

Key Electoral Issues

South Africa is faced with a multitude of challenges that threaten the country's prospects and current stability. Fourteen critical areas were chosen to focus on in each political party's approach to charting a meaningful, effective, and sustainable path to South Africa's future.

Economic growth and job creation

Economic growth and job creation are pivotal to alleviating poverty, reducing inequality, and improving overall living standards. South Africa is one of the most unequal societies, with extreme levels of poverty existing side-by-side with instances of obscene wealth and a disappearing middle class (1). The legacy of Apartheid and non-inclusive economic growth in the democratic era have left a deep divide between the economically affluent, the comfortable and the disadvantaged. Suffering the highest sustained rate of unemployment in the world amid stagnant economic growth and unequal access to education and opportunities contribute to this toxic status quo. A thriving economy would create jobs, generate revenue for public services through taxes, and lead to social stability through individual and national prosperity.

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Safety and security

Safety and security are vital for societal well-being, ensuring individual peace of mind, economic stability, and cohesive community development. In South Africa crime and violence have become far too commonplace. In the first three months of 2023 there were 6 228 murders recorded (2), averaging a staggering 68 murders a day in the country. South Africa's stubbornly high crime rate actively erodes the country's development prospects by breaking down public trust in government and deterring local and international investment. A country that is safe and secure is vital to fostering social cohesion and spurring economic growth.

Foreign affairs

Foreign affairs are crucial for any society as it impacts national security, economic interests, and global cooperation. South Africa's strategic role in geo-politics cannot be underestimated. The country's history of dismantling Apartheid and transitioning to democracy earned it respect internationally and placed South Africa in a unique position of global standing and influence. However, this respect has been eroded in recent years as South Africa finds itself in a geopolitical tug of war between the world's two biggest economies — the United States and China. As such, South Africa is in a delicate balancing act of fostering new links alongside maintaining existing ties to fully unlock the development potential international relations offers.

Energy security

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Without stable access to power, a nation can never achieve economic stability and sustainable growth. Nothing depicts South Africa's contemporary challenges better than the ongoing energy challenges the country faces. South Africa has endured load shedding for close to two decades, and reliable electricity supply remains elusive for homes and businesses alike. Ensuring energy security and transitioning to sustainable sources is critical for long-term economic viability and environmental sustainability.

Education

Education is the first building block to a successful nation and despite consistently spending close to a fifth of the national budget on education, South Africa's outcomes in the sector are continually disappointing. Remedying the country's education challenges are critical to empower individuals to become informed and engaged citizens specifically and drive economic development and overall societal progress generally. The

ongoing challenges include inadequate infrastructure, unequal access to quality education, teacher shortages, and continually low academic performance by primary, secondary, and tertiary learners. As such, the legacy of Bantu education continues to haunt the country.

Mineral resources

A diverse source of mineral resources can fuel economic growth, job creation, and resource development in any nation and contribute to overall prosperity. South Africa is blessed with an abundance of mineral resources including gold, platinum, and diamonds with a contribution of 8 per cent to annual GDP growth and providing direct employment to half a million people (3). It is, however, argued that the sector has never been exploited to its full potential with most minerals mined and exported in their raw form. The mining sector is also an emotive issue due to the country's historical legacy of Apartheid migrant labour in the South African mines.

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Youth development

Youth development is crucial for any society, since it can nurture a skilled workforce and prepare the nation's future leaders as well as foster innovation. South Africa's youth is another ticking time bomb that profoundly threatens the country's prospects. More than six out of every ten young South Africans aged between sixteen and 35-years are unemployed (4). Ensuring that young people are not idle and enjoy access to education, skills, and job opportunities is crucial to South Africa's future.

Housing

A nation's ability to provide shelter for the indigent and a stable environment in which its citizens can rent or own their own homes, is the foundation for a country's well-being, and contributes to overall societal development and cohesion. Over 12 per cent of South Africans live in informal settlements nationwide with that number rising to one in five in the metropolises of Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban (5). South Africa's severe shortage of affordable housing presents a significant challenge to addressing inequality and hampers the country's potential for development.

The environment and climate change

Addressing climate change and environmental sustainability is key to a sustainable future in South Africa. Big industries in the country, particularly the mining sector, are among the biggest polluters, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. South Africa's reliance on Eskom's ageing coal power station fleet exacerbates this challenge. However, balancing these environmental concerns with the need for economic growth and job creation is crucial.

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Tourism

Contributing more to South Africa's GDP than the agriculture, utilities, and construction sectors, tourism could play a vital role in South Africa's economy and society, were it given more support. It is estimated that one job is created for every ten to twelve tourists who visit the country's diverse travel offering. This could increase even further were the industry to rebound to the over 6 per cent contribution to GDP it recorded pre-covid in 2019 (6) after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Immigration and xenophobia

Immigration is becoming more of a contentious issue as xenophobic attitudes invade all levels of South African society. Beyond the sporadic outbreaks of violence directed towards foreigners, the country's immigration policy has become a hotly contested political issue, with foreign nationals being made scapegoats for plain governance failures amid genuine concerns over the impact of legal and illegal migration into South Africa.

LGBTIQA+ rights

Although South Africa enjoys legally guaranteed LGBTIQA+ rights and constitutional rights for close on two decades, the community continues to face discrimination daily in society. Many members of the LGBTIQA+ community still choose to be secretive about their sexuality in a society where homophobic violence, such as corrective rape remains shockingly prevalent.

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South Africa's twelve official languages

Linguistic diversity has been guaranteed in the South African constitution with protection and power being afforded to the country's eleven official languages since 1996, with sign language being added in 2023. However, this exists largely in law alone with English being the language of social power and economic influence in South Africa. With fluency in a language, most South African citizens do not consider their mother tongue being a critical deciding factor in an individual's success.

Artificial intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies are presenting opportunities for rapid economic development as automation and innovation replace existing modes of living and usurp workers in societies around the globe. This is, however, a unique challenge for South Africa, with its high levels of inequality and unemployment where millions rely on menial jobs to survive.

Sources:

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- (2) SAPS crime statistics first quarter of 2023/24 financial year https://www.saps.gov.za/services/downloads/april_june_2023_24_quarter1_presentation.pdf
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- (4) Trading economics: South Africa's Youth Unemployment rate - <https://tradingeconomics.com/south-africa/youth-unemployment-rate>
- (5) Stats-SA: General Household Survey - <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/P03182022.pdf>
- (6) Department of Tourism: 2022 - 2025 strategic plan <https://www.tourism.gov.za/AboutNDT/Publications/Department%20of%20Tourism%20-%202022-2025%20Strategic%20Mid-Term%20Progress%20Report.pdf>