

South Africa’s ANC faces consequential choices on Zuma, economic ideology after poll rout

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While the full results of South Africa’s 3 August local government elections won’t be fully known until Friday, the early results clearly indicate that public support for the ruling African National Congress has taken a severe nose dive among the country’s cosmopolitan professionals, and also in the most economically deprived towns and provinces. While the cosmopolitan professional middle classes have come to loathe President Jacob Zuma, the working classes and unemployed are also increasingly critical of the centrist-orthodox economic program of the ruling party and are drawn to radical populist economic appeals.

The ANC, historically a centrist, somewhat conservative petit bourgeois party, before 1948, has since the end of apartheid in 1994 sought to meander its way back to its old centrist identity and has sought to keep the country’s more radical labor unions at bay. However after two decades of centrist orthodox economic policies, which have failed to break the stranglehold of unemployment which runs as high as 25% by official readings and almost 40% if the underemployed are factored in, the party is losing the support of the both working masses and the middle classes. While the middle classes are upset about government incompetence and corruption, the working classes are economically frustrated by the lack of jobs – good paying or not.

ANC Membership Trends (1997 - 2017E)								
	1997	2002	2005	2007	2010	2012	2015	2017E
Gauteng	42,824	52,531	58,223	59,909	70,305	134,909	87,759	62,773
KwaZulu-Natal	64,998	53,531	75,035	102,742	192,618	331,820	158,199	142,423
Limpopo	68,560	44,107	56,474	67,632	101,971	161,868	84,413	79,817
Mpumalanga	38,044	48,588	48,239	54,913	46,405	132,729	96,799	19,867
North West	35,800	41,388	39,006	47,535	57,911	75,145	78,922	65,195
The Eastern Cape	44,684	89,167	70,651	153,164	161,161	187,585	124,050	134,888
The Free State	40,184	33,115	38,331	61,310	41,627	121,074	51,088	17,102
The Northern Cape	19,894	24,390	21,608	37,262	37,122	36,428	38,680	37,846
The Western Cape	30,790	29,796	33,141	36,497	40,427	38,499	49,960	43,715
Totals	385,778	416,613	440,708	620,964	749,547	1,220,057	769,870	603,626

Source: ANC Party/ DaMina Advisors

Thus unless the ANC takes drastic actions in the coming weeks, including probably forcing President Zuma out of office, its ability to coherently govern the country could become almost impossible as it simultaneously fights off a resurgent centrist-rightist opposition which is increasingly the party of choice for many middle class

professionals, and the radical leftists who have eaten into the ANC's political stranglehold on the working poor.

In order to survive the ideological and generational challenges facing the ANC it will either have to shift rightward and absorb the centrist policies planks and even the party apparatus of the centrist opposition Democratic Alliance (DA), or shift leftward to absorb radical leftist Economic Freedom Fighters party (EFF). However whether the ANC shifts leftwards or rightward, Zuma political days are over since no ideological shift is possible under the poisoned clouds that hover around his presidency. Under a President Cyril Ramaphosa, a merger with the DA, or rightward shift is more likely. The ANC will then be transformed into anti-revolutionary mainline leftist-centrist party representing both the black professional and middle classes as well as whites. An alternative, but unlikely leftward shift or merger with the EFF will see the ANC party lose millions of black middle class professionals, but win back the working classes and remain a revolutionary party.

Many academic papers have been written over the years about how South Africa could be transformed into a viable two-party democratic system, with most hypotheses assuming that the ANC will be pulled leftwards and an alternative centrist/rightist party will emerge. However it is increasingly likely that the opposite could happen, the EFF could gain a large chunk of the working classes base of the ANC, and rather push the ANC into the arms of the DA, with the ANC-DA as the party of power and EFF as the permanent militant revolutionary opposition.

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