



FW de Klerk
FOUNDATION

WHAT TO DO IN THE LAST DAYS BEFORE THE SIXTH DEMOCRATIC ELECTION?

By Theuns Eloff: Executive Director, FW de Klerk Foundation

It is generally accepted that, after a period of intense political and social turmoil, South Africans are generally somewhat despondent, negative and bewildered. It is not necessary to further expand upon this - the daily dose of the latest state-capture scandal, road and flood deaths are well-known.

However, a general election doesn't come every year. And with just two days before the election, the question is: what does one do from now until Wednesday and how does one approach the polling station on May 8, 2019? The correct answer is not, "nothing special". Or, "I'm not going to vote", or "I don't know who to vote for".

No South African is allowed to take the right to vote for granted - previously millions of South Africans did not have this right. And today there are millions in the rest of the world who still don't have it. Not voting is a way of 'saying' something, but is it the best way? Every eligible South African also has a responsibility to vote - to help ensure a better future for you and your children and their children; and to hold politicians accountable after election day.

Members of minorities (linguistic, cultural, demographic and religious minorities) may feel that they are too few to make a difference. The fact remains that if large numbers of minorities are going to vote, their vote is actually proportionally larger. This is because majority groups are traditionally even more uninvolved - as the millions of young people who have not even registered as voters, prove. In our electoral system, no voice is wasted - provided it goes to a party that has proven support (more than 50 000 votes nationwide).

The *first* thing you have to do is *decide* to vote - and even make practical arrangements on how to get there and what time you plan to vote. This will make it easier to stick to your decision on 8 May.

The *second* thing is to decide on which party(s) you are going to vote for. It is not something that one can leave for the polling station - things happen quickly and the ballot paper (or should one rather say the ballot booklet) with 48 possible parties at national level will make it impossible to make a responsible choice on the spot. Each voter has two votes - one for the national government and one for the province in which you live. You need to think beforehand whether you are going to vote for two different parties at provincial and national level, and of course for which parties.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow identified a "hierarchy" of human needs years ago. Whether one agrees with him or not, it provides a useful framework for distinguishing different human needs.

Maslow's point is not that some needs are more important than others, but that some are needed first, before others become important to people. According to Maslow, the most basic need of all people is physiological: we all need food, water, shelter, warmth, sleep and



FW de Klerk
FOUNDATION

fresh air. Secondly, we need safety or security - personal safety, legal security, financial security (in terms of income) and health. Thirdly, all people need love and a sense of belonging. This includes family ties, friendships and communities (including linguistic, cultural and religious communities). Fourthly, people want esteem and respect from others, and also to develop a good self-esteem. Finally, people want to achieve their personal optimal potential, and experience and pursue personal growth and experiences.

What does it all have to do with choice of political party?

South Africans have certain basic rights in terms of the Constitution. These must be protected by the State (and therefore the government of the day) so that they can be exercised by everyone. The judicial system, where there are competing rights, must carefully weigh them up and give a fair and balanced verdict. These rights are undeniably linked to every South African's basic needs. One can say that in a sense, Maslow's needs become rights in the Constitution - and one can therefore measure political parties' ability and will to protect these rights and meet one's needs as a yardstick for one's vote of choice.

One hears of these rights and needs every day: security and stability; an income, occupation or social allowance; housing; basic services (which many expect free of charge) and service delivery for your taxes (water, sewerage, roads); an environment free of corruption; good health services; freedom of religion; good education (for some in their mother tongue) and being able to practice one's language and culture.

The majority of South Africans (who are black and poor) will place greater emphasis on their basic physiological needs: food, water and accommodation. In addition, they will pursue personal safety, income security (such as a social grant) and health services. And they will vote for a party they believe can give it to them.

People with middle-class incomes - and who could largely satisfy their physical and security needs - will tend to place greater emphasis on social needs. This includes community life, culture, religious freedom and education in the language of choice. In South Africa, this middle-class group (still) to a large extent, consists of minorities - in terms of demography, language, religion and culture. Such South Africans will, of course, want to vote for parties who also consider these issues to be of importance.

Of course, there is no question of a watertight divide between the needs of the majority and minorities. There are many poor South Africans who, for example, recognise the value of good education and make it a priority. There are middle-class South Africans who see personal safety or reconciliation as a priority. But it is useful to keep this hierarchy of needs (and rights) in mind when deciding who to vote for.

It is also important to (at least superficially) take note of the 48 parties competing in the election.



FW de Klerk
FOUNDATION

Against the background of the above needs, it is insightful to note that 12 of the 48 parties have “African” in their name. One must accept (and this is confirmed by their list of candidates) that none of them place minority interests in the forefront. There are another 11 that have “transformation”, “Azania”, “Revolutionary”, “People’s” and “Traditional Authorities” in their name. Along with the EFF and BLF there are 25 of the 48 parties (more than 50%) that openly (and here and there exclusively) advocate for the interests of the majority, black South Africans. It's not surprising or wrong - but it requires minorities to ask: why should I vote for them?

There are four parties that focus on local service delivery. There are three parties with “Christian” or “Revelation” in their name. Then there are quite a few parties (seven) who, according to their candidate lists, are multi-cultural: among these are “Compatriots of SA”, “Congress of the People” (Cope), the DA, “Free Democrats”, Patricia de Lille's GOOD, the IFP and the National Freedom Party. There are three parties that are clearly single-issue parties: the “Capitalist Party of SA”, the “Economic Emancipation Forum” and the “Land Party”. And finally, there are three parties who are clearly in favor of demographic minorities: Front Nasionaal (white Afrikaans), Minority Front (SA Indians) and FF+ (Afrikaans).

One’s decision of where your vote goes, therefore depends on your needs.

If your primary need is physiologically driven, you will probably want to consider voting for one of the parties who prioritise the majority's needs. If your needs are more social in nature, you may decide on one of the multi-cultural and/or minority rights parties. But of course, one also wants to vote for a party that can provide basic needs, such as electricity. The current government's inability to provide certain basic services and satisfy needs through the “transformed” public service therefore becomes a major factor in choosing who to vote for. Unfortunately, not all voters realise this, and they vote for repetitive promises.

The same kind of reasoning can also help determine where one's provincial vote goes. If, after May 8, a certain party still governs the province in which you live, it has certain implications for your immediate environment and needs. Do you want to change it or are you relatively satisfied with how things work? Or possibly, your social needs (such as mother tongue education) may not be determined at provincial level, but at national level. This may help one determine who to vote for on that level.

South Africa's democracy is growing and developing. The fact that we have 48 choices on May 8 is proof thereof. This gives us greater choice as voters, but also greater responsibility. Whether you are going to vote, and who you are going to vote for (national and provincial), will have consequences for you and yours for at least five years. And maybe longer ...

***First published in Afrikaans on Netwerk24**