

BLACK PROFESSIONALS AND THE ANC IN THE 2014 ELECTION

LOOSENING TIES?

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The growing black middle class¹ of South Africa has increasingly become the subject of interest for political parties. Noticeably, more political parties campaigned for votes from that sector in society in the 2014 Parliamentary elections.² Interestingly, the calm was disrupted with the ruling African National Congress (ANC) adamantly viewing the black middle class as the product of their own success and consequently as loyal voters. In light of this recent development the black middle class gains further political significance.

Black middle class support for the ANC had been strong since 1994, and had increased over the years.³ However, prior to the 2014 general elections, there was reason to suppose that black middle class support for the ANC had begun to decline, and that this would prove a significant factor at the polls. To give one example, the ANC Gauteng leadership reportedly expected a fracturing of its support in the province, one that it ascribed to loss of support from the black middle class.⁴ In the event, in the race for the



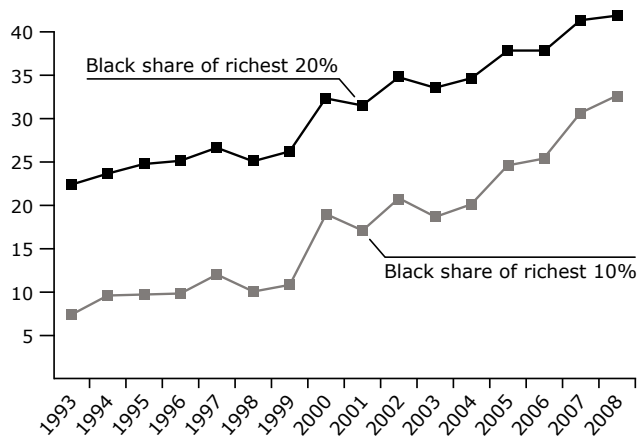
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- 1 | Black refers to the African population group.
- 2 | The South African elections 2014 see also: Holger Dix, "20 Years of Democracy and the Fifth Parliamentary Elections in South Africa", *KAS International Reports*, 6/2014, 73, <http://kas.de/wf/en/33.38101> (accessed 23 Sep 2014); Collette Schulz-Herzenberg and Roger Southall (eds.), *Election 2014 South Africa. The Campaigns, Results and Future Perspectives*, Auckland Park, Jacan Media, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2014.
- 3 | Cf. Collette Schulz-Herzenberg, *Towards a silent revolution? South African voters during the first years of democracy 1994-2006*, Dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2009, 139.
- 4 | Cf. "ANC's 45% Poll Panic", *City Press*, 9 Mar 2014, <http://citypress.co.za/politics/anc-fears-will-get-45-votes-gauteng> (accessed 22 Sep 2014).

provincial legislature, the ANC won 54 per cent of votes in Gauteng, a decrease of nearly ten per cent from its performance in 2009. Furthermore, results indicated that, with the exception of Buffalo City, support for the party in all the country's metropolitan areas and cities had dropped significantly. Malusi Gigaba, the head of elections for the ANC, stated that the party would review the voting patterns of the white community and black middle class, in order to better understand its election performance.⁵

Fig. 1

Black share of the South African upper class



Source: Own illustration modified from "Household Income and Expenditure Patterns in South Africa, 2011", The Bureau of Market Research (BMR) of the University of South Africa (UNISA), 2, <http://unisa.ac.za/contents/faculties/ems/docs/Press429.pdf> (accessed 2 Oct 2014) with data from the All Media and Products Study (AMPS).

Therefore, various accounts of this apparent decline in support by the black middle class for the ANC shall be evaluated. As research foundation for this article, the author draws upon diverse sources to map black professionals' political leanings in the 2014 election. In particular, interviews were conducted mainly with chartered accountants, lawyers, doctors and economists in state departments and corporate sector organisations in the Gauteng and Limpopo provinces. The author also relies on three focus groups, a

5 | Cf. "ANC to look at voter patterns among whites", *News24*, 12 May 2014, <http://news24.com/elections/news/anc-to-look-at-voter-patterns-among-whites-20140511> (accessed 24 Mar 2014).

total of 52 people interviewed, with state managers, entrepreneurs and corporate professionals in Johannesburg and East London in July 2013 and in Cape Town in September 2013. Last but not least, the analysis also includes references to political debates in the (social) media.⁶

Table 1

Comparison of middle class between 1993 and 2012

	1993	2012
Total (in figures)	3,562,874	7,243,596
Share of population (in per cent)	8.19	13.86
Blacks (in figures)	340,874	2,991,143
Share of black population (in per cent)	10.73	41.29
Rural population (in per cent)	9.04	10.63
Average per capita household income (in rand)	4,530	5,523
Years of education	11.34	12.38

Source: "The emergent South African middle class", Stellenbosch University, Research on Socio-Economic Policy (ReSEP), 2, http://resep.sun.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/The-emergent-SA-middle-class_.pdf (accessed 2 Oct 2014).

Table 2

Distribution of income groups 2011

Group	Income per annum in euros	Share in per cent
Poor	0 – 3,794	9.9
Low emerging middle class	3,795 – 10,606	18.7
Emerging middle class	10,607 – 25,403	22.4
Realised middle class	25,404 – 44,053	17.7
Upper middle class	44,054 – 60,301	10.7
Emerging affluent	60,302 – 92,957	10.5
Affluent	> 92,957	10.1

Source: BMR, Fig. 1.

6 | Although the author is unable to present her data as statistically representative, there is no reason to believe that representatives of the focus groups held views different from the norm for their class.

During apartheid the black middle class was created to serve as a buffer zone between the white population and the liberation movement.

The socio-political significance of the black middle class has long been of scholarly interest. During apartheid's twilight years, the state made a concerted effort to develop, albeit at a managed rate, a Bantustan and township-based black middle class. It hoped to co-opt this class and thereby underpin white minority rule. This black middle class was created to serve as a buffer zone between the white population, white-ruled state and white capital, on the one hand, and the liberation movement, comprising workers, unions and political organisations, on the other. The effort ultimately proved counterproductive, as the emerging black middle class had long been aligned with the ANC as a liberation party that had been created by individuals from within the class. This created an emotional bond between the two that both the party and observers largely took for granted during the early years of South Africa's democracy.

The importance of this connection was reinforced by the results from the first three national elections, which showed a high rate of black middle-class support for the ANC. However, after the 2009 elections there were increasing indications, some offered by the ANC itself, which pointed to a loosening of ties between the class and the party. This was most strongly evidenced by the formation of the Congress of the People (COPE), a party forged largely by disgruntled former president Mbeki's supporters who left the ANC after he had been "invited" by the ruling party to resign from the national presidency in September 2008. In the run-up to the 2009 national elections, many analysts predicted that COPE's support would come from the black middle class. In the event, although COPE secured some seven per cent of the vote, most of this came from the unemployed and working-class population.⁷ Even so, what has become increasingly apparent is that there has been gradual, albeit slow, decrease in support by the black middle class for the ANC. Even if this has only minimal effects on parliamentary representation, it constitutes a significant political and moral challenge to the ANC's claims of inclusivity.

7 | Cf. Susan Booyesen, "Congress of the People: Between Foot-hold of Hope and Slippery Slope", in: Roger Southall and John Daniel (eds.), *Zunami! The 2009 South African Elections*, Auckland Park, Jacana, 2009, 85-113.

WHO ARE THE BLACK MIDDLE CLASS?

Racial categorisations have a long and contested history in South Africa. In this study, the “black” middle class is defined as including only black Africans and excludes coloured, Indian and Chinese people; in contrast, the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) legislation includes all these groups as “blacks”. This chapter focuses on black professionals working in the public and private sectors as a major constituent stratum of the broader black middle class (that is, they belong to what many depict as an upper middle class). They included engineers, doctors, lawyers, architects, accountants, economists and those in financial services: all professionals who hold a strong position in the labour market, enjoy high status and sometimes wield considerable societal power. Many of them enjoy high levels of mobility across industries and countries. Even within South Africa, their ability to achieve economic autonomy from the state affords them considerable levels of personal and political independence. The disaggregation as well as specificity of this study allows it to move away from the treatment of the black middle class as a homogeneous group, and permits depth in the analysis of the degrees, modes, intensity and quality of political values and activities of black professionals.

Black professionals have historically held, and continue to hold, a prestigious and influential position in black society. Arguably, black professionals have greater symbolic importance to South African society and politics now more than ever before, as they represent a visible manifestation of successful democratic transformation. Through their access to information, knowledge, position and resources, the black middle class is in a stronger position to influence important decisions and, perhaps more significantly, to make those decisions, compared with the apartheid black middle class. Most fundamentally, by virtue of proximity, racial credentials and autonomous sources of economic power and prestige, they are also well placed to hold political officers and institutions accountable. This is in contrast to white professionals, whose critiques of the ANC tend not to enjoy as much political legitimacy.

Through their knowledge, position and resources, the black middle class is in a stronger position to influence important decisions, compared with the apartheid black middle class.

Even under the relatively narrow understanding of the term offered here, there are as many estimations of the black middle class's size as there are definitions. Subjective definitions tend to be more inclusive, while objective definitions using income or occupational categories tend to be less inclusive. The Human Sciences Research Council, as quoted by Laurence Schlemmer,⁸ estimated that the class comprised a total of 2.5 million individuals in 2004. Roger Southall's occupational estimation is close to this figure, citing 950,000 to 1.5 million professionals and managers as composing the upper middle class, with 870,000 to 1.2 million clerks and sales persons in the lower black middle class in 2004.⁹ For all that there are relatively few black professionals in South Africa, they nonetheless represent a powerful segment of black society, many of them making important societal decisions. Furthermore, their political voice and activism have the power to influence the opinions not only of other segments of the black population, but of South Africans in general.

THE BLACK MIDDLE CLASS VOTE

Academic analysis shows that the political strength of the post-apartheid black middle class lies in its ability to countervail and disrupt ANC hegemony and introduce democratic pluralism.

The Employment Equity Act of 1998 and increased entry into the public service have significantly enlarged the size of the black middle class, thereby building upon the pre-1994 foundations. Current academic analysis inclines to the view that the political strength and significance of the post-apartheid black middle class lie in its ability to countervail and disrupt ANC hegemony and introduce democratic pluralism by breaking its allegiance to the party and voting for others.¹⁰ The ANC's rhetoric, too, evidences this, even as it politicises this group. The party lays claim to the expansion of the black middle class, citing the success of its redress and transformation policies, and stating that there can be "no middle class without AA [affirmative

8 | Cf. Lawrence Schlemmer, "Lost in transformation? South African's emerging African middle class", *CDE Focus*, No. 8, 2005, 10, <http://cde.org.za/images/pdf/Lost%20in%20transformation.pdf> (accessed 22 Sep 2014).

9 | Cf. Roger Southall, "Political change and the Black middle class in democratic South Africa", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 2009, 521-542.

10 | Cf. Schulz-Herzenberg, n. 3.

action]”.¹¹ For example, ANC spokesperson Jackson Mthembu proclaimed in a media release that “the African National Congress celebrates the successes of our deliberate and decisive socio-economic transformation policies which are yielding results”.¹² Similarly, President Zuma declared in 2013 that “as a result of these and other developments resulting from progressive government policies, there has been an impressive growth of the black middle class”.¹³



More flexible social barriers, but patterns of the past remain: Even two decades after the apartheid ceased, members of the growing black middle class continue to struggle to find their identity. This comes more easily to those possessing professional status. |

Source: ign11, flickr ©©.

THE BLACK AND MIDDLE CLASS NEXUS

The intersections of race¹⁴ and class provide important variables in explaining the political character of the black middle class. A racial identity that overlaid middle-class consciousness has produced enduring support for the ANC.

11 | Statement made by Enoch Gondongwana at ANC talk with Professionals on 10 Apr 2014. Personal notes.

12 | Mthembu Jackson, “ANC welcomes findings on expansion of the black middle class”, *politics web*, press release, 30 Apr 2013, <http://politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71654?oid=373342&sn=Detail&pid=71616> (accessed 22 Sep 2014).

13 | Jacob Zuma, “Black middle class has more than doubled in eight years – Zuma”, *Acts Online*, 6 Oct 2013, <http://news.acts.co.za/blog/2013/10/black-middle-class-has-more-than-doubled-in-eight-years-zuma> (accessed 22 Sep 2014).

14 | The use of the term “race” is common in South Africa.

As Grace Khunou and Detlev Krige have asserted, black middle-class individuals struggle to identify with their middle-class status and location.¹⁵ This view was strongly endorsed by many of the black professionals who were interviewed for this study: blackness was seen as an immutable and visible identity that in South African politics, which remains heavily racialised, comes with strong and often inescapable ascriptive pressures.

Racial identity still trumps class allegiance among black professionals. They expressed continued support for the ANC.

Conversely, middle-class identity was seen as mutable and malleable. As such, it can be acquired, but middle-class membership was seen as tenuous and precarious, fluid and novel. Consequently, racial identity still trumps class allegiance among black professionals. Typically, therefore, black professionals expressed continued support for the ANC, and had a strong perception of the party's commitment to and support of economic transformation. In the words of an economist working in the corporate sector, "by now I am thinking, you know, the only gap that I have to reach, aspirationally, is to be upper class."¹⁶

Many professionals aspired to consolidate their class position and sought opportunities for mobility into the upper class. They saw support for the ANC as instrumental to strengthening their class position and advancing further. This is reflected in a statement by an entrepreneur working in the engineering sector:

"I'm voting for the ANC. [...] I am a beneficiary of ANC policy. This is a view one can hold whether you work in corporate South Africa, or as an entrepreneur. And even considering where we come from, I don't think, even with my combination of skills and call it the luck I have, the white Nationalist government would have plucked me from wherever I am and encouraged me to actually participate, and to create an enabling environment for me to participate in the mainstream economy."

15 | Cf. Khunou, Grace and Krige, Detlev, "Why is it difficult to be black and 'middle class'?", *Mail & Guardian*, 8 Nov 2013, <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-11-07-why-is-it-difficult-to-be-black-and-middle-class> (accessed 22 Sep 2014).

16 | Xhanti Payi, "Middle class panel discussion with Eusebius McKaiser", *Powerfm Radio*, 19 Mar 2014.

The perceived racism of white-owned businesses was another reason why black professionals continued their support for the ANC, as they felt they were still being excluded on structural grounds. "There are still challenges in the mainstream economy that are structural, that manifest themselves in racial inequality. Whether I am dealing with the banks, I cannot help but think that some of the positions I find myself with the banks, is also largely because I am black." Nevertheless, black professionals did not blindly support the ANC simply because they had been beneficiaries of employment equity and BEE. Numerous criticisms of the implementation of these policies were made. In the main, these were calls for improved implementation and oversight of employment equity and BEE. One black professional explained that the ANC had not succeeded in deracialising the workplace, particularly the corporate sector. This is also supported by a recent thesis by Jeffrey Modisha,¹⁷ who argues that while the corporate environment has seen a significant increase in the numbers of black managers, this has not translated into qualitative participation by black people, and that a floating colour bar remains.

Many of the black professionals working in the corporate sector complained of having to work harder than their white counterparts and of being overlooked for promotions. They viewed the professional culture of corporate organisations as entrenching racialised treatment. On the one hand, black professionals perceived the levels of professionalism within the corporate sector as extremely high and more firmly established than within the state. Consequently, once hired, black professionals have to fall into already established rules and norms of professionalism. On the other hand, they felt that the rules of professionalism were not the same for blacks and whites.¹⁸ One

17 | Cf. Jeffrey Modisha, *The contradictory class location of black managers explored the capacity of African managers*, Master's Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2012.

18 | As one interviewee put it: "Being a professional means arriving on time. Doing what is directed within the timelines. There's already a culture, the culture dictates how you would do. For example, if I come to a meeting five minutes late, 'Ah sorry, guys, that was my nanny.' [...] It isn't the same as a white person saying it. First of all, I am not even expected to have a nanny. [...] So, how professional we are, especially as black people, is very relevant. It depends on the kind of boss I have."

black professional explained that there was a tension in the relationship between being a competent black professional and carrying out one's duties. For example, he explained there was an implicit expectation within the corporate culture that a black professional should know his place; if he "questioned or contradicted what is being said – it is insubordination. Because in this level you are expected to know who is who in the zoo, you must understand levels and your place in them". The corporate culture also promoted formal political neutrality.

An *Independent Online* news report noted that frustrated black professionals had complained to the Economic Freedom Fighters' (EFF) Dali Mpofu and Floyd Shivambu that

The ongoing inequality was viewed as a result of political failure on the part of the ruling party ANC, and a potential point of support for the EFF as a black opposition party.

"white-owned or -led firms made them work twice as hard to get recognition, compared to their white colleagues".¹⁹ This was viewed as a result of political failure on the part of the ruling ANC, and a potential point of support

for the EFF as a black opposition party. Black entrepreneurs in the professional sectors also complained of white corporate racism, saying that most of their contracts came from government. What is apparent from these findings is that the distance of corporate black professionals from the state did not result in decreased support for the ANC or another black opposition party, as Southall suggested.²⁰ Rather, perceived racism within the corporate sector actually ensured that black professionals maintained their support for the ANC in the expectation that it would provide protection against such bias. It was widely thought that the black middle class would not be attracted to the EFF, as it would represented an affront to their middle-class status. This was based on the assumption that black professionals are educated and require a party whose manifesto would support some of the widely held principles of a stable and productive economy, notably, that it would protect and promote private property rights. However, a small number of black professionals saw the EFF as a party they might support, who thought it could "rattle the ANC".

19 | Piet Rampedi, "We're oppressed, say black professionals", *IOL News*, 18 Nov 2013, <http://www.iol.co.za/news/-1.1608420> (accessed 2 Oct 2014).

20 | Cf. Roger Southall, "Political change and the Black middle class in democratic South Africa" (forthcoming).

Compared with their continued support for the ANC, there was a noticeable reluctance on the part of black professionals to support the liberal Democratic Alliance (DA), which stemmed largely from its lack of clarity on BEE. An economist stated: "I would vote for the DA if they were much cleaner on their transformation stance, unfortunately they are not." For professionals such as this, support for the DA would mean risking their competitiveness in the labour market and, by extension, risking their middle-class position. What potential support there was for the DA derived from the perception that it was a party committed to good governance, and thus able to provide social services on a better scale than the ANC. Notwithstanding this, black professionals regarded the DA as perpetuating racial inequalities in the Western Cape. To some extent, the refusal to vote even for a DA that was seen as performing better than the ANC in government reflects some level of distancing by black professionals from the black working class, in that that they recognised greater service delivery by the DA for the poor but did not seek to support the party on this basis. On the other hand, black professionals often complained of being debt-ridden because of their continuing need to make remittances to poorer family members, despite the impact of ANC-led developmental programs.



Dwindling support: The ANC under President Jacob Zuma, here at the launch of a water project, has long been considered as the first choice of the black middle class. However, due to scandals and dissatisfaction the party has to face loosening ties with this group. | Source: Siyabulela Duda, Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), flickr ©11©.

Interestingly, one engineering entrepreneur of the studied focus group said that, on close inspection, the DA's policies represented the interests and needs of black people. This, he reasoned, followed from the fact that, within a democracy, a minority group cannot rule over a majority group. As a result, the DA would feel compelled in government to perform better than the ANC for fear of black majority anger: "The white government would work harder to quell any discontent that may arise from the black masses." Nonetheless, comparisons of the DA and ANC revealed major mistrust of the DA and swung the support of most back to the ANC. While the DA's track record for delivery was recognised as a positive aspect worthy of political support, this was nullified by the mistrust arising from seeing images of many black people marching on behalf of the DA and party leader Helen Zille dressed in African traditional attire, which was interpreted as a disingenuous move to dupe black people. Furthermore, the black and young leaders within the ranks of the DA were regarded as puppets used to further "a white agenda".

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After the election, when DA chief whip Lindiwe Mazibuko resigned from the DA to study at Harvard University, Helen Zille is said to have declared that she "made" Lindiwe. This caused an uproar in the media and on social media platforms, with many citing this as proof that Zille had cynically used Mazibuko as well as Mmusi Maimane²¹ to boost the DA's black support.

Besides aspiration and the need to consolidate their class position, black professionals offered support to the ANC because of what it represented for black people. In the words of an economist, the ANC showed that black people were "good, smart, decent". Another entrepreneur stated that her continued support for the ANC did not stem from its performance, which she perceived as problematic, but rather from an "emotional tie" to the ANC that, in the end made her vote for "for business".²² In short, the history of the ANC as a successful struggle party emerged as one of the major reasons for continued support.

21 | DA candidate for the Gauteng Province and now new chief whip of the DA in the National Parliament.

22 | The statement "I voted for business" meant in the context of the discussion that she had voted for the ANC because of its BEE support policies.

There were also black professionals who, having previously departed from the ANC, were now returning to it: "Deciding to vote for the ANC now, when I might have perhaps not voted for them the last time, is because I think the ANC is under siege. [...] Because while I am in the black middle class and I can actually say that certainly my circumstances have improved. By and large, I think the ANC has done a lot to improve the lives of the black people. ANC must continue to work for the poorer population, and for all of us: to address the vestiges of unequal development." For the most part, therefore, the black middle class strongly identifies with being black and associates its racial identity with party political support. Members of that group ask "who does serve my needs as a black person?" and only then "who does serve my needs as a black middle class individual?"

BLACK PROFESSIONALS: FRACTURING SUPPORT FOR THE ANC

Class consolidation and aspiration served as major reasons for the continued support for the ANC by some black professionals. However, for other respondents, continued support was seen as a liability as they sought to secure their middle-class status and position. Moreover, the more ambitious often viewed it as a threat to their continued upward class mobility and they feared that poor government performance of the ANC would result in higher costs for the black middle class.

Another reason for cessation of support for the ANC was its leadership. An engineering consultant explained that the ousting of Mbeki at the ANC's 2007 Polokwane party congress, and his replacement by Jacob Zuma, had represented the overthrowing of the middle-class agenda within the ANC. In addition, Zuma was associated with multiple, highly publicised scandals.²³ These became a breaking point for some professionals in their support for the ANC. There was also strong criticism directed at Zuma for his various gaffes, notably his reference to the black middle class as "clever blacks". Furthermore, his lack of education,

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23 | Cf. Anthony Butler, "The ANC's campaign in 2014", in: Schulz-Herzenberg and Southall, n. 2.

traditionalism, penchant for singing and dancing and his many wives, all combined to offend middle-class sensibilities and values. This critique was aggravated by the perception that the ANC is arrogant and, in being oriented towards the poor, does not address middle-class grievances. One respondent stated, "I find the hubris of the current ANC nauseating and alienating and think EFF can rattle them." It was in a bid to quell such perceptions that the ANC targeted black professionals and professional bodies in the 2009 and 2014 election campaigns, hosting dinners and talks at which the party reiterated its continued support for and commitment to employment equity and BEE.

Considering their vote for COPE in 2009 had been a wasted vote, many within the black middle class sought out alternatives in 2014, and some returned to the ANC.

COPE and Agang South Africa both represent a failed opportunity to win political support from the black middle class away from the ANC, and to consolidate a black opposition party. With a seven per cent win in 2009, COPE had the opportunity to build upon its support base, particularly from the black middle class, but then frittered this away by in-fighting. Considering their vote for COPE in 2009 had been a wasted vote, many within the black middle class who had supported it in 2009 sought out alternatives in 2014, and some returned to the ANC. The result for COPE was its paltry performance at national level (only 0.67 per cent of the votes), forcing its leader, Mosisoa Lekota, to publicly eat his hat, after he had predicted the party would outperform its 2009 results. The failure of COPE thus meant additional black middle-class votes for the United Democratic Movement (UDM) and EFF, as well as returned votes for the ANC.

Agang failed before it even competed in the 2014 general elections. At its foundation, Agang was widely regarded as pitching for the black middle class, especially since its leader, Mamphele Ramphele, was an educated professional who mirrored the aspirations of this class. But within a short space of time, it was evident that Agang was going nowhere. Its potential was destroyed by its failed merger with the DA, which destroyed the credibility of the party among both its membership and potential black middle-class voters.

Those black professionals who were dissatisfied with the ANC, disappointed by COPE and distrustful of the DA inclined towards the UDM and EFF. They explained their support for these parties by saying that while they wanted the ANC to stay in power, the EFF and UDM were needed to keep the ANC in check: "I am voting for the EFF but do not want them to govern. I want a strong black opposition party." While EFF had some support from black professionals, there was an understanding on their part that the EFF would also need to be managed. Southall has observed that the revolutionary capacity of the apartheid-era black middle class has typically been treated as dependent upon that of the working or poor class.²⁴ In contrast, the black middle class's vote for other black political parties than the ANC indicates that it is beginning to develop into an independent political actor in its own right. What is more, despite its minority status, this class's search for alternative black political parties indicates its increasing capacity to contribute to the process of democratic consolidation in South Africa.



Historical bonus: The history of the ANC as a successful party fighting for freedom is one of the major reasons for continued support, even among the black middle class. | Source: Romério Cunha, flickr ©📷.

24 | Cf. Roger Southall, "The African Middle Class in South Africa 1910-1994: A Preliminary Overview", (forthcoming).

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES AND AMBIVALENCE TOWARDS THE ANC

Southall has argued that closeness to or distance from the state is a key factor in determining political attitudes or relationships to parties.²⁵ A variant of this argument would be that black managers and professionals working closely with the state tend to support the ANC. However, according to interview data, the veracity of this argument is questioned by the fact that black professionals in the state are increasingly antagonised by the way in which ANC employees overpoliticise work environments.

Professional identity has begun to influence party political support significantly, resulting in higher levels of ambivalence towards the ANC. This is particularly the case among chartered accountants working as chief financial officers (CFOs) in local and district municipalities.

Chartered accountants in ANC governed municipalities explained that they had to balance the “correct technical expertise” with the politicisation of municipal functions.

CFOs are primarily charged with the authority, control and management of municipal finances. Contextually, it is important to note that municipalities, especially those governed by the ANC, have higher levels of black employees across all levels. The CFOs explained that they had to balance the “correct technical expertise” of the municipality financial management with the politicisation of municipal functions. The following extract from an interview illustrates this:

“You can be at a meeting and hear the Mayor saying ‘in two months we will build a bridge for you here’. And you know that there is no money for that. He is talking to the community and children are drowning in the river when they cross it to go to school. You listen and when you get back to the office you basically have to look for that money, rearrange priorities and find the money for the bridge to be built.”

This incident is all about balancing different priorities in a difficult situation, as municipalities must earn revenue in order to continue providing services to their communities. At the same time, citizens must have trust in the municipalities and its leadership in order to pay their rates.

25 | Cf. Southall, n. 20.

One CFO explained how municipal employees organised themselves politically in his department: "They lobby inside and outside. They lobby. They lobby senior officials, municipal managers and councillors, they lobby at the regional office of the ANC. By the time the idea comes to me, it is also already sorted out, they have gotten buy-in from those areas and I have to implement, you have to sign off on it." This kind of practice and the interference of politicians negatively affected the performance of the municipality, often resulting in qualified audits. CFOs explained that while government structures and regulations existed, they were hampered by this type of politicisation. Furthermore, financial and performance management was put at risk by personal temptation where people transgressed controls for personal gain. The political leadership of the municipalities was also described as problematic because politicians "don't mean what they say, they don't lead by example. We need to change the way they do things."

The practice and the interference of politicians of the ANC negatively affected the performance of the municipality.

For the CFOs, "integrity, honesty, punctuality, dignity" combined with the "correct technical expertise" constitute forms of professionalism. However, these qualities were countered by a culture that is 50 per cent professional and 50 per cent unprofessional. CFOs blamed the lack of professionalism on deployed comrades who are highly unionised and who see themselves primarily as political activists rather than professionals. These comrades were regarded as self-interested and prone to corruption.²⁶ These deployed individuals were accused of "just drawing a salary" and "being untouchable" because of their deployment status. From the study it emerged that the professional identity of the CFOs was stronger than their political identity.²⁷ This meant that there was tension between responding to political directives and responding to professional accounting standards. The CFOs explained that they

26 | One CFO explained: "I think we need economic freedom. But that's not going to happen. People are out to gain things for themselves as they are deployed, they only want to benefit from the system."

27 | One professional put it this way: "I am an academic. Accounting does not mix with politics. I am a member of SAICA (South African Institute Chartered Accountants), and I subscribe to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles. I am affiliated to the SAICA. I can't serve two chiefs."

had not acquired their qualifications to become politicians. But they did speak about how they manage their professional identity when it is threatened by bad politics in the municipality. For example, one CFO described his situation in this way: "I am a silent politician, but I speak my mind to counsellors. I don't let them get away with anything. I am not a political person really, but I follow them. I must understand what is political. I have never been a politician and I will never be."

Some members of the focus group had moved away from supporting the ANC to supporting EFF, while others were privately ambivalent towards the ANC.

CFOs have become resentful of political interference by ANC employees within the workplace, arguing that this works against service delivery by the municipalities. For the CFOs, this had two implications for party political support. Some had moved away from supporting the ANC to supporting EFF, while others were privately ambivalent towards the ANC, had no interest in another party, but were silent about this position. "This contradictory impulse is most acutely apparent amongst those South Africans who feel both betrayed by and indebted to the African National Congress."²⁸ Consequently, the continued vote for the ANC by black professionals is a grudge vote. This offers a new way of understanding how political attitudes are formed and how they result in party political support. It also suggests that proximity to the party or state can act to undermine black professionals' support for the ANC.

CONCLUSION

The argument presented here goes beyond familiar explanations rooted in the numerous and highly public scandals associated with the ruling party and its leadership. Rather, it is argued that decreasing black middle-class support for the ANC signals a far more fundamental socio-political development, one reflecting a repositioning of both the class and the party. One can say that the black middle class is becoming increasingly confident in its class position, a development that allows it to begin to assess the wider

28 | Msimang Sisonke, "Requiem for a dream: On loving and leaving the ANC, South Africa", *Daily Maverick*, 20 Mar 2014, <http://dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2014-03-19-requiem-for-a-dream-on-loving-and-leaving-the-anc> (accessed 22 Sep 2014).

political landscape critically. As a result, an increasing capacity of the black middle class for contributing to the consolidation of democracy is evolving.

On the whole, the alignment of the black middle class with ANC has continued. Yet levels of partisanship have continued to decline among this class as a whole, with dissidents moving in different political directions. The evidence is incontrovertible that the upper and middle classes in South Africa are becoming more racially mixed, a process which, although very much a product of ANC policies, has its roots in economic and political developments before 1994. Nevertheless, racial patterns of power and privilege can still be observed that were established under apartheid and expanded by subsequent attempts of the ANC to bring about racial redress. What this suggests is that "race" continues to be a major factor in shaping "class" and that consequently, even today, it makes sense to trace class interests through the racial contours of South African history.

The black middle class provides the core of the political class in South Africa. The more it moves in different political directions, the more likely it is that the political class will itself display disunity – and open up the prospect of greater political diversity, which will enhance the consolidation of democracy. A strong and well-developed professional identity had the power to disrupt the racial cleavages in party political support. In this way, professional identities create a different and unexpected interaction between race and class. It is their consolidation that may become the main driver of greater plurality in political support. In short, the elections of 2014 offered a moment in which the loyalties of the black middle class to the ANC were tested as never before.

I would like to recognise the invaluable guidance I have received from my two mentors, Roger Southall and Loren Landau.