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The prospects for a vigorous parliamentary opposition in a democratic South Africa

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2007-03-01T12:14:17Z
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CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROSPECTS FOR A VIBRANT PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION IN SOUTH AFRICA; INTERVIEWS, FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS.

Having gone through the past democratic elections in South Africa and having also seen the analysis that were made, it is imperative to have a deep consideration of the voting trends in order to determine what are the prognosis for the country's future elections. In this chapter, I will relay the interviews I held with some of the top politicians, important party dignitaries and ordinary citizens; whose comments and opinions will help in drawing the final analysis and conclusions in the succeeding chapter. Those interviewed were randomly selected from the opposition parties in order to grasp their opinion on the unfolding events of the South African democracy. Their views were mainly intended for reference purposes and to support the arguments espoused by this writer.

South Africa's first universal suffrage election in 1994 was widely hailed as a turning point, marking the final point to the "negotiated transition" from colonial-racial dictatorship to a condition of non-racial democracy elaborated around one of most liberal democratic constitutions in the world. It is clear that South Africans cannot afford to be complacent about the state of democracy in their country considering the experiences of some other countries that went back to authoritarian rule after a taste of democracy. The UNDP Human Development Report for 2002 pointed out, many countries that have taken the first steps towards democracy have failed to consolidate and deepen that process.[92] The Harare Declaration, which affirms democracy as a fundamental Commonwealth value, was a turning point for the Commonwealth as no other Commonwealth declaration has been for over a generation.[93] It is in this instance that, The Commonwealth (Latimer House) principles on the accountability of and the relationship between the three branches of government have also taken dramatic steps to address the interrelated roles of the branches of government: Parliament, the Executive and the Judiciary. This therefore identifies the need for independence and accountability in

[92] 'Government and Opposition – Roles, Rights and Responsibilities' (A workshop organized by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, in co-operation with the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and the Citizens' Agenda Network – Crowne Plaza Hotel, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 25-27 July 2005) P.1
[93] Ibid

all three governmental sections and in addition, underlying the importance of restraint in power usage in each political sphere as well as the need to embrace a balance of power between each branch. These concepts are fundamental to functioning democracy which will be sustained by a vigorous parliamentary opposition.

In its submission to Commonwealth Heads of Government in Abuja, Nigeria in December 2003 and which was an overt recognition of this challenge, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) said the challenges facing democracies are constantly changing and public expectations and public impatience for results are growing relentlessly; the case of mass demonstrations in South Africa allude to this fact. The CPA's submission also stressed that parliamentary government must not only be representative, responsible and accountable, but it must also be successful to give substance to the commonwealth's democratic principles. As the report of the joint CPA – Commonwealth Secretariat workshop on the Role of the Opposition (London 1998) states, "this requires a shared commitment to the essentials of parliamentary democracy and to making parliament work properly".[94]

In South Africa, due to their dominance the ruling party (ANC) and opposition parties completely fail to reach an understanding on what the Commonwealth Secretary General has called the "Collaborative Context"[95] for their work. There is no agreement on roles, rights and responsibilities, on limits and consensus, on what the idea of a "constructive and responsible" opposition means in practice, and on when and how government and opposition should work together to promote national consensus. From my understanding of this, that does not preclude or contradict having a "vigorous parliamentary opposition". The vibrancy of the opposition can still be contained within the jurisdiction of the discharge of its duties. It means that all sides in the political debate – however deep their differences – share the fundamental democratic values of freedom of speech, the rule of law and equal protection under the law. In South Africa, there is no real dialogue at all as there is no sense in which governing and opposition parties see themselves as partners in the development of the democratic process.

[94] Report of a workshop on the rights and responsibilities of the opposition, Marlborough House, London, 8-10 June 1998.
[95] Speech by the Commonwealth Secretary General to the CPA annual conference, Bangladesh 2003.

The reality is that the interplay between governing and opposition parties is an essential part of politics – parliamentary opposition being crucial to a healthy democracy. As the then CPA secretary general said at the opening of the 1998 workshop, "governing and opposition parties should see themselves as partners in the development of the democratic process.[96] It is constructive opposition that gives voice to those in society who represent a perspective other than the status quo and the opposition must articulate arguments as to how and why that status quo should change.

The opposition parties here are divided along grounds of history, ideological aspiration, orientation, race and ethnicity as well as by more immediate competition for electoral advantage; this leaves them struggling around major questions of tactics and strategy; on how best to oppose – whether singly or through alliances, should they engage in constructive opposition or should they be robust? And as these parties grapple with these dilemmas, most of them face an existential crisis, which have seen serious decline and even outright elimination of some of them, like the former National Party (NP). To worsen matters, the ANC (as alleged mostly by the DA, the official opposition now) used various means to de-legitmize, marginalize and tame the opposition. Its attack on the freedom of opposition parties to ask questions in Parliament (seeing it as willful attack on the government), and demonizing all criticisms emanating from non-Africans as racist;[97] more so its criteria in appointments have also been criticized. It is also becoming increasingly clear that not only was there no minority veto but that the ANC was intent on dominating all of the institutions of state. Like the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan, the Italian Christian Democratic Party after WW2, Mapai in Israel after independence and the Congress Party in India, the ANC may achieve the seemingly paradoxical result of electoral domination in a working democracy.

An article in the Mail and Guardian (one of South Africa's most influential and highly respected weeklies) highlighted on the need for the other parties to be reinforced in order to pose a challenge to the incumbent government. In its editorial "How will Political Science classes... look back on the general elections of 1999"? The answer we would hope will be that 1999 was the election which

[96] Speech by the CPA secretary general at a joint CPA/Commonwealth secretariat workshop on 'The Role of the opposition', London 1998.

[97] See, the DP's document 'The Politics of Intolerance: How the ANC attempts to de-legitimize its opponents'

brought home to South Africans how integral a real opposition is to the concept of democracy. "Real Opposition" it went on to define as the posing of an effective challenge to government in Parliament which, the commentary collaborated as requiring the threat that the government of the day faces the prospects of losing power if it fails to perform"[98].

But as Howard Barrell had proclaimed, "if the first duty of an opposition party is to oppose or at very least, test government policy at every turn, its second is presumably to become the ruling party".[99] However, as Barrel went on to observe, none of the opposing parties appeared to have any chance of replacing the ANC as government in the (then) forthcoming election of 1999 or even the one after that. No party in other words can yet aspire to serving as an "alternative government" in some years or decades to come. As this argument rages on, some optimistic assessments of the ANC's dominance propose that it will likely stabilize the new order and guarantee democracy; but I share the view of Giliomee and Simkins that party dominance is rather more likely to close down opposition and in effect transform democracy into "elective dictatorship".[100] This can be viewed seriously because notwithstanding the fact that the new South African constitution and the present democratic dispensation afforded parties with requisite support to attain representation in Parliament, to pursue the interests of their constituents, if these are not properly harnessed (through the re-enforcement of the other parties), it may still not be meaningful if they do not have the political clout to be potent enough to confront the dominance of the ANC.

On the other hand, as Southall equally pointed out and which was a corroboration of Lodge's view, the electoral system which is based on the party list system of proportional representation, has produced a party system within which the opposition is highly fragmented; the physical layout of the Parliament itself has been restructured to get away from Westminster-style confrontationalism and the constitution formerly eschews adversarialism in favour of the practice of "co-operative and consensual" governance, which at another level is expressed by the opposition party serving in government. No wonder that the idea of opposition in contemporary South Africa is somewhat confusing. Is it a "loyal" opposition with its Westminster-style connotations, or "constitutional"

[98] Mail and Guardian, 28th May- 3rd June, 1999.
[99] Barrell Howard, 'The Race for the Real Second Place' mail and Guardian 28 Feb- 4 March 1999.
[100] Giliomee Herman and Simkins Charles (eds.), *The Awkward Embrace: One-party Domination and Democracy*, Tafelberg, Cape Town, 1999. P347.

opposition, which as articulated by Giovanni Sartori envisions opposition opposing a government; not the political system as such.[101] After all, in 1994-1999, the Government of National Unity (GNU) witnessed a spate of resignations from the other opposition party members of cabinet when they discovered that the idea of "loyal" opposition was not in their best interests; even the IFP did same in 2004. This can give justification to the robust oppositional stance of the DA which in my view should be the best for South Africa in order to contain the excesses of the ruling ANC.

The initial concerns that a robust opposition will not be appropriate for the country have now been replaced by fears that the ANC with its huge electoral majorities would be too strong. In support of this, Rupert Taylor and Thabisi Hoeane, observed that in the 1999 elections, the DP constantly urged voters to 'fight back' against the ANC's hunger to appropriate more and more power, likewise an article on the NNP web page also warned that by 'handing absolute power to the ANC, one will see a continuation and escalation of the anti-democratic and corrupt political behaviour that has spiraled under ANC rule – with the ANC seeing itself as being accountable only to itself"[102]. It was therefore maintained, according to Taylor and Hoeana, that what was needed was a strong opposition in order to check this.

The ANC almost meets Pempel's definition of a dominant party because it is dominant numerically in Parliament, it has a dominant bargaining position, it has been in control for some years (although not as many as in the classically dominant parties) and it controls the public policy agenda[103]. Similarly, if one considers Sartori's definition of a dominant party as one that has won three consecutive absolute majorities, so the ANC could be considered in this category after its landslide victories in the 2004 national elections. And again, Duvergers definition of a dominant party, which depends less on electoral results than the domination of an era's symbols, also seems to fit the ANC: "A party is dominant when it is identified with an epoch; when its doctrines ideas, methods, its style so to speak coincide with those of the epoch"; the dominance of the ANC has created real fears for the future of South Africa's democracy.

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[101] Southall Roger, 'Opposition in South Africa: Issues and Problems' in Southall Roger (ed) *Opposition and Democracy in South Africa*, Frank Cass Publishers, London, 2001. P1

[102] Rupert Taylor and Thabisi Hoeane, 'Interpreting the South African election of June 1999', Politikon, (1999), 26 (2), 133-144

[103] Theodore K. Rabb and Ezra N. Suleiman (eds) *The Making and Unmaking of Democracy: Lessons from history and world politics*, Routledge, U.K, 2002. P.214

Herman Giliomee, in his presidential address to the South African Institute of Race Relations also warned that South Africa's current political arrangements could lead to a return of authoritarianism: "while there is a formal observance of democratic rules, liberal values are constantly eroded, something which is exacerbated by the distinction between ruling party and state being obliterated". South African white liberals are hardly alone in worrying about the effects of electoral dominance. Writing in Foreign Affairs, Leonard Thompson made this extraordinary argument: "since no opposition party received as much as 11% of the vote in the 1999 elections, South Africa is a de facto one-party state".[104] As this is a source of concern to many, so also it's a source of worry to Prof. Eghosa E. Osaghae of the Department of Political Studies, University of Transkei, who sounded a note of warning (may be with the Nigerian experience) that "in a situation where opposition parties remain in opposition with little or no real chance of ever controlling state power is most likely to encourage a recourse to extra-parliamentary forms of opposition which may include separatist tendencies".[105] In the light of a call (some years back) by the IFP for a confederal relationship between the KwaZuluNatal and other provinces in South Africa, I think this view by Osaghae should be taken seriously.

In his skepticism on the issue of ANC dominance and the inadvertent weakness of the opposition, Prof. David Welsh contended that "the effectiveness of government has a reciprocal relationship with the vigilance of opposition is a truism which bears repeating as South Africa contemplates the distinct possibility of single-party hegemony"[106]. According to him, "a credible notion of democracy requires three structural or procedural elements: universal adult suffrage in regular, free elections; the effective protection of rights, most notably the right to freedom of expression and association; and the independence of the judiciary. These elements, however, presuppose at least some degree of

[104] Ibid P.215
[105] Osaghae E. Eghosa, 'The International Experience of Opposition Politics: Lessons for South Africa? The Nigerian experience' in Hennie Kotze (ed), *Parliamentary Dynamics: Understanding political life in the South African Parliament*, Centre for International and Comparative Politics, South Africa, 1996. P. 34.
[106] David Welsh, 'Opposition or Coalition? Implications for the consolidation of democracy in South Africa' in Hennie Kotze (ed), *Parliamentary Dynamics: Understanding political life in the South African Parliament*, Centre for International and Comparative Politics, South Africa, 1996. P.91.

fluidity in the electorate's political preferences so that the reasonable possibility exists of an alternation of governing parties or that the composition of governing coalitions will shift"[107].

However, not all theorists are so pessimistic about the democratic prospects of South Africa. Tom Lodge, for instance, does no more than repeat the historical record when he notes, "Dominant party systems do not inevitably degenerate into autocracies". And he finds possible benefits: "There may be more positive effects, though of a dominant party system within a new democracy. It may foster party consolidation and other kinds of institutionalization produced by continuity. The endurance in power of one party may depend upon support from other well organized social groupings – labour for example – which may be more susceptible than political parties to democratic accountability". The record of dominant parties, by necessity, is quite good (otherwise, they would not have been re-elected so many times). Both the LDP and CDP led the economic miracles in Japan and Italy respectively. Mapai in Israel set the foundations for both economic growth and liberal democracy. From these successes come several lessons. State officials must first distinguish between party and state interests.

At the same time, the ANC is much more than a political party to its many supporters. As the institution that generations of Africans associated with the struggle against apartheid, it has emotional and social roots with large segments of African society that go well beyond normal political affiliations. This is what Raymond Suttner will call "identity politics"[108], in the sense that the ANC was assumed by the people to have liberated South Africa in the apartheid struggle and as such may not vote against it even in the face of non- performance. In many areas, the ANC's relationship with the population is closer to a church than a "normal" political party that can be jettisoned if it becomes unpopular. The contrast between political dominance and economic weakness explains why the ANC appears to violate one of political science's most interesting precepts: that parties will develop minimum winning coalitions, but no more, to rule.

[107] Ibid.
[108] Suttner Raymond, 'Democratic transition and consolidation in South Africa: The advise of 'the experts', Current Sociology, September 2004, vol.52 (5): 755-773, SAGE Publications, London, Thousand Oaks, C.A and New Delhi.

As Riker argued, when the threat from an opposition is great, pressure to keep a coalition together is high. However, when opposition is negligible, "those who lose in the intramural contests of an oversized winner tend to leave the coalition and the remaining members are on the whole content to see them go".[109]Lodge noted that if a party is a nationalist movement that broadly represents a racial majority in a society which has a history of racial conflict and racial oppression, and if it represents the formerly oppressed group most closely, it might be argued that its supporters will be fairly uncritical or undemanding and that this leaves its leadership scope for plenty of misbehaviour".[110]

Possibilities for Change:

Since the duty of the opposition is to oppose, its very existence adds to the legitimacy of the government and therefore to the stability of he country. How it discharges its functions, especially in an infant democracy such as South Africa is very important. It has been said that while the minority must be allowed to have its say, the majority must always be allowed to have its way.[111] This could be true in a sense, but in terms of fostering confidence and mutual trust, in terms of rallying all those involved in politics to the fundamental institutions and interests of the state, it is not a particularly helpful maxim.

It is of course the right of a democratically elected government to govern, but it is also the duty of that government to do so in a manner that contributes to the consolidation of democracy. Governing parties need to recognize that an effective and responsible opposition is essential for the success of parliamentary democracy. It is not only to oppose, but to offer positive counter proposals and initiatives of their own. It is also to make the majority party aware of the minority views in a critical but constructive way.[112] There is a need to challenge government policies vigorously and to provide another perspective on policy issues even if there is no foreseeable hope that their party will attain power. In presenting itself as a credible and responsible alternative government, the opposition must acknowledge their responsibility not just to reflect, but to lead public opinion.

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[109] Riker C. cited in Theodore K. Rabb and Ezra N. Suleiman (eds) *The Making and Unmaking of Democracy: Lessons from history and world politics*, Routledge, U.K, 2002. P.213

[110] Lodge Tom, *Politics in South Africa: From Mandela to Mbeki*, David Philip, Cape Town, 2002. P154

[111] Speech by the Commonwealth secretary general at the preparatory meeting of the Roundtable of Heads of Government of Commonwealth Africa on Democracy and good governance in Africa, Botswana 1997.

[112]Colin Eglin, remarks at an NDI seminar on 'The Role of the Legislature in consolidating democracy' in Abidjan 1997.

Despite their important role, opposition parties must remember that the voters having elected another party to govern sent them into parliament as a minority. Parties that persist in simply obstructing the processes of government may risk being marginalized, not just by the majority party, but by the electorate in the longer term. An essential requirement for a stable democracy is that voters must be able to believe that their elected representatives will be prepared to put the interests of the country above narrow party concerns. Parliament does not lend itself to quick cures, but it is able through careful and considered debates, to bring about long-lasting ones. For this to be achieved, however, a mature and constructive relationship must exist between government and opposition.

Again there seems to be an almost unanimous view among political analysts across the political divide on this issue. Almost all would argue there is no viable parliamentary opposition in South Africa, although they would differ as to what the implications of that are for the consolidation of democracy. Some of them like Tom Lodge, Roger Southall, Rupert Taylor, Themba Sono, Adam Habib, Herman Giliomee, Charles Simkins, L. Schlemmer, R.W Johnson and others have all expressed their concerns. All that seems to be the subject of debate is the form of that opposition and whether its effect would be the same if it were to be located within an alliance with the ruling party. This assessment is borne out by the results of past elections which categorically indicates that the ANC is way ahead of the pack. The party's support was approximately half of the electorate in 2004. Its nearest rival was the Democratic Alliance (DA) with only 12.37%[113] of support among voters. In any case as Habib would reason, even if the DA, IFP, UDM, I.D and PAC came together, they would not constitute an electoral challenge to the ANC.[114]The ANC's dominance is still absolute.

But a closer investigation into how people feel towards various parties shows that the ANC is not in an unchallengeable position. Available statistics suggest that substantial proportions of the population have multiple party preferences. This effectively means that a large part of the ANC's support base may simultaneously feel close to other parties. And again, the potential bases of support for parties are far larger than actual party votes tend to suggest. This means that a large proportion of opposition

[113] The 2004 South African general elections (http://www.saweb.co.za/elections/default.asp)
[114] Habib Adam, 'Introduction: Public opinion and the prospects for democratic consolidation in South Africa 1999-2001'. P5. (www.hsrcpress.ac.za)

parties' support bases do not turn out to vote; and how to get them to the voting booth should be the concern of these organizations. Should, however, opposition parties succeed in this, then the establishment of a viable parliamentary opposition would not constitute such an impossible task.

Another argument here is that the fulcrum of opposition sentiment lies to the left of the ANC. The South African Communist Party (SACP) on its own has as large a potential base of support (17%) as does the DA (17%)[115]. If you add the SACP's potential support with that of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), AZAPO and the UDM, you would have a potential base of support (53%) that rivals that of the ANC[116]. Yet the entire initiative to construct a viable opposition is occurring to the right of the ANC, initially with the collapsed DP/NNP experiment, and now with the DA/IFP initiative in KZN. On the left, parties are too constrained from exploring innovative solutions by existing strategic alliances and relationships. But the possibility of the opposition's potential base of support translating into an actual one may primarily depend on whether the electorate is satisfied with the state of governance under the ruling party ANC.

This concept of "weak opposition" which is giving growing concern among political scientists have been exacerbated by the constant increase in the electoral support base of the ANC and the diminishing returns of the opposition as shown by the succeeding elections results after 1994. This advertently led to the concern about "one-party dominance" and which has been given prominence in recent works of Giliomee and Simkins (1999), Myburgh and Schlemmer (2001), Habib and Taylor (2001). The argument that they proposed had various elements, but most notably that there is a fundamental tension between dominant-party rule and democracy, for whilst party dominance can pave way to competitive democracy, it can also lead to façade democracy or barely concealed authoritarianism. Butler summarizes the predicament fairly accurately when he states that "South Africa's fundamental political dilemma is that liberation movement domination is a necessary condition for the entrenchment of democratic practices and institutions, but it is also and at the same time a threat to them".[117]

[115] Ibid.P6.
[116] Ibid. P7
[117]Butler Anthony, 'South Africa's Political Futures: The Positive and Negative Implications of One-party Dominance' Paper presented at the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa , 7th August 2002. P.12

But the problem with the opposition is their incoherence and lack of vision. As Vincent Maphai would say inter alia, "for the foreseeable future, there is nothing in the current opposition ranks that poses a serious challenge to the ANC. The threat to a future vibrant democratic system is not, as some may suggest, a strong ANC; to say this is to punish success. After all, it is hardly the job of the ANC to create and nurture opposition to itself. Opposition parties must rather address the problem of lackluster and ineffective opposition".[118] These allegations of a one-party dominance have been refuted by the ANC on primarily political grounds, arguing that the concept of dominance is inherently conservative and that even if it is not deployed in the interests of the Democratic Alliance (DA) directly, it serves as a cover for white interests which have an inherent distrust of black governance, and which are suggesting, at base that the ANC is anti-democratic[119].

In contrast, there are some who do not share the view of Giliomee et al on the issue of the ANC dominance; notwithstanding that their arguments provided veritable analytical platform. Whilst the idea of the ANC having become a dominant party and the continued weakness (in electoral strength) of the opposition has been accepted by many commentators as common sense, they simultaneously propose that the ANC's dominance has been, and is limited by constitutional provisions (such as democracy-promoting bodies in the form of the Human Rights and Gender Commissions), its relative incapacity to impose its authority upon society as a whole, and the ability of its (at times) unruly partners within the Tripartite Alliance to substitute for otherwise ineffective opposition parties by provoking important debates about major issues, such as the economy and HIV/AIDS. But the argument against this proposition is that mere establishment or inclusion of these institutions in the constitution is not enough reason to guarantee abuse. After all, those charged with the handling or running of these agencies are equally core ANC members and as such could be subject to manipulation by the party. The best watchdog to the government can only come from the opposition; and this can only be achieved if the opposition is vibrant and coherent.

After a careful analysis of the election results, voter results, voter participation and voting patterns of 2004, analysts and some opposition leaders such as DA's Tony Leon argued that there is hope for the opposition politics in South Africa. In an interview, Tony Leon pointed out the increase in the

[118] Maphai Vincent, ThisDay 09:04:05.
[119] For example Mbeki 2004; Suttner in ThisDay 26:03:04

number of votes secured by his party the DA (despite the poor performance of other opposition parties) 1,931,201[120] which equated to 12.37% of the total votes and as a result secured 50 seats in the parliament; and as such believed that there is a hopeful future.

Rev. KRJ Meshoe, the leader of the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) believes that the prospects of the opposition in the contemporary South African politics, in view of the division and cracks that are obvious to all in the Tripartite Alliance, are good. He was of the view that opposition parties will benefit from the looming split within the ANC and also that the ACDP are going to benefit from the Christians that have supported the ANC in the past. Saying that their integrity has been compromised particularly because of the corruption allegations that have been leveled against the former Deputy President, Jacob Zuma and the on-going allegations of rape has made it even worse. He contended that many Christians who believe in moral integrity in leadership will not continue supporting a party that has serious allegations of rape against one of its top members. Therefore, he definitely thinks that there is hope for the opposition in future elections, particularly the ACDP and also that the country will not get to the point of "de-facto one party state" because the political unrest, disturbances and rioting has resulted from the community being unhappy regarding service delivery. That indicates that the patience of the electorate with the majority party is waning fast and that can only benefit opposition parties.[121]In agreement with the party leader, the Parliamentary Media Liaison Officer Mr. Sabrina Richmond added that he believes the future of the ACDP in this country is good and because he can confidently say "we have never had an avalanche of people coming to the ACDP like now".[122]

The DA leader Tony Leon, was of the view that strong government which is a pre-requisite to develop South Africa is too frequently or deliberately confused with big government. The DA's concept of governance is of a smaller smarter state that performs a few key functions very well, rather than doing too many things badly. He said that a smarter government and a really strong and self-confident state, would change, downsize, outsource and privatize much of the state sector so that it would deliver a proper service to the country. He described the so called constitutional provisional

[120] IEC website: www.elections.org.za
[121] Interview with Rev. KRJ Meshoe, MP; Leader of ACDP.
[122] Interview with Mr. Sabina Richmond, the Parliamentary Media Liaison Officer for ACDP

watchdogs as not being effective when he said 'if eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, then it may be said that some of our watchdogs are more like toothless lapdogs'.[123]He is very sure that the drift towards one-partyism has to be arrested decisively because the ordinary people would want their hopes of an alternative force to be realized; and this can only be achieved through the Democratic Alliance especially coupled with glaring failures of the present government in key areas. This according to him has led to the increase in the DA followership nation-wide which could be seen from the increase in DA's received votes since 1999 – 2004.

Mr. Mpho Shule, AZAPO spokesperson, posited that there is very good chances for the opposition in the South African future elections. He gave the present ruling party low marks in the areas of service delivery and other "dividends" of democracy as he put it. And because the interview co-incided with the period of campaign for the Provincial elections, he called for the abolition of Provincial Governments, saying that it is a waste of resources and there is lack of managerial skill and no expertise. He maintained that it is a myth to think that government has no money; rather it is the corruption which has affected service delivery and that if the money and resources available could be handled properly, there will be significant improvement in the service delivery. He contended that Provincial governments are no longer necessary because according to him, the local governments are the ones closer to the people (grassroot).[124]All these shortcomings of the present government will lead to its change, he said.

Unfortunately, several attempts to reach the leader of the Independent Democrats, Patricia De Lille, failed, so it was her P.A Monique Scharffenorth who replied my e-mails. She was emphatic that the party (ID) will continue to grow from strength to strength. By her estimation, the in-roads made by the party in the last election (2004) are enough testimonies and warning signals that they have come to stay. Considering that the party is relatively young and already occupying positions in the national and provincial legislatures to her means that they are a force to reckon with and have bright futures as well.[125]

[123] Interview with Tony Leon (DA Leader).
[124] Interview with Mpho Shule, Spokesperson for AZAPO.
[125] Interview with Monique Scharffenorth, PA to Leader of the ID (Patricia De Lille.)

Notwithstanding all these positive comments and high hopes by members of the opposition parties, it was expected that the level of voter participation would decline in 2004, from the impressive heights achieved in 1994 (when 19,533,498 people voted) and 1999 (when 15,892,367 voted)[126]. The reasons suggested as to why participation would be lowered revolved around notions that voter apathy or alienation would be increased by amongst others, constraints or limitations imposed upon popular political participation by formal governmental institutions and / or the behaviour of politicians since 1994 (Hicks 2004[127]; Southall 2004)[128], dissatisfaction with the level of delivery by the government (Landsberg and Mackay 2004)[129], a sense amongst opposition voters (in particular) that their votes would have little impact or efficacy (Roefs 2004)[130] and importantly, the rapid de-politicisation of post-apartheid youth and the loss of impetus of "struggle politics" (Daniel 2004)[131] . Not surprisingly, the 2004 turnout was lower, (15,863,554; total votes cast)[132], which was correctly anticipated that the low turnout would increase the ANC's advantage relative to the parties of opposition. The 1999 poll saw 16,228,462 (total votes cast) of South Africans voting. Since then, the voters roll grew from 18.2 million to 20.7 million. Despite this increase, fewer people voted in 2004; nationally 77% of registered voters were polled in 2004, compared with 89.3% in 1999.[133]

Although voter turnout was down in the last election, it was argued by some that this was merely a reflection of growing democratic "normalcy" and that in any case, the proportion of active voters continued to compare extremely well with considerably lower electoral participation rates in countries like the U.S.A and Britain. Again whilst it was only natural for the ANC to celebrate their "outstanding victory",[134] a more detailed analysis of participation rates suggests caution because of the following reasons; first, only 57% (i.e 15,863,554) of all estimated eligible voters (27,438,897) cast ballots. Second, 6.76 million eligible voters had inadvertently or deliberately remained

[126] IEC website: www.elections.org.za
[127] Hicks J.; 'Public participation beyond the election', Election synopsis 1 (1): 8-12, 2004
[128] Southall R., 'Containing accountability', Election Synopsis 1 (1): 6-8 (2004).
[129] Landsberg C & Mackay S, 'South Africa's decade of democracy, inequality and impoverishment', Election Synopsis 1 (1): 3-5 (2004).
[130] Roefs M, 'One-party dominance, racial cleavages and decreasing voter turnout', Election Synopsis 1 (1): 17-19 (2004).
[131] Daniel J., 'The South African elections of 1994, 1999 and 2004: The (non)issues then and now', Election Synopsis 1 (1): 12-14 (2004).

[132] The 2004 South African general elections (http://www.saweb.co.za/elections/default.asp)
[133] Sachs Michael, 'Voting Patterns in the 1999 and 2004 elections compared' in Election Synopsis.
[134] ANC Today, 30.04-06.05.04

unregistered. Third, 5.06 million registered voters stayed away from the polls, or were for one reason or another prevented from voting. Fourth, consequently, the newly 70% ANC popular majority translates into a 40% minority of the entire eligible population[135].

Presently, it may not be appropriate to give reasons why over 40% of the eligible population failed to participate in the election; although survey findings such as those of Afrobarometer indicate massive distrust of politicians[136]. However, what this level of non-involvement of the eligible voting population in the electoral process may suggest is a degree of political alienation which questions conventional analysis that democracy has taken firm root in South Africa. Dale Mckinley has argued that "the lack of participation confirms the huge potential that exists for South Africa's social movements, alongside the rank and file of the organized working class, to fill the potential vacuum and build a viable and radical people's power alternative to the ANC".[137]

Such analysis will draw sustenance from indications of growing support for the formation of a party to the left of the ANC. For instance, a survey carried out by A.C Nielsen found that one-third of all urban adults backed the idea of a Workers Party being formed by the trade union movement.[138] Although this may call for caution here because whilst analysis of continuing ANC dominance of the political arena needs to be informed by awareness of decreasing levels of commitment to the party amongst its historical constituency, and whilst there are clear limitations upon the extent to which existing opposition parties are able to generate support, it remains a sour point whether social movement activism can be translated into a sustained organization which can challenge the ANC politically.

The rifts in the Tripartite Alliance can be used to the advantage of the opposition in this regard. The ANC had been criticized for its abandonment of the promises of liberation and in adopting market-driven policies, it had become the vehicle for a self-serving elite and the alliance a machine for

[135] Southall Roger & Daniel John, 'The state of parties post-election 2004: ANC dominance and opposition enfeeblement'. P40. (www.hsrcpress.ac.za)
[136] Afrobarometer report in Mail & Guardian 13-19 Dec. 2002.
[137] Mail and Guardian 14-20.05.04.
[138] Business Day 1.03.04

political management and patronage[139]. Further critics argued that its dominance had been transformed into political arrogance[140] and that it was ignoring - and indeed, suppressing – criticism from new social movement organizations such as Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) and local "crisis groups"[141]. All these can be seen as potentially productive of a new opposition initiative to the ANC's left; which could be more vibrant than those currently existed.

If one should consider Idasa's public opinion service report which indicated a reasonable percentage of "learners" and "independents" in the electorate[142]; which together with the drop in voting intentions for the ANC between 1994 and 1999 (the period of the survey) creates the potential for significant electoral shifts in the future. The data indicate that there is a great potential for opposition parties to win over significant sections of the electorate; but unfortunately this possibility has not been capitalized by the opposition because the electorate's partisan identification is rigidly defined in racial terms and more so, due to the perception by the electorate that the current opposition parties do not represent their interests.

The major opposition parties, due to their historical legacies and current positioning are still seen as articulating the interests of particular racial and ethnic groups; instead of these parties weaving programmes that will attract the support of diverse communities,[143] they target only narrow sections of the electorate. The IFP for instance, has projected itself as the defender and representative of the Zulu people and by so doing, reducing its appeal for non-Zulu independents. The defunct NNP and DA, historically seen as serving the interests of Afrikaner and English Whites respectively, developed electoral strategies that targeted White, Coloured and Indian sections of the electorate; thereby failing to diversify and widen their appeal; which again denies them the opportunity to appeal to African voters who constitute, by far, the largest segment of the independent voter category and so making parliamentary opposition to remain unviable.

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[139] Sunday Times 11:04:04
[140] Financial Mail 9:04:04
[141] Sunday Independent 16:05:04.
[142] Habib Adam & Taylor Rupert, 'Political Alliances and Parliamentary Opposition in post-Apartheid South Africa' in Southall Roger (ed) *Opposition and Democracy in South Africa*, Frank Cass Publishers, London, 2001. P215.
[143] Habib Adam & Taylor Rupert, 'Political Alliances and Parliamentary Opposition in post-Apartheid South Africa' in Southall Roger (ed) *Opposition and Democracy in South Africa*, Frank Cass Publishers, London, 2001. P215.

In order to change this scenario and have the prospects of being seen as a capable alternative to the present day government, the opposition parties according to Taylor and Habib would have to offer a set of socio-economic policies that would attract the support of the lower middle class, working class, poor and unemployed of all racial groups.[144] It would require offering a substantive policy choice to the electorate on macro-economic policy; at least something different from the former Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) and the present GEAR programmes of the ANC; which is widely claimed to have met limited success. This will be an incentive for the growing section of the electorate that feels unrepresented to vote for the opposition party.

In concluding this chapter, it can be rightly observed that while the ANC can be seen to be in a very strong and enviable strategic position, it was not unassailable and can still be vulnerable in key areas to a skilful attack by opposition parties. The projection by some experts like David Welsh is that it would be unwise to assume that the ANC will survive intact into, say, the second decade of the next century. The conventional argument is that the ANC being a "broad church" is a coalition of relatively disparate forces unified around common opposition to segregation and apartheid. Remove that binding force and the ANC will split into different ideological or class segments, thus losing its hegemonic position. Moreover, as the ANC wrestles with the intractable problems of economic growth and inequality, inevitably its alliance with the "labour aristocracy" in the form of COSATU will come under strain and eventually breakdown. So too may its alliance with the SACP, many of whose MP's have trade union backgrounds and retain working class sympathies.[145]Taylor shares this view as he also believes that the present developments in the Tripartite Alliance are an indication that some challenges are equally emerging; because no matter how remote, chances are still there for a break-up in the future[146].

However, in the present circumstances, the ANC's continuous dominance in the final election returns can be attributed to its own average performance in government and a less than skillful opposition that failed to present dissatisfied voters with a credible alternative. Therefore, even if voters saw

[144] Ibid
[145] David Welsh, Opposition or Coalition? 'Implications for the consolidation of democracy in South Africa' in Hennie Kotze (ed), *Parliamentary Dynamics: Understanding political life in the South African Parliament*, Centre for International and Comparative Politics, South Africa, 1996. P.94
[146] Discussion with Professor Rupert Taylor.

things going in the wrong direction and even if they blamed the government for this, people who voted for the ANC would still have needed to see a legitimate, credible alternative in order to shift their votes. Thus, while a large part of the way people decide to vote is based on how they feel government is doing, an equally key component consists of whether they think any other party offers a better alternative. Even on those key issues where dissatisfaction with ANC performance was widespread, few voters saw any other party as a real alternative. But a viable political alternative comes not just from political parties taking different policy positions, but from convincing voters that they can trust them to handle new issues, to govern well generally and to govern in their interests. Given the low amount of factual information that most voters possess about policy positions or party records, voters often are left to infer information about candidates and parties (what Samuel Popkins call) "low information reasoning").[147] Most importantly, voters try to figure out whether a party is credible and likely to govern well.

In lieu of other information, they often do this by simply looking at things such as the demographic characteristics of candidates and party leadership, whether respected community leaders might support the party, what knowledgeable friends and neighbours are saying about that party, where and how a party and its leaders campaign and the track records of parties and candidates. In other words, without any other information, voters look to things like skin colour, language, accent and whether a candidate appears to know and understand their culture and what their problems are.

Thus, the surveys which examined voter perceptions of all the major political parties across a wide range of criteria like: Asking people whether they thought each party represented all South Africans or one specific group? Could they believe what a party said? Did they like what each party had done, as a party over the previous four years? Did they feel each party could do a good job running the government, if it were elected? Etc. The resulting picture across all these criteria was resoundingly the same. On virtually every criterion, positive perceptions of the ANC ran far ahead of any other opposition party. More importantly, perceptions of almost all opposition parties were fairly, or evenly

[147]Robert Mattes, Helen Taylor and Cherrel Africa, 'Public opinion and voter preferences 1994-1999' in Reynolds Andrew (ed), *Election '99 South Africa: From Mandela to Mbeki*, Cape Town, David Philip, 1999. Pg.51

exceptionally, negative[148]; which clearly indicates the continued dominance of the ANC and the general weakness of the opposition.

But on the aggregate, trends strongly suggest that analysts and politicians alike need to rethink many of their simplistic understandings of South African voters. They are not really as blindly loyal or as unresponsive to political reality as is widely assumed. This is true as well of black voters, who have been traditionally portrayed by political analysts as solidly even blindly committed to "their" political parties and lacking the ability or willingness to distinguish between positive and negative areas of performance.

One can see in these attitudes, potentials for electoral change. The electoral strength of the ANC was not fore-ordained by the racial or ethnic composition of the electorate. There is a significant bloc of "floating voters", who while not large enough to threaten the ANC's majority at present, could seriously improve the strategic position of the opposition. In recognition of this fact, Habib and Taylor noted inter alia "opposition would only be viable if it is able to weave a policy programme capable of attracting the support of a diverse set of constituencies, and in particular the growing community of independent African voters"[149]. Many of these will also include White, Coloured and Indian voters who were dissatisfied with the performance of the NNP to date. But a significant portion consisted of black voters who were dissatisfied with the performance of the ANC, yet were still relatively upbeat about the new dispensation and did not see any credible alternative among the opposition.

Given that opinion polls have shown that many South Africans are open to alternatives should they present themselves, the future of elections and political parties suggest that the ANC does not occupy a permanently unassailable position and must govern effectively in order to maintain its present dominance or margin of superiority. The ANC has and most certainly will continue to have many areas of weakness and vulnerability in terms of voter evaluations, areas that could potentially be exploited by well articulate opposition parties. It is far from hegemonic in terms of public opinion. In

[148] Ibid. Pg. 53-54.

[149] Habib Adam and Rupert Taylor, 'Political Alliances and Parliamentary Opposition in Post-Apartheid South Africa' in Roger Southall, *Opposition and Democracy in South Africa*, Frank Cass publishers, London, 2001. P216.

this, one can see significantly potential for electoral change; but for now, few people see any real alternative offered by any opposition party – certainly far too few in the ranks of those who supported the ANC since1994. But as the DA leader Tony Leon would say, "A vote for the opposition will be a hopeful sign that South African politics is maturing and moving beyond race, patronage and post-liberation nostalgia as the major themes of our democratic discourse".[150]He explains that opposition parties (especially the DA) have proved in both the provinces that they controlled and the places where they provided the strongest opposition, that political competition produces more competent government and more efficient service delivery.

But in the minds of voters, it seems that it is the opposition more than the government that is not delivering on its part of the bargain. The real long-term threat to competitive multi-party democracy now seems to be (in the mind of the electorate) the lack of credible legitimate opposition, rather than ANC one-party dominance. What is needed is responsible opposition guided by a commitment to overriding national interests rather than narrow and selfish party or racial interests. Because according to Habib and Taylor, "the existing opposing parties by locating themselves in minority racial groups and by not offering substantive policy choice in terms of macro-economic policy, undermine their own viability. The fluidity and shifts in electoral support that were registered in the Opinion and electoral polls in 1999 will not fundamentally alter the situation".[151] If this trend is left unchecked, over time, dissatisfied voters with no place to turn to may become apathetic, apolitical and may not care about the survival of democracy; and as such may also become increasingly more discontented. This may lead to a deteriorating situation unless a political force develops that is capable of serving as an electoral pole that can attract disenchanted citizens and thereby establish a competitive democratic order.

[150] Tony Leon, 'The possible split is no cause for grave concern and should be welcomed', Mail and Guardian September 9 – 15, 2005. P2

[151] Habib Adam and Rupert Taylor, Political Alliances and Parliamentary Opposition in Post-Apartheid South Africa in Roger Southall, Opposition and Democracy in South Africa, Frank Cass publishers, London, 2001. P216.