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Gary Prevost

College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, Gprevost@csbsju.edu

Janet Cherry

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Article

Kwazakhele after twenty years of democracy: the contradictory development of political pluralism and political alienation¹

Gary Prevost and Janet Cherry

gprevost@csbsju.edu; janet.cherry@nmmu.ac.za

Abstract

The article explores political participation and democratic consolidation in South Africa 20 years after the end of apartheid. It does so through the lens of the residents of Kwazakhele, a black township in Nelson Mandela Bay in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Two surveys conducted in the month following the May 2014 elections provide the basis for analysing the political attitudes and expectations of older residents and comparing them with those of younger residents of the 'born free' generation. The findings are that while there is a high level of participation by older residents, there is a significant alienation of youth. At the same time, the consolidation of democracy is evidenced by the growth of political tolerance and political pluralism, shown by the presence and (limited) support for opposition parties. The findings include analysis of how the voting patterns in Kwazakhele contributed to the defeat of the ANC in the 2016 local elections in the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality.

Introduction

This article tracks political loyalties, political participation and civic involvement over a 20 year time period in the black and working class township of Kwazakhele in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, and documents the challenges now facing the African National Congress (ANC) to maintain its traditional base of support. In 2014 the researchers surveyed approximately 200 residents with half of the participants being aged 38 years and above, those who grew up under apartheid and voted for the first

time in 1994. The second group, primarily 25 and under, were born when apartheid was being abolished, the so-called 'born free' generation. The primary question that the article seeks to answer is what the political trajectory of the Kwazakhele community is after 20 years of democratic elections, and what that trajectory tells us about the future of democracy. To answer that primary question several secondary questions are pursued including: for whom have the residents voted and why? Has there been any change in dominant support for the ANC? For those that continue to support the ANC, what is the basis for that support? For those that have moved to other parties, what is the reason? In particular how has the community responded to new parties over time, the Democratic Alliance (DA), the Congress of the People (COPE), the United Front of the Eastern Cape, and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)?

Beyond voting patterns, another set of questions are posed to probe deeper into the nature of democracy in the new South Africa: as the result of the appearance of these new parties, can it be said that there is now an established political pluralism in the township? What has been the pattern of voter turnout, especially in recent elections? Beyond voting, what is the level and character of political participation in the area? Has the traditionally high level of voting participation in the area (close to 80 per cent in national elections) been maintained by the 'born free' generation? What is the level of civic participation and has it remained constant with the current generation? Is the declining vote for the ANC a measure of disconnect with the ruling party or an alienation from politics and society more generally?

Finally, the data collected in the surveys allowed us to examine the significant predictors of 2014 voting. Are they demographics such as age, gender and employment; or are they behavioural variables such as those mentioned above – political participation, civic involvement, and involvement with local government? The sections below detail how these behavioural variables are operationalised and used in a regression analyses to predict voting behaviour.

The Kwazakhele surveys

The research findings in this article are based on two surveys conducted in Kwazakhele township, Port Elizabeth, South Africa in May 2014, following the national and provincial elections. Earlier surveys were

conducted by one of the authors (Cherry 2000, 2011) in the same area following national elections from 1994 forward. In 2014 one survey focused on residents 38 years old and older, those who grew up under apartheid and were eligible to vote for the first time in 1994. It is from this cohort that the previous surveys going back to 1994 were conducted. In 2014 for the first time a separate survey was conducted of persons 25 years and younger, those born as the apartheid system was being dismantled, the so-called 'born-free' generation. One hundred questionnaires were completed by older adults and 96 by younger adults. Each respondent in the survey completed 26 questions. The questions in the survey first established basic demographics – age, gender, status of employment, educational level, and spoken home language. It then proceeded to ascertain whether or not they voted in the 2014 election and if so for which party they voted.

The next section asked about their level of political involvement. Were they party members, did they attend party meetings, and had they voted in previous local and national elections? The next section explored the question of civic engagement by seeking information about civic organisations in the township and whether or not they were active in such organisations. The next section of the questionnaire focused on expectations and perceptions of democracy by asking questions such as: how has South Africa and Kwazakhele changed since 1994; what has changed in your life? Respondents were also asked whether the ANC government had met their expectations, and asked for concrete examples of expectations met or disappointed. The final question in this section asked what they could do if the government did not meet their expectations.

An additional section of the youth survey asked the respondents to rank the importance of government action on the following issues – racism, crime, lack of social cohesion, unemployment, poverty, and slow pace of social transformation. The question was phrased in a way to measure youth attitudes toward government in general, not just the current ANC government. The ranking was done by fourteen different pairings with the request to state which issue was more important for action compared to the other. This enabled a comparison of the working-class township youth, with the political opinions captured in other surveys of South African university students conducted by one of the authors (Steyn Kotze and Prevost 2015).

The surveys were conducted by a team of researchers who conducted 196 interviews in randomly selected households in all of the voting wards of Kwazakhele. The researchers were students of Development Studies or Political Studies at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, and were Xhosa-speaking. The map of Kwazakhele was divided into five sections (identified as A, B, C, D, E) to ensure that respondents were captured in all areas of Kwazakhele. Forty locations in each section were selected through using Excel's built-in 'random function' to generate a set of coordinates. A pair of researchers was allocated to each section and went to the house closest to each of the coordinates on the map of that section. If nobody was available or willing to respond in the first house approached, the next house at the same coordinates was approached. The primary selection criterion for participation beyond a willingness to fill out the survey was an age requirement, 18-35 for the youth survey and 38 and older for the older adult survey. The respondents also had to be residents of Kwazakhele (not temporary visitors). The primary language of the area is isiXhosa but the survey was written in English, with the surveyors, speakers of isiXhosa, able to assist in verbal translation of questions and answers where necessary. All surveys were conducted in the month following the national election of May 7, 2014, ie between May 8 and June 7, 2014.

Election statistics and demographic data are drawn from the South African websites for the Independent Electoral Commission and the South African Census 2011, www.elections.org.za and www.statssa.gov.za respectively. Although the borders of Kwazakhele township do not precisely match the ward boundaries, the data from the seven wards which make up most of Kwazakhele and the voting stations within these wards is used for corroboration of the survey data. These wards are wards 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24 and 25 of Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality. As will be seen below, the IEC data corroborates the survey findings, and the Census data broadly corroborates the demographic data of the survey. Some survey data are counted for both surveys together (total 196), while for the purpose of comparison between older and younger residents' political participation, the data of the two surveys are counted separately (100 and 96 respectively).

Kwazakhele wards 2016



The history, demography and politics of Kwazakhele

Why should such a study of voter participation focus on the township of Kwazakhele? As can be seen from the demographic profile of those surveyed, Kwazakhele is a relatively homogenous population, in many ways typical of African urban working class communities around South Africa. Unlike the newer townships and informal settlements on the outskirts of the city, whose residents have urbanised in the past two decades, much of Kwazakhele's population have been living in the city for generations. With an established and stable population with a long history of political activism, it is an ideal community in which to document trends in voter participation over time.

Kwazakhele is an old municipal township, with a population of approximately 100,000.² It was established at the height of apartheid in the late 1950s, to accommodate urbanised African residents of Port Elizabeth who were living in Korsten. In one of the biggest – but least documented

– forced removals in apartheid’s history, 45,000 people were moved over a period of three years (Cherry 1988). Most of Kwazakhele still consists of the original municipal houses, known as ‘matchbox houses’ as they are tiny rectangular houses. In addition to these areas, there are three other kinds of housing in Kwazakhele. Matthew Goniwe Village was originally built as the Single Men’s Quarters, barrack-type accommodation for migrant workers. Over the past two decades the dilapidated and overcrowded barracks, crudely known as *KwaNdokwenza*, have been converted into family housing, and services have been provided together with certain amenities including a community hall and a row of containers for small businesses (*KwaNdokwenza* means ‘where you get “done”’ in reference to migrant workers having casual sex). There are also some areas of new RDP³ housing built since 1994, to replace informal settlements with formal housing and services. Lastly, there are still a few pockets of informal dwellings without services, in the process of being replaced by RDP houses and formal services.

Many of the older residents of Kwazakhele have a political history going back to the 1950s, to the days before the liberation movements were banned. The ANC had a strong presence in Kwazakhele in the early years of the township’s existence, from 1956 until 1960 when it was banned. From the time of the 1976 uprising, the next generation of youth of Kwazakhele pursued a more militant path of resistance to apartheid oppression, with the revolt in Port Elizabeth townships being centred on Kwazakhele High School. This generation of youth, many of whom were jailed or banned, came back to Kwazakhele in the early 1980s and, together with older ANC veterans, built a powerful grassroots mass movement (Cherry 2000). This movement was based in a remarkable network of street and area committees, which linked together to form what were known as residents’ associations, civic organisations or ‘civics’, affiliated initially to the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (PEBCO) and then to the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO). Along with a powerful school student organisation, a militant youth organisation and a women’s organisation, these civics affiliated to the United Democratic Front, which gave leadership to the struggle from 1984 through the period of the township uprising which reached its height in 1985-6. This uprising saw unprecedented levels of mobilisation in Kwazakhele, the resignation of the apartheid Black Local Authority councillors under popular pressure, and the rendering of the township

‘ungovernable’ and apartheid ‘unworkable’. The empowerment of ordinary working class people through their own structures and actions was accompanied by significant violence, some of it state-sponsored, between supporters of the UDF and those of the Azanian People’s Organisation (AZAPO).

As a consequence, the ANC’s hegemony was undisputed by 1994 when the transition to democracy began. The transition period between 1990 and 1994 saw Kwazakhele largely untouched by the violence which ravaged some other townships, including KwaNobuhle in neighbouring Uitenhage. Bolstered by important township development concessions, the ANC built up its now legal branches with high levels of support and participation from the residents of Kwazakhele. At one point, the ‘Kwazakhele 2’ branch had the highest membership of any ANC branch in the region, with 13,000 members (Cherry 2000:139).

Given this political background, it is not surprising that the first democratic election, held in April 1994, saw residents of Kwazakhele participating in great numbers and expressing their joy at being able to vote, as well as considerable pride in their participation in bringing about the downfall of the apartheid regime. Long considered as a stronghold of the liberation movement, Kwazakhele saw consistently high participation in every election, and consistently high levels of support for the ANC, generally above 90 per cent. This was only challenged in any significant way in the 2009 election, when COPE gained 25 per cent of the vote in one Kwazakhele ward from some ANC voters who were dissatisfied with the treatment of Thabo Mbeki (Cherry 2009:121, 126). Given that Kwazakhele voters are considered to be the ANC’s ‘prime’ constituency, it is also not surprising that considerable efforts have gone into improving the conditions and developing the township. Houses have been transferred into the ownership of the long-term residents; almost all homes are electrified; roads have been tarred, and the ‘bucket system’ has been replaced with proper sewerage pipes in all but a few pockets of shacks.

In addition to consistently high levels of political participation in elections, residents of Kwazakhele have maintained a fairly high level of involvement in structures of civil society. However, this has been changing over the last 20 years. On the one hand, there has been a significant decline in the influence of SANCO and its structures, together with the consolidation of the ANC branch’s influence at local level through formal political structures such as Ward Committees. On the other, there is a new

generation of residents of Kwazakhele, who have grown up in a democracy, and who have other motivations for political involvement (or lack of involvement) from their parents and grandparents. The survey helps us to explore these changes over the 20 years of democracy, and explain the current shifts in voter participation in the most recent election of 2014 and also to analyse the results of the 2016 local elections. The 2016 elections saw the Democratic Alliance win control of the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality (NMBM) and while the ANC continued to dominate the Kwazakhele wards, its declining vote totals help to explain their overall defeat.

Analysis of Kwazakhele voting trends

A review of the voting records of the seven municipal wards that make up Kwazakhele (18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, and 25), for the last four elections (2009 and 2014 national and 2011 and 2016 local) underscores the continuing political domination of the area by the ANC, but also reveals a declining level of support. In the 2014 national elections support for the ANC was consistent across the seven wards, ranging from 78.5 per cent in Ward 25 to 82.5 per cent in Ward 18. This compares to the figures from the 2009 elections where support ranging from 70.7 per cent in ward 25 to 79.7 per cent in Ward 18. The greatest level of support in terms of percentage actually occurred in the 2011 local elections where ANC support level ranged from a low of 82 per cent in Ward 25 to high of 90 per cent in Ward 18. However, in the 2016 local elections the ANC victory totals declined to a high of 78.6 per cent in Ward 19 to a low of 72.2 per cent in Ward 20. Across the Kwazakhele wards, the party fell from a ward average of 85.89 per cent in 2011 to 75.4 per cent in 2016, a loss of more than 7,500 votes. This loss of votes contributed significantly to the victory of the Democratic Alliance metro wide in the proportional representation (PR) voting, a sharp reversal from 2011.

An explanation for the fluctuation in percentage vote for the ANC across the four elections mainly has to do with the performance of the opposition parties, particularly COPE and to a lesser extent the Economic Freedom Fighters, the United Front of the Eastern Cape, the Democratic Alliance, and the United Democratic Movement. COPE was founded just ahead of the 2009 elections as the result of the split in the ANC that resulted from the removal of president Thabo Mbeki before the end of his scheduled term of office. COPE and its Mbeki supporters had considerable

backing in the Eastern Cape and Nelson Mandela Bay. The result was that for a new political movement COPE gained significant traction in the predominantly African wards of the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, including in Kwazakhele. The COPE vote ranged from a high of 25.7 per cent in Ward 25 down to a respectable 16.7 per cent in Ward 20. However, COPE did not fare well in the period after the election. Nationally, its success did not mirror the gains made in the Eastern Cape and bitter infighting undermined the party and its potential for growth. Some of its more prominent members re-entered the ANC, especially in the Eastern Cape. As a result COPE's vote share dropped dramatically in the 2011 elections to a high of 11.5 per cent in Ward 25 to a low of 5.8 per cent in the Ward 21. By the 2014 elections the party had been reduced to a marginal factor with voter totals from 4.6 per cent in Ward 25, where they have always had the greatest support, to a low of 1.6 per cent in Ward 18, a clear ANC stronghold. The rapid decline of support for COPE allowed the ANC to recover its position in the 2011 local election and to a lesser degree the 2014 elections (Ferree 2011).

The pie charts below illustrate the changes in Kwazakhele voters' behaviour over the past 20 years. Chart 1a shows the consistency in overwhelming ANC support from 1994 to 2004, with only 6 per cent of the vote going to parties such as AZAPO, PAC and the UDM. Chart 1b shows the significant vote for COPE (an ANC breakaway) in the 2009 election, and Charts 1c and 1d show the spread of the opposition vote over a number of parties in both the 2014 and 2016 elections:

Chart 1a: Kwazakhele voting patterns 1994 – 2004 (IEC):

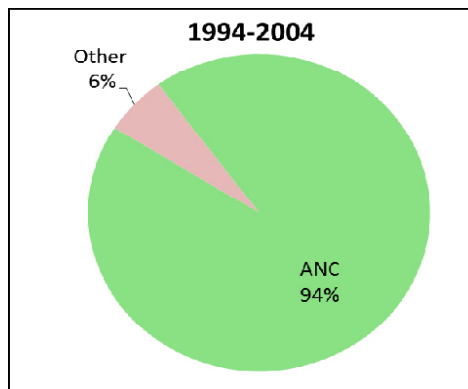


Chart 1b: Kwazakhele voting patterns 2009 (IEC):

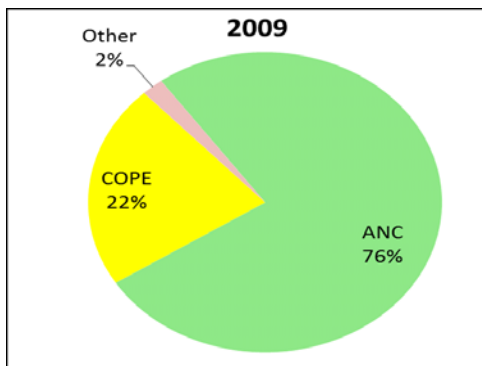
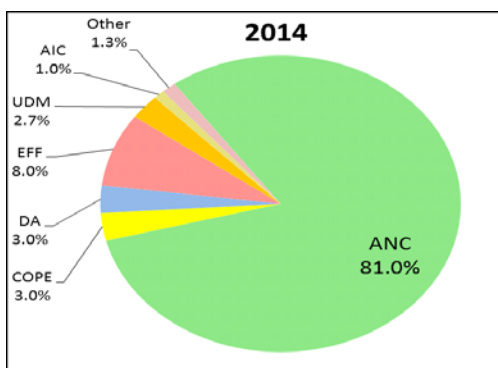


Chart 1c: Kwazakhele voting patterns 2014 (IEC):



Analysis of the 2014 elections highlights three interesting factors beyond the almost complete collapse of COPE support – the emergence of the Economic Freedom Fighters as a small but significant opposition party; small but potentially significant gains for the Democratic Alliance; and a higher abstention rate compared to the 2009 national poll. The EFF, under the leadership of former ANC Youth League president Julius Malema, emerged ultimately as the primary new challenge to the ANC in 2014. It presented itself to South Africa’s African majority as a legitimate alternative to the ANC, with its roots in the liberation movement and seeking to appeal to previous ANC and COPE supporters disappointed in the performance of the government. The EFF, with a populist message

emphasising land reform and free university education, sought to position itself to the left of the ANC and capitalise on defections from the ANC, especially from within the youth and the labour movement. Support for the EFF was consistent across the Kwazakhele wards ranging from a high of 8.6 per cent in Ward 25 to 6.8 per cent in Ward 19. Our two surveys showed that this support likely came mostly from youth voters. While the youth survey included 6 EFF voters, the adult survey had none. The EFF forward trajectory continued in 2016 surpassing 10 per cent in five Kwazakhele wards, averaging 9.7 per cent with a high of 10.8 per cent in both wards 20 and 21.

The dominant position of the ANC was also impacted by the efforts of the Democratic Alliance to grow its votes in the black community. The DA made significant gains in the ‘coloured’ townships of Nelson Mandela Bay in previous elections, and almost gained 50 per cent of ward council seats in 2011. The previously disenfranchised residents of Nelson Mandela Bay were divided by apartheid into African and coloured (of mixed race) residential areas. As the term ‘black’ is often used to refer to all those oppressed by apartheid, including people of Asian and mixed descent as well as ‘black Africans’, the terms African and coloured are used here to differentiate the black residential areas which have very different political histories and loyalties. Building off its successes in 2011 in the ‘coloured’ townships, the DA worked hard in the elections of both 2014 and 2016 to gain black votes in overwhelmingly black townships like Kwazakhele. In February 2015 the DA established a DA office in Kwazakhele intended to serve constituents in all the black townships of the metro (Ndamase 2015). The DA’s efforts resulted in a modest increase from 1.37 per cent in 2011 to 4.52 per cent in 2016.

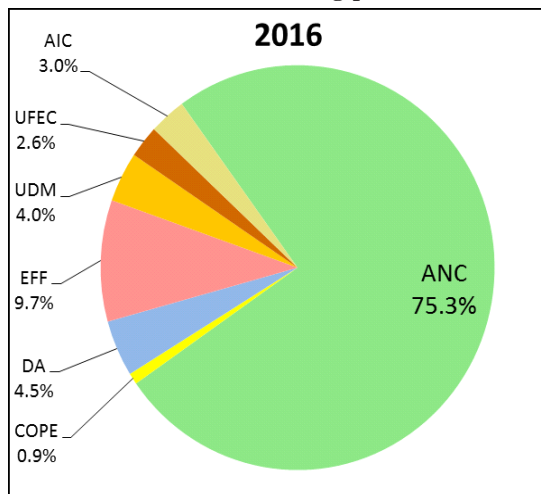
The DA’s progress is shown below on a ward by ward basis:

Table 1. DA support, per cent by ward, 2009 × 2016

	2009	2014	2016
Ward 18	0.4	3.0	6.1
Ward 19	0.4	2.8	6.0
Ward 20	0.4	2.5	4.8
Ward 21	0.3	2.5	4.1
Ward 22	0.4	3.4	6.8
Ward 24	0.2	2.4	5.4
Ward 25	0.4	3.0	3.8

Our 2014 survey, which admittedly included a very limited number of DA voters, indicated that the votes may have come from younger, more educated Kwazakhele residents. In 2016 in addition to the DA success, a small, but significant challenge to the ANC came from the resurgent United Democratic Movement (UDM) with 4.0 per cent of the vote, the regionally-based African Independent Congress (AIC) with 3.3 per cent, and the newly formed United Front of the Eastern Cape (UFEC) with 2.6 per cent.

Chart 1d: Kwazakhele voting patterns 2016 (IEC)



The relative success of COPE, DA, EFF, UDM, and UFEC, in challenging the absolute political domination of Kwazakhele by the ANC is evidence of a developing political pluralism in the township. In her 1995 book, *Reconstructing Political Pluralism*, Avigail Eisenberg emphasises a piece of the definition of political pluralism that was essential to our analysis of the changing political dynamic in Kwazakhele, freedom of political association. She writes

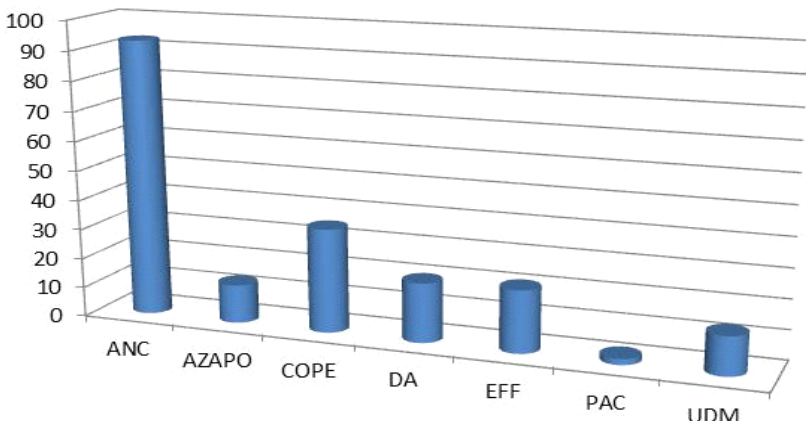
Freedom of association is a necessary condition of political pluralism. But pluralist theories go beyond merely accepting the legitimacy of free association and instead view association and multiple group affiliations as the central elements of liberal and democratic aspects of politics. Pluralism is not just tolerated, rather, it is the very life pulse of a healthy polity. (Eisenberg 1995:2)

In the context of South African politics and in particular of townships such as Kwazakhele, the viability of political support for parties other than the dominant African National Congress is the critical indicator of pluralism. In the first three post-apartheid national elections in the township there was virtually no support for or political activity on behalf of any party beyond the ANC. That pattern was broken somewhat by the emergence of COPE, the breakaway party from the ANC in the 2009 elections. However, the extent of pluralism, defined by multiple opposition parties campaigning openly in Kwazakhele, only fully emerged in 2014 when in addition to COPE, the long-established national opposition party, the Democratic Alliance and the newly formed Economic Freedom Fighters, made their presence felt. The trend continued in 2016 with the growth of the United Democratic Movement and the birth of the United Front of the Eastern Cape.

While freedom of voter choice, evidenced to a limited extent in Kwazakhele, is one indicator of pluralism, it is also evidenced in the presence of an increasing variety of political parties. The greater presence of a wider variety of political parties in Kwazakhele in 2014 is shown in Chart 2 below. This chart illustrates the response of residents to the question: ‘What political parties are present in your area?’. It thus tests not voting patterns or party allegiance, but the awareness of residents of the presence of political parties.

Chart 2: Which parties have a presence in your area? (2014)

Party presence 2014



In the early years of democracy, it was only the ‘liberation parties’ that had a presence (AZAPO and PAC in addition to the ANC) in Kwazakhele. The chart illustrates that in recent years the presence of the DA as well as other parties such as the COPE, the UDM and the EFF has expanded in the township. It is argued that this expanding tolerance for a wider range of political parties at grassroots level, is evidence of the consolidation of liberal democracy and the growth of genuine political pluralism. Of particular note in recent years has been the increasing visibility in the area of the Democratic Alliance. The DA and its familiar signature blue t-shirts have an increasing presence in the townships, especially at protests on education issues. In 2013 DA supporters rallied in Kwazakhele over the potential closure of Ilungelo School (Gqirana and Fengu 2013). As detailed later the DA has made modest gains in the recent elections among black African voters in the area. Our survey revealed that such support is likely coming from younger, more educated voters.

The finding of greater political pluralism is corroborated by Kwazakhele community leaders, who explain how political tolerance manifests in the households of Kwazakhele:

There is political tolerance in the sense that in the last elections I noticed something... COPE wanted to write the name of COPE on the walls, and some people would take out the (posters) of parties from the walls. But this has not caused any conflicts. In the house, let’s say there are four people in this house, and three of them are ANC, one is UDM or COPE, but there is no conflict, just like in the neighbourhood. Next door is COPE, that one is UDM, but we don’t fight each other, as it was during the time of UDF and AZAPO. (Interview with Thamsanqa Bonani, Ward 20, April 29, 2015)

This is corroborated by another Kwazakhele trade unionist, who says:

From where I am, I think there is political tolerance, because you will find here and there sprinkles of DA, you will find PAC, AZAPO, UDM. There is indeed political tolerance. People live along each other, and belong to different political organisations. There is no hatred of the collaborators of the past. (Interview with Mziyanda Twani, April 18, 2015)

However, this should not be understood to be indisputable evidence of a culture of tolerance within the ANC, which still in some situations articulates a culture of being a hegemonic liberation movement; as one Kwazakhele critic said

When people do not see eye to eye be it with the ANC or whatever organisations, they are being labelled as dissenters, as impimpis and such. (Interview with Puiso Kekana, May 13, 2015)

Voter profiles

The table below provide a demographic snapshot of those polled in both surveys: men vs women, employed vs unemployed, age. There was no significant difference in voting rates between men and women in either survey. There was also no statistical significance in the relationship between employment and voting in the two surveys. However, age was a determining factor as younger adults were significantly less likely to vote than older adults.

Table 2: Demographics and voter participation

Demographics and Voting				
Youth sample		Sample per cent	Per cent voting	Chi square
Gender	Female	49.0	49.0	
	Male	51.0	54.3	0.274, df=1, p=.601
Age groups	19-24 (n=43)	44.8	51.2	
	25-35 (n=46)	47.9	48.9	0.405, df=1, p=0.831
Employment	Not employed	55.2	53.8	
	Employed	28.1	48.1	0.250, df=2, p=0.882
Adult sample				
Gender	Female	61.0	82.0	
	Male	39.0	76.3	0.464, df=1, p=0.496
Age groups	38-50 (n=49)	49.0	68.8	
	51-88 (n=51)	51.0	90.2	7.05, df=1, p=0.008
Employment	Not employed	55.0	85.2	
	Employed	29.0	65.5	5.19, df=1, p=0.023

Voter turnout

The final aspect of voting behaviour in Kwazakhele that bears scrutiny is the turnout percentage. This area has had a record of consistently high voter participation both in terms of high levels of voter registration and turnout at the polls. For example, in the 2009 national poll the turnout rate was 80.7 per cent across the seven wards ranging from a high of 88 per cent in Ward 24 to a low of 76.2 per cent in Ward 22. Voting in local elections is always significantly lower but by national standards Kwazakhele remained

above average in 2011 with voter participation between 59.2 per cent and 66.0 per cent. However, the 2014 elections saw a perceptible drop in turnout from previous national elections of 7.3 percentage points with a seven ward average of 73.4 per cent, a high of 81 per cent in Ward 20 and a low of 68 per cent in Ward 19. Voter turnout in the 2016 elections continued the pattern of decline with only 61.6 per cent voting. Table 3 below shows a steady decline in voter participation in national elections over the 20 year period:

Table 3: Participation in national elections, Kwazakhele, 1994-2014
(Source: IEC)

1994	1999	2004	2009	2014
96%	92%	88%	82%	73%

The drop in turnout of registered voters is not the only story. There was also a drop in registration of almost 7 per cent from a 2009 total of 60,398 to 56,207 registered voters in 2014. Ward 20 was particularly striking where registered voters fell from 8,249 to 6,649, making the 2014 ward high percentage turnout of 80.8 per cent somewhat misleading. It is in this context that the ANC vote must be analysed. As noted earlier, the ANC actually increased its percentage totals across Kwazakhele in 2014 versus 2009, but that is not the full picture. In 2009 the ANC received 33,031 votes in the seven wards compared to only 28,331 in 2014. In the 2016 local elections the ANC garnered only 20,373 votes.

Our survey gave some insights into the nature of the rise in both abstention and non-registration. Based on our two surveys the non-participation in the electoral process is primarily among younger voters. As analysed earlier, participation rates remain very high for those 38 years and older, staying at slightly above 80 per cent. However, there was a sharp drop-off with the 35 and under group, to just over 50 per cent registering and subsequently voting. The survey also revealed in the 26 to 35 year olds a pattern of consciously boycotting the 2014 poll as a protest against the ANC for whom they had previously voted. It was not revealed in our survey but it also appears that a significant numbers of 2009 COPE voters may have joined the ranks of the non-voters, as the total number of ANC voters did not rise, but fell, and the EFF polled vote totals less than half those of the COPE vote totals.

In the 25 and under group there also were a significant number of non-registrants, likely a contributing factor to the decline in actual registration numbers and a potential worrying trend for democratic practices. On the other hand, this is not unusual; worldwide political participation by those 25 and under tends to lag behind the older generations, but picks up as potential voters grow older. The relatively high level of youth participation as part of a high level of overall societal participation may have been a creature of the dramatic democratic opening that came with the end of apartheid in 1994.

Another important profile is that of the non-voter, especially in the youth survey where the abstention rate reached 46 per cent compared to only 18 per cent in the older adult survey. Of all the non-voters in the 25 and under group only one had voted in previous elections. A significant portion, approximately 50 per cent of the 25 and under voters, was clearly disappointed with the ANC and government performance. They cite little change in their lives which are marked by poverty and unemployment, and a negative view of government, especially a perceived high level of corruption. Interestingly almost half of the non-voters expressed that they were satisfied with government performance but they were simply not interested in politics and saw little reason to vote. Such a segment of non-voter is common in established democracies with lower voter turnout than South Africa.

The profile of the 2014 non-voter among the 26 to 35 year olds was different from their younger counterparts. More than half of these non-voters had voted in either the 2009 national elections or the 2011 local elections, most of them in both, and most having cast their previous ballot for the ANC. However, this group expressed significant disappointment with the ANC and chose to express their disappointment by abstaining from the ballot rather than voting for another party. These non-voters epitomised a regional and national trend of greater abstention voter in the 2014 elections.

Political alienation

For our purposes in the South African context, political alienation is operationalised as diminishing support for the political system as measured by political participation. The concept of political alienation is deeply rooted in modern political science literature. In her seminal 1970 article

entitled 'Dimensions of political alienation,' Ada Finifter observed that

Available evidence exists that enstrangement from the polity is widespread in countries throughout the world as fundamental questions are being raised about the legitimacy of political institutions and political leadership. (Finifter 1970:389)

Writing at the time of profound political disillusionment in the United States over the Vietnam War, Finifter argues that alienation is conceived as a continuum and is grounded in a rich intellectual history that permitted the 'development of an empirical theory relating citizens' attitudes to the structures and processes of the political system' (Finifter 1970:390). Finifter goes on to distinguish four different ways in which alienation from the political system may be expressed. The first is 'political powerlessness' where the individual feels that they cannot affect the actions of government. The second, 'political meaninglessness' sees the actions of government as capricious and unpredictable. The third category drawn from Durkheim's 'anomie' sees the norms and rules of the political system breaking down as officials do not follow legal norms. The fourth dimension, labelled as 'political isolation', refers to a rejection of the political norms and goals that are widely held in the society. This dimension would be manifest by a belief that voting or other socially defined political obligations are merely conformist formalities. In the Kwazakhele context, the non-voters seem to fall within all of Finifter's categories. Some clearly expressed the powerlessness dimension by stating that their vote would have limited impact or that they had little interest in politics. Others did fit the category of being repulsed by the capricious nature of government action marked by the non-voter that expected electricity fees to drop but they did not. However, in the Kwazakhele context, the most consistent manifestation of alienation was the category of anger over the failure of public officials to follow norms often in contemporary times seen as political corruption. This perspective was epitomised in the quote from a survey respondent that 'all politicians are liars'. The fourth category, labelled 'political isolation' seems to describe those previous ANC voters who consciously boycotted the 2014 poll to register their disappointment with the ruling party.

The Kwazakhele voter and non-voter

What is the primary takeaway from the voting pattern of Kwazakhele residents? The resilience of support for the ANC remains strong: among

the youth, 78 per cent of those who voted and declared their preference, voted for the ANC. Though impressive it falls short of the over 90 per cent support for the ANC recorded in the older adult survey. The willingness of the younger voters, those 25 and under, to break with the ANC is small and evenly distributed between the main two national opposition parties of 2014: the EFF and the DA. The small support for EFF is mirrored in the older survey by a small core of support for COPE, a party which, like the EFF, was formed as a breakaway from the ANC. The small increase of support to the DA, concentrated among those under 25, may be the most significant trend; there was only one DA voter in the older adult survey. The DA targeted gaining black votes in 2014 in townships like Kwazakhele, and this survey mirrored their overall small progress in the seven wards of the area.

Table 4. Youth and adult party choice (2014 survey, absolute numbers)

Party choice	Adults	Youth
ANC	73/82 (89%)	38/49 (76%)
AZAPO	3/82	0
DA	0	3/49
EFF	0	6/49

The trend of a greater abstention is probably the most significant marker, rising to 46 per cent among the youth compared to just 10 per cent among the older adults. As analysed in the non-voter profile, the relatively high abstention rate among those 35 and under was a combination of disillusionment with the ANC among the 26-35 year olds who had previously voted for the party, and 25 and under who seem generally uninterested in politics. Overall those who voted in the youth survey were just as politically active as their older counterparts but they were simply a significantly fewer number of voters. However, our surveys indicate that as the younger groups grow older, they could become more politically active.

Beyond voting: political participation at the local level

In traditional political sociology, participation by the individual or the citizen in political activity is viewed as ‘a virtue in its own right’ (Dowse 1986:266). Formal political participation, or participation in representative democracy, is measured by participation (ie voting) in elections, and in addition by participation in political party activities (eg

attending meetings, serving on an executive) and by active involvement in campaigning or lobbying. While Kwazakhele residents have participated enthusiastically in elections since 1994, with a consistently high level of voter participation from the older generation, this does not necessarily translate into active participation by citizens in local politics. The old UDF critique of liberal democracy was represented by the oft-repeated refrain that ‘democracy means more than casting your vote once every five years’.

In most liberal democracies, there are two key institutions for the political participation of ordinary people in addition to the electoral process. The first is the political party, and the second is the structures of local government.

Participation in political party branches

In the case of the governing party, the ANC, participation is at the first level through membership of a branch. Every ANC member, up to national cabinet minister, is required to be a paid-up member of a branch. Branches are established geographically along ward lines, with one ANC branch per ward. Other political parties have different organisational structures, but as the ANC is so dominant in Kwazakhele, and as it has historically built very strong branch structures, it is worth examining involvement in branches in a little more depth.

Residents of Kwazakhele were asked the question ‘How do you participate in the party you support?’ Residents were asked to respond in terms of their participation over the previous year; and could give multiple forms of participation. By allowing multiple responses, researchers could examine each party support item individually, or collectively sum the individual items (1=participation, 0=non-participation) into an index of party support. With eight items (described individually below), that allow an index of party support to range from zero – no support of a party – to eight – high support, with the respondent participating in all eight measured activities. This index can be used as an independent variable in a regression analysis to help understand who votes and who does not vote.

The older generation of residents indicated that they still engage in a very high level of political participation, with over half (51 per cent) attending political meetings of some kind, and nearly a quarter (23 per cent) being members of a party branch and claiming to be paid up members. In addition to voting for their party in both national and local

government elections, a surprisingly high number of residents (18 per cent) were involved in party campaigns in some way or another. Only 15 per cent of the older respondents said that they are not involved in any way in any political party – quite remarkable when compared to participation in political parties in the older established democracies. This, a positive demonstration of active citizenship, is indicative that Kwazakhele is a ‘strong’ democracy in Benjamin Barber’s (1984) sense.

In the adult sample, the party support index ranged from no activities (23 per cent) to seven activities (2 per cent).⁴

Table 5. How do you participate in the party you support? 2014 survey, absolute numbers

Type of participation	Adults	Youth
Membership of party	22	7
Attending meetings	51	23
Campaigns	18	6
Executive member	0	2
Not in any way	15	40

Among the youth, while paid up membership of a party branch is considerably lower than for the older residents, the ‘normal’ forms of political participation, such as voting and attending meetings, are the most common and are only slightly lower than for the older residents, with 23 attending meetings, and two serving on committees. Only six were involved in campaigns, however – compared to 18 of the older residents. What is noticeable is that there is quite a big contrast between those who are not involved at all, and those who are, and who named many different forms of involvement. There is a core of 10 – 15 per cent of youth who are actively involved in branch activities, beyond voting.

The considerably higher level of apathy among the youth is indicated by the 40 who responded that they are not involved in party politics ‘in any way’. Together with the 12 who did not answer, this gives over 50 per cent of youth who are not interested in party politics – compared to 25 per cent of older residents. It is also notable that of this 50 per cent, 36 per cent are from those youth who are under 25 – the ‘born free’ generation. Of this admittedly small sample of 55 younger residents, only seven had voted in previous elections (understandable given that they may not have been eligible in previous elections). Six claimed to be members of a party; and 12 attended meetings, while only three were involved in campaigns and not

one of them served on an executive. While this can be explained in that generally older residents would be elected into executive positions, it does not indicate a strong ‘youth wing’ of any party. This is perhaps also a reflection on the general state of the ANC Youth League in the Metro, where the regional structure had been disbanded several times in the past few years. In August 2014 a new executive was elected, with only two of the additional members coming from Kwazakhele (both from Ward 25) (Kotey 2014).

An index of party support was created for the youth sample in the same way as for the adult sample. Fifty-two per cent indicated they participated in none of the activities, and 2 per cent indicated they participated in seven of the items.⁵

Service delivery and protest

Eight per cent of the total respondents were involved in protests against poor service delivery and housing delivery. It should be noted that protests can vary widely from peaceful mass protests to violent actions. While this is not a very high percentage, indicating that service delivery in Kwazakhele is generally good, it is still significant. In the context of widespread service delivery protests in the informal settlements all over South Africa, it is perhaps most noticeable that in Kwazakhele, there are only protests around particular development failures or other problems which the government has failed to address.

The residents involved in protests were concentrated in specific areas. Some development conflicts in Kwazakhele are where there is new RDP housing development and where there are conflicts over housing allocation and beneficiary lists. Another recent conflict has been over the destruction and relocation of certain properties due to the development of Njoli Square (a commercial node). In addition, residents have at times protested against specific problems such as traffic accidents or rape; at times they have taken the law into their own hands when the police have failed to respond timeously, and have delivered ‘mob justice’ to the perpetrators.

The preparedness of residents to engage in protest is directly related to their expectations and whether these are frustrated or not. In response to the question ‘have your expectations been met?’ there is fairly evenly divided response. Of the older residents, 56 per cent said their expectations had been met, and 44 per cent that they had not; while of the younger residents, it was the other way around, with 55 per cent saying their

expectations had not been met, and 45 per cent saying that they had. Engagement in protest is also related to specific disappointments and how residents understand their actions to be effective at local level. While unemployment is the biggest problem in the community, it is very hard to protest against unemployment, as there is no public representative who can be held responsible. It is easier to protest against the slowness of housing provision, or against who is excluded from the beneficiary list for new housing.

Regarding housing provision, for example, there are many positive responses –

It has brought back my dignity as I am no longer staying in a shack; I have a house and water. (survey respondent, 38-year old male kindergarten teacher)

Although it is not clear in all cases whether these refer to new RDP housing areas of Kwazakhele (as in the above quote), or to the transfer of old Kwazakhele houses from municipal into private ownership. Many of the negative responses are from people on the waiting list for housing:

The building of new houses is happening. For years I have been waiting for new home I am still living in the back-yard. (survey respondent, 65 year old female pensioner)

We were waiting for houses. Nothing has changed, we haven't received anything for our stolen land. Only promises. (survey respondent, 72 year old female pensioner)

In response to the question 'What can you do if your expectations are not met?' there was a wide range of responses. However, the overall indication is that the formal institutions for participation are accepted by the residents of Kwazakhele. Among the older residents, by far the largest number of respondents said they would 'vote the ANC out' or 'vote for another party' (22 per cent), followed by 16 per cent who said they would in some way engage through the existing channels, such as the ward councillor. Thirteen per cent said they would not vote, and 11 per cent that they would engage in protest or mass action of some kind. Rather than understanding formal participation and protest as binary opposites, the residents of Kwazakhele understand there to be a continuum between attending meetings, voicing dissatisfaction, and engaging in disruptive protest. Some indicate that they will engage in many ways:

There is not much I can do rather than telling my children and grandchildren to do as we did during the apartheid years and voice out.

It should also be noted that mass action, even directed against the ANC, has not been seen by participants as disloyal or inconsistent.

My duty is to put pressure through protest

Rather, these actions warn the ANC that it must govern better. This was most evident in April 2014 at a public meeting held in Lilian Ngoyi Hall in Kwazakhele, addressed by Ronnie Kasrils. The meeting, to commemorate SACP leaders Chris Hani and Mbuyiselo Ngwenda for ‘Heroes Month’, saw a packed hall responding strongly to the message of various speakers, including Kasrils, critical of the ANC. The thousands of activists who attend such meetings have been voting for the ANC since 1994, but for the first time are able to articulate strong criticisms of their liberation movement and there is some indication that some of them may have boycotted the 2014 and 2016 elections.

Among the youth on the question of what you would do if your expectations were not met, the largest response was the 21 per cent who would ‘vote for another party’, especially among the under 25s, who mentioned that they would vote for the EFF. Nineteen per cent said they would engage government in some way – in particular through their ward councillor; 15 per cent said they would abstain from voting, and 8 per cent said they would protest.

Table 6. What can you do if government does not meet your expectations? 2014 survey, absolute numbers

	Adults	Youth
Vote for another party	22	20
Engage through existing channels	16	18
Not vote	13	14
Protest or mass action	11	8

Some of the older residents of Kwazakhele are less active now than in their youth. The reasons are varied, but one indication that democracy is ‘working’ is that people do not see the need for constant activism. For some, the attainment of democracy was itself the goal of political activism:

[The attainment of] democracy was the only reason I became involved in politics. I never had an interest in political activities after acquiring democracy. (42 year old unemployed female resident)

Others feel that involvement is necessary when there is a specific problem; once that has been dealt with, they need no longer be so active:

I attend meetings on crime and it has yielded results, it's relatively quiet now. (43 year old unemployed female resident)

I am old now and the factors that made me to be active have improved. (84 year old female pensioner)

One resident noted somewhat cynically that their participation is out of a sense of duty, but that in between elections they are not politically active:

We just vote because it's a duty and because of Mandela, there after we keep quiet to vote again after 5 years. (40 year old male general worker)

Conclusions

Despite the dire predictions of some political analysts that South Africa is facing an 'Arab Spring' or a 'civil insurgency', our survey of the urban African working class residents of Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality indicates the consolidation of liberal democracy. The 'revolution of the underclass' predicted as a result of dissatisfaction with the limitations of electoral politics, is unlikely to come from the residents of townships such as Kwazakhele. Despite economic marginalisation, residents of Kwazakhele do not see militant protest as the way to bring about change; a combination of electoral politics (vote for another party) and 'insider' persuasion (work with the ANC) were the dominant choices of residents when asked what they could do if their expectations were not met.

The rise of pluralism and the growth of political tolerance is indicated by the presence and acceptance of a number of political parties in Kwazakhele. Although the ANC still dominates both electoral and other institutions at local level, this indicates a significant change from the hegemonic politics of the liberation movement of the 1980s.

As the 2016 local elections graphically demonstrated, the ANC's dominant political position in Nelson Mandela Bay is under serious threat from the twin realities of political alienation and political pluralism. The factor of alienation is significantly reducing the turnout of black African voters at a time when turnout in both white and coloured communities remain strong. While these communities are largely not represented in Kwazakhele itself this trend was primarily responsible for the ANC's loss of dominant position in the PR voting in the 2016 elections. The loss of

position in the PR voting also occurred because of the growing political pluralism in the community that saw a greater willingness to support other parties, including the predominantly white Democratic Alliance which gained control of the NMBM in coalition with the Economic Freedom Fighters who gained five PR seats in the municipality, aided by the votes they received in Kwazakhele. The ability of the ANC to recover its former absolute dominance in the township is problematic as years of infighting in the local party structures going back to the removal of Thabo Mbeki from the presidency, as well as the negative impact that this has had on the delivery of services, have taken their toll on overall party support. As in any evolving political landscape the key question may be the political direction the younger residents take as they age. Further research will be needed to track whether these younger Kwazakhele residents engage in political participation and voting as they age.

Notes

1. The authors wish to acknowledge the assistance of Rob Daves with the statistical analysis done in this article.
2. The 2011 Census for the seven wards gives a combined population of 100,889. This does not correspond exactly with the boundaries of Kwazakhele used in the research.
3. RDP houses are small formal housing units built with government subsidy since 1994, when the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was adopted by the ANC.
4. Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.678$. While not at the 0.70 level, researchers considered the fact that all eight of the variables are significantly correlated with voting, three significantly (at $p < 0.05$), despite the small sample size, which suggests that the items are appropriate for creating a party support scale. The overall scale was significantly correlated with voting ($r = 0.30, p = 0.00, n = 99$).
5. Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.711$, which suggests that the eight items are appropriate for creating a party support scale. The party support scale was significantly correlated with voting ($r = 0.31, p = 0.00, n = 95$).

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