

EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROVINCIAL LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT IN DOMINANT PARTY SYSTEMS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC QUALITY. INSIGHTS FROM KWAZULU-NATAL, 2004-2024.

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ABSTRACT

Corruption and poor governance in the North West, Free State, and Mpumalanga provinces were exposed by the Zondo Commission, emphasising the urgent need for improved oversight and accountability. Following their 2004 electoral win at the national and provincial levels, the ANC enjoyed 15 uninterrupted years of political control in KZN, becoming a dominant party system. That period, however, saw corruption scandals expose weaknesses in oversight and accountability, particularly concerning accusations of wrongdoing against senior ANC figures in provincial departments. Studies on dominant party systems have predominantly been focused on the national sphere of government. This study is to investigate how the legislature's oversight and accountability influence the democratic quality in a dominant party system. Qualitative research methods formed the basis of this study through a case study approach focusing on the standing committee on provincial oversight committee. Detailed one-on-one interviews were conducted with six knowledgeable individuals who have been actively involved in political parties, such as the ANC, IFP and DA in KZN, and in the committee. The study reveals multiple weaknesses, including politicisation, interference from political entities, and a blurred boundary between political parties and the state. Inadequate oversight accountability has had a detrimental impact on the democratic quality, as the ANC's control has eroded essential democratic principles posing a major threat to democratic quality in the province of KZN.

Keywords: Corruption, Democratic quality, Dominant party systems, Provincial government



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1. INTRODUCTION

Following Huntington's third wave of democracy in the 1990s, numerous African

nations shifted from one-party states or dictatorships to established democracies. However, the transition was not without any complexities (Lynch and Crawford, 2011). Nur (2015) offers valuable insights into the challenges faced by Africa's third wave of democracy, including ethnic tensions, corruption, and political violence. South Africa, a member of the African democratisation wave, established democracy through a landmark election in 1994. With a two-thirds majority, the African National Congress (ANC) achieved its greatest electoral success in 2004. However, while this achievement reinforced the party's dominance, the party's most notable achievement was undoubtedly securing majority control of KZN. This can be attributed to the IFP's success in the previous two elections, where they secured a majority of 51% in 1994 (Mottiar, 2004) and a 41% victory in 1999 (Piper, 1999). After 10 years of provincial IFP rule, the ANC eventually secured electoral victory in 2004 with a 41% victory (Letsholo, 2005). Considering the ANC's overwhelming dominance in KwaZulu-Natal's political landscape, this study investigates the ruling party's influence as a dominant party in KZN between 2004 and 2024.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Legislative Oversight

In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, there is a recognition of the crucial role played by various stakeholders regularly and inclusively reviewing progress at both national and sub-national levels (Cepal, 2019). The United Nations (2023) focus on goal 16 of the sustainable development which emphasises the crucial role of good governance in achieving equitable and sustainable resource management. Non-contemporary literature from Dlomo (2006) and Mbetse (2016) along with more contemporary scholarship by Gumbi and Tsholo (2023) acknowledge that parliament has a special role as they are uniquely positioned to understand the needs of their constituents while also being responsible for scrutinising the government's actions. To prevent the abuse of power, it is important to have a parallel accountability structure that allows for checks and balances between institutions (Pillay and Meny-Gilbert, 2023). Malapane (2015) accentuates the importance of parliament and its ability being accountable to parliament entails ministers having to clarify and provide information within their sphere of responsibility.

The constitution and the separation of powers acknowledge the importance of the legislature in ensuring accountability and oversight (Calland and Sithole, 2022). Pellizo and Stapenhurst (2014) suggest that parliamentary oversight plays a crucial role in guarding against government misgovernance in light of ineffective oversight structures. When governments are under effective control, they are more likely to be accountable and support democratic principles (Makhado and Nyathela, 2014). Despite the acknowledged significance of legislative oversight, its implementation is intricate and contingent upon multiple factors encompassing politics, society, economy, and culture (Notshulwana et al., 2019).

Madue (2016) highlights the importance of considering the political and socio-economic environment when conducting legislative oversight, rather than solely focusing on buzzwords and populist sentiments such as accountability and being accountable to 'our people', without any follow through and implementing tangible accountability inducing initiatives. The 2009 task team report on accountability and oversight acknowledges that the constitution establishes oversight as an important responsibility of the legislative and their respective bodies to effectively scrutinise the executive branches of government (Parliament of South Africa, 2009: 29). The task team has outlined the oversight functions as follows:

- Detect and prevent abuse and unconstitutional conduct on the part of the government and public agencies.
- To hold the government accountable, particularly in relation to how taxpayer's money is used.
- Monitor the progress of government programmes in relation to its targets.
- Ensure that there is transparency in government operations and improves public trust and enhances public trust in the government, which is inclusive of effective policy as well.

Parliamentary accountability mandates that a government organisation, acting on behalf of the people, must provide an account of its actions or failures (Makanya, 2023). Marino et al. (2016) identify six worldwide governance indicators, which include -voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption. Lastly, capacity indicators are related to evaluating the government's quality and its capacity to enforce political decisions, uphold the rule of law, and promote effective governance (Nistotskaya, 2020). According to Vaccaro (2020), three measures are used to assess state capacity in government indicators: bureaucracy quality, corruption, law, and order. By engaging in legislative oversight, the goal is to ensure that all six indicators, as stated above, are successfully implemented in a country.

2.2 Provincial Parliamentary Oversight

South Africa is governed as a unitary state, but it also incorporates quasi federal elements that are specified in its constitution (Tepeciklioğlu, 2018). In Koelbe and Siddle (2014)'s view, the federal characteristics of South Africa were a deliberate outcome of a pre-democracy negotiation, aiming to prevent the emergence of an overly powerful national government that could potentially abuse its authority and engage in non-democratic practices, such as interference. Yet, assigning such a categorisation is not a straightforward task, as Schwella (2016) points out the significant disagreements surrounding South Africa's federal aspects and whether they qualify it as a country with federal characteristics. Lodge (2005) acknowledges that including provinces and provincial

legislatures in South Africa's unitary system makes up elements of federalism.

2.3 Limitations of oversight accountability

The Arms deal scandal brought to the forefront the weaknesses in parliamentary oversight in South Africa's fledgling democracy. Crawford-Browne (2004) laments that one of the initial actions taken by a newly elected democratic government was to acquire overpriced military equipment without sufficient reasoning. By prioritising party loyalty over oversight and accountability, the ruling party weakened parliamentary oversight (Maganoe, 2023). Neethling et al. (2020) make the case that there has been a notable decrease in legislative oversight in the past twenty years. Nevertheless, even with these restrictions, legislative oversight continues to be a fundamental element of democratic accountability (Esau, 2008). The noble intentions underlying the implementation of parliamentary oversight mechanisms, like SCOPA, reflect a strong commitment to accountability and oversight (Matebese-Notshulwana, 2019). Urgent government intervention resulted in a decline in legislative power (Thovoethin and Moshood, 2022). Booysen (2015) points out that the powerful ANC undermined parliamentary checks and balances to favour its own party. Furthermore, parliament's accountability mechanisms have proven ineffective due to a lack of guidance regarding their oversight duties and responsibilities (Masiapato et al., 2020).

3. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1 Dominant party systems

The study of dominant party systems is prominent not only in political science but also in the fields of governance and democratic quality. The foundational scholarship on dominant party systems presents varying viewpoints on how to classify and evaluate these systems. Satori (2005) proposed that the identification of dominant party systems should take into consideration the number of relevant parties involved in a country's democratic structure. Arian and Barnes (1974) made the case that parties in dominant party systems should be recognised and considered dominant based on their prolonged period in office. On the other hand, Duverger (1963) proposes an alternative perspective, stating that the classification of dominant party systems as dominant should be determined by public opinion. Contemporary literature on dominant parties delves deeper into the classification of dominant parties and sheds light on the key attributes of a dominant party system. In their study, Du Toit and De Jager (2014) highlight that, for a party to be classified as dominant, it must have won four successive elections and exerted significant control over the country's national policy. The ANC can be considered dominant due to their convincing victories in every national election from 1994 to 2019, and their firm control over policy (Khambule, 2018). Southall (2014) highlights that the ANC has consistently achieved electoral victories that

are free, fair, and devoid of any attempts to undermine the electoral process.

3.2 Advantages of dominant party systems

Several advantages are linked to dominant party systems. For instance, Arian and Barnes (1974) identified a significant advantage of dominant party systems in their earlier work, stating that there is a capacity to uphold democratic stability. When a single party remains in power for an extended period. Examples from South Africa, through the ANC, and Taiwan, with the KMT party, demonstrate how extended periods of political dominance can foster stability and the establishment of democratic institutions (Simkins and Giliomee, 1999 and de Jager and Steenekamp, 2015). Mchunu (2023) offers contemporary literature in exploring the relationship between dominance and stability in democracies, indicating that countries with stronger political party dominance have a reduced risk of democratic collapse. Furthermore, African countries are struggling with a decrease in democratic processes, putting them in a vulnerable position as fragile democracies (Frantzeskakis and Seeberg, 2023). Margolis and Moreno-Riaño (2016) argue that dominant party systems facilitate the creation of formal institutions that support the rule of law and strive to enhance governance.

Democracies with carefully crafted constitutions are more likely to endure, despite potential obstacles such as an excessive reliance on courts to address political disagreements (Keman, 2025). De Jager and Du Toit (2013) discusses another advantage, highlighting how dominant party systems can contribute to the promotion of tolerance and ethnic diversity, especially in countries that have been plagued by violence resulting from ethnic divisions. Through national and provincial elections, political parties contest elections which determine who gets to form government across nine provinces. In provinces such as the Western Cape, the Democratic Alliance has governed without disruption since 2009, while as in the North West and Mpumalanga, the ANC has also ruled without ever losing power since the dawn of democracy in 1994. This study focuses on KZN, a province marked by multiple changes in government and, concurrently, the ANC's uninterrupted 20-year reign (2004-2024).

3.3 Drawbacks of dominant party systems

When looking at disadvantages associated with the dominant party system, four distinct risks come to mind.: The blurring of boundaries between political parties and the state, constraining the growth possibilities of opposition parties, accumulation of power, and lack of accountability (Laws, 2016). According to Mattlin (2019), the attainment of state power by dominant parties often leads to the exploitation of state resources for private benefit. Power concentration in a single party can lead to a blurring of party and state lines which emerges as a result of unchallenged authority gained by the governing party (Swane-

poel, 2022). As Matshiqi (2012) emphasises, the ANC's governance has led to a blending of party and state boundaries, going beyond the influential selection of government officials, and encompassing institutions like the judiciary. A recent example of a blurring of party and state lines relates to Eskom, where an ANC caucus summoned Minister of Public Enterprises and senior executives at Eskom to find out why is Eskom failing to address load shedding and the rolling blackouts and went as far as saying Eskom was sabotaging the ANC ahead of the 2024 national and provincial elections (Swanepoel, 2022). It was clear that party and state lines were being blurred, as neither the Department of Public Enterprises nor Eskom was answerable to the ANC. Eskom and the Department of Public Enterprises are accountable to Parliament, not to any political party caucus.

Research evaluating the risks that come with dominant party systems, disempowered opposition parties and weakened oversight mechanisms can make valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge. Debates on oversight mechanisms and the role of opposition parties in exercising effective oversight have raged on. Some scholars have argued that a feeble opposition is a contributing factor to the endurance of dominant party systems, as evidenced by a range of literature see (Chiroro 2006; Joannou and Coetzee, 2010; Schulz-Herzenberg and Mattes, 2023). Some of the weaknesses cited include poor strategy and limited ideological prowess (Lotshwao, 2021). According to Lekalake (2017), there is a trust deficit, as well as a lack of institutionalisation and poor relations with civil society. On the contrary, De Jager and Du Toit (2013) challenge the idea that opposition parties are inherently weak, suggesting instead that their strength is undermined by their coexistence with a dominant party. The incumbent takes advantage of the disproportionate access to state resources to drown out opposition parties, leaving them at a disadvantage in the political arena (Levitsky and Way, 2010). Murtaza (2023) makes a similar observation, suggesting that opposition parties in the country have struggled to secure resources and strengthen their political positions. The incumbent party gains power to control resources and counter opposition strategies through the incumbency advantage (Parkin, 2022).

The ANC's hegemony in KwaZulu-Natal produced a deficiency in oversight mechanisms, most notably in the provincial legislature. Gabela, Inderpal and Karodia (2015:47) posit that deficient oversight mechanisms are indicative of accountability deficits stemming from a dominant, unaccountable and unethical party and a simultaneously weakened, ineffective opposition. Through its dominance, the governing ANC in KZN could bypass accountability mechanisms in the legislature, which would result in continued misgovernance and procurement corruption (Ndlovu and Mutambara, 2023: 90). Mchunu and De Jager (2024:149) detail how opposition parties were restrained in their powers of oversight because the legislature had become a rubber-stamp institution with members of the ruling ANC protecting members of the executive from appearing before oversight committees.

3.4 Understanding Accountability

The concept of accountability primarily revolves around establishing a relationship between two groups, instead of individuals (Nel and Patience, 2022: 2). In this relationship, one group is responsible for conveying information, offering explanations, and providing justifications for their actions (Schmitter, 2007). There are three main types of accountabilities in political governance- these are horizontal accountability, vertical accountability, and diagonal accountability (Walsh and Williams, 2013). Mechkova et al. (2017) define horizontal accountability as the responsibility of a country's institutions, such as parliamentary committees, state institutions, and a system of checks and balances, to prevent the misuse of power. Vertical accountability primarily focuses on elections (Sommer, et al., 2023:223). The accountability framework outlined by Jelmin (2012) suggests that voters should reward their preferred political party for satisfactory performance and hold them accountable if they fail to meet expectations. Diagonal accountability, as defined by 2017), encompasses the engagement of external entities, such as the media and civil society, in roles that oversee and ensure accountability (Lührmann et al. 2017). This research paper examines horizontal and diagonal accountability in the context of key state institutions responsible for oversight, as well as insights from civil society organisations involved in governance activities in the province of KZN.

4. QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING

Assessments of South Africa's democracy are closely tracked, reflecting its continued maturation (Gordon, et al., 2025:2). In the view of Nadeau, Daoust, and Dassonneville (2023), the progress made by emerging democracies in their democratic transition is praiseworthy, but there are still reservations about the overall quality of democracy. It is important to understand that the concept of democracy's quality is complex and not easily defined (Logan and Mattes, 2012). To address this, Mohammed (2023:323) seeks to establish a more precise definition of democratic quality, encompassing regular elections that are considered both free and fair, with at least two political parties contesting, and an unrestricted uncensored media. Factors such as a visible rule of law, active citizen involvement, fair electoral competition, and both vertical and horizontal accountability contribute to the overall quality of democracy (Mauk, 2021). However, as Munck (2016) argues, when assessing the quality of democracy, it is insufficient to rely solely on quantitative measurements. This is because quantitative data provides broad, holistic figures, it does not offer nuanced evaluations and contextual understanding of the quality of democracy at a particular point in time of a country's democracy (Knutsen, et al., 2023:9). Factors, such as government decision-making and the sociopolitical context, must be carefully considered. A strong dedication to democratic principles is required, regardless of the evolving socio-political landscape. These indicators are crucial in determining the demo-

cratic quality of a country, and Fuchs and Roller (2018) acknowledge that, despite being subjective, they are still effective in assessing democracy's quality.

5. METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

This research study adopts a qualitative methodology utilising key informant interviews as the primary source of data collection. Six key informant interviews were conducted with academics, politicians, and officials from the KZN legislature. A case study research design is employed in this study, with the province of KZN as its focus. The methodology used involves conducting six key informant interviews using a qualitative approach. One of the author's doctoral research projects involved collecting the data. In their work, Eze et al. (2023) define qualitative research as the process of understanding complex phenomena by examining subjective perspectives. The preference for qualitative research stems from the understanding that some topics cannot be effectively grasped through numerical analysis alone (Busetto et al., 2020). To increase the likelihood of obtaining valuable data, the study opted for a qualitative approach, utilising semi-structured interviews as the main method of data collection. Elhami and Khoshnevisan (2022) discuss how interviews can be effective in gathering comprehensive data and insights, including the participant's informed reasoning, which they can share with the interviewer

5.1 Case study

This research examined the province of KZN as the chosen case study. Mtisi (2022) defines case study research as the parameters or restrictions that determine the extent of a research study. Researchers can use case studies in their research to explore the "how" and "why" questions, which offers them a significant advantage (Lavarda and Bellucci, 2022). The ANC's continuous control in KZN, which began with its initial victory in the province, provides a valid reason for its selection. A country or province can be classified as a dominant party system when it meets the requirement of consistently winning elections and exerting control over policy direction, as explained in the literature section. KZN, being under the leadership of the ANC and previously known as a stronghold for the ruling party, undoubtedly operates as a provincial government with a dominant party system. In order to address oversight, the selected committee for this study is the Standing Committee on Oversight (STACOV). Detailed information about sampling will be discussed in the next section.

5.2 Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was used to select the study participants. According to Palinkas et al. (2015), this sampling technique is specifically used to select participants who can provide in-depth knowledge on a particular sub-

ject. The utilisation of purposive sampling requires careful consideration, which includes the consistent application and mitigation of researcher bias. This is because researchers naturally have biases when intentionally selecting participants (Thomas et al., 2012). There are a total of six representatives, with one from each of the political parties, academia, and civil society. Key informants who have affiliations with the African National Congress (ANC), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), and the Democratic Alliance (DA) in KZN, and who have also served or are serving in STACOV, were carefully chosen. A respondent from the Public Affairs Research Institute, a research think tank at the University of Witwatersrand, was chosen for the study. The last two key informants were affiliated with Corruption Watch and Right2Know, respectively. Each of the six participants had significant expertise in accountability and governance, with a specific emphasis on the province of KZN.

5.2.1 Ethical Clearance

Researchers conducting research studies ought to do so by observing and upholding high standards of ethics. Muthanna, Chaaban, and Qadhi (2024) highlight the substantial connection between research ethics and research integrity. Upholding ethical principles is paramount, as the validity of the study's data hinges on researchers' integrity, transparency, and the secure management of sensitive information (Kolstoe and Pugh, 2023). In light of the data's origin as part of a doctoral dissertation by one of the authors, an ethics application was submitted to and approved by the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee. The notification of full approval for Project number 2222 was issued on July 1, 2021.

5.3 List of Study Participants

Participant Name	Position	Sector
Key participant 1	Member of parliament 4 th and 5 th administration (DA)	Public Sector
Key participant 2	Member of parliament 5 th and 6 th administration (ANC)	Public Sector
Key participant 3	Member of parliament 4 th , 5 th and 6 th administration	Public Sector
key participant 4	Researcher fellow	Academia
Key participant 5	Researcher	Civil society
Key participant 6	Activist	Civil society

source: Authors(2025)

6. RESULTS

6.1 Blurring of party and state lines

This study's findings are derived from interviews with key informants, including members of the legislative oversight committee STACOV, academic experts, and representatives from the civil society sector. A significant challenge that hampers legislative oversight in KZN is the lack of clear distinction between the state and the political parties. All three committee members, including Key Participant 2, who is an active member of the ANC in KZN, mentioned this challenge. When questioned about the specific nature of this challenge, Key Participant 1, a key informant from the DA, responded: *It might be more a case of having a party that is so dominant and that also controls its institutions because they have blurred the lines, and they are able to have a super majority which sort of covers parliament and parliament covers them (Key Participant 1-DA representative).* Maganoe (2023) further supports the previous statement by providing an example of President Ramaphosa misleading Parliament about his awareness of his son's questionable dealings with Bosasa. The company in question is the same one that has been involved in procurement malpractice, with implications for various ANC leaders, including former President Jacob Zuma and current minister of Mineral Resources and Energy Gwede Mantashe. The ruling party's control weakens the ability of legislative oversight committees, as they are often nullified by the party with the majority of representatives. Consequently, this may lead to a lack of responsibility, paving the way for possible corruption and, ultimately, the state being taken over (Swanepoel, 2022 Key Participant 2, an ANC member, holds the same opinion).

The key informant emphasised how members of the ruling party exploit the oversight committee, using it to advance their party's interests instead of focusing on their oversight responsibilities. Booysen (2015) details how the ruling ANC choosing to prioritise the party's interests over the state's interests multiple times. One notable example is the Nkandla case, which involved former President Jacob Zuma, and the security upgrades made to his private residences. In addition, Key Participant 3, a representative of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) in the STACOV, mentioned how the dominant party system hampers the effectiveness of the provincial legislative oversight tool. The key informant further said: *I think the legislature itself must be independent from the executive and very often there seems to be a blurred line particularly in our province where the dominant party blurs those lines for effective oversight and often when we want to do effective oversight, the result of that oversight gets blocked to protect the executive from any consequence (Key Participant 3, IFP).*

When analysing the feedback from the three experts in civil society and academia, we found significant resemblances between their expressed concerns and those of the STACOV members. Key Participant 4 Jeffries, an academic, pointed

out the same difficulties faced by the legislature due to a dominant party system and the blurring of party and state boundaries. The individual additionally stated: *The institutions are unable to navigate the party and state relationship because mostly of the dominance that the ANC has exerted over the state. If I think about the fact that in SA, we have a dominant party that is able to influence who is appointed as the Public Protector. How then do we think these institutions do not blur lines (Key Participant 4).*

6.2 Political Interference

Calland and Pienaar (2016) have extensively studied the challenge of political interference in the legislative context. Booysen's emphasis is primarily on the legislature, whereas Calland and Pienaar mainly focus on interference in chapter 9 institutions. In her work, Booysen (2014) highlights that the national legislature has faced political interference, specifically in relation to its oversight duties. The findings from this research have highlighted these further. *I think, as I mentioned earlier, the political interference is there for all to see. The institutions have been politically compromised and, from the outside; it seems like some of the institutions are just there to reinforce the ANC's position or they are afraid of taking on the serious corruption cases (Key Participant 6).*

Another perspective, presented by Key Participant 5 Mazulaemthini from Corruption Watch, reinforces these views. This participant focuses on the problem of political meddling in oversight institutions, and he asserts that the politicisation of the legislature is a widespread issue. Additionally, the key informant stated: *They have failed; the problem is that even though they are supposed to guard against political interference, they themselves are also politicised (Key Participant 5).*

Studies on political interference have primarily concentrated on the domain of local government, as evidenced by the research conducted by Van der Waldt (2015); Reddy (2016); Maqoko and Asmah-Andoh (2019). The findings address the issue of political interference in the provincial legislature within a dominant party system, a topic that has been neglected in research on political interference. In Pillay's (2022) analysis, the Zondo commission's investigation uncovered extensive corruption and a concerning absence of accountability in several provinces, including Mpumalanga, the Free State, and the Northwest. The report indicates that state capture led to a staggering loss of over R50 billion in total. The presence of poor legislative oversight, a lack of political resolve, political interference, and the uncontested dominance of the ANC in all three mentioned provinces played a significant role in the occurrence of widespread corruption and mis-governance.

6.3 Cadre deployment

The third obstacle that the STACOV is dealing with is the deployment of person-

nel. Just like the challenges mentioned earlier, there is extensive scholarship on cadre deployment in South Africa. Thebe (2017) asserts that the phenomenon of cadre deployment is prevalent on a global scale. In countries with established democracies like the United States, there is clear utilisation of cadre deployment, which is an accepted practice where a winning party in the elections is expected to appoint staff members who share their political ideology (Twala, 2014). The findings of this study imply that the deployment of staff has had a negative impact on the suitability of STACOV. A key participant further said: *it seems as though the party tries to put some of the weaker members in there so that they would less likely be able to scrutinize everything that happens. so... I am not sure that they would always have their political independence because it is compromised (Key Participant 1, Democratic Alliance).*

The ANC's policies led to the implementation of the cadre deployment policy in local, provincial, and national government. Moreover, it presented an opportunity for the ANC to further its political agenda by strategically placing ANC members in important government positions (Sebake and Sebola, 2014). In addition, another individual participating in the study mentioned the influence of cadre deployment and stated: *Political parties will deploy who they want to deploy. We have had a case whereby a former mayor is being investigated for corruption but now sits as an MP. How does that work? If that same person were to be deployed to the committee, what can we do about it? Nothing. So, there is nothing much for us to do in that regard because the political parties deploy whomever they wish to deploy (Key Participant 3, IFP).*

There has been a noticeable uptick in corruption within the public sector and a decline in service delivery across all branches of government (Reddy, 2008; Reddy, 2010; Mubangazi, 2010). Booysen (2011) argues that the ANC's cadre deployment policy has had a direct impact on the increase in corruption within the public sector and has compromised the accountability mechanisms designed to maintain transparency within the state. The practice of cadre deployment compromises the independence of institutions, prioritising the party's agenda over the constitutional prerogatives of the state (Pearson and Ndlovu, 2018). Additionally, Tshishonga (2014) points to the lack of sound human resources practices, which often leads to the appointment of inappropriate individuals to crucial roles, creating opportunities for corruption, inefficient spending, and the politicisation of public office.

7. DISCUSSION

South Africa's democracy held the aspirations and dreams of millions of South Africans who had been historically disenfranchised. Improving service delivery was a key priority for the government, led by the ANC. However, the intention behind creating the constitutional architecture and system of checks and balances was to ensure that accountability was firmly integrated into the demo-

cratic setup of the country. The ANC's dominance, particularly in recent years, has presented governance challenges that underscore the importance of accountability and oversight. The primary function of the parliament in South Africa's democracy is to provide oversight. Despite this, research studies have placed greater emphasis on the national parliament instead of the provincial parliament. It is crucial to recognise the significance of the provincial legislature in light of the ANC's strategy of creating strongholds in KZN, Mpumalanga, Free State, and the Northwest to maintain party dominance. Former deputy President David Mabuza, former ANC Secretary General Ace Magashule, Supra Mahumapelo, and Zandile Gumede were prominent ANC leaders in these provinces. It became clear that misgovernance and corruption were prevalent in all four ANC strongholds. This had a negative effect on democratic principles at the provincial level. It can be argued that the challenges experienced at the national legislature were mirrored in the provincial legislature of KZN.

The deterioration of democracy in South Africa is clear, and this is closely connected to the lack of effectiveness of oversight institutions, particularly parliament. This has also resulted in a decline of the quality of democracy and a rapid increase in populism and undemocratic behaviour. In Erasmus' (2023) work, Chief Justice Zondo's statements bring attention to his concerns about Parliament's effectiveness in stopping future occurrences of state capture. In South Africa, the process of ensuring government accountability begins with parliamentary oversight, even though the ANC holds significant influence in parliament. There is very little proof of the legislature holding the ANC responsible. In his constitutional ruling on the Nkandla renovations, former Chief Justice Mogoeng determined that the former President had breached the rules, while the national legislature had neglected its duty to enforce accountability for the renovations in his personal residence. The situation in KZN was no different, as oversight.

8. CONCLUSION

This article assessed the impact of provincial oversight mechanisms on the quality of democracy. The effectiveness of provincial oversight mechanisms in dominant party systems is hindered by three key challenges:- (i) blurring of state and party lines, (ii) political interference, and (iii), cadre deployment. These challenges are not exclusive to the province of KwaZulu-Natal. However, this research study highlights the importance of parliamentary oversight in safeguarding the principles of separation of powers and checks and balances and ultimately, democratic quality. The 2024 elections in South Africa marked 30 years of democracy, during which the ruling ANC party lost its majority party status and signalling the end of the dominant party system in South Africa. In KZN, the ANC experienced its largest decline, dropping from 54.22% in 2019 to 17.62% in the 2024 elections. This particular result can be interpreted as a form of vertical accountability that further validates the democratic status of the country. Still, the

ANC's supremacy in the legislature had made it difficult for horizontal oversight mechanisms to effectively hold the government responsible for governance lapses, corruption accusations, power interruptions, and the growth of poverty. These challenges have had a profound effect on the quality of democracy. The decline of democracy is significantly influenced by political disillusionment, which, if not tackled, can lead to decreased voter participation and a government lacking legitimacy. Additionally, it is uncertain how oversight mechanisms in KZN will operate with the multi-party coalition governing the province.

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