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Finding their feet

South Africa's Government of National Unity
First Anniversary Report

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List of Acronyms

ACW	African Citizens Watch
ANC	African National Congress
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment
DA	Democratic Alliance
FF+	Freedom Front Plus
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNU	Government of National Unity
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
JET	Just Energy Transition
MTDP	Medium-Term Development Plan
PA	Patriotic Alliance
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
RDP	Redistribution Development Plan
SOE	State Owned Enterprise
SSSF	Spaza Shop Support Fund
UDM	United Democratic Movement
VAT	Value Added Tax

Introduction

This report provides an analysis of the Government of South Africa's performance from July 2024 to July 2025. It is based on data collected on the South Africa Citizens Watch Tracker of actions undertaken by the government to fulfil promises outlined during President Cyril Ramaphosa's Opening of Parliament address and the Cabinet-adopted Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024–2029. The report builds upon an earlier report published in February 2025. The South Africa Citizen Watch Tracker enables real-time tracking of government activity. We recognise that interim assessments can sometimes be perceived as premature or unfair, especially when a term is still underway. However, periodic evaluations are essential for fostering transparency, accountability, and informed civic engagement. This report is one of several tools we use to equip citizens with timely, evidence-based insights—ensuring that public discourse is grounded in both context and data.

The African Citizens Watch (ACW) Tracker is an independent platform deployed by SIVIO Institute to track the performance and effectiveness of African governments based on the pledges made in election manifestos and other important policy pronouncements. The platform was initially piloted in Zimbabwe in 2018 and has since expanded to track four (4) other governments in Botswana, Malawi, South Africa and Zambia. The platform captures and reports publicly reported actions of the various governments as they relate to the promises they have made. These promises are categorised under five (5) sectors: economy, social services, governance, corruption and climate change.

The Government of National Unity (GNU) made commitments across multiple sectors: Economy (36% of promises), Governance (21%), Social Services (33%), Corruption (5%), and Climate Change (4%). By anchoring our analysis in these categories, we

aim to provide citizens with a clear, data-driven view of progress— while also identifying areas where momentum must be strengthened.

Background

Since the dawn of democracy in 1994, South Africa has made significant attempts at transforming a deeply unequal and racially segregated society. However, despite some gains, the country's socio-economic and political affairs remain marked by persistent inequality, governance challenges, and political disillusionment. These factors have contributed towards the decline of the electoral dominance of the African National Congress (ANC).

The ANC government has been accused by the opposition parties and the media of leading governance failures, which can be attributed to corruption allegations, including high-profile scandals involving senior ANC leaders, for instance, the Nkandla security updates, the executive engagement with the Gupta brothers, and the Digital Vibes tender associated with the former Minister of Health have severely damaged the party's credibility. Recently, the COVID-19 funds were misappropriated, and no one has been held to account

to date, while the Phala-Phala case involving the President has left a bitter taste for South Africans.

Today, millions of South Africans live in informal settlements without basic services, while municipalities under the ANC are accused of financial mismanagement and dysfunctionality, as reported by the Auditor General (Auditor-General South Africa, 2025).

The ANC has been on a perpetual decline for several reasons. Firstly, the crisis of credibility, failure to deliver on socio-economic promises, and unpunished corruption tendencies. South Africa's promising democracy, which signalled a better future for citizens, has culminated in a disillusioned electorate since the quality of governance and public trust in leadership are under severe strain. The 2024 election results, where the ANC lost its parliamentary majority for the first time, underscore a pivotal moment—a demand from citizens for renewal, accountability,

and competent governance.

This has been the view of many South Africans who are disillusioned by the promise of democracy. The 2024 elections were characterised by voter apathy; many young people abstained from voting, which some believe is due to defections, but also to increasing voter apathy. Before the 2024 elections, 1.2 million new voters were registered by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) (Mbete, 2024), and there was a total of 5 million registered voters under the age of 30 (Love, 2025). For the first time since 1999, according to the IEC, voters under the age of 30 accounted for less than a fifth (18%) of all registered voters (Mbete, 2024) despite making up about 25% of the voting age population. The under-30 age group saw a voter turnout of 48% compared to 61% for older voters (Love, 2025).

South Africa's public sector has come under increasing strain due to a complex web of systemic and structural challenges that have accumulated over decades. Central among these is the exponential growth of the public sector wage bill, which has risen from 5.6% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1994–1995 to 10.4% in 2023–2024 (Mathekga, 2025). While public employment plays an important role in ensuring service delivery, the size and cost of the wage bill have significantly constrained fiscal space. This limits the government's ability to invest in critical developmental priorities such as infrastructure, health, education, and social protection.

Compounding the fiscal strain is the chronic underperformance of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), many of which have become synonymous with inefficiency, mismanagement, and repeated bailouts. Entities like Eskom, Transnet, and the South African Post Office have suffered from leadership instability, poor governance, and weak accountability, further burdening the public purse and undermining public trust.

At a deeper level, structural problems such as entrenched corruption, high levels of violent crime, poverty, and extreme inequality continue to erode the legitimacy and functionality of the public sector. Corruption has become systemic. The recently concluded Zondo Commission of Inquiry into State Capture exposed the extent to which public institutions were compromised to serve narrow political and private interests. Despite commitments to reform, implementation remains inconsistent and often hindered by internal resistance within the state apparatus and ruling party factions.

Moreover, the country's political culture, marked by cadre deployment, factionalism, and weak performance management, has undermined merit-based appointments and contributed to a crisis of capacity in key public institutions. The erosion of state capacity is evident in the declining quality of basic services, poor infrastructure maintenance, and rising levels of public dissatisfaction (Mamokhere, 2023). These weaknesses were starkly illustrated

during the July 2021 unrest, which exposed both the fragility of public order and the inability of the state to respond effectively to crises.

Finally, the persistence of poverty and inequality, both legacies of apartheid and consequences of uneven post-apartheid economic growth, puts additional pressure on the public sector. The state remains the primary vehicle for redistribution and social protection, yet its ability to deliver on these mandates is increasingly compromised by fiscal limitations and governance failures. Addressing South Africa's public sector constraints thus requires more than technical reforms.

The Formation and Promise of the Government of National Unity

The GNU was formally established following the May 2024 National and Provincial Elections (NPE) 20224, which resulted in a hung parliament with the ANC securing only 40% of the vote (Al Jazeera, 2024), its worst performance since 1994. The GNU is comprised of 10 political parties – the ANC, Democratic Alliance (DA), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), Good Party (Good), Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), Patriotic Alliance (PA), Freedom Front Plus (FF+), United Democratic Movement (UDM), Rise Mzansi (Rise) and Al Jama-ah. It was forged as a means of building consensus and stability. On 18 July 2024, President Cyril Ramaphosa delivered his Opening of Parliament Address (Parliament of South Africa, 2024), outlining the coalition's ambitious agenda based on a Statement of Intent (African National Congress, 2024), committed to rapid economic growth, job creation, and improved service delivery.

As South Africa marks the first anniversary of its GNU, the coalition government finds itself at a critical juncture (Davis, 2025). The coalition promised stability, unity, and effective governance. However, one year later, the GNU has been characterised by public displays of disagreement, unprecedented budget delays, stalled service delivery, and mounting challenges that have tested the coalition's resilience and effectiveness.

Methodology

This assessment of the performance of the GNU is based on empirical evidence that we have been gathering during the process of real-time tracking. The process entails tracking individual actions, verifying, and scoring the GNU's progress on its policy promises. The scoring approach ensures objectivity, transparency and sectoral comparability by applying a standardised scoring system to each promise, then aggregating results by sector.

To build the tracker, 121 policy promises were extracted from the 18th of July 2024 Opening of Parliament address made by President Ramaphosa and the MTDP. The promises are categorised into five (5) key sectors: Economy, Governance, Corruption, Climate Change, and Social Services. All governmental actions tracked in this report are captured and archived on the South Africa Citizens Watch Tracker. This live, open-access digital repository compiles evidence-based updates and records progress made against each declared government promise. Each entry is supported by verifiable public data, including parliamentary records, departmental announcements, budget documentation, and independent audits.

Government Sources	Independent News/Media Houses
• The Presidency • Parliamentary Monitoring Group • South African Government • South African Parliament Website • Department of Home Affairs • Department of Sports, Arts and Culture • Government Statements	• Daily Maverick • IOL • Mail and Guardian • News 24 • The Citizen

FIGURE 1   **Overview of Sources Used to Track**

The five (5) categories for each promise have been defined as follows:

- Not Commenced – No discernible steps or actions have been initiated to address the promise.

- In Progress – Initial steps have been taken toward fulfilling the promise, but the actions remain partial or insufficient. Additional measures are needed for full implementation.

- Implemented – The government has fully acted on the promise, with all necessary measures completed to deliver on its commitment.

- Modified – The original promise has been altered—either expanded or reduced—due to shifting circumstances, though efforts continue to align with the overall intent.

- Broken – Government actions have actively contradicted the original promise, moving in a direction that undermines or negates it.

This assessment report follows a methodology that has been used by ACW and refined over time since its piloting in 2018. All reported actions are triangulated and fact-checked across multiple sources before being recorded on the South Africa Citizens Watch Tracker. Each promise is assigned a status and corresponding score based on its implementation progress:

TABLE 1   **Overview of Promise Score**

Status	Description	Score
Implemented	Promise fully delivered as stated in the manifesto	14
In Progress	Partial fulfilment: measurable progress but not fully completed	1–13
Broken/ Not Commenced	No action taken or promise explicitly abandoned	0

The assessment seeks to score the government on the progress that it has made to the fulfilment of its promises. Each promise is tracked through action-level indicators, which are then scored using a refined, multi-point system based on the substance and potential impact of the government's response.

The scoring methodology is structured in this format: promises classified as Implemented receive the maximum score of 14, signifying full delivery. In contrast, those marked as Not Commenced or Broken receive a score of 0, indicating an absence of meaningful action or a reversal of intent. Promises identified as In Progress or Modified are reviewed through a structured set of indicators that gauge both the depth and quality of government action. Each commitment is scored on a scale from 1 to 13, capturing its current stage of implementation.

The evaluation framework draws on four critical dimensions:

01. Has a legal or policy foundation been enacted to underpin the commitment?

02. Are sufficient financial resources allocated or secured to drive implementation?

03. Have relevant ministries or personnel been designated and effectively engaged?

04. Are there established implementation timelines, and have tangible milestones been met?

MAXIMUM SCORE
14
points possible

ACTION			
New Strategy		Yes = 1	No = 0
Policy Reform (+) Incentive **2x weight**		Yes = 2	No = 0
Policy Reform (-) Dis-enabler **2x weight**		Yes = 2	No = 0
Does it fit in an existing Legal Framework?		Yes = 1	No = 0
Has a new law been established?		Yes = 1	No = 0
Has budget implications: New resources have been allocated		Yes = 1	No = 0
Fits within an existing ministry		Yes = 1	No = 0
Cross ministry/agency collaboration established		Yes = 1	No = 0
Time-frame-fits within current annual planning cycle **2x weight**		Yes = 2	No = 0
Is it a fully implemented policy? **5x weight**		Yes = 5	No = 0
Barometer Action Score		**TOTAL**	

FIGURE 2   **Promise Assessment Scoring**

For each sector, an average score is derived by totalling the scores of all classified promises within that sector and dividing by the number of promises assessed. This method allows for cross-sector comparison, helping to identify areas where government action is either advancing or lagging. The overall performance score is then calculated by averaging the sectoral scores, offering an integrated overview of progress across the full policy landscape.

Findings: What has the Government of National Unity achieved so far?

In its first year, the GNU has made modest progress toward fulfilling its commitments. Out of the 121 promises tracked, the government has commenced work on 26 promises (21% of promises) and to date has made 9% progress toward fulfilment.

Back in February, before the MTDP was released, the government had executed 17 actions related to the 38 promises captured in the Opening Address to Parliament (Mfuto, 2025). Since then, the platform has added 83 promises that were made in the MTDP. As of July 2025, the tracker has captured 30 actions across 26 promises.
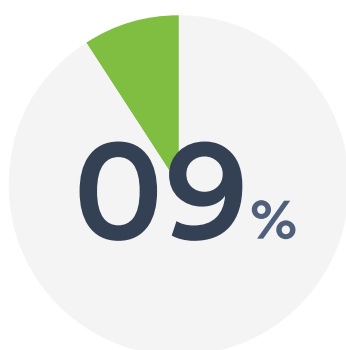
09%

FIGURE 3   **Overview Progress of the GNU in the first year**

TABLE 2   **Sector Breakdown of Progress**

Sector	Number Promises	Number of Actions	Percentage Fully implemented	Percentage Broken	Percentage In Progress	Assessment score
Economy	44	12	0%	0%	23%	12%
Governance	22	5	0%	0%	23%	4%
Corruption	7	3	0%	0%	43%	15%
Climate Change	6	0	0%	0%	0%	0%
Social Services	42	10	0%	0%	19%	11%
Overall Total	**121**	**30**	**0%**	**0%**	**21%**	**9%**

Economy

Out of the 44 promises made across nine economic sub-sectors, the government has so far carried out 12 actions—yielding an overall implementation score of 12%.

TABLE 3   **Overview of Economic Sector Performance**

Sub-sector	Number of Promises	Number of Actions	Assessment Score
Industry and Economic Development	16	4	10%
Job Creation and Employment	6	2	10%
Trade and Infrastructure Investment	8	4	19%
Tourism	1	0	0%
Energy	4	1	14%
Transport	6	0	0%
Resource Mobilisation	1	0	0%
Land Reform	1	1	57%
Debt Resolution	1	0	0%
Total	**44**	**12**	**12%**

One of the key promises in this sector is to launch One Stop Shops across all provinces for small and medium enterprises. This promise is expected to address major concerns regarding the support that small and medium enterprises receive from the government and the red tape that exists in ensuring that marginalised businesses are also recognised. There is also an important promise on energy that aims to expand and strengthen the transmission network to enable new generation capacity in areas with strong wind and solar resources.

One notable commitment under the Industry and Economic Development sub-sector is to capacitate the Spaza Shop Support Fund (SSSF), which falls under the promise to support small- and medium-sized enterprises in townships and rural areas. As of now, the Department of Small Business Development has disbursed R6 million (1.2%) from the

total allocation of R500 million for this fund (Mashilo, 2025). The initiative is designed to provide financial assistance and capacity support to South African-owned spaza shops and food-handling businesses located in townships and rural communities.

The SSSF aims to promote local enterprise, stimulate grassroots economic activity, and ensure that small informal businesses, particularly in historically underserved areas, are better positioned to grow, become sustainable, and contribute to job creation. While the disbursement marks a step in the right direction, the amount released so far reflects only a small fraction of the total budgeted support, indicating the need for accelerated implementation and transparency in reaching the intended beneficiaries.

The State of the Economy — Budget Battles and Fiscal Fragility

Context

In 2025, the GNU faced its first major test: passing a national budget amid deep ideological divisions. The country's fiscal constraints—rising debt, sluggish growth, and mounting service delivery pressures—prompted the National Treasury to propose a controversial Value Added Tax (VAT) hike from 15% to 17% (Ernst & Young, 2025).

Conflict

The proposed VAT increase ignited fierce opposition within the GNU. Key coalition partners, including the DA and FF+, condemned the measure as regressive and anti-poor. Accusations of inadequate consultation and procedural flaws led to Budget 1.0 being withdrawn before tabling. The budget had to be revised and presented three times, each iteration reflecting political compromise rather than economic strategy.

- Budget 1.0: Proposed 2% VAT hike — rejected due to coalition discord.

- Budget 2.0: Staggered 1% VAT hike — legally challenged and rescinded.

- Budget 3.0: No VAT hike — but introduced deep spending cuts.

Consequences

The prolonged budget impasse destabilised investor confidence and undermined growth projections.

TABLE 4   **Economic Consequences of Budget Delays**

Indicator	March 2025	May 2025
GDP Growth Forecast	1.9%	1.4%
Infrastructure Cuts	—	R13 billion
Social Grant Reductions	—	80% decrease

The crisis revealed the fragility of coalition governance in economic policymaking. The inability to pass a coherent fiscal framework exposed the GNU's lack of unity and strategic direction, with ripple effects across markets and public institutions.

Implications

- Coalition governments require robust consensus-building mechanisms on fiscal policy.

- Political instability directly impacts economic planning and investor sentiment.

- The budget process must balance fiscal discipline with social equity to avoid deepening inequality.

Under the land reform sub-sector, the government promised to increase funding towards land reform, prioritise the transfer of state land and improve post-settlement support by strengthening the institutional capacity of responsible structures. The 57% score in this sub-sector reflects meaningful progress driven by the enactment of the Expropriation Act 2024 (Expropriation Bill), which provides a legal foundation for transferring state land in the public interest, including under conditions of nil compensation. This satisfies the first indicator—establishing a

legislative basis for reform—but falls short on the remaining three. The Act does not allocate financial resources for implementation; lacks coordinated institutional engagement for post-settlement support, and offers no clear timelines or measurable milestones. While it marks a significant step toward fulfilling the promise to prioritise land redistribution, its impact remains limited without accompanying budgetary and administrative reforms.

Governance

Under governance, five (5) out of the 22 promises are in progress. The government has seen a 4% progress towards fulfilling the promises made in the sector. All of the promises that have commenced are under one sub-sector, 'State Capacity Development and Monitoring'.

TABLE 5   **Overview of Governance Sector Performance**

Sub-sector	Number of Promises	Number of Actions	Assessment Score
State Capacity Development and Monitoring	19	5	12%
Women, Youth and People with Disabilities	1	0	0%
International Relations and Foreign Affairs	2	0	0%
Total	**22**	**5**	**4%**

Progress under governance includes a key milestone: the launch of Phase II of Operation Vulindlela (South African Government News Agency, 2025a), which is set to play a leading role in advancing South Africa's Digital Transformation Roadmap. This falls under the promise to launch the second phase of Operation Vulindlela, which will focus on reforming the local government system and improving the delivery of basic services, and harnessing digital public infrastructure as a driver of growth and inclusion. President Cyril Ramaphosa officially launched the second phase of this initiative, which is strategically focused on tackling some of the country's most pressing structural challenges, namely spatial inequality, poor local government performance, and the urgent need for digital transformation in the public sector.

As part of this effort, the Cabinet has approved the Roadmap for Digital Transformation of Government, a policy framework aimed at modernising government operations and service delivery (South African Government News Agency, 2025a). The roadmap envisions a more efficient, transparent, and citizen-centred state by investing in digital public infrastructure, streamlining bureaucratic processes, and expanding access to digital services, particularly for marginalised communities. Operation Vulindlela Phase II signals a more targeted and reform-driven approach to governance, to unlock inclusive economic growth and improve the responsiveness and efficiency of the state.

Corruption

In this sector, three (3) out of the seven (7) promises are in progress. However, a cause for concern remains the complete lack of progress on the government's three (3) core anti-corruption promises. These include the establishment of independent investigative agencies and the reform of governance structures within state-owned enterprises (SOEs), critical measures that could significantly strengthen transparency and accountability across public institutions.

TABLE 6   **Overview of Corruption Sector Performance**

Sub-sector	Number of Promises	Number of Actions	Assessment Score
Corruption	7	3	12%
Total	**7**	**3**	**12%**

Despite all this, there have been some recent developments that signal intent. Notably, the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (South African Government News Agency, 2025c) has successfully frozen and recovered funds linked to stolen public resources, demonstrating that actors within the state are taking concrete steps toward uprooting corruption by addressing the promise to increase in freezing and recovering money assets that are the proceeds of unlawful conduct and crime. While this is a positive indication of what is possible, it remains an isolated success rather than part of a sustained, strategic anti-corruption drive.

In the absence of broader institutional reforms and full implementation of the promised anti-corruption measures, such actions, though commendable, fall short of the scale and urgency required. Much more remains to be done to build public trust and ensure that accountability mechanisms are embedded across all levels of government.

Climate Change

All six (6) promises — from green energy investments to climate resilience — have not been commenced. As the world tilts toward environmental urgency, this lack of movement signals a troubling disconnect.

TABLE 7   **Overview of Climate Change Sector Performance**

Sub-sector	Number of Promises	Number of Actions	Assessment Score
Climate Change	6	0	0%
Total	**6**	**0**	**0%**

The six (6) promises that the government has committed to are:

- Accelerate growth through massive new investment in the energy sector by leveraging solar and wind resources.

- Develop context-appropriate and sector-driven climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.

- Establish a Climate Change Response Fund.

- Prioritise and accelerate the implementation of the Just Transition Framework, Just Energy Transition (JET) Trade and Infrastructure Investment Plan and JET Implementation Plan.

- Facilitate investments in the electricity, green hydrogen, and new energy vehicles sectors.

- Undertake a just transition towards renewable energy.

Despite repeated warnings from scientists, communities, and civil society about the intensifying climate crisis, the government has yet to take visible or decisive steps in this area, at least according to the publicly tracked commitments.

This lack of action could be attributed to several intersecting challenges, including limited political will, poor interdepartmental coordination, and a continued overreliance on fossil fuels, particularly coal, which remains central to the country's energy strategy. It may also reflect a governance culture that prioritises short-term economic and political gains over long-term sustainability and intergenerational equity.

However, the cost of inaction is already being felt—particularly by the most vulnerable communities who bear the brunt of climate-related shocks. The government's failure to embed climate adaptation and mitigation strategies into its broader development agenda risks not only worsening inequality but also undermining national resilience

in the face of future disasters.

The absence of climate action is not just a policy gap—it is a crisis of accountability and foresight. Urgent, coordinated, and transformative leadership is needed to ensure South Africa transitions toward a greener, more equitable, and climate-resilient future. The promises above provide a good basis for citizens to advocate for and encourage the government to prioritise climate mitigation.

Social Services

Under the Social Services category, eight (8) of the 42 promises are in progress. A significant portion of this progress is concentrated within the education sector, where several initiatives are currently in progress. These include efforts to increase budget allocations for public schools, aimed at improving infrastructure, access to learning materials, and the overall quality of education across the country.

TABLE 8   **Overview of Social Services Sector Performance**

Sector	Number of Promises	Number of Actions	Assessment Score
Social Protection	6	1	7%
Women, Youth and People with Disabilities	11	3	15%
Food Security	3	0	0%
Health	5	2	27%
Education	7	2	24%
Housing and Development	6	0	0%
Water and Sanitation	3	2	18%
Social Services	1	0	0%
Total	**42**	**10**	**11%**

Recent actions highlighted in the tracker show the government's recognition of the urgent need to strengthen the social foundations of society, particularly through investment in basic education. This includes measures to address long-standing challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of essential resources, and disparities between urban and rural schooling environments. To address the promise to ensure schools are conducive to education, with enough classrooms, safe and appropriate sanitation facilities, clean water and a daily meal for those who need it. The Department of Basic Education has allocated R15.3 billion for the Education Infrastructure Grant to be used by provinces to eliminate pit toilets, expand classrooms and repair schools (South African Government News Agency, 2025b). So far, progress has been made in school infrastructure and safety, with 97% of sanitation projects completed under the Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE) initiative. R10 billion will feed over

nine million learners daily, reflecting the constitutional duty and belief in education as a powerful tool for transformation. This was also preceded by the signing of the Basic Education Amendment Laws Bill into an Act by President Cyril Ramaphosa (The Presidency, 2024). The Basic Education Laws Amendment Act, 2024, aims to transform Basic Education and eliminate inequality by ensuring adequate classrooms, sanitation, clean water, and daily meals. It delegates responsibility to the Provincial Department of Basic Education Heads, makes Grade R compulsory, punishes those denied access, and prohibits corporal punishment and initiation practices in schools (Mfuto, 2025).

While these steps are encouraging, especially the newly launched interventions, their impact will depend heavily on consistent implementation, proper oversight, and ensuring that funds are directed efficiently at schools most in need. The progress under Social Services reflects a growing acknowledgement of education's role in breaking the cycle of poverty and inequality, but sustained action and accountability will be crucial to translating these commitments into lasting change.

The State of Social Services — Budget Cuts and Service Collapse

Context

South Africa's social services—particularly health and education—have long been under strain. The 2025 budget crisis exacerbated these pressures, delaying funding flows and slashing allocations to critical programs.

Conflict

- While Budget 3.0 avoided a VAT increase, it came at the cost of deep cuts to frontline services:

- Infrastructure funding reduced by R13 billion.

- Social grant increases slashed from R23.2 billion to R1.6 billion.

- Education and health sectors received modest nominal increases, but real growth lagged behind inflation.

Consequences

The impact on service delivery was immediate and severe.

TABLE 9   **Consequences of Budget Delays on Service Delivery**

Sector	Impact
Infrastructure	79% of projects delayed; R2.9 billion in stalled investments
Education	2.6% real growth; thousands of vacant posts remain
Health	Cuts to HIV/AIDS (-3.1%) and EMS (-2.4%) programs
Social Grants	80% reduction in planned increases

The Department of Public Works reported delays in 164 out of 206 infrastructure projects, affecting schools, hospitals, and police stations. These disruptions compound existing backlogs and erode public trust in government capacity.

Implications

- Budget delays and austerity measures disproportionately harm vulnerable populations.

- Service delivery requires predictable, protected funding streams—especially in coalition contexts.

- Long-term underinvestment in education and health undermines national development goals.

Lessons Learnt

The ACW platform's first year of tracking the Government of South Africa has underscored several critical lessons, both in terms of governance accountability and the methodology of tracking government performance in real-time. However, there is a deep complexity in tracking political commitments made by government leaders.

Firstly, tracking 121 promises from the Opening of Parliament Inaugural speech by the President and the MTDP across five sectors (Economy, Governance, Corruption, Climate Change, Social Services) requires navigating a highly complex institutional and political landscape.

The ACW initiative has given us the following insights.

- Government communication is fragmented. Key actions are often spread across ministerial statements, parliamentary minutes, press briefings, budget votes, and Presidential speeches. Consolidating this into one coherent framework has been a significant challenge.

- Language is often vague or aspirational, making it difficult to determine whether an action has been completed or is merely symbolic. Promises often lack clear timelines, measurable indicators, or responsible departments.

- Coalition dynamics hinder progress clarity. As seen in the 2025 budget crisis, competing priorities among GNU parties lead to delays, reversals, or diluted commitments. This creates a moving target for trackers trying to assess what counts as progress.

Limitations of Using Government Gazettes, Speeches, and Reports

The ACW platform relies heavily on official sources: Presidential speeches, national and departmental budget documents, gazettes, and official reports to establish a baseline for government commitments and action. However, this reliance introduces

several limitations, such as:

- **Delay and accessibility issues:** Government gazettes and departmental updates are not always timely or easily accessible. Critical actions can go unreported or undocumented, skewing perceptions of inaction. For instance, the publication of the MTDP took almost a month before it was made available to the public after it was endorsed by the cabinet.

- **Speeches are rhetorical, not binding:** Presidential and ministerial speeches are often politically driven, designed to inspire or reassure rather than inform. They frequently contain broad promises that may not be backed by policy or budgetary commitments. For instance, in speeches made by the President, the Expropriation Act has been interpreted as if it would allow the government to appropriate land even without compensation. In the speeches, the political leaders do not dissect the intricacies of the policy and how it is aimed at addressing inequality.

- **Reports often lack disaggregated data:** Progress is usually presented in aggregate form, masking inequalities or disparities at provincial and municipal levels. This undermines the ability to assess tangible impact on communities. Even though the tracker focuses on the national government, it is in the interests of citizens to be informed about the allocation of budget and expenditure in their communities. Despite these challenges, the ACW has added immense value by creating a centralised, public-facing, and evidence-based monitoring system that converts political discourse into accountable data points.

Importance of Data-Driven Monitoring and Tangible Evidence

The South African case highlights how evidence-based tracking fosters transparency, empowers citizens, and holds governments accountable. The ACW methodology incorporates a structured scoring framework that includes legislative or policy foundation, budgetary allocations, departmental responsibility, and measurable implementation milestones.

This empirical lens helps differentiate between political promises and actual delivery. For example, although President Cyril Ramaphosa announced support for spaza shops, ACW revealed that only R6 million out of a R500 million fund was disbursed. Secondly, despite claims of anti-corruption reforms, none of the three (3) key anti-corruption promises had been acted on by the end of the first year. Without such a structured and data-backed approach, public assessments would rely solely on political rhetoric or media narratives, leaving citizens disempowered and misinformed.

The ACW model in South Africa has proven both necessary and innovative in a time of coalition politics, fiscal austerity, and declining public trust. However, it has also revealed the systemic barriers to transparent governance, bureaucratic opacity, political fragmentation, and inconsistent data availability.

Above all, the South African experience reaffirms that empirical, data-driven monitoring is not optional, but it is essential for democratic re-imagination, especially in an era of growing disillusionment and political uncertainty.

Conclusion

In our report in March, we said it was still early days for the GNU, and perhaps it will be judged on how it resolves problems of poverty, unemployment, weak service delivery and crime. These have become the Waterloo of South Africa's post-apartheid governments. Attempts at fixing these challenges, combined with South Africa's values-based foreign policy, will most likely create more friction within the GNU. It seems like the friction has tightened the collapse.

The South African Federation of Trade Unions' assessment (2025) of the GNU's first year painted a stark picture; these statistics underscore the magnitude of the service delivery crisis facing the country.

- 12.7 million people are unemployed, 80% for more than a year.

- Per capita spending on basic services shrank by 18.3% since 2020.

- Over 23,000 education posts were lost through attrition.

One year after its formation, South Africa's GNU stands at a crossroads. The budget crisis of 2025 has exposed fundamental weaknesses in the coalition's ability to govern effectively, with severe consequences for service delivery, infrastructure development, and social protection. The unprecedented delays in budget adoption have created a cascade of problems that will likely persist well beyond the current financial year.

This report calls for a political and institutional transformation that prioritises accountability, restores ethical leadership, and builds a developmental state capable of responding to the country's complex socio-economic challenges.

The GNU's survival may depend on its ability to move beyond crisis management toward proactive governance. As South Africans increasingly express that "this is not what we voted for" (Majadibodu, 2025), the coalition faces mounting pressure to deliver tangible improvements in unemployment, service delivery, and curbing

corruption. The promise of unity and effective governance that characterised the GNU's formation has given way to the harsh realities of coalition politics and fiscal constraints.

The delays in budget tabling and adoption have not only hindered immediate project implementation but have also undermined confidence in the GNU's ability to govern effectively. Without decisive action to address these systemic challenges, the coalition risks becoming another failed experiment in South African governance, with profound implications for the country's democratic future and development prospects.

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