

TENDENCIES OF A DOMINANT PARTY SYSTEM IN THE FREE STATE LEGISLATURE (1994-2008)

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Abstract

Dominant party tendencies exist either when a single party enjoys monopoly of power through the exclusion of other parties, or when the electorate continues to re-elect the same party despite the existence of other political parties. Dominant party systems display various characteristics: the tendency to rule for a prolonged period of time; complacency and corruption; competition within the dominant party; a weak and ineffective opposition; and, a blurring of lines between the party and the state. Under the apartheid regime, the National Party dominated the political system. In 1994, through a process of transformation, South Africa held its first democratic election. The African National Congress (ANC) won the election and successive elections, and has since governed by majority. This has led critics to argue that South Africa is becoming a dominant party system. This article discusses dominant party tendencies in the Free State Legislature. In the four elections held since this transformation process of democratisation began, namely 1994, 1999, 2004 and 2009, the ANC dominated the Legislature whilst the opposition remained weak and ineffective, with no viable alternative for the electorate. Despite protests against service delivery and transformation projects, the electorate continued to re-elect the ANC. These tendencies reinforced the pattern of ANC dominance and weak opposition.

1. INTRODUCTION

The past sixteen years in South Africa have seen a period of transition and transformation from an authoritarian state under the apartheid regime, to a democracy under the African National Congress (ANC). This period of transition and transformation has faced many challenges: the consolidation of democracy (Joannou 2008:1); the ruling party's transformation from liberation movement to political party; economic growth and development and social development and service delivery (Duvenhage 2004:25).

A democracy is simply rule for and by the people (Heywood 1997:68). It is a process that makes provision for the mass public to exercise power over the election of those leaders responsible for policy, and is in accordance with principles such as a popular sovereignty, political equality, popular consultation, government in public interest and majority rule (Kegley and Wittkopf 2001:G4; Ranney 1987:193; Heywood 1997:404). South Africa's transformation process requires that democratic institutions be consolidated through participation and representation. The challenge

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thus is to institutionalise this process by changing society through the organisation of structures and institutions of government. If a situation begins to emerge where one party becomes the dominant party, then tendencies can emerge that will impact upon the success rate of transformation delivery and democratic consolidation.

In South Africa there were four elections between 1994 and 2009 and each of these was won by the ANC according to democratic processes and by popular consent. This led critics to raise concerns about a movement towards a dominant party system and the implications for democracy (Karume 2004:42; Brooks 2004:121). A dominant party system is one in which the electorate continues to elect the same party over a prolonged period of time, despite the existence of other political parties, because the electorate themselves have opted to do so (Sadie 1991:163; Harris 1997:108).

To date the opposition have been unsuccessful in challenging the ANC alliance (Joannou 2008:2). Election results show the opposition parties all securing a significantly lower percentage of votes than the ruling party which gained over 60% of the votes nationally in each election (Electoral Institute of Southern Africa 2007c:online). Without a strong and viable opposition, there is little chance of a change of regime.

2. PROBLEM AND AIM

By 2009 the African National Congress's (ANC's) control of eight of the nine provinces and a majority of 65,9% can be seen as the emergence of a dominant party system. As a result, the party will be allowed to pursue its legislative programme unhindered. Such dominance, together with the lack of a credible opposition, could be seen to raise concerns about government accountability. While it should be noted that the ANC did not achieve dominance through undemocratic means, this does pose certain implications for the sustainability of democracy, particularly in a democracy as young as that of South Africa (Joannou 2008:4). The emergence of dominant party tendencies manifest themselves in various forms and is seen to weaken democracy. These include debt, patterns of decay such as corruption and inefficiency, a limited support base in terms of opposition parties and divisions within the ruling party.

The study focuses on the period of transformation in South Africa, from the first democratic election in 1994, to the most recent election in 2009. During this period the ANC secured dominance in all of the provinces, with the exception of KwaZulu-Natal during 1994 and 1999, and the Western Cape during 1994 and 2009 (Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, 2007c:online).

The primary aim of the article is to critically analyse dominant party tendencies in the Free State Legislature. The Free State is characterised by unique infighting within the ANC, where there are two distinct groups: those from the northern region and those from the southern region. Such infighting in turn also leads to slow delivery

(Ginsberg 1996:123), which, if not checked by an informed electorate and strong civil society, can lead to unconstrained elitism and dominant partyism (Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987:198). However, despite the effects of division within the dominant party, the party's election results continue to reflect more than 60% of the vote in Free State. This lends credit to Lodge's (1999:182) statement that voters in South Africa still tend to vote according to racial identity.

The basic aim was to explore whether or not the Legislature was heading towards dominant partyism during the period 1994 to 2009. Exploring dominant party tendencies can determine whether these tendencies will strengthen or weaken the young democracy in future. Dominant parties tend more towards one party states and eventually become one man states which are common in dictatorships or totalitarian states. The lack of a strong opposition and the issue of legitimacy in terms of the history of these parties (Karume 2004:57) in the Free State Legislature could serve to strengthen the dominant party tendency. The broad aim will thus be to look at the patterns with regard to dominant party tendencies. Here it is particularly important to focus not only on tendencies within the Free State, but also upon the ANC dynamic: the party's history, loyalty and culture.

The study is exploratory and descriptive in its approach. Insight is given into the present situation by means of a literature study. Data gathered from these sources will be supported by descriptive research to be derived from present theory on dominant party systems. The study is thus qualitative.

Much of the study is inductive, and data gathered are used to gain insight into the understanding of the dominant party tendencies in the Free State Legislature. Deductive reasoning is used to make a final recommendation. The value of the study lies in searching for solutions that can serve to entrench democracy and encourage a strong civil society which is not complacent, supports a strong opposition and has a willingness to remove ineffective governments which do not deliver.

3. DOMINANT PARTY SYSTEMS

The number of political parties operating within the state is referred to as the party system. One party systems allow for one dominant party and little, if any, opposition is tolerated. In two party systems, two strong parties compete, with a tendency to alternate power. Multiparty systems have numerous political parties competing, often requiring a coalition in order to win an election. A multiparty system is characterised by the presence of three or more political parties with relevant electoral support (Winter and Bellows 1992:160). The strength of multi-party systems is that they create internal checks and balances within government (Heywood 1997:246). The number of parties and the amount of party cohesiveness and government stability vary amongst multiparty systems (Winter and Bellows 1992:159). Although several

political parties compete in dominant party systems, it is one single majority party that gets re-elected repeatedly because the electorate so wish.

Matlosa and Karume (2004:9-10) define a dominant party system as a system “in which despite the multiparty situation, only one party is so dominant that it directs the political system and is firmly in control of state power over a fairly long duration of time that even opposition parties make little if any dent on the political hegemony of a dominant ruling party”.

Dominant party systems display various characteristics that can influence the politics of the system and the branches of government. In a dominant system, the system is competitive and a number of parties compete for power. However, a single majority party enjoys prolonged periods in power (Heywood 1997:240). In the case of the Free State Legislature, the ANC secured the majority of seats in all four elections with over 70% of the vote (Electoral Institute of Southern Africa 2007c:online). In the successive elections, the official opposition was the National Party (NP) in 1994, the Democratic Party (DP) in 1999, the Democratic Alliance (DA) in 2004 and the Congress of the People (COPE) in 2008.

	1994		1999		2004		2009	
	% votes	Number of seats	% votes	Number of seats	% votes	Number of seats	% votes	Number of seats
ANC	76,65	24	80,79	25	81,78	25	71,10	22
Nearest opposition	12,59 NP	4	5,33 DP	2	8,47 DA	3	11,61 COPE	4

Table 1: Election results in the Free State Legislature
(Electoral Institute of Southern Africa 2007c:online).

The election data prove that the ANC secured political hegemony in all four successive elections under study in the Free State. In securing this position, the ANC “ensures its overwhelming control of the Parliament and other key institutions of the state as well as a relatively unchallenged policy trajectory in terms of determination of the future and destination of South Africa’s democracy and development” (Matlosa and Karume 2004:10). In a parliamentary system such as in South Africa, members of the Legislature also serve on the executive. The existence of a dominant party therefore allows for the concentration of power since the branches of government are not separate. A separation of powers allows for checks and balances against the abuse of power. The ANC’s control of both the Legislature and the executive therefore contributes to concerns raised about the entrenchment of democracy and development.

The continued dominance of one party and the weakness of another is a self-reinforcing process and each has a direct relationship with the other. A dominant party is able to define the permissible and the unacceptable, in that it controls the rules of

the political game (Joannou 2008:23). It controls the environment in which the party system functions. Arian and Barnes (in Brooks 2004:125) identify an additional feature which reinforces the continued re-election of a particular party: that of the dominant party having been a “former liberation movement with a particularly symbolic identity and which played a historically significant role”. It is thus noted that a dominant party’s ability to continue to be re-elected rests on its strength and party organisation, as well as its history and identity.

“Long dominance by one party affects the way the other political forces perceive the political system” (Arian and Barnes in Brooks 2004:125). As such, the strategy and response of the opposition parties are driven by the dominant party, and the dominant party enjoys its position as a result of the opposition parties. Given the advantages that dominant parties enjoy, they have little incentive to govern effectively in a reasonable competitive environment and to allow the conditions for democratic competition to thrive (Karume 2004:53). Where one party dominates the political landscape and faces little prospect of electoral defeat, concerns arise about the possibility of electoral declining government response to public opinion, loss of accountability, and the overall erosion of democratic principles and development of authoritarian methods of rule (Brooks 2004:122).

In view of these circumstances and under such conditions, dominant party systems are perceived as not conducive to a liberal democracy. Although dominant party systems allow for an element of stability and predictability, the system itself is viewed as an “unhealthy phenomenon” (Heywood 1997:244; Welsh in Sadie 2001:294). In a dominant party system the distinction between that which is the state and that which is the ruling party, begins to erode. The lines between “party interests” and “state interests” begin to blur (Welsh in Sadie 2001:294). If political parties provide the link between the state and civil society, each separate entity within the system, then this blurring implies that parties no longer provide for that function in such a system because the state becomes the party. Elements such as corruption and a weak and inefficient opposition begin to emerge, and with time, the electorate begins to fear change. The lack of a strong civil society that is well informed will simply result in citizens failing to remove government via their right to vote and replacing it with a representative and accountable assembly (Heywood 2002:263). Furthermore, the dominant party may begin to increasingly concentrate power in the executive and central party structures. The separation of powers in order to provide for checks and balances on the abuse of power, is then no longer useful in such a system. Finally, Welsh (in Sadie 2001:294) argues, that since the opposition parties are no longer competitive rivals for power, it becomes so much easier to ignore criticisms and protests. Over time, issues of legitimacy will eventually arise. Thus, although such a system may have arisen as a direct result of the democratic choices of the electorate, in time a change of leadership does become necessary in order to consolidate democratic transition.

While this may paint a somewhat gloomy picture, Karume (2004:48) noted that at times and under certain conditions, a dominant system may in fact be necessary and conducive to the entrenchment of democracy. In fact, developing nations may need such a system which provides a “third alternative to the full competition of two party and multiparty democracies on the one hand and the iron monopolies of power in the dictatorial one party systems on the other. It [dominant party] thus offers new and struggling nations a way out of what some people see as an impossible choice between too much party competition and none at all” (Ranney 1987:181-182). This view was also noted by Macridis and Brown (1986:265), who state that many observers suggested that such systems and even one party systems may in fact aid transition in new countries seeking to transform to a more democratic regime. Party dominance on the other hand also serves well when there is a need to promote national reconciliation and forge the unity required after oppressive systems, such as apartheid in the South African case, have been eliminated. A degree of political stability needed to be established in the new South Africa, not only to promote national reconciliation, but also to create the preconditions necessary for democracy and the building of the nation, especially in the context of the immense political and development challenges it faced.

Pierre du Toit (in Karume 2004:50) refers to this need for national reconciliation and nation building as “benign bridge building”, and adds that the dominant party can only serve to unite a country if it has the necessary organisational functions, namely party strength and party system strength.

Whilst the dominant party system is often viewed as an unhealthy phenomenon in the democratic political system, the historical background in which a dominant party operates needs to be considered before such judgement can be made. For example: Is dominance the result of the choice of the electorate? What is the history of that country in terms of style of governance? Is the ruling party a former liberation movement? As a result of the dominant party’s ability to remain in power for long periods of time, the dominant party is able to significantly influence the Legislature where the interests of the people are represented. This can be done through various strategies such as the manipulation of election rules, the abuse of government resources, and the manipulation of democratic institutions (Karume 2004:45-46). The dominant party is able to further wield influence in such situations when they have a stronger, more developed, party organisation.

The focus of this article is the Legislature where the dominant party tendencies and characteristics of dominant partyism are to be analysed.

4. DOMINANT PARTY TENDENCIES IN THE FREE STATE LEGISLATURE

4.1 Analysis of the dominant party system

The characteristics of a dominant party system have been identified. When these characteristics are applied to the Free State, various tendencies emerge. These tendencies will be examined in the light of their effect on the Legislature.

4.2 Ruling for a prolonged period of time

In defining dominant party systems, Sadie (in Venter 2001:293) uses Sartori's definition of dominant party systems in which he refers to a prolonged period of time as ruling for at least three consecutive elections. In the Free State, the ANC won four consecutive elections. With each election the ANC fared better, enjoying 65,9% of political support in the 2009 election nationally and 71,10% in the Free State Provincial Legislature (Electoral Institute of Southern Africa 2007a:online; Electoral Institute of Southern Africa 2007b:online). Translated into seats in the Legislature, this means that the ANC won 264 out of 400 seats in the National Legislature and 22 out of 30 seats in the Provincial Legislature (Electoral Institute of Southern Africa 2007a:online; Electoral Institute of Southern Africa 2007b: online). The remaining seats were divided among the various opposition parties.

The ANC's tendency to dominate the Free State Legislature is compounded by the tendencies of the Free State people to vote in racial blocs, as well as the demographics of the voters in the Free State. Lodge (1999:180) stated that the "size of the huge ANC majorities in ... (the) Free State reflect(s) African demographic dominance". Since statistics reveal that voters continue to vote in racial blocs in the absence of a viable opposition, and considering that the ANC has a predominantly rural support in the Free State, these Free State statistics are indicative of future voting patterns.

Furthermore, the tendency to rule for a long time is the result of several factors present in the Free State. Firstly, the tendency is to vote according to racial identity (Brooks 2004:122). Secondly, this tendency is reinforced by the fact that opposition political parties have very little to offer as an alternative. This can be reflected in the number of seats secured by the opposition in the Free State: in 1994 the official opposition (National Party) secured only four seats in the Legislature; in 1999 the Democratic Party, as official opposition, secured two seats; in 2004 the Democratic Alliance, as official opposition in the Free State, secured three seats; and in the 2009 elections, the Congress of the People secured four seats to become the official opposition (Electoral Institute of South Africa 2007c:online). Voters themselves very often become complacent, and often either elect not to vote or simply spoil votes.

Voter turnout in the Free State declined in the last two elections (Electoral Institute of South Africa 2007c:online). Botha (2004:56) argues that this, too, is an important tendency towards dominant partyism. Finally, the ANC, as the dominant party, also enjoys the status of a former liberation movement. As a result, the people themselves remain loyal to the party that contributed towards their freedom (Brooks 2004:125). The tendency to rule for a long period of time is reinforced by several factors. As a result the dominant party then has a tendency to become both complacent and corrupt (Heywood 1997:243-245; Brooks 2004:121).

These factors also imply that the ANC is assured of re-election irrespective of whether the party is able to deliver or not. This in itself leads to other dominant party tendencies which in turn re-enforce dominant partyism. As a result of this, members of the dominant party that are elected to the Legislature become complacent and corrupt.

4.3 Complacency and corruption

Complacency and corruption occur when a party was re-elected for a prolonged period of time, irrespective of whether or not the party had delivered successfully on election promises. In the case of the dominant party in the Free State the effect of this complacency and corruption can be seen at grass roots level as the electorate begins to suffer the consequences. The relationship between the Legislature and the executive bears relevance here, since the ruling ANC has dominance in both branches of government. The following incidences of complacency and corruption are as a result of the party's dominance in the executive and are influenced by the infighting as North-South groups try to control the executive which is responsible for carrying out transformation and development goals.

The Community Survey of 2007 (Stats Online 2007:online) shows that people making use of electricity in their households increased from 74,4% in 2001 to 86,6% in 2007. Households that have access to piped water increased from 95,7% in 2001 to 97,5% in 2007. While more than 50% of people make use of a flush toilet system, the Free State also has the country's highest number of people in the country making use of the bucket system: 12,7%.

Based on the Auditor General's reports for 2005/2006 the Democratic Alliance spokesperson on provincial and local government, William Doman, compiled a document on provincial service delivery. The results of this were severe under-expenditure, misallocation of houses and lack of sewerage (Doman 2007:5). Education, missing reports, corruption and wastage were the main problems, which were coupled with a staff who "could not be physically verified" (Doman 2007:5). The Health Department too reflected problems with tendering processes, debt, non-existent employees and delays in the completion of construction projects. Such tendencies are not only evident at provincial level, but also at municipal level. For example, the Census Survey of 2001

showed that between 1996 and 2001 the Free State did not show any improvement in the collection of refuse removal (Stats Online 2007:online).

This complacency is not only reflected in service delivery but also in terms of members of the Legislature meeting in order to fulfil the requirements of a provincial Legislature. Reports state that “the Free State Legislature met for six hours and 25 minutes over five days. On one day, it met for five minutes” (Anon. 1999a:online).

In terms of corruption, the Free State is ridden with examples from the former Premier of the Legislature down to local municipalities. These cases of corruption are noted, since members of the executive serve on the Legislature. Former Premier Patrick Lekota was under scrutiny for failing to declare business assets (Piper 2003:online). During Lekota’s time as Premier, he suspended Vax Mayekiso, MEC for Housing, in April 1995 for alleged abuse of his position for financial enrichment (Twala 2005:114). In 1996 Lekota also allegedly removed Magashule as an MEC for so-called mismanagement of public money, but reinstated him under pressure from the ANC’s national leadership (Anon. 2008c:online). Bauer (2007:112) too cites examples of corruption mentioned in the Mphahlele Commission of Inquiry and the Dube Commission of Inquiry to investigate allegations of irregularities and maladministration in the Free State’s Department of Education. Municipalities also find themselves victim to corruption. Recent Scorpions Crime Unit investigations claim that corruption topped R150 million or 10% of the municipal budget of the City of Mangaung (Bloemfontein) (Robinson 2006:online). This investigation eventually led to the removal from office of Mangaung Mayor, Papi Mokoena in 2005 (Sole 2005:online). This is just one such example of corruption on municipal level. As long as inconsistencies remain in terms of how the corruption is dealt with, such corruption will continue.

4.4 Lack of competition between parties

The lack of competition between parties within the Free State Legislature is reflected in the number of seats occupied by the opposition. After the 1994 election the opposition shared six seats (National Party four seats and Freedom Front two seats) in the Free State Legislature (Electoral Institute of Southern Africa 2007c:online). After the 1999 and 2004 elections, this number was reduced to five seats between the New National Party, the Democratic Party and the Freedom Front in 1999; and the Democratic Alliance, the Freedom Front + and the United Democratic Movement in 2004 (Electoral Institute of Southern Africa 2007c:online). By the 2009 elections, opposition seats had risen to eight (Congress of the People four seats, the Democratic Alliance three seats and the Freedom Front one seat), whilst the ANC retained over 70% of the seats (Electoral Institute of Southern Africa 2007c:online). This may be attributed to the ANC’s strong rural influence, and the inherent weaknesses within the opposition parties. When weighed up against the dominant ANC’s majority seats, the combined opposition poses no threat to the party’s dominance (Giliomee, *et al.* 2001:162-163). As long as

opposition parties are unable to appeal to a broader spectrum of the population, they are likely to remain weak and ineffective. This occurs as a result of opposition parties remaining fragmented, and voters voting according to racial identity, thereby providing little competition between parties and little chance of a change to the dominance in the Legislature. This feature is particularly applicable to the Free State Legislature where the ANC dominated the Legislature in all four general elections with more than 70% of the seats (Electoral Institute of Southern Africa 2007c:online).

This characteristic of the lack of competition between parties in turn leads to competition within the dominant party. This tendency is visible both on a national level and on a provincial level, and particularly in the Free State.

4.5 Competition within the dominant party

The existing tensions, infighting and factionalism within the ANC is an accepted fact. In this section, the competition within the dominant party will be discussed in terms of the effects on the Legislature.

The factionalism within the dominant ANC party in the Free State are along the lines of what has been referred to as the North-South divide, or the Magashule-Lekota supporters, and in recent developments within the party on a national level in terms of Mbeki-Zuma supporters, or even the “doves and the hawks” (Anon. 2008b:online; Duvenhage 2004:23). The effect of this infighting resulted in repeated cabinet reshufflings, required the need for national government intervention and redeployment of members of the Executive to Parliament, and saw the national government dissolving the Provincial Executive. In turn this impacts on the Executive. As Sandra Botha (2007:27) writes in the *Round Table Quarterly* “local (Free State) control is totally ANC and divisions in the Legislature are entirely based on factions hoping to have control of the Executive”. Then the failure of service delivery and corruption begin to manifest themselves. Finally, when there are repeated cabinet reshuffles, the Legislature is unable to fulfil its functions in terms of passing bills (Anon. 1999a:online).

In the absence of a viable opposition and while the tendency to vote in racial blocs remains, the tendency for competition within the dominant party will also remain.

4.6 Weak opposition

Although comparatively the opposition in the Free State remains weak, sharing only five seats in the Legislature, the opposition is making inroads. In the 2000 municipal by-elections, the DA demonstrated that it could draw electoral support from townships such as Allanridge and Tumahole (Lodge and Scheidegger 2006:27). In the April 2006 municipal by-elections, opposition parties gained two previously ANC wards: one in Allanridge, won by the DA, and one in Tumahole went to the PAC (Tabane, Rossouw, Dawes and Sole 2008:online). Furthermore, these were significant victories

in terms of percentages: in Allanridge the DA won by 68,85% and in Tumahole, the PAC won by 88% (Independent Electoral Commission 2008:online).

With strong factionalism within the ANC both nationally and particularly in the Free State between the North–South regions, this tension could in future benefit opposition parties and could result in opposition parties considerably strengthening their current weak status. Furthermore, the DA managed to secure more votes with each election: 1,73% in 1994; 9,56% in 1999 and 12,37% of the votes in 2004 (Electoral Institute of Southern Africa 2007c:online). The ANC continued to dominate both the Provincial and National Legislature in the 2009 election. However, their win by a slightly reduced margin than in previous years as a result of infighting and the emergence of a new party, in the form of the Congress of the People (COPE), allowed the weak and fragmented opposition to benefit substantially. There is thus evidence of voter dissatisfaction with the dominant ANC in the Free State.

5. MANIFESTATIONS OF THE DOMINANT PARTY TENDENCIES IN THE FREE STATE LEGISLATURE

The above-mentioned dominant party tendencies in the Free State Legislature have manifested themselves in the following areas:

5.1 Debt

In terms of debt, poor revenue collection (Mufamadi 2006:online) as well as the misallocation and misappropriation of funds are major contributions to municipal debt. Furthermore, many municipalities find themselves in financial crises (Gericke 2008b:online; Gericke 2008a:online). In the Goldfields, business is taking legal steps against municipalities for collapsed infrastructure; in Kroonstad and Bethlehem rate payers are withholding rates and taxes in protest against non-delivery of services; in Bloemfontein/Mangaung the ANC temporarily expelled Executive Mayor Gertrude Mothupi, her Speaker, Mahlomola Ralebese, and 14 councillors for mismanagement (Anon. 2008d:online; Gericke 2008b:online). Doman (2007:1-13), in a report based on the Auditor General's report of 2005/2006, cites numerous inconsistencies in the Free State. These include underspending of budgets, failure to investigate financial misconduct timeously, failure to conduct internal audits, non-existent employees and missing assets. This occurred largely in the housing, health and education departments.

5.2 Division within the ruling party

Division within the ruling party in the Free State Legislature manifested in regular cabinet reshuffles and deployment of members to parliament, tension between the North-South supporters, and the formation of COPE, resulting in former ANC

members joining the newly created party, all contributing toward dominant party tendencies. This division within the ruling party impacts on both the Legislature and the executive because little time is spent on governance as party members attempt to establish dominance.

Yet, despite the division within the ruling party leading to the establishment of COPE as a party, the ANC itself has withstood infighting and factionalism since its liberation movement days (Compare Gericke 2008a:online <http://152.111.1.251/argief/berigte/volksblad/2008/08/28/OS/1/straat1.html>; Maré 2008:online <http://152.111.1.251/argief/berigte/volksblad/2008/08/28/VR/2/vsroy.html>; Anon. 2008a:online). COPE secured over 10% of the vote in the Free State, Northern Cape and Eastern Cape, thus becoming the official opposition in these provincial legislatures (Electoral Institute of Southern Africa 2007c:online).

5.3 Positive aspects of dominance

While dominant party tendencies may result in a weakening of democracy, the existence of a dominant party may also allow for continuity and consistency in terms of governance and policy. Dominant partyism may even at times be necessary for nation building in diverse countries. In this respect the ANC as dominant party in the Free State enjoyed several successes:

5.3.1 Relative stability

Given the potential for violence and instability in countries undergoing transformation, South Africa in general and the Free State in particular has enjoyed relative stability (Marshoff 2008:online).

5.3.2 Stable economic growth

In her State of the Province Address in February 2008, Premier Beatrice Marshoff announced that the Free State Province had achieved an economic growth rate of 4,2%, and had reduced unemployment from 38,9% to 26,5% (Free State Provincial Government 2007a:online; Marshoff 2008:online).

5.3.3 Gender equality

The Free State also appointed the first female premier in the country, Ms Ivy Matsepi-Casaburri. The province is also at the forefront of gender equality in terms of other provincial government appointments: women constitute 20% of the heads of provincial departments, 20% of the 25 municipal managers and 23,7% of the provincial government's senior managers (Marshoff 2008:online).

The dominant party tendencies in the Free State Legislature thus manifested themselves in real issues which directly affect the voter at grassroots.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Dominant party systems display tendencies of prolonged periods of power, complacency and corruption, competition shifts from between parties to the dominant power, weak and ineffective opposition and a blurring of lines between state and party.

In the Free State Province, the ANC won each election with more than 70% of the votes and established dominance in both the Legislature and the Executive in the last 15 years. However, the party is internally fragmented, and the division lies between the North and South supporters and lies further along the lines of party President, Jacob Zuma, and former State President, Thabo Mbeki.

The research has shown that dominant party tendencies do indeed exist in the Free State Province. The province has elements of complacency and corruption; competition shifted from between parties to the dominant party; and the opposition in the province remains weak and fragmented. The ANC dominated the Free State Legislature with an overwhelming majority in the Legislature, and thus also controls the Executive in the province. Within the party itself, the elements of infighting and factionalism between the north-south groups remain as tense as ever.

In terms of the criteria for dominant partyism that a political party should have ruled for a prolonged period of time, the ANC secured that position since 1994 both nationally and provincially. The ANC won all democratic elections in South Africa and one can therefore conclude that the system has become a dominant party system displaying all the characteristics of a dominant party system. The provincial focus of this study has shown that the party ruled for a prolonged period of time and after four consecutive elections. While the provincial party leadership contributed to some successes in the province, the infighting and factionalism in the province contributed to poor service delivery and governance. This led to voter apathy, despite the party winning by large percentages with each election. The members of the electorate who do vote continue to do so more out of party loyalty than because of a rational choice.

If no strong opposition party emerges, then it is likely that the ANC will once again dominate the Free State Provincial Legislature for another term. This dominance though will be secured through party loyalty and low voter turnout, and not through the party's ability to meet campaign promises and deliver. With the emergence of a new political party and Magashule's supporters still being in the majority, the ANC will have to reassess its strategy. While this may be good for democracy, the Free State Legislature will still endure the tendencies of a dominant party system even though the margin by which the party wins is smaller.

In conclusion, dominant party tendencies exist in the Free State Legislature and are not conducive to nation building, good governance and service delivery. In the absence of a strong opposition, the DA and COPE may in the future gain a few extra seats but not enough to challenge the dominant power. As long as the opposition is unable to present viable policy alternatives and as long as voters continue to vote according to racial identity, the *status quo* in the Free State province is likely to remain. Despite the emergence of a new political party the *status quo* remains, as it appears that Magashule supporters are in the majority. However, with the eventual appointment of Ace Magashule as Premier, it is not a given that rifts in the dominant party will cease, and this infighting and factionalism will not be conducive to service delivery and good governance. Dominant party tendencies are thus likely to continue in the province at least for the next election term.

It is, therefore, recommended that in order to entrench democracy and democratic values in South Africa's transformation to a democracy, a strong civil society emerges. Such a civil society can contribute to knowledge and skills in South Africa and can empower society and assist the state in driving change. A strong opposition party is required, be it from existing opposition parties or from existing alliances. When the electorate is given a viable choice in elections then voters will begin to base their choices on the differences that a party can make and not upon party loyalty and racial identity. This will result in strong competition between parties and will lead to more effective opposition. Stronger opposition parties will offer the ANC as dominant party that element of uncertainty required in an election that will limit the tendency for complacency and corruption. This will also reduce the blurring of lines between state and party.

It is important to note that South Africa has a multiparty system, from which a dominant party has emerged. The concerns are that the tendencies of a dominant party that are presently manifested, will lead to erosion of democratic principles and ultimately to authoritarianism. The fact that the ANC emerged as the dominant party, is the result of various factors, including the tendency to vote along racial lines, the history of the ANC as a liberation movement, and the fact that there is no strong opposition. As many as 26 parties competed in the 2009 general election, all with diverse ideologies, thus dividing opposition support. The continued dominance of one party and the weakness of another is a self-reinforcing process and each has a direct relationship with the other. There needs to be fewer but stronger opposition parties, that appeal to a broader interest spectrum of South African society, and opposition must have more credibility and legitimacy.

If the ANC wishes to remain in power and become the example of the type of dominant party that contributes to unity and nation building during periods of transformation, then the party will have to address the issues noted in this study: complacency and corruption, competition within the party, and blurring of boundaries

between state and party. These issues manifest themselves in the form of debt, lack of administrative and management capacities, weak institutionalisation and poor service delivery. By addressing these dominant party tendencies responsible for the low success rate of transformation, the ANC has the potential to become the type of dominant party suggested by Macridis and Brown, and Karume.

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