

The Star

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Ponder this as you vote

TOMORROW'S general election, the fourth since the emancipation of South Africa, is different from all previous elections. It's arguably the most important since the advent of our non-racial democracy.

Elections held during the era of white hegemony were seen by the main adversaries as a conflict between good and evil. The delusions of the apartheid regime provoked a justifiable response which eventually morphed into the universally-supported struggle against apartheid.

The settlement negotiated in the early 1990s, as manifested in the interim constitution of 1993 and the adoption in 1996 of the constitution forged by the representatives of South Africa's first democratically-elected parliament, set our country on the path to normalcy. And if nothing else, that's what we need to celebrate tomorrow.

Though the election oratory often creates the impression of vast ideological difference between the main competing parties, these disparities are often exaggerated. The near-unanimous acceptance by all the competing parties of the constitution on which South Africa's non-racial democracy is founded, and the country's concomitant status as a constitutional democracy, mean that the divergences between the major parties are largely confined to general policy and other peripheral issues.

South Africa has come of age as a democracy. The distinguishing feature of the 1994 elections was how the ballot was guided by our emotions. It's a sign of our growth and reshaped political alignment that tomorrow's poll requires some rational thought and the careful weighing up of one party against another.

Another change is that the African National Congress no longer occupies the moral high ground, which in the past owed much to its prestige as a liberation movement and by the world acclaim for Nelson Mandela as a man who combined courageous resistance with generous magnanimity.

Equality enshrined in constitution

The ANC today is largely bereft of its moral authority, due to the divisive conflict between rival factions led by Jacob Zuma and former president Thabo Mbeki.

The paradigm of oppressive whites and oppressed blacks has been rendered obsolete by the doctrine of equality enshrined in the constitution, though, of course, the liberation of millions of South Africans from poverty is still far from complete. As a result of these changes and the declared acceptance by all the major parties of the constitution, and the bill of rights in it, The Star no longer feels the need to endorse one party at the expense of its rivals.

In these circumstances our advice to the 23-million voters is to cast their ballots in favour of the party that they adjudge to be most committed to protection of their constitutional rights and the constitution that guarantees them.

The rule of law, and the associated doctrine that all citizens are equal before the law and that no citizen, no matter how highly placed or how powerful, is above the law, are integral and vital components of the constitution.

In pondering these important principles it is salutary for citizens to remind themselves that containment of corruption depends largely on the constitutional clauses that uphold the independence of the judiciary in general, and the Constitutional Court in particular. As the highest judicial authority in the land, it is tasked with the responsibility of protecting the constitution from political erosion.

Voters should assess for themselves to what extent Zuma has been the victim of a political conspiracy and to what extent the NPA's decision to withdraw the charges against him is the result of political pressure and machination comparable to the alleged abuse of state authority. Though it is a tough ask, voters need to remember that citizenship bestows obligations as well as rights.

The huge sacrifices made to achieve democracy in South Africa have made it a moral imperative and an obligation on all eligible citizens to exercise their vote. Although the outcome of the national election is fairly predictable, your vote can either ensure or deny the ruling party a two-thirds majority; it can weaken or strengthen the opposition and even sway the outcome in some of the provinces.

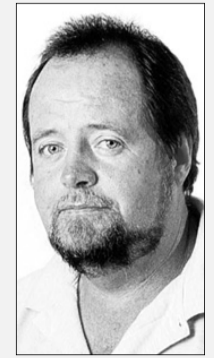
We urge you to vote tomorrow and to make a choice based on your own analysis and conscience.



Crime-free SA the best legacy

LITTLE SPOT

BRENDAN SEERY



JACOB Zuma is going to be our next president. Is this a bad thing? Here's my 10 cents' worth: it may be simplistic, it may be naive, but... Jacob Zuma is like any politician. He's in it for the power; the sort of rush no drug can bring. And, if his ego is as well developed as other politicians' egos, he will want to leave a legacy, to be judged kindly by history, to earn a place in the history books for something not related to Schabir Shaik, corruption or rape charges.

He cannot beat Nelson Mandela's bequest; the saintly man who liberated this country is going to take some beating. And Thabo Mbeki, for all his faults, got the African Renaissance on the move.

So, what can JZ do to leave his mark? Sort out the one thing his two esteemed predecessors could not: crime.

The person who sorts that out might even overshadow the others, because that is truly the thing that hobbles this country from achieving greatness.

It might not be pretty. It might give liberals the vapours because JZ has never shown himself to be afraid of cracking eggs when needing to make an omelette. Then again, as they said about Mussolini's Italy: At least the trains ran on time.

We need that kind of order in this country. Over to you, JZ. Use it, don't use it...

Why I won't give ANC my vote

COMMENT

MARK GEVISSER



Rather than walk away from a compromised Zuma, the ANC chose to fuse its destiny to his

WHEN I go to the polls tomorrow I will – for the first time in my life – not be voting for the ANC. Although I have never signed up as a member, being “ANC” has been central to my identity since my late teens. I not only subscribed to the liberation movement's values – I also thought it essential, for both my own healing and that of our brutally-divided country, to cross the racial line and merge my aspirations with those of the majority.

Most of the professionals and intellectuals in my multiracial world felt similarly, and we revelled in being part of the new order. But now I feel that I have lost my political home. I am not alone: although the ANC will maintain its significant majority, there is not a single person in my world, black or white, who will put his or her cross easily next to the image of Jacob Zuma. Most of us will vote for an opposition party for the first time, or spoil our vote, or stay away.

A few will vote ANC, anyway, for want of a better alternative.

For many of us, this is a direct response to Zuma himself. His supporters would have it that this reveals us as Eurocentric elitists scornful of a polygamous traditional Zulu man with no formal education, but for me Zuma's lack of formal education is totally irrelevant: I would have no problem, for example, voting for the similarly uneducated Lula da Silva.

No, the discomfort with Zuma is based on his populist politics and his manifest lack of judgement. Even if he was set up in his rape trial, most of the people I know find it impossible to vote for a man who admitted to having unprotected sex with an unstable, HIV-positive woman who regarded him as a “father”, and who permitted misogynist mob action outside the court.

Of course, Zuma has the right to a fair trial. The tipping point for me – in both the rape and the fraud cases – was the way he seemed willing to threaten social instability as part of the arsenal of defence tactics deployed to get him off the hook.

Zuma's speech at Sunday's Siyanqoba rally was masterful and heartening. But there has been a pattern to his off-the-cuff statements on the campaign trail: the brags about beating up gay men; the call to sequester pregnant schoolgirls; the appeals to churches to challenge policies they find abhorrent. This record has led me to believe that a Zuma-led government runs the risk of a return to conservative patriarchy at odds with the values that attracted me to the ANC in the first place.

Zuma talks tough on crime, certainly, but in a manner that suggests the easy solutions of vigilantism, as in the way he once suggested that suspects of violent crimes should forfeit their rights. Most troubling



ANC supporters listen to ANC president Jacob Zuma's address at the Siyanqoba rally on Sunday at Coca-Cola Park in Johannesburg.

PICTURE: ADRIAN DE KOCK

was his suggestion that he would overlook Dikgang Moseneke for promotion because the deputy chief justice once made a statement that he owed his allegiance to the people rather than to the ANC.

Surely anyone who really believes in the primacy of the constitution would see that as an asset rather than a disqualification? This points to the biggest issue: the way Zuma has been sullied by the charges of fraud and racketeering, even in the way they have been dropped.

Whether you agree with the National Prosecuting Authority's (NPA) decision or not, two facts are inescapable. The first is that the decision was made on the basis of Zuma's own representations to the NPA, which means that he did not want his day in court even though this might have given him – and his government, and thus the country – the possibility of a resolution which now eludes us all.

And the second is the “substantive merits” of the case remain, and that even if his rights were violated by the “collusion” between Bulelani Ngucika and Leonard McCarthy, the charges against him revealed poor judgment at the very least, in both his personal financial management and in his choice of benefactor.

Then there is the question of how Zuma obtained the evidence that set him free. It took the form of covert recordings which he could have only accepted illegally. This suggests that he is guilty of the very sin of

which he accuses Mbeki: the abuse of state organs to fight his own political battles.

Ultimately for me, the loss of a political home is not just about Zuma. It is about a ruling party that has subjugated the national interest to its own internal power struggle, thus subjecting the whole country to what is, in essence, a family feud. For this, of course, I blame Mbeki primarily, and I was deeply dismayed by his attempt to hang on to power at Polokwane.

But what amazed me, too, was that rather than walking away from the compromised Zuma, the ANC chose to fuse its destiny to his, and to lead the campaign to clear his name. In so doing, it put the fortunes of its leader above the well-being of the country, and thus compromised itself morally, too.

This is a symptom of what has happened to the ANC since it came to power. Leading a de facto one-party state, it has developed an unduly proprietary sense of ownership over South Africa's destiny, and a propensity to confuse party and state.

Flowing out of this is a system of patronage and kickback politics that undermines the very “developmental state” it wants to establish.

The ANC remains closest to my own vision for social democracy, and it still includes on its election list many very principled politicians; people whom I respect, deeply for their public service thus far.

Conversely, the alternatives give me cold

comfort. The Congress of the People has proven itself to be more interested in protecting Mbeki's legacy than in moving South African politics beyond it.

And the Democratic Alliance remains the shrill redoubt of white and coloured minority interests. But I nonetheless feel that it is my democratic duty to check the arrogance and abuse of the ruling party – even if this means voting for a party that does not feel like “home” to me.

If, then, there was something liberating about voting in 1994, this year it feels like a burdensome responsibility. The worst part is the distance I now feel from the majority of South Africans for whom the ANC does remain “home”. For the first time in my life, I will vote with the minority.

I take comfort, at least, that this minority is less racially defined now than it was 15 years ago: most of the black people I love or trust are also leaving “home” for the first time.

We might be statistically insignificant, but we represent a critical threshold: for all of us, voting with the minority today seems to be as necessary a rite of passage in the maturation of our young democracy as voting with the majority was in 1994.

● *Mark Gevisser is Writer in Residence, University of Pretoria. His updated, abridged version of Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred has just been published by Jonathan Ball.*

▶ *Why Zackie Achmat will vote ANC, Page 11*

The Star

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Be prepared, think clearly ... then vote

HUMOUR

CAROL LAZAR



A plethora of unknown parties will appear on your ballot paper

SO TOMORROW is the big day and I hope you're getting ready to vote. I've been doing arm and hand exercises just to make sure that I get the voting rhythm right.

I mean, one has to take this seriously, we're talking about the future of our country here.

Some tips. If you are voting in at a polling booth where you're likely to be standing in queues for a long time, then take along a book, a bottle of water and some sarmies to keep you from feeling faint before you get to tick that important box.

I guess most people know before they enter the polling booth which party they are going to vote for otherwise they might find themselves confused by the plethora of names.

Nobody has been able to give me a definitive count of political parties that will be

contesting tomorrow's election.

The ANC, the DA, the ID, IFP, PAC, Freedom Front Plus (FF+), Azapo, African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), African Peoples' Convention (APC), Minority Front (MF), National Democratic Convention (Nadeco), United Christian Democratic Party (UCDP), United Democratic Movement (UDM) are already represented in Parliament.

Huh, I bet you hadn't heard of several of these parties and didn't remember them from the last ballot form you picked up if you voted.

Newcomer, Cope, has been grabbing headlines recently, so we are all up to speed on that front.

But then, doing some research into the matter, I discovered that we have at least 50 other political parties buzzing around our lovely land.

Did you know this?

As yet, this other clutch of political parties is not yet represented in Parliament and I'm not sure who many of them are.

The Afrikaner Volks Party, the African Independent Congress, the Boerestaat Party, the Black Consciousness Party, the Christian Democratic Alliance, the Christian Front, the Democratic Socialist Movement, the Economic Freedom Movement, the Employment Movement of South Africa, God's People's Party, Herstigste Nasionale Party, the Keep it Straight and Simple Party, the New Vision Party, the Women Forward Party.

Well, whatever happens, you have to admit, we live in exciting times.

Imagine living in the boring US with only two political parties to speak of, the Democrats and the Republicans.

Then there's the UK that also has a hand-ful, the Labour Party, the Conservative

Party and the Liberal Democrats.

Oh, there are other minor local political parties in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, but it's the above three parties that dominate.

Well, if nothing else, we have diversity and democracy which is more than can be said for many other countries in the world that are either one-party states, some might use the word dictatorships, or they have no elections at all.

Think about that and shudder. Everyone gets fed-up with the pre-election propaganda dished out left, right, centre and even further away and some say they couldn't be bothered to vote as the outcome will be the same.

Ag, ja, well, no, fine.

The bottom line is that a vote is a proud privilege.

So think clearly and then go and make your tick.