



South Africa — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[for the time between 01/01/1900 until 05/31/1910 see Cape Colony, Natal, Transvaal and Orange Free State]

05/31/1910 Start (Monarchical) Electoral Oligarchical Autocracy: In 1907, Dominion became the distinguishing label for the colonies with responsible government. Dominion status was a half-way house between colonial and independent status. On 05/31/1910 The Union of South Africa was established through the amalgamation of the formerly distinct Colonies/Dominions, including Cape Colony, Natal, Transvaal, and Orange Free State, creating a unified Dominion (McIntyre 1999). Similar to Canada, Australia and New Zealand, the Union of South Africa attained self-governing dominion status within the British Empire. This status was solidified by the Balfour Declaration of 1926 and the Statute of Westminster in 1931. Governed as a constitutional monarchy, the Crown was represented by a governor-general.^{79F¹} However, Dominion status did not confer full sovereignty during that period. The concept of Dominion evolved over time, and even New Zealand did not achieve complete independence, meaning absolute autonomy and sovereign authority over its constitutional arrangements and foreign affairs, until 1947.^{80F²} Thus, it is essential to check how the parliament of Union of South Africa was restricted in terms of legislative powers (e.g., foreign relations and external trade). South Africa became independent under a racially restricted male suffrage.^{81F³} Hence, elections were competitive but not at all universal. Because non-whites were the huge majority in South Africa the regime cannot be classified at all as a democracy (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 94). Based on our observations, multiparty, executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Following LIED the elections were competitive between 1910 and 1947. Since 1948 the scores decreased, referring to an absence of competitiveness. The systematic exclusion of electoral groups explains why the V-Dem's CEI scores South Africa with a not really cleanliness at this period. According to V-Dem's EF&FI the overall election conditions were ambiguous between 1910 and 1947. From 1948 to 1993 they are considered as not really free and fair. In addition, V-Dem's LDI shows a constantly low level between 1910 and 1994 reflecting that the country was an autocracy in that period. Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. From 12/11/1931 on the Statute of Westminster granted full sovereignty to the Dominions. Dominion from then on only meant a common allegiance to the British Crown (McIntyre 1999). In 1931 female suffrage for white women was introduced.^{82F⁴} The non-white majority, however, remained completely disenfranchised and politically repressed throughout the regime period. Although South Africa was clearly an autocracy due to the systematic exclusion and subjugation of the black population, government power occasionally alternated between competing white parties. This suggests that elections within the dominant racial group retained a certain degree of competitiveness, albeit strictly confined to a racially exclusive political system. For the period 1910-1946, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI indicates in our interpretation an ambiguous state regarding political liberties. For the rest of the period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties are not truly present. From 1910 to 1946, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. From 1947 to 1949, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on

the executive were limited. From 1950 onwards, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited.

05/31/1961 Continuation Electoral Oligarchical Autocracy (as a republic): On this date South Africa became fully independent from the British Crown, the Queen no longer acting as the ceremonial head of state. Hendrik Verwoerd, who had been prime minister since 1958, when he became leader of the National Party (NP), is regarded as the "architect of apartheid" for his policy of "good neighborliness", which further institutionalized racial segregation and white supremacy. It was under his government that Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for life. Verwoerd was assassinated on 09/06/1966; his assassin proclaimed he wanted to see a change in government because he thought the government under the NP not to be representative.^{83F⁵} Following Verwoerd's death, Balthazar Vorster was named new head of the NP and thus succeeded Verwoerd as prime minister. Vorster remained in office until his retirement in 1978 and was replaced by Pieter Botha who became the new head of the NP and the new prime minister.^{84F⁶} The governmental continuity attests to lack of competitiveness in election processes and repression of opposition. In 1984, Pieter Botha promulgated a new constitution, which established additional houses of parliament for "colored" and Asian people respectively. This act cannot be interpreted as equalizing political rights, however, because the "white" cabinet still held ultimate authority, and Black people were excluded from these innovations all together. Additionally, Botha's constitution removed the office of prime minister and merged the position with the office of state president, which Botha proceeded to assume. In 1989, Botha resigned due to health issues and was replaced by Frederik de Klerk.^{85F⁷} In 1990, the National Party government lifted the ban on the African National Congress and other political organizations. Frederik Willem de Klerk ordered the release of Nelson Mandela from prison and began negotiations for a political transition. The government repealed apartheid legislation and agreed to hold free elections in 1994 with universal suffrage not regarding race or color of skin.^{86F⁸} According to FH's classification for 1972, a score between 11 and 14 makes the country not free, which we also place in the not free category. Per FH's evaluation from 1973 to 1976, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. Per FH, for the years 1977 to 1989, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. According to FH, from 1990 to 1993, a score between 9 and 10 makes the country not free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather not free. As per FH's classification for 1994, the country receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. As per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was on par with or below that of other branches, reflecting executive parity or subordination. Based on our observations, multiparty, executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. For the period 1961-1990, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are not really present. In the timeframe 1991-1993, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as being ambiguous about the status of political liberties. For 1994, we code the PCLI data as indicating political liberties being present. Until 1983, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited. From 1984 to 1992, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

04/29/1994 End Electoral Oligarchical Autocracy/Start Electoral Democracy: On this date, competitive elections with universal suffrage were held. The oppositional African National Congress (ANC) gained an overwhelming majority and government turnover took place (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 58, Sinai 1996, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 94).^{87F⁹} Nelson Mandela was elected president; these elections may be interpreted as the step towards political representation of the Black majority in South Africa and their political inclusion. In the following elections through 2019, the ANC has won the parliamentary majority, indicating that the ANC has established its voter base among the Black communities.^{88F¹⁰} Reports of corruption among

government officials often emerge, and in recent years, the ruling ANC has been accused of undermining state institutions to protect corrupt officials and preserve its power as its support base has begun to wane.^{89F}¹¹ South Africa is a bicameral democracy, with the president being both the head of state and of government. Its constitution, promulgated in 1996, acts as its supreme law, granting and securing civil liberties and political rights. In the elections on 05/08/2019 the parliamentary election was won by the ruling ANC, but with a reduced majority of 57.50%, down from 62.15% in the 2014 election. In the general election on 05/29/2024, the ANC suffered a historic defeat, winning only 40% of the votes. Although the ANC still secured most of the seats in the National Assembly, it lost its parliamentary majority. Consequently, the ANC, the DA and other minor parties formed the first coalition, and incumbent president Cyril Ramaphose was re-elected.¹² As per FH's classification for 1994, the country receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. According to FH, for the rest of the assessed regime period, the country is categorized as free with a score between 2 and 4, which corresponds to our interpretation of free. Based on our observations, multiparty, executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Since 1994, LIED's data confirm constant competitive elections. The two years after the end of the electoral oligarchical autocracy the scores by V-Dem's CEI indicate an ambiguous level of electoral cleanliness. Between 1996 and 2004 V-Dem CEI reflects the elections as somewhat clean. From 2005 to 2013 the elections gained full cleanliness. Since 2014 the elections decreased to somewhat cleanliness outcomes. In addition, V-Dem's EF&FI still declares the elections as somewhat free and fair between 1994 and 1998. Since 1999 the overall elections conditions are considered as free and fair. According to the LDI South Africa is classified until 1999 by an ambiguous score. Since 2000 the LDI increased to a somewhat score, echoes to a democracy. In 2023 the LDI states a backslide to an ambiguous outcome. While the country is internationally considered a proponent of human rights,^{90F}¹³ corruption issues persist, including all levels of government, up to the presidency. Moreover, gender-based discrimination and violence remain a problem. For the relevant period, LIED identifies political liberties as present, and V-Dem's PCLI is also classified by us as indicating that political liberties are present. Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. Since 1996, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. In 09/2022 the constitutional court continued to advance transparency reforms by ruling that senior officials must disclose the receipt of intraparty campaign funding.^{91F}¹⁴ On 07/01/2024, the ruling ANC announced a coalition agreement with the predominantly white Conservative Party, following the ANC's loss of its absolute majority in the 05/2024 election. This significant event marks the first time the ANC has not governed alone and the first instance of a predominantly white party participating in governance since the end of Apartheid.^{92F}¹⁵ This would suffice to declare South Africa a full democracy, as our previous reason of ANC-dominance no longer holds true. However, we continue to list the country as an electoral democracy as in the meantime, the conditions of democracy have decayed beyond acceptability. Corruption, mismanagement and deterioration of state services have come to a point where social exclusion based on class is commonplace. Rolling blackouts due to infrastructure constraints or cessation of rail traffic are just some examples (Hausmann et al. 2023).

Electoral Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Lacour-Gayet 1977)

South Korea see Korea

Soviet Union: see Russia 1917 to 1991

Notes

- ¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_of_South_Africa
- ² https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/research-papers/document/00PLLawRP07041/new-zealand-sovereignty-1857-1907-1947-or-1987#footnote_3
- ³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37
- ⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hendrik_Verwoerd#cite_note-:1-56
- ⁶ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html> , see narratives for version 5.0, South Africa_R: 1-2, South Africa_V: 2
- ⁷ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html> , see narratives for version 5.0, South Africa_R: 2
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37
- ⁹ <http://africanelections.tripod.com/za.html>
- ¹⁰ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html> , see narratives for version 5.0, South Africa_R: 2, South Africa_V: 2
- ¹¹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/south-africa/freedom-world/2023>
- ¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_South_African_general_election
- ¹³ https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230306424_8
- ¹⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/south-africa/freedom-world/2023>
- ¹⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cw9yx5w9577o>

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