



Briefing Paper 338

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The Political Climate in the Run-up to the 2014 Election

1. Introduction

Since the dawn of democracy in April 1994, our country has seen four peaceful national and provincial elections. Now, South Africans are bracing themselves for another trip to the polls to elect their public representatives. The 2014 election has been deemed one of the most important in the 20-year history of our democracy. This is due to a number of factors, including the fact that the so-called 'Bornfrees' have come of age and will be voting for the very first time in this election. Also, there are signs that the ANC may slip significantly from its position of complete dominance of the vote. Political parties, both old and new, have started their campaigns and the youth are clearly emerging as one of the most important constituencies that political parties will be focusing on.

In the light of these issues, it is important to look at how the political climate is developing in the run-up to the election. This briefing paper is based on a roundtable discussion, jointly hosted by CPLO and the Hanns Seidel Foundation, which took place on Friday, 15th November in Cape Town. There were four speakers: Prof Robert Mattes and Dr Collette Schulz-Herzenberg of the University of Cape Town; Prof Amanda Gouws of Stellenbosch University; and Dr Cherrel Africa of the University of the Western Cape.

2. The Roundtable Discussion

2.1. Prof Robert Mattes

Prof Mattes gave an overview of the current political climate, looking at the different political parties and how they are perceived by voters at

the moment. He stated that 90% of black voters who go to the polls vote for the ANC, and that 90% of the ANC's vote come from black voters; this has been consistent since 1994. This has led some, mostly outside the ANC, to ask, "When will black voters stop ignoring the failures of the ANC government and start voting with their minds and not their hearts?" However, this view ignores the fact that the ANC *has* delivered to some extent, and that people's lives have changed for the better, which means that the ANC has had some policy success. Despite the high levels of service delivery protests, people see the ANC as having done well in terms of delivering social welfare services, such as social grants. On the other hand, voters feel that it has performed very poorly in macro-economic areas such as job-creation and fighting inequality and corruption, and in security questions, including crime.

Prof Mattes made the very interesting point that, when citizens are dissatisfied with the ANC, they tend not to vote for another party, but instead they stay away from the polls. Voters in South Africa look at whether a political party represents them or not, and most of them see opposition parties as representing a certain group of people, e.g. whites in the case of the DA or Zulus in the case of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). Moreover, most South Africans do not appear to know what the opposition parties stand for, which speaks to the quality of some of those parties and their visibility, or the lack thereof, between elections. Political parties need to be visible between elections and not wait for the campaign period to start reaching out to the people. Prof Mattes concluded with a number of questions which could prove significant: Concerning the ANC, have people's perception of the President Jacob Zuma changed? And will this have a negative impact on votes for the ANC? Has

the DA managed to convince black voters that it has their best interests at heart? And who does AgangSA represent, and will its founder and leader, Dr Mamphela Ramphele, be able to use her struggle credentials to attract voters?

2.2. Prof Amanda Gouws

Prof Gouws noted that in 2009 13 parties were registered at national level, but only four of these managed to get more than 1% of the vote. The ANC took 65.9%, the DA 16.66%, COPE 7.42%, and the IFP 4.55%. In the run-up to the 2014 election, we have the parties that we know, plus quite a number of new ones, including Julius Malema's EFF and Dr Ramphele's AgangSA. It will be important for voters to understand what these new parties stand for and who they represent. The EFF, for instance, appeals to disgruntled and displaced young voters, but can also appeal to other constituencies. Part of Mr Malema's populist stance is that he claims to be radical and in favour of the oppressed and therefore wants to nationalise mines but he also takes the side of the rich and powerful when it suits him, like when he made sexist and insensitive comments concerning the woman who was accusing President Zuma of rape in 2009. AgangSA, on the other hand, appeals to the middle-class, black and white. It is clear that it is opposed to the ANC and sees the ANC as having betrayed the struggle. It also promises a clean government, but beyond that it is not clear what this party stands for in terms of wider policies.

Regarding the ANC, Prof Gouws thought that it would be interesting to see whether or not people's perceptions of the party would change due to President Zuma's five years of scandals, bad appointments and corruption. She suggested that the ANC would campaign around the National Development Plan and its own struggle credentials, while attempting to discredit other parties. The DA had managed to grow in the last election, but the party's biggest challenge would be to draw in more black voters while retaining its traditional white support-base. A key question would be whether it would form alliances with other opposition parties. Prof Gouws made the following predictions concerning the election: ANC – 60%; DA – 12%; Agang – 5%; EFF – 5%. Lastly, she noted that none of the parties, except for the ANC, seemed to be focusing on gender equality on their electoral lists. Women had numbers that could 'swing' the overall vote, yet no party was canvassing them specifically, not

even the three women-led parties, the DA, Agang and the National Freedom Party.

2.3. Dr Collette Schulz-Herzenberg

Dr Schultz-Herzenberg gave an overview of voter participation trends since 1994. She stated that it is important to measure voter registration levels in terms of the eligible voting age population (VAP) in order to be able to capture the reality of voter participation in any country. Registration in South Africa has not kept pace with growth in the VAP. Voter registration declined from 80.4% in 1999 to 75.4% in 2004. There was a slight increase to 77.3% in 2009, but current indications are for 69% in 2014. These numbers show voter registration as a proportion of voting age population, and thus indicate in real terms what is normally masked by the overall numbers published after elections: if only 70% of the VAP are registered, and 70% of registered voters actually vote, then only 49% of eligible voters have cast a ballot. Young voters comprise 39% of the VAP, but non-registration is high among this group: currently, only 41% of all eligible 18-29 year olds are registered to vote. If all 41% actually turn out to vote, this would still mean that only 16% of the country's youth had voted. This low participation rate amongst youth has serious implications for political parties whose target is the youth because, even if they succeed in convincing the youth of their policies, if that does not translate to votes it is not of much help.

2.4. Dr Cherrel Africa

Dr Africa looked at election campaigns and whether or not they play an important role in South Africa. The campaign period is meant to allow political parties to propose and discuss policies, she said. Even though the ANC has won a majority in all elections since 1994, the party still doesn't take election outcomes as a given, and campaigns vigorously. Smaller parties always believe that they stand a chance of increasing their share of the vote and therefore there is always fierce competition during the campaign period. However, South Africa's campaign culture is mostly negative, with parties tending to point out the weaknesses and failures of their rivals, rather than focusing on their own ideas and policies.

Dr Africa highlighted the symbiotic relationship between political parties and the media. Political parties, whose incentive is to win elections, need

the media for publicity, while the media, whose incentive is to increase sales, need the political stories to increase readers/listeners/viewers. The reality of the situation is that all the promises made by political parties about crime-reduction, poverty-alleviation, job-creation and so forth, are in fact secondary goals of parties. The primary goal is to win elections. To win, political parties have to find out what it is that will evoke a response from voters. Unfortunately, in South Africa what evokes a response is the areas of difference, especially racial and class differences, that continue to prevail. This leads to appeals to fear, prejudice and anger and, as a result, we find that 'attack politics' prevail in South Africa. This year the election campaigns have started early and are even more aggressive than in previous elections.

As for bringing in the voters, Dr Africa stated that we should not be surprised that voter registration has decreased. Voters don't wait until election time to evaluate parties, they are doing so all the time; however, parties tend to be invisible between elections. Finally, it appears that most political parties, having carried out some introspection after the election, come to the conclusion that voters are to be blamed for their failures because they are not rational, and because they vote along racial and ethnic lines.

3. The Big Players in South Africa's Political Field

3.1. The African National Congress

Since 1994, the ANC has been the governing party in South Africa, winning each election with over 60% of the vote¹. Many analysts claim that the ANC is viewed by black South Africans as the only party that represents them, and therefore they have remained faithful in voting for this party. However, voter surveys conducted by a number of organisations show that this loyalty is not so much a reflection of people's satisfaction with the performance of the party, but a reflection of a perceived lack of a viable parliamentary opposition.² Almost two decades after the birth of democracy in South Africa, problems of inequality, inadequate service delivery and unemployment still persist³, much to the dissatisfaction of the masses that nevertheless go to the polls at each election to pledge their support for the governing party.

It is important also to note that, since 2009, South Africa has seen more than 3000 protests,⁴ most of which were related to service delivery. Many of these protests have been violent and some have led to loss of life at the hands of the police (and thus, indirectly, at the hands of government). The death of protester Andries Tatane in the Free State in 2011, and the horrific event now known as the 'Marikana massacre' that resulted in the death of 34 people in the North West province last August, serve as examples of how violent protests have become in South Africa. These events have invited much criticism of the ANC, not only from opposition parties but also from its own supporters.

The ANC is also facing criticism from its alliance partner, COSATU, on issues such as the introduction of the e-tolling system recently rolled out in Gauteng province, and the National Development Plan (NDP), to mention only two. This means that the ANC approaches the 2014 elections with a number of challenges, even from within. If results from the last few elections are anything to go by, there remains a good chance that the very same dissatisfied ANC supporters will go out and vote to give the party yet another win. However, two other possibilities arise. Firstly, a significant number of ANC supporters may simply stay away from the polls altogether as a way of expressing dissatisfaction. Secondly, but less likely, some traditional ANC voters may begin to look to other political parties as an alternative home.

3.2. The Democratic Alliance

The DA is South Africa's biggest opposition party and the only one that has shown sustained growth since 1994, moving from just 1.7% then to 9.56% in 1999, 12.4% in 2004, and 16.7% in 2009, in which year it also won the Western Cape by an outright majority⁵. As we approach the 2014 elections the DA is optimistic about its growth yet again, hoping to take over one more province from the ANC. The biggest question for the DA at the moment is whether it will be able to attract significant numbers of black voters, many of whom are still very wary about voting for a political party led by a white person, for fear of the repeat of the past. The DA has been accused by many of representing the white minority and the middle class, and it has also been accused of not caring for the poor masses. Accusations have also been made that, if a white-led political party would be in government, South Africa would go back to the apartheid system⁶. The DA has

developed a campaign to counter these allegations and to prove that its leaders were also involved in the fight against apartheid. Moreover, at its recent policy conference, the DA's leaders emphasized the importance of race-based policies to redress the apartheid legacy.⁷ At this conference the DA also reiterated its support for Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE). Will this be enough to convince South Africa's black voters, especially those disillusioned with the ANC, to cast their votes in favour of the DA? And, in the quest to entice black voters, is the DA going to risk alienating its traditional white support base, which views race-based policies as unfair and discriminatory?

4. The New Players in the Field

The run up to national and provincial elections has seen the emergence of various new parties. By October this year, 19 of them had registered to contest the 2014 elections at national level⁸. Clearly, the two most significant of these are the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), formed by the expelled ANC Youth League president Julius Malema, and AgangSA, led by the former anti-apartheid activist and businesswoman, Mamphela Ramphele.

4.1. Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)

Julius Malema officially launched this party in October 2013 at Marikana⁹, the scene of the tragedy already mentioned. The target constituency for this group is the youth, especially those that are disgruntled and disappointed with the ANC. The party seems to have found some resonance with a number of these frustrated unemployed young people who feel that the ANC has not delivered and are looking for an alternative. A few surveys show that the EFF's policies have to some extent attracted the support of this group¹⁰. Also, the EFF's policies focus on the country's poor and dispossessed in general. In its manifesto, the EFF claims to be fighting for the economic emancipation of South Africans. The party addresses the issue of the landlessness of the majority of South Africans, and this speaks to people living in shacks in informal settlements, as well as to farm workers who work the land without sufficient benefit from it.¹¹ At the centre of the EFF's policies therefore, are nationalization of mines and land redistribution. However, it remains to be seen whether or not these policies will be enough to convince people to abandon the ANC and vote for

the EFF, or to convince those who have decided to stay away from the polls to go out and vote for the EFF.

4.2. AgangSA

AgangSA was introduced to the voting public by its founder in February 2013, but was formally launched as a political party only in June.¹² AgangSA has been very critical of the corruption that currently dogs the ruling party. Among other things, AgangSA promises South Africans a clean government, a better education system, and job creation¹³. This will resonate very well with a large number of people who have had enough of corruption and unemployment, but the party has been criticised for not making its policy stance clear beyond these criticisms.¹⁴ According to some political commentators, all Dr Ramphele has managed to do is to point out the failures of the ANC; she has said very little about her own policies.¹⁵ Like the EFF, AgangSA targets those that are disgruntled in the ANC, those that have decided to stay away from the polls, and the youth.¹⁶ However, there is also a possibility that this party will attract a portion of the DA's traditional vote.¹⁷

5. South Africa's Youth

At the centre of every political party's campaign for 2014 is the youth, and especially the 'born frees'. The concept of the born frees particularly applies to a group of young people that were born in or after 1994, and who are seen as not having had any direct encounter with the oppression of apartheid. This will be the first election in which these young people will be joining the voting age population (VAP). Given that this group has supposedly grown up under different, and better, conditions than their parents, it is assumed that their political orientation and understanding will also be different; and therefore that the ANC will struggle to attract the support of this group¹⁸.

Professor Steven Friedman of Rhodes University questions this notion. Firstly, he argues that there is no evidence to prove that people who do not remember apartheid will vote differently from those who do. He points out that, in 2009, those who voted for the first time were only three years old in 1994 (and thus not old enough to understand or 'feel' apartheid) but they didn't vote any differently from the older generation. Furthermore, personal experience is not the only factor that contributes to the political choices we

make; the influence of others plays an important role too, especially that of our elders.¹⁹ Prof Friedman goes on to claim that the 'born-free' theory amounts to a kind of prejudice, as opposed to a sound analysis, because no one is claiming that other groups of young voters, such as traditional supporters of the DA, the Inkatha Freedom Party or the Freedom Front, will be breaking ranks in this election; the focus is only on those that might be expected to vote for the ANC. He supports this by stating that there is no group of voter that is less rational than another; all groups vote for the party they believe is representative of people of the same backgrounds and circumstances as theirs. "South Africans vote their identities", he argues²⁰. Prof Friedman goes on to challenge the assumption that the group born after 1994 is 'free', and that it never experienced the realities of apartheid. He points to the poverty and inequality that still prevails in South Africa, and which takes a racial form in the sense that it is still largely the very same black people that were poor under apartheid who still live in poverty today. Many young people growing up in the townships now are in no better position materially than their parents were.

If political parties entertain any hopes of attracting the youth of South Africa, whether born before or after 1994, it will be very important for them to address issues that speak to young people. These are things like poverty-alleviation, a better education system that produces self-reliant graduates, job-creation and

youth empowerment. They will have to go to where the youth is and hear what the youth have to say. As political parties roll out their campaign strategies, it remains to be seen how many of them will live up to their claims that youth are at the centre of their thinking. It will be even more interesting to see how many will keep those claims alive through their actions after the election hype has died down.

6. Conclusion

As our political parties swing into campaign mode various questions come to the fore. Are parties willing to go beyond the campaign period in convincing South Africans that they have their best interests at heart? Will the entrance of the new parties have any lasting impact on the political landscape? Will the political parties manage to attract young people and convince them that they have their interests at heart; and if they do manage to convince them, will that translate into significantly increased votes? Lastly, will the black electorate still go out and vote overwhelmingly for the ANC despite the many woes that are affecting the party? It is entirely fitting that we should be facing such questions; they are an indication that, as we prepare to mark the celebration of 20 years of democracy, our political system is alive and well, and that it is dynamic enough to envisage various potential outcomes.

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¹ McGroarty, P. Wonacott, P and Maylie, D. 2013. Wall Street Journal: South Africa's ruling ANC loses its luster. <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887323455104579012453503568092>

² EISA Occasional Paper number 25, October 2004. The dominant party system: Challenges for South Africa's second decade <http://www.eisa.org.za/PDF/OP25.pdf>

³ McGroarty, P. Wonacott, P and Maylie, D. 2013. Wall Street Journal: South Africa's ruling ANC loses its luster. <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887323455104579012453503568092>

⁴ Media24: SA has a protest every two days⁸. <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/SA-has-a-protest-every-two-days-20130121>

⁵ C. Africa. 2013. More of the same? Taking stock of the political climate in the run-up to 2014 elections

⁶ City press. November 2013. DA "black caucus" puts Zille in her place, Cosatu. <http://www.citypress.co.za/politics/das-black-caucus-put-zille-place-cosatu/>

⁷ S. Mkokeli. 2013. DA embraces race as new political reality. <http://www.timeslive.co.za/thetimes/2013/11/25/da-embraces-race-as-new-political-reality>

⁸ News24. November 2013. Nineteen new political parties registered. <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/19-new-political-parties-registered-20131002>

⁹ <http://www.economicfreedomfighters.org/>

¹⁰ News24. November 2013. One in four young South Africans would vote for expelled ANC youth league president Julius Malema.

<http://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2013/06/26/26-of-the-youth-would-vote-for-malema-s-party-survey>

¹¹ <http://www.economicfreedomfighters.org/>

¹² Africa. C. 2013. More of the Same? Taking stock of South Africa's electoral landscape in the run-up to the 2014 elections

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