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## Assessing Local Government Elections in South Africa: Trends and Reflections on the Future

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The African National Congress (ANC) has been a dominant party since the dawn of democracy in 1994. This is confirmed by the elections results which has always supported the fact the ANC has been a dominant player in the body politic in South Africa. The dominance has been observed at national, provincial and local spheres of government. There have been signs of decline of the electoral support of the ANC but the real impact was felt in the 2016 local government elections. The 2016 local government elections brought the establishment of a coalition government in the four metropolitan councils in South Africa which are Tshwane, Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni and Nelson Mandela Bay. The loss of support by the ANC in these metropolitan councils, gave birth to the coalition governments which isolated the ANC from the governance of these metros. The Democratic Alliance (DA), the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), United Democratic Front (UDM) and Congress of the People (COPE) became the major players in the formation of these coalitions in the different metros. The 2021 local government elections further confirmed that the ANC is gradually losing support and more coalitions have been established including eThekweni Metro. This study analyses the establishment of coalitions in South Africa at local government level. The study further argues that the establishment of coalitions in South Africa is not based on an ideology, but on the common political opponent which is the ANC. The study further found that the voters are not involved in the establishment of coalitions as it is only done by the politicians without consulting the voters.

**Keywords:** Coalition governments, Politicians, Local government, Governance, Framework.

### Introduction

Coalition governments are generally a new concept in the South African body politic and in Africa generally. According to Oyugi (2006), Kadima (2014) and Resnick (2014), the theory and practice of coalition governments have their roots mainly in the experiences of the West European countries. Evidence in literature emphasises that coalition governments are the primary option in modern political set-up (Kadima, 2006, 2014; Booysen & Mubangisi, 2016). The 2016 local government elections became a watershed moment in the South African political landscape as they eroded the dominance of the ANC. This was also confirmed in the 2021 local government elections in which the trend

seems to be continuing. In the 2021 elections, the opposition parties, the Democratic Alliance (DA), Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), Congress of the People (COPE), United Democratic Movement (UDM), Action SA and the Patriotic Alliance made serious inroads in the traditional strongholds of the African National Congress (ANC). The IFP and the DA made a huge impact in KwaZulu-Natal in the 2021 local government elections. The decline in the ANC's electoral support has paved the way for coalitions to be established, which followed the 2016 trend in which most parties did not want to be in a coalition with the ANC. Parties could collaborate amongst each other, but none wanted to collaborate or work with the ANC though there were a few exceptions where the ANC collaborated with the Patriotic Alliance.

The study employs a qualitative approach as it allows the researcher to interview key informants with in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. Using this method provides diverse viewpoints that enlighten the researcher about the intricacies associated with the research problem. Officials in the city of Tshwane, politicians from the ANC, DA and EFF, students, political analysts and journalists were interviewed in order to provide data.

## **Defining Coalition Government**

A coalition government is a government which is formed by an agreement between two or more political parties. According to Gautam (2018), a coalition government has several political parties that cooperate to arrive at a unanimous decision, primarily to form a government or conceptualise different public policies. According to Kadima (2014), the coalition government is the association of at least two or more political parties working together in parliament or government based on election results. Parties arrange themselves in pursuit of a common goal. Coalition mainly happens where there is no outright winner in the elections.

The critical element of a coalition is the control of the state's executive arm, depending purposely and explicitly on the level of government. Schreiber (2018) reiterates that a coalition is primarily a post-elections activity which is meant to form a government based on the elections results.

The definition by Gautam (2018), Kadima (2014) and Schreiber (2018) suggests two primary issues that coalitions seek to achieve:

- A coalition government is a form of government in which political parties cooperate, reducing the dominance of any one party within that "coalition". The usual reason for this arrangement is that no party on its own can achieve a majority in the elections.
- A coalition government is formed when no single party secures a majority in the polls. In such a situation, two or more parties come together and form a coalition government.