

# Chapter 12

## Profiles of Party Political Support

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### Introduction

Since the establishment of South Africa as a national entity in 1910, incumbent governments have been defeated in parliamentary elections only on four occasions.<sup>1</sup> This is attributable to uniformity in the historical voting behaviour of ethnic electoral blocs, both before and after the implementation of a universal franchise democracy in 1994. As the new democracy matures it is therefore of particular interest to determine the potential for the emergence of political alignments capable of bridging or cross-cutting strategic ethnic and racial cleavages. Most other African democracies have similarly been characterised by political stasis as a consequence of repeated ethnic voting patterns. Exceptions have included Benin and Zambia in 1991 where incumbent leaders were outvoted in national elections (Esterhuysen, 1992; IDEA, 1997). During 2000, Senegal's Diouf lost the election to Wade and Zimbabwe's ruling ZANU (PF) narrowly retained its parliamentary majority when the traditionally monolithic Chishona-speaking section of the electorate split along an urban-rural cleavage.

Most contemporary South African political parties go to great lengths to portray themselves as multi-ethnic non-racial organisations. Individuals from groups not historically associated with the party are propelled into positions of prominence as a means of attracting the support of those groups. This chapter explores the extent to which party support profiles continue to reflect traditional historical cleavages, using the results of a national survey of public opinion conducted during November 1999. Responses to three of the survey questions are analysed to determine

feelings of closeness to each political party, intention to vote for that party and reasons for voting for that party in the June 1999 election.

## **Voter Identification with a Political Party**

In a nationally representative survey of public opinion conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) during November 1999 (Rule, 2000a), the electorate was questioned about its party political loyalties. Fieldworkers made the following statement to each respondent.<sup>2</sup> “I would like to ask how close or distant you feel towards various political parties and organisations. If you feel close to a party you would support it. If you feel distant you would oppose it.” The responses to this statement were particularly interesting in the light of the shifts in political allegiance that occurred in the June 1999 election, five months before the survey. Table 12.1 lists the percentages of respondents who indicated closeness, neutrality, distance or uncertainty in respect of each of 15 political parties.

An expressed feeling of closeness to a political party did not necessarily imply a real commitment to the party. However, the distribution of respondents who indicated that they felt “very close” to each political party reflected the same broad pattern of support received by each party that contested the June 1999 election. Almost half (46%) of the respondents indicated that they felt “very close” to the African National Congress (ANC). Much smaller proportions of respondents stated the same about the other parties, even the main opposition parties, namely the Democratic Party (DP) (3%), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) (2%) and New National Party (NNP) (3%). If those who felt “close” to each party are added to those who felt “very close”, the ANC came out on top at 65%, followed by the DP (13%), NNP (10%) and IFP (6%). Given the election results, it is apparent that feeling “very close” or “close” to the ANC translated more easily into voting for the ANC than was the case with opposition parties (Table 12.1).

**Table 12.1: Feelings of closeness, neutrality or distance from each political party, November 1999**

Political party	Very close	Close	Neutral	Distant	Very distant	Uncertain/ Don't know
	Percentage					
ACDP	0,8	3,9	10,4	12,6	46,2	26,0
ANC	46,4	18,7	7,9	5,5	16,0	5,5
AEB	0,2	0,6	5,8	12,3	52,4	28,7
AZAPO	0,5	3,1	9,7	12,5	52,4	21,8
CP	0,1	1,7	6,7	14,5	54,5	22,3
DP	3,4	9,7	9,5	12,9	46,9	17,7
FA	0,3	1,1	6,0	13,6	53,1	25,9
FF	0,7	1,8	6,3	13,5	54,3	23,3
IFP	2,1	3,5	7,7	13,6	57,3	15,8
MF	0,3	0,9	5,1	11,4	55,8	26,4
NNP	2,5	7,9	9,3	13,9	51,3	15,2
PAC	0,9	5,9	10,8	13,2	51,6	17,8
SACP	1,7	4,9	8,2	12,6	50,4	22,1
UCDP	0,5	2,4	8,7	13,3	50,5	24,7
UDM	1,3	4,2	9,6	13,7	51,2	20,1

The proportions of respondents who indicated closeness to the DP (13%) and NNP (10%) were slightly more than those who actually supported them in the election (10% and 7% respectively). The IFP was an exception to this trend, however. In all previous HSRC surveys, the proportions of respondents who indicated closeness to the IFP were lower by as much as half the actual proportion that voted for the IFP in June 1999. Whereas 6% indicated that they felt “very close” or “close” to the IFP, more than 8% voted for the IFP in June 1999 (Table 12.2). This was attributable to fear among respondents of revealing their support in a continuously volatile political environment. In successive opinion surveys, residents of KwaZulu-Natal, the provincial stronghold of the IFP, were those most likely not to reveal political preferences.

Of utility to analysts and political party organisers are the demographic characteristics of political support bases. Table 12.2 indicates the

proportions of each population group who felt “very close” or “close” to each political party in November 1999.

**Table 12.2: Feelings of closeness to each party by population group, November 1999**

Political party	Blacks	Whites	Coloureds	Indians	Total
Percentage very close or close					
ACDP	4	8	8	6	5
ANC	80	7	42	21	65
AEB	0	4	0	1	1
AZAPO	5	0	1	0	4
CP	1	9	2	1	2
DP	4	54	22	35	13
FA	1	6	0	2	1
FF	1	16	1	0	3
IFP	6	7	1	2	6
MF	1	1	1	12	1
NNP	5	23	33	25	10
PAC	9	0	3	0	7
SACP	9	0	2	0	7
UCDP	2	4	5	1	3
UDM	5	8	7	2	6

The distribution of “closeness” to each political party by population group suggests a fairly high degree of racial polarisation in the South African electorate. This was most evident among the black respondents, four-fifths (80%) of whom indicated that they felt “very close” or “close” to the ANC. This was not surprising given the history of that party under Nelson Mandela both before and after the liberatory election of April 1994 and under his successor, Thabo Mbeki since 1999.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to blacks, only 7% of white respondents felt “close” or “very close” to the ANC. “Close” and “very close” levels were significantly higher among coloureds (42%) than among Indians (21%) (Table 12.2). The latter two groups were also politically oppressed under the apartheid system and would understandably have been more supportive of the ANC than would whites.

Although closeness to the DP was highest among whites (54%), closeness to the DP was much lower than closeness to the ANC. A greater divergence of opinion existed among whites, who also exhibited a degree of apathy and cynicism that clearly impacted on commitment to a particular political party. Only 4% of black respondents felt close to the DP, many of the others having been alienated by a DP election campaign that was perceived to imply resistance to the ANC's social development policies. Intermediate were the other two groups, with 22% of coloureds and 35% of Indians indicating closeness to the DP. Its major competitor, the NNP, on the other hand, elicited feelings of closeness from one-third (33%) of coloureds, and one-quarter of Indians (25%) and whites (23%) (Table 12.2). Fierce contestation for political turf by the DP and NNP resulted in victory for the DP among whites and equal DP and NNP support among coloured and Indian respondents. The termination of FW de Klerk's leadership of the NNP, his successor's (Marthinus van Schalkwyk's) lower public profile and a distaste for perceived NNP collaboration with the ANC were reasons for the dramatic decline in support for the NNP since 1998.

Only 6% of black respondents admitted to feelings of closeness to the IFP, as did 7% of whites. Sentiments portraying a more conservative approach to economic policy and trade unionism had been clearly articulated by IFP leader Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi, in spite of his position as Minister of Home Affairs in the ANC government. A surprising phenomenon was the lack of closeness among respondents to the ANC's partner in the liberation movement, the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC). In spite of its parallel efforts in the struggle for political freedom, it managed only to elicit feelings of closeness of 7% of the respondents (9% of blacks and 3% of coloureds), most of whom clearly did not translate their sentiments into votes. This was attributable to the failure of the PAC to capture the imagination of the electorate and its inability under Clarence Makwetu and Stanley Mokgoba to match the vision and charisma exuded by Nelson Mandela. Seven per cent (7%) of the respondents indicated that they felt close to the South African Communist Party (SACP), a member of the tripartite ruling alliance (ANC, SACP and COSATU) (Table 12.2). This

closeness figure echoed the SACP's electoral contribution to the alliance, although the party contributed proportionally more to the policy directions of the alliance's dominant partner, the ANC.

Six per cent (6%) felt close to the United Democratic Movement (UDM) of General Bantu Holomisa and his co-leader at the time, Roelf Meyer. The UDM appeared to draw similar levels of support from whites, blacks and coloureds, but less support from Indians. Five per cent (5%) felt close to the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), demonstrating the appeal of a Christian fundamentalist approach to politics, in this case at levels ranging from 4% to 8% across all four population groups (Table 12.2). Opposition to the permissive policies of the ANC with regard to abortion, gambling and capital punishment was clearly enunciated by ACDP leader Reverend Kenneth Meshoe before the June 1999 election.

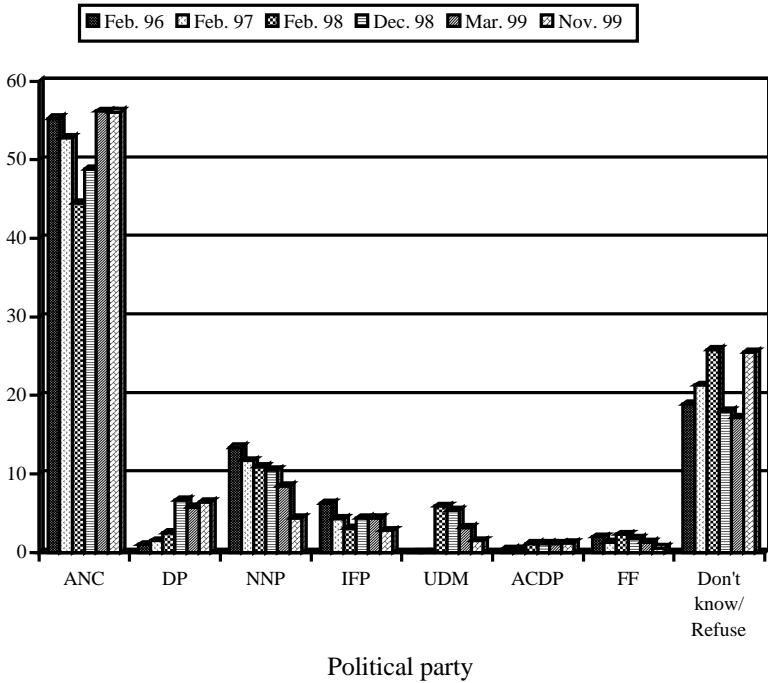
## **Voting Intention**

Intention to vote for a party was gauged by a separate question that enquired more directly, "Which party would you support if an election were held tomorrow?" Fifty-six per cent (56%) indicated support for the ANC. The DP and NNP followed with 6% and 4% respectively and the IFP with 3% (again, clearly an underestimate given its 8% of votes in June 1999) (Table 12.3). The UDM would have received the vote of 2% and the ACDP 1% of the votes. The proportions of respondents who indicated that they would not vote (6%) or did not know for which parties they would vote (12%) were higher than those in the pre-election survey of March 1999 (Rule, 1999a). A similar proportion of respondents refused to divulge their intentions in both March and November 1999 (8%) (Table 12.3).

**Table 12.3: Voting preferences for each party “if an election were held tomorrow”, 1996-1999**

Party	Feb. 96	Feb. 97	Feb. 98	Dec. 98	Mar. 99	Nov. 99
	Percentage					
ANC	55,3	52,8	44,5	48,8	56,2	56,1
DP	1,0	1,5	2,5	6,7	5,8	6,4
NNP	13,4	11,7	10,9	10,5	8,5	4,4
IFP	6,3	4,3	3,1	4,4	4,4	2,8
UDM	-0	-	5,9	5,4	3,2	1,5
ACDP	0,4	0,4	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,2
FF	2,0	1,3	2,3	1,8	1,3	0,6
FA	-	-	-	0,4	0,4	0,3
PAC	0,8	1,8	2,1	1,1	0,9	0,2
CP	1,1	0,4	0,4	1,0	0,3	0,1
AZAPO	0,2	0,4	0,2	0,3	0,2	0,1
SACP	0,1	0,6	0,6	0,0	0,0	0,0
Other	0,5	3,5	0,6	0,6	1,1	0,6
Would not vote	6,0*	10,2*	11,0*	10,8	3,6	5,8
Don't know	12,9	11,1	14,8	3,8	5,3	12,2
Refused				3,4	8,3	7,5

\* “Would not vote” and “Refused” were combined in these surveys .



**Figure 12.1: Voting preferences for each party “if an election were held tomorrow”, 1996-1999**

In order to estimate the likely distribution of votes had an election been held in November 1999, certain adjustments to the survey statistics were required. First, those who indicated that they would not vote were removed from the equation. Second, the feelings of closeness to any party that were expressed by those who were “uncertain”, indicated that they “don’t know” or refused to divulge their voting preference were taken into account where applicable. Third, the IFP proportion was adjusted upwards by the extent to which the March 1999 survey under-predicted the June 1999 election results (i.e. half).



The results of the hypothetical November 1999 election did not differ significantly from those of the June 1999 election. The ANC would once again have achieved almost two-thirds of the votes, followed by the DP with just short on one-tenth. The IFP would have followed with just over 8% and the NNP would have lost more ground by achieving only 6% of the votes. The UDM's total would have declined marginally to 2,4% and the ACDP's would have increased to 1,8%. Seven smaller parties would have obtained results similar to those of the June 1999 election. Interestingly, even though the CP had not participated in the June 1999 election, a small proportion of the respondents nevertheless indicated that they would have voted for the CP.

**Table 12.4: Distribution of votes had an election been held in November 1999**

Party	% of votes: committed + balance	Party	% of votes: committed + balance
ANC	56,3+10,0=66,3	FF	0,6+0,6=1,2
DP	6,4+3,2=9,6	UCDP	0,3+0,6=0,9
IFP	(2,9+1,3)*1,95=8,1	FA	0,3+0,3=0,6
NNP	4,4+1,8=6,2	AEB	0,1+0,4=0,5
UDM	1,6+0,8=2,4	AZAPO	0,1+0,3=0,4
ACDP	1,2+0,6=1,8	CP	0,1+0,3=0,4
PAC	0,2+0,9=1,2	MF	0,1+0,1=0,2

The November 1999 survey facilitated a breakdown of the ethno-linguistic characteristics of potential voters for each party. Clearly, ANC support was very solid among blacks. Even amongst isiZulu speakers, almost one in two was a potential ANC voter. Support was also strong among the coloureds, where almost one in three indicated that they would have voted for the ANC. The DP drew most of its support from white respondents. Afrikaans-speaking whites had a slightly weaker tendency than other whites to support the DP (Table 12.5).

**Table 12.5: Party support by ethno-linguistic grouping, November 1999**

Party	Black Zulu	Black other	White Afrikaans	Percentage			Total
				White other	Coloured	Indian	
ANC	46,9	79,8	0,8	4,6	30,7	8,0	56,1
DP		0,5	29,5	46,8	6,6	26,4	6,4
IFP	11,6	0,3	2,3		0,5	0,8	2,8
NNP		0,7	15,8	4,7	19,2	21,3	4,4
UDM	0,1	2,1	1,9	1,5	1,5	0,2	1,5
ACDP	0,6	1,0	0,9	2,9	2,2	4,0	1,2
FF			6,1	1,8	0,4		0,6
PAC	0,1	0,4					0,2
CP			0,7	0,6			0,1
FA		0,1	2,6	1,2		0,5	0,3
AZAPO		0,2			0,1		0,1
SACP					0,1		0,0
UCDP		0,5		0,9			0,3
Other		0,3		0,5	0,7		0,6
Won't vote	7,0	5,0	4,8	3,2	7,9	12,0	5,8
Don't know	5,7	4,1	10,9	6,1	12,1	8,2	6,0
Uncertain	8,5	2,4	13,1	17,6	11,3	5,8	6,2
Refused	19,4	2,6	10,6	7,7	6,6	10,2	7,6
Total	20,6	53,7	7,8	4,9	9,7	0,7	

However, twice as many Afrikaans-speaking whites felt close to the DP than to the NNP, and the DP:NNP ratio for “other” whites was 10:1. These figures represent a dramatic shift away from the NNP. Its predecessor, the (old) National Party, commanded a majority or at least significant support among white Afrikaans speakers (Rule, 1989) throughout the apartheid era and until as recently as 1997. Among coloureds, the NNP:ANC ratio was 2:3. Indians were divided in their loyalties between the DP, the NNP and the ANC.

The average supporter of the ANC was thus black and a speaker of one of the five most common African languages in the country (isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho or Setswana). In terms of other variables, he/she was likely to have an educational qualification of lower than Standard 8 and, in only two out of five cases, some form of employment. Although he/she was not satisfied with his/her household financial situation or with the general economic situation in South Africa, the typical ANC supporter thought that things would improve during the next 12 months. Most ANC supporters lived in Gauteng, the Eastern Cape or the Northern Province. Three church groupings were most highly represented amongst ANC supporters, namely the Zionist Christian, Roman Catholic and Methodist churches (see Rule, 1999b).

On the other hand, supporters of the DP were most likely to be white and English or Afrikaans speaking. More than one-third had a post-matric education and 57% had jobs (many of the balance being students, pensioners or full-time housewives). The majority held pessimistic views about the economy and about their own financial situations. DP supporters were most likely to live in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal or the Western Cape. The two largest church denominations among them were the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) and the Methodist Church. Supporters of the NNP were mainly coloured or white speakers of Afrikaans or English. About half had passed Standard 8 or 9 or matric and half were employed in full-time or part-time jobs, indicative of a standard of living higher than that of their ANC and lower than that of their DP counterparts. Most felt negative about the economy and its prospects for the next year. The majority of NNP supporters were residents of the Western Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. The largest religious groups among the NNP supporters were the NGK, the Roman Catholic and the Anglican Church.

Speakers of isiZulu who live in KwaZulu-Natal are likely to vote for the IFP. Half had an education of below Standard 8 level and only two in five were employed. Although not positive about the national or their personal economic circumstances, those who expected an improvement during the next year were more than those who did not. The largest church

membership groups amongst IFP supporters were the Zionist Christian and Roman Catholic churches.

UDM supporters were more likely to be female than male and predominantly speakers of isiXhosa or isiZulu. Most lived in the Eastern Cape or KwaZulu-Natal and just over half had an education of at least Standard 8. A sizeable proportion of UDM supporters was Methodists and generally they were dissatisfied with both their household financial situations and the economic situation in South Africa as a whole. Two in five anticipated an improvement in their circumstances during the next 12 months.

## **Reasons for Voting Preferences**

It should not be presumed that voters automatically vote for parties that are perceived to represent their particular population, ethnic or linguistic group. The November 1999 survey indicated that motivations for voting for a particular party were not overtly related to population group or ethnicity. Respondents were asked, "If you did vote in the 1999 election, for what reason did you choose the party that you did?"

One-third (36%) of the responses were related to a specific policy of the party concerned (Table 12.6). Most frequently mentioned were jobs, followed by housing and crime or security issues. Other responses contained generalisations such as "good promises", "good economic policy" or the "vision" of the party concerned. A further one-third (34%) of responses referred to an improved quality of life in the country, including "for a better life in South Africa", "for improvement", "to make things right" or "for stability". The first of these statements resonated with a catchy ANC campaign slogan that promoted electoral support for the ANC. Less tangible reasons (e.g. "trust or belief in the party", "like for the party", "a good opposition") were offered by 22% of the respondents. Significantly, and as was the case in a Namibian election survey (Keulder, 1998), only 4% suggested overt racial identity as their motivation for supporting a particular party. Nevertheless, given the apartheid history, race/population group probably determined for which parties most South Africans voted, even if this merely assumed a subliminal role (Table 12.6).

**Table 12.6: Reasons for party selection by population group, 1999 election**

Reason	Black	White	Coloured Percentage	Indian	Total
Improved life quality	34,2	21,0	42,3	47,7	33,7
Specific party policy	37,5	26,2	29,9	10,0	35,7
Identification with specific party	18,0	48,3	22,2	36,9	22,2
Racial identity of party	4,4	3,4	1,8	1,5	4,0
Other reasons	1,7	0,0	1,2	0,7	1,6
Did not vote	0,4	1,2	1,8	2,5	0,7

The November 1999 survey revealed that seven provinces would again have been won by the ANC with large majorities; two, the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, would have been narrowly lost to opposition parties. The latter provinces were localities of the most dissatisfied sectors of the electorate. New opposition parties, namely the UDM and UCDP, would have retained the support of significant numbers of voters in ANC strongholds, that is, the Eastern Cape and North West, respectively. Both were led by former homeland leaders, namely Bantu Holomisa and Lucas Mangope. Lodge (1999a, p. 85) observed that these trends pointed “to a future in which the ANC’s predominance within the borders of former non-Zulu homelands is no longer guaranteed”.

The massive shift in voting allegiance that occurred among whites (from the NNP to the DP) appeared to have stabilised. The DP’s share of the vote had risen from 1% to almost 10% between 1994 and 1999. Although the policies of the DP did not change (Welsh, 1999), the image and presentation thereof had become more robust, appealing to whites who felt that the NNP was not opposing the ANC effectively. The trend began during the inter-election period with the DP’s increasing ability to win by-elections at local government level in Afrikaner-dominated municipalities such as Witbank and Boksburg. This culminated in the DP displacing the NNP as the second largest party in parliament and major opposition to the ANC in June 1999.<sup>4</sup> Remaining votes for the NNP appeared mainly to come from the coloured electorate of the Western and Northern Cape.

Even in this sector, however, both the DP and ANC made significant gains. In the case of the ANC, the shift in allegiance resulted in the Northern Cape becoming an ANC-dominated province in 1999. In 1994 it was marginally held by the ANC with the support of the single DP member of the provincial legislature.

A new phenomenon in South African politics was the dramatic increase in support for the ACDP. Although starting from a small base, the ACDP more than doubled its absolute share of the votes in comparison with 1994, in spite of the significantly lower poll. Lodge (1999b, p. 193) observed that although the support base of the ACDP was predominantly white, the “sociology is likely to alter as the suburban evangelical congregations increasingly represent a ‘rainbow’ middle class”.

Estimates of the proportion of support for each party from each population group (Reynolds, 1999) in the June 1999 election appear to be borne out by the November public opinion trends. In the latter survey, the ANC received most of its support from blacks (90%) and the DP most of its support from whites (77%). The IFP’s support base remained almost exclusively speakers of isiZulu in rural KwaZulu-Natal. Almost half (44%) of the NNP’s support came from coloureds, with relatively high white (31%) and black (18%) components. These patterns also correlate strongly with the profiles of party support extracted from the March 1999 survey (Rule, 1999a).

The June 1999 election illustrated that the individual voting stations at which the major parties achieved their highest proportions of votes were their regional strongholds (Rule, 2000b). Thus, the ANC did best in a rural locality in a former Ciskei homeland area of the Eastern Cape and the DP in a former white (now racially mixed) urban residential suburb of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The IFP achieved its best result in rural northern KwaZulu-Natal and the NNP in a rural coloured Afrikaans-speaking locality in the Western Cape. The UDM did best at a location near Richmond, KwaZulu-Natal, where its provincial leader was killed a few months before the election. However, the core of its support came from disenchanted chiefs and public servants in the Umtata region of the former

Transkei (Maseko, 1999). The ACDP achieved its best result in Butterworth, Eastern Cape, with other concentrations of support in the suburbs of metropolitan Cape Town, especially Fish Hoek.

**Table 12.7: Best performing voting district per party, June 1999 election**

Party	Locality	District	Province
ANC	Zozo Public School	East London Rural TLC	EC
DP	Forest View Primary School	Durban Outer West MLC	KZN
IFP	Landulwazi School	Zululand Regional Council	KZN
NNP	Kruidfontein Stoor	Prince Albert TRC	WC
UDM	Magoda School	Richmond TLC	KZN
ACDP	Bava Junior Sec. School	Butterworth-Gowa TRC	EC

## **Conclusion**

The political landscape as determined by the first democratic election of April 1994 appears to have stabilised. The 1999 election and a subsequent poll of public opinion indicate a slight strengthening of the ANC's dominance among the black electorate and a significant strengthening among the coloured electorate. With most white Afrikaans speakers as well as significant numbers of Indian and coloured voters having shifted allegiance to the DP, as well as its alliance agreement with the NNP in June 2000, that party has consolidated its position as the country's major opposition party. The IFP retains its power base in rural northern KwaZulu-Natal, almost exclusively amongst isiZulu-speaking voters. The NNP's remaining power bases in the Western and Northern Cape largely mirror the distribution of the coloured population. The local government elections scheduled for 2000 will reveal the extent to which the opposition Democratic Alliance retains traditional NNP support. The growth of the UDM appears to have been stalled and that of the next largest party, the ACDP, to be expanding amongst all sectors of the electorate, although at a slow rate.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In 1924 the National Party (NP) unseated the South African Party government; in 1938 the United Party defeated the NP; in 1948 the NP returned to power and in 1994 the African National Congress (ANC) assumed control.
- <sup>2</sup> The realised sample totalled 2 678 respondents in all nine provinces.
- <sup>3</sup> For more than eight decades the ANC fought and negotiated for the trans-formation of the racially exclusivist hegemony under FW de Klerk and his predecessors so as to institute universal franchise and a multi-party democracy.
- <sup>4</sup> The shift in voter allegiance later precipitated a political alliance between the two parties in order to consolidate opposition support in the local government elections scheduled for late 2000.

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