

South Africa

Trevor Manuel to retire from South Africa politics



Andrew England in Johannesburg MARCH 11, 2014

Trevor Manuel, the former South African finance minister and one of the country's most high profile lawmakers, has announced his retirement from politics just weeks before [crucial elections](#).

The decision comes as the ruling [African National Congress](#) heads into the May 7 poll that many predict will be the country's most hotly contested vote since the end of apartheid 20 years ago.

Mr Manuel, the national planning minister, who gained an international profile during a 13-year stint as finance minister of Africa's largest economy, announced in his farewell speech to South Africa's parliament that he would not continue as an MP.

"At some point serving leadership must give way so that new blood, fired up with life-changing ideas, can take society to a higher level of development. I am happy to have played the small part that history has assigned to me," he said.

The first black person to take the top job at the Treasury, Mr Manuel oversaw the most concerted period of growth in South Africa's history as the traditionally leftist ANC defied scepticism about its economic management and soothed cautious markets.

A veteran of the anti-apartheid struggle, the 58-year-old had been an ANC MP since Nelson Mandela led the former liberation movement to a historic victory at South Africa's first democratic election in 1994.

Mr Manuel's exit from government is unlikely to have a significant impact on the ANC's electoral chances, with the former liberation movement widely expected to [maintain its grip on power](#).

However, the retirement of a figure held in high esteem across South African society will be a symbolic blow for the former liberation movement as it attracts [increasing criticism](#) for cronyism, corruption and patronage.

Last year, Mr Manuel triggered debate when he appeared to contradict President Jacob Zuma by saying the government could no longer blame the nation's problems on the apartheid years.

In a rare critique of the progress made under the ANC, as well as a possible hint at his own frustrations, he said "our government has run out of excuses".

"We cannot continue to blame apartheid for our failings as a state," he said. "For almost two decades, the public has been patient in the face of mediocre services. The time for change, for a ruthless focus on implementation has come."

There has been a perception in [South Africa](#) that Mr Manuel's influence has been on the wane under Mr Zuma's presidency. Mr Manuel was close to Thabo Mbeki, the former president who was forced from office in 2008 by Mr Zuma during a bitter battle within the ANC.

Markets were shaken when Mr Manuel resigned briefly that year before he agreed to serve under Mr Zuma.

He has held the post of national planning minister since Mr Zuma took office in 2009. His most prominent role has been to oversee the country's National Development Plan, which lays out strategies to wipe out poverty and drastically reduce unemployment by 2030.

The NDP has been lauded widely in South Africa and is being touted by the ANC as the key element of its economic and developmental policies.

But the critical test is whether it will be effectively implemented by a Zuma-led government, with critics accusing the president of being indecisive on policy and soft on graft.

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2018. All rights reserved.