

Class Dynamics, a Declining ANC and the Failure of Policy Implementation

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Abstract

While conditions for the majority in South Africa have worsened and delivery has become more important politically, the ANC is increasingly unable to deliver and address national issues. At the same time, the state is failing to resource, manage, coordinate and skill its departments, institutions and programmes. While the imperative of improving the state is recognised, and issues of skill and leadership are flagged, this article focuses on two interrelated causes of implementation failure: an ANC that is the site of dire struggles for state power while manifesting endemic corruption and a dangerously anti-public vision; and racialised elite and subaltern class dynamics that often escape state mediation. The limits of government in its overarching economic policy are considered as a brief case. The article concludes that given the problems in these areas, particularly in the management of the capitalist economy and class contradictions, a restructuring of the political field and a renewal of popular public involvement are necessary for improved welfare and development in the future. There are also imperatives of civil service reform. However, these changes will have no chance of taking root unless firm steps towards a dynamic and inclusive economy are taken.

Keywords: African National Congress (ANC); implementation; class dynamics; bureaucracy; economic policy

Introduction

In South Africa, the government will be evaluated increasingly on improved delivery and class redress, alongside coherent national governance. Although the 2019 election performance of the African National Congress (ANC) was supported by the popularity of Ramaphosa as the presidential candidate (Schulz-Herzenberg 2020, 182–183), increasingly, the ANC is measured more by its implementation of appropriate policies (Askvik 2008). Due to the decline of partisan voting and the entry into voting of unaligned youth, “the party will increasingly be required to brandish its performance record in order to attract new voters” (Schulz-Herzenberg 2020, 188). In a survey prior to the election, “while all potential voters put more value on socio-economic well-being than democratic rights, this was more pronounced among young people” (Patel, Sadie, and Bryer 2019).

Yet, in a country where living conditions for the majority have worsened, dynamics inside the ANC have made it ever more unable to address national issues and unable to form and nurture the state institutions necessary for inclusive growth, risking its hold on power. At the same time, class dynamics have deepened national problems.

Implementation and National Task Completion

While the ANC government has had a range of successes, particularly in the first decade of democracy, there have been significant and, in some cases, cumulative failures of policy. The progressive and growing crises in Eskom’s coal-based power provision (Comrie 2022), in sewage treatment (Turton 2023) and water provision (Fraser 2023), together with growing blight in most of the big metropolises have led to a sense of deep decline of state capacity.

Studies of South Africa’s policy implementation (Atkinson 2015, 41–51; Palmer, Moodley, and Parnell 2017; Plaatjies 2011; Seekings and Nattrass 2015, 136–161, Ch 7, 258–262) show implementation extending in scope but suffering from very poor quality, especially in the areas which used to be homelands. Some systems, such as water and sanitation, and electricity, have suffered progressive losses of technical skills. Services and infrastructure are generally better in the richer provinces and cities and poor or non-existent in poor and rural areas. Palmer et al. (2017, 16–17) suggest the phases of “freedom and reorganisation” (1994–2000); “growth and implementation” (2001–2008) and “slowing economy and disheartened citizenry” (2008 onwards). The depletion of the state through state capture and the ubiquitous corruption this facilitated, followed by the years of the Covid-19 epidemic, surely constitute a fourth stage. Between 1994 and 2009, many government objectives (with the exception of land reform) were adequately met (Booyesen 2011, 111–112), while between 2006 and 2011, there was evidence of modest achievements despite increasing problems due to factors such as the 2008 financial crisis, poor local government capacity, increasing poverty and joblessness making service delivery less effective and affordable for the poor, and weak systems, management and planning in education, health and policing (Booyesen

2011, 464–465). State bureaucracy evolved to an uneven status where metropolises and the central state were generally functioning adequately, while the countryside and many smaller municipalities were not (Palmer et al. 2017; Picard and Mogale 2014), but following state capture, both central government and many metropolises displayed growing dysfunction. State capture significantly reduced the functionality of the security cluster and crucial state-operated enterprises (SOEs) (Bhorat et al. 2017), and the spread of corruption has led to worsening audit reports since 2014, including ballooning irregular expenditure to R120 billion (Auditor-General South Africa 2019, 12). Irregular expenditure was still a massive R54 billion after more than a year of Ramaphosa’s presidency (Auditor-General South Africa 2019, 4), and was still R51 billion in 2022 (Auditor-General South Africa 2022, 62). The audit of the provinces displayed sharp provincial differences by the end of the Zuma era, with the Western Cape (the best under DA administration); Gauteng (much better than the rest); and the Free State and North West (with provincial governments deeply embroiled in corruption) receiving qualified audits for more than 80% of municipalities (Auditor-General South Africa 2020, 5). By 2022, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape were showing improvement, and Gauteng was showing areas of decline (Auditor-General South Africa 2022, 75).

The ANC government has had major achievements while in office, ranging from aspects of economic management, infrastructure and welfare provision (Southall 2020, 17) to the establishment of democratic institutions (Friedman 2019, 284–290), building “a credible system of governance out of the chaos of the apartheid state” (Butler 2017, 28), and achieving comparative peace through class and regional alliances (Chipkin 2018, 126) as well as through non-racial democracy (Mamdani 2020, 4–5). As late as 2015, the systems of government delivery as a whole displayed a basic level of functionality in significant respects, albeit with sharp spatial divides between town and countryside and between established and informal settlements (Palmer et al. 2017, 252–255). Yet, even when successful, delivery focused on “poverty reduction and household service provision and skimmed on developmental tasks” (Palmer et al. 2017, 254); furthermore, delivery addressed material but not psycho-social needs (Everatt 2019, 304).

The part-success of government delivery systems appears to result from institutional endurance, partly related to improvement efforts, leadership (Olver 2021, 3–4) and to systems somewhat insulated from the forces of state capture, local and provincial corruption, and chaotic factional dynamics within the ANC. Other successes are seen in programmes that are largely under single departments and programmes, which may be large but involve comparatively simple reiteration of processes such as basic housing and electrical connections. These programmes also enjoyed widespread approval within the ANC and its constituency. There have been successes in particular departments that have built internal capacity, such as the treasury (Friedman 2021; Pearson, Pillay, and Chipkin 2016). Beneath the political turmoil “the ship of state slowly sails on, doing at least its minimal tasks, staffed at least partially with committed officials with integrity” (Atkinson 2015, 50). Yet, the rising costs of the state and the many areas of dramatic

failure of government, especially after state capture, indicate that this capacity of the state is under threat.

Currently, in many instances, the state system itself is not rationally arranged, the structure of law and due processes are an obstacle (Cousins 2014, 57–59; Ledger 2020; Monama 2020) and the issue of coordination among siloed government departments and different levels of government has been an issue tracked for some time (Bhorat, Cassim, and Hirsch 2017; Kraak 2011). The proliferation of government structures since 1994 has created issues of overlapping mandates with confusion and slowness of procedures.

The loss of technical and managerial skills in the transition from apartheid has impeded delivery in the energy sector (Dubresson and Jaglin 2016; Mondi 2018) and water and wastewater provision (Turton 2016), and the current lack of technical skills at the local government level is at crisis level (Palmer et al. 2017, 122–124). General training of the civil service has also been inadequate.

The conclusion of more historically formed analyses, such as those of Picard and Mogale (2014) and Chipkin (2016a; 2016b; 2017; 2018) is that the administrative politics of the past and current politics around state institutions and the bureaucracy exert a powerful role that has often worked against a rational bureaucracy. A significantly non-Weberian and unprocedural state was left by the apartheid government (Hyslop 2005, 782–785). The transformation of apartheid’s White-led civil service included the importation to the unified bureaucracy of several hundred thousand officials from the mostly poorly run and often corrupt “homeland” administrations (Chipkin and Meny-Gibert 2012, 107). Further, the work ethic in the bureaucracy may be impeded by an apartheid-derived distrust of skill and leadership as practices that are somehow “White” (Von Holdt 2010). The urge to work hard within a bureaucracy is also compromised in those with a neo-patrimonial outlook who invest in personal and community networks (Lodge 2014). These are acute and colonial forms of an inherent contradiction between Weberian systems and rational and feeling people in modernity (Denhardt 1991, 99–101; Habermas 1985, 340–343).

The scale of political deployment rather than deployment itself (Booyesen 2016, 101–102; 268; Naidoo 2013) and undue and destructive political influence over government processes was dramatically seen in state capture, but is also visible at many local levels where there is “unaccountability of overwhelmingly ANC-led local councils” (Southall 2020, 19). Further, the jostling between ANC office holders and ANC managers at all levels creates incoherent governance.

Despite its great dysfunction in many areas and its vulnerability to corruption and political manipulation, the South African government bureaucracy, in part, shows itself to be a system where improvement can be made by addressing clear, functional and human issues. Despite these deepening problems in state function, in-depth studies of

municipal dysfunction (Fowler et al. 2021; Palmer et al. 2017) show that there is enormous scope for improvement in the management of municipalities (Ledger 2020; Palmer et al. 2017, 109–128) and other structures of the state (Palmer et al. 2017, 107–108). In important aspects, the state follows “the rational model of organisation” (Denhardt 1991, 15–33). State reform is not as “sticky” as, for example, economic or educational reform.

Thus, there are indeed levels of finite issues that can be addressed, but even here, there is a massive volume of improvements to be made, with a particular concentration of tasks in local government, school education, and in peripheral parts of the country where government structures are in decay. Until addressed, the imperfect policy and implementation frameworks, the lack of coordination, corruption at every level, and pervasive undue political influence over governance, create for managers and ordinary staff a multiplication of tasks that are intractable, contradictory, and open-ended. Additionally, the multidimensional developmental and transformational task of government structures needed for our rapidly changing and unequal polity makes the task of management and leadership much more complex. The state must build up leaders and managers who engender trust and address the given complexity effectively (Schwella 2021, 35–36).

The huge backlogs of very doable tasks of delivery and reform and serious complexities of management at each level will be poorly addressed by the ANC, as it is unlikely to find solutions involving all stakeholders (Plaatjies 2021, 4–7).

Economic Policy: A Failure to Find Solutions to a Hard Problem

The ANC failed to improve on a stagnating industrial path inherited from late-apartheid years (Padayachee and Van Niekerk 2019, 227–234) and in the GEAR strategy set a non-inclusive and financialised course in motion, with distorted investment and a degree of deindustrialisation (Palma 2014, 16–18). At the same time, debt was stabilised, the currency was protected, and there were years of consumer and commodity-driven expansion. Yet, growth has been very low since the 2007–2008 financial crash and global peers are doing considerably better than South Africa. There is worsening unemployment and acute inequality. Productive sectors of the economy, such as manufacturing, are highly concentrated and made rigid by oligopoly. In a largely White-owned private sector, it thus remains difficult to open up industry to new, particularly Black, participants (Vilakazi, Goga, and Roberts 2020).

Following GEAR, the ANC has put forward some 10 economic plans, some of them planning major investments—but “apart from GEAR, economic policy in South Africa has generally lacked the political will to make the difficult choices it demands” (Jonas 2019, 9). Addressing the demands of classes in contradiction creates a “gridlock” in government (Freund 2015, 70). The ANC’s internal socioeconomic vision shows “a lack of ideas” (Freund 2015, 68), as was the case under Mandela’s presidency (Padayachee and Van Niekerk 2019, 230; 109–42). The SOEs also suffered poorly implemented

privatisation and part-privatisation under President Mbeki, followed by policy vacillation towards using SOEs for strategic national goals (Gumede 2016, 84–90; in the case of Eskom, Dubresson and Jaglin 2016, 33–42). Overall, this has been damaging for institutions designed for a previous era.

The ANC government has had a weak relation to business, which generally got its way in the transition (Michie and Padayachee 2019, 2–9). The ANC started off with considerable distrust of business (Spicer 2016, 6), and their ideologies (Gumede 2012, 47–48) and class basis (Mbeki 2020, 2) were distant from each other. While the government built up the relation with business to some extent through NEDLAC and other institutions (Hirsch and Levy 2018, 17–21; Nattrass and Seekings 2010, 40–47) and through emerging Black business, this relation worsened considerably from the mid-2000s (Spicer 2016, 13–18) and the focus was importantly but narrowly on developing Black business (Hirsch and Levy 2018, 21–29). Cohen (2020, 125–30), however, believes that after 2017 business has become more open to partnership with government.

Planning and reaching sustained economic growth are both highly complex and lacking blueprints (Banerjee and Duflo 2019, 207). Economic policy in a capitalist economy must involve the coordination of many government departments, but it is concerned firstly with a private sector outside government. Further, the tasks facing the South African government have been large. Yet, economic policy can be classed a failure because, despite these difficulties, there is a clear possibility of a coherent and successful economic route (Andreoni et al. 2021; Bhorat, Rooney, and Steenkamp 2018; Bhorat et al. 2019; Nattrass and Seekings 2019). It is doubly a failure because it is the single most pivotal task facing government—fashioning an inclusive and vibrant economy aided by an economic coalition (Creamer 2021, 119–28; Gumede 2012, 50; Seekings and Nattrass 2015, 218), civil service improvement and constructive political pacting would outflank state capture’s predatory and rent-seeking political economy, which is now again in waiting.

While the Covid-19 pandemic did deep damage to the economy, it has also opened up new economic policy options for the government (Creamer 2020; Davies 2021, 230–236). Yet the government retreated into caution (Davies 2021, 219–220). The ANC has failed to devise a coherent, inclusive, expansive and sustainable economic path, which induces sacrifices onto private business and the ANC’s own constituency. The ANC’s caution with a bad economic structure does not rise to the task at hand, to fashion “a fundamentally new relationship between all economic actors willing and able to tackle complexity to achieve outcomes that matter” (Mazzucato 2021, 208).

ANC Decline and Class Dynamics as Reasons for Failure of Implementation and Task Completion

There also manifest failures of policy. Most visible are the failures to create employment, to reduce glaring inequality, and to shape a sustainable growth path. There

are enduring crises in management and planning of energy, education and local administration. Further system crises are in massively failing SOEs (Gumede 2016; Jonas 2019, 71–83) and the complex systemic damage that is still unfolding from state capture. Across government there is a huge deficit in skilled and ethical leadership.

This paper, however, focuses on class dynamics that often escape state mediation; and an ANC that is the site of dire struggles for state power while manifesting endemic corruption and a dangerously anti-public vision.

Class Conflict and Initiative

Kohli (2004, 18–23) distinguishes between “cohesive capitalist” states and “fragmented, multiclass” states with split commitments to development and contradictory class claims. South Africa’s priorities are decisively on this latter terrain, with acute class issues relating to the apartheid social order and the largely racialised inequality fed by current capitalism. This has resulted in a “violent democracy” (Von Holdt 2013) and a state that spends considerably on welfare (Seekings and Natrass 2015, 133–182) and on extensive and well-paid state employment for union allies and the political elite (Freund 2015, 65–66; Marais 2011, 444–447; Seekings and Natrass 2015, 230–231).

The whole economic, social, spatial and institutional order in South Africa in 1994 was almost completely formed by the colonial and apartheid states, their racially articulated capitalism, and a culture of racism. This has had profound and ongoing effects on policy and implementation. Some capitalist groups have directly intervened in democratic South Africa’s policy environment. The lobbying of internal groups, such as Anglo-American and the Brenthurst group in the early years of democracy, the ongoing pressure of organised business, credit ratings (Davies 2021, 219–220), and pressures from the IMF, WTO and the EU have, without doubt, helped to create a somewhat ring-fenced zone for the play of still-racialised South African capitalism.

South African capitalism is still largely White-led but increasingly foreign-owned (Butler 2013, 128–129). Together with tides of international market forces, it is largely responsible for the increase in inequality and for a distorted market structure displaying a huge and unplanned financial sector (Karwowski 2018), heavy financialisation and concentration of capital, and shedding of labour. It has also manifested in periodic financial volatility, notably the 2007–2008 financial crash, the collapse of commodity prices between 2012 and 2015, and a flow to short-term investment. Further, finance-led capitalist dynamism has led to zones of capitalist growth that have outflanked static policies, in unplanned urban growth (Chipkin and Meny-Gibert 2013; Murray 2008, 125–153; Pieterse 2010, 165), in the rapid growth of capitalist farming, and in agribusiness’s financialisation of the food system (Bernstein 2013; Greenberg 2017). This dynamism of foreign and local business in pursuit of short-term profits has set back the implementation of a range of economic policies.

The spatial distribution of poverty and race, relating both to the engineered inequality of apartheid and to uneven capitalist development, has had a major impact on education (McKay 2018, 165), health (Brauns and Wallis 2014, 205) and municipal government (Palmer et al. 2017, 266), and the quality of these services varies neatly with plenty and privation. Though the failure of these systems in poor areas is also due to the “failure since 1994 to invest in institution-building” (Chipkin 2016b, 226) these areas remain profoundly shaped by patterns of dispossession, elite accumulation, cheap labour, migrancy, the labour reserve system (Arrighi, Aschoff, and Scully 2010), and a market structure that concentrates wealth and recreates peripheries.

In the post-apartheid period, elite classes with a growing Black sector have flourished, further accumulating wealth and skills and fostering expensive but excellent private education, health facilities, and elite leisure. Buoyant property and financial markets have amplified the strong but unequal consumerist culture (James 2015, 35–59; Mbembe 2014; Posel 2010) and increased financialisation of daily affairs, with the concomitant spread of debt (James 2015, Chs 2, 5, 6; Neves 2018). The rising Black middle classes, still insecure (through debt, the threat of job loss and the obligation of extended family support) increasingly share in this consumerist culture (Southall 2016, 171–174). The market values of consumption, the pursuit of private interest and competition, are thus widespread in society.

There are rising Black business classes built on older Black business that developed under apartheid, on government programmes, and on the more recent advancement of whole networks of family and friends connected to cynical ruling party government officials (Von Holdt 2019). Arguably, there have been two different classes using government for private gain: firstly, an accumulative nascent capitalist class, already fairly established, using modern networks and resources in central, provincial and metropolitan government to control large tenders and budgets; secondly, in local government and local tenders for other structures of governance, the networks are predominantly lower middle class and somewhat traditional, and the aim is more towards “spoils consumption” and stabilisation of family financial affairs (Beresford 2015, 232). Facilitated by the ANC, these new strata have had dramatic effects on both delivery—through corruption—and, through their involvement in the tender capitalism that evolved into state capture, the stability of the state.

Outside the state, business with one foot in illegality have emerged. The taxi industry is a case of this, as are new abusive forms of landlordism. The struggles over electricity and the huge culture of non-payment by working-class townships (Soweto alone “owing” R20 billion [Booyesen 2021, 221])—in response to poor delivery, cut-offs and high prices—have contributed to the Eskom debt, but are also part of working-class economic resistance, which (with the fees must fall campaign) can be seen as costly challenges to policy (Allais 2014, 159–163). Township “service delivery” protests, while sometimes holding government to account, increasingly have political discourses outside the ANC alliance that can delegitimize government (Duncan 2016, 167–168).

There is also a form of resistance in the illegal cutting of corners (with regard to issues such as VAT and tax payment, submitting building plans and working conditions) in the informal township economies (Mottiar 2019, 289), which necessitates changes in policy (Charman, Petersen, and Govender 2020, 305–306). The mass looting of shops by many ordinary citizens in July 2021 (alongside criminal elements and an organised campaign of infrastructural disruption by displaced ANC networks) was also a form of class resistance.

The widespread move to part-illegality in subaltern classes has three significant effects. Firstly, it is fertile ground for the steady rise of organised crime (Shaw et al. 2022). Secondly, it has a major effect on government revenue. Thirdly, it reflects multiple failures of regulation of the ANC's constituency, and is a source of the government's culture of prevarication with implementation.

In some respects, the ANC has managed and stimulated class formation through holding together an alliance of class and regional elites. Since the ANC government determines the bulk of redistribution of capital and may alter the nature of national markets, it has mediated all capitalist dynamics, though often unleashing forces it has been unable to control. Thus, the state has allowed considerable latitude to the private sector, which has continued patterns of capitalisation of firms, financialisation and oligopoly. The narrow economic ideas in South Africa's private sector (Gumede 2012) and the neoliberal rules of international bodies have sustained discourse in the media, business and sectors of government defending the basic structure of the financialised status quo. The perceived influence of these ideas on the ANC was a major source of factionalism and economic policy vacillation in the Mbeki years, for example, in the case of the GEAR policy (Jonas 2019, 37–38) and policy towards Eskom (Dubresson and Jaglin 2016, 33–36). The ANC government's attempts to fashion a class of share capitalists, a Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policy that exposed aspiring Black businessmen to the corporate elite and its frequent racism, and the movement of ANC-appointed state managers to the private sector, all brought dominant economic discourses into the Black middle classes. The legislation towards cost recovery (McDonald 2003, 21–22), phases of privatisation of state assets and the 42% of the government's budget procured from private service providers (Public Affairs Research Institute 2014, 5) illustrate the marketised practices within government itself.

Black entry into consumption, upward mobility and ownership in the market economy were key aims of the ANC (Friedman 2019). The ANC's programme of creating a nascent Black business class was firstly through share capital, which brought a new form of corruption into the public and private sectors through "a collusive relationship between sections of both at the expense of the rest of government and the rest of private business" (Friedman 2019, 296). Secondly, it was through tenders preferentially granted through SOEs, started under Mbeki. The "crony capitalism" engineered by the ANC placed many comrades in business, gave established business access to the ANC and funded the ANC (Beresford 2015, 234–238). Under Zuma, Black businessmen

clamoured for much more such access on easier terms. After this was not granted by the national treasury, the elaborate structure of state capture emerged in multiple illegal SOE deals (Chipkin et al. 2018, 107–117). While “patronage networks, crony capitalism, and factional struggles are inexorably bound up with the development of capitalism” (Beresford 2015, 247) the ensuing state capture was dramatic. In addition to these uncontained elite strategies, the ANC’s redressive intent and its obligations to its constituency—in a situation of extreme proletarianisation (Arrighi et al. 2010, 434)—have resulted in much-needed social grants, a social wage package, the development of a Black middle class, and preferential spending in education and health. Through its alliance with the trade union federation Cosatu and with the South African Communist Party (SACP) (which can be seen as increasingly weakened working-class forces), a labour dispensation with a fair degree of worker protection and relatively high wages has been instituted. State employment, increasingly of Black South Africans and significantly in the middle class, grew from 1.45 million to 2.03 million between 1995 and 2015 (Butler 2017, 83), while between 1992 and 2012 employee remuneration in the state grew significantly more than in the private sector (Seekings and Natrass 2015, 103). The bill for this support is an increasing part of the national budget.

These overflowing class dynamics provide changing obstacles to task completion and delivery and are the prime sources of inequality, unemployment, and a society centred on elites—and social struggle over each of these. They, therefore, form a large influence on the success and failure of policies related to these fundamental questions.

The ANC and Loss of Public Purpose

The failure to implement a variety of programmes and national tasks is partly due to a loss of public purpose in large sections of the ANC. Conquest of state power enabled the ANC to unify the country and carry out necessary programmes. However, this dominant incumbency in government, together with the ANC being the political centre of the Black majority’s class and regional dynamics, is the prime source of the malaise of public purpose. This malaise seems to have grown in proportion to the embeddedness of the ANC in the state and the length of incumbent power. The themes discussed below—lack of vision and accountability, factionalism, and corruption—relate to the party as a whole rather than a wayward minority. These destructive dynamics act singly and together to decisively undermine the effectiveness of a still-complex ANC and to give it an anti-public character. The ANC’s electoral decline is attributable in part to this internal decline.

Confusion of Vision

The ANC has made efforts to create vision, notably rallying people around the Redistribution and Development Plan (RDP) and the National Development Plan (NDP); yet the RDP was sidelined, and the NDP added up “to very little in terms of prioritisation or emphasis. This is an attractive document to show visitors” (Freund

2015, 62). Overall, the party's vision is confused, and there have been too many periods where vision has been betrayed.

Before 1994, the ANC had a fairly rich political formation of a fairly small membership. The ANC now has a mass membership that is somewhat occasional (Butler 2015, 16) and of little political formation. "Ordinary people flocked to join the party" (Ndletyana 2020, 319), bringing different interests into play. In the former homeland areas, the ANC spread by recruiting corrupt homeland elites (Lodge 2014, 17). Between 2005 and 2012, membership rocketed to 1.2 million (Booyesen 2016, 45) and branches and membership were created for factional purposes preceding party elections. New members were inducted into this incoherent environment. There is a "decline in political consciousness amongst the general membership as well as the leadership across all structures of the movement" (ANC 2012, 82). In an ANC culture allowing considerable freedom to members, members at all levels could give scope to personal interests (Ndletyana 2020, 6, 320) and colour their ANC identity with their private milieu.

Within the ANC, there is a chaotic *mêlée* of forces with differing ideologies and degrees of public accountability. Within this *mêlée* are various strands of public-spiritedness, at different levels, whose ethos resonates well with the public goals the ANC espouses. Yet, these forces are dispersed and not currently dominant. There are powerful and fissiparous provincial (Atkinson 2015) and metropolitan clusters within the ANC with particular interests. Local ANC structures have practices not condoned from the centre (Friedman 2015, 152). The alliance partners, the SACP and Cosatu (though much changed) represent interests, as do those senior managers who interface with corporate business. Via business involvement and experience of international governance, another group is the carrier of conventional and neoliberal economic thinking. The both creative and perverse division between liberals and Marxists in the party (Butler 2013, 92–118; Jager and Steenekamp 2016) still runs through the party. Ongoing division on economic matters has fed into policy vacillation. There are increasingly visible class divisions within the party. Under the ANC government, there have been competing visions in different government departments (Bowman 2020, 409) and irrespective of vision, departments are siloed fiefdoms (Atkinson 2015, 45–47). The ANC's crucial role in mediating the interests of regional elites and competing classes in the Black population, while necessary, has made the ANC the site for intense and destructive factional projects to gain and retain state power (Chipkin 2021b; Von Holdt 2023). When all these forces interact with huge waves of factionalism and competition for local and national resources in such factional projects, ANC members are not in a position to have clear political vision.

From these partly disparate forces are formed heterodox alliances that can prevail in the ANC and in national elections. The grouping in power may be tossed out by increasingly chaotic general councils determined by pressured branch votes, which have installed both the Zuma and Ramaphosa elites.

There have been regular crises concerning the direction and identity of the ANC, in which sections of the party have felt excluded by the direction taken by leadership. For some, corruption associated with the arms deal “was a moral turning point in the life of the ANC” (Feinstein 2007, 239); the GEAR programme, “around which the different contending forces in the struggle over the NDR would mobilise for years to come” (Davies 2021, 71) “placed an intellectual straightjacket on economic thought in the movement” (Turok 2014, 165). The factional struggles around the character of the ruling ANC alliance that sloughed off COPE and the EFF, and that split Cosatu, was also a splitting-off of sections of debate within the ANC. State capture by the then-ruling faction in the ANC from about 2012 has been the biggest crisis in the ANC.

These different interests are united in a schizoid ANC; the contradictory forces work together like a matrix of potentiality in each member and structure, facilitating dozens of ANC identities and opening the door to sectoral, factional, and private inflexions of the ANC.

Flouting of Accountability

The ANC has willingly taken on the task of national governance, and through NDR theory and other discourses, portrayed itself as the necessary centre of politics in evolving South Africa. Being in government is an embodiment of the agency needed to effect the national democratic revolution, or the broad historical mission to effect racial redress and national development following apartheid (Southall 2004, 2–3). In this perspective, the exercise and retention of state power are both natural and necessary for the ANC. Many ANC members in government thus “use their offices to promote the goals of the dominant party” (Atkinson 2015, 49); from the first period of ANC government there was a deliberate transition strategy “that conflated the general interest with the policies of the ANC” (Chipkin 2016a, 7). This has instilled an ethos of power unaccountable to forces outside the ANC. Under the ANC presidencies of Mandela, Mbeki and Zuma this superiority of the ANC to the state—and indeed to society—was demonstrated in three instances catastrophic for delivery and welfare. Under Mandela, the GEAR programme, which arguably set South Africa on the wrong economic course, was instituted by an ANC economics team that was “unevenly trained and inexperienced,” yet which “failed to engage with the power of the democratic movement in formulating economic policy, choosing instead to form themselves into a tightly knit and self-referential circle who trusted only themselves” (Padayachee and Van Niekerk 2019, 228).

The current electricity crisis was, before 2008, significantly caused by the executive’s failure to work with Eskom and “government’s profound ignorance of the dynamics of the sector” and “by a lack of direction, of vision and of passion for the electricity industry” (Dubresson and Jaglin 2016, 62). Under Zuma state capture, which may have cost the country R1.5 trillion (Merten 2019), emanated from a mixture of factional dynamics within the grouping that defeated Mbeki and pressures from emerging Black business (Von Holdt 2023). Zuma’s own security and interests resulted in an inflated

presidency that effectively merged party and state (Booyesen 2016, 28–32; 64–75; Calland and Sithole 2022, 114–129), neutered aspects of the criminal justice system (Bruce, Lewis, and Newham 2021), captured and personalised the security cluster (Thamm 2021), and formed a narrow power elite operating significantly outside the law (Chipkin et al. 2018, 48–53; Swilling and Madonsela 2021).

State dominance by a massified ANC has also reduced accountability. The ANC is embedded in the state through hundreds of thousands of ANC members in middle-class state employment and thousands deployed to higher positions (Saba, Harper, and Koko 2020). Membership is spread across the country in ANC structures, across all government departments and all levels of government. Due to the control of most government structures, the ANC is in a position of dominance in exercising state functions. In addition, the ANC is the trading house for most Black politics. This double power has seen experience, monitoring processes and a sense of professionalism take root (Atkinson 2015, 49), but also allows widespread abuse that cannot easily be challenged, and an authoritarian and antidemocratic character has emerged (Von Holdt 2013, 600–601). Dominance, morphing into domination, is more systematic in poor areas under ANC government (Piper and Anciano 2015), where the ANC is the unstable centre of “class formation ... and contestation of symbolic order” (Von Holdt et al. 2011, 25); the ANC “both opens channels of resident participation and access to a remote and opaque state apparatus and closes opportunities for strong opposition and radical debates” (Bénit-Gbaffou 2012, 187). However, this dominance is not absolute: the Western Cape is governed by the DA and the urban suburbs are zones outside ANC control (Friedman 2015, 148).

This is manifested in widespread impunity regarding non-performance and corruption (Fakir 2020), but also in the criminal callousness of power shown in the Marikana massacre and the Life Esidimeni tragedy (Dhai 2018), deaths as a result of police brutality (Knoetze 2021), and widespread hostility to and control of local communities (Friedman 2015, 150–152; Pithouse 2010, 53–55). In Port Elizabeth (now Gqeberha), the ANC was voted out in 2016. Local and national leaders took it extremely badly (Ndletyana 2020, 264–269; 290–295): “the party just could not function out of government. Its shape and operations were wholly dependent on incumbency” (Ndletyana 2020, 3018). More generally, the indications are of reduced party and party-in-government connection to the nation around it.

The too-common lack of accountability to legality and to the public makes for officials who are not strongly motivated to address difficult government tasks. Equally seriously, while extension of democracy may be a necessary step to break the crisis of economic and social exclusion and elite rule (Friedman 2018, 217–218; Mbeki and Mbeki 2016, 107; Seekings and Nattrass 2015, 266), the ANC’s prioritisation of party interests and disdain for other democratic forces, almost rule this out.

Factionalism

Factionalism has derived from ideological splits over class and national interests and conflicts over power and resources at both regional and national levels. Because of this, as the ANC declines electorally, factional conflict will intensify, even though unity would be better electorally. State capture emerged from the centre of a duly elected ANC leadership, which further factionalised the party. Following Zuma's imprisonment in 2021, elements in his increasingly marginalised faction carried out grand economic sabotage that led to massive food riots (Laganparsad and Pithouse 2021; Tandwa et al. 2021) and had major effects on delivery and economic life, especially in KwaZulu-Natal. Factionalism threatens any stable project in the ANC due to the current chaotic and unpredictable way that National General Councils now function. Conquest of ANC power by a faction led by "crude political entrepreneurs, the corrupt and the cynically ambitious" could lead to "a collapse in the capacity of the state to provide public services, for a protracted economic stagnation and ultimately for a ruinous counter-reaction against entrenched injustice" (Butler 2017, 194).

Policy vacillation (Jonas 2019, 58–62; Dubresson and Jaglin 2016, 33–36) resulted largely from the clash of ideological factions within the ANC alliance, and then increasingly of factions competing for resources to spread in private networks (Ndletyana 2020, 320). Such factions have dominated ANC rule since Mbeki's presidency. Another influence of factionalism on policy implementation is that some policies are not firstly aimed at implementation, but may be aimed both at overcoming internal divisions by giving recognition to different interests (Jansen 2002) and as a form of electioneering and public relations (Booyesen 2016, 129–130). In the Zuma years, much energy was put into repackaging economic and other policies as "radical," while little implementation occurred (Booyesen 2016, Ch 4) to shore up government and Zuma's faction.

Factionalism, particularly around access to resources, has also led to high levels of violence within the ANC (Von Holdt 2013, 597–599), which exacerbates the intolerance and lack of accountability already in parts of the party. Factionalism in its present form has corroded the identity and unity of the ANC, and brought suspicion to every office.

The ANC's Role in Corruption

Corruption has spread through the ANC (Beresford 2015; Ndletyana 2015). The patrimonial and modern networks of energetic, entrepreneurial use of ANC positions in government (Brunette 2019; Chipkin 2017; Lodge 2014, 20–23; Von Holdt 2019) amplifying corruption at different levels, have generated a political culture involving "a ruthless pragmatism, a habit of creating personalistic syndicates well-concealed in political factions, a complete amorality (with the willingness to resort to criminal actions, when required), and the use of high-sounding political rhetoric to justify rampant self-enrichment" (Atkinson 2018, 78). These processes may even form embedded corrupt "political machines" that have elsewhere lasted for generations

(Atkinson 2015, 41; Brunette 2019; Brunette 2023, 77–81) and lower budget “corrupt syndicates” (Brunette 2023, 73–77). These tight networks generate loyalty and a degree of secrecy. As a force within the party, it is, therefore, intrinsically highly factional. This nascent elite is also quite capable of using criminal networks (Ndletyana 2020, 320–321; Lodge 2014, 9–11). In this way, corruption is profoundly damaging to the party in government.

The formation of corrupt networks in the national state, some provincial governments, several SOEs and in major municipalities (such as Nelson Mandela Bay) (Ndletyana 2020; Olver 2017) and in local municipalities, has already had a major effect on delivery, programme implementation, government coordination and economic growth. Provincial ANC structures, bolstered by influence over provincial governmental funds, are key players in factional ANC elections (Atkinson 2015) and are epicentres of corruption. The corrupt “premier league” provinces were the model for national state capture (Chipkin 2021b).

The direct consequences of this are degrading or complete failure of services; near collapse of local government in many poorer areas; and the failure of government systems depending significantly on provinces and local bodies, such as education, health and water and sewage.

By being the political centre in the tide of corruption, ANC personnel (including those in high office) have been the gatekeepers facilitating state corruption at all levels of government. The biggest clusters of corruption have accrued to the central ANC government: the huge state capture episode and the related “tender capitalism” cultivated in the SOEs, the arms deal, and corruption through the BEE programme. In all these instances the ANC government has seen these events as political programmes “exercising party-political sovereignty” (Chipkin 2021a, 20) rather than as corruption. The influence of foreign and domestic capital is evident in each of these, and state corruption must be understood together with corrupt forces within the private sector.

The massive fraud involved has greatly damaged delivery in specific institutions—in particular in the bigger SOEs—especially through the repurposing of government (Chipkin et al. 2018, 101–132) but also through exacerbating factionalism, which is also driven by the accommodation of regional elites in both ANC structures and in provincial government (Chipkin 2021b, 11–13). It is damaging to investment and to citizens’ trust of government.

The Crisis of the Political Economy and State Action

A government that addresses the country’s capitalist economy and class contradictions in an innovative way is not on the horizon. The ANC has taken commendable responsibility for governing and creating a national vision in the past, but has become an increasingly ineffective and, on some counts, destructive force. There are very high levels of debt (currently at 71% of GDP in 2023) (CEIC 2023), and a worsening growth

environment, unemployment, inequality, local democracy, wastewater and water quality, and road and rail upgrading. There are dire indicators of the quality of mass education, quality of health, quality of policing, and rural municipalities. A compromised ANC with a lack of appetite for complex tasks faces vast backlogs and changing national needs. For these reasons there has been a steep decline in electoral support for the ANC.

Unfortunately, the main opposition parties are also some distance from what is required. The DA does not aim to progressively restructure markets; nor would it support an expanded role for the state. The EFF is even further than the ANC from drawing in the private sector into coherent national solutions, and has plans for a greatly expanded state without clear plans for state reform. Both these parties are dominantly lodged in single classes and are weakly placed as regards cross-class solutions.

Given the limitations of the ANC, a restructuring of the political field and a renewal of popular public involvement are necessary for improved welfare and development in the future. There are also imperatives of civil service reform (Chipkin 2021b) and new political pacts (Levy et al. 2021, 28–32). No improved economic strategy is possible without these imperatives. Yet, equally, these changes will have no chance of taking root unless firm steps towards a dynamic and inclusive economy are taken.

The main reasons for policy failure have not significantly changed, other than the exit from government of the ANC faction promoting state capture. Even here, only some of the heights of this project have been reversed. Unless a brave and coordinated new South African deal is taken forward, most benefits from the clean government approach of Ramaphosa will accrue to the centre and the continuation of “minority rule” (Friedman 2019, 298; Mbeki and Mbeki 2016, 56–57), with Black capitalists clamouring for state tenders and the strong clout of fissiparous regional elites. At the same time, improving the centre of government and addressing a range of middle-class and aspirant middle-class claims may be the necessary platform for more fundamental changes that address majority needs in the future.

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