

The other Verwoerd

 By [Nicci Botha](#)

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Bearing the name of the so-called architect of apartheid can't be easy for anyone in the political arena, but Melanie Verwoerd has earned her stripes. She joined the National Assembly for the ANC in the first democratic election as the youngest woman ever elected, she helped write the constitution and served as the country's ambassador and, later, as UNICEF's executive director in Ireland.



Source: [joe.ie](#)

To illustrate how much the landscape has changed, she recalls a story where she was due to give a presentation at a big corporate. She arrived at the reception and gave her first name. After being escorted to the boardroom, the receptionist asked her surname.

"It's a bad one," she replied. "It's Verwoerd."

To which the receptionist said: "What a relief. I thought it was Zuma."

Speaking at a recent Stanlib seminar on political, economic and investment risk, Verwoerd explained some trends currently affecting the globe.

She says the world is in a state of flux, as illustrated by Brexit and the American election race, which makes it increasingly

hard to predict what's going to happen in the future.

This is because people are losing faith in the political leadership, which is showing a huge lack of integrity. "This has created fertile ground for fanaticism as we are seeing in a global shift to the right."

On the local front, Verwoerd says the "big, mighty ANC tank" took a tremendous knock in the local government elections. "Eight percent is a huge loss of votes for any political party."

But on the plus side it shows our democracy has come of age. "The ANC is bruised but will fight back," she explains.

What went wrong?

Verwoerd says that global trends show that liberation movements generally start fragmenting after 20 years in power, and the elections acted as a referendum to the attitude of the growing middle class.

"In the short term there will be no challenge to the presidency, even though there is some push back within the party ranks," Verwoerd says. However, Gwede Mantashe and Cyril Ramaphosa's positions have been weakened, but what is really scary is that Baleka Mbete, one of Jacob Zuma's stalwarts is in the running to take over from the current president.

"The next 18 months are crucial," she says.

The low road/high road scenario

Borrowing from Clem Sunter, Verwoerd says the low road would be that those in the Zuma camp of patronage will close ranks and hit back at opposition. Secondly, Zuma is clearly angling for a third term as ANC president. Not of the country, but of the party, she clarifies.

If the party takes the high road, this will should be a period of introspection to create a more cohesive party, including working on rebuilding the tripartite alliance.

What happens with Pravin Gordhan, the state-owned enterprises, who is chosen as the new public protector, the Gupta investigation and the constitutional court charges against Zuma will all come into play as to which direction the country takes.

"It's a cruel, crazy, beautiful world. Unstability is better than what we have, because it creates opportunities for change," Verwoerd concludes.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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