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Attracting the Pentecostal-Charismatic Vote During the 2024 South African National Election Campaign

BY

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Abstract

In a previous article, Mzondi argued that three Evangelical-Pentecostal leaders—Frank Chikane, Kenneth Meshoe, and Mmusi Maimane—displayed Langalibalele Dube’s leadership attributes and a non-dichotomous Ubuntu view of faith and politics. These are juxtaposed with the leadership attributes of Jacob Zuma, an honorary religious leader of a section of African Pentecostal churches in South Africa. Following the faith and politics interplay, the article focuses on the 2024 South African national election campaign of the four to determine the influence of a non-dichotomous Ubuntu view of faith and politics and Langalibalele Dube’s leadership attributes. Hence the following three objectives. First, to examine how Pentecostal-Charismatic churches and formations align themselves with the African National Congress, the Africa Christian Democratic Party, Build One South Africa, and the uMkhonto weSizwe Party during pre-election 2024 national elections drive. Second, to determine if there is a change in the political perception of Pentecostals and Charismatics. Third, to establish if Pentecostals and Charismatics continue to support Jacob Zuma despite his unethical conduct as, previously argued.

This quantitative study is an interplay of the Ubuntu worldview and Pentecostal studies. The two are used as a research framework to achieve the above three objectives. The findings demonstrate that African Pentecostal-Charismatic leaders and members associate with different political parties, have shifted to embrace the non-dichotomous Ubuntu worldview, and are not blind political followers but appear to exercise caution, thus rejecting the argument that all Pentecostals and Charismatics support Jacob Zuma.

Keywords: S A Elections, Pentecostal-Charismatics Churches, ANC, MK Party; ACDP, BOSA

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INTRODUCTION

Since the first democratic national elections in 1994, politicians have acknowledged the role of Pentecostal-Charismatic votes in their election campaigns. Reverend Kenneth Meshoe established the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) (Mzondi, 2021, p. 87) and specifically appealed to Pentecostal-Charismatic voters to support his party in the 1994 national elections. As a result, the ACDP became the official opposition party that publicly claimed to represent the voice of Pentecostal-Charismatic voters in the post-1994 democratic dispensation.

Contrary to this, the African National Congress (ANC) claimed to represent a broader constituency that included African Pentecostal-Charismatic voters. This was evident as it appealed to this constituency through the efforts of Pentecostal-Charismatic church members and leaders who appreciated its role in ushering political freedom in the country. Key among these leaders was Reverend

Frank Chikane, an ordained pastor of the Apostolic Faith Mission and a political and anti-apartheid activist (Chikane, 2017; Hunter, 2020; Masuku, 2024; Mzondi, 2021).

After the 2019 national elections, Mzondi (2021) compared the leadership attributes of three evangelical leaders active in politics: Frank Chikane, Kenneth Meshoe, and Mmusi Maimane. He argued that these three display the leadership values of the first president of the ANC and a priest, John Langalibalele Dube. He also juxtaposed their leadership values with those of Jacob Zuma, an honorary pastor among a section of Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches and the former president of the ANC and South Africa (West, 2010, p.137).

Notably, during the 2024 national elections, except for Frank Chikane, Kenneth Meshoe, Mmusi Maimane, and Jacob Zuma are the faces of their respective political parties: the African Christian Democratic Party, Build One SA, and the uMkhonto weSizwe



Party. The article is a quantitative study that analyses, using the non-dichotomous Ubuntu worldview (Mzondi, 2021, pp. 88–90) and Pentecostalism theology (Kgatlé, 2024, pp. 121–127), the pre-election drives of three of these four leaders—namely Kenneth Meshoe, Mmusi Maimane, and Jacob Zuma—to attract the Pentecostal-Charismatic vote.

A non-dichotomous Ubuntu worldview entails a perspective that does not separate faith from political activity, while African Pentecostal theology emphasises practicing a multi- and interdisciplinary theological approach. Hence, the interplay of these two frameworks is the focus of this article.

From this framework, the article intends to achieve three objectives: first, to explore how the religious and political leaders attracts Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches and formations during the pre-election 2024 national elections drive; second, to explore how Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches and formations align themselves with either the African National Congress, or the African Christian Democratic Party, or Build One South Africa, or the uMkhonto weSizwe Party during the same period; and dispel the view that all Pentecostals support Jacob Zuma.

The article then covers four main sections. The first section discusses the history of the Pentecostal and Charismatic faith tradition. The second section focuses on how the three leaders engaged in efforts to attract the Pentecostal-Charismatic vote in their pre-election drives. The third section reflects on how the leaders of the mentioned political parties display the leadership values of Langalibalele Dube. Finally, the article concludes by examining the shift in the African Pentecostal-Charismatic stance from being apolitical to active political engagement, dispelling the notion that all Pentecostals support the unethical Jacob Zuma (van Wyk, 2019).

PENTECOSTAL AND CHARISMATIC TRADITIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA.

Historically, Kgatlé (2017), Nel (2018), and Mzondi (2019) mention that Pentecostalism reached South Africa in the mid-1910s after John G. Lake and Thomas Hezmalhalch arrived in South Africa as missionaries. William Seymour, the leader of the 1906 Azusa Street revival and the subsequent founder of the Apostolic Faith Mission, commissioned them to reach South Africa. They later established the Apostolic Faith Mission, which became the first and largest Pentecostal church to date. Other missionaries from different Pentecostal groups also reached South Africa and later grouped themselves to form what is now the Assemblies of God (Resane, 2018, p. 37). Another group of missionaries formed the Full Gospel Church. These three are the classical Pentecostal churches in South Africa. The fourth is the Back to God Movement founded by Nicholas Bhengu (p. 38).

The second wave consists of churches founded by leaders who seceded from the Apostolic Faith Mission. These are classified as African Indigenous Churches, mainly consisting of Apostolic and Zionist churches. The third wave includes various Charismatic churches established in the 1980s when some influential South

African church leaders embraced the teachings of Kenneth Hagin and Oral Roberts. Later, in the 1980s, African leaders established Independent Pentecostal-Charismatic churches (Mzondi, 2019).

Historically, with a few exceptions, the leaders and members of these churches have been apolitical (Anderson 2018, p. 238; Masuku 2024, p. 6; Resane, 2018, pp. 46-47). A slight shift occurred when the ACDP was established in 1993. This shift continued to be observed before and during Jacob Zuma's presidency of the ANC and his subsequent headship of the ANC administration. The shift has taken a new dimension in the current 2024 national campaign, as the ACDP can no longer claim to be the main voice of Pentecostal-Charismatic voters. Undoubtedly, the MK Party also shows that it is a voice for Pentecostal and Charismatic voters. The African National Congress, uMkhonto weSizwe Party, African Christian Democratic Party, and Build One SA engaged (directly or indirectly) to attract the votes of members from all these churches. This article will focus on classical African Pentecostal churches, African Charismatic churches, and African Independent Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches.

The next section will now turn to the pre-election drives to secure the votes of Pentecostal and Charismatic church members.

THE DRIVE FOR THE SUPPORT OF INDEPENDENT PENTECOSTAL-CHARISMATIC CHURCHES

This section focuses on the pre-election campaigns for the May 29, 2024, national elections by analysing the political parties of the four evangelical-Pentecostal church leaders: Frank Chikane, Kenneth Meshoe, Jacob Zuma, and Mmusi Maimane (Mzondi, 2021). Three of them are ordained pastors, while Jacob Zuma is an ordained honorary pastor (Mzondi, 2021, p. 91). Except for Frank Chikane, the other three are now the faces of their political parties: Jacob Zuma for the uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MK Party), Kenneth Meshoe for the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), and Mmusi Maimane for Build One SA (BOSA).

The pre-election drives are divided into two groups: the African National Congress (ANC) and the uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MK Party); and the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) and Build One SA (BOSA). Unlike Kenneth Meshoe and Mmusi Maimane, who established political parties, Jacob Zuma, publicly, communicated that he did not establish a political party. Instead, he pledged his support for the newly formed uMkhonto weSizwe Party on December 16, 2023. In his letter to the Independent Election Commission (IEC), Mr Jabulani Khumalo claimed that he is the founder of the uMkhonto weSizwe Party and that Jacob Zuma was made the face of the party during the election campaign (Chabalala, 2024). On May 20, 2024, the Constitutional Court (ConCourt) overruled the High Court's decision, making Jacob Zuma ineligible to stand as a candidate for parliament (Sowetan, 2024).

Leaders of political parties, especially the ANC and the National Party (NP) during the apartheid era, usually attended church services as part of their political campaign to gain voter support.



The ANC argues that the church contributed to its founding and that its first conference was held in a church in Bloemfontein (Odendaal, 2012, p. 466; Sacr), with a priest, the Rev. John Langalibalele Dube, elected as its first president (Gumede, 2007, p. 5; Odendaal, 2012, p. 467). Thus, it cannot disregard the church (Mbalula, 2024). Similarly, Jacob Zuma values the importance of the church and attended church services as a political drive to gain voter support.

The African National Congress and the uMkhonto weSizwe Party.

Senior leaders of the ANC and the MK Party delivered speeches at several Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches prior to the May 29, 2024, national elections. These churches are categorised as follows: pro-ANC churches from the International Federation of Charismatic Churches (IFCC) and pro-MK Party churches from its ardent supporters, namely, Apostle Mohlala Ministries, Rivers of Living Waters, and the All-Africa Federation of Churches (AAFC).

Pro-ANC churches

The president of the ANC, Cyril Ramaphosa, delivered a speech at the Eagles Christian Church's Passover (Easter) conference, appealing to congregants to pray for peace in the upcoming elections (SABC News, 2024). The church appears to align with the Charismatic Church tradition. During the same period, the secretary-general of the ANC, Fikile Mbalula, and the ANC Gauteng province chairperson, Panyaza Lesufi, attended the Grace Bible Church, a member of the IFCC, for a Passover service (Mudzuli 2024). Interestingly, the former ANC president, Jacob Zuma, now the leader of the MK Party, delivered a speech at this church during the previous national elections. The visits of ANC national leaders indicate that the church is pro-ANC rather than necessarily pro-Zuma.

The African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL) held a pre-election prayer service at the Katlehong Change Bible Church, a member of the International Federation of Charismatic Churches (IFCC) (Nonyukela, 2024). Although the prayer service was an ANCWL event, it seems the church endorsed the ANC as its party of choice. In her speech, the ANC's first deputy secretary, Nomvula Mokonyane, said, "It's the crunch hour; the revolution is under threat. Stand with Cyril Ramaphosa."

Pro-MK Party churches

An interesting development in the MK Party is that, although the church leaders Jacob Zuma visited know him as their honorary pastor, they opt not to address him as 'Pastor' (Mzondi, 2021, p. 91). Instead, they refer to him as 'President Zuma,' as is common within the party, including in interviews with the party's secretary-general (SABC, 2024b).

Between January 2024 and April 2024, President Jacob Zuma spoke at two Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches. The first was at a church service of one of his ardent supporters, Apostle Mohlala Ministries, where he urged congregants to give the MK Party a chance (S.K. Media Production YouTube, 2024). He vowed to

change the constitution of the country once the MK Party is in power during a service at Rivers of Living Waters (Schrieber, 2024). Additionally, the All Africa Federation of Churches (AAFC), an organisation of Pentecostal-Charismatic and Apostolic churches, endorsed Jacob Zuma and the MK Party (News Central YouTube, 2024; Chabalala and Sifile, 2024).

The above discussion shows that the ANC made several efforts to attract members of African Charismatic Churches, while the MK Party aimed to secure support from members of African Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches led by Zuma's ardent supporters. The actions of these Church leaders in allowing political party leaders to give keynote addresses or attend church services indicate a shift from the apolitical stance of Pentecostal-Charismatic church leaders during the apartheid era to political alignment in the democratic dispensation. This shift towards what Mzondi (2021, pp. 88–90) labelled a non-dichotomous Ubuntu worldview is evident in the practices of Langalibalele Dube and other Christian leaders before him.

Furthermore, the involvement of some Pentecostal-Charismatic leaders in MK Party activities mirrors the endorsement of Jacob Zuma for the presidency of the ANC and the country by Pentecostal-Charismatic leaders. This is also seen in the actions of leaders from Pentecostal-type (Apostolic) churches, such as Bishop Sophonia Tsekeledi, who supported Jacob Zuma and established the All Africa Alliance Movement (AAAM). This movement aimed to have former Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng as its presidential candidate and future president of the country (Chabalala and Sifile, 2024).

In contrast, leaders of churches affiliated with the IFCC have taken a more cautious approach by not publicly showing political allegiance. However, they allowed national leaders of the ANC to address their congregations during the 2019 national election campaigns and the current 2024 national election campaign.

The African Christian Democratic Party and Build One SA

This section follows the same division of dividing Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches into pro- a political party. In this instance it is being pro-ACDP and pro-BOSA.

Pro-ACDP churches

Seemingly, the ACDP and BOSA did not have high media coverage showing their efforts to attract the votes of Pentecostal and Charismatic church members. The ACDP, as a Christian party, largely relied on its website and social media to reach these church members, who form a large part of its constituency. They appealed to them to prioritise considering the spiritual source and values of parties, promoting the ACDP as having a biblical worldview, and advocating for godly governance (ACDP, 2024a).

Apart from this website advertisement, an internet search did not show how the leader, the Rev. Kenneth Meshoe, engaged Pentecostal and Charismatic church members to vote for his party. It appears that the ACDP relies on its internal party leaders to



coordinate the pre-election campaign among their church members. As in previous national elections, the national leader relies on his church members to vote for the party, as do other regional and national church leaders, as seen in its 2024 national election manifesto (ACDP, 2024b). The ACDP manifesto launch demonstrates that it has sufficient national support from the Pentecostal-Charismatic members through its influential regional and national leaders.

Pro-BOSA churches

Although an ordained pastor (Mzondi, 2021, p. 87), Mmusi Maimane is not addressed as Reverend or Pastor since he assumed the national leadership of his former political party, the Democratic Alliance (DA). Unlike the Rev. Kenneth Meshoe, who largely focuses on the Pentecostal-Charismatic constituency, Maimane uses his former party's approach and experience to appeal to a broader constituency. He aims to apply "the principle of ground-up, grassroots decision-making" (Makinana, 2024). However, it cannot be outrightly said that pro-BOSA Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches do not exist. It is safe to assume that a small percentage exists, given his religious background and political career.

After resigning from the DA, Maimane embarked on a national consultative drive to engage like-minded individuals who supported his political vision. Some of these supporters, including a few Pentecostal-Charismatic church leaders, campaigned in the previous 2021 municipal elections as independent candidates under the banners of One SA (OSA) and the Independent Candidate Association of South Africa (ICA) (Letshwiti-Jones, 2021). Prior to these developments, an NGO called the New Nation Movement (NNM) had approached the Constitutional Court to rule on the constitutionality of individuals standing for local and national elections. The court ruled it unconstitutional to forbid individuals from campaigning in municipal and national elections (Mabuza, 2020).

As an astute politician, earlier in 2024, Mmusi Maimane demonstrated that he has not only focused on the narrow Pentecostal-Charismatic constituency but has broadened his political base. He managed to convince seven organisations to join BOSA, the party he launched in 2022, as alliance partners under the BOSA banner (Cape Town Press Club, 2024; Makinana, 2024). He follows Jacob Zuma's approach of convincing disgruntled community members and organisations to form an alliance representing their diverse aspirations because:

We recognised no one party can stand alone and represent the will of many vastly diverse communities across the country in parliament. Rather it will take smaller groupings of citizens who are community-based, and community biased, to all coalesce under one umbrella body (Makinana, 2024)

LANGALIBALELE DUBE'S LEADERSHIP AND ATTRIBUTES IN THE LEADERSHIP OF THE ANC, MK PARTY, ACDP, AND BOSA

As observed in Mzondi (2021), Frank Chikane, Kenneth Meshoe, and Mmusi Maimane display a non-dichotomous worldview by not separating faith from politics and by practicing the other leadership values of John Langalibalele Dube, such as *seriti/isithunzi* (moral force), prophetic voice, placing the interests of the community at heart, and servant leadership.

Two observations flow from the above sections. First, the leaders of the ANC, ACDP, MK Party, and BOSA exhibit the non-dichotomous worldview of integrating faith and politics. Senior ANC leaders and Jacob Zuma, an honorary pastor, attended services of Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches. Kenneth Meshoe and other leaders are pastors of Pentecostal churches. Meanwhile, Mmusi Maimane, although primarily an ordained pastor, leads a new political party as he did before.

A second observation is that in their pre-election drive, the senior leaders of the ANC aimed to appeal to Pentecostal-Charismatic voters and the broader nation by highlighting their achievements over the past thirty years. They also acknowledged their shortcomings and the disappointment they caused the nation. In doing so, they indirectly reflect some of the leadership values of Langalibalele Dube of displaying *seriti/isithunzi*. As the governing party, they are not a prophetic voice addressing the government but addressing the nation.

In contrast, Kenneth Meshoe, Mmusi Maimane, and Jacob Zuma also display *seriti/isithunzi* as they aimed at the ANC by pointing out its failures. Kenneth Meshoe and Mmusi Maimane strive to display the leadership values of Langalibalele Dube to Pentecostal-Charismatic voters. Meshoe promotes a biblical worldview that incorporates godly governance in the ACDP manifesto, while Maimane seeks to bring together diverse disgruntled citizens under the banner of his party to effect change and transformation in the country.

In his visits to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches, Jacob Zuma did not disappoint. He also indirectly displays the leadership values of Langalibalele Dube to the church members and the broader nation of disgruntled ANC members by addressing issues affecting them, such as poverty, unemployment, lack of housing, and moral issues like alcohol and drug abuse, while restoring the role of traditional leaders.

Consequently, the leaders of the ANC, ACDP, BOSA, and MK Party correctly display the non-dichotomous worldview of Ubuntu. In their efforts to attract voters from Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches, they implicitly display the leadership values of Langalibalele Dube, namely, placing the interests of the community at heart and being a prophetic voice challenging the governing party, the ANC.

THE VIEW THAT PENTECOSTALS SUPPORT JACOB ZUMA

It was previously argued that Pentecostals and Charismatics blindly followed Jacob Zuma without reflecting on his ethical behaviour (van Wyk, 2019). This notion stemmed from a section of

Pentecostal-Charismatic church leaders who were part of the faction within the ANC, Cosatu, and civil organisations that embraced the narrative that Jacob Zuma was mistreated or persecuted, as expressed by some of his ardent followers, from the era of Thabo Mbeki to during and after his tenure as president of the ANC and the country.

However, things began to change when Jacob Zuma publicly announced on December 16, 2023, that he would not vote for the ANC but for a new party, the uMkhonto weSizwe Party.

These political developments led some from the group of Pentecostal-Charismatic church leaders, who had ordained him as an honorary pastor, to publicly support his political move and endorse the MK Party. They also allowed him to deliver keynote addresses in some of their churches, as discussed above. Unfortunately for them, a few days before the national elections, the Constitutional Court ruled that he was not eligible to be a member of parliament. Jacob Zuma was the chief driver in all the campaigns of the MK Party.

Clearly, the above political developments show a different phenomenon associated with Jacob Zuma. Some sections of Pentecostal-Charismatic church leaders are associated with the MK Party. Some sections of Pentecostal-Charismatic church leaders are associated with the ANC, some with the ACDP, and some are indirectly associated with BOSA. These associations indicate a dynamic shift in South African politics (see Masuku, 2024), namely, African Pentecostal-Charismatics in South Africa are evolving from being apolitical, as previously discussed, to embracing a non-dichotomous Ubuntu worldview. This shift is evident in the works and activities of Langalibalele Dube, the first president of the ANC, and his predecessors among traditional and religious leaders (Mzondi, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The 2024 national elections have demonstrated a new political phenomenon as political leaders of the ANC, ACDP, MK Party, and, implicitly, BOSA targeted the votes of African Pentecostals and Charismatics. This development represents a political shift among African Pentecostals and Charismatics in South Africa, a group of believers previously critiqued for being apolitical and, in some sections, for blindly supporting Jacob Zuma. The latter section is now associated with a new political party, the MK Party, with Jacob Zuma as its sole campaigner to attract Pentecostals and Charismatics to be part of its constituency.

On the other hand, the leadership of the ANC and ACDP also devoted efforts to attract Pentecostals and Charismatics as part of their constituencies during the national elections. The ACDP largely draws its support from African Pentecostals and Charismatics. Contrary to the ACDP, the leader of BOSA opted to engage several groupings to build a broad constituency by convincing them to campaign under the banner of BOSA, a move that indirectly also targets African Pentecostals and Charismatics.

Thus, it is evident that African Pentecostals and Charismatics have shifted from being apolitical and are now an envied constituency

that the ANC, ACDP, MK Party, and BOSA consider significant. This refutes the claim that all African Pentecostals and Charismatics support Jacob Zuma, regardless of his questionable ethics.

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