

The Polarizing Effects of Poor Governance **A Reflection on South Africa**

Jordan Fredericks

Abstract

South Africa's society has been polarized historically along the lines of race, class, and income. The 1994 transition toward democracy brought with it an era of national optimism and a brief period of reconciliation in which these lines were slightly diffused. At the helm of this national reconciliation was the ruling African National Congress (ANC), guided by its overarching nation-building plan, the National Democratic Revolution (NDR). Despite the noble aspirations of the NDR, its governance strategy of cadre deployment often has contradicted the constitutional aspiration of impartial good governance that ensures the balance between minority and majority interests. Moreover, the NDR allowed the facilitation of a corrupt network under the administration of former South African president, Jacob Zuma. The Zuma years were characterized broadly by poor governance, corruption, economic malaise, social discontent, and most significantly the re-emergence of polarized tensions. This essay reflects on poor governance under the Zuma administration and how it flamed polarization in the country.

Keywords: African National Congress, cadre deployment, corruption, democracy, Jacob Zuma, National Democratic Revolution, poor governance, state capture.

When it comes to polarization, the case of South Africa is unique in that its apartheid past has polarized the society along the lines of race, class, and income. In 1994, the peaceful negotiated transition to a democratic state brought with it an era of national reconciliation in which these lines of polarization were largely diffused. At the helm of this national reconciliation was the ruling African National Congress (ANC), guided by its overarching nation-building plan, the National Democratic Revolution (NDR), with its aim of creating a raceless, classless, and economically empowered society to be

Jordan Fredericks is a researcher at the Centre for Research on Democracy, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa. <jfredericks023@gmail.com>

realized through the deployment of party loyalists (cadres) to institutions of the state. While the inauguration of democracy and the NDR achieved significant gains in mooting race, class, and income polarization, tensions remain.

Despite the noble aspirations of the NDR, its governance strategy of cadre deployment often has contradicted the constitutional aspiration of impartial good governance that ensures the balance between minority and majority interests. Instead of defusing tensions, the NDR's cadre deployment has facilitated the creation of a nepotistic network within institutions of the state.¹ This nepotistic network was easily usurped by a compromised figure, such as former South African president, Jacob Zuma,² and his cronies, the Indian-born Gupta family, which led to the capture of state institutions and the perpetration of high levels of corruption that ultimately resulted in predemocratic cleavages and the flare up of tensions.³ Consequently, observers contend that poor governance under the administration of Jacob Zuma (2009–2018) and the high levels of corruption and concomitant poor economic performance during his tenure⁴ deepened polarization.

In agreement with these observers, this essay contends that poor governance and the capturing of state institutions under the Zuma administration served to reignite predemocratic tensions, resulting in a highly racially and economically polarized state. Moreover, this essay contends that these high levels of polarization are resulting in out-groups—that is, those who are economically disenfranchised and socially excluded—increasingly banding together amid a growing appeal of nondemocratic governance options that are believed to address more effectively the profound imbalances that lie at the root of polarization in South Africa. This essay develops this argument by first considering the impact of the contribution of poor governance to the flaring of societal polarization. It then sketches the promise brought on by the transition to democracy in 1994, arguing that the then introduced universal suffrage and economic freedom have helped to roll back the high polarization levels imposed by the apartheid regime, thanks to the emergence of inclusive state institutions and progressing economic development that augured well for a better future for all citizens of the young democracy. The main body of the essay probes the poor governance by the Zuma administration that was characterized by endemic looting and wide-spread corruption at the highest

¹ Jordan Fredericks and Nicola de Jager, “An Analysis of the Historical Roots of Partisan Governance within the ANC: Understanding the Road to State Capture,” *Politikon*, 2021, DOI: 10.1080/02589346.2021.2018119.

² Jacob Zuma is a South African politician who served as the fourth democratically elected president of South Africa from 2009 until 2018.

³ Fredericks and de Jager, “An Analysis of the Historical Roots of Partisan Governance within the ANC.”

⁴ Roger Southall, “Polarization in South Africa: Toward Democratic Deepening or Democratic Decay?” *The Annals of the American Academy* (2019): 194-208.

level of governance and throughout most of the state's structures. The essay closes by considering the resultant levels of polarization in South Africa.

Governance and Polarization

Good governance, understood as impartial governance, is fundamental to both the successful development of democratization in South Africa, as well as to the reduction of apartheid-induced polarized tensions in the country. As Bo Rothstein and Jan Teorell note, social capital, that is, “norms about reciprocity and generalized trust in other people,” appear to be determined by good governance.⁵ This could be because good governance ensures that democratic institutions function impartially, thereby ensuring that state institutions operate in the interest of the broader public rather than being skewed to serve the interest of a minority group at the expense of the majority. Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino contend that good governance based on stable institutions ensures the realization of universal freedom and equality of citizens and satisfies expectations through a democratic and legitimate functioning of state bureaucracies. As such, when institutions of state operate unbiasedly, the apartheid-imposed divisions of class, race, and income become reduced.⁶ Rothstein and Teorell define good governance as impartial governance. They maintain that good governance entails exercising authority without being moved “by certain sorts of considerations such as special relationships and personal preferences.”⁷ This definition is derived from an understanding that while democracy refers to how public authority is accessed (namely, through elections), good governance means the exercise of this authority by governing impartially. Therefore, while political equality (equal opportunity to participate in government making) acts as a norm for legitimizing the democratic regime, impartiality acts as a parallel legitimizing principle for exercising political authority within the regime.⁸ In this regard, both political equality (as an input) and impartiality (as an output) represent the principle of “ought to treat equally.”

Conversely, a poor quality of governance—understood as lacking impartiality, high corruption, bias or compromised judiciary, and an ineffective administration—is likely to precipitate high levels of polarization and even fuel pre-existing tensions in society.⁹ This is because in the absence of impartiality,

⁵ Bo Rothstein and Jan Teorell, “What Is Quality of Government? A Theory of Impartial Government Institutions,” *Governance: An International Journal of Policy Administration and Institutions* 21, no. 2 (2008): 165-190.

⁶ Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino, “The Quality of Democracy: An Overview,” *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 4 (2004): 20-23.

⁷ Rothstein and Teorell, “What Is Quality of Government?”

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Willy Jou, “Ideological Radicalism and Democratic Experience in New Democracies,” *Democratization* 23, no. 4 (2016): 592-612.

government institutions will be drained of their democratic content, eventually degenerating into the abuse of office by using state sources in the interests of personal gain. This is likely to result in limited and restricted access to resources and economic opportunity, which, in turn, spurs affective polarization.¹⁰ As noted by Steven Hitlin and Sarah Harkness, economic inequality “begets negative moral emotions”¹¹ and “is socially divisive because it prompts envy towards the top and scorn towards those at the bottom.”¹² Therefore, when partisan and corrupt governance results in poor economic conditions and greater inequality, societies are likely to become increasingly polarized.

Pierre du Toit and Nicola de Jager recognize that an essential condition of good governance is the separation of, or jurisdictional boundary between, state and government. They argue that within democratic statehood the state is expected to retain its autonomy (act as a neutral arbiter), while the incumbent government temporarily occupies and exercises authority in the state.¹³ Andrew Heywood contends that “government power can be held in check only when the government of the day is prevented from encroaching upon the absolute and unlimited authority of the state.”¹⁴ Hence, the distinction between the state as enduring and autonomous, and an elected political party that temporarily occupies the office of government, goes to the heart of constitutional democracy. When the line between the state and government is blurred, state resources can easily be used for private or partisan ends, rather than for the benefit of the broader public interest. Resultantly, when state resources, its structural framework, and associated institutions are captured (repurposed for private interests), the state loses its autonomy (and neutrality), and it cannot function in the interest of the public at large. Consequently, the uneven accessibility to state resources and limited economic opportunity are likely to highlight pre-existing divisions (be it class, race, income, religion, and so on) causing conflict and noncooperation.

The Democratic Reduction of Polarization in South Africa

Democratization in South Africa could be seen to have largely diffused the intense social cleavages engrained in the country’s society by its apartheid past. The process of democratization in South Africa itself was the result of

¹⁰ Noam Gidron, James Adams, and Will Horne, “How Ideology, Economics and Institutions Shape Affective Polarization in Democratic Polities,” working paper 2018, <https://ces.fas.harvard.edu/uploads/files/events/> (accessed November 27, 2021).

¹¹ Steven Hitlin and Sarah K. Harkness, *Unequal Foundations: Inequality, Morality, and Emotions across Cultures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), chap. 6.

¹² Gidron et al., “How Ideology, Economics and Institutions Shape Affective Polarization in Democratic Polities.”

¹³ Pierre du Toit and Nicola de Jager, “South Africa’s Dominant-Party System in Comparative Perspective.” *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 10, no. 2 (2014): 93-113.

¹⁴ Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies* (Johannesburg: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

the coming together of highly polarizing elite figures within the ANC and the National Party (NP) government, culminating in a peaceful negotiated process and compromise. This negotiated transition saw the establishment of a Bill of Rights; a hybridization between parliamentary and presidential systems of government that would ensure cooperativeness and inclusivity; a federal devolution of powers to nine provinces; and various checks and balances, including the establishments of Chapter Nine independent and impartial governing institutions, all of which were subject to the Constitution and Constitutional Court as the final neutral arbiter. Each of these elements and actors housed under the new democratic dispensation are considered to have been instrumental in both diffusing civic distrust and “allowing mutually exclusive political identities to give way to a broader sense of South Africanism.”¹⁵ While the realities of racial and economic divisions remained, the newly inclusive political institutions and opportunities assisted in mending previously stark cleavages between minority and majority groups.

One of the main structural elements that encouraged maximum political inclusivity in South Africa was the adoption of a party-list proportional representation (PR) system in both provisional and national legislatures. As Roger Southall notes, the implementation of a PR system ensured that opposition parties would need to vie for support from a range of social groups across race, ethnicity, and class in order to ensure representation.¹⁶ This increased representation and further provided for the inclusivity of minority and majority interests groups.¹⁷ Hence, while nationally the ANC has retained its dominance since the 1994 elections, South Africa’s political landscape has included a wide range of opposition groups, with at least twenty-nine parties competing in the national elections in 2014 alone.¹⁸

Further, the early years of democratization in South Africa saw an era of national reconciliation, as conflict was replaced by peace and economic growth rates reached those unseen since the 1960s.¹⁹ Social progress was underpinned by significant developments in infrastructure, services, and welfare, and increasing economic opportunity brought on by affirmative action policies saw rising living standards for many in the black community.²⁰ However, it should be noted that despite economic developments bridging overt societal

¹⁵ Southall, “Polarization in South Africa.”

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Du Toit and de Jager, “South Africa’s Dominant-Party System in Comparative Perspective.”

¹⁸ Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), “Electoral Commission: National and Provincial Election Report,” 2014, <https://www.elections.org.za/content/Elections/Election-Report--2014%C2%A0National-and-Provincial%C2%A0Elections/> (accessed July 1, 2019).

¹⁹ Southall, “Polarization in South Africa.”

²⁰ South Africa Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), “Life in South Africa: Reasons for Hope,” 2018, <https://irr.org.za/reports/occasional-reports/files/life-in-south-africa-reasons-for-hope.pdf> (accessed October 20, 2021).

divisions, inequalities along race, wealth, and income remained and continue to define the societal landscape of South Africa. Whites remain the dominant group within the private sector, while black communities continue to endure increasingly high levels of poverty and unemployment.²¹ Notwithstanding, the lines of division in each of these areas have been significantly altered since the inception of democracy and democratic economic opportunity in the country.

Democratization and the Polarization of the ANC Governance

Since the outset of its democratic victory in 1994, the ANC has sought to mend all apartheid-imposed cleavages of race, ethnicity, income, and class under its creed of a *national democratic revolution* and the realization of a *nonracial democracy*. The party perceived the turn to democracy as only the first step in mending social cleavages, intending its victory to guide restorative peace and diffuse polarized lines through its governance.²² This was most prominently articulated through the party's national governance strategy, the National Democratic Revolution.²³ The main objective of the NDR was ultimately the realization of a "united, non-racial, non-sexist, and democratic society."²⁴ However, for the ANC, access to power by democratic means only partially satisfied this objective. The ANC contended that, for the party to realize a democratic society as envisioned by the NDR, further "control of state machinery" would be required.²⁵ Thus, the ANC envisaged democratization and societal transformation to be achieved through the harnessing of state power, asserting that it required "strengthening the hold of the democratic government on state power, and transforming state machinery to serve the cause of social change."²⁶ This approach further entailed the extension of the hold of the ANC "on all levers of power," including those of the "army, the police, the bureaucracy, intelligence structures, the judiciary, parastatals, and agencies such as regulatory bodies, the public broadcaster, the central bank and so on."²⁷

²¹ Ibid.

²² Fredericks and de Jager, "An Analysis of the Historical Roots of Partisan Governance within the ANC."

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ ANC, *Strategy and Tactics 1997*, as amended at the 50th National Conference, December 1997, <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/conf/conference50/strategyamend.html> (accessed October 20, 2021).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ ANC, "Accelerating the Pace of Change: Assessing the Balance of Forces in 1999," *Umrabulo*, 1999, <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/pubs/umrabulo/articles.html> (accessed November 19, 2019).

²⁷ ANC, "The State, Property Relations and Social Transformation: A Discussion Paper towards the Alliance," *Umrabulo*, 1998, <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/pubs/umrabulo/articles/sprst.html> (accessed November 2, 2019).

The objective of the NDR and state transformation was to be realized through a “practical strategy” that could serve the NDR while simultaneously ensuring that the ANC continued to be at the center of control over all levers of power through the cadre deployment program.²⁸ According to the ANC’s Strategies and Tactics document,²⁹ the practical strategy adopted by the party was the deployment of cadres³⁰ to “all centers of power,” particularly in parliament and the executive. Cadre deployment further entailed assigning members of the party to key positions in the public sector to effect ideological and demographic change. The ANC contended that building an “army of consciously committed and properly deployed cadres” was central to serving the cause of social change.³¹ Accordingly, the ANC consistently prioritized the appointment of party loyalists to various levels of the state, including parliamentary legislative bodies, student movements, trade unions, youth organizations, women’s and other mass democratic movements, as well as institutions of state that continue to be constitutionally mandated to govern impartially—all of which was done in order to achieve broader and more inclusive societal representation.³²

While the intended aspirations of the NDR are both democratic and noble, “the strategy of the appointment of party loyalists within state machinery often prove[s] sufficiently ambiguous and stand[s] sharply at odds with the constitutional requirement of impartiality and the rule of law.”³³ Nonetheless, the ANC has continued to commit itself to “cadreism.” Consequently, cadre deployment under the guidance of the political elite’s leadership has paved the way to the establishment of a massive patronage network in which state appointments are based on loyalty and partisanship and not competence.³⁴

Acknowledging this consequence of cadre deployment, President Cyril Ramaphosa previously declared that,

²⁸ ANC, “Cadre Policy and Deployment Strategy, Facing the Challenges,” *Umrabulo*, 1999, www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/pubs/umrabulo/articles/cadrepolicy.html (accessed November 7, 2019).

²⁹ ANC, *Strategy and Tactics 1997*.

³⁰ Gwede Mantashe, a South African politician who since 2018 has been the ANC chairperson, explained during the Commission of Inquiry into State Capture that cadre deployment concerns educating and training prospective deployees (party loyalists) to occupy positions within the public service.

³¹ ANC, “Strategy and Tactics of the ANC: Building a National Democratic Society,” as adopted at the 52nd National Conference of the ANC, 1999, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/strategy-and-tactics-anc-building-national-democratic-society-revised-draft-anc-30-august> (accessed June 5, 2020).

³² Ben Turok, *Readings in the ANC Tradition Volume 1: Policy and Praxis* (Auckland Park: Jacana Press, 2011).

³³ Fredericks and de Jager, “An Analysis of the Historical Roots of Partisan Governance within the ANC.”

³⁴ *Ibid.*

in identifying suitable candidates for positions in public entities, the ANC does not seek to circumvent the established and often legally mandated processes for the appointment of individuals to these positions. Candidates are still expected to submit their applications, meet the necessary requirements and be subjected to the normal processes of recruitment, selection and appointment.³⁵

However, President Ramaphosa conceded that despite these processes to guard against illegitimate appointments to positions of power, there have been “several instances” when individuals were appointed to positions for which they were not qualified or suited.³⁶ The ANC’s deployment of party loyalists to institutions of state so as to achieve the NDR resulted in a “leadership succession process tolerant of mediocrity and corruption” rather than merit and ethical standards of governance.³⁷ According to Chitja Twala,³⁸ cadre appointment and deployment are commonly based on the loyalty and connections that cadres have to senior leaders, and on the basis of these connections, they are rewarded for “good behavior.” Twala notes that cadres provide a shield against criticism of senior party members or the party itself, if the need arises; in return, where cadres have “proven” their loyalty, they are rewarded with the spoils of office, which usually include state bonuses, transportation, promotions, and the like.³⁹

This mutually beneficial relationship between the political elite and the deployed cadres holds two broad implications for the quality of governance. First, it implies that the cadres govern with the interest of the political elite or party in mind, and consequently there is no accountability or responsiveness to the broad public. Twala contends that the deployed cadres often regard themselves as appointees of the ANC rather than as public servants.⁴⁰ Therefore, they see themselves as accountable to no one other than the alliance deployment committee that appointed them. In this sense, cadre deployment has served as a means of entrenching party or elite political control of the state at the cost of constitutional checks and balances. In addition, according to Angela Quintal, this aspect of cadreism has created the problem of social

³⁵ Carol Paton, “Cyril Ramaphosa Defends ANC Cadre Deployment,” 2021, <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/2021-04-28-cyril-ramaphosa-defends-anc-cadre-deployment/> (accessed October 13, 2021).

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Mzukisi Qobo, “Party and State in South Africa,” 2019, <https://media.africaportal.org/documents/CDE-VIEWPOINTS-Party-and-State-in-South-Africa-final.pdf> (accessed October 13, 2021).

³⁸ Chitja Twala, “The African National Congress (ANC) and the Cadre Deployment Policy in the Post-Apartheid South Africa: A Product of Democratic Centralization or a Recipe for a Constitutional Crisis?” *Journal of Social Science* 41, no. 2 (2014): 159-165.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

distance, in which the interests of ordinary members and supporters have become far removed from elected officers.⁴¹ Further, the realities of cadres' loyalty to those who appointed them imply that positions within the state machinery become synonymous with access to the state and its resources.⁴² In other words, providing access to the state and its resources is more about offering positions and power for political loyalty—partiality—and less about broad public representation and delivery. When governments can politically control the public bureaucracy and use state resources for partisan ends, the state loses its autonomy and neutrality. This effectively creates a zero-sum game and raises societal divisions.

Hence, while the ANC and its NDR policy have demonstrated a commitment to overthrow an unjust socioeconomic system alongside a demand for democracy, the party's cadre deployment strategy has allowed for the facilitation of a massive patronage network that heeds only the demands of a limited, politically connected elite and, ironically, has caused the reiteration of exclusion of minority interests. Further, the robust patronage network enabled through the cadre deployment and NDR was easily usurped by the Zuma administration, and subsequently facilitated the capturing of the state for private interests and reignition of polarizing societal conditions.

Poor Governance under the Zuma Administration: Reigniting Polarizing Tensions

Zuma's Ascent to State Office

The ANC's NDR policy and cadre deployment which allowed for significant control of state appointments and resources provided a fertile breeding ground for factional infighting and served as an impetus to Zuma's ascendancy to the office of president.⁴³ Zuma's victory at the ANC's 2007 conference was largely the result of the coming together of ANC members who were disgruntled with the incumbent president's (Thabo Mbeki's) interpretation of the NDR. Mbeki's interpretation emphasized presidential centralism often to the exclusion of the other two members within the Tripartite Alliance—the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)—effectively shutting them out from the spoils of office.⁴⁴ Southall notes that while Mbeki's centralizing state power in the office of the presidency succeeded in better coordination of government and in reigning in the wayward

⁴¹ Angela Quintal, "ANC Acknowledges It Should Not Use State as Party-Political Instrument," *Cape Times*, February 2, 2007, 1.

⁴² Du Toit and de Jager, "South Africa's Dominant-Party System in Comparative Perspective."

⁴³ Fredericks and de Jager, "An Analysis of the Historical Roots of Partisan Governance within the ANC."

⁴⁴ Susan Booysen, *The African National Congress and the Regeneration of Political Power* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2011).

tendencies of the provinces, it simultaneously led to the alienation of hungry provincial “barons.”⁴⁵ Consequently, disgruntled ANC members from a wide range of factions, including members from the SACP, COSATU, the ANC Youth League, the ANC Women’s League, Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) oligarchs, as well as ANC leaders under investigation for corruption who hoped that if Zuma’s court cases were quashed theirs would be too, all threw their weight behind Zuma.⁴⁶ Hence, Zuma succeeded in becoming the party president in 2007 and state president in 2009, with the expectation that he would use state machinery toward achieving partisan ends, but this time for the specified interests of those who had put him in power.

Once Jacob Zuma took office as president, his administration primarily concentrated on strengthening the NDR and the cadre deployment strategy, although this was no longer geared toward the policy’s earlier noble aspirations of reducing polarizing tensions. Instead, Zuma’s objective centered largely on shifting the locus of power away from the party toward himself—ultimately resulting in a reignition of polarizing lines. The new administration’s expansion of the NDR and cadre deployment was underscored by the Building a National Democratic Society: Strategy and Tactics of the ANC document⁴⁷ adopted at the 52nd National Conference, which placed cadre deployment at the center of the administration’s aspirations for future tenure. This document, like its predecessors, maintained a commitment to earlier goals of achieving a national democratic society and, in so doing, reemphasized that for the ANC to continue to exercise its vanguard role, the party must prioritize the involvement of “cadres in all centers of power.”⁴⁸ This entailed both that the ANC’s wielding of state power necessitated the presence of ANC members and associates within the state and greater activism in the “mass terrain of civil society structures,” particularly those that fell within its intellectual and ideological realms.⁴⁹ This aim of hegemonic control of all sectors of society is an aspiration more fitted to an authoritarian, communist regime than a pluralistic, democratic one. Good quality democracies require idea-diverse institutions and robust independent media, not ideological conformity.

The theme of cadreship as the bedrock of the NDR in the pursuit of a national democratic society under the Zuma presidency was again reiterated at the ANC’s 53rd National Conference in December 2012, when the party

⁴⁵ Roger Southall, “The Coming Crisis of Zuma’s ANC: The Party State Confronts Fiscal Crisis,” *Review of African Political Economy* 1 (2015): 1-16.

⁴⁶ Roger Southall, “Understanding the ‘Zuma Tsunami,’ ” *Review of African Political Economy* 36, no. 121 (2009): 317-333.

⁴⁷ ANC, “Strategy and Tactics: Building a National Democratic Society,” as adopted by the 52nd National Conference, December 16–20, 2007, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/2007-anc-national-policy-conference-report-commission-strategy-and-tactics-30-june-2007> (accessed November 7, 2019).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

declared that the period of 2013–2023 would be the “Decade of the Cadre.” This decade, according to the ANC, was to be characterized by developing a contingent of cadres trained and disciplined in ANC ideology, who could carry these ideas into the civic terrain.⁵⁰ Further, the emphasis on the agents of change in terms of cadre deployment as a key to pursuing the NDR under the Zuma administration not only indicated an expansion of the cadre corps but, more significantly, signaled the broadening of the patronage network.

Shifting the Locus of Power: From Party Interests to Personal Interests

The broadening of the patronage network provided by cadre deployment under the Zuma administration was evident in Zuma’s cabinet makeup. In 2009, various changes were made which were most significant among the top leadership structure in which Zuma substituted Mbeki loyalists with Zuma devotees. This was to bring security to his position and repay the debt of support given to Zuma in his ascension to power. However, this exchange process was moderated mainly by the need to win over Mbeki supporters, which was achieved primarily by assuring Mbeki loyalists of job or income security.⁵¹ Additionally, Zuma’s initial cabinet makeup indicated that he successfully managed to overcome his predecessor’s presidential centralism by neatly blending many of the direct interfaces between party and state—with power skewed more toward the party than the state.⁵²

In this regard, the ANC’s Polokwane National Executive Council was given high-level representation in the May 2009 cabinet, while representation was provided to eligible members of the National Working Committee as well.⁵³ The cost of Zuma’s political “debt repayment” was a bloated government marked by a cabinet of thirty-five ministers—by comparison, Mbeki had twenty-nine ministers in his 2004 cabinet, while Nelson Mandela had twenty-five ministers in his 1994 cabinet.⁵⁴ Although these changes were made when Zuma initially took office, allocating cabinet positions would eventually become a vital instrument in leveraging and wielding political power for the sake of capturing the state. In just the first three years of his presidency, Zuma managed to completely change “the character, personnel, and ideological hue and political alchemy of the cabinet,” despite the same party being in power.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ ANC, “2012 ANC National Policy Conference: Economic Transformation: Policy Discussion Document March 2012,” <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/2012-anc-national-policy-conference-economic-transformation-policy-discussion-document> (accessed June 20, 2020).

⁵¹ Booysen, *The African National Congress and the Regeneration of Political Power*.

⁵² Fredericks and de Jager, “An Analysis of the Historical Roots of Partisan Governance within the ANC.”

⁵³ Booysen, *The African National Congress and the Regeneration of Political Power*.

⁵⁴ Richard Calland, *The Zuma Years: South Africa’s Changing Face of Power* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2013).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

By the end of his tenure in early 2018, Zuma had shuffled his cabinet twelve times since 2009.

The cabinet changes instituted by Jacob Zuma ensured that the party remained the primary base of power over the state. At the same time, through much maneuvering, Zuma also successfully managed to shift the levers of power to satisfy his own interests.⁵⁶ Southall notes that while Zuma appeased the elite figures he had marginalized by appointing them to ministries of little personal concern to him, he “retained strong personal control” over ministries meeting his own interests by appointing to these ministries those loyal to him.⁵⁷ This strategy was particularly evident in the state security sector and the “boards and senior leadership of many parastatals and state institutions,” where positions were filled by individuals with close ties to him.⁵⁸ In this way, Zuma made it possible to appoint personal loyalists to key positions of state and shift the locus of power toward the president and his cronies, the Gupta family. As a result, public interests were jettisoned “in favor of private material gain for select connected individuals in the private and public sector,”⁵⁹ in a process that has become known as the state capture.⁶⁰

The Public Protector’s State of Capture report,⁶¹ and more recently, the State Capture report by Raymond Zondo, South Africa’s incumbent chief justice since 2021, showed numerous instances of undue influence by private individuals over Zuma in relation to the appointments and removals of cabinet ministers as well as the directors of state-owned enterprises, which often resulted in the improper (and potentially corrupt) awarding of state contracts. Prime among these was the appointment of cadres to state-owned enterprises (SOEs).⁶²

⁵⁶ Nicola de Jager and Animee Parkin, “Wither the ANC’s Dominance? Waning Electoral Dominance, Rising Hegemonic Dominance,” in *Political Parties in South Africa: Do They Underpin or Undermine Democracy?* ed. Heather A. Thuynsma (Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2017).

⁵⁷ Southall, “The Coming Crisis of Zuma’s ANC.”

⁵⁸ De Jager and Parkin, “Wither the ANC’s Dominance?”

⁵⁹ Sanet Madonsela, “Critical Reflections on State Capture in South Africa,” *African Studies* 11, no. 1 (2019): 113-130.

⁶⁰ Fredericks and de Jager, “An Analysis of the Historical Roots of Partisan Governance within the ANC.”

⁶¹ Public Protector, “State of Capture: A Report of the Public Protector,” 2019, <https://cdn.24.co.za/files/Cms/General/d/4666/3f63a8b78d2b495d88f10ed060997f76.pdf> (accessed November 1, 2019).

⁶² Here, the case of Eskom, South Africa’s national power supplier, is a salient example. In December 2014, the cabinet overhauled the Eskom board by appointing nine new directors—five of whom were directly linked to renowned Gupta associate, Salim Essa, and all nine of whom were linked, by way of businesses and family connections, to the Guptas. By mid-2015, the Minister of Public Enterprises at the time, Lynn Brown, appointed Brian Molefe as chief executive officer of Eskom. This meant that the entire makeup of Eskom’s 2014–2015 board consisted of individuals with direct or indirect business or personal relationships with Zuma, his son, Duduzane Zuma, and the Gupta family, leading the Public Protector to conclude in

The Economic Impact of Poor Governance during the Zuma Administration

The consequences of compromising the constitutional impartiality mandate and poor governance by the Zuma administration have been severe on South Africa's economic, societal, and democratic landscape. The administration's partisan governance under the banner of the NDR and cadre deployment resulted in stark failures of state parastatals, contributing to South Africa's economic malaise and furthering previously diffused polarizing issues of inequality and race. While the legacy of apartheid might still explain the deep economic disparities in the country, the legacy of the poor governance under the Zuma administration significantly reduced the country's economic ability to overcome these challenges. Contemporary South Africa continues to deal with a fiscal crisis of a weakening rand, poor service delivery by its parastatals, and overall low productivity—all of which can be seen as consequences of the patterns of patronage, looting of the state's coffers, deployment of cadres, and subversion of the rule of law under the Zuma administration.

In addition to the resultant steep slowdown of the economy, the rand-dollar exchange rate suffered dramatically during the Zuma years. At the inception of his presidency, the rand stood at 7.22 to the dollar; by the end of it, it had dropped to 13.31 to the dollar, an 84 percent depreciation over a ten-year period.⁶³ At the same time, the twelve cabinet reshuffles contributed to a capital flight of R500 billion in 2017 alone.⁶⁴ These factors—collectively and separately—resulted in S&P Global Ratings and Fitch reducing South Africa's credit rating to below the investment grade (junk status) in the first quarter of 2017, cementing therefore the unfavorable economic climate and further decreasing investor confidence.⁶⁵

Furthermore, the gains of increased social spending were curiously accompanied by rising costs in civil service remuneration. Jannie Rossouw, Fanie Joubert, and Adele Breytenbach found that while social grants increased from 12.6 percent to 14.2 percent of total government revenue between 2008 and 2012, civil service remuneration increased from 31.7 percent to 42.2

her report that the board had been improperly constituted. This, together with a compromised Minister of Mining, resulted in the way being paved for Tegeta—a Gupta-owned mining company, in which Duduzane Zuma had significant shares—to take over Optimum, the former coal supplier to Eskom.

⁶³ Nica Schrueder, "The Rand's Roller-Coaster: The Effect of Zuma's Presidency on SA's Economy," 2018, <https://citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/1809917/therands-rollercoaster-the-effect-of-zumas-presidency-on-sas-economy/> (accessed March 15, 2019).

⁶⁴ South African Institute of International Affairs, "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: An Economic Review of Zuma's Presidency," 2017, <https://saiaa.org.za/research/the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly-an-economic-review-of-zumas-presidency/> (accessed January 7, 2019).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

percent during the same period.⁶⁶ In addition, total state employment increased by 13 percent and the remuneration bill increased by 76 percent during the financial period 2012–2013.⁶⁷ Rossouw et al. contend that should these spending patterns continue, they would likely absorb government revenue by 2026—creating a fiscal cliff—where government income would not be able to sustain growing government expenditure.⁶⁸

The strained economy exacerbated unemployment. The National Treasury of the Republic of South Africa found that by the end of the Zuma administration, the rate of unemployment had reached 27.1 percent in 2018, with youth the most affected.⁶⁹ According to StatsSA, the figure for youth unemployment for the second quarter of 2017 stood at 32.2 percent.⁷⁰ By 2018 of the same quarter, this figure had risen to 38.8 percent, reaching 54.7 percent by the fourth quarter of the same year.⁷¹ This contributed significantly to raising polarizing tensions in South Africa, as the large numbers of youth struggling to find employment also presented a serious risk to the promotion of an inclusive economy and society. The Zuma administration made attempts to address the problem through employment-driven initiatives such as the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), creating 941,593 work opportunities for the financial year 2012–2013.⁷² However, most of the opportunities were temporary, with only 273,938 employees finding fulltime positions.⁷³

The economic issues mentioned above have contributed to widening poverty and inequality in South Africa. StatsSA's (2018a) report on poverty and inequality in South Africa showed that in 2015 nearly half of the population was considered chronically poor. A second segment of the population had an above average chance of falling into poverty, and a third segment (the nonpoor but vulnerable) faced an above average risk of slipping into poverty, even though their basic needs were being met. The StatsSA (2018a) report also revealed that South Africa's poverty rate was higher than that of other upper-middle-income countries and higher than that of other countries with a per

⁶⁶ Jannie Rossouw, Fanie Joubert, and Adele Breytenbach, "South Africa's Fiscal Cliff: A Reflection on the Appropriation of Government Resources," *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe* [Journal of Humanities] 54, no. 1 (2014): 144-162.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ The National Treasury of the Republic of South Africa, National Budget Review: 2019, <http://www.treasury.gov.za/documents/national%20budget/2019/review/FullBR.pdf> (accessed June 12, 2019).

⁷⁰ Statistics South Africa (StatsSA), Quarterly Labour Force Survey: Quarter 2: 2017, <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02112ndQuarter2017.pdf> (accessed January 10, 2019).

⁷¹ Statistics South Africa (StatsSA), Quarterly Labour Force Survey: Quarter 2: 2018, <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02112ndQuarter2018.pdf> (accessed January 10, 2019).

⁷² Press Statement, "The Presidency, Achievements and Milestones during the Tenure of President Jacob Zuma," 2018, <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pressstatements/achievements-and-milestones-during-tenure-president-jacob-zuma> (accessed January 10, 2019).

⁷³ Ibid.

capita Gross National Income (GNI) less than that of South Africa. In focusing on the period between 2011 and 2015, StatsSA (2018a) showed that at least three million people had slipped into poverty during this period, consequently raising the poverty rate from 36 percent to 40 percent.

Moreover, Margaret Chitiga-Mabugu, Evans Mupela, Phindile Ngwenya, and Precious Zikhalo argue that inequality reduction has seen even more meagre gains by comparison to poverty reduction.⁷⁴ According to the consumption expenditure data for 2014–2015, South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world—where inequality has consistently increased since 1994 and by 2015 measured 0.63 (StatsSA, 2018a). In addition, StatsSA (2018a) found that wealth inequality has been high and growing over time (2008–2015). The data captured indicated that the top percentile of households had 70.9 percent of the wealth and the bottom 60 percent had 7.0 percent—indicating that the disparity between richer households is almost ten times that of smaller households (StatsSA, 2018a).

Beyond these structural issues, the predatory governance by the ANC under Jacob Zuma resulted in stark failures of state parastatals, which contributed to the economic malaise. Southall remarked that “virtually all [parastatals] appear to be confronting a crisis of performance,” all of which could be attributed to the various patterns of patronage and poor governance.⁷⁵ Ultimately, the patronage network created by the NDR and cadre deployment transmogrified under the Zuma administration into a vehicle for private material accumulation and upward mobility by his cronies, undermining the integrity of governmental institutions to deliver fair and equitable (impartial) goods and services to ordinary citizens and resulting in a deepening of societal divisions as well as a resurfacing of polarizing tensions.

The Polarizing Effects of Poor Governance under the Zuma Administration

As economic conditions and societal wellbeing began to deteriorate amid mounting and pervasive corruption, manifold indications of discontent with ANC rule became evident. This was most prominently communicated through community protests targeting failures of service delivery and poor governance. Dissatisfied citizens from various social, economic, and ethnic groups often came together in protest against the inadequacies of the ANC government’s ability to address corrupt governance within the party and respond to service

⁷⁴ Margaret Chitiga-Mabugu, Evans Mupela, Phindile Ngwenya, and Precious Zikhalo, “Inequality, Poverty and the State: The Case of South Africa 2006–2011,” in *State of the Nation South Africa 2016: Who Is in Charge?* ed. Daniel Plaatjies, Margaret Chitiga-Mabugu, Charles Hongoro, Thenjiwe Meyiwa, Muxe Nkondo, and Francis Nyamnjoh (Cape Town: HSRC, 2016).

⁷⁵ Southall, “The Coming Crisis of Zuma’s ANC.”

delivery demands—which often resulted in violent clashes between protestors and the authorities.

According to Lizette Lancaster, between 2013 and 2015, the percentage of events that turned violent (relating to unlawful and unintentional acts such as faction fighting, rioting, violent resistance to the police by a mob, and forcible coercion of other workers by strikers) increased significantly from 44 percent to 63 percent.⁷⁶ Similarly, Frans Cronje, using data from the South African police, showed that in 2014 alone South Africa averaged around four or five violent antigovernment protests a day.⁷⁷

Discontent with the Zuma administration's poor governance not only fueled violent protest action but also reignited polarizing political tensions reminiscent of the apartheid heritage of deep inequality and mass social divisions. Instead of effectively addressing the root of the issue, that is, poor governance, the Zuma administration—and the ANC continues to do so to this day—resorted to the narrative that the NDR was being thwarted by deeply entrenched “white monopoly capitalism” and that a campaign of “radical economic transformation” (and further deployment of cadres) was needed in order to bring effective redress. The inability of the ANC government to address issues perpetrated by and within its own governance continues to inhibit its ability to govern effectively and overcome the polarizing lines it continues to reinforce.

Concluding Remarks

The economic downslope and lines of polarization ignited during the Zuma years continue to characterize the economic and social landscape of South Africa, even four years after the end of his presidential tenure in 2018. In this regard, while menial attempts have been made in job creation and economic stimulation, the ANC has dismally failed to stem the economic consequences of state capture perpetrated during the Zuma administration. Notably, South Africa's unemployment rate stood at 35.3 percent as of last quarter of 2021—the highest jobless rate to date. This figure is in part attributed to the decline in economic activity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic; however, this is also attributed to the poor governance and state capture.

Most significant are the social and political consequences of the Zuma years. Since the Zuma administration, the ANC has experienced a pattern of dwindling national and provincial electoral support. In the 2021 local government elections, support for the ANC fell below 50 percent for the first

⁷⁶ Lizette Lancaster, “At the Heart of Discontent: Measuring Public Violence in South Africa,” ISS Paper 292.

⁷⁷ Frans Cronje, “Protest Action in South Africa: Threat, or Opportunity for Reform?” 2014, <https://irr.org.za/reports/atLiberty/liberty-protest-action-in-south-africa-threat-or-opportunity-for-reform> (accessed June 21, 2022).

time, suggesting that prospects for the longevity of governance of the party are dim. Further, physical expressions of discontent with ANC rule continue to be made manifest through violent and sporadic outbursts. This was most clearly demonstrated in mid-2021 when numerous South African citizens looted stores, vandalized shopping centers, and caused mass social disruption in the Kwazulu-Natal and Gauteng provinces.

Together, these consequences continue to provide impetus for segregation and division within South African society, particularly in respect to the future governance of the country. While division remains deeply entrenched, the remedy ultimately will rest in the future governance of the country and whether the ANC will be able to overcome its internal policy challenges—the NDR and cadre deployment—to reinvent itself as a new champion of anticorruption and more democratic governance practices.

