

The ‘Ballot and the Brick’: Protest, Voting and Non-Voting in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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Abstract

Over the last decade protest has become an enduring feature of the post-apartheid political landscape. Despite this wave of protest the African National Congress (ANC) has retained its dominant status, securing 62% of the vote in the last national elections held in May 2014. The endurance of the ANC’s electoral support in spite of the high levels of protest has led leading political commentator Susan Booysen to conclude that protests in South Africa form part of a ‘dual repertoire’ of political contestation. She argues that protests are used to signal grievances to the ANC between elections but that, ultimately, people remain loyal to the party of liberation. This article interrogates Booysen’s claim through advancing an analysis of voting district and ward level data in protest hotspots. The article argues that there are weaknesses in the methodological base of Booysen’s thesis. By analysing the support for the ANC amongst the estimated eligible voting age population, this article suggests a different relationship between voting and protesting in post-apartheid South Africa.

Introduction

Political participation is often held as one measure of the quality of democracy but what is considered as political participation is often viewed through a narrow conceptual lens dominated by the concerns of the Global North, focussing upon electoral turnout and membership of trade unions and political parties (Norris 2002). Studies of participation in the Global South tend to study what have been termed ‘invented’ or ‘invited’ spaces of political participation (see Cornwall 2002, Hickey and Mohan 2004, Mirafteb and Wills 2005, Cornwall and Coehlo 2007, Coehlo and von Lieres 2010). However, these are usually studied as analytically distinct spaces and the connections between the two have not been adequately

theorised. McAdam and Tarrow (2010) argue that in democratic societies that protest and voting are amongst two of the most significant ways in which conflict in democratic systems can be registered. However, the relationship between these two forms of what could be termed ‘invited’ and ‘invented’ forms political participation is often under-researched and under-theorised (although see Norris 2002; Bernhagen and March 2007; McAdam and Tarrow 2010; Alexander 2012). This article considers the relationship between these two modes of political participation in the context of South Africa.

Since 2004 South Africa has witnessed a growing protest wave primarily emanating from the predominately Black¹ and socio-economically marginalised townships and informal settlements (Alexander 2010). The protests are most frequently described as ‘service delivery’ protests reflecting the common demands protestors generally raise for the provision for housing, water and electricity in these under-developed areas. Many of these protests have been disruptive or even violent in nature with roads barricaded, tyres burnt and government buildings such as clinics and libraries burnt down, a tactic reminiscent of the struggle against apartheid (Alexander 2010; Von Holdt et al 2011). These protests have been described by Peter Alexander as ‘insurrectionary’ and ‘amounting to a rebellion of the poor’ (Alexander 2010: 25). Scholars such as Susan Booysen (2007, 2012) are critical of the idea that such protests are rebellious and point to the continuing electoral dominance of the ANC in the very same poor communities that are at the heart of protest activity. She argues that in South Africa protest form part of a ‘dual repertoire’ which poor communities use to fight for service delivery between elections but that protestors ultimately remain loyal to the party of liberation at election time (Booyesen 2007: 22). While the African National Congress may continue to dominate electoral politics, securing 62% of the vote in the last national elections of 2014, analysts have highlighted the decline in voter turnout, particularly amongst young people (Schulz-Herxenberg 2009, 2014a, 2014b). Indeed, voter turnout has declined rapidly

over the twenty years of South Africa's democracy from a high of 86%² in 1994 to 57% in 2014 (Schulz-Herxenberg 2014b). While the decline in turnout may be seen as a 'normalisation' of democracy (Carlin 2006) it may also erode the legitimacy of democratic institutions and arguably weaken the quality of democracy, particularly in a dominant one party state such as South Africa (Schulz-Herxenberg 2014b).

Commentators have noted that protests in South Africa are characterised by their highly localised nature, often taking place in only a particular section of a settlement (Bond and Mottair 2013). This, I argue, necessitates a methodological approach which goes beyond the analysis of municipal or ward level data to analyse the voting districts in which protest has occurred. The article analyses the election results of three protest 'hotspots'³: three informal settlements in the Gauteng province: Thembelihle, Barcelona and Driezick Extension 4. As well as analysing the actual result this article further advances the study of South African elections by placing the results in the context of the estimated eligible voting age population (EVAP). In so doing, the article challenges the methodological base for Booysen's thesis and presents an alternative approach. In the three cases presented there is a general trend of decline in electoral support for the ANC between 2004 and 2014. Yet, this has not directly translated into support for opposition parties. The article suggests that in a dominant one party state, such as South Africa, voters may be choosing to abstain from voting as a sign of their political dissatisfaction. However, these claims are provisional as the study of voter abstention in South Africa is an area in need of further research.

South Africa's Contentious Democracy

South Africa held its first democratic 'one person, one vote' elections on 27 April 1994. In the twenty years since South Africa has held five national elections in which the ANC has dominated, securing over 60% of the vote in every election (Schulz-Herxenberg 2014a).

Although multiple parties contest South Africa's elections, the dominance of the ANC means that few scholars understand South Africa to be a multi-party democracy, as Booysen suggests (Booyesen 2007: 21). Most scholars agree that South Africa should be understood as a dominant party system which has implications for the quality of democracy and electoral participation (see Giliomee et al 2001; Habib and Taylor 2001; Southall 2001; Habib and Schulz-Herxenberg). Although the main opposition party in South Africa, the Democratic Alliance (DA), has been growing for many voters it is still not regarded as a feasible electoral alternative to the ANC. In large part this is related to the history of the DA, the product of a merger of the Democratic Party with the National Party, the party which led the apartheid regime. The legacy of apartheid means that, as Mattes (2014) highlights, 'race' continues to play an important role in South Africa's electoral politics. Numerous studies have demonstrated that a key attribute that voters examine in South Africa is whether a party is considered to racially and ethnically inclusive. In the South African National Election Survey only 39% of respondents considered the DA to be racially inclusive (cited in Mattes 2014: 183). Although Booysen (2007) argues that dissatisfaction with the ANC can be expressed at the ballot box through voting for opposition parties, a lack of feasible alternatives may make this an unviable option. The result of the ANC's electoral dominance, Schulz-Herxenberg suggests, is that the party has 'little incentive to improve its accountability and responsiveness' (2014b: 1). In light of this, it could be argued that in a dominant party system protest has a greater significance as a form of political participation and expression.

Although there are debates regarding how protests should be counted, by most measures protest has been increasing (see Alexander 2010; Nyar and Wray 2012; Duncan 2014). Figure 1 presents data on protest captured from media reports by the Rebellion of the Poor protest monitor based at the University of Johannesburg. As the chart shows protest has been increasing since 2004 with at least one protest a day occurring in 2012.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Protests most commonly centre around demands for ‘service delivery’, the provision of basic services such as housing, water and electricity in townships and informal settlements. For Booysen protests are a ‘mechanism’ used by communities to gain better service delivery (2007: 21). However, a number of commentators have suggested that protests are not just about service delivery but are reflective of wider concerns about deepening inequality and a wider crisis in the quality of South African democracy (Friedman 2012; Evans 2014; Alexander et al 2014a). In this way South Africa’s protest wave has resonance with the wider global protest movement. In Europe and North America the issues raised by the *Indignados* and Occupy movements have critiqued the failings of representative democracy and demanded the more equitable distribution of resources in society (Burawoy *forthcoming*). Although protests in South Africa have not taken on the mass character of their counterparts in the North, with protests in South Africa generally smaller, more decentralised and dislocated from one another, there are similarities in the concerns and demands expressed.⁴ This is particularly apparent if one considers how many protests in South Africa express concerns with accessing urban land which exceeds the narrowly conceived ‘service delivery’ paradigm and speaks to wider issues of post-apartheid land redistribution, reconciliation and justice. Therefore, I argue that so-called service delivery protests should not be solely understood as a mechanism through which to gain service delivery, as Booysen suggests, but be understood as an expression of wider concerns about the quality of South African democracy.

Analysing election results in post-apartheid South Africa

Susan Booysen has been the leading political commentator in assessing the link between voting and protesting in South Africa. However, there are a number of methodological weaknesses in her approach including her selection of protest sites and her analysis of election data. In a 2012 article Booysen undertakes an analysis of local government election results of seven protest areas; Ermelo, Ficksburg, Umtata, Wesselton, Green Village, Ipelegeng and Rustenburg. Booysen provides no methodological rationale as to why these areas were selected. Some areas such as Ermelo and Ficksburg were at the heart of large scale protest activity in 2011. Ficksburg is etched into the memory of many South Africans after the death of protest leader Andries Tatane at the hands of the police was captured on film. The protest sites that Booysen selects have often been the site of large but often one-off protest actions rather than areas of sustained protest. I argue that in order to assess the relation between protesting and support for the ANC one should look at areas of sustained protest. The cases selected for analysis here have been based upon data collected by the Rebellion of the Poor database based at the South African Research Chair in Social Change at the University of Johannesburg. The database has collected over 2,000 media reports on protest from 2004 until the present (see Runciman et al 2015). The three areas identified for this article are amongst the most protest-prone areas between 2009 and 2014, according to the database. The cases selected are all located in Gauteng which is reflective of the high levels of protest in the province but was also necessitated by the methodology which required local knowledge of these areas, as will be discussed further below.

As outlined above, protest in South Africa is a highly localised phenomena, often taking part only within one section of a ward, the geopolitical subdivisions of municipalities. In her analysis Booysen (2007, 2012) frequently draws upon municipal level results. However, I contend that the social composition of municipalities which frequently include well-serviced and more affluent areas that have not embarked upon protest make this

problematic for drawing out the relationship between support for the ANC and protesting. Booyesen does make use of ward level data that provides a more accurate level of analysis, but even ward level data presents problems for analysing the relation to protest in South Africa. As I have argued, protests frequently only occur within particular sections of a ward, most frequently areas of informal settlement or areas which experience comparatively poorer levels of service delivery. As table 3 demonstrates while the majority of ward 77 have flush toilets this is of little comfort to those living in the informal section of Barcelona which until 2012 had no access to water-borne sanitation. Furthermore, wards can also include areas of differing racial and socio-economic characteristics as is the case in ward 5. Ward 5 consists of a Thembelihle, large informal settlement populated predominately by Black Africans, and a section of Lenasia, a formerly Indian-only township. Given the differing voting patterns amongst race groups in South Africa (see Lodge 1999) and the differing socio-economic conditions it becomes problematic to draw conclusions about Thembelihle from ward level data. Thus, in this article I use both ward and voting district data to analyse the relationship between support for the ANC and protesting. Analysing election results at this level required local knowledge from residents in order to identify the areas which have undergone the most sustained protest in their ward and necessitated a focus in Gauteng.

This article also provides a different approach to the analysis of election results than that used by Booyesen. Booyesen uses only the overall percentage by which the ANC won the ward or municipality and the number of seats this translated to within the municipality. What this overlooks is the importance of the declining turnout and a consideration of what role abstention may play. As I will go on to demonstrate, while the ANC may be able to retain a high vote share this is based upon a decreasing electorate. I argue that in order to fully understand the relationship between support for the ANC and protesting, election results need to be interpreted through an analysis of the actual number of votes cast as well as placing this

analysis within a calculation of the estimated voting age population (EVAP). To date, analysis of voting results amongst the EVAP have tended to be done at the national and provincial level (Schulz-Herxenberg 2009, 2014a, 2014b). However, there is a need to take this analysis further. In this article estimates for ward level EVAP have been supplied by StatsSA. No equivalent data could be obtained for the voting district. These figures have been calculated through counting the number of dwellings within the voting district and estimating the population through the average household size for the ward and then calculating the proportion of the population eligible to vote based upon ward level data drawn from the census. While this measure may not be entirely accurate using both the figures for the ward and voting district together builds a more comprehensive picture of voting trends in protest hotspots than has been previously available.

By looking at ward and voting district level data more closely this article presents an alternative methodological lens through which to analyse the relationship between voting and protesting. In so doing it questions the role of abstention. Voter abstention is most commonly seen as a result of voter apathy or, in newly transitioned societies, as evidence of the ‘normalisation’ of democracy (Carlin 2006: 639). For Booyesen, abstention is seen as a ‘mild form of punishment’ (2012: 300) for the ANC with her identifying ‘real’ punishment as a vote for the DA. While voting for the DA may indeed be a punishment to the ANC it overlooks the political reality in which most South Africans find themselves unable to select a viable opposition party, as argued above. In such a context, I argue that the role of voter abstention should therefore be examined more closely.

To date, there have been very few studies of voter abstention in South Africa (but see Lodge 1999, HSRC 2014). Indeed, voter abstention is a phenomenon that is under-studied in the continent generally. When low voter turnout is examined it is usually with reference to how institutional mechanisms cause low voter turnout and how these mechanisms can be

improved (see Kersting 2007, Kuenzi and Lambright 2007). The reasons individuals may hold, particularly the political reasons, for abstention are largely left unexamined. Without further research it is difficult to provide definitive reasons for voter abstention, whether this represents political apathy, a 'normalisation' of democracy or, as I suggest here, a form of protest. These are issues that need further theoretical and empirical consideration and this article provides some suggestions for future research in this area.

Analysing the 2014 National Elections

The 2014 national election arguably presented the ANC with the most significant challenge to its electoral dominance with one poll showing a fall in support for the ANC from 63% in November 2009 to 53% in November 2013 (Southall 2014: 2). A number of events provide context for understanding this decline in support. The killing of 34 striking platinum miners at Marikana on 16 August 2012 has been recognised by a range of political commentators as a significant turning point in South African politics (see Gumede 2012, Alexander 2013, Saul and Bond 2014). Indeed, Pallo Jordan, former Minister of Arts and Culture, has said the massacre has caused the ANC to lose its legitimacy (Jordan cited in Saul and Bond 2014: 244). Furthermore, corruption continued to dog the ANC exemplified by the outcry surrounding the estimated R200 million (approximately 18 million US dollars) 'security upgrades' made to President Zuma's private residence. The ANC also faced dissent within its own ranks with open divisions within its alliance partner Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), which were deepened following the resolution of its largest affiliate the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) not to endorse the ANC's 2014 electoral campaign and to explore the formation of a worker's party.

On the electoral terrain the ANC would be challenged by a new party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), led by expelled ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema. While there have been previous splits from the ANC the significance of the EFF is that it has been

the first break to the political left from the ANC. With a focus on ‘economic freedom’ Malema and his party spoke to the frustrated aspirations of young people, many of whom are unemployed. Furthermore, the elections themselves were held in the midst of what would become a five month strike in the platinum sector and in a continuing wave of community protests.

Despite the difficulties faced by the ANC it was returned as the governing party with a decreased but still sizable 62% of the vote. It may therefore appear that despite the widespread nature of protest, as Booysen suggests, the dominance of the ANC has been largely left unchallenged. However, a more considered analysis of the elections results which analyses the support for the ANC amongst the EVAP, the level of voter abstention and a focus upon the protest-prone province of Gauteng reveals a more complicated picture and provides evidence to suggest a fragmentation of the ANC’s support.

Looking at national election results between 2004 and 2014 (table 1) reveals that the since 2004 between 40% and 43% of the EVAP has abstained from voting. As a result, the percentage of the EVAP voting for the ANC is under 39%, with the levels of support broadly comparable between 2004 and 2009 amongst the EVAP and declining slightly in 2014. During this period opposition parties have been making small increases in their share of the electorate.

[Insert table 1 here]

Looking at Gauteng reveals the most fundamental shifts in support for the ANC. The Gauteng province is a key economic driver in South Africa and comprises nearly a quarter of the total population. It is also the province which has been at the heart of protest action (Alexander et al 2014b). Despite a turnout, which was higher than the national average, Gauteng’s 2014 national election results reveals a considerable drop in support for the ANC

in comparison to the national result (table 2). In Gauteng the ANC lost 292 265 votes to what Faull calls the ‘triple threat of apathy, the DA and the EFF’ (2014: 3). The DA grew its voting share from 22% to 31% and the EFF received 40% of all of their national ballots in Gauteng (Faull 2014; Schulz-Herxenberg 2014a). While the decline of the ANC’s vote share may be attributed to the levels of protest in the province a number of commentators have linked the increase in the DA’s share of the vote to changing voting trends amongst the Black middle classes (Friedman 2014). Therefore, in order to understand what, if any, relationship voting has to protest one must analyse the areas in which protest happens.

[Insert table 2 here]

The Ballot and the Brick: Thembelihle, Barcelona and Drieziek Extension 4

Informal settlements are often areas prone to high incidences of protest (see Alexander 2010) and the fact that all three of the case study areas comprise a large percentage of people living in informal settlements is significant. Informal settlements are not only areas which are often protest prone but are also inherently precarious spaces. The population of informal settlements can grow very rapidly but equally can informal settlements can be destroyed by the State, a further dimension that Booysen neglects in her analysis.

All three areas were first settled informally between in the late 1980s and early 1990s; Thembelihle in 1989, Barcelona in 1992 and Drieziek Extension 4 in 1994. In all three areas the ANC was influential in leading the settlement of the land however, the three communities have fared differently over the twenty years of South Africa’s democracy. Thembelihle is perhaps faced with some of the most difficult conditions. As table 3 reveals ward level data reveals that within the ward boundaries under which Thembelihle is demarcated 71.6% of the ward live in informal housing with 76.9% of the ward having no access to a flush toilet. The area was declared a transit camp in the 1990s and is thus somewhat regularised with stands marked out and an informal road system through which

vehicles are able to pass (Wilson 2005). As the area has not been declared a township the municipality refuses to provide electricity and the residents have taken to making illegal connections (Dugard and Tselapedi 2013: 59). Although Thembelihle has been in existence for thirty years there are plans to remove the settlement and resettle its people elsewhere due to the fact that the settlement is placed upon dolomitic land which therefore makes it unsafe for building although the community disputes the extent to which the land is dolomitic (Dugard and Tselapedi 2013). This resettlement and the lack of other basic services have been a continuing source of protest in the area.

Barcelona was established in 1992 through a so-called land invasion which was led by the ANC. Like Thembelihle the informal settlement has been regularised with stands marked out for each shack. Since 1994 government subsidised housing, commonly referred to as RDP housing, has been built in the area however, as table 3 demonstrates nearly a quarter of the population within the ward remain in informal housing. Amongst the areas of informal housing until 2012 there was no electricity or water-borne sanitation in many parts of the settlement which became the focus of a series of protests in 2011.

Drieziek Extension 4 was first settled in 1994 when the municipality allocated the land for people to live informally. Since its establishment, no government-subsidised housing has been built. The brick structures that exist are either the result of people building their own houses or as a result of projects undertaken by Non-Governmental Organisations, as a result as table 3 shows 34.7% of the population in ward 5 live in informal housing. The area that has been at the heart of the protest activity has no water-borne sanitation and the dirt roads are impassable by vehicles in many places. The lack of water-borne sanitation was at the heart of protests that erupted in 2012 and since then sewage pipes for water-borne sanitation have begun to be laid. Although the three areas have broadly similar histories the

voting trends reveal divergent trends in support for the ANC, opposition parties and abstention.

[Insert table 3 here]

Voter turnout and abstention rates in the protest hotspots

Since 1994 voter registration and voter turnout although still high has been decreasing. Such trends fit with other post-transition states (Norris 2002; Carlin 2006). However, a decline in the participation in one of the key practices of democracy may raise questions over democratic accountability and durability. Table 4 demonstrates a decrease in voter registration amongst the EVAP in both ward 8 (Thembelihle) and ward 77 (Barcelona), an estimated decrease of 20.8% and 14.9% respectively. Only ward 5 (Drieziek) has demonstrated an increase in voter registration above that of the national average. Similarly, a decline in turnout was observed in both ward 8 and ward 77 with an increase in ward 5. For both ward 8 and ward 77 abstention rates have increased between 2004 and 2014 with nearly two thirds of the EVAP abstaining from voting. Thus in two of the three protest prone wards examined here there has been a decrease in electoral participation amongst the EVAP of around 16%, a rate higher than has been documented at the national level. From informal interviews conducted in Drieziek it would seem the beginning of a project to lay sewage pipes in the area shortly before the election may have played some role in influencing people to vote.

[Insert table 4 here]

How the ANC polled in protest hotspots

Table 5 compares the actual results for the specific voting districts most affected by protest, based upon information gathered from residents. An analysis conducted at the voting district

rather than at the ward or municipal level is, I contend, the most accurate way in which to analyse the relationship between voting and protesting. As noted above, protest in South Africa is a highly localised phenomenon and it is rare for a whole ward to protest. Thus looking at the results of particular voting districts can grant better insight into the relationship between voting and protesting.

An analysis of the overall results alone demonstrates a high degree of electoral support for the ANC. In Drieziek Extension 4 the ANC has consistently polled over 80% in the last three national elections. However, as table 5 demonstrates in Thembelihle and Barcelona there has been a decline in the actual electoral support for the ANC. In Thembelihle the ANC have dropped their vote share by 17.5% since 2004 and by 11.1% in Barcelona. An analysis of the results in the context of their vote share amongst the EVAP shows a further decline in the levels of support. Thus although the ANC has consistently polled above 80% in Drieziek Extension 4 once these results are placed in the context of the EVAP a different picture is revealed, with support for the ANC declining by a quarter. In Thembelihle support for the ANC amongst the EVAP has declined to a low of 15.1% in 2014. While in Barcelona the ANC's support amongst the EVAP declines from from over 40% in 2004 to a low of 28% in 2014, comparable to national averages. Table 5 illustrates that in these protest hotspots the ANC is experiencing a steady decline amongst the voting population and the electorate more generally, contrary to Booysen's thesis.

[Insert table 5 here]

Support for opposition parties in protest hotspots

Table 6 provides an analysis of the election results all opposition parties combined. It was decided to use this measure as, aside from the DA, none of the most significant opposition parties, the Congress of the People (COPE) and the EFF, have contested all three of the

national elections between 2004 and 2014. With the decline in the support for the ANC observed above we may expect to see a corresponding rise in support for opposition parties. Table 6 shows that in Thembelihle and Barcelona opposition parties have doubled their share of the vote while more modest gains have been observed in Drieziek Extension 4. However, when these results are placed in the context of the EVAP the gains made by opposition parties have been much smaller. This may suggest that many voters are choosing to abstain rather than vote for an opposition party, contrary to Booysen's expectations. However, as argued above, voter abstention is an area in need of further research.

[Insert table 6 here]

Voter abstention in post-apartheid South Africa

Vote boycotts have played an important part of South Africa's history as a form of protest. Under apartheid the United Democratic Front (UDF), one of the leading anti-apartheid movements, led a vote boycott against the newly formed tri-cameral parliament which established electoral representation for Coloured and Indians but still excluded the Black African majority (Van Kessel 2000). In post-apartheid South Africa vote boycotts have been employed by various different political actors. This strategy was first used by the Landless Peoples' Movement in 2004 mobilising around the slogan 'No Land! No Vote!' Later in 2006 a similar campaign was taken up by the Anti-Eviction Campaign and Abahlali baseMjondolo around the slogan 'No Land, No House, No Vote'. It has also been taken up in various local organisations and in the run up to the 2014 elections many communities, such as Bekkersdal and Sterkspruit, threatened to boycott elections (see Mgaqelwa and Ntshobane 2013; Mkhize and Raubenheimer 2014). Furthermore, in the build up to the 2014 elections former minister of intelligence Ronnie Kasrils led the *Sidikiwe-Vukani* (Vote No) campaign. Although this was widely misunderstood as a call for a vote boycott, Kasrills and others actually called for

a vote against the ANC (Nicolson 2014). These calls for a vote boycott have generally not gone much beyond the organisations calling for them although they have had traction within the membership of these organisations

Outside of organised vote boycott campaigns, various interpretations are provided for explaining voter abstention. Institutional arrangements and the registration process are common factors used to explain voter abstention (see Jackman 1987; Wolfinger 1991; Lijphart 1997; Kersting 2007; Kuenzi and Lambright 2007). Of the reasons for abstention in the 1999 election, 39% of respondents cited not being registered, Lodge highlights this was largely linked to the need to have a 'bar-coded' identity document which many citizens in the new South Africa did not yet possess (1999: 10). In more recent times, administrative barriers to electoral participation have declined with less than 15% of respondents in the HSRC voter participation surveys conducted in 2008, 2010 and 2013 citing not being registered as a reason they would not vote if there was an election tomorrow (HSRC 2014: 25).

Others scholars concentrate on demographic variables such as class, gender and age in determining electoral participation (see Avey 1989; Moysen and Day 1992; Hill and Leighy 1999; Evans 2000; Fornos et al 2004). Indeed, Lodge (1999) highlights the role of race in voter abstention with higher rates of abstention in the Asian, White and Coloured respondents in the 1999 national elections. However, this work has not been followed up by another analysts meaning we have little analysis of the demographic variables that may influence voter participation in South Africa.

Apathy is also given as a common explanation, surveys conducted by the HSRC (2014) show that disinterest and disillusionment accounted for over 65% of the responses as to why respondents would not vote if there was an election tomorrow. However, as Henn and his colleagues (2002) highlight a reluctance to engage in the formal process of voting may not signal a disinterest in politics as a whole. Indeed as Bhavani (2010) highlights one of the

limitations of quantitative studies on political behaviour is that the understanding of politics is based on a narrow conception of formal political participation and therefore neglects a broader understanding of politics. Therefore abstention need not automatically be associated with apathy as choosing not to vote may be an expression of wider political dissatisfaction (Karklins 1986; Kang 2004). A limitation of the voter participation surveys conducted by the HSRC is that respondents are presented with a list of what could be characterised as ‘negative options’ to explain disinterest and disillusionment. What is excluded is an option in which not voting can be considered as an expression of political dissatisfaction but also an active concern with politics. As argued above, the nature of South Africa’s democracy, which is dominated by one political party, means that voting for an opposition party is not widely regarded as a feasible alternative. Thus as Kang argues ‘if there is no alternative, the choice will be between abstention and continuous support for the party but those who want to respond to the decline of quality have only one option: abstention’ (2004: 84).

Analysis conducted by Ryabchuk (2014) of 76 interviews conducted with voters and non-voters on 2014 election day further supports the argument that abstention may be a political statement to register citizens dissatisfaction with the quality of democracy. For many South Africans the concept of democracy is strongly tied to the reduction of socio-economic inequalities (Mattes et al 2000: 9-10). This is perhaps unsurprising given the historical experience of apartheid in which an exclusionary citizenship was constructed around racially stratified rights to housing, basic services and employment, creating vast racialised inequalities which continue to permeate today (Miraftab and Wills 2005). Thus as Ryabchuk finds many non-voters cite a lack of change in their livings standards as their reason for not voting. While apathy may be an important element in explaining voter abstention in post-apartheid South Africa there is also a case for understanding it as part of an expression of

political dissatisfaction in the absence of credible opposition parties. It is clear that further research is required on the reasons for non-voting in post-apartheid South Africa.

A problematic feature of Booysen's thesis is to assume that people who protest also vote. There is some evidence to suggest that protestors may be more likely to abstain from voting. An exit poll conducted in 16 areas, many of which were protest-prone areas, by the South African Research Chair in Social Change at the University of Johannesburg showed that of the 3,782 voters surveyed only 30.8% had participated in a protest in the last 5 years (Paret n.d.). Furthermore, if one considers the general demographics of protestors, generally young people, it further raises the possibility that protestors are more likely to abstain from voting. In the last election only 22.6% of 18-19 year olds were registered to vote and only 54.5% of 20-29 year olds (IEC 2013: 6).

The majority of explanations for voter abstention are informed by scholarship from the Global North. While this does not make the theoretical and empirical observations of these scholars redundant it is important to note such work is not meant to directly apply to many of the democratizing contexts of the Global South. As I have argued, voter abstention is an under-theorised and under-researched area. By highlighting this gap, this article raises an important area for future research which, I contend in the South African context, at least, will become increasingly salient as new political formation and parties increasingly seek to challenge the ANC's hegemonic position in a dominant party state.

Concluding remarks: Protest, Political Participation and Opposition in South Africa

How can the relationship between protest and voting be understood? Do we see a 'rebellion of the poor' as Alexander would argue or does the continued, albeit dented, support for the ANC suggest a maintenance of the status quo, as Booysen would contend? This article has drawn attention to weaknesses in the methodological base of Booysen's thesis. As an alternative, I have advanced the analysis of the relation between protest and voting through

an analysis of ward and voting district level data in three protest hotspots. By placing the analysis of these results within an analysis of the EVAP, this article as demonstrated that the level of support for the ANC in protest ‘hotspots’ is not as stable as previous analysis conducted by Booysen has suggested. The analysis presented here has highlighted the increasing trend in voter abstention at all levels: national, provincial, ward and voting district. Thus, although the ANC still enjoys a wide degree of electoral support this is based upon declining numbers of voters. This article has argued that voter abstention is an important phenomenon in post-apartheid South Africa in need of further research.

Booyesen dismisses the political significance of the current protest wave for not resulting in a decisive break away from the ANC. However, what this fails to appreciate is the incremental and often contradictory ways in which resistance to a hegemonic force will be forged. While I have argued there are similarities between the global protest wave and protest in South Africa, a distinctive feature has been the fragmented nature of these protests. Some commentators have termed protests in South Africa as ‘popcorn’ protests reflecting the way in which they rapidly spring up but often equally as rapidly subside (see Bond 2011, Bond and Mottair 2013, Mottair 2013). The use of such terminology is problematic as it belies the complex dynamics of protest, which are mostly hidden from public view: the numerous attempts to engage the authorities and the rounds of community meetings which usually proceed a protest. While authors employing the term are correct to highlight that the high level of protest activity in South Africa has yet to coalesce into a social movement that would raise collective demands or pose a challenge to the political dominance of the ANC, this does not mean such protests should be dismissed as insignificant. Scholars such as Piven and Cloward (1979) highlight that collective action outside of movements may actually be more effective than collective action organised through more formalised social movement organisations. Furthermore, I argue that the kinds of community-based concerned residents

groups which are often in the forefront of leading protest are an important political and democratic space. While most community-based organisations lead protests around the basic provision of services, as I have suggested, such protests are often also about a wider struggle about the content and quality of post-apartheid democracy. Such forums provide an important outlet for critique to the ruling ANC which do not exist elsewhere. While so-called service-delivery protests may be primarily engaged in issue-based politics, the frequency and the widespread nature of such protest action means that in the absence of effective opposition parties that they should not be under-estimated as a political force.

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¹ This article follows the general conventions used in analysing 'race' in South Africa. Thus, the term 'Black' refers to all the non-white groups designated under apartheid (Black African, Coloured and Indian). While also using the terms 'Coloured' and 'Indian' to refer to certain sections of the Black population. While using these terms may run an acknowledged risk of reifying 'race', the particular history of apartheid means that these categories still have a lived reality both in terms of how people identify themselves but also in the enduring patterns of socio-economic exclusion.

² The voter turnout figures for 1994 have to be interpreted with caution as there was no formal voter registration and statistics for the population are unreliable in this period.

³ The term 'hotspot' is used to denote an area of sustained protest activity as identified by the Rebellion of the Poor protest monitor at the University of Johannesburg. This term is used to distinguish these areas from areas of more sporadic or 'one-off' protest activity.

⁴ My thanks to Marcel Paret for sharing this idea with me.