

## **Democratic Political Community in South Africa Elusive or Not?**

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### **Abstract**

A democratic government needs the support of its citizens to maintain its legitimacy. A stable and effective democracy does not depend on democratic institutions alone; rather, it requires a political culture that is conducive to democracy. This study utilizes data from the last four waves of the World Values Survey (WVS) to map the characteristics of a democratic community by means of a three-level (culture, structure, and process) hierarchical model in South Africa. The findings show that support for democratic rule is fairly high and higher than support for authoritarian rule; support for the current political system is steadily increasing; and South Africans generally condemn unconventional forms of political behavior and the use of force to gain political goods. At the same time, however, support for authoritarianism has more than doubled; confidence in governmental institutions is decreasing; and South Africans' positive attitude toward law-abidingness is in decline. Possible explanations for these contradictory results are presented, as well as an assessment of the likelihood of a democratic political culture persisting in South Africa.

**Keywords:** Democratic community, democratic values, political culture, South Africa.

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South Africa's negotiated and relatively peaceful transition from apartheid rule to liberal democracy is widely regarded as a triumph and often hailed as a "miracle." However, while South Africa has made significant strides since transition, the structural condition of extreme economic inequality and poverty, the decline of the African National Congress (ANC) as the central integrating institution, a political elite seemingly driven by the material rewards of public office, and the weakening of key political institutions as a result of the blurring

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of party and state in everyday practices all contribute to a political culture dominated by political society. A fragmented ruling party, the reliance on and the appeal of state patronage, together with a historically marginalized majority call into question the achievement of a democratic political culture in South Africa.<sup>1</sup>

A democratic government, unlike an authoritarian regime, needs the support of its citizens to maintain its legitimacy. A stable and effective democracy does not depend on democratic institutions alone; rather, it requires a political culture that is conducive to democracy. In the same line of research on democracy, studies have concluded that political legitimacy is absolutely dependent on popular support. David Easton, in particular, contributed significantly to the study of support for democracy by distinguishing between models and levels of support for democracy. These models include diffuse and specific support, whereas the levels include the political community (a cultural entity), regime (principles, procedures, and formal institutions), and political authorities (officials occupying governmental positions).<sup>2</sup> This essay utilizes data from the last four waves of the World Values Survey (WVS) to map the characteristics of a democratic community in South Africa.

## The Paradigm and Content of Political Culture

In the most influential research in the field, Gabriel Abraham Almond and Sidney Verba define political culture as “specifically political orientations—attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system.”<sup>3</sup> Political culture is the collection of “attitudes, sentiments, and cognitions” that govern political behavior, representing “coherent patterns which fit together and are mutually reinforcing.”<sup>4</sup> Political culture serves various vital functions in society for the individual and the collective. At the individual level, political culture provides a basis for identification and highlights socially acceptable political viewpoints or norms. Political culture also creates an anchor for individuals in the political world and can be reinforced through shared meaning attached to political symbols.<sup>5</sup> At the collective level, political culture acts as a rule-setting function within

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<sup>1</sup> Thiven Reddy, “Decline, Social Mobilization and Political Society: Understanding South Africa's Evolving Political Culture,” *Politikon* 37, nos. 2-3 (2010): 185-206.

<sup>2</sup> David Easton, “A Re-assessment of the Concept of Political Support,” *British Journal of Political Science* 5, no. 4 (1975): 435-457.

<sup>3</sup> Gabriel Abraham Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Lucian Pye, *Communication and Political Development* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 78.

<sup>5</sup> Jaron B. Manheim, *The Politics Within: A Primer in Political Attitudes and Behavior* (New York: Longman Group, 1982), 51-54.

a political system and creates a framework for political action. This popular culture establishes the rules of the political game and provides guidelines within which political activity takes place. The more citizens are willing to support these shared political values or the dominant political culture, the greater the political legitimacy of the state.<sup>6</sup>

Five assumptions lie at the paradigmatic core of political culture.<sup>7</sup> First, all regimes require a political culture to maintain legitimacy. Second, political culture is derived from the shared values and attitudes of citizens within a given society. Third, political culture is dependent upon the successful transmission of political attitudes, beliefs, and patterns of behavior from one generation to the next. These value orientations often are deeply entrenched and difficult to change. Fourth, political culture must be viewed as a macrophenomenon, if it is believed to influence the persistence of a given type of regime. And fifth, political culture as a macrophenomenon is derived from the aggregation of the attitudes of individual citizens.

Almond and Verba highlight the contrast between participant and subject cultures, arguing that democratic outcomes are more likely where participatory norms are widespread and less likely where values take a predominantly passive or subject form. They describe political culture not only as providing the conditions necessary for change, but also as sustaining the product of that change, and maintain that political culture may or may not be congruent with the structure of the political system.<sup>8</sup> They further argue that, assuming different cultures fit different regimes, only a certain type of political culture—civic culture—is appropriate to democracy. A civic culture is a “participant political culture in which the political culture and political structure are congruent.”<sup>9</sup> By studying political culture, one can understand “the relation between the attitudes and motivations of the discrete individuals who make up political systems and the character and performance of political systems.”<sup>10</sup>

To study the content of political culture, Fuchs developed a hierarchical model of system culture in which he distinguished among three objects of a political system (values, structure, and process) and their attitudinal constructs.<sup>11</sup> Figure 1 illustrates this hierarchical model of system culture. The first level, political culture, relates primarily to citizens’ commitment to democratic values. A democratic community is characterized as one that embraces the fundamental principles of freedom, equality, and self-governance.<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 54-55.

<sup>7</sup> Dieter Fuchs, “The Political Culture Paradigm,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behaviour*, ed. Russell Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 163.

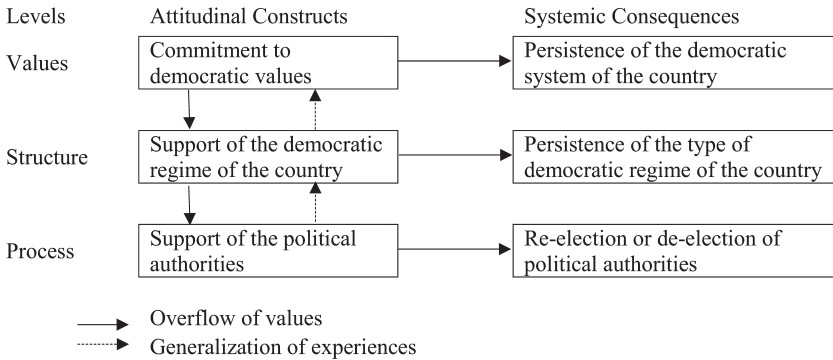
<sup>8</sup> Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*, 21.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>11</sup> Fuchs, “The Political Culture Paradigm,” 165-166.

Figure 1. Model of System Culture



Source: Dieter Fuchs, "The Political Culture Paradigm," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behaviour*, ed. Russell Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 166.

second level, political structure, relates to the democratic regime of a country and can be understood as "a selective implementation of the cultural values of a community for the action context of politics, and this system of government is also legitimated by recourse to these values."<sup>13</sup> A democratic community at the structural level is not as clearly identifiable as at the cultural level. This is because a democratic regime relies on its citizens' support for democracy as the preferred type of regime. However, although some citizens may support the idea of democracy, they can (simultaneously) express dissatisfaction with the way in which democracy functions in their country; these citizens are referenced as so-called "dissatisfied democrats."<sup>14</sup> Both possibilities are compatible within a democratic community. The third level, political process, relates to the "realisation of the collective goals of a community by the actors," and taps into the behavior of and subsequent support for various political actors within the democratic regime.<sup>15</sup> At this level, a democratic community is not characterized by consensus about political goals but rather by the "actual compliance with the procedural norms for taking action as laid down by the constitution, and which are intended to regulate everyday political

<sup>12</sup> Dieter Fuchs and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, "Eastward Enlargement of the European Union and the Identity of Europe," *West European Politics* 25, no. 2 (2002): 22.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Hans-Dieter Klingemann, "Mapping Political Support in the 1990s: A Global Analysis," in *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Government*, ed. Pippa Norris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 54.

<sup>15</sup> Fuchs and Klingemann, "Eastward Enlargement of the European Union and the Identity of Europe," 22.

conflicts.”<sup>16</sup>

Political culture is not, however, without its critics. Some argue that research concerning political culture is driven primarily by technique rather than by theory or data,<sup>17</sup> while others argue that, by presenting political culture as a concept and theory, this weakens its explanatory value and limits its analytical power.<sup>18</sup> Yet, despite these criticisms, the presumption that cultural differences drive significant elements of political and economic life has garnered wide academic support.

## **Political Culture Studies in South Africa**

There has been much research on political culture over the last five decades; however, studies of political culture in South Africa have been far more limited and have varied in their application of theory and method.

One of the first studies, by Robert Mattes and Hermann Thiel, focused on the idea of national legitimacy and contended that legitimation is necessary for democratic consolidation. They argued that structural conditions need to be “linked to democratic consolidation through purposeful actions and the attitudes that inform such actions,”<sup>19</sup> and stressed the commitment of both the elite and citizens to democratic processes as the “single direct determinant of the probability of democratic endurance.”<sup>20</sup> They used mass survey data to measure commitment to democracy, support for the “new” democratic system, as well as satisfaction with democracy and found that variation in the levels of unconditional commitment to democracy in South Africa was based on economic and political performance evaluations rather than on communal values, socialization, or level of education. The authors warned that the probability of democratic endurance is hampered when citizens equate commitment to democracy and the legitimacy of its institutions to performance, while also recognizing that formal political equality has little value when the basic needs of citizens, especially in unequal societies, are not met.<sup>21</sup>

Michael Bratton and Robert Mattes also used survey data to measure citizens’ attitudes toward democracy; however, they compared political attitudes in Ghana, Zambia, and South Africa within the first decade of their transition to democracy. In particular, the authors wanted to measure the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>17</sup> James Johnson, “Conceptual Problems as Obstacles to the Progress of Political Science: Four Decades of Political Culture Research,” *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 15, no. 1 (2003): 97.

<sup>18</sup> William M. Reisinger, “The Renaissance of a Rubric: Political Culture as Concept and Theory,” *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 7, no. 5 (1995): 329.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Mattes and Hermann Thiel, “Consolidation and Public Opinion in South Africa,” *Journal of Democracy* 9, no. 7 (1998): 96.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 108.

nature of support in new democracies to determine whether such support was intrinsic (based on political freedoms and equal rights “for better or worse”), or instrumental (conditional support based on what material goods democracy can deliver).<sup>22</sup> They divided regime performance into economic goods, which included economic assets, jobs, and basic social services, and political goods such as “peace, civil liberties, political rights, human dignity and equality before the law.”<sup>23</sup> They found that South Africans have a materialistic world view and hold socio-economic considerations central to their notion of democracy, although satisfaction with democracy was remarkably low. Furthermore, support for as well as satisfaction with democracy would be explained by citizens’ assessment of the performance of government in terms of delivering both economic and political goods. However, they concluded that the “general public in African countries think instrumentally. ... hence, a culture of democracy has had little chance to take root.”<sup>24</sup> From the perspective of political culture, new democracies in Africa remain “democracies at risk.”<sup>25</sup>

The study by Carlos Garcia-Rivero, Pierre du Toit, and Hennie Kotze also relied on survey data between 1994 and 1999 to measure political culture in South Africa; however, they did not use the same approach as previous studies. Instead of measuring the levels of commitment to democracy, they measured the indicators of political culture, namely political tolerance and institutional trust, most related to democratic consolidation.<sup>26</sup> They found that more South Africans were increasingly willing to extend political rights to their political opponents, while trust or confidence in the government had decreased. Similar to Bratton and Mattes, the authors found that occupational status, income, and education did not have a statistically significant effect on trust in the government; however, unlike Bratton and Mattes, they found that political goods, such as the recognition of human rights, were more important than any economic good when explaining institutional trust. They concluded that government performance must be improved in the political realm for a democratic political culture to persist.

More recent research on political culture in South Africa has adopted a qualitative approach. In his 2011 study, Xolela Mangcu examines the relationship between elections and political culture in a one-party-dominant state.<sup>27</sup> He argues that elections are essential for democratic accountability but

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Bratton and Robert Mattes, “Support for Democracy in Africa: Intrinsic or Instrumental?” *British Journal of Political Science* 31, no. 3 (2001): 448.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 473.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Carlos Garcia-Rivero, Pierre du Toit, and Hennie Kotze, “Political Culture and Democracy: The South African Case,” *Politikon* 29, no. 2 (2002): 170.

<sup>27</sup> Xolela Mangcu, “Elections and Political Culture: Issues and Trends,” *Journal of Public Administration* 46, no. 3.1 (2011): 1153-1168.

that political dominance can lead to an “unaccountable political culture.”<sup>28</sup> He also maintains that public philosophy, civic and political participation, and leadership are required to inculcate a democratic culture. The argument is that “elections are the procedural mechanism by which people choose government whereas the three elements provide the substantive foundations upon which a democratic system of governance must stand or fall.”<sup>29</sup> As an analytic tool, Mangcu measured public philosophy, civic and political participation, and leadership in the 2011 local government elections to gauge political culture in South Africa. The study concludes that, to enhance political participation, South Africa requires a new vision of local democracy that is based on a public philosophy of inclusive, reconciled, nonracial citizenship.

## **Empirical Analysis**

This study entails the application of the model of system culture developed by Fuchs<sup>30</sup> and advanced by Fuchs and Klingemann<sup>31</sup> to map, for the first time, the characteristics of a democratic community in South Africa. This research question, however, relates specifically to the persistence of democracy as the regime type in South Africa, where the dependent variables are the political attitudes and behavior of South African citizens since the transition to democracy.

### ***Data Sources***

This longitudinal descriptive analysis relies on data from the last four waves of the World Values Survey conducted in South Africa between 1995 and 2013. The WVS provides a valuable tool with which to analyze the values, beliefs, and motivations of ordinary citizens at the mass level over time. The increasingly prominent worldwide values research convincingly shows that changing value patterns have a strong effect on political, economic, and social developments within a country.

The WVS is conducted by means of face-to-face interviews in the respondents’ language of preference. Probability samples are drawn, with all adult citizens having an equal chance of being selected. The total sample size (N) was comprised of 2,899 respondents in 1995, 3,000 respondents in both 2001 and 2006, and 3,500 respondents in 2013. The samples also are stratified into homogenous subgroups defined by various demographic attributes. These include gender, race, province, and community size (rural and urban

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 1154.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Fuchs, “The Political Culture Paradigm,” 161-184.

<sup>31</sup> Fuchs and Klingemann, “Eastward Enlargement of the European Union and the Identity of Europe,” 19-54.

inhabitants). Since the samples are weighted to the full population and within a statistical margin of error of less than 2 percent at a 95 percent confidence level, they are representative of the adult population of South Africa.

***Characteristics of a Democratic Community***

Political Culture

In order to measure the level of political culture in South Africa, various types of political systems were described to respondents across all four WVS waves. The respondents then were asked whether each type was a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing the country. The types of political systems included:

- (a) A democratic political system;
- (b) A strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections; and
- (c) Army rule

South Africans’ commitment to democratic values was measured along two dimensions: support for democratic rule<sup>32</sup> (a), and support for authoritarian rule<sup>33</sup> (b + c). The expectation is that societies or communities with a democratic political culture should have high levels of support for democratic rule, while simultaneously rejecting authoritarian alternatives. Table 1 indicates the level of political culture in South African between 1995 and 2013.

Table 1. Level of Political Culture in South Africa, 1995-2013

Commitment to Democratic Values	1995	2001	2006	2013
Support for democratic rule	90.9	89.8	90.2	72.0
Support for authoritarian rule	19.6	16.6	27.3	46.8

On first glance at the data in table 1, one could argue that South Africa, indeed, has a democratic political culture, as in all waves under investigation support for democratic rule is greater than support for authoritarian rule. However, it is the longitudinal trends in commitment to democratic values that are cause for concern. In the period following the transition to democratic rule, support for democracy in South Africa was at its highest (90.9 percent).

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<sup>32</sup> The percentages in table 1 include the responses “very good” and “fairly good.”  
<sup>33</sup> Scores of the two items were added to form an index for support for authoritarian rule. The scale ran from 2 (low support for authoritarian rule) to 8 (high support for authoritarian rule). The percentages in table 1 include the proportion of respondents with scale values of 6 through 8.



Levels of support for democratic rule remained consistently high over the next decade at 89.8 percent and 90.2 percent in 2001 and 2006, respectively, which served as positive reinforcement for the new democratic regime. This, however, was followed by a decrease in support for democracy by almost 20 percent between 2006 and 2013, to reach its lowest level (72 percent) since the advent of democracy. This decrease in support for democratic rule also has been coupled with an increase in support for authoritarian alternatives.

Given the history of disenfranchisement and apartheid rule in South Africa, it is unsurprising that fewer than two in every ten South Africans indicated their support for authoritarianism in 1995 and 2001. Since then, there appears to have been a value shift; increasingly, more South Africans believe that various forms of authoritarian rule would be fairly good or very good ways of governing South Africa. Support for authoritarian rule increased by 10.7 percent between 2001 and 2006 and by a further 19.5 percent between 2006 and 2013, to reach its highest level (46.8 percent) in democratic South Africa. Not only has support for authoritarian rule more than doubled since the democratic transition but also the gap between support for democratic rule and authoritarian rule has narrowed (from 71.3 percent in 1995 to 25.2 percent in 2013), which does not bode well for the persistence of a democratic community in South Africa.

### Political Structure

Support for the democratic regime was measured along two dimensions. Regarding the first, South Africans in all four waves were asked to rate the current political system.<sup>34</sup> The second tapped into levels of institutional trust in political parties, the South African government, and parliament.<sup>35</sup> The expectation is that democratic societies or communities will demonstrate strong support for their democratic regime and have relatively high levels of confidence in the state machinery. Table 2 presents the changing levels of support for the current political system and confidence in governmental institutions, respectively, between 1995 and 2013.

Overall, support for the (democratic) political system in South Africa has increased by 12.1 percent, despite a few fluctuations in the four waves under investigation. While the levels of support for democratic rule were high in

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<sup>34</sup> Respondents were asked to rate on a ten-point scale—from 1, very bad, to 10, very good—the current political system. Table 2 includes the proportion of responses between scale values 6 and 10.

<sup>35</sup> Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or no confidence at all in the following institutions: political parties, the South African government, and parliament. Scores of the three items were added to form the index for confidence in governmental institutions. The scale ran from 3 (low confidence) to 12 (high confidence). The percentages in table 2 include the proportion of respondents with scale values of 8 through 12.

Table 2. Level of Political Structure in South Africa, 1995–2013

Support for the Democratic Regime	1995	2001	2006	2013
Support for the current political system	53.2	48.6	69.7	65.3
Confidence in governmental institutions	64.0	57.8	61.9	43.2

1995 (see table 1), South Africans' evaluations of the political system at the time were more modest (53.2 percent). Support for the current (democratic) political system dropped below 50 percent only once (to 48.6 percent in 2001) and was at its highest (69.7 percent) in 2006. In the latest wave, support remained quite stable at 65.3 percent, despite a slight decrease from 2006. It should be pointed out there are no set benchmarks against which to measure the various levels of political structure; however, we can assume that the minimum levels of support or confidence required would be 50 percent and that these levels should increase or remain consistent over time if the levels are high. If we are to apply these guidelines to support for the current political system in South Africa, we can ascertain that the support for the democratic regime is conducive to the persistence of a democratic community.

If we apply these same guidelines to South Africans' confidence in governmental institutions, however, the results paint a different picture. Confidence in various governmental institutions, such as political parties, parliament, and the South African government, decreased by more than 20 percent between 1995 and 2013. As with support for the current political system, confidence in state institutions fluctuated over the four waves and dropped below 50 percent only once (to 43.2 percent in 2013). Unlike support for the democratic political system, the longitudinal trend regarding confidence is one of decline, which could hamper the political structure and the persistence of a democratic community in South Africa should this negative trend continue.

### Political Process

To measure support for the political process and political authorities, the attitudes and behavior of respondents toward the illegitimacy of violence and law-abidingness are analyzed. The illegitimacy of violence is operationalized as the opposition to various forms of unconventional protest behavior, which includes boycotts, unofficial strikes, the occupation of buildings,<sup>36</sup> and the

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<sup>36</sup> Respondents were asked to indicate whether they have taken part, might take part, or would never take part in the following forms of political action: boycotts, strikes, or the occupation of buildings or factories. Scores of the three items were added together to create the index of unconventional protest behavior. The scale ran from 3 (would never participate) to 9 (have taken part). The percentages in table 3 include the proportion of respondents with scale values of 3 through 5.

use of force for political goals.<sup>37</sup> Law-abidingness is operationalized as the support for various legal norms, such as paying one's taxes, paying one's fares on public transport, and not claiming government benefits to which one is not entitled.<sup>38</sup> The expectation is that citizens in democratic societies and communities will demonstrate law-abiding values and reject the use of violence or force in political discourse. Table 3 illustrates the levels of political process and support for the political authorities in South Africa between 1995 and 2013.

Table 3. Level of Political Process in South Africa, 1995–2013

Support for the Political Authorities	1995	2001	2006	2013
Illegitimacy of violence: Unconventional protest behavior	83.2	75.7	87.0	75.4
Illegitimacy of violence: Use of force for public goods	80.9	Not asked	Not asked	73.8
Law-abidingness	76.0	68.3	72.4	44.9

The majority of South Africans condemn the use of violence in the political sphere. A minimum of three quarters of South Africans across the four waves indicated that they would never partake in any of the forms of unconventional protest action. Similarly, 73.8 percent of South Africans in 2013 believed that the use of violence to pursue political goals never could be justified, despite a 7.1 percent decrease from 1995. It would appear that, when it comes to the illegitimacy of violence, South Africans prefer to abstain from unconventional forms of political behavior and the use of force, which is indicative of a democratic community. Although the trend in the illegitimacy of violent measures is one of decline, it should be noted that the decline is slow and starts from a relatively high base and that levels in 2013 remained fairly high.

The decline in law-abidingness, however, has been more rapid and drastic. For the first three WVS waves following South Africa's democratic transition, the majority of South Africans supported law-abiding norms. This support was highest in 1995 at 76 percent, before dropping slightly to 68.3 percent in 2001, and increasing to 72.4 percent in 2006. The period between 2006 and 2013 saw

<sup>37</sup> Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree that using violence to pursue political goals is never justified. Table 3 includes the proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed.

<sup>38</sup> Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which various items are never justifiable (1) or always justifiable (10). These items included: claiming government benefits to which one is not entitled, avoiding a fare on public transport, and cheating on taxes if one has the chance. Scores of the three items were added to form an index of law-abidingness. The scale ran from 3 (low level of law-abidingness) to 30 (high level of law-abidingness). The percentages in table 3 include the proportion of respondents with scale values of 24 through 30.

a 27.5 percent decrease in support for various social and legal norms, dropping to its lowest level of 44.9 percent. Regarding the level of political structure, there is no set benchmark for law-abidingness; however, one can assume that if fewer than half of South African citizens support the idea of abiding by various laws, it will negatively affect the political process.

### ***Discussion***

The longitudinal data on the various characteristics of a democratic community in South Africa represent mixed results. On the one hand, support for democratic rule is fairly high, despite a sharp decline between 2006 and 2013, and higher than support for authoritarian rule; support for the current political system is steadily increasing. Further, South Africans generally condemn unconventional forms of political behavior and the use of force to gain political goods. On the other hand, support for authoritarianism has more than doubled since 1995 and is nearing the 50 percent threshold; confidence in governmental institutions is decreasing and, in 2013, dropped below 50 percent for the first time since transition. This same pattern applies to South Africans' attitudes toward law-abidingness. What are the possible explanations for the contradictory results, and to what extent could they impede the development of a democratic community in South Africa?

At the cultural level, one could argue that commitment to democracy has not become fully entrenched in the value system of South Africans as a result of the socio-economic reality of their majority. Despite the growth of the black middle class since 1994,<sup>39</sup> poverty, unemployment, and inequality are arguably some of the biggest challenges to the South African government. Poverty has many dimensions beyond income, and any calculation of poverty must include the number of people who fall below a given poverty line. The South African government's failure to adopt a single official poverty line complicates the measurement of poverty in South Africa.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, the book, *South Africa Survey 2016*, includes a measure for relative poverty in South Africa, which is adjusted year-on-year according to the cost of living, and depends on the number of people living in a given household. According to this measure, 35.9 percent of South Africans live in relative poverty.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, data from the latest Quarterly Labour Force Survey, conducted by Statistics South Africa,

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<sup>39</sup> Ronelle Burger, Cindy Lee Steenekamp, Servaas van der Berg, and Asmus Zoch, "The Emergent Middle Class in Contemporary South Africa: Examining and Comparing Rival Approaches," *Development Southern Africa* 32, no. 1 (2015): 25-40, and Carlos Garcia Rivero, Pierre du Toit, and Hennie Kotze, "Tracking the Development of the Middle Class in Democratic South Africa," *Politeia* 22, no. 3 (2003): 6-29.

<sup>40</sup> According to the National Planning Commission in the Presidency, the South African government uses U.S. \$2 a day or R524 a month per person (in 2008 prices) as an unofficial guide.

<sup>41</sup> Gerbrandt van Heerden, "Assets and Incomes," in *South Africa Survey 2016*, ed. John Kane-Bergman (Johannesburg: South African Institute for Race Relations, 2016), 339.

indicates that, in 2015,<sup>42</sup> 34.9 percent of South Africans were unemployed when applying the wide (unofficial) definition of employment, while a quarter (25 percent) of South Africans were employed by the narrow (official) definition.<sup>43</sup> South Africa also remains one of the most unequal societies in the world. According to the World Bank<sup>44</sup> and *South Africa Survey 2016*,<sup>45</sup> South Africa's Gini coefficient<sup>46</sup> has ranged between 0.64 and 0.70 since 1996 and is among the worst in the world. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that when a list of characteristics desirable to a democracy was provided to respondents in the last two waves of the WVS, they prioritized economic and substantive goods over political and procedural ones. Table 4 ranks the essential characteristics of democracy as identified by respondents in the 2006 and 2013 surveys.

In both the 2006 and 2013 waves, South Africans prioritized equal opportunity in education as the most essential characteristic of democracy. This was followed in the 2006 survey by basic necessities such as shelter, food, and water provided for everyone, which dropped to fourth place in 2013. Jobs for everyone was the second most essential characteristic of a democracy in 2013. Equality of the vote was identified as the third most essential characteristic of a democracy in 2006 and 2013 and is the most important political good or democratic value on the list. These findings support those of Bratton and Mattes, who found that the vast majority (91.3 percent) of South Africans equate democracy with what it can deliver, such as “equal access to housing, jobs and a decent income.”<sup>47</sup> Although the majority of South Africans in their study also identified regular elections (67.7 percent) and at least two strong parties (59.4 percent) as essential characteristics of democracy, they were not ranked as highly as some of the economic goods.<sup>48</sup> Thus, despite the government's emphasis on “pro-poor” policies and constitutional provisions for housing, health care, water, and education for the poor, Anthea Jeffery

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<sup>42</sup> Tamara Dimant, “Employment,” in *South Africa Survey 2016*, ed. John Kane-Berman (Johannesburg: South African Institute for Race Relations, 2016), 217.

<sup>43</sup> In the survey reference of the Quarterly Labour Force Survey, the official (or narrow) definition of unemployment refers to those who have not worked; have actively looked for work or tried to start a business in the four weeks prior to the reference week of the survey; were available for work in the reference week of the survey; or had not actively looked for work in the four weeks prior to the survey, but were starting at a definite date in the future. The wide definition of unemployment includes discouraged work seekers.

<sup>44</sup> The World Bank online, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/southafrica/overview> (accessed December 22, 2016).

<sup>45</sup> Van Heerden, “Assets and Income,” 313.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. The Gini coefficient measures the levels of income (in)equality within a society. It assigns a “measure to distribution of total personal income between 0, which is perfect equality (everyone has the same income) and 1, which is perfect inequality (one person has all the income).”

<sup>47</sup> Bratton and Mattes, “Support for Democracy in Africa,” 454.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Table 4. Democratic Values in South Africa, 2006 and 2013

Essential Characteristics of Democracy	2006	2013
Equal opportunity in education	1	1
Jobs for everyone	4	2
Equality of the vote in elections	3	3
Basic necessities such as shelter, food, and water for everyone	2	4
Women have the same rights as men	8	5
Complete freedom for anyone to criticize government	14	6
People choose their leaders in free elections	5	7
Elected officials try to do what people want	6	8
The individual human right to dignity is upheld	13	9
Criminals are severely punished	9	10
Majority rule	10	11
Prosperous economy	7	12
Civil rights protect people from state oppression	12	13
People receive state aid for unemployment	11	14
Government taxes the rich and subsidizes the poor	15	15
The army takes over when government is incompetent	16	16

questions whether these interventions have helped to liberate the poorest and most marginalized in South Africa and whether they have resulted in increasing citizens' dependency on the state.<sup>49</sup> The failure to deliver these economic goods could result in South Africans' loss of faith in democracy. In new or young democracies, citizens are more likely to evaluate democracy based on its performance because they have rather limited experience with democracy and no reservoir of democratic values from which to draw, as is the case for citizens in more established democracies. This opens the door for populist leaders, such as Julius Malema of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), who are willing to trade certain political liberties for more economic freedoms, a sentiment that is growing among South Africans as shown by their increasing support for authoritarian forms of government (see table 1).

At the structural level, the changing nature of party politics, especially within the ruling ANC, and rampant political corruption likely are responsible for South Africans' loss of confidence in the state. Since the first democratically held elections in 1994, the ANC has enjoyed the status of a dominant party in South Africa, carrying more than 60 percent of the vote in every national

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<sup>49</sup> Anthea Jeffery, *Chasing the Rainbow: South Africa's Move from Mandela to Zuma* (Cape Town: South African Institute of Race Relations, 2010), 310.

election to date. The defeat of Thabo Mbeki by Jacob Zuma during the ANC Polokwane Conference in December 2007 was the first sign of dissent within the ruling party, with Mbeki eventually resigning as president in September 2008.<sup>50</sup> While Mbeki supported pro-capitalist policies, Zuma pursued a “pro-poor” and working-class agenda, which was widely welcomed by ANC supporters and has been key to the ANC’s preservation of power.<sup>51</sup> On the one hand, a high proportion of the electorate supports the ANC in the hope that it will benefit from government resources (adequate service delivery, housing, access to education, and social welfare); on the other hand, there has been no serious alternative to the ANC. The emergence in 2013 of the EFF under the leadership of former African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) president, Julius Malema, has shaken up the traditional ANC support base. The EFF, which defines itself as a “radical and militant economic emancipation movement,”<sup>52</sup> has been aggressively outspoken about the ruling party and President Jacob Zuma, in particular, and managed to win a 6.35 percent share of the national vote in the 2014 election.<sup>53</sup> Its support base is predominantly black youth and the unemployed. Other political parties, such as the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the pro-Mbeki Congress of the People (COPE) are considered marginal, while the official opposition, the Democratic Alliance, is regarded by the black majority as unsympathetic, despite the appointment of the party’s first black leader, Mmusi Maimane, in 2015 and its good track record of service delivery.

In addition to party politics and political infighting, corruption scandals have littered the political landscape in recent years, most of which center around President Jacob Zuma. These include, but are not limited to, the expenditure of more than R240 million of taxpayer money on upgrades to the president’s private residence, *Nkandla*; the dismissal of Nhlanhla Nene as Finance Minister in 2015 after Nene turned down a proposal from the South African Airways (SAA) board to restructure a reflecting transaction with Airbus;<sup>54</sup> the inappropriate relationship between the president (and Zuma family) and the Gupta family, which was documented in the State of Capture report by former public protector, Thuli Madonsela; the appointment of Zuma as the chairperson of a coordinating committee that will oversee South Africa’s state-owned

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<sup>50</sup> Peter Alexander, “Rebellion of the Poor: South Africa’s Service Delivery Protests—a Preliminary Analysis,” *Review of Africa Political Economy* 37, no. 123 (2010): 33.

<sup>51</sup> Claire Ceruti, “African National Congress Change in Leadership: What Really Won It for Zuma?” *Review of African Political Economy* 35, no. 115 (2008): 112.

<sup>52</sup> “About Us,” Economic Freedom Fighters, <http://www.effonline.org/about-us> (accessed December 22, 2016).

<sup>53</sup> “2014 National and Provisional Elections: National Results,” Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa, <http://www.elections.org.za/content/Elections/Results/2014-National-and-Provincial-Elections--National-results/> (accessed December 22, 2016).

<sup>54</sup> The SAA chair, Dudu Myeni, is a close ally of President Zuma and serves as the chairperson of his educational trust.

enterprises, a move which is tantamount to state capture; and, most recently, a cabinet reshuffle which resulted in the dismissal of another finance minister, Pravin Gordham, and his deputy, Mcebisi Jonas, who were widely regarded as safeguards within the treasury to stave off political corruption. This latest move by Zuma, despite concerns within his own party, has been described by opposition parties as an act of complete state capture. South African parastatals also are in crisis. The SAA board reported a loss of R4.5 billion for 2016–2017, a figure significantly higher than the R1.7 billion estimated in September 2016.<sup>55</sup> SAA, however, is only one of South Africa’s parastatals marred by debt and mismanagement. The public utility, Eskom, has been unable to provide a stable power supply, and the deepening of the electricity crisis has muted economic recovery and growth. The state-owned broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), is in total disarray and on the verge of financial collapse in the wake of the appointment of Hlaudi Motsoeneng as Chief Operations Officer, deemed “irrational and unlawful” by a Western Cape High Court that dismissed the SABC’s application to keep Motsoeneng employed.<sup>56</sup>

Against such background, it is hardly surprising that South Africans reported a loss of confidence in political parties and in the president, to reach the lowest values in 2013 of 38.1 percent and 43.6 percent, respectively, since transition (see table 5). This decline in confidence likely will have an impact on the persistence of a democratic community in South Africa.

Table 5. Confidence in Political Actors in South Africa, 1995–2013

Political Actors	1995	2001	2006	2013
Political parties	46.9	44.2	43.8	38.1
President	Not asked	60.4	74.8	43.6

At the process level, support for political authorities has been adversely affected by the increase in unconventional political behavior (i.e., protest action, in response to poor service delivery). The democratic transition was accompanied by the restructuring of relationships among the state, the economy, and society. Numerous expectations were raised during this process, as the developmental needs of the population were in urgent need of attention. These

<sup>55</sup> “Things Get Worse for SAA as Losses Climb R1 Billion Higher in Just 10 Days,” *Business Tech* (March 27, 2017), <https://businesstech.co.za/news/finance/166421/things-get-worse-for-saa-as-losses-climb-r1-billion-higher-in-just-10-days/> (accessed March 29, 2017).

<sup>56</sup> Genevieve Quintal and Bekezela Phakathi, “SABC Loses Another Court Bid to Keep Hlaudi Motsoeneng Employed,” *Times Live* (February 7, 2017), <http://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2017/02/07/SABC-loses-another-court-bid-to-keep-Hlaudi-Motsoeneng-employed1> (accessed March 29, 2017).



expectations were based on the normative assumption that the government should strive to meet the needs and wants of the population. Despite the provision of basic infrastructure and social welfare, the majority of South Africans are yet to substantially improve their living standards. At the same time, the ANC has continued to dominate at the election polls. To demonstrate their frustration, on the one hand, it appears that South Africans have resorted to unconventional methods in order to influence political decisions, while, on the other hand, others have withdrawn from electoral politics altogether.

Historically, protest action and contentious political behavior have stemmed from citizens' feelings of frustration and deprivation.<sup>57</sup> In South Africa, protest action is heavily concentrated among those who are socially and economically disadvantaged and mostly takes place in informal settlements and underdeveloped areas. However, it is not only the prevalence of protest action that is cause for concern but also the number of incidents of violent protest that has surged. The cases of violent unrest increased from 1,226 in the 2011–2012 reporting year to 3,542 in 2015–2016.<sup>58</sup> The number of peaceful protests also increased from 10,832 to 11,151 over the same period.<sup>59</sup> Some of the key triggers that determine the escalation or de-escalation of protest action in South Africa include: failed infrastructure and services, the media's interest in the issues, police action and response, the low level of access to resources, trust and distrust of official authorities, highly motivated individuals, and officials' response to the violence.<sup>60</sup> There also were reported incidents of violent protests related to political matters, such as the mayoral and councilor nominees before the start of local government elections in 2016.<sup>61</sup> These levels of discontent and civil disobedience run the risk of becoming the dominant political resource used by citizens to mobilize public opinion and influence policy makers. And while protest action is regarded as a positive development in democracies, it has a negative effect on the persistence of a democratic community and culture once it becomes violent.

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<sup>57</sup> Russell J. Dalton, *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2008), 52.

<sup>58</sup> Nomahlubi Jordaan, "Violent Protests Surge by 188% in Five Years, Crime Statistics Show," *Times Live* (September 5, 2016), <http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/article1785765.ece> (accessed March 29, 2017).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Lizette Lancaster, "At the Heart of Discontent: Measuring Public Violence in South Africa," Institute for Security Studies Paper 292 (May 2016), <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/Paper292.pdf> (accessed December 22, 2016).

<sup>61</sup> Mashupye Herbert Maserumule, "What Rising Protests in South Africa Say about Attitudes towards Local Government," *The Conversation* (June 21, 2016), <https://theconversation.com/what-rising-protests-in-south-africa-say-about-attitudes-towards-local-government-61109> (accessed December 22, 2016).

## Conclusion

Political culture is not static; the feedback loop is natural and continuous. The behavior of citizens is influenced by the operations of government, and the attitudes and responses of government are influenced by the shifting values, orientations, and approaches of citizens.

The data presented in this essay provide the first longitudinal mapping of the characteristics of a democratic community in South Africa. At first glance, the findings seem to suggest that South Africa has successfully embodied a democratic political culture. Support for democracy and the current political system is fairly high, which is to be expected as we assume that citizens will provide at least tentative support in new or young democracies because they promise change from failed authoritarian systems. However, upon closer analysis of the cultural, structural, and process levels, it is evident that the inability of the state to meet the expectations of its citizens and the performance-driven evaluations of the government have given rise to populist sentiments. Fractured party politics and widespread corruption have been detrimental to the legitimacy of political institutions since democratization, resulting in a decline in confidence in South Africa's government. The reliance on (often violent) protest action as a political resource rather than on the electoral system is indicative of a political culture in which the political elites are regarded as being out of touch with their constituents and nonresponsive to their needs.

The essay's findings are highly problematic regarding the persistence of a democratic community in South Africa, as Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk argue that democracies run the risk of deconsolidating when "a sizable minority of citizens loses its belief in democratic values, becomes attracted to authoritarian alternatives, and starts voting for 'anti-system' parties, candidates, or movements that flout or oppose constitutive elements of liberal democracy."<sup>62</sup> Much the same as Bratton and Mattes concluded in 2001, South Africa remains a democracy at risk from the perspective of political culture.

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<sup>62</sup> Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, "The Signs of Deconsolidation," *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 1 (2017): 9.