

## Election Review – Is real competition emerging?

The essence of democracy is competitive politics. Has that been enhanced by this election?

The broad outlines are clear: the ANC lost some ground; the smaller parties and independents lost considerably more; and the DA gained a lot.

All of this happened on the back of many more voters voting. The percentage poll went from 48% in the last two local government elections to 57,6% now – this with 2,5 million more registered voters than in the 2006 local government elections. Clearly South Africans are participating – confounding predictions of a big stay away.

### First the numbers

The **ANC** managed to keep its support above the 60% level. It got 62,93% of the party list votes cast and 61% of ward votes cast. (Let's ignore the 3<sup>rd</sup> vote that some rural voters had for District Councils).

The ANC lost ground in 8 of the 9 provinces. Strip out the progress it made in KZN and its vote on the party list would decline to 61,73%. That still leaves the party above the 60% mark, but it underscores the ground it has lost.

The real loss for the ANC is not so much in these numbers, but in the fact that it has lost considerable support amongst the minority race groups. This loss has not been uniform, as the results in Northern Cape and Beaufort West, for example, illustrate, but even so it has been pretty severe.

The **DA** had a very good election, transforming itself from a 15%/16% party into a 24% party. This is approximately 50% growth, which no party can be unhappy about. Its support amongst minority groups grew very strongly.

Within these national figures both parties experienced some set-backs: the DA could not capture Nelson Mandela Bay Metro nor other towns it targeted like Potchefstroom, and the ANC could not dislodge the DA from the Midvaal municipality in Gauteng, in spite of sending a number of ANC big guns to campaign there.

**COPE** and the **IFP** have been decimated. COPE garnered just over 2% of the party list votes, just less than 300 000 votes, compared to the 7,8% or 1,3 million votes the party got in 2009. (COPE did not exist at the time of the 2006 local government elections). The IFP went from 8,1% in 2006 and 4.6% in the 2009 parliamentary elections to 3.6% now.

### A sense of perspective

The DA now controls 18 councils outright (6,5% of the total). This is a healthy increase from the 6% it controlled before the elections, but for perspective one should remember there are 278 councils in the country. The ANC controls 198, or 71%. 62 Councils (22,5%) will have to be governed by coalitions. Intense horse-trading to determine coalition partners will take place over the next few weeks.

## **The results, race and competitive politics**

Steven Friedman put it succinctly: "South Africans vote their identities". Did they do so in this election? They most certainly did, but there are important nuances.

The ANC became more (African) Black, because it lost a lot of Coloured, White and Indian votes.

The DA on the other hand became less White. In fact, White voters now probably constitute less than half of DA supporters. Some wards in the Black heartland voted DA. Port Elizabeth came within a whisker of a change in political control. The DA claims that it captured 6% of Black African votes in this election, up from 1% in 2009. To woo some of the remaining 94% the nature of the party will have to change further over the next few years. This changing demographic will change the nature of the party and it will be interesting to see how its core voters, many who also vote according to identity, react to these changes.

Will the nature of the ANC change? It has to decide whether to try and re-capture some of the lost support amongst minorities. Will it abandon its traditional non-racial stance to lean towards the Black nationalism of a Jimmy Manyi and a Julius Malema, or will it try and re-capture the non-racial stance of a Mandela?

Its second, and arguably more important challenge, is to improve delivery to its core Black constituency. (By the way, that is also where the security of minorities lies, certainly not in a party of their "own".) Will the ANC just be complacent about the election results, happy that 62% plus of the population supports it, or will it try and govern better?

I do not think it can just be complacent. The fight has already started, as this election showed. Mrs Zille has stated her vision: she wants the DA to capture power nationally by 2019. That may be over-ambitious but it indicates a strong will to fight competitive politics – by definition that will take her into traditional ANC constituencies and the ANC will have to respond.

## **From group to individual**

Will delivery trump identity? I think we are moving in that direction, but it is of necessity a process. We will arrive at competitive politics when issues common to all voters, like delivery, corruption, poverty, access for all and so on become the deciding factor for more and more voters. That takes us to the heart of an open society.

The philosopher Karl Popper defined an open society as one where the individual counts more than the group. It has taken the Afrikaans-language group, for example, a long time to move from the group being paramount to the individual being paramount. Even today the transition is not complete, as various debates indicate. (It is by no means the only group in SA struggling with that transition, but the Afrikaners illustrate the move well).

We will not achieve competitive politics as long as most voters think in groups. That mindset first has to change.

My sense is that it has changed somewhat in these elections. The “Black” group (as in everybody that is not White) switched some support to a traditionally White party. Some Black Africans switched to the DA. Delivery issues, corruption, acceptable candidates ... slowly these things are beginning to count as important vote catchers.

Things are loosening up.