



## INCLUSIVE SOCIETY INSTITUTE

### Op-ed

#### ***Voluntary Government of National Unity - an alternative to messy coalition government*** ***By Daryl Swanepoel***

If the latest polls are anything to go by, South Africa can expect the ruling ANC to dip below 50% for the first time since the advent of our democracy in 1994. In the latest IPSOS poll, in a medium voter turnout scenario, the ANC garners 44% support, the DA 20,9%, the EFF 11%, MKP 8,7%, the IFP 3,3% and all the other parties together, 12,1%. That being so, some form of cooperation between political parties will be required to form a government.

Should the election yield the results as anticipated in the IPSOS poll, one thing is certain: a Multi-Party Charter coalition will not be possible, nor any other non-ANC coalition without the support of the EFF and/or MKP. The maths show that should all parties other than the ANC, EFF and MKP stand together, they could cobble together only 36,3%.

There are therefore five potential coalitions that could be stitched together: An ANC, EFF and/or MKP coalition; an ANC/DA coalition; or a non-ANC coalition including the EFF and MKP; or a non-ANC coalition supported by the EFF and MKP without them participating in the coalition arrangements, only driven by the desire to keep the ANC out. The fifth possibility, being an outside chance of patching together an ANC-led coalition where they are joined by a myriad of ultra-small parties or a combination of smaller parties and one or two of the Multi-Party Charter parties breaking rank.

All of the above are problematic.

- A **populist** turn represented by an ANC/EFF/MKP coalition could lead to inflationary policies that scare off investors. Our economy can ill-afford such reckless experimentation.
- The DA will be reluctant to go into a **grand** ANC/DA coalition, since it would require them to go against their *'not with the ANC'* commitment to their supporters and their Multi-Party Charter partners, which down the line could cost them support.
- A **keep-the-ANC-out** coalition including the EFF and/or MKP is ideologically incohesive and therefore not sustainable.
- An **minority** opposition coalition supported by the EFF and MKP without their participating in the coalition government will also not be sustainable given the tail-wag-the-dog nature thereof. Put plainly, we will see the Johannesburg-Ekurhuleni-Tshwane municipal instability play out at the national level.
- A **fractured** coalition will be difficult to hold together with a combination of tail-wag-the-dog and kingmaker demands.

What complicates issues, is that in terms of section 51 (1) of the Constitution, the first sitting of Parliament must take place within 14 days of the election results being declared and at which sitting the President needs to be elected in terms of section 86 (1) of the Constitution. Parliament failed to timeously put legislation in place to properly govern coalition governance, and now we sit with the implication of these provisions, which are not conducive to a coalition regime.

The establishment of a coalition requires the coalition partners to negotiate a coalition agreement stipulating their agreed government programme, and they will also need to decide the structure of said coalition, that is the basis on which the Executive and Parliament will be organised, whether the coalition will be uniform in terms of national and provincial arrangements, and who from which party will be deployed into the positions that make up the National and Provincial Executives, Parliament and the Provincial Legislatures. For this time is needed lest the negotiations be rushed.

To rush negotiations of this magnitude is a disservice to the nation, especially given when the policy positions of the diametrically opposed parties require carefully crafted compromise and negotiations. It is when such negotiations are done under pressure that mistakes are made, and that principles are brushed aside for the convenience of power. The consequences for South Africa are simply too great.

The establishment of a left-wing populist government will subdue economic recovery, a fragile coalition will undermine service delivery, and marriage of convenience will weaken trust in politics to the detriment of democracy. The economic and service delivery challenges of our country are simply too great to play experimental games with.

There is another way.

As in 1994, when South Africa required politicians committed to the greater good - that is the nation above the party - in order to transition from the old to the new dispensation, the country is again in need of a fundamental transition. Today's transition requires the country to revitalize itself after years of state capture, economic decline, and social and infrastructure failure. The wrong mindset in 1994 would have been disastrous for the country; the wrong mindset today will set us back for decades to come. The solution then was a Government of National Unity (GNU); the solution today, the same, albeit voluntary in nature.

Whilst a Voluntary Government of National Unity reveals the same features of power-sharing that a coalition government would, the fragility of rushed and imposed coalition arrangements is eliminated. In a GNU, participating parties retain their identity, and they promote their own policy position. But they share power based on an agreed formula, thereby requiring them to negotiate government policy on an ongoing basis. A win for the inclusive decision-making as envisaged in the constitutional ethos of participatory democracy.

Such a model will allow any party with material support to participate in government without comprising their principles or going against the wishes of their supporters. If anything, it gives greater power to each vote cast. It does away with the need for coalition agreements and/or ideologically unsustainable arrangements, and/or power grab opportunism.

If one were to venture a proposed formula, the outcome of such where any party that obtains 10% or more of the vote at the national and/or provincial level, would, should the IPSOS poll prove correct, bring the ANC, DA, EFF, MKP, IFP, and possibly Action SA into play. The distribution of power at the national level should be based on the overall share of the national vote, and at the provincial level on the relative strengths of the parties that have obtained more than 10% in the particular province.

For the economy it would mean that a policy swing to the populist left could be tempered, inclusive policymaking strengthened and social cohesion advanced through the participation of a wider range of communities.

It gives power and meaning to our national motto: Unity in Diversity.

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