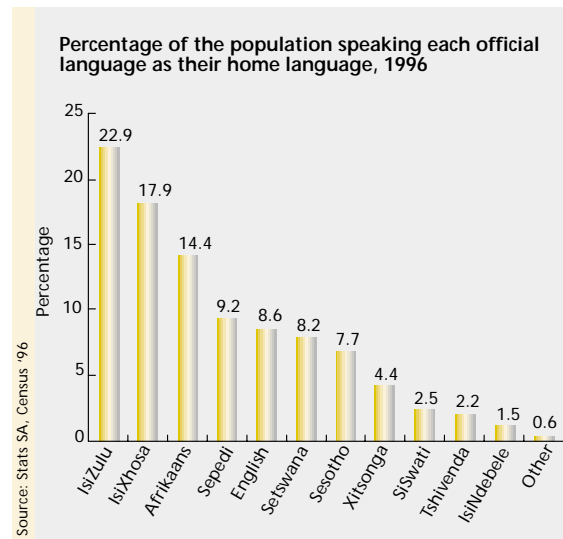




South Africa's biggest asset is its people; a rainbow nation with a rich and diverse culture. South Africa is often called the cradle of humankind, for this is where archaeologists have discovered 2,5 million-year-old fossils of our earliest ancestors, as well as 100 000-year-old remains of modern man. Although South Africans come from many cultural traditions, they belong to one nation, a dynamic blend of age-old customs and modern ways, building a new South African society to create a better life for all.

On the night of 9 October 1996, a census found that there were 40,58 million people in South Africa. Of these, 76,7% classified themselves as African; 10,9% as white; 8,9% as coloured; and 2,6% as Indian/Asian. In 2001, the population was estimated at 44 561 million, of which some 23 122 million were women.

The South African population consists of the following groups: the Nguni people (the Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele and Swazi), who account for two-thirds of the population; the Sotho-Tswana people, who include the Southern, Northern and Western Sotho (Tswana); the



Tsonga; the Venda; Afrikaners; English; Coloureds; Indians, and people who have immigrated to South Africa from the rest of Africa, Europe and Asia and who maintain a strong cultural identity. A few members of the Khoi and the San also live in South Africa.

South Africa is home to a diverse multitude of people with unique cultures, traditions and languages. This uniqueness is supported by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, which provide for, among other things, the right to freedom of religion and the right to receive instruction in a person's language of choice, where this is reasonably practicable.

Everyone has the right to use their own language and to participate in the cultural life of his or her choice, but no one may do so in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights.

The Constitution provides for 11 official languages, namely Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga. The Constitution expects government to

implement positive measures to elevate the status and to advance the use of indigenous languages.

A majority of South Africans, particularly those living in urban areas, speak English either as a first or second language.

According to the 1996 census, isiZulu is the mother tongue of 22,9% of the population, followed by isiXhosa (17,9%), Afrikaans (14,4%), Sepedi (9,2%) and English (8,6%).

Almost 80% of South Africa's population adheres to the Christian faith. Other major religious groups are the Hindus, Muslims and Jews. A minority of South Africa's population do not belong to any of the major religions, but regard themselves as traditionalists or of no specific religious affiliation. Freedom of worship is guaranteed by the Constitution, and official policy is one of non-interference in religious practices.

Church attendance in South Africa is favourable in both rural and urban areas. Apart from the work of the churches, a number of Christian organisations operate in South Africa, doing missionary work, giving aid and providing training.

The largest grouping of Christian churches is the African Independent Churches (AICs), and one of the most dramatic aspects of religious affiliation has been the rise of this movement.

Although these churches originally resulted from a number of breakaways from various mission churches (the so-called Ethiopian churches), the AICs have developed their own dynamics and momentum and continue to flourish. The majority can therefore no longer be regarded as Ethiopian churches, but are Zionist or Apostolic churches. The Pentecostal movement also has its independent offshoots in this group. The Zion Christian Church, with four million adherents, is the largest of these churches in South Africa and the largest church overall. More than a million members gather twice a year at Zion City, Moria, near Polokwane (formerly Pietersburg) in Limpopo (formerly the Northern Province), at Easter and for the September festival.



The 4 000 or more independent churches have a membership of more than 10 million, making this movement the single most important religious group in South Africa. The independent churches attract people from rural and urban areas. There are, for example, hundreds of separate churches in rural KwaZulu-Natal and at least 900 from all ethnic groups in the urban complex of Soweto alone.

The *Nederduitse Gereformeerde* (NG) family of churches in South Africa (the Dutch Reformed churches) represents some 3,5 million people. The NG Kerk is the largest of the three churches with a total of about 1 200 congregations countrywide. The *Nederduits Hervormde Kerk* and the *Gereformeerde Kerk* are also regarded as sister churches. There are several other churches with Afrikaans-speaking adherents, some with very large memberships.

In recent years, the Roman Catholic Church has grown strongly in numbers and influence, even though South Africa is predominantly Protestant. The Catholic Church works closely with other churches on the socio-political front.

Other established churches include the Methodist Church, the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (Anglican), various Lutheran and Presbyterian churches and the Congregational Church. Although the different Baptist groups are not large, they represent a strong church tradition. The largest traditional Pentecostal churches are the Apostolic Faith Mission, the Assemblies of God and the Full Gospel Church.

A number of charismatic churches have been established in recent years. The daughter churches of the charismatic churches, together with those of the Hatfield Christian Church in Pretoria, are grouped in the International Fellowship of Christian Churches. Also active in South Africa, among the smaller groups, are the Greek Orthodox and Seventh Day Adventist churches.

Because the traditional religion of the African people has a strong cultural base, the various groups have different rituals, but there are certain common features.

A supreme being is generally recognised, but ancestors are of far greater importance, being the deceased elders of the group. They are regarded as part of the community, indispensable links with the spirit world and the powers that control everyday affairs. These ancestors are not gods, but because they play a key part in bringing about either good or ill fortune, maintaining good relations with them is vital and they have to be appeased regularly by a variety of ritual offerings.

As a result of close contact with Christianity, many people find themselves in a transitional phase somewhere between traditional African religion and Christianity.

Most Indians retained their Hindu religion when they originally came to South Africa. Today, some two-thirds of South Africa's Indians are Hindus. The Muslim community in South Africa is small, but growing strongly. The major components are the Cape Malays, who are mainly descendants of Indonesian slaves, as well as 20% of people of Indian descent. The Jewish population is less than 100 000, most of them Orthodox.