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## The Government of National Unity in South Africa 2024: A Threat or An Opportunity?

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### Abstract

Governments of National Unity (GNU) are constituted with "National Unity" being the fundamental objective for previously or historically divided elements of the society. Unlike coalitions, GNU are inclusive by design and not necessarily driven by the desire to resolve the dilemma arising from hung parliaments or local municipalities. A GNU as an inclusive form of a government seeks to create a stable administrative and good governance. This form of government is embedded in the broad theory of power sharing and is underpinned by the public office-seeking theory and desire to access the state. Inherently, each GNU formed in a particular discourse imposes a threat(s) or an opportunity as it arise. To affirm the 2024 GNU in South Africa (SA) as either a threat or an opportunity, the researchers conducted a qualitative desktop literature review. While the article provides an African experience of a GNU, it further identifies the potential threats and opportunities form a GNU. Constitutional time constraints to establish the national assembly prevents the parties from constituting a fully inclusive GNU. The author argues that a GNU is South Africa, 2024 present both threats and opportunities.

**Keywords:** Government, Elections, Unity, Coalition, Power sharing

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### 1. Introduction

*"What this election has made plain is that the people of South Africa expect their leaders to work together to meet their needs."*

(Republic of South Africa, 2024)

In his journal article Thwala (2023:52) concludes "There is greater expectation that South Africa at national

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level will for the first time be governed through a coalition in 2024". The reality is that it would not be for the first time that South Africa is governed by a conglomeration of political parties in 2024.

Thwala (2023:41) also observe that SA's first coalition government was the surplus majority government called the Government of National Unity (GNU). The game changer in the 2024 elections is that no single political party achieved sufficient votes to constitute government alone. This discourse enjoins political parties in SA to work together to form government. "Our people expect all parties to work together within the framework of our constitution and address whatever challenges we encounter peacefully and in accordance with the prescripts of our constitution and the rule of law" (Republic of South Africa, 2024). This paper evaluates the Government of National Unity in SA after the 2024 elections

## 2. Methodology

This is a conceptual study analysing the concept of GNU as a form of a government with specific reference to its opportunities and threats. For this article, a qualitative desktop literature review research Method was applied. The methodology applied entails (i) the review of the literature (old and new), (ii) journal articles, (iii) official government documents, (iv) master dissertations (v) and doctoral thesis produced in the discipline of public administration and political studies with a concentration on coalition government.

The study is one dimensional as it focuses on the narrative element of the Literature. Literature was reviewed to understand the GNU as a form of government, the African context of a GNU and assess whether it is an opportunity or a threat. The data analysis for this study applied a content analysis. Thus, the content is presented thematically covering the conception of a GNU and the experience of a GNU in selected African countries. The authors argue that the GNU is an opportunity, but it inherently poses a threat.

## 3. Defining a Government of National Unity (GNU)

In his case study entitled: "Reconciling the impossible': South Africa's Government of National Unity, 1994-1996" Schreiber (2016:1) wrote that in April 1994, after a decades-long struggle for democracy and more than three years of strenuous peace negotiations, the African National Congress (ANC) under the stewardship of President Nelson Mandela (MHSRIP) constituted a power-sharing government with its rivals.

The 1994 SA's power sharing deal with the ANC included the now defunct National Party (NP) under the leadership of Mr. F. W De Klerk and the Inkatha Freedom Party led by its President, Prince Buthelezi. In 1994 the country was highly polarised due the Apartheid oppression and discrimination against the black majority and other national groups, political violence and brutal killings in KwaZulu-Natal and parts Gauteng Province.

As a result, the ultimate goal of the 1994 GNU was according to Mpanza (2024:2) to turn SA into a rainbow nation was no easy mission to accomplish, given diverse political backgrounds from which South Africa's race groups came. It was inherent that those who had benefitted much from the Apartheid government would try hard to preserve their privilege Whereas those previously disbarred from national franchise would strive hard to access opportunities presented by the democratic state (including positions in the state, economic opportunities, education, health, land, etc.).

In the interest of national unity, the Interim Constitution of SA (Republic of South Africa, 1993) clause 88(2) stipulated that: "A party holding at least 20 seats in the National Assembly and which has decided to participate in the government of national unity, shall be entitled to be allocated one or more of the Cabinet portfolios in proportion to the number of seats held by it in the National Assembly relative to the number of seats held by the other participating parties".

The constitution of 1993 further empowered a party that obtained more than 80 seats in the National Assembly (NA) to designate an Executive Deputy President amongst its elected members of the (NA). The interim Constitution of 1993 further stipulated that as an alternative to the above stipulation, a party holding the largest number of seats and the party holding the second largest number of seats shall each be entitled to designate one Executive Deputy President from among the members of the NA. Therefore, the GNU of 1994 in SA was clearly prescribed in the 1993 Constitution. However, the questions still stands: What is a government of national unity?

To understand the GNU, we initially define the concept of national unity. In the Malaysian context national unity is characterised by Chang *et al.* (2013) as efforts to strengthen the linkages and relations amongst citizens while demolishing walls of segregation amongst the people of different races. Therefore, national unity is necessitated by deep roots of segregation (Ethnic, racial, tribal, wars, and otherwise). National unity could fundamentally be conceptualised as a state in which all citizens from different groups (ethnic, religion, regions) live peacefully as a united nation, fully committed to a national identity based upon the Constitution and the national ideology (Malaysia, 1992).

Therefore, the objective of national unity is healing the present or historical divide of the society. Such factors might have emerged from wars, ethnic or tribal divide, socio-economic divide, race, and tribal divide. Therefore, national unity is a product of deliberate actions by policy makers and law makers to bring the country together driven by the state. The most critical task is for the role-players to acknowledge that the country is divided, and to identify measures to build national unity.

In addition, Chigora and Guzura (2011:21) observes that national unity supports the achievement of national consensus on broad national issues and a single vision. It further represents the active recognition, participation and inclusion of the broader spectrum of the nation's diverse political views. On the other hand, GNUs are historically constituted under conditions where a country faces a crisis in the broad sense (political or socio-economic crisis, military situation etc. (Vitaliy, 2014:22).

Therefore, a GNU is not the ultimate, but it is a vehicle to achieve national unity. The task of the state simply becomes to adopt policies and programmes to build national unity. Key amongst the national projects developed after the 1994 breakthrough were the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Employment Equity, gender equality, and equal recognition of religions and, Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and the adoption of the new constitution.

According to Mukoma (2008), Nhengu and Murairwa (2020) a GNU is a coalition government, designed specifically to accommodate all participating political players in governmental structures. Nhengu and Murairwa (2020) further identify four key elements of the GNU including (i) political transition, (ii) inclusive participation, (iii) human rights, (iv) and the rule of law. GNUs are underpinned by shared power and the objective of achieving national unity.

However, Chigora and Guruza (2011:24) questions the extent which the GNUs translates to tangible power sharing. The essence of government is that Head of States hold executive powers conferred to them by constitutions of their different countries and it is difficult to split such powers to other partners, even when they are in the cabinets, the executive authority remains vested with the head of state. This demands that role-players identify and agree on what would be the key programmes of government they will be constituting.

To this end, the GNU of 1994 in SA was identified as one amongst many instruments to ensure inclusivity during the transition period from apartheid to democracy, 1990-1994. The fundamental mission of the 1994 GNU was to oversee a new South African Constitution, as well as to radically improve the quality of life of all people of South Africa History Online (2014). Whether the objectives of the 1994 were achieved is a subject of a separate extensive research and analysis.

#### 4. Central Theoretical Themes for a GNU

As it has already affirmed by Mukoma (2008), Nhengu and Murairwa (2020), a government of national unity as a form of a coalition government is underpinned by three perspectives: (i) *the office-seeking theory*, (ii) *the policy-seeking theory*, (iii) *and forming a broader and all-encompassing front*. These three theories are foundations from which the opportunities and threats for government of national unity emanate. The driving factor behind participating in government is to occupy the public office, manage state power and implement or make policy decisions. However, the GNU imposes the element of inclusivity and all-encompassing form of government.

The central theoretical theme around government of national unity is that it is formed because of political necessity. As a result, different role player and stakeholder including political parties are brought together to achieve national stability and a functional state. This may also occur where no party could attain a simple

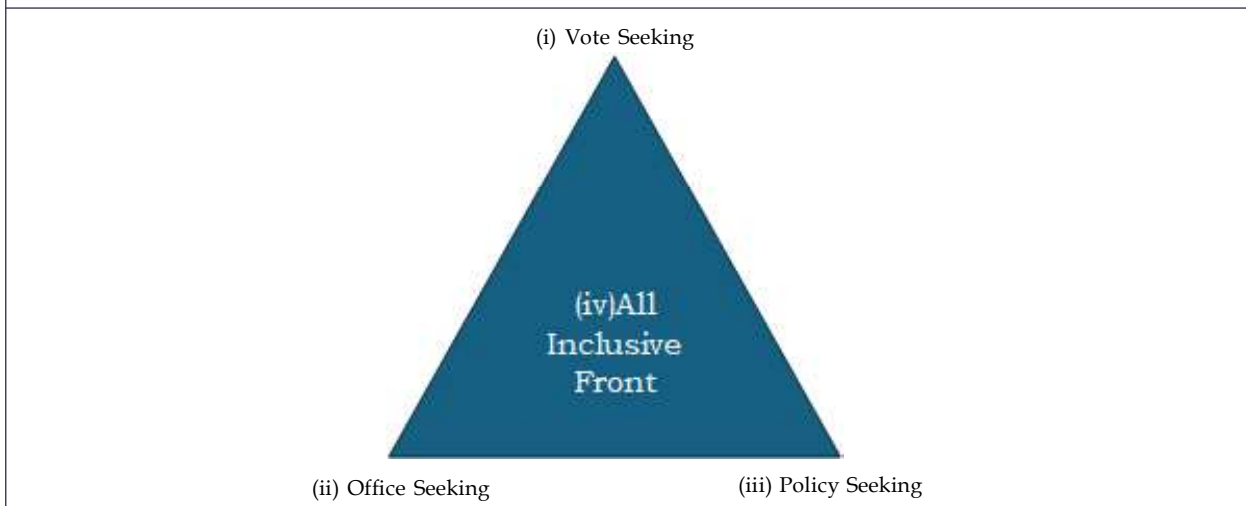
majority (Ndou, 2022:33) during an election. This perspective is shared by Knowles (2021: 35) that coalition are established to create political stability and governability. However, Knowles (2021:37) further acknowledges that while a GNU could bring stability and governability in an instance of hung parliaments and local municipalities, it could also lead to poor governance characterised by lack of answerability, corruption and mismanagement.

GNUs further enhances the social coordinating role of government where politicians and the state machinery in the GNU could serve as a mechanism for social coordination for at least one of the following three reasons: Firstly, it enables people to cooperate and make their choices on the basis of something beyond the individualism of the market. Secondly, political decision making under a GNU is flexible therefore it can deal with uncertainty, ambiguity, unexpected change and wicked problems. Thirdly, that, politics is a coping mechanism in an uncertain and unpredictable world and fourthly because politics can move beyond a distribution of benefits to establish a process of social production in which the interests of society are broad together to achieve a common purpose (Sithanen, 2003:23).

However, the constitution of government of national unity is primarily driven by the office-seeking theory and ambition of individual role-players, and the policy-seeking theory by the role-players. In the next section we further discuss both the office-seeking and policy-seeking theories of GNUs. We overemphasise this view not because office seeking and desire to pursue own policy initiative is wrong but as the true objective of all political role-players.

In Diagram 1 below we illustrate a modified Kaare Strøm’s’ model for party behavior (Forsyth, 2023:3). In the diagram Strom places: (i) vote seeking as the apex behavioral aspect of a political party. The author then identifies (ii) office seeking, (iii) policy seeking as both anchor elements from political party’s behavior is driven. We added (iv) the forming of a broader and all-encompassing front as the fourth element. Therefore, that subjectivity is inevitable in the process of forming a GNU. What is important is for all role-players to appreciate that each amongst them emanates from a particular objective besides the national unity project.

**Diagram 1: Strøm’s Model for Party Behaviour (Adapted from Forsyth, 2023:3)**



#### 4.1. Office-Seeking Theory

Ndou (2022: 34) indicates that office -seeking to government of national unity is founded on the conviction that the primacy of political contestation is access to political power. Knowles (2021:39) emphasise that this power is to enable parties in the government of national unity to control the executive, make political appointments and come to the nerve-centre of policy work which include passing and implementing legislation.

Parties in a GNU comes in for two reasons, either oust a ruling party completely or to join the ruling party when it fails to achieve simple majority (Law, 2018:17). In these two instances, political powers careless about policy and ideology but are more concentrated in securing government office even at the expense of policy goals (Knowles, 2021:43). This is emphasised by Ndou (2022:36) who argues that in power-seeking theory, ideological likeness is not overriding factor when political parties enter a GNU.

Therefore, ideological alignment is not a prerequisite for parties in the GNU (Luebbert, 1986:61). This is one factor that makes GNUs volatile and susceptible to infightings once role-players are in office. This is affirmed by Ndou (2022:46) that this led to vulnerability to breakdown and shorter lifespan of the GNUs. Opposite to the office-seeking theory is the policy-seeking theory which is discussed in the next section.

For instance, in the 1994 GNU the ANC, NNP and other political parties reached consensus on the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). Whereas the NP clearly sought defend the supremacy of Afrikaans Language and camouflaged it in the right for pupils to be taught in a language of their choice and the consolidation of the role of parents in the management of schools (Mpanza, 2024:17) To this end only two languages are used as a medium of instruction in SA's schools and Tertiary institutions (English and Afrikaans) even the Decolonisation and Fallist movement of 2015 have not successfully demolished the English and Afrikaans language dominance over all other languages in the country.

#### **4.2. Policy Seeking Theory**

Contrary to the office-seeking policy, the policy-seeking policy is the view that parties joins the GNU driven by policy and ideological goals (Knowles, 2021:43). Ndou (2022:39) supports this by writing that policy seeking GNUs are formed by parties that have different ideological choice and that government formation is focused on matters on which parties have congruent or at least compatible views (Knowles, 2021:43).

Parties that joins a GNU participate on the basis of an agreement reached on the minimum agreed goals. Ndou (2022: 47) asserts that the advantage of the policy seeking theory is that coalition partners create a more prominent and united voice behind the advancement of a specific key policy view.

### **5. The Genesis, Progress, and Challenges of GNUs in Selected Countries**

GNUs as a form of establishing an inclusive and broad government encompassing all role-players has been used in different countries. The following section provides an African context of government of national unity.

#### **5.1. South Africa**

According to Schreiber (2016:1), Thwala (2023:42) South Africa entered into a GNU between 1994 and 1996. Furthermore, the SA GNU was reconfigured as the NP withdrew in 1996. This surplus majority form of GNU was constituted by the ANC as the majority party, the National Party (NP) and the IFP. After the adoption of the Constitution, the NP exited the GNU and occupied the opposition benches in Parliament and their leader Mr. F.W. De Klerk left the party leadership positions.

At the announcement of its departure from the GNU in 1996, the leader of the NP bemoaned the refusal of the ANC transfer the power sharing clauses from 1993 Interim constitution to the 1996 constitution (O'Malley, 2011). Clearly, the NP wanted the prescribed and constitutional power sharing whilst the ANC wanted to invite parties into their government establishment. The ANC continued with the IFP until the 1999 elections as invited by the President of the governing party.

The driving factor behind the 1994 GNU in SA was uniting the previously divided nation and they further restructured the country's legal system and public service and implemented a variety of social programs aimed at undoing the injustices of apartheid (Schreiber, 2016). Thwala (2023) further notes that ANC continued to share power with the IFP in the 1999-2004 administration as the minimum dominant parties in KwaZulu Natal.

The ANC majority also continued share ministerial positions (like Home Affairs) at national government to the IFP and later added the PAC until 2004. The 1994-1999 GNU is credited by Schreiber (2016) for adopting the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and restructuring the legal system and rolled out programmes aim at undoing the apartheid inequalities. According to SAHO (2014) the 1994 GNU in SA contributed immeasurably to improving the spirit of reconciliation in the country.

According to Mpanza (2024) the GNU of 1994 in SA attempts at resolving its challenges of diverse magnitude considering what it had been up against, could be said to have recorded a reasonable success rate. This important because it had to remove policies of the longstanding apartheid state, build one government out the splinters from nine homelands and apartheid boundaries.

## 5.2. Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has put in place at least two various GNUs since independence (Dodo *et al.*, 2012:210). Whilst the most recent GNU in Zimbabwe is the September 2008, Global Political Agreement (GPA) which laid foundation for the establishment of the GNU in February 2009, Zimbabwe had its first experience of GNU in the pre-independence era in 1978 through the Muzorewa/Smith Zimbabwe-Rhodesia coalition. In the post-independence era, the 1980 Patriotic Front which was a collaboration between ZANU and ZAPU (Chigora and Guzura, 2011:20) was the second.

Literature reveals that a dichotomous relationship between ZANU and ZAPU (Ngwenya and Molapo, 2018:71) dated back to the pre-independent era where both parties could not cooperate in their pursuit of the armed struggle for independence. It was given that the pre-independence dichotomy between ZANU and ZAPU would spill over to the post-independence era and the GNU of 1980. LeBas and Mulemo (2019) argues that the existent polarisations (dichotomy) arising from the contrasting founding principles ideology and tactic) are likely to be carried through a long period of time within the democratic era and result in what LeBas and Mulemo identifies strong enclave of partisan loyalties.

In addition, trust deficit, re-emergent polarisation and demise of the national unity objectives is brewed within the GNU partners. The battle for tribal dominance, territorial wars and wars of tribal annexation of dressed in the new uniform of civilian wars and state brutality were at play. LeBas and Mulemo (2019) reports that the old ZIPRA forces did not find comfort in the national army and the state responded with a heavy hand against the defectors. As a result, LeBas and Mulemo (2019) observed that the first GNU of Zimbabwe collapsed between 1980 and 1987 resulting into deadly violent clashes between ZANU and ZAPU.

To this end, the ZANU and ZAPU clashes is attributed to the death of up to 20 000 people with a greater portion coming from Matabeleland. The emergence of ethnic undertones and rivalry of the Shona and the Ndebele brewed by the pronouncement of leaders, allegation of plots to overthrow the government, imminent arrest of ZAPU leaders, dismissal of ZAPU ministers signalled the total collapse of the first GNU and Mr. Nkomo went into exile. From the above, it can be deduced that the 1980 GNU's collapse was influenced by the historical dichotomy between the two role-players ZANU and ZAPU. The objective of governing for national unity was obstructed by the historical ethnic divide and premediaeval mentality of ethnic cleansing. Similarly, the 1987 Unity Accord between ZANU and ZAPU was able to bear some fruits of unification as the: (i) ethnic rivalries between the Ndebele and the Shona faded, (ii) Mr Nkomo was appointed as Vice President with other Ndebele's forming part of the cabinet (LeBas and Mulemo, 2019).

However, there was an emergent of new polarisation of the Zimbabwean nation as the Civil Society and Labour were growing more dissatisfied with the state. In the aftermath of the 1987 unity accord the ZANU PF led government pursued a new struggle for land occupation. Subsequently, there was a massive invasion of white owned farms (LeBas and Mulemo, 2019).

The most recent 2008 GNU pact in Zimbabwe borne of the impasse resulting from the electoral dispute from the 2008 elections whereby the ruling ZANU PF suffered an expected electoral loss in the parliamentary seats (Dodo *et al.*, 2012:204). The subsequent rerun in the Presidential elections were marred by controversies including allegations of state brutality. Out of the extensive political engagements and interventions of the regional bodies the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADAC), the GPA was reached as a settlement. The 2008 GPA culminated into the rival party leader the late Morgan Tsvangirai being appointed as the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, and other leaders of the opposition occupying cabinets seats.

The Speaker of Parliament was also elected from the MDC majority in parliament. The MDC in government suffered loss of political of identity. According to LeBas and Mulemo (2019) the MDC in GNU abandoned its confrontational rhetoric, mass mobilisation, and protest and got absorbed in governance whilst appearing to be enjoying the benefits of office while suffering a disconnect with the Zimbabwean Civil Society. Whilst the above assertion might be true, it is common course that President Mugabe and ZANU maintained the control of the highly politicised state security apparatus and could have easily fuelled the sold-out rhetoric against MDC. The allegations of usage of state intelligence apparatus against the Prime Minister even during the international visits surfaced.

The alleged state sponsored violence targeting MDC leaders and organisers was frequently reported and the realignment of constituency boundaries all worked against the MDC power base (LeBas and Mulemo, 2019). An investigation on the factors that led to an MDC decline to 34% in 2013 would require a separate study.

Nhengu and Murairwa (2020) highlights the appointment of the Attorney General before the Prime Minister was appointed as a clear demonstration of disregard of the GPA by President Mugabe and ZANU. The authors further highlight few success stories from the February 2009 GNU of Zimbabwe including: (i) prevention of instability and chaotic violence, (ii) brought the different political opponents (ZANU and two MDC factions) to a shared power deal. However, the GPA failed to bring the minority of whites into the fold as the battle for land intensified and there was no smooth handover of the land by the white occupants. Equally, the ZANU heavy handedness against the MDC activists continued.

Zimbabwe's GNU developments represent four critical efforts: (i) the 1978 Muzorewa/Smith Zimbabwe-Rhodesia coalition whose efforts was keep the Smith regime in power, (ii) the 1980 post independent GNU which was a collaboration between ZANU and ZAPU bringing together forces of liberation marred by the historical dichotomies and ethnic rivalries, (iii) the 1987 Unity accord of the ZANU PF which successfully eliminated the ethnic rivalries which collapsed the 1980 GNU, and (iv) the 2008 GPA which led to the establishment of February 2009 GNU. The 2009 GNU set the ground for stable economic environment, ushering in of gender equality but led to the decline in MDC support in 2013.

### 5.3. Lesotho

Lesotho has according to Nhengu and Murairwa (2020) established three consecutive GNUs since the 2014 elections with the first two failing operate for more than two years, and the country held three elections in five years between 2014 and 2017. Coalition governments in Lesotho predates the 2014 elections, with first coalition coming into office in May 2012 (Moseme, 2017; Deleglise, 2018).

Thwala (2023:44) observes that Lesotho had undergone six coalitions between the year 2012 and 2022. The allegations of mistrust amongst the partners and jostle for power as a driving factor behind the instabilities as identified by Thwala (2023). In addition, Kapa and Shale (2014:97) there is no fundamental ideological chasm between the various political formations in Lesotho except a suspected desire for prestige that comes with public office.

Nhengu and Murairwa (2020) further reports that a GNU was established in Lesotho after the 2017 elections, and it strived to achieve cooperation amongst political parties after an extended period of instability. However, Nhengu and Murairwa are concerned about the Lesotho's GNU being unable to distribute power rationally amongst the GNU partners and non-adherence to partnership agreements.

Amidst the criminal allegations confronting the leader of the GNU Prime Minister Thabane and the internal wranglings within his All-Basotho Convention (ABC) party resulted in Thabane's removal in 2020 and he was replaced by his finance minister Mr. Moeketsi Majoro who also remained in office until October 2022. Clearly, the process of constituting government and remaining in office has been very fragile and controversial in Lesotho (Nyane, 2023:33). Nyane (2023) also observes that the management of the transition of governments is vulnerable and inadequately regulated.

From the above, it can be deduced that Lesotho has endured difficult eras of Coalitions and GNU since 2012. Lesotho's power sharing arrangements resulted into gross instability and frequent removal of governments through the motions of no-confidence. The problem in Lesotho are not based on national divide or polarisation. The differences between the political leaders and weaker legislation around power sharing has made it difficult for governments to last for more than two years.

### 5.4. Libya

The formation of a GNU in Libya in 2021 was a milestone and attempt to resolve the impasse within the leading formations and disintegrated governments after the removal of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. Whilst this western sponsored removal of Col. Gaddafi and his subsequent killing was celebrated by his detractors, Libya has since the demise of Col. Gaddafi endured almost a decade of disintegration and fighting between the

militias escalated and Libya was effectively split into two halves, each with its own government (Polat, 2021:2). The author further observes that Libyan state has struggled to establish unified national institutions.

Libya's decade long period of conflict and instability between the two ruling factions (Khalifa Haftar in the east, and Fayeze al-Sarraj the West) (Polat, 2021:2) was settled through UN-led engagement process that produced the GNU (Lacher, 2021:2). However, Lacher (2021) is concerned that the negotiations towards the GNU in Libya were selective with regard to its participants and the questions it tackled, thus setting it for a difficult path to success. Accordingly, the three Presidential Council, and single Prime Minister chosen by the House of representatives was due to culminate into an election in December 2021.

Sadly, the planned elections scheduled for the 24<sup>th</sup> of December 2021 didn't occur as anticipated (Hammady, 2022) key points of difference was around the issue of Presidential elections versus the nature of government that would be prescribed in the ultimate Libya's Constitution. To this end, Libya has struggled to implement efficient control and security throughout the country (Polat, 2021:2).

There was a continued civil war for the control of the Libyan capital city (Tripoli) (Larcher, 2021:1). However, the establishment of the GNU represented the first step towards the unification of polarised country. According to Polat (2021) the Libyan GNU was faced with the difficult task of: (i) demilitarising and reintegrating militias, (ii) fostering national reconciliation, (iii) restoring security, and (iv) preparing Libya for elections. The Libyan GNU might have failed to hold elections, but it has succeeded in minimising the violation of the 2015 ceasefire agreement (United Nation, 2024) thus ushering some form of stability.

### **5.5. The New 1994: Reflections on the Government of National Unity in South Africa 2024**

The assertion made by President Ramaphosa during the declaration of the election results on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2024 that South Africa expect their leaders to work together to meet their needs (Republic of South Africa, 2024) set the tone for the for the nature of things to come. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of June 2024 the African National Congress' (ANC) National Working Committee (NWC) concluded that it has taken the position that political formations in the country must act in the interest of the country and its people, and work to build national consensus on the form of government that suited to move South Africa forward.

As a result, the ANC National Executive Committee (NEC) announced on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 2024 that it will invite political parties to form a Government of National Unity (GNU) as the viable option to move South Africa forward. Whilst the organisation had achieved a below 50% decline in electoral support, it didn't abandon it leadership of the society and immediately directed the country to a new path of inclusive government rather than entering into a narrow two-party coalition as anticipated. It was a new 1994 moment.

Clearly, the ANC has studied and analysed the balance of forces in the fragile nature of two-party coalitions in South Africa which resulted unstable municipal leadership since 2016. Thwala (2023) observed that the post 2021 coalition governments in Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni, and Nelson Mandela Bay were marred by instability and leadership changes largely due to big brother attitude of bigger parties.

Th coalitions also accorded power to the unreliable kingmakers (smaller political parties) who continuously vacillate and change postures. This is not for a stable government.

## **6. Is the GNU in 2024 A Threat or An Opportunity?**

National unity is important for building a nation (Chang *et al.*, 2013) Governments of National Unity are important for giving different political party an opportunity to set aside political differences and build democratic societies (Nhengu and Murairwa, 2020). The emphasis is on uniting the country and focusing on the achievement of national objectives of the country and eliminate polarisation of the society. At the formation stage of the GNU the leaders should therefore do the following: (i) agree that the country or the nation is highly polarised/ divided, (ii) identify the issues that divide the society, (iii) identify national priorities to eliminate the matters that causes the division, and (iv) implement programmes to bring the society together. The fundamental task of the state under GNU thus become to implement policies to unite the society and eliminate matters that divide the society. Therefore, the leadership should have a clear understanding of the issues that pulls the country apart. Nhengu and Murairwa (2020) identifies five dimensions that can be adopted to progressively drive sustainable peace including: (i) political transition, (ii) inclusive participation, (iii) human



rights, (iv) rule of law, and (v) resource mobilisation. Of course, there are many other dimensions to GNUs including the creation of national identity.

As a result, Chang *et al.* (2013) suggest that the latest meaning of national unity could fundamentally be conceptualised as “a state in which all citizens from various groups (ethnic, religion, regions) live in peace as one united nation. Knowles (2021:87) emphasise that the opportunities presented by a GNU: (i) include realising good governance enabled by strong leadership, (ii) qualitative sustainable service delivery, (iii) establishing political stability, and (iv) foster a citizen-centric government. The later opportunity is emphasised by Ndou (2022:69) who wrote that the opportunity that is presented by a GNU include: (i) improved public engagement, and (ii) participation leading in responsive social services, improved oversight through checks and balances.

### 6.1. Threat

A GNUs constituted for wrong purpose creates volatility and it can further result in a polarised society. A society or a country divided by race, tribes/ethnicity and economic status leads to political strife (Nhengu and Murairwa, 2020), instability and possible loss of life.

Therefore, the government of national unity is a unique concept which cannot be employed in every situation of political bickering. Societies are not homogenous by design and homogeneity of people cannot be equated to national unity.

The fundamental threats to a GNU especially if formed through the office-seeking theory are: (i) poor objectives or lack of clarity of purpose, (ii) secondly the differences between the different groups do not disappear immediately when the leaders are brought together especially where painful historical experiences exist), (iii) mistrust amongst leaders and members of the society remains a continuous threat to the goal of national unity, (iv) the battle for a bigger voice and dominance amongst the role players, (v) elitist ambition for power, and (vi) ideology, and identity politics. The above-mentioned threats affirms that a GNUs are volatile forms of government just like coalitions.

The first GNU in South Africa imploded in 1996 when the National Party demanded that the Concept be carried over from the 1993 Interim Constitution to the Constitution of South as adopted in 2006. Whereas the ruling ANC wanted to pursue national unity as a matter of principle and not limit it to positions in government. The 2024 scenario of GNU is not informed by the state driven national segregation and disunity of citizens. By this we do not suggest anyhow that the issues that polarised the South African society before 1994 have disappeared.

The biggest threat to the GNU is identified by Mpanza (2024) as inadequate resources to roll out programmes to address inequalities. The author attributes limited resources of the state as a factor which affected the 1994 GNU performance. To this end, inequalities between the blacks and whites are still persistent and now there is also a big gap between the affluent blacks and the poor blacks. Unemployment remains unexpectedly high, and the cost of living continue to rise. The ownership of land and access to higher still have colour in South Africa. The patterns of human settlements and construct of provincial boundaries display unwritten undertones of tribal divide (homelands).

The major political parties in the GNU like the DA has rejected the appropriation of land without compensation, black economic empowerment, the minimum wage, the National Health Insurance (NHI) and Basic Education Amendment Act. This pose a threat to the stability of the GNU. It suggest that the President of the country will spend more resolving policy disputes than addressing service delivery for the people.

### 6.2. Opportunity

The GNU itself is a very good concept of government, and more so when it is formed through the glances of the policy-seeking theory to coalition formation. I therefore argue that a GNU is a broader form of a coalition where many parties are brought together to implement identified common national objectives. National stability is fundamental indicator of national unity. As a result, Ismail 2003 cited in Chang *et al.* (2013) wrote that a nation is said to have achieved a minimum level of unity only when it has an effective administrative and governance system that allow its citizens to live in peace and harmony, though the citizens' ethnicity or racial identity

remain unchanged or forgotten Unity in Diversity. Therefore, an effective administration and governance system being an indicator of national unity.

## 7. Recommendations

According to Chang *et al.* (2013) the best way to promote national unity is to find a national symbol or ideology as the basis for the national identity that is accepted by all the ethnic groups. However, this is more relevant to societies divided by ethnic issues. Parties in GNU at the formation stage uses the office-seeking theory in South Africa largely by the tight timeframes to constitute the national assembly and elect the President. However, for parties to keep the GNU would need to consider policy-seeking office. In the SA context, in order to preserve the sustainability of the GNU, the national dialogue to set the urgent tasks and priorities of the GNU is recommended to bring about policy-seeking theory for parties to rally around common policy direction and government programme.

## 8. Conclusion

A government of national unity is not an outcome itself but a route to the ultimate objective which is national unity. The objectives of the GNU are therefore premised on various national priorities. National Unity is not an event, it cannot be achieved overnight. The task of bringing society together includes changing mindsets and attitudes to one another by the society itself. It extends to interpersonal relations, and what Chang *et al.* identify as sense of national identity to the integration of diverse and discrete cultural traditions which include beliefs, values, religion, culture, language, race, gender, etc. This paper evaluated the GNU in South Africa 2024, and it has exposed the threats and opportunities presented by the GNU. The biggest threat to political parties in the GNU are the politics of identity.

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