



**Journal of  
CONTEMPORARY  
SOCIETY & EDUCATION  
(JCSE)**

**ISSN: 2709-832X (Print)  
2709-8338**

## EDITORIAL NOTE

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69778/2709-8338/2026/5.3/EN>

### **From Policy to Practice: Governance, Education, and Social Transformation in Africa:**

Welcome to the October 2026 issue of the Journal of Contemporary Society and Education (JCSE). The sixteen articles assembled in this volume reflect the journal's commitment to rigorous, interdisciplinary scholarship on the pressing social, political, and educational challenges confronting contemporary Africa. Together, they illuminate a central tension of our time: the persistent gap between policy ambition and lived reality.

Several contributions in this issue grapple directly with the question of governance and service delivery. Motadi examines the opportunities and barriers shaping digital transformation in South African government departments, while Moloto and Pillay explore technology's influence on governance at the local municipal level. Akindele, Sanni, and Lamidi assess citizen satisfaction with public transportation in Lagos State, offering an important reminder that the legitimacy of the state rests on the quality of everyday services. Jutta and Alao interrogate the democratisation of the administrative state through South Africa's Government of National Unity, and Okudolo examines decentralisation and the effectiveness of local political leaders in Nigeria. Kambiri's analysis of governance challenges in managing internal displacement further underscores the consequences of normative commitment without implementation capacity. Agbor's critical perspectives on the operational independence of Elections Cameroon and the Constitutional Council round out this focus on democratic institutions.

Education remains a cornerstone of social progress, and this issue devotes considerable attention to it. Mtshali and Meyiwa assess the role of climate change education in maritime studies, while Modiba asks whether rural secondary schools are adequately managing learners with special educational needs associated with HIV/AIDS. Babalola interrogates the legal and policy complexities of foreign partnerships in Nigerian higher education, and Shabangu examines how school management teams respond to violence in rural South African schools. Nephawe and Mudimeli offer a distinctive contribution on the indispensability of English as a lingua franca in interpreting selected Pauline epistles.

The issue also foregrounds questions of gender, culture, and well-being. Nesane and Amaechi explore *Mamalo* as a resource for gender equality and women's empowerment in Limpopo, while Gudani, Khosa, and Nomatshila examine adolescents' perceptions of child support grant management through a family systems lens. Matheere offers an

exploration of the life journey of traditional healers in rural Limpopo, and Nkuna and colleagues provide an analytical study of compounding and naming in Siswati personal names. These articles remind us that social transformation is experienced at the level of culture, family, and community.

Collectively, these contributions demonstrate the vitality and breadth of contemporary social science research in Africa. They challenge scholars and policymakers alike to move beyond policy pronouncements toward meaningful implementation. We thank our authors and reviewers for their dedication and trust that this issue will stimulate further inquiry and debate.

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## DEMOCRATISING THE ADMINISTRATIVE STATE: THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY AS A FRAMEWORK FOR PROFESSIONALISATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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### **Abstract**

*In most countries in Africa, the dissatisfaction with the procedural democracy has been paralleled by the ongoing worry of poor administrative performance and underwhelming development results. This paper explores the 2024 Government of National Unity (GNU) in South Africa as a modern institutional experiment, which places democracy contestation beyond the electoral sphere to the operational arena of public administrative practice. Using a qualitative institutional and documentary research design, the study also draws on primary policy documents such as the 2024 GNU Statement of Intent, the National Framework Towards Professionalisation of the Public Sector (2022) and its 2024 implementation Directive, as well as Operation Vulindlela Phase II, parliamentary records, contemporaneous media reporting (2024–2026), and the developing body of peer-reviewed literature, on the 2024 GNU. Two theories are then applied to investigate the possibility that power sharing among the African National Congress (ANC), the Democratic Alliance (DA) and coalition partners might be able to restructure executive control of the civil service: Consociational Democracy Theory and Path Dependency Theory. The paper does not assume that coalition governance has decreased patronage or increased merit-based recruitment or that it has not done so. Rather, it sees the institutional tensions created by coalition bargaining as a theoretically ambiguous process that can either drive*

*reform or lock in the status quo in terms of patronage systems with a broader coalition calculus. The main contribution of the paper is a theoretically informed, researchable conceptual framework that identifies conditions under which democratic power-sharing may recalibrate or fail to recalibrate the administrative state. It is offered as an interpretive framework for further comparative testing, not as a causal explanation, and its findings are bounded by the documentary evidence available to August 2026.*

**Keywords:** *government of national unity; administrative reform; professionalisation; consociationalism; accountability*

## **1. Introduction**

Although third wave of democratisation in Africa provided regularly conducted multiparty elections to most of the continent, it has not been consistently followed by responsive, capable states (Mkandawire, 2001). It has long been argued that formally democratic institutions in Africa are often accompanied by informalised personalised networks of political control, which hollow out the professional civil service (Bratton & van de Walle, 1994). South Africa is no exception to the trend, a government uninterrupted by any opposition for three decades, functioning under the leadership of the African National Congress (ANC), managed to deliver substantial welfare benefits but, as the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture (2022) has documented in detail, also, and not least, a civil service whose senior appointments were often made on a party-political basis instead of professional merit.

This was upset by the 2024 general election. The ANC for the first time since 1994 did not get an absolute majority in parliament, with around 40% of the votes compared to the Democratic Alliance (DA) which received about 22% (Dullah Omar Institute, 2024). The ANC chose not to rule over a small minority, nor to join an “ideological bloc” with parties and parties that are ideologically similar, but instead embarked on a Government of National Unity (GNU) with the DA, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), the Patriotic Alliance (PA) and another seven smaller parties (Dullah Omar Institute, 2024). As a story of coalition arithmetic, cabinet bargaining, and the longevity of an improbable partnership between the ANC and the DA, this decision has been widely read, both in early media commentary and emerging in nascent academic literature (Oukouomi Noutchie, 2025; Vilakati & Bentley, 2024; Masipa & Mabitsela, 2025).

This paper adopts a slightly different approach. It questions whether the 2024 GNU is genuinely a middle-class option for power sharing in the cabinet, more precisely, whether the

new executive oversight by the cabinet, which recognises the need for cross-party oversight, has any impact on the professionalisation of the administrative state under the political executive. There are two reasons this is a timely question. First, the GNU coincided nearly exactly with the operationalisation of the South Africa's National Framework Towards Professionalisation of the Public Sector adopted by Cabinet in October 2022 and translated into a binding directive on Human Resources Management and Development for Public Service Professionalisation in 2024 (Department of Public Service and Administration [DPSA], 2022, 2024). Second, it was during the launch of the second phase of the joint structural reform programme of the Presidency and National Treasury, Operation Vulindlela, which specifically incorporated digital public infrastructure and local government performance into its mandate in May 2025 (National Treasury & The Presidency, 2025). The GNU, the professionalisation agenda, and Vulindlela II are therefore simultaneously emerging, but institutionally separate reform strands whose interconnections have yet to be theorised systematically.

As with the nature of the investigation, the paper does not make any predictions. Nor is it intended to claim or imply that coalition government in South Africa has made any strides in curbing patronage or increasing transparency, or that it has resulted in merit-based selection.

Rather, it formulates and implements an integrated conceptual framework that draws on the frameworks of Consociational Democracy Theory (Lijphart 1969, 1977, 1999) and Path Dependency Theory (Mahoney 2000; Pierson 2000) in an attempt to question when democratic power-sharing might reshape or, not less likely, fail to reshape the oversight and management of the civil service in practice by the executive. Institutional friction is the main analytical concept of the paper. It is defined here as publicly observable contestation between coalition partners over the appointment, removal, or oversight of public officials and the resources that sustain administrative capacity (appointments, budgets, and portfolio allocations). It is distinguished from ordinary coalition disagreement or political contestation by three criteria (elaborated in Section 3.3): (i) its object is administrative (the selection, control, or accountability of public servants) rather than purely policy or electoral; (ii) it involves a claim that invokes a formal rule or constitutional principle (for example, section 195 of the Constitution or the Professionalisation Framework); and (iii) it is capable of generating a verifiable procedural consequence (a reversal, review, disclosure, or revised appointment). Contestation that meets criterion (i) only is treated as ordinary coalition politics, not as accountability relevant friction. Friction is treated as theoretically ambiguous, not intrinsically reformative, it can be a new "horizontal accountability device" that allows the appointment system to be cross-party examined and

challenged, which a dominant party system would not have allowed; or it can be merely the shift and multiplication of the places of political capture as each coalition partner attempts to safeguard patronage opportunities in their own portfolios.

## **2. Literature Review**

The starting point of this study is a body of literature that has long challenged whether procedural democracy, regular reasonably free elections lead to a capable developmental state. Mkandawire (2001) has also pointed out that the African states have not been able to successfully integrate democratic accountability with the traditional features of East Asian developmental states, since the processes of democratisation have not always focused on the nature of the existing civil service. Bratton and van de Walle (1994) provided a seminal analysis of neopatrimonialism defined as a situation where formally rational-legal institutions of state are infiltrated by informal, personalised networks of loyalty and reciprocal obligation, and multiparty elections, on their account, can coexist with neopatrimonial administration indefinitely without displacing it.

Literature in South Africa on cadre deployment is firmly in this tradition, albeit not always in so many words. The Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture (2022) revealed that the ANC's cadre deployment policy introduced in 1997, undermined the constitutional

principles enshrined in section 195 of the South African Constitution, which stipulates that the public administration must have a professional, impartial and development-oriented character and that cadre deployment is one of the structural conditions that perpetrated the state capture of the 2010s. This was followed by litigation, forcing the release of records of the deployment committee of ANC, but commentators have pointed out that court orders are unlikely to help end a practice in the operating processes of the party (de Vos, 2024).

There is a separate literature on coalition and power sharing governments. Most studies on power-sharing in divided societies have been sceptical that grand coalitions will consistently deliver stable democracy or better governance results; elite accommodation can equally turn into an unaccountable cartel (Horowitz 1985). Within Africa specifically, coalition and unity governments have emerged from contested elections and have tended to stabilise immediate political crises without bringing about lasting reform of the inherited institutional structures, a pattern that raises an obvious comparative question for the South African case. Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho are referred to in this paper as illustrative reference points drawn from secondary literature. They are not analysed as formal comparative cases, and no claim of systematic comparison is made. Their role is to indicate why the South African question is of wider regional relevance and to motivate

the comparative research agenda in Section 7.

There is already a rapidly expanding, but still largely constitutional and political-science literature on the 2024 South African GNU. Oukouomi Noutchie (2025) examined if the current constitutional arrangement is conducive to coalition governance over a GNU in the face of socio-economic stress. Vilakati and Bentley (2024) provided a theological and social justice interpretation of the inclusiveness of GNU. Makhanya (2025) analyzed the implications of the GNU for the concept of nation-building and reconciliation, and Masipa and Mabitsela (2025), in a document-analysis approach more or less similar to the one employed here, mapped the political, economic and social roots of the inception of GNU. However, what is missing from this early literature is a thorough discussion of the implications the GNU has for the administrative apparatus of the state, in other words, for the civil service that is charged with carrying out policy regardless of who is in power in a particular ministry. This paper fills that void by reading the GNU literature alongside the professionalisation agenda of the DPSA which was parallel to the agenda of GNU, and, in fact, was much older (2022, 2024), and alongside Operation Vulindlela (National Treasury & The Presidency, 2025), which has not yet been systematically related to the literature on the coalition-governance.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The conceptual architecture of this paper is based on two theories that are rarely brought together in the African literature of administrative reform. Consociational Democracy Theory, which focuses on designing power-sharing at the top of the executive; and Path Dependency Theory, which focuses on the inertial properties of the administrative institutions that power-sharing is intended to shape. Reading together, the two questions that the paper poses are impossible to answer with one theory alone. What happens when a consociational political bargain meets a path-dependent bureaucracy?

#### ***3.1 Consociational Democracy Theory***

Lijphart (1969, 1977) describes four characteristics of consociational democracy in segmented societies, government by grand coalition among the political leaders of all important segments; mutual veto, which allows for minority segments to block decisions that would threaten their vital interests; proportionality in political representation and the appointment of civil servants; and segmental autonomy in the conduct of each internal affairs of the group. Lijphart (1999) in his later comparative work was able to identify the elements of a consensus democracy and a majoritarian system of government on the basis of the kind of executive power-sharing found in broad coalition cabinets and the concentration of executive power in a single-party government, respectively. Lijphart also

noted that genuine consociational coalitions generally are larger than the minimum number of parties required to form a parliamentary majority, i.e. he referred to surplus majority coalitions, a structure which exactly expresses inclusiveness beyond the bare arithmetic necessity of a parliamentary majority.

The 2024 GNU has some, but not all of these consociational traits. It is clearly a surplus coalition in Lijphart's (1999) terms. The ANC and DA would have had a parliamentary majority if they were the only ones, but the GNU was enlarged to eleven parties with several having very little seat share (Dullah Omar Institute, 2024). Cabinet allocation provides a more or less proportional representation to the electoral strength of parties, with smaller parties getting somewhat more than their vote share would strictly merit, a tendency that has been noted to occur in other coalitions (in this paper referred to as a coalition premium) and is consistent with the classic logic of coalition formation (Riker, 1962) (see Figure 3 and Section 6.1). There is no constitutional mechanism for the DA to exercise a veto, but in practice, in 2025, the DA's rejection of the fiscal framework of the government amounted to a veto of the budgetary programme (see Section 6.2). Segmental autonomy, the fourth pillar, is the most awkward fit. In his original formulation, Lijphart envisioned autonomy over cultural, religious, or linguistic affairs that affected a particular segment, but in South Africa, autonomy has more come to mean de

facto partisan control over specific ministries, which conflicts with the constitutional imperative, and the explicit goal of the 2022 Professionalisation Framework, "public administration as a single, unified, non-partisan public service" (DPSA, 2022).

This is no nitpicking about what constitutes a definition. However, critics of consociationalism, such as Horowitz (1985) and more conceptually, Bishara (2018), have long argued that Lijphart's model was derived from a small number of relatively homogeneous European cases, and that grand coalitions can create an unaccountable elite cartel that forecloses any real political contestation after the deal is struck. In the South African context, this criticism becomes a specific empirical problem which is reiterated in Section 6. If there is more responsibility for politically directed appointments spread across more parties than just the ANC, does the number of parties increase rather than decrease?

### ***3.2 Path Dependency Theory***

Consociationalism focusses on institutional design at the political level, whereas Path Dependency Theory focuses on why institutional practices, once established, are difficult to formally redesign. Applying the concept of path dependence, Pierson (2000) described it as a social process that arises from increasing returns. The more an institutional arrangement becomes beneficial to those involved in it, the more it becomes beneficial to

them, and the earlier they make their choices to be part of it, the more the payoff of continuing along the path increases relative to the payoff of going down an alternative path, so early choices are consequential and later changes are costly, even if the initial institutional arrangement is found to be dysfunctional. Mahoney (2000) expanded on this idea of “self-reinforcing sequences” that occur when each step in a practice reinforces its own structural, coordinative, or utilitarian rationale for continuing the practice, versus “reactive sequences” in which each event is a response to the previous event without necessarily repeating the underlying rationale.

The deployment of cadre is a good description of Mahoney's (2000) self-reinforcing sequence. As successive cohorts of politically deployed officials made their way up the civil service and state-owned enterprises, they created building blocks of the practice, making informal vetting networks more efficient, cultivating an internal party interest in sustaining the practice, and establishing party structures as internal party discipline's first line of duty with respect to who is appointed to senior positions rather than a secondary function (Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, 2022). Pierson's (2000) logic of increasing returns suggests that a reform measure that is launched after a set of sunk organizational investments, such as the proposed introduction of an independent Head of Public Administration (HOPA) under the 2022

Professionalisation Framework with authority over the appointment of heads of department (DPSA, 2022), will run into resistance that is commensurate with the sunk investment already made in the pre-existing set of organizational investments, no matter how strong the formal legal mandate for the reform.

There are two other implications of path dependency theory that are directly relevant to the argument of this paper. Path-dependent processes have critical junctures, or moments of contingency, in which the probability of alternative outcomes increases significantly before a new pattern re-stabilises, first, according to Pierson (2000). The 2024 result and consequently the GNU that it brought forth is a plausible candidate to the critical juncture (it was not an engineered reform but a contingent election result that did open up questions of the Executive's appointment powers that three decades of the ANC majority had shut down). Second, and more original to the argument of this paper, a critical juncture does not have to break a self-reinforcing sequence, it might also be incorporated into it. Any coalition parties that gain access to their own portfolio-specific appointment discretion (the segmental autonomy discussed in Section 3.1) may not be the final ones to eliminate the underlying practice of politically directed appointment, but rather expand its reach across an expanded set of parties, each with an interest in preserving, not challenging, the practice of politically directed appointment. In Section 6.3,

this possibility is elaborated upon, because of the commentary from 2026, it seems that deeply rooted patronage networks might have an interest in the failure of the GNU exactly because of the continued success of it (BizNews, 2026a).

### ***3.3 Towards an Integrated Framework***

Both strands of theory are combined in Figure 1 as a heuristic device. Path dependency (historical cadre-deployment legacies and the increasing returns they generate) and consociational power-sharing (the 2024 grand coalition, proportionality, and informal veto dynamics) are treated as two interacting background conditions that together shape a zone of institutional friction (contested appointments, budget stand-offs, and cabinet reshuffles, reported in Sections 5 and 6). Consistent with the interpretivist orientation of the study, the terms "conditions" and "pathways" are used in a sensitising rather than a strictly causal sense, they direct attention to patterns in the documentary record but do not claim that the design can isolate cause and effect.

The framework does not presume that friction runs in a single direction. It outlines two analytically distinct and

non-exclusive pathways, a recalibration pathway, in which cross-party scrutiny strengthens the technical mandates of the Professionalisation Framework and Vulindlela; and a path-locked paralysis pathway, in which coalition bargaining reproduces the patronage incentives the reforms sought to remove.

To separate accountability-relevant friction from ordinary coalition disagreement, each episode in the corpus is classified against the three criteria in Section 1, administrative object, invocation of a formal rule or principle, and a verifiable procedural consequence. An episode that meets all three is coded as accountability-relevant friction; one that meets only the first is coded as ordinary coalition contestation; one that meets none is excluded. For example, the 2025 VAT dispute is a fiscal-policy disagreement and is coded as ordinary contestation, whereas the 2026 dispute over the redeployment of party appointees would be coded as friction only to the extent that the sources record a rule-based claim and a procedural outcome. The balance between pathways remains an open empirical question, to be assessed through the evidence in Sections 5 and 6 and not fixed in advance.

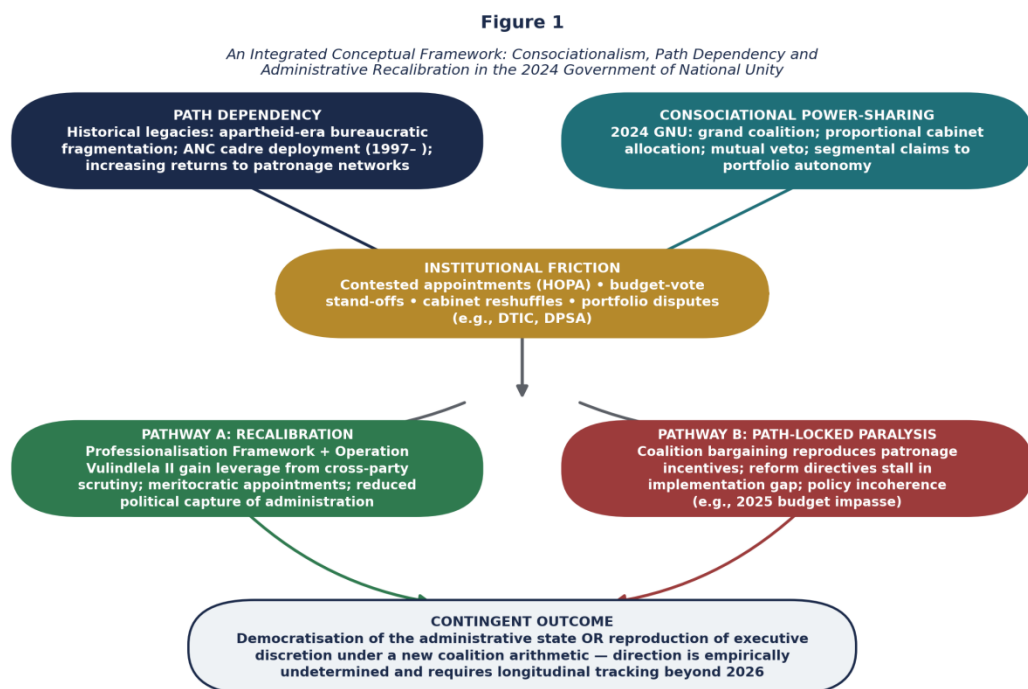


**Figure 1.** *An integrated conceptual framework linking path dependency and consociational power-sharing through institutional friction to change two interacting conditions.*

**Source:** *Authors' Construction, 2026*

#### 4. Methodology

The design is a qualitative institutional research study that fits the interpretivist paradigm because the meaning of the research object (an actively contested, continuously evolving coalition government) is continually created through a process of political discourse; that is, it is not predetermined at a single moment of measurement (Yanow, 2000). Qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009) is the main method used, with an interpretive reading of the policy discourse on the professionalisation agenda and Operation Vulindlela. The

unit of analysis is the individual document (policy instrument, parliamentary briefing record, media report, and peer-reviewed article), and, within each document, the coded passage (a segment of text that makes a claim about appointment practice, accountability, coalition bargaining, or administrative reform). Findings are reported at the level of themes across documents, not at the level of individual actors.

The corpus comprises 27 documents: 5 primary policy and legal instruments, 2 parliamentary and institutional records, 16 media

reports, and 4 peer-reviewed sources. Documents were identified through Google Scholar, Web of Science, Scopus, Parliamentary Monitoring Group, and outlet archives between 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2024 and 31<sup>st</sup> of August, and sampled purposively to capture the main documents bearing on the GNU, the Professionalisation Framework, and Operation Vulindlela. The first includes primary policy and legal instruments, namely the 2024 GNU Statement of Intent, the National Framework Towards Professionalisation of the Public Sector (DPSA, 2022), the 2024 Directive on Human Resources Management and Development for Public Service Professionalisation (DPSA, 2024), the overview document and quarterly progress reports of the Operation Vulindlela Phase II (National Treasury & The Presidency, 2025 and National Treasury, 2025), and the relevant sections of the final report of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture (2022). The second consists of institutional and parliamentary documentation such as summaries of briefings by the Parliamentary Monitoring Group at the DPSA and National School of Government to the Portfolio Committee on Public Service and Administration. The third consists of contemporary media coverage of the formation of the GNU and the subsequent tension, which was sourced from both South African and international outlets (such as Daily Maverick, BusinessTech, Eyewitness News, the Sowetan, BizNews, AllAfrica, Semafor and

NPR) and cross-checked between at least two independent sources of coverage where a particular factual claim regarding GNU tension is cited throughout the analysis. Because South African academic literature specific to the 2024 GNU is still emerging, a fourth, complementary set of very recent peer-reviewed sources (Makhanya, 2025; Masipa & Mabitsela, 2025; Oukouomi Noutchie, 2025; Vilakati & Bentley, 2024) is used to triangulate the political-science reading of the coalition against the administrative-reform reading developed here. Inclusion criteria were: (i) published between June 2024 and August 2026 (policy instruments from 2022 were included as foundational texts); (ii) directly addressing GNU formation, cabinet composition or conflict, public-service appointments, professionalisation, or Operation Vulindlela; and (iii) publicly accessible. Exclusion criteria were: (i) opinion pieces and editorials that did not report verifiable events; (ii) duplicate syndicated reports; and (iii) sources whose claims could not be traced to a named actor, official statement, or document. This time frame covers the formation of the GNU in June 2024 to the time of writing in August 2026, which this paper explicitly considers as a bounded observation window on an institution that is still being formed, rather than a finished case. This will have implications for the type of claims that the paper can make responsibly, as discussed further in Section 9.

Coding followed the framework analysis procedure of Ritchie and Spencer (1994) in five stages: (1) familiarisation with the corpus; (2) construction of an initial coding frame from the two theoretical lenses (deductive codes); (3) application of the frame, with open coding of passages

that the frame did not capture (inductive codes); (4) charting of coded passages into a matrix by theme and document type; and (5) interpretation, in which patterns across the matrix were examined against the theoretical propositions.

**Table 1: Coding frame**

| <b>Code type</b>            | <b>Category</b>                                    | <b>Indicator</b>                                                                     |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Deductive (consociational)  | Coalition composition                              | Number and identity of parties; surplus coalition                                    |
| Deductive (consociational)  | Proportionality                                    | Cabinet share vs seat share                                                          |
| Deductive (consociational)  | Veto-like events                                   | Public rejection or blocking of a partner's proposal                                 |
| Deductive (consociational)  | Segmental autonomy                                 | Claims of party control over a portfolio                                             |
| Deductive (path dependency) | Continuity/discontinuity                           | Persistence or change in appointment practices                                       |
| Deductive (path dependency) | Sunk investment                                    | Evidence of entrenched patronage routines                                            |
| Deductive (path dependency) | Critical juncture                                  | Markers of contingency and opened alternatives                                       |
| Inductive                   | Horizontal accountability / institutional friction | Partner-to-partner challenge of appointments, coded against the Section 3.3 criteria |

***Source: Authors' Construction, 2026***

Media reports were used for two purposes only, to establish that a public event occurred (a statement, dismissal, or reshuffle), and to record how actors framed it. They were not used to establish motives or the existence of patronage networks. Each report was appraised for outlet type, whether claims were attributed to named actors, and corroboration. Factual claims about contested events were retained only where corroborated by at least two independent outlets or by an official document; claims resting on a single source, or made by a party about its rival, are reported as claims, not facts, and are flagged as such in the text.

Documentary analysis can establish what the formal rules require, what actors publicly state, and how contested events were reported. It cannot establish what happened inside appointment processes, whether formal reforms have changed administrative practice, or the motives of actors. The absence of elite interviews, personnel and appointment records, and other primary evidence means that this study assesses formal institutional change and public contestation, not practice change. The findings should therefore be read as an interpretive mapping of the documented record, which future interview-based and administrative-data studies can test.

Triangulation by document type (legal/policy instruments, institutional records, media reporting, and academic literature) and by independent media outlets for any given factual claim about a contested political event was sought, and a documented audit trail of the sources cited in the analysis was maintained. Section 4.5 states explicitly what this approach can and cannot establish, and the point is returned to in Section 9. There is no human subject in the study and the corpus is composed of sources public domain, such as government, parliamentary, media and academic sources, so no additional ethical clearance was required beyond those required for normal desk-research, although care was taken to state the origin of controversial political claims, for example, those made by the ANC and the DA over cabinet reshuffle controversies instead of claiming them to be fact.

## **5. Contextualising the 2024 Government of National Unity**

The national results of South Africa's 2024 general elections resulted in the lowest national vote share for the ANC (about 40.2%) compared to the DA (21.8%) and the new uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) party (14.6%) (Masipa & Mabitsela, 2025). President Cyril Ramaphosa called in all parties in the National Assembly to enter into negotiations with a view to forming a Government of National Unity, and issued a Statement of Intent on 14 June 2024 (Dullah Omar Institute, 2024). The resulting coalition eventually included the ANC, the DA, the IFP, the PA, Rise Mzansi, Al Jama-ah, the United Democratic Movement and the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania along with the short-lived engagement and subsequent withdrawal of the United African Transformation party in July 2024 (Dullah Omar Institute, 2024).

Figure 2 places the 2024 GNU in the context of longer sequences of critical junctures that extend back to the first, 1994, Government of National Unity (GNU) under the power-sharing principles of the interim Constitution, which included the representation of the ANC, the National Party and the IFP. The earlier GNU is instructive because it has been shown to have failed to endure, collapsing with the retreat of the National Party in 1996, into the ANC-dominated majoritarian government which in South Africa have had a history of being transitional and not permanent arrangements (Masipa &

Mabitsela, 2025). The 1997 institutionalisation of ANC cadre deployment, the entrenching of patronage networks found by the Zondo Commission in the 2010s, the 2020 roll

out of Operation Vulindlela, the 2022 roll out of the Professionalisation Framework and finally the groundbreaking GNU in 2024 followed by an early clash of interests in 2026.

**Figure 2**

*Critical Junctures in South Africa's Path Toward the 2024 Government of National Unity (1994–2026)*

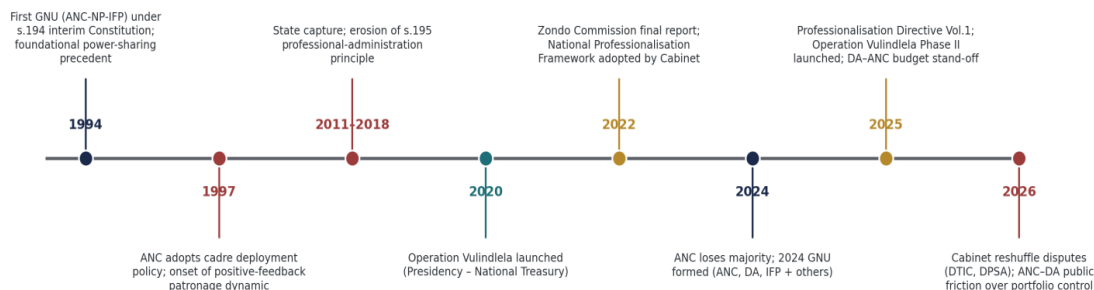


**Figure 2. Critical junctures in South Africa's path toward the 2024 Government of National Unity, 1994–2026.**

**Source: Authors' Construction, 2026 compiled from Dullah Omar Institute (2024), Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture (2022), DPSA (2022, 2024), and National Treasury & The Presidency (2025).**

That tension worsened significantly during 2025 and 2026. The DA's opposition to Finance Minister, Enoch Godongwana's proposed tax framework fuelled by a proposed VAT increase in April 2025 sent the proposed coalition to a compelling rethink of its agreements with all the other GNU partners, and raised speculation regarding its viability (Africaninsider, 2025). In June 2025, President Ramaphosa dismissed DA Deputy Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition Andrew Whitfield,

sparking an emergency meeting of the DA's Federal Executive as a warning that the coalition is now putting itself in an increasingly hostile environment (BusinessTech, 2025). The DA's own leadership reshuffle by mid-2026 resulted in the sending of former party leader, John Steenhuisen, from Agriculture to Deputy Minister in the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, leading to a public ANC statement denouncing the DA as treating the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition as a dumping

ground for party reassignments and using constitutional principle selectively (BizNews, 2026a). Commentary in the sources (BizNews, 2026b; Sowetan, 2026) suggests that patronage may be a threat to the coalition's cohesion. This is the interpretation of those outlets and is not independently verified in the documentary record.

The next, more analytically interesting, empirical question is whether or not cabinet allocations in the GNU approximate the proportionality that a consociational model (Lijphart 1999) would suggest, which is the focus of Figure 3. As the figure illustrates, the ANC has more ministers than it has seats in Parliament, with about 56 per cent of cabinet members holding parliamentary seats, whereas the DA has fewer cabinet members than seats in Parliament (19 per cent compared with 22 per cent) and the other small parties together have a smaller share than their legislative weight would suggest. This

is remarkably similar to the coalition-premium logic previously discussed in section 3.1, in which junior partners are rewarded with representation in excess of proportionality for their support, and it is also a feature with direct relevance to the argument of this paper. In this case, the ministry that has been directly constitutional and administrative tasked with professionalising the state, the Department of Public Service and Administration, is not held by the ANC or the DA, but by the IFP, whose Deputy President, Inkosi Mzamo Buthelezi, was appointed Minister of Public Service and Administration on 3 July 2024 (The Presidency of South Africa, 2024). This is an aspect that is often omitted in media and scholarly discussion that portrays the GNU as an ANC-DA alliance, and it suggests the empirical puzzle of what level of cabinet representation of professionalisation, as opposed to professionalisation per se, would be needed.

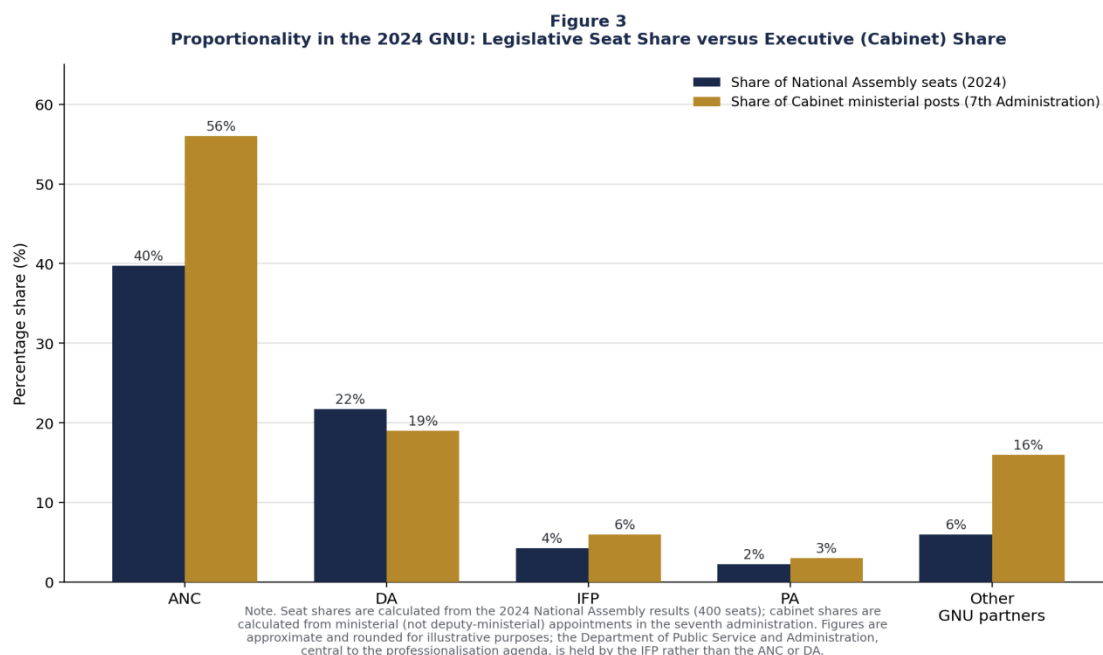


**Figure 3. Proportionality in the 2024 GNU: legislative seat share versus executive (cabinet) share.**

**Source:** Authors' Calculation, 2026 from 2024 National Assembly results and seventh administration cabinet appointments; figures are approximate and rounded for illustrative purposes.

## 6. Findings and Critical Discussion

Each subsection below separates (a) what the documentary record shows, (b) the interpretation the framework offers, and (c) what the evidence cannot establish.

### **6.1 Consociational Proportionality Without Segmental Administrative Autonomy**

The proportionality analysis in Figure 3 is consistent with a broader hypothesis regarding the consociational structure of the 2024 GNU. Cabinet allocation tends to reflect, although not exactly correspond to, electoral strength, in line with the coalition-

premium principle which explains why junior coalition partners are awarded more representation than they win in the polls (Riker, 1962). This is no out of the ordinary coalition politics as far as this paper is concerned, what is important is that the ministry in charge of implementing the professionalisation agenda is not in control of either of the two largest political parties behind the scenes that fueled the bulk of media and academic writings on the GNU. There are two acceptable interpretations of this arrangement, and neither can be determined from the documentary evidence. Two interpretations are

possible, and the documentary record cannot adjudicate between them. The first holds that having a smaller and less factionally divided party holding the portfolio would create a “fortuitous” or “conscious” barrier to one party or another capturing the department to use for their own patronage purposes. A more cynical interpretation would see a minor coalition partner having less bureaucratic leverage and political credibility in Cabinet to push a disruptive agenda on reforming the two dominant political parties' respective systems of appointments, which are also largely unimpacted by a professionalisation system that operates outside their portfolios. The more basic theoretical conflict, however, is much deeper than the allocation of a single portfolio. The professionalisation agenda's vision of a single, unified public administration (DPSA, 2022) is at odds with the consociational logic of segmental portfolio autonomy, where each coalition partner has an interest in viewing its ministries as a zone of protected influence. The design of the GNU does not result in the removal of the ANC's legacy of politically-directed appointment while it does remove the possibility of it alone doing so from the documentary record but it does provide at least a structural possibility that the political direction of appointments is spread over a broader set of parties than it has been.

## ***6.2 Mutual Veto as Fiscal Brinkmanship: The 2025 Budget Impasse***

The mutual veto among coalition partners is central to Lijphart's (1969) model and is demonstrated in the DA's rejection of the national fiscal framework for 2025. There was no constitutional right for the DA, as well as other GNU partners, to exercise a constitutional veto over budgetary issues, as the parliamentary arithmetic would have been sufficient for the ANC to pass the framework with the support of other partners in the coalition. However, the DA's opposition had significant ramifications and led to the ANC's national working committee resuming talks with all coalition partners and to a constant barrage of questions in the public domain on the future of the GNU (Africaninsider, 2025). It suggests that mutual veto, in Lijphart's consociational sense, can happen informally, without codifying veto rules, something Lijphart's original European cases with their more formally institutionalized veto arrangements did not expect. The fiscal brinkmanship has a direct practical implication for the professionalisation and Vulindlela agendas. Reforms that were previously contingent on multi-year funding such as recruitments into the relatively small cadre of occupations that require scarce skills as well as the operationalisation of the proposed Head of Public Administration function and the investments into the digital infrastructure envisaged under Vulindlela II are now hostage to the

budgetary process, which is now subject to informal inter-party veto.

### ***6.3 Path Dependency: Professionalisation Gains Against a Sunk Patronage Architecture***

Path dependency theory (Pierson, 2000) is also echoed in the persistence of cadre deployment despite the negative findings of the Zondo Commission and a court order to make available records of the deployment committees of ANC; a practice with compounding returns of organisation, coordination and career which has spread over nearly 30 years will not be displaced by the discovery of the practice and the court order, especially because the core beneficiaries of the practice, that is, incumbent officials who are appointed on its basis, and ANC party structures whose internal discipline relies on it, have the institutional position and the incentive to protect it. One media source (BizNews, 2026b) advances the claim that entrenched patronage networks may have an interest in the coalition's failure. The documentary record does not allow this to be verified, and it is treated here as a hypothesis for future research and not a finding. If it were borne out, it would extend the concept of path dependence from bureaucratic inertia (Pierson, 2000) to an organised political interest structure.

Against this, the proposed Head of Public Administration function in the 2022 Professionalisation Framework, which aims to centralise and depoliticise the appointment of heads of department (DPSA, 2022), and the

2024 Directive operationalising it (DPSA, 2024) are formal institutional attempts to interrupt the self-reinforcing sequence. The document record available at the time of writing suggests that implementation guidance was issued, but does not allow for a confident assessment as to whether the function has so far been substantively institutionalised in practice. The paper does not claim to have solved the empirical puzzle of whether, and to what extent, the function is institutionalised in practice, but only tackled the formal institutional puzzle of how the function should be institutionalised.

### ***6.4 Institutional Friction as an Ambiguous Mechanism: Catalyst or Noise?***

Perhaps most clearly, and most probably most original, was the nature of institutional friction itself. The ANC's public airing of the DA's apparent disregard for constitutional principle in the appointment of its trade, industry and competition deployees, and then loading its own members onto the same accountably-intractable list (BizNews, 2026a), is an example of a horizontal accountability channel that is structurally missing in a single-dominant-party setting. Horizontally, coalition partners are now entitled and have a vested interest in drawing attention to the practices of their fellow party, suggesting a possible accountability channel between themselves that complements weak vertical accountability in South Africa over senior appointments, which is

exercised through elections. It is not the formal veto or proportionality rule per se, but the oppositional dynamic between two formally co-governing parties that compete in elections that leads to scrutiny, this is a feature of consociational proportionality but not a part of its definition. This horizontal accountability mechanism is however not constitutional, and possesses exactly the susceptibility that critics of consociationalism like Horowitz (1985) and Bishara (2018) identify, that it relies on the political incentive of coalition partners to “publicly” challenge each other's behavior, and that over time this challenge could become more and more subdued in favour of elite accommodation, transforming accountability into an unaccountable “cartel”. Again, it is not clear yet, as of September 2026, if adversarial coalition politics is an enduring form of accountability or merely a side-effect of a less-than-completely established coalition.

### ***6.5 Operation Vulindlela II as a Semi-Insulated Technocratic Track***

The case of Operation Vulindlela is analytically different from the professionalisation agenda and should be treated accordingly. In contrast to the DPSA-administered professionalisation Framework, which is embedded in a one-combined Cabinet portfolio, Vulindlela is a coordinating unit between the Presidency and National Treasury which facilitates structural reform in various Cabinet portfolio ministries without being a Cabinet portfolio itself (National

Treasury & The Presidency, 2025). The first phase (which focused on electricity, freight logistics, water, telecommunications, and the visa system) has seen 94% of the reform targets achieved by the time Phase II commenced in May 2025; the second phase of the programme was expanded to cover local government performance, spatial integration, and digital public infrastructure (National Treasury & The Presidency, 2025). Unlike the consociational-patronage tension found in Sections 6.1 - 6.4, Vulindlela largely avoids it because it works much more through inter-governmental technical coordination processes that were already in place before the formation of the GNU, and do not involve the political party bargaining in the cabinet. This brings up an important question for future research, as will be explored further in Section 7. Is bypassing the contested core of the civil service through delivery units of this kind a more enduring path to administrative improvement than trying to professionalise the contested core directly in a coalition?

### **7. Towards a Conceptual Framework for Administrative Democratisation in Africa**

The original contribution of this paper is a proposition that coalition power-sharing and administrative path dependence interact through contested appointment processes, and that whether this interaction recalibrates or locks in patronage depends on three conditions (below). This proposition is offered as a researchable claim for

comparative testing, and not as a causal finding. Together, the results of Section 6 offer a more general and tentatively formulated theory. The democratisation of the administrative state in the context of coalition government is not a foregone conclusion when a power-sharing executive is introduced; it relies on at least three conditions. The first is the institutional structure of the coalition, namely, whether proportionality in cabinet membership is carried over to genuine cross-party monitoring of appointments, or simply spreads out the control of patronage among more parties. The second effect is related to the degree of strength and sequence of pre-existing path dependencies, whether patronage practices have evolved as truly self-reinforcing sequences, as Mahoney (2000) would define them (with organised beneficiaries able to resist reform) or remain relatively amenable to change. The third is the existence or absence of semi-insulated technocratic delivery mechanisms, like Operation Vulindlela, that can take a step forward on a particular administrative reform without having to seek the approval of cabinet-level coalition negotiations.

This proposition is proposed as a researchable model for comparison and is not a conclusion that can be made specific to South Africa. The Kenyan National Accord (2008), the Zimbabwean Global Political Agreement (2009), and Lesotho's repeated coalition governments are cited in the secondary literature as cases in which executive power-sharing coexisted with entrenched patronage

structures. They are not analysed in this paper, and no comparative inference is drawn from them. Future studies could benefit from a structured analysis of these cases against the three conditions identified here, coalition design, path-dependency strength and the presence of insulated technocratic tracks, to test whether the South African case identified in this paper (partial recalibration coexisting with partial path-locked paralysis) finds its way in a broader pattern of African coalition governance or is only the South African type of institutional and historical conditions.

## **8. Policy Implications**

Given the limits set out in Section 4.5, the following are tentative implications for debate and further testing and not recommendations derived from demonstrated causal effects. First, the institutional structure of the Head of Public Administration should be explicitly safeguarded against changes in the composition of the cabinet and renegotiation of portfolios, as the documented contestation over portfolios suggests that politically exposed reform functions may be at risk. Second, operation Vulindlela's semi-insulated technocratic model (Section 6.5) implies that the professionalisation policy agenda, at least some elements of it, could be implemented in a more durable way, at least partially in a ring fenced, specific and well-defined implementation framework within joint delivery structures of Presidency and Treasury than within a single contested

ministerial portfolio. Thirdly, the horizontal accountability relationship described in Section 6.4, coalition partners publicly challenging each other's appointment processes, might be formalised as a regular inter-party parliamentary oversight (IPIO) body for the appointment of senior public servants, rather than being an incidental and contingent aspect of coalition politics. Fourth, accountability rules on politically directed appointments should apply equally to every coalition partner that holds a portfolio, not only to the ANC, since the segmental autonomy discussed in Section 3.1 could extend appointment discretion across more parties.

## **9. Conclusion**

This paper sought to analyse, rather than make assumptions about results, whether the 2024 Government of National Unity in South Africa is a viable option for democratising the administrative state, or whether it merely translates and/or maintains the patronage logic that the ANC entrenched over the past few decades in government. However, the evidence brought together here cannot definitively be used as a basis to answer either question, and the paper has suggested that this is a substantive finding rather than a methodological one. The GNU is a genuine institutional experiment with open-ended administrative implications, and the interplay between consociational coalition design (CCD) and pre-existing path-dependencies remains an administration problem that the

integrated conceptual framework of the paper (Figure 1) aims to render analytically manageable.

The study has four main limitations. First, it relies on documentary and media sources and includes no elite interviews or administrative records, so it can assess formal reform and public contestation but not changes in actual appointment practice. Second, the observation window (June 2024 to August 2026) covers a coalition that is still evolving. Third, the corpus depends on publicly available material and may under-represent informal processes. Fourth, the comparative references are illustrative only. Future research should test the framework through interviews with senior officials and coalition negotiators, analysis of appointment and personnel data, and structured comparison with Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho.

It can only be said with some degree of certainty that, so far, the debate on the GNU's significance has been mostly constitutional/electoral in nature and that this articulation of the debate poses a risk of failing to see a truly new element in the current moment. The accountability of coalition partners to each other in a horizontal direction, one that has never existed in South Africa's post-1994 dominant-party era. It remains to be seen whether this dynamic will persist or slip into a broader but eventually seamless patronage system, as path dependency theory suggests, given the span of this paper. The contribution Of

the paper is an interpretive, researchable framework linking coalition design, path dependence, and institutional friction, and a set of conditions under which power-sharing

may or may not democratise the administrative state. It is offered for testing and does not claim to establish the effects of the 2024 GNU.

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