Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

By: TA | AP Insight

# South Africa's ruling party is at an all-time low after the election



South Africa's African National Congress party faced its worst election results ever Sunday and a new low point on its gradual decline in popularity as voters rebuked it for a failure to deliver basic services like water and electricity in towns and cities.

The once-dominant ANC — the party of Nelson Mandela — had received around 30% of the vote in Wednesday's local government elections with 99% of ballots counted.

The final results were expected late on Sunday, according to the Independent Electoral Commission.

The ANC remained the largest party by total share in an election involving hundreds of parties, but the Democratic Alliance that is its main opposition had received around 25% of votes in the near-complete count.

That brought closer to reality the once-unthinkable notion that the ANC that led South Africa out of the white minority rule of apartheid and delivered freedom in 1994 under Mandela might one day not be its biggest party. It used to command 70% of the vote.

## It's a 'very catastrophic outcome' for the ANC

The ANC's popularity has declined for more than a decade. It won 45% support in the last local elections in 2021, the first time it had dropped below 50% in any election.

In 2024 it then lost its Parliamentary majority for the first time in a national election, which brought about a coalition national government and a seismic shift in South African politics.

The ANC was on course Sunday for a steep drop of about 15 percentage points from the last local elections and the loss of approximately one-third of its support from five years ago.

> If anyone has not heard what the people are saying in this election, then you are lost - Fikile Mbalula

"If anyone has not heard what the people are saying in this election, then you are lost," said ANC Secretary-General Fikile Mbalula. "This has been a very catastrophic outcome for the ANC."

He said the results called for the ANC "to be humble, to hear our people and respect them," and to "earn again through service and not through slogans the trust people have lent to others."

DA leader Geordin Hill-Lewis said his party — which was around 20 percentage points behind the ANC in the 2024 national election — had now "taken a big step forward" in its aim to be South Africa's biggest.

## As the ANC declines, voters leave for several parties

But while the ANC's popularity has dropped sharply, no single party has overtaken it as the vote has fragmented among many parties on a local and national scale.

Another seven major parties shared around 30% of the vote in these local elections, which had more than 500 parties contesting and many picking up small shares.

The MK Party led by former South African President Jacob Zuma, who broke away from the ANC and was expelled by it, held the third-largest share of votes at around 10%.

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Voters across South Africa have long expressed frustration over failed public services that have left many cities and towns

with regular water and electricity outages, broken roads and streetlights, and uncollected refuse.

Those local government failures, along with long-held anger over corruption scandals connected to the ANC, largely were the key issues in this election.

The election was to choose local government councilors that run South Africa's eight biggest cities as well as its 44 district and 205 local municipalities.

## The ANC loses in major cities

The ANC was on course to lose its place as the largest party to the DA in the economic hub of Johannesburg, the capital of Pretoria, and the large Ekurhuleni municipality east of Johannesburg.




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In Johannesburg, where failed services have been most under scrutiny, the white-led DA put forward its former leader, 75-year-old Helen Zille, as a candidate for mayor.

Her campaign included stunts like snorkeling in a water-filled trench in the middle of a city road in an attempt to highlight the failures.

But while the ANC's decline was obvious in the biggest cities, most of them could be left with hung councils because no party was set to win a majority.

That meant a series of complex coalition agreements will be required to decide who governs and the ANC could be part of the governing coalitions.