

SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL ELECTIONS, 1994-2009: A CONTEXTUAL COMPARISON

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Abstract

The article compares the national elections from 1994 to 2009 contextually and argues that the most important developments in politics did not take place within the systems as measured against election results, but precisely within the broader context. Notwithstanding, the national elections are important comparable milestones which indeed point out the contextual instead of the system nature of South African politics.

1. INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

“The ANC...is faced by [an] unprecedented caustic and politically crippling leadership struggle” (Wines 2007).

The ANC, “which led the struggle against apartheid, is bracing for a potentially bruising split on Saturday as dissidents open a convention to prepare to launch a rival party” (Mail & Guardian 2008).

These headlines reflect the turbulent preamble to the 2009 national election. The so-called split did occur, but the African National Congress (ANC) was still elected with a vast majority. The face of South African politics has, however, changed with speculation over “business as usual” (a pattern of ANC electoral domination since 1994) or “business as usual” (a new, strengthened opposition and competitive democracy) becoming the order of the day - this debate pertaining not just to election results but, as this article will show, especially to politics outside of Parliament as accompaniment to the elections.

Eventually the Congress of the People (COPE) was formed and this party outperformed much older and more established parties, such as the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), Freedom Front (FF)+ and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), garnering the third most seats in Parliament (30), behind the ANC and the Democratic Alliance (DA), on its first outing at the polls. This however does not define the most important issue, which is the fact that the ANC (and the bigger governing alliance), that, according to some of its members, would govern South Africa until the second coming of Christ (Mkhwanazi 2008), all of a sudden did not seem so monolithically powerful or so staunchly democratic. The powerhouse liberation movement, turned messianic political party, within the bigger Tri-partite Alliance seemed, for the

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first time after the 2009 general election, to have cracks, divisions and hegemonic aspirations. (In this sense perhaps the 2009 general election was a watershed.)

This perception of deep divisions (suggesting more populist, more anti-colonialist, less liberal democratic and perhaps less pro-1994/1996 constitutional sentiments) has subsequently been shown as accurate, with the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) being involved in public spats, and the ANCYL saying: “Members of the ANC and ANCYL are called upon to rise and defend the African National Congress against the pressure groups and factionalists masquerading as communists” (Mboyisa 2009a); COPE supporters being called “snakes”, “dogs”, and “cockroaches” (the last name having been the name the Hutu extremists used to justify the genocide in Rwanda [Johnson 2009:6400]); various powerful figures within the ANC experiencing inter- and intrarole conflict by virtue of dual loyalties to the ANC and the SACP with Gwede Mantashe, SACP Chairman and ANC General Secretary, refusing to give Julius Malema (ANCYL) a chance to address SACP delegates, booing him and Billy Masetlha (an ANC National Executive Committee member); Masetlha having previously warned the SACP and COSATU not to “impose their socialist views on the ANC” and the purges of Mbeki supporters from the ANC with resulting chaos at local and provincial government level (ANC 2009) and of course the infamous and recurring “Shoot the boere...they are rapists.”

The 2009 election not only revealed the nature of internal ANC and Tripartite Alliance politics, but differed from the other democratic elections in South Africa in other ways as well, a few examples being that:

- South African citizens living abroad could vote, with the DA taking 77% of the expat votes.
- The new party, COPE, outperformed older parties as mentioned above.
- The DA emerged as winner in the Western Cape and took over the Provincial Government.
- The ANC defeated the IFP in Kwazulu-Natal.
- The ANC’s support declined from 69,69% in 2004 to 65,9% in 2009 (Mboyisa 2009b).

In the light of these factors the goal of this article is to employ a contextual comparison to describe changes in the South African political landscape, using the national elections from 1994 to 2009 as the comparative milestones. From this comparison certain trends will become discernible.

Concerning methodology, it is important to note that only the national elections of 1994, 1999, 2004 and 2009 will be included for comparison. Further, the method that will be employed to attain the stated goal will be firstly to provide a

short description of the development of the South African electoral system, secondly to draw up a collated table of election results for 1994 through to 2009, thirdly, to use this table to sketch the background for a comparative historical analysis of the various national elections, and fourthly, from within this comparison to identify certain specific trends for further description. Thereafter conclusions can be drawn in accordance with the goals of this article.

Firstly, however, a short historical background is needed regarding the development of the South African electoral system.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The South African electoral system came into being in 1909 when the South Africa Act was passed by the British Parliament establishing the Constitution of the Union of South Africa and a parliamentary system similar to the Westminster model composed of a directly elected House of Assembly and an indirectly elected Senate (Alvarez-Rivera 2009). This system was a simple first-past-the-post majoritarian system that restricted representation to white men only, except in the Cape where a small group of black and coloured males were allowed to vote owing to property right considerations. In 1930 representation was extended to white, but not to black or coloured, women. In 1955 coloured voters were removed by the National Party from the common voters' role (Alvarez-Rivera 2009).

On 5 October 1960 a referendum was held among the white community, the result of which was the formation of the Republic of South Africa. The new Constitution, the Republic of South Africa Constitution Act of 1961 (based on the South Africa Act of 1909), brought little change, except by replacing the British monarch with a ceremonial state president (Alvarez-Rivera 2009).

The National Party under Prime Minister (State President from September 1984) PW Botha introduced a number of political reforms due to growing domestic and foreign criticism of the apartheid policies. A new constitution was introduced in 1983 which provided for three houses of Parliament: the 178 seat House of Assembly (whites only), the 85 seat House of Representatives (coloured), and the 45 seat House of Delegates (Indian). Each chamber would have responsibility over "own affairs" such as education, social welfare and housing, while "general affairs" such as defence, finance and foreign policy required approval from all three chambers.

This Constitution made no provision for enfranchising black South Africans and in spite of some reform measures the distribution of power remained unchanged (Alvarez-Rivera 2009). Under FW de Klerk, who became State President in 1989, reform was accelerated, the bans on the SACP, the PAC and the ANC and other political organisations were lifted and Nelson Mandela was released from prison.

In 1994 all South Africans voted for a democratic government. These elections were proclaimed free and fair by the IEC Independent Electoral Committee (IEC) and international observers (Alvarez-Rivera 2009). In May 1996 the Constitutional Assembly (a joint sitting of the National Assembly and the Senate) adopted the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. This document, along with the Electoral Act of 1998, the Electoral Commission Act of 1996, the Public Funding of Represented Political Parties Act of 1997, Local Government: Municipal Structures Act of 1998, Local Government: Municipal Demarcation Act of 1998 and the Local Government: Municipal Electoral Act of 2000, forms the legal basis for the current South African electoral system (Alvarez-Rivera 2009).

Under this system, elections for seats in the National Assembly take place every five years on the basis of direct universal adult suffrage. The composition of the National Assembly, that elects the President of the country, is determined by proportional representation. One half (200) of the seats in the National Assembly are filled from regional lists submitted by the political parties with the remaining half being filled from national lists. These lists are closed; voters can thus not vote for a specific candidate, place a candidate on the list, or delete a candidate from the list (Alvarez-Rivera 2009; EISA 2006). Thus, on the national level, the South African electoral system is a pure proportional representation list system that “gives party leaders power to choose, expel and switch list members in and out of Parliament at will. South Africa allows neither the representation of constituencies nor independent-minded MPs. Only parties are represented and only party bosses matter” (Johnson 2009:13). Pottinger (2008:42-43) qualifies this statement since, according to him, this is necessary to negate a winner-takes-all mentality, but it does result in a system where no parliamentarian is accountable to a constituency.

As illustration of this primacy of political parties, a table is presented below of the collated election results for the elections under discussion in this article.

3. THE ELECTION RESULTS: 1994, 1999, 2004 AND 2009

Methodological note: Figure 1 is compiled on the basis of the minimum number of one seat gained in the National Assembly in the election of 2009. Furthermore, not all parties contested all elections; historically important parties such as the NP were included as they represented a fundamental factor in the 1994 election, as well as being an indicator of the shift in political attitude as this party disintegrated.

Thus the parties represented in alphabetical order in Figure 1 are: The ACDP (African Christian Democratic Party); the ANC (African National Congress); the APC (African People’s Convention); AZAPO (Azanian People’s Organisation); COPE (Congress of the People); the DP, DPSA/DA (Democratic Alliance); FF+/VF+ (Freedom Front +); ID (Independent Democrats); the IFP (Inkatha Freedom Party); the MF (Minority Front); NP/ NNP (National Party); PAC (Pan Africanist

Congress of Azania); UCDP (United Christian Democratic Party) and the UDM (United Democratic Movement). The goal of this figure is to give a broad perspective on the changes and constants in party politics in South Africa as exemplified by the physical electoral results from 1994 till 2009.

Figure 1: Comparative election results 1994-2009

POLITICAL PARTY	1994		1999		2004		2009	
	VALID VOTES	TOTAL SEATS	VALID VOTES	TOTAL SEATS	VALID VOTES	TOTAL SEATS	VALID VOTES	TOTAL SEATS
ACDP	88104	2	228975	6	250 272	7	142658	3
ANC	12237655	252	10601330	266	10880915	279	11650748	264
APC	*	*	*	*	*	*	35867	1
AZAPO	*	*	27257	1	39116	1	38245	1
COPE	*	*	*	*	*	*	1311027	30
DP/ DPSA/ DA	338426	7	1527337	38	1931201	50	2945829	67
FF+/VF+	424555	9	127 217	3	139465	4	146796	4
ID	*	*	*	*	269765	7	162915	4
IFP	2058294	43	1371477	34	1088 664	28	804260	18
MF	*	*	*	*	55 267	2	43474	1
NP/NNP	3983690	82	1098215	28	257824	7	*	*
PAC	243478	5	113125	3	113512	3	48530	1
UCDP	*	*	125280	3	117792	3	66086	2
UDM	*	*	546790	14	355717	9	149680	4

(IEC 2009a; IEC 2009b; Election Resources 2009)

From the figure above the following becomes apparent:

- The ANC enjoys close to, or an actual, $\frac{2}{3}$ majority in every election.
- Over the four elections the four most important parties have been the ANC, the DA (or DP as it was first known); the NP/NNP (that no longer exists), and the IFP.
- A variety of smaller (very low impact) parties exists that has virtually no influence in the National Assembly.
- The ANC and thus the government has been stable.
- The NP/NNP, through various transformations, degenerated into extinction.
- The Progressive Party/Democratic Party became the Democratic Alliance (DA) and in contrast to the NP, which it largely replaced, grew stronger.
- COPE, the splinter party/group from the ANC coming from within the Tripartite Alliance, outperformed much older parties and became a serious political contender.
- The main changes in party politics have occurred in the realm of opposition politics. *Yet only limited inroads have been made into ANC support and power bases.*
- The 2009 election is the first election that the ANC won where discernible internal stress and rifts have become evident.
- This election is also the first where a transition of power from one elite to another elite (albeit within the governing party or alliance) took place.

In conclusion: When the election results are compared, a picture of business as usual (total ANC dominance) is painted. This does not, however, represent all the facts. In order to further compare the various elections a more qualitative historical method needs to be employed. For this reason the various elections will now be compared in greater historical detail.

4. A COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL ANALYSIS: THE ELECTIONS OF 1994, 1999, 2004 AND 2009

In this section the historical backgrounds of the different democratic elections (1994-2009) will be compared.

1994

In 1994 the grand political transition of South Africa took place. Apartheid, the system of institutionalised discrimination, called a settler oligarchy by Bratton and Van de Walle (1998:78), was transformed into a democracy. From 26-29 April 1994, millions of South Africans voted for the first time. The ANC became the government, winning 62,2% of the vote (Alvarez-Rivera 2009). The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP)² became the macro policy framework and nation building became the national objective.

The ANC swept to power with the dual slogans: “A better life for all” and “Jobs, jobs, jobs.” The reality, according to Johnson (2009:5), was that the formal job sector was shrinking at a rate of over 100 000 jobs per year. By 2001 more than 5 000 people a week were dying of AIDS, a number which soon increased to 1 000 a day. Signs of social distress proliferated, the crime rate soared, house prices fell and the ANC government lost the confidence of some foreign and local investors. During this time the then President, Thabo Mbeki, attempted to deny that HIV caused AIDS and many of the wealthy and educated left the country (Johnson 2009:5). South African society was deeply divided and characterised by acute levels of poverty (Landsberg 2004:9). In 1996 1,9 million South Africans survived on less than one US dollar a day (Roodt, as quoted by SAPA 2007).

1999

During the period after 1997 Parliament entered a period of “degradation” (Galland, as quoted by Pottinger 2008:44). This under a “rampant Mbeki ascendancy” led to a weakening of its capacity to oversee government (Pottinger 2008:44). Furthermore, a number of the ruling parties’ members were involved in a scheme to defraud government through the manipulation of the travel vouchers system.

In stark contrast to the poorer growing country (in the period between 1994 and 1999), the ANC approached the 1999 election with a surfeit of funds coming from overseas and local investors. The “old left” had fallen silent: Winnie Mandela was out of favour, Harry Gwala was dead, Bantu Holomisa (UDM) had his own party, Peter Mokaba and Toni Yengeni (a long-time communist) were Mbeki supporters. Thus COSATU and the SACP, having seen the lie of the land, postponed their battles to another day and campaigned for Mbeki (Johnson 2009:165).

The result was an election victory for the ANC and the Mbeki presidency. Despite “Travelgate” and weakening institutions, a booklet authorised on behalf of the European Union proclaimed that South Africa “had made a good start” (Muthien

2 According to Feinstein (2008:45), the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) propagated an expansionist fiscal and monetary policy focusing on growth and employment. The RDP was intended to be people- driven and envisaged the reduction of broad inequality.

1999:19). The perception that ANC rule and indeed ANC electoral domination were business as usual was taking root.

2004

The 2004 election campaign was started proactively by the ANC; Sankie Makhanyale-Mtembo, Deputy Secretary General of the ANC, admitted that the party had erred with respect to their AIDS policy and that this had to be rectified (Andrew Feinstein [2008:142] in his book *After the party* queried this as a possible pre-election ploy); “Oilgate” in which an empowerment company, Invume Management, channelled 11 million rand of public money from the state oil company, Petro SA, to the ANC helped fund the election campaign (Feinstein 2008:24) and Thabo Mbeki sat at the centre of a web of power not experienced in South Africa since the heyday of apartheid.

He had loaded the deck and created a super-presidency (Johnson 2009:167). First Nkosasana Dlamini Zuma, having fulfilled Mbeki’s directives in the Health Department, was put in charge of Foreign Affairs; secondly the Intelligence portfolio was elevated to a full cabinet ministry; thirdly Essop Pahad was given cabinet status as Minister in the office of the President, effectively creating a *de facto* prime minister; fourthly Health (still a controversial post due to the AIDS policy) was given to Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, another Mbeki insider, and fifthly Steve Tshwete was put in control of Safety and Security. Most tellingly of all, the office of the Deputy President, the office of Jacob Zuma, was combined with the office of the President and Zuma’s brief was to fulfil whatever tasks the President allocated to him (Johnson 2009:166). Zuma’s response to this was: “I don’t mind at all - I was just happy to be on the team” (Zuma, as quoted by Johnson 2009:166).

In this vein the 2004 election was business as usual with the ANC again nullifying opposition parties at the polls by margins in excess of nine million votes (IEC 2009:93). The main political agenda however was not driven at the polling stations, but rather inside the ANC where Thabo Mbeki began to see a threat in Jacob Zuma and started the process of getting him off the team. “Somehow Zuma got transformed from backer-in-chief to he-who-must-be-dumped” (Gordin 2008:72). The vehicle for this process was the Mbeki manipulation of the by now infamous arms scandal (Gordin 2008:75- 184; Johnson 2009:250). Zuma’s reaction to this was to set like steel. He refused to resign from the deputy presidency and when fired by Mbeki, rallied influential friends such as the trade union COSATU, that lobbied extensively and tirelessly for his cause (Gordon 2008:125). By the time Zuma’s rape

trial³ ended people were chanting “uZuma for President” (Gordon 2008:164). The left that had in 1999 postponed their battles had found a champion.

The 52nd Conference of the ANC to be held in Polokwane (Limpopo) was at hand “and while Zuma and everyone else involved or potentially involved in the forthcoming elections spent a great deal of time denying that they were interested in standing for the ANC presidency, they were busy with little else” (Gordon 2008:210). The Polokwane Conference was indeed a watershed in ANC and South African history (Pottinger 2008:14; Wines 2007). For the first time in South Africa’s democratic era true transition of power, a government change, and possibly a second transformation of the bigger socio-political environment were in the offing. The Madiba/Mbeki era was drawing to a close and the Zuma, Zwelinzima Vavi (COSATU), Fikile Mbalula, Julius Malema (ANCYL), Blade Nzimande (SACP) more leftist, more populist era was being ushered in to the tune of “Bring me my machine gun”.

This long-time apartheid era revolutionary anthem again rallied the masses and revolutionary rhetoric supplanted reconciliation and moderation: “The youth of South Africa would die in supporting President Jacob Zuma” (Malema, as quoted by SAPA 2008a); “Remnants of the counter-revolution, including the Democratic Alliance and those opposed to Jacob Zuma becoming SA’s next president must be eliminated” (Malema, as quoted by SAPA 2008b). ANC supporters chanted “Kill Shilowa, kill Lekota” outside a meeting held by Lekota. Zwelinzima Vavi (COSATU) said: “I am not going to waste my time with the human rights heroes of yesterday” (Mkhwanazi 2008b) and Umkonto we Sizwe veterans weighed in with threats to make the Western Cape ungovernable (SAPA 2009). This rhetoric pervaded and formed a menacing backdrop to the Zuma trials, the Polokwane Conference and eventually the 2009 election.

Before Polokwane the ANC launched a programme of structural organisational reform (ANC 2007a); at Polokwane a new commitment was made to the proponents of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) as the basis for the “revolution”⁴ with a movement away from GEAR and NEPAD towards social transformation to aid the poor (ANC 2007b) with the spectre of neorevolutionary rhetoric in the background. After Polokwane, with Zuma now party head and the Zuma faithful claiming top jobs, Mbeki was recalled as President of the country.

This transition which Duvenhage (2007:1) called a “palace revolution” was the watershed (not the 2009 election), a true transition of power between contesting elites (although within the same coalition and the same party) with a possible transformation of the country as a whole as a future goal.

3 Zuma was charged on 6 December 2006 with the rape of a family friend, a charge of which he was subsequently exonerated (Gordin 2008:147).

4 “A process of struggle that seeks to transfer power to the people and transform society into a non-racial, non-sexist, united democratic one, and changes the manner in which wealth is shared in order to benefit all the people” (ANC 2007b).

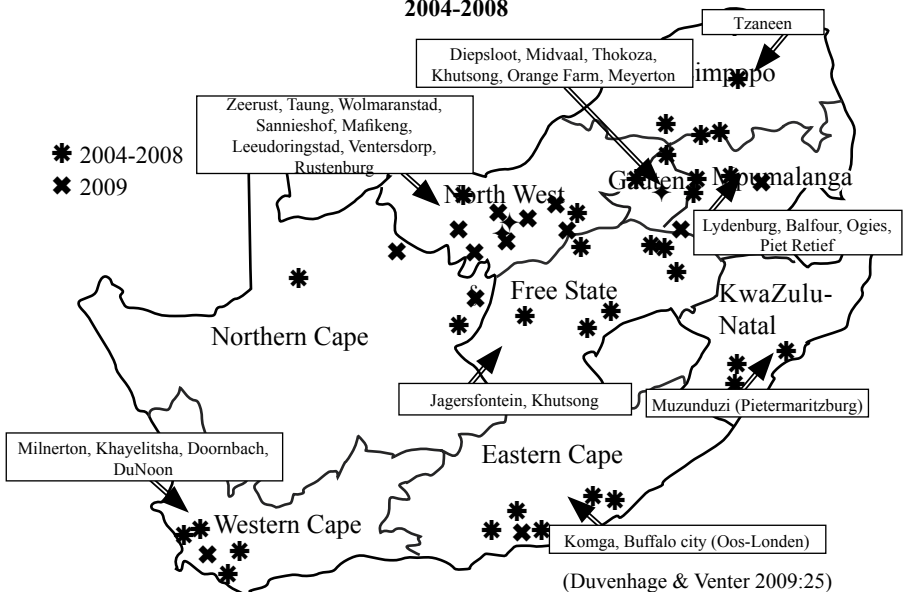
2009

The 2009 election was business as usual with the ANC again trouncing the opposition with more than ten million votes securing a 65,90% majority. This made possible the more fundamental transition of power inside the ANC, the Tripartite Alliance and the government.

The bruising split mentioned above, with Mosiuoa Lekota serving divorce papers on the ANC, did materialise in the formation of the new COPE party. A steady stream of defectors followed and speculation as to the impact of the new party proliferated. The influence of this party on the ANC-dominated election results where COPE only managed to garner 7,42% of the vote is open to debate, as is the future of COPE (IEC 2009b).

However, to a certain extent Pandora’s proverbial box was opened by the 2009 elections. Some of the headlines have already been mentioned in the introduction to this article. This does by no means provide the full picture. Shortly after the election and ANC victory the country saw unrest that still pervades civil society with wage strikes, service delivery protests, incidents of vigilantism and xenophobia (it was almost as though the democratic process of national elections had not released enough pent-up frustrations and political energy, and therefore political system overspill occurred). Figure 2 illustrates the spread of violent unrest and protest through South Africa in the months after the 2009 election.

Figure 2: Unrest and protest after the 2009 election compared with the period 2004-2008



Furthermore, some members of the National Defence Force stormed the Union Buildings and were shot at by police (Department of Defence 2008); Malema went from supporter of Zuma during his rape trials to firebrand making enemies of the “white boere journalists” (SAPA 2010a) to the PAC youth who wanted to “injure him to death” for the injudicious terms used in describing the Sharpeville uprising of 1960 (*Mail & Guardian* 2010). Meanwhile COSATU lashed out at “tenderpreneurs” warning that the country (South Africa) would become a “predator state” if this practice was not curbed. Again ANCYL leader, Julius Malema, was implicated (SAPA 2010b). The criticism of one alliance partner against another remains at levels never seen before and so does the “temperature” of politics. At no time save perhaps pre-1994 South African politics was as volatile as it was pre-2009 and especially post-2009. It seems as if the lid was lifted, and the only man who can close it, President Zuma, remains silent (Reuters 2010).

In conclusion, business as usual came to be shown in the ANC domination of election results. It has become the norm for the ANC to win by wide margins. The 1994 election was the first democratic election in the country’s history and it was also a perfectly stage-managed transition of power and transformation of a country at the socio-political level. The 1999 election saw the transfer of the custodianship of the transformation from Madiba to Mbeki without outward signs of discord (we now know that this was only outwardly the case [compare Johnson 2009]). In 2004 it became clear that certain groupings in the “broad church” of the Tripartite Alliance (the SACP, the ANC and COSATU) were not happy with the Mbeki style. The outward image of business as usual was however kept intact. In 2009 the façade could no longer be maintained. Due to the opposition the Mbeki programme had generated, the rise of the left within the ANC, the SACP and COSATU and the general dissatisfaction with the performance of the government, regime change started occurring, resulting in the replacement of the Mbeki elite by the Zuma, more populist and more leftist elite. A prominent tool of this new guard is violent, revolutionary rhetoric containing sometimes subtle and sometimes brutal (and undemocratic) threats.

From the above analysis, many areas can be identified for special attention. In the next section four of these issues will be compared further.

5. SPECIFIC ISSUES FOR CONTEXTUAL COMPARISON

The authors chose the issues of (i) “racial census”, (ii) rhetoric, (iii) the fortunes of the left and (iv) populism for further comparison, because when the development of these issues from 1994 to the present is examined a very distinct characterisation emerges of where South Africa stands politically at this time.

5.1 “Racial census”

The first issue is the fact that South African elections, as was seen above, always return the ANC to power with vast majorities. In 1994 the ANC won 252 seats; in 1999, 266 seats; in 2004, 279 seats and in 2009, 264 seats with little real variation over time in opposition ranks. This has been the case to such an extent that this phenomenon has become known as “racial census” meaning, according to Ferree (2006:803), that “since 1994, race has been an overwhelming predictor of voting behaviour for most of the South African electorate”.⁵ As such, white voters tend to vote for a “white party alternative”. The black vote goes, primarily, to the ANC, with the Zulu vote (until the 2009 election) going to the IFP. The parties going against this trend are the DA and COPE. This however does not negate the nearly ten million vote majority of the ANC.

Ferree (2006:804-806) examines three explanations for this phenomenon: expressive identity voting (voting as a means of expressing a group allegiance); policy and performance voting (the choice of candidate or party is paramount with race as an *incidental* factor secondary to performance and/or policy) and race and/or ethnicity as information (information about policy and performance is informed by, amongst others, race). Her conclusion is “that radicalized party images play a critical role in shaping South African voting behaviour” (Ferree 2006:814). This is because of a combination of the various explanations presented above. Carlos Garcia-Rivera (2006:57-75) presents an important perspective. He states:

“(T)he question of whether class [a whole new system of common identity] will eventually overtake race as the main factor influencing voting behaviour is of considerable importance in South Africa. Should it occur, internal debate within the ANC is expected to develop over the issue of whether it is the impoverished black masses or the new black middle class or elite who should constitute the principal social groups to be represented by the ANC” (Garcia-Rivera 2006:69).

This perspective of Garcia-Rivera explains to a certain extent the internal ANC and ANC alliance dynamic from the Polokwane Conference through the 2009 elections until now. This is however a small trend and the larger backdrop is still one of race divisions and a racially mobilised society leading to intolerance where parties have been placed beyond electoral reproach in favour of racial identity leading to frustration when policy or system failure occurs.

In essence, due to racial census, South Africans will vote for bad policies disenfranchising themselves to keep a racial balance. It is easy to see that this is a part of the legacy of apartheid, distrust and professional politics. One result of this process is the service delivery unrest that followed so soon after the 2009 general election.

5 Other authors on this subject include Johnson & Shlemmer 1996; Lodge 1999; Mattes 1995 and Reynolds 1994, 1999 (Ferree 2006:803).

5.2 Rhetoric

“We are saying to Malema to apologise within five days or we will injure him to death” -Pan Africanist Youth Congress (*Mail & Guardian* 2010).

The political rhetoric of the day gives an idea of how powerful leaders want to shape the country. Before an election such rhetoric also gives an idea of where the political leadership of a party thinks they can find support that can be converted into votes, what communities need to be placated and what communities should be rallied.

“Nelson Mandela spoke of how place names should be changed only with ‘great care, through consensus’ and reminded his voters that he was not just a President for blacks ‘but a President of whites as well’” (Johnson 2009:57). He apologised for his government’s failures and he told Parliament: “Whites in this country have a particular obligation. You have the knowledge, you have the skills, you have expertise. We cannot build this country without that knowledge...And we want you to take the leadership in building a new South Africa. We do not regard it as correct that the majority should oppress the minority” (Johnson 2009:57). With these words of reconciliation the dream of the Rainbow Nation seemed a reality.

In 2006, Charles Nqakula, now a top Zuma advisor, told white South Africans complaining because of the high crime rate in South Africa, to leave the country, this while the country suffered the second highest murder rate in the world (*Mail & Guardian* 2007; Nationmaster 2009). In many ways this was the start of a torrent of rhetoric that marked a radical departure from the nation-building efforts of Mandela. During the Zuma trials words such as “purges”, “elimination”, “ungovernable” and “killing” were bandied about (Julius Malema, as quoted by SAPA 2008a; Malema, as quoted by SAPA 2008b; Mkhwanazi 2008).

At first this rhetoric was directed at the perceived enemies of Jacob Zuma during his trials, then during the election at the opposition and after the election at Tripartite Alliance members. Jeremy Cronin (Deputy General Secretary of the SACP) was labelled “reactionary” by the ANC Youth League. Their leader, Julius Malema, added that he does not need the permission of a “white political messiah” to think (SAPA 2010c). Zuma supporters called members of the breakaway movement COPE “snakes”, “dogs” and “cockroaches”, the last name being, as mentioned above, the name the Hutu extremists used to justify the genocide in Rwanda (Johnson 2009:6400).

Before the 2009 elections the debate over place names also intensified with municipalities changing names at a ferocious pace (a proposed 42 changes in 2010 [SAPA 2010]), totally disregarding Nelson Mandela’s earlier (2004) statement concerning this issue. The question of Pretoria versus Tshwane became a thrust and counter between the pro’s and no’s with the Freedom Front Plus (FF+) threatening

mass action during the 2010 World Soccer Cup should the name change take place (SAPA 2010d).

After the 2009 elections “a racial tit-for-tat” erupted with Malema’s singing of the old struggle song “Shoot the boer” and subsequently with every political party weighing in, especially after the murder of Eugene Terre’Blanche (SAPA 2010d; *Rapport* 2010:1).

It seems as if political rhetoric underwent a drastic thematic change from 1994 to 2009. In 1994 the emphasis was on nation building as the various groups were placated with commitments to good governance and best practice. By 2009 the ANC and the Tripartite Alliance had taken a jump to the left with a radicalisation of rhetoric, a commitment to symbolic name changing, a mobilisation of the masses along populist (unpractical) lines and intolerance towards opposition with the overt threats and the epithet “white” (again) regarded as a curse.

5.3 The fortunes of “the left”

The true party political left in South Africa has never contested an election, yet they are through the SACP and the trade union COSATU a dominant force in South African politics. The ANC would have struggled if the left had not so staunchly supported the party through the various elections. The 1994 election was the great transition; in 1999 and even in 2004 the left inside and outside the ANC chose to postpone their battle for control of government, due to the Mbeki hegemony, until a later date. When the Zuma/Mbeki feud erupted an opportunity presented itself to place the historically inevitable transition to socialism (derailed by the 1994/1996 class project) back on track.

After the Polokwane Conference it became clear that “the SACP had successfully used Zuma as a battering ram in order to mount a sort of disguised takeover” (Johnson 2009:562). It was also evident (as was seen in the first pages of this article) that this free ride heightened tension within the Tripartite Alliance.

However, Blade Nzimande (2006) described South Africa as follows: “(T)ransitions to democracy, welcome and important as they are in the struggle for socialism...require vigilance...for the SACP, especially since the adoption of the Native Republic Thesis of 1928 (a struggle for a native republic as a stage toward a socialist South Africa...) we had always understood the national democratic revolution as the most direct route to socialism...”

From this it becomes clear that the 1994 settlement and subsequent democratic elections were just useful phases for the left on the way to a more “just” (socialist) and a less capitalist (liberal democratic) South Africa (Nzimande 2006). Zuma needed allies ahead of Polokwane and the SACP (Blade Nzimande, Zwelinzima Vavi, Gwede Mantashe and others), the Youth League (Julius Malema) and the Women’s League (Winnie Mandela) stepped up. The 2009 election secured a win

for the ANC, but this ANC was not the liberal democratic ANC of Mandela or even, as Pottinger (2008:16) differentiates, “classic” or “light”, it is the New Left.

Some voices from within this new left are looking toward “economic emancipation” and want to “take command of the economy from the hands of white males” (Julius Malema, as quoted by SAPA 2010f). These words could also have been dealt with under the heading of rhetoric except perhaps for the weight lent by Zuma’s words: “People want us to shout him down. Why must we do that?” and “There is a leader in him for the future” (Reuters 2010). There are also those now, after 2009, who say, “Mandela let us down. He agreed to a bad deal for blacks. Economically we are still on the outside. The economy is very much ‘white’ ” (Winnie Mandela, as quoted by Naipaul 2010).

The true role of the left and how they are going to deal with the radicals quoted above still remains to be defined. It is clear that COSATU and even the SACP do not have much love for Malema. At this point in time the bigger movement is playing the part of the moral compass for the Tripartite Alliance. Love and war (and politics) do however make strange bedfellows.

5.4 Populism

President Zuma has called for a restoration of traditional values; hinted at the return of the death penalty and that criminal suspects should be denied the right to silence and be “made” to speak to police; that school prayers be made compulsory; that all South Africans should fear their ancestors; that there was too much nudity and sex on television and that the long-past-deadline cases for land restitution should be reopened (Johnson 2009:640). Many of these suggestions are unconstitutional, unpractical and it could be argued, never intended to be dealt with seriously. This is populism, a derogatory term pertaining to pandering to the interests of the masses (McLean & McMillan 2003:427).

During the previous elections, especially the 1994 election, the serious politicians tempered their messages and sometimes delivered unpopular statements in the interests of nation building. Nelson Mandela for example appealed to whites: “Don’t leave, don’t let us down and leave the country” (Johnson 2009:76).

As has become painfully clear, he did it in such a way that the African nationalists did not agree. He then appealed to them: “Why should we not pacify them? Let’s forget the past. Let’s put down our weapons. Let’s turn them into ploughshares, let’s build our country” (Johnson 2009:76).

As has already been described, the rallying call for the 2009 elections was “Bring me my machine gun.” Julius Malema’s theme is fast becoming “Shoot the boer”. Both of these songs were a huge success in drumming up support as proven by the 2009 elections and Malema’s Facebook page and political rallies. This is very different from the conciliatory and non-populist tone that politicians took in the

previous elections. The new populist propagandistic speechmaking is irresponsible as the country is currently teetering on the brink of a crisis last seen in the pre-1994 South Africa. Racial tensions are inflamed, polarisation is occurring, capital flight will follow if not something altogether worse happens. What we need now is strong non-populist leadership.

In this section four trends in South African national elections were described. The elections were used as moments in time around which comparisons could be made. Certain constants and changes over time were then described: it seems that race still determines for whom we vote; rhetoric has become more inflammatory; the left is a new force in government, and politicians are more populist.

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

National elections present a moment in a democratic system when the citizenry are actively involved in government and when political parties vie for votes and support. Elections also present an opportunity for a performance audit of government, a moment when hidden agendas and players come to the fore and when changes can take place. This being so, elections are the perfect events for comparing certain variables. That was the goal of this article, in a general and contextual way. This was done in order to describe the mainstreams of South African politics that invariably, owing to the ANC's dominant hegemony, cannot be described merely by the tabulation of election results. The main theme of South African politics is not interparliamentary, but rather intertripartite alliance and more specifically inter-ANC politics. This fact was illustrated by the description of the evolution of the South African electoral system; the provision of a collated tabulation of election results for all the elections in the scope of this article; a historical relation/comparison of the various elections and the specific comparison of four selected variables.

At the end of this article the following conclusions can be drawn: Through the use of the national elections of 1994, 1999, 2004 and 2009 as points of contextual comparison, the South African political environment is characterised by increasing racial divisions, more populist politicians using inflammatory, irresponsible rhetoric pandering irresponsibly to masses of people with nothing to lose. The left of the political spectrum (even though never having contested an election) wields considerable influence in this system.

The implications of this for the young South African democracy could be dire. We are left bereft of another Mandela. It should also be noted that it is becoming increasingly important to look at South African politics not from a system perspective but from a contextual outside the system perspective.

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