

**Government Defence
Integrity Index**



**COUNTRY
BRIEF**

SOUTH AFRICA

2025





SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa is undergoing a period of significant political transition. The 2024 general election marked the first time since the end of apartheid that the African National Congress lost its parliamentary majority, leading to a new era of coalition politics.¹ While the peaceful conduct of the polls reaffirmed South Africa’s electoral stability, the outcome also reflected declining public trust in political institutions.² Decision-making remains highly centralised in the presidency, and patronage networks have eroded the separation between party structures and the state.³

Regionally, South Africa maintains significant diplomatic and strategic influence. As a founding member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and a key actor within the African Union (AU), it plays an active role in regional integration and security cooperation. South Africa has chaired the AU Peace and Security Council, contributed troops to SADC and AU missions, and supported mediation in regional crises including Lesotho, Mozambique, and Sudan. Nevertheless, domestic political distractions, fiscal strain, and declining diplomatic leverage have reduced its ability to project consistent regional leadership.⁴ South Africa remains as the most industrialised economy in sub-Saharan Africa, yet it struggles with slow growth, inequality, and high

unemployment. The government continues to prioritise fiscal consolidation and public-sector reform; however, governance challenges have placed pressure on public finances and weakened state capacity to deliver services.⁵

The Government Defence Integrity (GDI) findings highlight this transition, revealing a defence sector that retains strong oversight architecture while struggling to translate it into consistent policy responsiveness. South Africa’s defence sector benefits from relatively strong institutional controls, long-term oversight mechanisms and a solid external audit presence, though responsiveness in policymaking remains limited, with low engagement from the Executive and uneven accountability. Defence-spending risks are moderate, but procurement continues to face gaps between the legal framework and its implementation. These inconsistencies are even more pronounced in operations, where corruption risks are poorly managed.

| | |
|--|------------------|
| Member of Open Government Partnership | Yes |
| UN Convention Against Corruption | Ratified in 2004 |
| Arms Trade Treaty | Ratified in 2014 |

SOUTHERN AFRICA

Southern Africa’s security landscape is shaped by a mix of transnational threats, institutional weaknesses, and evolving defence governance challenges. Organised crime, including arms, drug, and human trafficking, remains pervasive across the region due to porous borders, weak governance, and capacity deficits, undermining both public safety and state legitimacy. In Mozambique, longstanding Islamist insurgency in Cabo Delgado continues to drive insecurity. Zimbabwe’s security landscape remains dominated by a politicised security apparatus, where blurred civil–military boundaries and the use of coercive organs for regime preservation inhibit professionalisation and public trust. South Africa’s defence institutions are under strain: declining investment, ageing equipment, and manpower shortages have limited the South African National Defence Force’s (SANDF) operational capabilities.



Across the region, weaknesses in defence sector governance continue to limit states’ ability to respond effectively to evolving security challenges. While South Africa’s defence sector demonstrates comparatively stronger institutional resilience than its neighbours, parliamentary oversight of defence policy and expenditure remains frequently constrained by executive dominance—particularly in countries governed by entrenched ruling parties such as Mozambique and Zimbabwe—as well as by limited technical expertise. Defence budgeting and procurement processes remain opaque, heightening the risk of corruption and inefficiency, while integrity frameworks for military operations are underdeveloped. Financial transparency is generally limited across the region, with South Africa representing a partial exception. Despite the existence of formal personnel management and ethics frameworks, senior appointments continue to be shaped by political influence, undermining merit-based governance and accountability.

1 Jakkie Cilliers, “The ANC and South Africa Visions of the future,” Institute for Security Studies, February 14, 2022.
2 BTI Transformation Index, South Africa Country Report 2024.
3 Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025, South Africa.
4 International Monetary Fund, “South Africa: 2024 Article IV Consultation – Staff Report,” IMF Country Report No. 24/87, Washington, D.C., 2024.
5 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “Economic Outlook for South Africa 2023: Structural Reform and Fiscal Challenges,” Paris: OECD, 2023.



SOUTH AFRICA

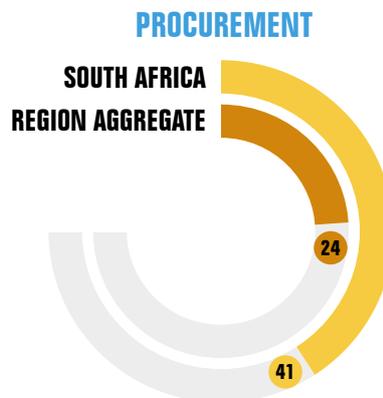
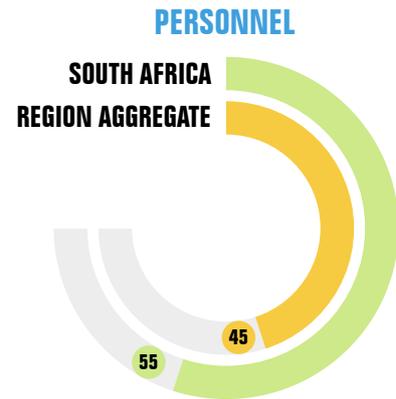
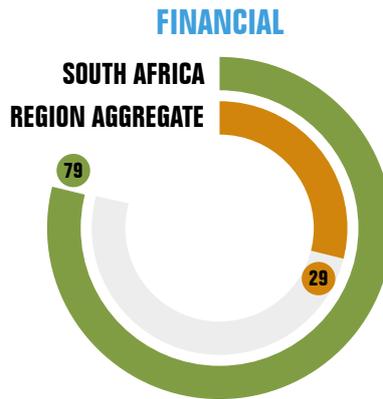
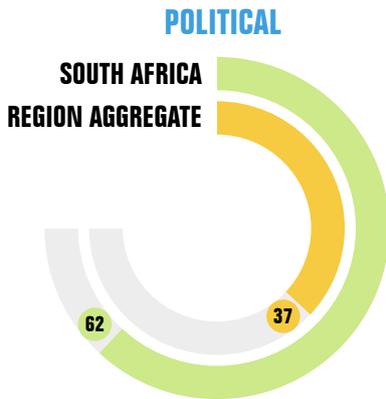
RISK COMPARISON

The Government Defence Integrity Index (GDI) assesses five key risk areas: political, financial, personnel, operational, and procurement. This section compares South Africa's performance in each area with the regional average (Sub-Saharan Africa).

HIGH RISK

D

48





PARLIAMENTARY OVERSIGHT

| | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Legislative oversight of budget (Open Budget Survey, 2023) | 64/100 |
| Military expenditure as a share of government spending (SIPRI, 2024) | 2.11% |
| Committee members with defence expertise (%) | 3% |
| # of meetings/year | Data is not publicly available. |
| Last review of defence policy/strategy | 2015 |

Despite Parliament’s extensive formal powers, oversight is often constrained by ruling-party dominance. The Commission of Enquiry into State Capture found that Parliament failed to use its oversight tools effectively when senior figures were implicated, prioritising party protection over accountability.^{6, 7} While cases such as the Arms Deal and scrutiny of deployments in Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo show that oversight does occur, this is reactive and uneven.⁸

These patterns frame how Parliament’s formal oversight powers operate in practice and help explain the mixed performance observed in the GDI assessment. South Africa’s Parliament holds extensive authority to oversee defence policy through specialised committees, including the Joint Standing Committee on Defence, the Portfolio Committee on Defence and Military Veterans, and the Joint Standing Committee on Intelligence. These bodies have demonstrated their potential in long-running cases such as the Arms Deal, as well as in more recent scrutiny of deployments, and wasteful expenditure, supported by strong external oversight from the Auditor-General and the Military Ombudsman.⁹ In practice, however, oversight effectiveness is irregular. Parliamentary scrutiny is constrained by party-political dynamics,¹⁰ and limited defence expertise among most committee members.¹¹ Although committees meet regularly and receive extensive audit findings, follow-through is weak, with slow responses and non-compliance from the MoD.¹² South Africa’s oversight framework is comparatively robust on paper, but inconsistent enforcement and political resistance prevent Parliament from exercising effective oversight.

FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY

| | |
|--|--|
| Defence-related access to information response rates | 1) % granted full or partial access: Data is not publicly available. |
| | 2) # subject to backlog: Data is not publicly available. |
| Defence-related complaints to ombudsman/commissioner # | Data is not publicly available. |
| Does the commissioner have authority over the MoD? | Data is not publicly available. |
| Audit reports on defence (2020-2025) # | None |
| Open Budget Index (IBP, 2023) | 83/100 |
| World Press Freedom Index (RSF, 2025) | 27th out of 180. |

South Africa demonstrates strong financial transparency in the defence sector, supported by a robust public financial management framework and high international rankings for budget openness. Defence budgets are published in a timely and accessible manner, with detailed information on programmes, sub-programmes, and economic classifications, and are scrutinised through an annual and medium-term budget cycle.¹³ Actual expenditure is reported in disaggregated form in the MoD’s annual reports, with explanations for variances. Independent external auditing by the Auditor-General provides comprehensive scrutiny of defence finances.¹⁴

Transparency is limited to sensitive areas. A small proportion of defence spending, primarily allocations to intelligence services and transfers to the Special Defence Account, is classified and disclosed only at an aggregate level.¹⁵ While access-to-information mechanisms are clearly established and supported by a detailed legal framework, responsiveness to requests can be inconsistent, with national security occasionally invoked to delay or limit disclosure.¹⁶ These constraints are limited in scope and do not undermine the general openness of defence financial governance, resulting in low corruption risks in this area.

6 Monique Doyle, Jennifer Rault-Smith and Rashaad Alli, “WHERE WAS PARLIAMENT?” A PMG review of parliamentary oversight in light of State Capture and the Zondo Report, 2022.

7 Public Affairs Research Institute, “Implementing the Zondo Commission recommendations: taking stock of progress and charting a way forward,” 2023.

8 Joint Standing Committee on Defence, SANDF Deployment (Operation Thiba); Committee Programme, Annual Report & Legacy Report, 2024.

9 Ernst Heydenrych, “An Analysis of the Regulation of Defence Procurement in South Africa,” 2023.

10 Armscor, Annual Report 2022/2023, 2023.

11 Parliament Committees, 2024.

12 Joint Standing Committee on Defence, Revised SANDF HR Strategy; SANDF deployment; with Minister and Deputy Minister, 2023.

13 National Treasury, Budget Review, 2024.

14 Len Le Roux, “South Africa,” In Budgeting for the Military Sector in Africa. Edited by Wuyi Omitoogun and Eboe Hutchful. Oxford University Press, 2006.

15 Joint Standing Committee on Intelligence, Annual Report of the Joint Standing Committee on Intelligence for the Financial Year Ending 31 March 2024, including the Period up to May 2024.

16 DefenceWeb. “DoD “delaying” Lady R PAIA,” June 14, 2023.



PERSONNEL ETHICS FRAMEWORK

| | |
|---|---|
| Whistleblowing legislation | Protected Disclosures Act, No. 26 of 2000. |
| # defence-sector whistleblower cases | None |
| # Code of conduct violations | Military: Data is not publicly available. Civilian: Data is not publicly available |
| Financial disclosure system | # submitted: None. # of violations: None. |

South Africa's personnel ethics framework shows moderate corruption risks, with a combination of solid formal safeguards and persistent weaknesses in implementation. The defence sector benefits from legally mandated enforcement bodies, including the Military Police and civilian investigative agencies, and from well-established codes of conduct covering bribery, misuse of office, and ethical behaviour for both military and civilian personnel.¹⁷ ¹⁸ Regular anti-corruption and ethics training is conducted across the Department of Defence, and personnel numbers are systematically recorded, audited, and publicly reported.¹⁹

At the same time, some gaps undermine overall effectiveness. Whistleblowing remains a high-risk area, as legal protections are limited in practice, anonymous reporting is not guaranteed, and declining disclosure rates point to low institutional trust and fears of retaliation.²⁰ Appointment and promotion processes at senior levels also present elevated risks, with evidence of opaque, non-merit-based decisions and weak oversight by under-resourced supervisory bodies.²¹ These shortcomings weaken otherwise strong disciplinary and training frameworks, resulting in a moderate overall corruption risk in this area.

OPERATIONS

| | |
|--|---|
| Total armed forces personnel (World Bank, 2020) | 89,000 |
| Troops deployed on operations # | 765 (as of 31 October 2025): 727 in DRC (MONUSCO). |

Contemporary operations undertaken by the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) are primarily focused on regional peacekeeping under United Nations and SADC mandates. Parliamentary debate has linked operational shortcomings to mismanagement and corruption concerns, particularly following recent deployments to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.²² The deaths of 14 SANDF personnel during operations further exposed gaps between resourcing and operational preparedness.²³ These concerns, alongside procurement-related allegations connected to deployment support,²⁴ have raised questions about how integrity risks are managed in external deployments.

Within this context, operations present critical corruption risks. Military doctrine and strategic guidance do not treat corruption as an operational risk, and there is no evidence that corruption considerations are integrated into deployment planning, doctrine, or mission design.²⁵ Pre-deployment training focuses on rules of engagement and general conduct rather than corruption risks, and no specialised corruption monitors are deployed in the field.²⁶ Resource constraints, weak logistics, and under-equipped deployments heighten vulnerability, while corruption concerns tend to surface only after controversies.²⁷ The risks also highlight a legal grey area around Private Military Contractors (PMCs): while mercenary activity is regulated, PMCs providing logistics, training, or intelligence support fall outside clear oversight, with no defence doctrine addressing their corruption or accountability risks.²⁸

17 Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, 2012.

18 Department of Public Service and Administration. Public Service Act Regulations, 2016.

19 Department of Defence. Annual Report 2021, 2022, 2023.

20 Republic of South Africa, Discussion document on proposed reforms for the whistleblower protection regime in South Africa, 2023.

21 Public Service Commission Ethics in Selection and Recruitment Processes in the Public Service, 2022.

22 ACDP Parliamentary Media Office, "Don't deploy our troops in peacekeeping roles without the necessary resources," February 10, 2025.

23 Anthoni van Nieuwkerk, "National Security: Restoring Public Trust in Broken SANDF a Complex Journey," May 2025.

24 SowetanLive Opinion, "Commentary on allegations against Mapisa-Nqakula tied to peacekeeping mission contracting," January 28, 2025.

25 Republic of South Africa, National Defence White Paper, 1996.

26 Leleti Maluleke, "SANDF: A force stretched to its limits," March 24, 2025.

27 Interview with a member of a local NGO, August 19, 2025. Government Defence Integrity Index.

28 Institute for Security Studies, "Mercenaries and private military security: Africa's thin grey line," December 01, 2025.

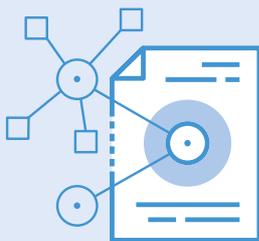


DEFENCE PROCUREMENT

| | |
|---|--|
| Military expenditure (US\$ mil) (SIPRI, 2024) | \$2836.0 |
| Open competition in defence procurement (%) | Data is not publicly available. |
| Main defence exports – to (SIPRI, 2020-24) | UAE (29%); USA (21%); India (11%); Singapore (5.9%); Malaysia (4.8%) |
| Main defence imports – from (SIPRI, 2020-24) | Netherlands (100%) |

South Africa’s defence procurement framework is strong in law but inconsistent in practice, resulting in high corruption risks overall in this area. Procurement is supported mainly by Public Finance Management Act (1999). While a new Public Procurement Act was passed in 2024, it is not yet in force, leaving defence procurement reliant on Treasury regulations that allow deviations for security or emergency reasons. In practice, these deviations are frequently misused, with recurring Auditor-General findings of irregular expenditure, weak consequence management, and non-compliance by both the Department of Defence and Armscor (the state-owned defence procurement and armaments acquisition agency).²⁹

Oversight mechanisms, particularly the Auditor-General and parliamentary committees, are independent, active, and publicly visible, representing the strongest element of this area. However, their impact is constrained by persistent implementation failures, limited transparency around forward acquisition planning, and superficial scrutiny of strategic alignment and operational need.³⁰ Procurement cycles and requirements are formally structured, but internal processes are not publicly disclosed, open competition is inconsistently applied, and politically influenced procurement decisions, most notably highlighted by the Arms Deal and State Capture findings, continue to shape outcomes.^{31 32}



GDI data collection for **South Africa** was conducted from May 2024 to August 2025.

29 Consolidated general report on national and provincial audit outcomes 2022-23 and 2021-2022.

30 Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, "Committee complains about lack of consequence management and persistence of non-compliance at the DoD," September 29, 2022.

31 Department of Defence. Annual Report 2021, 2022, 2023.

32 Judicial Commission of Inquiry into State Capture. Report: Part VI Vol.2: State Capture Established, President Ramaphosa's Evidence and the Role of the ANC and Parliamentary Oversight.



SOUTH AFRICA 2025 GDI SCORECARD

| | Grade | Score |
|---|----------|-----------|
| POLITICAL RISK | C | 62 |
| Q1 Legislative Scrutiny | C | 58 |
| Q2 Defence Committee | C | 50 |
| Q3 Defence Policy Debate | B | 81 |
| Q4 CSO Engagement | B | 67 |
| Q5 Conventions: UNCAC / OECD | B | 75 |
| Q6 Public Debate | B | 75 |
| Q7 Anticorruption Policy | A | 88 |
| Q8 Compliance and Ethics Units | C | 50 |
| Q9 Public Trust in Institutions | NS | |
| Q10 Risk Assessments | B | 75 |
| Q11 Acquisition Planning | B | 75 |
| Q12 Budget Transparency & Detail | A | 88 |
| Q13 Budget Scrutiny | B | 75 |
| Q14 Budget Availability | B | 75 |
| Q15 Defence Income | A | 83 |
| Q16 Internal Audit | E | 25 |
| Q17 External Audit | B | 81 |
| Q18 Natural Resources | B | 67 |
| Q19 Organised Crime Links | C | 50 |
| Q20 Organised Crime Policing | C | 58 |
| Q21 Intelligence Services Oversight | E | 25 |
| Q22 Intelligence Services Recruitment | E | 25 |
| Q23 Export Controls (ATT) | B | 75 |
| Q76 Lobbying | F | 0 |
| FINANCIAL RISK | B | 79 |
| Q24 Asset Disposal Controls | B | 67 |
| Q25 Asset Disposal Scrutiny | A | 83 |
| Q26 Secret Spending | E | 25 |
| Q27 Legislative Access to Information | NA | |
| Q28 Secret Program Auditing | C | 63 |
| Q29 Off-budget Spending | A | 100 |
| Q30 Access to Information | B | 75 |
| Q31 Beneficial Ownership | A | 100 |
| Q32 Military-Owned Business Scrutiny | A | 100 |
| Q33 Unauthorised Private Enterprise | A | 88 |
| Q77 Defence Spending | A | 94 |
| PERSONNEL RISK | C | 55 |
| Q34 Public Commitment to Integrity | D | 33 |
| Q35 Disciplinary Measures for Personnel | B | 75 |
| Q36 Whistleblowing | E | 25 |
| Q37 High-risk Positions | E | 25 |
| Q38 Numbers of Personnel | B | 67 |
| Q39 Pay Rates and Allowances | C | 63 |
| Q40 Payment System | B | 67 |
| Q41 Objective Appointments | F | 8 |
| Q42 Objective Promotions | C | 63 |
| Q43 Bribery to Avoid Conscription | NA | |
| Q44 Bribery for Preferred Postings | A | 83 |
| Q45 Chains of Command and Payment | C | 50 |
| Q46 Military Code of Conduct | B | 75 |
| Q47 Civilian Code of Conduct | A | 88 |
| Q48 Anticorruption Training | A | 83 |
| Q49 Corruption Prosecutions | D | 33 |
| Q50 Facilitation Payments | C | 50 |

**OVERALL
COUNTRY
SCORE**

HIGH RISK



RISK GRADE

| | | |
|----------|---------------|-----------------------|
| A | 83–100 | VERY LOW RISK |
| B | 67–82 | LOW RISK |
| C | 50–66 | MODERATE RISK |
| D | 33–49 | HIGH RISK |
| E | 17–32 | VERY HIGH RISK |
| F | 0–16 | CRITICAL RISK |

| | Grade | Score |
|---|----------|----------|
| OPERATIONAL RISK | F | 2 |
| Q51 Military Doctrine | F | 0 |
| Q52 Operational Training | F | 0 |
| Q53 Forward Planning | F | 0 |
| Q54 Corruption Monitoring in Operations | F | 8 |
| Q55 Controls in Contracting | F | 0 |
| Q56 Private Military Contractors | NS | |

| | | |
|--|----------|-----------|
| PROCUREMENT RISK | D | 41 |
| Q57 Procurement Legislation | C | 50 |
| Q58 Procurement Cycle | B | 67 |
| Q59 Procurement Oversight Mechanisms | A | 83 |
| Q60 Potential Purchases Disclosed | C | 50 |
| Q61 Actual Purchases Disclosed | F | 13 |
| Q62 Business Compliance Standards | C | 50 |
| Q63 Procurement Requirements | C | 50 |
| Q64 Competition in Procurement | C | 63 |
| Q65 Tender Board Controls | B | 69 |
| Q66 Anti-Collusion Controls | C | 50 |
| Q67 Contract Award / Delivery | D | 44 |
| Q68 Complaint Mechanisms | D | 42 |
| Q69 Supplier Sanctions | C | 58 |
| Q70 Offset Contracts | F | 0 |
| Q71 Offset Contract Monitoring | E | 25 |
| Q72 Offset Competition | E | 25 |
| Q73 Agents and Intermediaries | F | 0 |
| Q74 Financing Packages | F | 0 |
| Q75 Political Pressure in Acquisitions | NS | |

KEY

- NEI** Not enough information to score indicator
- NS** Indicator is not scored for any country
- NA** Not applicable

GDI

Government Defence Integrity Index



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Series editor: Michael Ofori-Mensah, *Head of Research*

Author: Irasema Guzmán, *Research Officer*

Project Manager: Patrick Kwasi Brobbey, *Research Manager*

Design: Colin Foo



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands