

Motion of no confidence

8 August 2017

As we expected, the motion of no confidence did not succeed despite it being held in secret. The secrecy clearly did not alter the balance of power significantly. But let's first crunch the numbers.

The numbers

- The motion was defeated by 21 votes. 177 parliamentarians voted for the motion, 198 against, 9 abstained. This is by a mile the smallest margin of victory of all the no confidence motions to date. The previous margins varied between 88 and 126 votes.
- This steady deterioration in the ANC tally is a noticeable trend. No wonder ANC Chief Whip Jackson Mthembu said after the event it is a moment of reflection for the ruling party.
- Allowing for vacancies and members absent from the Chamber, 45% of members voted **for** the motion, 50% **against** and 5% abstained or were not present.
- 29 ANC members voted for the motion. That is far from the 60 that Julius Malema and Bantu Holomisa predicted if the vote was to be held in secret.
- A further estimated 10 or so ANC members did not vote for the motion but still withheld their votes. That means about 39 members (15% of the caucus) defied the party exhortations.

Why does the ANC rally behind Zuma?

A vociferous critic of Zuma's who has repeatedly called for his resignation, the SA Communist Party, called on members to vote *against* the motion of no confidence. A known Zuma adversary, ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe, put huge pressure on the caucus to *also* vote *against*. Why are these anti-Zuma people rallying behind him?

Various theories are advanced, from Zuma's political survival skills to dark theories on bribery and blackmail. Perhaps the explanation is much simpler. The ANC is deeply divided and cannot afford to hold an election now to choose a successor, which they would have had to do if Zuma was unseated. In fact, Jackson Mthembu said as much in an interview on eNCA a few days before the vote. The fear is that if a new president had to be elected within 30 days the ANC might very well implode. No faction was/is ready for the succession fight *now*. Better then to stumble along to December when a new leader will be elected any way. Zuma was the beneficiary of this fear of implosion. It has more to do with party divisions than magical survival skills.

Nevertheless, this inside-the-party dynamics may pass the ordinary voter by. The ANC has lumbered itself with the perception that it protects Zuma. This is a far cry from where the country is.

Parliament out of step?

The latest opinion poll data we have is the IPSOS poll from May 2017. (It is worth remembering that IPSOS accurately forecast the voting patterns which led to a change in control in the 3 metros.) 62% of voters disapproved of Zuma and 18% approved. Amongst **ANC supporters**, 54% wanted him to step down and 27% thought he was doing a good job and should stay on. These are not only wide margins against Zuma; they also run in the opposite direction from the de facto 50%-for-Zuma and 45%-against vote recorded in Parliament.

This is not a sustainable position for the ANC. All the more so if one bears in mind that this poll was taken **before** the Gupta emails started leaking. Since the leaks started even ANC leaders have lamented how much the Gupta saga has hurt the party.

A consensus view is that Zuma's support lies in the rural areas and that opinion polls do not capture these accurately. Maybe, but the conservative rural parties in parliament like the IFP and NFP from KZN's rural areas voted **for** the motion and their speeches in the debate were vociferous. Also, the ANC lost the municipality of Zuma's

homestead Nkandla as well as some other municipalities. Rural people understand corruption and kleptocracy as well as anybody.

Obviously the opinion poll that counts will be the election of 2019 and that is still 22 months away. A lot can happen (including missteps by the Opposition). But if the ANC cannot rid itself of the Zuma albatross it will have a fight on its hands to maintain the 55% of the vote it got in the 2016 municipal elections.

So What?

- The secret vote in Parliament did not render the result of 60 ANC members voting for a motion of no confidence. The EFF and UDM predictions were wide off the mark.
- Although a win for the ANC, it was the smallest margin of victory of all the no confidence votes to date; certainly no runaway victory for Zuma. On the contrary, the trend is one of a declining victory margin.
- The main reason the ANC stuck with Zuma is that it is not yet in a position to elect a successor and it fears an implosion.
- The vote in Parliament is decisively out of step with the mood in the country and the ANC will jeopardise its own electoral chances if it does not change course.
- A major consequence of the vote might be to nudge the ANC away from a binary Ramaphosa/Dlamini-Zuma fight to a negotiated outcome. It may also open the door to a third party candidate.

Timeline leading up to the ANC national conference

At the request of some colleagues, I compiled a timeline of politically important developments till the end of the year. Surprises must course be added to the list as they occur.

- During July and **August** – audits being done of ANC branches across the nine provinces.
- **Middle August** – High Court in KZN will hear the case brought by some KZN ANC members against the results of the KZN provincial conference held in November 2015. The applicants are challenging the election results, which saw Zuma supporters taking control of the province. Should the Court declare the 2015 election null and void a new conference will have to be held before the December national conference, which could alter the balance of power in the province.
- **August** – the ANC in the Free State will hold its provincial conference and conduct elections for a new provincial leadership. This is a strong Zuma-supporting province but the election may render some surprises.
- **September** – Branch nominations open for candidates for the Top 6 positions in the ANC for election at the elective conference in December. Nominations are sent by the branches directly to the ANC's Election Commission, which will receive all the nominations and oversee the election process. Expect the various provincial structures to still try and influence the branch choices.
- **15 September** – Appeal Court hearing on the re-institution of the 783 charges against Jacob Zuma. It is unknown when the Court will deliver its verdict; if it goes against Zuma he will probably appeal to the Constitutional Court, but it will add pressure.
- **By end September** – the Eastern Cape ANC is expected to hold its elective Conference to choose a new provincial leadership. The Eastern Cape is the second biggest province in the ANC after KZN and the election will give an indication which way the province will vote in December.
- **October** – the ANC's electoral commission will announce the results of the nominations received from branches. This will give a very good indication of the support the leading contenders enjoy. In the previous two ANC elections the voting at the elective conference was almost identical to the nominations made by branches.
- **On-going** – although we do not know how much there still is to reveal, the weekly leaks from the Gupta emails will probably continue for a while; causing embarrassment, claiming some scalps and piling pressure on the ANC to cleanse itself of the Zuma kleptocracy.
- **16 to 20 December** – ANC's 54th National Conference to take place in Gauteng where the new leadership of the ANC will be elected.