

THE FORMATION, COLLAPSE AND REVIVAL OF POLITICAL PARTY COALITIONS IN MAURITIUS

Ethnic Logic and Calculation at Play^{*}

By

Denis K Kadima and Roukaya Kasenally^{**}

Denis K Kadima is the Executive Director of EISA.

P O Box 740 Auckland Park 2006 Johannesburg

Tel: +27 (0) 11 482.5495; Fax: +27 (0) 11 482.6163

e-mail: dkadima@eisa.org.za

Dr Roukaya Kasenally is a media and political communication specialist
and teaches in the Faculty of Social Studies and Humanities at the

University of Mauritius. Reduit, Mauritius

Tel: +230 454 1041; Fax: +230 686 4000

e-mail: roukaya@uom.ac.mu

ABSTRACT

Coalitions and alliances are a regular feature of the Mauritian political landscape. The eight post-independence general elections have all been marked by electoral accords where those expecting to retain power or those aspiring to be in power hedge their bets by forming alliances with partners that ensure that they will be elected. Another fascinating feature is that, apart from that in 1976, all these coalitions have been formed before the election, allowing each party leader to engage in a series of tactical and bargaining strategies to ensure that his party gets a fair deal and, more recently, an equal deal, where the alliance partners shared the post of Prime Minister. The purpose of this paper is to shed some light on this under-researched area and to offer some explanation of the different mechanisms that exist

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** Denis K Kadima has been the Executive Director of EISA since December 2002. He played a key role in the development and adoption of the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC Region (PEMMO) and has published extensively on electoral processes, democracy and governance in the SADC region. This article is based on his doctoral research on political party coalitions in Africa, being conducted at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Dr Roukaya Kasenally is a media and political communication specialist and also teaches at the University of Mauritius. She holds a PhD in broadcasting and has written and published on the state of media and the process of information democratisation within Southern African as well as on the Asian continent. Dr Kasenally is currently Chairperson of the Standards Committee of the Independent Broadcasting Authority in Mauritius as well as the Regional Chairperson of the SADC Media Award.

for the formation, maintenance and eventual collapse of alliances and coalitions. The authors also assess the impact of ethnicity, the current electoral system (first-past-the-post) and the domination of mainstream parties that are often 'conducive' factors for the perpetuation of coalitions and alliances. They also examine the effect of party coalitions on women's representation in Parliament.

INTRODUCTION

Mauritius's politics have been characterised by 'devastating political tsunamis' as far as party coalitions are concerned. The shifting of party coalitions is a recurrent phenomenon and since the country achieved its independence there have been nearly twice as many coalitions as there have been parliamentary elections. Few of these coalitions last and most collapse spectacularly. Interestingly, the collapse of a party coalition does not mean that former partners do not consider reuniting at some later point; hence the continual revival of political party coalitions on the island.

Since independence Mauritius has held seven general elections. All but one have been fought between two coalitions. The exception was the election of 1976, which was a three-horse contest. The nature of these coalitions lend themselves to further scrutiny. In six of the seven post-independence general elections, namely, those of 1982, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995 and 2000, the coalitions were formed before the election, while, in 1976, a coalition was formed after the election.

The formation of these coalitions raises a number of questions. What brings particular political parties together? How are negotiations conducted? Who is entitled to negotiate? How are the relationships nurtured? What is the impact of party coalitions on women's representation in Parliament?

Despite 35 years of post-independence political history, there is no research systematically documenting this aspect of the Mauritian political process. This omission can partly be explained by the dichotomous nature of Mauritian politics – at one level these 'marriages of convenience' are hailed as a national 'sport', at another they remain a private matter. In fact, negotiations and exchanges between political parties are rarely conducted in the open, a factor which leads to rumour mongering and speculation until an official statement is issued to the media by the parties to a particular coalition. As one would expect these speculations reach fever pitch at the approach of a general election.

It should be noted that, though the word 'alliance' refers to the pre-election grouping of political parties and 'coalition' to the post-election groupings, these words are often used interchangeably. This study will not draw the distinction but when it is necessary for the sake of the argument to differentiate between groupings formed before elections and those emerging afterwards, they will be designated 'pre-election' or 'post-election' coalitions.

Party coalitions in Mauritius have been far from being alliances between parties of equal standing or status. In all seven post-independence general elections a

dominant party has scooped the highest job on offer – the post of prime minister. The only case of more or less equal partnership was in the 2000 election, when there was an electoral agreement to ‘split’ the term of the prime minister between the two coalition leaders, a compromise, political observers argue, that resulted from the weakened position of one of the partners. On that occasion history was made not only because of the split term of the Prime Minister but because a non-Hindu occupied the top place in government.

In any coalition a great deal depends on the breadth and depth of discussion and leverage of each party leader, which often defines the amount of bargaining capital to which he is entitled. It is not unusual to hear reports that a political party that has practically agreed on an alliance with another party is being ‘courted’ by or is ‘courting’ a third party. At the time of writing discussions and negotiations are taking place in different political quarters in relation to the 2005 general elections.

Although our research concentrates on post-independence Mauritius, pre-independence Mauritius merits some consideration, as, between these two eras, there has been a fundamental shift in the political ideology that has fuelled the different parties as well as an evolution in the nature of electoral alliances.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The General Elections of 1963, 1967: Setting the Tone for Marriages of Convenience

The two pre-independence general elections that will be considered are those of 1963 and 1967 as they were instrumental in paving the way to independence. The 1963 election was fought by the Labour Party (LP), the Independent Forward Bloc (IFB) and the Parti Mauricien Socialiste Democrate (PMSD) on the theme of independence. The PMSD played on the fears of the minorities by opposing independence while the LP campaigned for full independence. Though the LP, with its ally, the IFB, won an overall majority of seats, it sustained severe reversals in the urban area to the benefit of the PMSD.

The 1963 election saw a regrouping along ethnic lines, which, in subsequent elections, become one of the core features (but also one of the complications) of political coalitions and alliances.

As had been agreed at the London constitutional conference of July 1961 which authorised the governor to appoint the leader of the majority party in the Legislative Council as chief minister, the leader of the Labour Party was made premier of the colony; the Legislative Council was restyled the Legislative Assembly and the Executive Council was upgraded to Council of Ministers. The succeeding years proved to be particularly tough as the question of independence continued to divide the different political parties. In 1966, an Electoral Commission led by Lord Banwell was set up to devise an electoral system and the most appropriate method of allocating seats in the legislature and to set the boundaries of electoral constituencies. The same electoral system persists to this day.

The 1967 general election once again saw political parties align themselves more or less ethnically. The LP was allied with two other Hindu parties – the IFB and the All Mauritian Hindu Congress (AMHC) – and the Muslim party known as the Comité d'Action Musulman (CAM) joined forces with them. In many ways the election was a referendum on independence, the rural/urban fracture became more pronounced and the PMSD campaign hardened and deepened communal divisions and rivalries. The LP campaigned on political, economic and social issues, arguing that independence would give the country an opportunity to tap additional resources for its development, while the PMSD exploited the fear of the unknown in an uncertain world as well as the numerical dominance of a united Indo-Mauritian group.

As shown in Table 1, the LP and its allies won handsomely with 54 per cent of the popular vote and secured 43 of a total of 70 seats.

Table 1
Results of the 1967 General Election

Party	Percentage of votes	Number of seats
MLP*	33,7	26
IFB	15,1	12
CAM	6,3	5
PMSD	43,1	27

* MLP: MAURITIAN LABOUR PARTY/LABOUR PARTY
SOURCE: SMITH SIMMONS 1982

Mauritius achieved its independence on 12 March 1968. Soon afterwards a coalition government was formed, led by the LP. One of the first tasks of this coalition government was to pass through Parliament three constitutional amendments: the postponement of the following general elections, which were supposed to be held by August 1972 at the latest; the suspension of the fundamental rights of the citizens of Mauritius (to allow for the imprisonment of political detainees without trial) and the abolition of by-elections for the legislature. These harsh and undemocratic measures were justified by the government on the grounds that economic development and social peace were threatened by the activities of a new political party, the Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM), which emerged as a political movement in the 1970s to meet the aspirations of the youth of a newly independent country, disappointed by the politics of the old parties. The MMM accused the parties of political irrelevance and of creating communal tension and believed they could no longer be trusted by the younger generation. Independent Mauritius needed a paradigm shift in its political system and the MMM responded appropriately to that expectation. From 1973 to 1975 political activity was largely

proscribed, the press was censored and the MMM was subjected to political repression and physical violence against its founders, leaders and supporters that only served to harden the resolve of its followers.

The years 1968 to 1976 were difficult ones for the LP, which struggled to contain its coalition partners. It is interesting to note that one of its most ferocious enemies – the PMSD – became an ally from 1969 to 1973, a fact that throws an important light on the type of ‘ideology’ that brings political parties who are in total opposition to secure a ‘marriage of convenience’ aimed at remaining in power.

The first post-independence general election was held in December 1976. The MMM won, with 30 directly elected members, followed by the Labour Party and its ally with 25 seats and the PMSD in third position with only 7 members. After the allocation of the best-loser seats, the MMM had 34 parliamentarians in the new Assembly, the Labour Party and its ally secured 28 and the PMSD 8 (see Table 2).

Table 2
Results of the 1976 General Election

Party	Percentage of Votes	Number of Seats
MMM	38,64	34
LP and CAM	37,90	28
PMSD	16,20	8
Others	7,26	0

SOURCE: MATHUR 1991

The LP and the PMSD entered into a post-electoral coalition, essentially to prevent the MMM from acceding to power, but the coalition government was weak and was no match for the MMM team in Parliament. The 1976-1981 Parliament saw the erosion of the authority of the Labour government. Dogged by internal division and a slim parliamentary majority, it encouraged some members of the MMM to cross the floor for ministerial and other office. The leadership was undermined by fractious groups either calling for reform or jockeying for power. On two occasions (1979 and 1980) the opposition filed motions of censure against the government, which were only averted after certain members of the opposition sided, for opportunistic reasons, with the government.

An ageing Sir Seewosagar Ramgoolam, the then Prime Minister, bent on holding office at any cost, could not see the writing on the wall. Economic difficulties arising from two International Monetary Fund (IMF)-imposed devaluations of the local currency compounded the discomfort of the government. Fraud and corruption denounced by a commission of enquiry added to the agony of a languishing regime. The Labour Party, in a frenzy of self-inflicted injury, expelled three of its National

Assembly members, who formed a new political party, Parti Socialiste Mauricien (PSM), led by Harish Boodhoo. The PSM rallied many of the disillusioned Labour supporters, laying the ground for the final assault on the Labour government and its landslide defeat in the 1982 general election.

Despite these tumultuous years, democracy worked well, with an opposition party that was able to keep the government and its allies in constant check. In fact, the 1976-1981 opposition party was among the most functional and productive of post-independence Mauritius.

The 1982 general election is an interesting test case in ethnic politics. With the LP considerably weakened, the MMM enjoyed the support of a people certain that a wave of change was about to sweep the country. Despite this 'certainty', the MMM was not ready to risk going alone to the polls, an uncertainty essentially triggered by the fact that the party had, since its inception, been viewed as one that had made space for the Muslim community as well as as a real alternative for the Creole people and it required a political partner that would secure the Hindu community. Bowman (1991) sums up the situation eloquently when he says that the MMM's alliance with 'the PSM and its promise that Aneerood Jugnauth would be prime minister if the election was won were clear gestures toward the Hindu population and, as such, diluted the party's non-communal, class-based image' (Bowman 1991, p 80). Table 3 illustrates the landslide victory of the MMM and the overwhelming repudiation of the LP.

Table 3
Results of the 1982 General Election

Party	Percentage of Votes	Number of Seats
MMM/PSM	64,16	60
PAN*	25,78	2
PMSD	7,79	2
Others	2,27	2

* PARTI D'ALLIANCE NATIONALE, LED BY THE LABOUR PARTY AS THE MAJOR PARTNER WITH THE MUSLIM ACTION COMMITTEE AND DISSIDENTING PMSD MEMBERS.
SOURCE: MATHUR 1991

The enthusiasm and euphoria and the carte blanche given by the population to the MMM/PSM alliance to steer the future course of the country were short lived. Only nine months after its resounding victory, the government collapsed over a series of issues ranging from the status of the Creole language to the stringent economic policies proposed by the then Minister of Finance, Paul Bérenger. A dominant portion of the MMM, led by Bérenger, resigned, rupturing the party. Jugnauth was quick to react by forming the Mouvement Socialiste Mauricien (MSM).

A fresh election had to be called in 1983 as the MSM, into which the PSM had integrated, did not have the required majority in Parliament.

*General Elections in 1983, 1987, 1991 and 1995:
Political Partners Play Musical Chairs*

The 1983 and 1987 general elections could be termed the reunion of the Hindu community – ethnic politics and calculation were rampantly practised. Jugnauth's MSM called on the LP and the PMSD, which, ironically, he had help oust from power, to form a new coalition, while the MMM confronted the electorate alone. According to certain political observers the election results provided a fine example of the way in which the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system can distort and misrepresent the wishes of the electorate. Despite winning some 46,4 per cent and 48,12 per cent of the popular vote in the 1983 and 1987 elections respectively, the MMM had secured a minority of seats (see Table 4).

Table 4
Results of the 1983 and 1987 General Elections

Party	% of Votes 1983	% of Votes 1987	Number of Seats 1983	Number of Seats 1987
MSM/LP/PMSD	52,2	49,86	46	44
MMM	46,4	48,12	22	24

SOURCE: MATHUR 1991

What is interesting but equally disquieting is that parties had become aligned along geographic and ethnic lines – the MMM had come to represent the urban areas, where the Creole and Muslim communities were largely located, while the MSM and LP reigned supreme in the rural areas, where the majority of the Hindus resided, and, as expected, ethnic politics was at its peak.

The numerical majority that the MSM/LP/PMSD coalition government had secured in the 1983 election was far from offering any guarantee of stability. In fact, within six months of taking office, the coalition government underwent its first tremor with the sacking of the leader of the Labour Party, Sir Satcam Boolell. At this point another common feature of the Mauritian political landscape emerged – the Labour Party split and a group of three Labour Party ministers and eight Labour Party members of Parliament decided to continue to lend support to Jugnauth's government by forming the Rassemblement des Travailleurs Mauriciens (RTM). However, the 'defining' factor that marked the 1983-1986 era and was seen by many political observers as the major cause of instability was the rise of graft and

corruption within government ranks, which culminated in the arrest in late 1985 of four members of Parliament from the coalition government at Schipol Airport in Amsterdam when one of them was found with 20 kg of heroin in his luggage. That episode was followed by general panic within the coalition government when the 'architect' of the 1983 election victory, Boodhoo, resigned as chief whip in 1984 and started a bitter campaign against Jugnauth, claiming that the latter's party had benefited directly from corruption money. His 'revelations' caused a cascade of resignations and defections from the MSM. This resulted in Jugnauth calling on Boolell, who he had sacked some years before, to lend his support to the ailing coalition government. It is interesting to note that the opportunistic nature of Mauritian politics and the overriding urge to remain in power at any cost brought Boolell back into the coalition government, which enabled it to survive for another year when the general election was called for August 1987.

The 1987 party coalition line-up was similar to that of 1983 despite the major problems and splits of the 1983-1986 period. The inevitable happened just a year after the coalition's electoral victory when the PMSD, led by Sir Gaetan Duval, left the government. The departure of the PMSD did not really affect the ruling coalition but suggested that an important segment of the Mauritian population was no longer represented within the ruling coalition party. The MMM, an important rallying point for the general population, was the official opposition party.

Other failed attempts to redefine the Mauritian ethnic landscape caused various levels of tension and unease within the ruling coalition party as well as among opposition party members. Something quite extraordinary was to happen in early 1990 (two years before a general election was due) when the MSM and LP were officially the ruling coalition government and the MMM was the opposition party, which largely explains the never-ending permutations and combinations to which political parties lend themselves.

In 1989, with the LP keen to rebuild the political strength it had lost after the 1982 debacle, there were bilateral discussions and negotiations between it and the MSM, between it and the MMM and between the MMM and the MSM. Issues pertaining to parity between coalition parties dogged the discussions between the LP and the MMM as well as those between the LP and the MSM and, by mid-1990, the MSM and MMM had finalised a partnership deal, leaving the LP no choice but to leave the coalition, while the MMM, the existing opposition, was invited to join the government. Anticipating that electoral victory was clearly within the reach of the coalition, it called a general election a full year in advance of the scheduled date.

The 1991 general election saw a confident 'reconstituted' 'militant' family, while the opposition parties – the LP with a new leader at its helm, Dr Navin Ramgoolam (son of Sir Seewsagar Ramgoolam), and the PMSD were weakened and badly organised and no real match for the MSM/MMM alliance. The alliance scooped 57 seats and won 56,3 per cent of the popular vote (see Table 5). Political bliss was short lived as the MMM underwent its second split. The *Renouveau Militant*

Mauricien (RMM), led by Prem Nababsing and some of the key figures of the MMM, was formed and stayed in government, while Bérenger and his loyal 'lieutenants' stepped into opposition. By the time the 1995 general election was due, Jugnauth had been Prime Minister for some 13 years, always as leader of the dominant party that had forged a series of alliances since 1983.

Table 5
Results of the 1991 General Election

Party	Percentage of votes	Number of seats
MSM/MMM	56,3	57
LP/PGD*	39,9	8

*PGD: PARTI GAETAN DUVAL, A FACTION OF THE PMSD
SOURCE: EIU 1991

The 1995 general election saw the triumphant return of the LP, supported by the MMM. What ensued was a total red and purple '*raz de marée*'; red and purple being the party colours of the LP and MMM respectively. The political reign of Jugnauth came to an abrupt end. The LP/MMM won 63,7 per cent of the popular vote and all the seats, while the MSM/RMM reaped a mediocre 19,3 per cent of the popular vote and remained seatless (see Table 6). In fact, the MSM/RMM won the lowest percentage of the popular vote recorded by an alliance in any of the post-independence general elections. However, it did not take long before the now familiar pattern of a ruptured coalition government emerged, and the MMM was urged to leave government in 1997.

Table 6
Results of the 1995 general election

Party	Percentage of votes	Number of seats
LP/MMM	63,7	60
MSM/RMM	19,3	0
Others	16,0	6

SOURCE: EIU1996

In the most recent general election, in 2000, it was once more back to basics, with the grand 'reunion' of the 'militant' family, resulting in an almost clean sweep for the MSM/MMM coalition, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7
Results of the 2000 General Election

Party	Percentage of votes	Number of seats
MSM/MMM	52,3	58
LP/PMXD*	36,95	8

*PARTY MAURICIEN XAVIER DUVAL (PMXD) IS ANOTHER SPLIT PART OF THE PMSD
SOURCE: ELECTORAL COMMISSION OFFICE 2004

The pre-electoral accord (popularly known as the 'medpoint' accord) was in fact a feat of electoral agreement/negotiations as it historically split the term of the Prime Minister, allowing the two coalition leaders each to take a turn and providing for each of the main coalition parties, the MSM and MMM, to receive 30 parliamentary seats. As mentioned above, the accord was even more unusual in allowing a non-Hindu to occupy the position of Prime Minister, which had always been reserved for a particular sub-group within the Hindu majority (Lodge, Kadima and Pottie 2002). The current alliance is well into its fifth year – the longest term yet of an alliance.

The question that is very much in the air is whether this successful electoral accord will be a once-in-a-lifetime achievement or whether it will inaugurate a new tradition within the Mauritian political party coalition landscape.

Examining the various coalition governments enumerated above, one can detect a systematic pattern of triumphant electoral victory followed by alliance decay and an early poll. In the 35+ years of post-independence Mauritian political history, political parties have forged alliances with other parties that have been historically and ideologically in opposition to them or with the very parties with whom relationships broke down when they were in a coalition government. No doubt, the above is just the tip of the iceberg, which sheds light on the complexity of political alliances where ethnicity, the presence of dominant parties, leadership style/personality and electoral victory are predominant ingredients in devising a 'perfect' winning formula.

Ethnicity: The Necessary Evil of Coalition Political Parties

Mauritius prides itself on being a multi-ethnic, linguistically rich and culturally diverse nation. Celebratory slogans like 'unity in diversity', 'one people one nation' and 'rainbow nation' are devised and popularised by politicians. However, the irony and hypocrisy lie in the fact that these very politicians practise and thrive on a politics of ethnic division and calculation. As shown in an earlier section of this paper, pre- and post-independence elections have been marked by ethnic considerations with the 'choice' of an alliance partner determined by its ethnic coefficient as opposed to its ideological proximity or compatibility.

Ethnicity is and will continue to be an important feature of Mauritian politics. People living in Mauritius are constantly 'split' between the multiple identities of their ancestral homeland and the one in which they have grown up. This layering of identities is usually exploited, not to say abused, at election times, when certain politicians appeal to the basic instincts of voters, asking them to support 'people of your kind'.

The omnipresence of ethnicity within the Mauritian political context is further embedded by the current electoral system which, for many, legitimises/ institutionalises the process of political ethnicisation. This is clearly illustrated by the fact that coalition parties were sought and alliances forged using ethnic 'logic' based on securing a majority base. This will be further explained in the section on the legal framework of the study and illustrated by the system of 'best losers', or variable correctives, which, in the search for a balance of ethnic representation, requires that each candidate for Parliament declare his or her ethnic affiliation.

Parties abound within the Mauritian political landscape and in the general elections of 2000 there were 22 political parties registered with the Electoral Supervisory Commission (ESC). This is no doubt indicative of the interest of parties in fielding candidates. Despite this diversity of political parties the post-independent Mauritian political landscape remains dominated by three of them, namely the LP, the MMM and the MSM. In fact, an interesting feature of these three parties is that, in the past 30 years or so, they have undergone multiple splits which have generated new parties, some of them short lived, others driven by a communal/ ethnic purpose and some essentially becoming one-person or one-issue parties.

Each of the mainstream parties has a particular ethno-electoral baseline. In the case of the LP, its pro-independence struggle allowed it to rally most of the Indo-Mauritian groups (Hindus, Muslims, Tamils and others) behind it, while the PMSD essentially represented the Creole community and the minority group of people of European descent (the whites). Post-independence Mauritius saw the emergence of a new party – the MMM, which was to challenge the old LP guard and appeal to certain ethnic groups, namely the Muslims, a fair segment of the Creole community and certain minority strands within the Hindu majority group. The 'hegemony' that the LP had acquired vis-à-vis the Hindu community was eroding and this deterioration was exacerbated by the creation of the PSM, which, in joining forces with the MMM for the 1982 general election, allowed the MMM to overcome the perception that it consisted entirely of Muslim, Creole and certain ethnic minority groups.

After its creation in 1983, the MSM recuperated and rallied a large section of the Hindus who had been staunch supporters of the LP prior to that party's 1982 decline. Indeed, when the MSM was formed, it was able to appeal to and attract a fair majority of the LP's electoral base. However, this electoral base, essentially made up of Hindus, began to return to the LP in the mid-1990s, leaving the MSM with diminished support. The period between 1983 and 1989 saw a great reunion

of the Hindu community, with the MSM taking on board for two successive elections (1983 and 1987) the LP as well as other minority parties.

As for the PMSD, the presence and clout that it had secured among the Creole community before independence steadily dwindled with the creation of the MMM. The PMSD has also suffered from multiple splits, which further fragmented its electoral base.

Mention was made above of several splits within the three mainstream parties since their inception. Although the formation of splinter parties has not made a substantial difference to the electoral balance, a fact that has been ascertained on several occasions by opinion polls, these parties have nevertheless been able to chip at the electoral capital of the three mainstream parties. The LP, for instance, has 'generated' splinter parties like the Parti Socialiste Mauricien (PSM), Rassemblement des Travailleurs Mauriciens (RTM) and the Mouvement Travailleur Démocrate that emanate from and represent the Hindu community.

The MMM has undergone three splits since its inception (in 1973, 1983 and 1993). The only one which allowed for the advent of a significant party was that in 1983 when the MSM was created. The *Renouveau Militant Mauricien* (RMM), created in 1993, was not significant and, as mentioned above, the MSM and RMM recorded the lowest percentage of the popular vote in any post-independence general election when they garnered only 19,3 per cent.

Since its inception the MSM has undergone several turbulent phases, essentially marked by the departure of senior members of the party. In 1994, the party experienced its first official split when Madan Dooloo, a senior minister in Jugnauth's Cabinet, left to create the *Mouvement Militant Socialiste Mauricien* (MMSM). The MMSM remains a one-person party and is currently part of the *Alliance Sociale* led by Navin Ramgoolam's LP. In February 2005 several members of Parliament, led by Anil Bachoo (who in the mid-1980s had created the *Mouvement des Travailleurs Dissidents* (MTD) – a breakaway group from the LP) had left the MSM, blaming its leader, Pravind Jugnauth, for being unable to steer the party and giving in too much to its coalition partner, the MMM. Bachoo's new party is known as the *Mouvement Socialiste Démocrate* (MSD) and has officially integrated *l'Alliance Sociale*, led by the LP and some five other small parties.

In the last decade or so, the Mauritian political landscape has also been marked by the advent of ethnically-driven parties like the *Hizbullah*, the *Mouvement Démocratique Mauricien* (MDM) and *Les Verts*, who claim to represent respectively the voices of a given section of the Muslim, Hindu and Creole populations. These three parties have not really caused a major stir but their ethno-political claims have, from time to time, struck a sympathetic chord among people belonging to certain ethnic groups.

Officially the mainstream parties like the MMM, LP and MSM appeal to a broad-based electorate but on the ground the reality can be very different, a fact that has been 'proved' in numerous general elections, particularly those of 1983 and 1987, during which ethnic differentiation was most obvious. From the early

1980s to the early 1990s, the Muslim community was ostracised by the government coalition for supporting the MMM, who were in opposition. Two events lend support to this claim. In 1984, the then Prime Minister, Aneerood Jugnauth, expelled the Head of Mission of the Libyan Embassy who was believed to be over sympathetic to the MMM. In 1987, the Muslim Personal Law (MPL), which gave legal status to the marriage of Muslims who opted to marry only religiously, was withdrawn and, to date, has not been reinstated. This has caused great anguish and concern to a section of the Muslim community.

It is obvious that certain political parties in Mauritius and, by extension, their coalition partners, operate a policy of carrot and stick – encouraging and rewarding ethnic groups that support them while punishing those that oppose them. Clearly this policy goes against the tenets of democracy and broad-based representivity, but, unfortunately, it fits the logic of ethnic politics.

So it seems that ethnicity is here to stay. Should one allow the current situation to continue unchallenged or should the necessary mechanisms be instituted to loosen the grip of ethnicity on politics? There is no doubt that the second option is desirable in the interests of every Mauritian citizen. However, it would require enormous political commitment and determination from some political parties to do away with a system that has favoured them to the detriment of other parties. Two events that have provided a glimmer of hope that matters might be heading in the right direction – the post of Prime Minister being occupied by a non-Hindu and the series of discussions leading to electoral reform. Although both these developments are important steps in the right direction, they are being jeopardised by a revival of ethnically charged language and the call from certain quarters to restore the 'due' of the Hindu community. In the latter case, electoral reform seems to be far down on the list of priorities of political leaders.

Party Coalitions and the Invisibility of Women

Mauritius has one of the lowest percentages of women in Parliament – 5,7 per cent (Inter-Parliamentary Union Database 2005), a situation that can be explained by the fact that Mauritian society is highly patriarchal and by the nature of the current electoral system which has systematically proven to be prejudicial to female representation. The Sachs Commission Report (2001) describes the low level of women's representation in Mauritian politics as 'a grave democratic deficit'.

Elections have always been extremely competitive in Mauritius because of the winner-takes-all electoral system that pushes party bosses to select those of their members who are most likely to win. These selected candidates are usually men. Although some political parties are discussing the institution of a quota system to correct this gender imbalance until now there has been no formal mechanism to ensure that more women are guaranteed a ticket.

This situation is further aggravated by the fact that general elections in Mauritius have essentially been fought on a coalition basis. The formation of

coalitions brings an additional level of competition to the one that already exists at party level, where women are already significantly marginalised. At inter-party level, negotiations are always tougher because fewer seats are available to each coalition party and this results in even fewer women being nominated.

Table 8 gives a breakdown of the number of women fielded as candidates in the post-independence general elections.

Table 8
Number of Women Fielded as Candidates in General Elections

Year	Government Coalition	No of Women	Opposition Coalition	No of Women	Single Party Opposition	No of Women
1967	Independence Party	1			MMM PMSD	3 2
1982	Parti de L'Alliance Nationale	1	MMM/PSM	2	PMSD	1
1983	MSM / LP	1			MMM PMSD	4 1
1987	MSM/LP	2	MMM/MTD/ FTS	4		
1991	MSM / MMM	2	LP / PMSD	2		
1995	MSM / RMM	3	LP / MMM	5	Parti Gaetan Duval	6
2000	LP / PMXD	8	MSM / MMM	4	MDN	6

NOTE: EACH COALITION OR SINGLE PARTY HAS A LIST OF 60 CANDIDATES.
SOURCE: DATA COMPILED FROM THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION OFFICE 2005

Judging from the above, there does not appear to be much difference between the number of women fielded by coalitions and by single (mainstream or small) parties. The proportion of women candidates has never exceeded 8 per cent in any coalition combination or mainstream single party. Matters improved slightly in the 2000 general election, when the LP/PMXD fielded the largest percentage of women candidates (13%) in any general election. It is also interesting to note that in 1995 and 2000 the Parti Gaetan Duval and MDN (two small parties) each fielded 10 per cent women candidates but none of them was elected.

Party leaders have promised to field more women candidates in the coming 2005 general election and, since the nomination of candidates is, to a large extent, their prerogative, it is only when the two coalitions make public their respective

lists that we will know whether they are indeed committed to the issue of gender representation in politics or whether it is mere rhetoric.

It must, however, be pointed out that the number of women candidates is not a sufficient indicator of the commitment of party leadership to gender balance. Beyond the numbers, it is worth investigating whether or not female candidates are fielded in winnable constituencies. In a proportional representation system, the number and ranking of female candidates on the party list is the ultimate criterion used to determine how serious a party is about gender parity.

Party Structures and Ideology

The major political parties, namely, the LP, MMM and MSM, have undergone a significant shift in ideology since they were founded. This shift could be interpreted as the death of party ideology and the rise of political opportunism. In fact, the major concern of most political alliances seems to be to retain power or to return to power, an assumption backed up by the strange bedfellows they choose. Over the years, the leaders of different political parties entering or about to enter a coalition have offered various justifications for their choice of political partners. In this regard the comments of Paul Bérenger on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the MMM are quite telling: 'There are,' he said, 'natural coalitions as well as coalitions that go against the natural order of things (*L'Express* 18 September 1994).'

As mentioned above, the LP was forged in the spirit of bringing independence and autonomy to the then British colony of Mauritius. The party was driven by an inherent belief that it offered an alternative to the oppressive forces of colonisation and hence preached the political and social emancipation of the masses. Shortly after independence, the party put into place a fully-fledged and comprehensive welfare system and instituted a culture of government subsidies which still exists today. The MMM was founded to provide a new approach to local politics after the old guard failed to solve the country's post-independence economic, social and political problems. At its inception it was viewed as a leftist/radical party with its major support coming from the trade unions. In the early 1970s, it promoted itself as a people-centred party. The MSM is in fact a fragment of the MMM, formed after a split from the MMM in 1983. The party has evolved with the economic situation of the country and the evolution of the society itself. Indeed, in the mid-1980s and 1990s the then Prime Minister and leader of the MSM, Sir Aneerood Jugnauth, was credited as the 'father' of economic success.

However, today there seem to be no real ideological differences between the three parties – they all say that they promote a pragmatic socialist ideology bent on social justice and redistribution of wealth. This emerges in their electoral manifestos, which use similar language and converge in terms of ideas and objectives (MSM/MMM 2000 and LP/PMXD 2000).

When it comes to party structure and organisation each party is bound by its constitution, which gives operating guidelines as well as the different sub-structures

for the dissemination of views, opinions and decisions at all levels of the party. The three parties have more or less similar structures and all pride themselves on an inclusive and bottom-up approach.

The mainstream political parties, as well as some of the smaller ones, have a four-tier structure comprising a political bureau that is in charge of policy conceptualisation, a central committee responsible for decision-making, a general assembly that meets at least once a year and regional branches that gather the grass-roots members. Despite what appears to be well-oiled party machinery, closer scrutiny of the actual operations of the political parties demonstrates the overriding authority of the leader of the party, an authority that often includes the power of veto when it comes to critical issues such as nomination of candidates, party funding and the formation and dissolution of alliances.

According to a former senior cadre of the MMM, more than a decade ago, the MMM's central committee would meet fortnightly, with meetings ending with a press conference. Today's MMM, says the same cadre, is under the total control of its leader, there is no longer any separation between government and party and the grassroots members are consulted less and less. This view was corroborated by another former MMM senior official, who argues that the party once had mechanisms in place for consulting its support base but today the leadership decides for the party. This top-down approach, with the party leader playing a central role, is not unique to one party, it is a feature of all political parties in Mauritius and demonstrates that despite promoting a discourse of internal political democracy, political leaders retain absolute control of their parties

THE CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK GOVERNING POLITICAL PARTY COALITIONS

Mauritius is often cited as an exemplar of democratic success within the Southern African region. The regularity with which it holds elections, its culture of multi-partyism, its track record of political stability, management of diversity, political alternation and the fact that election results have not been contested are some of the positive elements of the 'Mauritian democratic model'. However, several questions must be posed about the 'quality' of this democracy. Is it sufficient only to have elections every five years or should citizens be consulted on policy in the interim? Should electoral reforms remain merely political pledges or should they ensure the consolidation of democracy and good governance? Should the law not give more leverage and latitude to the Mauritian Electoral Commissioner in the discharge of his electoral activities?

Some of the above questions have been left partly unanswered because of the absence of any specific electoral or political party law. Legally, political parties are required by the Constitution (1968) to register with the Electoral Supervisory Commission (ESC) at least 14 days prior to the nomination of their candidates for any general election (Constitution, First Schedule, s 2). The National Assembly

Elections Act of 1968 lays out the modus operandi of the registration of political parties, which should be recorded in 'form 3 and shall be made and signed in the presence of the Electoral Commissioner, by the president, chairman or secretary of the party duly authorised to do so by a resolution passed by the executive committee of such party and such application shall be supported by a certified extract of the minutes of proceedings of the meeting at which the executive committee of such a party passed such resolution' (Section 7 (2)). It is important to note that the above regulations apply solely to election periods. At other times political parties are completely unregulated.

The law is usually supplemented by the constitutions of each political party, which provide the necessary internal party guidelines. However, the applicability of the party constitution is questionable as members of some political parties have said that they have never been able to access such documents.

This relative freedom and flexibility has allowed political parties to register and nominate the candidates of their choice. Candidates may also stand as independents and do not require any party affiliation or nomination. In previous general elections, the number of political parties and independent candidates registered with the ESC has been significant – in 2000, 43 political parties were registered (Electoral Commission 2004). Mere registration does not, of course, mean that all these political parties play an active role or have a significant impact. In fact, the Mauritian political landscape has, for some decades, been dominated by three major political parties – the LP, the MMM and the MSM – and this situation is likely to continue for the foreseeable future, while the rest are condemned to remain fragments of little or no importance.

The absence of any electoral or political party law per se seems to be adequately compensated for by the Constitution, which defines Mauritius as a sovereign democratic state and ensures the separation of powers between the executive, the legislature and the judiciary as well as providing them with the necessary mechanisms for the discharge of their respective duties. In 1991 the Constitution was amended and the country became a republic, with a president who is the head of state and commander-in-chief and who 'shall be elected by the Assembly on a motion made by the Prime Minister and supported by the votes of a majority of all members of the Assembly (Constitution of Mauritius, Section 28 (2)). The President of the Republic, in turn, appoints the Prime Minister and his deputy (Section 58 (1)) who, together with the Cabinet, are accountable to Parliament. Should Parliament pass a resolution of no confidence in the government and should the Prime Minister not resign within three days of such a resolution, 'the President shall remove the Prime Minister from office' (Section 6 (1)). Even the post of leader of the opposition is enshrined in the Constitution (Section 73).

There is no doubt that these provisions ensure a system of checks and balances which prevent unilateral decisions being made and offer each 'player' an important stake. What impact does this have on parties or members of parties in coalitions? Section 59(3) of the Constitution provides that the 'President, acting in his own

deliberate judgment, shall appoint as Prime Minister the member of the Assembly who appears to him best able to command the support of the majority of the members of the Assembly'. This clause not only officially determines the majority governing partner (although in most of the cases of pre-election alliances this is already established and 'sold' to the electorate) but allows one of the partners of a ruptured governing alliance to hold onto power, as happened in 1984, 1989, 1993 and 1997.

Although the Constitution legitimises the ruling and opposition parties, the first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system that has been operational since 1886, together with the 'best loser' system, has led to countless permutations and combinations of pre-election alliances. The FPTP is in fact a first-three-past-the-post system, allowing for 60 elected members to be represented in the National Assembly, each of the 20 constituencies returning three MPs and the Island of Rodrigues two. In addition, a system of best losers (variable correctives) prevails, attributing an extra eight seats to non-elected candidates based on their ethno-religious affiliation. Many political observers believe the FPTP and the best loser system have been at the root of the proliferation, creation and ultimately the disbanding of political party alliances. In addition the system has resulted in the crude ethnicisation of political parties, which have essentially focused their attention on the electoral benefits of political party alliance formation.

In fact, the constant ethnic calculation in which political parties engage is 'legitimised' by the Constitution, making it necessary for 'every candidate for election at any general election of members of the Assembly to declare in such manner as may be prescribed which community he belongs to and that community shall be stated in a published notice of his nomination' (First Schedule, s 3(1)). This process of deliberate ethnicisation has been further compounded by the drawing of electoral boundaries that perpetuate a rural-urban divide based on ethnic agglomeration.

Electoral reform has been one of the political pledges of the main parties, even appearing in their electoral manifestos. As early as 2001, the Government set up a 'Commission on Constitutional and Electoral Reform' presided over by a judge of South Africa's Constitutional Court, Judge Albie Sachs). The commission presented its recommendations a year later, following which a Select Committee of the Assembly was appointed to study the report. The select committee only made its recommendations public in 2004 (Select Committee 2004). What is striking about the two reports is that they both recognise the deviant and disproportionate distortion of the prevailing FPTP system where 'the three member constituencies frequently produced results which were grossly disproportionate to the share of votes obtained by the different parties. At times, although obtaining a substantial vote, the Opposition was completely or nearly completely eliminated' (Sachs Report 2001 para 33). The main aim of the two reports was to ensure an electoral system where fairness and representativeness were not forsaken especially when it came to 'correcting the over-representation of the leading party or alliance' (Sachs Report 2001 para 37).

Despite the investment of considerable time and resources in these two committees nothing much seems to be happening and all hopes that a dose of Proportional Representation might be introduced into the general elections scheduled for late 2005 have been stalled. Electoral reform is one of the elements that is expected to consolidate the fabric of Mauritian democracy. The absence of any electoral or political party law is to be lamented as the mere registration of political parties, particularly since this only happens at election times, is far from sufficient.

POLITICAL PARTY COALITION FORMATION

This section analyses the formation of political party coalitions in Mauritius and attempts to answer the following questions: How are these coalitions formed? What are their purposes? What are the driving forces, including those located behind the scenes? What are the real motivations of the political leaders in entering into coalitions? How is the power shared amongst the affiliated parties? To answer these questions, the authors held extensive interviews with current and past senior members and leaders of the LP, the MMM, the MSM and the PMSD. Secondary sources were also consulted, but in a limited way, because the subject of political party coalitions in Mauritius has barely been studied.

The Objectives and Driving Forces of Party Coalitions

There are several factors, of varying degrees of importance, which compel political parties to enter into pre-election coalitions and which shape the conditions of these partnerships. The dominant factor in Mauritius is the ethnic set-up of the country, which makes it impossible for one party to win more than 50 per cent of the vote. Prior to independence, the LP was the strongest party, as it had been able to rally practically the whole of the Indo-Mauritian community and consequently was able to win on its own. With independence, the population became ethnically segmented, especially with the coming of the MMM. Thus, contracting an alliance has become an important ingredient in the formula for election victory.

Another factor that explains why Mauritian leaders tend to resort to coalitions is the three-member constituency first-past-the-post electoral system combined with the limited geographical concentration of the various communal groups. This compels parties to spread across ethnic barriers and enter into pre-electoral alliances in order to avoid wasting votes.

There is also a psychological reason for these coalitions – they reassure voters, who feel secure when a party demonstrates that it is open to others and can, if need be, rally their forces. Explaining this symbolism, one respondent notes that even the majority community, the Hindus, feels the need to reassure the other communities by entering into coalitions, even with small parties. The quest for social cohesion is therefore not a negligible factor.

Most respondents maintain that coalitions are formed to accommodate ethnicity. The authors do not concur with this view. As in other parts of the world, political parties in Mauritius enter into pre-election coalitions with a view to winning elections and governing. Party coalitions are ultimately formed in order to access or maintain power. To achieve this, the architects of party coalitions resort to ethnic calculation and logic. It can therefore be argued that, though the factors described above, including ethnicity, shape the formation of political party coalitions, the overarching objective of entering into these coalitions is to remain in power or to access it and govern the country.

The first case of a post-election party coalition was the 1969 coalition government, which took the form of a marriage of convenience between the Hindu-dominated pro-independence party, the LP, and the Creole and white dominated anti-independence party, the PMSD. This arrangement accommodated ethnicity when the ethnically based political polarisation that resulted from the bitterly fought pre-independence election in 1968 made it difficult to run the country. The solution seemed to be to bring the two main pre-independence parties together in a government of national unity.

On the other hand, the 'economic bourgeoisie', which consisted mainly of white businesspeople, had voted against independence and was resented by the new 'political bourgeoisie', composed of the Indian-dominated pro-independence groups led by the LP. To ease the tensions between the economic and the political bourgeoisies, which did not augur well for the newly independent state, France and the United Kingdom, the former colonial powers, brought the two parties together in a consociational arrangement.

Interestingly, the two main political parties, the LP and the PMSD, agreed subsequently to suspend elections, thus entrenching their joint rule beyond their term of office. This development showed that political leaders did not hesitate to sacrifice their professed 'democratic' values in order to consolidate their grip on power. For seven years Mauritius was transformed into a kind of two-party 'dictatorship'.

The 1976 post-election coalition between the LP and the PMSD was partly justified by some ideological considerations – the two parties were alarmed at the emergence of the leftist party, the MMM, which they regarded as communist. Fearing the possible geo-political impact of an MMM victory on other countries in the region, such as Madagascar, Seychelles and Reunion, France and the United Kingdom encouraged the LP and the PMSD to form a coalition, which they did, successfully keeping out of power the MMM, which had actually won the election. In summary, the objectives of the 1976 post-election coalition were threefold: the self-interest of the losing parties, the preservation of the national economic bourgeoisie who had been frightened by the MMM's socialism, and the external forces which were threatened by the MMM's leftist ideology.

All the subsequent coalitions have been pre-election alliances. The respective ideologies of the political parties involved have become increasingly irrelevant

because, since Mauritius is an export-oriented country, successive governments have had to maintain liberal economic policies in order to continue to enjoy preferential treatment and quotas. This trend was reinforced from the late 1980s with the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the advent of Perestroika.

As indicated above the driving force behind most coalition negotiations has been the party leaders. In 1976, Sir Seewsagar Ramgoolam and Sir Gaetan Duval combined to keep out their 'common enemy', the MMM. In 1982, although the leaders of the MMM and the PSM, respectively Anerood Jugnauth (before he quit to form the MSM) and Harish Boodhoo, along with Paul Bérenger, the then secretary general of the MMM, drove the formation of the coalition of those two parties, although the MMM also consulted other strong party members who, no doubt, had an important role to play. When the coalition collapsed, the MSM's Jugnauth formed an alliance with the LP, having negotiated directly with its then leader, Sir Satcam Boolell.

1983 saw the start of the reign of Jugnauth's MSM as the 'dominant' party in the 1983, 1987 and 1991 coalition governments. Another important point to bear in mind was the practically undisputed choice of Anerood Jugnauth as the Prime Minister of the pre-electoral coalition.

In 1995, the electoral agreement between the LP and the MMM saw the return of the LP as a dominant party after nearly 13 years of absence. Bérenger personally conducted the negotiations.

In 2000, Bérenger and Jugnauth reached a historic agreement on an MMM-MSM coalition. Two high-ranking officials, Anil Baichoo of the MSM and Pradeep Jeeha of the MMM, are also credited with having played a crucial role in the negotiations. Harish Boodhoo of the Parti Socialiste Mauricien (PSM), a smaller coalition partner, was also an important force. The MSM and the MMM were each entitled to 30 parliamentary seats but each of them was to share its seats with minority coalition partners. Indeed, the MMM gave two seats to the PMSD and the MSM offered one seat to the Verts and another to the Mouvement Républicain (MR). It is worth noting that the decision to share the post of Prime Minister between the leaders of the MSM and the MMM was not explicitly included in the agreement. It was agreed that after three years Jugnauth would voluntarily cede the post to Bérenger. During Bérenger's term Jugnauth became the ceremonial President of the Republic of Mauritius. Also by agreement Pravind Jugnauth, son of Sir Aneerood Jugnauth, became the Minister of Finance for the first three years and Deputy Prime Minister for the last two years of the government's term. When his father became President of the Republic, the son became leader of the MSM.

While many in the MSM were happy with the arrangement, realising that the coalition was necessary for an election victory, others were hostile to it and hoped it would not last.

Party coalition negotiations usually take between one and three months, although, in exceptional cases they have lasted for a year and, in one case, they took just one week. It is undeniable that party leaders are the driving forces behind most

coalitions, though, in some cases, the initiative of approaching a potential partner has come from high-ranking party officials, one level below the leaders.

The role played by party members and supporters in the formation of coalitions should not be underestimated. If members and supporters favour a particular potential partner or coalition composition it is difficult for leaders to ignore the popular will.

Selection of Coalition Partners and the Sharing of Power

It is argued above that there are no longer fundamental ideological differences in Mauritius and that what differences there are are created by political parties in order to build their own style and identity. All Mauritian parties lean towards social democracy and the centre-left and stand for social cohesion, national unity, democracy, anti-corruption and social progress.

As an export-oriented country subject to World Trade regulations, Mauritius has sacrificed its sovereignty by constantly seeking support from the world, including the European Union, the United States and South Africa, a factor that has led to a common ideology.

The selection of affiliate parties is therefore based on criteria other than the sharing of a common ideology. All the respondents recognise that the underlying criterion in the formation of political party coalitions is the accommodation of ethnic diversity. Each coalition ascertains that it is seen as ethnically representative, an important requirement for social cohesion.

Apart from this first criterion related to the need for political correctness in matters of ethnic representivity, several other criteria determine the selection of potential coalition partners.

The second criterion is the relative strength of political parties. This is an important element because the ultimate objective of a coalition is to win the election so it is important to assess how many seats a party can bring to the coalition in order to secure victory. The strength of a political party can be measured through opinion polls, the most recent election results and the size of the crowd attracted to rallies. All these factors play a part in determining each party's share.

A third criterion is the ability of a leader to govern. This helps to explain why a particular party leader might be invited to join a coalition and play a leading role even if his political party is relatively small. This was the case with the MSM in 1991 and 2000.

The drive for political stability in the interests of the economy is another factor that has been instrumental in shaping coalitions, for instance that between the LP and the PMSD in 1976.

The outgoing Prime Minister is in a position of strength to negotiate unless polls show that his popularity is in decline. Indeed, the Prime Minister has substantial leverage not only in determining the date of the next election but also in choosing with which political party his party will form a coalition. In the same vein, economic

problems under a particular prime minister may make him and his political party unattractive as a coalition partner in the next election.

The final criterion which determines the formation of a coalition is agreement about how power is to be shared among the partners. Extensive interviews with current and party leaders revealed how power sharing is negotiated. The basis of allocation of Cabinet portfolios and other senior positions is negotiation. This includes the selection of the prime minister, the deputy prime minister, the president of the Republic, the vice-president of the Republic, the speaker of Parliament, the deputy speaker, the minister of foreign affairs and the minister of finance.

In addition to negotiations, other factors explain the sharing of positions both within the parties and between coalition partners. Among these are the internal dynamics of a party which allow some individuals to secure posts for themselves and their protégés. The selection of parliamentary candidates is carried out by the political bureaux of the two main parties in the coalition and takes into account, *inter alia*, the ethnic profile of the constituency as well as the rural-urban divide. Loyalty to the leader from within the party is an important criterion in the internal selection of candidates because the leader requires the assurance that in case of a breakdown of the coalition the majority of members will remain with him and will not cross the floor. In the past the MMM had lost many of its members, who, following the collapse of the coalition, chose to form a new party and remain in the coalition.

The mechanisms of selecting parliamentary candidates within the coalition are influenced by factors such as the balance of power between the coalition partners. In this regard, the leading party in the coalition, needing to ensure that it keeps its majority even if the coalition breaks down, must have a sufficient number of seats for this to be possible. In addition, the determination of the number of parliamentary candidates for each partner party depends on the size of the partner. If the coalition is formed with a smaller party, such as the MSM, the larger party would be assured of receiving the majority of seats.

An implicit element must be factored in when posts are shared out. Until recently, all the country's prime ministers have not only come from the Hindu community but from a specific caste within that community. This implicit criterion has made it possible to predict the next prime minister from among a handful of Hindu party leaders.

The advent of Bérenger as the country's Prime Minister was initially appreciated by the electorate. Eventually, though, it caused a great deal of discontent among some conservative Indians. It will be interesting to see in the future whether the inauguration of a non-Hindu as the Prime Minister of the islands in late 2003 was just an exception that confirms the rule of power-sharing; an *accident de parcours*.

MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF PARTY COALITIONS

In-depth interviews with past and current senior party officials and leaders have enabled the authors to look at the internal mechanisms of political party coalition

management and maintenance. This section examines these procedures, analyses the challenges of sustaining coalitions and determines the consequences for individual affiliate parties of joining a coalition. In addition, the section examines internal party procedures and mechanisms in the area of consultation with the party membership in order to determine how internal party dynamics influence the functioning of the coalition, and vice versa.

Coalition Management Procedures

Party coalitions are preceded by speculation and rumour, a situation that persists until the agreements are announced in press statements. Typically, press releases do not provide detailed information on matters such as management procedures. The fact that these procedures tend to remain informal means that coalition management systems tend to depend on personal relationships between the leaders, and negotiations are initiated or arranged with the support of close allies sympathetic to the parties.

The leaders of the coalition partners in government meet on an almost daily basis, giving them an opportunity to harmonise their views. In 1992, for example, the MSM-MMM coalition government held weekly meetings known as the *Réunion des Eléphants* or Meeting of Elephants, which provided a platform for discussion and action. There is no doubt that these regular meetings, although they are essentially informal, afford the leadership an opportunity to avoid conflict, although, at times it has proved necessary to bring in brokers or wise men to help sort out differences or misunderstandings between coalition partners. Problems arise when one of the coalition partners leaves or is forced to leave government – a recurrent feature as, historically, coalitions (especially governmental ones) have a short lifespan.

Leaders of the opposition party and other smaller parties which are not represented in Parliament continue to hold meetings but tend to concentrate on internal party matters, although it is important to note that opposition parties frequently join forces. The exception was the case in which members of the opposition MMM joined forces with the ruling MSM, allowing the latter to continue its mandate.

Very little is known about the mechanisms used to initiate, develop and finalise coalition agreements between political parties as matters are always conducted behind closed doors and with the greatest secrecy. For the purpose of this paper, three coalition agreements are studied – those of 1991, 1995 and 2000 and the only source of information documenting aspects of these agreements are newspaper reports of the chronology of events leading to the signed coalition agreements.

In the case of the 1991 agreement that saw the MSM and MMM partnered, negotiations started when the former was still in coalition with the LP and the MMM was in opposition. This was, no doubt, a very awkward situation for the LP, and especially for its then leader, Sir Satcam Boolell, who had fallen out with the

leader of the MSM, the then Prime Minister, over a series of issues, one of them being a change in the Constitution to make Mauritius a republic. This awkwardness was exacerbated when, on 19 July 1990, the MSM and MMM issued a press statement detailing the essence of its pre-electoral agreement (*L'Express* 20 July 1990 and *Le Mauricien* 20 July 1990).

The communiqué covered eleven points dealing with the number of candidates each party would field (MSM 33, MMM 27); the distribution of important posts such as president, vice-president, prime minister, deputy prime minister, speaker and the deputy speaker of the National Assembly and the commitment of the two political partners to making Mauritius a republic. This pre-electoral agreement was made official more than a year before the 1991 general election was called. As expected, this situation became unbearable for the LP, who soon left the coalition government, and the MMM stepped in.

The 1995 coalition agreement brought together the LP and the MMM. In 1993, after a series of problems arose between Paul Bérenger (then Minister of Finance in the 1991 ruling coalition government) and Sir Anerood Jugnauth (then Prime Minister), a split MMM left the coalition government and moved into opposition.

The negotiations between the LP and the MMM started in early 1994 and, after some three months of intense exchanges between the party leaders, the parties came up with a 'package deal which was acceptable to the two parties and more importantly that could be sold to our respective electorate' (*L'Express* 5 April 1994).

The electoral accord was signed on 9 April 1994, more than 18 months before the 1995 general election. The main features dealt with the sharing of tickets (35 for the LP and 25 for the MMM), the prime ministership (LP) and deputy prime ministership (MMM), the allocation of ministerial portfolios (12 for the LP and 9 for the MMM), the presidency (MMM) and the vice-presidency (LP) as well as the position of speaker of the National Assembly (LP) (*L'Express* 9 and 10 April 1994 and *Weekend* 10 April 1994).

Of the three agreements under consideration here, the 2000 agreement required the most extensive negotiation and lobbying. Only a week prior to its signing, the two political protagonists were still proclaiming their intention of going it alone. On 15 August 2000 (less than a month before the general election) the historical pre-electoral accord) that would see for the first time a split prime ministership and an equal share of tickets (30 for the MSM and 30 for the MMM) was signed, as described above. (*L'Express* 14, 15 and 16 August and *Le Mauricien* 16 and 17 August).

In light of the above, it is clear that coalition electoral agreements are never final until they are signed and made public. Potential political coalition partners enter into negotiations, which intensify when the Prime Minister dissolves Parliament and sets the date of the general election as provided in the 1968 Constitution. The aim of these negotiations is for each political partner to get a fair deal, which can in turn be 'sold' to its electorate. Another important feature of these pre-electoral negotiations is that although they can last anything from a whole

year to just a week it is always the 24 hours prior to the signing of the electoral accord by the party leaders that are deemed the most crucial.

Challenges of Sustaining Party Coalitions

The sustainability of a party coalition comes with a set of challenges for the coalition itself and for the affiliate political parties. These challenges start at the formative stage of the coalition, continue through its life and only end when the coalition collapses. What makes party coalition maintenance particularly challenging in Mauritius?

All political parties want to be seen to be politically correct by presenting an inclusive government encompassing all the ethnic groups. This lack of homogeneity constitutes the main weakness of party coalitions in Mauritius. Because of the divergences of policies and personal interest among the coalition partners, it is difficult to reach consensus and satisfy everyone and the compromises and agreements that betray principles cannot go on indefinitely. This makes the survival of the coalition unsustainable over time. The requirement of diversity which allows a coalition to win an election is the very same factor that is the origin of its collapse. It is a political absurdity.

According to one of the respondents, it is more difficult to maintain a coalition made up of two parties of comparable size. He argues that when a dominant party, like the MMM or the LP, each of which enjoys the support of about 30 per cent of the electorate, enters into a coalition with a smaller party, such as the MSM (10%), the coalition is likely to last longer. It is true that the only time the LP and the MMM did coalesce, the alliance did not last, whereas the MSM-LP coalition of 1983 lasted for four years (the LP was made to leave the coalition after a year and was brought back a couple of years later) and the 2000 MMM-MSM coalition lasted the full term. However, the assumption that party coalitions last when they consist of a dominant party and a smaller one is contradicted by a number of examples. Neither the 1982 coalitions between the MMM and the PSM nor that in 1987 between the MSM and the LP lasted. In fact, it seems that the length of survival of a coalition relates to its term of reference and, since coalitions are rarely electoral agreements of equal status (except that of the 2000 general election), they cannot be expected to last.

As detailed above, the collapse of a coalition government does not necessarily mean the end of the government – the frequency with which MPs leave the departing coalition party and form their own to join the government in a new form ensures that most coalition governments survive, albeit in a different form. Aneerood Jugnauth has proven to be most skilful in reconstituting coalitions to his own advantage, a talent that enabled him to remain the Prime Minister of Mauritius without interruption for 13 years, from 1982 to 1994.

Why do so many party coalitions fail to survive in their initial form? The reasons are numerous and include deep differences in policy, power struggles, personal

gain, incompatible leaders' personalities and perceived unfairness of the deal, measured by the number of ministerial and diplomatic appointments and posts in parastatals allotted to each of the affiliate coalition partners. Satisfying the personal ambitions of divergent constituents in relation to promotion, appointments and various favours and privileges has been the main challenge to the maintenance of party coalitions, given that expectations are high while the means of achieving them are limited.

Beyond material gain, at times tensions or splits have occurred because of inadequate consultation and dialogue within the coalition. Regular meetings help coalition partners to harmonise their views in a transparent manner and iron out differences. All of this contributes to building trust and confidence, which are indispensable to the sustainability of any coalition.

The collapse of coalitions may also be the result of internal political problems. Strong leadership is needed to keep the coalition together.

Several respondents interviewed by the authors indicated that it was difficult to sell the concept of the 2000 MSM-MMM coalition to many MSM supporters. These supporters only accepted the arrangement in the hope that the coalition would collapse before the end of the three years, when Bérenger was due to take over from Jugnauth as Prime Minister.

The breakup of coalitions has also been a purely electoral strategy, used particularly when the coalition government is doing badly in the opinion polls and a coalition partner has left some months before the next general election in order to become 'clean'.

It is worth noting that the above challenges apply essentially to ruling party coalitions. Opposition party coalitions face other challenges. First, it is difficult for them to access the state-owned media. Similarly, financial resources are less accessible to the opposition than to the party in power. In addition, the state apparatus is controlled by whoever is in power. It is also not easy for opposition coalitions to convince the electorate that they constitute an alternative government. This can be even harder when the government of the day is perceived to be delivering on its election promises, just as it can be challenging for a ruling coalition to enter an electoral race when the economy is bad and people are unhappy.

A unique difficulty that opposition coalitions face is the challenge of managing the pressure from members who are impatient to get into power. To their advantage, however, is the fact that opposition coalitions are under no pressure to meet the demands of the electorate.

Affiliated parties are affected by coalition related intra-party tensions. According to the respondents interviewed, the MMM, having lost two successive elections (1983 and 1987) by standing alone was desperate to enter a coalition with a large party ahead of the 1991 elections. Reportedly, Bérenger wanted to coalesce with the party's traditional adversary, the Labour Party, while his lieutenants hoped for the reunification of the militant family (ie, MMM-MSM). After the MSM-MMM coalition won the election, Bérenger allegedly destroyed the coalition, using his

role as the party secretary general to criticise the coalition government, of which he was Minister of Finance.

The selection of MP candidates and appointments to important posts outside government is naturally a difficult and competitive process. Competition takes place at two levels: among the coalition partners and among officials within the party. It has been observed that this process runs relatively smoothly when the chances of winning are greater, especially when one of the parties clearly dominates the coalition.

The fact that coalitions mean that fewer seats are available for members of the parties involved often results in some party members opposing the coalition. In some extreme cases, intra-party tensions following some appointment have led to the breakup of coalitions.

In addition, when there are divergences of policy, and for the sake of the coalition's survival, the leadership of one of the parties may choose to accommodate its coalition partners. As a consequence backbenchers may find it difficult to defend unpopular actions taken by the government, which may result in an explosive situation within the party.

Consequences of Coalitions for Affiliate Parties

Although the majority of voters are essentially faithful to their party of origin and are most likely to vote for it in the following election, sizeable numbers may 'sanction' a party for entering certain kinds of coalition.

Most respondents reported that the MSM, which is classified as a conservative Hindu-dominated party, has lost a lot of support because of its alliance with the MMM in 2000, making it possible for a representative of a minority group to occupy the top job of Prime Minister for the first time. Indeed, many sectors of the Hindu community who had hoped that the coalition would collapse by the end of the third year, before the MMM leader could take over as the head of government, expressed their discontent with the arrangement when Bérenger was sworn in as Prime Minister in late 2003.

The MMM-MSM coalition government is believed not to have delivered on several of its election promises and the country is going through a socio-economic crisis. It would be interesting to conduct a survey to determine whether the resentment against the government is caused fundamentally by ethnic feelings or by socio-economic hardship. Would the resentment have been as strong had the Bérenger government clearly delivered on its electoral promises?

There is another important question that deserves to be answered separately in order to determine the extent to which discontent with Bérenger's premiership is essentially ethnically motivated. Is the MSM not weakened more by the discontent over the perceived weak leadership of Pravin Jugnauth than by the fact that the party allowed a non-Hindu to become Prime Minister? Is the recent political 'haemorrhage' that has further weakened the MSM an electoral positioning strategy

by some MSM members, a rejection of Jugnauth junior's leadership or a distancing from Bérenger's leadership?

As pointed out above, a further consequence of party coalition has been rifts within parties, with the MMM the major victim of this phenomenon. Generally, however, the splinter parties do not survive beyond the next general election, the MSM being an exception.

For example, after the split of the MMM-PSM government in 1983, the newly created MSM attracted MMM dissidents and joined forces with the PSM, putting the MMM out of government. Similarly, the MMM-MSM coalition government, which had won 100 per cent of parliamentary seats in the 1991 general election, collapsed following tensions in the coalition and the MMM was again out of government. Led by Prem Nababsing, the *Renouveau Militant Mauricien* (RMM) joined the MSM Prime Minister, allowing the coalition government to continue in power.

Because until recently the leader of the MMM did not qualify to be the Prime Minister of Mauritius because he was not a Hindu the MMM has always been on the losing side. Interestingly, with Bérenger Prime Minister for the first time, it is also the first time that his party has not split as a result of its participation in a coalition government. Instead, roles have been reversed and the MMM's main partner in the coalition, the MSM, lost members in February 2005.

COALITION SURVIVAL

Few party coalitions have survived the full five-year term of office in their original form. Only the 1976 LP-PMSD and the 2000 MMM-MSM have achieved this feat. What are the underlying causes of the longevity of some coalition governments and the short life expectancy of most of them?

One of the respondents believes that success or failure depends on the relative strength of the main coalition partners. He argues that when partners are equally powerful, like, for instance, the LP and the MMM in 1995, there is more likely to be confrontation between the two. When one party is clearly dominant, the coalition is likely to last longer because each party knows the limits of its bargaining power, as was the case with the MMM-MSM coalition of 2000.

While there is some logic in this argument, the 1982 MMM-PSM, the 1987 MSM-LP and the 1991 MSM-MMM coalition governments were all characterised by the existence of one dominant party (the MMM in 1982 and 1991 and the LP in 1987) and one smaller party – the MSM. They all collapsed. Clearly the explanation is more complex and needs to take into consideration other factors as well.

Some respondents argued that, given that pre-election coalitions come with a common programme ahead of the general elections in contrast to post-election coalitions, whose members contested the elections defending different programmes, the former have a better chance of success than the latter. This viewpoint is contradicted by the fact that the only two post-election coalition governments

formed in the country (in 1969 and 1976) did not collapse before the end of their term of office while pre-election coalitions with common programmes, which have been numerous in the history of Mauritius, have rarely lasted a full parliamentary term. Conversely, the development of a governmental programme after an election does not necessarily mean that post-election coalition governments are more vulnerable to early termination than pre-election coalition governments.

The study of the longevity of party coalitions in Mauritius is a complex subject because both objective and subjective factors are often at play. Furthermore, a specific constellation of these factors and circumstances during periods of economic recession or prosperity, the weight of ethnic politics, personal ambition, the leadership skills and personality of party bosses, electoral strategy, the relative strength of coalition partners and trust, respect and dialogue or the lack thereof, all impact on their survival or premature termination.

CONCLUSION

The formation, collapse and revival of party coalitions are an integral part of Mauritian political culture. Party coalitions are seen as indispensable to the accommodation of the country's ethnic diversity, consensus building and social cohesion. Coalitions have usually taken the form of ethnic accommodation, a vehicle that politicians have used extensively to access or maintain power. The packaging and ultimately the selling of these coalitions to the electorate is done with the necessary spin and very often the coalitions are named in celebratory language such as 'Parti de L'indépendance' (1967), 'Parti Alliance Nationale' (1982), 'L'Alliance Bleu Blanc Rouge' (1983), 'L'Union pour le Future' (1987) and 'Alliance Sociale' (2005) which essentially emphasise the sense of solidarity and consensus that brings different parties together.

Another point to bear in mind is that the Mauritian mainstream parties seem to espouse common ideologies built around the fundamental concepts of social justice, sustainable and equitable development and a people-oriented investment strategy. In fact, interviews with key political actors from the three mainstream political parties define their respective parties as centre-left.

This study has attempted to answer broad research questions such as: what brings political parties together in a coalition? How are coalitions negotiated? Who is entitled to negotiate on behalf of the political parties? How are coalition relationships nurtured? What makes coalitions survive, collapse and revive?

Extensive interviews with current and past senior party officials and leaders allowed the authors to understand the internal working of political party coalitions and to answer the above questions. It is our conclusion that the ultimate objective of political party coalitions is to win elections and govern the country. Contrary to widespread belief, party coalitions are not formed essentially to accommodate the country's ethnic diversity. While highly desirable and desired, ethnic accommodation has been a vehicle through which to access or maintain political power.

It is not an end in itself. Otherwise the 1983 and 1987 coalition governments would not have consisted of parties essentially dominated by one communal group.

Similarly, it has been found that party coalitions exacerbate the under-representation of women in elected positions. Women in Mauritius find themselves having to compete at both the intra- and inter-party levels. In the case of intra-party competition, they are confronted by 'ferocious' opposition from their male colleagues, which is compounded when a coalition is formed because of the sharing of electoral tickets.

The study has also noted that coalition negotiations are conducted essentially by party leaders and other senior party officials and that coalition management procedures are informal and often lack explicit conflict management mechanisms.

As to the mechanisms for maintaining the coalition, regular and periodic meetings (preferably weekly) are essential. By means of sincere dialogue, coalition partners may learn to trust and respect each other, develop a sense of tolerance and flexibility and enhance their commitment to the coalition because problems arise when each party tries to get the best of a deal, undermining the value and relevance of the meetings.

It is also crucial that the coalition agreement be fair to all parties. Coalitions serve their purpose well if policies are spelled out and addressed. The electorate judges the value of a coalition by its ability to improve the quality of their lives. This means that the coalition government must strive to deliver on its promises.

It has been observed that coalitions become more fragile as a general election approaches; this is especially the case when the outgoing coalition government is rated low in public opinion polls and is expected to lose the coming election.

One of the weaknesses of coalitions in Mauritius is the fact that there is no law governing them. They should be registered and their objective, duration and agreement made public because, like political parties, they are institutions of public interest. The agreements linking political parties in coalitions should be in the public domain. At the same time, excessive regulation of coalitions and political parties should be avoided as this could impinge on freedom of association.

In the final analysis, the strength of party coalitions in Mauritius is the consensus over the need to accommodate the country's ethnic diversity in its political institutions. Party coalitions win elections thanks to ethnic accommodation, which, in turn, helps increase their appeal among a broader constituency than the narrow groupings of the constituent parties; a reassuring sign of inclusiveness for the electorate. It is argued abundantly above that the main weakness of party coalitions in Mauritius is to be found in the precedence of ethnic over ideological identity, which makes them fragile in the face of ethnic pressure. Can it, however, be argued that by coalescing along ethnic lines Mauritian parties and their leaders have, over time, learned to work together beyond their ethnic allegiances and have evolved towards a common ideology characterised by a respect for human rights, social democracy and national cohesion, which, if not examined more closely, tends to look like an absence of ideology?

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