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# **Coalition Politics in Southern Africa**

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## **Introduction**

When this publication was first conceived, it was meant to provide answers to three different, albeit inter-connected questions. Firstly, the question of what are the political conditions that lead to the formation of coalitions, either at the level of political parties and/or within governments. Embedded within this question were several assumptions, especially the one that when countries coming out of conflicts form coalition governments they do it as an attempt to ensure collective action towards addressing issues of broader social, political and economic transformation, in other words, peacebuilding. Secondly, the question about how to offer a deeper understanding of the decisions that inspire some of the political actors to enter into a coalition. Thirdly, and related to the second, the question whether coalitions, at the level of political parties or government, have any positive contribution towards issues of effective governance, and sustainability of governments, thus enabling them to fulfil their mandates.

The questions posed above are unpacked by means of three articles, each of which focuses on a specific country case study, namely Lesotho, Mozambique and South Africa. The articles deal with the experiences, challenges, and intricacies of forming coalitions within these three countries, as well as the context under which such coalitions were created or attempted. Interestingly, while the contexts in these three countries may appear to be completely different, there are similar and related challenges that have been experienced by those political actors

who have attempted to forge coalitions. With regard to the outcomes in the three countries, however, the articles reflect differences on the basis of the choices made by the political actors.

The first article is entitled *The rise and fall of Lesotho's coalition governments*. It provides a contextual account of the processes that Lesotho has gone through in order to try and ensure that there is long-term stability, and effective governance when it comes to an elected government. What the article clearly demonstrates, is that certain decisions were made in the late 1990s to transform the country's electoral laws with the aim of solving what was then perceived to be the cause of government instability, that is, the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system. At that time, the political party contestations which negatively affected the stability of government, were perceived to be rooted in the country's electoral system. The amendments to the electoral laws gave hope that what was identified as a challenge would be confined to history. However, experience since then has proven otherwise. It should be recalled that the electoral law amendments created the possibility to prevent one party from wiping the electoral slate clean, by codifying into law, a need to have a coalition government, after each and every election. The hopes that these amendments would bring about stability, as the article shows, were dashed, given that most of the coalition governments that have been formed have in fact experienced instabilities in spite of these amendments to the country's electoral laws. The question posed by this article is, therefore, whether the challenges in Lesotho rested within the electoral laws or whether they were perhaps embedded in the country's political parties. Secondly, whether the cause of coalition government instability may be the political strategies and tactics deployed by competing parties which end up undermining the spirit and the letter of the amendments that were instituted back in the late 1990s.

The second article is entitled *Intricacies and Pitfalls of the Politics of Coalition in Mozambique*. It is an interesting reminder of the fact that in Mozambique several political actors have attempted to forge coalitions with the aim of obtaining political power. What is unique about

Mozambique, compared with the other two case studies, is that the efforts to forge coalitions were concentrated mostly within opposition parties, and primarily revolving around the main opposition party, the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO). Also of interest, and clearly detailed in the article, is the varying degrees of success and failure of these efforts by opposition parties to forge coalitions. For instance, the article provides an account of the many and varied efforts by opposition political parties to forge coalitions in order to contest an election, only to collapse even prior to these actors actually participating in the intended elections.

The third and last article is entitled *The Politics of Dominance and Survival: Coalition Politics in South Africa 1994–2018*. It traces and presents a solid overview of the various efforts by different political actors in South Africa to forge coalitions. In the context of a country coming out of a long period of apartheid rule, the negotiations in the early 1990s provided for the creation of a Government of National Unity (GNU). This article is able to craftily trace South Africa's foray into coalitions from that time. It is a fine reminder that the South African politics have always experienced some type of a coalition at all levels of government (national, provincial and local), from as early as 1994. This reminder is most relevant, given that the conversations that emerged in South Africa after the 2016 local government elections may have been mistakenly perceived to mean that it was for the first time that the country had to face up to a possible reality of having coalition governments. Concomitant to this, the outcomes of the same 2016 elections brought to the fore lively discussions and debates by different political parties in terms of who they would enter into a coalition or 'partner' with. Such debates occurred, for instance, when the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) decided to support the 'winning' opposition, in this case, the Democratic Alliance (DA) in all contested Metropolitan Councils. In these debates there were either criticism levelled at the EFF or support for the decision. However, this lively debate seems to have forgotten that it was not for the first time that two possibly ideologically and pragmatically opposed parties had entered into a coalition and/or partnership. As the article reminds us, the

death knell of the National Party (NP) was sounded when it entered into a coalition with its erstwhile enemy, the African National Congress (ANC) back in 2004. Additionally, the article makes an important contribution regarding how considerations for political survival of different political actors, seem to have driven some of the decisions made to forge coalitions in South Africa, as compared to, for instance, a common political agenda and/or programme.