

Analysing the emerging democracy of south africa politics essay



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South Africa is a young democracy that has begun making serious attempts to bring the nation together and create national equality among the people.

First to understand what a democracy is it needs to be defined. William Hay Anthony defines democracy as “ liberal representative government under law, sustained by a political culture that accepts open disagreement and demands accountability” (Anthony, pg 135). This definition highlights “ the role of institutions in making a political order work” (Anthony, pg 135).

Applying this definition to the South African case is important to analyzing its development within being a democratic nation. Civil and political rights are important to a democratic nation because it must maintain rights to all of its citizens equally. South Africa has made huge steps in ensuring equal rights to all of its citizens, though it is quite clear that a lot more could be done. In terms of economic rights and social rights, South Africa has made attempts in making these rights equal for everyone. The democratic role of South African political parties has been a constant one. The African National Congress has been the party in power of the state since its first democratic election in 1994 and it seems like it is getting more and more support as time goes by. Their policies which have been put forth have the same goal of having equality within the state. In the past 16 years, South Africa has made numerous attempts to make its nation more democratic but it is clear that the work that the nation must do to have a complete democracy, is nowhere near finished.

Rights have not always been equal to all people of South Africa throughout history, even in the past 20 years. From 1948- 1994, South Africa was under an apartheid, that is, a segregation of blacks and whites in all aspects of

society. Under this rule, all races that were identified by the South African Government were divided. At the time, the government recognized four different racial categories: "African, coloured, Indian and white" (Lichbach 2009, 466). There were many laws that were put in place to keep the people of the country segregated at all times; the only exclusion to that was if a black African was working for a white one. Some apartheid laws were the "Group Areas Act, Land Acts, Population Registration Act and Reservation of separate Amenities Act" (Lester 1996, 227). During the apartheid, because coloured people could not vote or own property, they were living in extremely poor conditions and kept in certain black only areas. Even when coloured people could own land, the qualifications amount was raised too high for many coloured people to even consider attempting to purchase land. (Maphai 1994, 3). Without the ownership of property, one could not vote. When the first democratic election was held in April of 1994, it marked a new beginning in South Africa; some called it the "New South Africa". Mandela was named as president and many apartheid laws were abolished. People were becoming more equal within this country which meant people of all the coloured races were lawfully allowed to integrate with their white counterparts in education, work, property ownership and other rights that were not given to them before. With a new government set in place, citizens were excited to see how their country would change for the better given its new democratic policies that would soon begin to be in effect. What some people don't fully understand is that many things like becoming a new democracy take time, especially when dealing with a country with a past like that of South Africa. With that being said, even though these wonderful laws were being put into government, they were not exactly being implemented very

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well. One of the biggest reasons why so many of the country's people have to live this way is because of the huge inequalities within the country; "Inequality is still higher than anywhere else in the world" (Pons-Vignon 2008, 3). Inequality is something that cannot be changed overnight with the passing of different laws; it is something that will be an ongoing struggle for the country. Something that is special with the democratic characteristics of South Africa is the fact that the minority of the country has most of the power; white people are the clear minority of the population but they clearly have the most power. In 1980, it was shown that "whites, who were one sixth of the population, earned two thirds of total income in the country" (Maphai 1994, 137). Because white people have such great power as a whole, it is more difficult for other citizens of the country to rise economically. Since 1994, the only place that whites do not have the most power is in government. The Party that has been in power since the liberalization movement has been the black-led African National Congress or ANC. When it comes to voting, which many black people do have a right to now, whites just cannot even compare with the numbers that the Blacks have; in 2001, "79 percent of the population classified themselves as African, 10 percent as white, 9 percent as Coloured and 2 percent as Asian" (Lichbach 2009, 472). The fact that government is led by a black supported party is not unfortunate for most white people. In the early 1990's, the ANC adopted many policies and went through many negotiations with the National party (NP) to get more support from the white community. With the attempt that the ANC made toward getting support from white people in the country, white people began to see the ANC more like a rival as rather than an enemy. (Maphai 1994, 75) As well, the leaders of the ANC have done a <https://assignbuster.com/analysing-the-emerging-democracy-of-south-africa-politics-essay/>

good job in convincing all people, including whites, that their policies will only help to better the country. Unions are also helpful with making a nation more democratic. The ability to have specific rights because of employment is a huge factor in having equal rights for people. It was 1979 when African Trade Unions were finally recognized and the Congress of South African Trade Unions was then formed in 1985. (Lichbach 2009, 477) Recognizing unions that were made up of Black workers was essential in implying that they, as workers within the state, deserve no less than that of white workers. Unions allow a group of workers to negotiate with their employers about better wages and working conditions. In the aspect of civil and political rights, South Africa is making a clear progression towards truly having equality within those rights. Democratically, South Africa is making a big progression towards effectively having equal political and civil rights for all of its citizens. Through the coming years there should be more policies out being put into effect and hopefully a better understanding of equality among races. It is only then that the rights that are actually listed within the South African law will have been respected and truly put into practice.

Before democracy was even a possibility in South Africa, the main problem was “ an attempt by white settlers to make a country whose population is 75 percent African a `white man`s country“ (Maphai 1994, 1). Three million white people had achieved unchallenged superiority over sixteen million Africans by 1965. (Maphai 1994, 1) The technological advancement of white people is one of the big factors of what made them overpower that large number of blacks. (Lichbach 2009, 463) Economically and socially, many South Africans do not have adequate rights that should be equated to them

within their democratic nation. In 1994 the life expectancy was at 65 years and then within the next decade it dropped to 52 years. This is because of a degenerative health care system and the battle with HIV- AIDS that the country has to deal with. (Bond December 2009, 581) As of 2007, South Africa had the most deaths of HIV-AIDS than any other country in the world. (Central Intelligence Agency 2010) The infant mortality rate is decreasing but is still relatively high because of the amount of babies dying because of HIV- AIDS. The Literacy rate is on the rise because more people now have access to adequate schools. In 1980, when the literacy rate for whites was 99. 3% it was at 67% for Black Africans. (Maphai 1994, 138) Historically, when all coloured Africans were separated from whites, there was always an enormous gap between the well being of whites and that of coloured people. Today, the gap has closed but it is still not equal. As years go by, there are more and more opportunities for black Africans in regard to employment. Years ago, blacks did all of the labour and whites reaped all the economic benefit from that labour. Since new laws have been put in place, blacks now have the option to work in any field that is desired by them. Although, within certain industries, “ policies biased against employment have restricted income earning opportunities for blacks” (Maphai 1994, 143). Skilled jobs with high wages were granted to whites while black workers were paid poorly. (Lichbach 2009, 465) Some say that affirmative action may be needed to keep at least a significant portion of black people in certain jobs but this is not always “ a sufficient (way) to redress the socio-economic imbalances in South Africa” (Waghid 2003, 168). Affirmative action policies may turn qualified applicants to the job solely because of the fact that they are white and cannot be hired because the business needs to hire more

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black people. There needs to be other policies out into effect that actually provide adequate education to more blacks. A company should not feel obligated to hire someone just to fill a quota; a person should be hired based on the skills he or she has. Poverty is affected by those that are unemployed and those that earn wages. In 1991, the ANC said that the best way to address poverty was through economic growth. (Lichbach 2009, 478) Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is represented in terms of income. This is unfortunate for the black majority that only earns wages. White people earn an income as well as other money in forms such as that of interest, rent, dividends and profits. " All these other forms of income were accessible to whites by virtue of ownership of capital, land and other assets" (Maphai 1994, 137) which black people did not have the advantage of being able to own. In the decade of 1986 - 1996, the annual growth of the GDP was less than one percent whereas the population growth of the country was an average of 2.5 percent per year. (Lichbach 2009, 472) The South African Economy was " never designed to serve a black majority" (Lichbach 2009, 472). As a middle income country, South Africa has a GNP of about 3630 US dollars per person. After 1994, the economy was revived with the GNP growing at a " rate exceeding that of the population growth rate" (Lichbach 2009, 472).

During the Apartheid, sex and marriage between races was prohibited. Every aspect of social life was segregated by race. People of different races did not have the right to interact with one another socially no matter what the circumstance. The Freedom Charter of the ANC from 1955 declared that " South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white and that no

government can justly claim authority unless it is based on will of people” (Lichbach 2009, 467). It was the 1980’s that the government realized that the apartheid was costing a lot of money. The economy was suffering from “ a recession, currency inflation, and excessive costs” (Lichbach 2009, 468). While the economy was going through this hard time, white people had the money emigrate whereas black people had to face the brunt of the poor education system. A social right that should be equal to all is that of citizenship. Under the Bantu Homelands Act (1957) “ Africans were stripped of citizenship, expelled from parts of the country and consigned to ten scattered, ethnic homelands” (Kopstein & Lichbach, pg 467). This was the largest forced movement of a group of people anywhere in the postwar world. Today, all South Africans have citizenship within their country and are able to purchase land anywhere they would like. In 1989 there were numerous black consumer boycotts “ due to Conservative Council’s decision to uphold separate Amenities Act” (Lester 1996, 233). The effect of these boycotts was that many businesses decided to take down their ‘ white only’ signs from store fronts. This movement really showed the power that united black consumers can have. Overall, South Africa is moving in the right direction in terms of their economy and society. With the GDP in a steady increase and more jobs being available to more of the country, it seems as if the country is heading towards making the state more democratic.

In the term of 1989 - 1994, the National Party was in power. It is a white led party was whose leader was Frederik Willem de Klerk. De Klerk had an enormous role in ending the apartheid in South Africa. He was very supportive in changing the country into a multiracial democracy. (Lichbach

2009, 469) During the 1990- 1991 period, De Klerk used expressions like “bill of rights, mixed economy, one undivided South Africa and one person one vote” (Maphai 1994, 75). He wanted reform and non-racialism within the country. The leader of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1994 was Nelson Mandela when he won the Presidency. It is a black led party that was trying to gain more support from white people within the country. Not many white people wanted to support the party because they viewed the release of Mandela as the catalyst to the chaos that was on the rise within the country. As the ANC began to adopt more policies that appealed to more people in the country it was the first time that the ANC and the current government at the time openly agreed upon the same constituency. (Maphai 1994, 76)

The two biggest parties in South Africa were the National Party and The African National Congress. In 1997, the National party changed its name to become the New National Party (NNP). They did this to try to move away from their apartheid past and create a new image for themselves. The party already began to share more views with the opposing ANC, which then led to an alliance between the two parties. After witnessing two federal elections as a recognized party, The NNP decided to dismantle in 2005. This was because of the rapid decrease in voter support; people did not like the idea of the NNP being allied with the ANC. In the 1994 election, NP had some 20% of the vote whereas in the election 10 years later that number dropped down to 1.9% (NEED CITATION FOR THAT). It was clear that the NNP was never going to have much say in governmental matters with so little voter support. Many

former members of the NNP decided to join the ANC when the NNP was terminated.

Negotiations for reform within the country began in the end of 1991 (Lichbach 2009, 470). During these negotiations the ANC and NP would agree on certain things like “ one person, one vote; an independent judiciary; and re integration of the homelands“ (Lichbach 2009, 470). These parties resolved most of their issues through political, economic and military pacts. A transitional government was finally made after the multiparty negotiating forum that took place in 1993. (Lichbach 2009, 470) It was the young leaders like Walter Sisulu, Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela that recommended to the ANC that they should begin discussing the aspect of a multiracial democracy. Within the 1994 election, there was celebration throughout the country. There was an extremely high voter turnout; 86% of eligible voters came out to vote, with ANC having a 63% majority. With Nelson Mandela as the new President, the top three parties, ANC, NP and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), formed the Government of National Unity (GNU). (Lichbach 2009, 471) In 1986, it was P. W. Botha that “ authorized the repeal of selected apartheid laws in recognition of the fact that blacks now lived permanently in the heart of all major metropolitan areas“ (Lichbach 2009, 468). Unfortunately this did not work for him because it ignored majority political aspirations. The ANC has been in power of South African since it was liberated in 1994. What people need to know is that the South African economy was “ never designed to serve a black majority“ (Lichbach 2009, 472). Some question whether the fact that ANC has such a huge majority over government is a good thing or a bad thing. The strong hold

that the ANC has over power of the country may tempt leaders to “ change rules of the game to cover up corruption or to squelch political dissent” (Lichbach 2009, 490). Others say that it is good to see the government representative of what the majority of the country wants. There are about fourteen parties that are represented in the South African government with many of them having no real chance of coming into power.

This aspect of the democratic audit is quite good in the case of South Africa because of how representative the government is. The majority of the population, which are coloured, also have the majority in government. Therefore, it is easier for many people to have their voice heard through the party that they support. Though with the fact that one party has such a majority over all the rest, it can also be said that none of the other people in the country will be represented. What makes ANC different from many other majority parties is that many parties want or have an alliance with them. Alliances only occur between parties that share similar views and want one another to prosper. “ In South Africa, it can be deceived that the ANC-COSATU- SACP alliance manipulates blocks of vote into concentrations of political power for their own aggrandizement” (Waghid 2003, 120) to disempowered minorities whose interests are affected by the group’s policies.

As one of the world’s youngest democracies, South Africa has many democratic elements that need to be implemented within the society. Having democratic policies are meaningless unless those policies are being implemented. Rights and equality issues have been and will still be at the forefront of the government’s policies as they try to make the country a

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better place for all citizens. The rights that are written down in South Africa's constitution provide a sense of pride knowing that they are there for everyone but what needs to be realized is that "being afforded rights is not the same as being able to exercise such rights" (Waghid 2003, 15). The high levels of inequality that are present in South Africa have to do with the fact that it is a young democracy that needs time to alter their society to reflect that. The African National Congress that is in power in government is doing a moderate job in maintaining a satisfactory level of order within the country and will only do more as time progresses. To say that South Africa is not a real democracy would not be a fair statement to make because of its youth and inexperience with this type of government. This country is a democracy that needs to evolve more and allow the people truly understand what it means to be a democracy.