The early inhabitants
The discovery of the skull of a Taung child in 1924; discoveries of hominid fossils at Sterkfontein caves, a world heritage site; and the ground-breaking work done at Blombos Cave in the southern Cape, have all put South Africa at the forefront of palaeontological research into the origins of humanity. Modern humans have lived in the region for over 100 000 years.

The small, mobile bands of Stone Age hunter-gatherers, who created a wealth of rock art, were the ancestors of the Khoikhoi and San of historical times. The Khoikhoi and San, although collectively known as the Khoisan, are often thought of as distinct peoples. The former were those who, some 2 000 years ago, adopted a pastoralist lifestyle herding sheep and later, cattle. Whereas the hunter-gatherers adapted to local environments and were scattered across the subcontinent, the herders sought out the pasturelands between modern-day Namibia and the Eastern Cape, which generally are near the coast. At around the same time, Bantu-speaking agropastoralists began arriving in southern Africa, bringing with them an Iron Age culture and domesticated crops. After establishing themselves in the well-watered eastern coastal region of southern Africa, these farmers spread out across the interior plateau, or “Highveld,” where they adopted a more extensive cattle-farming culture.

Chiefdoms arose, based on control over cattle, which gave rise to systems of patronage and hence hierarchies of authority within communities. Metallurgical skills, developed in the mining and processing of iron, copper, tin and gold, promoted regional trade and craft specialisation.

At several archaeological sites, such as Mapungubwe and Thulamela in the Limpopo Valley, there is evidence of sophisticated political and material cultures, based in part on contact with the East African trading economy. These cultures, which were part of a broader African civilisation, predate European encroachment by several centuries. Settlement patterns varied from the dispersed homesteads of the fertile coastal regions in the east, to the concentrated towns of the desert fringes in the west.

The farmers did not, however, extend their settlement into the western desert or the winter-rainfall region in the south-west. These regions remained the preserve of the Khoisan until Europeans put down roots at the Cape of Good Hope. Aided by modern science in uncovering the continent’s history, which forms part of the African Renaissance, South Africa is gaining a greater understanding of its rich precolonial past.

The early colonial period
Portuguese seafarers, who pioneered the sea route to India in the late 15th century, were regular visitors to the South African coast during the early 1500s. Other Europeans followed from the late 16th century onwards.

In 1652, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) set up a station in Table Bay (Cape Town) to provision passing ships. Trade with the Khoikhoi for slaughter stock soon degenerated into raiding and warfare. Beginning in 1657, European settlers were allotted farms by the colonial authorities in the arable regions around Cape Town, where wine and wheat became the major
products. In response to the colonists' demand for labour, the VOC imported slaves from East Africa, Madagascar, and its possessions in the East Indies.

By the early 1700s, the colonists had begun to spread into the hinterland beyond the nearest mountain ranges. These relatively independent and mobile farmers traded with the Dutch authorities. As they intruded further upon the land and water sources, and stepped up their demands for livestock and labour, more and more of the indigenous inhabitants were dispossessed and incorporated into the colonial economy as servants.

By the late 1800s, there were more slaves in the Cape than there were indigenous inhabitants. The slave population steadily increased since more labour was needed. By the mid-1800s, the colonists had begun to spread into the hinterland beyond the nearest mountain ranges. These relatively independent and mobile farmers traded with the Dutch authorities. As they intruded further upon the land and water sources, and stepped up their demands for livestock and labour, more and more of the indigenous inhabitants were dispossessed and incorporated into the colonial economy as servants.

Diseases such as smallpox, which was introduced by the Europeans in 1713, decimated the Khoisan, contributing to the decline of their cultures. Unions across the colour line became known, remains the subject of much speculative debate.

The British colonial era

In 1795, the British occupied the Cape as a strategic base against the French, thus controlling the sea route to the East. After a brief reversion to the Dutch in the course of the Napoleonic wars, it was retaken in 1806 and kept by Britain in the post-war settlement of territorial claims.

The closed and regulated economic system of the Dutch period was swept away as the Cape Colony was integrated into the dynamic international trading empire of industrialising Britain.

A crucial new element was evangelism, brought to the Cape by Protestant missionaries. The evangelicals believed in the liberating effect of “free” labour and in the “civilising mission” of British imperialism. They were convinced that indigenous peoples could be fully assimilated into European Christian culture once the shackles of oppression had been removed.

The most important aspect of the mission movement in South Africa was the Dr John Philip, who arrived as superintendent of the London Missionary Society in 1819. His campaign on behalf of the Khoisan coincided with a high point in official sympathy for philanthropic concerns. One result was Ordinance 50 of 1828, which guaranteed equal civil rights for “people of colour” within the colony and freed them from legal discrimination. At the same time, a powerful anti-slavery movement in Britain promoted a series ofameliorative measures focused on the abolition of slavery in the 1820s, and the proclamation of emancipation, which came into force in 1834. The slaves were subject to a four-year period of “apprenticeship” with their former owners, on the grounds that they must be prepared for freedom, which came on 1 December 1838.

Although slavery had become less profitable because of a depression in the wine industry, Cape slave-owners rallied to oppose emancipation. The compensation money, which the British treasury paid out to sweeten the pill, injected unprecedented liquidity into the stagnant local economy. This brought a spurt of company formation, such as banks and insurance companies, as well as a surge of investment in land and wool sheep in the drier regions of the colony in the late 1830s.

Wool became a staple export on which the Cape economy depended for its further development in the middle decades of the century. For the ex-slaves, as for the Khoisan servants, the reality of freedom was very different from the promise. As a wage-based economy developed, they remained dispossessed and exploited, with little opportunity to escape their servile lot. Increasingly, they were lumped together as the “coloured” people, a group which included the descendants of unions between indigenous and European peoples, and a substantial Muslim minority who became known as the “Cape Malays” (misleadingly, as they mostly came from the Indonesian archipelago).

The coloured people were discriminated against on account of their working-class status as well as their racial identity. Among the poor, especially in and around Cape Town, there continued to be a great deal of racial mixing and intermarriage throughout the 1800s.

In 1820, several thousand British settlers, who were swept up by a scheme to relieve Britain of its unemployed, were placed in the eastern Cape frontier zone as a buffer against the Xhosa chiefdoms. The vision of a dense settlement of small farmers was, however, ill-conceived and many of the settlers became artisans and traders. The more successful became an entrepreneurial class of merchants, large-scale sheep farmers and speculators with an insatiable demand for land. Some became fierce warmongers who pressed for the military dispossessions of the Xhosa chiefdoms. The coveted Xhosa land and welcomed the prospect of war involving large-scale military expenditure by the imperial authorities. The Xhosa engaged in raiding as a means of asserting their prior claims to the land. Racial paranoia became integral to white frontier politics. The result was that frontier warfare became endemic through much of the 19th century, during which Xhosa war leaders such as Chief Maqoma became heroic figures to their people.

By the mid-1800s, British settlers of similar persuasion were to be found in Natal. They, too, called for imperial expansion in support of their land claims and trading enterprises.

Meanwhile, large numbers of the original colonists, the Boers, were greatly extending white occupation beyond the Cape’s borders to the north, in the movement that became known as the Great Trek, in the mid-1830s. Alienated by British liberalism, and with their economic enterprise usurped by British settlers, several thousand Boers from the interior districts, accompanied...
South Africa yearbook 2016/17

although in certain places a substantial one.

was that black and coloured people formed a minority of voters

also based on income and property qualifications. The result

practised in India. Although Indians gradually moved into the

the techniques of passive resistance, which he later effectively

South Africa's population. It was in South Africa that Indian activist

This system is widely regarded as having provided a model for

rights outside the reserves were effectively limited to white people.

granted to the educated products of the missions, in practice they

whereby chiefly rule was entrenched and customary law was

and the freedom to govern themselves in accordance

original colony of settlement, the Cape. The size of the black

Zulu State, developed along very different lines from the

The Colony of Natal, situated to the south of the mighty

Natal developed a system of political and legal dualism,

by a number of Khoisan servants, began a series of migrations

These Indians, who were segregated and discriminated

labour migrancy suited employers and the authorities, which

have followed these developments, but short-term, recurrent

the land. Conquest, land dispossession, taxation and pass laws

only be provided by Africans, who had to be drawn away from

white-owned farms.

remained in the hands of the colonists, but the Boers continued

What became known as the “liberal tradition” in the Cape

depended on the fact that the great mass of Bantu-speaking

farmers remained outside its colonial borders until late in the

19th century. Non-racialism could thus be embraced without

posing a threat to white supremacy.

Numbers of black people within the Cape Colony had sufficient

formal education or owned enough property to qualify for the

franchise. Political alliances across racial lines were common

in the eastern Cape constituencies. It is therefore not surprising

that the eastern Cape became a seedbed of African nationalism,

once the ideal and promise of inclusion in the common society

had been so starkly violated by later racial policies.

The mineral revolution

By the late 19th century, the limitations of the Cape's liberal

tradition were becoming apparent. The hardening of racial

attitudes that accompanied the rise of a more militant imperialist

spirit coincided with the watershed discovery of mineral riches

in the interior of southern Africa.

In a developing economy, cheap labour was at a premium, and

the claims of educated blacks indemnent for equality met

with increasingly fierce resistance. At the same time, the large

numbers of Africans in the chiefdoms beyond the Kei River

and north of the Gariep (Orange River), then being incorporated

into the Cape Colony, posed new threats to racial supremacy

and white security, increasing pressures.

Alluvial diamonds were discovered on the Vaal River in

the late 1860s. The subsequent discovery of dry deposits at

what became the city of Kimberley drew tens of thousands

of people, black and white, to the first great industrial hub

in Africa and the largest diamond deposit in the world. In 1871,

the British, who ousted several rival claimants, annexed the

diamond fields.

The Colony of Griqualand West thus created was incorporated

into the Cape Colony in 1880. By 1888, the consolidation

of diamond claims had led to the creation of the huge De

Beers monopoly under the control of Cecil John Rhodes.

He used his power and wealth to become Prime Minister of the

Cape Colony (from 1890 to 1896) and, through his chartered

British South Africa Company, conqueror and ruler of modern-

day Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The mineral discoveries had a major impact on the

subcontinent as a whole. A railway network linking the interior

to the coastal ports revolutionised transportation and energy

availability in the north, while the Rand, named after the eponymous

Port Elizabeth, East London and Durban experienced an economic

boom as port facilities were upgraded.

The fact that the mineral discoveries coincided with a new

era of imperialism and the scramble for Africa, brought imperial

power and influence to bear in southern Africa as never before.

Independent African chiefdoms were systematically subdued

and incorporated by their white-rulled neighbours. In 1897,

Zululand was incorporated into Natal.

The Transvaal was founded by Britain in 1877. Boer

resistance led to British withdrawal in 1881, but not before the

Pedi (northern Sotho) State, which fell within the Republic's

borders, had been subjugated. The indications were that,

having once been asserted, British hegemony was likely to be

reasserted.

The southern Sotho and Swazi territories were also brought

under British rule but maintained their status as imperial

dependencies, so that both the current Lesotho and Swaziland

emerged as the result of two separate, but related events.

The discovery of the Witwatersrand goldfields in 1886 was a

turning point in the history of South Africa. It presaged the

emergence of the modern South African industrial state.

Once the extent of the reefs had been established, and deep-

level mining had proved to be a viable investment, it was only

a matter of time before Britain and its local representatives

again found a pretext for war against the Boer republics of Transvaal

and the Orange Free State.

The demand for franchise rights for English-speaking

immigrants on the goldfields (known as uitlanders) provided a

leverage for applying pressure on the government of President Paul

Kruger. Egged on by the deep-level mining magnates, to whom

the Boer government seemed obstructive and inefficient, and by

the expectation of an uitlander uprising, Rhodes launched a raid

into the Transvaal in late December 1895.

The raid's failure saw the end of Rhodes' political career, but

Sir Alfred Milner, British high commissioner in South Africa

from 1897, was determined to annex the Transvaal and establish

British rule throughout the subcontinent. The Boer

Government was eventually forced into a declaration of war in

October 1899.

The mineral discoveries had a radical impact on every sphere

of society. Labour, previously owned almost exclusively by

whites, was required on a massive scale and could only be provided

by Africans, who had to be drawn away from

the land.

Many Africans responded with alacrity to the opportunities

presented by wage labour, travelling long distances to earn

money to supplement rural enterprise in the homestead

economy.

In response to the expansion of internal markets, blacks

exploited their farming skills and family labour to good effect

to increase production for sale. A substantial black peasantry

arose, often by means of share-cropping or labour tenancy

on white-owned farms.

For the white authorities, however, the chief consideration

was ensuring a labour supply and undermining black competition

on the land. Conquest, land dispossession, taxation and pass laws

were designed to force black people off the land and channel

them into labour markets, especially to meet the needs of the

mines.

Gradually, the alternatives available to blacks were closed,

and the decline of the homestead economy made wage labour

increasingly essential for survival. The integration of blacks into

the emerging urban and industrial society of South Africa should

have followed these developments, but short-term, recurrent

labour unrest suited employers and the authorities, which

sought to entrench the system.

The closed compounds pioneered on the diamond fields,

as a means of migrant labour control, were replicated at the
The Anglo-Boer/South African War (October 1899 to May 1902) and its aftermath

The war that followed the mineral revolution was mainly a white man’s war. In its first phase, the Boer forces took the initiative, besieging the frontier towns of Mafeking (Mahikeng) and Kimberley in the northern Cape, and Ladysmith in northern Natal.

Some colonial Boers rebelled, however, in sympathy with the Afrikaners. But after a large and well-armed force under lords Roberts and Kitchener arrived, the British advance was rapid. Kruger fled the Transvaal shortly before Pretoria fell in June 1900. The formal conquest of the two Boer republics was followed by a prolonged guerrilla campaign. Small, mobile groups of Boers defeated the imperial forces. The British responded with a scorched-earth policy, which included farm burnings, looting and the setting-up of concentration camps for non-combatants, in which some 26 000 Boer women and children died from disease.

The impact of the Anglo-Boer/South African War as a seminal influence on the development of Afrikaner nationalistic politics began at the end of the war.

The Boer leaders – most notably Louis Botha, Jan Smuts and JHM Hertzog – played a dominant role in the country’s politics for the next half century. After initial plans for anglicisation of the defeated Afrikaners were abandoned as impractical, the British looked to the Afrikanders as collaborators in securing imperial political and economic interests.

By 1907 and 1908, the two former Boer republics were granted self-government but, crucially, with a whites-only franchise. Under the leadership of Louis Botha, the Boers were sacrificed in the interest of white nation-building across the white language divide.

The National Convention drew up a Constitution and the four colonies became an independent dominion called the Union of South Africa on 31 May 1910.

The 19th century’s formally non-racial franchise was retained in the Cape but was not extended elsewhere, where rights of citizenship were confined to whites alone. It was clear from the start that segregation was the conventional wisdom of the new rulers. Black people were defined as outsiders, without rights or claims on the common society that their labour had helped to create.

Segregation

Government policy in the Union of South Africa did not develop in isolation, but against the backdrop of black political initiatives. Segregation and apartheid assumed their shape, in part, as a white response to blacks’ increasing participation in the country’s economic life and their assertion of political rights.

Despite the government’s efforts to shore up traditionalism and retribalise them, black people became more fully integrated into the urban and industrial society of 20th-century South Africa than elsewhere on the continent. An educated elite of black businesspeople, journalists and professionals grew to be a major force in black politics. Mission Christianity and its associated educational institutions exerted a profound influence on black political life, and separatist churches were early vehicles of African political assertion.

The experiences of studying abroad, and in particular interaction with black people struggling for their rights elsewhere in Africa, the United States of America and the Caribbean, played an important part.

A vigorous black press arose, associated in its early years with such pioneer editors as John Tengo Jabavu, Pixley ka Isaka Seme, Dr Abdullah Aburdahman, Sol Plaatje and John Dube serving the black reading public.

At the same time, African communal struggles to maintain access to the land in rural areas posed a powerful challenge to the white state. Traditional authorities often led popular struggles against intrusive and manipulative policies. Government attempts to control and co-opt the chiefs often failed. The Steps towards the formation of a national organisation of coloured people began around the turn of the century, with the formation of the African Political Organisation in 1902 by Dr Aburdahman, mainly in the Cape Province.

The African National Congress (ANC), founded in 1912, became the main body representing black people in rural as well as urban areas. But it was short-lived. The Communist Party, formed in 1921 and since then a force for both non-racialism and worker organisations, was to prove far longer-lasting. In other sections of the black population too, the turn of the century saw organised opposition emerging.

Gandhi’s leadership of protest against discriminatory laws gave impetus to the formation of provincial Indian congresses, including the Congress of Indian Fathers of India. The Congress was formed by him in 1894.

The principles of segregationist thinking were laid down in a 1905 report by the South African Native Affairs Commission and continued to evolve in response to these economic, social and political pressures. In keeping with its recommendations, the first union government enacted the seminal Natives Land Act in 1913.

This defined the remnants of their ancestral lands after conquest for African occupation, and declared illegal all
land purchases or rent tenancy outside these reserves. The centenary of this Act was commemorated in 2013.

The reserves ("homelands" as they were subsequently called) eventually comprised about 13% of South Africa’s land surface. Administrative and legal dualism reinforced the division between white citizens and black non-citizens, a dispensation personified by the governor-general who, as “supreme chief” over the country’s African majority, was empowered to rule them by administrative fiat and decree.

The government also reserved skilled work for white people and denying black workers the rights to organise. Legislation, which was consolidated in the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, entrenched urban segregation and controlled black mobility by means of pass laws. The pass laws were designed to force blacks into labour and to keep them there under conditions and at wage levels that suited white employers, and to deny them any bargaining power. In these and other ways, the foundations of apartheid were laid by successive governments representing the compromises hammered out by the National Convention of 1908 to 1909 to effect the union of English-and Afrikaans-speaking white people. However, divisions within the white community remained significant. Afrikaner nationalism grew as a factor in the years after union.

It was given impetus in 1914, both by the formation of the National党的breakaway from the ruling South African Party, and by a rebellion of Afrikaners who could not reconcile themselves with the decision to join the First World War against Germany.

In part, the NP spoke for Afrikaners impoverished by the Anglo-Boer/South African War and dislodged from the land by the development of capitalist farming.

An Afrikaner underclass was emerging in the towns, which found itself unconsumptive in the labour market, as white workers demanded higher wages than those paid to black people.

Soon, labour issues came to the fore. In 1920, some 71,000 black mineworkers went on strike in protest against the spiralling cost of living, but the strike was quickly put down by isolating the compounds where the migrant workers were housed. Another threat to government came from white squatter movements in peri-urban areas brought about by administrative fiat and decree.

Meanwhile, Malan’s breakaway NP was greatly augmented by an Afrikaner cultural revival spearheaded by the secret white male Afrikaner Broederbond and other cultural organisations during the year of the Voortrekker centenary celebrations (1938), as well as by anti-war sentiment from 1939.

**Apartheid**

For the Second World War, in 1948, the NP, with its ideology of apartheid that brought an even more rigorous and authoritarian approach than the segregationist policies of previous governments, won the general election. It did so against the background of a revival of mass militancy during the 1940s, after a period of relative quiescence in the 1930s when black groups attempted to foster unity among themselves. The change was marked by the formation of the ANC Youth League in 1943, fostering the leadership of figures such as Anton Lembede, AP Mda, Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and Walter Sisulu, who were instrumental in the struggle to come.

In the 1940s, squatter movements in peri-urban areas brought mass politics back to the urban centres. The 1946 Mineworkers’ Strike was a turning point in the emergence of politics of mass mobilisation.

As was the case with the First World War, the experience of the Second World War and post-war economic difficulties enhanced discontent.

For those who supported the NP, its primary appeal lay in its determination to maintain white domination in the face of rising mass resistance; uplift poor Afrikaners; challenge the pre-eminence of English-speaking white people in public life, the professions and business; and abolish the remaining imperial ties.

The State became an engine of patronage for Afrikaner employment. The Afrikaner Broederbond coordinated the party’s programme, ensuring that Afrikaner nationalist interests and policies attained ascendancy throughout civil society. In 1961, the NP government under Prime Minister HF Verwoerd declared South Africa a republic, a move being a whites-only referendum on the issue. A new currency, the Rand, and a new flag, anthem and coat of arms were formally introduced.

In 1961, after a sojourn, having become a republic, had to apply for continued membership of the Commonwealth. In the face of demands for an end to apartheid, South Africa withdrew its application and a figurehead president replaced the British queen (represented locally by the governor-general) as head of state.

In most respects, apartheid was a continuation, in more systematic and brutal form, of the segregationist policies of previous governments. A new concern with racial purity was apparent in laws prohibiting interracial sexual activities and provisions for population registration requiring that every South African be assigned to one discrete racial category or another.

For the first time, the coloured communities, who had always been subjected to informal discrimination, were brought within the ambit of discriminatory laws. In the mid-1950s, government took the drastic step of overriding an entrenched clause in the 1910 Constitution of the Union so as to be able to remove coloured voters’-the common voters’-role. It also enforced residential segregation, expropriating homes where necessary and policing massive forced removals into coloured “group areas.”

Until the 1940s, South Africa’s racial policies had been entirely out of step with those to be found in the colonial world. But by the 1950s, which saw decolonisation and a global backlash against racism gathering pace, the country was dramatically opposed to world opinion on questions of human rights. The architects of apartheid, among whom Dr Verwoerd was pre-eminent, responded by elaborating a theory of multinationalism. Their policy, which they termed “separate development,” divided the African population into artificial ethnic “nations,” each with its own “homeland” and the prospect of “independence,” supposedly in keeping with trends elsewhere on the continent.

This divestiture of power was designed to freeze the racial basis of official policy-making by the substitution of the language of ethnicity. This was accompanied by much ethnographic engineering, as efforts were made to resurrect tribal structures. In the process, the government sought to create a significant division between the white South Africans, and therefore also the international community, declined to recognise. In each case, the process involved the repression of opposition and the use by the government of the power to name and thereby pad elected assemblies with a quota of compliant figures.

Forced removals from “white” areas affected some 3.5 million people and vast rural slums were created in the homelands, which were used as dumping grounds. The pass laws and influx control were extended and harshly enforced, and labour bureaux were set up to channel labour to where it was needed.

Hundreds of thousands of people were arrested or prosecuted under the pass laws each year, reaching over half a million a year by the mid-1960s. Industrial decentralisation to growth points on the borders of (but not inside) the homelands was promoted as a means of keeping blacks out of “white” South Africa.

In virtually every sphere, from housing to education and healthcare, the emphasis was on white supremacy and black lives with a view to reinforcing their allotted role as “temporary sojourners,” welcome in “white” South Africa solely to serve the needs of the employers of labour.
However, these same programmes of control became the focus of resistance. In particular, the campaign against the pass laws formed a cornerstone of the struggle.

The introduction of apartheid policies coincided with the adoption by the ANC in 1949 of its programme of action, expressing the renewed militancy of the 1940s. The programme embodied the rejection of white domination and a call for action in the form of protests, strikes and demonstrations. This led to the creation of the Federation of South African Women (FSAW), which included women from all races.

In 1956, the Freedom Charter was drawn up at the Congress of People of Soweto. The charter enunciated the principles of the struggle, binding the movement to a culture of human rights and non-racialism. The country was divided into five sectors, in particular intellectuals and the student movement, to integrate and coalesce.

The resurgence of resistance politics in the early 1970s was dramatic. The Black Consciousness Movement, led by Steve Biko (who was killed in detention in 1977), reawakened a sense of pride and self-esteem in black people. News of the brutal death of Biko reverberated around the globe and led to unprecedented outrage.

The renewed militancy of the 1940s and the rising cost of living led to unprecedented anger among black people in the country. Armed action was contained by the state.

State repression played a central role in containing internal resistance, and the leadership of the struggle shifted increasingly to the missions in exile. At the same time, the ANC leadership embarked on a campaign to infiltrate the country through what was then Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).

In August 1967, a joint force of MK and the Zimbabwean People’s Revolutionary Army (Zipra) of the Zimbabwe African People’s Union entered Zimbabwe, and over a two-month period engaged the joint Rhodesian and South African security forces. Although the joint MK-Zipra force failed to reach South Africa, this was the first military confrontation between the military forces of the ANC-led alliance and white security forces.

The resurgence of resistance politics in the early 1970s was dramatic. The Black Consciousness Movement, led by Steve Biko (who was killed in detention in 1977), reawakened a sense of pride and self-esteem in black people.

In this period, leaders of other organisations, including the PAC and the New Unity Movement, were also sentenced to long terms of imprisonment and/or banned. The 1960s was a decade of overwhelming repression and relative political disarray among black people in the country. Armed action was contained by the state.
Developments in neighbouring states, where mass resistance to white minority and colonial rule led to Portuguese decolonisation in the mid-1970s and the abdication of Zimbabwe’s minority regime in 1980, left South Africa exposed as the last bastion of white supremacy.

Under growing pressure and increasingly isolated internationally, the government embarked on a dual strategy, introducing limited reform coupled with intensifying repression and militarisation of society, with the objective of containing the pressures and increasing its support base while crushing organised resistance. An early example of reform was the recognition of black trade unions to try to stabilise labour relations. In 1983, the Constitution was reformed to allow the coloured and Indian minorities limited participation in separate and subordinate houses of Parliament.

The vast majority of these groups demonstrated their rejection of the tricameral dispensation through massive boycotts of elections, but it was kept in place by the apartheid regime despite its visible lack of legitimacy. Attempts to legitimise community councils as vehicles for the participation of blacks outside the Bantustans in local government met a similar fate.

Militarisation included the ascendency of the State Security Council, which usurped the role of the executive in crucial respects, and a succession of states of emergency as part of the implementation of a comprehensive counter-insurgency strategy to combat what, by the mid-1980s, was an endemic insurrectionary spirit in the land.

However, by the late 1980s, popular resistance was taking the form of mass defiance campaigns, while struggles over more occupied large sections of communities mobilised in united action. Popular support for released political prisoners and for the armed struggle was being openly expressed.

In response to the rising tide of resistance, the international community strengthened its support for the anti-apartheid cause. Sanctions and boycotts were instituted, both unilaterally and across racial divides, and yearned for international respectability.

In 1982, disenchanted hardliners split from the NP to form the Conservative Party, leaving the NP open to more flexible and modernising influences. After this split, factions within the Afrikaner elite openly started to pronounce in favour of a more inclusive organisational strategy, which became increasingly militaristic and authoritarian.

A number of business, student and academic Afrikaners held meetings publicly and privately with the ANC in exile. Secret talks were held between the imprisoned Mandela and government ministers about a new dispensation for South Africa, with black people forming a major part of it.

Inside the country, mass action became the order of the day. Petty apartheid laws and symbols were openly challenged, and the integration of South Africa into a rapidly changing global economy was inevitable.

The First Decade of Freedom

After a long negotiation process, sustained despite much opportunistic violence from the right wing and its surrogates, and in some instances sanctioned by elements of the State, South Africa’s first democratic election was held in April 1994 under an interim Constitution.

The Interim Constitution divided South Africa into nine new provinces in place of the previous four provinces and 10 homelands, and provided for the Government of National Unity (GNU) to be constituted by all parties with at least 20 seats in the National Assembly.

The compliant NP and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) formed part of the GNU until 1996, when the NP withdrew. The ANC-led government embarked on a programme to promote the reconstruction and development of the country and its institutions.

This called for the simultaneous pursuit of democratisation and socio-economic change, as well as reconciliation and the building of consensus founded on the commitment to improve the lives of all South Africans, in particular the poor. It required the integration of South Africa into a rapidly changing global environment.

Pursuit of these objectives was a consistent focus of government during the first decade of freedom, seeking the unity of a previously divided society in working together to overcome the legacy of a history of division, exclusion and neglect.

Converting democratic ideals into practice required, among other things, initiating a radical overhaul of the machinery of government at every level, working towards service delivery, openness and a culture of human rights. It has required a more integrated approach to planning and implementation to ensure that the many different aspects of transformation and socio-economic upliftment cohere with maximum impact.

A significant milestone in the democratisation of South Africa was the exemplary Constitution-making process, which in 1996 delivered a document that has evoked worldwide admiration. So, too, have been the national and local government elections subsequent to 1994 – all conducted peacefully, with high levels of participation and accountability and accepted by all as free and fair in their conduct and results.

Since 2001, participatory democracy and interactive governance have been strengthened through the practice of public participation, roving executive council and mayoral meetings, in which members of the Executive, in all three spheres of government, including The Presidency, regularly communicate directly with the public about the implementation of programmes of reconstruction and development.

The second democratic national election in 1999 saw the ANC majority increase to just short of two-thirds and the election of Thabo Mbeki as President and successor to Mandela. It saw a sharp decline in the popularity of the NP (then the New National Party [NNP]) and its replacement by the Democratic Party as the official opposition in Parliament. These two parties formed the Democratic Alliance (DA), which the NNP left in 2001.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), under the leadership of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, helped inculcate a commitment to accountability and transparency in South Africa’s public life, at the same time helping to heal wounds inflicted by the inhumanities of the apartheid era.

During 2003, Parliament accepted government’s response to the final report of the TRC. Out of 22 000 survivors or surviving families of the structure of organised resistance, 19 000 were identified as needing urgent reparations assistance – virtually all, where the necessary information was available, received interim reparations.

As final reparations, government provided a once-off grant of R30 000 to innumerable survivors of violent death before and were designated by the TRC, over and above the programmes for material assistance. There are continuing programmes to project the symbolism of the struggle and the ideal of freedom.
During the first decade of freedom, it acted at various times as chair of the Southern African Development Community, NAM, AU and the Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings. It hosted several international conferences, including the UN Conference on Trade and Development in 1996, the 2000 World AIDS Congress, the World Conference Against Racism in 2001, the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 and the World Parks Congress in 2003. The country has also been represented in international forums such as the International Monetary Fund’s Development Committee and Interpol.

The Second Decade of Freedom

When South Africa celebrated 10 years of freedom in 2004, there were celebrations across the world in countries whose peoples had helped to bring freedom to South Africa through their solidarity, and who today are partners in reconstruction and development. As government took stock of the first decade of freedom in the Towards a Ten Year Review, it was able to document great progress by South Africans in pursuit of their goals, as well as the challenges that face the nation as it traverses the second decade of its freedom towards 2014.

In its third democratic elections, in April 2004, the country gave an increased mandate to the Government’s programme for reconstruction and development and for the entrenchment of the rights in the Constitution. It mandated government specifically to create the prerequisites for halving unemployment and poverty by 2014. Following these elections, President Mbeki was appointed to a second term of office – a position he relinquished in September 2008, following the decision of the National Executive Committee of the ANC to recall him. Parliament elected Kgalema Motlanthe as President of South Africa on 25 September 2008.

Local government elections in 2006, following a long period of civic unrest as communities protested against a mixed record of service delivery, saw increased participation compared with the previous local elections, as well as increased support for the ruling party based on a manifesto for a concerted effort, in partnership with communities, to make local government work better for all communities.

South Africa held national and provincial elections to elect a new National Assembly as well as the provincial legislature in each province on 22 April 2009. Some 23 million people were registered for the 2009 general election, which was about 2.5 million more than in 2004. About 77% of registered voters turned out in the election. In the election, only three political parties were as follows: the ANC achieved 65.9%, the DA 16.6%; the newly-formed Democratic Alliance (DA) 4.5% and the Independent Democrats 0.9% of the votes cast.

Jacob Zuma was inaugurated as President of South Africa on 9 May 2009. Shortly thereafter, President Zuma announced several changes to existing government departments and the creation of new structures within The Presidency. The latter essentially comprised the Ministry for Performance Monitoring, Evaluation and Administration, and the National Planning Commission (NPC). The minister responsible for Administration, in the National Planning Commission (NPC), Minister Trevor Manuel, handed the revised NDP 2030 over to President Zuma during a Joint Sitting of both Houses in Parliament. The revised document, entitled Our future – make it work, is a policy blueprint for eliminating poverty and reducing inequality in South Africa by 2030.

Implementation of the plan will be broken up into five-year chunks, in line with the electoral cycle, with the 2014 to 2019 medium-term strategic framework forming the first five-year building block.

The Presidency will lead the formulation of the 2014 to 2019 medium-term strategic framework, which includes key targets from the NDP and other plans such as the New Growth Path, National Infrastructure Plan and Industry Policy Action Plan.

There is an urgent need for the Government to ensure that plans and budgets are aligned, and develop clear performance indicators for each programme.
Government will focus on areas where implementation of existing policies needs to improve and will hold focused discussions to overcome obstacles to implementation. It will also engage with other sectors to understand how they are contributing to the NDP’s implementation and to identify any obstacles they face.

The 2019 to 2024 and 2024 to 2029 planning cycles will be used to initiate the remaining activities and will be informed by a performance review of the previous cycle.

The objective of a better life for the people of South Africa, the continent of Africa and the world at large was at the heart of the country’s successful hosting of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change’s 17th Conference of the Parties in Durban towards the end of 2011. Aware of the fact that Africa is the continent most affected by the impact of climate change, South Africa was committed to ensuring that Durban delivered a fair and balanced outcome that would help secure the future of our planet. The resulting Durban Platform outcome was a coup for South Africa and the African continent.

South Africa has continued to build on its international profile. On 1 January 2011, South Africa began its second term as a nonpermanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) for the period 2011 and 2012. South Africa serves alongside the five permanent members, China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and elected members Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Colombia, Gabon, Germany, India, Lebanon, Nigeria and Portugal. In January 2012, the UNSC President saw the adoption of Resolution 2033 that provides for closer cooperation between the UN and the ANC.

In the conduct of its international relations, South Africa is committed to garnering support for its domestic priorities, promoting the interests of the African continent, enhancing democracy and human rights, upholding justice and international law in relations between nations, seeking the peaceful resolution of conflicts and promoting economic development through regional and international cooperation in an interdependent world.

On 8 January 2012, Africa’s oldest liberation movement, the ANC, celebrated 100 years of existence. This was a historic achievement, not only for the movement, but also for South Africa, the continent and the world. Thousands of ordinary South Africans, political and religious leaders attended the centenary celebrations which were held in Mangaung, Free State, the birthplace of the ANC.

On 25 May 2012 the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) Organisation announced that the SKA Project would be shared between South Africa and Australia, with a majority share coming to South Africa. The full dish array and the dense aperture array will be built in Africa. The core, i.e. the region with the highest concentration of receivers, will be constructed in the Northern Cape, about 800 km from the town of Carnarvon (the same site where MeerKAT is being constructed). The sparse aperture array (low-frequency array) will be built in Western Australia.

Over the next few years, teams of radio astronomy scientists and engineers from around the world will work together to scope and finalise the design of the SKA.

In July 2012, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, then Minister of Home Affairs, was elected as the first female head of the AU Commission and the first person from South Africa to hold this position. In September 2012, she received the UN South-South Development Award for Global Leadership.

In November 2012, South Africa was elected by the members of the UN General Assembly to the UN’s 47-member Economic and Social Council (ECosoc). It is one of the principal organs of the UN, alongside the Security Council and General Assembly. South Africa completed its two-year non-renewable, nonpermanent membership of the Security Council on 31 December 2012, and immediately assumed the membership of ECosoc on 1 January 2013. South Africa last served in ECosoc from 2004 to 2006.

 Released in September 2012, the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Report 2012/13 confirmed that South Africa remained the most competitive economy in sub-Saharan Africa.

On 30 October 2012, Statistics South Africa released the Census 2011 results. The census, which analysed the country’s demographics, population distribution and access to services, showed an average household size, income, migration, and mortality, was the first national census conducted in the post-apartheid period in South Africa. Results showed that the country’s population grew to 51,8 million people from 44,8 million in 2001, representing a 15,5% increase over the last decade.

In December 2012, President Zuma was re-elected as the president of the ANC during the ruling party’s congress in Mangaung. Cyril Ramaphosa was elected as the party’s deputy president.

In July 2013, Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, was appointed executive director of the UN Women’s Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, and Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, was appointed director in the UN Development Programme’s Bureau for Development Policy.

While receiving intensive medical care at home for a lung infection after spending three months in hospital, South Africa’s first democratically elected President and anti-apartheid icon, Nelson Mandela, died at the age of 95, on 5 December 2013. Mr Mandela led South Africa’s transition from white-minority rule in the end of the apartheid era in 1994, and the first held since the death of Nelson Mandela. It was also the first time that South African expatriates were allowed to vote in a South African national election.

The National Assembly election was won by the ANC (62,1%). The official opposition, Democratic Alliance (DA) won 22,2% of the votes, while the newly formed Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) obtained 6,4% of the vote.

Eight of the nine provincial legislatures were won by the ANC. The EFF obtained over 10% of the votes in Gauteng, Limpopo and North West, and beat the DA to second place in Limpopo and North West. In the other six provinces won by the ANC, the DA obtained second place. In the Western Cape, the only province not won by the ANC, the DA increased its majority from 51,5% to 59,4%.

In December 2013, the discovery of Homo naledi, an extinct species of hominin, in September 2015 became worldwide news. In 2015, South Africa celebrated the 60th Anniversary of the Freedom Charter, which advocated for a non-racial South Africa.

The 40th Anniversary of the 16 June 1976 Soweto Student Uprising was celebrated in 2016, along with the 20th Anniversary of the signing of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996.

The 2016 Local Government Elections were held on 3 August 2016. The ANC won 53,9% of the total votes, followed by the official opposition DA with 26,9% and the EFF with 8,2%.