



Growth prospects of the African National Congress manifesto

May 2024
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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1. Growth focus	1
1.2. Dwindling wealth	1
1.3. Implications of low growth	2
2. Election prospects	2
3. ANC Election Manifesto 2024	3
3.1. Continuity	3
3.2. Achievements	3
3.3. Tripartite Alliance	4
3.4. Transformation	5
3.5. Six priorities	6
3.5.1. Put South Africa to work	6
3.5.2. Build our industries to achieve an inclusive economy	8
Master Plans	8
Localisation	9
Labour-intensive sectors	10
Red flags	10
Fixing broken infrastructure	11
Prescribed assets	11
3.5.3. Tackle the high cost of living	11
3.5.4. Invest in people	13
3.5.5. Defend democracy and advance freedom	14
Crime and crime prevention	14
Corruption	15
Developmental state	16
Moral regeneration	16
3.5.6. Building a better Africa and World	17
3.6. From manifesto to action	18
4. Conclusion	19



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1. Introduction

In this paper, we review the election manifesto¹ of the African National Congress (ANC), published in advance of the 2024 National and Provincial Elections to be held in South Africa on 29 May 2024.

If you have read the introduction to *Growth prospects of the Democratic Alliance manifesto*, feel free to skip to section 2, *Election prospects*.

1.1. Growth focus

This review will have a singular focus, because there is a singular overarching goal that any post-election public policy must achieve, and that is vigorous economic growth.

That is not to say that other objectives are not important, or not necessary. Far from it. However, the success of everything else, from reducing poverty to reconstructing failing infrastructure to improving race relations depend upon economic growth.

Without rapid growth, South Africa will become a failed state in which factions of the wealthy elite fight each other for the opportunity to extract resources and loot dwindling wealth, trampling the shrinking middle class and growing poor masses underfoot.

With rapid economic growth, everything else – from poverty reduction to jobs growth, from education to healthcare, and from redress for past injustice to economic inclusivity – becomes possible. Without it, all other policies, however well-intended or well-crafted, will fail.

1.2. Dwindling wealth

The African National Congress (ANC) won a national majority in South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, and has been the sole governing party ever since.

The government embarked on expansive programmes to dismantle the legacy of apartheid, integrate education and other services, improve housing conditions, and extend access to utilities like water and electricity to those who had historically been denied it.

Monetary and fiscal discipline, and economic policies that were largely pro-market and investor-friendly, ensured that despite these expenses South Africa's per-capita GDP closely tracked the world average during the first half of its incumbency, between 1994 and 2008.

In 1994, South Africa's GDP per capita² was \$9 690, compared to a world average³ of \$9 810. In 2008, they still matched, at \$13 596 for South Africa and \$13 659 for the world. Both had grown by an average of 2.6% a year.

The world average includes large, developed economies with low growth rates. South Africa was an emerging market that ought to have been growing much faster, which still puts this growth in a poor light. However, the country was more or less keeping up, and perceptible progress in the living conditions of the poor kept the electorate largely satisfied with the government's performance.

This all changed with the global financial crisis of 2007 and 2008, and the 2009 election of Jacob Zuma to the presidency of the ANC and of the country.

In 2009 the curves began to diverge sharply. While the world's GDP per capita continued to grow to \$17 523, representing 1.9% growth per year, South Africa's GDP per capita marginally declined, to \$13 479.

This is an ongoing economic catastrophe, indicating that South Africa's anaemic economic growth is not even keeping up with population growth.

1.3. Implications of low growth

This means that 'a better life for all', to quote the popular political slogan of the ruling ANC, is not being achieved.

It means that average living conditions cannot improve. It means that the economy cannot absorb new jobseekers. It means that social welfare provisions become increasingly unaffordable. It means that civil service wage growth is unsustainable. It means that the campaign against poverty is in retreat. It means that investments earn a poor return by comparison to growth markets. It means that economic dynamism remains low, which depresses tax revenues, which curtails spending on essential services such as healthcare, education, infrastructure and policing.

As the CEO of the Institute of Race Relations (IRR), John Endres, put it in *The IRR's Blueprint for Growth*, 'The government has resigned itself to administering misery through state alms and subsidies, rather than resolving it. While paying lip service to desiring economic growth, in reality its ambitions extend no further than helping the poorest stave off total destitution by providing them with dysfunctional state services and miserly social grants.'⁴

He continues: 'Entirely missing is any ambition to combat poverty and defeat it decisively, rather than simply overseeing it. That is entirely unsatisfactory. The main objective of the South African government should be to eliminate poverty by increasing prosperity.'

And further: 'Contrary to the apparent belief of the ANC government, poverty cannot be defeated through redistribution. It can only be beaten by fast economic growth.'

In keeping with these observations, the manifestos of would-be governing parties, whether they expect to govern with an outright majority or as part of a coalition, should support this main objective: eliminating poverty by increasing prosperity; that is, to achieve rapid economic growth.

2. Election prospects

The ANC is hoping to retain its grip on the national government, and most of South Africa's provinces, in the 2024 election.

Pre-election polls available at the time of writing were variable, and sometimes contradictory, but taken together they suggest it is unlikely but not impossible that the ANC will retain an outright majority, and it is also unlikely but not impossible for an opposition coalition to unseat the ANC.

The two most likely outcomes are that the ANC will be able to form a coalition, either with a few small but pliant parties contributing only a few percentage points to reach 50%, or, if the ANC's own electoral fate is worse, and closer to 40%, with one or more major opposition parties.

In the latter case, the most likely candidate is probably the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), which will be able to extract significant concessions in favour of its revolutionary, Marxist-Leninist-Fanonist, agenda.

Other combinations are also plausible, the most notable of which would be an ANC coalition with the Democratic Alliance (DA), which might draw the ANC's post-election policies in a more liberal direction.

While the DA might consider such a coalition, in the hope of improving its ability to hold the national government to account and as a launchpad for a putative opposition coalition majority in 2029, it is unclear which way the ANC would lean.

Provincially, the ANC will most likely retain power in six of the eight provinces in which it governs, the ninth being the Western Cape, which the DA will likely retain.

Polling indicates that the ANC is on track to lose control of both Gauteng, where the loss of urban support for the party is most keenly felt, and KwaZulu-Natal, where the newly-launched MK Party of former president Jacob Zuma threatens to draw a large share of voters away from the ANC.

For the ANC to cobble together governing coalitions in these two provinces would be possible, but require it to extend hands across acrimonious political divides.

3. ANC Election Manifesto 2024

3.1. Continuity

The ANC's manifesto highlights the party's past achievements, but promises to learn from the past, 'from mistakes and setbacks'.

It celebrates 'the journey to a united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous society, which guarantees a better life for all,' and says: 'We will do better, we will do more and we will do it faster. Together.'

For the most part, the ANC promises policy continuity, seeking to 'speed up transformation', and recommits itself to the 'immediate national aspirations' of the National Development Plan, which is to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030.

3.2. Achievements

It spends several pages on what the party considers to be its achievements. It reaffirms its central role in the defeat of apartheid, and in working 'towards a common vision of a united, democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and more equal South Africa.'

Although it justifiably claims that 'the lives of millions of South Africans have improved', it also engages in some electioneering sleight-of-hand.

It benchmarks achievements against 1994 ('Our economy has tripled in size since 1994'), and cherry-picks positive statistics ('the number of people in employment has more than doubled from 8 million in 1994 to 16.7 million today').

These claims gloss over the fact that the party's policies have been far from non-racial, that South Africa is not particularly united, and that inequality has, in fact, increased.⁵

They also neatly omit that economic growth has stagnated since 2010,⁶ that GDP per capita has declined since about 2013,⁷ and that both the unemployment rate,⁸ and the absolute number of unemployed people⁹ have sharply increased in the last 10 to 15 years, to record levels.

The manifesto's claims to past achievements, therefore, do not paint a complete picture of the last 30 years of ANC rule in South Africa.

3.3. Tripartite Alliance

The ANC's partners in the Tri-Partite Alliance have endorsed its manifesto.

The South African Communist Party (SACP) in a statement¹⁰ said that the party was 'actively involved in the ANC-led Alliance manifesto drafting consultative process', and described it as 'consensus-seeking consultation'.

This is consistent with the ANC's unwavering support of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR),¹¹ the ideological lodestone that was written in the 1960s by the SACP under Soviet guidance, and has been included in the ANC's *Strategy and Tactics*¹² at every ANC policy conference since then.

The SACP provides intellectual leadership to the ANC. It does not participate in elections itself, but expects the ANC to act as its ideological proxy.

The NDR envisaged a two-stage revolution. The first phase was to overthrow apartheid and attain a democracy with a universal franchise. This was an ideal shared by liberals, who fought for political equality alongside the ANC.

Having achieved democracy in 1994, the second phase, now underway, is to seek the gradual implementation of socialism, as the 'transitional social system between capitalism...and [the] fully classless, communist society'.

This is where the paths of the left-wing liberation movement and classical liberalism, as espoused by the IRR, diverge.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions also issued a statement calling upon workers to vote for the ANC in 2024, but it appears to have copied and pasted text from the 2004 election ('We know that progress has often been slower than we expected when we won the great victory against apartheid ten years ago. We could not overcome 300 years of colonialism and apartheid in a single decade.'¹³) and makes some questionable claims ('Today, most American citizens [sic] over the age of 18 are entitled to vote in National and Provincial elections, but voting was not a right prior to 1994.')

Although the labour movement has been heavily critical of the ANC's under-performance and corruption in recent years, and even threatened to pull out of the Tripartite Alliance and call on the SACP to contest elections on its own,¹⁴ Cosatu has thrown its considerable voting weight behind the ANC and its 2024 election manifesto.

3.4. Transformation

The ANC admits 'the poor performance of the economy', and blames 'internal and external challenges, including economic downturns, the effects of state capture, the COVID-19 pandemic, load shedding, global political conflict, the July 2021 unrest and climate change'.

In response, the manifesto says, 'South Africa has a choice: transform or stagnate.'

The real choice, as explained in *The IRR's Blueprint for Growth*,¹⁵ is between *growth* and stagnation.

The term transformation is not defined at all in the ANC's manifesto, and only vaguely defined in general.

It is sometimes used simply to refer to economic progress, such as in the following: 'Despite persisting challenges, we made progress in economic transformation, with initiatives to promote job creation, infrastructure development, broadening economic opportunities and investment.'

Elsewhere, it is often meant to indicate either a greater degree of demographic representivity, or less subtly, preferential treatment for black Africans, and sometimes women and people with disabilities.

In policy documents, it often refers to the transformation of the economy to increase the developmental role of the state, seize the 'commanding heights of the economy', and progress in stages (such as through nationalisation and expropriation) to a more radical, socialist economy.

Different factions within the ANC use the term freely, though often with vague and sometimes conflicting meanings.

In principle, a transformation from a racially-exclusive economy to one in which all are equally represented, is a noble objective. So is 'working to transform the economy to focus on increased industrialisation, jobs and opportunities for all'.

In the ANC's ideology, however, all of the meanings of transformation, whether for worthy objectives or otherwise, involve greater state intervention in the economy and a crowding out of free market dynamics.

The ANC appears to believe that material equality and demographic representivity will bring growth and prosperity. Classical liberals believe that growth and prosperity will create opportunities to improve material equality and demographic representivity, should people choose to exploit them.

In the senses in which the ANC uses the term transformation, it does not mean growth. Instead, it deliberately deprioritises growth in favour of other social, economic or political objectives.

However, given the parlous state of the South African economy, economic growth should be the sole over-arching priority of any would-be government. Other social, economic or political objectives, however important, can only be realised in an environment of rapid and sustained economic growth.

3.5. Six priorities

The ANC election manifesto offers six priorities, which it claims will make it possible to ‘eradicate income poverty and reduce inequality, so that the wealth of the country is more equitably shared’.

These are:

1. Put South Africa to work, through public employment programmes that create work opportunities in the public, small businesses and social sectors.
2. Build our industries for an inclusive economy, by implementing a cross-cutting industrial strategy that drives growth and creates opportunities for youth and other unemployed persons.
3. Tackle the high cost of living, by taking steps to make everyday life more affordable for workers, unemployed persons, women-headed households and the middle class by addressing key needs like food, housing, health care, energy, transport and wages.
4. Invest in people, by meeting the basic needs of all, investing in education, improving health outcomes and improving service delivery.
5. Defend democracy and advance freedom.
6. Build a better Africa and world, by supporting development and peace efforts on our continent and across the world, strengthen trade and investment links with other countries and work towards the reform of international bodies.

The ANC manifesto mentions economic growth only seven times in its 58 pages, and often qualifies it with adjectives such as ‘sustainable’ or ‘inclusive’, which imply conditionality on other objectives, seen as equally or more important than economic growth.

There is little, if anything, that is new in the ANC’s six priorities. There is nothing that the ANC has not promised before. Like Cosatu’s endorsement, much of the 2024 manifesto might have been lifted straight from the manifestos of years gone by.

3.5.1. *Put South Africa to work*

South Africa’s single biggest socio-economic problem is its world-record unemployment rate, which reached 32.9% in 2023, and 42.4% if you include people too discouraged to even look for work.

The International Monetary Fund expects this rate to rise to 33.5% in 2024, and 33.9% in 2025.¹⁶

The country's demographics, unlike in many northern-hemisphere countries such as the US, EU, China and Japan, skews heavily towards youth. This should be a tremendous economic boon for the country, but with almost half of South Africans under 35 now being jobless, they're a burden, instead, and also pose a significant risk to social stability.¹⁷

Despite this crisis, the ANC's manifesto devotes only a single page, of 250 words, to its 'jobs plan'.

This 'plan' sets the pattern for most of the rest of its manifesto.

First, it seeks to use the public purse to, '[e]xpand public employment to sustain 2.5 million work opportunities delivering public goods and services in communities. This includes work done through the Presidential Employment Stimulus, funding to civil society through non-profit companies and organisations to provide work opportunities; expand and institutionalise the National Youth Service in partnership with the SANDF, and work opportunities for unemployed graduates'.

These 'work opportunities' are almost always temporary jobs, and very often pay substantially less than the minimum wage. Many of them are unproductive by design, since they are part of labour-intensive make-work projects that could be completed much faster, and at much less expense, if machinery and technology were employed instead.

Second, the ANC promises to '[i]ncrease support for small enterprises, entrepreneurs and cooperatives, especially in townships and villages, providing additional one million work opportunities, with set-asides for women, youth and persons with disabilities'.

Subsidising selected businesses to create jobs is not a reliable means of encouraging sustainable economic activity. Shoehorning other socio-political objectives into such a programme will make it even less effective than it already is.

Third, the ANC will '[e]ngage the private sector on job creation, to protect jobs and contribute to national efforts to create employment and get South Africans working'.

The ANC has been 'engaging the private sector on job creation' for 30 years, with nothing to show for it. This is a tacit admission that the ANC has no idea what the private sector needs in order to organically create jobs.

This promise means only that the ANC will stick to what it knows and already does: government intervention. It will continue to make subsidy support, licences and permits, tax breaks, and import tariff protection dependent on employment commitments, as it does today.

Finally, the manifesto promises to '[c]ontinue to promote and monitor employment equity to ensure that black people, women and persons with disabilities are represented in the public and private sectors, in the professions and artisanal sectors towards the growth of a vibrant, non-racial and non-sexist middle strata, critical to national development'.

As discussed above, this is putting the cart before the horse. All the ANC's commitment to employment equity and other racial preferences has achieved is to create a limited black elite, while it has left more than half of South Africans below the upper-bound poverty line.

(Up-to-date claims about poverty are impossible to substantiate, because there is no data more recent than 2016.¹⁸)

The growth of the black middle class is dependent not in the first instance on demographic representation, but on substantive employment growth that exceeds the rate at which new job-seekers enter the market.

The ANC's commitment to 'public and social employment programmes', which have failed to make much impact in the past, will not make much impact in the future.

What the ANC calls 'Our Jobs Plan' is, unfortunately, not a plan at all. It will not contribute substantially to the creation of productive jobs, nor to the ability of the private sector to organically create jobs, nor, ultimately, to economic growth.

3.5.2. Build our industries to achieve an inclusive economy

The ANC manifesto devotes the most space to industrial policy – seven times more space than to jobs.

This is no surprise, given the ANC's ideological commitment to a 'developmental state', characterised by strong state intervention, extensive regulation and central planning.

It will, literally, do all the things. It will 'empower cooperative banks', 'support small-scale fishing cooperatives', 'develop gas, nuclear and hydro power projects', 'restore domestic refinery capacity', establish a 'sovereign wealth fund', 'develop and expand the local digital sector', and 'support at least 2,000 black industrialists, especially women, persons with disability and young people', among many other things.

Almost all of these promises have been made before, and in almost all cases, they have failed to achieve economic growth, industrialisation, or job creation.

On the contrary: despite decades of industrial policy planning, South Africa's manufacturing industry has collapsed. As a share of GDP, manufacturing has declined from 21% of GDP in 1994 to 12% in 2022.¹⁹ In 1996, it dropped to a 35-year low of 20.3% – lower than at any time since the founding of the Republic – and it has declined steadily ever since.

Manufacturing employment declined from 1.4 million in 2005 to 1.09 million in 2021. Today, 22.5% of manufacturing capacity is underutilised, according to the South African Federation of Trade Unions.²⁰

Master Plans

The ANC promises to use familiar industrial policy tools. It will, it says, 'Consolidate industrial and sectoral master plans into a comprehensive industrial policy to drive localisation.'

Business in South Africa is well acquainted with the ANC's master plans.

It has master plans in place for the commercial forestry sector, for the poultry sector, for the R-CTFL (retail, clothing, textiles, footwear and leather) value chain, for the sugar value chain, for steel and metal fabrication, for the cultural and creative industries, for the furniture industry, and for the automotive industry.²¹

None of these master plans has been particularly successful, however. In most of these planned industries, exports have fallen sharply, import protection remains necessary, growth has been stagnant, domestic prices have remained high, and major companies have been closing.²²

Even in the automotive industry, the jewel in the ANC's industrial policy crown, the master plan shows signs of unraveling. One major manufacturer has gone on record to express concern about the future of its South African operations, and poured cold water on the prospect of building electric vehicles in South Africa.

'Eventually you have to say, why are we building cars in a less competitive factory somewhere far away from the real market where the consumption is?' Volkswagen's global brand chief Thomas Schäfer told Reuters last year. 'I'm very worried about it ... We're not in the business of charity.'²³

Instead of picking winners, the government has picked losers, and the people of South Africa are paying premiums to prop up uncompetitive, inefficient industries as a result.

More of the same industrial policy planning is extremely unlikely to turn South Africa's industrial fortunes around.

Localisation

Neither is localisation. The idea that South Africa can pull itself out of its economic malaise by import substitution and raising export taxes, as the ANC proposes, is antithetical to growth.

Autarky (self-sufficiency) did not serve to rescue the faltering apartheid-era economy under B.J. Vorster and P.W. Botha, and it will not serve to rescue the ANC-era economy, either.

By simple logic, intervening in an economy to direct markets reduces efficiency and results in lower quality, higher prices, or both. These costs are ultimately born by consumers, and hit the poor the hardest.

The belief that developing economies are harmed by free trade, and should persist with import substitution and protectionism in pursuit of a more self-sufficient economy, is a relic of the 1960s.²⁴

The same goes for the belief that imports are bad, and exports are good. A country's people cannot eat exports, but they can eat imports. The only reason to export is to earn currency with which to buy imports.

Producing goods domestically that can be imported more cheaply does not strengthen the economy. In reality, by raising prices and lowering quality, it makes the buyers of those goods poorer, and destroys wealth that could have been spent or invested more productively elsewhere.

As with industrial policy planning, a localisation policy is unlikely to be successful, and if it is successful, it will not materially raise economic growth. On the contrary, it will depress growth.

Labour-intensive sectors

The ANC also promises to '[p]rioritise industrial sectors that are labour intensive'.

It will, its manifesto says, '[c]ontinue to cultivate partnerships to expand domestic industries with significant potential to create sustainable jobs such as mining (including artisanal and small-scale mining), agriculture, energy, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals and medical equipment, the green and blue economies, tourism, the creative sector and the digital economy.'

In principle, the idea of reviving and reinvigorating labour-intensive industries by removing obstacles to their flourishing is sound. In particular, the three sectors that have long employed large numbers of unskilled people should be prioritised: agriculture, mining and tourism.

However, while the ANC proposes to '[m]ore effectively use provisions in the Constitution and expropriation legislation to accelerate land reform and redistribution to reduce asset inequality', the IRR's *Blueprint for Growth* says that restoring secure property rights is at the top of a list of necessary policy reforms, followed by other reforms that fly in the face of ANC ideology, such as reforming labour legislation to create a more flexible and less costly market for labour.

None of the ANC's policy proposals are likely to help ' industrial sectors that are labour intensive' succeed.

Red flags

There are many other red flags in the industrial planning section of the ANC's 2024 election manifesto.

Among them are pie-in-the-sky ambitions such as 'become a world player in green hydrogen, battery and electric vehicle production,' which is unlikely to happen even with the best will in the world, and is certain not to happen without the major economic reforms necessary to unleash private-sector investment, reduce labour costs, slash red tape and over-regulation, and dismantle onerous race-based empowerment policies.

Another is the desire, on one hand, to 'increase exports to global and continental markets,' while on the other implementing 'export taxes on essential raw materials'.

The ANC proposes to: 'Coordinate fiscal and monetary policy mandates, including interest and exchanges rates, towards supporting balanced and sustainable growth as envisaged in the Constitution. Where necessary, this will require an expansionary fiscal policy.'

The manifesto is vague on exactly what the ANC will do with interest rates, exchange rates or monetary policy, but intervening in any of them would raise grave concerns about the independence of the South African Reserve Bank, which governs interest rates and is mandated to protect the currency. Interfering with the central bank is a key milestone on the way to hyperinflation, which is why this promise is a red flag.

Some of the ANC's manifesto commitments are real head-scratchers. 'The requirement of experience for entry-level jobs in the public sector has been scrapped. Business has been encouraged to do the same.'

One wonders why that requirement existed in the first place, and whether a government that imposed such a requirement for entry-level jobs should be entrusted with managing the public sector at all.

Fixing broken infrastructure

Many of the ANC's promises are simply commitments to remedy what existing ANC government policies has broken.

For example, it wouldn't have to 'restore domestic refinery capacity' if all four of the major refineries had not ceased operating, 'mainly due [to] a persistent lack of regulatory certainty and policy stability,' according to Bonang Mohale, a former chairman of Shell Oil Products Africa and former CEO of Business Leadership South Africa.²⁵

The same goes for its commitments to, '[m]obilise investments in freight rail infrastructure to enhance logistics and shift goods from road to rail', '[m]odernise commuter rail for efficient and green public transport', and '[r]estructure ports with modern technology to increase efficiency'.

None of these would have been necessary had these infrastructure services not collapsed entirely as a consequence of ANC policies and ANC corruption.

Prescribed assets

Many of the ANC's promises will require funding, and the manifesto leaves no doubt where that funding will come from: 'prescribed assets', 'progressive tax reforms' and 'other measures'.

Taking more money from the private sector to pump into state-owned enterprises and government infrastructure projects will not only drive away both investment and high-net-worth families, but it will also reduce the capital available for more productive ventures, which in turn will dampen, rather than stimulate, economic growth.

That the ANC once again has to promise to establish both a sovereign wealth fund and a state bank, after having promised to do so in its 2019 manifesto, throws this issue into stark relief: the money to establish these entities has simply not been available, because it was needed to bail out one state-owned enterprise after another.

Billions vanished into these bottomless pits. Proposing to throw pension funds and other private assets after them is a violation of property rights which destroys the confidence needed for vigorous economic growth.

3.5.3. Tackle the high cost of living

The ANC's 2024 election manifesto spends exactly one page on the high cost of living, which it promises to 'tackle' by increasing hand-outs to the poor, up to and including a basic income support grant, increasing the national minimum wage, expanding subsidies for basic services, and regulating rental prices for student accommodation.

All of these interventions are likely to fail at their objectives, while risking negative side-effects.

Increasing social welfare support, for example, merely masks the problem of rising living costs, instead of addressing the causes of price inflation. Perversely, raising welfare grants can in themselves be inflationary, if they are not accompanied by a commensurate increase in production of goods and services.

Producers and retailers, knowing that customers now have more money at their disposal, are likely to respond in the short term by raising prices, rather than raising production.

A higher minimum wage has similar inflationary effects. It also benefits only the employed. South Africa's minimum wage is set at three times the upper-bound poverty level, and about level with the median wage.

As the IRR's Gabriel Crouse has pointed out, this level is extraordinarily high, by comparison even with highly developed countries.

While there is some debate about the effects of a minimum wage set at a lower level in countries with less unemployment, there can be little doubt that in the South African context, the extraordinarily high minimum wage requirement is likely to drive up unemployment unless employers ignore it – as they are increasingly doing, which helps to explain the rapid growth in South Africa's informal economy.²⁶

There is limited evidence on the effect of higher minimum wages on employment (although fully one third of domestic workers lost their jobs since the introduction of the national minimum wage in 2019²⁷) but they are unlikely to stimulate employment.

Regulating prices, as the ANC manifesto proposes, has its own unintended side-effects, which includes creating shortages when the government sets a price below the market price. Controlling rental prices, for example, is likely to result in a lack of investment in new rental properties (leading to a dearth of rentals) and a lack of investment in existing rental properties (leading to lax maintenance).

Curiously, the ANC also throws in a reference to National Health Insurance in this section: 'Implement the National Health Insurance to reduce the cost of medical care, especially for the poor.'

In fact, medical care, especially for the poor, is already inexpensive or free. Anyone can go to a public clinic or hospital, receive care, and expect to pay nothing, something, or full price, based on their income level.

It is unclear, then, how the NHI will reduce the cost of medical care for the poor. It will – perversely – reduce the cost of medical care for the rich, yes, but not for the poor.

Finally, the ANC proposes to lower the cost of food through VAT exemption on essential items, which does not differentiate it from political rivals that promise the same thing.

More importantly, zero-rating additional items runs against the recommendations of the Davis Tax Committee, which found that VAT exemptions benefit the rich more than the poor and are expensive.

'There is broad support in the literature,' the Davis Tax Committee report of 2018 said, 'for the view that VAT is not an appropriate tool for manipulating social behaviours or advancing equity considerations.'²⁸

It would be better to eliminate zero-ratings and spend the money directly helping the poor. A 1999 report estimated that the VAT rate could be reduced by 1.25% if the zero-rating of basic foodstuffs were withdrawn.

It is worth quoting the Davis report recommendation on zero-rating in full: ‘In line with most VAT jurisdictions worldwide, certain so-called basic foodstuffs are zero rated in South Africa. It is clear that the zero rating of such basic foodstuffs, taken in isolation, addresses to some extent the regressivity of the VAT. However, there is clear evidence that this approach is not optimal from an economic efficiency perspective given that, in absolute terms, the concession is of significantly greater benefit to the more affluent households. Theoretically, it must always be better to rather collect the tax revenue and redistribute the additional income through a targeted transfer to the poor.

‘However, while the DTC is of the view that zero-rating is an extremely blunt and second-best instrument for addressing equity considerations, the DTC takes the view that it would be very difficult to eliminate the current zero-ratings. At best, it may be appropriate to consider only retaining those items that more clearly benefit the poor households, such as maize meal, brown bread, rice and vegetables, while withdrawing those items more clearly consumed by the more affluent households, such as fruit and milk.

‘The **strong recommendation** of the Committee is, however, that no further zero-rated food items should be considered.’ (Emphasis in the original.)

All the interventions contemplated in the ANC manifesto address the symptoms of higher living costs, and not the causes, which include rapid increases in administered prices – which are controlled by the government. None of the interventions will increase economic growth.

3.5.4. Invest in people

This section promises to perform some of the most basic functions of an effective government – functions which the ANC-run government has hitherto delivered only very sporadically.

It says that national and provincial governments will be given greater responsibilities to support municipalities that struggle to deliver services.

On one hand, that merely restates a Constitutional obligation: ‘The national government and provincial governments, by legislative and other measures, must support and strengthen the capacity of municipalities to manage their own affairs, to exercise their powers and to perform their functions.’²⁹

On the other hand, there is a relatively high legal bar for intervening in the affairs of municipalities, in terms of section 139 of the Constitution.³⁰

Better-functioning municipalities in principle are good for the economy. It is easier to conduct business when municipal services are efficiently delivered, and residents incur fewer unnecessary costs if municipalities do what they are supposed to do.

The ANC’s commitment to holding its public representatives and deployees accountable, however, rings hollow. It has promised to do so in the past, but does not have a good record of actually doing so.

Similar arguments can be made for the ANC's boilerplate commitments to education and fostering science, technology and innovation. It has long promised to '[f]oster a culture of reading, numeracy and technological skills,' for example, but its outcomes have become worse, not better, over the years.

Notably, it does not promise to review its approach to education, and makes no concrete proposals on how, specifically, it would improve the delivery and effectiveness of basic education.

The ANC promises to '[m]ove decisively towards implementing the National Health Insurance,' but then, it also did so in its 2019 manifesto.

A critique of the NHI proposal is beyond the scope of this paper, which focuses on achieving rapid economic growth. For a summary critique and counter-proposal by the IRR's head of policy, Anthea Jeffery, see *What's wrong with the golden promise of NHI?*³¹

The ANC proposes using science and innovation for development, by '[supporting] innovation in green technologies, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and decarbonisation programmes', '[increasing]research and development spending and prioritise areas like industrialisation, climate change and technologies like virtual reality, augmented reality, blockchain, artificial intelligence and the internet of things', '[fostering] development of new and existing industries, increase patent development and strengthen local innovation systems, including green energy technologies', and '[contributing] to the African Union's goal of producing 100,000 PhD graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics in the next decade'.

While these are noble objectives, experts at the International Monetary Fund warn that government support should focus on fundamental research, early in the innovation cycle, instead of trying to pick winners and direct research commercialisation.³²

In developed countries, they say, such support should be preferred over industrial policy. In less developed countries, that are less technologically advanced, they say 'governments can obtain larger productivity dividends with policies that promote the diffusion of technologies developed elsewhere'.

They add: 'But they must invest in human capital and strategic infrastructure to reap the full benefit of technology inflows.'

It is doubtful that the ANC manifesto's approach to science and technology is any different from its past endeavours in this regard, which have been notoriously unsuccessful – witness the Joule electric vehicle and the Pebble Bed Modular Reactor, for example.

3.5.5. Defend democracy and advance freedom

Crime and crime prevention

The first heading in this section deals with crime. In principle, the ANC's proposals on tackling South Africa's extraordinarily high crime rate are good. The manifesto is painfully short on detail, however. It neither explains the causes of crime, nor explains how an ANC government's interventions will work in practice.

For example, the ANC is committed to ‘reducing case backlogs and delays’, but does not explain why there are case backlogs and delays, nor how they will be reduced.

This makes the promises on crime read more like a wish list than a credible plan.

The ANC promises to ‘[m]odernise policing with more frontline police officers’. But in 2019, it promised to ‘[i]ncrease police visibility in our communities by increasing the number of men and women in uniform,’ and the opposite happened. Both the total number of SAPS and the number of visible policing officers declined.³³

The proposal to establish specialised police units to tackle priority crimes like gang violence and cash-in-transit heists is to be welcomed, but the introduction of such units ought to be extended to murder, robbery, fraud, the drug trade, illegal mining, the vandalism and theft of vital infrastructure, and other types of organised crime.

The ANC’s manifesto does not acknowledge the degree to which empowerment policies and cadre deployment contribute to crime and corruption, and to the ineffectiveness of the SAPS and NPA.

For example, the construction mafia, which the ANC proposes to tackle by ‘strengthening the SAPS Economic Infrastructure Task Team’, is premised on the notion that black ‘business associations’ are entitled to a 30% black economic empowerment share in any project.

Also lacking from the manifesto is an explicit commitment to merit-based appointments and promotions in both the SAPS and the NPA.

Curbing South Africa’s high crime rate, and strictly limiting corruption, are both essential to fostering rapid economic growth. The ANC’s commitments in this regard are therefore appropriate.

However, these commitments are nothing new, and there is little indication in the ANC manifesto about how the party intends to achieve these objectives this time around. Its ability to implement the necessary reforms, therefore, remains questionable.

Corruption

In this section, the ANC promises to establish the Investigating Directorate as a permanent entity within the NPA, with investigating powers.

This is a sensible proposal. Since the old Directorate of Special Operations (Scorpions) was disbanded, the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (Hawks) that replaced it was housed within the SAPS chain of command, which made it powerless to tackle the sort of organised crime that involves the corruption of high-ranking police officers. The independence of an anti-organised crime unit is critical to its success.

The ANC’s manifesto states: ‘Action is being taken against alleged perpetrators of state capture and funds are being recovered. To date, the NPA Investigating Directorate has taken 34 state capture and corruption cases to court, involving over 200 accused persons. Freezing orders of R14 billion have been granted, and around R8.6 billion in corrupt proceeds have been returned to the state.’

The majority of these accused persons are minor players, however, and numerous figures implicated by the Zondo Commission of Inquiry into State Capture remain in senior positions either in the ANC-run government, or in the ANC itself.

While the recovery of R8.6 billion is a start, it pales into insignificance when compared to the more than R500 billion that president Cyril Ramaphosa said state capture cost the country.³⁴

It is by no means clear that, as the manifesto claims, ‘The ANC has taken decisive measures to prevent corruption within its ranks.’

Such measures have been notable for their rarity.

The ANC’s promises to prevent corruption, and to act against corruption when it happens, are again not new. Whether they will be any more effective after the 2024 election than they have been to date remains to be seen.

Developmental state

The ANC recommits itself to ‘building the developmental state’.

Says the manifesto: ‘It will have attributes that include: (i) capacity to intervene in the economy in the interest of higher rates of growth and sustainable development; (ii) effecting sustainable programmes that address unemployment, poverty and underdevelopment with emphasis on vulnerable groups; (iii) and mobilising the people as a whole, especially the poor, to act as their own liberators through participatory and representative democracy.’

The ANC has not demonstrated any capacity to intervene in the economy in the interest of higher rates of growth and sustainable development, nor effecting sustainable programmes that address unemployment, poverty and underdevelopment with emphasis on vulnerable groups.

If it did have this capacity, it would be guilty of criminal neglect for not having implemented them in the past. If it did not have this capacity, the ANC’s manifesto gives no indication why this would suddenly change.

Its basic ideology and policy prescriptions are no different from those the ANC has followed in the past. Without change in ideology, and changes in policies, how can we expect any changes in outcomes?

The same goes for its promises regarding local government. If it was able to ‘ensure municipalities fulfil their basic obligations to citizens,’ as it now promises, this raises the question of why it has not done so to date. On the contrary, the performance of local governments has only become worse under ANC government.

Moral regeneration

The ANC manifesto also promises to ‘promote moral regeneration’.

For context, the Moral Regeneration Movement dates back to a meeting in 1997 between then-president Nelson Mandela, leaders of faith-based organisations, then Deputy Minister of Education Father Smangaliso Mkhathshwa and the SABC, to discuss spiritual transformation.³⁵

At a Morals Summit on 22 October 1998, called by the National Religious Leaders' Forum, Mandela said: 'The symptoms of our spiritual malaise are only too familiar. They include the extent of corruption both in the public and private sector, where office and positions of responsibility are treated as opportunities for self-enrichment; the corruption that occurs within our justice system; violence in interpersonal relations and families, in particular the shameful record of abuse of women and children; and the extent of tax evasion and refusal to pay for services used'.³⁶

Twenty-six years later, the ANC is still promising the same moral regeneration that its very first democratic president promised.

It is once again promising 'transformation led by honest, dedicated and capable leaders'.

It says it 'is working hard to restore trust and confidence as leader of the National Democratic Revolution and the fundamental socio-economic transformation of our society', as it 'vowed' to do at its last two national conferences, of 2017 and 2022.

The first of those conferences was seven years ago, and only now does the ANC say, 'We are now raising the intellectual capacity and enhancing the moral and ethical orientation of our membership.'

It is uncontentious to say that an effective government that is capable of creating an environment in which the economy can grow rapidly requires 'honest, dedicated and capable leaders'.

Unfortunately, even if such leaders were to be found in the ANC, their dedication to the National Democratic Revolution would not lead to the economic growth South Africa needs.

3.5.6. *Building a better Africa and World*

In the final section of the ANC's 2024 election manifesto, it sets out in very broad strokes its international relations policies.

South Africa's leading role in the African Union, and in particular its participation in the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, is to be welcomed. While we are still a long way from seeing any benefits from that agreement, and free trade within Africa is hampered by some factors other than regulatory trade barriers, it is laudable that the ANC is in principle committed to free trade.

The ANC promises to: '[s]trengthen the implementation of the African Union's flagship African Continental Free Trade Area, promote cross-border infrastructure, tourism, agriculture, and manufacturing value chains through industrialisation and minerals beneficiation in the region, and increase the levels of South African manufacturing and value-added exports to the rest of the continent.'

If it can succeed in these commitments, this will contribute to faster economic growth. If the ANC can expand its commitment to free trade beyond Africa, this will contribute further to economic growth.

Although the manifesto gives a cursory nod to the G20 group of countries, the ANC's foreign policy alignment is far more focused on the BRICS group of countries, on the 'Global South', on 'progressive internationalism' (an international movement uniting and mobilising progressive left-wing activists and organisations³⁷) and 'solidarity' with places like Palestine, Western Sahara, and Cuba.

Notably, it does not express solidarity with the people of Ukraine against Russian imperialist aggression, which is in line with the silence of 'progressive internationalism' on that subject.

There is an obvious risk that South Africa's closeness to overtly anti-Western countries, such as China, Iran, Russia and Cuba, might alienate some of its largest trading partners. This would very substantially threaten South Africa's opportunities for economic growth, since South Africa's political allies will not be able to compensate for losses in trade with major Western powers.

South Africa's alignment on the international stage also informs its political and economic ideology. By expressing solidarity with the governments of left-wing socialist and communist countries, it largely rejects the policies that have built prosperity for so many in the liberal democracies of the developed world.

A great deal of evidence indicates that the statism and interventionism associated with socialist ideals are harmful to economic growth and prosperity. By contrast, classical liberal principles and economic freedom are associated not only with growth and prosperity, but with many other indicators of living standards and quality of life, including lower poverty rates and improved living conditions for the poor.³⁸

3.6. From manifesto to action

In a departure from its previous manifestos, the ANC this time included a page on implementation. This involves a 'three-pronged approach', namely 'mainstreaming, prioritisation and accountability'.

Embedding the manifesto objectives into planning at all levels of government and throughout the civil service, establishing clear targets, and ensuring that budget priorities are aligned with the manifesto, are intended to raise the likelihood that the promises in the manifesto are fulfilled, instead of forgotten.

These commitments are welcome, but the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. It will take a vigilant press, vigilant civil society, and vigilant judiciary to hold an ANC-dominated legislature and executive to account.

4. Conclusion

The ANC's manifesto for South Africa's National and Provincial Elections of 2024 promises continuity. It undertakes to accelerate transformation, and 'ensure the country is back on track to meet the aspirations of the National Development Plan'.

The problem with this is that South Africa does not need 'continuity'.

A 2022 opinion survey by the Brenthurst Foundation found that 80.1% of respondents felt that the country was heading in the wrong direction.³⁹ A poll conducted by the IRR in 2023 revealed that 71.7% of respondents said their lives had not improved over the previous five years.⁴⁰

The ANC prioritises transformation over economic growth. It remains strongly committed to statism, interventionism, industrial planning and socialism.

Its proposals to create 'work opportunities' (as opposed to sustainable jobs) mostly involve government make-work programmes, instead of fostering an economy in which the private sector can grow rapidly to create employment.

The manifesto promises to fix a lot of things, without interrogating the ideology and policies that led to their being broken in the first place.

It does contain some well-intended promises, but the credibility of those promises is significantly undermined by the failure of the ANC to fulfill nearly identical promises in the past.

Ultimately, the manifesto, when measured in terms of its potential to stimulate rapid economic growth, fails on ideological grounds. It is far removed from the classical liberal principles of free enterprise and secure private property rights.

History, both in South Africa and abroad, shows that the socialist policies the ANC continues to pursue lead to stagnation, unemployment, poverty and corruption.

A manifesto that promises to redouble the ANC's efforts in pursuit of the socialist National Democratic Revolution and the failed National Development Plan is not a manifesto that will lead to rapid economic growth and a vibrant economy capable of employing millions of people and lifting millions more out of poverty.

If the ANC retains its grip on power, which seems likely at least in coalition at a national level, South Africans should brace for further economic decline.

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