



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

The return of Jacob Zuma does not provide solutions to South Africa's problems



South Africa will not benefit much from the first-rate political conflict within the ruling African National Congress (ANC), which has already set the tone for the forthcoming parliamentary elections scheduled for the end of May.

Former South African President Jacob Zuma was **cleared to participate** in the May 29 election 2 days ago after a court rejected the ruling ANC's request to ban Zuma's MK party from the race.

However, the Electoral Commission still granted requests to **deny Zuma** the right to participate due to previous corruption convictions and, as a result, his name is unlikely to appear on the list of candidates.

However, this provides scope for the comeback ambitions of the former ANC leader and head of state (2009-2018). Jacob Zuma is being offered as an alternative to the ruling party, playing on its poor performance in running the country, primarily regarding the economy.

But in Mr Zuma's attempt to return to the top of South African politics, there are many revanchists and even vengeful motives, and at the centre is the struggle for supremacy in the ANC, which has been leading the country since the abolition of apartheid 30 years ago.

His conflict with current President Cyril Ramaphosa and the ANC leadership does not seem too principled and focused on a battle of different political concepts.

This is a typical intra-party conflict over supremacy and state leadership, putting aside state reforms.

Earthquake and consequences

Jacob Zuma has a good chance of returning to the centre of South African politics, even though he will probably not be on the list of candidates for parliament.

Since stepping down as head of state in 2018

and coming to power of President Ramaphosa, Mr Zuma has had a thorny road and was even in prison on corruption charges.

His statement from last December, when he said that he would be active in the campaign of the newly founded MK party (uMkhonto we Sizwe), was a real political earthquake, particularly in the ranks of the ANC.

It was clear that the activation of Mr Zuma only represented an ambition to take over a part of the membership and voters of the ANC, investing in it his long-standing background as a revolutionary and anti-apartheid fighter.

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Until that point, the ruling ANC was more or less confident that it would be able to secure a new mandate in the May elections, with the repeated support of more than 50% of voters.

However, Zuma spoiled such calculations and brought unrest to the ruling party's leadership, even to the point of requesting the Electoral Court to suspend his party's participation in the elections, which was a rather desperate step.

The ban on his participation in the elections, announced by the Electoral Commission on Thursday, does not apply to the MK Party. Mr Zuma's disqualification will probably boost its chances of success even more, as it will present this as an ANC move motivated by fear of Zuma's return.

Coalition government - a precedent for South Africa

Two months before the elections, the ANC **cannot count on the support** it was sure it had

last December - over 50%. Its rating is around 40%, probably subject to further decline, which puts this party in a position to think about forming a coalition if it wants to remain in power.

No political line-up in the ANC has been in this position since the overthrow of apartheid. During the time of President Thabo Mbeki in the early 2000s, it was at its peak with close to 70% of support and declined over time but not below the 57% it won in the last elections in 2019.

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Jacob Zuma's followers are emerging as a growing force, and 2 months before the elections, they have slightly more than 20% support, according to surveys.

Their trend has been increasing, but it is uncertain where the boundaries of this division lie within the ANC's electorate.

If these trends remain until the elections, it will be a significant change for the young South African democracy because it would force the former political hegemon - the ANC - to share power and form coalitions for the first time.

That will be the only value for the country from the reactivation of Jacob Zuma on the political scene.

More ANC than ANC offers

His election offer is almost no different from that of his former friends from the ANC. Except that Zuma offers even more populism and a return to the revolutionary roots of Nelson Mandela's party.

That is why Mr Zuma insists on symbolism that

goes back to the glory days of the struggle against apartheid. The name of the MK party means "spear of the nation", which was the slogan of the armed wing of the ANC (of which Mr Zuma was one of the leaders) during the struggle against apartheid.



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The party of which Zuma is a trademark will rely on the votes of those who seek more nationalism and the return of real power to the people, not the elites. According to the interpretation of Zuma and his followers, the ANC has lost its ear for the needs of the people over time, particularly the "revolutionary spirit", which he wants to bring back.

It is not, however, an option that will be an effective alternative for South Africa to solve its enormous economic and social problems, so the May 29 elections might be another missed opportunity for a shift towards reforms.

Zuma's new attempt to come to the leadership position in the government does not provide expectations for reducing unemployment, which in South Africa exceeds 30%, or for improving the work of public services or dealing with increasing crime rates. His offer is - more ANC than ANC is currently giving you.