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A CONTEST OF THOUGHTS

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EVERY campaign season the politicians always say and do the right thing. In a country with more than 30 percent unemployment, they promise jobs. On a continent with the highest pre-tax Gini coefficients – the gap between the haves and the have-nots – in South Africa, arguably Africa's richest nation but the world's most unequal at 0.7, they promise to reduce inequality.

In a country with more than 16 million on social grants who are battling to make ends meet, they promise to reduce poverty.

In a country with a history of a collective struggle for independence irrespective of class, race or wealth, it is not strange to see candidate Jacob Zuma attending a Thanksgiving mass at the Good Hope Centre, Helen Zille kissing a potential voter in Chris Hanu informal settlement or Julius Malema laying misaligned tiles in a house for S'thandiwe Hlongwane that the EFF built about 300m from Zuma's Nkandla homestead.

During electioneering, politicians are with us and among us. They hear us, they see us, they feel us and they even remember where we live – or rather, where they come from and how they got to where they are.

But in-between elections it's a different story.

They suffer routine amnesia while freely spending the R900 billion the SA Revenue Service collects, and rise above the people who voted for them – demanding they make way for their speeding blue light luxury 4x4 and sedan convoys.

Inexplicably, during elections, the electorate also suffers from amnesia – and invokes that South African spirit of ubuntu and forgiveness.

During elections, swept up in the euphoria and excitement of shaking hands, breaking bread, having mass with and kissing a president, ministers, premiers and those who want those positions, all is forgiven.

This election is no different.

With 33 parties registered to vote, it's open season, and street poles and billboards are littered with party campaigns.

It's been good business for manifesto and poster printers, aligned creative agencies and a temporary resurgence of the textile industry to produce that ubiquitous and unavoidable African election must-have couture – the party T-shirt.

It's been a boost for the "sponsorship" industry with those individuals and institutions who are hedging their bets putting their money where their futures lie.

Leading the pack is the under-siege Zuma's 102-year-old liberation movement, the ANC. The resilient and stubborn IFP of Mangosuthu Buthelezi.

Helen Zille's DA, a remnant of the grande dame of liberal politics, Helen Suzman's PFP and merger with the old ruling party, the National Party, and basically a refuge for all – the former Independent Democrats' Patricia De Lille and the former ANC Eastern Province premier Nosimo Balindlela.

Newcomers such as Dr Mamphela Ramphele's floundering and, no doubt, the modern South Africa's political faux pas, AgangSA; Julius Malema's political saviour and revelation, the EFF; splintering splinters – Cope; Patriotic Alliance and NFP.

But with only three days to the election day, it's clearly an unequal three-horse race between the ANC, DA and EFF, while the others scramble for voter leftovers to justify a tax-payer-funded parliamentary refuge.

The ANC is promising to create a better life – 6 million jobs, decent work, jumpstart the lagging economic growth, fight crime and corruption, housing, basic social services – everything that plagues South Africa.

It's a heavy burden with its leadership under siege for, among others, corruption, headlined by the proverbial elephant in the expansive KwaZulu-Natal room – Nkandla. Thus the call for help: "Together, we move South Africa forward."

Countering, or rather paralleling, the ANC, the DA is lobbying for the South African mandate by promising to do for South Africa what it did for the Western Cape.

It is promising "opportunities for all", creating more real jobs than the ANC's 6 million, growing the economy at 8 percent, faster than the ANC's 1.9 percent, and getting South Africa "back on track towards realising the dream of 1994".

Realising, like the ANC, that it can't do it alone, it too is asking for help: "Together, for change. Together for jobs."

Time for a wake-up call for the ruling party

The ANC might win the majority vote again, but the DA and EFF, inspired by corruption in government, Nkandla, and inefficient cadres, are taking advantage to win new voters, writes Thebe Ikalafeng



UNITED FRONT: Cosatu President S' dumo Dlamini, President Jacob Zuma and SACP General Secretary Blade Nzimande at the Peter Mokaba Stadium in Polokwane at Cosatu's May Day rally.

PICTURE: MATTHEWS BALOYI

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**BUT LIKE ALL
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On the other hand, the new kid on the block, led by the former ANC's *enfant terrible* Malema, the EFF, has made an unprecedented run and impact on the national elections.

Perhaps not surprising, because its leader has been legally dispossessed of allegedly ill-gotten riches, its manifesto – its promise to the youth and poor – is to "control the state and gain control of the economy" to deliver hope and fast-track economic freedom.

Its commitment to jail anyone convicted of corruption for 20 years is either a rhyme with the euphoria of anything 20 this year – as is the preamble to the 22 South African ills during the 20 years of democracy – or an incredible gamble that its leader will survive all corruption charges he is facing (legitimately or tactically).

Its promise to the electorate has a sense of urgency which seems to appeal to the millions of youth and poor: "Now is the time for economic freedom."

Much of these promises are beyond reach or reality, but perfectly pitched to sway gullible voters.

South Africa, as the ANC government has assessed, reported and repeat-

ed on the election trail, is definitely a better place than it was in 1994.

With 85 percent having access to basic services such as water and electricity, a GDP that's grown from \$150 billion (R1.5 trillion) to \$400bn, tourism that's risen from 3 million in 1994 to 9 million last year, and the highest beneficiary of foreign direct investment in the region, it is "a good story to tell".

But like all good stories, the end is not always good.

All signs are that while that assessment is indisputable, South Africa is no longer the pre-eminent African global good story.

Foreign Policy Magazine's Profitability Index, which measures the potential of high returns for investors, rated South Africa at number 41 – well below Botswana (2), Rwanda (3) and Ghana (10) globally.

Transparency International ratings show that South Africa has declined from Number 38 out of 177 nations to number 72 since 2001, with the greatest decline between 2009 and last year.

South Africa's global competitiveness rating is now number 53, overtaken by Mauritius, from a historic high in the 30s, partly because of lack of trust in politicians, wasteful expenditure by government, poor education and skills, rigid hiring practices and labour market inefficiencies, and strikes which have risen from 24 days from 1994-1999, to a high of 20 674, 7 days in 2010 according to the recent widely referenced Goldman Sachs 20 Years of Freedom Report.

Unemployment is estimated at 30 percent and as high as 70 percent among the youth, who are more than 50 percent of the country.

And now, Nigeria, undoubtedly Africa's unrealised potential giant, is the biggest economy at \$500bn compared with South Africa at \$400bn, catalysed by Nigeria's sustained high growth rates, 6.4 percent last year compared to South Africa at 1.9 percent. It may not mean anything on the ground, but in the battle for public perception and compe-

titition for investors, it signals a stunning repositioning for South Africa.

The numbers may be unintelligible to the man in the street, but pose a serious threat to the government's ability to raise funds, pay debts and fulfil promises and thus hamper its necessary but ambitious infrastructure programme to enable a better life for all – creating jobs, reducing poverty and inequality.

That certainly matters for the ordinary man who is going to mark the ballot on May 7.

But while 77 percent of eligible voters are registered to vote, there's a growing apathy among South Africans, with an alarming 35 percent claiming, in a recent IPSOS, to be uninterested in politics and elections.

ISS Africa quotes a survey by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in 2012 that there's a decline in trust among the South African youth in the country's leaders' ability "to do what's right". Forty-nine percent of the youth do not trust politicians.

Fifty-eight percent would consider joining a different political party from the one they had previously supported.

In protest, according to a recent survey by Pondering Panda, one in four of the young South Africans do not plan to vote.

While there are growing voices for change, it won't change the results on Wednesday.

The IJR survey found that 41 percent of young black South Africans, while despondent, still felt that the ruling party would do a better job than the opposition.

A TNS survey conducted earlier this year showed that 71 percent of the voting would be based on loyalty.

It is a consistent view supported by a "Who votes in Africa?" study by Afrobarometer that concluded gender, attitudes, political efficiency and education had little bearing on voter participation, compared to age, political affiliation or loyalty and geography, where the older and rural were found to be more likely

to vote.

While the messages, political efficacy and campaign theatrics of the DA and EFF have injected a sense of democratic dynamism in the young democracy, the voter environment is a perfect hand for the ruling party, leaving the EFF to scramble for the few registered and apathetic youth, and the DA for the insignificant, albeit loud, urbanised middle class.

But for South Africa to regain its stature and moral high ground among global and African nations, it should not be that predictable. South Africa shouldn't settle for anything less than the best.

As a growing democracy – no doubt a reality largely created, and strangely often challenged, by the ANC, contrary to the campaign by Ronnie Kasrils – South Africans must exercise their right to vote, for which they fought.

While the ANC will return to government, South Africans must continue to hold government accountable for the precious mandate entrusted in them to serve.

Or else, as Nelson Mandela warned, "if the ANC does to you what the apartheid government did to you, then you must do to the ANC what you did to the apartheid government".

The elections will show that possibility is no longer far-fetched. It will be a wake-up call for Africa's liberation movement that successfully fought hard for a better South Africa, but now seems intent to self-destruct.

But it is not too late to be the exemplary and enduringly great movement that Pixley ka-Seme, Sol Plaatje, John Dube, Albert Luthuli, OR Tambo, Thabo Mbeki and Nelson Mandela envisioned.

Nor should it be the legacy Zuma leaves.

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■ *Ikalafeng is a global African branding and reputation architect, adviser and author who successfully led the political branding and campaign for Ghana's ruling parties in 2008 and 2012. @ThebeIkalafeng.*

Is there an Indian vote out there?

WITH the election three days away, political parties are wrapping up their campaigning. It has been a frenzy and even the ways in which we remember Nelson Mandela, that towering political visionary, has been dragged into the electioneering.

In Cape Town every election hinges on the so-called coloured vote.

In Durban the so-called Indian vote has often proven to be decisive.

The ANC has been intensifying its meetings with minority communities in recent days and often declares that today's ANC is the same ANC of struggle stalwarts like Yusuf Dadoo, Monty Naicker, Billy Nair and Mewa Ramgobin".

Some may well argue that today's ANC is, very clearly, a very different organisation from the one that people like Dadoo, Naicker, Nair and others supported. The idea that someone like Dadoo would countenance Nkandla, or Gupta, is just not on.

And the ANC should not think that Indian people will only vote for a party with Indian heroes. The idea that Indian people may cast their vote on the basis of principle, or support of particular policies or personalities rather than out of ethnic identification, should also be factored in by the ANC. The ANC is committed to non-racialism, after all.

The Indian vote has always been something of a myth. Back in the 1990s Adam Habib, now vice-chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand, first made his name when, as a lecturer at the former University of Durban-Westville, he wrote a paper debunking the myth of the "Indian vote".

Habib showed that in upper-class Indian areas, Indian people overwhelmingly voted for the ANC, while in working class areas there was strong support for rival parties. This pattern was explained by the fact that upper-class Indians were well placed to benefit from affirmative action and were therefore thriving in the new democracy. On the other hand working-class and poor Indians were losing jobs in clothing and shoe factories in great numbers and had often found that the new democracy had made their lives more difficult.

In other words, people didn't vote out of ethnic identification; they voted in accordance with their material interests.

Of course the Minority Front always did its best to mobilise Indian people on an ethnic basis. And every now and then, demagogic leaders have tried to do the same. But the bulk of the Indian electorate has had no truck with ethnic politics.

But both the leading political parties prefer the myth of "the Indian vote" to the reality that Indians are a diverse group of people in terms of class and political principles and ideas. The ANC is pushing particularly hard to win over Indian voters in this election. Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan, Ravi Pillay and Maggie Govender have been hard at work in historically Indian areas. All three are excellent, committed and principled politicians and need to be wary of the politics of non-racialism.

The ANC does have two possible aces up its sleeve. One of those is that the fascist anti-Indian ravings of Phumlani Mfeka and his Mazibuye Africa Forum, along with the anti-Indian elements in Julius Malema's Economic Freedom Fighters, have left some Indian people feeling rattled.

In this climate, the ANC's tactic of showing its historical connection to heroic Indian activists of the past, and using its current Indian leaders to campaign, may make some Indian voters feel more at home in the party than they do outside. And of course, one can't compare fascist movements with a party of the stature of the ANC. There is a good chance that Mfeka and Malema will win the ANC a considerable number of votes.

The other ace up the ANC's sleeve is that, as the ruling party, it just has more power to get things done. This fact may well appeal to some less well-off voters who really depend on state services.

But no doubt some will turn to opposition parties and some will just not vote at all. And some will turn to the kind of grassroots activists who were such a powerful force in this city in the 1980s.

But whether we like it or not, the myth of the "Indian vote" is not going away soon.

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