

Zunami! The 2009 South African Elections Edited by Roger Southall and John Daniel

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The first part of the title of this book is a play on a statement made by Zwelinzima Vavi, Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) general secretary, in 2005. At the time Vavi had said that any attempt to stop Zuma, then the ANC's deputy president as he was preparing a challenge to Thabo Mbeki's leadership, would be like '... trying to fight against the big wave of a tsunami'.

The editors of this volume suggest that the most recent general election in South Africa, April 2009, was mainly a referendum on Jacob Zuma. Though a number of other developments were also interesting — a decline in national support for the ANC with the exception of KwaZulu-Natal (it lost 5-10% of its vote share in eight of the nine provinces), the emergence of the new opposition party, the Congress of the People (COPE), among others— events around Zuma since 2005 dominated these elections.

The result is now well known. The ANC won by a large majority, just short of two-thirds, while COPE — a party of former ANC leaders closely associated with Zuma's predecessor, Thabo Mbeki, established late 2008 — mustered 7 odd percent of the national vote. '... There was no serious suggestion during the 2009 election campaign that South Africa would have to confront the 'turnover' test — the willingness of an incumbent government in a new democracy to hand over power if defeated at the polls — which theorists consider the ultimate test of democratic consolidation' (p.6).

University of the Witwatersrand political scientist Anthony Butler points out that the ANC hardly stretched itself. 'Its manifestoes were moderate, uncontroversial, and anti-populist in economic policy' (p.66).

The largest opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA), which has participated in postapartheid elec-

tions since 1994 in various disguises, only increased its vote — still largely limited to the majority of whites and some coloureds — by single digits. (In the chapter on the DA, University of Cape Town academic Zwelethu Jolobe, concludes otherwise: he claims that the DA has achieved 'considerable success' [p.146] since 1994.)

However, the election pointed to a number of exciting developments. The 7% earned by COPE is remarkable given that it was only formed in 2008. Compare that to the DA, which has not reached even 20% despite participating in elections since 1994. Though the editors agree that the emergence of COPE does not signal the ANC's monopoly over voters, it still represents a significant development, especially as it emerged from within ANC ranks. In her chapter on COPE, political scientist Susan Booysen — who dismisses the smear that COPE is a mere extension of Thabo Mbeki loyalists — argues that COPE's impact on South African politics was twofold: 'It rendered the ANC more vibrant than it would have been without it, and it helped breathe life into opposition politics' (86).

The book also contains two chapters dealing with the smaller opposition parties — the ethnic Inkatha Freedom Party, the United Democratic Movement, Independent Democrats, Freedom Front Plus (a white sectarian party whose leader was co-opted into Zuma's new Cabinet). The prognosis on these parties is not as positive as with COPE. Instead, this may have been the last electoral showing by some of these parties.

Another exciting development was the participation of young people. A first time 18-year-old voter in 2009 was not even born when Nelson Mandela was freed from prison. 'A full third of the potential electorate had become eligible to vote' (p.9). They were four when some of their parents voted for the first time in 1994. The only government they know is the ANC. They feel

less of a recidivist attachment to the ANC or the party's role in defeating Apartheid. Though most of them still voted ANC, increasingly they'll judge the ANC on performance and for them the ANC is associated with deepening inequality, homelessness, lack of healthcare, and poor education, little accountability by public representatives and increased public corruption. Since 2004 there has been an increased in protest actions by poor black people. Zuma has some sympathy with these voters. However, it is unclear how that support will last the further we move away from the end of Apartheid.

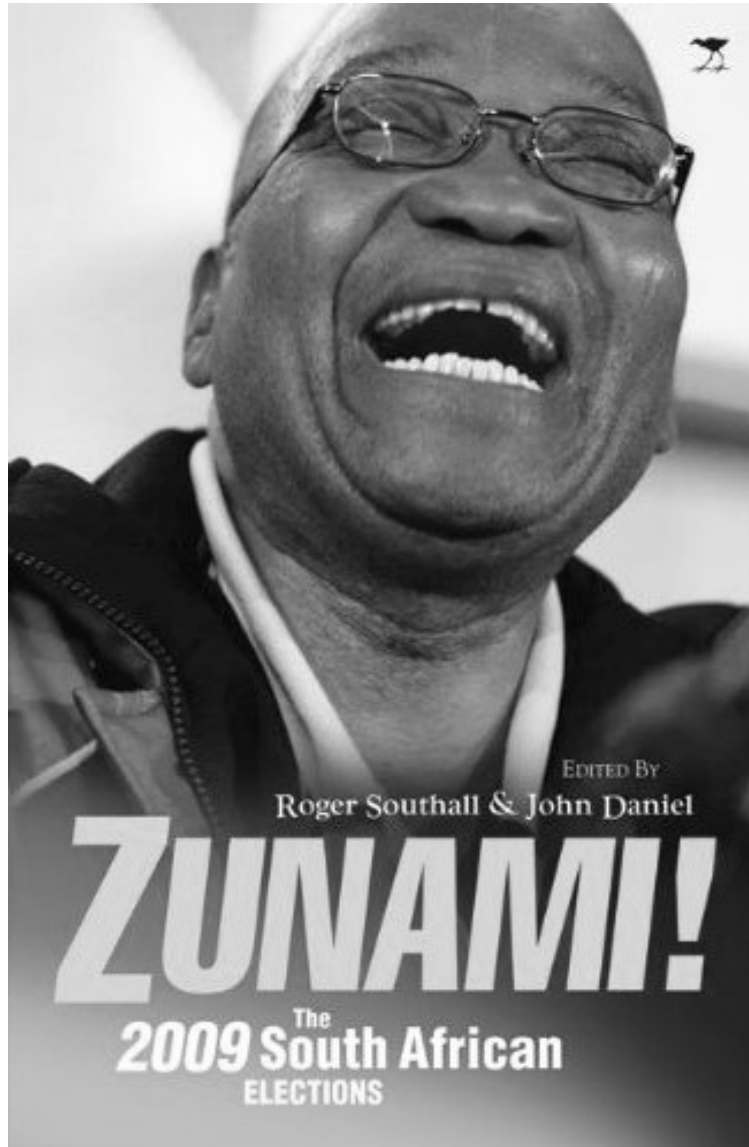
In what may be good news for opposition parties, Collette Schulz-Herzenberg, a pollster at the University of Cape Town, argues that, contrary to popular wisdom, South African voters have become 'less predictable' and 'significant potential exists for electoral fluidity' (p.24). However, Schulz-Herzenberg points out that South African voters still learn much about politics 'racial cues' (p.44). In what reads like veiled criticism of the DA and its leader, Helen Zille, Schulz-Herzenberg writes '... to contest future elections seriously, [opposition parties] need to be more attentive and responsive to subtle shifts in political identity' (p.44). Schulz-Herzenberg's findings also suggest that voters increasingly factor in government performance evaluations.

Three chapters deal with topics that are not specifical-

ly focused on the political parties. Jane Duncan studies the media while Idasa researcher Judith February evaluates the electoral system and electoral machinery. February concludes that the election was 'well run and well managed'. She has nothing but praise for the electoral commission. However, she points out that South Africa's electoral system requires reform. While the party-list driven proportional representation-system that South Africa uses since 1994 'supports democratic values of fairness and inclusivity,' crucially it lacks accountability, with representatives reverting to party bosses.

Finally, Shireen Hassim, who is probably the country's foremost scholar on the relation between politics and gender, writes that gender was a 'major fault-line' in the 2009 election, but not in the way feminists preferred. Hassim points out any casual (feminist) observer of the 2009 elections 'might conclude that she had finally arrived in heaven'. 'Two of the top four contending parties are led by women, half the number of candidates on at least two parties' lists are women, and the country has one of the most advanced legal, constitutional and institutional frameworks for ensuring gender equality in the world' (p.195).

However, politically active women were smeared as monstrous (Helen Zille became 'Godzille'), as witches (supporters of COPE) or as benign mamas (the leaders of the ANC's Women's League).



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