

South Africa: Tensions Escalate ahead of Local Government Elections

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Global Research, May 10, 2016

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Opposition parties in South Africa, the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), are seeking ways to not only gain votes in the upcoming local elections but to also discredit and bring down the African National Congress (ANC) government.

An impeachment vote against President Jacob Zuma on April 5 failed in the parliament since the ANC controls 62 percent of the seats in the legislative body. Zuma was accused by the opposition of violating the constitution of the Republic of South Africa which the ANC had the most prominent role in drafting during the early period of their rule under Nelson Mandela.

The Constitutional Court ruled unanimously that Zuma should have agreed to pay back some of the state funds utilized for upgrades of his Nkandla residence. The ANC government accepted the court decision and agreed to comply with orders from the highest judicial body in the country.

Nonetheless, another provincial court decision was handed down on April 29 reversing a previous ruling setting aside hundreds of corruption charges leveled against Zuma while he served as deputy president under the administration of President Thabo Mbeki. These charges prompted the removal of Zuma as deputy president fueling a factional struggle within the ANC that led to the ascendancy of Zuma as head of the ANC at the Polokwane conference in 2007.

The court dismissal of the charges against Zuma triggered the recalling of Mbeki who was unable to complete his second and final term of office. Later in 2009, Zuma was elected president of South Africa by a wide margin.

However, in a remarkable decision “a South African court ruled that the decision by prosecutors to drop a corruption case against President Jacob Zuma seven years ago was irrational and should be set aside, opening the way for the 783 charges against him to be reinstated. Then acting National Director of Public Prosecutions Mokotedi Mpshe was under pressure and made an ‘irrational decision’ to dismiss the charges in April 2009, ignoring the importance of his oath of office to act independently and without fear or favor, Judge Aubrey Ledwaba said at the North Gauteng High Court in Pretoria, citing the ruling by a full bench of judges. Zuma should face the charges in the indictment, he said.” (Bloomberg, April 29)

This latest decision has encouraged the opposition to renew calls for Zuma’s resignation. The president says he has no intentions of resigning and it appears that the majority within the ANC leadership structures are supporting Zuma.

Local Elections to Reveal Actual Strength of the ANC and Opposition Forces

The local government elections scheduled for August will represent a political test for both the ruling ANC and its opposition within parliament.

At present the DA, a party advocating a greater reliance on neo-liberal policies, controls approximately 22 percent of the seats in the legislative body in Cape Town. The EFF, headed by former ANC Youth League (ANCYL) leader Julius Malema, has six percent of the seats in parliament.

EFF leader Julius Malema and other former ANCYL leaders were expelled from the ANC after being accused of indiscipline and corruption. Malema and his comrades formed the EFF and ran candidates in the 2014 elections.

The EFF has called for the nationalization of South African agricultural land and mines. They have taken an extreme position against the ANC demanding that Zuma resign.

EFF Members of Parliament (MPs) voted in a bloc with the DA in the failed impeachment resolution in parliament. On several occasions EFF MPs have been forcefully removed from parliament due to disruptive tactics.



In a recent interview with Al Jazeera, Malema told the Qatar-based satellite network that the EFF would “run out of patience very soon and we will remove this government through the barrel of a gun.” Malema went on to say that “We will fight. We have the capability to mobilize our people and fight physically.” (Aljazeera, April 24)

Responding to the statements by Malema, ANC spokesperson Zizi Kodwa said: “These remarks are a call to violence, are inflammatory, treasonable and seditious and should be treated with extreme seriousness. They also are in clear violation of the Electoral Code and the Charter on Elections Ethics signed by a number of political parties - including the EFF, last week. In signing this charter, parties committed to upholding and promoting Constitutional values, alongside the Elections Code.” (IOL, April 25)

The government has since announced that an investigation into filing treason charges against Malema were underway. Kodwa told the Citizen newspaper that: "We have opened a case of high treason against Julius Malema in his personal capacity as well as the EFF, following his reckless comments about being prepared to remove a democratically elected government using undemocratic means and force. We are doing this on behalf of all South Africans to defend and protect our hard-won freedom and democracy." (April 26)

Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) President Sdumo Dlamini, a close ally of the ANC, described Malema's latest remarks as reckless. COSATU spokesperson Sizwe Pamla later emphasized: "In any other situation, it would be easy to say that Malema's statements can be ignored, but given the various coalitions making calls to topple the ANC government, this is something that must be taken very seriously by law enforcement.

On May 9, two ANCYL leaders were assassinated in Newcastle. These murders are under investigation by the government.

Limpopo Unrest May Be Criminally Motivated

Violence rocked Limpopo Province where 19 schools were burned down during early May. ANC cabinet officials have said that the arson did not stem from protests in the area over a dispute involving demarcations and were probably carried out by organized crime elements. (Eye Witness News, May 6)

The government has accused the United States State Department of being behind a regime-change agenda in the country. ANC Secretary General Gwede Mantashe made these allegations earlier in the year saying the U.S. embassy was recruiting and coordinating opposition forces bent on overthrowing the government.

These events are taking place amid an ongoing economic crisis stemming from pressures emanating from the international capitalist market which has driven down the prices of export commodities and consequently prompting a large drop in the value of the national currency.

The views of the main two allies of the ANC government, COSATU and the South African Communist Party (SACP) will be critical leading up to August when local elections are held. Both COSATU and the SACP have come out in support of the ANC for local offices.

A May Day statement from the SACP says "Let us unite our movement, let us close ranks. Let us defeat the strategic agenda of imperialism and monopoly capital. Let us consolidate and accelerate a second radical phase of the National Democratic Revolution. But on what programmatic basis do we unite? Is it unity simply for the sake of unity? Is it unity for public appearances? No, and again: No! Is it unity because local government elections will be held on August 3rd? Yes, that's part of it, but that isn't a sustainable basis for revolutionary unity. After all, we have been there before."

This same statement goes on appealing to the alliance saying "Let us close ranks on the basis of a strategic program and active organization and mobilization focused on the needs and aspirations of the workers and poor of South Africa. To do that - we must say NO to the politics of money; No to the politics of factions; No to the politics of gate-keepers and No to the politics of personal ambition and opportunism." (sacp.org.za)

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