Now that the 2014 elections are coming to an end with the final few votes being counted, Max Gebhardt takes a look at what it means

For once the pollsters largely managed to get the results of South Africa’s fifth democratic election, or the “Born free” election as it has become known, correct. Most had said that the ANC’s majority would be pinned back to around the 62% mark and that the DA would increase its share of the vote. By Friday morning, with 95% of the votes counted, the DA had polled 22%.

This is a five percentage point improvement on its performance in the 2009 general elections when the DA secured 16.7% of the votes. The ANC secured 65.9% of the votes in 2009.

The DA managed to increase its share of the vote in the Western Cape, as predicted, securing 56.8% of the vote up from 48% in 2009.

The ANC maintained its dominance in all the other provinces and saw marginal gains in some areas, particularly in the Eastern Cape where it increased its majority to 70% following the spectacular collapse of Cope. which has all but disappeared from the South African political landscape.

Cope had gained 7% of the vote in 2009. The complete destruction of the party isn’t that surprising as it had been imploding even before the elections with the constant infighting and leadership battles.

It has been replaced by Julius Malema’s EFF which has managed a truly stunning performance given its lack of resources, securing over a million votes. At the current levels the party is on course to secure 14 seats in parliament.

There were of course a couple of surprises, the main one being the higher than expected voter turnout. The other was the demise of Cope and a number of other smaller parties such as the Minority Front and Agang, which has failed to secure a single seat in parliament.

The IFP has also been reduced to a mere shadow of itself with just 2.4% of the vote, down from 4.5% in 2009.

Perhaps this is an indication that voters are starting to prefer to vote for the larger parties. This could be the beginning of the end for smaller parties, at least on the national stage.

What now?

Now that the elections have been largely completed without too many glitches, the next step will be the inauguration of Jacob Zuma as the country’s President. This will take place on Saturday June 24.

For the markets, all eyes will be on the composition of the new cabinet, especially the economic cluster. There is already speculation that Malusi Gigaba will be moved from his position at the Department of Public Enterprises to the Department Mineral Resources. There is also speculation that Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi will be moved from his post to Energy.

It is also likely that a ministry of small and medium business will be created. In the run up to the election the ANC mentioned several times that it was on the cards, as was the dissolution of the ministry for women, children and people with disabilities which is widely accepted to have been a costly failure.

And the country will get a new Deputy President, most likely Cyril Ramaphosa.

It is hoped that President Zuma will use his new mandate to tackle the unions and try to drive a more growth-friendly economic policy. Hints of a hardening of attitudes were evident when President Zuma said Amcu’s 15-week strike was a threat to the sector and jobs. Mr Gigaba also gave indications that this might be the case, saying the party wanted more inclusive growth while trying to avoid conflicting policies.

What now for the EFF?

The party that everyone is watching is the EFF. Once it is part of the political system it will find it harder to adopt unworkable populist policies. There is also talk already that, as with Cope, the party is going to find itself in factional battles as members compete for positions of power. There is also the possibility the party has been infiltrated by ANC members who will destabilise it, as was done with Cope.

Going forward

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the election is how normal our elections have become. The markets barely took note and the day after the election the JSE punched through the technically important 49,000 point barrier. It has been at this level before and is part of the almost 18-month long bull market.