



ANC's BIG FALL FROM GRACE IS A WAKE-UP CALL TO AFRICA'S REGIONAL POWERS ¹

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Africa is shell-shocked after South Africa's long governing and liberation party, African National Congress (ANC), lost its parliamentary majority in the May 29, 2024 election. The mainly white-led Democratic Alliance (DA) has a real chance to cobble a rival coalition that can push the former liberation party into the opposition or hew a unity government to co-govern with the anti-apartheid party facing an existential challenge from its former compatriots.

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The ANC has fallen a dangerous mix of elite fragmentation, the strident rise of ethnic populism and the collapse of the nationalist consensus in Africa's most industrialized country and \$400 billion economic powerhouse. ANC's fall from grace casts a dark shadow over other regional powers like Kenya.

In the 2024 elections, the ANC has received only 40.18 percent, (6.46million votes) which translates to 159 seats in parliament. The Democratic Alliance (DA), the main opposition party, which received the second-highest number of votes (21.81 percent) 3.5 million votes followed by the MK party (14.58 percent) 2.34 million votes, and EFF (9.52 percent), 1.53 million votes. Because it needs 201 seats to form a government, it has to clinch a deal for a negotiated coalition to govern.

But it is not just the ANC that has lost its shine and appeal in the eyes of the voters but also South Africa's democracy. While the electoral commission registered a record 27.7 million voters, only 16.2 million votes (58.64 percent) turned out to cast their ballot. Experts have described the lowest ever voter turnout in South Africa's 30-year democratic history as a "massive bloodbath."

Two phases of ANC's history are discernible. The first is the age of 'promises kept'. As with other liberation parties, the first decade (1994-2004) was the 'era of the beautiful bride' for both ANC and democracy. The economy and standard of

living grew under Nelson Mandela (1994-1999) and Thabo Mbeki (1999-2008). Corruption, abuse of power and mis-governance were kept to their minimum. The voters rewarded the party and its leaders accordingly. It won 62.5 percent of the vote in 1994, 66.4 percent in 1999, and clinched almost 70 percent of the vote – its highest ever.

The second phase is the age of 'promises broken'. From there it was a steady decline. The party became stained with corruption and poor governance. And angry voters punished it in the subsequent elections. The party's victory margin declined from nearly 66 percent of the votes in 2009 to 62 percent in 2014 and to 57.5 percent in 2019, the lowest ever. Correspondingly, voter turnout stood at 86.87 percent in 1994, reaching its peak with 89.30 percent in 1999. From there, it steadily declined from a high of 77.76 percent in 2004, 77.30 percent in 2009, 73.48 percent in 2014 to 66.05 percent in 2019.

In the age of 'promises broken' (2008-2024), the ANC tragically failed to convert the gains of democracy into sustained and shared economic prosperity, especially for the poor black majority. This era has been marred by corruption, gross mismanagement of state affairs, state capture, crumbling infrastructure, stunted growth, power cuts, poor handling of COVID 19, pervasive poverty and highest unemployment. In the apt words of Professor Jeffrey Sachs, South

Africa had become a tale of two countries living side by side: one black and poor, the other white and rich. South Africa became has been described as the most unequal countries in the world, with race playing a determining factor in a society where 10 percent of the population owns more than 80 percent of the wealth. The most recent data indicates that South Africa has the highest income inequality in the world, with a Gini coefficient of around 0.67 (with coefficient as any values between 0 to 1, and zero signifying a perfectly equal distribution of wealth within a population).

The ANC has been its own worst enemy. Failure of the ANC to resolve conflict and broker the unity of its elite, leading to the collapse of nationalist consensus, elite fragmentation and proliferation break-away parties that have sealed the fate of the ANC. It has also fallen to titanic power struggle between its top leaders, first between Mbeki and his deputy, Jacob Zuma and then between Zuma and his deputy Cyril Ramaphosa. After Mbeki was humiliatingly removed from office in 2008, his sympathizers formed the breakaway Congress of the People (COPE). Ramaphosa, whose wealth is estimated at over \$450 million 2018 when he became president, expelled Julius Malema from the ANC who proceeded to form the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in 2013, which has been the third-largest party in parliament and now fourth.

The Zuma-Ramaphosa feud took a dangerous turn in 2021 with the eruption of Pro-zuma riots in KwaZulu-Natal and the economic heartland of Gauteng after Zuma was imprisoned for 15 months for contempt of court after refusing to co-operate with an inquiry into wide-spread corruption during his time in office. At least 350 people died, more than 150,000 jobs were estimated to have been lost and more than 200 shopping malls were looted in the worst to hit South Africa since apartheid ended in 1994.

September 2023, Zuma formed the Umkhonto weZizwe (MK) Party. He said he joined MK because he was unable to vote within the ANC. MK signifies the surge of ethnic populism to haunt South Africa's nationalist project. Ideologically, it is a radical left-wing populist party championing the nationalism and interests of Zulu nation, South Africa's largest ethnic group estimated at 13.5 million people or 23% of the country's 59.89 million people. The Zuma-Ramaphosa feud will continue to haunt the ANC for generations to come.

Smooth transition of power and continuity of governance after elections is the cornerstone of South Africa's democracy. Two or so weeks after the 2024 election, the 400 seats in South Africa's National Assembly will be allocated to parties based on the election results, parliament will hold its first sitting to swear members and elect the speaker; soon after the National Assembly will elect the

president from the largest party or coalition of parties who will, in turn, form the government, including the appointment of ministers.

Jacob Zuma is the great disrupter in the 2024 elections. But according to the Constitutional Court, he is 'not eligible' to run for parliament over the 2021 contempt of court conviction. However, he will be one of the most influential figures in the negotiations for new coalitions. In the next fortnight, South Africa will be gripped in high-stakes business of coalition building, a totally new game in town. The results of the 2024 parliamentary elections thrown up four possible coalition scenarios.

First, the ANC has the option, albeit most unlikely, to form the government with the main opposition party (DA) comprising of a total of 246 seats. But this will run straight into the headwinds of ideological divisions within the ANC. President Ramaphosa the economic moderates in the ANC might favor this route. But the party's chances are slim owing to fierce opposition of such an alliance from the more radical ANC camp.

The second option is to negotiate for an ANC-led coalition with the MK and EFF with a total strength of 256 seats. The EFF and MK make perfect coalition partners for ANC because they are founded on the ANC policies. But both Jacob Zuma and Julius Malema blame Ramaphosa for pushing them out of the ruling party. MK

has already ruled out coalition with ANC as long as Ramaphosa is at the helm of the party. Only tough negotiations can clinch a coalition deal.

Third, with the DA and Jacob Zuma's MK out of the equation, the only other option is an ANC coalition with Malema's EFF, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the Patriotic Alliance (PA) with a total of 224 seats. The hard bargaining here will be with the EFF whose radical policies runs against the ANC's conservative wing.

However, the ANC's worst nightmare is the real possibility of the white liberals and federalists leading the Democratic Alliance (87) clinching a coalition deal with MK (58), EFF (39), IFP (17) and PA (9) with a combined strength of 210 seats. For the first time since the end of apartheid in 1994, the ANC will be kicked out of government into the opposition.

The tragic fall of the ANC is a wake-up call for other regional powers like Kenya and Nigeria where resurgence of radical ethnic populism and disintegration of elite consensus and infighting haunts ruling coalitions.

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