

# Small parties and independents – from also-rans to kingmakers

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Small parties and independents play an important role in South Africa's democracy. It is on the level of the local that these small parties and independents have some chance to make inroads in terms of winning a few wards that could turn them into council kingmakers, or at least represent some particular local constituency needs. This chapter examines the multitude of small and micro-parties, as well as independent candidates in the 2011 local government elections. It first features classification-based endeavours to 'make sense of this multitude of often-neglected but crucial political players in South Africa'. The classifications use the number of contesting candidates and election outcomes as the two classificatory principles. The chapter also explores the increase in contestation by independent candidates. Thereafter it investigates the details of their results, and the reasons for their largely dismal displays in local election 2011. The chapter concludes that while these political actors remain largely in an underworld of small and micro-parties, they retain enthusiasm for electoral contestation, thus continuing to add value to multi-party democracy in South Africa.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Local government elections are particularly important for small political parties in South Africa. It is the arena where small parties and independent candidates can establish direct links with communities and community-level stakeholders. It is on the level of the local that small parties have a chance of winning a ward or, when there

is no outright winner, they can play the council kingmaker role. The local is where communities can entrust parties with local standing to represent them. Small parties and independent candidates can, therefore, play crucial roles in the political processes of the local.

The 2011 local government election saw a proliferation of small and micro-parties, and independents. The number of contesting parties increased from 97 in 2006 to 121 in 2011 and independent candidates increased from 663 in 2006 to 754 in the 2011 local government election. Many expected to benefit from heightened frustration with the African National Congress (ANC) as expressed through increased service delivery protests (see Booysen, Chapter 17). This frustration around a perceived lack of sufficient service delivery was compounded by dissatisfaction with the ANC's internal candidate selection process. The pre-election occurrences ignited hopes that small parties and independent candidates might inject new faces and fresh political perspectives into South Africa's political arena.

The high hopes of independent candidates and small parties were dashed at the polls. Their electoral support turned out to be fractional and in fact even lower than in previous elections. Thus, despite increased contestation of small political parties, residents' associations and independents, the most notable trend of the 2011 election was the definite movement *away from* smaller parties.

The Democratic Alliance (DA) was the primary beneficiary of the migration away from smaller parties. For the DA this exodus was a culmination of ongoing campaign messages since 2004. The DA had been actively promoting a move towards a two-party state by emphasising that small parties 'fracture the opposition' and that a vote for such a party is a 'wasted vote' (*Independent Online*, 18 March 2004). The DA's Athol Trollip went as far as to say that the 2011 election 'will spell the end of smaller parties' (Stolley, 2011). The DA's victory, however, was a hollow one as it effectively engendered a reduced set of political options for voters.

The bleak outlook for small parties prompted some political analysts to question the prospects of their continued existence. For example, Petlane (2009:193-194), whilst acknowledging that 'there may still be space and support' for smaller political parties, argues that the relevance of small parties is under threat because the rainbow nation has in large part succeeded and 'minority groups have been accommodated and accorded their proper space in a multi-cultural society'. However, without detracting from significant reconciliation achievements since 1994, South Africans are a long way from being fully reconciled. Historical antagonisms, structured primarily around racial

fault-lines, still manifest in public discourse on a regular basis. Anger and bitterness between groups continue to simmer below the surface, and occasionally spill into the open.

This chapter examines the performance of the multitude of small and micro-parties, as well as independent candidates, in local election 2011. It first features classification-based endeavours to ‘make sense of this multitude of often-neglected but crucial political players in South Africa’. The classification uses the number of contesting candidates and election outcomes as the two classificatory principles. The chapter also explores the increase in contestation by independent candidates. Thereafter the chapter explores the details of their results, and the reasons for their largely dismal displays in local election 2011.

## **CLASSIFYING THE SMALL CONTESTANTS IN SOUTH AFRICA'S LOCAL ELECTION 2011**

To develop a typology of political parties in South Africa, one can refer to existing classification typologies. Gunther and Diamond (2003) develop a complex typology, which distinguishes 15 different species of party based on the level of formal organisation, programmatic commitments and strategy. Criteria for party classification identified by Gunther and Diamond which are applicable in the South African context include decision-making procedures, the extent of organisational structure, minority versus broad-based representation, ideology, religious orientation and whether it has a broad catch-all focus. Additional criteria relevant to South Africa not identified by Gunther and Diamond include whether the party is nationally, regionally or locally based and whether it was registered as a political party at the outset, emerged from a civic movement or organisation, or still is a civic organisation, but has stood for election.

Overtly religious parties and single-issue parties (as identified by the party's name) can easily be categorised using these criteria. However, many of the 121 parties that participated in local election 2011 have names that provide no clues to their ideological, religious or programmatic sentiment. Even more problematic for the operationalisation of any form of typology in South Africa is the lack of publicly accessible primary or secondary information about these parties (or their leaders), which is necessary for the process of classification.

### **Small parties by candidate diffusion**

A nuanced classificatory option that enables insights into the party's organisational, infrastructure and resource base is that of the number of candidates the party fields

in an election. This measure is also sensitive to the micro-level of small community parties that may nominate only in concentrated geographical areas. An analysis of the 121 parties that contested local government election 2011 reveals that the vast majority of them can in fact be classified as micro- or small parties.

Table 1 shows that in terms of the schema developed for the analysis, 15 (12 percent) of the 121 parties participating in the 2011 election can be classified as micro-parties – they fielded fewer than 10 candidates each to contest the election. This category consisted primarily of residents' associations and some localised parties, which hardly have any party organisational infrastructure. Category 2 parties fielded between 11 and 50 candidates, which indicates small parties and very limited party infrastructure and resources. Overall, 44 parties (36 percent of the party contestants) could be placed in this category (IEC, 2011).

**Table 1.** Party (electoral participant) classification by number of candidates fielded

Size classification by number of candidates	Category	Number of candidates fielded by the party	Number of 2011 parties in the category	Percentage of parties in the category (%)
Micro	Category 1	1-10	15	12.4%
	Examples include Umhlaba Uhlagene People's United Nations (UUPUN), Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Ou Pacaltsdorp Inwonersvereniging (OPRA), Beter Bloemhof Party (BBP) and Student Stem Party (SSP)			
Very small	Category 2	11-50	44	36.4%
	Examples include Solidarity Party (SP), African Independent Congress (AIC), Civic Democrats (CD), Socialist Civic Movement (SCM) and the Working Together Political Party (WTPP)			
Small	Category 3	51-200	39	32.2%
	Examples include the Khoisan Party (KP), People's Democratic Movement (PDM), Royal Loyal Progress (RLP), Truly Alliance (TA) and United Action Front (UAF)			
	Category 4	201-500	11	9.1%
	Examples include the Minority Front (MF), Movement Democratic Party (MDP), National People's Party (NPP), Pan Africanist Movement (PAM) and United Resident's Front (URF)			
Smaller-medium	Category 5	501-2,000	2	1.6%
	UCDP and Azapo			
Medium	Category 6	2,001-3,000	6	5.0%
	APC, IFP, NFP, PAC, UDM and FF+			
Large	Category 7	3,001-9,403	4	3.3%
	ANC, DA, COPE and ACDP			
Total			121	100

Source: IEC, <http://www.elections.org.za>, various windows, accessed 20 August 2011.

Parties in categories 3 and 4, fielding between 51 and 200, and 201 and 500 candidates, respectively, can be seen as small, but with a higher level of organisation than parties in category 1 and 2, and achieving *some* ability to be bigger than a one-community player. In total 39 parties were classified as category 3. Similar descriptions apply to parties in category 4, which had 11 parties. Category 5 parties are the so-called smaller-medium parties. Only two parties qualified for category 5. These were the United Christian Democratic Party (UCDP), a regionally based North West province party, fielding 606 candidates and the Azanian People's Organisation (Azapo) which fielded 1,491 candidates (IEC, 2011).

Category 6 can be viewed as the medium parties that fielded between 2,001 and 3,000 candidates. The six parties that fit into category 5 were the African People's Convention (APC), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), National Freedom Party (NFP), Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC), United Democratic Movement (UDM) and the Freedom Front Plus (FF+) – the bulk of these political parties that also have representation (albeit ranging only from minimal to modest) in the Parliament of South Africa. The largest parties, according to this classification, were the African National Congress (ANC), the Democratic Alliance (DA), the Congress of the People (COPE) and the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP). The ANC fielded the most candidates (9,403) while the DA had the second largest proportion of candidate nominations and fielded 7,117 candidates (IEC, 2011).

Classification by electoral support is a more stringent test of party size because the number of candidates fielded does not necessarily translate into better results at the polls. Table 2 shows that half (50 percent) or 60 of the 121 entities, which contested fit into category 1 – in other words they *did not win any* seat of any type. These can be classified as micro-parties. Using this classification system, 42 parties or 35 percent won between one and five seats. These are classified as very small parties. Again, this group did not have any defining characteristics. However, many overtly religious parties and residents' associations fell into this category. Collectively then, 102 parties or 84 percent of those that contested the 2011 election can be classified as micro- or very small, because each had won a maximum of five seats (and more than half of them no seat at all). Many of these parties or entities were based in a single municipality or were single-issue parties.

**Table 2.** Party (electoral participant) classification by electoral outcome

Size classification by electoral outcome	Category	Number seats won by the party (ward or PR)	Number of parties in the category	Percentage of parties in the category
Micro	Category 1	No seats won	60	49.6%
Very small	Category 2	1-5 seats won	42	34.7%
Small	Category 3	6-10 seats won	4	3.3%
	Category 4	11-20 seats won	4	3.3%
Smaller-medium	Category 5	21- 100 seats won	6	4.9%
Smaller-large	Category 7	101-400 seats won	3	2.5%
Large	Category 8	1,555 seats won	1	0.8%
	Category 9	5,633 seats won	1	0.8%
Total			121	100.0

Note: There was only one party in category 8 and 9, therefore, the numbers are not continuous from category 7.

Source: IEC, <http://www.elections.org.za>, accessed 20 August 2011.

Overall, four parties or three percent won between 6 and 10 seats. The Independent Civic Organisation of South Africa (ICOSA), founded by controversial former ANC Central Karoo District Municipality manager Truman Prince, and the National People's Party (NPP) won six seats each. The Bushbuckridge Residents Association (BRA), managed to secure seven seats. Categories 4 and 5 are the smaller-medium sized parties. This band of categories only had 10 parties in it. Azapo, the Minority Front (MF), the African Independent Congress (AIC) and the Mpumalanga Party (MP) each obtained 15 seats. Both the MP and AIC are strongly regional, founded in protest against the ANC government's provincial boundary demarcations. The MP first contested in 2011 (rebelling against being allocated to Limpopo instead of Mpumalanga) and the AIC first contested in 2005 (protesting against being placed in the Eastern Cape instead of KwaZulu-Natal), and winning 10 seats on that occasion (IEC, 2011).

Parties in category 6 and 7 are classified as medium-sized parties. The UCDP, APC and FF+ won 25, 28 and 38 seats, respectively, while the ACDP and PAC both won 40 seats. The UDM won 65 seats. Category 7 had three parties namely the IFP, COPE and the NFP. These parties won 352, 236 and 224 seats, respectively. According to this criterion, only two parties, the ANC and DA, could be classified as large. The ANC won a total of 5,633 municipal seats and the DA won a total of 1,555 (IEC, 2011).

Parties that fielded more candidates *could* secure more seats. However, this is not always the case. For example, the socially conservative and Christian ACDP fielded 3,735 candidates, while the left and Black Consciousness-oriented PAC nominated 2,985, the APC (a party formed as a splinter from the PAC under the leadership of

Themba Godi in September 2007) 2,158 candidates and Azapo 1,491. These relatively high totals indicate more infrastructure and organisation than a party that could field 10 or fewer candidates. Yet these parties did not perform at the 2011 polls, only securing 40, 40, 28 and 15 seats, respectively. On the other hand, the AIC and MP fielded 74 and 175 candidates, respectively, and both won 15 seats (for the AIC this was a five-seat improvement on 2006). This could be due to the fact that fielding more candidates can in fact stretch limited party resources (and therefore, campaign capacity), which in turn can negatively affect the eventual outcome for the party (IEC, 2011). Both the AIC and the MP have narrow geographical presences.

## PERFORMANCE IN THE 2011 ELECTION

Parties, such as the AIC and MP, which were primarily formed to advocate around municipal location relative to provinces, performed relatively well, with their 15 seats each. The AIC secured 8,605 ward votes and 23,414 proportional representation (PR) votes. The MP obtained 12,882 ward votes and 13,429 PR votes (for a more complete discussion of these parties, see Cherry, Chapter 4; Booysen, Chapter 17). Two other small parties that were successful in the 2011 election are ICOSA and the Karoo Gemeenskapsparty (KGP). ICOSA, a party that is no stranger to coalition agreements, won a majority of three PR seats in the Kannaland municipality of Ladismith in the Western Cape. The ANC and DA each won two PR seats (IEC, 2011). ICOSA formed an alliance with the ANC to secure municipal government in Kannaland. A newly-established party, the KGP, loosely translated as the Karoo Community Party, won three out of seven PR seats in the Prince Albert Local Municipality. The ANC and Democratic Alliance each won two PR seats (IEC, 2011). The KGP eventually formed an alliance with the ANC to co-govern in the Prince Albert Local Municipality.

Parties with more generalised goals did not attract much support. Examples of these are the Black Economic Empowerment Party (BEE) which received only 60 ward votes and 154 PR votes and the South African Determined Volunteers (SaDev) which received a paltry 68 ward votes and 66 PR votes. Parties such as the Khoisan Party (KP), which targeted a single ethnic-identity group, also performed poorly – it gained 262 ward votes and 298 PR votes (IEC, 2011).

The 2011 election was devastating to those identified as medium-sized parties (namely Azapo, the ACDP, PAC, UDM, MF, UCDP and FF+). As an illustration of the dismal results in this category, the ACDP took 0.6 percent of the PR component of the total vote in 2011 while the FF+, PAC and the MF each took only 0.4 percent of the PR vote. Azapo took a mere 0.2 percent of the PR vote nationally-calculated in

2011. These results are in fact worse than the already low electoral support received by these parties in the 2006 municipal elections. The UDM performed fractionally better obtaining 0.6 percent, up from 0.3 percent in 2006 (IEC, 2011).

The situation becomes even more desperate on consideration of these parties' losses in absolute number of votes rather than percentages (Table 3). The PAC took the largest loss, declining from 109,816 PR votes in 2006 down to 54,846 PR votes in 2011, thus shedding 54,970 votes. These PAC votes were largely syphoned by one of the PAC's splinter groups, the APC. The APC obtained 54,332 PR votes, primarily in Mpumalanga and Limpopo. The other PAC offshoot, the Pan Africanist Movement (PAM) received fractional support – only 2,352 PR votes (IEC, 2011).

**Table 3.** Change in party support between 2006 and 2011, local government elections on the PR ballot

Party	2006		2011		Increase/Decrease
	Valid PR Votes	% Valid PR Votes	Valid PR Votes	% Valid PR Votes	Total Votes gained or lost
ACDP	128,990	1.31%	78,737	0.59%	-50,253
Azapo	30,321	0.31%	26,300	0.20%	-4,021
FF+	94,140	0.96%	53,931	0.40%	-40,209
MF	42,530	0.43%	53,042	0.40%	10,512
PAC	109,816	1.11%	54,846	0.41%	-54,970
UDM	129,047	1.31%	84,623	0.63%	-44,424
UCDP	62,459	0.63%	25,971	0.19%	-36,488

Source: IEC, <http://www.elections.org.za>, various windows, accessed 30 May 2011.

The ACDP came in second in the *losses stakes* in this category by shedding 50,253 votes. The UDM lost 44,424 votes since the 2006 election and the FF+ lost 40,209 votes. Only the MF gained, namely 10,512 votes (IEC, 2011). Whilst in the overall picture these losses are modest, for parties with such low levels of existing support the results constitute a major local-to-local election loss. For the PAC, it means a loss of about half its 2006 votes. The associated forfeiture of council seats amounts to massive losses of party resources and infrastructure, including income from monthly councillor contributions to the party, public funding of parties, and the knock-on effect of lessened profile due to no representation in some municipalities.

The overall value of small parties was somewhat upgraded through the need to form coalitions in the councils where no single party had achieved an outright win. It was especially in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal that small parties held the balance of power and became council kingmakers because of winning a strategically important seat. For example, in Swellendam, Western Cape, the ANC and the DA



each won four seats and the ACDP took the remaining seat. It opted to co-govern with the DA. Lengthy deliberations fleshing out practical aspects of the agreement caused delays in formalising post-election governance structures. ACDP Western Cape provincial leader, Grant Haskin (personal communication, 1 September 2011), noted that it took the two parties three months from the 18 May elections to settle complex co-governing dynamics and sign the agreement as some contentious agenda items were escalated to the parties' provincial leaderships to resolve. According to Haskin, such delays were preferable to potential future instability amongst co-governing partners. Many of these coalition arrangements remained strained into 2012 due to a number of underlying factors. These included the adversarial nature of the 2011 campaign and the rapid rate at which key role-players (who did not necessarily trust one another) needed to acclimatise to their newly-acquired governance roles (Haskin personal communication, 24 January 2012). This may be compounded by the fact that the national imperatives of political parties may be at odds with the reality of local political complexities.

## **INDEPENDENTS IN THE 2011 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS**

By definition, independent candidates are not linked to any political party and can only contest at the ward level in South Africa's local government elections. They therefore generally do not have access to the infrastructure and resources that are available to established political parties.

The 2011 local government election is likely to be remembered for the surge in contestation by independent candidates. In the 2011 local government elections there were 29,570 ward candidates, 754 of whom were independents (IEC, 2011). Thus there was a 14 percent increase over the 667 who had registered for the 2006 local elections. As seen in Table 4, a total of 844 independents were initially nominated as ward candidates for the 2011 elections. However, only 754 independent candidates eventually contested. This was due to the fact that some candidates failed to submit required documents and/or the deposit of R1,000 before the deadline stated in the IEC's election timetable. Some also withdrew in compliance with the ANC's appeal to those affected by candidate disputes not to oppose the ANC, but to let the party settle the issue post-election.

**Table 4.** Nomination and registration of independents in the local election 2011, by province

Province	Number of independent candidate nominations	Number of certified independent candidates
Eastern Cape	182	165
Free State	35	31
Gauteng	86	80
KwaZulu-Natal	119	107
Limpopo	182	172
Mpumalanga	53	46
North West	62	54
Northern Cape	30	27
Western Cape	95	72
Totals	844	754

Sources: IEC, <http://www.elections.org.za>, accessed 30 May 2011.

Many independents stood for election in areas marked by dissatisfaction with the ANC's candidate selection processes. The ANC's nomination process has traditionally been complex, involving an intricate combination of consultations with various stakeholders and internal party structures. In 2007 at their 52<sup>nd</sup> National Conference, the ANC adopted a resolution to 'strengthen list guidelines and processes for public representatives to enhance democratic participation' (ANC, 2007). As a result of this resolution, and to mitigate against damage to the party's image in view of increased service delivery protests as well as extensive media coverage on allegations of corruption, mismanagement and poor governance in municipalities, the ANC altered its candidate selection process to allow for greater community involvement. Higher ANC structures stepped in, however, to augment the final list in terms of demographic balance and political alignment of local candidates.

The changes in the selection process had unintended consequences when in some instances the communities' preferred candidates did not make it to the final candidate list. The exact number of former ANC candidates running as independents cannot be verified because the IEC's registration process does not require independent candidates to state their former party affiliation. Frustration with the candidate selection process was extensive enough for the Election Monitoring Network (EMN) to report that the majority of pre-election instances of violence were as a result of tensions around candidate selection rather than inter-party conflict (EMN, 2011:4).

## Registration patterns of independents

Table 5 shows that the greatest number of independents contested in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo. The provincial breakdown of the 754 registered independents was as follows: Limpopo (172), Eastern Cape (165), KwaZulu-Natal (107), Western Cape (72), Free State (31), Gauteng (80), North West (54), Mpumalanga (46) and Northern Cape (27) (IEC, 2011). Table 5 shows a 12-percentage point increase in independent contestation in Limpopo. In absolute terms, the number of registered candidates more than doubled from 75 in 2006 to 172 in 2011. The number of independents in the Eastern Cape also increased sharply from 128 to 165.

**Table 5.** Local election registration of independents, 2000-11

Province	2000 elections		2006 elections		2011 elections		Percentage point difference from 2006
	Count	Percent (%)	Count	Percent (%)	Count	Percent (%)	
Eastern Cape	134	19.94	128	19.34	165	21.88	2.55
Free State	48	7.14	45	6.80	31	4.11	-2.69
Gauteng	74	11.01	80	12.08	80	10.61	-1.47
KwaZulu-Natal	100	14.88	108	16.31	107	14.19	-2.12
Limpopo	76	11.31	75	11.33	172	22.81	11.48
Mpumalanga	57	8.48	61	9.21	46	6.10	-3.11
North West	66	9.82	86	12.99	54	7.16	-5.83
Northern Cape	25	3.72	12	1.81	27	3.58	1.77
Western Cape	92	13.69	67	10.12	72	9.55	-0.57
Totals	672	100	662	100	754	100	-

Sources: IEC, <http://www.elections.org.za>, various windows, accessed 30 May 2011.

The greatest number of independents contested in smaller municipalities consisting of 30 or fewer wards. Contesting in smaller municipalities is, coincidentally, a strategic choice because these candidates are more likely to win support in such areas. Candidates contesting in smaller wards also stand a greater chance of becoming a kingmaker. There were only a few wards where two independent candidates contested and there were no wards with three or more independents in the race (Berkowitz, 10 May 2011).

## How independents fared

Although local election 2011 was marked by a significant rise in the number of independents contesting, this did not translate into major shifts in support at the polls. The notable trend was that independent candidates failed to make any inroads in the 2011 local government election. Voter loyalty to the ANC overwhelmingly

triumphed over the unique challenge presented by independent candidates who were ANC members dissatisfied with the list-compilation process. Overall, independent candidates received 302,243 ward votes, which translated into 2.26 percent of valid ward votes (IEC, 2011).

There were 45 successful independent candidates (Table 6). This was a slight improvement on the 34 successful independent candidates in the 2006 local election. Of the 45 successful independents, 12 were located in the Eastern Cape and 11 in Limpopo. Independent candidates won 66,597 votes (1.42 percent) of the votes cast in the Eastern Cape. In Limpopo independent candidates obtained 65,617 votes (1.91 percent) of votes cast. In Gauteng not a single independent candidate gained a seat and only one independent was successful in the Northern Cape.

**Table 6.** Successful independents in the local election 2011

Province	Number of certified independents candidates	Number of successful independent candidates
Eastern Cape	165	12
Free State	31	2
Gauteng	80	0
KwaZulu-Natal	107	6
Limpopo	172	11
Mpumalanga	46	3
North West	54	5
Northern Cape	27	1
Western Cape	72	5
Totals	754	45

Sources: IEC, <http://www.elections.org.za>, various windows, accessed 30 May 2011.

There were a few instances in which more than one independent gained success in the same municipality: Eastern Cape municipalities: Mbhashe [Idutywa] (2 seats), Port St Johns (3 seats); KwaZulu-Natal municipalities: uMhlathuze [Richards Bay] (2 seats); Limpopo municipalities: Greater Giyani [Giyani] (3 seats), Greater Marble Hall (2 seats), Greater Tubatse [Burgersfort/Ohrigstad/Eastern Tubatse] (2 seats); North West municipalities: Rustenburg (2 seats), Moses Kotane [Mogwase] (2 seats) (IEC, 2011).

## REASONS FOR POOR PERFORMANCE

In all elections since 1994, political parties (besides in some ways the DA) have been overshadowed by the electoral might of the ANC. The challenges faced by small parties

and independent candidates can be clustered into five key areas. These are financial constraints, negative party images in the case of small parties, limitations on campaign efforts and the campaign context in general, the nationally-focused political space, and difficulties in attracting positive media coverage.

Firstly, small parties and independent candidates face a myriad of problems around limited resources and infrastructure. This affects their ability to organise and campaign effectively. These parties typically bemoan the lack of financial resources as the primary reason for their declining support levels. Yet, many small parties perform their best precisely at the time when they have the least amount of resources i.e. in the election directly after their formation. Parties such as the UDM, Independent Democrats (ID) and COPE performed best in the election after they were formed, but received reduced support at the polls thereafter. In the 2011 LGE, it was the IFP breakaway party, the NFP, which performed relatively well as a first-time contender. Voters who initially cast their ballots for these parties might feel that they are willing to give the party a chance but then adopt a wait-and-see attitude. Newly-established political parties have a short window of opportunity to establish a positive party image and gain voter loyalty.

Secondly, once party images such as trustworthiness are crystallised in the minds of voters they have far-reaching effects. Voters are unlikely to engage with campaign messages delivered by alternative parties regarded as untrustworthy. Surveys conducted since 1994 show marginal improvements in perceptions of opposition parties and their leaders. However, the persistent trend has been that large proportions of the electorate either had a poor image of opposition parties or are unable to offer opinions about many of the attributes of the opposition parties. In contrast (even in the context of heightened service delivery protests), a majority of South Africans across all racial groups, including those who said that they did not feel close to any party, saw the ANC as a trustworthy party (Africa, 2009:67-68).

Thirdly, opposition parties tend to position a critique of the ANC as the centre of their campaign strategy. This permeates their campaigns. As Mattes (2005:48) shows, South Africans are 'ready and able to discriminate across policy areas, criticising government in some policy areas and praising it in others'. A critique of government performance is unpersuasive to an electorate already cognisant of what the policy problems are. Voters not comfortable to vote for either the ANC or the DA may simply opt out of the system.

Another gradual but significant change in the political rhetoric of these parties is that they have become progressively more centrist in nature. For example, the FF+ moved from primarily highlighting issues that confront Afrikaners (FF+, 2009) to a greater focus on issues of service delivery and accountability (FF+, 2011). As Petlane (2009:192) indicates, small parties that traditionally had narrow ethnic or geographic constituencies have begun couching minority rights in universal rather than particular terms. Given that they fared better when they framed their appeals around minority rights, the target constituents of these parties may feel betrayed by this shift in focus.

Small parties in South Africa have persevered over time despite attempts by the bigger ones to capture the small ones' support bases. In the 2004 national election, the ANC under former President Mbeki dismissed small parties as being divisive and irrelevant. Similarly, the DA in 2004 and 2009 made a strong argument for a consolidated opposition vote. In the 2011 campaign the ANC and DA were somewhat less disparaging of smaller parties, although the DA did campaign to draw small parties' support into the DA. The big parties' moderation of attacks on their small counterparts could be attributed to the realisation that they could need small parties to co-govern, especially in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. The DA's 2011 result was nevertheless boosted by its usurpation of large chunks of small party support (see Jolobe, Chapter 8; Greben, Chapter 19).

Fourthly, the 2011 election was in many respects a nationally-focused event (see Piper, Chapter 3). Indeed Western Cape ACDP provincial leader, Haskin, believes the ANC and DA successfully *nationalised* the local government election campaign, which crowded out the voices of smaller parties and polarised the vote into an either-or choice – for the ANC or the DA. The 2011 local election, he argues, was epitomised as a choice between Jacob Zuma and Helen Zille, rather than a choice about which ward candidate would best represent the community. Haskin (2011) argues that the focus on a two-horse race was re-enforced through the open toilet saga and the Afriforum vs Julius Malema court case. Haskin notes that the DA's 'specific emphasis' on the service delivery track records of parties had the effect of drowning out all those who could not develop such track records.

Finally, small parties and independents receive limited national media coverage because media in South Africa tend to focus on the most dramatic and conflictual aspects of election campaigns, which usually occur between the larger and medium-sized parties and their leaders, and on issues that can be projected nationally. This added to the hurdles that small parties and independents faced – and simultaneously benefited

the ANC and DA that effectively used their national leaders to run a high-profile media-intensive campaign alongside the smaller parties' more localised campaigns.

## CONCLUSION

The continued relevance of small parties and independent candidates in South Africa is framed around their ability to secure electoral support and the idea that small parties are obsolete because they do not have the capacity to challenge the ANC, or the DA, in meaningful ways. A related argument by Petlane (2009) is that small parties have lessened relevance because minority statuses have become less of an issue for South Africans. However, when the focus is shifted from electoral performance to advocacy efforts, smaller parties assume more relevance.

Notwithstanding their lacklustre electoral performances, the small parties and independent candidates with little chance of glory do add value to multi-party democracy in South Africa. Small parties (even if it is in a symbolic way) continue to bring minority groups into the political fold. In many instances small parties engage in legal action and take up issues that would not be taken up by the ANC and the DA. Two notable instances of this, at the national level, was the UDM's role in challenging floor-crossing legislation and the role of the FF+ in securing voting rights for citizens outside the country. Finally, both small parties and independent candidates add to the multitude of voices that help democracies thrive.

Irrespective of the fact they largely remain in a wasteland of small and micro-parties, local election 2011 showed that the multitude of small and micro-parties retain enthusiasm for electoral contestation. This is the other world of party politics, the one in which credible performances in ward and local communities matter. Some of the small parties (and independents) see these performances as full justification for their existence and for return appearances. Others, like the Mpumalanga Party, calculate that credible local performances are their launch pad for future challenges in mainstream politics.

The likely lasting impact of local election 2011 on local parties and participating independents is twofold. Firstly, local election 2011 will be remembered for the consolidation of opposition support in the DA, to the detriment of small opposition parties. Secondly, local election 2011 will be recalled for its emphasis on the increased number of registered independents, contesting but ultimately not causing notable upsets. In the final instance voter loyalty toward the ANC overwhelmingly triumphed over the challenge posed by the upsurge in independent candidates.

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