



South Africa Post-Election Review Policy Series POLICY BRIEF NUMBER 9

Accountability and Representation – A Reshaping of the Political Landscape

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The analysis presents the details of how the shifting party fortunes resulting from South Africa's Election 2024, paired with the formation of a coalition government, opened opportunities for greater representation and accountability in government. The research notes the ANC's retention of a strong minority party standing, which is linked to extensive ongoing state control. The ANC led the coalition formation process, extended party-political representation and incorporated into government most of the parties that won parliamentary representation, yet it also limited power-sharing. The national coalition government operates amid minimal transparency and proscribed accountability; the provincial coalition governments remain to show their accountability colours. Early indications are that there is much space to advance accountability and deepen representative democracy.

This policy brief records the hope that South Africa's 2024 coalitions moment and its extended levels of party-political representation carry seeds of greater accountability, and hence more responsiveness and effectiveness in service delivery and addressing citizen needs. To this end, the brief cautions that the newly opened spaces cannot be taken for granted. Coalitions, representation and accountability constitute uncharted territory in South Africa and parties, civil society organisations and the scholarly community need to claim coalition ownership and shape this new phase in South African politics through activism and advocacy that target government practice and its associated political culture.

BACKGROUND

Using the focus on representation and accountability, the research for this policy brief maps the unfolding South African interregnum of change from one-party dominance and liberation movement majoritarianism within a multiparty democracy, to the politics of national and provincial coalition government. The national coalition is also known as the Government of National Unity (GNU). The research explores the link between the election results, coalition formation and the representation in the governing coalition of 10 out of 18 political parties represented in Parliament, the bulk being small and minor parties. In addition, Build One South Africa (BOSA, not a GNU member) and Rise Mzansi (in GNU but not in Cabinet) chair two important parliamentary committees. The research records details of the national and three provincial coalition governments, noting the divergent iterations at the provincial level and the ongoing contests of coalition ownership and constitution.

In the aftermath of Election 2024, the South African political system thus experienced a broadening of representation of parties in the executive arm of government, both nationally and provincially. Previously at a national level and in the provinces of Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Northern Cape, it was just the African National Congress (ANC) in power. Post-election KwaZulu-Natal has a majority coalition government of four parties – the ANC, Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), Democratic Alliance (DA) and National Freedom Party (NFP). In Gauteng, a

minority coalition of four parties rule – ANC, Patriotic Alliance (PA), IFP and Rise Mzansi, probably to be supported by the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) when governance requires majority votes. The ANC in the Northern Cape requires a minimal top-up to achieve a majority and entered a confidence-and-supply style coalition government with the Freedom Front Plus (FF+) and the PA. The notable exclusions from the GNU are the EFF and the uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) party; over time both had split off from the ANC. They contest the coalition government, striving to tilt the ANC towards an alternative 'radical economic transformation' (RET) governing coalition.

The coalition configurations predispose the government to be not just more inclusive in representation and transparency, but also more accountable. Yet, heightened transparency and accountability may be neutralised by the ANC's familiarity with the governance terrain and its embeddedness in the state's policymaking and governance processes. The odds remain stacked in favour of continuity in content and process. Action will be required to change the formulaic coalition government into substantive improvements in policy content and implementation. The continuous strength of the ANC and the fact that it sees the current coalition period as a time of ANC recovery before the resumption of full power in 2029, reveal its inclination to act as a continuous outright majority party, without bringing in enhanced accountability.

POLICY ALTERNATIVES

The tentative changes that the South African polity has been undergoing in the wake of Election 2024 will not automatically translate into improved accountability. Concerted action and advocacy are necessary.

The ANC as the biggest (lead) party in the coalition needs to make it clear that it accepts coalitions as a possible longer-term governance option. Its constituency will be reminded of the election outcomes and the associated interdependence of partner parties. The deliberations and decisions of the government must be in the public domain, in details that reveal the inner operations of the GNU.

The message must be that coalitions are measures to get accountable, developmental governance and not contingency steps for party political advantage. The policy recommendations here regarding representation and accountability are in the sphere of advising on behavioural change by political parties and government. It bears on the different uses of political cultural norms regarding how to relate and respond to citizens and party constituencies. There are often no legal limitations on the desired alternative behaviours. The alternative behaviours, such as those in this modest set of policy recommendations, will be driven by the norms of responsiveness and transparency.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for the coalition government and associated political parties

- Overall, coalition governments nationally and provincially need to bring in a stronger focus on transparency and accountability, both on substantive and procedural policy.
- The government needs to approach the new coalition government for what it is – a coalition government, which needs to be informed by the best policy alternatives that the parties can collect, plus new alternatives – all focussed on responsiveness to need, while linked to the policy priorities that were settled in the Statement of Intent.
- Political responsibility needs to be heightened and treatment of the civil service as a cotton-wooled reservoir of votes needs to be ended. Performance should be measured with immediate effect in terms of realised outcomes rather than tick-box exercises to record statements of intent, events and steps in general processes.
- All public statements of good intent must be accompanied by listings of specific deliverables and dates. The Statement of Intent needs to be elaborated to capture such further details.
- The coalition conflict regulation-resolution mechanism needs to be particularised and linked to explicit, publicly-known processes. This is part of recognising that the contest of ideas and processes is a healthy part of accountable coalition governance. The centralisation of much of these processes in the hands of the President is not conducive to longer-term constructive coalition praxis.
- There must be heightened transparency regarding the debates and deliberations of the coalition cabinet and the provincial executive committees. Healthy coalition governance will be advanced if parties are released from the current situation of a secretive GNU entity and are empowered to keep their constituents fully informed of government progress and problems.
- Top-level government leaders rather than their spokespersons and junior ministers need to assume direct responsibility for public briefings held, at a minimum, every month. Current national government practice is to have media briefings and statements following Cabinet meetings. These are opaque and do not embrace transparency and accountability.
- All political parties in the GNU must constitute joint and/or individual platforms, possibly in the form of monthly parliamentary podcasts or YouTube broadcasts, to inform their constituents, and the South African citizenry in general, of all matters of progress across all government departments, to cover the full lifespan of the current coalition government.

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