

Cooperative government is key to a prosperous future for SA

The GNU is without doubt the most promising model of government the country has had because it keeps all the partners in check, it ensures stability and it brings a sense of both hope and urgency. By **William Gumede**

The most successful model of governance in Africa since the first African country became independent almost 150 years ago is coalition government. In Africa's postcolonial history, it has been the most consistent in delivering economic growth, jobs, stability and the rule of law while also tackling poverty.

Mauritius, for example, has had consistent success with coalition governments for the past three decades. Cape Verde has also had success moving from liberation dominance to multiparty dominance.

Even conflict-ridden African countries have been successful during times when they have had a government of national unity (GNU) or multiparty government. In Zimbabwe, the period of two years when it had a GNU was the most successful period in its post-independence history.

Looking outside the continent, Brazil was run by military governments for decades after World War 2, but the moment it moved to a coalition government it was able to leverage economic growth, stability and inclusivity to deliver the Brazilian "economic miracle".

Often these coalition governments are made up of a large number of parties and span the ideological spectrum, from far left to far right. Although coalitions are critical for diverse developing societies, they are also the best-run governments in the developing world. In fact, coalition or multiparty governance has been successful in more than 40 countries globally – from Germany and Finland to East Asia.

And there are different permutations of coalitions. In the post-war period, Japan had a non-traditional coalition government based on social pacts, where the governing party co-governed with business and labour.

Ireland also adopted this special form of coalition that brought together wider society in the social pact that delivered its "Celtic tiger" economy.

There are many who would disagree, but coalition government, not one-party government, is the ideal model for South Africa, considering its diverse population and divided history. No single party, race or ethnic community alone can successfully develop South Africa.

The country needs collaboration, and not just political party coalition, but a wider coalition, as seen in Japan and Ireland. A coalition-plus, so to speak, combining a political coalition – in our case, the GNU – with civil society, business and communities.

How can the GNU change SA?

First, for the country to genuinely prosper, it needs a realignment of its politics.

The current political parties are not fit for purpose to handle South Africa's diversity. Most of them, including many of the new ones formed after 1994, are based on the issues that define the apartheid past, not the present or the future.

There is a real opportunity for the current parties in the GNU to form the basis of a future long-term centrist coalition that can realign South Africa's politics to become much more attuned to the country's consti-

Another opportunity that the GNU offers is to entrench a culture of collaboration between the state, civil society and professionals to deliver public services. There have been many attempts in the post-1994 period to foster a social pact, a culture of collaboration. But it has not worked, as it was based in the past, on majority rule, rather than on equal co-governance.

Whether South Africa is able to achieve this will depend on how open the GNU partners are to bringing in business and civil society professionals to co-govern, particularly in critical state departments and entities.

The greatest impact of the GNU so far from a success point of view has been the sense of optimism it has ignited in the people of South Africa. This is gold: economic growth, job creation and poverty alleviation cannot

on any ideological policy they choose, because there is no pushback.

Generally, so far, the GNU is more responsive, accountable and transparent than the government was when it was ANC-dominant. The non-ANC parties in the GNU want to show the public and their supporters that they can deliver, that they are better.

And so, it is the competition in the GNU itself that is making the government more responsive, responsible, accountable and effective.

For the GNU to work, three things must happen: there must be consensus-based decision-making, all GNU partners must perform to keep their own votes, and all of them must hold each other accountable. Structurally, there is an outside political council where the GNU will take conflicts to be resolved so that it does not undermine the GNU itself.

There are a few potential risks to the GNU. The biggest

risk is a fallout in the ANC between pro- and anti-GNU groups. If an anti-GNU ANC president is elected in 2027 at the party's national election conference, it is likely that the GNU will collapse

tutional and democratic dispensation, and to the diversity of its society.

Second, the GNU could potentially become a new, pragmatic policy, pro-Constitution, pro-rule-of-law political centre that involves the social democratic wing of the ANC and the liberal social democratic wing of the DA, Rise Mzansi, and so on.

And third, the GNU offers the possibility of using South Africa's diversity to foster economic growth, a common prosperity and stability.

However, rather than seeing the country's diversity as the basis of its growth, many South Africans believe that one party, colour, ethnic group or ideology will deliver growth, prosperity, jobs and peace. But that is not the case.

One of the important principles underlying the GNU is consensus seeking. It is critical for South Africa to foster a culture of consensus seeking, as Nelson Mandela did, not only in its politics, but also in its wider society, to attain growth.

happen when a country is steeped in a culture of hopelessness.

With the GNU comes hope, a sense of fresh energy, new talent and more inclusiveness in government, which has had a positive ripple effect in business and investment sentiment. Individuals are also much more open to invest their businesses, savings and skills in the country.

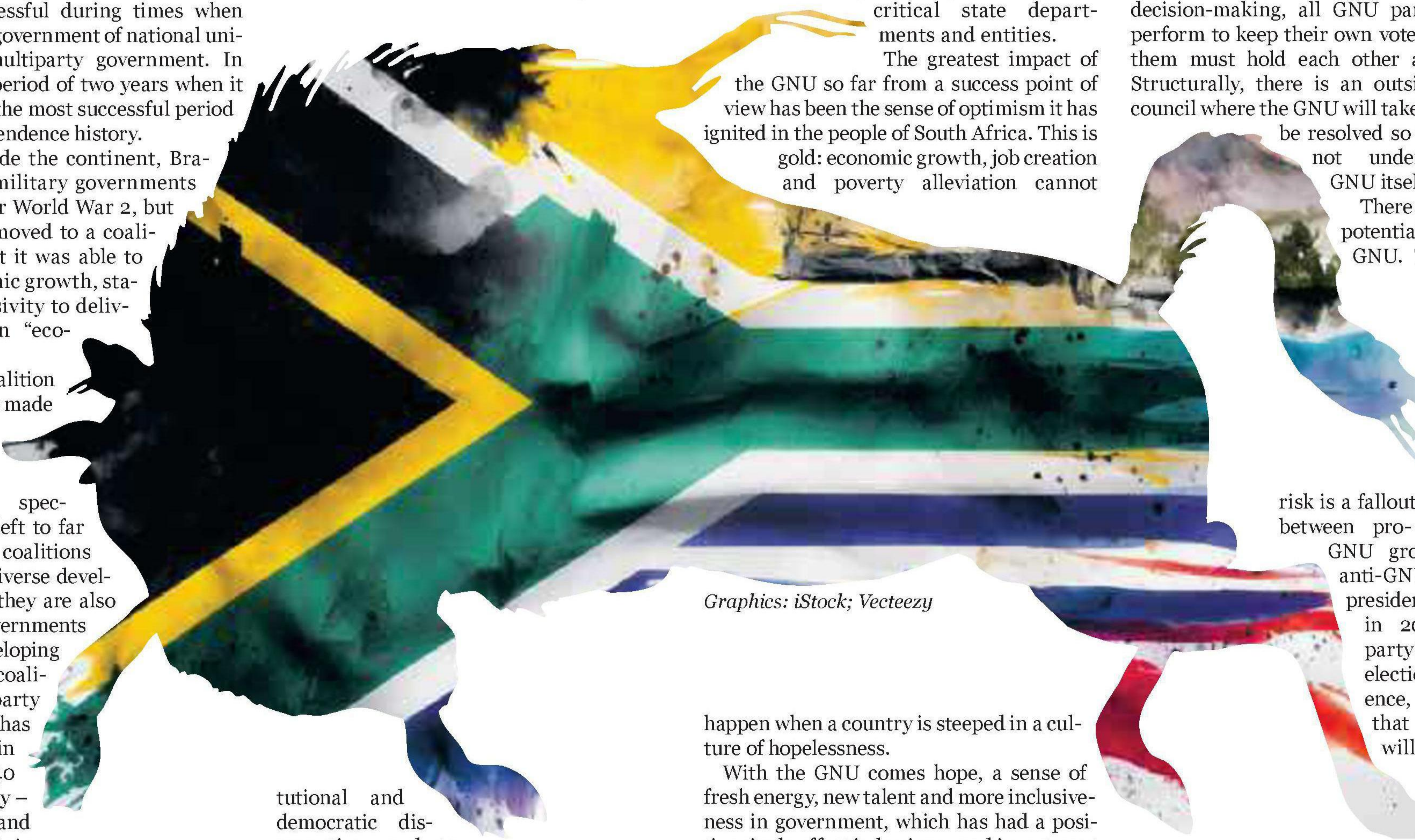
Sense of urgency

There is also a greater sense of urgency at the heart of government – an urgency not seen since Mandela came to power.

In the past majority government, there was a clear lack of urgency to deliver. A drawback of parties being dominant for decades is that a lack of accountability creeps in. Parties and leaders believe their supporters will always vote for them.

The potential outcome of this new urgency is that the country will see a slowdown in irrational, nonsensical, ideologically outdated policies that stand in the way of job creation and poverty reduction.

In a GNU based on consensus, all policies have to be stress tested. They need to be based on evidence and in the public interest, whereas majority governments can decide



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