




# Chapter Twelve

## Gender and Age Demographics: The Qualitative Decline of the ANC

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### Introduction

There is a universal, commonly held view in political discourse that democracy can only be achieved through the involvement of political parties because they are the building blocks of democratisation. Therefore, political parties must be understood within the overall theory and practice of democracy. Political parties have developed into an effective method for contesting power in democracies, in Africa and elsewhere. They are a crucial component for institutionalising, fostering, consolidating, and strengthening democracy (Shale, 2013).

However, there are two major flaws with African political parties – particularly the former liberation movements-turned government: first, political organisations that brought about political freedom and independence were typically led by men because of the patriarchal and cultural value systems. Second, because they were founded on the same European political culture, political parties mirrored the very colonial system that they were meant to replace (Shale, 2013). There is a familiar pattern of entrenched patriarchy and ageism with former liberation movements in government. These movements fought against the destructiveness of colonialisation. Now, they have become hostage to their own success as liberation movements. It is very hard for liberation movements male leaders to recognise that women and young people could have any equivalent right



to lead, while for them, their record in the struggle confers a virtually permanent claim on power.

The dream of promoting and protecting civil freedoms that had been suppressed by the colonialists, was put on hold even though independence came with the expectation of doing so. Former liberation movements have kept maintained the discrimination of women and young people in political leadership, and the African National Congress (ANC) is no exception. Through a qualitative approach, the chapter investigates how South Africa's ruling ANC, as a result of patriarchy and ageism, has failed to evolve, and similarly failed to arrest its declining electoral support.

The aim of the chapter is to illustrate how the inability of the ANC to allow time and space for women to lead; as well as paving the way for the next generation of leaders of the movement, has led to its decline. While efforts have been made to promote gender balance in leadership positions. Achieving full gender equality remains an ongoing challenge that requires continued commitment and effort from the ANC and South African society.

Accordingly, through a consideration of the 31 years that have passed since the advent of democracy and 32 years since the ANC's first conference in the country after its unbanning and the current relationship between the ruling party and the representation of women and young people in its leadership, this article aims to locate the present state of the country's ruling party and its declining hegemony, through an exploration of the lack of women and young people in positions of responsibility in the party. The ANC has been swamped by many challenges ranging from lack of political consciousness, careerism, ostentatious behaviour and factional tendencies. While the decline of the party cannot be attributed to two things, the atrophied state of the party, and specifically its patriarchy and ageism has been a contributing factor.

## Conceptual Consideration

The theory of gender equality and intergenerational mix in political leadership encompasses the idea that diverse representation in political leadership, in terms of gender and age, can positively affect governance and decision-making. This theory is rooted in the belief that a more inclusive and balanced political leadership can better address the complex and evolving needs of society. This section looks at Gender Equality in Political Leadership and Intergenerational Mix in Political Leadership – as the theoretical lenses of this chapter.

### **Gender Equality in Political Leadership:**

Achieving sustainable development and egalitarian societies requires women to participate equally in politics. While there has been some progress in the fight to end the under-representation of women in leadership roles, it has been inconsistent and gradual. Gender equality in political leadership aims to ensure that men and women have equal opportunities to participate in and influence political processes. The theory behind this concept suggests several benefits which diverse perspectives – this is because when it comes to political leadership positions, men and women frequently bring distinct life experiences, points of view, and goals. A more balanced representation of the two genders can result in more thorough and well-rounded policymaking (Elias & Musi, 2022). This has a ripple effect on better policy results – improved social, economic, and political outcomes can be attained by gender-inclusive leadership, which produces policies that are more attentive to the needs and concerns of the entire population (Nwankor, 2022). Furthermore, enhanced democracy – leadership that is gender-balanced works to advance democratic principles by guaranteeing that all citizens are equally represented and have a voice in decision-making (Nwankor, 2022). Inspiring future generations of women to pursue political professions and dismantling conventional gender stereotypes is the role-modelling power of women in leadership positions. Increasing women's participation in public life strengthens a country's democracy, economy and long-term peace and stability.

**Intergenerational Mix in Political Leadership:**

For political systems to be representative, all parts of society must be included. When young people are disenfranchised or disengaged from political processes, a significant portion of the population has little or no voice or influence in decisions that affect group members' lives. A key consequence is the undermining of political systems' representativeness. The concept of intergenerational mix in political leadership emphasises the importance of having a variety of age groups represented in government.

This perspective is based on the belief that a mix of younger and older leaders can lead to fresh perspectives – younger leaders often bring new ideas, technological expertise, and a forward-looking approach to governance, which can be valuable in addressing contemporary challenges. This finds credence in, for example, the African Union's Agenda 2063 (AU, 2013). Youth participation in formal political processes and a voice in shaping today's and tomorrow's politics are crucial if they are to have an impact over the long run. Not only is inclusive political involvement a fundamental political and democratic right, but it is also essential for creating stable, peaceful societies and formulating laws that cater to the particular demands of younger generations. In order for young people to be fairly represented in political institutions, processes, and decision-making, especially during elections, they must be aware of their rights and provided the skills and resources needed to engage meaningfully at all levels. With the active participation of young people, democratic principles can come to life and authoritarian practices can be overthrown. If they are not involved in new formal decision-making processes, young people in nations where they have led protests that have ousted authoritarian administrations are likely to experience tremendous frustration. Democratisation may become unstable as a result, and conflict dynamics may accelerate.

In practice, achieving gender equality and an intergenerational mix in political leadership can be challenging because of existing power structures, biases, and societal norms.

However, many countries and organisations have taken steps to promote these principles through policies like gender quotas, youth representation initiatives, and mentorship programmes. The goal is to create more inclusive and responsive political systems that better serve the needs of diverse populations and promote sustainable governance.

## **The ANC and Women's Participation and Representation in Leadership**

The ANC's fundamental objective goal has been to bring about the National Democratic Society (NDS), which it describes as being brought about by overcoming the three antagonistic contradictions of class, race, and patriarchal relationships that are interconnected. The ANC asserts that this goal will be accomplished through a National Democratic Revolution (NDR) (ANC, 2007).

As Africa's oldest liberation movement, the 110-year-old organisation has never been led by a woman. This is a reflection of an organisation, together with its rank and card-carrying members, that does not believe that there has ever been an astute woman (or women) to lead the movement. Rosho (2022) argues that the women and the struggle for liberation are inextricably linked, and therefore none can exist in the absence of the other, including the 1965 resistance when more than 20,000 women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest against the pass laws (Rosho, 2022).

It is well documented that John Langalibalele Dube was the founding president of the ANC, however, it was Nokutela Dube, his wife, who co-founded the Ohlange Institute: established for Africans and saw leaders such as Albert Luthuli - who would be the future President of the ANC and Africa's first Peace Prize Laureate - educated there (The Presidency, 2017). As Gabaitse and Kumalo (2014) express, she became the embodiment of the first generation of African women who championed women's struggle against all forms of oppression.

The ANC of Lillian Ngoyi, Albertina Sisulu, Winnie Mandela and many others provide us examples of how women

have historically been at the centre of revolutions. When liberation movements were banned, their leaders jailed and exiled, Winnie Mandela kept the fires burning; Albertina Sisulu played a key role in United Democratic Front and Charlotte Maxeke, the first black woman to obtain a degree, formed the Bantu Women's League (SA History Online, 2011) (predecessor of the ANC Women's League) when the South African Native National Congress (predecessor to the ANC) would not allow female members.

Over the years, however, the ANC has not created a political environment where women are given the responsibility to lead the organisation, this despite it having some of the most prominent and generally accepted women leaders in society within its ranks. Women in the ANC have not been viewed as intellectuals, theorists or nationalists, despite having shaped the history of the movement. They have continuously been reduced to figureheads such as 'Mother of the Nation' or 'Mother of the Liberation Struggle'. Women in the ANC have been left out of history's hall of fame, despite their tremendous contributions to some of the events that have helped shape our lives.

There is no denying that the ANC has worked to emancipate women and continues to be the leader in society in the promotion of non-racism and non-sexism – since this is the case, it is neither feasible nor desirable to draw broad conclusions regarding its progress or lack thereof – the bone of contention, rather, is that in contrast to its goals and objectives, its leadership has been male-oriented.

While the ANC has made significant contributions to the transformation of South Africa on many fronts and while its National Executive Committee (NEC) has made a conscious effort to put in place measures to ensure that women have access to actual power, it has so far failed in according its women cadres' positions of responsibility in the party. The fact that the party signed the 2008 SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (SADC, 2021) is insufficient if it does not create practical pathways for women to hold leadership positions in the party.

Interesting developments have been taking place in the area of the struggle for women's emancipation within the ANC since the beginning of 1990. The ANC Women's League (ANCWL) proposed that 30% of the ANC NEC be women but that was rejected by the 48<sup>th</sup> National Conference in 1991 (Knapp, 2015). All the women's organisations in the country were persuaded by the ANC Women's League to form an alliance – the mission of this alliance would be to conduct research, coordinate efforts, and draft a women's charter based on the objectives and issues that matter most to women across the nation (SA History Online, 2011). Early in 1991, the National Women's Coalition (NWC) was established, and work on the Women's Charter began right away. As a result, significant appointments of women to the government coincided with the establishment of democracy in 1994. This was the result of the effective advocacy of women who were organised during the transition under the guidance of the NWC (Kedijang, 2018).

The ANC adopted a 50/50 gender parity policy on all of its structures at its 52<sup>nd</sup> National Conference in Polokwane in 2007 (Martens, 2012). There is no doubt that gender quotas have contributed significantly to the rise of women in the ANC NEC. The standing of women in the broader structures of the party has not dramatically improved despite this. In the provinces, regions, and branches, men still make up the large majority of elected officials and to this day, the late Edna Molewa remains the only woman to have been elected provincial Chairperson (North West) and currently only Zandile Gumede leads a region (eThekweni).

This is because gender parity only deals with issues of gender politics at a procedural and policy level. It does not address the substantive equality that remain absent in leadership positions within the party. It doesn't matter whether there are 60 females in ANC's 80-member NEC if, collectively, they don't yield as much influence as the 20 male members. To state the obvious, this isn't merely a numbers game, it's about creating real change about how women are viewed in the ANC and the influence that they hold.

### **The Top 6 Debate – Now Top 7**

The top 7, formerly the top 6, are the most powerful positions in the ruling ANC – which comprise the president, deputy president, national chairperson, secretary general, two deputy secretary generals (the second deputy secretary general was added after the 2022 National Conference) and the treasurer-general. These are the national office bearers of the ANC.

Formerly ‘unprepared for a black President’, South Africa eventually elected Nelson Mandela as its first, and the result was stability for the ANC and the nation as a whole. No woman has ever been elected president or deputy president of the ANC in its 110-year history. Interestingly, sometimes even women themselves have doubts about a woman being president today: the ANC Women’s League once said that South Africa was not ready for a female President, “We want to have a female president in the near future. We are just not prepared for it now. We do not have capable leaders” (Seale, 2013). It is of paramount importance for the ANC to destroy the deeply ingrained patriarchy, particularly the role of men in the ANC, because it is threatening the culture, values, and future of this once glorious movement.

“Democracy and genuine humanism, according to Lenin, is equality. At the age of 18, Adelaide Frances Tambo was the chairperson of the ANC’s George Goch branch and, guess what, Oliver Tambo was an ordinary branch member. He was led by a woman, but history is always written by winners — men” (Mdekazi, 2017).

Since the dawn of democracy in South Africa, the party has held seven elective conferences: the conferences of 1994, 1997 and 2002 saw only one woman elected into the top 6 – Cheryl Carolus, Thenjiwe Mtintso and Sankie Mthembi-Mahanyele respectively (all three occupied the position of Deputy Secretary General – henceforth DSG) – “it seems like the position of deputy secretary-general was created for women” (Tau, 2022).

In order for Jacob Zuma to be elected party deputy president without opposition in 1997, the ANC’s NEC asked Winnie Mandela to decline nomination from the conference

floor; Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma was reduced to nothing more than being the ex-wife of outgoing party leader when she contested for the position of party leader in 2017; and despite having served as the United Nations' Under Secretary General for Women and previously as deputy president of the Republic, Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka has never been voted into the top 6 (7) in the party.

This phenomenon has found expression in slate politics that date back to 2007 when Thabo Mbeki, who wanted to bring an end to the tradition that automatically renders the leader of the ANC the president of the state, by contesting for a third term as party leader. But the conference in Polokwane was more than a contest between Zuma and Mbeki. It was about one faction of the ANC overthrowing another and seizing control. This gave rise to slate politics – always led by men and women included to ensure some kind of gender representation. This also highlights the fact that the women running on these slates were not really in positions of influence or authority.

The 2007 elective conference saw two women in the top 6 for the first time with Baleka Mbete elected National Chairperson, the most senior position to be held by a woman in the ANC to date; and Thandi Modise elected DSG. Baleka Mbete was re-elected five years later and Jessie Duarte replaced Thandi Modise as DSG. Five years ago, Jessie Duarte was re-elected into her position (the only woman to be elected into the top 6 at the 54<sup>th</sup> National Conference) – a position she held until she succumbed to cancer on 17 July 2022. Although the 2022 conference saw the inclusion of three women into the national leadership of the ANC, it was at the behest of a top 6 changed into a top 7. Why this is not a step towards mainstreaming gender parity amongst the national officials of the ANC is that the president, deputy president, chairperson and secretary general positions are all occupied by men. Therefore, the three women who occupy the positions of first and second deputy secretary general as well as treasurer were nothing more than a tick box exercise for men that chose them as running mates for the respective slates.

### **Politically Senior: Women Are Ahead of the Men**

“We are the backbone of this movement. We are the women who have carried the man on our shoulders through the years for them to succeed in the struggle”

– Adelaide Tambo at the  
ANC’s 48th National Conference, 1991

The anomaly here is that unlike their male counterparts, women in the ANC have risen through government and party structures – whereas male leaders have risen to their cabinet posts through party ranks, and not both. This means that women in the ANC generally have more experience than men in the party.

With the exception of Thabo Mbeki – who did play a larger role as Nelson Mandela delegated to him policy-related responsibilities, while he attended to projecting the new republic’s global image (Peter, 1999) – the position of deputy president, which in three of the last four administrations has essentially served as a president-in-waiting, has offered very little opportunity for policy involvement.

Mbeki’s successor, Jacob Zuma served as Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Economic Affairs and Tourism for KwaZulu-Natal from 1994 to 1999. And the highlight of his six-year tenure as State Deputy President was being a facilitator of the Burundi Peace Process (Curtis, 2017). Cyril Ramaphosa, who was deputy president at the time, similarly devoted much time facilitating peace in the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho (The Presidency, 2015). While it might ensure South Africa’s role as the ‘Big Brother’ in efforts to bring about peace and other continental challenges, as well as familiarise themselves with the international community for when they assume the presidency (while not negating the basic truth that SA will bear the brunt of instability in its neighbouring countries), it must also be acknowledged that experience in domestic policy, whose primary duties are management and direct administration, cannot be replaced by credentials in international policy because national interests start domestically.

To what extent does a head of state rely on assurances given to him by members of his cabinet? How can a president hold people accountable if he is not acutely aware of what a ministerial job entails because he has never been one? The fundamental issue facing the ANC and, by extension, South Africa, is that since 1994, none of the presidents have had a ministerial role (and do not know what policy implementation on the ground looks like), instead rising through the customarily dual party-government position of deputy president (Ndzendze, 2022).

On the other hand, women have had extensive experience within the ANC and in government. Take for instance, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, who has served under all the Presidents since the democratic dispensation of 1994: Minister of Health (under Nelson Mandela), Minister of Foreign Affairs (under Thabo Mbeki and Kgalema Motlanthe), Minister of Home Affairs (Under Jacob Zuma) and Minister in the Presidency and later Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Under Cyril Ramaphosa). Before being appointed into Ramaphosa's cabinet, she served as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chairperson of the African Union Commission – the first woman to lead the continental organisation or its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) (DIRCO, 2012).

Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka was a member of the first South African democratically elected Parliament in 1994 – chairing the portfolio committee on Public Service and was the deputy minister in the Department of Trade and Industry. The election of Thabo Mbeki as Mandela's successor saw her appointed as minister of Minerals and Energy. She later became the Deputy President of South Africa (2005 – 2008), the highest-ranking female political leader in the history of the country (ACCORD, 2020). In 2013, she was appointed by the then UN chief, Ban Ki-Moon as the United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women – a position she held for two terms, until 2021 (UN Women, 2021).

Elsewhere on the African continent, women have shown what great leaders they can become. One of the most

outstanding examples of peacebuilding in Africa in has come from the women of the Mano River in West Africa. When Ruth Perry, a prominent member of the Liberia Women Initiative, was chosen to oversee a transitional team of truculent warlords in September 1996, subsequently becoming Africa's first female head of state (Massaquoi, 2007). She contributed to the end of a battle that had carried on for seven years and during which 13 peace deals had been ruled null and void because of her vigour, skill, and respect. Ellen John Sirleaf, the first democratically elected woman President in Africa, ushered Liberia through a peaceful transition of power, ended a civil war and dispelled the notion that her country is a poster boy for destruction - earning her a Noble Peace Prize in the process.

Similarly, in January 1996 a determined women's movement in Sierra Leone helped push a military junta out of power, paving the way for the 11-year-old democratic rule of Ahmed Tejan Kabbah (Bangalie, 2011). Women's groups in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea have been a catalyst for change - irreplaceable in their ability to lead with distinction especially when it is was not fashionable nor conducive to do so - including the likes of Guinea's Sarah Daraba Kaba - who co-ordinated peacemaking efforts in a bid to calm the troubled waters of Mano River.

These are female politicians and leaders who are more experienced than their male colleagues. Maybe the question we should be asking is: Who is more qualified than the other?

### **Ageism and Lack of Succession Plan**

“A country, a movement, a person that does not value its youth & children doesn't deserve its future”

- ANC Longtime President, Oliver Tambo

Young people have been the driving force behind every significant turning point in South Africa and in the ANC, the one organisation that has been a part of the country's dynamic journey for more than a century. Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Walter Anton Lembede, and Robert Sobukwe were amongst the

most notable ANC figures to emerge from the Youth League (YL) during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and came to dominate the fight for liberation (Redding, 2015).

The young leaders of the 1944 generation burst through the gates, motivated by their youthful idealism and impatience against the oppression of black people and senior leaders of the movement who appeared to be locked in a 'gradual' fight for liberation. Young people were prepared to give their lives in order to radicalise their thinking and intellect and develop fresh strategies for fighting for the freedom of the people. They wanted to take over the mother body and chart a way forward in the relentless fight for self-determination - and succeeded in doing so (Diko, 2022).

Leaders like Steve Biko and Rick Turner, who inspired millions of young people to participate actively in the Durban strikes of 1973 and the 1976 student uprising, which brought about the changes that finally led to South Africa's liberation, followed in the 1970s. The Soweto uprising in 1976 and the 1980s street struggles that made South Africa ungovernable to a point of no return bring to mind images of youth as the driving force behind activism and political change.

This brings me to the second point - the absence of young people in leadership positions within the ruling party. The late Peter Mokaba, arguably the most prominent ANC Youth League leader, had never been elected into the top six of the ANC. Malusi Gigaba, once touted as future party leader, was never elevated within party structures, until his unceremonious departure from government and Fikile Mbalula led an unsuccessful bid to become Secretary General in 2012 - all three are former leaders of the ANC Youth League. Others such as F  b   Potgieter-Gqubule and Rapu Molekane have also been overlooked. Today, all six national officials of the ANC are in their 60s and their average age is 64, with party leader, Cyril Ramaphosa - who's likely to be re-elected at the party's 55<sup>th</sup> National Conference - turning 70 later this year. *"Peter Mobaka waited to be the one of the officials of the ANC...comrade Fikile Mbalula waited, comrade Malusi Gigaba waited...we are also told that we must wait in this que.*

*It means that we are going to wait forever because all those that came before us are still waiting in that que and there is no hope that they will one day make it to the other line”* lamented Ronald Lamola (39) at an ANC rally in Mpumalanga in 2022 – Lamola, who had been touted as the potential deputy president, did not make it into the national officials of the ANC in the 2022 Conference.

Former leaders of the ANC YL have not played a role in the succession of the ANC. The ruling party does not have a succession plan as most of the senior leaders have been there since the 1991 conference – and therefore there has never been a new generation of leaders in the party. The role of the youth has proven to be of particular importance in democracies around the world particularly in South Africa as a fledgling democracy. There is a dire need for the development of young people into astute leaders who can carry the banner of the ANC forward.

The youth of its leaders has always been advantageous to the ANC. Only Nelson Mandela (‘Madiba’), who was 70 years old at the time, assumed leadership of the ANC late in his life – and that can’t be divorced from his 27 years in prison. Nevertheless, Mandela’s government was amongst the youngest the nation had ever seen because Madiba himself had valued the wit of his own youth of the 1944 generation and entrusted much of his work to his young deputy and cabinet.

Lembede, Sisulu, Tambo, Mandela, Majombozi, Mda, Nkomo, Nokwe, and many other young leaders who were not just Youth Leaguers but were young leaders driven by a sense of destiny and urgency to lead the entire ANC and country at a time when elders had become more conservative with age were necessary for the ANC to survive at that time. They changed the course of history forever and out of them, came out a globally revered icon.

This is no different to the generation of young people that followed – Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma, Chris Hani, Thandi Modise, Ayanda Dlodlo, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula and others who came into the organisation to lead it into greater frontiers and new waves of battle. If today’s ANC is to revive and thrive, young people must take over the reins.

When compared to the second and third biggest political parties in the country, the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), the ANC is nowhere close to gender equality and intergenerational mix: Helen Zille, now Federal Chair of the DA, had two terms as party leader and was first elected when she was 56 years old and the youngest member amongst the national officials of the DA is 35 years old, Ashor Sarupen; the EFF has a three-a-side with three men and three women in its top six, with party leader, Julius Malema (former leader of the ANC Youth League) 41 years old.

## **Conclusion**

Since the ANC has an internal patriarchal culture of patronage and ageism, women and young people have a hard time climbing the ranks of the party. The dawn of democracy has seen older men refusing to vacate and usher in a new generation of leaders, because for them, the ANC is now a vehicle through which state resources are obtained to enrich themselves – and the now defunct Women’s League and Youth League have not been able to make serious advancements for women and young people to be represented and supported throughout the different tiers of the party. With women only propelled to leading positions because of gender parity policies on provincial top positions, it can easily lead to women becoming mere proxies for men. After all, representation is not only a numbers game. Therefore, gender equality and intergenerational mix policies for the upper tiers of national and provincial leadership are a great achievement but mean little in context of intra-party politics that remain firmly in male hands.

As a result of its entrenched patriarchy and ageism, the party has declined and has been haemorrhaging electoral support for many years. These two factors have made it impossible for the ANC to be a vibrant institution through which there is an emergence of a leadership that is intellectually astute, morally above reproach and professionally grounded, with a thorough grasp of governance. The only way that the ANC can reclaim its hegemony in society is by becoming an organisation that best reflects the dreams and aspirations and

the age and gender demographics of the society it claims to best represent. This can only be achieved when the party, through an intergenerational mix and women's empowerment in positions of responsibility.

Once hailed for its role in the struggle for liberation and best representing the dreams and aspirations of society, now has patriarchy and ageism rearing their ugly heads, making it difficult for the party to evolve, arrest the declining electoral support and adapt to the changing dynamics of the country. If the ANC is to reclaim its place in South Africa as a vehicle for social transformation, it cannot ignore the gender and age demographics any longer.

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