


Chapter 18

Investigating the Dynamics of Coalition Governance in South African Local Government

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ABSTRACT

The dynamics of coalitions in South Africa's democratic landscape can be attributed to the ANC government's shortcomings or failure in providing services to communities and its pervasive issues of corruption. The chapter argues that enhancing governance, service delivery, and fostering unity in South Africa requires a political centre, consistent policy agenda, and capable politicians. This is essential to fulfil the service delivery mandate, and it also suggests the need for a legislative framework to regulate coalition governments, considering their inevitability in the current political climate of South Africa. The current South African political climate of coalitions is clouded by political immaturity which is a receipt for poor service delivery. An analysis of several motions of confidence passed in coalition governance in many municipalities across the country shows that coalition governance in the contemporary South African political climate is characterized by instability, political egos, no commonality of interest, and political patronage which are ingredients of poor service delivery, particularly as the next 2024 national and provincial elections draw near. Coalition governments typically include parties with varied ideological orientations and policy preferences. The task of reconciling these differences to establish a unified policy agenda can pose significant conundrums and delays in service delivery. What ordinary people need on the ground is very simple, which is just the provision of basic services not political ideologies. However, different policy agendas from political parties haunt the delivery of basic services to the constituencies. This chapter sees it as imperative to demonstrate contextual and institutional effects that supplement emergent discoveries in the literature of coalition governance. Thus, it adopts a literature-based approach, which is conceptual, to assess the dynamics of coalition governance in South African local government, looking at policy implementation, political stability, and service delivery inter alia.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Coalition, “a marriage of inconvenience” as described by Dorey and Garnett, (2016) is currently topping the agenda in government and political parties. Yerankar (2015) proffers that a coalition is a characteristic feature of a multi-party government, wherein several minority parties collaborate to collectively govern when individual party rule is not feasible. The author further lengthens that the formation of a coalition occurs when multiple groups reach a consensus and establish a shared program or agenda to guide their collaborative efforts in governance. One could infer that personal arranged marriages have transitioned to government in the name of coalitions in South African local government. Because in a personal arranged marriage, the bride and the groom make some compromises to a certain extent for the sake of a sustainable marriage. At times the newlyweds would even compromise their happiness for the sake of keeping an arranged marriage alive. Same applies to political parties in coalition. According to Law and Calland (2018), coalitions provide medium to smaller parties with the opportunity to enhance their public visibility and wield disproportionate influence. The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) serves as a prime example of a party that strategically positioned itself as a kingmaker in the Johannesburg Municipality. Instead of officially joining the coalition, it opted to exert its significant influence to secure voting power (Makgale, 2020).

The 2016 local government elections which is currently paving a way to the national dialogue on coalitions especially anticipating the 2024 national elections. This arranged marriage on inconvenience, inconveniences good governance, consistent policy and service delivery. Unfortunately, several motions of no confidence passed in the city of Tshwane against Mayors such as Solly Msimanga (Makgale, 2020) for incompetence and lack of service delivery, clearly demonstrate that coalitions have their own setbacks. Coalition governments typically arise when no single party commands an outright majority in the nation’s parliament or legislative body following an election. Such alliances serve to diminish the dominance of any single political party, and the pursuit of power stands out as a primary motivation for the formation of coalition governments (Longley, 2023). This is the case in South Africa, following the 2016 local government elections wherein the ANC lost total dominance and power in some local government entities, municipalities and metros.

The outcomes of the 2016 local government elections led to the formation of a coalition between the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), along with other smaller parties. This coalition aimed to remove the ANC from power in the City of Johannesburg, Tshwane, and Nelson Mandela Bay Metros (Ndou, 2022). The debate on coalition government should be blamed on the ANC for failing to deliver services and for a continuous looting, corruption and lack of accountability amongst others. The question is, would coalitions serve the best interests of the people or advance political interests of different political parties? In an attempt to answer this question, one wonders how these arranged marriages would be sustainable due to policy differences from political parties. Longley (2023) postulates that in the face of having to make policy concessions or compromises, a political party would prefer to retain some degree of power rather than having none whatsoever.

The current political wind in South Africa resembles a circus filled with amusing characters, and the initiation of the national dialogue on coalition governments is capturing the interest of diverse stakeholders. As political parties and various participants convene to deliberate on the complexities of coalition politics and governance, it raises the question of whether these political entities will transcend the immaturity that characterized them in the previous decade (Fakir, 2023). The author further demonstrates that the present-day politics are marred by erratic political parties advancing self-referential policies

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