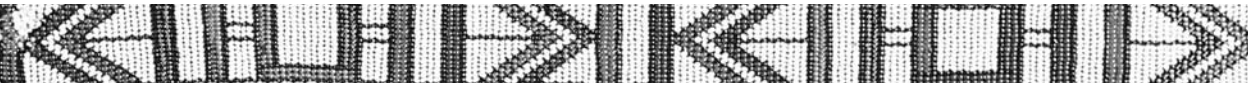


# South Africa

## Democracy and Political Participation

A DISCUSSION PAPER



**AfriMAP and Open Society Foundation for South Africa**



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Published by:  
Open Society Foundation for South Africa

ISBN: 1-920051-38-4

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Design by Jeanne Criscola/Criscola Design, New York

Layout and printing by: Compress, South Africa

Cover image: Headband, 20th century Ndebele; South Africa Glass beads, fiber 20 1/4 x 2 1/2 in.

Collection of the Orlando Museum of Art, gift of Norma Canelas and William D. Roth

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# Introduction

Now in its second decade, South African democracy, in its most essential and basic procedures, appears to be healthy. Legal discrimination has largely disappeared, elections have become fairer, and voter turnout remains relatively high, notwithstanding persistent social inequality.

But has democracy become stronger? How active and assertive are South Africans in exercising their rights as citizens? After discussing the impact of major reforms and the quality of electoral participation, this paper considers the opportunities that exist for public involvement in political life between elections. The story is one of mixed achievement. Government appears to have become less willing to use consultative policy-making procedures but political parties remain accessible and to a degree internally democratic. A lively civil society nurtures vigorous social movements capable of influencing policy decisions. Independent mass circulation newspapers help to compensate for an overly deferential public broadcaster.

The analysis in this paper closes with a set of suggestions that target the key areas in which modest resources and practical measures might significantly enhance the opportunities for political participation.



# 1. Political participation and active citizenship: Conceptual introduction

A democratic political system in its essentials must include consistent application of the law, respect for basic freedoms and regular equitable competitive elections. Even with respect to these limited requirements, many new democracies are deficient. Participatory democracy is a more ambitious concept. Political participation itself can be a feature of both democratic and certain sorts of authoritarian politics. For example, totalitarian regimes may require high levels of popular mobilisation and in such contexts authority may, to a degree, rest upon consent. Authoritarian leaders sometimes legitimate their actions through by-passing institutions, inviting public approval through plebiscites and referenda.

This paper is about the kinds of political participation that enrich democracy and extend it. The language of political participation is today routinely included in international conventions and agreements, including declarations signed by African governments. Long-standing commitments were reinforced in July 2002, when the Durban Summit of African leaders endorsed a Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance, committing their administrations to ‘just, honest, transparent and participatory government’. In contrast to liberal emphasis on freedom from state interference, theories of democratic participation take their cue from republican ideals of active citizenship. Here, democracy depends not just on periodic electoral sanction but rather ‘a continuous interplay between the state, intermediary groups and individual rights’.<sup>1</sup>

Building upon intellectual foundations provided by civic republicans, advocates of deliberative democracy maintain that democratic politics should result in qualitatively superior decisions. These are reached by political procedures through which ‘participants arrive at a decision not by determining what preferences have greatest numerical support, but by determining which proposals the collective agrees are supported by the best reasons’.<sup>2</sup> In deliberative democracy, political participation is often social rather than individual. Citizens make political choices through consultative procedures that enable them to become fully informed about the consequences of their decisions, for themselves and others.

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Crick, *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p.65.

<sup>2</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford University Press, 2000, p.23.

How are such ideals institutionalised? Obviously voting and other forms of electoral activity represent the starting point for political participation. From the perspective of deliberative democracy, electoral arrangements that foster inclusion, choice and civil debate are obviously highly desirable. Active citizenship can be expressed through membership in political parties. Political parties need to be structured in such a way as to invite assertive political behaviour by their ordinary members, and officials must be answerable to those who elect them. Almost as important as political parties are those kinds of associational membership that may not be prompted directly by consciously political considerations but that defend or express particular interests. Especially important for advocates of deliberative democracy are organisations and associations that build bridges between groups, enabling people to transcend relatively narrow conceptions of self-interest and develop conceptions of common good. Active citizenship can be nurtured through the devolution of authority—involving parents in school governance, for example—as well as the establishment of accessible bodies that perform consultative or advisory functions. Certain kinds of militant ‘direct action’—strikes or civil disobedience—may also promote political sociability, provided they are not coercive or intimidating in the way that they enlist participation.<sup>3</sup> Participatory democracy generally, and deliberative democracy particularly, depends upon the existence of a substantial ‘public sphere’ constituted by these opportunities for ordinary people to assert themselves politically.

To participate politically and to become full citizens, people need resources. First of all and most obviously, they need a degree of material welfare and social security so that they can invest time and effort in this public realm of social activity. They need information so that they can participate in the political system knowledgeably. To encourage such participation, the administrative and political authority must behave in a way that suggests its accountability to citizens.

Arguably, participatory politics promotes more efficient government. It is more likely to supply government decision-makers with better information. In a participatory system, it is more probable that citizens will obey laws conscientiously and voluntarily. Political participation may foster greater willingness to support political policies that represent compromises because citizens make their political decisions in a social context and hence are likely to be influenced by wider considerations than those prompted by personal interest. More modestly, it seems sensible to assume that better informed citizens can make more sophisticated and knowledgeable decisions and hold more reasonable political expectations. Finally, political participation can have individual benefits, its exponents suggest, increasing people’s perception of their own effectiveness and hence enhancing their awareness of responsibility for their own lives and their relationships with others.

In the following discussion, we will review the degree to which the South African political system invites vigorous participation and encourages active citizenship.

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<sup>3</sup> This paragraph draws heavily upon David Held, *Models of Democracy*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990, pp.254-264; and Anthony Birch, *The Concepts and Theories of Modern Democracy*, Routledge, London, 2001, pp.104-118.

## 2. Overcoming segregation

To what degree has South Africa reduced historic patterns of racial discrimination and other kinds of social injustice? South Africa's apartheid history—the systematic racial discrimination that not only excluded 'non-whites' from political power (common to all African countries during most of the colonial period), but also imposed a strict segregation on all aspects of public and private life—gives the country peculiar challenges in building a democratic society today. Since 1994, enormous strides have been made in meeting those challenges.

Racial, gender and disability discrimination in a comprehensive range of fields has become illegal. Antidiscrimination legislation, both in the public and private spheres, is enforced through especially established Equality Courts. A range of other laws uphold equality of treatment in employment, the property market, education and medical aid. Discrimination is constitutionally outlawed. Decisions by the Constitutional Court have helped to extend the scope of antidiscriminatory laws to embrace foreign immigrants and permanent residents as well as citizens.

In recognition that overcoming historical injustice and increasing economic equality will require more than prohibiting discrimination, the government has also taken forceful affirmative action measures. By 2003, the overall composition of the public service roughly corresponded with the racial make-up of the population. Probably more significant as an indication of change, 56 per cent of senior managers were black and only 25 per cent white—whites predominated in top echelon positions in 1994. The pace of women's advance in the public service has been slower, though there are significantly more women in senior positions than was the case a decade ago. Beyond the public sector, both desegregation and measures to increase black economic empowerment began to be implemented almost immediately after the new government came to office. Since 1998, the Employment Equity Act requires private sector employers to promote, plan and monitor the diversification of their workforces. The 2003 Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act provides for preferential treatment by the government of companies with racially integrated management and ownership. The Mineral and Petroleum Resources Act makes black economic empowerment a requirement for companies seeking new mineral rights. Such policies have helped to induce a range of sectoral charters in which employers in particular industries commit themselves to particular targets for diversifying ownership. These measures are fairly new: it would be unreasonable to expect them to have substantial impact already on the overall distribution of economic wealth. Indeed, black ownership in the private economy as measured by the presence of black-owned companies on the

stock exchange remains at single-digit percentages.

However, a broader pattern of social mobility is discernable through census statistics. In 2001, for example, there were roughly equal numbers of Africans and whites in professional occupational categories recorded in the census, though whites continued to massively outnumber other groups in the top income echelons. African student registrations predominate in most institutions of higher education, often key institutions in facilitating or inhibiting social mobility in historically segregated societies. Previously segregated white high schools have substantially diverse student bodies, though 'township' schools remain racially monolithic. Similarly there has been a degree of desegregation of previously exclusively white middle-income residential neighbourhoods, but most urban Africans continue to live in townships and in informal housing settlements. Desegregation and affirmative action have achieved limited successes in creating a more racially diverse middle-income group and such measures have begun to enable black South Africans to play an assertive role in managing the economy, particularly in the command levels of the para-statal corporations. Black social mobility and black entry into shareholding have not altered historic patterns of social inequality, however. As a consequence of rising unemployment, social inequality remains acute, and the poorest sections of the population are almost exclusively African. The proportion of the population living in poverty has remained unchanged since 1994. It is certain that poverty impacts disproportionately upon women, particularly in their role as caregivers and as the victims of criminal violence. In summary, vast social inequalities persist, but social privilege is no longer a racial monopoly.

Despite these positive steps, race remains a pervasive faultline in South African politics and society. Private discrimination and intolerance are a fact of life for millions of South Africans; discrimination by public institutions, though being steadily overcome, is still a reality, partly because many public servants are themselves the product of racist conditioning. Racial language has been used by all political parties in a way that—while perhaps representing no more than the inevitable rough and tumble of politics—indicates how race could, in bad economic circumstances, for example, become a dangerous tool for mobilisation. At present, opinion polls indicate that most people believe that race relations have improved since 1994, yet most South Africans have no more than occasional social contact with people from other race groups. Until cross-racial social life becomes more routine, at least among middle-income people, South Africa will still be some distance away from developing a common non-racial sense of citizenship among its inhabitants. Moreover, the integration of a large number of migrants from the rest of the continent is a huge challenge, and levels of xenophobia in South Africa are worrying. South Africa has been hesitant in supporting initiatives to promote free movement at the level of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC); in the long run, it has much to benefit by promoting increased recognition of a regional citizenship.

Do existing social inequalities correlate with inequalities of participation? Probably not in the most basic sense: with respect to electoral participation, the historically most underprivileged groups—black women generally, and the elderly black rural poor—are most likely to vote once they have been enfranchised through registration. The public authorities have also made quite conspicuous efforts to promote participation across society with respect to voting and in other spheres.

### 3. Elections

Voting is the most basic and the most simple form of political participation. South Africa's election management, starting from a triumphant first democratic election in 1994, has steadily improved and become established routine. And, even though turnout in South African national elections has inevitably declined since 1994, it remains comparatively high. In 1994, 19.72 million people voted; turnout in 1999 was lower, at 16.22 million, but this time registration requirements instituted in 1998 (including the exclusion of non-citizens) limited the qualified electorate to 18.1 million. In 2004, the registered electorate totalled nearly 20.7 million, about three-quarters of the voting age population, and 15.86 million people voted. If turnout is considered against the voting age population, it has declined from 86 per cent in 1994 to 58 per cent in 2004. As a proportion of the registered electorate, turnout in 2004 was 77 per cent, down from 87 per cent of the registered electorate in 1999.

As a percentage of the registered electorate, the 2004 turnout in South Africa is roughly comparable with Western European levels and much higher than many African countries. The numbers of unregistered voters are typical of relatively new democracies, and the increase in the size of the electorate was a consequence of an extremely extensive registration campaign by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and the Department of Home Affairs (which issues the required citizen identity documents) in the months leading up to the 2004 election.

Participation in municipal elections is much lower. In 1995–96, 49 per cent of the registered electorate cast their ballots; in 2000, the proportion voting was 48 per cent; and in 2006, turnout was just over 50 per cent. Low participation in local polls is an international trend and again the South African statistics are comparatively normal.

In general, then, the overall rates of electoral participation in South Africa are reasonably good. Do low registrations and electoral abstentions disadvantage particular groups in the population? The IEC's own statistics offer only limited insights. Women are slightly more likely to vote than men, partial compensation for their historic social subordination. Among the registered electorate, turnout tends to be higher in the more rural provinces. For example, in the 2004 elections, the turnout was lowest in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape, provinces with large urban populations. Conversely, though, survey research conducted after the 1999 general election suggested that the largest number of eligible citizens to fail to register were the poorest African rural residents. This was despite very energetic efforts by IEC registration

teams to extend their operations in the more remote rural vicinities. Significant shares of the Indian and coloured electorate abstained from voting in 1999, and, among these communities, levels of registration were probably lower than among Africans as a group. Indian, coloured and white abstainers, when surveyed, were more likely to cite political disaffection as a reason for not voting. Young citizens eligible to vote for the first time were much less likely than average to vote. In local elections, participation is more vigorous in the countryside than in the cities and African urban voters are especially disinclined to participate. In this case (African urban voters in municipal polls), abstention may signal displeasure with the political performance in office of councillors from the ruling African National Congress (ANC), together with disinclination to support the ANC's rivals. In general, the sociology of electoral participation and abstention does not especially disadvantage poorer people or those previously affected by political exclusion and racial discrimination.

What about the quality of electoral participation? Is it free of coercion and are voters presented with meaningful choices? With respect to these considerations, the improvements are quite evident since 1994. They are clear in the decline of electorally related violent political competition over the last 10 years and the elimination of so-called no-go areas, territorial domains in which a party is able to deny access to canvassers and candidates who represent its rivals. These no-go areas were quite common in 1994. They were confined to KwaZulu-Natal in 1999. In 2004, the ANC was able to extend its campaign operations to the heartland areas of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), the former ruling party of the KwaZulu homeland, and for the first time ANC agents were present at all polling stations in the province, helping to promote general perceptions that the count was equitable. In general, a noteworthy feature of South African elections is that losing parties generally accept the outcomes as the results of a free and fair process.

At least in the major cities, most voters are exposed to a range of electoral messages from the different parties. The two major parties base their manifestos on professionally conducted market research and their campaigning addresses issues in the order of priority of their core supporters' priorities (housing and poverty alleviation with respect to the ANC, crime and corruption in the case of the Democratic Alliance (DA)). In 2004, canvassers representing the two main rivals, the ANC and the DA, were conspicuously active in African townships around Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town, as well as in some of the smaller centres. For many rural African voters in 2004, however, access to reliable information about the ruling party's opponents might have been more difficult. Only the ANC maintains a routine organisational presence in most rural communities (outside KwaZulu-Natal, where the IFP does so) between elections. Rural voters are less likely to read newspapers and are more exclusively dependent than urbanites upon radio and television for political news and commentary. In this context, it is worrying that complaints about the public broadcaster's political bias have become more frequent in recent years.

How reasonable are voter choices? Analysts of South African voter behaviour continue to disagree about the extent to which voters remain influenced by the social solidarities and political loyalties of the liberation struggle. It is true that the two main parties have enjoyed only mild success in developing more socially diverse electoral support bases despite their efforts to recruit multiracial political representatives and memberships. In general, though, South African elec-

tion campaigns focus on policy issues and the achievements (or failures) of the party in office; on the whole, politicians do not attempt to mobilise their followers around communal identities or historical resentments when they try to seek support. Party leaders eschew messianic personality cults.

Core support for the ruling party is strongest among the poor rural communities. Though people who live in the countryside are as likely to be poor as was the case a decade ago, their support for the government may well be a consequence of very visible government efforts to improve their lives. The scope of social grants—pensions, disability benefits and child support—has broadened considerably and the value of such payments has risen faster than inflation. Rural people are increasingly likely to have piped water, to live in homes with electricity connections and to send their children to school. In general, government expenditure on infrastructure and new social facilities is rurally biased, partly because of developmental imperatives but also, possibly, as a consequence of the political significance to the ruling party of the rural vote. They may not be better off materially, for they are more likely today to be unemployed and HIV positive, but it is quite easy to understand why they might hold positive views about government. Hence, near-universal support for the ruling party in many districts may reflect quite reasonable satisfaction with government performance. Similarly, white support for the DA may not necessarily be a reflection of reluctance to identify with black political leadership, but rather a consequence of hostility to policies that appear to conflict with the interests of most middle-income white South Africans, including very high rates of personal income tax and legally enforced affirmative action.

It is quite likely that a mixture of considerations prompt voter choice. These include rational calculations of self-interest, historic memories and more idealistic considerations. It is also likely that, at least in an urban setting (and more and more South Africans live in cities), voters are confronted with choices about which they can make well-informed decisions.



## 4. Parliament, legislatures and local government

South Africa's electoral system based on proportional representation generally facilitates socially inclusive representation in Parliament and other elected bodies. Most obviously, the extension of the franchise in 1994 now ensures that all racial and ethnic groups have the right to stand for election and be represented in Parliament. Parliament itself does not publish racial statistics, a surprising omission given the government's own insistence that other corporate bodies should account for their racial constitution. In 1999, Africans comprised nearly 60 per cent of the membership of the National Assembly and whites 25 per cent; then, and probably today, the racial minorities are disproportionately present in Parliament, though only the very small party caucuses are uniracial. The list-making procedure, in which key decisions are made at the provincial level of party organisation, helps to maintain ethnic balances in the constitution of party parliamentary caucuses. This is because of the extent to which provincial boundaries correlate with the regions inhabited by major ethnic groups within the African population. Hence the provinces, and therefore the main ethnic groups, are equitably present in Parliament.

The proportion of women in the national legislature has increased from 27 per cent after the 1994 elections to nearly 33 per cent today; before 1994, few women were elected. The dramatic improvement is very substantially the consequence of the ANC adopting a one-third quota, a practice followed by some of the smaller parties. Women's presence in municipal government, too, has increased, again mainly as a result of the ANC's internal policies which in 2006 included a 50 per cent quota. Women are also conspicuous in senior government positions. Out of 28 cabinet ministers appointed by President Thabo Mbeki in 2004, 11 were women, several holding key strategic positions. The increased number of women in Parliament and government is generally believed to have been important in ensuring a focus on gender equality at the highest policy levels.

National closed-list proportional representation gives party leaders great power, for in practice they choose who sits in Parliament. Voters choose between parties that represent slates of candidates rather than between individual personalities, except with respect to the ward contests in local government elections. But even here, for the most part, voting is prompted by party or programmatic considerations rather than by personal loyalties. For example, the ANC contested

the 2006 local government election with a slate of candidates in which it had replaced nearly two-thirds of the sitting representatives, and yet increased its share of the vote. Within the ANC caucus in the National Assembly, there has been a 40 to 50 per cent turnover with each election—rather a high rate that detracts from parliamentary effectiveness but makes it less likely that office holders will become a socially exclusive caste. There are no research findings available that tell us about the social background of parliamentarians but, though members of Parliament (MPs) are generally well educated, it is likely that a large proportion of them come from underprivileged backgrounds. On the whole, South African party leaders have used their discretion to increase the social diversity of their party representation. This is most obvious with respect to representation of women. Parliament is also inclusive in another way. The electoral system allows for an extremely low threshold of voter support for party representation in the National Assembly. In 1999, The Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) gained representation with 0.17 per cent of the vote. In 2004, AZAPO also emerged as the parliamentary party with the smallest share of the ballot, 0.27 per cent. The ideological spectrum of political representation in Parliament ranges from the radical socialist left to traditionalist conservative and free-market liberalism. It includes parties that appeal to modernist secular forms of social identity as well as parties that emphasise more particularist and patrimonial notions of community. There are no substantial political groupings in South Africa which do not contest and win representation in national, regional or local representative assemblies.

Such inclusiveness does tend, however, to make the opposition very fragmented, divided as it is in Parliament into several small and very small parties often unwilling to cooperate with each other. Fragmentation has been accentuated by the enactment in 2003 of 'floor-crossing' legislation that allows parliamentarians, legislators and councillors to switch their party allegiance for new parties during two-week 'window periods' each year. Running against the logic of an electoral system in which voters choose parties, not individual personalities, and also tending to work to the advantage of government (in practice it is more difficult for ruling party MPs to defect), the legislation weakens the already attenuated accountability of elected representatives.

Does the existing electoral system encourage political participation? As we have noted above, turnout rates are relatively high and this may partly be the consequence of a proportional representation system in which no votes are wasted because they all count in favour of the party's ultimate tally of seats in the legislature. However, the use of a proportional representation (PR) system based on a national closed list of candidates is widely criticised in South Africa, because it does not provide any mechanisms of personal accountability between representatives and voters, and because it concedes such wide powers to party leaders if they can exercise control over candidate selection. In practice, the selection procedures employed by most South African parties do invest leaders with considerable influence over the final constitution of the lists. For the ruling party, this leadership capacity makes it additionally easy for the executive to predominate over the parliamentary caucus. Moreover, the combination of closed-list PR plus floor crossing means that the voter has neither any say on who gets on the party list nor any guarantee that the persons on the list of the party he or she voted for will remain on the list after the elections. Advocates of electoral reform in South Africa, including a government-appointed investigative 'electoral

task team' led by Frederik van Zyl Slabbert, favour the introduction of a mixed-member system, in which a proportion of representatives would be elected in geographical constituencies with the remainder brought in to represent parties that fail to win constituency seats. Such a system could combine proportional representation with an element of personal accountability, and the constituency-based MPs might expect to be less deferential to the executive. If it is serious about deepening democracy, the government should make revisiting the task team report a priority.

Parliaments and other elected bodies may be socially inclusive in their membership. However, in a political system that attempts to encourage public political participation, there are other ways in which parliaments should be publicly accessible. How accessible are parliamentarians and other elected representatives to ordinary citizens? Do the various elected bodies, that is, Parliament, the provincial legislatures and local councils, attempt to enlist public interest in their activities?

The larger political parties assign their elected representatives to geographic districts or 'constituencies'. For smaller parties, committee attendance and associated obligations often displace commitment to developing links with constituents. Generally, parliamentarians appear to value constituency work and parties spend a major proportion of their IEC-allocated funding to maintaining offices that are shared with municipal councillors and members of provincial legislatures. The ANC maintains an especially extensive network of offices, 42 in Gauteng province alone. Both the national assembly and the provincial legislatures reserve designated periods in their annual schedule for constituency work. According to Thabo Rapoo, the most authoritative researcher on this aspect of the parliamentary process, many of the consultations take place between office staff and constituents and tend to concern issues that can most easily be addressed by local provincial officials: access to social grants and entitlements and the provision of additional local services.

Parliament and legislatures also hold public hearings on issues about which legislation is currently subject to debate. Gauteng, for example, a provincial legislature in which successive speakers have committed themselves to eliciting public participation, held 44 such hearings in 2002 and 35 in 2003. In 1999, 17 per cent of randomly sampled respondents in Gauteng, in a Human Sciences Research Council survey, claimed they had attended public hearings, a surprisingly high figure. In the same survey, nearly nine per cent of respondents across the country claimed to have attended a meeting during the previous year with an elected representative, again a substantial proportion. However, in the 2000 local elections, complaints about unavailable councillors who had failed to hold report-back meetings with their constituents appeared to be very widespread indeed, and the high proportion of councillors that the ANC chose to replace in 2006 suggests that the quality of local representation has not improved much recently. Complaints about the quality of representation are most vigorous with respect to local politicians, despite the existence of a system of geographically defined ward representation intended to create a personal kind of accountability between councillors and citizens. Such accountability may well develop in future, but the system may also merely foster a politics of patronage, as is suggested by anecdotal evidence of corruption around local government allocation of housing subsidies. Ward committees, though widely established in the wake of the 1999–2000 reorgani-

sation of local government, appear to have become inactive in many of the vicinities in which they were elected.

On a more positive note, legislatures and Parliament have instituted various public information programmes including websites, newsletters and other publications, school visits, and so forth. Televised National Assembly coverage is also helpful, especially given the absence of serious parliamentary reporting by newspapers. Press neglect of provincial and local governments is a serious problem, especially outside the major towns and most urbanised provinces. The Parliamentary Monitoring Group of the Institute for Democracy in Southern Africa (IDASA, a non-governmental organisation) provides important reportage of the debates of the National Assembly and National Council of Provinces, the upper house. However, it ceased reporting on provincial institutions in 2000 and now there is no comprehensive or reliable source of information about their activities. The Public Service Accountability Monitor based at Rhodes University supplies invaluable data on the incidence of venality in the Eastern Cape administration; and, for its subscribers, the African Eye News Agency in Nelspruit has provided unusually well-informed political commentary and analysis on the machinations of Mpumalanga's politics. But no comparable reporting is available for the Northern Cape, the North West, Limpopo or the Free State.

## 5. Public access to the policy process

To what degree is policy-making based on procedures that invite broad forms of political participation? One set of answers to this question must focus on Parliament and other representative bodies. Do elected representatives attempt to represent the public interest in the exercise of their law-making and oversight functions? Do parliamentarians play an assertive role in making laws, and in these functions do they seek advice and opinions from interested groups in civil society? In addition to Parliament, what other arenas of policy-making exist, and to what degree do these help to open the policy-making process and make it more inclusive?

As might be expected in a recently enfranchised democracy, the National Assembly has enacted an impressive quantity of legislation, mostly initially drafted by government departments. A busy legislative programme may be at the expense of quality. Ruling party MPs are generally reluctant to challenge the executive or play an assertive role on the back benches; this reluctance is accentuated by the dynamics of an electoral system which renders them vulnerable to 'redeployment' by the party leadership. There are exceptions to this generalisation. Under ANC chairmanship, certain portfolio committees have played a creative and sometimes even combative role in modifying proposed legislation; the Justice and Communications Portfolio Committees, under the chairpersonships of Johnny de Lange and Nat Kekana respectively, were especial cases in point. It may be the case that ANC backbencher inhibitions in shaping policy and legislation are more a consequence of lack of expertise than a result of political timidity. MPs have modest research resources and office assistance, and turnover rates and consequent inexperience among ANC parliamentarians remain high.

Lobby groups that supply well-researched information can exercise considerable effect on policy: this is evident from the history of the Women's Budget Initiative, which began as a civil society parliamentary lobbying agency. The Initiative's concerns have now been to a fair extent incorporated into the priorities of the Budget Office of the Ministry of Finance. Another instance of successful action by lobbyists occurred in 1997 when a group of organisations, coordinated through the University of the Western Cape, managed to persuade MPs that ministerial proposals for a new child welfare benefit would not work. Discouragingly, the most widely cited instances of effective parliamentary lobbying all refer to the first post-1994 administration, not to the periods of its successors.

Among opposition parties, DA parliamentarians often play an effective role in committees

in amending draft legislation. Parliamentary and provincial legislature committees are quite energetic in encouraging public participation, though the most conspicuous participants at public hearings are the representatives of well-organised interest groups. These latter include business associations, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and particularly resourceful sectoral lobbies. (The Cape Town office of the Institute of Security Studies, for example, has been especially influential in projecting defence-related concerns within the policy domain). Business can also reach government and influence policy independently of Parliament, through forums specifically created to promote connections between the private sector and government: the Black Economic Empowerment Commission and the Business Trust have played particularly important roles in this way.

Do public hearings by parliamentary bodies actually influence legislation and policy? The first ANC administration between 1994 and 1999 invested very considerable resources and effort in consultative procedures and these shaped policy significantly: the Defence Review was a particular case in point. The Department of Education also appeared to be especially amenable to external influence. By contrast, the key procedures through which macro-economic policy emerged, notably with respect to the adoption of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) programme in 1996, were quite removed from public participation and were presented even to the ANC's national executive as a predetermined set of decisions. The adoption of GEAR was accompanied by the termination of a separate minister for the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and of offices in provincial government for the promotion of the RDP's priorities. These agencies had encouraged participatory decision-making procedures to determine the conception and design of local development programmes. With the abandonment of the planning requirements that had been stipulated by the RDP offices, development project implementation became more centralised and less likely to feature community consultation. It is true that the Integrated Development Planning mechanisms that were instituted in the reform of local government in 1999–2000 were meant to feature consultative mechanisms and report-backs by councillors on the progress of implementation. However, as noted above, the municipal ward committees that should promote participation are often inactive, though their effectiveness varies. In any case, ward committees are often not especially representative because they are frequently established at very poorly attended meetings. High-profile consultative events such as the *'imbizos'*, the public assemblies at which local residents can meet cabinet ministers, have an important symbolic function in underlying the government's acknowledgement that its officials should be accountable; however, they are occasional rather than routine institutional devices that promote public participation in policy-making.

Since 1999, deliberately initiated major public policy discussions have become much less common, and the public hearings that continue (and at least with respect to provincial legislatures their frequency is diminishing) may be more important as a means of legitimation than as a channel through which citizens can help shape policy. Significantly, the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), a quadripartite (government, business, labour and civil society) advisory institution, which played a major role in the 1994–1999 determination of labour relations legislation, has become much less significant as a policy-making arena. A pro-

vincial version of NEDLAC, established in the Western Cape in 2003, has made a contribution in a province in which political life is unusually competitive and civil society groups especially assertive. One positive development with respect to public participation in parliamentary activity is the initiation of a public petitions process in several of the provincial legislatures. This has enhanced the relative power of the legislature and specifically the office of the speaker in its relations with the executive. In Gauteng, the legislature addresses between 60 and 70 petitions a year, mainly concerning housing and welfare entitlements. In Mpumalanga, the passage of a petitions bill sanctioning publicly instigated legislative inquiries into executive abuse became a major issue of confrontation between the ANC caucus in the legislature and the premier during 2001–2002. The bill was introduced by a former member of the provincial cabinet, and opposed by Mpumalanga Premier Ndaweni Mahlangu; Mahlangu challenged the bill in court, but eventually lost the case in the Constitutional Court. ANC legislators in Mpumalanga then embarked on an offensive against the Mahlangu administration, sanctioning investigations into official corruption. Factional disunity within an ANC-dominated legislature thus encouraged backbenchers to become more assertive in confronting party leaders.

Aside from drafting legislation, parliamentarians are conventionally expected to perform oversight functions. The most conspicuous example of Parliament's effective exercise of oversight was the investigation into arms contracting by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA). SCOPA was conventionally chaired by an opposition MP, even before 1994, but its original determination to address public reports and allegations of high-level corruption in a major government arms purchase was partly a consequence of an unusually independent ANC group on the committee led by Andrew Feinstein, a former accountant. The investigation sponsored by SCOPA resulted in the prosecution of an ANC parliamentary whip and the charging and resignation from public office of Deputy President Zuma. However, it also had the consequence of SCOPA itself losing its degree of autonomy, as the ANC members were reined in and in some cases replaced by party leadership. More recently, widespread abuse among parliamentarians of a system of providing vouchers for official travel, and evident reluctance to penalise the individuals concerned (who included the deputy speaker), have helped to engender public cynicism about Parliament's commitment to effective oversight. In certain provincial legislatures, ANC caucuses have occasionally been quite assertive in exercising oversight prerogatives, though this has been partly the consequence of factionally divided provincial party organisations, as in Mpumalanga. At the local government level, the record of local government councillors in checking and addressing administrative shortcomings in the provision of services has been very poor, even in the case of personally elected ward councillors who might be expected to be more accountable to voters.

Public participation in policy-making need not limit itself to formal channels provided by parliaments and other representative bodies. The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) is an especially striking example of an activist organisation which, through civil disobedience and others kinds of mass mobilisation, as well as through engagement with formal institutions (including the courts and public health officials), has succeeded in altering public policy, overcoming official reluctance to institute large-scale public provision of antiretroviral medication to HIV-positive

patients. In the South African context, the TAC is an unusually well-organised social movement, with substantial membership (90 per cent African) and a well-educated, articulate and resourceful leadership with prior activist experience, much of it within the ANC. The TAC's cause has enjoyed an unusually widespread degree of public sympathy, and the government's refusal to supply medication was unpopular with ANC middle and senior echelons as well as among civil servants in the Department of Health with whom the TAC engaged frequently. Notably, though, the TAC's key victory was won in a succession of court cases; only after favourable judgments, including by the Constitutional Court, did feeling in its favour begin to become openly evident within the ANC's national executive. At least with respect to the TAC, constitutional rights have supplied effective points of access to policy-making in a setting in which Parliament has been ineffectual. The TAC's experience does not exhaust the potential for active citizens to shape policy. Civil society is strong in South Africa, but the combination of resources, public support and strategic skills needed to achieve influence upon policy formation remains unusual: outside the trade union movement few voluntary associations can claim a comparable impact to the TAC.

In general, the evidence suggests considerable public propensity to participate in policy-making, whether through attending hearings or through involvement in issue-prompted activism. Through their own public programmes, formal representative institutions encourage participatory behaviour even if policy, at least in its original conception, is largely determined in the executive domain. The social profile of the membership of activist organisations such as the TAC indicates that political participation need not be confined to privileged groups.

## 6. Political parties and their internal dynamics

What about political parties? Do they supply avenues through which ordinary citizens can participate meaningfully and effectively in policy decisions and more general political processes? To a degree, political parties do provide such channels. South Africa is unusual among new democracies because of the existence of a relatively well-organised range of political parties.

The main parties are historically well established with consistent bases of electoral support. Both succeed also in attracting quite generous financial backing, though the absence of any legal requirement to disclose the identity of donors renders policy-making and decisions about resource allocation quite vulnerable to venal abuse. Both the ANC and its main opponent, the Democratic Alliance, have quite vigorous internal lives. Most significantly, most South African parties aim to be mass-membership organisations, depending upon their members to reach the public.

At the party's 2002 conference, the ANC's secretary-general provided membership statistics: there were 416 874 ANC members nationally with paid-up R12 (approximately US\$2) annual subscriptions. At present, ANC officials believe membership stands at 450 000. In general, since 1990, the ANC's membership has not exceeded half a million.

The ANC's main competitors are less specific in the information they supply in public about their membership. Throughout the 1980s, the IFP claimed organised followings of between one and two million; since then, its officials concede, membership has declined, though they still claim supporter figures larger than those of the ANC. They also confirm the organisation's membership to be predominantly drawn from the KwaZulu-Natal countryside.

The Democratic Alliance claimed in 2003 that 80 per cent of its youth wing was 'black' and 32 of its Gauteng branches are established in what it calls 'emergent areas'. The DA does not normally publish or make available to researchers its membership statistics, though it claims that the membership is increasing. Black delegates claimed that they had been successful at the 2004 party congress 'to get our party to listen and initiate a strategic revisioning route'. Soon, they predicted, the party would experience 'a huge cultural shift'.

Indicators of membership activism are probably more telling signals of vigorous party organisation than the statistical claims parties make about their following. Researchers have

confirmed that, in the cases of both the ANC and the Democratic Alliance, members participate quite widely in a range of different sorts of branch-based activities between election campaigning seasons. Finding evidence of comparable activism is much more difficult with respect to Inkatha. In general, the ANC has provided a model of mass mobilisation that its rivals, whatever their size, seek to imitate: this is a model that encourages political participation (in contrast to cadre party kinds of politics in which parties' local influence is exercised indirectly, through networks of notables).

The ANC's constitution describes a democratically structured organisation in which leaders are periodically accountable to members and in which members participate in competitive procedures of leadership renewal. In practice, the party's inner life is more controlled. For its most senior positions, the ANC's senior echelon discourages competition. At the 2002 conference, none of the top five offices was contested and there were significantly fewer nominations for the National Executive than at the previous conference, five years before. In 2001, the National Working Committee approved a document, *Through the Eye of the Needle*, which would make it very difficult for aspirant office holders to systematically solicit support. 'Electoral processes' held the risk of 'tear(ing) the movement apart' and 'secret lobbying' would 'open the movement up to opportunism'. It was 'a matter of profound cultural practice within the ANC that individuals do not canvass for themselves'.

Unlike his three predecessors as party leader (Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and Albert Luthuli), Thabo Mbeki has not used the party deputy presidency to signal his own or the party leadership's preferred successor, though recently he has noted that he would like his successor to be a woman. Putting Jacob Zuma, a former unionist and Robben Island prisoner, subsequently in exile, and the ANC's most senior Zulu politician, into the deputy presidency seemed to defer the necessity to make any decisions about who would eventually replace Mbeki. Zuma himself had no higher ambitions, party insiders believed, a supposition that he confirmed publicly in 2001; though subsequently he has evidently changed his mind. Zuma, though, was unusual in government in his command of personal political support, balanced between two key ANC constituencies, organised youth and organised labour. Zuma's maintenance of his Communist Party affiliations encouraged trade unionists to view him as a potential ally in their opposition to neo-liberal macroeconomic policies. Meanwhile, the deputy president's reputation as a 'traditionalist' man of the people is well received in an increasingly rurally oriented Youth League and more generally among ordinary ANC members alienated by technocratic authority in the party and in government.

In 2005, the conviction for corruption after a protracted trial of Zuma's former financial adviser, Shabir Shaik, helped raise fresh questions about who would succeed Thabo Mbeki. The evidence in Shaik's trial suggested that Zuma accepted bribes in return for various favours to Shaik himself, and, even more disturbingly, to contractors in a massive government arms purchase. In the same year, Zuma was charged in connection with these allegations, and the trial was set for 2006. Subsequently, he was also charged, tried and acquitted of rape. During these events, Zuma projected himself to his supporters as the victim of a politically manipulated judicial authority that would deny him his deserved accession as Mbeki's heir.

What is most disconcerting about these developments is not so much the possibility that a senior politician may be venal; corrupt figures can be identified in most democracies. What is worrying here is that such a substantial section of the ANC's activist following appear to be unconcerned about the allegations against Zuma, and second that, aside from Thabo Mbeki, no one else within the ANC's upper echelon appears to command significant public support to match Zuma's popularity. This is mainly a consequence of the way in which, since the early 1990s, ANC leaders have sought to inhibit open competition for office within the party's ranks, despite the existence of formal rules that permit such competition. It is also worrying that Zuma and his supporters have been rather successful in subverting or restraining the functions of the prosecuting authorities as well as intimidating sections of the judiciary.

In contrast to the ANC, the Democratic Alliance's constitution allows less scope for members to determine policy and leadership and, in general, accords greater influence to parliamentarians. Between its biannual congresses, the party's governing authority, the Federal Council, is composed mainly of parliamentarians and councillors.

In the IFP, authority is centralised and the constitution confers considerable power and discretion to the national leadership. A disciplinary committee can impose penalties for a range of offences that include 'acting disrespectfully to the party or any of its officials at a meeting of the party'. The vigour of the IFP's internal democratic procedures was subjected to public scrutiny in July 2004. Delegates reacting to the party's poor electoral performance nominated Ziba Jiyane to stand against the incumbent party chairman, the former provincial premier, Lionel Mtshali, against the wishes of the leadership. Jiyane won by a large margin. Chief Buthelezi showed his displeasure by calling Jiyane to account the following day for various recent media statements. Jiyane's support base was located among party 'modernisers' in the Youth Brigade. Jiyane lasted a year in his new post. He was suspended for 'bringing the name of the party into disrepute' in claiming that its functioning resembled 'an internal dictatorship'. Shortly thereafter, he resigned his IFP membership and announced the formation of a new party, the National Democratic Convention, which would build a 'philosophical conservative' approach around 'three pillars': family values and the 'fear of God', deepening of democracy, and a 'market based developmental state'. Four IFP parliamentarians crossed the floor to join the new party in September 2005.

Would South African democracy benefit if the internal procedures of political parties were more subject to regulation by an external authority? To a degree, they are already. Registered parties must publish a constitution, and if they breach their own rules they render themselves vulnerable to civil litigation. On the whole, the two main parties maintain a degree of internal democracy without the presence of stronger legal compulsions. They hold periodic elections of their leadership using secret ballots, and they provide opportunities for their members to engage with leadership in policy discussion. It would take a very exacting and intrusive set of legal prescriptions to remove culturally entrenched authoritarian predispositions within the ANC or the DA. A degree of legal prescription might, however, be a sensible precaution to ensure the continuation of existing democratic practice in most parties, such as regular leadership elections monitored by independent agencies. One aspect of party affairs that urgently merits stronger legal restraint is funding: donations to political parties have featured in a succession of major

corruption scandals, and the extent to which party leaders are secretly subject to pressure or inducements from donors reduces the significance of more open and public kinds of political participation. As the failure of court proceedings initiated by IDASA demonstrated, there is no constitutional requirement for such legislation, and future regulation of party funding will have to be an outcome of a change of heart among political leaders. Such a development is unlikely without public pressure.

## 7. Parties and policy development

Can party members shape their organisations' policies? Ostensibly, ANC policy is determined by delegates at its national conferences. A policy conference is held before the national meetings to discuss draft resolutions. In 2002, at the last such policy conference, draft resolutions echoed the content of a 131-page volume of 'discussion papers' that had been circulated to branches in the August issue of *Umrabulo*, the ANC's journal. ANC officials maintained that the resolutions themselves had been informed by 400 separate submissions from branches and regions. Only members of the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC) can draft discussion documents. In reality, though, the resolutions discussed at the 2002 policy conference reflected existing government departmental programmes. Few were written in such a way as to invite debate. However, the participatory rituals that accompany the ANC's contributions to public policy-making may have a value that extends beyond simply investing public policy with political legitimacy: policy conferences attended by 8 000 delegates who themselves report back to a much larger constituency probably help to nurture active citizens by engendering informed public interest in policy issues.

ANC MPs have created a separate field of policy-making: they constitute party 'study groups' for each portfolio committee. In their policy-making capacity, MPs are subordinate to the NEC and indeed are bound by a code of conduct in which they undertake to refrain from any 'attempt to make use of parliamentary structures to undermine organisational decisions and policies'. In 1998, the ANC conference decided *against* giving parliamentary caucuses special constitutional status within the party, a recognition ANC MPs had been urging.

As we have noted, the limits to the extent to which even the party's leadership can influence government policy were most clearly obvious in 1996 with the government's adoption of GEAR, a programme of economic liberalisation that many party members, particularly trade unionists, viewed as being at odds with the ANC's 1994 'Reconstruction and Development' manifesto. GEAR was not shown to the ANC's NEC before its publication on 14 June 1996 as a 'non-negotiable' statement of government policy. Conversely, though, and more recently, in 2002–2003 the NEC played a major role in persuading the government to expand the provision of antiretroviral drugs for HIV/AIDS patients. HIV/AIDS is one issue in which party policy has demonstrated considerable sensitivity to public opinion, and has—albeit belatedly and after some struggle—influenced government to pay more attention to the unpopularity of its policies and modify them accordingly.

In contrast to the ANC, in the DA, parliamentarians and other elected public officials play a major role in the Federal Council, the main policy-making body between biannual meetings of all party members, known as Federal Congresses. For every department of state, the DA appoints from its parliamentary caucus a policy specialist and spokesperson. Parliamentarians and councillors also make up a major share of those present at Federal Congresses. The DA's Constitution authorises its national leader to interpret and even make policy 'in respect of new matters or new situations'. In Inkatha, leadership authority over policy-making is buttressed by a system of standing committees, appointed by the IFP's national and provincial councils, which make recommendations directly to the party president and the national chairperson. These committees are expected to coordinate their activities with parliamentary portfolio 'study groups'.

Opposition parties, then, even in their formal procedures, give ordinary members less of a role in the determination of policy than the ruling party. In practice, the ANC membership's influence over party policy, which is formally mandated by the party's constitution, is quite circumscribed, given the overwhelming presence of branch delegates at the key meetings and conferences. And, from time to time, the habits that engender deference to highest authority lose their hold. This happened with respect to official HIV/AIDS policy, and it appears to have happened also with respect to the debate over the succession to President Mbeki, in which support for a particular personality is simultaneously a rebellion about not just particular policies but a general style of government.

## 8. Access to information and the quality of broadcasting and the press

South Africans have constitutional rights of access to government information and to information held by other bodies that may be needed in exercising their rights. Since 2001, special legislation has encouraged public access to information, though many of the legislation's provisions are recommendations rather than requirements. To date, however, court appeals against official denials of requests for information have tended to be unsuccessful. In general, both researchers and journalists encounter a disinclination among officials to supply information about even routine uncontroversial aspects of government, a reflection of administrative incapacity and political defensiveness.

Even so, a quantity of official information is made available quite readily and in easily accessible ways: Statistics South Africa's website is one example of an important government database that supplies, free of charge, a wealth of detailed insights into social change, economic progress, and government performance, including comprehensive census reporting. Nor is all the publicly available information positive. Most of the newspaper reportage on government inefficiencies, especially with respect to corruption, derives from official disclosures.

Public bodies are in fact capable of very efficient communication. A notable instance of a successful government publicity initiative was the 'Public Participation' campaign undertaken by the Constitutional Assembly between 1995 and 1996, intended to generate popular interest in the constitutional debate and to invite submissions to the drafters. Extensive advertising was accompanied by the mass distribution of attractively designed booklets and newsletters. Twenty thousand people attended workshops. The SABC broadcast a weekly hour-long 'Constitutional Talk' programme in eight languages, listened to by about 10 million people. Ten thousand people used a special telephone talk-line. After the enactment of the constitution, seven million copies were distributed. Market research confirmed that the campaign reached 65 per cent of all South Africans, and the Constitutional Assembly received 1.7 million submissions.

A wide selection of independent mass-circulation newspapers enhances the quality of political participation. About seven million South Africans read a newspaper every day, though daily newspaper sales are in the region of two million. Twenty dailies are published across South Africa, mostly with local or regional circulations. They are published mainly in English, though

there are also three Afrikaans dailies and a Zulu tabloid. Most newspapers increasingly direct their editorial content at black readers. Most daily newspapers are non-partisan and often assertively critical of political leadership across the party spectrum. The only political party to own a newspaper is Inkatha, which maintains a controlling interest in the Zulu-language weekly, *Ilanga*. The ANC produces a weekly online newsletter, read by many of its members and widely cited in the commercial press. South Africans are spoiled for choice on Sundays, with 11 titles to choose from, most of them widely available throughout the country. Most of these publications include serious political reportage and commentary, including the mass circulation *Sowetan*. Small-town weekly local newspapers—there are more than 50 of these—tend to focus on more parochial concerns, but several of these undertake critical investigative reporting. The *Representative* in Queenstown, in the Eastern Cape, is exceptional in this respect, and also unusual in a local paper in its coverage of black community affairs; most local weeklies focus on the concerns of white farmers and businessmen.

Black rural South Africans generally live beyond the reach of newspapers and depend mainly upon radio and increasingly upon television for political information. Most rural populations are also limited to public broadcasting: many rural audiences do not receive transmissions from privately owned radio and television stations. Given the virtual monopoly of the public broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), over news distribution in many rural communities, the occasional evidence of editorial political bias in favour of the ruling party as well as the weakness of the regulatory agency, the Independent Communications Agency of South Africa (ICASA), is worrying. SABC television news only occasionally carries unfavourable reports on government, in contrast to the more impartial coverage offered by the independent e.tv. In fairness, the SABC's shortcomings are partly inherited, and not necessarily the consequence of deliberate manipulation of the broadcaster from outside by the ANC's leadership. Moreover, editorially neutral material about opposition parties appears quite frequently on television and is featured in radio broadcast, and, at least on English-language radio services, including those of the SABC, there is critical analysis of government performance.

In many respects, South African mass media are more diverse, more accessible and less restricted editorially than two decades ago before the advent of universal suffrage. Professionals are critical of what they view as a decline in the quality of newspaper reportage, but it is likely that readership of serious analytical political commentary as carried in newspapers has expanded and is much more likely to be black. What has disappeared, though, is the so-called alternative press that constituted such an important dimension of local anti-apartheid resistance. There can be no question that the stronger of these publications, such as *Grassroots*, significantly opened up the public realm in the communities they served. The functions they performed have not been replaced by mainstream newspapers, increasingly disinclined to report on local events. The degeneration of campus-based student journalism is also alarming, given the critical role that South African university students have played in promoting and sustaining community-based activism.

# General conclusions

In summary, opportunities and support for political participation have greatly increased since the inception of full democracy in 1994. Significantly, more black people share the privileges and the access to power and wealth that used to be restricted to white South Africans. Radical social inequality persists, though, and the very poor remain exclusively black. However, the poorest and most vulnerable sections of the population are more likely to vote, and even this fairly restricted degree of political participation is likely to have affected the government's allocation of resources in their favour. The weakness of local government must be a matter for concern, given the importance of municipalities as potentially the most accessible sites of political authority for poor people and the key role that municipal governments perform in implementing development projects.

At higher levels, elected institutions and office bearers invest resources in making their activities accessible to the public. Though the record is uneven, there are striking instances in which public pressure has helped to shape policy; and on occasions parliamentarians and legislators have asserted their prerogatives in calling the executive to account. Well-organised, issue-oriented pressure groups are a relatively fresh and extremely welcome ingredient in South African politics. Political parties recruit mass memberships and to a degree maintain democratic internal procedures, though culturally entrenched authoritarian predispositions inhibit policy debates as well as competitions for leadership. The combination of a closed-list proportional representation system and legislation that allows MPs to change parties without losing their seats tends to reinforce central party leadership control and discourage independent-mindedness in parliamentary behaviour, while weakening accountability of individual members to the electorate. Secrecy about their funding arrangements and hence the extent to which their leaders defer to donors' interests also represents an important limitation on the democratic effectiveness of internal party procedures.

In general, South Africans enjoy relatively unrestricted access to politically useful information through certain kinds of official disclosure, through mass circulation newspapers, and through an extensive system of public broadcasting. Uneven access to information puts the rural poor at a disadvantage, limiting the extent to which their political choices can be well informed.

Finally, the extent to which political mobilisation exploits racial and ethnic identities, and the degree to which it can be commanded by patrimonial and authoritarian leaders, hinders the evolution of a deliberative and civil democracy in South Africa.



# Recommendations

The measures that are likely to engender more effective and socially wider political participation are programmes that address and alleviate poverty. To be fair, such programmes already constitute priorities for government, and social expenditure in the poorest parts of the countryside does help to explain relatively high levels of voting. Partly because the record of electoral participation is good, resources available for voter education have dwindled. This is a pity: there is clearly a need for voter education programmes that can help to prompt more interest in elections among the 18- to 25-year-old group, including programmes that are school-based. Educational programmes might emphasise motivational issues more; in the past, voter education tended to focus on the procedures of voting as well as related concerns about secrecy. More generally, civic education is an expanding and experimental field in South Africa, with its recent incorporation into the formal school syllabus.

South Africa's electoral system creates the danger of excessive leadership dominance of party lists, and executive dominance of Parliament. The government has so far deferred a decision on the electoral reforms proposed by the task team examining the issue—in particular, the creation of a multiple-member constituency system of proportional representation. This decision should be revisited, and the proposed reforms adopted, in the interests of engendering more consciousness of public accountability among elected representatives and strengthening independent debate in Parliament. A relatively simple reform would be to end floor crossing within the current system, a practice opposed by several opposition political parties and generally disliked by the public.

Regulation of party finance should represent a priority in any programme to enhance the public accountability of political institutions. The limits to litigation over this issue have been confirmed by the failure of the court proceedings initiated by IDASA. Inducing a change in the law will depend upon effective advocacy and agitation. At present, the two main parties strongly oppose even restricted kinds of disclosure. Though rules on party funding are perhaps more urgent, there also is a case for legislation or a constitutional amendment requiring political parties to respect democratic procedures in candidate selection and other matters.

Some of the most useful programmes that help to facilitate and enhance political participation are those that supply information. The Parliamentary Monitoring Group that is run through IDASA is an invaluable resource for lobbying agencies and pressure groups, providing as it does

detailed and accurate information on National Assembly portfolio committee proceedings. No comparable information is available on the work undertaken in the provincial legislatures. This is a serious reporting deficiency, given the scale of public expenditure for which provincial governments are responsible, and the virtual absence of any systematic monitoring of their conduct in the majority of provincial capitals. The African Eye news Agency in Nelspruit and the Public Service Accountability Monitor at Rhodes University represent important examples of the role independent institutions can play in fostering greater local interest in provincial governance issues. Any programme that might encourage more frequent coverage of local government in local newspapers or radio would be very helpful. This might be achieved through the funding of special supplements carried by local newspapers, the establishment of local media projects on the models of the more successful 'alternative' community papers of the 1980s, and the provision of incentives for local journalism.

More systematic and sophisticated monitoring is needed of the political content of public broadcasting, given the importance of radio and television as a source of political information. The Johannesburg-based Media Monitoring Project already undertakes authoritative work but the scope of its research is confined and does not often extend to the radio stations that reach black rural listeners. The editorial independence of the SABC and other media should be jealously guarded.