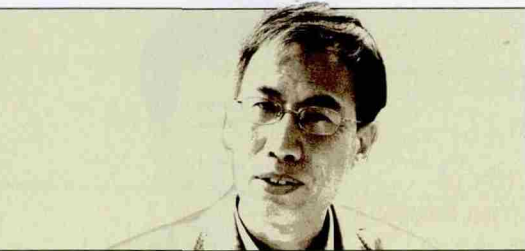


ANC Victory Brings Challenges



Zhang Zhongxiang

Many predicted that South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) party would win the country's fifth general elections when voters went to the polls on May 7. The election results confirmed their prediction, with the ANC taking 249 of the total 400 seats in the National Assembly (NA) and remaining the majority party. **Zhang Zhongxiang**, Deputy Director and professor of the Center for African Studies of Shanghai Normal University, told *ChinAfrica* that despite its election victory, the ruling ANC is faced with severe challenges in its next five-year term. His edited views follow:

BEFORE the elections, the international community was widely concerned that the ANC would see a big drop in their percentage of votes. Reasons for this included the slowing down of the economy, ongoing labor disputes, a high unemployment rate, corruption, the great disparity between the rich and the poor and also because it would be the first election since independence without the ANC's spiritual leader, Nelson Mandela. Results showed that the ANC won the elections with 62.15 percent of the vote, down slightly from 65.9 percent five years ago.

Reasons for victory

First, the ANC has the support of the black majority, who account for 79.6 percent of the population. "The ANC is the political party that led South Africans to overthrow the apartheid system," a street vendor in South Africa said in an interview with *People's Daily*. "We had problems in the past 20 years under the ANC's rule, but the majority trust the ANC. The ANC is closely related with my life and future." Her view is representative of many.

Second, the opposition parties are relatively weak. The Helen Zille led Democratic Alliance (DA), the official opposition at the national level, has gained an increase in votes in the past three elections from 12.37 percent in 2004 to 16.66 percent in 2009, and 22.23 percent in 2014. It took 50 seats in the NA in 2004, 67 in 2009 and 89 in the recent election. But Zille admitted that DA needed at least 10 years to restructure politically and become strong enough to contest the ANC's ruling position.

Third, the ANC has made obvious achievements in the past 20 years. Since it came to power in 1994, the party has taken economic development and improving people's livelihoods as the priority of the government's work, putting forward the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), Black Economic

Empowerment (BEE), Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (ASGISA) and other plans to improve the economic status of black South Africans and realize an inclusive development. Since President Jacob Zuma took office in 2009, he has put job creation high on the government's list of priorities. In November 2010, the South African Government initiated The New Growth: the Framework, which aimed to create 5 million jobs in the coming 10 years and reduce the unemployment rate to 15 percent from the present 25 percent.

With the efforts of this and previous governments, by 2012, 3.5 million jobs had been created, and annual per-capita income has increased to 38,500 Rands (\$3,720) in 2012 from 27,500

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Rands (\$2,657) in 1993. During this period, the average wage in the mining and manufacturing sectors had experienced a 150-percent increase. President Zuma said that South Africa has a good story to tell in the past 20 years of its democracy, but it has not been easy.

In addition, being a member of BRICS has further enhanced South Africa's cooperation with emerging economies and raised its international status.

Challenges ahead

The winning ANC has to face several challenges in its next five-year term.

Developing the economy and improving people's livelihood is a long-term and arduous task. This is especially true for a middle-income country like South Africa, where high labor costs make it lack a competitive edge in the international market. Though the apartheid system has been abolished for 20 years, many black South Africans are still suffering from poverty and high unemployment. To address the sharp contradictions between the long-term task and the urgent needs of the people, the South African Government in 2011 put forward the National Development Plan (NDP) - Vision for 2030 to seek to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality in two decades. According to the plan, South Africa's economy will realize an annual growth of 5.4 percent and 11 million job opportunities will be created in the next 20 years. By 2030, the unemployment rate is projected to be reduced to 6 percent from the present 25 percent and the Gini coefficient will be reduced to 0.6 from the present 0.7.

However, to sustain an average of 5.4 percent economic growth is not an easy task. In 2011, South Africa's economic growth rate was 3.1 percent and it was around 2 percent in 2012 and 2013.

The decline in votes for the ANC at the recent elections has something to do with the slowed economy. According to the constitution of South Africa, it needs the approval of over two thirds of NA members to have articles in the constitution amended. To play a domi-



nant role in national development and governance of the country, the ANC has to keep its support rate over 66 percent.

How to balance the interests of all parties and realize an inclusive growth is another challenge. In the anti-apartheid struggle and in the general elections, the ANC had strong support from the South African Communist Party (SACP) and Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), forming a tripartite alliance.

To develop the economy, the ANC encourages foreign investment, protects foreign capital and has adopted a prudent attitude toward land reform. But these policies were criticized by COSATU and SACP.

Participating for the first time, the far-left Economic Freedom Fighters won 6.35 percent of the vote, 25 seats in the NA and became the main opposition party in two of the nine provinces. This indicates that it has a special rallying point among black youth.

If the ANC adopts more radical policies under pressure, it can win over

some voters in the short term, but it may scare away investors and this will not be conducive to economic growth and reconciliation in the long term. Corruption is also a perennial problem that South Africa has to tackle. However, if the ANC continues to develop the economy, improve people's livelihoods, fully implement the NDP and continue its multi-faceted diplomacy, South Africa will surely have a better future.

South Africa is China's largest trade partner in Africa. In 2013, bilateral trade reached \$65.1 billion. The bilateral relations have advanced to a comprehensive strategic partnership since 2010. Both China and South Africa are members of the G20 and BRICS, and the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) will be held in South Africa in 2015. The ANC's victory in the elections and President Zuma's successful re-election to a second term, will further promote the continued growth of the comprehensive strategic partnership of the two countries. **CA**