



SOUTH AFRICA LAND OF INEQUALITY

After 25 years of democracy, South Africa continues to struggle with the legacy of apartheid

BY PATRICIA SMITH

Haves and Have Nots: Black South Africans desperate for land put up a settlement of shacks on Stefan Smit's farm (left and above); many white South Africans live in gated communities, like this one (inset) in the suburbs of Johannesburg.

One morning last July, Stefan Smit, a white farmer in South Africa's wine-making region, woke up to find that overnight his vineyard had essentially been invaded. In a matter of hours, impoverished residents of a nearby black township had showed up on his land, cleared weeds, and put up 40 shacks to live in.

"We see that land, we must take that land," said Zola Ndlasi, 44, the man who led the takeover, as he walked among the new shacks. By the end of August, nearly a thousand shacks spread across Smit's property.

And with that, Smit's farm, about 30 miles east of Cape Town, became yet another battleground in a bitter political fight that continues to split this nation. The key question: Who owns South Africa's land?

White South Africans, who account for only 8 percent of the population, control much of the country's economy a generation after the end of apartheid. Many of their black neighbors are still struggling to acquire a tiny patch of earth on which to build a shack. Blacks make up more than 80 percent of South Africa's 58 million people.

A quarter-century after a historic election transformed



South Africa from white rule to a true democracy, the nation has made enormous strides in some areas but still faces huge challenges in others.

"The political empowerment of black South Africans has been a huge achievement," says Vanda Felbab-Brown, a South Africa expert at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. "But land and wealth is still concentrated disproportionately



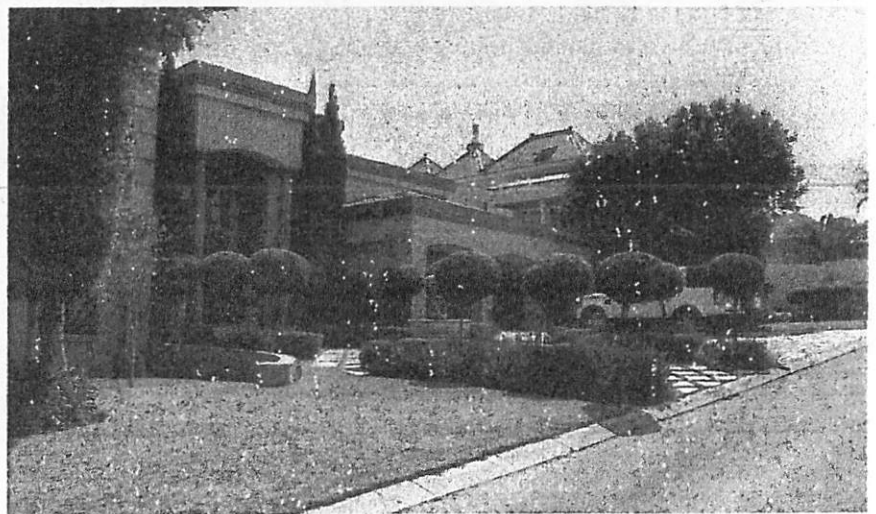
in the hands of the white minority.”

For much of the 20th century, black South Africans lived under apartheid, a government-imposed system of rigid racial segregation, with roots going back to Dutch and British colonization in the 17th century (see *Key Dates*, p. 10). Black South Africans couldn't socialize with whites, have a voice in government, or even travel outside designated areas without government permission. (People of mixed race, known as “coloreds,” faced their own restrictions.) Secret police spied on black activists, and arrests, beatings, and even murders of dissidents were commonplace.

The End of Apartheid

In 1964, Nelson Mandela, a leader of the African National Congress (A.N.C.), a group fighting apartheid, was accused of trying to overthrow the government; his activism earned him a life sentence in prison (see “*Nelson Mandela: South Africa's Founding Father*,” p. 11).

After decades of international pressure, things changed in 1990. The government freed Mandela after he'd spent 27 years



behind bars and began negotiations toward black majority rule. Apartheid officially ended in 1991, and three years later, all South Africans elected a new government. Some feared a racial bloodbath when white rule ended, with blacks taking revenge for past injustices. Instead, South Africans heeded Mandela's call to move forward: In 1994, rather than turning to violence, they stood in line to vote, with nearly 90 percent of those eligible casting ballots in the country's first truly democratic election. Mandela was elected president.

Twenty-five years later, South Africa has a lot to brag about. It boasts the continent's second-largest economy (after Nigeria) and has an abundance of natural resources that it exports—including diamonds, gold, and platinum—and a modern infrastructure in much of the country. Considered the superpower of Africa, South Africa regularly sends troops on peacekeeping missions elsewhere on the continent.

Perhaps its most important achievement, experts say, is its political progress.

“South Africa is a functional constitutional democracy

with a vibrant political opposition, an independent judiciary, and a highly active civil society," says John Campbell, a South Africa expert at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, D.C.

Economic Failures

But there have been many disappointments too. The country's unemployment rate is above 27 percent, and it's even higher for young South Africans: Almost 40 percent of 15- to 34-year-olds don't have jobs.

Although poverty has declined since the end of apartheid, inequality has only risen, according to a recent report by the World Bank and the South African government.

The country's economic problems have disproportionately affected black South Africans: More than 60 percent of blacks live in poverty, according to Statistics South Africa, compared with just 1 percent of white South Africans.

Linked to South Africa's economic problems is its failure to make significant progress on many social issues since the end of apartheid—education in particular.

"The quality of primary education available to blacks is very poor and not significantly better than it was under apartheid," Campbell says.

The shoddy condition of many schools for black children flashed suddenly into view last year when two students drowned in pit toilets at their school. Pit toilets are holes in the ground where waste collects, covered by a platform that's often crumbling or filthy or both. There are nearly 4,000 schools in South Africa where pit toilets are the only option for students to relieve themselves, government statistics show.

In addition to a lack of resources, the other challenge to improving South Africa's education system is language. South Africa has 11 official languages.

"English is the first language of only about 9 percent of the population," Campbell says. "Much of the country's black population doesn't learn English in school, and that has huge economic implications. If you learn Zulu, try getting a job answering the telephone in Johannesburg."

In other words, in a country where a large chunk of the economy is run in English, the huge number of black South Africans who don't learn English in school lack access to many opportunities.

South Africa also suffers from high rates of violent crime. Last year, there were more than

20,000 murders in the country, making its homicide rate one of the highest in the world—about six times higher than the U.S. murder rate. This has important ripple effects, says Felbab-Brown, the Brookings expert: It has led many wealthy whites to live in gated communities that exacerbate racial tensions, and it has pushed many other South Africans who can afford it to leave the country.

South Africa has also been plagued by widespread corruption. Over the past two decades, tens of billions of dollars in public funds—intended to develop the economy and improve the lives of black South Africans—have been siphoned off by leaders of the A.N.C., the very organization that had promised them a new, equal, and just nation.

"There is tremendous corruption and rot in the A.N.C.," says Felbab-Brown.

Last year, President Jacob Zuma was forced to resign amid ongoing corruption scandals. Zuma's replacement, Cyril Ramaphosa, has

promised that he will make fighting corruption a priority, but it remains to be seen how serious his efforts will be.

'If I Build a House'

One of the thorniest unsolved problems in South Africa is land reform, and this is another area in which Ramaphosa has promised progress. A recent government survey found that white farmers own 70 percent of the land held by individual owners. Many black South Africans feel betrayed by the failure of the A.N.C. government to provide access to land for the black majority.

Frustration over that fundamental inequity is what fuels confrontations over land like the recent takeover of Stefan Smit's farm in Stellenbosch. The black squatters on Smit's land say they came out of desperation. They had been living in a neighboring black township called Kayamandi, crammed into flimsy shacks squeezed into crowded streets.

60 percent of blacks live in poverty; just 1 percent of whites do.



A whites-only beach in Cape Province, 1974

SOUTH AFRICA KEY DATES

1600s-1700s In 1652, the Dutch begin to colonize the Cape Peninsula, conquering the native peoples and calling themselves "Afrikaners." In 1795, the British begin establishing colonies.

1910 After the British defeat the Dutch in the second Boer War, the Union of South Africa is established under white-minority rule. The African National Congress is created two years later to promote racial equality.

1940s-50s After centuries of oppression, South Africa's government formally establishes apartheid, a system of racial segregation in education, transportation, housing, and jobs.

1980s International pressure to end apartheid increases. In 1986, the U.S. Congress bans imports from South Africa and prohibits American businesses from investing there.

Nelson Mandela: South Africa's Founding Father

How a freedom fighter and outlaw became president

In May 1994, Nelson Mandela, once South Africa's most famous political prisoner, became the country's first democratically elected president.

Mandela was born in 1918 in the village of Mvezo, where his father was a tribal chief. In 1941, Mandela moved to Soweto, a huge black slum on the outskirts of Johannesburg. There he met Walter Sisulu, the local leader of the African National Congress (A.N.C.), a group that opposed apartheid.

Sisulu arranged for Mandela to study law, and in 1949 Mandela became one of the A.N.C.'s leaders. Six years later, the organization issued a declaration of principles that called for racial equality. The government saw it as treason and arrested Mandela and other A.N.C. leaders.

They were acquitted, but the trial put Mandela at the top of the government's enemies list. In 1961, Mandela became head of the A.N.C.'s new military wing, and he was arrested the next year. In



Nelson Mandela and his wife, Winnie, at an A.N.C. rally in 1991

1964, he was convicted of conspiracy to overthrow the state and sentenced to life in prison.

But as international condemnation of apartheid grew, Mandela became a symbol of South African oppression. By the mid-1980s, many democracies and international companies refused to do business with South Africa until it ended apartheid. Under pressure from these sanctions, the white government began to meet secretly with Mandela.

In February 1990, President F. W. de Klerk announced that all political prisoners would be released, and anti-apartheid organizations like the A.N.C. would be "un-banned." A week later, Mandela walked free.

Over the next few years, Mandela

and De Klerk negotiated a new constitution. In 1994, millions of South Africans voted for the first time, and Mandela became president.

"Never, never, and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another and suffer the indignity of being the skunk of the world," Mandela said at his inauguration.

In 1999, Mandela finished his five-year presidential term and stepped aside. He died in 2013 at age 95.

"His commitment to transfer power and reconcile with those who jailed him," former U.S. President Barack Obama said when Mandela died, "set an example that all humanity should aspire to."

"If I build a house, then I will leave this for my children," says Lubabalo Mphiliso, 20, one of the squatters.

South Africa's leaders are sympathetic to the frustration that leads to this sort of land grab, but they're wary of forcibly seizing land owned by whites. They know that could seriously damage the country's economy and international reputation.

Regardless of how the government responds, the incident shows the huge gulf between white and black South Africans.

"I never spoke to the people myself," Smit says of the black South Africans who live in the township next to his farm. "You don't do that. It's not un-dangerous. It's not advisable."

1994 Three years after apartheid is formally abolished in 1991, South Africa holds its first democratic elections. Nelson Mandela is elected the country's first black president.



Black South Africans waited in long lines to vote for the first time, 1994.

Experts will be watching closely to see if Ramaphosa is able to manage the racial tensions that stem from lingering inequality and guide South Africa toward more prosperity that is widely shared.

"Because the social and economic and education progress of the black majority has been so slow, that leads to dysfunctional behaviors straight across the racial divides," says Campbell of the Council on Foreign Relations. "But I'm optimistic about South Africa because they got the politics right with a constitutional democracy." •

With reporting by Selam Gebrekidan and Norimitsu Onishi of The New York Times.

TODAY A quarter-century after Mandela was elected president, South Africa has a robust democracy. But many problems remain—including poverty, corruption, and the black population's lack of access to land.

For use with "South Africa: Land of Inequality" on p. 8 of the magazine

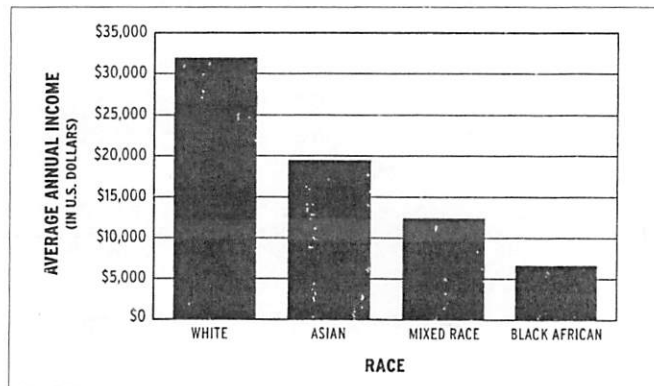
GRAPHS

Income Inequality in South Africa

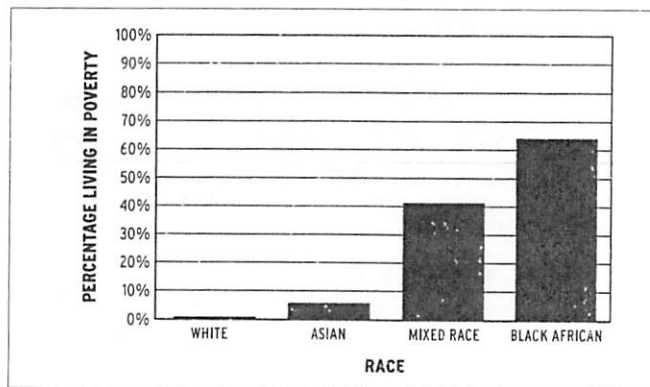
Apartheid was abolished in 1991, yet nearly 30 years later, living conditions for black people in South Africa have not greatly improved. Most of the country's wealth is owned by white South Africans, who make up only 8 percent of the population. Black South Africans comprise more than 80 percent of the population but own very little land and earn far less on average than white South Africans, as the top graph shows. As a result, far more black South Africans than white South Africans live in poverty (see bottom graph), and tensions between the two groups are rising. Use the graphs to answer the questions below.

The top graph shows the average annual income in 2014/2015 in South Africa by race, in U.S. dollars. The bottom graph shows the percentage of South Africans in each racial group living in poverty in 2015, as South Africa defines it. Data for both graphs is the most recent available.

INCOME IN SOUTH AFRICA BY RACE



POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA BY RACE



SOURCE: AFRICA CHECK, STATISTICS SOUTH AFRICA (FOR INCOME LEVELS, CONVERSION FROM RAND TO U.S. DOLLARS IS BASED ON THE EXCHANGE RATE ON APRIL 10, 2019)

ANALYZE THE GRAPHS

- The average annual income of white South Africans is about ____.
a \$7,000
b \$12,000
c \$19,000
d \$32,000
- Which group in South Africa has an average annual income of about \$7,000?
a white
b Asian
c mixed race
d black African
- On average, white South Africans earn nearly ____ times as much as black South Africans.
a two
b two-and-a-half
c three
d four-and-a-half
- About what percentage of Asian people in South Africa live in poverty?
a 1 percent
b 6 percent
c 41 percent
d 64 percent
- About 64 percent of which group in South Africa lives in poverty?
a white
b Asian
c mixed race
d black African

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do the graphs add to your understanding of land-ownership tensions between white and black South Africans?
- The article provides statistics about the percentages of black and white South Africans living in poverty. Does seeing the information presented visually in a graph affect you differently from reading about it? If so, how so?

Test Your Knowledge

Choose the best answer for each of the following questions about "South Africa: Land of Inequality."
For the analysis section, refer to the article as needed.

CHECK COMPREHENSION

1. Who called themselves "Afrikaners"?
 - a Dutch colonists in South Africa
 - b members of the African National Congress
 - c citizens who voted in South Africa's first truly democratic election
 - d international business people who pressured the South African government to end apartheid
2. The African National Congress fought against _____.
 - a apartheid
 - b land takeovers
 - c Dutch colonization
 - d freeing Nelson Mandela
3. What percentage of eligible voters cast ballots in South Africa's first truly democratic election after apartheid ended?
 - a nearly 10 percent
 - b nearly 30 percent
 - c nearly 70 percent
 - d nearly 90 percent
4. In what area have black South Africans made tremendous gains since apartheid ended?
 - a land ownership
 - b personal wealth
 - c political empowerment
 - d all of the above

ANALYZE THE TEXT

5. In the article, the author refers to "a historic election." She is referring to the election of _____.
 - a F.W. de Klerk
 - b Barack Obama
 - c Nelson Mandela
 - d none of the above
6. The author says, "One of the thorniest unsolved problems in South Africa is land reform." Which word does the author use to emphasize the difficulty of solving the problem?
 - a one
 - b thorniest
 - c unsolved
 - d reform
7. Based on the article, you can reasonably infer that black South Africans who participate in land takeovers are doing so to _____.
 - a create chaos in the country
 - b build wealth for themselves
 - c gain access to better schools
 - d help end corruption in the government
8. Which quotation used in the article best supports the answer to question 7?
 - a "'We see that land, we must take that land,' said Zola Ndlasi."
 - b "'English is the first language of only about 9 percent of the population,' [John] Campbell says."
 - c "'If I build a house, then I will leave this for my children,' says Lubabalo Mpiliso."
 - d "'I never spoke to the people myself,' [Stefan] Smit says."

IN-DEPTH QUESTIONS Please use the other side of this paper for your responses.

9. Reread John Campbell's quotation at the end of the article. What is his point of view toward South Africa's future? How does he support his point of view? Is his reasoning sound?
10. The author starts the article by describing a recent event. What would be another effective beginning? Why?