

## Topic Page: [Swaziland](#)

Definition: **Swaziland** from *Collins English Dictionary*

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**1** a kingdom in southern Africa: made a protectorate of the Transvaal by Britain in 1894; gained independence in 1968; a member of the Commonwealth. Official languages: Swazi and English. Religion: Christian majority, traditional beliefs. Currency: lilangeni (plural emalangeni) and South African rand. Capital: Mbabane (administrative), Lobamba (legislative). Pop: 1 403 362 (2013 est). Area: 17 363 sq km (6704 sq miles)



Image from: [The oxhide shield with two spears and a staff... in Philip's World Factbook 2008-2009](#)

### Summary Article: **Swaziland**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(swä'zēlānd), officially Kingdom of Swaziland, kingdom (2015 est. pop. 1,319,000), 6,705 sq mi (17,366 sq km), SE Africa. It is bordered on the S, W, and N by the Republic of South Africa and on the E by Mozambique. The capital and largest city is Mbabane.

### **Land and People**

The country is mountainous, with steplike plateaus descending from the highveld (3,500–5,000 ft/1,067–1,524 m) in the W through the middleveld (1,500–3,000 ft/457–914 m) and the lowveld (500–1,500 ft/152–457 m), then rising to the rolling plateau of the Lebombo Mts. Swaziland is cut by four major river systems, which have vast hydroelectric potential and are increasingly used for irrigation.

The population is about 97% African and 3% European. English and Siswati (a branch of Nguni) are the official languages. About 40% of the population is Zionist Christian (a blend of Christianity and indigenous beliefs), while 20% are Roman Catholic; there are other Christian (Anglican, Methodist, and Mormon) groups, as well as Muslim, Bahai, and Jewish minorities.

### **Economy**

Swaziland has excellent farming and ranching land, and 80% of the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture. Sugarcane is grown on plantations, mainly for export. Other important crops are cotton, corn, tobacco, rice, citrus fruits, pineapples, sorghum, and peanuts. Cattle and goats are raised in large numbers. The Swazi engage primarily in subsistence farming on communally owned land that is allocated by chiefs. The pine and eucalyptus forests of the highveld yield timber and wood pulp. The country has several nature reserves, and tourism is being developed.

Coal mining and stone quarrying are important; Swaziland's other mineral resources include asbestos, clay, cassiterite (tin ore), gold, and diamonds. Industry consists chiefly of food processing and the manufacture of soft drink concentrates, textiles, and consumer goods. Many Swazis are employed in South Africa's mines and industries. Railroads connect with ports in South Africa, the country's main trading partner, and with Mozambique. The country's chief exports are soft drink concentrates, sugar, wood pulp, cotton yarn, refrigerators, citrus, and canned fruit. Imports include motor vehicles, machinery, transportation equipment, foodstuffs, petroleum products, and chemicals. A major portion

of the government's income consists of revenues from the Southern African Customs Union.

## Government

Swaziland is a hereditary monarchy governed under the constitution of 2005. The monarch is the head of state. The government is headed by the prime minister, who is appointed by the monarch. There is a bicameral Parliament (*Libandla*). The Senate has 30 members, 10 appointed by the House of Assembly and 20 by the monarch. Of the 65 members of the House of Assembly, 10 are appointed by the monarch and 55 are elected by popular vote. Members of both houses serve five-year terms. Administratively, Swaziland is divided into four districts.

## History

The ancestors of the Swazi probably moved into the Mozambique area from the north prior to the 16th cent. Fleeing Zulu attacks in the early 19th cent., they settled in present-day Swaziland. During the 1800s, Europeans entered the area to seek concessions, and in 1894, Swaziland became a protectorate of the Transvaal. In 1906, Swaziland became a High Commission Territory ruled by a British commissioner. Limited self-government was not granted until 1963, and four years later Swaziland became a kingdom under a new constitution. On Sept. 6, 1968, Swaziland achieved complete independence but retained membership in the Commonwealth of Nations. The king became the head of state, administering through a cabinet and a prime minister chosen by parliament.

In 1973, King Sobhuza II (reigned 1921–82) abrogated the constitution and assumed personal rule. The Swazi people continued to find a common cause in resistance to incorporation into South Africa, which was favored by the country's Afrikaner minority. The original constitution was formally abolished in 1976. A new constitution was adopted in 1978, but it so diluted the vote that the king ruled nearly absolutely.

In 1982, South Africa and Swaziland formally agreed to defend each other's security interests, with Swaziland promising to deport African National Congress (ANC) members back to South Africa. After 61 years as monarch, Sobhuza died and Prince Makhosetive Dlamini was selected as his successor in 1982; he was crowned King Mswati III in 1986. The late 1980s were marked by periodic raids by South African troops searching for ANC dissidents operating from Swaziland.

In 1992, severe drought conditions put Swaziland in danger of famine. During the 1990s a series of protest actions by prodemocracy dissidents put increasing pressure on the king. The country's first parliamentary elections were held in 1993 (and have been held every five years since then), but candidates for the lower house have to be nonpartisan and are nominated by local councils (the upper house is largely appointed by the king).

The early 21st cent. has seen increased pressure from opposition groups for limitation of the powers of the king, who has been criticized for abuse of power and personal indulgence, and for establishment of a democratically elected parliament, but the king has steadfastly resisted making any significant changes. A new constitution that the king approved in July, 2005, did not diminish the king's ultimate hold on power. The same month the African Union's human rights commission criticized Swaziland for failing to conform with the African Charter and gave the government six months to rectify the situation.

The country suffered severe crop losses in 2007 due to drought; an estimated 400,000 were expected to need food assistance before the next harvest (in 2008). Before elections for Swaziland's parliament were held in Sept., 2008, prodemocracy forces mounted protests to little effect, despite

negative publicity generated by the extravagant lifestyle of the king and his family. A recession-related drop in Southern African customs revenues in 2010 led to a government financial crisis late that year and continuing into subsequent years. The government sought a sizable loan from South Africa, but did not want to agree to the reform conditions attached to the loan; the king's income was unaffected by the crisis. Repression of the opposition continued, and opposition groups boycotted the 2013 parliamentary elections, although some proreform candidates participated.

## **Bibliography**

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