

## THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 2004: OPINION POLLS AND THE EVENTUAL RESULTS

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The earliest political polls took place in America in 1824 in an attempt to assess the outcome of the forthcoming presidential election in which John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson were the candidates. These first attempts to quantify electors' intentions were an unscientific extension of normal journalistic soundings. No attempts were made to ensure that a representative sample was taken, but they provoked interest and caught the eye of politicians.

By the end of the nineteenth century, polling methods were more refined and, no doubt, under the influence of social enquiries of a more academic nature, consideration was given to the representativeness of the sample.

Between 1936 and 1948 opinion polls became an established part of the American political scene. During the 1960s interest in political polling intensified across the world. Opinion polls are now part of the political scene in many countries, including South Africa where they are ingrained in the political and the business world.

Broadly speaking, as continuing features of the political system polls are financed and sponsored by news media and, although their use by political parties and pressure groups is of growing importance, their major role is played in the newspapers.

Polls, as predictors of election results, are not infallible and never will be. By their very nature they represent a static view of a dynamic situation and in this sense they are not predictors at all. They show the relative positions of the parties only at the point in time that the poll is taken. They cannot project that finding into the future. Furthermore, these polls are subject to considerable sampling errors which means that the polls can only talk in terms of probability and not in terms of

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certainty. In short: polls are indicative and not definitive.<sup>2</sup> In their short history the polling methods used have undergone considerable refinement and this process of change continues, also in South Africa where opinion polls are a regular practice in the run-up to general elections.

How creditable are political opinion polls, especially in South Africa? To what extent can such polls influence the results of elections? As election fever surges people usually speculate widely on the outcome of the election. When opinion polls are conducted, it is important to include a large segment of voters. Moreover: in South Africa all voters - urban voters (of all communities) as well as voters from remote rural areas - must be part of the survey. The South African political analyst, Harold Pakendorf, maintains that there is a failure factor of 3% to 4% in any opinion poll. Furthermore: opinion polls can produce a broad trend, but very seldom an accurate survey. Political analyst, Anneke Greyling (Markinor), maintains that the failure factor of a random test of 3500 can vary between 0,6% and 1%.<sup>3</sup> If one accepts this, one must accept that the failure factor of a scientific opinion poll is very small, and that opinion polls are a strong indication of the public opinion at a certain stage and time.

In political systems such as South Africa's, all voters do not have access to political representatives; thus the important role of opinion polls as means of communication. Opinion polls enable government and parliamentarians to have an indication of people's viewpoint on certain issues. It depends on individuals whether opinion polls can change their political viewpoint. It is mostly the undecided, well-read voter who may possibly be influenced by polls. Those who vote by heart and the loyal political supporters of a political party will find it difficult to be influenced by polls. Pakendorf's view that the ordinary readers of newspapers do not even read survey findings is doubtful. The ordinary reader does take cognizance of these findings and can be influenced by it. The influence of the results of a scientific survey on undecided voters may be an eye-opener and shed more light on this issue. In the meantime the reliability of opinion polls will also continue to be questioned.

## 2. THE RUN-UP TO THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 2004

The third democratic South African general election since 1994 was held on 14 April 2004 and opinion polls roused interest in this important event. As early as October 2003 analysts realized that the mighty African National Congress (ANC)

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<sup>2</sup> F Teer and JD Spence, **Political opinion polls** (London, 1973), pp. 7-22; NM Bradburn and Seymour Sudman, **Polls and surveys. Understanding what they tell us** (San Francisco, 1988), pp. 1-36.

<sup>3</sup> **Beeld**, 24 February 2004.

and president Thabo Mbeki would easily be returned to government in the general election of April 2004. The only thing in doubt was whether the ruling party would obtain a larger or smaller majority than in 1999.

AC Nielsen's opinion poll<sup>4</sup> at this stage revealed that while 23% of the nation had earlier contemplated Mbeki's rule as 'good', it had risen to 32% at the end of 2003. While 41% typified the Mbeki Government as 'good' to 'very good' only 29% of the respondents had fallen in this category 18 months earlier. The opposition parties were hopeful of a split in the ANC/SA Communist Party (SACP)/Cosatu ranks before the elections. Eventually it became evident that this would not happen and analysts already predicted the possibility of an increased ANC majority which could even be more than two thirds. This was in spite of increasing poverty, the government's handling of Aids, growing unemployment, corruption and the alarming crime and violence statistics. In spite of the fact that Deputy President Jacob Zuma was under siege pending a court case of possible corruption against him, his name was high on the list of preferred candidates for the coming elections. In KwaZulu-Natal he ranked first while Mbeki ranked ninth. In the Free State, which has a history of defying head office, Zuma also topped the list with President Mbeki fourth. To top it all a new survey showed 78,7% of respondents regarded Mandela a better leader than Mbeki. Nevertheless, no one seriously predicted the demise of the ANC of Mbeki.<sup>5</sup>

In spite of the strong ANC-SACP-Cosatu coalition the New National Party (NNP) entered into an agreement with its old adversary, the ANC, after its earlier political alliance with the Democratic Party (DP) had broken down. The ANC/NNP co-operation was a limited co-operation agreement (a type of government of national unity). Their aim was to create truly inclusive and fully representative government.

Bearing this in mind, South Africans asked themselves: Is South Africa stuck in a political rut with a boring sameness and predictability of the outcome of elections for the foreseeable future? Moreover: are election results a reflection of blind loyalty towards parties, or a sort of racial census, rather than voters exercising considered choices based on their levels of satisfaction with the performance or policies of parties? Put another way, is South African democracy, after ten years, vibrant, responsive and viable, with voters displaying high levels of enthusiasm and critical engagement with the political process?

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<sup>4</sup> AC Nielsen is the research house carrying out the survey on behalf of Business Day Barometer.  
<sup>5</sup> **Burger**, 4 October 2003; **The Citizen**, 22 October 2003.

Towards the end of October 2003 the ruling ANC, after shedding some support in opinion polls up to late in 2002, bounced back, and just months ahead of the 2004 poll enjoyed slightly more public backing than it had done at the time of the 1999 election. In addition, opinion polls showed that support levels for opposition parties remained modest, with the rank order of these parties remaining the same.

In 2002 just over half of the ANC supporters indicated that if they disagreed with their party long and hard enough, they would support someone else. Towards October 2003 the ANC's popularity had grown to over the 70% mark, but people like political analyst Lawrence Schlemmer still believed that this did not mean the ruling party would garner seven out of every 10 votes cast in the election.<sup>6</sup> Among the undecideds it seemed that Africans and white Afrikaners were the groupings most prepared to consider other options. Participants in opinion polls seemed to agree that the ANC, yet again, would capture 60-70% of the vote in the 2004 elections, with even the most ambitious projections for the main opposition party hovering in the 12-20% range.<sup>7</sup>

Towards the end of October 2003 analysts were not sure of the extent of voters' apathy in the coming elections. Many voters questioned the importance of registering and voting due to the large predicted ANC support. It was alarming that opinion polls indicated that only 44% of the voters intended to vote in the Western Cape, in spite of the fact that an election is a central event in any democracy. Newspapers urged voters to use their democratic right to register and vote.<sup>8</sup>

In November 2003 an opinion poll of **Proactive Insight** was published, indicating that only 5% of respondents believed that the ANC was capable of stemming crime and 70% believed that the ruling party did not stick to their election ventures of 1999. It was still doubtful whether this would reflect in the election results of 2004.<sup>9</sup> An opinion poll of the **Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)** revealed that the ANC would capture 67,8% of the vote, compared to 66,4% in 1999 and 62,6% in 1994. This was important, giving the ruling party 1,1% above the 66,7% it needed for a two-thirds majority, enabling it to make fundamental changes to the constitution without consulting other parties. The DA, although coming second with 10,5% of the vote, fell far short of the 20% plus they predicted. The NNP, written off by many analysts as a spent force, was projected to win 8,7% of the vote. The HSRC gave the IFP 7,17% of the vote, the UDM 1,7%, the PAC 0,51% and the Independent Democrats (ID) about 0,5%. In terms of the projections,

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<sup>6</sup> **Cape Times**, 27 October 2003.

<sup>7</sup> **Cape Times**, 27 October 2003.

<sup>8</sup> **Burger**, 31 October 2003.

<sup>9</sup> **Afrikaner**, 6 November 2003.

the DA-IFP coalition would command 17,6% of the national vote, making it by far the largest opposition grouping. The ANC-NNP coalition, at this stage, looked set to keep its parliamentary majority in the Western Cape. As a consequence 32,6% declared themselves undecided!<sup>10</sup> It seemed that small parties faced an uphill battle to survive. Mainstream parties seemed set to benefit at the expense of the lightweights.

The startling results revealed that in KwaZulu-Natal the ANC would poll 46,6% of the provincial vote compared to the IFP's 33,9%, the DA's 6,6% and the NNP's 6,2%. In the Western Cape the NNP was set to win 17 seats, against the ANC's 12 and the DP's 10.<sup>11</sup>

Analysing the HSRC election survey it revealed that most South Africans still choose to express their voting preferences based on race. About 95% of the ANC's supporters were black. So too, were the supporters of the IFP and the United Democratic Movement (UDM). Surprisingly, the NNP attracted a more diverse cross-section of the population into its ranks, with just more than 40% of supporters being coloured, 30% white, 20% black and about 10% Indian.<sup>12</sup> This indicated that political parties needed to look at their policies and practices and put mechanisms in place that would make them more attractive to all racial groups - this was especially true of opposition parties if they had any ambition of winning an election.

#### OPINION POLLS BY THE END OF 2003

PARTIES	MARKINOR	HSRC
ANC	64%	67,8%
DA	11%	10,5%
NNP	4%	8,7%
IFP	4%	7,1%
UDM	2%	1,7%
ACDP	1%	1%
Small parties	1% ID. Total support of the rest: 27%	1% for PAC, FF+ and Azapo each

South Africans welcomed 2004 as celebration time. This was the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their democracy and also the year of the third democratic general election. Early in the new year **SABC/Markinor** published the results of a poll held in

<sup>10</sup> **Star**, 20 November 2003; **The Citizen**, 27 November 2003.

<sup>11</sup> **The Citizen**, 24 December 2003; **Natal Witness**, 29 December 2003; **Daily News**, 29 December 2003; **Burger**, 10 January 2004.

<sup>12</sup> **Cape Argus**, 2 November 2003.

October/November 2003. They found that 64% of voters who had been likely to vote then would support the ANC. The DA seemed to have reached a ceiling at 10% of the vote, with the NNP and IFP tied at around 4%. The Independent Democrats (ID) at 1% had double the support of the PAC, the party from which their leader, Patricia de Lille, had defected. The UDM, which had been the surprise performer in the previous election, now had a lowly 2% support. There were only 11% undecided voters. The ACDP's support was 1% and the other parties' joint support was 2%.<sup>13</sup>

It was evident that the support of the IFP, NNP and PAC was down and that the ID could be a surprise package in the general elections. Not much had changed for the ANC and the DA. Nevertheless, the PAC dismissed the Markinor survey and claimed that its support was growing.<sup>14</sup> The poll clearly reflected that the DA would not make the inroads into ANC support it had predicted. What the poll pointed to was that support for the two main parties were split, not only along racial but also along class and geographic lines, in that support for the DA, for example, was stronger among higher income groups and two-thirds of its support lay in the metropolitan areas. It is interesting that Afrikaans was the home language of 50% of those who said they would vote for the DA, in spite of their leader Tony Leon's poor ability to speak Afrikaans. This survey also reflected that 94% of ANC support was black while two-thirds of DA support was white. Though the NNP's support was down considerably it was not clear whether the party would be wiped out in the election.<sup>15</sup>

The focus in the election fell squarely on the provincial polls in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Although the Markinor poll pegged the DA's support in the Western Cape at just 16% they were confident of winning the battle and minds of the voters and their own poll had shown they would garner 51% of the vote!<sup>16</sup> As the opinion polls were being published in the run-up to the election the two opposition parties, the DA and the NNP, disputed the extent of their support in the Western Cape, while the ANC was content to watch and wait. The NNP, however, was supporting its coalition partner, the ANC.

President Mbeki meanwhile aspired to break Inkatha's hold on KwaZulu-Natal, so that the ANC would have undisputed control of all nine provinces, thereby dealing a death blow to the spectre of regionalist dissent.

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<sup>13</sup> **Star**, 16 January 2004; **Cape Argus**, 16 January 2004; **Business Day**, 16 January 2004; **Burger**, 16 January 2004; **Daily News**, 16 January 2004.

<sup>14</sup> **Star**, 19 January 2004.

<sup>15</sup> **The Herald**, 19 January 2004.

<sup>16</sup> **Cape Argus**, 23 January 2004.

At this stage DA leader, Tony Leon, warned South Africans to steer itself away from ending up in a Zimbabwe-type situation: a "two-party state - one party in power and the other party in jail", while Marthinus van Schalkwyk, NNP leader, said that the minority groups did not hold the key to stronger opposition; they had to look to the ANC for a role in the future.<sup>17</sup> The ANC-NNP election campaign was set to discredit the DA's message of fear, that warned the electorate to vote for it or face the possibility of a South Africa that would degenerate into a Zimbabwe.

Towards the end of January 2004 a national survey predicted that 23 million voters could turn out for the general elections, the highest number in 10 years of democracy. At that stage the warning-lights were flashing for the NNP. The **SABC/Markinor survey** predicted only a 1% vote for the party that had ruled South Africa for almost five decades until the first democratic elections in 1994!<sup>18</sup> This suggested that its political relevance had waned. NNP leader, Marthinus van Schalkwyk, nevertheless, said there was a strong feeling that his party deserved much more, "say 9,4%".<sup>19</sup>

This opinion poll suggested that 49 year-old Bantu Holomisa's UDM might get only 2% of the vote in the pending general election - much lower than the 3,5% it had won in 1999. Holomisa doubted the creditability of this poll since "they (Markinor) linked up with a government institution, the SABC". He believed the UDM was continuing to make inroads into ANC territory.<sup>20</sup>

The DA's claims that it intended to be the alternative government after the 2004 election was surely wishful thinking and an attempt to influence voters. The best it could hope for was to improve its support and drive the final nail into the political coffin of the NNP.

With the election seven weeks away a survey by **Standard Corporate and Merchant Bank (SCMB)** among people from the corporate and public sectors found that the ANC's biggest risk in the coming election was voter apathy. "Recent municipal elections and voter registration drives have signaled that lethargy is creeping into the electorate", according to SCMB.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> **Cape Argus**, 23 January 2004; **Business Day**, 27 January 2004.

<sup>18</sup> **Business Day**, 23 and 27 January 2004.

<sup>19</sup> **This Day**, 2 March 2004.

<sup>20</sup> **Sunday Times**, 1 February 2004.

<sup>21</sup> **Business Day**, 24 February 2004.

By February 27, just hours before the deadline for paying deposits, 25 parties had registered to contest the election.<sup>22</sup> Eventually 21 parties competed nationally and at provincial level only 11 parties competed in all nine provinces.<sup>23</sup>

The outcome of the elections in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) was an interesting topic. Most political pundits predicted a fierce and bruising battle between the IFP and the ANC, with opinion polls a few weeks before the election suggesting that this province would no longer elude the ruling party. The **Markinor-SABC** opinion poll in March 2004 suggested that the IFP and DA combined would receive 30% of the KZN vote as compared to the 50% of the ANC.<sup>24</sup> Such a political outcome would spell the beginning of the end for Buthelezi and complicate his life inside the party. The stakes were high.

The DA was self-confident on the outcome of the election and five weeks prior to April 14 they predicted that with its partners in the IFP the DA would win between 25% and 30% of the vote nationally, setting the stage for a serious challenge to the ANC over the next five years. The DA believed that over the previous five years they had increased their support among black voters significantly. They were set to double their support to 19% and with the IFP would emerge to challenge the ANC for power in 2009. DA leader Tony Leon rightly argued that a strong democracy in South Africa necessarily required a strong opposition.<sup>25</sup> The DA had the white vote in the bag - taking the party beyond its existing support levels meant winning black votes, and the election would prove to be a test of how effectively it could do just that.

The **SABC/Markinor survey** conducted in February 2004 among 3500 respondents was immensely comforting for the ANC. Depending on voter turnout the survey predicted that the ANC would win between 70,9% and 73,4% of the national vote.<sup>26</sup> Not everyone was as pleased as the ANC. A major concern repeatedly expressed by opposition parties was the consequent implications for the health of South Africa's democracy. South Africans feared a 'one party dominance' and that the governing party (the ANC), assured of re-election, was likely to become increasingly complacent and unresponsive to public opinion.

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<sup>22</sup> **Sunday Times**, 29 February 2004.

<sup>23</sup> **This Day**, 7 April 2004.

<sup>24</sup> **Daily News**, 2 March 2004.

<sup>25</sup> **This Day**, 10 March 2004; **Star**, 5 March 2004.

<sup>26</sup> **Sowetan**, 25 March 2004.



The DA's support was regarded between 8,6% and 9%, that of the IFP between 3,2% and 4,6% and the NNP 1,5% to 1,8%. Undecided voters made up 7,9%.<sup>27</sup> At that stage of the run-up to the elections the latter might have speculated whether it would be worthwhile to vote for a party like the NNP with its support down to as little as 1,5%.

The implications of such a result were:

- That the ANC would for the first time breach the two-thirds barrier on its own. Support for the ANC had been above 66,7% in every survey, except the first two in May and June 2003, moving with a narrow range from 67,5% to 69,9%. The trend of ANC support had been marginally upward since the first survey in May 2003. At that stage two factors could influence measurably on the ANC percentage, the researchers acknowledge: the rural vote and the hidden intentions of those who declined to reveal their voting preference. Throughout the surveys, almost a quarter of eligible voters have declined to reveal their position.<sup>28</sup>
- The ANC would secure a majority in seven provinces but in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal they would need coalition partners to obtain 50% of the vote. In Western Cape they would need a third coalition partner to reach 50%.
- With 2 million new voters on the voters' roll, most of whom were black, the ANC would continue to increase its majority so long as opposition parties could not find a way to break out of their ethnic or racial moulds.
- The NNP would become a small insignificant party and might fade away in the long run. With their support down to 13,3% in their stronghold, the Western Cape, it could well be asked what would become of this party in the rest of South Africa.

Two weeks prior to the election IEC (Independent Electoral Commission) records showed that 20,6 million South Africans were registered out of a possible 27,4 million eligible voters. A **SABC/Markinor poll** found that a high percentage, 87% to 92%, of registered voters indicated their intention to vote (the turnout in the 1999 election was 89,3%).<sup>29</sup> The IEC was still concerned about voter apathy.

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<sup>27</sup> **Business Day**, 30 March 2004.

<sup>28</sup> **Beeld**, 19 March 2004.

<sup>29</sup> **Business Day**, 29 March 2004.

Voters were mainly concerned about the ANC's inability to tackle crime and unemployment,<sup>30</sup> according to a **Markinor opinion poll** in March.<sup>31</sup> Whether this would have a large influence on the outcome of the election and the position of the ruling party, was doubtful, although crime was now cited as a new source of oppression. An American poll found that eight out of ten people saw crime as a "serious threat to democracy", and surprisingly some blacks were even prepared to trade democracy for safety. This poll also found that in South Africa, 20% of respondents thought that opposition parties should be barred from standing for office.<sup>32</sup>

The January/February **Markinor opinion poll** showed that the outlook was dark for the NNP in the Free State (0,5% support) and Northern Cape (1,6%), as well as for the Freedom Front Plus with 2,7% in the Free State and 6,2% in the Northern Cape.<sup>33</sup>

A week prior to the elections the Independent Democrats (ID) leader, Patricia de Lille, claimed that her party was poised to win up to 10% of the national vote, and that she expected the worst result would be 5%.<sup>34</sup> These figures seemed extremely ambitious and not supported by any opinion poll. Nevertheless, De Lille, being anti-ANC and not white, made her a good choice for conservative people of all races who want to appear non-racial but also want to oppose the ANC. She could reasonably be expected to pick up some of the 10% undecideds.

With the elections only a few days away the ANC told the media that they would decide on the NNP's position in the government after they have investigated the election results. Marthinus van Schalkwyk was sure that he would be returned as premier of the Western Cape.<sup>35</sup> With the NNP's possibility of only 13% of the vote in this province it seemed a little bit over optimistic.

In many ways the election of 2004 was a watershed election for the DA. Their leader, Tony Leon, faced the toughest test of his 30-year political career. This election would determine whether the DA was shaping up as a real contender, or just another also-ran on the Great South African political scrapheap. Was the DA

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<sup>30</sup> At this stage 42,1% of all adults in South Africa were unemployed. Cf. National survey by the **Washington Post**, the Henry J Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard University. In some rural areas, eight out of ten people who can work were unable to find a job. The national jobless rate had risen, on average, by more than one full percentage point every year since 1995.

<sup>31</sup> **Burger**, 30 March 2004.

<sup>32</sup> National Survey by **Washington Post**, Henry J Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard University.

<sup>33</sup> **Volksblad**, 1 April 2004.

<sup>34</sup> **Business Day**, 7 April 2004.

<sup>35</sup> **Beeld**, 8 April 2004.

extravagant in its promise to win 20% of the vote? What would the failure to live up to that mean for the future of political opposition in South Africa? Leon would emerge as either the leader of a political movement capable of taking on the ANC in future elections or as a spent force in, as Leon himself put it, a de facto one-party state, until a truly viable opposition party or grouping would emerge. Leon predicted that the DA's increased support would be matched by a 10% fall in the number of votes for the ANC<sup>36</sup> but pre-election surveys suggested that he was more than a touch optimistic. **MarkData** said the DA would get 11,8% of the vote - far short of Leon's 20% prediction. Markinor's political analyst, Mari Harris, said a worrying factor for opposition parties was that research suggested that many of the traditional opposition voters were not going to vote at all.<sup>37</sup>

What was sure was that the ruling ANC still carried the cachet of a former liberation movement, had the support of the world leader Nelson Mandela and would continue to attract widespread support, regardless of what mistakes the government might have made.

### 3. THE ELECTION RESULTS

As the results were being announced it was evident that South African politics have changed dramatically. The ANC went into its third five-year term in office with its biggest majority to date. Those who believed that there would be a backlash against the ANC because of the "slow pace of delivery" or that there would be a stay-away, were proved wrong as the ANC increased the number of votes it received in 1999 from 10,6 million to 10,88 million, and its percentage of the vote with 3,33% from 66,35 to 69,68. It also won a higher percentage of the vote in the hotly contested Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. About 5 million people did not register to vote, while about 5 million cast their ballots for 21 other parties.<sup>38</sup>

If ever there were a show of the power of history and the ineffectiveness of opposition in the face of it, it was the sight of the ANC, 10 years after coming to power, waltzing past a two-thirds parliamentary majority for the first time during the final counting of votes. Not only did the ANC get its vote out, but no party made any headway against it. Thus, President Thabo Mbeki's ability to claim massive support for his policies of transformation and fiscal caution, carried him into his final term.

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<sup>36</sup> **Business Day**, 13 April 2004.

<sup>37</sup> **Business Day**, 13 April 2004.

<sup>38</sup> **The Herald**, 19 April 2004; **Star**, 19 April 2004.

**FINAL RESULTS 2004: NATIONAL (First ten parties)**

<b>Party</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
ANC	10 877 302	69,68%
DA	1 929 816	12,36%
IFP	1 088 645	6,97%
UDM	355 702	2,28%
ID	269 678	1,73%
NNP	257 815	1,66%
ACDP	250 249	1,6%
FF+	139 458	0,9%
UCDP	117 785	0,73%

**COMPARISON OF RESULTS 1994, 1999, 2004 (First ten parties)**

<b>Party name</b>	<b>% 1994</b>	<b>% 1999</b>	<b>% 2004</b>
ANC	62,65	66,35	69,68
DA (formerly DP)	1,73	9,56	12,36
IFP	10,53	8,58	6,97
UDM	-	3,42	2,28
ID	-	-	1,73
NNP	20,39	6,87	1,66
ACDP	0,45	1,43	1,60
FF+	2,17	0,8	0,9
UCDP	-	0,78	0,76
PAC	1,24	0,71	0,73

**RESULTS IN TWO KEY PROVINCES (First five parties)**

<b>KwaZulu-Natal</b>		
<b>Parties</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
ANC	1 312 767	47,47
IFP	964 101	34,87
DA	276 429	10
MF	51 339	1,86
ACDP	49 823	1,8

<b>Western Cape</b>		
<b>Parties</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
ANC	740 077	46,11
DA	432 107	26,92
NNP	151 476	9,44
ID	127 991	7,97
ACDP	60 613	3,78

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<sup>39</sup> Saturday Star, 17 April 2004; Sunday Independent, 18 April 2004.

The ANC's target before the election was to win all nine provinces on its own, but this did not happen in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. It was a severe disappointment for the ruling party. The ANC was successful in picking up small pockets of support from the UDM and possibly also the NNP. But it was unable to significantly break into the support base of its main opponents, the IFP and the DA. Overall the election results brought alliance politics back into the picture. The ANC's failure to win Western Cape or KwaZulu-Natal on its own meant that effective government in these two provinces required new alliances.

Perhaps the ANC's most impressive performance was on the defence rather than in attack. Six months before the election, opposition parties had at their disposal a range of offensive weapons - the high level of crime, unemployment, HIV/AIDS and arms-deal corruption, among others. In these circumstances, just holding on to its support base suggests an impressive electoral performance. In short: the ANC can still rely on the automatic vote of huge portions of the population, but attitudes are probably shifting. How much this shifting will be in the next five years is yet not clear. Indications are that ANC supporters are now more willing to think about voting elsewhere.

The ANC's overall strong showing in the 2004 election is a result of a brilliant election campaign, in which large numbers of potential voters were visited at home and in which top government officials addressed hundreds of neighbourhood meetings about local community issues. Markinor's October 2003 poll showed that 64% of people had a strong intention of voting for the ANC. By February that had gone up to 70% - an indication that the campaign had gone a long way towards shifting voter perceptions. The ANC's ability to boast political giants like former president Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu as leaders of the party, appealed to black voters. "They do not want to believe that the party of Mandela would lie to them", it was said.

Fewer people voted in 2004 than in the previous election, 15,86 million compared with 15,97 million in 1999.<sup>40</sup> But it was not ANC voters who stayed away. The ANC gained in absolute and proportional terms, while the opposition share shrank.

So where did all the ANC's new voters come from? The first source was KwaZulu-Natal, where about 125 000 new ANC votes popped up on the scoreboard. The growth appears to have come from two areas: the far northern areas of the province and Indian working-class neighbourhoods in Durban. The ANC also grew its support among coloured working-class people in the Western Cape, for the first

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<sup>40</sup> **Financial Mail**, 23 April 2004.

time becoming the biggest party in Mitchell's Plain in Cape Town. From this emerges a critical trend: the ANC can now claim to be the biggest party among coloured and Indian minorities. In the Western Cape the ANC gained around 60 000 votes.<sup>41</sup>

Once again, where turnouts were low - in urban coloured neighbourhoods - it was the opposition, both NNP and DA, that suffered. The trend that began in 1999, of rural coloureds turning away from the NNP and voting for the ANC, continued. But by far the biggest source of new ANC votes came from the Eastern Cape, where the party got 180 000 more votes than in the previous election. This seems to be as a result of the return of former UDM supporters.<sup>42</sup>

Although the ANC does not intend to change the constitution, its overwhelming majority will allow it to be authoritarian and to make unpopular decisions in handling South Africa's problems. Such problems are inter alia unemployment and the big gap between rich and poor. Another danger which may result from one party having so much power is that weaklings may end up in positions of power and may cause damage making short-sighted decisions. President Mbeki may claim that the voters' overwhelming majority supports the government's handling of the Aids issue and the Zimbabwean problem. He may tend to ignore any criticism of his handling of affairs owing to his large support base.

Nevertheless, a vote for the ANC does not necessarily mean agreement with all the ANC policies. As some political pundits said, 'election time' is more than anything else, a period to celebrate freedom.<sup>43</sup> Not all criticism levelled at the ANC in the run-up to the elections was wrong. Voters probably considered what other political parties said and decided that the ANC with all its imperfections came closest to what they aspired to. It is probable that some could credit the ANC for the breakthrough in 1994. It could also be a realisation that the years was not long enough for a party to fundamentally change the conditions in which millions of people were living. So, in a way, this could have been an opportunity for people to overwhelmingly give the ANC a chance to deal with service delivery deficits.

It is interesting to analyse the performance of the main opposition party, the DA, in the election. On the face of it the DA's success was substantial. The party held on to the coloured voter support once considered a certainty for the NNP. The DA's increase in support is by far the largest of any major party. It is now uncontested as the major opposition party. This increase came largely at the expense of the NNP,

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<sup>41</sup> **Financial Mail**, 23 April 2004.

<sup>42</sup> **Financial Mail**, 23 April 2004.

<sup>43</sup> **Star**, 19 April 2004.

which just imploded in this election, and dismally failed to live up to its own bold prediction that it would win 20% of the vote.

The DA did not make much of an inroad among black voters. At best, it was able to capture black voters who were not going to vote for the ANC anyway. Tony Leon's assessment that his party defied predictions and will continue to do so because "we are in touch with the people",<sup>44</sup> is not quite true. The people he refers to are mainly white, coloured and Indian and not black. This surely must be a concern to the DA. The DA trumpeted its gains, but these had not been at the expense of the ANC, which had increased its majority by another 3%.

Though the DA put up a brave face, pointing out that in absolute and relative terms it grew - it garnered 400 000 more votes than in 1999 - the overall result of 12% is a devastating disappointment.<sup>45</sup> The party now really faces some hard questions. Some say it should forget about black votes (which probably is true), others that a black leader would provide the solution. Perhaps a formidable and charismatic black leader would be the solution. In short: unless the DA reinvents itself as a real option for black voters, it will never erode the ANC's share of the electoral spoils. The DA and its leader still have the image of guardians of white minority interests. Until they shake off this image they will never challenge for power in a national poll.

Give the DA its due: it may not be a realistic alternative government given its enduring image of white negativity among blacks, but it is certainly an effective watchdog.

The IFP did not perform well in the elections. They won 34,87% of the vote in their stronghold KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), giving it 30 seats. They afterwards claimed that the ANC had shifted votes around in this province - and bused voters in from other provinces - to skew the results. It claimed that more than 367 000 irregular votes had been cast in KZN. This number of voters would account to roughly the same needed to reverse the ANC's victory in Natal - and give the IFP a majority of one seat. The DA/IFP alliance won 37 seats in the provincial legislature while the ANC with its supporter, the Minority Front (MF), boasted 40 seats.<sup>46</sup> The IFP had two choices - to govern the province as a junior partner with the ANC or to be the senior partner with the DA as the opposition in the province. The only consolation for this party was that they remained the third largest party in the country.

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<sup>44</sup> **Business Day**, 16 April 2004.

<sup>45</sup> **Financial Mail**, 23 April 2004.

<sup>46</sup> **The Herald**, 19 April 2004. The ACDP won two seats and the UDM one.

The decimation of the (New) National Party is indeed a historical phenomenon. This is a party which dominated South Africa's national affairs for nearly the whole of the last century but which now died in a single decade. It was a humiliating death, which the Afrikaner historian Herman Giliomee likens to 'a prostitute's funeral'.<sup>47</sup> This was inevitable. Political parties based on ideologies die when their ideologies collapse. What had made its dying days so tawdry was the bed-hopping expediency of its last and uncharismatic leader, Marthinus van Schalkwyk, as he desperately tried to cling to some semblance of power. That is what earned it Giliomee's harsh metaphor.

The 2004-elections eventually heralded the fameless end for a party which in the early years had such idealism and once was a legitimate liberation movement for a liberation group, just like the ANC. Marthinus van Schalkwyk in 1997 inherited a party with approximately 20% support which he led in 2004 to a party with less than 2% support. Within seven years since he took over, the NNP received its death knell. All that remained of this party was its heart beat. Its brain stopped working and the final preparations for its funeral started.

The NNP today has no useful purpose other than to help the ANC to rule in the Western Cape. Nationally the party was reduced to the league of the one and two per cent parties, the small ones which the media notes from time to time, but which they do not consider as important when the broad painting strokes are made on the national canvas.

Van Schalkwyk's short-lived alliance with Tony Leon's DA in 2000 was a further piece of opportunism which was part of his party's effort to survive and never was a policy issue. Free State's NNP leader, Inus Aucamp, must be applauded for his bold step to dissolve the party in this province after the election. The national leader was not willing to follow suit in the country as a whole.

Analysts were amazed that the NNP leader survived as head of the party on 19 April when he received an endorsement to negotiate further with the ruling ANC on their cooperation agreement. It became clear that the Western Cape premiership was lost to Van Schalkwyk, because of the party's poor showing. The NNP took slightly less than 11% of the provincial vote, down from the 34% it had garnered in 1999.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> **Star**, 20 April 2004.  
<sup>48</sup> **Business Day**, 20 April 2004.



Contesting an election for the first time, the ID emerged as a good performer, getting 1,73% of the vote. Their leader, Patricia de Lille, became the lady of the moment. She became the darling of the media, and was showered with allocades by liberal commentators for her sterling performance in the Western Cape and elsewhere. There are various possible explanations why the ID was such a sudden hit. It was a fresh voice similar to the UDM at its embryonic stages. De Lille's popularity may partly be based on her combative approach to the ANC, and particularly President Mbeki. The degradation of a black-dominated government, especially its Afrocentric leader, is sweet music to the ears of some people who curse 27 April 1994. So she can be a whipping stick for Mbeki and the ANC. In fact, unconsciously, De Lille is to many liberals in South Africa what Morgan Tsvangeraai is to white Zimbabweans. She is a fantasy to the anti-ANC lobby.

Where did her voters come from? They seem to have come almost entirely from two areas: coloureds, formerly loyal to the NNP, and whites, formerly from the DA. In Gauteng, for instance, the 1,5% she polled came from the DA. In all traditional strongholds, De Lille grabbed about 10% of the DA's vote. In some coloured areas, she turned out healthy scores of around 20%.<sup>49</sup>

Her future? The ID is a party without policy or direction and it would be a remarkable (though not impossible) feat if De Lille were able to grow it by force of personality alone. If she wants to keep her support, she must never slip and talk about land repossession, or wealth redistribution. She must continue her vitriolic attacks on the ANC, and must focus on building her small party. Given the ANC's overwhelming power, the public would rightly be confused if DA's Tony Leon and De Lille did not try in the next five years to find common ground and fight the next election as one party.

The 2004-election was a terrible disappointment to Bantu Holomisa's UDM. The party, fashioned as the new alternative to the ANC, lost support from 3,42% in the last election to 2,28%. The Freedom Front Plus increased its support from 0,8% in 1999 to 0,9% in 2004, at the expense of other right-wing parties. The ANC and other parties on the left (mainly PAC and Azapo) remained stagnant, polling around 0,73% and 0,25% respectively.<sup>50</sup> Political scientist Adam Habib rightly said that the Africanist language of the PAC, Azapo and Sopa had been overtaken by the ANC. The PAC came across as a party perennially in crisis, Azapo appeared too small and Sopa offered no coherent policy alternative. A discernable trend in the election was that voters realised that voting for smaller parties would not make a fundamental impact on the national political landscape. That is probably part of

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<sup>49</sup> **Financial Mail**, 23 April 2004.

<sup>50</sup> **Saturday Star**, 17 April 2004; **Sunday Independent**, 18 April 2004.

the reason why the ACDP and UCDP received respectively only 1,6% and 0,76%.<sup>51</sup> The ACDP for the first time won a seat in the Northern Cape.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Predictable though it all was, the 2004-election was a landmark election in three respects - the dramatic demise of the NNP, the stagnant state of the political opposition, and the formidable challenge that faced the ANC, the outcome of which will determine President Mbeki's legacy and indeed the political future of the country.

For the opposition to be quite unable to make any inroads into the support of a party which presided over an unemployment rate that had swelled to around 35% is quite remarkable. What happened is that the opposition has cannibalised itself. The DA, the ID and the FF+ had all been feeding off the corpse of the NNP - to the extent that some of them had gained a few black votes; those probably came from the shrunken PAC and UDM.

What was the message of 14 April 2004? With a ruling party that increased its dominance, it is the duty of the institutors of South Africa's democracy to prevent a classic one-party rule. A real two-party system might come in due course, when eventually the left wing of the ANC alliance might break away from the centrist leadership to form a socialist opposition party. That could perhaps happen in five or ten years'a: time.

Since April 14 Mbeki moved into his last presidential term and his legacy will depend on what he does with it. In particular, what he does to meet the challenge of what he himself described as two nations, one rich and the other dirt poor. Will he be able to deliver the promised "better life for all?" His big majority is a mandate to act on what he has now seen and felt. In his State of Nation Speech in February 2004, Mbeki said that "no new policy initiatives are necessary".<sup>52</sup> He must change that view. New policy initiatives are imperative, otherwise his legacy will be one of failure.

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<sup>51</sup> **Star**, 16 April 2004.  
<sup>52</sup> **Daily Dispatch**, 7 February 2004.