

# ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPRESENTATION IN SOUTH AFRICA'S 2024 ELECTIONS

## *A Reshaping of the Political Landscape*

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South Africa's 2024 national government coalition deal, the so-called Government of National Unity (GNU), has been characterised as an inclusive government in that it incorporates a range of political parties, ideologies and perspectives. It brings together parties that are willing to cooperate in governance, share power and perhaps extend their individual party prospects. In many respects it embodies broader representation, more transparency, and brings in prospects for heightened accountability. Yet, early practice in the short-term aftermath of the conception of the GNU also raised important questions not just about the exact character, depth and sustainability of these advances, but also about the consequences of non-participation by the parties associated with the Radical Economic Transformation (RET) faction of the ANC.

The outcome of South Africa's 2024 elections saw the ANC lose its outright majority nationally and in three of the nine provinces. For the second time in South Africa's three decades of parliamentary democracy it became necessary to form a national coalition government – the 'GNU'. This was a voluntary political act of building a majority by extending party political participation; it contrasted with the 1994 coalition experience, which had been a constitutionally mandated act of transitional reconciliation that included the three largest parties.

The paper analyses this transitional period in South Africa's post-apartheid political evolution, and specifically this early period of post-ANC hegemonic rule with a view to understanding the notions of party representation and accountability in the 2024 context. The three decades of uninterrupted African National Congress (ANC) governance at national level, from 1994 to 2024, had been synonymous with de facto ANC one-party dominance within a system of competitive, multiparty democracy that is entrenched through constitutionalism. The elections of 2024 opened up a new party political landscape.

Given the ANC's antecedent, uninterrupted three decades of literally all-round power, there has been much fusion between party and state. Come the

moment of party political transition following the 2024 elections there would be no guaranteed and rapid transition in state and government. At the end of these three decades of mostly exclusive ANC rule, there was also widespread evidence of the fragility of public institutions, of parallel systems of de facto governance that challenged notions of the rule of law and formal institutions of government. These contexts were an essential aspect of the parties' handling of the 2024 transition. There was a rapid transition to multi-party, cooperative, coalition government representing over 70% of South Africa's participating electorate; at the governance level there was a continuation of entrenched government processes and plans; and at the state bureaucratic level there were high levels of continuity short of the appointment of a new and more inclusive executive, and small bands of advisors and other aides that accompanied the high level executives.

At the popular level and supplementing the election's lowered levels of voter participation, populism and xenophobia increased, matching the declining levels of public trust in state institutions and processes (see Afrobarometer 2023). South Africa faced a polycrisis that includes the intractable problems of unemployment; urbanisation, migration and homelessness; deindustrialisation and a lack of substantive economic growth; along with growing lawlessness and gender-based-violence. These problems were accompanied by high levels of decay in public infrastructure. The coalition parties had a massive set of tasks – and representation, transparency and accountability will help define their success and the credibility which they forfeit or accumulate.

Using the focus of representation and accountability, the paper thus assesses the interregnum of changing from one-party dominance and liberation movement majoritarianism to the politics of national and provincial coalitions and coalition government. It reflects on the ways in which party representation and accountability impact the 2024 transition to coalitions. It records the hope that the moment may carry the seeds of greater responsiveness and effectiveness in service delivery and addressing citizen needs. It documents and reviews this period in South African politics focusing on links between the election result, coalition formation and the representation of 10 out of 18 political parties (the bulk being small and minor) in the coalition government executive.

The analysis deals with both national and the three provincial coalition governments. It details how the ANC's decline opened the opportunity for greater representation and accountability, while noting the ANC's ongoing resistance and efforts to minimise incorporation of new coalition partners into high-level government. This was manifested in, among others, the coalition negotiation process, the allocation of executive portfolios, and the willingness (or not) to reinvent government substantially.

The paper is based on the author's multi-year study of electoral politics, the ANC (Booyesen 2011; 2015; 2021), and policy and governance in the era of political

democracy in South Africa. It incorporates insights from her recent research on unfolding coalition politics and governance in South Africa (Booyesen 2024c; Booyesen 2021; Booyesen et al. 2024).

## REPRESENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

### *South Africa's 2024 Conjunction and Promise of Change*

Evidence suggests that higher levels of representation, which combine with the opportunities for citizen participation, will help hold government and state agencies or frontline providers accountable, and that these processes have sound prospects of positive impact on outcomes (Devarajan, Khemani & Walton 2011). Devarajan et al. (2011, p. 182) add the proviso of the political actors' orientation that provides essential leveraging:

We have argued that there is a potential role for civil society action in these contexts. The most important domain for greater accountability is via power and politics. If politicians, and especially leaders, do not have the incentives to deliver on development, putting extra pressure on bureaucratic state agencies is likely to have limited, or local effects. When the political leadership has some commitment to development, civil society may have a role to play in how internal state mechanisms work, including in front-line interactions.

Through its six national elections in the democratic period until 2024, South Africa had maintained a de facto system of ANC one-party dominance within a multiparty democracy. Throughout this period, accountability has been ineffectual (see, for example, Ijeoma & Sambumbu 2013; Munzhedzi 2016; Sindelo & Cronjé 2024). Then, for the first time in South Africa's 30-year history of constitutionally mandated multiparty democracy (Constitution of the RSA, 1996), in the seventh set of general elections of 2024, the ANC lost its outright national majority. The ANC accepted the 2024 election result (Ramaphosa 2024a), was reasonably well prepared for the eventuality (see Haffajee 2024) and promptly entered into coalition negotiations and agreements to establish a majority national coalition government in the form of the GNU (see also Shoba et al. 2 June 2024). These steps were the likely entry points into a post-ANC-dominance epoch. Moving forward, there would be greater, more inclusive representation; this may very well help leverage greater accountability (inclusive of corruption-free or corruption-reduced governance, and responsiveness to citizen need and actual delivery); but accountability was not guaranteed.

In assessing these interrelated, conditional prospects, it is useful to consider the connotations attached to the concepts of representation and accountability, especially accountability. Transparency and openness become key values of accountability (see Gumede 2021). Bovens, Goodin and Schillemans (2014, also cited in Gumede 2021, p. 14) point out that accountability requires more than documents such as citizen charters and protocols for implementing processes of, for example, quality control systems and benchmarks. In their own right, these do not constitute accountability – they need supplementation through a forum (possibly external) that exercises powers of sanction. Han and Demircioglu (2018, pp. 68-75) highlight the centrality of politics and power in mediating accountability. Yet, and as evident in the argument of Thakur (2020), accountability denotes that public representatives and officials will personally *assume responsibility* for their actions (or inactions); mere reporting, accounting, or nominal sanction is insufficient. As Gumede (2021) highlights, this could be what the drafters of the Constitution of South Africa (section 1(d), 1996) envisioned through their inclusion of the term ‘responsiveness’.

Accountability is also not fully constituted by participation, and perhaps even by responsiveness – as is evident in the greater inclusion of political parties in coalition government, and the processes of representative deliberation that may result. Transparency does not equate with accountability; for example, the mere publication of a report, or adoption of a declaration – or Statement of Intent (2024) such as in coalition practice in South Africa – is no guarantee of accountability. In South Africa, in addition, the new coalition executive, in as far as it may elicit enhanced accountability, stands against the background of existing institutions of accountability, such as the Public Protector, Chapter Nine institutions, and courts that are designed to hold government departments and their individual role-players accountable for public services. Institutional checks and balances to control the actions of government are essential. Yet these institutions and their processes have had partial effects. As Gumede (2021) notes, ‘... if these institutions are packed with incompetent and politically connected staff, they are also unable to play their constitutional role and therefore undermine state capacity’.

Furthermore, the processes for accountability in South Africa are often obfuscated through diversion into opaque internal party processes. The party political processes are used to provide buffers between accountability and sanction, and the public processes tend to be moderated or neutralised. It will be important to monitor the extent to which South Africa’s system of coalition government with its extended levels of representation will be able to extract undiluted accountability. The paper addresses this question from the perspective of the early coalition government aftermath of the 2024 elections.

## PARTY POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

In 2024 an unabated proliferation of political parties contested the elections. This enhanced competitiveness (see EISA 2024), but also held negative consequences. The considerable number of party political contestants extended representation yet contributed to vote fragmentation. South Africa's local government elections of 2016 and 2021 (see MISTRA 2021), and the national-provincial elections of 2019 set the groundwork for the 2024 trend of large numbers of parties registering and paying their participation deposits to the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC). Of the 52 parties contesting 2024's national elections, 18 achieved representation and kept their deposits.

The party political compulsion to contest contradicted the decline in participation by individual voters (see select papers in this collection about the decline in voter turnout), and helped forge fragmentation. Vote fragmentation is linked to both the electoral system of proportional representation (PR) and the rise of coalition government, which is known to encourage political parties to enter the ring (see Skibba 2024). Of the 18 successful parties (see Table 1), 13 parties achieved one, two or three seats each, namely GOOD, Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC), United Africans Transformation (UAT) – one seat each; African Transformation Movement (ATM), Al Jama-ah, Build One South Africa (BOSA), National Coloured Congress (NCC) and Rise Mzansi – two seats each; and the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) and United Democratic Movement (UDM) – three seats each. The Freedom Front plus (FF+) and ActionSA won six each; and the Patriotic Alliance (PA) nine. Diversity of party representation hence also came with limited support.

The flip side of this proliferation of contesting parties was that many entered the race as inexperienced, poorly resourced and relatively unorganised participants. There was great inequality in skill and resources between the bigger and smaller, and established and new, participants. Results nevertheless showed that popular traction – in for example for uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) and the PA – substituted for existing funding and established, conventional party structures.

The admission of independent candidates into the 2024 elections further reinforced the fragmentation of representation. Despite prominent levels of public discourse and court action to enable independent participation alongside political parties, only a handful of independent candidates enlisted. No independents won seats, neither nationally nor in any of the five provinces where they participated (Head 2024).

A key explanation for the high number of party contestants in South African elections was the major political influence small parties had been gaining in municipal coalition politics, especially since 2016 (see MISTRA 2024). These parties

bargained for high office-holding and influence in decision-making. A culture of king-making took hold where small parties held the balance of power. Due to their disproportionate roles, the proposal to introduce a threshold for representation in municipal councils gained traction and was included in draft legislation to regulate local-level coalitions (Department of Cooperative Governance 2024), but there were no legal constraints at the time of the elections.

### *ANC's Ceding of Majorities Allowed for More Inclusive Representation*

The change in the party political landscape built on the decline of the ANC. Not only was there more space for opposition parties to enter the legislative institutions, but the coalition government opened opportunities for opposition parties to enter executive government.

The regression in ANC status unfolded over multiple elections, mostly since 2004. The details in Table 1 show the decline from 2019 to 2024, which indicates that the ANC might have lost its outright majority even without the rise of the MK party. This would probably have amounted to a modest shortfall below 50%, which the ANC might have been able to supplement through cooperation with a handful of small parties. The public opinion polls done by agencies such as Ipsos (2024) and MarkData (2024) in the run-up to the 2024 elections confirmed the scope of these support gaps.

The advent of the MK party, however, pushed the ANC into a severe deficit. It forced the ANC to include either the Democratic Alliance (DA) (see Mbalula 2024a) or the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in its coalition plans (see also Malema 2024). The ANC did not see MK as an option (Mbalula 2024b). The EFF plus one minor party would also have fitted the numerical bill to gain an outright majority. However, the ANC was wary of the EFF's unpredictable municipal coalition behaviour, its pre-election policy preconditions, and its initial insistence on not cooperating with an ANC under the leadership of President Cyril Ramaphosa (see EFF 2024). The ANC was aware of the soothing effect that an alliance between the ANC and DA would have on a conservative investor community. The other small parties that would enter the GNU came largely without policy demands.

The ANC's national decline was manifested across the provinces (Booyesen 2024c), not only in the provinces where the ANC ceded its outright majorities (Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and the Northern Cape). Yet, the ANC's declines in the populous KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng pivoted the ANC's 2024 electoral collapse. Gauteng ANC support declined tangibly and MK in KZN annihilated the ANC, pushing it from 54% to 17% of the provincial vote. The space that opened for broader party representation was taken largely by MK. The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) regained support, but far less than had been anticipated before MK's

rise. The EFF in KZN suffered a reversal of its previous foothold, confirming convergence in the EFF-MK support bases.

**Table 1: Coalitions and Alliances in the National Assembly (June – October 2024): Government of National Unity, Progressive Caucus, and not aligned**

Parties in National Assembly	National seat count in 2019	National percentage support in 2024	Government of National Unity	Progressive Caucus	Not aligned
			Number of seats		
ANC	230	40.18	159		
DA	84	21.81	87		
MK	Registered 2023	14.58		58	
EFF	44	9.52		39	
IFP	14	3.85	17		
PA	Did not participate	2.06	9		
FF+	10	1.36	6		
ActionSA	Established 2020	1.2			6
ACDP	4	0.6			3
UDM	2	0.49	3		
Rise Mzansi	Founded 2023	0.42	2		
BOSA	Launched 2022	0.41			2
ATM	2	0.4		2	
Al Jama-ah	1	0.24	2		
NCC	Established 2020	0.23		2	
PAC	1	0.23	1		
UAT	Registered 2023	0.22		1	
GOOD	2	0.18	1		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>400</b>		<b>287</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>71.75</b>	<b>25.5</b>	<b>2.75</b>

Notes: This table was last updated on 10 October 2024. In-table acronyms not explained in text: ATM: African Transformation Movement; ACDP: African Christian Democratic Party; NCC: National Coloured Congress; PAC: Pan Africanist Congress of Azania; UAT: United Africans Transformation; UDM: United Democratic Movement

Source: Booysen's compilation, based on data from <https://results.elections.org.za/home/downloads/npe-results>

In the Northern Cape, the ANC ceded its outright majority and entered into agreements with the Freedom Front Plus (FF+) and PA, hence also extending opportunities for former opposition parties to enter government. The ANC's three strongest provinces, Limpopo, Eastern Cape and North West still showed substantial majorities for the ANC. However, not only had these majorities been declining, but they were anchored in reduced turnout rates. This meant that the ANC paid a price in not getting larger numbers in overall support, which would have helped it to maintain national vote numbers and proportions. Mpumalanga and the Free State, former bulwark provinces for the ANC, still registered outright majorities; but the ANC's edge over the opposition parties dwindled.

### *Approaches to Coalition Formation to Extend Participation and Build Majorities*

An intensive period of negotiations, spanning roughly two weeks, undergirded the formation of South Africa's 2024 coalition government (Booyesen 2024a; Boonzaaier & Masungwini 2024). Internally, the ANC worked to counter resistance against whether the ANC had to form a coalition government instead of trying to run a minority government; and, if a coalition initiative were to be the choice, which opposition parties would be suitable ANC government partners.

The ANC's approach was one of calculated inclusivity. It aimed at parties with support targets different from the ANC's, arguing that cooperation with the EFF would be detrimental to the ANC's future electoral prospects. Many in the ANC would have preferred that the ANC constitute a minority government (informant interview 14 June 2024). It could govern with the occasional support of several political parties, which may have congealed in confidence-and-supply arrangements (see also De Vos 2021). The ANC could have achieved this with occasional support on crucial measures such as the election of officials and passing budgets, but it preferred the stability and public support that a formally agreed coalition government could offer. There was also much public support for a coalition government (see SRF 2024; Marrian 2024). The DA moved from initial preference for a confidence-and-supply arrangement to commitment to a coalition deal (Merten 2024; Booyesen 2024a).

The ANC's internal divisions on the nature of the bailout it sought from smaller parties for the ANC in essence to retain power, as leading party in the emerging coalition government, leveraged the deliberations to form a coalition government. After the ANC's early, principled decision to work with the DA it had to find ways to counter internal resistance against coalescing with the DA. Hence, ANC secretary-general Fikile Mbalula denied that the ANC had formed a 'coalition' with the DA – the GNU became the chosen designation (Mbalula, interview with Shoba et al. 16 June 2024):



There is no DA-ANC coalition, it's finding expression in a GNU... Six million people want the ANC to lead and survive. They want us to serve the national democratic revolution, including our allies. There is no issue like... we've got a deal with the DA.

The ANC used GNU inclusivity of multiple small and minor parties to minimise perceptions of (and internal resistance to) a deal with the DA. The broad, multi-party GNU stake-holding became an ANC instrument to publicise its resistance to DA cabinet aspirations and the conduct of coalitions. In relation to the executive, the bolstered ranks of deputy ministers would also help accommodate many ANC leaders, thereby building endorsement of its 'not-a-coalition' GNU executive. ANC-DA haggling on the allocation of cabinet portfolios, both in numbers and domains, propelled the negotiation process (Booyesen 2024b) and ensured that the ANC could flag its dismissal of some DA demands. The DA accepted the inclusive 'GNU' approach.

#### *Inclusivity and Composition of the Coalition National Executive*

The two-week negotiations culminated in parties (mainly the ANC, DA and IFP) signing the Statement of Intent (2024) on 14 June 2024, and then electing the president and National Assembly office-bearers, followed by the finalisation and inauguration of the cabinet. The ANC took the lead; the composition reflected its approach of retaining control and capturing portfolios central to ANC identity and national power. A select number of sufficiently important portfolios went to the GNU partners.

Eventual numerical representation of parties in cabinet diverged from proportionality, and confirmed that the ANC remained largely in charge, despite electoral losses and the give-and-take of negotiations. The DA had hardened its negotiation attitude when the ANC refused to sacrifice certain positions and offer better proportionality (see Ferreira & Mzangwe 28 June 2024). At one point it had added claims for either the deputy presidency or a ministry in the Presidency of South Africa. The addition of micro parties to the GNU executive exacerbated this disproportionality.

The announcement of cabinet on 30 June 2024 reduced tensions pertaining to character of the coalition government. New cabinet portfolios were added, mostly by splitting existing portfolios. Nine of the ten parties in the GNU were included in the executive – either in the 32-member cabinet, or in the ranks of 43 deputy ministers. The ANC held a total of 20 of these 32 cabinet positions, including all portfolios in the economic cluster and in the Presidency, and International Relations, and the DA had six, the IFP two, the PA one, GOOD one, the PAC one,

and FF+ one. The ANC took two-thirds of the deputy ministerial positions. The DA accepted deputy ministries in six departments.

The ANC designated the coalition government arrangement an open-door GNU, rather than in essence a coalition with the DA and IFP; the open door guaranteed more, higher positions to the micro-parties. The ANC encouraged broad inclusion, saying: 'The ANC once again takes this opportunity to invite political parties who resolved to define themselves outside this effort to reconsider and join the GNU' (ANC 17 June 2024). Several small parties heeded the call, probably lured by the possibility of cabinet posts.

Besides the process of including a high number of parties in the coalition government – 10 of the 18 in Parliament – it is significant that the parties in the executive represented over 70% of the electorate that voted (see Table 1). While the ANC and DA as the two biggest parties represent just over 60% of the voting electorate, it is possible that the ANC and the range of small GNU parties could also constitute a majority should parties like the 'non-aligned' ActionSA and/or the ACDP assist. The ANC at national level also had a third alternative: aligning with the EFF and a micro party or two. This would be in line with the Gauteng ANC approach, and would heighten pressure on the national ANC accordingly.

The composition of South Africa's executive thus revealed much about the ANC's strategy to retain power despite extending party political participation following the election result. The balance of power between the political parties in the executive tilted in favour of the ANC. The cabinet reflected the co-option of opposition parties, rather than the outcome of substantive power-sharing where no party enjoyed definitive control on its own. From its controlled negotiation process the ANC gained an overwhelming dispensation of retaining power, although it would have to sacrifice some of its old ways and risk more transparency and accountability (see Booysen 2024b). Yet, it had a guaranteed majority. It proclaimed, as in the July 2024 Cabinet report-back to Parliament, that it was simply operating on the basis of the sound work of the (previous) sixth ANC administration.

In the process of constituting the relatively inclusive government executive, several small and micro-parties moved into the GNU and cabinet on the basis of their modest election results; others gained powerful positions chairing parliamentary committees. They were useful to the ANC, which could use their inclusion into the GNU executive and parliamentary committee leadership to counter pushback from the broader ANC community against the ANC's GNU association with the DA. This grouping included trade union association the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and the South African Communist Party (SACP).

### *Diffusion of the Coalition Agreement to the Provinces*

The absence of synchrony in South Africa's transition from one-party dominance to coalitions was evident in the varied interpretations of what coalition government entails. The differences became even more pronounced in the formation of coalition governments in the three coalition provinces of Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Northern Cape.

Only KwaZulu-Natal approximated the formula of the national coalition, as envisaged in the SOI (2024). The province determined a power-sharing dispensation in which the IFP, DA, ANC and NFP shared in the provincial portfolios. The legislature's seat division following the election was: MK 37, IFP 15, ANC 14, DA 11, EFF 2 and the NFP 1, with the coalition totalling 41 of the 80 seats. The KZN premier (Thami Ntuli, IFP) was elected, and the NFP with its one seat made it onto the provincial executive council. The KZN coalition deal came through just hours before the election of parliamentary office-bearers and the president of South Africa, signalling that the national coalition deal would materialise.

Following the 2024 elections, Gauteng was the last of the provincial coalition deals to be finalised, and the GNU formula was not sustained. The executive arrangements followed *after* the DA had helped elect Lesufi as ANC premier, when it was still anticipated that the SOI style agreement would find traction in Gauteng. Gauteng chairperson and subsequently premier, Panyaza Lesufi, refused to share executive portfolios proportionately or approximately proportional with the DA, instead offering it just a few minor portfolios which the DA refused to accept. It had insisted on three out of ten MEC positions (the ANC-DA support ratio in the legislature being 34.76 to 27.44%). Lesufi announced a minority coalition; the ANC shared power with three minor parties, the PA (two legislature seats), and IFP and Rise Mzansi (one seat each). The four coalition parties' seat total in the legislature was 32 out of 80 (the ANC contributed 28). Lesufi had obtained undertakings from the EFF to offer confidence-and-supply support when outright majorities were required. Earlier, the ANC had been close to sealing a formal power-sharing deal with the EFF.

In the Northern Cape the ANC was one seat short of an outright majority. It entered a confidence-and-supply arrangement with the FF+, through which it retained full provincial executive power. It signed in the PA for additional assurance of its provincial majority. The FF+ had one legislature seat and the PA three. The trade-off was that the FF+ would help elect the ANC's Zamani Saul as premier. In exchange, the FF+ gained recognition for the white Afrikaner enclave Orania's 'self-sufficiency' – to care for its own management, free of obligation to use services from the faltering Thembelihle local municipality. The FF+ also

took on the chairpersonship of the oversight committee on local government (see Stone 30 June 2024).

These divergent provincial coalitions reveal the extent to which provincial specificities altered the national SOI agreement (2024, article 22). The three provinces all had broadened representation of political parties and their constituencies; yet there were many exclusions and much divergence from the national model, which enjoyed continuous legitimation through official government and presidential narratives. Beyond the set of governing coalitions, the exclusions included the EFF and MK, both awake to opportunities that could let them access the new porous coalitions core of South African politics.

### ACCOUNTABILITY DERIVED FROM BROADER REPRESENTATION

The South African citizenry craves higher levels of representation of interests and accountability from their government. This has been evident in, among others, the declining levels of trust in politicians and public institutions (Krönke & Cumanzala 2024); shrinking vote loyalty to political parties; public outcries against corruption and malfeasance in governance; ongoing insistence that perpetrators must face consequences; and the public's welcoming of the formation of South Africa's GNU-type coalition government (see SRF 2024).

The immediate expectation in the aftermath of instituting this coalition government in June-July 2024 was that the relative inclusivity of the formation – presented in the details above – would also lead to greater transparency of the processes of decision making, policy implementation in the state institutions, and in extracting responsiveness and accounting to the citizens and voters that gave the mandate to this supermajority group of government actors. This section explores altered prospects for accountability in the new phase in South African politics.

#### *GNU Agreement, Convergence and Template for Accountability*

In taking the decision to embark on an inclusive coalition government, the leading parties were informed by public opinion poll trends that affirmed elevated levels of support for a coalition government. For example, the Social Research Foundation (2024) found that around 55% of a survey of ANC and DA voters support a GNU very strongly; another 20% was somewhat positive about it. The question was how they would feel if President Cyril Ramaphosa were to constitute a grand coalition of parties that agreed to share national power and cooperate to deliver to the people through a single policy programme. Only 10% would find such a government very or somewhat undesirable. Such findings (along with lack of viable alternatives), helped motivate the ANC and DA.

South Africa's 2024 GNU coalition model is evolving continuously. Components up to October 2024 included:

- On 6 June 2024, following an ANC NEC meeting, ANC President Ramaphosa announced that the party was inviting all political parties to join negotiations to establish a GNU;
- The adoption of the Statement of Intent (SOI) on 14 June 2024, intensely negotiated between the ANC and DA, and others, was first endorsed by the IFP, and adopted without query by the smaller coalition parties. The SOI outlined the principles and the minimum programme of priorities upon which the GNU was founded: the decision-making procedures (dispute resolution structures and mechanisms for communication and coordination were not specified); the GNU committed to focusing on nine priorities, including economic growth, tackling poverty, correcting local government, elevating education skills and health care, building state capacity and a professional civil service, and strengthening both law enforcement and Parliament;
- The election and inauguration of the ANC's Ramaphosa as president of South Africa were on 14 June and 18 June, respectively;
- The negotiation of the Cabinet composition, especially in deliberations between the ANC and DA: Cabinet was announced on 30 June 2024;
- The Minister in the Presidency, Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, called new, non-ANC members of Cabinet to order, cautioning them that the GNU's choice of priorities would have to be aligned with the National Development Plan (NDP) of 2012;
- The Cabinet lekgotla of 13 to 14 July 2024 decided on a joint governance programme focusing on convergence around resuscitating the economy. The outcomes agreed upon at the Cabinet lekgotla would trickle down to all provincial and local governments;
- The new Cabinet members assumed office, taking modest new initiatives that fell within the ambit of existing legislation and government programmes;
- Agreement, in broad terms, to a coalition conflict resolution mechanism in September to October 2024, following a dispute about the Basic Education Laws Amendment Bill and Act; and
- The GNU coalition absorbed the fallout and divergence into non-GNU arrangements at the local level, including the case of Tshwane's mayorship, in October 2024.

### *Continuity and the ANC Assuming Coalition Power*

These developments concerning the outcome of the 2024 elections and the formation of South Africa's GNU coalition government indicate that a new political order was being established, that citizens wished to have such an order, and harboured expectations that effective representation and accountability would be rendered by the political parties and their leaders. The coalition government came with emphases on convergence in policy programmes (see Omar 2024). Inter-party agreements indicated reinvigorated attention to solving South Africa's protracted policy and governance problems (largely related to implementing and enforcing prevailing policies), and thus that there might be more representative, responsive and accountable government.

The ANC projected the 2024 government as an inclusive and consensus-seeking 'GNU party' in power (Ntshavheni, quoted in Goba 13 July 2024). It attempted to limit intra-GNU policy contestation, while preserving the ANC's ownership of the coalition government. As argued by the Dullah Omar Institute (2024, p. 42), the elections and their early aftermath displayed hallmarks of a 'stable, competitive constitutional democracy'. The SOI stressed acceptance and loyalty to the Constitution, and also, in particular, to the president's powers. Amid indications that South Africa's politics of the winner-takes-all was over, the election results were accepted in essence by all parties, and governments were formed in accordance with the constitutional provisions.

Yet, several counter-indicative issues were flagged, impacting either inadvertently or by design. There were strategic silences about inconvenient aspects of the GNU agreement, which detracted from the representativity of the new consensus and held implications for accountability. The ANC had forged a 'consensus', using among others the power it had accumulated across the state apparatuses, and had then limited or discouraged the expression of divergent opposition voices. It had made full use of the weakness of its coalition partners and fostered alternative back-up majorities that it could achieve with the host of small and micro coalition partners. The DA was a strong coalition partner but weak in that it needed the coalition with the ANC even more than the ANC needed it. The ANC kept an escape clause in its arsenal, an alternative National Assembly coalition with the EFF, in which case a majority would be achievable with minimal help from one or two micro parties (see Goba 14 June 2024).

The constraints on broadened representation in government and enhanced accountability of government to the citizens and voters of South Africa were evident at both the party political and state-bureaucratic levels.

At the *party political and party-government levels*, the ANC had no qualms about taking an early lead in establishing the coalition government. It

asserted continuity of state and governance at a time when the ANC lost its outright national majority, in May 2024. Convergence, consensus and renewed reconciliation were its messages. In cooperation with the other nine coalition parties, the ANC asserted the existence of good prospects for a constructive and accountable exercise of power. The GNU's apparent dedication to principles of nation-building, social cohesion, unity, non-racialism and non-sexism underscored the GNU aims of promoting inclusion and cooperation (DOI 2024). In the subsequent months – up to just beyond 100 days of the GNU – there were modest indications of problems being solved and de facto improved accountability being manifested. The changes, however, were rare, and progress slow.

Opposition parties, including the DA, remained weak and were reminded continuously of their subordinate positions in the GNU, being subject to the SOI and the ANC's interpretation of the constitutional prerogatives and the rights of the president. The ANC's early initiatives in directing the formulation of the SOI principles, and the modus operandi of the GNU through the deliberations of the June 2024 cabinet *lekgotla*, were supplemented later through public discourse on the rights and roles of participating parties by the Minister in the Presidency. These went a long way to ensuring that the ANC would retain most, if not almost all, of the policy and governance initiatives.

In the words of Malan (2024) this was due to effective strategy:

(T)he ANC is currently occupying a much stronger position than its electoral support justifies. Judging by events since 31 May in relation to government formation, we have clearly not entered a new era of benevolent cooperation and partnership... the ANC had engaged in a deft strategy of deceit in the manner of the fox... such outsmarting of an adversary is no cause for moral indignation, but for accolades for clever tactics.

Accountability was bolstered in that the inclusion of nine parties besides the ANC in the coalition forced the ANC-led civil service, especially at top level in the Presidency of South Africa, to integrate policy priorities of participating parties into government programmes. The ANC as a 40% party had stepped in, and was still close to twice the size of the second-largest party, the DA. The ANC held on tightly to state power, irrespective of the transition in party politics and the institution of coalition government, to the extent that the ANC's minority-level dominance of party political coalition initiatives and the government formation process defined the early-GNU period.

In this process, and at the *state-bureaucratic level*, the ANC benefitted from a widely supportive (although often also crippling unprofessional and ineffective)

civil service, which came equipped with planning instruments and processes. Much of the ANC's retention of state power throughout the time of ceding party political power was anchored in the Presidency of South Africa, where governance plans had been operationalised both before the elections and while the electoral transition was unfolding. The Presidency's planning unit adjusted planning instruments to reflect a consensual coalition core. This happened in great haste following the 2024 elections and helped create credibility and legitimacy for the Presidency of South Africa in the eyes of the GNU partners.

The multiparty thrust of the coalition government was paired with the government's Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP). In the months preceding the elections the bureaucrats in the Presidency had been updating this document in preparation for the seventh administration. In many respects it mirrored the ANC's election manifesto – the pre-election focus was still on translating the ANC manifesto into a government planning document. Post-election amendments reflected shared thrusts of the manifestos of all GNU parties, although the ANC stressed at the point of 100 days of GNU that it was the ANC manifesto that the GNU was implementing (Ramaphosa 14 October 2024). Nevertheless, the bureaucrats were said to be working on the basis of the GNU coalition's SOI, while claiming the guiding light of the National Development Plan (NDP) which had been supported by all parliamentary parties when it was launched in 2012 (see Omar 2024). Policy compliance was expected from the GNU partners; even the ANC as party issued a statement to 'clarify' the limited say the GNU partners would have (ANC 4 July 2024):

There is no agreement that exists of 'sealed mandates' where each Minister in the GNU pursues their sectarian party policies. Such an agreement would run counter to both the letter and spirit of the constitution, which all GNU party signatories have agreed to act on the basis of.

Ramaphosa (18 July 2024) outlined the priorities that emerged from the Cabinet lekgotla when he delivered the opening of Parliament address, stating that the GNU 'has resolved to dedicate the next five years to actions that will advance three strategic priorities: drive inclusive growth and job creation, reduce poverty and tackle the high cost of living, and build a capable, ethical and developmental state'.

In the subsequent months there were tentative advances in accountability through some improved scrutiny of contracts and tenders by especially the national departments under opposition party ministers. There was evidence of fresh perspectives on ineffective ways of implementing policies. The opportunities for corruption, capture and misappropriation arguably decreased. When problems became known, there were fewer prospects of these being swept under the carpet



or accountability being delayed and avoided. Although only a few incidences of malfeasance, tips of the icebergs, were revealed and addressed, they were potential signals to better future practice.

The 'BELA moment' – the GNU fallout regarding the Basic Education Laws Amendment Act – of September 2024 shed further light on the GNU government's unfolding processes of representation and accountability. Part of the controversy was in the Bill and Act spanning the sixth and seventh administrations. Shortly before the May election, the sixth Parliament had hastily adopted the BELA Bill, obligating the President to sign it into law unless he deemed it unconstitutional. Signing followed in September 2024. (Ramaphosa had signed a similarly controversial National Health Insurance Act just before the election.) The BELA Bill had been flagged as a contested matter in the GNU negotiations. Several GNU parties – the DA, FF+ and UDM – as well as the non-GNU ACDP and ActionSA were opposed to the Bill, but Ramaphosa proceeded, on the grounds of not having any choice. Wide-ranging mobilisation for better accountability followed, including by civil society groupings surrounding the core coalition parties. AfriForum and Solidarity bolstered the hand of the DA and FF+ in opposing the Act. Ramaphosa's compromise was to sign the Bill but suspend the implementation of the two clauses concerning mother tongue education and the powers of school governing bodies to control the language status of schools. Ramaphosa (16 September 2024) argued:

In taking this approach, we are seeking to establish a culture of openness and dialogue among the GNU parties. We are also drawing on a long history in South Africa of engagement among parties on matters on which they seem far apart.

The BELA moment hence demonstrated how conflicts push and alter the boundaries of the minimally defined coalition government arrangement. The incident highlighted the necessity of creating a coalition conflict resolution mechanism. The ANC agreed reluctantly and a 'process committee' style of mechanism saw the light. The ANC at first resisted affording the mechanism formal status, arguing that the mechanism could not usurp the power of the president. Subsequently, a clearing house dispute resolution mechanism, also referred to as a multiparty, issue-specific negotiating committee, took shape. Its limited powers were confirmed: its decisions would not override those of cabinet.

## CONCLUSION

The true test of whether heightened accountability in the new coalition order is both acceptable and sufficient will only emerge over time. There have been

significant yet still tentative advances. Sound templates emerged, but advances often remained concealed by political party contests. The ANC does not yet accept the GNU coalition as an unadulterated new epoch in South African politics. Up until at least November 2024, parties were approaching the coalition largely as a new weapon to recover or win future electoral support.

The parties involved in the 2024 coalition will continuously monitor their progress among the electorate. Citizens and voters will interpret and decide on the level of credibility and legitimacy that coalition involvement brings to individual parties. By-election results and public opinion polls are bound to be watched closely as key future moments approach. These include the ANC's mid-2027 National General Council meeting (a stock-taking event mid-way between its national elective conferences where future leadership candidates start emerging); the next round of local government elections scheduled for late 2026, possibly early 2027; and the ANC's next elective conference in December 2027. The DA's next elective federal congress in 2026 will also be monitored for ongoing coalition endorsement or rejection and possible withdrawal.

A large part of the ANC's motivation will be to use the GNU to rebuild and gain support from the constituencies that its GNU partners represent. Early indications also include that the ANC will go to great lengths to demonstrate distance from especially its main GNU partner, the DA, despite its assertion that the coalition represents a GNU party. This will be to appease internal factions and possibly retain credibility in the eyes of MK and EFF followers. In relation to the GNU, it may make some concessions on policy and be seen to act against its own deployees on the corruption front while it pursues its objective to recover and regain support. Issues of representation and accountability will be core determinants of possible ANC advances, but also of overall coalition credibility. Constructive GNU coalition behaviour will build reassurances of representation and accountability, while strategic party political priorities remain main drivers up until and after the national and provincial elections of 2029.

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