

# How did white rule before 1948 affect black South Africans?

THE BRITISH HAD said that one reason why they were fighting the Boers in the South African War was to protect the rights of black people. Black South Africans welcomed the British victory in 1902. They were to be sorely disappointed.

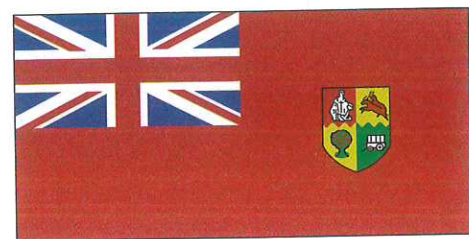
South Africa was now part of the British Empire and decisions were taken in London or by the British High Commissioner in South Africa. Yet the Union of South Africa, formed in 1910, set up a government elected almost entirely by whites. A few thousand better-off Coloureds in the Cape still had the right to vote, but even they lost this right in 1936. Africans and Indians had no voting rights at all. A deputation of South Africans of mixed races went to London in 1909, while the union was being discussed, to plead for voting rights for all. No one in London took any notice. Why did the British do this?

Some British felt guilty about the war against the Boers. Furthermore, South Africa's tremendous wealth was now in the British Empire. The British decided to hold out the olive branch to their ex-enemies to keep the country united. The 'alliance of gold and maize', that is, the business interests of the mine-owners and the big farmers, overcame the principles the British had proclaimed as their reason for fighting the war.

In the First World War many black Africans fought for Britain; 5,635 of them died. Another deputation went to Britain in 1919 to ask for an improvement in their civil rights, but they were again ignored.



**SOURCE 1** The South African deputation to Britain, 1909. There were blacks, Coloureds, and one white MP. They went to try to persuade the British government to introduce full democratic rights for all South Africans



**SOURCE 2** The Union Flag of South Africa, 1910

## TASK

Not being able to vote and having no say in government decisions left black South Africans in a very weak position. What happened to them shows just how important the vote is in any society. We are going to look at how they lost out in three important areas: **land, housing and jobs**. As you work through this investigation, complete a copy of the table below.

	Land	Housing	Jobs
How did the law separate blacks and whites?			
In what ways were they treated separately?			
In what ways were they treated unequally?			
Was South Africa already segregated in this area by 1948?			

## Land

At the beginning of the twentieth century, seven out of eight black South Africans lived in rural areas. Many were successful small farmers. The growth of towns and cities and the rising population meant that there was a good market for the food they produced. Black Africans often farmed more successfully than Afrikaners. One reason for this was that they simply had more labour: it was part of the African tradition for women to work on the land, while Afrikaner women did not. Many blacks also farmed as share-croppers, a system in which the share-cropper gave part of his crop (usually half) to the white landowners in return for the land he used.



**SOURCE 5** A successful farmstead run by black Africans

Africans were very reluctant to give up farming, but the mine-owners and farmers wanted their labour, in the mines and on the land. So the 'alliance of gold and maize' got the white government to pass the Natives Land Act of 1913. According to this Act:

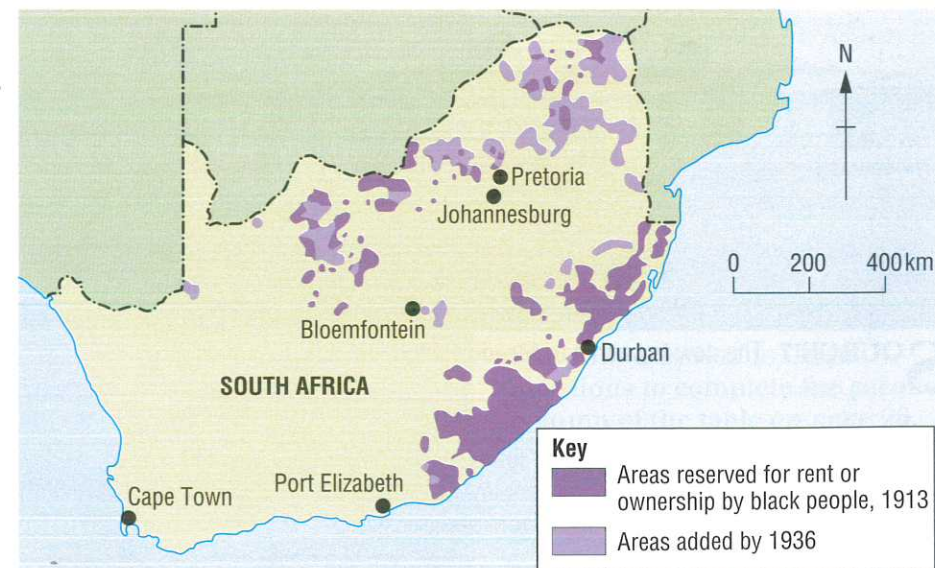
- blacks could not own or rent land except in the black RESERVATIONS. These made up only 7 per cent of the land, although the area was extended to 13 per cent by the 1936 Natives Land Act (see Source 6). They were far away from towns and cities
- share-cropping was banned. Blacks could only occupy white-owned land if they worked for the farmer.

**SOURCE 3** A comment made by a British visitor to South Africa in 1910

*“ Man for man, the kaffir [a white term for black Africans] is a better farmer than the European; more careful of their animals, cultivating a larger area of land, working themselves more industriously. ”*

**SOURCE 4** An old Sotho woman, Nkono Mma-Pooe, was recorded in 1983 talking about her early life. Here, she describes her husband, Naphthali, a share-cropper

*“ Naphthali was a hard worker. Indeed he worked very hard in his fields. He produced a lot from the soil. Hundreds of bags [of produce], half of which he gave to Theuns [the farmer] who in turn sold them and got a lot of money from the labour to which he had contributed nothing. ”*



**SOURCE 6** A map showing land reserved for black ownership or rent by the Natives Land Acts of 1913 and 1936



Sol Plaatje, a black writer, bicycled all over the country finding out about the effects of the 1913 Land Act. In his book *Native Life in South Africa*, published in 1916, he described the hardship he had seen. He told the story of Kgobadi, a black share-cropper. Before the Act, Kgobadi made £100 a year after giving half his crop to the farmer. When the Act was brought in he was told he could only stay if he handed over his oxen and if he and his wife worked full time for the farmer for a joint wage of £18 a year. He refused and was given until nightfall to leave. He and his family set off on the road.

**ACTIVITY**

1. Look at Sources 4 and 6. What do you think happened to Naphthali after the 1913 Natives Land Act was passed? Write another episode in his story, describing the impact of the Act on him and his family.
2. What do you think happened to Kgobadi? Write another episode in his story, describing him ending up in a city, looking for work.
3. Do you think the Act affected Naphthali and Kgobadi in similar ways?

**TASK 1**

1. What was the condition of black farmers before the 1913 Natives Land Act?
2. How did the Act affect them?
3. How did the Act affect white farmers?
4. What do you think the long-term effects of the Act on black people might have been?

Now complete the first section of the table on page 26.



**SOURCE 7** The new township of Meadowlands, outside Johannesburg

**SOURCE 8** The City Engineer of Johannesburg describes how the cost of building houses at Orlando was kept low. They had two rooms, one door at the front, no doors between rooms, dirt floors and no ceilings

“Ceilings were omitted on account of the extra expense entailed as well as to give additional air-space in the buildings.”

**Housing**

The view of most whites was that Africans were rural people, not suited to urban life. Nevertheless, they wanted black people to come and work in their mines and factories, and as domestic servants. More and more Africans moved into the towns and particularly to those areas where poor white people lived. There was a single but powerful difference between poor whites and poor blacks: the whites had the vote. Politicians had to pay attention to their problems. This was why they decided to segregate housing: so that poor whites could be housed at the expense of blacks.

The government set up the Stallard Commission to look into the situation. The result was the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923. This allowed local councils to segregate housing in towns into ‘black’ and ‘white’ areas and to build new black townships.

Inside towns, the more desirable areas were allocated for ‘whites only’ housing. The houses available to Africans were often run-down, older properties and their yards. Town councils demolished black housing in areas declared ‘white’. The inhabitants had to move, often many kilometres away, to segregated ‘black locations’. Here, cheap new housing was built to very basic standards (see Sources 7 and 8). Africans living in these new townships faced long, tedious and expensive journeys to work.

The Act was not fully enforced everywhere. In some places, like Sophiatown in Johannesburg and District Six in Cape Town, black people owned houses or had secure leases. Blacks and whites lived side by side.

**SOURCE 9** A group of British social workers visited South Africa and wrote about what they saw in the British weekly journal *New Statesman and Nation*, September 1939

“Most Africans living in Johannesburg are segregated into separate townships and locations... For the whole of one township there is only one Medical Officer and one health visitor for the 15,000 residents. Schools are available for only 38 per cent of the African children in Johannesburg.”

**SOURCE 10** Naboth Mokgatle, a black activist, describes the demolition of black housing in 1940

“One day I witnessed a sight which broke my heart and which I have never been able to forget. Near Marabastad was an African location, Schonplatts. I saw the City Council’s workmen brought in to demolish Schonplatts, and as they did so to throw the inhabitants and their belongings out. That drove me into politics. It was the end of Schonplatts. In its place was a football ground and playing field for white children. Schonplatts was a slum, but that was not why it was demolished.”



**Passes**

The Stallard Commission wanted to restrict the numbers of blacks entering towns and to make their stay temporary. This was done by extending the pass system, which had existed since the eighteenth century in some places. Every black male had to carry a passbook giving his address, employer, wages and other personal details. He could be stopped at any time by the police and required to show it.

1. Why do you think the pass system was so hated by black South Africans?

**SOURCE 12** An extract from a report by the Stallard Commission, 1923

“(Africans) should only be permitted within urban areas in so far and for so long as their presence is demanded by the wants of the white population.”

**TASK 2**

1. What did the law do to create separate housing areas for blacks and whites?
2. In what ways were blacks and whites treated separately?
3. In what ways were they treated unequally?
4. Were South Africans already segregated in housing by 1948?

Use your answers to these questions to complete the second column of the table on page 26.

**SOURCE 11** District Six, an old area of black-owned housing near the centre of Cape Town which was not cleared until the 1970s



### Jobs

There had always been separate jobs for whites and blacks in South Africa. In the mines, for example, whites had supervisors' jobs, while black workers could only be labourers at a much lower rate of pay. Segregation was extended in the decades before 1948.

In the 1920s poor white farmers, called *bywoners*, found themselves unable to make a living. There were droughts and epidemics of disease. More and more of them gave up farming and drifted to the towns. Here, they could only afford the cheapest housing in areas where blacks also lived.



**SOURCE 13** Poor whites in Johannesburg in the 1930s

**SOURCE 14** A *bywoner* describes his arrival in Johannesburg

*“Man, I felt like a rabbit thrown into a cageful of dogs. Wherever you look there are people. It was a frightening discovery to walk in the streets. I was so far from the open plains of the Orange Free State and to be in Jo’burg was a terrible thing.”*

### TASK 1

1. Poor whites and blacks from rural South Africa arrived in the cities in increasing numbers in the 1920s and 1930s. Use Sources 13–19 to make a list of the ways in which their problems and experiences were the same.
2. Compare Sources 11 (see page 29) and 13. Why would the white government be shocked by this comparison?

As with housing, the Government passed laws to ensure job segregation too.

- Industrial Conciliation Act, 1924. This allowed white workers to join trade unions, but barred black workers from doing so.
- Mines and Works Act, 1926. This restricted a whole range of jobs to whites only. It was called a ‘civilised labour policy’. Most famously, jobs on the railways were restricted. Every railway worker, from management to drivers, clerks, wheel-tappers, fitters and labourers, was white. By 1942 it was estimated that one in eleven working white males worked for the South African Railways.

**SOURCE 15** An extract from a government report of 1914

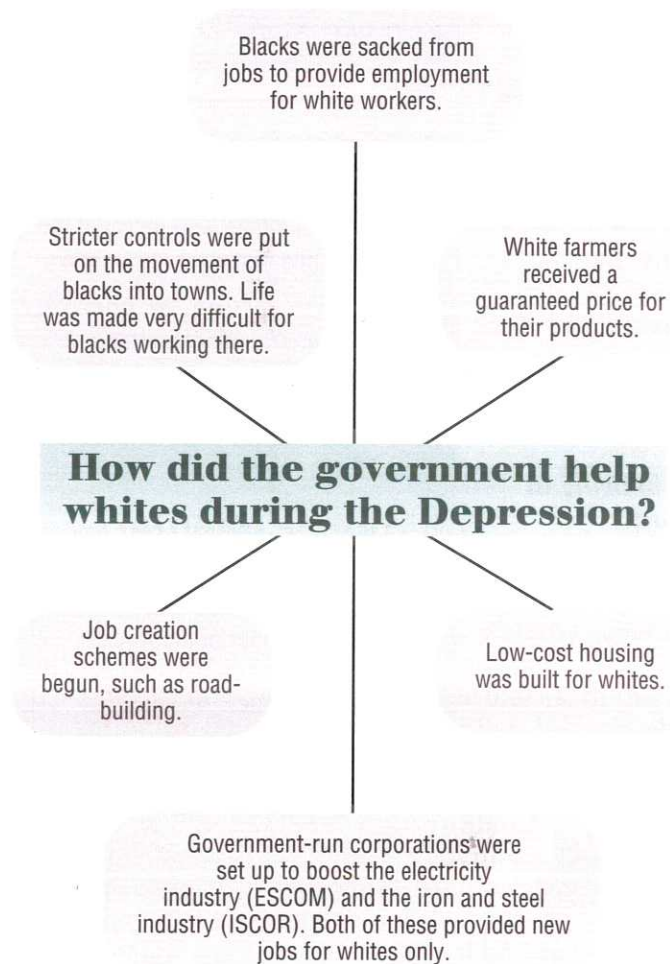
*“The European minority, occupying the position of the dominant race, cannot allow a considerable number of its members to sink into poverty and so to fall below the level of non-European workers.”*



**SOURCE 16** White railway workers in the 1920s

### The Depression

There was a worldwide ECONOMIC DEPRESSION in the 1930s. Following the Wall Street Crash in the USA in 1929, banks and factories all over the world closed down. The 1930s Depression hit both black and white South Africans hard. The government was shocked to learn that one in five whites was in dire poverty. The situation for blacks was certainly worse, but again the fact that only whites had votes ensured that the whites were helped.



**SOURCE 17** How the government helped whites during the Depression

**SOURCE 18** Naboth Mokgatle describes the effects of the Depression

*“Nineteen thirty was a year of depression. Many Africans were out of work and could not find any. Some of them were thrown out of their jobs to make room for European workers. Notices appeared in the windows of many places stating that the work done there was only by white labour.”*



**SOURCE 19** A black trader trying to make a living in Johannesburg, 1940

### TASK 2

1. What did the law do to separate whites and blacks at work?
2. In what ways were they treated separately?
3. In what ways were they treated unequally?
4. Were South Africans already segregated in employment by 1948?

Use your answers to these questions to complete the final column of the table on page 26.

### ACTIVITY

Working in pairs, look back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on pages 4–5. The Declaration was actually produced *after* the events described in this chapter, but which of the rights do you think were likely to have been broken in South Africa before 1948?



# How did the National Party appeal to white voters?

WE NOW COME to the third possible explanation for the Nationalists' victory in 1948 – their appeal to white voters.

## The rise of the Afrikaners

Although the Afrikaners formed the majority of whites in South Africa, they had always been individualists, keeping themselves to themselves. They had no real sense of unity as a people. After 1902, their defeat in the South African War, the deaths of so many of their relatives and the attempt to suppress their language led to the forging of an Afrikaner identity.

### TASK

1. Why was there no real Afrikaner identity before the twentieth century?
2. What difficulties would there be in uniting all Afrikaners?
3. Explain how each of the five factors in Source 2 helped to build and support Afrikaner unity.

1. In Source 3, who are the 'strangers [who] now want to trample us underfoot'?

The emphasis on a chosen people and racial superiority had much in common with the Nazi movement in Germany, which was rising to power at the same time. Several Afrikaners were keen supporters of the Nazis. They included Dr Verwoerd and John Vorster, who both later became Prime Ministers of South Africa.

The year 1938 seemed a great opportunity for Afrikaners, keen to make the most of their history, to celebrate the centenary of the Battle of Blood River, and their vow (see page 13). The Voortrekker Monument was built, showing the taking of the vow. Two wagons carrying men, women and children dressed in Boer costume set off from Cape Town for the Monument. In every town they passed through, people flocked to see these 'trekkers'.

**SOURCE 1** Crowds in nineteenth century Boer costume greet one of the two wagons of 'trekkers' on its way to the Voortrekker Monument as part of the celebrations for the centenary of the Battle of Blood River, 1938



**SOURCE 3** An extract from *The History of our country in the language of our people*, 1876, explaining the book's aims

“To make our children familiar from an early age with what their forefathers had to go through and what they suffered in this land where strangers now want to trample us underfoot.”

### Publishing

- A history of the Afrikaners, in Afrikaans.
- A popular magazine, *Die Huisgenoot* (*The Home Companion*). It was intended to reach ordinary Afrikaners, perhaps living on isolated farms, and give them a sense of unity with the rest of the Afrikaner people.
- An Afrikaner newspaper, *De Burger*.

### Secret society

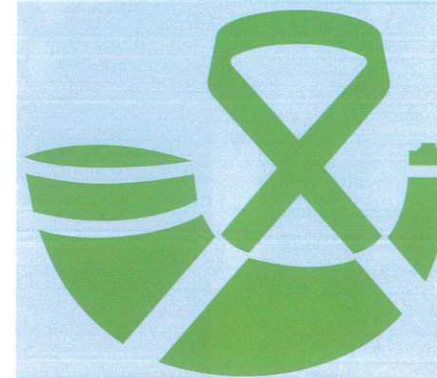
The **BROEDERBOND**, formed in 1918 in Johannesburg and dedicated to uniting and supporting Afrikaners:

- particularly sought out men in positions of influence to become members
- tried to ensure Afrikaners were promoted
- had a secret handshake, so that members could identify each other
- had 500 members by 1930, mainly in Transvaal.

At its ceremonies the British flag was spread over a table and covered by the South African flag.

**SOURCE 2** Factors that helped to develop Afrikaner unity

## How did Afrikaners develop a sense of unity?



The powder horn, the symbol of the National Party. Horns like these were used by Trekboers to hold gunpowder

### Finance

In 1918 wealthier Afrikaners helped to set up Afrikaner insurance and saving companies, called Santam and Sanlam. The aim was to help Afrikaners start up their own businesses without having to rely on British-controlled banks.

### Politics

The National Party, formed in 1914, set out to win the support of all Afrikaners, rich and poor, farmers and business people.

### The Church

The Dutch Reformed Church (the Church of the Afrikaners):

- gave Biblical support to Afrikaner views on the racial superiority of whites
- set up schools so that Afrikaner children could be taught in Afrikaans.



## How did the National Party appeal to whites?

### White grievances

White South Africans were feeling disgruntled in the years just after the Second World War. There were several reasons for this.

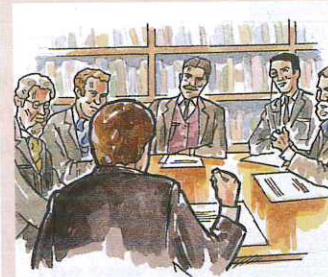
- The economy was in difficulties as it readjusted to peacetime conditions. For a while, jobs were scarce. White workers returning from the war found black workers in jobs they had regarded as theirs. They found that black wages had risen from one-fifth of white wages to 'only' a quarter.
- White farmers resented the policy of keeping food prices low, which Smuts had introduced in the war years. They also resented the flood of black workers to the cities, where they could earn good wages; farmers wanted cheap black labour.



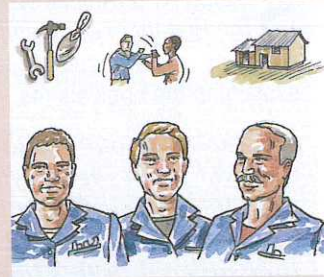
**SOURCE 4** Farm labourers picking oranges

- They were shocked at black protests and strikes. They hated and feared black resistance and Smuts did not seem to be able to 'keep the black man in his place', as they put it.
- They read about Smuts talking of liberty and democracy while he was abroad. In fact he left his ideals at the airport when he returned to South Africa but, increasingly, whites distrusted him. They were angry at the new United Nations for criticising their racist policies.

### Nationalist promises



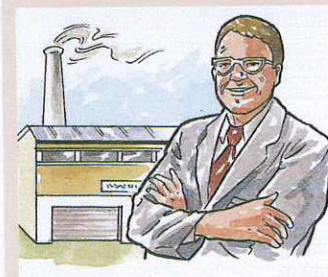
For Nationalist Afrikaner intellectuals, teachers, clerics and Broederbond members Malan promised a white South Africa under Afrikaner rule, with blacks removed to the reserves.



For white workers he held out the danger of the 'black threat', to jobs, law and order, and housing.



**SOURCE 5** Dr Daniel Malan, leader of the National Party, and Prime Minister 1948–56



But for white industrialists he promised a more 'flexible' apartheid, with blacks allowed, under strict controls, to leave the reservations temporarily to work in the cities.

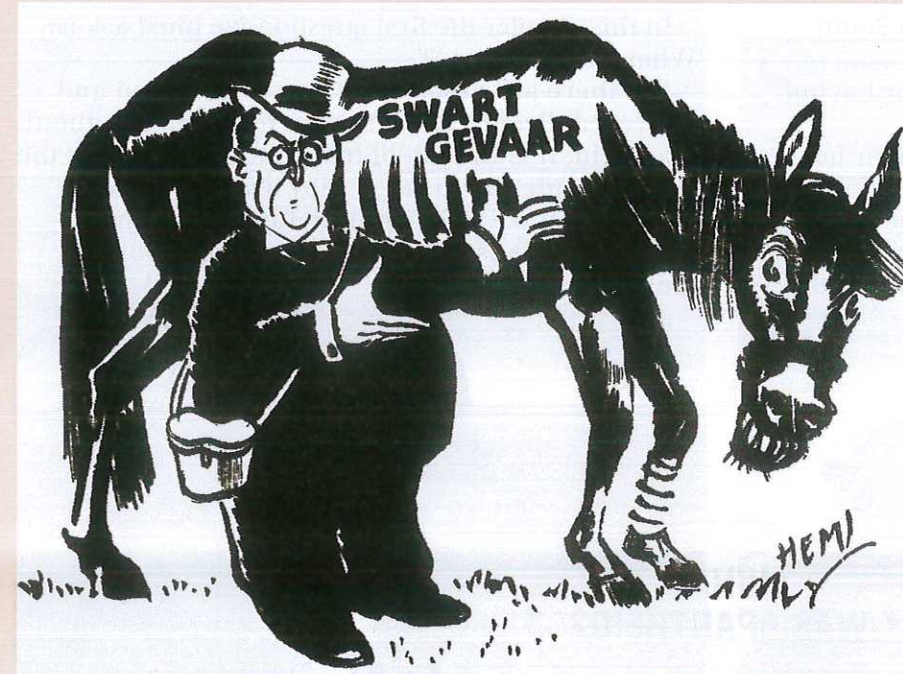


For white farmers, a supply of cheap black labour was promised.

**SOURCE 6** Smuts made clear his policy on racial segregation in South Africa in 1945

*“It is a fixed policy to maintain white supremacy in South Africa, maintaining our white civilisation and keeping our white race pure.”*

Smuts seemed to be unable to hold the whites together under his leadership. Dr Malan managed to unite enough of them to win. The Sauer Report outlined apartheid, but in vague terms, so that many whites from different backgrounds and with different beliefs could find in it something for them.



**SOURCE 7** Malan in a cartoon from an Afrikaner newspaper in 1945. *Swart gevaar* means 'black threat' in Afrikaans

### SUMMARY TASK

'The most important factor in the National Party's election victory in 1948 was that they united all Afrikaner voters.' Do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.

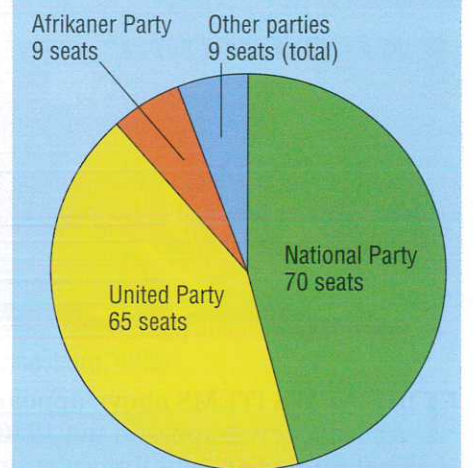
Use your answers to the Tasks on pages 36 and 40 to start you off. Did the Nationalists win because:

- organised black resistance was becoming too effective?

- the Second World War had changed the country in ways many whites did not like?
- they united all Afrikaners?
- they united all whites?

Use your answers to these little questions to help you answer the **BIG** question. Start with a simple yes or no to each, then give your reasons. End by describing the ways the statement at the top is right and the ways it is not right, or not the whole answer.

### The result



**SOURCE 8** The National Party won only 39 per cent of the votes in 1948, but it was enough to become the largest party in Parliament. Two-thirds of the Afrikaners voted for them, but the National Party would not have won without the support of 20 per cent of English-speaking South Africans too