

Abstract

South Africa's 25 Years of Region-Building and Regional Integration, 1994–2019: Progress, Challenges, and Prospects

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This paper uses this platform as a base, which is an opportune moment in South Africa's democratic history for scholars to provide critical input, with robust policy recommendations that are practical considerations for policymakers, with a view to progressing South Africa's political and socio-economic positioning towards economic development and growth. Thus, as a primary focus of this 25 year review project of South Africa's achieving of democracy since 1994, the discussion in this paper is anchored in South Africa's international relations linked to its domestic reality within a growing regional, continental and global role. The methodology deployed in the paper considers both quantitative and qualitative research approaches, as well as interviews with key regional and international actors adopted during research undertaken on South Africa and Africa's political economy and security apparatuses over a period of two decades. The paper attempts to constructively evaluate South Africa's efforts of achieving socio-economic growth, political stability and continental security by promoting Pan-Africanism in region-building and integration efforts, with a view to strengthening its continental relevance and positioning the continent to becoming an influential player in the real world. South Africa's good intentions towards the region are resoundingly clear: evident in their signing of the regional and continental free trade agreements (the Southern African Development Community [SADC] Free Trade Area in 1996; the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa [COMESA], the East African Community [EAC], and SADC 2008 Free Trade Agreement; and the African Continental Free Trade Area [ACFTA] in March 2018 that came into force in July 2019), as well as Tshwane's peacekeeping regional and continental roles towards achieving Pan-Africanism.

The first main argument assesses Tshwane's historical region-building and integration efforts with internal and external actors and factors that have filtered into existing regional practices. Such earlier efforts have constituted uneven economic growth of Africa's member states at national, regional and continental levels. The paper also considers South Africa's region-building role in the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) established in 1910. In order to evaluate the impact of South Africa's region-building and regional integration efforts on its socio-economic national growth, the second argument provides contemporary analyses on two main arguments centred on South Africa's divergence and convergence of regional economic integration, and on divergence and convergence of regional security by incorporating two theories: Pan-African Economic Integration; and Pan-African Security Convergence. Also discussed is South Africa's international relations role with key external actors including: Europe, the United States (US), and China, among others. In achieving economic growth through region-building, regional security is equally important. The paper thus, expands the discussion on South Africa's peacekeeping role in the continent and situate the debates and discussions on South Africa's region-building and regional integration efforts between the period 1994 and 2019 that is squarely linked to progress, challenges and prospects for improving its socio-economic and security conditions that carefully balances regionalisms, linked to building security in Africa and advancing South Africa's role in the world. The conclusion provides recommendations to be considered by policymakers and practitioners to advance South Africa's future trade and security relations in the continent.