

## Chapter 8

### **The Inkatha Freedom Party: Turning away from Ethnic Power**

Of all the major players in South African politics between 1994 and 2004, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) had been the most ethnically and regionally based, receiving over 90 percent of its support from one ethnic group, the Zulu, and locating virtually all its support within the confines of one province, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). During the first decade of democracy, the IFP attempted to shed the party's exclusive Zulu appeal and to build a national following based on social and economic conservatism. Whether or not the IFP succeeded (the party still derives most of its support from Zulus), the mere fact that party genuinely attempted to become a national, nonethnic organization is important and reflects the dynamics of the political system.

In the case of the DA and NNP, decisions to move away from purely ethnic-based mobilization were motivated by calculations of electoral payoff: given the relatively small size of most ethnic groups, ethnic mobilization was not sufficient to guarantee a party genuine influence in the National Assembly. With the IFP a slightly more complex logic was at work, for courting the Zulu vote, if it delivered the entire constituency, could have provided more than 20 percent of the vote. The IFP found, however, that it could not command the loyalties of all Zulus and that provincially based power did not prove as valuable a resource as the party had anticipated. As a result the IFP tried to reach beyond both its ethnic and provincial roots to earn a national support base independent of the Zulus.

By late 1998, the IFP had developed national aspirations that could be realized only by increasing its representation in the National Assembly. Facing challenges from the African National Congress (ANC) for the loyalties of Zulu voters in the 1995 local elections, the

subsequent inroads that the ANC made into the IFP's Zulu heartland in 1999, and the preexisting incentives for seeking national power, the IFP shifted its rhetoric and policies toward a nonethnic, broadly conservative platform, and chose to direct significant campaign resources to the national level rather than concentrating solely within KwaZulu-Natal. Given the electoral system the IFP could reach for support spread out across several provinces without needing to gain enough votes in any single area to win over a particular ward, and by doing so could stretch its campaign resources. While the party found that provincial governments did not have much policy autonomy, nonetheless controlling the government in KwaZulu-Natal enabled the party to reinforce support in its core rural Zulu areas with a minimum of effort.

Unlike the NNP and DA, which rejected the cultivation of regional bases, the IFP felt that retaining its provincial power base was a crucial backup should the primary national strategy fail. The very presence and importance of this national strategy reflects the incentives of the nationalized institutions and social divides. The party could earn a certain base level of votes while prioritizing a more risky national strategy that did not rely on Zulus. The party therefore pursued distinct national and regional strategies: in the national tier the party positioned itself to shed the reputation as an ethnic party and to build a coalition of social and economic conservatives who liked "traditional" values, while attempting to retain the provincial stronghold as a fallback plan. Accordingly, the IFP managed its mobilization strategy with these two goals in mind.

### **Party Preliminaries: Background of the IFP**

The current incarnation of the IFP traces its roots to 1928, when the Zulu King Solomon kaDinizulu created an organization, Inkatha kaZulu, to act as a rallying point from which the Zulu people could fight the Native Affairs Bill of 1920.<sup>1</sup> This exclusively Zulu organization did not last very long, but while it was active, it worked in coordination with the ANC. Many of Inkatha kaZulu's core leaders were also highly placed members of the ANC, including such eminent people as Pixley kaSeme, John Dube (the first ANC president), and Josia Gumede.

After a long dormancy, Prince Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi began to rebuild Inkatha during the 1960s, ostensibly as a Zulu cultural organization, but also with the purpose of supporting and advancing the goals of the ANC inside South Africa.<sup>2</sup> In 1975, Buthelezi officially revived the organization in the form of a cultural