

## Background Note: South Africa

[Adapted from the U.S. State Department,  
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/z898.htm>]

**OFFICIAL NAME:** Republic of South Africa

### GEOGRAPHY

**Area:** 1.2 million sq. km. (470,462 sq. mi.).

**Cities:** Capitals—Administrative, Pretoria; Legislative, Cape Town; Judicial, Bloemfontein. Other cities—Johannesburg, Durban, Port Elizabeth.

**Terrain:** Plateau, savanna, desert, mountains, coastal plains.

**Climate:** moderate; similar to southern California.

### PEOPLE

**Nationality:** Noun and adjective—South African(s).

**Annual growth rate (2004 World Bank Group):** 0.8%.

**Population (2004, 46.6 million):** Composition—black 79%; white 9.6%; Coloured 8.9%; Asian (Indian) 2.5%. Official figures from 2000 South African Census at <http://www.statssa.gov.za/>.

**Languages:** Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, and Xitsonga (all official languages).

**Religions:** Predominantly Christian; traditional African, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish.

**Education:** Years compulsory—7–15 years of age for all children. The South African Schools Act, Act 84 of 1996, passed by Parliament in 1996, aims to achieve greater educational opportunities for black children, mandating a single syllabus and more equitable funding for schools.

**Health:** Infant mortality rate (2000)—59 per live births. Life expectancy—52 yrs. women; 50 yrs. men. Health data from 2000 U.S. Census Report: HIV/AIDS Country Profiles at <http://www.census.gov/ipc/hiv/safrica.pdf>.

### GOVERNMENT

**Type:** Parliamentary democracy.

**Independence:** The Union of South Africa was created on May 31, 1910; became sovereign state within British Empire in 1934; became a republic on May 31, 1961; left the Commonwealth in October 1968; rejoined the Commonwealth in June 1994.

**Constitution:** Entered into force February 3, 1997.

**Branches:** Executive—president (chief of state) elected to a 5-year term by the National Assembly. Legislative—bicameral Parliament consisting of 490 members in two chambers. National Assembly (400 members) elected by a system of proportional representation. National Council of Provinces consisting of 90 delegates (10 from each province) and 10 nonvoting delegates representing local government. Judicial—Constitutional Court interprets and decides constitutional issues; Supreme Court of Appeal is the highest court for interpreting and deciding nonconstitutional matters.

**Administrative subdivisions:** Nine provinces: Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, North-West, Northern Cape, Limpopo, Western Cape.

**Political parties:** African National Congress (ANC), Democratic Alliance (DA), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), Vryheidsfront Plus/Freedom Front Plus (FF+), Pan-African Congress (PAC), African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), United Democratic Movement (UDM), and Azanian Peoples Organization (Azapo).

**Suffrage:** Citizens and permanent residents 18 and older.

## ECONOMY

**GDP (2004):** \$213 billion. 2004 GDP at market prices (baseline year 2000)—1.374 billion rand (R).

**Real GDP growth rate (2004):** 3.7%.

**GDP per capita (2004):** \$3,480.

**Unemployment (September 2004):** 27.8%.

**Natural resources:** Almost all essential commodities, except petroleum products and bauxite. Only country in the world that manufactures fuel from coal.

**Industry:** Types—minerals, mining, motor vehicles and parts, machinery, textiles, chemicals, fertilizer, information technology, electronics, other manufacturing, and agroprocessing.

**Trade (2004):** Exports—\$36.3 billion (2003 merchandise exports R256\* billion; 2003 gold exports R35 billion): gold, other minerals and metals, agricultural products, motor vehicles and parts. Major markets—U.K., U.S., Germany, Italy, Japan, East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa. Imports—\$34 billion (2003 merchandise imports R263 billion): machinery, transport equipment, chemicals, petroleum products, textiles, and scientific instruments. Major suppliers—Germany, U.S., Japan, U.K., Italy.

**GDP composition (2003):** Agriculture and mining (primary sector)—11%; industry (secondary sector)—24%; services (tertiary sector)—65%. World's largest producer of platinum, gold, and chromium; also significant coal production.

## PEOPLE

Until 1991, South African law divided the population into four major racial categories: Africans (black), whites, Coloureds, and Asians. Although this law has been abolished, many South Africans still view themselves and each other according to these categories. Black Africans make up about 79% of the population and are divided into a number of different ethnic groups. Whites compose about 10% of the population. They are primarily descendants of Dutch, French, English, and German settlers who began arriving at the Cape of Good Hope in the late 17th century. Coloureds are mixed-race people primarily descending from the earliest settlers and the indigenous peoples. They make up about 9% of the total population. Asians descend from Indian workers brought to South Africa in the mid-19th century to work on the sugar estates in Natal. They constitute about 2.5% of the population and are concentrated in the KwaZulu-Natal Province.

Education is in transition. Under the apartheid system schools were segregated, and the quantity and quality of education varied significantly across racial groups. The laws governing this segregation have been abolished. The long and arduous process of restructuring the country's educational system has begun and is ongoing. The challenge is to create a single, nondiscriminatory, nonracial system that offers the same standards of education to all people.

\* "R" is the symbol for "rand," the South African currency.

## HISTORY

People have inhabited southern Africa for thousands of years. Members of the Khoisan language groups are the oldest surviving inhabitants of the land, but only a few are left in South Africa today—and they are located in the western sections. Most of today's black South Africans belong to the Bantu language group, which migrated south from central Africa, settling in the Transvaal region sometime before AD 100. The Nguni, ancestors of the Zulu and Xhosa, occupied most of the eastern coast by 1500.

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to reach the Cape of Good Hope, arriving in 1488. However, permanent white settlement did not begin until 1652 when the Dutch East India Company established a provisioning station on the Cape. In subsequent decades, French Huguenot refugees, the Dutch, and Germans began to settle in the Cape. Collectively, they form the Afrikaner segment of today's population. The establishment of these settlements had far-reaching social and political effects on the groups already settled in the area, leading to upheaval in these societies and the subjugation of their people.

By 1779, European settlements extended throughout the southern part of the Cape and east toward the Great Fish River. It was here that Dutch authorities and the Xhosa fought the first frontier war. The British gained control of the Cape of Good Hope at the end of the 18th century. Subsequent British settlement and rule marked the beginning of a long conflict between the Afrikaners and the English.

Beginning in 1836, partly to escape British rule and cultural hegemony and partly out of resentment at the recent abolition of slavery, many Afrikaner farmers (Boers) undertook a northern migration that became known as the "Great Trek." This movement brought them into contact and conflict with African groups in the area, the most formidable of which were the Zulus. Under their powerful leader, Shaka (1787–1828), the Zulus conquered most of the territory between the Drakensberg Mountains and the sea (now KwaZulu-Natal).

In 1828, Shaka was assassinated and replaced by his half-brother Dingane. In 1838, Dingane was defeated and deported by the Voortrekkers (people of the Great Trek) at the battle of Blood River. The Zulus, nonetheless, remained a potent force, defeating the British in the historic battle of Isandhlwana before themselves being finally conquered in 1879.

In 1852 and 1854, the independent Boer Republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State were created. Relations between the republics and the British Government were strained. The discovery of diamonds at Kimberley in 1870 and the discovery of large gold deposits in the Witwatersrand region of the Transvaal in 1886 caused an influx of European (mainly British) immigration and investment. In addition to resident black Africans, many blacks from neighboring countries also moved into the area to work in the mines. The construction by mine owners of hostels to house and control their workers set patterns that later extended throughout the region.

Boer reactions to this influx and British political intrigues led to the Anglo-Boer Wars of 1880–81 and 1899–1902. British forces prevailed in the conflict, and the republics were incorporated into the British Empire. In May 1910, the two republics and the British colonies of the Cape and Natal formed the Union of South Africa, a self-governing dominion of the British Empire. The Union's constitution kept all political power in the hands of whites.

In 1912, the South Africa Native National Congress was founded in Bloemfontein and eventually became known as the African National Congress (ANC). Its goals were the elimination of restrictions based on color and the enfranchisement of and parliamentary representation for blacks. Despite these efforts the government continued to pass laws limiting the rights and freedoms of blacks.

In 1948, the National Party (NP) won the all-white elections and began passing legislation codifying and enforcing an even stricter policy of white domination and racial separation known as “apartheid” (separateness). In the early 1960s, following a protest in Sharpeville in which 69 protesters were killed by police and 180 injured, the ANC and Pan-African Congress (PAC) were banned. Nelson Mandela and many other anti-apartheid leaders were convicted and imprisoned on charges of treason.

The ANC and PAC were forced underground and fought apartheid through guerrilla warfare and sabotage. In May 1961, South Africa relinquished its dominion status and declared itself a republic. It withdrew from the Commonwealth in part because

of international protests against apartheid. In 1984, a new constitution came into effect in which whites allowed Coloureds and Asians a limited role in the national government and control over their own affairs in certain areas. Ultimately, however, all power remained in white hands. Blacks remained effectively disenfranchised.

Popular uprisings in black and Coloured townships in 1976 and 1985 helped to convince some NP members of the need for change. Secret discussions between those members and Nelson Mandela began in 1986. In February 1990, State President F.W. de Klerk, who had come to power in September 1989, announced the unbanning of the ANC, the PAC, and all other anti-apartheid groups. Two weeks later, Nelson Mandela was released from prison.

In 1991, the Group Areas Act, Land Acts, and the Population Registration Act—the last of the so-called “pillars of apartheid”—were abolished. A long series of negotiations ensued, resulting in a new constitution promulgated into law in December 1993. The country's first nonracial elections were held on April 26–28, 1994, resulting in the installation of Nelson Mandela as President on May 10, 1994.

Following the 1994 elections, South Africa was governed under an interim constitution establishing a Government of National Unity (GNU). This constitution required the Constitutional Assembly (CA) to draft and approve a permanent constitution by May 9, 1996. After review by the Constitutional Court and intensive negotiations within the CA, the Constitutional Court certified a revised draft on December 2, 1996.

President Mandela signed the new constitution into law on December 10, and it entered into force on February 3, 1997. The GNU ostensibly remained in effect until the 1999 national elections. The parties originally comprising the GNU—the ANC, the NP, and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)—shared executive power. On June 30, 1996, the NP withdrew from the GNU to become part of the opposition.

During Nelson Mandela's 5-year term as President of South Africa, the government committed itself to reforming the country. The ANC-led government focused on social issues that had been neglected during the apartheid era, such as unemployment, housing shortages, and crime. Mandela's administration began to reintroduce South Africa into the global economy by implementing a market-driven economic plan known as Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). In order to heal the wounds created by apartheid, the government created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) under the leadership of Archbishop Desmond Tutu. During the first term of the ANC's post-apartheid rule, President Mandela concentrated on national reconciliation, seeking to forge a single South African identity and sense of purpose among a diverse and splintered populace, riven by years of conflict. The diminution of political violence after 1994 and its virtual disappearance by 1996 were testament to the abilities of Mandela to achieve this difficult goal.

Nelson Mandela stepped down as President of the ANC at the party's national congress in December 1997, when Thabo Mbeki assumed the mantle of leadership. Mbeki won the presidency of South Africa

after national elections in 1999, when the ANC won just shy of a two-thirds majority in Parliament. President Mbeki shifted the focus of government from reconciliation to transformation, particularly on the economic front. With political transformation and the foundation of a strong democratic system in place after two free and fair national elections, the ANC recognized the need to focus on bringing economic power to the black majority in South Africa. In April 2004, the ANC won nearly 70% of the national vote, and Mbeki was reelected for his second 5-year term. In his 2004 State of the Nation address, Mbeki promised his government would reduce poverty, stimulate economic growth, and fight crime. Mbeki said that the government would play a more prominent role in economic development.

#### **GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS**

South Africa is a multiparty parliamentary democracy in which constitutional power is shared between the president and the Parliament.

The Parliament consists of two houses, the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces, which are responsible for drafting the laws of the republic. The National Assembly also has specific control over bills relating to monetary matters. The current 400-member National Assembly was retained under the 1997 constitution, although the constitution allows for a range of between 350 and 400 members. The Assembly is elected by a system of "list proportional representation." Each of the parties appearing on the ballot submits a rank-ordered list of candidates. The voters then cast their ballots for a party.

Seats in the Assembly are allocated based on the percentage of votes each party receives. In the 2004 elections, the ANC won 279 seats in the Assembly, more than a two-thirds majority and an increase of 13 seats from 1999; the Democratic Alliance (DA) won 50, the IFP 28, the New National Party (NNP) 7, the United Democratic Movement (UDM) 9, and other groups won the remaining 27. In the 2004 electoral campaign, the ANC aligned with the NNP, and the DA aligned with the IFP. On August 6, the NNP announced that it would merge with the ANC. Elected representatives of the party would, however, continue to hold their seats in the national and provincial legislatures as NNP members until the next floor-crossing period in September 2005.

The National Council of Provinces (NCOP) consists of 90 members, 10 from each of the nine provinces. The NCOP replaced the former Senate as the second chamber of Parliament and was created to give a greater voice to provincial interests. It must approve legislation that involves shared national and provincial competencies as defined by an annex to the constitution. Each provincial delegation consists of six permanent and four rotating delegates.

The president is the head of state. Following the April 14, 2004 elections, the National Assembly reelected Thabo Mbeki as President. The president's constitutional responsibilities include assigning cabinet portfolios, signing bills into law, and serving as commander in chief of the military. The president works closely with the deputy president and the cabinet. There are currently 28 posts in the cabinet. Of the 28 ministers,

Mbeki appointed two from outside the ANC—one from the former NNP and one from the Azanian Peoples Organization (Azapo). On June 14, 2005, President Mbeki informed the South African Parliament that then-Deputy President Jacob Zuma was being “released” from his duties following the conviction of a close associate on corruption charges relating to monetary payments to Zuma. On June 22, Mbeki named former Minister for Minerals and Energy Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka to the position of Deputy President, the first woman to hold this office.

The third arm of the central government is an independent judiciary. The Constitutional Court is the highest court for interpreting and deciding constitutional issues, while the Supreme Court of Appeal is the highest court for nonconstitutional matters. Most cases are heard in the extensive system of High Courts and Magistrates Courts. The constitution's bill of rights provides for due process including the right to a fair, public trial within a reasonable time of being charged and the right to appeal to a higher court. The bill of rights also guarantees fundamental political and social rights of South Africa's citizens.

#### **CHALLENGES AHEAD**

South Africa's post-apartheid governments have made remarkable progress in consolidating the nation's peaceful transition to democracy. Programs to improve the delivery of essential social services to the majority of the population are under way. Access to better opportunities in education and business is becoming more widespread. Nevertheless, transforming South Africa's society to remove the legacy of

apartheid will be a long-term process requiring the sustained commitment of the leaders and people of the nation's disparate groups.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), chaired by 1984 Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu, helped to advance the reconciliation process. Constituted in 1996 and having completed its work by 2001, the TRC was empowered to investigate apartheid-era human rights abuses committed between 1960 and May 10, 1994; to grant amnesty to those who committed politically motivated crimes; and to recommend compensation to victims of abuses. In November 2003, the Government began allocation of \$4,600 (R30,000) reparations to individual apartheid victims. The TRC's mandate was part of the larger process of reconciling the often conflicting political, economic, and cultural interests held by the many peoples that make up South Africa's diverse population. The ability of the government and people to agree on many basic questions of how to order the country's new society will remain a critical challenge.

One important issue continues to be the relationship of provincial and local administrative structures to the national government. Prior to April 27, 1994, South Africa was divided into four provinces and 10 black "homelands," four of which were considered independent by the South African government. Both the interim constitution and the 1997 constitution abolished this system and substituted nine provinces. Each province has an elected legislature and chief executive—the provincial premier. Although in form a federal system, in practice the nature of the relation-

ship between the central and provincial governments continues to be the subject of considerable debate, particularly among groups desiring a greater measure of autonomy from the central government. A key step in defining the relationship came in 1997 when provincial governments were given more than half of central government funding and permitted to develop and manage their own budgets. However, the national government exerts a measure of control over provinces by appointing provincial premiers.

Although South Africa's economy is in many areas highly developed, the exclusionary nature of apartheid and distortions caused in part by the country's international isolation until the 1990s have left major weaknesses. The economy is now in a process of transition as the government seeks to address the inequities of apartheid, stimulate growth, and create jobs. Business, meanwhile, is becoming more integrated into the international system, and foreign investment has increased dramatically over the past several years. Still, the economic disparities between population groups are expected to persist for many years, remaining an area of priority attention for the government.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS**

The 1997 constitution's bill of rights provides extensive guarantees, including equality before the law and prohibitions against discrimination; the right to life, privacy, property, and freedom and security of the person; prohibition against slavery and forced labor; and freedom of speech, religion, assembly, and association. The legal rights of criminal suspects also are enumerated, as are citizens' entitlements to a safe

environment, housing, education, and healthcare. The constitution provides for an independent and impartial judiciary, and, in practice, these provisions are respected.

Since the abolition of apartheid, levels of political violence in South Africa have dropped dramatically. Violent crime and organized criminal activity are at high levels and are a grave concern. Partly as a result, vigilante action and mob justice sometimes occur.

Some members of the police commit abuses, and deaths in police custody as a result of excessive force remain a problem. The government has taken action to investigate and punish some of those who commit such abuses. In April 1997, the government established an Independent Complaints Directorate to investigate deaths in police custody and deaths resulting from police action.

Although South Africa's society is undergoing a rapid transformation, some discrimination against women continues, and discrimination against those living with HIV/AIDS remains. Violence against women and children also is a serious problem.

#### **PRINCIPAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS**

**State President:** Thabo Mbeki

**Executive Deputy President:** Ms. Phumzile  
Mlambo-Ngcuka