

In one word, the 2019 elections are: Unwinnable

Imagine the ANC not being able to hold sway in Gauteng province, nor the DA being able to muster a majority in the Western Cape! But that is what the pollsters are telling us.

What is going on? Everywhere you go, there are splits.

What the ANC called “unity” was code language for “gridlock”. Essentially there are two ANCs in what can only be described as an “identity crisis”. The Reformation is led by Ramaphosa, and the Counter-Ramaphosa is led by Magashule. David Mabuza’s silence worries everyone; it makes him look like he is eyeing the top job as the original proponent of “unity”.

There has also been an internal tug-of-war within the DA between the erstwhile Liberal democrats and the Maimane-led Social democrats. This might seem to some like splitting hairs, but it has caused some friction.

The Labour movement is also split. COSATU no longer speaks for all the Unions, as some have walked out of the ruling alliance and joined SAFTU with Vavi and Jim. So organized labour has lost some of its force, and that is starting to show as union members vote to call off strikes and to return to work with less that they were demanding.

In fact, the word “split” is not strong enough. A better word would be “fragmentation”. For starters, you have 48 parties contesting these 2019 election. That is a lot more than in 2019, when 29 parties contested. Of those 29 parties, 13 of them won at least one seat in the National Assembly.

So we can probably expect to see over 20 parties with at least one seat this time around.

The parties that do not win even one seat, still drain away votes from the total vote-count. This will have the biggest effect on the party that had the biggest number of votes in 2014 – the ANC.

But there is another huge split that already happened before the elections. That is, that 10 million citizens who are eligible to vote did not register. In other words, they voted with their feet. They left. *Gatvol*. Democracy has disappointed them. State Capture offended them. They apparently do not see any political party on the horizon that can fix the mess that South Africa has landed in. Are they longing for a Julius Caesar who will cross the Rubicon and save Rome from itself?

Another split is also predicted. That is the “stay-away” vote. Some estimates suggest that as many as 5 million voters who have registered will not turn out to vote. This is worse than *gatvol*, this is a declaration of disgust. In its most refined form, it consists of spoiled ballots.

Not a small “x” beside a party name, but a big “X” across the whole ballot. Ballots like these are counted as abstentions. But these days, voters tend to be apathetic if not fatalistic – they just don’t bother to rock up at any polling station. They hold the whole process in contempt.

So the Electorate is also divided against itself. 37 million citizens old enough to vote and only 27 million registered. Sad but true.

Worst of all, the highest age density of the 10-million un-registered voters is Youth – under 35 years of age. (Not counting the 20 million citizens who are too young to vote, of course.) What this means is that the election results will be decided by older people. Even though they are out-numbered by far, by younger people.

86 percent of eligible voters turned out to vote in 1994. It was down to 57 percent by 2014. How low can it sink to in 2019? This split is really, really sad when you think of the sacrifices that were made to gain the universal franchise that we enjoy today.

But make no mistake – the un-registered voters and the stay-away vote, as well as the spoiled ballots or abstentions are all saying something to posterity. This is intentional. It has meaning. They have split themselves from the Electorate, just like Patricia de Lille has split from the DA and like Mosiuoa Lekota served divorce papers on the ANC in 2008 to form COPE. The biggest splinter party of them all is the 10-15 eligible voters - who are not unlike conscientious objectors. They vote with their feet.

Where will this leave us? The answer is, with Coalition Governments. In short, these may prove to be more democratic than a one-size-fits-all liberation movement turned political party.

Coalitions may be messy, but they will hold parties and politicians to account better than a party whose erstwhile dream was a one-party state. Until Jesus returns. We are losing vanguardism, and that is a good thing.

We may also lose the prospect of a 67 percent block of votes required to amend the Constitution. (Or is it really 75 percent?) For example, to impose expropriation without compensation. If any party ever thought that this would be easy, or that it would line up with the 81 percent of the population that is black, these elections will set that straight.

Coalitions will assure us of a more democratic future, with more accountability and transparency. Coalitions are caused by elections that are unwinnable. That is where we are in mid-2019.