



FACT CHECK:
FALSE CLAIMS ABOUT LAND
OWNERSHIP IN SOUTH AFRICA

Why the 72% claim is misleading

Summary

It is commonplace in South Africa to often cite statistics in the debate on land ownership. However, these are frequently presented as facts without proper scrutiny. It is deeply disconcerting that these statistics are also used to justify radical land reform policies, including eroding property rights and justifying expropriation without compensation. One of the most popular claims is that white South Africans own 72% of the “country’s land” – a figure that is derived from the *2017 Land Audit Report*, which actually refers only to agricultural land and smallholdings. However, significant questions exist about the audit’s accuracy and methodology, and how the audit is interpreted. In this factsheet, we examine the key flaws and inconsistencies in the 2017 report (which focused on private land ownership) and (very briefly) the 2023 report (which focused on state-owned land) and highlight the need for a credible, transparent, and evidence-based assessment of land ownership in South Africa. In early 2025, members of Parliament themselves acknowledged that a credible land audit was necessary to address the untrustworthiness of the existing statistics.

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A glance at the fundamental flaws

Fragmented datasets

The goal of the *2017 Land Audit Report* was to provide information as of 2015 on private land ownership by race, nationality and gender. However, the government does not have a single integrated database that contains all the ownership, cadastral and demographic information that is required for such an audit. Instead, the audit relied on the integration of multiple datasets held by different custodians. It is worth noting that spatial data resided in “a very fragmented way” with different government departments, organs of state or parastatals as data custodians in South Africa, therefore making integration difficult.¹ The authors of the report themselves acknowledged the need “to ensure comprehensive, up-to-date, credible and accessible national land information”, including a need to improve data management.²

The different sources that it utilised are listed in table 1.

Table 1: List of data sources that were consulted for the 2017 Land Audit Report³

Source	Information available	Racial information available
Office of the Chief Registrar of Deeds	Land ownership information (name, surname, South African identity number or date of birth)	No
The Office of the Surveyor-General for cadastral information	Land information	No
The Department of Home Affairs	Population register (nationality of origin and gender of South African citizens)	No
Statistics South Africa	Census data	Yes

Discrepancies between unofficial and official land datasets

Another factor that should be taken into consideration is the discrepancies between official and unofficial datasets on the total size of South Africa’s land area. The differences between official and unofficial land datasets are less than 1%. The largest discrepancy is more than 1 million ha, which is sufficient to significantly distort land ownership statistics and perceptions.⁴ The percentage itself may appear insignificant, but the actual land area that it represents is substantial and therefore crucial to consider. For example, a discrepancy of 960 949 ha is enough to accommodate nearly 57 million people. This is almost the entire South African population in 2016,⁵ or 89% of South Africa’s estimated population in 2025.⁶

Table 2: Size of South Africa according to different data sources (arranged from smallest to largest)^{7, 8}

Data source	Size (ha)
2017 land audit	121 924 881
Department of Rural Development and Land Reform: <i>Land audit 2013</i> booklet	121 973 200
Statistics South Africa: Census 1996 (provinces)	122 782 933
Municipal Demarcation Board: Provincial demarcations 1996	122 782 933
Statistics South Africa: Census 1996 (place names)	122 801 644
Statistics South Africa: Census 2001 (main places)	122 812 342
Municipal Demarcation Board: Provincial demarcations 2001	122 812 452
CSIR Built Environment: Mesoframe boundaries	122 823 953
Statistics South Africa: Census 2011: (main places)	122 832 022
Municipal Demarcation Board: Provincial demarcations 2006	122 933 311
Statistics South Africa: <i>Stats in brief 2017</i>	122 933 800
Municipal Demarcation Board: Provincial demarcations 2016	122 934 149

Numerical and calculation errors

There are several numerical and calculation errors in both the 2013 and 2017 reports. While some discrepancies may appear minor in isolation, their cumulative effect raises serious concerns about the accuracy and credibility of the findings. This underscores the importance of verifying and not simply accepting figures on the grounds that it is derived from an official or supposedly reputable source.⁹

In several instances, the errors amount from hundreds of thousands to even millions of hectares. One discrepancy in the 2013 report alone amounted to approximately 2,4 million ha – an area larger than the Kruger National Park, which covers roughly 2 million ha (see figure 1 below).¹⁰



Figure 1: South African map showing the location of Kruger National Park¹¹

It is further stated in the 2017 report that “the highest concentration of foreign erf land owners is in Gauteng at 88 479, followed by the Western Cape at 50 486, KwaZulu-Natal at 21 355, and the Eastern Cape at 11 604. The rest of the provinces have less than 8 000 000 of foreign erf land owners each.”¹² However, according to table 15 in the 2017 report,¹³ the total number of South African, foreign and other erf land owners combined was 5 969 465. It is therefore impossible for any province to have had “less than 8 000 000” foreign erf land owners, as this figure would have exceeded the total number of erf owners that had been recorded nationally.

The scale of such discrepancies demonstrates that these are not merely typographical errors (although there are also numerous typographical errors) but issues with the potential to materially affect any interpretation of land ownership patterns.

More examples from the 2017 report include:^a

1. Incorrect totals

Some errors appear in key findings. In paragraph 3 of the executive summary, it is stated that “[t]he Land Audit also shows that individuals, companies, and trusts own 89 523 044 ha or 90% of the 114 223 276 ha land”. However, the sum total of individuals (37 800 986 ha), trusts (29 291 857 ha) and companies (23 199 904 ha) equals 90 292 747 ha. This is a significant difference of 769 703 ha.¹⁴

2. Incorrect percentages

Another example from the executive summary reads: “Erven in urban areas [...] are owned by 8 469 845 [...] owners of land, [...] With 65% or 56 million of the total population found in these tiny land parcels [...]” However, according to table 1 of the report, there are 8 469 845 individual owners of urban erven. The reference to “65% or 56 million” appears to contain a typographical error, with the word *or* most likely intended to be *of*. Even if this correction is made, the statement remains problematic. Dividing the reported 8 469 845 individual erven owners by a population of 56 million equates approximately 15% – nowhere near 65%. This suggests that either the percentage, the population figure or the description of ownership was reported incorrectly.¹⁵

Inconsistencies

The 2017 report contains several ambiguities, internal inconsistencies and interpretation errors. Examples include:

^a See Annexure A for an edited version that shows the numerical errors in the 2017 report.

1. The report provides two different totals for land owned by individuals – 37 031 283 ha (table 2) and 37 800 986 ha (*Executive summary*) – a discrepancy of 769 703 ha. According to the Department, the larger number (37 800 986 ha) included land that is co-owned by other categories of land ownership, for example trusts.¹⁶
2. A related inconsistency appears in the section that focused on agricultural land ownership. It is stated in the report that individuals owned 37 078 289 ha of farm and agricultural land, which is more than the total number of land that is supposedly owned exclusively by individuals (37 031 283 ha). The Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, who compiled and published the report, attributed this discrepancy to co-ownership arrangements that had increased the total hectare figure, while sectional-title properties were excluded from the overall individual ownership calculation.¹⁷

Race classification by inference

The South African government continues to use apartheid-era racial categories such as “white”, “black”,^b “coloured” and “Indian” in legislation, policy making and demographic reporting – despite the repeal in 1991 of the Population Registration Act 30 of 1950, which abolished the statutory system of compulsory racial classification.¹⁸ The 2017 land audit was conducted by extracting information on all properties that were then registered with the Deeds Registry and combining it with cadastral data from the Office of the Surveyor-General to determine the size of each property. Information on the nationality and gender of individual property owners was obtained from the Department of Home Affairs population register.¹⁹ According to the 2017 report, Statistics South Africa was the only institution that officially collects racial data on individuals,^{20,21} as is evident from their *2025 General household survey*.²² Where no direct racial information could be matched, the audit had relied on names and surnames to “try to determine the race” of owners.²³ Such an approach is problematic because surnames are not reliable indicators of race and do not necessarily correspond to an individual's racial classification. For example, surnames such as *Van Wyk*, *Van Rooyen*, *Van Rhee* and *Schoeman* are not exclusively white South African surnames,²⁴ and there are many other such examples. The report itself acknowledged the limitations of this approach and warned that it exposed the audit to the risk of under- or over-reporting racial ownership patterns.²⁵ In other words, the authors of the *2017 Land audit report* made an informed guess based on unreliable data. Notably, the government was already conscious of this limitation in 2014, when it determined that race “was not obtainable”.²⁶

^b The report refers to *Africans* instead of *blacks*, however.

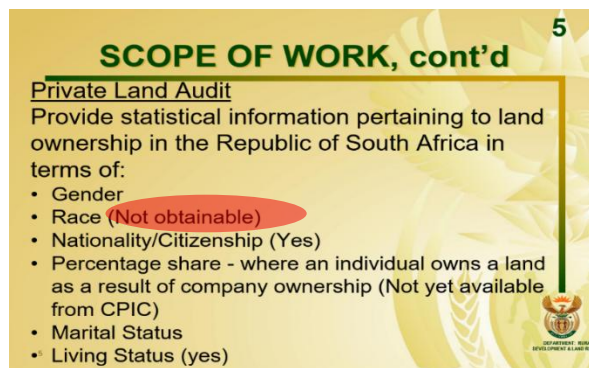


Figure 2: Department of Rural Development and Land Reform's presentation on state and public land management in South Africa

Why current land statistics require context

Major ownership categories were excluded from racial profiling

The *2017 Land audit report's* racial ownership analysis covered only a limited portion of South Africa's land surface area, with racial data available for roughly 38 million ha of the approximately 114 million ha that were assessed.²⁷ If this figure is generalised, it means that only about **30%** of South Africa's total 122 million ha can be reasonably accurately profiled according to race.²⁸

The Institute of Race Relations (IRR) reports that, in terms of landholding, large ownership categories – including trusts (24%), companies (19%) and community-based organisations (2,9%) – must be excluded from racial profiling because they “cannot be racially classified” – amounting to nearly **45,9%** of land ownership that is excluded from racial profiling.²⁹ The *2017 Land audit report* also includes categories such as “other”, where the race of the owner could not be identified due to incomplete, incorrect or unavailable information, and “co-ownership”(0,7%), referring to land jointly owned by people of different races, which include individuals who are classified as “other”. These categories added further uncertainty to the race-based ownership calculations.^{30, 31}

In addition, **23%** of South Africa's total land surface area is classified as state land (registered and non-registered) and can therefore not be racially classified. The total land that can therefore not be racially profiled comprises almost 69%, as is shown in figure 3.

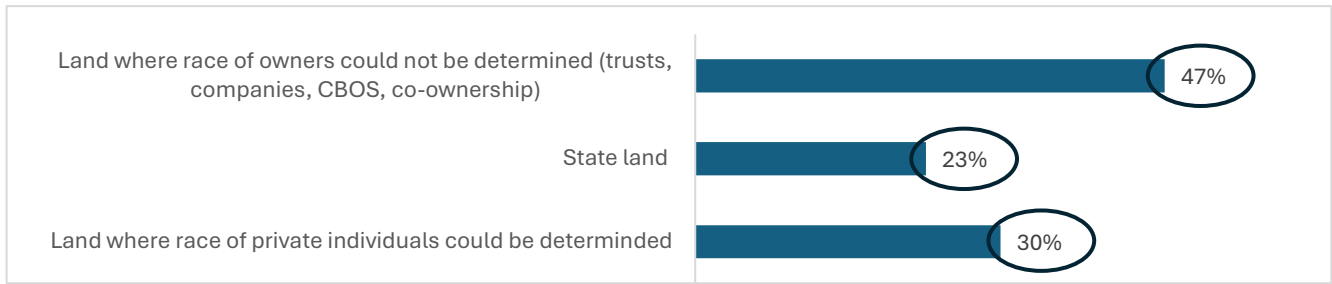


Figure 3: Ownership classification in South Africa

The 72% claim as an indication of total land ownership is unfounded

The racial breakdown in the 2017 *Land audit report* therefore applied only to a small subset of land ownership and subsequently did not reflect ownership across all land in South Africa. The widely quoted 72% figure refers to an additional subset or slice of data: individually owned farms and agricultural holdings where the owner’s race could be determined. This indicates that the precise racial pattern of ownership for all agricultural holdings and farms still remains uncertain.^{32, 33}

It is also important to note that in the 2017 report, the term *farm* did not necessarily refer to agricultural land. It may also have included national parks, game reserves, communal areas, water reservoirs, mining operations and forestry land. The report therefore incorrectly refers to all such land as “farmland” in some instances.³⁴

When the 72% is measured against South Africa’s total land surface area, the figure of white-owned rural land decreases to approximately 22%.³⁵ This would also imply that the state, which controls roughly 23% of South Africa’s land surface area, is the largest single landholder in the country.

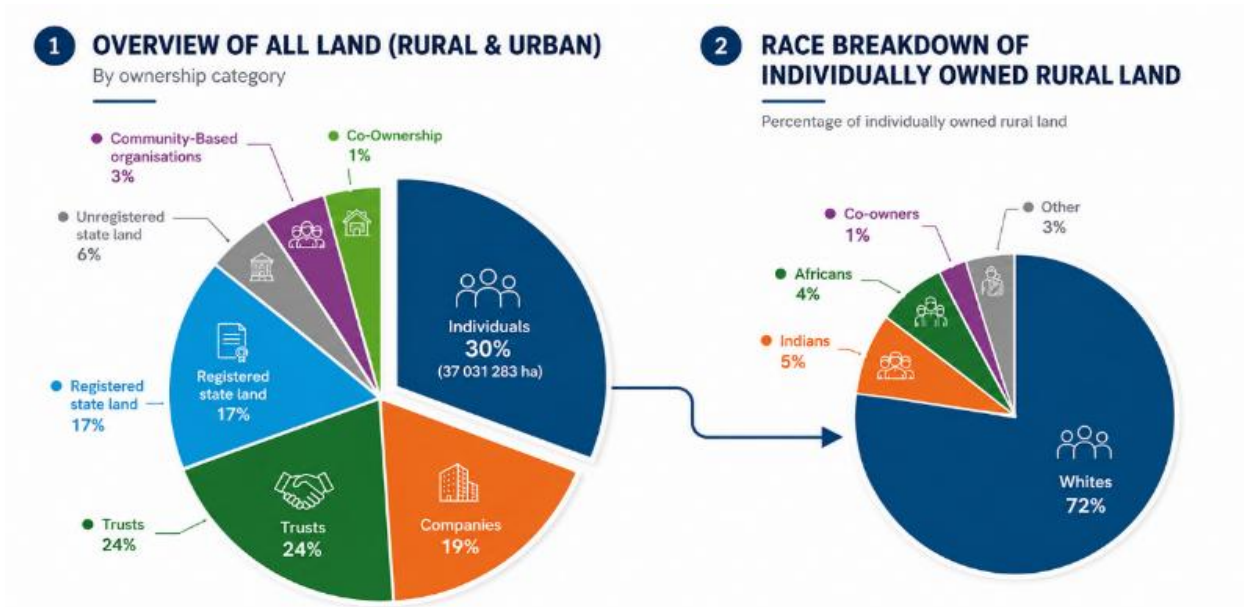


Figure 4: 72% of land as a portion of land ownership illustrated³⁶

The reports were based on incomplete datasets

Both the 2013 and 2017 land audits identified millions of hectares of land that could not be properly accounted for, including 8,3 million ha in the 2013 audit and 7,7 million ha of unregistered trust and state land in the 2017 audit.^{37,38} This is also important as unregistered land in many countries leads to weak or ineffective systems that govern land access and property rights.^{39,40} Most of the country was found to be occupied by individuals and communities in the former homelands.⁴¹ It is important to acknowledge that many forms of land occupation, use and control in South Africa exist outside the formal land administration system and are therefore difficult to measure through conventional ownership records alone. This implies that the data set is incomplete.⁴²

As a result, substantial portions of land that are occupied or controlled by “black” South Africans may not have been fully reflected in the report’s racial ownership analysis. One prominent example of land that is occupied by tribes and communities is the land that is administered under the Ingonyama Trust, which covers approximately 2,8 million ha. This figure comprises nearly 30% of KwaZulu-Natal and is home to several million Zulus. The land is held in trust for traditional communities who live under customary tenure arrangements. In the 2017 report, this land was classified as “state land” rather than attributed to a racial ownership category.⁴³

This illustrates how the audit’s methodology may have understated the extent of land occupied or controlled by black South Africans outside conventional freehold ownership structures. Research from 2017 estimated that close to 60% of all South Africans hold land or housing outside the formal system^{44,45}

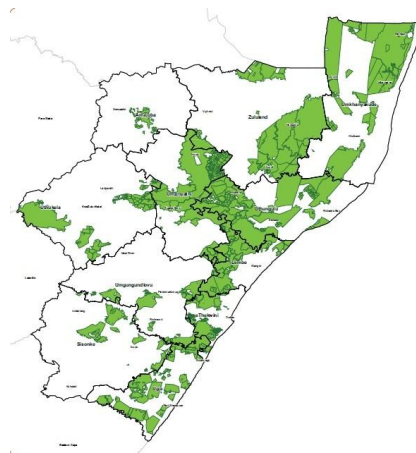


Figure 5: Ingonyama Trust land indicated in green⁴⁶

Agriculturally related limitations to land were not considered

A major limitation of the 2017 *Land audit report* is that it measured land mainly in hectares (surface area) without considering regional differences in agricultural potential. A hectare of land in one part of South Africa is not equal in productive value to a hectare elsewhere. Climate, physical features of land (soil quality, topography) and weather patterns affect farming potential. Two critical measures of this are arability and grazing capacity.⁴⁷

Arability refers to how suitable land is for cultivation (without irrigation). When looking at arability, only 26,4% of South Africa's total land is considered arable, highly arable land is also scarce and concentrated in certain provinces.⁴⁸ Highly arable land has strong farming potential, while low or non-arable land has limited or no farming potential.

According to AfriForum's 2018 report *Land in South Africa: A geospatial perspective*, the Free State has the largest share of highly arable land (6,2%), followed by Limpopo (4,3%), North West and Mpumalanga (3,7% each), and KwaZulu-Natal (3,5%). This is important because white-owned rural land is heavily concentrated in provinces with very low agricultural potential. For example, 43,12% of all individually owned white rural land is located in the Northern Cape, a province with virtually no arable land (0,0%). A comparison of the percentage of white- and African-owned rural land is illustrated in table 3 below.

Table 3: The percentages reflect each race group's share of individually owned rural land.^{49,50}

Province	% Individual ownership of rural land – white ^c	% Individual ownership of rural land – African	Arability
Free State	14,06%	11,64%	6,2%
Limpopo	4,27%	13,75%	4,3%
Mpumalanga	3,63%	8,27%	3,7%
North West	9,03%	15,08%	3,7%
KwaZulu-Natal	3,20%	20,57%	3,5%
Eastern Cape	11,28%	19,05%	2,5%
Gauteng	1,03%	2,30%	1,0%
Western Cape	10,37%	4,05%	1,5%
Northern Cape	43,12%	5,27%	0,0%

^c The figures were calculated by using the IRR's (2018) methodology, and data from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (2018) as well as Gildenhuys (2018).

Grazing capacity, also known as carrying capacity for livestock, measures how many animals a piece of land can sustainably support over the long term without damaging the grass, shrubs, or soil. It is expressed in Animal Units (AU), where 1 AU is equivalent to one 450 kg beef cow.⁵¹

As with arable land, high-quality grazing land in South Africa is limited. Less than 20% of the country has grazing land that can support one cow on less than 10 ha of land. This means that most parts of South Africa can support relatively few cattle per hectare. Grazing conditions differ widely across the country because of differences in rainfall, climate, soil quality and vegetation.⁵²

To put this into perspective, one hectare is roughly the size of a rugby field. In areas with good grazing, one cow may need only about two to five rugby fields of land to graze sustainably. In areas with poorer grazing, a single cow may need more than 25 rugby fields of land.⁵³

This difference in grazing conditions is illustrated in figure 5 below.



Figure 6: Comparison of grazing land required to sustain one cow in high-potential versus low-potential grazing areas, using rugby fields as a visual scale.⁵⁴

Ignoring changes in ownership patterns and the age of datasets

Data is collected to serve a specific purpose at a particular point in time, but ownership patterns and demographic realities change continuously. Consequently, the age of the underlying datasets must be considered in any land debate.⁵⁵ The 2017 *Land audit report* was based on data that had been obtained in 2015, meaning that the information is now more than a decade old.⁵⁶ These reports therefore provide

historical estimates of land ownership rather than an up-to-date representation of current ownership patterns.

According to the National Development Plan, the ultimate goal of land reform is to transfer 30% of agricultural land (approximately 23 million ha) to black ownership by 2030.⁵⁷ However, according to research by Johann Bornman, an agricultural property expert, about 19,5 million ha had already been redistributed.⁵⁸ From this, we can deduce that 25,2% of all farmland that was previously owned by white land owners has been restored or redistributed to black South Africans or was transferred to state ownership. Therefore, 84% of the government’s land target has already been achieved.

Bornman estimates that this figure represents 43,3% of the value (i.e., money that was spent relative to land value) of South Africa’s agricultural land.⁵⁹ When measured by land value, black ownership of agricultural land amounts to 56,4% in KwaZulu-Natal, 80,7% in Mpumalanga, 85,3% in Limpopo, and 73,7% in Gauteng. Black ownership of land in terms of hectares is particularly significant in several provinces. In the Eastern Cape, black people own 60,8% of the land, while the figure stands at 67% in KwaZulu-Natal, 59,7% in Mpumalanga, 43,7% in Limpopo, and 78,6% in Gauteng.⁶⁰

Table 4: Agricultural land under black ownership (1993 compared to 2024)⁶¹

Province	% of land in ha in 1993	% of land in ha in 2024	% of land value in 2024
Western Cape	0	11,4	7
Eastern Cape	28	60,8	45,9
Free State	1,6	30,4	8
Gauteng	0	78,6	73,7
KwaZulu-Natal	45,4	67	56,4
Limpopo	38,6	43,7	85,3
Mpumalanga	20,6	59,7	80,7
North West	34,5	31,5	37,3
Northern Cape	0	14	27,5
Total	14,9	25,5	43,3

The scale of land reform is even greater when restitution settlements and private land purchases are included. Compensation that is paid to restitution claimants exceeds the amount of land acquired by the state for redistribution when converted into hectare equivalents.⁶²

It is also estimated that black South Africans privately purchased agricultural land on a scale comparable to government redistribution programmes. This demonstrates that changes in land ownership occurred not only through state-led land reform programmes, but also through private market transactions.⁶³

Increased urbanisation

The current land debate must also consider the impact of urbanisation, which means that more people are moving from rural and farming areas to cities.⁶⁴ South Africa’s population increased from 39,62 million in 1994 to 63 million in 2024, representing growth of about 59%. Urbanisation has also accelerated, with the share of people living in urban areas rising from 56% in 1993 to 67% in 2024. By 2030, South Africa’s population could reach 67,2 million, with 71,3% living in urban areas. By 2050, the population is projected to increase to 79,4 million, with urbanisation reaching 81,6%.⁶⁵ The growing demand for urban land is also reflected in South Africa's land restitution process. The Restitution of Land Rights Act 22 of 1994 allowed for people to institute claims for land of which they had been deprived of as a result of apartheid practices such as forced removals.⁶⁶ Approximately 87% of restitution claims that were lodged before the 1998 cut-off date were for urban properties. Noteworthy is that most claimants chose financial compensation rather than restoration. It should be noted, however, that the remaining claims (i.e., 13%) were for group claims, which represent a larger number of people.⁶⁷

The impact of urbanisation is also reflected in the 2017 report. Although the audit found that only 3% of the 122 million ha was urban land, there were substantially more parcels and owners of erven, compared to agricultural holdings and farms.⁶⁸

Table 5: Table from the 2017 Land Audit Report, showing the contrast between urban and rural land ownership⁶⁹

Land parcel type	Parcels		Extent		Owners	
	Number	%	Ha	%	No.	%
Erven	6 839 985	94	3 197 760	3	8 469 845	93
Agricultural holdings	50 253	1	340 272	1	60 623	1
Farms	419 005	5	110 685 243	96	527 422	6
Total	7 309 243	100	114 223 276	100	9 057 890	100

According to the IRR’s analysis of the 2017 report, black South Africans own more urban land than white people in seven of the nine provinces; the Northern Cape is the only exception.⁷⁰ The report also showed that the number of individual black urban land owners (56%) for erven exceeded the number of individual white owners (26%).⁷¹

Table 6: 2017 Land audit report table showing individual-owned erven per race

Province	White		African		Coloured		Indian		Other		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
EC	169 622	26	361 469	56	62 054	10	35 939	6	18 705	3	647 789
FS	74 287	16	354 461	75	22 608	5	11 030	2	7 379	2	469 765
GP	414 120	21	1 296 797	65	118 635	5	105 010	5	49 217	2	1 983 779
KZN	139 287	18	438 085	56	44 207	6	136 451	17	24 005	3	782 035
LP	21 788	12	145 655	82	5 604	3	3 834	2	1 804	1	178 685
MP	54 466	17	242 427	75	12 443	4	8 555	3	4 575	2	278 601
NC	84 041	44	59 926	30	29 962	16	12 049	6	5 915	3	188 893
NW	52 034	19	198 429	71	14 613	5	8 568	3	4 957	2	278 601
WC	543 008	49	227 227	20	197 703	18	92 633	8	56 861	5	1 117 432
Total	1 552 653	26	3 321 476	56	507 829	9	414 069	7	173 418	3	5 969 445

Problems with land reform

Shifting away from willing-buyer-willing-seller

At the 2005 Land Summit, the government resolved to move away from the willing-buyer-willing-seller model in favour of a “proactive, government-led approach to land and agrarian reform”. In fact, the willing-buyer-willing-seller principle was “overwhelmingly rejected.”^{72, 73} This shift led to the Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS) in 2006, in terms of which the government is supposed to identify, buy, warehouse (lease), develop and transfer the land.⁷⁴ The State Land Holding Account, which falls under the Department of Agriculture and Land Reform, is the custodian of this land. Of the approximately 2 500 beneficiaries, the majority were given 30-year lease agreements with the state instead of full ownership with title deeds.⁷⁵

- The principle of willing seller-willing buyer as the basis for land reform was overwhelmingly rejected. Market-based land acquisitions entail reliance on the existing land market system which is characterised by a number of distortions and imperfections, such as restrictions on land subdivisions, the absence of an effective land tax, unequal access to capital markets and information, as well as contradictory requirements in respect of municipal zoning regulations. The free

Figure 2: Extract from Summary of key findings on the study on the willing-seller, willing-buyer approach and sharpening land acquisition strategies

Government has acquired nearly 2,5 million ha through redistribution programmes; yet much of this land has not been formally transferred to black farmers.^{76, 77}

Background Cont...

- In 2005 there was a Land Summit which resolved in favour of the state moving away from willing-buyer-willing seller approach. This eventually gave birth to Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS), wherein government is supposed to identify, buy, warehouse (lease), develop and transfer the land.
- The PLAS brought about a fundamental shift from freehold title to leasehold. Unfortunately, this was also applied to farmers who had already been offered an opportunity to purchase farms from the state, hence Ragsdale case. The state had also committed to a rent-to-buy scheme called Financial Assistance Land (FALA), wherein a number of lessees had finished paying for the land but transfer was not taking place.



Figure 3: A slide from the briefing to the portfolio committee on land reform and rural development⁷⁸

Corruption, fraud and maladministration

The land restitution process, which was initiated over 25 years ago, and which was evidence-based and based on fair, market-based compensation, is fraught with corruption, fraud and maladministration.⁷⁹ In 2009, the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform itself acknowledged that restitution claims were “plagued with corrupt officials, fraudulent and ghost claimants.”⁸⁰ A 2019 investigation by the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) also uncovered fraud on an “enormous scale”, including the allocation of farms and grants to people who did not qualify as beneficiaries.

In a 2026 update, the SIU once again reported widespread governance failures that included “weak controls, poor verification systems, fraudulent transactions, collusion involving officials and external actors, irregular expenditure, and systemic maladministration affecting land reform and restitution processes.”^{81, 82} Other problems on state-supported farms include refusal to pay rental lease, vandalism, illegal subletting, land invasions and capacity constraints.⁸³ The findings extended to other structures, including communal property associations (CPAs), the legal entities that acquire, hold, and manage land on behalf of beneficiaries.⁸⁴ CPAs have been described as “a royal mess” that characterised “infighting, legal paralysis, funding shortages and a lack of accountability to members.”⁸⁵ Of the 1 743 registered CPAs, only 12% are compliant, while the majority are partially or non-compliant.⁸⁶

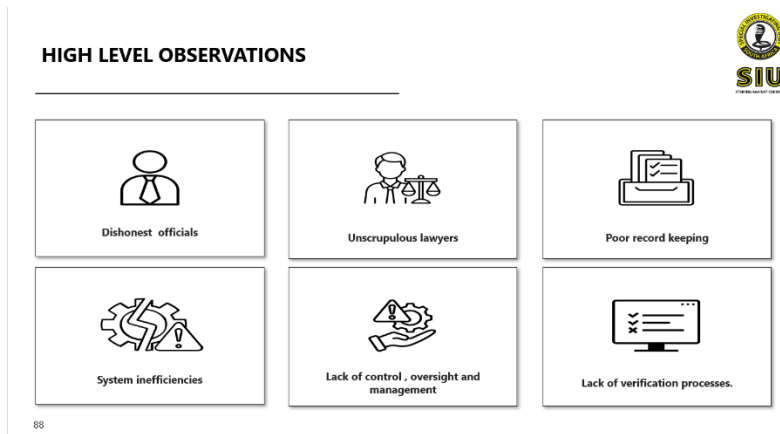


Figure 4: High-level observations for the SIU’s presentation on various investigations into land reform and rural development⁸⁷

High failure rates on state land reform projects and dormant farms

In 2020, the then Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Thoko Didisa, revealed that nearly 900 state-owned farms, which cover approximately 700 000 ha, were either underutilised or not used at all.⁸⁸ The latest figures show that there are 830 abandoned farms.⁸⁹ This has an enormous impact on the economy in terms of job losses as well as food production. It is estimated that the government spent billions to acquire farms under PLAS;⁹⁰ however, poor implementation and inadequate post-settlement support reportedly contributed to many of these farms failing.

Of the 529 PLAS farms that were selected for support through the Recapitalisation and Development Programme, 397 were reportedly operating at subsistence level or were no longer productive.^{91, 92} One example of this is Dawn Valley Farm, which was purchased by government in 2008 for R12,8 million. However, there is little evidence to suggest that the farm is still productive or at the least active.⁹³ Moreover, in 2025, Deputy President Paul Mashatile stated that Dawn Valley and another farm were “facing serious challenges of vandalised infrastructure and have not been well managed”.⁹⁴



Figure 5: Irrigated fields of potatoes and other vegetables at Dawn Valley Farm in 2002, six years before the land claim settlement⁹⁵



Figure 6: A satellite image of the same fields in 2022, showing few signs of any cultivation⁹⁶

A path forward

Rather than relying on inaccurate or outdated narratives, AfriForum sets out the following points as a path forward:

1. **Destructive policies:** Expropriation without compensation is not the answer to South Africa's land reform challenges. Replacing one flawed system with policies that risk further economic and social harm is unlikely to produce sustainable outcomes.
2. **Restitution:** To counter a history of land dispossession, a restitution process was put in place over 25 years ago, which AfriForum supports because it is evidence-based and requires the payment of fair compensation. This legitimate process of addressing the wrongs of the past has been derailed by corruption and mismanagement, however. The existing, sufficient, evidence-based and market-based process must be fixed rather than abolished.
3. **Support for beneficiaries:** Many land reform projects have struggled or failed not because of a lack of access to land, but because beneficiaries did not receive adequate post-settlement support. Farming is not easy. It is a technical job that requires a significant amount of time, expertise, experience and money, as well as substantial support and training if you have no background in farming. Providing someone with the land to farm is no guarantee that the farm will be successful. Farmers (especially new farmers) need support, experience and proper training.
4. **Honesty about the facts:** Public debate and policymaking should be based on accurate, transparent and up-to-date information. Politicians must stop injecting misinformation, half-truths and outright lies into the land debate for political gain – such as the falsehood that white South Africans own 72% of the land in the country. This does not facilitate solutions. It only misinforms people, fuels division and conflict, and muddies the waters. It is shameful and should not be tolerated.
5. **Protect the constitutional right to private property.** Countless studies show that the protection and enforcement of private property is one of the key factors that facilitate economic growth, job creation, investment (both foreign and domestic) and political stability. Many case studies show that the destruction of private property rights has the exact opposite effect on all these metrics.

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