

Sudáfrica, año XXX de la era Mandela

Resumen:

Se cumplen tres décadas de la celebración en 1994 de los primeros comicios democráticos multirraciales en Sudáfrica y de la elección de Nelson Mandela como presidente. Es un momento oportuno para hacer balance de estos treinta años aprovechando la efeméride y la celebración de los recientes comicios del 29 de mayo. Sudáfrica se ha ganado la reputación de ser la potencia económica de África subsahariana y ha aprovechado su éxito económico y social durante los primeros quince años de la nueva era Mandela para ampliar su alcance hacia el norte y ganar influencia sobre grandes franjas del continente. Gracias al desarrollo de su sector industrial y de sus infraestructuras, y a sus vastos recursos terrestres y minerales, Sudáfrica encaja de forma natural en la categoría de líder por defecto de África. En el ámbito doméstico, durante las últimas tres décadas la democracia ha sido un juego de dos mitades: en los primeros quince años se vieron mejoras generalizadas en la vida de la gente, pero en los últimos quince los logros positivos han decaído. El país no se encuentra en su mejor momento y atraviesa una situación de deterioro: estancamiento económico, elevadas tasas de desempleo, incremento de las desigualdades sociales, graves cortes de electricidad, corrupción y delincuencia. Esta situación explica que el partido de Mandela, que ha gobernado con mayoría absoluta durante todo este tiempo, la haya perdido en las recientes elecciones y se haya tenido que conformar con una amarga victoria.

Palabras clave:

Sudáfrica, elecciones, Mandela, Ramaphosa, BRICS, África austral.

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Introduction

It is three decades since the first multi-racial democratic elections were held in South Africa in 1994 and Nelson Mandela was elected president. It is an opportune moment to take stock of these thirty years, taking advantage of the anniversary and the recent elections on 29 May.

The new Mandela era brought both hope and uncertainty. There was hope because the South African problem of *apartheid*, which was a thorn in the side not only of Africa but of the whole world, was finally coming to an end. There was uncertainty because African countries did not know what to expect from the new economic giant, now with its hands free. The continent wondered whether South Africa would choose to play with the big brothers to the north or side with its African peers. Mandela's ideological vision was that foreign policy should be based on the ideals of human rights, especially as they related to the African continent. Mandela's policy of reconciliation was seen as a great example of leadership and underlined the high expectations that African nations had of this man whom many, not only in Africa, regarded as an icon of humanity¹.

South Africa has earned a reputation as Africa's economic powerhouse and has used its economic and social success during the first fifteen years of the new Mandela era to extend its reach northwards and gain influence over large swathes of the continent. The country is endowed with rich land resources, especially fertile agricultural land, vast mineral resources, a temperate climate, large water endowments and a very diverse population. In terms of physical infrastructure, the country is unrivalled in the region.

Leader of the African continent

Although *apartheid* policies led to its isolation from the international community during the second half of the 20th century, South Africa continued to exploit its geography and natural resources to its advantage. The country teamed up with *apartheid-friendly*

¹ MUTSINDIKWA, Canisio. "South Africa in African geopolitics: the imagined and real role of South Africa in Africa from case analysis". University of South Africa, 2017.
https://www.academia.edu/11637297/SOUTH_AFRICA_IN_AFRICAN_GEOPOLITICS_THE_IMAGINED_AND_REAL_ROLE_OF_SOUTH_AFRICA_IN_AFRICA_FROM_CASE_ANALYSIS

Note: All hyperlinks are active as of 3 June 2024.

governments such as Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Angola, Mozambique and South West Africa (Namibia) - a group known to some as 'white Africa' - and accumulated power².

The continent has been the focus of South Africa's foreign policy since the end of *apartheid*. Deepening trade and investment relations with African countries and strengthening and broadening regional integration are key objectives of the South African government's economic diplomacy³.

South Africa's economic and trade links with the rest of the southern African states are traditionally close. The country has extensive access to the sea, more than any other African nation on the continent. Most of the landlocked nations in this African region (Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi) have historically relied on South Africa for export routes for their goods abroad. Swaziland and Lesotho are almost entirely economically dependent on South Africa and are therefore inescapably dominated by it.



Map of Southern Africa

The country has the widest variety of mineral resources in the region and because those of its neighbours are less diverse, they can often only be used in combination with minerals from South Africa. In this way, its mining activities have become linked to those

² "Southern Africa: A Sputtering Powerhouse", *Stratfor Worldview*. 2017.

³ VICKERS, Brendan. "Still Leading in sub-Saharan Africa? South Africa, the need for change", *Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale*. 2016. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/south-africa-need-change-15907>

of South Africa. In addition, labour migration to South Africa's commercial operations and mining sector has brought Africans from virtually the entire continent to South Africa⁴.

South African ports have served as gateways to southern Africa. Since southern Africa was first connected to the European economy through ports and railway lines in colonial times, most of the region has depended on South Africa as a direct trading partner. Rail lines and roads connect landlocked countries, and even some with long coastlines, to South African ports. Goods purchased by South African companies can easily be transported to the rest of southern Africa. Since neighbouring countries have comparatively weak domestic markets, but favourable conditions for transport to South Africa, many overseas products available in these countries are imported through South Africa. Without strong South African demand, many foreign products would not be available at reasonable prices in countries such as Botswana, Namibia or Zambia. Thus, advantages of scale explain South Africa's role as a regional transport and trade hub.

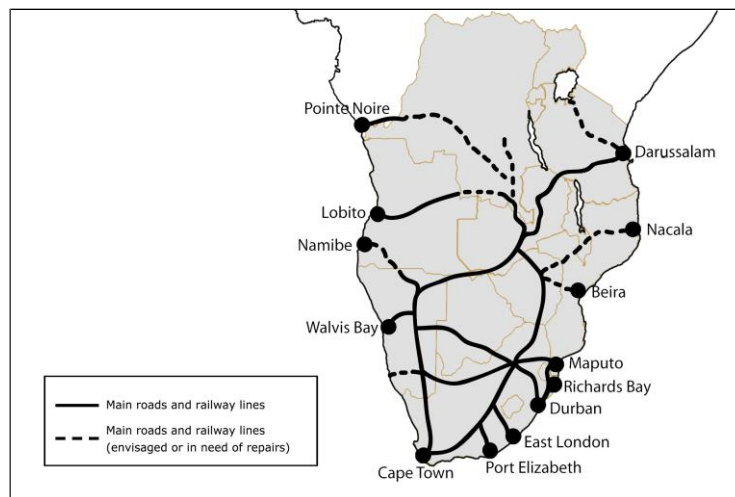


Image 2. Main transport infrastructures in Southern Africa. Source: SCHOLVIN, Sören

South African companies in the tertiary sector such as telecommunications, tourism and financial service providers, which are not constrained by physical barriers, have acquired dominant positions not only in Southern Africa, but also in the more lucrative markets of East and West Africa. Other economic linkages have been generated by South African

⁴ SCHOLVIN, Sören "The economics of Southern Africa from a geopolitical perspective: why and how geography matters", *Trade Law Centre for Southern Africa, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung*. 2011.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349733163_The_economics_of_Southern_Africa_from_a_geopolitical_perspective_why_and_how_geography_matters

mining companies, which are using the strength gained from exploiting South Africa's vast mineral reserves to expand across sub-Saharan Africa, leading the mineral resource extraction sector in all latitudes of the continent. In addition, South African companies have the experience and expertise to assess the viability of mining projects in Africa and are therefore valuable partners for foreign companies investing in mining on the continent⁵.

In terms of its foreign policy identity, South Africa, with the African continent at its core, abandoned its pro-Western Anglo-Afrikaner stance after *apartheid*, and although it did not gravitate towards anti-Western hostility, it began to articulate an Afrocentric one based on international political alliances in the struggle for liberation and human rights. However, some authors have criticised that Mandela's successors, in their external actions, have not always sided with the defence of the rights and freedoms of the civilian population, citing the role played in Zimbabwe as an example⁶.

South Africa has participated in peacekeeping operations and mediation in other African countries such as Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar and Zimbabwe. Its armed forces are currently deployed in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mozambique and Sudan. Through Southern African Development Community missions, 1495 South African National Defence Force troops are deployed in Cape Delgado (Mozambique) and 1198 in eastern DRC⁷.

Thanks to the development of its industrial sector and infrastructure, South Africa naturally fits into the category of Africa's default leader. It is true that South Africa is not an undisputed leader, but the country has contributed significantly to the continent's development over the past twenty years through growth in trade, investment and development cooperation. In 2014, Nigeria overtook South Africa to become the largest economy in sub-Saharan Africa, but despite GDP indicators, South Africa is far more industrialised than Nigeria and is the more diversified economy⁸.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ MUTSINDIKWA, Canisio. "South Africa in African geopolitics: the imagined and real role of South Africa in Africa from case analysis". University of South Africa, 2017.

https://www.academia.edu/11637297/SOUTH_AFRICA_IN_AFRICAN_GEOPOLITICS_THE_IMAGINED_AND_REAL_ROLE_OF_SOUTH_AFRICA_IN_AFRICA_FROM_CASE_ANALYSIS

⁷ "South Africa extends troop deployment in Mozambique and Congo", *Reuters*. 24 April 2024.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/south-africa-extends-troop-deployment-mozambique-congo-2024-04-24/>

⁸ KORNEGAY, Francis. "The Geopolitics of IBSA: The South African dimension", *International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth*. <https://ipcig.org/conference/ibsa/papers/ibsa14.pdf>

Hosting the Africa Cup of Nations, the FIFA World Cup or running the continent's largest airline does not lead to regional hegemony. But South Africa, as host to millions of Africans in their diasporas, does influence interstate affairs, generating some soft power, as the continued flow of remittances is important to the national budgets of some of its neighbours⁹.

On the side of the big boys: one of the BRICS

Outside the continent, South Africa's convergent - though not identical - interest with other emerging powers such as China, Russia and India has united them against the West in an attempt to rebalance the international power equation.

China is South Africa's largest trading partner with 20.8% of total imports and 11.5% of exports. This entails economic risks for the country, as its economy is vulnerable to Chinese influence, both intentional and unintentional. For example, in 2015 the People's Bank of China devalued the yuan by 2%, which caused the South African rand to lose 26% of its value in the following six months¹⁰.

In 2009 China, India, Russia and Brazil decided to organise a summit where they could meet outside the G7. This was the beginning of the BRICs. In 2011, South Africa, invited by China, joined the group on a permanent basis and became the BRICS. This invitation was a momentous foreign policy event and has placed South Africa in a privileged position on the international stage.

Beijing wants the BRICS group (now BRICS+) to be the catalyst for its link with the global south and wants to turn this organisation into a strategic, financial and economic alternative to the G-7, with a governance proposal based on multipolarity. In this strategy, South Africa, until a few months ago the only African representative, has played a very important symbolic (rather than economic) role¹¹.

⁹ SHAW, Timothy M. *African agency? Africa, South Africa and the BRICS*. Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. <https://eiti.org/documents/african-agency-africa-south-africa-and-brics>

¹⁰ "South Africa - Country overview", *JANES*, February 2024.

¹¹ PARDO DE SANTAYANA, José. "Las potencias revisionistas y el Sur Global", *Panorama Estratégico 2024*. Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, 2024. https://www.ieee.es/publicaciones-new/panorama-estrategico/2024/PANEST_2024.html



South African President Cyril Ramaphosa at the BRICS summit.

With respect to the BRICS, it does not fall into the category of an aspiring great power mega-state. Its comparative advantage within this relationship is its geostrategic centrality at the confluence of the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans, combined with its status as a traditional southern gateway to the rest of the African continent.

Many international investors have long considered South Africa as a suitable avenue of approach for their African operations. This is often attributed to the strength of the country's financial markets, its regulatory regime and superior service infrastructure, including advanced transport and distribution networks. Foreign-owned multinational companies have taken advantage of their South African bases to make inroads in the region. However, the trend today is for multinationals to increasingly enter the African continent from jurisdictions more suited to the nature of their operations, whether mining or services, or closer to the specific domestic markets they are targeting. For example, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Rwanda are increasingly operating as gateways to their respective regions, generating beneficial competition¹².

If South Africa's membership of the BRICS was a way of making its leadership visible on the international stage, the recent enlargement to six new countries at the August 2023 summit in Johannesburg, including two African states -Egypt and Ethiopia- means sharing symbolism and losing uniqueness. Economically, the physiognomy of the BRICS+ has not changed in the sense that the sum of the six new members' GDPs represents only 11 per cent of the total, a very modest figure compared to the 89 per cent of the original group. China dominates the new group as overwhelmingly as the

¹² VICKERS, Brendan. "Still Leading in sub-Saharan Africa?" South Africa, the need for change", *Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale*. 2016. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/south-africa-need-change-15907>

old one. The main difference is the declining weight of the smaller original members, in particular South Africa, in the group as a whole. Its economic weight is less than that of four of the six new members - Saudi Arabia, Argentina, United Arab Emirates and Egypt - and accounts for only 1.4% of the group's GDP¹³.

Economic weight (GDP 2022) in BRICS+ countries	
China	61,6 %
India	11,7 %
Russia	7,7 %
Brazil	6,6 %
Saudi Arabia	3,8 %
Argentina	2,2 %
United Arab Emirates	1,7 %
Egypt	1,6 %
South Africa	1,4 %
Iran	1,2 %
Ethiopia	0,4 %

Table 1. Economic weight (GDP 2022) in the BRICS+ countries. IMF data, October 2023.
 Source: VERCUEIL, Julien.

All in all, with a population of around sixty million and devoid of a first-rate military machine, South Africa might be judged to be at a distinct disadvantage as a regional power. However, South Africa's leadership must be seen in the broader context of African integration. Thus, rather than as a power, South Africa could be seen as a default leader of its region, committed to propelling the continent towards an enhanced status within the international system¹⁴.

¹³ VERCUEIL, Julien. "BRICS: les incertitudes d'un forum alternatif", *Institut Français des relations internationales*, 2023. https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/pe4-2023_vercueil_site.pdf

¹⁴ KORNEGAY, Francis. "The Geopolitics of IBSA: The South African dimension", *International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth*. <https://ipcig.org/conference/ibsa/papers/ibsa14.pdf>

Internal balance: in question

What has happened inside the country during these three decades? When Archbishop Desmond Tutu first coined the term "rainbow nation" to describe *post-apartheid* South Africa, he intended to illustrate the unity in multiculturalism and the confluence of many races and ethnicities in a country once identified with a stark separation between blacks and whites. But three decades later, the rainbow colours have lost their lustre. The country is not at its best and is in a state of decline: economic stagnation, high unemployment, corruption, increasing social inequalities, protests over water shortages or power cuts, crime and racial divisions.

South Africa is undeniably a free country. The elections of 29 May last year were fair. Its citizens are protected by a liberal constitution that guarantees rights and freedoms. It has a basic welfare state that has lifted millions of people out of poverty. South Africans now interact more with people of other races than they did in 1994. And this progress was not guaranteed thirty years ago. Indeed, there were more than a few who feared that South Africa would slide into civil war or some form of dictatorship or autocracy.

Over the past three decades democracy has been a game of two halves: the first fifteen years saw widespread improvements in people's lives, but the last fifteen have seen a gradual decline in positive achievements. Thus, on the thirtieth anniversary of regime change the question arises: how long can Mandela's vision of South Africa survive when so many young people have not enjoyed the benefits of the new era?¹⁵.

After the African National Congress (ANC) won its first electoral victory in 1994, it became clear that the new ruling party was there to stay. As a former liberation movement that led the long struggle to bring the country out of *apartheid* rule, it benefited from its commitment, perseverance and ultimate success in the struggle. Once it had gained a key and undisputed role in the rebirth of the nation, the source of long-term legitimisation was established. Freedom had come to black South Africans - who represented the vast majority of the population - through the ANC. The party continued to accumulate

¹⁵ "How South Africa has changed 30 years after *apartheid*", *The Economist*. 2 May 2024.
<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2024/05/02/how-south-africa-has-changed-30-years-after-apartheid>

increasingly solid victories in successive elections with majorities legitimately won at the ballot box and rarely seen in Western democracies¹⁶.

Its best result was obtained in the 2004 elections with close to 70 % of the vote. But since then, the trend has been a gradual reduction of its majorities while the main opposition party, the liberal Democratic Alliance (DA), has been winning several important urban centres in local elections. In the 2019 elections, the ANC fell below 60 % (57.5 %) for the first time, and in the last elections on 29 May it obtained a meagre 40.18 %, which will force it to form a coalition government or govern in a minority. What has led the ANC to this situation of electoral decline, which reflects the bitter victory of the last election?

Economic stagnation and electricity crisis

Since 2012, the average year-on-year GDP growth of the South African economy has averaged just 0.8%. Falling tax revenues have led to rising public debt, with debt repayment costs consuming a larger share of the national budget than basic education, social protection or healthcare¹⁷. South Africa's public debt-to-GDP ratio exceeds the average for emerging market economies by about five percentage points and that of other sub-Saharan African countries by about 15 percentage points¹⁸.

South Africa's rapid economic deterioration in recent years is largely due to the ongoing electricity crisis, which has so far reduced the country's growth prospects by two percentage points by 2023, according to the South African Treasury. Years of corruption, mismanagement, underinvestment and deteriorating infrastructure have forced Eskom - which supplies about 95 % of South Africa's electricity - to increasingly make scheduled outages to avoid total grid collapse¹⁹.

¹⁶ MAGRI, Paolo. "South Africa, the need for change", *Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale*. 2016.
<https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/south-africa-need-change-15907>

¹⁷ "What are key issues in South Africa 2024 election?", *Reuters*. 13 May 2024.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/key-issues-south-african-voters-wide-open-2024-election-2024-05-13/>

¹⁸ "No end in sight to South Africa's economic stagnation", *RANE Worldview Stratfor*. 2023.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Unemployment and inequality

The unemployment rate stood at 32.9% in the first quarter of 2024, ten points higher than in 1994 when the ANC came to power. Young people account for more than half of the country's unemployed²⁰. Some factors behind these figures are beyond the government's control, such as drought, depletion of mineral resources and increasing competition from China. However, according to experts, part of the problem is home-grown, as South Africa's development and employment generation strategy has favoured high-productivity, high-wage activities over labour-intensive job creation²¹.

Indices describing social inequality are among the highest in the world and structures of exclusion have become entrenched in South African society, both within and between racial groups and geographical areas. Black South Africans continue to face higher rates of poverty and unemployment. Despite efforts at socio-economic transformation, including policies aimed at improving the socio-economic status of the black population, inclusion has been limited in practice. Poverty has increased to 55.5% according to the national poverty line, and many more households rely on state transfers to sustain their meagre livelihoods²².

Corruption

A series of corruption scandals involving ANC figures or individuals associated with the ANC has led to a perception among many South Africans that the greed of those in public office is contributing to poor public service delivery for everyone else²³.

In February 2018, former president Jacob Zuma, after nine years in power, was forced to step down in the face of multiple corruption cases. Corruption in the civil service has continued to increase and this situation has generated significant wealth for those who

²⁰ O'REGAN, Victoria. "South Africa's Unemployment Rate Edges Up to 32.9 Percent Just Before 29 May Polls," *All Africa*. 14 May 2024. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202405140480.html>

²¹ NATTRASS, Nicoli. "The Drowned and the Saved: Development Strategy Since the End of *Apartheid*." *South Africa, the need for change*. Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, 2016. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/south-africa-need-change-15907>

²² VV. AA. "Growth through inclusion in South Africa", *Working Papers*. Center for International Development at Harvard University, November 2023. <https://growthlab.hks.harvard.edu/policy-research/south-africa>

²³ "What are key issues in South Africa 2024 election?", *Reuters*. 13 May 2024.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/key-issues-south-african-voters-wide-open-2024-election-2024-05-13/>

are part of these networks, but at the expense of ordinary citizens. On the other hand, it is also fair to note that the country maintains an independent judiciary, a vibrant and relatively free media and strong state institutions²⁴.

Racial divisions

At the end of *apartheid*, South Africa was characterised by sharp racial and ethnic divisions. The new democratic regime has attempted to address this situation and as a result "privileged South Africa" and the middle class is increasingly multiracial. Thus, whereas during the *apartheid* regime the class structure perfectly matched the racial stratification (a white elite, an Indian and coloured "petty bourgeoisie" and a large black proletariat), South African society today is characterised by a largely multi-racial bourgeoisie. However, the reduction in inequality between racial groups has been offset by the growth of inequality within each of these groups²⁵.

With regard to land ownership, South Africa continues to face racial tension. According to a 2017 land audit by the South African Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, South Africa's white population owned more than 70% of farms, but represents less than 10% of the total population. Land reform policies are therefore a persistent source of racial tension, with many black South Africans calling for greater redistributive measures and white farmers claiming racially motivated attacks²⁶.

Violence

For almost two decades the number of murders in South Africa fell annually from just under 27,000 in 1995/96 to 16,213 in 2012/13. Thereafter, the numbers began to rise to 27,272 in 2022/23. In the case of crime, the World Bank estimated in December 2023 that it costs the South African economy around 10% of GDP annually. The country's crime rates have long been among the highest in the world. Illegal mining or copper theft,

²⁴ MARCHANT, Michael. "A Captured State? Corruption and Economic Crime", South Africa, the need for change", Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, 2016. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/south-africa-need-change-15907>

²⁵ RONZA, Rocco W. "'Race, Inequality and Civil Unrest: Social Tensions on the Rise. *South Africa, the need for change*". Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, 2016. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/south-africa-need-change-15907>

²⁶ "South Africa - Country overview", JANES, February 2024.

especially in railway infrastructure, are the main criminal factors contributing to constraining South African GDP growth²⁷.

High levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality have created fertile ground for crime to take root in South Africa, exacerbated by the proliferation of organised criminal groups and a flood of illegal arms in recent years²⁸.

Perspectives after the last elections

Nelson Mandela voted for the first time in his life on 27 April 1994 in Inanda, a poor area in the hills above the city of Durban. The choice of location showed that South Africa's future president had not lost his symbolic power after 27 years as the world's most famous political prisoner. After casting his vote, Mandela walked to the nearby grave of John Dube, the first president of his party, the ANC. "I come to tell you, Mr President, that South Africa is now free," he declared²⁹.



Mandela's vote on 27 April 1994 and Ramaphosa's vote on 29 May 2024.

South Africa is still free three decades later, but Mandela's party is weaker than ever. The results of the 29 May national elections, which saw the ANC lose its absolute majority for the first time, enshrine a period of political transition from a dominant party system to a more competitive party system.

²⁷ "Crime will exacerbate South Africa's growth crisis", *Oxford Analytica*. January 2024.

²⁸ "What are key issues in South Africa 2024 election?", *Reuters*. 13 May 2024.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/key-issues-south-african-voters-wide-open-2024-election-2024-05-13/>

²⁹ "How South Africa has changed 30 years after *apartheid*", *The Economist*. 2 May 2024.

<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2024/05/02/how-south-africa-has-changed-30-years-after-apartheid>

The ANC, which has dominated South African politics at national, provincial and local levels, is no longer guaranteed regular majorities and coalition governments will become increasingly common at all levels of government. This has been experienced after the 2021 local elections, where there was a significant increase in the number of local councils where no party won a sufficient majority to govern alone (around eighty compared to thirty in the previous legislature)³⁰.

Coalition government at the state level is not new in South Africa, given that the first *post-apartheid* executive was a government of national unity. But to get an idea of how it might work this time around, the best example can be found in the performance of municipal coalition governments. At this local level, despite some successes, political polarisation and personal ambition have prevented the cooperation and compromise needed to form stable, problem-oriented coalitions. In the absence of a broader sense of national unity, most South African analysts are pessimistic that political parties will be able to overcome their divisions and harness the democratic potential of coalition government³¹.

Among the parties most likely to support President Cyril Ramaphosa in office are two ANC splinter parties: the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and the newly formed uMkhonto Wesizwe (MK), the latter led by former President Jacob Zuma. These parties competed for a similar core constituency. The EFF won 9.52% of the vote (fourth). A party that advocates black economic empowerment and land redistribution policies, it could be the most viable option for a coalition government (especially for the ANC's populist faction, Radical Economic Transformation). One of the main commitments with which the EFF has run in these elections is to abolish the constitutional provisions on compensation in the case of land expropriation. In the case of MK, with 14.58% of the vote (third force), it directly advocates scrapping the constitution itself and replacing it with "unrestricted parliamentary sovereignty". These promises reflect the growing discontent of some young black voters with the liberal constitutional order, which they blame for the country's persistent social and economic inequalities. By contrast, the second most voted force and traditionally the main opposition party, the DP (21.81% of the vote in the last election), is a centre-right party with a support base among South Africa's racial minorities (white and

³⁰ DESAI, Pranish and ZONDO, Mxolisi. 'Enhancing political accountability in South Africa', *Good Governance Africa*. June 2023. <https://gga.org/enhancing-political-accountability-in-south-africa/>

³¹ TOWRISS, David. "How South Africa's elections may reshape its democracy", *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*. 15 May 2024. <https://www.idea.int/blog/how-south-africas-elections-may-reshape-its-democracy>

coloured). It offers an economically liberal diagnosis and blames economic stagnation, inequality and unemployment not on constitutional constraints but on excessive state control over the economy and race-based policies³².

According to South African analysts, a coalition involving the two major parties - ANC and DP - would be more stable than alliances with new and radical formations. The leader of the DP, John Steenhuisen, has already indicated his willingness to begin immediate talks with Ramaphosa with the aim of blocking what some have described as a "doomsday coalition" between the ANC, EFF and MK. For their part, the aforementioned leftist formations have also shown a willingness to negotiate, with the caveat that MK has said it is willing to make deals with the ANC but not with Ramaphosa³³.

If the ANC decides to partner with centrist and fiscally conservative parties it will increase pressure on President Ramaphosa to expand the role of the private sector in the energy and transport sectors. But this privatisation drive is likely to be limited by the president's need to maintain unity within the ANC and avoid an internal rebellion by the party's more populist faction. If instead the ANC chooses to rely on left-wing parties such as the EFF or MK in its governing action, the likelihood of leading market-friendly economic reforms will be reduced. Moreover, these political groups will push for even greater state intervention in the economy, as well as uncompensated land expropriation from white landowners. These pressures would make it difficult to implement the politically costly and long-term economic reforms that many experts believe Ramaphosa must undertake to accelerate the pace of economic growth, renew the industrial and energy fabric and thus encourage the creation of new jobs.

Conclusions

To sum up these three decades of the Mandela era, we can conclude that, on the international scene, South Africa has consolidated, albeit through the incomparable absence of its rivals, a dual leadership in the sub-Saharan region of the continent: economic leadership thanks to its natural wealth and a process of industrialisation that is unique in those latitudes, and moral leadership due to its policy of defending human rights

³² "No end in sight to South Africa's economic stagnation", *RANE Worldview Stratfor*. 2023.

³³ "Race to form South Africa's next government: Who will the ANC ally with?", *Al Jazeera*. 3 June 2024.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/3/race-to-form-south-africas-next-government-who-will-the-anc-ally-with>

and democratic principles. South Africa is today a reference and model of success in Africa, but in the current moment of polarisation and geopolitical changes, the question is whether the country that has become a regional power during the Mandela era will continue to be so if internal disputes are not resolved, which could lead to a "post-Mandela" era, and which in combination with the effects of geopolitical reconfiguration could drag the rainbow country to suffer a decline in its weight in Africa and in the world.

On the domestic front, in the short term the results of the latest elections will not make it easy for Ramaphosa to undertake the economic and social reforms the country needs to return to the virtuous circle of economic growth and job creation. In any case, what seems clear is that this bitter victory is a wake-up call from the citizens, especially the younger ones, to the president. A clear message from South Africans to the ANC's political elite: the "moral high ground" has run out and it should not be taken for granted that in five years' time there will be no political alternation in the national government. Alternation is always healthy from the point of view of democratic principles.

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