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CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT “COEXISTENCE STRATEGY” AND “PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT MONITORING OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT”: AN OVERVIEW OF SELECTED CASE STUDIES IN KWAZULU-NATAL

Muzi Shoba 

Nelson Mandela University, South Africa.
Email: muzi.shoba@mandela.ac.za

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Abstract

This article describes the coexistence strategy employed by the opposition parties and discusses the complexities associated with provincial government supervision of local government, arising out of the alleged ‘politically’ motivated interventions. The article draws on secondary data sources and uses two local municipalities through case studies to discuss the coexistence of opposition parties and the challenges associated with the provincial government’s involvement in local government affairs. The selected case studies are the uMngeni Local Municipality and uMsunduzi Local Municipality. The two local municipalities are based in the uMgungundlovu District Municipality in South Africa. Opposition parties have adopted a coexistence strategy, forging informal and formal coalitions to challenge the African National Congress (ANC) hegemony in South Africa’s political landscape. This has prompted the ANC to use its powers overly as the ruling party to monitor and supervise municipalities, particularly those that the opposition parties, such as the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the Democratic Alliance (DA), govern. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa enjoins the provincial government to monitor and supervise the local governments, as stated in Sections 154(1) and 155(6, 7). This implies that provincial governments have the responsibility to support the municipalities in discharging their fiduciary duties in relevant cases. However, this analysis reveals that despite ‘politically’ motivated interventions in local government, the ruling party’s electoral support will continue to shrink in South Africa. This situation will result in the formation of more coalition governments in the country. The article contributes to an improved understanding of the complexities, associated with provincial government intervention in local government, and how the opposition parties have deployed the strategy of coexistence to dethrone the ANC’s dominance in the country’s political landscape.

Keywords: Coexistence, Opposition parties, Local government, Provincial government, South Africa

1. Introduction

The year 1994 was a watershed moment in South Africa’s configuration and development when the first democratic elections took place in the country (Greffrath and van der Walddt, 2016). This

was in the aftermath of apartheid which saw South Africa becoming a free and democratic country (Shoba and Mtapuri, 2022). This ushered in a new dispensation that allowed the country to reinvent itself, which entailed the introduction of new policies and legislation that reflected the democratic era that the country had entered. One of the imperative adjustments, initiated under democratic dispensation, was the introduction of democratic decentralization. This resulted in a three-sphere structure of the governance of South Africa – the national, provincial and local spheres (Chilenga-Butao, 2020). The theory of democratic decentralization advocates for a more democratic and participatory approach to government where the services are directed locally by empowering communities and including them in the policy-making processes (Reddy and Govender, 2013). This occurs when the national sphere of government formally transfers administrative, fiscal and political powers to its subnational structures at the provincial and local levels (Ribot, 2002). Agrawal and Ribot (1999) define the term decentralization “as any act in which a central government formally cedes powers to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarch.”

Of the three spheres of government in South Africa, the local government is the closest sphere of government to the people. This sphere of government plays an imperative role as an interface between the state and society owing to its proximity to the people. This sphere is mandated to ensure that basic services are rendered efficiently and effectively to the people (Mlambo and Maserumule, 2024). This is one sphere of government that is currently undergoing enormous changes due to the changing political patterns in South Africa, which has resulted in declining electoral support for the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC). While important changes are occurring in local government, a casual observer of South Africa's politics is normally drawn to patronage politics, such as the state capture debacle (Croucamp and Malan, 2018), the ongoing energy crisis that has engulfed the country into an incessant state of darkness (The World Bank, 2023), and triple challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment (Khambule, 2019), as well as the issue of gender-based violence (Govender, 2023). However, the often overlooked and ongoing situation in the country is the changing nature of the local government terrain, owing to the emerging popularity of the opposition parties' coexistence strategy (Khambule *et al.* 2019) and the increasing politicization of the government's existing legislative framework under the leadership of the ANC in local government (Mathenjwa, 2014).

Throughout the country, the opposition parties have employed the coexistence strategy to counteract the dominance of the ANC under the auspices of the coalition. Different opposition parties in the country have formed formal and informal alliances as they try to dethrone the ANC. This coexistence of opposition parties has enabled them to topple the ANC in some metropolitan and local municipalities. The opposition parties have also attempted to use this strategy in the national assembly, particularly during the so-called 'state capture epoch' and the #ZumaMustfall campaign. However, as this coexistence strategy gains momentum, and opposition parties have succeeded in dethroning the ANC in some metropolitans and local municipalities, the opposition parties have complained about the governing party's politically motivated interventions in local government affairs (Meyer, 2024a). Many of these complaints have been reported in KwaZulu-Natal, as the ruling party faces the challenge of power decline in its electoral support. The official opposition party to the ANC government is the Democratic Alliance (DA). The DA enjoys considerable electoral support in the country and controls one province, the Western Cape, and several municipalities. Although the DA only controls uMngeni in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), the two parties contested the local government in the province considerably. The DA has accused the KZN government, led by the ANC, of 'double standards' politically targeting the uMngeni Local Municipality while turning a blind eye to the dysfunctional uMsunduzi Local Municipality that the ANC governs.

In this regard, this article describes the coexistence strategy of the opposition parties in South Africa and the problems, associated with the provincial government's supervision of local government, arising out of politically motivated reasons. The paper uses the uMngeni Local Municipality and the uMsunduzi Local Municipality as selected case studies to describe the problems associated with the provincial government's interventions, in local government. Both uMngeni Local Municipality and uMsunduzi Local Municipality fall under the uMgundundlovu District Municipality. The DA and ANC govern the two local municipalities respectively. The article

relied on secondary data sources, drawn from previous studies or extant literature, to delineate the phenomenon under study. This implies that no primary data sources were collected to compile this article (Shoba and Mlambo, 2024).

The article is structured as follows: this section is the introduction that sets the scene for the paper. It is followed by a review of the literature on the coexistence of opposition parties under the banner of coalition in the South African context. A review of the literature on the provincial government's supervision of local government, under the auspices of Section 139 interventions, is presented and this is followed by a presentation of the two selected case studies. Subsequently, the last part of the article presents a discussion of the findings of the study, based on the two selected case studies. The concluding remarks and final recommendations, based on the review of the subject matter under study, are presented.

2. Coexistence of opposition parties in South African politics

Khambule *et al.* (2019) propound the notion of the coexistence of opposition parties to describe the emerging phenomenon in the South African political landscape where political parties work together with the common goal of toppling the ruling party. The coexistence of opposition parties varies, depending on the context in which it is deployed. As Khambule *et al.* (2019) elucidate, coexistence could be a "strategic, temporary and informal coalition between two or more political entities to counter a dominant political party." The theory of coexistence among political parties could be largely associated with coalition. Generally, a coalition represents provisional cooperation or partnership, formed by two or more political parties, to achieve a common goal and shared aspiration (Netswera and Khumalo, 2022). In this context, this arrangement often occurs when a single party does not have a majority of the seats in the legislature or municipal council (South African Government, 2024).

Considering the above backdrop, it can be argued that coalition and the notion of the coexistence of opposition parties symbolize the same phenomenon, though these two concepts are not essentially alike. Coexistence, as Khambule *et al.* (2019) discuss, is like a coalition, based on a shared and common vision of political parties, to counter the dominance of one party. However, the coexistence of opposition parties could occur with or without a formal agreement whereas a coalition government's constitution requires a formal agreement. As Kariuki *et al.* (2022) suggest, "Coalitions are formed on and grounded in nonformal, lawfully binding arrangements and agreements among political parties and groupings." Notably, while the formal arrangements are a requirement for the formation coalition government, the current legislative framework of South Africa does not explicitly recognize the formation of coalition governments (De Vos, 2021; Beukes and De Visser (2021) outline three guidelines for an effective coalition government: it should translate into a program of action for the incoming administration, customize the needs of the municipality and local communities, and be strengthened by coalition partners in practice while being publicly announced to ensure transparency.

Formulating clear guidelines to regulate and control the formation of coalition governments is essential to achieve stable coalitions that can deliver on their mandate. Kariuki *et al.* (2022) note that clear guidelines for forming coalition partnerships are imperative and should be grounded in law to regulate how coalition partners must practice their coalition politics. This implies that coalition agreements, as argued by Beukes and De Visser (2021), should outline a policy program of the coalition, and stipulate how the coalition will be organized by prescribing procedures for decision-making, coordination and dispute resolution. Moreover, these agreements should be formulated in a way that enables coalition partners to anticipate and resolve disputes and conflicts in a manner that ensures the stability of the government (Kariuki *et al.* 2022).

The foregoing explanations demonstrate that the coalition and coexistence of opposition parties are different but related concepts in the context of South African politics. Indeed, both concepts have been applied in South African politics, both at national and local government levels. The failure of the opposition parties to assemble sufficient electoral support to defeat the ANC's dominance has been the main factor behind the deployment of the coexistence strategy of the opposition parties in the country. Khambule *et al.* (2019) argue that opposition parties have

deployed coexistence strategies through formal and even informal coalitions, both at national and local levels of government. A remarkable event that showcased the coexistence of opposition parties with different political and ideological systems was seen in 2017 when the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and the right-wing DA and other smaller parties as well as some senior members of the ANC protested against former President Jacob Zuma. This was in the aftermath of the president of South Africa's dismissal of the then Minister of Finance, Mr. Pravin Gordon. Furthermore, the opposition parties have demonstrated coexistence under the banner of an informal coalition in the National Assembly where they coordinated a case against the speaker in their quest to dismantle the ANC's dominance (Khambule *et al.* 2019).

Subsequently, the opposition parties have also deployed a coexistence strategy at the local government level where they have managed to remove the ANC in several metropolitans and local municipalities. Indeed, coexistence has been used in most cases as a strategy against the dominance of the ANC, however, there have been situations where the ANC has deployed the very same strategy to stay in power. The last local government elections saw the ANC failing to amass enough votes in eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality which meant that the party was on its way out of power in one of the country's most important metropolitans. Mokgosi *et al.* (2017) postulate that for a party to dominate the elections, it must garner the most votes at 50% plus one, which the ANC failed to obtain in eThekweni metropolitan during the last local government elections (Khumalo and Singh, 2021). However, the ANC managed to find ways to broker a deal with the smaller parties, including Abantu Batho Congress (ABC), which foiled the DA-Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) coalition.

3. Provincial government's supervision of local government

Since the birth of local government in 2000, the ANC has mostly dominated the local government landscape in South Africa (Mokgosi *et al.* 2017). The party has dominated and controlled the local government terrain, enjoying a landslide majority in almost all the municipalities in the country (Kariuki *et al.* 2022). However, in recent times, the electoral dominance of the ANC in South African politics has been dwindling with each passing year (Everatt, 2024). According to Gottschalk (2023), the main contributing factor to the spiraling downward electoral support of the ANC has been its inability to drive good governance and its poor performance in the eight provinces and most municipalities in the country. As the electoral dominance of the ANC continues to decline, Everatt (2024) envisages that the worst is yet to come for the ruling party:

"Unless something unforeseen occurs, the shape of post-election South Africa is already reasonably clear: a wounded and decaying ANC, well below the 50% mark (in this poll at 42% among registered voters who intend voting) but bigger than any other party; the DA (19%) and EFF (16%) winning less than a fifth of the vote; many of the older smaller parties dying off; and the remainder dividing tiny vote shares."

The aforementioned developments and possibilities are already a reality in many parts of South Africa's local government landscape. This has made the ANC paranoid, aggressive and intolerant of the opposition parties which have managed to dethrone it from political power in some metropolitans and local municipalities. This is evident in KwaZulu-Natal where the IFP and the DA have accused the ANC of using its powers as the governing party to sabotage municipalities that are governed by the IFP and the one DA-governed municipality. The ANC government's monitoring and supervising strategies for local governments hinge on Section 139 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, which provides for a cooperative government system (Mathenjwa, 2014). The cooperative government system envisions that the government of South Africa must be active, responsive, transparent, accountable and coherent to discharge its developmental state mandate effectively. It calls for all three spheres of government, namely, national, provincial and local government, to work together with the sole aim of improving people's lives and providing excellent services to communities (Makoti and Odeku, 2018). The local sphere of government, which operates under the tutelage of municipalities, is imperative, given its proximity to the people (Shoba, 2022).

The three spheres of government operate autonomously yet they are interconnected and mutually dependent (Makoti and Odeku, 2018). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa

(1996) stipulates that the spheres of government are distinctive, interrelated and interdependent. However, they all operate according to the Constitution, legislation and policies of South Africa. In this context, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa enjoins the provincial government to monitor and supervise the local governments, as stated in Sections 154(1) and 155(6, 7). This implies that provincial governments have the responsibility to support the municipalities in discharging their fiduciary duties in relevant cases. This is outlined in Section 139 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Mettler, 2013; Makoti and Odeku, 2018). This section states that the provincial government has the legal authority to intervene in a municipality when it does not fulfil its administrative obligation in terms of legislation. However, the Constitution also underscores that each sphere of government should be allowed to execute its mandate without undue interference from the other.

In this regard, Mathenjwa (2014) emphasizes that the provincial government, in exercising its supervisory powers over local government, should not erode the autonomy of local government. This implies that the spheres of government should respect one another and coexist to foster healthy relations for the greater good of the country. Moreover, Mathenjwa (2014) posits that the provincial government should not abuse its supervisory power over the local government even if perceived political or ideological differences prevail. Rather, the provincial government must make efforts to align and coordinate its activities with local government. Both parties must learn to coexist and build synergy that would allow them to become an effective, responsive and accountable coherent government, as envisaged in the Constitution. The next section presents the two selected case studies to discuss and explain the challenges associated with provincial governments' monitoring and supervising local government.

4. Case studies

The uMgungundlovu District Municipality was chosen as a case study, exploring challenges related to the provincial government's intervention in local governance. This district is noteworthy because it is the first region in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) where the Democratic Alliance (DA) gained full control over a local municipality. In this district, the African National Congress (ANC) governs the uMsunduzi Local Municipality, while the DA governs the uMngeni Local Municipality. Although the ANC controls the district and the provincial government, the DA's electoral success in uMngeni marks the first time in KZN's history that the DA has governed a local municipality. This unique political landscape provides a valuable case study for examining the dynamics of provincial and local government interactions.

4.1. uMngeni local municipality

Markedly, the DA took the uMngeni Local Municipality from the ANC in the 2021 local government elections (LGEs). The ANC enjoyed a majority rule in the municipality for years, as presented in Table 1 below, which shows the composition of the uMngeni council after past elections and the ANC and DA's results in the local government elections.

Table 1. The composition of uMngeni council between 2000 and 2001 by the ANC and DA

Election year	African National Congress	Democratic Alliance	Other parties
2000 election	11	8	2
2006 election	12	8	1
2011 election	14	9	0
2016 election	13	10	0
2021 election	10	13	0

Source: Author's compilation, based on past LGE results for uMngeni Municipal Council

The past LGE results, as depicted in Table 1 above, demonstrate that the ANC and the DA have always heavily contested each other in the uMngeni Local Municipality. The electoral

victory of the DA in uMngeni Local Municipality could be a strategic building block for dismantling the dominance of the ANC in KZN. It is also an opportunity for the DA to showcase its leadership to the electorate in the province, dominated by the ANC and partly by the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). However, the ANC is not expected to take this lying down, and indeed the DA has already reported complaints of 'mistreatment' and 'political targeting' in the uMngeni Local Municipality. In September 2023, claims of corruption, nepotism and maladministration surfaced against the mayor of uMngeni Local Municipality, Mr. Christopher Pappas. It is alleged that the mayor used his powers to influence the council's decisions in favor of a company and organization, allegedly associated with his former fiancé (Ngema, 2023). However, the mayor rebutted the claims, stating that the organization in question had been receiving financial support from the municipality even before he became the mayor. He also stated that he was not involved in the committee that approved the application of the organization, which is associated with his former fiancé. Regarding the alleged misconduct relating to Growth Spurt Consultancy, a company, linked to his former fiancé, the mayor stated: "How can a company that only registered this year get tenders that did not even exist in 2021? That does not make any sense. Also, why is all of this coming out now, but these people claimed they've known about these allegations for a while." (quoted in the press by Lekabe, 2023).

The Office of the Public Protector and KwaZulu Natal Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (KZNCoGTA) were requested to investigate the alleged challenges in the uMngeni Local Municipality (Ngema, 2023). This was an opportunity for the ANC-led government to attempt to replace the DA in the municipality. However, the findings of an investigation, conducted by the KZNCoGGTA, cleared the mayor and the municipality of all the allegations. In a communique, sent to the municipality, KZNCoGTA noted, "...a preliminary assessment was conducted into the allegations...Based on information sourced and provided, and in the absence of further details, it was deduced that the allegations, at this stage, are unfounded" (quoted in the press by Ngema, 2023). ANC has the upper hand in local government in KZN because it is the governing party in the province. The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) has oversight responsibility over municipalities in South Africa. The ANC oversees CoGTA at both national and provincial levels in KZN. The KZNCoGTA has a legislative mandate to support local government and to improve the capacity of municipalities to drive service delivery in the province. Through various legislation, the KZNCoGTA may intervene in governance-related matters, financial management matters, public participation aspects and the administration of any municipality in the province. In line with the Municipal Systems Act, 2000 (Act No. 32 of 2000), the provincial government has powers to act against the municipality provided the following:

- I. If an MEC has reason to believe that a municipality in the province cannot or does not fulfil a statutory obligation, binding on that municipality, or that maladministration, fraud, corruption or any other serious malpractice has occurred or is occurring in a municipality in the province, the MEC must -
- II. by written notice to the municipality, request the municipal council or municipal manager to provide the MEC with the information required in the notice; or
- III. if the MEC considers it necessary, designate a person or persons to investigate the matter (Mathenjwa, 2014).

The foregoing backdrop therefore implies that the DA-led government in uMngeni Local Municipality reports to the ANC government in the KZN province. This creates a unique situation in KZN politics and a conundrum for both the ANC and DA in the province. The two parties find themselves in a situation where they must coexist and collaborate to accelerate service delivery. The cooperative government system requires that the provincial government create a conducive environment that enables local governments to coordinate and align their activities with the programs of the provincial government. The ANC in KZN never had to oversee a DA-controlled municipality until the DA won the uMngeni Local Municipality in the LGEs in 2021. It would be interesting to observe how the ANC would navigate this challenging political path in a municipality as the party has had control since 2000. Therefore, the reports of the ANC-led government's

politically motivated acts towards the only DA-run municipal council in the province should not come as a surprise.

4.2. uMsunduzi local municipality

The ANC has enjoyed an outright majority in uMsunduzi Local Municipality since the first LGEs and has governed the municipality without a coalition. Since the 2000 LGEs, the ANC has consistently managed to garner over 50% of the total votes, while the DA has always occupied a runner-up position in the municipality. In the last three LGEs, the ANC received 68.35 in 2011, 66.18% in 2016, and 49.48% in 2021 respectively, while the DA received 19.49% in 2011, 19.30% in 2016, and 19.55% in 2021 of the total votes in the same period (IEC, 2011; 2016; 2021). The DA has been consistent in its electoral performance in uMsunduzi Local Municipality whereas the ANC has not, as evidenced by the results of the past three LGEs.

However, the 2021 LGEs were different for the ANC as the party lost its majority for the first time in the history of uMsunduzi Local Municipality. The party failed to garner a 50% plus plurality of required votes to obtain a majority in the municipal council (Meyer, 2024b). As a result of failing to garner enough votes during the 2021 LGEs in uMsunduzi Local Municipality, the ANC had to join an informal coalition with an independent councilor to stay in power. In March 2023, the ANC suffered another blow in uMsunduzi Local Municipality after the party had lost a ward to the IFP during a by-election in Sweetwaters, which is in Ward 2 of the municipality (Magubane, 2023). This situation made things even harder for the party as the party's votes had dropped below 50% in the municipality. The party had to seek further partnerships to remain in power in the council. Magubane (2023) states that the people of uMsunduzi were rejecting the party due to its failure to provide basic services to residents. The party has struggled to provide effective political leadership, maintain good governance and deliver services to the residents of uMsunduzi Local Municipality. It is evident, therefore, that the party's poor performance and its failure to effect good governance has culminated in the dwindling electoral support in uMsunduzi Local Municipality.

As a result, the KZNCoGTA placed the municipality under administration in April 2019 in line with Section 139 of the Constitution, as referenced in the preceding section of this article. Section 139 was invoked after reports of a host of problems in the affairs of the municipality, including irregular expenditure, maladministration and absenteeism of councilors (Singh, 2019). In a statement, the KZNCoGTA averred, "After a long period of instability and poor results, the people of Pietermaritzburg deserve that we give them a municipality they can be proud of through our hard work and flawless performance. This municipality has also failed to institute consequence management measures for managers responsible for unauthorized and irregular expenditure" (quoted in the press by Singh, 2019).

The lack of strong capable and ethical leadership has been a major cause of the many problems in the municipality. Corresponding with the foregoing comments, the South African Cities Network (SACN) report on the state of uMsunduzi Local Municipality as follows: "Without strong leadership, the municipality will not be able to deliver on its goals and objectives. What is needed is political and administrative leadership that is forthright, ethical, respected and supported by the national, provincial and local spheres of government" (SACN, 2021:260). Commonly, weak or failing municipalities are characterized by poor governance systems, which often arise from a lack of strong political and administrative leadership who fail to make the right decisions in the municipality's interest. This is currently a challenge in the uMsunduzi Local Municipality in the hands of the ANC-led government. A report by SACN (2021) found that uMsunduzi Local Municipality has faced governance-related challenges since its formation in 2000.

The Auditor-General (AG) report shows that poor governance remains the main driving factor behind many dysfunctional municipalities in South Africa (AG, 2023). In the same vein, the Institute of Directors of South Africa (2024) agrees that "Poor governance leads to defective financial reporting and thus a lack of accountability". The AG's reports have consistently noted that municipalities lack the necessary skills and qualifications to oversee the financials of the municipality properly. The audit committees consist of councilors who have no previous

experience and knowledge of managing the financial councils. Indeed, KZNCoGTA cites that the municipality has cash flow problems and other complex financial and service delivery challenges that require extraordinary measures. It is not surprising therefore that the uMsunduzi council approved a bizarre financial sponsorship worth R27 million to a local football club even though the municipality currently experiences financial difficulties, as cited by KZNCoGTA. The municipality reportedly owes Eskom over R400 million; yet its council continues to make reckless financial decisions (Malati, 2023).

5. Discussion

The study explores the coexistence of opposition parties and discusses challenges associated with provincial government interventions in local government in South Africa. The opposition parties in South Africa, both at local and national levels, have deployed the coexistence strategy to challenge the dominance of the ANC in the country's political landscape (Khambule *et al.* 2019). This strategy has been used by the opposition parties under the broader realm of coalition to form informal and formal coalitions as they wrestle for political power against the ANC. Khambule (2022) avers that South Africa was progressively moving toward coalition as the norm in the country's politics. However, Ndletyana (2018) emphasizes that while coalitions are becoming more popular in the country, it is imperative to note that it is not a new phenomenon in the country's political landscape.

Opposition parties are now making inroads into government more particularly at the local government level, as the DA took the uMngeni Local Municipality from the ANC in the 2021 LGEs. The DA took control of uMngeni Local Municipality without a coalition with another party. However, in other municipalities, the opposition parties have deployed the coexistence strategy to dethrone the ANC through formal or informal coalition. Interestingly, the ANC had to use the same strategy when the party lost the majority in uMsunduzi Local Municipality. The ANC is currently governing uMsunduzi Local Municipality through an informal coalition or partnership with an independent councilor. Indeed, even the ANC, which has dominated South Africa's political landscape for years, now needs help from smaller parties and independent councilors to stay in power. This validates Khambule's (2022) assertion that coalitions are becoming a norm in the country.

However, while it is evident that the opposition parties want to remove the ANC from power through formal or informal coalitions, the ANC as the governing party is not taking this challenge lying down. The ANC is still a governing party in South Africa, controlling eight out of nine provinces in the country (Gottschalk, 2023). Therefore, the party still has political power in the country's political landscape, especially at the local government level. Given this situation, the municipalities that the opposition parties control in the eight provinces, which the ANC governs, report to the ruling party's government. In KZN, some municipalities are controlled by the IFP either through a coalition or an outright majority. In the same province, the DA controls the uMngeni Local Municipality through an outright majority. Indeed, the ANC's political power is currently dwindling in the country due to its failure to effect good governance, which the AG (2023) cites as the reason behind many dysfunctional municipalities in South Africa. This failure of the ANC to effect good governance, particularly in the provinces where the party governs, Gottschalk (2023) argues is the main reason for its poor showing in past elections.

Markedly, in the case of uMsunduzi Local Municipality where the ANC governs through an informal coalition with an independent councilor, the party seems to be showing no signs of making up for its mistakes in the municipality. Agreeing with this assertion, Khambule (2022) states that the ANC-led government was not willing to learn from the mistakes of lost municipalities, such as Johannesburg, Tshwane and Nelson Mandela Bay. Instead, the ANC remains fixated on its internal party politics and factionalism which impact the work of government negatively in the end, particularly at the local government level. The party in uMsunduzi Local Municipality continues with its spoils system, rewarding party loyalists and affiliates by using the resources of the municipality. A remarkable occurrence that validates this claim is a recent case where the uMsunduzi council approved a senseless sponsorship deal for a football club, owned by one of the party's loyalists (Maliti, 2023). Meanwhile, the municipality owes Eskom and its creditors billions of rands. The party has dismally failed to avert corruption and maladministration

in the municipality. This claim is concretized by the sporadic service delivery protests in the municipality's townships and surrounding areas as well as the dilapidating state of the municipality's central business district (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2020). The municipality is weak, and it cannot enforce by-laws, as evidenced by thousands of illegal electricity connections, which have contributed to the municipality's Eskom debt (Meyer, 2024b).

6. Conclusion

The article aimed to describe the coexistence of the opposition parties in South Africa as a strategy to counter the ANC's dominance in the country's political landscape. As the opposition parties are succeeding in their common agenda of removing the ANC from power, especially in local government, the ANC has used its position as the ruling party in government to respond to this challenge.

Based on the case studies presented in this article, the following conclusions are made: (1) the battle for South African politics is fought at local government level. Therefore, the ANC's political support will continue to decline as the party shows no signs of improving its performance in municipalities where the party is in government; (2) the ANC's electoral decline will lead to more formation of coalition governments and therefore coalitions are going to become a norm in South Africa, as Khambule (2022) argues; (3) more challenges at the local government level will emerge as more municipalities will be governed through coalitions, which shall pose a complex conundrum for the political parties with different ideologies and policies.

Conversely, the DA's electoral victory in uMngeni Local Municipality offers the opportunity for the DA to showcase its leadership to the electorate in KZN. It is also an opportune moment for the DA to craft a model of its governance in KZN, a province dominated by the ANC. Finally, the case of uMsunduzi Local Municipality where the ANC governs through an informal coalition demonstrates that the party is not willing to learn from the mistakes that have caused them to lose votes in the municipality. Therefore, the ANC is likely to be out of power before long not only in uMsunduzi Local Municipality but in many other municipalities in the country.

7. Study limitations

A major limitation of this study is its conceptual nature. The conclusions are not supported by any form of quantitative or statistical analysis. Therefore, most of the views are the author(s)'s views. Furthermore, the article does not address other significant events, such as the recent provincial and national government elections in South Africa, that led to the formation of a government of national unity (GNU). Although the GNU is a significant event in South Africa's political landscape, it has not had a general impact on local government formation, which is the primary focus of this article, notwithstanding the formulations on provincial government level.

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