



**Question:** *So Mr Zuma has left.*

**Answer:** And what a huge sense of relief. In politics it is not just the legal position that matters (Mr Zuma is innocent until found guilty) but also the perceptions that people have. Mr Zuma is a decent man and gifted politician. He brought peace to KwaZulu Natal after 1994 and scored huge peacemaking successes in Burundi. But an albatross of improbity has been hanging over him from as far back as 2002. And it just won't go away.

**Question:** *A huge victory for the rule of law and corruption fighting?*

**Answer:** Indeed. The ANC Youth League now really looks silly with their outburst against Judge Squires. It clearly illustrates that we must not be too impressed by the forces on the fringes. The broad centre is holding and is, in fact, quite strong.

**Question:** *What do you mean the centre is holding?*

**Answer:** A black judge-president appointed Judge Squires and defended him when he was slurred and attacked; black editors called for Zuma to go (it took much longer for Afrikaans editors to call for resignations in the info scandal of the 1970s); and President Mbeki used his weekly letter for a passionate defence of the independence of the courts. He hammered both rightwing academics and rabble-rousers on the left for criticising judges in a way that undermines their independence and legitimacy.

**Question:** *And Mr Zuma is not the only one subject to the rule of law?*

**Answer:** Indeed. He had the highest profile, but look at who preceded him: Winnie Mandela (remember her profile?); ANC chief whip Tony Yengeni (remember the newspaper ads on his innocence?); Alan Boesak (remember the prayers?) – he got a pardon, but certainly served his time. In each of these cases the law took its course, although it was sometimes excruciatingly slow and erstwhile icons came down. The Zuma affair consolidates a long development indicating that SA is not a banana republic when it comes to judicial processes, although many want to live with that fear.

**Question:** *We have come a long way?*

**Answer:** Nothing illustrates it more vividly than the situation in KwaZulu Natal. Mr Zuma helped to stabilise that province after 1994. From a semi-civil war to peace. In 2004 President Mbeki had the confidence to fire Chief Buthelezi from his cabinet – and not too much happened. In 2005 he has fired Mr Zuma and it does not look as if too much will happen. There is now as much political violence in KwaZulu as there is in Holland.

**Question:** *What now?*

**Answer:** I believe the main challenge will be whether or not President Mbeki can remain in charge of the ANC and drive the economic policy agenda. His Zuma decision has made him stronger, not weaker. At the same time it might make him more attuned to the grass roots. That will strengthen him further – much as last year's election did.

**Question:** *That will be good for economic growth?*

**Answer:** Undeniably. I sense a new political ambition to push growth to 5% and more. With Mbeki firmly in charge of the party, one must watch this space - but that is for next week.