

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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South Africa Summary 23 May 2024

South Africa will hold its national general election on 29 May amid a strong possibility of the African National Congress (ANC) losing its ruling majority. A series of recent voter surveys has found that the ANC is polling below 45% among prospective voters. The ANC decline is due to growing voter dissatisfaction and the emergence of the uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MKP), led by former president Jacob Zuma (2009-2018). However, the ANC will be buoyed by the fact that the official opposition, the Democratic Alliance (DA), appears to be struggling following some strategic missteps. There is a threat of unrest and interparty violence ahead of, during and following the election. However, authorities have heightened security measures and set up a dedicated coordinating centre to respond to any emerging concerns.

Polls predict a hung legislature

South Africa will hold its national general election countrywide on 29 May in what is expected to be the most competitive election in its democratic era. There is a strong possibility that the ruling **African National Congress (ANC)** will lose its majority in the country's **National Assembly**, resulting in a hung parliament, which would be a fundamental shift in South African politics.

Indicative of this shift in voter intentions, the ANC has consistently polled below 45% in voter surveys over the past six months. This has continued with the final round of public polls that have been released over the past month (see table below).

Party	SRF (April) ¹	Ipsos (April) ²	ENCA/MarkData (May) ³	SRF-Tracking (20 May) ⁴
ANC	37%	40.2%	43.4%	44.1%
DA	25%	21.9%	18.6%	23.1%
EFF	11%	11.5%	11.4%	10%
MKP	13%	8.4%	14.1%	10.5%
Other	14%	18%	12.5%	12.3%

It should be noted that South Africa's polling industry is somewhat underdeveloped and there may be a wide margin of error. However, it is noteworthy that these various polling agencies find similar patterns and outcomes in their surveys, lending credibility to their findings. In addition, **Ipsos** and **MarkData** have historically been the most accurate of the firms which conduct pre-election polls. In 2019, both companies' final surveys were within four percentage points of the eventual election result. Notably, both firms over-pollled the ANC, predicting that the ruling party would win 61% and 60.6% respectively compared with the ruling party's actual tally of 57.5%.⁵

¹ SRF, 10 Apr 2024

² Daily Maverick, 26 Apr 2024

³ ENCA, 20 May 2024

⁴ SRF, 20 May 2024

⁵ IEC, 11 May 2019

Accordingly, it is likely that these firms overcorrected and are currently under-polling ANC support. Even so, this would still place the ruling party's likely 2024 vote haul at around 46%, meaning that the ruling party will need to form a coalition to remain in power.

Although the ANC is likely to lose its parliamentary majority, it will remain the largest political party in South Africa and continue to dominate the country's politics. Even in the worst-case scenario for the party, in which its support falls below 40%, it will remain the largest party.

Furthermore, any coalition government that includes the ANC will require the opposition **Democratic Alliance (DA)**, **Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)** and **uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MKP)** to work together. ⁶The DA has already discounted the possibility of working with the EFF and will not approve an alliance with the MKP, which is led by former president **Jacob Zuma** (2009-2018).⁷

The possibility that the ANC will lose its majority will mean that the party will need to form a coalition with one or several smaller parties in order to secure the necessary majority support in government required to form a government. If the ANC can form a coalition with one or more minor parties this will have little impact on the current status quo; however, if the party's support falls low enough it will need to form a partnership with one of the larger opposition parties which will have a practical impact in government policy. In the ANC forms a coalition with the far-left EFF, it will result in a sharp shift towards more ultra-left statist policies; especially, in any policies formed by any ministry controlled by EFF leaders in the possible coalition. In contrast, an ANC-DA coalition will likely be much more pro-business with the DA using its new power to push a more centre-right agenda.

MKP aggravates ANC woes

The ANC's anticipated decline in voter support is due to multiple factors. After 30 years in power, the ruling party is largely viewed as responsible for South Africa's economic challenges and the government's poor service delivery record. This has fuelled disillusionment and discontent amongst the electorate, leading many voters to defect to other parties or refuse to vote. It is also a natural progression for a multi-party democracy to tend away from a state of one-party dominance to a more pluralistic electoral landscape.

However, this shift away from the ANC has been aggravated by the emergence of the MKP, or more specifically, Zuma's emergence as head of the MKP. Zuma's decision to openly challenge the ANC (of which he is technically still a member) and contest the election as the head of another party has caused many voters to defect from the ANC to the MKP.

Zuma has claimed that the MKP's goal is to rescue the ANC from President **Cyril Ramaphosa** (2018-present), whom he claims has been captured by "*white monopoly capital*".⁸ This message is intended to create permission for ANC loyalists to defect to the MKP under the pretence of saving the ruling party. The fact that the ANC has failed to expel Zuma from the party has helped to lend weight to Zuma's claims.

The MKP has found deep pockets of support in areas which have long supported Zuma. This is primarily in **KwaZulu-Natal (KZN)** province and the Zulu-speaking areas of **Mpumalanga** and **Gauteng** provinces. Zuma's brand of rural ultra-conservatism, which advocates for the weakening of the judiciary and legislature and the devolving of power to traditional leaders, has resonated in these patriarchal constituencies. This has been reflected in the polling that suggests that the MKP will be among the two largest parties in KZN alongside either the ANC or the **Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)** and could secure over 10% of the national vote.⁹

⁶ Note that the MKP is a breakaway party from the ANC that contentiously uses the name of the ANC's erstwhile armed wing.

⁷ DA, 5 May 2024

⁸ Daily Maverick, 20 May 2024

⁹ ENCA, 20 May 2024

The MKP has also been bolstered by Zuma's knack for dominating South Africa's political discourse. The polarising leader has successfully attracted media attention to his new party, which has essentially been a multi-million-rand messaging boost. Admittedly, this is partly due to Zuma's various legal difficulties. The MKP has used the former president's court appearances related to his impending corruption trial as an opportunity to stage rallies and advance its narrative that Zuma is being victimised.

Furthermore, Zuma's very presence on the MKP's candidate list was challenged and led to a high-profile legal battle with the **Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC)**. On 20 May, the **Constitutional Court of South Africa** resolved this matter when it upheld the IEC's original finding that Zuma was not eligible for the National Assembly due to his 2021 contempt of court prison sentence.¹⁰ This ruling will have little impact on the election campaign as it is too late to amend the ballot to remove Zuma's picture as the MKP leader.

The MKP's dominance over South Africa's pre-election media coverage and discourse has not only bolstered that party but also undermined the EFF, which usually enjoys outsized media coverage due to its polarising policies and inflammatory rhetoric.

South Africa's third largest party has struggled to break through with its message this election and, as such, is not expected to achieve meaningful electoral growth and could even find itself replaced by the MKP as the third largest party in **Parliament**.¹¹

It's all about the provinces

Although the ANC remain the dominant – albeit reduced – force in South Africa's national politics, the increased competitiveness of the upcoming election could have serious ramifications for provincial-level politics in the country. The decline in support for the ANC on a national level will threaten the party's control over provincial legislatures. Currently, the ANC controls eight of the country's nine provincial legislatures with the DA governing the **Western Cape**.

The ruling party is expected to easily retain control of the country's more rural provinces – **Limpopo**, the **Eastern Cape**, **North West Province** and Mpumalanga – given its commanding majorities in these provinces. In 2019, the ANC won between 61% and 75.5% in these provinces and has largely retained this support over the past five years. This is partly because no other party has the resources or numbers to effectively campaign across these rural provinces. However, the party's majority is threatened in the **Free State**, **Northern Cape**, KZN and Gauteng.

KZN and Gauteng provinces have witnessed a dramatic decline in ANC support in recent years, underscored by the fact that the party only received 41.4% and 36.06% of the respective total votes cast in these provinces in the 2021 local government elections.¹² This is particularly concerning for the party as these two provinces contain around 43% of all registered voters in the country.

These low levels of support indicate that opposition parties could potentially take control of these provinces from the ANC via multi-party coalitions. This was particularly likely in KZN where the ANC's support is under the most pressure. However, the likelihood of such a possibility is falling as the ANC has embarked on a last-minute push to salvage its support in these provinces. Since the start of May, the ANC has deployed resources to aggressively campaign in these provinces, including deploying popular former party leaders and presidents, **Thabo Mbeki** (1999-2008) and **Kgalema Motlanthe** (2008-2009).¹³ They are popular figures with the electorate and their presence has helped to renew the emotive connection between the ANC and its voting base.

¹⁰ CNBC Africa, 20 May 2024

¹¹ ENCA, 20 May 2024

¹² News24, 4 Nov 2021

¹³ News24, 5 May 2024

Opposition missteps

The ANC's final push has also been aided by missteps by opposition parties, most notably the DA. South Africa's official opposition party elected to adopt a strategy of negative campaigning. This ill-advised strategy included airing an advert depicting a burning South African flag which was supposedly meant to highlight the alleged dangers of an ANC-EFF or ANC-MKP coalition.¹⁴ The advert backfired in a largely patriotic country which loudly takes pride in national symbols such as the flag. As a result, the DA has found itself defending the advert rather than campaigning on its preferred issues.

The DA's pursuit of fear-based politics around possible ANC-led coalitions is intended to mobilise its core white urban base. This may be effective; however, it provided space for the party's critics to accuse the DA of dog-whistle racism which will likely help the ANC and EFF to mobilise their voters.

The DA should be thriving in this election given South Africa's deep economic challenges, worsening unemployment, multiple governance crises, and the fact that the DA has an objectively better service delivery record in the Western Cape. Yet, South Africa's official opposition party appears to be on the back foot and is not expected to secure meaningful electoral gains.

The party also appears to be concerned that it may lose its majority in the Western Cape and be forced into a coalition government.¹⁵ This fear has been illustrated by the party's repeated attacks on smaller opposition parties notably the **Patriotic Alliance (PA)** and **Rise Mzansi**.¹⁶ These parties are attracting votes from different elements of the DA's base. Rise Mzansi is emerging as a potential rival for liberal centre-left voters who have formed a core part of the DA's voting bloc ever since 1994 while support for the PA is growing among coloured voters – an essential voting bloc for any party that wishes to govern the Western Cape.

The DA's issues this election are also rooted in the party's misunderstanding of the 2019 election results in which its support fell to 20.77% from 22.23% in 2014, a result of voters defecting to the more conservative **Vryheidsfront (VF) Plus** party.¹⁷ In response to this decline in support, the DA has shifted its policies and rhetoric rightwards to regain these more conservative, largely white voters. This has come at the cost of alienating a larger share of the electorate and stymieing the DA's ability to achieve meaningful growth this election. It should be noted that the voters who defected to the VF Plus were always an uncomfortable fit for the DA, which is unlikely ever to be conservative enough for them. These voters were likely anti-Zuma voters who supported the DA to bolster a unified opposition but felt comfortable shifting to the VF Plus when faced with the more benign Ramaphosa presidency. If the DA fails to secure meaningful, countrywide electoral growth it will raise doubts about the party's long-term viability, especially outside the Western Cape.

Security concerns raised ahead of the election

Elections in South Africa are accompanied by an associated risk of civil unrest and politically motivated violence. In response to this, the **National Joint Operational and Intelligence Structure (Natjoints)** has established a 24-hour coordinating centre to address any potential threats.¹⁸ Law enforcement and intelligence agencies have also identified 650 voting districts as 'hotspots' where the threat of election-related violence is elevated. These hotspots are predominantly located in areas with a history of political violence such as in northern KZN and **Johannesburg's Alexandra** (Gauteng) neighbourhood.

Such violence usually takes the form of inter-party clashes such as what occurred between ANC and EFF supporters in **Juju Valley** (Limpopo) on 19 May during which two people were shot.¹⁹ However,

¹⁴ ENCA, 12 May 2024

¹⁵ News24, 19 May 2024

¹⁶ News24, 29 Mar 2024

¹⁷ IEC, 21 May 2024

¹⁸ SABC News, 19 May 2024

¹⁹ Citizen, 20 May 2024

periods of elevated political sentiment have also been known to fuel incidents of xenophobic violence during which foreign nationals are targeted. This threat is particularly relevant as the anti-immigrant **All Truck Drivers Forum and Allied South Africa (ATDF-ASA)** threatened to stage a strike on 20 May protesting the presence of foreign freight truck operators in the country.²⁰ This strike was suspended after urgent stakeholder meetings. However, anti-foreigner sentiment being elevated ahead of the election is a concern.

The most serious threat of electoral violence is believed to stem from the MKP. The party's supporters have repeatedly threatened to stage protests if it does not win the election, which it will not. Zuma's backers have also made veiled threats to instigate unrest similar to that which occurred during the July 2021 riots if Zuma is prevented from being elected president. There is a strong possibility that the MKP will refuse to accept the election results which could lead its supporters to protest.

However, such protests are unlikely to resemble the July 2021 unrest. Firstly, South Africa's intelligence and security services are better prepared and there will be heightened security measures across the country over the election period. Secondly, MKP has not called any major protests after the constitutional court barred Zuma as a National Assembly candidate, suggesting that there may be limited appetite for such violence among the party's rank and file.

Planner

29 May 2024 **(South Africa)** General election
 2 Jun 2024 **(South Africa)** Results expected to be announced
 2025 **(South Africa)** G20 Summit (details still to be confirmed)

Chronology

20 May 2024 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *EWN*. South Africa marks 55 days without load-shedding but state-owned power utility **Eskom** warns that load-shedding remains possible during the coming winter months;

20 May 2024 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *Office of the Chief Justice*. The **Judicial Services Commission (JSC)** interviews prospective candidates for the **Supreme Court of Appeal** and the **Constitutional Court**;

19 May 2024 **Pretoria (South Africa)** *News24*. Department of defence and military veterans confirms that it will not pay for former **National Assembly** speaker **Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula**'s legal defence in her ongoing corruption trial related to her time as defence minister (2012-2021);

19 May 2024 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *News24*. Opposition **Democratic Alliance (DA)** federal council chairperson **Helen Zille** is reported to the **Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC)** for spreading disinformation after she shared a picture of a doctored **African National Congress (ANC)** election poster on social media;

18 May 2024 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *EWN*. **African Congress for Transformation (ACT)** leader **Ace Magashule** calls on his supporters in provinces where ACT will not be on the ballot to vote for the **uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MKP)**;

18 May 2024 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *EWN*. Opposition **Democratic Alliance (DA)** accuses police minister **Bheki Cele** of intentionally delaying the release of the latest crime statistics to prevent the ruling **African National Congress (ANC)** from receiving negative media coverage ahead of the election;

²⁰ News24, 19 May 2024

- 18 May 2024 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *BBC*. Former president **Jacob Zuma**'s new opposition political party, the **uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MKP)**, holds its manifesto rally at **Orlando Stadium** in **Soweto** which is attended by thousands of supporters;
- 17 May 2024 **Cape Town (South Africa)** *Daily Maverick*. **Parliament** passes the controversial **Basic Education Laws Amendment (BELA) Bill**;
- 17 May 2024 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *EWN*. Overseas voting begins at South African diplomatic missions across the world until 19 May;
- 16 May 2024 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *EWN*. The **Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC)** announces that 160 observer missions have been accredited and dismisses reports that this includes a mission from **Zimbabwe**'s ruling party **Zanu-PF**;
- 16 May 2024 **Pietermaritzburg (South Africa)** *News24*. **KwaZulu-Natal Division of the High Court** schedules former president **Jacob Zuma**'s corruption trial for 14 April 2025;
- 14 May 2024 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *EWN*. The **European Council of Muslims** and the **United States Council of Muslim Organizations** issue a statement endorsing the ruling **African National Congress (ANC)** ahead of the 29 May election due to the party's stance on **Palestine**;
- 14 May 2024 **Pretoria (South Africa)** *StatsSA*. **Statistics South Africa (StatsSA)** releases the latest **Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS)** which reveals that unemployment increased by 0.8% in the first quarter of 2024 to 32.9%;
- 13 May 2024 **Bloemfontein (South Africa)** *GroundUp*. The **Electoral Court** fines the ruling **African National Congress (ANC)** and opposition parties **African Transformation Movement (ATM)**, **Congress of the People (COPE)**, **Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC)**, **National Freedom Party (NFP)** and the **African Independent Congress (AIC)** for failing to submit audited financial statements to the IEC as required by the **Political Parties Funding Act (PPFA)**;
- 12 May 2024 **Cairo (Egypt)** *Al Jazeera*. **South Africa**'s case against **Israel** before the **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** is boosted as **Egypt** announces it will formally support **South Africa**'s position;
- 12 May 2024 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *My Broadband*. State-owned power utility **Eskom** files court papers to sue **the City of Johannesburg** to recover nearly R1 billion (\$55m) in unpaid electricity bills;
- 10 May 2024 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *Citizen*. The **Constitutional Court** dismisses an application by three political parties which failed to fully qualify for the election ballot to delay the election;
- 6 May 2024 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *CNBC Africa*. **United Kingdom**-headquartered oil and gas company **Shell** announces that it will divest from its downstream businesses in **South Africa** as part of its wider global realignment;
- 6 May 2024 **Bloemfontein (South Africa)** *EWN*. The **Supreme Court of Appeal** overturns the **Western Cape** high court's acquittal of former state security minister **Bongani Bongo** and orders that he be retried for corruption;
- 6 May 2024 **George (South Africa)** *SABC*. A building collapses in **George (Western Cape)**, killing at least 34 people;
- 30 Apr 2024 **Cape Town (South Africa)** *News24*. Police officials confirm they are investigating a complaint by a former **uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MKP)** member **Lennox Ntsondo** that the MKP forged signatures on its election nomination forms.

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