

Chapter 1

Factors and Conditions Triggering the Formation of Political Coalitions

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ABSTRACT

Party coalitions have become very important in contemporary African politics in parliamentary and presidential systems. The dawn of democracy in the third world, and Africa in particular, witnessed significant democratic developments. African political parties have increasingly seen the value of co-operation and have built coalitions and alliances to achieve similar goals. Key amongst these developments have been the formation of political coalitions. Several factors and conditions have triggered the formation of political coalitions and alliances in most African countries. A coalition is a grouping of rival political parties that, in most cases, are motivated by the perception of a common threat or recognition that their goals cannot be attained by not coalescing. The management of a coalition is also critical in order to attain stability. The rationale is that stability becomes important to parties when they enter their coalition pact.

INTRODUCTION

A Coalition government is a democratic mechanism through which willing parties come together to power to lead the Nation. Their agreement is usually based on a shared policy agreement they want to pursue in government. The critical aspect of Coalitions is that they enhance democracy. When political players work together, the net results benefit the broader electorate. The rationale for forming Coalitions was to strengthen democracy. It can also be argued that democracy is unthinkable without democratic parties, and we cannot have political parties without democracy. Additionally, “political parties created modern democracy, and modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties.” (Schattsch-

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neider, 1942, pp. 1-2). Therefore, political parties and democracy are mutually inclusive. You cannot have one without the other.

Diamond (1995 and 1999) defines democracy as the best form of government, better than any imagined option. He views it as the only business in town. In any democracy, political parties are critical for entrenching democratic culture and practice. Democracy has given political parties a high premium of cooperating and strengthening democracy by forming Coalitions. For instance, some parties at the “local government level, Coalition or multiparty governments were formed to ensure that the business of government was carried out” (Kadima, 2006, p.15).

Since independence, most African countries, such as Mauritius, have been governed through Coalition governments. In other countries like Kenya, “the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) won the 2002 elections, giving meaning, for the first time in nearly 40 years, to democratic alternation” (Kadima, 2006, p. vii). In South Africa, alliances were formed amongst opposition parties and Coalitions during the first democratic elections to strengthen democracy in governing the country and, thus, contribute to nation-building and reconciliation. These alliances and Coalitions formed by different political parties within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region and throughout Africa were instrumental in triggering democratic consolidation. It must be stated that “some party Coalitions were formed for either strengthening the governing party or creating a viable and stronger opposition” (Kadima, 2006, p.15). Therefore, democracy is strengthened more by the establishment of Coalition governments.

In most African countries in the 1960s, multiparty politics were banned, and immediately after independence, they were replaced by one-party dominant systems. In Lesotho from 1970 to 1986, political parties were banned by the then ruling Basotho National Party (BNP) (Khaketla, p.1971). During military rule, these parties were banned from 1986 to 1993 (Matlosa and Sello, 2005). Political parties in Lesotho were only allowed to function after the 1993 Constitutional reforms, which allowed a free democratic process. Conversely, this period ushered one dominant political party, the Basotho Congress Party (BCP), until 1998, when electoral reforms were introduced, and a new electoral Model of Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMP) was introduced (Likoti, 2009).

This chapter is divided into five sections, including this introduction. The following section defines a Coalition government. This section forms a framework for understanding Coalition governments. Section three discusses the various reasons for forming Coalitions. It presents an overview of the constellations of factors that provide a rationale for forming Coalition governments. The fourth section discusses the management of Coalitions to ensure their stability and efficiency. The sections emphasise stability as one of the prerequisites for managing this cooperation, amongst other factors. The section put forward some essential factors which must be considered in managing a successful Coalition government that will strengthen democracy. The conclusion forms the last section of this chapter.

BACKGROUND

Towards Definition of Coalitions Governments

The advent of Coalition governments has become a global phenomenon. The composition, nature and life expectancy of Coalition government varies from country to country, depending on specific political circumstances. The emergence of pluralistic politics in the early 1990s motivated the emergence of Coalition governments to secure sufficient seats in Parliament to form stable governments. These power-

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