

CHAPTER 5

THE EXTREME WHITE RIGHT: A SECURITY THREAT?

In retrospect it is clear that the white right was at the zenith of its strength in late 1993 and early 1994. The Conservative Party was the country's official opposition in the whites only House of Assembly. The AWB successfully disrupted National Party meetings across large swathes of the country, and right wing rallies regularly drew thousands of enthusiastic supporters.

Moreover, significant portions of the officer corps in the SADF and South African Police (SAP) were white, and less than enthusiastic about the prospect of serving under an ANC government. A civil war, or right wing inspired secession, could have resulted in a number of rural army and police structures siding with AVF leader, retired General Constand Viljoen.

After the collapse of the Bophuthatswana homeland government, a key AVF ally, serious divisions within the white right emerged. At the last moment Viljoen decided to participate in the 1994 election. As a result civil war and large scale right wing political violence was averted. The 1994 election went ahead and ushered in the country's first black government.

Degree of support for the white right

In the post-1994 era most right wing whites, disillusioned by the political impotence of right wing organisations and leaders, have withdrawn from political activity. Many have joined the Democratic Alliance (DA) to find protection in an ideology based on individual rights, or are supporting parties such as the Freedom Front with the dim hope that Afrikaners will be granted some form of cultural autonomy by the ruling ANC government. Some have moved to Orania or are withdrawing from the realities of the new South Africa by moving into security complexes or boomed-off suburbs. Others, especially the younger generation, are emigrating.²⁶⁰ These whites—the bulk of the almost one million people who voted against majority rule in a unitary state in 1992—do not pose a security threat to the new South Africa.

Already in the mid-1980s an astute political observer of the right wing scene, ZB du Toit, argued that for political and economic reasons, the Afrikaner is unlikely to engage in violent resistance on a large scale:

I think this option [violent resistance] is an illusion because the Afrikaner has never rebelled on any significant scale. Look at the rebellion of 1914. This was only twelve years after thousands of women and children had been murdered by the British. Then the Afrikaners went and fought with those people and only a few hundred, two or three hundred, resisted! ... The Afrikaner has become a middle-class person with a nice Mercedes and a nice house. He is really more worried about whether his Kreepy-Krauly [automatic pool cleaner] is working than what is happening in politics.²⁶¹

Indeed, with a few historical exceptions (1914, 1940–44 and 1993–94), the bulk of right wing activity has always been contained within the ambit of parliamentary or constitutional activity.²⁶² However, what about the small number of radical fundamentalists on the outer fringes of the white right? What of the extreme right which is prepared to use violence, and break the law, to further its cause?

The number of extreme right wingers who are prepared to use violence to achieve their aims is likely to be small. Even in 1994, when the white right was organised and powerful, only a few dozen people got actively involved in acts of sabotage and terrorism. Today, with disillusionment and division rife within the remaining right wing organisations, the number of potential saboteurs is likely to be even lower.

While violent actions of the extreme right are unlikely to ever engender the active participation of most Afrikaners, it is a sobering fact that for a sabotage campaign to be successful and create long term instability this is not necessary. At the height of its activities the IRA (Irish Republican Army) did not have more than a few hundred active members. The secret of its success was that it had a large number of sympathisers who provided the organisation with safe houses and logistical support. In this way members of the IRA could plan their acts of sabotage—and evade the police after the event—among a fairly wide range of supporters spread throughout the Irish countryside. In South Africa, with its vast and often inhospitable rural hinterland, a small group of right wing saboteurs would be difficult to apprehend should they enjoy widespread sympathies among the Afrikaans farming community.

In mid-1987 Professor Barney Uys, who specialised in monitoring right wing electoral trends, estimated that about 2% of adult Afrikaners (approximately 70,000 people) would eventually be prepared to engage in, or actively support, an armed resistance struggle to defend their right to self-determination.²⁶³ So far history has proven Uys wrong. With some relatively minor exceptions—of which the Boeremag sabotage campaign in 2002 is the most significant—the threat posed to national security by the extreme right has been minor.

Under the right conditions it may, however, be possible for a small group of radicals to marshal the support of a much larger group of people: the 70,000 Uys refers to. These are people who are not in principle opposed to committing acts of violence and sabotage in furtherance of their political beliefs, but will get involved in illegal activities only if there is a real prospect of success. That is, people who are prepared to break the law provided they are persuaded that their acts will make a difference and are being co-ordinated by intelligent and capable leadership. In essence, the kind of people who would have followed the orders of AVF leader, Constand Viljoen, to commit acts of sabotage in the run up to the 1994 election.

Had the Boeremag, for example, been more successful in its sabotage campaign it might have generated a significant level of sympathy and even support. The AWB had an estimated 150,000 supporters in the late 1980s when majority rule was on the distant horizon and the enemy was the ‘liberal’ National Party. It is probable that the majority of these supporters sympathise with the actions of organisations such as the Boeremag. In fact, both the South African League of Former Police, Soldiers and Officials and a spokesperson for the AWB openly voiced their support for the Boeremag, while the HNP refused to condemn the bombings.²⁶⁴

Mobilising support

One of the Boeremag documents seeks to give a populist spin to its activities. The document cites post-1994 levels of crime, unjust affirmative action policies and the sidelining of Afrikaans as reasons why an independent Boer state is justified. Given the real high levels of violent crime, rising white unemployment, and the state-sponsored campaign against farmers in neighbouring Zimbabwe, such arguments may be capable of eliciting widespread sympathy among conservatively minded Afrikaners.

Liberal-left political analyst and a traditional foe of the white right, Max du Preez, argues that the appearance of the Boeremag can be explained in terms of real and perceived grievances that exist in the Afrikaner community:

Why do we have a right-wing resurgence now? It might have escaped an overconfident ANC government, but there is a substantial and growing feeling of alienation felt by many whites, especially Afrikaners. They feel their language rights are being disregarded, especially with moves to downscale Afrikaans in courts, the police, the military, the prisons and the public service. There are also fears that there will soon be no universities with a mostly Afrikaans character.

Conservative communities believe the government does not care enough about the large numbers of murders of white farmers. They fear that the government's softly-softly approach towards the land-grabbing and mistreatment of white farmers in Zimbabwe means that the same could one day happen in South Africa. Affirmative action and black empowerment make them feel that under the present regime there is no future for their children.

They feel despondent, fearful and believe that their room to manoeuvre as a cultural minority has diminished substantially. Their enthusiasm for the new South Africa started waning when the more assertive Thabo Mbeki, with much less appetite for reassuring whites, took over the presidency from Nelson Mandela.²⁶⁵

Other commentators who hold no brief for the white right have come to similar conclusions—namely, that there are a substantial number of white South Africans who feel threatened by their own government's ambiguity towards land seizures in Zimbabwe, violent crimes committed against white farmers in South Africa and the lack of official protection for the Afrikaans language and culture.²⁶⁶

Violent crime and farm attacks

The expectation which many whites had in 1994 that crime—especially violent crime—would decrease has not materialised. Consistently high levels of violent crime (and the media coverage of it) have resulted in a significant increase in the public's feelings of insecurity. This is especially so among white South Africans whose suburbs and farming communities received a disproportionate amount of protection from the state's security forces before 1994.

Afrikaners and race relations

In mid-2001 a national survey, commissioned by the South African Institute of Race Relations, sought to gauge South African's views on race relations and racism in everyday life. Overall the survey results were positive, with twice as many respondents stating that race relations in South Africa had improved in the five years prior to the survey compared to those who felt that they had deteriorated. The survey results did, however, indicate that Afrikaners (defined as "white Afrikaans speaking") were significantly more negative in their views on race relations in the country than respondents from other ethnic groups:²⁶⁷

- To the question: "Over the past few years, relations between people of different races in South Africa have: improved, stayed the same, or become worse?", a quarter of the respondents (25%) said that race relations had got worse. Afrikaners were the most negative, with 44% stating that race relations had got worse.
- To the question: "Compared to a few years ago, do you trust your fellow South Africans more, less, or about the same?", almost two-thirds (66%) of the respondents said they trusted their fellow South Africans less. Afrikaners were again the most negative with almost three-quarters (75%) expressing the view that they trusted their compatriots less.
- To the question: "What counts these days for a person trying to make progress in a career?", 14% of respondents said "one's race group". Afrikaans respondents were the most likely to give this answer, with 42% doing so.
- To the question: "These days some people complain about racism that has continued despite the changes that have taken place in South Africa. How serious do you think the problem of racism actually is?", 59% of respondents thought that it was serious. Afrikaans respondents were the most likely to say that it was serious, with 87% doing so.

Poorer communities, which are badly policed and bear the brunt of violent crime, are increasingly engaging in vigilante activity. However, more formal vigilante organisations such as *Mapopo-a-Mathamaga*, count a significant number of middle class Afrikaners among their supporters. Mapogo, which

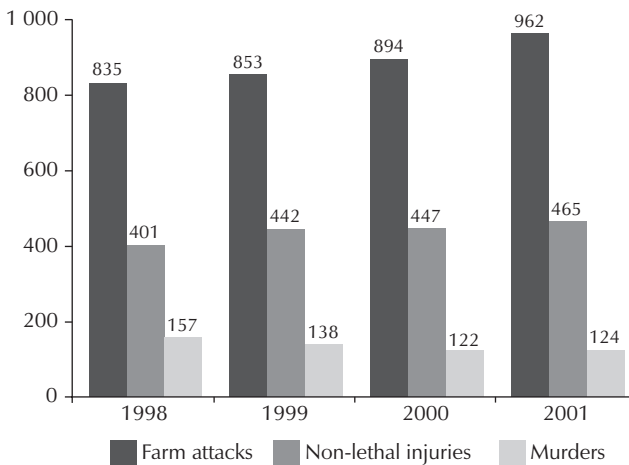
openly advocates corporal punishment for suspected criminals, claims to have 70,000 fee paying members.²⁶⁸

Among rural Afrikaners the violent attacks on farmers and their families have contributed significantly to a hardening of attitudes. A Markinor poll amongst commercial farmers in early 2001 found that almost two-thirds of respondents would “take the law into their own hands” if farm violence was not stopped.²⁶⁹ Such opinions hold serious implications for the internal sovereignty of the state. A substantial number of Afrikaners do not trust the state’s ability to fulfil one of its most important functions: to protect its citizens from violent criminals.

Between 1998 and 2001 there were some 3,500 recorded farm attacks in South Africa.²⁷⁰ The attacks have resulted in the murder of 541 farmers, their families or their workers. On average more than two farm attack related murders are committed every week (Figure 6).

Significantly, shortly after the commencement of the Boeremag bombing campaign, the chairman of the Waterberg District Agricultural Union (the area

Figure 6: Farm attacks, injuries and murders, 1998–2001



Source: SAPS Crime Information Analysis Centre

where a number of the alleged bombers lived), said that “while most farmers in the area do not condone the actions of the wanted and arrested men, they do understand their frustrations which inspired their actions”.²⁷¹

Conservative Afrikaners largely interpret farm attacks as a racially inspired campaign to force them off their farms. At its 1997 national congress the Conservative Party said the murder of farmers was part of a plot to drive farmers off their land.²⁷² In response to attacks on farmers across the country in the latter part of 1997, Freedom Front leader Viljoen said that “it could be a new form of terrorism”.²⁷³

In mid-2001 the Freedom Front appealed to the United Nations Human Rights Commission to place pressure on the South African government to do something about the murder of Afrikaans farmers, which “had taken on the shape of an ethnic massacre”.²⁷⁴ Freedom Front leader, Pieter Mulder, said most farm attacks seemed orchestrated, and that the motive for the attacks was not only criminal. Mulder further claimed that “a definite anti-Afrikaner climate had taken root in South Africa. People accused of murdering Afrikaners were often applauded by supporters during court appearances.”²⁷⁵

Comments made by senior black politicians that portray white farmers as the enemy and alien invaders are interpreted by the conservative farming community as offering a justification to farm attackers for their deeds. A comment in a speech made by the former ANC parliamentary chief whip, Tony Yengeni, illustrates the point: “Everything whites own, they stole from the blacks.”²⁷⁶

During the violent and protracted transition to democracy in the early 1990s, anti-white Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) slogans—of which the most famous was ‘One Settler, One Bullet’—were taken up by many ANC supporters. ANC youth leader and later the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Peter Mokaba, led the chant ‘Kill the Boer, Kill the Farmer’ at the April 1993 funeral of assassinated South African Communist party leader Chris Hani.²⁷⁷ At Mokaba’s funeral in mid-2002 the chant was again used by the mourners.²⁷⁸

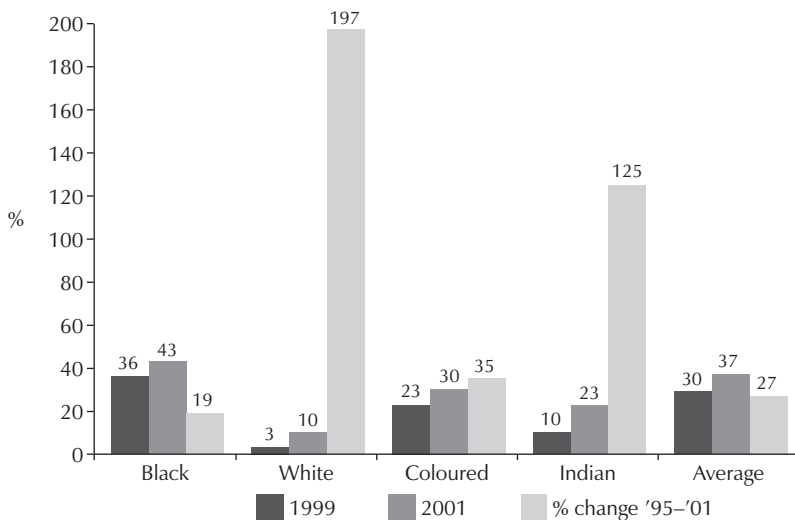
In late 2002 the South African Human Rights Commission, an official statutory body, found that the slogan ‘Kill the Boer, Kill the Farmer’ did not amount to hate speech. According to the Commission the slogan amounted to “undesirable speech” but did “not incite violence or warfare”.²⁷⁹ The decision was derided by the Freedom Front and white farmers in generally.²⁸⁰ Both the Freedom Front and the Transvaal Agricultural Union, the second largest commercial farmers’ union in the country, appealed the Commission’s decision.

According to the organisation 'Action Stop Farm Attacks', which is supported by commercial farmers' unions, "evidence strongly suggests that many farm attacks are concerted efforts to intimidate the farming community", which is why farm attackers "do not merely intend killing their victims, but instead want to inflict pain, humiliation and suffering, especially on elderly people and women".²⁸¹ A countrywide signature campaign launched by Action Stop Farm Attacks in May 2000, in protest against the high number of attacks on farmers, was endorsed by the Freedom Front and the AEB. Half a year later, the petition had received 372,000 signatures.²⁸²

White unemployment

White employment is low by South African standards: 10% in 2001, compared to a national average of 37%.²⁸³ White unemployment has, however, experienced the greatest proportional increase between 1995 and 2001: 197% compared to a national average of 27%. In 2001 some 228,000 economically active whites were unemployed (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Proportion economically active population unemployed in 1995 & 2001, and percentage change '95-'01 (by race)



Sources: Stats SA, and SA Institute of Race Relations

The government's affirmative action policy—and the legislation enforcing the policy—is frequently blamed by the white right as a cause of white unemployment. One consequence has been the membership growth of the trade union 'Solidarity', which has traditionally supported the white right. Until 2001 Solidarity was called the Mine Workers Union. The union is well represented in the chemical, electrical, telecommunications, motor, steel, engineering and mining industries. The union's membership grew from 33,000 in 1994 to 128,000 in early 2002.²⁸⁴

Speaking in March 2002, Solidarity's information and strategy officer expressed himself bitterly about how affirmative action was applied in South Africa:

Affirmative action is one of the most burning issues for our membership. We experience more and more a feeling of alienation in the workplace... The Employment Equity Act [affirmative action legislation] is primarily aimed at the racially driven transformation of the labour market, and not chiefly at the rectification of the inequalities that resulted from the past... It is our experience that numerous enterprises regard affirmative action programmes as methods of ridding themselves of whites in the workplace, in order to replace them with blacks. This is not affirmative action—it is ethnic cleansing.

The question arises whether there is any difference between confiscation of white farms in Zimbabwe on the basis that these are not proportionally owned, and the confiscation of white posts in South Africa because these posts are not proportionally occupied... numerous advertisements are encountered for posts which have been earmarked solely for affirmative action purposes. A feeling of powerlessness prevails, which could lead to various forms of resistance.²⁸⁵

Language

According to Smith, most nationalists identify nationality with language.²⁸⁶ Based on German philosopher, Johann Herder's work, nationalists argue that language is the primary social bond. Though communities are the product of various factors—biological, geographical and psychological—they are held together by human communication. In Eastern Europe, especially, nationalists have tended to single out language as the basic ingredient of nations, and the main issue fuelling nationalist movements.²⁸⁷

For Afrikaner nationalists the Afrikaans language is regarded as one of the major justifications for the belief that the Afrikaner constitutes a distinct and separate *volk* with a legitimate right to self-determination: "An own language is the most important precondition for the development and continued existence of a people, as a separate people among the peoples of the world."²⁸⁸

Giliomee points out that the reason the Afrikaner people survived as a distinctive ethnic group is not primarily because of political skill or military force, but the huge effort that went into developing Afrikaans as a high culture language:

Originally branded as a 'kitchen language', Afrikaans was deliberately turned into a white man's or 'civilised' language. Furthermore—and this was ultimately of paramount importance—the white Afrikaner nation came to see its distinctive identity as expressed by that language.²⁸⁹

Many Afrikaners feel their language is under threat in the new South Africa. In a survey conducted early in 1997 only 16% of Afrikaners felt that their language was adequately treated. Nearly 90% felt that Afrikaans enjoys less than its rightful place in public life. Amazingly, even half of white English-speaking respondents and more than a third of black respondents felt that Afrikaans is being discriminated against.²⁹⁰

In 2002 a number of towns and cities with historic Afrikaans names dating back to Voortrekker times—such as Pietersburg and Potgietersrus—had their names changed, often in the face of popular opposition to the change. In the same year the government decided that state departments had to choose a single language for inter- and intra-departmental communication, effectively compelling public servants to communicate in English with one another.²⁹¹

The government's language policy in respect of education has probably been the most contentious in the eyes of the Afrikaner right. The constitution recognises the right to mother tongue education in any of the 11 official languages, but this is qualified by the proviso that it must be reasonably practicable. The post-1994 educational authorities have resisted Afrikaner demands that public schools and universities should retain their cultural identity. According to Giliomee the government views "the right of blacks to have access to all public institutions in their preferred medium of instruction, namely English, as a higher priority than the claim to cultural rights or institutional autonomy".²⁹²

Of the 31 universities in South Africa, five were historically Afrikaans (Free State, Potchefstroom, Pretoria, Rand Afrikaans University and Stellenbosch). In mid-

2002 national education minister, Kader Asmal, announced that Afrikaans medium universities must implement parallel teaching in English, despite a proposal by a government appointed commission that two Afrikaans universities should be retained to further Afrikaans as an academic language.²⁹³

According to the government's language policy for higher education "the notion of Afrikaans universities runs counter to the end goal of a transformed higher education system, which... is the creation of higher education institutions whose identity and cultural orientation is neither black nor white, English or Afrikaans-speaking, but unabashedly and unashamedly South African".²⁹⁴ The language policy avers that the country's constitution limits the right of individuals to receive education in the language of their choice, but that the exercise of such a right may not negate considerations of equity and redress. Moreover, that "the values and shared aspirations of a democratic South Africa... require the Constitution to compel transformation".²⁹⁵

At primary school level a row erupted in early 2003 when the Limpopo province education department intervened in the admission policy of four Afrikaans-medium schools, compelling them to admit non-Afrikaans speaking pupils. This effectively obliged the schools to teach such pupils in a language they can understand, probably English. The AEB criticised the decision of the provincial education department.²⁹⁶

In late 2002, Freedom Front member of parliament, Corné Mulder, argued that in relation to Afrikaner frustrations the Boeremag bombing campaign constituted "the tip of the iceberg". Government's approach towards things like Afrikaans-language universities and the lower status of Afrikaans generally have put Afrikaners on edge, Mulder claimed.²⁹⁷

Creating martyrs

Any small group of right wing extremists requires the tacit support of its broader ethnic community to conduct a successful and lengthy sabotage campaign. One way of mobilising ethnic support is to exploit popular grievances as discussed above. Another way is to alienate the broader ethnic community from the agencies of the state, and to create martyrs whose 'suffering' and 'sacrifices' can be idealised and used to enlist new impressionable young recruits.

If conservative Afrikaners have any goodwill for the state's fight against right wing saboteurs, this could be rapidly undermined by security force excesses.

The perception can then be fostered that the security forces (and by implication the government), are victimising members of the ethnic group generally. With time, and depending on the extent of the abuses, a significant number of Afrikaners may begin to view the security forces as their real enemy instead of the right wing extremists. Once this happens a small but substantial number of Afrikaners may stop co-operating with law enforcement agencies, and even develop sympathies for the extremists amongst them.

According to well known terrorism expert, Paul Wilkinson, security forces in multi-ethnic societies such as South Africa have to be especially careful not to create the perception that they are victimising members of the public who share the same ethnic affiliation as the terrorists:

The terrorists can make enormous propaganda capital out of violations of the law by members of the security forces and use these as additional justifications for their own campaigns. Thus they conveniently divert the public's gaze away from the violations of the law and outrages stemming from their own petty tyranny, and attempt to portray the incumbent authorities as monstrous blood-soaked oppressors.²⁹⁸

In respect of the Boeremag the SAPS was able to arrest the bombers within a relatively short period of time. This was because of good intelligence, detective and forensic work, and the fact that the police knew within days of the first bombings who the likely perpetrators were. Yet it appears that the police used unnecessarily robust, and even extra-legal, methods in its activities against the Boeremag.

As part of Operation Hopper the SAPS raided some 90 farms and homes of right wing suspects. Reports soon filled the press of "police barging into private homes before dawn, without warrants, permission or explanations".²⁹⁹ An unnamed police legal advisor admitted "the police may have acted outside the law... if they were not in possession of a valid warrant".³⁰⁰ A number of people were arrested because they were unable to find their firearm licences quickly enough.³⁰¹ As one of the arrestees wrote in a letter published in a daily newspaper: "This [the raids] was a fishing expedition which has set back reconciliation many years."³⁰² One couple were kept in custody for almost two months, and then released without bail. The charge against them, of possession of an unlicensed firearm, was withdrawn.³⁰³

The Transvaal Agricultural Union complained that the police arrested several union members for offences such as being in possession of a firearm licensed

in a brother's name, and keeping a flare.³⁰⁴ In a press release the union stated angrily: "In typical Zimbabwe style the government is using the SAPS to intimidate law abiding citizens, some of whom are our members, through night time raids without search warrants."³⁰⁵

Potentially more serious are allegations that Boeremag suspects were tortured by the police. According to press reports a white homeless man was mistakenly arrested in connection with the Soweto Boeremag bombings. The man alleges that the police "tortured him, including electric shocks to his toes, and had demanded information about bombs and right-wing operatives".³⁰⁶ According to the newspaper report the police confirmed that the man was detained for eight hours and interrogated, but would not be drawn on whether he was tortured.³⁰⁷ Allegations have also been made by the legal representative of some of the Boeremag arrestees that their clients were tortured by the police.³⁰⁸ A right wing organisation, Orde Boerevolk, intends petitioning the International Committee of the Red Cross to intervene in the alleged maltreatment of incarcerated Boeremag suspects.³⁰⁹

It would be a victory for the extreme white right if any of these allegations turn out to be true. Firstly, it can result in the acquittal of guilty accused if crucial confessions were made under duress and torture. This would be an acute embarrassment to the criminal justice system and the government while providing a moral boost to the extreme right. Secondly, such abuses would enable the extreme right to create the martyrs they need to sustain support and enthusiasm for their cause.

Possibility of a coup d'état

Given the right circumstances, and a right wing organisation capable of exploiting popular Afrikaner grievances, it is possible that a right wing sabotage campaign could be condoned—and even tacitly supported—by a significant number of Afrikaners. What is unlikely, however, is that the extreme white right can attract sufficient popular support, and develop the organisational capacity, to execute a coup d'état. Writing shortly before the 1994 election, Adam and Moodley also rejected the likelihood of a right wing coup in South Africa:

The ultra-right is unlikely to provoke a military takeover under present conditions. Even if such a seizure of power were to take place during a future civil war, the right wing alone could not govern the

country. Unlike military juntas in Latin American states, who can count on domestic financial endorsement and influential international support, a military coup in South Africa would meet with determined opposition. The hope of the ultra-right, despite its military rhetoric, lies not in a takeover but in secession from an increasingly integrated non-racial state.³¹⁰

According to military analyst, Rocklyn Williams, the prospects of a successful right wing coup d'état are virtually zero. Williams argues that for a coup to be successful in any country it is vital that a number of preconditions are in place—all of which are absent in respect of the South African right wing:

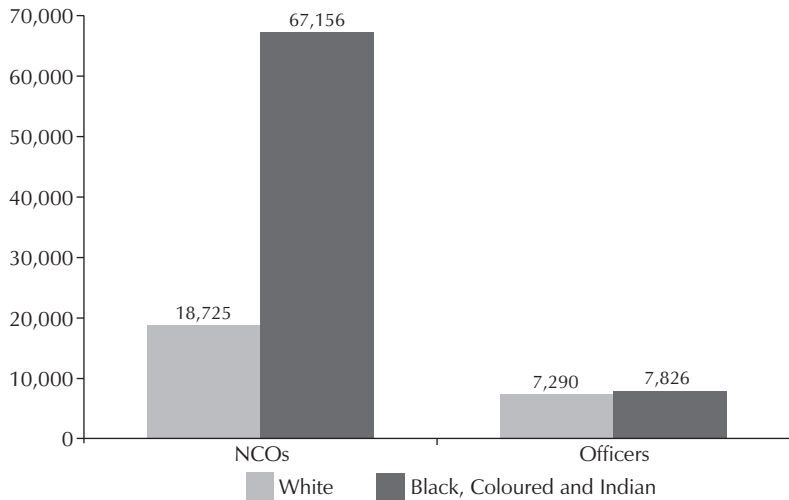
- A high level of political will and mass mobilisation must exist to ensure that the coup plotters possess the required levels of legitimacy and political support.
- The coup plotters need to be able to secure control over the most important of the country's strategic installations. In a country as large, complex and organised as South Africa this is close to impossible to achieve.
- The bulk of the officers corps, or a significant part thereof, need to support the objectives of the coup, and possess the political will to govern.³¹¹

With every passing year since 1994 the extreme white right's chances of violently taking over the reigns of power, or establishing an independent Afrikaner state, have diminished. Most of the country's senior civil servants are ANC appointees. The SANDF and SAPS have become multiracial organisations at all command levels. Moreover, senior officers in the defence force and the police with right wing beliefs have been sidelined or given early retirement.

In mid-1991 some 43% of the police personnel in the former South African Police (SAP) were white. Officers' ranks were virtually exclusively white. Even in mid-1994, some 95% of the officer corps in the SAP was white.³¹² At the end of 2002 just over a quarter (26%) of all police personnel in the SAPS were white, and just under half (48%) of the commissioned officers and 22% of the non-commissioned officers (NCOs) were white (Figure 8).

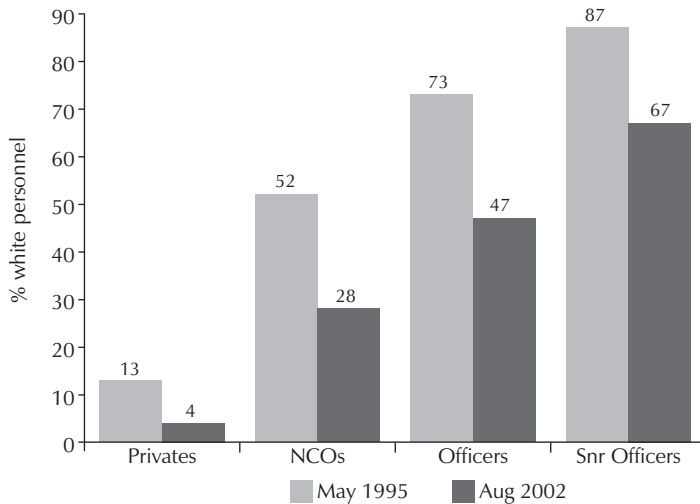
In May 1995, the SANDF employed some 76,000 full time uniformed personnel (excluding civilians), of whom 28,413 or 37% were white. The proportion of white employees for the different rank categories were as follows:

Figure 8: Number of Officers and NCOs in SAPS, October 2002



Source: SAPS

Figure 9: Proportion of white SA(N)DF full time uniformed personnel, by rank, 1995 and 2002



Source: Department of Defence

private, 13%; non-commissioned officers (lance-corporal to warrant officer 1st class) 52%; officers (chaplain to captain) 73%; and senior officers (major to general) 87%. By the end of 2002, the proportion of white SANDF full time uniformed soldiers had declined significantly. Among senior officers, for example, the proportion of whites had declined from 87% in 1995 to 67% (Figure 9).