

Aids denialism in South Africa

South African President Thabo Mbeki appealed to principles of free speech in his defence of Aids denialism. A case study by Casey Selwyn.



[Aids denialism](#) is a movement which claims that HIV does not cause Aids and that antiretroviral drugs – the most effective available method of treating Aids to date – are poisonous and promoted by a profit-driven pharmaceutical industry. In South Africa, a country that has experienced one of the most severe [Aids epidemics](#) in the world, President Thabo Mbeki, his health minister and numerous other high-level officials endorsed the concept of denialism in the early 2000s, often [appealing to principles of free speech](#) as justification for questioning the origins of Aids and the efficacy of anti-retrovirals as treatment. Public health researchers have [estimated](#) that approximately 343,000 Aids-related deaths are attributable to the South African government's endorsement of denialism between 1999 and 2007.

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