

Editorial

-- by Martin Nicol

Resilience surprises!

Let's just say 2024 has been the year of elections for Africa, and the results have for the most part been unexpected, to say the least. While the usual stories abound about vote rigging, corruption and 'stay on a bit longer' shenanigans, voters in some African countries have turned things around and challenged the status quo in states that have looked as if those in power would be there forever ... South Africa being a case in point.





In contrast with the doom and gloom of many of the contributions published in a recent issue of *New Agenda* which marked 30 years of democracy in South Africa, this issue of *New Agenda* brings a close to the journal for 2024 with a series of articles that reflect and record the fortitude of our democracy, and the people's determination to defend and preserve it.

The Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA) has made the unusual editorial decision of publishing in this issue a comprehensive three-part focus on a subject that has preoccupied us greatly over the past years – the relationship between corruption and democracy.

IFAA thanks the author, founder and former Director of Corruption Watch, David Lewis, for choosing *New Agenda* as the platform to publish this analysis of South Africa's downhill slide into the chaos of state capture and now a chance of recovery. While the Government of National Unity (GNU) is decidedly precarious at this time, it seemed fitting that we end 2024 by publishing a forward-looking article that signals much-needed change and possibly an opportunity to reset and revive the democracy South Africa started out with in 1994.

When you read "Corruption v Democracy" parts 1, 2 and 3 you will be reminded how very close the country came to irreversible disaster. The attempt at state capture – by the Zumas, the Guptas, the Bosasas and their running dogs – very nearly succeeded. Lewis looks at how this corrupt syndicate, united by a drive to use state power for personal profit, rigged institutions and structures in an effort to hold onto unbridled power and control. However, unlike many other countries (Russia, Algeria, Egypt...) they were halted; South Africa's key institutions of democracy, particularly the judiciary, but also the media and civil society, fought back and interrupted the steal.

But the cost was, and still is, high. Lewis argues that the major loser in the state capture story has been the ANC, which split ruinously and lost its majority in parliament. Control of the ANC, particularly through its branches, was a key requirement for state capture.

South Africa is not out of the woods yet. Corruption still abounds, and very seriously at local government level and in some major provinces. Our burdened law enforcement institutions are still trying to convict villains fingered in the Zondo Commission report. Several of these bottom feeders are now honourable members of the seventh democratic parliament, having been allowed onto the electoral lists of the MK Party after the election was over. (Even though the Constitutional Court found that the party leader himself, former President Zuma, was barred from standing for election to parliament because he is a convicted criminal who was sentenced to a jail term longer than one year.)

The 2024 election has provided South Africa with a respite. The future of democracy is still based on the rainbow nation in all its diversity. Does the political system have sufficient capacity to correct course and, most critically, to tackle persistent and widening inequality and massive unemployment?

The other articles in this issue of *New Agenda*, and indeed the work of IFAA and civil society in all its formations, is driven by the urgent need to find the way forward to achieving that goal.

A year of elections

2024 was called the "year of elections". Almost half the world's population lives in countries that were scheduled to vote during the year. Some planned elections were cancelled – for example in South Sudan, Burkino Faso and Mali. Some produced spectacular support for incumbents who had meddled with the electoral process to disadvantage opposition parties in one way or another – Kagame was awarded 99% of the vote in Rwanda, Saïed in Tunisia achieved 91% and Tebboune in Algeria secured 84% in his landslide re-election win. Some were transparently and blatantly rigged, as in Mozambique. Chad's military leader, Mahamat Idriss Déby (who seized power after the former president, his father, died in 2021), was declared the winner of a disputed presidential election with 61% of the vote.

But there were also surprises. Elections in Senegal in March, after the courts rejected a 'stay on a bit longer' move by President Macky Sall, made opposition politician Bassirou Diomaye Faye the new president. Faye was released from prison days before the election, which he won with 54% of the vote. In Botswana the long-ruling government party was bundled out of parliament in a landslide defeat. The President conceded even before the results were confirmed, and wished his successor all the best.

In South Africa, the defeated ANC formed a Government of National Unity (GNU) that includes the former main opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (rather than the shards of the populist Economic Freedom Fighters [EFF] and uMkhonto weSizwe [MK] parties). Commentators speak of "a seismic shift" (*Economist*, 7



October 2024), but these were the seventh set of stable, free and fair elections since 1994. And the GNU, as a coalition, does not have a settled policy on anything.

Periodisers of South African history will note that the GNU was formed exactly a century after the 1924 “Pact Government”, where the whites-only Nationalist and Labour parties defeated Smuts’ South African Party. This ushered in a period of radical change marked by tariffs to encourage local industry and transformative labour legislation. That was a seismic shift – not so sure about the GNU.

One year of the revamped *e-New Agenda*

New Agenda’s Issue 95 marks the end of the first year of the journal’s move into the digital age, with the launch of the new look digital journal. We hope you like it. IFAA aims to take our work further into the public domain using the opportunities provided by technology. We gratefully thank our long-standing funder, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, for its steadfast support in this ongoing digitalisation of IFAA’s flagship publication and other information and communication channels.

We also thank the University of the Western Cape (UWC) for partnering with us in our move into the online content management system run by the UWC library and providing us with the requisite open source “OJS” software. All of our four issues for 2024 are now housed on the UWC portal. All articles are available in PDF format on the site, and each has a Digital Object Identifier (DOI) to enhance discoverability and citation tracking. DOI allocation provides a permanent and unique link to the articles, facilitating easier access for readers and ensuring that the scholarly contributions are properly attributed.

The registration of our e-ISSN is in progress, to provide an electronic complement to the long-existing ISSN. *New Agenda* and its publishers are extremely grateful to Mark Snyders, Manager of Scholarly Communication at the Main Library, UWC, and his team for training, hand-holding and support this year.

We are still experimenting with the best ways to develop our character as a “hybrid” journal that includes both peer-reviewed academic articles and commentaries, reviews and essays that reflect our history as a vehicle for political and social activism. Some of this content comes from the campaigns and events (virtual as well as face-to-face) that are generated by the socially engaged activities of IFAA. This is of fundamental importance to the profile of the journal.

The ‘balance’ between peer-reviewed academic content and commentaries varies, sometimes markedly, between issues. Issue 94 was a Special Issue on food security in Africa that featured academic outputs from a visionary international programme to develop the capacity of younger researchers in Africa. All content in the issue underwent a double blind peer review process. This issue, no 95, contains only one academic article (by Sergio Carciotto). For the rest we have focused on our work as IFAA, for example our exciting Living Rights Festival, which we hope to develop into an annual event.

The Living Rights Festival was a unique collaboration of Cape Town artists, actors, poets, writers, scholars and activists in a call for justice, peace and human rights in response to escalating global conflicts and deepening humanitarian crises. Initiated by IFAA, it a community-led initiative to address the growing global violence and injustice that threatens the planet’s collective future and offered a programme of panel discussions and cultural interventions to confront injustice, advocate for essential freedoms, and inspire a new vision of global peace and dignity.

We are continually reviewing our performance against the ‘better journal guidelines’ from the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), which oversees compliance with the Department of Higher Education and Training’s academic accreditation requirements, as well as those provided by African Journals Online (AJOL), the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL). We already follow the guidelines (although there is always space for improvement). Our challenge is updating and particularising on the *New Agenda* web platforms all the information we provide authors and reviewers. There are three of these ‘portals’, each being enhanced as our capacity allows.

As 2024 ends, IFAA’s editorial collective wants to express its enormous thanks to the Institute for Social Development and all UWC colleagues for their support and guidance, and to our editorial board who has accompanied us on this journey. *New Agenda* is so much stronger, and more centred as an African journal because of its partnership with this storied university and the support of the international academics who comprise the editorial board.

See the full issue of *New Agenda 95* at <https://epubs.ac.za/index.php/newagenda>