

Delivering an Elusive Dream of
DEMOCRACY

Lessons from Nelson Mandela Bay

JOLEEN STEYN KOTZE



Delivering an Elusive Dream of Democracy: Lessons from Nelson Mandela Bay

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About the Author

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Nelson Mandela Bay caught the national imagination in 2016 with the local government elections. Referred to as a 'Battle of the Bay', a mini Waterloo of sorts, this metropolitan municipality was seen as the arena where the Goliath contest between the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and the Democratic Alliance (DA) would play out. This metro had once encapsulated the hope of the 'Dream of '94' and had established the first transitional council in 1995 under the leadership of Nceba Faku. A mere 23 years later, the hope of a reconciled South Africa represented here, seemed to evaporate – a 'dream deferred' if you will. What led to this? How does one explain the punishing losses the ANC suffered? How was it that the ANC, for the first time, lost political leadership of the Eastern Cape Province's economic hub?

Despite widely held predictions that the ANC would emerge from the 2014 general election bruised from huge losses, it maintained an electorally dominant position nationally with 62% of the vote (Southall, 2014a:1). Despite a sense of growing disillusionment that democratic rule under the ANC had not necessarily brought a better life, it had, as political analyst Susan Booysen (2011) details, despite the low quality of democratic representation, regenerated power.

A mere two years later in 2016, polling research showed that the ANC may not be regenerating power in some municipalities, most notably in Nelson Mandela Bay (eNCA, 2016c).¹ The ANC was once again on the defensive after the general election of 2014. Metros, such as the cities of Tshwane and Johannesburg, remained too close to call as the country moved to what some saw as historic local government elections on 3 August 2016. For many, the 2016 elections represented the first real electoral competition where the outcome in highly contested areas could not be predicted. No longer was it a given that the ANC would win.

The 2016 local government elections happened at a time when the ANC was rocked by various scandals, most notably around its leader and state president, Jacob Zuma. Allegations of undue influence and state capture by the powerful Gupta family and a landmark Constitutional Court ruling that found that President Jacob Zuma had

¹ Ipsos MORI polling research conducted in the run-up to the elections showed that the DA had 44% while the ANC had 37% of the votes.

undermined his oath of office whilst affirming the power of the Public Protector South Africa (PPSA), brought forth questions on the moral capital of the ANC. Still, the ANC went to the polls in 2016 with Jacob Zuma as the face of its electoral campaign, although not prominently featured in ANC election posters. In Nelson Mandela Bay, ANC posters featured ANC mayoral candidate, Danny Jordaan. Just over a year before the ANC went to local government elections Jordaan had been deployed to restore faith in the ANC as a governing party in the metro. He was set to epitomise a renewed commitment of the ANC to put their constituencies first and to provide the much promised and elusive 'better life'. Colloquially referred to as 'Mr Fix-it', Jordaan was tasked to clean up government and engage in social development projects. His 'clean-up' entailing suspending officials engaged in alleged corruption and maladministration, seeking to establish a Metro Police Service, rolling out free Wi-Fi, and developing a developmental plan entitled 'The Five Golden Years' proved to be a little too late. The ANC could not regenerate its electoral power in Nelson Mandela Bay.

Over the course of the last twenty years or so, the ANC in Nelson Mandela Bay municipality has been plagued by party-dominant 'dilemmas'. Issues of maladministration, bitter factional intra-party battles at the cost of service delivery, political appointments and interference, the rise of the 'tenderpreneur', allegations of corruption and self-enrichment of political elites, and an education crisis that had seen communities closing schools, among many other socio-economic and socio-political problems, dominated the socio-political landscape in this metropolitan municipality.

According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) (2016), in 2011, Nelson Mandela Bay was the most racially segregated city in South Africa. The city also suffered from high levels of unemployment with an unemployment rate of around 37%, with youth unemployment a staggering 47.3% (Stats SA, 2011b). The city is also known as the 'bucket system capital' of South Africa as no other municipality has more people still without proper sanitation.

The ANC could not rely on the vote of perhaps the most powerful union in this municipality, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUMSA). The workers' vote is, of course, a valuable commodity for any political party. With the launch of the grassroots organisation, the United Front, it seemed that workers were reclaiming a political identity separate to that of the ANC. The United Front sought to invoke the historical imagery of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and struggle for voice and accountability. The sentiment was that the ANC could not deliver on dealing with workers' concerns. Its policies and leadership were no longer representatives of workers' struggles in a post-apartheid South Africa.