Hennie Kotzé

Institutionalising parliament in South Africa: the challenges to parliamentary leadership

Summary

As democratisation moves from a transitional phase to one of consolidation, the legislature becomes integral to the process. In South Africa, the conflict-regulating capacity of the new democratic system is determined to a large extent by the constitutionally created institutions, on the one hand, and political leadership, on the other. This study will attempt to gauge the attitudes of the South African elites and the public to the performance or worth of parliament as an emerging institution in the aftermath of the country's first democratic elections, and in so doing, to ascertain the progress of the institutionalisation process. It is argued that attitudes are based primarily upon the performance of parliament, with the parliamentary leadership and the opportunities and dilemmas it faces forming the core of this discussion.

Die institusionalisering van die parlement in Suid-Afrika: die uitdagings vir parlementêre leierskap

In die oorgangsfase van transisie na konsolidering word die wetgewende gesag 'n integrale deel van die konsolideringsproses in nuwe demokrasieë. In Suid-Afrika word die konflikregulerende kapasiteit van die nuwe demokratiese stelsel in 'n groot mate bepaal deur die konstitusioneel-ontwerpte instellings en politieke leierskap. Hierdie studie poog om elite en openbare houdings oor die werkverrigting of waarde van die parlement as 'n ontluikende demokratiese instelling te toets ten einde vordering in die institusionalisering daarvan vas te stel. 'n Groot deel van die bespreking word gewy aan die bestaande houdings oor die waarde van die parlement, en die geleenthede en dilemmas wat dit aan die parlementêre leierskorps bied.

Prof H J Kotzé, Dept of Political Science, University of Stellenbosch, Private Bag X1, Matieland 7602; E-mail: hjk@akad.sun.ac.za

Legislatures are important institutions. Not only are they among the oldest political institutions known to society, but they have also been crucial to the development of democracies.[1] In South Africa, political leaders have at various times been faced with choices regarding parliamentary structures. The most recent occasion was during the period of transition from an authoritarian to a democratic state, with the adoption of the 1996 Constitution.

Few would have argued, however, that the founding election of April 1994, the Constitution or even the Bill of Rights could have sustained the new democracy. In South Africa, the racial domination prevalent in the institutions of the old order and the potential abuse of new institutions for sectional interests are still uppermost in the minds of the voting public. It is, therefore, unrealistic to expect that confidence in and sympathy with these institutions will be fully regained in the near future.

The discussion of the possibility of sustaining democracy in South Africa thus inevitably moves to the topic of the nation's political institutions. As democratisation progresses from a transitional phase to one of consolidation, the country's legislature becomes a "central site", integral to the process. The hegemonic apartheid regime that preceded the democratic system depended largely on oppressive measures to control the system. In the new South Africa, however, the survival of important institutions such as parliament is dependent on the perception among the elite and the public that the rights and interests of minorities will be protected against the potential tyranny of the majority. In this respect, the conflict-regulating capacity of a democratic system is most often determined by its constitutionally created institutions and the political leadership. In this regard, parliament must exhibit responsiveness to a variety of interests and address inequalities, not least the huge inequality in wealth, but it must also stabilise support for both the incumbents and the regime.

For Di Palma (1990a: 38) the consolidation of a democracy remains "logically different from the structuration of its institutions and their networks". He distinguishes two distinct phases in the democratisation process, namely: crafting and institutionalisation. Crafting is defined as a "time-bound process designed to ensure that even unwilling players enter the game". In defining institutionalisation, Di Palma uses Huntington's notion of a process that "gives institutions value and stability". Crafting, in Di Palma's sense, logically precedes institutionalisation. During this process, and as institutions gain value and stability, voters evaluate any success or failure.[2]

Adopting Di Palma's distinction, this article therefore seeks to examine, albeit a little prematurely, the process of institutionalisation or "settling down" of parliament as a key political institution. Survey data will be adduced. Attitudes about the parliamentary institution among the public and opinion-formers — the elite — are primarily based upon its performance. It is assumed that the leadership in parliament can substantially enhance attitudes regarding the value of the institution. The opportunities and dilemmas faced by the leadership in the process of institutionalising parliament consequently form an important part of this discussion.

The structure of the article is as follows. The first section will examine the degree of "sympathy" — used here as a measure of institutionalisation — of the public and the elite towards parliament. Secondly, the background characteristics of the leadership in parliament will be described. Finally, the major opportunities and dilemmas confronting the leadership, as well as parliament itself as an institution will be elaborated upon.

1. Institutionalising parliament

A noticeable trend in recent studies on the democratisation process is the emphasis on aspects that may collectively be described as institutional variables.[3] This trend forms an important part of the revival of

---

2   In this regard, see also Di Palma 1990b.

institutional analysis addressing the significance of political institutions.

Institutions are important because they provide the formal and informal rules that structure political life, thereby also providing the guidelines and framework within which the elites and the public are expected to act. The central aim of correctly developed institutions is to "provide incentives and rewards for co-operative behaviour as well as sanctions for non-co-operative behaviour". Co-operative behaviour is indicative of attitudes that are "supportive of the political system and that, in turn, result in stability" (Mezey 1995: 17-9).[4]

The maintenance of stability and order is a problem common to all modern states, in particular newly democratised states such as South Africa, which are especially vulnerable if their institutions do not measure up to expectations.[5] Thus, the attitudes of the elite and the public towards the performance or worth of an emerging institu-

3 See in this regard Apter 1991: 475-78. However, according to Steinmo *et al* (1992: 12-3): "An institutional approach does not replace attention to other variables — the players, their interests and strategies, and the distribution of power among them". Rather, "it puts these factors in context, showing how they relate to one another by drawing attention to the way political situations are structured" (Pontussen 1995: 119).

4 According to Pontusson (1995: 118-9) some of the claims advanced by "institutionalists" on the role of institutions are that institutions determine "the capacity of governments to legislate and implement policies; the strategies of political or economic actors; the distribution of power among political or economic actors; [...] who the actors are and/or how the actors conceive their interests". See also Weaver & Rockman (1993) and Steinmo *et al* (1992).

5 In South Africa we are dealing with emerging institutions whose future performance is still in the domain of what Di Palma (1990a: 39) describes as the "probable and expected". Di Palma (1990a: 39) writes that for newly democratised countries this means "that whether the risk of a breakdown stays out of the agenda of a new democracy depends also on how institutions turn out. Thus, on the one hand, as institutions emerge, they should become valued *per se* and should make the chances of players backing out ever more remote. They should at least render inoperative any reservations that players may residually hold. On the other hand, such players' 'socialisation' (following, as it were, their recruitment to the game) remains contingent, and consent relies on institutional performance".

tion such as parliament will play an important part in the stability of the country; institutionalisation is crucial.

Unfortunately, institutionalisation as a process lacks an explicit formulation. Regarding the use of the concept by political scientists, Welfling (1971) notes that some, like Eisenstadt, Pye, Almond and Powell, emphasise the importance of institutions, while neglecting the concept as such. Huntington was the first major theoretician of political change to address the concept of institutionalisation. Huntington (1968: 38) defines institutionalisation as "the process by which organisations and procedures acquire value and stability". Its level of stability is measured by the scope and strength of institutions, manifested in the "size, number and effectiveness of its (the political system's) organisations". Institutionalisation can thus be seen as the outcome of certain characteristics of organisations and procedures.

Closely related to the concept of institutionalisation is the idea of legitimacy, often used to facilitate a workable definition of institutionalisation.[6] The definition of institutionalisation reduces institutions to mere products of certain characteristics of organisations and procedures. It would be quite difficult to add a measurable dimension to (operationalise) the concept. Furthermore, it would appear that it is not easy to avoid expressing an *ex post facto* judgement on the merits of different organisations and procedures. As Groth (1974: 206) comments,

> institutions will be judged 'effective' today largely because for any number of reasons they have been 'effective' thus far.

The only difference between "institutionalisation" and "legitimacy", as far as I am concerned, is rooted in the fact that institutionalisation describes a process through which, over a period, members of a society attach an increasing value to institutions or procedures.

6 While a number of social scientists associate the stability of institutions with the legitimacy thereof, Lipset (1963: 64), for instance, claims that "legitimacy involves the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate for society". It would, however, appear that the only trait associated with legitimacy distinguishing it from institutionalisation is consensus.

This increasing acceptance of the basic institutions of a society amounts to nothing less than the creation of legitimacy. The process of institutionalisation would therefore occupy the period during which the members of a society increasingly accord legitimacy to political institutions.

In the final instance, it appears that the dimension of time is of crucial importance in the process of institutionalisation. A recently created institution such as the new South African parliament will only be institutionalised if its architects can immediately secure recognition of its legitimacy from a majority of the population, or if it gains this legitimacy over a period of time. In this article, our initial focus is upon the citizens' confidence in the political institution as measured in November 1995, approximately 18 months after the establishment of the new parliament. In this period the National Party (NP) was still part of the Government of National Unity (GNU). During 1997, after the departure of the NP from the GNU, sympathy for parliament was again gauged at both the elite and the public level. It is quite clear that both "confidence in" and "sympathy with" an institution are related to the question of legitimacy but that they are by no means identical. Legitimacy is closer to "support" for the institution while "confidence" and "sympathy" are broader concepts which form an important element of the process of institutionalisation.

The following propositions may be advanced. It is to be expected that in a society such as South Africa, where deep divisions between racial groups correlate with social variables, varied patterns of confidence in and sympathy with parliament will be evident. Furthermore, it may be expected that political differences such as party support will show some correlation with confidence and sympathy. At the level of the elite the general expectation may be that supporters of parties will be actively involved in the design of the political institutions would have more sympathy with these institutions. Logically, therefore, it should follow that the same pattern of correlation will also be noticeable among the citizens. It is difficult to speculate on the exact level of confidence and sympathy that is necessary for institutionalisation, but it seems fair to say that at least a majority of the population, or a sub-group thereof, should have positive attitudes to-

wards the institution. However, the aim is not to establish the exact cut-off points for institutionalisation but rather to point out trends in the process of institutionalisation.

The results of the surveys reported here form part of two separate studies: (i) the public's confidence in parliament was measured in the World Values Study conducted in 1995; and (ii) sympathy with parliament and other institutions was measured in a battery of items in an Omnibus survey, including 20 institutions, conducted by Markinor.[7] The elite[8] survey measuring attitudes towards the same institutions forms part of a longitudinal study that has been conducted annually (with the exception of 1996) since 1989/90.[9] Although the abovementioned surveys of confidence in and sympathy with parliament were conducted before the second democratic election of 1999 they provide important benchmarks against which the institutionalisation of parliament can be measured.

7   These institutions include the following: parliament, the courts, the president, the South African Police Service, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the South African Broadcasting Corporation, and the civil service.

8   The term "elite" refers to those who occupy strategic and influential positions in society and in organisations and who can use their organisational power in the political process. They hold top positions in the "largest and most resource-rich" political, governmental, economic, professional, communications and cultural organisations and movements in society (Field *et al* 1990: 152-3).

9   For a full description of the research design used in the World Values Survey see Kotzé & du Toit (1997). For the research design used in the surveys of the elite, see Kotzé & du Toit (1995).

     The introduction to the items in the elite surveys reads as follows: "Please indicate how sympathetic or unsympathetic you are towards the following institutions and groups". The choice was between "very sympathetic, sympathetic, neutral, unsympathetic, very unsympathetic". This list of items was designed to ascertain the sympathy patterns of respondents for the various items. The wording of the introduction to the items has remained the same for the past five years. The phrasing of the question on confidence in institutions in the World Values Survey was as follows: "I am going to name a number of organisations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or none at all?"

2. The results

Although the support of the broad public for institutions is important, the support of the elite is even more significant in a state that has been engaged in an elite settlement such as South Africa. At this point, it is helpful to introduce a distinction made by Easton (1965). He uses the concepts "specific support" (support for the specific policies of the incumbents) and "diffuse support" (support for the existence of the state, the regime — the institutions — and the incumbents or leaders of the regime). In this case, however, it is not support but the broader concepts of "confidence" and "sympathy" that were used to measure the attitudes of the public and the elite.

Table 1: World Values Survey 1995: Public confidence in Parliament by party support[10]

Confidence	ANC	NP	IFP	FF	DP	CP	PAC	Total %
None at all	3	17	9	35	13	31	4	8
Not very much	14	40	14	44	48	50	19	20
Quite a lot	37	27	33	12	33	12	39	34
A great deal	39	8	20	6	1	4	38	28
Don't know	7	7	24	3	5	3	0	9

N = 2936

Table 1 demonstrates that it was only the supporters of the African National Congress (ANC) (76%), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) (76%), and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) (53%) who had more than a 50% confidence level in parliament ("quite a lot" and "a great deal" combined). It is interesting to note that the respondents supporting the IFP, which like the other two parties has an overwhelmingly black constituency, had the lowest confidence in parliament among these parties.

Among party supporters who had lower levels of confidence in parliament, right-wing parties including the Conservative Party (CP) (16%) and the Freedom Front (FF) (18%) emerged with very low levels of confidence in parliament. One would have expected a higher level of confidence in parliament from FF supporters due to their participation in the 1994 elections and their consequent representation

10   N=635 but only N=567 was used because the "other parties" which included a number of supporters of the smaller parties were excluded from the analysis.

in that parliament. (The CP boycotted the negotiations and the election). Likewise, National Party (NP) (35%) and Democratic Party (DP) (34%) supporters did not have much confidence in parliament, exhibiting far less confidence in parliament than there was sympathy for parliament among their elite (Table 3).

A varied pattern in confidence in parliament emerged among different population groups (Table 2). On the one hand, confidence was high among Blacks (74%) and relatively high among Indians (53%), while on the other hand, there was a low to very low confidence level among Coloureds (38%) and Whites (26%). (The overall confidence level was 63%).

Table 2: World Values Survey 1995: Public confidence in Parliament by race

Confidence	Black	White	Coloured	Indian
None at all	4	25	13	8
Not very much	13	24	36	33
Quite a lot	38	22	29	38
A great deal	36	4	9	15
Don't know	9	4	13	6

N = 2936

There is a relatively strong correlation between the confidence expressed by the various parties' supporters in the 1995 World Values Survey (Table 1) and the expressed sympathy of the public opinion survey of 1997 (Table 3). Among parties with overwhelmingly black support — the ANC and IFP — there was an increase in support if the confidence levels are compared with the sympathy levels and assuming that these concepts measure more or less the same attitude. The figures for the PAC remained at the same level. IFP levels increased notably more than those of the ANC. The two parties with relatively few black supporters, the NP and DP, evidenced decreased levels. This difference in support for parliament between the different groups is most marked in Table 2.

Table 3: Sympathy for Parliament by party support in the 1997 Public survey (Markinor Omnibus), Elite 1995 and Elite 1997 Surveys*

Party	Sympathetic	Neutral	Unsympathetic
ANC			
Public 97	78.8	16.2	2.7
Elite 97	90.7	9.3	0.0
Elite 95	92.0	7.0	1.0
NP			
Public 97	31.1	36.5	23.2
Elite 97	56.9	31.9	11.2
Elite 95	48.0	29.0	23.0
IFP			
Public 97	67.9	21.6	6.2
Elite 97	77.0	15.4	7.7
Elite 95	50.0	25.0	25.0
DP			
Public 97	26.5	34.1	37.5
Elite 97	45.6	35.3	7.7
Elite 95	57.0	29.0	15.0
FF			
Public 97	14.2	30.7	54.1
Elite 97			
Elite 95			
PAC			
Public 97	77.8	13.9	8.3
Elite 97			
Elite 95			

Public '97, N=3 493; Elite '97, N=470; Elite '95, N=635

*Parties with too few supporters among the elite not reported.

The elite results in Table 3, indicating sympathy toward the institutions of parliament, point to a growth in sympathy over the two years among NP and IFP supporters ("very sympathetic" and "sympathetic" were combined to from one category, as were "very unsympathetic" and "unsympathetic"). This sympathy remained more or less steady for the ANC, whereas it decreased significantly among the supporters of the DP. There is no clear-cut explanation for this trend. The support of the DP among the elite stemmed mainly from business people in the sample. A possible explanation may be that they

experienced a host of what they regarded as negative labour laws during this period. With the withdrawal of the NP from the Government of National Unity (GNU) during May 1996, one would expect NP elites to exhibit reduced sympathy. Overall there was a marked increase in the sympathy level among the elite as more ANC supporters moved into top positions in the various sectors included in the elite sample.

Table 4: Sympathy for parliament by race in 1997 public survey
(Markinor Omnibus)

Sympathy	Black		White		Coloured		Indian	
	Pb 97	El 97	Pb 97	El 97	Pb 97	El 97	Pb 97	El 97
Sympathetic	76.2	90.7	16.3	53.8	48.3	89.3	21.1	86.95
Neutral	17.3	8.0	39.2	32.4	27.2	15.4	49.9	13.0
Unsympathetic	3.6	1.3	38.4	13.8	14.2	15.4	17.0	0.0

Pb/Public, N=3 493

El/Elite, N=470

A significant pattern that emerged, with definite implications for the institutionalisation of parliament, was the marked difference in sympathy for parliament between the public and the elite in all race groups (Table 4). Moreover, it appears that there was a notable decrease from an already low confidence level among Whites in 1995 (26%) to a dangerously low level in 1997 (16%). Among the Indian group this decline was even more dramatic[11] — a drop from 53% to 21%.

Overall, the public, with the exception of ANC and PAC supporters, exhibits very high levels in the "neutral" category. In a sense this

---

11   Interestingly, although not similar in all respects, levels of "approval" were reported by POS (1996: 5), which stated: "Perhaps the most important element in popular opinion about parliament concerns people's evaluations of the way parliament has performed its job. A slight majority (53%) approves of the Parliament's performance over the past year; just over one-third (36%) disapproved (12% did not have an opinion)". Among the population groups the approval rating was as follows: African (63%); White (24%); Coloured (39%); and Indian (47%).

pattern was to be expected if one considers all the negative publicity the parliamentary institution had experienced over the previous two years.[12]

It is quite clear that there were higher levels of sympathy with political institutions among the elite than confidence or sympathy levels for these institutions among the public. The interesting aspect here is that the elites, closer to parliament in terms of policy-making, retained higher levels of this support across party affiliations. Those parties on the left of the political spectrum also had average higher sympathy levels than those on the right.

This same division, which correlates with party support, was apparent within the various population groups. Confidence levels were especially low among the White and Coloured groups, with Whites and Indians exhibiting even lower sympathy levels. These findings tend to support the propositions stated in section one.

If the majority of the South African population wishes to base the legitimacy of parliament not only upon participation in parliamentary elections but also upon the confidence and sympathy it has among the public, the nature of the strategy to be followed in order to institutionalise this body among all societal groupings is far from resolved.

Although Huntington was one of the few theoreticians to have dealt with institutionalisation theory, he was unable to explain the mechanics of the process. Inspecting Ben-Dor's (1975: 323) criticism of aspects of Huntington's ideas can give an idea of its complexity. He writes:

> [W]hat Huntington calls 'being valued' depends on the ability of the institution to respond to (and to shape and reshape) the value system of a given society. In order to make institutions valued (and thus contribute to their stability) it is necessary to deal with value systems in society which are often fractured, conflicting and rapidly changing.

12 Some of these patterns correspond with a high level of legitimacy in a "legitimacy index" designed by the HSRC (1995: 9). A legitimacy index (including six items) among the broad public (N=2 229) in June 1995 showed the following distribution: 69% of the respondents were positive; 24% negative; 8% uncertain towards the new government.

The process of institutionalisation consequently has much in common with the process of building a nation. According to Huntington (1968: 397), the success of a nation-building process depends initially upon the successful "horizontal" integration of the diverse groupings to be moulded into a national unit and, secondly, upon the "vertical" assimilation of economic and social classes.

In South Africa, two competing views on the management of society retard these processes of integration and assimilation. This conflict may well lie at the root of the differing levels of confidence and sympathy evidenced between supporters of the ANC, on the one hand, and supporters of the other parties, on the other. The dominant view emphasises the substantive view of democracy, stressing the equality between groups and cultures. The principle of equality is also the driving force behind the implementation of a policy that is regarded in some circles as the artificial distribution of wealth, ie "equalities of income" that have no relation to colour or culture.

The contending view is that South Africa comprises a variety of cultures and must therefore be managed as a plural state. According to supporters of this view, policies enforcing the substantive view of democracy will lead to the marginalisation of minorities and of the middle class in South Africa. At present all 11 official languages are recognised in parliament and recent proposals to make English the language of record were seen by some legislators as an example of the marginalisation of minorities. The ANC's Executive vetoed this proposal by the Speaker and others (*Die Burger* 1998).

These two perspectives on the functioning and management of society have influenced the design of political institutions, including parliament. There is a need for these approaches to be managed in order to create a consensus as to how society should be administered. Only when this is effected, it would seem, can the process of institutionalisation of parliament be likewise enhanced.

The parliamentary leadership (those in top positions in the governing party) should see working in an institution with declining "value" and a relative lack of institutionalisation, albeit in only a small (but economically significant) section of the population, as a major dilemma. However, the patterns in institutionalisation described above offer exciting and interesting opportunities for them to

play a significant role in the institutionalisation of parliament. In order to understand more clearly the strategies and modes of operation that are available to the parliamentary leadership a brief overview of their recruitment patterns and social background will now be given.

3. Pathways to leadership in parliament

Policy divisions in the South African Parliament run almost exclusively along party lines. Within parties themselves there are, however, in many instances definite faultlines to be found between backbenchers and their frontbench leadership.

The new South African parliament started life during 1994 in the GNU, in which three parties shared leadership positions. After the withdrawal of the NP in 1996, the IFP remained, with two ministers and one deputy minister. Leadership in this context refers to those persons in parliament who are not backbenchers and it includes persons in the following categories: ministers; deputy-ministers; the speaker and deputy-speaker; chief whips, and, chairpersons of portfolio committees. As in the British Westminster system, careers in the South African parliament involve rising in the party ranks to positions of leadership. In the historical perspective, this was obviously not possible in South Africa and the majority of the top positions were filled by those who had proved themselves in leadership or administrative roles during the liberation struggle, which meant that the ANC leadership assumed their positions through a variety of "pathways".

In this analysis of the composition of the leadership, based on those persons in leadership positions who completed a *Who's Who* questionnaire, only respondents of the ANC, as the largest, and the governing party will be used.[13] The leaders (N=39) will in some

13 This project was launched in the second half of 1996 by the Centre for International and Comparative Politics at the University of Stellenbosch. Respondents came from the National Assembly. The main aim of the project was not only to provide interested people with the personal background of their political representatives, but also to provide the ordinary member with an opportunity to inform voters of his/her activities in the National Assembly. Due to

instances be compared with the backbenchers (N=99) of the ANC to give an indication of how these two groups in the same party differ. (The sub-sample of 39 respondents is very small but the data will be "pressed" to provide a comparative perspective).

In the sub-group of leaders (N=39) who responded, the racial composition was as follows: Black: 59%; White: 15.4%; Coloured: 5.1%; and Indian: 20.5%. This composition raises the issue of representation.[14] In South Africa this debate is not related to Burke's idea of representation, but rather to ensuring demographic representation of the electorate among the elected. For example, if 52% of the population are women, there should be the same proportion of women among the representatives.

This dimension of the debate has arisen in South Africa on at least two levels. The first is related to the racial composition of the National Assembly (NA) and the second to the number of women in the NA. With regard to the first aspect, a debate arose in the ANC's parliamentary caucus where it was claimed that Africans were not only under-represented in the institution, but not even elected or appointed to positions of authority in proportion to their numbers in the electorate (*Cape Times* 1997). (It is interesting to note that there are, comparatively speaking, substantially fewer women in the leadership group than among the backbenchers: 12.8% and 31.3% respectively).

the relatively low response rate (62%) the *Who's Who* was not published and selected results were reported in an occasional paper instead.

If the response rate of the respondents per party is analysed, ie the number of *Who's Who* questionnaires returned, measured against the number of representatives of the party in the NA, the distribution is: ANC 54,7%; NP 82.9%; IFP 53.4%; FF 88.8%; DP 85.7%; PAC 60%; ACDP 100%. It is clear that a relatively full picture can really only be formed of the smaller parties.

(This section of the study relates closely to the occasional paper listed as Kotzé 1997).

14 Mahler (1995: 88) summarises this requirement as follows: "whether or not legislatures are truly representative in a demographic sense, the need for legislatures to appear representative is central to their mission".

As far as age categories are concerned (cf Table 5), the distribution is as follows: nearly 60% (59%) of the leaders were younger than 50, compared to 41% of backbenchers. There were also proportionally far fewer members among the leadership older than 60.

Table 5: Age distribution of ANC respondents in National Assembly

Age categories	Leaders	Backbenchers
20-30	0.0	3.1
31-40	23.1	21.4
41-50	35.9	30.6
51-60	20.5	12.2
61-70	10.3	23.5
Older than 70	5.1	8.2
No answer	5.1	1.0
	N=39	N=99

While about 23% of the leaders were younger than 40, a few (15.4%) were older than 61. In pluralist systems, these figures average 11% and 21% respectively. In the former communist systems, on average, more than 40% of the leaders were older than 60 (Welsh 1979: 66-7). Interesting parallels emerge with regard to the age variable and the transitional systems of Latin America. In these systems, the leaders are on average younger than in the pluralist democracies, and considerably younger than in the former communist systems. One possible reason for this is that politics in transitional systems is considerably more volatile and unstable than in other systems; this makes it easier for younger, inexperienced persons to assume positions of political power.

It can be expected that this situation will change, as the NA becomes more institutionalised. Younger representatives will also want to continue their careers in the NA, creating fewer opportunities for other young people to enter the NA. A relatively large group of leaders (35.9%) was so bold as to indicate that they saw themselves remaining members of the NA beyond the 1999 elections. An even higher figure was recorded for backbenchers (39.8%.). Respondents from other parties were less optimistic about predicting their re-election to the NA.

The largest single group, namely 35.9% of the leaders, gave its home language as English; 7.7% as Afrikaans; 2.6% as both lan-

guages. With regard to the African languages, there were 17.9% Zulu speakers, 10.3% Xhosa, and 23.2% other African-language speakers among the leaders.

Education is an aspect of social stratification that shows a high correlation with political leadership (cf Table 6). According to Putnam (1976: 27) developing states such as India, Turkey and Mexico exhibit higher ratios of well-educated individuals in political leadership positions than some Western states. This is important in the case of South Africa as the correlation between leadership positions and education emphasises the importance of social status and access to educational institutions.

During the apartheid era, the social status of the black majority was severely curtailed, limiting access to educational opportunities at all levels. Indeed, in the majority of cases, the education of respondents suffered from this lack of opportunities. In addition, for a long time, black education was probably the arena of strongest anti-apartheid resistance. The 1976 Soweto riots which (symbolically speaking) presaged all subsequent resistance were triggered by pupils' protests. In the decade or so following the protests, black students were seldom outside the political firing line. During this period, a large number of young people who are in leadership positions today sacrificed their school and university careers for the liberation struggle.

Table 6: Highest academic qualification of ANC leaders and back benchers

Highest academic qualification	Leaders %	Backbenchers %
Standard nine and lower	0.0	11.1
Matric	15.4	19.2
Post-matric diploma	17.9	22.2
Bachelor's degree	25.6	19.2
Honours degree	15.4	11.1
Master's degree	17.9	9.1
Doctorate	7.7	4.0
No answer	0.0	4.0

When comparing the leadership and backbenchers, it is only on the bottom rungs of the academic ladder that there are significant differences. More than 30% of the backbenchers had matric or a

lesser qualification whereas among the leadership this figure fell to 15.4%. More than one third of the leaders, compared to about 20% of the backbenchers, studied at overseas universities; many were thus partly socialised in systems other than the South African.

There is a dramatic difference between the leaders' levels of education and those of their parents. In the case of their fathers' highest level of education, no less than 64.1% indicated a level of education lower than Standard Nine, and of those 46.2% reached a level below Standard Six or very basic literacy.

In reply to the question: "Which of the following best describes your political status prior to transition in 1990?" a number of interesting categories could be discerned. A fairly large number of leaders indicated that they were in detention, for example, 12.8% on Robben Island, while 15.4% were "imprisoned elsewhere for longer than one year" (cf Table 7 for legislators' political status before 1990). The comparison in Table 7 between the experiences of the leaders and those of the backbenchers in the ANC reveals a striking pattern. In terms of their political experience, the leaders form a representative group among their parties' legislators. Only one experience reveals a small difference, namely "member of tricameral parliament". It would appear that their respective experiences in the apartheid system stood some leaders in good stead when they assumed their new parliamentary roles. (It should be remembered that the N subsample involved only 39 leaders).

Table 7: ANC parliamentary respondents' political status prior to 1990

Political status prior to 1990	Leaders	Backbenchers
In exile	17.9	14.1
Imprisoned on Robben Island	12.8	7.1
Imprisoned elsewhere for longer than one year	15.4	19.2
Member of Tricameral Parliament	7.7	2.0
Member of homeland government	2.6	4.0
Politically active in a party/organisation	35.9	40.4
No direct political activity	2.6	6.1
List other activity	5.1	7.1

4. Opportunities and dilemmas

One of the most promising opportunities presented to the ANC leadership in 1994 was the chance to reconsider the role and functions of parliament. Against the political and social background of the leadership sketched above it was to be expected that they would use the opportunity to transform the Westminster model, on which the tricameral parliament was based, into a uniquely South African model. In addition, the fact that the ANC leadership had such a large majority to work with created various opportunities.

- They were able to restructure and extend the committee system, with important advantages for the legislative process. First, this has created a more informal space where members can debate and test ideas. Secondly, MPs in the committees have a great degree of political independence. Thirdly, submissions from independent experts create the opportunity to test the views of the civil servants who serve on the committees. Fourthly, the activities of the cabinet — especially its policy-making function — are thoroughly investigated and there is a check on such activities. Finally, opportunities have been created for the public at large to participate more directly in the legislative process in an individual capacity and through interest groups.

- They created another control function over policy-making, namely question time. Wednesday afternoons are devoted to question time in the NA and 90 minutes are allowed for this purpose.

- It became possible to put some effort into ensuring that parliament does not simply rubber-stamp legislation submitted by cabinet. The following process was adopted: the submission of a discussion document (green paper) to which the public can react before the draft bills (white paper) are published. At the committee stage, the bill is debated by interested parties and individuals, and groups can submit written or oral commentary.

- The procedures and functions of parliament were also altered. One aspect that was not welcomed by all, in particular the more conservative MPs from the previous dispensation, was the more informal dress code; the Speaker no longer wears formal attire during sessions and it is not compulsory for male members to

wear jacket and tie.

- Steps were also taken to reduce MPs' administrative and research burdens. Various non-governmental organisations and nearby universities provide some assistance in this regard.

- By the end of 1996 a register of members' interests had been established. This general control function increases the level of accountability of all members of the NA. In this manner, possible conflicts of interest, for example, shareholdings, directorships, consultancies, and so on, may be detected by members of the public, who have access to the register.

In spite of the sound beginnings of 1994, serious dilemmas and warning signs remain for the leadership in parliament. Among other things, the following should be highlighted.

- The list system of proportional representation has been described as "negat[ing] the link between citizen and parliament" (Good 1997b: 557). Some observers link this structural aspect to the high level of absenteeism in parliament. On occasion, to the embarrassment of the leaders in parliament, no quorum was present in debates and votes during the first years of parliament's operation. The Constitution requires that at least 50% of the members be present at a vote on a bill, and at least one-third at other votes.

The absence of quorums was widely publicised. This situation prompted a respected political journalist to ask:

> Why is it that so many of the new crop of MPs are so dysfunctional, or uninterested in their work, that they cannot fulfil the primary role which the Constitution and the voters have given them: to attend debates of the National Assembly? (*Daily News* 1995).

It must be added that party leaders and whips in particular have recently been acting considerably more strictly against absenteeism — a number of MPs have even been dismissed from parliament.

Another implication of the list system is that it makes party switching ("crossing the floor"), coalition formation or even taking a seat as an independent quite impossible. This is seen as an "anti-defection" clause and the ANC argues that it is necessary during the transition process. Opposition parties are strongly

opposed to this measure and argue that it holds MPs hostage and constrains the free flow of changing opinions in a democracy. A multi-party parliamentary committee investigating this matter postponed its decision until after the elections in 1999.

• It is quite clear that there is a group of MPs who are not politically mature enough or do not have the necessary level of education to work effectively in their parliamentary roles. The large number of parliamentary committees, along with the absence of coherent management of the parliamentary programme, provided a number of "reluctant" MPs with good excuses for not pulling their weight. As a result, a trend developed whereby interest groups began lobbying the executive directly. This indicated that power was shifting away from parliament to the executive, according to a usually well-informed financial weekly (Bisseker 1997).

• From 1996 onwards the leadership came under fire because of ministers' practice of arriving late for question time, or not at all. This caused considerable dissatisfaction among representatives of the various parties in parliament. Good (1997: 563) summarises the reasons for non-accountability among the leadership as follows:

> The responsibility, or rather loyalty, of ANC ministers moves upwards to the leadership, and when this is supported by a record of devotion, the leadership extends its support downwards to them.[15]

• Despite promises and earlier practices of openness, portfolio committees have become increasingly closed to the public. Good (1997: 560) links this practice to the "leadership predominance" of the ANC. The operation of the committee system draws continual criticism from opposition parties. It is alleged that the composition of the committees jeopardises their effective functioning. Only three of the 27 committees are chaired by an indi-

---

15 A recent case in point was the inability of ANC MPs to censure the Minister of Health for the unauthorised expenditure of R14 million on an HIV education musical, *Sarafina*. It was reported that "though ANC MPs reportedly 'writhed with embarrassment' they dutifully stayed mute" (Parker 1997).

vidual external to the ANC, and there are no records of proceedings (Coetzee 1997).

There is growing pressure for the leadership to consider giving parliament's portfolio committees more power in the budgetary process, especially as far as powers of amendment are concerned. At present, this is prohibited by the Constitution. It is alleged that at the moment parliament acts simply as a rubber-stamp and has no effective oversight role (Krafchik 1998).

- Another possibly divisive issue is the location of parliament. There is a strong lobby inside ANC leadership structures for the relocation of parliament to the Gauteng province (either Pretoria or Midrand near Johannesburg). The Premier of the Western Cape, where parliament is presently situated, recently warned that

> the location of Parliament in the Western Cape was the link between the Cape's very different communities and the South African mainstream, anchoring the province to the rest of the country. Take away this anchor and the Cape could drift away, or even worse, could become a province hostile to the rest of South Africa (*Cape Argus* 1998).

The final decision on this matter was postponed until after the elections in 1999.

- An even more serious dilemma is the decline in sympathy for parliament amongst the white and Indian population groups, with the resultant threat to its institutionalisation.

5. Concluding remarks

In this article several surveys of attitudes towards parliament have been reported. Although the measurement was taken too soon after the establishment of the institution to recognise firm trends, there is generally already considerable sympathy with, and confidence in, important new institutions among the majority of the population. This finding points towards a growing institutionalisation of the new political institutions.

One disturbing factor, however, is the fractured nature of these patterns of sympathy and confidence. Moreover, the low levels of

sympathy and confidence correspond with the political and racial divisions in society. This finding supports the general assumption that there may be a causal connection between levels of sympathy and confidence, on the one hand, and the perceived interests of the various groups, on the other. If this is indeed the case then levels of sympathy and confidence will increase only when these groups believe that parliament and its policies take care of or protect their interests, as well as those of other groups. However, this assumption cannot be tested directly with cross-sectional surveys of attitudes such as those reported here. The time dimension remains of pivotal importance in the process of institutionalisation and only a longitudinal study of some magnitude could bring clarity on this question.

It is important for new democratic systems to institutionalise their institutions. South Africa has made a good start on this challenging quest. The conflict-regulating capacity of democracy is also to a large extent determined by its constitutionally created institutions, such as parliament. If political leaders do not act within the democratic rules of the game, this can hardly be expected of the public, in particular if the leadership is not halted in its efforts to marginalise ordinary backbenchers and the opposition. These trends are evident at present in parliament. It is therefore important that political power remain vested in the backbenchers: the true representatives of the people.

Bibliography

APTER D E

1991. Institutionalism reconsidered. *International Social Science Journal* 43: 463-82.

BEN-DOR G

1975. Institutionalization and political development. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17(3): 322-41.

BISSEKER C

1997. Power shifting away from parliament. *Financial Mail* 20 June 1997: 35.

CAPE ARGUS

1998. Kriel warns against relocation of parliament. 19 May 1998: 2.

CAPE TIMES

1997. Soul-searching: ANC caucus affirm commitment to representivity. 26 May 1997: 5.

COETSEE J

1997. Komiteestelsel bevraagteken. *Finansies en Tegniek* 17 Oktober 1997: 19.

DAILY NEWS

1995. Absence of parliamentarians cause for concern. 18 November 1995: 9.

DIE BURGER

1998. ANC veto voertaal voorstel. 5 Mei 1998: 2.

DI PALMA G

1990a. *Parliaments, consolidation, institutionalization: a minimalist view*. Liebert & Cotta (eds) 1990: 30-48.

1990b. *To craft democracies: an essay on democratic transitions*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press.

EASTON D

1965. *A systems analysis of political life*. New York: John Wiley.

FIELD L *et al*

1990. A new elite framework for political sociology. *Revue Européene de Sciences Sociales* (28)1: 150-66.

GOOD K

1997. Accountable to themselves: predominance in Southern Africa. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 35(4): 547-73.

GROTH A J

1974. The institutional myth: Huntington's order revisited. *Review of Politics* 41(2): 201-18.

HUNTINGTON S P

1968. *Political order in changing societies*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL (HSRC)

1995. *Perceptions of current sociopolitical issues in South Africa*. Pretoria: HSRC.

KOTZÉ H J

1997 Take us to our leaders: the South African National Assembly and its members. Johannesburg: Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung Occasional Papers.

KOTZÉ H J & P DU TOIT
1995. The state, civil society and democratic transition in South Africa: a survey of elite attitudes. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 39(1): 27-48.

1997. Public opinion on security and democracy in South Africa after transition: the world values Survey. *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 19(2): 52-75.

KRAFCHIK W
1998. MPs need more than a rubber stamp. *Business Day* 17 April 1998: 11.

LIEBERT U & M COTTA (eds)
1990. *Parliament and democratic consolidation in Southern Europe*. London: Pinter.

LIPSET S M
1963. *Political man*. Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books.

MAHLER G S
1995. *Comparative politics: an institutional and cross-national approach*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

MEZEY M
1995. Legislatures and the creation of consensus in divided societies. Unpubl paper prepared for the IPSA Research Committee on Politics and Ethnicity, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

PARKER J
1997. Sarafina: the second act. *Finance Week* 2 August 1997: 21.

PONTUSSON J
1995. From comparative public policy to political economy: putting political institutions in their place and taking interests seriously. *Comparative Political Studies* 28(1): 35-54.

POS
1996. *Public opinion service report: the public's view of parliament*. Cape Town: IDASA.

PUTNAM R D
1976. *The comparative study of elites*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

STEINMO S, K THELEN & F LONGSTRETH
1992. *Structuring politics: historical institutionalism in comparative analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

WEAVER R K & B A ROCKMAN
1993. *Do institutions matter? Government capabilities in the United States and abroad*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institute.

WELFLING M
1971. *Political institutionalization: the development of a concept and its empirical application to African party systems*. DPhil dissertation, Northwestern University. Chicago: University Microfilms.

WELSH W A
1979. *Leaders and elites*. New York: Reinhart & Winston.