Chapter 19
Critical Reflections on Coalition Governments in the 30th Year of South African Democracy

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ABSTRACT

This chapter comprehensively explores the detailed evaluations of coalition governments in the 30th year of South African democracy. Despite being a relatively recent concept in our political discussions, implementing coalition arrangements is frequently mishandled, posing a hurdle to efficient administration in local municipalities. The main contention of this chapter is that if coalition agreements in South Africa were motivated by a sincere aspiration for effective governance and the provision of services, they would have had positive outcomes for the general public.

INTRODUCTION

In 1948, the National Party, led by Daniel Francois Malan, won the election on an apartheid platform. Apartheid was a conscious decision to deny black South Africans their rights and liberties. Apartheid was not an entirely new policy. Since the late 19th-century mineral discoveries, Africans have experienced a growing deprivation of their rights, along with the implementation of segregationist policies. The police were granted unrestricted authority. Detention without trial was implemented and became frequent. Individuals were detained without charges for both 90 and 180 days and frequently subjected to torture. South Africa's transition to democracy came about with the 1993 Interim Constitution, cre-

ated through discussions between different political parties in the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA). This led to the country's inaugural non-racial election in 1994 (Waldmeir, 1998).

Booysen (2014) contends that South Africa's first decade of democracy, 1994-2004, delivered a high volume of governing and opposition alliances and coalitions in South Africa. These alliances and coalitions catalyzed the party system and facilitated the consolidation of the African National Congress (ANC) power. Simultaneously, alliances in this decade triggered the main opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA), which continued to dominate opposition politics numerically through numerous elections. The second decade of democracy, 2004-2014, was characterized by continued ANC dominance, yet instead of the ANC's unremittingly usurping parties, it became subject to splits. Some of the split-offs emerged to become opposition parties. Others fused into alliances with the ANC or existing opposition parties (Mlambo, 2023). This article takes stock of the development during these two decades and looks ahead to budding new alliances that may thrive in lessened ANC dominance. According to Booysen (2014), in his article, which provides an overview of the developments during these two decades, South Africa experienced many governing and opposition alliances and coalitions during its first decade of democracy from 1994 to 2004. These alliances and coalitions played a crucial role in shaping the party system and strengthening the power of the ANC.

Drawing insights from Golding (2015), coalition government is conceptualized as a unique form of government where two or more political parties work collectively to form a governing body. This type of government arises when no party can secure a majority of the votes (50 percent or more) during an election. While many of the coalition governments at the local level in South Africa have failed and continue to witness many challenges, Ndou (2022) contends that coalition governments have now become part of South Africa's political system. However, these coalitions have resulted in instability, paralysis, and failures in service delivery in certain regions/municipalities of South Africa. This can be attributed to the nature of the political parties involved in these coalitions. For instance, political parties advocate for key positions during coalition arrangements in major metropolitan municipalities such as the City of Johannesburg and Tshwane, considered significant cities and economic hubs in South Africa. If consensus cannot be reached, they vote against each other. As a result, and according to Khumalo and Netswera (2020), mayors are often removed from office within a short period when coalition agreements are breached. In a country with more than 540 parties listed on the ballot paper, coalitions are likely to give rise to ideological differences.

The authors believe that lack of adequate institutional capacity, poor financial management, corruption, coalition governments, lack of accountability, and political instability are the causes of these problems. This chapter aims to unearth the drivers and critical reflections of coalition governments in South Africa's 30-year democratic history. This is prompted by the fact that coalition governments have, over the last few years, given rise to poor governance and adequate service delivery in some parts of South Africa, especially since 2016. This is pivotal given the sense (especially since 2016) that coalition governments have become a new phenomenon in South Africa's political and administrative interface. This is given the fact that (1) the changing dynamics in South Africa's political landscape, (2) voter behavior, (3) the increase in political parties contesting elections, (4) ethical leadership and governance from the ruling ANC and (5) the slight and continuous decline of the ANC (Mlambo and Thusi, 2023). Hence, as South Africa gears for the general elections of the 29th of May 2024, at a time when the ANC seems to be losing its grip on power, one may deduce that we can expect to see an increase in the number of coalition governments being formed from 2024 to 2029.

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