

BOOK REVIEW

***Who will rule South Africa? The Demise of the ANC and the Rise of a New Democracy* by Adriaan Basson and Qaanitah Hunter, Flyleaf Publishing and Distribution, 2023. ISBN 978-1-998956-982; ebook ISBN 978-1-998956-920**

This useful analysis of the current state of South Africa politics suggests four possible outcomes of the forthcoming election in May 2024. These are as follows: first, although the ANC holds on to its majority by winning just over 50% of popular support, it will emerge weakened, thus igniting the internal flames of rebellion against party leader, President Cyril Ramaphosa. Second, the ANC receives below 50% but more than 45% of the vote, propelling it into opposition with one or more smaller parties, which will thereby gain unprecedented political leverage. Third, its support plunges to just above or just below 40%, which because coalition with multiple smaller parties would be unsustainable and messy, might lead it into a potentially more stable coalition with the EFF; or, at a long shot, with the DA. Fourth, although highly unlikely, the DA-encouraged Multi-Party Coalition (or ‘moonshot pact’) performs so well electorally, that it unseats the ANC completely.

‘Whichever of the above scenarios plays out’, argue the authors, the 2024 election will end the one-party grip on South Africa’, plunging South Africa into a new era of uncertainty (p.198). The authors admit that that they are not sure whether this will be ‘better or worse’ for South Africa. This is rather at odds with their optimistic subtitling of their book as presaging ‘the rise of a new democracy’. They do not say so explicitly, but it becomes evident that in their estimation, if South Africa is to embark on a less corruption-ridden and pro-growth and pro-democracy future, it will have to come about as the product of an ANC-DA coalition, whatever the difficulties this will encounter. The alternative they fear, especially if the ANC teams up with the EFF, is that the election will lead to South Africa sliding more deeply into the maw of ‘kakistrocracy’ (‘government by the worst in society’).

Pre-election books always risk becoming ephemera, blown away by the movement of time once the election results are known. Written by two of South Africa’s most highly respected journalists, this offering is well worth the read and deserves to avoid that fate. Granted, its scenarios are unexceptional, but they are well informed. Part One of the book provides an overview of the ANC’s descent into a welter of corruption, from the moment of the notorious 1998 arms deal, through to its brutal exposure by the report of the Zondo Commission. Part Two

provides a useful overview not only of the ascent of Cyril Ramaphosa to the ANC presidency but of the way his presidency operates, offering much insight into how his reluctance to engage in confrontational politics has shaped his temporising with the various factions within the party, and the seeming paralysis of the state he runs. Part Three focuses on the campaigning of Paul Mashatile for the post of deputy president, posing worrying questions about his financial integrity given the very real prospect that he may rise to the presidency if Ramaphosa is displaced by the ANC following a poor election result.

The book is wrapped up by a detailed discussion of the four scenarios listed above, these enriched by careful analysis of how the ANC's domination has been weakened by its loss of support in the 2021 local government elections, and it being either ejected from office or clinging on to rule in major cities by its formation of shaky coalitions. Its focus on the prospect of South Africa entering 'coalition country' is supplemented by useful summaries of the recent trajectories of both the DA and EFF, the ANC's two major rivals for power, along with brief introductions to the various smaller parties on the bloc.

This book is written in a highly readable style. It's well informed about the internal party dynamics of all three major parties, even if these are jazzed up with quite a lot of unsourced political gossip. However, as it was published in late 2023, it has missed out on the formation of the MK party. By early pre-election publication, the authors must have known that they were taking a risk, and in this case, their gamble has rather blown up in their faces, as MK was a major player in the election with worrying consequences not only for the ANC but also for the future of democracy. Nonetheless, this book will still be well worth a read after the results of the election are out, and the authors are to be congratulated for their courage to stick their necks out.

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