

## Ignoring the Trauma of a Generation?

By [Andrew Cope](#)

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TWO WEEKS ago, The Economist failed to print even one story regarding an African nation in their 'Middle East and Africa' section, such was the world's transfexion with the Gaza conflict. Almost 4,000 miles away, the South African political scene is arguably the most fascinating that it has been since Mandela walked free from the imprisonment of Robben Island.

The past twelve months have been turbulent; President Thabo Mbeki has been ousted and replaced by caretaker Kgalema Motlanthe with his new cabinet; the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party leader Jacob Zuma has been charged, acquitted and re-charged with fraud and racketeering (for the third time in as many years). The ANC have split, leading to the creation of a new breakaway movement 'Congress of the People' (COPE); there have been perpetual talks with neighbouring Zimbabwe and preparations made for Africa's first ever FIFA World Cup next year.

Finally, add to this list the desperate need to deal with the myriad of socially entrenched issues that have come to characterise post-apartheid South Africa – poverty, high crime, rampant AIDS, extreme inequality, soaring immigration and desperate unemployment. Elections are only three months away. Are these the signs of another African state abandoning liberal democracy and descending into the abyss of factions, greed and lawlessness? Arguably one of the great failures of the young South African democracy thus far has been its sheer unrelenting single-party dominance (particularly when contrasted with the highly competitive democracy of Ghana). The arrival of COPE on the political scene to challenge the ANC can certainly be seen as a positive step forward and a welcome break with recent history.

Up till now, the ANC have enjoyed a comfortable two-thirds majority across the entire country with the one exception of the Western Cape, where Helen Zille's Democratic Alliance have proved strong-willed aggressors. Judging by the past month's bi-elections in the Northern Province, COPE has joined the DA in a gradual eroding of the ruling party's supremacy. While the emergence of a rival party may seem democratically promising, they raise an altogether more worrying problem – ethnic factionalism. If one treats the case of Zuma (a Zulu) as the exception that proves the rule (he certainly wasn't the first choice of Mbeki), the ANC is arguably becoming increasingly Xhosa-led. Zuma's attempts to dissolve this portrayal are clearly not working well enough, considering the shooting of three ANC supporters outside a rally in the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)-affiliated Kwa-zulu Natal province this week (the IFP has an infamous history of conflict with the ANC).

Some alarming parallels can be drawn with the situation in Kenya just one year ago, where ethnic conflict welled up surrounding accusations of electoral misconduct to catastrophic effect.

The nationwide xenophobic attacks of last May (though of an entirely different nature to the inter-tribal tensions), prove that only a tiny step between volatile peace and outright violence exists. Questions are still being raised over the ongoing crisis in Zimbabwe. The international community is desperate to know how much longer it will be before the policy of playing safe is finally abandoned.

As for Jacob Zuma, the current Prime Minister, only time will tell. Former MP Andrew Feinstein would have us believe that he is indeed guilty of corruption in a \$3.4bn arms deal (so certain was he of the truth of his claims that he eventually felt forced to resign) however it seems likely that we shall only find out once he

is (probably) elected as the next President.

One promising sign has been the appointment of Barbara Hogan as Minister of Health to replace Manto Tshabala-Msimang and her appalling vegetarian 'remedies' for fighting AIDS. Hogan, as a white MP in the ANC, also represents the need to halt the white exodus draining the country of skilled professionals that are so essential for development- since 1995 approximately one million whites have left the country.

Ultimately, the biggest concern here must be the people of South Africa - only if the nation's politicians of today can prioritise this above their own agendas will decades of travesty finally be remedied, and Mandela will be able to die a happy man knowing that his legacy has not been squandered.



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