

South African elections

Ramaphosa elected to full term as president amid record low ANC vote

Eddie Haywood
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In an election marked by a sharp decline in support for the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and a significant decline in voter turnout, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, a union leader-turned multi-millionaire businessman, won election to a full five-year term in the national vote held last Wednesday.

Over the weekend, the country's Independent Electoral Commission reported that the ANC, which has ruled the country since the end of apartheid 25 years ago, had won 58 percent of the vote in the national parliamentary elections. This marks the first time in the ANC's post-apartheid history that its vote has fallen below 60 percent. In the previous national elections held in 2014, the ANC obtained 62 percent of the vote.

Overall voter turnout, in elections that included provincial and local offices, fell to 66 percent from 73 percent five year ago. The sharpest fall in voter turnout was among the youth. The majority of the 10 million South Africans who did not even bother to register to vote, some 6 million, are under the age of 30.

The ANC barely maintained control of the province of Gauteng, home to Johannesburg and Pretoria, the economic and political capitals of the country and the center of the black middle class that has enriched itself off the backs of the masses of black workers and poor since Nelson Mandela became president in 1994.

Ramaphosa, the former head of the National Union of Mineworkers, used his connections to become one of South Africa's richest men following the end of apartheid. After ousting former President Jacob Zuma and becoming leader of the ANC in 2017, Ramaphosa took power as President of South Africa in February 2018. He carried out his takeover of the party and the

nation on the basis of pledges to clean up the pervasive corruption that marked the ANC regime under Zuma.

The Democratic Alliance, the successor to the apartheid-era opposition party, with a base among English-speaking whites and mixed-race people, which has since incorporated some dissident factions of the Black bourgeoisie, also lost voter share as compared to 2014, winning about 22 percent of the vote. It maintained control, however, of its traditional base in Western Cape province and the city of Cape Town. It is headed by Mmusi Maimane.

The supposedly "far-left" Economic Freedom Fighters, led by former ANC youth league president Julius Malema, himself a millionaire, saw its voter share increase to about 11 percent, but this was below the rise anticipated in pre-election opinion polls.

The deep social and political crisis, under conditions where the aspirations and interests of the working class and youth can find no expression through any of the bourgeois parties, found a malignant expression in the increased vote for the Freedom Front Plus, a coalition of far-right parties advocating "white self-rule," which increased its number of seats in parliament from four to ten.

The conflict between the Zuma and Ramaphosa factions of the ANC, by no manner settled with the election, is between two right-wing sections of the black elite for positions and control of the spoils of power, in which both defend capitalism and the interests of native and Western big business against those of the broad masses of the population.

Underlining the financial and business interests at stake with an ANC victory is the fact that the South African Rand rallied 0.4 percent to 14.3242 per US

dollar over the past week as an ANC win became clear.

Ramaphosa has made clear he aims to impose a right-wing agenda, centered on privatization and making South Africa “more attractive to foreign investment.” He has declared a goal of taking in \$1.2 trillion rand (\$83 billion) in foreign direct investment by 2023.

One indication of what this means in practice is Ramaphosa’s murderous role in the 2012 massacre of 34 miners at Lonmin’s Marikana operation while he was the company’s Black Economic Empowerment partner. Ramaphosa, then a top ANC official, owned a 9 percent share in the company. When the mineworkers struck in defiance of the official unions, he denounced the workers as criminals and demanded that the authorities “take action.”

The ANC’s aim of imposing Ramaphosa’s agenda of privatization and “attracting investment” has received much praise from international finance and corporations. On Friday the *Financial Times* suggested in an editorial that Ramaphosa should root out “enemies of progress” in the ANC.

“The problem is not bad apples. The ANC barrel is rotten. Mr. Ramaphosa needs to make examples of the worst offenders by sacking them. He also needs to empower state prosecutors and investigators to pursue convictions ... More broadly, the president must make good on his promise to attract investment and get the sluggish economy going again.”

Ralph Matheka, the author of *Ramaphosa’s Turn*, told the *Washington Post* that the ANC receiving a smaller share of the vote will make it easier to implement its right-wing agenda: “Getting less than 60 percent of votes nationally means Ramaphosa will be less tied to the party’s more radical promises, like land expropriation without compensation.”

The South African economy is stagnant, growing only 0.8 percent last year. It is the most socially unequal country on the planet, according to the World Bank, with a 50 percent poverty rate and an official unemployment rate of 27.5 percent. The jobless rate for young people ages 18 to 35 is at nearly 50 percent.

Home to 10 billionaires who collectively control more than \$30 billion, the top 1 percent in the country own 70 percent of the country’s wealth, while the bottom 60 percent own just 7 percent.

The coming to power of the ANC and Mandela and the end of apartheid on the basis of a nationalist and pro-

capitalist program has produced after a quarter century even greater poverty and inequality for the working class while enriching a grasping black bourgeoisie and privileged middle class, who have plundered the economy in the name of “black economic empowerment.”

The election sets the stage for an intensification of the social crisis and the class struggle in South Africa. Under conditions of a rising wave of class struggle across Africa and internationally, the South African working class will seek a revolutionary alternative outside of the entire existing social, economic and political framework.



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