

## COMMITTEES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

- Much of the work of the NA takes place in Committees.
- The NA's committees are called Portfolio Committees.
- The work of each committee relates to a corresponding government department. For example, a Portfolio Committee on Trade and Industry deals with all the matters that concern the Department of Trade and Industry.
- Each committee has a Chairperson to ensure the smooth running of its business.
- Portfolio Committees are responsible for discussing, debating and amending Bills.
- Committees may hold Public Hearings on legislation or matters related to legislation.
- Committees are also responsible for overseeing and monitoring the work of the government departments.

## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- Constitutionally, Parliament is obliged to involve the public in lawmaking and other processes of Parliament.
- The Portfolio Committees are obliged to consult with members of the public in order to get input on a Bill or to hear their views on matters of national importance.
- The public is encouraged to actively participate in the proceedings when the Committees hold Public Hearings.
- Individuals or groups are also encouraged to make written or oral submissions on matters of concern to them.
- Members of the public have the right to participate in the processes and activities of Parliament by:
  - Attending meetings of the Portfolio Committees.
  - Contacting Members of Parliament serving in the NA to enquire about or request information on their work in Parliament.
  - Attending Public Hearings held by Portfolio Committees.
  - Observing plenary debates in the House e.g. Budget Votes.
  - Petitioning Parliament on any matter that is of concern. Petitions to Parliament should have the support of a Member of Parliament.

This pamphlet is available in all the official languages of South Africa.

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PARLIAMENT  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



English

*The National Assembly*  
**The National Assembly**



**PARLIAMENT**  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



## PARLIAMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA

Parliament consists of two Houses, namely the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces.

### THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (NA)

- The NA is elected every five years in national elections.
- During the elections voters choose whom they want as their representatives by voting for the political parties of their choice.

### THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The NA has a constitutional mandate to:

#### Lawmaking Role

- One of the main functions of the NA is to make the laws by which the country is governed.
- The NA refers Bills to Committees for processing and debates Bills.
- The NA can approve, reject or refer Bills back to the Committees for further discussion.

#### Oversight Role

- Parliament has a responsibility to scrutinise, monitor and oversee the actions of government or any other organ of State, in respect of the implementation of laws, the application of the budget, and the observance of the Constitution.
- Parliament keeps the Executive accountable by approving budgets, through asking parliamentary questions, having parliamentary debates about important issues and by proposing and voting on motions relating to the work of government.

#### Elect the President

- The NA has a constitutional mandate to elect the President of South Africa from among its Members.

### THE COMPOSITION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

- The NA consists of 400 elected Members of Parliament (MPs).
- Members of the NA are elected through a system called proportional representation.

- Before an election, each party draws up a list of candidates in order of preference. These candidates are then elected in proportion to the number of votes the party wins in the election. For example, if a party wins half the votes, it will hold half the seats in the NA.

### OFFICE BEARERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

#### Presiding Officers

- At the first sitting of the NA, the members of the NA elect the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker who are referred to as the Presiding Officers of the House.
- The Presiding Officers are entrusted to run the affairs of the NA.
- The Speaker and Deputy Speaker of Parliament preside over the meetings of the NA.
- They make sure that Members of Parliament speak freely, but adhere to the rules of the House.

#### House Chairpersons

The rules of the House make provision for House Chairpersons to assist the Presiding Officers in performing their work. The House Chairpersons may also be required to preside over sittings of the House.

The functions of the House Chairpersons include:

- Co-ordinating the work of Committees
- Preparing reports on legislation
- Co-ordinating oversight activities of the Committees
- Providing political and strategic support to the Presiding Officers.

#### Chief Whips

- Each political party in the NA elects a Chief Whip to run its affairs.
- The whips look after the Members of their respective parties.

#### Leader of Government Business

- The President appoints a Leader of Government Business who works with the office bearers of both Houses.
- The Leader of Government Business is responsible for looking after the interests of the Cabinet and Government business in Parliament.
- The Leader of Government Business ensures that Cabinet Members attend to their parliamentary responsibilities.