

## South Africa rules husband can take wife's name

15th September 2025



A court in South Africa has ruled that a man can now take his wife's surname or have a double-barrelled name after marriage. Prior to this ruling, the country's Births and Deaths Registration Act had stipulated that a husband

needed to apply to the Home Affairs department in order to take his wife's surname or to hyphenate it. However, even if a man submitted an application, there was no guarantee that it would be granted. The request was denied in many cases. The new decree stipulates that the law prohibiting a man from adopting his spouse's family name was discriminatory on the basis of gender. It says a man has the right to assume the last name of a woman he marries.

The court's pronouncement has been met with mixed reaction on social media. Many people lauded the decision as being forward-thinking and a sign that the country was providing greater equality. They highlighted the fact that the previous law was passed in the colonial, apartheid era and was overly paternalistic. They also say the law continues South Africa's progressiveness. The country was the first in Africa to legalize same-sex marriage. However, others have criticized the new ruling. They view it as being counter to the country's traditions. One user on X said it would "destroy the norms and values" of indigenous citizens.

Sources: yahoo.com / [businessstech.co.za](https://www.businessstech.co.za) / [msn.com](https://www.msn.com)

## Writing

No one should change their surname after getting married. Discuss.

## Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

court / South Africa / surname / marriage / guarantee / decree / spouse / gender / mixed reaction / social media / decision / equality / apartheid / same-sex marriage

## True / False

- 1) A court ruled that a man must take his wife's surname in South Africa. **T / F**
- 2) A man could automatically get a name change from the government. **T / F**
- 3) A court said it was discriminatory to deny a man a name change. **T / F**
- 4) The court says it's a man's right to change his surname upon marriage. **T / F**
- 5) There have been wholly positive responses on social media platforms. **T / F**
- 6) Most of S. Africa's laws regarding names were from pre-colonial times. **T / F**
- 7) S. Africa was the second African country to legalize same-sex marriage. **T / F**
- 8) An X user said the new law would destroy values of indigenous citizens. **T / F**

## Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- |                         |              |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| 1. <b>ruled</b>         | a. partner   |
| 2. <b>submitted</b>     | b. accepted  |
| 3. <b>granted</b>       | c. take on   |
| 4. <b>spouse</b>        | d. put in    |
| 5. <b>assume</b>        | e. decreed   |
| 6. <b>pronouncement</b> | f. native    |
| 7. <b>lauded</b>        | g. decision  |
| 8. <b>counter to</b>    | h. standards |
| 9. <b>norms</b>         | i. praised   |
| 10. <b>indigenous</b>   | j. against   |

## Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you think about what you read?
- b) Do people get too excited when they comment on social media?
- c) Why haven't all countries legalized same-sex marriage?
- d) What do you think of the word 'maiden name'?
- e) How bothersome is it to have to change your surname?
- f) Should everyone keep their own surnames after marriage?
- g) How progressive is it for a country to allow a man to change his name?
- h) What questions would you like to ask the South African lawmakers?

## Phrase Match

- |  |                             |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. Prior                                     | a. spouse's family name     |
| 2. in order to take his wife's surname or to | b. same-sex marriage        |
| 3. there was no guarantee                    | c. the last name            |
| 4. prohibiting a man from adopting his       | d. country's traditions     |
| 5. a man has the right to assume             | e. the decision             |
| 6. The court's pronouncement has been met    | f. hyphenate it             |
| 7. Many people lauded                        | g. colonial, apartheid era  |
| 8. the previous law was passed in the        | h. that it would be granted |
| 9. the first in Africa to legalize           | i. with mixed reaction      |
| 10. They view it as being counter to the     | j. to this ruling           |

## Discussion – Student B

- Why shouldn't a man adopt his wife's surname after marriage?
- Would you like to change your surname?
- What do you think of double-barrelled surnames?
- What do you think of triple-barrelled surnames?
- How important is your surname to you?
- Why is the married woman expected to change her surname?
- Is the system of changing names after marriage discriminatory?
- What is the meaning of your surname?

## Spelling

- have a lduboe-ealbrerd name
- latdipsetu that a husband needed to apply
- or to tneapheyh it
- a man submitted an naictioplp
- The new reedec stipulates that
- adopting his spe'ssuo family name
- The court's oopcnmnerneu
- Many people uldeda the decision
- in the localnol, apartheid era
- overly csptlrateaini
- tcrueno to the country's traditions
- gosnnieudi citizens

### Answers – Synonym Match

1. e	2. d	3. b	4. a	5. c
6. g	7. i	8. j	9. h	10. f

## Comprehension Questions

Listen to / read the news article. Answer these questions.  
(Answers are on p. 27 of the 27-page PDF.)

1.	What name could a man have after marriage beside his wife's name?
2.	Where did a man in S. Africa have to apply to adopt his wife's surname?
3.	What happened to name-change requests in many cases in South Africa?
4.	On what basis was the old law about name changes discriminatory?
5.	What does the article say a man has a right to after he gets married?
6.	What kind of reaction was there to the new law on social media?
7.	What did many people laud the new law for being?
8.	When was the older law passed?
9.	Which African country was the first to legalize same-sex marriage?
10.	Who did an X user say the law would destroy the norms and values of?

## Speaking – Marriage

Rank these with your partner. Put the best changes after marriage at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- |                    |            |
|--------------------|------------|
| • Eternal love     | • Children |
| • Better finances  | • Support  |
| • Shared housework | • Intimacy |
| • Happiness        | • In-laws  |

### Answers – True False

1	F	2	F	3	T	4	T	5	F	6	F	7	F	8	T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.