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## Politics in a Stabilizing Democracy: South Africa's 2004 Elections

*Strategic Insights*, Volume III, Issue 5 (May 2004)

by [Jessica Piombo](#) [1]

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April 1994 was a time of liberation and desperation in Africa. While Rwanda degenerated into genocidal slaughter, millions of South Africans celebrated freedom as they elected a democratic government to end apartheid. Ten years later, as the world quietly memorialized the ten year anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, South Africans launched a month-long celebration to commemorate ten years of democracy. The highlight of the celebration was the staging of the country's third democratic national and provincial elections on 14 April, followed by the inauguration of the president on 27 April, Freedom Day, in a 90-million Rand fete at the Union buildings in Pretoria.[2] Once again, the continent witnessed two extremes in the month of April: reflection and contemplation in Rwanda, contrasted against exuberant celebration in South Africa.

The outcome of these elections was never in doubt: all knew that the ruling African National Congress (ANC) would retain its position and remain the head of government. The questions on the minds of South Africans were how great would be the ANC's margin of victory and whether the opposition parties would fragment or coalesce around a few, allied parties. By the evening of 15 April, the answer to these questions became apparent: the ANC was heading to win over two-thirds of the votes cast, while the opposition remained as fragmented as it had become in the 1999 elections. In the end, the ANC won 279 out of 400 seats in the lower house of Parliament (the National Assembly - NA), and the power to form the government in all nine provincial governments. The opposition did not band together behind a few large parties and returned to parliament with thirteen parties sharing just 121 seats. The former ruling party, the National Party (now the New National Party, or NNP), experienced a devastating defeat as it saw its national support decline to less than two percent, winning seats in only two of the provincial legislatures.

What were the major events in the electoral process, how did various parties fare, and what do the results of these elections mean for the future of South Africa? How should we interpret the increasingly dominant position of the ANC, and the escalating fragmentation of the opposition? What comes next? As South Africa enters its second decade of democracy, this article represents a preliminary assessment of the 2004 electoral results, tracing major trends since 1994.

### Administering Elections

The 1994 elections exhibited a duality common to political transitions: the period was filled with the spirit of hope and renewal, but within a climate of insecurity and political intimidation. Politically-related violence spiked the year before the elections, with a large number of political assassinations, internecine violence between supporters of rival political parties, and fears that

the White Right or Inkatha would destabilize the electoral process. Violence monitors estimated that before the April polls, hundreds of people died each month in politically-related violence, with the highest number of incidents occurring in KwaZulu and Natal (areas now combined in the KwaZulu-Natal province, KZN), between members of the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). In other instances, monitors were worried that members of the White Right would stage a violent incident capable of derailing the electoral process. In the end, the elections took place without major incident, but the process was on a knife's edge.

In 1999 there were still incidents of violence and intimidation, but on a much smaller scale. KZN remained a hotspot, but whereas in the six months preceding the 1994 poll, over 300 people died each month, in 1999, in the entire five months before the elections, just under 300 people were killed.<sup>[3]</sup> Other hotspots included areas where a new party, the United Democratic Movement (UDM), was strong and posed a challenge to the ruling ANC, such as in the Cape Flats outside of Cape Town, the Richmond area of KZN, and certain townships outside of Johannesburg. The White Right, which had threatened to derail the poll in 1994, remained passive. The relative calm was a sign that as the transition progressed, politics were beginning to normalize.

By April 2004, the electoral process had become so routine that many hailed the campaign and election day as boring, and reporters, notorious for their penchant to search for controversial stories, had little to cover. There was no large-scale political intimidation, the number of politically-related deaths was minimal, and there were very few "hotspots" of conflict between rival parties. The list of potential trouble areas identified by the Independent Electoral Committee included, for the most part, informal settlements (i.e., shack areas) where fires had destroyed people's identity documents, potentially preventing them from voting. The IEC worried that these people would try to vote anyway and could get violent when denied.<sup>[4]</sup> There were reports of intimidation in KZN and a few areas but the campaign and election day were overwhelmingly peaceful. The process was perceived to be on track to such an extent that the European Union, United Nations, Commonwealth and Carter Center all declined to send observer and monitor delegations to observe the 2004 polls.

In fact, by 2004 politics had become so routine that political leaders and analysts worried not about voter intimidation but about voter apathy. In 1994 all South Africans over the age of 18 could vote, but the 1996 constitution required that all subsequent elections be run with a voters' roll. Unlike many European countries, in South Africa the responsibility of registering to vote lies with the individual, who must first possess a specific form of identification (an official, bar-coded identity book) and then apply to be included on the voters' roll by registering at a local office of the Department of Home Affairs. While South Africans could register to vote at any Home Affairs office at any time up until the election was called, most people either did not know about or were unable to take advantage of this opportunity. Therefore, as it had done in 1999, the IEC held special "registration weekends," during which local voting stations opened for the purpose of registering eligible voters and allowing those already registered to check the existing voters' roll to make sure that they were listed. Originally the IEC planned to hold only one registration weekend for the 2004 elections but during the initial weekend in September 2003, so few potential voters registered that the IEC resorted to holding two more weekends: one in November and one in January 2004.<sup>[5]</sup> After all three weekends, 75% of the eligible voters (i.e., those over the age of 18, with figures drawn from the 2001 census) had registered to vote, a five percent decline since 1999.

**Table 1: Registration and Voting Statistics <sup>[6]</sup>**

	Voting Age Population (VAP)	Registered Voters	% VAP Registered	Turnout - Registered	Turnout - VAP
1994	22,709,152	N/A	N/A	N/A	86.0%
1999	22,589,369	18,172,751	80.4%	89.3%	71.8%
2004	27,436,819	20,674,926	75.4%	76.7%	57.8%

As demonstrated in the above table, both registration and turnout have been steadily decreasing over the past three elections. Participation in the national elections has decreased by 30% between 1994 and 2004 (evaluated as a percentage of voting age population, VAP). The figures are not so low as to jeopardize the quality of South African democracy, yet, but they do show a drop off in participation. South Africa is beginning to exhibit rates of participation parallel to other institutionalized democracies.<sup>[7]</sup>

The decline in registered voters between 1999 and 2004 reflects a variety of factors, including confusion about the registration process, inability to get to a registration point, lack of the proper identity document, and simple disinterest.<sup>[8]</sup> Analyzing the factors underlying this decrease has become a heated debate among South African analysts, assuming political overtones. On the one hand, supporters of the ANC claim that "apathy" is not a problem and represents the normalization of the democratic process. On the other hand, critics of the ANC's predominant position argue that the decline in registration and turnout are symptoms of a system in which people do not think that their vote will make a difference, and therefore are less inclined to bother to register and to vote. Thus whether apathy is simply part of the normalization process, or whether it is a symptom of declining democracy, underlies the debate among South Africans.

In most instances, one cannot claim that the decline in turnout in 2004 was due to political intimidation or a poorly organized electoral event. On the morning of 14 April, most voting stations opened on time, and most closed on schedule. Stations at which there were still lines at closing time allowed all people in the queue to cast ballots, as the presiding officer at each polling place could make the decision to extend voting hours to midnight, rather than closing at the official time of nine pm. The voting process proceeded smoothly, with few of the impediments that had been experienced in previous elections (these included lack of ballot papers, long lines, inadequately trained staff, wrong sections of the voters rolls).<sup>[9]</sup> Unlike 1994 and 1999, there were relatively few incidents of overcrowded polling stations at which people had to wait the entire day to vote. Overall, the process was judged free and fair, with only a few objections about irregularities and intimidation lodged with the IEC.

The biggest problem encountered on election day pertained to difficulties projecting how many voters were likely to turn up at each station, because South Africans were allowed to cast ballots at any station in the country, provided that they had their bar-coded identity documents with proof that they had registered to vote.<sup>[10]</sup> This provision created a significant organizational difficulty: since the elections were held right after the Easter holiday weekend, many South Africans took advantage of the public holiday on the election day to extend their vacations and vote outside their home stations. This made planning for bottlenecks difficult.<sup>[11]</sup> To help counteract long wait times, several parties organized transportation to move people from crowded to less busy voting stations, as had happened in 1994. Nevertheless, the cumulative effect of enabling voters to cast ballots at any station, while increasing the ability of people to participate in the electoral process, made it difficult for the IEC to anticipate how many voters would arrive at specific stations. Finally, complicating the matter further, reports came in that election officials in many stations were at times unclear on how to process voters who were trying to cast ballots outside their stations, and occasionally turned people away from stations at which they were not registered.

This administrative difficulty, however, was the only major obstacle on election day. Ten years into a democratic South Africa, this represents a remarkable achievement. Similarly, the fact that the major worries of political leaders and analysts was about potential apathy, rather than electoral violence, signifies the politics are becoming increasingly routine, a sign of the institutionalization of democracy in South Africa. Whether this desensitization to politics holds positive or negative implications for the quality of democracy in South Africa is a topic that will be discussed at the end of the paper. Here, what is important is that, given the high rates of electoral fraud and voter intimidation elsewhere in Africa, the often tense situation surrounding elections, and South Africa's particular history with political violence and intimidation, it is significant and positive that we can discuss the electoral process in terms of "normal" politics should not be underestimated. The longer-term effects of such a decline in participation have yet to be seen.

#### **Electoral Outcomes, 1994-2004**

While the normalization of the electoral process in South Africa can be attributed to the institutionalization of democratic politics, a large part of the reason also lies in the dominance of the ruling party. In a context where the ANC and everyone else knows that the party will win at least a majority, if not a super-majority (two-thirds of the vote) of the national ballot, the ruling party has little need to intimidate supporters of other parties or meddle with ballot boxes. In fact, that the few remaining incidents of electoral violence and intimidation tend to occur with highest frequency in the provinces over which the ANC does not hold a majority of the vote, the Western Cape and KZN, and in the Eastern Cape, where the UDM challenges the ANC's hold in certain rural areas. Thus, the ANC's security in its dominant position can be interpreted as one of the factors underlying the increasing peacefulness of the electoral process.

The electoral dominance of the ANC has been increasing steadily since 1994 (Table 1). The 2004 elections will be remembered most for the fact that the ANC secured its "Parliament of Hope," winning over two-thirds of the seats in the NA and control over all provincial legislatures.<sup>[12]</sup> The ANC increased its share of the national vote from 63% in 1994 to 67% in 2004, while winning a plurality of the votes in all nine provinces, and a majority of the ballots in seven (the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal were the exceptions). The ANC has formed the government in all the provincial legislatures and announced the premiers within the week of the elections.

In contrast to the ANC's consolidating hold on the electorate, the opposition share of the vote has declined since 1994. Yet, whether or not the opposition is becoming more fragmented depends on the timeframe that one considered. The largest increase in the number of represented opposition parties occurred between 1994 and 1999, and there has been a slight concentration of the opposition vote behind the largest opposition party between 1999 and 2004 (though in a smaller number of votes overall). Since 1994, the number of opposition parties represented in the NA has doubled. Many opposition parties that previously earned seats in most provincial legislatures now win seats in just a few (Table 3) and the ANC's share of the seats in several provincial legislatures has increased.

As a bloc, the opposition has been unable to maintain its share of the vote, so that the largest opposition party in Parliament in 2004 (DA, with 50 seats) has over one-third fewer seats than the largest opposition party held in 1994 (the NP, which held 82 seats). The share of the vote held by opposition parties, 30.3%, is now distributed among 20 parties contesting the election, and 13 of these gained entrance into parliament, up from just 6 opposition parties in 1994 (and 12 in 1999). At the same time, however, the largest opposition party in Parliament has gotten larger, in terms of absolute number of votes, seats, and share of the poll, since 1999 (although still much smaller than the equivalent party in 1994). The "leader of the opposition" following the 2004 poll, the DA, holds 12.3% of the vote (50 seats), while in 1999 the largest opposition party (the Democratic Party, the predecessor of the DA), held less than 10% of the vote, and just 38 seats.

Other trends among the opposition saw the NNP decimated: its share of the national poll reduced to just 1.7%, down from 6.9% in 1999 and 20.6% in 1994. The party that dominated electoral contests for fifty years is now represented in only two provincial legislatures. The UDM increased its position to fourth in the NA, despite losing more than half of its members of parliament during a period of floor crossing in late 2003, which weakened the party's ability to wage an election campaign. The Independent Democrats, in existence for less than a year, broke into the national political arena with a larger vote share than the NNP.

**Table 2: National Results, 1994-2004 [13]**

	Votes			Percentage			Seats		
	1994	1999	2004	1994	1999	2004	1994	1999	2004
ANC	12,237,655	10,601,330	10,878,251	63.12%	66.35%	69.69%	252	266	279
DA	338,426	1,527,337	1,931,201	1.75%	9.56%	12.34%	7	38	50
IFP	2,058,294	1,371,477	1,088,664	10.62%	8.58%	6.98%	43	34	28
NNP	3,983,690	1,098,215	257,824	20.55%	6.87%	1.65%	82	28	7
UDM	--	546,790	355,717	--	3.42%	2.28%	--	14	9
ID	--	--	269,765	--	--	1.73%	--	--	7
ACDP	88,104	228,975	250,272	0.45%	1.43%	1.60%	2	6	6
PAC	243,478	113,125	113,512	1.26%	0.71%	0.73%	5	3	3
UCDP	--	125,280	117,792	--	0.78%	0.76%	0	3	3
FF+	424,555	127,217	139,465	2.19%	0.80%	0.90%	9	3	4
FA	--	86,704	--	--	0.54%	--	--	2	--
AEB	--	46,292	--	--	0.29%	--	--	1	--
AZAPO	--	27,257	41,776	--	0.17%	0.27%	--	1	2
MF	13,433	48,277	55,267	0.07%	0.30%	0.35%	0	1	2
Other	145,683	28,866	112,861	0.0%	0.2%	0.75%	0	0	0
Valid Votes	19,533,498	15,977,142	15,612,667	100%	100%	100%	400	400	400

**Table 3: Provincial Seats Won, 2004**

	Eastern Cape	Free State	Gauteng	KwaZulu-Natal	Mpumalanga	Northern Cape	Limpopo	North West	Western Cape
ACDP	--	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	2
ANC	51	25	51	38	27	21	45	27	19
DA	5	3	15	7	2	3	2	23	12
FF+	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
ID	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	3
IFP	0	0	2	30	0	0	0	0	0
MF	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	--	--
NNP	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	5
PAC	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
UCDP	--	--	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
UDM	6	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1

### Interpreting Electoral Trends

There are many ways to interpret these electoral trends. The first point that should be mentioned is that the ANC's increased share of the vote must be considered against declining registration and turnout. These declines have occurred in a context of an increasing population, raising the absolute numbers of both eligible and registered voters (this increase is especially important since the 2004 figures are based on the 2001 census, which more accurately captured African and township dwellers than had the 1996 census, on which the 1999 registration figures were based). There were five million new voters (VAP) and over two million more registered to vote in 2004 than in 1999, yet the ANC only increased its absolute number of votes by 276,921 ballots. What this means is that the party won a larger share of the poll, but this should be interpreted as a decrease in "real" terms: if turnout had increased proportionate with the increase in population, the overall number of ballots cast would have been much larger. Therefore, the ANC's 70% could very well be an artifact of turnout.

Second, interpreting the results immediately raises the question of how we should understand the electoral dominance and centralization of power within the ANC. The debate on the ANC as a dominant party overlooks one very important aspect of the phenomenon: becoming a dominant party was not an automatic process, and retaining that position has required effort. The ANC has worked very hard to retain its position as the leading party in South Africa and to prevent the organization from following in the footsteps of the many liberation movements throughout Africa that fractured soon after independence in the 1960s and 1970s. The mid-1990s were an arduous time for the ANC as the liberation movement reworked itself into a functioning political party and began the transformation of South African government and society. The party, which had been forced by the demands of the struggle to operate in exile since 1960, had a tradition of top-down, hierarchical control that enforced strict party discipline. In contrast, within South Africa the United Democratic Front (UDF), an umbrella body of grassroots organizations that were loosely aligned with the ANC, waged the struggle against apartheid on the inside. The UDF, in contrast to the ANC in exile, governed itself through a through a system of consultation and discussion, as the numerous sub-units retained their autonomy while working together for the struggle. After the National Party un-banned the ANC in 1990, the two organizations began to merge, a process of integration that has created many internal challenges for the party.

At the same time as it faced these internal challenges, the ANC had to take over a government that had been designed to oppress the majority, and to turn it into an organization capable of development, uplift-ment, and empowerment. On the governing front, the ruling party had to transform the apartheid bureaucracy into a civil service that would transform and uplift, to learn how to govern a massive country of forty-two million people, to manage the conflicting demands of a modern, industrial economy that sits side-by-side with traditional, small-scale farming; to confront problems of endemic poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment, and poor education. The demands were many and varied, and the party faced them with varying success. Internally, the party had to reconcile the different traditions of the ANC and the UDF while protecting against fragmentation and to retain the unity between South Africans from various backgrounds that was created during the struggle.

The ANC never took its position as a dominant party for granted. Instead, from 1994 through 2004, the ANC strategically used its position to influence the creation of political institutions and national legislation that provided the party with mechanisms with which it could insulate itself from centripetal pressures, such as a party-list proportional-representation electoral system and an extremely centralized federal system, focusing all lines of power and accountability upwards to the national leadership. In the latest example of this centralization, the ANC refused to nominate candidates for the provincial premierships prior to the 2004 elections, instead nominating people to be "deployed" as the premiers three days after the elections. This tactic both defused factionalization within the provinces, while also reinforcing the party's control over its members.

The ruling party has also pursued less formal mechanisms to preserve its status, such as maintaining the strategic alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). This alliance enables the ANC to internalize (and co-opt) criticism from the left and provides the party with the ideological flexibility to curtail the organizational ground for opposition parties. Finally, the ANC has manipulated its dominant position to intentionally organize political discourse to demonize the opposition as racist and reinforces one social cleavage, that between blacks and whites, into a political white-black opposition that has prevented the successful politicization of competing lines of division, be these based on interest groups, ethnic identities, or class. On top of all these long-term strategies, the party runs a formidable election machine that brings disaffected supporters back to the party at election time.<sup>[14]</sup>

The electoral performance of the ANC, its continued dominance and its behavior in government must be interpreted against all these factors. The tendency to centralize power in the presidency, to strictly enforce party discipline, and to crack down on public dissent outside of party structures

are all defensive mechanisms to keep the party together. The ANC has felt that this unity was necessary to begin and manage the transformation of South African society. Similarly, the ANC views its dominant position as enabling it to lead the transformation without derailment.

Yet, the party's tendencies toward intolerance of public criticism and centralization of power are worrisome from the perspective of increasing democratic accountability, responsiveness, and transparency. When one party controls so much of the National Assembly, the most important debates take place within the caucus of the ruling party. If, then, the ruling party exhibits signs of intolerance of dissent and centralization of power, when it muffles vibrant debate, this becomes worrying to those concerned with the continued democratic development of South Africa.

Third, the opposition to date has barely presented itself as a viable alternative to the ANC, as a group of parties with leadership and policy platforms that are attractive to a wide variety of South Africans. The opposition's continuing inability to present itself as a viable, credible and genuine alternative to the ANC remains a major trend in South African electoral politics. The decline of the NNP seems, to most, to be the inevitable conclusion for the party that created the apartheid system. In 1994, the NP emerged from the elections as the second largest party in parliament, with representation in all nine provincial legislatures. The "New" NP was reduced to third largest national party in 1999, with its support base concentrated primarily in the Western and Northern Cape provinces. It retained members in all nine provincial legislatures, seven out of nine provinces its held only three or fewer members. The NNP's performance in 2004 proved disastrous: the party won seats in just two legislatures (Western Cape and Northern Cape), and became the fifth largest party in the NA.

The NNP's poor performance can be attributed to many factors, but chief among them is the fact that it has engaged in so many coalitions and alliances since 1994 that voters can no longer say what, if anything, the party stands for. The last straw seems to have been the coalition arrangements that the NNP worked out with the ANC in 2001, giving the ANC entrance into the Western Cape provincial government. This deal put the NNP back into a close relationship with the ruling party, an arrangement that makes it difficult to consider the NNP as a genuine "opposition" party. In 1996, the NP had withdrawn from the Government of National Unity precisely because of this problem, so it should have been no surprise that it faced similar problems in the 2004 campaign. Whether the NNP will last even 5 more years now becomes a genuine question, and there have been rumors in the South African press that the NNP is considering disbanding.<sup>[15]</sup>

The transformation of the Democratic Party from a liberal, English-dominated voice for freedom into its current conservative form (the Democratic Alliance) took more analysts by surprise than did the decline of the NNP. After the elections in 1994, the DP had seven representatives in the National Assembly, and decided that it would operate as a moderating voice in parliament, attempting to persuade the much larger parties to adopt DP policy perspectives. This changed by 1998, however, as the party shifted tactics when beginning to position itself for the 1999 elections. At this time, the party began to take a much more aggressive stance, becoming a vocal opposition party, so much so that party leader Tony Leon earned the moniker, "the chihuahua."

In its bid to become the largest opposition party, the DP first pursued the NNP's Afrikaner support base in its campaign for the 1999 elections, then created an alliance party (the Democratic Alliance) with the NNP in June 2000,<sup>[16]</sup> and following the withdrawal of the NNP from the new party in 2001, the DP decided to go forward with the new creation. The DP officially became the DA at all levels of government in April 2003. In its current form, the DA's strategy of "aggressive opposition" alienates many South Africans, and the party has become perceived by many as a conservative protector of minority interests that simply opposes all ANC propositions on principle. Even though the party claims that it represents the interests of all South Africans, common perceptions differ.<sup>[17]</sup> Therefore, the party's potential to develop into an alternative party capable of mounting a real electoral challenge to the ANC will remain limited, unless the party radically



changes tactics and recruits a large cohort of black supporters, not just at the mass level, but also in leadership. The DA made small inroads into the black electorate in the 2004 elections, but has yet to break through to significant support levels. The DA has yet to genuinely transform its leadership to include a majority of black, colored and Indian leaders. At present, most of its leaders are white, and those who are not have histories from the struggle era that render them suspect amongst many South Africans. Until the party's national leadership changes, the DA is bound to remain perceived by many South Africans as a representative of minority (interpreted as white), interests.

The IFP emerged from the 2004 elections as the third largest party in the NA, holding same rank as in 1994 and 1999. The IFP's bid to increase its performance in the provinces in 1999 had failed, and after the 2004 elections its presence outside KZN declined even further. The big changes for the IFP after this election were that the party lost control over the KZN provincial legislature, and failed to secure ministerial position in the new Cabinet. Both of these are highly significant for the party, as KZN is the IFP's stronghold and the party previously retained national relevance by serving in the cabinet. Now, the only IFP representative in the cabinet is the Rev. Musa Zondi, the IFP's national spokesperson, appointed as the deputy minister of public works. The ANC gave Buthelezi's portfolio as Minister of Home Affairs, which he had held since 1994, to his former deputy minister.<sup>[18]</sup>

Equally, if not more significant, for the first time the ANC eclipsed the IFP as the largest party in KZN, challenging the party in its sole remaining area of influence. The IFP could not accept this fact, and immediately launched a court case to protest the certification of electoral results, claiming that it had launched complaints with the IEC about the conduct poll in forty-seven electoral districts. The party argued that approximately 367,000 votes in KZN had been tampered with, exactly enough to overturn the ANC's plurality in the provincial poll. A week later, in the "interests of national unity," the IFP dropped the court case, on the same day as Zondi was nominated to serve in the cabinet. Overall, the IFP emerged from the 2004 as a much reduced political force, with a tenuous position in its traditional stronghold, and needing to resort to tantrum tactics to retain influence in the national scene.

Small parties that broke into the national political scene in 1999, such as the United Democratic Movement (UDM), had briefly raised the possibility that a non-racial (or multi-racial) opposition party had finally arrived. Yet in 2004, the UDM performed very poorly, and has been reduced to a primarily black, Eastern-Cape based, organization. The one sign of hope in the elections was the rise of the Independent Democrats (ID), a political party formed in April 2003, which just one year after its formation earned a number of votes equal to the NNP. Led by fiery politician and ex-Pan Africanist Congress member Patricia de Lille, this party has the potential to become a multi-racial voice for the poor, if it can build an organization that does not sustain itself solely through the charisma of its leader, de Lille. Christian parties, such as the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), though representing a small percentage of the overall vote, continue to perform relatively well among the opposition. The ACDP has consistently increased its vote share since 1994.

Underlying all these trends is the decline in voter turnout. At this point, one can only speculate as to which categories of eligible voters declined to exercise their rights. The decreased share of the vote earned by the opposition parties would suggest that it is their voters who stayed home. At the same time, the fact that the ANC's absolute votes increased by only 270,000 also indicates that while the ANC prevented many in its traditional support base from voting elsewhere, it also did not motivate a large number of its potential supporters to actually go to the polls.

For the time being, politics in South Africa is stable and democracy is sinking deep roots. There are worrying signs of party dominance, which could be creating voter apathy, but the country's rates of participation are not unusually low when compared against other countries in similar situations. The increasing centralization and dominance of the ANC remains a concern from the standpoint of democratic transparency, but at the same time this dominance has increased

political stability in post-apartheid South Africa. Similarly, the continuing "irrelevance" of the opposition may become a threat to democratic stability, for as voters de-align from the ANC, if they do not find an alternative political home through which to express their political aspirations, the party system could become divorced from the realities of political life. In a system run on party-list proportional representation, this disconnect could ultimately prove destabilizing.

But such pessimism is not yet warranted. The 2004 elections did not represent a break with trends that were established between 1994 and 1999. The election process and results demonstrated that politics are normalizing in South Africa, while at the same time pointing to areas that need to be monitored. For now, democracy is stable, institutionalizing itself and performing well. If the country can avoid the pitfalls of permanent party dominance and the slow erosion of democratic freedoms (as occurred in neighboring Zimbabwe after 1980), the second ten years of democracy will be worth celebrating.

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1. This paper is a draft of a chapter being written for the edited volume, *Election '04 South Africa: The Third Test of Majority Rule*, eds. Jessica Piombo and Lia Nijzink (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, forthcoming August 2004). The author would like to thank the Centre for Social Science Research at the University of Cape Town for supporting the research for this chapter.
2. The exact figures have not been released by the government; this estimate is from the South African Broadcasting Corporation nightly news cast (channel 3), on 27 April 2004.
3. Interview with Fran Fearnley, head of the Electoral Code of Conduct Observer Coalition in KZN province, April 1999.
4. Interview with Courtney Sampson, Provincial Electoral Officer of the Western Cape, 8 April 2004.
5. See Patrick Hlala, "IEC Wants Another 9 Million Voters," *Pretoria News*, October 9, 2003.
6. 2004 VAP calculated by the author and based on the [2001 Census](#), the [2004 registration statistics](#) obtained from the IEC, and the 1999 and 1994 percentage of VAP figures from Reynolds (1994: 187; 1999: 178).
7. In fact, Pippa Norris, in her work *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), argues that party-dominant democracies register turnout rates on average of 57%, which is exactly South Africa's rate in 2004.
8. See, for example, Christelle Terreblanche, "South Africa's 10 Million Missing Voters," *The Sunday Independent*, July 13, 2003, and Donwald Pressly, "South Africa's Youth Spurn the Electoral Process," *Mail and Guardian Online*, 5 November 2003. On another note, the decrease in registered voters also points to the fact that while creating a voters roll helps to guard against electoral manipulation, it can also present a barrier to the full participation of all eligible voters.
9. Many of these problems were observed by the author while an election monitor in the Western Cape province during elections in 1999 and 2000.
10. In 1994, South Africans had not been required to register to vote, so the IEC had to base its projections of voter turnout on population figures. Since the census tends to undercount the population in informal settlements, the IEC tended to be less prepared for the volume of traffic through the voting stations in those areas, and therefore these stations were characterized by lines that took hours, if not all day, to get through. The queues were minimized, to some extent, because voters could cast their ballots at any station in the country, and therefore in some areas organized parties transported voters from crowded stations in the townships to empty stations in

city centers. In 1999 the IEC could use the voter's roll to estimate potential turnout, since South Africans were required to register at specific polling stations and to cast their ballots at those stations on election day. In theory, this made it relatively easy for the IEC to anticipate how many people would come to specific station, even though in practice they underestimated the number of people who showed up in townships, especially in informal settlements, throughout the country.

11. Sampson interview; see also Philani Makhanya and Siphon Khumalo, "IEC Official Tells of Voting Nightmare," *The Mercury* April 24, 2004.

12. These figures are significant because a two-thirds majority enables the ANC to unilaterally change the constitution, and controlling all provincial legislatures means that the ANC absolutely controls the upper house of parliament, the National Council of Provinces (NCOP).

13. 1994 voting results were obtained from the South African Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and 1999 figures from Reynolds (1999:175). The 1994 turnout is from Reynolds (1994:187). There was no voters roll, so the figure given by Reynolds is based on 1992 census figures of the voting age population (VAP – those 18 and older). The 2004 results sourced from IEC, and 1994 spoilt ballots from Reynolds (1994:189).

14. For an extended analysis of these dynamics, see Jessica Piombo, "Political Institutions and the Decline of Ethnic Politics in South Africa, 1994 – 1999," *Party Politics* (forthcoming 2004).

15. Jeremy Michaels, "We Will Not Be Disbanding - NNP," *Cape Times*, April 26, 2004.

16. This party existed only at the local level, as the parties were prevented from merging at the national and provincial levels by constitutional provisions that then existed against floor-crossing in the national and provincial legislatures.

17. The series of opinion polls released by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, the South African Broadcasting Corporation and Markinor in 1999, called "Opinion '99" revealed that most South Africans did not perceive the DP as inclusive, and little evidence since has disconfirmed this trend.

18. The ANC was forced to include an IFP representative in the cabinet in 1994, due to power sharing provisions in the interim constitution. After 1999 the ANC retained party leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi as Minister of Home Affairs, as part of a deal that the ANC made with the IFP in KZN.