

May 2019

# country report

KAS South Africa

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## South Africa has voted: ANC loses support – Ramaphosa does not

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Despite a significant loss in votes, the African National Congress (ANC) is the clear winner of the 8 May national and provincial elections. President Ramaphosa receives a five-year mandate to pull the country out its economic doldrums. The next months will show whether the 57.5% of votes cast in favour of the ANC grant Ramaphosa enough power to marginalize his party opponents, many of which have an undesirable and corrupt reputation even within their own party. With regards to opposition parties, the radical left-wing Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) managed to win over many of the lost ANC voters, while electoral support for the liberal Democratic Alliance (DA) slightly declined for the first time. A low voter turnout of only 66 percent can be read as an expression of voter dissatisfaction in both ruling and opposition parties. Over the longer term, the country will transition to coalition governments, as indicated by the election result in the economic heartland of Gauteng: here, the ANC scraped into a position of absolute majority by only the thinnest of margins.

*Henning Suhr, translation by Christiaan Endres*

The sixth national and provincial elections of South Africa failed to surprise. The ANC won 57.5 percent of votes and hence 230 of the 400 seats in the national parliament. As a consequence, the ANC leader, Cyril Ramaphosa, will rule the country for the next 5 years with a comfortable majority. Compared to the 2014 election results, the ANC lost 4.65 percent and continues its 15-year downward trajectory. That the perennially ruling party did

not lose more votes is almost certainly thanks to Ramaphosa, whose popularity extends beyond party lines. He was the right candidate for the ANC, given his ability to act as statesman on the global stage and yet be in tune with his grassroots supporters in the townships. In addition, he managed to distance himself from his predecessor Jacob Zuma and his corruption scandals. Voters accepted Ramaphosa's claims that he would fight corruption and embezzlement while re-building the integrity of state institutions. They will hold him to these promises in the next legislative period.

### Positive „Ramaphosa Effect“

The positive effect of Ramaphosa on the electoral fate of the ANC can be deduced from the fact that the ANC fared significantly better in the national than provincial ballot. Some voters expressed their support for a national government under Ramaphosa's leadership on the national ballot, while voting against the ANC provincially. Of ten million ANC voters, at least 640,000 split their vote in such a way. "Vote splitting" may indicate growing democratic maturity in the electorate, as it requires a thorough understanding of structure of the electoral system. Previous elections did not show such a scale of split voting.

#### Result of the national ballot

Party	Votes (number)	Vote share (%)	Change from 2014	Seats	Change from 2014
ANC	10.026.475	57,50%	- 4,65%	230	- 19
DA	3.621.188	20,77%	- 1,46%	84	- 5
EFF	1.881.521	10,79%	+ 4,44%	44	+ 19
IFP	588.839	3,38%	+ 0,98%	14	+ 4
VF PLUS	414.864	2,38%	+ 1,48%	10	+ 6
ACDP	146.262	0,84%	+ 0,27%	4	+ 1
UDM	78.030	0,45%	- 0,55%	2	- 2
ATM	76.830	0,44%	First election	2	First election
GOOD	70.408	0,40%	First election	2	First election
NFP	61.220	0,35%	- 1,22%	2	- 4
AIC	48.107	0,28%	- 0,25%	2	- 1
COPE	47.461	0,27%	- 0,40%	2	- 1
PAC	32.677	0,19%	- 0,02%	1	+/- 0
ALJAMA	31.468	0,18%	+ 0,04%	1	+ 1
Other parties	310.794	1,78%	- 0.94	0	+/- 0
TOTAL	17.436.144	100%	-	400	+/- 0

Source: Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), own presentation

The ANC result more or less met the median predictions of various opinion pollsters. A range of analysts and experts expected that a strong ANC result – at most, over 60% - would strengthen Ramaphosa's hand in his party and allow him to marginalize his opponents in the ANC. These are, as a rule, loyal to Ramaphosa's predecessor, Jacob Zuma. The Zuma-faction

has a reputation of corruption and a weak election result for the ANC would have emboldened them to pin the result on Ramaphosa. While a common claim, there is little evidence to suggest this. Undoubtedly, the party remains divided. But by and large, the party's leadership must be aware that they are stronger united. Ramaphosa will be in control of a large majority in parliament and therefore dominant in the ANC.

The business sector has also responded positively to the result. The local currency (the Rand) showed virtually no change in value despite being one of the most volatile currencies globally with great sensitivity to political occurrences. The business elites trust Ramaphosa to implement the necessary reforms to restart the economic motor, especially given that he is a wealthy businessman himself. But the time has now come to make good on the credit that has been extended to him. Busisve Mavuso, Chairman of the association Business Leadership South Africa, has demanded that Ramaphosa deliver on his promise to cut the size of his cabinet and restructure ESKOM, the state-owned electricity monopoly. "If he does not make the right decisions now, then we will be the latest in the line of African failed states", says Mavuso, whose association represents the 70 largest South African corporates.

The support of big business should not mislead one as to the character of the ANC electorate. Voters of this ex-liberation movement tend to be old, poor, black and predominantly rural. The ANC's biggest challenge is to connect with the young and urban vote.

So it comes as no surprise that the ANC experienced its worst result (read: greatest loss in support) in the most populous provinces of Gauteng, Western Cape and Kwazulu-Natal. These are the urban economic heartlands of South Africa, future-orientated in spirit, where voters feel less relation to the ANC and the liberation struggle against Apartheid. Should the ANC not be able to change this trend, then it will continue to decline in support and its absolute majority will be under threat come the next election in 2024.

### **Low voter turnout evidences frustration and disappointment**

The official voter turnout of approximately 66 percent was modest, despite the ANC's ongoing efforts to trumpet its achievements in birthing democracy and the associated universal franchise. Since only around three-quarters of eligible voters bothered registering to vote, this means that actual voter participation was circa 50 percent - a noticeably poorer message. Since the first election in 1994, a constant drop in electoral participation is evident.

Yet South Africans are definitely not a-political. Low turnout is mostly driven by the youth cohort. They feel no emotional connection to the ANC and its Apartheid struggles, nor do they see adequate alternatives.

The EFF attempted to fill this gap but remain unelectable to many voters due to their aggressive posturing and radical demands. Meanwhile, the DA has failed to shed its "white party" image, despite its many black leaders. Other parties are regarded by many voters as too radical or too small to be effective. In this assessment, many voters miss that in South Africa's representative system, small parties can exert disproportionate amounts of influence if a coalition government is formed.

## Has the DA hit its limits?

The big loser of this election is the Democratic Alliance (DA). For the first time in its history, it was unable to expand its share of the vote and dropped 1.5 percentage points to 20.8 percent. Two important factors may explain how it lost votes:

Firstly, internal strife brought much unrest to the party. Mostly this focused on the dispute with Cape Town's former mayor, Patricia de Lille, who was forced out of the party on charges of corruption. She founded a new party, called "GOOD", which successfully competed for some DA voters – especially in the "Coloured" vote of the Western Cape. In addition, the DA's dealings with the outgoing Prime Minister of the Western Cape Province, Helen Zille, were extremely unfortunate. Zille contributed to the party's confused messaging by posting polemical news about the colonial era via Twitter. Party chairman, Mmusi Maimane, was unfortunate and left voters puzzled when he reconsidered some of his decisions.

Secondly, the party pursued young, black, urban voters by approaching populist positions that were new to the DA. Most importantly, it stated support for the maintenance of the ANC-propagated Black Economic Empowerment policy (BEE), which prioritizes jobs for black South Africans. Previously, the DA argued against BEE. In the election campaign, its messaging dissolved to a state of ambiguity. Moreover, the DA's position on the issue of expropriation without compensation seemed unclear. These two points scared conservative, libertarian and white voters in particular. Some of them voted for the ethno-nationalist Freedom Front Plus (FF+), which claims to defend the interests of Afrikaans-speaking voters, but historically, mainly white Afrikaners.

Especially in the urban centres of Cape Town and in the province of Gauteng, which are the strongholds of the DA, not all DA voters were dissatisfied. Some of them stayed away from the urn or they switched to smaller opposition parties like GOOD or the FF+. In the Western Cape, small parties such as the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) and the Muslim al-Jama-Ah-party profited.

The DA lost nearly four percent of its vote in the Western Cape, but will continue to govern the province with a comfortable majority without coalition partners. Interestingly enough, the ANC also lost a lot of approval here. With the age-related departure of popular but sometimes bellicose provincial premier, Helen Zille, a new era is dawning for the DA. Her successor, Alan Winde, is following in her footsteps and now has to show that the DA continues to govern the Western Cape more effectively than the ANC governs the remaining provinces.

### Result of the Western Cape provincial ballot

Party	Votes (number)	Vote share (%)	Change from 2014	Seats	Change from 2014
DA	1.140.647	55,45%	- 3,93%	24	- 2
ANC	589.055	28,63%	- 4,26%	12	- 2
EFF	83.075	4,04%	+ 1,93%	2	+ 1
GOOD	61.971	3,01%	First election	1	First election
ACDP	54.762	2,66%	+ 1,64	1	+/- 0
VF PLUS	32.115	1,56%	+ 1,01 %	1	+ 1
ALJAMAAH	17.607	0,86%	+ 0,62%	1	+ 1 First election
Other parties	72.252	3,51%	- 0,31%	0	+/- 0
TOTAL	2.057.212	100%	-	42	+/- 0

Source: Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), own presentation

For the time being, the DA's election results showed the party's growth limits. From a party program perspective, the party has over-reached for now. On the right, the party lost white voters to the FF+, but could not compensate for the loss by gaining urban black voters. Since the latter group of voters promises great growth potential, the DA now has to decide whether it will continue to focus on holding the political centre or will try to win back voters to the right. Although this group of voters is much smaller, it can be relied upon to come out and vote. In any case, the party leadership must determine the future strategy. For the present, it is utopian to assume that the DA can seriously challenge the national absolute majority of the ANC without a coalition partner.

### EFF – the big winners of the election

The EFF are the big winners of the election. Party leader Julius Malema – who was once chairman of the ANC Youth League – has firmly established the ANC spin-off EFF in South Africa's party landscape, with 10.8 percent of the vote. In the provinces of Limpopo, North-West and Mpumalanga, the party became the official opposition, mostly thanks to former ANC voters. With its radical, left-wing populist and black-nationalist agitation, the party understood how to successfully address mainly poor, black voters. The party is tightly structured. Instead of "party leader", Malema calls himself "commander-in-chief" to underline his sole claim to power. The EFF achieved a campaign presence far beyond its actual representative strength thanks to a focused message of "jobs & land" amplified by effective branding.

The party might have received significantly more votes were it not for the low turnout of the youth vote. The absence of young voters is not only due to general frustration in political parties or the failure to register, but also thought to be affected by a lack of intention and organisation. Nonetheless, the long-term prospects for the EFF are more positive than for any other party. It stands for a generational shift in South Africa's politics, personified by the only 38-year-old Malema.

## IFP grows in support but falls short of its goal in Kwazulu-Natal

Another interesting development is the resurgence of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa's second most populous province. Predominantly ethnic Zulu voters backed this conservative and traditionalist party. This support base is the result of the party's regional focus on the province of KwaZulu-Natal, where the party was able to increase its share of the vote from 10.9 to 16.3 percent. Nevertheless, the party cannot be satisfied with the result, since it was based on winning back voters that deserted it in the last election in favour of the National Freedom Party (NFP). The NFP was a spin-off of the IFP, but today has largely melted to insignificance.

The IFP failed to capitalize on the weakness of the ANC in KwaZulu-Natal, which lost more than ten percentage points in the province. The vote loss of the ANC was self-inflicted by the fragmentation of the ANC in KwaZulu-Natal. Former President Jacob Zuma has many supporters in his home province and is ethnically Zulu, while his successor Ramaphosa is a member of the small Venda ethnic group. The IFP could have won more of the ANC vote had it run a more effective election campaign with a stronger focus on the Zulu ethnic group. As recently as 2009, the IFP achieved more than 20 percent support in KwaZulu-Natal. However, with a campaign very similar to the local election campaign in 2016, the IFP missed the opportunity to govern the province in coalition with partners such as the DA, EFF and other smaller parties.

### Result of the KwaZulu-Natal provincial ballot

Party	Votes (number)	Votes (%)	Change from 2014	Seats	Change from 2014
ANC	1.951.027	54,22%	- 10,30%	44	- 8
IFP	588.046	16,34%	+ 5,48%	13	+ 4
DA	500.051	13,90%	+ 1,14%	11	+ 1
EFF	349.361	9,71%	+ 7,86%	8	+ 6
NFP	56.587	1,57%	- 5,74%	1	- 5
MF	18.864	0,52%	- 0,5%	1	+/- 0
ATM	17.729	0,49%	First election	1	First election
ACDP	17.214	0,48%	+ 0,04%	1	+ 1
Other parties	105.402	2,93%	+ 1,24%	0	+/- 0
TOTAL	3.598.281	100%	-	80	+/- 0

Source: Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), own presentation

In addition, there is still uncertainty about the future of the IFP party leader, Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who has chaired the party for over 40 years. He announced his resignation from the party presidency and resignation from parliament last year. He rescinded this decision after the election in parts, when he announced that he would continue to be a member of the National Assembly. Prince Buthelezi is a member of the extended royal family of the traditional Zulu ethnic group in addition to his position as party chairman. As long as he is active in the IFP, he will remain a very important leader of the party, because his colleagues seem to respect him too much to express dissenting views.

Despite all its challenges, the IFP speculates that in the future its few seats in provincial and national assemblies will allow it to join a coalition government should the ANC lose its majority at the given moment. The votes of the small and very small parties could then be the decisive factor. But there is still a lot of time until that comes to pass, and the IFP should use this window to renew itself and find new ways to attract voters.

### Conclusion: Coalitions gain relevance in South Africa's politics

At the local level, there are already coalitions between the DA, the EFF and micro parties, replacing the ANC in many cities in the country. The coalitions are ideologically diverse, but are held together by their common enemy, the ANC. Big cities like Johannesburg, Pretoria and, at least for a time, Port Elizabeth, are examples of this trend. In the 8 May election, opposition parties aimed to take the province of Gauteng, but failed narrowly. With 50.5 percent of the vote and a one seat advantage, the ANC defended its absolute majority. For the ANC, the loss of Gauteng, the country's economic center, would have been a big blow.

#### Result of the Gauteng provincial ballot

Party	Votes (number)	Votes (%)	Change from 2014	Seats	Change from 2014
ANC	2.168.253	50,19%	- 3,4%	37	- 3
DA	1.185.743	27,45%	- 3,3%	20	- 3
EFF	634.387	14,69%	+ 4,39%	11	+ 3
VF PLUS	153.844	3,56%	+ 2,36%	3	+ 2
IFP	38.263	0,89%	+ 0,11%	1	+/- 0
ACDP	30.605	0,71%	+ 0,09%	1	+ 1
Other parties	108.842	2,52%	- 0,79%	0	+/- 0
TOTAL	4.319.937	100%	-	73	+/- 0

Source: Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), own presentation

Due to their stark ideological contradictions, however, it is questionable whether the EFF and the DA can continue to be coalition partners in the long term. Cooperation is conceivable only as long as both parties need each other to forge a coalition against the ANC.

Given this consideration, the question arises as to how the party landscape will develop if the expected downward trend of the ANC continues. Already, there are many political actors who want to form a coalition with the major parties – the ANC, DA or EFF. The trend towards fragmentation in at the national and provincial level continues: there are now 14 parties in the National Assembly alone. However, for the moment none of the micro-parties is likely to develop into a political force with significant strength of five percent or more, which in the coalition game would be a partner worth courting by the major parties.

Yet there is room for change given the large reservoir of non-voters. These are in the main religious, conservative and market-oriented, black voters who lack a political home. So far, no serious political project is attempting to win over these voters. If a new, disruptive force enters the political arena in South Africa, it has a good chance of tipping the scales of political power within a short time, given the current trends and majorities,

For now, media attention is focused on Ramaphosa. The days after the election spawned speculation about how political posts would be distributed. The composition of his new - hopefully reduced - cabinet will reveal how many allies Ramaphosa can draw on and how serious he is about driving reforms.



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