

About South Africa

This document introduces the key facts about South Africa, its history, politics and development successes and challenges.

Key facts

Population	48.6 million (UK 61 million). This is an increase of 8.2 million since the end of apartheid in 1994.
Capital	Tshwane, also known as Pretoria, is the executive capital; Cape Town is the legislative capital.
Area	1.22 million sq km/ 470,693 sq miles- nearly five times size of UK (UK 245,000 sq kilometres/94,600 sq miles).
Major languages	11 official languages including Afrikaans, English, Sesotho, Xhosa and Zulu. Nine of the country's 11 official languages are the languages of the indigenous southern African peoples.
Major religion	Christianity. About two-thirds of South Africans are mainly Protestant, although this is often linked to traditional beliefs. Other significant religions are Islam, Hinduism and Judaism.
Life expectancy at birth	50.8 years (UK 79.3 years). This has reduced dramatically as a result of HIV/AIDS rates.
Under-five mortality rate	68 per 1,000 live births (UK 5.8 per 1,000 live births).
HIV prevalence	18.8 per cent aged 15-49 (UK 0.1 per cent). South Africa has the highest number of people living with HIV in the world 5.5 million.
Adult literacy rate	83 per cent ages 15 and older.
GDP per capita	US\$11,110 (UK US\$48,000).
Monetary unit	1 Rand = 100 cents.
Main exports	Gold, diamonds, metals and minerals, cars, machinery.
Share of the world's CO2 emissions	1.5 per cent.
Population without access to an improved water source	12 per cent (UK 0 per cent).
Population using improved sanitation	65 per cent (UK 100 per cent).
Government	African National Congress (ANC).
President	Jacob Zuma.
Year women received right to vote	1930 for European descendants, 1994 universal franchise (UK 1918 age 30 and 1928 age 21).

History

South Africa has been populated for millions of years. In the Gauteng province there is a complex of limestone caves where fossilised evidence of hominid existence has been found dating back approximately three and a half million years. For this reason the caves complex have been designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, and called the “Cradle of Humankind”.

By 125,000 BC the earliest known humans lived in caves on the Tsitsikamma coast of South Africa. From 3,000 – 1,000 BC, the Zulus, who form the majority of the population of South Africa today, with other tribes including the Khoikhoi, the San, and the Xhosa people, were living in South Africa. These indigenous peoples of South Africa lived as farmers, or as hunter-gatherers.

By 300 AD ancestors of the Bantu-speaking majority of the population settled south of the Limpopo river, joining the Khoikoi and the San people who had lived there for thousands of years.

In the 1400s, the Zulu and Xhosa tribes established large and powerful kingdoms in the South Africa region. The Southern African peoples continued to live in the region and farm the land.

During the period from the 1480s, people started arriving from Europe. The Europeans seized the lands the Southern African people inhabited and farmed, and enclosed them. The colonial practices of the Europeans laid the foundations for exploitation of the indigenous African people, and the iniquitous Apartheid regimes.

From the late 15th century onward, European traders stopped off along the coast line to collect supplies.

The Dutch East India Company established a supply depot in Cape Town in 1652. It was initially intended as a staging post but developed into a permanent settlement, the Cape Colony. Britain took the Cape Colony from the Dutch following the battle of Bloubergstrand in 1806, where the British defeated Dutch forces. The British occupation was formalised at the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1814 and the Cape was established as a Crown Colony.

In the 17th century the Dutch continued to settle on land owned and occupied by the Khoikhoi hunter-gatherers and San farmers. The Khoikhoi and San people mounted rebellions to regain their lands and stolen cattle, but Europeans dominated the western half of the area by 1800.

The Europeans brought diseases with them which had not been in South Africa before, and against which the people had no resistance. Battles and smallpox decimated the San and Khoikhoi.

In 1809 the British decreed that the San and Khoikhoi must work for white employers and placed restrictions on their travel.

From 1816 – 1826 Shaka Zulu founded and expanded the Zulu empire into a great empire. He excelled in developing fighting strategies and created an impressive and fearless army, resisting the European colonisers.

In the 19th century there was increased migration both from Europe and from the transatlantic slave trade. The abolition of the importation of African slaves in the

British colonies in 1807, the abolition of the slave trade in 1833, the fact that the British had seized control of the Cape and the resistance of African people, encouraged the Afrikaners, descendants of Dutch settlers, to trek north out of the Cape. These colonisers thought of this as 'the Great Trek'. Eventually four provinces were formed: Cape and Natal controlled by the British; and Transvaal and Orange Free State controlled by the Afrikaners, known as Boers.

Diamonds were discovered in Kimberley in Northern Cape in the 1870s, while gold was found later in Witwatersrand (Johannesburg). From 1899 to 1902 Britain took up arms against the Afrikaners in the Anglo Boer War in order to control South Africa's gold and diamonds.

In 1910 the Union of South Africa was formed as part of the British Empire.

In 1909 a delegation went to London to plead the case of 'non-whites'. This was followed by the formation of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1912, making it the oldest liberation movement on the continent of Africa.

More repressive legislation was enacted from the mid-19th century onwards including the Masters and Servants' Act in 1867, the reservation of skilled work for white people, the Native Poll Tax and the 1913 Land Act which reserved 90 per cent of the country for ownership by white people. In 1936 black Cape voters were removed from the common roll (the franchise was previously based on economic qualifications). In the following year laws were passed to stem black people moving to urban areas and compel municipalities to segregate black African and white residents.

In 1948 the National Party came to power on a platform of apartheid, an Afrikaans term meaning 'apartness'. From this time on began a period of unspeakable oppression and exploitation in South African history.

In 1950 the Government passed the Population Registration Act, which classified all citizens by race as Bantu or black African; Coloured or mixed race; white or Asian. The passing of laws restricting the movement of black people followed in 1952. The Separate Amenities Act of 1953 introduced apartheid segregation, for example, on buses and in post offices.

Separate education was introduced in 1953 under the Bantu Education Act, eventually resulting in 17 different "ministries of education", although most were poorly resourced.

In 1955, during the Congress of the People, the African National Congress (ANC) adopted the Freedom Charter outlining their demands for democracy and rights in a non racial South Africa.

In 1960, 69 unarmed South Africans were shot in the Sharpeville Massacre for protesting against the pass laws. In the immediate aftermath more than 200 further people were killed by the apartheid regime. The pass laws made it compulsory for all black South Africans over the age of 16 to carry a pass book at all times and restricted where they could visit and when they could go.

After Sharpeville, the ANC and other organisations were banned. It was only then that ANC formally adopted the armed struggle, after 48 years of seeking equality peacefully through all possible means and following thousands of arrests.

In 1962 Nelson Mandela was sentenced to three years imprisonment. The following year the “Rivonia trial” began in which Mandela and comrades were charged with sabotage and conspiracy. Mandela delivered an historic speech from the dock on 20 April 1964, claiming “the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities” was one he hoped to live to see but one for which he was prepared to die.

In June 1964 Mandela and seven other defendants were found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment.

In June 1976 police opened fire on thousands of young people in Soweto as they protested against the Government’s policy to impose teaching in Afrikaans in all state schools and against apartheid rule. The uprising spread throughout the country and the response of the Government received international condemnation and resulted in economic and cultural sanctions.

In 1983 the United Democratic Front was formed inside South Africa as a coalition of trade unions, black student groups, and community and church groups. Throughout the 1980s there was growing internal resistance and increasing international pressure, resulting in the isolation of the pro-apartheid government in South Africa.

In 1990 Mandela was released from prison after 27 years.

From 1990 to 1993 negotiations led to an interim constitution, in a context of increasing violence from Inkatha against the ANC. After several massacres, many commentators predicted a descent into complete violence. Chris Hani, the leader of South Africa Communist Party and widely regarded as one of the most charismatic leaders in South Africa, was assassinated. Some white groups threatened violence and armed militias, including Inkatha, engaged in violence toward the ANC with the support of the State.

In 1994 South Africa held its first democratic election in which all South Africans were able to vote. The ANC were elected into Government with Nelson Mandela as President.

The democratic government of South Africa inherited a deeply divided South Africa. The economy was geared to meeting the needs of the privileged white elite. There was gross inequality in all aspects of society including education, employment, housing and basic amenities (water, electricity and housing). Apartheid and its predecessors had created the most successful positive discrimination programme in the world, in favour of white people. The system and structure of government was based on delivering what white people wanted and controlling everyone else by denying their political, economic and social rights and taking away their resources. South Africa in 1994 had no basis in its structures or processes for meeting the needs of all its citizens.

Mandela declared that there would be a new South Africa. In the years since the start of the ANC government, South Africa and South Africans have seen great and fundamental changes. Since 1994, programmes have been put in place to build homes for people dispossessed under the apartheid regime and living in impoverished townships or informal settlements. Programmes have been put in place to get supplies of electricity and clean water to communities. The education system has seen massive investment, so that schools are no longer allowed to discriminate on who can attend, and all are open to anyone. Programmes have been put in place

to improve healthcare opportunities for all, and to abolish practices such as reserving top jobs for white people.

There is a long way to go, but the new South Africa has laid the foundations for all South Africans to thrive and live successful lives.

Politics

The South African constitution is one of the best in the world in codifying the rights of its people. The country's parliament consists of the National Assembly of 400 seats and a National Council of Provinces of 90 seats. The President, who is also the head of state, is elected by the National Assembly for a five-year term. Each of the country's nine provinces has its own provincial government, including a premier and an executive, all elected for a five year term. South Africa held elections in April 2009. The turnout was 77 per cent (compared to 61 per cent in the UK in 2005). The ruling ANC won with 65.9 per cent of the vote and its leader Jacob Zuma, who served 12 years as a prisoner on Robben Island and 15 years in exile, became President. The ANC is the dominant political party and is the oldest liberation movement in Africa. It will celebrate its centenary in 2012.

Since the end of apartheid, South African foreign policy has focused on its African partners, particularly in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). South Africa has played a key role as a mediator in African conflicts over the last decade and become a driving force in African peacekeeping.

Economy

Since the end of apartheid in 1994 the Republic of South Africa has experienced sustained economic growth for 15 consecutive years. However, it entered a recession in 2009 as a result of the global economic crisis. It is Africa's largest, most advanced economy. With abundant natural resources and well-developed financial, legal, energy and transport sectors, South Africa leads the continent in industrial output and mineral production. However, daunting economic problems remain from the colonial and apartheid era, especially chronic poverty and lack of economic empowerment among the most vulnerable groups. In a context of high inequality, growth, which has averaged at approx 3.5 per cent since 1994, has not been strong enough to cut into unemployment. Unemployment stands at 25 per cent according to the official government figure, but many sources estimate it to be higher.

Civil society

South Africa has a large and active civil society including trade unions and church linked groups. Many have their origins in the period of the liberation struggle. Today, they focus on poverty reduction, gender equality, HIV/AIDS and environmental issues. South Africa's trade union movement is widely recognised as the most developed on the continent. Its role in dismantling apartheid legislation and practices in the workplace remain its major achievement. There are three prominent trade union federations with affiliates operating in South Africa, the largest of which is the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

Achievements in South Africa since the first democratic election in 1994

- South Africa has been praised across the world for the way its people, led by Nelson Mandela, managed the transition from an apartheid society to the new South Africa, with democracy, equality and human rights.
- Pride in South Africa and being South African: Most South Africans, both black and white people feel South African and are proud to be South African. They believe their country has achieved something significant yet intangible, the recognition of rights and needs and a functioning, vibrant democracy. Huge strides have been made in recognising dignity, rights and diversity, all values that apartheid denied.
- Constitution: The Constitution of South Africa is widely regarded as one of the best in the world in providing rights for its citizens.
- Women: In parliament and provincial legislatures women comprise 33 per cent, this compares to 19 per cent in the UK Parliament. All southern African countries are committed to 50 per cent representation of women in government.
- Housing: More than 2.3 million new homes have been built since 1994.
- Water: Access to safe water has increased from 59 per cent of the population in 1994 to 85 per cent of the population by 2007.
- Sanitation: In 1994, 50 per cent of the population had access to decent sanitation; by 2007 this was 71 per cent.
- Electricity: 4.2 million homes were electrified between 1994 and 2006, and 80 per cent of homes now have electricity.
- Healthcare: It is free to children under six, pregnant women and people with disabilities; Immunisation is widespread (90 per cent of the population) and polio has been eradicated.
- Education: There have been big increases in spending on education. No public school can refuse admission on the grounds that a parent cannot pay the fees and 40 per cent of schools do not charge fees. The number of overcrowded schools has fallen from 51 per cent to 24 per cent in the last ten years. Schools are no longer allowed to discriminate on who can attend. The curriculum has been changed, so that the old ideas based on a view of white supremacy and denying the contribution of black people have been substituted by a more objective and just curriculum. Schools without access to safe water reduced from 8,823 to 3,152 in ten years. Schools with electricity increased from 11,174 to 20,713 in the same period.
- Pensions and benefits systems: South Africa provides a pension system for its citizens and increasingly a benefits system for those in need. Pensions have been shown to have the greatest potential for reducing poverty amongst the elderly. 12 million South Africans now receive social grants.
- Macro-economic stability: South Africa has had the longest period of economic growth in its history. It has not needed to rely on the International Monetary Fund or World Bank as many other African countries have.

- South Africa in Africa: Only after 1994 was South Africa really accepted by other African nations. It is now a key player in the Africa Union and in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).. It has led the call for leadership from Africa to deal with Africa's problems. The Pan African Parliament is located in South Africa and South Africa has mediated in various regional conflicts.
- South Africa in the world: It is now a leading player in the G20 group of the world's leading economies.
- South Africa will host the World Cup in 2010, the first African nation to do so.

Development challenges

- Poverty and unemployment: Unemployment is at 25 per cent according to the official government figure, but many sources estimate it to be higher. A key challenge is how to ensure that macro economic stability and economic growth translates into jobs.
- Continuing inequality: Many South Africans are locked into poverty and inequality. There is a developing black middle class and a small black rich elite but it is relatively small compared to the numbers still in poverty. There are two South Africas, still divided by race and gender (70 per cent of management posts are held by white people, approximately 12 per cent of the population). There is also a divide of class, with some highly educated people in skilled employment, whereas the majority have low education and skill levels, are unemployed or in the informal sector and are marginalised.
- HIV/AIDS: South Africa has the fourth highest rate of HIV in the world. A 2008 national survey estimated that 16.9 per cent of people aged 15–49 years old were HIV-positive. It now has a proactive national strategy and programme providing free anti-retroviral drugs to all who need them. As a result, HIV prevalence appears to have stabilised, and may even be declining slightly. Among teenage girls the rate fell from 16.1 per cent in 2004 to 12.9 per cent in 2007. This follows a lack of leadership on the issue under the Presidency of Thabo Mbeki, including mixed messages about the cause of AIDS. Since stepping down as President, Nelson Mandela has been forthright on the urgent need to tackle AIDS. He has established 46664 (his prison number) as his global HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaign.
- Crime: South Africa suffers from high rates of crime, especially in its major cities. Most of the victims of crime live in poverty. Many of the perpetrators of crime also live in poor areas, for some with little prospect of employment in an unequal society crime unfortunately can be an appealing or unavoidable option. Crime in South Africa is not a recent phenomenon. During the apartheid years the police were employed largely to enforce the race laws rather than addressing crime in poorer areas.
- Education: This is still in transition. South Africa has had to build a new education system geared to all and not the few, which prepares and skills its youth for the 21st century. The challenge of achieving good quality education for all is ongoing.
- Capacity: Service delivery is an ongoing challenge. Since 1994 South Africa has been trying to meet the needs of all its population, not just 12 to 15 per cent of the population. This involves resources and policies, but also the capacity to

deliver and this has required building a new system of government. It requires people with the education, knowledge, skills and information to ensure policies translate into effective action on the ground.

- Land reform and rural development: Rural development, food security and land redistribution are continuing challenges. The Government aims to transfer 30 per cent of farmland to black South Africans by 2014.
- Migration: An estimated eight million people have moved to South Africa since the early 1990s. Prior to this, the apartheid system used migrant labour, including migrant labour for mining. It strictly controlled who came in and where they went. Such controls became largely inoperative from about 1992 onwards. There have been instances of resentment from some South Africans to migrants which resulted in some cases of xenophobic violence.
- Southern Africa: There are a number of challenges relating to democracy, human rights, trade and development in both Zimbabwe and Swaziland which affect the SADC.