



FRONTLINE AFRICA
— **ADVISORY** —



SA: POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REPORT

APRIL 2025

by Frontline Africa Advisory

Introduction

- April 2025 was a momentous month for South Africa, marked by significant political, economic, and significant developments on the international front.
- From tensions over the fiscal framework (in particular the value-added tax - VAT- increase) and coalition instability within the Government of National Unity (GNU), to strides for alternative revenue streams, the period illustrated a political system grappling with deep challenges amidst efforts to restore public trust and economic momentum.
- With some interesting municipal by-elections held, this report also offers critical insights ahead of the much-anticipated 2026 Local Government Elections.

POLITICAL LAY OF THE LAND

VAT Fallout, Coalition Tensions and Shifting Political Ground

- South Africa's fiscal consolidation agenda has entered a period of political turbulence and legal challenges following the controversial decision to raise the VAT, which VAT was initially set to increase by 2% from 15% to 16%, then revised to 0.2% spread over two fiscal years.
- The fallout from this move has triggered a crisis within the GNU, a High Court challenge by the Democratic Alliance (DA) – later joined by the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), and a rare ministerial reversal of an important decision as the re-tabling of the Budget.
- On 24 April 2025, Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana announced his decision to reverse the proposal for a VAT increase, bowing to mounting pressure from opposition parties and within the GNU itself.



VAT Fallout and Political Pushback

- The VAT increase, announced in February, was framed by Treasury as a difficult but necessary step to stabilise public finances amid stagnant growth, rising debt-service costs, and limited borrowing capacity. However, the policy triggered immediate and widespread backlash.
- **Public Concern:** As a consumption tax, VAT disproportionately affects low-income households. In a country already grappling with high inequality and unemployment, the hike was seen as socially insensitive and politically tone-deaf, despite the National Treasury's assurance that it would expand the list of zero-rated food items (meaning they have no VAT), such as staples like maize meal, brown bread, and rice, as well as other items like vegetables, fruit, and certain types of canned goods.
- **Political Division:** One of the key GNU partners, the Democratic Alliance (DA), distanced itself from the decision, accusing Treasury of bypassing coalition consensus. Outside the GNU, the EFF, the uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MKP), along a host of other opposition parties, condemned the measure as a betrayal of the poor.

Legal Action: DA and EFF Challenge

- In a rare show of tactical unity, the DA and EFF jointly approached the Western Cape High Court in late April to block the implementation of the VAT increase. Their argument rested on two central claims:
 - **Procedural Irregularities:** That the VAT clause was pushed through Parliament without adequate public consultation, violating the Money Bills Amendment Procedure and Related Matters Act.
 - **Constitutional Grounds:** That the manner in which the VAT increase was introduced failed to meet constitutional standards for transparency, accountability, and participatory governance.
- The case, which was concluded with the court nullifying the VAT increase and instructing the parties to find an out of court settlement, may establish critical precedent on how fiscal decisions, especially tax-related, must be handled under coalition governments.



In essence, the re-tabling of the 2025 Budget is more than a procedural reset; it is a test of political maturity, institutional resilience, and democratic legitimacy. For the GNU, it presents an opportunity to recalibrate its internal dynamics and re-establish credibility with the public.

Minister's Reversal: Budget to Be Re-tabled

- On 30 April, Minister Godongwana announced that the revised 2025 Budget would be re-tabled on 21 May 2025. This move is aimed at:
- Ensuring Procedural Legitimacy: Providing space for enhanced parliamentary scrutiny and public input.
- Rebuilding Political Consensus: Allowing GNU partners to re-engage with key provisions of the Budget in a more consultative process.
- Avoiding Judicial Embarrassment: Pre-empting a possibility of another court challenge should things not be done correctly this time around, that could further damage Treasury's institutional credibility.

Broader Implications

Coalition Governance Under Strain

- The VAT saga has exposed the structural weaknesses of the GNU. While the ANC remains the dominant player, it lacks the unilateral authority to push through unpopular reforms. Without a clearer coalition governance framework, major policy decisions risk frequent breakdowns.

Fiscal Policy and Public Trust

- This episode has damaged public confidence in fiscal governance. Treasury's inability to build consensus around critical measures signals a wider crisis in state capacity to manage economic reform. The perception that fiscal consolidation comes at the cost of equity may inflame social tensions heading into the 2026 municipal elections.

Judicial Oversight of Economic Policy

- The case brought by the DA and EFF elevates the role of the courts in adjudicating fiscal matters. The High Court decision nullifying the VAT hike could force future Budgets to include deeper layers of public engagement and parliamentary scrutiny, slowing down reform, but strengthening accountability

Investor Sentiment and Economic Credibility

- Policy volatility, especially around taxation, unnerves investors. While Treasury's fiscal rationale for the VAT hike was sound, the political mismanagement and reversal introduce uncertainty about South Africa's ability to deliver on its economic plans. This may weigh on the rand, sovereign credit outlooks, and investment flows.
- In essence, the re-tabling of the 2025 Budget is more than a procedural reset; it is a test of political maturity, institutional resilience, and democratic legitimacy. For the GNU, it presents an opportunity to recalibrate its internal dynamics and re-establish credibility with the public.
- For Treasury, it is a second chance to balance fiscal necessity with social sensitivity. But the clock is ticking: without cohesion, clarity, and constitutional adherence, the fallout from this episode could linger well into the 2026 election cycle and beyond.



BUDGET

Municipal By-elections: Is the Stage Set for the 2026 Local Government Elections?

- The recent budget fallout has left the ANC reeling - both in governance credibility and in public perception - as the 2026 local government elections approach. The party's efforts at internal renewal, especially through restructured provincial and regional leadership in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, remain a work in progress. Whether these moves will reverse its declining fortunes is still uncertain.
- By-election outcomes across the country offer a mixed bag for major parties. The ANC, DA, IFP - and to a lesser extent, the EFF - have all seen pockets of gains and setbacks. This inconsistency makes it difficult to predict their prospects for the 2026 elections with confidence.
- In KwaZulu-Natal, a province that remains a key battleground, the IFP appears poised for gains. The ANC is visibly weakened here, while the MKP is emerging as a serious contender. A telling example is Ward 18 (iSithebe) in Mandeni, where the IFP grew from 13% in 2021 to 30% in the recent by-election. However, it was MKP that made the most striking impression, securing 42% of the vote and pushing the ANC to third place and the EFF to fourth.
- Internal tensions within the ANC are also contributing to the uncertainty. The party's Provincial Task Team in KZN is reportedly divided over whether regional structures should hold elective conferences before the 2026 elections. Some argue the ANC is not electorally ready, while others view the postponement as a centralisation move to shore up support for the Cyril Ramaphosa faction.
- Elsewhere, internal strife continues to hamper the ANC. In Limpopo, disgruntled members from Vhembe district legally blocked the PEC and PTT from proceeding with a regional conference last weekend. Meanwhile, in Gauteng, the ANC's Lekgotla reviewed the 2024 general election losses and began laying groundwork for 2026.
- MKP's rise is one of the most significant developments in KZN politics. In Ward 14 (Ray Nkonyeni Municipality), MKP's Pat Madlala won with 51%, displacing the ANC. In Ward 11 (Umzumbe Municipality), former ANC speaker Sbonelo Maphumulo secured MK's first council seat. In iSithebe, MKP's 42% win marked a dramatic reversal from 2021, where the ANC dominated with over 60%. By the 2024 provincial elections, MKP surged past 70% in the same area, with the ANC collapsing to 16%.
- These gains suggest a consolidation of MKP's support in parts of KZN. Still, its performance has not been uniformly strong. In Glenwood-Umbilo, Durban, MK's vote share dropped from 26% in May to 14% by September 2024. Even in Nkandla - Jacob Zuma's home turf - MKP couldn't unseat the IFP, although it did outperform the ANC, which managed only 6%.
- Outside KZN, MKP's impact has been muted. In Ward 01 (Madibeng, North West), it drew just 1.4% of the vote. In Ward 04 (Govan Mbeki Municipality, Mpumalanga), MKP made a stronger debut with 28%, finishing behind the ANC but ahead of the EFF and IFP.



Implications for 2026 Local Government Elections

- The 2026 local government elections will take place in a political climate marked by fragmentation, declining loyalty to legacy parties, and rising voter dissatisfaction. The ANC, DA, IFP, and EFF each face unique opportunities and risks as they attempt to secure or expand their local government footprint.

The ANC

- The ANC faces declining support amid corruption scandals, poor service delivery, and internal factionalism. The ANC is under pressure to retain municipalities, especially in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal.
- **2021 baseline** - the party got below 50% nationally in local elections for the first time, and fell below 40% in last year's general elections.
- **2026 outlook** - ANC will likely continue to lose urban support but may hold onto rural strongholds. Coalition-building will likely be a new essentiality. New threats from MKP could splinter its base further in provinces like KZN.

The DA

- The DA's key challenge are persistent perceptions of racial disconnect and limited appeal beyond its traditional middle-class and minority voter base.
- **2021 baseline** - the party lost ground in some metros but remains strong in the Western Cape.



- 2026 Outlook - Likely to maintain control in DA-run municipalities like Cape Town. Growth prospects are better in urban, mixed-income areas where the ANC has underperformed. Its ability to lead stable coalitions will be tested again.

The MKP

- MKP's by-election results suggest a potential to disrupt traditional political dynamics, especially in KZN. The party's ability to capitalise on ANC's declining support and internal challenges positions it as a formidable contender. However, sustaining and expanding this momentum will require strategic planning, consistent messaging, and addressing organizational weaknesses.
- While the party has achieved significant gains in certain areas, its inconsistent performance underscores the challenges ahead. The 2026 local government elections will be a critical test of MK's ability to consolidate and expand its support base.



The IFP

- The party's key challenge is to balance expansion efforts with the resurgence of MK in its KZN heartland.
- **2021 Baseline:** The party regained ground in KZN after years of ANC dominance, but suffered tremendously in the 2024 national and provincial elections.
- **2026 Outlook:** The IFP could consolidate power in northern KZN and parts of Gauteng. However, competition with MK and the ANC will be intense. Its local leadership structures and grassroots organisation remain assets.

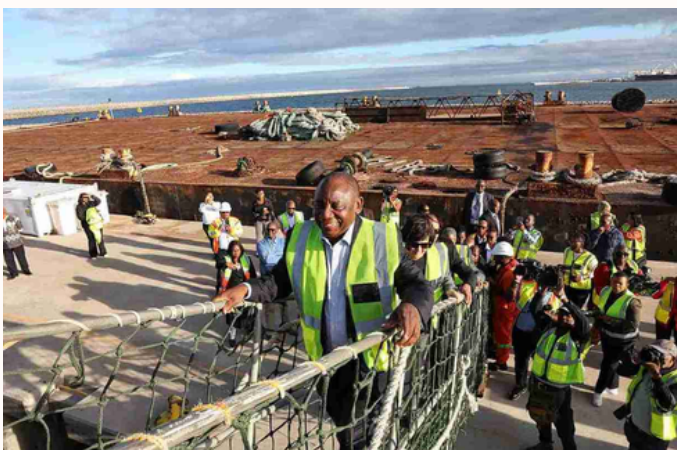


The EFF

- The key challenge is that the party is yet to convert national visibility into control of municipalities.
- 2021 Baseline: Gained votes but did not win any municipality outright.
- 2026 Outlook: Positioned as kingmakers in coalitions, especially in metros. Their appeal to younger, economically frustrated voters may grow. The EFF's aggressive campaign style and focus on land and economic justice remain central to its strategy.
- The 2026 elections are set to accelerate political realignment. No single party is likely to dominate, making coalition governance and local-level credibility more important than ever. The ANC's losses, the DA's plateau, the IFP's KZN battles, and the EFF's outsider insurgency will shape the future of South Africa's municipalities.



Eastern Cape's Presidential Oversight: A Shift Toward Delivery?



- President Cyril Ramaphosa's oversight visit to the Eastern Cape from 15 to 16 April 2025 marked a clear departure from ceremonial engagements. This was a working visit with a delivery focus; targeting economic development, particularly in the automotive and logistics sectors, and reinforcing alignment with the national District Development Model (DDM). The key focus areas were:

Port of Ngqura Revamp

- The visit spotlighted the strategic importance of the Port of Ngqura, with government backing for two major infrastructure projects:
 - A new Liquid Bulk Terminal
 - A 22-million-ton Manganese Export Terminal.
- These projects aim to boost export capacity and position the province as a logistics gateway to African and global markets.

Investment Strategy Endorsed by Cabinet

- Cabinet's approval of the Eastern Cape's investment strategy reflects a coordinated push to stimulate economic growth. The strategy is built on three pillars:
 - Investment Promotion: The formation of a Provincial Investment Council (PIC) to cut red tape and attract global and local capital.
 - Economic Diversification: Focus on renewable energy, agro-processing, and the oceans economy to reduce dependency on traditional industries.
 - Infrastructure Development: Upgrades to ports, roads, and energy systems to support industrial growth.

Geopolitical Risk Management

- Premier Oscar Mabuyane raised concern over deteriorating U.S.–South Africa relations and their potential impact on the Eastern Cape’s automotive exports. In response, the province is:
 - Diversifying Partnerships: Seeking investment from China, Italy, and Greece in EV manufacturing and maritime sectors.
 - Promoting EV Development: Collaborating with Stellantis and BYD to establish electric vehicle production hubs.
 - Supporting Local Industry: Integrating local mechanics and panel beaters into the broader value chain to drive inclusive growth.

Real Intergovernmental Coordination

- The highlight of the visit was not just policy announcements but real intergovernmental coordination. A joint Cabinet–Provincial Executive Council meeting advanced alignment between national priorities and the province’s Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP), especially in:
 - Special Economic Zone (SEZ) expansion
 - Port infrastructure upgrades
 - Industrial diversification, with a strong EV and logistics focus.



Commentary

- This oversight visit signalled a serious pivot toward results. It wasn’t about photo-ops; it was a strategic move to operationalise the MTDP and anchor it in visible, high-impact initiatives. The endorsement of the province’s investment strategy, coupled with political urgency around trade risks and infrastructure constraints, shows a growing appetite for delivery over rhetoric.
- If momentum is sustained and plans translate into on-the-ground execution, this may mark a shift from policy inertia to delivery traction. But, as always, the ultimate measure will be implementation.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



Tensions with the U.S. vs. Global Stage Ambitions

- South Africa’s international posture is currently defined by two contrasting dynamics: worsening diplomatic and economic tensions with the United States, and rising global visibility ahead of hosting the G20 Summit - the first on African soil. These developments expose the delicate tightrope South Africa must walk: managing geopolitical strain while asserting leadership as a voice for the Global South.

U.S.–South Africa Relations at Breaking Point

- **U.S. Tariffs:** The United States imposed 30% tariffs on key trading partners’ imports, including South Africa’s. Though the tariffs we put on a 90-day pause, South Africa remains anxious about the behaviour of its second largest trading partner and whether its expulsion from African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) by President Trump’s administration is now fait accompli.
- **Political Fallout:** The diplomatic rupture escalated with the expulsion of South Africa’s ambassador and Washington’s cool reception of Pretoria’s foreign policy positions.
- **Strategic Damage Control:** President Ramaphosa appointed former deputy finance minister Mcebisi Jonas as a special envoy to Washington, tasked with managing the fallout and preserving what remains of strategic ties.
- **Trump’s G20 Boycott:** Donald Trump has confirmed he will skip the Johannesburg G20 Summit, citing “concerns over diplomatic neutrality and governance priorities,” deepening the rift. The lingering question is whether, as the incoming G20 president, the U.S. will follow through the comprehensive agenda set by South Africa or do things anew – true to his signature-style of undoing his predecessor’s legacies. This more so, given Trump’s unconventional approach to international relations.

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G20 Presidency: A Platform for Global South Leadership

- South Africa is advancing its G20 agenda around key global priorities: debt relief, climate finance, digital inclusion, and fairer global tax systems.
- The G20 Summit offers a pivotal opportunity to centre Africa's development needs and push for reform in global economic governance structures that often sideline emerging markets.
- South Africa's leadership in this forum is being closely watched as a bellwether for Africa's evolving role in shaping international policy.

Commentary and Implications

- The deterioration in U.S. relations goes beyond bilateral friction; it reflects shifting global alliances. The potential loss of AGOA benefits could devastate export sectors like automotive, citrus, and wine, threatening tens of thousands of jobs. Meanwhile, uncertainty around PEPFAR places millions at risk, especially in rural areas reliant on U.S.-funded health services.
- Trump's G20 snub adds a political dimension to a multilateral development platform. It also raises deeper questions about U.S. engagement with African-led initiatives at a time when Global South solidarity is gaining momentum.
- However, the crisis also presents opportunity. South Africa can, and arguably must, recalibrate its foreign policy, reduce overdependence on Western partners, and deepen alliances across Asia, the Middle East, BRICS+ nations, and intra-African frameworks such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).
- The G20 presidency could become a defining moment. Despite Western tensions, South Africa has a chance to elevate African priorities - from energy transitions and debt justice to trade equity - on the world stage.
- With Trump absent, there's room for stronger engagement with likeminded G20 partners such as India, Brazil, Indonesia, and the African Union, who share a reformist agenda.
- The coming months will test South Africa's diplomatic agility. Success will depend not only on repairing fractured alliances, but also on projecting stability and credibility through domestic reforms. If seized wisely, the G20 Summit could be the inflection point that redefines South Africa's global role, not just as a regional player, but as a serious voice in shaping a fairer world order.



PEACE AND STABILITY

Inaugural Police Summit: Real Reform or Another Missed Opportunity?

- South Africa's first-ever Police Summit, held in April 2025, marked a potentially pivotal moment in the country's long-standing struggle with crime and police credibility.
- Framed under the theme *"Towards a Professional and Community-Centred Police Service,"* the Summit brought together SAPS leadership, policymakers, civil society, academics, and international partners — a recognition that fixing policing is a national priority, not just a law enforcement task.



A Shift in Strategy?

- The Summit signalled a move away from reactive, force-heavy policing toward institutional reform. Key commitments included:
 - Professionalisation of SAPS through improved recruitment, training, and leadership development.
 - Strengthened community policing and revitalisation of local forums.
 - Greater use of technology, data, and intelligence to drive operations.
 - Enhanced civilian oversight and internal accountability to root out corruption.

Rebuilding Public Trust

- Public confidence in SAPS is at a historic low, particularly in high-crime communities where corruption, inefficiency, and abuse are widespread. The Summit's focus on co-producing safety with communities and restoring oversight mechanisms reflects a broader understanding: trust is not a given; it must be earned through competence and transparency.

Technology and Intelligence as Force Multipliers

- The Summit reaffirmed the need to modernise policing through digital tools, real-time analytics, and integrated intelligence systems. South Africa's fragmented, paper-based systems remain a major constraint in fighting organised crime, cybercrime, and gang violence. The potential is there. However, scaling innovation beyond pilot projects will require sustained political and financial commitment.



Commentary

- The Police Summit could be an inflection point, only if it leads to action. For too long, South Africa's crime strategy has relied on visible policing, lacking deeper reform in capability, accountability, and leadership. This Summit at least acknowledged that fixing policing is a systems issue, not just an operational one.
- The emphasis on community partnerships is particularly important. Trust has broken down between SAPS and the public, especially in areas where police are seen as part of the problem. Rebuilding that trust will require consistent engagement, transparency, and shared responsibility for safety outcomes.
- Equally crucial is the commitment to professionalise SAPS. South Africa cannot reduce crime without a competent, disciplined, and ethical police service. But changing a bureaucratic and often politicised institution like SAPS will require more than good intentions - it needs insulation from factional battles within the security cluster and measurable targets for leadership reform.



Economic Updates

Revenue Gains, Fragile Growth, and the Urgent Need for Reform

- South Africa's economy remains caught between promising fiscal signals and deep structural fragilities. Record tax revenue and labour peace at key SOEs offer some stability, but growth remains stagnant, infrastructure is under strain, and reform momentum is slow. Without coordinated action, the economic outlook risks drifting further off course.
- The IMF has also slashed growth forecast to 1.5% for this year, down from 1.8%.



Record Tax Revenue – But Fiscal Pressures Persist

- The South African Revenue Service (SARS) closed the 2024/25 fiscal year with a record R2.3 trillion in gross collections (↑ 6.9% YoY), driven by improved compliance and enforcement. Net revenue reached R1.855 trillion, pushing the tax-to-GDP ratio to 24.8% - a positive signal for fiscal health.
- SARS also processed a record R447.7 billion in refunds and blocked R146.7 billion in impermissible claims, reflecting better systems integrity.
- Despite this strong revenue performance, rising public spending needs and slow economic growth continue to limit fiscal flexibility.



Growth Stuck in Neutral

- South Africa posted just 0.6% GDP growth in Q4 2024. While agriculture and trade showed modest gains, mining and manufacturing continued to drag.
- Household spending rose 2.3%, driven by credit uptake. However rising fuel (though set to drop beginning of May), a near-increase in VAT, and electricity costs risks eroding consumer resilience.
- Early 2025 indicators, including the BankservAfrica Transactions Index, suggest continued stagnation, with GDP growth likely to remain below 1%.



The Bigger Picture: Revenue Strength vs. Reform Deficit

- President Ramaphosa's 3% growth target over the medium-term looks increasingly aspirational without significant economic reform.
- The proposed VAT hike in the two failed Budgets, while aimed at fiscal consolidation, has amplified public frustration and exposed divisions within the GNU.
- Investor confidence is hampered by coalition instability and the perception of weak policy coordination.

SOEs: Labour Stability Masks Financial Fragility

- South Africa's state-owned enterprises remain a weak link in the country's economic architecture. Once envisioned as engines of development, many SOEs have become sites of financial distress, operational inefficiency, and governance failure.
- Amid persistent bailouts, leadership churn, and declining service delivery, the outlook for key entities like Transnet, Denel, and the South African Post Office, to name just a few, is one of precarious survival - not recovery.
- A last-minute 6.25% wage agreement in March helped Transnet avoid a strike that could have crippled exports. The deal stabilised labour relations in the short term and signalled revived commitment to social dialogue.
- However, Transnet, much like other state-owned companies such as Denel, remains under severe financial stress, burdened by debt, deteriorating infrastructure, and operational inefficiencies.
- As a vital trade and logistics artery, its instability poses systemic risk to the broader economy.



Structural Constraints Tighten

- Temporary relief from a stronger rand and softer oil prices hasn't changed the fundamentals.
- Energy insecurity, broken logistics, and policy drift continue to suppress productivity and deter investment.
- Job creation remains weak, the tax base is stretched, and household debt is rising faster than income.



Commentary

- SARS’ revenue performance is commendable. It shows that institutions can still deliver under pressure. But tax collection alone cannot power economic recovery. Behind the headline figures, South Africa faces a dangerous imbalance: a rising tax burden amid flatlining growth.
- Transnet’s wage deal bought time, but its operational weaknesses remain a drag on trade competitiveness. Meanwhile, households are increasingly squeezed, and consumer-driven growth, fuelled by debt rather than productivity, cannot be sustained.
- The window for structural reform has not closed, but it is narrowing. Without urgent action on energy, logistics, governance, and investor confidence, South Africa risks locking itself into a low-growth, high-pressure economic trap.

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South Africa’s Risk Outlook

A risk outlook for South Africa across five categories - political, social, economic, governance, and security – is broken down into immediate (0–6 months) and mid-term (6–24 months) horizons. Each risk is rated as Low, Medium, High, or Critical, with brief reasoning.

Political Risks

Risk	Immediate	Mid-Term	Notes
GNU Instability	High	High	Coalition governance remains fragile, especially over 2025 Budget, increasing chances of deadlock or collapse.
Populist Pressure from EFF & MK Party	Medium	High	Rising populism could undermine policy stability and drive radical rhetoric or protest mobilisation.

Social Risks

Risk	Immediate	Mid-Term	Notes
Service Delivery Protests	High	High	Persistent failures in water, electricity, and sanitation services drive unrest, especially in townships.
Youth Unemployment & Social Frustration	High	Critical	One of the highest youth unemployment rates globally; fuels inequality, crime, and loss of trust in institutions.

Economic Risks

Risk	Immediate	Mid-Term	Notes
Energy Supply Instability	High	High	Despite on-going reforms, energy insecurity persists, weakens investor confidence and slows industrial output.
Youth Unemployment & Social Frustration	High	Critical	Rising public debt, poorly performing SOEs like Transnet, and constrained revenue weigh on fiscal space.
Rand Volatility	Medium	Medium	Sensitive to U.S. monetary policy, domestic unrest, and political uncertainty. The IMF has also slashed growth forecast to 1.5% for this year, down from 1.8%

Governance Risks

Risk	Immediate	Mid-Term	Notes
State Capture Recovery / Institutional Weakness	Medium	Medium	Slow reform in policing, prosecution, and SOEs keeps governance capacity weak.
Corruption and Procurement Mismanagement	Medium	Medium	While oversight has improved, systemic weaknesses and patronage networks remain embedded.

Security Risks

Risk	Immediate	Mid-Term	Notes
Organised Crime & Infrastructure Sabotage	High	High	Copper theft, rail sabotage, and extortion rackets undermine service delivery and the economy.
Xenophobic Violence / Targeted Attacks	Medium	High	Rising during economic downturns or political agitation, often with local political backing.
Urban Violent Crime	High	High	Persistent high crime rates, particularly in metros like Cape Town and Johannesburg, with limited police capacity.