



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Navigating the Promise and Perils of Post-Apartheid Service Delivery: An Analysis of the South African Social Contract

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## ABSTRACT

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The objective of this study was to analyse the evolving relationship between service delivery and the social contract in post-apartheid South Africa, focusing on how this relationship has influenced the achievement of aspirations for equity, justice and inclusive development over the past 30 years. The study employed a qualitative methodology, using a literature review approach to gather data from various sources, including government reports, academic databases, and scholarly articles. The findings suggest that despite the African National Congress's (ANC) significant efforts to enhance service delivery through government initiatives, persistent challenges such as inequality, corruption and inefficiencies in public administration have hindered the fulfilment of the social contract's promises. The study also highlights the increasing number of service delivery protests, which reflect the growing dissatisfaction among citizens with the government's failure to fulfil its obligations. The study recommends revisiting the social contract to address contemporary societal needs better, strengthening anti-corruption measures, enhancing social safety nets, and increasing support for civil society organisations. Additionally, it calls for greater civic education to empower citizens to engage more effectively with the democratic process. In conclusion, the study finds that despite the progress made since 1994, the social contract in South Africa remains a work in progress. Through the Government of National Unity (GNU) the government must prioritise addressing the historical legacies of apartheid, corruption and inequality to ensure the effective delivery of services and fulfil the aspirations of the South African people.

## INTRODUCTION

There is a broad consensus that the social contract in South Africa and its attempt at social inclusion and cohesion has been worsening and in demise in recent years (see Basset, 2004; van der Walt *et al.* 2014; Ragolane 2022). Cloutier *et al.* (2021) point out that the fragility of the social contract reflects an "incomplete transition" as many citizens are excluded from job opportunities and basic services as well as joining the middle class thus putting pressure on the social contract. Van der Walt and Oosthuizen (2014) have cautioned us that "the fact of social disintegration in South Africa [and elsewhere] has forced us once again to look at the nature and contents of the social contract that the South African citizenry has entered into, voluntarily or not." This paper finds this analysis in the form of service delivery realisation to the society as envisioned in the forging of the new democratic government. In 1994, the South African government faced the monumental task of dismantling the apartheid legacies *inter alia*, poverty, inequality and racial segregation in service delivery to create a unified, efficient public service that met the basic needs of all citizens (Managa, 2012). This

responsibility was not to be achieved in isolation but rather in collaboration with society. The democratic dispensation held great hope and the potential for success in the face of South Africans. However, the promise of a "rainbow nation" after apartheid was not fully realised due to poor progress in addressing service delivery and inequality (Ndinga-Kanga, Van der Merwe & Hartford, 2020). It is worth recognising the reasons behind the fact that one of the renowned democratic models of the 1990s (Levy, Hirsch, Naidoo & Nxele, 2021), which was hailed as one of the strongest forms of democracy, currently grapples with inequality and poor service delivery which is crucial not only for the political-administrative landscape but also for social welfare development and policies that are beneficial for the South African people who have longed to be included in the discussions of "national building" and "freedom". Prior to 1994, the social welfare policies of the apartheid system were designed to disregard the black population and extend the privileges of the white population. Within this system, the white minority population enjoyed access to quality education, employment, land and healthcare services. Due to this predicament, 60% of South Africans were living in rural areas facing issues such as unemployment, poverty, inequality and weakened government institutions (Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), 2014). During this time, the African National Congress (ANC) and anti-apartheid organisations sought to fight for the South Africans whose dreams were shattered by the oppressive system. Through the persistence of the South Africans and liberation movements, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April 1994, the first democratic elections were held, culminating in a transition to a non-racial democracy, which served as a social contract between the new state and its citizenry regarding their expectations of the new democratic order (Connolly, 2013). On 10 May 1994, President Nelson Mandela's inauguration speech ushered in one of the first words that provided the establishment and maintenance of a social compact for the South African citizens:

"We have, at last, achieved our political emancipation. We pledge ourselves to liberate all our people from the continuing bondage of poverty, deprivation, suffering, gender and other discrimination. We succeeded to take our last steps to freedom in conditions of relative peace. We commit ourselves to the construction of a complete, just and lasting peace. We have triumphed in the effort to implant hope in the breasts of the millions of our people. We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity - a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world" (Nelson Mandela, SABC, 2015; 41:04).

Nelson Mandela challenged and put forward the suggestion that South Africa has entered into a new social contract underpinning liberal democracy and social cohesion amongst the ordinary citizens who have been subjected to white minority rule. Thus, in the aftermath of the first democratic elections held in 1994, the South African government and the African National Congress (ANC) unveiled comprehensive development plans to eradicate poverty, unemployment, and other societal issues that disproportionately affected the majority Black population (Mlambo & Thusi, 2023). These plans were outlined in the Constitution of 1996, which aimed to restructure the administrative governance and public service landscape to represent the interests of the entire population (DPME, 2014). To achieve this, the government implemented decentralisation, dividing institutions into national, provincial and local spheres with interdependent yet shared responsibilities. Furthermore, the social grant program was introduced to alleviate poverty levels, while municipalities provided municipal rate rebates to the poor, as well as free basic water and electricity. The National Planning Commission (NPC) introduced the National Development Plan Vision 2030 (NDP) to address the challenges of poverty, inequality, improved economic growth and service delivery (Blom, Jahed & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023). Additionally, no-fee schools were established to make education more accessible for low-income families as well as the low-income housing subsidy program was also implemented to provide access to affordable housing for the country's most vulnerable population (DPME, 2014). Notwithstanding these developments, studies have revealed that challenges persist in the democratic dispensation and the standard of public service delivery and implementation is deteriorating (Thusi, Ragolane & Matyana, 2023). These challenges remain in creating sufficient economic opportunities, addressing inequality, and ensuring equitable access to quality public services like education and healthcare. Factionalism, patronage, and corruption within the ANC have also undermined the state's capacity to effectively deliver on the social contract (Bassett, 2004; Connolly, 2013).

In recent years, the country has experienced a growing number of service delivery “protests”. Studies reveal that service delivery protests emerged after the third democratic election (Alexander, 2010). Protests have become a recurring aspect of South African politics, with more than 2500 incidents documented between 2007 and 2011 (Mamokhere & Kgobe, 2023). In 2022, the South African Police Service (SAPS) attended approximately 2455 protests, and during the first half of 2023, they were present at 122 protests (Tswelopele Makoe, IOL, 2023). Ragolane (2022) points out that the social contract has been weakening since 1994 as the government has taken the burdens and responsibilities created by the previous government. As such, the lack of service delivery led to the deterioration of the state-society relationship exacerbating protests as the people felt that their aspirations were not realised. In reflecting on service delivery and the social contract in post-apartheid South Africa over the past 30 years, it is evident that the country has faced significant challenges in reconciling strong institutions with massive inequalities. Despite achievements in reducing poverty and implementing inclusive development strategies, there have been persistent issues related to distributional disparities and limited economic prospects for those outside the elite. The ANC's struggle to manage internal deployment processes has led to factionalised contestation, rent-seeking, and patronage-driven practices (Levy *et al.*, 2021). 30 years of democracy and freedom for the majority of South Africans must be synonymous and relate to *inter alia*, quality education, healthcare, equality and employment. Within this context, the social contract initiated by the government has been seen as an integral component of realising the aspirations of South Africans. Thus, the social contract in post-apartheid South Africa remains a work in progress, as the government grapples with the legacy of apartheid and the high expectations of the democratic transition (Ndinga-kanga *et al.*, 2020).

Against this background, this paper argues that there must be an understanding and explanation to this question: Has the South African social contract achieved the realisation of service delivery after 30 years of attainment? This paper explores the intricate complexities around service delivery and the social contract in South Africa in the 30 years of democratic dispensation.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

The administration of South Africa, particularly at the local level, has faced several challenges that have led to the breakdown of administrative governance. In the post-apartheid era, the transition to democracy in South Africa sparked hopes for a society characterised by fairness, justice, and improved service delivery for all citizens. Despite significant progress made over the past three decades, persistent challenges continue to impede the realisation of these aspirations. One of the major problems facing the nation is the gap between the promises of the social contract and the actual delivery of essential services to communities across the country (Ragolane, 2022). Despite the implementation of extensive government initiatives and policies aimed at addressing historical inequalities, disparities in access to basic services such as water, sanitation, healthcare, and education persist, disproportionately affecting marginalised and disadvantaged populations (Mlambo & Thusi, 2023). This disconnection between the expectations of the social contract and the reality of service delivery outcomes has significant implications for governance, social cohesion, and the overall well-being of South Africa's citizens. Furthermore, the inability to effectively address these challenges threatens to undermine public trust in government institutions and erode the legitimacy of the democratic process (United Nations, 2016). Persistent issues such as corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-economic disparities exacerbate the difficulties in achieving equitable service delivery. Moreover, social unrest and protests, fuelled by frustrations over unmet expectations, highlight the urgency of addressing these systemic shortcomings (Ragolane, 2022). Therefore, it is critical to understand the complexities surrounding service delivery and the social contract in post-apartheid South Africa to inform policy interventions and promote inclusive development that advances the aspirations of all citizens.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative methodology and a review of the literature to achieve its objectives, which involved analysing existing literature on service delivery and the state-society relationship in South Africa. The literature was gathered from various sources, including government reports and briefs, university databases (such as thesis and dissertations), as well as

academic databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Scopus, JSTOR, and Google. The literature review process utilised a thematic approach to identify trends and events related to service delivery in South Africa over the past 30 years. This approach involved systematically analysing the literature to identify key themes, patterns, and developments in service delivery, as well as the dynamics of the state-society relationship. Specifically, the study focused on understanding the level of service delivery in South Africa and assessing the impact of the state-society relationship on service delivery outcomes.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### Conceptualising Social Contract

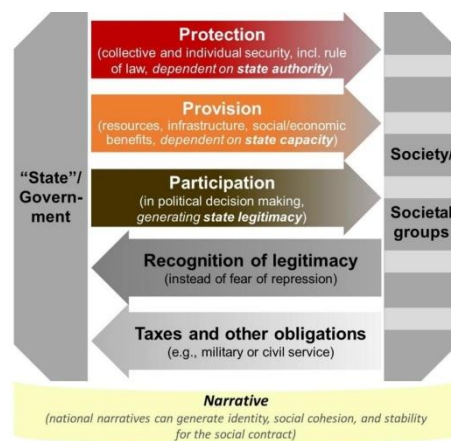
The social contract is a theoretical concept that is widely discussed in the fields of political philosophy and social sciences. The social contract theory is one of the prominent political philosophies, with contributions from theorists such as Hobbes (1651), Locke (1689), and Rousseau (1762), among others. For instance, Hobbes (1651) proposed in his work "Leviathan" that individuals in a "state of nature" willingly relinquish their freedoms to a sovereign state to escape chaos and conflict, as Hobbes (1651) put it, leading to a "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" life. According to Hobbes (1651), the social contract theory posits that people naturally desire security and order. Therefore, to preserve, protect, and avoid pain, they enter into a contract with a sovereign state. In Hobbes' thesis, the citizens have no more value than that of the state (Ragolane, 2022). Conversely, Locke (1689) provided a contrasting perspective, arguing that the government exists not to be superior but rather to protect the rights of life, liberty, and property of the people and to serve the people. Locke argues that people seek to abandon the "state of nature" to form a more organised and civil society. In contrast to Hobbes' view, Rousseau (1762) offered a more reasonable perspective on the social contract. Like Locke, Rousseau argued that the government must reflect the will of the people. According to Rousseau (1762), the social contract is the formation of a new government or state that guarantees the people freedom, equality, liberty, and rights. Taking perspective from Rousseau's thesis, the importance of a state and government is to offer a participatory democracy, where the citizens are offered a place to actively engage in decision-making processes.

The social contract refers to an implicit agreement between individuals to form a society and establish a system of governance. According to this theory, there is an agreement between governments and citizens, as well as organisations and institutions, in which each party accepts certain mutual obligations and rights. The social contract is based on the premise that respecting these mutual obligations leads to good governance and positive outcomes for society. Citizens and private actors agree to respect the rule of law and fulfil their obligations under the social contract, while governments promote justice by respecting citizens' rights and ensuring proper governance (Lemmens *et al.*, 2022). The concept of the social contract has been debated in philosophical circles for centuries, and its meaning has been interpreted in different ways in relation to sovereignty, morality, and the rule of law. However, at its core, the social contract is about the agreement between citizens to live together under a shared cooperative scheme (Hobden & Matisonn, 2022).

Contemporary philosophers and scholars have built upon these historical perspectives. The recent, wide circulation of the concept of social contract, however, speaks to a discursive use quite different than its classical roots suggest. The renewed interest in the social contract reflects a profound exploration of what it means to be a part of an interconnected global community that transcends the conventional boundaries of nation-state sovereignty. It is a response to unprecedented disruptions, economic and ecological imbalances, as well as new regimes of ideological, corporate and technocratic control (Toukan, 2023). Ragolane (2022) defined a social contract as a democratic connection between the state and the citizens. Van der Walt and Oosthuizen (2014) argued that "the social contract is the hypothesis that human beings, as they came together to live in communities and society, thus encountering interdependencies, must reach a common agreement regarding the relationships and responsibilities and rights of that society's members." Loewe, Trautner, and Zintl (2019) posited that a social contract involves the state and the society and is characterised by three elements: its *scope* (the contracting sides and their respective spatial range of rule or influence), its *substance* (the deliverables exchanged between the contracting parties), and its *temporal dimension*

(beginning, duration, and end) (Loewe *et al.*, 2019). Furness and Trautner (2020) further explained the three dimensions of a social contract: the *spatial dimension*, which refers to all the social groups in the society, especially those who have been marginalized, politically or economically disadvantaged, as well as those who have been displaced in the past, included in the establishment of the social contract - disregarding them and their grievances would spoil the social contract; the *substantive dimension*, which means that the state must offer protection and peacebuilding and inclusive developmental justice; and the *temporal dimension*, focusing on the expectations of citizens and whether these expectations change over time, helping determine whether the social contract is developing or peacebuilding is achievable (Furness *et al.*, 2020).

In the context of South Africa, the social contract is particularly important due to the country's history of apartheid and its transition to democracy. This transition involved the establishment of a political settlement and a social covenant that aimed to protect the welfare of citizens. From a social contract perspective, the South African government was responsible for providing the deliverables of a state-society relationship, as explained by Loewe, Zintl, and Houdret (2021). **Figure 1** emphasises the state-society relationship and what the government has to offer to its citizens.



**Figure 1: Deliverables to a state-society relationship**

Source: (Loewe *et al.*, 2021)

The figure above highlights the importance of *protection*, *provision*, and *participation* in a functional state-society relationship. For instance, *protection* involves promoting human security through the enforcement of human and civil rights, such as by the police and courts. *Provision*, on the other hand, refers to access to basic services like resources, social services, and economic opportunities, such as land, water, transportation, education, health, and employment. Lastly, *participation* involves citizens' involvement in the decision-making processes of the government at all levels, including national, provincial, and local. This exists within which people recognise the government and its legitimacy by adhering to the rule of law and state obligations such as taxes. Loewe *et al.*, (2021) assert that countries may fail to deliver the above deliverables as a result leading to a revolt, protests and a lack of trust in the current government. In South Africa, the past thirty years since the end of apartheid present a rich landscape for examining the evolution and influence of the social contract on governance, citizenship, and service delivery. According to scholars Lethlokwa Mpedi and Tshilidzi Marwala, South Africa stands at a critical juncture and our challenging context and historical legacy indicate that we must reconsider our social contract if we hope for a better future, we must begin by rethinking this social contract (Mpedi & Marwala, *Daily Maverick*, 2023). Several scholars argue that South Africa has not achieved its social contract and political settlement (Levy *et al.* 2021; Hobden *et al.*, 2022; Ragolane, 2022).

The current South African government faces numerous issues, including high unemployment, state capture, rising inequality, and the failure to realise the democratic vision of the 1990s (Mpedi & Marwala, *Daily Maverick*, 2023). The increasing number of service delivery protests reflects this broken social contract. A failure to fulfil any or all the government's responsibilities towards its citizens can lead to grievances, political instability, and potential state fragility (Ragolane, 2022).

For instance, Loewe *et al.*, (2021) contend that Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries have experienced disruptions in their social contracts, leading to protests and uprisings. This occurred due to the marginalisation of deprived and disadvantaged societal groups and the failure to deliver on the promises made in state-society relationships. The uprisings in MENA countries in and after 2011 can be seen as protests against the erosion of former social contracts, characterized by reduced social benefits and increased taxation despite limited political participation. Although protesters did not share the same goals, with some calling for greater social justice and political freedom, and others advocating for a return to populist social contracts centred on service delivery (Loewe *et al.*, 2021).

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) lays out a social compact that enshrines the Bill of Rights, including civil, political, and socio-economic rights. This compact guarantee the people's right to basic services, as well as their right to peaceful protest and to have their needs addressed. This relationship between the state and society can be understood as an agreement between citizens and the government, centred on the values of democracy, equality, and inclusivity. However, there is growing scepticism about whether the benefits of this social compact have been realised. Adams (2018) argues that the Constitution was, from the outset, "ideologically, politically, and philosophically" limited, and thus has not lived up to its "contractual" promise to transform society, particularly with regard to race and economic inequality (Ragolane 2022). It is necessary to consider the perspectives of citizens, policymakers, and civil society when examining the dynamics of the 30-year contract in South Africa. As Mpedi and Marwala (Mpedi & Marwala, *Daily Maverick*, 2023) point out,

"There is a call for a new social contract which emphasises responsible citizenship. Responsible citizenship is a prerequisite for a functioning and healthy social contract. It refers to the actions and attitudes that the citizens exhibit as members of society, such as obeying laws, paying taxes, participating in the democratic process, being informed about public issues and volunteering or giving back to the community... The social contract can help to promote responsible citizenship by providing citizens with the resources, opportunities and protections they need to be active, informed and engaged members of their communities".

Based on theoretical perspectives, we aim to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the state of service delivery in South Africa after three decades of constitutional democracy. Our goal is to offer insight into the state of service delivery and the state-society relationship in the democratic dispensation. While our analysis is not exhaustive, it points to the scholarly consensus that the growing number of service delivery protests is due to failing government institutions and an unfulfilled social covenant of the African National Congress. Furthermore, we add to the discussion of rethinking and reforming the social contract to deal with challenges such as unemployment, corruption, failing state institutions, uncontrollable crime, and a failing educational system.

### **The Social Contract in South Africa Pre- and Post-1994**

The development of the social contract in South Africa is a highly intricate process. Before 1994, the South African government was defined by systematic racial segregation, economic disparity, and social inequality. For a country like South Africa, which is still addressing fundamental demands within the context of its apartheid past, inequality and its impact on social mobility are at the core of its challenges. While apartheid existed through the institutionalization of inequalities, democracy creates the opportunity to address these challenges through social dialogue and partnerships aimed at producing mutually agreed-upon solutions (National Planning Commission, 2015). The end of apartheid in 1994 marked a pivotal moment in South African history. The country's first democratic elections brought Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) to power, signifying the emergence of a new social contract based on principles of equality, justice, and inclusive citizenship. The 1996 Constitution established the foundation for this new social contract, enshrining the principles of human dignity, equality, and freedom, and obliging the state to make progress towards the realisation of socio-economic rights. However, the fragility of the social contract is seen as a manifestation of an 'incomplete transition.' When a significant portion of citizens is excluded from job opportunities and, consequently, from entering the middle class, it exerts substantial pressure on the social contract (World Bank, 2021).

The shift towards democracy in South Africa was accompanied by a move towards a form of developmental welfarism, which began during the presidency of Nelson Mandela (1994-1999) and took on a specific institutional form during the presidency of Thabo Mbeki (World Bank, 2021). The adoption of an interim constitution in 1993, following extensive negotiations among moderate politicians from all parties, played a crucial role in this process (Marx, 1995). This period was marked by strategic shifts in the calculations of the white minority government, the black liberation movement, and other parties, with intermittent violence often reinforcing the incentives for leaders to negotiate settlements to avoid mutually damaging outcomes (Marx, 1995). The presidency of Nelson Mandela (1994-1999) marked the beginning of a new social dispensation in South Africa, signalling the end of the political monolith of white minority power. The African National Congress (ANC) led government was tasked with addressing the trio of challenges facing the country: poverty, unemployment, and inequality, and working towards a better life for all South Africans (ANC, 2017). To achieve this, the government passed various acts to encourage societal transformation and remove all past discriminatory policies from the statute books. However, the process of dismantling apartheid's policies was a long and difficult one, as parliament grappled with rescinding the numerous discriminatory laws and replacing them with ones that upheld the principles of democracy, justice, and equality in a divided and racially stratified society (Connolly, 2013). The government's policy initiatives were structured around three main platforms: (i) the substantial expansion of the social protection system, prioritizing mothers and the elderly; (ii) the objective of "deracialising" economic control through affirmative action policies aimed at accelerating the placement of black individuals in management and senior management roles; and (iii) the transformation of white ownership of the economy through Black Economic Empowerment policies. The government introduced the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) to address socioeconomic disparities, which focused on housing, healthcare, education, and employment. The RDP aimed to provide "decent, well-located, and affordable shelter for all by 2003." In the short term, the RDP aimed to build one million new low-cost houses within five years (Connolly, 2013). During the administration of Mbeki (1999-2008), there was a shift toward economic policies aimed at growth and global integration, as evidenced by the introduction of the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) policy. This policy, which was more "macro-economically" focused than the RDP, aimed to stimulate economic growth through fiscal discipline, privatisation, and liberalisation, as well as the African Renaissance and NEPAD. Despite the challenges posed by increased inequality and fragmentation of marginalized groups, as well as an increase in service delivery protests (Alexander, 2010; Ragolane, 2022), Mbeki's administration also placed greater emphasis on black economic empowerment (BEE) and affirmative action to address economic imbalances.

Both ambitious social policies and significant controversies characterised the Zuma administration (2009-2018). The rise of Zuma marked a radical departure from the nascent democratic contract, moving the ANC away from its role as the primary catalyst for societal transformation. The democratic social contract was reinterpreted and replaced by a party hegemony that functioned like a "shadow state," a highly organised network aimed at managing what they referred to as the symbiotic relationship between the constitutional state and the shadow state (World Bank, 2021). This social contract was redefined through the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, a comprehensive strategy aimed at eradicating poverty and reducing inequality by 2030 through inclusive growth and increasing social welfare programs to support the disadvantaged through the expansion of social grants. However, Zuma's presidency was also plagued by allegations of corruption and state capture, which eroded public trust in the social contract and led to economic challenges and social unrest (Mlambo and Thusi, 2023). This further impeded the effective implementation of the NDP and other socio-economic initiatives. The period was marked by growing public disillusionment and widespread protests over poor service delivery and corruption.

The administration led by President Ramaphosa since 2018 has strongly emphasised revitalising the economy and combating corruption, fostering economic growth, generating employment, and enhancing service delivery through the implementation of the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP). However, the government has thus far been characterised by a slowing economy, a disillusioned citizenry, and a fractured ruling party. National policies have become increasingly contentious and have been plagued by corruption, unemployment, poverty, inequality, and persistent scandals, particularly from the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party



(Mlambo *et al.*, 2023). The enduring legacy of corruption and governance failures from the previous administration continues to hinder the effective implementation of policies and the delivery of services.

The question of whether the goals set forth after 1994 in South Africa have been realised is a two-part inquiry that requires an examination of both the accomplishments achieved in transforming the socio-economic landscape and the ongoing challenges that continue to obstruct progress. Although significant strides have been made in addressing the injustices of apartheid and improving access to basic services, the realisation of the post-1994 aspirations remain an ongoing process marked by both notable accomplishments and persistent obstacles.

### **Attainment of Social Contract Efforts**

Social Contract is an ongoing agreement without a start or end date. Hence, the government owes it to the people to keep its end of the bargain. Nevertheless, in South Africa, the citizens have upheld their obligation and consistently fulfilled their tax obligations, while the government has failed to fulfil its side of the contract (Geoff, 2021). The government fails to effectively utilise its resources to ensure public safety and mediate disputes among citizens (Geoff, 2021). Put differently, Songezo Zibi (2022) posits:

“For millions of South Africans, the promise of democracy, a promise our Constitution attempts to set out in its preamble, will not be realised in their lifetime. It is a broken promise. Even those who are yet to be born will live and die poor and marginalised because their country was not ready to provide the tools that would help them to make their lives meaningful, healthy and prosperous.”

Despite the challenges faced by the government towards the Social Contract since its inception, McCandless (2021) argues that there is some level of attainment of the Social Contract which can be noted. South Africa experienced an impressive economic gain during Thabo Mbeki's presidency period (McCandless, 2018), which oversaw an average growth rate of 4.1%, and it was the strongest economic growth (Strydom, 2024). Human development indicators have improved from 62% in 1990 to 71% in 2019. Khoza (2023) contends that significant progress has been made towards service delivery in South Africa. For example, by the year 2016 87,6% of households had access to electricity, 89,8% of households used piped water, 63,4% used flush toilets that were connected to either the public sewerage or to a local septic system, and finally, 63,9% of households receive refuse removal services (Khoza 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the social contract between the government and the people in South Africa. The pandemic has put pressure on the government necessitating it to implement efficient measures to mitigate the negative impacts of the epidemic, including engaging eminent scientists with stakeholders to develop first public policy solutions, creating online resource portals to improve transparency, and providing a stimulus package to address hunger, as well as social challenges, and help enterprises and workers (McCandless, 2018). Moreover, expansive efforts can be noted towards President Ramaphosa's administration (2018- current) through the introduction of the State Capture Commission of Inquiry to investigate public sector fraud and bring officials and servants to account. In ensuring inclusivity and representation there is an impressive scoring in women in Parliament.

### **Service Delivery Challenges in South Africa**

Many emerging countries confront service delivery issues. In several of these countries, public demonstrations have erupted. In recent years, several districts in South Africa have seen violent service delivery demonstrations (Masiya, Davids & Mangai, 2023). Improving public service delivery is a major problem for local governments in Africa (Akinboade, Mokwena & Kinfack, 2014). In South Africa, governance and the delivery of essential services are severely hampered by backlog issues such as housing, water, and sanitation; relationships with communities harmed by insufficient communication and accountability; problems with the political administrative interface; and intra- and inter-political party conflicts. Lack of access to essential utilities such as housing, water, and sanitary facilities, as well as insufficient municipal capacity caused by a shortage of critical skills (Masuku & Jili, 2019). The South African government inherited service delivery backlogs from the apartheid era, affecting millions of individuals. The transition process has been challenging (Mpehle,



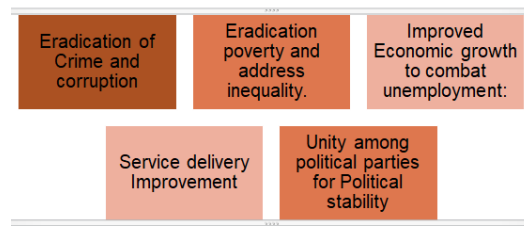
2012). South Africa's local government system is among the most advanced globally, according to its constitution. However, there are still issues with service delivery. Despite a progressive constitution, laws, and electoral democracy, South Africa has been known as the "protest capital of the world" due to growing violent social movements (Bohler-Muller, Davids, Roberts, Kanyane, Struwig, Masiya & Nomdo, 2016). Over the years, South African municipalities have recognised several ongoing service delivery challenges, including governance issues and backlogs (Masuku & Jili, 2019). Corruption at all levels of government in South Africa is a major concern that undermines municipalities' legitimacy and capacity to deliver basic services. Corruption violates human rights and undermines the ideals of the Constitution. Furthermore, ongoing corruption weakens local government structures. It blurs the line of accountability, therefore eroding the democratic value (Mashamaite, 2014). In South Africa, ethical leadership difficulties have resulted in corruption across government departments. Corruption stems from unethical leadership, leading to poor public service delivery (Mbandlwa, Dorasamy & Fagbadebo, 2020).

### **Public Perception and Citizen Satisfaction with Service Delivery**

Public perceptions of South Africa are decreasing in a consistent manner. This trend undermines democracy by suggesting that the population does not have a say in South Africa's destiny, despite voting (Tsheola, 2014). Masuku, Mlambo and Ndlovu (2022) found that despite policy efforts to improve service delivery, citizens' perception of the state remains largely negative, with significant mistrust in official institutions. Inequitable Poverty and development hinder efficient public service delivery by reducing households' access to essential services and limiting local governments' ability to reach high-cost informal settlements. Service delivery challenges have long dominated the South African political discourse. Public perception of service delivery has been poor (Pekeur, 2018). Citizen satisfaction helps policymakers and public administrators understand their consumer base, identify sub-groups, and discover gaps. Furthermore, citizen contentment might be a useful indicator of overall government performance (Masiya, Davids & Mangai, 2019). Burger (2009) identifies several grounds for service delivery demonstrations in South African municipalities. Service delivery demonstrations stem from dissatisfaction with basic municipal services, such as clean water, power, and toilets, particularly in rural areas. According to Mamokhere (2020), community protests for basic rights enshrined in the Constitution of Republic of South Africa, 1996, due to slow service delivery and dissatisfaction with municipal performance in areas such as water, sanitation, electricity, housing, and more. South Africa's public sector is in catastrophic condition after 30 years of democracy, raising concerns about its ability to satisfy people's needs. Poor public service delivery and frequent protests in South Africa contribute to this issue. Citizens have flocked to the streets to vent their dissatisfaction with a failing government (Thusi, Matyana & Jili, 2023). Service delivery protests, whether violent or nonviolent, stem from local communities' dissatisfaction with inadequate services. Protests over service delivery reveal widespread dissatisfaction with South Africa's local government structure (Ngcamu, 2019; Khoza, 2023).

### **Prospects of Government of National Unity on Social Contracts and Service Deliver in South Africa**

A new social contract for South Africa is more than just a political or legal document; it is a communal agreement that includes common values, goals, and obligations to all citizens. It means addressing the grave scars caused by decades of colonialism and apartheid (Matwadia, 2024). A new social contract necessitates the participation of the entire society. It requires dedication from all segments of society. Inclusivity and access are critical for avoiding the errors of the past GNU and establishing a sustainable future for South Africa (Solomon, 2024). The GNU represents an opportunity to reimagine a new social contract for South Africa (Hlatshwayo, 2024). The **Fig 1** below present what citizens want from GNU to prioritise sustainable service delivery and social contracts:



**Fig 1. Five things South Africans want from the Government of National Unity**

**Source: (Nkadimeng, 2024).**

Since the 1990s, South Africa's political settlement has prioritised the realisation of socio-economic rights outlined in the Constitution. However, the political solution has not resulted in equal economic and social outcomes that address past grievances and promote sustainable livelihoods (Ndinga-Kanga *et al.*, 2020). As South Africa grapples with its complex past and looks forward to a bright future, the idea of establishing a new social contract and the potential impact of a government of national unity (GNU) have emerged as key issues (Matwadia, 2024). The GNU is dedicated to ensuring that service delivery, rather than the robbery of valuable resources, is part of the new form of responsible governance (Balthazar, 2024). The GNU offers a distinctive opportunity to enhance the progress achieved since 1994 by fostering collaboration among a variety of political parties. This unity enables a more inclusive governance approach, in which multiple perspectives are considered during decision-making. This approach is informed by the statement of intent, which is embodied in the State of the Nation address, a profound government policy statement that establishes the course for socio-economic development (Masemola, 2024). Since government operations are often accused of their inefficiency and corruption, GNU partners might encourage performance and accountability (Pardey, 2024).

## DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the lofty ideals set out in the constitution and later in the policy documents of the National Planning Commission (NPC) and the NDP 2030, some consider South Africa's social contract to be at 'breaking point' (Adams, 2018). Not long before Pravin Gordhan was summarily dismissed as Minister of Finance, he stated that the ruling party has 'moved away from [its] duty to serve our people [...] we have broken that contract. With the government to blame for this discourse, it should be held accountable, and the mechanisms in the constitution (the office of the Public Protector, the Auditor General and civil society) must be allowed to function properly. Moreover, self-correcting mechanisms in the constitution and in civil society should constitutionally restore the balance' (Adams, 2018).

Research indicates that the social contract in South Africa necessitates a comprehensive re-evaluation to ensure that the expectations set for the nation and its people are fulfilled and met (Ragolane, 2022). South Africa is, in fact, plagued with numerous instances of governance failures, which cast a shadow over its democracy (Fukuyama, 2011). These issues have led to an array of social, political, and economic challenges that disrupt the lives of South Africa's citizens. The uncertainty surrounding the political system and its goals in governance has been evident in various aspects of "doubts" about what the future holds for the people. Perhaps the GNU will bring about a better future for the country through its efforts to regulate the national, provincial, and local governments in providing basic services to the citizens. However, the question remains whether this change will result in another five years of broken promises. To determine whether this change will bring forth the desired results, it will be crucial to evaluate the delivery of services, as the failure to fulfil the promise of democracy poses one of the greatest challenges to the legitimacy of political systems (Fukuyama, 2011).

Our perspective is that it is crucial to have a discussion about renewing the social contract, especially in light of the challenges highlighted by protests, such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality, following the COVID-19 pandemic (Dhisha, 2021). This is essential for creating a fair social contract that addresses the changing needs of the 21st century. Based on these considerations, it is important for the social contract to prioritise maintaining a balance of power within the state, upholding the

rule of law, and ensuring accountability. Is the current social contract in South Africa similar to the one established 30 years ago? Literature suggests that the social contract, as outlined in the Constitution, Bill of Rights, policies, and manifestos, has not been fully realised (Ragolane and Malatji, 2024; Ragolane, 2022). Despite the Constitution's goal of redressing the injustices of the Apartheid regime by guaranteeing access to socio-economic rights, the government has failed to fulfil these obligations. This failure has become more apparent since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, as many South Africans have been unable to follow basic non-pharmaceutical measures due to inadequate access to water and sanitation, food and nutrition, healthcare, and quality education (Dhisha, 2021).

These observations indicate that while there has been a change in government in the 2024 elections, democracy in itself must not be carried out as a mere concept but implemented in practice to deliver on the promises of the people. As Fukuyama (2011) points out democracy as a concept is attractive to many people because it promises accountable and effective government. However, the failure often comes not from the idea of democracy but from how it is carried out in practice. People around the world generally want an accountable government (answerable to the people) and effective (able to provide services efficiently and cost-effectively). However, many governments struggle to deliver on these promises due to issues like weak institutions, corruption, insufficient capacity, or even the lack of institutions altogether. This means that even if a country transitions from an authoritarian or apartheid regime to a democratic one, the new democratic government might still fail to function effectively. Simply changing the form of government (e.g., moving from authoritarianism to democracy) is not enough. Successful democracy requires strong institutions, rules, systems and organisations that effectively support governance. Building these institutions is a long, difficult, and expensive process. Passion and activism alone, while important for initiating change, are insufficient without the hard work of establishing and maintaining effective institutions. (Fukuyama, 2011).

In order to address the persistent issues that hinder the successful implementation of the Social Contract, the study recommends the following to ensure the attainment of Social Contract objectives:

*Revisit the social contract:* While the promises of the Social Contract Post-1994 are still not realised to this day, a revisit of the social contract is crucial requiring a renewed focus, essential to prioritise the efforts to reduce inequality, improve transparency, responsiveness and foster equitable economic growth. The new social contract should also take into consideration the ever-changing needs of society more especially in this digital age era. This will ensure a modernised governance.

*Strengthening anti-corruption measures:* Inequality and exclusion stem from policy choices and are fuelled by corruption; they undermine foundations of inclusive and resilient national social contracts, e.g. trust in government and societal willingness to consent to difficult policy choices. The decline in involvement in official electoral procedures and the increase in protests suggest a loss of trust in current political systems and institutions for settling conflicts and promoting consensual politics. Protests frequently serve as a clear indication of a decline in the degree of faith in government and not actively participating in government elections (Ragolane and Khoza, 2024). Some claim that the results of the IEC are manipulated and thus, promoting corrupt activity. This then calls for strengthened systems and frameworks to effectively manage and mitigate corruption in the public sector.

Enhancing society safety nets such as increasing the coverage of social grants and enhancing healthcare services, can effectively mitigate poverty and provide assistance to marginalised groups. Implementing strong measures towards social welfare programs will foster social cohesion; promote human capital development; mitigate the risk of misuse and purchase of socially undesirable substances by providing a cushion against livelihood shocks and stimulate local demand.

*Increase support and protection for Civil Society Organisations:* As watchdogs, civil society organisations need help and increased support from the government. This includes profound protection for civil society activists in holding the government into account and exercising their advocate role in consolidating democracy. This is to remedy the increasing cases of murder of activists and threats that hinder their oversight role.

*Civic Education:* At times people lack knowledge of what their Social Contract entails, therefore this necessitates that there must be increased civic education on what is the Social Contract, the government's role, and how citizens will benefit from it. This entails community projects and campaigns to empower citizens with knowledge to help them to effectively engage. This will in turn encourage active participation by the people in the democratic process, ultimately promoting collaborative governance among stakeholders.

## CONCLUSION

The study has explored the development of service delivery and the Social Contract in post-apartheid South Africa. The South African government is still challenged in their pursuit to deliver basic services to its citizens and meet its contractual obligation. This is attributed to its historical legacies making it difficult to achieve Social Contract imperatives. Although the contract is based on the principles of equality, social justice, and inclusive economic growth, issues like as corruption, inequality, and inconsistent service provision have put pressure on this relationship, resulting in public discontent and demands for increased accountability. The African National Congress (ANC) has been subject to criticism for its failure to completely fulfil the commitments outlined in the social compact, resulting in a sense of disillusionment among many South Africans due to the slow pace of progress and the absence of accountability. Thus, this calls for greater and renewed commitment to address these pressing issues and ensure effective and efficient governance with principles of good governance at the heart of the Social Contract. With the current government being a Government of National Unity (GNU), it is crucial to prioritise the establishment of the social contract. According to various researchers, when a GNU is in effect, the primary focus of the involved parties is often on advancing their political agendas rather than prioritizing democracy and political unity to address the interests of the people. Therefore, we assert that the political landscape in South Africa is evolving in the 21st century. As a result, the evolving political landscape must be in part with the needs of the people to ensure that what was promised is delivered effectively and efficiently.

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