

Idasa 2009 Election Response

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This is the first in a series of briefs analyzing the results of Elections 2009. This first brief takes a glance at the immediate trends visible in the national and provincial results.

Introduction

After months of anticipation, widespread speculation and tireless campaigning by political parties, the 2009 elections have come and gone. As expected, the African National Congress (ANC) has once again been delivered an emphatic mandate to govern, winning 65.9% of the national vote and a majority in eight of the nine provinces.

However, despite the appearance that the political landscape has remained largely the same, the ANC's support base has indeed shifted. For the first time since 1994, the ruling party's support has declined nationally, and in most provinces.

The political context in which the 2009 elections were held was defined by several key issues:

Firstly, would the controversy around Jacob Zuma be an electoral liability for the ANC. And whether the ANC would again win more than two-thirds of the national vote, allowing the ruling party an easy majority in Parliament. Although this outcome remained unclear until the last of the voting stations declared final results, the two-thirds majority proved elusive, and the ruling party finds itself a mere 3 seats short of the 267 needed to dominate any vote taken in the National Assembly.

Second, would the voting public display an electoral appetite for the opposition? Under the leadership of Helen Zille, the Democratic Alliance (DA) was re-launched as a party ready to govern, rather than a party content to simply fill the opposition benches. The party has benefited from a relatively strong track record in the Cape Metro government, and has attempted to both broaden its support within the electorate and dispel perceptions that it represents minority interests: namely those of white and coloured voters, and of the middle class.

Third, how the emergence of the Congress of the People (COPE) last year, as the result of an unexpected cleavage within the ANC, would influence support for the opposition. COPE's establishment appeared to generate a great deal of excitement, particularly among voters who, broadly speaking, were interested in a non-racial opposition with demonstrated political capital and credentials, those who felt disillusioned by the ANC's performance and governance of its new leadership in recent months.

At the same time, COPE's performance at the polls also hinged on the party's ability to prove itself a more measured alternative to the ANC, and to distinguish itself from the ruling party through its policy proposals and governance approach.

Finally, the emergence of COPE and a relatively stronger DA also begged the question whether South Africa's small opposition parties would be able to maintain their relative shares of the national and provincial votes.

Now that the votes have been tallied, it is clear that there have been several key changes in South Africa's political landscape.

- The ANC has maintained its majority of the national vote; although its share has been diminished somewhat, and more substantial declines are evident in a number of provinces.
- The opposition vote has undoubtedly been consolidated between the largest parties: the DA has substantially grown its share of the national vote, while COPE has fared very well for a party only in existence for a few months, and competing at the polls for the first time.
- For smaller parties, however, elections results have come as a virtual death knell and most have experienced a decline in actual ballots cast, in share of the national and provincial votes, and in seats within legislatures.

The ANC: Beginning of a decline?

Despite facing its strongest contest at the polls since the first democratic elections in 1994, the ANC performed well, winning 65.9% of the national vote and a substantive majority in eight of the nine provinces.

Table 1. National Voting Changes in Absolute Numbers and % 2004 -- 2009				
	2004	2009	Absolute change	% increase of voters
Total Registered Voters	20 674 926	23 181 997	2 507 071	10.81473266
Total Actual Voters	15 863 558	17 919 966	2 056 408	11.47551284
ANC	10 880 915	11 650 748	769 833	6.607584337
DA	1 931 201	2 945 829	1 014 628	34.4428682
IFP	1 088 664	804 260	-284 404	-35.3621963
ID	269 765	162 915	-106 850	-65.58634871

Based on Table 1 and if we were to assume that new voters continued to distribute their vote in the same way that they did in 2004, we can make the following analysis. First, there were almost 2 million additional voters in the 2009 elections. The reasons for this could be multi-fold, population increase, new young voters who became eligible to vote for the first time and old voters who were motivated to register and participate. Overall it meant an 11% increase in the actual votes cast. If we keep our assumption about voting patterns then we see that the ANC actually increased its overall vote by 769,833 votes nationally but that was only a 6.6% increase compared to the overall 11% rate of increase in total voters. The DA by comparison increased its total voters by just over a million votes and this translated into a 34% increase over the previous year. Similarly, the IFP and ID lost votes almost 28,000 and 106,000 respectively resulting in a 65% decrease for the IFP in between the two elections and a 35% decrease for the ID. The main finding of the data is that the ANC while increasing its overall share of the vote did not keep up with the national increase in overall voters.

Thus, support for the ruling party has seen some decline somewhat in last week's elections. Despite early indications that the ANC might reach its two-thirds majority, the party fell just short of this coveted target, winning 65.9%. For the first time since 1994, the party's share of the national vote declined, and it suffered a loss of -3.79% from the 69.69% won in 2004. (See Table 2)

Party	2009	Diff	2004	Diff	1999	Diff	1994
	%	% pts	%	% pts	%	% pts	
ANC	65.9	-3.79	69.69	3.34	66.35	3.7	62.65
DA	16.66	4.29	12.37	2.81	9.56	7.83	1.73
COPE	7.42	-	-	-	-	-	-
IFP	4.55	-2.42	6.97	-1.61	8.58	-1.96	10.54
ID	0.92	-0.81	1.73	-	-	-	-
Others	4.56	-4.68	9.24	-6.26	15.5	-9.58	25.08

Source: Independent Electoral Commission

The ruling party has also lost significant support in many of the provinces, as shown in Table 3 below. Although there may have been an increase in the absolute number of votes for the ANC, this is to be expected given the larger pool of registered voter for these elections. Thus it is the percentage difference between elections that tells the real story. The most significant decline in support is in the Western Cape, where the loss of close to 14% of the provincial vote translated into an outright majority for the DA in the province. Declines of 10-11% in the Free State and Eastern Cape were also significant losses: in the latter, COPE won 13.67% and the DA 9.99%, although both also likely took votes away from the United Democratic Movement (UDM). The ANC also lost about 8% of the provincial vote in both the North West and Northern Cape.

Province	2009 Votes	2009%	2004 Votes	2004%	Difference %	Difference Votes
Eastern Cape	1 552 676	68.82%	1 768 987	79.27%	-10.45%	216311
Free State	734 688	71.10%	827 338	81.78%	-10.68%	92 650
Gauteng	2 662 013	64.04%	2 331 121	68.40%	-4.36%	330 892
KwaZulu-Natal	2 192 516	62.95%	1 287 823	46.98%	15.97%	904 693
Limpopo	1 265 631	84.88%	1 439 853	89.18%	-4.30%	174 222
Mpumalanga	1 110 190	85.55%	959 436	86.30%	-0.75%	150 754
North West	783 794	72.89%	1 048 089	80.71%	-7.82%	264 295
Northern Cape	245 699	60.75%	219 365	68.83%	-8.08%	26 334
Western Cape	620 918	31.55%	709 052	45.25%	-13.70%	88 134
National Total	11 168 125	65.06%	10 880 915	69.69%	-4.63%	287210

Source: Independent Electoral Commission¹

The KZN and Western Cape (WC) provinces tell two sides of the ANC's 2009 election story. KZN was the only province where the ANC increased its support, a 15.97% increase. The slow decline of the IFP in its former stronghold has been on the cards for quite some time and the ascendance of a popular Jacob Zuma to the presidency of the ANC no doubt aided

¹ Here figures in green indicate an increase, whereas red figures indicate a decrease.

in this regard. Moreover, the province was the recipient of a vigorous and intensive election campaign by the ruling party, particularly in former rural “no-go” areas which were traditional IFP strongholds, while the poor service delivery performance of IFP councillors did not help the IFP cause. The DA’s *Stop Zuma* campaign may also have alienated possible swing voters from the ANC in a province where Zuma enjoys high approval ratings

On the other hand, the ANC’s loss of the Western Cape to the DA also points to a number of things, most of all that it has haemorrhaged support among minority groups such as coloured South Africans. Polls suggest that despite the DA capturing 51.72% of the WC provincial vote, the ANC has continued to attract the support of voters in predominantly lower income earning black African areas. However, without deeper analysis, this is not completely certain but does also raise questions about whether the ANC is losing support among the middle class. And moreover, whether the ANC may have actually given up on the middle class?

In Khayelitsha the ANC won the majority of the provincial vote in 77 voting districts in the sprawling township whereas COPE and the DA, in particular, trailed far behind. This indicates that the ANC retains strong support among black South Africans.² This is in contrast to Mitchell’s Plain, a predominantly low-middle income coloured area, where the ANC trailed the DA. Thus, the results show that class formation may be more subtle and socio-economic mobility more pervasive in some areas than others. However, this contrast may affirm the notion that race plays a more dominant role in WC politics.

Interesting trends also emerge across the rural and urban dimensions of voter support. In the Eastern Cape the ANC received a total of 68.82% of the national vote, a reduction from 2004 where they received 79.27% of the vote. This reduction of the vote was reflected in the urban areas where the ANC reduced its share of the urban vote in all the major metropolitan areas, sometimes dramatically for example in the Nelson Mandela Bay area where their share of the vote fell from almost 70% to 50%. Other than in King Sabata Dalinyeto (Umtata) where the ANC’s share remained about the same (a .72 reduction) in all remaining metro areas the party fell by approximately 13%. Not surprisingly the DA saw an increase in voters share in all the metro areas peaking in Nelson Mandela Bay by almost 7% to 28% of the total. COPE received between 13 and 17% of the metro vote in the Eastern Cape. What the data indicate is that the urban population in the Eastern Cape barring Lukhanji (Queenstown) voted at a lower rate for the ANC than the rural population.

In the City of Cape Town metro, ANC support declined by 12.63% from 45.39% in 2004 to 32.76% in 2009. However, in KZN, the ANC bucks the national trend, where it secured more support than the opposition in urban areas such as eThikwini (Durban Metro) and Msunduzi (Pietermaritzburg), with 67.52% and 73.79% respectively.³ This is in large part due to the loss of support for the IFP among the urban poor. Though in Gauteng, there was a minimal differential between urban and rural areas where, other than Ekurhuleni and Emfuleni, the ANC dipped a few percentage points below its provincial total of 64% in all urban areas though not by more than a few points.⁴ Nevertheless, there seems to be some correlation between the rate of urbanisation and some loss of support for the ANC.

The Democratic Alliance: Has it reached its glass ceiling?

The DA has exceeded expectations by increasing its share of the vote by 4.29% (1 014 628 votes) from 12.37% (1 931 201 votes) in 2004 to 16.66% (2 945 829 votes) in 2009, as seen

² Independent Electoral Commission, 2009.

³ Independent Electoral Commission, *2009 National Election results*. 2009.

⁴ Ibid. 2009

in Table 4. Almost half of this increase of 1 million votes was in the Western Cape however, while the rest was spread across the other provinces. The DA ran a strong campaign that clearly consolidated opposition support behind it. However, it has yet again failed to make an impact where it mattered, among poor black South Africans. The DA was unable to increase its share of the vote by more than 3.7% in any province, except in the Western Cape where the demographics are starkly different to the rest of the country.

Table 4: DA provincial election results comparison 2009 and 2004

Province	Party Votes	2009 % Party Votes	Difference 2004-2009	2004 % Party Votes	1999 % Party Votes
Eastern Cape	230 187	9.97%	2.63%	7.34%	6.29%
Free State	127 259	12.10%	3.63%	8.47%	5.33%
Gauteng	924 211	21.27%	0.49%	20.78%	17.97%
KwaZulu-Natal	364 518	10.33%	1.98%	8.35%	8.16%
Limpopo	57 418	3.71%	0.12%	3.59%	1.42%
Mpumalanga	102 039	7.60%	0.66%	6.94%	4.46%
North West	96 850	8.70%	3.70%	5.00%	3.26%
Northern Cape	54 215	13.08%	2%	11.08%	4.77%
Western Cape	989 132	48.78%	21.67%	27.11%	11.91%
Total	2 945 829	16.66%	4.29%	12.37%	9.56%

Source: Independent Electoral Commission

The decrease in support for parties such as the Freedom Front Plus (FF+), African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) and the disappearance of the New National Party (NNP) as well as the capture of the Western Cape, tells the tale of the DA's performance in election 2009. The party managed to complete a process it began in 2004 by consolidating the opposition vote, traditionally hostile to the ANC, behind it. Key to its victory in the Western Cape was the demise of the Independent Democrats (ID) and support lost by the ANC, particularly among coloured South Africans in areas such as Mitchell's Plain. The DA also performed well in a number of municipalities outside of the Cape Metropole (see Table 5 below), which were key to its victory in the WC provincial election.

Table 5: DA provincial election results by municipality comparison 2004 and 2009

Municipality	% DA Votes 2004	% DA Votes 2009	% Difference
Swartland (Malmesbury)	43.58%	61.89%	18.31%
Bergrivier (Velddrif)	38.81%	48.91%	10.10%
Overstrand (Greater Hermanus)	37.36%	57.80%	20.44%
Mossel Bay	37.20%	54.56%	17.36%
Cape Agulhas	36.76%	48.70%	11.94%

So although the DA performed strongly in election 2009 by affirming its status as the official opposition, it has continued in its inability to crack the mass base of the ANC's electoral market share. In South African politics the power lies among the poor, and without increasing its support among this stratum the DA will be unable to effectively challenge the ANC's electoral dominance in the future.

The Congress of the People and the COPE Effect

Despite its status as a relative newcomer on the political scene COPE managed to attract significant support with its national total standing at 7.42%.⁵ Given its status as a splinter party, COPE was widely expected to cut into the electoral support of the ANC with a number of opinion surveys polling it at above 10% in March and early April.⁶ However, these expectations were indeed unrealistic given its status as a new party as parties such as the ID or UDM have never cracked the 10% mark as new parties in previous elections.

Table 6: COPE provincial election results 2009

Province	Party Votes	2009 % Party Votes
Eastern Cape	308 439	13.67%
Free State	120 018	11.61%
Gauteng	323 327	7.78%
KwaZulu-Natal	44 890	1.29%
Limpopo	112 325	7.53%
Mpumalanga	37 789	2.91%
North West	89 573	8.33%
Northern Cape	67 416	16.67%
Western Cape	152 356	7.74%
National Total	1 311 027	7.42%

Source: Independent Electoral Commission

However, its performance did not live up to expectations. The new party has been widely criticised of having a largely middle class appeal and being a symptom of Mbeki's loss to Zuma at the ANC's 2007 Polokwane Conference, thus tempering its ability to effectively challenge the ANC's electoral dominance which is rooted among the poor. Nonetheless, COPE did fairly well to attract significant levels of support. Although the party was unable to dislodge the DA as the official opposition in the national election, it did complete this task in 5 provinces and may be poised to increase its electoral support with a view to election 2014.

Overall, COPE made a splash in the electoral pool of 2009, but was unable to significantly challenge the ANC's electoral base or dislodge the DA nationally. However, the emergence of COPE has had a far reaching effect on the political landscape by opening up the political space. The 2011 Municipal elections will be a key test of whether COPE will grow its support base or whether it will join the ranks of other new parties that were exhausted after one election, such as the ID and the United Democratic Movement (UDM). If it were to grow its base, it may be able to dislodge the DA as the official opposition by building and leading a consolidated opposition effort. The challenge posed by COPE in early 2009 also rallied the ANC into a massive election campaign effort, while it also spelled the demise of smaller opposition parties such as the ID and the UDM. Herein lays the *COPE effect*, whereby the emergence of the splinter party opened up political space and renewed interest in the election.

Death-knell sounded for minor opposition parties

Of the 26 parties in the national election the bulk of the opposition vote or 34.1% of the national vote was distributed over just four parties; the DA (16.66%), COPE (7.42%), IFP (4.55%) and the ID at (.92%). The balance of the 20 opposition parties at the national level shared between them 4.56% of the vote, which is an almost 4.7% reduction in the national

⁵ Independent Electoral Commission, 2009.

⁶ Plus 94 Research Surveys, *Democracy Poll Survey*, (March 2009). Although a similar Markinor Survey did poll COPE at around 8%.

vote since 2004. Notable amongst the laggards were formerly highly touted parties such as the ID, the UDM, the PAC and AZAPO. Although the ID was a newer party its share of the vote almost halved from 1.72% in 2004 (when it was formed) to .95%. The UDM, a primarily regionally based party based in the Eastern Cape, fell from 3.42% in 1999 (when it was formed) to 2.28% in 2004 and just .85% in 2009. Similarly the IFP, which is also regionally based in KZN and counts on some Zulu based support in Gauteng, fell from 8.6% in 1999 to 7% in 2004 slipping even further to 4.55% in 2009.

What can we read in this consolidation of the opposition vote? On one hand it might be that the electorate is shying away from a narrow ideological mandate (PAC/AZAPO) or a regional mandate (UDM) and support parties with a broader centrist appeal, which have the potential of winning both local regional and national power. A caveat to this is that recent infighting and the split of PAC may have led an earlier than anticipated demise. However, identity politics took centre stage in this election, in KwaZulu Natal it may be that voters coalesced around Jacob Zuma's strong Zulu identity, which strengthened ANC support.

The consolidation behind a few parties may also indicate that smaller parties that have been around since 1994 and before such as PAC, AZAPO, the Minority Front etc. have not been able to make a dent in national or regional politics, and moreover that the electorate may have lost faith in their likelihood to govern and chose to support parties who provided a more viable choice in this regard. Coalitions with larger parties have also seemed to hurt smaller opposition parties such as the ID (in coalition with the DA in the Western Cape) and the MF in coalition with the ANC in KZN. The larger party in each instance subsumed the identity of the smaller party and alienated the opposition's base who could no longer distinguish it from the dominant party.

What can we expect from a consolidated opposition? Most likely, this may lead to greater collaboration over opposing the ANC. If smaller opposition parties merge with larger ones we may see the larger opposition parties strengthen, but with the absence of floor crossing such mergers will be fraught with problems. The IFP however, seems to be losing its base of Zulu supporters and as this peters out over the next election they seem to be heading towards extinction unless they can re-fashion themselves with a broader appeal for all South Africans and make the transition to a new dynamic leadership post-Buthelezi. A reduction in the vote for the majority of opposition parties sends a message to political parties that South Africans are looking to support parties that can represent a broad section of South African society and move beyond narrow sectional interests. However, having a broad mandate is not enough; organisational coherence and longevity are important factors too. Hence, the ID, which has a broad mandate but is organisationally weak with a limited leadership, lost voter support.

The future political landscape

Election 2009 was characterised by a shifting political landscape, albeit subtle, and opportunities won and lost.

Despite securing an emphatic majority with an increase in absolute votes, the ANC's support has indeed declined, and no more so than in the Western Cape. Nevertheless, it has managed to complete the process of dominating the KZN political scene by routing the IFP in the provincial polls. The ANC victory also affirms that in South Africa the electoral power lies among the, predominantly black African, rural and urban poor. These demographics remain firmly behind the ANC, despite recent political controversy surrounding the ANC leadership, a bleak socio-economic picture and poor service delivery. Thus, despite the opportunity presented by these weaknesses, the opposition has failed to attract a wider support base by providing a viable alternative political home. Nevertheless, performance in

the areas of service delivery will be a key test for the new ANC government if it is to stem any future decline in its support.

Although affirming its status as official opposition and increasing its share of the vote across the country, the DA may have hit its glass ceiling in that it has again been found wanting in its appeal among poor black South Africans. This is compounded by the regional character of its electoral strength which is confined to the Western Cape. Without significant progress among this electoral market, the DA will be unable to challenge the ANC in future.

The emergence of a black middle class and COPE has however opened up new opportunities for the opposition. But the *COPE effect* of opening up the political landscape has had a far wider impact in this election than COPE itself. Although COPE remains poised to possibly provide the most viable challenge to the ANC's electoral dominance in the future, it was unable to affect such a challenge in election 2009. This election also spelled the demise of the IFP, which was reduced to a shadow of its former self. Its poor showing in KZN may point to a weakening in the importance of ethnic politics in South Africa. This may however, be tempered by the implicit ethnic chauvinism displayed in the ANC's election campaign in KZN. Nonetheless, future opposition politics in South Africa may well be less tinged by race and ethnicity, but will seemingly continue to be divided by class.

The implosion of smaller opposition parties such as the ID, the UDM, the PAC, the ACDP and AZAPO may also spell a decline for niche parties based on narrow identities. Although the political landscape has opened up to create some shifts in electoral support, these shifts have largely occurred across a contracted electoral market. In short, the trend of fragmentation among the opposition in South Africa may be coming to an end.

These parties and the opposition as a whole will have to refocus their energies on adapting their party images to the political reality that the poor hold the power in South African elections. Without such introspection the opposition will be unable to consolidate itself against continued one-party dominance. Without significant growth into the poor black African electoral market by COPE and particularly the DA, the ANC's electoral dominance is likely to continue.