

The End of Apartheid: Rethinking South Africa's 'Peaceful' Transition

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Abstract. This paper investigates what made South Africa's negotiated transition to majority rule politically possible—that is, how the leaders of the National Party and of the ANC garnered support for their shifts in policy in 1989-90 from violent confrontation to negotiated compromise. Among whites, key factors included the decline in fears of the global Communist threat, the collapse of the racist symbolic politics that had propelled apartheid policy, trust for F.W. de Klerk, and clever framing of the National Party's message in a 1992 referendum campaign. Among blacks, negotiations were easily accepted by a public opinion that was notably more moderate than were ANC leaders, including Nelson Mandela, and that also had a substantial amount of trust in de Klerk. However, both de Klerk and Mandela failed to get all of their followers to accept restraint; the result was a civil war that killed over 10,000 people while the negotiations were underway.

The lasting popular image of South Africa's transition from apartheid is of a "miracle" (Waldmeir 1997) that enabled the country to achieve a peaceful shift to democracy under the benign leadership of Nelson Mandela. In the years that followed, journalists and scholars beat a path to South Africa's doors in search of the secrets of its miraculous peace. Their premises, however, were wrong: the transition was not peaceful; the leadership that mattered was more that of President F.W. de Klerk than of Nelson Mandela, whose influence was not entirely benign; and even the assessment that the result was a democracy is looking increasingly threadbare.

First, the fighting. Depending on how one counts, South Africa experienced either one or two civil wars during the decade of transition from about 1985-1995, resulting in the deaths of approximately 20,000 people. The first war, or phase of the war, was the 1985-86 uprising in the black townships inspired by the African National Congress (ANC) and its United Democratic Front (UDF) allies, along with a simultaneous terrorist campaign by the ANC's armed branch, Umkhonto we Sizwe. This uprising resulted in the deaths of between 2,000 and 3,000 people—most famously the hundreds who were "necklaced," or burnt to death with a flaming tire around their necks, by pro-ANC township youths. It ended not due to diplomacy but to a government state of emergency that crushed the uprising, cutting the death rate from political violence in half in 1987 compared to 1986. This was a civil war by any reasonable definition.

The next stage of the fighting was worse, pitting ANC and UDF supporters against Zulu supporters of the Inkatha movement, and also against other black opposition groups, in fighting that killed between 10,000 and 20,000 people between about 1988 and 1995. If this was not a civil war, or a portion of one, it is only because the usual definitions of a civil war require that the government be one of the main participants, which was not true in this case. It was a war primarily of mutual massacres and assassinations, though there were a few small pitched battles; and it was very much a war for control over territory. It subsided around 1995—about a year after Mandela's election as President—after a partial ANC victory, with the ANC ending up in control of the area around Johannesburg and Pretoria, while Inkatha retained predominant power in most of its base region of KwaZulu-Natal.

Not only was South Africa's transition not peaceful, then, but the famous negotiations of the early 1990s between the ANC and the apartheid government were not responsible for ending either of the two main rounds of the fighting. What the negotiations did was to end the lingering violence between agents of the government and of the ANC by allowing free elections which everyone understood the ANC would win. The main hero of the negotiation process was F.W. de Klerk, who courageously passed the point of no return early in his presidency by unbanning the ANC and other opposition groups, and who managed to keep his reformist government on the path to a negotiated settlement in the face of fierce opposition by hard-line opponents. Mandela's role in calming white fears of black rule was important, both before and after 1994, but his commitment to peace was equivocal at best. The main objective of the ANC and Mandela throughout the transition process was not to achieve peace, but ANC political domination, which they considered identical to "democracy". They achieved this goal by defeating Inkatha (and other groups such as the Pan-Africanist Congress) in combat while

blaming de Klerk for the violence, thereby undercutting de Klerk's negotiating leverage and forcing him to accept an agreement closer to their bottom line than to his.

None of these facts diminish the importance or the moral value of South Africa's negotiated settlement. They do, however, change the questions we need to ask about it. In this paper, I focus on one: what explains the decision of both parties to the mid-1980s war to end their political conflict through a negotiated settlement that would lead to black rule? My argument is that symbolic politics theory offers a wide-ranging explanation of what happened. Apartheid existed in the first place, I note, because of racist narratives of Afrikaner identity that fostered extreme racial prejudice, a strong perception of a "black threat," and a resulting symbolic politics of white domination. The uprising of the 1980s came because Afrikaner symbolic predispositions were changing, leading then-President P.W. Botha to experiment with efforts to create a "reform apartheid"; these reforms opened up the opportunity for nonwhite supporters of the ANC to form the UDF and mobilize in opposition. The South African state retained the armed might to slam shut the window of opportunity for organized violence, which it did by imposing a state of emergency in 1986, but the experience proved to most white South Africans that apartheid had hit a dead end.

The result of these events was that symbolic predispositions in favor of apartheid eroded further, aided by rising economic troubles at home and growing isolation internationally, which hit hard at Afrikaners' identity as part of the white West. At the same time they came to recognize that apartheid had failed, whites' perception of the threat from the ANC was also diminishing: Botha had identified the ANC threat with Communism, and the fall of the Berlin Wall eliminated the threat of global Communism. The way was therefore open on the government side for de Klerk's famous "great leap" into negotiations. De Klerk succeeded in large part because of the credibility of his leadership: he had the credentials to persuade his white supporters that he would protect their interests. White voters supported him in a 1992 referendum on the negotiating process because de Klerk's National Party cleverly reframed the threat, persuading voters that the greater danger lay in breaking off talks, not in continuing them.

The ANC, for its part, had nothing to lose from joining the talks. ANC narratives had always focused on the injustice of apartheid, favoring a strategy of peaceful mass protest; "armed struggle," they claimed, was a last resort. The environment of the 1990s was therefore congenial: the newly legalized ANC could return to its strategy of mass mobilization (involving limited violence) and international pressure, while quietly continuing its efforts at clandestine organizing and the use of force against black opponents. The final agreement achieved the ANC objective of majority rule, with the temporary concession of a transitional period of power-sharing.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. I begin with a summary of the symbolic politics theory that I apply to the case. Next comes a brief survey of South Africa's complex ethnography and its contentious history. I then outline the setting for transformation, focusing on the key identity narratives on the side of the white regime and of the ANC, and the resulting prejudices and other symbolic predispositions among blacks and whites. This section concludes with a brief description of the workings of symbolic politics in the apartheid era, and an analysis of the opportunity structure that confronted the ANC and the regime as the time of de Klerk's

succession to the presidency. The following section explores the symbolic politics of accommodation among whites, exploring white hopes, fears and attitudes; de Klerk's leadership and elite politics; and the nature of regime rhetoric to explain white support for de Klerk's policy, especially in the 1992 referendum on his negotiation policy. The final main section explains the symbolic politics of resistance among blacks, explaining support for the ANC in terms of black hopes, fears, and attitudes; ANC rhetoric; and the leadership and policies of Mandela and his rivals.

A Symbolic Theory of Politics

My basic premise is that the best way to understand politics is to focus on people's biases, or "symbolic predispositions". All political preferences are strongly influenced by these symbolic predispositions, which are defined as enduring inclinations to react emotionally to certain political stimuli (Sears et al. 1986). For example, predispositions like racial prejudice, ethnocentrism, political ideology and partisan identification have long been known to be very powerful influencing public opinion and voting behavior (Sears and Citrin 1982; Sears et al. 1986; Kinder 1994; Abelson 1982). Feelings about specific political figures and specific issues can also become symbolic predispositions that strongly influence political behavior (Westen 2007). Inclinations to seek material gain or security also generate powerful symbolic predispositions, as do desires for status and a secure identity. The complication is that the ways people define and pursue their "rational" interests are deeply influenced by their other symbolic predispositions, such as ideological and racial biases. All political behavior can in principle be understood in terms of how the interplay of symbolic predispositions influences what people do.

These symbolic predispositions come from different sources. Universal predispositions toward security, material gain, status and identity are innate and probably best explained by evolutionary psychology (Haidt 2012). Some variable predispositions also seem to be genetically linked: for example, people who are more reactive to threat are more likely to be politically conservative, ethnocentric and hawkish on defense issues than others. Variation in this predisposition has been measured physiologically and shown to be influenced by genetics (Hatemi et al. n.d.; Oxley et al. 2008). Other symbolic predispositions, however, are the result of socialization, as Sears (Sears et al. 1986) assumes: prejudice toward particular outgroups, many aspects of ideology, partisanship, and attitudes toward particular issues or politicians can result only from learning about those stimuli. Thus, as constructivists would point out, people's symbolic predispositions at any time are in large part the result of the influence of ideas, norms and narratives that they were exposed to in the past. Thus prejudice—symbolic predispositions about racial, ethnic or other outgroups—is largely the result of exposure to the narratives defining people's own group identity.

The assumption of symbolic politics theory (Kaufman 2001) is that in their political behavior, people respond emotionally to political stimuli in accordance with their symbolic predispositions. Even when the issue is a "rational" objective such as material gain, people's reactions are influenced—biased—by their emotional predispositions, both the universal sort (e.g., the preference for a "bird in the hand" over larger future gains) and the variable sort (e.g.,

liberals and conservatives will weigh the benefits of identically-sized tax cuts differently). Politics, then—and especially political campaigns—are largely exercises in appealing to people’s emotional predispositions and in manipulating those predispositions (e.g., by trying to create positive images of oneself and negative images of one’s opponent).

The Politics of Protection. How does this explain the difference between ethnic peace and ethnic war, and the texture of politics in each case? Prospect theory provides a useful starting point. In a series of experiments, Kahneman and Tversky (1979) showed that people are more willing to take risks to avoid losses than they are to pursue gains. One effect of this tendency is that, when issues are framed in terms of preserving life, people are cautious; but when they are understood in terms of avoiding death, people are more willing to accept risk (Levy 1992, p. 176). A separate set of studies on “terror management theory” has shown that in the context of threats of death, people tend to become more ethnocentric, nationalistic, and physically aggressive toward those who differ (Greenberg et al. 1990; Cuillier et al. 2010; Cohen et al. 2005; Pyzszcynski et al. 1997). The logical deduction is that the symbolic politics of war is driven by threat: the more people perceive a physical threat, the more likely they are to support violent and risky policies to address that threat, and the greater is the likelihood of war. If the perceived threat is from an internal ethnic or racial group, then the war in question will be an ethnic civil war. Either way, the pattern of politics is what I term the “politics of protection”.

When people perceive threat is, of course, a complicated question. I suggest two categories of cases: obvious threats and ambiguous threats. Obvious threats are cases in which threat perception is not dependent on individual symbolic predispositions; there is a consensus that the threat exists. Situations in which war is declared or open hostilities have begun—most dramatically in cases such as Pearl Harbor or 9/11—are the clearest examples here. Ambiguous threats are those in which threat perception is dependent on individual (or group) symbolic predispositions. Individuals are more likely to perceive threats from groups that are the subject of negative stereotypes than those that are not (Riek et al. 2006). For example, conservatives, Republicans and the ethnocentric generally perceived Saddam Hussein as a major threat to the U.S. in 2002; liberals and Democrats generally perceived less of a threat.

War is relatively likely in the context of either sort of threat—either obvious threat, or ambiguous threats that resonate with widespread symbolic predispositions in the relevant population. Ethnic civil war, then, is relatively likely either in the presence of an obvious ethnic threat (such as the initiation of armed violence) or an ambiguous threat coupled either with widespread ethnocentrism or with prejudice against the targeted ethnic group. Also necessary for ethnic war to occur is an opportunity structure that favors or at least permits violent mobilization: successful repression, lack of resources or leadership for would-be rebels, or lack of a territorial base can all prevent violent mobilization; while opportunities for peaceful redress of grievances undercut the incentive for it.

The presence of threat, in any case, leads to a politics of fear, because threat and fear are the most powerful political motivators. The question of responding to the threat comes to dominate the political agenda. Conservative or hawkish leaders frame the issue in terms of threat and loss (“we must act to avoid being harmed”), harnessing the effects identified by terror management theory to drive followers’ political preferences to the right. Dovish leaders have no

effective response if the threat frame is credible because the presence of physical threat overshadows other issues.

The Politics of Redistribution. Even if there is no physical threat, the logic of prospect theory still applies if other issues can be framed as either a symbolic threat to status, identity or values; or as a threat to material interests. All of these sorts of threats cause prejudice to increase (Riek et al. 2006; Stephan and Renfro 2002); and prejudice, in turn, strongly predicts discriminatory behavior (Duckitt 2003). The effect is clearest in ethnic politics (I define race as simply one kind of ethnic difference). When any issue is framed in ingroup-outgroup terms—that is, when group identity becomes more salient—people are more likely to think in terms of group stereotypes, and people who identify strongly with their group are more likely to act in xenophobic ways (Brown 2010, pp. 29, 161). Making group identity salient also increases the tendency for people to discriminate in favor of their own group—which, in a world of finite resources, typically means discriminating against other groups (Brewer 1999).

In the terminology of sociological mobilization theory (Goffman 1974; Gamson 1992), defining an issue in terms of a threat to group interests, values or identity works as an “injustice” frame. The claim, for example, is that “they” are (unjustly) taking “our” jobs. To use a more concrete example, the politics of symbolic racism in the U.S. merges affective anti-black prejudice with the claim that “they” are promoting policies that undermine the values of justice that “we” hold dear—specifically, in demanding social welfare support, “they” are subverting the values of hard work, thrift and self-reliance (Sears and Citrin 1982). These injustice frames lead to a more moderate level of mobilization: not the violent mobilization associated with civil war, but the generally nonviolent mobilization of social movements, such as the 1970s California “tax revolt” Sears and Citrin (1982) examined. More recent examples in the U.S. include both the Tea Party and the Occupy Wall Street movements. These sorts of movements can lead to violence if police or other security forces initiate it; otherwise, they tend to generate the contentious but relatively nonviolent politics of redistribution—politics understood as taking from one group to give to another (inspired by Zimmerman 1973).

Several conditions have to be met, however, for such a frame to resonate with potential supporters and result in social mobilization. Besides being salient and consonant with existing values, the frame needs to be credible (Benford and Snow 2000). For example, frames of economic threat are most credible against groups that are prosperous, gaining in prosperity, or at least represented by prominent group members of which one or the other is true. Frames of threat to values or identity require behavior by the out-group, or some out-group members, that violate ingroup norms or threaten ingroup identity. Finally, mobilization is likely only if the opportunity structure favors it, including a perception that less-costly forms of political expression are ineffective.

The Politics of Distribution. The argument so far suggests a sort of hierarchy in the power of alternative frames. Because threat frames—that is, frames suggesting physical threat—call on such a powerful mixture of psychological mechanisms, especially the “terror management” effect, they are the most powerful frames, and are likely to overwhelm other frames if they are credible. Such frames make violent group conflict relatively likely. Injustice frames do not evoke the “terror management” effect, but they do evoke a number of other

psychological effects that make them very effective at promoting social mobilization. Both threat frames and injustice frames are, in the terms of prospect theory, “loss” frames, so they are both likely to evoke stronger reactions than “hope” frames which define issues in terms of the opportunity for gains.

Politics framed in terms of hope therefore occurs only when threat and injustice frames are not effective; the result is the relatively non-contentious politics of distribution—pork-barrel spending, logrolling and in general the distribution of government largesse and an expanded economic pie. Frames of threat and injustice may be unavailable, yielding a politics of distribution, for two different kinds of reasons. First, frames of *ethnic* threat or injustice may be unavailable either because it is not credible (there is no obvious ethnic threat) or because it does not resonate with existing values (i.e., levels of prejudice are low). More generally, there may be no obvious target against which claims of injustice can be directed regarding the salient issues of the day. The second possibility is an absence of opportunity: threat and injustice frames can be suppressed, either externally, through state repression; or internally, through elite self-censorship. Since elite self-censorship is not likely to last over the long run, ethnic contention can only be avoided over the long run through the other two mechanisms—either low prejudice and low ethnic threat, or coercive state repression.

The Symbolic Politics of Ethnicity. To summarize, according to the symbolist theoretical framework, ethnic civil war should be on the political agenda and be relatively likely in cases in which there is either an obvious ethnic threat, or an ambiguous ethnic threat in the context of significant ethnic prejudice; and where the opportunity structure favors violent mobilization. Ethnic politics should be contentious but not very violent, yielding a politics of redistribution, in cases in which issues can be credibly framed in terms of a threat to group identity, status, values or economic interests; and where the opportunity structure favors nonviolent political mobilization. Again, this is most likely in the presence of relatively high levels of affective prejudice, or stereotypes that support the relevant injustice frame, or both. Ethnic politics should be non-contentious in cases in which prejudice and ethnic threats (physical, economic or ideational) are low or discredited; in circumstances of elite self-censorship; or when ethnic mobilization is repressed. As I shall now show, this logic very much applies to South Africa’s racial politics of the 1980s and 1990s.

The Groups and their Histories

South Africa’s Ethnic Geography

The diversity of South Africa’s population goes far beyond the division between black and white. Apartheid South Africa distinguished between four racial groups—blacks, whites, coloreds (people of mixed race, mostly Afrikaans-speakers), and Indians. In 2010, blacks comprised 79.4% of the population, whites 9.2%, coloreds 8.9%, and Indians or Asians 2.6%. While the relative size of the white population has been declining in recent decades, blacks have always comprised the overwhelming majority of the population.

There is, however, a great deal of diversity within these groups, especially by language. Contemporary South Africa has 11 official languages: Afrikaans, English, and the languages of the nine largest black ethnic groups. Among the latter, by far the largest groups are the Zulus (about 24% of the population in 2001), who are concentrated in what is now KwaZulu-Natal Province; and Xhosas (18% of the population), most of whom live in Eastern Cape Province. Zulu and Xhosa, along with the less widely-spoken Swazi and Ndebele, are closely-related languages of the Nguni group; all four are mutually intelligible, with Zulu often serving as the lingua franca among them. Afrikaans is the third most widely-spoken language, as the mother tongue of white Afrikaners and also of most coloreds; and indeed, Afrikaans-speakers (mostly Coloreds) form the majority in two South African provinces, Western Cape (which includes Cape Town) and Northern Cape.

The next three most widely-spoken African languages are the three members of the Sotho language group: Pedi or North Sotho, South Sotho, and Tswana, each spoken by about 8-9% of the national population—that is, about a quarter of the population combined. The Pedi are concentrated in the contemporary Limpopo Province, the Tswana in Northwest Province (on the border with Botswana), and the South Sotho in Free State (on the border with Lesotho). The Swazi form the largest language group in Mpumalanga province, though there are also significant numbers of Zulu, Tsonga, Ndebele and North Sotho-speakers there. South Africa's final province, Gauteng—which includes both Johannesburg and Pretoria—is a melting pot, containing significant numbers of Zulus, North and South Sothos, and English- and Afrikaans-speakers.

Historical Background

The Afrikaners trace their origins to the establishment of Cape Town by Jan Van Riebeeck and the Dutch East India Company in 1652. When they arrived, they found the Cape region inhabited by the pastoralist Khoikhoi and hunter-gatherer San peoples (known at the time as “Hottentots” and “Bushmen”). Concerned primarily with its own profits, the Company was repressive toward the European (mostly Dutch) settlers, known as Boers, with whom it was often in friction (Giliomee 2009). It was even less concerned with the fate of the Khoikhoi and San, whose societies were destroyed and whose survivors were eventually assimilated into the population of colored servants to the colonists. The colony was itself conquered by the British Empire, temporarily in 1795, and then again permanently in 1806, beginning a century and a half of English-Boer contention.

Some of that conflict concerned relations with the Cape colony's Xhosa neighbors, with whom the first of a series of Frontier Wars broke out in 1779. The Xhosas were driven back and then subdued during the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1836, the Boers initiated the Great Trek into the interior (Giliomee 2009; Beck 2000). Some of these Voortrekkers were killed in clashes with the local inhabitants, but they ultimately succeeded in defeating Zulu attacks and establishing the two independent—“free” but slaveholding—republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State. The British finally crushed the Zulus in the Zulu War of 1878-79; but the southern Sothos and the Swazis had a bit more success in maintaining their

autonomy, leading to the eventual creation of Lesotho and Swaziland as independent states. After the discovery of gold in the Transvaal had aroused an irresistible cupidity, the British launched the 1899-1902 Boer War, after which it took over both Boer republics.

Ironically, what the Boers lost on the battlefield, they won through negotiations: with the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, the Boers—later known as Afrikaners—formed a voting majority, and so they acquired political leadership of the state for the next 84 years. Until 1948, their leaders were ex-Boer generals such as Jan Smuts, who were surprisingly pro-English, but still fostered the development of the Afrikaans language. These leaders instituted a system of rigid racial discrimination aimed largely at keeping a steady supply of cheap black labor available to the mines, reserving all political power and skilled and supervisory jobs for whites.

After its 1948 election victory, D.F. Malan's National Party hardened and systematized this policy of discrimination into the program of apartheid. Apartheid aimed first to strengthen Afrikaners' cultural and economic position relative to English-speaking whites by subsidizing Afrikaner-language education and culture, and by instituting a system of preferences to promote the hiring of Afrikaners, especially for government service. At the same time, it aimed to maintain white rule in South Africa by reversing the flow of black labor into major cities and white areas, forcing all blacks to accept citizenship in a series of small ethnic "homelands" which were to receive independence. Black workers were then to be treated as non-citizen migrant laborers, and racial segregation of cities and towns was enforced with increasing strictness. The plan for homeland independence became known as "grand apartheid," the system of rules for separate amenities was termed "petty apartheid" (Louw 2004, 44-50).

The black majority tried to resist the increasingly discriminatory treatment, but without success. The organization that would later be called the African National Congress (ANC) was established in 1912, led by the small black intelligentsia whose members protested as proper Englishmen should, through letters, petitions and public meetings. They were ignored. Their effort to organize a popular "defiance campaign" in the 1950s was equally unsuccessful, and ended in the ANC being banned. The rival Pan-Africanist Congress's effort to protest apartheid "pass laws" was answered by the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre in which police killed 69 unarmed protestors. The ANC now established its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, led by Nelson Mandela (who was quickly jailed), and embraced tactics of "armed struggle". In response to a government initiative to impose Afrikaans as the language of instruction in black schools, schoolchildren launched a mass protest in 1976; when police fired on the crowd, they provoked the Soweto Uprising, during which some 700 black protestors were killed.

Afrikaners made enormous economic gains as a result of apartheid. When the National Party came to power in 1948, only 27% of Afrikaners were (generally middle-class) white-collar workers; by 1980, 62% were (Giliomee 2009, pp. 489, 606). The black population, meanwhile, received enough economic and social gains to make them dangerous, but not enough to make them content. Black life expectancy increased from 38 to 61 years between the 1940s and the 1990s, while infant mortality dropped by more than half, both trends fueling an explosion in the black population (Giliomee 2009, p. 596). The number of blacks in secondary school increased from about 55,000 in 1960 to over 1 million in 1985. Wages also rose, with black miners' wages

increasing from under 5% of the white wage to over 15%. However, these wages were still miserable, working conditions and living conditions remained generally horrendous, and in the 1980s the labor market collapsed, leaving the majority of black secondary school graduates unemployed—and available to make trouble (Giliomee 2009, p. 600). Additionally, as of 1980 the majority of the black population was under the age of 20, so the numbers of these disgruntled graduates (and dropouts) were huge (Welsh 2009, p. 283).

Recognizing the crisis of apartheid, Prime Minister P.W. Botha launched his program of “reform apartheid,” which involved creating toothless local councils to administer black townships; establishing (as of 1984) a tricameral parliament with separate, subordinate chambers for coloreds and Indians; and simultaneously building up an elaborate national security system for domestic repression. The effort failed: most coloreds and Indians joined with the black majority in rejecting the new system, forming the ANC-allied United Democratic Front (UDF) to resist it. The UDF’s young supporters in the black townships used intimidation and violence to enforce compliance with their strike and boycott campaigns; they murdered those they saw as regime collaborators; and they launched outright rebellions in a few local areas. Their most famous weapon, as noted above, was the “necklace” murder: 399 people were “necklaced” to death in the late 1980s, along with 372 others who were burnt to death in other ways (SADF 1994). At the same time, the ANC unleashed a widespread if inefficient campaign of terrorism. The overall scale of the killing—over 2000 people were killed in this political violence in 1985 and 1986—raised it to the level of a small civil war (Kaufman 2011).

While Botha’s “securocrats” managed to crush the rebellion by declaring a nationwide State of Emergency, the episode had lasting effects on the thinking of both sides. First, regime supporters were out of reform ideas; they increasingly recognized that apartheid had failed to bring lasting stability. Second, even relatively conservative National Party politicians like the future President, F. W. de Klerk, learned to moderate their racial views as a result of the contact they had with colored and Indian members of the tricameral parliament (De Klerk 1999). Third, the ANC learned that the regime remained too powerful to defeat in a violent uprising. After his health broke in 1989, Botha was forced to step aside for his successor, de Klerk, and the way was prepared for apartheid’s endgame.

The Setting for Transformation

Symbolic politics theory identifies group narratives and the resulting prejudices, feelings of threat, and the opportunity structure as the most important background conditions against which ethnic (or racial) politics plays out. I focus on two key narratives that shaped black views—the liberal Rivonia narrative, and the Revolutionary narrative, neither of which encouraged anti-white prejudice. On the white side, I focus on two competing narratives, the Afrikaner nationalist narrative, and the liberal one. Both were more or less racist, encouraging very high rates of racial prejudice among whites. Feelings of threat among whites rose along with the violence over the course of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Blacks generally perceived a very high degree of threat—both from the violence and the regimes crackdown against it—except during two brief moments of optimism. These feelings of threat were a key obstacle that leaders on both sides would have to overcome.

Black narratives of group identity

The Rivonia Narrative. The original ANC narrative defined a future South African national identity emphasizing liberal and social democratic values. The organization's first President identified racial inequality—the “color bar”—as the group's concern “first and foremost”. The group and its members, Jabavu stated, “wish to live in absolute peace and harmony with every race in this country be it black or be it white, green or yellow”. Their demand, he stated, was merely for their rightful “privileges as the subjects of the Queen” (Jabavu 1912). The ANC's 1955 Freedom Charter expanded on these ideas, asserting the goal of “a democratic state” that operated “without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief”. Additionally, it specified principles of equal political and economic rights for all individuals and national groupsequal human rights; universal, free and compulsory education; and “peace and friendship amongst all of our people,” among other goals.

Until the early 1960s, the ANC's strategy was one of nonviolent resistance, for both practical and principled reasons. In 1961, however, in the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre, the ANC abandoned nonviolence, establishing Umkhonto we Sizwe as its new armed wing. A December 1961 Umkhonto leaflet articulated the reasons why:

The time comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices: submit or fight. That time has now come to South Africa . . . [T]he people's non-violent policies have been taken as a green light for government violence . . . The government policy of force, repression and violence will no longer be met with non-violent resistance only! The choice is not ours; it has been made by the Nationalist government which has rejected ever[y] peaceable demand by the people for rights and freedom and answered ever[y] such demand with force and yet more force!
(Umkhonto 1961)

In his statement at the famous Rivonia trial, Nelson Mandela expanded on this logic, noting the government's increasing repression. First all lawful protest acts were made illegal, he said, and then nonviolent illegal action was met with a “show of force to crush opposition”. Mandela movingly continued that Umkhonto:

Had behind us the ANC tradition of non-violence and negotiation . . . We believe the South Africa belongs to all the people who live in it . . . we did not want an interracial war, and tried to avoid it to the last minute. . .

I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society . . . It is an ideal which I hope to live for and achieve.

But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die
(Mandela 1964).

A key part of this formulation was the use of minimum violence. Mandela emphasized that a major impetus for the shift to using force was to forestall other, more radical black groups that were also planning to turn to violence: “There now arose a danger,” Mandela noted, “that these groups would adopt terrorism against Africans, as well as whites, if not properly directed”. Umkhonto, in contrast, initially decided to limit itself to tactics of sabotage aimed against economic targets because it “did not involve loss of life”.

Another theme of this Rivonia narrative, besides liberalism, human rights and social democracy, was a unified South African—but primarily black—nationalism. As Mandela also said at Rivonia:

[E]lders of my tribe [told] of wars fought by our ancestors in defence of the fatherland. The names of Dingane and Bambata, Hintsa and Makana, Squngthi and Dalasile, Moshoeshoe and Sekhukhuni, were praised as the glory of the entire African nation
(Mandela 1964).

Mandela thus cleverly created the idea of a single (South) African nation by ascribing to the elders of his (Xhosa) ethnic group an equal respect for the historical leaders not only of the Xhosa (Hintsa, Makana, Squngthi and Dalasile), but also of the Zulus (Dingane and Bambata), the South Sotho (Moshoeshoe), and the Pedi (Sekhukhuni)—heroes of each of the largest black ethnic groups in South Africa. Notably, most of these men were not only chiefs, but also warrior-chiefs who were leaders of rebellions or wars against the British imperialists; Squngthi was a leader of Mandela’s own Thembu subgroup of Xhosas. Mandela was, in short, defining as *national* heroes a group of leaders of resistance to white domination, and putting one of his ancestors among them.

This, then, is the Rivonia narrative, focused on the principles of the national unity of all South Africans, liberalism, social democracy, racial and economic equality. After Mandela’s release from prison in 1990, he increasingly intertwined it with the theme of reconciliation. In this effort he was building on the humanitarian concept of “ubuntu” which Archbishop Desmond Tutu had been promoting for many years. Tutu explained the idea this way:

We speak of inner 'Ubuntu, or Botho' . . . it has to do with what it means to be truly human, it refers to gentleness, to compassion, to hospitality, to openness to others, to vulnerability. . . If we could but recognise our common humanity, that we do belong together, that our destinies are bound up with one another's . . . that we can be human only together, then a glorious South Africa would come into being (*Sydney Morning Herald* 1986).

For Tutu and Mandela, reconciliation based on “ubuntu” was a critical means to achieving the goals of the Rivonia narrative.

The Rivonia narrative therefore generates two opposed symbolic predispositions. Its main theme is defiance: it encourages its supporters’ willingness to struggle for liberation and, if necessary, to die or to kill for it. On the other hand, the ubuntu strand of the narrative encourages compassion and reconciliation once that goal is achieved. Neither strand, therefore, encourages racial prejudice against whites.

The Revolutionary Narrative. After the ANC was banned in 1960 and went into exile, it grew much closer to its key allies, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the government of the Soviet Union. It therefore increasingly articulated a narrative distinct from that of Rivonia, a narrative espousing violent revolution rather than peaceful democratization. The ANC became, indeed, difficult to distinguish from the SACP, as many of its key leaders—including (in the 1970s-80s) Joe Slovo, Mac Maharaj, Thabo Mbeki and Chris Hani—were also leaders of the SACP. As a result, as early as 1969, a major statement of the ANC’s program, subtitled, “Strategy and Tactics of the South African Revolution,” was calling for a “revolutionary armed struggle” aimed at “the conquest of power”. Going back beyond the foundation of the ANC, this new document claimed that the turn to armed struggle was in fact a return to an earlier tradition—that of the “first 250 years” of “unbroken resistance to [white] domination,” which featured “regular armed clashes, battles and wars” (Turok 2011, 99, 102). The older ANC nonracialism was impaired: ANC President Oliver Tambo (1987, 94) forthrightly stated in 1971, for example, “Power to the people means, in fact, power to the black people”. The ANC renewed its commitment to armed struggle in 1983, when Joe Slovo wrote a new strategy document advocating “people’s war,” arguing that violence was the only real answer” for the ANC (Barrell 1993, 314). This document was formally adopted as ANC strategy in 1985.

Continuing throughout the 1980s, the ANC’s public statements sounded much like the pronouncements of orthodox Marxist-Leninists of that time. In February 1985, for example, Slovo (1985) wrote in the ANC magazine *Sechaba*: “the inseparable link between national liberation and social emancipation implies a strategy which must lead to a revolutionary overthrow of the existing ruling class”. In other words, while starting with the goals of the older Rivonia narrative (“national liberation and social emancipation”), Slovo recast those goals in Marxist-Leninist terms: political liberation required violent revolution. Another article in the same issue of *Sechaba* reinforced the point, carrying the title, “Revolutionary violence as an imperative part of the mass political struggle” (Sechaba 1985a). A later *Sechaba* editorial (1985b), explained the link between means and goals this way: “Even the much talked about principle of one-man, one-vote in a unitary South Africa is seen by us as an aspect of—indeed subordinate to—our ultimate goal . . . Our struggle is for the seizure of power . . . The armed struggle must continue.”

ANC President Oliver Tambo’s pronouncements of the time were equally strident. In his annual January address in 1985, for example, Tambo (1985a, 4, 9-12) applauded “the armed offensive spearheaded by Umkhonto we Sizwe,” stating that ANC policy “puts the politics of revolutionary change to the fore . . . We have planted the seeds of people’s war . . . We must

[now] build up the mass combat forces . . . for the forcible overthrow of the racist regime”. Tambo’s list of the four “pillars” of the ANC’s strategy—underground organizing, “mass political action,” an “armed offensive” by Umkhonto, and promoting international pressure—did not include negotiations. Highlighting the ANC’s growing ruthlessness, a *Sechaba* (1985b) editorial later that year reported that the June “ANC conference, which took the form of a council of war, decided that the distinction between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ [i.e., civilian] targets should disappear”. The ANC was openly endorsing terrorism.

On the other hand, the ANC maintained its tenuous commitment to non-racialist principles. While in exile, it had opened up its membership to members of all races, and included in its leadership white and Indian Communists such as Joe Slovo and Mac Maharaj. It did not identify the enemy in racial terms as whites; it was primarily the regime that was the target of ANC bile: the “racist monstrosity,” the “apartheid regime,” and so on. The other major targets of ANC animosity were rival black leaders, especially those perceived as “sellouts” collaborating with the regime. Perhaps the most prominent of these leaders was Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi, the Inkatha leader, about whom another *Sechaba* editorial (1985c) said, “Gatsha Buthelezi . . . has fallen on the side of the people’s enemies, on the side of the Pretoria racists, where he belongs. The people will deal with him.” The ANC was now calling for the assassination of its black rivals.

To summarize, the revolutionary narrative kept the Rivonia principle of nonracial African nationalism as the central ANC principle, but it subordinated the democratic goals of the Freedom Charter to the revolutionary goals of the seizure of power and complete destruction of the existing system. It also pushed economic objectives in a more radically socialist direction. It lumped rival black leaders such as Buthelezi in with the regime as enemies of “the people”. And strategically, it subordinated mass political protest to a component of a larger, violent strategy of “people’s war” that embraced terrorist tactics as well. The symbolic predispositions it promoted were therefore those of a radical authoritarianism: predispositions toward violent struggle, radical change rather than compromise, and violent intolerance of competing views.

White Narratives of group identity

As noted above, the Afrikaner narrative begins with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck and 90 Dutch East India Company settlers at Cape Town in 1652. Emphasizing the theme of Afrikaner commitment to individualism and freedom, the great Afrikaner historian Hermann Giliomee (2009, 1) opens his book with a story of a petition by these early Boers for better treatment from the Company. A 1987 National Party pamphlet opens with a reference to the same issue; it goes on to assert, “This [friction] led, among other things to the establishment of the Republics of Graaf Reinet and Swellendam,” referring to short-lived rebellions against the

Company in 1795 in those two towns.¹ The point is clear: Afrikaners have always been concerned with their “political rights” (van der Merwe 1987).

The next great event in the Afrikaner narrative is the Great Trek, which began in 1835 (Giliomee 2009, 162). Piet Retief, one of the early leaders of this movement, articulated the reasons in an 1837 newspaper article which is reproduced at Pretoria’s Voortrekker Monument. The Boers, wrote Retief, could no longer live with the “plunder from the Kafirs” (i.e., by black tribesmen). Additionally, they were distressed because their slaves had been emancipated without compensation for the owners, and that servants now had the legal right to testify in court against their owners. Treating them this way, Retief protested, was demonstrating “hatred and contempt of the Boer”. Retief rejected the notion that natives could be legal equals; in the Boer view, blacks were the “sons of Ham,” destined to be “hewers of wood and drawers of water” (Moodie 1975, 3, 29). In a letter written a few months after his article, Retief articulated the Boers’ political objective in their move: “[We] desire to be considered a free and independent people” (Giliomee 2009, 157).

In spite of the trekkers’ ostensibly peaceful intentions, the Great Trek led to bloody clashes between the trekkers and the black peoples of the region. One group of trekkers, led by Retief himself, was massacred by the Zulu King Dingaan when his group appeared, unarmed, at a parley in 1838. This massacre was avenged in December of the same year, when a large group of over 500 armed trekkers led by Andries Pretorius (and sporting one bronze cannon) killed some 3,000 Zulu warriors at the place thereafter called Blood River. Dingaan was killed soon thereafter, and his successor Mpande aligned himself with the Boers (Giliomee 2009, 163-165).

These events took on a central place in Afrikaner mythology. Before Blood River, the early twentieth-century historian J.S. du Plessis wrote, a “solemn oath was sworn to celebrate that day each year to the glory of the Lord if he would grant them victory. And God gave them victory over thousands of enemies, and therein was God’s hand seen again”. Another historian, F.W. Reitz, commented in 1900 about the whole Voortrekker movement: “our people had to pursue their pilgrimage of martyrdom throughout South Africa, until every portion of that unhappy country had been painted in blood”. A poem in the 1920s expanded on this theme not only of martyrdom, but also of election by God: the martyrs of the trek were the “first of a new line. . . of an Afrikaner nation, worthy to bear the crown upon the Way of the Cross by our fathers who died” at the hands of the Zulus (quoted Moodie 1975, 5-6, 14).

The other “chosen trauma” (Volkan 1998) of the Afrikaner people was the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, which was in large part a naked British grab for the land and mineral riches of the Boer republics; it was also, as British Prime Minister Lord Salisbury put it, an effort to show the world that “We, not the Dutch, are Boss” (Giliomee 2009, 233, 245-48). And if the British motives in the war were appalling, their conduct of it was worse. The vastly outnumbered Boers quickly resorted to guerrilla tactics, at which they proved adept; the British responded with scorched-earth tactics and a policy of imprisoning Boer civilians in “concentration camps”. Before the war was done, over 4,000 Boer women and 22,000 Boer

¹ According to Giliomee (2009, 73), the rebels “did not proclaim republics, as is often assumed, but rather expressed the desire” to be governed directly by the new Dutch Republic.

children were dead. This brutality did not only traumatize the Boers of the Transvaal and Orange Free State; it also deeply alienated the Afrikaners of the Cape, who had until then been loyal British subjects (Giliomee 2009, 256-7).

This experience was interpreted to reinforce Afrikaners' sense of themselves as a chosen people. A 1915 church conference statement asserted that Boers "see in their history and origin the hand of God," demonstrating that they had "a national calling and destiny" (Giliomee 2009, 385). As one book, referred to as the "New Testament of Afrikanerdom" put it, "Disasters, adversity, privation, reversals, and suffering are some of the best means in God's hand to form a people . . . and determine its worth". It continued, "We believe that the Afrikaner will do it again under the guidance of God. He will arise from the debris and ashes of his defeats, shake them off, overcome them and finally become a powerful and victorious people" (quoted Moodie 1975, 13-14).

The dilemma posed by this Afrikaner narrative of national identity is that it identified two threatening national enemies—the blacks and the English. Afrikaners comprised a majority of the voters in the Union of South Africa established in 1910, but little more than 10% of the overall population (because most nonwhites could not vote). How were they to manage this situation? Afrikaner leaders proposed two different approaches. Anglophiles like Smuts argued, in 1907: "In a South African nation alone was a solution . . . the Boers and the English must either unite or they must exterminate each other". Smuts did not say so, but the real fear was of the "*swart gevaar*," the "black threat". John X. Merriman had articulated the concern in 1894: "The white population was a minority" and a "garrison" that held "the country in the interests of civilization"; he worried that without white unity and mutual support, "it would be impossible to maintain their dominance" (Giliomee 2009, 318, 358). Smuts' rival J.B.M. Hertzog argued for a different focus, on defending Afrikaner language and culture against the English. Quoting Cicero, he argued, "The language of the conqueror in the mouth of the conquered is the language of slaves". The two programs were of course compatible, and Smuts' and Hertzog's parties merged into the United Party in 1933 (Giliomee 2009, 370, 407).

The Apartheid Narrative. South Africa's Calvinist churches took the lead in articulating the racist assumptions on which apartheid was tacitly based. For example, a 1931 church synod declared that "racial leveling" and "bastardization" were "an abomination to every right-minded white and native". Racist language, such as references to "Kafirs" and "Hotnots," was also common in 1950s grass-roots politics. Yet when they were defended overtly, segregation and apartheid were defended based on the claim that such measures were just for all; in this perspective, the fate of the Tower of Babel demonstrated God's plan to separate the nations of the world. Segregation, one theologian argued, would allow "self-determination . . . to the non-white races on every terrain of life"; as a result, according to another, "The policy of segregation that is promoted by the Afrikaner and his church is in the best interests of both the white and the non-white" (Giliomee 2009, 459-62).

The key motive for apartheid was survival in the midst of a black majority. Thus one historian argued at the time, in a book entitled, *Do the Afrikaner People Have a Future?*, that apartheid was necessary simply due to the Afrikaners' minority status. In his speech at the 1949 inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument, National Party Prime Minister D. F. Malan argued

that the Voortrekker spirit was threatened by “godless communism,” blood mixing and the disintegration of the white race. In a letter around the same time, Malan asserted that South Africa had to choose between “two irreconcilable ways of life: between barbarism and civilization” (Giliomee 2009, 470, 488, 499). Similarly, future premier J.G. Strijdom denounced mission schools in 1946, asserting that they were “far too eager to . . . [provide] education to *Klein kaffertjies* [little kafirs];” such education threatened whites’ ability to maintain racial discrimination (Giliomee 507). Apartheid was, as Giliomee (2009, 447) argued, a “radical survival plan”; the aim was to “govern ourselves at all costs” (Interview no. 11).

The architect of apartheid, Hendrik Verwoerd (1966), knitted all these themes together in his rhetorical justification for the system. His basic premise was that South Africa “is a White republic, ruled by the white man.” “The White man,” Verwoerd argued, “is of incalculable importance for civilization and for history, and . . . will always be needed where order and peace and progress are desired.” Verwoerd also emphasized the Afrikaners’ history of overcoming victimhood: “the light of the sun of freedom was extinguished years ago, but not forever . . . [now] we are a free, happy and prosperous nation”. However, Verwoerd warned, South Africa was under threat, demanding “the unity we must have in the face of the attacks surrounding us”. The alternative to apartheid was, he suggested, “forced assimilation or absorption of peoples;” those who advocated multiracial democracy were “wreckers”. Rejecting this prospect, he asserted, “True morality . . . [involves] each going his separate road”—that is separate development or apartheid. “We have no ambitions . . . to exploit others,” he claimed, glossing over the raft of South African laws and policies that did just that. His answer to the “wreckers” was defiance: “We will . . . not sacrifice this Republic and its independence and our way of life.”

In sum, apartheid was based on racist symbolic predispositions, which encouraged also perceptions of threat to whites’ position in every black request or demand for decent treatment.

White Counternarratives. Liberals in South Africa were generally in retreat throughout the first three-quarters of the twentieth century as government discrimination against non-whites steadily escalated. However, liberal voices did occasionally speak out with doubts about apartheid and suggestions of an alternative path. One early voice of caution was the poet N.P. van Wyk Louw, who on the one hand denounced the idea of majority government as “national suicide” for Afrikaners; but on the other insisted that Afrikaners must strive for “survival in justice”. He posed the issue this way: “Can a small volk [people] survive for long, if it becomes something hateful, something evil, in the eyes of the best in—or outside—its fold?” He answered, “I would rather go down than survive in injustice” (Giliomee 2009, 472-74).

Others argued that apartheid was not so much unjust as unworkable. One early dissenter said in a speech that he would support apartheid if blacks were given sufficient land and capital investment to make the homelands economically viable, “free government,” and generous budgetary subsidies. His point was to make clear that the costs of a genuine policy of “separate but equal development” were far too high for white voters to support, and indeed Verwoerd consistently opposed all of these measures. A study in 1952 made the point more explicit: if apartheid did not result in the mass migration of blacks back to the homelands—which was never economically possible—then “There was no honorable manner in which we as Christians and

democrats will in the long run be able to deny them political and other rights” (Giliomee 2009, 483-484).

In 1960, the World Council of Churches held a conference in Cottesloe, Johannesburg, and issued a challenge to apartheid. It affirmed that everyone had the right to own land where they lived and to participate in government; that mixed marriages were not banned by Scripture; that the apartheid system of migrant labor was harmful to families; that there should be an end to job discrimination; and that colored people should be allowed in the South African parliament (Giliomee 2009, 527). However, Verwoerd organized a counterattack in which South African churches and other institutions denounced these views. Beyers Naude, a prominent pastor, attempted to defend them but was ostracized for his pains; he eventually joined the ANC and was dismissed as a traitor to Afrikanerdom. In 1959, eleven liberals had defected from the United Party, Smuts’s old party, to form the Progressive Party—but in the next election, only one of them, Helen Suzman, won re-election.

For the next thirteen years, from 1961 to 1974, Suzman was the only Member of Parliament speaking out against apartheid. An evocative statement opposing a set of 1964 policies illustrates her position: “this bill . . . strips the African of every basic pretension he has to being a human being, to being a free human being in the country of his birth, and it reduces him to the level of a chattel” (Suzman 1964). The trouble with her position was the one van Wyck Louw had pointed out: what liberal path was available to Afrikaners that did not result in national suicide? The fiery poet Breyten Breytenbach was driven to open rebellion early in his career, writing in 1965 that he so hated apartheid that, “If I could renounce my being an Afrikaner I would do it. I am ashamed of my people” (quoted Giliomee 2009, 556). Such wholesale rejection did not offer an alternative path.

Much more important were growing concerns among apartheid supporters that the policy simply was not working. The white population was growing much more slowly than projected, the black population was growing more quickly, and the South African economy was increasingly dependent on black labor, skilled and unskilled—all just as the early doubters had projected. Thus Piet Cilie, noted for his fiery pro-National party rhetoric in the 1950s, wrote thirty years later that Afrikaners “had clung too long, against overwhelming evidence, to the dream of a homelands policy” (quoted Giliomee 2009, 597).

Prejudice and Symbolic Predispositions

White Prejudice and Partisan Identification. As a result of their socialization through these narratives, South African whites showed a great deal of racial prejudice in the 1990s. For example, according to a July 1992 survey, 73.8% of white respondents opposed mixed marriages; a plurality of them (47.4% vs. 36.8%) opposed racially integrated suburbs; and views on integrated schools was divided roughly equally (41.5% vs. 42.3%) between support and opposition. Afrikaners showed more prejudice than did English-speaking whites. For example, 27.4% of Afrikaners held that “population group”—i.e., race—was the most important factor

students in a school should have in common (as opposed to language or scholastic ability); only 11% of English-speaking whites felt the same way.²

By the early 1990s, though, the changing discourse about race was showing up in moderating opinions about it. For example, according to a 1991 survey, two-thirds of whites agreed or partially agreed with the proposition, “Race or population group should not play any role in the provision of education.” Even among Afrikaans-speaking whites, over 53% either agreed or partially agreed with this idea—essentially, the racial integration of schools. These numbers suggest a major shift in Afrikaner opinion. When asked bluntly whether they favored or opposed “racially mixed schools,” fully 86% of Afrikaners had opposed it in 1988 (Manzo and McGowan 1992, 7); that proportion had dropped to 52.6% in the July 1992 survey.

Closely related to racial prejudice are symbolic predispositions toward political parties. Table 1 summarizes the proportions of black and white respondents who told pollsters that they felt either “very close” or “close” to each of the political parties listed (February 1992 survey).

Table 1
Favorable Symbolic Predispositions Toward Political Parties

Political Party	% Blacks “close to”	% Whites “Close to”
National Party	21.6%	67.3%
Inkatha Freedom Party	14.1%	25.9%
African National Congress	69.0%	6.3%
Conservative Party	5.6%	38.4%
Azanian People’s Org.	13.2%	0%
AWB	0.8%	11.8%

These feelings about the political parties seem plausible in the context of the racial attitudes mentioned earlier. For example, the 38.4% who felt close to the hard-line racist Conservative Party is roughly equal to the overall number of whites who rejected the notion of race-blind educational policy, and the 11.8% who felt close to the extremist AWB is similar to the proportion of whites who Smith and Stones (2001) found to be “strongly racist”. The roughly two-thirds of whites who felt close to the National Party at this time presumably includes both the NP’s longtime constituents—their old partisan base—and the more liberal English-speaking whites who had previously supported more racially tolerant opposition parties, but who now supported de Klerk’s reformist stand.

² The survey results cited in this paper, unless otherwise noted, are based on analyses of data generously shared with the author by the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa, and analyzed by the author in collaboration with Julio Carrion.

Black Prejudice and Partisan Identification. South Africa’s blacks are typically perceived, unlike the country’s whites, to have rejected racial prejudice. Thus Patti Waldmeir concluded, after conducting a wide range of interviews in the mid-1990s, “Black South Africans refused to indulge [in] racial hatred” (1997, xi). She quoted an ANC supporter who had been abused in prison as follows:

There is no way I can hate whites. To hate whites would be unfair
 . . . Our problem is not whites per se. Our problem is the system
 which made whites the culprits of apartheid (1997, 61).

This impression is supported by the Smith and Stones (2001, 167) study, which found that only 9% of blacks in the late 1990s had “strong anti-white sentiment,” while the vast majority were not anti-white.

The survey data I analyzed says relatively little about the question of black prejudice, since the surveys did not ask questions about black stereotypes of whites. However, some information can be gleaned. Blacks, interestingly, showed as much support for racially segregated schools as English-speaking whites did, with 11.3% in 1991 choosing “population group” or race as the most important factor children needed to have in common in school. This number is roughly in line with the 13.2% of blacks who in 1992 said that they felt close to the black separatist AZAPO. Interestingly, only 56.8% said they favored racially mixed marriages; nearly 30% explicitly opposed such marriages. Mainstream blacks’ acceptance of whites was not without limits. However, the 21.6% of blacks who said they felt close to the National Party, and the nearly 39% who trusted de Klerk, suggests that racial concerns were less of a barrier to political loyalty among blacks than among whites.

Support for armed groups. A different measure of South Africans’ feelings about the different political groups is provided by a different question in the data, which asked which armed group the respondent would be prepared to advise a friend or relative to join. The answers were compatible with respondents’ feelings of closeness, but by no means identical, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Favorable Symbolic Predispositions Toward Armed Groups

Armed Group (political affiliate)	% Blacks offering advice to join	% Whites offering advice to join
South African Defense Forces	10.1%	75.4%
Umkhonto we Sizwe (ANC)	57.2%	2.6%
AWB	0.1%	2.6%
APLA (AZAPO)	1.1%	0%
Inkatha	10.2%	0.5%
None	18.5%	17.3%

What is interesting in these data is how support for the more extremist groups shrinks when the question turns to advising a friend or relative to risk his or her life. In particular, among blacks, the 13.2% who felt close to AZAPO shrank to only 1.1% who would be prepared to advocate joining their armed wing. Similarly, of the 11.8% of whites who felt more or less close to the AWB, less than a quarter (2.6% of the sample) were inclined to advise anyone to join that vicious and undisciplined band of thugs—with just as many whites at the other end of the spectrum prepared to encourage people to join the ANC’s armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe.

The mainstream groups saw much less shrinkage in their support. Virtually all whites supported either the National Party or the Conservative Party, and fully three-fourths of them were prepared to advise a loved one to join the South African military. Similarly, the 69% of blacks who were ANC supporters shrank only a bit to 57.2% who were prepared to advise friends or family to join its armed wing, MK. Inkatha supporters were similarly stolid, with 14.1% expressing feelings of closeness to the group, and 10.2% prepared to encourage loved ones to sign up for its armed wing. This question seems a useful one for identifying those who truly had a strong symbolic predisposition in favor of each group.

Symbolic predispositions toward leaders and institutions. In theory, feelings about key political leaders are also important in influencing popular attitudes on important issues. The best survey measure available is the question, asked in several surveys, about whether the respondent agrees that a particular leader is “sincere when he says that he wants to build a non-racial democratic South Africa”. The answers to this question regarding Mandela and de Klerk from the July 1992 survey are summarized in Table 3. The numbers reported sum up those who either “agree” or “agree to some extent” about each leader’s sincerity.

Table 3

Symbolic Predispositions Toward Key South African Leaders (1992)

Leader	% Blacks saying “sincere”	% Whites saying “sincere”
Nelson Mandela	70.0%	14.5%
F.W. de Klerk	38.9%	68.9%

The most important point this data shows is that Mandela and de Klerk each had the backing of over two-thirds of his racial group: 70% of blacks trusted Mandela, and 69% of whites trusted de Klerk. Interestingly, de Klerk was much more trusted among blacks than Mandela was among whites, with nearly 39% of blacks seeing de Klerk as sincere, as opposed to the 14.5% of whites who trusted Mandela. As explained below, this was in large part because Mandela’s positions were more radical than generally perceived in the west, a fact perceived by South African blacks as well as whites. Not surprisingly, feelings about leaders were correlated with support for parties, especially among whites: 92.7% of those who planned to vote for the National Party felt that de Klerk was sincere. Mandela’s constituency was a bit more volatile, as

only 72% of those planning to vote for either ANC or its ally the Mass Democratic Movement felt that Mandela was sincere.

In sum, we have some reasonable evidence about symbolic predispositions among South Africans in the 1990s. First, there was a great deal of racial prejudice among South African whites, ranging across issues from the nearly three-quarters of them who objected to racially mixed marriages, through the plurality who opposed racially integrated suburbs, to the 10%-15% whom Smith and Stones (2001) found to be “strongly racist”. Second, there was somewhat less racial prejudice among blacks, but still some: nearly 30% opposed racially mixed marriages, but only 9% were found by Smith and Stones to be “strongly anti-white”. Third, each group had strong symbolic predispositions in favor of its mainstream party and political leader. Finally, hard-core support for the extremist groups AWB and APLA was much lower than feelings of closeness toward them, with only 2.6% of whites willing to advise a loved one to join the AWB, and a mere 1.1% of blacks willing to do the same in support of APLA.

Symbolic Politics of Apartheid

As Verwoerd’s rhetoric (quoted above) illustrates, apartheid was justified using the tools of symbolic politics to propel a politics of protection. The preconditions for such a politics were well-established. Afrikaners had a powerful national narrative centered on the chosen glories of the Great Trek and Blood River, and the chosen traumas of the massacre of Retief’s party and of the Boer War. Over the succeeding decades, Afrikaner leaders and intellectuals refined this narrative into one of ultimate victory over the British, and of glorious achievements threatened by the *swart gevaar*, the black peril. The only alternative to national annihilation, in this narrative, was the political exclusion of blacks and the social separation of the races.

Even as internal resistance and external criticism of the system grew in the 1980s, so too did South African whites’ fears and perceptions of threat. Whites especially feared that a future black majority government would be a severe threat to their way of life: in surveys from 1985-90, a consistent 86%-93% said that a future under an “African majority government” would be “bad”. Furthermore, the violence of the time was considered to be a direct threat to them and their families: the proportion of those who said they feared for their own or their family’s safety doubled in the late 1980s, increasing from 24% in 1986 to 49% in April 1990. When asked how safe they personally felt, the proportion answering “unsafe” rose from 9% in September 1987 to 29% in March 1990 (de Kock 1996, 45, 37).

All Afrikaners’ symbolic predispositions thus supported the apartheid message. The narrative was not only comfortable and familiar; it also resonated with their strong feelings of racial prejudice, and the universal bias toward ingroup favoritism. Their pastors reinforced this inclination with the narrative of the Tower of Babel story as suggesting racial separation was the divine will. Furthermore, Verwoerd’s claim that Afrikaners’ way of life was at stake was no hyperbole, as Afrikaners indeed faced multiple threats: the violent uprisings of 1960, 1976 and 1984-86 implied a physical threat to their safety; the black demand for political equality threatened their status and identity as the defenders of western civilization; and the ANC socialist

program threatened both their material well-being and their economic values. This set of threats made it psychologically plausible, if not logical, to claim that the very existence of the white community in South Africa was at stake. This strong confluence of prejudice, fear and material interest explains the durability of the apartheid narrative, in spite of the self-evident hypocrisy of the claims to want “the well-being of all”. The strength of the South African state, and its organization based on a whites-only electorate, gave them the opportunity to persist on this path for decades.

P.W. Botha’s government used these rhetorical tools to justify his hard-line positions. State-run radio reiterated the theme of Afrikaner victimization, stating in 1979, for example, “What many outsiders fail to realize is that for many years Afrikaners in South Africa lived under the yoke of British colonialism” (BBC 1979a). “The National Party,” Botha insisted with typical disingenuousness, stood for “fair and equal treatment and rights for all in South Africa” (BBC 1981). However, he asserted, repeating the theme of existential threat: “the idea of equality did not mean that the white man should sacrifice his right to live in South Africa” (BBC 1979b). Therefore, Botha commented a year later, his “government was not prepared to [negotiate] on condition that a black majority government should be accepted in South Africa” (BBC 1980). Indeed, Botha claimed, “the battle in South Africa was not between black and white but between Christian civilization and Communism” (BBC 1981). Those who wanted political rights for blacks, Botha claimed, were really seeking “the destruction of our system of government and civilized values” (*New York Times* 4/20/85) and “committing treason” (BBC 1982). In an aside to Cabinet colleagues, Law and Order Minister Louis LeGrange confirmed the electoral calculations behind this rhetoric: “When you pull the republican flag out of the bucket of blood, then they vote NP again,” he said (interview).

However, the structure of narratives that justified apartheid was starting to come apart (see Waldmeir 1997, 132). Government leaders became increasingly reticent to even mention the word apartheid, and they overtly denied any belief that nonwhites were racially inferior; their claim, as noted above, was that separate development would allow freedom and equality for all. But the claim was increasingly hollow. The Dutch Reformed Church was expelled from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 1982 for its support of apartheid, solidifying Afrikaners’ moral isolation. As a result, in 1986 the Dutch Reformed Church itself abandoned apartheid, opening itself to members of all races (Giliomee 2009, 620); in 1989 it condemned apartheid as a sin. Universities also increasingly became critical of apartheid, with dissidents even at conservative stronghold Stellenbosch University issuing an anti-apartheid statement in March 1987. A few months later, liberal academics began a series of meetings with ANC leaders including Thabo Mbeki, with the full knowledge of South African intelligence chief Niel Barnard (Harvey 2001, 9, 125-29).

Similarly, by 1986 the Afrikaner Broederbond, an influential secret society that had long been a major ideological prop for apartheid, was circulating a document positing “the *exclusion* of blacks from the highest level of decision-making as a threat to the survival of whites” (Giliomee 2009, 621, emphasis in original). In this view, then, it was the continuation of apartheid that was the greatest threat to white survival. Indeed, Broederbond leader Peter de Lange met with Thabo Mbeki in New York in 1986 (Welsh 2009, 200). The Broederbond’s youth wing, called Reiterbach, became active in opposing apartheid. According to one student

activist of the 1970s, “my generation of students became critical of this policy” (reflecting the habit of avoiding mention of the word “apartheid”); he reports that he was elected to a leading post in the organization precisely *because* of his advocacy of the view that apartheid was not working (Interview no. 10).

Another prop of the regime, the business community, also began countering the apartheid narrative as its economic basis crumbled. As early as 1967, one South African newspaper pointed out the economic cost of apartheid, asserting: “Race policies precluded the most economic use of the non-white labor force” (quoted Giliomee 2009, 598). Throughout the 1970s, for precisely this reason, businesses needing additional black labor pushed for loosening restrictions on black migration. Indeed, big business soon gave up on the notion of treating black workers as mere migrant laborers with no rights, getting behind the 1979 push to recognize black unions and the FOSATU labor federation, aiming to create an orderly system of labor relations. As early as 1985, business leaders were already sending delegations to meet with Oliver Tambo and the ANC leadership in Zambia (Waldmeir 1997, 25-27, 73). The next year, the Federate Chamber of Industries called for universal suffrage (Welsh 2009, 262). Business support for apartheid had nearly evaporated.

Opportunity structure in the early 1990s

The likelihood of violence or, conversely, of peaceful conflict management, depends heavily on the opportunity structure. By 1990, the opportunity structure for both sides increasingly favored the pursuit of negotiations. Because of the power of the South African state, the National Party leadership could not be dislodged violently, but neither could they impose peace and stability, and all their ideas for unilateral reforms had failed. The country remained largely ungovernable in the assessment of members of the Cabinet (Interview no. 12).

At the same time, international pressure was gaining strength. Financial sanctions took the biggest toll. As the Finance Minister of the time, Barend du Plessis, recalled in a later interview (2010), the need to repay foreign loans without any new financing drained the country of capital and made it impossible to generate strong economic growth. De Klerk (1999, 154) agreed, calling economic stagnation “one of the greatest challenges that we would face” in those years, especially because of “capital outflows caused by the repayment of US \$1 billion per annum on our outstanding loans”. At the same time, de Klerk (1999, 141) reports, even South Africa’s closest allies like British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher were pushing him to reform the system. In the assessment of one cabinet minister at the time (Interview no. 12), the pressure from Thatcher was especially important in influencing de Klerk.

The ANC was also increasingly hemmed in. The Zimbabwean government had neutralized the ANC base in that country in February 1982 (Barrell 1993, 276); and the Nkomati Accord between South Africa and Mozambique, signed in March 1984, cut off Mozambican cooperation with ANC, and therefore severed the ANC’s best route for infiltration into South Africa (Simpson 2010). In 1988 the circle was closed, as the agreements for peace in Angola and South West Africa/Namibia called for the evacuation of Umkhonto fighters from Angola.

Tambo told his staff that he was under pressure from both Soviet President Gorbachev and friendly African states, the so-called front-line states, to enter negotiations (Interview no. 3). By the start of 1990, the Berlin Wall had fallen and the Soviet Union was in crisis, so the ANC was losing its strongest patron. The prospects for military victory were dim. As interim ANC leader Alfred Nzo conceded in January 1990, “We do not have the capacity . . . to intensify the armed struggle in any meaningful way (quoted Rantete 1998, 151).

The prospects for nonviolent struggle, by contrast, were improving. The UDF had been banned, but was quickly replaced by the Mass Democratic Movement, which provided a strong base of popular support for the ANC inside South Africa. Black trade unions had been legalized in 1979, initially coalescing under the umbrella of the avowedly apolitical Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), but by 1985 coalesced with activist groups into the politically-oriented Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) which was also openly allied with the ANC. These shifts opened up the opportunity for the key nonviolent elements of the ANC’s overall strategy: “mass action” protests inside South Africa, and international sanctions from outside. Negotiations with the regime would fit well with this strategy.

The Symbolic Politics of Accommodation

Most accounts of the end of apartheid focus on the actions of elites. From this perspective, apartheid ended because a reasonable leader, F.W. de Klerk, became President of South Africa, and he released ANC leader Nelson Mandela, who similarly wanted to reach a negotiated settlement. After some tough negotiations, the two sides reached an arrangement, and voila, the new South Africa was born.

While this is all true, what this story misses is the need for leaders on both sides to maintain public support for their actions. The pivotal moment for the government was in early 1992. After his party did poorly in a series of by-elections in conservative areas, President de Klerk suddenly called a referendum on the question of his policy of negotiations. The referendum question asked: “Do you support the continuation of the reform process that the state president started on 2 January 1990 and which is aimed at a new constitution through negotiations?” If voters were going to stop the process that was leading inexorably to the loss of white control, this referendum was their best opportunity to do so. We therefore need to understand why two-thirds of white voters voted “yes” in answer to this question, when they were fully warned that blacks would have at least the majority of power in the new system. Why did they vote to give up power peacefully?

The question on the opposition side is similar. The ANC under the leadership of Oliver Tambo had been increasingly committed to armed struggle for almost thirty years, and its main support base inside the country was the violent and militant township youth. The ANC’s new leader, Nelson Mandela, had been in prison for almost all of those thirty years, and he left prison with more moderate views than most leaders and most activists in his organization held. How were they persuaded to shift to a strategy focused on negotiations and compromise rather than armed struggle and revolution?

Symbolic politics theory provides a way to think about these questions. The reason apartheid lasted as long as it did was the fiendishly effective symbolic politics of protection that sustained it. Built on a narrative of threat and the victimization of Afrikaners, and exploiting symbolic predispositions toward self-defense and dominance, apartheid's supporters were remarkably successful at convincing each other that the system was morally justifiable. When the system finally came apart, it did so because changing political circumstances drove a shift to a more moderate politics of distribution that demobilized the dominant white minority. Threats diminished, prejudice declined, and a continuation of apartheid came to be seen as more threatening than its dismantlement. The greatness of F.W. de Klerk is that he understood this situation and seized the moment with courage and determination.

Politics among nonwhites had a totally different character. Anti-white prejudice was confined to a small minority; the degree of threat from security forces declined; and the ANC's narrative of injustice was more and more widely articulated. As a result, the opportunity structure for all kinds of activism in South Africa, both violent and nonviolent, opened wider, even if the prospects for a violent overthrow of the government remained dim. In this context, the nonwhite communities did not have to choose between violent and nonviolent mobilization. Rather, some blacks continued violent attacks, mostly on black rivals; a few also attacked ordinary whites. A larger number engaged only in various forms of nonviolent activism—strikes, protest marches, rallies, and so on. The ANC carefully calibrated its response to this situation, publicly “suspending” its “armed struggle” while quietly continuing to engage in a civil war of substantial size against Inkatha, and also supporting violent attacks on black collaborators. The greatness of Mandela was in his ability to construct a strategy that allowed him to use his supporters' violence, which he did not fully control, in support of a policy which most blacks liked but which his own activists doubted.

White politics of accommodation

White hopes and fears. As noted above, fears in the white community were running high as the 1980s ended. Polled in early 1990, nearly 49% of whites said they feared for their family's safety, and 29% said they personally felt unsafe (de Kock 1996, 37). By September 1991, the proportion of whites feeling unsafe had risen to 38.8%.

At the same time, however, two huge and connected changes in South Africa's international environment altered white South Africans' perceptions of threat from the ANC. The larger change was the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe in the last quarter of 1989. As noted above, Botha's arguments for his hard-line stance against the ANC were based on his conflation of the ANC into part of a larger international Communist menace. In the view of numerous National Party and government elites, the collapse of Eastern European communism was essential to making the opening to the ANC possible, by reducing the sense of threat. The notion of the ANC as a Communist threat was simply no longer plausible. As a result, National Party leaders abandoned this line of argument.

The other big international change was the December 1988 agreement ending the conflicts in Angola and Namibia, which led to the withdrawal Cuban troops and Umkhonto fighters from Angola—a tangible, nearby indication of the decline of the Communist threat. It was also an indication that agreements with pro-Communist organizations like the MPLA in Angola and SWAPO in Namibia were feasible. After the Namibia elections were carried out successfully and the Cuban troops left Angola, it also demonstrated that such agreements might be observed. At least two government leaders of the time identified this agreement as another factor that lowered tensions in South Africa and paved the way for the release of Mandela (Interviews no. 11, 14). The result of these changes was a decline in white fears of communism, and a rise in white hopes for achieving a peaceful and tolerable settlement.

What hopes whites had for the future were pinned to the idea of power-sharing: when asked in March 1985 about a potential future “under a government consisting of whites, coloureds, Indians and Africans,” 47% had responded that they thought such a future would be “good,” with 32% saying it would be “bad”. By April 1990, hopes had risen further, with 63% expecting that the future under a power-sharing government would be “good,” and only 20% expecting that it would be “bad” (de Kock 1996, 46-48). Whites by this time were gloomy about other options: 92% thought a future under an “African majority government” would be bad. Assessing the then-current structure that included whites, coloreds and Indians but not blacks, 37% expected a bad future if it continued; only 29% expected this system to yield a good future. Whites were realizing that there was no going back.

The degree of white hope peaked in January of 1991. When asked whether they had more or less hope for a peaceful future than a year ago 56% answered “more hope” in January 1991. Hope remained high at the time of the 1992 referendum, with 48% still reporting “more hope” than before in February 1992.

Government rhetoric. One way of understanding how white voters were influenced in the 1992 referendum is to examine the advertising campaign that the National Party launched in the weeks before it took place. This campaign had a powerful symbolic politics element to it. A key tactic was to frame the issues so that voting against the negotiations process would seem riskier than voting for it—that is, to make fear work in favor of the policy of negotiating with the ANC. The major risk NP ads highlighted was the economic risk, summarized in a stark two-line ad in an Afrikaans-language newspaper: “Do not vote yourself out of a job. Vote ‘Yes’ for a solution that will work.” (*Volksblad* 3/9/92, p. 11). De Klerk emphasized the security risks in blunt terms as well, saying at one point, “A ‘No’ vote would be suicidal. It will scuttle all hopes of so-called white ‘survival’ because it would isolate whites” (quoted Strauss 1993, 341).

An earlier ad (*Volksblad* 3/6/92, p. 5) laid out this logic in more detail, stating:

You can vote yourself out of work.

You know that even the smallest ‘No’ vote majority will result in full-scale sanctions and boycotts.

Immediately.

That means: nobody wants the state we seek to make.

The coal we mine will remain a heap. . .
Our grapes and apples rot in storage houses. . .

A 'No' vote guarantees labor unrest, large demonstrations, strikes,
empty factories, neglected machines. . .

But you also know a 'Yes' vote will result in more money pouring
into the country . . .
More work for everyone.
More money in everyone's pocket. . .

[V]ote 'Yes' for a solution that will work.

The shrewdness of this ad is that it wraps together all of the different kinds of individual and group threats that drives individual motivation. Besides the individual economic threat in the opening headline, there is also the none-too-subtle physical threat implied by "labor unrest, . . . unemployment, . . . more crime". At the group level, there are threats to group status ("nobody wants the state we seek to make"), economic interest ("our grapes and apples rot"), and physical security of the society ("large demonstrations, strikes, . . . more crime"). Obviously, many of these points imply several threats at once. But it is so powerfully effective emotionally that various versions were printed, including one that enlarged specifically on the threat to the Cape region's fruit industry (*Die Burger*, 3/12/92, p. 8).

Other symbolic appeals also appeared in the campaign. Some appealed to values, as in: "Vote referendum '92. It is your right. It is your duty. It is your future." (*Die Burger* 3/16/92, p. 1). A more pointed values appeal was this one: "The world is going to judge us according to what we do on 17 March. And if the worst happens . . . future generations will remember . . . They voted for evil when they could have voted for good." (*Volksblad* 3/1/92, p. 13) Other ads focused on group pride and status: "Without reform South Africa is on the road to nowhere. Vote 'yes' on 17 March and we are on the way to the top" (*Die Burger* 3/7/92, p. 9). Another promoted fear of the neo-fascist AWB: "This one [swastika symbol] cost 45 million lives and six years of war. How many lives will this one [AWB's similar three-armed symbol] cost?" (*Volksblad* 3/13/92, p. 15)

Another powerful ad posed a series of questions appealing primarily to feelings of national pride and security fears. The second in this list of questions referred to the end to international sporting sanctions, asking, "Are you happy that South African teams can once again . . . [compete in] the Cricket World Cup?" The third posed a similar question about rugby. Several more were pointed security questions, such as "Are you glad to know that bombs and mines are no longer planted in shopping centers and streets?" and "Do you believe in peaceful negotiations instead of bloody revolution?" Two more of the questions appealed to economic interest, for example, "Do you want more international investment in South Africa so that the economy grows. . .?" Here the framing is for hope, rather than fear, but the overall message is: don't blow it. This point is driven home in the closing lines of the ad: "[A]sk yourself one more

question. How was it ever possible for you to have thought of voting ‘No’?” (*Volksblad* 3/5/92, p. 7). Statements by prominent South Africans supported these arguments, with athletes emphasizing their reluctance to return to international isolation, and economists offering their analyses of the dire economic costs of a “no” vote (Strauss 1993, 343-45).

To be sure, mixed with the symbolic and emotional appeals were a large number of logical arguments and appeals to material interest in the “yes” campaign. Certainly the economic arguments were both of these, and they were often quite detailed. Another theme was reassurance on political rights, for example: “we already have an agreement on a Charter of Fundamental Rights that will ensure your right to life, freedom and property” (*Volksblad* 3/9/92, p. 9). Yet another was to blast the opposition Conservative Party for its alleged inability to propose any alternative path: “they offer you a blank policy” (*Volksblad* 3/11/92, p. 7). Others mention specific shifts in the security environment and their benefits for individuals, such as “peace in Angola, shorter national service, . . . an end to bombings in fast food joints” (*Volksblad* 3/4/92, p. 9). Also mentioned were tactical arguments that negotiating now would enable the NP to negotiate from “a position of strength” (Strauss 1993, 346).

Opposition Rhetorics. The campaign for a “no” vote, as summarized by Annette Strauss (1993, 340), tried to revive the apartheid-era appeals to security, identity and economic fears:

The leader of the Conservatives, Dr Andries Treurnicht, claimed . . . that the N.P. would create 'massive chaos and total economic collapse' in South Africa if it won the referendum. The Communists would be allowed to take over, and they would nationalise assets and suppress cultural groups. According to a C.P. advertisement, 'the communistic governed countries in darkest Africa count among the most impoverished in the world', and South Africa would join their ranks . . . the farms of the whites will be handed over to the farm workers' without any compensation, and the A.N.C. would . . . redistribute one-third of the assets of whites among blacks. . . civil servants would lose their jobs. At a meeting in Uitenhage, the C.P. member of Parliament, Willem Botha, predicted that 'Whites will no longer control the defence force, the police force and all the government institutions.

Black leaders had two messages for white voters. On the one hand, Mandela in particular repeatedly emphasized a message of reassurance for whites if they would allow a peaceful transition. In one speech to supporters, for example, he insisted, “Whites are fellow South Africans and we want them to feel safe. We appreciate the contribution they have made towards the development of this country (quoted Moriarty 2003, 58).

On the other hand, black leaders unanimously made clear that a “no” vote in the referendum would be disastrous for whites. Mandela bluntly threatened: if whites voted “no,”

“then there would be a fight”. Chris Hani threatened that blacks would return to mass violence and to making the country ungovernable. Frank Chikane, general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, stated that a “no” vote would be “too ghastly to contemplate, because it would strengthen the argument for a violent resolution”. On the other hand, Mandela and other black leaders tried to calm white fears about the implications of a “yes” vote, denying intentions to seize white-owned farmland, or to deprive civil service retirees of benefits (Strauss 1993, 342-46).

It is impossible to know the extent to which these competing campaigns changed opinions. The final result was a 68.7% “yes” vote on polling day (Welsh 2009, 441), a bit more than the 60% who had told pollsters they supported negotiations two years earlier. However, the government’s internal polls showed a consistent two-thirds level of support for the reform policy (interview no. 14), suggesting that the “yes” campaign simply stabilized existing public opinion. Predictions of lower support were probably biased, overly influenced by the few Conservative Party successes in by-elections in conservative districts in previous months.

Leadership. F.W. de Klerk was not known as a charismatic leader; his cabinet colleagues generally believed that when a charismatic speech was called for, Foreign Minister R. F. “Pik” Botha was the man for the job. Nevertheless, if we understand leadership the symbolic politics way—whereby positive feelings about a leader (and his party) translate into positive feelings (that is, support for) his policies, then de Klerk was quite good at it. As noted above, nearly 69% of whites indicated in September 1991 that they trusted de Klerk, and this did translate into support for his policies. For example, from October 1987 to April 1990 a steady 70-73% of whites told pollsters that they supported the “government’s reform policy”: even though that policy changed dramatically from Botha’s time to de Klerk’s, the public stayed with him.

A better indicator is this one. In November 1988, when the idea was against government policy, only 30% of whites indicated that they supported negotiations with the ANC. By 1990, however—less than two years later—after de Klerk had announced his shift toward a policy of negotiating with the ANC, popular support for the idea has suddenly doubled to 60% (de Kock 40). It took the shift in the President’s position to crystallize all of the doubts about apartheid that had been growing in the public mind. De Klerk’s immediate associates generally agreed on the importance of the President’s role, with one Cabinet colleague going so far as to say that voters “blindly” follow their leaders (Interview no. 5). A reformist Member of Parliament (Interview no. 2) described his voters’ response to his reformist views (in the 1980s, when they were still radical) this way: “I never heard so much shit,” he says his constituents told him, “but clearly you believe it, so we trust you”.

Public opinion analysis. Statistical analysis of public opinion shows that symbolic politics powerfully influenced people’s views on the issue of negotiations. The best measure of voters’ views comes from the question in a September 1991 survey in which people were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement: “The current policies of President de Klerk will bring lasting peace to South Africa”.

Table 3: Influences on White Support for Negotiations

Model	Unstandardized coefficient B	Std. Error	Standardized coefficient Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	.603	.154		3.921	.000
Schools should be open to all who qualify	-.440	.076	-.241	-5.773	.000
De Klerk sincere in ending race discrimination	.359	.057	.261	6.332	.000
How safe do you feel in S.A. today?	.191	.046	.178	4.128	.000
Your life in new S.A. would be (better or worse)?	.233	.052	.196	4.518	.000

Dependent variable: De Klerk will bring peace

R=.604; R Square=.365; Adj. R Square=.359; Std. error of Estimate = .73118

Table 3 above shows the most important factors influencing support for de Klerk’s policy of negotiations, all of them part of a symbolic politics explanation. First, more prejudiced people (those opposing school desegregation) were more likely to oppose de Klerk’s policy. Even more important were feelings about de Klerk himself: those who trusted de Klerk (i.e., believed he was sincere) were more likely to back his policies than those who did not. The other two variables that mattered most were essentially measures of hope (will your life in the new South Africa be better or worse?) and fear (How safe do you feel in South Africa today?). Those with higher hopes and lower fears were more likely to support de Klerk than were the pessimistic and the fearful.

In sum, a simple symbolic politics model of public opinion based on four variables—hope, fear, prejudice and feelings about the leader—gives us more explanatory leverage than anything else, accounting for almost 36% of the variance. Nothing else in the data set makes much difference. Another survey done on the eve of the referendum yielded similar results. Respondents were asked whether they could support establishing an interim government including “the total population”. This question is similar to the real referendum question, since the negotiations were in part about establishing an interim government. Again, the key variables influencing whites’ views were symbolic predispositions and emotions: fear, prejudice, hope (as measured by optimism about the economy), and authoritarian attitudes (measured as approval for restrictions on freedom). Attitudes about de Klerk were not measured in this survey.

De Klerk’s (2010) own retrospective judgment is consistent with these findings. When asked how he built support for his policies, his first answer was, “I had the credentials” of a conservative reputation and the respect accorded to the State President—that is, trust. He also mentioned the immediate symbolic benefits of his opening to the ANC, noting that the public had noticed the positive international reaction. Additionally, he saw a feeling akin to hope—“a sense of relief” among a population that sensed they were leaving the “doomed road” they had been on. He also judged that the decline of the Communist threat was important—that is, a

lowering of the sense of fear. Thus, in de Klerk's view, the key variables in building white support for the negotiations process were trust, prestige, relief (or hope), and declining fear.

Elite politics among whites. Besides building popular support for the reform effort, de Klerk also had the task of building and maintaining elite support, especially in holding his cabinet and party Caucusus together, and in maintaining the loyalty of the security forces.

The first task was eased by the fact that de Klerk himself was the leader of the more conservative wing of the National Party: in the words of one inside observer, he was the "leader of the pack" of those opposing reform in the 1980s (Interview no. 1). On the other side, there was already a strong constituency in the leadership for just the kind of course de Klerk embarked upon. In fact, when de Klerk was elected leader of the National Party, there were initially more votes for his more reformist rivals than for him. "My interpretation," de Klerk wrote later, "was that there was an urgent desire among many members of the caucus to move quickly ahead with reform" (de Klerk 1999, 134).

De Klerk used a curious mixture of participatory and directive leadership styles to keep the leadership together. For example, he famously met with his cabinet at a *bosberad* or "bush conference" in December 1989, two months before his speech unbanning the ANC, but the discussion was general, "focusing . . . on the principles of the policy," in de Klerk's words. De Klerk then worked out the details with a small inner circle over the following weeks (de Klerk 1999, 161-163).

Another, even earlier key move was de Klerk's abolition of the State Security Council, whereby he shifted power from the more conservative "securocrats" in that body to the more reformist Cabinet. In the view of one of his close aides, this move played an important role in enabling de Klerk to push forward with negotiations. Also important was the style of cabinet government that de Klerk followed: he encouraged open debate in cabinet meetings, but there were no votes. Instead, President de Klerk would sum up the discussion and formulate a resolution (Interview no. 10). This process enabled de Klerk to ensure that all cabinet members had a voice but not a veto: enough voice to make them feel included, but not enough to stop progress. Finally, National Party leader realized that their careers depended on their success in the negotiations process: to have bolted from the part would have ended their political careers (Interview no. 17). Thus de Klerk managed to maneuver the more reluctant among his colleagues into accepting the tough compromises that were necessary. In later interviews, de Klerk's cabinet colleagues were widely agreed on the importance of his leadership in keeping the process on track.

The other critical issue of elite politics was maintaining control of the security forces, especially the military. De Klerk later wrote about this problem:

In my relationship with the security forces, I sometimes felt like a man who had been given two fully grown watchdogs—say, a Rottweiler and a bull terrier. Their previous owner had . . . allowed them to run free and chase cats all over the neighbourhood. I had put a stop to all that. As a result, they did

not particularly like me—although they had an ingrained sense of obedience . . . I could guide them, but I knew that if I pulled [on the leash] too hard, I might choke them—or they might slip their collars and cause pandemonium in the neighbourhood (de Klerk 1999, 264).

There was, in fact, a great deal of illicit security force activity that de Klerk knew nothing about. Two secret military units, the Civilian Cooperation Bureau (CCB) and the Directorate of Covert Collection (DCC) were tied respectively to assassinations and to promoting the violence in Natal (Welsh 2009, 468). Yet another military unit, the Fifth Reconnaissance Regiment, which contained mostly black troops, was linked by at least two sources to random massacres on Johannesburg-area commuter trains in the early 1990s (Steyn; TRC II, 612). The police were at least equally out of control. In the 1980s, policemen had engaged in throwing gasoline bombs at ANC activists' homes, among other assorted mayhem in the townships, acting as they saw it "in terms of a general order to intimidate and scare activists" (TRC Amnesty Committee 1996). There was also a secret South African Police hit squad based at the Vlakplaas farm outside Pretoria that killed at least 70 people in the 1980s and early 1990s (Gordin 1998, 19), including some in random attacks on taxi stands (Ellis 1998, 285). South African police also systematically aided and armed Inkatha fighters in the Natal violence (Bopela and Luthuli 2005). De Klerk appointed several special commissions to investigate these misdeeds in both police and army, but their probes were constantly blocked, as top-ranking police generals and other officers destroyed relevant documents and lied to the commissions.

Yet de Klerk did not wholly fail in controlling the security forces. When a former head of the South African Defense Forces, the charismatic and highly-respected Gen. Constand Viljoen, became head of the right-wing Afrikaner Volksfront and began gathering armed supporters (Welsh 2009, 417, 503), his successor Gen. Georg Meiring made clear that he would oppose any coup attempt (Hammann 2001, 210). Meiring's loyalty, and Viljoen's decision not to challenge it, prevented a civil war among whites.

Summary: Symbolic politics among whites. Symbolic politics helps us understand why white voters supported the negotiations with the ANC, even though those negotiations were going to lead to a black-led government. The changing opportunity structure had much to do with it: the moral and tangible effects of international sanctions were raising the costs of apartheid, while the collapse of Communism made the prospect of an ANC-led government less threatening. These shifts showed up in changing feelings among white voters: while they remained fearful of the continuing violence, they had high hopes for a future power-sharing government in the early 1990s. Declining prejudice and their high level of trust in de Klerk also influenced white voters to support his policies.

The National Party government vigorously pressed on the voters' hot buttons to maintain that sentiment, emphasizing the threats that would face any effort to maintain apartheid policies. Continuing apartheid, they said, would threaten South Africans' economic future (due to economic sanctions), their status in the world (due to religious rejection and sports boycotts), their moral standing (apartheid was "evil"), and their physical safety (because violence would

escalate). However, reform offered hope: economic growth, international acceptance, and peace. Hope finally conquered fear.

The symbolic politics of resistance

The gross injustice of the apartheid system meant that political appeals based on an “injustice” frame usually resonated powerfully with non-white communities. The lesson of the mid-1980s was that only government repression was inhibiting mass non-white mobilization in favor of a politics of redistribution. When P.W. Botha’s policy of reform apartheid opened a window of opportunity for non-white political action, the UDF quickly sprang to life behind Allan Boesak’s famous demand to correct injustice: “We want all our rights, we want them here, and we want them now” (Lodge and Nasson 1991).

With the State of Emergency that he imposed in 1986, Botha attempted to slam shut that window of opportunity, but de Klerk’s policy of negotiation with the ANC required that he re-open it, re-legalizing the ANC and allowing it to engage in peaceful mass mobilization without legal restraint. The result was the re-emergence of a mass politics of redistribution, demanding full political rights and some economic redistribution in favor of the nonwhite majority. The threat to which people were responding was apartheid’s continued assault on their dignity and status, and on their life chances in both the political and economic realms. Where blacks differed was on their reaction to the simultaneous threat of violence: while some, supporters of the Rivonia narrative, preferred to stick to nonviolent mobilization, others responded to the ANC’s revolutionary narrative and renewed the violent tactics of the mid-1980s. The challenge of the ANC leadership was how to maneuver between the opportunity provided by de Klerk and the competing preferences of their own followers.

Black hopes and fears

South African blacks, often living in more dangerous neighborhoods than whites did, were, unsurprisingly, more likely than whites to tell pollsters that they felt unsafe. In March and July 1986, as the township unrest was raging, 63%-64% of blacks said they felt unsafe. This fell to 34% in July 1988, after the state of emergency had reduced rates of township violence. However, as violence between Inkatha and ANC supporters rose again at the end of the decade, so did feelings of insecurity: 76% of black respondents said they felt unsafe in the July 1989 survey (de Kock 1996, 55).

As they began seeing the results of de Klerk’s policies, blacks’ fears remained strong, but the fear did not typically influence their political attitudes. On the one hand, township violence continued to rise, prompting over 61% of blacks (and 74%-76% of coloreds and Asians) to agree partially or fully in the September 1991 survey that “Political violence is continuing to threaten the introduction of a genuine democratic order in South Africa”. When asked whether they felt safe or unsafe, 65% of black respondents replied, “unsafe”. Nor were people very optimistic

than the problem would improve with a new majority government: nearly as many black respondents expected political violence to get worse (36%) as better (43%) when asked about this in February 1992. Yet there was no significant statistical relationship between these concerns and their hopes for the future: fears did not dampen hopes. And since the violence was a result of the status quo of apartheid, it paradoxically lowered the risk of activism, since clearly the vast majority of non-activists felt unsafe anyway.

Against this background of fear, blacks were still hopeful in some ways: when asked in 1991 whether “the current policies of Pres. De Klerk will bring lasting peace to South Africa,” almost 54% of blacks agreed completely or to some extent, with another 31% neutral and only 15% disagreeing. When asked whether their lives would be better or worse in the future, black survey respondents were more skeptical, with fewer than 39% saying life would be better or much better, and 28% saying it would be worse. Optimism increased a bit by February 1992, as 49% of blacks told pollsters that they imagined people like themselves would be wealthier in a future South Africa. When asked in 1992 and 1993 whether they had more or less hope for a peaceful future than the year before, a steady 52%-54% answered that they had “more hope” (de Kock 1996). As far as hopes went, then, blacks were optimistic about peace, but a bit less certain about achieving comity or prosperity.

ANC rhetoric, resistance and violence

After the ANC was unbanned in February 1990, it absorbed and replaced the Mass Democratic Movement, the UDF’s successor. However, with Mandela’s release, tensions began growing between defenders of the Rivonia narrative who wanted to shift focus toward negotiations, and advocates of the revolutionary narrative who wanted to overthrow the government, not talk to it. As a result, the ANC continued to call for people’s war as late as January 1990, and even Mandela upon his release in February 1990 spoke about the need to “intensify the struggle on *all* fronts” (quoted Welsh 2009, 387, emphasis added). While interim ANC leader Nzo conceded in January 1990, “We do not have the capacity . . . to intensify the armed struggle,” (quoted Rantete 1998, 151), Umkhonto chief of staff Chris Hani threatened in a July 1990 speech that “the ANC might have to ‘seize power’ if the government did not make concessions” (Smith and Tromp 2009, 217).

Even so, the ANC had been moving for years, unsteadily and tentatively, toward the possibility of entering negotiations starting around 1987 (Moriarty 2003, 37). In that year, it had released a statement asserting that it was “ready and willing to enter into genuine negotiations provided they are aimed at the transformation of our country into a united and non-racial democracy” (quoted Rantete 1998, 145), subject to a number of conditions including the release of political prisoners and an end to the State of Emergency. This list of ANC conditions for talks was generally ratified by the Organization of African Unity in the August 1989 Harare Declaration, giving the ANC an additional push toward the negotiating table. Still, hard-liners like Hani distrusted the South African government and were dubious about the value of seeking a negotiated settlement. Even some ANC intellectuals like Pallo Jordan long continued to

denounce the idea of “cowardly compromises” with a government at war with the ANC (Rantete 1998, 202).

Mandela (1990a) played a critical role in building the constituency for talks, steadfastly repeating the Rivonia narrative starting with his speech in Soweto two days after his February 1990 release from prison. On the one hand, he said, “the ANC will pursue the armed struggle against the government as long as the violence of apartheid continues.” On the other hand, he asserted:

We are . . . disturbed that there are certain elements amongst those who claim to support the liberation struggle who use violence against our people. . . We condemn that. Our major weapon of struggle against apartheid oppression and exploitation is our people organised into mass formations of the Democratic Movement. This is achieved by politically organising our people—not through the use of violence against our people

Mandela went on to reach out to the police, and to call for understanding of their position, citing his own famous line from the Rivonia trial: “I stated in 1964 that I and the ANC are as opposed to black domination as we are to white domination. . . We must clearly demonstrate our goodwill to our white compatriots.”

Two months later, in an address to the South African Youth Congress, Mandela (1990b) was already pushing hard for acceptance of the negotiations process while repeating the call for restraint against black opponents, saying:

We must therefore be clear that negotiations do not mean the end of the struggle. They are a continuation of the struggle . . .

We expect you to respect other freedom fighters outside our organisation. . . Any form of violence, any form of coercion, any form of harassment is against the policy of the ANC...

On the other hand, Mandela still had some tough words for the government and for traditional black leaders:

Recently the government has let loose the South African police against our people. . . President de Klerk, please take notice: If people are becoming angry and intolerant, . . . it must be measured against the activities of your police and your troops.

It is not the policy of the ANC to condemn the chiefs as such. These are our traditional leaders. . . [However,] if any chief decides to be a tyrant, to take decisions for his people, he will come to a tragic end in the sense that we will deal with him. . .

In sum, Mandela was trying to take a line in favor of negotiations and restraint of violence, while warning both the government and black “chiefs” (including homeland leaders) that this restraint was not unlimited.

Mandela (1990c) reiterated this call for restraint to one of his toughest audiences, a rally of the South African Communist Party, in July of 1990. He opened with the main point: “Even when we got together with comrade Joe Slovo and others in 1961 to form the People’s army, Umkhonto we Sizwe, we understood . . . that despite the fact that state repression had compelled us to take up arms, this did not make the ANC a slave to violence.” Batting down claims that Umkhonto leaders were using violence to undermine negotiations, he defended them, saying, “To suggest . . . that these outstanding sons and daughters of our people harbour ideas of unilateral military action against the peace process, is an insult manufactured by the enemies of democracy.” He then reiterated the Rivonia commitment to peaceful change if it was possible:

Our movement, which has a distinguished and unchallenged history of commitment to peaceful solutions, has itself never abandoned the strategy of non-violent struggle. . . It cannot now turn against the peaceful resolution of the conflict in our country, precisely at the moment when such a peaceful resolution seems possible. . .

We must move with all possible speed to abolish the apartheid system and to transform South Africa into a united, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist country. We have entered into talks with the government for the realisation of these goals. . . we insist that the talks must go on.

While Mandela was making this case, the events of the first half of 1990 gave the ANC the final push it needed to enter negotiations. First, in his dramatic February speech, de Klerk unbanned the ANC and Umkhonto; he had begun releasing ANC prisoners even earlier, thus beginning to meet the ANC’s preconditions for negotiations. In the middle of the year, the ANC was embarrassed by the exposure of its Operation Vula, a covert plan to “lay the foundation for a revolutionary armed insurrection” (Rantete 1998, 186). At this point, the ANC finally reciprocated de Klerk’s moves by formally suspending its armed struggle. Its promise to do so was included in the “Pretoria Minute” agreement signed with the government in August 1990, which stated that the ANC would suspend all “armed actions and related activities;” the subsequent DF Malan Accord in February 1991 specified a long list of such activities that would be halted (Welsh 2009, 393-96). Umkhonto terrorist operations had actually ceased some time before, but the hope was that other ANC-related violence would also end.

During the next two years, ANC policy continued to oscillate between what it called a “Programme of Mass Action to Destroy Apartheid and Transfer Power to the People” (Rantete

1992, 3)—the revolutionary narrative—and a focus on negotiations with the government. The ANC’s National Consultative Conference in December 1990 decided to continue to recruit and train people for Umkhonto (Smith and Tromp 2009, 220). Even as Mandela and his team pursued preliminary talks with the government, Umkhonto chief of staff (and later Communist Party leader) Chris Hani continued to argue that the talks were a ruse, and that the ANC would have to return to revolutionary warfare (Smith and Tromp 2009, 224). Similarly, Mac Maharaj, the leader of Operation Vula, simultaneously promoted support for negotiations among the “comrades” and supported violence against black township councilors. As he argued later, these “councilors continued to implement apartheid, so they came into our firing line” (Maharaj 2010). In sum, the ANC’s strategy was simultaneously to fight and to talk, with different leaders advocating different mixtures of these tactics.

The program of pursuing a negotiated transition did not become settled ANC policy until a pair of key political conferences in July and October 1991, and even then it did not stay settled. At the ANC’s July 1991 national conference, Mandela reiterated his characterization of negotiations as “a theatre of struggle,” and repeated his argument against delaying them: “It can never be in our interest that we . . . delay . . . the achievement of the objective of the transfer of power to the people,” (Meredith 1998, 447). Mandela’s line was approved at the conference, but other ANC leaders continued to repeat the views of the revolutionary narrative, arguing that the key objective had to be to gain power in the streets (Rantete 1998, 202). An October 1991 “Patriotic Front” conference that included both ANC and more radical PAC members then ratified the more moderate line, accepting the notion that all-party talks offered the only path forward to the constituent assembly they wanted. This agreement paved the way for the opening of the CODESA talks two months later (Friedman 1993, 17).

Even as the negotiation process moved forward, however, violence was rising to unprecedented heights. A civil war between UDF and Inkatha supporters had already broken out in KwaZulu and Natal in the late 1980s, resulting in the deaths over 2,000 people in 1988-89. But now the fighting spread more widely, and especially to the Johannesburg-Pretoria area (now the province of Gauteng): nearly 10,000 people were killed in political violence in 1990-92, nearly half in KwaZulu and Natal but the rest in other regions (Kaufman 2011). The ANC knew that the “self-defense units” it had set up were responsible for much of this violence (Rantete 1998, 190), but even Mandela cynically continued to blame the ANC’s opponents (Jeffery 2009). In effect, Mandela was defending the violent behavior of his own radical supporters, rather than attempting to restrain them.

A key turning point came in June 1992 in the township of Boipatong, where Inkatha supporters retaliated for past murders of local Zulus by massacring 45 people they presumed to be ANC supporters. The ANC again blamed the government, comparing it to the Nazi regime (Welsh 2009, 449) and blaming de Klerk “in person” for the killings (Jeffery 2009, 329). The ANC was wrong: the killers later testified that they had acted without police assistance (Jeffery 2009, 329-30; Welsh 2009, 450-51). However, its accusations were effective, playing a pivotal role in undermining the moral authority de Klerk had gained among some South African blacks and in the international community.

When the negotiations deadlocked in the middle of 1992, just before the Boipatong massacre, ANC leaders turned to what Communist Party theoretician Jeremy Cronin called the “Leipzig way”: an attempt to topple Pretoria’s internal allies, and possibly the government itself, in a series of mass demonstrations (reinforced by workers’ strikes) similar to those that had toppled Eastern Europe’s Communist governments in 1989 (Jeffery 2009, 324; Welsh 2009, 448). After this effort resulted in the Bisho massacre of September 7, 1992, the ANC finally shifted to a focus on pursuing a negotiated settlement, though it continued to use mass protests and fierce propaganda attacks to strengthen its hand in the negotiations.

The ANC attitude toward Inkatha remained hostile, but it was ambiguous about the use of violence. Mandela signaled moderation in 1990, famously visiting Durban and telling ANC supporters, “Take your guns, your knives and your pangas, and throw them into the sea . . . End the war now” (quoted Jeffery 2009, 240). However, the ANC did not reinforce this message with action. Mandela’s colleagues refused to allow him to visit Buthelezi for peace talks in 1990; Mandela later reported that they would have “throttled” him if he had done so (Welsh 2009).

Instead, ANC leaders often encouraged the fighting against the IFP. The central ANC figure in this fighting was Harry Gwala, ANC regional leader in the Natal midlands and one of the top ten officials in the ANC. It was Gwala who famously stated in May 1992, “Make no mistake, we kill warlords,” referring to his IFP opponents (quoted Jeffery 2009, 315). ANC Youth League president Peter Mokaba supported this line, urging, “If Inkatha members come to Richmond, let them enter the township, but they will never return” (quoted Jeffery 1997, 258). Even Mandela praised the formation of ANC “self-defense units” (Welsh 2009, 249), and endorsed a “ban” on IFP supporters from the Vaal triangle in Gauteng (Jeffery 2009, 249), implicitly encouraging ANC supporters to enforce this ban violently.

ANC moderates eventually decided Gwala had gone too far, and tried to remove him, but they failed: his radical position had too much support in the organization (Rantete 1998, 211). This failure to restrain its radical leaders was an ANC pattern, applying also to Winnie Mandela, who had praised the necklace killings and whose bodyguards murdered a 14-year-old boy. It was impossible to bring her down, ANC official Tokyo Sexwale noted: “Winnie is a symbol” (Rantete 1998, 76). According to du Toit (2001, 78), the ANC’s inability to control its own supporters’ violence—and the regime’s similar inability—was a result of the nature of the fighting: insurgency and counterinsurgency warfare is inevitably highly decentralized, so high-level commanders inevitably have imperfect control over their subordinates.

Mandela finally publicly accepted partial ANC responsibility for the violence in 1993 (quoted Meredith 1998, 495), but by then it was far too late to prevent civil war between ANC and Inkatha. Nearly 8,000 people would die in political violence in KwaZulu-Natal between 1990 and 1995, when the fighting finally began to diminish. Another 9,000 would die in political violence in the rest of the country, much of it in the disputed Pretoria-Johannesburg area (Kaufman 2010).

Black public opinion

Though the ANC claimed to represent the whole nonwhite community in South Africa, public opinion polls suggest that popular views were much more moderate than the debate between Mandela and his radical rivals would suggest. The best data on this come from a July 1992 survey, which was taken after the ANC's walkout from the CODESA talks, and before the violent Bisho massacre drove them back to the negotiating table. At this time, when all options seemed open, black public opinion was notably moderate, with a majority endorsing strategies more cautious than the position of Nelson Mandela and the ANC mainstream. Given four options for how the ANC should move forward, the plurality opinion among blacks (36%) was that the parties should just keep on negotiating. Another 15% were even more conservative, choosing the answer: "The present talks will not work. The government should run the country and look for other options"—which was of course the favorite choice of white conservatives. The second-largest group, 27%, advocated Mandela's and the mainstream ANC's combined strategy of negotiations and protest rallies (that is, "mass action"). And only 22% indicated support for the radical "Leipzig Way" strategy that the ANC was then pursuing, agreeing that "The ANC and other parties should organize very large protest meetings, marches, stay away strikes and boycotts to force the government to resign from power".

Further analysis shows a number of influences underlying these views, revealing a mixture of symbolic and instrumental concerns. The most powerful influence was assessments of Mandela's sincerity: blacks who believed Mandela to be sincere tended to support more radical options. Strikingly, then, Mandela had a relatively radical image among both blacks and whites in early-1990s South Africa. Not only did most whites not trust him, as noted above; but the blacks who were listening to him were hearing primarily a radical message; it was the blacks who did not trust him who were more cautious. Trust for de Klerk pushed the other way: blacks who thought de Klerk was sincere were more inclined to favor more conservative options, like negotiations without protest rallies. A third symbolic predisposition that mattered was social conservatism. For example, blacks who were more tolerant of homosexuality were a bit more inclined to radicalism than were those who disapproved of homosexuals. Finally, prejudice had a small influence on these opinions: blacks who favored replacing white civil servants with non-whites (73% of the sample) were slightly more likely to favor radical strategies than those who opposed such reverse discrimination.

There was, however, a giant exception to this influence of symbolic predispositions. The second-most influential factor influencing support for radical strategies was the purely instrumental one of whether respondents believed that "mass action will be able to force the government to reach agreement with the ANC". Black respondents were split almost exactly in half between those who thought mass action would work; and those who were either unsure, or convinced that it would not work. Among those who believed that mass action would work, almost 33% favored a revolutionary strategy, as opposed to only 9% of the skeptics and 16% of the pessimists convinced it would not work. In contrast, the pure-negotiation route was favored by only 29% of those who thought mass action would work, but by 50% of those who did not, and 41% of those who were skeptical about mass action. Summed up another way, almost three-quarters (74%) of the radicals were people convinced mass action would work. The rest of the

radicals were probably those who, like Hani, were willing to try mass action but expected it to fail, and then to have to return to armed struggle.

Reasons for ANC strategy

Why did the ANC leadership continue to pursue radical tactics when most of its followers preferred a more moderate path? In part this was a shrewd recognition of the fact that disorder on the streets provided the ANC with its strongest leverage in negotiations with the government. If the ANC learned from the Bisho massacre that a pure “Leipzig Way” strategy would be bloody and ineffective, the National Party learned from the same set of events that it needed negotiations to continue, and that it had to be more flexible in those talks. This was time when the government shifted its focus from trying to assure group rights for whites (which was unacceptable to the ANC) to protecting whites’ interests through strong individual rights for all (Interview no. 12).

Yet if their reliance on peaceful protest was shrewd, ANC leaders’ tolerance of their followers’ violent tactics stemmed from a mixture of cynicism and weakness. On the one hand, many ANC leaders were so devoted to the revolutionary narrative that there was always a group of them—people such as Harry Gwala, Ronnie Kasrils and Winnie Mandela—who were willing to justify and encourage violent action against the ANC’s opponents. Mandela and his moderate supporters probably lacked the ability to rein these colleagues in, and stronger efforts to do so might well have caused them to lose all control over militant local groups. As a result, they temporized, alternately praising and attempting to restrain the militants, using them as a weapon while denying responsibility and trying to moderate their worst excesses. The ANC leaders won, gaining lasting power in South Africa, but the legacy of their followers’ violence endures in South Africa’s continuing epidemic of violent crime, which ANC-led government remains unable to control.

Conclusion

The stark injustice of apartheid makes South Africa’s dilemma appear simpler than it was. Of course apartheid had to end, and of course Mandela was the best partner for the regime to work with in managing the transition. Unfortunately, there was no way to make that transition a smooth one.

The central problem, as the ANC repeatedly pointed out, was the regime’s embrace of violent repression and unsparing discrimination directed against the black majority, justified in terms of self-defense against the “black peril” and the “Communist threat”. By denying economic opportunity to blacks wherever possible, the regime limited their stake in maintaining South Africa’s economy, pushing them toward socialist ideas; and by responding to nonviolent protests with savage repression, it turned even dignified lawyers like Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo into violent, radical firebrands. After decades spouting violent revolutionary rhetoric, the

ANC leadership began turning into just the sort of Communist bogeyman that the National Party always said it was. Afrikaners, meanwhile, were inculcated so deeply with their own narrative of victimization at the hands of the British that they were unable to see how they were victimizing the nonwhite population: they actually managed to convince themselves, partly as a result of Verwoerd's charismatic advocacy, that apartheid was just and well-intentioned.

Even when the breakthrough came in 1990, therefore, both de Klerk and Mandela were constrained by the deeply embedded symbolic predispositions on both sides in favor of violence. For whites, the fears of Communist domination had diminished, but the racist distrust of blacks remained strong among many. And of course, apartheid's dim view of blacks was in large part a self-fulfilling prophesy: by denying decent education and job prospects to so many young blacks, it fostered just the sort of uncultivated and indolent, but desperate and dangerous, population that its apologists imagined (though to a lesser extent than they feared).

The ray of hope that de Klerk was following was the popular view among whites, endorsed by his National Party, that a power-sharing arrangement could offer salvation for themselves and for South Africa. The window of opportunity was provided by the Soviet collapse and the peace agreements in Namibia and Angola. De Klerk then built support for his policy using the symbolic strategy of fostering hopes, assuaging fears, appealing to the less prejudiced and capitalizing on the trust he had earned as a long-time conservative in the National Party. According to the survey data, these were the factors that underlay his success with public opinion. His campaign in favor of the 1992 referendum helped, cleverly framing the choice so that the notion of going back to apartheid policies was shown to be more threatening to their safety, status, and prosperity than continued negotiations would be.

For Mandela, of course, it was de Klerk who provided the window of opportunity by meeting most of the ANC's preconditions for negotiations, not least by releasing him and his colleagues from prison. The path to ANC moderation was paved in part by its consistent argument that its enemy was the apartheid system, not the white race, and by most ordinary blacks' principled adherence to that non-racialist view. Indeed, black public opinion had remained more loyal to the Rivonia narrative than the ANC leadership had, with a solid centrist majority favoring either a pure-negotiation or a "negotiation plus protest" route to a democratic future. The black public therefore responded to Mandela's call to support negotiations based on a mixture of trust in Mandela, faith in the sincerity of de Klerk, pragmatic skepticism about the prospects of success for more radical strategies, and a conservative outlook that generated skepticism of the hotheaded young radicals' ideas and behavior. For most South African blacks, just like the whites, going forward with negotiations seemed clearly to be the least risky course.

But none of this enabled de Klerk or Mandela (or Buthelezi) to restrain the violent predispositions of their more hotheaded supporters. De Klerk's security ministers, Defense Minister Magnus Malan and Law and Order Minister Adriaan Vlok, were either too incompetent or too malicious to control their lawless subordinates, and often too deceitful to inform de Klerk of what they did know. De Klerk should, in retrospect, have tried harder to uncover and rein in this behavior, since his metaphorical police Rottweiler had in fact slipped its leash. But his fear of even worse possibilities was not unjustified—there really was talk of a coup, quashed by Gen. Meiring's loyalty. Yet if the worst of the allegations are true—of military involvement in train

massacres, of police mayhem and fueling of the ANC-Inkatha fighting—then the halo on de Klerk’s well-earned Nobel Peace Prize is badly tarnished by what he was unable to do.

Mandela’s halo is at least equally tarnished. Though he spoke out repeatedly against the use of violence by his supporters, he was too often equivocal, praising the “self-defense units” that so often ran out of control; blaming township violence on the government and Inkatha-influenced hostels when his own supporters were equally responsible; and threatening recalcitrant chiefs and homeland leaders that “the people will deal with them,” certainly ungenerously. Of course, he has the excuse that, unlike de Klerk, he was not working with an ostensibly disciplined state bureaucracy, but with a motley collection of ex-prisoners, ex-exiles and street protestors that had very little internal discipline at all. By one account he tried to remove Harry Gwala, for example, but was unable to do so—probably in part because Gwala’s subordinates might have run even more amok in his absence. Still the ANC’s credentials as fighters for justice against apartheid tyranny are open to question based on the brutality of the means its followers employed. And the ANC does bear some responsibility for those means, as they were justified by the rhetoric of the ANC’s own revolutionary narrative. Mandela’s cynicism in blaming it all on the government was certainly an important obstacle to efforts to reduce the body count.

South Africa emerges, therefore, as an ambiguous case, not the positive one I had initially expected. It did, indeed, successfully devise and implement a negotiated end to apartheid. But it did not avoid civil war; 20,000 people paid with their lives for that failure.

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