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## CONTEXTUALISATION OF STATE POWER, ELECTIONS AND COALITION GOVERNMENT

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To contextualise the study of coalition governments in literature, it is important to conduct a review on existing studies on the topic of multi-party governance. Reflections on the practice of coalition government in relation to origins, and global, continental and domestic contexts as solicited from literature will be covered in this section. From the outset, an attempt is made to elucidate the concept 'coalition government' as this study's primary phenomenon so that the associated contextual discourses can be properly understood. The starting point in engaging the conceptual discourse of coalition governments is to make sense of elections as a mechanism for the attainment of state power.

### Elections

Elections are defined as "a formal group decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual or multiple individuals to hold public office" (Encyclopaedia Britannica). In South Africa, elections follow a five-year cycle, with national and provincial elections held simultaneously and municipal elections held two years later. The electoral system is based on party-list proportional representation, which means that parties are represented in proportion to their electoral support. For municipal councils there is a mixed-member system in which wards elect individual councillors alongside those named from party lists. In elections of the National Assembly or parliament, every South African citizen who is 18 or older may vote, including (since the 2014 election) those residing outside South Africa. In elections of a provincial legislature or municipal council, only those residing within the province or municipality may vote. All elections are conducted by the Electoral Commission of South Africa – an election management body established under chapter nine of the South African Constitution.

In South Africa, elections are not only a constitutional mechanism for electing legislators, but are also the foundation on which our liberation struggle was built. It was only in 1994, following decades of a protracted struggle against the draconian apartheid regime,

that South Africans of all races could participate in general elections. The elections were also the first held with universal adult suffrage following decades of the exclusion of Black people and other persons of colour, as well as historically, Black men and women without franchise. And while the ANC won 62 percent of the vote, this was shy of the two-thirds majority needed to unilaterally amend the interim constitution, necessitating the formation of a Government of National Unity that would subsequently elect Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela as the country's first democratically elected president.

Elections, evidently, have always been about the contest for state power – the power to control the national assembly, provincial legislatures and municipal councils in order that ideas of the governing party, about how to architect a higher civilisation, could find expression.

## **The State as a Power**

The state is primarily a power. It possesses legal dominion over the population of a definite territory, and its legality is original rather than derived from another power that might dominate it. Other organisations within the state, such as municipalities, are legally the creatures of the state and possess the powers they exercise by delegation from the state. The state itself is distinguished by the fact that its powers are not imputed but are native to it. Hence it is the judge of its own legal competence, as well as of the legal competence of the corporations that it creates. The state is the arbiter over both its own legal powers and those of its subjects.

Many measures of state power have been defined in terms of the material capabilities of the state. For example, in the United States "constitutional law, police power is characterised as a salient form of state power. This power is defined as the capacity of the states to regulate behaviour and enforce order within their territory for the betterment of the health, safety, morals, and general welfare of their inhabitants" (Encyclopaedia Britannica). This power is exercised by the legislative and executive branches of the various states through the enactment and enforcement of laws.

Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci (quoted in Hyug Baeg, 1991) elaborates on this discourse, contending that state power is not only a function of material resources in the conventional sense of the word, but of hegemony. Gramsci contends that ideology plays a significant role in the creation of cultural hegemony, which becomes a means of bolstering the power of the nation-state. Hegemonic power by the state is thus maintained not only through the material image of power that is characterised by coercion and economic or physical force (violence), but also through the projection of consent. However, Snider (1987) argues that there are important differentials in the state's capacity to convert material resources into political power. This thus defines state