Political Parties in South Africa
Do they Undermine or Underpin Democracy?

Political parties and the party system that underpins South Africa’s democracy have the potential to build a cohesive and prosperous nation. But in the past few years the ANC’s dominance has strained the system and tested it and its institutions’ fortitude. There are deeper issues of accountability that often spur the Constitution and there is also a clear need to better meaningful public participation and transparency. This volume offers a different and detailed assessment of the health of South Africa’s political system.

About the Editor
Heather Thynsma is an Adjunct Lecturer from the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria.

Heather A. Thynsma [ed.]

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Edited by
Heather A Thuynsma
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## Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACDP</td>
<td>African Christian Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEB</td>
<td>Afrikaner Eenheidsbeweging (National Action Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMCU</td>
<td>Association of Mine Workers and Construction Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMP</td>
<td>African Muslim Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANCYL</td>
<td>African National Congress Youth League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANCWL</td>
<td>African National Congress Women's League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>African People's Convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASA</td>
<td>Advertising Standards Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>AZAPO</td>
<td>Azanian People's Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-BBEE</td>
<td>Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRICS</td>
<td>In economics, BRIC is a grouping acronym that refers to the countries of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa which are all deemed to be at a similar stage of newly advanced economic development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPI</td>
<td>Computer Assisted Personal Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATI</td>
<td>Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGE</td>
<td>Commission for Gender Equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CODESA</td>
<td>Convention for a Democratic South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concourt</td>
<td>Constitutional Court of South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONGOS</td>
<td>Co-opted Non-governmental Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTRALESA</td>
<td>Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPE</td>
<td>Congress of the People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COSATU</td>
<td>Congress of South African Trade Unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>Democratic Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAWN</td>
<td>Democratic Alliance Women's Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DP</td>
<td>Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFF</td>
<td>Economic Freedom Fighters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETT</td>
<td>Electoral Task Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FA</td>
<td>Federal Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FF</td>
<td>Freedom Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FF+</td>
<td>Freedom Front Plus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPTP</td>
<td>First-past-the-post</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
G8 – Refers to the group of eight highly industrialised nations – France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Japan, the United States, Canada, and Russia

G20 – Refers to an international forum for the governments and central bank governors from 20 major economies.

G77 – The Group of 77 at the United Nations is a loose coalition of developing nations, designed to promote its members’ collective economic interests and create an enhanced joint negotiating capacity in the United Nations

GEAR – Growth, Economic and Redistribution

ICASA – Independent Communications Authority of South Africa

IBSA – India-Brazil-South Africa

ICC – International Criminal Court

ICJ – International Court of Justice

ICRG – International Country Risk Guide

ID – Independent Democrats

IEC – Independent Electoral Commission

IFP – Inkatha Freedom Party

IMF – International Monetary Fund

KAS – Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

LGE – Local Government Elections

MEC – Members of the Executive Council

MMP – Multi-member Proportionality

MP – Member of Parliament

NA – National Assembly

NAM – Non-Aligned Movement

NCOP – National Council of Provinces

NDR – National Democratic Revolution

NEC – African National Congress’ National Executive Committee

NFP – National Freedom Party

NGO – Non-governmental Organisation

NNP – New National Party

NP – National Party

NPA – National Prosecuting Authority

NUMSA – National Union of Mine Workers

NWC – African National Congress’ National Working Committee

OAU – Organisation of African Unity
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACRONYMS</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OSPAAL</td>
<td>The Organisation of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAC</td>
<td>Pan Africanist Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAPI</td>
<td>Paper Assisted Personal Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Proportional Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QoG</td>
<td>Quality of Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDP</td>
<td>Reconstruction and Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SABC</td>
<td>South African Broadcasting Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACP</td>
<td>South African Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SADC</td>
<td>Southern African Development Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SANCO</td>
<td>South African National Civics Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCOPA</td>
<td>Standing Committee on Public Accounts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCDP</td>
<td>United Christian Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDF</td>
<td>United Democratic Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDM</td>
<td>United Democratic Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDEMWO</td>
<td>UDM's Women's Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAP</td>
<td>Voting Age Population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZANU-PF</td>
<td>Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front</td>
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</table>
Foreword

The party system in South Africa is moving. The finding that was still valid until very recently, namely that a dominant party system had established itself in South Africa for an unforeseeable period, no longer applies. During the 2016 local government elections, the governing African National Congress (ANC) party witnessed a nationwide drop in support, from 62 per cent to 54 per cent, and did not achieve an absolute majority in half of the eight metropoles of the country. As a result, the opposition took over governing responsibilities in Johannesburg, in the capital Tshwane, and in Nelson Mandela Bay. Measured in terms of the population registered to vote, the ANC now only represents approximately one-third of South Africans, with a continuous downward trend being evident here too.

Many South Africans rightfully saw this development as South Africa’s democracy maturing. Indeed, the decreasing dominance of one party increases competition between parties and therefore also the chance of government taking action to improve the living conditions of the population.

However, two other political trends that persisted throughout the local government elections are cause for concern. First, the number of non-voters increased to 41 per cent of eligible voters, and constitutes by far the largest group of the electorate. In surveys, non-voters proclaimed repeatedly that elections would not lead to change or that the parties standing for election did not provide an attractive offer. This suggests that a large number of South Africans clearly feel that political parties do not represent their interests and that they have no confidence in their ability to shape the political landscape. At the same time, the number of parties standing for election rose to a record 204. Is this a contradiction?

The second trend is the obvious success of populist political offers. Populist agendas were able to repeat their election success of the 2014 parliamentary election cycle and succeeded in binding their electorate, particularly in urban areas. Should this trend continue, populists, such as the EFF, who are unwilling to test their own policies by assuming government responsibilities – in essence, a destructive political approach – could cause permanent damage to the South African democracy.

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung considered the latest developments in the South African party system an opportunity to initiate the present study. The foundation is committed to promoting democracy and the rule of law around the globe. We are convinced that political parties are the pillars
of democracies and that a parliamentary, pluralistic democracy can only be realised with functioning parties. Conversely, parties that do not fulfil their tasks or serve purposes other than those assigned to them within a representative democracy constitute a potential threat (and sometimes, unfortunately, even real threat) to democracy.

Political Science handbooks teach us that political parties are meant to articulate and aggregate the political interests of the population. They: develop political objectives and programmes in competition with other parties; integrate different population groups, confessions and ideas. Parties, therefore, have a mediatory function between citizens and the organs of state, and contribute to the political socialisation of citizens while also promoting their political participation. Parties recruit political leaders, nominate candidates to fill political offices and assume political power after successfully competing in elections. In other words, they form an essential pillar in representative democracies.

Unfortunately, the reality of party democracy is often far removed from these ideals, especially in young democracies. This study intends to unravel the condition of the party system in South Africa and culminates in the question: Do South African parties promote or hinder democracy in the country? The areas of the party system that are known to require continued work are the weakness of democratic structures within parties, the perceived lack of responsibility of elected parliamentarians towards voters, non-transparent private partner financing structures and a lack of attractiveness of party-political commitment, especially for women. Experts in the respective fields address all of these areas in this book.

I would like to thank the editor of this book, Ms Heather Thuynsma, and the authors for their commitment to this publication. With this book, we intend on providing the citizens of South Africa with an indication of what they can expect from parties. We want to provide the parties with incentives to critically assess whether or not they are fulfilling their function and to continue developing into representative and attractive parties and thus become anchors of stability for parliamentary democracy.

Dr Holger Dix
Resident Representative: South Africa
Konrad Adenauer Stiftung
South Africa’s Complex Party System after the 2016 Local Government Elections

Kgalema Motlanthe
Former President of the Republic of South Africa

Unpacking, understanding and mapping out the realisation of our democracy and all its intricacies is an enduringly critical task that we should all partake in. As such, my contribution here falls under this injunction.

Each of us has a part to play in the development of our state and the maintenance and widening of the freedoms that we hold so dear – keeping in mind the perilous conditions under which it was laboured for and produced. These contributions, although different in form and specification, shape the consistent creation of the democratic society we occupy and enjoy, and safeguard it for future generations.

To locate my reflections within the context of South Africa’s recent elections is to ask for a reading of our maturing democracy that encompasses its challenges, successes and the contemporary continuities of sites of struggle that are a matter of historical inheritance.

The difficulties of our times, like many others that reach out before, are the consideration of multiplicities that exist within it. They ask us to say not ‘either or’, but ‘both’, when asked about the nature of the states that we live in. To put it simply, we live in complex times, in a multi-faceted society of complicated conditions. I keep this in mind as I attempt to map out some of the sites of consideration that determine our response to the 2016 elections and ideas about its outcomes.

The world that we inhabit today stands in many respects apart from the one that our forebears contended with, on material, social, economic and political levels. But by the same measure, it is very similar. We are required, then, to deal with this complexity, rather than to ignore the uncomfortable coexistence of similarity and difference that defines it.

The set of questions produced by this topic will consider:
• The outcome of the 2016 elections, through situating South Africa within post-colonial norms;
• The country’s development along lines of race, class and current challenges, and exploring economic diversity within urbanisation and migration;
• Critiquing the diffusion of ideas within our borders that undermine monolithic politics and singular ideologies that are aligned to the ruling party;
• This will be underscored by upholding the critical importance of our constitution, which creates the conditions needed for a robust multi-party political system, and a non-racial, non-sexist, just society; and
• The critical importance of press freedom and civil society independence within it.

This volume will be published almost exactly 11 years after a similar book, in which the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) considered ‘challenges to one-party dominance’,2 that culminated in the production of an important and extensive seminar report and book, which I encourage all to read.

The report locates itself in a world that exists in the wake of Samuel Huntington’s ‘third wave of democracy’,3 where Sub-Saharan Africa and other territories experienced political transitions to free and equal states.

In considering the consolidation and quality of democracy in the region, Andrea E. Ostheimer4 cautioned readers about a common characteristic in Southern African states, which she identified as a tendency towards a dominant single party.

This caution exists because such dominance can prevent the consolidation of democracy and weaken opposition parties – which can, in turn, abrade the checks-and-balances intended by the constitutional separation of powers.

Whilst not arguing that single party dominance represents a direct pathway to rule-by-absolutism, this caution is put forward as such monolithic governance is said to lay the foundation for ‘non-democratic attitudes and actions by the ruling party’ through:

• blurring boundaries or conflating the state with the dominant party;
• centralising power; and
• threatening democracy’s development and entrenchment.