MEMBER PROFILE

AFRIKANERS

Freedom Front Plus (FPP)

Last updated: July 2017
**Population:** nearly three million out of approximately 49 million inhabitants of the Republic of South Africa, plus as many as half a million in the diaspora

**Language:** Afrikaans

**Religion:** Predominantly protestant (Calvinist)

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**UNPO MEMBER PERSPECTIVE**

Freedom Front Plus is a South African political party that aims to protect linguistic and cultural rights of the Afrikaner community, which are increasingly threatened in present-day South Africa. Furthermore, the party works towards self-determination for Afrikaners within the South African constitution. In their view, the latter should be interpreted in such a way that it allows for regional autonomy of all groups that seek self-determination.

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**OVERVIEW**

The Afrikaners are descendants of European explorers who arrived in South Africa in the seventeenth century. They speak their own language, Afrikaans, which is derived from Dutch. The Afrikaners originate from the first permanent settlement of Dutch colonists in 1652, though their development has also been influenced by the French Huguenots who came to South Africa as they fled from catholic France, as well as by German settlers. Some contemporary cultural traits, such as their language, can easily be traced back to these original settlers, whereas their overall way of life has changed significantly over time.

While the majority of Afrikaners live in the Republic of South Africa, considerable numbers can be found in other African countries. During the colonial era, several Afrikaners went to farm in Kenya, but it was mainly over the course of the past two decades that a significant flow of Afrikaners left their home country to settle elsewhere. Forming part of the greater capital flight of skilled labour out of South Africa, many educated Afrikaners have left towards the United Kingdom, Australia and other countries considered to offer more opportunities. Afrikaners in South Africa increasingly face discrimination as well as hate crimes in the form of so-called “farm attacks”.

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**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The Afrikaners are descendants of settlers who arrived at the Cape of Good Hope during the period of administration by the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie or VOC), from 1652 to 1795.

The Dutch first settled at the Cape in 1652 with the intention to build a strategic rest point for Dutch ships travelling to Asia. These initial plans quickly evolved and a permanent settlement emerged, which grew in size as more European settlers arrived. The Huguenots increased the community’s size as they fled from France in 1688, escaping persecution from the Roman Catholic Church. Over the years, the community incorporated settlers from different European nationalities, although Dutch settlers remained the most numerous.

The Cape was administrated by the Dutch East India Company for nearly 150 years until the Dutch were forced to hand over their African settlement to British control in 1795. This led to great resentment amongst the local population and marked the north- and eastward migration of Boer Afrikaners. By 1835, the Afrikaners had established independent states in different parts of present-day South Africa.
The Voortrekkers ("those who trek ahead") founded the Republic of Transvaal and the Orange Free State and claimed independence from British rule. Although now formally independent, they soon encountered new challenges as the Zulus resisted the influx of settlers. The Zulu leader, Dingane, killed one of the most prominent Voortrekkers, Pieter Retief, provoking the Battle of Blood River in 1838. Even though the Afrikaners came out victorious from this conflict, they were less successful in combating the British several decades later.

When gold was discovered in the Transvaal, tensions between the Afrikaners and the British began to arise once British gold diggers came to the area. Before long, friction led to conflict, which ultimately ignited the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). The British, much more resourceful and numerous than the Afrikaners, won this costly and deadly conflict. While the Afrikaners lost their independence as their republics were annexed to the British-controlled Cape colonies and united under the Union of South Africa, the war also created a sense of unity among them that would last until the present day.

**POLITICAL SITUATION – SUMMARY**

Even though several of the country’s territories were nominally self-governed, South Africa’s black majority was excluded from virtually all democratic participation in the governing of their state and country during the decades that followed. Segregation policies, to be traced back to 1905 when the British separated public schools along ethnic divisions, were soon to be complemented by discriminating legislation passed by the British-controlled government. In 1923, the Pass Laws were adopted, initiating the enactment of Apartheid laws that would taint the country’s history forever.

For several decades, a relative status quo was maintained until the freedoms of black South Africans were further restricted in 1948. The Apartheid system finally came to an end towards the end of the century through the efforts of State President F.W. de Klerk, Nelson Mandela and others.

In 1992, a convincing “yes” vote in the organized referendum paved way to the democratic elections of 1994, which were to make Mandela the first post-apartheid president of South Africa. In 1999, Thabo Mbeki succeeded Mandela, followed by Kgalema Motlanthe in 2008 and Jacob Zuma in 2009. Zuma was reelected in the 2014 elections and his mandate will expire on 2 June 2019.
Throughout the past decade, the South African government has been implementing affirmative action policies and black economic empowerment programs. While good in its intentions to redress the deep and structural inequalities of the Apartheid era, these programs have side-effects and disadvantages the Afrikaner minority, a large proportion of whom are low-income farmers and working class citizens.

CURRENT ISSUES

In recent years, the Afrikaners have continued to play an active role in national politics as they aim to protect their cultural heritage and interests. In light of the latter, they continue to put the issue of self-determination on South Africa’s political agenda. Freedom Front Plus currently has four seats in the national parliament. The ANC, however, maintains a significant majority of 249 seats since the 2014 elections.

According to Freedom Front Plus, the Afrikaners are experiencing an increasing violation of their cultural, linguistic and political rights. The issues they face are not sufficiently covered in national media and the government virtually ignores the needs of the Afrikaner population. Meanwhile, however, the South African Constitution guarantees the right to a cultural life of one’s choice (S.30), for general cultural, religious and linguistic rights (S.31) and for the right to self-determination (S.235). It is on the basis of these constitutional rights that Freedom Front Plus aims to protect the cultural heritage of the Afrikaners, as well as indigenous cultures and diversity in South Africa as a whole.

Linguistic and cultural discrimination

The South African Parliament has been working on legislation concerning linguistic rights for many years. They have further worked to set up a Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities. Problematically
enough, however, parliamentary debates have not resulted in any significant action. Bills are circulating between departments for many years and end results are minimal. Through education reform and other means, the South African government has increasingly taken steps to subject indigenous languages to English. As a result of these policies, 50 percent of schools that used Afrikaans as the medium of instruction have been dismantled since 1994.

To most Afrikaners, their native language Afrikaans is an integral part of their identity as human beings. It has de facto already been replaced by English in business and administrative environments and, to a large extent, in education too. The FPP wants to promote Afrikaans and indigenous languages in South Africa by strengthening the Pan South African Language Board and ensuring the protection of indigenous languages in education.

**Farm attacks**

Hate crimes against Afrikaners have increased significantly throughout the past years. While the murder rate of the entire South African population is notably high at 31 per 100,000, the murder rate of Afrikaner farmers is about four times higher. According to the Institute of Security Studies, the farm attack rate in 2013 was 120 per 100,000. The numbers of Transvaal Agricultural Union were slightly higher at 130 per 100,000. This makes the murder rate of Afrikaner farmers in South Africa one of the highest in the world. In 2015, AfriForum reported an increase in farm murders in the previous five years. Farm attacks skyrocketed in early 2017 with 30 violent attacks on farmers in February alone.

**CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT**

**Language**

Although Afrikaans and Dutch are mutually intelligible up until today, the former has undergone a highly interesting transformation ever since the Dutch settlers came to the Cape. Unlike the Dutch spoken in the Netherlands, the language of the settlers was strongly influenced by languages spoken by slaves, as well as by the languages of other settlers and of distinct indigenous peoples. Over the years, Portuguese, English and Zulu, amongst others, have had profound impacts on the pronunciation and the morphology of the language. Vocabulary and syntax would change at a slower pace, and have remained very close to Dutch over time. Today, Afrikaans is one of the eleven official languages of South Africa.

**Religion**

Religion has played an important role for the Afrikaners throughout history. Up until today, a large portion of the population attends church on a regular basis and is a member of a Calvinist church. In recent years, the influence of religion on the life of the Afrikaners has been waning slowly, yet it remains of great importance to many.
RELEVANT LINKS

Freedom Front Plus:
http://www.vryheidsfront.co.za/

Afrikaans language and culture organization:
http://www.atkv.org.za/

Afrikaner youth movement Die Voortrekkers:
http://www.voortrekkers.org.za/

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