



The 2009 South African Election: outcomes and analysis

An Overview by APCO Worldwide

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Background

Since the dawn of democracy in South Africa in 1994, the victory of the current ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), in national elections has not been questioned. The 2009 elections were no different.

The real electoral contest nationally was between the opposition parties. Since 1999, the dominant force on those benches has been the Democratic Party, now reconstituted as the Democratic Alliance (DA). At the provincial level, the ANC's hegemony has only really been questioned since 1994 in two of the nine provinces, the Western Cape and KwaZulu Natal, where it has faced strong challenges from the DA and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), respectively.

The opposition contest was enlivened in this year's election by the emergence of a new party, Congress of the People (COPE), a faction that broke away from the ANC just 130 days before the election, accusing it of reneging on its founding statement, the Freedom Charter. COPE is the second group to break away from the ANC since 1994, following the example of the United Democratic Movement (UDM) in 1997.

What united the opposition parties – DA, COPE, UDM and the Independent Democrats (ID) – was a desire to strengthen their collective position and prevent the ANC from obtaining the two-thirds majority in parliament that would give it the power to make unilateral changes to the constitution.

The animated electoral climate saw 16 teams descend to observe the vote, including representatives from the Commonwealth, the African Union and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Following a court victory by the Afrikaner-rights Freedom Front Plus (FF+) party against the Independent Electoral Commission, South African citizens living abroad were allowed to vote for the first time in the 2009 election.

Manifestos

The ANC manifesto promised continuity of policy. Their top priorities continue to be increased access to education and health care; the creation of good jobs; and sustainability. Improvements in the rural infrastructure and agricultural reform lie at the heart of the ANC's promise of national food security.

A close look at the opposition parties shows they failed to provide a credible alternative. For instance, the ANC made the fight against crime and corruption just as much of a priority for the next five years as did its rivals.

The opposition parties quibble over the detail, however; for example, they question the ANC's intentions in proposing judicial reform to tackle crime more effectively. Their skepticism was justified, they would argue, by the decision to drop corruption charges against ANC President, Jacob Zuma, and by criticism of the judiciary by senior ANC members more generally.

The DA’s manifesto offered an “open, opportunity-driven society for all.” Toward the end of the campaign period, though, the tone changed as the DA focused on a “Stop Zuma” campaign, targeting him as a “one-man, constitution-wrecking machine”.

COPE also sought to capitalize on the corruption charges against the ANC president to position itself as an “ethical” party. Nominating an ordained minister as their presidential candidate formed part of their appeal as a party with “clean hands”.

The opposition parties were more or less united in their call for a first-past-the-post electoral system, rather than the current proportional arrangement. This would support the growth of parties with strong regional support, but which are unable to translate this into success nationally.

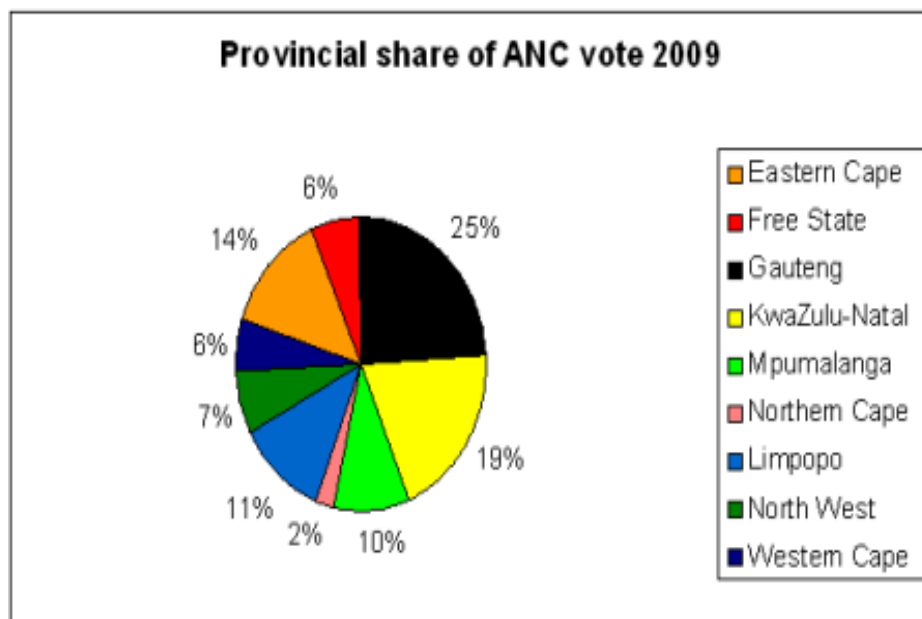
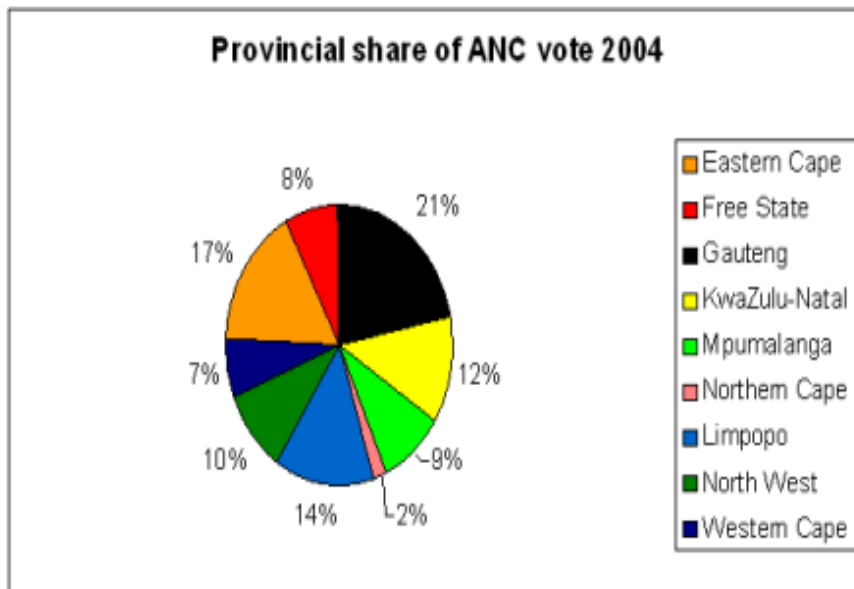
Given the history of racial segregation in South Africa, the parties tend to hold to similar ideologies; only areas of emphasis differentiate one from another. The ANC’s tripartite alliance, which includes the Communist Party and the largest trade union movement, COSATU, ensures it puts more stress on concepts such as “decent work,” while the DA tends to emphasize an open society and the impact of crime and corruption on foreign investors. The priority of the FF+ is the protection of minority rights.

The Election Results

Seventy-seven percent of the country’s 23 million registered voters turned out to vote. The table below outlines the final results and parliamentary seats. Parties that contested the election but do not appear on the list had insufficient votes to secure a parliamentary seat.

Party	Votes (%)	Seats (number)	Seats (%)
ANC (African National Congress)	65.90	264	66
DA (Democratic Alliance)	16.66	67	16.75
COPE (Congress of the People)	7.42	30	7.5
IFP (Inkatha Freedom Party)	4.55	18	4.5
ID (Independent Democrats)	0.92	4	1
UDM (United Democratic Movement)	0.85	4	1
FF+ (Freedom Front Plus)	0.83	4	1
ACDP (African Christian Democratic Party)	0.81	3	0.75
UCDP (United Christian Democratic Party)	0.37	2	0.5
PAC (Pan-Africanist Congress)	0.27	1	0.25
MF (Minority Front)	0.25	1	0.25
AZAPO (Azanian People’s Organization)	0.22	1	0.25
APC (African People’s Convention)	0.20	1	0.25
Total	100	400	100

The ANC won with an overwhelming majority, as expected, but narrowly missed the symbolically crucial two-thirds threshold. The graphic illustrations below outline where the 10 percent drop in ANC support since the 2004 result was recorded. It shows a softening of support in all but three provinces. In KwaZulu Natal, the party's strength can be attributed to the "home advantage" of the party's leader, Jacob Zuma, and the consequent hemorrhaging of the IFP vote.



As expected, the DA solidified its position as the main opposition in control of the Western Cape. Nationally, its position was strengthened by overwhelming support (77 percent) amongst expatriate voters.

COPE made a good showing, becoming the leading opposition party in three provinces, ahead of the DA. It received 9 percent of the expatriate vote, just ahead of the ANC's 7 percent. Nationally, both it and the DA appear to have drawn significant numbers of votes from the myriad smaller opposition parties, such as the ID and the FF+, whose seats have been halved since the 2004 elections.

Reactions

Although there were some reported incidents of violence and 12 formal complaints lodged with the electoral commission, these were not determined to be well-founded. "The elections were fair, transparent and credible," said SADC mission head Clement Dlamini. In contrast to the tone of the campaign itself, the post-election rhetoric from both the ANC and the DA has stressed cooperation, not confrontation.

"Now that the election is over, we must enter a new era of hope and progress...We have scored a victory for a better education system, better health care, safer and secure communities and rural development. We will make our country one that creates an enabling environment for women to develop, thrive and be successful."

- ANC leader and President-Elect Jacob Zuma

"You only go into coalition if you do not have enough seats to govern on your own. But I will consider inviting competent people from smaller parties to join us in government [in the Western Cape], because they add value."

- DA leader Helen Zille

The New Government

The inauguration of Jacob Zuma as President of South Africa is expected to take place on May 9, after Members of Parliament (MPs) have reported for duty on May 6. It is expected that the new cabinet will consist of 31 ministers, an increase over the previous 28. This is a result of the splitting up of the education, minerals and energy, and trade and industry portfolios.

There has been speculation that the Department of Public Enterprises will be dissolved, and the political leadership of the various state-owned enterprises currently under its supervision will be devolved to the appropriate ministry. For instance, control of South African Airways will be given to the Department of Transport.

This will involve significant bureaucratic adjustments, as will the proposed new planning commission, which is designed to improve coordination between the national and provincial tiers of government, and the efficient delivery of services. The planning commission is also expected to review the current cluster system and introduce new forms of oversight for government ministers.

The new cabinet will be made up of both seasoned and new MPs. The ANC will, furthermore, seek to protect the gender gains already achieved in response to calls from its women's organization for a 50-50 gender split.

In line with Zuma's inclusive style, he will seek to continue the ANC's tradition of inviting some members of the opposition parties into the cabinet, as well as senior members of the tripartite alliance.

Jacob Zuma will deliver the State of the Nation address as the country's new president on June 3.

Commentary

Although the ANC ran a campaign promising continuity, some changes can be expected over the next five years. These include:

1. *Further employment regulations* – The call for “decent work” indicates a clear intention to address the increase in labor brokerage in South Africa. The number of brokers has increased as employers have attempted to circumvent labor laws which some have branded internationally uncompetitive. The introduction of laws to regulate contract workers, sub-contractors and outsourcing is expected.
2. *Publication of a national energy strategy* – A wider dialogue that includes options for energy generation and approval for capital spending to address current energy shortages is expected. It is hoped this will ensure the national grid keeps pace with development and regional commitments. This will require a shift away from South Africa's current position as a supplier of cheap electricity. Non-governmental organizations such as the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF) have conducted research and engaged in multi-sector dialogues on the options for energy generation in South Africa. Some of the proposed energy solutions offered by the WWF correspond with the ANC's manifesto commitment to invest in the creation of “green jobs”.
3. *Health reform* – The last few months have seen a significant attitudinal shift in dealing with national health challenges. Two pieces of legislation, the Medical Schemes Amendment Bill and the National Health Amendment Bill, which fell away because of the end of the parliamentary session, will be re-introduced as part of a wider reform proposal. The reforms will also include the introduction of a National Health Insurance (NHI) system and revision of the drug policy to support the effective implementation of the NHI. A feasibility study will also be conducted into the establishment of a state-owned pharmaceutical company.
4. *Social reform* – The ANC manifesto promised significant increases in social spending, such as widening eligibility for the child support grant from the age of 15 to 18. A grant system will be introduced for people living with chronic illnesses. Furthermore, retirement funding reform with a view to the introduction of a contributory social security system is on the cards.

Policy and legislation that have been on hold as a result of electioneering, Zuma's legal distractions and the Mbeki-Zuma power struggle is likely to resume. It is expected that following extensive consultations already, the President-Elect's new team will be in place very quickly and that continuity is likely on the economic front.

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