

Election 2019: Change and Stability in South Africa's Democracy

edited by Collette Schulz-Herzenberg and Roger Southall, Jacana Media, Auckland Park, 2019, 350 pp.

The South African national and provincial election of May 2019 was a watershed in South Africa's ongoing process of democratisation. It was also the most analysed election in the democratic era before the actual voting took place. Numerous attempts to predict the result demonstrate how high the stakes were and still are for all the parties and citizens, rich and poor, in South Africa. As is to be expected, the pollsters and their instruments failed to capture the dynamics of voting and the actual result. Of interest were alternative approaches to predicting the outcome. These entailed examining party performance in past elections (national, provincial and local as well as local by-elections) based on voting station and ward data. I dare say that these approaches got close to being accurate.

While an ANC national victory was never in doubt, the question was the extent of its loss of support based on the Zuma years of state capture and corruption. On the other hand, the DA was under pressure to perform, based on resource allocation, and to break out of the Western Cape while growing black township votes. Internal DA turmoil cast doubt on whether the ambitious targets set could ever be met. The EFF, still riding the crest of the wave of its previous electoral successes, extrapolated that it would receive four times the support it won in 2014. The involvement of the EFF in the VBS scandals emerged in full detail only much later, enabling the EFF to fight the election on a relatively scandal-free ticket. The IFP entered this election as an enigma. After dropping support in 2014 to the NFP, there were signs that it was rebuilding and consolidating support at the expense of the latter. In addition, there were numerous smaller provincial parties hoping to win a seat or two in the national and provincial legislatures.

After the dust had settled and the results were in, interest in the outcome and analysis of these elections waned. Many analysts were exhausted and either boasted about their accuracy and how they got it right, or provided ad hoc modifications to their polling to show how they were actually correct even though this was not so. In this immediate post-election climate of guesswork, thumb-sucking and opinion polls, there was a need for careful analysis of the results to draw out the implications of May 2019 based on real data. Thankfully, Schulz-Herzenberg and Southall have gathered together a team of writers who focussed on parties and cross-cutting themes in the elections. This collection is, therefore, the definitive analysis of the 2019 election and is indispensable reading for professional and amateur psephologists and political analysts alike.

It is a book crammed full of useful data and election tables that will serve as a reference point for many years to come, and the editors and authors deserve

praise for the consolidation of such complex data in an accessible yet meaningful way. A sign of the value of the text is that party performance comes after important preliminary analysis of national context and election management through the IEC. With the ANC entering the campaign on the back foot through its own internal divisions, there were concerns that the IEC would not perform its tasks to the letter of the law because high officials were politically aligned. Early concerns indicated that these fears were justified, as the absence or lack of ballots in certain voting stations coupled with the ink controversy made it possible for some to wash the marking off and then vote again. A statistical analysis of flagged voting stations was undertaken to establish whether such events materially undermined the final result. They did not, but the flaws in the system remain and require serious attention. Voter participation and turnout also receives attention in the early part of the book and this review will return to these matters later.

The ANC campaign and performance are succinctly discussed and analysed in the first chapter, getting to grips with the politics of the election. Besides ANC relief at achieving a 65% national victory and retaining its Gauteng majority by the closest of margins, there is valuable insight into how the campaign played out for the divided ANC. Clearly, keeping the ANC comfortably in the 60% area provided a power boost for ANC President Ramaphosa in trying to keep the ANC together while nudging it towards reform. More data here would have provided specific insights into how Gauteng was held, demonstrating the effectiveness of power brokers in the eastern part of Gauteng winning back many of the faithful. This success has resulted in power plays and new powerbases for groupings not clearly aligned to President Ramaphosa. At the same time, the loss of support in parts of KZN may also contribute to an understanding of future ANC internal dynamics. The implications of this will come through in the 2021 local government election and the ANC's 2022 National General Council.

The chapter on the DA uses the data to show where and how the voting base of the party declined and is prescient on the implications this would have for the party. In October this year the DA leader, Mmusi Maimane, resigned and there is a restructuring and reorientation of the DA currently underway. The analysis here provides a clear understanding of how and why this happened. While the ANC's 3% in support was, ironically seen as a victory, the DA's 2% decline was perceived as a disaster and heads did end up rolling. At the same time, the data shows that the DA failed to break out of the Western Cape and Gauteng, its bulk voting bases, and consolidate support in other provinces.

The only major party to grow support was the indefatigable EFF which nearly doubled their 2014 vote share of 6.4%, achieving an impressive 10.8%. A breakdown of the EFF voting base requires more analysis; the provincial weighting of its support is clear and it lacks a meaningful presence in the south and east of South

Africa. What the EFF appears to have done successfully is appeal to the youth, as indicated by its dominance of campus politics. In a way, their success suggests the political failure of former President Zuma's announcement of free higher education in a bid to win back the campuses to the ANC. The question is whether the EFF can continue its growth trajectory now that there is more information in the public domain about the association of some of its leaders with funds allegedly obtained from the now collapsed VBS Mutual Bank. The 2021 local government election will be watched closely to see if this is the case.

Unfortunately, all the other parties are dealt with in a single chapter. This is understandable at one level, as they all received below 5% of the vote. But the regional dynamics of these parties is lost and at the same time competition and ebbs and flows of support amongst and between them are lost. This is not insignificant as the IFP seems to have gained at the NFP's expense while the loss of ANC support in parts of KZN needs to be analysed in relation to these smaller parties. Were they able to pick up votes through the fallout of ANC factional battles? It is important to understand the future prospects of at least these two parties, the IFP and NFP. These regional dynamics and fluctuations in voting are crucial at local level and will inform trade-offs between the ANC and IFP in building future municipal coalitions in different parts of the country. On the other hand, the rapid growth of FF⁺ is nothing more than the defection of white former DA voters in certain parts of the country alienated by the DA's focus on affirmative action. It is unlikely that these voters will return in significant numbers to the DA. The DA's future prospects depend on growing its black voter base significantly, and this is the challenge facing its new leadership.

Other chapters examine social media in the run-up to the election, with fascinating spirographs of bots and other activity. Yet there is no clear evidence of how any of this may have influenced the voting behaviour of citizens, a large portion of whom do not have access to or participate in social media. The chapter on gender presents important data on policy and gender representation across parties as well as in parliament and the provincial legislatures. A general analysis of party voting support includes valuable tables demonstrating the trends and drawing out their implications. The volume concludes with a general overview integrating all the chapters, their argument and analysis.

The results of the 2019 election were largely expected and there were no real surprises. This means that the detailed analysis of parties and their performance, while important, is not the takeaway issue from the election. Rather, and as already suggested, the process issues regarding the management of the election certainly are. More significantly are the related data of voter registration and actual voter turnout. These issues are discussed in a chapter in the early section of the book but they deserve more attention.

While the 2019 election will be declared successful, demonstrating the increasing strength of South Africa's democratic system, there are latent issues that are of great concern and which require that such optimism is qualified. Voter registration is down and 9 million eligible South Africans did not or could not register. This is a challenge for the IEC to go into all parts of South Africa to create registration opportunities. Moreover, if the demographic analysis is valid, then the large number of youths not registering is of particular concern. Is this apathy or is it a perception that mainstream parties don't reflect the needs of marginalised rural and urban youth? If that is the case, then the implications are dire. To survive parties need to find policies that reflect this constituency's needs and keep it within the realm of participatory constitutional democracy.

In addition to a decline in voter registration, voter turnout was also down from 2014 (73.5%) to 2019 (66%). Many analysts assumed a lower turnout than 2014, but the extent caught most by surprise. Many established democracies may only dream of a 66% turnout; but the fact that there was a 7.5% decline in participation is the real take away from this election. It clearly suggests that South African voters are increasingly less convinced that parties really act in their interests, while the performance of public institutions does not benefit them. This loss of public trust in the democratic process and related institutions is the canary in the coal mine. If responsiveness, representation and performance do not improve across the board at national and provincial level, South Africa's great democratic experiment of 1994 may enter a phase of irreversible decline. This is the challenge to all parties and government. More needed to made of this trend in the chapter and these issues deserved greater prominence.

All in all, however, the book is a valuable contribution to understanding South Africa's democracy. It will appeal to novices and experts alike and this is a compliment to the authors and editors. Increasingly, election analysis is moving away from 'will the ANC win' to 'are citizens participating fully in the democratic system'. This collection is one of the first serious analyses to engage with this vexed question and is an indispensable addition to the library of anyone who has an interest in the sustainability of democracy in South Africa.

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