



**Briefing Paper 348**

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## **New Political Parties and Coalitions**

### **1. Introduction**

South Africa held its first democratic elections in 1994, and 20 years later we are approaching another general election. In two decades South Africa has grown and developed in many ways, but since 1994 the African National Congress (ANC) has been in power with a clear majority in each general election. Today, though, people are starting to question whether the ANC has really reached its full potential in improving the lives of ordinary South Africans.

One cannot discount the success of the ANC in the transition from Apartheid to democracy from 1990 to 1994. With Nelson Mandela at its head, it spared South Africa from excessive violence and potential ruin, and brought change and reconciliation; however, today the party is riddled with scandal and corruption.

Democracy is about supporting diversity, equality, freedom and dignity. In order to ensure that a democracy remains healthy, there need to be strong political parties that can compete in elections and keep the ruling party accountable with checks and balances. After 20 years of democracy, the emergence of parties like Agang and the EFF indicates a strengthening of our multi-party system. Strong opposition parties are an important element in creating and consolidating a strong democracy. They keep the ruling party on its toes, but they also offer support to different constituencies of people. Each political party has a set of ideals and principles that speak to different groups of people, and this in turn helps to protect the culture, language and needs of these different groups within South Africa. The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and Agang SA are the two most prominent new political parties, and they

were invited to address a roundtable discussion jointly hosted by the CPLO and the Hanns Seidel Foundation on 4<sup>th</sup> April. Cheryllyn Dudley MP, of the African Christian Democratic Party also participated, focusing on the idea of smaller parties forming coalitions. Dr Cherrel Africa, the head of the Department of Political Studies at the University of the Western Cape, responded to the speakers. What follows is partly based on these four inputs.

### **2. The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)**

The EFF was registered with the Electoral Commission on the 29 July 2013 after being launched at a rally in Soweto. The EFF's leader, Julius Malema, the former ANC Youth League president, was expelled from the Youth League after being found guilty of causing divisions within the organisation, among other allegations.

The EFF is founded on the main principle of the redistribution of wealth, and casts itself as a 'revolutionary' political party. Economic freedom for the EFF is about ensuring that the main national assets, such as the mines, the banks, and major commercial enterprises, are owned by South Africa (preferably by the State) and not by foreign investors or companies<sup>1</sup>. According to the EFF, people are being exploited by these companies and investors, and these enterprises should rather be taken away from foreign hands and nationalised so that South African workers can benefit and rise out of poverty. The nationalisation of mines, companies and 'unused' land will be done without compensation to the current owners; land taken by the government will then be redistributed to people to farm. The EFF plans to give ward councillors land to use as

community farming projects to help decrease poverty and unemployment.

Malema speaks for many followers who identify and connect with the principles and ideals of the EFF. Some people feel that the governing party has not done enough to reduce poverty and increase employment for the people on the ground, and that the wealth of the country is still in the hands of the elites. The EFF shares these views and is very vocal about how it will improve the living conditions of poor people through nationalisation and land redistribution. The EFF is set on creating change for the country, but the nature of this change is still to be seen. Many observers feel that the radical principles espoused by the EFF may cause more harm than good if the party should succeed in gaining any degree of power.

The EFF has taken up a strong position against corruption. Present tender processes will be discontinued. Private companies, management firms and consultants will not be used to do the work of government. The EFF wants to develop and improve internal government structures to ensure that government can provide adequate services to the people and not have to use private companies. Public representatives who are found guilty of corruption will be sentenced to a 20-year jail term. The EFF also highlights the importance of the independence of corruption watch groups, the Public Protector and the Auditor General.

Besides fighting for economic change, the EFF claims to be 'among the people'. By this Julius Malema and his party mean that they are ordinary people who experience, and empathise with, the day-to-day lives of the working people. They are not like the 'elites' of other political parties who are inaccessible to the ordinary people. The EFF claims that, once it is in power, politicians will be forced to use public health and education facilities instead of private facilities. Their reason for this is that if the facilities are good enough for ordinary people to use, then politicians should use them too. According to the EFF, this will ensure that the politicians deliver quality to the people. The EFF have marketed themselves as a working/lower-middle class political party fighting for economic change for the people on the ground. They have identified the 'enemy' as poverty and unemployment, but they offer a populist solution which, to say the least, would be of highly questionable efficacy.

### 3. Agang SA

Agang is another of the new political parties on the scene for the upcoming elections. The party was established in February 2013 and is led by Dr Mamphela Ramphele. Agang presents itself as a non-racial party which aims to build a better country together as a nation; people need to work together to move South Africa forward.

The goal of the party is to ensure that South Africa reaches the potential that it possesses and that the people are given back their hope, dignity and respect. In order to achieve this goal of a brighter South Africa, Agang has set out a turnaround strategy in its manifesto<sup>2</sup>. This strategy involves five steps, or what the party refers to as the 'Five E's'. The first step is to *empower* the people of South Africa. Empowerment can only happen through the upliftment of people and their communities. Education and skills development, security, and access to health are elements that are needed to empower people to improve their lives and the lives of their communities.

The second step is to improve the quality of, and access to, *education*. In order for people to empower and uplift themselves they need to learn and develop the skills that will ensure their success. The first step to ensuring quality education is to provide proper facilities to learn in. Agang wants to see the eradication of mud schools and improvement in the poor infrastructure of schools. The next step is to ensure that the level of education is the same in each school and that learners receive the same quality of education. This will be achieved by ensuring that teachers are properly trained and are competent. All students should have equal opportunity to study and develop; therefore, funding needs to be secured to help the less fortunate to reach their dreams of going to university or college after high school. Education will also be available to those who have special needs, and children who have disabilities will be able to attend school with teachers who are equipped to cater to their needs. Education is extremely important to Agang as it is the foundation on which to build a strong successful nation.

The third step in the turnaround strategy is to promote *entrepreneurship*. If people are given the skills and the tools to empower themselves and start their own businesses, it will not only provide employment but also economic growth and development for the country as a whole. Agang will help support the growth of new businesses by

reducing the red tape that, they claim, strangles new business owners. They will also develop working relationships with banks and other enterprises to help provide start up loans to new businesses owners. This will make it easier for entrepreneurs to start their own businesses and thus provide jobs and economic growth. Agang also feels that worker's rights need to be protected, especially those who are hired by labour brokers. Workers deserve the right to live with dignity.

The fourth step is to increase *employment opportunities*. This will be done by ensuring that people have access to skills development programmes. Agang would like to set up different training facilities and schools so that people are able to learn and develop the necessary skills they need to get a job. Agang would also like to see businesses take a more active role in providing skills-training for their staff, and the party promises to create the spaces needed for people to acquire useful skills and thus provide people with opportunities for employment.

The fifth step is to create an *effective government*. This means that government will serve the needs of the people before it serves its own needs. Through effective government, Agang will ensure that service delivery takes place, that houses are built, and that health care is assessable to all. Agang will work with the rest of the political parties in Parliament to create a transparent, accountable system that will serve the people.

These two political parties offer South Africans new and intriguing options in the 2014 general election. However, there is no guarantee that either of them will emerge as a major political force; polls suggest that neither of them enjoys anywhere near the support of the two dominant parties, the ANC and Democratic Alliance (DA).

#### **4. Coalitions**

In order for there to be a strong multi-party democracy, South Africa needs robust parties that can hold their ground. Until our smaller political parties reach this point, the other option is to form coalitions in order to provide a strong alternative opposition. According to Cheryllyn Dudley, of ACDP, coalitions are a useful tool for smaller parties who want to stand together as a collective voice of opposition and yet retain their own identities.

Coalitions can be explained as different groups making a decision to work together against a common opponent or for a particular reason. South Africa has many different minor political parties, and in 2013 five of them made the decision to form a coalition for the 2014 elections called the Collective for Democracy. Each party would remain intact, but they would work together, and even campaign together on certain issues. The five parties which entered into this coalition were the Freedom Front Plus (FF+), the Congress of the People (COPE), the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), the United Christian Democratic Party (UCDP) and the ACDP<sup>3</sup>. The idea behind forming the Collective for Democracy is to provide an alternative opposition which would hold far more political power than the individual parties standing on their own. The coalition hopes to ensure the protection of diversity and that the voices of the different minority groups are heard and not ignored.

Coalitions in a dominant party state offer a chance for smaller parties to make a difference and to hold the ruling party accountable for its actions. A strong democracy needs strong opposition and, according to those promoting the coalition idea, this implies that there should be more than just one major opposition party. Indeed, Ms Dudley argues that both South Africa's largest parties, the ANC and the DA are striving for an effectively one-party state, as long as they constitute the governing party. A coalition, on the other hand, would preserve diversity and a dynamic range of opinions and approaches.

However, in a proportional representation system coalitions lack the desired effect they would have in a purely first-past-the-post system, where their supporters would support a particular candidate from the coalition as opposed to their own party and in that way either achieve a majority for the coalition, or at least avoid splitting the opposition vote. In the current system coalitions do not work to that effect, especially in the case of elections. Therefore, the Collective for Democracy may succeed in working together after the elections on policy and legislative questions, but it is unlikely to have any noticeable effect on how people vote.

#### **5. Conclusion**

South Africa may have many different political parties, but many of them lack the strength to count as effective opposition to the ruling party. Democracy needs strong and diverse opposition

to survive. The arrival of the EFF and Agang SA is a further indication that South Africa has a strong, dynamic democracy. In addition to the emergence of new parties, the formation of coalitions could also help to ensure that our country is able to grow and develop to the benefit of every person, rather than one particular group.

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<sup>1</sup> The Economic Freedom Fighters' manifesto, retrieved from <http://effighters.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/EFF-ELECTIONS-MANIFESTO.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Agang SA manifesto, retrieved from <http://agangsa.org.za/pages/election-manifesto>

<sup>3</sup> The ACDP is now reconsidering its position, according to Ms Dudley.

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