

A Mission of Transformation: The ANC's Historical Project Turned One-Party Demise

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1. Introduction

Beginning in 2007 and peaking in 2023, South Africa experienced country-wide rolling blackouts as the public power utility, ESKOM, was unable to “keep the lights on”. ESKOM’s failure to perform, like many other state-owned enterprises (SOEs), was symptomatic of years of mismanagement, corruption and maintenance-neglect as the institution, its management and board were filled with party loyalists. Typical of dominant party systems, the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), captured state institutions and its resources utilising the strategy of cadre deployment. The ANC justified its capturing of the state under the guise of its historical mission of “transformation”, attempting to place itself beyond public scrutiny. The dominant party system would characterise the South African political landscape between 1994 and 2024. This ended with the May 2024 national elections, as the ANC’s support declined to 40 per cent compelling the party to form a Government of National Unity (GNU).

To be considered a ‘dominant party’, the ruling party must consecutively win four or more national elections under democratic conditions (Du Toit and De Jager 2013: 8–10). The party’s election and re-election are, thus, characterised by predictability. The ANC won six consecutive national elections up until 2024. To analyse the rise and decline of the ANC’s dominance the resource theory of Kenneth F. Greene (2007) is used. According to Greene (2007), a dominant party can sustain and consolidate its dominance if it can employ an acquiescent bureaucracy, and gain access to and control over state-owned resources. Gaining access to state resources enables the party to control both government and state and in doing so, determine both policy and the polity (De Jager and Steenekamp 2016). This ensures the almost unfettered use of state resources for party ends. However, Greene (2007) also identifies that dominance can decline, notably with the professionalisation of the bureaucracy and the privatisation of formerly SOEs.

Through the case study of the consolidation of the ANC’s dominance between 1994 and 2024, and subsequent decline, this article adds to Greene’s theory, concluding that while a compliant bureaucracy and state expansion might initially entrench dominance, it is also the source of its eventual demise. A core basis of the ANC’s longevity in power—deploying party loyalists into all levers of the state and establishing a party partisan bureaucracy—was also the seed of its own destruction. It can be argued that the ANC’s partisan governance (using the state for party ends through deploying party loyalists rather than merit-based appointments), placed party interests over public interests, and produced dysfunctional institutions, unravelled trust and diminished social support. The ANC’s decline in support, indicates the former ruling party receiving its just desserts—being punished at the ballot box. The current evidence of professionalisation and privatisation within the state sector, is still in the early stages. Thus, the ANC lost its position of dominance, rather due to society’s response to the consequences of partisan governance.

This article explores the above issues, asking: What accounts for the ANC’s dominance from 1994 until 2024?¹ And what explains the ANC’s recent decline? To better understand the ANC’s approach and strategies, its national conference proceedings are analysed. While the ANC leadership is elected at the national conference, this is also the forum where the party’s policies are discussed and tabled. The documents emanating from these conferences, thus, help to understand the sources and aims of its historical mission of “transformation” and strategy of deploying cadres. Furthermore, firsthand accounts of the party’s cadre deployment policy and its consequences are derived from the Zondo Commission Report. The Zondo Commission Report released by the former Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela, documented the outcome of the investigation of state capture between 2009 and 2018, under the Zuma-administration. It consisted of the testimonies of various political officials who provide insight into gross misconduct, personal partisanship, and cronyism during South Africa’s so-called nine wasted years. This report will be used to unpack what happened at two SOEs—ESKOM and Transnet. These cases are presented as illustrations of how an acquiescent bureaucracy and the politicisation of state-owned resources were achieved through cadre deployment and its subsequent consequences. And thereafter, to trace levels of (dis)trust in societal support for the ANC, survey data

¹ It must be acknowledged that while the ANC’s support has declined, the combined “liberation movement vote” in 2024 which includes the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), the newly formed uMkhonto weSizwe (MK Party) and the ANC, was still at the 1994 level. The EFF and MK are both breakaway parties from the ANC.



from Afrobarometer is used. Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that collects data on topics related to democracy and governance through regular surveys.

This article is set out as follows: Greene's resource theory and the dominant party system are explained. "Transformation"—the mantra used to justify the ANC's increased state control and use of cadre deployment is presented. Thereafter, the party's capturing of two SOEs—ESKOM and Transnet—is discussed; considering how an acquiescent bureaucracy through cadre deployment was setup and how the SOEs were in-turn, politicised for private and party gain. Lastly, it is argued that the ANC had, through repurposing the state and SOEs for partisan party ends and not for public benefit, set in motion its own eventual demise.

2. A theory of party dominance: Consolidation and decline

There are recognised criteria in the literature identifying one-party dominance. These include: uninterrupted incumbency (Pempel 1990; Greene 2010) in the context of electoral competition (Sartori 2005); and the to-be dominant party winning its initial election during a time of heightened political change (Levite and Tarrow 1983; Mozaffar 2006). In South Africa, the ANC won six consecutive national elections (see Table 1.1). It has done so in an ostensibly democratic nation-state, as the nation scored 7,05 on the democratic index, making it a flawed democracy (World Population Review 2025). Furthermore, the ANC won its first national election at the end of apartheid during South Africa's transition to democracy. This ripe moment acted as a catalyst for its dominance (Di Palma 1990), as the ANC gained symbolic credibility from presenting itself as the nation's liberator and leader of political change.

Table 1.1 ANC's percentage of vote share and number of seats in the National Assembly, 1994–2024

Year	1994	1999	2004	2009	2014	2019	2024
% of Vote Count	62,6	66,6	69,7	65,9	62,1	57,5	40,2
Seats Obtained	252	226	279	264	249	230	159
Total Seats	400	400	400	400	400	400	400

Source: Adapted from IEC Results Dashboard for National Elections, 1994–2024 available at <https://www.elections.org.za/pw/>

Party dominance is by no means unique to South Africa. Greene (2007) in his seminal book, *Why dominant parties lose: Mexico's democratization in comparative perspective*, studied the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) which held uninterrupted political power in Mexico from 1929 until 2000. Greene (2007) studied the PRI to understand its political endurance in the face of a competitive electoral system, and then its eventual decline. The author noted that once a dominant party had gained access to an SOE and established an acquiescent bureaucracy, it could repurpose state-owned resources for party ends and hence, maintain one-party dominance. An acquiescent bureaucracy means that party loyalists are dispersed into the public (state) sector to ensure loyalty to the ruling party and as a means of curtailing the measures of accountability. Sustained dominance was, thus, dependent on the politicisation of public resources—institutions and people. Greene (2010) identified four ways in which the incumbent maintained its dominance:² repurposing state resources for party ends; enlarging the state sector; using public agencies for political campaigning and making local businesses complicit in maintaining its dominance. The latter goes beyond the public and into the private sphere. Local businesses may decide to strategically comply with the dominant party in the hopes that they can secure business offers that relate to SOEs. If a local business offers financial support to the dominant party, the latter will potentially offer the former economic protection and access to state contracts (Greene 2010). This mutually benefiting relationship between the local business sector and the dominant party enables the former to sustain its business even under highly regulated and constrained economic conditions, while providing the latter with both financial and electoral support, ultimately sustaining its dominance.

² It should be noted that the literature on party dominance is broad. Other explanations for one-party dominance, include a weakened or weak opposition, and voter behaviour. The arguments include that opposition parties are weakened due to resource disparity and an unfair playing field (Levitsky and Way 2010). The incumbent party, thus, has resources and institutional advantages over opposition parties (Pempel 1990; Mtshkulu 2006; De Jager and Meintjes 2013; Langfield 2014). However, opposition parties can themselves be weak due to poor electioneering decisions such as, but not limited to, their campaigning and political positions (Sebudubudu and Osei-Hwedie 2010; Mbete 2024). In addition, voter behaviour has been argued to explain party dominance through its sociological, sociopsychological and rational choice models (Dalton and Wattenberg 1993; Popkin 1994; Magaloni 2006). Taking weak and weakened opposition and voting behaviour into consideration as party dominance explanations, Greene's (2007) resource theory offers an explanation that speaks to and goes beyond these explanations. It identifies that the dominant party's hyper access to state-owned resources enable it to have unfair electoral advantages, which both weaken and result in weak opposition due to resource disadvantages and decision-making limitations. In turn, resource advantages attract voters, because the dominant party is perceived to be the best resourced to realise voters' political aspirations.

The theoretical framework of Greene (2007) furthermore identifies that dominant parties tend to lose their dominance when their access to state-owned resources is reduced. This means that the decline of one-party dominance is inversely proportional to having availability to state-owned resources. Sustaining the political economy of dominance requires that incumbents resist pressures to liberalise their economies (Greene 2007). This speaks to the relationship between resource monopoly and political monopoly. It also explains why dominant party systems were more prevalent before the 1980s shift towards free markets. It may also explain why the dominant party system remains prevalent in many southern African countries where the free-market system is constrained and the economies are weak, thus, making the state the key holder of resources. On the other hand, access to state-owned resources is lessened through liberalising the economy, professionalising the bureaucracy and privatising SOEs. Professionalism is the transformation of occupations to make them independent professions characterised by formal education requirements, forming professional identities and associations, with a code of professional rules and ethics and performance reviews (Mathonsi et al. 2012). Professionalism creates a public sector system based on merit, whereby citizens are served by professionally qualified individuals instead of those who are politically vested (Jarbandhan 2022). Privatisation and professionalisation encourage the separation of public administration and ruling party and the separation between the public and the private spheres, as local businesses are less beholden to the ruling party for access to limited resources. Hence, one-party dominance declines as the state can no longer be repurposed to sustain partisan party and narrow private ends. For Greene (2007), privatisation best explains the reduction in the dominant party's access to SOEs and therefore, the decline of one-party dominance.

3. “Transformation”: The ANC’s mantra for gaining access to and politicising the public sector

Democratic South Africa inherited an ethnically partisan apartheid-designed public sector. The public sector was filled by white Afrikaners, who in turn, ensured that the state's budget and policies favoured a specific ethnic group—white South Africans. It was, thus, a statist system characterised by partisan governance. During the apartheid era, so-called homelands³ handled public service delivery differently (Gumede 2015). Specific ethnic groups provided public service in these homelands, whilst the apartheid government prioritised public service in areas that located the minority white populace (Gumede 2015). This led to Black communities receiving an inferior quality of service delivery compared to that in white communities (Nkoana, et al. 2024). Following the transition to democracy, which began in the early 1990s, the much-needed changes in the public administration enabled the ANC to set itself up as the champion of public sector reform or transformation. At its 50th National Conference, the ANC (1997) argued for ‘the transformation of the old machinery’ which ‘should see the location of the motive forces of the revolution at the helm of the state’. The ANC (1997) goes on to identify itself as ‘the vanguard of all these motive forces of the NDR’. The democratic transition and its victory at the 1994 elections thus enabled the ANC to position state institutions to implement the South African Communist Party (SACP) backed National Democratic Revolution (NDR). The SACP confirmed this at its 2022 National Conference: ‘The April 1994 democratic breakthrough opened the prospects for a new, radical phase of the national democratic revolution, our strategy for democratic transformation and development towards socialism’ (Mashilo 2022).

Since the 1960s the SACP has had considerable influence over the ANC (Myburgh 2017). The ANC adopted the Communist Party's programme of Strategies and Tactics with the goal of a National Democratic Revolution (NDR) at the Morogoro conference in 1969 (Filatova and Davidson 2017). The NDR was developed in the Soviet Union in the late 1950s as a two-stage revolution, first liberation, then socialism, to justify its support of Africa's bourgeois liberation movements. If the end goal was the adoption of socialism, then the Soviet Union could overlook the educated, middle-class composition of the liberation movements. The 1980s saw the decline of the Soviet Union and in 1991 its eventual collapse with the NDR being presumed fruitless (Filatova 2012). Despite this, the ANC and SACP have persisted with the NDR as the “transformation” project for South Africa (ANC 2017, 2022).

Recognising this strong communist influence helps to make sense of the ANC's determination to persist with the NDR, despite its deeply flawed outcomes. The party is, thus, not unlike other communist parties such as the Socialist Unity Party (SED) of the former German Democratic Republic, which considered themselves to be on a ‘historical mission’ (Schöne 2024: 11). In such systems there was “no room for doubt” or even self-doubt, let alone criticism from outside parties. The mission needed to be fulfilled. Like the SED, the ANC fashions itself to be the vanguard party, assigned to lead the way forward without any alternative. This thinking remains evident in the ANC leadership today.

³ Homelands were areas set aside for Black South Africans to supposedly self-govern and eventually have independence (Maharaj n.d.). It was an apartheid policy initiative aimed at ensuring white supremacy in South Africa (Maharaj n.d.).

More than three decades into South Africa's democracy the NDR remains the 'shared theory of fundamental change' according to the President of South Africa and the ANC, Cyril Ramaphosa (2024). In typical Soviet-style, the NDR calls for the deployment of loyalists (cadres) and the centralising of all power around the state. The historical mission for both the SACP and the ANC has been to remove any impediments to its final goal of socialism. Framing 'transformation' as redressing past injustices towards 'a united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous nation' (Ramaphosa 2024), has provided a morally-based motivation for extensive state control that is difficult to contend with. This transformation is euphemistically shrouded in calls for redress due to South Africa's racialised past, effectively protecting it from criticism. In his 2024 speech at the 113th anniversary of the ANC, Ramaphosa (2024) called those who resist the ANC as 'counter-revolutionary' and opposition parties that hinder the ANC's control over the majority of the voter share as 'as forces ... to deprive the ANC of the ability to use state power to effect change'. Ramaphosa (2024) goes on to argue that 'to pursue the NDR effectively, the democratic movement needs to have a decisive influence over the state and a clear mandate to govern in pursuit of fundamental change', finally exclaiming: 'Without state power, the NDR will not succeed'. The NDR, with its end goal of socialism, is the transformation envisaged by the ANC. Control of state power and cadre deployment are then touted as the means of achieving this "transformation".

3.1. *Cadre deployment: Deploying party loyalists into the public and private sectors*

Cadre deployment, the placement of loyal party members into key state positions (Booyesen 2011; Twala 2012), has enabled the ANC to gain access to and control over the state and state-owned enterprises. In 1997, the ANC ratified the cadre deployment strategy at its Mafikeng conference, providing for the 'deployment of ANC cadres to all areas which the movement regards as crucial for the transformation project' (Politicsweb 1998). The party used the goal of transformation to justify the deployment of party loyalists into all sectors of the South African society (Myburgh 2016). The strategy has resulted in the establishment of an extensive client-patron network using state resources.

Various public policies have since been enacted through the legislature, dominated by ANC members of parliament, to enable the deployment of cadres into the public service, as well as into the private sector. For example, the White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service and the Employment Equity Act adopted in 1998 were justified based on transformation, arguably to make the public sector and the workplace more racially representative (Myburgh 2016). This inevitably led to the state being enlarged and politicised. The state was politicised by granting political affiliates key positions, repurposing state institutions and resources meant for public use, instead for the political sustainability of the ruling party. Furthermore, "redress" policies for the private sector, such as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) have served to enrich those politically-connected to the ANC (Gumede 2025). These policies have thus, created client-patron networks that have extended beyond the public sector and into the private sector.

The use of cadre deployment ensured that the political party could fulfil its aspiration of state control through lessening measures of accountability and possible hindrances associated with opposition. Cadres are expected to display loyalty toward their deployers (Booyesen 2011; Twala 2014; Gumede 2015; Mlambo 2023). For example, the ANC granted members of the Tripartite Alliance (the SACP and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)) key state positions (Fredericks and De Jager, 2022). In turn, these organisations campaign for the ANC during election time (Southall 2017). This makes it likely that cadres will display favouritism or loyalty toward those who placed them in their job positions and hence, indicates the opportunistic behaviour associated with cadre deployment. Consequences include the entrenching of dominance (Twala 2014), the erosion of accountability as cadres become answerable to the political elite or party that deployed them instead of the public, and an acquiescent bureaucracy. An acquiescent bureaucracy implies that civil servants become compliant to those who deploy them (Gumede 2015).

4. Capturing the state for party ends: The repurposing of two SOEs

South Africa's state sector is large. Its large size is partly a function of the government's developmental agenda with the emphasis on the state to address the nation-state's triple challenge of inequality, poverty and unemployment (Kleynhaus and Coetzee 2019) as opposed to a free market economy. As a result, South Africa has become economically, partly unfree (The Heritage Foundation 2023). The nation-state was ranked 111 out of 184 nation-states and scored 55,3 per cent on the Economic Freedom Index, due to extensive state regulations and labour market inflexibility (The Heritage Foundation 2023). Despite unsustainable levels of unemployment, between 32 and 40 per cent (depending on whether the official or broader definition is used), and lacklustre levels of growth of below 1 per cent, the ANC has resisted changes which would release small- and medium-sized businesses to grow and create jobs or ensure an environment which would attract investors. Instead, it doggedly pursues policies that support state intervention and regulation such as highly redistributive social spending (Inchauste et al. 2015), employment equity, BEE, land reform, the state ownership of mineral and water resources and extensive labour

legislation (IRR 2024). This has, in-turn, created a system of dependency on the state. Many citizens see the ANC as the political party that provides for their social needs through grant distribution (Braun 2024). Hence, blurring the line between state and governing party, as citizens perceive the ANC party as the distributor of resources instead of the public state.

The conflation of state and governing party is a common practice for dominant parties (Mukwede 2021). If a dominant party can successfully capture a historical project (for example, redress after apartheid) and present itself as the solution to socio-economic challenges, that is, to use these powerful narratives to reinforce its public policy of state control, it can create enduring dominance (Pempel 1999). The ANC has done this through its creation and implementation of transformation and social welfare policies arguing for them based on redressing apartheid injustices—a powerful invocation. These policies have not only enabled the ANC to cadre deploy, but has garnered support from those reliant on the said policies. Moreover, those who receive social welfare tend to accredit it to the ANC, as opposed to the taxpayers and the state.

The ANC's control of the state went as far as state capture. State capture is the term that describes the severity of corruption regarding the repurposing of state resources for party and personal ends, and the Zondo Commission provides the best account of how it took place. State capture encompasses the actions of individuals or collectives in the public and private sectors aimed at influencing decrees, regulations, law formation and other government policies for self-interest (and party interest) (Martin and Solomon 2016.). It was the systematic reduction of checks and balances to enable the use of state resources for party and private ends. The personal-political tie between the Indian-Born Gupta family and the ANC—particularly ex-President Jacob Zuma epitomises state capture. Moreover, the Zondo Commission (Zondo 2022a) identified that ex-president Jacob Zuma was effectively controlled by the Gupta family. Rajesh “Tony” Gupta, at one of the Gupta's infamous residences, personally said that Zuma was willing to do anything his family instructed (Zondo, 2022a). This was particularly evident with the alarming rate at which ministers were removed and replaced. When the Gupta family instructed Zuma to remove and replace a minister with one that would be more co-operative, he complied (Zondo 2022a). When Zuma became president, he initially appointed Barabro Hogan as Minister of Public Enterprise (Zondo 2022c). In the Zondo Commission (Zondo 2022c), Hogan testified that Zuma allowed political corruption, lack of accountability and nepotism in all state bodies and he improperly and recklessly interfered in matters relating to the appointment of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and Boards of Directors at SOEs. Hogan was initially replaced by Malusi Gigaba, however, at the insistence of Ajay Gupta, Gigaba would subsequently be replaced by Lynn Brown in 2015 (Zondo 2022c).

The Zondo Commission identifies how state capturers were able to: capture parts of the independent media, were complicit in corruption, reduce parliamentary oversight, appoint willing corroborates in key state positions and elude law enforcement (Momoniat 2023). State capture occurred in several SOEs, however, for this article ESKOM and Transnet are given focus.

4.1. Cadre deployment and politicisation of Transnet and ESKOM

SOEs are state-owned businesses, with the government as the largest shareholder (Greene 2010). Many SOEs have a direct impact on the lives of citizens, because they create infrastructure and deliver services. Ministers (executives) are tasked with ensuring the smooth running of SOEs to the best of their ability. They are to exercise government oversight and ensure efficient and effective service delivery (Du Toit 2005). The President of South Africa appoints members from the National Assembly (NA) in ministerial and deputy ministerial positions (Parliamentary Monitoring Group 2024). Under the Zuma administration ministers were handpicked for the purpose of party and personal endowment. Ex-president Zuma both hired and fired ministers with the aim of monetising state resources for personal (and party) ends (Arun 2019). Compliant ministers, in turn, selected compliant boards of directors. The boards of directors are tasked with governing SOEs (Du Toit, 2005). They are to manage SOEs by safeguarding the entity's assets and managing its expenditure and liabilities (Du Toit 2005). However, compliant ministers had instead done the opposite and rather enabled the repurposing of SOE resources for party and private ends.

The account that follows provides information from the Zondo Commission as to how the respective SOEs were used for personal and political ends with the aim of self-enrichment and sustaining ANC dominance.

Transnet

Transnet is a state-owned transport and logistics company with over 57 000 employees (World Economic Forum 2024). It has five operating branches: Transnet Freight Rail; Transnet National Authority; Transnet Port Terminals; Transnet Engineering and Transnet Pipelines (World Economic Forum 2024). The purpose of the SOE is to transport goods and services via sea, land and air. It is also the SOE that

experienced the greatest loss due to state capture (Zondo Commission 2022c). State capture at Transnet began with Jacob Zuma being elected as president and Maria Ramos resigning as the Group Chief Executive Officer (GCEO) (Zondo 2022c).

Upon Maria Ramos's resignation from Transnet, the position for GCEO was open. Initially the board wanted Pravin Gordhan to fulfil the position, however, he retracted his candidacy once he became Minister of Finance (Zondo 2022c). For the board, the next ideal candidate would be Siphosiso Masako (Zondo 2022c). Zuma, however, did not want him to fulfil this position, instead wanted Siyabonga Gama. This led Hogan (Minister of Enterprise from 11 May 2009 to October 2010) to inform Zuma that the board found Gama unqualified for the position (Zondo 2022c). It should be noted that the decisions against Gama's fulfilment of the position were based on an array of factors. These factors included Gama not even being the board's second choice; he was under investigation for disciplinary action and Masako was already the board's ideal candidate (Zondo 2022c). On several occasions Hogan tried to sway Zuma against Gama as a candidate, however, Zuma insisted that the position remained open until the conclusion of Gama's investigation (Zondo 2022c). Hogan's resistance to Gama's appointment worked against her as on the 31 October 2010, Zuma and the ANC Secretary-General of the time, Gwede Mantashe, summoned her and removed her as Minister of Public Enterprises (Zondo 2022c). The next day Zuma appointed Malusi Gigaba as Minister of Public Enterprises (Zondo 2022c). Thus, non-compliant ministers were removed and replaced with loyal "employees".

Gigaba, in turn, instated Gama as CEO of Transnet Freight Rail and appointed Brian Molefe and Anoj Singh as directors of Transnet (Zondo 2022c). Molefe, Gama and Singh then gave free rein to Iqbal Sharma, chair of the Board of Acquisitions and Disposal Committee (BADC) (Zondo 2022c). The power vested in BADC to make procurement decisions was so extensive that it signed off billions of rands worth of procurement (Zondo 2022c). Moreover, the Gupta-Essa racketeering⁴ ring received billions from procurement deals (Zondo 2022c). It is explicitly stated in the Zondo Commission (Zondo 2022c) that under Singh as Chief Financial Officer, Sharma as BADC chair and Molefe and Gama as GCEOs, most of the corruption and money laundering regarding locomotion procurement and financing had taken place. An acquiescent, political-connected bureaucracy resulted in the capturing and redirecting of state resources away from used in the public interest.

ESKOM

The Electricity Supply Commission (ESKOM) is the nation-state's main electricity producer and uses a mix of nuclear, coal, pump storage, diesel and hydroelectric to supply South Africa's energy needs (Zondo 2022a). The Minister of Public Enterprise is its shareholder representative, and the South African government is its sole shareholder (ESKOM 2024).

Most of the corruption at ESKOM stemmed from directors and managers improperly managing procurement practices (Zondo 2022a). Some of the improper managing of procurement practices included the unscrutinised or non-oversight tampering of finalised procurement contracts with the aim of expanding or modifying contracts (Zondo 2022a). The politicised bureaucracy at ESKOM enabled the misconduct regarding wrong procurement practices and reduced the measures of checks and balances.

Subsequent to his "usefulness" with capturing Transnet, Minister of Public Enterprises, Malusi Gigaba had become uncompliant to the wishes of the Gupta family and was summarily replaced. The newly appointed Minister of Public Enterprises, Lynn Brown, then appointed a board of directors with close ties to Gupta associate Salim Essa, the Gupta family and Duduzane Zuma (Zondo 2022a). The connection the Gupta family and Essa had to the board of directors at ESKOM ranged from business associates to cousins to the wives of cousins (Zondo 2022a). Moreover, many of the members of the boards of directors were unqualified to fulfil a position of such seniority (Zondo 2022a). This identifies how cadre deployment and state politicisation led to corruption, nepotism and poor management as underqualified people were placed into high profile positions. In turn, this resulted in poor service delivery and social consequences for society at large, namely loadshedding, economic loss and increased electricity prices.

The misconduct at ESKOM is further seen with the lucrative procurement contract given to Tegeta, a company owned by Duduzane Zuma (Jacob Zuma's son) and the Gupta family (Pillay et al. 2023). ANC cadres, placed as members of the boards of directors, established lucrative tender deals with the company (Zondo 2022a). In return, the company offered monetary support for the ANC's political campaigning. Ex-ANC treasurer General Zweli Mkhize admitted that the Guptas had offered the political party money (Gerber 2017).

⁴ The Essa and Gupta racketeering ring describes that way that Salim Essa managed business arrangements with a range of companies for procurements at ESKOM. Essa would then get a kickback from the deals made and from the percentage of money he received, he then gave most of it to the Guptas, almost in compensation for doing business based on the Gupta's connections; this is evident in the Zondo Commission report.

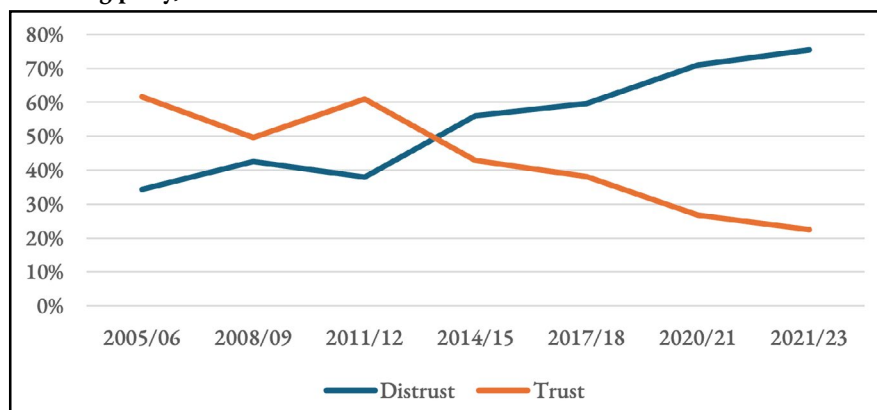
The contract had been awarded to Tegeta, even though the company did not meet the procurement requirements. Initially Tegeta did not have a water-use license which meant it was unable to conduct mining activities. The said license was eventually acquired even though the Department of Water Affairs indicated that the company did not comply with the requirements to obtain this licence (Zondo 2022b). Moreover, the coal-blend the company offered ESKOM was unsuitable to be used at its power stations (Zondo 2022b), making such a deal with the company a farce. Furthermore, the procurement period agreed and signed by ESKOM and Tegeta was later extended from five to ten years (Zondo 2022b). At the Zondo Commission (Zondo 2022b), it was explicitly noted that the procurement agreement with Tegeta had been given strong support from higher-up. It should be noted that non-compliant employees like Kiren Maharaj (ex-head of Primary Energy) who tried to ensure cost saving at ESKOM and keep the measures of checks and balances, were dismissed (Zondo 2022b). The procurement deals with Tegeta became especially questionable when, as stated in the Zondo Commission (Zondo 2022a), ESKOM had signed over R564 000 000 in contracts with a company that was of little benefit to the SOE and, in turn, the public. On the other hand, the procurement contracts with Tegeta benefited the ANC, as the political party received donations from Tegeta (as stated earlier) as reciprocation for giving it access to state resources.

5. Self-inflicted demise: The ANC in decline

One-party dominance can bear the seeds of its own demise (Duverger 1954). While cadre deployment may have enabled the ANC to prolong its dominance over six election periods, it is argued the resultant poor service delivery and the decline in the state structures has also led to a loss in societal confidence and trust in the political party. It is, thus, unsurprising that the ANC eventually experienced losses in electoral support. Cadre deployment resulted in an ill-equipped bureaucracy, mismanagement of funds, corruption and a reduction in accountability and transparency (Shava and Chamisa 2018; Bless 2023). The practices of corruption and nepotism meant the appointment of unqualified persons into high-profile positions. This practice has been very costly for the South African economy with President Cyril Ramaphosa admitting at the 2019 Financial Times Africa Summit in London that corruption had cost the nation-state ZAR1-trillion (Ngqambela 2020). This consequently led to outcomes such as poor service delivery in the public sector and municipalities (Shava and Chamisa 2018; Fredericks and De Jager 2022; Bless 2023). Ironically, the practice of cadre deployment which was argued to improve the service delivery for the disenfranchised was the same practice that instead created endemic poor service delivery for all. For example, loadshedding has caused many to experience a loss in their income and even their livelihoods (Ledger 2023). It is estimated that loadshedding had resulted in a loss of ZAR224 billion in economic activity between 2020 and 2023 (Ledger 2023). It makes sense to think that many would begin to question and even lose trust in the governing party. Between 2005 and 2012, the ANC as ruling party, enjoyed fairly high levels of trust (see Figure 1.1). In 2005 and 2011 trust peaked to just above 60 per cent. Thereafter, trust began to plummet, reaching a low of barely 20 per cent in 2023. On the other hand, distrust hit highs of nearly 80 per cent in 2023. Thus, during and following the years of state capture under the ANC, South Africans increasingly distrusted the ruling party.

Consequently, the ANC's inadequacies led to a reduction in its support base and the eventual end of parliamentary dominance in 2024. As seen in Table 1.1, the ANC's vote count for the 2024 National Election fell below 50 per cent, requiring the political party to form a GNU with the leading opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA). Eight other political parties were included, a move likely used to diminish the power of the DA within the GNU. The ANC, thus, holds less than 200 parliamentary seats out 400 as seen in Table 1.1, causing it to no longer hold a parliamentary majority.

Figure 1.1: Trust in the ruling party, 2005–2023



Source: Adapted from Afrobarometer Data, [South Africa], [R3-9], [2005/6; 2008/9; 2011/12; 2014/15; 2017/18; 2020/21; 2021/2023], available at <http://www.afrobarometer.org>. The percentages do not add up to 100 per cent as “Don’t Knows” were excluded. The categories “Not at All” and “Just a Little” were merged into “Distrust” and the categories “Somewhat” and “A Lot” were merged into “Trust”.

6. One-party dominance in decline: The Privatising and professionalisation of ESKOM and Transnet

Privatisation reduces the access dominant parties have to SOEs. It is the outcome of private firms purchasing SOEs or parts thereof (Bond and Ruiters 2024). Due to years of mismanagement and the siphoning out of public funds into private pockets and the ANC's purse, South African SOEs are, out of necessity, being privatised and professionalised. South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa has dissolved the Department of Public Enterprise (DPE) (Khoza 2023; Maeko 2024). With the DPE tasked with overseeing seven SOEs, it is unsurprising that it was infamously the ministry with the highest repurposing of public goods for party ends. Some of the recognised problems associated with the DPE included not carrying out proper oversight functions and not achieving targets nor clean audits (Corruption Watch 2023). Sixty-three per cent of audits were outstanding from five of the seven SOEs in the financial year 2021/22 and the DPE achieved only 58 per cent of its targets (Corruption Watch 2023).

In its stead, the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) is tasked with co-ordinating the SOEs and advancing the National State Enterprise Bill B1- 2024 (SOE Bill). The SOE Bill was introduced in September 2023, by the late minister Pravin Gordhan, as a way to hinder political interference in the running of SOEs (Mahlaka 2024). The SOE Bill establishes the State Asset Management SOC (SAMSOC) Limited (Reyburn et al. 2024). By duty, SAMSOC Limited is required to uphold the interest of thirteen of South Africa's chief SOEs, which include: Central Energy Fund; the South African Post Office; Transnet; ESKOM; National Road Agencies; South African Airways and the Airports Company South Africa, amongst others (Reyburn et al. 2024). An important facet of the SOE Bill is the limiting of government access to SOEs, which can be seen with how the directors of SAMSOC are to be selected. First, the President as shareholder representative sets out how many directors are to be appointed, then an independent panel (including a retired judge as head) must develop and implement the appropriate processes for selecting a president, and the selection of a board of directors are to be promulgated by public consultation, which not only further limits the role the President has in the selection of board members, but also makes the process more participatory, independent and transparent (Reyburn et al. 2024). Essentially, the SOE Bill offsets the current ownership model of government overseeing the functioning of its agencies (Maeko 2024). If correctly administered, the SOE Bill has the potential to hamper the access of an incumbent party to SOEs and hence, limit its ability to repurpose state-owned resources for political gain. This is because it provides for the professionalisation of SOEs, as it becomes very likely that the appointment of board members will be based on merit and not political affiliation.

In addition, the Electricity Regulation Act of 2006 has been amended to provide procedures for the privatisation of generating electricity (Klopper 2024). South Africans have begun to install more than 4 400 MW solar energy (from private companies) and ex-ESKOM CEO, André de Ruyter, rolled out 66 000 MW of renewable energy investments aimed at private management and investment before his resignation from the parastatal (Woode-Smith 2024). Plans have been ratified for the nation-state's energy sector to include private sector investment. This has been outlined in the Just Energy Transition (JET) Implementation plan (JET Implementation Plan 2023–2027, 2023). The plan is targeted at decarbonisation commitments whereby it aims at giving the private sector leeway to distribute renewable energy for large scale battery generation and storage (JET Implementation Plan 2023–2027, 2023). Furthermore, it appears that South Africans support the privatisation of ESKOM, as 59 per cent agreed that it should be privatised (Mpako 2023).

Transnet is also enroute to partial privatisation. The Network Statement and Tariff Methodology was released in May 2024 to provide the guidelines for rail privatisation. Also, Transnet terminals are being privatised in partnership with private partners (Khumalo 2024). A 25-year public-private partnership with the International Container Terminal Services Inc. (ICTSI) was entered into in 2024 and is set to take over Durban's container terminal (Jacobs 2024). High-volume corridors such as the iron ore and coal export routes have been touted for partial privatisation, and suggested logistics reforms include granting concessions to private operators, co-investing in the upgrade of infrastructure, while granting access to third-party service providers (Botha 2025).

If Greene's (2007) theory is accurate, one can expect that the professionalism of South African SOEs will lead to the further diminishing of the ANC's political power.

7. Conclusion

Greene's (2007) resource theory contends that dominant parties sustain political control through near-unrestricted access to state-owned resources and a compliant bureaucracy, but lose their dominance when privatisation and bureaucratic professionalisation take root. In the South African context, the ANC strategically employed the discourse of "transformation" to justify the deployment of loyal, but often unqualified cadres, expand the state apparatus for patronage and deflect criticism. Framing "transformation" as redressing past injustices,

provided a morally-based motivation for extensive state control that was difficult to contend with. However, beneath this normative justification lay a deeper ideological orientation: the Soviet-inspired NDR—a historical mission to create a socialist state with the ANC as the vanguard. The party's capturing of the state and deploying party loyalists, resulted in the undermining of the state institutions and their potential to function. This, in turn, resulted in a decline in trust and electoral support of the ruling party. Thus, before the professionalisation of the bureaucracy and the privatisation of the SOEs had occurred, the social support of the party was already in decline. In its attempts to consolidate its dominance, the ANC had sown the seeds of its own demise. Through setting up a system of poor governance (placing individual and party interests above public interests), it failed to use the state and its personnel for its specified purpose—the public good.

This analysis extends Greene's (2007) framework by introducing poor governance as a mediating factor that accelerates the erosion of dominant party support. In the South African case, the eventual push toward privatisation and professionalisation appears less a voluntary relinquishment of control, and more a reactive measure to mounting public demand for accountable and effective governance.

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