



## BACKGROUND

### Land and Climate

Area (sq. mi.): 470,693

Area (sq. km.): 1,219,090

South Africa is about the size of Peru, or slightly larger than the U.S. states of 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, and rugged mountains. 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

#### Colonization and the Boer Wars

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 First Boer War (1880–81) and the Second Boer War (1899–1902), which is also called the South African War. The Boers were ultimately defeated, and the Boer republics of Orange Free State and Transvaal become self-governing British colonies. In 1910, Britain combined its Cape and Natal colonies with the Boer republics to create the Union of South Africa.

#### Independence and Apartheid

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 Britain and subsequently withdrew from the British Commonwealth over criticism of its racial policies.

For the next three decades, South Africa was a 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 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.

#### **Reform and Current Challenges**

Despite sporadic violence, multiracial and multiparty elections were held peacefully in April 1994. Mandela was elected president and launched a *Masakhane* (Nguni for "Let us build together") campaign. In 1996, a new constitution, with an extensive bill of rights guaranteeing equality for all who live in South Africa, was ratified. In 1999 national elections, the ANC won all but one seat needed for a two-thirds (constitutional) majority, allowing Thabo Mbeki to assume the presidency as Mandela retired. Mbeki won reelection in 2004 but was forced to resign in September 2008 after losing the support of the ANC. His detractors alleged he had interfered in a corruption case against ANC leader Jacob Zuma. After the ANC won elections in April 2009, Zuma was inaugurated as president.

South Africa has long been among the strongest economies in Africa, which has led to large flows of immigrants from the rest of southern Africa (particularly Zimbabwe) in search of better economic opportunities. However, recent economic difficulties and high unemployment rates have created tensions in society. In 2008, violence toward foreigners swept the country, causing thousands of immigrants to flee to their home countries. Strikes by workers in various sectors have occurred, including violent mining-sector strikes in 2012. In addition to economic difficulties, South Africa continues to have the world's largest population of people living with HIV/AIDS, despite government efforts to improve the situation. A bright spot in South Africa's recent past was its 2010 hosting of the soccer World Cup, becoming the first African nation to do so.

#### **Recent Events and Trends**

- **Nelson Mandela's death:** On 5 December 2013, former South African president Nelson Mandela died at the age of 95. His memorial service was attended by more than 90 current and former heads of state. Mandela is considered the father of democratic South Africa and is credited with ending apartheid in the country.
- **Protests:** Protests, a common occurrence in South Africa, have recently grown dramatically in number. In February 2014, authorities recorded some 3,000 protests in the previous 90 days. Most protestors are shantytown residents seeking improved economic and living conditions; at least 10 have died in clashes with police.

- **Elections:** In May 2014, South Africans voted in general elections that marked 20 years of multiracial elections. The ANC won by the smallest margin in its history but still garnered 62 percent of the vote, returning Jacob Zuma to a second term as president.

## **THE PEOPLE**

---

### **Population**

*Population:* 48,375,645

*Population Growth Rate:* -0.48%

*Urban Population:* 63%

South African law prior to 1991 divided the population into four racial categories: Africans (blacks), whites, coloureds (people of mixed race), and Asians (or Indians). Many South Africans still view themselves and each other according to these categories. The majority of the population (79 percent) is comprised of black Africans, mostly from nine ethnic groups. The Zulus are the largest group, followed by the Xhosas, North Sothos, South Sothos, Tswanas, Shangaan-Tsongas, Swazis, Ndebeles, and Vendas. Each ethnic group 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"; blacks could only buy and occupy land within a specified area and had to carry a pass for identification outside their homeland. The homeland concept 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 (2 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 (10 percent) include English-speaking descendants of English, Irish, and Scottish settlers, and *Afrikaners*, Afrikaans-speaking descendants of Dutch, French, and German colonials. A large population of illegal immigrants from neighboring African states also resides in South Africa.

### **Language**

Native South African languages are roughly divided into four families: Nguni; Sotho; Tsonga, or Shangaana; and Venda. Most black South Africans speak a Nguni language: Zulu and Xhosa are the most prominent languages, 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.

Afrikaans (a Dutch derivation) is widely spoken among people of mixed race and whites. 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. Some whites are now learning a major African language to help them become more aware of South Africa's diverse culture.

### Religion

Most South Africans are Christians. Afrikaans speakers belong primarily to the Dutch Reformed Church. English-speaking whites belong to Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Methodist, and other congregations. Blacks 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. Some South Africans adhere solely to indigenous belief systems, though many people mix Christian and traditional beliefs and practices. The majority of Indians are Hindus, the rest are mostly Muslims and Christians. About 15 percent of South Africans claim no religion. A 2012 study found that about two-thirds of South Africans consider themselves religious, which is a decrease from previous years. Precise religious figures are difficult to determine because questions about religion appeared most recently on the 2001 census.

### General Attitudes

South Africa faces a formidable set of challenges, including insufficient housing, high unemployment, violent crime, huge wealth inequality, and a high rate of HIV infection. Many people have been frustrated by the slow pace of change in these and other areas since the transition to majority rule. Some black Africans complain of job discrimination, while many whites disagree with attempts to require companies to hire more blacks. 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 blacks are angry that whites are not giving up more of their wealth or moving faster to integrate society.

Despite these frustrations, the majority of South Africans accept coexistence in their multiracial, democratic society and want to contribute their efforts to building it. Many have a strong sense of identity as a South African. Most people value their new economic opportunities and agree that South Africans must work together to achieve the goals set forth in the constitution and to allow South Africa to capitalize on its natural wealth, strong economy, and diverse peoples.

### Personal Appearance

Some rural black Africans wear traditional clothing for special purposes or everyday attire. This may include a variety of headdresses and colorful outfits. They usually wear Western-style clothing on a daily basis. Rural women wear a scarf or other headdress with either a dress or a blouse and skirt. Urban black men wear pants, shirts, and sometimes suits, but rarely shorts. Urban black 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 wear suits or shirts and trousers. In rural areas, they may prefer shorts and knee socks. Women generally wear comfortable dresses or modest pants. Many Muslim women wear head coverings and other traditional Muslim attire. Indian women often wear a *sari*, a wraparound-type dress.

## CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

### Greetings

Of the many 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 the type of handshake differs between groups. Some use firmer, others lighter, shakes with one hand; many rural people use both hands. Close friends and relatives may hug. Sometimes black friends greet with an intricate triple handshake that involves interlocking the smallest fingers, claspings fists, and interlocking fingers again. Black men may also hold hands when walking or conversing.

Although friends use first names and nicknames, 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). Afrikaans-speaking people, both white and of mixed race, refer to older males as "uncle" (*oom*) and older females as "auntie" (*tannie*).

### Gestures

Blacks 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. Blacks 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 typically 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 blacks, 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. Black 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

#### Structure

South Africa's white families are small, live as a nuclear unit, generally are close-knit, and enjoy a good standard of living. Black South Africans traditionally live in extended family settings, with a dominant father at the head. Married sons leave the extended family to begin their own households.

Although nuclear families are becoming more common, family ties remain strong, and the extended family still plays an important role during problems and times of crisis, in which members are expected to help and support one another. Relatives play an important role in caring for children and providing aid to those in need; many nuclear families are also supporting a niece, nephew, aunt, or uncle.

#### Parents and Children

Urban family settings have undergone large changes as a result of urbanization, housing problems, political factors, and poverty. The high incidence of children born out of wedlock often causes generations to live together. Both high HIV/AIDS infection rates and high unemployment rates in South Africa cause some elderly grandparents to become the breadwinners in their families, supporting their children and grandchildren with pension money. Children are taught to respect their elders and obey their parents.

### Gender Roles

In rural South African communities, women were historically assigned to agricultural tasks, domestic work, and child care. Girls were assigned to fetch firewood and water for cooking. Boys served as cattle herders. Men were responsible for heavy agricultural labor and local political affairs. Today, many men are migrant laborers far away from home, leaving women to manage rural households. If the men do not send their wages home to their rural families, the women must also become migrant workers. In urban areas, both women and men work outside the home, but women are still responsible for household chores and child care. Domestic responsibilities usually fall to older female children, who balance housework and schoolwork.

Male dominance of the family is a feature of South African families that cuts across ethnic and geographic lines. However, South Africa's constitution has fostered gender equality and other human rights. Although not widely practiced, gender equality is encouraged by the legal system and official public discourse. For example, the project "Take a Girl Child to Work Day" encourages companies to bring female students, usually from disadvantaged backgrounds, to spend a day in May at their place of work. Slow but visible progress is occurring in the advancement of women in the domestic and public spheres, assisted by the active engagement of the many women in the top levels of government and the private sector. This is also true in tribal areas where people live under customary law, which has generally been rather discriminatory against women's rights.

### Housing

Housing varies widely by socioeconomic level. Whites usually have the largest and most expensive houses, made of brick with tiled roofs and comprising a living room, dining room, kitchen, one or more bathrooms, two or more bedrooms, and an enclosed garage. These homes have electricity and running water and are furnished similarly to houses in Europe and North America. A wall or fence, often electrified or topped with razor wire, surrounds the property.

At the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum, many urban blacks live in informal settlements called shantytowns. These homes are made of corrugated iron, wood, and/or cardboard and usually consist of a single room. There is no electricity, and an outside water tap is shared by an entire community. Cooking is done inside on a paraffin stove or outside on a coal fire. Furnishings are sparse, typically only a wooden table, some chairs, and perhaps a mattress. An extended family of three generations often occupies the room. In rural areas, extended families live in a *kraal* (compound) consisting of several circular huts with thatched roofs and walls made of clay or wood. They contain no furniture except sleeping mats.

### Dating and Marriage

#### Dating and Courtship

South African youth usually socialize in structured group activities, such as a birthday party or a school dance. Dating habits vary between ethnic groups. Among mixed-race and black people, dating occurs only after a young man proclaims

his love to a woman. If the woman reciprocates, they may be seen together in public.

### **Marriage**

Traditional African laws such as *lobola* and polygamy have been recognized by the law since 2001. *Lobola* is practiced in many ethnic groups and involves a complex process of negotiation between the two families amid great ceremony. The two families agree on a price (traditionally paid in a number of cows) that the groom must pay the bride's family. Many modern families opt for cash for the sake of convenience. However, paying *lobola* can take years; a couple might have several children before it is paid. In most Xhosa and Zulu families, the *lobola* must be paid in full before a couple can marry. Some women's rights activists believe that the *lobola* provides women with protection. Divorce is not usually granted unless the bride's family can repay the amount.

Weddings are some of the most important societal occasions. Traditional wedding celebrations involve much dancing and feasting. The law recognizes tribal weddings. Most white and mixed-race South Africans marry in a church or marry civilly. Indians have their own wedding traditions.

Polygamy is legal, and all marriages are required to be registered to ensure that each wife has an equal right to property. However, polygamy is on the decline, even in rural areas, and monogamy is the norm. Cohabitation without marriage is a common domestic living arrangement in black and mixed-race communities. Divorce rates are above 50 percent.

### **Marriage in Society**

Most South Africans plan on marrying and having children. Marriages are considered sacred and usually involve the union of extended families and sometimes even entire communities. Certain practices, such as polygamy and *lobola* (bride-price), are viewed as preventing divorce and marital disintegration. However, cohabitation without marriage is a common domestic living arrangement in black and mixed-race communities, and divorce rates in South Africa are above 50 percent.

## **Life Cycle**

### **Birth**

When a child is born to white or mixed-race South Africans, the infant is usually christened in a church. In most Indian families, a Hindu ceremony is held six days after a child's birth. Prayers are offered, and the child's hair is shaved so evil spirits may not attach themselves to the child.

### **Milestones**

Among African groups, a coming-of-age ceremony is one of the most important events in a person's life. Sometime between the ages of 10 and 18, young people take part in an initiation process in which elders teach them how to prepare for adult status. For boys, the final stage is a circumcision ceremony. A boy is then regarded as an adult and has the right to marry. Girls go through similar initiation schools. Among white or mixed-race South Africans, 21 is regarded as the age a person enters adulthood, and a special party may be held.

### **Death**

Since the majority of South Africans are Christian, a person is typically given a Christian funeral at death, and the body is buried in a cemetery or cremated. Hindus cremate the body within 24 hours and spread the ashes into a sea, lake, or river. The family observes a period of mourning for 10 days. No food is cooked in the home, so friends and relatives provide the family with meals. The family observes three further periods of mourning, at 13 days, 6 months, and 12 months after the person's death.

### **Diet**

South Africans enjoy a wide variety of foods, including roast beef or roast lamb, potatoes, curries, *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. Black Africans eat *mealie meal* (cornmeal porridge, sometimes cooked with vegetables and meat) on a regular basis. Cooked in a three-legged cast-iron pot over a fire, *potjiekos* (pot food) is a popular meal among Afrikaans speakers for weekend social functions, festivals, and holidays. Fresh fruits and vegetables are abundant and often sold by farmers from roadside stands. *Biltong* is a jerky-like snack made from various types of meat. The *milk tart*, a custard-like pie, is a favorite dessert. Wine, tea, coffee, beer, and *cool-drink* (any soft drink or juice) are common beverages.

## **Recreation**

### **Sports**

Soccer, rugby, and cricket are the most important sports in South Africa. Whites prefer rugby and cricket, while blacks mostly follow soccer. However, South Africans of all backgrounds cheer when fellow citizens win at international events. Many people also enjoy tennis and swimming. 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.

### **Recreation**

Many children in rural areas and townships grow up making their own toys, like tin guitars, wire cars, and nylon soccer balls. Space isn't usually a constraint, and children play soccer on open fields. The South African government promotes indigenous games such as *intonga* or *induku* (stick fighting), *diketo* (a game of tossing and arranging pebbles), *jukskei*, (an Afrikaner game in which players try to knock over an upright stick using the wooden pin from an ox's yoke), *kgati* (skipping rope), *khokho* (a famous Indian sport similar to tag), *dibeke* (a running ball game with two teams of 12 players), *shumpu* (a singing and dancing game), and *mancala* (a traditional African strategy game).

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 other popular activities.

## **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. 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

South Africa's official holidays are 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.), Heritage Day (24 Sept.), Reconciliation Day (16 Dec.), Christmas, and Day of Goodwill (26 Dec.). Each religion also observes other important holidays.

#### *Christmas and New Year's Day*

Most South Africans celebrate Christmas by going to a church service, after which they get together with their families for a Christmas meal. Black South Africans may slaughter a sheep to mark the special occasion. On New Year's Eve, South Africans like to gather for parties. Some churches hold services from 8 p.m. or 10 p.m. until midnight. Many people celebrate New Year's Day on the beach.

#### *Political Holidays*

South Africans remember Human Rights Day, Freedom Day (which celebrates the first democratic elections held in South Africa), and Youth Day by attending patriotic events, usually held in stadiums, and listening to leaders speak. Human Rights Day commemorates the day in 1960 when black South African men campaigned against inequality by refusing to carry their pass books (documents that black Africans were required to carry to prove they were allowed to enter white areas). The police at the Sharpeville station opened fire on the demonstrators, killing 69 and wounding 180 people.

Youth Day was previously known as Soweto Day. In 1975, protests broke out in African schools after a ruling that Afrikaans was to be used in schools on an equal basis with English. This set off protests about the greater issue of the education system, which was characterized by segregated schools and universities, poor facilities, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequately trained teachers. The violence that ensued over the next few weeks killed approximately seven hundred people, many of them youths.

## SOCIETY

### Government

*Head of State: Pres. Jacob Zuma*

*Head of Government: Pres. Jacob Zuma*

*Capital: Pretoria*

### Structure

South Africa's national legislature (Parliament) has two houses: a 90-member National Council of Provinces and a 400-seat National Assembly. Council members are elected by the nine provincial legislatures, with each legislature selecting 10 members. Members of the National Assembly are directly elected through a proportional representation system. All members of Parliament are elected to five-year terms. South Africa's president is chosen by the National Assembly on the basis of the majority party's recommendation and serves a maximum of two five-year terms.

#### *Political Landscape*

The African National Congress (ANC) is the dominant political party in South Africa and has maintained a majority in Parliament since the end of apartheid. The ANC maintains an alliance with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU, the largest of the country's trade union federations) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). The ANC identifies itself as a social democratic party, and much of its party ideology revolves around efforts to reduce the socioeconomic divisions in society that resulted from apartheid. Efforts to decrease these divisions include various affirmative action programs, including the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) program, which is designed to create a higher percentage of black ownership and control of businesses and the economy. The BEE creates racial quotas for business ownership, which have been controversial. Land reform (transferring white-owned land to black ownership) is another contentious issue in society.

Many communities in South Africa are allowed to follow customary law, which is based on the tribal traditions and historical culture of the people in the community. When constitutional law and customary law conflict, constitutional law is supposed to prevail, but this is not always the case in practice. Such discrepancies can be a source of conflict between traditional and national leaders.

#### *Government and the People*

South Africa has very high crime rates, which the government struggles to contain with an understaffed police force, sometimes leading to police brutality and vigilante groups. Generally though, freedoms guaranteed by the constitution (such as speech, religion, and association) are respected. People often criticize the government over corruption and wasteful spending. South African elections are generally free and fair, and citizens are eligible to vote at age 18. Turnout of registered voters for parliamentary elections regularly exceeds 75 percent.

### Economy

*GDP (PPP) in billions: \$595.7*

*GDP (PPP) per capita: \$11,500*

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 blacks. Mixed-race people earn

closer to the average national GDP. Strong growth and investment will be necessary to reduce high unemployment and poverty. The unemployment and poverty rates are nearly 25 percent.

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. It also exports diamonds, chrome, and coal. Low gold prices on world markets have sometimes slowed that sector's growth. The industrial base is large and diversified, and new investment is allowing for growth. Wine and tourism are fast-growing industries. The service industry accounts for about two-thirds of GDP and about two-thirds of the labor force. To improve market conditions and raise capital, the government has privatized (in whole or in part) some of the largest state enterprises. The currency is the *rand* (ZAR).

### Transportation and Communications

*Internet Users (per 100 people): 49*

*Cellular Phone Subscriptions (per 100 people): 147*

*Paved Roads: 17%*

South Africa has the best-developed infrastructure in Africa. Railroads carry freight and passengers throughout the country. Air routes link major cities. South Africa's road system is well maintained and extensive. Traffic moves on the left side of the road. Many urban commuters ride *combies* (minibuses) to work.

The nation's advanced telecommunications system is also considered the best on the continent. Television is widely available, and state-run and commercial networks broadcast in English, Afrikaans, and the Nguni and Sotho language groups. Thousands of viewers subscribe to satellite and cable TV. Radio broadcasts are available in all of South Africa's languages. Cellular phones are prevalent in many areas of the country. A growing number of people have access to the internet.

### Education

*Adult Literacy: 93%*

*Mean Years of Schooling: 9.9*

#### Structure and Access

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. Schooling is compulsory from age 7 to age 15. School life spans 13 years or grades, from grade 0 (known as *reception year*) to grade 12 (known as *matric*, the year of matriculation). The *matric* pass rate rose from around 40 percent in the late 1990s to 68 percent in 2008. General education and training runs from grade 0 to grade 9. Further education and training takes place from grades 10 to 12 and includes career-oriented education and training offered in technical colleges, community colleges, and private colleges.

Many schools are without adequate texts or supplies. A high school education is much more common among whites and Indians than it is among people of mixed race and blacks.

### School Life

Classroom activities include collaborative assignments, tests, and individual papers. Students normally spend an hour or two on homework every day. Educated parents in South Africa, especially mothers, are very involved in helping their children with homework, but illiterate parents usually leave education up to a child's teachers. South Africans receive instruction in their native language until the grade 7, and then they usually are taught in English after that. Afrikaans is also offered as a language of instruction. In urban areas, an increasing number of primary schools teach in English. Cheating in school is not tolerated, and those who are caught cheating may end up with a criminal charge.

### Higher Education

A *matric* endorsement is required for university study. Students who pursue post-secondary education have many options, as South Africa has 23 public and over 100 private institutions of higher learning. Of South Africa's 23 public universities, 11 are traditional, 6 are comprehensive (combining both academic and vocational training), and 6 are technical. Most comprehensive universities are a result of educational reforms beginning in 2003, which combined smaller universities and technical schools into a single institution.

### 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; about 18 percent of adults aged 15 to 49 are infected. Tuberculosis, malaria, and cholera are also serious problems. Efforts to improve access to improved sanitation and water sources have proven successful; almost 80 percent of South Africa's population has access to improved sanitation, and over 90 percent has access to adequate supplies of potable water.

## AT A GLANCE

### Contact Information

Embassy of South Africa, 3400 International Drive NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 232-4400; web site [www.saembassy.org](http://www.saembassy.org). South Africa Tourism, phone (800) 593-1318 or (212) 730-2929, web site [www.southafrica.net](http://www.southafrica.net).

### Country and Development Data

Capital	Pretoria
Population	48,375,645 (rank=27)
Area (sq. mi.)	470,693 (rank=26)
Area (sq. km.)	1,219,090
Human Development Index	118 of 187 countries
Gender Inequality Index	94 of 148 countries
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$11,500
Adult Literacy	94% (male); 92% (female)
Infant Mortality	42 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	54 (male); 58 (female)
Currency	Rand

**CultureGrams™**

ProQuest  
 789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
 Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106 USA  
 Toll Free: 1.800.521.3042  
 Fax: 1.800.864.0019  
[www.culturegrams.com](http://www.culturegrams.com)

© 2014 ProQuest LLC and Brigham Young University. It is against the law to copy, reprint, store, or transmit any part of this publication in any form by any means without strict written permission from ProQuest.