

The Impact of the 2011 Municipal Elections on Political Realignment in South Africa

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ABSTRACT The African National Congress has dominated the South African politics since 1994, when the country emerged from the shackles of apartheid and adopted democracy and a multi-party political system of governance. Between 1994 and 2011 there have been four municipal elections. The ANC has won all of them with a wide margin of over 60% of the total votes cast by the electorate. The remaining votes have always been shared among, and by, over 100 opposition political parties. However, the 2011 municipal elections heralded a new era of multiparty politics in South Africa. For the first time in the history of municipal elections, one opposition party, namely the Democratic Alliance, exerted itself firmly as the second most popular party in South Africa. This has raised mixed feelings: first, hopes for a two-party democratic system in South Africa; and, second, questions about the future of small parties in the country. This paper argues that while the ANC retains its political dominance in the country, political patronage and its credentials of liberation struggle have begun giving way to issues of accountability, good governance and efficiency in service delivery. This has opened up a new political landscape and space for other political parties such as the Democratic Alliance to compete with the ANC competitively based on sound policies both in governance and service delivery. This trend was evident in the increase in the of DA supporters and voters in the 2011 municipal elections, mainly due to the party's aggressive election campaign, in which it emphasized its good track record in governance, transparency and service delivery in the Western Cape.