

A Summary of the Latest Flags and Scenarios for the World and South Africa

Here is my choice of the eleven flags to watch to judge which scenario is in play for the world at large over the next ten years. They represent the principal forces driving the present into the future:

1. The religious flag resulting from the major religions of Christianity, Islam and Judaism competing more intensely with one another. This flag led to 9/11 in September, 2001 and is now focused on the current unrest in Israel and the likelihood of Iran developing a nuclear bomb.
2. The leadership flag around the quality of world leaders at a particular moment in history and whether they are engaged in a positive or negative relationship. The current bunch are pretty old and uninspiring and have little to do with one another. They pursue their own agendas. Sometimes it requires a whole new generation of world leaders to put the world on a different trajectory.
3. The red flag of Russia, China and North Korea. With Russia, the question is whether the conflict in Ukraine escalates into World War Three or is ended by negotiation with some sort of peace agreement. One or other side winning the war outright has a low probability at the moment. With China, the central issue is Taiwan and the country's deteriorating political and trading relationship with America. With North Korea, it is the sheer unpredictability of its leader who has nuclear weapons at his disposal.
4. The grey flag of the ageing of the populations of Japan, Europe, the UK and now China, which can negatively impact the long-term economic growth prospects of those nations. By contrast, America has a younger, more resilient population which boosts the health of its economy. India also has a young demographic profile which means it could be heading for the top of the global economic rankings in the second half of this century.
5. The green flag of climate change causing the world to warm up but, more importantly, creating a higher frequency of extremely serious weather events. These range from atmospheric rivers of huge rainfall leading to devastating floods in some areas; and more severe and longer-lasting droughts in other regions. The phenomenon of EL Nino is expected to worsen the situation later this year. The conflictual relationship between the major powers means that it is all rhetoric and very little action to lower carbon emissions in the world at the moment. In addition, green technologies and infrastructure need a significant uplift to make ordinary consumers reduce their carbon footprint willingly.
6. The anti-establishment flag of increasing polarization within society caused by the spread of social media and greater wealth inequality between the rich and the poor. This has led to a decline in genuine debate on the major issues affecting life today. People are on one side or the other. There is no synthesizing of different opinions to achieve progress.
7. The porous border flag where the rich countries are experiencing a major increase in the number of illegal immigrants trying to cross their borders in order to lead a better life in new circumstances. There are lots of personal tragedies happening to refugees and their families during their flight from poverty and war with no ethical solution in sight. Nevertheless, climate change could make the numbers soar as parts of the planet become uninhabitable.
8. The debt flag where the easy money policies since the financial crash of 2008 have created the possibility of critical debt defaults by governments or homeowners saddled by large mortgages. This is particularly the case now that interest rates have risen from zero to five per cent to combat inflation. Adding to potential woes is that the recent fall in commodity prices suggests the global economy is not yet in a full recovery mode from the recent lockdown. It could even reverse into a further recession.

9. The pandemic flag which has not gone away, because there could be another virus like avian flu or a new variant of the coronavirus.
10. The crowded space flag of a possible collision in space between rockets and satellites which could disrupt the global communication and banking systems.
11. The artificial intelligence flag which is so new that nobody has yet worked out the real upsides and downsides of it. For example, will it create lots of new jobs or displace people out of their current jobs? Will it enhance or jeopardize cybersecurity? Will it eventually control humankind?

The two mainframe global scenarios that flow out of these flags are “Friendly Planet” where a new generation of world leaders create a more co-operative world in which climate change and other international issues are addressed in a positive way; versus “Gilded Cage” where the West huddles together in its cage and leaves the rest of the world to sort itself out as long as there is no danger to Western interests. Meanwhile, the planet deteriorates as climate change sets in. The flags would suggest that at the moment we are in the second scenario until the world has new leaders.

As far as South Africa’s future is concerned, there are five flags to watch:

1. The crime and corruption flag and whether we are making genuine attempts to bring it down the pole.
2. The quality of infrastructure flag in areas such as electricity supply, railways and ports, education and healthcare. For this flag to be positive, there has to be a proper alliance between the government and private sector.
3. The entrepreneurship flag, where young entrepreneurs are given the right support systems to open up businesses and grow them and where the township economies are successfully integrated into the mainstream economy.
4. The 2024 election flag where the result could be much closer than previous elections since 1994, particularly with the talk of coalitions between parties. Moreover, there could be a surprising switch from the trend of rising voter abstention and apathy to people being persuaded to vote positively for change by putting their cross against a different party on the ballot paper. However, this will only happen if all parties when campaigning articulate exactly what they will do to improve the lives of young people, should they be elected to lead the country.
5. The neutrality flag where South Africa ensures that it treads a middle path in the presently divided world and keeps its trading relationships with its main external trading partners intact.

The two mainframe South African scenarios that flow out of these flags are “People’s Economy” where steps are taken to establish a genuine entrepreneurially driven economy which grows from the ground upwards, while infrastructure and services are enhanced by a lasting government/private sector partnership; and “Cautionary Tale” where the economy flounders, civil unrest rises and the country begins a descent towards a Waste Land of misery. At the moment, the flags would suggest that we are in a 50:50 situation with the odds evenly distributed between the two scenarios. That is why the 2024 election could prove to be a tipping point either way in terms of the nation’s future over the next ten years.