

CHAPTER

11

Political culture in South Africa

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Outcomes

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Discuss the concept of political culture and its relationship to democratic consolidation
- Define a human rights political culture
- Define non-racialism and discuss its relationship to a human rights political culture
- Discuss post-apartheid South African culture with a focus on liberation political culture, the culture of struggle and peoples' power, and the political culture of South Africa's marginalised
- Discuss an emergent 'political culture of apathy'.

Key terms

Democratic consensus

Pluralism

Political efficacy

Populism

Human rights regime

Political culture

Political socialisation

Political apathy

Introduction

This chapter discusses South Africa's **political culture** following the end of apartheid in 1994. Central to successful democratic consolidation is the ability of a fragmented polity to construct a national identity and sense of nationhood founded on a common culture. In the South African context, however, national identity construction is based on the principle of *unity in diversity*. This means that given the diversity of cultural-linguistic and religious communities, the post-apartheid South African state attempted to construct a national identity that respects the equality of diverse people and is founded on a multiculturalist world view. The South African Constitution commits South African political society to a political culture rooted in a strong human rights tradition. The doctrine of non-racialism as an ideology can serve to unite a fragmented South African society. Born from the Freedom Charter, which envisioned a South Africa that 'belongs to all who live in it, black and white', the doctrine of non-racialism follows a world view that does not recognise race (in other words legal access, public services and opportunities need to be available to all irrespective of race). In attempting to transform South African society, a delicate balance between racialism and non-racialism is a necessity. Therefore, a delicate and often contradictory relationship exists between what is construed as a **human rights regime** and the re-racialisation of South African political society. This strenuous relationship between culture and race remains a key area of study for future democratic consolidation in South Africa. This is especially so due to the nature of the socio-political environment, which is characterised by fragmented citizenship and two enduring legacies of apartheid: (1) the apparent permanence of apartheid-constructed identities; and (2)

socio-economic concentration of poverty and inequality predominantly among the black South African population.

Why do you vote for a particular political party? How do you feel about particular political parties or groups within society? What do you think about the state generally and the government in particular? Do you vote? If not, why don't you vote? If you do vote, why do you vote? Do you boycott elections because you believe that your vote does not matter? Many ordinary South African citizens grapple with these questions at some level of political awareness. **Political socialisation** and political culture are the foundation upon which we build our political ideas. Political culture is learnt through the processes of political socialisation. Heywood¹ states that 'much of politics takes place in our heads, that is, it is shaped by our ideas, values, and assumptions about how society should be organised, and our expectations, hopes and fears about government'. He further notes that 'perceptions may not only be more important than reality; in practical terms, perceptions may be reality'. It is these perceptions and ideas that influence our political culture (values and attitudes towards political systems and processes) and our political behaviour (how we act, for example whether we vote and how we vote).

Democratic values are central to the survival and consolidation of democracy in transitioning and democratising states. Society must see the new democracy as legitimate, so broad attitudinal changes towards the state are necessary. And, political elites need to commit to abide by the new laws and rules of democracy as a way to signal to society that they respect democracy and its rules. New political values are often captured in democratic constitutions, which effectively seek to create a new democratic political culture that will ensure the sustainability of the new democracy. This value system generally focuses on the centrality of respect for human rights in the day-to-day interaction between different groups that are now one nation under a new democratic order. This implies a trend towards **pluralism** and the centrality of civil and political liberties. Most importantly, the creation of a democratic value system needs for citizens to view the new democracy as legitimate and for a **democratic consensus** to be established.

This chapter first discusses the concepts of political culture, political socialisation and political identity. Thereafter, the chapter discusses the relationship between political culture and democratic consolidation. This is followed by an overview of democratic citizenship and human rights as a central focus of national identity construction in post-apartheid South Africa. This is followed by an overview of the South African political culture. The chapter concludes with a discussion on what can be seen as an emergent political culture of apathy in South Africa's post-apartheid electoral landscape.

11.1 Political culture and socialisation: Learning our political identities

Culture is defined as the 'shared beliefs, values, traditions, and behaviour patterns of particular groups'.² Diamond³ defines political culture as 'a people's predominant beliefs, attitudes, values, ideals, sentiments, and evaluations about the political system of their country, and the role of the self in that system'. Heywood⁴ states that political scientists consider political culture to be 'the pattern of orientations to political objects such as parties, government, the constitution, expressed in beliefs, symbols and values'. From these two definitions, one can state that political culture is a concept that looks at the views, values and norms of a political society, and how this society views a particular political system.

The study of political culture was born in the 1960s with Verba and Almond's *The Civic Virtue*, pioneering its study by conceptualising three types of political culture as presented in Table 11.1.

Table 11.1 Types of political culture⁵

Type of political culture	Type of political system
Parochial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typical of tribal, feudal cultures • No specialised roles (head of family, tribe, etc.) – roles are diffuse and changing • No awareness of the system as a whole • Political systems and cultures in this tradition are conflict societies in Africa such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and Somalia. The state has lost legitimacy and, due to the conflict situation, in many instances has lost control of parts of the territory. Consequently, traditional leadership becomes central as an authority figure and a means to organise a community politically.
Subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typical of autocratic and charismatic leadership systems • Individual is aware of the specialised governmental authority • Oriented towards the decisions and outputs of the system: individual is the subject of the system, not a participant in it • These systems are typical of authoritarian and totalitarian systems. Regimes include Idi Amin's Uganda, Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe, Mobutu Sese Seko's Zaire and other dictatorships. These systems were also found in the communist regions of the world and in Latin America's military regimes.
Participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberal democracy • Individuals are aware of the roles of government • Individuals are oriented towards input in the decision-making process • Individuals recognise their benefits as the outputs of the system • Individuals see themselves as participants • These systems are typically found in the Western world like Europe and America. They are liberal democratic systems founded upon participation, inclusion, human rights, tolerance and secularism. Interestingly, in the process of the political development of Europe and America, they were, at some stage, tribal, feudal societies, and then later became subject political societies. Only after a violent and turbulent history did these societies manage to cultivate a participant political culture.

Different political communities have different political cultures, depending on whether people were socialised under an authoritarian or democratic regime. In this sense, Almond and Verba⁶ highlight:

a participant is assumed to be aware of and informed about the political system in both its governmental and political aspects. A subject tends to be cognitively orientated primarily to the output side of government: the executive, bureaucracy, and judiciary. The parochial tends to be unaware, or only dimly aware, of the political in all its aspects.

Almond and Verba's conceptualisation of political culture thus speaks to three primary orientations. These are a cognitive, affective, and/or evaluative orientation to political life.⁷

- On a cognitive level, political culture denotes knowledge of and beliefs about the political system. Here, what you believe about the political system is often constructed based on what you learnt as a child and through your experiences.
- The affective orientation consists of feelings about the political system. For example, do you feel the political system is fair? Do you trust that the elections will produce a fair result? Do you feel that the system as whole is legitimate?
- The evaluative orientation refers to the commitments to political values and judging the performance of the political system relative to those values. Here, positive regime performance validates values of tolerance and moderation in that groups learn that the best way to deal with conflicting interests is through democratic procedures and institutions.

In this sense, the cognitive distribution refers to the knowledge about a political system, the affective to the feelings about the roles and role-players in the political system, and the evaluative to how we feel about the performance of the political system against the acceptable standards and norms.⁸

Political culture is learnt through a process of political socialisation. Through this process, people are taught social norms, social roles and social rules. Social norms refer to the accepted and expected rules of behaviour and social roles refer to the norms associated with groups that occupy a certain position in society.⁹ Political culture operates in all spheres of society, from the nation, group and community to the individual. Political cultural ideas will thus depend on the position that groups perceive they occupy within society, their experiences that shape their knowledge, and the reinforcement of this knowledge through interaction with other groups. This creates a political identity of an individual and a collective political identity of a group. Political identity is understood as 'systems of meaning, as intersubjective but malleable tools that people use to build descriptions, explanations, and justifications'¹⁰ in their political choices, behaviour and actions. Thus, the end product of political culture is political identity constructed through the process of political socialisation.

Definition

Political socialisation

Political socialisation is the process through which we learn our political culture. We learn our political culture from various agents, including our family, peers, schools and the media. What we feel and believe about our political system and government is also learnt through our experiences in broader society. This also includes what we believe about different groups that make up our society, as well as our views about different classes in our society. Very often, we also support the same political parties as our parents and friends, for example, as we share similar political values and attitudes and will thus vote in a similar way to our parents and friends.

There are various agents of political socialisation. These include family, education and peers, and churches, mosques or temples. Your first experience in any group setting is the family. It is therefore not surprising that through the family some degree of political learning takes

place. Think about the following: Do you vote for the same party as your parents? Do you hold the same belief about the government as your parents? After the family, most group interaction takes place at school. Children learn about national anthems, national heroes, the history of their country, and the major political values associated with their nation through the education system. Through our interaction with education in the school system, we are taught the prevailing ideology associated with that state. This process is sometimes equated with indoctrination, which is ‘an overt instruction in a body of beliefs.’¹¹ There exist what are called intended effects of the political socialisation process in schools.¹² These include ‘loyalty to the nation; respect for and understanding of its institutions of laws and authority figures; understanding of the political system and the responsibility of citizens to this system; respect for and acceptance of all groups which compose the national political community; devotion to the nation’s basic values; and the skill and the willingness to participate in the nation’s political life.’¹³

Peer groups are also important socialisation agents, as it is with our peers with whom we discuss issues that are central to our political being. Peer groups are ‘a lifelong force of political socialisation. We find them in the sandbox, at school, on the assembly line or in the office, in clubs, and eventually in retirement homes.’¹⁴ Furthermore, the prevailing national climate – for example, a recession – influences political thinking.

Box 11.1: Perspective

Assessing news stories

Read the following news report and answer the questions developed by Lawson.¹⁵

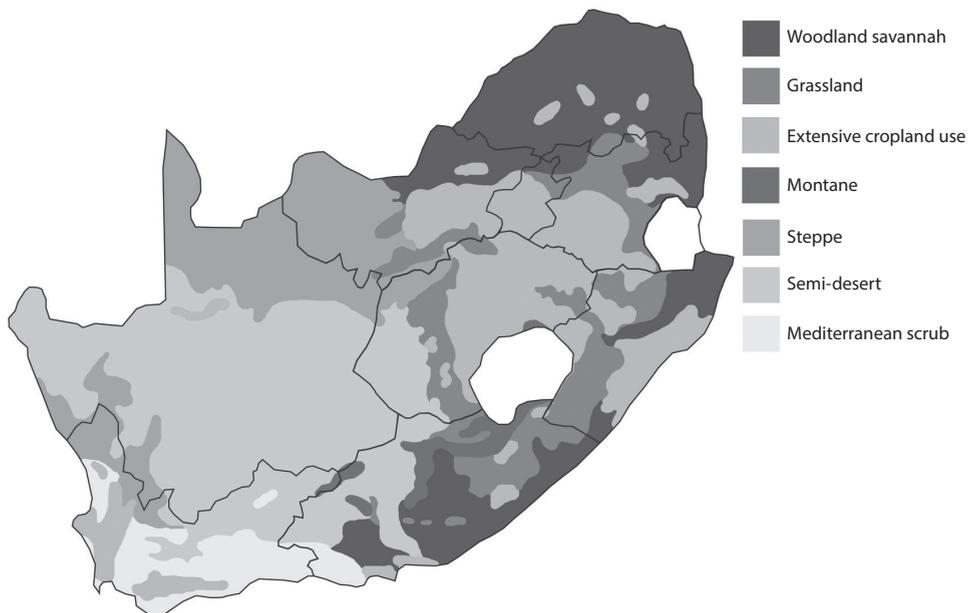


Figure 11.1: Agricultural regions of South Africa

On 18 June 2013, the Africa Research Institute published *Shunting Hectares: Land Reform in South Africa*.

Greater economic and financial commitment – and a fundamental restructuring of the rural economy – are needed if South African land reform is to progress. Does a raft of new legislation signal renewed vigour on the part of the ANC? The 19th of June marked the centenary of the 1913 Natives' Land Act, which effectively excluded the black population from the ownership of some 90% of land. The emotive issue of the land reform programme, initiated in 1994 by the African National Congress (ANC), to redress historical injustices, has come once more to the fore. During a recent budget debate in the South African Parliament, an outgoing Freedom Front Plus MP, Pieter Groenewald, warned the government that 'whipping up emotions' about land reform threatens to create a 'Zimbabwe situation'. Gugile Nkwinti, then Minister in the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, responded disarmingly by calling the comparison with Robert Mugabe an 'honour'. New legislation – the Expropriation Bill, Restitutions Amendment Bill and Valuation Bill – raised the temperature of the public debate about land reform. Warnings of the land issue being a 'time bomb' or a 'tinder box' have thus far proved alarmist. But against the backdrop of subdued economic growth, widespread industrial unrest and rising inequality, meandering land and agrarian reform is susceptible to political opportunism. During his leadership of the ANC Youth League, Julius Malema made expropriation of white-owned land one of the League's main rallying calls. 'The land question must be resolved, if needs be the hard way' Malema said, quoting Oliver Tambo – an emblematic figure in ANC history.

Worryingly, frequent murders of white farmers feature prominently in coverage of the land issue in foreign newspapers. Yet, rather than being an expression of a determination to seize land, rural crime in South Africa is mostly prompted by astounding – and rising – inequality and a historically antagonistic relationship between white commercial farmers, black labourers and local communities. Some farmers' associations have acknowledged that their responsibilities to surrounding communities have fundamentally altered and need urgent attention. Others have proved far more resistant to change.

It is far too soon to predict whether the reinvigorated debate about land reform, and the accompanying flurry of legislation, translates into tangible results. But the ANC's undertaking to create a million agriculture-related jobs by 2030 might suggest that it is beginning to recognise a real opportunity in agriculture. It is clear that if this opportunity is to be realised, a bolder – and more wholesale – approach to restructuring South Africa's rural economy is needed.

Source: Adapted from Cieplak, P. (June 2013). *Shunting Hectares: Land Reform in South Africa*. Africa Research Institute. Available at <http://www.africaresearchinstitute.org/blog/shunting-hectares-land-reform-in-south-africa-by-piotr-cieplak/>.

Answer the following questions:

1. How do you think the intertwined issues of land reform, food security and property rights should be addressed in South Africa?
2. How do you think other groups in South African society may interpret the land issue?
3. Should land reform include communal land? Despite bearing the brunt of forced removals and the discriminatory Land Acts legislation, the tenure rights of South Africans living in the former Bantustans is not yet in place. Should people in these areas be given tenure or should it remain in the hands of traditional leaders?

4. The ANC as South Africa's governing party adopted a policy of land expropriation without compensation. Key to the argument for land expropriation without compensation is the need for radical intervention to have some equality and restore dignity for those dispossessed of land many years ago. How may your opinion in this policy directive differ from a person from a different cultural background?

11.2 Democratic consolidation and a democratic political culture

Democratic consensus entails a constitutional foundation to which all the significant political actors are committed, adhering to the rules, and where no significant financial, human and social resources are spent on attempting to revert to authoritarianism.¹⁶ Also, through **political efficacy** and delivery, discontent is kept to a minimum as governments deliver on their mandate by way of efficient economic development and regime performance. This stabilises the new democratic order by ensuring that no political actor has a desire to act outside the acceptable limitations of political behaviour, and ensures that discontent does not grow to a level where political instability characterises the political life of ordinary citizens.

As discussed in Chapter 1, indicators of democratic consolidation include behavioural, constitutional, structural and attitudinal factors. Attitudinally, a democracy is seen as consolidated when the elite as well as the majority of citizens accept that democracy is the most desirable form of government and anti-democratic groups have little or no support in the broader society. Culture and political culture are central to democratic consolidation in that they will underpin the behavioural and normative commitment needed for liberal democratic endurance. A central issue is thus the creation of a democratic political culture or civic virtue.

Definition

Civic virtue

Studies associated with civic virtue are a major area of inquiry in political philosophy, comparative politics and democratisation studies. Civic virtue relates to a democratic political culture where values like tolerance, a commitment to human rights, a sense that one is obligated to participate in the political system and respect for and commitment to civil and political liberties guide political behaviour and political life.

Diamond¹⁷ highlights that it is only through collective political experiences of the quality of governance that positive attitudes and feelings develop among ordinary citizens towards the political system. These feelings and attitudes impact on what we believe about our political system: is it a corrupt system or does it cater for our needs as citizens of a state? If we do not believe that democratic institutions and processes work to our advantage, we are more likely to engage in protest action to draw attention to a particular issue. More importantly, the way we feel about our political system influences whether we believe that the system is legitimate: in other words, do we believe that the political system is working and thus has our support in making decisions about society and the economy on our behalf? This sense of legitimacy

of a new democratic regime refers to what is called the politico-cultural aspect of democratic consolidation. This legitimacy is determined through intrinsic and instrumental support.

Intrinsic support, interpreted as an inherent commitment to the democratic system with its accompanying civil and political liberties, acts to sustain the emerging democracy during economic and social crises. Instrumental support is generated through efficient regime performance to meet socio-economic demands.¹⁸ Legitimacy based too heavily on instrumental support, however, can be problematic for the following reason:

[I]nstrumental support [is] granted and may be withdrawn according the mood of the times. If citizens evaluate regimes mainly in terms of their capacity to deliver consumable benefits or to rectify material inequalities, they may also succumb to the siren song of **populist** leaders who argue that economic development requires sacrifice of political leaders.¹⁹



Figure 11.2: Democratic fatigue ... too many empty promises

Source: Cartoon by © Yalo, <http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2014/01/13/cartoon-anc-manifesto>.

Populist political discourse usually emerges when there is a perceived failure in the institutions of government. In other words, there is a sense of failure in governance and overall delivery and performance of government. Consider the birth of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). The story that this political party tells is one of ANC failure, one in which the ANC is accused of forgetting its core constituency – the poor. Malema’s EFF engages in populist discourse to mobilise the poor against the perceived failures of the ANC government through, for example, going to Parliament in overalls and domestic workers’ uniforms. This creates the idea the EFF is there to represent the forgotten poor. In this context, populist leaders portray themselves as providing a voice for the people.²⁰ More importantly, populist leaders use a sense that the views of the people have largely been ignored by mainstream political elites as a means to generate a mass support base.²¹ The greatest political capital that populist leaders have is their appeal to the people as a legitimising force for a particular set of ideals or policy positions.²² In this context, consider the clarion call for nationalisation and radical land redistribution without compensation. Julius Malema is very often the political face we equate with this

particular discourse. He also capitalises on this discourse through the theatrical use of red overalls and hard hats to create the perception that he is the one who is truly concerned with the ANC's forgotten poor and working-class majority. Populist leaders accuse political elites of 'having become increasingly removed from "the people" and thus pursuing policies which run counter to those actually wanted by the people'. Think of the theatrics of the EFF and Julius Malema in Parliament, such as chanting that then President Jacob Zuma must repay the money spent on Nkandla. This is meant to show the public that the EFF is taking on corrupt leaders on behalf of the forgotten poor and the 'decent working class person'.²³ **Populism**, however, is not politics that teaches, educates or nurtures – it is the politics of seduction that undermines democratic functioning.²⁴ The EFF regularly engages in confrontational politics, using Parliament and other institutions of government to advance its political agenda. This includes threatening to disrupt parliament if ministers are not fired as well as disrupting state of the nation addresses,²⁵ holding municipal councils hostage through disruption and not voting on key issues such as budgets and integrated development plans in an attempt to advance their national political programme,²⁶ and demonising political opposition and government institutions that seek to hold the party and party leaders accountable.²⁷



Figure 11.3: Confrontational EFF Politics; Disrupting the 2020 State of the Nation Address

Source: <https://www.news24.com/Columnists/MelanieVerwoerd/melanie-verwoerd-the-eff-marike-de-klerk-and-years-of-parliamentary-chaos-20200219-2>.

What, then, does the political culture of South Africa look like? Afrobarometer and the World Values Survey have done studies on political culture and democracy. These are non-partisan and independent research institutions that conduct analysis and research on issues of political culture and democracy. While Afrobarometer focuses predominantly on Africa, the World Values Survey is concerned with the global picture of political culture and democracy.

Most South Africans exhibit some support for democracy; however, over time this support has declined. The World Values Survey found that in 2006 87% South Africans demonstrated strong support for democracy, scoring the importance of democracy between 7 and 10 on a scale of 1 (not important at all) to 10 (absolutely important).²⁸ By 2013, only 69% of South Africans held similar views.²⁹ Similarly, Afrobarometer data also demonstrates a declining support for democracy.³⁰ In 1999 60% of South Africans indicated that democracy is preferable, and by 2018, only 54% of South Africans indicated support for democracy (see Figure 11.4).

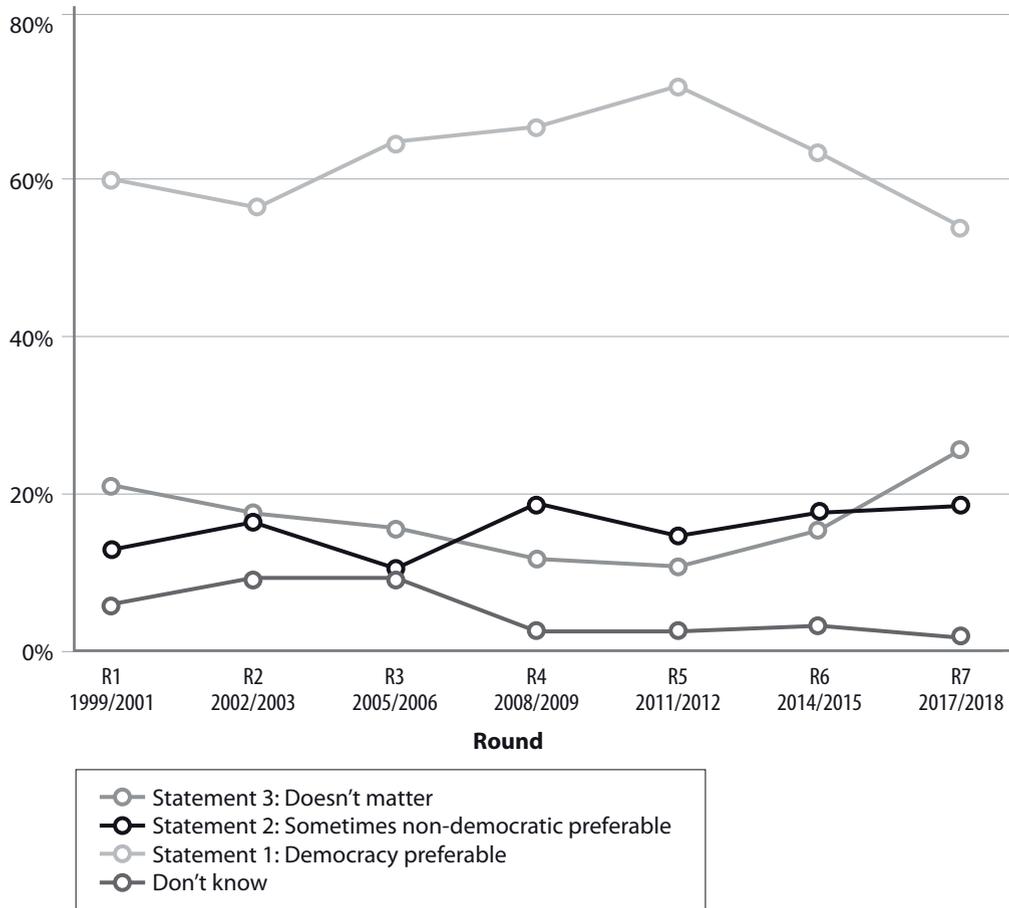


Figure 11.4: A declining support for democracy in South Africa, 1999–2018

Source: Afrobarometer Online Data Analysis.

A key question is whether we support democracy because we value it as a principle of our political life, or because we will gain economic and material advantages from the state through it? In other words, do we exhibit intrinsic or instrumental support for democracy? How do we explain a declining support for democracy? In assessing levels of commitment to democracy in South Africa, Afrobarometer found that support for democracy is essentially instrumental. This means that South Africans are not necessarily committed to the values of democracy,

but rather rate democracy according to an improvement in their lives (such as a job or access to basic services). Therefore, for many South Africans, democracy is about delivering social and economic goods.

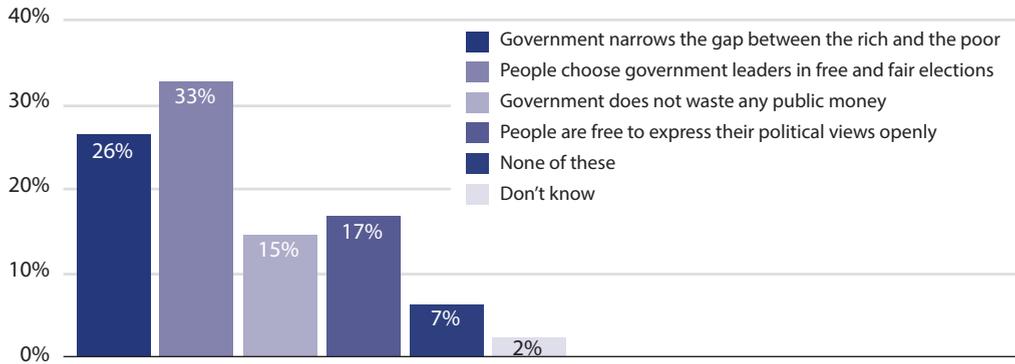


Figure 11.5: Uncertain meanings of democracy

Source: Constructed from Afrobarometer Online data analysis Round 5 (2011/2013).

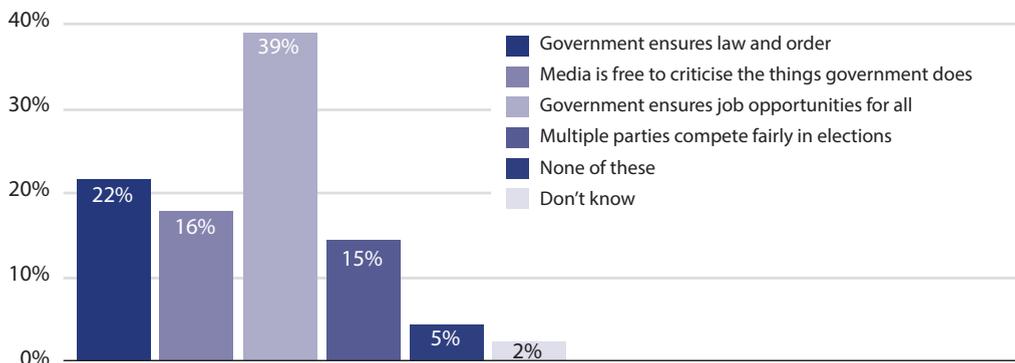


Figure 11.6: Democracy means a job for me?

Source: Constructed from Afrobarometer Online data analysis Round 5 (2011/2013).

If commitment to democracy is instrumental, if South Africans perceive that the government is not delivering on what is viewed as the essential characteristics of democracy, then they are more likely to engage in protest action and experience disillusionment with democracy. For example, Afrobarometer found that in Round 7 (2018/2020) 76% of South Africans felt that the government was not doing enough to effectively manage job creation.³¹ Furthermore, in assessing government performance in reducing the income gap (a key characteristic of deepening substantive democracy), 77% of South Africans were not satisfied with government implementation in this regard.³² While 82% of South Africans stated in Round 5 (2011/2013) that they would never use force or violence for a political cause,³³ violent and destructive protest action against poor basic service delivery and overall mediocre government performance in job creation (which is essentially the responsibility of the private sector) have become almost normal characteristics of our socio-political landscape (see Chapter 8).

11.3 The problem of the ‘nation’ in post-apartheid South Africa and challenges to non-racialism

In South Africa, one still finds fragmented citizenship, and the notion of race still dictates socio-political life and experiences of citizenship 25 years into South Africa’s democratic journey. A central national debate, since the inception of democratic rule in 1994, has centred on the national question³⁴ – how to draw different communities and racial groups into a single unified nation. Racial division in South Africa is characterised by two enduring legacies of the apartheid state: the apparent permanence of apartheid-constructed socio-political identities, and the socio-economic concentration of poverty among the black population.

11.3.1 Challenges to non-racialism: African nationalism and racialised inequalities

Emerging from an exclusionary apartheid history, South Africa needed to break down constructed citizenships based on race and ensure equal social and political benefits to all South Africans. Non-racialism is a world view and ideological doctrine that does not recognise race. The idea of non-racialism has been advocated within the ANC throughout its history. Generally founded on the principles of the Freedom Charter, non-racialism advocates an intercommunal understanding between groups and advocates finding similarities between different racial groups as opposed to focusing on the differences.³⁵ In order to achieve this, the doctrine of non-racialism would have proved valuable ideologically in that it voids the notion of race. Indeed, as a response to apartheid-constructed identities, non-racialism as an ideology sought to do away with race consciousness as a vestige of the apartheid regime’s divide-and-rule strategy on the one hand.³⁶ On the other hand, given the racist nature of the apartheid regime, non-racialism and an Africanist nationalist dialogue developed concurrently during the liberation struggle and in post-apartheid South Africa.³⁷ An Africanist worldview is often constructed as a deeper form of African nationalism in that it perpetuates the complete liberation of Africans, in a psychological and a political sense.³⁸ While non-racialism perpetuates a non-racial world view that does not recognise race, Africanism holds that race is at the heart of citizenship due to the intimate relationship that the apartheid regime created between racial identity and access to political power and material and economic benefits.³⁹

The apartheid regime denied citizenship (and, by default, access to political power and socio-economic benefits) to the majority of its citizens. It is this racialised nature of inequality in South Africa that makes redress and transformation an essential element of democratic durability. Consequently, the models of redress such as affirmative action and broad-based black economic empowerment are measures to address the upliftment of citizens who were disadvantaged during the apartheid era, through a string of political and social compromises.⁴⁰ Furthermore, attempts to address the racialised nature of inequality and its concessions become ‘legitimised on the basis of full realisation of citizenship rather than race, ethnicity, and cultural group.’⁴¹ Affirmative action is a policy that gives preference to the hiring of black, female and disabled people as a means to ideally create a more representative workforce. To this effect, affirmative action is conceptualised as ‘corrective steps’ to create an equitable environment specifically to benefit those who had been ‘historically disadvantaged by unfair discrimination.’⁴² This contested relationship between non-racialism and Africanist views

emerges strongly in the narrative of affirmative action. The contested relationship between race and redress creates conditions conducive for the persistent politicisation of race in post-apartheid South Africa. In this sense, creating nationhood is undermined by persistent patterns of racialised inequality and low inter-group trust.⁴³ Affirmative action, although a necessary tool for racial redress, further compounds the challenge to creating a sense of common nationhood in that:

[w]hite people and minority groups feel unwanted because of a policy of Affirmative Action ... We have not confronted the question of how to manage race in a non-racial society ... The source of resentment for the policies of Affirmative Action is the manner in which it is abused across the board ... In the private sector this policy is largely about compliance and statistics. Similarly, the public sector employs this policy as a tool for patronage, nepotism and corruption.⁴⁴

It is this poor implementation of affirmative action that subjects the policy to severe criticism and diminishes the value of this redress to reverse racism. Affirmative action is criticised for being inherently racist, betraying the ideological base of non-racialism.⁴⁵ However, this criticism is not new as throughout the ANC's history there has always been a contested relationship between the narratives of non-racialism within an Africanist context (see Chapter 3).⁴⁶

A central theme that emerges from the ANC's discussion – *Nation formation and nation building: The national question in South Africa*⁴⁷ – is the necessity of socio-economic transformation to address the divisive nature of inequality in South Africa. The centrality of redress and transformation to destroy the structural nature of poverty and deprivation based on race in South Africa was an inherent political objective of the ANC's intellectual tradition on questions of nationhood.⁴⁸ In this sense, the ideological commitment to non-racialism within the broader liberation movement was contested by a more dominant Africanist view, especially when conceptualising racial redress in a post-apartheid context.⁴⁹ Racial redress through affirmative action was justified on the basis that it helps to achieve the constitutionally enshrined principles of equality and representation, on the one hand.⁵⁰ On the other hand, affirmative action is seen as a tool for social justice, engineered to 'bridge the gap between the injustices of the past to a democratic future'.⁵¹ Inherent to this discussion document is an Africanist view that links material benefit to citizenship, which places the discussion document at odds with the broader discourse of non-racialism.

Identities are constructed or imagined, as Bentley and Habib⁵² remind us – thus, a central question is: how does one construct and build a non-racial society and ensure political integration of diverse cultural groups, especially in a context in which deprivation and poverty are of a racialised nature? How does one engineer social unity when the separate worlds created by the apartheid architects are enduring, especially on a socio-economic level?⁵³

The procedural view of democracy maintains that the ultimate aim of social cohesion in a multicultural context is peace and stability, with a neutral state defining and maintaining the minimum rules of engagement between the different cultural groups while citizens remain free to pursue their individual happiness.⁵⁴ This view of nation formation in the South African context is somewhat problematic given the nature of the country's inequality, poverty and deprivation. The substantive view of democracy, that there is a moral obligation on the South African state to eradicate the socio-economic legacies of the past, is also central to democratic

development and sustained democratic durability. The concern with this approach is the emphasis it places on the centrality of the state to make the required changes, as opposed to a plurality of actors – including individual responsibility.

Linking access to material goods on the basis of race, as a necessary means to redress inequality through affirmative action, also perpetuates the continued politicisation of racial identity. This creates exclusive spaces that some citizens feel they cannot access while others feel that some citizens have no right to access those spaces. In negotiating this tension between redress and equality, strong, responsible and accountable leadership is needed.



Figure 11.7: Growing a human rights culture

In dismantling the legacies of apartheid, the transformation agenda leads to a situation in which the notion of race has been judicially scrapped as the basis of citizenship, but legislatively inscribed for the purposes of transformation and redress.⁵⁵ Thus, while the South African state is committed to non-racialism at a constitutional level, the realities of affirmative action and redress require a recognition of race. Indeed, as South Africa progresses on the path to democratic development, the expansion of citizenship in all its facets through the transformative agenda further divides the South African polity. Even so, the ANC posits that racial classification of South Africans remains a necessary evil, in that without some form of classification, the transformative agenda of democratisation cannot be addressed.⁵⁶ However, the ANC does acknowledge that the continuous use of racial classification ‘creates the risk of freezing racial and cultural categories rather than allowing for the organic development [of the nation].’⁵⁷

11.4 South Africa's political culture: A myriad of different sub-cultures?

It is commonly acknowledged that a human rights culture founded on respect for diversity, tolerance, moderate socio-political behaviour and a commitment to civil and political liberties could not develop in an apartheid context. Apartheid was founded on a political system of exclusion, discrimination and constructed racial superiority of one group over another. Therefore, the basic values associated with democracy would not have been inherent in the apartheid system. However, given the racist and discriminatory foundation upon which the normative dialogue and justification were built, non-racialism emerged as a response, rejecting the notion of race and white superiority. That all races are equally human is the foundation upon which the narrative of non-racialism is built. While the South African Constitution commits all South Africans to a non-racial world view, the realities of transformation and affirmative action still require a recognition (and the use of) racial classification. This results in a tension between the political values captured in the Constitution at a procedural level, and the demands of substantive democratisation to address basic questions of equality, inclusion and citizenship.

Central to creating a human rights culture and policy would be a strong constitutional state founded upon a universal Bill of Rights that applies equally to all. In creating procedural citizenship or nationhood, South Africa has developed strong recognition of diversity at a constitutional level. Melber⁵⁸ defines a human rights-based policy as a 'value-orientated policy that pursues the protection and enhancement of human rights, supporting individual and collective security and the best possible degree of participation of people in the affairs of their countries, freedom from fear and protected from the abuse of power'. However, it is important to bear in mind that the relationship between strong political institutions and the creation of a democratic political culture is not one of automatic reciprocity.⁵⁹ The enduring nature of customs, traditions and habits will affect the type of post-transition political culture that emerges as a state democratises.

Thus, while the ANC⁶⁰ attempts to highlight that all South Africans have equal rights, a common territory, a common loyalty to the Constitution and a common South African culture rooted in diversity and multiculturalism, when we assess, for example, issues of gender equality, we find a disparity between what the Constitution commits us to and the practice and approach to gender equality in the broader society. South Africa has one of the highest rates of violence against women and children, with one woman being murdered every three hours⁶¹ and more than one third of girls having experienced a form of sexual violation and abuse before the age of 18.⁶²

Furthermore, the view of the ANC also stresses that a key component of South African political culture is a commitment to, and acceptance of, diversity and multiculturalism. However, when assessing the treatment of and perceptions of migrants and foreigners, for example, we find that South Africans display intolerant views and very often engage in violent behaviour against migrants (see Perspective box 11.2).

What about people who hold different political views? In many communities, people who support opposition political parties are sometimes beaten, ridiculed or forced out of their communities. In some cases, people have allegedly been beaten to death for not supporting the ANC, and in KwaZulu-Natal, electoral violence between IFP and ANC supporters is a concern at every election. Xenophobia, political intolerance and violent behaviour justified by the



Figure 11.8: The #AmINext movement following the rape and murder of UCT student Uyinene Mrwetyana in 2019⁶³

premise that one cannot be different, or have different views or political choices, from one's broader community seems to dictate our political interaction, actions and behaviour. How do we explain that while our Constitution commits us to democratic values like tolerance, the reality of political action, discourse and behaviour shows us that overall, South Africans seem to have an undemocratic political culture founded on exclusion and intolerance of, and justified violence against, those they see as different?



Figure 11.9: Violence and xenophobia

There are arguably three broad sub-types of political culture within South African society. The first is at an institutional level, and is often constructed as the liberation political culture. Liberation political culture refers to the creation of the relationship between the liberation state, civil society and broader South African society. The second sub-political culture is found in the terminology of South Africa's struggle culture. This political culture of struggle is rooted in the experiences of the United Democratic Front (UDF) that sought to bring about democratic change through mass mobilisation and the adoption of people's power. The third sub-political culture is constructed as the political culture of South Africa's marginalised, found in the poor rural areas and informal settlement communities.⁶⁴ We also see the emergence of a culture of 'apathy' premised on the view that democracy does not deliver a *better life*.

11.4.1 The liberation political culture

South Africa's liberation culture is not unique. Many African states – such as Kenya, Zimbabwe and Namibia – have constructed citizenship in a postcolonial context in terms of liberation. In this context, the relationship between the ANC as the governing party and broader society is determined by the liberation dynamics and struggle against apartheid.⁶⁵ In this sense, the ANC constructs itself as the custodian and caretaker of South Africa's hard-won democracy, in the achievement of which it had a central liberation role. Therefore, by virtue of being the liberator of South African society, the ANC constructs itself as the only viable political party to govern and ensure the continuation of democracy in South Africa. To this effect, the ANC thus creates an all-encompassing relationship between itself and broader society that extends beyond party membership and voting.⁶⁶ Therefore, its existence as the 'only legitimate representative of the people ... has become the essence of the "legacy" of the ANC over the past twenty years.'⁶⁷ Think, for example, of when Cyril Ramaphosa urged voters to vote for the ANC, claiming that if they did not, then 'the Boers [would] come back.'⁶⁸ With this statement, the ANC reinforces the idea that should the official opposition (the DA) win a national election, it would result in regression to authoritarianism (this is even though the DA, when it was the DP, was in staunch opposition to apartheid and the party is at its ideological core a liberal party). By default, the idea that the ANC remains the only option to guarantee democracy also comes to the fore.

The ANC still portrays itself as a liberation movement, committed to the advancement of a non-racial democracy. This implies that the liberation project is not complete and that only the ANC can achieve this and will do it on the basis of principles of democratic centralism.⁶⁹

Centralised leadership with a strong focus on leading from the top has become part of the South African political culture in that the ANC dictates policy choices to civil and broader society, regardless of whether there is severe resistance to those policy choices. Key examples include e-tolls and the decision to implement the National Development Plan in spite of severe criticism from the union movement. This creates the view that the ANC constructs its electoral mandate to make decisions for broader society and not on behalf of society. The consequence of this is that 'little room has been provided for popular grievances to be expressed outside these institutional challenges, and especially outside the party.'⁷¹

This means that should there be a grievance against the ruling party, the space to express grievances is limited to within the political party. This limits space for political debate and grievance, as the only platform to debate and deal with grievances is found within the political party.

Definition

Democratic centralism

Democratic centralism is a guiding principle of Leninist-Communist political parties. While members have the freedom to debate and discuss issues internally within the political party, once a decision is taken, all members must abide by that decision. Therefore, the 'democratic' aspect is found in the element of debate, while the 'centralism' aspect is found in the obligation of all members to uphold the decision, regardless of whether they agree. To this effect, while other parties such as the Democratic Alliance may demand that members abide by decisions taken internally, a key difference is that within more leftist parties, in the event of criticism from broader society, critics are constructed as anti-revolutionary or opposing a broader (and often moral) political agenda.⁷⁰

The hegemony of the ANC as the governing party in its relationship with broader society as the custodian of democracy is justified by Nkrumah's slogan about the necessity of economic freedom after achieving political freedom.⁷² Thus, the idea of democracy is reduced to state-led development where the ruling party drives economic transformation in the name of democracy.⁷³ This is also evident in the emergence of majoritarianism, constructed by the ANC as a justification that once they have taken a decision, civil and broader society is obliged to follow, regardless of their disagreement with the decision. Therefore, there is an expectation to toe the party line, regardless of the implications or legalities of party decisions.

To maintain legitimacy, the liberator constructs a hegemonic discourse justified on a historical mission of liberation and transformation (both political and economic). This discourse frames the liberator as the only legitimate contender for ensuring that complete societal transformation occurs⁷⁴. The risk is that by limiting 'legitimate' discourse within a context of democracy, the cultural context of liberation may facilitate the development of an authoritarian political culture in which the political space is dominated by ethnocentrism, prejudice and inter-group hostility.⁷⁵ Reflecting on the development of South African political culture over the past 20 years, Du Plessis notes that while the ANC still holds electoral dominance, the re-emergence of people's power – not in Parliament but on the pavements – is starting to challenge the hegemonic discourse of the ANC and could result in a fundamental shift in political culture for South Africa.⁷⁶ The fundamental shift may reflect a withdrawal from the electoral process and a general apathy towards voting and elections discussed later in this chapter.

11.4.2 The political culture of struggle – people's power

One cannot negate the influence of the United Democratic Front (UDF) on South Africa's political culture. Born in 1983, the UDF was a non-racial and largely non-violent means of resisting the apartheid regime. It had sought to mobilise communities along the lines of key daily issues that affected their members' quality of life under the apartheid regime. In this sense, the UDF had:

reframed the struggle by using local issues to mobilise apolitical groups and build a broad base of support through non-violent tactics. The move to non-violent forms of resistance led to a beneficial form of 'ungovernability'. Ultimately, the shift from violence to non-violence, and the localisation of issues, became an inclusive strategy that allowed all South Africans to fight against apartheid.⁷⁷

Providing an inclusive space for struggle (although recognising that some within the UDF also created fear and used violence through the practice of necklacing and intimidation in communities where people were often killed based on gossip and rumours or accusations of being traitors), the UDF sought to become a broad South African movement capturing the internal struggle for democracy. It was not necessarily a political organisation, but a social movement geared towards achieving a society based on the vision of the Freedom Charter. By adopting this non-racial vision of what a future South Africa could look like, the UDF effectively created a focus on the nation; as such, it could transcend racial and cultural boundaries in the fight against apartheid.⁷⁸ A key strategy was to localise issues:

Rather than trying to mobilise support based on the complete elimination of the oppressive system the government enforced, the UDF brought the struggle down to the local level and framed the fight in terms of everyday issues that average people could relate to.⁷⁹

While the UDF was disbanded in the early 1990s and many activists joined the ranks of the ANC, a lasting impact of the UDF is the notion of people's power and localised community struggles. To this effect, the narrative of rights of the local communities in their daily struggles for survival was not removed from the discourse of liberation – as such, liberation had to occur first for communities' rights within a non-racial democracy to be realised.⁸⁰ It is within the ambit of the UDF social movement structures that the conceptualisation of a future participatory South African democracy emerged.⁸¹

At the birth of the South African democracy, the idea of a participatory and democratic political culture was written into the Constitution. Further to this, the nucleus where participatory measures for democratic participation is most localised is at local government level. Here, the notion is that communities should engage their representatives through the ward committee structures and influence policy and developmental plans. This has remained an elusive ideal, however. As noted earlier, the post-apartheid ANC has taken on an increasingly hegemonic role; as such, participatory democracy is often reduced to a 'feedback' workshop in which party officials inform communities what policy and development directives will be. The voice of communities is limited in that they are not able to influence policy and developmental directives directly. As a result, community-based organisations are emerging increasingly. Much like the UDF, these organisations mobilise their communities around local issues that directly affect their daily lives. These organisations take up issues with which the state should be concerned, such as HIV/Aids; education; empowerment initiatives; and skills training and adult basic education. In addition, peoples' power is an ongoing theme of these organisations. Working on an apparently similar premise to the UDF, these organisations seek to mobilise people to claim their legitimate and democratic right to material and economic goods like education and housing. However, given the narrowed space for interaction with the state and the hegemonic position that the ANC seeks to construct, the space for volatile, destructive and violent protests also opens up. A similar phenomenon was found within the UDF movement:

some streams employed tactics of violence and intimidation to achieve their political goals. There is a need to guard against romanticising struggle and protest; very often, protestors engage in radical political discourse that can mobilise communities against foreigners, for example, and allow protests to descend into violence and destruction.

11.4.3 The political culture of the marginalised

Why do protests turn violent and destructive? Why are foreigners of African descent evicted from township communities? What political and cultural factors explain such a phenomenon? In exploring the drivers of political interaction among the poor and marginalised communities in South Africa's rural areas and informal settlements, Thorton⁸² stresses that there are different and distinctive elements that motivate political action and behaviour and shape political ideas in these communities. Political alliances are built on multifaceted, network-based allegiances that often transcend kin and economic relationships.⁸³ The relationship to state can be construed as in the tradition of a subjective political culture in that:

They receive from the state a set of resources such as (in rough order of importance) pensions, schools, clinics, roads, water, and sanitation (if any), and with even more remote possibility, policing and formal system of redress and justice ... They rarely feel that they have any control over these resources and have little voice in where, when, how they are provided ... When they do participate in national politics, such as attending a rally of a political party or even joining one, they generally do so in order to achieve access to this wealth that is perceived to come from elsewhere.⁸⁴

The four principles that shape political culture in these communities are suffering, jealousy, respect and equality/equivalence. For Thorton, these principles are the tacit drivers of political interaction.

Table 11.2: Thorton's construction of political culture for marginalised local communities⁸⁵

Political value	Description	Liberal democratic equivalent
Equality/equivalence	All members in the community are alike as human beings. It differs from the notion of equality in democratic discourse as there is not equality in terms of human rights, but rather equivalence between members of the community by virtue of humanness.	Political equality
Jealousy	The principle is justified on the basis of equivalence. Through gossip and accusations of witchcraft, jealousy maintains a sense of equivalence between community members so that one cannot think one is better than one's peers.	It is difficult to construct a democratic equivalent to the value of jealousy. One can make a case that jealousy can be related to rule of law to maintain social order. However, this conceptualisation raises a set of normative problems, as rule of law is associated with equality under the law while jealousy can be used to motivate violence against foreigners who are seen as having more and thus being 'better' than community members.

Suffering	This is constructed as the moral consequence of equivalence, in that community members are united and equal in their suffering. This value also speaks of a communal approach to political life in that if one suffers, all suffer.	The liberal democratic equivalent could be constructed as a common identity created through a shared experience.
Respect	While a community may confer the virtue of respect to an individual, this is not done in relation to wealth and status, but rather a view that even though all within the community are equivalent, a special respect can be bestowed upon individuals who serve the community while suffering.	Distinction in terms of status, prestige, wealth, and political office.

While these principles of the political culture of South Africa's marginalised are open to debate, they do help us to explain certain political phenomena within these communities. Bearing in mind that 'culture provides the goals and motives of economic action, it provides the form and habits of social action, and provisions the political with the vision of what is possible and how to achieve it',⁸⁶ this conceptualisation can explain certain intolerant political behaviour. For example, many workers are very often forced to strike and, should they attempt to go to work while their co-workers are striking, they are often beaten for not wanting to participate in the strike. Therefore, their democratic right of choice not to participate in a strike is undermined through the behaviour of their co-workers who intimidate and beat them into submission to the general will. The notion of collective suffering could explain the phenomenon that if one worker suffers for the greater good of the community by asking for a higher wage, there seems to be a cultural obligation for all workers to suffer collectively for the greater good.

Box 11.2: Perspective

A political culture of violence and exclusion?

In May 2008, South African township communities were engulfed by a wave of violence that had shocked the world. Thousands of immigrants fled the townships. Sixty-two died and 670 foreigners of African descent were wounded when South Africans embarked on a violent eviction drive to rid their communities of foreigners. Thousands of foreigners of African descent fled and as approximately 430 South Africans were arrested for perpetrating xenophobic violence. Although the violent clashes started in Alexandra, Gauteng, they soon spread to other parts of South Africa such as Mpumalanga, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. These attacks were primarily aimed at foreigners, refugees and migrants who had taken up residence in these communities who were attacked by 'mobs who have stabbed, clubbed and burnt migrants from other parts of Africa whom they accuse of taking jobs and fuelling crime'.⁸⁷ Former president Thabo Mbeki was forced to involve the military to quell the violence that held these communities hostage for ten days and many refugee camps were constructed to provide some shelter for those evicted from their communities. Many of the dispossessed refused to return to their communities for fear that they would be subjected to further attacks.

Some foreign nationals returned to their countries of origin, others returned to their communities, and others attempted to rebuild their lives in other communities.

What motivated people to engage in these violent acts? Why were these acts primarily aimed at African migrants? Xenophobia is the innate fear and hatred of people who do not form part of your in-group. It can be aimed at all outsiders or limited to one specific group. One lesson that the xenophobic attacks taught South Africans is that life was no longer about African solidarity, but about survival. Buscus⁸⁸ highlights that the history of exclusion is not new to South Africa. Indeed, the apartheid government had 'denied South African citizenship to Africans and attempted, via the Bantustan system, to turn African South Africans into foreigners in their own country'. It is therefore not surprising that when democracy arrived with the founding elections of 1994, there was jubilation that all South Africans, regardless of race, would have the benefits of citizenships, including economic benefits. The harsh reality of absolute poverty and increasing unemployment, however, extinguished the joy of inclusion as survival became paramount. Therefore, the perception was that if foreigners were taking jobs, houses and other benefits that belong to South Africans, these foreigners had to be evicted from the community to ensure the survival of South Africans in a difficult and harsh environment.

Was this really xenophobia? On some level, stereotyping and hatred had to drive this process of eviction. However, on a deeper level, it was a symptom of the frustration South African citizens felt due to the slow pace of service delivery and poverty reduction. Indeed, what was termed xenophobia could perhaps be viewed more as displaced aggression. Displaced aggression is defined as 'the expression of aggression against a target other than the source of the attack or frustration, usually a safer target'.⁸⁹ It is perceived that government officials and local councillors are far removed from their communities and have lost touch with the primary issues that affect the daily lives of South African citizens. Consequently, foreigners became scapegoats of the frustration caused by the perception that South Africans' lives were not improving and that the government did not seem to care.

There is a growing body of research seeking to understand xenophobia in South Africa. These explanations range from the 'scapegoat' theory to the theory of relative deprivation (which suggests that social unrest comes from the perception that one is getting less than what one is entitled to or in comparison to another) to a micro-politics explanation, which posits that a key trigger for violence against foreign nationals and outsiders in specific locations is localised competition for political and economic power. This last explanation thus suggests that local-level politicians drive the attacks for their own political benefit.

Class discussion: Discuss why you think xenophobia is prevalent in South Africa.

The principle of jealousy could explain the underlying motivator for xenophobic violence in that foreigners of African descent are perhaps seen as better off in the community in which nationals suffer collectively. This serves as the justification for the eviction of foreigners from their communities. Gossip and jealousy determine who gets evicted, as it is generally individuals accused of witchcraft, rape, murder, or theft, among others. This is reminiscent of the role of gossip in identifying apartheid informers within these communities, who very often met a violent and brutal death if they were 'found guilty' by the community. The values of tolerance,

freedom and equality have not, it seems, trickled down to South Africa's marginalised communities sufficiently. These communities remain at the periphery of the state and of national political life, but this does not mean that their politics is not important.⁹⁰ Thornton thus highlights that 'theirs is the only politics that matter because it may determine their access to land, the water tap, pasture for goats, systems of local justice, and personal dignity.'⁹¹

11.4.4 A political culture of apathy?

Recent political analysis and scholarship have focussed on the increasing levels of what is constructed as **political apathy** in South Africa, most notably among the South African youth. There is widespread concern that we see less and less people going out to vote,⁹² and, for some scholars this is indicative of rising political disengagement.⁹³ Rising political apathy is central to democratic regression, and as such, an increase in non-participation in conventional politics poses a great threat to any democracy anywhere. Political apathy is defined as a general indifference or lack of interest in politics⁹⁴ which can result in 'a loss of confidence to achieve a particular aim or motivation.'⁹⁵ As discussed in Chapter 7, some scholars have focussed on the increased lack of participation in elections in South Africa,⁹⁶ but we are yet to explore if this lack of electoral participation is indeed an increase in political apathy and indifference or whether it is driven by other factors such as a perceived loss of political influence and low levels of satisfaction with democracy. When looking at voter turnout, Bartlett⁹⁷ draws on the notion of VEP, the voting eligible population, which refers to the number of people in a country that are eligible to vote. Some scholars, including Schulz-Herzenberg⁹⁸ and Roberts et al⁹⁹ draw on the voting age population (VAP) as a measure of voter turnout. The voting age population refers to all citizens 18 years and over. Bartlett notes that drawing on the VAP measure is problematic to get an accurate picture of voter turnout because this measure could include citizens who may not be eligible to vote due to mental incapacity or some other limitation.¹⁰⁰ The South African Electoral Commission (IEC) calculates voter turnout by dividing the number of votes cast by the number of registered voters.

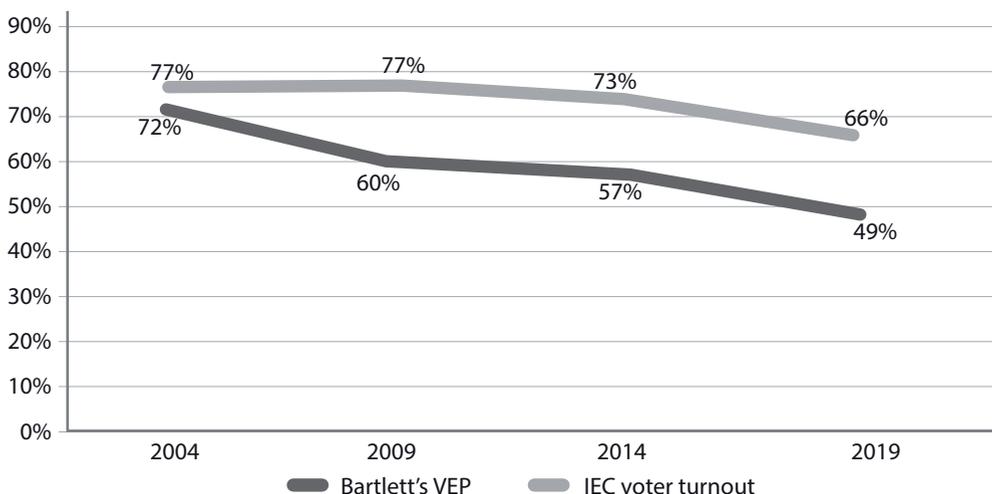


Figure 11.10: Bartlett's voting-eligible population (VEP) versus the IEC's voter turnout

Sources: Bartlett 2019¹⁰¹, IEC 2019¹⁰², IEC 2014¹⁰³, IEC 2009¹⁰⁴, IEC 2004.¹⁰⁵

It is evident that voter turnout is on the decline, but more worryingly, if we consider the voting eligible population in South Africa, just over half of eligible citizens have opted out of participating in general elections. While scholars have flagged a decrease in party loyalty¹⁰⁶ and noted that citizen evaluation of South Africa's democracy does not have a bearing on shaping the vote,¹⁰⁷ one cannot negate the impact of an instrumental support for democracy discussed earlier. If the South African electorate are increasingly disengaged and apathetic about politics, one would see a general disinterest and disregard for 'politics as important'. The World Values Survey found that approximately 45% of South Africans felt that politics is important in life and a little more than half did not regard politics as important.¹⁰⁸ The 2018 round of the South African Social Attitudes Survey conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council found that almost 30% of South Africans indicated that they were interested in politics compared to 44% who were not interested at all. How do we explain this decline in interest in politics considering our rich history of political activism? Rosenberg¹⁰⁹ flags what he refers to as the *futility of political activity*. The *futility of political activity* is determined by the outcome of political action:

In most cases a precondition for political activity is what one does will make a difference, will have an effect of some sort ... political activity beyond the level of discussion probably has the aim of *getting one's will translated into action*. But, people tend to be motivated to action only if they feel that this action leads to the desired outcome.¹¹⁰

Therefore, according to Rosenberg, if the individual or group feels that a specific political activity will have no desired outcome, they will be less motivated to engage in that specific activity. And, given that, generally speaking, people exercise political power through the vote, a person 'feels a *discontinuous* sense of control over the political process. He has some power at the periodic intervals of election time, but most of the time he sees no relationship between his desires and action and actual political results'.¹¹¹

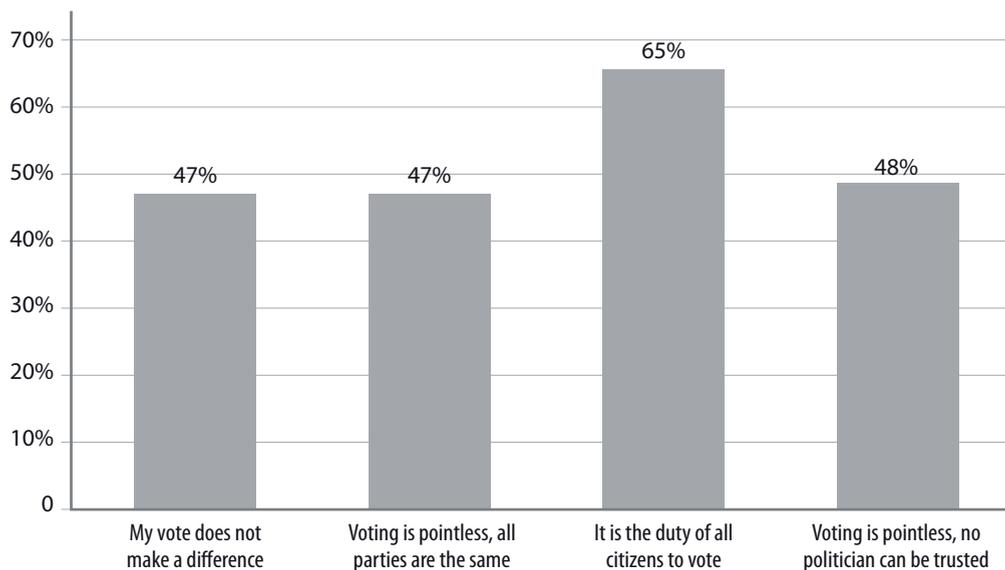


Figure 11.11: South African perceptions on voting as a political action

Source: Constructed from the 2018 South African Social Attitudes Survey, Human Science Research Council.¹¹²

Thus, if we look at voting compared to other forms of political activity and engagement, such as protest action, we note that a potential driver of political disengagement from the electoral process could be because of a sense of the *futility of political action*. Indeed, the South African Social Attitudes Survey found in 2018 that just under half of South Africans demonstrated ambivalence to voting as a political activity, yet almost two-thirds felt it their civic duty to vote.

As was pointed out in Chapter 8, if we consider the number of service delivery protests, however, we note a significant increase over a thirteen year period.¹¹³ In 2005, South Africa recorded 35 protests related to service delivery failures, and by 2014, an election year, the number of protests escalated to 191. By 2018, there were 237 service delivery protests, and 218 in 2019.¹¹⁴ Why do we see an escalating number of protests if South Africans consider it a civic duty to vote? A possible explanation is detailed in Von Holdt's *The Smoke that Calls*¹¹⁵ where he details the rationale for often violent and destructive service delivery protests and xenophobic violence. A central theme in this work is a sense that elected representatives neither listen to community concerns, nor do anything for the community. Similarly, Steyn Kotze¹¹⁶ details an increasing disillusionment with voting because of a sense that *democracy and freedom remains elusive* because life has not improved in a democratic South Africa. Thus, voting is seen as futile because of a sense of an *empty promise of democracy* because of failures in basic service delivery and a sense that 'voting is useless ... We vote for them and they don't deliver ... [and] I have voted several times and my voice has not been heard'.¹¹⁷ Indeed, Lekalake¹¹⁸ found that public satisfaction with democracy is at 48% because of high levels of dissatisfaction with political leadership, which 'spilled over into waning support for democracy'. Indeed, more worrying is the finding that half of South Africans feel that the country is undemocratic or a democracy with major problems and 61% of respondents would forego elections for a non-elected government who could provide basic services.¹¹⁹

South Africans may not necessarily be politically apathetic, but rather suffer a form of *disappointment* with formal democratic processes such as voting and working through established representation structures, because of very poor service delivery that impacts on life's opportunities, resulting in persistent patterns of inequality. This disappointment may lead communities to engage outside formal processes and embark on violent and destructive protest action to *have their voices heard*. This is a worrying development in our political culture and requires political elites to be more responsive and engaged to rebuild trust in political leadership, and more importantly, democracy as a system. In their empirical study, using the World Values Survey, De Jager and Steenekamp¹²⁰ found that poor and declining levels of government performance and effectiveness in South Africa negatively influenced levels of confidence in state institutions, creating a legitimacy gap. And of key concern, together with declining levels of confidence in government institutions, was a dramatic decline in support for a democratic regime type and an increase in support for non-democratic regimes. In 2013, the majority of South Africans (61%) indicated that they supported various forms of non-democratic rule. In Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán's¹²¹ study of democratic breakdown and survival in Latin America, they found that democratic survival was dependent on strong support for democracy together with avoiding radical policy positions. In other words, democracies were vulnerable to breakdown if political actors were indifferent to the intrinsic value of a liberal democracy and if they pursued radical policy preferences. De Jager and Steenekamp concluded that perceptions of poor quality of governance and a lack of trust in political institutions have significant consequences for South Africa's prospects of democratic consolidation.

Conclusion

The history of the struggle and the moral obligation of all South Africans to co-operate to break down the vestiges of apartheid can serve as a core from which to construct nationhood. Given the vast diversity that characterises South African society, non-racialism can serve as the common ideology around which a national identity can be constructed. This, however, must be done responsibly to ensure that all groups feel included and share in a common culture underpinned by non-racialism that rejects apartheid-constructed identities. This foundation, coupled with a commitment to a common identity as South Africans, can be a strong motivator for social cohesion. In harnessing this potential for a shared culture and historical memory, political elites have to be careful not to engage in politically intolerant behaviour that can be equated with nation-smashing (a colloquial term used by social commentators on the divisive nature of political discussion and rhetoric from within the government and broader society).¹²² By harnessing shared normative values, one can create the opportunity for citizens 'to engage in a meaningful dialogue, formulate and resolve their differences and pursue a common goal'.¹²³

The problem still remains the political will to capitalise on the traces of shared culture and identity in that 'we have not yet demonstrated the will to build one nation across the racial or class divides'.¹²⁴ Although there is a normative undercurrent of non-racialism as a driving force for achieving social cohesion and nation formation in South Africa, the realities of the persistent and apparently permanent apartheid-structured political economy undermine the idea of 'rainbowism'.

Only through embracing diversity, acknowledging the lessons of the past and constructing a vision of a just future society will South Africans be able to walk together, which requires citizens to engage collaboratively and critically with the government.¹²⁵ Central to social cohesion and nation-formation discourse is the concept of equal rights for all who comprise the South African polity. These rights are underpinned by the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution.

In terms of our developing political culture, South Africa is at a dangerous point in its democratic journey. There is increasing evidence that South Africans are exhibiting authoritarian political tendencies as well as a move towards populism. This is especially prevalent in the lack of tolerance and often violent response to divergent views. There seem to be spaces of invited and excluded voices, which further limit the political space for debate.

In a democracy, the political structure is one of inclusion, participation and collaboration founded on a respect for the constitution, the rule of law and basic civil and political liberties. Authoritarian political culture, however, is very often characterised by intolerance born from a political and socio-economic structure of exclusion. Socio-economic exclusion coupled with limited education allows intolerant political attitudes to manifest in the political space. While a constitution may create a democratic political structure, governments are essentially made up of humans. Therefore, elites are often seen as key to promoting a democratic political culture as they need to operate within the rules and boundaries of the political structure created by the constitution. There must be a commitment to tolerance and debate, because these create a strong civil society and a society that can keep the government in line when it starts to lose its way. More importantly, political elites need to re-evaluate their representation and engagement with South Africans. A sense that ordinary South Africans are being marginalised and their voices not heard leads to a disengagement from formal political processes and facilitates a declining support for democracy.

Discussion questions

1. How would you characterise South Africa's political culture? What are the values that motivate political behaviour and actions?
2. The racialised patterns of poverty and inequality undermine nation-building and constructing a democratic political culture. How does the continuation of this racialised inequality and poverty impact on the development of a South African political culture?
3. Are South Africans politically disengaged and apathetic? What challenges may or may not pose to the future of democracy in South Africa? Construct a debate to argue whether South Africans are indeed politically apathetic and explore possible reasons for a political disengagement from the formal political processes of voting.

Self-assessment

1. Define political culture. Why is political culture important to understand for the purposes of democratisation?
2. What is a human rights political culture? How is a human rights political culture related to the ideological view of non-racialism?
3. There are three traditions that influence South African political culture. Briefly define them and identify their main characteristics.
4. What are the main factors that can lead to political apathy and disengagement from the political system?

Essay question

Is it possible to construct a truly non-racial South African society? What must be done in order to achieve the goal of a human rights political culture founded on non-racialism?

Additional resources

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- De Jager, N. & Steenekamp, C. (2019). 'Political Radicalism: Responding to the Legitimacy Gap in South Africa'. In Van Beek, U. (ed). *Democracy under threat: A crisis of legitimacy?* Palgrave.
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