

Jessica Piombo, Lia Nijzink, eds.. *Electoral Politics in South Africa: Assessing the First Democratic Decade*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. xi + 297 pp. \$69.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4039-7123-4.



Reviewed by Elaine Windrich

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This book's place in the vast array of literature on South Africa's elections (especially the 1994 election because of its role as a historic landmark in the country's transformation from white minority rule to a multi-racial democracy) comes as the third in a series of analyses of democratic elections in that country. But this volume differs from the previous two edited by Andrew Reynolds because it also contains "a retrospective on the past ten years of democracy oriented toward how changes have affected the context in which elections take place" (p.viii).[1]

For this purpose, part 1 is entitled "A Decade of Democracy" and includes an appraisal of the first ten years by Steven Friedman; the electoral implications of social and economic change by Jeremy Seekings; voter information, government evaluations and party images by Robert Mattes; parliament and the electoral system by the two editors, Jessica Piombo and Lia Nijzink; and the administration of elections by Claude Kabemba. Although most of these topics did not appear in the earlier two volumes, *Election '99* does con-

tain a survey of "Democratic Government South African Style" over the preceding five years.

The second part ("The Party Campaigns") is of a similar length of approximately one hundred pages. It analyzes each of the contending parties represented in the National Assembly, a dozen of them altogether, and focuses almost exclusively on the election of 2004. The essays include Tom Lodge (superbly as usual) on the ANC; Susan Booysen on the official Opposition Democratic Alliance; Laurence Piper on the Inkatha Freedom Party; Collette Schulz-Herzenberg on the New National Party; Thabisi Hoeane on "The Left" (the Pan-African Congress, the Azanian People's Organisation, and the Independent Democrats); and Sanusha Naidu and Mbogeni Manqele on the "smallest" parties—the African Christian Democratic Party and the United Christian Democratic Party; the right-wing Freedom Front Plus; the Minority Front (representing the Indian community); and the United Democratic Movement (led by Bantu Holomisa after the retirement of his partner Roelf Meyer).

Whether so much space should have been allotted to the small or "smallest" parties is certainly open to question, especially when an additional chapter is devoted to the three classified here as "The Left." Ironically, in view of the election results, the "smallest" parties appear to have won more seats in the National Assembly than their left-wing rivals, with AZAPO reduced to a mere one seat and the PAC to three. In addition, the New National Party, successor to the party of apartheid which ruled South Africa for nearly half a century, ended up in the company of the "smallest" parties, with its seven seats comparable to those of the African Christian Democratic Party and the PAC's breakaway Independent Democrats, and even overtaken by the United Democratic Movement (which in *Election '99* appeared with the parties of "The Left"). So new classifications are obviously in order for South Africa's next electoral contest, especially with the ANC having at last won over two-thirds of the seats (279) in the National Assembly.

The final section, "Results and Assessments," consists of only two chapters (some sixty pages), one by Gavin Davis on media coverage of the 2004 election (which more appropriately belongs in part 1) and the other by Jessica Piombo on the results of the 2004 election compared with previous electoral behavior and outcomes since 1994. As the subtitle of the media chapter ("Were Some Parties More Equal than Others?") indicates, its main concern was to establish whether overall coverage was biased or partisan. On the whole, according to the author, it was not, even though the ANC and the Democratic Alliance (the official opposition with fifty seats) received the "lion's share" of media coverage, and "the high profile leaders of both parties [President Thabo Mbeki and Tony Leon respectively] attracted the media to cover their election campaign events" (p. 241). In addition, the media was far more diverse by 2004, in terms of ownership, personnel, and audience. Moreover, a number of radio and television stations, both commercial and community, had ar-

rived to challenge the old monopoly of the SABC. Nevertheless, the public broadcaster remains subject to government domination and pressure (as it was under National Party rule), especially with the appointment of ANC loyalists to the top positions and their blacklisting of critical voices.

On the whole, the conclusions of the other contributors also tend to be upbeat and optimistic, despite some worrying signs. Perhaps the greatest success is that elections have become "routine" and non-violent and that voters still go to the polls in high, albeit decreasing, numbers despite the predictable outcome. As the editor points out, while "the increasing dominance and centralization of the ANC are reasons for concern from the point of view of democratic accountability and transparency, at the same time the ANC's dominance has increased stability in post-apartheid South Africa" (p. 286). Whether the continuing "irrelevance" of the opposition becomes a threat to democracy remains to be seen. Perhaps when the next election comes around (and presumably the fourth volume to cover it) the proliferation of small parties will be replaced by a more credible opposition, although a breakaway from the monolithic ANC still appears to be remote.

Note

[1]. Andrew Reynolds, ed., *Election '94: South Africa: The Campaigns, Results and Future Prospects* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994); and *Election '99: South Africa: From Mandela to Mbeki* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

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