



SOUTH AFRICA'S NEW GOVERNMENT: Progress with limitations

President Ramaphosa and the African National Congress won the National Elections with a majority of 57%. Despite this win Ramaphosa had to make compromises with the internal opposition when composing his cabinet. He managed to keep loyal and competent ministers in the economic cluster and important sectors of government. Now he can prove that he is able to revive the economy.

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The African National Congress (ANC) won the sixth National Elections on May 8th with 57.5% of the votes. This constitutes a decline from the national elections of 2014 (62.2%) but an improvement to the Local Government Elections in 2016 when the ANC got 54.5%. President Cyril Ramaphosa could stop the downward trend which started under the second term of President Zuma and which led to the poor result in 2016.

The following months will show whether President Ramaphosa is indeed in control of his party. The expectation was that a win with over 60% of the votes would strengthen his position as the leading figure that saved the ANC. But, on the other hand, the actual win with 57% seems to be much better for the upcoming power play. The narrow win will ensure that his opponents in the party stay in line. The first warning shot against him came from the Secretary General of the ANC, Ace Magashule, who said that the victory of the ANC was because of branches, volunteers and organisations and “it was not about any individual”.

The constitution gives Ramaphosa the prerogative to appoint the cabinet, but in reality he has to consult the party and the other two partners in the alliance, the trade unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP); and in doing so he has to aim at a balance between the different factions in the party, at a fair regional representation and at gender equality.

Ramaphosa’s difficult position became obvious when the list of candidates of the ANC for the national parliament was made public. South Africa has a nation-wide proportional electoral system and the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the ANC decides on this list. The list includes, beside former President Zuma, a number of persons who were obviously involved in corruption and were part of a supporting network of the Indian Gupta family. The Secretary General himself, Ace Magashule, is a questionable leader. Investigative journalist Peter-Louis Myburgh published a book called “Gangster State” before the elections in which he described how Magashule as Premier of the North West Province was at the centre and in control of wide reaching corruption and patronage networks. After Ramaphosa he is number two on the election list of the ANC. The list had been given to the Integrity Committee (IC) of the ANC to check on the suitability of the candidates. No removals were made. The NEC declared that the involvement in corruption is alleged and as long as there is no conviction by a court of law the party does not see any reason to exclude candidates.

After the elections it was leaked to the media that the IC had indeed recommended the removal of 23 MP candidates among them Deputy President David Mabuza. The New York Times had written a critical report about his involvement in controversial deals during his time as Premier of the Mpumalanga Region. He refused to be sworn in as MP, was then cleared by the IC (without a public statement from the ANC about the reasons) and finally again became Deputy President in Ramaphosa’s cabinet. Mabuza was a key supporter of the Zuma faction but is now considered to be a traitor by them because at the elective conference of the ANC at the end of 2017 he allowed provincial delegates to vote as they pleased and thus made it possible for Ramaphosa to become president of the ANC. He now seems to be politically isolated.

An indication of the difficulties in forming the new cabinet is the fact that, unprecedentedly, the announcement of its composition only took place five days after Ramaphosa's inauguration. The cabinet is obviously the result of last minute compromises. By his own standards President Ramaphosa wants a capable, efficient and ethical government. In order to expand his patronage network former President Zuma had bloated the cabinet to 36 ministries and it was expected that Ramaphosa would significantly reduced its size. He trimmed the cabinet to 28 ministries but still kept 34 deputy ministers, only three fewer than under Zuma. Not quite the expected cut. Obviously he had to give in to lobby groups, had to secure his own support group and still had to satisfy the Zuma faction.

Only five ministers are linked to the Zuma faction, one of them, Nkozasana Dlamini-Zuma, is probably no longer aligned to it. None of them are considered within government as senior positions. At least twelve of the deputy ministers are thought to belong to the Zuma camp. But deputy members are not members of the cabinet and have no say over what the cabinet decides.

In the economic cluster, Ramaphosa maintained Tito Mboweni as Finance Minister and Pravin Gordhan in charge of Public Enterprises. The loss making state owned enterprises among them the energy supplier ESKOM with a debt soon reaching 500 billion Rand (32 billion Euros) are the largest threat to the economy. The retention of Gordhan, who had started to clean up the public enterprises, cannot be over-emphasised. He had been the target of a smear campaign from inside the ANC and the EFF (Economic Freedom Fighters) indicating that he successfully had cut into corruption. Moody's, the only major rating agency that still has the country's sovereign debt above junk status, warned that the country was fast slipping into that status as continued structural weakness and rising debts overtake the country's ability to service its obligations.

Former Finance Minister Malusi Gigaba who was closely associated with the Gupta family resigned voluntarily as MP. And the powerful leader of the ANC Women's League and former Minister of Social Affairs, Bathabile Dlamini, who is described as incompetent and who had lied under oath, was not re-appointed to a cabinet position. The league quietly accepted Ramaphosa's decision.

A surprise appointment as Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, from outside the ANC, is that of Patricia De Lille, the former DA (Democratic Alliance) supported Mayor of Cape Town who founded her own party, GOOD, which won two seats in parliament. The appointment is clearly aimed at the DA in the Western Province and as a move to gain more support from the coloured community. In her ministry she is also in charge of clearing government owned land for housing development in cities like Cape Town. Through actions in this field she could enhance the positive image of the ANC in a DA controlled province like the Western Cape.

The largest opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA) could not profit from the ongoing revelations in various commissions about corruption and state capture during the time of President Zuma and his Deputy Ramaphosa. In 2016, on the height of Zuma's scandals the DA managed to get 27% support. This time its support fell back to 20.77%. This result shows

that the party could not make significant inroads into the black electorate. Despite its black leader Mmusi Maimane it still remains mainly the party of whites, coloureds and Indians (these groups roughly constitute 20% of the population). Infighting and the continued prevailing image of being the party of the whites prevented blacks who are disillusioned about the policy of the ANC from voting for the largest opposition.

The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) made further progress. From 6.4% in 2014 to 8.2% in 2016 the party made it over the 10% mark to 10.79%. Strategically clever the party supported DA minority rule since the elections in 2016 in three larger Municipalities: Johannesburg, Pretoria (Tshwane), and East London (Nelson Mandela Bay). The ANC was made to feel the power of the EFF while the EFF was not bound by responsibilities in a coalition government. Its radical and populist slogans for expropriation without compensation and nationalisation of white companies attracted larger parts of the black population which felt that they had not benefitted from the political changes since 1994.

2019 National and Local Government Election Results in Comparison

| Party | National Parliam. 2009 | Local Governm. 2011 | National Parliam. 2014 | Local Governm. 2016 | National Parliam. 2019 | National Parliam. 2019 seats |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| ANC, African National Congress | 65.9% | 63.7% | 62.2% | 54.5% | 57.5% | 230 |
| DA, Democratic Alliance | 16.6% | 22.0% | 22.2% | 27.0% | 20.77% | 84 |
| EFF, Economic Freedom Fighters | | | 6.4% | 8.2% | 10.79% | 44 |
| IFP, Inkatha Freedom Party | 4.6% | 3.9% | 2.4% | 4.3% | 3.38% | 14 |
| FF+, Freedom Front Plus | | | 0.9% | 0.8% | 2.38% | 10 |
| 9 smaller parties | | | | | | 18 |
| Total | | | | | | 400 |

Another surprise was the gains of the Freedom Front Plus (FF+) with 2.38%. While the EFF got established on the left of the ANC the FF+ attracts voters on the right of the DA. The FF+'s policy centres on the idea of a "volksstaat" or autonomous region within South Africa with a high level of community autonomy, especially cultural self-determination. It is the party of the "Afrikaner"¹. Its supporters felt betrayed by former President FW de Klerk when he created together with Nelson Mandela the new South Africa. They are against black economic empowerment and affirmative action in employment. Most of their new voters previously supported the DA.

Without the Zulu Zuma on the top of its list the ANC is less attractive for voters in Kwa-Zulu Natal. The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) regained lost ground against the ANC and will send 14 members (3.38%) into the National Parliament. The IFP was the strongest party in KZN from 1994 to 2004 and could nominate the Prime Ministers.

¹ Descendants from predominantly Dutch settlers, and previously largely the supporters of the Nationalist – apartheid - Party

The South African population also decided on the composition of the parliaments in the nine provinces. The DA maintained its majority in the Western Cape with 55.45% of the votes. This is not surprising because this province has the highest numbers of coloureds and whites who traditionally tend not to vote for the ANC, which only reached 28.63%. As after the elections in 2014 the ANC will form the provincial governments in the other 8 provinces. The EFF is now the second strongest party in three provinces: Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West.

Particular attention was given to the results in Gauteng with its administrative centre Pretoria and economic hub Johannesburg. Here live and work most people who belong to the new black middle class. The first significant difference to other provinces is that the voter registration only reached 67.1%, the lowest in the country. The ANC had feared that it could lose the majority in Gauteng, besides the Western Cape. But the ANC just made it with 50.19% of the votes. The DA reached a disappointing 27.45 %. The black middle class is still battling to find a home. As a measure of protest against the ANC they either do not vote at all or they support the EFF. The EFF, a party relying on cheap populist rhetoric made it well over its national average to 14.69% in this province with the highest level of education.

2019 Provincial Election Results in %

| Party | Eastern Cape | Free State | Gauteng | KZN | Limpopo | Mpumalanga | North West | Northern Cape | Western Cape |
|--------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------|------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| ANC | 68.74 | 61.14 | 50.19 | 54.22 | 75.49 | 70.58 | 61.87 | 57.54 | 28.63 |
| DA | 15.73 | 17,58 | 27.45 | 13.90 | 5.4 | 9.77 | 11.18 | 25.51 | 55.45 |
| EFF | 7.84 | 12.58 | 14.69 | 9.71 | 14.43 | 12.79 | 18.64 | 9.71 | 4.04 |
| IFP | | | | 16.34 | | 0.31 | | | |
| FF+ | 0.58 | 3.69 | 3.65 | 0.31 | 1.42 | 2.43 | 4.32 | 2.68 | 1.56 |

The elections in South Africa were free and fair. This is positive and is not the rule in many other countries on the African continent. But the democratic system is under pressure because more and more voters are discouraged and do not believe any more that their vote would make a difference. Voter's participation is on the decline. The enthusiasm of 1994, which was still there in 1999 when nearly 90% of registered voters went to the polls, has vanished. Nearly 25% of eligible voters did not register and of those who registered only 66% went to the polling stations. This is an actual participation rate of just under 50%. A further warning signal for the survival of democracy is the fact that only 18.5% of first time voters registered. In depth interviews with young unemployed confirms their frustrations with those in power: "they don't care about us and voting would not change anything". The unemployment rate among young people is over 50%. A huge potential for radicalisation and even for a violent opposition is growing.

South African elections were again – and not surprisingly – dominated by race. South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world and the income stratification reflects the racial composition of the country. The side by side existence of affluent white suburbs with overcrowded black low-cost housing areas and townships is a constant reminder of the deficits in the South African society. Many believe that the ANC could have done a better job

during 25 years of government. Especially the “Zuma years” are considered “a lost time”. However, the ANC was not punished because larger parts of the black population are still bound emotionally to the ANC as the party of liberation and still vote for the ANC despite the obvious corruption and nepotism. But this may change. The protest votes of the new black middle class for the EFF in Gauteng and their absence from voting as well as the widespread refusal to vote among the young population are not only a threat to the ANC but also to democracy itself in South Africa.

The changes in Ramaphosa’s new cabinet were not as extensive as expected. The cabinet is the result of tough behind-the-scenes negotiations but it has the potential to reverse the results of the poor administration under the leadership of former President Zuma, especially in the economic sector. Ramaphosa himself indirectly admitted its limitations when announcing the cabinet. He described the reduction of ministries as “a significant move to downscale the state” but only as a start to an ultimately envisioned size of the government. The “master of the long game”², Ramaphosa, has further expanded his control over the party and his opponents have to realize that they are not strong enough anymore to reverse this. Now he can prove that he is able to revive the economy.

² Arnold Wehmhoerner: *South Africa’s new President Cyril Ramaphosa – Master of the long game*, www.feps-europe.eu