THE MIDP●INT

KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

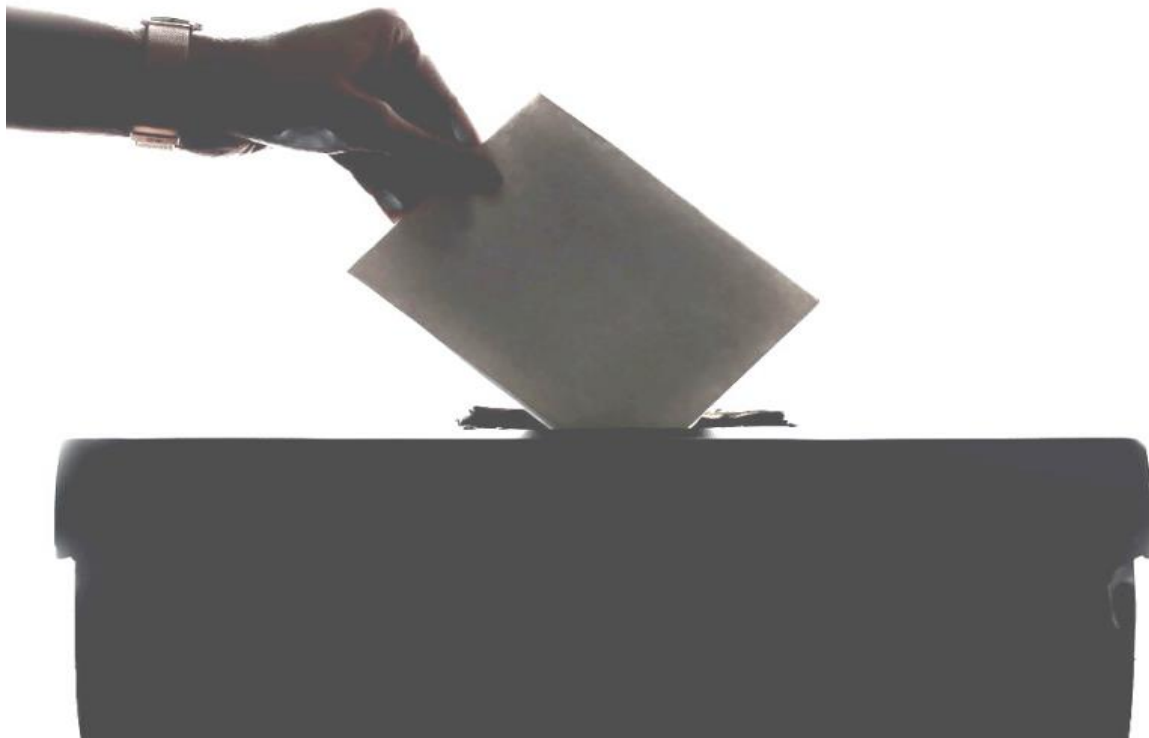*Photo by Element5 Digital on Unsplash*

A Religiously Motivated Electorate in South Africa?

Siphiwe I. Dube[1]

[1] Siphiwe I. Dube is a Senior Lecturer and former Head in the Department of Political Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. His current two projects focus on African Political Theology and the Religious New Right in post-apartheid South Africa.He is a United World College (Atlantic College) alumnus, a former NRF-DST Scarce Skills Development Postdoctoral Research Fellow, and currently a Pan-African Scientific Research Council Fellow as well as Africa Fellow at IASH, Edinburgh, amongst other things.

Introduction

Elections continue to have purchasing power within the discourses of democracy and good governance in Africa, despite ample critique regarding their limitation of actually being a good measure of democracy (Diamond 2008; Elklit 1999; Karl 1995, 2000; Lindberg 2003; Ninsin 2006). A key feature of the literature on elections in Africa is a concern with the role that ethnicity plays. In particular, the literature presents ethnicity, along with growing authoritarianism, as *the* hurdle to good and fair elections, as well as violence-free electoral processes. There is, however, very little about religion's role in elections, despite the generally accepted thesis of religiosity being regarded as central to the way of life of African people.

This paper concurs with Enyinna Nwauche's observation that 'even though Africa's second and third wave of democratization entrenched secularity as a governing ethic, the idea that secularity means the absence of religion from the public sphere is not a feature of African states' (2019: 64). According to Nwauche, what African states are grappling with is the question of how to manage the de facto state religions of Islam and Christianity that 'dominate and structure the public sphere. The challenge faced by secular African states is that of neutrality to enable all religions a fair access to the public sphere' (64). Therefore, as one mechanism of mediating the de facto religious public sphere of African states, elections form an important site on which religion in Africa has an effect.

As Stephen Ellis notes in his chapter, 'Elections in Africa in Historical Context', rather than replacing all configurations of other forms of sovereignty, elections in Africa have 'become widely established as one technique among others to express the legitimation of power', despite rarely serving 'as effective instruments for the regulation of supreme power in sub-Saharan Africa' (2000: 40). Ellis makes his point in relation to the argument that the legitimation of power across sub-Saharan Africa shares a principle in common with regard to its foundation, namely, religion. In particular, this draws attention to 'the notion that all power has its ultimate origin in the supernatural or invisible world, and that humans can acquire or lose power only with the acquiescence of the denizens of this invisible world, God or gods and spirits' (39). Although Ellis ascribes the validity of this argument as primarily pre-colonial in orientation, the effect of legitimation of power as lying in the invisible world continues to influence African politics today. If one takes seriously the extent to which news about many elections on the continent is imbued with the language of divine intervention, witchcraft, sacrifice and other such language that invokes the invisible world of religiosity, one can see the continued value of Ellis's argument. Moreover,

this paper invokes Ellis's argument to further support its own orientation of taking African religious epistemologies seriously in the context of politics and the political, and, in particular, the realpolitik effect that taking this seriously can have on the technical aspects of democracy-making, such as elections.

Methodology

Drawing on a summary of the studies discussed in detail in the literature review below as a starting point, this paper explores the intersection of religion and elections in the South African context. It does so through an analysis of the South African context in relation to other African countries, where a greater number of academic studies of religion and elections exists. The aim is to contextualise the South African experience within the broader African context, as well as to point out some differences that are particular to South Africa. The paper then proposes some ways to usefully explore this relationship between religion and elections in South Africa by drawing on available election data in order to make some preliminary analytical conclusions. A major focus is the need to understand the crisis language currently framing election-talk in South Africa through the broader and global discourse of the New Right.

While the paper relies on a discourse analysis of available academic and journalistic literature, it does so in light of both qualitative and quantitative studies. These studies inform the arguments and buttress the broad theme of the paper, which is how to understand the religiously motivated electorate in South Africa and to assess how much influence both religiously based and non-religiously based parties have on them when it comes to ballot choice. Furthermore, and admittedly so, the paper pays strict attention to the Christian dimensions of the religious factor to the exclusion of other religious traditions. This limitation is determined by the preponderance of the Christian narrative in South African politics, as well as the fact that Christian religious political parties currently constitute the highest number in terms of contesting elections in the country. While there are academic analyses of the relationship between the African National Congress and churches since the ANC's formation, including the imprint of different doctrinal and theological interpretations, in the post-apartheid era this close relationship is informed by a primarily religiously neutral secular orientation (Bompani 2006; Erlank 2012; Goedhals 2003; Hastings 1991; Kumalo 2014; Kuperus 2011; Landau 2015; Shore 2016; West 2010). This means that most political parties (including the ANC), unless explicitly religious, do not campaign on religious grounds, but do, nonetheless, rely on the electorate sympathies for the broad liberation agenda (Egan 2009).

This agenda is one that the ANC has interpreted broadly in the post-apartheid era. In this sense, the increase in the courting of specifically African Independent Churches during election campaigns is of particular interest in terms of the broad conceptualisation of the liberation agenda to include indigenous forms of Christian expression. However, the Economic Freedom Fighters and the Democratic Alliance (DA), which currently constitute the main opposition parties, have also been party to the courting of African Independent Churches, such as the Zion Christian Church. The focus of this paper on a specific set of actors is not a reflection of a lack of awareness of the diversity of religious expression in South Africa and the long history of the close relationship between religion and politics in the country. Rather, it is to draw attention to a specific new configuration of this relationship in the post-apartheid era that has been brought about by an increased link to the global processes of change articulated specifically through the language of Christian religious discontent with the current political order.

The South African context

A quick survey of the available literature on elections and religion in sub-Saharan Africa reveals a variety of different studies. First, of the studies that do feature religion in their discussions of elections in Africa, many focus on the negative role that religion has played in close conjunction with ethnicity (ethno-religion) as well as sex discrimination (Adamo 2018; Chacha 2010; Dovlo 2006; Gahnström 2012; Gunde 2020). Second, of the studies that shift away from simply a negative reading of religion, most have focused principally on the causal relationship between specific groups of religious communities (Pentecostals, in particular) and their voting habits and potential voting patterns.

From Ghana and Nigeria in West Africa, these works include, for example, Cletus Nwanko (2019), Hakeem Onapajo (2016), and Baffour Takyi, Chris Opoku-Agyeman and Agnes Kutin-Mensah (2010). In East Africa, studies from Kenya include Peter Kaganjwa (2005), as well as Henni Alava and Jimmy Ssentongo (2016) from Uganda. Scholars who focus on Southern Africa include Maria Frahm-Arp (2021) on South Africa, Shepherd Mpofu (2021) on Zimbabwe, and Elizabeth Sperber and Erin Hern (2018) on Zambia. Broadly speaking, a key observation arising from these studies is that there needs to be greater attention paid to the intersection of religions and elections on the continent. This is not only for the purposes of challenging the scholarly myopic narrative on religiosity, but also for understanding how religious voters might be engaging with electoral campaigns and the ethical-moral positions of candidates.

In the South African context, much of what exists in this discussion is a combination of news pieces and some academic studies stemming mostly from the 2014 and 2019 national elections. Dion Forster's (2019) analysis offers a reading of the role played by the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) in the lead-up to the 2014 elections. In particular, Forster considers the actions of 'the Rev. Vukile Mehana, who was the Chaplain General to the ANC at the time and a very senior minister in the MCSA, serving on the denomination's executive, holding the portfolio of human resources management' (Foster 2019: 326). Forster is critical of Reverend Mehana's encouragement of pastors in Cape Town to solicit votes on behalf of the ANC and considers his actions an example of populism. In other words, in line with some of the literature that deals with the intersection of religion and elections negatively, Forster's analysis does not see value in religious leaders meddling in elections as he probably considers himself on the side of what Simangaliso Kumalo (2014) calls critical solidarity in analysing church-state relations. In a democratic context, this means the church's role is not simply to endorse the political order, but to engage it critically. Hence, Forster views Mehana's actions as contrary to this official position of the mainline churches in South Africa.

Frahm-Arp (2021) offers another reading with her focus on what she calls Pentecostal charismatic evangelical churches and the role played by pastors in a number of select churches in the lead-up to the 2019 elections. Frahm-Arp observes that various church leaders had different understandings of political activism, including the value of the civic duty to vote. 'Some strongly advocated political activism among their members, others merely encouraged their members to vote on election day, while a third group did not directly mention politics or voting and did not endorse any form of political activism among the members of their churches' (Frahm-Arp 2021: 312). She provides various reasons for the differences in attitude, which are not central to my argument. The point is that her work falls in line with the literature identified earlier as shifting away from simply a negative reading of religion and focusing principally on the causal relationship between specific groups of religious communities (Pentecostals) and their voting habits and potential voting patterns.

Elsewhere, Rebecca Davis (2019) makes interesting observations about the flocking of political leaders to places of worship on the Easter Weekend leading up to the 2019 elections. Of significance for this paper is the observation that 'the 2019 national elections are unique in the unprecedented number of religiously-flavoured parties contesting the polls, and the unprecedented number of party leaders who have held positions in the church'. Davis cites

political analyst Ongama Mtika when she writes that 'the formation of small Christian parties in the run-up to the 2019 polls is informed by the sense of "moral crisis" in South Africa after a decade of State Capture, with religious individuals seeking to "influence the political system with good values"'.

Drawing from Ferial Haffajee's (2019) observations, Davis writes that churches in South Africa continue to command a high level of public trust: 'An electorate which is increasingly fed up with corrupt or disengaged politicians may choose to put their trust in men or women of the cloth rather than career politicians, in the hope that the former will be more likely to act in accordance with the best interests of the people' (Davis 2019). Although Davis is not completely convinced that voters are ready to abandon their big political parties, the 2019 election results certainly proved fruitful for some of the religious parties.

Davis further notes in relation to some of the results of the by-elections earlier in 2019, the most eye-opening results were the 'astonishing 20% jump for the ACDP [African Christian Democratic Party] in the Cape Flats suburb of Bonteheuwel in January 2019', which was previously a DA stronghold (Davis 2019). Moreover, while the ACDP won only 1% of the ward in the 2016 local government elections, 'three years later, it bagged 20.56%'.

The African Transformation Movement (ATM) 'won 30% of the vote in a March by-election in the Eastern Cape' (Davis 2019). This church-based party, with its 'South Africans First' motto, managed to secure eighth position nationally on its first try. The ATM claims to follow the philosophies of humanism and ubuntu. Upon closer reading of its policies, the ATM believes in the return of capital punishment, building a 'society founded on Divine-based Values', promoting 'Moral Regeneration', and reinvigorating the role of traditional leadership in governance (ATM 2019).

In addition, another conservative Christian organisation garnered enough votes for sixth place in the 2019 elections, namely, the ACDP, which was founded in 1993. Led by Reverend Kenneth Meshoe, the ACDP promises a fresh start based on Christian and family values. In reading its policies, it is clear that 'the ACDP promotes, upholds and defends Christian family values' (ACDP 2019). Moreover, the ACDP proclaims: 'We adhere to a moral philosophy that is based upon the Word of God, and measure the interpretation of our policies against the prerequisites of biblical standards.'

Given Davis's observations above, the by-elections were certainly a harbinger for the national elections, where some of the major religious parties, such as the ACDP, ATM and Al Jama-ah performed better than expected. To that end, Davis further notes, 'There are signs that the major political parties are alive to the potential allure of religious principles for conservative voters at this point' (2019). This observation deserves further attention from the major political parties if they are going to make any regains on votes lost or lure specifically religious voters to their side (for further interesting analysis, see Abrahams 2009 and Schneider 2014).

The dearth of analytical literature on this topic provides an opportunity for us to think about what this intersection might mean for South Africa's electoral processes, including the assumed implications for the democratic process as a whole. Given the country's ongoing crisis mode since the global economic crunch of 2008 (Bernstein 2019; Johnson 2015; SAIRR 2016; Mbeki et al. 2018), as well as the incremental number of political parties on the ballot paper in recent elections either led by religious individuals or affiliated with a religious community, we need to explore how these two elements might have an impact on voter behaviour. Alternatively, at least, we can ask what political parties campaigning at both local and national levels might gain from paying attention to the religious moral compass of their constituencies.

At face value, the link is obvious, especially given how during the last three national elections of 2009, 2014 and 2019 religious communities were clear targets of electoral campaigning by the major political parties (Davis 2019; Egan 2009; Schneider 2014). It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed analysis of party campaigns, but, generally speaking, whether such campaigning has translated into votes is something that needs further investigation from available data. Yet, we can safely assume for the large part that 'South Africans have traditionally not voted along faith lines, even though the majority of South Africans identify as being Christian' (Du Toit 2019). This raises the question of what, then, would be the value of foregrounding religion in talks about South African elections?

Values matter: The religious factor

Since a significant part of the voter base in South Africa is religious (94.8% counting all religious affiliations, according to the *2015 General Household Survey*), this must have some impact on how political parties frame their campaigns, policies and strategies in light of the values of this large constituency (Statistics South Africa 2016). The obvious question is: what values matter for voters and how are these, if at all, informed particularly by a religious orientation? While there are many

survey sources of values that South Africans rely on, including the World Values Survey, the General Household Survey and the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS), this paper draws from another survey conducted by the Centre for Social Development in Africa, which specifically deals with elections (Patel et al. 2021).

Conducted over a period of four years, this study used a longitudinal four-wave tracking system that analyses factors that influence voter choice (Patel et al. 2021). The authors ask questions pertaining to issues of corruption, democratic rights, governance, social grants, socio-economic well-being and trust in political leadership. A key conclusion of the study is that the primary driver of voter choice is concerns with socio-economic well-being, and the best explanation for this concern is rational choice consideration. This means that voters are not as reliant on party loyalty as they are on perceptions of good governance, and, in particular, with reference to how corruption is perceived as being dealt with by political leaders. More importantly for the context of this paper, trust in political institutions declined even though trust in the presidency of Cyril Ramaphosa increased. This conclusion regarding minimal trust in political institutions confirms the findings of an earlier SASAS study.

According to the authors of the SASAS study, 'In the 2008 SASAS survey, the vast majority of South Africans (83%) expressed high levels of confidence or trust in religious institutions, especially relative to politicians and political parties, the latter receiving a mere 29%' (Struwig and Roberts 2009: 18). However, despite such trust in religious leaders as the moral compass for politicians and the country, an overwhelming majority of South Africans (72%) 'stated that religious leaders should not try and influence votes during elections, while two-thirds of South Africans stated that they were opposed to religious leaders influencing government decisions' (19). Moreover, this position was irrespective of political party and religious affiliation. In light of this information, Forster's critique of Reverend Mehana reflects a solid basis in the general view of the country regarding the separation of spheres when it comes to religion and politics. That said, however, the conclusion should not be that religious orientation has no bearing on voter choice. Given the way in which the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected the ability of religious institutions to conduct their work freely, I would argue that the municipal elections currently slated for 1 November 2021 might have a particularly religious tone to them, further informed by the broader concern for socio-economic well-being.

This is not only because of the general role that religious institutions play in electoral literacy and campaigning in general by opening up their places of worship for politicians to plead their cases. It is also because of the push by some religious leaders of the message of punishing the governing ANC at the elections for the refusal to allow full attendance for religious houses of worship. In particular, Moafrika wa Maila, representing a number of Pentecostal charismatic churches, has made a big deal of the matter, including leading a march to the Union Buildings in January and again in August 2021. In one interview, he is quoted as saying: 'We are going to call on our members to vote against the ruling government, and for our youth to march to Premier David Makhura's office to say to him that he needs to speak to the ANC government because he is about to lose Gauteng province. That is how radical we are this time around' (Moatshe 2021).

However, this is not the first time that religious leaders have publicly called on the electorate to be morally vigilant against an increasingly callous government. In 2014, two weeks prior to the national elections on 7 May, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba organised an ecumenical march called 'Procession of Witness' (Makgoba 2014). A number of religious leaders from different religious communities supported the procession. These included Maulana Abdul-Khaliq Allie, secretary general of the Muslim Judicial Council; Professor Reverend Leepo Modise, national moderator of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa; and Reverend Dr Mary-Anne Plaatjies-van Huffel, president of the World Council of Churches. The Union of Orthodox Synagogues sent a message of support, as did the Western Cape moderator of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, Dr Braam Hanekom.

While the message of the procession focused on the protection of the then Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela, it called specifically for:

> A change in the practice and behaviour of all parliamentarians, captains of industry and commerce . . . That all those, in all sectors of society, who have influence and power, return to Nelson Mandela's way of governance and leadership: governance that was not threatened by healthy social discourse; governance that was always mindful of the plight of the poor and the marginalized; governance that took seriously its responsibility to all people who have given leaders their trust (Makgoba 2014).

In making a case for the procession, Archbishop Makgoba underscores the failed moral character of the current leaders. Consequently, that the procession took place so close to the elections could not have been by accident. Although not declared outright, the procession was a call from religious leaders to the electorate to exercise their religious moral compasses in the upcoming election.

Therefore, to return to wa Maila, in underscoring the important role that religious institutions have played in the electoral process, he does have precedent to draw from. In fact, wa Maila drives the point home regarding the significant role of religious organisations by arguing that the ANC will lose the ability to even use churches as voting stations. He argues:

> It's a declaration, there is no more for the ANC in the churches. It will be a slogan, from here. If seven days pass, if next week churches are not open at 100%, there is no vote for the ANC in our churches. And there is no more voting stations in our churches. We have 22 000 voting stations of which 4 800 of them are in the churches, they must move out . . . As we are speaking, the church declares a line between itself and government from here (Mlangeni 2021).

While wa Maila does not represent all religious institutions, including their positions on the matter, he does highlight how the COVID-19 pandemic might just be the tipping point for religious voters in terms of how they assess their choices.

In particular, this conclusion is purported in relation to the important factor of socio-economic hardship that the country has endured due to the pandemic, including the role of the governing ANC in exacerbating this hardship. Consequently, the voices of religious leaders might be important for swaying their congregants one way. To that end, we might see in the upcoming local government elections a reversal of the findings of Jaré Struwig and Ben Roberts (2009) regarding the general view in South Africa that religious leaders must refrain from trying to influence voters and government decisions. The significance of the religious factor for the local government elections is given further support by the general stance taken by the religious institutions that submitted their position to the Inquiry on Free and Fair Local Government Elections during COVID-19, headed by former Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke.

The Inquiry invited 'the public to provide their views on whether the Electoral Commission will be able to ensure that the forthcoming general local government elections are free and fair in view

of (i) the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and (ii) the measures promulgated by the government to curb the continued spread of the pandemic' (IEC 2021a). The public was also invited to indicate additional measures that the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) may be required to implement in order to realise free and fair elections within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In its conclusion, the Inquiry made the following recommendation: 'Having considered all the submissions of stakeholders, applicable law, research on electoral practices during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the related science, we conclude that it is not reasonably possible or likely that the local government elections scheduled for the month of October 2021 will be held in a free and fair manner, as required by the peremptory provisions of the Constitution and related legislation' (IEC 2021b: 98).

This recommendation goes against a largely supportive position for the holding of elections by the religious organisations and religious political parties that made submissions on the matter, as noted in the table below.

ORGANISATION	POSITION
African Covenant (ACO)	YES
African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP)	YES
African Transformation Movement (ATM)	YES
Anglican Church in Southern Africa	NEUTRAL
Ratanang Latter Rain New Order Ministry (RLRNOM)	YES
South African Christian Movement (SACM)	NO
Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC)	YES

Five of the seven religious organisations and religious political parties that made submissions argued that the holding of local government elections should proceed as planned, with the provision that the requisite measures for guarding against the transmission of COVID-19 are strictly observed.

All of the organisations and parties in support cite the constitutional requirements for the holding of elections as non-negotiable for democracy, barring force majeure and they do not consider COVID-19 as having such a status any longer, given the rolling out of the vaccination programme and the current lower level of lockdown. As such, these organisations argue that elections should go ahead, with the key second argument being the need to address what they deem as failing leadership at the municipal level. For example, in defence of this position, the ATM argues:

> The rationale for genuine periodic election is on the understanding that the electorate take a risk of voting for electoral promises made by representatives with no guarantee of delivery. Once you increase this period, thereby making it not to be genuine, you are actually denying the electorate free expression of their will. Right to elections delayed is actually right to elections denied, thereby making elections not to be free and fair. We cannot allow the current Councillors to overstay the period given to them by the electorate, particularly given the high levels of corruption by our Councillors (ATM 2021: 3).

The ACDP gives further support to this general position of the religious organisations by noting:

> The ACDP is aware that the vast majority of our municipalities are failing at the basic level of service delivery, financial management, transparency, accountability and numerous other governance metrics. Residents should not have to wait another three years to remove those elected public representatives who are corrupt and have been stealing or misspending ratepayers hard earned cash. It must be remembered that only 20 of 278 municipalities obtained clean audits in the last financial year. This is not atypical. In fact it is worsening year on year. Postponing the local government elections would give those involved in maladministration, irregular and wasteful expenditure, and corruption, another three years to plunder (ACDP 2021: 2).

In other words, voting is a necessary corrective to the current levels of amoral behaviour of elected officials who are not delivering what they promise. Consequently, it is the moral duty of the citizens to be able to remove such leaders on the basis that they are not upholding the sacredness of their

offices, as both the ATM and the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference regard voting as a sacred right.

The African Covenant (ACO) captures the general sentiments of these religious organisations and religious political parties with respect to their suspicion of why major political parties would opt for postponement. In its submission, the ACO notes:

> Political parties which are currently in parliament, provincial legislatures and municipalities are conflicted concerning whether or not to postpone elections. Their general preferences would be to postpone the election for obvious reasons. Therefore, any proposal from their sides, which points to the suspension or postponement of the elections, must be disregarded. They have generally been unable to provide a credible governance tenure to society. Their administration and terms of offices have been characterised by world-class and unprecedented corruption records, for which they were directly and indirectly involved (ACO 2021).

According to the ACO, political parties that want postponement do not want to face the moral judgement of their constituencies but, instead, want to continue their maladministration and to be granted more time to sell empty promises rather than delivering on what they have promised already. While not representative of the whole religious electorate, the views of the religious organisations and religious political parties in support of the elections going forward is important to consider in this particular election period. A crucial aspect of why the voices of the religious electorate need to be carefully considered is therefore linked to the debate about the crisis of municipalities, which can be located within a broader political context of the global crisis language currently circulating.

The language of crisis and the new right framework

What is interesting about the current South African political economy context is that its milieu is defined through the language of 'crisis'. This language harkens back to a specifically religious orientation of the early inception of New Right ideology in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US). Writing in the context of the rise of New Right in the 1970s and 1980s, for example, Jeffrey Marishane traces the role played by American Pentecostalism in this process. In particular, Marishane notes: 'The New Right's efforts to co-opt the fundamentalist and Pentecostal

movements' leadership into its hidden political agenda can be traced to 1976. In that year, New Right pollsters identified "born again" Christians as the single largest bloc of unregistered voters and set themselves the task of tapping this potential' (1991: 82). Accordingly, elections provide an important platform through which conservative religious ideology came to be part of the American political economy.

The traditional narrative of the American New Right is very clear on its analysis: society is losing control of children and has gone too far in shifting social and political policies towards the accommodation of minority groups (Apple 1990: 293). As Peter Kallaway notes: 'The emergence of the politics of the New Right in Britain and the USA, associated with the rise of Thatcherism and Reaganism, has frequently been represented as the politics of crisis, manifested in extremely high levels of unemployment, unprecedented levels of inflation, economic recession, a marked decline in balance of payments deficits in most industrial nations, and an alarming growth in the public debt of most western countries' (1989: 256). Michael Apple explains: 'Behind the conservative restoration is a clear sense of loss: of control, of economic and personal security, of the knowledge and values that should be passed on to children, of visions of what counts as sacred texts and authority' (1990: 306).

In the context of South Africa, the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), amongst many other organisations, represents a contemporary articulation of the 'crisis' discourse of the New Right, thus firmly entrenching the language of economic crisis in the post-apartheid lexicon of the South African New Right. While traditionally a liberal think tank, many interlocutors have come to label the organisation more Right than Centrist (Friedman 2019a, 2019b). In much of its recent policy position, including in its 2016 report, the SAIRR describes the current mode of the country as being in considerable trouble based on a measure of economic indices that 'range from mining and manufacturing production indices to residential property prices, vehicle sales, credit extension and default numbers, business confidence indices, consumer confidence indices, and consumer spending itself'. Further, the SAIRR notes: 'The most telling number of all is that, in real GDP terms, South Africans are again becoming poorer – as they did in the volatile and very violent 1980s' (SAIRR 2016: 4). In fact, in terms commensurate with the global New Right discourse, the SAIRR argues that in sacrificing economic performance 'in pursuit of ideological goals, the ANC has created rising new demand for a political alternative' (5). In other words, South Africa is underperforming economically because of an over-concern with person rights rather than

property rights (Apple 1990: 295). It is this underperformance, then, that is creating a space for alternatives to the current political order.

In particular, I would argue that the crisis language in South Africa highlights the hijacking of current global crises in general through the language of the New Right. While primarily a phenomenon associated with the US and the UK in the 1980s and, most recently, with the Alternative Right in these aforementioned countries, as well as parts of the European Union, Brazil, Turkey and India, amongst others, South Africa is not shielded from the New Right discourse. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a number of scholars in the US and the UK, such as Harvey Kaye (1987), Kallaway (1989) and Apple (1990), demonstrated how post-1970s' America and Britain fused the neo-liberal discourse of free markets with the neo-conservative Christian discourse of moral rightness to found the New Right. Kallaway notes: 'The emergence of the politics of the New Right in Britain and the USA, associated with the rise of Thatcherism and Reaganism, has frequently been represented as the politics of crisis' (1989: 256).

Drawing on the work of Stuart Hall, Apple argues that the use of this crisis language is to justify 'an increasingly close relationship between government and the capitalist economy' (1990: 299). Furthermore, according to Kallaway: 'The New Right in Britain and the USA represents not a weakening but a further strengthening of the authoritarian state required to deal with the weakening of capitalist hegemony and legitimacy' (1989: 261–262). Arguably, in most recent global history, the intervention of the governments of various states in the 2008 financial crisis represents one of the greatest illustrations of the kind of authoritarianism pursued in relation to a weakened capitalist hegemony, regardless of the cost to the public good. Indeed, in relation to the current COVID-19 pandemic, talks of authoritarianism have abounded.

Of further note in the scholarship on the New Right is the foregrounding of the centrality of emotion for political gain, where the New Right relies heavily on the discourse of 'crisis'. In particular, according to Apple, 'The movement away from social democratic principles and an acceptance of more right-wing positions in social and educational policy occur precisely because conservative groups have been able to work on popular sentiments; to reorganize genuine feelings; and, in the process, to win adherents' (1990: 298). What makes the New Right particularly attractive is the ability to skilfully manipulate feelings of predicament (Marishane 1991: 86). Consequently, it is under the guise of righting an economy in crisis (socio-economic well-being)

that, for these scholars, persons rights won over long periods of struggle are subsumed under 'rightist restoration politics' (Apple 1990: 300).

Therefore, I also argue that, in line with the important role ascribed to Christianity in traditional New Right discourse, the contemporary South African crisis discourse needs to pay attention to the rise of the New Right, understood primarily, but not solely, through the activities of the Neo-Pentecostal electorate. In particular, it is their interest in proffering a spiritual solution to the economic 'crisis' that provides for the need to pay attention to this group. As an economic and religious class that has come to represent the 'New South Africa', the hypervisibility of the Neo-Pentecostal churches in the post-apartheid era is important to analyse. This hypervisibility (observable in the case of challenging the postponement of local government elections, for example) highlights the salient ways in which Neo-Pentecostal Christianity (complete with its overvaluation of the discourse of moral decay amidst economic crisis) has appeal across racial and class lines. In terms of the religious organisations and religious political parties cited above, this list would include the ACO, ACDP, ATM, Ratanang Latter Rain New Order Ministry and South African Christian Movement.

In some of the current literature on Neo-Pentecostals in South Africa, there is a general indication of the rise of these churches within 'crisis' discourse. For instance, in her article analysing the political rhetoric of Pentecostal charismatic evangelical churches in the lead-up to the 2014 general elections in South Africa, Frahm-Arp directly links the rise of these churches in the public sphere to the broad political landscape, which is beset by a set of ongoing challenges that have 'the potential to threaten the stability of the democratic process' (2015: 126). Frahm-Arp lists these challenges as 'growing unemployment, poor and underperforming service delivery, education and medical care, labour unrest, particularly with regard to ongoing strikes and wage disputes, an ever widening income gap, one-party political dominance, corruption within the country's fiscal management and fragile political institutions' (126). Therefore, it is in light of speaking to these challenges that, for Frahm-Arp, the Pentecostal charismatic evangelical churches' leaders see 'their roles as changing the moral behaviour and legislation of government to come in line with conservative Evangelical principles' (117).

In further supporting this crisis-context argument, Terry Tastard, writing for a conservative American Christian magazine, highlights how 'possibly the newer, independent charismatic churches will encourage renewal at the personal level' in response to what he identifies as a spiritual crisis (2017). For Tastard, this spiritual crisis consists of 'a vacuum at the place where

morality, family life, and social conscience all interact. This vacuum means that South Africans live in a society scarred by corruption, precarious healthcare, and widespread violence – in other words, they are living a spiritual crisis, indeed.' However, in the manner of New Right discourse, the spiritual crisis is foregrounded by an economic crisis, most observable in 'protests over what is called "service delivery"'. According to this view, the material crisis has a spiritual dimension to it that should not be ignored if the strains on South African society are not to reach an 'explosive level'. This strained context, then, is one wherein the religious electorate (albeit Charismatic Pentecostal in Tastard's account) can encourage renewal.

The language of crisis is not limited to the Christian Right. In the letter referred to earlier, Anglican Archbishop Makgoba also uses the language of crisis to underscore the point that religious South Africans need to draw from religious values in responding to the crisis in government. He says, 'Although this is primarily a response to the crisis in government presented by the worrying developments surrounding the Chapter Nine institutions and especially those concerning the Office of the Public Protector, we are also responding to the plight of communities ravaged by gangsterism, drug abuse and poor education' (Makgoba 2014). Although not declaring himself as such, it is easy to see how Makgoba's language is very much in the vocabulary of the New Right discourse discussed above. Despite the social justice focus of Anglicans and Methodists not traditionally Right-leaning, and therefore different in that sense, it is not possible to delink current mainline talk about the crisis from the New Right crisis discourse. A mainline church's bishop calling for renewal in terms that echo the broader crisis language of the New Right is something worth thinking about deeply in terms of South Africa's political economy.

Such renewal is not limited to the purview of the religious electorate, but also extends to the politics of crisis that affects the whole country's constituency. In that sense, it is not only the openly religious electorate who must be convinced of the morally sound nature of the policies of the political parties concerned, but also the whole electorate of South Africa as the crisis affects us all. While South Africans might not traditionally vote along religious lines, this does not mean that religious values carry no meaning or weight in the adjudication of which party best represents the values deemed important by a large majority. As I have demonstrated through various attitudes surveys, socio-economic well-being is a major concern. Therefore, given that the socio-economic concerns are currently being framed through the language of crisis that is directly linked to New Right discourse, it is important for all parties to consider the weight of religious values.

Conclusion

The call of some church leaders for their members to vote against the ANC in the 2021 local government elections is buttressed by submissions in support of the elections proceeding despite the limitations posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether the members of these churches heed their leaders' calls to punish the governing ANC remains to be seen in practice, especially now that the application for postponement filed by the IEC has been rejected and the elections are proceeding. There is strong evidence to suggest that religious organisations and religious political parties will put pressure on their members to draw from their religious values in assessing the worthiness of local government candidates. This is partly because the local government space is where the ability to exert influence through voting is more realistic than at the national and provincial levels, where the party leaders have the upper hand. In religious terms, what the local government elections provide is an opportunity to right the wrongs of the socio-economic crisis through a perspective informed by a sense of sacred duty, including punishing those who have not delivered accordingly. Since the current ANC representatives at the local level are read through the lens of the main political party, and this party has been found wanting in moral and political character, the time might be ripe for religiously based political parties and non-religious political parties that take religion seriously to perform well.

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