

Jacob Zuma was born in rural KwaZulu-Natal in 1942. From his humble beginnings at Nkandla, he would follow an eventful path that eventually led him to the highest office in the land in the Union Buildings as President of South Africa. He was often characterised as "a man of the people" with traditional roots. He was also seen as a politician with many lives but eventually several controversies during his presidency would prove to be his undoing.

His African names given to him by his late parents somewhat predicted his journey in life. The name Gedleyihlekisa, means people who pretend to like you, while Mhlanganyelwa means people who collude or gang up against you.

Zuma was born on 12 April 1942 at Nkandla in northern KwaZulu-Natal. His father, a policeman, died when Zuma was a young boy. At the age of eight, Zuma began herding his grandfather's cattle while many other boys his age went to school. But he taught himself to read and write by using the books of other children who attended school. While herding cattle, he also engaged and excelled in stick fighting.

Around that time, his mother left to look for a job in Durban where she found employment as a domestic worker. When Zuma was in his teens, he would sometimes sneak in at his mother's work place. These occasional visits to the city introduced him to politics and he began attending ANC meetings.

In 1959, after having found work in one of the factories, he joined the ANC and the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) and began attending party and trade union meetings. He was later recruited to MK by the late ANC/SACP leader Moses Mabhida. Over the years Zuma rose through the ranks of the ANC, in various portfolios, including heading the party's Intelligence Unit. In 1994 he was appointed as KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Economic Development. A position he held until 1999. Zuma also served as the ANC's Deputy Secretary General, National Chairperson and Deputy President until he took over the party's top position in 2007.

President Zuma's trials and tribulations started in 2005 when he appeared in the Durban magistrates court on two charges of corruption related to his dealings with his former financial advisor Shabir Shaik. Another contentious issue during his term was the 246 million rand security upgrade to his Nkandla home. Former Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela found that the president had unduly benefited from some of the construction. It was also established that the construction was done at inflated the prices. The 2016 State of Capture report linked the controversial Gupta family with the President. He has on a number of occasions ascribed the attacks on him to people who he said could not believe that a person from a less privileged background could run the country.

“Coming from a poor background and you are now something and they try to make you a laughing stock, to make you feel, you don't know what you are doing, to make you feel you are useless. It is at times more painful if it is done by people who come from there as well. That's why South Africans can't believe that a person who never went to school is the president, he must be attacked 24/7. I suffered, because i never went to school i decided to educate myself and I can tell you stories and the stories continues until this day. What I'm saying to you now i will

say it what the black people did to their son who never went to school but educated himself and they torched him for all the time when he was given the responsibility and i will tell who are those people because i know them.”

Zuma has often been hailed for his work in the late 80's and early nineties in facilitating peace between ANC and IFP supporters in KwaZulu-Natal during the period of political violence. However IFP leader Inkosi Mangosuthu Buthelezi believes Zuma was given more credit than he deserves.

“It's definitely not true as some people say that he was solely especially the journalists. They use that shorthand and say that he bought about peace in the province which i say he participated yes in but it's not true they are giving him more than the marks they should give him for that.”

Zuma was sometimes at odds with other members of the ANC leadership. However, at the December ANC National Conference at Nasrec, the party's National Chairperson Gwede Mantashe described Zuma as a custodian of ANC history and one of the few leaders who understood the organisation at its core.

“And i can tell you because of the negative narrative that have been thrown at president Zuma one thing you will never appreciate is the deep knowledge of the man about the anc. Deep understanding about the ANC, experience history all a person being a depository of many issues that happened in the anc. That is the part that is hidden to the public. Now at that point you will not understand the positive aspects and the experience you derive in working with president Zuma. The ten years in the ANC has improved my understanding because working in that collective with president Zuma at the helm gave me a lot of experiences. One thing i know is that you can have problems with president Zuma but you cannot have a problem of the ability to talk to the masses of our people. Even if there is a problem and you throw him into a meeting with the masses that changes, that a rare gift.”

President Zuma has been hailed for work that he has done on the rest of the Africa continent - having successfully mediated in war-torn countries such as Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. He has on more than one occasion indicated that he would continue to play a role in the ANC after having retired