



INDLULAMITHI

SOUTH AFRICA SCENARIOS



INDLULAMITHI SCENARIOS 2035

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The world is now far hotter, and sea levels are rising faster, than expected. Many nations at least try to reduce their carbon emissions, but climate change has made food security in poorer countries more precarious than ever. Pandemics have become more routine.

The global economy has shifted sharply eastwards: China is the world's largest economy and India is ranked third.

AI-driven technology has democratised access to education and spurred global productivity; it has also disrupted entire industries and eliminated millions of jobs globally.

One in 5 people in the world - nearly 2 billion - live in Africa. In South Africa, only 4 million of the nearly 20 million who voted in 1994 are still alive.

What is South Africa like in 2035? How prosperous are its people? How cohesive is its society? How far has it come in the 40 years since the dawn of democracy? Many futures are possible; these scenarios capture three possible trajectories for South Africa in 2035.



HADEDA HOME

The Recrimination Nation

Into the 2030s, temperatures, prices and tempers have risen. South Africans cluster in enclaves protected by private armadas or neighbourhood protection teams; unscrupulous consortia extort private construction projects and plunder municipal treasuries. Like hadedas, members of the elite screech shrilly at each other, oblivious to the nation and the fragmenting.

Nationally, a centrist social democratic coalition governs South Africa. But party leaders exert control; everything is negotiated. Decision making and policy implementation are slow. In some areas, local and provincial coalition governments restore semblances of good governance, but, elsewhere, alliances are unprincipled and self-interested.

Graft increases as critical infrastructure crumbles. Water supplies are erratic, and although loadshedding is now rare, half the population still can't afford digital connectivity for more than an hour a day.

Roof-top solar and hydrogen energy have not scaled quickly enough to prevent further economic downturns. AI and automation have transformed the world of work but have eliminated more jobs than they have created. The national unemployment rate is 37%, and youth unemployment hovers around 55%. Measures of income and wealth inequality have hardly shifted and remain among the highest in the world.

Crime has evolved from disorganised and contingent to systemic and structured, as South Africa becomes a magnet for global criminality. South Africans are sicker. Almost half of the population over 40 battles with obesity, and diabetes prevalence soars. South Africa has the highest HIV burden globally, even though both status knowledge and treatment rates are high.

With social trust broken down, the stance is defensive. Walls are high, and basic goods are commonly stockpiled. Despite the well-run 2034 election, grumpy South Africans share few common goals beyond occasional sporting successes and survival. Everywhere, people are on edge: the blame game is the national sport. Unease and foreboding gather; the incessant noise of the hadedas coming home to roost grows louder.

VULTURE CULTURE

The Desperation Nation



In South Africa's Vulture Culture, scavengers – domestic and foreign – seem to hold the upper hand, ripping the skin from the body politic.

The liberal right-of-centre coalition that took power in 2024 alienated citizens with its austerity and repressive crime-fighting tactics, giving way in 2029 to a fragile populist coalition. The new coalition government embraced an authoritarian populism at odds with the constitution, lashing out at critics and journalists, denigrating migrants, and seemingly working with criminal syndicates. The spoils of office and the budgets of SOEs are carved up and served to the connected. Those able to do so increasingly decamp to South Africa's booming neighbouring countries or further afield for opportunities unavailable at home. Those who remain hustle more than ever, and contend with broken public health facilities, contaminated water supplies, and rickety infrastructure.

Social media-driven voter suppression tactics confused and demoralised potential oppositions, as do wide-scale arrests for 'subversion'. Despite its poor governing record, the coalition was re-elected in 2034, gaining from the lowest-ever voter turnout in a national election. The government used its incumbency to reward core followers, close democratic space, and harass opposition parties and NGOs. The SABC has again become a pliant state broadcaster, beaming out crude pro-government 'sunshine journalism'.

Organised crime syndicates seize the initiative from an increasingly disorganised and corrupt state.

Official unemployment rates exceed 43%; youth unemployment soars above 60%.

Fiscal catastrophe looms as South Africa borrows from anyone willing to extend credit. One-third of South Africans go to bed hungry more than one day a week.

As a vulgar vulture culture grips the nation, life is hard for ordinary South Africans. Expansive gas and oil discoveries and their revenue ignite some hope, but the vultures are rapacious in diverting these windfalls into their own pockets.



WEAVER WORK

The Cooperation Nation

As depicted by industrious collaboration of the Kalahari social weaver, enhanced sporting integration, more meaningful transformation of higher education and communal cultural experiences in real life and on social media have allowed a greater sense of shared nationhood to emerge in South Africa. By the mid-2020s, 'gatvol' South Africans, civil society and community groups launched a protest movement against inequality, poverty, lack of services... Alliances were forged across social divides, race, and class. Artists too got involved, giving new life to the creative industries. All this put huge pressure on government and business to respond to people's demands. There was a fresh sense of active citizenship and constitutionalism.

For the 2029 elections, parties were forced to consider serious grassroots demands. A wobbly coalition took power on the basis of 'listening to the people'. By building cooperative structures between government, civil society, and the private sector, the 'Concord Compromise' government relentlessly focused on service delivery, dealing with poverty and inequality, driving down crime, improving education, and shoring up South Africa's core infrastructure.

Restructuring SOEs helped attract FDI. South Africa's green transition began to show results in the mid-2020s and is faster and fairer than expected, promoting a wider regional prosperity.

Previous rapid urbanisation rates have been slowed by shrewd interventions in agriculture and tourism. The construction boom extends beyond infrastructure and commercial property to a much wider provision of social, affordable housing. As the population nears 70 million, immigration increases; many South Africans 'reverse migrate'. South Africa has become a smart investment.

Substantial financing for just green transition and strong economic growth from 2030 to 2035 reduces unemployment to 18% in 2035. Youth unemployment drops to 33% and measures of income inequality improve. South Africans are working together more closely, and emerging as a proud, hard-working, socially conscious nation.