JOHANNESBURG — Former South African President Jacob Zuma was [*barred Monday from running for Parliament*](https://apnews.com/article/south-africa-elections-jacob-zuma-75051f626f3f4fe68dc8ed04b1e2163b) in next week's national election over a previous criminal conviction, the latest twist in [*his return to* ***politics***](https://apnews.com/article/south-africa-zuma-elections-mk-manifesto-5049f66bc818f680769d8f70a3980640).

The decision by the country’s highest court, the Constitutional Court, may still be appealed. It ruled that Zuma is only eligible to serve as a lawmaker five years after his 2021 sentence for contempt of court was completed.

Zuma is now the leader of a new party, uMkhonto weSizwe Party, and is campaigning against the long-ruling African National Congress he once led.

Analysts say the ANC, which has comfortably held power since Nelson Mandela became the country’s first Black president in 1994, might receive less than 50% of votes in next Wednesday's election and lose its parliamentary majority.

That would be the ANC's worst electoral performance since it came into power in South Africa at the end of apartheid.

One reason the ANC is under pressure is Zuma, who [*stepped down as president*](https://apnews.com/article/b39c535eee1c4fcaaa779da21c00156b) in 2018 amid a swirl of corruption allegations and now threatens to draw more support away from the ANC.

Here is what you need to know about the 82-year-old Zuma’s contentious return and why he was disqualified from the election:

**WHO IS JACOB ZUMA?**

Zuma has long been one of South Africa’s most recognizable politicians. He was a senior leader in the ANC during the liberation struggle against apartheid. A former ANC intelligence chief, he has repeatedly threatened to reveal some of the party’s secrets. While Zuma was not one of Mandela’s preferred choices to succeed him, Mandela trusted Zuma to play an influential role in ending deadly political violence that engulfed the KwaZulu-Natal province before the historic 1994 elections. The province has remained a vocal base of support for Zuma ever since, and members of Zuma’s Zulu ethnic group make up its majority. Zuma became deputy leader of the ANC in 1997 and was appointed South Africa’s deputy president in 1999.

**HOW DID HE BECOME PRESIDENT?**

Zuma’s path to power included legal challenges. In 2006, he was found not guilty of raping the daughter of a comrade at Zuma’s home in Johannesburg. A year earlier, he was fired as South Africa’s deputy president after his financial advisor was convicted for corruption for soliciting bribes for Zuma during an infamous arms deal. Alleging a political witch hunt, Zuma launched an aggressive political campaign that saw him elected ANC president in 2007. His campaign appealed to widespread discontent with then-President Thabo Mbeki, who was often described as autocratic and aloof. The corruption charges against Zuma were later dropped, amid controversy, and he was elected South Africa’s president in 2009. The arms deal case has resurfaced decades later, however, and Zuma is due to go on trial for corruption next year.

**HOW DID HE LOSE POWER?**

Zuma’s presidency was often under fire. His close friends and allies, the Gupta family, were accused of influencing appointments to key cabinet positions in exchange for lucrative business deals. The allegations of corruption in government and state-owned companies eventually led the ANC to force Zuma to resign in 2018. A judicial [*commission of inquiry uncovered*](https://apnews.com/article/politics-africa-south-cyril-ramaphosa-jacob-zuma-cc867e3b1eea4d478119266e22aa5929) wide-ranging evidence, and Zuma in 2021 was convicted and sentenced to 15 months in jail for refusing to testify at that commission. Zuma remains aggrieved with the ANC and his successor, President Cyril Ramaphosa. But few South Africans expected the break to go so far.

**HOW HAS HE REEMERGED?**

Zuma shocked the country in December by denouncing the ANC and campaigning against a party that had been at the heart of his political career. His new political party, uMkhonto weSizwe (which means Spear of the Nation), was named after the ANC’s military wing, which was disbanded at the end of the struggle against white minority rule. The ANC launched a legal case seeking to stop the new party from using a name and logo that are similar to those of the military wing. The charismatic Zuma continues to crisscross the country, delivering lively speeches, and an image of his face is expected to represent the party on ballots.

**WHY WAS HE DISQUALIFIED FROM THE ELECTION?**

Zuma was disqualified from standing as a candidate for Parliament because of that previous conviction for contempt of court in 2021. The Constitutional Court said that a section of the constitution disqualifying people from standing for office if they’ve been sentenced to more than 12 months in prison without the option of a fine does apply to Zuma. It said Zuma is not allowed to run for Parliament for five years from when his sentence was completed. Even if he's not allowed to be a candidate, Zuma’s party still threatens to draw support from within the often divided ANC. It may emerge as a significant opposition party and could play a role if the weakening ANC must form coalitions to run the country.