
Marred in the electoral radar: National Freedom Party, political avarice and the pitfalls of a patron-based party

Bheki R. Mngomezulu

Abstract

As a norm, the formation of political parties constitutes one of the many segments in the consolidation of democracy in modern politics. Invariably, there are different typologies of political parties. The choice of each type is informed by a confluence of factors. Each of these types of political parties has its own characteristic features. Within this context, this paper, focuses on one of the new political parties in South Africa, the National Freedom Party (NFP). The main purpose of this article is to discuss the tenets, as well as the pros and cons of patron-based political parties using the NFP, as an example. The article looks at how the party was established, how it has performed in different elections, the intra-party challenges it has wrestled with and how it resolved them. Using a qualitative approach, the article takes a closer look at the developments that took place in the NFP before the 2016 Local Government Election (LGE). Based on the enumerated chain of events, it assesses the party's prospects for recovery. Lastly, the article avers that the NFP's demise or resurrection will depend on how it cleanses itself, following internal squabbles, after the incapacitation of its leader.

Introduction

The formation of the National Freedom Party (NFP) in 2011, led by Zanele kaMagwaza-Msibi, took many people by surprise. This shock was occasioned by many factors. Firstly, the party split from the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), which has been in existence since 1975 and was in control of the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province from 1994 to 2004. Secondly, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the leader of the IFP, was perceived by many to be invincible, especially because his party survived the return of the ANC into the political arena, from the early 1990s, after over three decades. Thirdly, while the IFP had experienced some intra-party challenges, when the likes of Ziba Jiyane and other high ranking members of the party questioned the party's *modus operandi*, no woman had ever taken the party leader head-on in the manner that kaMagwaza-Msibi did. Therefore, what was done by kaMagwaza-Msibi was unprecedented.

As shall be seen later in this article, the euphoria that accompanied the formation of the NFP was evidenced in the party's good showing at the 2011 Local

Government Election (LGE), although it had just been formed. The NFP obtained 2.4 percent of the national vote and 11.6 in KwaZulu-Natal. Importantly, in the case of KwaZulu-Natal, the NFP obtained majority seats in eDumbe Local Municipality and obtained plurality votes in Nongoma Local Municipality. These areas were known to be the IFP's strongholds. The 11.6 percent obtained by the NFP, in KwaZulu-Natal, was not far from the 17.33 percent garnered by the IFP (Kotze, 2012; Africa, 2013).

Even in the 2014 national general election, the NFP had a good showing, obtaining six seats in the National Assembly, thus taking the number five spot in the list of the top political parties (Ndletyana, Tchereni, Maimela & Lerakong, 2014). This was a great achievement, when considering the fact that there were eight political parties in the National Assembly that came after the NFP, in terms of votes and seats. This point will be revisited and expounded on later.

While there is credence in the points articulated above, it is equally true that, like all other political parties, the NFP has had its fair share of intra-party challenges. The question that begs attention from the outset is the following: did the NFP face these challenges, because it is a patron-based political party, or were the challenges bound to happen anyway, regardless of the type of political party it was? The second question could be phrased as follows: what are some of the characteristic features of patron-based political parties, from a general perspective, and how is the NFP similar to or different from this general trend? Finding answers to these questions is critical, because it will enable us to determine the extent to which the NFP subscribes to or deviates from the general norm reminiscent of similar parties.

The article begins by looking at the pros and cons of patron-based political parties. This is done in order to provide the broader theoretical context within which the NFP should be analysed. Secondly, the article provides a synopsis of how the NFP was established and looks at the party's performance in the 2011 LGE, as well as the 2014 general election. In essence, this section of the article looks at how the NFP grew as a political party. Thirdly, the article does a cogent analysis of the incapacitation of the party leader and its impact on the strength of the party, including developments that took place on the eve of the 2016 LGE. Fourth, and most importantly, the focus switches to extrapolating about future prospects of the NFP. In other words, it looks at whether the party will resuscitate itself, or collapse indefinitely, following the setback it experienced in the build-up to the 2016 LGE. Lastly, the article makes some recommendations on what the NFP needs to do to ensure its continued existence.

Patron-Based Political Parties: Their Pros and Cons

In the field of political science, the formation of political parties is generally viewed as one of the activities that epitomise the consolidation of a democratic order. Traditionally, the idea of establishing a political party is conceived under different

circumstances, for different purposes, and by different individuals or groups in society. As such, given the fact that the motivating factors behind the formation of political parties are not always the same, it is not an exaggeration to argue that their nature and outlook can be expected to reflect this diversity. Within this context, the present section provides the pros and cons of patron-based political parties from a general perspective, and then demonstrates why the NFP is an archetype of a patron-based political party.

It should, briskly, be stated that this discussion should not be confused with "patronage", which has been discussed, at length, by other scholars and whose main focus is on the spoils of office and how they are used to corrupt political parties. It is worth noting here that patronage presents itself in different forms and under different circumstances (Arriola, 2009; Beresford, 2015; Gunther & Diamond, 2003; Kopecky & Mair, 2006; Mainwaring, 1999; Pappas, 2009). On the contrary, patron-based political parties are different in the sense that they all have one characteristic trait, that is, they revolve around an individual who emerges as a key figure.

In a nutshell, a patron-based political party is a party that is built around an individual – usually a charismatic figure or a strong personality who happens to be popular for one reason or the other. In essence, the strength, growth and sustainability of a patron-based political party is short-lived. The party remains strong and popular for as long as the individual around whom it is built is still around and able to lead the party. In the event that such a charismatic figure crosses to another political party, is incapacitated, quits politics or dies, the party too either fades away or dies altogether. In that sense, as a general norm, the survival of patron-based political parties remains unpredictable, with their lives hinging on an individual.

Against this backdrop, we can safely say that, indeed, the NFP is one example of a patron-based political party. It is built around a personality, i.e. the charismatic kaMagwaza-Msibi, who founded it. With her still in charge, the party thrived. As soon as she was incapacitated, the NFP showed signs of disintegration. It is only now that its leaders are making relentless efforts to rebuild the party. Noticeably, even then, the current leaders, timeously, invoke the name of kaMagwaza-Msibi and sometimes bring her to the party's rallies, even if she will not be given a chance to talk to her followers. It is believed that her presence alone has the potential to revive hope among party supporters and to resuscitate the party. It is for these reasons that the NFP qualifies to be called a patron-based political party.

The Establishment of the NFP and its Performance in the 2011 LGE and the 2014 General Election

Invariably, the motivating factors behind the formation of political parties are never uniform, not even within the same country. For the purpose of this article, and in order to place the NFP in the broader context, three types of political parties are discussed in this section. Firstly, political parties are established in order to fill the void identified by certain groups or individuals. Such political parties usually have a clearly different agenda from that of the ruling party or other pre-existing political parties. The different focus is even reflected in the party's election manifesto, which distinguishes it from the rest of the other political parties. Secondly, new political parties are established as a result of disgruntlement with their old political parties. With a few exceptions, in general, such parties fail to distinguish themselves from the old ones they were once a part of. Even the party manifestos of these types of political parties do not seem to deviate, markedly, from the manifesto of the old political parties they ditched. In most cases, they either do not last long or simply become stagnant. Thirdly, and most importantly, some political parties are established, primarily, for egoistic purposes. In other words, self-aggrandisement as well as economic and political avarice become the key motivating factors behind the establishment of such political parties.

In their discussion on what they call "species of political parties", Gunther and Diamond (2003:171) corroborate the view that the causal factors for establishing political parties vary. They do this by listing different types of political parties. These authors write:

Some parties derive programmatic stands from well-articulated ideologies rooted in political philosophies, religious beliefs or nationalistic sentiments; others are either pragmatic or have no well-defined ideological or programmatic commitments; still, others are committed to advance the interests of a particular ethnic, religious, or socio-economic group, or geographically defined constituency, in contrast to those that are heterogeneous in their electoral appeals to groups in society. (Gunther & Diamond, 2003:171)

Against this background, it is pertinent, at this juncture, to reiterate the point that there are different types of political parties. The NFP is, by all accounts, a patron-based political party. This is evidenced in the manner in which the party was established and how it fell apart in the absence of its founder, who served as a rallying point. This submission will become clear in the discussion on the brief history of how the NFP was formed. Later, intra-party divisions, occasioned by the incapacitation of its founding leader, will make this point even more vivid.

The Establishment of the NFP

In political terms, it is not an exaggeration to say that the NFP, as a political party, is still in its infant stage. The party was formed in 2011. It was the brainchild of Veronica Zanele kaMagwaza-Msibi (affectionately known to her supporters and admirers as

"VZ"), who was the first ever national chairwoman of the IFP. kaMagwaza-Msibi announced the formation of the NFP, in Durban, on 25 January 2011, following a fallout with Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the leader of the IFP. The party, itself, was officially launched in February 2011, barely three months before the 2011 Local Government Election (LGE), which meant that its preparation for the elections would be a hurried affair.

But what were the motivating factors behind the establishment of the NFP? In other words, what did kaMagwaza-Msibi hope to achieve through the NFP that she could not achieve within the IFP? Certainly, there were ideological differences within the IFP, and between kaMagwaza-Msibi and Buthelezi, regarding the modus operandi of the party. In fact, this was not the first time that Buthelezi clashed with a senior member of the IFP who was becoming popular among party members. Dr Ziba Jiyane had to leave the party after making vain attempts to transform it from within. Buthelezi could not tolerate Jiyane's open criticism of the party's failure to transform. kaMagwaza-Msibi, too, was gaining popularity and stood a chance to challenge Buthelezi for the party's leadership position. She seemed to be winning the hearts of party structures, such as the Youth Brigade and the Women's League. Sithole (2011:1169) links the breakaway of kaMagwaza-Msibi to what he calls "internal ructions" within the IFP. While not refuting the popularity of kaMagwaza-Msibi, which attracted many IFP supporters to the NFP, Sithole argues that it was the internal dynamics, within the IFP, that became the push factor. These included intolerance of dissent, premised on the traditionalism that dominated in the IFP and did not accommodate modernity.

When lobbying, negotiation and convincing all failed to produce any positive results, the decision to quit became inevitable. Inferred in the discussion above is the understanding that the NFP was established not only because there was a fallout between kaMagwaza-Msibi and Mangosuthu Buthelezi (important as this factor might be), but also because there was something wrong in the IFP tradition, which pushed its members away. Even the fact that Buthelezi was determined to lead the IFP, indefinitely, and did not even have a deputy (until recently) meant that those who aspired to lead the party, one day, became pessimistic. In a way, the IFP was bound to face a rupture from within, as a result of its internal dynamics. kaMagwaza-Msibi became the hope some IFP members were waiting for.

However, it is worth noting that, unlike many other political parties that were formed out of excitement on the eve of the first democratic election in South Africa in 1994, the NFP was established with clear goals in mind – although these goals did not show any major deviation from what other opposition political parties had stipulated in their founding documents, policies and manifestos. Some of the NFP's goals are, cogently, captured in the founding Constitution of 2011.

They are stated as follows:

- To ensure that all South Africans are given the opportunity and means to achieve political and economic freedom through transparent and accountable democratic processes.
- To restore, retain and enhance the belief in a strong family unit with particular emphasis on the respect for differing cultural values and ethics of all our people.
- To introduce, develop, promote and initiate effective service delivery programmes together with built-in checks and balances to ensure a more meaningful and improved life for all our people.
- To introduce discipline, transparency and accountability into the governance of our nation and to ensure that the goals aspired to in this, and in the South African Constitution, be attained through disciplined implementation (Constitution of the National Freedom Party, 2011:4).

As can be gauged from these objectives, they were not totally different from what other parties (including the IFP) claimed to want to achieve. What made it possible for kaMagwaza-Msibi to gain support was a confluence of factors, and not just these objectives. Among these were the following: her charismatic character, people's discontent with Buthelezi's leadership style and the undemocratic and traditional nature of the IFP. These factors added to the fact that kaMagwaza-Msibi was a woman and the fact that by their very nature, human beings get excited when something new happens or comes up.

Further reasons for the establishment of the NFP could be gauged from the preamble of the party's founding Constitution. The preamble of the NFP's Constitution gives pointers on what the NFP wanted to achieve, which was not feasible within the IFP or the ANC as the country's ruling party. Among other things, the NFP was concerned about a lack of service delivery by government, the government's failure to provide economic emancipation, failure to alleviate poverty, increased unemployment, the collapse of the healthcare sector, the proliferation of crime in the country; the education system that was inadequate; the abuse and neglect of women and children; local government's inability to provide services to people; a lack of housing; rampant maladministration and corruption in government, etc. (Constitution of the National Freedom Party, 2011:4). Surely, these gaps could not all be filled in one go. However, the mere fact that the NFP identified them, upfront, meant that at least the party knew, from the start, what gaps existed and where it envisioned its potential contribution.

The NFP was established because it was clear that the leader of the IFP could not tolerate anyone challenging his authority. As mentioned above, kaMagwaza-Msibi faced the same challenge as Dr Ziba Jiyane, who was also forced to leave the IFP when it became clear that it was not easy to reconfigure the IFP with Buthelezi still at the helm. In that sense, Sithole (2011) was on target when he averred that

internal dynamics within the IFP, in terms of leadership style, party policies and ideological differences, weakened the IFP thereby making it possible for kaMagwaza-Msibi to appeal to the hearts of many IFP supporters who were not happy with the status quo within their party (the IFP).

The popularity of the NFP had very little to do with the party's stated objectives or policy position. This view is predicated on the fact that there was nothing special in these objectives, nor did all those who followed kaMagwaza-Msibi even read these objectives. On the contrary, the NFP's popularity was as a result of several factors. Among them were the following: the ideological struggle between the traditionalists and the modernists; a lack of transformation within the IFP; the charismatic nature of kaMagwaza-Msibi; the fact that a woman was bold enough to take Buthelezi head-on; and the optimism that, under the leadership of kaMagwaza-Msibi, those who aspired to move up the political ladder stood a better chance under the NFP than they did under the IFP. Based on this assessment, we can safely say that the main drawcard here was not what the NFP stood for, but who kaMagwaza-Msibi was as a female politician. Thus, the NFP is a patron-based political party.

The Performance of the NFP in the 2011 LGE

The NFP's first test came through the 2011 LGE. The second test would come three years later during the 2014 general election. As shall be seen below, in both instances, the party did well by performing better than other older political parties. For analytical purposes, it is imperative to do an analysis of the NFP's performance in the two elections. This will provide the bases on which the assessment of the party's good or bad performance could be done.

As indicated above, the 2011 LGE served as the first testing ground for the NFP. The party had just been established and it found itself having to compete against several other political parties – some of which had been in the political field for much longer.

One of the early successes of the NFP was its ability to divorce itself from the IFP and establish its own identity, independent of the IFP's shadow and influence. In recognition of this identity, some members of the IFP who, after self-introspection, came to the realisation that their political goals could not be achieved through the IFP, quit the IFP for the NFP. As a consequence of this, the IFP's support dwindled significantly, while that of the NFP showed conspicuous signs of growth. In that sense, the NFP showed early signs of success in the South African political landscape.

The second success of the NFP was to make its presence felt in the 2011 LGE, despite the fact that the party had only been established barely three months before that election. This was evidenced by the fact that the newly-formed NFP managed to

collect 1.2 million votes or 2.4 percent in that election. Importantly, in the case of KwaZulu-Natal, which was the NFP's support base, the party obtained majority seats in eDumbe Local Municipality and obtained plurality votes in Nongoma Local Municipality. In KwaZulu-Natal, in general, the NFP obtained 11.6 percent of the provincial vote compared to its rival, the IFP, which garnered 17.33 percent (Kotze, 2012; Africa, 2013). The NFP reconfigured the political landscape in South Africa, more especially in KwaZulu-Natal. Table 1 on the following page shows how the NFP performed in the 2011 LGE and confirms the comparative analysis of various election results over a 20-year period, provided by the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA) (2014).

Noticeably, the NFP performed better than seven other political parties as well as independent candidates. These political parties, in their ranking order were: UDM, PAC, ACDP, VF PLUS, APC, UCDP and AZAPO. Among themselves, and the independent candidates, they did not win a single council and collectively managed to get only 296 of the 8 436 seats.

TABLE 1: The national results for the 2011 local government elections

| Party | Councils | Seats | % Support Won |
|---------------|------------|--------------|---------------|
| ANC | 198 | 5 633 | 62.0 |
| DA | 18 | 1 555 | 23.9 |
| IFP | 5 | 352 | 3.6 |
| COPE | 0 | 236 | 2.1 |
| NFP | 2 | 224 | 2.4 |
| Other Parties | 2 | 140 | 2.0 |
| Total | 225 | 8 140 | 96.0 |

Source: Issued by the Electoral Commission, Centurion, 21 May 2011

But the success of the NFP should not be overstated. For example, when zooming into specific municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal where the NFP competed strongly with the IFP, the latter performed better. Therefore, another area of analysis in trying to establish the NFP's standing and performance should, specifically, be the 2011 municipal election results in KZN. A quick look at the performance of the NFP in six randomly selected municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal, in 2011, makes for an interesting read. The picture painted by these election results shows that the NFP did not do well, when compared with the ANC, DA and the IFP. However, the party still performed slightly better than the IFP at eThekweni Municipality, although the Minority Front was one seat up (winning 11 seats) compared to the NFP. Table 2 below provides the breakdown of election results for these four political parties in six big municipalities, in KZN, in that election.

The NFP's Performance in the 2014 general election

The success, highlighted in Table 2, boosted the morale of the party and propelled it to strive forward, oozing with confidence. As such, the party leadership, which included the National Working Committee (NWC) and the National Executive Committee (NEC), resolved to talk to the branches with the view to selling the now plausible idea that the NFP should contest the 2014 general election.

TABLE 2: The performance of the four dominant political parties in KZN in the 2011 local government elections

| Municipality | ANC | DA | IFP | NFP | Total |
|---------------|-----|----|-----|-----|----------------------------|
| Zululand | 4 | - | 6 | 4 | 14 |
| Uthukela | 7 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 13 |
| Umkhanyakude | 6 | - | 4 | 2 | 12 |
| Umgungundlovu | 13 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 18 |
| Ilembe | 8 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 12 |
| Ethekwini | 126 | 43 | 9 | 10 | 188 [plus 16 others = 204] |

Source: IEC National and Provincial Election Results, 2011

Indeed, this lobbying proved to be successful as all the party's branches welcomed the idea. As the date of the 2014 general election drew closer, kaMagwaza-Msibi was confident enough to inform the South African public that her party would take people by surprise and gain votes in the nine provinces across the length and breadth of South Africa. She averred "We will be fielding premier candidates in all nine provinces and a presidential candidate". Guided by the party's Constitution and party resolution to change the mode of operation in the South African political space, kaMagwaza-Msibi unabashedly assured the electorate that: "Our election lists have people with strong community and leadership background" (BusinessDay, 13 February 2014). Implicit in this statement was the argument that the NFP was different from other political parties (including the IFP from which it had separated) and that it would provide a new political home to the electorate.

When the results were announced, the NFP made it to the top five parties, nationally, having collected 1.57 percent of the votes or six seats in the National Assembly. What is worth noting is the fact that, as with the 2011 LGE, the NFP did better than seven older political parties (UDM, FF+, COPE, ACDP, PAC, AIC and APC). It also outshone the other new political party (AGANG SA) in the 2014 general election. Table 3 shows how each of the thirteen political parties, that managed to get parliamentary seats performed.

Given the fact that the NFP, just like the IFP, had a strong base in KwaZulu-Natal, it became necessary for the party to assess its success in terms of how it performed

in this province. Here too, there is compelling evidence to suggest that, although the NFP could have done better, it managed to have a good showing – coming immediately after the IFP, a party that has been in the political game since 1975. Table 4 on the following page shows how the top five political parties performed in the 2014 provincial election in KwaZulu-Natal (the Minority Front, which was another one of the six political parties that managed to obtain seats in KZN, had already taken a knock following the demise of its leader, Amichand Rajbansi, and, therefore, could not make it to the top five list, having managed only 1.02 percent of the provincial votes or simply one seat in the Provincial Legislature).

TABLE 3: The results of the 2014 general election indicating the number of seats for each party

| Political Party | % Votes | No. of Seats |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| ANC | 62.15 | 249 |
| DA | 22.23 | 89 |
| EFF | 6.35 | 25 |
| IFP | 2.40 | 10 |
| NFP | 1.57 | 6 |
| UDM | 1.00 | 4 |
| FF+ | 0.90 | 4 |
| COPE | 0.67 | 3 |
| ACDP | 0.57 | 3 |
| AIC | 0.53 | 3 |
| AGANG SA | 0.28 | 2 |
| PAC | 0.21 | 1 |
| APC | 0.17 | 1 |
| Total | 99.30 | 400 |

Source: IEC 2014 National and Provincial Election Results

**TABLE 4: 2014 Election results
in KwaZulu-Natal**

| Party | % Votes | No. of Seats |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| ANC | 64.52 | 52 |
| DA | 12.76 | 10 |
| IFP | 10.86 | 9 |
| NFP | 7.31 | 6 |
| EFF | 1.85 | 2 |
| MF | 1.02 | 1 |
| Total | 98.31 | 80 |

Source: IEC National and Provincial Election Results, 2014

The results presented above were critical in the NFP's preparation for the 2016 LGE, as they indicated to the party that its goal was not insurmountable. They gave the party a tantalising picture of what to expect if the elections were to take place in a few days' time. But, as shall be seen later in this article, the incapacitation of the party's president and, subsequent, developments within the party rendered it almost dysfunctional and even unable to participate in the 2016 LGE. This was sad news to the NFP, as it was on the verge of resuscitating itself after spending time addressing internal squabbles.

The Incapacitation of VZ kaMagwaza-Msibi and its Impact on the NFP

When kaMagwaza-Msibi took ill in November 2014, this incident sounded death knells for the NFP, which was still a relatively new political party. To make matters worse, the incident was covered with a veil of secrecy. It was only in November 2015, a year later, that the real sickness was revealed as a stroke. Before then, the common story was that she was suffering from fatigue, occasioned by the campaign for the 2014 general election. kaMagwaza-Msibi was said to have been advised by her doctors to rest in order to recover, before resuming her political duties. In the meantime, however, the party fell into disarray. Both the NWC and the NEC were not given the respect they deserved. At one point, Rammekoa Alex Kekana, the party's Deputy President, was suspended on the allegation that he did not respect the party's policies. Although the decision was later revoked, it divided the party unnecessarily.

In retrospect, we can safely say that with the party's President having been incapacitated, political opportunism crept in and rendered the party almost dysfunctional. Even when the NEC and the NWC tried their utmost to keep the party afloat, infighting and ill discipline, in total disregard of party rules and procedures spelt out in the party's Constitution, all contributed immensely to the evident weakening of the party. But was it really necessary for the NFP to fall into disarray in the absence of its President? The answer to that question is an emphatic NO! The party's 2011 Constitution spells out all the roles and functions each office-bearer should perform. Importantly, under 5.5, the Constitution is clear on what should happen in the absence of the President and

other office-bearers. For example, with regards to the President, the Constitution states:

5.5 Incapacity of Office Bearers

5.5.1 In the event of death and/or permanent incapacity or vacation of office of the:

5.5.1.1 President, then:-

- (a) the Deputy President shall assume the position of Acting President until such time as the next General National Conference meets where a new President will be elected,
- (b) provided that:-
 - i. such General National Conference will not have the status of an Elective General Conference unless such Conference has been scheduled to be an Elective National Conference in terms of section 4.2.4;
 - ii. the procedure for the nomination and election for a National Office-Bearer in terms of sections 4.2.8-11 is followed.

(NFP Constitution, 2011)

Given this clear guideline, there was no need for undeserving members of the NWC, NEC or the general party membership to be hysterical in any way. Vikizitha Mlotshwa, the NFP's KZN Chairperson was informed by this Constitutional prescript when he stated the following during a media briefing in Pietermaritzburg:

There is no crisis in the NFP, because there is a Deputy President and a national Chairperson. Those are the heads of the party. So if the President is not in, the Deputy President – according to our Constitution – is taking over work that used to be performed by the President (SABC News, 26 November 2016). As per Mlotshwa's statement, all the NFP leaders and members needed to do was to simply follow the prescriptions outlined in the Constitution, and keep the party intact until such time that the party's President had recovered, or until an announcement was made to elect her replacement in accordance with the Constitution. What happened in the party was unwarranted; it was an unfortunate situation. Some factions emerged and tore the party apart. Vice-president Kekana was undermined by some members of the party, with some even accusing him and the NEC and NWC of trying to take over the party from kaMagwaza-Msibi, whereas they were implementing the Constitutional prescripts. By all accounts, this was irresponsible and cheap politics, which undermined the party's Constitution.

As kaMagwaza-Msibi's absence was prolonged, more cracks in the NFP became visible. Those saddled with the responsibility of instilling discipline in the party found themselves having to hold disciplinary hearings for its members, in different branches, and against those holding senior leadership positions. The charges ranged from causing divisions within the party, not respecting the party's Constitution and policies, to addressing the media without any formal authorisation. The fact that NEC members, such as Nhlanhla Khubisa, Maliyakhe Shelembe, Scelo Mabika, Vikizitha Mlotshwa and Cindy Maphumulo-Masinga were

suspended from the party is indicative of the serious challenges the NFP had to contend with. Unfortunately, instead of the disciplinary processes bringing the party together, they sowed even more divisions. For example, the party's executive was not united in terms of communication and the execution of party decisions. It was in this context that the NFP's Treasurer-General (Xolani Ndlovu) had to be expelled after failing to pay the deposit that would have allowed the NFP to participate in the 2016 LGE. The normal procedure of calling party members to order was, at times, misconstrued as purging by those who were on the receiving end. Since the 2016 LGE, the party has embarked on the process to mend the wall and regroup in readiness for the 2019 general election, as well as the 2021 LGE.

The Build-Up to the August 2016 LGE and the NFP's Woes

As speculation began regarding the possible date of the 2016 LGE, the NFP was thrown into a state of frenzy. Party members and the general South African public wanted to know about the status of the party's President and whether she would recover, on time, to participate in the preparations for the forthcoming election. Interestingly, the focus was not on how the current party leadership was progressing in terms of its preparations. On the contrary, the focus was placed on an individual – the perceived patron of the party.

Eventually, on Monday, 23 May 2016, Des van Rooyen, Minister for Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) proclaimed 3 August 2016 as the day on which the 2016 LGE would be held. This was in keeping with section 24(2) of the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998 (Act No. 117 of 1998). Such proclamation put it beyond any shadow of a doubt that, indeed, the election would take place. As was to be expected, all political parties rolled up their sleeves in readiness for the election. Unfortunately, the NFP's woes continued, unabated. However, the prevailing situation did not deter the party from launching its election manifesto at Cecil Emmet Stadium in Vryheid on 19 June 2016. kaMagwaza-Msibi made a surprise showing at the rally. Instead of reassuring members, however, her showing sparked even more questions about her health. She never spoke at all, but just waved at the crowd. Her daughter, Gugu Gumede, who is not even an elected official in the party, read her mother's speech. This raised eyebrows for some. Explaining this anomaly, kaMagwaza-Msibi's spokesperson, Canaan Mdletshe, stated that the party felt that she would be too emotional midway in her address, which would not be good for her health; hence, the decision not to let her read the speech (Sunday Times, 19 June 2016).

As the semblance of hope built momentum that the NFP was readying itself for the 2016 LGE, like all other political parties, the unforeseen happened. It soon emerged that the party had missed the IEC deadline to pay the deposit to register for the election. This incident threw the party into disarray, as it meant that the party was unlikely to participate in the election. As would be expected, the blame game

ensued. The main culprit was said to be the party's Treasurer-General, Xolani Ndlovu – perhaps, correctly so, given the fact that he held the party's purse. Some party members accused Ndlovu of deliberately withholding payment for registration. The last-minute attempts by the party leadership to approach the IEC and the Electoral Court (and even contemplating approaching the Constitutional Court) failed to produce any positive results. On 29 July 2016, the Electoral Court ruled that the NFP could not participate in the 2016 LGE. Even when the party requested to be allowed to contest the election in KwaZulu-Natal only, this request could not be accepted, as it would have been in contravention of the electoral laws that govern the Electoral Court. These developments shattered the party's hopes to rebuild itself.

All the other political parties supported the NFP in its bid to appeal the ruling. The IFP was the only party that vehemently opposed this bid and even went to court to oppose it. This strengthened suspicion that the IFP might have had a hand in the NFP's failure to pay the deposit. Of course, no evidence was immediately available to buttress this insinuation.

As if this was not enough, some senior members of the party, in leadership positions, were subjected to party scrutiny and reprimand – with some being suspended on allegations of collusion in preventing the party from participating in the election. The party's Secretary-General, Nhlanhla Khubisa, as well as the Chairperson, Maliyakhe Shelembe, were reported to have tendered their resignations. This caused even more confusion within the party. Khubisa was, subsequently, reported to have rescinded his resignation, but some party officials denied this and considered him gone. The issue was later laid to rest and Khubisa resumed his duties. On Monday, 5 September 2016, Xolani Ndlovu, the NFP's Treasurer-General, was officially expelled from the party for having failed to pay the deposit to the IEC, so that the NFP could participate in the 2016 LGE (Herald Live, 5 September 2016). By all accounts, the NFP's inability to participate in the LGE caused further divisions that could have been averted.

Invariably, some party members started looking elsewhere for more answers to how the NFP got to where it was. In addition to blaming fellow party members (rightly or wrongly so), other political parties were also not spared. Some were implicated and accused of having played their role in sowing divisions in the NFP. Maria Busisiwe Tshabalala, Secretary-General of the NFP Youth Movement, accused the IFP of having hatched a plan to prevent the NFP from participating in the 2016 LGE, so that the IFP could get more votes and run KZN municipalities. She stated:

We call on the NWC (National Working Committee) to launch a thorough investigation into what resulted in our party not meeting the IEC deadline of paying a deposit, so that we can contest the elections, because there is a strong belief that some of our senior leaders had been bribed by the IFP, with huge amounts of money, to make sure that they deliver our people, especially in KwaZulu-

Natal, to vote for the ailing IFP in order for it to govern in KwaZulu-Natal municipalities. (BusinessDay, 4 July 2016)

Whether these accusations were true or not, the fact of the matter is that the NFP showed its determination to get to the bottom of what could have resulted in the party failing to pay the required deposit. What frustrated the party was the fact that it already had plans in place on how to approach the LGE. For example, the party had planned to target the 19 municipalities that were declared hung after the 2011 election. Two of those had since fallen under the IFP, following by-elections, while the remaining 17 were co-run by the NFP and the ANC.

Once it was clear that the NFP would not be taking part in the 2016 LGE, the NFP vote was up for grabs. Political parties used different strategies to achieve the same goal. Given previous relations after the 2011 LGE, the ANC opted to approach the party's national leadership in order to strike a deal. Eventually, the NFP agreed to let its members vote for the ANC. The IFP, DA and EFF went straight to the voters and persuaded them. The IFP appears to have been the major beneficiary of the NFPs non-participation considering the number of municipalities it won. Whether this vindicates Tshabalala or not remains subject for debate.

The Resurrection or Demise of the NFP

The resurrection or demise of the NFP will be contingent upon the decisions that the party takes from now on. As discussed earlier, the NFP had a good showing in both the 2011 LGE and the 2014 general election. What happened with the 2016 LGE was a setback. The NFP only participated in the Nquthu Local Municipality, which falls under Umzinyathi District Municipality, where it only managed to get two seats. Given that the party's members might have voted for either the ANC or any of the opposition political parties, it would be difficult to assess the party's performance in this municipality. In 2011, the NFP came third with 16.2 percent or five of the 34 seats. The top two parties were the ANC and IFP at 40.4 percent and 40.1 percent, respectively, which amounted to 14 seats each. The other seat went to the DA, which obtained 1.7 percent. Overall, the NFP obtained 5 224 ward and PR seats in 2016, or 0.01 percent, as opposed to the 644 917, or 2.4 percent, obtained in 2011, as indicated in Table 1 on page 639. This marked a decline.

But the resurrection of the NFP will not just happen automatically. In order for the party to rise up again, it will have to embark on a restructuring programme. This would entail sorting out the leadership uncertainties. If kaMagwaza-Msibi is not yet ready to resume her duties, the party needs to revert to its Constitution and use it to remove the cloud that has engulfed the party for too long. Secondly, both the NWC and the NEC will have to be purified so that only "real" members of the party occupy these leadership positions – so should the general membership. Thirdly, to avert a repeat of what happened in the 2016 LGE, the party should get to the bottom of what resulted in the failure to pay the deposit to the IEC. If, indeed, there was a "third

force", as alleged by the NFP Youth Movement Secretary-General and others, this assertion will have to be authenticated and mechanisms put in place to prevent the future occurrence of the same.

Apart from these technical issues, the party leadership needs to start, right away, to rebuild its branches and all party structures, such as the Youth League and Women's League, in readiness for the 2019 general election. Party leaders need to instil confidence, among the electorate, that the NFP is still alive before some old members resort to going back to the IFP or join other political parties. With both the EFF and the DA making inroads and appealing to the youth, the onus is on the NFP leadership to make the party visible and portray it as one of the political homes for the youth. Another issue that the NFP needs to act on is to define its relationship with the ANC and make its members aware of the position it has taken. In a nutshell, the party leadership should portray the NFP as one of the political actors in the South African political landscape. The 2011 momentum needs to be revived. This is not insurmountable. There is no doubt that the party has capable leaders. All that is needed is the political will by everyone within the party, at all levels, to join hands and rebuild the NFP.

What would bring the party to its knees would be the failure of the leadership to act swiftly on the issues enumerated above, and waiting until closer to the 2019 election to revive the party. Secondly, it would be foolhardy and detrimental to the party for the leadership to show signs of disunity by attacking one another in public. Isolating and dealing with those who might be trying to destroy the party from within is critical. Most importantly, what would kill the NFP would be the temptation to disregard or disrespect the party's Constitution and policies. In its current form, the NFP's Constitution provides clear guidance on how the party should proceed in the event that one of the office-bearers is incapacitated. The scramble for positions is an epitome of political avarice. It amounts to narcissism and self-aggrandisement – a menace to any political party worldwide. All of these features are detrimental to the party's future. Therefore, they need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Conclusion

In conclusion, patron-based political parties have one thing in common: they are all built around an individual leader. Secondly, they have a common history; they crumble when their founding leader either leaves or is incapacitated. The NFP is one such party. The party started off very well in 2011. It sustained momentum in 2014. With its leader being forced out of action by illness, opportunists used the space to fight for positions. The party's Constitution was undermined. The NFP's failure to participate in the 2016 LGE robbed it of its chance to test its might by putting it in a state of political coma. This left many party members disillusioned. With the 2019 general election coming, the NFP needs to pull itself together and revive all its structures. The potential is there. All that is needed now is a clear focus and determination. The longer the party waits to regroup itself, the more difficult it will be

for it to regain the confidence of the electorate. The onus is on the party to redeem itself. The NFP has the ability to do that given the crop of leaders who are there. All it needs is the political will to act and the courage to take some tough decisions, even if they are not popular. After all, nothing can be cured by simply massaging it.

References

- Africa, C. 2013. *More of the same? Taking stock of South Africa's electoral landscape in the run-up to the 2014 elections*. Johannesburg: Hanns Seidel Foundation.
- Arriola, L.R. 2009. *Patronage and political stability in Africa*. *Comparative Political Studies*, 42(10):1339-1362.
- Beresford, A. 2015. Power, patronage and gatekeeper politics in South Africa. *African Affairs*:1-23. *BusinessDay*, 13 February 2014.
- BusinessDay*, 4 July 2016. "IFP members are bribing officials, National Freedom Party Alleges".
- Constitution of the National Freedom Party as adopted on 2 December 2011.
- Gunther, R. & Diamond, L. 2003. "Species of political parties: A new typology." *Party Politics*, 9(2) (March):167-199.
- Grenoble, A.S. 2010. Hybrid political orders. Available at www.irenees.net/bdf_fichenotions-223_en.html (Accessed on 23 August 2016).
- Herald Live*, 5 September 2016. "NFP expels Treasurer-General after Local Government Elections blunder."
- IEC National and Provincial Election Results, 2011. IEC National and Provincial Election Results, 2014.
- Katz, R.S. & Mair, P. 1995. Changing models of party organization and party democracy: The emergence of the Cartel Party. *Party Politics*, 1(1):5-28.
- Kotze, D. 2012. "COPE – Grandiose entrance and micro status". In Booysen, S. (Ed.). *Local elections in South Africa: Parties, people, politics*. Stellenbosch: SUN Press. Kopecky, P. & Mair, P. 2006. "Political parties and patronage in contemporary democracies: An introduction." Paper prepared for the workshop on political parties and patronage, ECPR Joint Sessions of workshops, Nicosia, 25-30 April.
- Mainwaring, S. 1999. *Rethinking party systems in the third wave of democratization: The case of Brazil*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Ndletyana, M., Makhalemele, P.O. & Mathekg, R. 2013. *Patronage politics divides us: A study of poverty, patronage and inequality in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Real Africa Publishers.
- Ndletyana, M., Tchereni, B., Maimela, D. & Lerakong, S. 2014. Research report. "Voting trends 20 years into democracy. Analysis of South Africa's national and provincial elections". Johannesburg: MISTRA.
- Pappas, T.S. 2009. "Patrons against partisans: The politics of patronage in mass ideological parties." *Party Politics*, 15(3)315-333. May 2009.
- Republic of South Africa. *Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998* (Act No. 117 of 1998).
- Roniger, L. 2004. "Political clientelism, democracy, and market economy." *Comparative politics*, 36(3)353-375. April 2004.
- SABC News, 26 November 2016. "NFP deputy takes over the reins for now".
- Scott, J.C. 1972. "Patron-client politics and political change in Southeast Asia." *The American Political Science Review*, 66(1):91-113. March 1972.
- Seligman, L.G. 1950. "The study of political leadership." *The American Political Science Review*, 14(4):904-915.

- Shakil, R.H. & Marzia, K. 2013. Political parties and good governance: Bangladesh's perspective. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8(5)37-45. March-April 2013.
- Sithole, J. 2011. "Inkatha Freedom Party – National Freedom Party dynamics in the KwaZulu-Natal Province." *Journal of Public Administration*, 46(3.1):1169-1181.
- Sunday Times, 19 June 2016. "NFP leader's manifesto launch speech delivered by daughter."
- The Electoral Commission, 21 May 2011.
- The Russel-Cooke Voluntary Sector Legal Handbook.