

Chapter 5

Governments of National Unity (GNU) as the Democratic Governance Model in Selected Africa Countries

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ABSTRACT

This chapter interrogates the notion of government of national unity (GNU) as an emerging model for democratic and coalition governance in Africa. Considering Africa's dismal record of governance, coupled with socio-economic developmental challenges, coalition governance is imperative. African countries such as Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, and Zimbabwe were selected as case studies to demonstrate the opportunities and challenges of government of national unity or coalition governance. GNU is a co-governance mechanism often adopted over contested election results between the incumbent and opposition parties. Amongst the countries under study, only Kenya showcases a semi-successful story of how a coalition can be formed, maintained, and sustained to the next elections. Other governments of national unity, such as those in South Africa, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe, formed coalitions with opposition parties to unsettle the dominant parties. In the case of Zimbabwe, Malawi, South Africa, and Lesotho, GNU was adopted as both a democratic governance and conflict resolution strategy to govern better and ensure peace and stability over contested election results and simmering political violence. This chapter argues that the dominance of the ruling parties and weak opposition parties undermines coalition formation to challenge the incumbent parties through electoral democracy. The chapter concludes that GNU in these countries not only showed dismal evidence of being notoriously tyrannical in creating pseudo-space but was also a pace-setter for bad and undemocratic governance in Africa. Data for this chapter was collected through secondary sources.

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INTRODUCTION

In modern society, democratic governance has become a common thread that differentiates a democratic state from other governance systems such as autocratic, socialist, nationalist, and so on (Heywood, 2019; Hyden, 2016). African humanity in the continent has been wounded by foreign systems of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism (Shivambu, 2014; Welz, 2021). Africa has been a site for experimenting with developmental approaches, a dumping place for failed and unsuccessful models which, instead of bringing positive development to the African people, has facilitated dependency and underdevelopment. Additionally, scholars such as Rodney (2018), in his book *“How Europe Underdeveloped Africa”* were explicit in highlighting the challenges besetting Africa as traceable to her protracted socioeconomic and political subjugations and colonization. Through colonialism, imperialism, and eventually Apartheid, Africa and the African people were dehumanized and their resources exploited (Tshishonga, 2024). African history is intrinsically interwoven with the decades of imperialism and colonialism based on European exploitative domination with created borders and territorial boundaries as envisaged today (Zahorik, 2018). Thus, the imposition of imperialism and colonialism in the continent saw the erosion of Africa’s rich cultural history and heritage under so-called the ‘civilising mission’ of Africa by European powers (Zahorik & Piknerova, 2018, p. 1). However, Mills (2023) blames a clientelist political system where political elites focus on short-term needs instead of long-term reforms required for economic development. Considering the challenges facing Africa as a continent, including ‘deculturation’ and enculturation, Maathai (2009, p. 171) argues that for African countries to escape this impasse, it is imperative for them to re-discover their cultural heritage and to use this to both reconnect with the past and to help direct them in their political, spiritual, economic and social development.

African humanity is integrated and holistic in nature, which informs and embraces religious, social, cultural, developmental, economic justice, environmental, and political aspects that engender people-centered governance (Amtaika, 2017). Scholars in Political and Public Sciences differentiate the notion of government from that of governance. On the one hand, the government is described as an authority, including its institutional arrangements. In contrast, governance, conversely, denotes the process that ensures the ordering of citizens, groupings, communities, or society (Muium, 2023). The fundamental purpose of governance is to maintain law and order and further promote democratic governance within the context of a developmental state (Gazibo, 2016; Koechlin, 2016). In both developed and developing nations, the political arrangement commonly known as the government of national unity (GNU) or coalition governance (CG) is not a new phenomenon (Welz, 2021). Liberal democracy is intrinsically linked to elections as the mechanism through which government can be contested by various political parties (Heywood, 2019). Unfortunately, in Africa, the notion of democracy and, thereby, governance has been the source of both developmental and political conflicts marred by bloodshed, harassment, and politically motivated assassinations. Tshabangu (2024) alludes that the key impediments to Africa are within two ideological mishaps: imperialistic private capitalism and state socialism. This was also compounded by the superimposing of capitalism on the African citizens by the colonizer; state socialism became an imposition by the nationalist liberators from colonialism.

This chapter interrogates the notion of the Government of National Unity (GNU) as an emerging model for democratic governance in Africa. Considering Africa’s dismal record of governance, coupled with socio-economic development challenges, coalition governance is imperative (Schreiber, 2018). South Africa and Zimbabwe were selected as case studies to demonstrate the opportunistic and tyrannical nature of the government of national unity or coalition governance. GNU is a co-governance mechanism often

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