



Thabo Mbeki African School of Public and International Affairs

Community Engaged Scholarship: Electoral Dispute Resolution

Call for Book Chapters

Book Project 2025/26

**GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY IN THE TIME OF RAPID GEOPOLITICAL
SHIFTS: A SWOT ANALYSIS OF SOUTH AFRICA'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE**

Since 1994, constitutional democracy has widely been viewed as the best form of government in South Africa. Over the past thirty years of democracy, the African National Congress (ANC) has overwhelmingly dominated the political landscape in South Africa. However, increasingly, the overwhelming dominance (or what generally appeared to be a one-party state) has had unintended consequences. Firstly, it has culminated in constricted accountability, transparency, and disrespect for rule of law. Secondly, the overwhelming dominance along with complacency has wittingly (or unwittingly) hampered efficient and effective service delivery, leading to high rates of unemployment, corruption, poverty and social/economic inequality. Consequently, due to discernible trust deficit and widespread dissatisfaction with the ruling party characterised largely by a plethora of violent service delivery protests, decaying infrastructure and unprecedented levels of corruption, the 2024 national and provincial general elections unequivocally confirmed that there was no outright winner.



The ANC lost parliamentary majority. The ANC won less than 50% of the votes and in the process could not get an outright majority (more than 50% of seats) in Parliament's National Assembly and could not single-handedly form a government. This then led to a significant change in South Africa's political landscape. As a result, an all-encompassing, inclusive and highly consultative form of government had to be negotiated between the ANC and other political parties to produce a government.

This culminated in the signing of the Statement of Intent, which sought to provide a framework that would govern the partnership. However, despite the Statement of Intent which legally binds political parties involved, the ANC's pro-poor and transformation policies do not bode well with other Government of National Unity (GNU) partners, especially the Democratic Alliance (DA), Freedom Front Plus (VF+) and others. The ANC also does not believe that the policies (social and economic) of opposition parties would improve the lives of South Africans, especially the black majority. Thus, fierce contestation exists between the ANC and other GNU partners over the proposed National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill as well as the Basic Education Laws Amendment (BELA) Bill. These fierce contestations are not unique to South Africa, but they mirror the dismal performance of coalition governance in Africa. Therefore, although coalition government arrangements are formed after intensive consultations, it is not surprising that they are frequently plagued by internal challenges.



Moreover, what is more striking is that coalition government is not a new phenomenon in the South African context, although it has existed under different contexts. In fact, coalitions have been around for quite some time in many parts of the world particularly in the Scandinavian countries, and quite recently there is a proliferation in the developing world. South Africa once had this form of government after national general elections in 1994.

Despite different epochs in which coalition governments have existed, what remains largely apparent, regardless of the form and shape that each coalition takes, is that the conditions and the contexts within which coalitions are formed often differ markedly from one country to another. Therefore, there is no singular or uniform or universally accepted formula that can be used to improve the performance (or effectiveness) of coalition arrangements.

For example, coalitions are largely formed to respond to political crisis. The post-1994 GNU, for example, was essential to end political violence, political intolerance and ensure social cohesion and nation-building. However, irrespective of the country in which a coalition government is formed, what seems to be the common denominator is that coalitions often emanate from election results that could not produce an outright majority or winner. Whether coalitions epitomise an electoral democracy that has reached maturity, or an electoral democracy that is steadily waning remains highly debatable and quite frankly, it varies from one country to the other.

Considering the rapidly changing geopolitical shifts that are characterised by uncertainties, volatilities, vulnerabilities, and unpredictability, more academic scrutiny is thus required to demystify and underscore the resilience and efficacy of GNU arrangement as it is often beset by internal wrangles and cracks between its partners. Discernible disagreements amongst GNU partners have emerged not merely in relation to South Africa's foreign policy objectives and



priorities, but also in relation to bilateral, trilateral and multilateral relations that are pursued and forged in an effort to improve economic growth, and development.

The ANC and the DA have largely been at each other's throats particularly with regards to the strategic direction that South Africa-US relations should take. More discouragingly, attempts to find a common ground between GNU partners with regards to (1) Russia-Ukraine and (2) Israel-Palestine war have largely been in vain. Such attempts could not bear any fruits precisely because the bone of contention is that the GNU is typically a conceptual masterstroke or a smokescreen that is destined to advance and protect the politicians' interests. There are pertinent reasons why this is the case. Firstly, this suggests a lack of clearly defined policy and legislative frameworks that govern the GNU. Secondly, it suggests that although there is a proliferation of scholarly publications in this area, there is still a lacuna that exists in terms of finding viable policy and legal frameworks that would prevail over inherent ideological differences.

Considering these reasons along with rapidly increasing difference of opinions and divergence of ideas between the ANC and other GNU partners, vital questions continue to remain unanswered, and further academic scrutiny is urgently required:

- What needs to be done to salvage, repurpose or reimagine the GNU in the South African context, and in Africa at large?
- What GNU models/frameworks and approaches can be better suited for a highly unequal society like South Africa?
- Does the GNU represent political parties' interests or citizens' interests?
- What are Constitutional and legal prescripts that guide the GNU establishments?
- What are international best practices for forming and managing a GNU?



Taking these questions into consideration, the following sets of themes (or focus areas) become extremely important to underscore the nature and extent of coalition government within emerging/transitional (or young) democracies.

Thematic Lines/ Focus Areas

Challenges and Opportunities for Electoral democracy in Africa

Coalition government

Constitutional perspectives, Policy and legal frameworks undergirding the GNU

The impact and relevance of the GNU in a rapidly changing geopolitical, and geostrategic environment

Theories and models of forming coalition governments at local, provincial and national elections

Liberal democracy, Kleptocracy, Timocracy, Theocracy

Elite power versus citizen participation in decision-making

Pan African and Community Culture-based model of democracy

Changing global order or disorder

The role of political parties in forming the GNU

Political, economic and cultural contexts and conditions for forming a GNU



The role of GNU in shaping body politic

The Foreign Policy and National interest within the GNU arrangements

The GNU and its Impact on Social cohesion and nation building

GNU as a pathway to navigate the ideological differences

Political Party interests versus collective interests of GNU partners

The role of GNU in improving service delivery and/or building ethical developmental state

The Resilience and Efficacy of the GNU

Active Citizen and Community participation within the GNU context

Abstract guidelines

The abstract should have a title of the proposed chapter. The length of the abstract should be between 250 to 350 words, and it must clearly explain and highlight the focus of your chapter.

Chapter guidelines

The length of the chapter should be between 5000 to 7 000 words including references. The referencing style should be Harvard method. The line spacing should be 1.5. Words that are used in the text that are not written in English should be translated into English.



Submission deadlines/Review deadlines

- Receive abstracts: 20 November 2025
- Notification of acceptance or rejection: 28 November 2025
- Submission of full chapters: 20 February 2026
- Review of chapters: 27 February 2026 to 31 March 2026
- Feedback to the contributors: 15 April 2026

Contact persons

Editor: Prof. Mbekezeli Mkhize

Email address: mkhizmc@unis.ac.za

Co-editors: Ms Boikhutso Mfusi (mfusibf@unisa.ac.za) and Ms Mmatsie Mooki (mookism@unisa.ac.za)

Community Engagement Coordinator

Mr Nare Maleka

Email address: malekne@unisa.ac.za

References

Mafuno, T.N. (2024). “Uncertainties with the Government of National Unity in South Africa”, *Journal of Public Administration and Development Alternatives*, 9(3): pp: 164-176.



Sebola, M.P., and Tsheola, J.P. (2024). “South Africa’s 2024 GNU Conceptual Masterstroke or Protection of Presidential Incumbency?”, *Journal of Public Administration and Development Alternatives*, 9(1): pp: I-IX.

Tshishonga, N.S. (2024). *Governments of National Unity (GNU) as the Democratic Governance Model in Selected Africa Countries*, London: IGI Global.

Zweni, A., Faku, E.M., and Yan, B. (2025). “The Formation of a Government of National Unity in South Africa: Issues, Trends, and Prospects”, *Journal of Nation-building & Policy Studies (JoNPS)*, 9(1): pp: 145-164.