



## New Parties; Coalitions; Possible Outcomes

### 1. Introduction

Our recent Briefing Paper, *New Candidates; Three Ballots; Old Worries*,<sup>1</sup> dealt with the novelty of independent candidates and the move to a three ballot system necessitated by their inclusion, and looked at some perennial concerns – attacks on the IEC by disgruntled parties, overly aggressive rhetoric, and the thankfully unlikely prospect of election-linked violence. With only a week to go before the elections, we now consider the impact of some of the new parties that have emerged since the 2019 elections; the possibilities around coalition governance, or even minority governance, nationally and provincially; and the most likely outcomes.

### 2. New Parties

It is not unusual to have new parties entering the electoral fray, and even doing so with considerable success. In 1999 the United Democratic Movement under Bantu Holomisa won 14 seats and became the fifth biggest party; in 2004, Patricia de Lille's Independent Democrats won seven seats, also becoming the fifth biggest party; five years later, the Congress of the People, led by the disgruntled ANC veterans Mosiuoa Lekota and Mbhazima Shilowa, took 30 seats and third place, making it the most successful debutant party since 1994. In 2014 the Economic Freedom Fighters won 25 seats and also took third place, which they have held ever since. Only in 2019 were there no notable new parties – the African Transformation Movement and GOOD both managed only two seats.

This year there are numerous new parties on the national ballot, but it is fair to say that most of them have no realistic hope of earning a seat.

Of those that do, three seem likely to make at least a significant showing – ActionSA, the Patriotic Alliance<sup>2</sup> and Rise Mzansi – while one, the MK Party (officially listed as uMkhonto WeSizwe) is currently sitting at a very impressive 8-12 per cent in the opinion polls, depending on what the final voter turnout is. (As a rule of thumb, high voter turnouts tend to benefit populist parties and those that rely heavily on youth support, while lower turnouts favour the more centrist and 'establishment' parties.)

It will be a surprise if the MK Party sustains its early levels of support. At the moment it is benefiting from the novelty factor and from the undoubted charisma of Jacob Zuma, especially in his home province of KwaZulu-Natal. The party has also enjoyed a lot of free media coverage due to its legal battles with the IEC about Mr Zuma's eligibility to stand for Parliament, and with the ANC about the use of the uMkhonto name and brand. Mr Zuma's carefully constructed 'victim' persona strikes a chord with many poor and rural voters who, with good reason, feel let down and overlooked by the establishment.

The Constitutional Court's ruling, on May 20<sup>th</sup>, that Mr Zuma is ineligible to serve as an MP, and thus not qualified to stand as a candidate, will probably have only a limited impact on the party's support. His face will still appear on the ballot papers, which were printed some time ago, and the party remains part of his brand, unless and until his internal opponents succeed in their litigation to get him removed as MKP leader.

This last point indicates a serious weakness for the new party. There seems to be a deepening disunity in the ranks of MK, with some leaders being demoted or expelled, and others purporting to suspend Mr Zuma himself. Some poten-

tial supporters will be alienated by this but, more importantly, these divisions may well be carried into the post-election period, and its elected representatives could end up battling each other rather than rival parties. In addition, it may be expected that, once the novelty of the MK Party wears off, old party loyalties – in this case to the ANC and possibly the IFP – will reassert themselves. Nevertheless, it is certainly capable of winning 30 to 40 seats, which would signal yet another political triumph for Mr Zuma.

Of the other new parties only Action SA seems to have attracted the attention of national opinion polls; an IPSOS poll at the end of April gave it 3.4 per cent of the vote.<sup>3</sup> Provincially, it seems to be strongest in Gauteng, but even there it is hovering only around the 5 per cent mark, according to the Social Research Foundation's (SRF) tracking polls.<sup>4</sup> Rise Mzansi and the Patriotic Alliance fall under 'other' in both the IPSOS and the SRF national polls, making it very difficult to gauge their prospects. The PA has held some well-attended rallies in the Western Cape, and it has also had some good municipal by-election results there; despite this, the SRF has it at only around 7 per cent in the province, and it is unlikely to do better anywhere else.

Rise Mzansi is an unknown quantity. It has not contested municipal by-elections and neither has it managed to fill large stadiums. However, it has attracted considerable funding<sup>5</sup> and has established a relatively high media profile, possibly thanks to its leader's former career as a newspaper editor. Songezo Zibi has said that winning 5 per cent is doable for his party,<sup>6</sup> but that seems highly unlikely. Indeed, for any of these three parties to achieve even 2 per cent of the national vote would be an achievement, and would make them more successful than all but five of the parties that contested the 2019 elections.

### **3. Coalitions and Minority Governance**

One of these elections' biggest questions is whether or not the ANC will be in a position to govern alone at national level and in most of the provinces, as it has since 1994. For quite some time there was a general view among commentators, backed up by opinion polls, that it would fall well short of 50 per cent of the vote, with some even predicting a figure in the low 40s. However, the closer we get to polling day, the

less likely it seems that the governing party will fall that low. Unsurprisingly, the party itself is confidently claiming that it will retain its majority, but more and more experts are suggesting that this is possible. Past experience shows that support for the ANC tends to gather momentum in the final run-up, and this year will probably be no exception.

Nevertheless, a result of between 47 and 52 per cent seems on the cards, and anything in this range will mean that the party will need the co-operation of another sizeable party, or of a few small parties, to govern. Even with 52 per cent, which translates into 208 seats, the ANC would need to have all but seven of its MPs in the house to pass legislation or to survive a no-confidence motion (assuming that all opposition parties vote against it), and this will not easily be achieved. At least 65 of its MPs, going by past experience, will become ministers or deputy-ministers, and these are often not available for parliamentary sittings.

Ideally, from the ANC's point of view and that of stability in governance, the party will find a willing coalition partner to supply the needed seats. This could be a small, 3 or 4 per cent party, and the IFP is punted as the most likely candidate in this scenario, since Action SA, the only other party whose current polling suggests it may earn 10 to 15 seats, has firmly ruled out a coalition with the ANC. Alternatively, the ANC could take a number of very small parties into coalition. In 2019 the smallest eight parties shared 14 seats between them, and something similar could happen this time too. But, as has been the case at municipal level, coalitions that include large numbers of parties tend towards greater instability; and each of them would probably extract a price in terms of cabinet or deputy-ministerial appointments, leading to an ever more bloated executive.

If, however, the ANC does fall to the low 40 per cent range, it would need either the DA, or the EFF and/or MK, to obtain the needed working majority. Although the ANC and the EFF have co-operated at municipal level, the relationships have been strained, and at various times the larger party's executive committee has taken a stance against partnering with the EFF, though without actually enforcing it. Could the Ramaphosa ANC work with a Zuma MK party? It is very difficult to see this happening at all – Mr Zuma has made it clear that he wants Mr

Ramaphosa out of the ANC's leadership – and if it does the chances of it lasting more than a few months are negligible. The EFF, too, would exact a price that the ANC might be unwilling to pay – it has already listed the deputy-presidency and the ministry of finance, for example.

An ANC – DA coalition is an intriguing possibility, and one that both party leaderships have been careful to play down, but which neither have actually ruled out. It is to be hoped that they are indeed open to working together, because such a coalition would be a potentially very beneficial one, combining the ANC's historical stature and authority as the party of liberation with the DA's good track record in governance. At their core, the two parties' economic policies are not miles apart, and both claim to adhere to the same broadly liberal constitutional principles.

On the other hand, the DA may decide that its best option is to stay in opposition and continue to try to build the Multi-Party Charter<sup>7</sup> with an eye to the 2029 elections. To be a junior partner in government with an ANC that continues to underperform in so many areas of governance, and which is still far from shaking off the mantle of corruption and maladministration, may prove to be too high a price for the DA. At the same time, the DA's current leadership may not be flexible and pragmatic enough to accept the kinds of policy compromise that would be required for a successful coalition.

All of our main political parties currently seem to approach the idea of coalitions by first setting out their 'non-negotiable' points, rather than by seeking out areas of possible agreement and co-operation. This reflects, perhaps, the fact that we are still very much at the beginning of this phase of our democracy. For 30 years there has been no real need to learn how to negotiate and manage coalitions at national and provincial levels, and even though coalition governance will become only more necessary in coming years, the process of getting there is unlikely to be a smooth one.

A third alternative, in the absence of an outright majority or a coalition agreement, is that the ANC could continue to govern with a parliamentary minority. This would involve it securing support from opposition parties on a case-by-case basis for individual pieces of legislation, and for major items such as the Budget or

no-confidence motions. If the ANC falls just a few seats short of a majority this option could work, but the greater the support it needs the more unstable and unpredictable the situation would become. And, of course, this would come at a cost for the ANC – opposition parties would be tempted to extract a very high price for their support and, unlike in the case of a coalition, such parties would have very little to lose by withholding it.

One or other of these scenarios will also apply at provincial level in at least Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, where it seems certain that no party will achieve more than 50 per cent; and possibly also in the Western Cape, where it is possible that the DA will drop below that mark (although one week from the elections it was polling fairly comfortably above 50 per cent).

#### **4. Possible Outcomes**

As noted above, the ANC is facing a continuation, and perhaps an acceleration, of the decline in its support that began 15 years ago. Although some opinion polls last year and into the beginning of this year had it at around 40 per cent, and even below that level, it was always likely that the party would improve its position as the elections drew near. This seems to be partly due to its by now natural status as the party that brought democracy and liberation, and the promise of 'a better life for all', no matter that that promise has been only patchily fulfilled; and partly also to a feeling among many voters of 'better the devil you know'. Certainly, nothing that the government has done in the last six months justifies any surge in support – unemployment has risen slightly, living costs remain high, as does crime, and service delivery in most areas continues to decline. The absence of load shedding for the last 50 days (which most experts agree is not an election ploy) may have helped somewhat; the ceremonious signing into law of the NHI Act (undoubtedly an election ploy) probably didn't count for much. The party will also lose a certain amount of support to the MK party, especially in KwaZulu-Natal.

Cracking the 50 per cent mark would be an achievement for the ANC, and it is more likely that it will end up just below that.

The DA still cannot seem to make the breakthrough among African voters that it needs if it is ever to get to 30 per cent or beyond, and thus

be in a position to challenge, with its Multi-Party Charter partners, for national governance. Despite the fact that it is by far the most racially diverse party in terms of its public representatives, it has mismanaged the race issue at the highest levels of its leadership and is still widely labelled as a white or white-dominated party. Also, despite the fact that the provincial and municipal jurisdictions where it governs generally receive the best assessments by the Auditor-General, Stats SA, and the Department of Co-operative Governance, these successes have not been translated into electoral popularity in more than a handful of districts outside the Western Cape.

The DA is one of the parties that benefits from a low voter turnout, and that may be a factor this year. To reach 25 per cent after its 20.8 per cent in 2019 would be significant, but something a little below that is more probable.

Opinion polls strongly suggest that the MK party has been taking large numbers of voters away from the EFF. The latter is well down in most polls from the 10.8 per cent that it won in 2019, while MK is still polling at over 10 per cent. One of the EFF's problems is the very low rate of voter registration among its core youth support base. Its attempt to build support in KwaZulu-Natal seems to have been stymied by the emergence there of MK. But MK is not without its own difficulties, as discussed above.

The EFF has often been underestimated in opinion polls in the past, and that may be the case again now, but it seems safe to predict that it will decline to below 10 per cent. Anything

above 6 or 7 per cent for MK would be a considerable showing, given that it was only recently established, and it appears likely to exceed that level.

At one point the IFP was gaining a good deal of support, possibly as a sympathetic response to the death of its iconic founder, Mangosuthu Buthelezi. But it, too, seems to have lost out to MK in parts of KZN where Jacob Zuma is revered as a strong, traditional Zulu leader. It is hard to see the IFP taking more than 5 per cent of the national vote. The Freedom Front Plus will also probably move sideways, sticking at around 2 or 2.5 per cent. As mentioned earlier, Action SA is the only one of the new parties (other than MK of course) to feature individually in most polls, and its high point is around 5 per cent in Gauteng, the heartland of its support. Nationally it will be lucky to make half of that.

For the rest, the African Christian Democratic Party and the United Democratic Movement probably have sufficient core constituencies to win a few seats, and Rise Mzansi has had a sufficiently high-profile campaign to do the same. COPE, Good and the other parties that won only one or two seats in 2019 may not feature this time around.

A potential outcome would therefore be as follows:

ANC	48%
DA	23%
MK	9%
EFF	8%
IFP	4%
Others	8%

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<sup>1</sup> <https://cplo.org.za/briefing-paper-589-the-2024-general-election-new-candidates-three-ballots-old-worries-by-mike-pothier/>

<sup>2</sup> The PA is not strictly speaking a new party, since it contested the 2019 elections. However, after receiving a paltry 6 600 votes then, it made a much stronger impression in the 2021 local government elections, and it has gone on to occupy some high-profile municipal positions which it may be able to leverage into a few National Assembly seats this year.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ipsos.com/en-za/30-years-democracy-south-africas-2024-elections-marked-uncertainty-and-desire-change>

<sup>4</sup> <https://srfreports.co.za/reports/social-research-foundation-tracking-poll-gauteng-kwazulu-natal-and-the-western-cape>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-03-01-anc-and-da-are-the-big-losers-and-rise-mzansi-the-big-winner-as-political-party-funding-game-heats-up/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.voafrica.com/a/7569440.html>

<sup>7</sup> The MPC currently consists of the DA, the Inkatha Freedom Party, Freedom Front Plus, ActionSA, the African Christian Democratic Party, the United Independent Movement, the Spectrum National Party, the Independent South African National Civic Organisation, the Ekhethu People's Party and the United Christian Democratic Party. At present, apart from the DA, these parties account for only 28 seats in the National Assembly.



The Democracy & Governance Project of the CPLO is supported by the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF). The opinions and statements contained in CPLO's publications do not necessarily reflect the views of the HSF.

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