

SOUTH AFRICA AFTER THE ELECTIONS

Werner Böhler / Julia Weber

The ruling ANC party once again emerged victorious from South Africa's fourth democratic elections which were held on April 22 of this year. Having won 65.9 percent of the vote, it missed the two-thirds majority in parliament by a very narrow margin. Its top candidate, the not-uncontroversial Jacob Zuma, had already been talking of the break of a new 'era of hope' for all Africans. On May 9, he will be sworn in as the country's fourth president. The Democratic Alliance (DA) and the newly-founded Congress of the People (COPE) logged 16.66 and 7.42 of the vote, respectively. The opposition parties IFP, ID, UDM, FF+, Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, Azanian People's Organization, Minority Front and African People's Convention remained insignificant.

All in all, the result of the poll is a great success for the outgoing and incoming government party, especially because the results of the election were similar at the provincial and national level. The only exception is the Western Cape province where the DA won and the ANC received no more than 31.55 percent of the vote. Because of the 'Zuma factor' the ANC scored its greatest gains in Kwa-Zulu/Natal, Zuma's home province, where the downward trend that was feared after the spin-off of COPE from the ANC failed to materialize.

Led by Helen Zille, the DA is the only opposition party which succeeded in conquering one of the country's nine provinces, Western Cape, where it won 51.46 percent. Alluding to the ANC's motto, 'a better life for all', the doughty Mrs Zille had promised that life would be better for all with the DA. Although it failed to meet its own aspirations, the COPE as a newly-founded spin-off from the ANC may still be proud of its 7.41-percent share. Founded no more than three months ago, the party was hampered by internal conflicts, a lack of financial support, and the fact that it was not joined by prominent defectors from the ANC. All in all, the ANC's unmistakable victory and the performance of the opposition appear to confirm the trend in South Africa's party landscape towards the formation of a system of dominance featuring one or two opposition parties.

The losers include the IFP under Prince Buthelezi, which slumped to 22.40 percent even in its core province of Kwa-Zulu/Natal, as well as the ID, UDM, FF+, PAC, and ACDP, which all remained below the 5-percent mark. Moreover, nearly all of them lost votes to the newly-established COPE.

Apart from tragic isolated cases like the murder of the COPE politician Gerald Yona in Port Elizabeth, there was no outbreak of violence in the run-up to the elections in which expatriate South Africans were allowed to vote for the first

time after 1994. Observer groups sent by the SADC and the AU called the elections free, fair, transparent, and credible. In point of fact, there is hardly anything to criticize about the organization and implementation of the elections although the ANC's influence could be felt everywhere. Thus, the presence of ANC sentinels in the vicinity of nearly all polling stations was criticized as much as the distribution of 'government' food packages by ANC representatives. There was also talk of massive pressure being exercised on the rural population to vote for the ruling party, which doubtlessly handled the election campaign very well. Barbecue and street parties formed part of the ANC propaganda kit, as did showy appearances of its top candidate, Mr Zuma, in football stadiums.

The election campaign itself is probably the most expensive in South Africa's history. All in all, the parties are supposed to have spent 400 million Rand, half of which is accounted for by the ruling party. And indeed, Mr Zuma travelled the length and breadth of the country for weeks in a private jet, Mrs Zille chartered a plane bearing the logo 'vote to win' for the last few weeks, and the IFP leader, Mr Buthelezi, went around by car and plane without a break to spread his message. Mr Zuma's portrait hung from every lantern post, and it was only a week before the elections that the papers reported that some of these posters were put up in defiance of applicable laws. The ANC appeared to be getting into really hot water when the COPE began to lead in the media at the turn of 2008/2009. Once the subsequent wave of euphoria was over, however, internal squabbles over leadership paralyzed the newly-founded party, giving the ANC an opportunity to crank up its campaign machine. From then on, nothing could harm the ANC, not even negative headlines about the premature release from prison of Mr Shaik, Mr Zuma's financial advisor who had been convicted of corruption, or the dropping of the charges of 'political interference' against Mr Zuma himself. Events were increasingly dominated by the candidate of the ruling party, particularly when the DA allowed itself to be embroiled in the discussion about his person and increasingly lost its own profile in the process.

While Mr Zuma's biography is no model CV, he was the right man for the ANC. Although lacking Nelson Mandela's charisma, the ANC leader appealed to the masses, which he still does, despite having been accused of rape and variously charged with corruption, fraud, and tax evasion. While Thabo Mbeki repelled the people by his arrogance and technocratic propensities, Jacob Zuma promised simple solutions. He reached out to the people and lent them his ear. And even in Zululand, the IFP stronghold, the '100-percent Zulu boy' caught the people's imagination, winning 48 percent. He was able to carry the people along with him and give them hope.

The noisy arrival of Jacob Zuma is as striking as the noiseless departure of his predecessor Kgalema Motlante. A caretaker president from the start, the

successor of Mr Mbeki did not make any important decisions or implement any change of course in his seven months in office. Questions arise: does the ANC still stand for the ambition to reconcile that was once embodied by Nelson Mandela? Was not the party constrained to compromise by the need to adapt to new global conditions and the changes caused by them in the situation of South Africa itself? Under the ANC, the borderlines between the state and the party became blurred, and power was concentrated in the hands of a few. Mr Zuma will probably maintain continuity for the time being, especially in economic, financial, and foreign policy. At the same time, a turnaround is beginning to emerge in HIV/AIDS policy. Yet other fundamental problems remain. The culture of democracy will have to be consolidated in South Africa, which implies strengthening the institutions of the state and, by the same token, curtailing the party's influence on them. The objective is to rebuild confidence in democracy, the political process, and the legal system as such.

For one thing, South Africa's legal system appears to be under a cloud. In connection with the diverse charges against Mr Zuma who was the party's candidate at the time, some of the leading minds of the ANC said that the judges of the constitutional court were counter-revolutionaries and challenged the status of the court. Further causes for concern include the premature discharge of the former Chief Whip of the ANC, Tony Yengeni, who had been sentenced to four years in prison for corruption; the candidacy of the Winni Madikizela-Mandela after her court conviction; and the affair about fraudulent travelling expenses in parliament. A multitude of corruption cases has breathed life into the image of a 'culture of corruption', assisted by the fact that proceedings against Mr Zuma were dropped after he had been charged with 16 counts of corruption, bribery, and money laundering.

Another obvious problem is the long-consolidated closeness between the party and the state which manifests itself in numerous constitutional and ordinary-law bills, such as the controversial project of a 'single public service bill' or the proposal to change the 'three sphere system'. Thanks to its dominance, the ANC is still in a position to blend the interests of the state with those of the party.

The electoral system is similarly open to criticism, and it has already been suggested that it should be reformed. Although there is no percentage hurdle to debar parties from parliament, minor parties are disadvantaged. The ruling party, on the other hand, enjoys the advantage of having prominent members as well as the financial and structural resources required to reach the electorate.

Party funding is another field in which there is a need to change the rules. In 2003, a case failed that had been brought in court against the five biggest

parties to force them to disclose their finances. It was only the growing intensity of public criticism that induced a change in the climate of opinion, so that a few corporations recently disclosed their donations to political parties. To realize fair competition in South Africa's party system, an important – though not the only – step would be to create a transparent set of rules for party funding.

After the recent elections, the balance of power between the parties shifted slightly but did not change fundamentally. As before, the dominant ruling party is backed by two thirds and the opposition parties by one third of the electorate. Given the deficits of the opposition parties and the absence of a substantial programmatical debate, this is hardly amazing. It is not only the parties themselves that must learn from the elections results. Civil society, too, has a problem to solve – how to regain its critical detachment from power. Only if it recovers this detachment will it be able to compensate the parties' deficits, exercise its controlling function, and advance the process of peaceful transformation that began in 1994.

Quo vadis, South Africa? The foundation of the COPE raised spirits high, mobilization was evident everywhere in the runup phase, and the number of entries in the electoral rolls reached a record peak. Yet the turnout remained constant in the end, as did the number of people who are willing to emigrate. All this should make South Africa's responsible politicians sit up and take notice. They are now called upon to change the living conditions in their country so that no more South Africans feel compelled to turn their backs on their homeland.

IN: *Auslandsinformationen* 4/2009, ISSN 0177-7521, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V., Berlin, p.123-127