

Riots flare again in South Africa

By [Ed Smith](#)

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SOUTH AFRICA HAS been a hotspot for violence, hatred and discrimination from the earliest days of colonialism. Under British rule during the Boer War, it hosted the world's first concentration camp, causing unprecedented suffering, pain and misery for many Boer farmers. In addition, the apartheid regime that systematically ruptured an already fragile society and ruled between 1948 and 1990, casting a formidable legacy on the country.

The regime of apartheid and the long term effects of the inhumane system casts a long shadow. This is evidenced in the recent violent anti-immigration protests that took place on 24 February in Pretoria and Johannesburg, demonstrating the extent to which the South African society is severely fractured. The protests have been primarily in response to rising unemployment as black South Africans believe they are being overlooked in favour of migrants who are prepared to work for a lower wage. Police were dispatched to restore order, and were authorised to use stun grenades, rubber bullets, and water cannons.

These protests have rapidly descended into lawlessness as lootings and xenophobic attacks take place against migrants and refugees from central and eastern Africa, who have sought a better life in the most developed nation in the continent. As a result, President Zuma of the African National Congress has condemned actions on both sides of the dispute but has placed a particular emphasis on the 'mob-like' attacks on African immigrants, which have exposed the animosity and racism that still exists within South African society. Furthermore, generalisations by many black South Africans that these migrants and refugees are sub-human, thieves and job stealers have highlighted the dissemination of racist culture, causing South African society to become even more fractious and divided.

The growing anti-migrant sentiment in South Africa draws stark similarities to the spread of xenophobia in Europe and America as denunciations of 'fake news' and false populist allegations supersede basic facts and accurate intelligence.

In addition, many worry about the impact of the long term effects of apartheid and the dire record of riots in South Africa upon those in power. This is clearly why the government have taken a proactive stance as the Home Affairs Minister, Mr Malusi Gigaba, announced last Thursday, that surveillance plans have been drawn up to inspect workplaces to see if undocumented workers are being employed. Diplomacy will be used to negotiate with protesters.

Nonetheless, the crackdown may not be enough, particularly as Abike Dabiri, a Senior Special Foreign Affairs Advisor in Lagos, released a statement describing Mr Gigaba's statement as "discriminatory against law abiding Nigerians" and that he was contributing to the problem through his generalisations.

The newly-elected South African government therefore has a difficult battle facing it as it tries to create a civil and harmonious South Africa, like the one that was hoped for when Nelson Mandela was elected President in May 1994. As he remarked: "Never, never again will this beautiful land experience the oppression of one by another". However, this will not be easy considering how endemic racism and unemployment is in South Africa, creating a perfect storm of issues. Therefore any chance of a

prosperous and harmonious future for South Africa is unlikely, considering the political economic and social context of the African continent at the moment, which will only add to South Africa's diverse range of problems.



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