



## Unity or Subterfuge? ANC's Coalition Conundrum in South African Politics

### Description

The South African general elections took place on the 29th of May 2024. These historic elections witnessed the decline of the African National Congress' (ANC) one party dominance over South Africa for the last 30 years. The ANC has maintained a parliamentary majority for the last three decades since the 1994 post-apartheid elections, although it has been steadily declining, with 62.65% of the vote in 1994 to 57.5% in 2019. However, the 2024 elections have proved to be very interesting as the ANC has lost its parliamentary majority with only 40.18% of the vote.

So, what does this mean for South Africa? The ANC must seek a coalition partner to achieve a majority in parliament for backing its presidential candidate and legislative agenda unless it decides to persist with a minority government.

This week has been the most interesting week in South African politics as citizens speculate and engage in conversations about the future of the South African government. The question on everyone's mind has been, who will the ANC get into a coalition with?

Conversations on social media have arisen on the potential of an ANC–DA coalition, which has been largely favoured by more than 40% of those surveyed by the Brenthurst Foundation. This is followed by 19.5% supporting an ANC–MK coalition, and only 9.5% supported an ANC–EFF coalition.

However, the ANC has been holding a series of meetings with other political parties in an effort to put together a Government of National Unity (GNU). The ANC's national executive committee (NEC) met on Thursday to finalize the members of its proposed GNU and outline its operational framework, setting the stage for further discussions with other political parties.

The ANC has until the first session of the new parliament, scheduled for Friday, June 14, to forge its new political alliances before lawmakers sit to choose a president,

who is expected to be from the ANC as the largest party.

But is this really a GNU or a measure to avoid any political backlash for whomever the ANC chooses to enter into a coalition with?

A GNU is not new in South Africa. Emerging from a brutal and extremely divisive apartheid context, political leaders sought to create political stability through a unity government after the 1994 elections. However, the 1994 unity government was a requirement of the interim constitution.

It needs to be highlighted that this cannot be accepted as a GNU. What is a GNU? It is not merely a coalition. A GNU is a broad coalition government consisting of representatives from multiple political parties, often including all major parties. This type of government is typically formed during times of national emergency, such as wars, economic crises, or significant political instability, to foster unity and ensure political stability

The primary goal of a GNU is to include various political factions in the governing process to create a sense of shared purpose and national solidarity. This means that opposition parties either join the government or their influence is minimized to enable the ruling coalition to function effectively without significant internal opposition.

An example of a GNU is the wartime coalition government formed in the UK during World War II under Winston Churchill, which included members from the Conservative, Labour, and Liberal parties. This kind of government usually aims to address immediate national challenges and is often temporary, intended to last only until the crisis is resolved.

In summary, a GNU is distinct from a regular coalition government in that it typically involves a more extensive range of political parties and is formed in response to a critical national need, emphasizing consensus and cooperation over partisan politics.

So, agreeably, President Cyril Ramaphosa's appeal for a "government of national unity" is misguided. It incorrectly presumes that the ANC's decline to 40% of the vote in the May 29 election signifies a national crisis that necessitates a unified national response. But on the other hand, is it merely a tactic to avoid entering into an explicit coalition with other parties to avoid any responsibility?

In the case where the ANC desires to enter into a coalition with the DA, instead of explicitly entering into this coalition because this would be a risky choice, it would mean their liberation movement entering into a deal with a party that, although it too has its roots in the anti-apartheid struggle, later subsumed former apartheid National Party members into its ranks. They would be deemed "sell-outs," and the Economic Freedom Fighters would ensure that this political moment is capitalized on.

In conclusion, the ANC's efforts to form a GNU instead of a straightforward coalition appear to be driven by political strategy rather than a true response to a national emergency. While this tactic may help the ANC navigate its current political challenges, it risks undermining the principle of a GNU, which is meant to transcend partisan interests for the country's greater good.

In my opinion, the ANC should focus on transparent and genuine coalition-building efforts. By engaging openly with potential partners and the public, the ANC can foster trust and demonstrate a commitment to democratic principles. South Africa's political landscape is evolving, and the ANC must adapt by prioritizing stability and inclusive governance over tactical maneuvers. This approach will not only benefit the ANC but also strengthen South Africa's democracy and political integrity in the long run.

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seemola007gmail-com

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