South Africa’s Dominant-Party System in Comparative Perspective

Pierre du Toit and Nicola de Jager

Abstract

This essay serves as an analysis of South Africa’s dominant-party system. We address three questions. First, what accounts for the sustained electoral dominance of the African National Congress (ANC) and what does the ANC’s current decline in voter support indicate? Second, what can we learn of the nature of South Africa’s dominant-party system in comparison to its southern African neighbor, Zimbabwe (an illiberal dominant-party system of the most malevolent kind)? The third question explores how the nature of the ANC’s dominance affects the quality of government in South Africa. We find that the implication of the decline in support for the ANC—that South Africa may be moving toward a more competitive political system—is potentially positive, as competition should encourage greater accountability and pressure to deliver. But also it is potentially negative. The ANC’s response and the resources on which it depends for power and for governing are key determinants of this trajectory. If the ANC embraces quality of government on the basis of impartiality, its material resources will be both sustainable and a benefit to society as whole. If, however, the ANC becomes conflated with the state in the minds of those deriving benefit from political appointments as well as material resources (as happened in Zimbabwe), South Africa will become vulnerable to radicalism and populism.

Keywords: South Africa, African National Congress (ANC), dominant-party system, Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF).

Dominant-party systems are those, in our view, in which one political party succeeds in winning at least four consecutive national elections, enabling it to
dominate the polity and policy making.¹ In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) won its fifth consecutive national election in 2014, with 62.2 percent of the vote, its lowest support level since the inauguration of democracy in 1994 (see table 1). According to data from the South African Institute of Race Relations, voter turnout was also at its lowest level.² In the 1994 elections, 86 percent of eligible voters actually went to the polls. South Africa’s 1994 elections were unique in that there was no prior registration requirement. Since then, turnout has declined at every election; in 2014, 73 percent of the registered voters cast ballots. These voters represented 59 percent of the eligible voters, at the same level as 2009, and marginally higher than in 2004 (57 percent).³

This essay presents an analysis of South Africa’s dominant-party system. We address three questions. First, what accounts for the sustained (yet marginally declining) electoral dominance of the ANC and can we anticipate such dominance to end in the middle to long term? Second, what can we learn of the nature of South Africa’s dominant-party system in comparison to its southern African neighbor, Zimbabwe?⁴ Analyzing South Africa’s dominant-party system on its own is interesting, but doing so comparatively with Zimbabwe provides deeper insights. These southern African neighbors share many similarities: they have (or had in the case of Zimbabwe) significant white settler communities; endured suppressive indigenous white minority rule; embarked on armed liberation struggles; transitioned into procedural democracies through negotiated settlements; and currently are governed by former liberation movements. Zimbabwe stands out as an illiberal dominant-party system of the most malevolent kind. What trajectory did it take to reach this state of governance and what lessons are there for South Africa? The third question explores how the nature of the ANC’s dominance affects the quality of government in South Africa.

³ Ibid.
⁴ We acknowledge that there are potentially many other developing countries that have, or have had, dominant-party systems that would provide interesting insights through comparative study with South Africa. We thus refer to our book, Friend or Foe? Dominant Party Systems in Southern Africa: Insights from the Developing World, in which we include comparisons with Botswana, Namibia (as well as Zimbabwe), India, Mexico, South Korea, and Taiwan. We have selected Zimbabwe for this essay, as it is South Africa’s southern African neighbor, with a similar history, but representing the worst case scenario, enabling us to address the question of whether its trajectory can be foreseen for South Africa.
Table 1. South African National Election Results, 1994-2014

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<tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>African National Congress (ANC)</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
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<td>66.35</td>
<td>69.69</td>
<td>65.90</td>
</tr>
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<td>252</td>
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<td>264</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Votes (millions)</td>
<td>12,238</td>
<td>10,601</td>
<td>10,881</td>
<td>11,651</td>
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<tr>
<td>Congress of the People (COPE)</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Votes (millions)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,311</td>
<td>.123</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democratic Alliance (DA) / Democratic Party (DP)</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>9.56</td>
<td>12.37</td>
<td>16.66</td>
</tr>
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<td>Seats</td>
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<td>38</td>
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<td>Votes (millions)</td>
<td>.338</td>
<td>1,527</td>
<td>1,931</td>
<td>2,946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Seats</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Votes (millions)</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>1,169</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>10.54</td>
<td>8.58</td>
<td>6.97</td>
<td>4.55</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>2,058</td>
<td>1,371</td>
<td>1,089</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Freedom Party (NFP)</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seats</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Votes (millions)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.289</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(New) National Party (NNP)</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>20.39</td>
<td>6.87</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seats</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Votes (millions)</td>
<td>3,984</td>
<td>1,098</td>
<td>.258</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total valid votes (millions)</td>
<td>19,533</td>
<td>15,977</td>
<td>15,613</td>
<td>17,681</td>
<td>18,402</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled by the authors.
Note: All parties are not listed, thus the totals do not tally.

Resources and Political Dominance

We use a resource approach to analyze party dominance, with a generous interpretation of what constitutes relevant resources. In the comparative study done in 2013, *Friend or Foe: Dominant Party Systems in Southern*

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5 This approach borrows from both the historical-sociological and the neo-institutionalist perspectives on the emergence of party systems. We find relevant those resources that make it possible for parties to have a shaping effect on the preferences of voters and on their beliefs about conceivable outcomes to elections, given the competitive arena established by the electoral rules of the game. The impact of these factors on party system emergence can be appreciated by considering the path-dependent effects over consecutive elections. See Carles Boix, “The Emergence of Parties and Party Systems,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 499-554.
Africa, we identified the following resources: historic events that serve as a source of symbolic imagery by which to mobilize popular support and gain the sustained support of a “historic block” of voters; culture, as a marker of in-group solidarity and a source of symbols to describe and represent social identity; charismatic leaders, often linked to a particular era, or historically significant events; constitutional rules that favor one party over others; power of appointment and patronage; and control over the distribution of material goods, whether public or private. In some instances, even material goods that result from loot and plunder can be considered. The resource approach that we employ underlines our understanding that dominance has less to do with the weakness of alternative political parties than it does with extensive access to resources through hyper incumbency advantages and the astute use of these resources. Though opposition in some dominant-party systems may be weak, for example in Botswana where opposition parties tend to be fairly disorganized and susceptible to fragmentation, we agree with de Jager and Meintjes that dominant-party systems are inclined to be perpetuated through an uneven playing field.

**Historic Events**

South Africa’s negotiated democratic transition away from the racial oligarchic apartheid regime was one of the signal events in the Third Wave of democratization. This transition has been widely applauded, and often has been described as a most unlikely case that achieved almost “miraculous” success, considering the extent of polarization within the country, according to many analysts at the time. The ANC emerged as the first democratically elected party in the country, and obviously claimed most of the success of the transition for themselves, as the party of liberation.

**Charismatic Leaders**

Much, if not most, of the ANC’s acclaim has been centered on the person of Nelson Mandela, who achieved the status of a global icon of reconciliation. As president of the ANC after the death of Oliver Tambo, and as the national

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6 de Jager and du Toit, *Friend or Foe?*
7 See Kenneth F. Greene, *Why Dominant Parties Lose: Mexico's Democratization in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 7. Greene acknowledges that the electoral dominance achieved by dominant parties gives them extensive incumbency advantages.
president after the ANC’s electoral victory, the party always has been tied to Mandela’s career. Yet, the ANC could not manage to appropriate him exclusively for the party. His stature has far exceeded party political boundaries, and almost all South Africans now revere Mandela and identify with the values he came to symbolize.

Constitutional Rules
A number of constitutional rules can and do affect electoral behavior in South Africa; we single out those pertaining to the electoral system itself to be of salient importance. The Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) contains only one section (sec. 46) that stipulates requirements for the electoral system, and it includes the proviso in sec. 46(d) that the electoral system “results, in general in proportional representation.” The finer details of the party-list proportional representation (PR) system are written into subordinate legislation. South Africa still votes under essentially the same PR system that was introduced in 1994, and carried over into subsequent acts of parliament. The claimed advantages of this system were, in 1994, that it was highly inclusive, allowing small parties to gain representation. This argument was strengthened by the fact that a very low threshold for representation applied. Another argument favoring this system was that of fairness, in the sense that the percentage of votes cast for a party was reflected with mathematical accuracy in the percentage of seats allocated to any party. Another favorable attribute was the simplicity of the ballot paper, allowing even illiterate or semi-literate voters to make effective choices.

The major argument against the party-list PR system is that it undermines accountability. Party leaders control the lists, deciding who will be placed on the list, and at what ranking. Elected representatives are therefore constantly under the obligation to adhere to the party line. Furthermore, no wards are demarcated, so no individual representative can be called to account by the voters of any particular region.

The party-list PR system well suits the ANC by virtue of the fact that it accurately reflects the party’s numerical dominance at the ballot box. And, this dominance remains intact irrespective of how many small parties gain representation. Despite many attempts at electoral reform, the ANC appears content with the existing rules.

Power of Appointment and Patronage
The requirement contained in Section 195(1)(i) of the Constitution reads, “Public administration must be broadly representative of the South African people, with employment and personnel management practices based on ability, objectivity, fairness, and the need to redress the imbalances of the past to achieve broad representation.”

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representative of the South African people” has become the cornerstone for the ANC’s so-called Cadre Deployment Policy, unfortunately at times to the detriment of other requirements, such as objectivity (see discussion below). While this policy is aimed at achieving racial demographic representation, the ANC fine-tunes it by using the party’s power of appointment, as well as informal influence, to place ANC party loyalists into key positions within the state. The exact electoral benefit the ANC has gained through this policy is not immediately measurable, but it must be considered a vital factor in shaping the nature of the dominance that the party has achieved (see the discussion below).

Material Goods—Public Funds and Private Funds
Research by the South African Institute of Race Relations\textsuperscript{11} has revealed some distinct correlations in the voting patterns in the 2014 election, especially by province. The ANC fared worst in Gauteng and the Western Cape, gaining 54.92 percent and 34 percent of the vote, respectively. These results correlated with the GDP per capita, which was the highest in Gauteng (R87, 415) and the Western Cape (R74, 306), respectively. Conversely, the Democratic Alliance (DA), the official opposition party, fared best in these two provinces, gaining 57.26 percent of the vote in the Western Cape, and 28.52 percent of the vote in Gauteng. At the other end of the scale, the ANC did best in Limpopo Province (78.97 percent of the vote), which is the second poorest province (GDP per capita of R40, 919), and second best in Mpumalanga Province (78.80 percent

Figure 1. ANC Support and GDP Per Capita by Province


of the vote), the fourth poorest province, with a GDP per capita of R54,515. It did the third best (70.75 percent of the provincial vote) in the Eastern Cape, the poorest of all nine South African provinces, with a GDP per capita of R35,611.

Figure 2. DA Support and GDP Per Capita by Province

![Graph showing DA Support and GDP Per Capita by Province](image)


A similar correlation is found with respect to educational performance. The two provinces where the ANC had the lowest level of support (in terms of the regional ballot), namely the Western Cape (34 percent) and Gauteng (54.92 percent), were also the provinces with the best (Gauteng, 18.1 percent) and second best (Western Cape, 14.4 percent) pass rates in higher education. These also were the two provinces in which the DA fared best in terms of the provincial vote.

Correlation is not causation, but correlation is a necessary yet insufficient requirement for causation. Given the fact that income and education are two of the more-or-less standard indicators in measuring social class, and given the mutually reinforcing cleavages of race and class in South African politics historically, the above correlation invites further description.

Finding the cut-off points between the lower and middle classes and between the middle and upper classes is largely dependent on the indicators of class that are used. The most recent study of the middle class in South Africa, released by a research group at Stellenbosch University in 2013, and based

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Figure 3. ANC Support and Education Levels by Province


Figure 4. DA Support and Education Levels by Province


on 2012 data,\(^\text{13}\) reveals the following findings. Using the cut-off point of a monthly income per person of R4,100 (in 2012 prices), the research shows that South Africa’s black middle class increased from about 350,000 individuals

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(10.73 percent of the middle class) in 1993, to three million in 2012 (41.29 percent of the middle class). Black South Africans now clearly represent the largest share of the middle class, defined in these terms.

Could it be, therefore, that the new higher-income earners are also the voters with better education, who are concentrated in the Western Cape and Gauteng provinces, and who were more likely to vote for the DA and less likely to vote for the ANC?

The Stellenbosch researchers warn against hasty conclusions in this direction. They find that this very significant category of income earners is still not yet a distinct social group. Class-level incomes still do not form the basis of a social identity: “South Africans with middle class occupations that earn middle class salaries often do not think of themselves as middle class,”14 Race still trumps class as a marker of social identity. The Stellenbosch researchers also found that there is little evidence of shared so-called middle class values among this category of individuals, except for religion, which is important to the black middle class. And, they conclude that the move into the middle class by more black South Africans is unlikely to affect social cohesion in a way that is supportive of democracy (such as the formation of both bonding and bridging social capital). From this perspective, then, additional explanatory variables, such as the racial, cultural, and ethnic demography of every province, still should be taken into account in considering voting behavior, even after twenty years of democracy.

The correlation described above also can be illuminated from the other side of the scale, and tempts the proposition that ANC support may be concentrated among the very poor and the lower class, such as people resident in the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, and Limpopo provinces. One plausible reason for such support would be that the poorest of the poor are also the most likely beneficiaries of social grants paid by the state. This social-welfare safety net has expanded rapidly. In 1996-1997, benefits were paid to 2.4 million individuals. By 2011-2012, the social-welfare safety net served 15.59 million beneficiaries, and it is projected that it will reach 17.25 million people by 2015-2016. Furthermore, data show that the beneficiaries of social grants in the Eastern Cape represented the highest proportion of the provincial population (41.1 percent) among all provinces, followed by Limpopo Province (39.5 percent), Northern Cape (36.6 percent), and Mpumalanga (34.9 percent).15 It can be plausibly speculated that the more deeply the ANC as the long-standing ruling party is associated with the state in the minds of individual beneficiaries, the more electoral support the ANC stands to gain through continual extension of the social grant system.

14 Ibid.
The correlations are nonetheless intriguing if we consider them in relation to members of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), who contested their first national election in 2014, and represent the rise and potential popularity of more populist and radical politics in South Africa. Institute of Race Relations (IRR) data show that the EFF received its highest level of support in the North West Province (12.53 percent of the provincial vote), followed by Gauteng (10.26 percent), and Limpopo (10.27 percent). No apparent correlation, direct or inverse, appears to emerge in relation to per capita income. The North West has the fifth highest GDP per person, Gauteng the highest, and Limpopo the second lowest of all provinces (see figure 5, below).

Figure 5. EFF Support and GDP Per Capita by Province

A similar situation exists with respect to education. Both the North West and Gauteng provinces, with strong EFF support, had high matric pass rates. The Western Cape, also with high matric pass rates, however, scored the lowest level of EFF support.

One possible clue regarding EFF support can be found in levels of unemployment. The Western Cape has a significantly lower level (22.6 percent) of unemployment (according to the expanded definition) than the other eight provinces, with Gauteng the second lowest (29.8 percent). This may be the basis for the popularity of the EFF’s populist electoral rhetoric. However, other factors also need to be taken into account. The second lowest level of provincial support for the EFF is in the Eastern Cape, which has the highest level of unemployment per province, but which also is the historic heartland of the ANC.

Figure 6. EFF Support and Education Levels by Province


Table 2. ANC, DA, and EFF Support, GDP Per Capita, and Unemployment Rates by Province, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>ANC(%)</th>
<th>DA(%)</th>
<th>EFF(%)</th>
<th>GDP per capita</th>
<th>Unemployment rate (official) (%)</th>
<th>Unemployment rate (expanded) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Cape</td>
<td>70.75</td>
<td>15.87</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>35,611</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
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<td>Free State</td>
<td>69.72</td>
<td>16.24</td>
<td>7.89</td>
<td>59,149</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gauteng</td>
<td>54.92</td>
<td>28.52</td>
<td>10.26</td>
<td>87,415</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KwaZulu-Natal</td>
<td>65.31</td>
<td>13.35</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>47,983</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>37.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limpopo</td>
<td>78.97</td>
<td>6.60</td>
<td>10.27</td>
<td>40,919</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>39.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mpumalanga</td>
<td>78.80</td>
<td>10.04</td>
<td>6.15</td>
<td>54,515</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>41.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>67.79</td>
<td>12.59</td>
<td>12.53</td>
<td>56,875</td>
<td>27.7</td>
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<td>Northern Cape</td>
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<td>60,887</td>
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<td>Western Cape</td>
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<td>57.26</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>74,306</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


a 2012 data at current prices.
b Includes anybody without a job who wanted to work and was available to take up employment in the reference period, regardless of whether he or she actively looked for a job in the four weeks prior to the reference week.
Material Goods—Loot and Plunder

We do not find this category relevant to South Africa, but it is for Zimbabwe, South Africa’s immediate neighbor, a country which is very often drawn as a comparative reference point in assessing South Africa’s democratic prospects (see the analysis below).

The Nature and Levels of Dominance

In this section, we seek to consider the levels and nature of dominance, and postulate where South Africa finds itself, while comparing it to Zimbabwe—a country which has passed through all three levels of dominance into being an illiberal dominant-party system characterized by hegemonic dominance. It follows that we discuss the implications of these levels of dominance for the quality of governance.

Unfortunately, Zimbabwe stands out as a worst-case scenario, a dominant-party system of the most malevolent kind: for more than three decades, the ruling party has inflicted gross human rights abuses on many of its citizens, yet it still holds regular elections (often marred by fraud and violence), opposition parties survive (at great cost), and power is contested (though not fairly). This leads us to consider whether Zimbabwe’s trajectory is the path we can expect South Africa to travel.

In our analysis of dominant-party systems in Friend or Foe? Dominant Party Systems in Southern Africa, we describe three levels of dominance, which appear to be cumulative. Electoral dominance is the first level, and serves as a precondition for the second level, constitutional dominance, which, in turn, provides the platform for accruing hegemonic dominance.

Electoral Dominance

At the conceptual level, electoral dominance can be described as the most fleeting, ephemeral, and superficial type of dominance. In this type, dominant parties are at risk of losing elections, even if neither they nor the electorate anticipate such an outcome. The weakest form of dominance is to rule with a small majority in an electoral system that amplifies any marginal shift in voter preference. This type of dominance is constrained by constitutional rules, both formal and informal. These rules establish a playing field in which opposition parties are in competition, with a chance to win in any election.

The Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) has won every national and presidential election in Zimbabwe since independence in 1980, with the exception of the 2008 elections. The ruling party managed to quickly move beyond the level of electoral dominance, consolidating its position early. President Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF were hostile to any

16 de Jager and du Toit, Friend or Foe?
form of opposition from the outset and merely tolerated a democratic form of
government for the sake of appearance; the “institutionalization of a one-party
state has always been the basic tenet of ZANU-PF, beginning with ZANU’s
party conference in Mozambique in 1977.”17 The defeat and destruction of the
Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU), the other key player in Zimbabwe’s
liberation movement, was the first step in ZANU-PF’s project. Even prior to
the first election in 1980, Joshua Nkomo, leader of ZAPU, had appealed to the
British arbiters to cancel the elections due to ZANU-PF’s violence.18 Nkomo
complained that Zanla (ZANU-PF’s military wing) had instituted a “reign of
terror” and that a number of ZAPU officials and supporters had been abducted,
while others had been threatened by so-called mujibas (local youth, armed
during the liberation struggle).19 After the 1980 election, the ruling party
launched a further campaign against ZAPU, referred to as Gukuruhundi,20 in
which members were suppressed, persecuted, and silenced. The supporters of
ZAPU were portrayed as “insurgents” in the official media and were crushed
by the ethnic massacre in Matabeleland between 1982 and 1987.21 ZAPU
was literally bludgeoned into a Unity Accord in December 1987, which was
followed by the party’s dissolution.

This modus operandi vis-á-vis opposition would manifest again with the
growth of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), a party formed out
of a trade union movement in the late 1990s. The ruling party’s response to
the new opposition was predictable—violent intimidation and suppression. In
the 2008 election, the MDC even managed to take away ZANU-PF’s majority
in parliament. ZANU-PF did not accept this loss, reverting again to force and
violence, compelling the election winners to agree to a power-sharing accord
brokered by a third party. Despite this, the hegemonic grip of ZANU-PF
remained, making the arrangement of a power-sharing government nominal. It
was contrary to our expectations that a party could lose its electoral dominance
but retain its hegemony (yet, as will be discussed, this can occur when
hegemonic dominance is reached). As the trajectory continued, the MDC’s role
as Zimbabwe’s main opposition party would be severely compromised.22 The

17 Virginia Curtin Knight, “Growing Opposition in Zimbabwe,” A Journal of Opinion 20, no. 1
18 David Moore, “Zimbabwe’s Democracy in the Wake of the 2013 Election: Contemporary and
19 Ibid., 62.
20 Gukuruhundi is a Shona term for the “storm that destroys everything.” See Masipula Sithole,
“Is Zimbabwe Poised on a Liberal Path? The State and Prospects of the Parties,” A Journal of
Opinion 21, nos.1/2 (1993): 37. It embodied a policy to destroy any opposition to ZANU, an
approach that continued post-liberation.
21 Michael Bratton and Eldred Masunungure, “Zimbabwe’s Long Agony,” Journal of Democracy
19, no. 4 (2008): 44.
recent contentious 2013 elections saw the end of the Government of National Unity (GNU) and the reinstatement of Mugabe at the helm of a ZANU-PF-led government, with the MDC factions much weakened and discredited.

In South Africa, the ANC’s electoral dominance was again confirmed in the April 2014 elections, winning, by a fair margin, its fifth national election since 1994. Nevertheless, the ANC’s support also has continued to decline from its electoral high watermark of 69 percent of the vote (gaining 279 of 400 legislative seats) in 2004 to 65 percent (264 seats) in 2009, and currently with 62 percent of the vote (249 seats) (see table 1). The proportional representation electoral system, selected for this deeply divided society from the outset of South Africa’s democracy, has enabled broad representation and the participation of opposition in the political process. Although opposition has not garnered more than 40 percent of the national vote collectively, it has been active and vocal since 1994, and the elections have been considered free and fair by most accounts, especially in their adjudication by the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC). In addition, in line with democratic processes, the ANC also has instilled a culture of leadership change; between 1994 and 2014, South Africa has had four presidents, thus differentiating itself from many of its African counterparts, Zimbabwe in particular.

**Constitutional Dominance**

We suggest the proposition that the time span of dominance affects the nature of such dominant-party systems. The longer a party stays in power, the more likely it is to submit to the temptation to try to rewrite formal constitutional rules to its own benefit. Electoral dominance can become *constitutional dominance* when the dominant party succeeds in rewriting some constitutional rules, with the intention of strengthening its own position, or maintains rules that are clearly detrimental to opposition parties and to its own advantage. The security of constitutional rules from such subversion by dominant parties is a function of their status—in particular, whether these rules are seen to embody a social contract or not. In societies which have transitioned through peace pacts and processes of negotiation, the success of these processes and the later drafting of a constitution is dependent on whether all contending parties approached them in a spirit of “good faith.” Good faith places an expectation on all parties to the talks to show a commitment to peace, to be open to compromise in the common interest, and to regard all agreements reached, in particular, the interim and final constitutions, as binding and irrevocable.23 The key issue is whether these negotiations and concomitant constitutions are regarded as a social contract (a mutually agreed upon binding and enduring mechanism by which to negotiate both present and future conflicts in an amicable way)—or

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merely as a means to transfer power.

The Lancaster House Conference, held in 1979, led to the crafting of Zimbabwe’s independence Constitution. According to Britz and Tshuma, it unfortunately did not provide the fragile Zimbabwean democracy with institutions such as a human rights commission or an independent electoral commission. ZANU-PF swiftly used its electoral majorities to enact many fundamental constitutional changes, including a shift from a proportional representation electoral system to a first-past-the-post system in 1985, ensuring the party greater levels of electoral dominance. ZANU-PF and Robert Mugabe did not regard the Lancaster Constitution as a social contract. Instead, it was viewed only as a means to transfer power, while at the same time the ZANU-PF would not have to relinquish its aim of consolidating its hegemony over every sector of state and society. It was in this context that ZANU-PF set out to expand its hegemony through a vast array of fundamental amendments to the Constitution. These changes not only curtailed the democratic rights of citizens, but also facilitated the ruling party’s political dominance. Over more than two decades, the Constitution was amended nineteen times to entrench Mugabe’s and ZANU-PF’s rule. In 1987, a series of decisive amendments was pushed through parliament, one being the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Act (amendment no. 7). This led to the abolition of the office of the prime minister and the creation of a very powerful executive presidency “with sweeping powers,” including the power to offer pardons to those who perpetrate human rights violations. The provisions of this amendment essentially placed the president above the judiciary and parliament (and, therefore, above parliamentary accountability), while granting the president vast rule-making powers. In May 2013, a new constitution was signed into law, approved overwhelmingly by a referendum. Although it imposes a two-term presidential limit, this does not apply retrospectively, enabling the

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25 Ibid., 265.
89-year-old Mugabe to contest in subsequent elections and extend his rule of over three decades by another ten years.

South Africa’s 1996 Constitution was the culmination of multiparty and multiactor negotiations, which started in 1991 with the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA). It was the result of detailed and inclusive negotiations, and remains the highest law of the land. The Constitution is broadly respected and the judiciary is robust and impartial in its rulings. To date, there have been no major revisions of the Constitution, even during the period when the ANC held a two-thirds parliamentary majority (between 2004 and 2009) and could have done so unilaterally. There are, however, a number of disquieting developments, namely, emerging populist attacks on the Constitution and a growing disregard for decisions made by constitutional institutions and concerning legislation. Emerging populism, antagonistic to the Constitution, is clearly reflected in the sentiments of Ngoako Ramatlhodi, the ANC National Executive Committee member and the recently appointed minister of mineral resources. He is derisive of the Constitution, saying: “We thus have a Constitution that reflects the great compromise, a compromise tilted heavily in favour of forces against change.” He argues that “the black majority enjoys empty political power while forces against change reign supreme in the economy, judiciary, public opinion and civil society.”30 His view reflects a menacing sentiment that the ANC should have more power to do as it sees fit, with fewer checks and balances, and that the Constitution is a hindrance to this aim. More subtle “attacks” on the Constitution are evidenced in the disdain for certain court findings31 and constitutional institutions (for example, the Public Protector) and a lack of compliance to their decisions. A litmus test for South Africa’s constitutional democracy will be the ANC government’s response to the Public Protector’s report on the over R200 million in public funds spent on supposed security upgrades to President Jacob Zuma’s private residence in Nkandla. Laws, regulations, and limitations need not be amended, as in the case of Zimbabwe; they simply have been disregarded and ignored. The third noted area of concern relates to legislation, which potentially could serve to gag voices of accountability, such as whistle-blowers and a free press. On November 12, 2013, the Protection of State Information Bill was passed in the National Assembly by 225 votes to 88 (still to be signed into law). The bill was heavily contested by a broad range of civil society organizations and political parties, largely because it limits the public’s access to information and the ability of journalists and whistle-blowers to expose corruption.

Hegemonic Dominance

Hegemonic dominance becomes achievable once electoral and constitutional dominance have been secured. In the case of countries with liberation movements, the initial victory of liberation parties with mass support gives them sudden ability to allocate power and appoint people into jobs in the public service. This power of appointment often becomes a source of patronage and an inducement for loyalty. This kind of dominance entails the dominant party’s controlling the symbols of state and expressing its ideology through these symbols in an almost uncontested way. The same applies to the party’s interpretation of history, especially concerning the historic event from which its dominance was derived. The hegemonic party not only sets the policy agenda, but also the wider public agenda by dictating the rules concerning what is acceptable in public discourse and what is not. Institutionally, hegemony is achieved once the dominant party gains control of the state bureaucracy. This occurs when state personnel become loyal party members, who consider it their task to promote the party. When, for them, the public good and the interests of the party become indistinguishable, the conditions are set for the dominant party to effect a de facto merger of party, government, and state.

Building on its liberation credentials, which contributed to its initial electoral victories (together with intimidating the opposition), ZANU-PF subsequently made many constitutional changes, thereby entrenching its hegemony. The cleansing of white farmers from their land removed another locus of opposition, and the ruling party gained full control over the media from the 1990s. In the decade 2001-2011, ZANU-PF also reeled in the judiciary. By the 2008 elections, ZANU-PF had so entrenched itself that even though the MDC managed to break the ZANU-PF’s majority in parliament, the hegemonic grip of ZANU-PF remained. Thus, Zimbabwe is particularly interesting, since despite the party’s losing its electoral dominance, it has retained its hegemony. The key to this is ZANU-PF’s success in thoroughly converting almost all public servants into party loyalists, who are able to continue to rule, almost irrespective of who controls the parliament.

Is this the direction in which South Africa is headed? The ANC has made it clear that it aims for hegemonic dominance, in particular, through its national project, the National Democratic Revolution, and its strategy of cadre deployment (see the ANC’s Cadre Development and Deployment Strategy, 1999), but sites of opposition remain. First and foremost, the Constitution itself limits ruling power in a variety of ways, with the Bill of Rights arguably being the most important provision. Opposition parties have won some provincial and local-government elections and are able to govern there. Civil society groups mobilize continuously, and oppose the ANC in a variety of ways within the public domain. Probably the most crucial sites of power that constrain the ANC are the mass media and the judiciary. Yet, despite these countervailing forces, the cadre policy (the appointment of ANC loyalists to key positions
within the state and society) of the ANC allows the ruling party to steadily extend its power over state bureaucracies.

In moving through the three levels of dominance, Zimbabwe effectively shed its vestiges of democracy. A key difference, though, between Zimbabwe and South Africa (and many other dominant-party systems in the developing world, including Botswana under the Botswana Democratic Party and Mexico under the Institutional Revolutionary Party, 1929-1997) is the combination of the longevity of Mugabe’s dominance plus personal rule, underpinned by coercion. With the security apparatus firmly in the hands of the ZANU-PF, coercion has been used robustly and preemptively. Under the persistent leadership of Mugabe, as the country has become more impoverished and the number of resources (land, for example) used to maintain dominance has diminished, he has chosen, instead, the route of coercion. Violence and intimidation are synonymous with election time. Thus, even with elections, Zimbabwe cannot be classified as a democracy any longer.

Implications for the Quality of Government

It is becoming widely acknowledged that democracy is not necessarily equivalent to a good quality of government and that many languish in poverty and suffer human rights abuses under so-called democratic systems. Dysfunctional government institutions, even within democratic systems, play a critical role in much of the world’s economic and social malaise today. A democratic form of government is thus not sufficient for the well-being of its citizens. A distinction, therefore, must be made between democracy and quality of government. The former refers to access to public authority, whereas the latter refers to the exercise of authority. Rothstein and Teorell argue that quality of government should be defined as “the impartiality of institutions that exercise government authority.” Impartiality means to be “unmoved by certain sorts of considerations such as special relationships and personal preferences.” Whereas political equality acts as a norm for legitimizing democracy, impartiality acts as a norm for legitimizing political authority, and both norms embody the “ought to treat equally” principle. Restated somewhat, the notion of impartiality is achieved when allocation of resources measures up to the defining characteristics of public goods. Goods become public when they meet the criteria of nonexcludability (“they must

33 Ibid.,165.
be available to everyone if they are available to anyone”\textsuperscript{36}) and commonality of supply (“consumption by some individuals does not preclude consumption by others”\textsuperscript{37}). The norm of impartiality thus rules out corruption, clientalism, patronage, nepotism, political favoritism, and discrimination, and in doing so, counters populism and radicalism.

We add to Rothstein and Teorell’s quality of government argument that an important separation or jurisdictional boundary be recognized—a clear dividing line between the state and government. Whereas a state is neutral or impartial, a government (which is elected into power) is partisan to those in power. As Heywood\textsuperscript{38} asserts, this distinction goes to the very heart of a constitutional government: “government power can be held in check only when the government of the day is prevented from encroaching upon the absolute and unlimited authority of the state.” When state-government-party lines become blurred, the state loses its autonomy, and thus its neutrality; “state autonomy...is a precondition for state agencies and personnel acting in the public interest.”\textsuperscript{39} When the state becomes “captured,” it can be used for partisan ends. There is also a feedback loop; if state institutions, the electoral commission, in particular, are not administered impartially, this will inevitably affect the quality and legitimacy of the democratic selection process. And, a country will become locked into a reinforcing loop, which is currently the case in Zimbabwe.

This is where the levels of dominance and the quality of governance intersect. When hegemonic dominance is reached, and the lines separating state, government, and party have become blurred, impartiality is lost. As Rothstein and Teorell\textsuperscript{40} argue, impartiality is “other-regarding” and “all-inclusive,” whereas to maintain hegemony, the ruling party captures the state, and uses it for its own ends, for example, to offer patronage for loyalty, thus becoming “self-regarding” and exclusionary. In Zimbabwe, ZANU-PF’s “populist” strategies included using agricultural infrastructure from the previously white-owned farms as spoils for party loyalists, providing free inputs to the “new farmers” occupying the resettled farms, and canceling urban residents’ rate payments.\textsuperscript{41} Formal ownership of these commercial farms, expropriated

\textsuperscript{37} Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth A. Shepsle, \textit{Politics in Plural Societies: A Theory of Democratic Instability} (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1972), 84.
\textsuperscript{38} Andrew Heywood, \textit{Politics}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 91.
\textsuperscript{40} Rothstein and Teorell, “What Is Quality of Government?” 175.
\textsuperscript{41} Moore, “Zimbabwe’s Democracy in the Wake of the 2013 Election,” 60.
without compensation, reverted to the state, and these spoils were awarded to Mugabe’s fellow party elites without their acquiring title deeds, thereby deepening political and economic inequality instead of offering relief to the rural poor. By destroying the rule of law (which requires the impartial application of the law), Mugabe initiated an economic collapse, with the Zimbabwean state eventually even abandoning its own currency. The remaining spoils for redistributing to elites are the few remaining large commercial firms, mostly mining enterprises, which have been targeted by the Indigenization Law, which requires the state to acquire 51 percent of designated firms. The result of this “self-regarding” patronage has been authoritarian populism, and a socio-economic system characterized by poverty, unemployment, and destitution.

South Africa would do well to not follow the same path. The ANC’s cadre deployment strategy unfortunately has established a massive patronage network in which members of the ANC are given strategic positions within the public service, blurring the lines separating the state, government, and party. For example, ministers as opposed to directors-general (public servants) appoint departmental officers, thus strengthening political and executive control over the public service. In such a patronage system, created by cadre deployment and a belief in controlling all centers of power, access to the state and its resources is reduced to being able to offer positions and power (self-regarding) for political loyalty, and is less about representation and delivery (other-regarding).

On the positive side, there has been a growing acknowledgement within the ANC of the shortcomings of the deployment strategy. Members of the National Planning Commission (NPC), the drafters of the National Development Plan (NDP), have criticized the way in which directors-general themselves are appointed through the cabinet, citing that it “blurs the line of accountability.” Past National Planning Minister Trevor Manuel called for a professional civil service that can weather changes in the political administration. Minister Manuel also spoke to senior civil servants, reminding them that “[n]o matter how you were appointed, no matter who appointed you, you are not accountable to the ruling party.” The success of the 2030 Vision of the NDP hinges on an effective state, with clear separations among state, government, and party.

43 Ibid.
Conclusion

With an incrementally declining voter support base and decreasing voter turnout, the ANC garnered only 36.39 percent of the vote in the 2014 elections. Even so, it still won more than 60 percent of the valid vote and its dominance is entrenched for the short term. The ANC has engineered much for which South Africa’s citizens can be grateful. The party and its reconciliatory past president, Nelson Mandela, carried South Africa over the transition period, and served to unite South Africans. In addition, due to its liberation credentials, the ANC has enjoyed widespread national and international legitimacy. Sadly, however, the party has not always been a good steward of the trust placed in it. The decline in support for the ANC, therefore, should not come as a surprise.

The implication of this decline in support—that South Africa may be moving toward a more competitive political system—is potentially positive, as competition should encourage greater accountability and pressure to deliver. However, the change also could have negative implications. The ANC’s response and the resources on which it depends are key determinants of this trajectory. If the ANC responds by relinquishing its Cadre Deployment Strategy and embraces the pursuit of quality of government on the basis of impartiality, its material resources will be both sustainable and to the benefit of society as whole. It also would make viable the National Development Plan’s 2030 Vision. If, however, the ANC becomes conflated with the state in the minds of those deriving benefits from political appointments and material resources, such as social grants, support for the ANC will have less to do with sustained delivery and creating an environment that stimulates a productive society, and more to do with gaining access to the state. The problem with this is that, in light of South Africa’s high levels of poverty and unemployment and comparatively very small tax base, this is not a sustainable long-term resource base. In addition, appointments on the basis of political loyalty and partiality, as opposed to appointments on the basis of ability, objectivity, and impartiality, will mean that the quality of government will continue to suffer. And, as many become excluded from the privilege of “feeding at the trough of the state,” this scenario could open South Africa to a trajectory similar to that of Zimbabwe—radicalism and populism.