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The role of ANC economic policies in driving social and economic transformation in South Africa.

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

A Research Report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, School of Governance, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management.

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Supervised by Dr Hlengiwe Ndlovu

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is premised on the argument that while the African National Congress (ANC) has consistently articulated a commitment to social and economic transformation, the policy decisions made during and after the 2012 policy conference reflect a continuity of macroeconomic orthodoxy that limits the potential for genuine transformation. The study explores the policy resolutions adopted during President Jacob Zuma's administration, their alignment with the government's 2014 to 2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), and the subsequent policy shifts introduced under President Cyril Ramaphosa. Situated within the broader discourse of post-apartheid economic reform, this research engages the framework of Transformative Social Policy (TSP) developed by Thandika Mkandawire, which emphasises the interrelated functions of redistribution, reproduction, production, and protection. Grounded in the historical context of South Africa's persistent inequality, poverty, and unemployment, the study examines whether ANC policy efforts during this period met the conditions Mkandawire outlines as necessary for transformation, including investment in education and innovation, labour stability, inclusive institutions, and coherence between economic and social policies. Employing a qualitative document analysis methodology, the research draws evidence from ANC policy documents, government strategic plans, and public discourse to assess the extent to which these conditions were present and whether the policies adopted had the potential to realise TSP goals. The findings reveal that Radical Economic Transformation (RET) emerged as a dominant political narrative during the Zuma presidency, positioned as a vehicle for transformative change. However, the absence of a formal policy framework for RET, coupled with its rejection during the ANC's 2012 policy conference, undermined its potential as a structured agenda for change. Despite this, RET continued to influence decision making within state departments and state owned entities, often leading to governance challenges, internal party conflict, and contested interpretations of policy. While elements of TSP are reflected in ANC rhetoric and planning documents, the lack of institutional readiness and the failure to create enabling conditions limited the prospects for meaningful transformation. The contribution of this study lies in its critical interrogation of the disconnect between the ANC's stated transformative ambitions and the policy and institutional realities of

governance, offering a nuanced understanding of the limits and contradictions within post-apartheid policy development in South Africa.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Management in Governance at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other University. Where I have used the work of other authors, I have properly acknowledged them, and I have not copied any author or scholar's work with the intention of passing it off as my own. All the document that has been analysed for the purposes of this research report have also been cited correctly and I have not passed off any work, suggestions and quotes as my own.

Signature: E. HASANE

Date: 30 March 2025

DEDICATION

I distinctly remember aiding my mother, Ms. Sinelwa Hasane, in her pursuit of domestic employment in the suburbs of Mthatha. We would explore middle-class residences, soliciting information regarding employment opportunities. She undertook this challenging endeavour to augment her government social security benefits and guarantee that my siblings and I might have an education. As a working adult, I have developed a deeper appreciation for her efforts than I did in my childhood, with very little resources. She relinquished her freedom, health, and valuable time with us, as such employment frequently necessitated her absence from home. Her passing six years ago deprived her of the chance to witness my postgraduate graduation. I am thankful that she was able to see my undergraduate graduation, when she observed the results of her sacrifices. My ongoing endeavours in education and employment are devoted to her and to single mothers like her who, despite little resources, labour diligently to provide their children with equitable opportunities in life.

Upon my decision to return to my studies, my siblings offered their encouragement, despite my occasional perception of this choice as self-serving, since it constrained the resources, time, and attention I could allocate to them.

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I am naturally pessimistic and have a tendency to think that the worst or most unfavourable things will happen. It was difficult for me to believe that I could balance academics in my early 30s with obligations to my family, career, and life. I was afraid that going back to school would make me more likely to fail in some aspect of my life. However, many others who gave support and related their own experiences juggling life and academic endeavours contested and disproved this notion. My friend Ms. Thandi Mpondo admonished me bluntly to quit thinking like that, pointing out that I had committed to different aspects of my life and had not allowed any of them to fail. Using herself as an example, she showed that she made significant progress and pursued academic credentials despite working in government. In a similar vein, another buddy, Mr. Akanyang Moniaisa, persistently encouraged me to submit applications and followed up to make sure I didn't give up. When I was feeling self-conscious, their support and persistence gave me the boost I needed.

My coworkers in the Communications Unit of the Department of Transport have my sincere gratitude. Even during the most difficult seasons, like Easter and the holiday season, when the department's road safety programs were at their height, they kindly understood my request for leave during important academic periods. They made my academic endeavours more doable by stepping in and helping me during my study and exam breaks.

Students are frequently warned about supervisors that are unsupportive, apathetic, or uninterested when they first start their academic careers. I was lucky, nevertheless, to have Dr. Hlengiwe Ndlovu as my supervisor who proved these warnings to be false. She kept in regular and easy touch, showed real concern and compassion for my particular situation, and offered resolute support that increased my self-assurance at work. In addition to helping me achieve, her tolerance and direction motivated me to strive for more academic and knowledge-building contributions in the future.

ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
ANCYL.	African National Congress Youth League
BBEE	Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DA	Democratic Alliance
DPME	Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPAP	Industrial Policy Action Plan
MTSF	Medium-Term Strategic Framework
NDP	National Development Plan
NDR	National Democratic Revolution
NPC	National Planning Commission
NEDLAC	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NHI	National Health Insurance
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RET	Radical Economic Transformation
RSET	Radical Socio-Economic Transformation

SACP	South African Communist Party
SMMEs	Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises
SOEs	State-Owned Enterprises
TSP.	Transformative Social Policy
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNRISD	United Nations study Institute for Social Development'
WB	World Bank
WTO	World Trade Organization

Chapter 1

Foundation and Framing of the Study

1.1 Introduction

Former President Jacob Zuma and his allies have consistently argued that his administration initiated a policy agenda grounded in Radical Economic Transformation (RET), which they claim was abandoned by President Cyril Ramaphosa following Zuma's resignation. These claims draw their origins from the African National Congress (ANC)'s 2012 Policy and Elective Conference, which intensified calls for a 'Second Transition' of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR). At this juncture, RET was framed as the next phase of transformation, aiming to address the persistent structural inequalities inherited from apartheid. This terminology was later incorporated into formal government planning through the 2014 to 2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) (ANC, 2012; Government of South Africa, 2014).

During this period, divisions within the ANC deepened. One faction supported RET under President Zuma, while the other promoted what later became known as Radical Socio Economic Transformation (RSET) under President Ramaphosa. This division became increasingly visible during the ANC's 2017 leadership contest and exemplified broader ideological tensions in post-apartheid economic policymaking. Despite different approaches, both factions maintained their commitment to transformation, aligning with the ANC's long-standing developmental agenda established during its liberation struggle.

Since the dawn of democracy in 1994, the ANC has positioned itself as the primary driver of economic reform and redress. The party's founding documents, including the 1943 African Claims and the 1955 Freedom Charter, outlined a vision rooted in social justice, redistribution, and universal access to services such as education, healthcare, and decent work (ANC, 1943; ANC, 1955; Van Niekerk, 2013; Van Niekerk, 2019). Despite the promises embodied in these

texts, the ANC's ability to deliver on its radical commitments has been limited. South Africa continues to grapple with persistent poverty, deepening inequality, and high levels of unemployment. These conditions have prompted increasing critique, both from within the ANC and from broader society, regarding the party's transformation agenda (Zuma, 2012; Government of South Africa, 2019).

Over the last three decades, the ANC-led government has introduced a series of economic policy frameworks, including the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative (ASGISA), and the National Development Plan (NDP). While these policies outlined strategic visions for economic reform, their outcomes have been mixed. Scholars and policy analysts argue that these frameworks failed to achieve their core developmental objectives due to weak implementation, corruption, inconsistent governance, and internal party fragmentation (Padayachee and Van Niekerk, 2017; Government of South Africa, 2019). These challenges were further compounded by global economic pressures and the influence of neoliberalism, which steered the ANC toward market-driven reforms that prioritised liberalisation and fiscal discipline over structural transformation (Padayachee and Van Niekerk, 2017).

The tensions within the ANC's economic strategy came to a head at the 2012 ANC Policy Conference. At the centre of these debates was the contested legacy and direction of the National Democratic Revolution. The ANC's alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) had long been informed by the two-stage theory of revolution. This Marxist-influenced theory, adapted by the SACP, proposed an initial phase of national liberation followed by a second phase of economic transformation aimed at dismantling structural inequalities through redistributive mechanisms (Jonas, 2015; Rapanyane, 2021). By 2012, many within the alliance argued that the ANC had stalled in progressing toward the second stage, prompting renewed calls for RET as a vehicle for realising economic justice.

However, the implementation of RET during Zuma's second term was marred by factionalism and contestation over state resources. Competing interests within the ANC contributed to policy incoherence and compromised the realisation of transformative goals (Desai, 2018). The rise of opposition movements such as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), combined with growing activism from student groups and labour movements, added pressure on the ANC to deliver tangible socio-economic reforms. In response, the Zuma administration adopted radical policy directives in sectors such as mining, energy, and public enterprises. These included revisions to the Mining Charter, plans for nuclear energy procurement, and shifts in state procurement practices to prioritise black economic empowerment. Zuma and his allies later cited these as evidence of a coherent RET policy agenda.

Under President Ramaphosa, there was a significant shift in discourse and policy emphasis. The administration favoured the language of Radical Socio Economic Transformation (RSET), distancing itself from RET, which critics associated with state capture and elite-driven empowerment. Ramaphosa's approach emphasised good governance, institutional reform, and the restoration of public trust. Policy shifts included the cancellation of nuclear procurement deals, adjustments to the Mining Charter, and renewed efforts to professionalise state owned enterprises. The establishment of the Commission of Inquiry into State Capture, chaired by Chief Justice Raymond Zondo, symbolised this reformist turn (Moerane, 2019; Mathekga, 2018). Critics of Ramaphosa, particularly from the pro-RET faction, accused him of derailing transformative efforts and prioritising elite consensus over mass-based change (Desai, 2018).
To assess the claims of both administrations and their impact on the ANC's broader developmental vision, this study applies Thandika Mkandawire's framework of Transformative Social Policy (TSP). Mkandawire (2011) argues that social policy must serve four interlinked functions to achieve genuine transformation: redistribution, reproduction, protection, and production. This approach enables a holistic evaluation of whether ANC economic policies under Zuma and Ramaphosa aligned with these functions and whether the conditions for successful policy transformation were present.

International experiences provide useful comparative insights. Kpessa-Whyte (2021) highlights Ghana's post-colonial emphasis on social policy as central to economic development, focusing on investments in education, health, and social welfare. These investments not only addressed inequality but also contributed to productivity and economic growth. Similarly, Mkandawire (2011a) explores the case of Asian countries such as South Korea and Taiwan, which implemented land reforms and invested heavily in education as part of their industrial strategies. Singapore's investment in vocational training and universal education created a highly skilled workforce and positioned the country as globally competitive, while maintaining a strong commitment to social equity (Mkandawire, 2010). These cases suggest that transformative policies are most effective when they are integrated, coherent, and grounded in strong institutions.

This research investigates whether the ANC's policy resolutions, particularly from the 2012 Policy Conference and the 2014 to 2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework, reflect the principles of transformative social policy. By analysing both party resolutions and government implementation, the study seeks to understand the extent to which the ANC has pursued a coherent transformation agenda. Furthermore, it interrogates the ideological and practical tensions within the party that continue to shape South Africa's socio-economic trajectory.

This research explores the ANC's policy resolutions adopted under President Jacob Zuma, focusing on their relationship to the government's 2014 to 2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), which was the principal planning instrument during this period. It also examines the shifts in economic policy under President Cyril Ramaphosa, who succeeded Zuma amid growing internal and public concern regarding state capture and governance failures. While both administrations claimed to champion transformative objectives, their approaches diverged significantly in rhetoric, institutional strategy, and implementation. These divergences reflect not only internal factional contestation within the ANC, but also deeper ideological tensions about the nature and direction of economic reform in democratic South Africa. I argue that, despite the ANC's stated commitment to transformation, policy decisions made during and after the 2012 Policy Conference reveal a continued adherence to

macroeconomic orthodoxy. This orthodoxy, rooted in liberal economic principles that prioritise fiscal discipline and market stability, has constrained the possibilities for genuine structural transformation. The 2012 conference marked a turning point in the party's economic policy discourse, with intensified calls for a ;Second Transition' of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) and the formal introduction of the concept of Radical Economic Transformation (RET) into the policy arena.

The study situates its analysis within the broader context of post-apartheid economic policy and development, drawing on the framework of Transformative Social Policy (TSP) as articulated by the late Thandika Mkandawire. TSP offers a multidimensional lens through which to assess the social and developmental role of economic policy. It identifies four interrelated policy functions: redistribution, reproduction, protection, and production, as essential to achieving meaningful transformation. Furthermore, Mkandawire stresses the importance of conditions such as institutional coherence, political legitimacy, inclusive governance, and public investment in education, health, and innovation for transformation to be sustainable and effective.

Anchored in this framework, the study adopts a qualitative methodology, using document analysis to examine ANC policy texts, strategic government plans, and public political discourse from 2012 to 2019. The aim is to assess whether ANC economic policies during this period reflect the principles of TSP, and whether the necessary enabling conditions for transformation were present. Special attention is given to how RET, as advanced by the Zuma administration, was constructed, debated, and implemented, or in some cases, not implemented, within government departments and state owned entities. The findings of this study indicate that while the ANC's economic policies express elements of transformative social policy in their stated goals, the actual implementation has been undermined by institutional weaknesses, factional battles, and an inconsistent policy environment. As a result, the transformative potential of ANC-led governance has been significantly constrained, and the social and economic conditions of the majority remain largely unchanged.

The contribution of this research lies in its critical interrogation of the disjuncture between the ANC's transformative ambitions and the practical realities of governance. By applying the TSP framework, the study offers a nuanced analysis of the extent to which post-apartheid economic policy has fulfilled its redistributive and developmental goals. It highlights the limitations of symbolic transformation when it is not accompanied by institutional reform, policy coherence, and sustained political will. In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing debates about the future of transformation in South Africa and the role of the state in addressing structural inequality.

1.2 Background of the Study

The ANC has traditionally used policy conferences to outline its socio-economic policy trajectory. These conferences impact the nation's governing framework if the ANC attains electoral success, making them vital in determining the country's policy direction. Contestations of the 2012 ANC Policy and Elective Conferences, and later, of 2017 promoting Radical Economic Transformation were significant policy discussions and government governmental plans. These conferences underscored the need for measures that tackle enduring apartheid legacies. The adopted policies were subsequently articulated in the ANC 2014 Election Manifesto and implemented through the 2014-2019 Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), a pivotal document that establishes government policy priorities and provides directives for execution across all government departments, state-owned enterprises, provinces, and local government authorities for a five-year period, linked to an electoral calendar. These documents, in conjunction with legislative, media, governmental, academic, and other sources, provide an examination of the ruling party and government's perspectives, formulation, and execution of social policies concerning transition during this era.

Adesina (2009) asserts that the examination of social policy is essential to governance because of its crucial function in improving individual welfare within a community. It provides a structured framework for evaluating social policy initiatives, highlighting their ethical

dimensions, effectiveness in achieving developmental goals, and capacity to provide equitable results for all members of society (Adesina, 2009). This perspective aligns well with Thandika Mkandawire's expanded concept of social policy, which incorporates human development emphasising its potential to achieve transformative economic outcomes for full liberation of a people (Mkandawire, 2011c). Mkandawire contends that radical transformation requires integrated social policies that simultaneously advance economic, political, and human liberation (Mkandawire, 2011b, 2011c). These policies must thoroughly address the interconnected challenges of economic growth, social justice, and human well-being, integrating with economic policies to promote structural change rather than being subordinate to them (Mkandawire, 2011b, 2011c). Moreover, they must adhere to comprehensive developmental goals that emphasise fairness, sustainability, and inclusion (Mkandawire, 2011b, 2011c). Central to all this is the interconnection between economic and social policy. (Mkandawire, 2011c; 2012). Contending that social policy should not be a peripheral concern but an essential element of holistic economic planning. When implemented simultaneously, these policies foster inclusive and fair economic growth, promoting transformative social principles (Mkandawire, 2011c; 2012). Transformative social policy thus seeks to effect structural changes within a society's economic institutions, social interactions, and overall economy to enhance the well-being of all persons equitably. These structural changes are essential for achieving radical transformative economic growth (Mkandawire, 2007).

In developing countries, such as South Africa, the principal objective is to enhance societies to attain economic growth that elevates living standards and guarantees equitable human development (Gumede, 2018). Nonetheless, Mkandawire argues that the prevalence of neoliberal institutions, especially in the late 20th century, presented substantial obstacles to transformative policies in these developing countries (Mkandawire, 2011c, 2012). In the 1980s and 1990s, African development paradigms were significantly shaped by neoliberal proponents advocating for diminished state intervention in the economy, economic stabilisation, democratisation, privatisation of state-owned enterprises, and the adoption of 'good governance' practices (Mkandawire, 2004). Endorsed by Bretton Woods institutions such as the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), this shift led to the alignment

of social policies with market principles, marginalizing transformative social policy in favour of structural adjustment agendas (Mkandawire, 2004, 2011c).

Consequently, transformative social policy in these countries was relegated to a subservient status, leading to significant repercussions (Mkandawire, 2004, 2011c). Social initiatives were often reinterpreted as tools for addressing market failures, little supported, and devalued. This commercialisation of social policy shifted the responsibility for welfare provision from the state to the market, expecting that the market would provide essential public goods like healthcare and education (Mkandawire, 2012). As a result, African states saw little structural transformation despite policy improvements (Mkandawire, 2012). These expressions make it poignant to analyse if the South African developmental experience since 1994 fell into this trap.

Although Mkandawire's framework offers a strong normative blueprint for transformational social policy, my analysis emphasizes its contradictions within the South African context. Mkandawire presupposes the existence of a somewhat cohesive and competent state machinery capable of integrating the four tasks of redistribution, reproduction, production, and protection into a singular developmental initiative. In South Africa, this premise is complicated by the presence of institutional fragility, governance deficiencies, and deep-rooted factional politics. I understand Mkandawire not as a prescriptive blueprint for mass adoption, but as a critical framework for evaluating the aspirations and structural constraints of ANC policymaking. His focus on inclusive institutions, policy coherence, and enduring political commitment underscores the areas where the South African state has faltered, rendering the framework valuable for both assessing success and revealing the disparity between transformative rhetoric and policy results.

1.2.1. Historical foundations of the evolution of social policy

The evolution of social policy globally has been shaped by contestations over equity, access, and the role of the state in addressing social and economic inequalities. Richard Titmuss, one of the leading theorists in social policy, offers a sharp critique of capitalist societies, which he argues produced what he refers to as "diswelfare." This concept described the social harm

generated by systems that privileged economic efficiency over social justice, often to the detriment of the working class and marginalised communities (Titmuss, 1974; Alcock and Glennerster, 2001). Titmuss maintains that capitalist industrial societies perpetuated structural divisions by reinforcing class-based access to resources and opportunities, creating deeply entrenched patterns of inequality. He advocates for the role of social policy in correcting these disparities, proposing various mechanisms including social welfare, fiscal welfare, and occupational welfare as tools to promote collective well-being and achieve broader social objectives.

Titmuss's critique remains particularly relevant in understanding the historical roots of the ANC's policy positions. During the anti-apartheid struggle, the ANC consistently emphasised social justice, equity, and inclusion in its policy discourse, positioning itself in opposition to a political and economic system that had long produced systemic diswelfare for the majority of South Africans (Van Niekerk, 2013). The party's early policy documents, such as the 1943 *African Claims* and the *1955 Freedom Charter,* reflected a concern with overcoming structural inequality and redressing the legacies of colonial and apartheid rule. These positions were deeply aligned with Titmuss's view that social policy should serve as a corrective to structural injustice. The ANC's policy vision was therefore not only political but also social in orientation, recognising the importance of inclusive development and the provision of public goods as a foundation for democratic citizenship.

1.2.2. Historical context of social policy in South Africa

The historical development of social policy in South Africa cannot be separated from the racialised legacy of colonialism and apartheid. Prior to 1994, the South African state deliberately designed social policies to benefit the white minority, while systematically excluding Black, Coloured, and Indian communities from access to essential services, economic opportunities, and social protections (Van Niekerk, 2013; Padayachee and Van Niekerk, 2017). These racially segregated welfare and service delivery systems entrenched socio-economic disparities, reinforcing a hierarchical social order that positioned white South Africans at the apex of political, economic, and social life. This aligns with Titmuss' argument

that social policy is not neutral but is shaped by existing power relations and socio-cultural contexts (Titmuss, 1974; Van Niekerk, 2013).

Under apartheid, social policy was used as an instrument to institutionalise and preserve racial supremacy, with access to housing, education, healthcare, and employment determined by race. This deeply unequal policy landscape played a critical role in informing the ANC's post-apartheid developmental visio (Van Niekerk, 2013; Padayachee and Van Niekerk, 2017). Recognising the extent of exclusion and dispossession, the ANC sought to replace the apartheid state's discriminatory policies with a framework built on the principles of equity, redress, and universal access. The post-1994 policy approach thus reflected a conscious attempt to reorient the purpose of social policy towards inclusion, social citizenship, and human development (Van Niekerk, 2013; Padayachee and Van Niekerk, 2017). It acknowledged that the persistence of inequality could not be addressed without dismantling the structures that had historically governed the distribution of opportunity.

The ANC's historical policy outlook has therefore been shaped by both domestic realities and global influences. Its commitment to social transformation has drawn from progressive traditions in social policy, including those of Titmuss, while also responding to the specific needs of a society emerging from a history of racial and economic exclusion. Understanding this historical and intellectual lineage is essential for analysing the trajectory of post-apartheid policy, particularly in relation to whether initiatives like RET and RSET represent a continuation of this transformative agenda or a departure from its foundational objectives.

1.2.3. The Freedom Charter and African Claims

The ANC's historical commitment to equity and social justice is deeply rooted in key policy documents that predate South Africa's democratic transition. Among the most significant of these are the *African Claims* of 1943 and the *Freedom Charter* of 1955. Developed under the leadership of A. B. Xuma, the *African Claims* drew inspiration from the Atlantic Charter and outlined a progressive vision for fundamental rights in South Africa. This included improved healthcare services, fair labour standards, and the establishment of social security for all citizens, irrespective of race (ANC, 1943; Van Niekerk, 2013). These early demands

represented a foundational articulation of the ANC's broader aspiration for a just and inclusive society, reflecting an acute awareness of both the immediate social needs of the majority population and the long-term structural changes required to secure socio-economic equity.

The *Freedom Charter*, adopted by the ANC in 1955, expanded upon the ideas laid out in the *African Claims* by presenting a more detailed vision for universal access to basic services and a better standard of living for all South Africans. It called for transformative reforms in housing, education, healthcare, and social security, while also advocating for the redistribution of land, resources, and wealth (ANC, 1955; Van Niekerk, 2019). The Charter's insistence on these reforms foreshadowed the principles that would later be recognised as central to transformative social policy. These included the restructuring of economic and social relations, the eradication of structural inequality, and the expansion of state responsibility for ensuring human development and dignity. Collectively, the *African Claims* and the *Freedom Charter* stand as critical milestones in South Africa's policy history, evidencing the ANC's long-standing commitment to structural change well before the attainment of political power in 1994.

These early policy visions have continued to shape the ANC's development agenda in the democratic era. Scholars such as Gumede (2018) have conducted extensive analyses of the ANC's post-1994 policy trajectory, with a particular focus on the delivery of basic services, the management of labour relations, and the implementation of macroeconomic policy reforms. While the ANC's initial programme, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), reflected many of the redistributive ideals found in the *Freedom Charter*, its implementation was soon followed by the introduction of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy. This transition, driven in part by internal ideological debates and external economic pressures, marked a shift away from state-led redistribution toward market-friendly policies (Gumede, 2018). The replacement of RDP with GEAR also signalled tensions within the ANC-led alliance, particularly between the party leadership and labour movements such as COSATU, and introduced a pattern of policy inconsistency and contested reform.

1.2.4 The role of political parties in development and ANC policies since 1994

The role of political parties in shaping developmental outcomes has been emphasised by African scholars such as Anyang' Nyong'o (2022), who argues that the developmental capacity of ruling parties is often constrained by internal weaknesses, governance failures, and corruption. This perspective is especially relevant in the South African context, where the ANC has faced significant internal contestation, factionalism, and leadership struggles. These dynamics have often hindered the effective implementation of otherwise progressive policies and have contributed to a disjuncture between rhetoric and outcomes. The period following the ANC's 2012 policy conference illustrates this phenomenon clearly. The conference marked a rhetorical pivot toward a new phase in the National Democratic Revolution, with a heightened emphasis on Radical Economic Transformation (RET) and the construction of a National Democratic Society (ANC, 2012; Jonas, 2017).

Former president Jacob Zuma framed this shift as a "second transition" in the trajectory of the ANC, arguing that while political democracy had been achieved, the structural problems of poverty, unemployment, and inequality persisted, particularly among the black majority and youth (Zuma, 2012; ANC, 2012). This articulation called for deeper socio-economic transformation, including a renewed focus on redistributive justice and state intervention to address historical injustices. The policy documents released during and after the 2012 conference outlined ambitious proposals to democratise access to resources and transfer economic power to historically marginalised communities. These included the expropriation of land without compensation under a "just and equitable" principle, as well as the replacement of the "willing buyer, willing seller" approach to land reform (ANC, 2012).

In addition to land reform, the ANC proposed measures to expand the social wage through increased access to public goods such as free education, healthcare, and comprehensive social security systems. These proposals align closely with the functions of transformative social policy as articulated by Mkandawire, particularly the goals of redistribution, reproduction, and protection. However, the internal political context of the ANC significantly undermined the realisation of these ambitions. Competing interpretations of RET, factional power struggles, and inconsistent political messaging led to fragmented implementation and policy incoherence

(Desai, 2018). While the language of transformation persisted, the practical outcomes often fell short of the stated objectives, exposing a gap between policy design and political execution.

The analysis of this policy period is central to this research, which seeks to evaluate whether the ANC's policy initiatives during the RET era truly aligned with transformative social policy goals or were derailed by internal organisational dynamics. By drawing on Mkandawire's framework, this study will assess the extent to which these initiatives addressed the structural roots of inequality and exclusion. At the same time, it will consider how internal ANC politics, including factionalism and leadership contestation, affected the formulation, coherence, and implementation of transformative policy agendas. Through this examination, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between political party dynamics and national development planning in South Africa.

1.2.5. The 2014–2019 Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) and RET

The 2014 to 2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) was a critical document aimed at operationalising the ANC's policy agenda in line with its vision for transformative social development. Developed in the aftermath of the ANC's 2012 policy and elective conference, the MTSF was intended to serve as a practical roadmap for the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP), translating long-term strategic goals into concrete five-year priorities for government departments. As the principal planning tool of the fifth democratic administration, the MTSF drew guidance from the ANC's policy resolutions and sought to integrate party directives into government programming. Unlike its predecessors, this iteration of the MTSF was explicit in its engagement with questions of economic transformation. It reflected a more assertive policy orientation, signalling a commitment to a more radical restructuring of the South African economy, aligned with the rhetoric of Radical Economic Transformation (RET) that emerged prominently during this period.

Framing the MTSF within Thandika Mkandawire's paradigm of transformative social policy allows for a systematic evaluation of whether the state's planned interventions met the core

requirements of redistribution, reproduction, production, and protection. Mkandawire (2011) emphasises that for social and economic policies to be genuinely transformative, they must not only address poverty and inequality but must also challenge the structural foundations of underdevelopment. This study applies that framework to assess whether the MTSF's focus on inclusive growth, social protection, and expanded access to services was matched by institutional capacity, political commitment, and coherent implementation strategies. In doing so, the research moves beyond rhetorical commitments to assess the depth and substance of policy planning.

Understanding the development and implementation of the 2014 to 2019 MTSF requires an exploration of the political environment within the ANC during this period. While the MTSF reflected ambitions for transformation, including enhanced land reform, industrialisation, and increased state procurement to empower historically disadvantaged groups, its execution was marred by internal contestation. Factionalism within the ANC, alongside divergent interpretations of RET and its role in advancing the National Democratic Revolution, resulted in competing priorities and strategic fragmentation. As a result, the institutional coherence needed to implement the MTSF effectively was frequently compromised.

Although numerous academic studies have examined the content and outcomes of ANC economic policies, particularly the RDP, GEAR, and RET, there remains a significant gap in understanding the role of intra-party dynamics in shaping policy outcomes. Much of the existing literature tends to treat policy in a linear fashion, focusing on design and intended outcomes, while paying insufficient attention to how political struggles within the ANC have directly affected implementation and impact. The role of internal contestation, ideological divergence, and struggles for control over state institutions has too often been underemphasised in analysis of policy failure or stagnation.

This research seeks to address that gap by situating the 2014 to 2019 MTSF within the broader political economy of the ANC during the RET period. By applying Mkandawire's framework of transformative social policy, the study examines whether the MTSF was capable of driving structural change, and to what extent internal ANC politics, governance constraints, and

external economic conditions obstructed its implementation. This approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of how political governance intersects with economic transformation, contributing to a nuanced perspective on the barriers and possibilities for achieving inclusive development in South Africa.

The study interrogates the extent to which the RET and RSET frameworks reflect the principles of TSP and whether they represent a sincere attempt to redress South Africa's persistent socio economic inequalities. While RET under President Zuma was promoted as a bold agenda aimed at economic justice and inclusive development, and RSET under President Ramaphosa was positioned as a refined response to inequality and unemployment, this research questions whether either framework meets the standards for meaningful and sustainable transformation. The analysis addresses the central question of whether these frameworks move beyond political rhetoric and institutional constraints to embody a transformative agenda grounded in redistribution and inclusive growth.

In examining these frameworks, the study also explores the broader political and institutional dynamics that shaped their formulation and implementation. Internal factionalism within the ANC, governance challenges, and the pressures of operating within a global economic system have all influenced the articulation of RET and RSET. While policy documents and conference resolutions signal a commitment to transformation, I find that these ambitions were frequently undermined by inconsistencies in execution, contestation over economic direction, and a lack of institutional coherence.

Although Mkandawire's framework offers a robust tool for evaluating the developmental orientation of social policy, I also acknowledge its limitations. Sabelo Ndlovu Gatsheni provides a necessary critique of development models that centre the idea of catching up with the global North. He argues that such paradigms often overlook Africa's own socio cultural realities, historical contexts, and indigenous knowledge systems (Ndlovu Gatsheni, 2013). This critique is particularly relevant to RET, which, despite being framed as a radical break from the past, remained entangled in the logic of neoliberal policy and constrained by global economic structures.

The transition from RET to RSET under Ramaphosa did not mark a fundamental shift in approach. While RSET was introduced as a response to growing calls for inclusive development, it largely conformed to orthodox economic principles. The focus on restoring institutional credibility, securing investor confidence, and maintaining macroeconomic stability reflected a continued commitment to policy models that prioritised market legitimacy over structural change. In this context, the transformative claims of both RET and RSET appear limited, raising questions about the state's ability to pursue an agenda that is genuinely developmental and socially inclusive.

Despite these concerns, I maintain that Mkandawire's TSP framework remains a valuable lens through which to assess the ANC's policy direction. It provides a set of concrete criteria that enable a structured analysis of whether policy initiatives meaningfully address inequality, poverty, and unemployment. At the same time, by bringing Ndlovu Gatsheni's decolonial critique into conversation with Mkandawire's approach, this research foregrounds the need to rethink the assumptions embedded in mainstream development discourse. A transformative policy agenda in South Africa must not only meet the functional requirements of redistribution, protection, reproduction, and production, but must also respond to the epistemic and historical context in which it operates.

This research therefore contributes to a deeper understanding of the tensions and possibilities within the ANC's developmental project. It highlights both the achievements and shortcomings of RET and RSET as policy frameworks, while opening up space for thinking beyond inherited paradigms toward a more grounded, contextually relevant vision of transformation.

1.3 Problem Statement

The ANC, as the longest serving political party in democratic South Africa, has been instrumental in shaping the country's post-apartheid developmental and economic agenda (Gumede, 2018; Moerane, 2019). Since 1994, the ANC has prioritised policies aimed at

addressing structural challenges inherited from apartheid, particularly unemployment, poverty, and inequality. Despite these longstanding commitments, the ANC's overall economic strategy has largely been characterised as moderate in orientation, reflecting a cautious and negotiated approach to transformation rather than a radical restructuring of the economy (Padayachee and Van Niekerk, 2017; Gumede, 2018).

The introduction of RET, particularly under the leadership of former president Zuma, marked a significant rhetorical shift. RET was introduced in the lead up to the 2012 ANC Policy Conference as a proposal to initiate a Second Transition of the NDR. It was presented as a means to advance economic justice and redistribute resources to historically marginalised black communities (Jonas, 2017; Rapanyane, 2021). Despite its prominence in political discourse, RET did not achieve formal adoption within ANC policy resolutions at either the 2012 or 2017 policy conferences. Instead, the party reaffirmed its commitment to more moderate and balanced policy positions, a trajectory consistent with its post 1994 policy orientation.

Although RET continued to feature in government discourse during Zuma's second term and was mentioned in the MTSF, it lacked institutional coherence and did not exist as a formally endorsed policy. RET appeared in the strategic language of government due to the influence of Zuma's allies, who continued to occupy key positions in the state until his resignation. Its implementation was not guided by ANC conference resolutions, and its formulation remained ambiguous. In this context, RET has become a subject of debate: whether it constituted a serious attempt to drive transformation or functioned primarily as a rhetorical tool within internal ANC power struggles.

Following Zuma's departure, the emergence of RSET under President Ramaphosa reflected a continuation of transformative discourse, albeit with a reorientation toward governance reform, institutional renewal, and inclusive growth. Both RET and RSET were associated with the second phase of the NDR and informed debates at the 2012 and 2017 policy conferences. Despite the ambitious language of these frameworks, their implementation was undermined by ongoing internal tensions and factionalism within the ANC (Padayachee and Van Niekerk, 2017). These internal divisions have resulted in inconsistent policy direction, weakened cohesion, and limited progress toward the stated goals of transformation.

Scholarly literature has widely acknowledged the challenges facing ANC economic policy. Many researchers have noted that its developmental objectives have not translated into radical structural reform, often attributing these shortcomings to institutional weaknesses, external constraints, or elite capture (Gumede, 2018; Moerane, 2019). Much of the existing work has focused on outcomes, particularly regarding employment, growth, and poverty alleviation, or on the broader context of corruption and state capture. These studies have contributed valuable insights into governance and economic performance but often overlook the internal party dynamics that influence policy formulation and execution.

There remains a clear research gap in understanding how intra party contestation, factionalism, and ideological divergence have shaped the ANC's policy direction. Specifically, limited attention has been paid to how these dynamics affected the formulation and attempted implementation of RET and RSET during the period from the 2012 ANC Policy Conference to the transition between the Zuma and Ramaphosa administrations (Habib, 2013; Butler, 2017). Existing literature has not adequately interrogated how internal conflicts within the ANC contributed to policy incoherence, strategic fragmentation, and inconsistencies in the developmental agenda (Kim and van der Westhuizen, 2015; Moerane, 2019).

This study addresses that gap by examining the ANC's policy resolutions and the MTSF in relation to Mkandawire's TSP framework. The research assesses whether ANC and government strategies during this period aligned with the core functions of redistribution, reproduction, protection, and production, and to what extent these policies demonstrated transformative intent. It also investigates how internal ANC dynamics shaped the development, articulation, and implementation of these strategies.

By focusing on the influence of internal political conflict on policy processes, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between party politics and state governance. It extends current literature by locating policy outcomes within the context of intra party tensions, offering an alternative lens to evaluate the ANC's developmental project. The research also contributes to broader debates on economic transformation and social policy in South Africa by employing Mkandawire's framework to assess policy coherence and transformative potential beyond narrow economic performance indicators.

1.4 Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to analyse ANC's 2012 conference policy resolutions, that were adopted under Zuma ANC Presidency and later translated into the subsequent government's 2014-2019 Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) of his administration and the policies introduced under President Ramaphosa, focusing on their alignment with the functions of transformative social policy goals in South Africa. This research will utilise Thandika Mkandawire's approach to assess the effectiveness of these policies in addressing structural inequalities and facilitating significant social and economic transformation. It specifically evaluates how the programs tackled the essential functions of transformative social policy: redistribution, reproduction, production, and protection, within the framework of South Africa's enduring socio-economic issues. Further analysis of the impact of internal factionalism within the ANC on the development and execution of these programs, providing insights into how political dynamics inside the ruling party have influenced the results of economic reform initiatives. This analysis seeks to elucidate the complexities and possibilities of transformative social policies in attaining fair development in South Africa.

1.5 Research questions

The study will be guided by the following research question and sub-questions;

- Did the ANC's 2012 Conference policy resolutions and the subsequent government's 2014-2019 Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), under former President Zuma and continued by President Ramaphosa, constitute radical initiatives, and did they promote transformative social policy in South Africa?

Sub-questions:

1. How have the ideological divisions within the ANC developed from the era of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) to the implementation of Growth,

Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR), and to what degree do these divisions persist in shaping the party's policy framework today?

2. Did the Radical Economic Transformation (RET) plan, as proposed by President Zuma and his associates, evolve into a coherent and comprehensive policy framework embraced by the ANC and executed by the government?
3. In what manner do the ideological divisions within the ANC mirror wider issues that impact the efficacy of economic reform initiatives in South Africa?

1.6 Theoretical and conceptual framework

This study is grounded in a theoretical framework that draws from the paradigm of transformative social policy as developed by Thandika Mkandawire, and is complemented by insights from political economy. Together, these theoretical orientations enable a rigorous and multidimensional analysis of the ANC's 2012 policy resolutions and the 2014 to 2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework, developed during the presidency of Jacob Zuma and continued under President Cyril Ramaphosa. The framework provides tools to evaluate the alignment of these policy initiatives with the goals of structural transformation, while also engaging with the political and institutional dynamics that have shaped their development, articulation, and implementation.

1.6.1. Transformative social policy

At the centre of this framework is transformative social policy, which redefines the role of social policy beyond narrow welfare provision. Mkandawire (2004; 2011b; 2011c) conceptualises social policy not merely as a set of compensatory measures to address poverty, but as a core driver of economic and structural transformation. Transformative social policy is developmental in orientation, seeking to build productive capacity, reduce inequality, and foster social cohesion. Unlike residual or minimalist approaches, it integrates economic and social

goals into a unified developmental agenda, positioning social policy as central to national progress.

Mkandawire outlines four interrelated functions that define the transformative potential of social policy: redistribution, reproduction, production, and protection. Redistribution refers to the equitable allocation of wealth, resources, and opportunities (Mkandawire, 2011c). In South Africa, redistributive strategies are evident in programmes such as land reform and Black Economic Empowerment, both central to the ANC's post-apartheid vision of economic justice (Padayachee and Van Niekerk, 2017; Gumede, 2018). Reproduction involves sustaining the social and economic systems required to develop and maintain a skilled labour force. This includes access to education, healthcare, and social infrastructure, which are essential for human development and long-term economic participation (Mkandawire, 2011c). Production relates to enhancing a country's capacity to generate employment and grow its economy through industrialisation, infrastructure investment, and innovation (Mkandawire, 2007). Protection refers to the mechanisms designed to shield vulnerable populations from socio-economic shocks, such as pensions, unemployment support, and social grants, which contribute to stability and social resilience (Murunga, Ogachi and Adesina, 2021).

In addition to these core functions, Mkandawire (2011c) emphasises the importance of specific enabling conditions for successful policy transformation. These include investment in education and innovation, labour stability to secure the legitimacy of policy direction, the development of strong and inclusive institutions, and policy coherence between social and economic planning. These conditions are not aspirational, but foundational to the effective implementation of a transformative agenda. In this study, they are applied to assess whether the ANC's policies during the RET and RSET period were supported by the institutional, social, and economic foundations necessary for meaningful transformation.

While Mkandawire's model is a powerful framework for evaluating policy content and intent, it is not without its critiques. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) cautions against relying solely on development models, even those articulated by progressive African thinkers, if they remain entangled in Eurocentric worldviews and overlook Africa's own knowledge systems. He argues that developmental thinking must also confront the ongoing coloniality of power and the need

for epistemic decolonisation. In the South African context, although RET and RSET were presented as radical and transformative, they often failed to articulate a clear break from neoliberal economic orthodoxy and global policy norms. Their inability to offer a fully decolonial policy paradigm reflects the broader limitations of transformation within the post-apartheid state.

1.6.2. Political economy theory

To further illuminate these dynamics, the study draws on political economy theory to analyse the relationship between policy processes and political power. Political economy provides tools to investigate how political institutions, leadership struggles, and ideological contestation influence the formulation and implementation of economic policy (Blyth, 2013). In South Africa, the ANC has been deeply divided along ideological lines, with some factions favouring redistributive and state-led economic approaches, while others have supported a market-oriented path focused on investor confidence and macroeconomic stability (Butler, 2017; Kim and van der Westhuizen, 2015). These internal divisions have shaped the interpretation and implementation of RET and RSET and have produced inconsistencies that undermined both policy coherence and transformative potential.

Political economy theory helps explain how intra-party factionalism, institutional contestation, and power struggles have had tangible effects on development strategy. Gumede (2018) and Anyang' Nyong'o (2022) note that where political interests dominate over programmatic coherence, policies tend to reflect compromise, inertia, or symbolic rhetoric rather than effective transformation. This is evident in the way RET and RSET were articulated, promoted, and contested within the ANC, often without the institutional stability or consensus required to sustain long-term implementation. These dynamics have resulted in limited progress, misalignment between rhetoric and policy, and, in some cases, policy reversals.

Together, transformative social policy and political economy form a robust theoretical foundation for this study. Transformative social policy offers the functional and normative benchmarks for assessing policy design, while political economy provides insight into the political and institutional constraints that shape implementation. This theoretical framework

enables a comprehensive and contextually grounded evaluation of the ANC's policy agenda, exploring not only whether policies like RET and RSET were transformative in ambition, but also whether they were structurally and politically capable of realising their developmental goals.

1.6.3. Governance theory

This research is informed by a conceptual framework that brings together governance theory, institutional capacity, and policy implementation within the broader paradigms of transformative social policy and political economy. Governance theory emphasises the central role of institutions, leadership, and accountability in translating policy intentions into outcomes. As noted by Pierre and Peters (2020), effective governance requires the integration of political will, administrative efficiency, and public accountability across sectors. In the South African context, governance has emerged as a critical issue in the implementation of economic policies. Challenges such as corruption, bureaucratic inertia, and the erosion of institutional integrity have at times undermined the state's ability to implement transformative agendas, particularly under the RET and RSET frameworks (Gumede, 2018; State Capture Commission, 2022). Governance theory, when applied to this context, provides insight into the mechanisms that enable or constrain policy execution and the conditions under which institutional fragmentation and elite capture can derail reform efforts.

This study therefore engages governance theory to evaluate the extent to which institutional capacity and leadership have influenced the success or failure of ANC policy interventions. The findings of the State Capture Commission (2022) revealed how patronage networks and institutional dysfunction not only compromised governance structures but also weakened the implementation of economic reform strategies. Through this lens, governance is not only about formal procedures but also about the practical exercise of authority, coordination, and responsiveness within the state. This research adopts governance theory to interrogate how institutional weaknesses, limited accountability, and uneven leadership have affected the ANC's ability to execute policies that align with transformative social policy principles.

Governance literature also offers perspectives on improving policy coherence and identifying pathways for more inclusive and responsive policy development (Pierre and Peters, 2020).

The integration of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of transformative social policy, political economy, and governance allows for a comprehensive evaluation of ANC policy programmes. Each framework brings a distinct perspective to bear on the analysis. Transformative social policy provides a normative and functional model that defines the objectives of structural economic reform through the interconnected functions of redistribution, reproduction, production, and protection (Mkandawire, 2004; 2011c). Political economy offers a critical understanding of the internal dynamics within the ANC, explaining how factionalism, ideological divergence, and elite interests have shaped policy development and disrupted implementation (Butler, 2017; Gumede, 2018). Governance theory focuses attention on the administrative and institutional dimensions of policymaking, highlighting the role of state capacity, leadership, and accountability in determining whether policy frameworks are implemented successfully or remain aspirational (Pierre and Peters, 2020).

The synthesis of these approaches enables a more holistic understanding of the ANC's economic reform efforts. For instance, while Mkandawire's framework may suggest that a policy meets the normative criteria for transformative development, political economy analysis reveals how intra-party disputes and competing power interests can dilute the policy's ambition or redirect its implementation. At the same time, governance theory points to institutional constraints that further limit the efficacy of policy delivery, including weak oversight mechanisms and limited administrative professionalism. Taken together, these frameworks expose the complex interplay between policy intent, political context, and institutional execution. This research adopts these lenses to evaluate both the stated ambitions of ANC policy and the political and institutional factors that have mediated their outcomes.

However, the usefulness of these frameworks must also be considered alongside their limitations. The theory of transformative social policy, while valuable in advocating for the integration of social and economic development, assumes the existence of a capable and coherent state apparatus able to implement broad reform agendas (Mkandawire, 2004). In contexts such as South Africa, where governance structures have frequently been compromised

by corruption, fragmentation, and inefficiency, this assumption does not always hold (Gumede, 2018). Furthermore, transformative social policy often underestimates the influence of global economic systems, particularly neoliberal financial regimes, which limit the policy sovereignty of countries in the Global South (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Critics have pointed out that the theory is overly reliant on state-led transformation, which may be impractical in contexts where state institutions have been captured by elites and where accountability mechanisms remain weak (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Gumede, 2018).

Political economy theory, while adept at analysing the relationship between political institutions and economic structures, is sometimes criticised for lacking specificity when it comes to policy implementation. Its focus on material and institutional factors can obscure the cultural, ideological, and grassroots dynamics that are equally important in shaping policy outcomes (Hudson, 2014; Pereira, 2009). In the case of the ANC, political economy explanations may overlook the agency of social movements, civic actors, and marginalised communities whose demands and resistance play a significant role in shaping the contours of policy debates. This gap limits the ability of political economy theory to fully capture the complexities of socio-economic transformation in a contested democratic space.

Governance theory, on the other hand, tends to privilege procedural and technical solutions to policy failure. While this has value in identifying gaps in institutional design or administrative processes, it often downplays the deeper structural inequalities that underpin governance challenges (Keping, 2018; Midttun, 1999). The assumption that institutional reform alone can solve systemic problems overlooks the embedded nature of political culture, historical exclusion, and power asymmetries. Moreover, governance theory often does not account for the broader global constraints, such as debt dependency and international financial institutions, which significantly shape what is possible at the national level, especially in developing contexts like South Africa.

These limitations reinforce the need for a nuanced and integrative analytical framework. In triangulating transformative social policy, political economy, and governance theory, this research engages with policy analysis in a way that is both critical and grounded. It does not

seek to privilege one framework over another but rather uses their complementarity to examine ANC policy in its full political, institutional, and socio-economic complexity.

This study incorporates concepts from state theory alongside governance views to examine the role and capabilities of the post-apartheid state in influencing developmental outcomes. State theories assert that the state is not a neutral entity but a battleground where conflicting class, factional, and ideological interests are negotiated. From this viewpoint, the South African state has fluctuated between characteristics of a "developmental state," responsible for steering economic transformation, and a "neoliberal state," limited by global financial norms and domestic elite interests. The tensions among RET, RSET, and the NDP might thus be interpreted as conflicts over the fundamental role of the state: whether it serves primarily as a means for redistributive justice, a platform for elite competition, or a regulator dedicated to market stability. Incorporating state theory into the framework enables this research to transcend inquiries into policy intent and governance failure, facilitating a more profound examination of how the structural nature of the South African state has either facilitated or hindered transformational social policy.

1.7. Overview of the research report

This research report follows a slightly unconventional structure, which I have adopted to ensure a consistent and in-depth application of the analytical frameworks throughout. Chapters Three to Six are structured to present results in a way that critically examines policy processes within both the ANC and the state. I use a historical approach to show how past policy debates and decisions continue to shape present-day policymaking and developmental outcomes.

Chapter Two outlines the research design and methodology. I explain the approach taken, including data collection methods, sampling, and analytical strategy. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the chosen methods and reflects on my own positionality as a researcher. Chapter Three examines the origins and evolution of Radical Economic Transformation (RET) and its transformation into Radical Socio Economic Transformation (RSET) during the transition from the Zuma to the Ramaphosa administration. I argue that RET

lacked a coherent policy framework and existed more as rhetoric than structured policy, contributing to confusion and governance challenges.

Chapter Four focuses on the ANC's policymaking processes between 2012 and 2019. It assesses whether the party's policy intentions aligned with the principles of transformative social policy, particularly in addressing inequality, unemployment, and poverty. Using Mkandawire's criteria, I evaluate the policy debates and resolutions emerging during this time, especially around RET and RSET.

Chapter Five brings together insights from political economy, governance theory, and transformative social policy to interrogate the effectiveness of ANC policymaking in practice. I assess whether the necessary institutional and structural conditions for transformative social policy were present. This includes attention to human capital development, education, labour stability, and policy coherence. I also critique the ANC's liberal policy orientation, drawing on Mkandawire's own concerns about the limitations of developmental paradigms that rely too heavily on neoliberal assumptions and overlook African epistemologies.

Chapter Six concludes the report by bringing the findings into focus. I emphasise how RET and RSET lacked a coherent implementation framework and how internal party dynamics, institutional weaknesses, and external pressures have constrained the transformative potential of ANC policy. I end with practical recommendations for how the ANC and the state could better pursue a transformative social policy agenda that responds to South Africa's persistent developmental challenges.

Chapter 2

Methodology and Analytical Approach

2.1 Introduction

This chapter establishes the research design and methodology utilised in this research, offering a comprehensive explanation of the selected approach, data gathering techniques, sample strategy, and analytical process. It also examines aspects of validity and reliability, outlines the constraints of the chosen methodologies, and reflects on my positionality. The main objective is to elucidate how the methodological approach corresponds with the study's aim of investigating the congruence between ANC economic policies and transformative social values, as articulated by Thandika Mkandawire.

2.2 Research design

The research employs a qualitative approach, prioritising document analysis as the principal method. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena and facilitates a comprehensive understanding of historical, ideological, and political contexts (Bowen, 2009). This design is particularly effective for evaluating the evolution of ANC policies to government, from foundational documents such as the African Claims and Freedom Charter to more contemporary policy frameworks, including the RDP, GEAR, NDP, and MTSF 2014–2019. The qualitative technique is effective for revealing patterns and relationships that may not be readily observable, offering the analytical depth required to comprehend how internal political processes have influenced policy results (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

2.3 Research methods

This research employs document analysis as its primary method, offering a systematic and rigorous approach for examining policy-related texts. Document analysis is widely recognised within qualitative research as a suitable technique for extracting meaning, identifying patterns, and tracing developments within written content (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). It enables the

detailed exploration of textual data such as ANC policy documents, government strategic plans, public speeches, and scholarly publications. Bowen (2009) highlights that this method is non-intrusive and preserves the integrity of the data, allowing researchers to engage with material that is unaffected by external pressures at the time of analysis.

2.3.1. Document analysis

Document analysis is particularly relevant for this study as it facilitates the investigation of how the ANC's economic policy frameworks have evolved over time, and how they align with principles of transformative social policy. To ensure a structured and transparent process, I adopted a systematic literature review alongside purposive sampling of documents. The systematic literature review enabled the identification and synthesis of relevant academic and policy material related to the ANC's developmental agenda, while purposive sampling ensured that only documents with direct relevance to the research questions were selected. These included policy resolutions from ANC conferences, strategic government plans such as the Medium Term Strategic Frameworks, presidential speeches, and critical academic evaluations of ANC economic policy.

The choice of document analysis is justified by its ability to provide both historical depth and contextual insight. By examining documents produced at different stages of South Africa's post-apartheid period, the study is able to trace the ideological shifts, policy continuities, and contested interpretations that have influenced the ANC's approach to economic transformation. This method also allows for the assessment of how policy ideas, such as those associated with Radical Economic Transformation and the National Democratic Revolution, have been shaped by broader political, institutional, and global dynamics.

Importantly, this research analyses these texts through the lens of transformative social policy as theorised by Thandika Mkandawire. His framework provides the criteria for evaluating whether the ANC's policies reflect a commitment to redistribution, reproduction, production, and protection. By analysing the content and framing of ANC and government policy documents against these principles, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the

relationship between political ideology, state capacity, and socio-economic development in South Africa.

2.3.2 Scope of document analysis

The scope of the document analysis in this study encompasses a broad range of primary and secondary sources that are central to understanding the evolution of the ANC's policy thinking and its approach to socio-economic transformation. Primary sources include foundational ANC documents such as the *African Claims* (1943) and the *Freedom Charter*(1955), which articulate the party's early commitments to social justice, equality, and universal access to essential services. These texts provide the ideological grounding for the ANC's later policy frameworks and are essential for tracing the historical trajectory of its development agenda.

The analysis also includes major policy documents adopted by the ANC-led government after 1994. These comprise the Reconstruction and Development Programme, Growth, Employment and Redistribution, the National Development Plan, and the 2014 to 2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework. These frameworks are central to understanding how the ANC's historical vision has been translated into state policy over time. In addition, key speeches, legislative records, policy conference resolutions, and internal discussions among ANC leaders and alliance partners are examined to capture the political deliberations that shaped these frameworks. The focus extends to the presidential terms of Jacob Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa, allowing for a comparative assessment of how policy orientations shifted and how ideological commitments were interpreted and implemented under different leadership contexts.

Secondary sources are included to provide critical perspectives and to contextualise the ANC's policy positions within broader scholarly and political discourses. These sources offer valuable interpretations of both the content and implementation of ANC policies. The academic work of Thandika Mkandawire is used as the primary theoretical foundation, particularly his contributions to the study of transformative social policy. Other scholars such as Gumede, Desai, and Rapanyane offer detailed assessments of ANC governance and its socio-economic strategies, focusing on their strengths, contradictions, and limitations. Research by Peter

Anyang' Nyong'o, Adam Habib, and Kim and van der Westhuizen is drawn upon to understand the political economy of factionalism, especially how internal party divisions and ideological rifts have shaped policy outcomes.

Historical studies by Van Niekerk and Padayachee provide critical insight into the evolution of social policy in South Africa, allowing for an assessment of continuity and change in the ANC's policy orientation from the apartheid era to the present. These analyses are essential for understanding the shifting nature of the party's ideological commitments in response to domestic and global pressures. In addition, political analysts such as Mathekga and Desai highlight the governance challenges associated with Radical Economic Transformation, including issues of corruption, inefficiency, and state capture. These critiques provide a grounded perspective on how the radical policy rhetoric of the ANC has often clashed with implementation realities.

Finally, news platforms and reputable media outlets are also consulted for real-time commentary, direct quotations, and public responses to policy developments. These sources serve to capture the framing and reception of ANC policies by the broader public and offer further insight into the perceptions of key political actors. Taken together, this combination of primary and secondary sources allows for a comprehensive and critically engaged analysis of the ANC's economic policy agenda and its alignment with principles of transformative social development.

2.3.3. Limitations of document analysis

While document analysis proved valuable for tracing the development of ANC policy and evaluating government planning frameworks, I acknowledge certain limitations inherent in this method. One key challenge involved access. Some relevant documents were either restricted due to confidentiality or were not available through public archives, which may have limited my ability to fully capture the internal dynamics surrounding policy formulation and implementation (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 1994). Additionally, the nature of publicly available documents introduces the risk of selective representation. Often, official policy texts and

statements reflect the perspectives of dominant actors, while alternative or dissenting voices may be underrepresented or absent altogether (Yin, 1994). This raises the possibility of interpretive bias if such gaps are not acknowledged and addressed.

To mitigate these limitations, I drew on a range of supplementary materials, including media reports, academic publications, speeches, and external policy reviews. This triangulation allowed me to build a more comprehensive and balanced view of the policy landscape. While document analysis remains constrained by what is written, preserved, and made accessible, incorporating these varied sources helped to deepen the analysis and minimise the effects of bias.

2.4 Sampling strategy

This study employs a purposive sampling strategy to select documents that are most relevant to understanding the ANC's economic policy trajectory and its implementation through the state. The sampling process is directly informed by the research objective, which is to assess the extent to which ANC policy frameworks align with the core elements of transformative social policy, namely redistribution, production, reproduction, and protection, as defined by Thandika Mkandawire.

Documents were selected based on their policy significance, historical relevance, and thematic alignment with the transformative social policy framework. Key sources include foundational ANC texts such as the *African Claims* (1943) and the *Freedom Charter* (1955), policy resolutions from the 2012 and 2017 ANC policy conferences, and major post-apartheid government frameworks such as the Reconstruction and Development Programme, Growth Employment and Redistribution, the National Development Plan, and the 2014 to 2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework. These were chosen for their centrality in articulating economic policy direction and ideological shifts within the ANC. In addition, speeches by presidents and key political figures, policy conference briefing notes, and strategic implementation plans were included to capture how high-level policy thinking has been translated into state programmes.

To support a well-rounded analysis, the study also incorporates secondary documents, including academic literature, policy reviews, and journal articles that critically assess ANC economic policy. Works by scholars such as Gumede, Desai, Rapanyane, Van Niekerk, Padayachee, and Mkandawire provide essential context and theoretical grounding for interpreting the selected primary texts. Reports by analysts like Mathekga and commentary from reputable media outlets supplement the analysis by capturing public and expert reactions to policy developments.

All documents were accessed through publicly available sources to ensure transparency and verifiability. These include the official websites of the ANC, the South African Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), the Presidency of South Africa, and the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation. Historical documents and conference resolutions were retrieved from the ANC archives and relevant repositories such as the South African History Online database and institutional libraries. Academic sources were accessed through university databases, including JSTOR, Sabinet, and Google Scholar, while media sources were obtained through established South African news platforms and verified online archives.

2.5 Data analysis process

The process of data analysis in this study involves the systematic organisation, classification, and interpretation of documents to identify trends, patterns, and thematic connections. The analysis begins with the categorisation of materials according to time periods, types of documents, and their relevance to the research objectives. This includes distinguishing between foundational ANC documents, post-apartheid policy frameworks, and contemporary policy speeches and reports. To support consistency and transparency, a digital database was developed to store, organise, and retrieve the analysed documents efficiently, ensuring a methodical and traceable analytical process (Furber, 2010).

The research adopts a hybrid approach to coding, integrating open coding with deductive coding based on the predefined categories outlined in Thandika Mkandawire's framework of

transformative social policy. The four core policy functions: redistribution, reproduction, production, and protection, serve as guiding lenses through which the content of each document is interpreted and classified. Open coding enables the identification of emergent themes that may not be captured by the framework alone, allowing for flexibility in recognising additional patterns or shifts in the policy discourse (Furber, 2010).

Thematic analysis is used to synthesise and interpret the data. This method allows for a detailed exploration of dominant themes, underlying assumptions, and the ideological framing of policies. It helps assess the degree to which ANC policy documents, government strategies, and political speeches align with or diverge from transformative social policy goals. It also highlights the continuities and shifts in the ANC's policy orientation across different leadership periods.

Beyond document content, the analysis pays close attention to the political context in which these policies were formulated and implemented. This includes examining the influence of internal party dynamics such as leadership changes, ideological contestation, and factional tensions. These factors are important for understanding the extent to which internal governance challenges may have affected the coherence and effectiveness of policy execution.

2.5.1. Validity and reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of this research, I employed a triangulation strategy that draws on multiple data sources. This involved the cross-referencing of evidence from ANC policy documents, government planning frameworks, public speeches, official reports, and media commentary. The aim was to identify patterns, inconsistencies, and points of convergence across these different sources. As noted by Jabkowski and Kołczyńska (2020), triangulation strengthens the credibility of qualitative research by enabling the researcher to verify and substantiate findings through diverse forms of evidence. This approach enhances the rigour of the analysis and supports the development of a more nuanced and balanced understanding of the policy processes under investigation.

Throughout the research process, I maintained a clear audit trail documenting key decisions related to data selection, coding, and interpretation. This record of methodological decisions contributes to the transparency of the study and provides a pathway for other researchers to review or replicate the analytical process. Such transparency is essential for enhancing the study's dependability and reproducibility (Krippendorff, 2018).

In addition, a consistent and systematic approach was applied in organising, coding, and analysing data. This process was guided by the conceptual and theoretical frameworks discussed in earlier chapters, ensuring that all interpretations were grounded in the study's analytical lens. This level of consistency was necessary for producing findings that are not only trustworthy, but also aligned with the study's overarching research objectives and analytical depth.

2.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are central to this research, particularly in maintaining the credibility, transparency, and academic integrity of the study (Bowen, 2009). As the research relies primarily on the analysis of publicly available documents, issues related to confidentiality, informed consent, and personal privacy are minimal. The primary sources include ANC policy documents, government reports, public speeches, and peer-reviewed publications. All of these are in the public domain and are cited appropriately to ensure proper attribution and to avoid plagiarism (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

While the content used is publicly accessible, I have taken care to comply with copyright regulations and respect intellectual property rights. All material has been collected, referenced, and interpreted in accordance with recognised academic standards, and every effort has been made to acknowledge original authors and institutions (Bowen, 2009). Maintaining responsible use of sources strengthens the credibility of the study and contributes to the ethical foundation of the research process.

A further ethical consideration in this study involves maintaining analytical neutrality, particularly given the politically sensitive nature of the topic and the potential influence of the researcher's own perspective. As someone with an insider understanding of the South African political context, I remained conscious of the need to avoid bias, selective interpretation, or overstatement. To mitigate this, I applied triangulation by consulting multiple data sources, including alternative perspectives found in academic and media commentary, to validate findings and ensure balanced analysis (Jabkowski and Kołczyńska, 2020; Krippendorff, 2018).

Although the study draws from non-confidential sources, I acknowledge that some of the issues under examination, particularly those related to internal dynamics within the ANC, may be politically sensitive. I approached such content with care, avoiding speculative conclusions or emotionally charged interpretations. All claims are based on evidence and grounded in the data. Where uncertainty exists, I have opted for cautious framing, in recognition of the complex and often contested nature of the political environment. This ethical approach ensures that the research remains respectful and avoids causing harm to individuals, groups, or institutions, thereby upholding both academic and professional responsibility (Yin, 1994).

2.6.1. Researcher positionality

My positionality as a researcher is shaped by my professional background, particularly my former role as Director of Communication for an ANC government minister during the administrations of both President Jacob Zuma and President Cyril Ramaphosa. This experience has provided me with insider knowledge of the ANC's internal operations and the broader dynamics that influence policy formulation within government structures. This proximity to political processes has given me unique insights into how economic policies are conceptualised, debated, and implemented within the party and the state.

At the same time, I recognise that such proximity brings with it the potential for bias, whether through prior associations, interpretive leanings, or unconscious framing of data. Acknowledging this, I have approached this research with a heightened level of reflexivity and methodological rigour. Throughout the research process, I remained aware of the ways in which

my background might shape my interpretations. To mitigate this, I employed triangulation to ensure that all findings are substantiated by multiple sources. This process was critical for validating interpretations and for incorporating a range of perspectives beyond those I may have been previously exposed to.

By explicitly acknowledging my positionality and its potential influence, I have made a conscious effort to maintain academic integrity and neutrality. The theoretical frameworks used in this study; transformative social policy, political economy, and governance, serve not only as analytical tools, but also as safeguards against subjective bias. These frameworks provide structured, evidence-based approaches that ground the research in academic standards rather than personal viewpoints.

The transformative social policy framework enables the evaluation of policy based on measurable outcomes and structural impact, rather than on individual experiences or intentions. It allows for a systematic assessment of redistribution, reproduction, production, and protection, thus shifting the focus from interpretation to tangible socio-economic evidence. The political economy framework offers a critical lens through which to examine the influence of institutional power, ideological contestation, and factional dynamics on policy decisions. This lens is particularly useful in distancing the analysis from individual actors, allowing for a broader understanding of systemic influences on policy development.

The governance framework complements these approaches by focusing on institutional capacity, procedural accountability, and implementation integrity. Rather than attributing policy shortcomings to individuals, it emphasises systemic challenges, institutional weaknesses, and structural bottlenecks that shape governance outcomes. This not only limits the intrusion of personal bias into the analysis, but also ensures that critiques are rooted in verifiable institutional patterns and evidence.

While my insider position brings valuable contextual insight, it also demands a disciplined and transparent research process. By grounding this study in robust theoretical frameworks and

methodological safeguards, I aim to ensure that the research maintains analytical distance, objectivity, and scholarly credibility.

Chapter 3

Radical Economic Transformation and the struggle for policy direction in the ANC

3.1 Introduction

This chapter traces the emergence, evolution, and contestation of Radical Economic Transformation within ANC policy discourse, and its eventual transition to Radical Socio Economic Transformation. The chapter traces how RET emerged as a dominant political narrative between 2012 and 2017, gaining prominence in policy debates, electoral manifestos, and government planning documents, despite lacking conceptual clarity and a coherent framework for implementation.

The central argument advanced here is that RET functioned less as a structured policy programme and more as a politically contested slogan shaped by internal party dynamics, ideological rivalries, and strategic positioning within the ANC. Although presented as a transformative agenda to address inequality, unemployment, and poverty, RET was not formally adopted as ANC policy and remained loosely tethered to preexisting government programmes. The ambiguity of its content allowed competing interpretations to emerge, leading to uneven application across state institutions and ultimately contributing to governance breakdowns, particularly within state owned enterprises. These challenges prompted a shift under President Ramaphosa's administration toward RSET, a term that signalled a more moderated and institutionally anchored approach to economic reform.

The chapter begins by outlining the historical policy divides within the ANC that laid the foundation for later contestation over RET. It then explores the development of RET as a political concept, examining its early articulation by the ANC Youth League, its strategic use during the 2012 and 2017 policy conferences, and its eventual adoption in the 2014 election campaign. The chapter evaluates how RET was reflected in the fifth administration's Medium Term Strategic Framework, and how political contestation over its meaning intensified in the lead up to the ANC's 2017 elective conference. Finally, it explores the transition to RSET and the associated policy and governance shifts under President Ramaphosa.

In analysing RET and RSET within the broader ideological and institutional context of the ANC, this chapter highlights how political narratives can influence policy direction without necessarily providing the structure required for effective implementation. It also reveals the extent to which internal contestation can shape the coherence, reception, and performance of economic policy. This examination provides the basis for a deeper assessment of the policy content itself, which is taken up in the following chapter through the lens of transformative social policy.

3.2 ANC Policy Divisions that inform current debates

The ideological tensions that underpin contemporary economic policy debates within the ANC are not new, but rather rooted in long-standing divisions over the party's approach to redistribution, growth, and the role of the state. These divisions were most clearly expressed in the contrasting positions between the Macroeconomic Research Group (MERG), the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), and the later adoption of Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). These foundational disagreements continue to reverberate across the party's internal dynamics, shaping the contestation around Radical Economic Transformation and its successor, Radical Socio Economic Transformation.

Formed in 1992, MERG was composed of progressive economists and policy thinkers who, working within the ANC's broader liberation alliance, proposed a redistributive economic framework aimed at structural transformation. MERG's orientation favoured an interventionist state, greater equity in the allocation of resources, and socially anchored macroeconomic planning. According to Freund (2013), MERG's vision reflected the intellectual and political aspirations of the ANC's left-aligned base and aligned closely with the redistributive ethos of the liberation movement. However, MERG's recommendations were ultimately sidelined, and by 1996 the ANC formally adopted GEAR, a policy shift that institutionalised market-oriented reforms and macroeconomic conservatism. As Van Niekerk and Padayachee (2021) observe, this marked a decisive turn toward fiscal restraint and market liberalisation, influenced in part

by the pressures of global financial institutions and the ANC's desire to gain international investor confidence.

GEAR's formulation and adoption were not only technocratic but also deeply political. Freund (2013) notes the influence of individuals such as Trevor Manuel, Tito Mboweni, and Derek Keys, who helped steer the ANC's economic policy direction. Manuel, in particular, played a critical role both as Finance Minister and as head of the National Planning Commission during the drafting of the National Development Plan. Similarly, Mboweni's tenure as Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, followed by his later appointment as Finance Minister, reinforced the dominance of macroeconomic orthodoxy. Van Niekerk and Padayachee (2021) argue that these actors, while highly influential, were emblematic of a broader institutional consensus within the ANC that privileged market efficiency and global credibility over redistributive radicalism.

This shift came at a significant cost. The rejection of MERG's proposals and the implementation of GEAR were met with strong resistance from the ANC's alliance partners, including COSATU and the South African Communist Party. As Van Niekerk and Padayachee (2021) recount, GEAR was criticised for being imposed without adequate consultation and for deviating from the promises of the liberation struggle. The lack of participatory engagement in its development, and its technocratic framing, alienated many in the ANC's base and created a growing disjuncture between the party's formal policy positions and the expectations of its grassroots supporters. Critics viewed this not merely as a shift in strategy, but as a betrayal of the redistributive imperatives of the democratic transition.

The tensions generated by these early policy choices have endured and evolved. As the ANC moved from its formative governance years into the present, the legacy of these ideological divisions continues to shape intra-party discourse. Within contemporary debates, certain leaders and factions have been labelled as "sell-outs" or champions of neoliberalism, accused of abandoning the transformative vision of the Freedom Charter and the redistributive aims of the RDP (Van Niekerk and Padayachee, 2021). On the other side, more radical elements within the party have been dismissed as "policy dinosaurs," clinging to outdated notions of statist

control and state-led redistribution in a context that has become increasingly shaped by globalised capital and institutional constraint (Van Niekerk and Padayachee, 2021).

The contestation between advocates of Radical Economic Transformation and its critics has reproduced these earlier divisions. RET proponents frame their position as a corrective to the failures of GEAR and its successors, emphasising the need for bold state-led interventions to reverse the structural economic exclusions of the apartheid era. They argue that the persistence of poverty, unemployment, and inequality reflects the inadequacy of moderate reform and the betrayal of the redistributive promises made during the struggle for liberation. Their calls for land expropriation without compensation, state control over strategic sectors, and localisation of procurement reflect this ideological heritage.

However, critics of RET point to the instrumentalization of radical discourse for factional gain and personal enrichment. As Desai (2018) notes, RET has often served as a political smokescreen, deployed by elites seeking to consolidate control over state resources under the guise of transformation. This has given rise to the label "tender-capitalists," referring to politically connected actors who invoke radical rhetoric while participating in extractive patronage networks. These dynamics have deepened existing fractures within the ANC and have had profound implications for policy coherence and state capacity. The polarisation between these camps has hindered the development of a unified economic agenda capable of addressing the country's structural challenges. The continued presence of high unemployment, widespread poverty, and deep inequality is often linked to the ANC's failure to resolve this ideological tension and to adopt a cohesive and credible developmental strategy (Van Niekerk and Padayachee, 2021).

The broader debate now concerns the ANC's commitment to transformative social policy and whether its economic direction can meaningfully align with the goals of redistribution, equity, and structural reform. The adoption of GEAR, and its subsequent entrenchment in state planning, represented a significant departure from the ideals of the liberation movement. In turn, the rise of RET reflects both a critique of that departure and a strategic reactivation of radical discourse, albeit one that remains contested in both content and execution. This chapter situates these developments not only within the historical arc of ANC policy evolution, but also

as part of the ongoing struggle to define the meaning and direction of economic transformation in post-apartheid South Africa.

3.3 The Emergence of Radical Economic Transformation (RET) within the ANC

According to ANC policy discussions, the initial two decades of ANC governance were principally defined by the management of the country's democratic transition. This period focused largely on political stabilisation and the establishment of a democratic state, with less emphasis on the structural transformation of the economy. By the time of the 2012 ANC Policy Conference, however, growing dissatisfaction with the slow pace of socio-economic change led to intensified policy debates, most notably around what was termed the "second transition." This framing highlighted the need to reorient the economy in a way that would promote equity, reduce poverty, and enable sustainable livelihoods (The Sunday Independent, 2012; ANC, 2012).

Although RET remained ambiguously defined during this period, with no singular ANC or government document offering a thorough conceptualisation of the term, it began to dominate internal policy discussions. RET became closely linked to the broader call for a second transition in the National Democratic Revolution, but it existed more as a discursive tool than a structured policy agenda. The ambiguity surrounding the term allowed for varied interpretations within the organisation and beyond, contributing to both its popularity and its contestation.

The complete phrasing of Radical Economic Transformation was first introduced in public discourse by Julius Malema, then President of the ANCYL, during his opening and closing remarks at the 2011 24th Congress of the League where he was re-elected (The Star, 2011). Malema used the term to advocate for radical shifts in the country's political economy, including expropriation of land without compensation, nationalisation of key industries, and a redefinition of ownership patterns that continued to favour the white minority. This marked the first use of the term within a highly charged political setting, situated amidst growing calls for the ANC to take a more decisive stance on economic redress.

Interestingly, while the mother body of the ANC issued a statement congratulating Malema on his re-election, it simultaneously distanced itself from the Youth League's positions. The ANC clarified that the views expressed by the League did not reflect the official policy of the party, and that these were specific to the Youth League's mandate (Politicsweb, 2011). At that point, the ANC leadership sought to reassure the public and financial markets that there was no imminent shift in policy direction. As reported by Property24 (2011), this move was intended to allay investor fears and signal a commitment to policy stability. However, this posture would later become complicated when senior ANC leaders began to express support for similar policy positions, suggesting a blurring of the boundaries between rhetoric and official discourse.

During the 2012 ANC Policy Conference, RET gained further prominence. Although still undefined as a cohesive policy framework, it began to surface within formal ANC leadership statements. Thandi Modise, then Deputy Secretary General of the ANC, echoed earlier sentiments from the ANCYL by stating that the conference's policy proposals were designed to address long-standing injustices and socio-economic inequalities (Merten, 2012). Modise asserted that the proposals were situated within the framework of a second transition and were intended to dismantle the enduring influence of the white minority over the economy while tackling the interconnected problems of inequality, poverty, and unemployment. She stressed the need for a fundamental shift in economic policy to respond to these structural issues.

Jeff Radebe, serving as the ANC's Head of Policy at the time, reinforced this narrative during a media briefing on the conference resolutions (The Sunday Independent, 2012; ANC, 2012b). He confirmed that the ANC viewed the first phase of its post-apartheid administration as one focused on consolidating democracy and establishing political stability. However, this phase had failed to realise the full scope of the ANC's social and economic transformation ambitions. Radebe noted that the proposed second transition aimed to implement significant and radical changes to existing economic and social policies, thereby advancing the transformation agenda (ANC, 2012b; ANC, 2012c).

The official policy documents produced during the 2012 conference formalised this perspective. One of the key passages articulated that "this second phase of the transition should be characterised by more radical policies and decisive action to effect thoroughgoing and

continued democratic transformation, as well as the renewal of the ANC, the Alliance and the broad democratic forces" (ANC, 2012c). This language marked a shift in ANC discourse, placing greater emphasis on structural reform, institutional renewal, and more direct interventions in the economy. It also signalled an acknowledgment that political transformation alone was insufficient for achieving the goals of the National Democratic Revolution.

What becomes evident through this discussion is that RET, even in its early stages, emerged not as a structured or internally consistent policy framework but rather as a contested space of ideological engagement within the ANC. It was invoked variously by different actors to symbolise both a critique of the post-1994 economic consensus and a call for deeper forms of redistribution. Its rhetorical prominence did not translate into institutional clarity, a factor that would later have significant consequences for governance and implementation. As subsequent sections in this chapter will demonstrate, the absence of a coherent RET policy framework and the reliance on rhetorical mobilisation would shape both its operationalisation in state institutions and the political contestation that followed.

> This second phase of the transition should be characterised by more radical policies and decisive action to effect thorough-going and continued democratic transformation, as well as the renewal of the ANC, the Alliance and the broad democratic forces (ANC Policy Conference Proposal Documents).

The shift from policy proposals to the final resolutions adopted at the 2012 ANC Elective Conference reflected an important recalibration in the party's approach to socio-economic transformation. The resolutions signalled a commitment to what was termed the second phase of transition, which would prioritize bold and far-reaching initiatives aimed at the full liberation of the South African population (ANC, 2012d). This second phase was envisioned as one that would deepen democratic practices and promote transformative economic policies necessary to improve the quality of life for all citizens. The broader goal was to advance a unified, inclusive, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic, and prosperous society (ANC, 2012d).

These Marxist viewpoints have significantly influenced South Africa's political economy discussions, especially via the South African Communist Party and its interpretation of the National Democratic Revolution. The core of this paradigm is the "two-stage theory," which posits an initial phase of national liberation succeeded by a subsequent, socialist-oriented phase of economic reform designed to eradicate structural inequities. RET was advocated by its supporters as a means to further this second phase, in accordance with Marxist critiques of South Africa's persistent reliance on global capitalism and its ingrained racialized class hierarchy.

Despite the rhetorical shift, the findings reveal that the concept of RET remained vague and contested throughout the 2012 policy and elective conferences. The lack of conceptual clarity was a central concern emerging from the policy conference deliberations, where clear divisions surfaced within the ANC over the nature, urgency, and direction of economic transformation. Delegates coalesced around two broad positions: one group advocated for a more radical approach to economic restructuring, demanding urgent action to dismantle the entrenched systems of inequality; the other, more cautious, argued that existing frameworks such as the National Democratic Revolution already contained sufficient provisions for long-term transformation.

The tension between these two positions became a defining feature of the 2012 debates. Proponents of the second transition called for bold measures to address persistent inequalities and restructure economic power, while critics within the ANC warned that this approach risked introducing unnecessary conceptual confusion into the party’s long-standing ideological architecture. This contestation came to a head in the interventions of Joel Netshitenzhe, a senior ANC figure and executive director of the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (Netshitenzhe, 2012; Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection, 2021).

Netshitenzhe challenged the second transition proposal on the grounds of conceptual ambiguity and analytical weakness. While he agreed on the need to confront the enduring socio-economic legacy of apartheid in order to achieve social cohesion, he argued that the proposal lacked clear parameters and failed to define what constituted a new transition phase (Netshitenzhe, 2014). For Netshitenzhe, socio-economic transformation was not a discrete stage that followed

political liberation but rather a continuous process embedded in the broader National Democratic Revolution. He warned that framing change in rigid stages risked obscuring the interrelated nature of political and economic transformation and called instead for a focus on conceptual clarity and methodological coherence.

In response to this critique, the ANC leadership reached a compromise in the language ultimately adopted. Rather than endorsing the term second transition, the party settled on the notion of a second phase. This distinction was politically significant. The second phase retained the calls for radical policy shifts, but it also reflected a more measured and calculated approach to implementation. By reframing the proposal as a phase rather than a new transition, the party was able to preserve ideological continuity while accommodating demands for accelerated transformation. The revised language, which was subsequently ratified at the elective conference, marked a critical moment in ANC policy development by asserting the need for structural reform while simultaneously containing its most radical impulses (ANC, 2012d).

A clear example of this negotiated outcome was seen in the land reform debate. While early policy proposals had advocated for universal land expropriation without compensation, the final conference resolution adopted a more constrained approach. Expropriation without compensation would apply only to land that had been unlawfully acquired or that was being used for illegal purposes (ANC, 2012d). This resolution replaced the willing buyer, willing seller approach that had guided land reform since 1994 but fell short of the comprehensive overhaul that some factions had demanded. The nuanced shift demonstrated the ANC's attempt to balance the pressure for radical transformation with the need to maintain institutional and market stability.

Similarly, debates over the nationalisation of the mining sector were ultimately resolved in favour of more incremental reforms. While some delegates had called for full state ownership of key mineral assets, these proposals were not adopted. Instead, the conference endorsed measures such as increased taxation and penalties on mining companies, promotion of local beneficiation, and expanded state participation in new mining ventures (ANC, 2012d). These outcomes reflected the party's preference for gradual but strategic reform, as opposed to sweeping and potentially destabilising interventions.

The unresolved nature of the land and mining policy debates in the lead-up to the 2014 general elections contributed to a broader ambiguity in the policy environment. The 2012 conference resolutions provided investors and other stakeholders with some reassurance by affirming that the ANC remained committed to reform but would pursue change through pragmatic and institutionally grounded means. This positioning, however, also created a gap between the expectations raised by the RET rhetoric and the more restrained policy outcomes, reinforcing the perception that RET lacked conceptual and strategic coherence.

Former President Jacob Zuma acknowledged this divide in his opening address at the 2012 Policy Conference. He welcomed the intense policy debate within the party and emphasised that proposals aimed at renewing the organisation and deepening transformation were not self-serving but formed part of a national imperative. He stated:

> There has been a lot of debate about the documents, especially Strategy and Tactics and its reference to a Second Transition. We welcome the debates that have taken place on the proposals as they indicate a great deal of interest in ANC policy making… some of the proposals that are being put forward to this conference including the renewal of the organisation and the deepening of social and economic transformation, through embarking on a second transition…We are not doing this for ourselves as ANC members. We are doing it for the country as a whole (ANC former president Zuma 2012 Policy Conference Opening address).

This statement underscores the central contradiction in the ANC's position at the time. While the leadership endorsed the goals of structural transformation, they did so within a framework that remained cautious, ambiguous, and open to multiple interpretations. The party's inability to produce a clearly articulated and coherent RET agenda at this stage laid the groundwork for future policy inconsistencies and political contestation.

By the time of the 2014 general elections, Radical Economic Transformation had gained considerable political traction within ANC discourse, yet it still lacked a coherent policy framework or conceptual definition. Despite the prominence of the term in the party's rhetoric and campaign messaging, RET remained largely symbolic, an aspirational phrase without clear

operational content. This ambiguity is one of the key findings of this research, revealing how RET functioned more as a rallying cry than a policy programme.

> The radical second phase of our transition must bring about the economic emancipation of our people. In the next five years, despite the global economic outlook, we are determined to act decisively and boldly to increase investment in the real economy and infrastructure, stimulate faster levels of inclusive growth, speed up social development, substantially reduce poverty and unemployment, and place the economy on a qualitatively different growth path…Align the development mandate of state-owned enterprises The developmental mandate of state-owned enterprises, development finance institutions (DFIs) and other public agencies will be re-aligned to support radical economic transformation (ANC 2014 Manifesto).

This statement suggested an intention to recalibrate state institutions to serve transformation goals. However, it stopped short of offering a precise definition or outlining specific policy instruments that would underpin RET. The absence of clarity around how RET would be implemented, monitored, or differentiated from existing policy commitments undermined its credibility as a policy proposal.

The lack of definitional clarity was further exposed in public engagements during the election campaign. When asked by journalists to explain the meaning and implications of RET, then ANC Secretary General Gwede Mantashe responded by downplaying the need for a conceptual explanation. According to a Daily Maverick report (2014), Mantashe dismissed the calls for specificity, stating: “This is not the time for conceptual clarity” (The ANC Secretary General).

This response, while perhaps intended to shield the party from immediate scrutiny, inadvertently reinforced the perception that RET was politically expedient rather than substantively grounded. Mantashe’s refusal to elaborate on whether RET constituted a policy shift, a guiding principle, or a new development paradigm suggested that no formal consensus had been reached within the ANC regarding its meaning or scope. His comments also implicitly acknowledged that no detailed policy position existed at that time, raising concerns about the term’s utility in shaping actual government planning and implementation.

This episode is critical to understanding the trajectory of RET as a concept. Although RET was increasingly invoked by ANC leaders and candidates, its strategic function appeared more rhetorical than programmatic. Its use in the 2014 manifesto helped the ANC project a renewed commitment to transformation, but without accompanying policy clarity, RET risked becoming a malleable phrase that could be shaped to suit various political ends. This finding resonates with broader criticisms made in parliamentary debates, civil society forums, and academic publications during and after the election period.

The ongoing reliance on RET terminology without a formal policy framework can be largely attributed to its most prominent advocates, notably President Zuma and members of the ANC NEC, who continued to promote the concept throughout Zuma's second term. Their support elevated RET to a central position in ANC discourse and allowed it to influence state-level policy direction, even in the absence of formal adoption through standard policy development processes. However, this also intensified internal party contestation and public scrutiny, leading to debates about whether RET represented a genuine policy turn or simply a political slogan aimed at mobilising specific constituencies.

Regarding the NDR, detractors within the ANC and affiliated organizations contend that RET was more a rhetorical mobilizing of radical vocabulary than a cohesive Marxist agenda, aimed at legitimising factional conflicts over state resources. This tension exemplifies the contentious legacy of Marxist ideology within the ANC-led coalition: although its tenets persist in shaping demands for redistribution and state-driven development, their practical implementation has frequently been undermined by the party's embrace of neoliberal macroeconomic policies like GEAR and the NDP. In this regard, RET and RSET demonstrate both the persistent impact and the political exploitation of Marxist viewpoints in shaping South Africa's policy dialogue.

Ultimately, the 2014 elections marked a significant moment in the evolution of RET. The ANC's embrace of the term signalled an important discursive shift, but one that was not matched by substantive changes in policy design or institutional planning. The findings presented in this section show that RET continued to operate in a conceptual vacuum, setting the stage for the governance challenges and internal contestations that would become more pronounced in the years that followed.

3.4 The 2014–2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF)

Following the 2014 national elections, former President Jacob Zuma's State of the Nation Address marked a significant turning point, as it formally placed Radical Economic Transformation at the centre of the government's strategic priorities (Zuma, 2014). The address positioned RET as a necessary response to the structural and enduring legacies of poverty, unemployment, and inequality which, after two decades of democracy, continued to affect the black majority. This period thus represented a moment where political rhetoric around transformation gained renewed prominence, now articulated as a state programme rather than simply party discourse.

In an attempt to translate these ambitions into formal governance instruments, RET became one of the main pillars of the 2014 to 2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework. The MTSF is developed through an internal government planning cycle which includes inputs from departmental drafts, inter-departmental clusters, the Forum of South African Directors General, and final approval at Cabinet Lekgotla. It is designed to operationalise the National Development Plan through coordinated five-year planning, aligning the ruling party's policy resolutions with executable state action. The MTSF explicitly states:

> Government's programme of radical economic transformation is about placing the economy on a qualitatively different path that ensures more rapid, sustainable growth, higher investment, increased employment, reduced inequality and deracialisation of the economy. The NDP sets a growth target of at least 5% a year, and emphasises measures to ensure that the benefits of growth are equitably shared (MTSF 2014-2019).

Despite this bold articulation, what emerges from the analysis is that RET was not accompanied by a distinct or new policy framework. Instead, it was presented as a coordinated repackaging of existing development instruments. These included the New Growth Path, which emphasised employment generation; the Industrial Policy Action Plan, aimed at improving industrial competitiveness; and the National Infrastructure Plan, focused on addressing spatial and

service delivery backlogs (DPME, 2014). Existing social programmes such as the phased introduction of the National Health Insurance, reforms to the social security system, and the expansion of vocational education were bundled under the RET agenda. Similarly, Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment and the Expanded Public Works Programme were listed as transformative interventions central to the deracialisation of the economy.

This suggests that RET in the 2014 to 2019 MTSF did not represent a break from the developmental policy trajectory the ANC had pursued since the early 2000s. Rather, it functioned as a rhetorical overlay. The content analysis of the MTSF confirms that it largely retained the structure and orientation of prior frameworks, albeit under a new transformative narrative. As such, RET in the state context became a signifier of political will, but lacked institutional innovation or policy novelty.

This lack of conceptual and policy clarity was formally acknowledged by the Parliamentary Budget Office in September 2014, when it presented its concerns to the Standing Committee on Finance. The Office noted that while the 2014 to 2019 MTSF was the first government document to formally embed RET, it offered little in the way of clarity on the term's meaning, scope, or implementation strategy (Parliamentary Budget Office, 2014). The limited public response to this announcement was, according to the Office, largely due to the fact that the MTSF remained an internal government protocol rather than an externally debated policy platform. Its rollout occurred without public participation or broader societal consultation, limiting its resonance and legitimacy outside of state institutions.

By 2017, amid rising internal contestation within the ANC, RET had evolved into a highly politicised and contested concept. The political landscape during this period was shaped by the looming leadership contest in the ANC, with competing factions invoking RET to advance differing visions of economic justice. In his 2017 State of the Nation Address, Zuma reiterated RET's alignment with ANC objectives and sought to clarify its content in more definitive terms. He stated:

> We mean fundamental change in the structure, systems, institutions and patterns of ownership, management and control of the economy in favour of all South Africans, especially the poor, the majority of whom are African and

> female, as defined by the governing party, which makes policy for the democratic government (President Zuma 2017 SONA).

This articulation closely followed the language adopted at the January 2017 ANC NEC Lekgotla, where Radical Socio-Economic Transformation was described as a process to alter economic relations fundamentally and empower historically excluded populations (ANC, 2017b). However, by this stage, the political meaning of RET had already begun to fracture along factional lines, with multiple and contradictory interpretations emerging from within the party and alliance structures.

3.5 The Political Contestation Over RET; 2017 ANC Leadership Race

The relatively muted debates surrounding Radical Economic Transformation (RET) following its introduction in ANC policy discourse in 2012 took on an intensified political character by 2017. RET evolved from a loosely defined ideological proposition into a symbol of factional power struggles, particularly during the ANC's highly contested national leadership race. As President Jacob Zuma faced mounting allegations of state capture, RET became central to his counterstrategy, positioned as both a defence against accusations of corruption and a call to complete the liberation project through economic transformation (Alence and Pitcher, 2019).

The 2017 leadership contest between Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa and Zuma's preferred successor, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, exposed deep divisions within the ANC. RET became the central battleground, with each faction seeking to assert control over its meaning and political utility (Desai, 2018). Zuma's use of RET as a platform for economic justice was increasingly viewed through the lens of his political survival. By that stage, the concept had been entangled with allegations of state capture involving the Gupta family, who were accused of using their relationship with Zuma and state officials to secure lucrative contracts and influence government appointments. The controversial relationship was amplified by revelations that a British public relations firm had been contracted to shape public discourse by positioning RET as an anti-imperialist struggle against "white monopoly capital" (Desai, 2018).

The shifting meaning of RET became even more opaque as criticism of its strategic deployment mounted. Public Protector Thuli Madonsela's 2016 *State of Capture* report (PPSA, 2016) set in motion a series of inquiries into the abuse of state institutions, drawing RET into the frame not as a policy framework but as a political smokescreen for rent-seeking and elite accumulation. This undermined its credibility as a serious programme of transformation and complicated its status within official government policy, especially considering that the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) for 2014 to 2019 had already declared RET as a central component of the state's development agenda.

Amid these contestations, former Deputy Minister of Finance Mcebisi Jonas offered an important intervention. He argued that RET had no fixed meaning and instead had been appropriated by various actors to suit divergent agendas (Jonas, 2015). Jonas identified at least five interpretations of RET circulating within public and political discourse. The first was the official state-sanctioned version reflected in the MTSF, which aimed to stimulate inclusive growth through infrastructure development, enhancing competitiveness, and supporting marginalised groups. The second came from COSATU, advocating for a stronger state role in controlling strategic sectors, reforming wage policies, and strengthening organised labour. A third interpretation was espoused by populist formations such as the Economic Freedom Fighters, calling for land expropriation without compensation and the nationalisation of banks and mines. The fourth view, aligned to the South African Communist Party (SACP), stressed the need for a restructured productive economy that reduced dependence on global capitalism through industrialisation and state-led planning. Finally, the pragmatic wing, associated with figures like Joel Netshitenzhe, argued for a partnership between business and labour to advance inclusive economic growth without undermining investor confidence.

Jonas later testified that RET had been co-opted by individuals with "hidden agendas" aimed at capturing state resources. His public account of an attempted bribe by the Gupta family to appoint him as Minister of Finance in exchange for favourable business decisions provided strong evidence of how RET had become entangled with patronage politics (Jonas, 2016; Von Holdt, 2019). Jonas's critique aligned with broader societal scepticism, which increasingly

viewed RET not as a coherent policy but as a rhetorical device deployed for political expediency.

Despite these concerns, prominent voices within the tripartite alliance, particularly from the SACP, defended RET as a legitimate vehicle for socio-economic transformation. Solly Mapaila, a senior leader in the SACP, argued that RET, as adopted in the ANC's 2012 Policy Conference, was consistent with the Freedom Charter's call for a non-racial, non-sexist, and democratic society premised on equitable resource distribution (Mapaila, 2017). He contended that the GEAR policy adopted in 1996 had led to deindustrialisation and deepened inequality, making RET a necessary corrective to decades of neoliberal drift. According to Mapaila, RET was a response to the enduring socio-economic exclusion of the majority, especially the working class, despite political liberation. He traced its ideological roots to the alliance's opposition to GEAR and framed it as a response to both global economic inequality and the exploitation of workers that followed the 2008 global financial crisis.

However, Mapaila also issued a cautionary note: RET must not become a cover for elite accumulation. "RET must not serve private interests, benefit a few individuals, or promote divisive and populist politics," he stated (Mapaila, 2017). Instead, it should focus on industrial policy, democratic control over economic surplus, and land reform aimed at productive use. The emphasis was on institutional discipline, public sector accountability, and the redistribution of economic power to the people rather than political elites. In this framing, RET was not just a policy orientation but a moral imperative rooted in the ANC's historical mission.

Yet, the internal contradictions within the ANC and its alliance partners meant that these perspectives were never fully reconciled. RET became a contested signifier within the broader political economy of transition, shaped as much by ideological conviction as by factional rivalry. The 2017 ANC leadership contest thus marked the climax of RET's political life, illustrating the fragile relationship between rhetorical transformation and actual policy coherence. It also exposed the dangers of mobilisation without institutional clarity, where slogans risk becoming substitutes for strategy, and where transformative goals are subverted by competing elite interests.

3.6 The transition to Radical Socio-Economic Transformation (RSET)

The limited traction of Radical Economic Transformation (RET) within government policy frameworks following the 2014 elections was soon eclipsed by intensified political contestation in 2017. As allegations of state capture grew, President Jacob Zuma sought to assert control over the ANC's succession trajectory by promoting RET as a central plank of his political platform. The succession battle between Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa and Zuma's preferred candidate, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, brought RET into sharp ideological focus, revealing deep divisions in the ANC over the direction of economic policy and the broader vision for transformation.

Ramaphosa maintained the moderate stance formalised at the ANC's 2012 Elective Conference, which had replaced the "Second Transition" discourse with a more gradualist approach framed as a "new phase" of the National Democratic Revolution. By contrast, Dlamini-Zuma embraced the RET narrative in more radical terms, aligning herself with policy proposals such as the nationalisation of mines and the expropriation of land without compensation. These positions marked a clear ideological fault line between continuity and rupture within the ruling party, and the debate around RET became deeply politicised during the leadership race.

A particularly revealing moment in this contest occurred when Dlamini-Zuma responded to criticism that RET was a euphemism for corruption. In reaction to comments from a South African businessman who had suggested that RET was simply "code for theft," she declared:

> I have heard that somebody had said that radical economic transformation is just theft. This is an insult to all black people. We must reject this. We must all commit to radical economic transformation (Dlamini-Zuma responding to an influential businessman who had called RET a code name for theft in The Citizen, 2017).

This emotive defence of RET framed it as a matter of dignity and redress for historically marginalised communities, but it also revealed the polarising nature of the debate. In contrast,

Ramaphosa attempted to shift the discourse towards a more structured and inclusive formulation. Speaking at the 2017 ANC Policy Conference, he stated:

> Many of them are saying don't just call it radical economic transformation. What the ANC is about is to change and improve the social condition of our people, and they say we must refer to it as radical socio-economic transformation. So as the leadership we are here to listen, to imbibe what our delegates are saying. Our branch delegates are well-armed with the experience of our people, the poverty our people are going through, the unemployment, the inequality (Daily Maverick, 2017).

As noted by political journalist Carien du Plessis, this moment signalled a decisive conceptual divergence (Daily Maverick, 2017). While Dlamini-Zuma and her faction continued to advocate RET as the party's primary transformation agenda, Ramaphosa and his supporters endorsed a more programmatic and technocratic rebranding as RSET. This semantic shift was not merely rhetorical but indicated a deeper strategic move towards a more governance-centred and institutionally viable approach. The 2017 policy conference thus served as a pivotal moment where the ANC's future orientation toward economic transformation was contested not only in ideological terms but also in terms of policy coherence and implementation feasibility.

3.7 RET impact on Governance

The policy dissonance within the ANC between 2014 and 2017 manifested acutely in the governance of key sectors of the state. Under President Zuma's leadership, RET was incorporated into state rhetoric and selectively operationalised through the 2014 to 2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework. However, the absence of a coherent and codified RET policy framework led to fragmented and often inconsistent applications of its principles across government departments and state-owned enterprises (SOEs).

In energy, mining, and procurement policy, RET was used to justify expansive interventions that were often contested for their legality, efficiency, and developmental impact. Under Minister Mosebenzi Zwane, the Department of Mineral Resources advanced a new Mining

Charter that imposed increased ownership targets and transformation requirements on the industry. Meanwhile, the Department of Energy, led by Minister Tina Joemat-Pettersson, pursued controversial plans for nuclear procurement, drawing criticism for a lack of transparency and financial prudence (BusinessTech, 2016).

The Department of Trade and Industry revised its Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) guidelines to strengthen preferential procurement, explicitly targeting transformation in government supply chains. As captured in the 2014 to 2019 MTSF, this policy direction was framed as follows:

> Procurement reforms will be geared towards broad-based black economic empowerment (BBBEE) and support for local suppliers and smallholders, in addition to obtaining better value for money and reducing corruption. Government aims to procure at least 75% of its goods and services from South African producers (2014-2019 MTSF).

These changes, though framed as part of the radical transformation agenda, often led to unintended consequences, particularly within SOEs. The boards and executive leadership at Eskom, Transnet, South African Airways (SAA), and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) undertook sweeping changes ostensibly in pursuit of transformation. Yet the *State Capture Commission* later found that these interventions frequently compromised operational efficiency, financial integrity, and governance standards (State Capture Report, 2022).

Under Dudu Myeni's leadership, for example, SAA reversed its outsourcing model in favour of insourcing, a move purportedly aligned with transformation but one that resulted in accusations of corruption and mismanagement. At the SABC, localisation policies were implemented to promote local content, but contracts awarded to politically connected individuals raised red flags about ethical procurement. Across these institutions, procurement practices and leadership appointments were repeatedly linked to actors aligned with the RET faction, illustrating how the absence of a central policy framework allowed transformation rhetoric to be manipulated for political and financial gain.

The *State Capture Commission* concluded that in many cases, SOEs misinterpreted the vague RET directive, acting without clear policy mandates. This ambiguity enabled widespread patronage networks to flourish, undermining public trust in the transformation agenda. RET, rather than advancing socio-economic justice, became associated with elite accumulation and institutional decay.

These developments underscore the risk of implementing ideologically charged policy concepts without sufficient institutional scaffolding. The RET experience illustrates how factionalism, coupled with a lack of conceptual clarity, can derail well-intentioned goals of economic inclusion and transformation. As will be further examined in Chapter 6, the governance failings linked to RET reveal the critical importance of aligning political objectives with institutional coherence, robust oversight, and transparent implementation mechanisms.

3.8 Key policy initiatives under RSET: a comparative analysis of RET and RSET

The election of Cyril Ramaphosa as President in 2018 marked a decisive shift in the articulation and operationalisation of the ANC's economic transformation agenda. This transition from Radical Economic Transformation (RET) to Radical Socio-Economic Transformation (RSET) represented more than a semantic adjustment. It signalled a fundamental reconfiguration of the state's developmental posture, particularly regarding governance integrity, institutional accountability, and the implementation of reformist economic policy.

Where RET had been invoked as a political rallying point, often lacking conceptual precision and operational coherence, RSET was presented as a framework anchored in both constitutional and programmatic commitments. Ramaphosa's reformist project foregrounded governance modernisation, anti-corruption efforts, and macroeconomic stability as critical enablers of inclusive growth. Notably, this shift involved a recalibration of several high-stakes policy domains. For example, the nuclear energy procurement programme, heavily criticised under President Zuma for its fiscal and procedural opacity, was halted in favour of renewable energy alternatives. Simultaneously, the Mining Charter was amended to reflect a more balanced approach between transformation imperatives and industrial sustainability.

This reorientation was also evident in the leadership overhaul at key state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Institutions such as Eskom, SAA, Transnet, and the SABC underwent rapid changes in executive leadership and board composition, an attempt to stem the reputational and operational damage caused during the RET-associated period. These actions were strongly informed by the findings of the State Capture Commission, which highlighted how ambiguous policy directives under the 2014 to 2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) were frequently instrumentalised to justify irregular procurement practices and politically motivated appointments.

Indeed, the lack of a formalised RET policy framework had opened space for discretionary interpretation and political manipulation. Critics increasingly argued that RET functioned as a political device deployed strategically to consolidate power and access to state resources. The absence of a coherent policy architecture, combined with intra-party contestation over its purpose, allowed RET to become a contested and ultimately compromised policy banner. Rather than facilitating radical structural change, it often contributed to governance breakdowns and elite accumulation.

Against this backdrop, RSET emerged as a corrective approach, aiming to restore credibility to the state's development agenda while addressing persistent structural inequalities. In his 2019 State of the Nation Address, President Ramaphosa defined RSET as a broad-based and integrated strategy aimed at rebuilding public trust, driving equitable economic development, and addressing deeply entrenched socio-economic disparities. His vision included tangible reforms such as the establishment of the Presidential SOE Council, tasked with driving governance improvements across major public entities, as well as measures to professionalise leadership, combat corruption, and ensure alignment with national developmental objectives (Ramaphosa, 2019).

Central to the RSET agenda was a renewed focus on industrial regeneration, small enterprise support, and the promotion of domestic manufacturing. These were seen as levers to stimulate job creation, revitalise industrial parks, and re-anchor the productive economy. Moreover, Ramaphosa reaffirmed the ANC's 2017 resolution on land reform, specifically the expropriation of land without compensation, framing it as a constitutional imperative aimed at

addressing historical dispossession without undermining food security or economic stability (ANC, 2017b). Social policy interventions were also reprioritised under RSET. These included a phased rollout of the National Health Insurance (NHI), the strengthening of Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes, and targeted efforts to redress deficits in housing and educational infrastructure. These interventions, framed within a developmental logic, aimed to bolster the social wage while reinforcing the foundations of human capital development.

Perhaps most crucially, RSET was embedded within a broader governance reform agenda. Ramaphosa committed to revitalising prosecutorial institutions such as the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), intensifying anti-corruption efforts, and implementing the recommendations of the Zondo and Nugent Commissions. The proposed restructuring of Eskom into distinct generation, transmission, and distribution units further illustrated the technocratic character of RSET, positioning it as a policy orientation grounded in accountability, regulatory clarity, and institutional resilience.

The analytical significance of this transition lies in the contrast between the political populism of RET and the technocratic pragmatism of RSET. While both frameworks claim to pursue structural transformation, their operational logics and institutional preconditions diverge markedly. RET, in its vagueness, enabled a range of interpretations, which at times concealed personal and factional interests. RSET, though still in its formative stages, represents an attempt to recentre the state as a developmental actor capable of enacting inclusive and evidence-informed transformation.

As this chapter has shown, the shift from RET to RSET was not merely rhetorical but structurally consequential. It reflected an evolving consensus within the ANC leadership that long-term transformation cannot be sustained without credible institutions, strategic coherence, and governance integrity. Whether RSET will overcome the structural constraints that limited the ambitions of RET remains an open question; one that subsequent chapters will interrogate by assessing the extent to which institutional reforms have enhanced the state's capacity to deliver on transformative goals.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the emergence, evolution, and institutional implications of Radical Economic Transformation and its eventual transition to Radical Socio-Economic Transformation within the ANC's policy discourse and governance framework between 2012 and 2019. Beginning with the internal policy contestations at the 2012 policy and elective conferences, the chapter traced how RET gained political traction despite the absence of a formalised policy framework. While RET was initially positioned as a response to persistent socio-economic challenges, its conceptual vagueness, coupled with factional contestation within the ANC, undermined its coherence and implementation.

The findings demonstrate that RET was largely rhetorical, embedded in ideological posturing rather than grounded policy planning. Its incorporation into the MTSF 2014–2019 reflected an attempt to institutionalise its goals, but in practice, RET amounted to a repackaging of existing government programmes without a transformative policy shift. Furthermore, its politicisation in the lead-up to the ANC's 2017 elective conference, particularly through the leadership contest between Ramaphosa and Dlamini-Zuma, revealed how economic transformation discourse was weaponised for internal political gain.

Ramaphosa's eventual ascension to the presidency and the reconfiguration of RET into RSET marked a strategic pivot. The shift introduced a renewed emphasis on governance reform, institutional integrity, and economic pragmatism. RSET retained the broad transformative goals of its predecessor but placed greater emphasis on policy coherence, constitutional alignment, and developmental sustainability. Yet, even as RSET sought to restore credibility and redirect the state, critiques persist regarding its ability to deliver the structural change envisioned in earlier ANC policy aspirations and in frameworks such as the Freedom Charter and the NDP.

The chapter underscores the disconnect between political rhetoric and policy execution within the ANC's recent history. While the language of transformation remained prominent, the institutional conditions and political consensus necessary to deliver on this agenda were repeatedly undermined by internal divisions, governance failures, and the instrumental use of

policy for factional consolidation. These dynamics set the stage for the next chapter, which systematically evaluates the extent to which RET and RSET align with the principles of transformative social policy as articulated by Mkandawire, and the broader implications for inclusive development in South Africa.

Chapter 4

Policy intentions and transformative social values in ANC Policymaking (2012–2019)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the African National Congress (ANC)'s policymaking processes between 2012 and 2019, examining the extent to which policy resolutions and government strategies during this period aligned with the principles of transformative social policy. The chapter engages with key policy documents, including the ANC's 2012 and 2017 Policy and National Conference resolutions and the government's 2014–2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), to interrogate how transformative objectives were conceptualised, articulated, and advanced during a period marked by ideological contestation and heightened socio-economic pressure.

Centred on Thandika Mkandawire's theoretical framework of transformative social policy, the chapter interrogates four critical policy functions: redistribution, production, reproduction, and protection, to assess the degree to which ANC policy responses addressed South Africa's persistent structural inequalities. In doing so, it maps the ANC's attempt to confront the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment, and inequality within the broader constraints of a global neoliberal order, internal party dynamics, and state institutional capacity.

The chapter argues that while the ANC consistently reaffirms transformative ideals in its resolutions and planning documents, these commitments often remain rhetorical. The divergence between policy ambitions and implementation realities reflects not only the limits of state capacity but also enduring tensions between the ANC's redistributive traditions and the market-oriented direction its macroeconomic policies have taken since the 1990s. The analysis highlights how contestation over the RET agenda and its evolution into RSET further illustrates competing interpretations of what transformation entails and how it should be pursued.

By analysing the policy content and their stated objectives through the lens of transformative social policy, this chapter identifies the normative commitments, conceptual frameworks, and

programmatic approaches adopted by the ANC. It also assesses the coherence of these policies within a developmental state paradigm, drawing on Mkandawire's critique of late industrialising contexts. In doing so, the chapter builds on the historical and ideological tensions explored in the previous chapter, while setting the stage for the empirical evaluation of governance and policy implementation challenges.

4.2 South Africa triple challenges and ANC's transformation strategy

The democratisation of South Africa in 1994 represented more than a political breakthrough; it marked a critical turning point in the economic reconfiguration of a society deeply fractured by apartheid. The ANC positioned itself as the principal agent of transformation, seeking to dismantle entrenched systems of racial exclusion and structural inequality through an ambitious programme of inclusive social and economic reforms. The period from 2012 to 2019 saw the continuation of this agenda, albeit with increasing difficulty as the ANC grappled with the contradictions of pursuing a redistributive developmental trajectory within a global political economy shaped by liberalisation, fiscal discipline, and financial market expectations.

The ANC's strategy during this period was framed around the need to resolve what it terms South Africa's "triple challenges" – poverty, inequality, and unemployment. These deeply interconnected issues are not only the legacy of apartheid-era social engineering but also the result of post-1994 macroeconomic choices that constrained the state's redistributive capacity. The policy contradictions of the democratic era were intensified by internal party tensions over the nature and direction of economic transformation. While the ANC's policy documents and national conferences continued to articulate transformative ambitions, the actualisation of these goals was often limited by the dual pressures of internal factionalism and external market constraints.

To make sense of this complex policy environment, Thandika Mkandawire's transformative social policy framework provides a useful lens. Drawing on the work of Alexander Gerschenkron and the concept of late industrialisation, Mkandawire (2011c; 2012) situates countries like South Africa within a structural context where state-led transformation must be

ambitious, multidimensional, and adaptive. In this paradigm, catching up with both developed and developing economies requires not only economic growth but also the deliberate reordering of institutional arrangements and governance structures that perpetuate inequality.

Mkandawire (2012) defines transformative social policy as the purposeful reconfiguration of economic systems, social relations, and institutional arrangements to improve collective wellbeing. This approach seeks to go beyond remedial or compensatory interventions by embedding redistribution, protection, production and reproduction into the development strategy. Rather than treating social policy as an adjunct to economic policy, Mkandawire insists that the two must be mutually reinforcing. This vision includes critical policy areas such as education, healthcare, housing, labour markets, agricultural reform, and social security. It also incorporates equity-focused measures such as affirmative action, gender inclusion, and support for caregiving and elder care, areas traditionally excluded from economic planning but essential for holistic development (Mkandawire, 2011c).

These principles were reflected in ANC policy documents and resolutions during the period under review. Both the 2012 and 2017 policy and national conferences, as well as the government's 2014–2019 MTSF, contained commitments to structural transformation through investment in infrastructure, industrialisation, employment creation, and social redistribution (ANC, 2012; MTSF, 2014). These plans were designed not only to address immediate material deprivation but also to foster long-term social cohesion and inclusive economic participation.

In theory, the policy direction aligned with Mkandawire's call for coordinated, cross-sectoral approaches to development. Institutional strengthening, improved service delivery, and participatory governance were identified as key pillars for delivering transformative outcomes. The state was expected to play a proactive developmental role, facilitating access to economic opportunities, redistributing assets such as land, and ensuring social protection for the most vulnerable. These commitments suggest an awareness within the ANC of the broader systemic dimensions of inequality and the need for state-led interventions.

However, the extent to which these goals were realised in practice is more limited. While the ANC's policy rhetoric echoed the transformative aspirations articulated by Mkandawire, the

implementation landscape was constrained by governance challenges, factional contestation within the ANC, and broader political economy pressures. The result was a policy environment in which ambitious resolutions were often diluted during execution, producing uneven and sometimes contradictory outcomes. Policy intentions were frequently undermined by institutional weaknesses, regulatory incoherence, and the lack of clear operational frameworks. This disjuncture is a defining feature of the post-2012 policy era and signals a tension between vision and capability.

Ultimately, the ANC's attempt to position itself as a developmental actor capable of leading radical transformation remains hampered by internal contradictions and external constraints. While the party's policy documents contain many of the hallmarks of transformative social policy from redistributive land reform to infrastructure investment and gender equity, the persistence of inequality, poverty, and unemployment suggests that these interventions have not been sufficiently systemic or sustained. The question, therefore, is not only whether the policies are well designed but whether the state possesses the institutional coherence and political resolve to translate transformative ideals into lived realities.

4.3 Transition from Social Democracy to Neoliberalism; The Origins of Contestation in ANC Policy-Making

The preceding chapter highlighted that the ANC policy conferences have persistently served as arenas of dispute, characterised by ideological rifts between factions advocating for radical economic transformation and those favouring moderate approaches. The debates regarding policy and elective conferences in 2012 and 2017 are not unprecedented; they stem from the ANC's early participation in policy development during South Africa's transition to democracy. This period marked a significant shift in the ANC's policy orientation, moving away from its foundational social democratic ideals towards neoliberal economic strategies, exacerbating ongoing debates among different factions who view this era as a betrayal requiring correction. This shift has profoundly affected the ANC's governance strategies and continues to shape its contemporary policy-making processes. During its early years as the governing party, the ANC

embraced a social democratic framework to address the entrenched inequalities and racial exclusion instituted by apartheid policies (Van Niekerk & Padayachee, 2021). The RDP was essential to this objective, functioning as a policy framework for economic redistribution, improved access to vital services, and the promotion of social justice (Van Niekerk & Padayachee, 2021). Vishnu Padayachee and Robbie van Niekerk (2021) highlight the first explicit instance of this reversal strategy with the Macroeconomic Research Group (MERG), an ANC think tank led by Trevor Manuel in 1992, which promoted a state-driven, redistributive framework for economic transformation to the ANC during its transition into the new government.

Despite MERG's ideas being consistent with the ANC's longstanding commitment to fair development and reflecting its ideological roots in social democracy, they were ultimately rejected. Notably, ANC President Nelson Mandela, who first approved the procedure, later withdrew his support (Van Niekerk & Padayachee, 2021). MERG's ideas were ultimately sidelined in favour of the GEAR strategy, which was designated as the government's "non-negotiable" policy in collaboration with its supporters, eliminating any opposition. Leaders of the ANC, such as Trevor Manuel and Tito Mboweni, played a pivotal role in advocating for this transformation, asserting that fiscal discipline and foreign investment were crucial for economic stabilisation (Van Niekerk & Padayachee, 2021). This divergence from social democratic ideas caused ongoing disagreements within the ANC and its affiliated organisations, particularly the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

The ANC coalition partners and several trade unions persistently championed more radical economic reforms, endorsing policies that directly tackled the structural inequalities inherited from apartheid (Mapaila, 2017). The execution of GEAR, marked by inadequate consultation and democratic participation within the ANC and its coalitions, exacerbates divisions and estranges vital stakeholders in the broader democratic movement (Mapaila, 2017). Manuel and Mboweni's association with Deputy President and subsequently President Thabo Mbeki during the establishment of GEAR was followed by Jacob Zuma's ascension as ANC President, after a vigorous political fight that established the groundwork for subsequent policy divergences.

These influenced and exacerbated the economic policy deliberations culminating in the 2012 policy and elective conference. Zuma, viewed as an antithesis to Mbeki, was designated "a candidate of the left" by COSATU's Secretary General, Zwelinzima Vavi, reflecting the trade union's desire to overturn a policy-making strategy they considered neoliberal and insufficiently consultative (Pillay, 2008).

Although the party maintained its radical commitment to transformation and equity in policy formulation and conceptualisation, its policy execution in government progressively supported market-oriented solutions, from GEAR to the NDP over radical economic strategies (Van Niekerk, 2019; Mapaila 2017). This contradiction highlights the challenge of aligning the practical requirements of government with the ideals of a liberation movement, espoused by the Freedom Charter, the African Claims Document and subsequent policies adopted at ANC conferences (Van Niekerk & Padayachee, 2021). The top-down approach to policy-making during this period undermined the ANC's legitimacy as a representative of transformative social values within its alliance and constituency, as it seemed to prioritise global economic market liberalisation norms over domestic needs for equity and justice, resulting in deeply divisive and politically charged policy debates today that set a political arena for those who see themselves as advocates of radical measures pushing against the moderates (Van Niekerk & Padayachee, 2021).

While this is both a political and academic debate, it is not contested by government. As a matter of fact, the 25 Year Review of South Africa democratic dispensation makes this admission clear:

> In 1994, the government inherited an apartheid economy in crisis, with GDP growth averaging 1.2% in the preceding decade and outflows of capital. The country was also in the longest downward phase in the business cycle since 1945, which lasted from March 1989 to May 1993, with real-term negative growth between 1990 and 1992. At the end of 1993, the combined foreign debt totalled US$25 billion, of which US$15 billion was the public component, with the balance shared between the Reserve. Furthermore, globalization created pressures to reform fiscal policy institutions and budgetary systems, and also for policy convergence, including deficit

> reduction, tax reform to broaden the tax base, and the restructuring of the public services and enterprises. This changed the course of South Africa's history since the loan was agreed to under stringent conditions with 'the Transitional Executive *Committee [binding South Africa] to a neo-liberal, export-oriented economic policy and a redistribution through growth strategy.*' This was counter to the initially stated objectives of securing growth through redistribution (Government of South Africa, Towards a 25-year Review:1994-2019, 2019).

This passage reflects an institutional admission that the post-apartheid state was quickly embedded in a global economic architecture that imposed limits on domestic policy choices. The transition to a market-oriented policy model was not simply a political decision but was significantly shaped by external structural conditions. Yet, the enduring perception of this shift as a betrayal of the ANC's original mission continues to fuel internal contestation.

It is within this broader historical and ideological context that the emergence of RET and the subsequent contestation over RSET must be understood. These debates are not isolated episodes but part of a longer arc of struggle over the meaning of transformation in the ANC. The persistent tension between transformative aspirations and neoliberal governance frameworks continues to shape the policymaking landscape, producing the duality of radical discourse and moderate implementation that has characterised much of ANC rule.

4.4 Transformative Social Values from the ANC 2012 Policy and National Conference resolution and 2014-2019 MTSF

Transformative social principles have been a fundamental basis for assessing the ANC's policy program throughout its democratic governance. The principles articulated in the African Claims document, the Freedom Charter, and governmental initiatives such as the RDP reflected a dedication to addressing systemic inequalities, promoting inclusivity, and guaranteeing equitable access to resources, all of which are intrinsically linked to the objectives of social policy (Van Niekerk & Padayachee, 2021). As such, a relevant test for transformative principles would be through redistribution, reproduction, protection, and production functions of transformative social policy, drawing on the prior examination of the ANC's policy evolution

and emphasising their alignment with the principles of social policy articulated by Mkandawire.

4.4.1 Redistribution function of Transformative Social Policy

The redistributive function of transformative social policy lies at the heart of the ANC's post-apartheid agenda, aimed at correcting the deeply entrenched historical injustices of racialised economic exclusion. Since 1994, the ANC has employed redistributive policies to provide both immediate relief and long-term structural redress. These efforts reflect a broader attempt to align post-apartheid social policy with principles of social justice, drawing directly from the ideals articulated in the African Claims document, the Freedom Charter, and subsequent policy frameworks such as the RDP (Van Niekerk and Padayachee, 2021).

During the period under review (2012 to 2019), redistributive social policies were expanded to support vulnerable populations. This included cash-based social transfers such as the old age pension, disability grants, child support grants, and social relief for orphans and indigent households (Statistics South Africa, 2023). These measures formed a central pillar of the state's poverty alleviation strategy, with the child support grant emerging as one of the most far-reaching tools to reduce intergenerational poverty and improve access to basic services for marginalised families (Satumba, Bayat and Mohamed, 2017). Together with unemployment compensation, accident insurance, and other safety nets, these grants functioned not merely as welfare instruments but as vehicles for economic justice and human development (Statistics South Africa, 2023).

The ANC's 2012 Policy and National Conference reaffirmed its commitment to these redistributive measures, positioning them as essential to the transformative project. In this regard, Thandika Mkandawire (2011b; 2011c) argues that social transfers should not be seen in isolation but as part of a broader redistributive framework that includes land reform, agrarian policy, and housing. Redistributive justice, in Mkandawire's view, is only realised when these interventions are integrated into a coherent structural strategy aimed at economic empowerment and societal inclusion.

Reflecting these principles, the ANC's 2012 Policy Conference included provisions for land expropriation without compensation in instances where land was acquired unlawfully or is used for illegal purposes (ANC, 2012d). It called for the replacement of the market-based "willing buyer, willing seller" model with a constitutionally grounded "just and equitable" approach. These recommendations were echoed in the 2014 to 2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), which outlined measurable land redistribution targets:

> Government aims to achieve the following over the next five years; Increase the percentage of productive land owned by previously disadvantaged individuals from 11.5% in 2013 to 20%. Ensure that, by 2019, 7.2 million hectares of land in total will have been transferred to previously disadvantaged individuals and is being used productively (as compared to 4 million hectares by 2013) – 2014 -2014 MTSF (DPME, 2014).

This quote captures both the ambition and the pragmatism embedded in the ANC's redistributive project. The focus on "productive use" reflects an attempt to reconcile social justice with economic viability, a key tension that runs throughout ANC policy-making in this period. While the figures speak to progress, they also expose the persistent gap between redistributive intent and implementation outcomes.

The land audit, commissioned following the 2007 Polokwane Conference, illuminated the entrenched racial disparities that justified these policy shifts. The findings were stark: white South Africans owned 72% of agricultural land, while black Africans held a mere 4% (Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, 2017). These figures gave empirical weight to the arguments advanced by more radical factions within the ANC and its allies, especially those calling for expropriation without compensation. The 2012 ANC National Conference offered a qualified endorsement of this approach:

> We re-affirm the Polokwane resolution that a comprehensive audit of state-owned land be completed urgently. Willing Buyer willing seller. We affirm the following proposals; Replace willing buyer willing seller with the "Just and equitable" principle in the Constitution immediately where the state is acquiring land for land reform purposes. Expropriation without compensation on land acquired through unlawful means or used for illegal

> purposes having due regard to Section 25 of the Constitution. (ANC 2012 National Conference Resolution; ANC, 2012d).

This statement reveals an ideological compromise. Rather than embracing full-scale expropriation without compensation, the ANC limited this to specific cases involving illegality or non-productive use. The language of "just and equitable" reflects an effort to maintain constitutional legitimacy while responding to growing demands for accelerated redistribution. It also signalled the growing fault lines between the ANC's moderate and radical factions, a divide that would become even more pronounced by the 2017 Conference.

The failure of these reforms to materialise fully by 2017, coupled with rising public discontent and pressure from the EFF, led to a more assertive stance. The 2017 ANC Policy and National Conference formally adopted a resolution in support of expropriation without compensation, to be pursued through constitutional amendment (ANC, 2017). President Ramaphosa's 2018 State of the Nation Address sought to assure both domestic and international stakeholders that the reform would be implemented with care:

> This will be implemented in a manner that does not undermine economic activity or food security, and where we work with all stakeholders to resolve this historical injustice" (President Cyril Ramaphosa, 2018).

This underscores a central dilemma in the ANC's redistributive agenda: how to deliver radical transformation within a constrained global economic order. Ramaphosa's emphasis on safeguarding "food security" and "economic activity" reveals the balancing act between domestic political commitments and external investor confidence.

Public consultations followed, leading to the drafting and adoption of the Expropriation Bill. However, attempts to amend Section 25 of the Constitution failed to secure the required two-thirds majority in the National Assembly. The ANC had amended the original EFF motion to include broader issues obstructing land reform beyond property rights (Slade, 2019). In the end, parliament passed the Expropriation Bill, allowing for expropriation with nil compensation only under clearly defined conditions, such as abandoned land or property acquired unlawfully (Parliament of South Africa, 2020; 2022). This final form reflected a compromise, falling short of the vision advanced in the 2012 and 2017 conference debates.

The redistributive function of policy was also visible in mining. Proposals for nationalisation of the mining sector, though initially prominent, were ultimately rejected. Both the 2012 and 2017 conferences favoured a mix of higher taxation, enhanced beneficiation, and increased state participation in new ventures over direct nationalisation (ANC, 2017). The redistribution-related resolutions from the ANC's 2012 and 2017 conferences, as well as the implementation strategies outlined in the 2014–2019 MTSF, correspond with Mkandawire's framework for transformative social policy. Initiatives targeting land ownership, agrarian justice, human settlements, and income redistribution are consistent with the redistributive function as conceptualised by Mkandawire (2011b; 2011c). These interventions also intersect with productive goals, particularly by enabling access to economic assets such as land and housing and stimulating demand through social grants.

Mkandawire argues that such interventions must contribute to long-term structural change, promote social cohesion, and enhance the state's developmental capacity (Mkandawire, 2011b; 2011c). While progress has been made in expanding social security and supporting human settlements, land reform remains incomplete. Most recently, the Expropriation Bill was signed into law in 2025 under a coalition government, reigniting political contestation. Interest groups such as AfriForum, AgriSA, and political parties including the DA have opposed the law, especially after the United States warned of cutting aid should land expropriation without compensation proceed (MSN News, 2025). This development reflects the ANC's ongoing challenge of balancing domestic redistributive imperatives with international financial and diplomatic pressures in an increasingly contested policy environment.

4.4.2 Productive, Reproduction and Protection functions;

The ANC's policy resolutions from 2012 and 2017 reflect a sustained commitment to economic transformation through industrial development, infrastructure investment, and inclusive economic participation. These resolutions align closely with Thandika Mkandawire's conceptualisation of transformative social policy, which argues that social and economic interventions must address not only immediate welfare needs but also restructure a country's

productive base to achieve long-term development, equity, and sustainability (Mkandawire, 2011c; 2012).

By prioritising industrialisation and infrastructure-led development, the ANC sought to reposition the South African economy away from its exclusionary and extractive past toward a more equitable and productive future. As stated in the 2012 policy resolutions and further embedded in the 2014 to 2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), this vision involved leveraging state capacity and public investment to stimulate growth and reduce poverty, inequality and unemployment, the so-called triple challenges (ANC, 2012; MTSF, 2014). These objectives are indicative of what Mkandawire refers to as the productive dimension of social policy, which is concerned with enhancing national development by building economic capacity, generating employment, and enabling wider participation in the economy (Mkandawire, 2011c). The MTSF explicitly stated:

> The infrastructure investment programme will also provide employment opportunities for women and youth, promote broad-based black economic empowerment and support local procurement. State-owned companies will continue to play a critical role in driving development through building and maintaining economic infrastructure (2014 -2019 MTSF).

This statement highlights the ANC's intention to integrate social and economic objectives by using state owned enterprises not only as vehicles for industrial development but also as instruments of social inclusion. The focus on women and youth in this infrastructure agenda echoes Mkandawire's argument that transformative social policy must harmonise reproductive responsibilities with wider societal participation, especially for marginalised groups such as women, who bear the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work (Mkandawire, 2011b).

The ANC's approach to gender equity within the economic development framework included support for early childhood development (ECD), comprehensive maternity leave, and policies supporting maternal and child health (MTSF, 2014). These measures fall under what Mkandawire classifies as the reproductive and protective functions of social policy. The reproductive function ensures that society supports the biological and social reproduction of its population, particularly in ways that do not marginalise women. The protective function, on

the other hand, refers to policies that shield individuals and communities from market risks and social dislocation.

In recognising these imperatives, the ANC's policy documents highlighted the dual responsibility of women in both domestic and economic spheres, stating that:

> The state must continue to build capacity to drive the socio-economic agenda in the country, including absorbing young people and women into economic activity, employing professionals, investing in skills required by the economy, and investing in research and development to respond to the demands of the knowledge economy (ANC 2012 National Conference Resolutions).

Such initiatives not only address gendered burdens but also speak to the importance of enabling inclusive development pathways. The 2012 policy resolutions further echoed this approach by asserting:

> Fundamental change in the structure, systems, institutions and patterns of ownership, management and control of the economy in favour of all South Africans, especially the poor, the majority of whom are African and female (President Jacob Zuma SONA Reply 2017).

Zuma's emphasis on structural change in favour of the majority population aligns discursively with transformative policy ideals, particularly in targeting the historically marginalised. However, the ambiguity surrounding RET, combined with governance failures and misalignment in implementation, meant that the policy often remained aspirational rather than materially transformative. The policy commitment to industrialisation and infrastructure investment was further reinforced through initiatives such as support for small and medium enterprises, the promotion of cooperatives, and localisation of production. The ANC's resolutions aimed to reduce compliance burdens on small enterprises, improve procurement efficiency, and ensure timely payment by government, recognising these as vital enablers of inclusive growth and local empowerment.

Mkandawire's argument that transformative policies must enable local actors to participate actively in national development is reflected in this commitment to grassroots economic activity. Infrastructure initiatives, including investments in transport, ports, and energy, were intended not only to stimulate economic growth but also to improve quality of life, linking productive infrastructure with social development outcomes. This is what Mkandawire refers to as the fusion of social and productive policy logics to yield integrated development benefits (Mkandawire, 2011c).

Moreover, the ANC's use of state owned enterprises as agents of transformation speaks directly to the notion of a developmental state. The policy vision emphasised public ownership in strategic sectors, proactive industrial policy, and the use of state procurement to drive transformation. Such instruments are not only economic tools but also social ones, shaping the distribution of opportunities and resources across society. However, as the following chapter will explore, the effectiveness of these initiatives was undermined by governance constraints, capacity deficits, and political contestation. While the policy architecture was broadly aligned with Mkandawire's principles of transformation encompassing redistribution, production, reproduction, and protection, the translation from resolution to impact was uneven.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter critically examined the ANC's policy making between 2012 and 2019 through the lens of transformative social policy, with a particular focus on how party resolutions and state planning documents sought to confront South Africa's structural inequalities. The chapter drew from Thandika Mkandawire's conceptual framework, using the functions of redistribution, production, reproduction, and protection as a diagnostic to evaluate the ANC's approach during a period marked by political contestation and shifting ideological emphasis.

The ANC's policy resolutions and the government's 2014 to 2019 MTSF articulated a comprehensive development vision aimed at tackling the persistent challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment. These goals aligned with long-standing ideological commitments drawn from foundational documents such as the Freedom Charter and the African Claims, while also attempting to respond to contemporary pressures from within the

alliance, opposition parties, and broader civil society. The integration of transformative social values into the party's strategic orientation was evident in the emphasis on social grants, land reform, industrialisation, black economic empowerment, and gender-responsive policies. The redistributive and protective dimensions of social policy were clearly foregrounded, particularly through social security expansion and commitments to address land ownership disparities.

However, the chapter also highlighted that despite policy coherence at the rhetorical and strategic levels, implementation was often constrained by governance limitations, internal factionalism, and competing economic priorities. The unresolved tension between the ANC's ideological heritage rooted in social democracy and its post-1994 adoption of market-oriented policies continued to manifest in the ambivalence of its economic planning. The ANC's pursuit of transformative policy objectives was repeatedly undercut by institutional weaknesses, policy incoherence between party and state, and the persistent challenge of reconciling developmental ambition with pragmatic governance.

The dual framing of Radical Economic Transformation and Radical Socio Economic Transformation throughout this period further complicated policy interpretation and execution. While both rhetorically positioned themselves within a transformative agenda, their conceptual vagueness and politicised deployment diluted their effectiveness as coherent development strategies. As such, many of the policy gains articulated in the ANC's resolutions remained unrealised or only partially implemented, raising critical questions about the party's capacity to effect structural transformation through the state.

Ultimately, this chapter has demonstrated that the ANC's engagement with transformative social policy was substantive in ambition but uneven in execution. The aspirations articulated in its policy resolutions were closely aligned with the principles defined by Mkandawire. However, their translation into concrete developmental outcomes depended on governance capability, institutional alignment, and a favourable political economy, factors that were frequently fragmented during this period. These dynamics underscore the analytical significance of the intersection between policy, governance, and political economy, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 5

The Disconnect Between Policy Aspirations and Developmental Outcomes

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the gap between the African National Congress' transformative policy aspirations and the actual developmental outcomes achieved during the period from 2012 to 2019. Building on the previous chapter's analysis of policymaking frameworks and resolutions aligned with transformative social policy, this chapter examines the extent to which those ambitions materialised in practice. The radical economic transformation agenda, introduced as a corrective measure to structural inequalities, was hindered by persistent governance challenges, institutional weaknesses, and the political economy of policymaking within a contested and factionalised environment.

Through triangulating the concepts of transformative social policy, governance, and political economy, the chapter interrogates the disjuncture between party-based developmental aspirations and the limitations observed in state implementation. The discussion is guided by Thandika Mkandawire's conceptualisation of transformative social policy, particularly his emphasis on structural change, inclusive institutions, human capital development, and the integration of economic and social planning. While ANC documents such as the National Development Plan and the Medium Term Strategic Framework articulated ambitious goals, their implementation often faltered in the face of unstable labour relations, policy incoherence, underinvestment in research and education, and pervasive corruption.

The chapter begins by examining whether the conditions identified by Mkandawire for transformative social policy were present during this period, particularly in relation to labour stability, education investment, institutional strength, and intersectoral coordination. It then evaluates the limitations of the ANC's neoliberal macroeconomic policy trajectory, arguing that it inhibited the party's ability to fulfil its redistributive and developmental mandate. In doing so, it draws on critiques of the "catching up" paradigm which, while conceptually useful, often overlooks colonial legacies and the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge systems.

Finally, the chapter investigates the factionalised political dynamics that shaped the use of radical economic transformation as a tool of intra-party contestation. RET, rather than emerging as a coherent developmental framework, became increasingly associated with political patronage and state capture, weakening its legitimacy and further undermining public confidence in the ANC's transformative capacity. Through these analyses, the chapter exposes how the disconnect between policy vision and state capability has constrained the realisation of structural change in post-apartheid South Africa.

5.2. Political Stability through stable labour

Thandika Mkandawire argues that political legitimacy and labour stability are foundational for enabling transformative social policy in developing contexts (Mkandawire, 2007; 2012). In post-apartheid South Africa, the ANC government entered office burdened with the task of redressing a legacy of racial exclusion and socio-economic marginalisation. From the outset, its developmental project sought to integrate the goals of the African Claims and the Freedom Charter into a broader transformation framework articulated through the NDR. Central to this effort was the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which, at least in its formulation, embraced Mkandawire's core principle that labour must be incorporated into development planning through inclusive political structures and policy co-determination.

The RDP was developed with input from trade unions, particularly COSATU, as well as social movements and civic actors. It aimed to institutionalise redistribution through state-led delivery of jobs, housing, health care, and essential services (Van Niekerk & Padayachee, 2021; Visser, 2004). However, the programme was short-lived. By 1996, it was replaced by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy, a macroeconomic policy that prioritised fiscal austerity, liberalised trade, and investor confidence over redistributive goals. This shift represented more than a change in policy. It signalled a deeper ideological turn, from participatory developmentalism to a technocratic and market-oriented approach that side-lined labour and civil society (Van Niekerk, 2019; Van Niekerk & Padayachee, 2021).

Government's own 25-Year Review acknowledges 1996 as a pivotal turning point in economic policy. The review notes that the fiscal pressures of the early 1990s, particularly the public debt

burden and the structural adjustment conditions tied to international financial institutions, forced a recalibration of ANC policy in line with global neoliberal norms (Government of South Africa, 2019). Mkandawire critiques precisely this type of shift where social policy becomes subordinated to market logic, arguing that it weakens the very institutions and alliances needed to drive equitable transformation.

This strategic repositioning fractured the ANC's historic alliance. COSATU and the SACP founding members of the tripartite alliance found themselves increasingly excluded from key policy decisions. Labour felt betrayed as the ANC pursued economic reforms that seemed indifferent, if not hostile, to the demands of the working class. The culmination of this estrangement was brutally underscored in 2012, when 34 striking mineworkers were killed by police at Marikana. The incident revealed the deep fault lines in the ANC's post-apartheid political settlement. NUM, a traditional ally of the ANC, was publicly condemned for its close alignment with the governing party and its failure to represent mineworkers' grievances (Alender, 2013). This loss of trust led to the rapid rise of AMCU, which filled the void left by NUM's decline and embodied a more confrontational stance against both industry and the state.

Marikana thus became a symbol of a wider breakdown in labour stability. Rather than serving as a partner in development, organised labour became an adversary, mirroring Mkandawire's warning that policy without legitimacy and grounded consensus will not yield transformative outcomes. That the state responded with violence to a labour dispute spoke to the extent of political estrangement between government and the very constituencies it claimed to represent.

The erosion of labour unity continued. In 2014, internal tensions within COSATU reached a breaking point when NUMSA, its largest affiliate, was expelled. NUMSA had repeatedly criticised the ANC for embracing neoliberalism and abandoning the principles of the NDR (Tinsley, 2019). The union subsequently formed the United Front and later the Socialist Revolutionary Workers' Party, declaring a direct challenge to ANC hegemony over working-class politics (Tinsley, 2019). The emergence of these formations signalled a realignment in post-apartheid class politics and a reconfiguration of labour as a space no longer wholly captured by the ANC-led alliance.

By the mid-2010s, COSATU's credibility had eroded, and its calls for restructuring the alliance revealed deep disillusionment with the ANC's direction. The SACP, through figures such as Solly Mapaila, also voiced frustration with the ANC's failure to prioritise worker-centred transformation, criticising its alignment with business elites and its adoption of market-first policies (Mapaila, 2017). These dynamics illustrate Mkandawire's view that labour stability and ideological clarity are prerequisites for implementing effective transformative social policies.

The ANC's inability to sustain labour cohesion translated directly into policy instability. Labour reforms remained limited, worker representation became fragmented, and political legitimacy weakened. While government rhetoric continued to invoke radical transformation and economic justice, especially under the banner of RET, the institutional basis for delivering these promises had eroded. Policy, in turn, became reactive and contested, as the ANC tried to reclaim credibility while managing factional tension within the state and party structures.

In sum, the ANC's deviation from inclusive and negotiated policy development, beginning with the replacement of the RDP by GEAR, severed the foundational consensus upon which transformative social policy could be built. Labour unrest, the splintering of COSATU, and the alienation of key allies such as NUMSA and the SACP reveal how political and ideological fragmentation undermined the possibility of realising the developmental aspirations outlined in ANC policy documents. Mkandawire's framework underscores that transformation without political legitimacy and labour incorporation not only limits redistributive impact, it actively destabilises the governance structures required for long-term development.

5.3. Investment in research and innovation

Mkandawire (2007; 2012) contends that social policy is essential for human capital development, emphasising that investments in cultivating a skilled workforce for both the market and public service are imperative for future innovation and progress (Mkandawire, 2007; 2012). Transformative social policy establishes direct connections among skills training, capacity development, general education, and economic success (Mkandawire, 2007; 2012;) Phiri et al. assert that measures like academic institution enrolment rates, accessibility and

financing for research and innovation are essential for advancing the developmental agenda of impoverished nations (Phiri et al., 2016). Mkandawire underscores this essential importance of education and human capital development for transformative social policy implementation. The ANC's policies acknowledged the significance of this problem and aimed to rectify past inequalities in education and skills development. The Skills Development Act and Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) seek to improve opportunities for disadvantaged groups (South African Government, 2019). Legislation on employment equality, affirmative action, and social responsibility promotes private sector engagement in the employment, training, and education of historically excluded populations (South African Government, 2019). South Africa has the highest investment in basic education, achieving universal enrolment rates in its public schools ahead of the United Nations objective (StatsSA, 2023a) (South African Government, 2019). However, Technical Research Report from the Department of Higher Education highlights that in 2019, South Africa had a skills mismatch above 50% and recorded the lowest labour productivity among 30 nations (DHET, 2023). The Global Competitiveness Index for 2017–2018 positioned South Africa 61st among 137 countries on its ability to cultivate, attract, and retain talent (DHET, 2023).

Consequently, measures to improve education opportunities have been regarded as inadequate in tackling the nation's skills deficit. This compounded by challenges in financial needs for higher education, scientific research, and innovation investment. The Fees Must Fall movement highlighted the systemic issues in higher education financing and accessibility (Ndlovu, 2017). In response, President Zuma declared Fee Free Higher Education without previous engagement with the ANC or its educational structures (South African Government News Agency, 2017 ; Mpofu-Walch, 2025). In a podcast interview, former Higher Education and Training Minister, and now responsible for Science, Technology and Innovation, Dr. Blade Nzimande emphasised the absence of consultation with the ANC and the lack of a government policy as reasons for the ongoing challenges in expanding fee-free higher education (Mpofu-Walch, 2025). The ANC's reaction at the time, which included pledges for free higher education, was marked by ad hoc measures and reactive strategies in government, devoid of a coherent plan for funding for higher education. On paper, President Zuma fulfilled a resolution from the ANC policy

conference and articulated the persistent goals of the Freedom Charter for free education, however, it lacked alignment with current government policy and required financial reprioritisation and future planning, prompting worries regarding the policy's sustainability (Mpofu-Walch, 2025).

Mkandawire notes that in developing nations, measures such as subsidised training programs and higher education funding are intended to equip the labour market with skills; nevertheless, these efforts often fall short (Mkandawire, 2012; Phiri et al., 2016). The disparity between policy aspiration by ANC and government leaders and actual results illustrates significant governance issues in reconciling educational investments with the requirements of economic transformation while simultaneously highlighting the challenges of the RET political project where government policies were pronounced and implemented without any founding source policy but were said to be part of the transformation agenda. Buechtemann and Verdier (as referenced in Mkandawire, 2012) assert that these initiatives lack the requisite institutional coordination and specialisation to develop a workforce capable of fostering transformative economic growth. Mkandawire (2011c) underscores the imperative of knowledge advancement in academic institutions, noting that Africa’s innovation shortfall is partially due to barriers in knowledge acquisition and biases against higher education and academic elitism (Mkandawire, 2011c). Further he (2011c) asserts that inadequate emphasis on education within African development frameworks substantially exacerbates the innovation gap (Mkandawire, 2011c).

Gaps remain in the South African education investment, as resources designated for research and innovation are subject to budget cuts resulting from the department of education's budget reprioritisation. The insufficient investment in South African colleges and research institutions has created significant obstacles for the government's capacity to effectively forward its developmental goal. Insufficient funding for higher education and research has perpetuated a skills gap, restricting the government's access to a qualified human capital base essential for effective policy execution and innovation (National Advisory Council on Innovation, 2020). The Auditor General of South Africa (AGSA) has continually reported that high vacancy rates and inadequate internal capability within government departments have resulted in a dependence on consultants, often characterised by a lack of strategic planning and cost-

effectiveness (TimesLive, 2023). The dependence on external support rather than internal within state funded higher education reveals systemic inefficiencies, as consultants frequently entail more expenses than academic institutions (Mkandawire, 2011c).

Mkandawire challenges this trend, noting that governments often engage academics for research and policy assistance for little or no cost, driven by their commitment to fostering knowledge and societal progress (Mkandawire, 2011c). South Africa's research and development expenditure continuously falls below 1% of GDP, significantly lower than international benchmarks (National Advisory Council on Innovation, 2020). The ongoing underfunding limits the nation's ability to foster innovation and produce PhD graduates, which are critical indications of research capacity and advanced human capital (National Advisory Council on Innovation, 2020). The quantity of doctoral graduates per million inhabitants is markedly inferior to global benchmarks, underscoring the urgent need for investment in higher education and research to cultivate a workforce capable of addressing intricate developmental issues.

Barriers to knowledge acquisition continue to exist, as the education funding model and institutional constraints frequently restrict access to high-quality tertiary education. Reductions in research funding and insufficient structured collaboration between government and academic institutions intensify the issue. Many government departments choose to engage private consultants rather than utilising the extensive expertise found in universities, thereby diminishing the contribution of academia to policy innovation and evidence-based decision-making (Mkandawire, 2011). Mkandawire contends that removing these obstacles and enhancing investment in education and innovation is essential for African nations, including South Africa, to attain substantial development (Mkandawire, 2011c; Mulaudzi & Liesbenberg, 2007). Addressing these challenges necessitates increased funding and strategic collaborations between government entities and academic institutions to utilise existing expertise and develop a competent and innovative public sector workforce.

In the context of this study, the disjuncture between ANC policy aspirations and the realities of state investment in research and innovation underscores a broader pattern of institutional incoherence that has characterised the post-2012 governance period. Despite formal policy

commitments to transformation, education and innovation systems have remained underfunded, fragmented, and misaligned with South Africa's developmental priorities. As Mkandawire cautions, transformative social policy requires more than rhetorical ambition; it depends on a state's capacity to coordinate education, research, and industrial development toward long-term structural change.

Furthermore, the persistent skills mismatch, reliance on external consultants, and underutilisation of academic expertise demonstrate systemic governance weaknesses that have constrained South Africa's ability to realise its transformation agenda. This disconnect between policy and implementation illustrates a core argument of the study that without institutional capability, planning coherence, and meaningful alignment between social and economic objectives, transformative policies remain aspirational rather than real. The ANC's failure to fully integrate human capital development into a broader developmental strategy during this period ultimately weakens the prospects for inclusive growth, social justice, and sustained structural transformation.

5.4 Strong and Inclusive Institutions

Mkandawire argues that the success of radical social policy hinges on the presence of strong, inclusive institutions that can drive reform, ensure accountability, and address entrenched structural inequalities (Mkandawire, 2011c; Mulaudzi and Liesbenberg, 2007). In South Africa, however, the institutional landscape between 2012 and 2019 was marked by significant governance failures, corruption, and factionalism, all of which severely compromised the transformative ambitions of the ANC (Gumede, 2018). A political economy approach underscores that policy implementation is not only about sound ideas but also about the capacity of institutions, the quality of political leadership, and the mechanisms of accountability (Pierre and Peters, 2020). Effective governance depends on coherent policy coordination, cross-sectoral collaboration, and transparent decision-making. In practice, these requirements were consistently undermined during this period, especially in the execution of economic and developmental strategies.

State-owned enterprises (SOEs) such as Eskom, Transnet, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), and South African Airways (SAA), intended as developmental drivers under the 2014 to 2019 MTSF, became epicentres of patronage and maladministration. The State Capture Commission illustrated how individuals like Brian Molefe and Matshela Koko at Eskom facilitated contracts that disproportionately benefited the Gupta family through questionable prepayment deals, notably in the Tegeta-Optimum coal transactions. These deals drained Eskom's financial capacity and contributed to infrastructure decay and unreliable energy supply, thereby constraining economic growth (State Capture Commission, 2022).

At the SABC, under Hlaudi Motsoeneng's leadership and Ellen Tshabalala's board tenure, local content quotas were implemented under the guise of Radical Economic Transformation (RET), but their fiscal mismanagement resulted in considerable financial losses. Similarly, Dudu Myeni's tenure at SAA was associated with manipulated procurement procedures that diverted state resources toward politically connected individuals. Her leadership coincided with repeated bailouts and deepening debt, weakening the airline's operational viability (State Capture Commission, 2022).

These institutional failings were often cloaked in the rhetoric of RET, masking personal and factional interests as developmental objectives. This pattern of using transformation language to legitimise state capture extended into institutions responsible for oversight and justice. The National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), under Shaun Abrahams, was widely criticised for delaying or obstructing corruption cases involving allies of former president Jacob Zuma, thereby eroding public trust in the rule of law and enabling impunity (Bruce, Lewis and Newham, 2021).

The manipulation of the Treasury further exemplified how political interference destabilised institutions meant to safeguard the public interest. The 2015 dismissal of Finance Minister Nhlanhla Nene and his replacement by Des van Rooyen, a relatively unknown MP, caused immediate market instability and raised alarms over executive overreach. Analysts interpreted the move as an attempt to bring the National Treasury under factional control to facilitate access to public funds in line with RET narratives (State Capture Commission, 2022).

Moreover, infrastructure projects under the MTSF were systematically undermined by inflated procurement contracts at Transnet and other public entities. The overpricing of locomotives, allegedly to benefit companies linked to the Gupta family, diverted funds away from critical infrastructure needs and delayed project delivery. These failures did not only reflect administrative incapacity but pointed to deeper structural issues in the governance regime, issues that have had long-term effects on developmental outcomes and public faith in the state.

Consequently, governance breakdowns seriously undermined the ANC's ability to fulfil the transformative commitments it set out in the 2012 policy resolutions and the subsequent 2014 to 2019 MTSF. Initiatives aimed at land reform, industrialisation, and inclusive growth were hindered by institutional misalignment, corruption, and weak state capability. The South African case thus affirms Mkandawire's assertion that ambitious developmental goals cannot succeed without strong and capable institutions. He cautions that in the absence of institutional coordination and a culture of accountability, even the most progressive social policies risk being reduced to symbolic gestures (Mkandawire, 2011c).

The findings of the State Capture Commission clearly show that RET, in practice, often served as a smokescreen for elite accumulation. Rather than advancing economic justice or inclusive development, it was frequently used to justify rent-seeking behaviour and factional dominance. This has deepened institutional fragility, diminished public trust, and exposed the state's vulnerability to co-option by private interests. As such, the South African experience between 2012 and 2019 exemplifies the central thesis of this study: that without institutional coherence, good governance, and accountability, even policies grounded in transformative ideals cannot achieve meaningful structural change. RET's failure to institutionalise its objectives within a capable state apparatus has rendered its radical claims hollow and exposed the severe limitations of transformative policymaking in a compromised governance environment.

Drawing from Mkandawire's conceptualisation of transformative social policy, which insists on the foundational role of strong and inclusive institutions, the South African experience from 2012 to 2019 illustrates how institutional erosion, factionalism, and the politicisation of public entities undermined both the legitimacy and implementation of radical reform agendas. RET, rather than institutionalising inclusive economic transformation, became entangled in

patronage politics and weakened accountability structures. This disjuncture between aspirational policy rhetoric and operational reality demonstrates a fundamental governance constraint that has obstructed meaningful structural change. By situating this within Mkandawire's framework, the study shows that the failure to align state institutions with developmental goals is not merely a technical or administrative challenge, it is a deeply political problem that sits at the heart of post-apartheid South Africa's stalled transformation project.

5.5 Integration of Social and Economic Policies

Thandika Mkandawire (2011c) stresses that the integration of social and economic policies is a defining feature of any transformative developmental agenda, particularly in contexts marked by deep structural inequality. Yet, in post-apartheid South Africa, these policy spheres have largely operated in parallel rather than in alignment, with social policy framed primarily as a tool of temporary relief rather than a catalyst for structural change. Although social security interventions have significantly reduced poverty and improved educational retention among poor households (South African Government, 2019), their impact remains disconnected from broader economic transformation. The persistence of inequality despite these measures illustrates this disconnect.

The introduction of the National Development Plan (NDP) in 2012 under Trevor Manuel, who had earlier been instrumental in advancing the GEAR framework and sidelining the redistributive proposals of MERG reaffirmed a growth-through-redistribution strategy. While the NDP set ambitious long-term goals aligned with poverty alleviation and job creation, it received considerable criticism from within the ANC-led alliance. COSATU, the SACP, and the ANC's radical faction challenged the plan's fidelity to the Freedom Charter and the NDR, arguing that it preserved the inherited patterns of ownership and control (Mapaila, 2017; Jonas, 2016). This marked a strategic pivot from radical redistributive ambitions to market-based reformism, a move that drew heavily on the language of fiscal discipline and investor confidence.

As Mkandawire (2004; 2007; 2011c) notes, this shift reflects the broader entrenchment of neoliberal ideology across the Global South, where social policy was increasingly subordinated to the imperatives of structural adjustment, liberalisation, and macroeconomic stabilisation. In this framing, welfare expenditures are treated as economic inefficiencies, and the role of the state is reduced to enabling market mechanisms. South Africa's post-1994 trajectory was deeply shaped by these logics, as evidenced in the global and domestic pressures for policy convergence described in the 25-Year Review of South African democracy (South African Government, 2019). Structural reforms pursued under IMF and World Bank influence institutionalised this orientation, favouring export-led growth, privatisation of state enterprises, and the commodification of public goods, including healthcare and education.

The interplay of RET, RSET, and the NDP exposes the conflicts inherent in the ANC's developmental narrative. The NDP, implemented in 2012, outlined a long-term strategy prioritising macroeconomic stability, market confidence, and incremental reforms aimed at alleviating poverty and inequality. RET, in contrast, surfaced as a rhetorical alternative, portrayed as a dramatic departure that pledged expedited redistribution, state-driven industry, and profound alterations in ownership structures. Nonetheless, RET was never officially institutionalised, and its alignment with the NDP remained predominantly cosmetic, with scant indication of incorporation into the plan's implementation strategies.

Under Ramaphosa, RSET aimed to harmonise the inclusive and corrective rhetoric of RET with the pragmatic, investor-oriented approach of the NDP, indicating a transition towards reinstating state legitimacy rather than promoting structural reform. In this regard, both RET and RSET functioned in opposition to, rather than as extensions of, the NDP: they revealed the ideological rifts within the ANC between neoliberal developmental pragmatism and Marxist-influenced demands for redistributive justice. This inconsistency highlights the party's struggle to maintain a consistent transformation agenda, as its rhetorical pledges for radical change were consistently overshadowed by the orthodox frameworks supporting the NDP.

Consequently, the integration of social and economic policies was neither strategic nor holistic. Instead, welfare initiatives such as housing, education, and grants often acted as compensatory mechanisms, disconnected from broader strategies of industrialisation and labour market

reform. As Mkandawire (2012) argues, such fragmented social interventions fall short of transforming the structures that reproduce inequality. In this respect, the NDP, like GEAR before it, perpetuated the marginalisation of radical developmental tools in favour of a liberal technocratic model that excluded the alliance's traditional working-class base. The outcome was a growing alienation between the ANC and its historical constituency, reflected in widening social discontent and persistent structural inequality. While short-term social relief was achieved, the opportunity to use integrated social and economic policy to engineer inclusive structural change was lost.

Although key policy documents, including the NDP and the MTSF, acknowledged the urgency of tackling poverty and inequality, their underlying macroeconomic orientation remained tethered to neoliberal paradigms. Through Mkandawire's lens, this failure represents a critical rupture between the ideological commitments expressed in ANC resolutions and the actual policy instruments deployed by government. Rather than forging a developmental state rooted in redistributive justice and inclusive industrialisation, the ANC presided over a policy framework that decoupled social policy from structural reform. This disconnect illustrates how the dominance of market-centred development models, even under the guise of radical transformation, constrained the state's ability to restructure the economy in line with the principles of transformative social policy. It is within this rupture; between aspiration and execution, between rhetoric and institutional capacity, that the political economy of policy failure in democratic South Africa is most clearly revealed.

5.6 Catching-up Development

The notion of 'catching up,' as defined by Thandika Mkandawire, offers a critical framework for evaluating the ANC's policy-making efforts within South Africa's post-apartheid democratic context. Mkandawire argues that genuine developmental progress requires structural transformation, the integration of social and economic policy, and inclusive growth that addresses long-standing historical inequalities (Mkandawire, 2011c; 2012). These conditions are essential not only for fostering equitable development but also for ensuring that

political rhetoric is matched by effective, systemic change. This framework is particularly valuable when analysing the ANC's policy trajectory from 2012 to 2019, a period marked by intense ideological contestation over the vision and means of achieving socio-economic transformation.

During this time, the RET discourse emerged as a response to South Africa's enduring crises of unemployment, poverty, and inequality. Advocates of RET positioned it as a vehicle for addressing the injustices of the past, including land dispossession and economic exclusion. However, despite its populist appeal and grounding in historical grievances, RET remained conceptually vague. It often repackaged existing programmes under a new political banner rather than establishing a coherent and structured agenda, as defined in official policy documents like the MTSF. One of the most contentious elements of RET was land reform. Although the ANC's 2012 Policy Conference endorsed significant structural reforms, including proposals for expropriation without compensation, the eventual legislative output such as the Expropriation Act signed in 2025, narrowed these ambitions significantly. The Act permitted expropriation only under limited conditions, such as unlawful acquisition or demonstrable public interest.

This legislative compromise highlights the ANC's ongoing struggle to reconcile its redistributive aspirations with the practical imperatives of governance. President Cyril Ramaphosa's 2018 State of the Nation Address epitomised this balancing act. While reaffirming the commitment to land reform, Ramaphosa stressed that such measures would be implemented in a manner that preserved investor confidence and economic stability. This pragmatic approach reveals the extent to which the ANC has had to navigate a constrained policy environment shaped by global financial institutions and market expectations, a tension that has been present since the party assumed power in 1994. The neoliberal influence of institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund channelled South Africa's economic policy into frameworks that prioritised macroeconomic stability over redistributive justice, thereby limiting the space for transformative reform.

While Mkandawire's framework is instructive for analysing South Africa's developmental challenges, it is not without limitations. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni have critiqued the 'catching

up' paradigm for reinforcing Eurocentric development models that marginalise African socio-cultural contexts and indigenous knowledge systems (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). From this decolonial perspective, the very idea of "catching up" presupposes a global hierarchy in which African states are seen as lagging behind rather than as agents of autonomous, context-specific development. This framing entrenches dependency on Western norms and institutions, overlooking the structural legacies of colonialism and the epistemic violence that continues to shape policy discourse on the continent.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni's critique is particularly salient when assessing the ANC's failure to extricate its developmental agenda from the embedded logics of neoliberal governance. Although RET was intended to disrupt the status quo and promote radical change, it largely operated within a framework still tethered to global markets and donor expectations. As a result, RET initiatives often lacked both fiscal independence and ideological clarity. This reliance on external economic structures reinforces the limitations of the 'catching up' paradigm, which assumes that development can be achieved by following pre-established, Western-led trajectories, rather than building from endogenous strengths.

Moreover, Mkandawire himself recognises the constraints posed by neoliberal imperialism. Structural adjustment programmes imposed by the IMF and World Bank have eroded the capacity of African states to design and implement policies that serve their domestic developmental needs (Mkandawire, 2011c). These programmes prioritised fiscal austerity, privatisation, and liberalisation, which in turn undermined public institutions, widened social inequality, and restricted investment in local knowledge systems. In South Africa, these dynamics have prevented the full implementation of transformative social policy and have reinforced structural barriers to equitable growth.

As a result, many policy reforms in the post-1994 era, including those advanced under the guise of RET, remained constrained by a governance architecture that privileges market efficiency over social justice. The consequence is a policy environment that pays rhetorical homage to transformation but lacks the institutional capacity, coherence, and ideological autonomy to

realise it. The entrenchment of neoliberal ideas continues to weaken the state's ability to implement pro-poor developmental strategies, while simultaneously eroding public trust in the potential for meaningful reform.

This illustrates how the ANC's efforts to 'catch up' with global development standards have been limited by both internal inconsistencies and external constraints. While Mkandawire's framework helps diagnose the structural requirements for transformative policy, the South African experience reveals how deeply neoliberalism has embedded itself in the state's economic architecture, often neutralising radical ambitions before they can be translated into action. The ANC's policymaking between 2012 and 2019, particularly under the RET banner, reflects this contradiction. Despite the political urgency of redress, especially around land reform, the state's reliance on global capital, legal caution, and institutional fragility diluted the transformative potential of RET.

5.7 Backstage Dynamics: Factional Politics and Economic Reform

The articulation of Radical Economic Transformation as a vehicle for socio-economic redress must be critically examined in light of the political dynamics and state capture that engulfed South Africa between 2012 and 2019. While RET was presented as a progressive framework aimed at correcting historical injustices, it also became entangled in internal ANC factional battles and was ultimately discredited by its association with elite accumulation and governance failure. The competing interpretations of RET between factions led by Jacob Zuma and those aligned with Cyril Ramaphosa reveal the extent to which policy discourse can be co-opted for political consolidation rather than genuine transformation.

Zuma and his allies framed RET as a legitimate continuation of the Freedom Charter's promises, using it as a political rallying cry for radical economic restructuring and black empowerment. However, critics, particularly those close to Ramaphosa, contended that this framing masked a more opportunistic agenda. RET was cast as a populist slogan strategically deployed to shield Zuma from growing criticism and to bolster the candidacy of Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma at the ANC's 2017 Elective Conference (Desai, 2018). The factional use of RET

reflected a broader pattern in which ideological symbols are instrumentalised for leadership contests, blurring the line between political strategy and developmental policy.

The State Capture Commission revealed that RET was frequently used as rhetorical cover for institutional manipulation and elite enrichment. Evidence pointed to how state-owned enterprises (SOEs), particularly Eskom and Transnet, were used to funnel resources to companies connected to the Gupta family, under the guise of promoting transformation (State Capture Commission, 2022). Inflated procurement contracts and illicit prepayment schemes were justified through a discourse that claimed to advance black economic empowerment, yet these mechanisms overwhelmingly benefited politically connected elites rather than marginalised communities.

For instance, amendments to the Mining Charter, ostensibly aimed at increasing black ownership in the sector, were repurposed to facilitate access to lucrative mining licences for favoured individuals. Similarly, the appointment of Des van Rooyen as Finance Minister, an event that shocked markets and was widely perceived as an attempt to gain control of the Treasury, demonstrated the extent to which state appointments were being influenced by RET rhetoric to serve factional and private interests (Desai, 2018).

Among the most controversial cases was the nuclear energy deal negotiated with Russia, which was heavily promoted as part of RET's transformative industrial strategy. However, critics flagged the project's unaffordable cost and lack of transparency, arguing that it would saddle the state with unsustainable fiscal obligations while providing little benefit to the broader public (Desai, 2018). The politicisation of energy procurement not only destabilised governance in the sector but also compromised the credibility of renewable energy and infrastructure development agendas, both of which were critical to the MTSF and the National Development Plan.

The effect of these developments was the erosion of RET's legitimacy as a policy framework. What began as a call for redress and structural reform became, in practice, associated with inefficiency, cronyism, and state plunder. The internal factionalism within the ANC was thus mirrored in policy incoherence and institutional decline. Rather than acting as a cohesive

development strategy, RET became a symbol of opportunism, undermining both public trust and the state's developmental credibility.

These backstage dynamics of RET reveal how policy rhetoric can be deployed for factional mobilisation at the expense of institutional integrity and public interest. The co-option of transformative language by actors implicated in state capture highlights the dangers of conflating political survival with economic reform. It also reinforces one of the study's core contentions: that without robust institutional safeguards, inclusive governance, and ideological coherence, transformative social policy becomes vulnerable to misappropriation, weakening its potential to address inequality and deliver meaningful socio-economic change.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has interrogated the disjuncture between the ANC's transformative policy aspirations and the developmental outcomes achieved during the period from 2012 to 2019. Using Thandika Mkandawire's framework of transformative social policy as a lens, the analysis revealed a consistent pattern of rhetorical commitment to structural change that has not been matched by institutional capacity, coherent governance, or sustainable implementation. Each core condition for transformative development outlined by Mkandawire, including stable labour relations, investment in education and innovation, strong institutions, and the integration of social and economic policy, has been undermined by either internal political contradictions or the enduring influence of global neoliberal imperatives.

The chapter demonstrated how political instability, particularly in labour relations, weakened the state's capacity to foster an inclusive developmental coalition. The fragmentation of the tripartite alliance, symbolised most dramatically by the Marikana massacre and the expulsion of NUMSA, eroded the ANC's legitimacy among key working-class constituencies and exposed the cracks in the alliance's ideological coherence. This labour instability directly undercut the credibility and feasibility of transformative reforms.

In the realm of education and innovation, the ANC's policy intent to build a skilled, future-ready workforce has been undermined by underinvestment, poor institutional planning, and the outsourcing of critical functions to consultants. Despite declarations of free higher education and skills development, the sector has remained reactive and under-resourced, inhibiting the state's ability to cultivate the human capital necessary for transformative growth. This highlights the lack of long-term planning and institutional coherence required to sustain policy objectives beyond short-term political expediency.

The capture and hollowing out of state-owned enterprises under the banner of RET further exemplified the disconnect between policy narratives and actual governance. The misuse of RET to justify factional power plays and corruption not only compromised public institutions but delegitimised the language of transformation itself. The findings of the State Capture Commission underscore the extent to which governance failures, disguised as transformative initiatives, obstructed the achievement of radical economic change and further weakened the developmental state.

Furthermore, the ANC's failure to integrate social and economic policy underlines a broader strategic dilemma. Social interventions, such as social grants and subsidised housing, have alleviated poverty but remain palliative, with limited influence on structural inequality or economic exclusion. These shortcomings reflect a tendency to view social policy as compensatory rather than transformative. The NDP, widely criticised for advancing a market-driven growth path, exemplifies the ANC's turn towards fiscal restraint and global investor confidence, often at the expense of redistributive justice and industrialisation.

Finally, while Mkandawire's 'catching up' model offers a useful diagnostic tool, this chapter has also considered its limitations. Drawing on critiques by Ndlovu-Gatsheni, it was argued that development frameworks rooted in Eurocentric assumptions neglect indigenous knowledge systems and perpetuate dependency within global capitalism. South Africa's policy trajectory continues to be shaped by these global forces, constraining the space for self-determined, contextually relevant transformation.

Chapter 6

Conclusion and Recommendation

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a synthesis of the study's main arguments, reflecting on the conceptual, policy, and implementation dynamics of Radical Economic Transformation (RET) and Radical Socio-Economic Transformation (RSET) as articulated in the African National Congress (ANC)'s 2012 and 2017 policy resolutions and their attempted execution in government between 2014 and 2019. The chapter revisits the central research questions and summarises the findings in relation to the theoretical framework of Transformative Social Policy (TSP), as developed by Thandika Mkandawire. It reflects on whether the ANC's policy posture during the period under review signalled a break from South Africa's historically market-centred economic frameworks, and to what extent the party's stated radical agenda translated into effective governance outcomes.

The chapter further synthesises the methodological approach used in the study and discusses how the combination of document analysis, historical contextualisation, and theoretical engagement enabled a critical interrogation of the ideological, structural, and institutional challenges facing South Africa's developmental trajectory. Finally, the chapter offers recommendations grounded in the principles of TSP and the lessons derived from the ANC's policy and governance experiences. These recommendations aim to inform future policy coherence, institutional capacity building, and the strategic integration of social and economic policy, in order to realise a more inclusive and equitable society.

6.2. Discussion of the thesis argument

Throughout this study, I argue that the ANC's discourse on transformation, particularly through the concepts of RET and RSET, was driven more by political symbolism than by a coherent programme for structural change. These terms, which gained prominence during internal contestation, functioned largely as ideological placeholders in a broader struggle over the

ANC's identity, purpose, and policy direction. While they evoked radical intent, they were not grounded in a clear political economy framework capable of addressing the entrenched structural inequalities inherited from apartheid. Nor were they supported by the institutional capacity required for meaningful implementation.

RET, in particular, emerged as a discursive tool during a period of heightened factionalism and was used more to define leadership allegiances than to shape actual economic policy. Although presented as a break from the ANC's existing developmental trajectory, RET was never codified into a substantive programme. Instead, it operated within the parameters of existing economic frameworks, most notably the National Development Plan, and thus reproduced rather than challenged the dominant market-oriented approach established through the Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy.

This created a fundamental disjuncture between the rhetoric of transformation and its material outcomes (see *Chapter 3*). While the language of transformation was consistently invoked, it was rarely institutionalised. The tension between the ANC's historic commitments, embodied in the Freedom Charter and African Claims, and its economic governance reflected a deep ideological uncertainty. RET and RSET, rather than clarifying this vision, acted as containers for unresolved debates within the party. The result was a policy landscape marked by fragmentation and incoherence, where transformation was claimed but not pursued in any structured or coordinated way.

This ambiguity allowed RET to be appropriated for narrow political interests. Instead of being developed into a robust policy framework, it was often used to justify governance decisions that lacked legitimacy or alignment with developmental goals (see *Chapter 4*). The politicisation of state institutions, particularly state-owned enterprises such as Eskom and Transnet, exemplified this trend. These institutions, instead of being strengthened as developmental drivers, became arenas for patronage, elite accumulation, and factional struggle. The erosion of institutional integrity severely compromised the state's ability to implement transformative policy and deepened public scepticism about the ANC's capacity to deliver on its commitments.

From a political economy perspective, this period must be understood as one of unresolved contradictions. The ANC formally maintained a commitment to inclusive growth and redress, but its reliance on global market frameworks and foreign investor confidence limited the scope of its actions. Social spending was expanded in response to popular pressures, but the structural foundations of inequality, particularly those related to ownership, access to productive assets, and industrial capacity, remained largely untouched. Redistribution occurred, but it was compensatory rather than transformative.

Thandika Mkandawire's framework of transformative social policy provides a clear analytical lens through which to evaluate this gap. His emphasis on redistribution, production, protection and reproduction sets out a holistic and integrated approach to social and economic change. Measured against these criteria, the ANC's policy outcomes fell short. While certain redistributive measures such as social grants and minimum wage policies were implemented, they did not fundamentally alter the structure of opportunity. Efforts to drive production through industrial policy were uneven and often undermined by governance failures. Social protection, though expanded, was vulnerable to fiscal pressures, and investments in education, care work and gender equity were not meaningfully linked to broader economic strategies.

The central problem was not the lack of intention, but the absence of ideological clarity, institutional capacity, and political will to translate that intention into practice (see *Chapter 5*). The ANC's organisational structure, rooted in consensus and coalition-building, proved increasingly unable to resolve internal ideological divisions or to articulate a unified policy agenda. In this environment, RET functioned as a rhetorical device rather than a programmatic tool. It filled a vacuum where strategy should have been. This use of transformation discourse without a firm policy base created confusion and allowed space for misgovernance and even corruption under the guise of transformation.

What I ultimately argue is that the ANC's failure to develop and institutionalise a clear and coherent transformation agenda during the 2012 to 2019 period weakened both its ideological legitimacy and its developmental effectiveness. Transformation was promised, but not delivered. The policies advanced were either too embedded in neoliberal constraints to be transformative or too vague and contested to gain traction within the machinery of government.

The gap between party resolutions and state implementation revealed deeper issues related to leadership, accountability, and institutional cohesion.

Transformation remains a moral and political imperative in South Africa. But as this study has shown, it cannot be achieved through slogans or political performance alone. It demands a genuine reorientation of economic policy, grounded in a clear vision, executed by capable institutions, and supported by political leadership that is willing to challenge both external pressures and internal dysfunction. Without this, the project of radical transformation will remain suspended between aspiration and failure, and the structural inequalities that defined apartheid will continue to shape the post-apartheid state.

5.3 Discussion of methods

This study employed a qualitative research methodology centred on document analysis, guided by a critical approach to political texts, policy resolutions, and governance frameworks. The objective was to uncover the ideological underpinnings, structural constraints, and institutional contradictions that shaped the ANC's articulation and implementation of economic transformation policies between 2012 and 2019.

Document analysis was the core method used throughout the study. This included systematic reading and interpretation of ANC policy documents, national conference resolutions, Medium-Term Strategic Frameworks (MTSF), government reviews, parliamentary speeches, and media interviews with political actors. This method allowed for in-depth engagement with the official texts through which transformation was narrated, debated, and formalised, providing insight into both the discursive and institutional life of policy. The method enabled the tracing of how concepts such as RET and RSET were constructed, how they evolved over time, and how they were either reinforced or undermined in state programmes. A critical reading of these texts made it possible to assess whether rhetorical commitments were matched by coherent strategies, resourced implementation, and structural follow-through.

Historical contextualisation complemented this analysis. It allowed policy documents to be situated within specific moments of political tension, leadership change, or institutional decline. For example, reading the 2012 ANC policy resolutions alongside the Marikana labour unrest and the fallout from state capture hearings revealed the disjuncture between ideological posturing and governance realities. The same method revealed how political actors used policy language to legitimate particular positions or actions, even when these lacked institutional coherence.

Comparative analysis was also used to examine policy continuity and divergence across the leadership of Jacob Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa. Rather than treating the two administrations as isolated, the method traced how RET was articulated across both periods, noting its deployment as both a campaign tool and a governing discourse. This allowed for an assessment of whether policy positions shifted substantively or merely adapted in tone and expression in response to changing power dynamics.

In terms of material, a broad range of sources was examined to allow triangulation and ensure depth of interpretation. These included government white papers, reports from oversight institutions such as the State Capture Commission, public addresses, and internal ANC discussion documents. The inclusion of official review texts, like the Twenty-Five Year Review and departmental performance reports, offered further insight into the implementation gap and outcomes associated with policy aspirations.

What emerges from this methodology is not only a record of what was said and done, but a deeper understanding of the mechanics of policymaking in a fractured and factionalised political environment. The method revealed how internal party processes, public administration constraints, and ideological contestation shape the real possibilities of transformation. It also highlighted the fragmented nature of state capacity and the tendency for policy to become decoupled from programmatic planning.

6.4 Theoretical and conceptual framework

The study was guided by Thandika Mkandawire's framework of Transformative Social Policy (TSP), which served as the conceptual foundation for analysing whether the ANC's policy resolutions and the government's implementation strategy between 2012 and 2019 reflected a truly transformative agenda. Mkandawire's work offered a multi-dimensional understanding of social policy, not as a reactive mechanism of welfare provision, but as a proactive and integrated framework for structural transformation, inclusive development, and democratic consolidation.

At the centre of Mkandawire's theory is the idea that social policy should be integrally connected to economic transformation. It must serve four interrelated functions: redistribution, reproduction, production, and protection. These elements formed the analytical categories through which I evaluated the ANC's policy resolutions and the subsequent MTSF. This framework allowed for a critical interrogation of the extent to which the policies pursued by the ANC-led government responded to systemic inequalities and were supported by the necessary institutional and governance architecture to produce inclusive development.

The redistributive function was assessed through the ANC's social grant framework, its land reform rhetoric, and its commitments to equitable access to housing, education, and services. While these measures aligned on paper with the goals of transformative policy, they often lacked systemic depth and were not adequately embedded in a broader economic restructuring plan. As Mkandawire warns, redistribution in the absence of structural production reform tends to function as compensation rather than transformation.

The productive and reproductive functions were evaluated through the government's emphasis on infrastructure investment, employment schemes, education reforms, and black economic empowerment. However, the lack of policy coherence, the persistence of high unemployment, and the mismatch between education outcomes and market needs reflected deep institutional weaknesses. These issues were compounded by governance failures and an over-reliance on neoliberal economic instruments that constrained the developmental potential of these initiatives.

Furthermore, the protective function, which encompasses policies that safeguard vulnerable groups and create resilience against economic shocks, was evident in the expansion of social assistance programmes. Yet, as Mkandawire notes, protection must also be part of a broader developmental strategy that secures livelihoods and supports long-term economic participation. In this regard, the failure to link social protection with economic inclusion reflected a limited reading of transformative policy.

The framework also drew from Mkandawire's critique of neoliberalism. He argues that neoliberal ideologies undermine the developmental role of the state by promoting market fundamentalism, reducing public investment, and depoliticising social policy. This critique was especially relevant in the South African context, where economic policies like GEAR, AsGISA, and the NDP consistently favoured market-led development over structural transformation. This ideological continuity limited the space for radical policy shifts, even as political rhetoric around Radical Economic Transformation gained prominence.

To deepen the analysis, the study also engaged with Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni's theorisation of coloniality and its influence on African governance. His critique of Eurocentric developmental frameworks and the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge offered a valuable counterpoint to Mkandawire's modernist developmental paradigm. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's work helped illuminate the epistemic limitations of the ANC's policymaking, particularly its reliance on foreign policy models and its failure to decolonise the structure and content of economic governance. The interaction between Mkandawire's transformative policy framework and Ndlovu-Gatsheni's critique of coloniality enabled a dual lens: one that assessed the technical coherence of ANC policy and another that interrogated its ideological and epistemological foundations. This approach provided a nuanced understanding of why seemingly progressive policies often fall short of producing deep and lasting transformation.

Together, these theoretical insights allowed me to frame the ANC's policy journey not simply as a technocratic process, but as a contested ideological project shaped by factional politics, historical continuities, and the limitations of governance within a post-apartheid and globally embedded state. The conceptual framework proved essential in demonstrating that

transformative intent, when unaccompanied by institutional clarity, political will, and ideological coherence, is unlikely to produce transformative outcomes.

6.5 Discussion of findings

The central finding of this study is that while the ANC adopted the language of radical transformation, particularly through the concepts of RET and RSET, these ideas did not crystallise into a coherent or implementable policy framework. Instead, they served primarily as political instruments deployed within the party's internal struggles and factional battles, rather than as actionable mechanisms for structural reform. The findings consistently demonstrate a pronounced disjuncture between the rhetorical commitments to transformation and the practical realities of policy design, institutional capacity, and implementation.

This disconnection was especially evident in the analysis of the ANC's 2012 and 2017 policy resolutions and the government's Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) for 2014 to 2019. Although these policy documents expressed support for transformation, industrialisation, redistribution, and inclusion, the practical tools deployed by government largely adhered to a neoliberal economic orientation. Policies such as the National Development Plan (NDP) maintained market-led frameworks and fiscal conservatism, thereby limiting the extent to which transformation could be pursued through state intervention, redistributive justice, or structural reform.

The study finds that the ANC's policy positions during this period frequently relied on existing frameworks and programmes, many of which originated under previous administrations with moderate or market-oriented leanings. Despite RET being elevated rhetorically by factions aligned with former President Jacob Zuma, and presented as a response to the failures of prior macroeconomic policy approaches, there was no corresponding policy shift in substance. Instead, initiatives branded as RET were largely absorbed into existing government frameworks with limited innovation or rethinking of the development paradigm.

Furthermore, the study highlights that institutional fragility, governance failures, and widespread corruption significantly undermined the potential of any transformative agenda. State-owned enterprises, which were initially intended to serve as drivers of economic inclusion and infrastructure-led growth, became sites of political manipulation and rent-seeking. The findings of the State Capture Commission confirmed that RET language was often used to legitimise acts of patronage and elite enrichment, rather than to mobilise policy for the public good. This suggests that the rhetoric of radical transformation was repurposed to mask factional interests, weakening public trust and eroding the legitimacy of both the state and the ANC.

The findings also reveal the consequences of a weakened tripartite alliance. The rupture between the ANC and key alliance partners, notably the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), fractured the social base needed for the legitimisation of a developmental state. The Marikana massacre in 2012 and the subsequent labour disputes illustrate the extent to which the ANC had become alienated from the working class, undermining its historical claim as a representative of the poor and marginalised. This loss of labour stability, a core condition identified by Thandika Mkandawire for the success of transformative social policy, critically diminished the potential for policy implementation and social consensus.

In the area of human development, the study finds that South Africa has made notable progress in expanding access to basic education and social protection. However, the quality of outcomes remains a challenge, with persistent skills mismatches, underfunded research institutions, and high youth unemployment. This confirms Mkandawire's concern that developing countries often prioritise access over quality and fail to embed education in broader developmental planning. The promise of free higher education, announced abruptly by former President Zuma, although politically symbolic, lacked policy preparation and sustainable fiscal planning, thereby reflecting the broader pattern of reactive and uncoordinated decision-making.

In relation to the theoretical framework, the study finds that while some policy elements mirrored Mkandawire's principles of redistribution, production, protection, and reproduction, these were not integrated into a comprehensive strategy. The ANC's developmental discourse

continued to operate within the constraints of a global economic order shaped by neoliberal norms. The influence of international financial institutions, fiscal austerity, and investor-oriented policy design consistently limited the government's capacity to pursue radical or redistributive reforms.

Moreover, the findings point to the limitations of the "catching up" paradigm itself. While Mkandawire's work offers valuable insights into the structural features of developmental states, the South African case also demonstrates that such frameworks may fail to capture the enduring coloniality of power that continues to shape state formation and policy orientation. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni's critique is particularly instructive here, as it draws attention to how reliance on Western economic models and the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge systems undermines authentic and contextually rooted development planning.

Taken together, the findings of this research illustrate that the ANC's post-2012 radical discourse, though framed as a shift toward a second phase of the National Democratic Revolution, did not translate into a meaningful transformation of the policy landscape. The combination of rhetorical radicalism, institutional dysfunction, and ideological fragmentation produced a politics of promise without delivery. The transformative intent expressed in party resolutions was repeatedly constrained by structural limitations, internal contestation, and an enduring commitment to market orthodoxy.

This discussion reinforces the central argument of the thesis: that the ANC's transformative ambitions during the period under review were ultimately undermined by a failure to translate rhetorical commitment into policy coherence, institutional capability, and ideological clarity. As a result, the goal of realising a transformative social policy agenda remained largely unfulfilled.

6.6. Contribution of the study

This study makes several contributions to the existing scholarship on policy transformation, governance, and developmental policy analysis in South Africa. The first and perhaps most

substantive contribution lies in its critical interrogation of the ANC's policy discourse from 2012 to 2019 through the lens of Transformative Social Policy (TSP). By applying Thandika Mkandawire's framework to assess policy formulation and implementation, the study offers a nuanced, evidence-based perspective on the disjuncture between rhetoric and policy execution. While the language of RET and RSET dominated political speeches and resolutions, the study demonstrates how these ideas remained ideologically fragmented and operationally weak. This work therefore contributes to the broader understanding of how policy rhetoric can function as political currency without constituting a grounded or integrated policy strategy.

Secondly, the study contributes to knowledge by unpacking the internal dynamics of the ANC as a governing party and its impact on public policymaking. Existing literature often focuses on the ANC's macroeconomic policy shifts or electoral strategies, but this research foregrounds intra-party contestation and factional politics as core explanatory variables in policy incoherence. Through a sustained focus on the 2012 and 2017 ANC conferences and the associated contestation over the party's ideological direction, the study highlights the influence of internal political struggles on developmental planning. In doing so, it brings together political economy analysis and policy evaluation in a way that demonstrates the institutional fragilities that emerge when policy is subordinated to leadership battles.

Finally, the study advances a conceptual contribution by locating South Africa's post-apartheid developmental vision within broader debates on coloniality and the limitations of the 'catching up' paradigm. While Mkandawire's theory provides an important entry point into transformative policy, the study brings it into conversation with decolonial critiques, particularly those of Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, to highlight the limitations of policy frameworks rooted in Eurocentric modernity. In showing how policy failure is often linked not only to institutional or technical shortcomings but also to a deeper structural and epistemic dependence on neoliberal policy logics, the research opens a space for alternative development thinking that is more responsive to South Africa's historical legacies and socio-cultural realities.

6.7. Recommendations

This study has revealed critical gaps in conceptual clarity, institutional coordination, and implementation capacity within the ANC's transformation agenda between 2012 and 2019. Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed to improve the coherence and impact of transformative social policy in South Africa. First, there is a need to enhance policy coherence by strengthening institutional alignment and leadership accountability within both the ANC and the state. The research demonstrated that Radical Economic Transformation and related concepts were not expressed through programmatic frameworks, resulting in fragmentation and inconsistency between party resolutions and government plans. Reinforcing the link between ANC policy processes and government implementation through structured coordination, transparent planning, and consistent communication would help ensure that political intentions are translated into tangible developmental outcomes.

Second, the study highlighted the risks associated with the state's dependence on private consultants, which has undermined internal capacity and delayed progress in key sectors. Rebuilding a competent, professional public service is essential for delivering on transformative social policy. This includes investing in state institutions, prioritising skills development, and fostering long-term partnerships with universities and research centres to support innovation and policy design. The ANC and the government must reassert the role of the state as a capable developmental actor by restoring internal knowledge systems and reducing the outsourcing of critical functions.

Third, the internal ideological divisions within the ANC remain a significant constraint on policy direction and unity. As shown in this research, conflicting interpretations of transformation within the party have resulted in blurred strategic direction and recurring contestation. It is therefore essential for the ANC to prioritise internal ideological clarity, informed by its historical foundations such as the Freedom Charter and the African Claims document. Developing a more coherent and unifying vision would assist in aligning policy development with a consistent political mandate, strengthening the legitimacy and effectiveness of its developmental agenda.

Finally, further research is needed to understand how coalition governance will influence South Africa's development trajectory, particularly in the aftermath of the 2024 election where the ANC lost its parliamentary majority. This changing political landscape raises important questions about consensus-building, the durability of reform initiatives, and the state's capacity to implement long-term policy commitments. Future work should explore how shifting alliances and emerging political actors shape the policy space for transformative social policy, and whether coalitions can enable or constrain efforts to achieve more inclusive, equitable development.

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