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A SILENT REVOLUTION: SOUTH AFRICAN VOTERS DURING THE FIRST YEARS OF DEMOCRACY 1994-2006

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A Silent Revolution: South African Voters during the first Years of Democracy 1994-2006

Abstract

Since the onset of democracy in 1994, South Africa's elections have returned similar levels of support for the major political parties. 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 socio-economic change on long-standing cleavage and electoral behaviour. Using data from eight national public opinion surveys spanning 1994 to 2004, this paper looks at trends and patterns in partisanship over time, explores changes to the demographic support bases of parties and the motivations of South African voters and finally reflects on the results of the 2006 municipal elections, which are compared to overall trends in party support. This paper finds that dramatic socio-economic changes do not seem to have impacted heavily on the social composition of the ANC's support base. There is little or no shift of allegiance across party lines by racial and other social groups. 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. Rather than voters moving their support to another political party, partisanship has simply declined. Social groups remain important cues or information shortcuts for South African voters. Yet, partisan dealignment, coupled with a higher potential for inter-party movement, also suggests that static cleavage structures inherited from 1994 do not determine voting behaviour. Individual voters do not appear to be dominated by long-term socialised party attachments but also inform their party identification using evaluations of government performance and make reasoned judgments when choosing which party to support. The ANC still holds mass appeal across key demographic groups. Yet several factors signal that the ANC's support may become less broad based, as the party becomes increasingly reliant on specific segments of the public for its electoral support. A 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. Moreover, dealignment and demographic changes within the entire population have begun

to change levels of partisanship as the sizes and distribution of different social groups alter and affect voting results. Although party loyalties seldom shift abruptly it would seem that partisanship in South Africa has fluctuated considerably more than is often acknowledged. Yet, 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. Despite fewer voters predisposed towards any party new political contenders have been slow to emerge and garner a serious portion of the national vote. In the face of continued one-party dominance, and electoral stagnation, the greatest challenge for democracy in the next decade will be maintaining high levels of incumbent responsiveness towards citizens.

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 results 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 socio-economic change on long-standing cleavage 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 which 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 democracy. 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 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, this typified by an increasing amount 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 paper looks at trends and patterns in partisanship over time. Data from eight national public opinion surveys spanning 1994 to 2004 explore changes to the demographic support bases of parties and the motivations of South African voters.[1] Finally, the results of the 2006 municipal elections are compared to overall trends in party support.

An Electorate in Transformation

Voter behaviour is shaped by social and economic conditions. Rapid socio-economic 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. First, 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 eighteen and thirty. 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 African share of the population rising.

Second, socio-economic 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 between race groups. In 1995, 73 per cent of the individuals in the top decile (the richest ten per cent) were white, but by 2000, there were as many African households in the top income quintile twenty 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 Africans, with its 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 black Africans could be broadly defined as 'middle class'.

[1] Refer to appendix one 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). While inter-racial inequality has declined, intra-racial inequality is on the increase - among Africans the gini co-efficient rose from 0.70 to 0.81 between 1995 and 1998 (*ibid*). 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 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 and Valodia 2006). Moreover, other societal developments - such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, increasing educational opportunities and access to media and information- have made a major impact on many people's lives.

After what is now over a decade of democracy, the focus of politics in South Africa has shifted from the realisation of 'liberation' towards 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 socio-economic 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.

Looking beneath aggregate electoral outcomes

At first glance, voting patterns in South Africa appear fairly stable at the macro level. Table 1 present 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 1 Aggregate electoral results (%)

	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

Note: * The principle opposition parties during these elections were the National Party (to become the New National Party and 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 (to become the Democratic Alliance); Inkatha Freedom Party; the Freedom Front Plus; The Pan Africanist Congress; the United Democratic Movement (from 1999 election onwards) and a number of smaller parties.

Table 2 Voting Age Population (VAP), Registration, Turnout and Proportion of VAP for governing party and opposition:[2]

	*1994**	*1999*	*2004*
Voting age population (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
% of VAP vote for opposition parties	32.1	23.7	16.9
% of abstaining voters	14	29.4	43.9

Source: Independent Electoral Commission; Reynolds 1999; Piombo & Nijzink 2005

Notes: * 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

[2] Sources for VAP figures: Reynolds (1999); 2004 VAP figures based on Statistics South Africa Census 2001 figures. Also see Nijzink and Piombo (2005). The proportion of VAP for the ANC and opposition is calculated using total votes for ANC / total VAP. 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.

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 ten 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. First, whilst the eligible voting age population (VAP) has increased (due to population growth) by approximately 5 million over ten 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 7 million potential voters were not recorded (Kabemba 2005:95). Second, 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.

Third, 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 between parties, nor can it tell us about the intensity of commitment towards a party and the motivations or reasons for support.

Aggregate distributions of party identification

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

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, Palmquist & Schickler 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, 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.[3]

Levels of partisanship: partisans vs. non-partisans

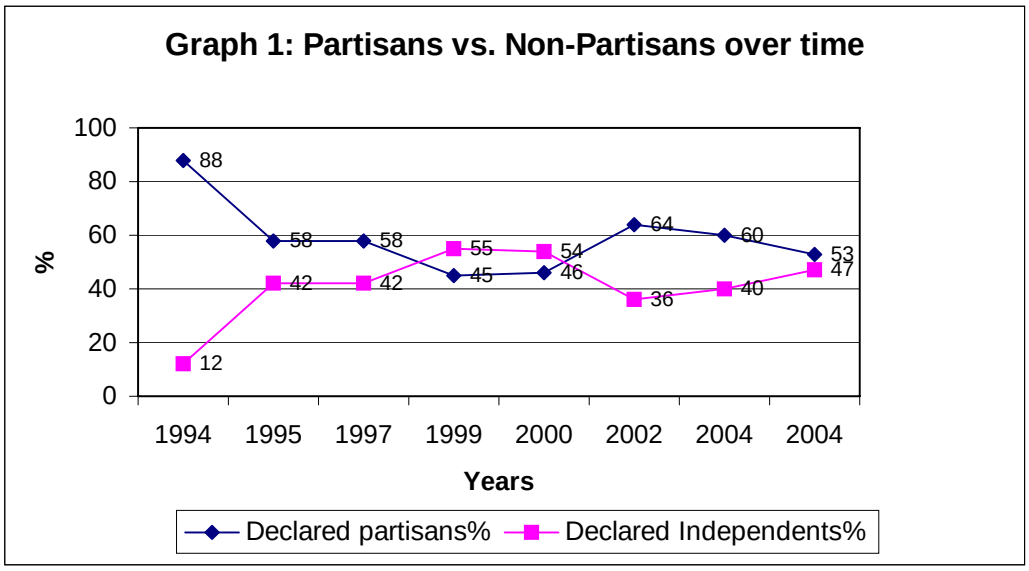
After initially high levels of partisanship after the historic 1994 'liberation' election, the proportion of partisans in the electorate declines significantly thereafter, fluctuating between 64 per cent and 45 per cent over the following ten years. Since 1995 no more than 64 per cent of the population have ever stated that they feel close to a political party. Decreases in partisanship are accompanied by corresponding increases in the proportion of non-partisans or 'independents'. By 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

[3] The measures of Partisan Identification 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 three-way identification with the ANC governing party, the opposition or non-partisan to measure the direction of PID. Lastly, ANC party identifiers were isolated from the entire survey sample and tested using the strength of 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 multi-party systems.

deciding which party to support, suggesting that short-term forces are potential influences on party support.

Table 3 Distribution of Partisans and Non-partisans over time %

Years	*Partisans*	*Non-Partisans/ Independents*	*Total*
1994	88	12	100
1995	58	42	100
1997	58	42	100
1999	45	55	100
2000	46	54	100
2002	64	36	100
2004	60	40	100
2004	53	47	100
Average	59	41	100



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 electorate identify with a party, while 40 per cent do so in the Czech Republic, 30 per cent in Slovakia, 20 per cent Hungary and only 15 per cent in Poland (White, Rose and McAllister 1997:135).

Direction of partisanship: ANC vs. independents vs. opposition

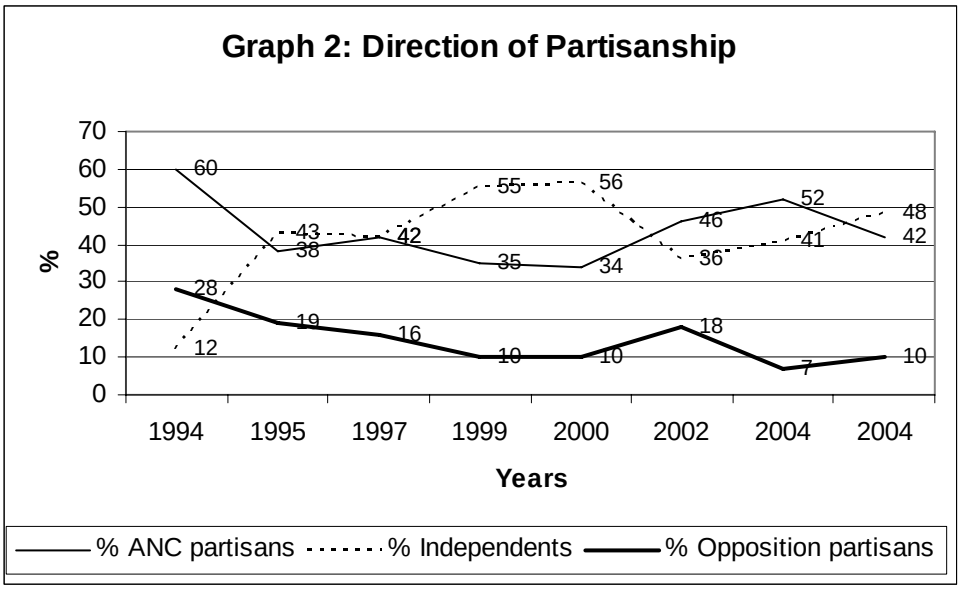
Self-declared partisans can be further divided into those who support the ANC and those who support opposition parties. Table 4 and Graph 2 show the ratios of ANC supporters, opposition supporters (includes all opposition parties) and independents across the electorate over time. Although the vast majority of declared partisans are ANC supporters there are several developments.

First, 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.

Second, 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.

Table 4 Direction of partisanship over time %

Years	*ANC*	*Independents*	*Opposition*	*Total*
1994	60	12	28	100
1995	38	43	19	100
1997	42	42	16	100
1999	35	55	10	100
2000	34	56	10	100
2002	46	36	18	100
2004	52	41	7	100
2004	42	48	10	100
Average	44	42	14	100



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 African population continues to identify with the ANC while minority groups identify more so with opposition parties, limited empirical knowledge exists about the demographics of supporters and non-voters. I analyse the partisan responses of key demographic groups to detect changes in the social composition of party support bases. 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[4]

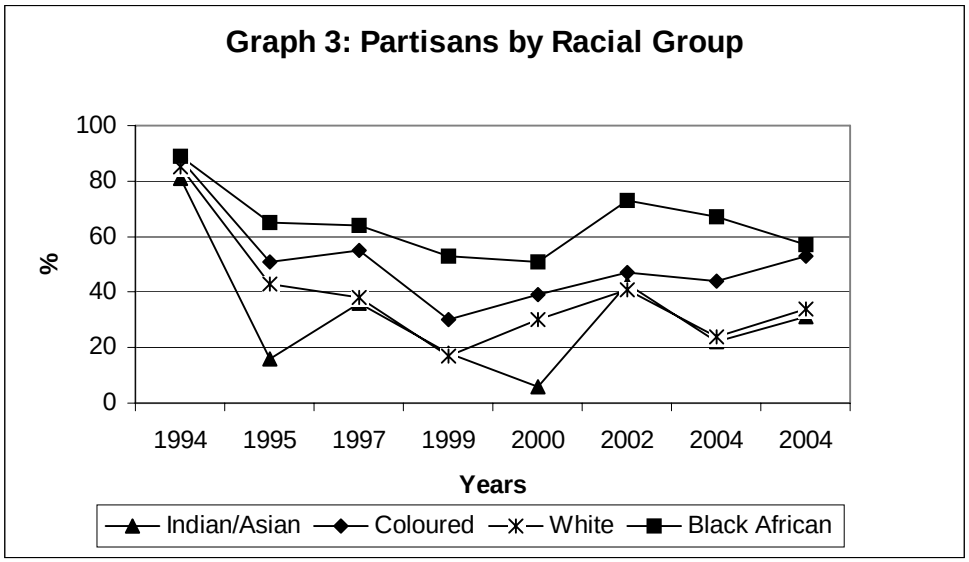
Black African voters are consistently more likely to identify with a party than other minority race groups. Yet, on average only 65 per cent of black voters are close to a particular party, whereas up to 49 per cent have declared themselves to be independents in some years. Subtle changes to the strength of support given to the ANC by black Africans are also noticeable. The proportion of party identifiers who are 'very close' to the party have 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

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

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.

Table 5 Levels of partisanship by race group %

Year	*Indian*	*Coloured*	*White*	*Black African*
1994	81	88	85	89
1995	16	51	43	65
1997	36	55	38	64
1999	18	30	17	53
2000	6	39	30	51
2002	43	47	41	73
2004	22	44	24	67
2004	31	53	34	57
Average	32	51	39	65



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 formerly ruling party which 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 mobilize 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 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 holds the key to future electoral realignments.

Urban vs. rural residents[5]

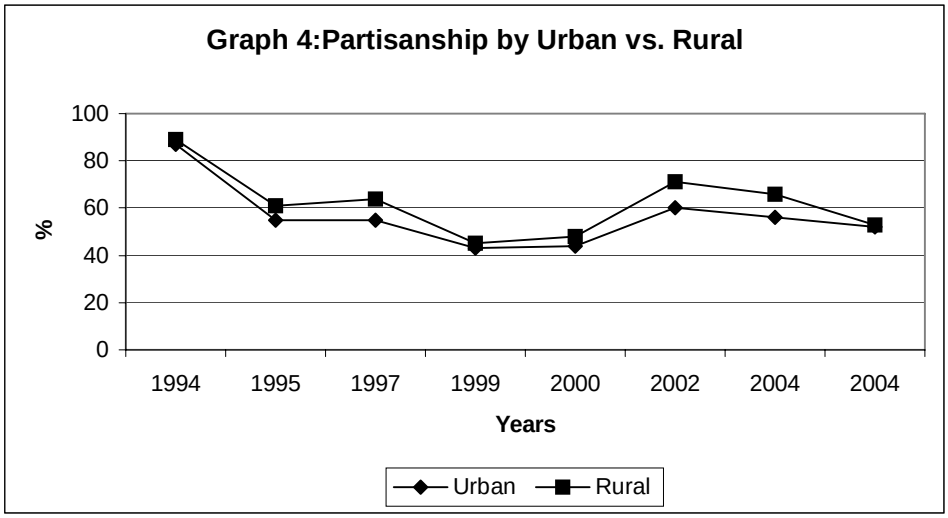
Trends in data confirm the overall decline in party identification among urban and rural voters. However, data also indicate that there are consistently fewer partisans and more independents among urban residents. In some years independents make up a majority of the urban electorate. In contrast, rural 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 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.

[5] Surveys from 2002 onwards use urban-rural definition adopted by Statistics South Africa. Surveys prior to 2002 use the definition adopted by Markinor and the All Media Products Survey (AMPS).

Table 6 Distribution of partisanship by urban-rural group %

Years	*Urban*	*Rural*
1994	87	89
1995	55	61
1997	55	64
1999	43	45
2000	44	48
2002	60	71
2004	56	66
2004	52	53
Average	56	62



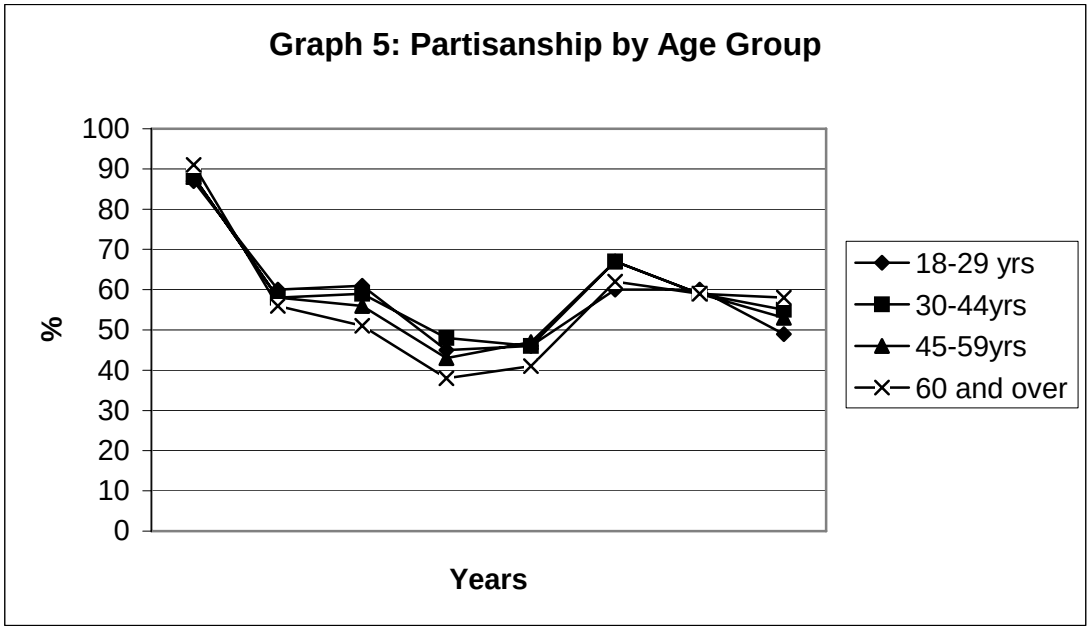
Age cohorts

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 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 enters the electorate around the year 2000.

While a sharper decline in partisanship among younger cohorts might have been expected, data show little variation between 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 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 less partisan attachments? This can only be confirmed in time. Young voters also show less support for opposition parties compared to their older counterparts, a possible indicator of increasing stagnation of opposition parties if they are unable to mobilise the pool of growing young 'independents' in coming years.

Table 7 Levels of partisanship by age cohort's %

Years	*18-29 yrs*	*30-44yrs*	*45-59yrs*	*60 plus*
1994	87	88	88	91
1995	60	58	58	56
1997	61	59	56	51
1999	45	48	43	38
2000	46	46	47	41
2002	60	67	67	62
2004	60	59	59	59
2004	49	55	53	58
Average	59	60	59	57



Class

While few surveys have a variable measuring class they all tap class through questions that ask respondents about their occupation and working status.[6] 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 business or employ people, the self-employed, managing directors 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 live middle class lifestyles but do not own the means of production. The Worker category includes non-manual and manual, 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 above categories as it

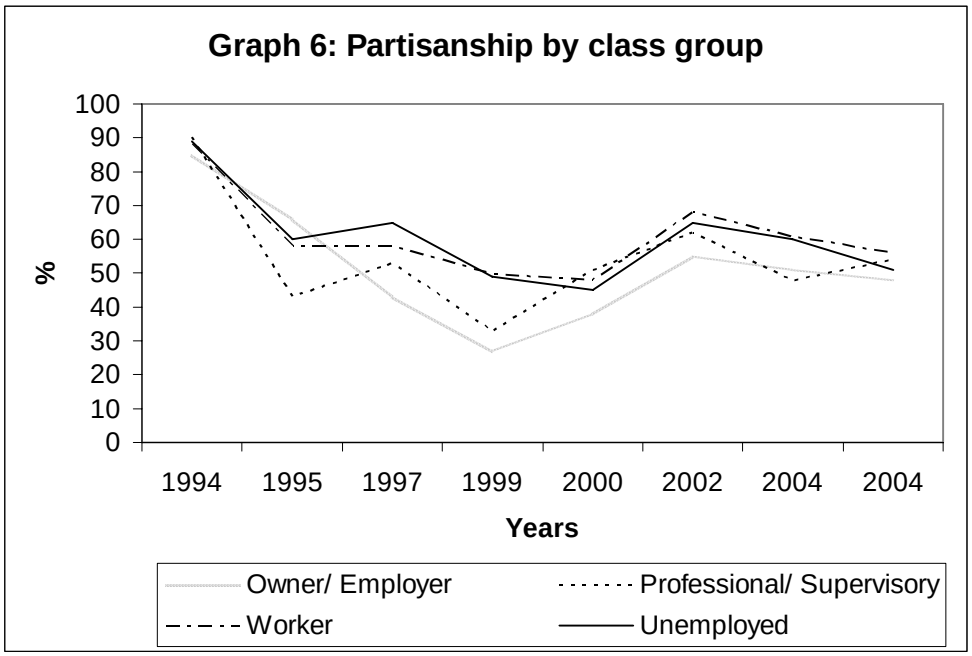
[6] The class status variable was constructed using surveys questions that ask respondents to choose among several occupational categories and an item that asks about status of (un)employment.

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 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, rising slightly and clustered 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.

Table 8 Level of partisanship by class group %

Years	*Owner/ Employer*	*Professional/ Supervisory*	*Worker*	*Unemployed*
1994	85	90	88	89
1995	66	43	58	60
1997	43	53	58	65
1999	27	33	50	49
2000	38	51	48	45
2002	55	62	68	65
2004	51	48	61	60
2004	48	54	56	51
Average	52	54	61	61



After 1994, ANC partisanship drops dramatically among the owner/ employer category whilst 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 African 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 African 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 the ANC only 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 end of 2004, 47 per cent are independents.

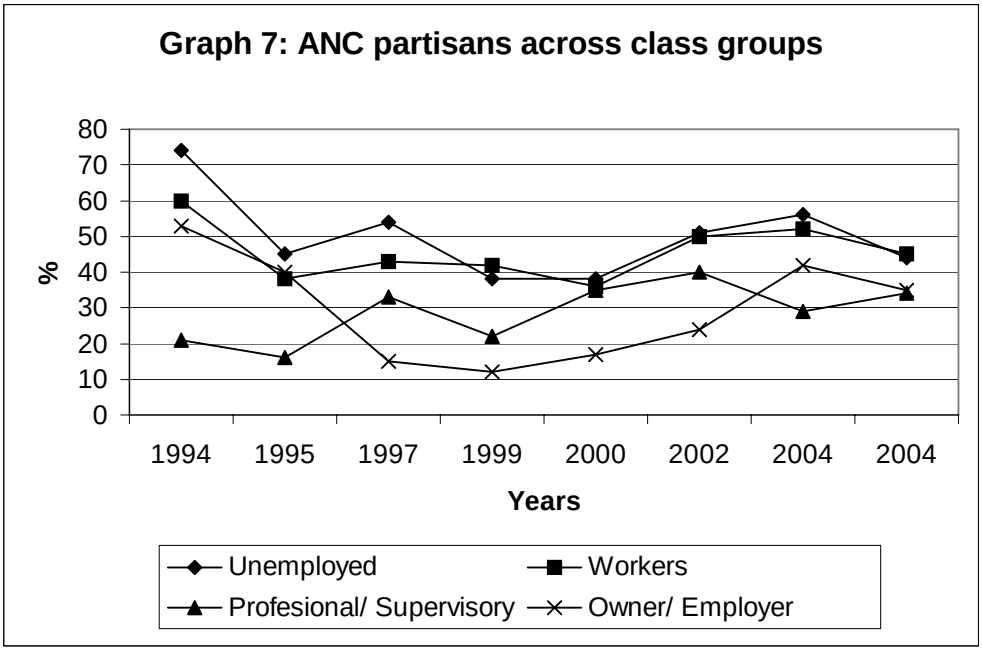
Changes to the middle class categories do not exemplify a situation of changing partisan minds but rather of changing partisan groups. In other words, middle class voters have not necessarily changed their partisan opinions – instead, fluctuations are more likely due to the introduction of a new set 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 ANC partisans are highest among the unemployed and then 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 former groups become less inclined to remain their traditional political allies (Southall 2004: 539-540).

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 fractions of the black middle class, along with 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 more pronounced among minority groups. In the Western Cape working class coloured voters tend to support the NNP (before its demise) and DA whilst middle-class Coloured voters were divided, with many supporting the ANC (Seekings 2005b:4). Habib and Naidu (1999) also concluded that class played a role in Indian areas in Kwa-Zulu Natal.

Graph 7: ANC partisans across class groups



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 black Africans, the unemployed, rural dwellers, and workers.

The most likely social groups to provide opposition partisans are whites, Coloureds, middle class and older voters. However, by looking at both tables 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 black Africans. Racial groups always hold the most partisans.

Table 9 ANC identifiers in each social group

Social group	*Percentage*
Whites	1
Indians	11
Coloureds	24
Professional/ supervisory	29
Owner/employer	30
60+ years	36
Urban residents	39
45–59 year-olds	41
30–44 year-olds	44
18–29 year-olds	46
Workers	46
Rural residents	50
Unemployed	50
Black African	56

Table 10 Opposition identifiers in each social group

Social group	*Percentage*
Black African	9
Unemployed	10
18–29 year-olds	12
Rural residents	12
30–44 year-olds	15
Workers	15
Urban residents	17
45–59 year-olds	18
Indians	19
60+ years	20
Owner/employer	21
Professional/supervisory	25
Coloureds	26
Whites	37

Black Africans have the least 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.

Overall, the data shows that the number of voters who feel close to a particular party has declined significantly since 1994. Less than half 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 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.

Table 11 Independents in each social group

Social group	*Percentage*
Black African	36
Rural residents	38
Unemployed	40
Workers	40
30–44 year-olds	41
45–59 year-olds	42
18–29 year-olds	43
60+ years	44
Urban residents	44
Professional/supervisory	47
Owner/employer	49
Coloureds	50
Whites	62
Indians	70

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 inter-party 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 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 socio-economic 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, levels of cognitive skills, and the type of information available.

Evaluations of government performance

The literature suggests 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 electoral support. The majority of voters also perceive that their future socio-economic interests can be best achieved by an ANC government.

Data from the Opinion '99 survey show that South African voters do not automatically form opinions about the national economy from their personal conditions. Second, voters make distinctions between overall government performance and performance within specific issues areas (Mattes and Piombo 2001). 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. When Mattes, Taylor and Africa (1999) tested the influence of attitudinal evaluations of government performance and political parties, whilst deliberately excluding race and other sociological variables, they found that a very large majority of partisan choices can be correctly predicted.

While these voters do not make up their mind anew at every election, the data does suggest that new information about political and economic developments combine with partisan loyalties. So although voters take their socio-economic 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. Table 12 compares the evaluations of identifiers with non-partisans among black Africans, a social group who are generally pro-ANC during the year 2000. Black African identifiers consistently have higher proportions of positive evaluations of government performance than their non-partisan counterparts.

Table 12 Government performance evaluations: identifiers vs. non-identifiers among Black Africans by percentage, 2000

Economic evaluations	*Identifiers*	*Non-partisans*
Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with economic conditions in SA?		
Dissatisfied/ very dissatisfied	60	69
Satisfied/ very satisfied	19	14
How do economic conditions compare to one year ago?		
Much worse/ worse	49	59
Better/much better	19	16
Overall direction of the country?		
Going in the right direction	49	34
Gong in the wrong direction	42	55

Cognitive mobilisation

There is convincing evidence from post world war Western Europe and the United States to suggest that voter evaluations of political parties depend largely on access to and the use of political information (Dalton 1988; Inglehart 1977). As socio-economic development occurs, the expansion of education produces a more sophisticated public by increasing voters' political skills, while the availability of political information broadens resources and reduces the cost of acquiring political information. Access to formal education and electronic news media, or 'cognitive mobilisation', has steadily reduced the effects of

sociological factors such as class and religion on party identification. Voting is influenced by what people *know* as well as by who they are. Voters use available information to reason about political parties, candidates, and issues and connect information to government performance.

In South Africa it is reasonable to expect that the developmental changes described earlier do play a role in shaping the partisanship of different groups. Yet, despite the relatively high levels of media use and formal education compared to other African countries, there is little evidence to suggest that access to news has increased since 1994 (Mattes 2005: 44).

The use of news media and the level of formal education are indications of the amount of political information to which voters are exposed and the cognitive skills required to make use of that information. Yet, they do not tell us whether citizens are more or less politically aware or engaged in the political process. Idasa and Afrobarometer surveys asked people about their interest in politics and the frequency with which they engage in political discussion. Since 1994, no more than one-twentieth frequently engage in discussion with family or friends and more than one-third stated that they never do. Only one-tenth frequently follows public affairs (Mattes 2005: 44). Levels of political cognitive engagement are low among the South African electorate and a large percentage of voters remain relatively unengaged and uninformed about politics and policy issues.

Yet, variations in the level of cognitive awareness among voters do play an indirect role in party identification. Depending on whether a voter is evaluating the governing party or opposition parties, cognitive awareness shapes voter evaluations differently. Voters with limited access to news media and education can still acquire information about the governing ANC party by assessing national performance from their personal situations. However, assessing opposition party performance is a little more difficult due to a lack of performance track records. Voters do not possess sufficient performance-based information and therefore need to rely on alternative information sources to inform themselves about opposition parties. Party imagery, or the racial credentials of political parties, then becomes important influences on voters' views of how well parties represent them. However, different levels of cognitive skills moderate the influence of these racial or ethnic images. Voters with limited access to information and/or limited cognitive skills make greater use of information short cuts or identity cues such race.

The influence of party images

When voters have little information, they rely on 'information shortcuts', often in the form of clues supplied by a candidates 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 1991: 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 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 percent of Africans 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 African 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, Africans did, particularly in 1999, and they generally identified the nature of the exclusion as racial.[7]

Voters use the logic of exclusion rather than representation to judge where their interests lie: voters' 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.

[7] The Democratic Party (DP) changed its name to the Democratic Alliance (DA) after a merger with the New National Party (NNP) take took place in 2000. The DA retained its name when the NNP left the alliance in 2001.

The influence of sociological factors

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.

Using Opinion '99 data, Mattes and 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. Race therefore takes on an indirect or moderating effect on the voting decision by providing an important information cue about government performance and party images.

This has come about as a result of radical differences in living conditions across racial lines, which has lead 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 benefited in different ways, has paid electoral dividends (Seekings 2005a: 36).

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. Moreover, there are no substantial divergences on salient political and economic policy between political parties, which could account for racial explanations. Major parties do not necessarily offer the electorate a choice of contrasting ideological positions, with most manifestos in recent elections essentially calling for the strengthening of the formal economy through increased investment, improved delivery to the people in the form of jobs and a widening of the social security net. There may be differences between parties on how to realise various policies or on

distributional issues but where differences do exist, they are subtle and to be found in the technical details, and it remains difficult to grasp how their impacts would differ across different groups.

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) concluded, 'the most complete explanation of voting behaviour needs to include some of these other variables alongside race'.

Towards an integrated model of voter behaviour

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.

Race is clearly an important factor in South African elections yet data show 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.

If this is true, how does one explain the appearance of racially aligned voting outcomes? Scientists are quick to remind us that correlation does not equal causation. As Christopher Achen (1992) explains, 'correlation between demographic factors and the vote do not explain the vote – they themselves need to be explained.' So how does race help our understanding of voting behaviour? 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, whilst 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.

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

The 2006 municipal elections

Following a year of nation-wide protests over poor service delivery, analysts expected the 2006 local elections to provide some indication of voter dissatisfaction with ANC incumbents at the local level, where municipalities deliver basic services. Events over the previous year had clearly indicated that the electorate was willing to express its discontent at the slow pace of service delivery in some localities. Many citizens also believe that municipalities perform worse than national and provincial government. The results from the 2005 HSRC / IEC survey also indicated that the local sphere of government was viewed less favourably than were the provincial and national spheres of government (wa Kivilu et al. 2005:3). The election offered voters an opportunity to punish incumbents for delivery failures at local level. The potential for realignment were also deemed to be higher than usual. Voters were offered new political choices with a wider array of localised parties and grassroots organisations, such as the Operation Khanyisa Movement. The amount of self-declared floating voters or independents prior to the elections was also significant. A Markinor survey done on 15 February 2006 recorded 30 per cent of voters were undecided on the eve of the election - a potentially significant 'swing vote'.

Despite these uncertainties, the ANC marched to victory once again, increasing their percentage of the vote share in many municipalities. Opposition witnessed further fragmentation with the associated rise of smaller, localised parties in some areas. So how does one explain the increased dominance of the ANC at local level, and the concomitant stagnation of opposition party fortunes, despite the indicated discontent over service delivery? Election results show continuity with earlier analyses. Asymmetrical dealignment continues while changes in demographics and turnout continue to affect overall trends. Results also reaffirm that voter evaluations of government performance affect party support while

party images continue to affect the way in which voters align themselves to parties.

Trends in turnout

Trends show consistently higher turnout at national and provincial elections than municipal elections which averages 48 per cent across all three municipal elections.

Table 13: Comparison of turnout as % of registered voters

Local elections	1995	2000	2006
	48.5	48.07	48.4
National elections	1994	1999	2004
	No registration	89.3	76.7

The national elections also have a turnout rate much higher than that of the local elections in the provinces and at local level. For example, provincial turnout at the 2006 local election in the Western Cape was 51 per cent versus 73 per cent in the 2004 national election. Whereas the City of Cape Town metropole achieved 86 per cent in 1999 and 73 per cent in the 2004 national elections, the turnout for the 2006 metropole was only 52 per cent. Turnout figures are consistent with many other democratic countries where the electorate seems to favour national and provincial elections over municipal or local elections (Socio-Economic Surveys Unit of the Knowledge System Group 2005b: 3).

Table 14 Provincial turnout at local elections as % of registered voters

Years	*1995*	*2000*	*2006*
Eastern Cape	55	56	57
Free State	53	49	47
Gauteng	49	43	42
KwaZulu-Natal	46	47	51
Limpopo	46	42	45
Mpumalanga	53	45	46
North West	45	45	46
Northern Cape	65	58	54
Western Cape	60	58	52

Source: 2006 Municipal Elections Results. Report presented at the IEC's National Results Centre, Pretoria on 3 March 2006.

While turnout averaged 48 per cent of registered voters in 2006, when turnout is calculated using figures for all eligible voters (VAP), it is clear that a growing proportion and increasing numbers of voters chose not to vote. As Steven Friedman remarked, about a quarter of all eligible voters are not registered,

which means that, at best, only 50 per cent of three-quarters of all eligible voters went to the polls. Only two-fifths of the population voted (*Business Day* 8/3/06).

Evaluations of Government Performance

Turnout figures are instructive when it is considered that they may represent an indirect method of lodging dissatisfaction with government performance. Many voters punished incumbents (and challengers) by not voting at all. Abstentions do not necessarily signal voter apathy, since citizens also withdraw their temporary support from politics to show their discontent over the lack of service delivery.

Local protests also suggest that voters are inclined to hold government accountable between elections, not just at elections. Moreover, while voters may feel strongly that government has failed them on specific areas of delivery, many generally believe that the ANC has done a good job overall. Positive national performance ratings almost certainly worked favourably for the ANC's local government election campaign strategy, which emphasised government's success at the national level, through the use of billboards promoting its achievements in positive economic growth, the 'feel good factor' in the country and the use of President Mbeki as the focal point. Mbeki also elevated developmental issues in his State of the Nation speech in a local election year while offering honest appraisal of failures at local level with the campaign slogan 'Make Local Government Work Better'. Delivery failures were openly acknowledged and then sidelined. The campaign also pointed to the massive relative improvements in people's lives, reinforcing the perception that an ANC government can best achieve the majority's socio-economic interests.

Party Images

Party images still resonate in voter evaluations and present the other half of the story. Further fracturing of the opposition bloc shows some inter-party movement between opposition parties. However, there is little evidence that opposition voters moved their support to the ANC or visa versa. Low turnout coupled with a lack of realignment was partly attributable to the limited appeal of opposition parties which failed to encroach into the ANC support base.

Several smaller parties managed to undermine both DA and ANC power bases in the Western and Northern Cape, where they look set to dominate future coalition agreements. Their successes suggest voters are prepared to realign themselves politically. In particular, the DA suffered at the hands of the newcomers to local elections, the Independent Democrats (ID), who gained a

crucial portion of the opposition vote across the Western Cape, effectively denying the DA its outright majority in the Cape Town Metropolitan Council and smaller local councils. The ID attracted increased support, partly because its more 'inclusive image' allowed for voting support from across the traditional political spectrum, but also because it represented a new political home for Coloured voters in these provinces, many of whom may have formerly voted for the NNP. In contrast to older parties which opted for more inclusive campaigns but failed to convince voters (such as the NNP during the 2004 election), the ID may stand a chance to appeal across old divides and build a broad multi-racial support base. It lacks the history that tainted older 'apartheid generation' parties such as the 'NNP'.

The DA's campaign strategy, particularly in the Western Cape, starkly reflected its ongoing dilemma - its increasing need for a performance track record in governance coupled with the need to remedy its negative party image among black voters.

We know that voters use party images as secondary information sources when no performance track record is available. In South Africa, most opposition parties face this dilemma. The DA embarked on the most likely strategy to win voter support in Cape Town, thereby earning the chance to obtain a performance track record, at the expense of making short-term gains among the black African electorate. The decisive factor for the political fate of Cape Town metropole was the relative turnout of the different partisan groups. In 2000 the DA mobilised its supporters in higher numbers than the ANC, thus giving it control of the unicity, only to lose it shortly thereafter to the ANC in the floor-crossing period. The DA knew that a 2006 victory relied on ensuring high turnout among white and Coloured voters, particularly former NNP voters. While African and white citizens constitute approximately 50 per cent of potential voters in Cape Town, the other half consists of the politically fragmented Coloured community. Especially crucial was the need to ensure that the bloc opposition vote was not fragmented any further by smaller opposition parties, which would have the effect of nullifying higher turnout for the DA.

These demographic calculations informed DA strategy - a reactionary campaign message would be most successful in attracting its target partisan groups. 'Take our city back' and 'Stop ANC racism' both served the purpose of 'racially grouping' the scramble for resources in the city and shows a clear attempt to mobilise the vital Coloured portion of the vote.

Having secured the mayoral position in the City of Cape Town Metropole by a slim coalition-led majority, the DA will be set on achieving an outstanding performance track record from which black African voters can turn to, to evaluate the party, *before* they turn to using the DA's traditionally negative

party image. The irony lies in the party's choice to utilise negative and limiting messages and imagery to secure power, which, may, in turn, help it to mobilise a wider political audience in the future.

The highly contested multi-party environment in Cape Town also reconfirmed the fallacy of the uniformity of the so-called 'Coloured vote' and the inadequacies of the 'racial census' argument. Results again show that the Coloured sections of the electorate are not politically homogenous or predisposed to a particular party, dividing its support between the ANC, DA and ID. Electoral trends since 1994 in the Western Cape support the general interpretation that voting is also contingent on short-term factors such as campaign and circumstances (Seekings 2005b: 4). Yet, the electoral volatility witnessed in Cape Town over the past ten years may lessen as in-migration of Africans expands the ANC's support base, thereby changing the proportional sizes of precariously balanced partisan groups.

Conclusion

The argument of this paper 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 African 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 broad based, as the party becomes increasingly reliant on specific segments of the public for its electoral support. Its vote share has decreased significantly. Second, 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 black Africans, the unemployed, rural dwellers and working class voters respectively 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 about their information sources when making a choice of which party to support.

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 socio-economic changes, it is likely that the sizes and distribution of different social groups will alter and affect voting results. For example, changes over time to the age, race or class status composition of the population can produce different results in certain areas.

Moreover, 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 Cape Town 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 Kwa-Zulu 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).

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 incumbent 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 ANC.

In the face of continued one-party dominance, the greatest challenge for democracy in the next decade will be maintaining high levels of incumbent responsiveness towards citizens.

Social groups remain important cues or information shortcuts 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 multi-ethnic and racial coalitions will need to address the way in which they are perceived in terms of racial exclusivity. 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 tripartite alliance and alter its party profile.

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Appendix: Methodology

This paper is based on ongoing doctoral research which consists of an analysis of change over time in the aggregate patterns of party support among social groups and to 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 which 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, whilst still employing international best practise 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 between 3 and 2 per cent allowing for 95 per cent confidence levels.

Idasa post-election study (1994)

This survey focused on the 1994 general election and specifically on voting intention, attitudes towards democracy, economic evaluations and various other political issues. Personal interviews were conducted with 2 517 eligible voters. The type of instrument used was a semi-structured survey personal interview recorded on questionnaires. The final results were weighted to reflect an electorate estimated at 24 million voters.

Idasa local government election study (1995)

The Idasa local election study provides the first systematic evidence about individual attitudes toward the legitimacy of the new local government system. This study consisted of a sample that is nationally representative, drawn using a multi-stage, clustered random probability sample disproportionately stratified by province, population group and community size (metro, city, large town, small town, village and rural). Interviews were conducted with 2 674 people. The type of instrument used was a semi-structured survey personal interview recorded on questionnaires. The final results were weighted to reflect an electorate estimated at 24.3 million voters.

Political culture study (1997)

This study focused on people's attitudes toward identity, diversity, citizenship, democracy, and democratic institutions. The study consisted of a sample, which was nationally representative, drawn using a multi-stage, clustered random probability sample disproportionately stratified by province, population group and community size. Structured personal interviews were conducted with 3 500 respondents and final results were weighted to reflect an electorate estimated at over 24 million voters.

Opinion '99 (1999)

Opinion '99 was a series of opinion polls conducted prior to the 1999 election by Idasa, Markinor and the SABC, and the Electoral Institute of South Africa. They provide information about South Africans' views of the political, social and economic developments in the country since 1994. The polls covered key issues related to the conduct of free and fair elections, voter participation, and other economic, political and partisan trends. In each round between 2200 and 3493 interviews were conducted. The samples for Opinion '99 were drawn using a multi-stage, area stratified probability sampling methodology, and stratified by province, population group and community size and all three samples were representative of the universe from which they were selected. The type of instrument used was a semi-structured survey personal interview recorded on questionnaires.

Afrobarometer Rounds 1; 2; 2.5 (2000, 2002, 2004)

The Afrobarometer survey series of South Africa is designed to assess attitudes about democracy, markets, and civil society in South Africa and to track the evolution of such attitudes over time. The samples are drawn using multi-stage,

stratified, area cluster probability sample. Each survey carries out at least 2 200 personal interviews.

Comparative National Elections Project [CNEP] (2004)

The CNEP is a multi-national project that studies political communication and social structure within the context of election campaigns. The CNEP survey was carried out nationally across South Africa in 2004 and covers aspects of the third democratic election that took place during that year. The sample was drawn using multi-stage, stratified, area cluster probability sample. During the survey at least 1 200 personal interviews were carried out.