

UNDER STRAIN

The Racial/Ethnic Interpretation of South Africa's 2004 Election

By
*Thabisi Hoeane**

Dr Thabisi Hoeane is a Lecturer in the Department of Political and International Studies, Rhodes University, Grahamstown
P O Box 94 Rhodes University, Grahamstown 6140,
Eastern Cape, South Africa.
Tel: (046) 603 8666 (w) (046) 603 8349 (h) 084 8047 594 (cell)
E-mail: t.hoeane@ru.ac.za or thabisih@yahoo.co.uk

ABSTRACT

An analytical framework that emphasises race and ethnicity has come to dominate post-apartheid electoral studies. In this view, race and ethnicity are regarded as primary analytical variables in explaining voting behaviour and are taken to be crucial in influencing the strategy and tactics of political parties. In this framework, South African society is considered to be characterised by such serious and insoluble racial and ethnic divisions that the prospects for democratic consolidation are imperilled.

Most explanations of voting behaviour and party politics in the 1994 and 1999 elections were based on this interpretation. The argument advanced in this paper is that such focus is misguided and flawed. It shows, through a reading and interpretation of the 2004 election, that this approach is limited. For there is emerging empirical evidence – revealed by the 2004 election – that race and ethnicity do not play a central role in explaining voting behaviour and the performance of parties. Thus the arguments embodied within the racial/ethnic view threaten democratic consolidation.

INTRODUCTION

One of the analytical frameworks used to interpret South African elections in the post-apartheid era accords primacy to racial and ethnic categories.² This view

¹ For an overview of this interpretation see Schlemmer 1994a, pp 149-167; Schlemmer 1994b, pp 17-22; Welsh 1994, pp 107-116; Johnson, 1996, pp 301-322.

* The author is grateful for the support of Rhodes University.

concludes that race and ethnicity pervade the behaviour of voters and political party programmes leading to the undermining of effective democratic consolidation. Counter arguments have contested this interpretation with respect to the 1994 and 1999 elections (Seekings 1997, Taylor and Hoeane 1999, Hoeane 2002). This paper focuses the debate on the 2004 election to assess the relevance and efficacy of the racial and ethnic view in providing a viable understanding of electoral politics and the prospects for democratic consolidation in South Africa.

It adopts the position that sufficient evidence is revealed by the 2004 election to challenge seriously the validity of this interpretation. It does so firstly by discussing the background to this racial/ethnic framework, outlining how it was used to explain the 1994 and 1999 elections, before providing countervailing evidence revealed by election trends and developments in the 2004 election results to challenge the contention that these factors are indeed influential in explaining the country's transition to democracy. It concludes by identifying some of the negative consequences embodied in this racialised and ethnicised interpretation of South Africa's democratisation process.

THE RACIAL/ETHNIC FRAMEWORK

This section of the paper discusses the background to the racial and ethnic interpretation, tracing its roots to the apartheid concept of race and ethnicity. It then shows how these concepts have been reformulated, basically distancing them from crude apartheid understanding to accord them salience in explaining post-apartheid South African elections.

The Apartheid Vision

In order comprehensively to understand the apartheid vision of race and ethnicity it is important to provide a general definition of the concepts. Race is primarily associated with physical features, such as skin colour, that are taken to set races apart. As James Kellas states, 'Races are discussed predominantly in biological terms with particular emphasis on "phenotypical" distinctions such as skin colour, stature etc, and presumed genetic distinctions' (Kellas 1991, p 15). Ethnicity, on the other hand, is defined as binding people around some normative behaviour such as culture, language, and religion based on socio-cultural traits (Drury 1994, p 13).

Apartheid thinking on the origins of race and ethnicity draws on the primordial view of the nature of human societies (Butler 1998, pp 224-25). According to this view, people are born into racial and ethnic groups, and being part of such a group is not a matter of choice or option. These identities are fixed and not subject to change; one is born into a pre-existing racial and ethnic group structure that defines one's place in a society and determines political behaviour.

A Reformulated View of Race and Ethnicity

It has to be acknowledged that the way in which race and ethnicity are used in contemporary South African electoral studies disputes the primordial interpretation as conceived in the apartheid vision. For what must be recognised, so it is argued, is that race and ethnicity are social constructs and can be utilised in an instrumental manner (Van Zyl Slabbert and Welsh 1979). That is, it is not outside the power of human beings to create and use race and ethnicity to achieve certain objectives and political projects – like apartheid. Therefore, apartheid was not a natural condition, as its architects and supporters claimed, it was a creation based on the construction and conceptualisation of race and ethnicity in a specific ideological manner. As Donald Horowitz, a leading scholar of ethnic politics, maintains: ‘Research has abundantly made it clear that ethnic groups are by no means given, that ethnic identities have an element of malleability, that groups form and reform their boundaries’ (1991, p 47).

Referring to the situation under apartheid, Arend Lijphart (1985, p 49) has criticised the way in which the apartheid state manipulated race and ethnicity, arguing that: ‘The use of racial and ethnic categories has two serious drawbacks: they are arbitrary, and they have been unilaterally imposed by the white regime instead of being voluntarily agreed upon’. Thus, in Lijphart’s view, individuals should be allowed to choose their racial and ethnic group attachment. Racial and ethnic boundaries should not be imposed from above by the state, as under apartheid, but freely decided upon by individuals.

Apartheid’s primordialist view clashes with the contemporary dominant racial/ ethnic interpretation then because the latter sees these concepts as fluid, malleable, and contextual. Lijphart, formerly a primordialist, has conceded that his earlier belief in ethnic differences as an ‘unalterable’ fact was a mistake and that, ‘More recently... I have been increasingly impressed with the empirical evidence of the variability and fluidity of ethnic loyalties in many instances’ (1993, p 94). Crucially, however, the racial/ethnic view does not deny the objective existence of race and ethnicity. It is acknowledged that race and ethnicity are independent variables that exert a significant sociological effect in their own right.

On closer scrutiny it is evident that the mainstream racial/ethnic viewpoint adheres to a dialectical understanding of the relationship between the primordial and the instrumental/constructivist reading of race and ethnicity. Lijphart maintains that those politicians who choose to ignore ethnicity in their policies are likely to be upstaged by their opponents, as ethnicity has ‘presence, in that others may choose to motivate and mobilise voters on an ethnic basis and defeat their opponents’ (Lijphart 1993, p 94). In this manner, the racial/ethnic view continues to grant race and ethnicity an objective reality. The important point is that race and ethnicity – although reformulated – have been retained as significant and important means of analysis.

RACIAL/ETHNIC PARTIES AND VOTERS

Those who hold this view contend that South African voters and political parties can best be understood by reference to their preoccupation with racial and ethnic views. Thus it is argued that when voters go to the polls their primary consideration is registering their vote along these lines, to the exclusion or non-emphasis of other factors. Voters are essentially registering their feelings of racial/ethnic identity and solidarity, as opposed to other variables, such as class, regionalism, age, gender, religion, and education, which influence voting behaviour. Hermann Giliomee (1989, p 114) has thus argued in relation to class, '...virtually all political parties ... are communally based and emphasise the promotion of communal interests rather than purely class objectives'.

In addition, despite their formal declarations and manifestos to the effect that they eschew racism and ethnicity, South African parties are said to exhibit racial and ethnic characteristics. It is assumed therefore that there is a direct link between a voter's race and ethnicity and the party he or she will vote for. As Lijphart has asserted, voters are said seldom to break this link and choose a party which does not correspond to their race or ethnicity. 'In deeply divided societies such as South Africa ... the interests and outlooks of the different groups diverge much more markedly and the voters' loyalties tend to be much more rigid, reducing the chances of a regular alternation of power' (1985, p 49).

As a result 'blacks' vote for 'black parties' and 'whites' vote for 'white parties'. As Lawrence Schlemmer has concluded with respect to the 1994 election: 'The first election, while formally an interest-based, non-racial, non-ethnic contest, had sufficient ethnic and racial content to signal a warning for the future' (1994a, p 166).

The main categories employed in explaining voting behaviour are delineated from tables and graphs featuring the groupings of white, black, coloured and Indian, which are, in turn, regarded as independent variables. In ethnic terms the most frequently used categories are Zulu, English, Sotho, Afrikaner, Xhosa and so on. So, probes into how voters arrive at their decisions group them into these racial and ethnic categories and the data are analysed from this standpoint.

Indicating how race is still prevalent in social scientific research related to South African voting behaviour, Hennie Kotzé noted that:

In terms of understanding voting behaviour in South Africa, I think that race is still important. It is one of those variables that you can use to explain certain things. If one looks at recent research, class is becoming very important as a factor in explaining the behaviour of people and choices they make. But at the moment, race is still at the fore, especially when one looks at the superficial voting trends in South Africa you can still use race very superficially as an indicator of people's preferences.

Interview with author

The racial/ethnic view directly opposes the pure primordial interpretation of the origins of race and ethnicity as espoused under the apartheid vision. It argues for a more sophisticated interpretation, which allows for the understanding that race and ethnicity are malleable concepts that can be manipulated to socially engineer society. It differs with the apartheid vision in that the latter applied the concepts to construct an unjust system whereas the same concepts may be utilised to construct a democratic society. In this view, race and ethnicity, once they have been constructed, are resilient. It is thus argued that race and ethnicity will continue to play a crucial role in the democratisation process in a post-apartheid society. Politics will largely continue to be framed by the parameters of race and ethnicity. Political parties orientations and policies, voters' intentions and behaviour will still largely be determined by racial and ethnic factors. The imperative, it is asserted, should be how to mediate these identities so that they do not destroy society

THE 1994 ELECTION AS A ' RACIAL / ETHNIC ' CENSUS

Lawrence Schlemmer (1994, p 19) has characterised the election of 1994 as follows: 'The pattern of results comes uncomfortably close to being a census of mobilised racial-cum-ethnic categories in South Africa.'

It is held that there exists a dividing line between black and white voters predisposing them to vote in particular ways for those parties that match their racial profiles. It is also maintained that such is the weight of racial sentiment that, as Schlemmer continued in his analysis of the 1994 election, 'The election, regrettably, was not quite the unfettered exercise in evaluation of competing policies which democracy is ideally supposed to be' (Schlemmer 1994, pp 18-19).

In line with such thinking, Giliomee asserts that in divided societies 'The basic political unit is the racial or ethnic or religious group, and where they have the chance people continue to vote overwhelmingly for parties representing the respective segments' (1990, p 299). Among the 'black' parties, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) is seen as the main party explicitly advocating a racial position. The central message of the PAC has always been the return to the black 'indigenous' people of 'Azania' (the PAC's name for South Africa) of the land stolen by whites. This stance of black militant nationalism, alongside a policy of denying party membership to whites, has earned the PAC a lot of criticism that it is racist and anti-white. The PAC has, however, consistently denied these charges, insisting that being African has nothing to do with skin colour (author's interview with Philip Kgosana).

Despite such protestations, the criticism has not diminished, and during the 1994 election it was argued that 'The threat of an anti-white, uncompromising counter-racism clearly emerged in the PAC' (Adam 1994, p 28). As Martin Meredith has written, 'its message to the electorate was simple; all land would be appropriated by the state and redistributed to Africans' (1994, p 157). In this election, it was estimated that PAC support was 94 per cent black and 6 per cent coloured – and the party had no white or Indian support (Mattes 1995a, p 24).

Although it projects itself as non-racial, the ANC is interpreted as being a racial party (black) with particular appeal to one ethnic group (Xhosa). This view of the supposedly racial nature of the ANC is supported by statistics that suggest that of the total ANC vote in the 1994 election, 94 per cent was black, 4 per cent coloured, 1,5 per cent Indian, and 0,5 per cent white (Reynolds 1994, p 191).

The Democratic Party (DP), like the ANC, was seen as a party with both a racial (white) and an ethnic (English) support base. Andrew Reynolds (1994, p 197) estimated that 'Between 80 to 90% of the DP's vote came from the white community, and predominantly the white community in the metropolitan suburbs of Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban ...'

A different set of reasons has been advanced to explain the voting behaviour of Indian and coloured people – it is generally argued that these apartheid designated racial groups are more inclined to vote for white parties. The fact that Indians and coloureds were disadvantaged under apartheid – although not to the same degree as blacks – would lead one to expect that they would vote against the National Party (later the New National Party) and for the liberation movements. Reflecting on this assumption, especially with regard to coloureds in the Western Cape, Robert Mattes has noted that 'Many on the left see anti-black racism as the reason why coloured citizens apparently voted against their own interests' (*Saturday Weekend Argus* 19-26 August 1995, p 16). What has transpired is that the voting behaviour of Indians and coloureds has been reduced to 'a racial group loyalty that translates into either a greater cultural affinity with other minority groups, or a fear that an African government would discriminate against them' (Habib and Naidu 1999, pp 190-91).

Overall then, the 1994 election was seen as a 'blood election' – typical of contests in ethnically and racially divided societies in which 'party choice [is] determined by the voters' colour and culture' (*The Star* [Johannesburg] 21 August 1999, p 5). In sum, race is clearly regarded by many people as a crucial factor that determined how both parties and voters behaved in the April 1994 election.

The dominant view is that the ethnic sentiments (whether 'black' or 'white') of South African voters are manifested along party lines. The main defining feature of an ethnic group is taken to be language.

The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) is characterised as the most ethnic of the 'black' parties. It is said to be 'Zulu'-based and is seen to derive most of its electoral support from this ethnic group. Evidence presented to this effect is that in 1994 about 85 per cent of its support came from blacks and almost all were Zulus, while 86 per cent of its national support came from KwaZulu-Natal, the province in which Zulus form the majority (Reynolds 1994, p 194). It is assumed that because KwaZulu-Natal is an area largely populated by Zulu speakers, Zulu ethnicity is a very powerful force in the province.

What the Zulus are to the IFP, the Xhosas are said to be to the ANC. It is formulated that despite the ANC's image and its efforts to project itself as a non-racial, non-tribal movement it is, nevertheless, 'popularly' seen as 'Xhosa' (Mattes

1995b, p 19). Marthinus van Schalkwyk, then media director of the NP, said the ANC was 'a party which in practice is a black organisation that favours Xhosa speakers' (*Die Burger* 1 February 1994). The relationship between territory, ethnic group, and voting behaviour is once again said to be reinforced in the ANC's case. The ANC's overwhelming level of support in its 'Xhosa heartland' of the Eastern Cape was not 'unexpected', given that blacks comprise 84 per cent of the population in this region and that – according to Reynolds – over 90 per cent of the electorate is of 'Xhosa stock' (1994, p 205).

'White' parties are also presumed not to be immune to the force of ethnic identity. The Democratic Party (DP) – the successor to the United Party (UP) and Progressive Federal Party (PFP), two long-time liberal opponents of the apartheid system – was also characterised as ethnic because of its overwhelming support from English-speaking voters. Such a view would seem to clash with core liberal values and principles, which are not rooted in group identities of race and ethnicity, but in individualism. However, in the South African context, the DP is characterised as having failed to escape this ethnic character. It was estimated that, in 1994, 69 per cent of DP supporters were white and English speaking and that therefore it qualifies as an ethnic party (Mattes 1995a, p 24).

Unlike the other two main 'white' parties, the DP and NP, the Freedom Front (FF) explicitly identified itself as an Afrikaner party. Its major aim was to secure a homeland for Afrikaners – a 'Volkstaat'. The party was formed by General Constand Viljoen in early 1994 and joined the election process after stalling and threatening violence. One of its office bearers, Joseph Chiolo, in discussing the ethnic base of the FF, and why Afrikaners in general are tied to parties with strong Afrikaner images, observed that: 'If you look at the 1994 election for example, you will see that the Afrikaner to a great extent sort of voted for the Freedom Front and to a certain extent for the National Party, but for instance not the Democratic Party' (Interview with author).

The logic here is that just as Zulus cannot identify with Xhosas and their party and vice versa, Afrikaners cannot vote for English parties and vice versa. Thus Mattes has noted that '100% of FF supporters are white, 83% of them Afrikaans speakers' (Mattes 1995a, p 8).

THE 1999 ELECTION: THE RESILIENCE OF RACE AND ETHNICITY

In an interview after the 1994 election F W De Klerk (the then NP leader and second vice-president in the Government of National Unity (GNU)) optimistically declared that 'The next election will not be about liberation, it will be about fundamental principles, about values needed to build society' (*The Star* [Johannesburg] 13 August 1999, p 5). De Klerk was reiterating the view that the 1994 elections had been a 'racial/ethnic census', while expressing hope that the next election would be marked by what he saw as a greater degree of political maturity – with parties and voters moving away from race and ethnicity in their outlooks and behaviour. Racial and

ethnic explanations, however, continued to be affirmed in debates about the interpretation of the 1999 election as the main determinants of voters' choices.

Clearly reflecting this continuing trend, Tony Leon, the leader of the DP, stated at a campaign rally in Soweto after his entourage was jeered by young blacks that: 'It would take a long time for voting patterns to shift from a racial formation, where blacks voted for "black" parties and whites for "white" parties' (*The Star* [Johannesburg] 17 May 1999, p 5).

Some political parties ascribed their inability to attract voters from across the racial divide to the hardening of racist attitudes among voters and their reversion to past practices. The IFP's spokesperson, Musa Zondi, for example, partly attributed the decrease in white support for the party since 1994 to a retreat 'into the laager of the DP and NNP' (South African Press Association [Sapa] 8 June 1999).

The ANC was identified as one of the parties that had failed to transcend this racial divide and to attract other racial groups (whites, coloureds, and Indians) into its ranks. It was still taken to be 'black' and it was assumed that it would continue to be so for a long time, if not forever. According to Koos Malan, a member of the executive committee of the Group of 63 (an Afrikaner intellectual movement): 'The ANC is the liberator and political vehicle of the black majority. Its political and legislative programme is sharply focused on the empowerment of the black majority ... thus; the ANC is a typically sectional political movement, catering primarily for one sector of the population' (*Mail & Guardian* 14-19 December 2001, p 17).

In a post-election newspaper column in *The Star*, Temba Sono, (former academic turned politician) put it bluntly: 'Beneath the veneer of civilized discourse, along appearances of tolerance, exists among most South Africans a hardened racial crust' (8 June 1999, p 8).

Beyond this, the DP's move to the right has been interpreted as reflecting the willingness of South African parties to resort to racist posturing to win votes. Political Studies Professor Jeremy Seekings put it this way: 'The critics of the DP were quite correct in saying that the party played an implicit race card in the 1999 elections. I think that is correct. The DP was clearly playing on minority group fears, saying that if you are a member of a minority group this is an important thing' (interview with author).

This new character of the DP alarmed the historically black parties. As the Azanian People's Organisation's (Azapo) Pandelani Nefolovhodwe commented: 'The opposition called the DP really, really of late ... in Azapo we believe that they are actually at the level of the Nationalist Party before ... They have gone into the white laager, they are just about to do the *swart gevaar* [literally black danger]. If they say they are hitting back ... that is why they were able to get many whites around them' (interview with author).

The success of the DP in displacing the NNP from the status of official opposition has also been interpreted in racial terms. The DP is said to have been the major beneficiary of the NNP's loss of support, especially the conservative

Afrikaner vote that switched allegiance and voted for the DP. An official of the NNP, Vincent Thusi, noted that: 'Look at the DP, it has made strides because white people voted for it; the majority of whites, especially Afrikaners ... but very few went to the ANC' (interview with author). Thus there was no way that Afrikaners could have voted for a 'black' party. Rather, they chose the DP, which, although liberal, is at least 'white'.

Beyond this, Indians and coloureds were seen to have continued to behave racially in exercising their vote in 1999. Ashwin Desai, a sociologist, commented with regard to the Indian vote in KwaZulu-Natal that: 'I think the Indian vote has still been a racial vote in this province for parties [NNP/DP] that have attempted to promise marginal groups that their lives would be destroyed by the black masses. I think that they have been largely successful' (interview with author). Cyril Madlala, the editor of *The Independent on Saturday*, a major newspaper in KwaZulu-Natal, noted that 'Indians and coloureds, who were oppressed under apartheid, find more comfort in traditionally white parties such as the NNP and the DP than in those that opposed that system' (*The Independent on Saturday* 2 May 1999, p 8).

The leader of the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), Reverend Kenneth Meshoe, commented on the appointment of a black ANC Chief Whip in the National Assembly over a white acting officer of the party in the following terms: 'The only reason ... for Mr Doidge's disqualification is that he belongs to the wrong tribe. Of the three ANC Chief Whips past and present, all are Xhosa, and we, as the ACDP, see this as nothing but tribalism' (*Sunday Times* 9 December 2001, p 9).

The NNP's extremely poor showing at the polls, reflected in its huge loss of Afrikaner support, has been ascribed to its attempt to move to the centre of the political stage – thereby abandoning its ethnic Afrikaner base, to its detriment. As the 'New' National Party it tried to shake off its political past as a party for Afrikaners and whites and to become a party for all. However, this alienated its power base – the Afrikaner vote, which would not go along with the 'new' move, primarily, it is reasoned, because these voters are still steeped in a racial and ethnic understanding of South African politics. Before the election DP official Phillip Grobler aptly noted this dynamic of NNP politics.. 'The NP's turn to liberalism will probably kill it at the polls' (*Sowetan* 22 April 1999, p 9).

The continuing influence of ethnicity in 1999 is considered to have further manifested itself in the re-emergence of political parties associated with the apartheid Bantustan system. One of these was the United Christian Democratic Party (UCDP) of former Bophuthatswana leader Lucas Mangope in the North West Province. What is significant about the UCDP is that its power is concentrated mainly in urban areas – particularly Mafikeng, the provincial capital. Here the UCDP won close to 50 per cent of the vote. And yet this was the very area that spearheaded the ANC's ousting of Mangope in 1994 (Taylor and Hoene 1999, p 139). The UCDP's success has been attributed to the fact that it played an ethnic 'Tswana' card. The party consistently pointed out that under the 'Xhosa' rule of the ANC conditions in

the province had deteriorated, and it was time to restore the party to power, as under 'Tswana' rule things would be different and better (*The Sunday Independent* 30 May 1999, p 7).

Similarly, the success of the United Democratic Movement (UDM) in the former Transkei Bantustan, which is now part of the Eastern Cape, was explained in terms of playing a 'Xhosa' ethnic card. Although the UDM portrayed itself as a non-racial, non-tribal party, its support base was largely drawn from the Eastern Cape, which is dominated by 'Xhosas' – prompting the DP to label it an 'emergent Xhosa ethnic party' (Southall 1999, p 43). Moreover, 60 per cent of UDM nominees for Parliament were from the Transkei (Lodge 1999, pp 105-106). In striking similarity to the UCDP, it also showed a strong following in urban areas. In Umtata, the capital of Transkei, the UDM won over 50 per cent of the vote.

The racial/ethnic paradigm clearly constituted the main interpretative framework for analysing the 1999 elections. As in the 1994 elections, race and ethnicity continued to be regarded as the starting point from which to judge what transpired. Political parties and voters were presumed to be best understood within this framework. Political parties were regarded as still locked into their traditional racial/ethnic backgrounds, with minimal chances of appealing to broad based support. Voters were still attached to their racial/ethnic backgrounds, which determined their choice of political party. Race and ethnicity were taken as powerful and resilient variables that explain voting behaviour.

THE RACIAL/ETHNIC VIEW UNRAVELS: THE 2004 ELECTION

The third democratic election, held in April 2004, has continued to elicit the interpretation that South African politics is based on racial and ethnic categories.² Thus, voters and parties are viewed as having largely continued to subscribe to identity sentiments. Voters are seen to have continued to vote along racial and ethnic lines, with political parties still primarily considered to be 'black' or 'white'. For example, the retired F W de Klerk asserted in a post-election media comment that '...the political scene will continue to be characterised by ethnic rather than policy driven politics' (*The Star* 21 April 2004, p 13). It is pertinent to provide an interpretation of pre-election surveys and election results, to point out the source of these contentions, before providing evidence that this reading is flawed.

The South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) conducted in 2003 by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) records the racial support bases of political parties and in this analysis reference will be made to the then four largest parties in Parliament – the ANC, DA, IFP, NNP and UDM. The survey reflects the

2 See, for example, Laurence 2004; Edigheji 2004; Brook 2004.

ANC, IFP and UDM as having more than 90 per cent black support. The DA's racial support base is recorded as about 77 per cent white. The NNP was the only exception, with a mix of supporters – fewer than 30 per cent of them white, its assumed 'traditional' base.

In terms of ethnicity such patterns continued to be affirmed when the results are analysed. The IFP's support still came overwhelmingly from KwaZulu-Natal (93%), reinforcing assertions about the 'Zulu' basis of this party. Lucas Mangope's 'Tswana' UCDP's support was still largely based in the North West Province (93%), where the bulk of members of this ethnic group reside. Fifty-three per cent of the UDM's support was drawn from its so-called 'traditional' base in the Eastern Cape, reinforcing its 'Xhosa' roots. The 'Indian' Minority Front (MF) was peculiar in that its provincial support in KwaZulu-Natal surpassed its national support by 29 per cent, indicating its firm base in the province and, in tune with this line of thought, also indicating its strong 'Indian' roots.

Given this scenario then, the assertion of the saliency of racial and ethnic voting patterns in South Africa would seem to be accurate. To this end, predictions that South Africa's democracy will be imperilled by the persistence of these identity patterns seem to be affirmed.

However, as indicated below, there is emerging evidence from the 2004 election that indicates that this interpretation is highly contestable and that explanations of electoral behaviour and political party performance that use racial and ethnic categories merit serious revision and inquiry. In as much as race and ethnicity still appear in South African electoral politics, there is countervailing evidence that a close analysis of trends revealed by the 2004 election seriously challenge this view and the resultant conclusion that democracy is at risk.

This counterview will be addressed with reference to and analysis of election campaigns, political party alliances and a reading of the election results.

POLITICAL PARTY CAMPAIGNS

Political party campaigning that is viscerally defined by reference to racial and ethnic posturing by political parties has tainted post-apartheid electoral contests. Given South Africa's history it is understandable that racial and ethnic factors cannot be absent from such contentious political processes as elections, where power is at stake. However, recognition of this fact does not in itself accord primacy to the view that these variables in and of themselves define and dominate political contestation.

The 1999 election was especially symptomatic of a polarised, racialised campaign, exhibited in the ANC and then the DP's battle over the 'fight back' campaign slogan (Taylor and Hoene 1999, p 136). 'Fight back' was the DP's main campaign slogan, intended to portray a formidable resistance and challenge to the ANC and translated by the latter, especially in the Western Cape, into 'fight blacks', leading to acrimony between the parties.

The 2004 election, however, was notable for the reduction in explicit racial undertones in political party campaigning. Notably, the ANC and the DA desisted from this racial bickering, bowing to the imperative to try to break ground and address constituencies other than their traditional ones. For example, the DA launched its election campaign in Soweto – the largest black township – and the ANC held numerous rallies, led by Thabo Mbeki, in white areas (*Sunday Times* 14 March 2004, p 1). Thus, the two main South African political parties tried resolutely to woo support from other racial groups and this made for a relatively clean campaign bereft of the type of racial arguments that had characterised the 1999 campaign.

On this basis there is evidence that, despite the racial support bases of these parties as revealed in pre-election surveys, as indicated above, there is indeed recognition that racialised politics do not benefit political parties. Therefore, the mere racial support bases of these parties should not and cannot be assumed to govern the behaviour of voters and political parties. As Seekings has pointed out, 'People's perceptions, attitudes, and understanding of their interests correlate with race in some cases, not completely, but in quite a significant way. What is harder to see is how race structures a set of other considerations. This, I think, is the really difficult question about the role of race in politics and electoral behaviour. To what extent do voters actually look at skin colour when they are assessing candidates?' (Interview with author). Thus it should not be assumed that voting behaviour is determined by identity, as there is no direct, observable relationship between the two.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ALLIANCES

Much more cogently than campaign strategies, which can, at some levels, be dismissed as mere window dressing by parties to draw votes, the emergence of political alliances between parties – especially the major ones – provides a basis for questioning this interpretation of South Africa electoral studies. The 2004 election was defined by the widespread formation of alliances between political parties (Booyesen 2004, p 11). Although the nature of these alliances was fluid in that the parties continued to have separate campaigns, they were much more formalised than they had been in previous elections.

The most notable alliance was that between the ANC and the NNP, which was described as a 'cooperative alliance'. The negative perception of this alliance is that it was motivated by opportunism in both parties – the ANC wanted to gain a foothold in the Western Cape and the ailing NNP was thought to be seeking a lifeline from the ANC (*City Press* 14 March 2004, p 17).

This viewpoint is emphatically contradicted by the election results in the Western Cape, where the ANC won 45,25 per cent of the vote, over seven per cent of the combined strength of the two 'white' parties in the province, where the DA received 27,11 per cent and the NNP 10,88 per cent, indicating that the ANC is the

strongest party in the province. What is significant about electoral contests in the Western Cape is that, despite the perception that the ANC is weak in this province because it is a 'black' party, it has steadily gained ground since 1994, having won 33 per cent in 1994, 42 per cent in 1999 and jumped to 45 per cent in 2004. In fact, the ANC was the majority party in the province in 1999 and was kept out of power by a coalition of the NNP and the DP.

Thus, there must be reasons other than racial imperatives to explain the alliance between the supposedly 'black /Xhosa' ANC and the 'white/ Afrikaner' NNP.

The other significant coalition was between the DA and the IFP – perceived as 'white/English' and 'black/Zulu' parties, respectively. The two parties came together in what they called a 'coalition for change' and their leaders – Tony Leon and Mangosuthu Buthelezi – held joint rallies around the country, notably in Soweto, where they jointly launched their alliance (*Sunday Times* 2 November 2003, p 5).

As in the case of the ANC/NNP alliance the challenge in explaining the 'coalition for change' between the DA and the IFP lies in seeking a different set of reasons, as the two parties appear to represent divergent racial and ethnic groups. These cross racial/ethnic alliances between the two main contending blocs of political parties require a much more considered explanation.

In interpreting the ANC/NNP alliance it is important to note that the NNP broke away from the DA alliance in 2002 on the basis that the latter was isolating it by clinging to the politics of fear of minority groups (*Mail & Guardian* 2-8 November 2002, p 23), which it asserted was not in the interest of a united South Africa. The NNP moved to the centre of the political spectrum, bringing it much closer to the ANC in terms of economic policies, for example. The core of hardline NNP members, who opposed policies like affirmative action and eschewed the ANC alliance with left-wing parties, deserted the party in 1999 to join the DA, leaving behind a segment of support that was much more accommodating towards the ANC's centre-left policies (Hoeane 2002, p 126). Here we see economic issues coming to the fore, refuting the basis of the racial /ethnic view. So the ANC/NNP alliance can be interpreted as a left-of-centre coalition in the scheme of political party configuration in South African politics, indicating the tenuous nature of the racial/ethnic explanation.

Similarly, the 'coalition for change' between the DA and the IFP requires a much more sophisticated analysis than a simplistic racial/ethnic assessment. Given that the DA is still strong on protecting 'minorities' and the IFP is prone to pandering to its 'Zuluness' the question to answer in this regard is: what is the glue that holds the two parties together? Once again the answer lies in material economic interests and ideological positions. Both parties have an economically conservative ideological outlook; both support unfettered free market policies, construe affirmative action as biased towards ANC elites and are critical of the left-wing allies of the ANC, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) (*Sowetan* 11 November 2003, p 15). Thus the 'coalition for change' should be seen to represent the coalescence of a

conservative understanding and expression of South African politics over and above the ethnic and racial identities of the DA and the IFP.

In the light of the above, it is clear that any interpretation of the 2004 elections must factor into the equation coalition building based on ideological interests rather than on race and ethnicity.

The fact that South African politics is shifting towards politics based on material interest rather than on racial and ethnic divides is a positive sign for the consolidation of democracy. It is pertinent to note that the only two parties, apart from the newly formed Independent Democrats (ID), that won over any significant number of voters in the 2004 elections were the ANC and DA, suggesting clearly that their politics makes sense to the electorate.³ And it cannot be assumed that this is related to the racial backgrounds of these parties because, as indicated below, other 'black' and 'white' parties performed poorly.

The ANC's achievement of a two-thirds majority in the 2004 elections can be traced to the fact that its economic policies are not generally hostile to the interests of the black majority (*Sunday Times* 25 April 2004, p 21) rather than to the 'liberation party' interpretation that has been used in the past to explain its success (Johnson and Zulu 1996, p 94). For there is ample evidence that another 'black liberation' party, the PAC, has consistently done poorly in post-apartheid elections. Although there has been some dispute over the ANC's transformation policies (most pronounced in tensions with its partners in the Tripartite Alliance, the SACP and Cosatu), in other areas it has not abandoned its progressive concern for the socio-economic rights of the majority of South Africans.⁴

On the other hand, the rejection of the IFP and the DA by the electorate – especially the black majority – can be directly attributed to policies that do not resonate with the interests of the largest segment of the South African electorate, the black voters. For example, their insistence on unbridled privatisation – a factor that is seriously contested within the Tripartite Alliance and has arguably made the ANC tread cautiously⁵ – clearly pits the DA/IFP alliance against the majority of voters. Adam Habib, of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) (*ThisDay* 13 August 2004, p 11) has observed with regard to the policies of the DA and its inability to attract black voters, 'The DA's problem is that its policy choices preclude it from becoming viable. This is not because of the racialised pattern of voting in our society, as its leaders believe. Rather, it is because its policy package does not speak to the interests of the majority of black people.'

3 The ANC gained the two-thirds majority that had eluded it since 1994 and the DA gained close to 400 000 voters – a significant number in South African electoral contests. Other parties, such as the African Christian Democratic Party and the Freedom Front Plus, which gained voters, were insignificant because their gains had no appreciable impact on their strength.

4 A Markinor/ SABC poll released in October 2004 indicated that over two-thirds of South Africans approved of the ANC government's policies.

5 The widely held public perception that the ANC is wedded to voracious privatisation policies is not altogether accurate; indeed the DA's main criticism of the ANC's macro economic policy, the Growth Employment and Redistribution strategy (Gear), is that it does not call for rigorous enough privatisation.

Beyond these alliances between major parties other minor alliances were formed that were clearly not based on identity factors. One of the most interesting of these was that between the IFP and Solidarity (Sapa 3 March 2004), a white right-wing trade union with strong Afrikaner roots that is noted for its conservative policies. It is not difficult to surmise what drew the 'Zulu/ IFP' and the 'white/ Afrikaner' Solidarity together: both are strongly anti-affirmative action and are opposed to the ANC's left-wing alliance of Cosatu and the South African Communist Party (SACP) and, indeed, the basis for their agreement was that the IFP sympathised with white workers who, it claimed, were victims of affirmative action, a policy it believes only benefits the ANC elite (Sapa 3 March 2004).

The DA also worked out an agreement with the Green Party of South Africa (GPSA), a development that cannot remotely be explained by any racial or ethnic interests – their joint statement announcing the pact noted that the two parties shared an interest in environmental policies.⁶ In another example, the PAC aligned itself with the Dikwankwetla Party (DK) of the former Sotho homeland of Qwaqwa. Since the PAC, given its hostility and opposition to tribal politics, would not cooperate with an ethnically-based party, this pairing indicates that some other common interest was at play here. The DK is known for its opposition to the ANC (it allied itself with the DP in the 1999 election) and the basis of its agreement with the PAC related to their common opposition to the ANC not to any racial persuasion. Any attempt to explain the alliance between the PAC and the DK in racial terms – 'black' parties coming together against the ANC – would be tortuous indeed, and would need to address the question: why are 'black' parties aligning against other 'black' parties?

The other signal of the paucity of the racial/ethnic view is the flip side of alliance formation by political parties: parties that are grounded in similar racial backgrounds but fail to align themselves on that basis. This is most pronounced with respect to 'black' parties such as the PAC, Azapo and the Socialist Party of Azania (Sopa). It has been suggested that one of the ways these parties might provide an alternative to the ANC is if they unite and pool their strengths. However, since 1994, the 'black' parties have tried many times but have failed to achieve unity (*City Press* 18 January 2004, p 2).

Over and beyond the fact that their unity is frustrated by other issues such as petty personal squabbles (author's interview with Philip Kgosana) it is quite persuasive to argue that their ideological positions set them apart. For example, Sopa and Azapo, especially the former, have committed themselves to fight for 'Scientific Socialism' based on the black working class⁷, while the PAC is well known

6 Joint Statement by DA and Green Party released on 13 April 2004, found at <http://www.da.org.za/da/Site/Eng/News/Article.asp?ID=3807>

7 Separate interviews with Sopa President Lybon Mabasa and Azapo Deputy President Pandelani Nefolovhodwe, in Johannesburg in 2000.

for its hostility to any communist ideas and adherence to militant African nationalism (Lodge 1994). Thus, 'blackness' as a factor is not enough to bring these parties together – their contradictory and mutually opposed material ideological bases militate against unity.

UNDERSTANDING THE 2004 RESULTS

The other indicator that points to the severe limitations of the racial/ethnic argument and its lack of potency in adequately explaining South African electoral politics is that those parties that have expressed an adherence to explicit racial and ethnic politics performed poorly in the 2004 election, as they did in 1994 and 1999.

The Failure of Racial Parties

The NNP's performance in this election offers compelling evidence to refute the racial understanding of South African politics. This supposedly 'white/ Afrikaner' party lost a massive 76 per cent of the support it had in 1999. Although the NNP has continued to be seen as an 'Afrikaner' party, empirical evidence indicates that this is an assumption fraught with serious inaccuracies. This is particularly significant because as far back as the first democratic election, in 1994, there were already signs that the NNP was shedding its 'white/ Afrikaner' image, with close to half of its support already being drawn from non-white groups (Reynolds 1994, p 192). Indeed, as the HSRC's SASAS survey indicates, the NNP's support base was about 30 per cent white (not all of it Afrikaans speaking), with the majority of its supporters coloured (40%), black (20%) and Indian (10%). Indeed, to the extent that the party could have been regarded as 'white/ Afrikaner', this would only apply up to just before the 1999 election, as most of its core Afrikaner supporters deserted the party to vote for the DP (Kotzé 1999). Furthermore, it is an indictment of the misdirection of the NNP's electoral campaign in that its 2004 election manifesto – despite clear evidence that the party was the most racially mixed in South Africa, as shown above – continued to emphasise targeting 'minorities' instead of projecting itself as non-racial.

At another level there is evidence to indicate that it is difficult to sustain the explicit racial / ethnic view that voters act as a group. For example, just to take one ethnic group, the Afrikaners, support (and the vote) is spread among such diverse parties as the centrist NNP, the right-wing Freedom Front Plus (FF+) and the centre-right DA. This indicates that there is no single political programme based on an Afrikaner identity with which this community identifies. Social scientific inquiry should thus focus on other reasons for the behaviour of 'Afrikaner' voters.

The 'black' parties that expose the limitations of the adherence to racialised politics are the PAC, Azapo and Sopa, for whom there was almost no improvement on their electoral performance in 1999. The PAC has effectively remained in the same position, winning only 387 more votes in 2004 than it did in 1999. It retains

three seats in the National Assembly (NA) – something of a comeback after losing one of its seats when Patricia De Lille defected to form the ID in 2003 – nevertheless this is a less than impressive performance. The party is represented in two provincial legislatures. Viewed against the background of the marginally lower voter turnout in 2004 (Kotze 2004) than in 1999, which affected all parties, the PAC's weakness becomes even more pronounced. Azapo also managed to retain one seat in the NA and once again failed, as it did in 1999, to gain any representation in the nine provincial legislatures. Sopa failed once again to gain in any representation in the National Assembly and also has no provincial representation. This is clear evidence that the racialised approach of these 'black' parties is flawed as it has failed dismally to resonate with the interests of supposedly 'black' voters, who have clearly rejected the parties.

The party associated with an explicit 'Indian' message in electoral campaigns in post-apartheid South Africa is the Minority Front (MF), led by Amichand Rajbansi. It is important to recognise that the MF – despite its avowed aim to represent Indian interests – has never managed to garner the majority of voters in this community, even in its stronghold of Natal, where the majority of South Africa Indians live. In 2004 it lived up to its reputation as a minority party, maintaining one seat in the NA.

THE WANING OF ETHNIC PARTIES

Two other parties that stand out as evidence of the weakness of the ethnic interpretation of South African electoral politics are the United Christian Democratic Party (UCDP) and the FF+.

The UCDP's support actually fell, both nationally and provincially. Nationally its support decreased from the 0,78 per cent it gained in 1999 to 0,75 per cent, while provincially in the North West, although it maintained its position as the official opposition, its support declined from 9,6 per cent to 8,49 per cent. Thus, a party that is strongly associated with strong representation of supposedly true 'Tswana' ethnic interests failed to draw significant support from this ethnic group.

The FF+, which claims to represent Afrikaner ethnic interests, has also not managed to make any convincing headway to indicate that it really represents the interest of this community. Its national support increased marginally from 0,80 per cent to 0,89 per cent in 2004 – a poor performance when it is taken into consideration that the new style Freedom Front Plus is actually an alliance of three 'Afrikaner' parties – the former FF, the Conservative Party (CP) and the Afrikaner Eenheids Beweging (AEB). So, even though it absorbed two other parties, the FF was only able to increase its support by 0,09 per cent, a very low figure by any standard. The fallacy of the ethnic ethos of parties like the FF is indicated by the fact that it has been estimated that even if it convinces its entire target audience the party is only like to win 6 per cent of the vote – a low figure indeed in overall South African electoral terms (*Mail & Guardian* 12-18 March 2004, p 8). Lastly, the National Action

(NA), formed by the defection from the AEB by its leader Cassie Aucamp during the floor-crossing period in 2003 and also claiming to represent 'Afrikaner' interests, failed to be returned to Parliament.

In juxtaposition to the above-mentioned parties, which have used the racial and ethnic view to gain support from the electorate and have failed, are the ACDP, the UDM and the ID, all three of which have shown that there is potential to exploit political space in South African that is based on issue politics.

The latter three parties have, each to a different degree, been relatively successful in establishing a presence on the political scene without reference to race or ethnicity. Admittedly they are not strong enough to challenge the ANC, but they offer a compelling argument that continuing to be trapped in racial and ethnic paradigms of contextualising South African politics is a serious political limitation.

The ACDP is a fundamentalist Christian party that was established in 1993 during the transition negotiations. Its message is conservative, woven around calls for the reintroduction of the death penalty, vehement opposition to abortion and to legal rights for homosexuals and lesbians, and it advocates a conservative macro economic policy (Piombo 1999). An analysis of the party's electoral history reinforces the optimistic view that issue-based politics have a role to play in South African opposition politics, in this case the pursuit of religiously focused policies with a conservative message.

Clearly, there are South Africans who have strong conservative feelings which are enunciated by the ACDP. It should be borne in mind that the ACDP was the only South African party that voted against the final Constitution of 1996, on the basis that the document embraced too many anti-Christian views (author's interview with Reverend Kenneth Meshoe).

In 1994 the party, then only six months old, surprised observers when it gained representation in the NA, with 0,45 per cent of the national vote, coming sixth on the national list with two MPs. In 1999 the party fared much better, doubling its support to 1,34 per cent and sending three MPs to Parliament. It performed sufficiently well to become the fifth largest opposition party in Parliament, doing significantly better than more established parties such as the FF and PAC, who had come in ahead of it in 1994.

In 2004 the ACDP increased its support marginally, to 1,60 per cent, but has fallen back into sixth position among the opposition parties in Parliament. What is significant about the ACDP's support base is that it is not grounded in any dominant racial and ethnic group (Lodge 1999, p 73). And unlike that of most opposition parties the party's support is more widely spread around the country: in the 2004 elections it achieved representation in six provinces. The IFP – the second largest opposition party – is represented in only two provinces.

The UDM was co-formed in 1997 by Bantu Holomisa, a former leader of the Trankei Bantustan and later ANC Cabinet minister who was expelled from the party, and Roelf Meyer, who had been the chief negotiator for the NP in the transition talks. The party has shown some form of resilience in South African politics, given

its relatively short existence. It made a significant impact in the 1999 election, when it became the fourth-largest opposition party, with 3,42 per cent of the national ballot and fourteen MPs. It nearly suffered a serious catastrophe in the floor-crossing period in 2003 when it lost ten MPs, but made a comeback in the 2004 election when it won 2,28 per cent of the vote, becoming the third-largest opposition party, with nine MPs. Its presence has largely been in the Eastern Cape, where it became the official opposition in 1999 and maintained this position in 2004.

Significantly, although the UDM has not seriously threatened the ANC, the Eastern Cape in the 1999 election and to some extent in the 2004 election was one of the provinces where the ANC's dominance has been seriously challenged in electoral contests. Although the party has been accused of showing signs of pandering to covert ethnic sentiments (Ndletyana 1999) shaped around 'Xhosa' images, its success is much more rationally explained by its issue-based politics. For if 'Xhosa' ethnicity has any relevance in the politics of the Eastern Cape, why is the supposedly 'Xhosa' ANC doing much better than a similarly 'Xhosa' UDM in this supposedly 'Xhosa' dominated province of South Africa?

The UDM's main policy platform is based on positioning itself as the party that will rectify the policy deficiencies of the ANC (Southall 1999), a stand that has been identified as one of its weaknesses. Although it is not fundamentally opposed to many of the ANC's policies, it would like to see some modifications. For example, its chief criticism of the ANC's macro-economic policy, Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear), adopted in 1996, is that there is a need for restraint in conceding state control over economic issues.⁸ It is also very strident in calling for tougher anti-corruption measures, an area, in which it perceives the ANC as weak. Indeed, its leader, Holomisa, was dismissed from the ANC after he accused some of its senior officials of corruption. Thus, in its battle for power with the ANC, the UDM's performance is much more rationally explained by the kind of policies it follows rather than by any imputation that it is a 'Xhosa' party.

The ID is the most significant party to have emerged from the floor-crossing period in 2003, when its leader, Patricia De Lille, defected from the PAC. The party campaigned in the 2004 election on a platform that was far removed from any racial or ethnic posturing, focusing mainly on issues such as the eradication of crime, HIV/AIDS, confronting corruption, gender equality and the protection of women and children.⁹ This was despite media reports that suggested that the ID, like other South African opposition parties, was ethnically based, with one newspaper headline proclaiming 'De Lille's Appeal Growing Among Marginalised Coloured Voters' (*Weekend Post* 10 April 2004, p 4). However, the party ran an effective, well-organised and technologically advanced electoral campaign that was very innovative, making use of a vibrant website, cell phone technology and so on.

8 See UDM Manifesto, National Election 2004

9 See ID Manifesto, National Election 2004

The ID did well in the 2004 election given that it was less than a year old, winning 1,73 per cent of the vote and sending seven MPs to the NA, becoming the fourth-largest party in Parliament. It is represented in three provincial legislatures (Western Cape, Northern Cape and Gauteng). The party's support is heavily concentrated in the Western Cape, where it draws 47 per cent of its national support and 57 per cent of its provincial support. Quite significantly, attesting to the strength of issue-based politics, the ID attracted double the number of votes of De Lille's former party, the PAC.

However, these parties are still weak, given the power and dominance of the ANC, and this can be ascribed to their narrowly focused issue campaigning (the ACDP with its emphasis on religion) the over reliance on strong and popular leadership (the ID's De Lille, the UDM's Holomisa) and the inability to carve a policy framework distinct from that of the ANC (ID, UDM).

The ACDP's over reliance on politics focused largely on and defined by conservative religious precepts restricts its capacity to cross over and draw support from the ANC's constituency. The ID and UDM's reliance on the popularity of their leaders is pursued at the expense of thorough policy formulation to challenge the ANC, especially with regard to economic policy, arguably the most important policy terrain, which opposition parties are failing to exploit in challenging the ANC-. They have no clear economic policies that would allow them the political space to challenge the ANC for power. The ID has been particularly criticised for lacking clear economic plans and De Lille has, herself, curiously, asserted this. When asked to elaborate on her economic policies she said her party was focusing on 'constitutionalism rather than ideology' (*Mail & Guardian* 23-30 April 2004, p 4). Unlike the DA/IFP, which have clear economic policy objectives that are different from those of the ANC (but do not appeal to the majority of South Africans), the UDM's economic policy is practically indistinguishable from that of the ANC.

In general, the failure of opposition parties effectively to challenge the ANC for power or at least to provide an effective channel for grievances against the ruling party was revealed in the 2004 election with respect to voters' behaviour. Although there has been a high turnout of registered voters in the past three elections: 86,86 per cent in 1994, 89,30 per cent in 1999 and 76,69 per cent in 2004 (an average of 84 per cent for the three elections) the fact that it is eroding is cause for concern. This erosion (it is estimated that about 43 per cent of eligible voters did not vote in 2004) also provides evidence that many voters have no political home and that neither the ANC nor the opposition parties is catering to their views (Kotzé 2004, p 2).

There is a variety of reasons, both positive and negative, for this voter abstention. The positive view is that South Africa is becoming a mature democracy, following global trends; the negative one is that there is serious disillusionment within the electorate. There has been no comprehensive study of the actual reasons behind the serious apathy in 2004, thus it is not quite clear which position accurately depicts what is happening. However, it is indisputable that a large percentage of

South Africans can be attracted to the ballot box to strengthen the country's democracy and this poses a challenge to the opposition parties, given their weakness. It can be surmised that the racial/ethnic posturing of most South African opposition parties is one of the factors deterring voters from supporting them. This fact is underlined by empirical evidence that generally South Africans who are disenchanted with the ANC stay away from the polls rather than vote for opposition parties (Lodge 2001).

This view refutes the racial/ethnic view's assertion that there are strong bonds between the identities of individuals and how they will vote, as significant numbers of South African voters between electoral contests regard themselves as independent from political parties.¹⁰ If voters were tied to racial and ethnic identities and voted for parties accordingly this supposed affinity would be constant and not only visible during elections.

Thus, a careful analysis of the behaviour of voters in South Africa with respect to elections and political parties does not seem to support the assumptions that are embodied in the racial/ethnic view that that these factors are primary in South African politics. Political parties are either forging policies that are counter to voters' interests (DA/IFP) or assume that racial and ethnic factors are attractive to voters (PAC, FF+, Azapo, Sopa).

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY

This characterisation of South African politics in racial/ethnic terms has serious and negative consequences for effective democratic consolidation. As opposition political parties interpret and construe their reading of society as steeped in these restrictive boundaries the effect is that they place emphasis on winning votes from their own 'niche' markets, whether black or white (*Mail & Guardian* 18–25 March, p 8), a situation which renders them weak and unable to challenge the dominance of the ANC. The final section of this paper addresses these implications: the consequences of voter apathy and the dangers of ineffectual regionalism.

VOTER APATHY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

One of the dangers inherent in this weak opposition is that it may lead to voter apathy – a present and real threat, as revealed by the large number of eligible voters who did not participate in the 2004 elections. By advocating these parochial racial and ethnic sentiments these parties alienate segments of the electorate which do not subscribe to these views and yet do not support the ruling ANC. As Lodge has written: 'If left unchecked over time, dissatisfied voters with no place to turn to may become apathetic, may not care about the survival of democracy, and may become increasingly more discontented' (1999, p 106).

10 See, for example, the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa) Public Opinion Report of 1998.

This trend may be very serious for South Africa's developing democracy, as it is important that as many citizens as possible be engaged in issues which affect the development of the country, especially during the early consolidation of democracy.

What can be even more threatening to the democratisation process is if this apathy turns into deep discontent and an aversion to democratic principles. That is, voters may feel so alienated that they would choose not to operate under the accepted procedures of democratic practice and, in the extreme, this could result in violence.

This is especially likely if the socio-economic disparities between blacks and whites are not adequately addressed by the Government's economic policies. This criticism has already been raised in various circles, especially by the ANC's alliance partners, Cosatu and the SACP, in relation to Gear (Marais 1998; Habib, Naidu and Taylor 1999). This threat has already become a reality on occasion, with social movements critical of government policies staging demonstrations that have led to violence. One such movement, the Landless People's Movement, threatened to disrupt the 2004 election.

The Government has enjoyed some success in delivery of social services, for instance it has provided 1,5 million government subsidised houses for lower income groups; provided access to clean water for 7 million people; and installed 2,5 million electricity connections between 1994 and 1999 (*Sunday Times* 18 November 2001). However, the unemployment rate has risen to 23 per cent from 20 per cent in the same period. (www.sairr.org.za) It is in such circumstances that politicians may exploit voters, arguing that democracy has not brought any tangible benefits, especially for black voters. As Mcebisi Ndletyana has observed, 'Opportunism might set in and the rise of demagoguery could occur' (interview with author). And that segment of the disillusioned white electorate that feels it is being excluded may also resort to extra-parliamentary means to express its feelings. Evidence emerging in the Boeremag Treason Trial¹², the first such trial in post-apartheid South Africa, indicates that there is a very real danger of such a response.

INEFFECTUAL REGIONALISM

The other impact of this racial and ethnic view is that parties that operate within its framework are increasingly becoming regional in outlook, with declining levels of support on the national stage. Any effective opposition to the ANC lies in the presence of political parties that appeal to the interests of a broad and national cross-section of South African society. However, racial and ethnic appeals tend to tie parties down, as their power bases roughly correspond to regions, as Horowitz

12 The Boeremag is a right-wing Afrikaner organisation that tried to topple the government by setting off bombs in black townships. In April 2003 more than 20 of its member were arrested and charged with treason.

(1985) has argued. 'Parties and politicians concerned solely with parochial ethnic conflicts find themselves unable to expand beyond their locality.'

The performance of most of these political parties has revealed that they have regionally based support, an assertion borne out by the results of the 2004 elections. For example, the IFP draws a massive 93 per cent of its support from KwaZulu-Natal; 58 per cent of the UDM's comes from the Eastern Cape; the MF's regional support in KwaZulu-Natal is greater than its national support, while the UCDP's main base is in North West, from which it draws 93 per cent of its support.

Regionalism is not intrinsically anti-democratic or negative. However, shaping and basing policies on racially and ethnically driven perspectives is fraught with danger for the democratisation process, engendering, as it does, in the electorate a deep sense of racial and ethnic outlooks. In this sense, a project to fashion a common nation, with common interests at the centre will be adversely affected.

Admittedly this trend to regionalism based on race and ethnicity is not strong, but it does have the effect of retarding a common vision of a united South Africa. Another problem is that if parties become increasingly regionally based there will be very few parties left on the national stage to fight for political power. Even the dominance of two parties on the national stage is not healthy for democratisation as it restricts voters' choices. Strong national parties are essential to a thriving democracy.

CONCLUSION

The racial/ethnic interpretation of South African elections maintains that these factors are pervasive in South African society and have negative consequences for the effective consolidation of democracy. Those who hold this view argue that because of South Africa's divided past race and ethnicity continue to define the boundaries of politics in the country. It should be noted that identity politics in South Africa have not totally disappeared and have surfaced in electoral contests, lending partial credence to the racial/ethnic view. However, there is abundant empirical evidence that suggests that racial and ethnic perspectives in South African society are not of primary importance. Incrementally from 1994 to the 1999 and 2004 elections this view is seriously unravelling, thus challenging its pessimistic conclusion that South Africa's democracy is imperilled.

This interpretation of South African politics embodies within itself serious implications for the consolidation of democracy by reinforcing these views within the electorate and among political parties. Thus, instead of democracy being imperilled by superficial trends shaped around race and ethnicity, it is clear that the view itself is limited in explaining the unfolding democratic process and, indeed, has negative consequences for it.

In relation to the 2004 election, a study of the conduct of political parties which did not emphasise racial and ethnic factors indicates that these elements are waning and the cross racial/ethnic political alliances that were formed (mainly by the major

parties) further indicate the invalidity of the racial/ethnic view. In addition, the failure of parties that continue to be held captive to both racial and ethnic interpretations is evidence that these categories are increasingly becoming irrelevant to South African politics and portends a more rational politics based on issues – just as it is in any democratic country.

— REFERENCE —

Publications

- Adam, H. 1994. 'Ethnic versus Civic Nationalism: South Africa's Non-Racialism in Comparative Perspective'. *South African Sociological Review* 7(1).
- Booyesen, S. 1999. 'The 1999 Election and the New Orientations in Opposition Politics in South Africa'. *Issue* 27(2).
- . 1999. 'Election 1999 and Scenarios for Opposition Politics in South Africa'. *Politikon* 26(2).
- . 2004. 'Ten Years of Democracy and the State of Opposition Politics in South Africa'. *Election Update 2004 South Africa* 8, 3 May.
- Brooks, H. 2004. 'The Dominant Party System: Challenges for South Africa's Second Decade of Democracy'. *Electoral Institute of Southern Africa Occasional Paper* 25.
- Butler, A. 1998. *Democracy and Apartheid: Political Theory, Comparative Politics and the Modern South African State*. London: Macmillan.
- Drury, B. 1994. 'Ethnic Mobilisation: Some Theoretical Considerations'. In J Rex and B Drury (eds). *Ethnic Mobilisation in a Multi-Cultural Europe*. Aldershot: Avebury.
- Edigheji, O. 2004. 'Fear Versus Freedom: Minority Parties and the ANC'. *Election Synopsis* 1(2) Pretoria: HSRC.
- Frederiske, J. 1991. *The Unbreakable Thread: Non-Racialism in South Africa*. London: Zed Press.
- Giliomee, H. 1989. 'The Communal Nature of the South African Conflict'. In H Giliomee and L Schlemmer (eds). *Negotiating South Africa's Future*. Johannesburg: Southern Books.
- . 1990. 'The Elusive Search for Peace'. In H Giliomee and J Gagiano (eds). *The Elusive Search for Peace: South Africa, Israel and Northern Ireland*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Habib, A and Naidu, S. 1999. 'Election '99: Was there a "Coloured" and "Indian" Vote?' *Politikon*. 26(2).
- Habib, A, S Naidu and R Taylor. 1999. 'Parliamentary Opposition and Democratic Consolidation in South Africa'. *Review of African Political Economy* 79.
- Hoeane, T. 2002. 'A Re-Interpretation of South African Electoral Studies: Race, Ethnicity and Democracy in the 1999 and 2004 Elections'. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

- Horowitz, D. 1985. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkely: University of California Press.
- .1991. *A Democratic South Africa? Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Johnson, R W. 1996. 'The 1994 Election: Outcome and Analysis'. In R W Johnson and L Schlemmer (eds). *Launching Democracy in South Africa: The First Open Election, April 1994*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Johnson, R W and P Zulu. 1996. 'Public Opinion in KwaZulu-Natal'. In R W Johnson and L Schlemmer (eds). *Launching Democracy in South Africa: The First Open Election, April 1994*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Kellas, G J. 1991. *The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity*. London: Macmillan.
- Kotzé, D. 2004. 'Post Election Phase: Election Results and Post Election Review'. *Election Update South Africa 2004 8*, 3 May.
- Kotzé, H. 1999. 'The New National Party in the 1999 Elections'. *Politikon* 26(2).
- Laurence, P. 2004. 'Bestriding South Africa Like a Political Colossus'. *Focus* 34, 2nd Quarter. Johannesburg: Helen Suzman Foundation.
- Lijphart, A. 1985. *Power Sharing in South Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- .1993. 'Power Sharing, Ethnic Agnosticism and Political Pragmatism'. *Transformation* 21.
- Lodge, T. 1994. 'The Pan-Africanist Congress, 1959-1990'. In I Liebenberg, B Nel, F Lortan and G van der Westhuizen (eds). *The Long March: The Story of the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa*. Pretoria: Haum.
- . 1999. *Consolidating Democracy: South Africa's Second Popular Election*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- . 2001. 'The South African Local Government Election of December 2000'. *Politikon*. 28(1).
- Marais, H. 1998. *South Africa: Limits to Change. The Political Economy of Transition*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
- Maseko, S. 1999. 'The PAC, Azapo and the UDM'. In A Reynolds (ed). *Election '99 South Africa: From Mandela to Mbeki*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Mattes, R. 1995a. 'The (Limited) Impact of Race and Ethnicity on Partisan Identification in South Africa's First Open Election'. Paper presented to Colloquium of IPSA's Research Committee on Politics and Ethnicity. Johannesburg.
- . 1995b. *The Election Yearbook: Judgement and Choice in South Africa's 1994 Election*. Cape Town: Institute for Democracy in South Africa.
- Meredith, M. 1994. *South Africa's New Era: The 1994 Election*. London: Mandarin.
- Ndebele, N. 2001. 'African National Congress Commitment to Non-Racialism: The Question of Open Membership, 1960-1990'. Unpublished MA dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
- Ndletyana, M. 1999. 'The United Democratic Movement: A Critical Assessment'. *Politikon* 26(2).
- Piombo, J. 1999. 'The UCDP, Minority Front, ACDP and Federal Alliance'. In

- A Reynolds (ed). *Election '99 South Africa: From Mandela to Mbeki*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Reynolds, A. 1994. 'The Results'. In A Reynolds (ed). *Election '94 South Africa: The Campaigns, Results and Future Prospects*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Schlemmer, L. 1994a. 'South Africa's First Open Election and the Future of its Democracy'. In H Giliomee, L Schlemmer, and S Hauptfleisch (eds). *The Bold Experiment: South Africa's New Democracy*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- . 1994b. 'Birth of Democracy'. *Indicator SA* 11(3).
- Seekings, J. 1997. 'From the Ballot Box to the Bookshelf: Studies of the 1994 South African General Election'. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 15 (2).
- Southall, R. 1999. 'The Struggle for a Place called Home: The ANC versus the UDM in the Eastern Cape'. *Politikon* 26(2).
- Taylor, R and T Hoeane. 1999. 'Interpreting the South African Election of June 1999'. *Politikon* 26 (2).
- Van Zyl Slabbert, F and D Welsh. 1979. *South Africa's Options: Strategies for Sharing Power*. Cape Town: David Phillip.
- Welsh, D. 1994. 'The Democratic Party'. In A Reynolds (ed). *Election 1994 South Africa: The Campaigns, Results and Future Prospects*. Cape Town: David Philip.

Interviews

- Chiole, C. Freedom Front (FF) Member of Gauteng Provincial Legislature. Johannesburg, 29 September 2000.
- Desai, A. Sociologist, University of Natal. Durban, 17 October 2000.
- Kgosana, P. Former Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) National Secretary. Pretoria, 15 May 2000.
- Kotzé, H. Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Stellenbosch. Stellenbosch, 25 October 2000.
- Mabasa, L. Socialist Party of Azania (Sopa) President. Johannesburg, 10 May 2000.
- Meshoe, K. African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) President. Johannesburg, 19 September 2000.
- Ndletyana, M. Policy Analyst, Centre for Policy Studies (CPS). Johannesburg, 30 May 2000.
- Nefolovhodwe, P. Azanian People's Organisation (Azapo) Deputy National Chairperson. Johannesburg, 15 May 2000.
- Seekings, J. Professor, Department of Political Studies, University of Cape Town. Cape Town, 26 October 2000.