

ANC's parliamentary majority reduced amid worsening economic conditions

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With 73 percent voter participation, South Africa's fifth fully democratic election saw the ruling African National Congress (ANC) returned with a reduced majority of 62.1 percent of seats in the National Assembly. This compares to the 65.9 percent the party commanded in the 2009 vote.

The Democratic Alliance (DA) won 22.2 percent of national votes, compared to the 16 percent it attained in 2009, while the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) of Julius Malema garnered 6.3 percent. The two parties now constitute the largest parliamentary blocs after the ANC.

On May 8, Radio station SAfm broadcast reports of dumped ballots outside a Lynnwood, Pretoria, voting station. Most of these ballots were in favour of the opposition DA. However, DA leader Helen Zille defused tensions over that, explaining via social media that according to party agents in Lynnwood, these votes had already been counted. This does not exonerate the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), which is formally obliged to keep ballots on hand for seven weeks after an election.

At Bekkersdal in North West province, one of the towns worst affected by "service delivery protests", IEC tents were torched by residents who had vowed not to vote. Others later voted in the presence of a police contingent once calm was restored.

A first-time Western Cape voter posted on social media her experience of receiving a ballot already marked in favour of the ANC—not her party of choice. She alerted IEC officials who took the ballot from her and replaced it with an unmarked one, before opening a fraud docket with the South African Police Service.

The IEC placed blame on printers contracted to produce the ballots.

A number of parties registered complaints with the

IEC of ongoing ANC campaigning on election day. The transgressions included the bulk texting of party-political messages to voters, the use of loudhailers to address queuing voters and the handing out of party-branded trinkets near or on the precincts of voting stations.

Certain polling stations ran out of ballot papers. At others, there were shortages of indelible ink, in which the thumbs of those who have already voted are supposed to be marked to obviate a second vote. At Eldorado Park, south of Johannesburg, there were reports of voters using lead pencils to mark ballots because of a lack of pens.

To the northeast of Johannesburg, in Alexandra, the army was deployed after police clashed with residents including EFF members who gathered near the magistrate's court on the evening of Friday, May 9. Protesters ransacked the local mall, blockaded streets with burning tyres and attacked foreign-owned shops and people in the vicinity of Madala Hostel. Rocks were thrown at motorists including those travelling on the N3 highway.

This followed the non-appearance in court that day of 31 Alexandra residents, some belonging to the EFF, who were arrested for arson and malicious damage to property after they sought to torch the local IEC offices. Protesters claimed to have earlier seen IEC ballot boxes inside a vehicle with ANC markings.

EFF leader Malema asserted that such reports could not throw the results of the whole election into doubt, saying, "We accept defeat."

He commended the "freeness and fairness" of the election and called for restraint from Alexandra's EFF members.

Among the election's losers were pan-Africanist parties, the Pan Africanist Congress, which won one

National Assembly seat, and the Azanian People's Organisation, which won none, as well as the ANC breakaway, the Congress of the People (COPE).

The COPE won only three seats, or one tenth of the 7.4 percent share gained when the party first contested elections in 2009. The COPE was formed by an anti-Jacob Zuma ANC rump following the ANC's abrupt removal of Thabo Mbeki from his post as national president after he lost the party presidency to Zuma.

Another bourgeois nationalist party, the Agang SA of Mamphela Ramphele, won barely enough votes for two seats in parliament.

The ANC share of the vote for the legislature in Gauteng, the economically dominant and most densely populated province, fell to 53.6 percent from 64.0 percent. The DA secured 30.8 percent against the 21.0 percent it won in Gauteng in 2009. With 10.3 percent of the same provincial vote, the EFF at one point demanded a rerun of the Gauteng ballot, alleging vote-rigging amid delays that made Gauteng the last province to submit results to the central IEC results centre.

In addition to becoming the official opposition in KwaZulu-Natal province, the DA increased its majority to 59.4 percent of the vote for the Western Cape legislature, further eroding the ANC's position there. Economically the second most important region, the Western Cape remains the only province not governed by the ANC.

Despite the incidents of unrest and declining IEC standards, international reaction to the election overall was positive. Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon remarked that the United Nations would continue to support democracy in South Africa.

As the first results trickled in, the rand rallied significantly on May 8. This partly reflected the relief of global capital at a relatively smooth election. It also speaks to the expectation among the international and local elite that the ANC victory will give the party a free hand in ramming through anti-working class measures in the face of the ongoing economic slowdown.

The strike led by the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) on the North West platinum belt has now entered its 15th week, testing the nerves of investors. Global investors have reason to expect that, having come out of the election relatively

unscathed, the new Zuma administration will redouble its efforts against workers' struggles including the AMCU strike, which is the most determined since the end of apartheid.

Whatever repression awaits it, the platinum miners' strike portends militancy, now and in future, among sections of workers. It indicates their readiness to make enormous sacrifices in the pursuit of common objectives. Protests during the election itself were noteworthy for expressing for the first time since 1994 a stubborn undercurrent of working class hostility to the entire bourgeois post-apartheid establishment including the IEC.

The 2014 election results reflect the reality that the poor, the bulk of the South African electorate, thus far see no credible alternative to the ANC despite its reduced majority. For the moment, they are subordinated to the ruling class by organisations like the "apolitical" AMCU, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the Stalinist South African Communist Party (SACP). The role of these organisations is to demoralise independent struggle. In the case of COSATU and the SACP, it is also to sell workers hope in the ANC's capture by the working class someday.

Resistance to the continued marginalisation of the poor must find a political outlet. Workers will derive no benefit, for instance, from favouring the EFF at the expense of the ANC. This amounts to merely moving votes around within the camp of the bourgeoisie. None of the parties contesting these elections poses any fundamental challenge to the capitalist domination of society. Yet through its assaults on workers, the bourgeoisie is preparing for itself a definitive showdown with workers.



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