules to increase the amount donors can give without telling anyone, and how much one donor can give. Why it wants to do this tells us why controls on party funding are so important and why this bill threatens democracy. It also tells us that we need to do far more to control funding than we have been since 2018.

During discussions on whether to force donors to disclose party funding, the DA repeatedly opposed this. It claimed donors would not give to opposition parties because they would fear government reprisals. This was never a strong argument – a government determined to punish people for donating to its opponents would no doubt find out who was funding whom. And in reality, the opposite of what the DA feared happened – the change in the law shrunk the ANC's funding, plunging it into crisis.

ANC leaders, in particular then treasurer-general Paul Mashatile, did little to hide their intentions – they were open both about blaming the law for the drop in funding and in insisting that the law needed to change so that donors could once again be shielded from the public.

It is hard to think of a stronger argument for the controls which the ANC wants lifted. If donors are so worried about being seen by the public to give to a governing party, it is hard to believe that they were giving because they deeply admire the party. Logic suggests that that they were giving for reasons they don't want debated in public.

That is precisely why we need laws forcing parties to disclose funding. While many people might donate to a party because they support its policies, companies and rich individuals are at least as likely to be parting with money because they expect something in return. If the act was indeed driving away donors who expected politicians to ignore voters in exchange for money, it was doing its job, and we need to insist that it stay.

To see how important the issue is, we need only look at politics in a country admired by many here, the United States. In theory its political rules are among the most democratic in the world – not only politicians but key officials, including some judges, are elected. Citizens can use referendums to express their view on policy and, in some cases, can recall people in office when they don't like what they are doing.

In practice, democracy in the US, where it operates at all, is very poor at expressing what the people want – on a host of issues, the attitudes of voters measured in many polls are at odds with what the politicians do.

The reason is simple – money's hold on politics. About half a century ago, the US made some attempt to control party funding but that went out of the window. And so, today, elected politicians are far more interested in what donors want than what voters want. They are in continual fund-raising mode, and this gives huge power to the wealthy.

If this country wants to avoid that – as, of course, it should – the controls on funding in the 2018 law which are now in danger are the very least South Africa needs. This is a highly unequal society and so there are relatively few people who can give politicians and parties the money they want. This makes it even more important to ensure that inequality is not worsened as people with means use them to make sure the law favours them.

Since the danger is this great, the problem with the current law is not that it is too controlling but that it is not controlling enough. What the country should be aiming for are rules which make it very difficult to buy influence.

It could do this by, firstly, imposing very strict limits on what any donor can offer – at most, say, R5 000. It could then continue the arrangement in which parties receive public funds. How much they receive would be measured by how many citizens are willing to donate to them – regardless of what they donate. So, the department store worker who gives R5 and the donor who gives R5 000 would both entitle the party to the same degree of public funding.

This is only one suggestion and there could be many others. What is crucial is the principle – if the country wants a democracy that no money can buy, parties should depend for funding on how many people support them, not on how rich the people who fund them are.

## Living with Reality – And Making it Work

**Steven Friedman**

There are more effective ways of dealing with a problem than telling it to go away. On the campaign trail in March 2024, President Ramaphosa, not for the first time, denounced coalitions. He said the ANC would avoid them because parties went into them only to serve themselves, not the public.

At first glance, this does not seem worth a comment. Governing parties – including those who govern provinces or municipalities – always want to govern on their own. One way of trying to achieve this is by warning voters of all the problems they will create for themselves by not supporting the largest party. It is a standard campaign theme of every party trying to avoid governing with others.

But the president is not the only public figure in this country to denounce coalitions – it is almost compulsory these days to insist that they are a blight on democracy. They are blamed for a host of ills – such as the fact that some Johannesburg suburbs lack water now. Coalitions are becoming politics' equivalent of load shedding, something on which everything which goes wrong is blamed.

Coalitions do still have their admirers – but they tend to be smaller parties which would get seats in government from them. Since the supporters represent fewer people, most of what we hear about coalitions is negative. This is a problem for two reasons. First, because most of the public debate misunderstands what coalitions are and so creates false problems and proposes false solutions. And because coalitions are sure to become a feature of this country's political landscape, we need to get used to them and make them work.

Not just an option

The most obvious point about coalitions is that they are not, as many of their critics and even some of their admirers seem to think, a new political idea which we are free to accept or reject. They happen not because anyone wants them but because no one can avoid them. If no party wins enough seats to form a government, parties need to get together to assemble a majority. It is a product of arithmetic, not policy choice.

That makes the debate over whether coalitions are good for us entirely pointless, a bit like arguing whether reality is good for us. Of course, coalitions are optional – parties can stay out of them

and the president did suggest that the ANC may prefer to sit on the opposition benches to serving in a coalition. But, in the real world, politicians faced with a choice between serving in a government or becoming the opposition usually insist that their parties serve in government. Ramaphosa has been condemning coalitions for at least four years and, during that time, his party has served in quite a few of them.

More importantly, there may be cases in which public opinion would insist that parties form coalitions. This is likely if no-one can form a government, which would be possible here if the largest party does stay out of coalitions. This is not an academic issue – it may face this country in less than three months' time.

It is hardly new to point out that the governing party may not win a majority in this election. But, even if it does very badly, it will be the biggest party, with at least 40% of the vote. If it does not form a coalition – either because it does not want to or, as has happened in some local governments, because no party big enough to give the ANC and its partners a majority wants to govern with it – a government could be formed only if opposition parties can assemble a majority.

But, given the divisions between some of these parties, this is not very likely: to name names, it would at the least require the DA and the EFF to work together, which would be deeply humiliating for both parties since the DA has branded the EFF 'Public Enemy Number One.' Since both might prefer not to be humiliated, we could then find that no one can form a government.

Public opinion is unlikely to favour this, and we can expect the grumbling about coalitions to end very quickly if it happens. It is safe to predict that, within days, most of those who now denounce coalitions would be yelling at the politicians to form one quickly so that the country would have a government. It seems likely that anti-coalition politicians would change their tune quickly to avoid being accused of selling out the country.

Even if all this does not happen in this election, it will almost certainly happen in the next. This country's party politics have been odd for 30 years because the electoral system we use almost always produces coalitions. The only reason it did not happen here is that one party had an unusually large share of the vote. It is losing a large chunk of that vote and so the system is beginning to work as it does

just about everywhere else. The days when coalitions were avoidable here are ending.

### *The real problem*

Given this, it would seem more useful to stop condemning the inevitable and to figure out why there is a problem with coalitions here and how it could be fixed. The most important problem with coalitions here is, sadly, not one which can be easily fixed. The largest party's vote share is declining but no party is gaining at its expense enough to get anywhere near forming a government. In the ANC's worst-ever performance, in 2021, it still received more than double the votes of the second biggest party, the DA, and more than four times that of the third biggest, the EFF.

This has meant that, when no one party wins a majority, the ANC's rivals find it hard to form a government because they are so short of 50% that the only way they can get there is to bring together a large number of parties. This is unstable because small parties know they can end the coalition and so they keep demanding more from it and may jump ship anyway if they are offered more from its opponents. The most stable coalition would therefore be one formed by the ANC – because it would need much fewer parties – but opposition parties fear they would lose support if they hooked up with the ANC and so these coalitions are hard to come by.

None of this happens because anyone is to blame – voters are entitled to vote for whoever they want, and parties are entitled to govern with whoever they want. But that makes the problem harder to fix because nothing we could reasonably ask anyone to do would solve it.

But this does not mean the country is doomed to endure self-serving coalitions that fall apart easily, at least until party support changes, because there is nothing anyone can do about it. Even within the limits imposed by reality, coalitions here would work much better if the most important people in a democracy, the voters, were taken more seriously by parties, or if voters insisted that parties listen to them.

A notable feature of coalition politics here is the parties' total disregard of the people who voted for them. Parties never try to find out who their voters want them to govern with or what they want the coalition to do – they don't even seem to bother to ask their active members given that, in Ekurhuleni, the local branch of one of

the major coalition partners issued repeated statements saying that they wanted nothing to do with this arrangement.

If parties paid more attention to giving voters what they want from coalitions, we might have less of the self-serving dealing we see now, more attention to what a coalition wants to achieve, and greater clarity on which partners are most likely to achieve it. And voters could play a role in ensuring that coalitions say what they plan to do in detail, rather than, as they do now, simply offering platitudes about serving the people.

Voters who do get more of a say may help by explaining to the bigger parties that they need their coalition partners and so ought to respect them. This seems obvious but isn't – at least one of the major parties is repeatedly accused by its coalition partners of belittling them, which has collapsed some of its coalitions.

It also would help coalitions if the parties thought a little about whether their choice of head of government is one with which most voters agree – in some municipalities, it almost certainly isn't. These are only a few ideas – there are many more. But they show where the discussion needs to go.

The question is not whether the country will have coalitions but whether those it will have will serve the people. It is time for the people to start telling the coalition partners what they want rather than resigning themselves to living with what the parties want.

## **Political Sloganeering: Implications on Voter Behaviour and Electoral Politics**

**Stanley Ehiane**

Whether in industrialised or developing countries, the form, philosophy, aims, and institutionalisation of political parties all have a substantial influence on how well democratic systems function, contributing to the consolidation of democracy. Voters' behaviour has an impact on both the election method and outcome. As a result, voters' and electorates' behaviour before, during, and after elections vary per country, depending on their socioeconomic and political characteristics. The most interesting questions to ask about an election are not who won, but why specific people voted the way they did and what the repercussions of the outcome would be. A thorough explanation must combine the unique characteristics of the election with a larger understanding of electoral behaviour.

However, to guarantee the success of any democratic system, political parties and leaders must offer the public accurate information about their party's policies, as well as a clear vision and political objectives. This will allow voters to make an informed judgement on whom to support. In this sense, political campaign slogans have remained critical to voter awareness and education. Political campaigns have grown into contests in which selecting a candidate demands the deployment of very inventive and creative communication and political marketing methods. Slogans have evolved into an essential weapon for politicians seeking power to persuade the public to support them. Slogans have been used as political tools since antiquity. Slogans are an enduring, unbreakable phenomenon, regarded as the unrivalled voices of their period. Slogans can encourage people to act or raise awareness. One may see the emergence of political and campaign slogans, as well as their societal implications. According to communication experts, individuals are more inclined to trust a candidate whose campaign language demonstrates a strong sense of integrity and a desire to better voters' lives. To put it another way, politicians who highlight their accomplishments in political advertisements are more likely to lose people's trust than those who promise to meet their fundamental requirements.

The term "slogan" as used in politics is claimed to derive from the (Gaelic) Scottish terms "slaughghairm" or "slogorne," which mean "battle cry" or "war cry". The term "slogan" was first used in

English in 1589. A political slogan is a catchy catchphrase or motto that is repeated to represent a concept or purpose in a political setting to influence the general public or a specific target audience. Slogans convey the ideals of a candidate during an election. They condense a political party or candidate's goal, vision, and principles into a single phrase. Political slogans may evoke memories, relationships, and emotions. Political sloganeering has undoubtedly dominated global politics for centuries, impacting the success or failure of elections in numerous countries throughout the world. Slogans have been used by several politicians in political campaigns throughout the world over the years. Slogans have been used in political discourse since the origins of politics. A memorable slogan can be used by a political group, party, or individual politician to garner attention, communicate specific information, or achieve a cause. Slogans are crucial in political marketing because they often express a political party's goals. In reality, campaign slogans are an integral part of election campaigns. Prompt, memorable slogans serve a vital political purpose by informing the audience of the candidate's platform. The success of a campaign slogan, like that of an advertising jingle, is decided by its reach. The connected message may also spread if it grows and becomes widely diffused in society. If not, the word may serve as a rallying cry for a limited group of local fans at most.

Political slogans are a strategy for imprinting one's political philosophy on the conscious and unconscious minds of the people while simultaneously undermining the opposition's narrative. Political slogans are the major form of communication between candidates and voters. It is the first piece of information about a candidate that a voter notices and recalls. Political campaign slogans comprise strong propaganda and language that politicians use to urge the public to vote for them and their parties by portraying themselves as the only competent and trustworthy candidate for the post. It is crucial to realise that memorable slogans are founded on credibility, passion, and explanation. Slogans may operate in political campaigns in several ways, including making appeals. Slogans may be used to tap into the emotions and ideas that a specific culture cherishes.

Political slogans work best when they make bold, clear declarations that appeal to people's credibility, empathy, and reasoning. These elements can impact both how others react to a phrase and how those who use it think. Campaign slogans are an important part of any political campaign, not just those in South Africa. Slogans have played a significant role in modern political



campaigns, from Nelson Mandela's "Amandla-Awethu" in the 1990s to Barack Obama's "Yes We Can" in 2008. After World War II, most Americans anticipated Democratic Party incumbent Harry S. Truman to lose the presidential election. "Give them hell, Harry!" yelled a fan during the candidate's whistle-stop tour of the country, and the term was picked up by the indifferent former general's followers. During the election, he thrashed Republican Thomas E. Dewey. "Yes, We Can" and "Change We Can Believe In" were Obama's campaign slogans. The United Farm Workers and its founder, Dolores Huerta, share the slogan "Sí se puede," which is well-known among Latinos. "Make America Great Again" has become a popular slogan for Donald Trump's 2020 presidential campaign. However, "Keep America Great" has gained popularity and is frequently used in conjunction with "Make America Great Again".

South Africa is deeply divided based on race, ethnicity, economics, language, and religion. Given the variety of the nation's population, voters must believe that the political parties that now exist effectively represent them. Due to South Africa's distinct geographical position and diversified population, many political parties are essential to portray the country. Political players in South Africa now recognise the rhetorical significance of slogans in election campaigns. Candidates use key components in their political campaign slogans, which are repeated several times to leave a lasting impact on voters. One of a candidate's distinctive features is their ability to interact with voters through campaign slogans.

Political slogans have the power to impact people's perceptions about candidates and how they vote. Voters are more likely to recall a memorable slogan than a politician's name. An intriguing slogan can provide a contender with an advantage over the competition. After repeatedly hearing the aphorism, voters are more inclined to support the politician linked with it. A good political slogan impacts voter decisions by spreading a candidate's or party's political beliefs and instilling their campaign message in people's brains. The use of memorable and catchy language increases the impact and reach of a marketing narrative by indexing and spreading it. The words and language used in the slogan influence voters' perceptions and comprehension of the candidate's story and worldview. When developing a slogan, careful consideration of word choice, grammar, and metaphor may help to convey a memorable story that will resonate with voters. Furthermore, research on neuropsychological reactions to political slogans has revealed that several cognitive-emotional

markers, including stress, interaction, enthusiasm, concentration, and relaxation, might impact how successfully a slogan influences voter behaviour. Remarkable slogans should be memorable and persuasive, based on credibility, passion, and logic. Slogans may operate in political campaigns in several ways, including making appeals. Slogans may be used to tap into the emotions and ideas that a specific culture cherishes.

Slogans helped to create memorable terms that are still in use today. A memorable slogan is essential for every successful political campaign. It may be used to efficiently communicate the party's views and aims to voters, or as a powerful branding tool. A well-written political campaign slogan that conveys a captivating message might help elect a politician who has an appealing and marketable programme. Political parties and politicians should work together to create a slogan that informs or encourages voters to vote for trustworthy candidates, rather than misleading them with enticing and provocative speech. Political campaign slogans are an essential tool for motivating voters to participate in election processes. Many campaigns make the mistake of developing a political slogan without first assessing the campaign's overall story. Confusion between the campaign message and the slogan is a common error made while creating slogans. Though these two concepts may appear to be identical at first glance, they serve separate functions in a political campaign plan. A memorable slogan is essential for every successful political campaign. Of course, slogans leave a lasting effect on the audience. Remarkable slogans should be memorable and convincing, built on credibility, passion, and reasoning. They serve as effective branding tools, informing people about the party's principles and aims.

## Political Parties' Manifestos and Voter Behaviour in an Election's Year: Challenges and Insight

**Lizzy Ofusori**

A political manifesto serves as a roadmap, outlining the policies the political party commits to implementing should it gain power in a general election. Before an election, each political party unveils its official manifesto, establishing the framework for its campaign. These manifestos play a crucial role by communicating to voters the rationale behind soliciting their support. Although a manifesto may initially appear as a simple compilation of policy proposals, it typically evolves into a thorough document that explores various aspects of the party's position on numerous issues. These documents not only outline policies but also offer justifications for their goals, with the aim of persuading voters to back them. Manifestos extensively address diverse topics, including but not limited to unemployment, economy, education, healthcare, and beyond. For example, as South Africa prepares for the upcoming election and enters the final stretch of intense campaigning, citizens are inundated with a multitude of party manifestos. Amidst this deluge of manifestos, voters encounter the challenge of not only deciphering their contents but also of assessing the credibility and feasibility of the proposed solutions. This necessitates ensuring that their voting choices align with their sentiments and needs. According to "People's Assembly", political party manifestos play a crucial role in shaping voter behaviour during election years, but their impact can vary due to several challenges and insights. Against this background, it becomes crucial to analyse the impact of political parties' manifestos on voter behaviour in an election year.

### *Challenges*

**Information overload:** In election years, voters are inundated with information from multiple sources, including media coverage, social media, and direct communication from political parties. This abundance of information can make it difficult for voters to fully digest and analyse each party's manifesto. Also, on internet platforms, voters have access to a wide range of information sources. Navigating this vast array of sources can be overwhelming for voters, especially when trying to discern credible information from misinformation or biased sources. It is important to note that during elections, misinformation and disinformation often

proliferate, as politicians may aim to sway public perception/opinion by spreading inaccurate or misleading information. Distinguishing the truth from false information can be challenging for voters, particularly when misinformation is widely circulated and presented in a convincing manner

**Voter scepticism:** Many voters are sceptical of political promises made in manifestos, especially if they perceive them as unrealistic or insincere. Past experiences of unfulfilled promises can lead to cynicism and a reluctance to trust parties' pledges. Furthermore, voter scepticism can also be as a result of their perceptions of corruption within the political system. When voters perceive politicians as being beholden to special interests or engaging in unethical behaviour, they may become disillusioned with the electoral process and disengage from participating altogether

**Polarisation:** In highly polarised political environments, voters may be less swayed by the content of manifestos and more by their pre-existing ideological beliefs. This can make it challenging for parties to attract undecided voters solely through their policy proposals. In addition, voters are more likely to surround themselves with like-minded individuals and consume media that reinforces their existing beliefs. In such polarised environments, finding a candidate or party that closely matches one's beliefs becomes more challenging.

**Trust and implementation:** Many voters harbour deep-seated distrust of politicians, viewing them as self-interested or untrustworthy individuals who prioritise their own agendas over the needs of the electorate. This scepticism can lead voters to question the authenticity of campaign promises and doubt the sincerity of candidates' commitments. Moreover, even if a party's manifesto resonates with voters, their ability to implement promised policies and deliver results once in power is crucial. Failure to follow through on manifesto commitments can erode trust and credibility, diminishing the manifesto's influence on future elections.

### *Insights*

**Policy salience:** Research suggests that voters are more likely to be influenced by manifestos that address issues they perceive as personally important. For example, an individual concerned about healthcare may prioritise healthcare policy proposals over economic or environmental issues. Parties that effectively identify and

prioritise salient policy areas are more likely to resonate with voters and shape their behaviour.

**Messaging and framing:** The manner in which parties frame their policies and communicate their messages can significantly influence voter perceptions. Political parties may frame their messages to appeal to specific voter demographics and address the issues most salient to their target audience. By framing their policies and positions in relatable terms, the political candidate seeks to capture voters' attention and support. Moreover, manifestos that employ clear, compelling language and resonate with voters' values and aspirations are more likely to mobilise support.

**Voter engagement:** Political parties that actively engage with voters throughout the electoral process, beyond simply releasing manifestos, are better positioned to shape voter behaviour. Direct interactions, grassroots organising, and community outreach can enhance the impact of manifesto commitments.

**Coalition dynamics:** In multi-party systems or in the context of coalition governments, voters may consider not only the manifesto of a single party but the potential implications of coalition formations on governance and policy outcomes. This adds complexity to voter decision-making. Understanding coalition dynamics allows voters to anticipate potential post-election scenarios and the likely distribution of power among governing parties.

### *Conclusion*

While political party manifestos can exert significant influence on voter behaviour in election years, they face challenges such as information overload, voter scepticism, and polarisation. Parties can enhance the impact of their manifestos by focusing on policy salience, effective messaging, voter engagement, and demonstrating credibility through implementation. Understanding these challenges and insights is essential for parties seeking to effectively shape voter behaviour and win elections.

## **Will the May 29 Elections be Quite the Watershed Moment Everyone Expects?**

**Stef Terblanche**

With a view to the 29 May elections, three leading recent opinion surveys had pegged support for the ANC at 40% or below. This suggested the ANC would lose power, which immediately brought up the question of coalition governments at national level and in several provinces. Hence the question that everybody was asking: With which other party or parties would the ANC conclude a coalition deal to be able to remain a governing party?

Most commentators viewed the 2024 election as likely to mark a pivotal moment in South Africa's 30-year-old democratic history and one that will decisively change the political landscape. Such a notion is not quite new though – in our 30 years of democracy we have previously seen such 'watershed' moments that altered the political landscape: in 2007 when Jacob Zuma replaced Thabo Mbeki as ANC leader, soon to become president, and again in 2014 when Julius Malema and his radical, populist EFF emerged as South Africa's third biggest political party after their noisy breakaway from the ANC. And the ANC's 2017 National Conference through to the 2019 elections was also supposed to be such a moment of change on the back of Cyril Ramaphosa's promise of "a new dawn", which never materialised.

And so, here we were again at another anticipated pivotal moment of change, with South Africans seemingly fixated on the idea of an ANC election defeat, driven by opinion polls and embellished by opposition politicians. But some sobering questions arose that challenged this widely shared opinion that the ANC was about to exit from the political centre stage.

Admittedly, since the advent of democracy in 1994 the ANC has never seemed weaker than now. But, at the time of writing we were still a month away from the 29 May elections, and as the ANC's election machinery facilitated by control of state resources kicks into top gear for the final month of campaigning, there were a number of factors that could have possibly still improved the party's election chances.

With that in mind, the question arose whether this election would indeed be the watershed one? Or would the real change for better or for worse only come in 2029, with this election merely

being the precursor setting in motion the processes that would ultimately lead us to that? Have we really reached the moment where South Africa will transition from 30 years of largely destructive one-party-dominant rule by a fading erstwhile liberation movement to a more diverse and inclusive governing coalition of several parties? Or have we reached the point where the ruling ANC will be shown the door, a fate that has befallen numerous African “liberation parties” before? Or will it stubbornly cling to power, perhaps by hook or by crook? For the answers we had to wait until after 29 May, but there was no harm in interrogating the factors that could alter the current popular narrative.

Although the opinion surveys have recorded a steady downward trend in ANC support over the past year, and previous elections and recent by-elections tend to support this trend, it is by no means a foregone conclusion that the ANC will be ousted from power just yet. It could still manage to scrape home and remain the sole ruling party at national level, with varying possibilities in the provinces. And even if its support fell not too far below 50%, it will still find itself in government as the dominant party in a governing coalition. For more significant change to kick in, the ANC’s support on 29 May must fall below 45%. That’s when one or more of the other big parties will get a real bite at power, setting the stage for what may come when we return to the polls in 2029.

### *Will the opinion polls be proven right?*

Currently this possibility of the ANC remaining in power is the wild card in the pack, the outside chance, but it is definitely still there. First, one should reasonably question the accuracy or reliability of the opinion surveys. We all know how in 2016 the opinion polls got it horribly wrong both before the Brexit referendum in Britain and the election of Donald Trump as US president.

In South Africa, with a view to the national provincial elections on 29 May, the local opinion polls have often over the past year come up with widely differing results, with one particular poll still showing ANC support at 51% earlier this year, and now having adjusted it right down to below 40%. That’s an unlikely swing of more than 11% in just three months. In six of the most recent surveys, support for the ANC varied from 48% down to 37% – again a big variance; so, which one do you believe?

The different surveys also use different methodologies, different sample sizes, different and differently structured questions, and different anticipated voter turnouts (which will have an impact on the election results). Most surveys are no longer conducted in person or door-to-door but are done via cell phones, which arguably may exclude a large representative proportion of people from the sample surveyed because they have no cell phone access for a variety of reasons. That will surely undermine accuracy.

One good example of this phenomenon in action is how the polls have been suggesting – they don't like the word predicting – that the DA will remain in power in the Western Cape, possibly with a relatively small loss of support. The Patriotic Alliance (PA) of Gayton McKenzie hardly featured in these polls. But when you look at recent municipal by-election results, the PA has been making serious inroads in DA country – McKenzie's appeal to the coloured community that their time has come after being sidelined respectively by both the apartheid and ANC/DA regimes, seems to have found a responsive audience not picked up by the opinion polls. After all, their grievances of neglect are real, and McKenzie is from that community, speaks its language with all its dialectical nuances and coding, and shares their concerns, speaking convincingly to this constituency in ways that a Steenhuisen, Malema or Ramaphosa could never do, the essence and impact of which can easily be missed by a 'scientific' opinion poll.

McKenzie is no fool and has done his homework, reaching out also to another DA constituency, the Afrikaner community – note his visit to Orania and interactions with various Afrikaner groups and leaders. He wants to capitalise on the fact that the DA already started losing Afrikaner support in the Western Cape and Gauteng to the Freedom Front Plus (FF+) and other small parties in the elections of 2019 and 2021, if not to bolster his own party, then to weaken the DA and elevate the PA to the role of kingmaker.

After the DA stubbornly excluded the PA from the MPC group of opposition parties it leads, McKenzie has promised that it's payback time. And if McKenzie's efforts and the recent by-election results in the Western Cape, plus popular sentiment in this province's majority coloured community with its large Muslim component over the fate of Palestinians in Israel's war in Gaza are anything to go by, payback could mean the DA losing control of the province and being forced into a coalition arrangement with smaller parties such as the FF+. And McKenzie and his PA will also be waiting in the wings.



Similarly, none of the polls or political pundits saw Jacob Zuma's MKP coming. Like McKenzie's assault on the DA, Zuma too is out to exact revenge from Cyril Ramaphosa and the ANC over what he views as their unfair treatment of him. And that could come in the form of the MKP seriously diluting ANC support in KZN and becoming a key partner in a provincial governing coalition, while it could possibly do the same at national level. There is a Machiavellian lesson to learn from all of this: don't isolate your political enemies but keep them close and never underestimate the power of wounded egos in politics. However, for now it would be prudent to keep a question mark over the various opinion surveys and their tentative suggestions towards a possible outcome on May 29.

How can the ANC still rescue itself?

The ANC is known for effectively kicking its election campaigns into top gear only in the last month before polling, often with good results – which is exactly what it is doing right now. Since shortly before Freedom Day on April 27, the ANC and its leader, Cyril Ramaphosa, aggressively launched the party's final offensive for the month of May. Ramaphosa speaks confidently of the ANC winning and remaining in power – is this just campaign bluster or are he and his fellow ANC leaders hiding something they know, and we don't?

At a recent meeting of the National Executive Committee (NEC) the ANC's battle plans were laid out in detail – in a leaked audio recording, the ANC election campaign boss seemed confident the party could again capture the 10 million votes that gave it 57.5% of the seats in parliament in 2019, but Ramaphosa demanded they aim for 14 million instead. However, Ramaphosa also raised concerns over signs of lacklustre campaigning in some areas – most likely that is or has been rapidly addressed.

Nonetheless, his demand was followed up by he himself campaigning door-to-door in Soweto – something the ANC is very good at and always utilises with good effect in the very last stretch of every election campaign. In similar vein the big guns, cabinet ministers and party leaders, were unleashed on townships around the country; past presidents are being roped in, with Thabo Mbeki leading and Kgalema Motlanthe likely to join him, despite their past criticisms of their own party; and government funds and resources are seemingly starting to be used for ANC campaign advertising, events and transport, much to the chagrin of the opposition DA.

The food parcels, T-shirts, organised transport, and other handouts, plus promises of houses and better local services, will surely follow.

The DA has lodged a complaint with the Public Protector accusing the ANC of “manipulating the public purse to pay for the ANC’s election campaign”. This, the DA says, would be done via a series of public relations exercises and paid media advertisements promoting state projects and governance where the ANC has governed over the last 30 years. This is indeed what was discussed at the recent ANC NEC meeting. Included in this strategy is a directive to tend to specific service delivery failures days ahead of ANC campaign visits, to create the illusion of efficient state delivery by the ANC government.

However, is this really such a surprise or is not something that ruling parties everywhere seem to do? In apartheid South Africa the then ruling National Party had perfected the art. Ramaphosa has indeed directed the NEC and his ministers to use their government departments to focus strongly on highlighting the claimed achievements and successes of the ANC over the past 30 years: a strategy he first employed in his state-of-the-nation-address in February 2024 with his story about Tintswalo, the so-called child of democracy. Critics should have seen it coming.

The ANC are masters of such deception and persuasion at election time. The party has a significant and well-oiled election machinery and tried and trusted strategies, while it recently seemed to have augmented its funds after initially being under pressure. Some suggest the sources of this are abroad among the ANC’s many authoritarian and radical new friends on the international geopolitical stage. Be that as it may, none of these developments and how potential voters are being influenced or responding to them, will have been picked up in the opinion polls to date. And that could well still make a difference and possibly arrest the ANC’s losing trend in the polls.

The question therefore is, will all of this persuade the multitude of disillusioned voters to again support the ANC? The same opinion surveys that have stacked the losing odds against the ANC, have also indicated that while their respondents blame the ANC for things in the country having broken down and going in the wrong direction, the majority still feel the ANC is most effective at governing. The DA comes in a fairly close second, about 6 to 8 percentage points behind. Yet in another survey anomaly, there seems to be almost

equal support among voters for a future coalition that excluded the ANC and an ANC-DA coalition, but with a possible coalition between the ANC and the EFF also coming in not too far behind as the third most popular option. The latter option is one that three of the latest opinion polls seem to support very strongly, but we'll return to that in a moment.

There are other factors too that could benefit the ANC. For one, the recent highly publicised corruption charges brought against the former defence minister and speaker of parliament Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, could help reduce criticism that the ANC is doing nothing about corruption and failing to prosecute its own. And the recent continuous and fairly long run of electricity provision without loadshedding interruptions could also soften criticism on that front. Both are big election issues. It is likely that Ramaphosa or one of his ministers may also still pull some rabbit from his or her hat on the jobs front in days to come – another pressing, perhaps the most pressing, election issue.

Furthermore, the ANC has over the past year or two steadily implemented a programme of increasingly radicalising or fast-tracking left-leaning policy and legislative content within its economic focus, but also in other spheres such as the National Health Insurance (NHI) and the expansion of student funding at tertiary level. This is a response to the demands of both a more militant and radical segment of the youth – the largest potential voting bloc – and those of a broader economically marginalised segment of society for radical economic transformation. It is the same demand on which parties like the EFF and Zuma's MKP have successfully capitalised and continue doing so.

And then there is the massive population segment – about 50% or 27.3 million people – who rely on some or other form of social grants from government, something the ANC has carefully nurtured. The ANC government's very recent extension – timed well to come just before the elections – of the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant (SRD Grant) until March 2025, and the plans it is dangling before the electorate to possibly make this grant a permanent one, will not have gone unnoticed by this captive audience, particularly in light of ANC warnings that voting for a potential new government could lead to the loss of these grants.

The ANC government's recent actions on the international relations front will also not have gone unnoticed at home, particularly

the bringing of genocide charges against Israel in Gaza at the ICJ. That speaks directly to the heart of a major domestic electoral segment made up of a large and often militant-leaning youth sector, a progressive and usually more progressive urban constituency, and the significant Muslim religious communities of the Western Cape, KZN and Gauteng plus the many who support their pro-Palestinian cause. Then of course there are the habitual United States haters who will also be pleased – an unproven generalisation I know, but you nonetheless pick it up in many places.

A radical leftist or moderate centrist coalition?

So, in the event that the ANC manages to cling to power on May 29, whether by scraping home with a fragile majority or by ending up as the dominant party in a national coalition government, it will be a sobering wake-up moment for the ANC and will set in motion the processes that will most likely lead to more significant political change in the 2029 election.

At this juncture, having seen how it has self-destructed and nearly got relegated to history, the ANC will seriously look at ways to reinvent itself and structure governance and policies in ways that will secure its own future. This will mean the ANC may go the moderate centrist route, clean up its act and introduce more balanced and liberal policies aimed at turning the economy around and addressing poverty, unemployment and all the other things on which it failed in the past. Or it may opt for the more radical route to the left, a position from where, with its radical leftwing partners, it may pursue more centralised authoritarian rule with the underlying aim of entrenching itself/themselves in a position of more permanent rule, and not necessarily by democratic means.

The ANC itself says it has not considered forming a coalition as it believes it can win again. So, no clues there. But if the ANC loses its monopoly on power with a small margin, it will most likely partner with small parties that it can dominate. If its support drops below 45% as the most recent opinion polls suggest, it will be forced to consider the larger DA/MPC on the centre-right, or the EFF and MKP on the left as coalition partners – options that are also supported by the numbers in the latest opinion polls. There are, of course, a few other possible coalition permutations, but they will mostly bring together highly disparate parties in a very dysfunctional government and are probably not being considered at the moment.

Forget about the previous assertions by political parties on both sides of the spectrum that they would never work with the ANC. When it comes to the horse-trading for a slice of the power after May 29, all previous odds, preconditions and objections will be off the table. An entirely new ballgame will have started in which anything will be possible. However, under prevailing circumstances, the smart money would be on a leftwing coalition being formed if it's up to the ANC – which will be a better fit for the ANC's existing ideology, policies and international relations. This will also be a passport to the authoritarian, entrenched-power scenario. If it opted for a coalition in the centre-right with the moderate DA and/or MPC, the ANC would have to tone down or even radically alter its current ideology, policy and geopolitical offering – and that would probably be a bridge too far, even for a party with its back against the wall.

## **The Politics and Practice of Stadiumology in South Africa: Implications for Voter Behaviour in an Election Year**

**Adebimpe Esther Ofusori**

Stadiumology is generally referred to as the use of large venues, such as stadiums, to gather people for events or activities. It is a strategy for holding large political rallies in stadiums or other venues to demonstrate popularity, stimulate support, or influence public opinion. South Africa's stadiums carry historical significance, particularly those associated with the anti-apartheid struggle. For instance, First National Bank (FNB) Stadium in Johannesburg hosted the final match of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, symbolising the country's progress and unity since the end of apartheid. However, stadiums in South Africa have a significance beyond just being used as sports venues; they symbolise the state's achievements or failures. In an election year, the use of stadiums for political rallies and events can serve as a means for political parties to demonstrate their strength and connect with voters on a grand scale. These events can become powerful tools for mobilising supporters and demonstrating a party's popularity. It is difficult to predict the success of a political party by the number of occupied or empty seats in stadiums at political rallies because some stadiums can be more crowded than others. The ability to fill a stadium with enthusiastic supporters can create a perception of momentum, convincing undecided voters. The atmosphere of these events can also energise the party base, leading to higher voter turnout among loyal supporters.

### *The implications of stadiumology on voter behaviour in an election year in South Africa*

The study of stadiumology involves examining the political, social, and economic impact of stadiums on communities. In South Africa, stadiums carry significant symbolic value and can have profound implications on voter's behaviour in an election year. The implications of stadiumology on voter's behaviour are outlined below:

- **Economic benefits:** The economic benefits associated with hosting events in stadiums, such as increased tourism and revenue generation, can indirectly influence voter sentiment towards incumbent parties or candidates who are seen as promoting economic development and job creation.

- **Accessibility:** The location and accessibility of stadiums can affect voter turnout. If a stadium is located in a densely populated urban areas or regions, an area with high voter turnout potential, with strong party support, it can be strategically used by political parties to mobilise supporters and maximise turnout.
- **Media coverage:** Media are normally attracted to stadiums where important events are held. Political rallies held in stadiums can receive extensive coverage, reaching voters who may not attend the event in person but are exposed to it through various media channels. Positive media coverage can shape public opinion and influence voter behaviour.

### **Community and identity**

Stadiums are often at the heart of local communities, serving as spaces for not just sports but also cultural events and gatherings. Political parties may leverage these spaces to engage with communities on a more personal level. This community-focused approach can affect voter behaviour by emphasising identity, belonging, and shared experiences.

### **Opposition and political division**

Large rallies can also contribute to division, as they create a highly obvious division between supporters and opponents. This can reinforce existing political divisions and influence voter behaviour by solidifying partisan lines.

### **Legacy and accountability**

In South Africa, the legacy of major events like the 2010 World Cup still echoes. In an election year, voters may evaluate political parties based on how they have managed stadium infrastructure and whether they have delivered on promises related to economic growth and social development. This accountability can influence voter behaviour as parties are held to their commitments regarding the legacy of these grand projects.

**Symbolism and identity:** Stadiums are more than just sports venues; they are often symbols of national pride, community identity, and political achievement. In South Africa, this symbolism can be particularly potent, given the country's history and diverse cultures. During an election year, political parties may use stadiums to align themselves with positive imagery, evoking a sense of unity and

national pride. This can influence voter behaviour by reinforcing a sense of belonging or nostalgia, driving voters towards parties that resonate with these sentiments.

### **Infrastructure development**

South Africa has invested heavily in stadium infrastructure, especially leading up to major international events like the FIFA World Cup and the Cricket World Cup. The construction and renovation of stadiums have not only enhanced the country's sporting facilities but also contributed to its overall infrastructure development.

### **Security and orderliness**

Stadium events require coordination of security measures to ensure the safety of attendees. The perception of security and orderliness at political rallies held in stadiums can impact voter confidence in the party's ability to govern effectively and maintain law and order.

### **Economic impact and resource allocation**

Stadiums often represent significant public investments, and their construction and maintenance can spark debates about the allocation of resources. In an election year, voters may scrutinise the economic impact of these investments, questioning whether they bring sufficient benefits to justify their costs. Political parties may need to address concerns about under-utilised stadiums or "white elephants" to maintain voter trust. This scrutiny can influence voter behaviour, with some voters prioritising parties that emphasise fiscal responsibility and social welfare.

### **Community engagement and grassroots mobilisation**

Stadiums can also be central to community life, hosting various cultural and social events. Political parties might use these venues to connect with local communities on a more personal level, hosting smaller gatherings or community-focused events. This grassroots approach can affect voter behaviour by fostering a sense of intimacy and responsiveness. Voters may feel more valued and heard, leading them to support parties that engage directly with their communities.

In conclusion, stadiumology in the context of South Africa's election year can play a significant role in shaping voter behaviour through mobilisation, media impact, community building, messaging, and potentially coercion or polarisation. Understanding



the dynamics of stadiumology in South Africa is essential for comprehending its broader implications for society, politics, and governance in the country. Also, understanding these implications can help political parties strategise their campaign efforts, utilise stadiums effectively as campaign venues, and tailor their messages to resonate with voters in South Africa during an election year.



### 3. The Use of Technology in Elections

#### **How Election Management Bodies can Fight Deepfakes as Electoral Cycle Begins in Africa**

**Paul Kariuki and Lizzy Ofusori**

Elections are big business across the world. They are competitive in nature and attract substantial interest from various stakeholders, who seek to secure significant political influence to lead countries. With the rapid proliferation of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), the stakes have risen a few notches, with politicians and political parties using digital technologies to further their political ends. There will be at least 18 elections in Africa in 2024, such as in South Africa, Togo, Madagascar, Rwanda, Ghana, Botswana, Namibia, Senegal, Mozambique, Tunisia, Chad, and Madagascar, to mention a few. In the context of elections, the emergence of new digital technologies presents threats of AI-generated threats such as deepfakes during this 2024 election cycle.

By definition, a deepfake is a video of a person who has had digital modifications made to their face or physique to make them look different. Deepfakes are often used to spread false information about a person. Stated differently, a deepfake is a recording or an image of a person that is convincingly altered or manipulated to misrepresent an individual saying or doing something that did not happen or said. Deepfakes are already gaining traction around the globe, generating significant concerns about their potential to cause political and social instability. Some of the challenges posed by a deepfake in the context of elections include misinformation about campaign messages by political candidates, intending to misrepresent their images and messages to sway the electorate either for or against them. Additionally, deepfakes can also be used to discredit a political party, through fake messaging through mechanisms such as advertisements, to influence the electorate negatively against the party and its candidates. Furthermore, deepfake can also be used by peddlers of doctored videos to spread provocative information and anxiety among the electorate.

*Where have deepfakes been used in elections?*

While there have not been reported cases of deepfakes specifically used in elections in Africa, there have been several notable cases where deepfake technology has been used or discussed in the context of elections outside Africa.

1. Slovakia: In October 2023, Rowan Philp (senior reporter at the Global Investigative Journalism Network) reports that an AI-synthesized impersonation of the voice of an opposition leader helped swing the election in Slovakia to a pro-Russia candidate. Also, a report from Reset, a research organisation focusing on the impact of technology on democracy, reports that deepfake videos containing hate speech or electoral disinformation circulated in Slovakia through Meta Platforms Inc.'s Facebook and Instagram, as well as Alphabet Inc.'s YouTube.
2. Bangladesh: Ahead of the Bangladeshi elections in January 2024, several deepfakes were created with inexpensive, commercial AI generators that gained voter traction (Rina Chandran (Context media)). For example, deepfake videos of female opposition politicians Rumin Farhana in a bikini and Nipun Roy in a swimming pool emerged. Although promptly debunked, these deepfake videos continue to circulate, and even low-quality content of this nature is deceptive, according to Sayeed Al-Zaman (an assistant professor of journalism at Bangladesh's Jahangirnagar University, who studies social media).
3. India: In India, where more than 900 million people are eligible to vote, there were concerns about the potential use of deepfake videos to spread false information and manipulate public opinion. According to Rina Chandran (Context media), the Indian authorities have warned that social media platforms could lose their safe-harbour status that protects them from liability for third-party content posted on their sites if they do not act. While there were no confirmed instances of deepfakes influencing the election, authorities and media organisations were on alert for the spread of misinformation through various digital channels.
4. United States: A deepfake voice message claiming to be President Joe Biden was sent to voters in an example of possible election disinformation. The voice says, "Voting this Tuesday only enables the Republicans in their quest to elect Donald Trump again." The message continues, "Your vote makes a difference in November, not this Tuesday" (Bryan Lynn (VOA Learning English)). Deepfake technology has been a topic of discussion

in the context of US elections, particularly during the 2020 presidential election. There were concerns about the potential for malicious actors to use deepfakes to spread false information or undermine confidence in the electoral process.

5. Taiwan: Ahead of the 2020 Taiwanese presidential election, concerns were raised about the potential for deepfake videos to be used for political manipulation. Authorities in Taiwan issued warnings about the spread of false information online and emphasised the importance of media literacy in identifying and combatting disinformation.

#### *How can election management bodies tackle deepfakes?*

Given that internet penetration in Africa is on the increase, the possibility of deepfake use in manipulating elections cannot be ruled out. So, to what extent are the election management bodies in Africa preparing to mitigate against the possible sociopolitical threats as a result of deepfakes? Here are some of the ways that election management bodies can tackle and mitigate this emerging threat.

#### **1. Public awareness and education**

Election management bodies should prioritise public awareness campaigns to educate voters about the existence and potential dangers of deepfake technology. Providing guidance on how to identify and verify credible sources of information can help citizens discern between genuine content and manipulated media. In addition, implementing media literacy programmes in schools, universities, and communities can help individuals develop critical thinking skills necessary to evaluate the authenticity of digital content, including videos and images. These programmes should emphasise the importance of cross-referencing information from multiple sources and fact-checking before sharing content online.

#### **2. Collaboration with tech companies**

Election management bodies in Africa can collaborate with technology companies and social media platforms to develop and deploy tools for detecting and flagging deepfake content. Implementing algorithms and machine learning techniques to identify suspicious media can help mitigate the spread of misinformation during election periods. Furthermore, election management bodies can establish dedicated teams or task forces to monitor social media and online platforms for

the spread of deepfake content, enabling swift responses to mitigate the impact of false information. Promptly debunking deepfakes and issuing corrections or clarifications can help minimise their influence on public opinion.

### **3. Establishing regulatory frameworks and international collaboration**

Election management bodies in Africa can advocate for the development of regulatory frameworks that address the creation, dissemination, and detection of deepfake content. Collaborating with government agencies, legislators, and international organisations to establish guidelines and standards for combating digital manipulation can enhance the legal and policy response to deepfake threats. Moreover, collaborating with international organisations such as electoral assistance organisations and cybersecurity experts, can facilitate knowledge exchange and coordinated responses to emerging challenges.

### **4. Secure communication channels and capacity building**

Ensuring the security and integrity of communication channels used by election management bodies, political parties, candidates, and other stakeholders is essential for preventing unauthorised access to sensitive information and preventing the dissemination of deepfake content. In addition, building internal capacity within election management bodies to effectively respond to digital threats, including deepfakes, through training programmes, workshops, and technical assistance can strengthen their resilience to manipulation and disinformation campaigns.

In conclusion, election management bodies in Africa have a role to play in mitigating this emerging threat. Countries in Africa and their election management bodies must institute necessary measures to mitigate against the threats that deepfakes pose to their elections. Effective legislation must be put in place to protect political candidates and the credibility of elections and their outcomes.

## **The Influence of Political Manifestos on Voter Perceptions of Political Parties in South Africa**

**Tyesha Pillay**

As South Africa gears up for the upcoming election and enters the final phase of intensive campaigning, citizens find themselves bombarded with a plethora of party manifestos. According to the IEC, 380 parties have lined up to contest the national election, meaning that citizens are faced with the daunting task of navigating these strategic blueprints. However, as we dig deeper, amid the flood of manifestos, voters are faced with the challenge of not only deciphering the content but also discerning the authenticity and feasibility of the proposals and solutions put forth – ensuring that their choice aligns with their sentiments and needs/wants.

As we grapple with the complexities of electoral decision-making, particularly in an environment rife with differing ideologies, it becomes imperative to examine the influence of political manifestos on voter perceptions and ultimately on the outcome of the election. Given these factors, this op-ed delves into the multifaceted role of party manifestos in shaping public opinion, navigating the challenges posed, and exploring their implications on the democratic process.

### *Defining political manifestos*

In the theatre of politics, election campaigning revolves around manifestos, serving as a critical tool in shaping public opinion and ultimately influencing voter outcomes. Political manifestos are blueprints outlining the specific pledges a party plans to implement upon winning an election. More precisely, manifestos encompass a comprehensive articulation of the party's stance on various issues. They present various policies (e.g., on education or gender) and provide explanations for their objectives, aiming to sway voters towards supporting them. These manifestos cover a range of topics (e.g., economy, healthcare, education, unemployment, energy, and technology), offering detailed insights into these areas in line with specific ideologies (e.g., Liberalism or Marxism) and visions.

### *Dissecting the manifestos of the top three*

Since January 2024, amidst grand displays of showmanship and extravagance, South Africa's top three parties – the ANC, the DA, and the EFF – have unveiled their 2024 manifestos. In an attempt

to retain power, the ANC capitalises on the progress made since 1994, while also acknowledging the prevailing challenges. In their 58-page document, the ANC refrains from charting a new policy course. Instead, they prioritise addressing their key areas, such as “creating jobs; boosting industrialisation; tackling the high cost of living; investing in people; defending democracy; and building a better Africa and world”, in a more timely and efficient manner. Moreover, the ANC commits to improving resource allocation and government spending, by tying ministerial performance contracts to the implementation of areas outlined in the manifesto.

Under the banner of ‘Rescue South Africa’, the DA commits to seven key priorities – creating “two million new jobs; ending load and water shedding; halving the rate of violent crime; addressing corruption by abolishing cadre deployment in favour of merit-based appointment; lifting six million people out of poverty, tripling the number of grade 4 learners who read for meaning and ensuring quality healthcare for all.” The DA also emphasises its achievements by referencing the Western Cape and DA-run municipalities, while simultaneously highlighting the failures of the ANC in comparison.

In contrast to the DA and ANC, it can be argued that the EFF takes a more openly ideological stance – particularly nationalism. In summary, the party advocates for the expropriation of land without compensation, creating millions of jobs by 2029 – using a range of strategies, securing the electricity supply, revolutionising the education system and improving public safety.

These manifestos, while not fully articulated here, reflect a strategic approach by each party to appeal to their core voter base. Rather than presenting bold new initiatives to address South African challenges, the emphasis seems to be on reinforcing existing commitments and addressing the immediate concerns. This presents a challenge, not only in terms of sustainable development and growth but also due to the projected formation of a national coalition following the election. The lack of innovative proposals and strategies in the manifestos could hinder effective negotiations and the formation of cohesive coalitions capable of addressing the complex issues facing the country.

### *Shaping voter perceptions*

While the relevance of manifestos in influencing voter perceptions has come under scrutiny, I believe that these manifestos remain relevant,



albeit in a different manner compared to their predecessors. Many citizens, particularly given years of broken promises and worsening socioeconomic conditions, may not engage with lengthy documents. However, parties have adapted to the changing environment by repackaging key points from their manifestos into digestible social media content (e.g. infographics, TikTok videos, soundbites), thereby enhancing their relevance.

In line with the key principles of democracy, manifestos facilitate informed decision-making by providing voters with the information necessary to assess which party resonates with their values and beliefs. Manifestos also offer a clear articulation of a party's values and plans. By publicly stating these promises, parties demonstrate transparency and can be held accountable for their promises – a trend we have seen in recent years. Additionally, they encourage policy debate and discourse among politicians and citizens, promoting a more informed and engaged electorate. This discourse is prominently observed on social media platforms, where direct access to political parties enables citizens to express their concerns in the comment sections. Furthermore, forums like the DDP Multi-Party Forum, which are dedicated to unpacking political manifestos, play a crucial role in engaging with politicians and providing citizens with a direct response to their concerns.

While it is recognised that manifestos play an imperative role in empowering citizens to participate in the election process, they can also serve as a deterrent by negatively shaping public opinion against the process as a whole. Repeatedly making the same promises during every election cycle does little to inspire hope among the electorate or encourage voters to turn up to the polls. Rather, this trend of false promises and poor execution could contribute to growing voter apathy in the country and worsen the already alarming low voter turnout. Moreover, as manifestos play a vital role in shaping the narrative of the election, parties may strategically tailor messaging to appeal to a specific demographic – as evident in the 2016 Trump campaign. In extreme circumstances, by micro-targeting, the elected party could prioritise the interests of these groups over the border electorate, which in turn creates divisions and perpetuates inequalities or increases distrust in institutions and leaders for marginalisation/and or not fulfilling these promises.

### *Conclusion*

As South Africa embarks towards the 2024 election, the influence of manifestos in shaping voter perception looms large. Despite their imperfections, these manifestos offer valuable insights into key priorities and are a meaningful instrument of democracy. Ultimately, its power lies in fostering trust, and accountability and empowering citizens to participate in the democratic process.

## **Mitigating AI-Driven Disinformation During an Electoral Year**

**Lizzy Ofusori**

Disinformation refers to false or misleading information that is spread deliberately to deceive and cause harm to a person. Within an election context, disinformation typically involves the intentional spread of false information to undermine political adversaries, manipulating the voting process, or altering perceptions of the political landscape during an election. This is just one of the various strategies employed to manipulate electoral outcomes. In the past few years, there has been increasing concern about the ability of disinformation to influence the process and outcomes of elections and its potential threat to democracy. Moreover, the increasing influence of disinformation is one of several factors contributing to the strain on democracies globally. In South Africa for example, there is now widespread acknowledgment that disinformation can play a significant role in shaping the results of an election. Electoral Commission Chairperson Mosotho Moepya says: “The dissemination of disinformation has huge potential to undermine the fairness and credibility of elections.” This has led to the Electoral Commission and Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) to join hands with major social media platforms to fight the spread of disinformation, during and beyond the November 1, 2021, municipal elections. With the upcoming national election later this year, the intensification of political campaigning will likely lead to a notable surge in the spread of disinformation, misinformation, and fake news. This trend is exacerbated by the advancing capabilities of AI tools, which render the distinction between truth and falsehood increasingly challenging to detect. According to Carina van Wyk, head of education and training at Africa Check, “AI-generated disinformation is becoming more sophisticated and is increasingly difficult to spot.” Hence, safeguarding people from AI-driven disinformation requires a collaborative effort involving governments, tech companies, civil society, and the public. It involves a combination of technological solutions, regulatory frameworks, educational initiatives, and international cooperation to effectively address the challenges posed by disinformation during electoral periods. These strategies are further discussed below:

*Strategies that can be employed to combat AI-driven disinformation*

This section discusses some strategies that can be employed to combat AI-driven disinformation.

**1. Collaboration and information sharing**

There should be collaboration among tech companies, governments, and civil society to share information and insights regarding emerging AI-driven disinformation tactics. With this collaboration, the tech companies can develop and deploy advanced detection algorithms that can identify patterns and characteristics associated with AI-generated content. This algorithm should be regularly audited and evaluated for biases and unintended consequences. Moreover, the government can work closely with major social media and tech platforms to develop and enforce policies against the dissemination of false information. The government should also encourage platforms to enhance AI-driven tools for detecting and removing disinformation. It is essential to note that a collective effort is crucial for staying ahead of evolving threats.

**2. Fact-checking**

The government can invest in robust fact-checking mechanisms to quickly identify and counter false information. In addition, they can collaborate with independent fact-checking organisations to verify the accuracy of information circulating online. Human fact-checkers can provide context, critical analysis, and nuanced understanding that AI algorithms may lack.

**3. Media literacy education and educational initiatives for politicians**

The government should promote media literacy education to enhance the public's ability to critically evaluate information sources. This includes educating individuals on how to discern between credible and misleading content, especially in the context of AI-generated information. Furthermore, the government should provide training for political figures and their campaigns on how to use technology responsibly, and equip politicians with the knowledge to identify and counteract disinformation targeting them or their opponents.

**4. Regulatory measures**

The government should implement and enforce regulations that address the misuse of AI in generating and spreading disinformation.

These regulations should encompass both the development and deployment phases of AI technologies. This regulation should hold social media platforms accountable for the content shared on their platforms. Furthermore, they should collaborate with technology companies to develop and adhere to guidelines that prevent the misuse of AI for disinformation purposes.

#### **5. User reporting mechanisms**

The government should establish user-friendly reporting mechanisms for individuals to flag potential instances of disinformation, and should swiftly investigate and respond to user reports to address the spread of false information. Citizens should be empowered to be proactive in identifying and reporting AI-generated disinformation. By providing channels of communication with accessible reporting mechanisms and tools, the government can engage the public in the fight against false information.

#### **6. International cooperation**

The government can foster international cooperation and coordination to address the global nature of AI-driven disinformation. Collaborative efforts can help develop standardised approaches, and governments can share best practices, intelligence, and resources with other nations to collectively combat AI-driven disinformation.

#### **7. Early warning systems, continuous monitoring, and adaptation**

The government can develop AI-driven early warning systems that can detect potential disinformation campaigns before they gain traction. This can be achieved by using predictive analytics to anticipate and mitigate the impact of false information on public opinion. Moreover, the government can also establish mechanisms for continuous monitoring of AI-driven disinformation trends. This involves staying vigilant and adapting strategies as disinformation tactics evolve.

#### **8. Algorithmic diversity and transparency in AI use**

The government should diversify algorithms used by social media platforms to disrupt the echo chamber effect that may contribute to the rapid spread of disinformation. Introducing variety in content recommendations can expose users to a broader range of perspectives. Similarly, they should advocate for transparency in the deployment of AI technologies, particularly in content creation and

dissemination. Clear disclosure of AI-generated content helps users make informed judgements about the information they encounter.

### *Conclusion*

The disruptive impact of disinformation in elections is expected to persist in the years ahead. As South Africa prepares for its 2024 elections, it is susceptible to this threat of disinformation. The risks associated with false information can overshadow the integrity of the electoral system, shaping public opinion, and undermining trust in the democratic process. However, to safeguard the democratic process requires a collective commitment to technological solutions, public education, regulatory measures, and international collaboration. These strategies can help mitigate the impact of AI-driven disinformation during an electoral year and safeguard the democratic process.

## **Youth Participation in the 2024 Elections: Insights, Lessons and Future Possibilities**

**Thelma Nyarhi**

Elections have come and gone. While post-election activities are wrapped up, including the inauguration of the president, the announcement of the new cabinet, and other processes, more work awaits. Election reflections on the voter turnout remain a vital concern. Numbers often tell a story by painting a much more tangible reality of the extremities of situations we find ourselves in. Throughout the election cycles, youth participation has been the primary concern.

Young voters continue to be disinterested in voter participation. While such voting trends have been prominent in South Africa since the 1994 elections, Western democracies too have experienced the same fate. The liberation struggle had one goal, that is, equality for all, particularly relating to election voter participation. The apartheid (Afrikaans: 'apartness') system had crafted legislative laws that entrenched racial segregation and white supremacy in South Africa. People of colour suffered the brunt of the system by being incarcerated or being excluded from resources such as land, mining rights or capital. Sometimes they would be given partial access, but were relegated to poorly paid, menial jobs. This further contributed to the racial inequality that spread in the country. The Black South African youth later engaged in anti-apartheid activism, culminating in the 1994 universal elections. While we cannot account for the voter turnout figure due to a lack of a voters' roll at the time, 1994 is still perceived to have been the electoral year with the highest voter turnout. However, observations show that electoral participation amongst some of the struggle beneficiaries has decreased since then.

The 2014 general elections were the first elections for the 'born-free' (i.e., born after 1994 elections) eligible voters. Currently, the eligible voter population is about 39.7 million, however only 27.8 million registered to vote. Of the registered population, 55.25% were female, indicating a higher voter turnout amongst females. Despite the registered voter population increasing over the electoral cycles, as seen by the approximate voter totals of 25.4 million in 2014, 26.8 million in 2019, and 27.8 million in 2024, there is a gap between the eligible voter population and registered voters. In 2014 this gap was about 7 million, in 2019 about 9 million, and in 2024 about 11 million. The gap is widening, and voter turnout continues to decline.

The 2014 elections recorded a 73.48% voter turnout, which was later followed by the 2019 electoral year with a 66.05% voter turnout. The 2024 national elections recorded a significantly lower voter turnout of 58.64%. What could be the reason?

Some citizens had alluded that their political apathy to be due to reduced government confidence over the years. This is because of reports of corruption and poor service delivery. This had led to low voter turnout. Additionally, the youth had reported feeling unseen and unheard.

In the recent 2024 electoral cycle, although voter turnout had been significantly low, youth participation in politics shifted. During the 6th parliament (2019–2024) we saw 9% of the members of parliament (MPs) comprising youth aged 25–35 years old. The 7th parliament sees a fair increase of youth representation in parliament, with 3% and 16.8% of MPs falling in the 20–29 and 30–39 age groups, respectively. Although the youth are present in Parliament, we still need more youth voices as they hold the future of the nation.

### *Youth participation in politics*

Political apathy and passivity have been a global concern when it comes to democratic exercises. While some research testaments reveal non-voter or spoilt ballot behaviour as being a protest of some sort, other observations reveal that there are underlying issues requiring attention. Voter turnout amongst the eligible youth (i.e., those aged 18–35 years) is the lowest compared to other age groups. In 2014, this was interpreted to mean that the youth were disinterested in politics; however, this was not the case. The youth had felt they had been ignored and their opinions had been seen as irrelevant. This was countered by a youth campaign that focused on having notable endorsements from peers that the youth looked up to, as well as the use of modern technology in voter education, through opinion pieces, social media exchanges, and other forums. This strategy has carried over into 2024.

Of the 27.67 million registered voters, 17.7% accounted for voters under the age of 30. This was a lower turnout compared to the 2019 elections that had 21%. This comes despite the varied youth campaign efforts in the higher education and other community spaces. The statistic still indicates low voter turnout amongst the youth. Despite this, unlike in previous years, the rise of digital



technology has not only prompted active youth participation in politics through various social media exchanges, podcasts, blogs and/or opinion pieces, but also seen the representation of youth in Parliament. With the current hashtag phrases, trending short video content creations, and algorithmic feeds, information has been shared at astonishing speed. This has drawn the attention of the youth and invited them into sociopolitical exchanges. Additionally, we have seen youth visibility even within electoral voting station staff. Most of the voting staff were young, thereby embodying a sense of hope for the future. Furthermore, there has been an increased documentation of the electoral process. The youth have partaken in their own archival pursuits by covering the electoral processes with their mobile phones, documenting and sharing reflections and media content. We therefore see how social media platforms function as decentralised spaces that offer an equal playing field wherein youth can engage and be heard. As mentioned in previous electoral years, youth felt unheard and ignored. The increased use of digital technology has shown the:

- **political power of social media** – social media has become a coordinating tool for most political movements, e.g., #FeesMustFall, #RhodesMustFall, etc. The true power of social media can be seen in the influence it carries. This has been seen in the growing trends and ‘viral’ attributes of social media content. Through anonymous or known commentary sections, #hashtags and ‘like culture’ information has been shared widely, consequently drawn the attention of youth who are the predominant demographic within social media spaces.
- **freedom of speech** – The internet has allowed various freedoms, including the freedom of access to information, as well as ordinary citizens’ freedom to create public media. The latter is seen in content creations that include different forms of media such as memes, parody sketches, videos, and written pieces, amongst others. All these media formats have communicated thoughts and enacted safe spaces for conversations.
- **political activism** – Digital spaces have enabled different voices to speak on sociopolitical issues. As enablers, they have prompted the spread and growth of political activism.

*Lessons learnt*

Looking at the voter turnout statistics, we may draw some lessons. The 1994 electoral year had the highest voter turnout. This may have been based on the idea of hope for a better future exemplified by the fight for equality. The electoral cycles that followed, however, show a decline of not only the registered population and voter turnouts, but also that hope for a better future. How can we re-ignite hope? With the increased use of digital technology, citizens, particularly the youth, have been vocal in these spaces and shared their expressions concerning politics within the country. Although layered with humour, as seen in the use of parody sketches and meme culture, there are some underlying truths. Digital spaces have enabled invisible actors in our democracy and unveiled youth political expressions as well as allowed them access and/or critique of their political leaders. Consequently, this has at times nudged political responsibility. Social media therefore serves as a contact zone for intergenerational exchange, creating lines of communication. This essentially re-ignites hope and presents opportunities for inclusion. By so doing, recommitment to nation building and social development by and amongst the elected officials and the youth can be made possible. Although we see increased digital youth participation in politics, there remains a need for increased political participation on the ground. This starts with hope.

## 4. Women's Political Leadership

### **“Is South Africa ready for a Woman President?”: After 30 Years of Democracy, Women Still Face Challenges in Politics**

**Yolokazi Mfuto**

In the 30 years that South Africans have lived under a democratic state, the idea of seeing a woman president has become elusive. The challenges women face in politics have built what seems like a glass ceiling. The question “Is South African ready for a woman president” has lingered for many years and it is disingenuous for a range of reasons.

Questions such as the latter are problematic because they are symptomatic of the dangers of a heteronormative patriarchal system. This kind of system promotes the idea that men are natural born leaders and women are below men. Women have always led in society; when the mineral revolution began and men were forced to work in the mines, women led their households and communities. They are leaders, just like men. The history of South African women in politics can be traced from the struggle against apartheid and the transition to democracy. Operations such as the 9th of August 1956 march to the Union Buildings, which preceded the 21st March 1960 Sharpeville Massacre, where black people were protesting pass law, were led by women. Thousands of women marched so that South Africans could be free. Even though the political terrain was volatile, women such as Lilian Ngoyi, Winnie Madikizela Mandela, Albertina Sisulu, Ruth First, and many others led the struggle alongside men. However, the role played by these women and those who are in politics are in a perpetual state of being diminished.

The South African government realised the need to empower women and create an environment that would enable women to occupy leadership positions. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, makes provisions for prohibiting discrimination based on gender. New laws and policies were enacted that promote gender equality. The state has also ratified international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

But even with these advancements, women in South African politics continue to confront many obstacles, including gender-based violence, and women in politics frequently face discrimination, harassment, and sexism. In addition, despite advancements in other sectors level, women in strategic leadership roles are still needed nationally.

Civil society organisations that support women's rights encourage women in leadership roles, and lobby for legislative changes to address gender-based discrimination, are all part of the ongoing efforts to advance gender equality in politics. Initiatives to improve the presence of women in decision-making bodies have also been advocated for, including gender quotas within political parties.

One of the women who have held influential political positions is Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, who served as deputy president from 2005 to 2008 and was marked to be president after President Thabo Mbeki. It has become a culture amongst all the leading political organisations that whenever women contest the position of leading the party, they end up being pushed out of the party. When Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma lost the confidence of the ANC, she was isolated in the ANC. In the DA, Mbali Ntuli contested John Steinhuisen for federal leadership, and the DA created new rules that campaigns should not be made public to derail her campaign. Eventually, she resigned after the congress. The former chairperson of the EFF, Mandisa Mashego, opposed the election of the secretary-general and disagreed with the EFF leader. She also succumbed and left the organisation.

It is quite clear that the quotas in place have been impactful. There are thousands of capable women who can lead; women will continue to struggle, because politics remain very hostile against women. There are women who have established their political parties. The late Zanele kaMagwaza-Msibi started the National Freedom Party (NFP) when she left the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) after attempting to contest the top leadership of the party against the late Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi. The NFP did very in the 2011 local government elections where they were leading in certain municipalities, and in the 2019 National elections the party amassed six seats in Parliament. When Patricia De Lille had her membership terminated by the DA Federal Executive, she subsequently resigned as Mayor of Cape Town in 2018. She claimed that she was now free of oppression and being abused. Patricia de Lille subsequently formed her political organisation, named GOOD. The party won two seats in

Parliament in 2019, and she was co-opted to the cabinet as a minister for Public Works and Infrastructure. She now serves as a minister for Tourism. The GOOD party is doing very well in the Western Cape, and they will be contesting the 2024 national elections.

The two examples given above are illustrations that the question of the state of readiness of the country for a woman president is irrelevant, because there is ample evidence that women are capable of leading. Therefore, there is absolutely no reason for people to prepare themselves for a woman to lead them. This is because women are already leading, just not as president.

According to a study conducted by Afrobarometer in 2023, most citizens (81%) say women should have the same chance as men to be elected to political office. However, 59% also say that a woman running for public office will be criticised, called names, or harassed by others in the community.

Ultimately, even though the South African government has made progress since apartheid ended in encouraging women to enter the political arena, much more must be done to attain complete gender equality and create an environment where women can have more influence in all areas, including running for positions like the president of the country.

Political organisations are still a breeding ground for a heteronormative patriarchy where women must work twice as hard to be seen. Therefore, political organisations should ensure that they create an environment where women are not fearful or chastised for attending to reproductive needs and can contest any political position without fear of discrimination.

Civil society organisations have been doing a lot of work in support of gender equality and supporting women empowerment programmes in South Africa. This work should start educating people on the importance of gender equality. Based on the report from Afrobarometer, there is a need for South Africans to unlearn patriarchal stereotypes and beliefs about women, particularly about women in leadership.

Business and political party funders have massive responsibility and power to turn the tide. Politics is a game that is mostly fuelled by money. Those with more money tend to win power, because they are in a better position to source resources. If funders could fund more women-led political parties and women running for leadership

positions within political parties, South Africa would have better chances of having a woman president.

## **Why Women's Participation in Electoral Politics is good for Democracy in South Africa**

**Lizzy Ofusori**

Globally, history has shown that politics is predominantly male-dominated, and women were not expected to hold significant political views or opinions. This reality is also evident in Africa, where men occupy most major political positions in African countries. However, in South Africa, the political landscape has evolved significantly toward greater inclusivity since the end of apartheid. While there have been advancements in terms of inclusivity, women are still underrepresented in nearly all major political parties and top positions in South Africa, perpetuating gender inequalities across various sectors of the country. Increasing women's participation in politics will help address and advocate for women's rights, challenge gender stereotypes, and promote gender equality. There is a common misconception that women are incapable of effective leadership due to perceived weaknesses in decision-making, leading to unreliable outcomes. However, women's political participation is crucial for a healthy democracy, and it is time for women to step up and claim their rightful place in the political arena. Women in politics can also serve as role models for young girls, inspiring them to aspire to leadership positions. Factors such as age, education level, influence, financial strength, and access to health facilities encourage women to engage fully in political activities. Conversely, illiteracy, lack of capital, and discouragement from spouses, among others, can hinder women's political participation. Hence, it is essential to empower and support women to enhance their full participation in politics. Moreover, women's participation in electoral politics is beneficial for democracy in South Africa for several key reasons:

### **1. Representation and inclusivity**

South Africa has one of the highest proportions of women in Parliament globally. As of the most recent data, women hold 46.2% of the seats in the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces, which positions South Africa within the top ranks worldwide for female parliamentary representation (Inter-Parliamentary Union) (People's Assembly). This leads to more inclusive decision-making processes that reflect the needs and perspectives of the entire population.

## **2. Diverse perspectives**

South Africa is a nation characterised by its diverse ethnic groups, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Women often bring different perspectives and experiences to the political arena. This diversity can lead to more comprehensive and effective policies, especially on issues like healthcare, education, and family welfare, which often affect women disproportionately.

## **3. Equity and justice**

South Africa, like many other countries, has deep-rooted patriarchal norms that have limited women's participation in public life. By increasing female representation in politics, these norms can be challenged and dismantled, creating a more inclusive and egalitarian society. Increasing women's participation in politics helps address historical and systemic gender inequalities. It promotes gender equity and social justice, essential components of a healthy democracy.

## **4. Improved governance**

Research suggests that higher female participation in politics is associated with lower levels of corruption and better governance. Women tend to prioritise transparency, accountability, and community welfare. Moreover, having more women in politics ensures that policies and legislation take into account the needs and concerns of all citizens, not just a particular segment of the population.

## **5. Role models**

Women in political leadership serve as role models, inspiring future generations of women and girls to pursue careers in politics and other leadership roles. For example, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma (former Minister of Health, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Home Affairs, and Chairperson of the African Union Commission) was known for negotiating the end of apartheid and her leadership in the African Union, where she focused on economic development and gender equality (UN Women). Having such women such as Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (Former deputy president of South Africa and executive Ddirector of UN Women) helps to break down gender barriers and stereotypes over time. It can encourage more women to pursue leadership roles, whether in politics or other fields, and helps break down stereotypes and societal barriers.



## **6. Policy prioritisation**

Women legislators are more likely to prioritise issues affecting women and children, such as maternal health, childcare, and gender-based violence. This can lead to more comprehensive social policies that benefit society as a whole. Furthermore, women play a significant role in advocating for community development projects like gender-based violence awareness campaigns and peace building/social cohesion programmes that enhance living conditions, infrastructure, and social services at the grassroots level.

## **7. Democratic strengthening**

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on gender equality and quality education emphasise the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment. By promoting women's political participation, South Africa can work towards strengthening her democratic processes. A democracy is strengthened when it is truly representative of its people. Ensuring that women have a voice in politics supports the principles of democratic governance and enhances the legitimacy of political institutions.

## **8. Economic benefits**

Women's participation in politics has been associated with positive economic outcomes such as improved economic growth and better governance. Policies that support gender equality and women's empowerment can lead to economic growth and development, as women's full participation in the economy is crucial for sustainable development.

## **9. Conflict resolution and peacebuilding**

Women often play crucial roles in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. For example, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first elected female head of state in Africa, served as president of Liberia from 2006 to 2018. She played a critical role in restoring peace to Liberia. Tawakkol Karman is a Yemeni journalist, politician, and human rights activist who played a significant role in the peacebuilding process during the Yemeni uprising in 2011. Women's participation in politics help create more stable and peaceful societies, as they tend to emphasise dialogue, reconciliation, and community building.

In conclusion, increasing women's participation in electoral politics in South Africa not only enhances democratic processes

but also leads to more equitable, just, and prosperous societies. Moreover, it improves the quality of governance, supports sustainable development, and strengthens democracy. By overcoming barriers and promoting women's involvement in political leadership, South Africa can tap into the full potential of its diverse population to tackle pressing issues and create a brighter future for everyone.

## **Why Women Political Leaders can Transform Coalition Governing in South Africa: Insights from the 2024 Elections**

**Adebimpe Esther Ofusori**

Coalition governance in South Africa has become increasingly relevant due to the fragmentation of the political landscape and the declining dominance of the ANC. The ANC, being the dominant party, has witnessed its support decline in recent years, leading to the rise of other parties like the DA and the EFF. This fragmentation necessitates coalition governments as no single party can easily secure a majority. Coalition governments can promote stability through compromise, as they require parties to negotiate and agree on policies and decisions, which could lead to more balanced governance. In the 2024 elections in South African, women political leaders play a crucial role in transforming coalition governance because they have leadership and negotiation skills. Women leaders often bring strong negotiation and consensus-building skills, which are crucial in coalition governments where diverse parties must work together. Their ability to navigate complex political landscapes and mediate between different factions can lead to more stable and effective governance.

When a woman is empowered, they are not just empowered as individuals, they also help to empower communities and societies. The presence of women political leaders can enhance the representation of marginalised groups within the coalition, ensuring that their needs and perspectives are considered in policy-making processes. In addition, women leaders often bring a collaborative and consensus-driven approach to leadership, which is essential for the success of coalition governments where negotiation and consensus are crucial. Below are insights into how and why this transformation could occur:

### **Diverse perspectives and inclusive policies**

Women leaders often bring attention to issues that might otherwise be overlooked, such as gender equality, healthcare, and education. This inclusion has led to the implementation of initiatives that aim to benefit a broader segment of society, contributing to more equitable governance.

### **Policy innovation**

Diverse leadership can lead to more innovative and inclusive policy-making, as different perspectives are considered in the decision-making process.

### **Breaking political barriers**

Women leaders can challenge and reshape traditional political dynamics, breaking down barriers and encouraging more progressive and innovative approaches to governance.

### **Conflict resolution**

The ability of women to mediate and resolve conflicts can help maintain stability within a coalition government, reducing the risk of political fragmentation. Their emphasis on consensus-building and negotiation can help manage conflicts and create more stable coalitions.

### **Boosting public trust**

The presence of women in high political offices can inspire confidence and trust among the electorate, particularly among women and young people.

### **Accountability and transparency**

Studies have shown that women in leadership roles often emphasise accountability and transparency, which can lead to more effective governance and increased public trust.

### **Addressing social issues**

Women leaders tend to prioritise social policies that address the needs of families, children, and marginalised communities, contributing to social cohesion and stability.

### **Gender-based violence**

Female leaders are more likely to push for stringent measures to combat gender-based violence, a significant issue in South Africa.

### **Economic empowerment**

Women in leadership positions can advocate for policies that promote economic empowerment for women, leading to more inclusive economic growth.

### **Entrepreneurship and SMEs**

Support for female entrepreneurship and SMEs can drive economic development and reduce unemployment in South Africa.

### **Transformative change in political culture**

The success of women in political leadership roles can challenge and change traditional gender norms, paving the way for future generations of female leaders.

### **Cultural shift**

Women political leadership can contribute to a cultural shift towards greater gender equality in all areas of society.

### *Coalition governance by women political leaders in South Africa: Insights from the 2024 elections*

The 2024 South African elections revealed several insights about how women political leaders are influencing coalition governance. Here are some of the insights:

### **Enhancing coalition stability**

Women leaders have been instrumental in fostering stability within coalitions. Their emphasis on dialogue and collaboration has helped to bridge divides among coalition partners, reducing the frequency of conflicts and increasing the overall effectiveness of governance.

### **Increased representation and legitimacy**

The participation of women in leadership roles has improved the representational legitimacy of coalition governments. Their presence has been positively received by the public, enhancing the credibility and acceptability of the coalition's decisions and policies.

### **Innovative leadership approaches**

Women leaders have brought new approaches and fresh perspectives to governance and coalition politics, emphasising transparency,

accountability, and stakeholder engagement. Their leadership styles often prioritise long-term solutions and consensus-building over short-term gains or partisan interests.

### **Challenges and resistance**

Despite these positive contributions, women leaders have faced challenges, including resistance from more entrenched political factions and scepticism from some quarters about their leadership capabilities. Overcoming these challenges has required persistence and strategic acumen.

### **Impact on policy implementation**

Women-led coalitions have shown an ability to implement policies more effectively by leveraging their collaborative approach. This has led to tangible improvements in areas such as social services and community development.

In conclusion, the 2024 elections highlighted the transformative potential of women in coalition governance, demonstrating their ability to bring stability, inclusiveness, and innovative leadership to South Africa's political landscape. Examining the performance of women-led coalitions in various municipalities and regions can provide valuable insights into their effectiveness and areas for improvement. Finally, women's political leadership not only enhances the functionality of coalition governments but also contributes to broader societal progress.

## **Analysing The Effects of Women's Political Leadership on South Africa's Democracy**

**Bongiwe Khumalo**

African women have traditionally been involved in politics. Politics in the present and the past demonstrate the significant influence that women have had on social and political concerns in Africa over a wide range of periods and regions. For example, in pre-colonial Africa, there were the Dahomey Amazons, a female military corps that defended the kingdom in the Kingdom of Dahomey (modern-day Benin); anti-colonial movements led by Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, a well-known feminist and anti-colonial activist from Nigeria; and independence movements led by Winnie Mandela, a well-known human rights activist and anti-apartheid campaigner from South Africa. The idea of organised female participation in politics, especially in leadership roles, is crucial to democracy in South Africa.

The political landscape of South Africa has significantly shifted towards gender equality in recent years, with an increasing number of women assuming leadership positions at all levels of government. The fact that women activists were flexible and successful in influencing policy has sparked debates and conversations on the impact of women's political leadership on the country's democracy. This blog explores the various dimensions of women's political involvement and evaluates the extent to which female leadership has impacted and altered South African democracy.

Despite being a "rainbow nation," or a varied and multicultural society, South Africa's democratic transition is assessed from the perspective of black women. It is noteworthy that there are more women in politics in South Africa and Uganda than in many other more developed democracies. This observation might be the result of major political parties implementing affirmative-action rules for candidate recruitment and selection in response to pressure from its women's wings.

Women have run for president and won in Malawi (Joyce Banda, president 2012–2014: second female head of state in Africa) and Liberia (Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, president 2006–2018: first woman to be democratically elected as a head of state in Africa), but no woman has been elected to lead South Africa. Four individuals have served as president of South Africa since apartheid ended in 1994. Nonetheless, women began to play significant political roles

in the country towards the end of the 1990s. Examples include Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1999 to 2009 and Minister of Health from 1994 to 1999. She also became the Chairperson of the African Union Commission in 2012. South Africa's governance is now more sensitive to gender issues than it has ever been thanks to the substantial legislative, regulatory, and service delivery improvements that women in leadership roles have contributed to bring about. Due to this enormous influence, South African women have seen previously unheard-of success in moving from active involvement in the liberation struggle to administrative participation.

The important contributions South African women made to the growth of the nation's democratic process are highlighted in the following points. These include regulatory changes, women leaders' experiences, and historical turning events.

### **The battle for gender equality**

Women led the charge in the resistance movement and were instrumental in overthrowing the oppressive government during the apartheid era. The significant work of female activists like Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Ruth Mompati, and Albertina Sisulu made it easier for women to participate in politics.

### **Developments in the legislative framework**

Following the end of apartheid, South Africa started the process of amending its Constitution, which opened the door to further progress in gender equality. Gender equality was included in South Africa's 1996 Constitution, which also granted women full political participation rights. Following that, laws enforcing gender quotas – specifically, the Electoral Act of 1998 – mandated that women hold at least 50% of part-time political jobs.

### **Policy prioritisation**

Women in leadership positions in politics have demonstrated a dedication to promoting gender-sensitive policies that tackle issues such as access to healthcare and education, economic empowerment, and gender-based violence.



### **Women's political representation Is on the rise**

Since gender quotas were introduced, the number of women in politics has been gradually rising. The remarkable growth of women's participation in the South African Parliament and local government is the reason that gender quotas and women's political leadership are positively associated.

### **Women's leadership**

Understanding that women's political experiences vary, and that intersectionality plays a significant role in determining their goals and leadership styles, requires an awareness of the diverse perspectives held by women leaders from a range of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds as well as the impact of their intersectional identities on their leadership and decision-making in government.

In conclusion, the impact of women in political leadership on South Africa's democracy cannot be overstated. Women leaders have played a crucial role in shaping national policy, elevating gender equality, and inspiring the next generation as the nation strives to build a more inclusive and equitable society. Although there are certainly challenges ahead, the progress made thus far demonstrates the revolutionary potential of female leadership. The democratic process in South Africa depends on the growth of women in politics; therefore, maintaining the support of these leaders is essential to building a better, more equitable future. There is the potential for greater participation from women who are actively involved in the conversations about how to improve gender equality in South Africa. No social groups should be excluded from this active engagement.



## 5. Coalition Governing in South Africa: Electoral Outcomes, GNU and Democracy

### **Constitutional Supremacy Versus Parliamentary Supremacy: Which Way For South Africa Post the Elections?**

**Stanley Ehiane**

In the complex realm of governance, two essential concepts influence a country's power dynamics: parliamentary supremacy and constitutional supremacy. Which idea should come first has been a source of heated debate and contention in South Africa, a country with a long history of combating injustice and bigotry. South Africa must assess how these opposing philosophies will affect its democratic institutions and the protection of basic rights as it moves forward.

Under South Africa's parliamentary supremacist system, Parliament has traditionally held the highest level of authority. Parliament enacted laws that were considered supreme and there were few methods of reversing or contesting these laws. During the apartheid era, parliament passed discriminatory legislation that enforced racial segregation and denied most black people the ability to vote. South Africa transitioned to a constitutional supremacy system in 1996 when apartheid was abolished, and a new democratic Constitution was ratified. The articles of the constitution became the supreme law of the nation, and all legislation, even that passed by parliament, had to follow them. The constitution also includes a Bill of Rights, which ensures that every South African has access to basic freedoms and human rights. The courts can preserve fundamental rights, even if they contradict laws passed by parliament.

Parliamentary supremacy refers to a legal system in which the Parliament is the ultimate authority. This indicates that no other institution has the right to overturn the legislature's decision to create, amend, or repeal any statute. This technique enables elected representatives to easily alter the laws, allowing for greater flexibility and agility in responding to changing circumstances. It does, however, entail the possibility of the ruling party in Parliament abusing its authority. This philosophy is embodied by South Africa's Westminster system of government, which it inherited from its

colonial past. In this setup, the Parliament has extensive jurisdiction, including the unfettered ability to enact, amend, and repeal laws.

The idea of constitutional supremacy holds that the constitution is the ultimate legal authority. All legislation, including that approved by Parliament, must adhere to the Constitution. Constitutions usually emphasise the protection of individual liberties, the division of powers, and checks and balances. Because the court has the jurisdiction to nullify legislation that violates the constitution, this system provides stability, predictability, and protection of fundamental rights. However, it may result in a rigid legal system that makes it difficult to reform laws without amending the constitution.

Thus, in many democratic countries, the principle of “supremacy of the constitution” serves as a check on the government’s authority, ensuring that it stays within the confines set by the constitution. This theory gained hold in South Africa when the post-apartheid constitution was adopted in 1996, which created a comprehensive foundation for democracy, equality, and human rights. The constitution created a system of checks and balances by defining the powers of the president, legislature, and judiciary, as well as providing for an independent judiciary to defend the rights of citizens. The basic contrast between constitutional supremacy and parliamentary sovereignty is where ultimate legislative authority lies. The legislature is under parliamentary sovereignty, whereas the state Constitution is under constitutional supremacy.

The choice between parliamentary supremacy and constitutional supremacy is determined by a country’s aims, ideals, and historical context, such as in South Africa. Both systems have benefits and drawbacks. Following the end of apartheid, South Africa transitioned from parliamentary to constitutional governance. The constitution is currently the country’s highest legal authority, and its provisions apply to all levels of government, including parliament. Between 1994 and 1996, the two Houses of Parliament worked together as a constitutional assembly to create South Africa’s Constitution. The procedure included a countrywide public participation campaign that solicited public feedback. The Constitution adopted by South Africa in 1996 is regarded as one of the world’s most progressive. It protects several rights, including free expression, equality, and access to healthcare and education. Because of the supremacy of the Constitution, these rights are protected, and difficult for the government or legislature to restrict.

Parliamentary sovereignty gives the legislature free ability to create and alter laws; this system is similar to the Westminster system used in the United Kingdom and South Africa during apartheid. South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy was arduous and multifaceted. Constitutional supremacy has helped to encourage nation-building, reconciliation, and social justice by providing a legal framework for redressing historical injustices and furthering equality for all people. Unlike the United Kingdom, South Africa is not a parliamentary democracy. To put it another way, neither the Parliament nor the UK Parliament are sovereign. Rather, South Africa is a constitutional democracy with among of the world's most robust statutory safeguards for minority rights. That is, a written Constitution restricts the authority of the legislative and the executive branch. Throughout South Africa's democratic transition, the clash between these two concepts has been evident. One of the most notable instances was the Constitutional Court's judgment in 2016 to overrule parliament's determination to hold President Jacob Zuma accountable for squandering public funds for personal gain. The court's decision reaffirmed the Constitution's supremacy over acts of Parliament, emphasising the significance of accountability and the rule of law.

In the context of South African democracy, the choice between parliamentary supremacy and constitutional supremacy has far-reaching consequences for law and order, government, and the preservation of fundamental rights. Detractors argue that an overemphasis on constitutional supremacy may jeopardise the concept of popular sovereignty as represented by elected members of Parliament. They contend that an overly intrusive court might infiltrate the legislative branch and steal the people's democratic mandate. On the other hand, proponents of constitutional supremacy argue that a robust Constitution is necessary for protecting individual rights and decreasing the likelihood of state abuse of power. They argue that in the absence of a strong constitutional framework, the rights of minorities and marginalised groups may be jeopardised by the whims of fleeting political majorities. Furthermore, they argue that constitutionalism fosters predictability, stability, and respect for the law, all of which are necessary for social cohesion and long-term progress.

Constitutional supremacy is often advocated above parliamentary supremacy in South African democracy. The constitution serves as the cornerstone for South Africa's democratic

system, providing a framework for safeguarding fundamental rights, maintaining the separation of powers, and furthering social justice and equality. Despite its importance in South Africa's political system, parliamentary democracy operates within the framework of constitutional principles and limitations. Given its emphasis on human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, South Africa's post-apartheid history demonstrates that constitutional supremacy aligns more closely with its aims and ideals. The effectiveness of institutions such as the court, which must apply the Constitution fairly, is critical to the functioning of constitutional supremacy.

Following the elections, South Africa may choose to reaffirm its commitment to constitutional supremacy by strengthening constitutionally protected institutions such as an independent judiciary and a vigilant civil society. This will ensure that the nation's administration remains focused on the promise of democracy and human rights, as outlined in the Constitution. That is not to imply that legislative responsibilities should be ignored; rather, they should be balanced within the framework of constitutional standards.

South Africa must carefully balance these contrasting ideals as it charts its destiny. Constitutional supremacy ensures respect for fundamental rights and serves as a deterrent to tyranny, but it must be tempered with an awareness of democracy and the role of elected representatives. Similarly, parliamentary supremacy, albeit representing the popular will, must operate within the confines of constitutional norms and principles.

The establishment of a constitutionalist culture across society, from the halls of Parliament to the corridors of power, will eventually overcome this dilemma. It involves a commitment to defending every person's right and dignity, promoting accountability and transparency, and upholding the rule of law. In South Africa, the choice between legislative and constitutional supremacy is not binary; rather, it is a dynamic interplay that must evolve to suit the changing needs and aims of the country's population. Constitutional supremacy may be more suitable and desirable than parliamentary supremacy, particularly given South Africa's unique circumstances and commitment to democracy and human rights. It provides a foundation for enforcing the law, protecting minorities' rights, and promoting equality and social justice.

## **A Democracy Comes of Age; Important Guiding Fundamentals have Emerged**

**Stef Terblanche**

By the weekend following our May 29 elections, it was clear: South Africa would henceforth be a different country politically to the one of the previous 30 years since Nelson Mandela had first led the ANC to power in 1994 following the momentous fall of apartheid.

And yet, will there be much that will really change to any large or speedy degree in governance and for people on the ground in 2024, as there was in 1994? For that, we had to wait and see what emerged from the discussions among the political parties as to who would form the next government and also trace how power would be distributed. Elections were one thing, but now forming a functional government was completely another. Perhaps more so than the elections themselves, these discussions that had started had moved the country into the danger zone.

Uncertainty still prevailed at this very moment as parties continued to talk and negotiate around forming a government, a dozen challenges remained lodged with the IEC, the comeback king Jacob Zuma had already issued threats of mayhem, and so forth. Constitutionally the parties have 14 days after the election to come up with a new president (and by extension a new government), failing which new elections may have to be held.

Once the parties agree on a new president – to be sworn in by the Chief Justice – one can safely assume that they will also have found agreement on a power-sharing governing arrangement involving two or more parties at the national level, with similar situations having arisen in three provinces – Gauteng, KZN and the Northern Cape. The modalities of agreements in these three provinces, would most likely be dictated by what took place at the national level. However, all three of these provinces had specific characteristics and political peculiarities that would come into play, so it was not going to be a case of one size fits all.

What was clear already, however, is that from this point on, responsibility and accountability would be shared among a broader, more representative spectrum of political parties, the exact combination and mechanisms of which were yet to be determined. Governing parties would be subjected to greater scrutiny, held more accountable, and would more easily be pushed out if they didn't

perform. That alone should generate much hope for a better future among all South Africans.

As things stood, the talks on forming a government were to be concluded quite soon, providing a measure of certainty on the way forward. Or the talks could have disintegrated and dragged on for weeks, even months, with legal challenges, and with even the possibility of a constitutional crisis or fresh elections if the talks collapsed and no-one was able to form a government. On the positive side, President Cyril Ramaphosa, in his closing remarks to the IEC Results Operation Centre in Midrand, as well as numerous leaders of other parties, had all agreed now was the time to put their differences behind them and put the country first and work together to find a workable agreement as to how best to serve the people going forward. They all acknowledged that the voters want power to be shared, with no one party being dominant.

In line with this voters' sentiment, we don't have to wait around for what may or may not occur from these power-sharing discussions; the outcome of the elections had already produced a number of fundamental underlying points that would or should have guided and determined the current state of play and the anticipated way forward, regardless of who or which parties would be in government. If we adhered to or remained mindful of these fundamentals, it should have considerably strengthened our democracy going forward as well as how we engaged with each other politically.

### *Important underlying fundamentals*

Therefore, to fully understand where we are and how we might proceed, we need to consider these important points – the underlying fundamentals that have emerged:

#### **Demand for change**

The driving force behind the 2024 elections has been a demand for “change” – a rather abstract and poorly defined call to action that by the next elections in 2029 will have again matured or metamorphosed into something different, perhaps then into a more sharply defined clarion call around specific issues. We are not at the absolute end of one era or phase or dispensation or the beginning of another; we are merely in the midst of an ongoing dynamic democratic evolutionary process.



### **A dynamic ongoing evolutionary process**

South Africa has not so much entered a “new era” as many are asserting – instead, like any other healthy democracy, ours is not a static one, but an ever-evolving, fluid and dynamic phenomenon that is always progressing through different stages and phases with overlapping familiarities alongside new possibilities that open up. The baton has been passed for the next leg of the race but essentially the players, the problems, the challenges and opportunities are still the same. For most people, little if anything will change on the ground any time soon. When we woke up after May 29, we still had high unemployment, crime, load shedding and all the other problems. These will take a long time to go away, if at all. Revolutions, coups, national conventions, palace revolts and military invasions bring about fundamental change and new or different eras and dispensations; democratic elections produce fresh legs and ideas, course and pace adjustments, and sometimes systemic alterations. Important is how the race is run from this point on; that is what could be changing soon and could in the longer run, produce its own hopefully good results. But for now, don’t anticipate any overnight miracles or major changes.

### **Changing political profile and expectations**

Key to the above is the changing political profile and expectations of the electorate, the citizenry, which is no longer the same as it was in 1994, in 2014, or even in 2019. By the next elections in 2029, the profile will have adjusted once more and many of the current dynamics and expectations will to some degree have shifted again, causing us to rechart the course on which the country has set sail.

### **End of the de facto one-party or one-party-dominant state**

These elections have also broken the total and sometimes abusive dominance of one single political party of the entire political environment through its control of the executive and the legislative branches, the latter which functioned as little more than the party and the executive’s rubber stamp. The de facto one-party state or one-party-dominant state is no more, which is a huge relief and a breakthrough for this young democracy. This has unlocked and broadened important participatory opportunities for all political communities and groups across the political spectrum that were always theoretically available in our constitution as its drafters had intended but were stifled because of single-party dominance.

This will most likely advance greater transparency, consensus, consultation and accountability as well as political inclusivity, which is why the drafters of the constitution settled on a party-list proportional representation electoral system. That system, more specifically its accountability and access to it, have now been further enhanced and expanded by the addition of allowing independent candidates to also stand for election – an addition that is still a work in progress. Over time, this aspect is likely to find greater traction.

### **More balanced, diversified policy and legislative processes likely**

Meanwhile, the policy and legislation arena is about to experience a significantly altered period in which increased checks and balances will enter, and in which no political party or combination of parties will have the absolute upper hand or a blank check it can fill out as it wishes. This should be welcomed by all moderate, pro-democracy forces, investors and the markets. Against the above background, and with the new division of seats among parties, and with no party having an outright majority in the National Assembly, the policy and legislative dictates of the executive will now be open to effective challenges in the National Assembly, greater scrutiny and adjustment, or even rejection. At the same time, with the ANC having majorities in five provinces and as it will possibly be a partner in a provincial coalition or two, it is likely to be the dominant player in the National Council of Provinces. The balance of power in the executive and the legislature will not necessarily be the same or be aligned and will be subjected to changing dynamics at times so that no one party can randomly impose its will on others. So, for example, situations will arise where the national executive drafts legislation based on its internally agreed-upon policy position; sends it to the National Assembly for refinement, a vote and approval, and where it may have to undergo significant changes or even be rejected and sent back; but once it is passed in the National Assembly it will be sent to the National Council of Provinces for further approval, where it may again undergo revision and be sent back to the National Assembly for suggested changes to be made. This will most likely significantly complicate the legislative process but will also promote more intense scrutiny, deliberation, consultation, consensus and common-ground agreement and balance. Furthermore, limits already placed by the constitution on certain types of legislation will, in a more diversified legislative process, add further limitations and checks and balances; thus, overall, the legislative process is likely to produce more

balanced end results based on maximum consensus across a wider spectrum of participation representing diverse interests and ideas.

### **The maturing of our democracy**

One of the biggest takeaways from these elections is not so much the massive fall from grace of the ANC after 30 years of rule, much of it on the wrong side of moral and historical judgement, but rather the fact that South Africa's democracy has now fully matured, coming of age. Even so, in the space of one single day, a party that had ruled the country without question or much opposition for thirty years was unceremoniously booted out of office. South African voters have shown that they will be patient for a long, long time without resorting to violence or going to the streets, but when their patience has been exhausted, they will seek change through the ballot and show no mercy. In the process, the country has been left with a collection of political parties, none possessing the majority needed to take the ANC's place. Although we are not yet fully out of the woods, commendable was the orderly and peaceful manner in which the elections occurred, allowing the IEC, various international observer missions, foreign diplomats, most local political parties, as well as the domestic and international media to declare the elections to have been peaceful, free and fair. Just as commendable was how the outgoing ruling party, the ANC, gracefully accepted defeat and prepared to hand over the governing baton to whatever will follow. All of this is almost as impressive a political testimonial and statement as were the 1994 elections that transitioned the country from apartheid to democracy without widespread violence or a civil war.

### **Some inherent dangers**

As mentioned already, the process of negotiating the next format of government among various political parties is in itself fraught with danger and could badly unravel at any moment if cool heads and the best interest of the country as a whole don't prevail. However, so far it seems the centre is holding and that in respect of the elections themselves and the immediate transitionary aftermath before we arrive at a new governing dispensation, play is proceeding smoothly, and the ball is being passed around without serious disruption. The only jarring note has come from Jacob Zuma and his MKP who, instead of revelling in their phenomenal, unprecedented success are issuing all kinds of ominous threats and warnings if they don't have

their way. Even the previously often unruly and raucous EFF, which lost considerable ground, seems uncharacteristically restrained and respectable in comparison. So far, most other parties have stood together in condemning such Big Man behaviour and it should be clear to Mr Zuma that 14.58% of the national vote and 46% of the provincial KZN vote, spectacular as it may seem, still represent only a minority. So, Zuma and the MKP should not delude themselves that they can dictate to the majority or plunge the country into unrest if they don't have things their way. Also of much concern is the diminishing participation in or support for our national democracy and its elections, with only 58.64% of registered voters having voted this time, down from 66% in 2019. Since the 86.87% voter turnout recorded in 1994, this figure has been on the decline, reaching its lowest point in national and provincial elections this year. In the municipal elections of 2021, only a meagre 45.86% of registered voters bothered to vote.

This year, far more eligible voters chose not to vote than those who were registered and voted. This is particularly concerning when it comes to the youth, now distinctly making up the largest potential voting bloc in the country. Research done some time ago suggested that a growing number of South Africans – particularly the youth – were willing to forfeit the constitution, and the multi-party democracy and its institutions, if this would bring them jobs, safety, education and other improvements. Seemingly playing into this sentiment has also been Mr Zuma who, should he come to power, has promised to tear up the constitution, take away the powers of the independent judiciary and replace it with an African justice system, and nationalise land, banks and mines, among other archaic and wholly undemocratic and unconstitutional measures. But largely underlying Zuma and the MKP's views on these matters has been their introduction of the politics of revenge and retribution, the assertion that force can be used to achieve goals, and the notion that democratic systems and checks and the rule of law are unnecessary and should be discarded, all to enhance their own power and control – in other words, a silent coup. The fact that such a sizeable segment of voters supported Zuma and the MKP despite his undemocratic and destructive tendencies should have alarm bells ringing everywhere.

### **A return to ethnic identity politics?**

Several commentators have raised concerns that these elections brought with them a return to divisive ethnic identity politics. That

may be so, but it has always been a feature of the post-1994 South African political landscape and is not in every respect necessarily a bad thing, or even that divisive. It could even promote harmony and peaceful co-existence. And it is something that was arguably even intended by the drafters of the constitution as it gives minorities an effective voice without them simply being swamped by the majority. In this context then, we saw the phenomenal rise of the MKP, mainly on a tide of pro-Zuma support combined with a wave of Zulu ethnic nationalism. Similarly, we saw the rise of Gayton McKenzie's PA on the back of a predominantly coloured vote, McKenzie having persuaded coloured communities that other political parties don't have their interests at heart. The EFF maintains a distinct pan-Africanist/black African nationalist outlook. Equally so, the DA still appeals strongly to whites across the language spectrum, and the FF+ attracts specifically white Afrikaners. The African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) appeals to Christians of all races, and Aljama-Ah is a party for Muslims. Also in the mix are parties for socialists, workers, pan-Africanists and others, so it shouldn't really surprise anyone that there are also parties for specific race, ethnic, cultural or religious groups in a country with so much diversity.

#### *What comes next?*

Now we ride out the negotiations phase, hope it will find peaceful consensus around a government to be formed, and pray that the danger period will pass without incident. The era of the ANC claiming to be the sole legitimate representative of the people has been abruptly and decisively ended. Its oft-flaunted credentials as the party of liberation suddenly no longer count for much. With a younger generation who never lived through apartheid now firmly in the ascendancy, the ANC should have known this day would be coming but chose not to acknowledge it until it was far too late. President Ramaphosa's Tintswalo has come back to bite an ANC that does not own her generation, unlike what Ramaphosa tried to intimate in his 2024 State of the Nation address. Now South Africa moves on ... hopefully to a better place.

For parties now engaging in governing and power-sharing deliberations, there are basically three options on the table:

**A coalition government**, in which two or more parties join forces to achieve a governing majority over 50% and agree on the distribution of power, positions and responsibilities among themselves. Coalitions

work well in a number of countries and South Africa has for some time now also been heading in this direction, starting with the 2016 municipal elections.

**A government of national unity**, in which a large number of the biggest parties come together to govern for the common good of the country and not for the mere sake of power, and they agree among themselves how best to achieve this and what each party's role and stake will be. Policy and legislative determination are achieved through consultation and consensus. This is by far the most inclusive and most representative form of government, but often a problematic one when it comes to reaching consensus and agreement around critical matters.

**A minority government based on a confidence and supply agreement.** In this format an outright majority was not required and, for example, the ANC with its 40% of National Assembly seats, could continue to govern as a minority government, but would rely on periodic pre-determined support from another party or parties, e.g., the DA, when voting on critical matters such as electing a president, making specific changes to the Constitution, or in respect of the budget and other crucial bills.

Parties were engaged in these kinds of talks. Without playing the guessing game or pre-empting any possible outcomes, based on known factors and conditions it would seem that any coalition or similar agreement between the ANC and ambitious radical leftwing parties like the EFF and MKP, would be prone to more squabbling and instability than an arrangement between the ANC and the moderate, centrist DA. The latter would also be much better received by investors and markets. But these decisions are up to the parties, and South Africa waits with bated breath for the result.

## **The Future of Small Political Parties in Limbo Post-May 29th Elections, South Africa**

**Stanley Ehiane**

Small political parties have played an essential role in South African democracy, notably in the post-apartheid period. South Africa's political landscape is growing increasingly dependent on small political organisations. New political parties such as Action SA, MKP (a breakaway party from the ANC, on the left to far left of the political spectrum), and the Alliance of Citizens for Change (ACC) indicates a more evolved democracy that values multiple points of view. These small political parties are expected to play an important role in any coalition discussions following the election, as they typically attract individuals dissatisfied with the larger, more established parties. Because of South Africa's challenges, such as unemployment, economic inequality, and popular dissatisfaction with the ruling ANC, smaller parties have an opportunity to win over disgruntled voters. The political landscape is more diverse than ever, with over 350 parties registered for the 2024 elections, as well as independent candidates. This offers a conducive atmosphere for small parties to gain traction if they properly answer voters' concerns.

With the 2024 elections, huge changes are taking place in South Africa's political landscape. Small political parties are becoming increasingly significant in today's shifting democratic system. Because of socioeconomic concerns and widespread voter unhappiness, the people are looking for alternatives to the ANC's long-held rule. Smaller parties may benefit from the rise of coalition politics, giving them more power in legislative and policy-making processes. Local coalition governance has been utilised in South Africa before, although with different degrees of success due to frequent instability and ephemeral relationships. Smaller parties may acquire more weight if these partnerships gain traction at the federal level.

Smaller parties, such as those included in the MPC and MKP, are positioning themselves to challenge the ANC's monopoly. Though larger than very minor parties, the DA and EFF are establishing strategic partnerships that may bring in weaker players to form a viable opposition coalition. This political plotting demonstrates how important little parties are becoming in a split political landscape. The ACC, recently launched by Masizole Mnqasela, and Action SA, a minor party founded by former Johannesburg mayor

Herman Mashaba, are gaining popularity. These parties, which attract members who sympathise with the new leaders' promises and ideas, are sometimes the consequence of internal conflicts within more established parties. Small parties represent a variety of unique ideas, organisations, and interests that major parties may not adequately represent. This includes specific political issues, ethnic or cultural groups, and geographical interests. The FF+, MKP, and IFP are political parties that focus on certain ethnic groups and regional problems.

Furthermore, voter engagement and turnout, especially among young people, will be critical. Low attendance has historically indicated disinterest, which minor parties may capitalise on by mobilising these groups through targeted campaigns and focusing on specific local problems that larger parties may overlook. The competitive dynamics of small parties can influence election outcomes. Small parties can influence the result of municipal and provincial elections by gaining support from larger parties. This fragmentation may push major parties to change their tactics, policies, and candidate selection to regain or maintain popular support.

Small political parties will likely continue to play key roles beyond the 2024 elections. Their influence may grow as the political landscape shifts, particularly if no party wins a landslide victory and greater collaboration and coalition building among diverse political groupings is necessary. This trend may result in South Africa's political system being more inclusive and representational. Several parties, even minor ones, are required in a democratic society to serve as checks and balances on the ruling party or coalition. This prevents power from consolidating and promotes accountability and transparency in governance. The success of minority parties has the potential to significantly influence election-wide political dynamics. They can siphon votes away from major parties, influence turnout, and modify the landscape of post-election discussions to create governments. When organising electoral campaigns and coalition discussions, the DA and EFF regularly had to consider the perspectives of minor parties.

A variety of factors, including the changing political climate, demographic shifts, economic conditions, and coalition politics dynamics, will have an impact on the future of South Africa's minority political parties. Minority parties can be represented in South Africa's proportional representation electoral system, even if they obtain a tiny percentage of the vote. Minority parties may guarantee



that their voices are heard by using this system to gain seats in both national and local legislatures. However, with the ANC's dominance and the growing power of the DA and EFF, smaller parties are having a tough time attracting a substantial voter base. Coalition politics are becoming more widespread, particularly in metropolitan areas, as the ANC's authority dwindles. Minority parties may be crucial kingmakers in these coalitions, wielding great power that is out of proportion to their modest size.

The youthful and urbanising population of South Africa may influence the future success of minority parties. Younger voters may likely be more open to different political agendas, thereby helping minority parties win new members. Furthermore, socioeconomic issues like as inequality, unemployment, and inadequate service delivery may shift voters in favour of political parties that provide practical solutions, thereby benefiting disadvantaged parties with strong local or issue-based agendas. Because of the expanding importance of social media and digital marketing, minority parties now have an affordable way of reaching out to potential voters. Using technology, these parties may generate funds, communicate with voters, and broadcast their message without the need for a large traditional campaign infrastructure. This helps to level the playing field by allowing smaller parties to punch above their weight. Minority parties usually face problems due to limited financial and organisational resources. Much effort and money are required to establish a strong party structure and maintain a visible presence between elections. To remain competitive, these parties must continue to mobilise the people, have strong leadership, and have well-defined policy platforms.

Small political parties' fates are fluid and vulnerable to change based on a variety of factors, including their ability to adapt to the needs of their followers, the effectiveness of their leadership, and the relevance of their programmes. Those who can adapt to changing circumstances and have a clear vision for the future will likely flourish, while those who cannot fade into obscurity.

Small political parties are an important component of the vibrancy and pluralism of South African democracy. Regardless of their problems, they have made invaluable contributions to political involvement, accountability, representation, and innovative policymaking. Small parties are likely to gain influence as South Africa's political landscape changes, supporting a more diversified and active democratic society. Important developments include

the establishment of tiny political parties and the involvement of independent candidates in South Africa's 2024 elections. These changes, in addition to providing voters with more options, point to a potential shift towards a more inclusive and coalition-based political system.

Finally, small political parties in South Africa look to have a promising future after May 2024, but this will be dependent on their ability to form strong coalitions, effectively address voter issues, and galvanise support among disaffected and younger voters. The shift to coalition rule may result in a more varied and dynamic political atmosphere, marking a significant break from the ANC's dominance. Smaller parties may play a larger role in coalition administrations as the political landscape becomes more fragmented, perhaps allowing them more control over national policies and developments. This dynamic demonstrates how South African democracy is evolving, and how citizens are beginning to demand greater accountability and representation from their political leaders.

# The Performance and Factors Impacting the Future of Independent Candidates in Electoral Politics in South Africa Post-2024 Election

**Lizzy Ofusori**

Independent candidates are individuals who run for public office without being affiliated with any political party. These candidates represent themselves and their platforms rather than the policies and ideologies of a political party. Independent candidates can run for various positions, including seats in local councils, provincial legislatures, and the national Parliament. In South Africa, the electoral system primarily operates on a proportional representation basis, particularly for national and provincial elections. However, local government elections follow a mixed system, which includes both proportional representation and ward-based representation. This mixed system provides a more accessible pathway for independent candidates, particularly at the municipal level. Recent legal developments, including the Constitutional Court's ruling in 2020, mandated changes to the Electoral Act to allow independent candidates to contest national and provincial elections, which were previously limited to party-affiliated candidates. In South Africa's political landscape, independent candidates (e.g., Zackie Achmat in the Western Cape, Anele Mda in Gauteng, Lovemore Ndou in Limpopo, Faith Phathela in Limpopo, and Blessings Ramoba in Limpopo and in Gauteng), have been gaining attention, particularly in the 2024 elections, marking a significant shift from traditional party-dominated politics. The performance of these independent candidates in this election has been noteworthy, with several key trends and outcomes:

**Increased representation:** Independent candidates have secured more seats in local councils and have made inroads in some provincial legislatures. Their success is often attributed to public dissatisfaction with traditional party politics and a desire for more accountable and locally focused representatives.

**Voter engagement:** There has been a noticeable increase in voter engagement with independent candidates. Many voters perceive independents as being more in touch with local issues and less driven by party agendas.

**Media coverage:** Independent candidates have received more media attention than in previous elections, highlighting their campaigns

and successes, which has helped boost their visibility and credibility among the electorate. For example, Zackie Achmat, in one of his interactions with GroundUp, affirmed that if elected to parliament, he will not join any coalition with existing parties. However, he will use his vote to elect the presidential candidate who appears most committed to upholding constitutional values, including the rule of law, resisting state capture and corruption, and advancing a progressive agenda.

### *Factors impacting the future of independent candidates*

Several factors will influence the future of independent candidates in South Africa's electoral politics post-2024:

#### **1. Electoral system reforms:**

- **Proportional representation vs. first-past-the-post:** The current mixed-member proportional representation system presents both opportunities and challenges for independent candidates. Any future reforms to the electoral system could significantly impact their ability to compete.
- **Legislative changes:** Potential amendments to electoral laws, such as lowering barriers for independent candidates to enter races, could enhance their prospects.

#### **2. Public sentiment and political climate:**

- **Trust in traditional parties:** Continued dissatisfaction with traditional political parties could drive more support towards independents. Issues such as corruption, poor service delivery, and internal party conflicts contribute to this sentiment.
- **Political awareness and civic engagement:** Increased political awareness and civic engagement, especially among younger voters, can boost support for independent candidates who are seen as agents of change.

#### **3. Resource mobilisation:**

- **Funding and campaign support:** Independent candidates often face challenges in securing funding and resources for their campaigns compared to party-affiliated candidates. Enhanced fundraising strategies and support networks will be crucial for their sustainability.

- **Technology and social media:** Leveraging technology and social media can help independents to reach a broader audience, engage with voters, and run more cost-effective campaigns.

#### 4. Organisational structure and collaboration:

- **Coalitions and alliances:** Forming coalitions or alliances with like-minded independents and smaller parties can enhance their influence and bargaining power in legislative bodies.
- **Local networks and community engagement:** Building strong local networks and engaging with community organisations can strengthen their grassroots support and improve electoral outcomes.

#### 5. Policy focus and issue-based campaigning:

- **Local issues:** Focusing on local issues and delivering tangible results can help independent candidates build a solid track record and gain voter trust.
- **Policy expertise:** Demonstrating expertise in key policy areas and offering clear, practical solutions can distinguish independents from their party-affiliated counterparts.

### *Challenges and opportunities*

While independent candidates have made significant strides, they still face several challenges:

- **Limited visibility:** Without the backing of a party, gaining widespread recognition and media coverage can be difficult.
- **Structural disadvantages:** The political infrastructure and electoral rules often favour established parties.
- **Sustainability:** Maintaining momentum and support between election cycles can be challenging without the continuous backing of a party organisation.

However, there are also significant opportunities:

- **Innovation in campaigning:** Independent candidates can innovate in their campaign strategies, using digital tools and community-based approaches to reach voters.
- **Responsive governance:** Being more flexible and less bound by party lines, independents can quickly respond to constituents' needs and issues.

### *Conclusion*

The future of independent candidates in South Africa's electoral politics looks promising but will depend on several evolving factors. Their performance in the 2024 elections indicates a growing appetite for alternative political representation. By addressing challenges related to resources, visibility, and organisation, and capitalising on public dissatisfaction with traditional parties, independent candidates can continue to expand their influence in South Africa's political landscape.

## **How South Africa's Recent Elections have Reshaped Politics and Democracy in the Country: Key Insights and Lessons**

**Adebimpe Esther Ofusori**

The recent elections in South Africa have significantly reshaped the country's political landscape and highlighted critical challenges facing its democracy. The 2024 elections marked a potential turning point, characterised by a noticeable decline in support for the long-dominant ANC, which struggled to secure an outright majority for the first time since the end of apartheid. This decline is attributed to widespread dissatisfaction with the ANC's handling of corruption, economic mismanagement, and poor service delivery, particularly evident through persistent issues like rolling electricity blackouts and high unemployment rates. President Cyril Ramaphosa's resignation debates in 2023 and the internal divisions within the ANC further aggravated the party's grief. The emergence of new political players and stronger opposition parties, such as the EFF and the DA, has increased competition and made coalition politics more likely. These shifts indicate a move towards a more fragmented and potentially unstable political environment. The elections also emphasised a broader disillusionment with democracy among South Africans, most especially, the youth. Many young voters feel disconnected from traditional political processes, considering them ineffective in addressing their pressing concerns, such as unemployment and inequality. This disillusionment has led to lower voter registration and participation among younger ones, raising concerns about the future of democratic engagement in the country.

In addition, the elections highlighted deep-rooted socioeconomic issues that continue to plague South Africa. Despite being the continent's leading economy, the country faces significant challenges, including a high poverty rate, economic stagnation, and a looming debt crisis, to mention but a few. The government's failed efforts to improve energy security, foster private investment, and create jobs has contributed to a sense of public dissatisfaction.

### *Key insights and lessons learnt*

The 2024 elections in South Africa have reshaped the country's political and democratic landscape in several significant ways, offering key lessons for future governance and political engagement. Below are the key insights and lessons:

### *Replacement of single-party dominance with coalition politics*

Insight: The ANC, which has been the ruling party since the end of apartheid in 1994, has experienced a decline in voter support. With the decline in the ANC dominance, coalition governments have become more common at the local and provincial levels. The inability of the party to acquire majority of the vote (50%), has necessitated partnership with smaller parties, marking a shift towards a more multiparty political environment. This may encourage more diverse political discourse and policymaking, as coalitions often require negotiation and compromise.

Lesson: The decline of the ANC's dominance illustrates the limitations of a single-party system in addressing complex, systemic issues. The need for coalition politics can lead to more inclusive and representative governance.

### *Impact of economic conditions on voters' behaviour*

Insight: High unemployment rates, economic inequality, and issues like power outages have significantly influenced voter sentiment, contributing to the ANC's decline and the rise of opposition parties. Effective economic policies and service delivery are essential for political stability and public trust.

Lesson: Economic performance and governance are crucial in maintaining political legitimacy. Persistent economic struggles can drive voter discontent and realignment.

### *Emergence of Independent candidates*

Insight: The inclusion of independent candidates in the 2024 elections has broken the traditional dominance of established political parties, providing voters with more choices and potentially leading to more responsive and accountable governance.

Lesson: Allowing independent candidates can diversify political representation and enhance democratic participation.

### *Youth Engagement and voter turnout*

Insight: Reduced voter turnout among the youth reflects a broader disengagement and discouragement with the political process. This highlights the need for political renewal and innovative approaches to engage younger ones.



Lesson: Engaging younger voters is important for the sustainability of democracy. Political parties must address the specific needs and concerns of the youth, involving them in decision-making processes to increase their turnout and political engagement.

### *Addressing corruption and governance*

Insight: Corruption scandals and governance issues have severely undermined the ANC's credibility, emphasising the importance of transparency, accountability, and ethical leadership in politics. Efforts to combat corruption must be sustained and must be visibly effective to regain public confidence.

Lesson: Combatting corruption and improving governance are vital for restoring public trust in political institutions. Therefore, political parties must address corruption and governance issues to regain public trust.

### *Political accountability and responsiveness*

Insight: The dissatisfaction with traditional parties underscores the need for political entities to continuously evolve and address the electorate's needs effectively. The rise of new parties and independents signals a demand for more accountable and responsive governance.

Lesson: Political parties must be responsive to public concerns and adaptable to changing political landscapes to remain relevant.

### *Impact of civil society and social media*

Insight: Civil society organisations and the media have played significant role in the elections, enabling greater political awareness and mobilisation, especially among younger voters. Political parties have increasingly utilised digital platforms to reach and engage with the electorate, reflecting a shift in how campaigns are conducted. They also play important roles in highlighting corruption and governance failures, thereby shaping public opinion and electoral outcomes.

Lesson: Effective use of social media and digital platforms is essential for modern political campaigns and engagement, offering new ways to connect with and mobilise voters. A vibrant civil society and free media are crucial in holding political entities accountable and informing the electorate.

In conclusion, South Africa's recent elections have reshaped its political and democratic landscape, reflecting both challenges and opportunities. The 2024 elections have brought us to a critical juncture for South Africa's democracy, with citizens pushing for greater accountability and responsiveness from political leaders. The key insights and lessons indicate the importance of addressing public disappointment, fostering inclusive governance, and embracing technological advancements to strengthen the country's democracy. As South Africa moves forward, these lessons will help to build a more accountable, transparent, and representative political system. The outcome and subsequent developments will likely shape the country's political and economic course in the future, emphasising the need for robust democratic institutions and inclusive governance.

## Will the Coalition Respect Democracy?

**Steven Friedman**

Is South African democracy safe in the hands of its coalition government? The answer is more complicated than it seems. The general election is an important sign of the strength of South Africa's formal democracy. Saying anything good about the state of politics in this country invites ridicule from the public debate. And so, the fact that a party that has governed nationally for thirty years has accepted without question not only a loss of its majority but a result far worse than it expected, has been taken for granted. But it shatters some bigoted stereotypes about Africa and its people.

If anyone had insisted for thirty years that democracy here would be alive and well after three decades, they would have been mocked. If they had insisted also that the governing party would accept the loss of its majority, the mockery would become much louder. Governing parties on this continent, they would have been told, don't accept the results when they lose their majority.

This is a prejudice, since there are African countries whose governing parties have accepted defeat at the polls – Ghana and Zambia are two examples. But, in a world in which Republicans in the US still refuse to accept the result of an election they obviously lost and in which democracy is under pressure everywhere, the fact that the election has produced a smooth change to a coalition, not an attempt by the governing party to stay in office, is a great asset.

One of South Africa's most important achievements is that formal democracy – free and fair elections, multi-partyism and the independence of the courts – has become entrenched. Not only did the governing party accept the result; there was never any question that it would. The principle that elections must reflect the votes of the people and that parties must accept the results is accepted as a given within and outside the largest party.

### *Avoiding complacency*

But that does not mean Democrats can be complacent about democracy here. The election also saw the growth of parties that claim democracy has gone too far – they are intolerant of people who were born elsewhere and others whose existence offends them. It saw for the first time demands that the Constitution be changed to remove protections which, it is claimed without evidence, block

changes the country needs. And a party that won 14 per cent of the vote claims, following the US's Donald Trump, that it was cheated of victory but refuses to present any evidence of this.

So, the celebration of democracy's advance must be tempered by vigilance about the threats it now faces. An important concern is whether the new government will respect democratic freedoms.

On one level, the question seems strange. The two largest parties in the coalition, the ANC and the DA, insist that the value they most share is respect for the Constitution. The DA likes to insist that its prime reason for entering a coalition is to protect the Constitution.

This suggests that the democracy South Africans have enjoyed for three decades is safe in the hands of the coalition. This may largely be true. But there are two reasons for asking whether democracy under the coalition will be as democratic as it is now.

The first is an issue raised here before – political party funding. Just before the election, the Electoral Matters Amendment Act became law. Until then, political parties had to make public any donations worth R100 000 or more. The new law allows the president to change this ceiling – he could, if he wants, make sure that very large donations are secret. And, until the president sets a limit, parties do not have to declare any donations at all.

This seriously weakens democracy, making it far easier for wealthy people to influence politicians. But the damage could be partly undone if the president sets the limit at R100 000 – or, ideally, lower.

The law is the ANC's idea – it came up with it when it found that donors were more reluctant to support it if their names became known. But will the DA want to maintain or reduce the limit since it too receives funds from donors who may prefer to stay anonymous, particularly since it is now in government, and they can be accused of buying influence? A coalition that wants to strengthen democracy would insist on forcing parties to say which wealthy people are funding them, but this government may prefer not to do that.

### *Limiting local democracy*

The second cause for worry is the Municipal Structures Amendment Bill, which was published just before the election and is widely known as the Coalitions Bill.

This too was an ANC idea since it was then the only party in government. But it also reflects the DA's view, expressed in a private members' bill it tabled in parliament. The bill aims to 'stabilise' coalitions; it contains two ideas that would strengthen democracy but several that would weaken it.

Democracy would be strengthened by the bill's proposal that municipal elections be decided by a show of hands, not a secret ballot. It aims to protect big parties whose councillors sometimes vote against their party's choice of candidate. But the principle that voters have a right to know how their representatives vote is important.

Those of us who sat through the election of a president, speaker and deputy speaker last week learned how much time a secret ballot of MPs can take. But nobody questioned why they were allowed to hide from the people who voted for them their choice in the most important election of its type since 1994. Not only would the proceedings have been over by mid-afternoon if MPs voted by a show of hands – voters would have known who their representatives supported.

The bill also gives councils more time – 30 days – after an election to choose a mayor or speaker. This is a step towards fixing a problem in the Constitution – it forces parties to form governments in a few days even though they may need weeks or months to bridge their differences. The two weeks parties had to form a national government was not nearly enough and this begins to allow more bargaining before governments are formed.

It does not go far enough – even 30 days may be too short, so what is needed is an arrangement for governing the country until a new government is formed. Since coalitions are likely to be part of the political future, this may be essential to make democracy work better.

Democracy will be strengthened if secret ballots are scrapped in elected bodies and more time is allowed to negotiate coalitions. But we cannot say the same about the bill's other proposals. One is that the votes parties need to win a seat be raised. At this stage, it would make no great difference – parties would need 1 percent of the vote, so it would only matter in councils with over 100 councillors. But the problem is the principle. Large parties prefer not to govern with small ones and so they want to deny them seats. The fact that they represent people is ignored.

Once the threshold has been introduced, it becomes much easier to raise it, excluding small parties that may play an important role in giving people a voice. In effect, the big parties are ganging up on the small ones. Since the coalition is dominated by the two biggest parties, that could become a theme over the life of this government.

Another proposal in the bill is that mayors and their deputies be protected from no confidence votes for two years. This is meant to prevent the turmoil we have seen in some local governments but will protect incompetents who have lost the confidence of most councillors and the public. And so, it will ensure much less accountability than we have now.

The bill also proposes that, if no party wins a majority in a council, it must use the executive committee system, in which parties are represented in the municipal government in proportion to their numbers. While this system has its merits, it can't be democratic to order councils to adopt a form of multi-party government if they don't want this. It may also be an attempt to get smaller parties out of government.

For now, these changes apply only to local government. They also do not seem that important when measured against the arrival of the first national coalition government since democracy was achieved. But the problem is the attitude behind them. Voters' choices and democratic politics are respected only if they don't disturb what the two biggest parties want. It is also a view which seems willing to trim our political freedoms to ensure that politics is 'orderly'.

So, we can expect the new government to honour the freedoms the Constitution protects. But voters will need to be on their guard to ensure that it does not limit their choices in the name of bringing order.

## **Addressing Trust Deficit among Political Parties and Leaders Post 2024 Elections: Here is How**

**Lizzy Ofusori**

Trust deficit among political parties refers to the lack of confidence and faith that political parties and their leaders have in each other, as well as the diminished trust that the public holds towards these entities. This deficit can arise from perceived dishonesty, broken promises, lack of transparency, or ineffective governance, leading to scepticism, decreased cooperation, and potential conflict within the political landscape. According to IPSOS Group (2024), currently in South Africa, more than 35% of registered South African voters believe that no political party completely represents their views and opinions. This sentiment creates a considerable dilemma for voters as they navigate their choices in the 2024 national and provincial elections. Moreover, while dedicated supporters of the three major political parties show high levels of trust in their parties, the broader South African population displays low levels of trust in these same parties. The election results depend on how successfully parties and leaders have been able to bridge this gap and appeal to the broader South African population. Hence, addressing this trust deficit among political parties and leaders post-2024 elections require a multifaceted approach aimed at fostering transparency, communication, and collaboration.

### *Strategies to address trust deficit*

This section briefly outlines some of the strategies that can be employed to address the trust deficit among political parties and leaders post-2024.

#### **1. Promoting open dialogue**

All political parties must establish regular, structured meetings between party leaders to discuss key issues and policies. Parties can work together across political lines to address common issues, showing that they prioritise the country's well-being over partisan interests. Furthermore, bipartisan committees can work on specific issues, ensuring representation from all major parties. In addition, the political parties can allow healthy discussion within the party on policy issues. A united front does not have to mean a silenced majority.

## **2. Increase transparency and accountability**

Political parties can ensure public accountability by being transparent about their policies, decisions, and actions. Consistently providing clear, truthful information about policies, decisions, and party activities helps build credibility. When parties admit mistakes and explain their actions, they demonstrate accountability. Regularly updating citizens on progress and setbacks and being accountable for mistakes can demonstrate integrity. Moreover, political parties can implement mechanisms for greater public accountability, such as regular press briefings, public disclosures of meeting outcomes, and transparent decision-making processes. Political parties can also create independent oversight bodies to monitor and report on the activities and decisions of political leaders.

## **3. Building trust through collaboration**

Political parties can collaborate on joint initiatives that address common goals, such as economic development, healthcare, and education. Also, they can develop shared platforms for policy development, allowing input from multiple parties and stakeholders. Collaborative efforts can help reduce polarisation and build public trust. Likewise, the political parties can renew the faith of citizens in democracy by promoting a positive vision of what government can achieve. Also, ensuring that the mode of communication is clear and fact-based, will help in building the citizens' trust and dispel doubts.

## **4. Encourage civil discourse**

Establishing and enforcing a code of conduct for political discourse that promotes respect, civility, and constructive dialogue is essential. Furthermore, political parties can implement conflict resolution mechanisms to address and resolve disputes amicably. Likewise, being proactive against misinformation by providing accurate information and addressing false narratives. Political leaders should make it a point of duty to follow through on campaign pledges and be honest when circumstances necessitate adjustments. Also, their conversation should shift from negativity and blame to presenting clear plans for addressing problems.

## **5. Engaging the public**

Political parties can organise public forums and town hall meetings to engage with citizens and gather their input on key issues. In addition, they can promote civic education to increase public



understanding of political processes, as well as trust and cooperation among leaders. Educating the public about the importance of civil discourse and the negative impacts of divisive rhetoric can foster a more respectful political environment. Campaigns that promote fact-based discussions and critical thinking can also help. Political parties should also create citizen panels that will provide feedback on policy proposals and government actions. Media outlets can also be encouraged to report responsibly and accurately, avoiding sensationalism and fostering informed public debate.

## **6. Institutional reforms and inclusive policies**

Electoral reforms that promote fair representation and reduce partisanship, such as ranked-choice voting or proportional representation, should be considered. Similarly, it is essential to strengthen democratic institutions to ensure they are robust, impartial, and capable of upholding the rule of law. Likewise, political parties need to develop policies that address the diverse needs and concerns of all population groups, not just core supporters, and demonstrate a commitment to serving the entire electorate. Inclusive policies show that parties are working for the benefit of everyone.

## **Conclusion**

In the wake of the 2024 elections, addressing the trust deficit among political parties and leaders is crucial for the stability and progress of the nation. By fostering open dialogue, ensuring transparency, promoting bipartisan cooperation, educating the public, actively listening to constituents, combating misinformation, exemplifying respectful behaviour, creating inclusive policies, and encouraging responsible media coverage, political parties can rebuild trust and create a more inclusive, respectful, and effective political landscape. These efforts will enhance public confidence and strengthen democratic institutions and processes. Furthermore, rebuilding trust is a long-term endeavour; hence, political parties need to work together with their leaders, parties, and citizens to bridge the gap and create a more functional political system.

Citizens should also critically evaluate information from politicians and media sources. Moreover, they can seek out diverse perspectives to form informed opinions. It is also essential to hold leaders accountable, by contacting political parties' representatives, attending town hall meetings, and expressing their concerns.

## **Politics has Changed – The Debate has Not**

**Steven Friedman**

Party politics in South Africa's democracy has changed, possibly forever. But it will take a while before politicians, media and commentators catch up with this.

May's national election was not only the first in the country's democratic history in which no party achieved a majority. It may well have begun a new era in which no party ever again gains a majority.

Elections in this country since 1994 have been highly unusual – it is virtually unheard of for any party in multi-party democracies to win over half the votes. It never happens at all in other countries using proportional representation. Parties can win seats with a very small share of the vote, so politicians and voters can stay away from bigger parties and still play a role in parliamentary politics. In countries that use this system, it is rare for the biggest party to win 30%, let alone a majority.

It seems highly unlikely that the ANC will ever again achieve a majority. While its decline at the polls is a product of general voter disaffection, the trigger that cost it its majority was a breakaway party – the MKP. This continued a trend: over the last decade and a half, the ANC's support has declined because breakaways scooped up a chunk of its vote.

So, politicians know now that it is possible to break away from the ANC and still play a role in politics – two parties that come out of the ANC occupy almost a quarter of the seats in Parliament. In future, ANC politicians who are unhappy with the leadership will join or form another party. The factional battles that divided the ANC over the past couple of decades will become a contest between parties.

Given this, it is hard to see how the ANC could ever again assemble an alliance that would give it more than half the vote. Or how any other party could do that because politicians can leave parties with whose leaders they disagree and still win elected office.

### *Living with coalitions*

Of course, if parties are not going to win majorities any longer, the country will be governed by coalitions, which is how all other countries using proportional representation are governed. Parties may hold onto majorities in some provinces and municipalities but

even that may become the exception – only half the provinces and a couple of metropolitan councils still have single party governments, and we can expect the number to decline.

As South Africans are finding out, coalitions are not an option parties choose – they emerge because there is no other option. And so, coalitions are about convenience and power.

Parties choose coalitions that they believe will enable them to govern without losing their support base. The choice has nothing to do with deep love for the other party, and parties who thoroughly dislike each other and campaign loudly against each other can govern together.

The seats in government that parties are offered depends on their power, not on the sort of formula for fairness we would expect in a Constitution. Numbers do matter because the coalition needs a majority. But, as we have seen in some local governments, smaller parties can wield far more power than their numbers warrant if the coalition needs them to stay in power.

Because coalitions are about building a majority, a party that wins the largest share of the vote – but less than a majority – is not entitled to govern unless it can create a majority by getting together with other parties.

Where coalitions turn out to be impossible because no-one can cobble together a majority, the new reality could also produce minority governments. Because governments only fall if they lose no confidence votes or they cannot pass a budget, parties can govern without a majority as long as they avoid both pitfalls. This may mean that a party outside the government agrees not to topple it in exchange for concessions – Johannesburg was governed this way for a time when the EFF agreed not to support the removal of a DA-led coalition.

The new reality may sound messy, but it creates opportunities for influence for citizens who would otherwise stay on the margins. If the party that speaks for you can win, say, 10% of the vote, it can end up in government with a say over important decisions. So, it should become more possible to use party politics to get what people want from government.

*Misunderstanding reality*

All these realities are now part of this country's democratic reality. But very little of this, it seems, has sunk in. First, coalitions are still seen more as a swear word than a reality. They are labelled as unruly, chaotic and a bar to effective government, even though no one has ever shown that coalitions offer voters worse service. There are constant calls to roll back democracy to control coalitions and a bill has been drafted that does that.

This bias may be part of the reason why the claim that the new administration is a government of national unity (GNU) is believed by many politicians and most of the public debate. The government has none of the features of a GNU – it does not unite parties across the spectrum to deal with a national crisis. It was formed because no party achieved a majority, which is not a national crisis.

It is called a GNU because the leadership of the largest party, the ANC, was worried about resistance in its ranks to a coalition with the DA. They thought it would be easier to 'sell' this if the coalition was dressed up as a GNU by including small parties even though their support does not warrant seats in government, and they are not needed to keep the coalition in power.

Why is so obvious a ploy widely believed? Because most of the debate does not like coalitions and is still convinced that only a government run by one big party is legitimate. A pretend GNU is comforting because it can seem like government by one big party even though it is not.

The debate also finds it very difficult to accept that coalitions are about political reality and about power. Some voices even have a problem with simple arithmetic. When the MKP could not assemble a coalition to govern KZN, the other parties were blamed for ignoring the majority. But MK did not win a majority – it won around 45%. The majority voted for the four parties in the coalition. So, the provincial government was elected by the majority – as were some local governments in which the ANC landed up in opposition even though it was the biggest party.

Beyond this, a common reaction to some negotiations since the election is to assume that there is a clear standard for who should form a coalition with whom and how parties should be represented. There isn't – as the current Gauteng government shows. Negotiations between the ANC and DA deadlocked when they could not agree

on how many government seats the DA should fill. The ANC then formed a minority government. It could obviously be voted out but may be around for a long time because the DA knows that, if it votes with other parties to remove the provincial government, it opens the way for the EFF or MK to join the province's government, which it told voters it would do everything it can to avoid.

All this has been greeted with outrage because the DA, which received only seven percentage points less than the ANC in the province's election, is excluded and was not offered seats in its governments in proportion to its share of the vote. But the current government is entitled to govern as long as most members of the province's legislature don't vote them out. And its leaders are entitled to take advantage of openings presented by the fact that the DA won't vote or govern with other parties outside the provincial coalition.

This failure to understand the new reality is a problem not only because it prompts ill-informed comment and misplaced moralising – although it does that too. The real problem is that, if people do not understand how political reality works, they cannot use it to claim their citizenship rights.

As long as all key political actors continue to treat government by one big party as normal and natural – even though it no longer exists – people will lose opportunities to use the new reality to make democracy work for them. It is still common, for example, to treat the biggest party in a minority government or coalition as though it won two-thirds of the vote and so to complain endlessly about it rather than influencing it.

Only those who understand the new reality will be able to make it work for them. Which is an obvious reason for those who take part in the national debate to recognise that politics has changed and to work out how to make the new world work for them.

## **An Unwieldy National Executive Born from a Rather Unholy Marriage of Convenience – But it Might Work**

**Stef Terblanche**

“The message delivered from the South African electorate has been heard loud and clear. No political party achieved an outright majority, and citizens want politicians to cast aside their differences and work together for the benefit of the people.”

With these words – the new favourite political cliché politicians have been trotting out ad nauseam since May 29 – President Cyril Ramaphosa finally announced his multi-party cabinet after almost a month of squabbling over power and positions and keeping South Africans and the world in suspense. It was an agonising exercise by political parties that mostly gave little thought to the ‘benefit of the people’ or the good of the country and the economy as they jostled for position.

Let me pour cold water on the false euphoria that greeted Ramaphosa’s announcement. It’s time to get sober and real about the latest edition of the ‘South African democracy’, which, as I have said before, is an evolutionary work in progress and not some grand revolutionary, post-watershed new dispensation. It remains also a contest for power, and is an adjusted reality forced upon disparate contestants not of their making nor that of the voters. It was little more than a coincidental outcome of elections that rearranged the pieces on the political chessboard – fortuitously so for the political parties that now enjoy varying measures of power but much less so for the overall body politic. We will win some and lose some, while the potential for disruption will always loom large.

But let’s first lay this fallacy to rest. The people did not speak. Only a minority of eligible voters came out to vote; the lowest voter turnout since the advent of democracy in 1994. Some 39 million people in South Africa are eligible to vote; over 11 million of them did not register to vote; and out of the 27.7 million registered voters, only 16.2 million voted on May 29.

Whether the majority who failed to vote stayed away out of protest over the poor state of domestic affairs (a legitimate form of voting that would have been an indictment of the ANC), or whether they had simply lost faith in the system, or whether they were lazy

or just couldn't care, we will probably never know beyond what some surveys may try to tell us. I certainly never encountered any voters before the elections who said they were going to vote like this or like that or not vote at all in order that no political party receives a majority, and the parties will thus be forced to work together for the good of the people! That's just a mythical cliché; putting nice words to a coincidental result. It's little more than political spin to hide an unpleasant and dangerous reality while creating a deceptive virtual bubble in which our perceptions of our troubled politics can try to move us forward.

For Ramaphosa and the ANC, stating it like that helps cushion the blow of a very hard landing suffered with the ANC's massive defeat, while it stakes a claim to continued political relevance of sorts for him and the ANC. For the dozen mostly very small erstwhile opposition parties now smoking their political cigars in the cabinet boardroom of power, it also staked their claim to some kind of relevance and to being included in the national political action, the power and perks at a higher level than they had previously ever thought possible. Prior to the election result being known, very few people thought 'government of national unity'; most people were fixated on 'coalition', in most respects a very different thing.

For Ramaphosa and the ANC's leadership, a GNU also offered a way out of a very tricky situation. They wouldn't have to choose between a radical socialist workers' party and a centre-right pro-business and markets party as coalition partners and be accused of some or other ideological bias or vested interests and risk further tearing the ANC apart; with a GNU they could simply extend an invitation to all parties, remain aloof and avoid the fallout. Yet even with the GNU emerging, that accusation of bias was levelled to a lesser extent against Ramaphosa and the ANC in respect of the participation of the DA and the FF+ by the parties that had (initially) opted not to join the so-called unity government.

#### *An ominous forewarning of things to come?*

Back to the cabinet. Instead of the announcement of the new cabinet heralding some kind of real political relief and a sense of certainty, permanency and progress – other than such temporary gratification as it provided 'the markets' until they find their next alarm – the entire process was rather an ominous forewarning of things to come. It's going to be a rollercoaster ride. There can be no doubt about that.

Politicians “casting aside their differences and working together”? What planet are we living on? There are a number of pertinent relevancies that should be considered, to which I shall return shortly. But let’s first look at the composition of the new cabinet.

Ramaphosa and other commentators are quite right in labelling it ‘historic’. South Africa has never before had a cabinet composed of members from so many different political parties, different policy perceptions, and different ideological persuasions. That in itself will immensely complicate working together in harmonious agreement, and the provisions of consensus or sufficient consensus to which the parties signed up in the statement of intent when they joined the GNU, will be severely tested in months or years to come depending on how long the GNU will remain intact.

Another historical first is the sheer size of Ramaphosa’s new national executive, which, apart from policy and ideological differences, will make it unwieldy, tension-filled, and hard for even the toughest, most decisive president to control – not a quality we generally associate with Ramaphosa. At last count, if my sums are correct, there are now 32 departments with 33 ministers plus the president and deputy president, making it 35 members of cabinet, with 43 deputy ministers, bringing the total of the national executive up to a staggering 78 members.

This is two persons short of the 80-member National Executive Committee (NEC) of the ANC, a body that also seldom is fully in agreement and one which Ramaphosa at the best of times has difficulty in always bringing around to his way of thinking. In the past it has been riddled with factional divisions resulting in power struggles. In the national executive one can envisage similar disagreement and discontent, here also along policy lines but in this instance informed by party political directives. Now Ramaphosa will have to fight his battles on two fronts in two very large, competing powerful bodies. Ramaphosa’s only saving grace will be that cabinet meetings generally will exclude the presence of deputy ministers, who are not members of the cabinet but rather of the larger national executive.

Before the negotiations that preceded the formation of the cabinet, Ramaphosa had vowed to reduce the number of executive positions. But he said, when announcing the cabinet, this had not been possible as he had to ensure that the national executive was inclusive of all the parties to the GNU – which was true to some extent – while he also rationalised the splitting of previously merged



ministerial portfolios into separate ministries to “ensure that there is sufficient focus on key issues” – which was partially deceptive spin. The more persuasive reason for reconfiguring some ministries was probably to avoid giving control to other parties, most notably the DA, over key areas of policy and governance, and thus ensuring continued ANC control over those.

For example, the portfolio of Agriculture was allocated to the DA, with its leader John Steenhuisen as the minister, while the politically more important or sensitive part of the former combined ministry, namely Land Reform and Rural Development was allocated to the PAC, with its leader Mzwanele Nyhontso as the minister. True, he’s not ANC, but he and his party are strong advocates for progressive land reform, including expropriation without compensation (EWC), appropriately in line with ANC policy and recent legislative developments. By appointing Nyhontso to this position Ramaphosa conveniently killed two birds with one stone. Steenhuisen and the DA on the other hand oppose much of ANC (and PAC) policy in this regard. Furthermore, having a socialist minister from the political left wing who favours EWC and land redistribution in that position, could also help take off some of the pressure on Ramaphosa and the ANC coming from the EFF.

In another example, the ministry of Correctional Services was allocated to the centre-right FF+ under Pieter Groenewald as its minister, but the politically more key ministry of Justice and Constitutional Development was separated from it and retained by the ANC under Thembi Nkadimeng as its minister.

In other instances, logical rationalisation dictated, such as in merging the ministries of Electricity and Energy under the ANC’s Kgosientsho Ramokgopa and separating it from the new ministry of Mineral and Petroleum Resources under the ANC’s Gwede Mantashe. This was also the case when Ramaphosa did away with the controversial former ministry of Public Enterprises that used to fall under the equally controversial Pravin Gordhan, now retired from the political centre stage. Coordination of the relevant public enterprises will now be located in the Presidency with some line functions going directly to the relevant ministries.

Looking at the executive as a whole, it seems that Ramaphosa and the ANC’s NEC managed to give effect to a fairly equitable distribution of positions in terms of gender, age, provinces, ethnicity and political parties. Overall, the executive seems to be a younger

one than the one before. Most provinces and regions, and therefore also ethnic considerations, seem to have been accommodated, although one was struck by the large number of newly appointed ministers and deputies hailing from Limpopo, while ethnic Zulus no longer dominate like they once did under previous administrations. Although Ramaphosa considers himself to be a native of Soweto born to Venda parents, he has strong roots in Limpopo as well as many political allies there within the ANC context, and owns significant property there. Also, as a by-product of the DA's participation in the GNU, the national executive now has more white faces than it has had at any other time since 1996 when Nelson Mandela's GNU ceased to exist, and the new Constitution took effect. That gives practical effect to the ANC's mantra of non-racialism through no fault of the ANC.

The ANC's decades-long alliance partner, the SA Communist Party (SACP), is also well represented and punching above its weight as always. As a party it has always piggybacked on the ANC, has never fought any election in its own right, and yet wields much influence in the ANC. In many respects the SACP is to the ANC what the Afrikaner Broederbond used to be to the erstwhile National Party in the apartheid era.

Members of the SACP's central committee and/or Politburo are present in the new national executive either as ministers or deputy ministers in the ministries of Science, Technology and Innovation; Mineral and Petroleum Resources; Finance; Higher Education; Justice and Constitutional Development; Land Reform; and Police. These are portfolios that were largely kept out of DA hands, and one suspects to some degree probably at the insistence of the SACP. However, an interesting political cohabitation now exists in the Ministry of Finance where the ANC's Enoch Godongwana is the minister, and the ANC/SACP's David Masedo and the DA's Ashor Sarupen are the deputy ministers. That should make for some interesting head-butting along the way.

Most of the positions allocated to the DA place it at best on the fringes of economic decision-making and not at the centre, via its somewhat diluted presence in ministries such as Agriculture; Communications and Digital Technologies; Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment; Public Works and Infrastructure; and via deputy ministerships in Trade, Industry and Competition; Finance; Small Business Development; and Electricity and Energy. Arguably the most significant or powerful position allocated to the DA is that of Minister

of Home Affairs (Leon Schreiber), followed by that of Agriculture (John Steenhuisen) and Basic Education (Siviwe Gwarube).

Of the 11 parties in the GNU, six are represented in the cabinet (ANC, DA, IFP, FF+, PAC and GOOD) and five are among the deputy ministers (ANC, DA, Al Jama-ah, IFP and UDM). That means in total 8 of the 11 parties are represented in the national executive, while 3 have been left out completely.

Apart from being given a deputy ministership at Finance, the DA was largely kept out of the related cluster of ministries despite it seeking such positions for itself in order to influence economic policy, direction and discourse. Overall, it seems the DA eventually settled for significantly less than it had originally asked for.

Difficult functioning and decision-making could tear it apart

Will this very bloated and very diverse national executive be able to perform much better than its predecessor? That's an open question. Its very diversity and multiplicity of political parties will make that very difficult. In contradiction of popular perceptions and expectations, the new parties in the executive will not be free to change policy and direction in their portfolios as they see fit. Decisions will still be subject to cabinet debate and voting, while party caucuses and party executive bodies will want their pound of flesh as well. And Ramaphosa as president who presides at cabinet meetings, will or should have a decisive say. Afterall, he is the head of government.

This is where the ANC's majority at 40%, and the influence and control of its powerful NEC will significantly come into play. During the inter-party negotiations for cabinet positions, it became patently clear that neither Ramaphosa nor even the ANC's top seven officials had sole or overwhelming discretionary powers; instead, the NEC played a big role from behind the scenes. After the DA had already accepted an offer from Ramaphosa of certain positions that included Trade, Industry and Competition, it was the NEC that forced him to renege and instead offer the DA fewer and lesser positions outside the centre of the economic cluster, a move that almost scuppered the GNU.

If this kind of negotiating in bad faith with behind-the-scenes interference from the ANC's NEC is duplicated in the GNU cabinet going forward, it will spell plenty of trouble. The question is, just how

unavoidable will such pressures be, not only from the ANC's party structures but also from those of the DA and possibly the others.

Finally, another as yet unresolved issue is the question of who will make up the Official Opposition in the National Assembly? It stands to reason that parties and their officials cannot be both in government and in the legislative opposition, and yet, it is expected that a number of chairperson's position of parliamentary committees will be allocated to the parties of the GNU. Already firing some warning shots across the bows of the GNU are the EFF and Jacob Zuma's MKP who have said their joint Progressive Caucus will fulfil that role. Yet they will only have a minority of the seats in the National Assembly.

In the final analysis, President Ramaphosa has presented to South Africans and the world, a bloated, unwieldy and highly diverse national executive, without any precedent to guide it in its work. Rules will be made up as it goes along, while the propensity for deadlocks and bitter arguments and policy tensions will be significant. Whether this executive will be able to effectively address high unemployment, runaway crime, the horrific cost of living, and water and electricity pressures as demanded by the voters in survey after survey, remains to be seen. But under the circumstances and given the many diverse influencing factors, it's probably the closest to the best anyone could have hoped for. Providing it gets past its initial teething troubles, it might just work, but the ride will probably be rough. Time will tell.

## **The Kwazulu–Natal Cabinet: A Provincial Government of Unity (PGU) or a Minority Coalition**

**Stanley Ehiane**

KwaZulu–Natal (KZN) is one of South Africa's nine provinces and has major cultural, economic, and political importance in the country. KZN operates within South Africa's decentralised governance structure, which includes considerable authorities and duties for provinces in addition to national and municipal governments. KZN, like other South African provinces, has a provincial government. It has its provincial legislature, which is in charge of enacting laws and monitoring the province's administration. The Premier of KZN leads the provincial government, chairing the Executive Council (ExCo), made up of MECs (Members of the Executive Council) who supervise several ministries. KZN is further divided into district and local municipalities, each of which has its local government structure in charge of service delivery, infrastructure development, and community governance.

The coalition, also known as the Government of Provincial Unity, brings together the strengths and representation of four political parties to form a stable and collaborative administration. This strategy was essential owing to the fractured electoral results, which necessitated party unity to establish a functioning administration. The coalition members agreed on a governance framework outlining their shared goals and strategies for solving provincial concerns such as economic development, health care, education, and infrastructure improvement. The coalition partners collaborated to secure representation from all parties, with an emphasis on shared governance to successfully solve the province's difficulties. The coalition was formed since no single party won an overall majority in the provincial elections. To build a stable administration, the parties needed to work together.

The political terrain and dynamics of South Africa have shaped coalition administrations in KZN, as they have in many other provinces. Following the first democratic elections in 1994, the ANC became the main political force in KZN. The IFP, led by the late Mangosuthu Buthelezi, maintained strong support in rural regions and some metropolitan centres, emerging as an important opposition group.

Political fragmentation intensified in the early 2000s, as minor parties and independent candidates challenged the ANC and IFP. However, political fragmentation has intensified, resulting in more coalition administrations at the local level. Parties such as the IFP, the DA, and smaller regional parties sometimes formed alliances to govern towns where no one party held a clear majority. Recently, KZN's political scene has become even more vibrant. The ANC has frequently been the largest party, but it has faced challenges from coalitions established by opposition parties, particularly in metropolitan areas and regions with varied demographic and political environments. After the 2024 elections, the KZN government will be led by a coalition, also known as the Government of Provincial Unity. This alliance consists of the IFP, the ANC, the DA, and the National Freedom Party (NFP). The IFP's Thami Ntuli was sworn in as premier, the first time in two decades that the party has held this office.

KZN emerged from the post-May 29, 2024, general election period with an unusual political position, as the MKP surprisingly won 45% of the vote, earning 37 seats in the 80-seat KZN legislature. The IFP has the second-most seats (15), followed by the ANC (14) and the DA (11). The EFF gained two seats, while the NFP received one. Without a doubt, Ntuli's election was the product of a coordinated effort among the coalition parties, which obtained 41 seats, barely beating the MKP and its ally, the EFF, who together received 39 seats. The alliance demonstrates a commitment to unity and collaboration since crucial cabinet seats are allocated among coalition participants. This alliance was forced by the electorate's decision, which did not grant any single party enough votes to rule alone. As a result, a power-sharing agreement was established to maintain the province's stability and effective government.

The cabinet represents a power balance among the coalition members, with important seats apportioned to guarantee participation from all parties. The cabinet contains major appointments, such as Nontembeko Boyce of the ANC as speaker and Mmabatho Tembe of the DA as deputy speaker. This coalition administration intends to confront the province's difficulties cohesively, emphasising service delivery and the objectives of the KZN electorate. This system intends to promote collaborative governance and effectively solve the province's concerns. The alliance was created to offer a stable governance framework following the elections, which yielded no clear majority. The coalition partners agreed on a structure for its

governance, with an emphasis on service delivery and electorate objectives. Despite initial worries about stability, the coalition has vowed to work together to carry out their agreed-upon plans.

Coalition politics in KZN reflect wider developments in South African politics, in which no single party has a consistent dominance throughout all areas, resulting in diverse and sometimes complex local governance systems. Coalition administrations in KZN have changed in response to shifting political landscapes and demographics, mirroring wider tendencies in South African politics towards multiparty democracy and coalition governance at the local level. These coalitions have changed legislation and governing techniques, affecting people's lives and influencing political strategy in future elections.

The choice between a provincial government of unity and a minority coalition in KwaZulu-Natal is influenced by a variety of variables, including the political environment, power distribution among parties, and the province's special requirements and issues. Despite being referred to as a Government of Unity, this coalition functions as a minority coalition in the sense that it was created out of necessity, with none of the parties possessing a majority. To appropriately characterise the present KZN administration, for example, the coalition parties earned 41 seats, barely beating the MK Party and its ally, the EFF, which together received 39 seats. Premier Thami Ntuli and his cabinet have emphasised their commitment to working together across party lines to satisfy the needs of the KZN populace while ensuring stability and effective government.

A minority coalition is one in which the ruling party or coalition in KZN does not have an overall majority and must rely on assistance from minor parties or independents to form government. To enact laws and keep the government stable, ongoing discussion and coalition building are required. In a coalition administration, particularly one with minority representation, decisions are frequently made by compromise rather than the imposition of a single party's agenda. This can result in more balanced and inclusive policies that represent broader social interests. Minority coalitions can help to maintain stability by developing collaboration among diverse political groups. This stability is critical for good governance and ensuring that the government runs effectively with few disruptions. It supports democratic values by recognising political diversity and ensuring that all views are heard during the decision-making process. This increases openness and accountability in government.

These explanations demonstrate how a minority coalition in the KZN cabinet might improve government efficacy while also promoting inclusion and representation in political decision-making processes.



## Local Democracy can do what Managers can't

**Steven Friedman**

If you want to fix local government, it is important to know what about it needs fixing.

It has become clear that trying to mend local government will be a core focus of the coalition government. What is less clear is whether what it wants to do will work – and whether it grasps what is wrong.

The president's speech at the opening of Parliament, the first in this country's democratic history in which the head of government was speaking on behalf of a coalition, stressed the need to make local government work. It identified municipal government as a core problem obstructing economic growth and insisted that the government planned to make sure that municipalities attract rather than repel investment. Since it widely agreed that the speech accurately conveyed the view of the coalition partners, we can expect local government to become a key focus of the new cabinet.

Fixing local government is also central to the strategy of the largest party in the coalition, the ANC. Its national executive held a lengthy meeting to discuss why it had lost 17 percentage points in this year's election – it fingered failings in local government as a core reason.

### *A debatable view*

The ANC believes that voters' experience of local government is shaping their attitudes to national politics. It argues that, for several elections after 1994, there was a clear difference between how people voted in national and in local elections. The gap, it says, has now narrowed, and so the two are more firmly linked in voters' minds. It is convinced that much of the reason why many voters did not support it is that their experience of ANC government at the local level was negative. So, if it wants to win back voters, it must make local government work for the people.

Whether this analysis is accurate is debatable. While it is true that the ANC has always fared worse in local than in national elections and this year's poll was the first in which that pattern was reversed, it is a huge jump to say that this is a trend, let alone that it

is caused by voters judging parties in national elections by how they govern locally.

Also, during the period in which the ANC won comfortable majorities, many people were unhappy with local government but voted for the ANC despite this. There is no evidence that they have now decided that local government performance was more important than they thought it was.

So, while it seems common sense to assume that voters will be more likely to support a party in national elections if it governs well locally, we have no hard evidence that this is so.

But whether it is right or not, the ANC believes that making local government work is crucial to its fortunes and so we can expect to see it push hard for this in the coalition. As a sign that it means business, it has appointed a task team to intervene in municipalities to improve public services. It is headed by a cabinet minister, Parks Tau, which could be seen as a sign that it agrees that revived local government is crucial to the economy since he is minister of Trade and Industry. But it seems more likely that he was chosen because he is a former mayor of Johannesburg and head of the SA Local Government Association (SALGA).

It seems clear that local government needs mending – it is the least popular sphere of government, and few people would argue that municipalities run well. But what is the problem and what is the solution?

Most commentators and politicians insist that the answer is obvious – municipalities are incompetent and so they need more capacity. That is a strong theme in the coalition's thinking – the president's speech promised to “put in place systems to ensure that capable and qualified people are appointed to senior positions in municipalities and ensure independent regulation and oversight of the appointment process.” So, appoint the best people and local governments will run as they should.

The ANC has also believed for a while that national government has the capacities that local governments need, and that one solution is to give it a greater role in municipalities – the coalition seems to agree, since the president said in his speech that: ‘As the national government, we have both a constitutional responsibility and a clear electoral mandate to assist municipalities in the effective exercise of their powers and functions.’

*Beyond 'common sense'*

To many, this seems like common sense. But it may be a lot less sensible than it seems.

Some municipalities do struggle to find people with the skills to do the job, but the problem – and the solution – is more complicated than we are being told. These municipalities are in poorer, less urban, areas where it is difficult to recruit people with technical and management skills. The only way to attract them is to offer salaries way above those which everyone else in the area earns, which triggers resentment. Finding people who can perform the technical tasks at something like the average pay in the area is impossible.

In other councils, a lack of technical know-how may not be the real reason why they are not meeting the needs of the people. Corruption is a problem in many, but a key reason for this is not that bad people are attracted to local councils, but that opportunities for people to get into the middle class and above are very limited in this economy, and local government often becomes a route to prosperity that is not available in the marketplace. This problem won't be fixed by beefing up know-how.

This reality also makes local politics part of the problem. In many places, the differences between being a councillor or losing your seat is the difference between being middle class and poor. And so local politicians are less interested in serving citizens than they are in making sure that they stay in the middle class. This explains why local politics often seems to disregard the needs of the people.

The national ANC and the coalition believe local politics is a problem, but their solution is again for national government to tell municipalities what to do. Their planned instrument is the 'coalitions bill', which was discussed in a previous article here and which seeks to shrink local democracy in order to 'stabilise' councils.

One other form of national control is being punted by the minister responsible for local government, the IFP leader Velenkosini Hlabisa – he says he will dissolve local governments and call fresh elections, although it is not clear why he expects the people who are then elected to run more stable councils than those they replace.

In different ways, all the 'solutions' mentioned here are likely to create more problems than they solve. The route to a solution lies in looking at local government in a very different way – seeing

it as what it should be in a democracy, a site in which people democratically govern local areas.

The cure for capacity problems in many municipalities may not be a futile attempt to add technical skills but one in which their chief job is to represent people, not to provide services. In many parts of the country that may mean making utilities – Eskom, water boards and the like – responsible for services. The municipality's job would be to negotiate prices and quality service on behalf of voters. Besides ensuring that there would be no point in becoming a councillor to enrich yourself, the skill most needed from councillors would be the ability to speak up for voters and get a good deal for them, abilities which anyone who seeks election should have.

In better-off councils, the answer to political failings is more democracy, not more skills. The only antidote to corrupt councillors – or even simply those who care more about their interests than those of voters – is citizens strong enough to hold them to account. That means more local democracy, not more control from the top.

This does not seem to feature at all in government plans. Besides the 'solutions' already mentioned, the cabinet's approach, according to the president's speech, centres around a new "institutional structure and funding model" for local councils and partnerships between business and local government to place municipalities on a sounder footing.

But structures and funding models do not make councils respond to the people – only democracy does that. And, while business is an important interest in municipalities, it is not the only one. Deals between local governments and businesses that ignore the rest of the people will come unstuck as people ignore or rebel against changes over which they had no say.

Local government does need fixing. But if the 'solution' is to dictate solutions from the top rather than to ensure that people have power at the bottom, and to concentrate on technical skills while ignoring the voice of the people, the 'remedy' will simply ensure that the 'illness' is never cured.

## **Democracy at Work: Some Positive Signs that a Reformist ANC and GNU are Finally Leading South Africa to the Promised “New Dawn”**

**By Stef Terblanche**

Over the years, democracy as an institution of government by the people for the people has often been accused of having inherent weaknesses that sometimes produce unintended bad consequences. It can even be its own worst enemy when it's abused by bad actors to attain absolute dictatorial power, with many such examples over the past century and more, in some ways even going back to Julius Caesar and the Roman Republic.

But even so, its apparent vulnerabilities fail to overshadow its more widely spread power to bring about fairer, more just and caring societies; a power that can also force recalcitrant political entities and individual practitioners to adapt and change ... for the common betterment of the people.

Are we seeing one such moment in our own history right now? A moment in which the ANC, South Africa's ruling party of the last 30 years and now the lead party in a multi-party GNU, is being forced to reform itself and perhaps some of its policies for the better? Or, if it's not quite reforming, is it at least willing to rethink some of its more controversial positions at this juncture? It certainly seems so.

Of course, the GNU has been in existence for only just over two months now and it's far too early to pronounce a definitive judgement on the direction the ANC might be or not be taking within this new dispensation forced upon it by the people. Or, more correctly, forced upon it by a small majority of voters as there were actually more voting-eligible people who did not vote than actually voted if we also count those who did not register.

Perhaps that's one of democracy's weaknesses in that a little more than half of a voting minority – 58.6% – can determine the fate of the entire majority. But is there any better system around? And if this democratic expression is responded to and managed responsibly and correctly, surely the non-voters may reconsider and eventually join the voting minority to create a participating majority. For people to buy into it, democracy must be attractive and not seen to be failing.

Nonetheless, in a single election on 29 May, the democratic power of the people changed the fate of the ANC and the political trajectory that brought us to that point. And already there are some welcome signs in what this change may be positively bringing about in return.

Before this election, the ANC had been a leftist-leaning, at times pragmatically compromising party with arguably a socialist programme premised on its controversial National Democratic Revolution (NDR) doctrine supplemented with periodic instalments of its Strategy & Tactics offering. Sometimes it spoke more socialism than actually doing socialism, and vice-versa. In many respects, after 1994 it was a party searching for its true ideological identity. The pre-1994 one did not always fit so well in a modern, democratic and post-Soviet Union world.

But in the meantime, that did not prevent it from clinging to much of its socialist roots. Its inexperience in government simultaneously showed like soiled underwear while the human and moral quality, or lack thereof, of many of its practitioners increasingly undermined the good of the people. Through its policy of unqualified cadre deployment, it sought total control of all the levers of state power. And it also followed an often racially discriminatory programme ostensibly to correct the racial imbalances and ills of the apartheid past.

In a number of instances, elements of its socialist redistributive ambitions and its quest for centralised control seeped through into its various policy and legislative positions, forced upon us top-down without much or any public consultation. A recent example is the National Health Insurance (NHI) Act. Arguably, many citizens may have benefitted or stood to benefit from some of this, but equally so, many were being or stood to be excluded and adversely affected – not a justifiable part of the ideal bottom-line of any true democracy, one might argue.

By and large, the ANC had unfettered power to do as it pleased, only occasionally held in check by the independent courts and the constitution. As a consequence of its seemingly unfettered control of state power and resources, during the latter half of its 30-year rule, wholly unwelcome and widely despised state capture, corruption and appallingly poor political and administrative management plunged the country into crisis. Despite at times very noisy public opinion, the ANC seemed tone-deaf and simply steamrolled ahead. Empty,

unfulfilled and belated promises of improvement later became part of the political fare, the failure of these to materialise worsening the already destructive status quo.

South Africa was very quickly becoming one of the worst examples of democracy and government gone wrong – until the power of democracy and the people spoke as they had always been intended to, putting their foot down on May 29 in no uncertain terms.

While many unsolicited clichés have been attributed to these events after the fact, such as the nice sounding one that the people decided no party should have a majority as if that could be determined by the voters in advance, the matter of the fact is: by hook or by crook, on May 29 the voters took away the ANC's unchallenged power. They demanded change ... and got it.

To fully appreciate what that change may be bringing about, we need to revisit the past 30 years, lest we forget and miss where we might be headed now.

#### *The first 13 years of post-1994 democracy under Mandela and Mbeki*

This was arguably the bloom period of ANC majority government, first in a self-imposed GNU under Nelson Mandela, and then under the ANC by itself led by Thabo Mbeki. In these 13 years, South Africa enjoyed:

- Inclusive nation-building and transition from a racially divided past.
- Successful implementation of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) under Jay Naidoo.
- The RDP contained fiscal spending, sustained or lowered taxes, reduced government debt and liberalised trade while implementing socioeconomic reforms.
- The RDP built more than 1.1 million houses for over 5 million people previously homeless or inadequately housed.
- In 1996, under Finance Minister Trevor Manuel and Mbeki, the ANC government adopted a second macroeconomic policy programme, the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy, followed by a third economic policy blueprint, the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) to accelerate economic reform and redistribution.
- GDP growth peaked at 5.60% in 2006.
- GDP grew from \$153bn in 1994 to \$458bn in 2011.

- Unemployment was more or less contained at just over 19% for most of that period.
- In April 2004, the ANC scored its best-ever election victory under Mbeki at 69.69%.
- Mbeki had also fired Jacob Zuma as deputy president over his alleged part in corruption.

However, by 2007 the SACP became dissatisfied with what it viewed as Mbeki and Manuel's neo-liberal policies, successful as they were, referring to it as the "1996 class project" and, with help from other actors in the ANC-led Alliance, removed Mbeki and eventually replaced him with Zuma. What followed were years of destruction.

*The next 17 years of post-1994 democracy under Zuma and Ramaphosa*

- South Africa's gross debt rose from 23.6% of GDP in 2008 to 71.1% in 2022.
- In 2009, GDP growth plunged to -1.54%, vacillating between 1 and 3% over the next few years, before falling to 0.26% in 2019 and then plunging to -5.96% in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Unemployment (using a narrow definition) had risen rapidly, from just over 19% under Mbeki to reaching 33.5% in the first quarter of this year, with the youth unemployment rates for those aged 15-24 years and 25-34 years standing at 60.8% and 41.7%, respectively.
- With few exceptions, investment largely dried up and major South African and foreign companies started divesting from South Africa.
- The crime rate rocketed, and mafia extortion rackets proliferated in almost every industry.
- Eskom's electricity crisis created darkness and Transnet derailed, both amassing enormous debts.
- A serious skills deficit was aggravated by a brain drain and capital flight to greener pastures abroad.
- Seeking to fill a perceived void left by a floundering ANC, radical and populist parties and movements such as the EFF, the student Fees Must Fall movement, Black First Land First (BFLF), and most recently, Jacob Zuma's MKP, emerged.
- In an effort to counter or compete with their radicalism, the ANC itself turned to more radical, socialist legislative remedies such



as the expropriation-without-compensation bill, free tertiary education, and later the quest to nationalise the entire health system.

- Under Zuma's auspices and protection, state capture and massive corruption escalated, led by the infamous Gupta brothers.
- In 2017/18 Cyril Ramaphosa took the reins and created high expectations with his promises of a "new dawn" – ending corruption, reforming the ANC, and getting the economy back on a growth trajectory.
- Despite some minor reforms mostly in a belated and desperate response to the crises at Eskom and Transnet, and some attempts to work more closely with the private sector, Ramaphosa largely failed to deliver, thus worsening an already dismal situation.
- In the general election of 2024, the ANC's rapid decline was already under way, culminating in the loss of power in 2024.

#### *The aftermath of the ANC's 2024 defeat*

By May 29 this year, the people of South Africa had had enough – the ANC received a beating at the polls, shedding 17 percentage points from its 57% in 2019 to 40% in this year's elections. From its peak of almost 70% in 2004, the ANC had by now shed almost 30 percentage points. Seeing its support sliding further in opinion polls in the two years leading up to these elections, the ANC miscalculated the public mood and responded by hastily passing into law some of its more radical policy options. This failed to prevent its loss of power.

To remain relevant with a continued stake in governing South Africa, it was forced to enter into a GNU with nine other parties – the DA, IFP, GOOD Party, FF+, PA, PAC, UDM, RiseMzansi, and al Jama-ah. One party had left the GNU.

To his credit, and perhaps also humbled by defeat and sensing that he had a second chance to finally deliver on his 2017 promises and leave a better legacy, Ramaphosa resisted pressure from within his own party and alliance for a coalition with the radical EFF, and instead opted for a GNU that included the liberal, moderate and centrist market- and business-friendly DA and IFP as the two "anchor tenants" alongside the ANC. The formation of this GNU created an invigorating new sense of optimism in South Africa and abroad, and the markets responded positively, with the rand strengthening significantly.

Arguably, all of this was bound to have a moderating influence on the Ramaphosa-led ANC. So, after the prosperity of the first 13 years and the destructive chaos of the next 17, could it be that South Africa finally stands on the verge of that elusive “new dawn”?

*Is the ANC busy reforming in a shift towards the moderate centre?*

As mentioned before, it's too early to tell with certainty or if so, the extent, but there certainly are signs of something being underway in the ANC. If not a moderating reformist trend, then at least a rethink of some policies and more leftist/radical positions.

For their own political survival in a governing capacity, Ramaphosa and the ANC are arguably reliant on the cooperation of the moderate centre parties in the GNU. These parties offer a sizeable and influential counterbalance to the ANC and the other small parties of a more left-leaning persuasion. All the parties, including the ANC, have signed up to make consensus decisions, which means for the first time in almost three decades the voice of moderate centrist parties will carry significantly more weight. This will influence the policy direction of not only the GNU, but by necessity also that of the ANC, and may act as a brake on the radical, socialist or populist tendencies of the more left-leaning parties of the GNU.

So, what has the ANC committed to so far?

- The GNU parties, including the ANC, have all committed to putting economic growth, resulting in job creation and poverty alleviation at the centre of their efforts.
- As long as the GNU remains intact, free from radical infiltration or dominance by the likes of the EFF and MKP, and as long as it functions effectively without debilitating friction, the markets and investors will respond positively, which in the longer term is likely to result in a stronger rand, increased investment and real GDP growth.
- After veering away from its traditional Western trade partners under the previous ANC government and embracing anti-Western regimes like Russia, Iran, and China, as well as bad actors like Hamas and Hezbollah, which invited potential punitive measures from the United States and perhaps others, the ANC has now committed to putting South Africa's economy at the centre of its foreign policy. That seems to be a definite shift from its previous position.

- There has also been a tentative commitment by the ANC that the GNU might revisit controversial and potentially economically very harmful legislation such as the NHI Act. It is likely also that the law allowing for property expropriation without compensation may also be revisited or simply be parked on the back burner without implementation. New legislation is unlikely to take on a leftist or radical sheen.
- The ANC and other major parties in the GNU are all committed to reforming and stabilising state-owned enterprises like Eskom and Transnet, improving their vital operations, and reducing the national debt caused by these entities in the past. This will send positive signals to foreign investors and trade partners, while local business and citizens will benefit.
- Of equal importance is the commitment spearheaded by the ANC and strongly supported by other parties like the DA and the IFP, to reform and turn around South Africa's ailing but vital local government sector. And the parties seem committed to also ending cadre deployment and improving, depoliticising and professionalising the public service.
- Since the formation of the GNU, perpetrators of corruption and state capture, as exposed by the Zondo Commission, are for the first time about to be brought to book, as announced recently by the ANC, while the fight against crime is now in much more competent hands at the political level.
- The radical and populist opposition parties that would want to undermine the GNU in its current form have been electorally limited to around 25%. The GNU possesses a super-majority in Parliament that these forces won't be able to overcome, while recent events – such as the defection of Floyd Shivambu from the EFF to the MKP – exposed disarray and divisions within the radical left. The GNU will, therefore, be at liberty to introduce more needed economic and other reforms of vital importance to get South Africa and its economy up and running again, and it seems the ANC is already committed to this.

These are just some of the early reformist benefits arising from the formation of the GNU and the ANC committing to them – there are more. But suffice to say that these already bode extremely well for recovery and growth, for business, trade, investment, jobs, poverty alleviation, and development.

Of course, there are always dangers that could disturb the balance and upset such a trend, not least of all coming from within

the ANC but even more so from its alliance partners, bringing back the spectre of the 2007 removal of Mbeki. Two jarring developments that seem to go against the grain of this hypothesis concern signs that, following the tensions between the EFF and MKP lately, it appears the EFF is moving closer to the ANC and the IFP, at least in KZN where the MKP is strongest. This may have future implications for the composition of the GNU.

The other issue concerns Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi insisting on TV that he would not scrap Section 33 of the current NHI Act, which states that medical aids in their current form will be scrapped, even if it means the collapse of the GNU. This refers to strong opposition from the DA and several other parties in the GNU to this particular clause. Motsoaledi somewhat arrogantly asserted, “We (the ANC) are not in an alliance with the DA; we just went into the GNU because the situation demanded it ...”. Whether Motsoaledi will be supported by Ramaphosa in his stance remains to be seen.

Nonetheless, while the radical left is in disarray, it’s a fluid situation that could again change and yet produce a threat to the GNU in its current form. Also, differences in the ANC over the form and makeup of the GNU could open wider divisions in the ANC in future. However, so far none of these potential threats have manifested themselves in any major or meaningful way. So, by all indications, South Africa may just be finding itself on the verge of a new inspirational era of progress, growth and prosperity, led by a reform-minded Ramaphosa and ANC in a largely centrist GNU. What we may be seeing is democracy positively at work ... in real time.

## **Social Cohesion and Nation-Building in Post-Elections South Africa: The Role of the GNU Government**

**Lizzy Ofusori**

The GNU led by Nelson Mandela and including major political parties such as the ANC, the NP, and the IFP, played a critical role in transitioning South Africa from apartheid to a democratic society. The GNU's efforts were centred around fostering unity and reconciliation in a deeply divided nation. According to President Cyril Ramaphosa, "The formation of the GNU is a fulfilment of the wish of the electorate – who did not choose an outright majority in the elections – for all political parties to collaborate in the formation of government" (SAnews). He further added that the GNU offers a unique opportunity for South Africans to unite and build a better future for all. Moreover, the GNU was instrumental in laying the groundwork for social cohesion and nation-building in South Africa. Through its emphasis on reconciliation, inclusive governance, constitutional reform, and social transformation, the GNU helped to guide the country through a complex and fragile transition period. While challenges persisted, the GNU's efforts created a foundation for a more unified and equitable South Africa.

### *Role of the GNU:*

#### **1. Reconciliation and peacebuilding**

The GNU prioritised reconciliation between South Africa's racial and ethnic groups. Mandela's leadership emphasised forgiveness and the need for national healing, embodied in initiatives like the TRC. This commission aimed to address past human rights abuses and promote restorative justice. The TRC provided a platform for victims of apartheid-era human rights violations to tell their stories and for perpetrators to confess their crimes in exchange for amnesty. This process was designed to promote healing and understanding by uncovering the truth about past abuses. The TRC was a unique form of restorative justice that emphasised the importance of truth-telling as a means to national healing, rather than focusing solely on punishment.

#### **2. Inclusive governance**

The GNU was designed to be inclusive, with representation from multiple political parties. This inclusivity helped to ensure that

different voices were heard in the government, promoting stability and reducing the likelihood of political conflict. By involving former rivals in the government, the GNU ensured that the transition to democracy was peaceful and inclusive, which was essential for building trust and cooperation among South Africa's diverse population.

### **3. Constitutional development**

The GNU played a crucial role in South Africa's constitutional development, which was integral to promoting social cohesion and nation-building in the post-election period. Under the GNU, South Africa developed a new Constitution that enshrined human rights, equality, and democratic principles. This was a key step in nation-building, as it laid the foundation for a society based on the rule of law and respect for all citizens. Through a process that emphasised inclusivity, reconciliation, and the protection of rights, the GNU helped to create a Constitution that reflected the aspirations of a united and diverse nation.

### **4. Economic and social policy**

The GNU also focused on addressing the socioeconomic disparities created by apartheid. Although challenges remained, efforts were made to improve access to education, healthcare, and housing for historically marginalised groups, contributing to social cohesion. By guaranteeing socioeconomic rights, such as access to housing, education, and healthcare, the Constitution aimed to reduce the disparities that had been created by apartheid. Addressing these inequalities was essential for social cohesion, as it helped to create a more equitable society where all citizens had the opportunity to thrive. This, in turn, strengthened the foundations for nation-building.

### **5. Symbolic and cultural integration**

The Constitution played a symbolic role in nation-building by recognising and celebrating South Africa's diversity. It acknowledged multiple languages, cultures, and traditions, promoting a sense of pride and respect for the country's rich heritage. This cultural integration was important for social cohesion, as it reinforced the idea that all South Africans, regardless of their background, were valued and respected members of the national community.

## 6. Creating a foundation for future generations

The Constitution developed under the GNU was designed not only for the present but also for future generations. By embedding democratic values, human rights, and social justice into the legal framework, the GNU ensured that the process of nation-building and social cohesion would continue beyond the immediate post-apartheid era. This long-term vision was crucial for sustaining the unity and stability of the nation over time.

### *Conclusion*

The GNU played a pivotal role in setting South Africa on a path toward social cohesion and nation-building. Its efforts to promote reconciliation, inclusive governance, and a new constitutional order were essential in stabilising the country during a critical period in its history. However, while the GNU made significant strides, social cohesion and nation-building remained challenging due to persistent economic inequalities, racial tensions, and political rivalries. The transition to a fully inclusive democracy was complex, and the legacy of apartheid continued to affect social dynamics. The long-term success of GNU efforts depended on addressing the underlying socioeconomic and political challenges that continued to affect the nation.

## **GNU or Marriage of Convenience? Factors that will Determine the Success or Failure of the New Governmental Arrangement in 2024 and Beyond**

**Amara Galileo**

The 2024 national and provincial elections represented a critical juncture in South Africa's history. While the concept of a GNU is not foreign to the nation – the first was established in 1994 to broker the transition from apartheid – this new coalitional arrangement has marked the end of ANC dominance and the beginning of a new political landscape. Falling short of the 50+1% mark that would have maintained the ANC's controlling majority, the formerly dominant liberation party was forced to negotiate a deal with opposition parties after being humbled with a mere 40% of vote share. The ensuing arrangement between the ANC, DA, IFP, PA, and other small parties has been coined a Government of National Unity, or GNU, and serves as a political partnership and agreement to co-govern.

This new iteration of the GNU differs significantly from the 1994 version headed by Nelson Mandela. Firstly, the 1994 GNU was not a necessity, but a concession and effort to ensure inclusivity and collaborative efforts in the phased transition to democracy. Although the ANC won a commanding 63% of vote share in these elections with a resulting 252 out of 400 seats in the National Assembly, rather than operating unilaterally, ANC leadership intentionally appointed members from the IFP and the National Party to prominent cabinet positions. Contrastingly, the 2024 GNU was formed out of necessity, ultimately serving to avoid political deadlock and create stability in the new administration. The context in which these two GNUs have operated is also dissimilar. While the primary aim of the 1994 GNU was to promote national reconciliation in a post-apartheid South Africa, the 2024 version encompasses a more diverse coalition of parties with a wide range of ideological interests and political priorities.

While we do use the term 'government of national unity' when describing the current arrangement, it is more of a rhetorical tool than a phrase grounded in reality. A key characteristic of GNUs is their inclusivity, and they necessarily include representatives from all major political parties. Notable absences in the present arrangement are the EFF and the newly formed MKP parties. Taken together, this means that the "GNU" fails to represent the nearly 25% of national vote share obtained by these parties, as well as the interests of their constituencies. One cannot have a true GNU without meaningful



representation of the 3rd and 4th largest parties in the nation. Critics have also noted that GNUs are intended to more evenly distribute power, and the present GNU remains largely dominated by the ANC despite its loss of majority. A truly representative arrangement would allocate cabinet seats in proportion to national vote share, whereas currently the ANC is clearly overrepresented in these positions. In these ways, the current governmental arrangement runs the risk of being a mere rebrand of the typical ANC domination.

At this early stage, the implications of the new GNU for the average South African remains unclear. However, the 2024 national and provincial elections have sent a clear message to elites that citizens will no longer tolerate a nation dominated by one party – regardless of how impactful that party was historically. Moving forward, elections are likely to be much more competitive, with smaller parties rising and falling and various coalitional agreements taking shape. Theoretically, the strength of any coalitional government lies in the increase in accountability. If the present GNU functions properly, no longer will the ANC be able to make largely unilateral decisions, and no longer will leaders have impunity or the ability to abuse public office for their own personal gain. Each party will check the other and ideally bring to light any maladministration within government. Additionally, the GNU democratises political decision-making in that it is more inclusive of various ideological and identity groups. While hopefully accounting for the good of all South Africans, each party may be seen to represent their specific constituency, and thus deliberation will theoretically consider the desires of a larger proportion of the population. If the GNU functions optimally, this is an opportunity for real democratic dividends – namely, improved social service delivery, the creation of jobs, and policies that benefit all segments of society. If governance improves, the lives of South Africans will improve. The extent to which the GNU will function as intended remains to be seen.

Various factors will determine the success or failure of the GNU. From my perspective, below are several of the most vital.

#### 1. *Maturity of leadership*

Willingness for political leadership in all parties to compromise will play a major role in whether the GNU succeeds or prematurely collapses. Political elites must promote policy that is based on the country's interests as a whole, rather than their own individual

interests. Effective leaders must be self-aware, take responsibility for their failures, and be open to accountability and responsive to the needs of the electorate. Mature leaders will be better equipped to make strategic decisions that address the complex national issues South Africa faces.

2. *Ability to navigate points of contention:*

Ideological convergence does not guarantee success in a coalition, nor does ideological divergence guarantee failure. Diversity in ideological positions among participating political parties can still result in constructive arrangements, as illustrated by coalitions in Germany, Kenya, Belgium, Japan, and India, among others. Far more important is the adeptness of party leaders in cooperating and navigating contentious policy decisions. In the case of the 2024 GNU, potential flashpoints include decisions surrounding healthcare policy, the Black Economic Empowerment Programme, and diplomatic relations, particularly as it relates to support for Russia and Israel as well as South Africa's involvement in BRICS. The GNU must navigate these and other disagreements to maintain a united front in policymaking.

3. *Internal ideological conflict within the ANC*

The ANC is a diverse party that, because it embraces so many disparate ideological positions, can be divided into factions. There is a market-oriented, constitutionalist, non-racial wing that is sympathetic to alignment with the DA and former members of the Multi-party Charter, and this faction may eventually clash with the more left-leaning, populist, and progressive wing that would prefer an arrangement with the EFF and MK parties. This inevitable ideological battle may result in a party split or compromise the GNU's stability over time.

4. *Performance in key areas*

If the government performs and the GNU provides tangible dividends for the average citizen, parties are more likely to remain active rather than jump ship. This includes performance in priority areas such as creating jobs, lowering inflation, decreasing economic inequality, attracting foreign investment, fighting corruption, improving social service delivery, and ending the electricity crisis. The ability to deliver on promises and a consequent positive public perception will likely

lead to cohesion within the GNU and a longer-lasting coalitional arrangement.

This GNU may mark the beginning of a new political dawn in South Africa. Despite ideological divergences, a fruitful coalition among the ANC, DA, and others is very much within reach. What will determine success in addition to much-needed democratic dividends is mature leadership, a willingness to compromise, and a prioritisation of collective interests over individual. South Africans are weary of one-party dominance with no accountability. May the new administration deliver the effective and inclusive government that citizens desire.

## **Coalition Governing and the Future of Social Cohesion Building in Post Elections in South Africa: Challenges and Opportunities**

**Adebimpe Esther Ofusori**

Coalition governance has become an increasingly prominent feature in South Africa's political landscape, especially since the decline in voter support for the once-dominant party, the ANC. Since the period of transition to democratic government in 1994, the ANC recorded majority votes from the South African electorate, until 2024, when a decline in the ANC's vote led to coalition governing at the national level for the first time in the history of South Africa. The 2021 local elections and the 2024 national elections reflect a trend towards more fragmented political representation, making coalition governments possible in many sectors. Coalition governance in South Africa could either enhance or undermine social cohesion, depending on how the government navigates the challenges of representation, inclusivity, and stability in the post-election period.

Coalition governments necessitate negotiation and compromise, which could foster a more inclusive and participatory political culture. This process might help build bridges between different communities and promote unity if managed constructively. In addition, coalition governments can bring about the need to accommodate various parties, which in turn can lead to a broader policy focus that addresses multiple societal needs. This inclusiveness in policymaking can positively impact social cohesion and ensure that diverse community interests are considered. In contrast, the rise of smaller parties, often representing specific ethnic and racial interests, can also prevent social cohesion. The success of coalitions in promoting social cohesion will depend on their ability to provide stable governance. Stable coalitions that effectively manage diversity could also set a precedent for constructive collaboration across political and social groups in South Africa.

### *Challenges*

The potential rise of coalition governments can pose some challenges for social cohesion in the post-election period in South Africa. Here are some of the challenges:

### **1. Political variability**

Coalition governments can be unstable due to the need to balance competing interests among diverse political parties. This can lead to frequent policy shifts and make it difficult to implement long-term strategies for social cohesion.

### **2. Compromised policy implementation**

Coalition agreements often require compromises that dilute the effectiveness of policies aimed at addressing inequality, unemployment, and social justice. This can result in the slow or incomplete implementation of initiatives designed to foster social cohesion.

### **3. Opposition**

In coalition governments, political parties may prioritise their specific agendas over broader societal needs, which can exacerbate existing divisions and hinder efforts to build social cohesion.

### **4. Lack of public trust**

Frequent changes in government or perceived inefficiency in coalition-led administrations can lead to public disillusionment and a lack of trust in political institutions. This undermines efforts to bring communities together and create a shared sense of purpose.

### **5. Frequent changes in leadership**

Coalitions are often fragile, with differing agendas leading to potential instability. Such instability can erode public trust in the government, making it harder to build a cohesive society. Frequent changes in leadership or policy direction can exacerbate societal divisions and lead to public disillusionment.

### *Opportunities*

Although coalition governments in South Africa do face some significant challenges, there are also unique opportunities that could enhance social cohesion. Below are some of the opportunities:

#### **1. Inclusive governance**

Coalition governments can promote inclusivity by ensuring that a wider range of voices and interests are represented in decision-

making processes. This can help address the concerns of marginalised groups and contribute to greater social cohesion.

## **2. Collaborative policymaking**

The need to form coalitions can encourage political parties to work together and find common ground. This collaborative approach can lead to the development of more comprehensive and balanced policies that promote social cohesion.

## **3. Innovation in governance**

The necessity of coalition-building can lead to innovative governance solutions as parties are forced to think creatively to satisfy their diverse constituencies. This can result in policies that are better tailored to the needs of a diverse society.

## **4. Strengthened civil society**

As political parties negotiate coalitions, civil society organisations may play a more active role in advocating for social cohesion. This increased involvement can lead to stronger community engagement and more effective social cohesion initiatives.

## **5. Enhanced accountability**

Coalition governments might enhance accountability, as coalition partners often monitor each other's actions. This can result in more transparent and responsive governance, which could foster public trust and contribute to social cohesion.

In conclusion, coalition governing in South Africa, especially in the post-election period, presents both challenges and opportunities for social cohesion. As the political landscape becomes more fragmented, the formation of coalition governments has become increasingly common. This trend is particularly significant in a country like South Africa, where deep-seated social, economic, and racial divisions persist. The future of social cohesion in South Africa will be shaped by how these dynamics play out in the post-election environment. Through understanding these challenges and opportunities, South Africa can work towards building a more cohesive and equitable society. Lastly, the active participation of civil society and community leaders in promoting dialogue and understanding among different groups will be vital in fostering a cohesive society.

## Map of South Africa





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