

DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA THROUGH THE LENS OF THE SIXTH SOUTH AFRICAN ELECTIONS

On 8 May 2019, South Africa went to the polls to elect a new National Assembly and provincial legislatures in each province. These were the sixth elections held since the end of apartheid in 1994. The National Assembly election was won by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) albeit with a reduced margin compared to all the five previous elections since 1994. It was the first time the winning margin had fallen below the symbolically important threshold of 60 percent thus representing ANC's worst performance. Nevertheless, these results follow a set pattern that shows a steady erosion of support for the dominant party (ANC) over the past three national elections.

ANC garnered 57.50 percent of the vote compared to 62.15 percent in the previous elections held in 2014. The official opposition party Democratic Alliance (DA) won 20.77 percent of the votes, a two-percent dip compared to 2014; while the Economic Freedom Fighters party (EFF)'s support significantly grew from 6.35 percent in 2014, to almost 11 percent in 2019. The Freedom Front Plus (FF+)'s performance also grew from 0.9 percent to 2.38 percent of the vote, which was its highest vote share since its founding.

Both the ANC and DA support seems to be waning while the newcomers in particular the far-left Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) of the former ANC youth league leader Julius Malema which has stirred up South African politics, seems to be gaining popularity. The dismal performance of the two most established political parties coupled with a lower voter turnout of 66 percent compared to the 73 percent in 2014, could be a sign of growing disillusionment with South African's political system and its relatively young democracy.

This year's electoral performance comes amid growing voter frustration over rampant corruption, poverty, social inequality, criminal activity and high unemployment rates. So far, the ANC has failed to find answers to these pressing social questions and challenges. This follows a similar pattern in Africa where the dormant and ruling political parties often known as 'liberators' lose support over time due to failed promises, unfulfilled and unmatched expectations.

If we could compare one country's political resemblance to the ANC it would be the Kenya African National Union (KANU). Like the ANC, KANU was the dominant party at Kenya's independence in 1963. KANU held majority of seats in both houses of parliament. It was so dominant that membership in the party was a requirement for holding public office. Later,

Kenya became a *de facto* single state 1982 where KANU and the State were one and the same thing.

After four decades as the ruling party, which was characterised by massive looting of public resources, corruption, land grabbing, closing of civic space as well divisive ethnic animosities and clashes, KANU was eventually removed from power by the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) in 2002.

This script is continuously being replayed in Zimbabwe with ZANU although the opposition has not been successful in removing it from power yet. Whereas, the older generation may still be emotionally attached to the idea of voting for the 'liberating' political parties that got them independence or threw off the yoke of the racist apartheid regime, the same is not true for the younger generation.

The youth who form the largest demography in South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe and indeed the whole continent, see the ANC, KANU, ZANU and their ilk as parties of corruptors, rather than one of liberators. In the recent South African elections, only 75 percent of those eligible to vote registered, which means more than 9 million people who could have registered opted not to.

Increasingly, many people especially the younger generations are beginning to doubt the value and place of democracy in Africa due to unfulfilled independence and liberation promises. All they can see is choreographed state capture perpetuated by the 'liberators and their cronies', corruption, mismanagement of public resources, lack of opportunities and jobs and general poor delivery of services ranging from health to education, housing to food security to mention but a few.

African system of politics seems to be one where political leaders don't listen, stay out of touch with the populace, take advantage of their positions to further their own personal interests to the detriment of the country's social, political and economic growth.

The unemployment rate in South Africa according to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey is 27.1 percent. Youth unemployment, which was 38.1 percent in 2018, is particularly worrying. The same can be said of Kenya, Zimbabwe and many other countries on the continent.

The incoming South African government faces staggering economic and social challenges. Perhaps trying to capture some of that old "Madiba magic" that Mandela was famous for, Ramaphosa is calling for a "new dawn" in the country. Whether or not they believe him, South Africans certainly need one.

With change through the ballot remaining unrealistic and or grinding at a snail's pace, are other constitutional and legal means provided for in the various constitutions the way to true freedom?

South Africa has already seen a number of protests related to higher education demanding tuition-free universities. These protests brought South Africa to a standstill. They forced the ANC government to commit significant resources to higher education and were able to shift the national policy agenda without lobbying politicians or making education an election issue.

Does the above scenario present the next realistic approach for the African people most of whom are below the age of 35 years, to reclaim and realise the African dream of social, political and economic freedom; the freedom from ignorance and illiteracy, the freedom from hunger and starvation and the freedom from avoidable deaths and disease? Only time will tell! However, the undisputable reality is that there will be a paradigm shift the moment the people will stand up to be counted and say "enough is enough." It is our hope that the political leaders will be part of the change by dispensing their duties and acting in the interest of their countries, otherwise they risk becoming the victims of the change.

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