

**CONCEPT NOTE:****COALITION POLITICS: REFLECTING ON SOUTH AFRICA'S EVOLVING  
POLITICAL LANDSCAPE****DATE: THURSDAY, 1 OCTOBER 2026****VENUE: MARKET THEATRE SQUARE , NEWTOWN****TIME: 5PM-8PM****Background:**

South Africa's political landscape has entered a new era in which coalition governments are becoming an increasingly important feature of its democratic architecture. At local government, following from the 2016 and 2021 municipal elections, an increasing number of councils had no party with an outright majority. After the 2021 elections, roughly 70 municipalities were hung councils, requiring coalitions or other governing arrangements. This shift presents both opportunities and challenges for political parties, elected representatives and citizens and indeed has a bearing for the state of the country's democracy and its stability. Often regarded as a sign of a maturing democracy, coalition governance provides opportunities for parties to work across ideological and organisational differences to form and sustain governing arrangements that serve the needs of society. Coalitions can strengthen a culture of dialogue, negotiation, compromise, consensus-building and shared accountability, and strengthen oversight, while encouraging political actors to focus beyond electoral competition but also towards collaborative approaches to governance and service delivery.

However, in the South African context coalitions have often been unstable. Seen more as "marriages of convenience" rather than presenting opportunities for consensual governance, the challenges experienced include partner withdrawals and shifting alliances, lack of common programmes, competition for positions, and the disproportionate influence of smaller parties, amongst others. The opportunity to turn this narrative around and leverage on the benefits that can be achieved through coalition governments require closer attention, encouragement and support. This Cool Politics Café will provide an open and interactive platform for examining how coalition governments can work better in strengthening democratic accountability, improving service delivery and encouraging collaborative leadership while navigating political differences and crucially, strengthening national social cohesion. With the local government elections looming, the dialogue will focus on facilitating a constructive multi-stakeholder dialogue on strengthening coalition governance in South Africa, drawing on lessons from local government experience to identify practical principles and reforms that can promote stable, accountable, transparent and service-delivery-oriented coalitions.

## Objectives:

- Promote informed public dialogue and constructive engagement between political leaders, academics, civil society and young people on coalition governance and collaborative and consensus-based leadership.
- Explore lessons emerging from coalition governments in South Africa.
- Explore potential avenues and opportunities to strengthen coalitions that can work for the benefit of the country.

## Key Themes:

- The SA governance set-up and institutional context underpinning the necessity for coalition governance.
- The key drivers of coalition instability, leadership and institutional challenges.
- The impact of coalition politics on governance, citizens, society and SA's democracy.
- Viable, responsible and responsive coalitions and institutional safeguards for greater coalition stability.

## Dialogue Format:

A moderated panel discussion followed by an interactive audience question-and-answer session, encouraging participation from political leaders, students, civil society organisations and members of the public.

A video podcast episode will be recorded during the dialogue for the Cool Politics Podcast.

## Expected Outcomes

- Increased public awareness of coalition governance and its challenges in the South African context.
- Improved understanding of the opportunities for strengthening responsible and responsive leadership for coalition politics.
- Identification of priority institutional and political reforms required to strengthen coalition governance.
- Practical recommendations for strengthening collaborative political leadership.

## Proposed Speakers:

- Prof Susan Booysen
- Dr Sithembile Mbete
- Lindiwe Mazibuko
- Dr Laurence Caromba

Moderated by Dr Rekgotsofetse Chikane

## Programme:

4:30 for 5:00PM: Arrival and refreshments  
5:00-7:00PM: Dialogue and podcast recording  
7:00-8:00PM: Programme ends with food and refreshments

## About Democracy Works Foundation:

Democracy Works Foundation (DWF) opened its doors in 2014 in South Africa in response to the weakening of public institutions, corruption and declining citizen participation. It is an organisation committed to promoting and building democracy in Southern Africa and supporting inclusive development and regional cooperation. DWF believes in developing homegrown and innovative solutions that support public officials and states to be more open, transparent, responsive and accountable. We also work to build the capacity of citizens and provide tools enabling them to better impact their democracies, meet their obligations and claim their rights. DWF works on the supply and demand side of democracy.

**[Check out the Youth Month Cool Politics Café](#)**

Follow @DemocracyWF on social media

[Facebook](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [YouTube](#)

[www.democracyworksfoundation.org](http://www.democracyworksfoundation.org)

For more information on the dialogue contact

[Mogale Mashiapata](#)

Project Specialist

For media partnerships contact

[Lerato Maloka](#)

Engagement Manager