

## The Historical Significance of the African National Congress (ANC) Election Campaigns 1994-2014: A Genuine Process of Political Liberalisation?

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### Abstract

The aspirations of a 'new' democratic South Africa which were realised after the April 1994 general elections marked a critical moment of freedom for the majority of the country's citizens who were refused the right to vote by the apartheid government prior to 1994. Unshackled from centuries of colonialism and apartheid, the idea of a 'new' South Africa held within it the aspirations of freedom, dignity and equality. The April 1994 election and the others which followed later marked more than a simple transfer of power. Rather, they signified the moment of liberation and the final victory over racial oppression and subjugation. Almost 20 years since the first general elections in South Africa, the study traces the role played by the African National Congress (ANC) and its election campaigns which made it victorious from 1994 to 2014. It is argued in the study that key rituals in the performance of democracy and election campaigns are windows providing insight into a particular political, social and cultural milieu at a particular time. The study concludes by showing the ANC's campaigning strategies over the past elections.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Freedom, Liberation, Rights, Corruption, Mandela, Vote

### 1. Introduction

The year 2014 marks 20 years of South Africa's democracy and the 180<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the official emancipation of the slaves in the Cape Colony. Therefore, the study foregrounds different perspectives on the 20-year rule of the ANC in South Africa by critically evaluating its election campaigning strategies. Differing in tenor, methodology and style, the study tackles various campaigning strategies as employed each time by the ANC prior to the elections over the past 20 years. Furthermore, the study offers new angles towards understanding what has sustained the ANC over 20 years in winning the elections. It should be noted that in all its election campaigns, the ANC has emphasised the development of a 'people-centred and bottom-up' campaign. Critically, this popular orientation was essential to the establishment of both national and international legitimacy for the ANC after the elections. The campaigns also sought to communicate a sense of the pre-ordination of an ANC victory. For the purpose of this study, the election campaigns of the ANC are divided into five phases, namely: phase one (1994); phase two (1999); phase three (2004); phase four (2009); phase five (2014). In all of these demarcated phases, the ANC won the elections and this could be attributed to its election campaigns.

### 2. Literature Review

Given the pivotal role of the ANC's rule in South Africa spreading over approximately 20 years, scholarly articles and research material has been generated and published for some time, locally and internationally (Southall and Daniel, 2008; Lissoni, 2012) As far as this is relevant to this research, the ANC's election campaigns are viewed as having direct links to its continuous victories. Ironically, little has been researched about the ANC's election campaigns over this period. For the purpose of this study, it is essential to explain how the above helped the ANC in achieving victory in all the elections that the party has contested since 1994.

### 3. Research Design and Methodology

As a qualitative researcher, the researcher is primarily interested in the election campaigns that enhanced the ANC's victory in the elections since 1994. Consequently, what inform the success of the ANC in all these elections is highlighted in this study. Therefore, the primary aim of this study is to determine the extent to which election campaigns have

assisted the ANC in attaining victory in all the elections it has contested. The strategies as employed by the ANC in this regard were explored and viewed from a political liberalisation approach. The study identifies patterns in words and actions in the context of the elections to describe; analyse and interpret this phenomenon. This knowledge will add to an understanding of the dynamism of the ANC during the electioneering periods. Consequently, the study presents an interpretative synthesis of arguments and research data generated throughout the period of analysis. The aim is to explore the argument of sustainable and reliable campaigns resulting from the different phases of the elections over a 20-year period. The researcher conducted research through direct involvement and observation of important ANC campaigning events, documentary analysis, interviews, consultation of secondary sources, and continuous media tracking.

## **4. Discussion and Findings**

### *4.1 The significance and impact of campaigns*

Campaign events are a useful means for gauging a party's intentions. Time is a limited resource on the campaign trail, particularly for the party leader. Party leaders can visit only a limited number of venues each day. Major party events (the launching of the party manifesto, the unveiling of lists, the celebration of holidays) occur only a few times during the campaign period. Thus, campaign events provide a window into the priorities of the party, an indication on which groups and regions a party is focusing (Ferree, 2011: p111). Like most of the political parties contesting the elections, the first feature of the election campaign was the fact that the election manifestos of the parties were, in essence, not all that different from one another. The ANC had to vigorously convince the electorate in all the elections from 1994 to 2014 of its relevance as the party of 'choice'. During the election campaign of 1994, the ANC could be seen as the underdog; after existing for 82 years as a liberation movement, the party had not yet participated in an election and knew comparatively little about electioneering. According to Barnard (1994: p120) the main challenge facing the ANC was the change from a freedom movement to a political party, and this was no mean task. What follows in this study are the different phases of the ANC's election campaigns:

#### *4.1.1 Phase One: Prior to the 1994 first general election*

The ANC's election machine began to constitute itself in 1992 when it formalised an electoral commission (Lodge, 1994: p23). It is interesting to note that during the first phase of the election campaigns in 1994, the ANC realised that it was not strong enough, from an organisational point of view, to manage its entire campaign from party offices and using only party officials. Therefore, it was not unusual to see the ANC making use of outside organisations to assist in its campaigns. Consequently, during the first democratic elections of 1994 in South Africa, the ANC professionalised its campaign by employing Hunt Lascaris, and hiring as advisers, Frank Greer and Stanley Greenberg, organisers of US Bill Clinton's successful 1992 presidential campaign (Bertelsen, 1996: p229). It did so while holding on to the 'mass character' of its appeal and its campaign. On the other hand, some of Mandela's top lieutenants were learning to perfect their new roles as politicians under the tutelage of the Swedish Social Democrats (Barnard, 1994: p119). The outside companies/organisations without doubt played a vital role in giving the campaign a new dimension which was, in many ways, similar to a typical American presidential campaign (Barnard, 1994: p120).

The electorate was beholden to the vision of a peaceful, free and democratic South Africa. The ANC went to the polls under the manifesto: 'A better life for all ... working together for jobs, peace and freedom' (Barnard, 1994: p119). The promise of a 'better life' had been informed by the policy orientations that the ANC espoused through the campaign. Housing, sanitation, education, peace, land, jobs and the like were the remedy to the social, economic and political dislocations that decades of apartheid rule had affected. Liberation from material deprivation was the salve for centuries of brutal oppression and exploitation (Ranchod, 2013: 90-91). Coupled with the above was the slogan 'Ready to Govern'. The most eye-catching promise, and one calculated to win support from the ANC's largely impoverished constituency was to build one million houses, provide running water to one million people and electrify 2.5 million urban and rural homes within the first five years of the new dispensation (Welsh, 2009: p540-541).

Furthermore, with the aid of the above-mentioned foreign companies/organisations, the ANC launched one of the most scientifically correct election campaigns ever conducted in this country. In the first place the whole campaign centred on the person of Nelson Mandela. This was evident when, enhancing its image and campaign further, the ANC had a 'postage paid coupon' permitting non-attendees to write to Mandela directly, stipulating their 'biggest concern' and suggesting solutions to overcome this concern (Ranchod, 2013: p86). The above sentiments were also echoed by

Coetzer (1994: p260) when he stated: 'The first democratic election of April 1994 in South Africa was a unique one, an election without voter's rolls and without a similar election preceding it, which could act as barometer. Especially the black vote, but also the coloured and Indian vote, was an unknown and, at the same time, a crucial factor. It was an emotional liberation election in which the liberator, the ANC, would naturally get a big slice of the election cake. To cap everything, the party moreover, had the advantage that its leader, the liberating giant, Nelson Mandela, was widely admired locally and internationally'.

To get their main product forcibly onto the election market, the ANC began to use a 'roadshow' reminiscent of American election campaigns. This process started with a triumphant ANC tour by train from Johannesburg to Soweto. In the ensuing months, roadshows, accompanied by the customary handshake, head-patting and smile, and by dancing drum majorettes, music and entertainment, plus a speech by Mandela, would become a common spectacle across the land. These actions enabled Mandela to become 'one of the people'; the populace could literally see him, listen to him and even touch him. He was no longer the mystical figure who had spent 27 years removed from society (Barnard, 1994: p121). Johnson and Schlemmer (1996: p85) argue that it was imperative for the ANC to also make use of its reputable political leaders. Therefore, for its credibility, it was of considerable significance that the ANC had leaders regarded by the voters as people of political credibility.

Welsh (2009: p540) states the following about the role played by Mandela in the election campaign of the ANC in 1994: 'The ANC's biggest electoral asset was obviously Mandela, who campaigned tirelessly and pressed the flesh in a time-honoured fashion. His avoidance of demagoguery was conspicuous. His major strength lay in his ability to interact with ordinary people, rather than in formal meetings with set speeches'. One of the strongest points in the ANC's election campaign was their argument that the National Party (NP) was carrying the ballast of the apartheid era with it. At every opportunity the ANC tried to discredit the NP. One other trump card for the ANC during the electioneering campaign prior to the 1994 general election was the use of People's Forums. According to Ranchod (2013: p86) 'the People's Forums succeeded in giving the ANC a presence on the ground, making leaders accessible and generating the necessary momentum for the impending poll'. They were also part of a broader campaign ethic of engagement, interaction and participation. The above analysis of the election campaign by the ANC shows that the 1994 election was a moment of great celebration, signalling the arrival of full political equality in a single South African nation (Johnson, 2004: p210).

#### *4.1.2 Phase Two: Preparations for and the results of the 1999 elections*

When Mandela retired as president in 1999, Thabo Mbeki who had been the deputy president of the country and in charge of day-to-day government business during the Mandela era assumed the presidency. As his deputy president Mbeki chose Jacob Zuma, the former head of ANC Intelligence who had done a great deal to bring peace to KwaZulu-Natal in the election run-up (Johnson, 2004: p220). It was again during this second phase of the elections in 1999 that the ANC continued to resort to negative campaigns. During the electioneering period, the ANC clearly attacked the Democratic Party's (DP's) 'Fight Back' slogan. In the Western Cape Province, for example, the party printed look-a-like posters but changed the wording to 'Don't Fight Blacks'. Although the ANC was ordered to take down its posters as they were deemed provocative, the move received extensive media coverage and became one of the most memorable moments in the entire campaign (Ferree, 2011: p103).

##### *4.1.2.1 Limiting the opposition parties' access to the media*

According Butler (2009: p65) like the 1994 election campaign, the ANC had a strong presidential character and built up extensive analysis and opinion survey research. Furthermore, it also used sophisticated marketing and media techniques to differentiate its national from the more local campaigns. It was in the interest of the ANC to keep the temperature of the opposition parties as low as possible in order to starve them of media coverage. The ANC could rely on citizens' limited knowledge of what opposition parties represented and why they should be deserving of attention.

#### *4.1.3 Phase Three: The second Mbeki era and the election campaigns of 2004*

Mbeki was re-elected to a second five-year term as South Africa's president in 2004 with an increased share of the popular vote. In 2004 South Africa celebrated ten years of democracy, a process that was generally associated with stocktaking and renewed plans of action for policy implementation and transformation. The ANC secured a 69% majority in the national election, and won all nine provinces.

#### 4.1.3.1 *The role of the working class*

The ANC appeared to have been able to rely on its history as the liberation movement that in 1994 negotiated the end of apartheid. During the 2004 elections, no real political alternative was presented to the predominantly black working class majority, despite the dramatic growth of unemployment and social inequality in South Africa under the ANC rule. The trade union bureaucracy remained loyal to the ANC.

#### 4.1.3.2 *The impact of the Presidential Izimbizo*

Twala (2008: p137) writes: '*Imbizo*, in its traditional form, has constituted an important aspect of the African political system for many centuries, including South Africa. It was only during the presidential term of Thabo Mbeki that the concept was revived to a position of importance in the contemporary lexicon and formal governance setting'. The ANC attempted to maintain its support by concentrating on local issues and holding '*imbizos*' in the townships, addressed by the top leadership of the organisation. During such meetings, President Mbeki and his cabinet ministers visited the communities to canvass votes. In other attempts to galvanise more support, provincial izimbizos were also organized whereby the provincial leaders of the ANC would engage with the electorate. This strategy proved to be useful for the success of the ANC.

#### 4.1.3.3 *The election posters*

One other aspect that helped the ANC to galvanise support was the use of the election posters to its benefit. In the posters, Mbeki as the leader of the ANC was glorified as the person with the power and the abilities to fulfil the organisation's promises and voters' expectations. Therefore, the photograph of the organisation's leader was almost a form of personification. Furthermore, the basic need for water, food, and shelter were emphasised. On its posters, the ANC again propagated its old and well-known slogan 'A better life for all' coupled with 'Vote ANC'. It had become a standard slogan since 1994. One poster had a smiling Mbeki presiding over the slogan, whereas another poster simply implored voters to vote ANC on 14 April (De Wet, 2004: p109-110).

#### 4.1.4 *Phase Four: The pre-2009 electioneering campaign and the Polokwane fiasco*

Barely a year after Mbeki's re-election as South Africa's president in 2004, there came the first portent of a rebellion when a council of senior party members orchestrated a comeback for Jacob Zuma, following his dismissal earlier that year as deputy president of the country after allegations of corruption. According to Russell (2009: p76) 'Mbekiites had hoped to finish him off politically once and for all by formalising his suspension as deputy head of the party. They failed. Instead, Zumaitees took charge of the meeting and insisted that their man was fully reinstated'. Mbeki and his aides remained blithely confident that the party would not betray him. There had not been a fight over the party leadership since 1949, when Mandela and other young firebrands had ousted the party's president, AB Xuma (Twala, 2009: p153-171). The above was an indication that while the party's constitution provided for regular contested elections at all levels, its political culture, which stemmed from its long period as an outlawed resistance movement, had deterred internal competition, branding those who vied for office as selfish and overambitious. It was not until 2007, that the leadership contest took centre stage (Friedman, 2009: p109).

Mbeki's term was to have expired in April 2009, but many in the ANC felt that he needed to leave office sooner. Finally, in September 2008, Mbeki's critics had a reason to fire him after Chris Nicholson, a High Court judge with good human rights credentials, had dismissed the corruption charges against Zuma on the basis of a technicality. The judge found that Zuma had had grounds to allege a political conspiracy against him, as the evidence before Nicholson was strong that Mbeki had meddled in his case (Louw, 2008: p1-2; Twala, 2009: p126-128).

During the 2009 election campaign, the ANC's slogan was 'Working together we can do more'. The ANC revealed a renewed sense of urgency, with government intentions spelt out in action-driven language at a time when greater persuasion of voters was needed. The ANC leadership worked on countering negative publicity, as well as having to deal with the launch and campaign of the Congress of the People (COPE), and possible fallout through abstention. A sense of rebellion and pseudo-regime transition reinvigorated the campaign. The leadership often descended into communities in grand style in motorcades and helicopters. According to Booysen (2011: p109-110) 'the party shone in mass rallies that hero worshipped the vibrant ANC that effectively resisted the forces of Mbeki's ancient regime and resurrected the popular orientation and connection with the people'.

During the ANC election launch, Zuma stated: 'South Africa will need a government with experience and political will, a government that fully understands what needs to be done to address our apartheid, and a government that puts people first and which works with the people. The ANC continues to be such a government. A vote for the ANC is a vote for a better life for all' (Booyesen, 2011: p110).

#### 4.1.4.1 *The 2009 election campaign and the ethnicity card*

In the 2009 elections, the ANC managed to win 66% of the vote (Louw, 2009: p1-2). To a certain extent, Zuma's 'Zuluness' and his projection as the 'leader of the people' played a significant role in this regard. Although the ANC got into full swing with the usage of the concept of Zuluness in campaigning for votes when Zuma became President of the ANC after the Polokwane Conference in December 2007, Hoeane argues that as early as the June 1999 elections, the ANC had started using the concept in an attempt to garner support, but to a certain extent unsuccessfully (Hoeane 1999: p133-144).

Twala (2010: p68) states the following about the Zuluness card played by Zuma during the 2009 elections: 'Without doubt the Zulu card played by Zuma in appealing for votes from the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) electorate played a huge role in making the ANC win that province by 63%. Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) received 22% and the Democratic Alliance (DA) 9.8%. The Zuluness issue raised questions about the role played ethnicity in contemporary politics and about its place in the process of consolidating democracy under the leadership of the ANC government'.

#### 4.1.4.2 *The ANC's appeal to traditional leaders*

Despite the issue of democratisation in South Africa since 1994, traditional leaders continue to wield more powers and have constituencies which could be exploited for political gains. Before Zuma was elected as President of the ANC he had gone out of his way to reach out to traditional leaders and chiefs (*amakhosi*), particularly in the KZN Province. Once he was elected the *amakhosi* felt they could relate to him. This stance also changed the perception that the ANC was a party for Xhosa-speaking people. In the several meetings held with *amakhosi*, Zuma portrayed himself as one of them. His latest close relationship with King Zwelithini paved the way for his easy access to the *amakhosi* in the region. This strategy of Zuma and playing the ethnicity card militated against the IFP's doing well in KZN. By infiltrating the *amakhosi*, the ANC became aware that they were considered instrumental in how the rural populace voted and, through legislation, like KwaZulu-Natal's Traditional Leadership and Governance Act, they now drew salaries, received pensions and qualified for houses from the provincial government (Twala, 2010: p74).

#### 4.1.4.3 *The 2009 election manifesto*

From the first election of 1994, Bulter (2009: p72) argues that on the advice of American pollster Stanley Greenberg, the ANC presented the electorate with a wide-ranging, detailed but somewhat boring policy programme that signalled its seriousness and commitment to good government. The 2009 manifesto was a low-key document that mostly steered clear of controversial and ideologically divisive issues. It identified five key emphases: unemployment, particularly young people in rural areas; health, with a national health insurance system provided within five years; education; rural development; and crime and corruption.

#### 4.1.5 *Phase Five: The 2014 election manifesto and the gains of 20 years as the government of South Africa*

Just few months before the ANC could seriously start with its election campaign for the 2014 general elections in South Africa, Mandela, the liberation icon who took the organisation to its first victory in 1994 against the NP, died on 5 December 2013 after suffering from lung problems. The ANC 2014 election campaign has been marred by criticism of Zuma (the ANC's President and that of the country). This challenge nearly compromised the organisation as the opposition parties capitalised on the Zuma issue, thus challenging the ANC. Some of the other challenges include the following:

##### 4.1.5.1 *Nkandla Report: ANC election headache*

Without doubt, with the release of the Nkandla Report by the Public Protector Advocate, Thuli Madonsela ahead of the 2014 elections, the ANC was concerned about the prospect of losing votes. The report implied that President Zuma knew

about the R 206 million which was tax-payers' money used to upgrade his private home in Nkandla. As early as December 2013, the Secretary-General of the ANC, Gwede Mantashe demanded that the report be released ahead of the elections, and if not, could be interpreted as a clear ploy to discredit the ANC. Mantashe told journalists at the party's headquarters in Luthuli House that: 'She (Madonsela) must release the report. The sooner she does the better. If she keeps it until the eve of elections, we will suspect she is playing a political game. If it affects the president of the ANC it will impact the image of the ANC' (Nhlabathi, 2013: p4).

Addressing journalists on 9 January 2014 at Mbombela Stadium ahead of the launch of the ANC election manifesto, Mantashe further reiterated his view that if Madonsela failed to release the report before the elections, her conduct would be interpreted as political. He stated: 'The Public Protector has been working on that report for a long time; we don't expect her to take another six months. If the Public Protector releases it close to the elections, we will actually assume it will be intended to tilt the balance of forces in the election. It will be intended to muddy the waters in the election campaign' (Pillay and Letsoalo, 2014: p2).

Despite the Nkandla Report, the ANC continued to remind the electorate of two decades of its rule and achievements. Furthermore, the ANC leaders reminded the electorate who, before its rule were subjected to abject poverty and dehumanising conditions under apartheid, are able to cast their votes, have access to better education and work, access to water and electricity (Mallala 2014: p4). Booysen (2014: p12) argues the following ahead of the 2014 elections: '... a Jacob Zuma-less ANC is predicted to enjoy better electoral fortunes than one under the captaincy of "Number One" himself. Turning around the top leadership of the ANC within the next few weeks will give the party a fighting chance of achieving a proud election victory, one without evidence of noxious slippage. It will signal that the ANC is serious about regenerating its power. It will build prospects of stable and focused government in the next five years'.

#### 4.1.5.2 *The 2014 election manifesto and its appeal to the masses*

The ANC's 2014 election manifesto entitled: '*Together we can move South Africa Forward: 2014 Election Manifesto: A better life for all*' was said to be dedicated to the late Mandela. Like the 2009 manifesto, the 2014 one prioritises the following: the creation of more jobs, decent work and sustainable livelihoods for inclusive growth; rural development, land reform and food security; education; health; and fighting crime and corruption. Furthermore, the ANC prides itself on the following achievements in the past 20 years of its rule: the abolition of discriminatory laws; advancing the right of people to equality, to protection against racial, gender and other discrimination; and to the progressive realisation of access to the basic necessities of life. In most of its campaigns, the ANC reminded the masses about the legacy of Mandela. It was also interesting to note that other new political parties such as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and Agang also claimed the legacy of Mandela in their election campaigns for 2014. On many occasions the ANC called such parties to order as Mandela was the ANC member until his death in December 2013.

## 5. Conclusion

In all the above elections, the ANC has been able to neutralise efforts by the opposition parties by running skilful campaigns, playing on the opposition parties' missteps and weaknesses, and controlling the supply of high quality African politicians. As hard and as loudly as the opposition claimed to have transformed, the ANC claimed the opposite. This was done by blocking the opposition from changing its image, by keeping the opposition 'white'. It is clear from this study that in all instances, the ANC's election campaigns and manifestos were carefully crafted. They were based on survey results that revealed voter needs and expectations and related to specific issues and identities, history and images. They reflected how the ANC wanted the people to view the organisation. The campaigns were signified in the ANC's policies which showed the combination of national conference resolutions and manifestos. Despite organisational upheavals, popular disappointments, and the manifold shortcomings of the ANC in government, the organisation remains largely electorally unchallenged.

The electoral imbalances in the party system and the static and predictable nature of voting outcomes have raised concerns about the depth and quality of South Africa's democracy. Concerns relate to the inability of elections to hold government accountable. With the victory of the ANC in almost all the elections since 1994, the party is able to take the citizenry's vote for granted because it is not seriously threatened at the polls.

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