

THE SOUTH AFRICAN GENERAL ELECTION OF 1943

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The 1943 general election was the ninth in the Union's history. It was contested by a coalition of government parties led by General J.C. Smuts - the United Party (UP), the Dominion Party and the Labour Party - against which were ranged the Herenigde Nasionale Party (HNP), the Afrikaner Party and the so-called Volkseenheid candidates. There were a record number of Independents, most of whom supported the government's war policy, as did the Communist Party and the miniscule Independent Labour Party, which also nominated candidates.

The coalition won a striking victory, obtaining 105 seats to the HNP's 43, the only opposition candidates elected. With 89 seats the UP alone enjoyed a majority of 25 over all other parties and groups in the House of Assembly. Quoting Southey on the Battle of Blenheim, Smuts called it a "famous victory",¹ a view which still seems to be accepted.² Conversely, some contemporary observers believed that the HNP had experienced "a political catastrophe".³

The perception of a UP "triumph" in 1943 continues to give rise to difficulties about the gulf between the magnificence of that victory and the poverty of the UP's performance five years later. Attempts to bridge it have also inspired a search for what are thought to be the special aspects of 1948, such as the HNP's new apartheid policy, which could have turned Afrikaner voters against the UP in large numbers.

The explanation is relatively straightforward. There was only the illusion of a "triumph". The signs were evident at the time.⁴ The extent of the victory, even the victory itself, stemmed from a combination of factors, some contrived by the government, others fortuitous. Collectively, however, they contributed to a misleading impression of the UP's strength in the country in 1943. If the artificial nature of its victory in 1943 is accepted, then the UP's defeat in 1948 is easier to grasp.

In retrospect, the underlying central theme of political developments in South Africa between 1934 and 1948 was the rise of the present-day National Party. That was hidden from many contemporaries. But because its results denoted a considerable growth of support for

J. van der Poel, (ed.), *Selection from the Smuts Papers, Vol. VI, December 1934 - August 1945* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 447, Smuts to M.C. Gillett, 31 July 1943.

2. What K.A. Heard said in 1965 is still operative. See *Voting trends in South Africa as revealed in recent General Elections and the 1960 Referendum, and their implications for the Theory of Representation* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Natal, 1965), pp. 2, 5. Heard's book, based on his thesis, appeared in 1974 under the title *General Elections in South Africa 1943-1970*.
3. B.K. Long, *In Smuts's Camp* (London, 1945), p. 144. See also Public Record Office, FO 371/36598 W 13462/1091/68, Syers/Attlee, No. 257, 23 August 1943, p. 2. The proponents of this view were influenced by what they saw as the HNP's failure to pick up all but two of the 24 seats vacated by the Afrikaner Party and the members of the New Order.
4. J.L. Gray, then professor of Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand, contradicted the general (E. speaking) euphoria: "I feel that the General Election of 1943 is not encouraging to the present Government or to the United Party, but that the position, while deteriorating, is not irretrievable. It can only be retrieved by extremely vigilant and efficient government in the next five critical years." "How the Nation Voted", *Common Sense*, Vol. 5, No. 1, August 1943, p. 9.

the HNP,⁵ the 1943 general election was a significant milestone in the HNP/NP's journey from small beginnings to the power that it has enjoyed uninterruptedly for the past forty years.

The ethnic factor is integral to an understanding of white politics in South Africa. At least during the first decades of the Union's existence, its influence was paramount at every general election.⁶ To a large extent, Afrikaners and English-speakers found themselves in different political camps and both groups sought to play the dominant rôle. Between 1910 and the 1940s there were realignments, but English-speakers largely voted for one party and Afrikaners for another.⁷

The Afrikaner/English-speaker split was also evident during the fusion years 1934-1939 except that both Hertzog and Smuts commanded a sizeable minority of Afrikaner support on personal rather than policy grounds which, in the former's case, seeped away over the entire period.⁸ Hertzog's loss of Afrikaner support contributed in no small measure to his defeat in the House of Assembly on 4 September 1939. Accompanied by most of what remained of his following, he broke with Smuts,⁹ leaving the United Party with even fewer Afrikaners than before.

In its original form the UP was born in December 1934 when the bulk of the then NP led by General J.B.M. Hertzog fused with Smuts's South African Party (SAP). For eighteen months previously they had co-operated in a coalition. On the NP side, nineteen MPs led by Dr D.F. Malan remained outside the fusion of parties, retaining the name National Party and calling themselves unofficially the "Gesuiwerde" National Party (GNP). On his side Smuts shed three pro-Imperialist diehards who formed the nucleus of the Dominion Party. After the departure of the Hertzogites, Smuts kept the name United Party but this was thereafter in essentials the SAP/Unionist merger of 1920 dominated, as was the latter, by English-speakers.

Although Afrikaners outnumbered them in the white population by about 58,34 per cent

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5. The HNP improved on its predecessor's (the GNP - see text below) share of the popular vote in 1938 by a greater percentage in 1943 (6,08%) than it did on its own between 1943 and 1948 (1,57%). The percentages given in this article in respect of the 1943 and 1948 general elections were calculated on the basis of the figures in the official returns. See *Government Gazette* No. 3233, 13 August 1943, pp. 219-21 and *Government Gazette Extraordinary*, No. 3980, 4 June 1948, pp. 1-3. No official return of the 1938 voting figures could be found. Those percentages were calculated from the figures given by B.M. Schoeman for each constituency in *Parlementêre Verkiesings in Suid-Afrika 1910-1976* (Pretoria, 1977), pp. 216-35.
 6. E.g., L.M. Thompson writes that the results of the 1910 general election demonstrated "a very close correspondence between 'race' and politics throughout the Union ... The overwhelming majority of the Afrikaner electorate had certainly voted Nationalist [i.e., for the South African Party]: the overwhelming majority of the British South African electorate had certainly voted non-Nationalist." *The Unification of South Africa* (Oxford, 1960), p. 478. Likewise, A.H. Marais says of the 1915 general election that "English-speaking voters did not support the government party in great numbers, in spite of the war policy." "Aspekte van die 1915-verkiesing", *Suid-Afrikaanse Historiese Joernaal*, November 1973, Nr. 5, p. 62. As S. Trapido (writing of a later period) puts it, "parliamentary party affiliations" were "determined almost entirely by linguistic and cultural ties; that is, by the structure of society". "Political Institutions and Afrikaner Social Structures in the Republic of South Africa", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. LVII, 1963, No. 1 (March), p. 75. See F.D. Tothill, *The 1943 General Election* (Unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of South Africa, 1987), pp. 16-78 and Tothill, "Why General Smuts won on 4 September 1939", *Kleio*, Vol. XIX, 1987, pp. 5-28.
 9. The Hertzogites formally departed from the UP in November 1939.

to 41,66 per cent,¹⁰ circumstances saw English-speakers very much on top in the years between 1939 and 1948. A Canadian historian has said that Canada “went to war because English Canadians still identified with Britain and Britons. Britain’s war had to be Canada’s war”.¹¹ South Africa went to war in 1939 because English-speaking South Africans also identified with Britain. But that was unacceptable to most Afrikaners.¹² The 1943 general election was probably the high watermark of English-speaking political influence in post-Union South Africa. Commencing with the coalition of the two major parties in 1933, it was an ascendancy which terminated abruptly, forever, in 1948.

It has been estimated that “slightly more than four-fifths [80 per cent] of the Afrikaans-speaking electorate” supported the NP at the 1929 general election.¹³ Shortly before the 1938 general election the magazine *The Round Table* held that “the United Party has the support of most of the English-speaking people of South Africa and probably of half its Afrikaans-speaking citizens.”¹⁴ But the general election itself revealed that Afrikaner support for the UP amounted to about 41 per cent of the Afrikaner electorate.¹⁵ The 1943 general election saw the percentage of the UP’s Afrikaner support drop to about 28 per cent or 26 per cent of the Afrikaner electorate.¹⁶

There are no doubt many reasons why the UP failed to attract the loyalty of a majority of Afrikaners during the fusion years. Basically, however, they found it unresponsive to their requirements. Even in the 1930s the GNP demonstrated itself more capable than its rival in mobilising Afrikaner support. The GNP was perceived as better articulating Afrikaner aspirations and the UP was unable to halt the process let alone reverse it. Indeed, it may not fully

1941 percentages based on home language. *Official Year Book of the Union of South Africa and of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland*, No. 23-1946, Chapter XXV, p. 10. The ratio of adult E. speakers to adult Afrikaners was more favourable to the former - about 45,93% to 54,07% in 1941. Those percentages were calculated by averaging the totals for adult Afrikaners and adult E. speakers in the language sections of the 1936 and 1946 censuses and applying the resulting figures to the average of the combined totals for adult Afrikaners and E. speakers in both years. See Vol. IV of the Sixth Census (1936), U.G. No. 44, '38, Table 7, p. 66 and Vol. IV of the Seventh Census (1946), U.G. No. 18/1954, Table 15, p. 78.

11. J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945* (Toronto, 1975), p. vi. See also pp. 19, 420. At that time English Canadians formed about 50% of the population and French Canadians 33,33%. The remainder were “European, American, Jewish and Oriental”. *The Round Table*, No. 113, December 1938, p. 40.
12. It was not that nationalist Afrikanerdom as such identified with Germany. Being pro-Afrikaner rather than pro anything else, it felt that “England’s wars” were contrary to South Africa’s interests.
13. N.M. Stultz, *The Electoral revival of the National Party in South Africa, 1934 to 1948* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Boston University Graduate School, 1965), p. 3.
14. *The Round Table*, No. 110, March 1938, p. 405.
15. See Gray, “How the Nation Voted”, *Common Sense*, Vol. 5, No. 1, August 1943, p. 9.
16. Figures of 395 284 E. speakers and 465 339 Afrikaners are produced by deducting some 25 000 coloureds who could have voted from total votes cast (885 623) and applying the 45,93/54,07 ratio to the balance (860 623). Allowing for about 99 665 E’s and 27 907 A’s to have supported parties and groups other than the UP and HNP, the UP’s total of 431 171 could have included some 295 519 E votes and 121 112 A votes or 26% of the estimated active Afrikaner electorate and 28% of the UP total. Naturally, these calculations should be regarded only as rough rule of thumb. The figure of 26% is close to *Die Transvaler’s* estimate of 25%. *Die Transvaler*, 3 August 1943 (Editorial). J.L. Gray estimated at the time that the proportion of the Afrikaner electorate which voted for the pro-war coalition parties in 1943 was 32%, a percentage Davenport awards to the UP by itself. Gray, “How the Nation Voted”, *Common Sense*, Vol. 5, No. 1, August 1943, p. 8; T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History* (Secod Ed., Johannesburg, 1977), p. 238.

have recognised what the problem was.¹⁷

The substantial drop in the UP's Afrikaner support between 1938 and 1943 had to do with circumstances prevailing in South Africa at the time, including the Hertzogites' departure in 1939. Nationalist Afrikanerdom was subjected to twin political pressures during the war: from the side of the government and from within its own ranks. The first was a unifying factor while the second, manifested as a leadership struggle, which the government attempted to exploit, tended to drive Afrikaners apart. Judging by the election results, government pressure was the stronger of the two.

Even so, the Afrikaner internecine strife had a direct and measurable effect on the outcome of the 1943 general election by contributing to the pressure of third party candidates in many Transvaal and Orange Free State constituencies, especially on the platteland. In four cases these cost the HNP the seat. In addition, Afrikaner voters in platteland constituencies in all four provinces stayed away from the polls, in some instances letting in the UP candidate.¹⁸

Smuts's take-over of the government by a narrow parliamentary majority, what the opposition called "a Parliamentary coup d'état",¹⁹ and the precipitation of the country into war on that basis, heightened the feeling of alienation between Afrikaner and English-speaker evident from the beginning of Union. The bitterness unleashed by the war, on the Afrikaner side at least, would endure for years.

Opponents of the war could have been confirmed in their opinion as much by the course that the government followed during the war years and by the wave of jingoism set in motion by the declaration of war as by the fact that the country was at war. English-speakers, not all of whom were of British origin, generally inhabited and controlled the major urban areas, even Pretoria and Bloemfontein where Afrikaners were in the majority. Most cities were therefore noticeably "British" in sentiment and provided a backdrop for that jingoism so abhorrent to Afrikaners.

Overt and covert government actions contributed greatly to the divisions between the two language groups. A leading cause of friction was the State of Emergency set in motion by Proclamation 201 of 14 September 1939.²⁰ The series of emergency regulations issued under the Proclamation formed the framework for the management of the wartime economy and the internal security situation. A round-up of enemy aliens commenced. The internment of Union nationals, at first mainly naturalised citizens, soon followed. The number of native born internees eventually exceeded the naturalised ones.

The internment policy may have been the greatest single cause of the discontent among Afrikaners during the war. That many of the younger internees came to occupy prominent positions in the national life, including B.J. Vorster, the country's seventh Prime Minister, heightens the sense of drama which still surrounds this issue. The HNP never deviated from the view, which persists to this day, that the internments were "aimed and directed against the great majority of Afrikaners who are opposed to the war policy of the Government".²¹

There is little doubt that Smuts had eventually to contend with an internal security problem of some magnitude as a result of the activities of the Stormjaer wing of the Ossewa-

17. Its elements would have included the British connection, the UP's native and agricultural policies, ideology (Moodie's "civil religion" - see T.D. Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Berkeley, 1975) as well as matters of a purely local nature.

18. See Tothill, *The 1943 General Election*, pp. 199-200, 361-73.

19. S.P. le Roux (Oudtshoorn). *H.A. Deb.*, Vol. 40, 1940, Col. 1507.

20. *Government Gazette Extraordinary*, No. 2679, 14 September 1939.

21. *H.A. Deb.*, Vol. 37, 1940, Col. 1122.

Brandwag. But it is difficult to assess the dimensions of the threat posed by subversive elements, particularly German agents, at the outbreak of war. The parliamentary opposition and its press were always sceptical about the nature of the German threat and its extent. Whatever measures the government took to counter it were seen, in most cases correctly, as being directed against their supporters. The opposition in turn founded its response on the proposition that it was government policy to destroy Afrikanerdom. Inasmuch as in their own propaganda Afrikanerdom meant nationalist Afrikanerdom, they summed up the situation correctly.

Most of the former nationalist MPs who followed Hertzog out of the UP in 1939, all but one Afrikaans-speaking,²² came together initially in the Volksparty which merged with the GNP to form the Herenigde Nasionale Party of Volksparty (HNP of V). Unresolved contradictions of policy and clashes of personality ensured it, at least as a parliamentary party, a short life in its original form. The bulk of the ex-UP members were extruded or extruded themselves. Some formed the Afrikaner Party, but the largest segment joined Oswald Pirow in his New Order which he may have set up originally in the hope of capturing the HNP from within. The Volkseenheid candidates who emerged in 1943 were also a manifestation of the confusion which beset nationalist Afrikanerdom at the time.

Dan O'Meara rightly observes that the intra-Afrikaner battles of the early 1940s "present an often bewildering array of issues and disputes".²³ The contemporary commentators Michael Roberts and A.E.G. Trollip believed that they were fought over principles rather than representing "the manifestation of the rival ambitions of ruthless professionals".²⁴ It is more logical to regard them as a struggle for power, primarily between the HNP and the Ossewa-Brandwag (OB), involving their leaders rather than the organizations as such.²⁵ Malan's problem with Dr J.F.J. (Hans) van Rensburg, the OB Commandant-General, and *vice versa* was that neither was prepared to subordinate himself to the other.

The fact that, of the opposition groups, only the HNP was a properly organized political party with a strong constituency infrastructure was vital in its struggle to assert itself against the others. In fact, it finally achieved dominance as a result of the 1943 general election. Van Rensburg's hopes were pinned on Germany winning the war, failing which the cards were stacked against him and his best chance of gaining power was to capture the HNP and its machinery. There he failed dismally if ever he seriously set out to do so. But the HNP leadership was aware of the danger of "white-anting" and it took particular care that only convinced party supporters, free of OB connections or sympathies, were adopted as candidates for parliamentary and Provincial Council seats.

The Afrikaner Party and the New Order were patched together associations of leaders with few if any followers. They lacked organizations to speak of and it was no secret to contemporaries that they would be blown away in an election.²⁶ The Afrikaner Party's moment would come in 1948 when it entered into an electoral agreement with the HNP and won nine seats at that year's general election.

22. S.C. Quinlan (Germiston District).

23. D. O'Meara, *Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism 1934-1948* (Johannesburg, 1973), p. 124.

24. M. Roberts and A.E.G. Trollip, *The South African Opposition 1939-1945: An Essay in Contemporary History* (London, 1947), p. 4.

25. See N.G.S. van der Walt, *Die Republikeinse Strewe: Dryfvere en Probleme binne die Suid-Afrikaanse Partypolitiek, 1902-1961* (Potchefstroom, 1961), p. 209 and L.M. Fourie, *Die Ossewa-Brandwag en die Suid-Afrikaanse Politiek*, p. 34. Fourie's work is Part VI of *Geskiedenis van die Ossewa-Brandwag*. Revised edition, (unpublished), P.F. van der Schyff, project leader, University of Potchefstroom, 1984.

26. *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 May 1943 (Letter by "Subaltern").

It can be accepted that the OB was a mass organization comprising hundreds of thousands of members as its zenith.²⁷ Its phenomenal growth after 1939 - in December of that year it was said to have a membership of 80 000²⁸ - was closely connected to its role as a channel for Afrikaner antipathy to the war and towards the Smuts government.²⁹ But Van Rensburg's dispute with Malan and the HNP leadership had a markedly negative impact on OB strength. By early October 1941 Military Intelligence, which closely monitored opposition activities, calculated that the OB had lost 40 per cent of its support in the Transvaal, 60 per cent in the Orange Free State and 80 per cent in the Cape.³⁰

Under normal circumstances, the South African electoral system is an imperfect instrument.³¹ But adjustments made to it in the three years preceding the 1943 general election, by bolstering the government's position, made it even less perfect from the opposition's point of view. Indeed, they were intended to have that effect. That the government felt that its position needed bolstering arose from the perception that it would not win a general election if one were held in the early stages of the war.³²

Six electoral Acts were passed between 1940 and 1943. The most contentious was Act No. 20 of 1940, the Electoral Laws Amendment Act, which *inter alia* brought about the compulsory registration of white voters. Two other measures, Acts Nos. 37 of 1941 and 34 of 1943, which provided for a soldiers' vote, were intended to consolidate the government's position. The other three Acts, Nos. 23 of 1941, 30 of 1942 and 20 of 1943 were more of technical than political significance.

The Electoral Laws Amendment Bill was expected to improve the balance between urban and rural constituencies,³³ the House of Assembly having reached its maximum number of seats in terms of the South Africa Act (150) in 1932, excluding the three Native Representatives who occupied their seats on another basis and under another Act. (No. 12 of 1936.) The UP thought that the legislation would give the Witwatersrand eight to ten extra seats which would have to be taken from the opposition's rural strongholds. It felt that these would accrue to itself.³⁴ In fact, the Witwatersrand gained only six seats in the 1942 delimitation.³⁵ The government coalition won five of them.

Given its purpose, the Bill did not go far enough because, for undetermined reasons, it left untouched the 15 per cent load and unload. The loading and unloading of constituencies was perhaps the most contentious aspect of the electoral system when the political rivalry between Afrikaner and English-speaker was at its peak because most English-speakers and, in 1943,

27. In February 1941, when HNP/OB relations were still reasonably good, Dr Malan told the House of Assembly that the organization commanded a membership of between 300 000 and 400 000. *H.A. Deb.*, Vol. 41, 1941, Cols. 2195-96. This would have included many HNP members.

28. *Sunday Times*, 24 December 1939.

29. H.O. Terblanche suggests, however, that the emergency regulations and the internments were a reaction to the growth of the OB. *John Vorster: OB-Generaal en Afrikanervegter* (Roodepoort, 1983), p. 75.

30. South African Defence Force Archives (SADF), CGS GP2, Holder 93, File 169/7, Fortnightly Intelligence Report, No. 14, 10 October 1941, p. 3.

31. It seems to magnify the shortcomings of the so-called first-past-the-post system with single-member constituencies. In at least two general elections (1948 and 1953) a substantial majority of votes delivered the losing party/parties a minority of seats.

32. See *The Round Table*, No. 117, December 1939, p. 211.

33. *Ibid.*, No. 119, June 1940, p. 700; No. 120, September 1940, pp. 922-23.

34. *The Star*, 8 November 1939.

35. Hillbrow, Houghton, Nigel, South Rand, Westdene and West Rand.

about 55 per cent of Afrikaners, were town-dwellers³⁶ and urban constituencies were generally loaded and rural ones unloaded to a maximum of 15 per cent either way. In 1943 this gave the platteland about seven seats.³⁷

Mandatory loading and unloading is not unique to South Africa, nor is a desire to give preference to country districts in the apportionment of seats.³⁸ Some writers claim that loading and unloading cost Smuts the 1948 general election.³⁹ But, with specific reference to the elections of 1948 and 1953, political scientists tend to downplay its importance, giving greater weight to the distribution of party support across the country.⁴⁰ The phenomenon of "useless" majorities, a symptom of the geographic concentration of its support that was to prove fatal to the UP at all subsequent general elections, was already evident in 1943.⁴¹

In 1943 the UP captured 49,25 per cent of the unloaded seats to the HNP's 46,27 per cent. In provincial terms, 29 Cape seats were loaded and 27 unloaded; Natal: 8 loaded, 8 unloaded; Orange Free State: 7 loaded, 7 unloaded; Transvaala: 39 loaded, 25 unloaded. Including uncontested seats, the parties won these seats as follows:

| | Loaded | Unloaded |
|-----|--------|----------|
| DOM | 4 | 3 |
| HNP | 12 | 31 |
| IND | 2 | - |
| LAB | 9 | - |
| UP | 56 | 33 |
| | 83 | 67 |

By 1936 Afrikaners over 21 years of age (i.e., potential voters) were in a majority in 164 or 66 per cent of the 249 magisterial districts into which the country was divided at the time.⁴² In

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36. Estimate based on Watts's and Van Jaarsveld's figures of 47,8% in 1936 and 60,4% in 1946. H.L. Watts, "A Social and Demographic Portrait of English-speaking White South Africans", A. de Villiers, ed., *English-Speaking South Africa Today: Proceedings of the National Conference July 1974* (Cape Town, 1976), Table 5, p. 53; and F.A. van Jaarsveld, *Die Afrikaners se Groot Trek na die Stede en ander Opstelle* (Johannesburg, 1982), Table, p. 175.
37. See Tohill, *The 1943 General Election*, p. 215.
38. W.M. MacKenzie, *Free Elections: An Elementary Textbook* (London, 1958), pp. 110-11. See also A.D. Robinson, "Class Voting in New Zealand: a Comment on Alford's Comparison of Class Voting in the Anglo-American Political Systems," S.M. Lipset and S. Rokkan (eds.), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (New York, 1967), p. 108.
39. See, e.g., B. Friedman, *Smuts: A Reappraisal* (Johannesburg, 1975), pp. 210-12; W.K. Hancock, *Smuts: The Fields of Force* (Cambridge, 1968), p. 506; A. Paton, *Hofmeyr* (Cape Town, 1964), p. 488; B. Solomon, *Time Remembered: The Story of a Fight* (Cape Town, 1966), pp. 203-04; and H.J. May, *The South African Constitution*, (Third ed., Cape Town, 1955), p. 139.
40. See G.M. Carter, *The Politics of Inequality: South Africa since 1948* (New York, 1977), pp. 159, 491-92; E. Lakeman, *How Democracies Vote: A Study of Electoral Systems* (Fourth ed., London, 1974), pp. 76-77; E. Lakeman and J.D. Lambert, *Voting in Democracies* (London, 1955), p. 76; and R.R. Farquharson, "South Africa 1958", D.E. Butler, ed., *Election Abroad*, pp. 229-75 (London, 1959), pp. 238, 271-72.
41. This is shown by the percentage of the vote drawn by the parties in the contests that they won:

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|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| DOM | LAB | IND | HNP | UP |
| 69,29 | 63,41 | 68,78 | 54,01 | 64,56 |

42. These are my own calculations based on a computer analysis of the figures given for each magisterial district in U.G. No. 44, '38, Table 7, pp. 44-67 (Vol. IV, Sixth Census, 1936) for English speakers and Afrikaans-speakers over the age of 21.

some urban districts Afrikaners and English-speakers were fairly evenly-balanced. But in many platteland districts in the Cape, Orange Free State and Transvaal, English-speakers formed a very small proportion of adult whites. By 1946 the magisterial districts had increased in number to 257 with Afrikaners in the majority in 69,26 per cent.⁴³

In 1943 the relative distribution of English-speaking and Afrikaner adults in the country was not as unfavourable to the former as it became later. A majority of the 150 constituencies carved out of the magisterial districts were Afrikaans-speaking. But in view of the number of urban seats (some 68 or 69 out of 150 in 1943) the proportion of seats where English-speakers were in the majority was greater than the ratio of majority English to majority Afrikaans magisterial districts. That is the other side of the argument that the Afrikaner platteland was over-represented. A.W. Stadler groups constituencies and magisterial districts into eighteen areas in accordance with their percentage of unilingual Afrikaners.⁴⁴ From that it can be deduced that in 1943 just over 75 seats were largely Afrikaans-speaking. The remainder were either largely English-speaking or, in a lesser number of cases, fairly evenly balanced.⁴⁵

Politically speaking, the government's motivation for arranging a soldiers' vote was that it expected the members of the armed forces, who enlisted voluntarily, to favour its war policy. The soldiers' vote had two sides. Military personnel outside the country (active service voters) voted for political parties in terms of Act No. 37 of 1941. Those inside the country (war service voters) voted for individual candidates in accordance with Act No. 34 of 1943. Most soldiers were stationed in the Union at the time of the general election.

The unique feature of the active service vote, voting for parties by indicating preferences, arose from the difficulty of supplying soldiers outside the country with ballot papers for individual constituencies. For that reason they could not take part in by-elections. Soldiers voted by numbering their preferences until the list of parties was exhausted. If a party of first choice was not represented in the constituency concerned, the next preference was counted.

War service voters recorded their votes on a ballot paper similar to that prescribed in the Electoral Act (Act No. 12 of 1918) and on which the names of Independents were listed. What distinguished such voters from the civilian voters were the envelopes in which their ballot papers were inserted. Voters and presiding officers were required to record certain details on the envelope at the time of voting. Their failure to do so in some cases prompted the HNP to apply for a judicial interdict at the counting stage.⁴⁶ War service voters could vote in by-elections by applying for postal votes in the normal way.

In basing itself on the assumption that the soldiers would support it at a general election, the government took a risk whose dimensions became increasingly apparent as the war progressed. Although the forces consisted mostly of volunteers, that did not necessarily mean that men "joined up" because they supported the war. Irrespective of political leanings, many saw military service as a way out of their economic difficulties.⁴⁷ Apart from that, an element of

43. Own calculations based on a computer analysis of the figures given for each magisterial district in U.G. No. 18/1954, Table 15, pp. 58-79 (Vol. IV, Seventh Census, 1946) for English-speakers and Afrikaans-speakers over the age of 21.

44. A.W. Stadler, *The Party System in South Africa, 1910-1948* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1970), Appendix I, pp. 176-86.

45. On a mathematical basis the 45,93/54,07 ratio of adult E's to adult A's would have entitled the former to 69 seats and the latter to 81.

46. The HNP applied for a second interdict a few days later. Its perception of collusion between the Afrikaner Party and the Volkseenheid candidates lay behind that.

47. There was clearly substance to the HNP's charge that economic necessity compelled many of its supporters to enlist. See *Opmars na die Republiek: Dr. Malan oor Herenigde Nasionale Party se Toekomsbeleid vir 'n Nuwe Suid-Afrika*, September 1942, p. 10.

compulsion lay not far below the surface in respect of recruiting.

Grievances, particularly about pay and conditions of service, were rife among the soldiers. The government's unwillingness to redress them contributed to a climate of discontent in the armed forces that was pervasive by 1943. The government did not accept responsibility for the payment of adequate allowances to soldiers' dependents, instead relying on the Governor-General's Fund, which was financed by voluntary contributions, to supplement its own allowances. The fund's grants were branded from the start as "charity", to which was added the humiliating nature of its enquiries into applicants' financial standing. In April 1943 Smuts improved the pay scales and agreed to subsidise the Governor-General's Fund on a pound for pound basis.

But other grievances remained. Some were relatively trivial. Others reflected tensions in white society. Complaints about the behaviour of unilingual English-speaking officers often found their way to the Prime Minister's Department through the UP Office.⁴⁸ In 1942 E.G. Malherbe, the Director of Military Intelligence, had commented that the troops were "loyal to General Smuts, but they care mighty little for the present government and still less for the United Party".⁴⁹ Such feelings were still prevalent at the time of the general election. In June 1943 the UP's organizing secretary at the Cape told the party's general secretary that he felt "baie pessimisties oor die soldatestem" and that "die eleksie was nie 'n dag te vroeg nie. Ons sit op 'n vulkaan wat elke oomblik kan uitbars."⁵⁰

Afrikaners were not alone among the civilian population to harbour grievances against the government. Even its nominal supporters thought little of it. As the war developed hard words came to be expressed in and by government-supporting organs about aspects of the war effort and other issues, including governmental ineptitude.⁵¹ In the result, UP organizers such as J.H. Looock were complaining as early as 1941 about the "deplorable lack of support from the English Press in this country".⁵²

What the United States Minister called at an early stage its "very tolerant internment policy"⁵³ gave rise to complaints that the government was acting with excessive mildness towards subversion. Many small fish were scooped up into the net, among them students and junior Public Servants. But the people whom government supporters would most dearly have liked to have seen interned, the big guns of the parliamentary opposition and extra-parliamentary leadership figures such as Van Rensburg, were never in much danger of being silenced.

Then there were matters which touched the electorate as a whole such as the food situation. From being very favourable at the outbreak of war, this had deteriorated by the beginning of 1942 *inter alia* because of excessive and unseasonal rains in some parts of the country and drought in others. A Food Control Organization was set up in March 1942 with W.R.

48. See the various volumes of the Central Head Office file "World War II, Correspondence of a personal nature regarding soldiers and recruits" in the UP Archives.

49. SADF, AG 3 154, Holder 504, File 154/696 (Springbok Legion), Item 57, Notes written at Smuts's request, 5 August 1942, para. 7, p. 2.

50. United Party Archives (UP Arch.), Central Head Office, Elections, General and Provincial Election 1943, Correspondence and Circulars, Looock/Oosthuizen, 12 June 1943.

51. See, e.g., the *Sunday Times*' series of "open letters" in 1942, including those to the Controller of Manpower, the Chairman of the Governor-General's Fund, the Secretary for Defence and the Chief of the General Staff. *Sunday Times*, 12, 19 and 26 April and 17 May 1942.

52. UP Arch., Cape Provincial Head Office, Head Committee Minutes 29 September 1941 to 22 October 1951, Vol. 1, Minutes of Cape Provincial Executive Committee, 29 September 1941.

53. United States National Archives (USNA), RG 59, DS 740.0011, Keena/Secretary of State, No. 879, 14 May 1940, p. 8.

Collins, the Minister of Agriculture, as its head.⁵⁵ He soon became very unpopular.

From about the middle of 1942, few newspapers were free of complaints about food distribution. If anything, government-supporting papers were more critical than opposition ones.⁵⁶ Complaints were aired about meat scandals, butter shortages, milk shortages, egg shortages, maize shortages, starving natives, citrus gluts leading to the rotting of large quantities of fruit, the wartime bread loaf (at best unpalatable; at worst injurious to health), poor distribution of foodstuffs, beer rationing in military camps (hops were imported), meatless days in military camps, rationing of onions and potatoes, and, naturally, the prices when food was available.

In normal times a government could expect to be penalised in respect of at least some of these matters at a general election.

Even though the necessary electoral measures were in place by 1943, prolongation of the House of Assembly's term was an option Smuts would seriously have considered if the war had been going against the Allies at the time.⁵⁷ He implied as much in the Assembly as late as March 1943.⁵⁸ Towards the end of 1942 there was debate among government supporters whether an election should be held and the cabinet was divided on the issue.⁵⁹

It was at that stage that Deneys Reitz, the Deputy-Prime Minister, committed the "indiscretion" which contributed to his dismissal from the cabinet. On 5 September 1942 he publicly advised against a general election because, "No matter what the result of an election might be, the Government was not going to hand the country over to people who would make peace with Germany."⁶⁰ If Reitz had not enjoyed a reputation for "shooting his mouth off", his remark could be viewed as a devious attempt to influence the turn-out of opposition supporters at the polls. But, as Dr Malan said apropos of this incident, "Deneys Reitz, soos ons almal weet, is Deneys Reitz."⁶¹ Nonetheless, by encouraging Afrikaner Party and Volkseenheid candidates to stand in some constituencies, Reitz's "indiscretion" was not without impact on the general election.⁶²

By early 1943 it was clear that the tide had begun to turn against Germany. In fact, against the background of the war situation, a few months after the fall of Stalingrad and a few weeks after Africa had been cleared of German forces, the election could hardly have been held at a time more favourable for the government.

This general election was probably the only one whose coming was so much of an open secret that the parties had already nominated many of their candidates before it was called. That was certainly true of the HNP, which had nominated a majority of them, and the UP and the other parties did not lag far behind. Smuts also entered into his election agreements with the Dominion and Labour parties before he announced 7 July as the date.⁶³

The HNP was warning its supporters at the end of 1942 to beware of a "blitz" election in the sense that it could come at any time.⁶⁴ It was a blitz election but only in the sense that the

54. See *The Round Table*, No. 120, September 1940, p. 931; No. 124, September 1941, p. 811.

55. J.M. Tinley, *South African Food and Agriculture in World War II* (Stanford, 1954), p. 24.

56. For examples of the latter, see A. Appel, *Die Oosterlig, 1937-1948: 'n Pershistoriese Studie* (Port Elizabeth, 1985), pp. 124-25).

The term was due to expire on 21 July 1943 with a general election constitutionally required to be held before 21 October. Prolongation of the House's life by means of legislation would not have been a practical proposition before 1943.

58. *H.A. Deb.*, Vol. 45, 1943, Col. 3267.

59. *Die Burger*, 15 September 1942 (Editorial).

60. *Sunday Times*, 6 September 1942; *Rand Daily Mail*, 7 September 1942.

61. *Opmars na die Republiek*, p. 14.

62. See *Die Vaderland*, 1 March 1943 (Report "Afr. Party En Nuwe Orde Stel Kandidate").

63. *The Star*, 12 April 1943; *Die Transvaler*, 7 May 1943.

64. *Die Burger*, 21 November 1942; *Die Volksblad*, 26 December 1942 (Editorial).

formal campaign was short (seven weeks), not that the opposition was caught on the wrong foot. On the platteland the campaign was even shorter because of a ten day Whitsun truce (3 to 13 June).⁶⁵

14 June was nomination day. Besides an unusually large number of Independents of various political persuasions (36), seven designated parties put up candidates: UP (115), HNP (109), Afrikaner Party (25), Labour (11), Dominion Party (9), Communists (9) and Independent Labour (3).⁶⁶ Candidates were returned unopposed in eighteen constituencies: sixteen UP candidates in Cape Peninsula and Witwatersrand seats,⁶⁷ Dr Malan at Piquetberg, and the Dominion Party candidate at Durban Musgrave.

Independent Labour was an offshoot of Solly Sachs's Garment Workers' Union.⁶⁸ This was also the first general election contested by the Communists who were thought to stand a good chance in one or two Cape Peninsula seats where coloureds were unhappy about government policy, especially the creation of a Coloured Advisory Council which was seen as a step towards segregation.⁶⁹

Ten of the Independents were Volkseenheid candidates. They were a Transvaal phenomenon. Indicative of collusion between them and the Afrikaner Party was that they stood in constituencies which the latter did not contest. Their rôle was that of spoiler. Most AP and VE candidates were interested less in winning seats than in striking a blow against the HNP. Seven withdrew between nomination day and election day.⁷⁰ Even so, their names could not be removed from the ballot paper and they drew votes from the other candidates. At Heidelberg, the AP candidate's 79 votes exceeded the UP's majority of 57.

However, most Independents stood in English-speaking urban constituencies which were firmly anchored in the government camp. If they had been marginal seats it is unlikely that Independents would have jeopardised the government's chances. The fact that they were safe for the government afforded politically-minded individuals who had an ax to grind about some or other aspect of government policy, including the food situation, an opportunity to obtain publicity for themselves and their views.

"Election outcomes are", according to Craig Charney, "more than a reflection of glacial change in social structure and political attitudes. They also reflect the strategies of the contending parties."⁷¹ Unfortunately, however, lack of data prevents a scientific assessment of the extent to which voters in 1943 were influenced by the parties' campaigns or whether those who voted for them, other than their enrolled members, knew exactly what they stood for. Nor is it possible to tell what effect the campaigns and the issues addressed in them had on voters in different parts of the country. Nonetheless, it seems not unreasonable to infer that in the par-

65. *Die Transvaler*, 17 May 1943; *Sunday Times*, 23 May 1943; *Rand Daily Mail*, 1 June 1943; *Springbok*, 3 June 1943.

66. *Die Transvaler* of 15 June 1943 gave a list of all the candidates. But it was not entirely accurate as to the affiliation of some of them.

67. Albany, Cape Town Castle, Claremont, Green Point, Hospital, Houghton, Kingwilliamstown, Mowbray, Orange Grove, Parktown, Port Elizabeth Central, Rondebosch, Sea Point, South Peninsula, Wynberg and Yeoville. They contained few Afrikaners which was probably why the HNP did not contest them.

68. See L. Witz, "A Case of Schizophrenia: The Rise and Fall of the Independent Labour Party", B. Bozoli, ed., *Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives* (Johannesburg, 1987), pp. 261-91.

69. *The Round Table*, No. 132, September 1943, p. 385.

70. Bethal, Germiston, Heidelberg, Pietersburg, Roodepoort, Standerton and Witbank.

71. C. Charney, "Towards Rupture or Stasis?: An analysis of the 1981 South African General Election", D.C. Hindson (ed.), *Working Papers in Southern African Studies*, Vol. III (Johannesburg, 1983), p. 183.

particular circumstances of 1943 the parties' campaigns as such may have had less effect on the outcome than at other general elections. For the battle lines were drawn even more clearly than usual - nationalist Afrikanerdom vs. the British Empire.

Government appeals for its supporters to cast their votes probably influenced the size of the poll in some urban areas (It was larger in Johannesburg and on the Witwatersrand in 1943 than in 1938 or 1948).⁷² In general, however, given the especially deep cleavage between English-speakers and Afrikaners during the war years, the major parties' election propaganda could not have made more than a marginal impression, if that, on their opponent's nominal supporters let alone inspiring fair numbers to change allegiance.

The mechanics of the major parties' campaigns involved posters, cinema advertising (in the case of the UP), stickers, cartoons, photographs of prominent leaders, newspaper advertising (again in the case of the UP), pamphlets and leaflets, and especially, "huisbesoek" (personal canvassing) and public meetings. Restrictions on paper and petrol, not to mention tyres, put something of a damper on the scale of these activities, each candidate being restricted to 650 gallons of petrol between 1 May 1943 and the date of the election and 125 pounds of paper.⁷⁵ All in all, it was an austerity campaign in keeping with the prevailing circumstances. Perhaps that was why, according to some accounts, it was a dull election. Military Intelligence reported that the "battle was fought without rancour and without any unpleasant incidents".⁷⁴

As a concession to active service voters the principal parties were permitted to set out their aims in a supplement to the June 17 issue of the armed forces' newspaper *Springbok. Common Sense*, the organ of the Society of Jews and Christians, ran similar policy statements including also those of the Communists and Independent Labourites, in its June 1943 edition.⁷⁵ Party leaders' speeches during the run-up to the election also served as election manifestos.

An important feature of the HNP manifesto, as set out in Dr Malan's statement of 15 June 1943, was the emphasis it placed on the HNP's status as an alternative government. Consequently, votes for "partytjies, wat wel teen die Regering is, maar geen hoop het om ooit aan die bewind te kom nie, is stemme 'wat weggegooi' word". Worse than that, in many cases they would be votes that would achieve the opposite of what was intended.⁷⁶

One of the HNP's difficulties was how to deal with the war, which it had vehemently opposed from the beginning. Many voters were connected with the war effort and outright condemnation of it was unlikely to attract their votes. Malan attempted to come to terms with the problem at Vredendal at the end of April. "As ons aan die bewind kom, sal ons ons aktiewe deelname aan die oorlog staak. Ons sal ons troepe wat tot ver buite ons grense gestuur is, binne ons grense terugbring." But whether an HNP government would immediately conclude peace would depend on circumstances, including the attitude of Germany and Italy.⁷⁷

At Garies a few days later he raised another issue, claiming that the British and the

72. See Tothill, *The 1943 General Election*, Table 19, p. 365.

73. *Die Burger*, 4 May 1943; *The Natal Daily News*, 30 April 1943.

74. SADF, CGS GP 2, Holder 93, File 169/7, Fortnightly Intelligence Report No. 41, 19 July 1943, p. 1. See also *Springbok*, 15 July 1943.

75. *Common Sense*, Vol. 4, No. 11, June 1943, pp. 5-14. See also J.M. van den Heever, *Die Parlementêre Verkiesing van 1943: 'n Analise van die Faktore wat die Verkiesing Beïnvloed het* (Unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1968), pp. 55-85(b). W.A. Kleynhans published the manifestoes of the UP, HNP, Afrikaner and Labour Parties in *South African General Election Manifestoes 1910-1981* (Pretoria, 1987), pp. 291-310.

76. *Die Transvaler*, 15 June 1943. See also Kleynhans, *South African General Election Manifestoes*, pp. 295-97; and Stultz, *The Electoral Revival of the National Party*, pp. 202-03.

77. *Die Burger*, 1 May 1943.

Americans could, as they had done in the case of the French colonies, occupy the country and its harbours by force. Thus "Of ons absolute neutraliteit kan bereik, weet ons dus nie."⁷⁸ Perhaps unwittingly, Malan himself therefore provided fuel for the allegation that the election was irrelevant because the Allies would not permit the country to bask in the sunshine of an HNP victory.⁷⁹

Malan's outline of the HNP programme in *Springbok* held that the HNP had "always honoured the soldier who is ready to sacrifice his life for his conviction, whatever his political standpoint may be. We have ever been against war mongers who sit at home and make pots of money, and hide behind the blood of others." About the same time, Malan said at Caledon that South African troops should come home because they had done more than their share.⁸⁰

There wasn't much more that could be said about the war from the HNP side in the prevailing circumstances which undoubtedly favoured Smuts. The war was, in fact, the strongest card in the UP's hand and Smuts insisted that the election was a referendum on it.⁸¹ Eleanor Hawarden, a journalist, claimed rather cynically that UP leaders shared a "view of politics which led them to make personal devotion to General Smuts the main election issue".⁸² The UP's policy statement in *Springbok* supported her point: "Our great leader - General Smuts - was instrumental in bringing South Africa into the war on the side of the United Nations. He saved the honour of our people and our country from ruin."⁸³

The Smuts name was invoked in many constituencies, even in Durban where it had not previously been a talisman. F. T. Howarth of Rosettenville blamed the opposition for making the war an issue: "Our beloved leader has been challenged by Dr. Malan and his Nationalist followers to have a General Election on the War Issue. General Smuts has accepted that challenge and now *he wants your support*." Those so foolish as to contemplate denying him it were reminded that "A Vote *NOT* given to the United Party is a Vote *FOR* Dr. Malan, Hitler, Mussolini and the Mikado of Japan"⁸⁴ (Emphasis in original).

7 July was election day but military personnel had cast their votes in the Union, North Africa and elsewhere between 15 June and 4 July. The counting of the civilian ballots was delayed until the military ballots had been counted and the totals telegraphed to the returning officers in each constituency. The last result was released at 6.45 a.m. on 30 July, 23 days after the election.

The results revealed a distribution of seats highly favourable to the UP (seats held before the election in parenthesis): UP 89 (71); HNP 43 (40); Afrikaner Party 0 (8); New Order 0 (16); Dominion Party 7(8); Labour 9 (4); Independent 2 (1). Although important because of what he could have achieved with it, Smuts's majority in terms of seats was deceptive. A better test of the parties' standing was provided by their percentage of the vote.

PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTE 1938 AND 1943

| | DOM | LAB | GNP/HNP | UP |
|------|--------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1938 | 57337 (6,86) | 43194 (5,17) | 247583 (29,64) | 447536 (53,57) |
| 1943 | 29023 (3,28) | 42094 (4,75) | 316320 (35,72) | 431171 (48,69) |

78. *Ibid.*, 3 May 1943.

79. Malan tended to play down the significance of Reitz's "indiscretion" at the time. See above and *Opmars na die Republiek*, p. 14.

80. *Die Transvaler*, 17 June 1943.

81. *The Cape Argus*, 23 June 1943. See also *Die Volkstem*, 2 June 1943 and Kleynhans, *South African General Election Manifestoes*, pp. 291-94.

82. *Common Sense*, Vol. 5, No. 1, August 1943, p. 9.

83. *Springbok*, 17 June 1943 (Election Supplement).

84. UP Arch., J.M. Conradie Collection, 23, Elections, leaflet. Howarth was opposed by a Communist and two Independents. The HNP did not contest the seat.

Disregarding the actual votes (total votes differed: 1938 - 835 433; 1943 - 885 623), the percentages seemed to bear out *Die Transvaler's* claim that only the HNP had grown since 1938.⁸⁵ Although this proposition is complicated by several factors,⁸⁶ the HNP certainly registered an improvement on the GNP's position in actual contests. Indeed, its 6 per cent increase in the GNP's share of the vote in 1938 showed that the country's political complexion was changing in its favour. That, not the 63,86 per cent of the electorate, including unopposed returns, estimated to support the war effort and the 36,14 per cent to oppose it,⁸⁷ was the long-term meaning of the 1943 general election.

The UP and the HNP had faced each other directly in 102 constituencies spread over all four provinces. Seventy were rural seats, most in predominantly Afrikaans-speaking areas, and 32 urban, a few Afrikaans-speaking. The UP won sixty seats overall and the HNP 42, the former attracting 54,96 per cent of the combined vote to the latter's 45,04 per cent.⁸⁸ Thus all but one of the HNP's victories in this election⁸⁹ were obtained in direct contests with the UP. By contrast, 67,42 per cent of UP victories were at the expense of the HNP, 17,98 per cent were delivered by uncontested seats, and 14,6 per cent in contests with other groups, i.e., Communists and Independents.

Thirty-two of the UP's victories against the HNP were in rural constituencies - twelve in the Cape, sixteen in the Transvaal and four in Natal. The HNP won eighteen rural seats in the Cape (not counting Piquetberg), eight in the Transvaal and twelve in the Orange Free State for a total of 38. The UP's 49,04 per cent of the combined vote in the seventy platteland contests, only 3,89 per cent less than the Hertzog/Smuts percentage in 1938, seemed quite reasonable in the circumstances.

While the HNP's support was still based in the platteland its urban support, particularly on the Witwatersrand, was growing despite its victory in only four urban seats. That would have been due to the phenomenon of Afrikaner urbanization which accelerated during the war. But the successful mobilization of Afrikaner opinion by the various anti-war groups, facilitated by Afrikaner feelings of persecution, was also significant. The government's internal security measures and pro-war propaganda, which HNP and other anti-war spokesmen presented as being directed against Afrikanerdom, were factors in that regard.

Politically-motivated abstenteeism by Afrikaners, especially OB members, was a feature of this general election. There may also have been potential voters who refused to register for political reasons, but their number would not have been significant.⁹⁰

Exactly how many Afrikaners stayed away for political reasons and not for others, including the alleged breakdown of the HNP election machine "mainly owing to lack of transport",⁹¹ is impossible to determine. There was also the weather on polling day, which brought heavy and unseasonal rains to the Transvaal, Orange Free State and Natal platteland, resulting in impassable roads.⁹² The abnormal weather conditions were said to have caused "an acute

85. *Die Transvaler*, 31 July, 1943.

86. E.g., the number of seats contested and the number of uncontested seats. The HNP actively contested a roughly comparable number of seats in 1938 and 1943, 106 to 108. But there was a marked difference in the number contested by the UP, Dominion and Labour parties because they were in competition in 1938 but not in 1943.

87. Graya, "How the Nation Voted", *Common Sense*, Vol. 5, No. 1, August 1943, p. 8.

88. These ratios relate only to votes cast for the UP and the HNP. Other parties' votes are not taken into account.

89. Dr Malan was returned unopposed at Piquetberg.

90. See Tothill, *The 1943 General Election*, pp. 373-75.

91. SADF, CGS GP2, Holder 93, File 169/7, Fortnightly Intelligence Report No. 41, 19 July 1943, p. 1.

92. *Ibid.*, 7 July 1943.

shortage of petrol” on the Transvaal platteland.⁹³ A comparison of percentage polls in 1938, 1943 and 1948 shows that the percentage of stayaways was arguably greatest on the Orange Free State platteland where, despite the presence of third party candidates in all twelve constituencies, the HNP secured a clean sweep.⁹⁴

The effect of Afrikaner absenteeism on the election results can be tested to some extent by analysing the outcome in the 108 constituencies which the HNP contested actively. The 42 seats it won (38,53 per cent of those contested) produced an average poll of 83,42 per cent, ranging from 89,79 per cent at Swellendam to 75,04 per cent at Bloemfontein District. The fact that the poll was relatively high in such constituencies suggests that political or other absentees were few in number.

The average poll for the 67 constituencies where the HNP was defeated was 3,73 per cent lower: 79,69 per cent, ranging from 90,8 at Bredasdorp to 64,69 at Fordsburg. It was in such constituencies that political absentees and third party candidates would have had a negative impact on HNP fortunes, though not in all of them. Although the influence of third party candidates is easy to detect, that of absentees can be measured only by deduction. For practical purposes most urban constituencies can be discarded because urban areas traditionally produce relatively low percentage polls. Possible exceptions, however, would have been Mayfair (74,72%) and Fordsburg (64,69%) where Afrikaners were known to be in the majority.⁹⁵

Of particular significance were rural constituencies with relatively low percentage polls⁹⁶ such as Newcastle (78,95%), Witbank (78,54%), Losberg (77,67%), Middelburg (76,74%), Vryburg (76,72%), Klip River (74,73%), Pretoria District (72,7%), and Drakensberg (69,7%). Middelburg and Pretoria District were lost because of AP candidates on the ballot but the position could have been retrieved for the HNP if the poll had been higher. The contemporary view was that the HNP lost Vryburg because of an OB boycott.⁹⁷ Other constituencies considered by contemporaries to have been similarly affected were Kimberley District (79,79%) and Wakkerstroom (82,21%).

The effect of the Afrikaner leadership struggle on the general election was confined to third party candidates and absenteeism. Apart from the probability that some soldiers and their dependents voted for the government against their convictions, there is little evidence that Afrikaner civilians who, under other circumstances, would automatically have voted for the HNP, on this occasion supported the UP. Afrikaner antipathy towards Smuts and all he stood for, not only in respect of the war, ran too deep for that.

It might be thought that if nationalist Afrikanerdom had been united, then the HNP would have stood a good chance of winning the 1943 general election. But the divisions probably had less effect overall than might be supposed. In fact, united or not, the anti-war groups would not have won the election, an assessment confirmed by at least one contemporary HNP source.⁹⁸

93. *Rand Daily Mail*, 7 July 1943.

94. See Tothill, *The 1943 General Election*, Table 19, p. 365. At least in respect of the Orange Free State, Stadler is probably correct in suggesting that the AP gained its votes at the expense of the UP, not the HNP. *The Party System in South Africa*, pp. 83-84. That may also have applied to the other three seats that the HNP won against UP and AP opposition (Klerksdorp, Kuruman and Westdene).

95. However, Marais Steyn, the UP organizer on the Witwatersrand, optimistically grouped Fordsburg among eight “safe seats which we cannot lose”. UP Arch., Transvaal Provincial Head Office (including General Councils), Steyn/Oosthuizen, 8 July 1943.

96. Due to a marked decline in the level of voter interest in recent years, polls considered low for the 1930s and 1940s would be high if recorded in the 1980s.

97. See Fourie, *Die Ossewa-Brandwag en die Suid-Afrikaanse Politiek*, p. 79.

98. See *Die Burger*, 30 July 1943 (Editorial).

The soldiers' vote played a major rôle in that respect. It cost the HNP ten constituencies: Heidelberg, Johannesburg West, Kimberley District, Malmesbury, Paarl, Prieska, Uitenhage, Ventersdorp, Vryheid and Worcester.⁹⁹ The UP would, in any event, probably have lost Heidelberg, which it gained by only 57 votes, but for the 79 votes (1,36 per cent) cast for the AP candidate who withdrew before the election.

All but one of the ten seats were rural or semi-rural, six of them on the Cape platteland where the coloured vote would have been a factor, but one impossible to quantify.¹⁰⁰ *Die Burger* attributed the HNP's loss of Malmesbury, Paarl, Prieska and Worcester to it.¹⁰¹

Its victory in six seats there concealed the shakiness of the UP's position in the rural Cape. Without them it would have obtained, not seventeen rural seats to the HNP's nineteen but only eleven and the HNP's total would have soared to 25, as was the case in 1948. More significantly, in its 102 direct contests with the HNP the UP's seats would have fallen from sixty to fifty and the HNP's would have risen from 42 to 52. At the same time the ratio of the UP's vote to the HNP's in these contests would have dropped from 54,96 per cent (367 622 votes) to 50,54 per cent (304 866 votes) and the HNP's would have increased from 45,04 per cent (301 280 votes) to 49,46 per cent (298 318 votes).

It was assumed at the time that the soldiers would stand (or be made to stand) solidly behind the government parties. That was indeed the case. Of the 83 131 votes counted, 62 756 (75,49%) were cast for the UP; 2 962 (3,56%) for the HNP; 4 647 (5,59%) for the Dominion Party; and 6 909 (8,31%) for the Labour Party. Other votes and percentages were: Afrikaner Party 356 (0,43%); Communist Party 707 (0,85%); Independent Labour 236 (0,28%); Independents (including VE candidates) 2 068 (2,49%). There were also 2 490 (3%) spoiled or rejected ballots.¹⁰²

The gross imbalance in favour of the government coalition illustrates the highly artificial nature of the soldiers' vote. That is further shown by the percentage that the latter formed of the total number of votes cast for the various parties. Only 0,94 per cent of the HNP's country-wide total of 316 320 comprised soldiers' votes compared with the United Party's 14,55 per cent of 431 171, the Dominion Party's 16,01 per cent of 29 023 and the Labour Party's 16,41 per cent of 42 094.

What may have influenced the results was that soldiers were required to take part in special voting parades¹⁰³ and to vote as a bloc rather than as individuals. One also cannot discount the influence of the rumour, unfounded though it may have been, that the ballot was not secret and that those dependent on the government for their livelihood should vote for government candidates if they knew what was good for them.

It is part of the lore of the 1943 general election that one-third or more of the military voters absented themselves from the polls, impliedly for political reasons.¹⁰⁴ That assumption could

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99. An incorrect version of the details first appeared in 1948. See Tothill, *The 1943 General Election*, pp. 376, 382-84.
100. See the second part of the Minister of the Interior's reply to Question XXII by F.C. Erasmus, 29 February 1944, *H.A. Deb.*, Vol. 47, 1944, Col. 2151.
101. *Die Burger*, 3 August 1943 (Editorial). The *Rand Daily Mail* (5 July 1943) forecast before the election that the UP would win Ceres, Worcester, Paarl and Malmesbury. The UP lost Ceres by 83 votes or 1,11%. Soldiers' votes comprised 9,76% of its candidate's total to the HNP's 0,45%. Only 65,57% of the soldiers registered in the constituency voted. Had more soldiers voted, the UP would presumably also have won this seat.
102. See Tothill, *The 1943 General Election*, p. 383, fn. 107 and p. 384.
103. It was compulsory to parade for the ballot paper, but voting itself was said to be optional. *Springbok*, 17 June 1943.
104. See S. Patterson, *The Last Trek: A Study of the Boer People and the Afrikaner Nation* (London, 1957), p. 101; E.A. Walker, *A History of Southern Africa* (New Imp., London, 1964), p. 729; and Roberts and Trollip, *The South African Opposition*, p. 167.

have been inspired by the fact that only 83 131 out of 149 355 registered soldier voters (55,66 per cent), voted.¹⁰⁵ On the balance of probability, however, the great majority of soldiers' votes went to government candidates simply because most opposition supporters, for whatever reason, voted for them rather than that they did not vote. Indeed, the fact that the contemporary opposition press was silent about politically-motivated absenteeism on the part of military personnel supports the conclusion that the number of deliberate absentees may not have been as great as later believed.

Wartime general elections tend to conjure up the spectre of governments being returned to power on a wave of patriotic enthusiasm. Thus the term "khaki election", which the opposition applied to this general election.¹⁰⁶ But by 1934 what pro-war enthusiasm there was, was confined largely to English-speakers in urban areas such as the Witwatersrand. Most of the contests between the UP and the HNP took place in platteland areas where a feeling of "them against us" irrespective of the issues would have been significant. Thus the results as a whole show little evidence of patriotic fervour.

The electoral system itself influenced the outcome as in 1948. That is shown *inter alia* by the disparity between votes and seats. With 48,69 per cent of the vote nation-wide, the United Party secured 55 per cent of the contested seats. The HNP's 35,72 per cent of the vote brought it 32 per cent of the contested seats. In 1938, the United Party's 53,57 per cent of the vote had given it 73,29 per cent of the 146 contested seats to the GNP's 18,49 per cent for 29,64 per cent of the vote.

The Dominion and Labour parties were also rewarded with more seats in 1943 than was justified by their share of the vote: 4,55 for 3,28 and 6,82 for 4,75, respectively. But neither in terms of votes nor seats were those parties significant. Their support was confined largely to English-speakers in a few of the larger cities. By 1943 both were in decline, the Dominion Party dying in 1948 and Labour lingering until 1958.

In 1943 the disparity between votes and seats affected the HNP to the greatest extent in the Transvaal. There 34,35 per cent of the vote gave it but 18,64 per cent of the contested seats. On the Witwatersrand outside of Johannesburg its 33,9 per cent of the vote was insufficient to deliver any seats. On the other hand, 52,3 per cent of the vote in the Orange Free State gave the HNP 92,9 per cent of the seats to the UP's 7,1 per cent (1 seat) for 35,4 per cent of the vote.¹⁰⁷

However, from 1948 onwards the electoral system favoured the HNP. A 0,77 per cent reduction in its share of the popular vote between 1943 and 1948 was accompanied by a 16 per cent reduction in the UP's share of the seats. Likewise, a 1,57 per cent increase in its share of the vote brought the HNP an additional 18 per cent of the seats. Between 1938 and 1943 the HNP improved its standing in seats at the UP's expense by fifteen while the ratio of its vote to that of the UP in direct contests increased, and the UP's dropped, by only 0,47 per cent.¹⁰⁸ This seems to imply both that the HNP was not as weak in 1938 as is commonly supposed and, especially, that the electoral system itself had a considerable impact.

105. Even so, soldiers' votes comprised 9,39% of all votes cast (885 623). There were a number of reasons for the discrepancy: (a) eighteen seats containing about 25 000 soldier voters were uncontested; (b) over 12 000 whites and 700 coloureds were either prisoners-of-war or missing at the time; (c) some soldier voters were prevented by administrative errors from casting their votes; (d) the names of about 30 000 ex-servicemen who had returned to civilian life remained on the military roll; (e) many registered soldier voters in contested constituencies presented themselves at the polls, to receive empty ballot envelopes or notices informing them that their constituencies were not contested; (f) albeit unlikely, the figure of 149 355 may have been incorrect.

106. See Dr Malan's statement in *Die Burger*, 31 July 1943.

107. See Tothill, *The 1943 General Election*, Table 14, p. 351.

108. *Ibid.*, Table 17, p. 358.

The UP benefited from the 1942 delimitation because five of the eight seats eliminated were held at the time by the HNP (Hopetown, Riversdale, Senekal, Willowmore and Wodehouse)¹⁰⁹ and only one (Carolina) by the former. The UP also gained four new seats¹¹⁰ in the election. The HNP lost three seats, the Labour Party gained three and the Dominion Party's gains balanced its losses at four each. Three of the sixteen seats held by New Orderites disappeared in the delimitation and, except for J.H. Grobler, who was unsuccessful at Brits, that group automatically forfeited the rest by not contesting the election. The UP largely filled the vacuum left by the New Order.

In conclusion, the government's victory in 1943 was less "famous" than Smuts believed. The triumph was flawed. It was, in fact, mainly the soldiers' vote which created the illusion of a triumph. All other factors remaining the same, including the struggle for power within the ranks of Afrikanerdom, the UP would have won the general election without the soldiers' vote, but the results would more accurately have reflected its real standing in the country. If there had been no soldiers' vote and if nationalist Afrikanerdom had been united, the election, at least in terms of seats, could have been closely run, producing something approaching the 1948 result.

Smuts's right-hand man, Louis Esselen, was one of the few associated with the UP who appreciated that the 1943 victory was not a guarantee of future success. In a despatch reporting on the depressing "picture of his party's future" that Esselen had drawn in one of their conversations, the American Minister quoted him as having said that "we must do something - a lot of things - constructive in this country, and that soon, or people will turn against us".¹¹¹ What Esselen did not realise was that most Afrikaners had already done so.

109. The incumbents at Hopetown (P. Theron) and Wodehouse (S. Bekker) had been returned as United Party MPs in 1938.

110. In the sense that the names were new.

111. USNA, RG 59, DS 848A.00/654, MacVeagh/Sec. State, No. 370, 9 November 1943, pp. 2, 3. Perhaps he was influenced by J.L. Gray's view quoted in fn. 4 above.