

How much of SA's land is in black hands?

In an opinion piece published in PoliticsWeb, Frans Cronje, deputy CEO of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), asks how much of SA's land is really in black hands. He argues that the figure is certainly closer to 50% than it is to 13%.

Pieter Mulder's controversial comments that black South Africans have no historical claim to land in the Northern and Western Cape and also that blacks own a greater share of the country's land than the government admits, come against claims that whites owned 87% of South Africa's land and that little progress has been made in changing this picture, Cronje says.

"However," he adds, "some basic arithmetic reveals that a far greater share of the country is in black hands than is often acknowledged. It is also apparent that ensuring the productivity of the portion remaining in white hands is increasingly important to the Government in maintaining political stability in urban areas." This has implications for the manner in which future land policy is implemented. "Any discussion on land ownership in South Africa risks generating more heat than light," he says, offering to "do the arithmetic to see who actually owns how much of South Africa's land."

According to Cronje's PoliticsWeb piece, people who comment on land reform in South Africa should consider a few points. "The first is that the amount of land in black hands is not 13% but may be as high as 50%. The second is that the 50% in white hands is held by South Africa's food producers and that their numbers are shrinking very quickly as urban markets demand ever more cost effective production methods. The third is that any policy that compromises the ability of those farmers to produce food may trigger a series of urban protests that the government may find difficult to control."

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