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978-0-521-76509-1 - Framing the Race in South Africa: The Political Origins of Racial-Census Elections

Karen E. Ferree

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Framing the Race in South Africa

The Political Origins of Racial-Census Elections

Post-apartheid South African elections have borne an unmistakable racial imprint: Africans vote for one set of parties, whites support a different set of parties, and, with few exceptions, there is no cross-over voting between groups. These voting tendencies have solidified the dominance of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) over South African politics and turned South African elections into “racial censuses.” This book explores the political sources of these outcomes. It argues that although the beginnings of racialized election outcomes lie in South Africa’s past, in the effects apartheid had on voters’ beliefs about race and destiny and the reputations parties forged during this period, their endurance reflects the ruling party’s ability to use the powers of office to prevent the opposition from evolving away from its apartheid-era party label. By keeping key opposition parties “white,” the ANC has rendered them powerless, solidifying its hold on power in spite of an increasingly restive and dissatisfied electorate. The ruling party’s ability to frame the opposition’s image in the electorate thus lies at the heart of both its continued dominance and the persistence of racial-census elections in South Africa.

Karen E. Ferree is an associate professor of political science at the University of California, San Diego. She has traveled extensively in Africa, particularly South Africa. Her research focuses on elections in Africa’s new and consolidating democracies, and she has published research articles in a variety of journals, including *American Political Science Review*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, and *Political Analysis*.

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*For my mother, Betty, and for Bari,
with love and gratitude*

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Acknowledgments

Over the course of writing this book, I have benefited from the intellectual, logistical, emotional, and financial support of many individuals, communities, and institutions. My gratitude for these gifts is immeasurable, as I hope the following remarks will express.

I began this book as a dissertation in the Government Department of Harvard University. When I started at Harvard, I intended to study international monetary institutions. By the end of my first year, I had jumped into the deep end of African politics, a decision that reflects, in part, the unique group of scholars and students collected at Harvard at that time. I thank Jennifer Widner for kindling my interest in Africa and Robert Putnam for encouraging my intellectual curiosity. Jim Alt, Ken Shepsle, and Gary King asked difficult questions and gave me the tools and freedom to answer them. Robert Rotberg and the late Leroy Vail introduced me to the history and politics of South Africa and provided useful practical advice regarding my first trip to the country in 1997. Robert Bates, to whom I owe so much, was a generous patron and a patient mentor. When I told him of my interest in ethnic politics, he told me to read *The Reasoning Voter*. When I talked to him about South African elections, he pushed me to think about Mexico. Thus began the journey that ended in this book. I also benefited from a truly extraordinary community of graduate students: Kanchan Chandra, Eric Dickson, Anna Grzymala-Busse, Shigeo Hirano, Macartan Humphries, Orit Kedar, Dan Posner, Ken Scheve, Naunihal Singh, Smita Singh, Jeremy Weinstein, and Steven Wilkinson (to name just a few). I had to run hard to keep up with them – and still do! A special thanks to Smita, for being a lively and fascinating friend, and to Ken, for his early enthusiasm for this project.

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