

South Africa Inequality Report

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Executive Summary

Data

Only one data set on wealth and status distribution in South Africa was available: the 2016 World Bank income quintiles.

Results

South Africa ranks as the third highest risk acceptant population in the world and while the lowest income sector of society is very risk acceptant, the highest income sector is more risk acceptant by roughly 250%. This difference is likely due to the monumental class divisions in South African society, where income inequality in the country has not significantly improved since the end of apartheid.

Significance for Risk Taking and Stability

South Africa is a key regional actor that assumes important political roles on the African continent, it also has the second largest economy on the continent. Internally, South African politics are slowly shifting away from a one-party democracy to a multi-party one, largely due to the lack of improvement in economic inequality and corruption. Inter-racial divisions still exist in South Africa and intra-racial divisions have steadily increased. With economic growth stagnating in recent years, exacerbated by corruption scandals of the ANC leadership, both the very poor and very rich are highly risk acceptant and skeptical about the government.

Implications for US Interests

The primary interest of the US is to prevent South Africa from politically aligning with Russia or China, and to continue a relatively good existing relationship. However, given the mounting domestic tension and an electorate that expects a great deal of anti-corruption and economic reforms to succeed, the status quo is in a precarious position. If the recently elected Cyril Ramaphosa cannot produce the results he campaigned on, then the political stability the ANC has offered South Africa over the past decades can evaporate, and less friendly governments may align South Africa away from the US.

Implications for China's Interests

China has been investing heavily for years in South Africa and is Pretoria's most important trading partner. While Ramaphosa is more inclined to the Western political order, his economic initiatives necessitate \$100 billion in investment and Beijing is a prime candidate donor. The extreme wealth inequality and class divisions in a democratic country imply a magnitude of latent instability that can jeopardize Chinese economic interests. The way China operates their investments in South Africa is of paramount concern and Beijing must navigate through a highly divided South African society and avoid the appearance of increasing inequality and exploitation of South Africans.

Implications for Russia's Interests

Russia has little foothold in South Africa either economically or by political influence, and this has lessened even more so after the departure of former South African president Jacob Zuma. Russia can thus view

the highly risk acceptant nature of South African society in opportunistic fashion; whereby fomenting anti-Western rhetoric among the risk acceptant poor and enticing the wealthy elite through corruption, could be a feasible strategy for Russia to disrupt US and Chinese influence.

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Introduction

This is a summary report on inequality in South Africa compiled as part of the Aggrieved Populations project conducted in support of the 2019 Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Future of Great Power Competition and Conflict project conducted for the JS-J39.

This report provides background on why the country was chosen, relevant historical background, literature review concerning inequality in the country, synopses of empirical data sources and analyses, and a concluding section that summarizes the findings. It is not intended to provide a comprehensive analysis of inequality and grievance in the country, but to place the empirical analyses conducted on this country in their social and political context and to highlight interesting cases of inequality pertinent to risk acceptance and great power competition. The analyses focus on the measurement of population risk sensitivity as a function of measured inequality using the Arrow-Pratt measure of risk aversion, whose positive values indicate risk aversion and negative values indicate risk acceptance. Studies have shown that risk acceptance is associated with social unrest, terrorism, and other forms of social disruption (Kuznar 2007; 2019). The full explanation of the underlying method and theory is presented in the summary report, *Inequality, Risk Sensitivity and Grievance in Context: Summary of Aggrieved Populations Country Reports*, submitted as part of this SMA project. This report is intended to be supporting material to that report and presumes familiarity with it.

In order to create an inclusive and more representative set of countries, an effort was made to analyze countries from each major region of the world (Africa, Central Asia, East Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, North America, South Asia).

Why South Africa?

South Africa was chosen for three reasons: 1) Its history of social cleavages and racial tensions, 2) it has one of the highest degrees of inequality in the world, 3) it is a regional focus of great power competition due to its high degree of symbolic and political influence in Africa (Lannegren & Ito, 2017).

Great Power Interests in South Africa

South Africa is an African leader as well as “a key player in global governance” (Lannegren & Ito, 2017), and historically, Pretoria has also been an important regional power during the Cold War as an important buffer to Soviet influence in Sub-Saharan Africa.¹ South Africa was also viewed during this period by many nations as an international pariah as the colonial era ended and apartheid still gripped the nation. Since the end of Apartheid in the 1990s, South Africa reasserted itself as an economic and political powerhouse in Africa and on the world stage. In the age of great power competition, South Africa is poised to become a focal point on the continent for competing influence from the US, Russia, and China. In addition, South Africa is preparing to join the UN Security Council².

South Africa has been a significant trading partner with the US since the end of apartheid and has been a beneficiary of American foreign aid.³ Trade is at the forefront for US interests in South Africa since

¹ Even developing a nuclear weapons program in the 1960's that voluntarily disarmed after 1989.

² The term lasting from 2019-2020.

³ USAID programs “strengthen small- and medium-sized enterprises, create employment, improve learning and job skills, promote basic education, combat gender-based violence, and promote HIV/AIDS care, prevention and treatment” (USAID, 2019).

Pretoria is a crucial member of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which promotes free trade with select African economies. Politically, the US seeks to maintain South Africa as a non-aligned democracy that is economically self-reliant. For example, President Trump's 2018 Africa strategy explicitly denounces Chinese FDI initiatives as imposing "undue costs" (The White House, 2018).

As a member of one of the BRICS states, South Africa is an important economic and geo-strategic partner for Russia. Russia had no colonial ambitions in Africa but did have a very antagonistic relationship with Pretoria during the Cold War. Consequently, there is a degree of hesitation from factions within South African politics to develop more of a relationship with Moscow.⁴ Through the BRICS institution, President Vladimir Putin has pushed for Russia's nuclear state owned enterprise (SOE) Rosatom for a deal to construct nuclear power plants in South Africa; however, since the exit of then President Jacob Zuma, South Africa's new president has dismissed such an initiative as too expensive at the moment (Winning, 2018).⁵ Importantly, South Africa has also repeatedly voted in favor of Russia in UN hearings on the Russian/Ukrainian crisis (UN, 2019), marking South Africa as an important political ally.

China has demonstrated a high level of economic interest in South Africa. Economically, China is South Africa's largest trading partner and also contributes more than double what the US does in financial direct investment (FDI) (Torrens, 2018). This magnitude of economic partnership makes China strategically important to South Africa, and Beijing has even provided anti-piracy assistance to Pretoria (Natulya, 2019). In 2015, China named South Africa a "Strategic Comprehensive Partner" and as an example of China's soft power outreach it is reportedly funding an ANC political school (Anthony, 2016).

Literature Review on Inequality in South Africa

South Africa is often the preeminent case study of inequality based on racial and colonial discrimination dating back hundreds of years and formally ending in 1994. Such codified discrimination severely limited political representation, legal rights, land and capital ownership, employment opportunities and a host of other rights of the indigenous African population⁶. Since the end of apartheid, South Africa has struggled to overcome the inequality induced by apartheid, despite decades of political reforms and the uninterrupted governance of Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) party since 1994. Inequality of South Africa is dire, and despite alleviation from the apartheid system, income inequality has risen since 1994 (Piketty, 2017).

There are many explanations for the sustained inequality—absent legal discrimination—not the least of which are the persisting racial cleavages in a society that still lacks social cohesion⁷. Despite this, an examination of inequality between the races in post-Apartheid South Africa reveals that intra-race

⁴⁴ Particularly due to Russia's involvement in "Nenegate," where in 2015 former finance minister Nhlanhla Nene refused to sign a \$70 billion USD nuclear energy deal with Russia's Rosatom, and was subsequently fired by the Zuma administration (Foy, Astrasheuskaya, & Pilling, 2019). Further elevation of the economic relationship between Pretoria and Moscow has been negatively viewed by Zuma's political opponents and there are also allegations of Russia seeking to influence elections to increase support for the ruling ANC party (Burke & Harding, 2019).

⁵ However ANC Treasurer commented that "Once we are clear that this is affordable for us to do, we are open for business including with Russia."

⁶ In fact, Nancy and William contend that by the 1980s, much of the black population were legally considered "foreigners" in their own land (2011, p. 37).

⁷ A 2015 SARB found that a little over two thirds of South Africans "have little or no trust in people of other racial groups" (Meiring, Kannemeyer, & Kannemeyer, 2018). However, The lack of social cohesion in South Africa cannot solely be attributed to the heritage of apartheid, as South Africa (as is typical of African nations) is ethnically diverse with 10 official national languages (dozens more unofficial) and over 500,000 refugees/asylum seekers from neighboring countries (UNHCR, 2015).

inequality has overtaken inter-race inequality; intra-race income inequality increased from 48% of total inequality in 1993 to 62% of total inequality in 2008 (Leibbrandt, Finn, & Woolard, 2012). Moreover, when considering wealth ownership vs. income distribution, 2016 survey data revealed that the top decile of South Africans own “at least 90-95% percent of all wealth, compared to 55-60% of all labor incomes”⁸ (Orthofer, 2016).

While the concentration of wealth in the ruling elite of South Africa due to hundreds of years of colonial/apartheid rule is a significant obstacle to overcome in any scenario, the ANC has struggled in recent years to coherently address issues of inequality. The ANC’s struggles have also translated to diminishing support, the ANC won the 2016 municipal elections with only 54% of the vote (Lannegren & Ito, 2017).⁹ The task of governing the South African economy was monumental in a fractious society and political landscape with viewpoints that competed between nationalizing economic control or a more neo-liberal approach to government policies that promote macro-economic development (Mosala, Venter & Bain, 2017). These scholars have argued that improvement in the South African economy can be attributed to the neo-liberal approach, but the glaring issue of inequality has not diminished.

Whatever policy enacted by the South African government, any indication of progress or successful measures to improve economic equality have been hampered by corruption. A 2011 report listed roughly 3% of the national budget being lost to fraud and the former ANC president Jacob Zuma has been plagued with corruption scandals dating back to 1995 (Lannegren & Ito, 2017). Lannegren & Ito (2017) also point to scholars who attribute the continual corruption as an inheritance of the previous apartheid regime.

Country-Level Measures of Inequality in South Africa

South Africa was initially assessed with a collection of country-level metrics. These metrics provide measures of the country’s inequality compared to other nations, inequality within the country, social conditions that may be consequences of that inequality, and the prognosis for stability in the future (Table 1).

South Africa is a developing country and is also among the strongest economies in the world in terms of GDP, ranking 29th out of 184 countries. However, given its severe inequality, its national per capita GDP is \$6,180, placing it in the middle thirty percent of countries, reflecting its status as a developing nation. It also has a very low Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI), placing it in the lower third of countries. South Africa has been nearly the most unequal nation in the world for decades and its Gini coefficient ranks in the top three of all countries.

South Africa’s unemployment rate is at 27% ranking it second highest in the world according to the World Bank, which is roughly three times the rate for unemployment globally and in Africa. Interestingly, the informal economic employment in South Africa is much smaller compared to the rest of the developing World. Research on the “churning” (i.e., the migration flow of workers in and out of jobs) from informal to formal economic employment is limited to only 27% of informal sector workers, with 34% remaining in the informal economy and the remainder no longer looking for work or are unemployed (Nackerdien &

⁸ Where there is a Gini coefficient of .95 for wealth ownership, and a Gini coefficient of .7 for incomes in this research.

⁹ The ANC has won elections consistently since 1994 with approximately 60-70% of the electorate, with Jacob Zuma even commenting in 2004 that “the ANC party would rule South Africa until Jesus comes back” (Lannegren & Ito, 2017).

Yu, 2019). Both insights lend the notion that South African society is extremely fractious and divided among class lines, and the poor sectors of South Africa have few opportunities to climb out of poverty.

South Africa ranks fairly high among measures of state instability even though it is not embroiled in any civil or inter-state conflict, and understandably so given the high levels of racial tensions and the magnitude of inequality. This is also explained by South Africa's territorial adjacency to unstable nations that contribute to hundreds of thousands of refugees and many more asylum seekers.

Table 1. South Africa: Basic Statistics on Inequality

Measure	Value	Rank	Source
Inequality Compared to Other Nations			
Per Capita GDP 2018	\$6180	87 of 187	WB
Country Measures of Inequality			
Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI) 2018	0.467	103 of 151	UN
Gini Coefficient	63%	36 of 184	WB
Informal Employment as % of Total Employment	34.0%	74 of 112	ILO
Measures of State Instability			
Fragile States Index	72.9	84 of 175	FFP
Terrorism Index	4.263	46 of 160	IEP
Probability of Mass Killing	0.009	62 of 161	EWP
Risk Sensitivity			
Average Arrow-Pratt Measure	-6.13	156 of 158	This Study
<p>*EWP – Early Warning Project, FFP – Fund for Peace, IEP – Institute for Economics and Peace, ILO – International Labor Organization, UN – United Nations, WB – World Bank</p> <p>-The Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI) is a UN measure of well-being and is a scale based on per capita GDP, life expectancy and education levels of the population.</p> <p>- The Fragile States Index is based on twelve conflict risk that include security apparatus, factionalized elites, group grievance, economy, economic inequality, human flight and brain drain, public services, state legitimacy, human rights and rule of law, demographic pressure, refugees and IDPs, and external interventions. The potential range of the index is zero (no fragility to 120 total fragility).</p> <p>- The Terrorism Index scores each country on a scale from 0 to 10; where 0 represents no impact from terrorism and 10 represents the highest measurable impact of terrorism.</p>			

Prognosis for Change to 2029

South Africa is seeking strong job and economic growth in a time where they face the highest amount of political uncertainty since the end of apartheid. The rocky, scandal-ridden presidency of Jacob Zuma left the ANC facing the emergence of South Africa as a multi-party democracy; however, the ANC appears to be incrementally rising in popularity following the 2019 general election that saw Cyril Ramaphosa¹⁰ lead the ANC to victory with 58% of the vote by campaigning on economic and corruption reforms. However, given the stagnation in economic growth, particularly among the poorest of South African society, voter turnout has steadily declined, and the “born free generation” (young voters born since the fall of apartheid) generally views the ANC as a “standard political party” (Campbell, 2019).¹¹ If Ramaphosa

¹⁰ It also noteworthy that Ramaphosa won election within the ANC with only a 52%-48% majority in 2017 (Calland & Temin, 2018).

¹¹ Rather than the revolutionary party of Mandela and the individuals that brought down apartheid.

and the ANC fail to deliver on campaign promises, there is a high likelihood that the ANC will continue to enjoy political hegemony and a political vacuum will emerge.

Domestic governance in South Africa also faces a looming debt crisis, inflation and a desperate need for numerous reforms¹². President Ramaphosa's plans to address these concerns entail ambitious plans of a \$100 billion USD investment in South Africa that depends on South Africa's ailing international reputation for FDI (Calland & Temin, 2018). An OECD report contends that economic growth will slowly increase but is fragile and "will remain vulnerable to policy uncertainties and external shocks;" consequentially the political stability of South Africa is highly uncertain. Should Ramaphosa and the ANC fail, it will likely further compound with the crisis of inequality already facing the country.

¹² Important among these being land reforms.

Empirical Data on Inequality in South Africa

Dataset 1: 2016 South Africa World Bank Quintile Data

The World Bank provides data on lowest and highest decile, and quintiles of percentage of income or consumption.¹³ These data are used to calculate their Gini coefficients. While not exactly measuring the actual income, the percentage of overall income provides an approximation. The South African data were gathered in 2016. **Error! Reference source not found.** presents the original data and the fitted distribution curve from which the Arrow-Pratt risk sensitivity measures will be derived, as well as the Arrow-Pratt measures of risk sensitivity.

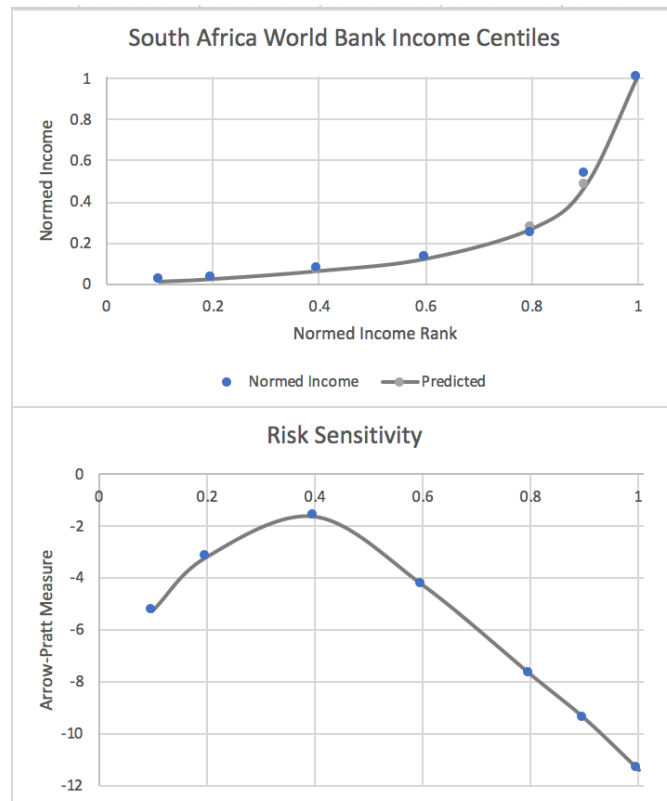


Figure 1: Distribution of Income, World Bank Quintiles South Africa 2014 and associated Risk Sensitivity.

Summary Dataset 1: 2014 South Africa World Bank Quintile Data

The risk sensitivity data paints a picture of a risk-loving population. The average Arrow-Pratt measure of risk sensitivity is -6.13 with respect to these data, which is well below the average of -4.64 for all countries and ranks it in the 98th percentile of risk sensitivity (**Error! Reference source not found.**). Furthermore, the lowest decile of society is approximately as risk acceptant as the rest of the world, and the highest decile is nearly three times as risk acceptant as the global average, making this sector of South African society one of the most risk acceptant populations in the world.

¹³ Data drawn from: <http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/1.3>

Findings on Inequality in South Africa

Relevance to Instability and Social Cleavages

Since the end of apartheid, South Africa has transitioned to a peaceful¹⁴ country that enjoys representative democratic institutions and fair elections. Truth and reconciliation commissions following the conclusion of apartheid were also historically successful in advancing national and racial unity. Despite all of this, racial divisions remain and class divisions have emerged intra-racially, thus maintaining South Africa's inordinate inequality, which leads to the unusually high-risk acceptance of nearly the entire population. The revolutionary honeymoon that the ANC and the post-apartheid political system enjoyed is also coming to an end, as the new generation of South African's are formally entering societal life. These tensions are likely to bear fruit in the coming decades and the cracks are likely to manifest in the social cleavages brought on by the inequality of the nation. The country's precarious economic position and the inaction of the Pretorian government or the failure of such policies as land reform are liable to resurrect latent and magnify overt racism.

Opportunities and Pitfalls for the US and Adversaries

The US has not seriously altered its relationship with South Africa over the past decade, a policy apparently continued by the Trump administration. An exception would be when President Trump tweeted "alleging that South Africa's government was seizing white-owned farmland and that large numbers of farmers were being killed, however, drew criticism from the South African government" (Cook, 2019). The US must also be aware of China's growing economic influence, particularly since President Ramaphosa is seeking \$100 billion USD in investment as the cornerstone of his economic policy. Ramaphosa is also reported to be more wary of BRICS engagement and is suggested to have a more Western, neo-liberal inclination¹⁵ (Calland & Temin, 2018), presenting an opportunity for the US to capitalize on its soft power capability to receive gestures of political goodwill from Pretoria.

Given these circumstances, the US should be wary of the extremely polarized and risk acceptant nature of South African society, despite the fact that President Ramaphosa is far less antagonistic to Western interests than Jacob Zuma. The success of the Ramaphosa led ANC would be beneficial for the US interest of South Africa remaining politically aligned to the neo-liberal world order. USAID programs that can improve inequality among the highly risk acceptant poor may reinforce the popular legitimacy of Ramaphosa's administration and improve the goodwill between him and the West.

China

China is likely to continue its expansionist economic outreach and capitalize on the Ramaphosa government's need for FDI. China has little need for political support from Pretoria and therefore both nations can engage in a lucrative economic partnership free from significantly costly political overhead¹⁶. Two obstacles remain to Beijing however, the first and foremost being the economic stability of South Africa as an investment, and the animosity from the US in China's economic activities as they are. While the latter concern has yet to materialize in a tangible way¹⁷ the former poses a serious concern to Beijing.

¹⁴ I.e., largely devoid of political violence, relative to the rest of Africa.

¹⁵ Relatively speaking to Zuma's heavier association with the communist roots of the ANC and his overall anti-Western political leanings.

¹⁶ Torrens contends that Ramaphosa "avoids antagonistic relations, and focuses more on consensus and compromise: he will not attempt to play West off against East and will not show political bias in favour of one side or the other," and China is notoriously uninterested in the domestic politics of their economic partners.

¹⁷ South Africa did suffer from initial US Steel and aluminum tariffs, but was later exempted (Cook, 2019)

High levels of crime in South Africa can put Chinese nationals at risk and Chinese Yuan and workers pouring into South Africa can be received negatively by poor communities that may view Beijing as exploiting South African resources, increasing this danger (Torrens, 2018). Such incidents could be detrimental to China's reputation domestic and abroad, especially if business transactions are aligned to high profile political scandals. Such scandals are not unlikely, given how extraordinarily risk acceptant the elites of South Africa society are, and the involvement of Chinese involvement in scandalized corruption could endanger China's reputation internationally and hurt their economic interests across South Africa.

Russia

While Russia has the least amount of interest in the region of the US and China, it is still seeking to exert influence and offer a non-Western alternative of international political spheres to Pretoria. While Russia has seemingly been stymied in their efforts to exploit their role as an energy superpower in the region, Russia can still utilize the mechanism of BRICS and political overtures through the UN and other institutions to reach out to South Africa and curry political support in Moscow's endeavors across the African continent and worldwide.

Given the political leanings of Ramaphosa compared to Jacob Zuma, who enthusiastically supported the non-Western BRICS and pursued nuclear-technical cooperation with Russia, the undermining of the Ramaphosa administration could be in Russia's favor. In this regard, the highly risk acceptant nature of South African society at both ends of the income distribution could be potentially be target of Russian influence campaigns. In such a scenario, aligning the poor risk acceptant sector of society to non-Western partnerships can stoke civil unrest and allow Russia to become more engaged in South Africa as a mediator, or even offer security/energy cooperation to the South African elite in a time where the West may be unable to do likewise in the event of a humanitarian crisis.

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