

## Article

# The electoral temptation of race in South Africa: implications for the 2004 election<sup>1</sup>

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### **Race and electoral politics in South Africa**

There is a growing consensus among serious observers of South African electoral politics that the 'racial census' model (Horowitz 1985:86) of voting behaviour is inadequate to explain voting behaviour. The broad correlation of race and party support has instead been explained – most convincingly by Mattes (1995) – as being owed to the experience of apartheid that structured individual interests (see also: Seekings 1997:297; Eldridge and Seekings 1996; Schlemmer 1994:161; Schrire 2001:141; and Maloka 2001:229-30). While voting behaviour may be more sophisticated than suggested by the crude racial census argument, campaigning continues to be strongly influenced by racial considerations.

In their analysis of the 1999 election, Taylor and Hoeane ask whether South Africa is really best seen as being trapped in racial and ethnic politics and assert that the purported salience of race and ethnicity in voting behaviour and campaign politics is misconceived (1999:138). This paper puts forward the case that, as far as campaigning is concerned, parties (at least the successful ones) do strategise in terms of what Taylor and Hoeane call 'racial arithmetic'. While the South African electorate may not consist of unthinking and irrational voters who vote according to the colour of their skin, major political parties do continue to play the race card when electioneering. This strategy proved highly successful for the ANC and the DP in 1999, indicating that voters remain susceptible to racial rhetoric. An emphasis on race during campaigning stirs up dormant tensions, deepens existing divisions and thus mitigates against race losing its salience in South African electoral politics.

Taylor and Hoeane make four points in their critique of the view that race and ethnicity remain significant. First, they argue that the ANC does

not have an exclusively black support base and does not present itself as a racially motivated party. While not exclusively black, it is estimated that 90 per cent of the ANC's votes in 1999 were received from black voters (Reynolds 1999:185). It will be shown in the following analysis that although not a solely racially motivated party, the ANC does mobilise some groups on the basis of their race if this is expedient. The ANC has been very successful in simultaneously appealing to its 'non-racial' and 'Africanist' adherents.

Secondly, Taylor and Hoeane argue that the notion of a bloc coloured vote is not supported by voting patterns in the Western Cape and that the ANC was able to win a plurality of votes in the Western Cape through 'the ANC's appeal to material concerns (which) cancelled out a coloured vote based on fears, perceived dangers and a sense of group identity' (1999: 139). It will be shown here, however, that in 1999 the ANC was able to appeal to coloured voters through stressing African and coloured solidarity in the face of entrenched white privilege. While appeals of this sort have a material dimension, they have a far stronger racial flavour since appeals to materialism can be achieved without resorting to race-speak.

Thirdly, they argue that many Indian voters cast their ballot for the ANC thereby identifying with the non-racial majority rather than an 'Indian vote'. They are right that it does not make sense to conceptualise the Indian and coloured votes as bloc voting, since voting within these group is differentiated along a class dimension with more educated coloureds and Indians voting for the ANC, while working-class voters from these groups have traditionally supported the DP and the NP (Habib and Naidu 1999: 188-99). However, this does not stop political parties from appealing to voters of such groups on racial terms. Indians and coloureds were both targeted by the DP in 1999 on the grounds that under apartheid they were not white enough while under the ANC they are not black enough (*Daily Dispatch* May 27, 1999; Leon 1999a:2). The ANC typically told Indian and coloured voters that voting for 'white' parties would make them traitors to the oppressed and that those who did so thought of themselves as second-class whites (*The Star* April 21, 1999; *Cape Argus* May 2, 1999; *Cape Argus* May 26, 1999; and *Sowetan* May 27, 1999).

Fourthly, Taylor and Hoeane point to opinion polls that show there were a significant number of undecided voters in late 1998, and that there is a growing emphasis on a common South African civic identity, rather than identification with a particular racial group. It is worth pointing out that an

undecided voter may not necessarily be willing to vote for a party across the racial divide, but be considering another party that will best protect their interests.

The decline of partisan support is no doubt a positive sign that South Africa is overcoming the rigid racial divisions of apartheid. However, come election day, voters overwhelmingly plump for a party that matches their demographic profile. This is because the larger parties on the campaign trail continue to play on racial issues that dredge up people's fears or evoke past struggles. In other words, it is the parties themselves, through their use of racial rhetoric, that set the tone of the election campaign and prevent voters from overcoming what is often mistakenly and crudely described as 'racial voting'.

Taylor and Hocane propose that a racialised interpretation of the 1999 election can be contested by analysing the election in terms of economic and class considerations (1999:141). Concurring with the view of Ray Hartley that the overall results indicate 'ethnic loyalties being put aside in favour of more rational liberal democratic alternatives', they contend that the ANC emerged as a 'centre-left party' and the DP a 'centre-right party' in 1999 (1999:140-1). However, an ethnically or racially neutral view of party campaigning is surely wrongheaded as both the ANC and DP explicitly appeal to groups on a racial basis.

The ANC described itself as 'a multi-class organisation representing the interests of forces that were participants in, and broadly stood to gain from, the victory of the NDR [national democratic revolution]: black workers, the black middle strata, black business in its various ramifications, the rural poor and others' (ANC 1998). Thus, the ANC emerged as a centrist party that aimed to redress racially skewed apartheid imbalances and promote the emergence of a black bourgeoisie, indicating that black solidarity trumps class considerations.

Like the ANC, the DP followed orthodox macro-economic policies, but favoured a 'merit society' and creating equal opportunities. The DP's virulent condemnation of affirmative action policies was an attempt to protect the interests of minorities, particularly working-class whites, coloureds and Indians, rather than asserting the interests of the middle class.<sup>3</sup> In this view, the ANC and the DP both emerged as centrist parties, differentiated by their willingness to assert the interests of certain racially defined constituencies at the expense of others.

It is important to note that appealing to such constituencies in a divided

society does not mean that those parties that do so are necessarily racist, although crude criticisms of this nature do tend to fly between parties at election time. The delegitimisation of racism in South Africa means that racial mobilisation often requires a degree of skill and subtlety to avoid being branded a 'racist party'. In their work on racial campaigning in America, Kinder and Sanders reveal how politicians use racial codewords to get out of the same predicament: 'Racial codewords make appeals to prejudice electorally profitable even when, as in contemporary American society, prejudice is officially off-limits' (Kinder and Sanders 1996:223). The following analysis demonstrates how both the DP and the ANC used codewords as well as more explicit appeals to race in their 1999 campaigns. This is not to argue that these parties relied solely on racial mobilisation but rather to point out that racially exclusive campaigning remained key strategies of the most successful parties in the 1999 election.

### **The African National Congress: advance and consolidate**

The ANC distinguished itself at the forefront of the anti-apartheid struggle as a non-racial movement that transcended ethnic politics. Despite the ANC's non-racial stance, the party has not shied away from using a racialised discourse to achieve its objectives. In 1999, ANC activity was highest in the Western Cape where the ANC had lost to the National Party in 1994 and the Eastern Cape where the ANC's support base was threatened. It will be shown that the ANC used a racialised discourse, especially to advance in the Western Cape and to consolidate its power in the Eastern Cape.

While the focus is on these two provinces, it is worth noting that the ANC played the race card elsewhere. In Welkom, in the Free State, (the late) Steve Tshwete said that whites must understand that Freedom Day was about liberating the oppressor as well as the oppressed and saluted those who liberated 'our oppressed masses' against the SADF and its allies (*Sowetan* April 29, 1999).

At a gathering of the main political parties in KwaZulu-Natal, ANC premier designate, S'bu Ndebele, said that parties like the New National Party (NNP) and the DP were 'irrelevant' and had 'fulfilled their racial mandates of the past' (*Sowetan* May 11, 1999). Winnie Madikizela-Mandela told supporters gathered at Shobashane that it was white farmers who were killing each other to provoke retaliatory attacks on blacks (*Sowetan* March 23, 1999). Later that day, at Port Shepstone, she told black voters: 'The problem is that the whites stole our money and that is why we are not able

to build you roads and houses as quickly as you need them' (*Sowetan* March 23, 1999). At Kliplaat in the Karoo, she told supporters that she was 'sick and tired of the white media saying they don't know who Mbeki is', that a third force was destabilising the country and that Mbeki 'owed the white man nothing' (*The Mercury* March 10, 1999).

Thabo Mbeki told voters in Upington that parties responsible for the oppression of black people for decades would ask residents to vote for them (*Cape Times* March 1, 1999). In Kimberley, Nelson Mandela told a black audience that whites had rejected the ANC's hand of friendship and still regarded the ANC as an organisation to be boycotted by whites (*The Star* May 19, 1999). At Phokeng in North West Province, Mbeki said that the other 41 parties should unite as they were all opposed to change and that Lucas Mangope (United Christian Democratic Party), Roelf Meyer (United Democratic Movement) and Marthinus van Schalkwyk (NNP) did not fight for freedom while the ANC did (*Daily Dispatch* April 28, 1999). At Kyalami in Gauteng, Mbeki told voters that the NNP was tricking people by claiming to be new, that the DP had supported apartheid legislation and that the UDM was no different from the parties of apartheid (*Cape Times* March 29, 1999; *Cape Argus* March 29, 1999).

In Pretoria, Mbhazima Shilowa said that the country did not need van Schalkwyk laying a wreath at Sharpeville and that van Schalkwyk should call on whites to pay reparations (*The Star* April 29, 1999). Mandela also used strong racial language in an address to a mainly coloured audience in Riverlea, Johannesburg, when he said that the first freedom fighter was Harry, the *Strandloper*, a man 'despised by white text books'. He continued: 'There is a rich history behind the coloured community and you do not have to fear. Voting for the National Party will show a lack of understanding. It will be an insult to be regarded as second-class whites' (*The Star* May 27, 1999). Shilowa also told voters in Vaal Triangle township to be careful of 'wolves in sheep's clothing' who chose to forget the past when campaigning for votes, reminding those present that the NNP had been responsible for apartheid and the DP had done nothing while the people had suffered. He added that it was the ANC who knew people's pain and struggled with them (*Sowetan* May 27, 1999).

### **The ANC vs the UDM in the Eastern Cape**

In the Eastern Cape in 1999, the ANC faced a fresh challenge from the newly formed UDM – the party it had identified as its biggest threat at its 1998 provincial conference (EISA 1999:48). The danger was compounded

by the growing perception among voters that the ANC had ignored the people of the Eastern Cape who had experienced inefficient service delivery and administrative incompetence in one of South Africa's poorest provinces (*Financial Mail* March 12, 1999). The ANC strategy in the province was two-pronged: assert that the ANC was the true vehicle of black aspiration and blame the legacy of apartheid for delivery failures, while simultaneously denouncing the UDM as collaborators with the apartheid regime.<sup>4</sup>

The ANC national chairman, Mosiuoa 'Terror' Lekota, told black Grahamstown residents: 'The ANC did not put you in the shacks and mud houses in which you live. It was the government of the boers' (*Sowetan* March 29, 1999). Mbeki repeated this line in the Transkei, blaming 'white' parties for the problems: 'These people created problems for 350 years. Today they appear and say why doesn't the ANC solve them in five years' (*Sowetan* April 12, 1999). The main thrust of the ANC's campaign in the Eastern Cape, however, was to denounce its challengers, the UDM, as apartheid collaborators or, in some cases, as a party formed by whites to steal black votes.

Campaigning as a catch-all party for the most part, the UDM's Roelf Meyer professed that its 'membership and support base is a mirror reflection of the nation' (*The Star* March 30, 1999). The party's threat to the ANC, however, is captured in the assertion by a UDM spokesperson that they were 'the only party that can make serious inroads into the country's black townships' (*Cape Argus* April 29, 1999). Nowhere was this threat greater than in the Transkei region, especially around the old capital of Umtata. It was here that the UDM leader, Bantu Holomisa, sought to capitalise on the antagonistic relationship that had developed between ex-Transkei civil servants and the ANC-led Bisho administration, as well as Holomisa's good standing among chiefs in the Transkei (*Financial Mail* June 12, 1998). Holomisa also played on perceptions of poor service delivery at a rally by calling Mbeki a grey-haired *tsotzi* who led a privileged life overseas and did not know the harshness of life in the rural areas (EISA 1999:331). In Umtata, Holomisa told 4 500 supporters that South Africa would become another banana republic if Mbeki was allowed to rule and reminded the audience that he had sheltered MK soldiers (*The Star* April 27, 1999). The UDM's campaigning in the Eastern Cape, especially the Transkei, had a different character to its campaigning in other parts of the country. An observer in Umtata noted that the billboards in the region

featured pictures of Holomisa only, whereas in other parts of the country both Holomisa and Meyer were featured (EISA 1999: 272). The UDM's strategy, therefore, was to play up to Holomisa's popularity in this region but to promote the party as the vehicle of reconciliation elsewhere.

An ANC pamphlet published early in 1999 was devoted to denouncing Holomisa as a 'military agent who went wrong' (*Financial Mail* March 12, 1999). Premier Makhenkesi Stofile labelled Holomisa an 'oppressor' for his role as a homeland leader in the previous regime, while Mandela, on a visit to the great place of Pondo Paramount Chief Mpondombini Sigcau at Qawukeni, accused Holomisa of being an apartheid collaborator (*Daily Dispatch* May 22, 1999; *Citizen* May 22, 1999).

Mbeki told traditional leaders at Gobe village and at Peddie that the ANC 'wanted nothing to do' with Holomisa's UDM (EISA, 1999:269-70). At a Freedom Day rally in Umtata, Mandela said that while the ANC was fighting for freedom some members of the UDM were 'running around avoiding a fight with their tails between their legs ... They were eating the bones left by their oppressors' (*Cape Argus* April 28, 1999). A month later he told the same thing to supporters at a village near Idutywa in the southern Transkei (*Sowetan* May 24, 1999). In Queenstown, Tshwete said that Holomisa had the 'wrong concept of democracy' by teaming up with the former NP Minister, Roelf Meyer, and he 'did not know the oppression of the black people' (*Daily Dispatch* May 3, 1999). At Elliotdale, Tshwete told supporters that the UDM was made up of former oppressors, dictators, informers and pimps and that the DP was financed by and represented the interests of the white elite (*Daily Dispatch* May 31, 1999a). In KwaZidenge village near Stutterheim, Mhuleki George labelled Holomisa an undisciplined and confused soldier being used by whites to recruit black support (*Daily Dispatch* May 31, 1999b).

The ANC's treatment of a party that it perceived as a real threat to its black support base is indicative of the phenomenon of ethnic or racial outbidding.<sup>5</sup> By dismissing another party as not having a credible claim to representing a particular race group, a party is able to assert itself as the most legitimate benefactor of that group's aspirations. The phenomenon of racial outbidding is a grave concern to the overcoming of racial campaigning in South Africa since it serves to polarise the electorate by raising their levels of race-consciousness. In the Eastern Cape in 1999, the ANC clearly aimed to convince black voters that the ANC was the only party that took black aspirations seriously.

### The ANC vs the NNP in the Western Cape

As the only province where black Africans were not in the majority, campaigning in the Western Cape has typically focused on the so-called 'coloured vote'. In 1994, many analysts and ANC campaigners were shocked when the National Party won the provincial election with 53.3 per cent of the vote to the ANC's 33 per cent. Eldridge explains the failure of the ANC to win the province in 1994 as partly due to its inability to convince coloured voters that they had a place in an 'African' party and the readiness of the NP to wage a *swart gevaar* campaign by playing on coloured fears of black domination under the ANC (Eldridge 1997:139-40).

By 1999, the ANC and NP were gearing up for another battle in the province where the coloured majority are considered 'swing' voters. The NP, now renamed the New National Party under the leadership of Marthinus van Schalkwyk, was hampered this time around by the loss of their popular leader FW de Klerk. A growing 'inclusivity' could also be discerned within the party. In the 1999 manifesto the NNP proposed an inclusive strategy 'where opposition parties are not relegated to the sterile role of critics but are regarded as constructive players in the political system' (New National Party 1999:3). They also professed to be the 'the most multi-racial party in South Africa', to 'represent a broad and inclusive South African patriotism that transcends race, language and religion', and to 'reflect unity and our nation's cultural diversity' (New National Party 1999:13).

In 1994, the NNP had exploited coloured fears of losing out to blacks in the new dispensation. In 1999, one NNP MP, Peter Marais, did traverse the province with his message of 'brown power', urging coloured unity, but emphasising that this should not necessitate ill-feeling with other races (*Business Day* May 27, 1999). The tendency to invoke *swart gevaar* tactics was notably absent in electioneering on the Cape Flats. Van Schalkwyk, speaking at Mitchell's Plain Full Gospel Church delivered a hard line on crime and urged the reinstatement of the death penalty (*Cape Argus* April 19, 1999). At Bishop Lavis, van Schalkwyk again highlighted crime and the growing unemployment under an ANC government. He asserted that the NNP was the most 'non-racist' of all parties, a fact, he said, that was reflected in the Party's leadership (*Cape Times* May 25, 1999). The emphasis on inclusivity and representivity made it difficult for the NNP to use the racial references it had profitably used in 1994.

The ANC's strategy was to stress the need for solidarity between



coloureds and blacks owing to their common history of oppression. Commenting on ANC strategy in the majority-coloured Western Cape in mid-March, its provincial leader, Ebrahim Rasool, said: 'It is obviously no secret that African areas are the ANC's traditional base. Rural areas are another strong base and the coloured middle class areas'. Rasool challenged the white community to share its privileges: 'You can't be secure in Bishopscourt while there is insecurity on the Cape Flats'; and called for a 'broad unity based on coloured-African solidarity'. He said: 'We see our priority as delivering to both communities rather than those communities competing. Our key target has to be white privilege, which remains untouched' (*Sowetan* March 11, 1999).

In the other provinces it was sufficient to push the line that the ANC was the party of black liberation and that this could only continue with the renewed mandate of black voters. In the Western Cape, however, the ANC's message to coloured voters was that they must switch allegiance from the party of apartheid to the party that would ensure the ultimate liberation of *all formerly oppressed people*. To achieve this, a strategy that served to exclude whites and dismiss its rivals as 'white' parties and defenders of white privilege was used.

Mbeki, accompanied by Rasool, told a coloured audience in Mitchell's Plain: 'We must all agree that in 1994 we made a mistake of voting for the party responsible for our oppression. We must not repeat that mistake' (*Sowetan* May 3, 1999). At a rally in Delft, the ANC's Western Cape spokesperson, Cameron Dugmore, said that Delft was a place where blacks and coloureds lived together: 'It is a success story of our vision for the province and we plan to popularise non-racialism as opposed to the narrow race-based politics of the NNP' (*Sowetan* May 11, 1999). Rasool attacked the NNP for 'using' coloured people to get votes and then entrenching white privilege, as well as the DP who 'did not have the guts to fight back during the liberation struggle' (*Cape Times* May 13, 1999).

The ANC was able to rely on the liberation factor in its campaigning without the need to resort to racial codewords owing to the moral legitimacy afforded to the anti-apartheid struggle. This strategy was designed to remind black voters that, despite shortcomings in delivery, the ANC was the true party of liberation and the only organisation that was capable, or had the will, to cater for the interests of blacks. When it suited the ANC, the definition of blacks was extended to coloured (and Indian) voters who it sought to bind together under the classification of the formerly oppressed who must unite to remove white privilege.

### **The Democratic Party: fight back**

After attracting a meagre 1.73 per cent of the vote in 1994, Tony Leon, who had proposed the merger of the DP and the NP in 1992 (Kotze 2001:122), replaced Zach de Beer as party leader. He immediately announced a more aggressive strategy for the party:

Victory does not belong to the faint of heart. We must not be too fastidious, precious or prissy. Certainly not if we are to attract the numbers we need to make a difference. And we must make deals and arrangements, even pacts, wherever and whenever it will be to our advantage, and will cause our support to be maximised. (Leon 1998)

As the quote suggests, vote maximisation was the key concern for a party on the brink of extinction. The 'fight back' strategy used to fight the 1999 election was a targeted campaign that emphasised the role of the DP as minority protector against a powerful government. That this strategy would inevitably lead to charges of racism did not apparently bother Tony Leon who commented to an analyst during the campaign: 'The DP does not care where its support comes from, as long as it obtains it' (EISA 1999:12).

By 1998, political opponents had resorted to allegations of racism in the DP as opinion polls started to show increased (traditionally conservative) Afrikaner support for the DP and the party began to win municipal by-elections in former NNP strongholds (Welsh 1999:95). The DP argued that, on the contrary, it was Mandela who was guilty of 'racial demagoguery' and that it was the ANC that played the race card under the guise of representivity (Leon 1999b). These tit-for-tat accusations of racism were a key feature of the campaign and suited both parties equally well as they each mobilised their relative constituencies.

In South Africa, 'white' parties needed to avoid the racist tag because of the delegitimisation of apartheid at home and abroad. However, for electoral success, they also needed to mobilise a constituency that feared and resented what it interpreted as 'reverse apartheid', while ensuring that they did not totally alienate black voters they could possibly target in the future. This precarious balancing act required the use of messages that could be interpreted by conservative whites as invoking the *swart gevaar*, but were not overtly racist.

Six such themes can be discerned in the DP's 1999 election campaign:

- Accusations that the ANC was racist. Such statements were designed to make minorities feel that the ruling party had a deep-seated prejudice against whites, coloureds and Indians.<sup>6</sup>

- The ANC was guilty of human rights violations, was violent, and intimidated opponents.
- That the ANC was aiming to gain a two-thirds majority to change the Constitution. This was designed to evoke fears of a black government with a free hand to rule as it pleased
- The former claim was substantiated by assertions that the ANC was centralising power and blurring the lines between the party and the State. The ANC was often compared to the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe.<sup>7</sup>
- References to crime were often mentioned with racial connotations. References to farm killings and claims that the ANC sympathised more with the perpetrator than the victims fell into this category.<sup>8</sup>
- Calls for merit-based employment policies and rejections of race-based affirmative action. A common theme that was clearly articulated to play on minority fears of exclusion under a black government.

In the introduction to their 1999 manifesto, the DP claimed that a power-hungry ANC elite was emerging that was attempting to enrich itself at the expense of the poor, while simultaneously re-introducing racial factors as a smokescreen for lining the pockets of the elite (Democratic Party 1999:1). The manifesto painted a picture of the 'empowerment feast' where already wealthy black elites reaped the benefits of transformation while the poor were left to 'feed on the crumbs' (Democratic Party 1999: 5-7).

The DP's charge of race-based elitism clearly aimed to appeal to minority groups who may have felt excluded from access to the resources of the state. The assertion that a self-interested elite had emerged also represented an opportunity for the party to appeal to poor black voters and the mention of the poor missing out on the 'empowerment feast' would no doubt resonate with many such voters.<sup>9</sup> However, the DP did not make a serious attempt to court these voters during the campaign and the call for merit-based employment policies was hardly likely to appeal to those voters who had been the most disadvantaged under apartheid. In fact, this 'missed opportunity' was a calculated attempt by the DP to throw in its lot with disaffected minorities, rather than compete directly with the ANC for the votes of poor blacks.

Most of the DP's campaigning was in white areas, focusing on traditionally conservative Afrikaans-speaking towns. At a meeting in Krugersdorp in March, Leon expressed the desire to take his supporters

into an anti-ANC alliance and he reiterated fears that the ANC would change the constitution with a two-thirds majority (*Cape Argus* March 20, 1999).

A recurrent theme of a speech to the South African Institute of Race Relations in Johannesburg was the failure of democracy elsewhere in Africa and particularly Zimbabwe. Leon strongly intimated that South Africa showed signs of following these countries. Leon said that in light of a sure-fire victory for the ANC and to prevent the reversion to authoritarian rule, 'those in power should be watched ceaselessly and be open at all times to inspection and criticism' (*The Sunday Independent* March 13, 1999). In the same speech, Leon openly patronised African voters in the 1994 election:

People, voting for the first time, voted for a Golden Age to begin the day after the results were announced. Naturally their hopes were unreal and their understanding of democracy imperfect. (*The Sunday Independent* March 13, 1999)

Speaking in Ventersdorp, Leon promised a hard line on crime, affirmative action and police killings. While the few blacks at the meeting greeted Leon's speech with derision, the DP leader clearly found favour with the white Afrikaners present. Leon said that the ANC stood for 'Another National Crisis', prompting supporters to chant: '*Slaan terug, Tony, slaan terug!*' Alan Jones, chairman of the DP's Ventersdorp branch, confirmed that many of the town's right-wingers had switched their support to the DP (*Cape Argus* May 11, 1999). In mid-March, at Fochsville, Leon promised to fight for the 'protection of Afrikaans language and culture' (Stober 1999). In the Northern Cape, Leon took up issues of direct concern to farmers, especially the government's withdrawal of subsidies to white farmers (EISA 1999:242).

In May, Leon addressed a group of Afrikaans-speaking farmers, professionals and business people at a restaurant in Upington where he demonstrated his solidarity with the Afrikaner leadership in a speech that referred to his visits to Boer war monuments and his appreciation of commercial agricultural interests (EISA 1999:276). In Kimberley, he played on the disenchantment that many Afrikaners feel with the NNP by reminding them of their 'betrayal' at the hands of the National Party government (*Sunday Times* June 6, 1999).

The focus of the DP's campaign in traditionally conservative areas evidently began to irk some of its more liberal members. At a DP meeting

in Grahamstown in April, white supporters voiced their concern that the DP was destined to remain an elitist white party and that the party was not as colour-blind as it professed to be. One long-standing DP supporter said that while the party claimed to have 'the guts to fight back', it did not seem to have the 'guts to put up Xhosa posters' (Addis 1999). Bossie Boshoff, a DP candidate in the Northern Cape, responded to the charge that the party was only catering for white interests. He said that the DP was not just the party of white farmers, but also coloureds who felt that before 'they were seen to be too black and now they are too white'. He added that, although the DP tried to campaign in black areas, 'most black people in this country are anti-white, and don't want to support white parties' (EISA 1999:241).

The DP's confrontational stance was making the party an attractive political home for disaffected white right-wingers and, in February, three politicians affiliated to the Freedom Front defected to the DP (*The Star* February 15, 1999; *The Star* February 17, 1999). As conservatives found a new home in the DP, black members of the party began to feel increasingly alienated. Dr Bukelwa Mbulawa, the party's only black National Assembly representative, defected to the ANC on the grounds that the DP was 'fundamentally opposed to transformation in our country' (*The Star* March 25, 1999). These defections signalled a rightward shift in the party and no doubt were perceived as such by the electorate.

The DP's fierce anti-ANC stance meant that the party found it difficult to appeal to black voters, fuelling perceptions that the party was anti-black. The ANC published posters in the Western Cape that twisted the DP's election slogan of 'Fight back' to 'Don't fight blacks', but agreed to withdraw the posters after the intervention of the Independent Electoral Commission (*Cape Times* May 7, 1999b). Cameron Dugmore of the ANC pointed out that the DP's Xhosa posters were about half the size of those in English and Afrikaans and that the Xhosa posters translated as 'the DP fights for the rights of people', a notable toning down of the 'fight back' message (*Cape Argus* May 7, 1999). This indicated that the DP realised that its campaign slogan was likely to alienate black voters.

The DP's concerns over the tyranny of the (black) majority placed them in the position to appeal to coloured and Indian voters in much the same way as white voters. At a Freedom Day rally in Booysen's Park, outside Port Elizabeth, Leon told the coloured audience that five years after the birth of democracy, the exclusion of minority groups was setting in. 'This new exclusion is being executed not on behalf of the majority but on behalf

of a small, increasingly powerful and arrogant ANC elite', he said (*The Star* April 28, 1999). Leon went on to tell the audience that under apartheid the coloured community were not white enough to get jobs and under an ANC government not black enough (Leon 1999a:2). In KwaZulu-Natal, the DP took up the case of Privani Reddy, an Indian student whose application to University of Natal Medical School was denied because the Indian quota of applicants had been filled (*The Star* April 13, 1999). DP members picketed outside the gates of the University of Natal with banners reading: 'Merit not quotas' (EISA 1999:221).

The strategy of the DP can be summed up as an attempt to play on the fears of minority voters who felt threatened by an ANC government, especially one with the ability to change the Constitution unilaterally. Black empowerment, affirmative action, the two-thirds majority issue, the allegedly racist agenda of the ANC and the decline of democracy in other African countries all formed part of the DP's armoury of racial codewords when campaigning for the votes of minorities.

The DP's success can also be attributed to the new inclusive stance of the NP, allowing the DP effectively to 'outbid' their rivals for the votes of minorities. In 1998, Marthinus van Schalkwyk set about revamping the NP's image in order to get rid of the party's association with apartheid. The party was renamed the New National Party (NNP) and given new colours and insignia. The Party's discourse took on an overt conciliatory tone, with van Schalkwyk telling the National Assembly: 'The pain and suffering, the injustice of the apartheid era, we must never allow to happen again' (*Financial Mail* March 5, 1999). As Breytenbach notes: 'The NNP's repositioning under van Schalkwyk was indeed an attempt to make it more inclusive, as the election of David Malatsi as deputy leader testified' (1999: 123).

NNP campaigning in historically white areas preached the Party's new message of inclusion and co-operation between all race groups and political parties. In a speech to Afrikaners in Bethlehem, van Schalkwyk told the gathering that they were faced with a choice between joining hands with their countrymen or isolating themselves in the same way as whites in other African countries. Van Schalkwyk said Afrikaners were engaged in a second Great Trek, and were in danger of being misled by 'self-appointed generals' who were trying to organise their own little treks (*The Star* April 15, 1999). Van Schalkwyk told business leaders in Upington that the DP was 'succumbing to the cancer of conservatism and racism' (*Cape Argus*

May 15, 1999). Referring to the DP's 'fight back' campaign, he said: 'The message is that this is a desperate effort to separate whites from other people. Our party is not going to do it. Our party will work with other parties, but it must be our ultimate aim to represent all the people' (*Cape Argus* May 15, 1999).

At a meeting at Stellenbosch University, van Schalkwyk responded to comments in the press that the NNP had been 'outflanked' by the DP by saying: 'We weren't outflanked, there is a vacuum (to the right) that the DP is filling. They are the new right'. He added that the DP's 'fight back' election slogan was reactionary, before claiming that a third of the NNP's support was black, a third was white and the other third coloured. 'We are a bigger black party than the PAC and the UDM', he said (*Cape Times* May 6, 1999). Addressing a crowd of coloured and white voters in Warrentvale in the Northern Cape, van Schalkwyk told those present: 'It doesn't help at all to be a negative and destructive opposition that only tries to score points by harping on people's deepest racial fears; and exploiting the *gatvol* factor as crudely stated on DP posters'. In contrast to the negative and narrow-based tactics of the DP, who 'will lead white voters into an Ian Smith-type of psychological homeland', the NNP had a 'big enough heart to accommodate all communities to ensure (voters) interests are not sidelined' (*Diamond Fields Advertiser* April 28, 1999).

The NNP was not averse to criticising the ANC and occasionally resorted to DP-style adversarial tactics. The two-thirds majority issue was raised and references to the ANC centralising power were made. In Table View, Van Schalkwyk accused the ANC of blurring the lines between the party and the state (*Cape Argus* May 5, 1999) and Manie Schoeman told voters in East London that the ANC would change the Constitution with a two-thirds majority in order to revoke the property clause and lead South Africa down the same road as Zimbabwe (*Daily Dispatch* May 21, 1999). Unlike the DP, however, the NNP argued that the way forward was to engage constructively with the ANC. More importantly, the NNP explicitly sought to convince voters of all races to work together towards reconciliation, a theme that was virtually absent from DP campaigning.<sup>10</sup> On Freedom Day, Van Schalkwyk laid a wreath at the Hector Petersen Memorial in Sharpeville, addressing an audience that was roughly two thirds black and one third white. 'It is only when white South Africans understand the struggle of black South Africans to be free that they will be really free', he told the audience (*Mail and Guardian* April 30–May 6, 1999). While some

analysts accused the party of crude electioneering, the action was nevertheless a symbolic attempt to appeal to black voters by convincing them that the party had shaken off its apartheid past.

The contrast between the DP and NNP's campaigning was striking. Whereas the NNP attempted to recast itself as the party for all, the DP was content to pick up the votes of minorities disillusioned with the NNP's conciliatory stance to what they saw as the growing authoritarianism of a black government.

### **Analysis and conclusion: implications for the 2004 election**

Nationally, the ANC often reminded voters that it was the party of black liberation whereas other parties were reactionary. In the Eastern Cape, the ANC beat off the challenge from the UDM by deriding the newcomers as apartheid collaborators and blaming white parties and the legacy of apartheid for delivery failure. In the Western Cape, the ANC used a more overt racialised discourse than it had done in 1994, referring to the need for coloured-African solidarity to fight white privilege.

The DP owed its success to its ability to convince minorities, particularly white voters, that it was the party best able to protect their interests in the face of the perceived authoritarianism of the ANC. The NNP, with its message of co-operative governance and racial reconciliation, clearly alienated many, particularly white, voters.

The NNP lost to the DP at every voting station in its former stronghold of Centurion. This pattern was repeated in Vereeniging, Heidelberg, Randburg and Potchefstroom. The DP emerged triumphant in strongly Afrikaans-speaking neighbourhoods, with majorities in such traditional NNP terrain as Krugersdorp North, Johannesburg's Mondeor, Vereeniging's Drie Riviere and Pretoria's Lynwood Ridge (EISA 1999:342). In the traditionally conservative areas of Ventersdorp and Potchefstroom, the DP emerged second to the ANC, suggesting that it beat the NNP in gaining the 'white' vote here (EISA 1999:358). The DP also emerged as the main contender to the ANC in coloured and Indian areas, with a 25 per cent share of the vote in such communities. Gains in these areas had not been at the expense of the ANC, but from conservative coloureds that had voted NNP in 1994 (EISA 1999:341). The DP also did well in urban coloured areas around Port Elizabeth and achieved some of its highest levels of support in rural coloured areas in the far western districts of the Eastern Cape (EISA 1999:328).



A comparison of the racial breakdown of the NNP and the DP's support shows the emerging popularity of the DP among white voters:

**Table 1: Racial breakdown of NNP and DP support in the 1999 election**

	DP vote share	Percentage of DP support	NNP vote share	Percentage of NNP support
Black	180 000	12%	200 000	18%
White	1 200 000	77%	340 000	31%
Coloured	75 000	5%	480 000	44%
Indian	90 000	6%	80 000	7%
Total	1 545 000	100%	1 100 000	100%

(Adapted from Reynolds 1999:183-5)

In 1999, the DP managed to attract over three and a half times more white votes than the NNP, with white voters accounting for over three quarters of the DP's 1999 support base. White voters made up less than a third of the NNP's support base in the 1999 election. Despite attaining 445,000 less votes in total, the NNP still managed to gain 20,000 more black voters than the DP and 405,000 more coloured voters, who now accounted for the greatest share of the NNP's support base.

A possible interpretation of the DP's rise and the NNP's fall is that the NNP had alienated supporters by showing itself to be a weak and ineffective party of opposition. This was not helped by the departure of de Klerk and the Party's equivocal stance on joining in an alliance with the ANC. In this way, the decline of the NNP can be looked at in a racially neutral manner. Given the segmented nature of South African politics, however, this analysis only tells half the story. A weak opposition in a segmented party system could only be perceived as one that does not have the ability to protect its (racially defined) constituents' interests. Many traditional NNP voters were alienated further by the Party's attempts during the campaign to cast itself as a multi-cultural and non-racial party, a strategy that did little to endear the Party to black voters. This failed 'catch-all' strategy stood in stark contrast to the ANC and the DP's successful and targeted campaigns.

That the DP and the ANC were able to mobilise their supporters by resorting to a racialised discourse does not imply the primordial 'racial census' model of voter behaviour. It does, however, suggest that voters do respond favourably to such discourse. As noted earlier, opinion polls before the 1999 election showed that there were a significant number of

undecided voters. The fact that most blacks and whites voted for the ANC and DP respectively indicate that their campaigns were successful in dredging up issues relating to the interests of voters based on their race. Such campaigning negates the potential of South African electoral politics to overcome racial divisions.

This is the electoral temptation of race in a divided society. Parties are tempted to campaign by appealing to racial sensitivities, and voters in turn are tempted to vote for the party that manipulates their fears and presents itself as the strongest defender of their interests. Voters that are not motivated by racial concerns but that continue to vote for parties that play the race card, become trapped in racialised politics, precluding the possibility of race losing its salience.

Both the ANC and the DP had their own specific temptations that led them to resort to racial mobilisation. The ANC was able to convince its supporters to turn out and vote by deflecting attention away from its own delivery failures and broken promises by references to its role in the struggle and asserting itself as the defender of black aspiration. The ANC was also able to consolidate its supporters' allegiance by denouncing opponents as defenders of white privilege or as collaborators with the apartheid regime. The demographic reality of South Africa means that it suits the ANC to maintain race as the primary cleavage in South African politics.<sup>11</sup>

The DP embarked on a campaign that sought to bond minorities into a fearful bloc, in a bid to extend its support beyond the handful of white liberals that supported it in 1994. This meant replacing the 1994 *rooi gevaar* strategy with the 1999 'fight back' campaign that many interpreted as closer to a *swart gevaar* one. The adoption of an inclusive strategy by the NNP opened up a space for the DP to outbid them for the votes of minorities.<sup>12</sup>

While Tony Leon argued that 'only those blinded by a bizarre racial bigotry could assume [the fight back message] was directed at any group', (*Daily Dispatch* May 5, 1999) it is most likely that the DP's campaign was seen by most, particularly black, voters as the ranting of a reactionary white party bent on maintaining white privilege.<sup>13</sup> There can be little doubt that the DP aimed to mobilise minorities with references (implicit or explicit) to race. After the election, Leon hinted that the DP's strategy was to focus on minorities particularly conservative whites – to the exclusion of blacks. He told the press: 'It took 46 years to get Afrikaner voters. After only four

years, it is too soon for blacks to join in large numbers' (cited in Welsh 1999:98).

In many instances, the DP used codewords, such as 'merit, not quotas', references to the NNP's 'betrayal' and the possibility of an ANC two-thirds majority that would take South Africa down the road of Zimbabwe. The ANC was more explicit in its discourse. The ANC was able to attack white privilege and openly fight for the advancement of blacks, without being labelled racist (except by the DP) because of the moral weight and legitimacy attached to the struggle against apartheid and the racial inequalities that flowed from it.

The campaign strategies of the DP and the ANC in 1999 indicate a somewhat fuzzy racial faultline in South African politics. The racial divide is between the 'formerly oppressed' (blacks, coloureds and Indians) and the 'excluded minority' (whites, coloureds and Indians). Indian and coloured voters in 1994 found themselves in a tug-of-war between the ANC and the DP. The ANC appeal to them to join the oppressed majority while the DP urge them to stand together with other minorities in the face of affirmative action and black empowerment.

The implication of the argument put forward as we head towards the 2004 election, is that the parties that campaign by evoking implicit or explicit racial appeals, are more likely to be successful than those who do not. This is of grave concern, especially in light of the recent spate of defections following the implementation of floor-crossing legislation. The ANC has now gained a clear two-thirds majority and the DP, in its guise as the Democratic Alliance (DA), has risen above the other opposition parties to claim 46 seats in the National Assembly.

The ANC and the DA are unlikely to want to break with their successful strategies. It has been suggested that the DP had a two-stage strategy in mind when it embarked on its 'fight back' campaign in 1999, with the first phase aiming to pick up the votes of disaffected minorities and the second phase (in 2004) targeting black voters dissatisfied with the government's delivery record (Welsh 1999:99). This task would require a particularly precarious balancing act. The DA's campaign for a basic income grant as well its call for the provision of AIDS treatments, for example, would position the party to appeal to poor, mainly black, voters. However, these same voters are not likely to be receptive to a party that continues to rail against the government's affirmative action policies and black economic empowerment. Working-class blacks are also not likely to support a party

that calls for more flexible labour legislation and claims to be more serious about privatisation than the ANC.

The NNP's 1999 campaign shows that catch-all strategies are doomed to fail in South Africa. The NNP was never able to convince black voters that it seriously catered for their interests because of the party's association with apartheid. The DA will similarly struggle to convince black voters because of the perception fuelled by 1999's fight back campaign that it is the party of disaffected minorities.

The passing of floor-crossing legislation has allowed for new parties to emerge straight into parliament. The Independent Democrats, established by the former Chief Whip of the Pan Africanist Congress, Patricia de Lille, have generated the most excitement. Announcing the new party, de Lille told reporters that it aimed to break the racial character of South African politics: 'Most parties had tried to break this (racial) mould but neither the governing party nor any significant party has been able to appeal to voters across the divisions of our past and across colours and classes' (*Cape Times* March 27, 2003). Achieving this will be no mean feat.

The UDM emerged in 1998 with the same aim but has been unable to become a political force nationally. While the motives of such parties can be viewed in a positive light, they also have the potential to polarise politics further as established (and stronger) parties aim to outbid them for votes. Just as the UDM was denounced by the DP as a 'Xhosa-ethnic party' in 1999 (*Daily Dispatch* May 27, 1999), it is likely that the DA will dredge up some of de Lille's more Africanist pronouncements on the campaign trail for the PAC, such as the statements she made in 1994 encouraging whites to emigrate (*Cape Argus* March 22, 1994). The ANC is also likely to denounce the Independent Democrats as just another party against transformation and aiming to secure white privilege, as soon as polls begin to show there is support for de Lille among whites.

This article has demonstrated that a successful strategy for South African political parties on the campaign trail has been to appeal to a pre-defined segment with policies that cater to that specific group's interests or worse, with appeals that attempt to create animosity, fear and resentment towards other race groups. The depressing conclusion to be drawn from this is that party politics remains destined to be cast in a racial mould as parties realise the benefits of using racially divisive tactics.

## Notes

1. The title takes its name from Chapter 8 of Kinder and Sanders 1996.
2. This work is based on a chapter of the author's MA thesis completed at the University of Cape Town. The author would like to thank Professor Jeremy Seekings for his valuable input as supervisor of the thesis. The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation is gratefully acknowledged.
3. On the campaign trail in De Aar in the Northern Cape, for example, Leon told coloured workers that affirmative action had changed the complexion of the boss, but did little for the worker (*Cape Times* May 7, 1999).
4. It should be noted at this point that this article does not claim to look at each campaign holistically but only to highlight the role played by race. Such a treatment would include a discussion of the role of the Chiefs in the Eastern Cape. Here appeals to chiefs are included only insofar as they referred to race.
5. See Horowitz 1985 for a full treatment of the concept of ethnic outbidding.
6. One example is when Leon told voters in Oudsthoorn that Tony Yengeni (who, according to Leon, said that whites had stolen their wealth) could be their next Premier (See *Daily Dispatch* April 16, 1999).
7. See, for example, *The Mercury* March 2, 1999.
8. See, for example, *Daily Dispatch* April 27, 1999.
9. A growing consciousness among the black poor of growing intra-black inequalities is apparent from the following response by an informant who took part in focus group discussions in Soweto: 'South Africa is a country of three nations. One is white and rich and is out in the apartheid suburbs. The other is black and rich and has moved from our townships to join them [whites] in the suburbs. The other nation is us here, black and poor. We have been abandoned and forgotten ...' (in Chabedi 2001:21).
10. Only two instances of DP campaigners urging racial unity or reconciliation could be found. The DP candidate, Graham McIntosh, told voters at Msinga in KwaZulu-Natal that the DP was not interested in skin colour and urged South Africans of all races to unite (see *Daily Dispatch* May 12, 1999). In Soweto, on Freedom Day, Helen Suzman delivered the standard DP critique of unemployment, crime, affirmative action and the two thirds majority threat. However, she also praised South Africans for becoming more racially tolerant and told those present that the DP had their interests at heart (see *Citizen* April 28, 1999).
11. As Mbeki noted in a speech at the debate on the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: 'The defining parameter in our continuing struggle for national unity and reconciliation is the question of race' (*Financial Mail* March 5, 1999).
12. Even the Freedom Front tried to be more inclusive. In a newspaper interview in 1999, the Freedom Front leader, Constand Viljoen, contrasted the approach

of the DP with his own party: 'I still believe we are in a new country of which black culture is a very great part. I do not believe in enforcing on the new Parliament a white style of politics. We in the Freedom Front are more African-like' (*Cape Argus* March 12, 1999).

13. The DP's cause was not helped when an editorial, written by DP candidate Nigel Bruce eight years previously, resurfaced. In it he had stated how pleasant it was to be served in restaurants by white teenagers, who were working for good tips, rather than by a 'surly tribesman with his thumb in the soup and eye on the clock' (*Daily Dispatch* April 15, 1999).

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