South Africa: Democracy Without the People?

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Perhaps more than any other democratizing country, South Africa generates widely differing assessments of the present state and likely future prospects of its democracy. If one takes the long view—comparing South Africa today to where it was just 12 years ago—it is difficult not to be enthusiastic about its accomplishments and its future. South Africa successfully emerged from the shadow of apparently irreconcilable conflict and unavoidable racial civil war to create a common nation. It has negotiated two democratic constitutions and has held four successful nationwide elections for national and local government. On the economic front, it has avoided the triple-digit inflation that many feared would accompany a populist economic strategy of redistribution and government intervention. It has stabilized the expanding debt and reversed the double-digit inflation inherited from the apartheid-era government. There have been impressive gains in employment opportunities and income for the growing black middle class, and poor blacks have seen unprecedented improvements in access to basic necessities.

Yet if one looks at South Africa's new democracy in a comparative perspective, one's enthusiasm is greatly tempered, if not altogether removed. Crossnational analysis has highlighted three broad sets of factors crucial to democratic consolidation: a growing economy that steadily reduces inequality; stable and predictable political institutions; and a supportive political culture. In terms of these factors, an analysis

of South Africa yields, at best, some reasons for guarded optimism and, at worst, many grounds for serious concern.

In each area, today's South Africa presents a paradox. In terms of political culture, South African society played a key role in achieving democracy through its widespread opposition to the apartheid regime. The country's numerous and diverse civil society organizations range from community grassroots groups to national trade unions and non-governmental organizations. Yet citizens are not particularly supportive of democratic rule and now display low levels of community and political participation. Economically, macroeconomic stability, fiscal discipline, and low inflation sit alongside weak business confidence, low growth, massive unemployment, and rising intraracial inequality. Politically, an internationally praised constitution designed to promote multiparty competition and individual rights is overshadowed by one-party dominance and limited governmental accountability. Thus, seven years into its new dispensation, South Africa's democracy in form appears to be relatively healthy, but in substance shows signs of early decay.

Economic Development

South Africa's economic policy makers should be proud of a number of accomplishments. The national budget deficit has shrunk from 8 percent to around 2 percent of GDP. Public and private affirmative-action initiatives in education, business ownership, and hiring have created a sizeable black middle class.[1] Since 1995, more than a million low-cost houses have been built, and the poor now have access to free medicine and more than 700 additional healthcare clinics. More than 5 million needy children now get a fifth to a quarter of their daily nutritional needs through school-based programs. More than 2 million people have received access to electricity and 7 million to water.[2] Relatively low inflation, around 6 percent, means that working South Africans are able to keep up with the cost of living.

Yet the sluggish economy has actually shed 500,000 formal jobs over this period and deprived hundreds of thousands of households of the income needed to make ends meet. Broadly defined, unemployment now stands at 36 percent.[3] A lack of business confidence has stifled both domestic and foreign investment, thereby hampering growth. While growth has been running at approximately 3 percent annually since 1995, the government sees growth of 6 to 7 percent as a prerequisite to cutting unemployment and reducing inequality.

Interracial inequalities have been reduced as a result of increasing black incomes and the redistributive effects of government spending, but inequality within all race groups has increased. Among blacks the top one-fifth of all households have made impressive strides while the bottom two-fifths have moved backwards.[4]

Recently, a new specter has appeared on the economic horizon. In its September 1999 decision to move forward with a R29.9 billion package of arms purchases, the government appears to have ignored internal feasibility studies warning that any depreciation of the currency could increase costs significantly. This has in fact happened, and the full costs of the deal are now estimated to be at least R50 billion. Indeed, the costs of this deal threaten to spiral out of control and consume any future funds the government had intended for increased poverty alleviation.

Disappointing Institutions

South Africa's 1996 Constitution is the darling of both liberals and social democrats around the world. Widely seen as a "state of the art" document, it contains a wide array of classic political and socioeconomic rights, institutional innovations such as the National Council of Provinces, a range of independent watchdog agencies and commissions, and an activist Constitutional Court. The electoral system (pure proportional representation with no thresholds) has induced virtually all parts of political society to play the electoral game and has allowed the representation of a wide range of organized tendencies. Yet the constitutional framework is significantly flawed in several respects, particularly with regard to the interaction among party politics, voter representation, and legislative-executive relations.

First of all, various features of the Constitution limit voters' control over their elected representatives. While the electoral system provides for high degrees of "collective representation" (the overall balance among parties mirrors aggregate election results) and "descriptive representation" (the legislature tends to look like the electorate in terms of ideology, race, and ethnicity), it has created no direct link between legislators and voters. Constitutional provisions also eject from Parliament any member who leaves or is forced out of a political party, further reducing any incentive for MPs to represent public opinions running counter to the party line.

In addition, the Constitution does little to effect the separation of powers between the legislature and the executive; other than a formal vote of no confidence, few mechanisms exist with which the legislature may check executive action. Any rigorous parliamentary oversight by majority-party MPs places them in the difficult position of criticizing senior party leaders, who could eject them from the party and hence from Parliament. This ability to substitute loyal MPs for disloyal ones also potentially enables the governing party to preclude any vote of no confidence.

A minimalist theory of democracy would argue that, even with this constitutional framework, sufficient public influence over government can still be secured simply by holding regular free and fair elections.

The threat of the next election forces the ruling party to "anticipate the voters' reactions" to current policy decisions and thus brings about an acceptable level of popular control and accountability. In South Africa, however, what is in theory a multiparty system is in fact completely dominated by one party. The ruling African National Congress (ANC) won 66 percent of the vote in 2000, up 4 percent from 1994, and is just one seat shy of the two-thirds majority necessary to amend the Constitution unilaterally. It also is the majority party in seven of the nine provincial governments—enjoying overwhelming dominance in at least five—and has decisive control in five of the country's six largest city governments. Part of this dominance is due to positive voter evaluations of its performance, but part of it is also thanks to the substantial number of dissatisfied black voters who do not identify with the ANC yet have thoroughly negative views of virtually all other parties.[5] For all intents and purposes, the ANC has few reasons to worry about future voter reactions to its current decisions.

Over the past five years, this constitutional and electoral landscape has resulted in several worrisome tendencies. First of all, there has been a trend toward centralism within the ANC. National party structures have increasingly extended their powers at the provincial and local levels; candidates for provincial premierships and local mayoralties are now nominated by a central committee rather than by provincial or local branches. Several provincial party structures have simply been dissolved and reformed by the national party, ostensibly because of "disunity" or "ill discipline," but critics have viewed these actions as attempts to head off grassroots movements critical of the president. The national party machinery has also deposed several provincial premiers, some of whom have been popular leaders widely seen as future challengers for party leadership.

The ANC's ability to eject people from Parliament by expelling them from the party was underscored in 1997 when it jettisoned one of its most popular figures, Bantu Holomisa, because he had publicly accused a sitting cabinet minister and former Bantustan ruler of apartheid-era corruption. Indeed, imposing party discipline has been an increasing preoccupation. At a 2000 national party meeting, Secretary-General Kgalema Motlanthe reminded members that "the principles of democratic centralism still guided party structures." New ANC members must promise to combat "any tendency toward disruption or factionalism."[6] Moreover, the interval between party conferences has been extended from three years to five, thereby limiting opportunities for the rank and file to elect senior party organs.

Very recently, the ANC suddenly dropped its steadfast opposition to legislators crossing the floor. This shift was prompted by a conflict that emerged between the key partners of the main opposition coalition, the Democratic Alliance (DA). As a result, the New National Party (the NNP is the direct heir of the architects of apartheid) decided to exit the coalition

and enter into talks with the ANC. The ANC changed its position principally to enable NNP Cape Town city councilors to leave the DA and cross into an alliance with the ANC, thus giving it control of the only city government it did not already dominate. As this article went to press, it has tabled legislation that would allow the president to declare specific windows of time in which legislators at national, provincial, and municipal levels could cross the floor to new or existing parties and still keep their seats.[7] Apart from the naked political opportunism exhibited by these events, the ANC has yet to explain how it can allow members to switch parties and still observe the constitutional requirement that election results must result in proportional representation.

The increasing tendency of ANC central party bosses to stifle open debate and dissent perhaps explains how the government was able to impose one of its most important policies—the neoliberal "Growth, Employment and Reconstruction" (GEAR) program—over the strong objections of its alliance partners, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). SACP and COSATU members complain that "consultations" over economic policy have amounted to little more than the ANC dictating what the policy will be.[8] COSATU and SACP MPs (who sit in Parliament as ANC members) have chafed under the traditions of collective cabinet decisions and "democratic centralism." These simmering internal differences finally exploded in August 2001 when union leaders, cabinet ministers, and the president publicly exchanged insults, and massive strikes were called in an effort to embarrass the government during the United Nations antiracism conference in Durban.

Problems of Governance

Beyond its handling of its own internal affairs, the manner in which the ANC has treated the institutions of governance is also a cause for concern. The governing party has failed to heed the 1996 Constitution's call that it pass legislation to enable Parliament to amend spending bills. (Currently, MPs only have the choice between accepting a bill or rejecting it altogether.) Additionally, the ANC has recently introduced two pieces of legislation containing seven separate amendments to the Constitution. The most important would reorder the relationship between the Appellate Court and Constitutional Court, scrap constitutional limits on the tenure of Constitutional Court justices, put their tenure in the hands of Parliament, enable the president to appoint two deputy ministers who are not MPs, allow national government intervention in municipal governments that do not comply with financial management standards, and broaden the finance minister's monopoly on introducing financial legislation. Not only does this rapid and far-reaching change have grave implications for the integrity of the Constitution, it is being attempted

without giving other parties the opportunity to take positions on each provision separately.[9]

On several occasions, the ANC has invoked party loyalty to prevent Parliament from conducting effective oversight of executive action. In 1996, party leaders reportedly ordered members of the Portfolio Committee on Health to refrain from any tough questioning of the health minister during hearings on the unauthorized expenditure of R14 million for a dubious HIV/AIDS education musical called *Sarafina II*.[10] And just recently, President Mbeki reportedly blocked internal party demands that Majority Whip Tony Yengeni appear before Parliament's Ethics Committee to explain why he received—but did not report—a discounted luxury truck from a European defense company that was bidding for an arms subcontract.

The most profound crisis in executive-legislative relations, however, originated in the R29.9 billion arms deal of 1999. In the second half of 2000, Parliament's Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA) began receiving allegations of nepotism, cronyism, and conflict of interest having to do with the negotiation of the deal. After an auditor general's report questioned the government's decision to select one of the more expensive sets of available options and highlighted deviations from accepted procurement practices, SCOPA (which traditionally operates on nonpartisan lines and is headed by an opposition party MP) launched its own inquiry, which included a high-profile anticorruption agency called the Special Investigating Unit (SIU). Although Parliament unanimously adopted a resolution in support of the inquiry, President Mbeki and other ANC leaders quickly attacked the process due to the inclusion of the SIU. The leader of the ANC delegation on SCOPA was replaced. Under pressure from party leaders, SCOPA's ANC members distanced themselves from the inclusion of the SIU, broke off communication with other investigators, and blocked efforts to obtain further information from the army and the government. The significance of this episode is hard to overstate. Parliament may continue to play an active role in developing and amending legislation in areas of no great interest to the executive, but when there is a difference of opinion on matters that are important to the executive, it will always prevail.

Perhaps no event better illustrates the troubling direction that South African politics has taken than what is now simply known as "the plot." When intra-ANC tensions began to surface in 2001, Minister of Safety and Security Steve Tshwete apparently took seriously charges that senior ANC officials were enlisting other party members and journalists in an anti-Mbeki campaign and (improbably) were spreading rumors implicating Mbeki in the 1992 murder of SACP leader Chris Hani. Operating on the strange assumption that the president's life would be endangered if these rumors were widely believed, Tshwete launched a police investigation into the matter and the possible involvement of former

premiers Mathews Phosa and Tokyo Sexwale, as well as Cyril Rama-
phosa, the father of the 1993 and 1996 constitutions. Moreover, Tshwete
went on national television to name the three as the subject of an official
police investigation into a "plot" against Mbeki.

In short, a faction of the ruling party was using the police to deter what
appeared to be legitimate canvassing, revealing that those in the highest
positions of power are capable of conflating internal lobbying and caucusing
with a treasonous "plot." On the positive side, however, both Mbeki and
Tshwete quickly drew the wrath of COSATU, the SACP, and other key
voices in civil society and the media. Mbeki did eventually say that Tshwete
was "wrong" to publicly name the three, yet he chose not to fire the minister
and went so far as to say that Tshwete was only doing his duty.[11]

Another worrying aspect of South Africa's institutional development
is the gap between the government's aspirations and the state's capacity.
While the government has demonstrated an impressive ability to use
parastatal agencies to deliver water, electricity, and telephones, and to
create government subsidies to allow people to purchase homes, the
picture is not nearly so impressive in other areas. The most obvious is
crime. Not only have most kinds of crime—especially violent crime—
increased substantially since 1994, but the number of prosecutions
launched and convictions attained has *declined*.[12] Law enforcement is
so hard-pressed to fight ordinary crime that the national police commis-
sioner recently refused the minister of health's request to commit person-
nel to enforce newly passed antismoking legislation. He also said that
there were no resources available to enforce new legislation on domestic
violence or on banning the use of cell phones by drivers.

One final problem of democratic governance in South Africa has less
to do with political institutions than with the personality of President
Thabo Mbeki and his stance on HIV/AIDS. In the face of one of the
highest HIV infection rates in the world, Mbeki has consistently chosen
to fritter away the considerable symbolic authority of his office by
questioning the causal link between HIV and AIDS, investing time and
resources in a presidential commission evenly divided between main-
stream and "dissident" scientists. The government has stalled, if not
blocked, funding for affordable anti-retroviral drugs and the distribution
of available drugs that would drastically reduce the rates of mother-to-
child transmission of HIV. Most recently, the government has moved to
discredit and suppress a report by the country's Medical Research
Council that directly contradicts Mbeki's attempts to minimize the impact
of AIDS.[13]

Trends in Public Opinion

A country's political culture does not develop in a vacuum. Rather, it
is against a background of economic and political trends and develop-

ments that public opinion about a democratic regime, a political system, and citizenship must be assessed and understood. A review of a range of public opinion indicators collected by the Institute for Democ-racy in South Africa (Idasa) since 1995 demonstrates that South African political culture is not yet mature enough to consolidate democratic practices.[14]

South Africans' support for democracy is lukewarm and has not grown in any substantial way over the past five years. With increasingly tenuous connections between the voters and their government and increasing policy disaffection, trust in government and satisfaction with economic and political performance are declining sharply. Perhaps most importantly, the web of organizations and the impressive tradition of popular participation that emerged to challenge the apartheid system have withered. Indeed, across almost all the key indicators of democratic political culture, South Africans compare quite poorly to their neighbors throughout southern Africa and elsewhere on the continent.

National identity. One area of political culture that does not appear to pose a major threat to democracy in South Africa, though it is often thought to do so, is the so-called "national question." The common view holds that, in deeply divided societies such as South Africa, people identify primarily with this or that component part—often their own racial, ethnic, or religious group—rather than with the multiethnic or multinational state. President Mbeki has entered this debate with his "two nations" thesis, which states that South Africa comprises "two nations," one relatively wealthy and largely white and the other relatively poor and overwhelmingly black. Although Mbeki's economic prognosis may still be largely correct, there is no evidence that the word "nation" ought to be applied to these economic divisions.

In fact, surveys since 1995 have revealed widespread popular consen-sus on the existence of a South African political community that tran-scends racial and economic divisions. Nationally, 90 percent or more are proud of being called South African, say it is a key part of how they see themselves, and want their children to think of themselves as South African. It is important to note, however, that there are some cracks in this consensus, as the proportions of white and Indian respondents agreeing with some of these items fell an average of 10 percent between 1995 and 2000.

To be sure, these high levels of self-identification with the nation exist alongside strong ties to subnational self-defined identity groups. Yet this may not be so much a contradiction as an indication that members of historically competing groups feel sufficiently comfortable to identify with a larger national community only when they have a strong sense of communal identity. And just as it is mistaken to assume that economic divisions necessarily translate into different visions of nationhood, it is

also mistaken to assume that a strong sense of national community necessarily brings about domestic tranquility. Indeed, high levels of national identity coexist with significant levels of in-group chauvinism, out-group rejection, racism, and intolerance.[15]

Yet few South Africans cite racism or discrimination as a problem requiring government intervention. In 1994, six months after the first election, one in five respondents spontaneously cited problems of discrimination and the removal of apartheid as one of the three "most important problems facing this country that government ought to address." Since then, however, no more than 5 percent have mentioned this issue. A recent survey by the South African Institute of Race Relations found that racism was rated ninth on a list of "unresolved problems," with just 8 percent listing it as a priority matter. In fact, 48 percent of the total sample (and 49 percent of black respondents) said that race relations had improved in recent years, while 25 percent said they had deteriorated.[16]

Support for democracy. As of July–August 2000, 60 percent of South Africans said that democracy "is preferable to any other kind of government," and 55 percent said that democracy is always the best form of government "even if things are not working." Yet just 30 percent said they were "unwilling" to live under a nonelected government that was also able to "impose law and order, and deliver houses and jobs." On none of these items is there any evidence of increased support for democracy since 1995.

Yet South Africans are likely to reject authoritarian alternatives to liberal democracy when they are mentioned. Three-fourths would disapprove of abandoning multiparty elections for military rule, 66 percent would disapprove of a presidential dictatorship, and 65 percent would disapprove of a return to apartheid, but just 56 percent would disapprove of one-party rule. Moreover, only 40 percent reject all four alternatives.[17] South Africans' support for democracy and rejection of authoritarian rule are consistently lower than in most of the eight southern African countries where Afrobarometer surveys have been conducted (generally ahead only of Lesotho and sometimes Namibia); on those items that have been asked in 12 countries across the continent, South Africa ranks as one of the lowest.[18]

Many more South Africans give positive evaluations to the present political system (58 percent) than to the apartheid regime (25 percent). These figures, however, show a significant increase since 1995 in "nostalgia" for the way the country is perceived to have been governed under apartheid, especially among white, "colored," and Indian respondents. And while South Africans widely prefer their present form of government to what they had before, their optimism about how they will be governed in the future has declined noticeably.

An important aspect of South Africans' attitudes toward democracy is their highly economic and substantive understanding of the concept. When unprompted, South Africans spontaneously see democracy as the realization of individual rights and civil liberties. When provided with a list of constitutive elements of democracy, however, an average of 60 percent say that socioeconomic goods are "essential" for a country to be called democratic, while an average of just 35 percent say the same about procedural components like regular elections, multiparty competition, and freedom of speech. This 25-point "gap" between substantive and procedural understandings of democracy is by far the largest in southern Africa.

Evaluations of democratic performance. Although many international analysts place South Africa at the forefront of democratic development in Africa,[19] the country's own citizens are not so sanguine. In 2000, one year after the second successful democratic national election, nearly three-quarters thought the 1999 election had been either "completely free and fair" (42 percent) or "free and fair with some minor problems" (31 percent). Yet the citizens of Namibia (78 percent) and Botswana (83 percent) were even more optimistic when evaluating their recent elections. And when asked to assess the extent of democracy in their country, 60 percent of South Africans said the country was either "completely democratic" (26 percent) or "democratic with some minor exceptions" (34 percent). This figure placed South Africans parallel to Zambians and Malawians (62 percent) but behind Namibians (71 percent) and citizens of Botswana (83 percent), the region's oldest democracy. Finally, 52 percent are satisfied with "the way democracy works in South Africa," which is higher than the 41 percent registered in 1995 but down from the 63 percent of November 1998. It is also lower than the figure recorded in Botswana (75 percent), Namibia (64 percent), Zambia (59 percent), or Malawi (57 percent).

Views of political institutions. When assessing their political institutions, South Africans are becoming increasingly pessimistic. As of July–August 2000, trust in elected institutions, approval ratings of elected officials' job performances, and the extent to which people saw them as responsive to public opinion were all at the lowest levels yet measured under the new political system. Only 41 percent of respondents said they trusted President Mbeki, and 34 percent said they could trust Parliament. For such state institutions as the army, the courts, the police, and the criminal justice system, trust ranged from 35 to 44 percent. Fifty percent of South Africans approved of Mbeki's performance over the preceding 12 months, and 45 percent approved of Parliament.

A large part of this trend can be attributed to a general economic downturn and the accumulating political problems confronting the Mbeki

government. For example, job creation has consistently been seen as the country's "most important problem," cited as such by 76 percent of all respondents in 2000. Yet just 10 percent approved of the government's efforts to create jobs. Sixty percent cited crime and security as a priority concern, yet just 18 percent approved of the way government has handled the problem. Indeed, surveys conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council showed that the proportion who said they felt "safe" or "very safe on most days" fell dramatically from 73 percent in 1994 to 44 percent in 1999.[20]

In addition, while public perceptions of corruption leveled off in 2000, they remain very high. Thus, even before the investigation of the arms deal, 50 percent of all South Africans felt that most or all government officials were involved in corruption. Two-thirds felt that the new government was at least as corrupt as the apartheid regime. How the ANC confronts the growing accusations of influence-buying and conflict of interest in the arms deal will tell us a great deal about the future course of public opinion.

Declining trust in government must also be attributed to the aforementioned flaws in South Africa's representative system. By 2000, only 54 percent of blacks and 46 percent of all respondents felt that the president was interested in their opinions; 48 percent and 42 percent, respectively, felt similarly toward Parliament; and only 33 and 31 percent said so about their local governments.

Economic evaluations. Individual evaluations of the economy have paralleled the country's macroeconomic trends. As recently as April 1999, more than half of all South Africans were optimistic about the country's economic future. By July–August 2000, however, just over one-quarter expected the economy to improve in the next year (the figure went from 63 to 35 percent among black respondents). Perceptions of relative deprivation have also increased sharply. Even in 1995, despite one of the highest rates of income inequality in the world, only 32 percent of South Africans said they were worse off than others. This was largely due to the fact that black South Africans tended to compare themselves to other blacks rather than to whites. By mid-2000, however, this figure had increased sharply to 50 percent. In the same survey, 31 percent of blacks said their lives were worse now than under apartheid, up sharply from 13 percent in 1997.

Citizenship and participation. The most troubling of the survey results are probably the data on citizen participation and interaction with government. South Africa now has one of the most passive citizenries in southern Africa. As of mid-2000, only 11 percent of South Africans said they "frequently" engaged in political discussion and 12 percent said they paid attention to government and public affairs "always" or

"most of the time." Both figures were the lowest yet measured since 1995, and also the lowest out of seven southern African countries. South Africans are less likely to participate in community-level organizations (such as church or self-help groups) or political actions (such as attending election rallies or working for a party) than Zimbabweans, Zambians, Malawians, or Namibians.

Of even greater concern are South Africans' extremely low levels of actual contact with government leaders or other influential community leaders. Just 6 percent said they had contacted a government or party official in the previous year to give them their views, and only 10 percent had contacted any other community leader. Both figures are the lowest in southern Africa. Perhaps the most damning finding of the entire 2000 survey was that just 0.2 percent—that is, only four of the 2,200 respondents—said they had made contact with a sitting member of Parliament in 1999–2000. Absolutely no one in the sample said he had attended any hearing or meeting organized by Parliament or by an MP. This passivity cannot be traced to a lack of information, since South Africans actually have the highest rates of radio, television, and newspaper coverage in the region. Neither can it be traced to poverty, since South Africa's much poorer neighbors tend to have far higher rates of contact.

Fostering Citizenship

Although the public opinion data reviewed here are worrisome, they do not suggest a deeply held "culture" of norms, values, beliefs, or predispositions inhospitable to democracy. Rather, it would be more accurate to see the current contours of public opinion as *consequences* of, or even *reactions* to, the problems facing South Africa's economic and institutional development. South Africans' support for democracy is modest, in part, because they understand democracy to mean the delivery of a range of socioeconomic goods, and progress toward this goal had been slow.

Surveys show that, compared to other countries in the region, South Africans have had one of the highest rates of participation in protest action in the past and are among the most likely to resort to protest again, given the reason and the opportunity. This rules out any notion of an inherent "culture" of apathy or passivity. South Africans participate at low rates between elections because the system offers them few incentives do to so. They do not contact parliamentarians or attend parliamentary "outreach" hearings at least in part because they do not know who their parliamentarians are and because MPs have no incentive to reach out to people.

Afrobarometer results from southern Africa underscore the strong impact of constitutional design, especially the electoral system, on the

degree of citizen-MP contact. In Namibia and South Africa, the two countries with proportional representation, the rate of contact with an MP or attendance at a parliamentary meeting or hearing is 1 percent and 0.2 percent, respectively. Among the five countries with first-past-the-post systems, contact rates are 7 percent in Zimbabwe and Zambia and 5 percent in Malawi and Lesotho. (Botswana is the "outlier" with a contact rate of 2 percent.) While all these figures may sound low, there is a huge difference between one out of every 10 or 20 people in each community having had contact with their elected national representatives and one out of every 100 or 200.

While South Africa is admired internationally for the negotiating skills and processes it has developed since 1990, as well as for its state-of-the-art Constitution, its citizens have been left behind by the past decade's preoccupation with elite bargaining and institutional design. South Africans need to shift the focus onto problems of citizenship, representation, and participation. In the next decade, they need to put as much emphasis on building a grassroots culture of citizenship as they have already put on building a culture of elite accommodation. This requires renewed emphasis on civic education by schools and civil society organizations, in order to teach citizens the intrinsic value of democracy and equip them with the resources necessary to participate more fully in the political process.

Furthermore, this requires institutions that encourage meaningful participation. South African constitutional designers need to rethink their assumptions about how institutions interact with ordinary people, and they must abandon the view (implicit in the present constitution) that citizen participation emanates from a sense of duty rather than from incentives and self-interest. Therefore, public participation in democratic government should be encouraged not through special processes or forums but by giving citizens reasons to engage with their elected representatives nationally, provincially, and locally. This requires legislators and councilors who can listen to identifiable constituencies and be persuaded by them, and who can in turn act according to the wishes of the voters. This goal can be accomplished by a system of strong separation of powers with weak party discipline, but it can also be accomplished in a parliamentary system, as long as party caucuses are democratic and autonomous from the executive. Either way, more effective constituency representation is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition to bring about greater contact between citizens and representatives.

Indeed, the window for electoral reform in South Africa is now open, if only because existing electoral legislation has lapsed and the ANC has begun the process of amending related legislation in order to cooperate with the NNP. But simply creating single-member or multimember districts will not be enough. Representatives must also be required to live in their districts, since if parties can "parachute" members into "safe districts" or "helicopter" them out when they face defeat, it

will remove any incentive for MPs to anticipate voter reactions. Finally, lifting the ban on floor-crossing, as the ANC recently proposed, is misguided. Changing parties mid-term is an undemocratic violation of the implicit contract under which a candidate stands for election, and it also disturbs the proportionality created by the voters. It would be better to amend the Constitution so that MPs have to give up their seats only if they *choose* to leave their political party, not if they are forced out. Mavericks who want to challenge party discipline will be less likely to be intimidated by party bosses if they know they can still keep their parliamentary seats if they are expelled from the party.

Together, these reforms should give legislators greater incentives to reach out to voters and to represent them, and give citizens and interest groups more reason to contact their representatives and interact with legislative bodies. In addition, they could help representatives more effectively oversee and check the actions of mayors, premiers, and presidents. Without such reforms, it is difficult to imagine the consolidation of South African democracy.

NOTES

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14. For the most comprehensive summary of these findings, see Robert Mattes, Yul Derek Davids, and Cherrel Africa, "Views of Democracy in South Africa and the Region: Trends and Comparisons," *Afrobarometer Working Papers Series*, No. 8 (Cape Town, Accra, and East Lansing: Afrobarometer, 2000); available at *www.afrobarometer.org.*

15. Robert Mattes, Donald Taylor, and Abigail Poore, "The Role of National Identity in Building a Democratic Culture in South Africa," paper presented at the Conference of the International Sociological Association's Research Group on Ethnic, Race and Minority Relations on "Multicultural Citizenship in the New South Africa" (Cape Town: Idasa Cape Town Democracy Centre, 15–17 December 1997).

16. "Racism 9th on Country's List of Problems," *Cape Times* (Cape Town), 24 August 2001, 5.

17. Michael Bratton, "Wide but Shallow: Measuring Popular Support for Democracy in Africa," paper presented at a workshop on "Democracy in Africa in Comparative Perspective," Stanford University, 27 April 2001.

18. The eight southern African states are Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe; the four not in southern Africa are Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, and Uganda.

19. Freedom House, for example, awards South Africa the highest score in southern Africa for 2000–2001 in terms of political rights. Larry Diamond has named it one of the four "liberal democracies" in the region (along with only Botswana, Namibia, and Malawi). See Larry Diamond, "Introduction," in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *Democratization in Africa* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), ix–xxvi.

20. Nedbank/ISSS, "Criminal Justice Monitor," *Crime Index* 4 (January–February 2000).