

## Chapter 7

# Local Experiences of Local Government's Coalition Politics in South Africa

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Coalition politics has become a key feature of many countries' political landscapes in the 21st century. Among others, countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, and Germany have experimented with the system of political coalitions at different levels and with varying degrees of success. However, scholars and practitioners have not uniformly understood coalition politics, regardless of the attempt to locate the thinking in this regard within the Westernised perspective. Against this backdrop, this chapter uses 2021 as an ending point for research to examine the historical emergence of local government coalition politics in South Africa. While this chapter's primary focus is on South Africa, the line of thought is located within a global context to generate a broader understanding. It is also unavoidable to make sense of local government's coalition politics without linking it to national politics. This is because there is no level of politics or governance that exists in a vacuum, and this is even more expressive within the cooperative governance model of South Africa. Given the explanatory and analytical power of theories, this chapter first discusses the theories and types of municipal coalitions and politics and then intentionally proposes Afrocentricity as an alternative contextual and theoretical lens to make a better sense of this phenomena (local government's coalition politics) in Africa and South Africa, in particular. At the core of the research analysis for this chapter is the interface between municipal governments and coalition politics with specific reference to Tshwane and Johannesburg metropolitan municipalities.*

## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

Globally, there is no consensus among scholars and practitioners on the definition of a coalition. The definition of a coalition within the scholarly and political circles remains an unsettled polemic and practical question. The latter is not limited to this term (coalition); it is commonplace in Social Sciences (Shai & Vunza, 2021). This chapter does not seek to provide a definite definition of a coalition. However, for the purposes of this chapter, the coalition is generally taken to mean an association of two or more political parties which is normally informed by an electoral outcome, and it is meant to foster cooperation in administration or government at a particular level (Booyesen, 2014). While coalitions in most countries are negotiated after elections, Mauritius is an exceptional case. Because the country has always been governed through coalitions since independence in the year 1968, coalitions in this country are negotiated pre-polls. Even then, there is room for negotiations to be taken to another level by bargaining informed by the realities of shared electoral spoils (Sithanen, 2003).

According to Maserumule (2020), compromise adds to cooperation as the fundamental principle of a coalition. A coalition can be negotiated in a manner that results in a written and signed agreement among all the parties involved. Alternatively, a coalition can be based on a principle of reciprocity. This means policy convergence and ideological alignment form critical aspects of a principle of reciprocity. Thus, the coalition between the defunct Democratic Party (DP) and Independent Democrats (ID) in the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality in South Africa was largely based on the shared ideology of economic liberalism (Shai, 2017). The contestation about the conception of a coalition was evident in South Africa following the 2016 local government elections. In certain metropolitan municipalities such as the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality and the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, the 2016 local government elections did not produce any outright winner and thus, resulting in hung municipalities. In these two cases, the Democratic Alliance (DA) was under the impression that it is in a coalition with the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and other small political parties. Contrary to this position, the EFF's political and populist rhetoric suggested that the party was not in a coalition with the DA in those municipalities. But it was having a voting arrangement on an issue-to-issue basis (Maserumule, 2020). This opportunistic stance by the EFF allowed the party to unduly influence decision making in municipalities that are led by the DA while leaving a room to distance itself from any municipal failures. For example, the coalition with the DA had allowed the EFF to swindle decisions in the municipality regarding strategic appointments such as City Manager. While still in a coalition, the EFF was able to distance itself from allegations of corruption facing the DA led City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. Central to these scandals was the irregular appointment of GladAfrica in a R12 billion deal for infrastructural management within the city (Maserumule, 2020).

While coalition politics in South Africa's local government sector gained traction in the year 2016, the reality is that political coalitions are not new to South Africa and Africa at large (Mare, 2000). The experience from other African countries shows that coalitions do not have a rich historical prominence. This is because most of the African states, particularly in Southern Africa are led by liberation movements cum dominant political parties (Shai & Zondi, 2020). Due to the dominant party system espoused in South Africa and other parts of Africa, the notion of a coalition was largely deemed by politicians as irrelevant (Masina 2021). As such, the trend in terms of the decline of the electoral fortunes of the dominant political parties in Africa is alive to the reality of coalitions. Thus the 2016 local government elections in South Africa represented the massive decline of African National Congress's (ANC) electoral support in the Gauteng province, a development that resulted in the DA coalescing with the EFF

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