

Reset button pressed

13 May 2019

The election result is a good result for SA.

The main parties have been rebuked for their past behaviour, yet political stability was not threatened. Displeasure was registered, but also a mandate given. The angry red berets got their full say, but the centre held. All and all, a good outcome.

A rebuke and a mandate simultaneously

The overall poll participation dropped from 73,5% in 2014 to 66%. A lot of people stayed home.

The ANC got 1,4 million fewer votes than in 2014, dropping from 62% to 57%. Voters have made it clear that they do not condone the shenanigans of the last few years. The party will face further vote losses in the future if it does not take its own renewal project seriously. The impunity of the Zuma years has been called to order.

Yet the 57% is an improvement on the disastrous 2016 local government results and as such a turnaround for the ANC. Predictions that their support would drop to 51% did not materialise. The party also held on to Gauteng province, avoiding the need for another destabilising coalition. Overall a rebuke, but not to the extent that stability is undermined.

How much of the 57% is due to Cyril Ramaphosa the individual is unclear, but he certainly saved the ANC's bacon. Fikile Mbalula, the ANC head of elections, said without Ramaphosa the ANC may only have achieved 40%. Perhaps a typical Mbalula flourish, but there is no doubt Ramaphosa helped the ANC. (Ace Magashule first wanted to argue the point with Mbalula, but on Saturday morning he recanted. That in itself is interesting... it was his second recant in 24 hours.)

Gauteng rising

Gauteng is the province with the largest population and the largest number of registered voters. It is now also the biggest contributor to ANC votes. It delivered 24% of the party's total, overtaking KZN which used to be the ANC's biggest province. (KZN contributed 20% compared to 22% in the last election).

The ANC margin in Gauteng is now so thin (50,2%) that there is little room for mismanagement and corruption – also in other provinces or by other individuals which may cause reputational damage in Gauteng. It is a pressure point on the ANC at large.

KZN and others declining

In KZN the ANC's share of the vote dropped from 64% to 54%. The IFP reclaimed ground lost to the NFP, garnering enough support to replace the DA as official opposition. Behind the DA in fourth position is the EFF with just under 10%. The ANC government in KZN will now face more opposition from parties to its right than to the left. The party's dismal performance is likely to weaken the Zuma faction in KZN and further diminish the ex-president's position.

The decline in ANC votes in KZN was repeated in the other Zuma-supporting provinces of Free State, North West and Mpumalanga. The decline shifts the balance of power in the ANC further to the other five provinces which are strong Ramaphosa supporters. The "Ramaphosa provinces" contributed nearly 60% of the total ANC vote.

Of course, the internal ANC balance of power is determined by branches and membership, and not by votes in national elections, but the party cannot divorce itself from the electoral reality out there (as both Ramaphosa's election in 2017 and this one amply illustrated).

CR's position

These factors constitute a good base for Cyril Ramaphosa. They certainly deprive the Ace Magashule faction of room to try and dump him, as the rumour mill would have it. All other things being equal (health, physical protection and a reasonable economy), Ramaphosa is set to serve as president for ten years. It gives the country time to reset and

get back on course – on course meaning economic growth faster than population growth; jobs; better management; stronger social cohesion. This election finally put the Zuma years behind us.

This does not mean that the Magashule faction will simply lie down and die. But they dare not threaten the renewal of the ANC and a reconnection with the voters. The balance of forces has shifted fundamentally in Ramaphosa's favour.

Trade union party not taking off

It is worth noting that the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP) launched by the trade union NUMSA failed miserably. It garnered 0,14% or 24 400 votes. NUMSA is one of the oldest and strongest trade unions in the country with more than 300 000 members and considerable funds and organisation. Clearly, the union could not get too many of its members to vote for SRWP. This may focus the minds of Cosatu members considering the establishment of a party in opposition to the ANC.

Reflection time for all parties

The election is a wake-up call for all political parties.

The ANC will have to look at governance and building a more capable state. Much as voters appreciate what has been done, they want to see better delivery and management. The party will also have to re-connect with the voters. The impunity and arrogance of the last few years is a proven recipe for how not to win support.

The DA got 470 000 less votes than in 2014, dropping from 22,3% to 20,8%. 250 000 votes seem to have gone to the FF+ and arguably another 73 000 to Patricia de Lille's GOOD Party. That leaves 150 000 or so lost votes to explain. It is very conceivable that they are DA voters who "voted for Cyril". These numbers describe where the lost votes went, but they do not explain the reasons behind those very different choices. The party will have to some soul searching. Paradoxically, the departure of 250 000 supporters to the FF+ may make it easier, but we will see.

Going by their own claims and predictions, the EFF must be very disappointed with the election. They improved their vote count by 707 000 (or 60%) and their share of the vote from 6,3% to 10,78%. This is good by any standard, but the party expected much more. Malema boldly claimed that the EFF would be "kingmakers" after the elections. They do not come near kingmaker status in any of the nine provinces. Some pre-election polls gave them 14% to 15%, but they only achieved 10,8% (another 707 000 votes short of 15%). The EFF was the official opposition in two provinces. They added Mpumalanga by getting 12,8% of the provincial vote, overtaking the DA. The militant message did not do as well as many predicted. South Africa's voters are not into radical politics, whatever the latest outrage on Twitter.

So What?

- The three biggest parties corralled 89% of the vote. Eleven smaller parties have a total of 11%. There will be fourteen parties in parliament.
- Two small parties disappeared from parliament (Agang and the African Peoples' Convention) and three new parties will enter parliament (Patricia de Lille's GOOD Party, Mzwanele Manyi's ATM and Al Jama).
- Gauteng has moved into pole position as the largest single provider of ANC votes (24%), despite the party capturing just over 50% of the votes in the province.
- This shift puts paid to the narrative that the ANC will become a rural party.
- Cyril Ramaphosa is now free to revitalise SA and pursue a balanced agenda of economic growth and social justice for the next ten years.

Upcoming dates

- The first sitting of the new parliament is scheduled for **Wednesday 22 May**, when the new president will be elected by parliament. This should be a formality.
- On **Saturday 25 May** the president will be inaugurated.
- On **Monday 27 May** the new cabinet will be announced and on Tuesday 28 May the new cabinet members will be sworn in. Expect this cabinet to be substantially smaller with about 25 cabinet members compared to 35 currently.
- A cabinet lekgotla will be held on **12 to 14 June**.
- Parliament will be opened with the State of the Nation address on Thursday evening the **20th of June**, when the President will outline the government's programme of work.