Thabo Mvuyelwa Mbeki

President, ANC (1999 - 2007)
Member, National Executive Committee, ANC
Member, National Working Committee, ANC
President of South Africa (1999 - 2008)

People like to identify Thabo Mbeki as an independent and original thinker, but one who remains close to the more visible leadership. His profile as a policy shaper and mediator in the movement has been built up over a lifetime of involvement. "I was born into the struggle," he says. His birth took place in Idutywa, Transkei, in June 1942.

Both his parents were teachers and activists. His father is a university graduate and there were many books in his home which Thabo read at an early age. Govan Mbeki was a leading figure in ANC activities in the Eastern Cape. Believing that sooner or later they would be arrested, Mbeki's parents decided that family and friends would also be responsible for bringing up the children. Mbeki therefore spent long periods away from home.

He joined the Youth League at 14 and quickly became active in student politics. After his schooling at Lovedale was interrupted by a strike in 1959, he completed his studies at home. Thereafter he moved to Johannesburg where he came under the guidance of Walter Sisulu and Duma Nokwe.

While studying for his British A-levels he was elected secretary of the African Students’ Association (ASA). He went on to study economics as a correspondence student with London University. The ASA collapsed following the arrest of many of its members, at a time when political movements were coming under increasingly severe attack from the state. Mbeki's father was arrested at Rivonia and sentenced to life imprisonment.

He left the country in 1962 under orders from the ANC. From Tanzania he moved to Britain where he completed a Masters degree in economics at Sussex University in 1966. Remaining active in student politics, he played a prominent role in building the youth and student sections of the ANC in exile.
Following his studies he worked at the London office with the late Oliver Tambo and Yusuf Dadoo before being sent to the Soviet Union in 1970 for military training. Later that year he arrived in Lusaka where he was soon appointed assistant secretary of the Revolutionary Council. In 1973-74 he was in Botswana holding discussions with the Botswana government about opening an ANC office there. In 1975 he was acting ANC representative in Swaziland. Appointed to the NEC in 1975, he served as ANC representative to Nigeria until 1978.

On his return to Lusaka he became political secretary in the office of Oliver Tambo, and then director of information. From this position he played a major role in turning the international media against apartheid. His other role in the '70s was in building the ANC in Swaziland and underground structures inside the country.

During the '80s Mbeki rose to head the department of information and publicity and co-ordinated diplomatic campaigns to involve more white South Africans in anti-apartheid activities. When delegations of sports, business and cultural representatives visited Lusaka for talks they all expressed surprise to meet a man deeply engaged in the issues they brought to the table.

From 1989 Mbeki headed the ANC Department of International Affairs, and was a key figure in the ANC's negotiations with the former government.

Mbeki was hand-picked by Nelson Mandela after the April 1994 general election to be the first Deputy President of the new Government of National Unity.

At the 50th Conference of the ANC at Mafikeng, from 16-20 1997, Thabo Mbeki was elected as the new President of the African National Congress.

Thabo Mbeki was elected President of South Africa on 14 June 1999 and was inaugurated as President on 16 June 1999.

He resigned as President of South Africa on 24 September 2008.

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**Personal**
- Date of Birth: 18 June 1942
- Marital Status: Married

**Positions last Held**
- President of the Republic of South Africa since 14 June 1999 until 24 September 2008.
- Member of the Steering Committee of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

**Academic Qualifications**
- Attended primary school at Idutywa and Butterworth and high school at Lovedale, Alice.
- Expelled from school as a result of student strikes (1959) and forced to continue studies at home.
- Sat for matriculation examinations at St John's High School, Umtata (1959).
- Undertook first year economics degree as an external student with the University of London (1961 - 1962).
- Master of Economics degree, University of Sussex (1966).
Career/Positions/Memberships/Other Activities

- Joined African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) while a student at the Lovedale Institute (1956).
- Involved in underground activities in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand area after the African National Congress (ANC) was banned in 1960.
- Involved in mobilising the students and youth in support of the ANC call for a stay away in protest against the creation of a Republic (1961).
- Elected Secretary of the African Students' Association (December 1961).
- Left South Africa together with other students on instructions of the ANC (1962). Went to the then Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, the then Tanganyika, now Tanzania and the United Kingdom (UK) to study.
- Continued with political activities as a university student in the UK, mobilising the international student community against apartheid.
- Served as Assistant Secretary to the Revolutionary Council of the ANC in Lusaka (1971).
- Sent to Botswana (1973). He was among the first ANC leaders to have contact with exiled and visiting members of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). As a result of his contact and discussions with the BCM, some of the leading members of this organisation found their way into the ranks of the ANC.
- The focus of his activities during this time was to consolidate the underground structures of the ANC and to mobilise the people inside South Africa.
- Engaged the Botswana Government in discussions to open an ANC office in that country. Left Botswana in 1974.
- Sent to Swaziland as acting representative of the ANC. Part of his task was the internal mobilisation and the creation of underground structures.
- Became a member of the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the ANC (1975).
- Sent to Nigeria (December 1976) as a representative of the ANC. Played a major role in assisting students from South Africa to relocate in an unfamiliar environment.
- Left Nigeria and returned to Lusaka (February 1978).
- Political Secretary in the Office of the President of the ANC (1978).
- Director of the Department of Information and Publicity (1984 - 1989).
- Re-elected to the National Executive Committee (1985).
- Served as Director of Information and as Secretary for Presidential Affairs.
- Member of the ANC's Political and Military Council.
- Member of the delegation that met the South African business community led by the Chairman of Anglo American, Gavin Relly, at Mfuwe, Zambia (1985).
- Led a delegation of the ANC to Dakar, Senegal, where talks were held with a delegation from the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (IDASA) (1987).
- Led the ANC delegation which held secret talks with the South African Government from 1989 and which led to agreements about the unbanning of the ANC and the release of political prisoners.
- Part of the delegation which engaged the National Party Government in talks about talks. He participated in the Groote Schuur and Pretoria deliberations, which resulted in the agreements which became known as the Groote Schuur and Pretoria Minutes (1990).
- Participated in all subsequent negotiations leading to the adoption of the interim Constitution for the new South Africa.
- Elected Chairperson of the ANC (1993). The election to this post meant succeeding the late former President and Chairperson of the ANC, Oliver R Tambo, with whom he had a close working relationship.
- Chairperson of the African Union (July 2002 - July 2003).
Awards/Decorations/Presentations/Bursaries

- Honorary Doctorate from Rand Afrikaans University (17 September 1999).
- Honorary Doctorate of Laws from the Glasgow Caledonian University (19 May 2000).
- Newsmaker of the Year from Pretoria Press Club (22 August 2000).

Source: The Presidency of South Africa and the African National Congress