

The Rise of Multi-Party Governance in South Africa's Political Spectrum: An Age of Coalition and Party Alliances

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Abstract: *Since the dawn of democracy, South Africa's politics has been gradually moving from the prevalence of one-party dominance to a multi-party system. The failure of the ANC to maintain its political dominance gave rise to other political parties such as IFP, UDM, DA, COPE and EFF, just to mention the few. These parties have gained more support and as a result, coalition governance is likely to become permanent feature of South African politics. This was witnessed in 2016 local government elections where a number of municipalities and metros are co-governed by various political parties. The purpose of this paper is therefore to contextualise South Africa's political spectrum and locate the challenges and opportunities of coalition governance thereof. To this end, an attempt was made to present an analytical account on various types and theories of coalition and a detailed examination of multi-party political systems. From the analysis, the paper argues that multi-party governance plays a key role in shaping the agenda of the government and as well as in terms of suggesting policy alternatives. Though party coalitions are likely to become a permanent feature to South African politics, the paper however acknowledges that most opposition parties are still struggling with ideological identity, and lack of a clear vision on how to manage the affairs of the country. This if not addressed might impose a serious impediment to a multi-party government. Furthermore, the paper recommends a need for parties building coalition to take into cognisance the risks emanating from multi-party government.*

Keywords: Coalition, party-alliance, multi-partyism, politics, governance, South Africa

Introduction

South Africa held its first democratic elections in 1994, and since then, the country's political landscape has gradually moved from one-party dominance led by the ANC to a multi-party governance. This was witnessed in the 2016 local government elections where by number of municipalities and metros are co-governed by various political parties. Political scientists and scholars alike allude that the emergence of political parties like IFP, UDM, DA, COPE and EFF, signals the strengthening and maturity of South Africa's democracy, (Brooks, 2004; Kadima, 2006; Kadima & Owuor, 2012; Bogaards, 2013; & Kadima, 2014). These scholars advocate for a need for strong political parties that can compete in elections and keep the ruling party accountable and for democracy to remain healthy. It is partly against this backdrop that this paper seeks to provide a scholarly argument and insights on 'future' of coalition era within South African polity. It is, however, worth noting that despite a considerable number of researches made, various aspects of party coalitions are largely under studied, particularly in Africa. It is within this context that this paper aims to provide an analytical framework surrounding the theories, challenges and opportunities that may ascend when coalition and multi-party governments are formed particularly in emerging democracies like that of South Africa.

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Apart from the introduction, the paper begins by providing conceptual views of party coalitions and alliances. The next section discusses various theories of party coalition with the view to demonstrate the opportunities and challenges that arise when building party-coalitions and multi-party government. The fourth section outlines the types of party coalitions. Section five looks at South Africa's political journey since the first democratic elections in 1994. Lastly, section six presents the conclusion and recommendations based on the implications of theories, challenges and opportunities of party coalitions.

Conceptualisation of multi-partyism, coalitions and alliances

Given their similarities, these concepts, multi-party governance, coalition and party-alliances are often and generally used interchangeably, hence it is important to differentiate them in terms of their unique features. Bogaards, (2013) posits that multi-party governance is one of the primary channels for building accountable and responsive government by providing a link between ordinary citizens and their political representatives. Hence, he emphasises that multi-party governance represents broader political constituencies and integrate the society into the democratic process and form the basis of stable political coalitions and hence governments. Warwick (1994) also acknowledges the importance of a multi-party government as he argues that such political parties play an essential role in the functioning of every modern democracy. According to Warwick (1994), the notion of coalition governance as he argues that opposition parties provide a support that makes democracy to work effectively and that they mediate between the demands of the citizenry, thus aggregating the diverse demands of the electorate into coherent policy. In order to form a stable government, Kadima (2014) posits that it is necessary for a party to secure at least 51% of legislative seats. Where no single party enjoys an absolute majority, party coalitions are formed. This particularly true of proportional representation electoral systems when no party has an absolute majority. He further reiterates that where no single party enjoys an absolute majority in Parliament, party coalitions are formed. According to Kadima (2014), the idea behind forming the coalition is that it gives smaller parties an opportunity to make a difference and to hold the ruling party accountable for its actions. He further suggests that party-coalition should preserve diversity, a dynamic range of opinions and approaches. In addition, Brooks (2004) on the other hand argues that in a democratic states party coalition are formed with the purpose of securing enough votes or combining a sufficient number of parliamentary seats to govern. Brooks (2004) further points out that some party coalitions have undoubtedly contributed to consolidating countries' initial steps towards democracy and peace, through power-sharing arrangements, others have however been characterised with ideological identities and unprincipled. As indicated, party-coalitions and party-alliances are often used interchangeably. Wyatt (1999) cited in Kadima (2006) however proclaims that the distinction between an alliance and a coalition is that the former is formed before an election and the latter is built on the basis of the election outcomes. Established from Wyatt's (1999) argument, party alliance can therefore be defined as the coming together of political parties prior to elections in order to maximise their votes, whereas coalition refers to the agreement between political parties to work together in government on the basis of the election outcomes.

Theories of party coalitions and alliances

As cited in Kadima (2006), theories of party coalitions are essentially based on the experiences of European countries and have focused mainly on explaining the models of government forming parliamentary democracies. Therefore, it is worth inquiring their relevance and applicability to the African context and if they are relevant, in what ways might they need modification? *Office-driven theory* is based on the assumption that the main goal of the political parties is to access power. This theory is also known as the 'office-seeking' or 'office-oriented'. The advocates of these theories (Bazazel & Deemen, 1989; Warwick, 1994 & Kadima, 2006) argue that formation of government is a win-lose situation in which cabinet portfolios are the ultimate payoffs. The office-driven theory was later refined by Bazazel and Deemen (1989) who proclaim that the largest party in the legislature is central in coalition negotiations and cannot easily be excluded from office. This was termed the 'minimal winning hypotheses'. According to the minimal winning hypothesis, government coalitions should comprise of as few political parties as possible. De Swaan (1973) cited in Kadima (2006) equally advocates for the hypothesis, arguing that political parties will form a minimal winning coalition with the smallest ideological range, which then positions the hypothesis of compact minimum winning coalition.

Michael and Schofield (1990) also support the notion of a minimum winning theory, arguing that the prospective government seek to minimise the number of parties involved in the coalition because it is easier to reach consensus. Michael and Schofield (1990) further modified the minimum winning hypothesis by introducing the "*policy-oriented theory*". Firstly, they argue that if parties are not interested in the office but only in the implementation of their preferred policies, the party controlling the median legislator will become a kind of a policy dictator and will definitely get into government. Secondly, they proclaim that the ideological differences within political opposition may be as relevant to the viability of minority itself. Similarly, Axelrod (1970) cited in Warwick (1994) noted that the policy-oriented theory is based on the assumption that party coalitions are justified by policy goals. He however argues that ideologically diverse governments tend not to survive because of the greater policy compromises that coalition party members have to make. In the early 1980s, the role of size and ideological differences in explaining the formation of party coalitions led to the rise of "*institutional theories*" which emphasise the variety of institutional procedures in structuring the formation of coalitions and its survival (Baron, 1993). According to Baron (1993), this theory is a common practice in Scandinavian politics. Another hypothesis for coalition government is termed, "*formateur procedure*". The procedure is based on the assumption that the potential parties to form a multi-party government are given a choice to either accept or reject formateur proposals. This allows the multi-party government to influence the ideological composition of the coalition in its favour (Stevenson, 1997). From the preceding theories, it can be noted that these theories have some shortfalls because they assume that political parties behave unitarily and that they don't differ when it comes to strategic decision making. The other issue relates to the ideological differences of parties forming coalition as this may cause challenges when it comes to policy making. The figure below further outlines some of the opportunities and challenges of party-coalitions:

Table 1: Opportunities and challenges of Party coalitions

<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Challenges</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By combining forces and resources with others, parties can increase their influence and accomplish goals they could not achieve on their own. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To find a common ground with partners, each party must to some extent compromise on its own priorities, principles and ideology.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parties can broaden their appeal and increase their vote share by combining forces with others. This may create an opportunity to secure legislative seats to form a government and achieve their specific political goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parties may lose some control over decision-making and may find it difficult to maintain a distinct profile that distinguishes them from their coalition partners.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The public may see coalition-building as an admirable effort to consider other points of view and seek compromise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to consult and reach agreement among coalition partners can make government decision-making more complex and slower.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coalition parties can learn from each other and thus strengthening their individual parties based on those experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor communication between individual parties on coalition goals, objectives and benefits can sometimes fuel tensions and cause divisions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coalition can provide opportunities to broaden participation in government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The public may feel that party leaders have abandoned their principles by coalescing with other parties .

Source: The National Democratic Institute (NDI) (2015).

Notwithstanding, the challenges and opportunities of building party coalitions, the NDI (2015) identified the following weaknesses of political parties in transitional countries;

- Political parties are often poorly institutionalised, with weak policy capacity
- They are organisationally thin, coming to life only at election time.
- They often lack a coherent ideology.
- They often fail to stand for any particular policy agenda.
- They often fail to ensure disciplined collective action in Parliament.

Another challenge is the process of succession of leaders within party coalition. Certain parties might impose their own preferred candidates' political party driven agendas not for the interest of the entire nation. These challenges might seem few, however, their ramifications might have serious implications on policy making and actions taken by the multi-party government. In addition, there is a general consensus that trust is an important element and precondition for building party coalition. The National Democratic Institute further developed the four main pillars which need to be part of the arrangements that coalition partners discuss and agree upon.

Firstly, *communication*, party leaders must communicate with their members and supporters to the objectives of the coalition. Leaders who regularly monitor how coalition is affecting their individual

parties and how it is being perceived by their supporters are likely to take remedial actions that may be needed to address the issues and discontent of its members. Partners should have a clear agreement on how decisions in coalition are taken. Depending on the type of coalition, a coordinated public outreach program may be necessary to inform the public about the goals and accomplishments of coalition (NDI, 2015). Secondly, *consultation*, a successful coalition-building requires individual parties to make effort to seek and understand each other's points of view. This can help set the stage for consensus and compromise. Even when consensus and compromise are not possible, having a clear idea of each partner's priorities and interests can be helpful in managing the expectations of all parties involved in a coalition (NDI, 2015).

Thirdly, *consensus*: Consensus-building involves finding a common ground among parties involved in coalition. When consensus has been reached, all partners are see their views reflected in the final outcome. The more areas of consensus that coalition partners can find, the stronger their partnership will be. However, consensus-building often requires significant time and effort. Moreover, it may not be possible for coalition partners to reach consensus on every single issue, compromises will then be required (NDI, 2015). And lastly, *compromise*: The ultimately objective of compromising should be to create win-win situation among the various parties involved in coalition. Decisions reached by the group should involve concessions from each individual party (NDI, 2015). In short, these four pillar serves a guideline for parties building coalition. It is therefore imperative for parties building coalitions to take into cognisance of the discussed, the challenges and opportunities and mitigate their risks thereof. This would also help the coalition party to achieve a common goal.

Typologies of party coalitions

It worth noting that the below discussed typologies of coalitions are mainly based in European electoral systems. It is, therefore, necessary to test their relevance and applicability in African context. This would serve as a guideline to African democracies on the type of coalition which best suit their political system.

Electoral Alliances: The main aim of an electoral is to combine the resources of two or more parties to improve the electoral outcomes for the members of the alliance. This may involve uniting behind common candidates or agreeing not to compete against each other in elections (Schonhardt, 2014). According to Schonhardt (2014), the ultimate goal of this type of alliance is to win election by attaining majority in the legislature and to form the next government. For instance, Kadima and Oduor (2012), shows that in 2002 Kenya's election, opposition leaders combined their votes to defeat the Kenya African National Union (KANU). Fourteen parties together with the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) coalesced into the National Alliance Party of Kenya (NAK) and reached an agreement to form a coalition called the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC). Each member party signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) detailing their agreement (Kadima & Oduor, 2012).

Coalition Governments: According to Jaffrelot (2014), coalition governments usually occur when no single political party wins a clear majority in the parliament. The largest party in the parliament reaches agreement with other parties to form a cabinet. Based on the agreement, the cabinet consists of

representatives from different member parties. In India, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) have governed India for the three decades, (Jaffrelot, 2014). Dagenborg (2014) shows that in Norway, the Conservative party, the Progress Party, the Christian Democratic Party and the Liberal Party reached an agreement to form a coalition government.

Grand Coalitions: This occurs when a country's main political parties unite in a coalition government. Coalition between these parties can be difficult given the traditional rivalry between them (Barry, 2014). In addition, Sanner (2013) argues that grand coalitions may be formed during moments of national political crisis. In Germany, Sanner (2013) noted that between 1966 and 1969 Social Democrats and Christian Democratic Union (CDU) came together to form a government and constituted 95% of the seats in Parliament.

Legislative Coalitions: Ruin (2000) noted that this type of coalition involves the agreement to pursue specific legislative goals without a division of cabinet or executive responsibilities. In Mexico, the Institutional Revolutionary Party, the National Action Party and the Democratic Revolution reached an agreement for a common legislative agenda. The agreement would become known as the Pact for Mexico (*Pacto pro Mexico*) (O'Day, 2004). Lastly, as discussed from the preceding types of coalition, coalitions can take many forms. Political parties have a wide range of reasons and objectives of forming a coalition. Some of these reason ranges from the electoral alliances where parties negotiate conditions to form the government to legislative reasons where party form a coalition to pursue a particular legislative framework. All these types of coalition are important, but each party will choose to build coalition on the basis of its objectives.

The ANC's election journey since 1994

In a democratic system like that of South Africa, political parties mobilize support of the voters from the general public. They do this by critiquing each and presenting alternative policies to that of the ruling party. This competition of ideas encourages each party to refine its own policies in order to win the hearts of voters. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa requires a candidate to win an absolute majority in order to be elected president of the country or premier of a province. In order to receive a majority of the votes and govern, coalitions of political parties are formed when no candidate has secured 51% or more, (Lodge 2004). Table 2 demonstrates the election outcomes for the ANC since 1994.

Table 2: The ANC election results since 1994

Year	% Votes	No. of votes	No. of Seats
1994	62.65	12 237 655	252
1999	66.35	10 601 330	266
2004	69,69	10 880 915	279
2009	65.9	11,650,748	264
2014	62.15	11,436,921	249
2016 (LGE)*	53.9		

LGE* Local Government Elections

Source: Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) (2016)

Since the first democratic elections in 1994, South African politics have been clearly characterised by the existence of one dominant party, and thus the ANC. From Table 2, it can be denoted that the ANC has enjoyed majority of votes since 1994. In 1994, the ANC won 62.5% which equates to 252 number of seats in a national assembly. The biggest victory of the ANC was in 2004 where the party won 69.69% resulting to 279 seats. However, since 2009, the party has suffered huge losses scoring only 65.9% in national elections. This perhaps owes to the general outcry of lack of service delivery, scourges of corruption, collapsing economy and lack of job creation which is usually blamed to ANC led government. Voters demonstrated anger and dissatisfaction for the ruling party as most of them opted to vote for other parties and others boycotting elections, and this was witnessed in 2016 local government election where the ruling party only scored 53.9% of votes, which is their worst ever since 1994. As a result, the ANC lost some of the major metros such Tshwane, Johannesburg and Nelson Mandela. This suggests that the ANC party is failing to maintain its dominance.

Though this paper intends not to make predictions for the future election outcomes, but by observing the current political dynamics, it can be safely said that the country is gradually moving towards multi-party governance. Hence the paper argues that party coalition is likely to become a permanent feature of South Africa's political landscape. Similarly, Friedman, (1999) points out that South Africa is formally a multiparty system in which one party is dominant and thus the ANC. He however noted that it is not a 'given' that the dominant party can rely on its continued dominance. Friedman, (1999) succinctly outlines that the issue of being able to retain dominance therefore acquires added importance. Under the circumstances in which continued dominance is not inevitable, Matlosa and Karume, (2004) recommend that, the dominant party must position itself strategically within the society and strategize against its opposition. Kadima (2014), however, argues that the absence of a credible opposition raises concerns over how to ensure that government remains accountable to its citizens. Though it is demonstrated that South Africa is moving towards multi-party governance, it is however important to acknowledge that other parties who are not yet exposed to governance might understand their political parties' role in governance.

Conclusion and recommendations

Though this paper intends not to make pessimistic predictions of future election outcomes particularly for the ANC, the 2016 local government elections were, however, an indication that party coalitions and multi-party governance are likely to become permanent features of South Africa's political system. The purpose of this paper was therefore to contextualise South Africa's political system and locate the theories, challenges and opportunities of coalition governance thereof. Various theories of party coalition and alliance were explored. As indicated, these theories are primarily based on the European context, therefore, their applicability and relevance in African politics, including South Africa might be difficult because of the country's diverse political and socio-economic aspects. Another challenge is the ideological differences of various political parties, and lack of a clear vision on how to manage the affairs of the country. This if not addressed might impose a serious threat to a coalition government. Apart from the identified challenges, the paper, however, suggests a need for a coalition as this ensures accountability and represents a broader political constituencies and integrate the society into the democratic process. Since multi-party governance is relatively new in South Africa's politics, there is need to broaden the understanding of political parties' role with respect to governance. This calls for the support political parties through workshops, training and capacity-building to redress deficiencies in their organization to ensure effective multi-party governance.

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