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Has the African National Congress lost touch with South Africans? The party over people

Author:

Professor Nicola de Jager

Department of Political Sciences, Stellenbosch University
ndejager@sun.ac.za

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Has the African National Congress lost touch with South Africans? The party over people

Nicola de Jager, Department of Political Science, Stellenbosch University

ndejager@sun.ac.za

Abstract

It was expected that the African National Congress (ANC) as part of South Africa's liberation movement would act in the best interest of South Africa and its citizens when it took the political helm in 1994. However, electoral support for the ANC declined to 28% of the Voting Eligible Population (VEP) in the 2019 elections as did trust in the party and its leaders. This has gone together with decreasing satisfaction with the performance of the ruling party's presidents. In this paper I present data from Afrobarometer to illustrate the increasing chasm between the party and the people. And I contend that part of the explanation for this chasm lies in the ANC's pursuit of the historical socialist tradition of the 1960s and the vanguard party, rather than the historical constitutionalist tradition of its founders, and servant-leadership. Following from this historical socialist tradition, the party has adopted partisan governance over governing in the broader public interest, and macro-economic policy focused on centralized state control rather than enabling an environment conducive to job creation. The chasm is thus not unexpected since the ANC has pursued party over people.

Introduction

2024 marks 30 years since South Africa's democratization, which culminated in the first democratic, non-racial, multi-party elections held on the 27th of April 1994. The process of democratization of the 1990s was preceded by a process of liberalization in the 1980s. It has been more than 40 years since then-President PW Botha revoked much of the draconian apartheid legislation. Botha would run out of reformist steam, and it was only under his successor, President FW de Klerk, that the African National Congress (ANC) and others were unbanned in 1990 and the country moved towards

democratic elections. Since the euphoria of the 1990s and the vast collective trust and good will South Africans placed in the ANC as their democratically elected political representative, the country made some positive strides in the earlier years under the ANC leadership, but has since been riven with corruption, stunted socio-economic development, racial polarization and foreign policy alignment with human rights abusers. As Fani Titi, Investec Bank's Group Chief Executive Officer, said in a public speech: 'You have to have a half-decent government and I don't think at the moment we are anywhere close...We are governed by guys in their late 60s and some in their 70s with no idea about how the world works'.¹

Since the former liberation movement was voted into public office its supporter base has steadily declined as has trust in its presidents and the party itself. Its national dominance has become increasingly tenuous with increasing expectations that 2024 may usher in coalition politics as the ANC dips below 50% of the vote. What has happened? How did the ANC get here? This paper argues that the former liberation movement has consistently made decisions for the party and not the people. The ANC had two histories to tap into – the constitutional, servant-leadership approach of its founders and the elitist, vanguard party approach of the 1960 communist influences. Rather than reaching back into the values of the founders, it tapped into the latter. Following from this historical tradition, the party adopted partisan governance and patronage, rather than impartiality and governing in the broader public interest, and a state-centered macro-economic policy focusing on the state as some kind of beneficent distributor of social goods, rather than an empowering dispersion of power through creating conducive conditions for employment. The ANC has become a party that sees itself as the vanguard – the leader - but is out of touch with the interests and needs of the citizens.

ANC performance, 1994-2023: The party without the people

Acknowledging that there are many possible measurements of performance (including socio-economic indicators and levels of corruption) the intention of this paper is to give focus to the perceptions of South Africans of the ruling party's performance. To do this

¹ [SA should vote out 'useless' politicians, says Investec's Fani Titi | Business \(news24.com\)](#)

these three indicators will be used: voting -election outcomes as a measure of social support; trust- trust in the president and trust in the ruling party; and satisfaction- satisfaction with the performance of the incumbent.

Declining electoral support

South Africa's proportional representation electoral system translates into the number of seats a party receives reflecting the proportion of votes gained during elections. Thus, of the 400 National Assembly seats, the ANC has consistently garnered the majority. This has meant that it can largely pass legislation as it so desires (acknowledging though that opposition parties do play an important role in the parliamentary committees where the draft bills are often robustly contested and engaged with). Besides the 1994 elections all elections have been conducted using voter registration, thus the official election results represent the proportion of those who registered and then voted for the party. Up until 2019 the ANC consistently won above 60% of the vote, with its highest outcome being nearly 70% in 2004, during the Mbeki administration (see table 1). Following the Zuma administration (2009-2018) and the so-called nine wasted years, the ANC fell below the 60% mark, receiving only 57.5% of the national vote in 2019. Together with the decline in the ANC's support has been a decline in voter turnout with 2019 being the election year in which more South Africans (51%) eligible to vote, did not vote than those that did vote (see Table 2 for the Voting Eligible Population² figures). In 2019 it became evident that more eligible to vote South Africans opted out of the electoral system altogether (51%) than those that voted for the ruling party (28%). While evidently dissatisfied with the ruling party, many citizens have yet to use the ballot box to punish the ANC for poor performance by shifting their support to another political party. 2024 will thus be a critical election in terms of gauging the maturity of the electorate and whether or not, voters will turn up and shift their vote. Key to this election is thus voter mobilization and reviving the importance of elections in a healthy, vibrant democracy. The growing number of civil society voter mobilization initiatives, such as Pledge to Vote³, and My Vote Counts⁴ points to the potential of getting voters back to the starting block of a democratic system. With the potential of mobilizing the 51% - the non-voting but eligible-to-vote

² The Voting Eligible Population (VEP) refers to all South African citizens, 18 years and older, who are eligible to vote.

³ <https://pledgetovote.co.za/>

⁴ <https://myvotecounts.org.za/>

voters- the electoral and in turn the legislative landscape of South Africa has the potential to change significantly.

Table 1: National election results, 1994-2019

Party		1994	1999	2004	2009	2014	2019
African National Congress (ANC)	%	62.65	66.35	69.69	65.90	62.15	57.5
	Seats	252	266	279	264	249	230
	Votes	12 237 655	10 601 330	10 880 915	11 650 748	11 436 921	10 026 475
Democratic Alliance (DA)/ Democratic Party (DP)	%	1.73	9.56	12.37	16.66	22.23	20.8
	Seats	7	38	50	67	89	84
	Votes	338 426	1 527 337	1 931 201	2 945 829	4 091 584	3 621 188
Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)	%	–	–	–	–	6.35	10.8
	Seats	–	–	–	–	25	44
	Votes	–	–	–	–	1 169 259	1 881 521
Total valid votes		19 533 498	15 977 142	15 612 671	17 680 729	18 402 497	17 436 144

Note: Not all parties are listed, thus the totals do not tally

Source: Compiled by author, data derived from www.elections.org.za

Table 2: Voter turnout as proportion of voting-eligible population (VEP), 1994–2019

	1994	1999	2004	2009	2014	2019
Estimated VEP	22 709	22 798 845	27 436	30 096	31 434	35 868

	152		926	466	035	190
% of VEP who voted	86	70	57	59	59	49
% of VEP who did not vote	14	30	43	41	41	51
% of VEP who voted for ANC	53.9	46.5	39.7	38.7	36.4	28
% of VEP who voted for DP/DA	1.5	6.7	7	9.8	13	10
% of VEP who voted for other parties	30.6	16.9	10.2	10.2	10	11

Source: Compiled by author, derived from South African Institute of Race Relations (2014), Fast Facts, www.irr.org.za and Schulz-Herzenberg (2019)⁵

Declining trust and approval of performance

“Trusting societies are wealthy societies;” with empirical research having shown that political and social trust encourages engaged citizenship, the implementation of public services, a reduction in tax evasion, enabling political losers to lose well, and ensuring a culture of political agreement and compromise.⁶ Political trust is thus acknowledged in the literature as important for effective democratic governance.⁷ Where democratic governance comprises rule of law, it is only as stable and effective to the extent that it is considered legitimate and there is compliance, and trust acts as a ‘positive

⁵ Schulz-Herzenberg, C. 2019. The 2019 national election results. In Schulz-Herzenberg, C. and Southall, R. (eds.) Election 2019. Auckland Park: Jacana; and the institute for Race Relations. 2014. Fast Facts. Available at: <https://irr.org.za/reports>

⁶ Newton, K.; Stolle, D and Zmerli, S. 2018. Social and Political Trust. In Uslaner, E.M. (ed.) 2018. *The Oxford Handbook of social and political trust*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, p. 38.

⁷ Uslaner, E.M. (ed.) 2018. *The Oxford Handbook of social and political trust*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

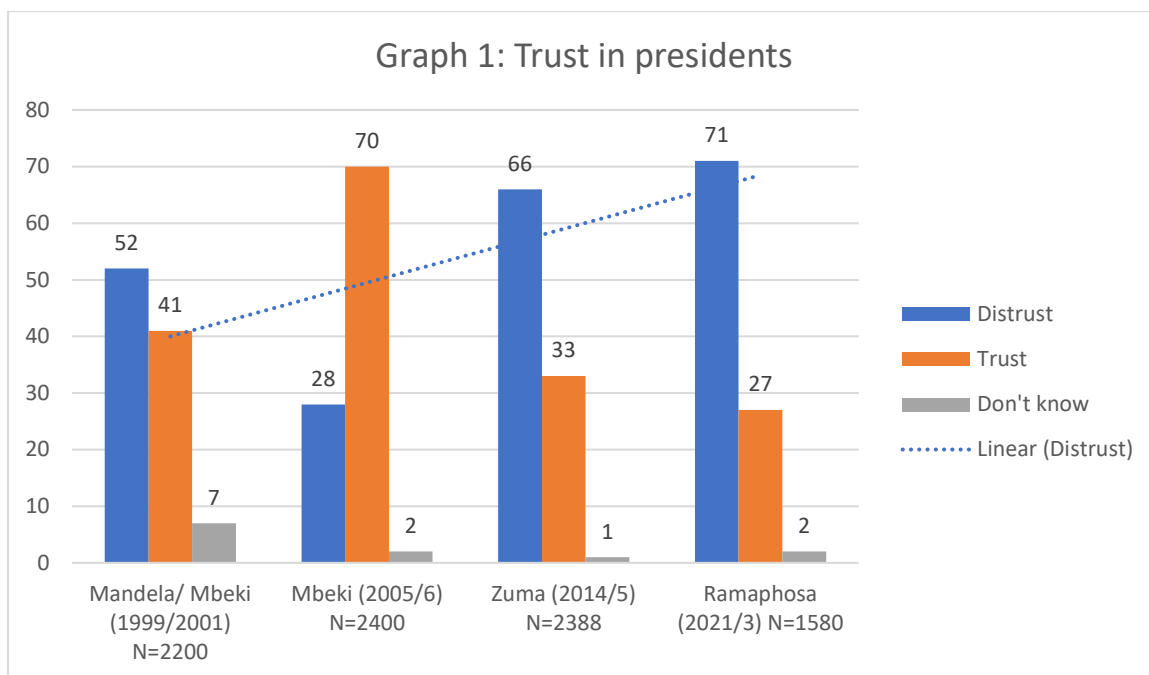
intervening factor'.⁸ Data derived from the public attitude surveys from Afrobarometer⁹ is used to measure levels of trust in the ruling party (the ANC) and the various presidents. Afrobarometer¹⁰ is a pan-African, non-partisan research network, which conducts public attitude surveys in 37 African countries on the topics of democracy, governance, and other related issues. The results are based on nationally representative random, stratified, area-probability cluster samples and face-to-face, local-language interviews.

Four rounds were selected in alignment with the four terms of political office. Nelson Mandela was president from 1994 until 1999, Thabo Mbeki 1999 until 2008, Jacob Zuma 2009 until 2018, and Cyril Ramaphosa 2019 until 2024. Nelson Mandela's presidency was characterised by somewhat more distrust (52%) than trust (41%). Considering his term was in the early days of South Africa's democracy, and followed the political violence of the 1980s and the authoritarian, apartheid regime, it is unsurprising that there were fairly high levels of distrust (see graph 1). With Thabo Mbeki's presidency, trust was to significantly increase to 70%, the highest levels of trust seen by any of the ANC's presidential candidates. This trust would invert under Jacob Zuma's presidency with him receiving 66% for distrust and only 33% for trust. And while Cyril Ramaphosa's 'new dawn' presidency had the potential to turn trust levels, trust has instead continued to decline with 71% of the respondents registering distrust and 27% indicating trust – the lowest levels yet.

⁸ Moreno, Alejandro. 2011. 'Social Trust'. In *International Encyclopedia of Political Science*, edited by: Bertrand Badie, Dirk Berg-Schlosser & Leonardo Morlino, SAGE Publications, Inc.

⁹ See: <https://www.afrobarometer.org/>

¹⁰ See: <https://www.afrobarometer.org/about/>

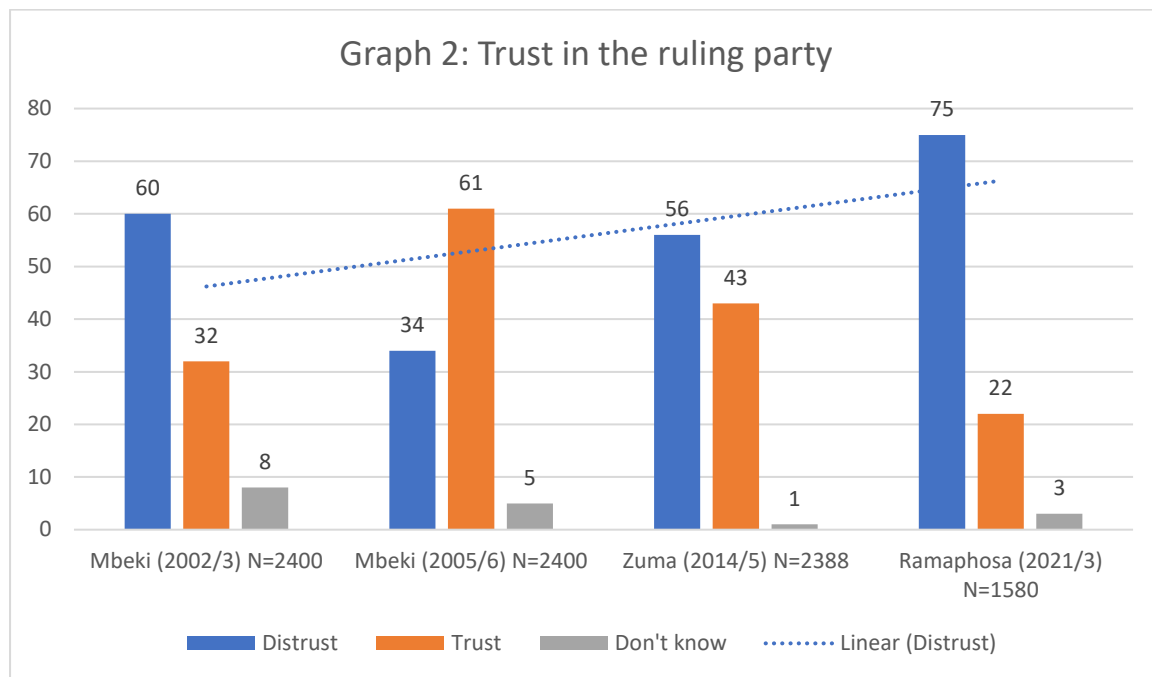


Notes: The graph has been derived by the author using data from Afrobarometer. Round 1 (1999/2001), round 3 (2005/2006), round 6 (2014/ 2015) and round 9 (2021/2023) were selected to largely coincide with the four different presidents. The question asked of the respondents was: *How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The President?* There were five categories of possible answers. The first two (*Not at all* and *Just a little*) were merged into 'Distrust' and the second two (*Somewhat* and *A lot*) were merged into 'Trust'. The third category was then *Don't know*.

Following the period of state capture (2009-2018), which saw the repurposing of state institutions for private purposes and the syphoning out of millions of rands from the public purse, the ANC has not been able to redeem itself or regain the trust of South Africans. Acting Director General of the South African National Treasury, Ismail Momoniat, observed: 'The worst legacy of state capture is that it not only changed the culture of the public service but weakened the ability of the state to make and implement decisions'.¹¹ Even though the ANC was voted into power again in 2019 with Cyril Ramaphosa as president, the party had to effectively campaign against itself, with Ramaphosa promising a 'new dawn'. The continued decline in social support and

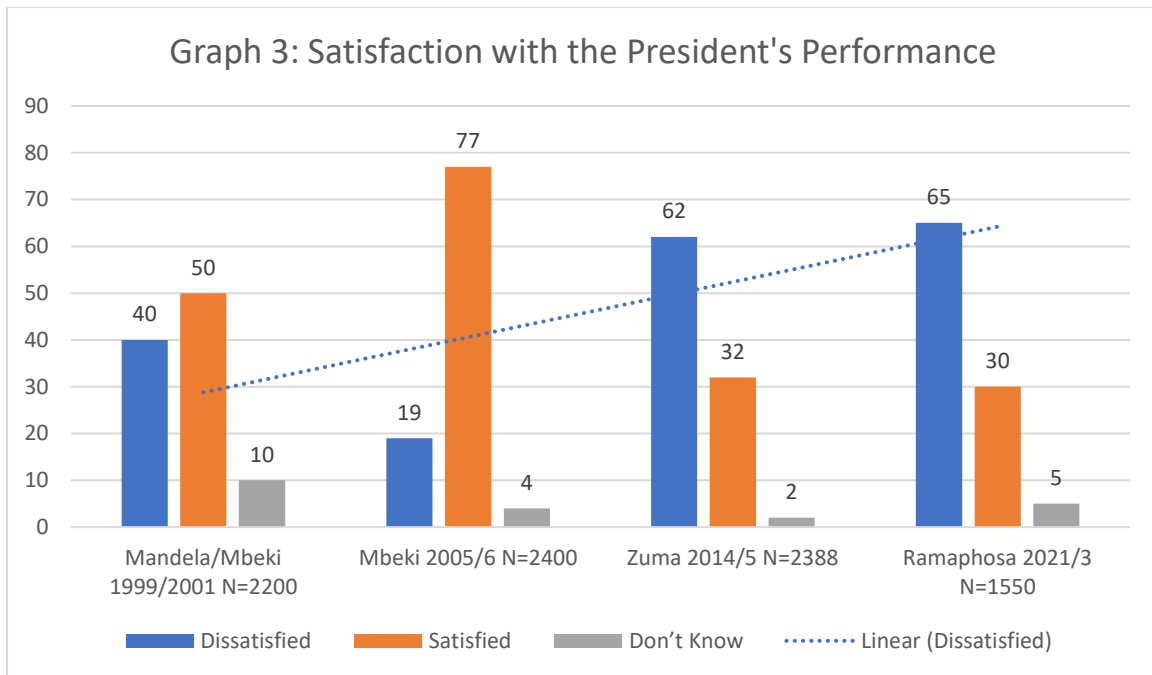
¹¹ Momoniat, I. 2023. How and Why Did State Capture and Massive Corruption Occur in South Africa ? Available at: <https://blog-pfm.imf.org/en/pfmblog/2023/04/how-and-why-did-state-capture-and-massive-corruption-occur-in-south-africa>

trust in the ruling party indicates that many have not experienced this new dawn, but instead have become disillusioned and even further distrustful of the ANC's promises (see graph 2).



Notes: The graph has been derived by the author using data from Afrobarometer. Round 2 (2002/2003), round 3 (2005/2006), round 6 (2014/ 2015) and round 9 (2021/2023) were selected to (largely) coincide with the four different administrations. The question asked of the respondents was: *How much do you trust the Ruling Party, or haven't you heard enough about them to say.*

In round 1 of the Afrobarometer surveys the question, *How much do you trust the Ruling Party, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?* was not asked, hence the data from round 2 (2002/2003) was used instead (see graph 2). This was during the early years of Mbeki's administration. Even with using round 2, there are similar patterns to graph 1's measurements of trust in the presidents; an initial distrust in the ruling party (and president), which shifted during the Mbeki presidency into increasing levels of trust of the ruling party (from 32% up to 61%) and then the decline in trust during Zuma's administration, with distrust levels of 56% which continued to 75% distrust in the ruling party during the Ramaphosa administration. The ANC thus currently registers the highest levels of distrust since 2002. And the party (61%), as with the president (70%), was most trusted during the Mbeki administration.



Notes: The graph has been derived by the author using data from Afrobarometer. Round 1 (1999/2001), round 3 (2005/2006), round 6 (2014/ 2015) and round 9 (2021/2023) were selected to roughly coincide with the four different presidents. The question asked of the respondents was: Do you approve (satisfied) or disapprove (unsatisfied) of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past twelve months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? President. There were five categories of possible answers. The first two (*Very unsatisfied/Strongly disapprove* and *Unsatisfied/ Disapprove*) were merged into 'Dissatisfied' and the second two (*Very satisfied/Strongly approve* and *Satisfied/ Approve*) were merged into 'Satisfied'. The third category was then *Don't know*.

The party support election data as well as the dis/trust data points to electoral support and trust peaking during Thabo Mbeki's presidency and administration, and then the continuous decline in support and trust which plummeted during the Zuma period and continued to decline into the Ramaphosa period. The rise and then continuous decline in trust coincides with satisfaction or approval of the performance of the president. This indicator goes beyond trust – which designates an expectation – to measure perceptions of actual performance (see graph 3). The decline in approval of the various presidents' performance is thus indicative of the fulfilment of the declining expectations. From a high of 77% approval of Mbeki's performance as president, approval plunged to 32% under Zuma and then 30% under Ramaphosa.

From the election results and the survey research it appears that the ANC is a party that no longer enjoys the majority of South Africans' support, trust or approval of the performance of its leaders. Considering its liberation history and promising start, how did it get to this beleaguered point?

Historical traditions: Tapping into the socialist dispensation over the constitutionalist dispensation

The ANC is not a monolithic party but has been influenced over the more than 100 years of its existence by different traditions and ideologies. Predominant amongst these has been that of its founders – the constitutional dispensation - and then the external influence during Africa's proxy Cold War of the Soviet Union facilitated by the South African Communist Party (SACP) – the socialist dispensation. Since it gained access to political power in 1994, the ANC has had the option to reach back to either of these traditions. Starting with Mandela at the helm, it looked like the ANC was initially set to build on its constitutionalist history, but this was not to last, especially with the recalling of Thabo Mbeki in September 2008. There is a deep irony in the recalling of Mbeki and the reasons given by Jacob Zuma, speaking on behalf of the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC): 'As the ruling party we need to sustain the confidence of our people in the ANC and its government. Once this level of confidence is weakened, the ANC has no alternative but to take action'.¹² Of all the presidents, Thabo Mbeki was the most trusted by South Africans, and trust in the ruling party reached its highwater mark during the Mbeki administration. He also received the highest approval ratings. Furthermore, the ANC received the most votes in 2004, nearly 70% (see Table 1) giving it a two-thirds majority under Mbeki's second term of office. The decision to recall Mbeki was thus not about 'the confidence' of the people or their interest, but was more likely a placing of party (and personal interests) over people. Mbeki had attempted to shift the locus of decision-making away from the Tripartite Alliance – an arrangement which had enabled the voices of the left to strongly influence the direction of the ANC and the country – to the governing structures of the presidency. This was unacceptable to the other two members of the Alliance, the

¹² Statement on Mbeki's recall, by Jacob Zuma on behalf of ANC NEC, 22 September. Available at: <https://www.politicsweb.co.za/news-and-analysis/jacob-zumas-statement-on-mbekis-recall>

South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of Trade Unions (COSATU).

The South African Native National Congress (SANNC), established in 1912 following the 1910 Union of South Africa, was comprised of the African middle class – professionals, property-owners and the educated *kholwa* (Christian converts), fruit of the missionary schools. Considering that the terms of the Union would secure white interests ‘at the expense of black interests’,¹³ it was recognised that a national organisation for the African people was needed. On the 8th of January 1912 chiefs and leaders of local organisations gathered in Bloemfontein, heeding the call by Pixley ka Izaka Seme – a graduate of the universities of Columbia and Oxford – to collectively respond. This educated elite met to organise against racial discrimination and to advocate for equal treatment before the law. The gathering culminated in the formation of the oldest liberation movement on the African continent and what would become the African National Congress (ANC). The ANC founders were constitutionalists and active members of society – establishing schools, newspapers, and civil society organisations in service of their communities. And, while legitimacy was attained and respect afforded through the inclusion of prominent chiefs in honorary positions, the key decision-makers were drawn from the *kholwa* – Christian converts.¹⁴

As historians have noted this African participation in electoral and constitutional politics goes back even further, and was largely influenced by the spread of education through the missionary schools.¹⁵ In the Eastern Cape alone by 1885 there were more than 700 missionary schools providing an education to over 15 000 African students.¹⁶ These schools produced teachers, church ministers, lawyers, journalists, interpreters, and clerks. This early generation of intellectuals placed great emphasis on rule of law and the importance of a constitutional approach and would greatly influence political life in South Africa as they began to challenge the unjust political order. As Andre Odendaal, author of *The Founders: The Origins of the African National Congress and the Struggle for Democracy*, profoundly notes, one need only consider: ‘the Dubes of

¹³ Odendaal, Andre. 2012. *The Founders: The Origins of the ANC and the struggle for democracy in South Africa*. Jacana Media: Auckland Park, p. 9.

¹⁴ Dubow, Saul. 2000. *The African National Congress*. Sutton Publishing: United Kingdom, p.4.

¹⁵ Dubow, Saul. 2000. *The African National Congress*. Sutton Publishing: United Kingdom.

¹⁶ Odendaal, Andre. 2012. *The Founders: The Origins of the ANC and the struggle for democracy in South Africa*. Jacana Media: Auckland Park, p. 12-13.

Inanda, the Lutulis of Groutville, the Kumalos and Msanes of Edendale, the Morokas of Thaba Nchu...to understand how the mission stations and schools became the breeding grounds for twentieth-century African nationalism'.¹⁷

Contra to the caricature of these early constitutionalists being engaged in 'deferential politics', they engaged in realistic strategies that were African in nature.¹⁸ While attempting to participate in the formal political processes they were also closely connected to their local communities and their issues – establishing community-based organisations, supporting teachers, opposing forced removals, and protecting land rights. They attempted to represent the interests of all Africans, irrespective of their class. For example, the first president of the SANNC, John Dube also established the Ohlange Institute – South Africa's first independent, African-controlled school; and founded and edited the newspaper *Ilanga lase Natal* (the Sun of Natal) – an important mouthpiece for African opinion. Dube's first wife, Nokutela Mdimma (Dube), was schooled at Inanda Seminary school for girls. Inanda Seminary established in 1869, by the Women's Board of the American Missionary Board, was a Christian school but with an African tradition.¹⁹ The school stimulated a philosophy of community engagement and upliftment.²⁰ Nokutela Mdimma would go on to study at the Union Missionary Training Institute in Brooklyn, and then become a pioneer in music education and start the choirs at Inanda.

These early founders, though deeply influenced by the missionary schools and Christian ideals, 'did not surrender their identities as Africans but proudly carried them into the new colonial era, even while being uncompromisingly Christian'.²¹ Their

¹⁷ Odendaal, 2012, p. 13.

¹⁸ Odendaal, 2012, p. 477.

¹⁹ Information received during a research visit to the Inanda seminary and museum, Inanda, KwaZuluNatal, 14 March 2016; Scott Everett Couper (2015) 'Where Men Fail, Women Take Over': Inanda Seminary's Rescue by its Own, *South African Historical Journal*, 67:1, 1-31.

²⁰ Examples abound of learners from this institution who would go on to serve their communities. Other alumni from the school include Sibusisiwe Violet Makhanya, who would become a pioneer in social work. Following her schooling at Inanda she ran a night school from her home, then raised her own funds and studied at Ohio and Columbia University. She returned to become the first black female social worker. Constance Nokapana Makhanya studied domestic science at Inanda in 1920s and would go on to become the first black teacher of this subject in Natal. She and her husband, a graduate of Adams College (another missionary school) troubled by the illiteracy and poor health in the Makhanya clan, set up a night school for herd boys. She then trained as a nurse at the American Board's McCord Zulu Hospital in Durban and graduated in 1932 with a certificate in mid-wifery. Together with her husband they built and established a maternity ward as she became one of the first black female pioneers of nursing.

²¹ Odendaal, 2012, p. 477.

political approach was informed by the values of African *ubuntuism*, Christianity and political liberalism.²² The founders called for the strategy of ‘shoot with the pen’, and sought constitutional and inclusive ways to take the country forward, placing great weight on human dignity.²³ The point of their stories is to illustrate a culture of embracing education, self-improvement and then using these skills to serve and better their communities. The constitutionalist dispensation was characterised by servant-leaders cognisant of the needs of their communities. They educated and skilled themselves so as to be constructive contributors to society.

In 1990 Nelson Mandela²⁴ requested to be released from prison on the 11th of February. The date was specifically chosen to honour the founding president of the SANNC, John Langalibalele Dube, who had died 11 February 1946.²⁵ And then, on the occasion of South Africa’s first democratic elections in 1994, after having voted at the Ohlange Institute (the school founded by Dube in 1901) Mandela visited Dube’s grave to report: ‘Mission accomplished, Mr President’.²⁶ Mandela, as the first president of democratic South Africa, was reaching back to and honouring a historical tradition in the ANC – a Christian-imbibed culture of education, progress, responsible civic engagement, and constitutionalism. While Mandela had been a card-carrying member of the SACP, ostensibly for expedient purposes and had initially been swayed by the SACP to move towards an armed struggle, he would moderate following his 27 years of incarceration. As Mangcu poignantly notes ‘Mandela’s [political] triumph was ... that of a particular type of African nationalism – closer to the conservative modernisers [early founders] than to the radical modernisers of his youth. The militant founder of MK had transformed himself into a man of reconciliation’.²⁷

The second tradition – the socialist dispensation – arguably also finds its origins in response to the 1910 Union of South Africa and the 1948 advent of apartheid. Where

²² Odendaal, 2012.

²³ Odendaal, 2012, p. 484.

²⁴ Mandela had been incarcerated for 27 years under the apartheid system, following the Rivonia Trial (1963-1964).

²⁵ Information received during a research visit to the Inanda seminary and museum, Inanda, KwaZuluNatal, 14 March 2016.

²⁶ Nelson Mandela, 1994, quoted in Odendaal, Andre. 2012. *The Founders: The Origins of the ANC and the struggle for democracy in South Africa*. Jacana Media: Auckland Park, p. 483.

²⁷ Xolela Mangcu, 2015, Edited by N de Jager, *South African Politics: An Introduction*, 2nd edition. Oxford University Press of Southern Africa: Cape Town, p.70.

there had initially been signs of promise for greater involvement and recognition of an emerging black middle class, going into the 1910 Union the white leadership of South Africa instead closed upward mobility opportunities and sought to rather create a cheap labour force of South Africa's African citizens. Government policy would actively stunt the education and development of the black intellectual, land ownership and hence the middle class.²⁸ And in doing so, it would encourage more militant and radical approaches including class-based protests and armed struggles informed by Marxism. These culminated in the 1960s following the ANC's banning during apartheid. The SACP would introduce members of the ANC's more militant Youth League to the Soviet Union and its communist ideas, during the Cold War period.

South Africa had been a key focus in southern Africa for the Soviet Union. The Soviet regime had hoped that through fermenting polarisation and radicalising the black community, revolution would result.²⁹ The ANC's close relationship with the Soviet Union had been facilitated by the Communist Party of South Africa (later the South African Communist Party) and reinforced with the decision to move towards an armed struggle in 1961 and form the military arm *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK).³⁰ The Soviet Union's influence on the ANC grew following the party's banning, making it more reliant on the SACP. A key consequence of this increased reliance was certainly the move from non-violence to violence in the 1960s³¹ and the transfer of communist ideology. ANC members received training in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, becoming familiar with the ideas of Marxism-Leninism. Amongst these ideas was the German philosopher, Karl Marx's understanding of the purpose of the state to act in the special interests of the working class, and therefore it could never be neutral. Instead, he argued that in the 'political transition period ... the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat'.³² This idea was further developed by Lenin who argued for the need of a revolutionary or vanguard party to lead the working

²⁸ Democratic theory points to the importance of the middle class in the development of and strength of constitutional democracy, thus this is a low point in South Africa's political history, and it certainly contributed to the undermining of democratic development.

²⁹ Seth Singleton, *Final Report to National Council for Soviet and East European Research: The Future of Soviet Influence in Africa* (Harvard University, 1987).

³⁰ Ellis, S. 2011. "The Genesis of the ANC's Armed Struggle in South Africa 1948–1961." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37 (4): 657-676.

³¹ Gevisser, 2010, p. 149.

³² Karl Marx, "Critiquing of the Gotha Programme, Part IV" (1875), Accessed October 24, 2019. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/>.

class towards revolutionary class consciousness.³³ Lenin believed that the working class was controlled by the bourgeoisie and was thus unable to determine what was in its best interests, hence the need for a vanguard party to lead it. If the vanguard party is considered to act in the interest of the working class, it followed that anyone or any party that dared to disagree then represented hostile interests. The Leninist approach left behind a polarizing us-versus-them narrative, where the liberation movements were conceived as the only true leaders, and any who would contend or disagree being portrayed as counter-revolutionary and then later as anti-transformation.

Besides the idea of the vanguard party, the socialist dispensation also infused within the ANC the Soviet theory of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR). The NDR which became part of the ANC's *Strategy & Tactics* adopted at the Morogoro Conference in 1969, has remained the ANC's national project into the democratic period.³⁴ Aligned with the NDR was the Soviet Union's proposed two-stage revolution, with the formation of a 'black republic' as the first stage and the establishment of socialism as the second stage.³⁵ Jacob Zuma's victory at the ANC's 2007 national conference was primarily the outcome of the banding together of Tripartite Alliance members disgruntled with Mbeki's interpretation of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) – an emphasis on presidential centralism (government over party) often to the exclusion of the other two members within the Alliance – the SACP and the trade union movement, COSATU.³⁶ This separation between party and state effectively shut out these alliance partners from the spoils of office as well as the strategic direction of the country – a situation they were not happy with. In the ANC's 52nd national conference, the conference at which Thabo Mbeki was ousted from power, the *Building a National Democratic Society: Strategy and Tactics of the ANC* (2007) document was adopted. It argued that the party needed to prioritise the

³³ Andrew Heywood, *Political ideologies: An introduction*, 5th Edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 122.

³⁴ It's worth noting that with the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, the NDR theory was largely abandoned by the Soviets.

³⁵ Roger Southall, 'The ANC for Sale? Money, Morality and Business in South Africa', *Review of African Political Economy* 35, no. 116 (2008): 105.

³⁶ Booyesen, Susan. 2011. *The African National Congress and the Regeneration of Political Power*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, p. 360.

involvement of ‘cadres in all centres of power’³⁷ effectively placing cadre deployment at the centre of the Zuma administration.³⁸ The deployment of loyalists – cadres- into public administration and state-owned entities is another socialist import.

Zuma thus became state president in 2009, with the expectation that he would use state machinery towards achieving partisan ends, but this time for the specified interests of those who had put him in power. The control of state appointments and resources were easily justified based on the rationale of the NDR and cadre deployment towards the goal of ‘transformation’, thus serving Zuma’s system of patronage well. As a reward to those who placed him into power Zuma inflated his first cabinet, which included SACP representatives such as Blade Nzimande (Minister of Higher Education and Training), Jeremy Cronin (Deputy Minister of Transport), and COSATU representatives such as Ebrahim Patel (Minister of Economic Development).³⁹

And while Zuma’s reign has since ended and state capture acknowledged as having been disastrous for the country, the ANC continues to pursue the socialist tradition and its features that created the very conditions for state capture. As evident in the ANC’s 2022 policy conference, the party persists in the pursuit of the Soviet NDR as its national project, referring to itself as the ‘vanguard of the National Democratic Revolution’, and portraying those who contend with it or hold it accountable as ‘counter-revolutionary’⁴⁰ and spreaders of ‘misinformation and false news’.⁴¹ ‘Vanguard’ infers that they see only themselves as qualified to lead and say as much in their 2022 policy documents: ‘The reality is that the African National Congress (ANC) remains the only viable vehicle with which meaningful economic transformation

³⁷ ANC.2007. ‘Strategy and Tactics: Building a National Democratic Society’. As adopted by the 52nd National Conference, 16–20 December 2007. Accessed 14 June 2023. Available at: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/2007-anc-national-policy-conference-report-commission-strategy-and-tactics-30-june-2007>, point 129.

³⁸ Fredericks, Jordan & de Jager, Nicola. 2021. ‘An Analysis of the Historical Roots of Partisan Governance within the ANC: Understanding the Road to State Capture’, *Politikon*, 49 (1): 21–42.

³⁹ Calland, Richard. 2013. *The Zuma Years: South Africa’s Changing Face of Power*. Cape Town: Zebra Press, p. 59-50.

⁴⁰ ANC. 2022. Policy Conference Discussion Documents. <https://www.anc1912.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Umrabulo-Policy-Documents-18th-May-2022.pdf> p.24.

⁴¹ ANC. 2022. Policy Conference Discussion Documents. <https://www.anc1912.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Umrabulo-Policy-Documents-18th-May-2022.pdf>, p. 48.

and development of the South African state can be driven'.⁴² The ANC elite regard themselves 'as an elect, embodying the will of the people, and uniquely able to recognise their true interests'.⁴³ Thus fully embracing the Lenin understanding of the vanguard party. In addition, despite the unconstitutional nature of deploying party loyalists into public institutions which are constitutionally mandated to be impartial, this strategy remains firmly intact. 'Crony appointments' into the state administration without the requisite skills or capability will continue, as it has, to undermine 'any chance of building a capable state.'⁴⁴

This choice of historical tradition has thus served to feed into the governance style of the ANC and its macro-economic policy decisions. Both of which have taken the party further away from the people as it closes ranks around its own interests.

Governance: Partisanship over non-partisanship

The state regulates relations to its citizens along two dimensions, namely the input side, which concerns access to public authority, and the output side, the exercise of public authority.⁴⁵ In a democratic regime public authority is accessed through elections and requires political equality as its underlying legitimating principle. This right to vote and elect one's political representatives, irrespective of race, was hard won by those who had opposed apartheid. While the input side speaks to how power is accessed, the output side speaks to how political power is exercised and in whose interest. Rothstein and Teorell⁴⁶ argue that there is quality of government or good governance when governance is exercised on the basis of impartiality. A public servant should not be susceptible to bribery, should not decide cases in terms of friends or relatives and should not favour any special (ethnic etc) interest when applying laws and rules. Moving from the basis of impartiality public servants should be guided rather by public interest rather than self-interest. The principle of impartiality is actually

⁴² ANC. 2022. 6th National Policy Conference Report. <https://www.anc1912.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/6th-ANC-National-Policy-Conference-Reports-2022.pdf>, p.37.

⁴³ Myburgh, James. 2019. 'Transformation is killing South Africa'. <https://www.politicsweb.co.za/opinion/transformation-is-killing-south-africa>

⁴⁴ Zille, H. 2016. *Not without a fight*. Penguin Books: Century City, p. 148.

⁴⁵ Rothstein, B. & Teorell, J. 2008. "What is quality of government?: A theory of impartial government institutions." *Governance: An International Journal of Policy Administration and Institutions* 21 (2): 165-190.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

embedded in the South African Constitution. For example, sections 165 and 96 prescribe that all branches of government – the executive, legislature and judiciary – are required to act ‘impartially’ (Republic of South Africa 1996). The judiciary is to be ‘independent and subject only to the Constitution and law, which they must apply impartially and without fear, favor or prejudice’ (Republic of South Africa 1996, 2). Quality of governance ensures procedures that demonstrate that state authorities can be trusted as impartial guarantors and enforcers of democratic rules. Where there is no such impartial guarantor then an environment of institutional and judicial uncertainty and insecurity is created.

The Marxist understanding of ‘good’ governance stands in contrast to this as it not only sees the state as partisan, but that it *should be* partisan, acting in the interests of the proletariat or working class.⁴⁷ Reaching back to the socialist dispensation, the ANC has persisted with the NDR as its national project. The main content of the NDR is the ‘national liberation of the African people in particular, and the black people in general’ with the goal of moving from socialism to communism.⁴⁸ The NDR not only proposes democracy of a particular kind – where a partial and centralized system of governing, led by the working class, is seen as necessary - but suggests that democracy itself only constituted a transitional stage towards socialism and eventually communism. As Chipkin argues the purpose of state transformation for the ANC government was to shift the social bias from white minority to black majority; ‘Blacks in general and Africans in particular’.⁴⁹ For some within the ANC, the aim was thus never to establish a neutral state, but an ethnically-partisan state. It has thus pursued aggressively racially discriminatory policies under the guise of transformation. This pursuit began already in 1997 as the ANC drove ‘transformation’, as embodied in the dual programmes of cadre deployment and demographic quotas. The White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service and the Employment Equity Act, adopted in

⁴⁷ Jordan Fredericks & Nicola de Jager (2022) An Analysis of the Historical Roots of Partisan Governance within the ANC: Understanding the Road to State Capture, *Politikon*, 49:1, 21-42.

⁴⁸ See: The National Democratic Revolution in the O’Malley Archives.

<https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/site/q/03lv02424/04lv02730/05lv03005/06lv03132/07lv03140/08lv03145.htm>

⁴⁹ Chipkin I. 2012. “Corruption and the State.” *Journal of the Helen Suzman Foundation* 67: 10–6; ANC. 1999c. “*Strategy and Tactics of the ANC: Building a National Democratic Society.*”, adopted at the 52nd National Conference of the ANC. Accessed 5 June 2020.

<https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/strategy-and-tactics-anc-building-national-democratic-society-revised-draft-anc-30-august>

1998, and subsequent policies such as Black Economic Empowerment have kept alive apartheid-era race categorisations.

This partisan governance approach has facilitated a system of corruption as argued by Fredericks and de Jager.⁵⁰ With the partisan state, a framework for state capture was set up through the pursuit of the NDR, overseen by the vanguard party and implemented through cadre deployment. The foundations for a patronage network were established in the NDR, a national policy that actively advocates for a partisan state, and that could then easily be utilised by a compromised individual such as Jacob Zuma and his personal connections. This partisan exercise of governance is hedged from critical engagement through the argument that its actions are to ensure transformation. Those who would contend or ask questions concerning such 'transformation' are silenced by being labelled racist or accused of being anti-transformation.

This partisan system of governance would not only work in the limited interests of the politically connected, but would work against the very people it was ostensibly presented as being partial towards. This is aptly illustrated in the Vrede Dairy Farm project and the public money set aside for this project which was instead diverted to pay for the lavish private wedding of Gupta family members at Sun City in 2013. A testimony presented at the Zondo Commission of Inquiry into State Capture lays out how the wedding was funded using public funds channelled through the Free State provincial government to Estina, a Gupta-owned company.⁵¹ Estina had been established as a front company to launder the money that had been intended for this community project and the upliftment of local farmers. But the economic consequences of the ANC's governance have spread further than localised community projects to hinder economic growth of the nation as a whole.

⁵⁰ Jordan Fredericks & Nicola de Jager (2022) An Analysis of the Historical Roots of Partisan Governance within the ANC: Understanding the Road to State Capture, *Politikon*, 49:1, 21-42.

⁵¹ See: [State capture inquiry: Estina was 'used to launder cash' prior to initiation of dairy project | News24](#)

Macro-economic policy: State control over societal job creation

In their study of why some countries grow and others stagnate Roll and Tallbot focus on the role of government in either encouraging or hindering development.⁵² The findings from their empirical study highlight indicators that improve and undermine Gross National Income per capita (GNIpc). Amongst the indicators with the highest levels of statistical significance were Property Rights – positively related with economic development, and Excessive State Regulation - negatively related with economic development. Political rights, civil liberties, and freedom of the press were also highly significant, and positive for improving economic conditions. These findings thus supported Milton Friedman’s claim that economic development and political freedom are mutually supportive.⁵³ Their research points to the importance of a fair and just system -namely good governance characterised by impartiality, and the avoidance of radical policies such as expropriation and repudiation. This is consistent with the longitudinal study of Latin America, from 1945 until 2005, of Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán.⁵⁴ In considering what contributed to long-term democratic stability, they found that a key factor was the avoidance of radical policies. Policy moderation was key to democratic longevity. A political environment where political and economic freedoms are upheld and radical policies such as expropriation are avoided, encourages investment, and the establishment of small businesses which have traditionally been critical engines of growth.⁵⁵

The scholarship thus points to the importance of economic and political freedom, and limited state regulation for economic growth and in turn increasing levels of employment. A country’s macro-economic policy speaks to the way in which a government orders and influences the economy of a country. It thus also concerns state-society relations and determines the extent to which the state intervenes in the market. From 1994 the ANC adopted a more interventionist and regulatory approach with a strong focus on the demand side of the economy rather than supply. In 1994 it adopted the Reconstruction and Development (RDP) programme focussing on

⁵² Richard Roll and John Talbott. 2003. Political Freedom, Economic Liberty, and Prosperity. *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 14, Number 3: 75-89.

⁵³ Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

⁵⁴ Scott Mainwaring and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán. 2014. *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emergence, Survival, and Fall*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

⁵⁵ In the United States more than two-thirds of the new jobs created each year come in industries where small businesses predominated.

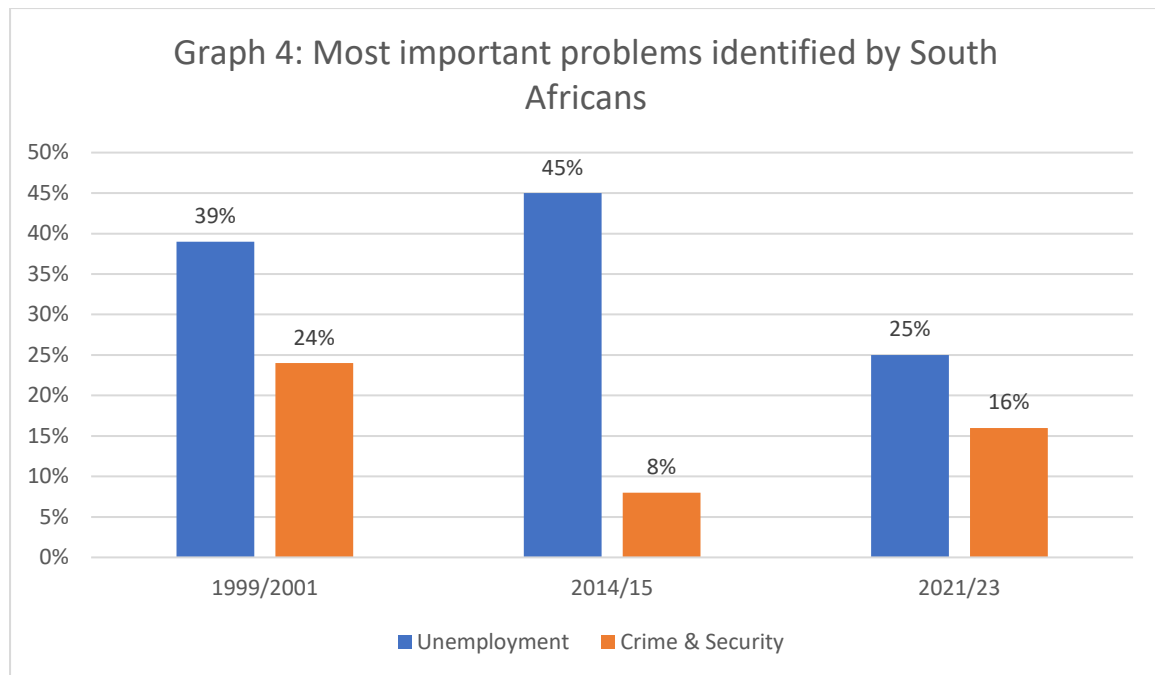
redistribution, social spending and strong state intervention. But it became increasingly clear to Mandela and Mbeki that the concern with emphasising the demand side of the economy is that it does not grow the economy – it spends. And, if the economy is not grown, through jobs and investments, there are few taxes, and there is no money to spend. Thus, the question became how could they grow to spend? In 1996 SA adopted the Growth Economy and Redistribution (GEAR) policy which focused on the supply side to create economic stability, to be more market-friendly and to encourage fiscal discipline. The argument was that you could not have development without growth. This more market-friendly approach, and thus enabling society to grow the economy, was not popular with the socialist dispensation in the ANC and its Alliance partners. And thus, while the economy grew during this period and with the Mbeki era being characterized by fiscal discipline, it would be ideology that would triumph. Since GEAR, SA has adopted a number of economic policies, characterised by an aspirational move towards a developmental state – and hence greater state intervention. The emphasis has thus been a return to the state, led by the ANC and its loyal cadres, as the driver of the economy and less society, in the form of the free market.

Unemployment has consistently been ranked the top problem for South Africans (see graph 4). This has consistently been followed by crime and security.⁵⁶ Under Mbeki's pragmatic economic policy unemployment levels were steadily declining until 2009 (see graph 5). As South Africa moved into the neopatrimonial and partisan governance period under Jacob Zuma, so unemployment levels inverted again and began consistently increasing. A further worry noted by South Africans in the Afrobarometer surveys, and which has become increasingly concerning over the years has been education, ranked fourth in 2021 by 24% of the respondents. Education is linked to employment as a connected concern is employability and being adequately prepared for the workplace. In the 2021 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 81% of South Africa's grade 4 pupils did not attain the study's already low international benchmark.⁵⁷ Suggesting that many grade 4 children cannot read for

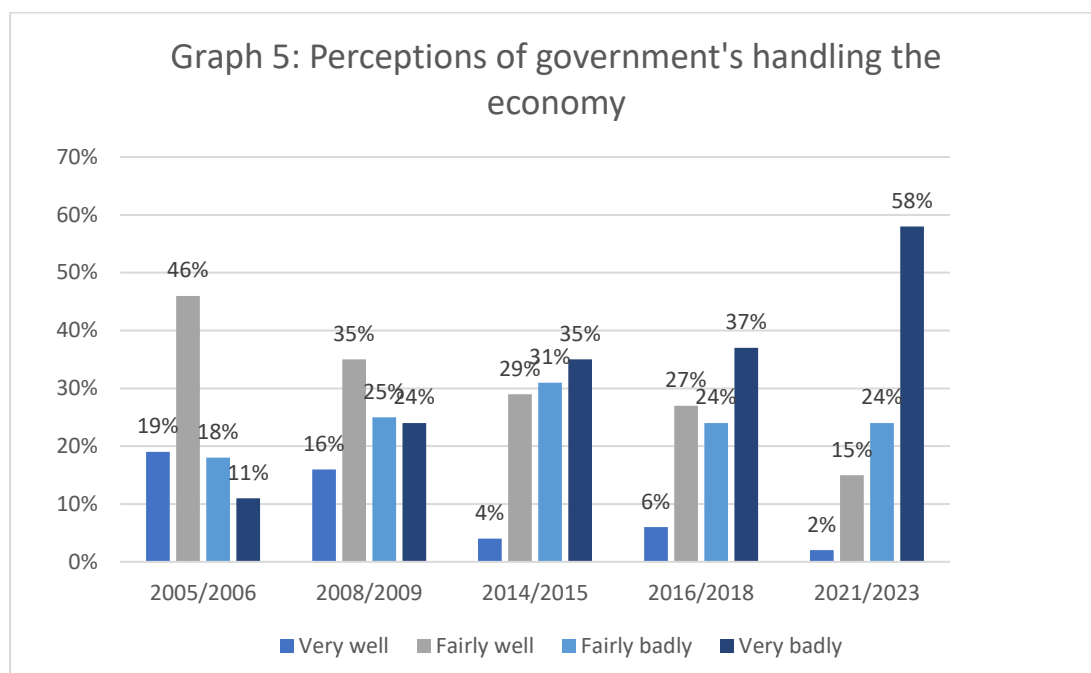
⁵⁶ Afrobarometer Data, [South Africa], [Round 8], [Year 2019/2021], available at <http://www.afrobarometer.org>

⁵⁷ Wills, Gabrielle and Ardington, Cally. 2023. 'Learning to read is a journey: a study identifies where South African kids go off track'. In *The Conversation*, June 6, 2023. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/learning-to-read-is-a-journey-a-study-identifies-where-south-african-kids-go-off-track-206242>

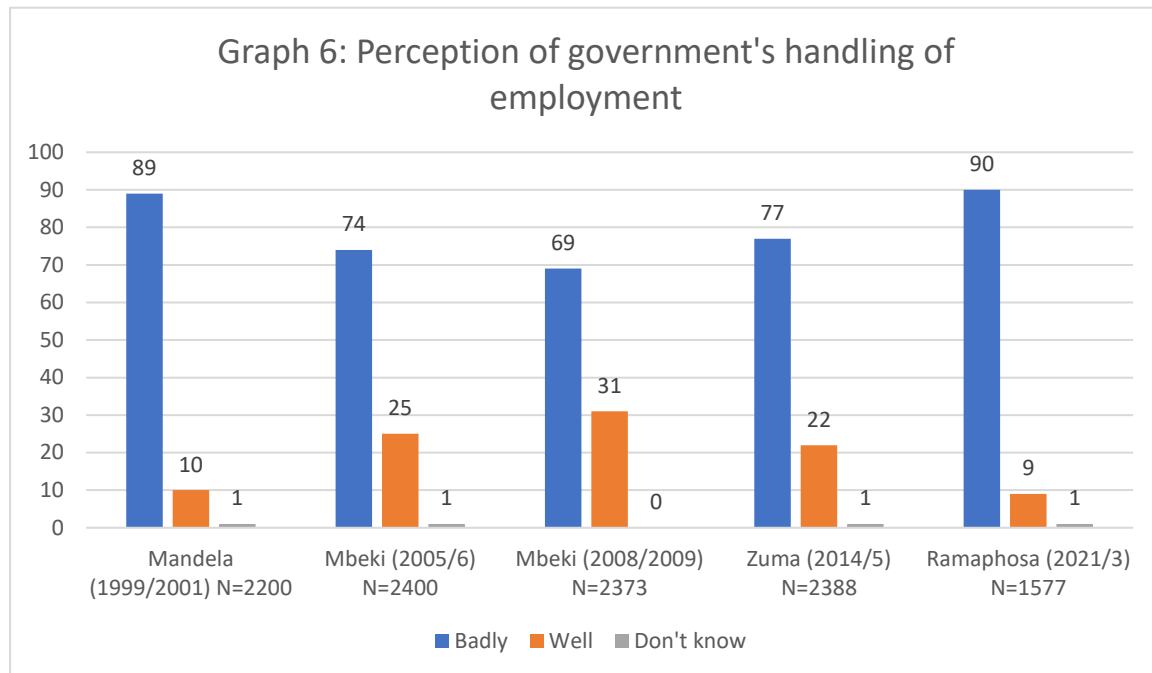
meaning. The study placed South Africa last out of 57 participating countries. A declining education system has not served to prepare and equip an employable workforce. Combined with this are rolling blackouts.



Notes: The graph has been derived by the author using data from Afrobarometer. Round 1 (1999/2001), round 6 (2014/ 2015) and round 9 (2021/2023) were selected. The survey asked: What are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? Which of these is most important. The graph thus indicates the top two problems identified by the respondents.



Notes: The graph has been derived by the author using data from Afrobarometer.



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South Africa’s unemployment rate is among the highest in the world and was recorded at 32,9% in the first quarter of 2023.⁵⁸ The expanded definition of unemployment, which includes unemployed and not looking for employment stood at 42,4%. It is acknowledged that these figures do not capture those that are engaging in work outside of the formal system.⁵⁹ On the other hand the country has one of the most expansive systems of social grants with nearly 19 million of the 62 million population receiving grants. This translates into 47% of the population receiving social transfers.⁶⁰ It is also a redistributive economy with the top 10% income earners contributing over

⁵⁸ StatsSA. 2023. Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 1st Quarter 2023. https://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1856&PPN=P0211&SCH=73571

⁵⁹ <https://theconversation.com/47-of-south-africans-rely-on-social-grants-study-reveals-how-they-use-them-to-generate-more-income-203691>

⁶⁰ See: https://static.pmg.org.za/SASSA_2022-23_Annual_Performance_Plan.pdf#page=9

80% of the income tax.⁶¹ In the long-term this is an unsustainable situation, even if the social grants have been a key source of poverty alleviation and the thin wedge which has kept many from plunging into abject poverty. While Personal Income Tax (PIT) collection is the largest source of tax revenue in South Africa, there are only 5,2 million individual taxpayers. This 9% of the population contributes 40% of South Africa's total tax revenue.⁶² But it is only 2 million that are contributing to 80% of the PIT.⁶³ Unless the economy grows this situation is unlikely to change. The ANC government leaning on its socialist, state-interventionist dispensation is unable to grow the economy presenting wealth as something to be redistributed but not grown. Inequality and poverty sit downstream from unemployment, but so long as the government persists in hamstringing the private sector this situation is unlikely to improve.

South Africa has a progressive tax system, high social spending and policies like BBBEE, but the tax base needs to be increased. With 5.2 million PIT taxpayers, a population of 62 million, and 19 million receiving social grants, it results in a dependency ratio of approximately 3:1. Thus while social grants and social spending help to alleviate poverty, this is not a sustainable solution, nor is it the solution that the majority of South Africans want in the long-term. One explanation for unemployment is an inflexible, highly regulated labour market and the power of trade unions facilitated through COSATU's position in the Tripartite Alliance. The 2023 Index of Economic Freedom ranks South Africa as 'mostly unfree' placing it 116th out of 176 countries. The Heritage Foundation presents an index which covers 12 freedoms – from property rights to financial freedom – in 184 countries. The country's property rights are below that of the world average making it a risky environment in which to invest (see graph 7). Using the International Institute for Management Development (IMD) World Competitiveness 2023 Annual Report South Africa is ranked 61 out of 64 countries, thus indicating South Africa is uncompetitive.⁶⁴ The report uses a combination of statistics and survey data to compute countries' rankings, and uses 330

⁶¹ Gabriela Inchauste, Nora Lustig, Mashekwa Maboshe, Catriona Purfield and Ingrid Woolard. 2015. The Distributional Impact of Fiscal Policy in South Africa Poverty Global Practice Group & Macroeconomics and Fiscal Management Global Practice Group. Policy Research Working Paper 7194

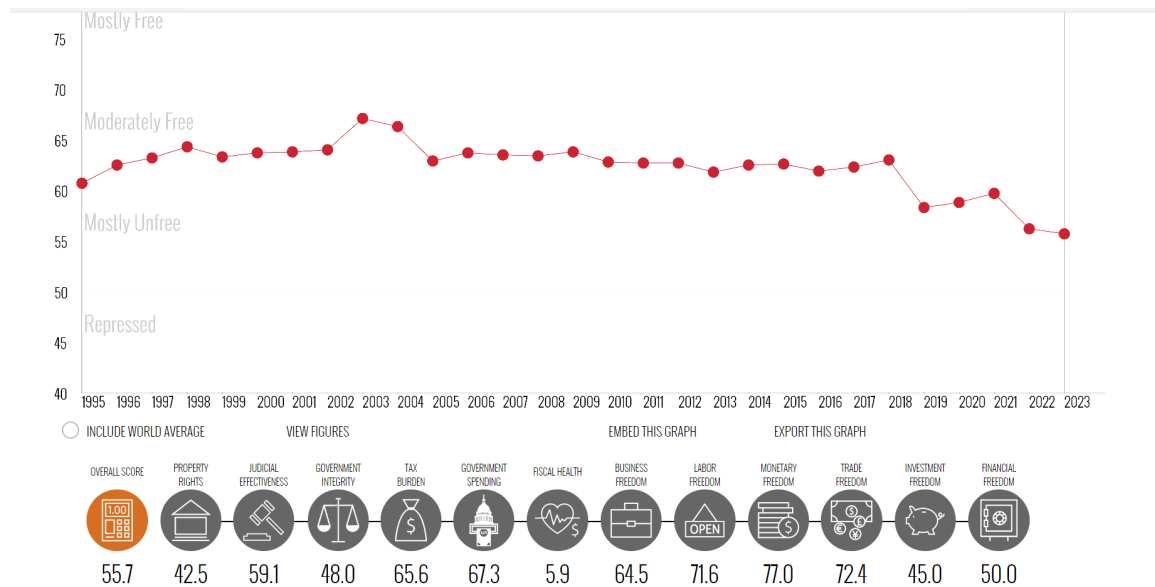
⁶² https://www.ey.com/en_za/tax/the-shrinking-pit-tax-base--what-s-next-

⁶³ <https://dailyinvestor.com/finance/4748/just-2-million-south-africans-pay-80-of-all-personal-income-tax/>

⁶⁴ <https://www.imd.org/centers/wcc/world-competitiveness-center/rankings/world-competitiveness-ranking/2023/>

competitiveness criteria which can be grouped under economic performance, government efficiency, business efficiency and infrastructure.

Graph 7: Index of Economic Freedom in South Africa



Notes: Graph derived by the author using the Index of Economic Freedom in South Africa, <https://www.heritage.org/index/visualize?cnts=southafrica&type=8>.

Graphs 5 & 6 indicate that the respondents do not consider the ANC government’s handling of the economy and unemployment favourably. As graph 6 indicates 90% of the respondents in the latest survey round consider the government’s handling of the employment as ‘badly’, while 58% consider the government’s handling of the economy as ‘very badly’. In light of unemployment being the number one concern of South Africans, the surveys again show the depth of the fissure between the ANC and the people. And instead of using the state capture moment to self-reflect and to re-consider its governance style and economic policies, the party has rather stubbornly dug in its heels and committed itself to more of the same.

Conclusion

During the 2023 World Rugby Cup South Africans *en mass* donned green and gold, and diarised and prioritised each successive match. There was a collective understanding that the rugby game was much more than a sports game as its communication strategy of #strongertogether took flame in the hearts and

imaginings of South Africans. The response of South Africans spoke to a desire for hope, to be united, our resilience and the enormous potential to build on the social capital that exists in the country. Having been 30 years at the political helm of South Africa the ANC had not been able to do (or likely did not have the will to do it) what a rugby campaign had – unite its country. The successive election results, the surveys measuring trust and satisfaction all point to the citizenry's hopes that have been persistently dashed.

If South Africans take a deep breath and a hard look they will realise that the country's future still rests with them, but they will need to acknowledge that the ANC of today is not the ANC of its founders. The dispensation of servant-leaders and constitutionalists has long ended. But South Africa is still a democracy and the voice of its citizens can still be heard through the ballot box, not through opting out, but through opting in and shifting their support wisely. Lessons also need to be learnt in terms of what grows a country's democracy and economy and in turn creates an environment of good governance and job growth. It is good governance, when those who hold political power use it not for partisan or personal ends, but in the broader public interest. It is a government that acknowledges that society too has a role to play and gives the private sector the breathing space to do what it does best – create jobs. The future of South Africa is not in the hands of corrupt leaders with fingers in the public purse but in the citizens and the moment to be stronger together is in the 2024 elections – it's time to kick the scoundrels out.

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung NPC

Gregor Jaecke
Resident Representative, Country Office South Africa
European and International Cooperation
www.kas.de/southafrica

gregor.jaecke@kas.de



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