VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN THE SA LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS OF 2006 WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE YOUTH

Maxi Schoeman and Charles Puttergill

Maxi Schoeman is Head of the Department of Political Sciences
at the University of Pretoria
Pretoria 0002
Tel: +27 012 420 4066; Fax: +27 012 420 3886
e-mail: maxi.schoeman@up.ac.za

Charles Puttergill is a lecturer in the Department of Sociology
at the University of Pretoria
Pretoria 0002
Tel: +27 012 420 2715; Fax: +27 012 420 3886
e-mail: charles.puttergill@up.ac.za

ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of the third local government elections in South Africa, held on 1 March 2006. Three broad explanations are given for voting behaviour (rational choice, party identification, and the sociological model). We argue that contrary to the expectations and assumption that voter turnout and behaviour would be determined by material issues (service delivery) the outcome points to participation as being an intrinsic value in itself. In the second part of the paper we focus on youth voting behaviour, based on a pilot study conducted among political science and sociology students at the University of Pretoria in April 2006. We conclude that despite low levels of voter registration and voting among young people, they tend to become more involved in 'ballot box' activities over time and remain largely optimistic about the country. To the extent that voters (youth and adults) are dissatisfied with the performance of the ruling party (the party of overwhelming choice) such dissatisfaction does not point to a shift to support opposition parties. Rather, debates about policy and performance will take place within the ruling party, among various factions fighting for the 'soul of the ANC'.

INTRODUCTION

In the run-up to the South African local government elections (LGE) of March 2006 much was made of service delivery as a) a crucial issue in the elections, b) a threat to support for the ANC in particular, c) a threat in general to the electoral process as a key aspect of democratic expression and d) a threat to democracy in the long run, with voters disillusioned to the point of rejecting elections as meaningless. But is this true? What were the issues in this election, how important were they, and what do perceptions of the delivery/failure of basic services tell us about, on the one hand, how commentators, opinion-makers, and elites view the voting process and impulse and, on the other, the nature of electoral behaviour and values that govern electoral choices?

In this paper we provide an overview of the issues on which political parties and the public focused during the election campaign, issues identified by the media as potentially determining peoples' voting decisions and the voting behaviour of one specific segment of the population – the youth – and the extent of their participation in the 2006 elections. In the first section we deal with a number of theoretical observations about voting behaviour and the role of the media in determining such behaviour. This serves to contextualise our main argument that, contrary to the perception that the election (both in terms of participation and the choices expressed by voters) would be determined or largely influenced by material issues (in particular that of service delivery), the outcome points to participation as being an intrinsic value in itself. In the second section we pay attention to the issues raised during the election campaign and in the third we compare voter behaviour with the assumption that it would be determined by instrumental considerations. In the final section we turn to the voting behaviour of the youth, analysing it by focusing on a sample of students at the University of Pretoria.

First, though, it is necessary to provide, by way of background, some basic statistics relating to the election results. Voter turnout in the 1996 LGE was 49 per cent, in 2000 it was 48 per cent (HSRC 2006, p 3) and in 2006 it was again 48 per cent. Although apparently low, this is in line with worldwide trends of voting patterns at levels lower than in national elections. The highest turnout was recorded in the Eastern Cape where 56 per cent of the voters cast their ballots.

Over all, the African National Congress (ANC) gained 66,34 per cent of the vote, with its highest support (84%) in Limpopo and lowest (38%) in the Western Cape. Apart from the ANC, only three other parties attracted more than 2 per cent of votes: the Democratic Alliance (DA) 14,77, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) 8,5, and the Independent Democrats (ID) 2,2. The African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the Freedom Front Plus (FF+) each attracted one per cent of the total votes cast.

THEORETICAL OBSERVATIONS

Democracy, as Schmitter & Karl (1991) point out, is not only about the electoral process. Yet, in the words of Friedman (1999, p 213) '[f]or many citizens, an election may be… the only occasion on which their choices are stamped on the political process'. Elections and the act of participation through voting remain, for many, the defining proof that they have a voice and the opportunity of 'asserting the political self, of expressing identity and autonomy'. In this sense, then, Friedman continues, exercising one's vote becomes more important to building and maintaining democracy than does one's choice of who to vote for.

But political issues inevitably turn into campaign issues, or are turned into campaign issues, and therefore a perennial question remains why people decide to vote and how they vote, that is, for whom they vote. The decision whether or not to vote is influenced by a range of tangible and intangible considerations (see Ball & Peters 2005, p 172). What has become clear worldwide is that national elections have a higher turnout than elections at lower tiers of government, that there is a general decline in voter turnout and that the youth vote is generally lower than that of other age groups. These assumptions will be tested against the South African LGE in later sections of this paper.

As to explanations of voting behaviour, that is, the reasons for choosing a specific political party, the literature provides three broad approaches, though these are not mutually exclusive (Ball & Peters 2005, pp 172-9). Political elites tend to favour rational choice theory as an explanation for voting behaviour: decisions are based on mainly instrumental criteria.[1] To quote again from Friedman (1999, p 220): 'citizens are believed to use democracy as a source of material benefit rather than of self-expression'. It is, therefore, not surprising that service delivery was turned into a major issue during the run-up to the LGE of 2006 (as was also the case, incidentally, in the 1996 and 2000 LGEs, though not to the same extent as during the 2006 election campaign), together with a number of other tangible issues, as discussed in the next section. The crux of this approach is that it privileges 'rationality' in a materialistically designed way, implying that choices based on intangible considerations such as identity or religion are somehow 'irrational' or 'not normal'.[2] Rational choice theory implies that elections are first and foremost issue-based, an assumption obviously adopted by South African elites, as evidenced in, for instance the ANC's 'Project Consolidate', launched in 2005, and the heavy emphasis placed on service delivery in the election manifestos of all parties that participated in the elections.

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1   This approach was popularised through the work of Downs (1957).
2   See, for instance, the discussion of the 'sentimental vote' (EISA 2006, p 51) as 'being emotional and linked to party allegiance', and Giliomee & Simkins 1999, pp 337-54.

A second explanatory model is the party identification model, according to which voting behaviour is based on loyalty to a specific political party. The assumption is that people vote for the party they feel closest to and such party identification is part of a person's early socialisation. Partisan identification in liberal democracies was especially strong in the 1950s and 60s, with electoral behaviour characterised by stability rather than change. In recent decades liberal democracies have been characterised by 'partisan dealignment' (Ball & Peters 2005, p 173), strengthening the case of proponents of rational choice theory. However, in Southern Africa the party identification model seems to remain strong, as evidenced by the continuing strength of liberation movements turned political parties in South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe, and the difficulty of new parties or opposition parties in wooing voters away from the ANC, the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) and the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF). Horowitz (1985) argues that in deeply divided societies party support is based on these cleavages and therefore, in a racially divided society political representation and party endorsement take on a racial dimension. This is not meant, though, to imply that voting behaviour in South Africa is fully explained by this model, as is argued below.

The third model is the sociological model, which contains various theoretical divergences not discussed here. In essence, this approach emphasises the group membership of the voter and views social class, religious affiliation, regional and ethnic loyalties, and personal aspects such as gender and age as determining voter behaviour. The sociological model 'identifies correlations between social cleavages and voting behaviour; it does not claim that there is a causal connection behind those correlations' (Ball & Peters 2005, p 176) and considers aspects such as apathy, disillusionment and social capital[3] (Russell 2005, p 557). It is from this model that assumptions such as the following are drawn, though the definition of these categories (eg, 'class') is important:

- The working class is more likely to support a left-of-centre party.
- Women tend to support right-of-centre parties.
- Older people tend to vote for conservative parties (conversely, young people will vote for liberal/radical parties).

The danger in accepting such assumptions as 'true' are clear: what do we make of a middle-aged working-class woman who votes for the PAC? Or a young man who votes for the FF+, as obviously happens regularly? And for South Africans,

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3   Social capital is defined by Russell (2005, p 557) as 'the social glue that binds communities together'.

or people familiar with the country's history and context, such behaviour makes perfect sense. This is not to say that the sociological approach, or any of the others, whether singly or jointly, cannot assist us in understanding voter behaviour. All three are used in the following sections, although it is necessary to keep in mind that history and context often provide the lens through which these approaches can be usefully applied.

A last theoretical consideration that should be touched on briefly in order to provide an analysis of the LGE is that of the media, whose role in shaping or influencing voter behaviour is hotly contested (see, eg, Mondak 1995, p 325), as is the exact nature of media influence. The print media in most states show clear political biases, yet this does not necessarily mean that they determine voter behaviour – one could argue, for instance, that their reach is mainly limited to like-minded readers. Television and radio are considered to be more neutral, though this assumption is also debatable, especially in terms of ownership (public or private; if private, by whom). At least in liberal Western democracies there seems to be an increasing trend for young adults to favour the Internet as a source of information on political issues. It is probable that the news media may create the impression that they determine or influence voting behaviour as they are often considered to be the main source of political information for prospective voters, but being a source of information is not equivalent to having a marked influence on people's opinions.

ISSUES IN THE 2006 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

There can be little doubt that the main issue of the elections was that of service delivery, or, as some would have it, the lack of service delivery. There are a number of reasons for the priority given to service delivery in the run-up to the elections. First among these is the fact that President Thabo Mbeki himself identified 'delivery' as the main focus of his presidency. Second, and as a consequence of this, the ruling party made service delivery part of its political platform ('Project Consolidate'), with the majority of other parties following suit, though whereas the ANC promised to improve and continue service delivery (EISA 2006, p 27), opposition parties focused on the lack of delivery. A third reason was the large number of service delivery protests that erupted in late 2004 and throughout 2005-2006 according to the South African Institute of Race Relations (as reported in EISA 2006, p 79). Finally, local government is the focal point of service delivery, the tier of government closest to the people, and the one to which the country's Constitution (s 153) gives the task of playing a developmental role.

The media made the issue of service delivery a priority in their reporting during the run-up to the elections, though other aspects were also covered and at

least one television programme focused on municipalities with track records of successful delivery (EISA 2006, p 15). Given the extensive and often very critical coverage of service delivery by the media and the attention paid to it by all political parties, one would have expected to see some impact on voter turnout and behaviour, yet there does not seem to have been a correlation in the LGE, as will be discussed in a subsequent section.

In a survey on voter participation in elections prepared for the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) (2006) even this institution found it necessary to warn the IEC that 'the lack of service delivery might impact on voting behaviour… This issue needs to be monitored since it could escalate and impact on voter behaviour' (HSRC 2006, p 28).

A number of other issues also came to the fore in the elections, though they were all related to service delivery. Inept councillors and municipalities were often cited as problematic, as was the fact that councillors failed to consult with communities. Schlemmer (quoted in EISA 2006, p 79) claimed that more than 50 per cent of municipalities were 'dysfunctional' or 'severely challenged', and much mention was made of corruption (EISA 2006, pp 18, 94) and of the inability of municipalities to spend their budgets. Even the issue of demarcation was closely related to that of service delivery. In the case of both Marafong (Khutsong) and Matatiele the dissatisfaction of the communities related to their fear of being marginalised by their 'new' provinces (North West and Eastern Cape respectively, both of which are amongst the poorer provinces in the county, with weak delivery track records).

One can safely say that the media, politicians and the political elite in general adopted a rational actor model approach to the LGE, assuming or taking it for granted that voting behaviour would be determined by service delivery and related issues. However, and very importantly, this was not the case at all. The ANC again attracted the vast majority of votes (69%) and voter turnout was the same as it had been in the 2000 LGE, and 1 per cent lower than in the 1996 LGE. How does one explain this, and which of the models discussed above best explains South African voting behaviour?

EXPLAINING VOTER TURNOUT AND BEHAVIOUR

In his analysis of voter behaviour in the 1999 national elections, Friedman (1999) refuted the claim that voters based their decision about whether or not to cast their ballot mainly on instrumental criteria. Could one also, then, claim that rational choice theory does not explain the decision to vote in the 2006 LGE? Voter turnout was less than 50 per cent, which, despite the huge support for the

ANC translates into, roughly, 35 per cent support for the ruling party in terms of the number of eligible voters. The fact that service delivery (and related issues such as corruption and the inefficiency of councillors and councils) formed the focal point of party agendas and of the media indicates, at the very least, a general acceptance of instrumentality as being a determining factor. On the other hand, we have no empirical evidence either confirming or refuting such an assumption. However, if service delivery had in fact been the determining factor, one would have expected one of two scenarios: a very high voter turnout with voters casting their votes for opposition parties or spoiling their votes in order to register their dissatisfaction, or a very low turnout, either because people did not believe their vote would make any difference or as a sign of disillusionment.

Yet neither of these scenarios played out – in fact, as indicated above, the turnout remained much the same as it had been in the two previous LGEs, when the issue of service delivery was nowhere near as pertinent and salient as it was in 2006. Rather, it would seem that a combination of the party identification and sociological approaches would, to some extent, explain voter turnout and, by implication, the high percentage of votes for the ANC. Because of its history the ANC has long been the choice of the majority of people in the country, who happen to be overwhelmingly black and working class. This is not to deny that rationality played a role in voter behaviour – the number of service delivery protests points to a level of genuine frustration and grievance amongst large section of the citizenry.

But dissatisfaction has obviously not resulted in a large-scale or dramatic rejection of the voting process, or, for that matter, of the ANC. Booysen (quoted in EISA 2006, p 65) reported that in the Eastern Cape, for example, though voters 'were prepared to engage in protests they were equally determined to turn up to vote on election day'. Despite the fact that Port Elizabeth and East London were the sites of particularly serious protests (EISA 2006, p 18), the highest voter turnout (56%) was in the Eastern Cape, with 65 per cent of registered voters going to the polls in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Council (Port Elizabeth). Over all, the ANC increased its support from 72/3 per cent in 2000 to 81,74 per cent in 2006. Anecdotal evidence from other provinces also points to the fact that although instrumental issues are important to voters they nevertheless cast their ballots (EISA 2006, pp 59-60; 111), indicating a belief in both the importance of the vote and the importance attached to a specific party.

It is also interesting that in an area such as Khutsong, site of some of the most violent protests up to and including election day, the voter turnout was very low (in fact, the lowest in the province, with only 300 votes cast). Yet, it is worthwhile quoting a political analyst commenting on activities in the Khutsong area on election day (EISA 2006, p 68).

> … a large percentage of [Khutsong] residents decided to participate in the election by not casting their votes and rather engage in sporting activities next to the polling stations; an act viewed by some commentators as a way of expressing anger, monitoring residents who defied the call not to vote by protesters, etc.

In other words, voters still interacted with the voting process. Khutsong also offers clear evidence of a form of identity politics: voters indicated dissatisfaction by not voting, but their anger did not result in a switch in party allegiance (see *Business Day* 6 March 2006). What their actions did indicate was a continuation of their protest against Khutsong's incorporation into North West *outside* of voting as a form of indicating protest/opposition and therefore in a sense a continuation of the politics of intimidation and boycott used to such good effect during the struggle against apartheid in the 1980s. Such actions suggest an attitude similar to that of Eastern Cape voters referred to above. Importantly, voters do not feel close to any other party, even though they might not or no longer feel that the ANC provides a political home for them (see Lodge 1999, pp 65-6).

The above observations confirm that party allegiance and sociological factors such as race, class and history (what Friedman 1999 calls 'identity politics') still largely determine people's voting behaviour. But does this hold true for the youth – the leaders, ruling elite and opinion formers of the future?

THE YOUTH VOTE

It is generally accepted that the voting turnout of the youth is always lower than that of other age groups (see Jennings et al 1997, p 14; UCLA 2004, p 1; Milan 2005, p 1; Russell 2005). Yet, given South Africa's 'history of youth at the forefront of political organization' (Banda & Faull 2004) one might expect South African politics to be an exception to this rule. What was the case during the 2006 LGE and what trends could be identified on the basis of these findings? In the last section of the paper we present an analysis of the youth vote, based on a pilot study[4] conducted in March 2006 among a group of 516 students in the Faculty of Human Sciences at the University of Pretoria and supplemented by and contextualised within broader observations and analyses of the youth vote internationally and in South Africa.

Apart from testing the behaviour of 'tomorrow's leaders', who are, incidentally, the largest age group in the country (as is the case in most developing

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4 The authors hope to expand the study during 2007 to include a broad representation of university students on several campuses in the country.

countries), we also hoped to gain some insight, however limited in terms of our sample, into aspects such as whether race and gender had any noticeable impact on voting behaviour, or whether rational considerations or party identification were a notable variable in explaining such behaviour. The University of Pretoria presents an interesting case as it has, on its main campus, both black and white students, but on its Mamelodi campus only black students, all of whom could be classified as studying at a previously disadvantaged (black) institution.

Youth apathy about participating in elections is a worldwide phenomenon. As several authors (eg, Milan 2005; Henn et al 2002) note, though, young people might not be interested in traditional methods of political participation, such as voting, but they often engage in politics through activities 'outside the ballot box'. This observation is confirmed by the frequency of young people participating in or instigating demonstrations, marches, rallies and riots, which belies the notion of 'youth apathy'.

Africa, and South Africa in particular, has a long history of youth engagement in politics, often with a crucial impact on the history of their countries. Nevertheless, there is a perception that in our present era 'low levels of civil involvement and political apathy remain a dominant feature among young people' (EISA undated). Despite the low youth voter turnout, youth participation in service-delivery protests was reported to have been high (HSRC 2006, p 30), confirming political activity 'outside the ballot box', though little, if any, data are available on the extent of such activities.

In an HSRC report for the IEC, based on a survey of 5 000 individuals and conducted in October 2005 on South African voter participation in elections, it was found that a large percentage (64%) of those in the age group 18-24 years were uncertain whether they would register as voters or did not intend to register as they 'were not interested' in voting (HSRC 2006, p 8). There was an increase in the participation levels of young people in the age group 25-34 (HSRC 2006, p 10). It was also people in the age group 18-24 who registered the highest agreement with the statement that they were 'strongly dissatisfied with local government' (HSRC 2006, p 23) and who indicated that they would not vote in the LGE because of a lack of service delivery. Two findings of particular concern in the report were, first, that a higher percentage of males than females participated in elections, though 54,75 per cent of eligible voters are women, and that there was a lower level of participation in elections among respondents at the post-matriculation level than in other groups (HSRC 2006, pp 9, 10).

According to a survey done in the Western Cape in the run-up to the elections (EISA 2006, p 23) up to 70 per cent of those in the age group 18-24 indicated that there were 'no good reasons to vote'. North West province recorded an 'extremely low' youth vote (EISA 2006, p 57) and a Free State report also mentioned high

levels of 'voter apathy' among students in Bloemfontein (EISA 2006, p 89), confirming the finding of Fourie (2006) that students were not interested in voting because they felt neglected by political parties. Similar apathetic attitudes were reported among students at Stellenbosch University (EISA 2006, p 97) and Ramoroka, in the *Diamond Fields Advertiser* (3 March 2006), commented on the low youth vote in the Northern Cape, linking it not as much to apathy as to dissatisfaction with living conditions. Overall, a picture emerges of young people across the socioeconomic spectrum being either apathetic when it comes to participation in elections, or feeling alienated and dissatisfied with their circumstances.

Our findings both support and, to some extent, contradict these observations, and allow us to put some of these perceptions into a broader context and to provide some insights into a range of perceptions about the political attitudes and voter behaviour of young people. The discussion is confined to registration as voters, voting, party membership and identification, student perceptions of the most important issues in their home communities, satisfaction levels with local government, perceptions of whether things had improved for them and their families between the 2000 and 2006 LGEs, and preferences and support for political leaders. First, though, some notes on the methods employed.

Methods

Permission to conduct this pilot survey among undergraduate political science and sociology students in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria was obtained from the Dean of Students. Ethical approval was obtained from the Faculty Committee before the research commenced.

A questionnaire was developed by the researchers and tested by asking undergraduate and graduate students to complete it. Changes were made to the questionnaire, based on the feedback obtained through this exercise. The questionnaire recorded biographical details and contained a number of questions about political preferences and participation. Most questions were closed-ended.

For this pilot study, given the importance of conducting the survey, which was held during April, as soon as possible after the March local government elections, we opted for convenience sampling. Students attending undergraduate lectures were requested to complete the self-administered questionnaire during a lecture. Foreign students were excluded from the study. If students had completed the questionnaire in another lecture, where registrations between the two subjects overlapped, they were asked not to complete a second questionnaire. Students were informed beforehand about the project and a second opportunity was provided in class for those who had missed the first lecture during which

the questionnaires were completed. Students were also invited to collect question-naires from the respective departments should they not have made use of the two opportunities during lecture periods to participate. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

Of a total of 887 students, 516 provided useable questionnaires, which translates into a response rate of 58 per cent. The response rate among first-year students, however, was lower (49%) than that of second-and third-year students (72% and 74% respectively), due mainly to poor class attendance by first-year students. As to race and gender, 40 per cent of the sample were white students and 60 per cent were black, while 35,5 per cent were male and 64,5 per cent were female. These statistics broadly reflect the demographic spread (both in terms of race and gender) in the two departments from which the sample group was selected,[5] although in terms of white students there was a higher proportion of females to males: 70 per cent female to 30 per cent male.

Once the questionnaires were completed the open-ended questions were coded with the help of student assistants from the two departments. We report data obtained from this coding. Chi-square tests[6] were used to determine statistical significance at the five-percent level of confidence, or lower.

Voter Registration

In all, 51 per cent of male students and 39 per cent of female students in the sample were registered as voters. The lowest percentage of registered voters was in the age group 18-21; by the age of 25 all students, with the exception of one 28-year-old, were registered, confirming that registration figures increase with age (as do voting and party membership).

The issue of non-registration needs to be investigated. South Africa adopts an approach similar to that of the US in placing the burden of registration on the citizen and, in order to register, citizens must produce a green bar-coded identity document. Students were asked in an open question why they were not registered as voters. The five most cited reasons were apathy, disillusionment, being under age, not being in possession of a valid identity document and administrative inefficiency. The latter two reasons should serve as a wake-up call to government and the IEC. The act of voting is, arguably, the most basic right in a democratic polity and, as Friedman (1999, p 215) argues, 'precisely because voting is an act

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5   Percentages are rounded off for the purpose of reporting, except in the case of half a per cent. Therefore, for example, 60,6 per cent will be reported as 61 per cent, but 60,5 per cent will remain 60,5 per cent.
6   A chi-square test evaluates statistically significant differences between proportions for two or more groups in a data set.

of democratic identification, the democratic state, if it wishes to ensure its continued survival in robust health, has a core responsibility to ensure that this opportunity is available to all who might wish to take advantage of it'.

A concerted campaign might be necessary to encourage applications for identity documents and voter registration and to ensure that both processes are efficient and affordable. One way of doing this might be for the Department of Home Affairs and the IEC to provide opportunities for students to apply for identity documents and register as voters on campus in an on-going process, that is, once a year. In the case of voter registration this might lessen the pressure on the IEC to run registration campaigns as 'one-offs' in the run-up to elections. Similar processes might be as necessary and successful in rural areas and need not be confined only to the registration of young people.[7]

Apathy and disillusionment, despite being the main reasons cited for not being registered, might not be as serious as implied or often agonised about in the media, given the fact that student registration (and voting) increases with age. What is of concern, though, is the relatively low level of registration on the part of female students,[8] though being under age (presumably at the time of voter registration in late 2005) was given as the second most frequent reason by females for not being registered. Government suggests a 50 per cent proportional representation of women in all spheres of public life and the 2005 South African Local Government Association '50/50 – get the balance right' campaign was aimed at the inclusion of more women in local government. The 50/50 representation was a major ANC election card, though it was acknowledged that it was a difficult objective to reach (EISA 2006, p 25) and many perceived it as 'undermining the democratic process' (EISA 2006, p 30). There were also reports of ANC male incumbents being dissatisfied with the 50/50 requirement as it would mean that many of them would lose their positions as councillors (EISA 2006, p 25). Over all the gender distribution of candidates remained the same as for the LGE held in 2000: 65 per cent male; 35 per cent female.

Two aspects of the difference between male and female registration (and voting) are important. This difference – 51 per cent male; 39 per cent female – is statistically significant, as is shown by the chi-square test at the 2 per cent level of confidence. First, though gender equality is firmly entrenched in South Africa's Constitution and though government is vigorously in favour of more/equal women's representation, there is still a level of resistance to women in positions

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7 The EISA (2006) Election Report abounds with references to the lack of identity documents among rural citizens.

8 The difference between male and female students is statistically significant, based on a chi-square, with a confidence level of 0,02.

of authority, indicating that gender bias is not rooted out or changed only on the basis of legislating gender equality but needs to change at an individual and societal level and that such bias is often the product of socialisation.[9] So, for instance, Adams (2006, p 5) reports:

> But last month saw an outcry at the ANC's Eastern Cape provincial conference after delegates moved to scrap the 50 percent quote for women. It was said that the proposal was backed by a feeling that women needed to be adequately equipped and empowered before being elevated to positions of power [sic].

The belief that women should 'prove' themselves equal to men seems still to be deep-rooted, especially among men. It would also seem that men are apprehensive about a 50/50 system for another reason: the fear of being sidelined. ANC secretary general Kgalema Motlanthe (quoted by Adams 2006, p 5) remarked with reference to such a system that the ANC anticipated the possibility that 'many men would feel sidelined as more women were nominated to governance structures'.

Second, although government and some of the political parties (especially the ANC) emphasise women's representation they do not specifically lobby for the female vote (EISA 2006, p 41; see also Bentley 2004). So, despite legislative provisions and a much larger contingent of women in leadership positions in the country, 'ordinary' women do not yet make their voices heard, even though they are in the majority (54% of eligible voters are female). Both government and political parties need to target women as potential voters and not focus only on leadership representation.

Voting Behaviour

Among the sample student voter turnout was very low – 24 per cent – compared with the national turnout of 48 per cent; 30 per cent of male students voted and 21 per cent of females (reflecting to a large extent the difference between male and female registration),[10] with 53 per cent of registered students having cast their vote. Again, voter turnout increased with age, as did voter registration. A rather obvious reason for the low turnout, apart from the fact that a large number

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9   Similar biases, with governments encouraging female representation and males resisting it, either because they perceive women to be 'inferior' or a threat to their own positions, are to be found in many Southern African countries, for example, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe (see Schoeman 2004).

10 The difference between male and female students is statistically significant, based on a chi-square, with a confidence level of 0,05.

of students were not registered, was 'inaccessibility', that is, many students are registered in their home constituencies and therefore could not vote in Pretoria.[11]

Yet, a breakdown of statistics in terms of race and, to some extent, socio-economic status, reveals some notable differences in student voting behaviour: at the main campus, 22 per cent of registered students cast their votes; at Mamelodi campus, where students are generally considered to come from a more disadvantaged background, 30 per cent voted.[12] The highest voting percentage was among white Afrikaans-speaking students: 32 per cent, slightly higher than the percentage for Mamelodi and considerably higher than the 22 per cent of UP main campus students and the 18 per cent for black African students on the main campus.[13]

This difference contradicts, for example, studies in the USA (see Ranney 1982, pp 175-6) which indicate that high socio-economic status groups tend to vote in much larger proportions than low socio-economic status groups. The US position (which is also reflected in other liberal democracies, at least in the developed world) is very different, though, from that of South Africa, where the vast majority of the electorate, and especially those who can now be considered to 'rule', are black. In Northern democracies the ruling elites are rich and white – in South Africa the ruling class is not yet distinguishable in terms of (high socio-economic) class, but very much in terms of race (see the discussion below on party support), though, as some writers point out, there is increasing evidence of a class cleavage within South Africa's voting population (see, eg, Garcia-Rivero 2006).

Furthermore, both the Mamelodi and the white Afrikaans-speaking students represent marginal groups in society. Mamelodi students come from a background of poverty, lower educational standards than their main campus peers, and a long history of political mobilisation and protest. The former Vista University[14] was an important site of struggle during the late apartheid period (the 1980s) and failed, largely, to develop a university culture, serving as a point of political mobilisation by a strong Pan African Students Movement of Azania (Pasma) organisation with ties to the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and black consciousness groupings. Students exhibit a strong political awareness and

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11   A similar situation was reported in Bloemfontein (EISA 2006, p 89).

12   The difference between the voting percentages in Mamelodi and on the UP main campus is statistically significant, based on a chi-square with a confidence level of 0,02.

13   The difference between white Afrikaans- and English-speaking students was not statistically significant, though.

14   Vista University's various campuses, spread over a large part of South Africa, were merged with technikons or historically white universities during the period 2003-2004 and the university ceased to exist.

protests occur much more regularly on Mamelodi campus than on the main campus and also tend to be more violent and disruptive.

This pervasive culture of protest and mobilisation among a group which has traditionally been excluded and is yet to reap the benefits of a post-apartheid society serves to explain their high voter turnout compared to that of their more privileged peers on the main campus. The political revolution in South Africa came from the bottom up, and these students represent those sectors of society that were instrumental in bringing about political change. It would seem that Mamelodi students are on overage more politically aware than their black counterparts on the main campus, and share this awareness with white Afrikaans-speaking students, who are also a marginal group, but who come from a background of perceived loss of power, yet are socialised into (and used to) taking responsibility and participating in politics.[15]

Does this low turnout indicate a lack of interest in the election process? In an interesting survey on youth voting behaviour during the 1994 and 1995/6 elections, Jennings et al (1997) found that, as is the case in other parts of the world, non-voting decreased with age. They categorised the age group 18 to 35 as 'youth' and found within this group that 35 per cent of those aged between 18 and 20, 51 per cent aged 21-25, 61 per cent aged 26-30 and 66 per cent in the age group 31-35 had voted. Our study confirms this observation with respect to voter registration and voting and also confirms the assumption (Jennings et al 1997, p 11) that youth are socialised over time into participating in election activities and that there is little evidence to suggest that apparent apathy will be carried over into their adult lives. Of the age group 18-20 only 18 per cent voted; 41 per cent in the age group 21-25 and 54,5 per cent in the age group 26 and older (though the latter was a very small group). These percentages are statistically significant, proving that age does have an impact on voter turnout. Interestingly, there was also a statistical correlation between the percentages of students registered as voters and party membership, indicating that party membership has an impact on voter registration.

Party Membership and Identification

In all countries party membership is much lower than party support or identification and South Africa, and our sample, are no exception. Nevertheless,

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15   Nevertheless, the relatively high voter turnout of white Afrikaans-speaking students needs to be further explored as the HSRC report (2006, p 11) mentions that people in the high living standard measurement (LSM) group (to which one can assume the vast majority of white people belong) tended to agree more than other groups that voting is 'pointless' and less than other groups with the statement that voting makes a difference.

though only 18 per cent of male students and 14 per cent of female students were registered party members (this difference is not statistically significant), party membership tends to increase with age: at first-year level only 13 per cent were party members; at fourth-year level this had increased to 30 per cent. There is, though, a marked difference in party membership between black and white students, with 21 per cent of the former being members of a political party and only 4 per cent of the latter, a difference which is statistically significant and indicates that race does have an impact on party membership. One explanation for this might be that a party such as the ANC has traditionally instituted youth representation on its various bodies, allowing the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) to play a significant role in the life of the party. As to support for a specific political party, the percentages were much higher, with 75 per cent of black students and 55 per cent of white students indicating such support.

In order to test students' identification with political parties, they were asked to rank a list of ten parties with '1' indicating the party they felt closest to and '10' the party they felt most distant from. All black students (including coloured and Indian) on both campuses listed the ANC as the party they felt closest to (with an average mean of 3,37). Black African students listed the DA in second place, followed by the PAC and the ID. White students felt closest to the DA, followed by the ID, ACDP and FF+, though there was an interesting difference between white Afrikaans-speaking students (DA, FF+, ACDP and ID, with the ANC in position 7) and white English-speaking students: DA, ANC, ID, ACDP, with the FF+, PAC and AZAPO in positions 8-10 respectively. There was no significant difference between black students on the main campus and those on Mamelodi campus.

These preferences indicate that white Afrikaans-speaking students remain more conservative than their white English-speaking counterparts, yet also more involved in politics, if measured against voting behaviour. But Afrikaans-speaking students clearly do not (yet?) feel close to the ANC (despite the 'merger' of the New National Party with the ANC in 2004) or to any other 'black' party, for that matter, testifying to their oft-reported feeling of alienation and exclusion.

Among black students the difference between identification with the ANC and identification with black nationalist parties was significant, with 83 per cent support for the ANC, as opposed to 19 per cent for the PAC and 7 per cent for the Azanian People's Organisation (Azapo). This seems to confirm that support for the ANC remains strong (as discussed in the first section of this paper), despite indications of dissatisfaction with service delivery and other issues, and that opposition politics in the country will continue to play out within the ANC, as support seems to be determined more by party identification than by rational choice. Furthermore, there is a strong statistical difference between white and

black students in terms of party identification, implying that race also has an impact on the extent to which (young) people identify with political parties.

Community Issues

Given the fact that the LGE was fought, both by political parties and in the media, on the platform of service delivery, students were asked to identify the most important issue in their community. Many listed more than one issue, but over all, on the UP main campus, crime was considered most important, followed by basic needs and services and poor infrastructure, with social and moral issues and political maladministration in third and fourth positions. At Mamelodi campus basic needs and services and poor infrastructure were considered to be the most crucial issue, followed by crime and political maladministration.

A breakdown by race and gender gives a slightly different order, with black African students on both campuses indicating that basic needs and services and poor infrastructure were the most important issues, followed by crime. White students all indicated that crime was the top issue, followed by basic needs and services and poor infrastructure, with social and moral issues being third on their list. Male students placed basic needs and services and poor infrastructure in top position, followed by crime; female students listed crime, followed by basic needs and services and poor infrastructure, though there was a very small difference between the two groups with regard to these two issues.

It would seem, therefore, that service delivery, which includes both basic needs and services and infrastructure, features high on the list of youth concerns, but that crime tops the list, though this is due to the large percentage of white students who listed it as the most important issue. This choice reflects the fact that, historically, black students have been much more exposed to crime and have had much less access to basic needs and services than their white counterparts, and that crime is of high importance to women – understandably, given the very high incidence of violent crime against women in South Africa.

Students were also asked to what extent a range of issues had an impact on their decision about which party to vote for (the options made provision for issues of service delivery, but also for the performance of the party in the past, its role in the liberation struggle, and its promise to tackle crime and moral issues).[16] Many students who answered this question were not registered or had not voted, but we took this as a general indication of an association of these issues with political parties and the political process. Over all, students listed, in order of preference,

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16   Cross tabulations in terms of race and campus have not yet been completed and will be considered in an updated version of this paper.

the party's performance in the past as the main issue influencing their choice. Second was the party's promise to tackle crime (though male students added the promise to fight corruption). For female students promises to fight corruption and to create/provide more jobs were their third and fourth choices respectively. Relatively few students indicated that the history of their party of choice in the liberation struggle had an impact on their decision, though it is conceivable that this was conflated with their first choice of 'performance in the past'.

Given the widespread allegations of lack of service delivery, corruption, inept councillors, and so on (referred to as issues on the LGE agenda and discussed in the first section of this paper), it would seem that rational choice does not necessarily determine voting behaviour among student voters, but that party identification and other issues of identity remain the strongest pull factors.

General Satisfaction Levels

Voting behaviour and citizens' political participation do not necessarily reflect their general satisfaction levels. Students were therefore asked whether 'things have improved over the past five years for people like yourself and your family'. A surprisingly large group (70%) indicated that things had improved, attesting, perhaps, to youthful optimism, but also suggesting that evidence of apathy vis-à-vis registration and voting does not necessarily indicate pessimism and disillusionment with the 'new South Africa'. There was a fairly high correlation between those who felt things had improved and the reaction to the question whether voting made a difference, with 80 per cent of the respondents of the opinion that voting did make a difference. There is a statistical correlation between satisfaction and voting: those who indicated that things had not improved for them and their families in the past five years tended not to vote. This was the same for voter registration, with those who were not satisfied also more inclined not to register as voters and those who did indicate satisfaction and an improvement in their lives being more inclined to register.

The situation is markedly different in relation to local government, with only 28 per cent of students indicating that they were satisfied with the services provided by their local authorities and an overall perception that local government does not address effectively those community issues that students deem most important. Yet, as discussed above, there is no evidence that dissatisfaction directly influences the decision to vote, nor that it has an impact on party preference and identification. In short, as was the case in the general discussion on the LGE (in the first section of this paper), despite perceived problems with service delivery, maladministration and corruption, high levels of crime and other problems, overall support for and belief in the democratic process remain high.

Political Leaders as Role Models

A final element to which we pay attention is which political leaders are admired by young people, though one should not attach too much importance to 'admiration for a political leader' in terms of political behaviour. According to many studies (see Ranney 1982, p 170), party identification rather than 'candidate orientation' (ie, personalities) and other variables (as discussed in the first section) remain the most important factors influencing voting behaviour. Only 3 per cent of black students did not indicate any choice, though almost 10 per cent (9,43%, to be exact) of white students did not mention anyone, perhaps a further indication of feelings of alienation and, conceivably, the fact that they do not identify with any of the political leaders. In fact, if 'no one' were to be taken as a choice in terms of ranking, it would have occupied third place. This category ('no one') would have followed Tony Leon of the DA (11%) and been ahead of Patricia de Lille of the ID (8%), 'white rightwing leaders' (7,5%) and Thabo Mbeki (7,5%).

Both black and white students (50% and 45% respectively) placed Nelson Mandela in first position, confirming the continuing very high esteem in which he is held by the vast majority of South Africans, for whom he remains a moral giant and a symbol of what is most positive in the human condition. Compared with the support and admiration for Mandela, there would seem to be a dearth of leadership role models for the youth, as the large percentage difference between their first and second choices (Mbeki for black students, with 33% support and Leon for white students, with 11%) indicates. This difference is particularly marked in the case of white students. One explanation for the high support for Mandela could be that leadership in the post-Mandela era is still dwarfed by his presence and one may assume that this situation will continue into the foreseeable future.

As far as gender differences were concerned, far fewer male students than female indicated a preference or admiration for women leaders.

Black students had as their third choice a range of black political and ANC leaders (excluding black consciousness and PAC leaders), who had 15 per cent support, and again, there is a huge difference between second (Mbeki, with 33%) and third position and also a significant difference between third and fourth position (7% for women leaders, excluding Patricia de Lille). Fifth position is shared by Jacob Zuma, Trevor Manuel and a combination of Black Consciousness and PAC leaders (5% each), though support for Zuma was higher among male students (6,5%) than among female students (1,5%). No white student listed Zuma as a leader they admired.

This leaves a question mark over the alleged 'youth support' for Zuma, a perception largely created by the support he enjoys within the ANCYL. It seems to confirm that his support is confined to specific groupings within the ruling

alliance, and is not spread across the spectrum of voters or ANC supporters. This does not mean that Zuma is therefore not necessarily an important political player or a serious contender for the presidential candidacy in 2009 (see, eg, Monare 2006), but the leadership struggle will take place within the party and between it and its alliance partners, with little input from 'ordinary' citizens.

CONCLUSION

Rational choice theory does not seem to explain voter turnout or preferences in the LGE of 2006. Identity politics – party political identification, together with some elements of the sociological model (such as socio-economic status, race and gender), serves as a better explanation, also in the case of youth voters. If party identification remains so important it is clear that opposition politics (whether in terms of leadership / power struggles or political issues) will continue to play out *inside* the ruling ANC and that instrumental issues, such as service delivery, job creation, poverty alleviation, health care and other related issues and appropriate policy responses will be dealt with within the ruling ANC, with direction determined by whichever faction wins the battle for the soul of the party. As stated above, this is in line with the nature of liberation parties in the Southern African region, and is a product of the symbolic value entrenched in the name and history of the party.

   In EISA's *Election Update* (2006) a number of analysts expressed views on 'challenges for the new local authorities' in each of the country's nine provinces and it is interesting to note that the majority of these observations revolve, once again, around issues of service delivery, without taking the implications of the voter turnout and increased support for the ANC (with the exception of the Western Cape) into account or in any way attempting to move beyond service delivery (and related issues) into serious or original thinking about what exactly might come out of and after the elections. So, for instance, Mashabela (EISA 2006, p115) in his analysis of the political implications of the election results in Limpopo (where the ANC gained the highest majority of votes of all nine provinces) in a rather clichéd manner warned that 'failure to deliver on the part of the ANC will have catastrophic consequences for democracy in the country'.

   A notable exception is that of Hoeane (EISA 2006, pp 94-95) on the Eastern Cape and, to some extent, Mottiar (EISA 2006, pp 79-80) on KwaZulu-Natal. Both analysts confirm that though South Africa has no sizeable or genuinely effective opposition, opposition politics are being played out within the ruling party, and sometimes viciously so, in an environment in which the vast majority of the electorate seems to be reasonably optimistic about conditions in the country yet remains largely detached from active politics.

Against this background South African youth do not seem to differ all that much from their counterparts internationally: as they grow older, they tend to take their civic duties and responsibilities more seriously. What is different, though, and positively so, is the very high level of optimism of, at the very least, student youth, who, in large numbers, believe that voting makes a difference, that it is important to vote and that things have improved for them and their families in the past five years. We would concur with Friedman (1999, pp 220, 222) that 'democratic intangibles matter to citizens as much as material improvements' and that 'democratic enthusiasm' is still very strong, though this in no way suggests that material issues or the future nature of the ruling party should be taken lightly. What our analysis does suggest is that there is much less evidence than is usually assumed by the political elites and media that apathy is pervasive and that disillusionment and dissatisfaction will keep voters away from the ballot box.

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