



With Regard to Borders and Ballots

1. Introduction

The IEC has confirmed that South Africa has 340 parties registered provincially and nationally and thus eligible to participate in the 2024 elections.¹ Not all will actually take part, but South Africa is the country in Africa with the highest number of political parties. It is thus arguably the most competitive country in Africa, election-wise.

Commentators now frequently speak about legacy voters and issue voters.² As the names imply, 'legacy voters' vote for parties with longer histories, whose links to, for example, the anti-apartheid struggle, still enjoy a priority over other considerations. 'Issue voters' are voters who cast their votes based on specific issues or causes, or even religious preferences. One of the key issues in the political domain, and which garnered votes in the recent past, especially in the last local elections, has been issues linked to immigration.

ActionSA and the Patriotic Alliance have uncompromisingly strong anti-immigrant messages which, when conflated with today's broader, more xenophobic populist rhetoric, have found resonance with a large number of people. These parties began attracting significant groups of voters from other political parties and this in turn caused bigger parties to adopt similar anti-immigrant messages in the hope of retaining voters with strong feelings on the issue. This very process has had the rather unfortunate result of shifting anti-immigration politics from the margins to a very mainstream position. At times, this has dominated the news so powerfully that it led many to ask whether the 2024 poll would in fact be 'an immigration election'.³ As things have turned out it appears that a raft of issues, and not just immigration, are under the spotlight in this election. A recent Brenthurst

survey does not rank immigration amongst the top four issues on concern for voters.⁴

The IFP is strongly rooted in its legacy, and still connected to its founder, Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi, with a strong sense of the traditional Zulu culture. This is clearly seen in the campaign slogan 'Do it for Shenge', an affectionate appeal to the Prince's clan name.⁵ It is an example of invoking its political legacy.

In this paper we look at a legacy party, a religious party, a brand new party, and an issue party's manifestos with regard to the issues of displaced persons and migrants.

2. The Inkatha Freedom Party

Amongst the parties launching their manifestos recently was the IFP. It is one of the four biggest parties on the South African political landscape, and a significant member of the Multi-Party Charter (MPC) of opposition parties acting together in the hope of unseating the ANC. Arguably, the IFP could emerge as the strongest party in KZN and make a significant showing nationally, thus being a possible alliance partner, especially for the ANC, at all levels of government. Therefore, its influence will be felt both provincially and nationally, whether as part of the MPC or as a coalition partner of the ANC, and its policy positions will matter greatly in the broader scheme of things.

Its stance on issues of immigration and allied areas comes across quite categorically in its manifesto. It can be summed up thus: 'Spaza' shops must be wholly owned by South Africans; companies' staff must include at least 80% South Africans; and that entry-level jobs and low-skilled work must be reserved for South Africans, especially with the youth in mind.⁶ It is also committed to strengthening immigration control to

deal with the 'national security threat' created by the 'illegal immigration crisis'. In the third of its thirteen points, the manifesto states, "The IFP believes that the failure of the State to manage migration has led to a national crisis. The IFP's position is that, while fairness is necessary, illegal migrants are law-breakers who pose a threat to the safety and security of the State, at the same time placing a heavy strain on South Africa's resources."⁷ The manifesto then details fourteen action points that the IFP will implement if it assumes power. These range all the way from building a border wall to banning the operation of businesses that employ illegal foreigners, without the option of a fine. It also emphasises the use of high tech equipment to improve the systems involved in this sector,⁸ and it calls for legislation that will lay down the percentage of foreign works in any industry. It raises the interesting possibility of allowing for a six month amnesty period to allow those in the country illegally to leave or to apply for the appropriate visa.⁹ This is a similar position to that taken by the government on the Zimbabwean Exemption Permits. It can be said, overall, that the party has a very unambiguous stand in this area and that it leans heavily towards a quota-based approach, exclusion, and creating significant barriers to the immigration of foreigners and protection for the vulnerable.

3. The African Christian Democratic Party

The ACDP, like the IFP, has been in Parliament since 1994. It is one of the two explicitly religious parties, the other being Al Jama-ah, the party embedded in Islam. The ACDP is an openly and proudly Christian party. Both have roots in the understanding that secular parties make it very difficult, almost impossible, for people of faith to give expression to their beliefs in the political domain, thus depriving politics of their specific insights and wisdom. The Al Jama-ah party has had little to say on the issue of mobile people, but the final paragraph of the ADCP manifesto states: "The ACDP stands for Christian principles, freedom of religion, a free market economy with a social conscience, family values, community empowerment and human rights in a federal system."¹⁰ Despite the obvious link between basic Christian principles and family values on the one hand, and immigration issues on the other – for example, family reunification and spousal and family visas – the ACDP has no specific section on immigration. However, we do

have an insight into the ACDP's thinking from recent comments by its leader in Parliament: "South Africa has faced significant challenges in managing immigration, leading to notable failures in the immigration management system. One key issue is the high influx of undocumented migrants crossing our borders. Limited personnel, porous borders and corruption have contributed to this. Home Affairs frequently leaves tens of thousands of documented Zimbabweans hanging while waiting for visa extensions until the last minutes, which the ACDP finds cruel and inefficient."¹¹

Christian public theology and social witness has, over the past few decades, developed a strong theology of migration, which the ACDP would be well placed to introduce into political thinking and policy options. Pope Francis has summed up these paradigms in four verbs, namely, welcome, promote, protect and integrate.¹² Exploring these verbs in the South African context would make a huge contribution from the faith community to developing just ways of understanding immigration.

4. The Patriotic Alliance

The PA launched a one-page, 'bullet point' type manifesto, simply highlighting its key pledges, one of which reads, "All illegal foreigners must go." It adds, "An inescapable truth that the PA upholds is that a country's first and only true obligation is to protect its citizens."¹³ Last year the party declared that the deportation of illegal foreigners was its main priority, and this was also one of the key promises it made in 2021 at its manifesto launch in Eldorado Park before the local government elections of that year.¹⁴ There has always been an activist dimension to its politicking, with demonstrations, marches and other very visible activities backing up the rhetoric and underlining that it is not content with words, but is committed to robust action. Thus, there is little doubt as to where they stand as a party on the immigration issue. In fact, it would be fair to say that their anti-immigrant stance is the one thing for which they are best known. They represent a hard-core anti-immigrant sentiment translated into policy proposals of exclusion.

There has been more of this activity in this intense pre-election season. For example, just over a week ago, shortly before its manifesto launch, it accompanied the pre-launch hype with

demonstrations at a primary school in Pretoria where there are a large number of foreign national children. The PA demanded that those children be sent away and their places given to South African children,¹⁵ and that the teaching of non-South African languages be scrapped. It is well-known that the PA has organised border patrols to stop illegal immigrants from crossing the border,¹⁶ something that the Minister of Defence has said is the job of the police and border officials, rather than self-appointed party loyalists.¹⁷ The President of the PA, Gayton McKenzie, denied in an interview that he was xenophobic, but at the *Daily Maverick's* 'Gathering' in March he repeated a position he articulated last year that, under a PA government, all foreigners would be required to carry their passports at all times. He was heavily criticised for re-introducing the hated 'dompas' system into South African life.¹⁸ Lastly, the PA has also called for a wall across the border to keep immigrants out.

5. Rise Mzansi

Rise Mzansi is literally the new kid on the block and so we have to assess their stance purely on their written proposals. We have no Parliamentary voting record by which to judge them nor comments in portfolio committees or platform rhetoric by which to understand their immigration politics. Overall, they state as their aim: "Rise Mzansi is committed to eradicating poverty, ending racism, ending inequality, and ensuring the employment of our people."¹⁹

Rise Mzansi's immigration proposals range from managing the flow and treatment of inward immigration through diplomatic engagement with neighbouring countries, and addressing immigration flows long before they reach SA's borders, to a conscious effort to reduce pull factors for irregular migration through stronger law enforcement targeted at employers.²⁰ It appeals for funding to strengthen enforcement capacity through increased fees that reflect the true cost of migration administration, and through fine collections. A third point is to fix the asylum-seeker system, stopping its use as a *de facto* permit for economic migrants. The party promises to clear the multi-year visa backlog through special projects,²¹ and it seeks to ease skilled immigration and business/tourist travel as critical enablers of economic development, as well as to simplify the critical skills visa. Along

the same lines, it will make it easier for staff who are transferred within companies to stay in South Africa, and it will regularise long-term, multiple-entry visas for tourists and business travellers.

An innovative step is to mandate the Competition Commission to study the local supermarket/spaza sector and investigate claims of unfair business practices.²² The manifesto indicates a fairly cautious, middle-of-the-road approach, not dissimilar to the bulk of opposition parties. An example is the balancing between stopping economic refugees from exploiting the asylum system and the curbing of exploitative practices. This is not wholly surprising for a movement still trying to find its way and to connect with its membership's attitudes and firm up its policies. It does, however – and this is a particular feature – emphasise employers and their obligations, and thus attempt to curb exploitation, especially of the undocumented. This is a positive aspect of the manifesto, consistent with the human rights paradigm which, it claims, runs through the entire manifesto. It is also interesting that some ideas and concepts are left open-ended. One such is the 'special projects' to help clear the various backlogs. This could mean special exemption permits and perhaps, even more interestingly, the possibility of declaring various types of amnesties. This could be an innovative, helpful, and humane mechanism to clear backlogs.

6. Conclusion

None of the parties adopt an open border philosophy. Rather, they seek to manage the borders more effectively and, in choosing particular options and a specific language, more or less support broader systems of 'cautious exclusion'. In this regard, the PA's position is so much starker and cruder than most other parties. Despite, or maybe because of, its crudity, it will attract a significant number of votes. It will also force other parties, vying for the same pool of voters, to shift their policies to the more exclusionary end of the spectrum. This has certainly taken the migration issue to centre stage and, in outdoing each other, some of the parties have painted such toxic scenarios with regard to immigrants that many have been victimised and treated very badly. This very negative situation violates the spirit of Ubuntu that has so influenced the early years of the liberated South Africa. It speaks of painful retrogression.

Across the board there is a certain haziness with regard to the often mentioned notion of amnesty. In almost all of the opposition party manifestos this is proposed as a kind of short term pause for undocumented migrants to either leave the country or apply for appropriate visas. This is close to the way in which the ZEPs were handled. A proper amnesty would be more along the lines of the granting of formal legal status to those in the country illegally or without documents or with expired documents. This does not seem to be on the cards in any of the manifestos,²³ opening the way for the political vocabulary to re-define a key concept and water down its content and usefulness in the struggle to ensure protection for vulnerable people on the move.

Lastly, the various manifestos across the political spectrum indicate that there has been a shift

from the immigration issue being largely on the margins to a point where it is a central issue. It would appear that the model settled for by most parties is a cautious exclusion with fewer paths open for safe migration and fewer protections for those who are undocumented, leading to an increase in vulnerability.

It is interesting, as a closing thought, to quote Pope Francis who, just over a year ago, labelled Europe's treatment of migrants "disgusting, sinful and criminal."²⁴ As was reported at the time, "Francis departed from prepared remarks to slam Europe's treatment of migrants as 'disgusting, sinful and criminal.' He noted that people from outside the continent are often left to die during perilous sea crossings or pushed back to Libya, where they wind up in camps he referred to as 'lager', the German word referring to Nazi concentration camps."²⁵

Peter-John Pearson
Director
pearson@iafrica.com

¹ <https://mg.co.za/thought-leader/opinion/2023-09-19-legacy-vs-issue-based-voting-in-2024/>

² <https://mg.co.za/thought-leader/opinion/2023-09-19-legacy-vs-issue-based-voting-in-2024/>

³ <https://www.businesslive.co.za/fm/features/2023-11-16-is-south-africa-heading-for-an-immigration-election/>

⁴ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-03-10-da-and-zumas-mk-party-big-winners-anc-and-eff-flop-new-brenthurst-survey-finds/>

⁵ <https://www.ewn.co.za/2024/03/10/do-it-for-shenge-ifp-leans-into-late-founders-legacy-to-win-kzn-as-2024-elections-approach>

⁶ <https://www.ifp.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Inkatha-Freedom-Party-2024-Manifesto.pdf> p.12

⁷ <https://www.ifp.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Inkatha-Freedom-Party-2024-Manifesto.pdf> p.12

⁸ <https://www.ifp.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Inkatha-Freedom-Party-2024-Manifesto.pdf> p.12

⁹ <https://www.ifp.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Inkatha-Freedom-Party-2024-Manifesto.pdf> p.12

¹⁰ <https://www.acdp.org.za/Manifesto2024.pdf>

¹¹ <https://pmg.org.za/hansard/37259/>

¹² <https://goodfaithmedia.org/pope-4-verbs-guide-christian-response-to-migrants-refugees-cms-24294/>

¹³ <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/21087890-patriotic-alliance-manifesto>

¹⁴ <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/elections-2021-patriotic-alliance-targets-illegal-foreigners-at-manifesto-launch-20211009>

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fYZ7fyiysM>

¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WppDUZAsmxM>

¹⁷ https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=%2BGayton%2BMc%2Bkenzie%2Bat%2Bborder%2Bcrossing.%2BTandi%2BModise%2Bnot%2Btheir%2Bjob

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9MV8YWBUqQ>

¹⁹ <https://www.risemzansi.org/peoples-manifesto>

²⁰ https://assets.website-files.com/6512abc58b1468c2e0784360/65ab627c5faa95ea313ab276_RISE%20Mzansi%20Manifesto%20%2B%20.pdf p.57

²¹ https://assets.website-files.com/6512abc58b1468c2e0784360/65ab627c5faa95ea313ab276_RISE%20Mzansi%20Manifesto%20%2B%20.pdf p58

²² https://assets.website-files.com/6512abc58b1468c2e0784360/65ab627c5faa95ea313ab276_RISE%20Mzansi%20Manifesto%20%2B%20.pdf p.58

²³ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/why-amnesty-is-the-wrong-way-to-go/>

²⁴ <https://apnews.com/article/pope-francis-religion-migration-vatican-city-36e9bd548977f9f36bb-59896b1adf4da>

²⁵ <https://apnews.com/article/pope-francis-religion-migration-vatican-city-36e9bd548977f9f36bb-59896b1adf4da>

This Briefing Paper, or parts thereof, may be reproduced with acknowledgement.