# Chapter 2
# Democratic Consolidation in South Africa, 1994-1999

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## Introduction

Democratic consolidation presupposes the holding of free and fair elections because such elections enable political parties to exercise legitimate authority and citizens to obtain protection by the rule of law. Democratic consolidation also presupposes a robust civil society that recognises the diversity/plurality of interests, the richness of associational life, the protection of individual freedoms and equality before the law.[1]

South Africa's fledgling democracy delivered the franchise to the majority, previously disenfranchised citizens. The 1994 democratic election ushered South Africa into an era of democracy that set the following key pillars of democratic consolidation in place:

- a functioning multi-party parliamentary system with election processes that are considered to be procedural and substantially free and fair;

- a prevailing sense of constitutionalism and of the rule of law, supported by institutions that buttress democracy, including the Constitutional Court, the Human Rights Commission, the Commission on Gender Equality, the Auditor-General, the Public Service Commission and the Public Protector;

- mechanisms of accountability, such as the Open Democracy Act, which enshrine the right to public information, force government to be more transparent and expose acts of corruption among public officials, grounded on a constitution that enshrines the values of good governance and sound administration in public affairs;

- a professional civil service functioning on the basis of constitutional values, including impartiality, dedication to service delivery and fiscal accountability;

- mechanisms for citizen participation, including public hearings of parliamentary committees and public participation in public policy-making processes;

- an integrated and highly developed economic infrastructure with considerable potential for economic prosperity.

The 1999 democratic election took place amid large-scale societal transformation and reform and represented the first major opportunity to measure the extent of democratic consolidation in South Africa.[2]

This chapter examines key indicators of democratic consolidation as measured in longitudinal studies by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), as a backdrop to the evaluation of the second democratic election in South Africa. These indicators are:

- Support for Democracy

- Race and Democracy

- Engendering Democracy

- Strength of Civil Society

The results presented in the chapter have been derived from the December 1998 and March 1999 public opinion surveys. HSRC public opinion surveys are conducted bi-annually on a randomly stratified, national representative sample of 2 200 adults. Although the results of such surveys

should be approached with caution, they can serve as a *barometer* to policy makers of citizen needs and aspirations when the surveys have been conducted in an *impartial* manner. In addition, the dissemination of the results can assist in creating an *informed public, which* enhances democratic participation.[3]
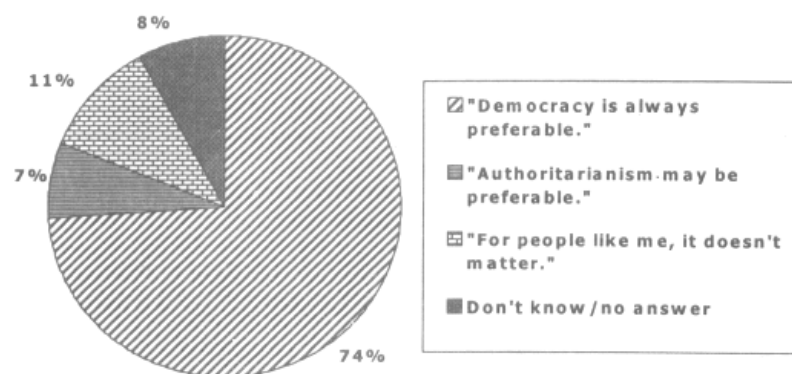
## Support for Democracy

The sustainability of democratic systems cannot be taken for granted. Robert Dahl points out that the number of democracies increased from 21 in 1950 to 51 in 1996, with 30 countries achieving democratic status between 1993 and 1996. However, between 1900 and 1985, non-democratic governments replaced democratic governments 52 times.[4] An estimate of the extent of continued support for democracy can therefore inform decision making in the interest of democratic consolidation.

## Institutionalisation of Democracy

The March 1999 HSRC survey indicated that 74% of South Africans supported democracy, while only 7% supported authoritarianism. In addition, it indicated significant support for democratically elected institutions (Figure 2.1). Of the respondents, 48% indicated that they would vote for other representatives as a means to express their dissatisfaction with government and 28% indicated that they would petition the relevant authorities, while only 10% indicated that they would resort to violent means.

**Figure 2.1: Public support for democracy in South Africa, Dec.1998**

## International Comparison

In comparing support for democracy among middle-income countries that underwent similar democratic transitions, especially since the 1980s, South Africa with its 74% support for democracy ranks the third highest. Uruguay rates first with a significantly high support for democracy of 86%. Brazil, with a socio-economic profile similar to South Africa's, shows only 50% support for democracy, while Poland, a more recently established democracy, shows a low support of 31 % (Figure 2.2).

**Figure 2.2: Public support far democracy in international perspective**
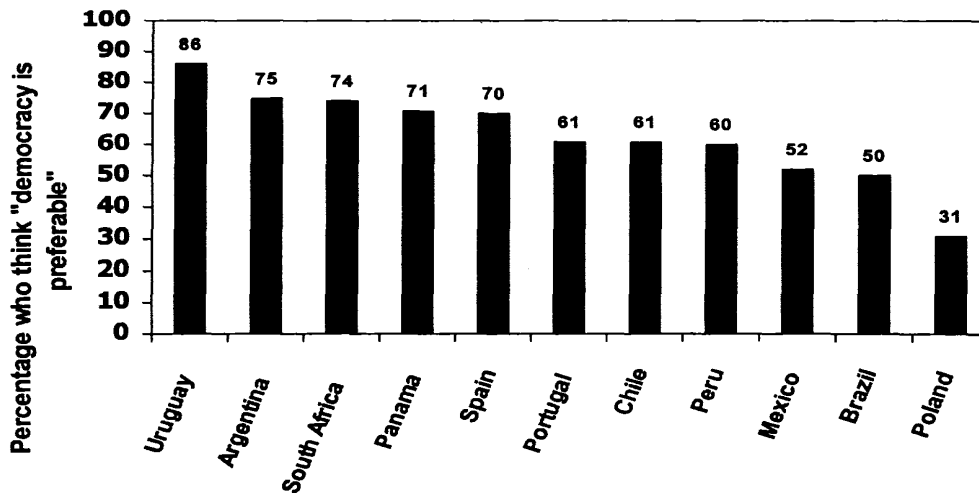


## Optimism about Future Democracy

The sustainability of democracy also depends on the degree to which democratic states are perceived to be able to improve the material wellbeing of their citizens.

Public expectations of future economic prospects in South Africa revealed interesting patterns according to HSRC surveys. Public optimism by income group indicated that the richest 20% of the population were pessimistic, while the middle and low-income groups were optimistic. Although the poorest and second poorest groups fell below the poverty line, they remained optimistic. The second poorest group showed the highest level of optimism, at 43%. This group probably benefited most from improved service delivery (Figure 2:3).

**Figure 2.3 Public optimism about five-year economic prospects, December 1998**



The continuation of inequality and material deprivation in the democratic South Africa prompts one to revisit current debates on state-civil society relations, in particular in respect of economic democracy. The imperatives of development in highly unequal societies demand a strong and extended democratic state that is committed to a clear development trajectory - a notion that rests somewhat uncomfortably with the values of a liberal democracy.[5]

## Race and Democracy

South Africa has emerged from a racialised history in which access to material wealth, basic opportunities and services, and degrees of human dignity were defined by one's skin colour/racial classification. The effect of this history is reflected in public attitudes to key national issues.

The March 1999 HSRC survey indicated that small proportions of the minority groups (the Indians, coloureds and whites) were satisfied with government performance, while 50% of blacks were satisfied (Figure 2.4).

**Figure 2.4: Satisfaction with the way SA is governed, by population group**



**Figure 2.5 Trust in the national government, by population group**
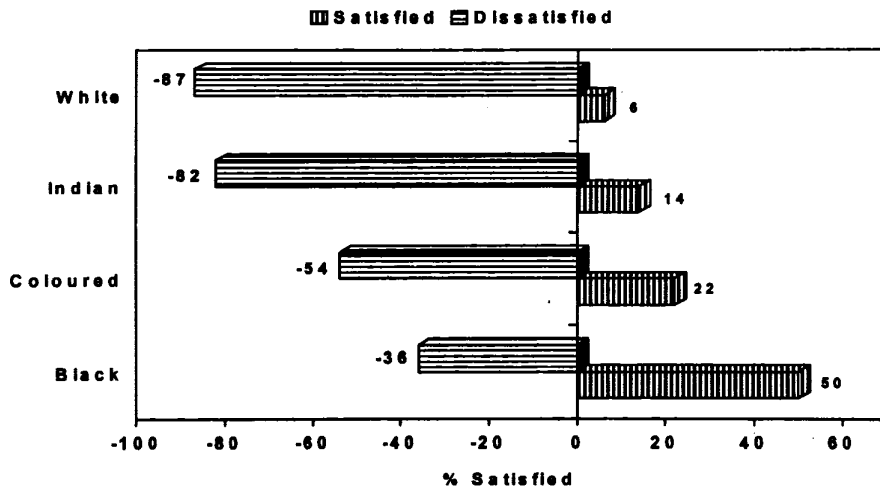


Trust in government was similarly divided along racial lines. The proportions of the minority groups that had trust in the government were much smaller than the comparable proportion of blacks (60%) (Figure 2.5).

The traditional support base of various political parties also revealed historical racial patterns. For example, the African National Congress support came overwhelmingly from black respondents, while the Democratic Party largely drew support from white respondents (Figure 2.6).
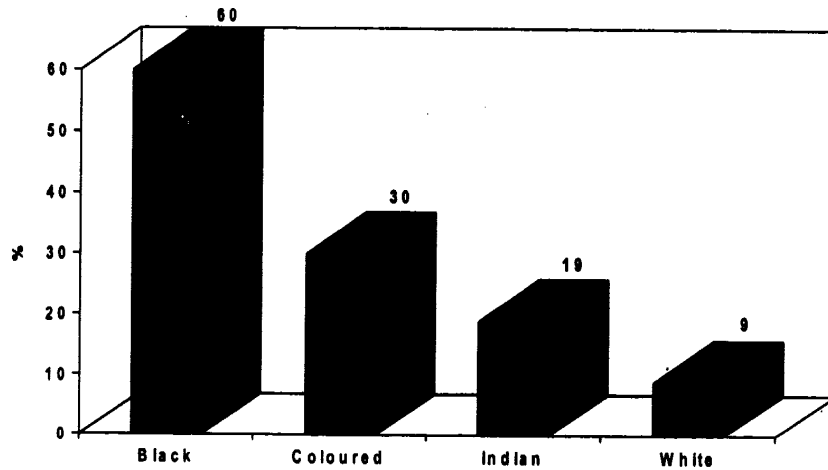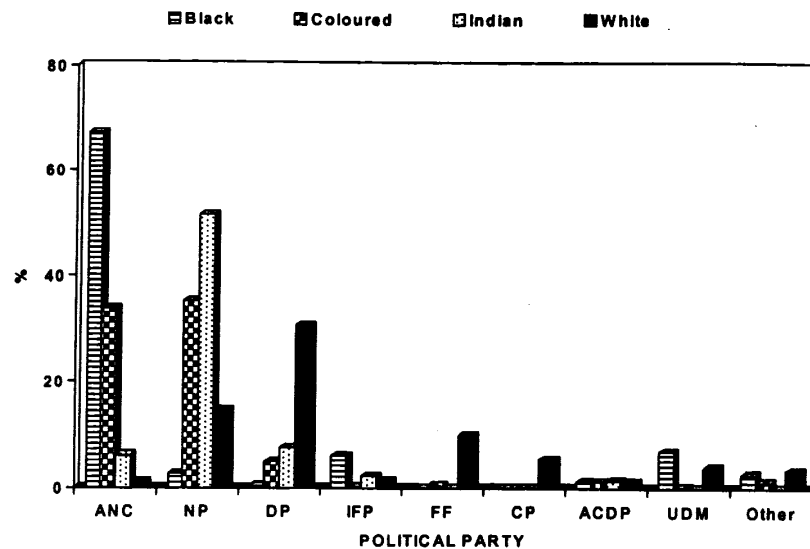
**Figure 2.6: Party support, by population group**



However, interesting shifts occurred since 1994. In the case of the New National Party, coloured support eclipsed the traditional white Afrikaner support in the 1994 election, and Indian support in turn eclipsed coloured support in the 1999 election. In the 1999 election coloured support was roughly equally divided between the African National congress and the New National Party. Thus the traditional racial support base of political parties has begun to shift.

Further interesting shifts were revealed in the social identity and social movement studies conducted by the HSRC. These studies revealed that class factors or socio-economic status was an increasingly important determinant of satisfaction with living standards, employment, housing, citizen safety, health care delivery and government performance. A composite score of satisfaction levels indicated that, as living standards increased, levels of dissatisfaction declined, irrespective of race.

According to Habermas,[6] democracy requires the co-ordination of divergent interests in society and the creation of solidarity among citizens. Although all identities are complex, multiple and heterogeneous by nature, historical patterns of polarisation around race, language, etc. can solidify group identities. A democratic culture thus has to symbolise politics of difference, recognition and inclusion.

Given the continued racial inequality in access to opportunities and material well being, the poverty and destitution of the black majority of the population constitute the single greatest threat to democracy. Consequently the critical challenge is to deracialise our society in material terms, to alter the traditional patterns of racial identification, and to create a society where merit, human capacity and equality of opportunity, rather than skin colour, mirror the human dignity of the individual. For as long as race coincides with inequality, democracy cannot flourish. Against this background the 1999 election presented a fundamental challenge to all political parties not to reproduce racial stereotypes and fan racial fears and hatred in order, to pocket a few cheap votes. Meeting this challenge would indeed attest to democratic maturity.

**Engendering democracy**

A vast body of feminist literature[7] has examined the construction of nationalism and democracy and has found them to be inherently gendered when considering the naturalised roles of women as the biological producers of the nation, women's roles in the cultural and civil construction of nationhood, as well as the construction of citizenship. Because the notions of nationalism and the nation-state are socially constructed, differential access to power, material wellbeing, resources and public institutions becomes the central question in the analysis of the gendered nature of democracy.

Given that women constitute the majority of the registered voting population in South Africa, their votes are clearly sought after. But do political parties know what women want? The results of the March 1999 HSRC opinion survey indicated that women strongly emphasised equality and representation by women. Women's priorities in order of preference were (Figure 2.7):

- equality in decision making

- family welfare

- education

- women's rights

- job opportunities

- personal safety

When men were asked what they thought women's priorities were, most men cited the following (Figure 2.7);

- equality in decision making

- family welfare

- crime prevention

Women's demands for education and job opportunities received a lower priority amongst men than women, and most men did not regard women's concerns about personal safety as a priority at the time of the survey. [8]

In testing the support for greater representation by women, the HSRC survey produced interesting results. The majority of blacks supported the institution of quotas for men and women in parliament. The vast majority of Indians supported this, but only a minority of whites did. A gender breakdown revealed that more Indian men (82%) than Indian women (74%) supported quotas, while only a minority of white males (18%) did so (Figure 2.8).[9]

The results of this survey clearly have implications for decision making in government and policy institutions. The demand for gender equality has not declined, notwithstanding the gains made through the achievement of formal constitutional rights to gender equality and the establishment of gender advocacy institutions, such as the Commission for Gender Equality, the Office for the Status of Women in the President's Office and the parliamentary Joint Monitoring Committee on Improvement of Quality of Life and Status of Women.

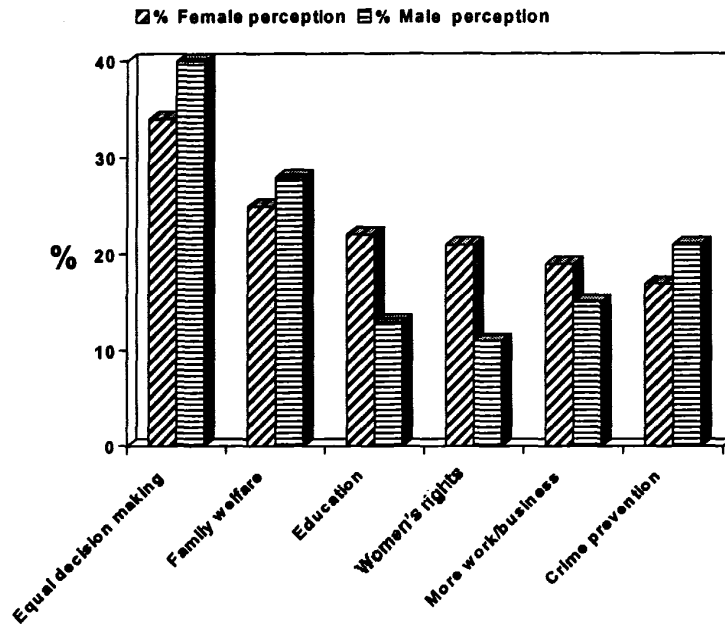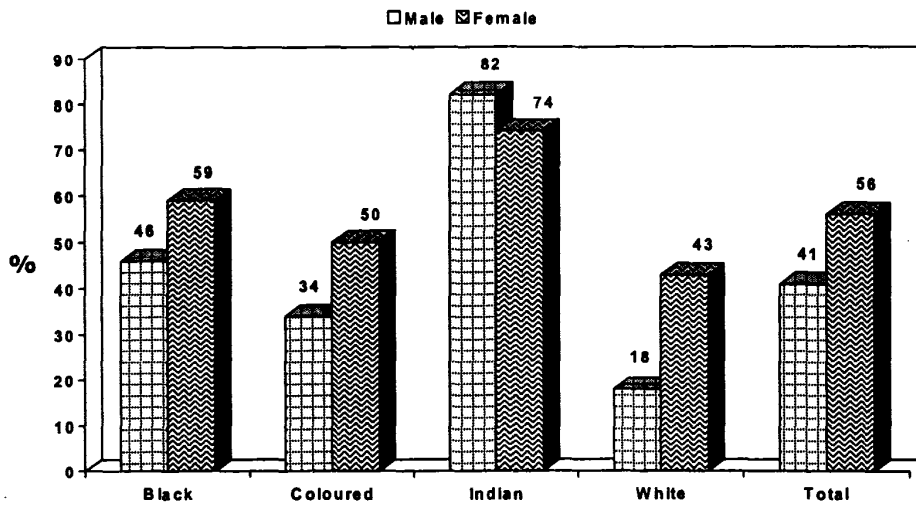**Figure 2.7: The most important priorities for women, by gender**

☑% Female perception ☐% Male perception

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 40
 30
% 20
 10
  0
```
Equal decision making, Family welfare, Education, Women's rights, More work/business, Crime prevention

**Figure 2.8: Quota for women on party lists, by gender and pop. Group**

☐Male ☑Female

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90
     82
80        74
70
60     59                    56
50         50        43
% 40  46
   34                    41
30
20           18
10
 0
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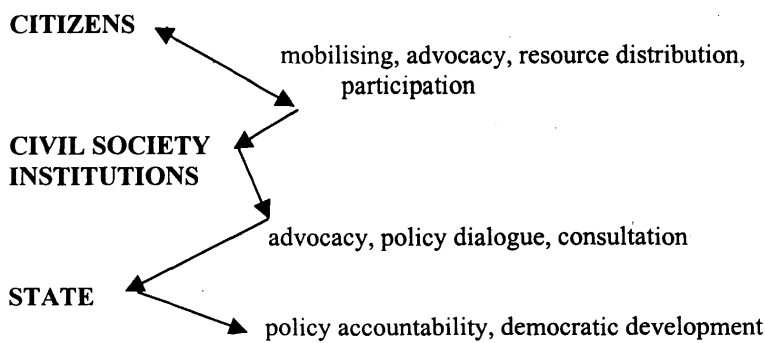Black   Coloured   Indian   White   Total

Feminist analyses have centred gender relations in social policy making by examining patterns of social provision in the sphere of state-market-family relations, gender differentiation in access to employment and service or benefit opportunities, as well as women's ability to generate income and thereby secure the material wellbeing of their households.[10] The results of these analyses and the priorities identified by women respondents to the HSRC survey thus serve as pointers in setting national priorities.

**Strength of Civil Society**

The debates on civil society and the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) over the last decade have elicited polar, at times antagonistic, relations between the state and civil society. Emanating from the neo-Gramscian literature of the 1980s, the state was perceived as a 'hegemony protected by the armour of coercion', and civil society as the bearer of democratisation and the

agent of setting limits on state power. As such, a robust civil society constitutes an essential pillar of a mature liberal democracy. In addition, as the agents of civil society, NGOs are viewed as the representatives of diverse and sectoral interest groups that enhance access to and public participation in public institutions and processes.[11]

Current debates stress the importance of robust institutions of civil society in generating good governance and economic growth. The social constructionist view asks not only about the nature of the state, but also about class, development and societal context, as well as the fabric of civic culture and state-civil society relations.[12] The nexus of state-civil society relations can be graphically demonstrated as follows:

CITIZENS

mobilising, advocacy, resource distribution, participation

CIVIL SOCIETY INSTITUTIONS

advocacy, policy dialogue, consultation

STATE

policy accountability, democratic development

The election to power of South Africa's first democratic government in 1994 had significant implications not only for state-civil society relations, but also for civil society itself. Informed by the social movement literature, the expectation was that civil society would enter a period of demobilisation. Because the goal of establishing a democracy was attained, so the argument went, there was no need for the high levels of mobilisation that characterised much of civil society during the 1980s and early 1990s.

In order to trace trends in organisational involvement in boosting democracy, the HSRC's research programme on social movements conducted annual surveys since March 1994. The five surveys to date were conducted at the same time of the year among a countrywide sample of about 2 200 respondents.[13]

Membership of political parties, civics, unions, women's organisations and stokvels[14] was investigated. The results are reported in Figure 2.9. The percentages indicate the level of active membership and/or official leadership in these organisations. A number of trends are evident.

**Figure 2.9: Active membership of political parties since 1994**
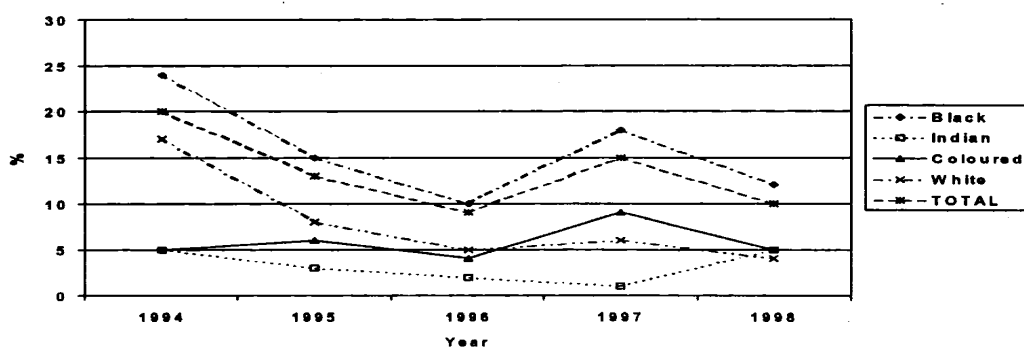


Membership of political parties decreased significantly since 1994. About one in five of the respondents were active members of a political party shortly before the founding 1994 election.

This proportion decreased overall to one in ten in March 1998. The high level of engagement in the run-up to the 1994 election explains much of this. Active membership of political parties was highest among African respondents (24%), followed by whites (17%), and then coloureds and Indians (about 5% each) (Figure 2.9)

The downward trend clearly suggests that South Africans are disengaging from active party political membership. This is most evident among white South Africans whose active membership decreased from 17% in 1994 to 4% in 1998. Active membership among black respondents decreased from its high of 24% in 1994 to 13% in 1998 (Figure 2.9). It is clear that white South Africans have disengaged much more from active party politics than other South Africans. This trend could be explained by their loss of political power as a group and the lack of a strong opposition.

The new democracy depleted the leadership of civil society organisations.. Nevertheless, participation in women's, youth and civic organisations. increased. Moreover, stokvels/savings societies showed a significant increase in participation, which reveals a revival of the entrepreneurial spirit in black communities (Figure 2.10).

Membership of those organisations. most active during the struggle for democracy, i.e. unions and civics, remained fairly constant between 1994 and 1998. This clearly suggests that overall there has been little demobilisation in South African civil society since 1994.

The extent to which supporters of political parties, unions and civics were prepared to engage in protest activities to advance their concerns was also analysed. Two interesting dynamics emerged. First, supporters of political parties and unions were less prepared to engage in protest activities than supporters of, for example, civics. Second, active members of these organisations. were much more prepared than passive or non-members to engage in protest activities.[15] Overall, organisational involvement seems to have become an important mobiliser of protest against pressing social problems.

An important indicator of democratic consolidation is the measure of trust in civil society institutions. The HSRC surveys revealed that trust in civil society institutions was generally high. Labour unions and political parties were the exceptions. Interestingly, trust in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) exceeded trust in the police and the courts (Table 2.1 ).

Generally, trust in the Independent Electoral Commission to deliver free and fair elections was also quite high - 63%(see Chapter 3).

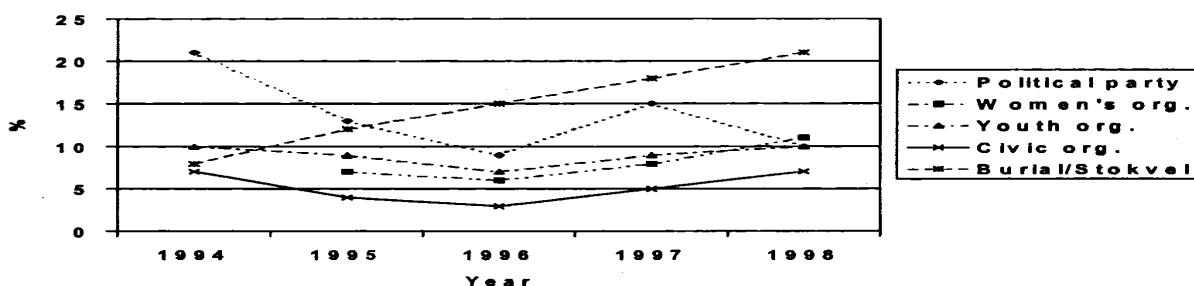**Figure 2.10: Organisational involvement:1994-1998**

**Table 2.1: Trust in civil society institutions**

| organisations./Institutions | Trust | Distrust |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| Media | 59 | 21 |
| Business | 54 | 25 |
| Churches | 73 | 9 |
| Labour unions | 28 | 39 |
| Political parties | 29 | 51 |
| Courts | 40 | 44 |
| Police | 41 | 44 |
| Defence Force | 46 | 35 |

## CONCLUSION

The potential threats to the second democratic election were racial politicking and reproducing racial stereotypes, fanning racial hatred, and fear and intolerance, especially through subliminal advertising; reproducing the deep divisions of the past through violence and intimidation; and irregularities at the ballot box. The positive indicators that augured well for the election included the existence of a robust civil society; high levels of participation in the electoral system through high levels of voter registration and voter turnout; greater realism about the pace of delivery and change; and confidence in the electoral machinery to ensure a free and fair election.

Given the scale of operations, the tight time frames and lack of experience, the first democratic election was an extraordinary feat of human resolve, dedication and bold spirit, borne out of the passion to deliver freedom, justice and democracy to the entire nation.

The second democratic election took place after five years of momentous changes in South Africa, of bold experimentation in transformation and of profound dealing with the atrocities of the past, all with the hope of accelerating the restoration of human dignity, respect for human rights and tolerance of diversity.

South Africa has a legacy of brutal repression and institutionalised state violence, systematic impoverishment and social deprivation, alongside a fierce and victorious passion for justice, equality and democracy, borne out of the longest liberation struggle in the world. Thus the new state contains both the seeds of repression and the seeds of democratic maturity. The key pillars of a formal democracy, embedded in the twin imperatives of transformation and development, are in place, but the sustainability of democratic behaviour is not guaranteed. South Africa has made a good start.

## Notes

1    Budge, I. & McKay, D.1994. *Developing Democracy.* London: Sage; Dahl, R. 1998. *On Democracy.* New Haven: Yale University Press; Linz, J. & Stepan, A. 1996. "Toward Consolidated Democracies". *Journal of Democracy,* 2(7), April.

2   Johnson, R. & Schlemmer, L.A. 1996. *Launching Democracy in South Africa: The First Open Election, April 1994.* New Haven: Yale University Press; Southall, R. 1999. "The 1999 Elections: Consolidating Democracy or Foreshadowing Decline?". *Indicator,* 16(1).

3   Rule, S. 1999. Democracy SA: Public Opinion on National Priority Issues. *Election '99.* Pretoria: HSRC.

4   Dahl, R. 1998. *On Democracy.* New Haven: Yale University Press; Benhabib, S. 1996. *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

5   Glassman J. & Samatar, A. 1999. "Development Geography and the Third World State", *Progress in Human Geography,* 21(2); White, G. 1995. "Towards a Democratic Development State", *IDS Bulletin,* 26(2).

6   Habermas, J. 1996. "Three Normative Models of Democracy". In: Benhabib, S. *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

7   Benhabib, S. 1996. *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political.* Princeton: Princeton University Press; Shanley, M. & Narayan, U. 1997. *Restructuring Political Theory: Feminist Perspectives,* Oxford: Polity Press; Yuval-Davis, N. 1997. *Gender & Nation.* London: Sage.

8   Given the accomplishment of instituting a democracy in South Africa, it remains an indictment on our society that women and children are increasingly preyed upon and their personal safety and dignity violated. Therefore, in order to achieve democratic maturity in this country, society will have to accept responsibility for restoring the human dignity of women and children.

9   The African National Congress pursues a quota policy of 30% representation by women in parliament, but opposition parties have not followed suit.

10  Muthien, Y. 1999. "Race and Gender Inequalities in Public Administration." In: Wessels, J. & Pauw, J. *Reflective Public Administration,* Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

11  Muthien, Y. & Olivier, J. 2000. "The State and Civil Society; Implications for Democracy in South Africa", *S A Review,* 8, Pretoria: HSRC; Markoff, T.1997. "Really Existing Democracy: Learning from Latin America in the late 1990s", *New Left Review,* no. 223, May/June; Sagasti, F. et al. 1997. "Democratisation, Modernisation, and Legitimation: The Case of Peru", *UNISA Latin America Report,* 13(1), Jan-June; Liebenberg, I. 1997. "Consolidation of Democracy in Africa: Inhibitors on Civil Society", *African Security Review,* 6(4).

12  Putnam, R. 1993. *Making Democracy: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy,* Princeton: Princeton University Press; Evans, P. 1995. *Embedded Autonomy: States & Industrial Transformation,* Princeton: Princeton University Press; Tendler, J. 1997. *Good Government in the Tropics,* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press; Samatar, A. 1999. *An African Miracle: State and Class Leadership and Colonial legacy in Botswana Development,* Portsmouth: Heinemann.

13  Muthien, Y. & Olivier, J. 2000. "The State and Civil Society: Implications for Democracy in South Africa", *S A Review* 8, Pretoria: HSRC.

14  Stokvels are savings clubs where members rotate access to the money among its members on say a monthly basis (see for example White, C. 1998. Democratic Societies? Voluntary Association and Democratic Culture in a South African Township, *Transformation,* 36:1-36; Muthien, Y. & Olivier, J. 1999, The State and Civil Society:Implications for Democracy in South Africa, *S A Review* 8, Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

15  Roefs, J., Klandermans, B. & Olivier, J. 1998. "Demobilisation of the Movement: Transition from Authoritarian Rule to Democracy". Paper presented at the Workshop on Social Movements in South Africa, November, Pretoria: HSRC.