

COALITIONS AND ALLIANCES DEMARCATÉ CROSSROADS IN ANC TRAJECTORIES

By Susan Booysen

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A number of scenarios are being considered by analysts in light of the ANC's Electoral Conference in December. A primary concern is the future of the ANC. Are splits more likely as South Africa heads to elections in 2019? The writer gives us some answers by looking at what has happened to the ANC since it came to power.

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INTRODUCTION

This article uses the lens of alliances and coalitions as they materialised at the time of the elective conference to dissect the jagged curve of the ANC's fall from hegemony and ongoing electoral dominance. It analyses both ANC internal politics (including inter-factional cooperation and the Tripartite Alliance) and inter-party cooperation with and beyond the

ANC. This is in the context of how the conference electoral outcome will affect the ANC's likelihood of being re-elected in the national and provincial elections of 2019.

The central argument is that at a time when the ANC needed the ability to form a united, inter-factional alliance to defeat fragile but also potent inter-party alliances and coalitions, such an intra-ANC alliance appeared impossible. In Gramscian (1971) terms, the ANC is in an interregnum in which the old is dying and the new is yet to be born.

The rest of the article presents interpretations of both the series of alliances and coalitions that have been keeping the ANC in power, a stock-taking of the damage they have suffered in recent years, and the future in light of the concurrent disintegration and disfigurement of the alliances on which the ANC has relied.

CONCEPTUALISATION AND THE ANC'S PAST RELIANCE ON ALLIANCES AND COALITIONS

In the party political arena an alliance is designated as two or more political parties coming together prior to an

election with the aim of maximising their votes. Beyond party politics alliances in the political domain focus on maximising mutual interests. Coalitions concern more concrete cooperative actions, for example when political parties jointly exercise government power. Coalitions hence refer to political parties cooperating in government, or in a legislative body, on the basis of an election outcome. In all cases the parties or agencies involved hope to achieve common goals through a shared strategy (Kadima 2006; Booysen 2013).

The ANC is on familiar ground when it comes to alliances and coalitions: in the days of the *ancién* regime, the transition of the 1990s and in the time of multi-party democracy the ANC relied on these formations. They helped the ANC to ascend into and consolidate its power in government. The United Democratic Front (UDF) from the 1980s to early 1990s, for example, was a broad-based alliance between progressive internal political forces that dovetailed with the ANC in a de facto alliance. The ANC of the time itself was an alliance of ‘internals’, ‘exiles’ and ‘islanders’ that captured state power with the help of the labour movement, including the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu).

The ANC continued on a coalition path after 1994, by now largely on the new inter-party terrain. In terms of South Africa’s 1993 interim constitution the ANC, the National Party (NP) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) joined to form a Government of National Unity (GNU). The GNU alliance faded when the (by then) New National Party (NNP) voted to disband and its Members of Parliament were absorbed into the ANC. The ANC’s rise to its electoral high of 2004 was aided by its alliance with the NNP, even though large numbers of NNP supporters chose rather to fuse into the Democratic Alliance (DA).

Coalitions also aided the ANC in consolidating government power



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provincially. In KwaZulu-Natal it had a long-standing coalition with the IFP, until finally it eclipsed the IFP in 2009 with an outright provincial majority. In the Western Cape, the ANC won the 1999 elections with a plurality of 42% of the votes, but lost provincial control to the NNP and the DP after these two parties formed an alliance (of short duration) and then took over provincial government (see Kadima 2006: 70). In the wake of floor-crossing the ANC regained the province with the help of the NNP until 2009 when the DA took over through elections.

In the wake of the 2016 local government elections, coalitions and alliances again came to the foreground. By this time the pendulum had moved and it was the turn mostly of the main opposition parties to capture a range of hung municipalities by forming coalitions amongst themselves and with ‘community organisation parties’, which often had won a single ward in the municipality at stake. In a few instances the ANC managed to form coalitions (with the help of minor parties), but mostly it was the ANC that was being edged out of power, in processes that could potentially be replicated at provincial and national level come South Africa’s 2019 elections (see below).

ANC FACTIONAL SPLITS AT THRESHOLD OF RETAINING POWER

The ANC by 2017-18 was already affected adversely by a decade of intensely factional rule associated with Zuma’s incumbency. It followed in the wake of the Mbeki period’s comparatively modest factional rule, which had antagonised core ANC constituencies due to exclusion from ‘drinking at the trough’ and alienation due to Mbeki’s predilection for neoliberalism and state managerialism. The ANC’s house became too small for both factions: the Polokwane ANC election outcome fuelled the Congress of the People (Cope’s) split from the ANC.

In time the Zumaists established themselves as the ANC – dominant and determined to use their dominance to gain from incumbency. They became the frontline for protecting the personal excesses and manipulation of the party and political system effected by ANC president Zuma and the circles of lesser beneficiaries surrounding him. They remained loyal even in the face of knowing that not just multiple state institutions, but also the ANC, had suffered capture by their president and his associates (see Amabhungane 2017; Pauw 2017).

The ANC retained a buffer over opposition parties both at the time of the Cope split and the subsequent, post-2012 Mangaung split by the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). It could still let dissenters go without risking the ANC’s electoral majority. However, the ANC’s margin over the opposition was worn down with the EFF’s post-2012 growth (albeit in a humble 6-8% support band). It combined with two further factors to wear down the ANC’s margin over the collective of opposition parties.

The first was the incremental growth of the DA, which included modest inroads into the ANC’s base (at municipal ward level in 2016 it >>

amounted to around 2-3 percentage point shifts in typical ANC support areas). The second was a holding formation of previous ANC supporters, now unwilling to vote ANC, yet not migrating to an opposition party vote. This bloc abstained and thus dented the ANC's performance, while opposition (and especially the DA) mobilised high turnout from their supporters, and stabilised turnout rates in comparison with preceding elections.

National projections of the 2016 local election results were that the ANC's support was barely 56%. Several subsequent opinion polls showed that the ANC would risk losing its outright national majority should the party be led by Zuma or a close Zuma associate (like Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma). A politician in her own right, she had however been endorsed directly by Jacob Zuma and had not distanced herself from his transgressions. Multiple polls indicated extreme popular dissatisfaction with Zuma's rule: his endorsements as president of South Africa slipped relentlessly. For example, in August 2017 his approval rating stood at 18% of metropolitan South Africans (TNS-Kantor 2017).

Despite a statement by Ramaphosa that he would 'serve under any elected ANC leader' (in late 2017) the conditions were ripe for factional fallout, even a split reminiscent of Polokwane-Cope. But this time the ANC no longer enjoyed an electoral buffer. A split by Ramaphosa-ists could render the ANC short of an outright electoral majority nationally. Given the turn of public opinion in and beyond the ANC, the ANC would probably only win a post-split election should it suppress public opinion, manipulate or subjugate the media, get help from state security agencies, conduct ideological warfare (for example projecting domestic mobilisation and resistance as 'regime change influenced by the West'), and even manipulate the Electoral Commission and election results.



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Campaign success would also depend on the ANC mobilising a large, youthful new electorate to erode the EFF's existing and potential future base. It would have to present a pro-Zuma candidate as the saint of 'radical economic transformation'.

The EFF's electoral support is crucial to the new generation of opposition coalitions. In 2016-17 it often held the balance of power between the ANC and opposition parties. These new sets of coalitions – in the 2016 hung councils in metropolitan and smaller municipalities – were often fragile: in many instances one member's defection brought about a new majority. The coalitions were subject to manipulation, especially by the ANC that could mobilise the EFF, small community parties and some of the other micro-parties against persistent racism and socio-economic inequities, qualities that remained associated with, for example, the DA base.

DEMISE OF THE TRIPARTITE ALLIANCE

The once-powerful Tripartite Alliance between the ANC, South African Communist Party (SACP) and Cosatu had helped to sustain the ANC through a series of campaigns and elections. Much of ANC grassroots electioneering had been carried by Cosatu, but from 2013 on, through elections of 2014 and 2016, Cosatu as the backbone of ANC

campaigns faded and then vanished. The Zumaist ANC's intolerance of criticism of the ANC president contributed to this development. Conformity and loyalty superseded cutting-edge debate and frank analysis. Hence the historic tripartite forum, that once bolstered ANC hegemony, broke down.

Amongst the significant changes were the exiting of former general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, and the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) splitting from Cosatu. By 2017 the new Vavi-associated union federation, the South African Federation of Trade Unions (Saftu), was launched. In 2017 even the supposedly pro-Zuma remains of Cosatu stepped up increasingly to condemn corruption and state capture, and participated in #ZumaMustFall campaigns.

The Alliance decline was vivid on the side of the SACP too. Post-Polokwane, the SACP had been excited at the prospects of Zuma as the next vehicle through which the SACP would leave an ideological imprint. There was a near-complete turnaround in the Zuma-SACP relationship during the next decade. At first the SACP enjoyed high deployment in the state apparatuses, losing much of its autonomous identity. Then, in the period from approximately 2013 onward the relationship soured while the now-purged ANC Youth League and tri-province Premier League became Zuma's trusted avant garde. Many SACP members were marginalised as ANC branches prepared for the 2016 local election. Some paid with their lives for having aspired to roles in the new local government. By late 2017 the SACP reached the point of contesting a municipal by-election ward in Metsimaholo municipality in the Free State under its own banner. It threatened also to contest national elections.

By virtue of the SACP and Cosatu's presence in the Tripartite Alliance,



it was assumed that the ANC had a de facto left conscience. But by late 2017 the NEC described the SACP's Metsimaholo contestation as 'regrettable' (ANC 14 November 2017). It declared itself as committed to 'engaging the [SACP] on this matter' to ensure that the Alliance remains 'united and strong' but the Alliance was dysfunctional. The two partners that had been pillars of ANC hegemony had fallen away. The ANC's condonation and cover-up of corruption and capture had contributed to the fissure. However, the potential remained for the SACP and Cosatu to return to the ANC fold under

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non-Zuma leadership. Alternatively, it could bolster a next ANC split-off party should the ANC internal divisions escalate.

ANC AS TROUBLED ALLIANCE OF INTERNAL FACTIONS

The most important coalition in the life of the ANC of South Africa might very well be one that follows, potentially, in the aftermath of its 54th national conference, namely that of keeping its internal factions united in one party – if the two main factions find the common ground. The run-up to December 2017 saw multiple symptoms of intractable inter-faction hostility. It was about retaining power versus challenging for power of owning and controlling the ANC. The Zumaist faction remained dominant into the last meeting of the 2012-17 NEC in November 2017.

The Zumaist ANC strategy at this stage was firstly to perpetuate its control (and associated unity) of the ANC, and to use this to forestall a split. Precursors were the stalemates on removing President Zuma from power, on several occasions in party and state: from the ANC NEC of late October 2016

to the parliamentary motion of no confidence of August 2017. The threat by late 2017, however, was that an ANC under a Zumaist candidate (most obviously, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma) would fail to win the next national and some provincial elections. A Ramaphosa victory in conditions of entrenched Zumaist influence throughout the state (entrenchment of those with everything to lose in the face of incisive anti-corruption action) would be no walk in the park either. Pro-Zuma forces embedded in state structures could bring ongoing government destabilisation.

These future alternatives both suggest a stalemate situation, which is set to continue through the interregnum from the ANC conference to the 2019 national elections. A big question is whether ANC unity could prevail in the aftermath of the succession campaign: can there be space for both an anti-corruption faction and one that will by definition shelter outgoing President Zuma?

The ANC in this interregnum will face several crossroads where the factions' baggage and compromises could bring upheaval of party and state. The analogy of the post-Polokwane >>

period (that followed the hostile factional victory), along with political decay since, demarcate these moments in the year and a half from late 2017 to the election of 2019.

CONFERENCE OUTCOMES JUNCTURE

Fire the president of South Africa period: President Zuma, like Thabo Mbeki a decade earlier, is vulnerable in his position as president of South Africa, especially under an ANC-Ramaphosa victory. If pressure to axe President Zuma threatens to split the ANC under Ramaphosa, restraint is likely. If Zuma, however, uses presidential powers in his pre-December 2017 'presidential prerogative' and unaccountable style the axe will fall irrespective of risking an ANC split. If Zuma exercises restraint, efforts will focus more on proceeding piecemeal (possibly half-heartedly) against previous excesses and try and let the pending election campaign compensate. Under a Dlamini-Zuma-ANC ascendancy there would be an outright attempt to retain Zuma as SA president, and his will is likely to be incorporated into state action, inseparable from the programme of the new ANC president. The premise will be that the damage of continued Zuma influence could be neutralised through an election campaign.

Split-off period: Both ANC-presidential victory scenarios point to the first priority being the ANC's preservation through efforts to counter a factional split. Experiences with previous splits showed that split-off parties do not supersede the ANC, and are likely to face a future of either aligning with other opposition parties or with the ANC. Dismal prospects thus decrease but cannot forestall the possibility of a split. If unity fails and an NDZ-ANC prevails, current indications are that it will come short on instituting clean governance and fiscal responsibility. A broad alliance

of ANC dissenting factions (such as unforgiving Ramaphosa-ists, including stalwarts) might exit this ANC, form new support-building alliances across civil society and possibly with some opposition parties. They would associate with the 'original ANC values' and form a new ANC.

Campaign for Election 2019: If unity prevails, neither of the two main vying ANC factions will hand the ANC an easy election campaign. A campaign in which the Ramaphosa (CR) faction is dominant would benefit from a publicly credible leader steering the ANC, with the sense of ANC reinvention, renewal and a better ANC taking control. A CR campaign would nevertheless have to persuade voters that Zuma does not rule from the political grave, and that CR incumbents have the capacity to uproot corruption and state capture. A CR campaign would also have to persuade a sceptical electorate that it is in command of the Zumaist state security and information apparatuses, besides all the previously captured institutions. A Dlamini-Zuma (NDZ) campaign would have to show the difference between the new and old Zumas as presidential incumbents. Campaign credibility would hinge on action to correct the damages of the Jacob Zuma era. Given the unlikelihood of the NDZ campaign doing this, it would then depend on hitching itself to the big nationalistic-patriotic, anti-western, radical leading light thrust. These ideas have been central to the ANC's own ideological positioning, but were abused and distorted through the Gupta-Bell Pottinger efforts to create distraction from Zuma-related capture of party and state.

Many of the indicators of the future trajectory of the ANC – whether an internal alliance of factions will hold and bring in a new ANC, or if the ANC factions part ways and split the ANC, possibly into a minority status – emerged from the period of the 2016-17 presidential succession

campaign. The rules are fluid and acrimony and subterfuge ruled. All candidate weaknesses were exploited and all organisational and branch tactics exhausted. The Polokwane and Mangaung conferences had schooled the ANC actors.

CONCLUSION

The critical dual question for the ANC is therefore not just if its centre holds, but whether there are sufficient centripetal forces to entice ANC factions to compromise and cooperate, and to give credible content to such a process. This does not just depend on personal and political will, but on the factions' perception that the common core of the ANC is so compromised by the Zuma years that there is no longer an identifiable and defensible post-conference ANC. The glue might be in the knowledge that the ANC's final chance to reposition and reinvent presents itself in the interregnum between its party elective conference and the national election. Judged by the succession campaigns, however, one cannot assume such a consensus.

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