

TEN YEARS OF DEMOCRATIC LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Is the Tide Turning?

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ABSTRACT

Since the 2006 local elections the ruling African National Congress (ANC) has lost a total of 48 wards in by-elections and won only 15. This is a complete reversal of the party's performance between 2000 and 2006 when it lost only five wards and won 47. Does this signify a change in South African voting patterns? This chapter is based on an in-depth analysis of election data provided by the Electoral Commission of South Africa on its website. The analysis covers a ten-year period from 2000 to 2010 and includes results of the 2011 local elections. It also refers to the national elections of 1994 and 1999 to make a comparison. The analysis shows the dominance of the ANC since the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, which it won, and continued to increase its voter support, peaking in 2004 with a 69.69% majority. Similarly, in local elections the ANC dominated in 2000 and 2006. The 2011 local elections show a slightly different picture. By-elections are also discussed, with data demonstrating a similar trend to that in the national and local elections. The period from 1994 to 2006 was a period of growth for the ANC and the period 2007 to 2010 was a period of decline, thus demonstrating a Bell Curve pattern.

INTRODUCTION

This article looks at the performance of political parties, mainly the African National Congress (ANC), Democratic Alliance (DA) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), in 10 years of democratic local elections in South Africa, with a view to assisting the reader to estimate the possible outcomes of the national and provincial elections of 2014.

The article begins with a discussion of the system used for local government

elections in South Africa. It then considers the performance of the main political parties in the national and provincial elections of 1994, 1999, 2004 and 2009 as precursor to the discussion of local elections in 2000, 2006 and 2011. By-elections are also discussed because they provide an important indicator of party support between elections. The article divides by-elections into two periods: First Period (2000-2006) and Second Period (2006-2010). The other factor to consider in distilling the information on by-elections is that some of the data at the source (www.elections.org.za) are incomplete, particularly the comparative tables¹ for three by-elections (14 July 2001, 24 October 2001 and 17 September 2003). Once again, the missing data do not render the analysis invalid because they are insignificant in the broader scheme of things.

THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The Constitution prescribes an electoral system that results in proportional representation (PR) for both the National Assembly and municipalities. However, for municipalities it gives two options – full PR based on a closed party list or a model that combines PR with a system of ward representation, that is, a mixed system.

I do not wish to go into the merits of the electoral model as this subject has been discussed adequately elsewhere (see Bogdanor 1984; Bogdanor & Butler 1983; Boix C 1999; Elklit 2003; Lijphart 1994; Matlosa 2003; Powell 2000) except to say that proportional representation is a system that matches the voting patterns with the composition of legislatures. For instance, a party that wins 10 per cent of the vote is expected to hold 10 per cent of the seats in the legislature, depending on the formula for allocating seats and surplus seats.

The most highlighted weakness of the PR system is that it deprives voters of the ability to elect candidates directly and thus hold them accountable. The system of ward representation for local government, as provided for in the Constitution, allows voters to elect individuals directly. This system is commonly referred to as majoritarian or plurality or first-past-the-post. The strength of this model is that it holds candidates directly accountable to the electorate, for, if they do not deliver, they will not be re-elected. Its obvious weakness is that it can catapult into power a government that does not enjoy majority support.² A mixed system was therefore adopted as most appropriate for local elections in South Africa, to try to balance the need for accountability and the need for proportionality.

1 The comparative tables provide information about party gains or losses during by-elections.

2 An example is where four candidates contest an election and the winning candidate emerges with a mere 26% of the vote. Various adaptations have been made to overcome this problem, eg, transferable votes and run-off elections.

To satisfy the constitutional requirement of ward representation and proportionality at local level parties are required to submit closed lists to contest the PR component of the elections and to provide individual candidates for the ward elections, with the final result reflecting proportionality. It is only at the level of ward representation that independent candidates may contest elections in South Africa. And indeed there has been an increase in the number of independent candidates standing alongside party candidates in by-elections.

It has also emerged that the mixed system creates some challenges, particularly in relation to how best to match the two sets of candidates for positions in municipal councils. Currently, party list candidates seem to dominate the full-time council positions – chief whips and mayors – while candidates who have received a direct mandate from the voters are often overlooked. In some instances, mayors have been parachuted in from other areas to run municipalities and this has caused tensions within councils. This factor may be one of the reasons for service delivery protests and the resurgence of the independent candidate in by-elections. Communities are often surprised when mayors are announced, because they have not had the opportunity to view party lists before the election. It is my belief that if mayoral candidates were to contest ward elections voters would be more supportive throughout their terms because they would say ‘we chose him/her’.

ELECTION TRENDS

This section begins with a brief glimpse into the national and provincial elections to set a basis for understanding the general trend in South African elections.

The first democratic elections, held in 1994, provide an interesting starting point. The elections were held without a national voters’ roll and there are accusations that many people who voted then should not have done so. The only two controlling factors were the presentation of an identity document, which was stamped at the polling booth, and the marking of the voter’s thumb with indelible ink. As a result, the figures provided and the trend set by these elections give little comfort to our analysis.

Chart 1 illustrates the performance of the political parties in the four national and provincial elections since 1994. The ANC showed a healthy growth pattern, peaking at 69.69 per cent in the 2004 elections, but began to backslide in the 2009 elections. The key question is whether this marked a turning point. It is only when we make comparisons with local election and by-election trends that we can begin to make concrete assumptions.

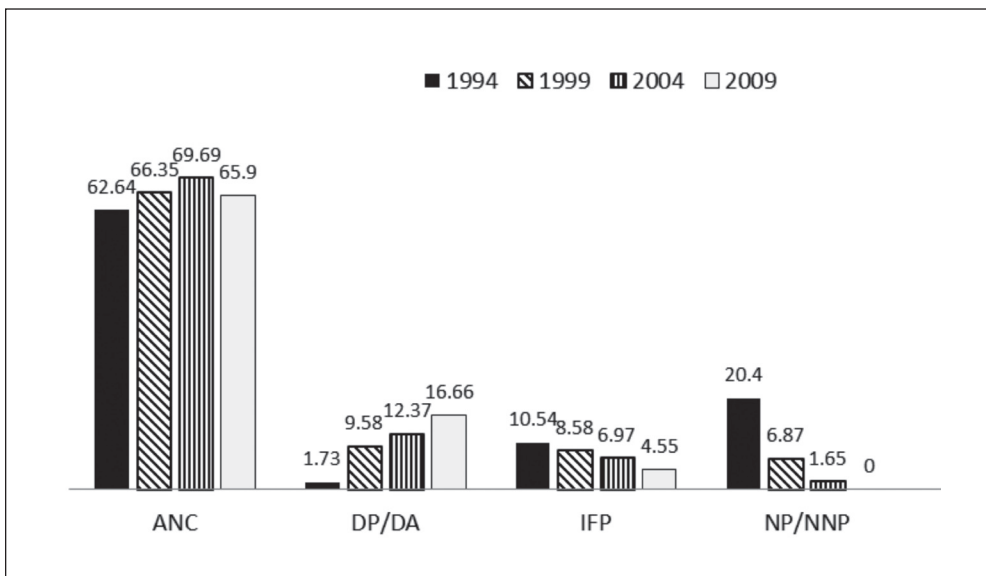
Chart 1 also confirms that the DA is the only party that has shown exponential growth trends over the four elections. The jump from a mere 1.73 per cent support

in 1994 to 10.3 per cent in 1999 (when it displaced the NNP as the official opposition in Parliament) and to 16.66 per cent in 2009 provides adequate evidence from which to conclude that it is, indeed, on a solid growth path. The key question is whether it can grow to a point where it can displace the ruling party.

The chart also shows that the two other parties, the IFP and the New National Party (NNP) were on their way out, in fact, the NNP has already departed the political arena. It is important to note the performance of the National Party in the first elections of 1994, when it was still in power. Several questions arise from this peak performance, which was followed by a collapse in the next elections.

The first question is: to what extent does access to state resources help a ruling party to win an election? The second question relates to the nature of the 1994 elections themselves. There was no voters' role and, as mentioned above, many people voted in 1994 who should, otherwise, not have voted. It has, for instance, been reported that many Namibians, who, at that point used the same identity documents as South Africans, were assisted to come to South Africa to vote. The author has met Namibians who have confirmed that they were brought to South Africa and paid a fee to vote in 1994. Is it possible that the NP received votes from these people?

Chart 1
Party performance in all four national elections

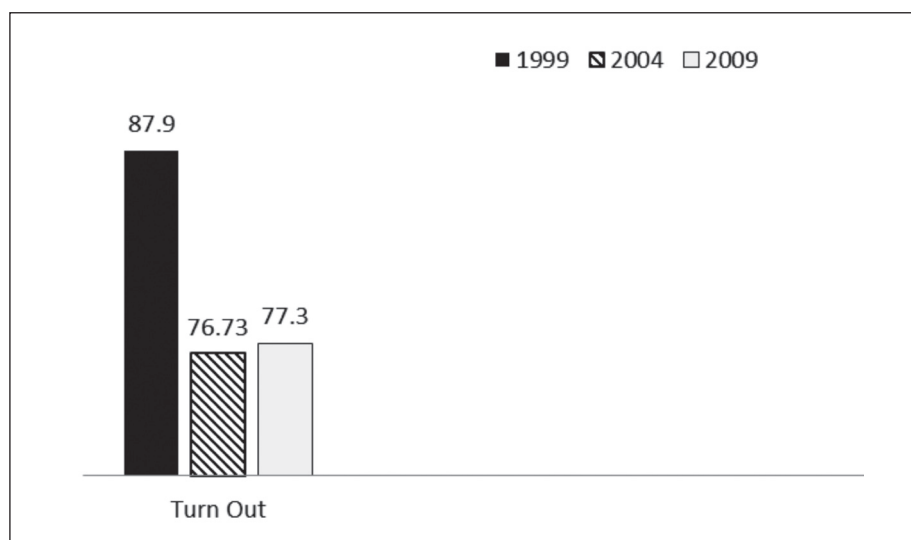


NB: DP/DA refers to the Democratic Party, which later became the Democratic Alliance
 NP/NNP refers to the National Party, which later became the New National Party
 The NNP disbanded in August 2004 and thus did not contest the 2009 elections

VOTER TURNOUT FOR NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

Chart 2 shows the number of voters who cast their votes in the elections from 1999 to 2009. No data are available for the 1994 elections since there was no voters' roll. It is important to consider this factor when looking at Chart 1 because it raises questions about the relationship between voter turnout and party performance. At a glance, one would wonder whether the decline in voter turnout in 2004 had a positive spin-off for the ANC or whether it meant that supporters for the other parties were not adequately motivated to go to the polls. This indicates that it is important in an election campaign not only to say 'vote for me' but to say 'go out and vote'.

Chart 2
Voter turnout as percentage of registered voters



LOCAL ELECTION TRENDS

Local elections have elicited little excitement and enthusiasm among voters and some political parties. This is likely to change, though, as it becomes increasingly clear that many political parties will either rise or fall based on their performance at local level. Some parties have, in the past, misconstrued the significance of local government and neglected it at their peril. Their leaders have secured comfortable positions in the national and provincial legislatures and have forgotten about local elections, particularly by-elections. The result is that they have almost reached their sell by date. The Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) and the United Democratic Movement (UDM) are examples.

The first local government elections in the new dispensation took place in 1995, following the successful national election in 1994. This election was considered transitional and as no data are readily available it is excluded from this discussion. Our 10-year period begins with the local elections of 2000.

In the 2000 local elections the ANC received an average of 56.2 per cent of the votes, increasing this to 62 per cent in 2006. The poor performance in 2000 compared to the party's performance in the national elections in 1999 can be attributed to various factors, one of which could be the fact that since the period of transition little enthusiasm had been built up about local government. The transition of local government was complex and the focus was largely on national government. It is only after the 2006 local elections that many people started waking up to the reality that local government is the alpha and omega of governance and service delivery. Even the tenderpreneurs (people who have made government tenders a source of enrichment)³ have woken up to the reality that local government is where the action is. Local government will become highly contested in the future and it is here that politicians will have to show their mettle.

Table 1 shows the dominance of the ANC in all three periods in all provinces except the Western Cape. In the 2000 local elections the ANC received fewer votes than the DA in the Western Cape but turned this around in 2006, when it dominated. In 2011 the ANC lost the Western Cape to the DA, with little hope of a comeback in the near future. Overall, the performance of the ANC in the 2011 elections showed a decline in all provinces, with the exception of KwaZulu-Natal.

The greatest losses in percentage terms were not, in fact, in the Western Cape, but in the Eastern and Northern Cape. In the Eastern Cape the ANC suffered an 8.26 per cent loss. Only in KwaZulu-Natal did it achieve an attractive 9.97 per cent growth between 2006 and 2011. Table 1, therefore, shows a Bell Curve tendency for the ANC in all provinces except KwaZulu-Natal, where the curve is exponential.

An interpretation of the emerging trend shows that in 2000 the political environment in South Africa was still convoluted. People did not fully appreciate the significance of local government in their lives, mainly because they were still reeling from the mania of national liberation under the leadership of Nelson Mandela and nothing was more important.

3 The expression is credited to Blade Nzimande (General Secretary of the South African Communist Party and Minister of Higher Education).

Table 1
Percentage of the vote won by the ANC, DA and IFP in the 2000, 2006
and 2011 local elections

| Province | Elections | ANC | DA | IFP |
|---------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|
| Eastern Cape | 2000 | 72.3 | 10.2 | 0.42 |
| | 2006 | 81.7 | 7.5 | 0 |
| | 2011 | 73.44 | 14.26 | 00 |
| Free State | 2000 | 70.4 | 17.5 | 0.27 |
| | 2006 | 76.7 | 12.5 | 0.07 |
| | 2011 | 71.74 | 19.34 | 0.04 |
| Gauteng | 2000 | 58.7 | 30.6 | 2.22 |
| | 2006 | 62.3 | 26.4 | 1.9 |
| | 2011 | 60.21 | 33.04 | 0.95 |
| KwaZulu-Natal | 2000 | 33 | 13.4 | 47.8 |
| | 2006 | 46.6 | 8.2 | 38.5 |
| | 2011 | 56.57 | 10.75 | 17.33 |
| Limpopo | 2000 | 78.6 | 15.8 | 0.12 |
| | 2006 | 84 | 5.5 | 0 |
| | 2011 | 81.63 | 6.65 | 0 |
| Mpumalanga | 2000 | 77.7 | 12.5 | 1.45 |
| | 2006 | 80.6 | 10.4 | 0.72 |
| | 2011 | 78.9 | 13.81 | 0.17 |
| North West | 2000 | 69.3 | 19.8 | 0 |
| | 2006 | 76.6 | 8.6 | 0.08 |
| | 2011 | 74.99 | 16.14 | 0 |
| Northern Cape | 2000 | 62.4 | 28.6 | 0.13 |
| | 2006 | 69.9 | 13.6 | 0 |
| | 2011 | 63.57 | 16.14 | 0 |
| Western Cape | 2000 | 39.7 | 49.9 | 0.17 |
| | 2006 | 40.2 | 39.3 | 0 |
| | 2011 | 34.07 | 57.08 | 0 |

The people of KwaZulu-Natal were licking the wounds inflicted by the violence that preceded the 1994 elections and still viewed the ANC with suspicion. The people of the Western Cape were still prisoners of the apartheid '*swart gevaar* (black danger)' ideology and did not fully exercise their democratic right to free choice. By the 2006 elections political maturity had begun to set in as prejudices started to wane. People who had regarded the ANC as a terrorist organisation only saved by the astute leadership of Nelson Mandela had little evidence to sustain such a view when Mandela stepped down, leaving the ANC intact. This boosted trust and confidence in the ANC.

The combination of this and other factors, such as the dissolution of the NNP following its dismal performance in the national polls in 2004 and its subsequent merger with the ANC, prompted many voters to embrace the ANC and support it in the 2006 local elections. It is evident that a significant number of supporters of the NNP voted for the ANC in 2006. As indicated above, in 2011 the ANC showed a decline in all provinces except KwaZulu-Natal. This signifies an important trend in the province – the people of KwaZulu-Natal are rapidly getting over the trauma of the violence and the perception that the ANC is a terrorist organisation bent on destroying cultural traditions.

Irrespective of the declining trend, the ANC still wins the highest support in Limpopo province, where it received 78.61 per cent of the vote in 2000, 83.99 per cent in 2006 and 81.63 per cent in 2011. Conversely, in KwaZulu-Natal it received the lowest votes in the 2000 elections (33.02%) but has since maintained a steady increase to 46.59 per cent in 2006 and 56.57 per cent in 2011. The Western Cape remains the province showing the lowest support for the ANC, with the party's share of the vote dropping from 40.26 per cent in 2006 to 34.07% in 2011.

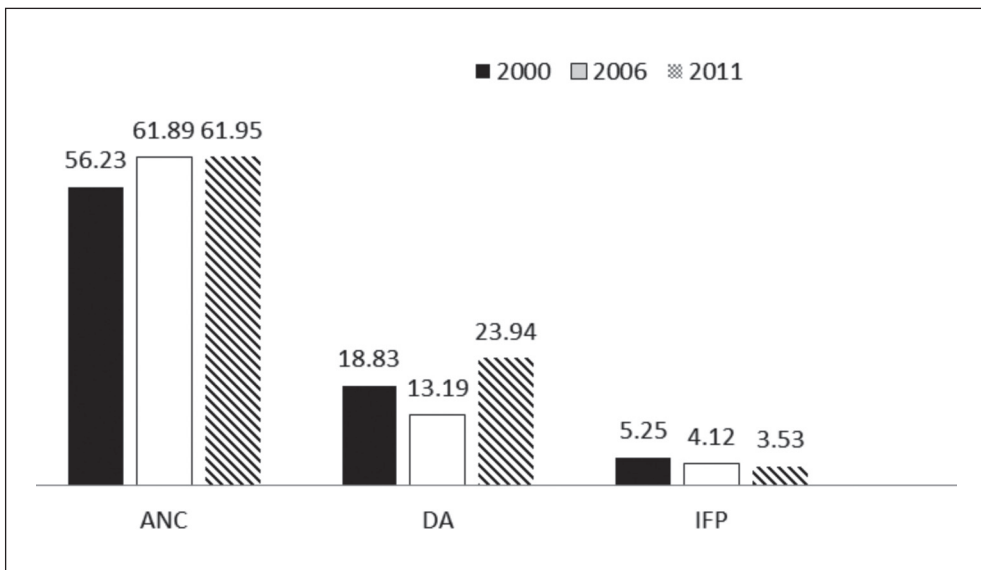
Thus it is clear that the 2006 elections marked the high point of the ruling party's growth. The ANC's overall performance in the 2011 elections was saved largely by the results in one province – KwaZulu-Natal. I predict that support for the party in KwaZulu-Natal will continue to grow as people desert the dying IFP, after which it will begin to decline. This declining trend is likely to continue until such time that a balance is reached where diehard members will remain entrenched and weaker ones will either despair and not vote or jump ship. Such a situation is, however, unlikely to diminish the dominance of the ANC in the long term because it is unforeseeable that a tangible alternative will emerge. Although the DA is showing significant growth trends its entrenched white dominance and control make it unlikely that it will grow to a point where it will be a threat to the ANC. It will not be easy for South Africans to entrust a white-dominated party with their hard won liberation. The DA must cede its white dominance to a credible black leadership if it is to begin a process of reconciliation and growth.

The DA has, however, demonstrated a unique growth pattern. In the 2000 local elections it performed beyond expectations, attracting a significant portion of the white vote following its alliance with the NNP after the latter's poor performance in the 1999 national elections. The marriage between the two parties did not last and, in 2001, the NNP announced its divorce from the DA and decided to go it alone in the 2004 national elections, a fatal decision, as it turned out, for it died at the polls. The results of this divorce haunted the DA during the local elections of 2006, where it shed about five per cent of its votes. It is not clear whether the five per cent the DA lost was the same five per cent the ANC gained in those elections, particularly because the NNP had decided to join hands with the ANC after the 2004 elections.

If this is true this behavior confirms that the NNP had a loyal support base that was prepared to sway with its leaders as they played musical chairs. However, specific mention should also be made of the fact that the IFP also lost about 1 per cent in the same election. On the balance of probabilities it is prudent to conclude that the boost in the ANC's gains could indeed have come from the NNP. The DA dropped about 10 per cent of its support in the Western Cape, a province that promises to be a battlefield for the ANC and DA for the foreseeable future, but recouped the losses in 2011.

The IFP, on the other hand, has suffered a downward slide, with the other parties, particularly the ANC, continuing to erode its support base. In the IFP's

Chart 3
Party support in the three local elections



stronghold, KwaZulu-Natal, support has dropped from an all-time high of 47.8 per cent in 2000 to 38.5 per cent in 2006 and 17.33 per cent in 2011 – a decline which might, indeed, sound the death knell for the party, which has negligible support in the other provinces.

Chart 3 shows that the ANC's support increased in all three local elections, but with diminishing returns in 2011. I maintain that the decline has started and that evidence from eight of the nine provinces of declining support is significant for our understanding of the emerging trend.

Chart 4 demonstrates clearly that in the local elections in 2000 and 2006 the ANC was growing at the expense of the other two major parties, particularly the DA. Its support grew least in the Western Cape (0.51%) and most in KwaZulu-Natal (13.57%). There were no growth points for the DA, which suffered its worst losses in the Northern Cape (14.92%) and least in North West (1.24%). The IFP, on the other hand, neither lost nor gained in North West and lost the most in its stronghold, KwaZulu-Natal (9.29%).

Between 2006 and 2011 the only party to register positive growth in all three areas was the DA. The ANC suffered its biggest setback in the Eastern Cape, largely because it was fighting opposition from two sides – the newly-formed Congress of the People (Cope) and the DA. The two charts clearly indicate growth on the part of the DA and decline on the part of the ANC. Statistically, if this trend were to remain constant, the DA would become the ruling party in about four elections.

Chart 4
Party support in the 2000 and 2006 local elections

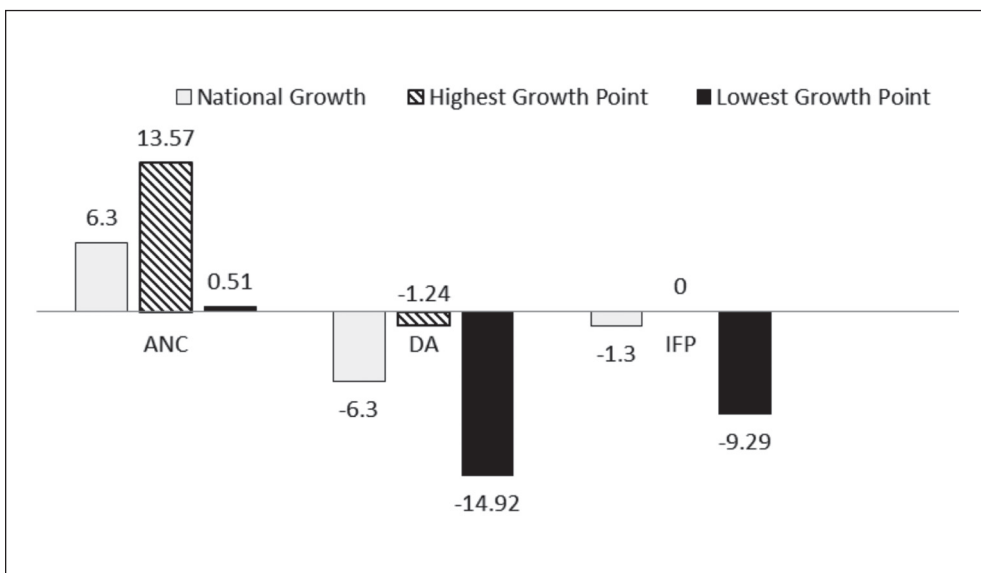
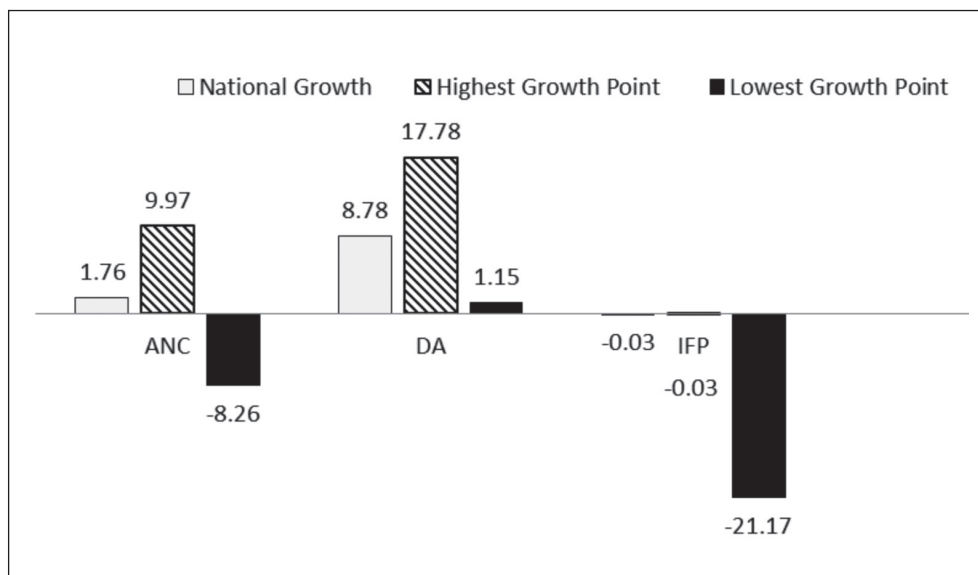


Chart 5
Party support in the 2006 and 2011 local elections



I now turn to by-elections to see whether the trend can be confirmed.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BY-ELECTIONS

The First Period: 2000-2006

Table 2
Total number of by-elections between 2000 and 2006

| | By-elections | ANC | DA | IFP |
|------------|--------------|--------|--------|-------|
| Total | 536 | 341 | 77 | 66 |
| Percentage | 100% | 63.62% | 14.37% | 12.3% |

Chart 6
Percentage of by-elections won between 2000 and 2006

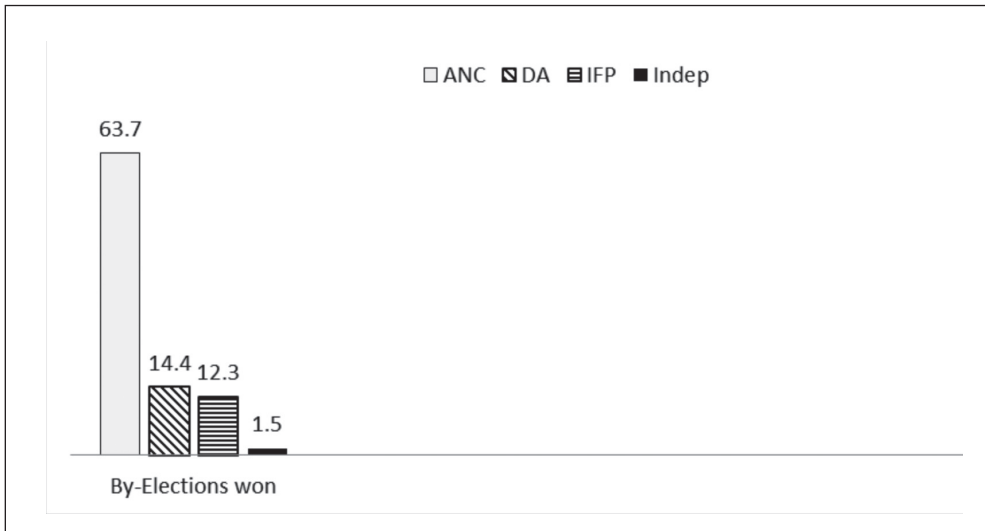


Chart 6 demonstrates once again the dominance of the ANC in local elections and by-elections between 2000 and 2006. Its dominance is such that even the contending parties combined did not pose a real challenge.

The number of wards gained or lost are, however, more important than the percentage of by-elections won, because they represent a change of guard and gain or loss of control. Chart 7 shows that the ANC gained a total of 46 new wards or constituencies during this period and lost only seven. All the other parties lost more than they gained, thus confirming that the ANC was consuming their support bases. The DA was the biggest loser, with 31 wards taken from it and only five gained. I have included independents in this chart to demonstrate the resurgence of the independent candidate. Independents are the only segment that broke even – losing two wards and gaining two. In other words, the performance of independents during this period was better than that of all parties apart from the ruling party – a significant indicator.

Chart 7
Party losses and gains in by-elections between 2000 and 2006

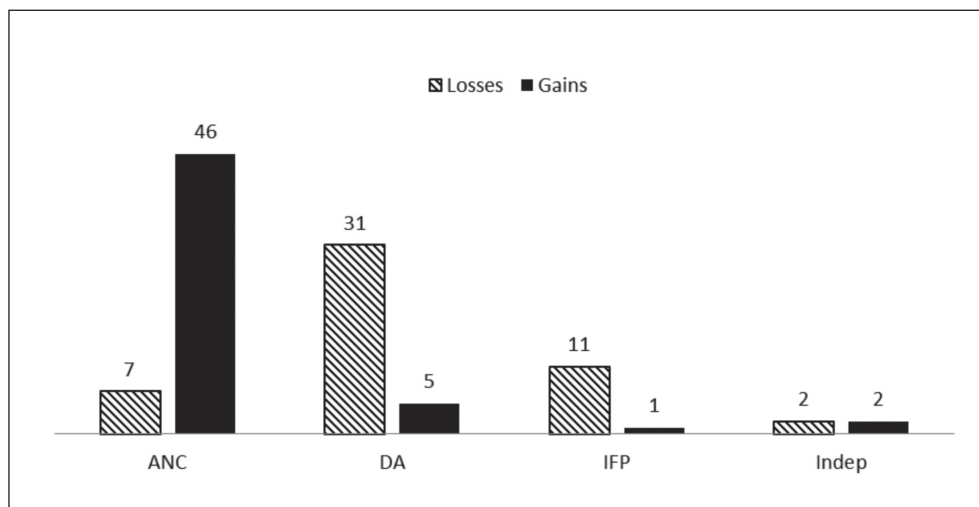


Table 3a
Party-to-party gains 2000-2006

| | From ANC | From DA | From IFP | From indep | From other | Total gains |
|-------|----------|---------|----------|------------|------------|-------------|
| ANC | – | 26 | 11 | 2 | 8 | 47 |
| DA | 4 | – | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| IFP | 1 | 0 | – | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Indep | 1 | 0 | 0 | – | 0 | 2 |
| Other | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | – | 4 |

Table 3b
Party-to-party losses 2000-2006

| | To ANC | To DA | To IFP | To indep | To other | Total losses |
|-------|--------|-------|--------|----------|----------|--------------|
| ANC | – | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| DA | 26 | – | 0 | 1 | 3 | 30 |
| IFP | 11 | 0 | – | 0 | 0 | 11 |
| Indep | 2 | 0 | 0 | – | 0 | 2 |
| Other | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | – | 8 |

The ANC lost a total of four wards to the DA and one to the IFP but gained a total of 26 from the DA and 11 from the IFP. This is so disproportionate that it is doubtful whether the other parties will ever be able to wrest a significant amount of power from the ruling party.

The Second Period: 2006-2010

Table 4
By-elections 2006-2010

| Total | ANC | DA | IFP | Independent | ID | Cope | Other |
|-------|-------|-------|------|-------------|------|-------|-------|
| 533 | 349 | 92 | 48 | 21 | 10 | 4 | 9 |
| 100% | 65.5% | 17.3% | 9.2% | 3.9% | 1.8% | 0.75% | 1.7% |

Chart 8
Percentage of by-elections won between 2006 and 2010

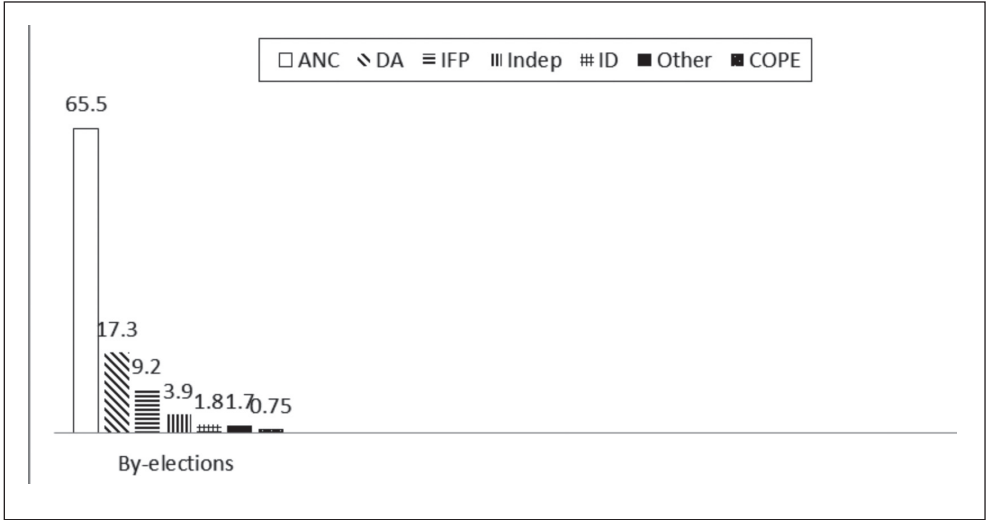


Chart 8 shows the continued dominance of the ANC in by-elections during this period, with an increase to 65.5 per cent from the 63.7 per cent in the previous period. The chart also shows an increase in the number of by-elections won by the DA in the same period, while the IFP continued to decline. I have also included independents in this chart to demonstrate the increase in support for independent candidates from a mere 1.5 per cent in the First Period to 3.9 per cent in the Second.

Could this be the first indication of a desire to move away from PR towards an individual, merit-based (first-past-the-post) system of elections? The chart also indicates the performance of new parties – the Independent Democrats (ID) and the Congress of the People (Cope) to demonstrate the level at which they currently stand. Cope’s performance in the by-elections is a far cry from the impressive results it achieved in the national elections in 2008. Could this be an indication of the teething problems of a young party or is it a reflection of the leadership problems that dog Cope?

I turn to the all-important data on party gains and losses for the Second Period, as represented in Chart 9. The ANC lost a total of 50 wards and gained only 18, while the DA won 25 wards and lost just five, followed by independents (17 gains, 5 losses). The IFP, on the other hand, followed the ANC, with more losses than gains.

Chart 9
By-elections 2006-10: Party losses and gains

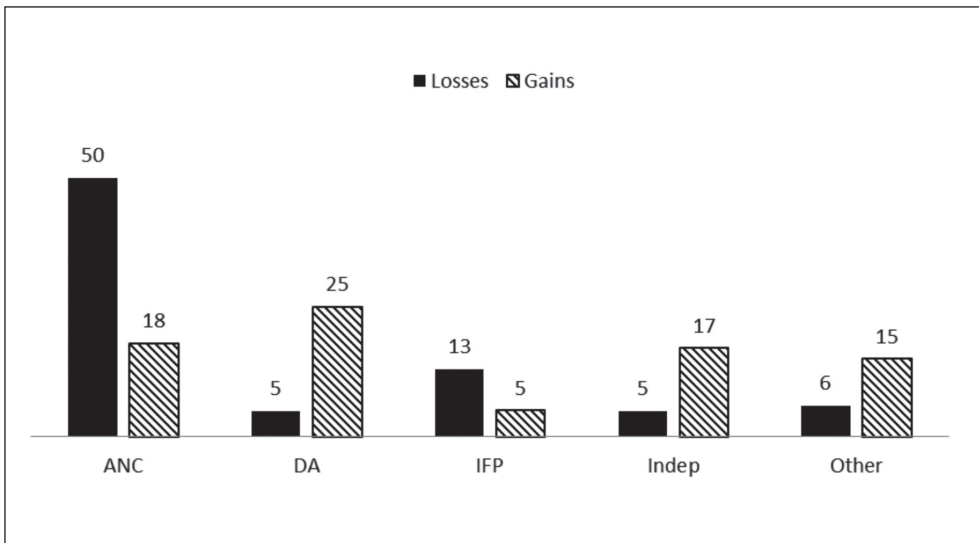


Table 5 shows party-to-party gains and losses. The ANC’s biggest losses were to the DA (19) and to independent candidates (16). Most of the losses to independent candidates were to people who had formerly been ANC ward candidates. The losses suffered in the Western Cape were the result of the leadership problems the party continues to experience in that province.

Table 5a
Party-to-party gains 2006-2010

| | From ANC | From DA | From IFP | From indep | From other | Total gains |
|-------|----------|---------|----------|------------|------------|-------------|
| ANC | – | 0 | 12 | 4 | 2 | 18 |
| DA | 19 | – | 1 | 1 | 4 | 25 |
| IFP | 4 | 0 | – | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Indep | 16 | 1 | 0 | – | 0 | 17 |
| Other | 11 | 4 | 0 | 0 | – | 15 |

Table 5b
Party-to-party losses 2006-2010

| | To ANC | To DA | To IFP | To indep | To other | Total losses |
|-------|--------|-------|--------|----------|----------|--------------|
| ANC | – | 19 | 4 | 16 | 11 | 50 |
| DA | 0 | – | 0 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| IFP | 12 | 1 | – | 0 | 0 | 13 |
| Indep | 4 | 1 | 0 | – | 0 | 5 |
| Other | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | – | 6 |

Chart 10
Comparison of by-elections won in the two periods

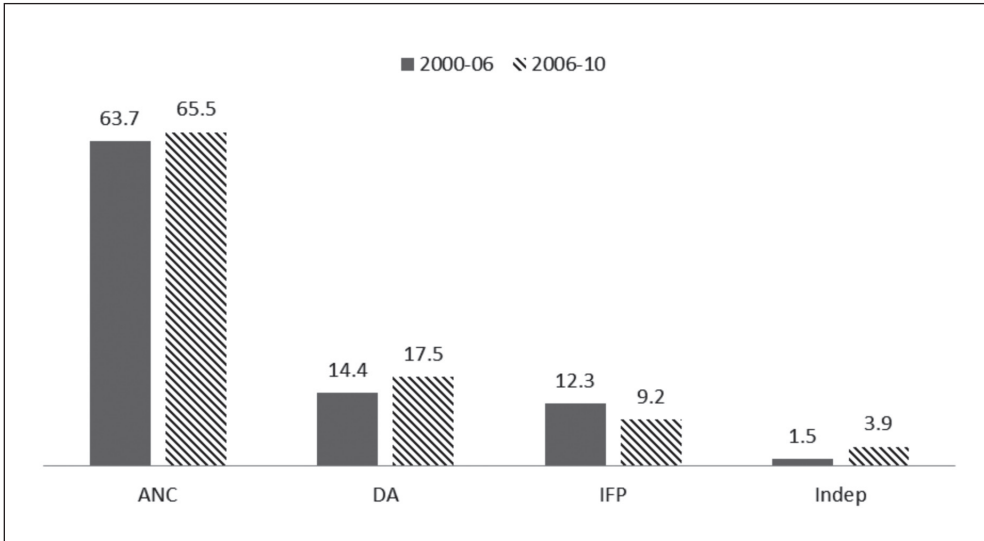
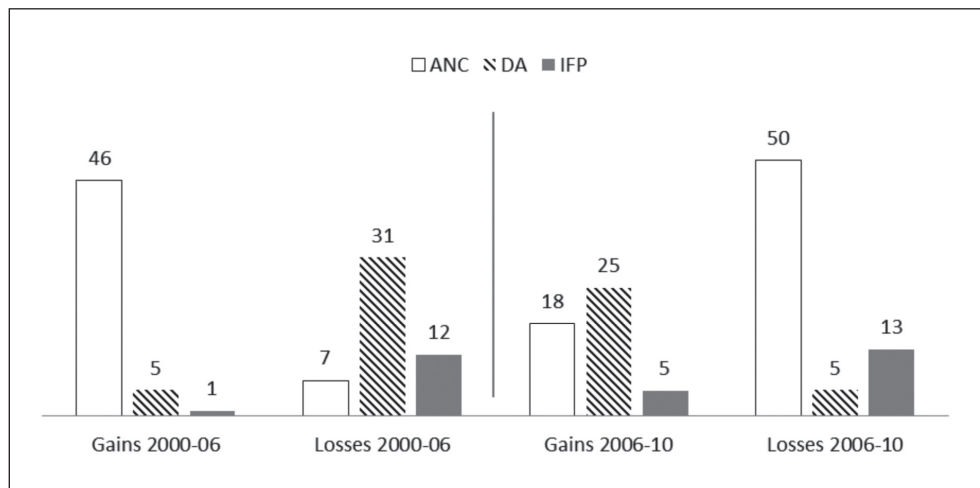


Chart 11
Comparison of gains and losses in by-elections in the two periods



Charts 10 and 11 show that the ruling party has had mixed fortunes. Chart 10 shows positive growth in by-elections won while Chart 11 shows positive growth in terms of the number of wards won in the first period (2002-2006) and negative growth in terms of the number of wards won in the second period (2006-2010). Chart 11 shows that in by-elections between 2000 and 2006 the ANC enjoyed the most gains, mainly from the DA and the IFP, while the DA suffered the most losses. In the succeeding period the ruling party suffered the most losses, mainly to the DA and to independents, particularly in the Western Cape.

The ANC suffered its worst defeat in the by-elections held on 10 December 2008 in the Western Cape, where it lost nine wards to independent candidates, mainly former members of the ANC; five to the DA and three to the ID. During the entire period between 2006 and 2010 the ANC lost 19 wards to the DA, four to the IFP, six to the ID, 16 to independent candidates, three to Cope and two to civic organisations. This is not a good record for the ruling party. A drop from 46 constituency wins to a loss of 50 in just two inter-election years is rather alarming.

The noteworthy factor here is the rise of the independents. It is disconcerting that the ruling party, with all its resources and support structures, could lose 16 of its constituencies to independents. It is, however, noteworthy that in the October 2010 by-elections the ANC was able to claw back two wards from the independents in the Western Cape. Although charts 10 and 11 show a mixed pattern, it is my belief that Chart 11 must be given more credence in the analysis

because it represents actual growth or decline in terms of the number of areas under the control of each party.

OVERALL PARTY PERFORMANCE

Charts 12 and 13 show the performance of the individual parties in the various elections.

Chart 12
ANC performance in all elections

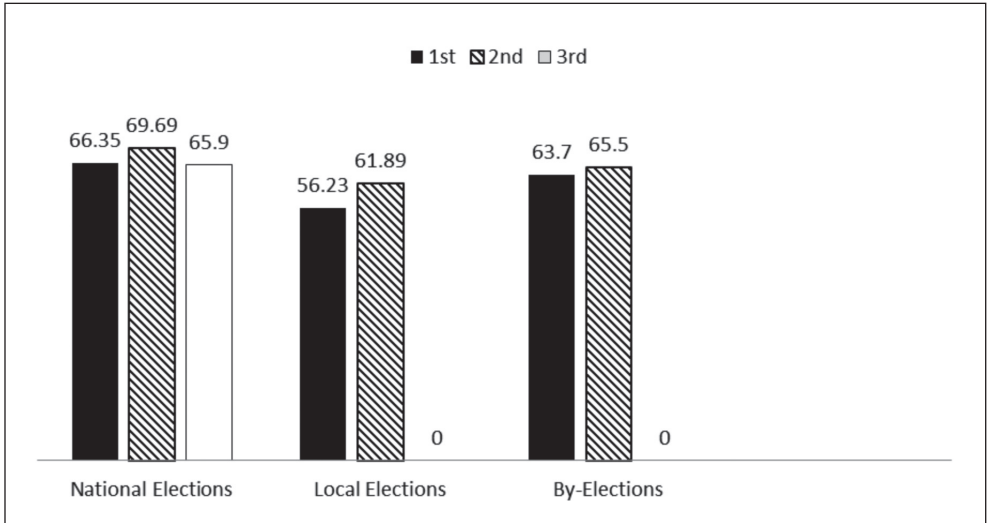


Chart 13
DA performance in all elections

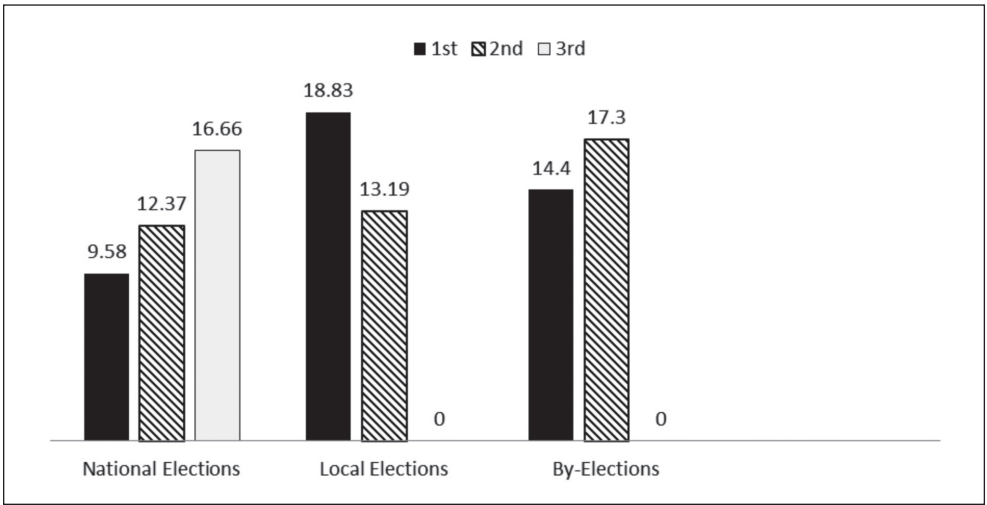


Chart 14
IFP performance in all elections

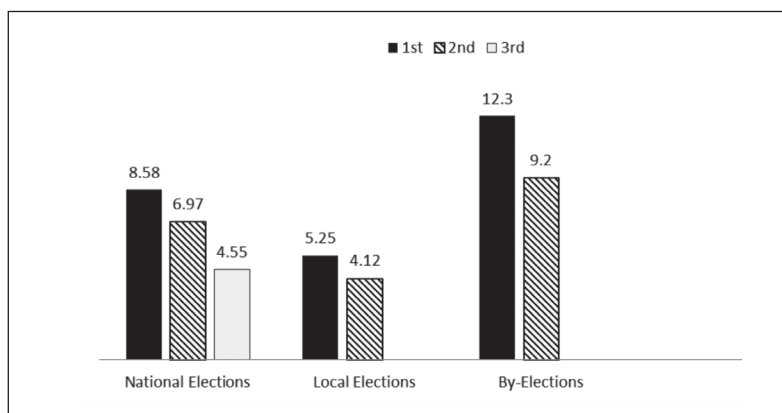


Chart Index:

- *National elections: 1st election 1999, 2nd election 2004, 3rd election 2009. NB: The 1994 elections are excluded from this comparison*
- *Local elections: 1st election 2000, 2nd election 2006, 3rd election 2011. NB: The first local elections held in 1995 are not included as they were transitional and there are no available data*
- *By-elections: 1st by-elections refer to 2000-2006, 2nd by-elections refer to 2006-2010*

Charts 12, 13 and 14 can be summarised as follows:

| | National | Local | By-election |
|-----|------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| ANC | Growth and Decline +/- | Growth + | Growth + |
| DA | Growth + | Decline - | Growth + |
| IFP | Decline - | Decline - | Decline - |

Some important factors to consider

- The first democratic elections, in 1994, were complicated by many factors, one of which was the absence of a voters' roll. Many people who voted in 1994 should not have voted. The positive showing of the National Party in the 1994 national elections could partially be explained by this phenomenon, as can its collapse at the polls in 1999.
- The 2000 local elections took place at a time when parties were still reeling from the outcome of the 1999 national elections. There was general confusion among the smaller parties as they tried to pick up the pieces and realign themselves through pacts and alliance agreements following the failure by a hairsbreadth of the ANC's bid to win a two-thirds majority. The period

between the 1999 elections and the local elections of 2000 did not provide sufficient time for political realignments to be completed. The National Party, which had changed its name to the New National Party to shed the old apartheid image, was quick to recognise the sudden change in temperature and went into an alliance with the Democratic Party to form the Democratic Alliance in preparation for the local elections of 2000. This appeared to work, because the DA increased its stake to 18.83 per cent in the 2000 elections.

- The United Democratic Movement (UDM), a young party launched with much enthusiasm in 1997, won 3.4 per cent of the vote in the national election of 1999. The departure of Roelf Meyer, a former member of the NP, who, along with former 'homeland' leader Bantu Holomisa, had founded the UDM, saw the fortunes of the party change as many white members, who had followed Meyer out of the NP, lost hope. Professor Susan Booysen is quoted as saying: 'I won't be surprised if other white senior leaders followed Meyer because he was their backbone and a bonding force in the UDM. Holomisa on his own has failed to come out as a leader that both white and black could cherish and follow with equal enthusiasm' (www.iol.co.za/index.php?sf=115&set_id=1&click_id=13&art_id=ct20000112205221603H620450). These views were echoed by Professor Mafa Sejanamane, who said, 'because the UDM was trying to be "everything to everybody" and had not defined its niche, Meyer's resignation was a major blow'. He was doubtful that the party's membership had bonded strongly enough to survive, because it was merely 'a coalition of former NNP and ANC members' (www.iol.co.za/index.php?sf=115&set_id=1&click_id=13&art_id=ct20000112205221603H620450). Sejanamane's view proved to be accurate. The organisation was still too fragile to suffer such a major leadership loss; the centre could no longer hold and things were bound to fall apart. The abandoned voters, as I wish to call them, became fodder for the other parties, particularly the DA.
- The Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) has suffered numerous internal organisational and leadership problems since it was unbanned and there is little evidence that it has been able to overcome these problems. The election of veteran Zephania Mothopeng as PAC president in 1986 (while he was still in prison)⁴ was an attempt to rebuild stability and give the party

4 Mothopeng was sentenced to a 15-year prison term in 1976 and was granted early release in 1988.

direction. However, the Lion, as he was fondly called, roared on his release and rejected negotiations with the President F W de Klerk's regime, opting to continue the armed struggle. Mothopeng died in October 1990, leaving the party in a state of flux. The PAC has had the highest leadership turnover of all South Africa's political parties. Clarence Makwetu stepped into Mothopeng's shoes in 1990 but was ousted in 1996 and replaced by Bishop Stanley Mokgoba, whose term lasted until 2003 when he was replaced by Motsoko Pheko. The current president is Lehlapa Mphahlele. Many PAC leaders left the party, taking with them their supporters. Like the UDM the PAC has not placed much emphasis on local elections and its participation in by-election has been negligible.

- The Inkatha National Cultural Liberation Movement, founded by Mangosuthu Buthelezi in 1975, transformed itself into a political party, the Inkatha Freedom Party, on 14 July 1990 and advocated a federal state option. The IFP threatened to boycott the first democratic elections, in April 1994, because of disagreements over the federal option and representation in the interim government. A breakthrough was achieved just over a month before the elections, on 2 March 1994, when an agreement was reached to consider international mediation with regard to the federal option. It is widely assumed that the party's late entry into the election race cost it dearly at the polls – it received a mere 10.5 per cent of the national vote. The party has continued on a downward slide ever since, losing support, largely to the ANC. Its image was dented by accusations of complicity with the so-called 'third force' that wrought havoc during the build-up to the negotiations and first democratic elections and by accusations of a lack of inner-party democracy, which led to a split just before the 2011 local elections. The formation by Zanele Magwaza-Msibi of a splinter party called the National Freedom Party (NFP) had a significant effect on the IFP's performance in the 2011 elections. In its stronghold, KwaZulu-Natal, it was able to rally only 11.06 per cent of the vote and its share of the national vote was a mere 2.42 per cent. The new kid on the block, the NFP, is worth watching, as it outperformed Cope nationally. The IFP has been a consistent player in local elections and by-elections during the 10 years under consideration, but its future is in serious doubt.
- The ANC, under the impeccable leadership of Nelson Mandela, could only grow bigger in numbers and stature. The careful succession planning that marked the handover to Thabo Mbeki was also a plus for the party, as it convinced many people that the ANC was the correct organisation to run

the machinery of state. The apparent tranquillity was, however, not to last forever, as leadership wrangles began to surface between Mbeki and Jacob Zuma over succession. This hurt the party, a factor that was evident at the polls in 2009, when the ANC dropped about 3 per cent of its support. It will be a considerable challenge for the party to regain this lost ground. Leadership problems in the Western Cape and service delivery protests have also cost the ANC dearly – the first because of poor succession planning, the second because of the manner of its response to protests.

Leadership is an important factor in party stability and support because it is usually the first signal that the centre can no longer hold. Leadership stability should not be misconstrued to mean lifelong leadership, but it involves various factors, one of which is succession planning and leaders who resonate with the sentiments of the people. In recent months the ruling party has had to contend with a belligerent youth league and criticism from its alliance partners, particularly the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). President Zuma appeared to have dealt with these challenges at the all important National General Council (NGC) of the ANC, held in Durban in September 2010, but it remains to be seen whether peace will return to the party as it prepares for its millennium celebrations in 2012.

CONCLUSION

From the above data it can be concluded that a trend is starting to emerge in the performance of the various political parties in South African elections. The ruling party seems to be showing a Bell Curve tendency, with growth in the beginning and decline more recently. Between 1994 and 2004 the trend was towards upward growth, but 2009 marked a downturn. The combined results of national elections, local elections and by-elections indicate that the decline can be located between 2007 and 2008, the period during which there were leadership battles within the ANC that led to the birth of Cope, which undoubtedly took a considerable number of votes from the ANC in the 2009 elections. This is a normal trend in African democracies, where strong opposition parties grow out of the liberation party.

The birth of an opposition from the womb of the ANC was expected, although it seems to have happened much earlier than anticipated. There is a strong possibility that more such splinter organisations will mushroom, at least in the foreseeable future, until such time as our democracy consolidates into two major parties. Such splinter parties can only eat into the support base of the larger parties, particularly the ruling party. The challenge for the ruling party is to try to contain the exodus of its supporters to become independents or to join

splinter parties that are likely to converge at some point to constitute a tangible opposition that can actually unseat it.

The DA, as the official opposition, has shown a consistent growth pattern in national elections, but has stumbled in local elections, especially in 2006. However, it has shown resilience in by-elections since 2006 and managed to put up a strong fight in the 2011 elections. It is, however, unlikely that it will grow to such a point that it will unseat the ruling party. The party has repeatedly been accused of a failure to transform itself from a liberal, white-dominated party into a broad-based mass party.

The IFP has demonstrated one consistent trend – decline, decline and decline. It appears that nothing much can be done to reverse this trend. The party has lost most of its constituency to the ANC at local level. In fact, it is the only party from which the ANC won seats in the by-elections of 2006 to 2010. The propensity of IFP voters to join the ANC may indicate a desire for a possible merger of the two parties. A merger with the ANC or Cope or the DA seems to be the only viable option to rescue the IFP, otherwise it is clear that any future analysis of the performance of major parties in the elections will exclude it.

Cope's performance as a newcomer in the 2009 elections was notable – it won 7.42 per cent of the vote. Many political commentators believe that this performance was a fluke and Cope will die at the next elections. Cope was born at an unfortunate time, when tempers were high as many people were trying to deal with the Mbeki-Zuma tussle. Were it not for the highly emotional state of affairs it might have made serious inroads into the ANC's support base.

Whether Cope will adequately resolve and reverse the emotional nature of its birth is another issue, but it seems likely that this will continue to be a major stumbling block for the party unless it goes through a total rebirth, with a new and untainted leadership. Its current leadership problems will not make it easy for the party to stabilise itself and win the hearts of many voters. Its performance in the 2011 local elections was not impressive – it won only 2.1 per cent of the national vote, a significant drop from the 7.42 per cent it won in 2009. Could this mark the beginning of the end for Cope?

The fact is, the search for alternatives has begun in our political milieu. The ANC will continue to be criticised for self-enrichment and tenderpreneurship. The service delivery protests and leadership battles in the Western Cape have hurt the ANC and will continue to hurt it, particularly because of the way in which it has responded to these challenges. There are other problems that will continue to affect the ANC with regard to local government:

- Internal political squabbles over leadership roles within the party. The contestation of political space at local level will continue to be intense,

particularly because political leadership is, correctly, seen to be a licence to accumulate wealth. Local government is the main employer in many areas and control of its machinery gives individuals real power. Any party that wishes to occupy this space must be ready to deal with the intensity of contestation for leadership. If uncontrolled such contestation has the potential to destroy political parties as in-fighting can lead to dirty tricks and even assassinations. The ANC suffered its biggest voter declines in provinces where there were leadership battles, that is, the Western Cape and the North West province. The simplest way to deal with such problems is to act decisively in endorsing democratically elected leaders, thus leaving little room for doubt about the support local leaders enjoy from the party leadership.

- Lack of resources (financial and human) for delivering the mandate of local government. Local government in South Africa is, literally, bankrupt. The income (rates and taxes) collected by municipalities falls far short of the needs and services expected by communities. Municipalities have become top-heavy, with numerous administrative functions imposed by bureaucrats at provincial and national government level. Councillors and local leaders are frequently ill-prepared to manage the highly sophisticated and complex nature of governance at local level. The good thing about democracy is that it gives everyone a chance, even those who are ill prepared to take centre stage. It is therefore important to create mechanisms to provide the necessary support for such people.

This article has outlined trends, from which extrapolations can be made. It is obvious that the 2014 elections will be highly contested and will return results that are different from those we have experienced in the past. It is also likely that all parties will be vying for the ANC vote.

The DA has consolidated its position in the Western Cape by merging with the ID and will continue to dominate the province, making it very difficult for other parties to make any inroads. As yet the ANC has shown little commitment to challenge the dominance of the DA in the province and I believe that it is a lost cause and serious choices have to be made between investing a great deal of effort in a province that has already been lost and putting more effort into areas where the ANC still dominates, to ensure that encroachment is stalled or prevented. Areas like the Eastern Cape will continue to be highly contested, with Cope and the DA continuing to lurk in the shadows.

The UDM has not been a key player in local elections, a fact that has continued to marginalise the party. In fact, the UDM is in the twilight of its political career

and the sooner Holomisa approaches Zuma with a suggestion of reintegration into the ANC the better for his political future.

The IFP has been a big player in local government elections and has fought on equal terms with the ANC and the DA in the by-elections. However, the party is in decline and it is speculated that the fact that Jacob Zuma is a Zulu will further erode its influence in rural KwaZulu-Natal, as happened in the 2011 elections. The survival of the IFP also depends on some serious soul-searching and political realignment. It is clear that most IFP voters are going to the ANC and what better incentive does a party need than to follow the wishes of its supporters?

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