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J. Soc. Sci., 13(3): 163-176 (2006)

PRINT: ISSN 0971-8923 ONLINE: ISSN 2456-6756

DOI: 10.31901/24566756.2006/13.03.01

**Media Perceptions and Academic Responses to South African
President Thabo Mbeki**

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KEYWORDS South Africa; politics; president; compassionate despotism; pathological patrimonialism;
personal rule syndrome

ABSTRACT This paper is about South Africa's first successor to Nelson Mandela, viz. Thabo Mbeki. The paper covers issues pertaining to the country's politics at national, regional and local levels and his perceived influence at each of these levels. It seeks to demonstrate the enigmatic and interesting political leader that Thabo Mbeki is and the possible directions that can be taken by the end of his term of office. The paper concludes with an assessment of possibilities that range from 'compassionate despotism', to 'pathological patrimonialism', to 'personal rule syndrome'.