

SOUTH AFRICA

Date of Elections: 29 April 1981

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the popularly-chosen members of Parliament some 18 months before the normal expiry of their term of office. General elections had previously been held in November 1977.

Characteristics of Parliament

Since 1 January 1981, South Africa has a unicameral Parliament consisting of the House of Assembly only*. It is composed of 177 members; of these, 165 are elected for 5 years, 76 representing the Transvaal, 55 the Cape Province, 20 Natal and 14 the Orange Free State. Of the remaining 12 members, 4 (one for each province) are nominated by the State President and 8 are elected by the 165 popularly-chosen members according to the principle of proportional representation, each voter having one transferable vote.

Electoral System

In order to be eligible to be registered as a voter in any electoral division, a person must be a South African citizen at least 18 years of age who is either actually resident in that division on the date of completion of his application for registration or has retained his home therein. He must, in addition, be a white person of sound mind. Persons convicted of treason (after 1950) and murder, as well as certain persons convicted of a corrupt or illegal practice under the Electoral Act, of an offence under the Suppression of Communism Act (1950) or the Terrorism Act (1967), or of any other offence in respect of which imprisonment has been imposed and such sentence has not expired are not entitled to registration.

Electoral registers are drawn up at the division level and are kept up to date by means of a system of continuous registration of voters and supplementation of lists; general registrations of voters take place at intervals of not more than 10 years. Voting is not compulsory.

In order to be eligible for the House of Assembly, it is necessary to be an 18-year-old white person and South African citizen who has resided for at least five years within the territory of the Republic.

Undischarged bankrupts, persons declared of unsound mind by a competent court, certain persons holding an office of profit under the Republic, as well as certain persons who have at one time been sentenced to imprisonment for at least 12 months are ineligible to be candidates for Parliament.

Nominations must be supported by two electors (proposer and seconder) from the division concerned. Nomination of candidates representing a political party are accepted

• See *Chronicle of Parliamentary Elections and Developments XIV (1979-1980)*, pp. 28-29.

only if the party is duly registered with the Chief Electoral Officer, who must be satisfied that the party has the support of at least 50 voters and that it has made a deposit of 500 *Rand*. Candidates of a political party with no seat in Parliament as yet or independent candidates must provide a statement signed by at least 300 voters supporting their candidatures, and make a deposit of 400 *Rand* per candidate, which is forfeited if the candidate polls less than one-fifth of the number of votes received by the successful candidate in his division. All nominations should be made no less than 21 days and no more than 28 days after the calling of a general election.

House of Assembly members in each of the 165 single-member constituencies are elected by simple majority. Electors vote for a single candidate to the exclusion of all others.

By-elections are held to fill elective parliamentary seats which become vacant between general elections.

General Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

On 28 January 1981, Prime Minister Pieter Botha scheduled general elections for the House of Assembly and the provincial councils for the end of April—some 18 months before a vote was due. He justified this announcement by pointing out that 17 parliamentary and 13 provincial by-elections were due, and stated that the elections would be fought on the theme of "security and progress". Political observers, for their part, interpreted this strategy as caused by the Prime Minister's wish to win a general election in his own right* to give him a stronger mandate in resolving differences between reformist and conservative wings of his National Party (NP) over issues involving constitutional change and other reformist measures. Main challengers to the ruling NP were the official opposition Progressive Federal Party (PFP), the middle-of-the-road New Republic Party (NRP) and the extreme right-wing *Herstigte Nasionale Party* (HNP).

On polling day, the NP was returned to power with a reduced Assembly majority, capturing 131 (previously 134) of the 165 seats, as there were defections to both the left and right of the political spectrum. The PFP, favouring moderately integrationist policies and led by Dr. Frederick van Zyl Slabbert, significantly increased its parliamentary representation while the HNP, led by Mr. Jaap Marais, greatly raised its vote total but won no seats. Mr. Botha remained Prime Minister.

- Mr. John Vorster led the National Party in the 1977 general elections.

Statistics

1. *Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats
in the House of Assembly*

Number of registered electors.	2,290,942
Voters	1,389,893*
Blank or void ballot papers.	24,926
Valid votes	1,364,967

* Results apply to contested seats.

Political Group	Number of Candidates	Votes obtained		Number of Seats*'
National Party (NP)	154	777,558	56.96	131 (-3)
Progressive Federal Party (PFP)	78	265,297	19.44	26 (+ 9)
New Republic Party (NRP)	38	106,764	7.82	8 (-2)
Herstigte Nasionale Party (HNP).	57	192,304	14.09	- (=)
Others	12	23,044	1.68	(-3)
				165*

**This figure does not include the 12 additional members, i.e. those nominated or elected by an electoral college, who obtained seats in the House on 23 January 1981 and who remain in office for 180 days after the general elections (see section "Parliamentary Developments"). Of these 12 members, 11 represented the NP and one the PFP.

*** Parenthetical comparison with previous elections does not include one vacancy.

2. *Distribution of Fully Elected Members of Parliament
according to Professional Category*

Farmers	4}
Politicians	41
Legal profession.	30
Businessmen	16
Company directors.	11
Engineers	6
Doctors	6
Teachers	3
Lecturers.	2
Others	7
	165

*3. Distribution of Fully Elected Members of Parliament
according to Sex*

Men.	163
Women	2
	165

*4. Distribution of Fully Elected Members of Parliament
according to Age Group*

20-29 years.1
30-39.18
40-49.57
50-59.70
60 and over.19
	165