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## **South Africa: Entering the Post-Mandela Era**

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

### **South Africa: Entering the Post-Mandela Era**

*Steven Friedman (bio)*

Post-apartheid South Africa's democratic quest resembles a good thriller—just as the plot seems clear, a twist appears in the tale. In

looking at the results of the country's second universal-franchise election, held on 2 June 1999, the "obvious" interpretation is that politics in South Africa is in grave danger of becoming "re-racialized." Yet upon closer scrutiny, a different and happier story line can also be detected, reflected in the large turnout for the election. The ending of this story has not yet been determined; it will depend upon the political choices made by the government of new president Thabo Mbeki, which, in turn, will be influenced by how it interprets its election victory.

The June 2 elections seemingly confirmed the view that sees elections in racially divided societies as a "racial census."<sup>1</sup> These elections may even provide some evidence for claims that divided societies offer rewards to "ethnic outbidders"—that is, those able to present themselves as more plausible vehicles of ethnic confrontation than their rivals.

The governing African National Congress (ANC), still more a liberation movement than a party, confirmed its status as the overwhelming articulator of black aspirations by winning more than 66 percent of the vote (a 4 percentage point increase over its result in 1994) and falling only one parliamentary seat short of the two-thirds majority that it needs to change the constitution unilaterally. Perhaps **[End Page 3]** more significant than the size of the ANC victory was the weakness of the black opposition—and given South Africa's demographics, only parties able to attract broad black support can win a majority.

The South African liberation movement has never been monolithic. The ANC has had to compete for support with parties representing the Africanist and "black consciousness" (BC) traditions, which, from differing perspectives, offer critiques of the ANC's philosophy of nonracialism. Their ideas exert considerable intellectual influence, as demonstrated by the continued impact of the ideas of BC founder Steve Biko and, to a lesser degree, Africanists such as Robert Sobhuze, A.P. Mda, and Anton Lembede. Yet the institutional bearers of this tradition, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), the Azanian Peoples' Organisation (AZAPO), and the Socialist Party of Azania, won only four seats in a 400 member

legislature chosen by closed-list proportional representation. Collectively, organizations embodying this tradition won less than 1 percent of the vote.

This does not mean that Africanist and BC ideas have lost all influence. Indeed, their eclipse at the polls is probably a consequence of the ANC's success, especially under President Mbeki, in coopting their ideas and intellectuals. Mbeki himself has adopted a brand of Africanism in word and deed. BC and Africanist intellectuals have been absorbed into government and into the emerging class of black business leaders who are unwilling to forego high corporate positions for the dubious benefits of a back-bench seat in the national legislature. The fact that these ideas are increasingly expressed within the broad umbrella of the ANC, however, does not yet make them a force for pluralism in party politics.

Another important source of black led opposition is the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), which draws its support primarily from those to whom the traditions of Zulu speakers, the country's largest language group, still matter. It also relies heavily on the traditional authority structures of KwaZulu-Natal province. As a result, the party has little support outside its home province or among non-Zulu speakers. It does represent a strong countervailing power to the ANC, however, and in 1994 it won control of KwaZulu-Natal. The IFP lost some support in the June 2 election but still confounded preelection polls consigning it to oblivion by retaining a plurality in KwaZulu-Natal and winning 8.5 percent of the vote nationwide. This result did confirm that the black vote was not monolithic, but its potential for fostering pluralism was largely negated by a *rapprochement* between the IFP and ANC. Although this *rapprochement* did much to contain political violence in KwaZulu-Natal, it also ensured that the coalition government between them that had been...



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