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The National Dialogue begins with the holding of the two-day National Convention but the legitimacy of the process is in question after major political parties and civil society organisations refuse to participate. Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) releases its latest quarterly labour force data, which reveals that unemployment worsened in the second quarter of 2025. South Africa's economy is expected to face increased pressure as the United States reintroduces a 30% trade tariff on imports from South Africa. South African National Defence Force (SANDF) Commander Rudzani Maphwanya expresses support for Iran during a visit to Tehran, undermining efforts to ease tensions with the US.

National Dialogue begins with major parties absent

The **National Dialogue** that had been promised by President **Cyril Ramaphosa** (2018-present) in the wake of the 2024 general election began with a [two-day conference](#) on 15 and 16 August, dubbed the **National Convention**. This conference was intended to lay the foundation for the larger dialogue, which will take several months to complete. The National Convention saw the confirmation of the dialogue steering committee and was meant to identify key agenda items for the countrywide dialogue. Ramaphosa has [promoted](#) the National Dialogue as an opportunity for South Africans to have a larger say in the country's developmental agenda, improve South Africa's democratic project, and provide an opportunity to address deep challenges, including lacklustre economic growth, unemployment, crime, corruption, and poverty.

However, the legitimacy of the National Dialogue has been undermined by the fact that Ramaphosa's **African National Congress (ANC)** party is the only one of South Africa's four major political parties (those with electoral support above 5%) that is participating in the process. South Africa's second largest party, the **Democratic Alliance (DA)**, [announced](#) in June that it would boycott the National Dialogue in protest of Ramaphosa's decision to fire then deputy trade minister **Andrew Whitfield** for undertaking an unauthorised overseas visit three months prior in March. DA leader **John Steenhuisen** positioned this boycott as a protest over the government's failure to act against ministers who have been credibly accused of corruption. The DA's boycott is particularly significant given that the party is the second-largest member of the ruling **Government of National Unity (GNU)** coalition.

South Africa's third-largest party and official opposition, the **uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MKP)**, announced its decision to boycott the National Convention on 12 August, [denouncing](#) the National Dialogue as "*nothing more than an expensive sideshow*". **Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)** leader, **Julius Malema**, similarly [refused](#) to participate in the convention, dismissing it as a waste of state resources. Malema amplified concerns over the [high projected cost](#) of the National Dialogue, which is expected to cost taxpayers at least R485m (\$27.65m). However, the National Dialogue will likely cost substantially more given the strong probability of delays, extensions, and overruns, even assuming that the process is not marred by any irregular or wasteful expenditure.

Although the DA, MKP, and EFF are the largest parties boycotting the National Dialogue, smaller parties such as the [Vryheidsfront Plus \(VF Plus\)](#) and [ActionSA](#) have also refused to participate. In total, parties representing 48.47% of the electorate and controlling 196 of the seats in the **National Assembly** are refusing to engage in the National Dialogue, substantively undermining the project's intention of stimulating a meaningful conversation on a shared vision for South Africa.

The dialogue's legitimacy was further undercut by the fact that seven leading so-called legacy foundations [withdrew](#) from the National Convention on 8 August and called for the event to be postponed. The groups included the **Steve Biko Foundation; Thabo Mbeki Foundation; Chief Albert Luthuli Foundation; Desmond and Leah Tutu Foundation; FW de Klerk Foundation; Oliver and Adelaide Tambo Foundation;** and the **Strategic Dialogue Group**.

The civil society groups cited numerous concerns behind their decision, including a lack of meaningful engagement, a rushed timeline, and worries that the process was turning into a symbolic gesture rather than a substantive engagement.

The absence of these organisations from the National Convention carried weight given that most of them were started by former ANC and struggle stalwarts, or their children, to carry on these figures' legacy. As such, their absence carries significant symbolic value and is a passive criticism of the current ANC leadership, including Ramaphosa.

The Thabo Mbeki Foundation's refusal to participate in the National Convention was particularly noteworthy given that the foundation and its patron, former president **Thabo Mbeki** (1999-2008), were a driving force behind the conceptualisation of the National Dialogue. The foundation released a statement on 17 August questioning the legitimacy of the convention and [claiming](#) that the "*core principles intended to underpin the entire National Dialogue have been violated*". It is evident that the absence of these so-called legacy organisations has concerned the dialogue's organisers more than that of the boycotting political parties as the **Eminent Persons Group**, which is guiding the dialogue, has [actively sought](#) to engage with these civil society groups to bring them back into the fold.

However, the reality is that the National Dialogue is currently unlikely to achieve its goals with or without these groups, as the process is not viewed as legitimate by the public at large. The Eminent Persons Group claims it wants to engage with [at least ten million](#) citizens during this process. However, these community engagements will likely devolve into an angry critique of the government and the state of the country. This discontent was already evident at the National Convention, where delegates denounced the government's failure to address crime or drive economic growth. As such, this process risks becoming a countrywide venting of frustrations about the state and the ANC in particular. As such, the ANC and the presidency will want to exert a significant level of control over this process to ensure that this is avoided, especially ahead of the 2026 local government elections.

Unemployment worsens in the second quarter

Frustrations with the government will likely only worsen over the coming months, given that South Africa's economy is failing to grow enough to address the country's unemployment crisis. On 12 August, **Statistics South Africa (StatsSA)** [released](#) the latest Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), which revealed that the country's unemployment rate increased by 30 basis points in the second quarter (Q2) of 2025 to 33.2% from 32.9% in Q1. This was in large part a function of the working-age population increasing by 0.3% (131,000 people) during this period. The data indicates that the economy is failing to absorb the new workers entering the labour market. This was further confirmed by the fact that youth (15–34-year-olds) unemployment increased from 43.8% to 43.9% between Q1 and Q2.

It should be noted that the 33.2% is the official unemployment rate but the expanded unemployment rate, which includes discouraged jobseekers, is estimated to be 42.9% meaning that StatsSA believes that over four in ten working-age people in South Africa are unemployed.

The **North West Province** has the highest unemployment rate in the country; StatsSA estimated the official unemployment rate at 40.1% and the unofficial rate at 54.7%. In contrast, **Western Cape Province** has the lowest rates of unemployment at 21.1% and 27% respectively.

South Africa's high unemployment rate is a serious long-term threat to the country's political and social stability. Unsurprisingly, it has become a deeply politicised topic. In recent months, the discourse over the unemployment rate has centred on the reliability of StatsSA's quarterly reports.

This came after **Gerrie Fourie**, the former CEO of **Capitec Bank**, [claimed](#) in June that StatsSA is failing to adequately capture informal sector employment. Fourie claims that the true unemployment rate is closer to 10%. StatsSA has dismissed this criticism, claiming its reporting is of a global standard. Fourie based his claim on Capitec's internal customer data.

Trade, industry and competition minister **Parks Tau** [voiced support](#) for Fourie's call to reassess StatsSA's methodology to ensure that the informal sector is better accounted for. This is unsurprising given that it is in the government's interest for the official unemployment rate to be markedly reduced. The high rate of unemployment is a concern for investors and is a major fact cited in criticism of the state.

However, this debate is largely meaningless in practice. Whether or not South Africans who are engaged in survival-level informal activity are counted as being employed will not change the fact that the country faces concerning levels of inequality, poverty, and lack of opportunities for upward mobility. The current unemployment rate acts as an accurate and useful proxy for these deeper challenges and the threat they pose to political stability.

The United States reimposes tariffs as US-SA relations worsen

The **United States (US)** so-called 'Liberation Day' tariffs, which were first introduced and then suspended in April, were [reintroduced](#) on 7 August, imposing a 30% tariff on the plurality of goods imported to the US from South Africa. Importantly, critical metals and minerals such as manganese and chrome, which form the bulk of South Africa's trade with the US, will be exempt from these tariffs. However, key export-focused industries such as agriculture and automobile manufacturing will be negatively impacted. These tariffs will result in South African goods being less competitive in the US and lead to a decline in exports to that market.

In an effort to address the impact of these tariffs, the South African government has [proposed](#) several measures such as actively seeking alternative markets for South African exporters; protective measures to prevent import dumping by other countries seeking alternative markets from the US; and efforts to bolster domestic consumption in key products such as blueberries and macadamia nuts.

South Africa is also continuing its attempts to engage with the US to reach a resolution. Most recently, the government submitted a proposed deal to the US that will allow increased access to South Africa for key US goods, including poultry. However, these overtures are unlikely to be successful. South Africa's **Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC)** is mistakenly operating on the belief that the US trade policy is practically motivated by the US's desire to end trade imbalances. In reality, the current US administration has strong isolationist instincts, which are driving its wider trade policy and a deep animosity to the South African government, which informs its South African policy.

US President **Donald Trump** (2025-present) has promoted false claims that white South Africans are subject to persecution and even genocide. This claim of persecution was repeated in the US State Department's [latest human rights report](#) in which the US reported:

"The [South African] government did not take credible steps to investigate, prosecute, and punish officials who committed human rights abuses, including inflammatory racial rhetoric against Afrikaners and other racial minorities, or violence against racial minorities."

Furthermore, the Trump administration is vocally opposed to South Africa's domestic economic transformation policies, its genocide case against **Israel** before the **International Court of Justice (ICJ)**, and its close ties to US rivals such as **China** and **Iran**. Accordingly, this animosity means it is unlikely that the US will ease these tariffs regardless of what the DTIC offers US trade officials.

South African general expresses support for Iran

South Africa is also continuing to unnecessarily undermine its own efforts to ease tensions with the US. On 12 August, **South African National Defence Force (SANDF)** Commander **Rudzani**

Maphwanya [met](#) with his Iranian counterpart Major-General **Seyyed Abdolrahim Mousavi** in **Tehran** (Iran). According to Iranian state-controlled media, Maphwanya claimed that South Africa and Iran had “*common goals*” and expressed support for Iran. Notably, Maphwanya did not deny that these reports as factually incorrect.

Maphwanya made these statements without the support of either the presidency or the **Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO)**. In fact, DIRCO [issued a statement](#) on 13 August distancing the government from Maphwanya’s statements and clarifying that only DIRCO and the presidency can make foreign policy pronouncements. Regardless, Maphwanya’s visit has aggravated tensions with the US, which has called on South Africa to [provide clarity](#) in its Iran stance. Maphwanya has provided a basis for US officials opposed to South Africa to justify their calls for the US to review its bilateral relationship with South Africa and potentially even treat South Africa as a hostile government.

Yet, Maphwanya’s statements were most concerning as they indicate a lack of effective control over the SANDF. Defence minister **Angie Motshekga** had granted Maphwanya [permission](#) to conduct this visit, but it was evident that neither DIRCO nor the presidency was informed of this visit, nor were there any actual senior diplomats overseeing this engagement.

The lack of effective civilian oversight over the SANDF and a worrying lack of discipline within the military have been evident in numerous developments in recent months. In June, 12 SANDF soldiers [were arrested](#) on charges of allegedly assassinating a police investigator. More recently, this month, Maphwanya [refused](#) to comply with an order from Motshekga to reinstate an air force colonel who received a favourable ruling by the military ombud.

Yet, Maphwanya is not expected to face any disciplinary measures for either his resistance to Motshekga’s order or his unapproved comments in Iran. The SANDF chief is set to [retire](#) in December, and Ramaphosa is expected to allow him to see out that time. This is in line with Ramaphosa’s nonconfrontational leadership style. While Maphwanya will be replaced in December, the lack of consequence for the SANDF commander threatens to exacerbate the culture of lack of accountability within the military.

Planner

20-24 Oct 2025 **Paris (France) Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** plenary meetings;
 22-23 Nov 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa) G20 Leaders’ Summit**;
 Apr 2026 **(South Africa) Democratic Alliance (DA)** elective conference;
 Oct/Nov 2026 **(South Africa) Local government elections**

Chronology

24 Aug 2025 **Cape Town (South Africa) News24**. The opposition **Democratic Alliance (DA)** releases its latest polling, which indicates that its support is increasing in major metropolises while support for the **African National Congress (ANC)** is in steep decline;
 22 Aug 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa) EWN**. State-owned railway and ports operator **Transnet** grants 11 train operating companies access to its rail system;
 21 Aug 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa) EWN**. The **Build One South Africa (BOSA)** opposition party reveals it is in talks with other smaller political parties about a possible coalition or merger ahead of the 2026 local government elections;
 21 Aug 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa) News24**. City of Johannesburg announces that controversial former **Johannesburg Property Company (JPC)** CEO **Helen Botes** is no longer employed by the city and that it will cooperate in all legal proceedings facing Botes;

21 Aug 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *EWN*. President **Cyril Ramaphosa** approves regulations to guide the **Madlanga Commission of Inquiry** into allegations of widespread corruption and capture within South Africa's police;

20 Aug 2025 **Pretoria (South Africa)** *News24*. Tourism minister **Patricia de Lille** dissolves the **South African Tourism Board**, accusing the board of convening an unlawful meeting on 1 August;

20 Aug 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *EWN*. **Statistics South Africa (StatsSA)** reveals that consumer price inflation reached a 10-month high of 3.5% in July, up 500 basis points from 3% in June;

19 Aug 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *EWN*. Constitutional court hears a dispute between the **Competition Commission** and 28 local and international financial institutions over currency manipulation allegations;

19 Aug 2025 **Cape Town (South Africa)** *Daily Maverick*. Opposition parliamentarians criticise higher education minister **Buti Manamela's** choice of Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) administrators, whom they claim are unfit and appointed due to their connections to the **African National Congress (ANC)**;

17 Aug 2025 **Gqeberha (South Africa)** *AlgoaFM*. A woman who was kidnapped in **Kariega (Eastern Cape Province)** on 11 August is released, but it remains unclear if a ransom was paid for her release;

15 Aug 2025 **Cape Town (South Africa)** *EWN*. Former state security minister **Bongani Bongo** appears before the **Western Cape** high court during which it is announced that his corruption trial will begin in April 2026;

14 Aug 2025 **Cape Town (South Africa)** *EWN*. The **Western Cape** high court sets aside **French** energy giant **TotalEnergies'** authorisation to conduct offshore exploration drilling off South Africa's southern coast;

14 Aug 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *EWN*. Johannesburg mayor **Dada Morero** establishes a disciplinary board to investigate financial misconduct in the city government in response to an earlier demand by the **National Treasury** that the city urgently improve its financial management;

14 Aug 2025 **Durban (South Africa)** *EWN*. The **KwaZulu-Natal (KZN)** high court in Durban schedules former president **Jacob Zuma's** daughter, **Dudu Zuma-Sambudla's** terrorism and incitement trial related to her role in the 2021 civil unrest for November;

12 Aug 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *EWN*. Higher education minister **Buti Manamela** announces plans to implement widespread reforms to South Africa's higher education sector, including creating a unified system;

8 Aug 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *SABC*. The **uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MKP)** officially expels its secretary-general, **Floyd Shivambu**, from the party;

8 Aug 2025 **Cape Town (South Africa)** *Moneyweb*. Public works minister **Dean Macpherson** lays criminal charges against **Independent Development Trust (IDT)** CEO **Tebogo Malaka** and IDT spokesperson **Phasha Makgolane**, after footage is released appearing to show the two attempting to bribe a journalist;

5 Aug 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *News24*. **United States-headquartered S&P Global Ratings** publishes a note on South Africa's inflation outlook, noting the **South African Reserve Bank's** (central bank) decision to lower the inflation target to 3% without the approval of the **National Treasury**;

4 Aug 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa) Business Day.** Mineral resources department amends the Draft **Mineral Resources Development Bill 2025** to include a licensing regime for artisanal and small-scale mining;

29 Jul 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa) Business Day.** Opposition **Democratic Alliance's (DA)** says that state-owned power utility **Eskom's** court challenge against **National Energy Regulator of South Africa's** approval of electricity trading and import/export licences undermines long-promised energy reforms.

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