

Publication: Farmer`s Weekly - Inside

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Publish date: 02 Aug 2024

Page: 14

Reach: 5807

AVE: R 24131.73

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OPINION AND ANALYSIS

SA's government of national unity: the electorate has spoken

POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE by Theo Venter



The outcome of the Russian election was no surprise as President Vladimir Putin is now almost a permanent national leader and elections simply a necessary 'compliance' issue. The same cannot be said about South African elections, nor those of India, the largest democracy in the world.

The snap election in France in July was a messy affair, with no clear victory for any of the three dominant party blocs, but in the UK, the early election provided a massive landslide victory for the Labour Party of Sir Keir Starmer.

These four elections had one issue in common: the electorates were not satisfied with the governance and policies of the incumbent political parties and indicated as much in no uncertain terms.

In South Africa, the ANC only received 40% of the vote, forcing the party to embark on an extended coalition system, referred to as a government of national unity (GNU).

In India, the ruling BJP of Prime Minister Narendra Modi expected an easy victory but failed to secure a majority of 272 seats in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) to control politics outright. The BJP only got 240 seats and had to form a coalition with other smaller parties to remain in power.

In France, the first round of elections favoured the right-wing National Rally of Marine Le Pen, but in the second round, a week later, a left-wing coalition of parties got the most seats in the national assembly, with no clear majority.

The political situation in the US needs an article of its own: the situation between Joe Biden and Donald Trump will only crystallise once the Republicans and Democratic Party have completed their national conventions and final nominations for president and vice-president. The outcome of the election in South

Africa made it clear that a coalition of some kind would have to be formed at the national level, as well as in the Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Northern Cape provincial governments. Following intense behind-the-scenes negotiations, a national cabinet was announced, with 11 parties participating in the GNU. Not surprisingly, President Cyril Ramaphosa enlarged the Cabinet to provide positions for the dominant players in the GNU.

VOTERS CLEARLY INDICATED THAT THEY WANTED OPPOSING POLITICAL PARTIES TO WORK TOGETHER

The GNU at executive level was inaugurated with a president, deputy president and 32 ministers, and 43 deputy ministers were added to make up the executive reach a full 77 members. The ANC kept the most significant ministries but gave the DA important portfolios such as agriculture, public works and home affairs. The IFP was given local government and traditional affairs.

The Speaker of Parliament, Thoko Didiza, is from the ANC, but her deputy, Dr Annelie Lotriet, is from the DA. The same design was followed in the National Council of Provinces.

The National Assembly Rules Committee also established 30 portfolio committees to do oversight of the 30 Cabinet portfolios. Only 30 portfolio committees were established and not 32, because there is no oversight of the Presidency yet.

Each committee will have 11 members: the ANC will have four seats, the DA and MK parties will get two seats each, the EFF one and

the other parties will get two seats.

The GNU design will also be applied for chairs of these portfolio committees.

Apart from the 30 portfolio committees there are also eight standing committees, such as the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Standing Committee on Finance, and joint committees like the Joint Standing Committee on Intelligence and Joint Standing Committee on Defence, which consist of members from both houses.

Committees are the engine rooms of Parliament and, in terms of the rules, their role includes dealing with oversight, public participation, bills and other matters falling within its portfolio.

The GNU model may address a recommendation by the Zondo Commission's report when it found that Parliament failed to use the oversight and accountability measures at its disposal and recommended that Parliament consider whether more opposition MPs could be appointed as committee chairpersons.

MORE PRAGMATISM

It is clear that there are centripetal and centrifugal forces in society and in politics. Centrifugal forces polarise society while centripetal forces identify the issues that the electorate have in common. Voters clearly indicated that they want opposing political parties to work together, less dogma and ideology, and more pragmatism.

People want their leaders to focus on better service delivery, to get the economy going and to create jobs and employment. Despite the ups and downs of the uncertainty of coalition politics, South Africa is now in a better position.

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