

The Zuma hurdle: on South Africa power struggle

With Jacob Zuma appearing to be finally willing to resign as President of South Africa, a protracted [power struggle](#) could soon draw to a close. Calls for the anti-apartheid veteran's exit acquired momentum after South African Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa was elected leader of the African National Congress in December. Litigation in countless cases, the overhang of a 1990s arms deal and actions that undermined judicial investigations have marred Mr. Zuma's decade-long presidency. But the controversy that has come to define his tenure is the questionable access an immigrant Indian business family, the Guptas, gained with ANC apparatchiks and state institutions, a nexus widely dubbed as 'state capture'. The financial dealings of the Guptas and their interface with the government in South Africa have tarnished the reputation of top global accountancy and public relations firms. As this succession of scandals dampened the optimism over the post-apartheid democratic transition, the ANC, Africa's oldest national liberation movement, saw its support plunge in the regional elections of 2016. The party conference in December 2017 was viewed as an opportunity for the [ANC leadership](#) to stem the rot before the next general elections, due in 2019. But the narrow win for Mr. Ramaphosa in the party polls over Mr. Zuma's ex-wife and preferred candidate meant the political transition was always going to be bitter.

As his supporters took top positions in the new ANC executive, Mr. Zuma brazened it out in the face of growing demands, within and outside the party and government, for his resignation as President. Over the past decade he has survived many parliamentary motions against his rule, thanks largely to the ANC's reluctance to rely on the opposition for such a manoeuvre. Recently, the South African Supreme Court criticised the legislature for failing to hold Mr. Zuma to account, giving succour to those calling for his impeachment. But rather than pursue an extreme parliamentary procedure, the ANC leadership has preferred an internal mechanism to ease the President out. Mr. Ramaphosa and other ANC leaders have engaged Mr. Zuma in discussions over a speedy political transition. The postponement of the President's annual state of the nation address, as also an emergency meeting of the ANC national executive signal that a resolution is in the making. The 2019 elections will be an acid test of the ANC's credibility. A change of guard could also pull the government away from the populist slide of recent years. An icon of the entrepreneurial spirit of South Africa's black majority and Nelson Mandela's preferred successor, Mr. Ramaphosa is a pragmatist. A business tycoon who has also been a trade union leader, he is well-placed to balance business interests and political imperatives. The days ahead may prove crucial for him and the ANC.

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