



Promoting Credible Elections and
Democratic Governance in Africa

**Realising effective and sustainable
democratic governance in Southern
Africa and beyond.**

The Dominant Party System: Challenges for South Africa's Second Decade of Democracy

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Introduction

The implications of a dominant party system for the successful consolidation of democracy, has long been an issue of interest amongst political scientists in democracies the world-over¹. In a context in which one party dominates the political landscape and faces little prospect of electoral defeat, then concerns arise surrounding the possibility of declining government response to public opinion; loss of accountability; and the overall erosion of democratic principles and development of authoritarian methods of rule. Since 1994, elections in South Africa, which have seen repeated overwhelming victory for the ruling African National Congress (ANC), have succeeded in projecting the nation's young democracy into the limelight with regards to this particular political debate. The national celebrations in April of this year, marking 10 years of freedom and democracy in South Africa, took place against the backdrop of a clear ANC electoral victory at the 14 April polls, in which the ruling party and former liberation movement succeeded in securing 69.68 % of the national vote. Given that the ANC is now set to rule for the next 5 years at least, what challenges does the dominant party system present for South Africa's second decade of democracy?

There is no doubt that the ruling ANC has commanded a legitimate electoral victory. However, surveys of public opinion and voter intentions have suggested that this is not matched by unquestionable voter satisfaction and contentment with the current government

¹ See for example, T.J. Pempel (1990) *Uncommon Democracies: the One Party Dominant Regimes*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, for a study of party dominance in the advanced industrialised countries. Arian and Barnes (1974) also discuss the dominant party systems of Italy and Israel. Giliomee and Simkins (1999) look at the dominant party regimes of South Africa, Mexico, Taiwan and Malaysia.

and its delivery. Space, in fact, exists for a political opposition to appeal to the interests of the electorate, not least South Africa's black majority. In the absence of a credible opposition, however, South Africans continue to vote largely according to racial identity. This has subsequently entrenched the political dominance of the ANC, which continues to be perceived as the party representing the black majority; and has spurred the withdrawal from the democratic process of those sections of the electorate who do not identify with the dominant party. The weakness of the political and parliamentary opposition equally raises concerns over how we can ensure that government remains accountable to its citizens. As a result, "increasingly the debate is not just about whether democracy in South Africa will survive, but about the *quality* of that democracy" (Southall, 2001: 1). While there appears to be no real threat to democracy in South Africa, it does face several challenges over the coming years, and successful democratic consolidation will depend upon alertness to the emergence of the undemocratic features frequently associated with dominant party systems.

This article is therefore an exploration of these various challenges. The paper begins by providing a conceptualisation, exploring the various theoretical arguments and debates surrounding the dominant party system and democracy. The following section then seeks to provide an understanding of the nature of the dominant party system in the South African political setting. This is done through a brief overview of the nation's three democratic elections and examination of both the ruling ANC as dominant party, and the role and nature of political opposition in South Africa. This is then followed by an analysis and discussion of the implications of this system and the challenges for South Africa's second decade of democracy.

Conceptualising Dominant Party Systems: A Literature Survey

In a recent issue of EISA's *Election Update*, Matlosa and Karume, categorised the dominant party system as a system "in which despite the multi-party 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" (2004: 10). The existence of this scenario is clearly a cause for concern if we concur with the negative view that the dominant party system is inimical to democracy. Much of the debate surrounding the incompatibility of the dominant party system and democracy are centred round the theory that the alternation of power is crucial for democracy². It has been argued that "one party dominance becomes problematic when a governing party sees less and less need to respond to public opinion because it is assured of re-election" (Africa et al, 2003: 2). Existence of political opposition within a competitive party system presents alternatives to the governing party and, therefore, stimulates debate within society over ideas and policies; and allows society to question the actions and choices of government. Moreover, it is argued that countervailing forces, the most effective of which is existence of a strong political opposition, are essential to check transgression toward authoritarian tendencies and abuse of power by the incumbency (Giliomee & Simkins, 1999: 337). This is a viewpoint vehemently argued by Giliomee & Simkins in their useful, while somewhat cynical, analysis of one party domination and democracy, *The Awkward Embrace*. For them, in a dominant party system, "the vital elements of democracy, namely genuine competition and uncertainty in electoral outcomes, are removed in a process that is self-sustaining" (1999: 340). It is argued that this process is characterised by a blurring of the boundary between party and state, which has the effect of reducing the likely formation of independent groups from within civil society that are autonomous from the ruling party; and a growing 'preponderance' of political power, leading to abuse of office and "arbitrary decision-making that undermines the integrity of democratic institutions, particularly that of the legislature and its ability to check the executive" (*ibid*).

² See for example, Huntington, S. 1991. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press; Przeworski, A. and Limongi, F. 1997. 'Modernization: Theories and Facts', *World Politics*, 49; and debates in Giliomee and Simkins (eds) (1999)

The dominant party system has therefore frequently been linked to concerns over the emergence of autocratic regimes and the one party state, not least within the Africa context. While the definition of democracy should by no means be reduced to the holding of elections, elections are undoubtedly a key vehicle by which the political leadership is able to retain dominance. A number of states, for example, have witnessed the manipulation of electoral laws and regulations by the incumbent party with the intention of disadvantaging opposition and ensuring the retention of power. Elections in Zimbabwe in 2000 and 2002 are, themselves, a case in hand. The ongoing political crisis of legitimacy currently being played out in the country lends credence to those further aspects of “the process of entrenching dominance” (Giliomee & Simkins, 1999: 340), which extend beyond the formal electoral arena, to undermining the democratic system at large. The dominant party trend in a number of African states since independence has seen the regression and reversal of democratic gains with regard to successful transitions in the region, and a threat to attempts at democratic consolidation.

On the other hand, others have advocated far more caution over branding the dominant party system as irreconcilable with the advancement of democracy. Arian and Barnes in fact hail the system as a “stabilising mechanism” in an article aptly entitled *The Dominant Party System: A Neglected Model of Democratic Stability*. Writing in 1974, their analysis is based upon examination of the dominant parties and party systems in Israel and Italy from the 1960s and 1940s respectively. However, the authors provide relevant insights into the nature of these systems which could be applied to others, and prove particularly useful to study of the dominant party system in South Africa. Their contention that the dominant party system be conceived as “a model of how democracy and stability may be combined under difficult conditions” (1974: 593), as well as “its superiority as a means to stability in fragmented polities” (1974: 600), is worth considering in the South African case.

Furthermore, while dominant party systems have not infrequently been characterised by

the use of illegitimate means, such as aforementioned electoral manipulation and even coercion, as a method of retaining power and electoral dominance, it is crucial to note that this is not a feature which can be applied to dominant party systems across the board. Rather, political dominance can equally be achieved via democratic means. Therefore, in some cases, although possibilities for alternation may seem acutely remote, dominance has been won through competitive elections and the “politics of consensus” (Matlosa & Karume, 2004: 14). Not only does this confer a legitimacy on the dominant ruling party by the electorate, but the party cannot ignore existence of political opposition (Chan, 1976: 4 cited in Friedman, 1999:100) and also, therefore, voter preferences (Friedman, 1999: 100). South Africa is formally a multiparty system in which one party is dominant. It is hence not a ‘given’ that the dominant party can rely on continued dominance. Rather, Arian & Barnes propose that “the politician of the dominant party can rely on electoral stability if he makes the appropriate decisions; he can rely on the cooperation of the satellite parties and the harmlessness of the opposition if he has electoral stability” (1974: 614). The issue of being able to retain dominance therefore acquires added importance. Under circumstances in which continued dominance is not inevitable, Arian and Barnes suggest that, rather, “political strategy is determining” and the dominant party must position itself strategically within the society and strategise ‘vis-à-vis’ the opposition (Arian & Barnes, 1974: 599).

Under a system in which party dominance has been won within the democratic rules of the game, the dominant party therefore has to function within the boundaries of the democratic system. Within this system are rules and institutions which administer checks and balances on abuse of power - although it should be noted that their effectiveness is dependent upon how advanced such a system is, and the effectiveness and autonomy of mechanisms and institutions in place. Equally, the ideology by which the party is identified by the electorate also puts certain constraints on its “freedom of maneuver” (Arian & Barnes, 1974: 597). However, while continuing dominance is by no means assured, Arian and Barnes have also argued that “the

dominant party is the authority that defines the boundaries between the permissible and the unacceptable” (*ibid*). It is therefore at a distinct advantage to the opposition. (Arian & Barnes, 599-600). For a dominant party, such as a former liberation movement, that holds a particularly symbolic identity and historically significant role, this gains added weight. The dominant party is able to consume the national political agenda at large. Giliomee and Simkins, drawing upon the work of Pempel (1990), refer to the party as administering an “historic project”, generating “even more dominance” (1999:xvi).

However, it should be noted that much also depends on the nature and legitimacy of that dominance. Taking the aforementioned example of those parties that emerged from the liberation struggle against colonial rule, such parties are able to use their liberation credentials to retain support (Baregu, 2004; Suttner, 2004). Moreover, the resonance this can hold with the majority of the electorate should not be underestimated. Often, it serves to not only legitimate the party as a hegemonic power, but also to delegitimize the opposition. As the dominant party comes to represent the nation and democracy, opposition can be depicted as opposing the national project (Myburgh, 2004; Suttner, 2004). On the other hand, it is also important not to overstate the case, as Friedman points out that ‘delegitimation’ of opposition is by no means a ‘gift’ given to the dominant party. Rather, “conditions must exist in which the electorate is open to delegitimation” (Friedman, 1999:101). Society’s response to, and continuation or cessation of support for, the dominant party is therefore also determined by society’s perception of the opposition and its identity, strategy and actions. Given the political weight of the dominant party, however, this is likely to be greatly influenced by the strategy of the ruling party.

Needless to say, therefore, that this is an interconnected and dialectical process. The continuation of dominance by one party is inextricably linked to both the opinion of the electorate (on whom the dominant party is reliant for the continuation of its political legitimacy); and to the existence of political competition in the form of opposition parties – neither of which it can ignore. However, a

crucial point raised by Arian and Barnes is that “dominant parties exist in *dominant party systems*. Long dominance by one party affects the way the other political forces perceive the political system...the dominant party comes to be identified with the regime and even with the epoch. Opposition parties are reduced to a role of carping and sniping rather than that of developing immediate alternatives” (Arian & Barnes, 1974: 599). As such, within the confinements of this ‘*system*’, in which one party is dominant, the strategy and response of the opposition inevitably come to be driven by that of the dominant party.

Given this above outline of some of the theories concerning the nature of the dominant party system and its relationship to democracy, it is important next to contextualise our analysis. This following discussion seeks to facilitate an understanding of the extent to which some of the arguments surrounding the dominant party system and its compatibility (or otherwise) with the development and consolidation of a healthy democracy apply to the South African case.

Electoral Dominance of the ANC

The ongoing debate surrounding South Africa’s dominant party system has gained increased significance over the nation’s three democratic elections. To enable a more informed examination of the South African context, this section will briefly cover the results of these elections. In 1994, the ANC entered into the Government of National Unity (GNU) with 62.65 % of votes, alongside the National Party (NP) - now the New National Party (NNP) - with 20.39 % and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) with 10.54 % (EISA, 1999). The 1994 political transition brought about the end of a racially exclusive and discriminatory political system, and extension of the democratic right to the majority. Realistically, the results of the 1994 election were preordained and there was no other probable outcome than that the ANC would win a majority in that election. The 1994 election was largely symbolic - “a rite of passage” rather than a contest between parties (Daniel, 2004: 13). However, the formation of the GNU, born of ongoing negotiation between parties, brought about the need for South Africa to embrace a politics of unity and

consensus building. The GNU was crucial to the formation of the new democracy, “incorporating the three largest parties, each representing major racial and ethnic segments of the electorate” (Schlemmer, 1999: 281-282). In a deeply divided and unequal society, historically constructed along racial lines, it is no surprise that voting patterns were a stark indication of voting along racial lines. A random sample survey conducted at the time suggested that 75.2 % of blacks voted for the ANC, compared to only 0.8% of whites; while 48.3 % of whites voted for the National Party (IDASA, Market and Opinion Surveys, 1994).

Table 1: Election Results: (% votes for those parties gaining seats in the National Assembly)

Party	Election Results: % Votes		
	1994	1999	2004
ANC	62.65	66.35	69.68
NNP (NP)	20.39	6.87	1.65
IFP	10.54	8.58	6.97
DA (DP)	1.73	9.56	12.37
UDM	-	3.42	2.28
ID	-	-	1.73
ACDP	0.45	1.43	1.6
PAC	1.25	0.71	0.73
FF	2.17	0.80	0.89
MF	0.07	0.30	0.35
FA	-	0.54	-
AEB	-	0.29	-
AZAPO	-	0.17	0.27

Source: Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, 1994, 1999; Independent Electoral Commission, 2004

In 1999, the ANC’s share of votes rose to 66.35 %. For some commentators, the 1999 election was a “consolidation election” (Southall, 1999: 15). The ANC returned to power as the dominant party and South Africans witnessed the smooth succession to power of President Mbeki; some have suggested that the ‘reformulation’ that took place amongst some opposition parties signified a movement away from the politics of the past; the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) played an invaluable role in overcoming many of the organisational problems of 1994; and the election served as a confirmation of what Southall terms as “South Africa’s broad acceptance of democratic rules of the game” (*ibid*). It has also been said that 1999 “represented the first ‘normalised’ test of

South African political attitudes given that the 1994 elections had been an emotionally charged ‘liberation election’” (Louw, 2000: 218).

However, 1999 also saw a weakening of the political opposition in Parliament. As indicated in table 2 below, in 1994 148 seats were occupied by 6 opposition parties, whereas, in 1999, the opposition gained only 134 seats, this time shared between twice as many parties. Having left the GNU in 1996 - feeling it would be able to do more to represent its constituencies as opposition - the NP saw a dramatic reduction in its support. From its position as the main opposition with 20.39 per cent of votes in 1994, this fell to a mere 6.87 per cent in 1999. This is despite the resignation of F.W de Klerk in 1997 and the NP’s attempts to revamp itself as the New National Party (NNP). In its place, the election saw the Democratic Party (DP) emerge as the official opposition under the leadership of Tony Leon, obtaining 9.56 per cent of the vote, up from 1.73 per cent in 1994. Support for the IFP, while still remaining fairly considerable, fell from 10.54 to 8.58 per cent in 1999. Although the election witnessed the emergence of some new extreme left and right wing parties, their share of votes remained fairly insignificant. Nonetheless, while a sizeable proportion of white voters transferred their allegiance from the NNP to the DP, the 1999 election continued to reflect people voting largely in racial blocs. The newly formed United Democratic Movement (UDM), while hoping to attract black and white voters - and particularly to win support away from some of the ANC’s black constituency - succeeded only in garnering support from some disgruntled blacks in the former Transkei (Louw, 2000: 221).

With regard to 2004, the efficiency and professionalism that characterised the elections were undoubtedly encouraging. The work of the IEC, and the attitude and involvement of civil society and political parties themselves gave the air of what appeared to be a broad national project to ensure elections were carried out successfully, and signified the commitment of South Africa to the strengthening of its own democracy. However, the 2004 election has also fuelled growing concerns over the future of

democracy in South Africa as results indicated a consolidation of the dominant party system. The most significant outcome for the opposition in this election was the increasing popularity of the Democratic Alliance (DA) – formerly the DP in the 1999 election. They reaffirmed their place as the main opposition with 12.37 per cent of the votes, up from 9.56 per cent in 1999. Contrastingly, for the NNP, the election represented an affirmation of their diminishing role on the South African political scene as they emerged with a mere 1.65 per cent of votes. Other opposition parties fared fairly poorly. The IFP saw a slight decrease in its share of votes compared to 1999. The newly formed Independent Democrats (ID), lead by former Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) member, Patricia De Lille, however, managed to draw a fairly impressive number of votes for its first election and secured 1.73 per cent of votes. The ANC, however, secured an overwhelming 69.68 per cent of votes – an increase of 3.33 per cent since 1999. While an ANC victory may have come as no surprise, the diminishing challenge posed by the opposition, and the consummate strengthening of the ruling party's hold over the national political agenda, raises some crucial questions as to the direction democracy in South Africa will take in the second decade of the country's liberation.

On the one hand, the past ten years, to an extent, have required patience and a certain amount of caution when making predictions for South Africa's future. In many ways it has been too early to tell how sustainable this young democracy will be, or, as some cynics have projected, whether South Africa would conform to the stereotyped pattern of other African states, of a steady abuse of power and authoritarian decline. Moreover, the immense social and economic challenges of reversing the inequalities of apartheid faced by the new ANC government on coming to power would prove challenging for any new democracy, let alone one laden with a legacy of racial inequality and discrimination. With its status and widespread support-base, the ANC was arguably the only party capable of carrying forth this project. It has also generally been accepted that change would not occur overnight, and "appreciation that a well-intentioned government is faced by remarkably difficult circumstances" (Southall,

1999: 14). The righting of South Africa's past and the significance associated with the extension of the democratic right to the majority, can, in part, help to account for why elections based on real policy issues, and conduct of successful opposition campaigns grounded in the provision of real policy alternatives, have not been forthcoming. Nonetheless, ten years on, given the tremendous hold on political power by the ANC, and the nature of the political opposition which has emerged within this context, the key concern lies in what implications this carries for South Africa's second decade of democracy.

It has been established that dominant party systems are by no means uniform (Giliomee & Simkins 1999, xvii - xviii). The process leading to the rise of party dominance will differ, and may be via democratic or inherently undemocratic means. Giliomee and Simkins categorise South Africa as "a democratic system with a dominant party playing according to some liberal democratic rules, but still well short of the alternation of power" (1999: xviii). They take a particularly negative stance on the ANC's dominance and the prospects it holds for democratic consolidation. However, this issue of adherence to the rules of liberal democracy is critical to our analysis. In a paper presented at EISA in May of this year, Rod Alence highlighted a crucial point, that in South Africa "the emergence of a single party dominant regime has coincided with the institutional strengthening of political contestation and constitutional government" and, moreover, that the growth of this dominance "has not been taken as licence to dismantle [these institutions]" (2004). In fact, in contrast to the abuse of power and unconstitutional tendencies of some of the ruling party's counterparts on the continent, Alence goes on to state that "the government has more consistently treated the consolidation of democracy as a central component of its project of postapartheid governance" (*ibid*)³.

³ Suttner (2004) also provides an interesting discussion. He challenges the argument that existence of a political opposition capable of becoming an alternative ruling party (and therefore able to keep a check on abuse of power by the incumbent) is a requirement for democratic consolidation. Rather, he points to

Moreover, the ANC government has given no indication that it wishes to suppress opposition (Edigheji, 2004: 17). On the contrary, “the South Africa (*sic*) Constitution provides for a liberal regime for the formation and operation of political parties, which the government has upheld” (*ibid*).

It is therefore necessary to place our analysis within South Africa’s specific political setting, and to exercise some caution when making pessimistic predictions for the future of democracy. The cooperation of political parties in this year’s elections and relative freedom given to those institutions such as the media and civil society organisations involved in the electoral process serve to exemplify this. Time and resources were put into ensuring that the 2004 election was run with efficiency; in strict accordance with the electoral law; and with consideration of the rights and needs of the electorate. Indeed, the 2004 election appears to have seen a growing respect for the role and authority of the IEC amongst both the electorate and political parties themselves. If, as Southall has argued, 1999 was a reflection of South Africa’s acceptance of democracy as the only “game in town” (1999: 9), then 2004 can only be seen as an encouraging indication of democratic consolidation in the country. To reiterate the point made earlier, this is not a party that has achieved dominance via undemocratic means.

This being said, however, it is necessary to go beyond the definition given by Giliomee and Simkins above, and to expand on and outline some of the features of the dominant party system as it is in South Africa. Matlosa and Karume have described what they see as some key features of the South African setting. These are “continuous electoral victories of a dominant party over time by huge margins and, as such, reducing oppositional contest to second fiddle; political hegemony of the ruling party over state institutions including control of the largest share of the legislature and local government authorities; and sole determination and direction of development policy trajectories by the ruling party with

the effectiveness and trust in constitutional mechanisms and institutions in South Africa, which are far more likely to facilitate the preservation of democracy.

little challenge or credible policy alternatives from opposition parties over time” (2004: 10). Of equal importance when applying particular theories of the dominant party debate to South Africa, is to understand the specific nature of the ANC as ruling party and the origins of democracy in South Africa, from which we cannot divorce the country’s unique political history. The protracted struggle against apartheid means that the historical role of the ANC carries tremendous significance. It is therefore futile to analyse South Africa’s democratic development without placing it in the context of its history of apartheid politics and racial separation on the one hand, and the politics of liberation on the other. No one would disagree that this still fundamentally serves to shape the nature of contemporary South African politics.

South Africa is by no means unique in that the leading nationalist liberation movement during its struggle became the governing party. Such parties have been able to command significant political legitimacy and support during the post-independence era, such that they are assured of a period of political power to embark on a ‘nation-building project’ as the new government. As such, systems characterised by the dominant party syndrome have tended to emerge in this context. The ANC, since its formation in 1912, has been able to extend its appeal and expand its support base to varying groups within society, such that it has within its ranks those on differing points along the ideological spectrum (Reddy, 2002:7-8). This has become more pronounced due to the precariously balanced relationship the party conducts with both business and capital, and with COSATU and the SACP in the tripartite alliance (see Suttner, 2004). This balance has to be carefully maintained, as Faull points out that the party’s manifesto must be crafted to “tie in the votes of trade union members, communists, the urban and rural poor, and the leafy suburbanites of the emergent middle class” (Faull, 2004: 10). An additional dimension to the dominant party in the South African context is therefore its historic alliance with labour and the political left. However, while COSATU played a valuable role in the political struggle, its influence on the ANC government’s policies post-1990 has given labour far less to shout about, as the

government has moved away from leftist policies toward the global economic orthodoxy of neo-liberalism. There consequently exists a contentious power balance within the alliance, in which labour and the left must consider which is the lesser of two evils: they can “cooperate and face marginalization”, or oppose their ally but risk “a government coming to power that is less friendly towards labour” (Webster, 2001: 271).

The breadth of the ANC comes from the party’s long history and evolution as a liberation movement-come-political party. Having moved in its inception from the middle-class black politics of an educated elite, to the politics of mass protest and urban uprising of the 1970s and 80s, the party extended both its ideological influence and moral authority, while its longstanding policy of non-racialism broadened its influence amongst some non-blacks during the struggle against apartheid. As a result, its extensive influence, “strong organisational structures” (Reddy, 2002), and centralised leadership (Butler, 2003: 8-9) have enabled the party to contain the varying viewpoints and policy stances within it in order to retain the cohesion and authority of the party (*ibid*; Reddy, 2002).

Interestingly, the dominant party system headed by the Congress Party in post-colonial India - widely seen as having *nurtured* the development of a democratic system in the country - has been likened by Reddy to the ANC (Reddy, 2002). Challenging the assumed negative correlation between ANC dominance and democracy, and drawing on work by Arian and Barnes (1974), he argues that “both parties bring three necessary ingredients for democratic consolidation: political stability, legitimacy and a democratic value system” (Reddy, 2002:1). These three ingredients provide a useful means by which to understand both party dominance in the South African setting, and how these factors can have positive implications for democratic consolidation:

Firstly, with regard to political stability, if we reflect on the theoretical arguments touched on earlier regarding the benefits of a dominant party to fragmented societies, a party whose authority the electorate respects, is a stabilising and uniting force. Negotiation,

cooperation and compromise between parties became crucial to both a smooth and peaceful transition and a long term environment of stability if South Africa was to survive – let alone set itself on a path toward democracy. By the end of Apartheid, the ANC and its leadership had commanded a significant amount of support and authority, vital to overcoming past divisions and bringing society at large on board the nation-building project for a new South Africa. To this extent, we can see how the broad support base of the ANC provided significant political stability.

Secondly, the liberation credentials of the ANC give it a political legitimacy that is difficult to rival and – perhaps more importantly – a moral legitimacy. This is undoubtedly reinforced by the liberation leadership of Nelson Mandela and his cohorts; the democratic principles that formed the pillar of the party’s mandate; its condemnation of violence; and its popular appeal and mandate of non-racialism. Through the ANC’s pivotal role in the protracted struggle, the party has commanded a sustained political hegemony.

Thirdly, with regard to bringing about a democratic value system, fundamental to the South African context is that the ANC “played a major role in crafting the country’s democratic constitution” (Giliomee & Simkins, 1999, xvi). Moreover, the founding of the party was grounded in democratic principle and the extension of democratic rights to the majority.

These three features provide a backdrop that helps to explain the emergence of ANC dominance. Nonetheless, as the ANC looks set to dominate South African politics for the foreseeable future, this has inevitably raised simultaneous concerns over the *detrimental* implications for democracy. A key concern surrounds South Africa’s continued adherence to the principles of liberal democracy. One argument proposes that liberal democracy is being steadily ‘eroded’ in South Africa, and that dominance of politics by one party and the seemingly bleak prospects for the alternation of power are instead directing South Africa toward “mere majoritarianism and electoralism” (Giliomee & Simkins, 1999). Despite provisions and mechanisms in place to protect the constitution and prevent abuse of power, Giliomee and Simkins argue that there

is “an acute tension...between the sovereignty of the constitution and the ‘sovereignty’ claimed by a party with an overwhelming majority” (1999, xviii). Others have expanded on this to state that, as the ruling party sees itself as “synonymous with ‘the people’ (meaning the black majority)”, democracy has come to be interpreted as “indistinct from ANC rule” (Myburgh, 2004). This therefore has a significant effect on the way the dominant party both perceives its political opposition, and the nature of the relationship they conduct with one another. This will be elaborated on in more detail in the following section of this paper, needless to say that this relationship is to a large extent determined by the dominant party.

However, if in a democratic system the dominant party is unable to ignore existence of political opposition, then party strategy becomes crucial to the continuation of dominance (Arian & Barnes, 1974: 599-600). Moreover, the legitimacy of the government rests on its ability to deliver the promised goods to its citizens. In the South African context, this point needs further exploration. Despite questionable government performance and policy choices; continuing impoverishment of the black majority; and the limited reach of the government’s transformation project to address socio-economic inequalities, the ANC retains a far reaching hold over the South African polity. In a survey conducted by the Helen Suzman Foundation in 2002, polls “showed that only 11 per cent of ANC supporters felt that poor people and the unemployed benefited most from government policies”, while “77 per cent felt that poor people were the most neglected group” (Schlemmer, 2004a). That the ANC is enjoying an increasing per centage of the nation’s vote, despite the failure of substantial improvements in socio-economic transformation to manifest themselves, may appear as somewhat of a paradox. How then can we explain this continued support?

Arian and Barnes have referred to one aspect of the dominant party’s strategy as “selective mobilisation” (1974: 598). The dominant party “needs majority or near majority support in order to remain in power” but, at the same time, must be careful about promising “everything to everyone” (*ibid*). The party therefore simultaneously needs to strategically

ensure it uses its ability and reach to give the appearance of representing the nation, selectively mobilising and meeting demands of groups throughout society (*ibid*). They suggest that, while many groups will be left ‘dissatisfied’ with the party and its delivery, “power remains elusive for those denied access as long as the dominant party can grant sufficient rewards to maintain its dominance” (*ibid*).

Continued ANC support can of course be partly accounted for by the “symbolism of liberation” which still remains influential amongst sections of the electorate (Schlemmer, 2004a). However, Schlemmer also astutely comments that “- a common feature of non-mobilised poor people in unequal societies is self-pity. This self-pity creates a powerful need for demonstrations of sympathy and for a leadership that ‘cares’” (*ibid*). Despite the limitations and absence of some government welfare programmes, therefore, he also notes that aspects such as expanded social pensions, child grants, comprehensive social subsidies, and the ANC government’s “infinite patience in the face of non-payment of local rates, service charges and housing bonds have reinforced its image as a ‘caring party’” (*ibid*). Such notions are reinforced by the personalised and door-to-door campaigning of President Mbeki during the recent election, and the ANC campaign slogan – ‘a better life for all’.

In light of this, Butler’s conclusion appears quite plausible, that “-the movement’s popular reach and legitimacy help to render the majority’s dire circumstances politically supportable, and its institutions ameliorate and contain the society’s diverse conflicts” (2003: 13). Although continuing dominance cannot be assured, a political environment and system are created, in which the party’s dominance is essentially stabilised. Having said this, to reiterate that “dominant parties exist in ‘dominant party systems’” (Arian & Barnes, 1974: 599), it is crucial to understand the other part of the equation in this system - the political opposition.

The State of Opposition Parties

Southall has observed that in South Africa, there is considerable debate over “the role, functions, legitimacy and capacity of political

opposition” (2001: 1). As highlighted by table 2, the past three elections have seen the opposition occupy a decreasing number of seats in Parliament, which, simultaneously, are being shared between a growing number of opposition parties. The strength of opposition, however, is not solely defined by the number of seats in its possession. The fragmentation and weakening of the opposition is also indicated by the various party identities, strategies, alignments and realignments over this period.

Table 2: National Elections: Seats in Parliament and seats lost/gained 1994 – 2004

Party	1994	1999		2004	
	No of seats	No of seats	+/-	No of seats	+/-
ANC	252	266	+14	279	+13
DA (DP)	7	38	+31	50	+12
IFP	43	34	-9	28	-6
UDM	-	14	+14	9	-5
ID	-	-	-	7	+7
NNP (NP)	82	28	-54	7	-21
ACDP	2	6	+4	6	
FF+	9	3	-6	4	+1
UCDP	-	3	+3	3	
PAC	5	3	-2	3	
MF	0	1	+1	2	+1
AZAPO	-	1	+1	2	+1
AEB	-	1	+1	-	-1
FA	-	2	+2	-	-2
Total seats	400	400		400	
Total opposition parties in parliament	6	12	+6	11	-1
Total opposition seats	148	134	-14	121	-13

Source: Table compiled from figures by the IEC, 1994, 1999, 2004

Many analysts predicted that the racial census of 1994 would, over time, come to be replaced by policy and issue-based voting as race loses its significance amongst the electorate. Moreover, as democracy matures in South Africa, this would of course be accompanied by the emergence of strengthening opposition parties challenging government power. The opposing argument to this, however, seriously questions the prospects of this in South Africa,

given the nation’s unique political history. This political history has served, for the moment at least, to map out the nation’s political demography largely along racial lines and, subsequently, has seen the emergence of a dominant ruling party representing the black majority.

Considering theoretical discussions on the significance of the *system* in which dominant parties function, it is suggested that the role of opposition comes to be dependent on, and determined by, the dominant party. In South Africa, given the powerful liberation symbolism of the ANC, it boasts significant leverage within the system. As Reddy has argued, “the scope of opposition politics is undoubtedly narrowed and limited to relating to the dominant party” (2002: 3).

A key strategy of the dominant party, which in turn limits the cards that the opposition can play, is that in assuming “‘the centre’ of the ideological and policy spectrum”, while at the same time housing a diversity of opinions and viewpoints (*ibid*), it is able essentially to take the sting out of challenges and criticisms that come from the opposition. In the 2004 election campaign, for example, opposition parties such as the DA and UDM, using campaign strategies which target criticism of government performance – particularly with regard to service delivery and response to HIV/AIDS – largely failed, as the government had already taken note of these issues prior to the election (Schlemmer, 2004b: 7). Indeed, the ANC appeared to have dealt with many of the issues raised by opposition, and more, within its “a better life for all” manifesto. Through placing focus on the party’s achievements over the past ten years, while also pledging that it will continue to do better, the ANC managed to cover the salient issues; and opposition campaigning on the grounds of government failure to meet expectations in areas of service delivery and job creation, was met with and counteracted by the “*people’s contract to create work and fight poverty*”.

Perhaps the more salient issue, therefore, has been opposition failure to present manifestos substantially different to that of the ruling party. Parties take similar stances on many major issues, such as macro-economic policy, with the ANC and DA both advocating

promotion of economic growth and job creation through investment (Herzenberg, 2004:15). For Schrire, the major political parties in South Africa do not vary greatly in 'ideology' (in terms of being left, centre or right on the political spectrum) but, rather, are broadly 'centrist' (2001: 141). Absence of a class-based politics in South Africa has re-emphasised, instead, political affiliation based on historical ties (Schrire, 2001:141). The black majority continue to identify with the ANC, and the political opposition, rather than compete with the ANC for the African vote, has turned to appealing to those groups outside of the ANC's hold – largely the White, Indian and Coloured communities.

South Africa's apartheid legacy, in combination with the boundaries of the dominant party system within which political parties operate, serves to highlight the continuing prevalence of racial identity in South African politics. The tendency, therefore, has been for party campaigns to mirror racial identities as the opposition continue to seek support from South Africa's minority and, historically, more privileged communities. Furthermore, with the exception of white business, the ANC does not need the vote of the white minority to retain dominance (Giliomee, Myburgh & Schlemmer, 2001: 167). Although parties such as the DA and NNP may take a more 'pro-business' stance than the ANC, and therefore seem more likely to court the interests and favour of capital, even this avenue remains closed to the opposition as Southall points out that business has entered into agreement with the ANC as "only [they]...could both call on *and contain* majority support while also implementing a neoliberal program" (1999: 11-12). Hence, while the years since 1994 have seen the emergence of a wealthy black middle class, this group are the beneficiaries of the ANC's policies of affirmative action and black economic empowerment. We are therefore yet still to see the growth of an autonomous, and indeed multiracial, grouping from within the middle classes that would hold prospects for the formation of an independent political force challenging the ruling party. This being said, however, polls conducted by the Helen Suzman Foundation/Mark Data have shown that out of Africans with middle-income levels (R 8000 per month) only 40 per cent hold the

ANC as their first choice of political party (Schlemmer, 2004a). This group could clearly therefore be open to alternatives.

Opposition parties have hence largely been criticised for failing to "transcend identity politics" (Edigheji, 2004: 16), and their election campaign strategies targeting minority communities have lent credence to this accusation. For some parties that have emerged out of the apartheid era, many are unavoidably tarred with the brush of racism. This has arguably been the fate of the NNP, and events following the 2004 election have seen the party formally disband. Despite its change in leadership since 1994 and the about-turn in its strategy to work in co-operation with the ANC government, as opposed to against it, as the party that created and administered apartheid it was never likely to win over the black majority. Furthermore, its ambiguous stance left its supporters and target groups in the white and coloured communities uncertain of its policies and principles, and feeling that the party provides no security or solid guarantees to its constituencies⁴.

The manifestos of many of the smaller parties appeal to too narrow and specific an interest group. The far right-white parties, such as the Afrikaner Vryheidsfront Plus (VF/FF) or Afrikaner EenheidsBeweging (AEB), for example, making demands for a separate Afrikaner nation, have found no real place for themselves in the new South Africa, and both the PAC and Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) have seen a decline in their support base over the years since 1994. These Africanist parties, rejecting a non-racial politics and advocating an extreme left viewpoint, have failed to posit a realistic and viable project for South Africa's future that would inspire the trust of any significant proportion of the electorate. The African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), while it saw a marginal increase in votes in the 2004 election, and has retained all of its 6 seats in parliament, is appealing to a narrow interest

⁴ See the article by Lanegran, K. 'South Africa's 1999 Election: Consolidating a Dominant Party System' for deeper analysis of voter perceptions of opposition parties; campaign styles and strategies.

group and has made little dent on the political landscape.

The IFP, the second largest opposition party, over the past ten years has succeeded in maintaining a sufficient amount of support to give it political weight in South Africa – particularly in its traditional stronghold of Kwazulu Natal. However, this support is gradually declining. In fact, one of the most interesting outcomes of the 2004 election was the party's loss of this highly contested province to the ANC. The ANC received 46.98 per cent of votes in Kwazulu Natal compared to its 39.38 per cent in the 1999 provincial election, whereas the IFP percentage declined to 36.82 compared to 41.9 in 1999 (IEC, 2004). This has presented some significant gains for the ANC government, as it now holds all 9 provincial premierships. This result perhaps serves to show a combination of changes taking place amongst the electorate in the province, in the form of the maturation of the electorate in the urban centres; and the growing concern of voters with socio-economic issues rather than with Zulu nationalism and the history of the Zulu nation. For the IFP, the election result is a reflection of the limitations of relying on symbolism of ethnic identity to retain support.

The DA continues to retain its position as the main opposition, and emerged stronger from this election with 12.37 per cent of the vote and 50 seats in Parliament, compared to 9.56 per cent and 38 seats in 1999. Since positioning itself as a major contender, the DA has posed a threat to ANC authority – particularly in its strategy of raising “uncomfortable issues and questions” over government decisions, attempting to detract the electorate from ANC ‘successes’ by bringing up issues of government accountability and corruption (Rapoo, 2004: 20). Although the DA has proven itself to be a largely white party, as many previous white supporters of the NNP have transferred their allegiance to it, it has also garnered support from sections of the wealthier Coloured electorate. The 2004 election campaign also saw the DA attempting to make inroads into the black community. The party has acknowledged that to increase its support base by any significant degree will require attracting the votes of the African majority.

However, the past two elections have seen the party make little headway in this regard. In 1999, the DA made a major campaign *faux-pas* with its ‘fight back’ slogan - far too easily interpreted as ‘fight *black*’ (Lanegran, 1999: 94)’. Indeed, its slogan for the 2004 campaign of “South Africa deserves better” - while attempting to suggest that all South Africans ‘deserve better’ than the ANC has been able to muster over the past ten years – could similarly be taken to hold connotations of South Africa deserving ‘better’ than a black government. Effects of such campaigns are likely to have a detrimental impact on the black majority's perception of the political opposition. Unfortunately the party's predominantly white leadership only serves to reinforce this image. As Lanegran notes, The 1999 “aggressive ‘Fight Back’ message was directed to racial minorities who felt threatened by their country's rapid changes in general and affirmative action in particular” (1999: 93).

In 2004, therefore, the DA has had to work to rid itself of the image of being a white party. However, while this time it approached the election under a banner which claimed to be working for the betterment of all South Africans, a still prominent feature of the campaign has been use of the “politics of fear” (Landsberg, 2004). A prominent feature of this election campaign has been to raise in the minds of voters the dangers of the ANC obtaining a two-thirds majority, and hence having the power to alter the constitution. A further tactic used by Tony Leon has been to instil in South Africans the fear of their democracy turning into a one-party state, with encroaching authoritarian tendencies and worrying levels of centralised power should the ANC be re-elected to government (Edigheji, 2004: 17).

This tactic of installing fear into the electorate has fuelled criticisms of the opposition failing to formulate concrete policies on which to campaign and which would persuade the electorate that they pose a viable alternative to the ANC. The DA also strongly criticised the government's dealings with President Mugabe in Zimbabwe during its campaign. While Mbeki's stance on the Zimbabwean situation has been an issue of concern to many South Africans, it is unlikely to be a vote-winner

amongst the black majority. Crucially, the weakness in opposition campaigning has been its failure to appeal to black majority interests. Instead of the issue of an ANC two-thirds majority, rather it is socio-economic issues such as the high unemployment rate, poverty and growing inequality that are uppermost in the minds of the majority of black voters (Schlemmer, 2004b: 7). Edigheji argues that underlying the “one party state” campaign issue of the opposition is that minority parties in SA want “an entitlement to votes, whether or not they identify with, and speak to, the wishes and aspirations of majority (*sic*) of voters” (2004:17).

In terms of the smaller opposition parties, they continue to represent too narrow a policy agenda or target support group to appeal to or capture the vote of any significant number of the electorate. This can be said of parties such as the ACDP; United Christian Democratic Party (UCDP); Afrikaner VF/FF; (Indian) Minority Front (MF); and the IFP. In short, “the electorate does not see current opposition parties as representing their interests” (Habib & Taylor, 2001:215). In addition to this, their growing number has led to increased fragmentation of opposition to the dominant ANC in Parliament, and has largely negated opportunities for any potential challenge to its power.

Having outlined the nature of both ANC as dominant party, and the nature of political opposition that has taken shape to date, what then can we say of its implications? Opposition party alignments and strategies; voter behaviour and participation; and the extent and reach of dominant party’s political power and hegemony present certain challenges to the consolidation of democracy in South Africa over the next ten years.

Challenges for the Second Decade of Democracy

One of the most significant aspects of the democracy debate is the behaviour of the electorate (and particularly in South Africa’s case, the various racial segments of the electorate) to the dominant party system. A crucial aspect with regard to this is that, despite the ANC’s electoral dominance, surveys of voting intentions and party

preference have revealed that while the ANC has secured its dominance by consensus through the ballot, the African vote for the ANC is by no means set in stone. Whereas, in October 1994, 61 per cent of voters stated that they would vote for the ANC in a National Government election, by October 2002 this had decreased to 42%. Confining this survey to Black voters alone, 79 per cent expressed the intention to vote for the ANC in September/October 1994. This decreased to 76 per cent in February/March 1999, and to 55 per cent by September/October 2002 (Africa et al, 2003). The ruling party is therefore clearly not insulated from loss of support. The figures cited earlier, reflecting voter scepticism of the extent to which the poor actually benefit the most from government policies, lend credence to this. The crux of the matter however, is that the opposition has failed to present voters with any viable or attractive alternatives to the current government and, as such, the electorate is continuing to vote along racial lines. The fear politics promulgated by sections of the opposition over South Africa declining into a one party state is an insult to the intelligence and ability of the electorate to make an independent choice that will guide their own future should they be presented with alternatives. As Butler quite legitimately suggests, “it may be the current absence of credible opposition parties reflecting the interests of the discontented, rather than unshakeable affiliation, that secures current ANC control” (2003:9). Edigheji has gone so far as to say that it is this situation “that will give rise to a one party state, rather than anything the ANC does” (2004: 18).

A point which is particularly relevant to countries in the developing world - not least South Africa - is that “democratic consolidation...is dependent on the government’s ability to address the widespread poverty and economic inequalities within the society” (Habib & Taylor, 2001: 210). The lack of serious policy alternatives from the opposition goes some way to explaining the continuous re-election of the ANC to power, despite indications of dissatisfaction amongst its support base over government delivery. The major challenge for opposition parties, therefore, is to begin appealing to the African voter, and this will require a significant change in the opposition’s strategy. As Schlemmer

has argued, parties “will have to try to convey the additional benefits that alternative policies could yield” (Schlemmer, 2004b:9). More importantly, however, he argues that such a strategy cannot be administered through rallies and campaigning in the immediate pre-election period. Rather, it “requires a more sustained engagement with interest groups...and a demonstration of what a stronger constructive opposition can offer” (*ibid*). As Habib and Taylor quite concisely put it, “parties must not only exist in a legal or organizational sense, but they must also be mechanisms that enable representation and express the social interests of significant constituencies in society” (2001: 209).

A further challenge for opposition is to reverse the demotivation and withdrawal from the democratic process of those sections of the population who do not identify with the ANC – namely South Africa’s White, Indian and Coloured communities. One view would predict that, at best, this could amount to a more pronounced apathy and resignation over forthcoming years. At worst, dissatisfied sentiments may take the form of outright rejection of the principles of democracy and the values it seeks to instil. One such consequence, for example, could be that extremist and separatist groups who do not feel a part of the new South Africa may begin to take a more organised form. Either way, marginalisation is likely to be compounded by both the continuation of racial politics under a dominant party system in which South Africa’s minorities do not feel they are represented; and the political ambiguity and weakness of opposition to the dominant party which, rather than increasing the influence of minority groups, is likely only to further their withdrawal.

This is a trend that has already begun and could be set to continue should there be no significant shifts in political competition over the next decade. It should be said however that analysis of this cannot be restricted to minority communities alone, as South Africa’s three democratic elections have witnessed declining voter turnout and indications of voters’ non-participation at large. Voter turnout decreased from 89.30 per cent in 1999, to 76.73 per cent in the 2004 election (Kotze, 2004). This amounts to approximately 15.8 million people

who voted - 76.73 per cent of registered voters - slightly less than 60% of the whole eligible population (IEC, 2004; Schlemmer, 2004b). *Afrobarometer* has also revealed increasing numbers of people in their surveys expressing the intention not to vote (Africa et al, 2003). While declining voter participation is a common feature of maturing democracies, the concern is that in South Africa it is symptomatic of party dominance and, more importantly, that it may become more pronounced over coming years. The worrying connotations of these figures, is that in a political system in which the outcome of elections are a foregone conclusion, voters can tend to think that there is no point in casting their vote. Given the lack of confidence voters appear to hold in available opposition parties, some votes for the ANC may come from those voters who feel it is the only party likely to get into power.

The two key issues of concern arising from the identity politics and narrow policy programmes of opposition within the dominant party system, are therefore that they both maintain the alienation and marginalisation of South Africa’s minority communities into exclusive racial political groupings; and act as a deterrent to the support of the African electorate, who continue to see opposition as unrepresentative of their interests. The tendency of some parties to rely on adverse criticism of the ANC in power, will only strengthen both the dominance of the ruling party, and its tendency to portray opposition as racist opponents of socio-economic transformation. This serves only to “play into the hands” of the dominant party (see Giliome & Simkins, 1999: 12-13), which is able to convince its own supporters of the opposition’s desire to subvert the national project and reverse the gains of the black majority. For the ruling party and its supporters “opposition is frequently identified with the creation of obstacles to delivery and the protection of illegitimate special interests” (Schrire, 2001: 147)

With regard to overcoming racial politics, then, the challenges to maintaining and consolidating democracy similarly lie with ruling party. As the ANC does not need the support of the white minority to retain dominance, it has displayed a tendency to

abandon non-racialism and has instead placed emphasis on its “liberation struggle heritage” (Maloka, 2001: 235) in order to appeal to its own supporters. Continued elevation of the liberation struggle in the politics of the ruling party may have a destabilising effect on democracy. The current political predicament in Zimbabwe has demonstrated the volatility of the racial issue within politics, and the threat to democracy that the failure to move fully beyond race can present. In Zimbabwe, threat to the power of the long standing dominant party has seen the resurfacing of the issue of racial identity and its manipulation by a political leadership determined to retain that power. Some commentators on South Africa have therefore understandably warned of the authoritarian and oppressive tendencies that can emerge from this type of unrivalled dominance⁵.

Of further significance to the dominant party system debate in South Africa are the conflicting interpretations between the ruling ANC and the political opposition over the role that opposition should play in the new democracy. Thus, while South Africa is formally a multi-party democracy with institutionalised political opposition, “the key debates revolve around which interests should be represented by which party and how should this opposition be expressed” (Schrire, 2001: 141). South Africa’s political history of discrimination against the black majority renders this a delicate and controversial issue. A prominent criticism has been the tendency for the ANC leadership to display intolerance of criticism (both from opposition parties and within its own ranks) and to view opposition as enemies of the transformation project (Myburgh, 2004). As Schrire has described, while the ANC “recognizes the philosophical justifications for an opposition, it harbours serious reservations about the nature of opposition...Given its unqualified commitment to ‘transformation’, it maintains that opposition based upon a rejection of fundamental socio-economic change is not legitimate...[and]...it does not accept the legitimacy of opposition parties that are based upon the representation of minority interests”

⁵ See, for example, Giliomee and Simkins (1999:343 – 350). Their analysis emphasises the ‘dangers’ of dominant party rule and its potential to suppress political competition.

(2001: 140). This can be seen most starkly in the ANC’s response to the DA. In contrast to the formation of various alliances between major opposition parties and the dominant ruling party, the DA has become known for its more ‘robust’ and adversarial stance. This has created a considerable degree of animosity between the DA and ANC government in the 2004 election. If we concur with Myburgh’s interpretation that “for Mbeki the opposition were welcome to participate in the elections, but once the will of the people had been freely expressed and the ANC returned to power, there should be unity in action, and the minority should submit to the majority” (2004), then increasing intolerance of opposition – in particular when opposition takes a critical stance against the ruling party – could well be a warning sign to look out for.

It is therefore necessary to look closely at the forms of political strategy that have emerged under the dominant party system⁶. For some parties, the limited scope available to the opposition has cast the politics of cooperation with the ruling party in a more attractive light, and as having the potential to be the most electorally lucrative option for opposition parties. The strategy of the NNP has involved allying with the ANC, claiming that it will best be able to represent the interests of its supporters through cooperation with the ruling party, rather than through continuous ‘attacks’ on its actions (Schrire, 2001: 142). However, the strategy has both spurred ongoing decline in the NNP’s support base, while adding to the parliamentary strength of the ANC. Most have argued that NNP leverage and influence within the alliance has been largely negligible (Schrire, 2001: 143), and events since the 2004 election have culminated in the effective disbanding of the party, and its merger with the ANC.

In equal contrast to the DA, has been the “co-optive opposition” strategy adopted by the IFP. This has provided the party with participation in government and policy (Schrire, 2001: 142). On the other hand, this has largely benefited “party leaders individually” (*ibid*). The lack of influence that

⁶ Schrire has identified and provides analysis of what he sees as “three broad opposition strategies: robust, co-optive and co-operative” (2001:141)

this form of politics has awarded the party at large, and the extent to which IFP supporters have benefited, is reflected in the party's declining support since 1994 (see tables 1 & 2).

The strategies of both parties are an indication of party desire to retain access to the channels of power, rather than to retain party principles or prioritise the concerns of supporters. Indeed, the NNP's brief fling with the DP in the formation of the DA in 2000 (as the former witnessed reams of its supporters fleeing to the DP in the 1999 election), only for it to enter into an alliance with the ANC in 2001, is but an example of this. Under ANC dominance, it could be argued that an 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em' mentality has taken root amongst sections of the political opposition. This political opportunism on the part of some parties - both the ruling ANC and opposition (Habib & Nadvi, 2002: 333) - can be interpreted as symptomatic of the dominant party system. As mounting an effective challenge to the ruling party seems so far from reach, parties instead "sacrifice political principle for short term electoral gain" (Habib & Taylor, 2002: 333). The ANC, possessing greater political leverage, is equally able to use this to its advantage. A recent controversy of this sort is the removal of the anti-defection clause from the Constitution. Legislation was amended in 2002 to allow floor crossing at the local government level and in 2003 at the national and provincial level. The floor crossing legislation is widely criticised as a deliberate ploy by the ANC to strengthen itself as it allows councillors to cross the floor to another party without losing their seat, while also stipulating that councillors can only do so if at least 10 per cent of party members wish to cross. This has conveniently protected the ANC from losing members to the opposition as there is unlikely to be as much as 10 per cent of the dominant party's members wishing to cross, while for smaller parties, the legislation has "deprived [them] of a vital shield" (Myburgh, 2003: 34). The enactment of the floor-crossing legislation demonstrates how the ruling party is able to use its position to consolidate further dominance. (See following tables)

At the same time, some opposition party members have seen it as an opportunity for themselves as individuals to retain access to

power by joining the dominant party. In the floor crossing of March-April 2003, NNP defections in the Western Cape saw the province handed over to the ANC, while in the National Assembly, nine MPs from the UDM crossed over to the ANC (Myburgh, 2003: 34). In the recent floor crossing window from the 1 to 15 September this year, the ANC acquired 326 councillors. The only parties not left at a loss were the ID and DA, who still only gained 39 seats and 20 seats respectively (IEC, 2004). The significance of these political realignments is that they entail a loss of accountability to supporters and diminishing competitiveness of the multi-party system. As Myburgh describes, "There is little incentive for a defector to the ANC to represent the interests of his electorate once he has crossed over. From the moment a defector joins his new party, he falls under its discipline... There is no real mechanism by which aggrieved voters can make such defectors to the ruling party answer for their actions either" (2003: 36).

Floor Crossing Results 2002 (Local Government Level) : Movements to the ANC	
Party	No of Councillors
Action Independent Peoples Party	1
African Christian Democratic Party	2
Alliance for the Community	1
Azanian People's Organisation	1
Breedevallei Onafhanklik	1
Civic Alliansie/Alliance	1
Democratic Alliance	51
Independents	6
Independent Civic Organisation of South Africa	1
Inkatha Freedom Party	7
Middelburg Residents Organisation	1
Pan Africanist Congress	10
People's Forum	1
United Christian Democratic Party	3
United Democratic Movement	16
Verenigde Gemeenskap Organisasie	1
Witzenberg Onafhanklike Vereniging	1
Ximoko Party	1
Zibambeleni Development Organisation	1
Total	107

Source: IEC, 2002

Floor Crossing Results 2004 (National and Provincial Level): Movements to the ANC	
Party	No of Councillors
ACDP	4
Alliance 2000+	1
AZAPO	2
Dababorivhuwa Patriotic Front	1
DA	31
Independents	6
IFP	25
NNP	195
PAC	17
Simunye in Christ Organisation	1
Thembisa Concerned Residents Association	1
UCDP	7
UDM	45
Total	336

Source: Table compiled from IEC, 2004 Floor Crossing Results

Under the dominant party system, this type of politics therefore presents certain challenges to democracy in the longer-term. On the one hand it has been argued that South Africa cannot afford a robust opposition due to its destabilising effects in such an ethnically and racially fragmented society (Schrire, 2004: 144). Moreover, such a strategy coming from parties still considered predominantly ‘white’ has, and will, encourage the ruling party to increasingly play “the race card” (*ibid*), and “tempt the ANC into using its overwhelming majority to dominate parliamentary politics” (Nijzink, 2001: 67). On the other hand, continuation of a feeble opposition – and indeed, ‘co-optive’ and ‘co-operative’ opposition (Schrire, 2004: 142), could result in a dangerous amount of power in the hands of the ANC. The party’s increased parliamentary power risks a “shift of real authority away from the constitution (and constitutional structures) to the ruling party” (Myburgh, 2003: 6); and its increased assurance of electoral dominance poses a significant threat to government accountability and responsiveness to the needs of its citizens.

While it has been argued that “for a party to be termed opposition, it must envision and organise itself as an alternative governing party” (Edigheji, 2004: 18), the role of opposition is not confined to being able to realistically displace the ruling party. Rather, opposition must be a credible and legitimate voice in the polity whose views will be listened to (Friedman, 1999: 110) and which is

able to hold government to account (Southall, 2001). Given the present weakness of the opposition in South Africa, some would argue that this cannot be readily envisaged. A key question in the current state of affairs will therefore be how we can safeguard government accountability, as well a party’s accountability to its supporters more generally. What needs to be emphasised over the coming decade is that in a context in which the likelihood of displacing the dominant party is so marginal, the equally crucial role of the opposition of ensuring that the existing government remains accountable to the electorate, becomes all the more important. Unless the opposition changes its current strategies and works hard to regain credibility, however, its ability to fulfil this role could well be undermined.

The complex nature of South Africa’s political development is such that any party failing to fulfil this role, inevitably lends further advantage and political weight to the dominant party. As discussed above, however, any effective counterweight to party dominance is not going to come from parties opposing the current government’s policies of affirmative action and black economic empowerment. Although the ANC’s macro-economic policy of Growth Equity and Redistribution (GEAR) may continue to receive much criticism from the political left within the party’s own ranks, the promotion of black economic empowerment has afforded the ANC significant influence amongst the African population. This will remain the case unless opposition parties also adopt policies that seek to redress South Africa’s racial inequalities. Indeed, unlike other faltering democracies on the continent, in which a growing educated black middle classes has emerged as the main source of opposition during the post-independence period, in South Africa, it is this group that has been the prime beneficiary of government policy. For Giliomee and Simkins, therefore, “a middle class which has risen as a result of ruling party patronage does not play any significant role in broadening and strengthening democracy. It may, in fact, stifle such a development” (1999: 3).

Opposition From Within the Dominant Party

It is clear that a recurring issue in the dominant party debate in South Africa is the safeguarding of democratic practice and accountability. Despite the ANC's electoral dominance, its supporters and contending voices within the party itself have remained divergent over party policies and the direction frequently taken by a centralised leadership. The limitation of the benefits of government policies to a narrow stratum of the population has generated resentment from the left. While it is not the purpose of this article to detail the debate surrounding political-economy in South Africa, it is a politically hot topic and brings to our attention a further issue of prominence in the debate over the future of South Africa's democracy - that ANC dominance presents equally impending challenges to those members of the ANC and Tripartite Alliance who are in disagreement with the macro-economic policy direction of the Mbeki presidency.

While the ruling party has an historical alignment with labour, significant debate remains around the extent to which the political left actually retains meaningful influence within the alliance. This balance of power is of concern as, given the weakness of opposition parties in South Africa, internal pluralism and debate within the alliance itself has come to be seen as having an extremely crucial role to play in maintaining checks on government power and ensuring that democracy is not undermined by arbitrary and centralised decision-making. Government has received criticism for deploying the more loyalist party members - known to be uncritical of decisions taken at the centre - to the more prominent positions within state organs (Southall, 2001:17). Such actions have functioned as mechanisms to curb criticism from within. As a result, healthy debate within the party is stifled, and critical voices have come to be portrayed by party leadership as enemies of the movement (Southall, 2001: 17-18).

One opinion on the direction for South Africa's democratic future, therefore, is that while the pact between labour and the ANC served its purpose during the years of political

struggle, the best prospects for healthy democracy and representative government now lie in a formal split within the Alliance itself (Habib & Taylor, 2001). They envisage the establishment of a labour-oriented party as presenting the only possibility for the formation of a significant opposition to the ANC in South Africa (*ibid*). From their standpoint, "the alliance is undermining the attempts of both COSATU and the SACP to achieve their [social-democratic] goals" (Habib & Taylor, 2001: 221). The likelihood of such a scenario coming to fruition, however, is debatable. Suttner opposes Habib and Taylor's suggestion, arguing that neither the SACP nor COSATU is likely to leave the ANC, particularly given that numerous positions within the party have been filled by individuals from the two organisations (Suttner, 2004: 115). Moreover, in light of the party's composition, the ANC equally "fears the electoral consequences of a split" (*ibid*).

A further key issue is that the ANC's move away from leftist policies toward the dominant neo-liberal orthodoxy advocated by the western liberal democracies, in fact, places some self-inflicted constraints on the party. While frequently interpreted as a reflection of the party's weakening commitment to its liberation promises, the flip side is that in terms of abuse of state power, the ANC is, to an extent, kept in check (Schrire, 2001: 145-146; Butler, 2003: 10). The government's adoption of neo-liberalism has integrated South Africa into the world economy while seeking to reverse inequalities in wealth and opportunity through affirmative action policies (Habib & Nadvi, 2002: 336). As such, South Africa's reliance on capital and foreign investment, as well as its leading role in the African Renaissance and as exemplar of economic development and governance on the continent, places its democracy far too directly in the global eye for government to risk stepping out of line.

Given the tenuous relationship that has ensued as a result of economic policy between the ANC and some of its followers, the party can neither afford to abuse the position and authority that has been conferred on it by the electorate, and hence fully risk losing their support; nor can it afford to deter investors and international actors by creating a climate of

political instability – despite the fears generated by opposition parties about the dangerous consequences of an ANC two-thirds majority.

Realistically, the chances of the left-wing partners breaking from the ANC over the next decade appear unlikely. The pros of remaining with a party assured of electoral dominance somewhat out-weigh the opportunities implied in opposing it. Given both the SACP and COSATU's long-standing ties with the organisation and the immensity of the challenge of denting the hegemonic power of the ruling party, the prospect of 'going it alone' is daunting. Rather, they "prefer access and influence to opposition and exclusion" (Lodge, 2002: 155). A key factor is that the COSATU leadership has suffered from 'brain-drain', losing many of its strong leaders to the government during the transition to democracy (Webster, 2001: 267). This has reduced the more political orientation and strength that characterised the trade union movement during the 1980s (*ibid*).

Having said this, the confrontation that has arisen on occasion between the ANC and adversarial voices within COSATU (Southall, 2001: 281) has succeeded in keeping the government on their toes. Equally, the ANC has, since coming to power, introduced an array of labour legislation to protect workers. While the party leadership's intolerance of dissenting viewpoints is concerning, that sections of the alliance continue to openly demonstrate their refusal to conform to the about turn in the party's neo-liberal economic policy since 1994, is a welcome indication of the role that the left still has to play in ensuring accountability. Additionally, much as the argument has been put forward that South Africa cannot presently afford a robust and adversarial opposition due to its political history and relative youth of its democracy, 'fragmentation' of the ANC could also have destabilising effects (Butler, 2003: 6).

Nonetheless, these arguments do not perhaps sufficiently make up for the political principles and goals being sacrificed by many on the political left. The existence of a dominant party – let alone a dominant party with the extensive reach and hold boasted by the ANC – renders the challenge of guaranteeing both

representation and accountability within a competitive party system far greater. In light of this, major challenges over the next decade are likely to lie *within* the party and Tripartite Alliance. Proponents of left wing politics must retain sufficient influence to make their voices heard; and rise above the temptation to choose the rewards offered in loyalty to the centre, over their commitment to the goals and principles of their organisation. For COSATU, Webster proposes that they adopt the role of "a 'left pressure group' inside the alliance pushing for redistributive policies" (2001: 271). The argument proposed earlier, regarding the vital importance of opposition being regarded as a credible voice able to ensure government accountability, without necessarily needing to be an electoral threat, should equally apply to internal voices, regardless of their alliance with the ANC. Moreover, their value as a check on authoritarian tendencies and policy decisions will, more than ever, be crucial.

Afterthoughts

South Africa's unique political history has inevitably shaped its current politics and the formation of a dominant party system. Indeed, it would not be overstating the case to argue that only a movement with the historic role, moral authority and hegemony possessed by the ANC could hope to lead South Africa out of the dire circumstances of pre 1994, to a new democratic dispensation. The unifying effects of the 'catch-all' dominant party doubtlessly have helped to mediate conflicts and contributed to a peaceful and smooth transition. While the consolidation of ANC domination has raised legitimate concerns over the prospects of simultaneous democratic consolidation taking place successfully, there appear to be no serious threats to this at the current stage. The argument that the dominant party system in South Africa is inherently undemocratic and is leading the nation into steady authoritarian decline requires reconsideration. Indeed, prospects for democracy are far more positive. Emergence of a one party state in South Africa is a highly unlikely scenario. Fear-mongering by some opposition as to the ruling party's desire to see a curbing of political freedom and a move towards a one-party state are merely tools to win votes, and unsuccessfully at that. The

institutional checks and balances on the ruling party and its track record of recognition of civil liberties; adherence to the terms of the constitution and the rule of law; existence of an institutionalised political opposition; and the strengthening of institutions of democracy and governance since 1994 lend credence to this argument.

These issues aside, however, there nonetheless remain significant challenges for those playing a prominent role in South Africa's democracy. Butler summarises the predicament fairly accurately when he states that "South Africa's fundamental political dilemma is that liberation movement domination is a necessary condition for the entrenchment of democratic practices and institutions, but it is also and at the same time a threat to them" (Butler, 2003: 12). One-party dominance becomes a threat to democracy when the governing party is assured of electoral victory and as a result "sees less and less need to respond to public opinion" (Africa et al, 2003: 2). Issues of government accountability hence reign strong in a dominant party system, and a key question is how such accountability can be ensured when the ruling party faces no threat of electoral defeat? The ability of the opposition to fulfil their role in holding government to account is undermined by its weak position within the polity. This can partly be understood as symptomatic of the dominant party system: the strength and leverage of opposition is essentially limited by both the symbolic identity and the extensive political power of the dominant party. The ANC's control has most recently been demonstrated in effecting the controversial floor-crossing legislation, allowing the party to increase its dominance in both Parliament and the provincial legislatures.

However, while the ruling party has frequently been able to use both its liberation heritage and political hegemony to 'delegitimize' opposition parties, as Friedman has asserted, "conditions must exist in which the electorate is open to delegitimation" (1999: 101). There currently exists no opposition presenting a viable alternative to the ANC, while the resignation of some parties to formulating tactics that focus on criticism of government and, therefore, black majority policies, undermines their legitimacy in the eyes of the

electorate. Furthermore, tendencies toward political opportunism are equally undermining their credibility. Given that opinion polls have shown that many South Africans are open to alternatives, should they present themselves, then the ANC's electoral victory says more about a feeble opposition and lack of credible alternatives than it does about undying support for the ANC. Moreover, the voter abstention and withdrawal amongst the electorate in general, but by South Africa's minority communities in particular - who do not feel represented by the current government - reflect more than anything that an opposition able to rejuvenate their participation is much needed. The co-optive and co-operative politics of some parties have served only to fuel this withdrawal.

A key feature linked to this is that political demography in South Africa continues to mirror racial divides. Efforts on the part of opposition parties are required to break away from narrow racial appeals and traditional constituencies, to begin appealing to a more "diverse set of constituencies" (Habib & Taylor, 2001: 216). If the dominant party system is to be broken, then an opposition party must emerge that, through policies appealing to the majority of South Africans, is able to split the loyalties of the black community to garner a proportion of the ANC vote. A key challenge is therefore for South Africans to be driven to vote on the basis of policies offered, rather than according to racial groups. Until political parties transcend this racial politics, then this will remain unlikely. Moreover, neither will the effectiveness of the tendency exhibited by the ruling party to resort to playing the race card in response to opposition criticism, be thwarted. The ruling party must, however, also demonstrate greater tolerance of opposition. Racialised politics will equally only be overcome if the ANC is willing to let go of 'race' as a convenient political tool to defend its actions and policies or to scapegoat a critical opposition.

As the party of liberation, and only ten years in to South Africa's democracy, the ability of opposition parties to present themselves as a viable alternative governing party to the ANC is perhaps restricted. The ANC has historically been a 'catch-all' party and commands a sustained hegemony which is difficult to rival.

However, it is precisely under these circumstances that the ability of opposition parties to keep a check on the governing party's power and hold the party accountable becomes all the more crucial. When an opposition lacks credibility amongst the electorate, its ability to fulfil its accountability function is undermined.

Within the ruling party itself, maintenance of sufficient political weight of those sections positing a more critical stance of centralised decisions will also be crucial. The central leadership cracks the whip within the party and the Tripartite Alliance, and far too easily reduces internal critics to self-seeking radicalists and disruptors of the national project. If the ANC's left-wing partners choose to remain in the alliance, then the greatest challenge for them will be to continue to pressure the government to hear their views and act upon them. This of course requires a co-operative and tolerant ANC leadership. It is business that possesses greater leverage over the ruling party, rather than COSATU and the SACP. The left's influence over government policies will therefore need to be significant, and they must prove themselves a force to be reckoned with. As has been argued, however, the global environment and neo-liberal policy direction which the ANC has chosen to embrace, does simultaneously place certain limitations on state power which can be beneficial to ward off the undemocratic tendencies often associated with dominant party systems.

Challenges for South Africa's second decade of democracy therefore remain numerous. The immensity of these challenges is greater due to the long-standing racial cleavages and skewed distribution of wealth amongst the population. However, it is important to note that, unlike some African states, South African civil society is active, well organised and historically a politically charged society. Unions and civic-based organisations have not failed to stand up and make their voices heard – indeed, given the weakness of the political opposition in South Africa, the role of civil society in holding government to account is all the more important. Of equal significance is that the ANC's traditional support base is a group with high expectations. The promises of both social and economic equality implicit in freedom from apartheid rule place limitations

on the current government's deviation from its pledge to serve the majority.

Nonetheless, if we are to look out for warning signs of the undemocratic tendencies that have been attached to dominant party systems, then the watchdog role will be a pivotal one. Those concerned to see the successful consolidation of democracy in South Africa over the next ten years will heed well to be vigilant of ANC intolerance – on the part of both the current President and his successor, whoever that may be. The overwhelming political power of South Africa's dominant party and the risks this poses to both the competitiveness of the multi-party system and authority of the constitution should not be underestimated. A key task for South Africa's second decade of democracy will therefore be careful and ongoing monitoring of government actions by all. In short, the institutionalised means by which power has been conferred on the ANC, should not lead to complacency as to the party heeding unquestionably to democratic methods of rule. This being said, however, many problems also lie in the weakness of South Africa's opposition, who will need to alter their strategies and present themselves as credible players within the polity, whether or not they can realistically displace the ANC.

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