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Special Analysis

SOUTH AFRICA:

Significance of Election

In the wake of the election last week Pretoria—always mindful that security is of uppermost concern to whites—is likely to resume implementing limited racial reforms that do little to assuage black frustration. Black opposition groups probably will concentrate on improving conditions at the local level, but militants will argue that only a campaign of violence against whites will change white attitudes. [REDACTED]

The election clearly illustrated the primacy of security over reform for most whites. Although reform has long been a key item on the ruling party's agenda, it apparently remains a secondary issue for the electorate as long as it is orderly and limited. [REDACTED]

The election nevertheless reflects the National Party's success in usurping the reformist agenda from the leftwing parties. Although the right wing doubled the percentage of the vote it received in 1981, the National Party compensated by gaining substantial support from proreformist whites. [REDACTED]

The shift to the right in the makeup of the new parliament—especially the Conservative Party's new role as the official opposition—will affect the tone of public and parliamentary debate. The Conservative Party is almost exclusively Afrikaner, comprised of former Nationalists. As such, Conservative attacks against President Botha's policies will have more sting than proreform criticism from the largely English-speaking left. [REDACTED]

Cautious Government Policies

In the coming months Pretoria is likely to return to its agenda of limited racial change, while maintaining its tough security posture. As Botha tries to strike the right balance, he undoubtedly recognizes that the National Party retained a majority of the electorate in part because of the backing it received from proreform whites, even though it lost many Afrikaner voters who rejected reform. [REDACTED]

The government will probably move quickly to create its proposed multiracial, advisory National Statutory Council, although most black leaders already have rejected it. Botha also will probably tinker with other apartheid laws, including the Group Areas Act, but major changes are unlikely. In the next year or two, Pretoria may hold elections for black local leaders and attempt to establish black city-states—essentially urban homelands that entrench racial separation. [REDACTED]

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The pace of reform, however, will be slow, and the substance of the changes will fall far short of black demands. Pretoria probably will not hesitate to halt reforms and intensify its crackdown if black unrest and protests increase. The government, in fact, risks stirring more unrest by restarting its limited reform program. Some initiatives—such as a decision to hold local black elections—probably would spark a new round of violence in the townships. [REDACTED]

Black Pessimism

The white electorate's refusal to support faster racial reform after almost three years of unrest has sent a strong signal to blacks. Blacks—and a minority of whites—now believe that traditional white politics are increasingly irrelevant to South Africa's future. [REDACTED]

Two elements in the black protest movement will probably gain the most influence as a result of the election. Black community organizations that focus on local issues are likely to win new supporters among blacks who see little hope for meaningful change at the national level. At the same time, black militants will be able to argue more persuasively that only an indiscriminate campaign of violence against whites will change white attitudes. [REDACTED]

-CIA, DIA, NSA-

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