

Crunch time

07 December 2017

In ten days' time the result should be known – who will be the new president of the ANC? The party's elective conference starts on 16 December at NASREC in Johannesburg, where a new leadership will be elected.

What is the lie of the land?

The just-completed nomination process amongst more than 3 500 branches countrywide reveal a fierce contest. There are three ways of looking at the nomination results: provinces, branches and delegates.

Provinces

Five provinces nominated Ramaphosa as president and four Dlamini-Zuma. If we assume that all delegates from a specific province will support the candidate nominated by that province, i.e. that they will vote as a provincial bloc, the four Zuma provinces would add up to 2 553 delegates and the Ramaphosa provinces 2 178 – a difference of 375 for Dlamini-Zuma.

However, we know that some provinces are deeply divided, and that in all provinces there are nominations for the other candidate. In practice the assumption of a united provincial voting bloc is unlikely.

Branches

Branches are the basic building block of the ANC and nominations have been made by branches. Delegates hold a mandate from them, but they also vote in secret at conference and can thus vote for anybody. (Also see paragraph below on “past experience...”)

Let's assume delegates will follow the nomination of their branch and religiously vote as their branches nominated. 1 860 branches nominated Cyril Ramaphosa as president and 1 358 nominated Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. If one adds the 223 branches from Mpumalanga who nominated “unity” to Dlamini-Zuma's tally, her total rises to 1 581. (Admittedly, that is an arbitrary addition.) A few branches nominated Lindiwe Sisulu as president and a few Zweli Mkhize. Add those to Ramaphosa's numbers and he climbs to 1 877 (again an arbitrary addition). About 78 branches were officially classified as not having made a choice.

The end result would be 1 877 branches (or 53%) for Ramaphosa, 1 581 branches (or 45%) for Dlamini Zuma, and 78 (or 2%) unknowns. A very different outcome from voting in provincial blocks.

However, that is not how it works in practice either.

Delegates

The most correct way of determining support is to look at neither provinces nor branches, but at delegates. This is the area of biggest importance, but also the biggest uncertainty. The Ramaphosa and Zuma campaigns have put out contradictory claims with each claiming to have the most delegates at the conference. That is clearly not possible, so one must try and look through the fog.

Not all branches send the same number of delegates to conference. The formula is one delegate for the first 100 branch members and thereafter one delegate for every 250 members. So a branch with 350 members will send TWO delegates. In contrast, three branches with a total of 350 members equally distributed between them, will send THREE delegates. This clearly favours smaller branches.

On the other hand, bigger branches will obviously send more delegates. There are some reports suggesting 6 or 7 delegates per branch – 6 imply a branch with 1 350 members and 7 a branch of 1 600 members.... there cannot be too many of them, but we do not know.

Two numbers are rock solid: a total of 4 731 delegates will be sent to the conference by the branches. In terms of the ANC constitution they will form 90% of the conference. We also know the official tally of branches that have nominated and abstained, as disclosed by the ANC electoral commission: 3 536. That implies an average of 1.34 delegates per branch.

However, this average varies widely between provinces. Gauteng has the lowest average with 1.14 delegates per branch (suggesting a large number of small branches) and Free State the highest with 1.62 delegates per branch (suggesting bigger branches). Employing these averages, one can calculate the delegates per province per candidate.

According to this calculation, Ramaphosa ends up with 2 355 delegates, Dlamini-Zuma with 1 905, “unity” in Mpumalanga with 355 and “others” or “undecided” with 116. That means 50% for Ramaphosa, 40% for Dlamini-Zuma, 8% for unity and 2% for others/undecided.

Obviously the 8% unity delegates from Mpumalanga will play a critical role; as will the 2% who have nominated other candidates or remained undecided. Most people place the “unity” delegates with Dlamini-Zuma, which will then give her 48% against Ramaphosa’s 50% and 2% other. That translates into 2 355 delegates for Ramaphosa against 2 260 for Dlamini-Zuma – a majority of between 95 and 170 depending where the “uncertains” vote.

For the record, the Ramaphosa campaign contest the arbitrary addition of the “unity” votes to Dlamini-Zuma and believe they will capture many of those Mpumalanga votes. Also, on Thursday last week KZN has requested to send 100 more delegates to conference; other provinces will no doubt fiercely resist that.

There are numerous reports on the prevalence of corruption and bribing of delegates. It is impossible to quantify what the extent of that is.

The 10% block

As stated above, the ANC constitution requires that 90% of delegates will come from branches. The remaining 10% will be delegates from the Women’s, Youth and Veterans’ Leagues; the current National Executive Committee and the nine provincial executive committees. That will add over 500 delegates, taking the total for conference to an expected 5 240 delegates.

The Ramaphosa campaign’s analysis is that Dlamini-Zuma is leading in this group with 27 votes. That would cut Ramaphosa’s lead, as guestimated above, to less than 70. That is out of a conference total of 5 240. To misquote the Duke of Wellington – a damn close-run thing!!

Past experience and importance of branches

The importance of branches in the electoral process in past experiences should be noted.

In 2007 at Polokwane Zuma got 62% of branch nominations and Mbeki 38%. In the election at conference the vote split almost like that: 61% for Zuma and 39% for Mbeki.

Repeat in 2012 at Mangaung. Zuma was nominated by 74% of branches and he got 75%; Motlanthe was nominated by 26% and he got 25% of the vote.

An eye on 2019

Whilst nominations have been going on inside the ANC, municipal by-elections took place in the municipality of Metsimaholo (Sasolburg and surrounds) and Umlalazi in KZN. In both an urban and a rural area in KZN the ANC lost considerable ground – in Metsimaholo it came to 10%. This continues a trend which saw them lose control of three metros in 2016. In those elections the ANC mustered 54% of the vote – a loss of the magnitude of Metsimaholo in the general election of 2018 will see them lose their majority-party status.

The ANC leader in KZN, Sihle Zikalala, has referred specifically to these by-election results and preached “unity” to “restore trust and faith” in the ANC. The prospect of defeat in 2019 is clearly concentrating the mind.

If Ramaphosa is not elected as ANC leader the SACP will probably continue its process of moving away from the ANC (they contested Metsimaholo independently and captured most of the vote lost by the ANC). The ANC's electoral decline will then certainly continue.

During the last month two ANC-initiated votes of no confidence in the DA-led municipalities of Johannesburg and Nelson Mandela Bay failed when the EFF supported the DA administrations "because they are the better of two devils". It simply underlines what is at stake for the ANC if they cannot reverse their political fortunes.

The rest of the Top 6

Should Ramaphosa be elected as ANC president, it is very possible that Dlamini-Zuma could become deputy-president, if she is available. She has far more support than any of the other candidates nominated for that post. It will also be an expression of the desire for unity preached by all.

On the other hand, if she is elected, Ramaphosa will probably not be available as deputy-president again. Conference will then have to decide between Lindiwe Sisulu, Zweli Mkhize and David Mabuza (or anybody nominated from the floor with 25% of the vote).

In both cases Gwede Mantashe is likely to become chairperson of the ANC, Senzo Mchunu the secretary-general, Paul Mashatile the treasurer – they have been nominated by both the Ramaphosa and parts of the Zuma camp. The deputy secretary-general will be either the current incumbent Jessie Duarte or Zingiswa Losi, a Cosatu deputy-president on the Ramaphosa slate.

So What?

- The election battle in the ANC is very much a 50/50 affair with a slight advantage, at the time of writing, for Ramaphosa.
- This could change at and during conference – delegates vote in secret, they can form provincial or regional blocs and the range of influences exerted on individual delegates will be considerable.
- The contest for the no 1 position is pretty much binary – one must lose and one must win.
- There is bi-partisan support for three of the remaining top 6 positions: Gwede Mantashe for chair, Senzo Mchuni for secretary-general and Paul Mashatile for Treasurer.
- The prospect of losing in 2019 may help to drive a possible compromise, particularly around the number 1 and 2 positions.