

FOCUS

South Africa



Jacob Zuma elected as ANC President

The end of the Mbeki era

With 60 percent of the votes, Jacob Zuma was elected as president of South Africa's ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC). In so doing, Zuma effectively handed his only opponent, current South African President Thabo Mbeki, a harsh defeat and is now seen as the most promising candidate for the national presidential elections in 2009. Controversy surrounds Zuma, because of the rape and corruption charges which he currently faces (he may possibly be retried for the latter).

"Various resolutions have been made at this conference, which will guide us on our way forward. ANC policies, including economic policies that have been adopted at this conference, do not indicate a fundamental shift from the policies that the ANC has adopted since it has come into power. Let me reiterate that decisions with regards to policies in the ANC are taken by participants of the conference and not by an individual."

Jacob Zuma in his statement at the closing of the ANC Conference

On Tuesday, the members of the *African National Congress* (ANC) determined (by virtue of a secret ballot) the composition of the six highest party positions. The incumbent President Thabo Mbeki was nominated for re-election, and Jacob Zuma was the only contender for the highest party position. Finally, Zuma won 2329 votes, while Mbeki only received 1505.

Former ANC Secretary General, Kgalema Motlanthe was elected as deputy president with 2346 votes, while his opponent, Zuma's ex-wife and current Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, lost with 1444 votes. Parliamentary Speaker Baleka Mbete was elected as new chairperson. Former Secretary General of the *National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa* (NUMSA), Gwede Mantashe, was elected as secretary general and Matthews Phosa as treasurer. Phosa managed to assert himself over South Africa's Deputy President, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. Thandi Modise became the new Deputy Secretary General by achieving victory over current Minister of Agriculture, Thoko Didiza.

Ultimately, the Zuma camp managed to acquire all its recommendations for the six highest party positions elected, each with a near identical and clear majority of 60 percent of the votes. At the elections for the *National Executive Committee* (NEC, the highest internal decision-making body) the Zuma camp also won a decisive majority.

Zuma – the controversial candidate

Preceding the conference was a two-and-a-half year internal power struggle between Mbeki and Zuma, which began with the dismissal of Zuma as South African Deputy President by Mbeki in 2005. The two had previously been devoted allies, and Zuma loyally supported Mbeki since his return from exile at the beginning of the 1990s. Reasons for his dismissal and the subsequent division in the ANC leadership were principally located in the corruption and rape allegations, for which he (Zuma) had to stand trial. Although both charges were dropped due to insufficient evidence, the corruption charges – dealing with a multi-billion Rand arms deal towards the end of the 1990s – could be reopened in the near future. Zuma's close friend and business partner Shabir Shaik, who was involved in the arms deal, was given a 15-year jail sentence for bribery and corruption. Nonetheless, Zuma is the favourite as successor of Mbeki as state president, who cannot stand for a third term due to constitutional law.

Internal conflict and the formation of camps leading up to the conference

It would however, be incorrect to reduce the struggle and debate regarding the successor of Thabo Mbeki as ANC president to a rivalry between two great personalities, as the South African media often has done in the run-up to the conference. Rather, Zuma's



Results of the election at the ANC conference in December 2007*

Position	Zuma's list			Mbeki's list		
	Nominated	Votes	%	Nominated	Votes	%
President	Zuma, Jacob	2329	60.75	Mbeki, Thabo	1505	39.25
Deputy President	Motlanthe, Kgalema	2346	61.9	Dlamini-Zuma, Nkosazana	1444	38.1
National Chairperson	Mbete, Baleka	2326	61.19	Netshitenzhe, Joel	1475	38.81
Secretary General	Mantashe, Gwede	2378	62.41	Lekota, Terror Mosiuoa	1432	37.59
Deputy Secretary General	Modise, Thandi	2301	61.26	Didiza, Thoko	1455	38.74
Treasurer General	Phosa, Matthew	2328	62.88	Mlambo-Ngcuka, Phumzile	1374	37.12

* In the percentage are invalid votes and abstentions from voting disregarded.

success can be explained by a variety of factors, which are more related to the dissatisfaction with Mbeki and the party and state leadership, rather than the personal popularity of Zuma. The main reasons for the radical replacement of the ANC leadership personnel (including Mbeki's dismissal) are Mbeki's centralised leadership style, along with the continued inequality, poverty and unemployment in South Africa, even though economic growth has accelerated and continues.

In South Africa, the first and third worlds meet in a truly unique manner. Thus South Africa belongs to the countries with the highest income inequality worldwide. More than a third of the population is forced to survive on the equivalent of less than two US dollars a day and live in poverty, while the upper class flaunt, even by European standards, their extravagant luxury. The unemployment rate lies – depending on definition – between 25 and 40 percent.

These particular social problems led to the fact that Zuma was able to gain the support of the two most important allies of the ANC, namely the *Congress of South African Trade Unions* (COSATU) and the *South African Communist Party* (SACP). Zuma had, as Deputy State President (and up to this day) supported the economic policy of the Mbeki government which has been criticized by COSATU and the SACP as being too business-friendly and “neo-liberal”. Nevertheless, COSATU and the SACP supported Zuma, as they regarded him as the only potential replacement. The clear positioning of the COSATU and SACP leadership provided Zuma with legitimacy on the one hand, and, on the other hand, enabled him to appear as “defender of the little man” and the underprivileged. At the same time, this led to a widening of the divisions in the ANC which crossed over to COSATU and the SACP as well. In all three organisations a majority supports Zuma. In the ANC itself, the essentially leftist *Youth League* was the strongest and most aggressive supporter of Zuma. Despite the rape allegations and his chauvinistic approach to women, the majority of the *Womens' League* finally supported him as well.



Political culture in the ANC as the deciding factor

During the internal power struggle (and particularly at the national conference), it became clear, though, that above the social problems, Mbeki's leadership style was the determining factor which led to him losing the vote. The contrast with his predecessor, Nelson Mandela, who concentrated on openness, reconciliation and contact with the population and party members, became more and more apparent over the years. According to many observers Mbeki ruled the party and State with mistrust and relied on a tight-knit circle of advisors and friends, some of whom had accompanied him for decades in exile. Critics believe that this attitude of obedience, detachment and the excessive pursuit of internal and external opponents practised by some former ANC exile cadres finally caused his downfall. For a long time, the firmly Mbeki-led ANC was ready to accept this since Mbeki had gained much respect due to his role in the freedom struggle along with his professional competence in foreign and economic policies, the stabilising of the macroeconomic situation and his work in the development of South Africa and a new African self-confidence.

However, many high-ranking members of parliament, senior administration officials, ANC veterans and political analysts (as well as Mbeki himself), were surprised about the manner in which the ANC has changed over the last few years. In the last two years, since the start of the dispute between Mbeki and Zuma, the membership of the ANC has grown by almost 50 percent from 416 000 to 620 000. The majority of the new membership is composed of relatively young individuals from rural areas (and who belong to the below average educated and poorer population group). With their interests, they represent the majority of the South African population, with which the previous ANC elite had lost contact – unlike Jacob Zuma. The form of articulating their interests was also different from the usual ANC conference procedure. It remains uncertain whether this change is permanent or temporary. Nevertheless, the new composition of the ANC has historic

meaning and consequent significance due to the results and course of the 52nd National Conference.

A conference full of tension

Despite the two-and-a-half year power struggle within the ANC, fought with increasing acrimony, most long-time observers of the party were surprised by the vehemence of the two camps at the conference, marked especially by the Zuma supporters amongst the delegates who caused unrest in the Mbeki camp with their singing, dancing and heckling. Such militancy was unknown at previous conferences. Nevertheless, the atmosphere remained peaceful and despite background orchestration had a grass-roots democratic character. The party rules, whereby any open support of a candidate outside the verbal expression of opinions in the debates is prohibited, were ignored from the first day of conference. Only mediation by former Secretary General and new Deputy President, Kgalema Motlanthe, could prevent the first session of the conference from sliding into chaos. Consequently, and especially after voting the situation calmed down. Mbeki himself was booed and Zuma supporters interrupted his relatively factual and statesmanlike opening statement as then President of the ANC with disrespectful, and, for Mbeki, humiliating heckles.

The great mistrust towards the old party leadership and between the two camps as well as the strain on delegates became clear right at the beginning of the conference. The formal question regarding the process of vote counting caused an unexpected debate. Zuma supporters, voicing concerns regarding vote manipulation, demanded

that votes – at least for the six highest positions – were counted manually and not, as suggested by the electoral commission, electronically. The heated debate surrounding the question required an *ad hoc* special meeting of the party's National Executive Committee and led to a delay in the conference. The concentration of the delegates on the outcome of the internal party power struggle also meant that discussion relating to political decisions and possible constitutional changes along with reforms in the party structure could only be held toward the end of the conference. Ultimately the resolutions which were made are in line with the recommendations agreed upon at the ANC Policy Conference in June 2007 (see Focus South Africa 04/2007 on this topic).

Quo vadis ANC?

Because of its 70% parliamentary majority and the fact that in the interim it will remain the ruling party, the question of the ANC's future after the historic power shift in the party leadership is closely tied to the future of South Africa as a whole. Therefore, the development paths of the ANC in the coming year-and-a-half until the next parliamentary elections will strongly influence the political development in South Africa.

Due to the deep divisions created by the complete replacement of the party leadership, there is uncertainty over the future direction of the ANC. This is amplified by the fact that – for the first time in ANC history – two centres of power have come into existence: in the party and in government. At the moment, no clear indications can be identified as to what the relationship between the two



Former and new ANC president: Mbeki and Zuma



Rendition of the election results on the ANC conference

archrivals, Mbeki and Zuma, in their new roles as state president “without a party” and party president without constitutional power and threatened by the justice system, could look like. Zuma’s closing speech at the conference was reconciliatory and promised a united ANC and tripartite alliance, as well as political continuity. Nevertheless, it would be too premature to conclude that all earlier conflicts have been buried. After all, it is clear that the majority of the party delegates expect and hope for nothing else and that Zuma principally needs to regain trust from the international audience and investors. In fact, three scenarios are equally plausible: Cooperation, confrontation or Mbeki’s resignation as state president and the subsequent need for early presidential elections.

Cooperation

According to this scenario, Mbeki would become the “servant to the party”, as he has seen himself for 50 years. He would have to accept the will of the majority in the party and, as demanded by the Zuma camp, subordinate himself to matters of policy and decisions made within and for the party. Power would be transferred from the Union Buildings in Pretoria, the official presidential office, to Luthuli House in Johannesburg, the ANC head office. Zuma and the new party leadership would give Mbeki a certain amount of leeway regarding foreign policy. Nonetheless, especially regarding economic and social policy, he would have to ensure that the agenda of (especially) COSATU, and furthermore that the decisions made at the conference relating to economic and social policy are more strongly considered – at least symbolically. Finally, in view of the reopening of corruption charges against Zuma, Mbeki would have to be markedly less involved than before.

Confrontation

The confrontation scenario implies that the power struggle between Mbeki and Zuma would continue and could become more intense, as both camps exhaust their power resources. The confrontation between state president and party president would have two dimensions: one political, the other personal. Politically, Mbeki would try to secure his legacy and especially the macroeconomic stability of South Africa. This would coincide with his increased warning of Zuma’s unreliability and a shift to

the left if he were to be elected as President of the Republic, in order to increase the pressure particularly from the economic sector on the party leadership not to nominate Zuma as candidate for the presidency. Personally, Mbeki would do anything in order to discredit Zuma and, through the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), provide the courts with as much material as possible in order to ultimately deliver a guilty verdict on corruption.

Zuma, on the other hand, would try to present Mbeki as a bad loser and pseudo-democrat, who, due to his elitist disposition, ignored the votes of the party majority. He would continue to try to mobilise the party, in the spirit of the liberation struggle, as they understand it, to reach political primacy and replace Mbeki prematurely. The appropriate tool in this instance would be the parliament, due to the fact that the list-voting system ensures that members of parliament are in fact not responsible to their constituency for re-election, but to the party leadership. Since the Zuma camp is dominant within the ANC leadership, Zuma and his allies would indeed have an effective instrument of persuading a majority in the ANC faction to cast a vote of no confidence for Mbeki.

Withdrawal of Mbeki from the role as state president and the calling of early presidential elections

A third scenario assumes that Mbeki, due to the humbling and unexpected defeat, is led to regard himself as something of a “lame-duck” president and is therefore not prepared to become a source of mockery of the party, the population and the international community. Rather, he would openly express his criticism and worries regarding Zuma. He would present himself as a statesman and responsible politician, who tried everything to prevent a political change of direction, but had to bow to the democratic decisions of his party. At the early elections – depending on the status of the case against Zuma – either Zuma himself or his deputy, Kgalema Motlanthe, would enter the elections as presidential candidate for the ANC.

Regardless of which of these scenarios is ultimately realised, the still young South African democracy will, due the brand new situation of two power centres, have to face major challenges. ■

Editorial

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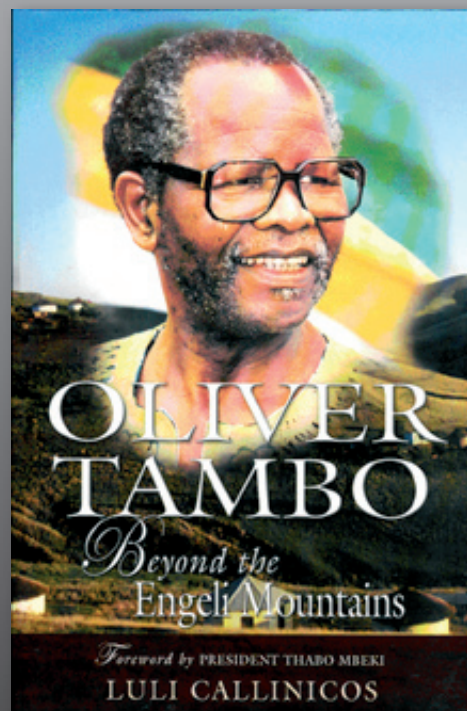


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