

**THE 2011 LOCAL ELECTIONS CAMPAIGNS IN THE TLOKWE  
MUNICIPALITY, NORTH-WEST PROVINCE: ENHANCING  
PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE?**

Communitas

ISSN 1023-0556

2011 16: 131 - 149

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**ABSTRACT**

*The South African Local Government Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) requires participatory governance. Although this Act is not concerned with electoral participation in the first instance, it is argued that it also sets the tone for electoral communication. In the spirit of participatory governance it could be expected of political parties to inform the electorate about issues relevant to local government, stimulate debate, motivate voters to participate in the elections and promote democratic values. Against this background, this article endeavours to investigate to what extent the campaigns of political parties in the 2011 local elections displayed the context of local developmental government and enhanced participatory governance. A qualitative content analysis was done of the election material (manifestos, posters, television advertisements and pamphlets) of the ANC, DA, FF+ and Cope in the Tlokwe Municipality. It was found that all the parties adhered to the spirit of and actively promoted local developmental government in their manifestos, although they did so to a lesser extent in the more popular media (posters, television advertisements and pamphlets). It was concluded that these messages were not harmful to the sustainability of local developmental democracy.*

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## INTRODUCTION

South Africa hosted its fourth local government elections in May 2011. Local government is the tier of government that is expected to be the most participatory, as confirmed in the South African Local Government Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 (South Africa 2000), which makes participatory governance a requirement. This implies active engagement by communities, not only during elections but also in-between elections.

Although the above-mentioned act is not concerned with electoral participation in the first instance, it is argued that it also sets the tone for electoral communication. In the spirit of participatory governance it could be expected of political parties to campaign in a manner that facilitates and promotes community engagement and sustainable democracy. South African political parties accordingly signed a code of conduct on 10 March 2011.

Electoral conduct and especially the tone of election campaigns is not an issue unique to developing democracies. The ethics of election campaigns world-wide have been questioned, especially in terms of their informational value and their use of negative and/or emotional messages. It is argued in this article that political parties contesting a local election have a responsibility to inform residents regarding local issues and that they should not merely address issues that would score political points but do not have local relevance. It is further assumed that by informing the electorate regarding issues that are important to them, public debate and participation could be stimulated.

In view of the above, this article endeavours to investigate to what extent political parties campaigned in the 2011 local elections within the context of participatory governance.

## CONTEXT: LOCAL DEVELOPMENTAL GOVERNMENT

### Principles of democracy

Dahl's (1998:10) definition of democracy implies that a democratic decision-making process should be characterised by the following:

- Opportunity is provided for all community members to participate;
- All members of the community should have equal voting rights;
- Community members should be reasonably informed to enable them to deliberate on issues;
- Members must have control over the agenda; and
- All community members must have the same rights (Dahl 1998: 37-38).

Democratic decision-making thus clearly assumes participation. Nsingo and Kuye (2005:748) further argue that democracy is a political concept premised on values, process and practice. *Values* imply a moral dimension, including tolerance of each other and recognition of diversity. *Process* refers to the ability of the political system to

facilitate human rights and basic freedoms, while democracy in *practice* implies the way in which power is organised and exercised. It is therefore evident that participation lies at the heart of democracy.

### **Developmental state**

The South African government explicitly defines South Africa as a *developmental state* (Lefko-Everett 2010): a developmental state focuses on economic growth and the mobilisation of national resources towards development goals (Levin 2009: 944). One of the key features of a developmental state is its aim to stimulate market growth while also addressing market-related inequalities (Levin 2009: 945, 948; Naidoo & Reddy 2008: 45). The South African developmental state is firmly grounded on the principles of democracy and socio-economic transformation. It focuses on social economic development based on a participatory and integrated planning process (Levin 2009: 948; Reddy 2010: 70).

The importance of participation is also emphasised in the definition of democratic local government in the White Paper on Local Democracy (South Africa 1998): "... local government is committed to working with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs and improve the quality of their lives".

According to the White Paper on Local Governance (South Africa 1998) the outcomes of local developmental government are the provision of household infrastructure and services; the creation of liveable, integrated cities, towns and rural areas; local economic development and community empowerment; and redistribution.

### **Participatory governance**

The decentralised nature of local government implies that local government is the sphere of government that should be the most democratic (Mzimakwe 2010: 514; Reddy 2010: 71). The importance of community participation is accordingly emphasised in the preamble of the Local Government Municipal Act (South Africa 2000):

A fundamental aspect of the new local government system is that active engagement of communities in the affairs of municipalities of which they are an integral part, should be promoted and in particular in planning, service delivery and performance management.

This begs the question of whether voting in elections alone could be regarded as participatory government. The Green Paper on Local Government (South Africa 1997: 63) clarifies this issue by describing two modes of democratic participation:

The importance of effective representation of community interests by elected councillors in the decision-making structures of local government, for example, can never be over-emphasised. The elected Council remains at the heart of local democracy, provided that electoral competition is open and regular. However, the contact between municipalities and communities need not be limited to election and

representation. On the contrary, increased citizen involvement will increase municipalities' ability to effectively shape viable human settlements.

Local democracy is thus seen as involving formal elections but also participatory processes that strengthen the democracy in the period between elections. In this regard, participatory governance refers to the manner in which municipalities govern between elections (Barichiev, Piper & Parker 2005: 370; Heydenrych 2008: 705-207; Esau 2007: 195). Barichiev, Piper and Parker (2005: 374) highlight three distinct aspects that define participatory governance, namely the definition of the municipality, the ward committee system and requirements for public participation. Of special importance for the current article is the definition of a municipality: a municipality is defined as being constituted of government structures (the elected councillors), the administration (appointed staff) and the residents (Barichiev, K., Piper, L. and Parker, B. *ibid.* 2005: 374). In practice this means that the residents who are the voters and citizens are seen as part of the municipality, and thus of government.

Mzimakwe (2010: 502) describes participation as a complex process in which people are supposed to (in varying degrees) influence development and government issues and activities that affect their lives. Participation is thus an active process in which citizens are afforded the opportunity to take initiative and action and therefore to play an active role in the shaping of their own rights and responsibilities (Nsingo & Kuye 2005; Mzimakwe 2010; Reddy 2010: 75; Esau 2007: 190-191; Murray, Tshabangu & Erlank 2010: 45).

This article focuses on elections as an opportunity to participate in democracy, but against the background of participatory governance it is acknowledged that elections alone do not guarantee democracy. Keeping this in mind, it will be argued that political parties need to campaign in order to enhance participatory governance.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Electioneering for participatory governance**

It is argued in this article that political parties should inform voters and stimulate public debate regarding issues relevant to local government, encourage voters to vote and actively promote democratic values in their electioneering (see Fourie 2011: 166-170 for a full discussion).

#### *Informing the electorate*

Information is the first step in the participation continuum (Nsingo & Kuye 2005: 750-751) as an informed community is a vital part of participatory governance (Eveland & Hively 2009). Politically informed voters are more likely to participate in elections and to be able to express their political opinion than their uninformed counterparts (Finkel & Smith 2010: 418; Eveland & Hively 2009: 205; Gunther & Mughan 2000; Kuan & Lau 2002). Voter behaviour may be explained by models such as the rational, party-identification and sociological models (Schoeman & Puttergill 2007).

According to the *sociological model*, voters base their vote on the fact that they belong to a specific social grouping. Although some elements of this model may be pertinent in South African circumstances (see Fourie 2004: 79-80), it is not the dominant model in South Africa and is therefore not discussed in detail in this article.

According to the *party-identification* model, votes are based on party loyalty that has been built up over time and not necessarily on the merit of political issues at hand (see Campbell *et al.* 1960). As is the case in many young democracies, the party-identification model seems to be the dominant model in practice in the South African context, although not all voting behaviour can be explained by this model (Schoeman & Puttergill 2007). The ANC, the party that is associated with the struggle against the former apartheid regime, has dominated South African electoral politics since the first democratic elections in 1994 (Kotze 2006: 209; Booysen 2007).

The *rational choice model* assumes that elections are issue-based and that the decision for whom to vote is thus a rational one based on the dominant political issues at hand. In the context of democracy, the rational choice model is often seen as the normative model and this ties in with the arguments of an informed citizenry (Eveland & Hively 2009). However, various researchers have indicated that voting is rarely a purely rational act and that it is unrealistic to expect that voters will base their decision for whom to vote only on the merit of policy issues (Page & Shapiro 1992: 5; Congleton 2001: 35; Eveland & Hively 2009: 218).

It is apparent that no one model can completely account for voter behaviour, as voters process information differently. When the models explaining voter behaviour are kept in mind, South African political parties are faced with the dilemma of, on the one hand, informing the electorate to contribute to sustainable participatory governance according to the rational voter model, while on the other hand also canvassing votes by emphasising party ties according to the party-identification model.

The South African political context is not unique in this regard, as literature on political communication frequently points out that parties may be focusing too much on the image of the party and/or candidate instead of on the issues at hand. In this article it is argued that both issue (rational) and image (emotional) messages have a function in an election campaign. Emotional messages should be used to attract the attention of the voter, but should also be contextualised against the background of policy issues, thus empowering the voter. This is even more pertinent in the context of local government election campaigns, where parties and/or candidates may use national emotional issues to canvass votes, instead of focusing on local issues that are pertinent to the specific community.

With the functions of local developmental government in mind, it could be argued that political parties should focus on service delivery, local economic issues and community development issues; and that public debate regarding these issues should therefore also be stimulated.

### *Stimulating public debate*

In an established democracy, it is the task of opposition political parties to critically evaluate the political scene during election campaigns. In a developing democracy, however, this should be done with care, as mere critique could destabilise the democracy. In this regard the use of negative messages during campaigns has widely been debated in political communication literature, as outlined in the following section. For the current argument, it is important to distinguish between comparative and negative messages (see Fourie & Froneman 2007). Messages that compare policy viewpoints or that highlight shortcomings in the policies of other parties, can contribute to political debate and strengthen democracy; but messages that result in mudslinging could threaten the stability of a young democracy or contribute to voter apathy.

It is argued that it is important for the ruling party to indicate what it has achieved, especially within the framework of democracy, while opposition parties should highlight issues that could threaten the sustainability of democracy. Issues emphasised by political parties should thus be framed within the context of local developmental government. Service delivery is certainly one of the most important mandates of local government and therefore should be one of the issues debated in the election campaigns. However, it should be linked to the relevance of local government and not merely be used as an emotional issue to gather party support.

### *Motivating voters to exercise their democratic right*

The mobilising function of political parties is extremely important in local government elections. While it is argued that local government should be “more democratic”, local elections often have a lower voter turnout than national elections. In South Africa, the turnout in local elections was 44.62% in 2000; 45.63% in 2006 and 53.47 in 2011; compared to the national elections turnout of more than 70% in all the elections since 1994 (IEC 2011).

Research in the early 1990s indicated that negative messages could lead to general political apathy and a decline in voter turnout (Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Simon & Valentino 1994; Ansolabehere & Iyengar 1995). Although these findings were confirmed in more recent publications (Abbe & Hernson 2000; Turner 2001; Rahn & Hirshorn 1999), the research was not conclusive. Some researchers, for example, have even concluded that negative messages motivate people to vote, as they are usually remembered better and their emotional appeals achieve greater electoral participation (Wattenberg & Brains 1999: 896; Kahn & Kenny 1999: 878). It seems that the result of a negative message will differ according to the type of the message, the medium that is used as well as the circumstances in which it is applied (Fridkin & Kenny 2010; Carraro & Castelli 2010; Walter & Vliegenthart 2010).

It is proposed that instead of focusing on the possible different outcomes of negative messages, political parties in a developing democracy have an obligation to explain to the voter why it is important to vote. On the one hand, the mandate of political parties require them to canvass as many votes as possible, in accordance with the party-

identification model; but on the other hand, in the context of a developing democracy it is also important to educate voters on the importance of participation in democratic structures. In the context of local developmental government, this could be done with reference to the role individual voters could play in participatory governance.

#### *Contributing to a democratic culture*

Through their interpretive function, political parties introduce a specific political reality to voters. This reality should contribute to voters' perceptions and understanding of democracy and should enhance their democratic conduct.

Political messages should also actively promote core democratic values, such as participation; the right to political choice and elections; and civil and political rights (Fourie 2011: 161-164), and it should also indicate how the specific political party's policies augment these values. In their campaigns, political parties should furthermore take care not to make statements that could have long-term negative effects on the democratic process.

#### **Research method**

This article focuses on the 2011 local election campaigns, but reference will be made to the 2000 and 2006 local election campaigns as well, to illustrate differences with previous campaigns.

The four largest political parties in the North West Province were included in the study, namely the African National Congress (ANC), Democratic Alliance (DA), Congress of the People (Cope) and Freedom Front Plus (FF+). The research focused mainly on each party's manifestos and posters, as supplemented by television advertisements and pamphlets. This method was followed because the manifestos are best suited to the normative rational voter model. It was also assumed that very few voters would study different party manifestos, while political posters are very visible and widely accessible. Political posters are also most likely to follow the party-identification model and to focus on image messages relating to the specific party. Television advertisements and pamphlets are the media where it is the easiest to combine the rational and party-identification models. However, these media are less accessible than posters, and only the ANC and DA used television advertisements.

The collection of data was limited to the Tlokwe Municipality in the North West Province, the municipality in which the researcher resides. This municipality was chosen for feasibility reasons but also for its political significance. The municipality is run by the ANC, but was considered by the DA as one of their strategic focus points. The DA did indeed gain three seats from the ANC in the election. Tlokwe Municipality was selected for this study primarily because it was expected to be an election campaign focus point for the major parties in the election.

All four of the above-mentioned parties were contacted and the aim of the research was explained to them. The parties were requested to provide the researcher with copies of their printed campaign material and they responded in different degrees to this request,

ranging from the FF+ who provided a comprehensive portfolio of their material, to the ANC who was not prepared to supply any material. The researcher accessed all available material on the political parties' websites and photographed all political posters in the Tlokwe Municipality. The DA's television advertisements were available on their website and the ANC's advertisements were retrieved from YouTube. This study thus focused on the campaign material as supplied by the political parties and material that was easily accessible to the general public. Hence, this study does not claim to have exhausted all campaign material, but the available material is deemed to have been sufficient, as it is argued that the average citizen does not actively seek political information and would not have gone to the trouble to obtain campaign material that was not readily available.

The campaign material was analysed by means of qualitative content analysis according to the theoretical assumptions outlined above.

## **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Informing the electorate: election manifestos**

The election manifestos of the main political parties confirmed that their policy issues were in line with what could normatively be expected from parties in developmental local government. The ANC addressed six key areas in its manifesto:

- Build local economies to create more employment, decent work and sustainable livelihoods

This included an emphasis on the party's new Growth Path Policy, job creation together with equal access to employment, skills development for women and support for small enterprises, co-operatives and informal sector and rural farmers. Infrastructure development, expanding public works and youth development programmes were emphasised in respect of sustainable livelihoods.

- Improve and broaden access to local public services

Typical service delivery issues were addressed here, including the improvement of municipal access roads, water, sanitation, electricity, refuse removal, primary health care, child-friendly facilities in municipalities and more information regarding the arts.

- Build more united, non-racial, integrated and safer communities

Building better communities involved housing, upgrading of informal settlements and addressing crime by mobilising communities and expanding police stations.

- Promote active community participation in local government

The focus here was on extending the Ward Committee System and furthering cooperation with community-initiated social activities.

- Ensure more effective, accountable and clean local government that works together with national and provincial government



This involved increased community participation, publication of reports on local performance plans, supporting municipalities that lack capacity in the management and delivery of services, regular feedback to the community and greater transparency.

The DA focused on two main issues in their manifesto, namely reducing *poverty* and improving (and maintaining) *service delivery*. The issue of poverty was addressed over a wide spectrum, as is typical in the context of developmental democracy. The DA's proposals in this regard included ensuring clean, transparent, efficient and effective government; planning and regulating growth; building and maintaining infrastructure; making government accessible; building strategic partnerships; using resources sustainably; building human settlements; and fighting crime. The second issue, service delivery, was defined as caring for the poor, providing clean water, electricity, managing sewerage, ensuring refuse removal, delivering primary health care and facilitating social development.

Cope did not distinguish between main and supporting issues in its manifesto but listed all the issues they wished to address. For the purpose of this research, these issues were grouped together according to themes, in order to make it easier to compare Cope's manifesto with those of the other parties.

The first theme pertained to the *effective functioning of government* and included citizen democracy, empowering the people, leadership, accountability and good governance. The second theme pertained to *services* and included ensuring better water and sanitation management, a better approach to dwellings, supporting effective local government in rural areas, early childhood development, achieving affordable energy and improving sports, arts and recreation opportunities and infrastructure. The importance of addressing crime and of the youth was also pointed out. The third theme pertained to promoting *economic growth*, development and food security.

The main issues put forward in the FF+ manifesto were *better services* and *municipal issues*. These included fair taxes; keeping local government local; sustainable and independent communities; service delivery; acknowledging and protecting diversity at all levels of government; acknowledging the important role of opposition councillors; the accountability of councillors; and moral values as informed by Christian principles.

### **Informing the electorate: posters, advertisements and other campaign material**

The issues of service delivery, local economics, development and the importance of the local community have been addressed extensively in the manifestos of the ANC, DA and Cope and to a lesser extent in that of the FF+. However, it would be premature to conclude that political parties did indeed inform the electorate appropriately. From the literature review it is evident that very few citizens are active seekers of political information and it would be unrealistic to assume that the majority of citizens studied the different manifestos of the parties and based their electoral decision on that. In order to determine which of the above-mentioned issues were popularised and how they were communicated to the citizens, political posters and other relevant campaign material were analysed.

The central theme of the ANC's campaign was *Together we can build better communities*. Their posters all echoed this slogan, but depicted different aspects of service delivery, including children's facilities, education, infrastructure maintenance, water and policing. The 2011 poster campaign of the ANC was a continuation of their campaigns which started in 2000 with the slogan *Together speeding up change and fighting poverty* and which was continued in 2006 under the slogans *Build better communities* and *A plan to make local government work better for you*.

In all their local election campaigns, the ANC had focused their posters on the importance of local communities and by implication on service delivery. This focus was even stronger in the 2011 election campaign and was supported by television advertisements such as:

Together we have changed our community; millions now have access to water, electricity, sanitation, health care and housing ...;

This is my community; I grew up here, everybody that lives here forms part of my family;

In our community, just like in so many other communities, conditions have changed for the better ...

The personalised approach of the television advertisements could elicit an emotional response and attract the voters' attention.

The DA also focused on service delivery in their poster campaign and television advertisements. The DA poster stated: *DA: We deliver for all*. This is in accordance with the 2006 poster, *The DA delivers*, but in contrast with previous poster campaigns where there was a stronger emphasis on crime, for example *Nail them and jail them* (2000); *Stop corruption* (2006); *Fight crime* (2006); and *Zero tolerance for criminals* (2006).

Service delivery was also the focus of the television advertisements. Where crime is mentioned in a television advertisement, the relevance for local government is indicated:

I feel very safe now that the DA is in our community because when the DA was not there, there were gangsterism ... Nowadays we can walk freely in our community.

The DA's television advertisement campaign involved an empathy appeal through a focus on ordinary people. In all their advertisements, ordinary citizens from all walks of life testified to the improvements in service delivery which the DA had been responsible for, including sports facilities, housing, community safety, general infrastructure and electricity. In all the instances it is indicated how the DA had touched the lives of individuals.

The Cope poster campaign did not highlight any specific policy issues, but focused on partnerships and the need for change. The FF+ focused on the issues of taxes and service delivery, with posters bearing the message *No service delivery, no taxes*.

It is important to note that there was a stronger emphasis on service delivery as an aspect of local democracy than in previous elections, although the focus was still not as strong as in the manifestos of the respective parties.

### **Stimulating public debate**

As was the case in the run-up to the two previous elections, there were many questions regarding the lack of service delivery (Naidoo & Reddy 2008; Kotze 2006; Schoeman & Puttergill 2007). The emphasis on service delivery was thus predictable, but the question remains whether the issue was used to stimulate public debate in the context of developmental local government.

In its manifesto as well as its television campaign, the ANC, being the dominant, ruling party, emphasised what has already been achieved regarding service delivery, but also admitted that still more work is needed. Their manifesto started with a message from the President admitting that: *Going forward and taking the message “working together”, we need to do things differently*. This message is reinforced throughout the manifesto where it is indicated what has been achieved, but also what still needs to be done, for example:

While many have access to housing and basic services, there is still a long waiting list;

Whilst many local authorities are doing excellent work we recognise that some are not performing well.

The ANC television advertisements followed the same pattern and stated that a lot has already been achieved in terms of access to water, electricity, sanitation, health care and social grants, while also indicating that there is still a lot of work to be done.

The ANC thus had a balanced approach, as they both pointed out what has been done, and at the same time also admitted that they could still improve. This was probably done in anticipation that opposition parties would attack them for the lack of service delivery in certain areas.

The official opposition, the DA, found itself in the position of not only being an opposition party, but also the governing party in seven municipalities at the time of the election campaign. As a ruling party, they focused on what they had achieved in these municipalities. This is in sharp contrast with previous elections, where the DA used negative and even hostile messages when referring to the ANC's inability to address crime and to the ANC's corrupt councillors. The DA's manifesto included no direct negative messages about the ANC, but comparative messages were used to indicate what the DA had done differently than the ANC, for example:

When the DA assumed office (of Cape Town) the municipality relaxed the criteria and opened up the Bid Adjudication Tender Award Committee to the public;

In 2000, the DA took control of the Kouga municipality in the Eastern Cape from the ANC. The municipality was bankrupt and struggling to deliver basic services. By 2002 ... the DA had turned the municipality around;

When the DA took over from the ANC in Cape Town, it pushed the qualifying threshold for indigent subsidies from R88 000 to R199 000 so that many more people qualified for subsidised services.

The same tone was reflected in the television advertisements, where the DA used testimonials from people representing different walks of life to demonstrate what they had achieved. Examples of these include:

The DA has developed and upgraded a sports facility ...;

The DA doesn't beat around the bush: it goes straight to the source of the problem. (Referring to the DA fixing the roof of her house.);

I have hope living here because the DA delivers on their promises;

There is no resentment in the community, as experienced elsewhere ...

The FF+'s campaign was typical of an opposition party. Their poster *No services no taxes* had a confrontational tone and implied that the ANC was not delivering the necessary services. This message was backed up in their pamphlet which argued that the ANC was not delivering services because they appointed people on the basis of race instead of capacity. Furthermore, it was indicated that the ANC was not maintaining civil order and that more than 3 500 farmers had been murdered since 1994.

The FF+ also used negative messages towards the DA. They referred to a case where the DA proposed English as the only business language in the Mid-Vaal municipality, whereupon the FF+ lodged a complaint and succeeded to secure recognition for Afrikaans as a business language in this municipality. In addition, the FF+ linked the DA with the ANC and in this way extended their negative messages about the ANC to the DA as well, by emphasising that both the DA and ANC are against the death penalty and that they both approved a Constitution which endorses affirmative action.

Cope criticised local government, but did not name specific parties. It appears, however, that the ANC is implied in statements like *Political infighting on the one hand and failure to uplift poor communities on the other have eroded the confidence of the people*.

Although the above-mentioned two opposition parties used negative messages, the messages that were studied contained no personal attacks or mudslinging. This research was limited to the Tlokwe municipal area and it was therefore not established whether pamphlets or fliers distributed in other municipalities obtained attack messages. The majority of the negative messages used in the campaign pertained to practices that could obstruct sustainable local government – the exceptions were the FF+ campaign's reference to affirmative action and the death penalty, which were both issues of national rather than local government.

It is significant that the two major parties did not engage in negative messages in their public debate, but that they often debated different sides of an issue in their comparative messages. Furthermore, the issues identified by the two parties were directly relevant to local government. Both the ANC and the DA explicitly indicated in their manifestos how and what they have achieved and aspired to do in future to contribute to local developmental government. The television advertisements complemented the information in the manifestos, although they did not emphasise these messages to the same extent as the manifestos did. The television advertisements had a strong focus on service delivery and its importance for the individual.

### **Motivating voters to exercise their democratic right**

In the different parties' manifestos, all the parties recognised the importance of participation. The DA's vision made reference to a free and independent civil society and declared: ... *we (DA) believe that every citizen must take responsibility for using opportunities provided.*

The ANC's manifesto did not directly refer to the importance to vote, but strongly emphasised community participation in statements like *our direct contact with the people* and *our commitment to find councillors who will be accountable to the communities they serve.*

Cope was the party that articulated the fundamental principles of participatory governance the strongest in their manifesto:

Political power resides with the people permanently and that during any election that power should not be merely surrendered to anyone. ... Cope advances this position because the party defines democracy unlike other political parties as a government OF the people, BY the people, FOR the people, WITH the people. In order to give effect to the understanding of democracy, COPE advocates an ACTIVIST STATE ...

Although all the parties endorsed the idea of participatory governance, they were still faced with the difficult task of mobilising communities to vote. Before the election, as was the case in the previous two election campaigns as well (Booyesen 2007; Bauer 2009), there were concerns that the lack of service delivery could result in a stay-away vote rather than a vote in opposition of the ANC.

Before the election campaigns, all the parties ran voter registration campaigns in which voters were urged to register to vote. These campaigns educated voters on why they had to vote and on how local government functions. The ANC's campaign focused on the requirement of an ID to be able to register. They linked the need to register to vote to the fact there was still more work to be done: *So be part of the future. Act now to make sure that you can vote.* The FF+ focused on the issue that every vote counts, even a vote for a smaller party. The FF+ furthermore explained that the lack of service delivery affected every citizen and that everyone therefore needed to vote.

During the election campaigns, however, political parties focused less on explaining the importance of voting. ANC and Cope posters urged people to vote for the respective

parties, while FF+ and DA posters had a stronger message indicating that an individual vote could make a difference in the election. For example, the FF+ stated: *Get influence for Better Services* and the DA said: *Your vote can win it*. Political parties thus did not emphasise the importance of electoral participation sufficiently in their election campaigns.

### **Contributing to a democratic culture**

All the parties' manifestos referred to the functioning and importance of local government as part of the South African government. The manifesto of Cope especially referred to citizen democracy, the role of leadership in democracy, accountability and good governance. However, all the parties were less successful with linking their policy issues to democratic values in their campaigns.

In their manifestos, both the ANC and the DA emphasised the important interplay between political and economic issues:

As the ANC, we know that political transformation without economic freedom is meaningless. The greatest obstacle on the road to an open opportunity society for all is poverty ... in order to slay the dragon of poverty, DA governments focus on two things: creating an environment for growth and jobs; delivering essential services to every person irrespective of circumstances.

This theme was, however, not conveyed in their poster campaigns. In their television advertisements, the ANC mentioned "more local employment". The DA's focus in their television advertisements was on service delivery, but they did not make the direct link between poverty and service delivery which they made in their manifesto.

Both the ANC and the DA emphasised inclusiveness in their posters and television advertisements. When the central theme of the ANC, *Together we can build better communities*, is read together with the ANC manifesto, it becomes apparent that the ANC thanks communities for the work that has been done, but also concedes that further change cannot be achieved without the communities' continued support. This theme was also echoed in their television advertisement: *Together we have changed our community ... and working together we can build better communities ...*

The DA focused on the message *we deliver for all* on their posters. In their manifesto, *for all* is defined as follows:

*We mean a society which truly belongs to all who live in it, in which all South Africans – regardless of the colour of their skin or the circumstances of their upbringing have the same rights ...*

The theme of inclusiveness is continued in their television advertisements, without referring to it explicitly. The DA had six television advertisements, each representing a different grouping of the South African society. This is also emphasised in the poster featuring a white, brown and black woman as representing the leadership of the DA.

Cope's posters also touched on inclusiveness, with reference to partnerships. The FF+'s poster with the message *No services no taxes* was more controversial. It was perceived by some as confrontational and not within the spirit of democracy; while it was also argued that service delivery is a democratic right and that citizens could protest in the absence of service delivery.

## CONCLUSION

It was argued in this article that political parties contesting an election in local developmental government should enhance participatory governance by:

- empowering the electorate to make an informed decision on whom to vote for by focussing on issues relevant to local developmental government;
- stimulating public debate by highlighting important political issues;
- motivating voters to exercise their democratic right to participate in elections by emphasising the importance of participating in the electoral process; and
- contributing to a democratic political culture by emphasising democratic values.

In the 2011 South African local government election campaigns, all the parties focused on issues relevant to local developmental government in their manifestos. The ANC, DA and FF+ emphasised service delivery as the most important issue on their posters. Service delivery was also emphasised in the ANC and DA television advertisements.

Given the context of dissatisfaction with service delivery before the election, it was not surprising that service delivery emerged as the most important election issue. What is important in the context of participatory governance is whether the issue was presented in a manner that could stimulate public debate and enhance participation. All the parties addressing service delivery emphasised its importance for each individual voter and the fact that all citizens are affected by (the lack of) service delivery.

The risk of involving an emotional issue, such as service delivery, in an election campaign is that it could result in excessive use of attack messages and that it can be used only to score political points according to the party-identification model. The DA, as the official opposition, did indeed highlight the ANC's inability to deliver services effectively to all constituents, but they used comparative rather than negative messages. This is in contrast with previous elections, where the DA used more negative messages towards the ANC. The ANC had a two-pronged approach towards the issue of service delivery, by firstly indicating what they had achieved, but then also admitting that more work still needs to be done. It is concluded that both the ANC and DA contextualised service delivery as a local government issue and their campaigns could have contributed to public debate regarding service delivery. The messages of the FF+ and Cope on this issue had a more negative tone.

Despite the focus on the pertinent issue of service delivery, political parties still needed to motivate people to participate in the elections, as dissatisfaction with service delivery could result in a stay-away vote. All parties explained the importance of democratic

elections in their voter registration campaigns, but this was not addressed in their actual election campaigns.

All the parties endorsed the principles of local developmental government in their manifestos. In their posters, inclusiveness was emphasised as necessary for participation. Other democratic values, however, were not prominent in the election campaigns.

In conclusion, it would seem that South African political parties did inform the electorate regarding the most important issues pertaining to local government, although they could have promoted democratic values, including the right to vote, more actively in their campaigns.

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*Endnotes*

<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to thank Ms Helanie Jonker for her research assistance.



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