



The 2014 General Election Part I: Outcome

1. Introduction

Now that the dust has settled after the May 7th general election, it is useful to look at its outcome in terms of the overall results; the new Parliament it has put in place; the appointments of office-bearers in that Parliament; and the selection of Members of Parliament to join the executive branch of government. The first point will be considered in this briefing paper;¹ the other three will be covered in Part II. But at the outset, let us look a little more closely at the electorate.

2. Three Types of Voter

We can distinguish between *eligible voters*, *registered voters*, and *actual voters*. An eligible voter is a South African citizen over the age of 18. Based on figures from the 2011 national census, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) estimated that there were about 31.4 million eligible voters at the time of its registration drive in November 2013.² This constitutes what is also known as the Voting Age Population or VAP. In most countries, including South Africa, the VAP is considerably larger than the number of registered voters, due to the fact that registration is not automatic; it requires an effort, having an Identity Document, filling in a form and visiting a registration station.

In order to form an accurate idea of the degree of participation in an election, the number of *actual voters* should be measured against the number of *eligible voters*. Instead, the 'voter turn-out' or 'percentage poll' almost always reflects the proportion of *registered voters* who actually cast a vote. Thus, we find that in last month's election some 18.6 million people voted, out of 25.4 million *registered voters*, giving a percentage poll of

73.2%. However, if we measure the 18.6 million *actual voters* against the official 31.4 million *eligible voters*, we find that only 59.2% voted. If we take the 2013 estimate of 32.7 million *eligible voters*, the turn-out drops to 56.9%.

So, about nine out of every twenty people entitled to vote did not do so. This is not remarkable by international standards³, but it is perturbing when seen against the background of our particular history. It is only 20 years ago that the majority of the population won the right to vote; much has been written about the sacrifices, sufferings and struggles that went into the achievement of that right, and yet a very significant percentage of the population appears to lack the necessary motivation to exercise it.

There are numerous ways of analysing and unpacking the electoral statistics⁴, but a few simple facts stand out clearly. Firstly, around 7.3 million eligible voters did not register. Why not? Is it due to logistical problems, lack of opportunity, or lack of understanding of the registration process? Or is it that people cannot be bothered to register; it doesn't strike them as important? Either way, we have a problem if over 22% of those entitled to vote do not take even the first step to doing so. Our democracy will not thrive if a fifth of its members exclude themselves, or are excluded, from participating in it.

Secondly, of those who took the trouble to register, more than a quarter did not vote. This is in some ways the more puzzling statistic. Making the effort to register suggests that you take voting seriously – why not, then, carry through the commitment by turning up at a voting station on the day? Does this reveal some sort of organisational weakness in the IEC – that it is not providing sufficient voting stations; or locating

them where they are needed; or ensuring that they are well enough staffed and resourced to allow people to vote quickly and conveniently? Or is it simply that one in four voters, having registered at some point in the past, has now become disillusioned or apathetic? Some commentators argue that many people vote only if they think that there is a chance that their party will lose; if they are satisfied that it will win, they stay at home. This is an idea that needs further research, but it could go some way to explaining why people make the effort to register, but do not make it to the polling stations to vote.

Thirdly, younger people are less likely both to register and, therefore, to vote. Registration rates in the over 30 age-group were around 90%, compared to only 60% of people in their 20s, and 33% of 18-19 year olds.⁵ No figures are yet available to indicate what percentage of registered young voters (18 – 30 year olds) actually turned out, but if it is assumed that the overall percentage poll of 73.2% applies to these age-groups, then only one in four 18-19 year olds, and four out of ten 20-30 year olds will have voted.⁶ It is some consolation to note that this is in line with international experience; as people age they are more likely to register and to vote, if only because they have further opportunities to do so every few years. Nevertheless, it is a pity that so many young people are either ignorant of the importance of democratic participation, or are lacking in sufficient motivation to register and to vote.

2.1. Registration – an unnecessary step?

All of this raises the question as to whether there is any need for a system of prior registration. Our voting procedure contains at least two physical safeguards against repeat voting – a stamp in the voter's identity document, and an ink mark on the voter's thumb. Despite a few alarmist reports of people having two ID books, and others succeeding in removing the ink with various solvents, there is no realistic risk of these measures being by-passed to the extent that anything above the most negligible degree of electoral fraud could be perpetrated. Certainly, prior registration helps the IEC to plan the provision and resourcing of voting stations, but there are other methods of assessing how many voters are living in a given residential district – municipal ratepayers' records, for example.

Alternatively, if it is felt that prior registration is vital, this could be done automatically when the citizen turns 16 or when he or she applies for an

identity document or a driver's licence. Automatic entry on the voters' roll would eliminate the need for a new (young) voter to visit a registration station, and thus make it easier to vote when the time came. Over time, a certain number of voters would move to another city or town, but this could easily be tracked via ratepayer's records, income-tax registration and the like; and the voters' rolls could be adjusted accordingly.

3. The Parties' Performances

Depending on how you choose to look at the results, the three leading parties (ANC, DA, EFF) all either did very well, or all fell short of expectations. In their pre-election hype, all three predicted that they would score somewhat better than they eventually did. In the ANC's case, this was backed by the only true opinion poll, conducted by Ipsos-Markinor, which suggested in late April that the governing party might come close to a two-thirds majority.⁷ Although the DA played down its expectations as the election drew closer, it started out the campaign talking about 30% of the vote.⁸ The EFF, meanwhile, confidently announced that it was planning to govern after the election.⁹ In fact, though, regardless of the hype, all three parties can be pleased about their performances.

3.1. The African National Congress

In a country with a multi-party system and regular, free and fair elections, it is almost unheard of that one party would win five successive elections with over 60% of the vote. The ANC's achievement in this regard is remarkable. Certainly, it reflects the deep, and sometimes unquestioning, loyalty that it enjoys as the party of liberation; it also no doubt reflects the esteem in which people hold some of its former leaders, notably the late Nelson Mandela. But it also indicates that the majority of voters continue to believe that the ANC is the party which most understands their needs, and which is most likely to respond to them.

Having said this, though, it is also clear that the party is facing a decline in support. While, in Prof Friedman's analogy, it did not suffer the blowout fondly imagined by some of its rivals, it does have a slow puncture. In 2009 it declined from its high of 69.7% in 2004, to 65.9% - a drop of 5.7%. Between 2009 and 2014, it has declined a further 5.7%, to 62.15% of the total vote. If this rate of decline continues, the ANC will win the next three

elections, and will dip below an outright majority only in 2034.¹⁰

Of course, there are numerous factors that could intervene before then to precipitate a quicker decline or, indeed, to arrest it. One of the most important of these is the party's performance in KwaZulu-Natal. In 1994, the ANC could manage only 32.25% of the vote in the country's second most populous province, but its share grew steadily to 39% in 1999 and 47% in 2004, before leaping to 63% in 2009. This last figure mirrors the rise to power of Jacob Zuma, the first Zulu head of the party since Albert Luthuli in the 1960s. Through Mr Zuma, who has always emphasised his Zulu culture, and whose links to the province are especially strong, the ANC has turned KwaZulu-Natal from an Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) stronghold into its own most important source of votes: more than 1 in every 5 ANC votes last month came from KZN.

It seems though, that a ceiling may have been reached – between 2009 and this year, the ANC's share grew by a mere 2.4% (compared to the 34% growth it experienced between 2004 and 2009). More worryingly for the ANC, its growth in the other seven provinces it governs was either very modest (4.75% in the Northern Cape and 1.5% in the Eastern Cape, its only other positive results), or negative (the worst being Gauteng, where it lost just over 15% of its 2009 vote). It managed 3.5% growth in the Western Cape, but remained in a distant second place to the DA.¹¹

More significant than the overall figures is the fact that three major cities, Johannesburg, Tshwane and Port Elizabeth have become marginal for the ANC. Its support in Johannesburg went from 63% to 53%; in Tshwane from 61% to 51%; and in Port Elizabeth from 50% to 49%. This puts all three metropolitan municipalities in reach of the opposition in the 2016 local government elections. But it also suggests that there is a growing divide between urban and rural areas – the latter remain quite firmly in the ANC camp, while the latter are moving away from it. This is of special importance in Gauteng, which is made up essentially of three metros – Johannesburg, Tshwane and Ekurhuleni. If the trend away from the ANC in the metros continues, and if the rate of urbanisation persists, as it certainly will, the drift to the opposition will pick up pace. More and more middle-class black South Africans, better educated and qualified than before, and with a greater stake in a free-market, competition-driven economy, seem set to shift their political allegiance to the party that most

embodies their economic aspirations: the DA. Ironically, this will signal that the ANC, without which the conditions for such urbanisation and *embourgeoisement* would not have emerged, has become a victim of its own success; or perhaps of its inability to adapt to the aspirations of its younger, more economically mobile, supporters.

3.2. The Democratic Alliance

Although the main opposition party fell slightly short of a symbolic one quarter of the vote, its achievement was nevertheless impressive. It has grown from 16.66% in 2009 to 22.23% in 2014, an improvement of 33.4%. If we take a longer view, its improvement since 2004 has been almost 80%. It is not clear whether the DA's performance is indicative of a real breakthrough in the traditionally ANC supporting sector of the population – the Holy Grail of the 'black vote'. Prof Friedman suggests that much of the DA's growth in majority black areas could have come about at the expense of COPE, which collapsed from 7.5% of the vote in 2009 to a mere 0.67% this year. In the absence of proper exit polls, it is very difficult to be certain about such shifts, but DA leader Helen Zille's claim that her party garnered around 6% of black votes (760 000) must be taken seriously. Likewise, it seems clear that the DA has wrapped up all but a tiny fraction of white votes, as well as about two-thirds of coloured and Indian votes.¹²

The problem for the DA is two-fold. Firstly, to have won only 6% of the votes of the overwhelming majority population group twenty years into democracy is hardly an earth-shattering achievement. It demonstrates that our politics is still very much race-based and, while this is not (solely) the DA's fault, neither it nor any of the other parties has managed to break free of this constraint to any significant extent. The DA cannot practically grow any further among white voters (where it claims 93%) and even if it does grow from the 60% - 65% level among coloured and Indian voters, they constitute only a small fraction of the electorate. To advance, the DA must move from 6% to 26% or 36% of the black vote; and there is precious little indication of that happening.

Secondly, and flowing from the previous point, if the DA were to keep up its impressive growth over the last two or three elections, it would win 29.6% in 2019; 39.5% in 2024; and take a slim majority of 52.7% in 2029. But very few people would argue that its recent growth rate is sustainable

over this period. Therefore, the prospects of the DA governing South Africa in the foreseeable future are, at best, remote. Instead, it will have to focus on winning the provinces (Gauteng and the Northern Cape) and the metros (Tshwane, Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth) where its policies appear to be most attractive to the voters. And, without being unduly dismissive of the rural parts of the country, if the DA were to end up controlling the Western Cape and Gauteng, along with Johannesburg, Cape Town and Pretoria, with the Northern Cape and Port Elizabeth thrown in for good measure, it would matter relatively little if it still lacked an overall parliamentary majority.

3.3. The Economic Freedom Fighters

Any party that comes from nothing and wins the votes of 1.17 million people (6.35% of the total turn out) has done well. Julius Malema understands the emotions of the electorate better than most politicians, and knows how to respond to them. The fact that the EFF's main policies on the economy, land, social welfare and affirmative action, are entirely unworkable is clearly neither here nor there for that part of the electorate which has grown tired of what it sees as the ANC's failure to deliver jobs, houses, advancement and wealth. The vote for the EFF was a classic protest vote; and early indications are that the EFF will take its version of protest politics into Parliament.

Is it sustainable? In 2009 COPE came from nowhere, also on the back of a protest vote (by ANC supporters who rejected the manoeuvring that saw Thabo Mbeki ejected from the presidency) and won even more votes than the EFF – 1.3 million, or 7.5%. It has now, for all practical purposes, evaporated as a party. This is not to say that the same will happen to the EFF, but it would not be surprising if it were to; a protest vote is a fickle vote. In addition, the EFF is Julius Malema writ large; no other party is quite so dependent on the charisma and drive of its leader. If Mr Malema's trial on corruption charges should go against him, he would have to leave Parliament, and where the EFF would be without him is anyone's guess. There is also the possibility of a leadership clash, or of factionalism developing within the EFF (COPE, again, offers a history lesson in this regard). In short, the mere fact that the EFF won a million plus votes, and 25 National Assembly seats, while impressive, does not establish the party as a significant player in the medium or long term.

3.4. The other parties

There is very little of significance to say about the remaining ten parties that won sufficient votes to earn a seat in Parliament. Perhaps the most noteworthy fact is precisely that *there are ten of them* – this means ten more party leaders, drawing an enhanced salary, ten more (short) speeches to be made on every Bill or motion, ten more sets of policies and priorities to be promoted and defended. Or does it mean, instead, ten more diverse sets of views reflecting the richness of our polity? Ten more opportunities for minority interests to assert themselves? Ten voices not beholden to the big parties and thus able to resist their tendency to force through their agendas?

Certainly, it is noteworthy that some of the most experienced and effective parliamentarians are to be found in these smaller parties. Many of them have been MPs since 1994 or 1999, and they have a finely-tuned sense of how to work the space between the two major parties and, thereby, craft better legislation. Some of these parties also bring certain distinctive worldviews to Parliament, be they the avowedly Christian, the Africanist, the Afrikaner, or the Zulu.

Finally, a word about Agang. By any measure, Dr Mamphele Ramphele ought to have a significant role to play in South African political life. A black woman with impeccable struggle, academic, business and leadership credentials, a grasp of what ails the country, and a lack of the kind of factional baggage that weighs down so many other bright politicians, should surely be able to attract a vast following. But she did not. Somehow, she contrived to end up with a paltry 50 000 votes. To launch the party as a 'platform' was a mistake; to fail to come up with at least a few recognisable names as a second string was another mistake; to be tempted into a one night stand with the DA was yet another. More than all that, though, Agang failed because it didn't have a clear, understandable, consistent and attractive message. The very same reasons, conversely, why the EFF succeeded.

4. Conclusion

The overshadowing fact of the 2014 general election is that nine out of every 20 people entitled to vote did not do so. The other eleven set the formal political agenda for the next five years, and will fight it out among themselves to see who comes up with the best ideas and the best plans for

their implementation. The voices and desires of the nine who did not take part in this year's election will count for nothing. Come 2019, the secondary question will be how to choose between the different policies and platforms put forward by the parties, and how to reward or punish them for their performances over the preceding five years. The primary question will be

how to energise and motivate the nine to the point where they take an interest in answering the secondary question.

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¹ This analysis is partly based on the presentations of Prof Steven Friedman and Mr Zackie Achmat at a roundtable discussion on the election outcome jointly hosted by CPLO and the Hanns Seidel Foundation on May 16th.

² It may safely be assumed that, by May 2014, this number would have grown somewhat. Dr Collette Schulz-Herzenberg has estimated that the real number was about 32.7 million at the time of the election. See <http://www.issafrica.org/uploads/Electoral-Trends-Collette-Schulz-Herzenberg.pdf>; see also <http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/2014/02/24/election-statistics-a-wake-up-call-for-dreamers>

³ It puts us in close company with India (56.5%), slightly behind the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation (61.1% and 63.4% respectively), and slightly ahead of the United States (53.6%). Schulz-Herzenberg, *op. cit.*

⁴ See, for example: <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-06-02-iss-analysis-digging-deeper-into-the-2014-election-results/#.U6CMRCjyHNt>;

⁵ See <http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/million-born-frees-won-t-vote-on-may-7-1.1678476#.U6HVvSjyHNs>

⁶ In fact, since the figure of 73.2% is an average over all age-groups, and since registration figures are higher for older ages, we can assume that actual turn-out was higher than 73.2% in the older age-groups, and lower among younger eligible voters.

⁷ See <http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/anc-set-for-two-thirds-majority-poll-1.1678302#.U6cbhLHyHNs>

⁸ See <http://www.citypress.co.za/politics/da-predicts-hammering-anc-but-wary-of-ramphele/>

⁹ See <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/Politics/Malema-EFF-plan-to-win-2014-elections-20140109>

¹⁰ It will win 58.6% in 2019, 55.25% in 2024, and 52.1% in 2029.

¹¹ A very useful comparison between the national and provincial results over successive elections can be found at <http://www.news24.com/elections/results#year=2014&map=previous&election=national>

¹² See <http://www.citypress.co.za/politics/6-black-voters-support-da-helen-zille/> It is regrettable that, in order to analyse and understand voting patterns and trends, recourse must still be had to Apartheid-era classifications.

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