

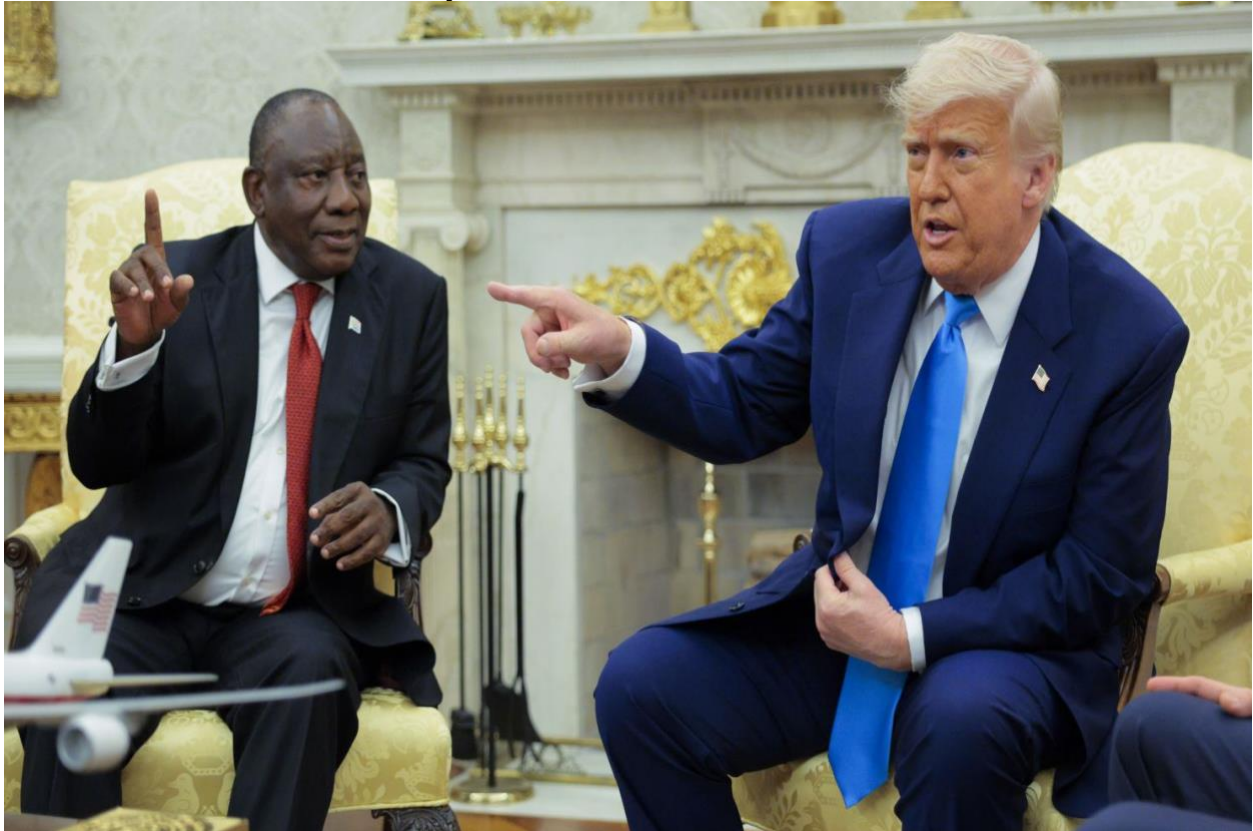
Fact check: Trump's false suggestion of a 'genocide' against White farmers in South Africa



By [Daniel Dale](#), CNN

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US President Donald Trump (R) speaks during a meeting with President of South Africa Cyril Ramaphosa in the Oval Office of the White House on May 21, 2025, in Washington, DC.

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Washington CNN —

There is [a lot of violent crime](#) in South Africa. There is not a genocide against White farmers there.

Claims of genocide can sometimes be difficult to adjudicate. This claim is easy. The facts show that the genocide President Donald Trump suggests might be happening is not happening – and that crime against White farmers in South Africa represents a tiny fraction of the country’s overall crime.

The [most recent South African official data](#) shows that the country had 19,696 murders from April 2024 through December 2024 – and that the victim in [just 36 of](#) these murders, about 0.2%, was linked to farms or smaller agricultural holdings.

Further, only seven of the 36 victims were farmers. (South Africa has Black farmers, too; the official data is not broken down by race.) The other 29 victims included farm employees, who tend to be Black.

Data from groups representing South African farmers also [shows](#) that farm killings [number in the dozens per year](#), a minuscule percentage of the country’s total.

South Africa doesn’t satisfy ‘genocide’ definition

Under the [United Nations definition](#), genocide requires acts, such as murder and serious bodily or mental harm, “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such.” There is no evidence that South Africa, whose [agriculture minister is White](#), has made or overseen any such effort.

The claim of a genocide against White South African farmers has been [pushed for years](#) by White nationalist groups. Trump, who has [expedited the processing](#) of White South Africans as refugees even while keeping all other US refugee resettlement suspended, [raised](#) the notion of a genocide last week and repeated it during a [contentious Wednesday meeting](#) with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa in front of cameras at the White House.

Trump [said](#) at one point Wednesday: “So we take (refugees) from many locations if we feel there’s persecution or genocide going on. And we had a lot of people, I must tell you Mr. President – we have had a tremendous number of people, especially since they’ve seen this – generally they’re white farmers, and they’re fleeing South Africa.”

During the meeting, Trump [brandished](#) printouts of what he said were reports about White South Africans being killed. He also had Ramaphosa sit through a [video montage](#) that included a clip of a demonstration featuring white crosses symbolizing South African farmers who were killed.

Trump wrongly identified these as “burial sites” – evoking the image of a mass grave – rather than symbols. And while Trump [did](#) tell a reporter that “I haven’t made up my mind” about whether genocide is occurring, he didn’t explain that murders of White farmers are a minuscule percentage of overall murders in South Africa.

Robbery seen as motive for many attacks on farmers

From 1948 to 1994, South Africa was governed under the segregationist apartheid system that subjugated the Black majority (which made up about 81% of the [2022](#) population) and privileged the White minority (which made up about 7% of the 2022 population). In democratic elections from 1994 onward, it has elected the Black-led African National Congress now headed by Ramaphosa.

Even when White farmers have been killed in South Africa, it has often been unclear that the crime was motivated by race. A South African government commission in 2003 [found](#) that the primary motive behind most attacks on farms was robbery. South African experts have [reached similar conclusions](#) this year.

“The isolation of farms makes farmers particularly vulnerable to crime, but this is a function of geography and socio-economic conditions rather than political or racial intent,” [Anthony Kaziboni](#), a political and critical sociologist at the University of Johannesburg’s Centre for Social Development in Africa, told FactCheck.org for an [article](#) last week.

“Given the UN’s definition, describing farm killings as genocide is a gross mischaracterization,” Kaziboni said. “This does not diminish the seriousness of these crimes, nor the need for targeted rural safety interventions. But it is essential to approach such topics with clarity and care, grounded in credible evidence and context.”

Even [some White farmers themselves](#) have said this year that farmers are often victimized because they are vulnerable targets and that [what is happening is not “genocide.”](#) And Trump’s own first administration highlighted doubts about the “genocide” narrative.

In 2020, late in Trump’s first term, the State Department released a [report](#) on human rights in South Africa in which it said, “Some advocacy groups asserted white farmers were racially targeted for burglaries, home invasions, and killings, while many observers attributed the incidents to the country’s high and growing crime rate.” The State Department went on to surface arguments against the notion of race-motivated farm attacks. It wrote, “According to the Institute for Security Studies, ‘farm attacks and farm murders have increased in recent years in line with the general upward trend in South Africa’s serious and violent crimes.’”

The State Department then noted that, according to official South African statistics for the 2018-2019 period, “farm killings represented only 0.2 percent of all killings in the country (47 of 21,022)” – the same percentage as in the data for the last three quarters of 2024.

Trump on South Africa’s new expropriation law

During the Wednesday meeting, Trump tried to bolster his case by making apparent reference to an expropriation [law](#) Ramaphosa signed this year [in part to help remedy](#) the [racial inequality](#) in land ownership that still plagues South Africa three decades after the end of apartheid. (A 2017 [report](#) found that White people owned 72% of the country’s farms and agricultural holdings by individual landowners.) The new law has been attacked by Trump ally Elon Musk, who is from South Africa.

The law [requires](#) the government to provide “just and equitable” compensation, in most cases, to a landowner whose land is expropriated. But it also allows seizures without compensation in certain cases – from owners of any race – when the seizure is deemed “in the public interest” and certain conditions are met, such as the land being abandoned, the land being unused because the owner’s main purpose is to benefit from its appreciation, or the land having a market value the same or lower than government investments or subsidies in it.

Trump [claimed](#) to Ramaphosa: “You do allow them to take land. And then when they take the land, they kill the White farmer.”

Trump was spinning fiction once more. No land had been seized under the new expropriation law as of mid-May, Bloomberg [reported](#) Tuesday, and Trump provided no evidence for his blanket assertion that White farmers are murdered after their land is taken.

In February, after the Trump administration cited the expropriation law in an [executive order](#) freezing aid to South Africa, the chief executive of a trade association for South African farmers [said in a statement](#): “To be clear no seizures or confiscations of private property have taken place. Nor has any land been expropriated without compensation. Isolated cases of land grabs and trespassing have been dealt with.” The statement said that while the law allowed for expropriation without compensation, “this does not mean expropriation without compensation is inevitable. The principle of just and equitable compensation remains intact, requiring a careful evaluation of all relevant factors.”

CNN’s Larry Madowo contributed to this article.