



Chapter 6

A Silent Revolution: South African Voters during the First Ten Years of Democracy, 1994–2004¹

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Introduction

Since the onset of democracy in 1994, South Africa's elections have returned similar levels of support for the major political parties. The static nature of electoral outcomes has arisen out of the politicisation of numerically imbalanced, stable social cleavages. This has 'racialised' the nature of voting outcomes and resulted in the continued electoral dominance of the African National Congress (ANC) over weak and fragmented opposition parties, raising concerns that genuine multiparty competition is limited and that potential for the alternation of power through the ballot box is substantially diminished. However, aggregate electoral stability does not necessarily shed light on the complexities that affect party support and voting intentions. Nor does it tell us much about the increasing impact of socioeconomic change on long-standing cleavages and electoral behaviour. Although party loyalties seldom shift abruptly, it would seem that partisanship in South Africa has fluctuated considerably more than is often acknowledged.

Changes to partisan support and voter motivations are signals of electoral fluidity in the party system that may have gone undetected because of the focus on aggregate electoral results. Alternatively, it may be that South Africa is on the cusp of an increasingly fluid party system. Either way, a 'silent revolution' among voters impacts on the quality and consolidation of South African democracy.

Dealignment, or weakening partisan ties, holds contrary implications for democ-

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racy. Firstly, the stabilising influence of partisanship on party alignments is diminished. This should benefit South Africa, which requires greater electoral volatility to ensure a more competitive democracy, by freeing more voters to shift their party support to other contenders. Volatility also increases the unpredictability of elections and the uncertainty of their outcomes, which, in turn, encourages parties and candidates to be more responsive to voter interests. Against this, the weakening of party bonds can have negative consequences for the political process in the form of stagnation among voters, typified by an increasing number of voters declining to cast their ballots for any party whatsoever. Larger percentages of the vote for a governing party from a decreasing number of voters as turnout decreases indicates a decline in the quality of democracy.

This chapter looks at trends and patterns in partisanship over time. Data from eight national public opinion surveys spanning 1994 to 2004 is used to explore changes to the demographic support bases of parties and the motivations of South African voters.²

An electorate in transformation

Voter behaviour is shaped by social and economic conditions. Rapid socioeconomic and political transformation can therefore alter long-standing or 'frozen' cleavage structures that often guide electoral behaviour.

The South African electorate has been subject to enormous change. Firstly, the demographics of the electorate are vastly different to that of 1994. Generational change has dramatically altered the age composition of the population, with an increasing proportion of youth voters aged between 18 and 30 years. Approximately one-third of the potential electorate in 2004 were too young to vote in 1994 (Seekings, 2005a: 24). Demographic population shifts and growth have also altered the regional and racial composition of the electorate, with the urban and black share of the population rising.

Secondly, socioeconomic patterns have shifted. The emergence of a new black middle class, due in part to redistributive policies and anti-discrimination measures, has begun to address income inequality among race groups. In 1995, 73 per cent of the individuals in the top decile (the richest 10 per cent) were white, but by 2000 there were as many black households in the top income quintile (20 per cent) as there were white households (Seekings, 2005a: 24). Long-term trends point to a substantial growth in the distribution of national income accruing to blacks, with their share increasing from 19.8 per cent in 1970 to 35.7 per cent in 1996 (Southall, 2004: 531). Southall also observes that by 2004 around 27 per cent of formally employed blacks could be broadly defined as 'middle class'.

2 Refer to the note at the end of this chapter for methodological information.



In contrast, structural constraints on job-creating economic growth, stubbornly persistent and high levels of unemployment, poverty, and inequality, in addition to the inaccessibility of the formal economy (especially for the unskilled) combine to widen the inequality gap between the rich and the poor, as well as between workers within the formal sector of the economy and those who struggle to make a living outside it. The country's Gini co-efficient rose from 0.73 per cent in 1995 to 0.80 in 1998 (Southall 2004: 531).³ While inter-racial inequality has declined, intraracial inequality is on the increase—among blacks the Gini co-efficient rose from 0.70 to 0.81 per cent between 1995 and 1998 (Southall, 2004: 531). Changing material conditions have encouraged a shift from race to class as the basis of inequality, and led to a shift in self-defined social identities away from race towards class and occupations (Lombard, 2003).

A fundamental shift in social delivery and budgetary spending ensures that social spending is heavily focused on the poor. Nonetheless, despite the extension of social welfare and redistribution, the post-apartheid state has shown limited capacity to address poverty and inequality rapidly. The rise of social movements connected to delivery issues is also indicative of an emerging class consciousness among the poor (Ballard, Habib & Valodia, 2006). Moreover, other societal developments—such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, increasing educational opportunities, and greater access to media and information—have had a major impact on many people's lives.

After what is now well over a decade of democracy, the focus of politics in South Africa has shifted from the realisation of 'liberation' towards the urgent concerns, such as social redress and nation-building, facing a post-apartheid society. South African citizens confront and debate issues that represent a more 'normalised' political terrain, such as housing, education and budgetary matters, and directly experience the outcomes of policy choices, and the political successes and failures of an ANC-led government.

By 2004 the electorate differed substantially from the one that had participated in the 1994 elections in terms of generational experiences and expectations, historical memory, class mobility, poverty levels, education and political information. Such rapid social transformation might be expected to hold consequences for voting patterns by reshaping the static cleavage structures inherited from apartheid, yet dramatic socioeconomic changes do not seem to have impacted heavily on the social composition of the ANC's support base. Instead, the strongest suggestion of electoral volatility lies in diminishing party loyalties for all parties and the corresponding growth of a 'floating' or an independent electorate.

³ The Gini coefficient is a quantitative measure of income inequality within a population, ranging from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (perfect inequality). The higher the coefficient, the higher the inequality of the income distribution.

Looking beneath aggregate electoral outcomes

At first glance, voting patterns in South Africa appear fairly stable at the macro level. Table 6.1 presents aggregate election results over three national elections showing similar outcomes with consistent proportions of votes obtained by the governing party and opposition parties, respectively.

Table 6.1: Aggregate electoral results (%), 1994–2004

	1994	1999	2004
ANC	63.12	66.35	69.69
Opposition parties*	36.88	33.65	30.31
Total	100	100	100

Source: Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), <http://www.elections.org.za>

* The principal opposition parties during these elections were the National Party (later to become the New National Party [NNP], and it was not an opposition party at the time of the 1994 election, as it constituted part of the Government of National Unity); the Democratic Party (later to become the Democratic Alliance or DA); the Inkatha Freedom Party; the Freedom Front Plus; the Pan Africanist Congress; the United Democratic Movement (from the 1999 election onwards); and a number of smaller parties.

Table 6.2: Voting age population (VAP), registration, turnout and proportion of VAP for governing party and opposition, 1994–2004

	1994*	1999	2004
VAP	22 709 152	22 589 369	27 865 537
Number of registered voters	No registration	18 172 751	20 674 926
VAP registered (%)	No registration	80.4	75.4
Overall turnout/total votes cast	19 533 498	15 977 142	15 612 671
Turnout of registered voters (%)	No registration	89.3	76.7
Turnout of VAP (%)	86	71.8	57.8
% of VAP vote for the ANC**	53.8	46.9	39.0
% of VAP vote for opposition parties	32.1	23.7	16.9
% of abstaining voters	14.0	29.4	43.9

Sources: IEC, <http://www.elections.org.za>; 2004 VAP figures based on Statistics South Africa Census 2001 figures; Reynolds (1999); Piombo & Nijzink (2005)

* In 1994 there was no formal registration and hence no voters roll. To vote in the 1994 elections, citizens simply had to present their identity document.

** Calculated using total votes for ANC/total VAP.



However, when turnout figures and the percentage of all eligible voters supporting the ANC across the three national elections since the 1994 elections are considered, they suggest that several major changes have occurred in the last 10 years, particularly in terms of the size of the active ANC electorate.

South Africa has witnessed a general decline in electoral participation in terms of both registration and voter turnout. Firstly, while the eligible VAP has increased (due to population growth) by approximately five million over 10 years, the number of registered voters has not increased at the same rate. Between 1999 and 2004 the IEC increased the voters roll by 2.5 million to 20.6 million voters. Yet, according to VAP figures, seven million potential voters were not recorded (Kabemba, 2005: 95). Secondly, the number of votes cast (or overall turnout) has actually decreased by roughly 3.9 million since 1994 *despite* growth in VAP and increases in registration.

Thirdly, despite increasing electoral margins for the ANC from 63 per cent to 69 per cent, the percentage of the VAP voting for the governing party has not increased or even remained static in proportion to population growth. In fact, its percentage of actual support has *decreased* from 53 to 39 per cent of South Africa's eligible voting population. By calculating the proportion of the VAP who voted for the ANC (calculated using total votes for ANC/total VAP), we can see that the ANC has retained 72 per cent of its original 1994 vote share, but lost approximately 28 per cent. Significant decreases in turnout and a reduced share of the vote qualifies the nature of the ANC's victory in the 2004 national election. In a corresponding fashion, the opposition has lost one-half of its vote share among the eligible voter population. If the magnitude of the ANC's latest 2004 election victory shrinks under scrutiny, so do the gains of the opposition.

Data shows increasing percentages of potential voters and an increase in the number of registered voters since 1999, but the number casting a vote has declined. Apparent aggregate electoral stability can conceal significant individual-level flux and disguise significant changes to internal party coalitions. Yet it is harder to predict who the abstainers are, and whether they are government or opposition supporters. Moreover, aggregate data does not shed light on whether there is any significant voter realignment among parties, nor can it tell us about the intensity of commitment towards a party and the motivations or reasons for support for a specific party.

Aggregate distributions of party identification

Using survey questions that measure the concept of party identification, this section traces macropartisan movements in the population over time. Party identification (PID) is widely used as an indicator of partisan loyalty or voter

behaviour and measures the extent to which voters 'identify with' or 'feel close to' political parties, in much the same way that they identify with social groups. Partisanship questions are designed to measure the basis of party support among the mass electorate. When treated as a dependent variable, partisanship provides a handy tool for investigating the micro motivations of individual voters. It can also measure aggregate or macropartisan movements across the entire population over time to assess overall patterns of partisan stability or volatility, realignment or dealignment, described as a shift or downturn in party identification, respectively, as public perceptions about parties alter (Green, Palmquist & Schickler, 2002: 139).

US and European studies show that party identification is analytically separate from actual vote choice, but often guides it (Campbell, Converse, Miller & Stokes, 1960; Green et al, 2002). Despite criticisms that the concept's explanatory powers as a measurement variable are limited, particularly outside the United States, recent studies show that the concept remains a significant methodological variable in electoral studies (Green et al, 2002). Party identification can still provide a common explanatory framework and be usefully applied across different political settings, and therefore provides an appropriate starting point for any analysis of a partisan political preference. Consequently, numerous international surveys use the indicator to tap long-term commitment to parties, with the concept applied successfully in post-communist country, Asian, African and Brazilian studies. If the same holds true in South Africa, then we should also be able to use the party identification concept to assess the overall extent of partisan stability, volatility and dealignment among voters.⁴

Levels of partisanship: Partisans vs non-partisans

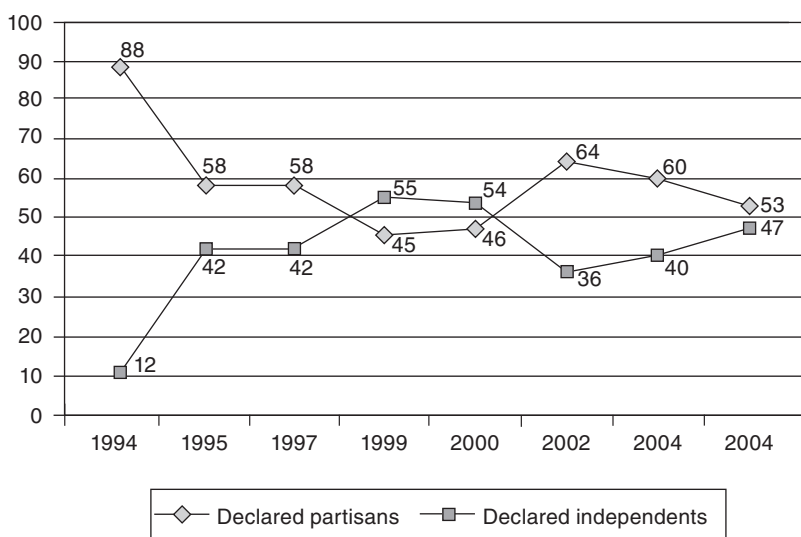
After initially high levels of partisanship after the historic 1994 'liberation' election, the proportion of partisans in the electorate declines significantly thereafter, fluctuating between 64 per cent and 45 per cent over the following 10 years. Since 1995 no more than 64 per cent of the population have ever stated that

⁴ The measures of PID were gauged by the following questions in all eight surveys: 'Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular party?' (If yes) 'Which party is that?' The dependent variable was dichotomised into identification with a party or as a non-partisan (independent), and this measures the extent of PID. Later, the dependent variable was further divided into a three-way identification with the ANC governing party, the opposition or a non-partisan position to measure the direction of PID. Lastly, ANC party identifiers were isolated from the entire survey sample and tested using the strength of the PID variable, 'Do you feel very close, somewhat close, or not very close (to the ANC)?' The wording of the PID question differs slightly in the 1994 survey. Thereafter, the question wording follows the international standard using the 'party closeness scale', which was developed for use outside of the United States and particularly in multiparty systems.



they feel close to a political party. Decreases in partisanship are accompanied by corresponding increases in the proportion of non-partisans or ‘independents’. By the end of 2004 the percentages of partisans and independents are almost equal in number, with partisans at only 53 per cent. Ten years into democracy, almost half the electorate were not overly loyal to one particular political party, nor guided at elections by long-standing partisan ties when deciding which party to support, suggesting that short-term forces are potential influences on party support.

Figure 6.1: Distribution of partisans versus non-partisans over time (%), 1994–2004



South Africa matches European figures more closely than other emerging democracies. In most Western European countries, 60–70 per cent of voters identify at least somewhat with a party, though this figure has declined in recent decades. In Latin America, party identification was 67.1 per cent in Uruguay, 37.6 per cent in Argentina, 35.9 per cent in Chile, 33.3 per cent in Venezuela and 32.5 per cent in Brazil (Mainwaring, 1999: 30). Only 22 per cent of the Russian Federation electorate identify with a party, while 40 per cent do so in the Czech Republic, 30 per cent in Slovakia, 20 per cent in Hungary and only 15 per cent in Poland (White, Rose & McAllister, 1997: 135).

Direction of partisanship: ANC vs independents vs opposition

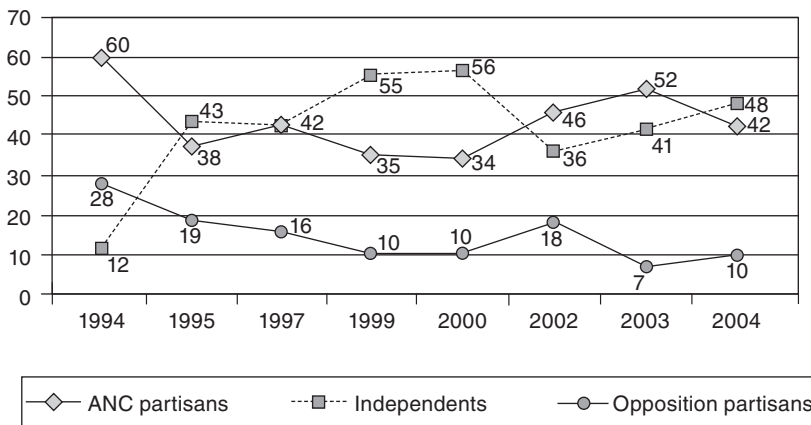
Self-declared partisans can be further divided into those who support the ANC and those who support opposition parties. Figure 6.2 shows the ratios of ANC

supporters, opposition supporters (including all opposition parties) and independents across the electorate over time. Although the vast majority of declared partisans are ANC supporters, there are several developments.

Firstly, party identification seems to be weakening for all parties. Both the ANC and opposition parties have leaked partisans to the independents category, which has increased dramatically over time. Yet independents are disproportionately coming from the opposition parties, which have experienced a much higher rate of decline than the ANC. This development can be best described as ‘asymmetrical partisan dealignment’, as people move away from feeling close to a particular party, but more so from the opposition. Unable to maintain their proportional share of partisans, opposition parties have been the biggest losers. That opposition parties have proliferated and fragmented since 1994, together with the fact that they share an increasingly smaller portion of partisans, suggests that they have to work harder to convince voters to support them at elections.

Secondly, non-partisans now make up a remarkable proportion of the eligible electorate (defined here as surveyed citizens who are eligible to vote), fluctuating between 36 per cent and 56 per cent. The high number of floating voters whose support is in doubt at the beginning of an election suggests that there is a higher than expected potential for electoral competition or movement in support across political parties.

Figure 6.2: Direction of partisanship over time (%), 1994–2004



Lastly, on average, less than half the electorate are ANC partisans. In 1994, 60 per cent of the electorate were ANC partisans, but this figure has since fluctuated between 34 per cent and 52 per cent of the total electorate.



The partisan responses of social groups

Despite general consensus that the black population continues to identify with the ANC, while minority groups identify more with opposition parties, limited empirical knowledge exists about the demographics of supporters and non-voters.

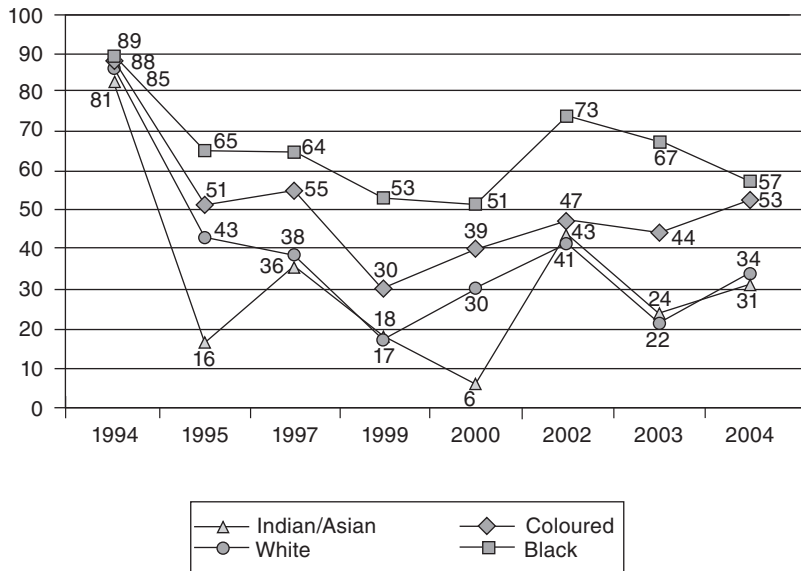
This section analyses the partisan responses of key demographic groups in order to detect changes in the social composition of party support bases. Therefore, the section explores the key cleavage structures over time and probes for changes or possible realignments to see whether partisanship is static or dynamic among specific key social cleavage groups. One can tell not only whether certain social groups are moving away from parties, but also whether they are shifting their partisan allegiances by moving from governing to opposition parties and visa versa or into the independents category. The strength of partisanship among social groups also informs us as to whether today's ANC partisans are as loyal as they once were.

*Race groups*⁵

Black voters are consistently more likely to identify with a party than other minority race groups. Yet, on average only 65 per cent of black voters are close to a particular party, whereas up to 49 per cent have declared themselves to be independents in some years. Subtle changes to the strength of support given to the ANC by blacks are also noticeable. The proportion of party identifiers who are 'very close' to the party has increased, while those who feel 'somewhat' or 'not very close' have steadily decreased. This makes sense when one considers that dealignment is most likely to occur first among the weakest partisans. Black voters are not an enthusiastic, unquestionably loyal electorate, as is often assumed. Levels of ANC partisanship among black South Africans have fluctuated between 62 per cent and 42 per cent, decreasing steadily since 1994, but have not been counter-balanced by shifts to opposition parties. Instead there is a significant increase in independents among this racial group, suggesting that core ANC support is smaller than initially supposed and many voters support this party, not because they are loyal partisans, but because they do not regard opposition parties as feasible alternatives.

⁵ While race is not recognised as a scientific category, for historical reasons socially constructed racial identities continue to be socially relevant in South Africa.

Figure 6.3: Level of partisans by race group over time (%), 1994–2004



Levels of partisanship among white South Africans have fluctuated between 16 per cent and 41 per cent, decreasing dramatically since 1994. Correspondingly, the increase in independents is significant. Support for the governing party remains negligible. Among Coloured South Africans we see a mixed trend emerging. Support for opposition parties has declined steadily over time, due possibly to the demise of the New National Party, (the former ruling party that merged itself into the ANC in 2005), offset somewhat by the growth in support for the Democratic Alliance among this racial group, while support for the ANC has also increased. Overall, there are more independents than partisans among Coloureds since 1995. Indians reflect similar trends to that of other minority racial groups, although dealignment has been remarkably rapid. Support for both the ANC and opposition parties is consistently low. The proportion of independents among Indians is the highest out of all racial groups and fluctuates between 57 per cent and 96 per cent.

While racial minority voters may still participate at elections, the data implies that opposition parties have to actively campaign to mobilise the support of these voters compared to the ANC, which still attracts a relatively higher proportion of partisans among black South Africans. While higher ratios of independents exist among smaller racial groups, a smaller proportion of independents among black South Africans can still amount to more independents numerically compared to the total of independents coming from minority groups. Given the demographic composition of South Africa, continuing increases in non-partisans among the black electorate hold the key to future electoral realignments.



*Urban vs rural residents*⁶

Trends in data confirm the overall decline in party identification among urban and rural voters. However, data also indicates that there are consistently fewer partisans and more independents among urban residents. In some years, independents make up a majority of the urban electorate. In contrast, rural areas consistently have more partisans. Yet by the end of 2004 the level of rural partisanship had dropped to urban levels (53 per cent).

There is a consistently higher ratio of ANC supporters among rural compared to urban partisans and, when testing for the strength of party identification, there are consistently more strong ANC partisans among rural residents than urban residents. Overall, rural areas offer more loyal ANC identifiers compared to their urban counterparts. Opposition partisans among urban and rural residents are in steady decline over the years, with only a slightly higher proportion in urban areas. Opposition party identifiers are mainly urban dwellers.

Age cohorts

Four age cohorts were designed to loosely reflect or capture four different political generations and provide a simple way to measure whether different age groups or generations affect partisanship. In 1994 the 18–29 year olds had reached the age of 16 years between 1981 and 1992 and are the ‘1980s’ generation. The 30–44 year old cohort in 1994 had reached the age of 16 between 1966 and 1980; they therefore comprised the cohort that experienced the 1976 youth uprisings. The 45–59 year old cohort in 1994 had reached the age of 16 years between 1951 and 1965 and constituted the pre-Soweto uprising generation that witnessed the rise and incarceration of Nelson Mandela. Anyone aged 60 or over in 1994 had turned 16 in or before 1950. Finally, a post-apartheid generation who have little direct early adult experience of apartheid entered the electorate around the year 2000.

While a sharper decline in partisanship among younger cohorts might have been expected, data shows little variation among cohorts, with no remarkable patterns or trends. Trends among ANC partisans also show little variation. It appears that the growth in independents and corresponding decline in ANC partisanship has little to do with voters’ age groups. In fact, the youngest cohorts have the highest proportion of ANC partisans. Yet rapid population growth among the youngest cohort also suggests that this group will have a higher *number* of independents compared to older groups. The impact of the post-apartheid generation is only likely to be detected after 2000, which is somewhat confirmed by the decline

⁶ Surveys from 2002 onwards use the urban–rural definition adopted by Statistics South Africa. Surveys prior to 2002 use the definition adopted by Markinor and the All Media Products Survey.

in partisanship among the 18–29 year olds, and in 2004, when older cohorts also show the highest number of loyal partisans who feel ‘very close’ to a party. Does this reflect the beginning of a new post-apartheid age cohort entering the electorate with fewer partisan attachments? This can only be confirmed over time. Young voters also show less support for opposition parties compared to their older counterparts, a possible indicator of the increasing stagnation of opposition parties if they are unable to mobilise the pool of growing young ‘independents’ in coming years.

Class

While few surveys have a variable measuring class, they all tap class through questions that ask respondents about their occupation and working status.⁷ Defining the notion of class in an industrialising and post-colonial setting such as South Africa is problematic (Southall, 2004: 521). In particular, when one uses occupational categories to determine class categories, results must be interpreted cautiously. Nevertheless, for parsimonious reasons and because these questions, and not items tapping income, appear in every survey, responses were divided into four main categories using occupational and employment data. The owner/employer category includes people who own businesses or employ people, the self-employed, managing directors of companies and commercial farmers. This constitutes what Dalton (1998) has called the ‘old middle class’, or, in Marxist terms, those who own the means of production. The professional/supervisory category includes office supervisors, industrial foremen and professionals (lawyers, engineers, doctors). According to Dalton, this constitutes the ‘new middle class’, since these people have middle-class lifestyles, but do not own the means of production. The worker category includes non-manual and manual workers, skilled and unskilled workers, soldiers, police, other security workers and subsistence farmers. The final category includes those who are unemployed, never had a job or have not worked long enough to consider themselves as workers. Housewives, students and the disabled are excluded from the above categories, as it is unclear which economic class they fit into (especially when cross-tabulated with secondary variables such as income).

Middle-class respondents within the ‘old’ and ‘new’ middle classes evince a steady decline in partisans until 1999 and a steady rise thereafter. Similarly, respondents from the working class and those who are unemployed also show an overall decline in partisanship, but there are consistently more partisans in the latter categories. By 2002 partisanship among all class groups has stabilised,

⁷ The class status variable was constructed using survey questions that ask respondents to choose among several occupational categories and an item that asks about status of (un)employment.



rising slightly and clustering between 55 per cent and 68 per cent. By 2004 the working class has the highest level of partisans, replacing the unemployed, who begin to show slight signs of decline by 2004. Subtle changes may present the beginnings of a newly emerging pattern among classes, where the unemployed begin to withdraw support from parties in general, while the wealthier middle classes increase their partisanship.

After 1994 ANC partisanship drops dramatically among the owner/employer category, while the proportion of independents increases steadily. Opposition partisans show slight decreases until 2002, after which they decrease sharply. By 1999, however, the number of ANC partisans in the owner/employer category begins to rise steadily, overtaking opposition partisans by 2002, while independents begin to stabilise. The data may reflect the emergence of the new black middle class, whose support for the ANC begins to dominate this social category by the year 2000. Where control over the means of production lay firmly with middle-class whites in the early years after the end of apartheid, by 2000 the black middle-class share had increased, thereby changing the proportion of ANC partisans in this category. These people slowly come to supplant the older white middle class, whose partisanship has steadily declined since 1995.

The direction of partisanship in the professional/supervisory category is reversed by the end of 2004. Whereas opposition partisans made up 70 per cent of this category in 1994 (while ANC partisans only made up 21 per cent), by 2004, 34 per cent of partisans are ANC supporters, while only 19 per cent are opposition supporters. Again, this is reflective of the rise of a new professional black middle class whose aspirations have been met and, as a social class, they respond with higher levels of party support for the ANC. A dramatic decline in opposition partisans is reflected in a steady rise of independents in this category. By the end of 2004, 47 per cent are independents.

Changes to the middle-class categories do not exemplify a situation of changing partisan minds, but rather of changing partisan groups. In other words, middle-class voters have not necessarily changed their partisan opinions; instead, fluctuations are more likely due to the introduction of a new set of partisan minds as the overall racial composition of this social group readjusts.

Among workers, ANC partisans remain steadfast over time, but never make up more than half the electorate in any year. Opposition partisans among workers are low and decline from 28 per cent in 1994 to 10 per cent in 2004. Independents rise steadily over the years, only declining slightly between 2000 and 2002, but rising again thereafter. In the unemployed category, the pattern is largely the same. If we look at ANC partisans across social groups, they are highest among the unemployed and workers, whose trends largely mirror each other. Yet these two categories show decreases in support over time. In contrast, the two middle-

class categories show clear increases in support for the ANC, especially among owner/employers at the end of the time span. Variations may also be reflective of emerging tensions between black capitalists and the civil petty bourgeoisie versus the working class and unemployed, as the middle and working classes come to have divergent economic and political interests (Southall, 2004: 539–40).

Data permitting, it may be interesting to look more closely at variations to partisanship *within* the (new) black middle class. As Southall (2004: 539) states, various fractions of the black middle class have shared the benefits of economic growth and transformation differentially. In particular, the relative economic advantage of ‘state managers’, corporate factions of the black middle class and the more advantaged sections of the civil petty bourgeoisie suggests the possibility that partisanship is stronger among these groups compared to the black trading petit bourgeoisie or ‘traders’, although a dependence of the latter upon procurement might mean that they are even more strongly partisan.

The impact of class on voting has been more regionalised and is more pronounced among minority groups. In the Western Cape, working-class Coloured voters tend to support the NNP (before its demise) and DA, while middle-class Coloured voters were divided, with many supporting the ANC (Seekings, 2005b: 4). Habib & Naidu (1999) also conclude that class played a role in Indian areas in KwaZulu-Natal.

So far, analyses focus on fluctuations and variations in levels and direction of party identification within social groups. However, an important part of this exercise is to investigate which social groups have the highest proportions of ANC or opposition identifiers and independents. After comparing the median averages of all social groups, the social or demographic groups with the most ANC partisans are blacks, the unemployed, rural dwellers and workers.

The most likely social groups to provide opposition partisans are whites, Coloureds, the middle class and older voters. However, it is clear that the highest averages among opposition identifiers are much smaller compared to averages of ANC partisans found in other social groups. Opposition partisans only make up an average of 26 per cent in the white racial group, the group with the most opposition partisans, compared to 56 per cent of ANC identifiers among blacks. Racial groups always hold the most partisans.

Blacks have the least percentage of independents of all social groups, followed by rural dwellers, the unemployed and workers. Minority racial groups have the most, followed by middle-class urban voters. Yet, compared to 70 per cent of Indians or 62 per cent of whites, both of which constitute a very small proportion of the overall population, 36 per cent of blacks may still constitute the highest absolute number of independents of any social group when one considers that this racial group represents the majority of the overall population.



Figure 6.4: ANC identifiers in each social group (%), 2004

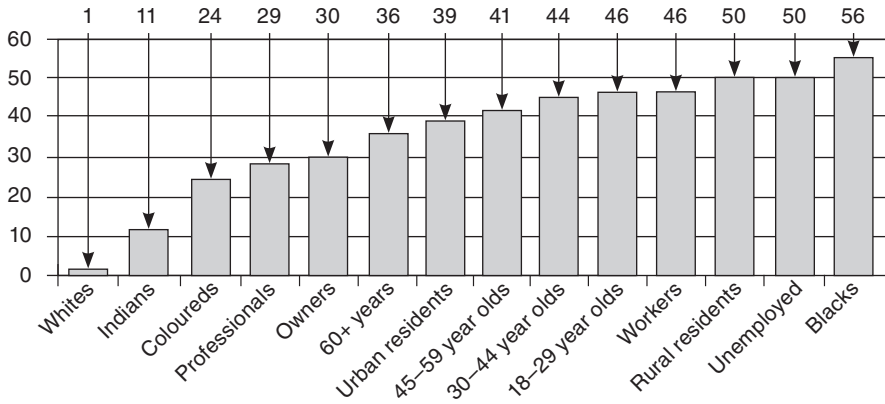


Figure 6.5: Opposition identifiers in each social group (%), 2004

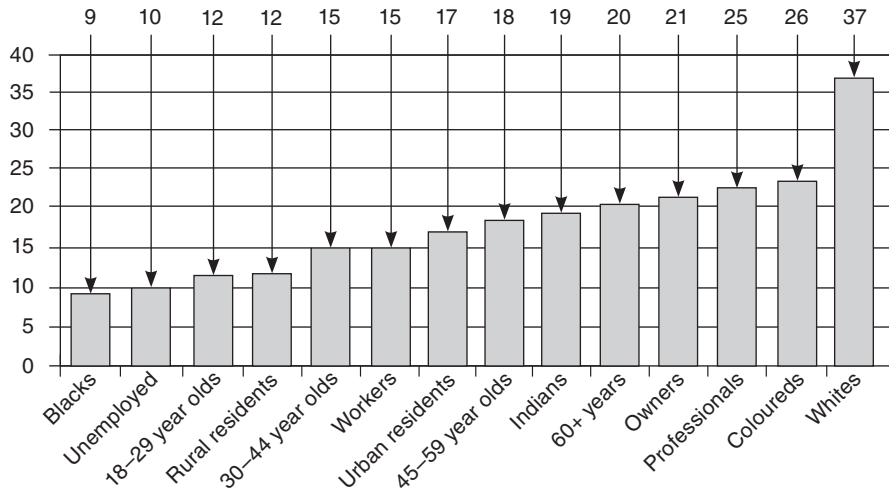
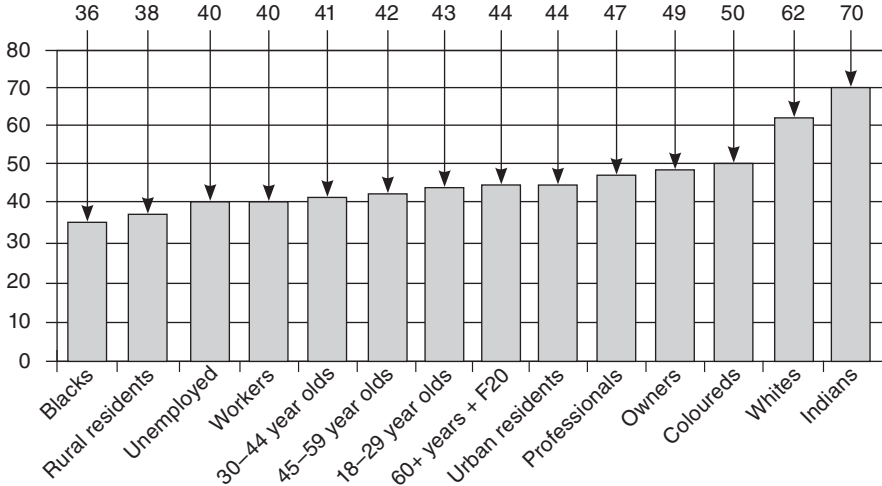


Figure 6.6: Independents in each social group (%), 2004



Overall, the data shows that the number of voters who feel close to a particular party has declined significantly since 1994. Less than half of the electorate are ANC partisans, while, on average, almost half are not guided by long-standing party ties at elections. While both the ANC and opposition parties have experienced losses to their long-standing support bases, the latter have lost more. Party identification has also fallen relatively evenly across social groups, with the greatest proportional losses among minority racial groups. The relatively even pattern of dealignment across all social groups has meant that the key cleavage structures that defined party support in 1994 are much the same in 2004. In short, the social compositions of partisan coalitions have not changed significantly over time.

Perhaps the most interesting finding is that there is little or no shift of allegiance across party lines by racial and other social groups. Rather than voters moving their support to another political party, partisanship has simply declined. Yet partisan dealignment, coupled with a higher potential for interparty movement, also suggests that static cleavage structures inherited from 1994 do not determine voting behaviour. Instead, voters appear to make reasoned judgments when choosing which party to support.

The micro motivations of voters

People generally choose political parties in response to a number of factors. Scholars argue that although party identification may be learnt through early family socialisation, it is also a running tally of current party assessment or a 'standing decision' that is constantly updated through evolving evaluations of government performance, party images and cognitive skills (Inglehart 1977; Fiorina, 1979; Achen, 1992; Popkin, 1994). Recent analyses confirm that long-standing party loyalties do not prevent partisans from updating their evaluations in the light of new information (Green et al, 2002). Short-term changes to party identification can and do occur. If this were also true in South Africa, then we can expect to see similar short-term factors influencing party identification. Accelerated socioeconomic transformation has changed the social structure of South African society, potentially affecting factors that shape political behaviour. If a person's position in the social structure is changing, the kinds of partisan cues that emanate from social positioning may be changing. Besides, people's value systems are not simply robotic reflections of the social structure. As people acquire new information and skills, their experiences and evaluations also matter. Adjustments therefore involve changes to the way people evaluate economic and political governance, party images and people's levels of cognitive skills.



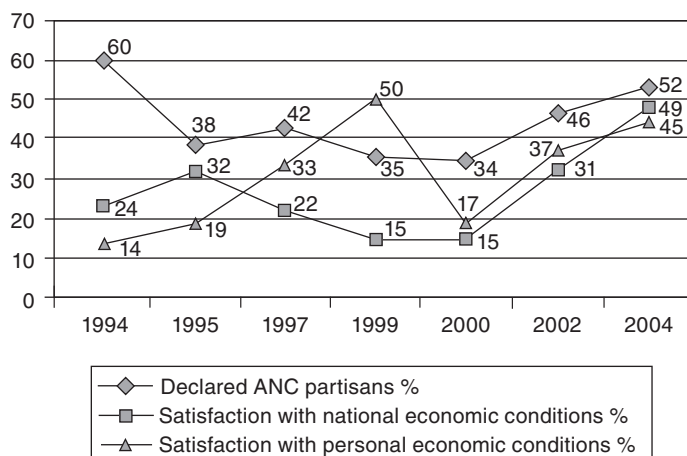
Evaluations of government performance

The literature suggests that voters judge which party is best suited to govern by looking at evaluations of their past performance and future promises (Downs, 1957; Fiorina, 1979). Voters then use economic and political performance evaluations to reward or punish government for their material improvements or economic decline.

Taking into account increasing unemployment, job losses, HIV/AIDS and poor service delivery, one might expect a significant decline in ANC support. There is a decline in party identification and turnout for the ANC, yet the party continues to attract majority support at elections. Why? Firstly, as shown earlier, votes for opposition parties have fallen faster than votes for the ANC. However, support for the ANC can be accounted for by the positive ratings of its performance in government. As voters evaluate the ANC government, they do so by also looking at the massive relative improvements in their lives. Government's redistribution policies have offset much of the negative economic developments of the past decade and partly account for high levels of ANC electoral support. The majority of voters also perceive that their future socioeconomic interests can be best furthered by an ANC government.

Figure 6.7 shows that South Africans viewed their personal and national economic evaluations positively over time. If we compare trends in party identification with popular satisfaction with their personal and the national economic situation, the data shows a pattern over time that offers strong support for the economic model. Trends in party identification are closely followed by similar fluctuations in evaluations of current economic conditions.

Figure 6.7: Economic evaluations and ANC partisanship (%), 1994–2004



When the chapter investigates the effects of both economic and political performance evaluations on voting behaviour in South Africa, it finds that performance evaluations influence the direction of partisan identification. Approval of economic and political performance is almost always associated with support for the incumbent party. Yet the delivery of political goods appears to influence partisanship to a greater extent than economic goods across time. The strength of bivariate relationships between various types of evaluations and direction of partisanship using correlation coefficients is presented in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3: Performance evaluations x direction of partisanship, 1994–2004

Item by type	1994	1995	1997	1999	2000	2002	2004
Sociotropic vs egocentric evaluations ⁸							
Current sociotropic	.275***	-	.254***	.306***	.299***	.231***	.186***
Current egocentric	.037	-	.131***	.025**	.175***	-.016	-.073*
Evaluations of government institutions ⁹							
Trust in the president?	-	.473***	.552***	-	.419***	.467***	.547***
Trust in the National Assembly?	-	-	.471***	-	.420***	.430***	.446***
Approval of job performance ¹⁰							
President		.653***	.497***	.781***	.524***	.421***	.530***
MPs		.501***	.444***	-	.494***	.421***	.399***
Approval of policy performance ¹¹							
Economic policy ¹²	-	-	-	.589***	.286***	.244***	.300***
Social services policy ¹³	-	-	-	.648***	.354***	.303***	.361***

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Dependent variable = ANC/non-ANC (opposition identifiers and independents)

MPs = members of parliament

Summary statistic: Gamma

8 In general, how would you describe: A. The present economic conditions of this country? B. Your own present living conditions?

9 How much do you trust in the president? How much do you trust in the National Assembly?

10 Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the president has performed his job over the last twelve months? MPs?

11 Two separate summated unweighted factor-based scales are used for bivariate analysis (consisting of average scale scores for each respondent) based on factor analysis data reduction techniques (two rotated factors extracted). The item wording for 2000–06 is: *How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters? List of issues.* The equivalent indicators for 1997 and 1999 are a 4-point and 11-point index/scale, respectively, that tap government performance in policy areas.

12 Economic Policy Evaluation Index reliability is high. For each year, the Cronbach's Alpha is above .60.

13 Social Services Policy Evaluation Index reliability is high. For each year, the Cronbach's Alpha is above .70.



South African voters do not automatically form opinions about the national economy from their personal conditions. Instead, they base their evaluations on their perceptions of the performance of the broader economy as a whole. People find changes in the national economy to be better indicators of how government is doing. Voters do not appear to hold the ANC government responsible for their personal economic plight. This might partly explain why the ANC continues to garner overwhelming popular support in the face of enduring poverty and deepening socioeconomic hardships.

It also appears that the delivery of ‘political goods’ such as institutional performance has a greater impact on people’s partisan decisions than policy performance. Secondly, voters make distinctions between overall government performance and performance within specific policy areas. Approval of social service policy has consistently greater impacts than that of economic policy. In addition, voters praise government on areas where they have experienced profound social change, such as the provision of essential services, housing and education. Correspondingly, they criticise government on the very issues that they see as the country’s most pressing problems, such as crime and unemployment, as seen in the downward trend in public opinion on these issues since 1994 (Mattes, 2005: 48). Yet, when asked for an overall assessment of government performance, voters give generally positive remarks. Overall positive evaluations are therefore informed by a balanced assessment of specific policy areas.

While voters do not make up their minds anew at every election, the data does suggest that new information about political and economic developments combines with partisan loyalties. So although voters take their socioeconomic positions into account, the electoral consequences of poverty and unemployment are offset by successful redistributive social policies. The poor do not seem to hold government directly responsible for their financial situations, and partisan loyalties are able to withstand short-term disappointments. For those whose loyalties are shifting through poor evaluations of economic performance, the data suggests that they simply move into the non-electorate.

The influence of party images

When voters have little information, they rely on ‘information short cuts’, often in the form of clues supplied by a candidate’s dress, race and accent, which provide information as to the potential attitudes and performance of that party in government. Party images therefore act as an alternative source of voter information and are cues that help voters complete their assessments (Popkin, 1994: 59). They take on either positive or negative connotations for voters as people use them to judge, among other things, whether parties are exclusive or inclusive. Inclusivity shapes

the credibility and trustworthiness of a party and reveals important information about whether it is representative of the voter's interests.

The role of race in South African elections is linked to the way voters perceive which group interests particular parties represent. Afrobarometer data shows that people generally see their own parties as inclusive of all South Africans. Voters are not overly preoccupied with affirming their racial identities through political parties at election time. Yet significant numbers of voters are unsure about whether other opposition parties are inclusive or exclusive of them, or simply perceive opposition parties to be solely exclusive. The 1994 Institute for a Democratic South Africa (IDASA) survey and its companion survey in 1999 asked a series of questions about the exclusivity of different parties, such as: 'Do you think that (party x) looks after the interests of all in South Africa or after the interests of one group only?' Fewer than five per cent of blacks viewed the ANC as an exclusive party, whereas whites, Coloureds and Indians largely saw it as representing only one group. Data also shows that while non-partisan black voters do not support the ANC, they often hold more negative views of opposition parties. As for the Democratic Party (the predecessor to the DA), while whites did not see it as exclusive, blacks did, particularly in 1999, and they generally identified the nature of the exclusion as racial.¹⁴

If we explore bivariate relationships between partisan choice and party images using the 1999 IDASA and 2004 Comparative National Elections Project (CNEP) surveys, voter perceptions of inclusivity and trust show moderate to strong relationships with the direction of support for the ANC or opposition parties.¹⁵

Table 6.4: Party image evaluations x direction of partisanship, 1999 and 2004

1999 IDASA	ANC	Opposition parties
Inclusivity	.377*	-.265*
Trust	.515*	-.264*
2004 CNEP	ANC	Opposition parties
Inclusivity	.342*	-.207*
Trust	.362*	-.221*

* Indicates that the correlation is significant at the 0.001 level ($p = <0.001$).

Summary statistic: Kendall's Tau C

14 The Democratic Party changed its name to the DA after a merger with the NNP take took place in 2000. The DA retained its name when the NNP left the alliance in 2001.

15 Inclusivity and trustworthiness of the ANC are entered as single item indicators. A scale was used that provides an average score for each respondent for the inclusivity and trustworthiness variables for all opposition parties. Coding of party inclusivity: 1 = all; 0 = don't know; -1 = only one group. Coding of trust: 1 = trust; 0 = don't know; -1 = no trust. Direction of partisanship is coded opposition/independents (0) and ANC (1).



By 1999 and 2004 there are intriguing changes in the way people view parties. Both the ANC and opposition parties witnessed an increase in levels of ambiguity about their images and a significant decline in levels of exclusivity. One might imagine that increasing levels of ambiguity about the racial profiles of parties is likely to affect the polarisation pattern seen in voting outcomes in South Africa. If more voters are less likely to cast parties as exclusive of their racial group, this offers a greater chance for multiracial cross-voting. Yet perceptions of inclusivity are a necessary but not sufficient condition for blacks to support white parties and visa versa. Of those voters who see opposition parties as inclusive, very few declared their partisan support (Ferree, 2006: 812). Thus, winning votes requires a party to have the right set of racial credentials, but racial credentials alone are not enough.

Racialised party images do impact on partisan choice in South Africa. Party images remain powerful cues for partisanship, but it appears that they may be declining in importance over time. Voters use the logic of exclusion rather than representation to judge where their interests lie: they judge a party by who is excluded from it, not who is represented by it. The racial credentials of parties and evaluations of party images therefore appear to affect voting behaviour.

The influence of sociological factors

Race is clearly an important factor in South African elections, yet data shows little evidence for theories that characterise voting as a racial census. If voting is an expression of racial identity, then voters should connect the party they are supporting with their identity group. However, data shows that South Africans are not overwhelmingly preoccupied with affirming their racial identities through political parties at election time. The high number of independents across racial groups and the influence of evaluations on partisanship also suggest that voters do not use elections merely to register their communal ties or racial identities.

So how does one explain the appearance of racially aligned voting outcomes? And can race help our understanding of voting behaviour? Scientists are quick to remind us that correlation does not equal causation. As Christopher Achen (1992) states: ‘correlation between demographic factors and the vote do not explain the vote—they themselves need to be explained.’

Voting is as much conditioned by who one is as by what one believes, and, as seen above, the sociological context can act as an information source to inform voters about which party is likely to reflect their interests best. Race acts as a useful summary statistic for voters when they consider whose interests a party is

likely to represent. Individual prospects are bound up with group prospects. The intersection of individual and group interests means that a group identity, like race, can act as an indirect information short cut for South African voters.

Voter calculations aim for maximising electoral payoffs, while reducing inherent costs that go with obtaining information to inform themselves about politics by turning to available information sources that are sociological by nature. 'Race is not important because of the passions it inspires or tradition it embodies but because of the information it conveys' (Posner, 2005: 104). South African voters are not unlike voters found elsewhere. Green et al (2002) found that partisanship in the United States is also guided by a sense of who belongs to various social and economic groups, and voters' relationship to them. Voters compare their self-image to what they perceive as the social bases of parties and then conduct a matching process to find an appropriate fit between the two.

Afrobarometer data does not show any major divergences of opinion across racial groups about policy areas, and also shows that most South Africans are in agreement about the key challenges facing the country. Yet, Mattes & Piombo (2001) show that voters from different race groups form different evaluations of the same criteria, leading them to conclude that race tends to shape *what* voters think, not the *way* they think about issues. This has come about as a result of radical differences in living conditions across racial lines, which has led to relative homogeneity of economic and political interests within racial groups. Overlapping class and racial identities partly account for continuing racial polarisation of party politics. The resilience of race, and not class, in electoral politics is also aided by political rhetoric, transformatory legislation, redistributive policies and patronage. While these are justifiable and necessary facets of a post-apartheid South Africa, they continue to affect voter perceptions by sending out racial cues that reinforce the belief that group and individual prospects correlate. The irony of the transition process lies in the extent to which apartheid identities are relied upon in efforts to bring about positive transformation. These cues act as useful directives to voters by helping them make a connection between their interests and electoral options.

Despite signs of a growing class salience, these identities are not yet affecting electoral politics. The ANC has proved itself adept at building a cross-class support base, thus disallowing class to eclipse race as the basis for political identities. The ANC's 'double class compromise', where business, the working classes and the poor have benefitted in different ways, has paid electoral dividends (Seekings, 2005a: 36).

It seems likely that racial groups will remain important cues or information short cuts for partisan identities among South African voters for as long as these group stereotypes persist as salient identities in politics.



South African voters do not make up their minds anew at each election: to a large extent, partisanship guides electoral outcomes. Yet survey data shows that multiple factors drive party identification as new information about political and economic developments combines with assessments of party images and cognitive skills. After testing data, Seekings found race to be a more powerful factor in explaining voting behaviour than other sociological or attitudinal variables on their own. But it was no more powerful than partisan identification or a combination of other sociological or attitudinal variables. As Seekings (2005b: 18) concludes, ‘the most complete explanation of voting behaviour needs to include some of these other variables alongside race’. A comprehensive understanding of voter behaviour in South Africa therefore requires a more thorough account of different theoretical explanations.

Conclusion

The argument of this chapter is that a silent revolution is under way among South Africa’s voters. Its characteristics may be found in the increasing numbers of ‘floating voters’ who are not overtly loyal to one particular political party, nor guided by long-standing partisan ties when deciding which party to support at elections. Where party identification was crystallised and reinforced in 1994 by historical factors, a dozen years later there are fewer voters predisposed towards any party. The fact that the extent of mobile voting or electoral availability is significant offers the potential to reshape future electoral outcomes.

Levels of partisanship have generally fallen across all social groups. Black voters are consistently more likely to be party identifiers than other race groups, but, on average, only 65 per cent of black voters are close to a particular party. Rural voters are more likely to support a party than their urban counterparts; middle-class voters are slowly becoming more partisan, while workers and the unemployed show signs of partisan decline. The silent revolution may have its biggest hold among the youngest voters who are becoming less aligned and the new middle classes who show signs of growth in partisanship.

The ANC still holds mass appeal across key demographic groups. Yet several factors signal that the ANC’s support may become less broadly based, as the party becomes increasingly reliant on specific segments of the public for its electoral support. Its vote share has decreased significantly. Secondly, its percentage of identifiers has declined, with less than half the electorate declaring themselves to be ANC partisans. The degree of loyalty felt towards the party has also diminished. Finally, while its strongest partisans are found among blacks, the unemployed, rural dwellers and working-class voters, this looks set to change if

emerging trends stabilise, such as the increase in support from middle-class and older voters, and the decline among workers and the unemployed.

Moreover, individual voters are not dominated by long-term socialised party attachments, but also inform their party identification using evaluations of government performance and make logical deductions using information short cuts when making a choice of which party to support. These changes suggest that voters are not overly predisposed towards expressive 'racial census' voting and that static cleavage structures inherited from 1994 do not overdetermine voting behaviour.

Nonetheless, changes in electoral trends or patterns should not be mistaken for changes in the behaviour of individual voters. As the South African population undergoes further demographic and socioeconomic changes, it is likely that the sizes and distribution of different social groups will alter and affect voting results. Much of the existing partisan change can be attributed to changes in the relative size of one or more social groups or economic strata, causing shifts to patterns of partisan support. For example, changes over time to the age, race or class status composition of the population can produce different electoral results.

In situations where partisan groups are relatively equal in size, differential turnout can cause swings and shifts entirely unrelated to changes in individual voter behaviour. Major power shifts in the Cape Town metropole are not necessarily voter realignments, but due rather to demographic change, as migration into the city boosts the ANC's share of traditional voters (Seekings, 2005b). In KwaZulu-Natal, the Inkatha Freedom Party's support base has also been eroded as demographic processes proceed, such as integration into the urban economy (Friedman, 2005). Even slight variations within and across social groups may, as time progresses, hold the key to future electoral realignments. Certainly, the expanding number of independents among blacks suggests that this group may become a significant player in future electoral realignments.

For the moment, demographics will also dictate the degree of electoral competition. Areas that have several relatively evenly sized demographic, particularly racial, groups, such as Cape Town are likely to experience higher levels of electoral contestation and volatility.

Of concern is the dealignment trend displayed in the data. As party identification declines, the majority of voters do not politically realign themselves. Instead, they become non-partisan in attitude, become harder to mobilise and generally abstain. Electoral change has not yet had visible electoral consequences for the percentages of support for the governing party, but instead has subtle implications for active political engagement and partisanship.

Electoral stagnation may have negative effects on the quality of South Africa's democracy. Dealignment should free more voters to shift their party support. Yet



new political contenders are slow to emerge and garner a serious portion of the national vote. The lack of realignment also decreases the chances for electoral uncertainty, thereby discouraging incumbents' responsiveness to voter interests. Where the outcome of an election is not in doubt, incumbents have less incentive to be responsive and accountable to the citizenry. Declining support for the opposition has also served to strengthen relative support for the ANC. In the face of continued one-party dominance, the greatest challenge for democracy in the next decade will be maintaining high levels of incumbents' responsiveness towards citizens.

Social groups remain important cues or information short cuts for South African voters, and while electoral politics continues to pivot around fixed identities, such as race, weakening party bonds will simply continue to provide the governing party with larger majorities from increasingly smaller electorates. In the medium term, electoral outcomes will continue to mirror the racial cleavages of the past.

The findings here also hold implications for the conduct of party politics. The problems of dealignment do not lie with voters as such. Instead, the limited appeal of many opposition parties is a primary factor. To seriously contest future elections, these parties need to be more attentive and responsive to subtle shifts in political identities. Parties wanting to build multiethnic and multiracial coalitions will need to address the way in which they are perceived in terms of racial exclusivity by addressing candidate selection. Those that struggle to present genuinely inclusive racial and ethnic imagery will not attract widespread support. Finally, any chance of increased political competition still seems to pivot around intra-ANC contestation. Demographic changes to the party's core support base may force new shifts in policy positions, which could deepen the ideological rift with the other members of the Tripartite Alliance and alter its party profile.

Note on methodology

This chapter is based on ongoing doctoral research that consists of an analysis of change over time in the aggregate patterns of party support among social groups and of the motivations of voter behaviour by comparing different electorates over 12 years using data from a series of cross-sectional surveys. To test for changes, the study operationalised sets of independent variables or competing theoretical models of voting behaviour. Findings are based on a range of statistical analyses such as cross-tabulations of structural and demographic variables and multivariate data analyses (logistic regression).

Most of the national public opinion surveys were fielded around the time of national, provincial and local elections in South Africa and were designed precisely for electoral research purposes. Moreover, the designs reflect well-established

traditions of electoral research originating at the University of Michigan, which have been used extensively in similar survey-based research projects worldwide. Consequently, the surveys used here employ indicators that have been tested rigorously in other country studies. In particular, the Afrobarometer series is based on the international barometer surveys (Eurobarometer, Latino-barometer, and so on). In line with these regional survey instruments, Afrobarometer's design takes into consideration South Africa's peculiarities and contextual constraints, while still employing international best practice and experience in its choice of variables and overall design.

Although the data is sourced over time from cross-sectional surveys, each consisting of individual samples, the sampling frame, method of sampling and sample size are all sufficiently similar to make comparisons over time valid. Each sample is representative of the wider South African population, using probability sampling methods such as stratified and multistage cluster sampling. Sample quality was also improved by applying statistical weighting adjustments during the analysis stage to minimise sample biases. Large sample sizes ensure that the surveys have a sampling error of between three and two per cent, allowing for 95 per cent confidence levels.

The IDASA post-election study (1994) conducted interviews with 2 517 eligible voters; the IDASA local government election study (1995) conducted 2 674 interviews; the political culture study (1997) conducted 3 500 interviews; Opinion '99 (1999) conducted 2 200 interviews; Afrobarometer rounds 1, 2, 2.5 (2000, 2002, 2004) carried out at least 2 200 interviews; and the CNEP (2004) conducted 1 200 interviews.¹⁶

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¹⁶ The data for these surveys is available on the Afrobarometer website, <http://www.afrobarometer.org>.



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