

# Snatching Defeat from the Jaws of Victory

Before the election date was announced officially, there was talk of the EFF doubling its market share from 10 per cent to 20 per cent in the 2019 elections. They blew it.

Malema was already facing corruption charges for his days as an ANC cadre – before he got turfed out and started the EFF in 2013, only months before the last general elections.

Every time someone in any party raises the subject that anyone “implicated” by testimony or under investigation should stand down pending due process, Malema blushes.

Then came his recent SAHRC hearing for hate-speech. The commissioners concluded that by the letter of the law, what he has said repeatedly was never technically hat- speech. But they went on to say that it was “problematic” because of the racial tensions that persist in South Africa.

This is the same week that Donald Trump is claiming “total exoneration” by the Mueller report. Which is not what that report says at all. Fact is, that special investigators don’t “do” exonerations. If they decide not to prosecute, that is where it stops. Short of any kind of exoneration.

Worse yet for the EFF, Floyd Shivambu could be implicated by the VBS scandal. In a much smaller party than the ANC, the top two have been conspicuously down-played in the elections so far. In fact, the EFF Chair appeared as number 3 on the EFF’s deployment list. His story sounded more like a spin doctor than anything – that he could do more in a Governance function than tackling one case at a time in court. Fact is, they need to shore up a leadership team that could become a headless horseman anytime soon.

Last of all, among the other 42 parties now registered with the IEC (excluding the three front-runners), is a party representing the 1.8 million security guard in South Africa. There are basically 10 security guard for every policeman, and they now have their own party. It is doubtful that this is a Marxist party whose demagogues shoot machine guns off at its rallies. The perception has been that the EFF came to power representing un-unionized workers – like security guards, gas jockeys and domestic workers. If that is so, the rise of this new party could erode support for the EFF.

Of the three front-runners, the ANC was the first to launch its election manifesto. Then came the EFF, and finally the DA. First the yellow, then the red, then the blue.

The sudden rise of Bosasa basically eclipsed the Guptas. No longer were foreigners the villains but wealthy South Africans. Only this week has it become clear that Bosasa had two links to the Ramaphosa family. First, a gift to the CR-19 election campaign. Then, separately, a monthly consulting fee was being paid to his son. For legitimate work, of course! While these are being played down, they are raising eyebrows among voters.

The cyclone in Mozambique was blamed for the re-emergence of load shedding, but that could be a convenient spin on what is really happening internally at Eskom. Voters are getting to be suspicious. No one is sure who to trust.

Certainly Ramaphosa is campaigning hard, and the clean-up campaign seems to be slowly gaining the upper hand. But the appearance of numerous implicated cadres and others who are still under investigation on the ANC deployment lists makes it seem certain that the “vindictive triumphalists” are not going away any time soon. Even if the “soul-battered mourners” have gained the upper hand for the time being. (These terms are borrowed from Mashele and Qobo from their erstwhile book The Fall of the ANC.)

Now we hear that the e-tolls are likely to end, but we wonder whether that is true or just more “pork-barrel electioneering”? Promises, promises.

The ANC is visibly divided and this sends confusing signals to voters. Will the Reserve Bank be nationalized? Or will some of the SOEs be privatized?

Will prostitution be legalized as agreed at Nasrec? Or will “partial decriminalization” be adopted, as agreed at the ANC’s Policy Conference only six months earlier? (i.e. Go after the men who pay and leave the women alone.)

Will there be expropriation of land without compensation? Or will that initiative be blocked for years in the courts?

The DA was last to announce its election manifesto. It was not leading the pack at the beginning of the race. It was not setting the pace. But as the contest intensifies, the DA is gaining slowly. Unless it is the pace-setters who are flagging?

For example, the DA is suddenly making a lot of noise about its plans to fix Eskom. They are demanding 15-year sentences for corruption across the board - to replace impunity.

The DA is going all out to win Gauteng, where it has been running the municipalities of Joburg and Tshwane (Pretoria) since the municipal election in 2016. Although it was already running Capetown and Western Cape province, running three out of the four major metros in South Africa gives it an edge of “credibility”. Especially compared to the EFF which has generally “supported” DA-led coalitions without taking on active executive roles. This could leave voters with the perception that the EFF is too inexperienced to run the country?

In other words, the DA has become something of a “default drive”. If the ANC keeps making major blunders, and if the EFF has run out of ideas, then where else can voters turn? Only the DA is big enough and experienced enough to step into the gap. Voters may be more inclined to vote the ANC out, than to vote the DA in. But as Avis used to say about Hertz: “We try harder”.

According to two recent polls, these three front-runners total 88 per cent of the vote. The other 12 per cent is distributed among the other 42 parties! But make no mistake – that combined 12 per cent is not insignificant, and could collectively be more than the EFF’s market share. So there are bound to be some king-makers from other parties in the final mix, even if they only win a few seats each in Parliament.