

GENERAL ANALYSIS OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION 2011

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Several analysts have concluded that the local government elections were a watershed event, primarily as a result of the Democratic Alliance's growth. It is therefore worth analyzing this conclusion and what the elections' significance is.

The two main contested areas of analysis are arguably with which election this one should be compared: the 2006 local government election or the 2009 general elections? Secondly, what is the source of the DA's growth and which parties declined in the process?

Electoral studies and research in South Africa have identified a number of general trends in local government elections: firstly, that a direct correlation existed in all the elections up to 2006 between national and local elections. The ANC normally received 5-7% more votes at national elections than local elections; the DA received more or less the same votes in both types of elections, while the smaller parties received generally 1-2% more votes at local level than in national elections. The voter turn-out was also consistently between 48% and 50% in local government elections while national elections varied between 75% and 85%. The 2011 election was approached with the same conclusions in mind, which meant that the bench-mark was the 2009 election. It was therefore predictable that the ANC will gain substantial support against the ANC in the Western Cape and the ANC will do the same against the IFP in KwaZulu-Natal.

When the early results already indicated a decline in ANC support, the question emerged how it should be determined. Compared with the 2006, the ANC's 63.65% support in 2011 was a decline of about 2.4%. Compared with the 2009 results and the trend already explained, it meant that the 66% minus 5-7% would result in an expected vote of approximately 60% for the ANC to maintain its 2009 support levels. Support of 63.65% would then not represent a decline since 2009. The ANC's losses in the Western Cape in 2009 would then already be incorporated in this comparison. It has also the implication that the spate of local demonstrations and internal turmoil in the ANC about the nomination process did not affect the ANC's support levels in electoral terms. Most of that discontent is arguably captured in the low voter turn-out (57.6%) which is not lower than previous local government elections but actually substantially higher.

Another expectation based on the 2009 results was that the ANC would increase its majority in KwaZulu-Natal significantly. It did not materialize. It increased it in the province with a bit more than 10% while in 2009 the increase was 15.5%. The steady decline of the IFP since 1994

unexpectedly stopped, mainly as a result of the performance by the new National Freedom Party. In 2009 the IFP received 4.55% nationally and in 2011 the combined support of the IFP and NFP is 6.52% (while their combined provincial support is 28.4% compared to the IFP's 22.4% in 2009). Their support base in KwaZulu-Natal follows the same trend, which is highly significant as a new trend. It prevented the ANC making inroads into the Inkatha support base. For the ANC it is possible the most serious setback in 2011 and was not necessarily predictable.

The relevance of the choice between the 2006 or 2009 election results as the basis of comparison and analysis for the DA does not so much affect the degree of its growth but from where did the growth come. The DA made its main break-throughs in growth in the 1999 general election and in the Western Cape also in 2009. Its support base in both 2006 and 2009 was approximately 17%. The latter included its dramatic growth in the Western Cape in 2009. Its growth of about 4% in 2011 is therefore not based on the Western Cape vote.

If 2009 is used as the bench-mark for the analysis, then it means that the ANC did not sacrifice significant numbers of votes, COPE lost about 5% support, the IFP/NFP did not shed votes to the ANC while the voter turn-out increased with about 6% above the expected level. The DA's increase therefore appears to be a combination of COPE votes and the increase in the voter turn-out. One of the DA election strategists indicated that they planned their strategy on the assumption that the other parties' supporters will continue with the 48-50% participation level, while an increase in the DA voter turn-out will give them an increase in support without withdrawing support from other parties. A more detailed analysis will possibly reveal that in some instances the DA did attract ANC supporters, but the overall view does not support the idea that it happened on a wide-scale.

The voter turn-out played an important role in this election. As already indicated, the trend before this election was a very low turn-out. In by-elections they were even lower. The gap of 5-7% between the national and local government support for the ANC is mainly attributable to the difference in the voter turn-out, which means that the higher the voter participation, the better for the ANC. The higher than expected voter participation in 2011, however, did not comply with that logic, because it involved more DA supporters than those of other parties. An initial impression is that the voter participation of the others parties was significantly less than 56%. For the DA the strategic implications of this situation is that in 2014 at the next general election the overall voter turn-out will possibly be again at the 75-80% across the board, which means that the DA will then not anymore enjoy this strategic advantage.

For COPE this election was a test to determine the impact of its leadership struggles and the withdrawal of COPE-Shilowa from the party. In 2009 it received 7.42%, mainly in the Northern Cape (16.67%), followed by the Eastern Cape (13.67%) and the Free State (11.61%). In 2011 it survived only in the Northern Cape (12%), while it suffered serious losses in the Eastern Cape.

Its national average declined to 2.33%. Ironically, in the Western Cape and Northern Cape in twelve municipalities (such as Oudtshoorn, Nama Khoi, Hantam, Karoo Hoogland, Laingsburg and Plettenberg Bay) no party received an absolute majority to constitute a government, and COPE is in the position to determine the coalition's composition. COPE's main challenge in the coming months is to consolidate its party organization, convene the elective national congress and legitimize its own internal structures. At the moment such a public message is more important than competitive electioneering.

The 2011 election is significant in the sense that gives us a better understanding of the diversity of public participation amongst the populace. At least six types of voter participation emerged during the course of the election period.

The first type is the 'anti-politics' citizens represented in social movements resembling the Tea Party movement in the USA and the Purple movement in Italy. In South Africa social movements are increasingly active in the form of the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement, the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign and the Mandela Park Backyarders. All of them propagated a complete stay-away from the elections and not merely an anti-ANC stance. Their main concerns are firstly the residential rights in informal settlements and secondly improved service delivery.

The second type is the apathetic absent voters indicated by the voter turn-out of 57.6%. They assume that decision-making is primarily a national function, including service delivery at local level. Therefore they participate in national/provincial elections but do not see the need for local involvement.

The third type is the protest voters who as ANC supporters protest against poor service delivery and the ANC's nomination process. Their voices in the election were represented in the form of low voter turn-out and nomination of independents.

The fourth type is the pro-ANC voter, who views the ANC as providing the main access to an economic future for them. Policies like BEE, employment equity and ANC deployment are seen by them as the primary means of survival, while service delivery is of secondary importance. It also explains the ANC's emphasis on job creation as the main focus of its election manifesto. Once a voter does not feel within reach of these policies, they might consider other parties as potential alternative providers of survival means.

The fifth type are the 'rational choice' voters who look at the track-record of parties, and therefore on their positions on service delivery, corruption and development. They do not depend on parties to provide them with access to an economic existence and therefore their focus is more aspects that determine their quality of life, such as service delivery. They represent the floating vote in elections as well as many of the DA's supporters.

The last type is those voters whose choice is primarily determined by a party's identity. They are the traditional party supporters and include those whose vote is determined by minority concerns or issue-based choices, such as the FF+, MF, IFP and religious-based parties.

Finally, while the 2009 election produced a party landscape of one dominant party (ANC) together with a 2½ -party (DA, COPE and IFP) opposition structure. The 2011 changed it to a primarily two-party system (ANC and DA) in which the ANC is still dominant, together with a second tier of two parties (National Freedom Party and COPE). The IFP is not included, because it is clear that it is still in decline and therefore does not have a long-term future. The result is therefore a 2+2 party system for the foreseeable future.