



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

## BACKGROUND

**Land and Climate.** Covering 471,445 square miles (1,221,043 square kilometers), South Africa is slightly larger than Texas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma combined. The country's large interior plateau averages about 5,000 feet (1,500 meters) above sea level. Primarily savanna and semidesert, the plateau is rimmed by a narrow coastal belt, which is subtropical along the east coast and has a Mediterranean climate along the southwestern cape. South Africa's most important rivers are the Orange, Vaal, and Limpopo. Snow is confined to the Drakensberg and Maluti Mountains in the east. Seasons run opposite those in the Northern Hemisphere. Humidity is generally low, except in the KwaZulu/Natal Province along the east coast. The country is noted for its long beaches, green forests, rugged mountains, and great canyons. Diversity among plants and wildlife adds to its stunning scenic beauty. The Kingdom of Lesotho, surrounded by South Africa, sits on a high plateau. South Africa also nearly engulfs the Kingdom of Swaziland.

**History.** The Khoikhoi, San, and other indigenous Africans lived in southern Africa for thousands of years, although little is known of their history. In 1652, the Dutch established a provisions station at Cape Town. It supplied ships with fresh foods as they sailed around the tip of the continent. French Huguenot refugees joined the Dutch colony in 1688 and Germans came later. The colonists became known as *Boers* (farmers). They clashed at times with indigenous groups but stayed mainly in coastal areas. Britain gained formal possession of the Cape Colony in 1814. Dissatisfaction with British rule led many Boers to migrate to the interior between 1835 and 1848. Their migration, which they call the Great Trek, led to war with the indigenous Zulu, Xhosas, and other Africans. The Boers won most of the battles and took control of large tracts of land.

After the discovery of gold and diamonds in these Boer territories in the late 19th century, Britain annexed parts of the area. Tension erupted into the Boer Wars (1899–1902), in which the Boers were defeated. Britain combined its colonies, Cape and Natal, with the Boer republics of Orange Free State and Transvaal to create the Union of South Africa in 1910.

Following its election to power in 1948, South Africa's National Party (NP) devised the apartheid system that separated the country's population into racial groups: whites, blacks, coloureds (people of mixed race), and Indians. In 1961, the country gained independence from Great Britain and subsequently withdrew from the British Commonwealth over criticism of its racial policies. For the next three decades, South Africa was the scene of turmoil and violence. The African National Congress (ANC), first organized in 1912, was banned in 1960 for its communist views and antiapartheid activities. The ANC then launched, with other groups, an armed struggle against the government. Many ANC leaders, including Nelson Mandela, were jailed. In the 1970s and 1980s, international sanctions and boycotts damaged the economy and isolated the country.

Frederik Willem (F. W.) de Klerk took office in 1989 and began to reform the government. He freed Mandela and other political prisoners, desegregated public facilities, and gave the ANC legal status. Mandela later suspended the ANC's armed struggle and dropped its socialist ideology. Violent clashes between rival African groups, among other factors, threatened progress toward greater political change. However, most apartheid provisions were abolished in 1991, and negotiations for a new constitution began in 1992. Mandela and de Klerk shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993.

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Despite sporadic violence, multiracial and multiparty elections were held peacefully in April 1994. Mandela was elected president. Mandela launched his *Masakhane* (Nguni for “Let us build together”) campaign. In 1996, a new constitution was ratified. It has an extensive bill of rights guaranteeing equality for all who live in South Africa. In June 1999 elections, the ANC won all but one seat needed for a two-thirds (constitutional) majority, and Thabo Mbeki took over the presidency as Mandela retired.

The challenges facing South Africa are formidable: insufficient housing, high unemployment, violent crime, corruption, and a high rate of HIV infection. Nevertheless, new health clinics and water systems have been built, homes are under construction, the unemployed are slowly receiving training, the government is cracking down on corruption, and all children now have access to education.

### THE PEOPLE

**Population.** South Africa’s estimated population of 42.8 million is growing annually at 0.01 percent. The majority of the population (77 percent) is comprised of Africans, mostly from nine ethnic groups. The Zulus are the largest (23 percent), followed by Xhosas (18), North Sothos, South Sothos, Tswanas, Shangaan-Tsongas, Swazis, Ndebeles, and Vendas. Each has its own cultural heritage, language, and national identity. Before migration patterns led groups to mix with one another, most lived in distinct areas of southern Africa. This division inspired the apartheid concept of “homelands,” which was abolished in 1992.

People of mixed race (9 percent) are most often descendants of early white settlers, native Khoikhoi, and slaves imported from the Dutch East Indies during South Africa’s colonial period. Indians (3 percent) are generally descendants of indentured laborers brought from India during the 19th century or of Indian immigrants who came between 1860 and 1911. Whites (11 percent) include English-speaking descendants of English, Irish, and Scottish settlers and Afrikaans-speaking descendants of Dutch, French, and German colonials. It is estimated that between two and four million illegal immigrants from neighboring African states also reside in South Africa.

**Language.** Sixty percent of all whites and most mixed-race people speak Afrikaans (a Dutch derivation). Other whites and Indians speak English. English is commonly used in business, between some ethnic groups, and as the primary language of instruction in secondary schools. The vocabulary and pronunciation of South African English reflects a unique relationship between English and other languages spoken in South Africa. English and Afrikaans are more common in urban areas than rural regions.

African languages are roughly divided into four families: Nguni, Sotho, Tsonga or Shangaana, and Venda. Most Africans speak a Nguni language: Zulu and Xhosa are most prominent, followed by Ndebele and Swazi. Sotho languages (South Sotho, North Sotho, and Setswana) dominate the central part of the country. Also, a few mixed languages have developed to facilitate communication between groups. Typical is a mixture of Zulu and Xhosa or Zulu and Sotho. People speak their original languages at home or within their own groups. Some whites are now learning a major African language to help them become more aware of their diverse culture.

**Religion.** More than half of Africans, most whites, and most mixed-race people in South Africa are Christians. Some mixed-race people are Muslims. Afrikaans speakers belong

primarily to the Dutch Reformed Church. English-speaking whites generally belong to Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Methodist, and other congregations. Africans typically belong to African Independent Churches—the largest of which is the Zion Christian Church—that combine Christian and traditional African beliefs in their worship patterns. As many as 20 percent of Africans adhere solely to indigenous belief systems. Most Indians are Hindus, although about 20 percent are Muslims and 10 percent are Christians. South Africa’s Jewish community is small, but it has had a significant impact on the country’s development.

**General Attitudes.** South Africa’s complex transition from minority to majority rule has been painful at times, but the majority of citizens accept coexistence in a multiracial society. Nevertheless, a slow pace of change in some aspects of the transition has frustrated many people. Money is scarce to pay for textbooks that teach more African history. Some Africans complain of job discrimination, while many whites disagree with attempts to require companies to hire more Africans. Mixed-race people often express a feeling of being left behind or marginalized in new planning. And, even as some whites are reaching out to others by improving access to job training or land, integrating neighborhoods, or learning about indigenous cultures, others continue to fear majority rule and oppose reform efforts. At the same time, many Africans are angry that whites are not giving up more of their wealth or moving faster to integrate society.

Overall, however, people want to contribute their efforts to building a democratic society. Despite various setbacks, the majority of South Africans value their new economic opportunities and a renewed acceptance by the international community. They agree that South Africans must work together to achieve all the goals set forth in the constitution and to allow South Africa to capitalize on its natural wealth, its strong economy, and its diverse peoples.

**Personal Appearance.** Some rural Africans wear traditional clothing for special purposes or everyday attire. This may include a variety of headdresses and colorful outfits. They wear Western-style clothing on a daily basis, but women include a scarf or other headdress and wear either a dress or a blouse and skirt. Urban African men wear pants, shirts, and sometimes suits, but rarely shorts. African women wear both African and European fashions.

White South Africans wear Western-style clothing, usually made from lightweight cotton. They tend to be well dressed in public. Men may wear suits or shirts and trousers; some wear shorts and knee-socks. Women generally wear comfortable dresses or modest pants. Indian women often wear a *sari*, a wraparound-type dress.

### CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

**Greetings.** Of the numerous greetings used in South Africa, the English phrases *Hello* and *Good morning* are understood by most people. Afrikaans speakers say *Goeie môre* (Good morning). Young English speakers say *Howzit* (slang for “How are you?”) to friends. A more formal *Good morning* or *Good afternoon* is common among adults. The Zulu and Swazis greet each other with *Sawubona* (literally, “I see you,” meaning “Hello”) or *Kunjani* (How are you?). An acceptable response to either is *Yebo* (Yes). The Xhosa greeting, *Molo*, and the Sotho phrase *Dumela* have similar meanings to *Sawubona*. On parting, most South Africans use a phrase that assumes a future meeting. In other words, people rarely say

good-bye. Rather, one says *See you* in English, *Tot siens* (Till we see each other again) in Afrikaans, or something like the Sotho *Sala gashi* (Go well in peace).

South Africans shake hands when they greet, but handshakes differ between groups. Some use firmer, others lighter, shakes with one hand; many rural people use both hands. Close friends and relatives may hug. Sometimes African friends greet with an intricate triple handshake that involves interlocking the smallest fingers, clasping fists, and interlocking fingers again. African men may also hold hands when walking or conversing.

South Africans generally do not address strangers or older people by their first name. Professional titles or the equivalents to “Mr.,” “Mrs.,” and “Miss” are preferred. It is polite to call an older African “father” (*Tata* in Xhosa, *Ntate* in SeSotho, or *Baba* in Zulu) or “mother” (*Mama* in Xhosa and Zulu or *Mme* in Sesotho). Friends use first names and nicknames.

**Gestures.** Africans and mixed-race people frequently use hand gestures in conversation. It is impolite to point at someone with the index finger, stand too close during conversation, or talk with one’s hands in the pockets. Africans use the right hand for handshakes, to pass objects, or to gesture. Receiving an object with cupped hands is polite. Some young people express “hello” or “good-bye” by extending the thumb and little finger up (folding all other fingers against the palm) and rocking the hand from side-to-side. Whites tend to use minimal hand gestures and are comfortable passing items with either hand.

**Visiting.** Visiting is an important social activity for most of South Africa’s groups. When possible, visits are arranged in advance, but unannounced visits among good friends or relatives are common, especially in areas where telephones are not accessible. South Africans are gregarious, hospitable, polite, and personally self-effacing. They enjoy conversing and socializing. Gender, ethnic, and age groups tend to socialize among themselves; association between such groups is more formal.

Etiquette varies widely between ethnic groups. Guests usually are served refreshments. In Indian homes, it is impolite to refuse these, and it is polite to accept second helpings if eating a meal. Among Africans, dinner guests are not expected to bring a gift. Whites will often bring something to drink (juice, wine, etc.). When guests leave, they usually are accompanied by their host to the gate, car, or street.

**Eating.** Whites generally observe the continental style of eating; the fork is in the left hand and the knife remains in the right. Africans more often eat meals with spoons or their fingers (depending on the food). It generally is not appropriate for adults to eat on the street unless eating ice cream or standing at a vendor’s stand. Eating alone is also rare. Dinner, usually eaten after 6 p.m., is the main meal. All South Africans enjoy a *braai* (barbecue), especially on the weekend. Beef and *boerewors* (spiced sausage) are usually featured at a barbecue.

## LIFESTYLE

**Family.** White families are small, live as a nuclear unit, generally are close-knit, and enjoy a good standard of living. Africans have strong extended family ties, even if nuclear units are not always able to live in the same household because of employment or education. Children are taught to respect their elders and obey their parents. Relatives play an important role in caring for children and providing aid to those in need.

**Dating and Marriage.** Dating habits vary between ethnic

groups, but most South Africans plan on marrying and having children. For many ethnic groups, the groom must pay *lobola* (bride-price) in the form of cattle or money to the bride’s parents before a wedding can take place. However, paying *lobola* can take years; a couple might have several children before it is paid. Traditional wedding celebrations involve much dancing and feasting. The law recognizes tribal weddings. Polygamy is more common in rural areas. Most white and mixed-race South Africans marry in a church or marry civilly. Indians have their own wedding traditions.

**Diet.** South Africans enjoy a wide variety of foods, from roast beef or roast lamb and potatoes, to various curries, to *boerewors* and pickled fish, grilled meats, stewed tomatoes, cabbage, pumpkin, and spinach. Wild game meats are also popular with many people. Corn, rice, beans, and potatoes are the staples for the rural majority. Africans eat *mealie meal* (cornmeal porridge, sometimes cooked with vegetables and meat) on a regular basis. *Potjiekos* (pot food) is a meal in a three-legged cast-iron pot over a fire. Fresh fruits and vegetables are abundant and often sold by farmers from roadside stands. *Biltong* is a popular jerky-like snack made from various types of meat. The *milk tart*, a custard-like pie, is a favorite desert. Wine, tea, coffee, beer, and *cool-drink* (any soft drink or juice) are common beverages.

**Recreation.** Soccer, rugby, and cricket are the most important sports in South Africa. Whites prefer rugby and cricket, while Africans mostly follow soccer. However, South Africans of all backgrounds cheer when fellow citizens win at international events. Many people enjoy tennis and swimming. Indeed, all ethnic groups value competitive sports, which are increasingly open to a broader population. Those who can afford equipment or club memberships participate in squash, lawn bowling, golf, field hockey, and sailing. Horse and car racing draw crowds. South Africans appreciate their many beaches and recreational facilities, including swimming pools, parks, libraries, and movie theaters. Dancing, playing music, attending festivals, and enjoying cultural events are popular activities throughout the year.

**The Arts.** South Africa boasts a diversity of musical styles. Choirs are common, and traditional folk songs have been integrated into choral music. The popular *mbaqanga* dance music originated in apartheid-era townships. *Kwaito* music, a favorite of young South Africans, mixes African melodies and lyrics with hip-hop and reggae. *Kwela* incorporates the distinctive penny whistle. South Africans are also devoted to the fine arts, and major cities host performances of the symphony, ballet, and opera. *Gumboot* dancing, developed by African gold miners, has become a popular performance art. Each ethnic group produces its own style of folk art, including basketry, beadwork, and soapstone carvings. South African authors of all races have dealt with controversial political and social themes, often writing in exile during the apartheid years. Nadine Gordimer, André Brink, and Es’kia Mphahlele are some of the most respected.

**Holidays.** The official holidays in South Africa include New Year’s Day, Easter (including Good Friday and Family Day on Monday), Human Rights’ Day (21 Mar.), Freedom Day (27 Apr.), Workers’ Day (1 May), Youth Day (16 June), National Women’s Day (9 Aug.), Inheritance Day (24 Sept.), Reconciliation Day (16 Dec.), Christmas, and Day of Goodwill (26 Dec.). Each religion also observes other important holidays.

**Commerce.** In general, businesses and shops are open from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, and until 1 p.m.

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on Saturday. Shopping centers and supermarkets stay open into the evenings and on weekends. Banks and government offices are open from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, and until 11 a.m. on Saturday. Few businesses and shops are open on Sunday. *Pavement* (sidewalk) vendors offer sundry items, and small retail businesses (*spaza* shops) run from suburban homes sell goods to neighborhood residents.

### SOCIETY

**Government.** South Africa's president (currently Thabo Mbeki) is chief of state and head of government. The president is chosen by an elected parliament on the basis of the majority party's recommendation. Parliament has two houses: a 90-member Council of Provinces and a 400-seat National Assembly. All members of Parliament are elected to five-year terms. Members of the National Assembly are elected directly by popular vote, while Council members are chosen by the nine provincial parliaments. The president serves a maximum of two five-year terms. All citizens are eligible to vote at age 18.

**Economy.** South Africa is the richest country in Africa, and whites generally enjoy a high standard of living. The relatively high per capita gross domestic product (GDP) reflects a wide gap between whites and others in terms of income because whites usually earn far more than Africans. Mixed-race people earn closer to the average national GDP. Women earn less than one-third of the nation's income.

More than half of all export earnings come from minerals and metals. South Africa is one of the world's largest producers of platinum and gold, and it also exports diamonds, chrome, and coal. Low gold prices on world markets have sometimes slowed that sector's growth. Wine and tourism are fast-growing industries. The industrial base is large and diversified, and new investment is allowing for growth. The government has privatized (in whole or in part) some of the largest state enterprises to improve market conditions and raise capital. Strong growth and investment will be necessary to reduce high unemployment and reduce poverty. The currency is the *rand* (ZAR).

**Transportation and Communications.** South Africa has the best-developed infrastructure in Africa. Railroads carry freight and passengers throughout the country; rail links with other southern African nations have been established, too. The national carrier, South African Airways, serves all major cities of the republic and some overseas destinations. South Africa's road system is well maintained and extensive. Traffic moves on the left side of the road. Many urban commuters take mini-bus *combies* to work.

The nation's advanced telecommunications system is also considered the best on the continent. Television is widely available, and four channels broadcast in English, Afrikaans, and the Nguni and Sotho language groups. One cable channel offers a mix of U.S. and British programming. Radio broadcasts are available in all of South Africa's languages.

**Education.** As in other areas of South African life, apartheid-era segregation in public education has been dismantled. However, it will take some time before all children receive the same opportunities within a uniform system. Many schools are without adequate texts or supplies. Schooling is compulsory to age

### DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank . . . . .	111 of 175 countries
Adjusted for women . . . . .	90 of 144 countries
Real GDP per capita . . . . .	\$11,290
Adult literacy rate . . . . .	86 percent (male); 85 (female)
Infant mortality rate . . . . .	61 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy . . . . .	48 (male); 54 (female)

15. Africans receive instruction in their native language until the seventh grade, and then they usually are taught in English after that. Afrikaans is offered as a language. There are 19 universities in South Africa.

**Health.** Medical services are socialized, but some private sector participation is also incorporated. Public hospitals and clinics are open to all citizens. Free care is given to all pregnant women and to children younger than age six. Disease and malnutrition are more common among blacks. South Africa is experiencing a devastating HIV/AIDS epidemic; it is estimated that roughly one-fifth of South Africa's adults are infected. Tuberculosis, malaria, and cholera are also serious problems. About half of South Africa's population lacks basic sanitation; almost one-third lacks access to adequate supplies of potable water.

### AT A GLANCE

#### Events and Trends.

- Much of the criticism of President Mbeki during his first term stemmed from his public questioning of the causal link between HIV and AIDS, as well as his administration's delay in establishing a program to effectively distribute anti-retroviral AIDS drugs. Nevertheless, Mbeki and his ANC party remain widely popular due in large part to the stability of the nation's economy and his efforts to increase the availability of housing and water.
- At the Commonwealth's annual summit, held in Nigeria in December 2003, President Mbeki tried unsuccessfully to have Zimbabwe readmitted to the organization. Zimbabwe was suspended from the Commonwealth in 2002 as a result of the increasingly autocratic measures of its president, Robert Mugabe. Other leaders in the Commonwealth stated that South Africa should take a tougher stance against Mugabe, but Mbeki argued that engagement is the best way to address the situation in Zimbabwe.
- A Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which reviewed apartheid-era human-rights crimes, completed its final report in 2003. The Commission granted amnesty to most people who confessed.

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