

South Africa's Second Democratic Election

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This study is about the recent, June 1999, elections in South Africa. The focus is on the contesting political parties and the successes or failures they have experienced. An attempt is made to analyze the major political parties in relation to their performances, provincially and nationally, but also centre attention on a number of factors that have influenced the election process, the parties' problems and prospects. The methodological stance reflects a predominantly analytical and descriptive approach. The study proceeds to apply this analytical and approach by, firstly, reviewing selected literature and outlining the nature of the political campaigns, electoral process and opinion polls as well as some of the unique characteristics of the major political parties. While these characteristics are, in the main crude and tentative, they nonetheless suggest some relevance to people's voting preferences. This descriptive characterization is followed by an analytical view of the "aftermath of the elections", their implications for social transformation, reconstruction and development agenda of the country in general and the ruling party in particular.

Introduction: Some theoretical insights

Available literature suggests that there are both classical and modern studies on voting behaviour and preferences, party identification and attitudes as well as opinions (Rossi 1959, Tingsten 1957; Merriam and Gosnell 1924). In terms of party identification, key theoretical variables and conceptual frameworks relevant to our study are those of majorities and minorities (Kinloch 1979). Whilst these typological frameworks may give analysis both scope and unity as well as potential for accounting for a wide range of social and political voter preferences, they nonetheless have their limitations, including the fact that they are extremely broad and tentative, requiring refinement and testing, especially in light of the country's state of social and economic flux as well as changing social class scenarios - especially among the burgeoning black middle class.

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Other studies have focused on methodological issues - such as conceptual and analytical differences in election studies (Somit & Tanenhaus 1963). Such works have served the purpose of orienting the subject towards significant problems by encouraging decompartmentalization and multi-disciplinary which take into cognizance the insights of history, psychology, sociology, economics, political science or anthropology.

This call for catholicity both in interests and methods of examining political and social behaviour preferences is supported - in part - by the view that neither sociology nor political science is noted for any clear-cut consensus concerning scope and method. As one author put it

"Within sociology, for example, debate is enjoined about the relative merits of conflict or consensus theories of society, so-called 'grand' theorising versus qualitative methods, and so on. Similarly, with political science a debate ranges over such matters as the behaviourists versus more traditional modes of political enquiry, the status of comparative study, the meaning of the term 'political' and the current relevance of classical political theory and philosophy. Clearly a subject so ambiguous in its status vis a vis political science and sociology is likely to defy uncontroversial elucidation" (Dowse & Hughes, 1985:1).

Still other studies stress the "unifying frame of reference for the special student of politics" which is "the rich and variable," the "powerful and the powerless" (Laswell 1958). These studies also explain how and in what ways the social, economic and political are interrelated to impact on voting preferences (Dahl, 1963; Weber, 1948) as well as how "politics occurs when there are differential in power". The relationship between governed and the governors (Mosca, 1939), symbols and ideologies with which the masses can identify and which are in accord with people's social idiom, also come into play.

Finally there is the multiparty or plurality system itself which, as it will be pointed out, tends to have unique problems of its own - the tendency to yield representation which is disproportionate to votes (Blackburn, 1995:362-64), such that the influence of voter outcomes, of elections is undermined. Other scholars have pointed out that the system leads to distorted electoral outcomes and does so in favour of large, well-organized political parties or coalition of interests (McLean, 1987:104; Sarton, 1994:9; Taagepera & Shugart, 1989:57, 142-155).

Notwithstanding the many problems associated the plurality system, there is evidence to suggest that within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) the system is recommended for "delivering free, fair, transparent and legitimate elections" (Madakufamba, 1997, Chimhete, 1997, Machipisa, - in Mail & Guardian, December, 8, 1996). These legitimate elections are often contrasted with situations of rising to power by the barrel of the gun or force. The latter is the so-called method of "beasts" (Machiavelli, 1958), of dictators and tyrants sharply distinguished from the method of democrats which involves the rising to power through the ballot box. Clearly, the latter form is constituted by the new South Africa as a case in point.

So, having sketched what may be the major theoretical focus of this study, it might be as well to address a few statements on the electoral process and campaigns through which party political activities in the country have been conducted.

The Electoral Process

A brief note on the nature of the political campaigns, the electoral process, and the opinion polls is in order as these are equally important and critical elements to the success of the elections themselves.

The rhetoric of South Africa's party political poster campaigns is rich in imaginative manipulation of reality. Their impact on voters is, however less certain. The electoral posters of the opposition parties, in particular, made for dismal reading: "Hang Killers and Rapists", "No Mercy". "The Guts to Fight Back", "Death Penalty for Murderers". For the New National Party, the Freedom Front, and the Federal Alliance, judging by the posters, the death penalty become the single election platform. However, parties like the Democratic Party, which had hoped to present themselves as more sophisticated, have fallen back on a message of "gatvol", appealing neither to intellect nor heart, but to myopia and "guts".

With these posters, most opposition parties like crime their major issue. This gave the parties opportunities to heap scorn on the government's attempts to maintain law and order. And because criminals tend to be indiscriminate about who they victimize, this makes law and order and sue on which parties can hope to broaden their support base.

As for the opinion polls released before elections, they showed that a two-thirds majority was within reach of the African National Congress. Polls also showed that KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape, the only two provinces currently not controlled by the ANC, could be won by the ruling party, albeit not with an outright majority, raising the possibilities of coalition government in both provinces. As it turned out, only in KwaZulu-Natal did the ANC succeed in joining a coalition government.

Observers have also noted that the focus during the 1999 election period and beyond should be:

- accelerating the delivery of basic needs;
- transforming the state and building capacity for delivery; and combating corruption and crime.

These electioneering perspectives can be tested through a comparison of results from opinion surveys - the opinion polls carried out before the election - with emerging election results to which we now turn our attention. But, first, a brief statement on the electoral process and results of the electoral polls - in that order.

With regard for the former, available evidence suggests that there has been a high degree of national consensus - across the racial and party political divide - in the legitimacy of the election process, despite complaints related to long queues, delays at Home Affairs Department offices in issuing ID or perceived inefficiencies with the registration process, etc.

And on the results of the polls, South African voters, and especially Africans, are on the whole astute in assessing their situation and making the best choice. What is more, they have a clear sense of strategy to advance their interests, suggesting that the grassroots definitely vote with their heads. For political analysts the outcome of the election is a message to continue reflecting the perspective of people at grassroots level in assessing the progress of transformation in South Africa. As for the winning party, its effort is on track and, as we shall demonstrate, it has increased its base especially among the poor who yearn for quicker implementation.

In the section that follows, focus is on oppositional case studies of major political parties starting with the New National Party (NNP). This will, be

followed by the Democratic Party (DP), the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) and "Indian constituencies in Natal" - in that order. These parties to the right of the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), are contrasted with black opposition organizations on the left including the Pan-African Congress (PAC), Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO), and the Socialist Party of Azania (SOPA).

The New National Party (NNP)

South Africa's second democratic election saw the virtual extinction of the party that invented apartheid but also NNP entry into coalition prospects in the Western Cape - with resultant inter and intra-party dynamics provincially. Two interrelated factors seem responsible for this state of affairs. Firstly, before elections, a spate of high level defections threatened NNP's regional hold. The Western Cape, once the bastion of NNP dominance, began to resemble a quagmire of political, opportunism, intrigue, and shifting allegiances which threatened the party's grip on power.

Perceptions vary as to the reasons for defections, which have occurred across party political lines. Some observers accuse defectors of political opportunism - the bedfellow of corruption - meaning that with the change of party affiliation before elections they want to plug into where the power lies. Defectors, on the other hand, claim to have miraculously undergone the Damascus experience (City Press, 4 April 1999:7).

Overall, the defectors have cited lack of vision and transformation as the motive that prompted them to jump ship. Adherents of apartheid ideology from previous racist regimes are blamed for hijacking not only the party's policies but also the Western Cape government.

Secondly, the NNP has performed badly in all provinces. Its national profile has taken a hard knock as a result of its small numbers provincially and nationally.

The NNP saw its share of the vote drop to about only 7%, a third of the support it enjoyed in 1994. It also lost its position as the largest opposition party - and official opposition. Unlike Tony Leon of the DP, the leader of the NNP, Martinus van Schalkwyl, failed to fill in the role of the saviour of those scared of the new South Africa but was willing to enter strategic alliances

with other opposition parties, less so with the ruling African National Congress. Whilst the NNP first preference was partnership with opposition parties, the party could not but rule out a coalition in the Western Province with the ANC.

Democratic Party (DP)

The DP is essentially a liberal party dominated by whites (both English and Afrikaans speaking) Coloureds and Indians - and a few blacks.

South Africa's white liberals, proud of having been part of the struggle to rid the country of apartheid, have come in for harsh criticism in the past five years. One such criticism is that, with rare exceptions, apartheid bred the liberals it deserved, embodying bigotry, and not battling it; that white liberals fought nominally for democracy, having for many years dabbled with balkanized federalism, even partition and a qualified franchise, but when full democracy arrived many of them simply took fright and, instead of seeing the potential for good, saw their privileges threatened.

More critical is the fact that many blacks in the DP are liberals - they believe in the rights of the individual, in the free-market economy, freedom of speech, the rule of law, and all other values cherished by liberals the world over; the party's ready acceptance of perceived conservatives (some have said racists) have merely added to perceptions among many detractors of liberalism that the party is a home to rich, white conservatives whose sole role is to block whatever attempts there may be at change. When change has not occurred, talk of a neo-colonialist conservative liberal agenda has flourished.

As a result, Black who have defected from the DP have indicated their shame to be associated with the "right wing ideologies" who are flocking to the DP, where black members are "used as tokens" to attract black voters. Not only is leadership style one of the compelling reasons for defections, but also the DP is perceived as opposed to transformation because "it does not believe in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, where "some are more equal than others" (Dr Bukelwa Mbulawa, the Democratic Party's most senior black member, who defected to the ANC, cited in the *City Press*, 28 March 1999:2).

A major rallying point for the DP was the threat of a two-thirds-majority victory for the ANC. Its supporters cast their votes as a white-minority bloc

although only 4 percent of the voters in the next 2004 election will be white. Some of its traditional liberal supporters have moved away from what they see as a group of "white wingers". They cast their vote for the ANC, seeing the negative connotations in the DP's "fight back" slogan as being against majority rule.

In particular, the DP (and NNP) stance regarding ANC participation in a coalition government of the Western Cape has made critics skeptical of the party's political agenda. The DP has not only rejected the principle of meaningful role for the majority party, the ANC, but also opposed inclusivity of the provincial government of national unity.

It is clear, therefore, from the foregoing, that a democratic system of any country relies on an adversarial approach for democracy to work; however, it is unfortunate that the DP's triumph is consigning the NNP to the rubbish bin of history in order to assume the role of the opposition has - through its campaign - effectively exploited the racial divisions of the past. Unlike the NNP, which has tried to distance itself from the role as champions of white privilege, the DP has resorted to the ideology of the "swart gevaar" and of racist identity.

It follows that the challenge before any serious opposition in the politics of South Africa is to appeal to the vast majority of voters and that means to appeal to black people who currently vote of the ANC. Voters need to feel a party is not only sensitive to their problems and aspirations but that it is also part of their social idiom so to speak. As long as the ANC appeals to the collective loyalty forged in the heat of the struggle against apartheid, there will be no room for real opposition outside the old - largely racial - divides of the past. What South Africans have, in the absence of real opposition, is democracy postponed (Mail & Guardian, 28 May - 3 June 1999:28).

So far the attempt has been made to focus analysis on the DP within the country's politics of electioneering, paying attention to its rallying points, and how it has robbed the NNP of the position of official opposition. This has occurred in an election where most of its gains were made in the Afrikaner heartland and among those dissatisfied with the ruling party because of how government policy has affected them - the group that came to be known as the "gatvol".

In the next section of this paper, emphasis is on the ACDP, especially on its unique leadership, principled political stance, and voting preferences.

African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP)

In a sense, the ACDP's modest election victory suggests that the party should be taken seriously. In both the national and provincial ballots, it gained significant ground such that concerns of moral realists - i.e. opposition to abortion, pornography, and gay rights - need to be taken seriously. The party leadership draws its followers mainly from the independent African churches as well as from the so-called "born agains". Its eminent leader, and himself a staunch "born again", is Kenneth Meshoe.

At times his beliefs seem to put him outside the domain of political reasoning. For example, he is reported to have said that the "ANC government will not last as long as they believe in Marxist philosophies and are anti-God" (*The Sunday Independent*, 25 April 1999:6). He has also surprised the South African nation when he declared that life was better under the apartheid government because the former Nat rules "believed in God". The ACDP itself believes so profoundly so in the death penalty that it voted against the new constitution even though it believed in its overall validity.

Alongside the ACDP as one of the "minority" parties vying for positions in the mainstream politics of the land is the Minority Front (MF) based in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Whereas as the ACDP enjoys a wider geographical and social spread, the MF is largely a provincial force, integrated into a local community of ethnic politics. In the next section, we examine the electoral and related challenges facing this Indian minority party, in particular, the twin pressures associated with party political demands and the broader, multifaceted process of belonging to the "national" community.

Indian Constituencies in Natal

Opposition parties in KwaZulu-Natal - such as the DP, NNP and FF have attempted to convince the Indian population that it is a marginalized minority and have fuelled insecurity within a community already fearful of the triumvirate of crime, affirmative action and Africanism. The DP and Minority Front, in particular, have, through elicit electioneering slogans, sparked discussion around the racial division between Africans and Indians

in the province. Their campaigns have done much to perpetuate the idea that the Indian community is under siege. Even the FF have sought to make the Indian electorate aware of self-determination - indicating that they will have to look at their own minority rights as well as the idea of forming a strong alliance to oppose the ANC in the 2004 elections.

The ANC, by contrast, have taken legal and political measures - with success - against the NNP, preventing it from distributing election material claiming that the ANC did not have the interests of Indians at heart. Of crucial importance is the organization doing the, most of allay Indian fears around affirmative action and crime. A group of prominent Indians, the Concerned Citizens Group, that includes anti-apartheid stalwarts such as Fatima Meer, Anant Singh and Ronnie Govender, have urged Indian voters to reject the DP and NNP. Their central plea is for the Indian People "not to side with the former oppressors", but rather with "the vast majority of the oppressed and the poor".

Whether this attempt to counter the tried-and-tested methods of "swart gevaar" will be successful remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that the tenuous political space Indians find themselves in will remain problematic for beyond the 1999 elections.

It suffices to say that, given the balance of power in KwaZulu-Natal, a give-and-take of sorts is unavoidable. However, whatever the trade-offs the Minority Front intends making, it is likely to be guided by the central imperatives that shape the interest of its party members.

So far, attention has been given to opposition parties to the right of the ANC, focusing on, inter alia, voting preferences, party identification, and attitudes as well as opinions. In the next section, a similar spotlight is turned to predominantly black political organizations - though in summarized fashion.

PAC, AZAPO, AND SOPA

To the left of the ANC are parties such as the PAC, AZAPO, and SOPA. Their manifestos have so much in common one wonders why they do not amalgamate. Similarly, with the white opposition, parties, what former President Mandela calls "Mickey Mouse" parties. Rather than exhibiting a soft to new heights of patriotism, and building a country in which colour and

creed are irrelevant and the nation's interests take precedence over petty political agendas, white political parties serve fundamentally white interests. Thus, for some, stuck in a time warp, the most important thing is still fighting the communists, apartheid-style; others want to "fight back" against the tide of transformation only to discover that tides are unstoppable. Still others want an exclusive "homeland" for their Chosen People only to find that the farm lands they vacate in moving to their "volkstaat" would be redistributed to landless blacks.

Whether left or right, and indeed beyond these ideological divides, there is no party that could have matched the performance of the ANC on the process of transformation by levelling the political and economic fields through delivery of basic services to the previously disadvantaged. Furthermore, any party villifying the ANC as an exclusively Africanist party wanting to sideline minorities, loses its credibility. There are actually more non-Africans in the ANC (up to Cabinet level) than in any other party.

From the foregoing, it is evident that there are two opposition blocs: one if to the right of the ANC and is centred on the DP, (most members of the) NNP and the UDM. The other is, rhetorically at least, on the left and comprises the small PAC, AZAPO and SOPA. Between these - left and right - opposition poles there appears to be no common ground.

Among the three black organizations, which have positioned themselves as viable alternative parties with the potential to pull a vast number of black supporters away from the ANC, none appears to have a chance of survival after the elections. Indeed, all three organizations have been, wrecked by internal divisions and bitter leadership struggles that have torn them apart before the elections. As the black political opposition, they are now faced with the choice of either uniting or being condemned into political oblivion.

Furthermore, none of the parties to ANC's left or right produced a critique of its Growth, Employment and Redistribution policy worth commenting on. Much of the electioneering was around crime and the "gatvol" factor - turned into a high art by the Democratic Party, which has now usurped the NNP as the premier representative of those white South Africans who still seek a racist/tribal identity.

Consequently, it should follow that the ANC will retain the policies of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macro-economic package as appropriate for the party's second five-year term of office. As both the programme and the policy remain "correct", the next government will continue to be bound by them.

Using mainly appositional case studies and working within a micro and macro-scope framework of provincial and national election politics, this paper has attempted a sketchy exploration of the underlying factors, elements, and processes relating to voting patterns and preferences, within South Africa's second democratic elections. In the final section below, we extend the analysis beyond a focus on party political parameters to cover the "aftermath of the elections" - the party political successes and failures, the major beneficiaries, and future imperatives for both the democratic movement and the next government.

The Aftermath of Elections

An important aftermath of South Africa's 1999 elections is that democracy is not only expressed in multi-party elections, but also through the institutions and processes of power sharing. Thus, whereas in 1994, some 21 parties from the ultra right to the far left of the political spectrum, learning to play by the rule of democratic contestation. Here the problem is that, while the governing party stood to win over 65% of the votes, 40 other parties scrambled for the other 35%. Simply put, South African opposition parties are too small, fractured and severely fragmented.

On the other hand, a case could be made that a two-thirds majority only five years after apartheid is neither in the ANC's nor the country's interest, that South Africa needs burden sharing and co-operative governance. However, the ANC came very close to this majority because of the poor opposition.

A more central trend is that the 1999 Elections have shifted the country's politics to the centre, suggesting that winners have been those with liberal economic and social agendas. The major beneficiaries were the ANC and the DP as well as IFP. Here is evident a triumph for democracy, richly rewarding parties of the centre, parties that are basically liberal democratic in their economic policy orientation and principles.

By contrast, parties advocating a return to apartheid and the establishment of a separate Afrikaner homeland were rejected out of hand. Similarly, parties with ethnic loyalties were put aside in favour of more rational liberal democratic alternatives. Indeed, the most conspicuous election trend had been the rejection of parties on the left and right fringes, which have been reduced to one or two members of parliament each, without exception. Put differently, the electorate was no longer tolerant of populism but accepts the pragmatic centrist programme of the ruling party.

No less important is the fact that the election results reflected the trust the "poorest of the poor" place in the ANC's commitment "to help them out of their conditions of misery". This trust in itself derives from the organization's programme for reconstruction and development and the commitment therein to engineer social transformation in a way that delivers critical essentials for "a better life" - first and foremost to the poor.

The challenges now facing the ANC are practical. They are about delivery - most particularly about rapid economic growth, jobs and a plan to help millions get themselves out of poverty. Of all these, the hard part - almost an imperative for the next president - will be to deliver growth.

From the foregoing, it appears then that South Africans have broken with the past with the overwhelming majority wanting a government that will meet the considerable challenges the country faces. These are, however, daunting challenges. First priority appears to be unemployment - an issue that tops the reconstruction and development agenda - which can be tackled with the private sector, ensuring that the economy grows at a healthy rate, creates new jobs and continues to develop into a modern and internationally competitive economy. Secondly, is the problem of crime and the need for radical improvement of safety and security of all citizen and addressing problems bedevilling a visibly demoralized police force and overburdened justice system. Thirdly, is the issue of housing delivery, the crises that continues to plague schools, the looming disaster that is HIV/AIDS and the much-vaunted African Renaissance.

In future government led by Mbeki, ANC-aligned officials must replace the "old order" officials in positions of power and influence in the civil service, to speed up the ANC's transformation programme. The vice-presidency designed to take over power, must make the presidency the centre of a

powerful network, of loyal ANC activists. Reshuffles of powerful positions in the police, army, public prosecutions, revenue service, foreign affairs, reserve bank, etc; should signal the incoming president's intentions. It is finance positions, at both ministerial and sub-ministerial levels that are lately to stay - if only to convince the market that nothing is changing.

Does a two-thirds majority matter? On balance, the ANC wants to interfere less with so-called "civil or property rights" or to curb the independence of institutions such as the auditor general, regarded as an agent of the old regime intent merely on harassing their comrades in the new government. The underlying objective in advocating constitutional changes would be to give the state greater powers to redistribute wealth.

On the other hand, opposition parties representing "white privilege" are likely to continue opposing the ANC's prospects for the two-thirds threshold. This view finds considerable support within the DP, NNP, and other opposition parties. Furthermore, financial markets are likely to take unkindly to ANC measures to curb the autonomy of the Reserve Bank or the auditor general. As one observer put it, the "markets would punish the South Africa economy very heavily" (Barrell, 1999:25).

Concluding Remarks

It would appear that the democratic movement must resist the liberal concept of "less government", which, while being presented as a philosophical approach towards the state in general, is in fact aimed specifically at the weakening of the democratic state. The purpose of this offensive is precisely to deny the people the possibility to use the collective strength and means concentrated in the democratic state to bring about the transformation of society.

The threat that Thabo Mbeki's leadership may present to the country is the familiar confusion of state and party in which the constitution is reduced to meaningless ornamentation. Inherent in Mbeki's approach to government is the belief that the ANC is not a party as such but still a liberation movement. He is reported to have, stated that it is only when the country has been "transformed" that "the ANC will begin to identify itself in terms of different schools of political thought."

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