

THE ECONOMIC FREEDOM FIGHTERS

*South Africa's Turn Towards Populism?*¹

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ABSTRACT

The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party has made an impact on South African politics since it was launched in 2013. After the general election in 2014 the EFF became the third-largest party in the National Assembly and the official opposition in North West and Limpopo provinces. Some commentators have raised concerns that the EFF's success represents a turn towards a dangerous populism in South African politics. This article seeks to analyse the EFF as a populist party by arguing that it fits into a global pattern of populism in electoral politics. It uses the category of 'political style', as developed by Benjamin Moffitt and Simon Tormey (2014), to discuss the brand of populism espoused by the EFF. The article argues that the performative elements of the EFF's politics – its uniform and rhetoric, as well as its engagement with national and provincial legislatures – have had the effect of sparking a debate about the relevance of the country's political institutions 20 years into democratic rule.

INTRODUCTION

The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party was the big story of South Africa's 2014 election. Led by the erstwhile president of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), Julius Malema, the EFF captured the public imagination and visually transformed the political landscape. Their red berets became ubiquitous at political meetings, township funerals and on urban streets across South Africa. Because of the political personality of its leader, the EFF dominated the media and public discourse far more than would normally be expected for a

1 Portions of this article have appeared in Kujenga Amani (forums.ssrc.org/kujengamani/2014/05/05/south-africa-2014-elections/#.VEaDBvldUW1) and the EISA *South Africa 2014 Election Update*, issue No 9.

party that had only been in existence for such a short time. Yet despite this triumph of form and imagery, the substance of the EFF's politics remains disputed.

Political analyst Steven Friedman dismissed the party's prominence as being 'a case of media hype over substance', arguing that the EFF's theatrics were being confused with actual influence over the electorate (Friedman 2014) and Ebrahim Fakir (2014, p 5) described the EFF as 'a hodge-podge of different ideological and political strains melding the incendiary politics of "radical blackness" with the seeming elements of socialism'.

While the party appeared to be radical in its approach, Fakir continued, 'it is essentially an empty rhetoric captured in the politics of spectacle, where even complex ideas get pared down to mere slogans'. The party's strategies of 'nationalising the commanding heights of the economy (mines, banks and large factories to the rest of us), expropriating and redistributing land seized by "white thieves" in a process of grand theft, without compensation, and distributing unused state land' were, ironically, he wrote, 'part of the policy arsenal of the apartheid era National Party'.

Various commentators from both the right and the left of the political spectrum dismissed the party as fascist and warned of the dangers it presents in a context of socio-economic hardships caused by high unemployment (Fogel 2013; *Sunday Independent* 2014; Whelan 2014). The label fascist is inflammatory and tends to preclude balanced debate because of the emotions it evokes. However, an examination of the EFF's politics is necessary to understand its place in South African politics and its future prospects.

This article argues that the EFF fits into a global pattern of populism in electoral politics. It uses the category of 'political style', as developed by Benjamin Moffitt and Simon Tormey (2014), to discuss the brand of populism espoused by the party. It argues that the impact of the substance of the EFF's politics is secondary to the impact of its political performance and populist political style on the content of current political debate in South Africa.

The article begins with a brief discussion of Moffitt & Tormey's concept of political style. It then goes on to discuss the EFF as a populist party, examines its ideological position and moves on to assess the party's election campaign and its performance in the elections. It then highlights how the EFF's populism is playing out in both the national and provincial legislatures and closes with some thoughts on its prospects for longevity and what it will take for it to achieve its goal of challenging the ANC's electoral dominance.

CONCEPTUAL NOTES: POPULISM AS POLITICAL STYLE

The past decade has seen a rise in populist politics across the globe. The rise of political movements of 'the people' against 'the elite' can be seen in a diverse range

of contexts – from the Tea Party in the United States to the Front National in France and the Red Shirts in Thailand. In the discourse, populism is generally regarded in a negative light as implying an emotive politics that explains phenomena in simplistic rather than holistic terms and encourages people to suppress or override their rationality. As Mudde (2007, p 542) points out, populism also refers to political opportunism – ‘policies with the aim of (quickly) pleasing the people/voters’. Mudde (2007, p 543) defines populism as

an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups. ‘The pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.’

Scholars have attempted to explain populism in a variety of ways, focusing on political ideologies (see Mudde 2007), organisational forms (see Weyland 2001) and types of discourse used by populists (see Laclau & Mouffe 1985; Panizza 2005). However, given the wide variety of populist organisations that do not fit the archetype in any of these categories the concept has been highly contested and its explanatory utility placed in doubt. Populism seems to be merely a convenient label used to dismiss *those whose politics we do not agree with*.

Moffitt & Tormey (2014, p 386) address this problem by introducing the perspective of populism as ‘political style’. This allows for a focus on the performance of politics and the way it creates political relations. Moffitt & Tormey (2014) ‘seek to acknowledge the collapsing of style and content in these “spectacular” times’. They quote Frank Ankersmit, who argues that ‘style sometimes generates content, and vice versa’ (Moffitt & Tormey 2014, p 388).

This acknowledgement of the mutually constitutive relationship between style and content in populist politics is significant in the context of the EFF, which has developed a distinctive style but has been accused of lacking substance. A conceptual approach that enables us to make the connection between the EFF’s political style and the content of its politics is compelling. As Moffitt & Tormey (2014, p 388) contend, ‘the contemporary political landscape is intensely mediated and “stylised” and as such the so-called “aesthetic” or “performative” features are particularly (and increasingly) important.’ Another benefit of Moffitt & Tormey’s approach is that it does not require an understanding of populism as an ideology to assess it as a political style. Much of the debate about the EFF has been about where to place it on the ideological spectrum, with those opposed to the party dismissing it as right-wing or fascist and those sympathetic to it characterising it as left-wing and progressive. These opposing caricatures do not assist us in understanding the EFF’s politics, its appeal to voters or its possible impact on

South African political life. This article is based on the assumption that a focus on the performative elements of the EFF's politics sheds light on its brand of populism.

Moffitt & Tormey (2014)'s model has three main elements, which are discussed below.

Appeal to 'the people'

What distinguishes populists from other political organisations is their evocation of the people as 'the true holders of sovereignty', as opposed to an exploitative or corrupt elite. The elite or political class are constructed as the source of some crisis or breakdown that is based on or has resulted in the people being let down, exploited or poorly governed. According to Moffitt & Tormey (2014) populists distance themselves from the elite or power bloc in several ways, including the adoption of popular language, gestures and fashion. Populists make claims of being the true voice of the people. The EFF's founding logic is that it represents the poor, marginalised masses of South Africa that continue to be exploited by capital and those who hold political power.

Crisis, breakdown and threat

The driving force of populism often comes from perceived crisis, breakdown or threat. These can be related to some collapse of relations between citizens and their representatives as well as economic hardships or social developments. Moffitt & Tormey (2014, p 392) argue that 'the effect of the evocation of emergency in this fashion is to simplify radically the terms and the terrain of political debate which is reflected in the tendency towards simple and direct language.' Framing incidents as emergencies enables the immediate and decisive action favoured by populists as opposed to the slow and technical process of modern governance. The EFF was formed out of crisis after its leader, Julius Malema, and its head of policy, Floyd Shivambu, were expelled from the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) in 2012. Since its establishment the party has received its impetus from various other crises, including the Marikana massacre, anti-government protests in several communities and the controversy over the development of the president's residence at Nkandla.

'Bad manners'

Populist discourse is coarse. As Moffitt & Tormey (2014, p 392) put it, 'much of populists' appeal comes from their disregard for "appropriate" ways of acting in

the political realm'. They mark themselves as the practitioners of a kind of low politics that is opposed to the high politics of the elite. In challenging the rules and conventions of politics and the institutions through which politics is conducted and mediated, they set themselves apart from the elite and identify themselves as part of the people. This can be seen in the EFF's 'revolutionary' dress code and its adoption of old military language from the days of the liberation struggle, which appears out of place in democratic politics. The EFF's disdain for parliamentary rules and its challenging of the legitimacy of parliamentary conventions are a part of the same phenomenon.

Moffitt & Tormey's framework provides a useful lens through which we can examine the EFF's populism. The next section discusses the formation, ideological foundations and political style of the party.

THE EFF AS A POPULIST PARTY

The EFF, formed in July 2013 as a breakaway ANCYL faction, merged with like-minded political formations including the September National Imbizo (SNI), whose leader, Andile Mngxitama, has explained the organisation's ideology as 'black consciousness, pan-Africanist'.

Those EFF leaders whose political formation took place within the ANC – Julius Malema, Floyd Shivambu and Mbuyiseni Ndlozi – brought into the party a foundational commitment to the Freedom Charter, whose principles, they argue, have been betrayed by the ANC since 1994.

The party's founding manifesto explains that its socialist commitment comes from an appreciation 'of the role played by the fathers and mothers of South Africa's liberation movement' and states that the party 'draws inspiration from the radical, working class interpretation of the Freedom Charter' (EFF 2013a). The suggestion is that this interpretation differs from the presumably conservative, elitist interpretation of the current ANC.

The two sections of the Freedom Charter used as the foundation of the EFF's manifesto are that 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it' and that the national wealth of South Africa (minerals, banking and industry) 'shall be restored to her people'. According to the EFF, this will be done by nationalising 'mines, banks and monopoly industries' (EFF 2013a).

The cardinal pillars of the party's manifesto are:

- Expropriation of land for equal redistribution, without compensation;
- Nationalisation of mines, banks and other strategic sectors of the economy without compensation;
- Building state and government capacity, which will lead to the abolition of tenders;

- Free quality education, healthcare, housing and sanitation;
- Massive protected industrial development to create millions of sustainable jobs, the introduction of minimum wages in order to close the wage gap between rich and poor and the promotion of rapid career paths for all people in the workplace;
- Massive development of the African economy and a move from reconciliation to justice on the entire continent; and
- Open, accountable, corruption-free government and society without fear of victimisation by state agencies

When the EFF joined forces with the SNI it adopted the black consciousness rhetoric (inspired by Steve Biko)² and pan-Africanism (inspired by Robert Sobukwe),³ as well as a critique of the post-colonial comprador state (inspired by Frantz Fanon).

In an interview Mngxitama explained the decision to unite with the EFF, saying that 'it became useless and childish to insist on developing a politics outside of the space Malema was operating in, because he had already appropriated [the left] agenda, our politics' (Sosibo 2013).

When asked about the contradiction between the SNI's black consciousness and Africanist agenda and the EFF's Charterist stance (and the non-racialism it implies), Mngxitama argued that the EFF's insistence on expropriation of land and wealth without compensation inherently contradicted the notion of non-racialism in the Freedom Charter and aligned the agendas of the two organisations. Following the merger, Mngxitama was responsible for drafting the party's election manifesto.

While the founding manifesto is couched in the race neutral language of workers' struggles and economic emancipation, the election manifesto is far more explicit in its focus on black struggles and the need for black economic emancipation and empowerment. This is not to argue, as some (mostly white) observers have done, that the EFF is a racist party (for nuanced discussion on this see Duncan 2014 and Harvey 2014). Rather it is to point out that the leftist, class-focused analysis that defined the party's rhetoric when it was launched has been replaced by an awareness of South Africa's class struggle as shaped by race and an alignment with aspirations of black self-determination and empowerment.

This is why, although much was made of the EFF's support among disenfranchised, economically marginalised black (male) youth, the party's

2 Anti-apartheid activist and founder of the Black Consciousness Movement, who died in police custody in 1977.

3 Anti-apartheid activist and founder of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), which broke away from the ANC in 1959.

message resonated with a sizeable portion of the (mostly) young black middle class who live in closest proximity to white South Africans and experience racism daily in their workplaces and leisure and living spaces. It is this constituency that sees the degree to which economic transformation has not been achieved in corporate boardrooms, newsrooms and university lecture theatres. The EFF recognised this by including a commitment in its election manifesto to improving the working conditions of black professionals like doctors, academics, lawyers and engineers who face racial discrimination in the work place.

Using Moffitt & Tormey's terminology, the EFF's appeal is to 'the people', defined as black Africans, who are variously referred to as the powerless black majority, the working class, the black majority and, specifically, poor black people. This group is placed in opposition to historically advantaged white capitalists and the newly advantaged ANC elite. The EFF's diagnosis of South Africa after 1994 is that black South Africans have become a 'voting, but powerless majority' because true economic and social power still resides in white hands. The people are therefore the historically disadvantaged black majority, who continue to be marginalised in the democratic dispensation. The people are exploited both by the white capitalist class that has not relinquished power since 1994 and by the corrupt, black elite that sold out during the negotiated settlement.

One of the ways in which the EFF identifies itself with the people is through clothing. The party's signature red beret, harking back to the revolutionary fervour of icons like Che Guevara and Thomas Sankara, is intended to distinguish it from the ANC and to connect it to the purity of genuine revolutionary struggle. Furthermore, the EFF's full range of uniforms – miners' overalls for the men and domestic workers' uniforms for the women,⁴ are a direct identification with the working class.

While they often mock the EFF's penchant for spectacle, both the ANC and the official opposition, the Democratic Alliance (DA), introduced their own berets during the election in response to the ubiquity of the EFF's headgear.

The EFF has used crisis, breakdown and threat effectively in its political strategy. The party's official launch was held in Marikana in October 2013. Julius Malema had been a frequent visitor to the platinum belt township following the brutal police killing of 34 miners in August 2012. The decision to hold the launch there gave the EFF the chance to emphasise some of its key messages. Marikana, the party maintains, symbolises what appears to be an ANC sell out to big capital, its failure to protect the interests of one of its largest labour constituencies, mineworkers, and its susceptibility to the excesses of force that are a feature of authoritarian regimes.

4 An examination of gender in the EFF's politics is a rich subject for future research.

As the first 'massacre' of the democratic dispensation, Marikana will go down in history as a source of shame for the ANC in government. By choosing to launch its party at the site of the tragedy, the EFF could give impetus to its agenda of being the revolutionary alternative to what it argued was a politically compromised governing party.

ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND PERFORMANCE

The EFF's nascent ideological identity as well as a distinctive rhetorical and symbolic position enabled it to run an effective campaign, aimed at establishing its identity as a 'party of the people'. The party consistently attempted to place itself in the position of revolutionary vanguard against a reactionary ANC-led government and other conservative forces. The EFF's populist political style was evident throughout the campaign as it used an appeal to the people, various crises and a test of the limits of appropriate political discourse to differentiate itself in the electoral market.

The party made use of both conventional and unconventional modes of campaigning. The conventional modes included election posters featuring leader Julius Malema, door-to-door campaigns in communities across the country, large rallies held in all the provinces and a television advertisement that took advantage of the free airtime offered by the South African Broadcast Corporation (SABC).

Among its non-conventional methods, the use of protests stands out. Using crisis to drive populism, the EFF took up the causes of communities engaged in service delivery protests against the ANC government in various provinces. Apart from an ongoing presence in strife-torn Marikana, it participated in protests in Moretele in the North West. After police officers shot at protesters, Julius Malema urged the community to continue protesting against the government. He was quoted by the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper as saying, 'I was told by EFF officials in North West that you would be marching. They said the officers here are used to killing people and we have come to join you so that they may kill us also' (Maromo 2014). This direct reference to placing himself in the same position as 'the people' of Moretele, is in keeping with the party's populist political style. Malema encouraged the people to march every day until they received services from the government, an apparently obvious solution to an evidently complex problem.

The EFF was also able to capitalise on protests in Relela, near Tzaneen, in January 2014, where demonstrations against poor policing in the area turned violent. After three people were shot dead, allegedly by police, Malema promised the community legal assistance and urged them to vote for the EFF to attain a better life. He was quoted saying, '[f]rom today, Relela belongs to the EFF' (Tau 2014).

In the months preceding the 2014 election EFF leaders became regular visitors to Bekkersdal, near Westonaria in Gauteng. Bekkersdal was the site of numerous

protests as the community called for the municipality to be disbanded because of alleged mismanagement of funds and corruption. EFF leaders in Gauteng, notably its candidate for premier of the province, Dali Mpofu, visited the community to express their support for the people's grievances. This included holding the Gauteng launch of the party's election manifesto in the area (Mathebula 2014), supporting the occupation by community members of vacant land owned by Rand Uranium mining company (Sapa 2014a) and encouraging protesters to continue fighting for 'water, electricity and housing' (Lekgowa & Simelane 2013).

The EFF used 'guerilla' tactics even in cases where it attempted more conventional campaign methods. The party's campaign advertisement was banned by the national broadcaster for inciting violence because it called for the physical destruction of the controversial e-toll gantries on Gauteng's highways. Following the ban, the EFF laid a complaint with the Independent Communications Authority of SA (Icasa), which upheld the SABC's decision (*Legalbrief Today* 2014). The party organised a march to the offices of the SABC to protest both the ban and Icasa's ruling – thus using the ban itself as a campaign tool and linking it to the grievances and methods of struggle of ordinary people. According to media reports, about 300 Bekkersdal residents joined the EFF's march (Mitchely 2014).

The EFF's aggressive campaigning style clearly touched a nerve in the ANC, whose youth wing disrupted EFF events and attempted to prevent some of the party's rallies from taking place. The ANC-aligned South African Students Congress (Sasco) attempted to disrupt an address by Julius Malema at the University of South Africa in September 2013 (Sapa 2013b) and Malema was forced to leave an event at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in April 2014 after it was disrupted by ANC supporters (Sapa 2014b).

Another element of the EFF's campaign was its challenge to the rules and leadership of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). In February 2014 the party launched an urgent application against the IEC, President Zuma and the minister of home affairs, hoping to interdict the IEC from claiming the registration fee required to contest the provincial and national elections. The party argued that the R200 000 national fee and the R45 000 fee for each province (a total of R605 000 for full participation) was prohibitively expensive for new parties and excluded poor people from the democratic process.

The urgent application was dismissed (with costs) and the party found the funds to register to contest nationally, as well as in all nine provinces (Whittles 2014). This challenge and the refusal to cooperate automatically with election conventions and rules that have evolved since 1994 is another aspect of the EFF's populist political style. The 'bad manners' displayed by the EFF in the IEC case, under the pretext of championing the interests of poor people, was just a precursor

of what was to come after the election, when the party took up its seats in the national Parliament and provincial legislatures.

The EFF's performance in the elections

The character and impact of the EFF featured prominently in the debate about whether the 2014 election would bring with it a grand realignment in South African politics to counter the dominance of the governing ANC and the DA's continued hold over opposition politics. The ANC won the election with 62.15% of the vote, receiving a convincing mandate to govern the country for the next five years. This was, however, a decline of about three per cent from the 65.9% it had won in 2009. The DA consolidated its position as the official opposition, with 22% of the vote, a five per cent increase from 2009. Both the DA and the EFF made inroads in Gauteng's metropolitan municipalities, which potentially bodes well for the DA's ambitions to govern the City of Johannesburg or Tshwane municipality in coalition after the 2016 local government elections.

The EFF emerged as the big winner among the new entrants, winning 6.35% of the vote, which gave it 25 seats in Parliament. It also became the official opposition in Limpopo and North West. While this performance falls short of the party's unrealistic hopes of winning more than 50% of the vote, it is a respectable showing for a party that was less than a year old when it contested its first election. The major new entrant in the 2009 election, the Congress of the People (Cope) won 7.4% of the vote in that election with greater resources than the EFF and the benefit of easily accessible protest votes following the ANC's divisive Polokwane conference.

While the EFF had a ready constituency of Julius Malema supporters from his days in the ANCYL and of supporters of the SNI, the new party had to build a constituency from below to have a realistic chance of contesting the elections both nationally and in each of the provinces. The results show that the party succeeded in establishing a broad support base, countrywide.

Table 1
National Election Results 2014 and 2009

Party	2014 % vote	Seats	2009 % vote
ANC	62.15	249	65.89
DA	22.23	89	16.6
EFF	6.35	25	N/A

An analysis of the results in the major metropolitan municipalities and in some of the protest areas targeted by the EFF sheds more light on the success of the party's campaign. The election in Gauteng was hotly contested in 2014. The ANC in the province does not support the presidency of Jacob Zuma and was one of the leading forces behind the presidential candidacy of Kgalema Motlanthe at the party's Mangaung conference in 2012.

With the high number of disgruntled ANC supporters in the province and a citizenry largely dissatisfied with the performance of the provincial and metro governments, opposition parties viewed the province as a key battleground. In addition, Gauteng has the highest number of registered voters in the country, so a good performance in the province can have a significant impact on a party's national performance.

The EFF won 10.31% of the vote in Gauteng compared to the ANC's 53.58% and the DA's 30.78%. The ANC's result was a decline of more than 10% from the 64.76% it had won in 2009 and it is likely that the EFF eroded some of the ANC's support, particularly among (both poor and middle-class) young black voters. The decline in support for the ANC was exacerbated by a lower voter turnout than in the previous election. The DA's improvement from 21.27% in 2009 to 30.78% in 2014 can be explained in part by the implosion of Cope, which lost most of the 7.78% it had won in 2009, dropping to a mere 0.49% of the vote.

The results in the Gauteng metros were especially contentious given the upcoming local government elections in 2016. If the trends set in the 2014 poll continue, the ANC will have a tough time holding on to control of the three largest metros in the country's richest province. In Ekurhuleni, where the EFF held its election manifesto launch, the party won 10.65% of the vote compared to the ANC's 56.41%. In the City of Johannesburg it received 10.15% and in Tshwane 11.43%. An interesting factor in the Gauteng results is the evidence of vote splitting, with the ANC winning a slightly higher percentage of the vote in the national poll (54.92%) than in the provincial poll (53.59%) and the DA performing better in the provincial election (30.78%) than in the national one (28.52%). This indicates that a small percentage of voters split their vote between different parties for the two different levels of government.

In the North West and Limpopo provinces the EFF won enough votes (10.74% in Limpopo and 13.21% in North West) to become the official opposition in the provincial legislatures. In both cases it unseated Cope, which performed dismally compared to 2009. Limpopo is Julius Malema's home province and one of the EFF's strongholds. However, it is also the province in which Malema's company, On-Point Engineering, is alleged to have fraudulently received tenders for construction work (Nicolson 2012).

Table 2
Gauteng Results 2014 and 2009

Party	National %		Provincial %	
	2014 vote	2009 vote	2014 vote	2009 vote
ANC	54.92	64.76	53.59	64.04
DA	28.52	21.27	30.78	21.86
EFF	10.26	N/A	10.3	N/A
COPE	0.51	7.78	0.49	7.78

Source IEC

Table 3
Ekurhuleni Results 2014

Party	National (%)	Provincial (%)
ANC	56.41	55.07
DA	26.88	29.05
EFF	10.65	10.61

Source: IEC 2014

Table 4
City of Johannesburg Results 2014

Party	National (%)	Provincial (%)
ANC	53.63	52.28
DA	29.76	32.37
EFF	10.15	10.13

Source: IEC 2014

Table 5
City of Tshwane Results 2014

Party	National (%)	Provincial (%)
ANC	50.96	49.31
DA	31.32	33.75
EFF	11.42	11.51

Source: IEC 2014

Table 6
Limpopo Results 2014 and 2009

Party	National %		Provincial %	
	2014 vote	2009 vote	2014 vote	2009 vote
ANC	78.97	85.27	78.60	84.88
DA	6.60	3.71	6.48	3.48
EFF	10.27	N/A	10.74	N/A
COPE	0.82	7.21	0.86	7.53

Source: IEC 2014

Table 7
North West Results 2014 and 2009

Party	National		Provincial	
	2014 vote	2009 vote	2014 vote	2009 vote
ANC	67.79	73.84	67.39	72.89
DA	12.59	8.70	12.73	8.24
EFF	12.53	N/A	13.21	N/A
COPE	0.76	8.43	0.80	8.33

Source: IEC 2014

Malema's support in the province appears not to have been much affected by the controversy. The DA increased its support, perhaps largely on the back of the decline in support for Cope. In the North West, the province in which Marikana and other platinum mining towns are situated, the EFF, not surprisingly, performed very well. Malema visited the platinum belt several times and the EFF developed cooperative relations with the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), which has played a leading role in the labour unrest in the mines there.

Performance in protest hotspots

Given the EFF's strategy of campaigning in areas hit by protest, it was expected that it would perform particularly well in those areas. However, a detailed

examination of the results shows that while this was the case in some areas, the EFF did not significantly erode the ANC's support.

For instance, in Bekkersdal, the ANC was the top performer in every voting district, winning well over 50% of the vote. The EFF performed better in those areas in Bekkersdal directly affected by protests than in those that were not, winning between approximately 15% and 20% of the vote in all but one of those areas. While some analysts had predicted a fall in voter turnout in areas affected by pre-election protests, in Bekkersdal this turned out not to be the case.

Table 8
Bekkersdal Results 2014

Station Address	National		Provincial		
	ANC votes %	EFF votes %	ANC votes %	EFF votes %	Voter turnout %
AME Church*	66.5	17.46	63.02	19.98	69.31
Paul Nel Hall	68.22	14.55	68.15	14.15	64.09
Kgothlang High School	59.57	18.19	51.29	18.06	71.63
Maputle Primary School	60.74	18.33	56.96	21.67	86.23
Ipeleng Primary School	71.71	17.56	69.59	20.00	73.28
Bekkersdal Development Hub	76.93	8.04	75.30	8.45	64.48
Thambo Base Section	78.8	5.75	79.22	10.07	46.14
Holomisa Tent	81.8	8.10	82.09	8.15	50.11
Tambo Soccer Field	80.15	8.49	77.91	9.67	55.58
TOTAL					63.95

Source: IEC 2014; Ndletyana, Tchereni, Maimela & Lerakong 2014

*Bold represents areas directly affected by protests

Table 9
Relela Election Results 2014

Station Address	National		Provincial		
	ANC votes %	EFF votes %	ANC votes %	EFF votes %	Voter turnout %
Relela Community Hall	86.48	8.72	84.63	9.16	55.11
Mabje-a-Kgoro Primary School	92.31	5.13	91.56	5.52	71.17
Matokane Secondary School	89.68	4.76	91.23	4.39	69.57
Semapela Secondary School	92.52	4.91	92.64	6.18	66.01
Sethong Pre-School	90.00	6.67	88.6	8.77	70.44
Sethong Primary School	90.31	7.59	90.40	7.73	66.21
Setheeni Pre-school	92.21	5.19	93.46	5.88	85.33
Motupa Kgomo Primary School	89.96	7.41	90.26	7.68	69.97
Mokutupi Primary School	92.26	6.71	92.27	6.44	62.02
Pholo-ya-Hlaba Primary	89.23	7.86	90.15	7.42	77.63
TOTAL					66.65

Source: IEC 2014; Ndletyana, Tchereni, Maimela & Lerakong 2014

The pre-election protests in Relela appear to have had a minimal effect on support for the ANC in the area, where it received overwhelming mandates in all ten voting districts, winning about 90% of the vote. The EFF received the second-highest support in all ten voting districts, but still won less than 10% of the vote. Therefore, contrary to Malema's pre-election campaign hopes, Relela does not belong to the EFF.

POPULISM v PARLIAMENTARY DECORUM

The EFF's populist political style has found full expression in the party's activities as parliamentary opposition to the governing ANC. In both the national Parliament and various provincial legislatures the EFF has tried to establish itself as the party of the people, challenging the rules of the game and rejecting agreed conventions of appropriate political conduct.

EFF MPs wore bright red overalls and domestic workers' uniforms to the first sitting of the National Assembly, in which Jacob Zuma was officially elected by members for another term as president of the Republic. Party MP Hlengiwe Maxon defended the party's red attire, saying:

This is the dress of domestic workers ... We are trying to tell people that we are from the Economic Freedom Fighters, we are here for the workers and the poor. We are sending a message to say that the Parliament for the people is not a Parliament for the elite. So the workers at home, when they see us dressed like this, they will know they are represented.

Makinana & Underhill 2014

The EFF's dress in Parliament was not merely a provocative fashion choice, it was a challenge to the 'Western' conventions upheld in South Africa's Parliament and the compromises made during the negotiated settlement that led to democracy. In July the party was barred from entering the Gauteng provincial legislature because its members, wearing their standard uniform of red overalls bearing the party's motto, 'asijiki [we are not turning back]', were dressed 'inappropriately'. According to the secretary to the legislature political insignia is not allowed on the legislature premises and this is the primary reason EFF members were barred from the building (Goldhammer 2014).

The EFF successfully transformed the seemingly inconsequential dispute over clothing into a broader debate about the ongoing legacy of colonialism and the terms by which the end of apartheid was negotiated. Malema argued that the reason his party members were barred from the legislature was that the ANC leadership was ashamed of workers and was treating the Economic Freedom Fighters as poorly as they treat their domestic workers at home. He dismissed the argument about an appropriate dress code thus:

To you proper is white, to you proper is European. We are not white, we are going to wear those uniforms ... We are defying colonialist

decorum. We are not English-made. We are workers, and we are going to wear those clothes and we are unapologetic about it.

Pillay 2014

Some observers see the EFF's challenge to the dress code as a legitimate questioning of the compromises made to attain formal democracy (Bunsee 2014). Following a two month stand-off, the EFF put its case before the South Gauteng High Court and won the right to wear its uniforms in the Gauteng legislature (EWN 2014). This is a political and propaganda victory for the party.

This notion of challenging the foundations of the 'elite pact' that resulted in the present democratic order was expounded upon by Malema in response to President Zuma's State of the Nation address in June 2014. Malema's speech denounced white supremacy, emphasised the similarities between the ANC and the DA and stated that the ANC had 'murdered' the miners at Marikana (Malema 2014). Malema was ejected from the house for refusing to retract this remark. The rest of his party's MPs walked out with him, whistling and hurling comments as they exited. Parliamentary walkouts and similar disruptions appear to have become a signature move of the EFF.

The party is currently in a stand-off with Parliament after a similar incident took place in August 2014, when President Jacob Zuma was answering questions in the National Assembly. Malema, dissatisfied with Zuma's response to a question about the Public Protector's report on her investigation of the upgrades of Zuma's residence in Nkandla, insisted that Zuma answer whether he was going to repay the amount spent on the upgrades. Following a heated exchange between National Assembly Speaker Baleka Mbete and EFF MPs about their conduct, the speaker suspended the session and threatened to have EFF members forcibly removed from the chamber when they refused to leave.

EFF members remained in the chamber chanting 'pay back the money!' at Zuma and then at the media surrounding them after he left (ENCA 2014). These events were followed by a press conference held by the crime prevention and security cluster of ministers, who announced plans to secure Parliament and prevent any future disruptions. This unprecedented move prompted concerns about the apparent breach of parliamentary independence and a violation of the separation of powers set out in the Constitution of the Republic (Hartley 2014).

A disciplinary hearing set up by Parliament's Powers and Privileges Committee (PPC) to hear evidence about the incident, summoned 20 EFF MPs to appear before it, but, on 7 October 2014 Malema led a walkout from the hearing, claiming it was impossible for his party's members to receive a fair hearing from the ANC-dominated committee (Makinana 2014a). In an interview with the *Mail & Guardian*, party spokesman Mbuyiseni Ndlozi stated 'We are not giving up

on Parliament, but we are there to transform it ... Walking out is a contestation of a decision that says that, whatever you decide, it is not going to be binding' (Makinana 2014b).

The committee continued without the EFF's participation and submitted a concluding report on 3 November 2014 in which it found all 20 EFF members guilty of the charges against them and recommended a 30-day suspension without pay for 12 of them, including Julius Malema and Floyd Shivambu (Parliament of SA 2014). The PPC's report has been criticised by opposition parties, who called the committee process 'procedurally flawed' and maintained that it amounted to a 'political hatchet job by the ANC' on the EFF (Sapa 2014d). The EFF is seeking to challenge the report in court but has come up against the Western Cape High Court Judge President, John Hlophe, who, the party alleges, has refused to allow the matter to be heard in that court (EFF 2014a). At the time of writing the matter had yet to be resolved.

The PPC disciplinary hearing did not discourage the EFF from its strategy of challenging the ANC and the president in Parliament. On 13 November 2014 riot police were called into the National Assembly to remove an EFF MP, Ngwanamakwetle Mashabela, who had refused to retract a statement that President Jacob Zuma is a thief and a criminal (Davis 2014). This followed seven hours of filibustering by opposition politicians to prevent Parliament from adopting a report that found the president innocent of wrongdoing in relation to the building of his residence at Nkandla. The unprecedented move of calling public order police into Parliament, as well as the decision to switch off the live parliamentary TV feed, led to concerns about the ANC's commitment to democratic institutions and about Parliament as a site of robust public debate (Suttner 2014).

Moffitt & Tormey's concept of the constitutive relationship between political style and political substance is relevant to understanding the EFF's first few months in Parliament. While some observers have dismissed the party's behaviour as a series of publicity stunts that are interfering with important legislative business, it could be argued that the EFF's challenges to the conventions of the system are opening space for a substantive debate about the relevance of the current political institutions to addressing the challenges South Africa faces. Inadvertently, the EFF is testing the commitment of the ANC to these institutions by showing how quickly the governing party resorts to force and possibly undemocratic means to maintain control and exercise its governing mandate and authority. The EFF's actions have also placed it in the position of most-vocal opposition party in Parliament and have turned the spotlight on Parliament for the first time since the early days of South Africa's democracy. The renewed public interest in Parliament (even if only to see politicians fighting each other) is a positive development.

In spite of this, it is already clear that maintaining a consistently 'revolutionary' stance will not be easy for the new parliamentarians. After EFF MPs refused to use Parliament's medical scheme, arguing that all government officials should use public services, it was revealed that Malema's son would continue to attend a private school instead of moving to a public one (Sapa 2014c). Clearly, the party's stated intention and the actions of its leadership show the challenges of consistency between political message and individual behaviour.

While in their rhetoric they may claim to be 'of the people', the trappings of power and comfort appear to be difficult to resist. The extent to which the EFF can negotiate between these two poles will play a significant role in deciding the future of the party. The fact that Julius Malema reached an agreement with the South African Revenue Service to settle his tax debt of R16-million and his apology for accusing the taxman of acting on instructions of the ANC, is another example of the limitations of radical rhetoric and the ultimate necessity to play by the rules of the system, in order to have any chance of acquiring real political power within it (Jadhoo & De Lange 2014).

THE EFF'S LONG-TERM PROSPECTS

The EFF faces two main challenges to its sustainability as a political party and its ability to make its populism an influential political force in South African politics.

The first challenge will be how it navigates the dull everyday work of Parliament, away from the spotlight of the National Assembly chamber. The three functions of the South African Parliament are oversight over the executive, representing the views of South Africans and making and passing laws. While all four democratic parliaments have performed the first two functions with varying levels of efficacy, they have all been proficient at the third.

The process of debating and amending laws introduced by the executive is a key responsibility of parliamentary committees and various pieces of legislation have been fundamentally transformed, often for the better, through the committee process, with Parliament acting to counter the whims of a sometimes over-zealous executive.

Prominent examples from the fourth Parliament include the Protection of Personal Information Bill and the Protection of State Information Bill, which emerged in a far better state than they were when they were introduced. The EFF's ability to develop research capacity, to work with knowledgeable interested parties and to adhere to the discipline of committee structures will be critical to determining its success as a parliamentary opposition.

The second challenge is the extent to which the party will be able to build a self-sustaining party structure. In spite of its rhetoric of being of 'the people' its

leaders were not elected in an open contest or at any elective conference. All new parties in democratic South Africa have, of necessity, had unelected leaders in their infancy and the EFF is no different. Julius Malema has raised concerns about the existence of ANC-planted moles in the party who are being used to disrupt it.

According to Malema the party put in place temporary leadership structures to strengthen it and enable it to prepare for its first elective conference (Kgosana 2014). In a demonstration of the underlying tensions in the party's structures, on 10 October 2014 several disgruntled EFF members announced the formation of a breakaway party (Raaff 2014). While this may have turned out to be inconsequential, it indicated the necessity for the party to formalise its structures and develop party machinery.

The party held its first 'National People's Assembly' from 13 to 16 December 2014 at the University of the Free State, where it elected a new central command team and developed policies to take the party forward. The event started on a calm and disciplined note, with Julius Malema asserting his control over the party with a detailed political report and a warning to those who sought to disrupt the organisation. However, the second day was characterised by conflict as members of some provinces disputed the process used to elect the party executive. In an unexpected move, Andile Mngxitama and another prominent EFF MP, Khanyisile Litchfield-Tshabalala declined nomination to the central command team, apparently for reasons of conscience, revealing tensions within the leadership structures of the party. Whether these tensions will become the seeds of destruction within the party remains to be seen (Poplak 2014).

The party's first elected central command team is as follows:

- President and Commander in Chief: Julius Sello Malema
- Deputy President: Floyd Nyiko Shivambu
- Secretary General: Godrich Ahmed Gardee
- Deputy Secretary: Hlengiwe Hlophe-Maxon
- Treasurer: Magdeline Moonsammy
- National Chairperson: Dali Mpfu

A notable aspect of the people's assembly was the emphasis on political education. The party spent a significant portion of the conference teaching delegates about ideology, history and leftist economics, with the apparent intention that they go back into their communities and spread the message of the EFF. This is explained in the declaration of the People's Assembly, which states:

Political education of all our members shall be the priority of the movement at all times, because we accept the observation by Thomas

Sankara that a soldier without political and ideological training is a potential criminal ... We shall ensure to cover every corner of South Africa, village to village, township to township, suburb to suburb, kraal to kraal, city to city, and everywhere where there is human life to speak and preach the message for economic freedom in our lifetime. We will use all modes of transport to get to where we should preach the message of economic freedom. We will use bicycles, donkey-carts, cars, lorries, trucks, buses, trains, planes, helicopters, ships, boats and all forms of transport spreading the word for economic emancipation in our lifetime.

EFF 2014c

This use of education to build the party one person and one community at a time will probably be the key to its longevity and continued growth as a political force.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that the EFF fits into a global pattern of populism in electoral politics. Using the terminology of political style as developed by Moffitt & Tormey, it examined the EFF's political ideology, its electoral campaign and its subsequent parliamentary performance to make sense of the party's populist politics.

The EFF's political style has clearly struck a chord with a portion of the South African electorate, enabling it to have had an impact on the politics of the Gauteng province and raising the stature of the EFF to official opposition in the North West and Limpopo provinces.

Furthermore, the party has used its engagement in legislative politics to challenge the foundations of South African democracy and to advocate a different kind of representative politics. The article has argued that the performative elements of the EFF's politics – the uniform and rhetoric, as well as its engagement with national and provincial legislatures – have had a substantive effect on politics, sparking debate about the political institutions of democratic South Africa and their appropriateness for the country's current circumstances.

The EFF ended 2014 by establishing itself as a political party and has set up the structures necessary to grow its membership and pursue its vision for South Africa. It faces the challenge of growing its support base sufficiently in 2015 to be a real contender in the 2016 local government election.

The People's Assembly ended on a revolutionary note, threatening to occupy land and mines – the test the party faces is to what extent this strategy delivers real gains for its supporters. It further remains to be seen whether the EFF will have a positive effect on the further consolidation of democracy.

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