South Africa's Path from Apartheid to Modern-Day Democracy

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Abstract

This paper serves to address South Africa's path from its institutionalized system of racial segregation with apartheid to its modern-day democracy. While progress was made under Nelson Mandela's newly forged political system, the country continues to experience issues that threaten its democracy. Of these issues are endemic corruption, income inequality, marginalization, unequal education, and high unemployment. These issues have been compounded with the new threat of COVID-19. This paper aims to address how South Africa's democracy was established as well as how it has been received through modern times. It will focus primarily on the threats of corruption and extreme polarization while taking into consideration the future of the country with the threat of the global pandemic.

Unsurprisingly for a new democratic system, the Republic of South Africa's path to democracy has been riddled with highs and lows. Where the country currently stands is yet to be determined. South Africa was deeply entrenched in apartheid prior to establishing its democracy. In 1994, changes within the country were evident as the population sweepingly voted to become a democratic republic and voted in Nelson Mandela as their first black president (Anyaoku 2017, 641-642). While progress has been made over the last two decades, the country still faces grave threats to its democracy. Of these threats are endemic political corruption, varying degrees of marginalization, severe income inequality, and high unemployment. In addition, the global pandemic caused by COVID-19 has presented a new threat in 2020 as it has increased the country's unemployment rate, fractured their economy, and deepened the educational divide amongst classes (Dube 2020, 135).

South Africa's shift towards an anti-apartheid state was well received on the international stage. Foreign aid was given to the young state for poverty assistance as well as general support for newly forged path of democracy. With it, the country saw significant economic growth and showed promise of becoming a significant geopolitical agent on the African continent as the notion of inclusivity grew (Kangarlou 2013; Leshoro 2013, 63). The country's rich

multiculturalism is how it was coined the "Rainbow Nation" by Desmond Tutu. This concept

was elaborated on under Mandela and helped shape South Africa into to the African power that it

is today (Sidanius et al. 2019, 254). However, with great power comes great responsibility.

Political missteps and corruption have plagued the country since Mandela, largely under Jacob

Zuma's administration, where the economy took a large downturn despite its foreign assistance

and general progress it made up until that time (Friedman 2019, 280). With continued

corruption, race and class marginalization, and educational divides, the country faces challenges

for its democracy in the future. These issues will likely be further compounded by the

challenges presented by COVID-19 unless they are aggressively addressed by South Africa's

current administration.

Understanding South Africa's history is essential in understanding its current democratic

state. Apartheid, the Afrikaans word for "apartness," was implemented in 1948. Governmental

policies under the apartheid system created systematic racial discrimination and segregation for a

greater portion of population (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, 49). It was a system that not only

"cruelly and forcibly" separated its people, but additionally had a" fearsome state apparatus to

punish those who disagreed" with it ("South Africa – First 20 years" 2019). In theory, it called

for separate racial groups to have the ability to grow and develop separately; however, this was

not the case. "On paper [apartheid] appeared to call for equal development and freedom of

cultural expression, but the way it was implemented made this impossible" ("South Africa – First

20 Years" 2019).

Cultural expression and equality were key drivers in South Africa's push towards

becoming a democratic state. It suffered years of unrest between 1960 and 1989. A catalyst of

this political unrest was the Sharpeville massacre on March 21, 1960. On that day, peaceful

protesters gathered to protest pass laws – laws that dominated apartheid era discrimination as they were implemented with the intention of both monitoring and limiting movement of black South Africans ("The Anti-Pass Campaigns" 2019). Within a two-minute period, policemen fired over 1,300 bullets into the crowd of protesters leaving sixty-nine dead and injuring 180. The majority of those killed suffered bullet wounds to their backs, indicating their retreat (Lodge 2011, 106). In the wake of the massacre, the anti-apartheid movement started to take shape.

After man years of civil unrest, newly elected President F. W. de Klerk announced in his opening address to Parliament in February 1990 that he was lifting a long-standing ban on the African National Congress (ANC) and other black liberation parties. Consequently, he also released Nelson Mandela from a twenty-seven-year prison sentence, who became a staunch advocate for democracy (U.S. Department of State 2020). This was a turning point for South Africa. The country's first democratic election was held in 1994 where it had an 85% participation rate. It resulted in the ANC being voted into power by 62.7% under the leadership of Nelson Mandela ("Transition to Democracy' 2020).

Nelson Mandela, largely associated with being the father of South African democracy, envisioned a nation in which all cultures and people were treated equally. As the antithesis of apartheid, Mandela believed his newly established democracy to be a true representation of the country, a "Rainbow Nation." In his inaugural address he poetically stated,

> Each time one of us touches the soil of this land, we feel a sense of personal renewal. The national mood changes as the seasons change. We are moved by a sense of joy and exhilaration when the grass turns green and the flowers bloom. That spiritual and physical oneness we all share with this common homeland explains the depth of the pain we all carried in our hearts as we saw our country tear itself apart in a terrible conflict, and as we saw it spurned, outlawed and isolated by the peoples of the world, precisely because it has become the universal base of the pernicious ideology and practice of racism and racial oppression… We thank all our distinguished international guests for

having come to take possession with the people of our country of what is, after all, a common victory for justice, for peace, for human dignity. We trust that you will continue to stand by us as we tackle the challenges of building peace, prosperity, non-sexism, non-racialism and democracy…We have triumphed in the effort to implant hope in the breasts of the millions of our people. We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity - a Rainbow Nation at peace with itself and the world... Let there be justice for all. (Mandela 1994).

Ultimately, the country did see economic growth and prosperity under Mandela, as represented

in *Figure 1* below (DeSilver 2013).

Figure 1

Mandela's South Africa
Average income and population by racial group
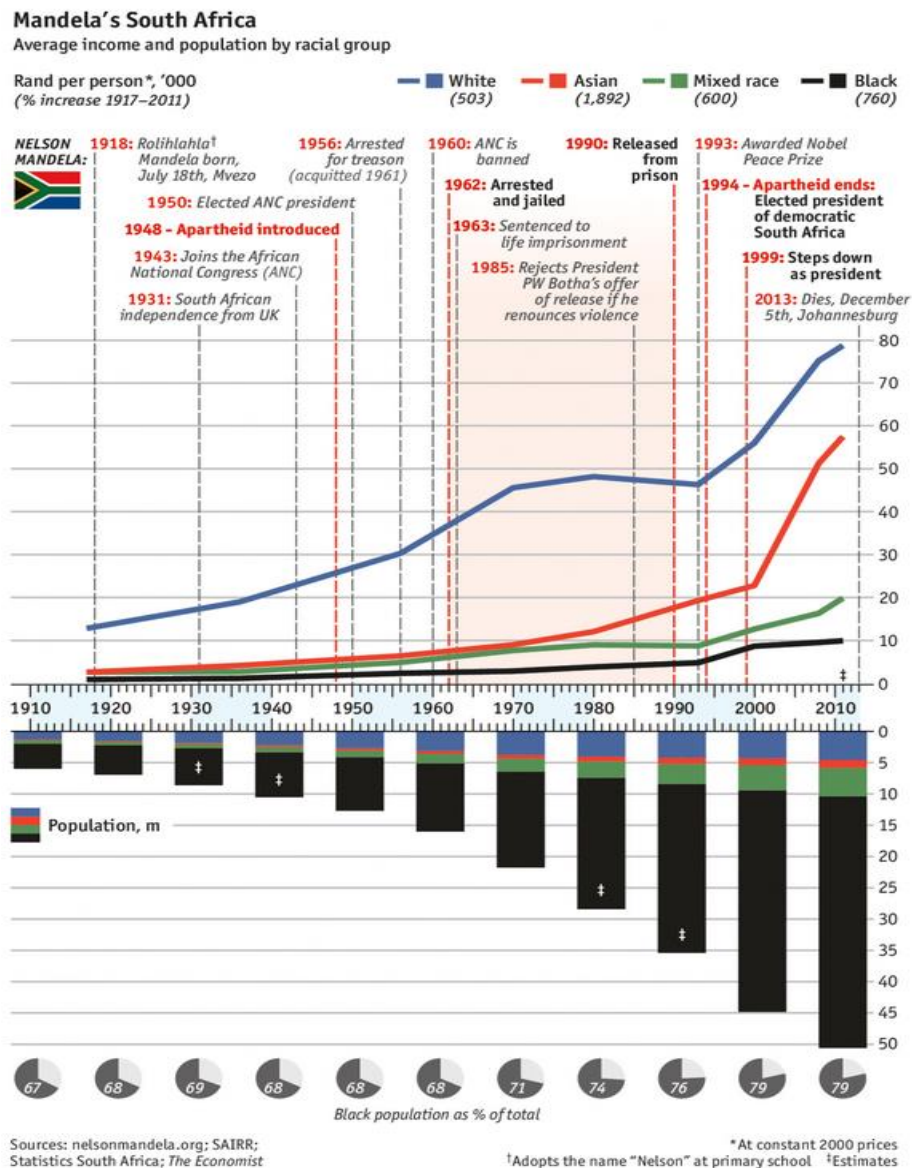
Mandela strategically addressed international guests in attendance for his inauguration. In the post-apartheid era, Africa was inundated with foreign aid to progress their democracy. This aid was provided largely by highly developed states such as the United Kingdom, United States, Germany, France, and Denmark and their anti-apartheid backing (Leshoro 2013, 56; Koch and Weingart 2017, 38). During the first few post-apartheid years, donor countries chose specific institutional targets for their aid and this was successful because aid was used solely for changing existing institutions as well as building a new system of governance. However, aid used generally in targeting South Africa's poverty achieved less. As the period of post-apartheid crisis decreased, donors began to seek other objectives, such as promoting overall economic growth, and aid money was not targeted towards specific goals. (Leshoro 2013, 56). One criticism of foreign assistance for young democracies has been that not only could it leave room for foreign interference but could hinder the state's ability to operate autonomously (Koch and Weingart 2017, 341-2). In the hands of the wrong administration, this could prove to be an economic disaster. At the onset of its democracy, South Africa was a prominent example of a peaceful transition to a democratic process (Myre 2013). However, some administrations and their widespread governmental corruption have not always lived up to its citizen's expectations of Mandela's "Rainbow Nation."

Much of the criticism of South Africa's economic and civil downturn was under Jacob Zuma's rule (Friedman 2019, 281). From the onset of his administration in 2009, Zuma was accused of deep-rooted corruption (Desai 2018, 499). A large portion of these accusations were a result of the ties that he had with the Gupta family. South Africa's Public Protector – "a state ethics ombud with inquisitorial judicial powers" – released a report that stated the Gupta family "wielded immense political clout and benefited economically through official connections to

secure lucrative state contracts and private loans, and were themselves involved in shady mining

deals involving coal, uranium, gold, platinum, diamonds, and iron ore" (500). Additionally, the

report added that had violated official codes, improperly used his office for personal and political

gain, and breached legal duties (Desai 2018, 500; Matthee 2014, 27-28). The administration was

saturated with political scandal and Zuma was forced to resign in early 2018 (Friedman 2019,

279). According to the IHS Markit Territory report, through 2019 and 2010 the Commission of

Inquiry into State Capture has largely focused their attention to the Zuma-Gupta alliance

("Country/Territory Report - South Africa 2020"). Presently, Jacob Zuma is formally facing

fraud and corruption chargers and the United States Department of Treasury has implemented

sanctions on the Gupta family (Magome 2020).

Corruption can undermine a state and put it at a disadvantage for social and economic

development (Naidoo 2013, 523). Ultimately, the Zuma-Gupta alliance severely damaged South

Africa's fractured economy, further exacerbating the issue of economic divide (Friedman 2019,

281). Nevertheless, endemic corruption is not the only issue to plague South Africa. While

Figure 1 represents the growth of the nation since its democracy, it also shows continued

marginalization years after apartheid was abolished (DeSilver 2013). A report by the Institute

for Justice and Reconciliation stated,

> Majority of the poor continue to be black and segregated from the multiracial, urban
> middle class. This pattern is witnessed on the geographical landscape of South Africa,
> where our cities may demonstrate increasing racial integration, but townships and rural
> settlements continue to be poor, black, and segregated as was intended by apartheid
> planners. (Gumede 2015, 143)

This marginalization is evident in statistics regarding South Africa's black and colored

population where there has been little middle-class economic development compared to white

and Asian growth (142). Today, South Africa's "black middle class is numerically stronger, and

soon will have more purchasing power, than their white counterparts. The private sector still is dominated by white South Africans who also own two thirds of the commercially cultivable land" (Renwick 2018). Other key issues that continue to threaten South Africa's democracy are rising unemployment and, consequently, worsening poverty (Ballard et al. 2005, 615).

These separations are also evident within the South African education system, perpetuating the divide. Every child has a right to education, for which South Africa provides its youth; however, the education that is received between economic classes is irrefutably unequal. Reports show that "despite new plans and existing efforts to improve the school system guided by a water tight constitution, it appears the education system remains abysmal and indicative of apartheid legacies that subsists within the education system" (Chitsamatanga and Rembe 2020, 112). Additionally, studies have presented evidence that South Africa's public-school system is not exempt from corruption (Serfontein and de Waal 2015, 8). This is a particularly troubling statistic as the public-school system has been disproportionally marginalized due to COVID-19. Recent reports have shown that rural learners "face unprecedented challenges in adjusting to a new mode of life and learning" (Dube 2020, 136). Furthermore, rural students

> …find themselves excluded from schooling and unable to access online resources, due to a lack of infrastructure, the unavailability of electricity and electronic gadgets, and a lack of qualified teachers who can assist with online learning. It appears that online learning [favors] urban and well-privileged learners, thus, widening the gap between the poor and the rich, instead of uniting the nation in the fight against COVID-19. (137)

Naturally, the education system is not the only area that has been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Like many other nations, the South Africa's lockdown has had severe implications for their economy (Arndt et al. 2020, 22). While the nation had an unemployment rate of 28-29.1% at the end of 2019, it is projected to increase to nearly 37% by December of 2020 (1).

A 2017 study on the link between South Africa's financial sector development and

income inequality in South Africa between 1990 and 2012 revealed that "financial development, especially when it is inclusive reduces the level of inequality in South Africa both in the short- and long-run. The results also highlighted that economic growth, external trade activities and government activities have played a very important role in reducing inequality in South Africa" (Mingiri 2017, 420). This is indicative that hope remains for the future of the nation, so long as has strong leadership that puts their country's agenda in front of their own.

Undoubtedly, South Africa has faced a number of challenges in a post-apartheid era. Under its new leadership of Cyril Ramaphosa, however, South Africa is seeing a growing desire to return to the democracy established under Mandela. South Africans expressed their desire for democracy in the civil unrest throughout the years leading up to their first election. The election results reflected a nation that demanded a new legacy away from the institutionalized segregation system of apartheid. However, Mandela inherited a country that was deeply divided. Throughout the 1990s, "the harsh reality of a significantly distorted income distribution and consequent structural distortions in the demand for goods and services eventually resulted in a significant economic crisis" (Gumede 2015, 4). Likewise, Ramaphosa has inherited an economically challenged state. While Mandela needed to build the nation from the ground up, Ramaphosa will need to continue on the path set out by Mandela outlined within their inclusive constitution. The new administration must do so with the challenges that the Zuma presidency left them as well as new economic hardships brought on by COVID-19.

While South Africa has been – and continues to be – one of the richest countries in Africa, a vast majority of the country lives in poverty. Despite this, it also carries the superlative as one of the world's most unequal countries. South Africa's inclusive democracy was designed to establish a country "in which all enjoy equal rights, and its much-admired constitution created

a framework that [allowed] citizens and their representatives to use its levers to create a fairer, more prosperous society" (Friedman 2013, 279). Thus far, South Africa has not seen this dream come fully to fruition. Political missteps and corruption have plagued the country post-Mandela's rule where the economy took a large downturn despite its foreign assistance (280). Marginalization and unemployment continue to plague the nation, deepening income inequality. This remains true all while the full impact of the global pandemic on South Africa is yet to be known. Nevertheless, inequality within the country was not caused by apartheid, rather, it was exacerbated under it. Similarly, challenges for South Africa's democracy were not created by COVID-19, but they have been intensified by it. South Africa has proven itself capable of overcoming great adversity within the past two decades. This tenacity will be necessary in years to come if South Africans truly want to live under a "Rainbow Nation." As Mandela himself said, "it is not our diversity which divides us; it is not our ethnicity, or religion or culture that divides us. Since we have achieved our freedom, there can only be one division amongst us: between those who cherish democracy and those who do not" (Chang 2020).

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<u>Outline</u>

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