



Centre for Policy Studies

**Research Report 106**  
**Race and Ethnic Relations Barometer:**  
A Narrative Analysis of Findings, from  
The Centre for Policy Studies  
Social Identity Survey  
**Francis Kornegay**

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Social Identity Survey**

Francis Kornegay

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

As South Africa starts its Ten Year Review, 'The Race and Ethnic Relations Barometer' seeks to establish South Africa's social identity profile. To what extent after a decade under a post-apartheid government, have South Africans overcome the socio-racial polarisation that had been entrenched through the system of apartheid (perhaps the most extreme form of racial dictatorship)? To begin addressing this question, the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), funded by the Mott Foundation, undertook a research project aimed at devising a "Barometer of race perceptions and interaction". This research was conducted using a survey to obtain a sample of opinions on the state of South Africa's race relations and derived national identity.

What follows is a narrative analysis of the findings. The analysis will highlight some of the salient points, observations and implications emerging from the data and is not intended to be comprehensive. A general overview of results reveals a nation that remains deeply divided along socio-racial lines, but does not exhibit highly politicised or, perhaps more critically, destabilising degrees of inter-group polarisation. This lack of destabilising polarisation could be because apartheid racial divisions were not bipolar or biracial ('black versus white') but multi-polar and multi-ethnic, despite 'non-racialism' having been a dominant theme during the era of the liberation struggle and the mass democratic movement.

The non-racial 'blackness' of the black consciousness movement was another counter to socio-racial divisions, though this conflation contained the potential to lead to biracial 'black versus white' polarisation. This potential was not fulfilled but this is perhaps, an area that may require further inquiry. Considering this background, the findings that emerged from the survey offer a social identity profile of the nation that is more racially nuanced. Even though the survey may have revealed a picture that is not polarised from an empirical standpoint, the tendency for high-visibility incidents with strong racial overtones to generate potentially polarising public controversies remains a reality in the public life of post-apartheid South Africa. This tendency is a reality that belies the lack of destabilising polarisation that emerged in the responses to this survey. This may reflect 'still waters' running deeper than the CPS instrument was able to measure. Prevalent colloquialisms such as 'reverse racism' could, for example, be an attitudinal expression that may inform some perceptions of the post-apartheid socio-racial environment.

A public attitudes questionnaire was prepared by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and employed as the instrument for eliciting social identity responses. For this analysis the questions that were used in the questionnaire were grouped into the following sub-headings:

## 1.1 National identity profile

- Do you identify yourself proudly with the following? Please indicate which ONE you think is most important: Ethnic group (e.g. Xhosa, Afrikaans, Shangaan), Race (white, black, coloured, Indian), Member of the 'Rainbow Nation', a South African or an African.
- In your opinion, should all citizens of South Africa be referred to as 'African' like all citizens of the United States of America (USA) are identified as 'American'?
- Do you think the Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities Commission can make a positive difference by promoting tolerance and the equal treatment of such communities?

## 1.2 National identity profile: tolerance levels

- Does it matter to you when people around you belong to a different group from your own in the following respects: Ethnic group, Race, South African citizenship (they are from another country)

## 1.3 Social integration profile

- Have there been people of other race groups than your own who have interacted with you in the following cases: Public places, At work or in a class, At a place of worship, Where your child goes to school, Where you live (street, block, neighbourhood), Social occasions, Sexual partner or close friend, Domestic worker or gardener?
- In your experience, do people of different race groups work well together?
- In any of the following cases (Public places, Work, School, Place of worship, Neighbourhood, Sexual partner or close friend) would you rather have people mostly or only of your own race group?
- In your experience or to your knowledge, has the integration of residential areas improved or soured relationships between people of different race groups?

#### 1.4 Competitive race relations profile

- Does your ethnic group (e.g. Zulu, Portuguese, Jewish) help you or count against you when you want a job or position?
- Does your race group (e.g. coloured, black) help you or count against you in the following situations: Educational institutions, Finding work, Getting promoted?
- Has affirmative action (AA) helped previously excluded people to access employment?
- Do you feel that black economic empowerment (BEE) is diminishing the degree of inequality?

#### 1.5 Human rights priorities

- Please indicate which of the following you believe should be an important part of the work of the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC): Promote and protect human rights, Deal with racism and discrimination, Monitor the civil service and government transformation, Ensure socio-economic rights (housing, water and health care), The SAHRC cannot make a difference?

#### 1.6 Xenophobia

- When deciding whether foreigners may immigrate to South Africa, should government take into account whether they: Come from Africa or Europe, Make a contribution to the economy, Qualify as refugees?

#### 1.7 Racism: problem perception

- Is racism a problem in South Africa?
- Other problems compared in rank to racism: Crime and violence, Poverty and unemployment/inequality, The xenophobia-homophobia-sexism cluster, Service delivery?
- Do you think relations between different race groups have improved since 1994?
- In the last three years, have you personally experienced any of the following due to racism: Racist comment, Cannot find work/poor wages, Bad treatment on the

job/lack of opportunity, Poor housing, Bad police treatment, Bad treatment in a shop, Victim of crime/violence?

## 1.8 Overcoming racism

- For each of the following things, please indicate whether you believe that it makes or could make a difference to the way people of different race groups feel about each other in South Africa: The new Constitution, AA, BEE/preferential tendering, School programmes promoting tolerance and democracy, Government transformation, Reparations, Poverty eradication and housing?
- Which of the following should be responsible for eradicating racism: Individuals, Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community based organisations (CBOs) or relevant civic organisations, Community groups including religious organisations, Political parties, Government? And which one of these should assume the greatest responsibility for combating racism?
- Which of the following are good ways for government to combat racism: Lessen poverty/inequality, Educating people about tolerance, Legislative banning of racism, Policing acts of racism more severely?
- Do you believe individuals can combat racism in their daily lives, for instance at work, at school or in conversations with friends?

## 2. SOUTH AFRICA'S EMERGING NATIONAL IDENTITY

The national identity cluster of questions and responses reveals a multiplicity of identities among South Africa's four major socio-racial groups in terms of ethnicity, race, national and continental identity. All groups reflect strongly held racial and ethnic identification, with ethnic loyalties competing more or less evenly with racial identification. Yet, all groups appear equally committed to a common South African national identity. This finds expression when the combined responses to "member of a rainbow nation" and identification as a "South African" are factored into the identity mix. Whites rate the lowest in terms of identification with a rainbow nation. Nevertheless a slim majority of whites - just over half of respondents (54.2%) - identify with the rainbow depiction. Whites compare more evenly with other groups on identifying "yourself as proudly South African", at 68.4% (compared to 70.9% for blacks, 74.6% for coloureds and 71.5% for Indians/Asians).

The sense of a common South African identity shows in the results to the question of which identity is "most important". Here "South African" outranked all other identity



categories, with whites at 25.6%, blacks at 24.3% and coloureds and Indians/Asians at 22.6% and 22.1% respectively. The highest “rainbow nation” adherents based on this survey, are Indians/Asians with 77.4% followed by blacks with 72.5% and coloureds with 69.8%. Coloureds however, have the edge in identifying themselves as “proudly South African.” When it comes to identifying as “African” blacks, as expected, outscore all other groups but well over half of coloured and Indians/Asians also subscribe to identifying themselves as “African.” On this question, blacks lead with 74%, with Indians/Asians coming in a close second with 73.2% and coloureds following with 65.8%. Slightly more ambivalence shows among coloureds and Indians/Asians when asked the question, “should all citizens of South Africa be referred to as Africans”, with just over 60% of coloureds and 61% of Indians answering in the affirmative.

Not unexpectedly, whites trail all other groups with only 47.6% identifying themselves as “African” - just under half, but far from an overwhelming rejection of this identification. More pronounced is the negative white response to the question of whether or not all South African citizens should be referred to as “African”. This is rejected by 37% compared to the majorities in the affirmative among blacks, coloureds and Indians/Asians with blacks supporting this by an overwhelming 80.1%. However, to place race consciousness in perspective, ‘race’ is out-competed among blacks by ethnicity and “proudly South African.” Still an implicit pro-African race consciousness is suggested by the overwhelming black support for all South African citizens being referred to as “Africans.”

When it comes to provincial breakdowns, “proudly South African” is considered “most important” by the Western Cape and the Free State and they lead slightly with 27.4% each. Western Cape scores the highest among the provinces where respondents cite themselves as being proud of their ethnicity (83.3%) followed by Limpopo (81.6%). Where those in the Western Cape exhibit a strong “proudly South African” loyalty, their adherence to ethnicity may reflect a strong sense of regional exceptionalism vis-à-vis other provinces. Limpopo, on the other hand has had to contend with, perhaps, the highest degree of homeland-based ethnic pluralism, which resulted in a high degree of ethnic consciousness. Two homelands (Lebowa and Venda) and part of a third (Ndebele) collapsed into the successor to the Northern Transvaal, Limpopo province. The rest of the Ndebele homeland became a part of Mpumalanga.

What is curious, however, is that the “tribal” and “urban informal” categories scored more than “urban formal” on “rainbow nation” and “proudly South African” identities among the provinces. Given the expectation that urban formal sectors would reflect a greater degree of cosmopolitanism and exposure to the outside world than informal and tribal sectors, these results seem to beg more questions about the comparative nature of identities along the urban-rural divide.

All four socio-racial groups see “educating people about different cultures” and “improving race relations” as the most important aspects of building South Africa. The responses to the majority of options under this question (“Do you view the following as

important aspects of building South Africa?") are in the 90% range except for whites where, for example, only 66.3% support "promoting the Rainbow Nation". After that, the next lowest percentage among whites is 79.5% in support of "strengthening local democracy". Yet whites are almost on par with other groups in support of poverty alleviation as an important aspect of building South Africa at 89.9%. This could be read as being especially significant in terms of policy implications as it suggests broad-based cross-racial support for a more pronounced 'war on poverty'. The provincial breakdown of responses further amplifies rather than contradict socio-racial group responses.

## 2.1 The Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities Commission

Based on the high rating afforded to "educating people about different cultures" as a means of building South Africa, one would expect a higher rating for affirmative responses to the question, "do you think the Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities Commission can make a positive difference by promoting tolerance and the equal treatment of such communities?" The majority of the four groups (except for whites) are in favour of such a commission, but not overwhelmingly so. The lowest affirmative percentage, 42.2% represents that of white respondents. Ironically, this commission is the result in part of the political need to address the cultural and linguistic survival concerns of Afrikaans-speaking whites. The highest affirmative percentage is from black respondents at 69.2% followed by Indians/Asians at 66.5% and coloureds at 57.1%. The higher priority that this commission receives amongst blacks carries over at the provincial level where provinces with large black majorities and supporters of the government register the highest affirmative responses: Eastern Cape (77.9%), the Free State (73.3%), KwaZulu-Natal (68.2%) and Limpopo (63.2%). This support extends to clear majorities within the provinces, transcending the urban-rural, formal-informal/tribal divides. Black support for this commission would appear to underline the importance of ethnicity alongside race in South African socio-national identity formation.

All South African socio-racial groups are multi-dimensional in terms of the extent to which their members express their identities. No group is monolithic although, perhaps an even greater understanding might be gleaned from a more differentiated sampling of opinion among different white and coloured groups, especially coloureds. The survey does not do justice to the degree of cultural pluralism amongst coloureds who, in a sense, reflect a bridging sister relationship to all other South African socio-racial/cultural groups. Depending on the region of the country, the coloured group merge into significant African ethno-linguistic groups (e.g. Xhosas in the Eastern Cape, BaPedi/Northern Sotho in Limpopo and Zulu in KwaZulu-Natal), with Indian/Asian communities (e.g. Cape Malay and important Muslim communities throughout South Africa) and with Afrikaans-speaking whites.

White opinion should reflect some interesting nuances between Afrikaans and English-speakers. Afrikaans-speakers have often evoked their own sense of being "African", coupled

with yet more nuances that may emerge among other important white sub-groups such as Jews and Portuguese-speakers. The apparent strong “rainbow” identification of Indian/Asian South Africans, many of whom are also not averse to identifying themselves as “Africans” also begs interesting questions regarding internal socio-economy and cultural dynamics among this group vis-à-vis the rest of South Africa. As for blacks, ethnicity appears to be at least as important, if not more so than race in contributing to depolarisation of the South African socio-racial dynamics.

## 2.2 National identity as a reflection of levels of tolerance

On the question, “does it matter to you when people around you belong to a different group from your own in the following respect: ethnic group, racial group, one’s South African citizenship?” blacks appear comparatively less tolerant than all other socio-racial groups, followed by whites with a gap between white and black levels of tolerance of between 5% and 10%. For example, with respect to “ethnic group” a majority of blacks answered no over yes, 53.2% and 46.8%, compared to 63.4% versus 36.6% for whites. Regarding “race group”, it was 54% and 46% for blacks compared to 58.9% and 41.1% for whites. Regarding “citizenship”, blacks said no, 51.6%, and yes, 48.4%, while for whites, it was 61.5% and 38.5%. However, this comparative intolerance among blacks is offset by the fact there is still a majority of blacks who state that they do not mind people of different nationalities around them as opposed to those who state that they do. This apparent trend towards relative intolerance may amplify attitudes reflecting xenophobia which appear to be higher among blacks on a comparative socio-racial basis.

When the reaction to interaction with different peoples is broken down according to provinces, those who do not mind whether others are of a different ethnic group, race or different citizenship are in the minority in some provinces. This is reflected especially on the question of ethnicity in the Eastern Cape, Gauteng and Mpumalanga. In Eastern Cape, 52.1% mind if others are of a different ethnic group. This compares with 47.9% who don’t. In Gauteng 53.3% mind as opposed to 46.7% who don’t, while 63.6% mind as opposed to 36.4% who don’t in Mpumalanga. This also extends to race in Gauteng and Mpumalanga, with the third province being North West instead of Eastern Cape. Gauteng and Mpumalanga also show negative majorities on the question of the citizenship of persons around one, an indicator having a bearing on xenophobic potential.

Could it be that seeming melting pots of urban ethnic and, to a lesser extent, racial diversity within a competitive economic environment, exacerbated by poverty and high unemployment may accentuate negative feelings about the presence of ‘the other’ in explaining such sentiments in Gauteng, South Africa’s economic capital? To the extent that such attitudes may have a bearing on the incidences of xenophobia, such linkages are far from clear when reviewing the results of the cluster of questions addressing this issue.

### 2.3 Xenophobic ambivalence

All groups were more or less evenly divided on the question, “when deciding whether foreigners may immigrate to South Africa, should government take into account whether they come from Africa or Europe?” Blacks, coloureds and Indians/Asians responded ‘yes’ more often than ‘no’ but whites responded the other way around. Respondents were less ambivalent on the question of government considering the potential economic contribution that immigrants could make. Clear majorities favour such a contribution from foreign immigrants. However, the ambivalence is noticed again on the question of whether or not South Africa should allow immigrants to qualify as refugees. A clear majority favour allowing immigrants to qualify but there is an almost even split among whites with the majority against such a proposition. Coloureds appear much more in favour of allowing immigrants to qualify as refugees than either blacks or Indians/Asians. These socio-racial group findings are reflected closely in the provincial breakdowns.

## 3. THE BLACK SOCIAL INTEGRATION DEFICIT

Compared to coloured, Indian/Asian and white South Africans, blacks come across as much less integrated socially on all counts pertaining to the question, “have there been people of other race groups than your own who interact with you in the following places?” which then notes a range of different settings: public places, the work place, school and class room, places of worship, socialising with friends, engaging with sexual partners, close relative or with domestic worker or gardener. Coloureds, Indians/Asians and whites score 83.3%, 89.1% and 80.5% respectively on having interacted with other racial groups whereas for blacks it is at 60.4%.

Similar percentage gaps between blacks and other groups appear for all the instances in this question. However, this apparent social integration deficit should not come as a surprise. It appears to clearly reflect a legacy of decades of apartheid that were based on the social, economic and political exclusion of blacks to a degree greater than for all other socio-racial groups. This exclusion was coupled with economic exploitation and impoverishment. When responses to these questions are broken down by provinces, the Western Cape has the highest affirmative responses when it comes to interracial interactions in public places (87.3%), places of worship (57.2%), on one’s street (65.5%) with the lowest to the question of sexual partner/close friend or relative (7.2%). Gauteng shows the highest affirmative response on interracial interaction “at work as colleagues” (57.6%) and comes in second to the Western Cape regarding public places interaction (75%). The Free States scores the highest percentage when it comes to interaction among children at school.

The follow-on question “do people of different race groups work well together?” shows Indians/Asians with an overwhelming percentage majority of 62.4% responding affirmatively

(compared to 37.9% for blacks, 37.7% for coloureds and 35.7% for whites). Other groups come across as being deeply divided or ambivalent on this question - coloureds and whites more so than blacks and Indians/Asians. Except for Indians/Asians, the majority among coloureds and whites interpret such perceptions as depending more on the individual. Overall socio-racial group perceptions of workplace social integration appear highly mixed and uneven.

### 3.1 Racial interaction preferences

Interestingly, when it comes to the questions clustered from 34 to 42 that deal with preference for the own racial group, whites show high degrees of tolerance to most questions, reflected by “does not matter” responses. Blacks, appear almost uniformly as the most socially conservative in terms of racial preference interactions. Coloureds exhibit the least social conservatism. Yet, when compared to another set of tolerance indicator questions, Q70-72: “I respect people of other cultures/expect people to respect my culture,” blacks rate among the highest percentages of the four socio-racial groups. Thus, on questions having to do with mutual respect of cultures, black percentages of ‘yes’ were marginally higher at 96.7% over coloureds at 95%, whites at 91.8% and just behind Indians at 97.6%. On “race jokes are a funny/good way to help races to get along,” while all socio-race groups disagreed on this score, blacks agreed with 32.7% compared to 28.7% for whites, 21.4% for coloureds but Indians were at 35.6%. In terms of agreeing or disagreeing on being proud of racist legislation having been abolished and a bill of rights having been adopted, blacks and Indians tied in their agreement at 78.5% ahead of whites at 63.9% and coloureds at 58.9%. With Q34-42, with regard to sexual partner/close friend race preferences, blacks register higher percentages than all other groups, showing the least same-race preference. Whites show the most same-race preference on the sexual partner/close friend question. Thus, the more intimate the racial interaction, the more distance is reflected among whites.

With the provincial breakdown, Gauteng shows a higher degree of same-race preference conservatism than any other province. The exception is the Western Cape on the question of sexual partner/close friend interaction. As the most urbanised, black-dominant province, Gauteng’s racial interaction preference profile appears to closely reflect the black social intercourse conservatism that shows up in the inter-group comparisons. The exception is the question of sexual partner/close friend interaction.

### 3.2 Residential racial interaction preference

Residential area integration is another major indication of social integration. Here, whites show the least preference in terms of racial integration. Blacks, coloureds and Indians/Asians feel that racial residential integration improve race relations by 50%, 47.2% and 52.9% respectively. Only 28.1% of whites concur and 21.5% of whites feel that race relations would

be soured by residential integration. However, white aversion to racial integration in neighbourhoods is offset by an even larger group, 31.4%, who feel that “it has not made much difference”.

The Eastern Cape shows the highest percentage of respondents who believe that residential integration improves race relations (60.5%) followed by Limpopo (58.5%). In all other provinces the range is somewhere between 40-50% (also for the urban-rural/formal-informal/tribal breakdowns). Percentages of respondents who feel that race relations are soured by residential integration are a distinct minority in all provinces and sizable percentages feel that it makes little difference one way or the other.

Overall, a clear majority of 47.1% believe that residential integration enhances race relations. This compares to 14% who feel that it sours race relations, 28.3% who feel that it makes little difference and 10.5% who are uncertain about the impact.

#### 4. COMPETITIVE RACE RELATIONS

“Competitive race relations” refers to a phenomenon interpreted by historical sociologist Pierre van den Berghe in his study ‘Race and Racism’ published in 1967.<sup>1</sup> He suggested that racial tensions were likely to heighten in situations where people were thrown into intense economic competition for scarce resources. With the post-apartheid emphasis on affirmative action (AA) and black economic empowerment (BEE), this paradigm may be useful for understanding competitive situations that have resulted from a political process aimed at redressing racially-rooted socio-economic backlogs imposed by apartheid. It is within this context that responses to a series of questions about the impact of race and ethnicity on access to jobs, positions, promotions and educational opportunities, may be understood.

Questions 44 and 45 asked whether the respondent’s ethnic group and race “help you or count against you when you want a job or position”. On ethnicity, blacks were almost evenly divided when saying ethnic groups help (23.9%) or hurt (25.3%). For Indians/Asians, ethnicity was seen as hurting more (38.4%) than helping (20.4%). This was the same for coloureds, except the percentages were much lower (12.8% hurting and 17.9% helping). Most coloureds at 69.4% did not think ethnicity made any difference. The majority of blacks (50.8%) and Indians/Asians (41.2%) also did not think ethnicity made a difference. Only whites gave the highest percentage (47.6%) to ethnicity counting against them. Interestingly, with regard to coloureds, these findings don’t match the strong anecdotal expression associated with many coloureds that when it comes to employment opportunities, they “are not black enough”.

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson William Javier. ‘Brazil and US: The Black-White Divide’. [www.brazil-brasil.com](http://www.brazil-brasil.com).

Similar percentage patterns are reflected in the responses to the question of whether or not race helps or hurts. For blacks, race marginally helps more (23.7%) than hurts (17.8%) a slightly bigger difference than when compared to ethnic group identity. For all other groups, race is seen as hurting more than helping. This is very marginal for coloureds with a split that is almost even between race helping (9.4%) and hurting (10.6%). For Indians/Asians race helps less (21.7%) than hurts (26.1%). Whites show the largest discrepancy between race helping (11.9%) and hurting (20.8%). The response “It makes no difference” has the most support in all the groups. This also holds for the question of race helping or hurting in entering into educational institutions, finding jobs and obtaining promotions.

Significantly, more blacks see race as hurting when it comes to finding work (29.5% compared to 22.7% who don't see it as hurting) and obtaining promotions (28.8% compared to 18.8% who don't feel race hurts) with the latter percentages on obtaining promotions much higher than for coloureds, Indians/Asians and whites. This aspect may need further enquiry as blacks who would be expected to reflect a more optimistic outlook in the pursuit of job opportunities. The factors colouring black perceptions regarding the influence of race on job opportunities, may be high levels of unemployment and the issue of employability and required skills levels. However, as in the case of ethnicity, the “It makes no difference” responses have the most support in all categories namely: entering an educational institution, finding a job or obtaining promotions.

For race and ethnicity in terms of provincial comparisons, high percentages for “It does not make any difference” become even more pronounced. However in all provinces, race appears to be a more important factor in helping to enter educational institutions than in finding work or obtaining job promotions. The exceptions are the Western Cape, Gauteng and Mpumalanga where there are marginally higher responses for race holding back one's entering such institutions. While one could almost begin to conclude that a non-racial society has arrived in education and employment due to the large majority percentages indicating that race “make no difference,” important though lesser percentages indicate that in finding work and getting promoted on the job, more respondents of all groups feel that race holds them back as opposed to helping. Only with “entering educational institutions” does race help and outscores “holds me back.” An inference could be made here of a marginal advantage for blacks, though even here, majorities of blacks don't seem to feel that race matters much if at all.

#### **4.1 BEE/AA versus poverty eradication**

Here it is important to match responses to questions regarding government policies that contribute to “changing feelings of races”, with those generated by questions pertaining to affirmative action (AA) and black economic empowerment (BEE), in terms of how much respondents felt these made a difference to people of different race groups. The sharpest

difference among the groups in the responses to questions 61-67 centred on BEE. Only blacks saw BEE as a major advantage (60.9%) and this positive response more than outscored “negative” or “no difference”. Coloureds (42.6%), Indians/Asians (50.8%) and whites (65.3%) mostly see BEE as negative. AA generated a more positive response among coloureds (43.9% in favour compared to 25.6% against) as was also registered, even more significantly, among blacks (64.3% in favour compared to 15.5% against). Indians/Asians and whites perceive themselves as being disadvantaged by AA. Thus, competitive race relations are highlighted more on the questions relating to BEE as opposed to AA. This was softened by a much higher percentage consensus among blacks, coloureds, Indians/Asians and whites that “poverty eradication” would make the most difference in terms of the way people of different races feel about each other in South Africa.

## 5. RACISM: PROBLEM PERCEPTION

An important barometer of race relations is the extent to which different racial groups perceive racism in a deeply divided society as a continuing problem. On this score, all groups perceive racism as a problem but the percentages are higher amongst Indians/Asians and whites than among blacks and coloureds (for whom “Yes, a little” scores marginally greater than “Yes, very much”). The question is how the problem of racism is perceived, since Indians/Asians and especially whites are likely to see “reverse racism” as the crux of the problem of continuing racism. Here, the questions do not permit an exploration of this nuance; one that would have a greater bearing in determining more accurately the degree of post-apartheid racial polarisation.

Regionally, the problem perception of racism is strongest in KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Free State and Gauteng whereas “Yes, a little” is more pronounced among respondents in Western Cape. Given its coloured majority, this last result matches the coloured problem perception regarding racism in the comparative racial group breakdowns. All groups acknowledge a fairly strong recognition of racism as a problem though the percentages in the “Yes, very much” category are not decisive. Coloureds register the highest percentage (20.6%) in seeing racism as not being a problem.

Polarisation or the lack thereof, on the question of the problem perception of racism is given greater perspective when racism as a problem is compared to other issues. Here, crime and violence and poverty and unemployment are seen as more important challenges facing South African than racism. However racism rates as a more important concern than the clustered concerns of xenophobia/homophobia/sexism. On the question of “service delivery”, only among blacks does this receive a higher percentage as a problem compared to other groups; an important indicator of this group’s expectations vis-à-vis other groups in terms of benefiting from a post-apartheid dividend. This pattern is reflected in the overall age percentages and in the provincial breakdowns.



## 5.1 Post-1994 racial comity?

All groups register a perception that race relations have improved with coloureds registering the strongest positive response (58.8%) and the lowest in conveying a perception that race relations have actually deteriorated post-1994 (5.2%). Of marginally significance perhaps, more whites see race relations as having improved (40.1%) than deteriorated (30.8%). However, this is a large enough minority to underline the challenge confronting racial reconciliation, especially since many, if not most, blacks perceive of the government and ruling party as having bent over backwards to placate whites. A relatively large minority of Indians/Asians also perceive deterioration in race relations.

On balance however, there is a cross-racial consensus on post-1994 improvement in race relations. This pattern carries over into questions regarding “in the last three years, have you personally experienced any of the following due to racism?” (someone making a racist comment in one’s presence, cannot find job/poor wages, treated badly at work/lack of opportunities, poor housing/development in one’s area, bad treatment by police or other officials...) There are no percentages below 70 for any of these instances listed in questions 54-60. Clear majorities of over 70% in all socio-racial groups answered “no, didn’t happen/not from racism”. This result suggests less polarised racial feelings as a complement to the findings from Q53 where all groups perceive an improvement in race relations since 1994.

Police-community relations are an historical flash point for blacks. However, only 14.9% said “yes, happened because of racism” when asked the question of whether they were “treated badly by police or officials due to racism” (though this percentage was marginally higher than for the other groups). Further, although there is a prevalent perception of disaffection among whites concerning affirmative action, only 19.9% said they “cannot find work/poor wages due to racism” (as opposed to 80.1% who denied racism was a factor). What is of concern here is that sizeable minorities of blacks (28.5%) and Indians/Asians (29%) link difficulty in finding work or poor wages to racism. The highest indicator of black disaffection is in the area of housing where 34.6% attribute “poor housing/development in my area” as due to racism.

## 6. BUILDING NON-RACIALISM

In spite of these positive indicators, the politics of race continues to be alive and well in post-apartheid South Africa. Therefore, and because the project as a whole is intended to inform the work of the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), the survey asked respondents to comment on or react to a range of options for enhancing race relations and human rights. Questions 12-16 were devoted to eliciting responses on the role of the SAHRC:

“Please indicate which of the following you believe should be an important part of the work of the South African Human Rights Commission”:

- To protect and promote human rights
- To deal with racism and discrimination
- To monitor the civil service and transformation of government
- To make sure people receive basic rights like housing, water and health care
- The SAHRC cannot make a difference.

The respondents overwhelmingly chose all of these categories (except “cannot make a difference”) as areas where the SAHRC could play a relevant role. All socio-racial groups answered in the affirmative for all categories; from 84.3% of whites agreeing that the SAHRC should deal with racism and discrimination to 100% of Indians/Asians endorsing the SAHRC’s role as that of promoting and protecting human rights. This role received the most support. The provincial breakdown of these responses closely reflects the racial group percentages.

## 6.1 Common ground on eradicating poverty

Beyond, the role of the SAHRC, respondents were asked to prioritise initiatives that would further enhance race relations and reconciliation in questions 61-67:

- The new Constitution
- Affirmative action
- Black economic empowerment, business deals and/or preferential tendering
- School programmes that promote tolerance and democracy
- The transformation of government departments
- If government paid reparations to people who suffered certain losses under apartheid
- If poverty were eradicated and everyone had a home.

Without revisiting the earlier observations made about BEE/AA, it is important to note that these questions elicited responses that reflected the greatest degree of biracial black-white polarisation. However, the majority percentage of whites, did feel that “if poverty were eradicated and everyone had a home,” this would make the most difference in the way “people of different race groups feel about each other”. Coloureds and Indians/Asians fall in the middle with all of these categories and the inter-group response patterns are closely

reflected in the provincial breakdowns. However, on a related statement expressing “South Africans can be proud of the fact that we have overcome our past in the sense that racist legislation has been abolished and/or a Bill of Rights adopted”, little polarisation is evident. The percentage responses range from 78.5% for blacks and Indians/Asians, 63.9% for whites to 58.9% for coloureds.

## 6.2 Stereotyping

When it comes to stereotypes, the majorities of blacks, coloureds, Indians/Asians and whites perceive Nigerians as tending to sell drugs in South Africa. Yet, these prejudices are offset by combined percentages that either disagree or hold no opinion. All groups disagree with the notion that “Black people need less privacy than white and Indian people”. However, blacks and whites are opposed on the statement that “Most Afrikaners are bigoted”. The majority of blacks (55.2%) hold to this notion though a total of 44.8% either disagree or hold no opinion. Whites disagree with this assertion by 54%, as do coloureds (27.7%) and Indians/Asians (37.8%). On the question of Muslims supporting terrorism, blacks marginally agree with 36.4% compared to lesser percentages for coloureds, Indians/Asians and whites. Blacks also appear more prone to believe that “Most Jews earn high salaries in their business” than other groups. Yet, these stereotypes are not held by an overwhelming majority. A total of 49.5% among blacks either disagrees (9.5%) or hold no opinion (40%) on the notion of “most Jews earn high salaries in their businesses” whereas a total of 63.6% among blacks either disagree (18%) or hold no opinion (45.6%) on the assertion linking Muslims and terrorism.

## 7. ERADICATING RACISM: WHO IS RESPONSIBLE AND WHAT TO DO

Among blacks and coloureds, at 85% and 85.3% respectively, the feeling is that government is primarily responsible for eradicating racism. Indians/Asians follow closely with 80.2% while a healthy majority of whites, at 72%, concur. After that, all groups feel that community groups, including religious organisations, and then political parties should bear responsibility for eradicating racism. At the provincial level in Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, Free State, North West, Gauteng, Limpopo and Mpumalanga respondents also felt that government should play a leading role. Those in the Western Cape, however, feel that the primary responsibility for combating racism falls to individuals (by an overwhelming 95%).

In the related question about “which ONE of these should assume the greatest responsibility for combating racism,” blacks overwhelmingly place the onus on government. Among coloureds, there is an almost even split between individuals and government, with the accent on the individuals (amplifying the Western Cape). Indians/Asians feel it is

government's responsibility. Whites join coloureds in placing the onus on individuals at 37.9% compared to government, 34.1%.

On the question of "Which of the following are good ways for government to combat racism," education and poverty alleviation are given priority. This reinforces responses to questions 7-11 ("Do you view the following as important aspects of building South Africa?") where "educating people about different cultures" and "alleviating poverty and inequality" received the highest positive responses among all groups. That being the case, one could draw the following social policy implications from this survey:

- The importance of historical reconstruction in developing credible regional and national social sciences texts about South Africa for use in public and private schools. The emphasis on reconstructing the history of the African continent as the 'cradle' of human evolution and civilisation (instead of texts where human evolution in Africa suddenly skips to the rise of the civilisation of ancient Greece without any references to Afro-Asian antiquities).
- Government's move toward implementing a massive public works programme as a transitional poverty alleviating initiative is a move in the right direction. This might be given a stronger push through mass mobilisation initiatives for popular participation in development at the grassroots level in poor urban and rural communities. A healthy social reconstruction component that could incorporate HIV/AIDS prevention, civic and democracy education as well as gender sensitisation and government-NGO/CBO partnerships could be featured in such efforts.

## 8. SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

Some observations about race in post-apartheid South Africa ten years after the political transition, based on the findings can be made:

- While South Africa remains deeply divided along socio-racial lines, these divisions do not result in a paralysing political polarisation and are offset by all four socio-racial groups sharing a commitment to a common national identity.
- All four socio-racial groups appear to reflect a consensus on the need for "educating people about different cultures" and "improving race relations" as the best means of building South Africa.
- All groups feel that government is primarily responsible for eradicating racism. Though, when it comes to combating racism, while blacks overwhelmingly favour government assuming responsibility, substantial percentages of whites and coloureds placed this responsibility on the individual.

- As far as government assuming the responsibility for combating racism, all groups favour education and poverty alleviation as the means to accomplishing this.
- A majority in all the groups perceive race relations as having improved over the past ten years though a significant minority of whites feel that race relations have deteriorated.
- Though the “problem perception” of race is high among all groups, greater concerns are expressed about crime, violence and poverty and unemployment while concerns clustered around xenophobia/homophobia/sexism rate much less concern.
- Africa/blacks, Indians/Asians and coloureds tended to feel that “when deciding whether foreigners may immigrate to South Africa,” government should take into account whether they come from Africa or Europe whereas whites did not feel this should be the case.
- All groups feel that government should consider the potential economic contribution that immigrants to South Africa can make.
- Only blacks see black economic empowerment (BEE) as making a positive difference while whites, Indians/Asians and coloureds perceive BEE as having a negative impact. Affirmative action registers more positively with these groups.
- Ironically, blacks rated the positive impact of affirmative action at a lesser percentage than all other groups.
- All groups agree that “poverty eradication” would make the most difference in terms of the way people of different races feel about each other in South Africa.
- On the issue of preference of racial interactions as a reflection of levels of tolerance, blacks appear more socially conservative than other groups, while coloureds appear to be the least socially conservative here.
- Compared to other groups, whites show the greatest degree of social conservatism in terms of racial interaction preferences when it comes to the issue of residential integration.
- There is overall consensus that protecting and promoting human rights, combating racism and discrimination, monitoring the civil service, transformation of government and making sure that people receive basic socio-economic rights are all areas where the SAHRC can play a relevant role.
- A majority in all the groups, except whites, are in favour of the establishment of the Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities Commission.

## 9. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings from this survey should serve as a basis in conducting a periodic update of the 'pulse of the nation' on these critical social identity questions. A nation's 'national identity' is not a static but a dynamic phenomenon. There is also room to develop more nuanced and differentiated instruments to gain more in-depth insight into socio-racial group attitudes and opinions. None of these groups is monolithic and a further fine-tuning of instruments should provide a more comprehensive profile of South Africa's evolving post-apartheid national identity. More specifically:

- The need in intra-racial group categories to capture more fully the regional, cultural and ethno-linguistic nuances regarding South African social identity.
- The seeming socio-racial consensus on racism as a problem may not be based on a commonly shared interpretation of the nature of the problem. The possibility of 'reverse racism' colouring perceptions of race/racism could not be explored. A more comprehensive survey would allow the team to look at this question in more detail in the future.
- More questions than answers are posed by the comparative percentages regarding responses to questions broken down along urban-rural, formal-informal sector and tribal/non-tribal dichotomies. Seemingly cosmopolitan urban-industrial, formal sector regions come out as comparatively conservative in the survey.
- A follow-up is suggested by some of the "competitive race relations" questions on socio-racial group perceptions of advantage/disadvantage in the job market associated with the role of race in finding work.
- Finally, there may be another important omission in terms of the instrument. The need for socio-economic indicators such as income (along with race group, age, urban/rural and provincial indicators) to possibly indicate the extent to which socio-racial and ethnic attitudes reflect intersections between race and class. Socio-economic indicators may add more resonance to a race barometer that shows a national consensus on the need for a concerted 'war on poverty'.

This is probably a far from comprehensive listing of points raised by the social identity survey that is in need of follow-up and further refinement. It should be suggestive however, of the focus in establishing an ongoing monitoring of how South Africans view themselves and their society.