

# SA Reconciliation Barometer 2015

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**NATIONAL RECONCILIATION,  
RACE RELATIONS,  
AND SOCIAL INCLUSION**



# NATIONAL RECONCILIATION, RACE RELATIONS, AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

South African Barometer Briefing Paper 1:  
8 December 2015

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## About the IJR

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) was launched in 2000, in the aftermath of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The aim was to ensure that lessons learnt from South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy were taken into account as the nation moved ahead. Today, the Institute's vision is to build fair, democratic and inclusive societies in Africa through carefully selected engagements and interventions. The IJR's mission strives to shape national approaches to transitional justice and reconciliation in African countries by drawing on community intelligence, as well as macro-trend research and comparative analysis.

## About the South African Reconciliation Barometer Survey

The South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) is an annual public opinion survey conducted by the IJR. Since its launch in 2003, the SARB has provided a nationally representative measure of citizens' attitudes to national reconciliation, social cohesion, transformation and democratic governance. The SARB is the only survey dedicated to critical measurement of reconciliation and the broader processes of social cohesion, and is the largest longitudinal data source of its kind globally. The SARB survey was conducted annually between 2003 and 2013 through face-to-face interviews and using a structured questionnaire. In 2013 and 2014, the SARB survey instrument underwent extensive review in order to improve the survey questionnaire in both its conceptualisation and measurement. This process was concluded in 2015 and the new survey was fielded during August and September 2015 by international market research company TNS. The survey employed a multi stage cluster design, whereby enumerator areas (EAs) were randomly selected and, within each of these, households were randomly selected for visitation. At each household a systematic grid system was employed to select the specific respondent for an interview. The final obtained sample of 2 219 respondents was then weighted to represent the adult population of South Africa adequately.



## Summary

While most South Africans agree that the creation of a united, reconciled nation remains a worthy objective to pursue, the country remains afflicted by its historical divisions. The majority feels that race relations have either stayed the same or deteriorated since the country's political transition in 1994 and the bulk of respondents have noted income inequality as a major source of social division. Most believe that it is impossible to achieve a reconciled society for as long as those who were disadvantaged under apartheid remain poor within the 'new South Africa'. Although there is a desire among most South Africans to have more contact with people from racial groups other than their own, they are precluded from doing so by the spatial and economic legacies of apartheid. These also serve to reinforce old prejudices.

## Key findings

- South Africans generally believe that the country has made progress on the road to national reconciliation since the end of apartheid (59.2%), and are convinced that the country has to continue to pursue it as a national objective (69.7%).
- Most, however, believe that this objective will remain impossible for as long as those who were disadvantaged under apartheid remain poor. Inequality remains the most frequently mentioned source of social division within South Africa.
- A majority of respondents (61.4%) feel that race relations since 1994 have either stayed the same or deteriorated. Only 35.6% of the sample indicated that they experience no racism in their daily lives. Moreover, trust between the country's historically defined racial groups remains low – 67.3% of all respondents noted that they have little to no trust in their fellow citizens of other racial groups.
- Most interracial interaction between South Africans occurs in public spaces, such as places of work and study and shopping centres. Interaction in more intimate spaces, such as private homes and social or communal gatherings, is limited. Citizens who are materially better off report higher levels of interracial interaction than those who are worse off.
- Although South Africans primarily associate with their own race and language groups, 75.5% of respondents noted that they regard being South African as a very important part of their identity.
- Most respondents (71%) believe that it is important to strive for the creation of a united South African nation.

## Background and context

Protest stemming from the frustration with, and disappointment about, persisting social inequality and exclusion has become a regular feature of post-apartheid South Africa. Hardly a day goes by on which people, mostly black and poor, somewhere in the country do not rise up to say that their living conditions have become untenable. That they feel neglected. That they have reached a breaking point, where enough is enough.

Yet, despite the proliferation of the number and intensity of these displays of discontent, they have largely been unsuccessful in moving those who hold political sway to act with greater urgency. Protest, by and large, is manifested on a local level in direct response to context-specific issues that afflict poor, powerless communities with little or no bargaining power vis-à-vis ineffective, and often corrupt, local authorities. Rarely are these local struggles connected to highlight the common threads that run through and across each of these contexts and, as a result, they seldom succeed in eliciting responsiveness from a dominant ANC government – the custodian of the new order – and those with a vested interest in sustaining the status quo. This absence of mobilisation has entrenched an asymmetrical relationship between a powerful, centralised core and the disparate, powerless discontents. Its effect has been to sustain a hegemony that allowed for the venting of frustration without having to fear the consequences of ignoring demands.

In 2015, this new post-apartheid political order was supposed to celebrate its coming of age. But it was not to be. Something shifted in our body politic. Instead of celebrating ‘good stories to tell’, the localised struggles of marginalised South Africans finally spilled over from impoverished townships onto the campuses of tertiary education institutions where students, from predominantly black middle- and lower-middle-class households, confronted powers – at the university administration and national governance levels – that they held responsible for their sense of continued cultural and economic exclusion from their respective institutions. In addition to their concerns that related directly to tertiary education, another parallel metanarrative emerged alongside the ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ (RMF) and ‘Fees Must Fall’ (FMF) campaigns, which challenged the fundamentals upon which the entire post-1994 political transition were premised. ‘We were sold out by Mandela’ has become a common refrain within these movements. By challenging the conditions of a negotiated settlement, once hailed as ‘miraculous’ by the international community, they have drawn parallels between the context of their struggles and those of other marginalised South Africans. One clear example of this has been these movements’ insistence on the end of outsourcing, in solidarity with university workers.

These events brought about a marked shift in both the tone and content of our national discourse. It has become more urgent and uncompromising and, importantly, less patient with anything or anyone appearing to stand in the way of more radical forms of social transformation.

To be sure, there were enabling conditions that bolstered and sustained the impetus of the student movements. The first set of these was economic. Like many other emerging economies, South Africa has yet to regain the pre-recession growth momentum of the previous decade. Apart from the implications that this has had for unemployment and its related pressures to sustain a social welfare system that expanded in exponential terms during the 2000s, stubborn budget deficits and ballooning government debt have necessitated deep funding cuts that the tertiary education system could not escape. These were, in turn, passed on to students, many of whom find themselves in the country’s highly precarious and vulnerable middle class. In many ways, this has been the straw that broke the camel’s back.

These material circumstances played strongly into the second set of essentially political conditions, characterised by increasingly contested spaces once dominated by the ANC and its tripartite alliance partners, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). The alliance, which has had a pervasive influence on all spheres of South African life for most of the past two decades, is slowly but surely fragmenting

and losing its grip on society. Internally, factionalism is rampant and patronage, rather than common cause, is increasingly being relied upon to keep things together. Externally, the ANC as a governing party has – with growing frequency – had to resort to violent confrontation, rather than moral persuasion, to bring disaffected citizens into line. As some of its more senior members have warned in recent years, its liberation narrative, which it consciously tried to fuse with that of the post-apartheid state, is no longer sufficient to attract mass support or forge consensus on its own. As a consequence of this, and against the backdrop of the events of this year, it is therefore not only the narrative of the liberation movement that has been drawn into question, but, more profoundly, also that of the entire post-apartheid state.

Reconciliation counts among one of the central concepts – if not as the central concept – that people around the world associate with South Africa’s political transition of the 1990s. Instead of outright retribution for political crimes, as was the case in the Nuremberg Trials that prosecuted functionaries of the NSDAP in the wake of World War II, post-apartheid South Africa opted for a reconciliation model that prioritised national unity over punitive punishment as a means to rebuild a deeply divided society. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, headed by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, became the institutional embodiment of this approach. Alongside Tutu, the towering figure of former President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela who, through many personal reconciliatory gestures towards former enemies, displayed his commitment to this process, loomed large. When many within the current student movement therefore retrospectively charge Mandela with ‘selling out’, they use concessions made to the apartheid government at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), prior to the 1994 elections, as an economic reference point, while ‘reconciliation’ and the broader work of the TRC are blamed for the continued exclusionary dominance of white values and racism. Reconciliation, for those who still attach any value to it within the student movement, can only redeem itself under conditions in which economic justice prevails.

Given the centrality of the concept of reconciliation and the way in which it has shaped our society over the past 21 years, it is important to understand whether it still holds currency among the majority of South Africans. What does this concept mean to them? Do they think the country has been successful in its pursuit? And, importantly, is it still worth pursuing in years to come? The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) probes these and other questions about the state of race relations and political and interpersonal trust through its South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) Survey, which it has conducted since 2003.

This is the first of four despatches that will release public opinion data from the fourteenth round of the SARB Survey, which was conducted among a nationally representative sample of 2 219 respondents during August and September 2015 for the IJR by the reputed international survey company TNS. Together with the South African leg of the Afrobarometer Survey, which focuses on issues of governance and democracy, the SARB Survey is the only social survey of its kind that was conducted during this critical period that preceded and partly overlapped the student protests. In the following sections, we present selected findings that relate to questions of reconciliation, race relations and social division.

## Reconciliation: What does it mean, and what are its prospects for South Africa?

South Africa’s brand of reconciliation, as it found bearing within the TRC, prioritised nation-building. It was believed that if the country did not come to terms with its past in a way that initiated a healing process, it would at some point in the future revert to its original cycle of systematic violence. It therefore opted for a restorative, non-punitive model, which emphasised the extraction of truth from, rather than punishment of, alleged perpetrators who were prepared to make full disclosure of their deeds. Opposing views at the time proposed a process more akin to that of the Nuremberg trials. Without judicial justice at the outset of the new post-apartheid state, its proponents argued, the ability of the state to convince citizens

of the supremacy of the rule of law would be compromised if those who represented its very antithesis were not properly prosecuted.

But what does reconciliation mean to South Africans in 2015? Do the views of the meaning of reconciliation that prevailed in the 1990s still hold? Or have they made way for perspectives that favour a more retributive stance?

**Table 1: The meaning of reconciliation to South Africans (%)**

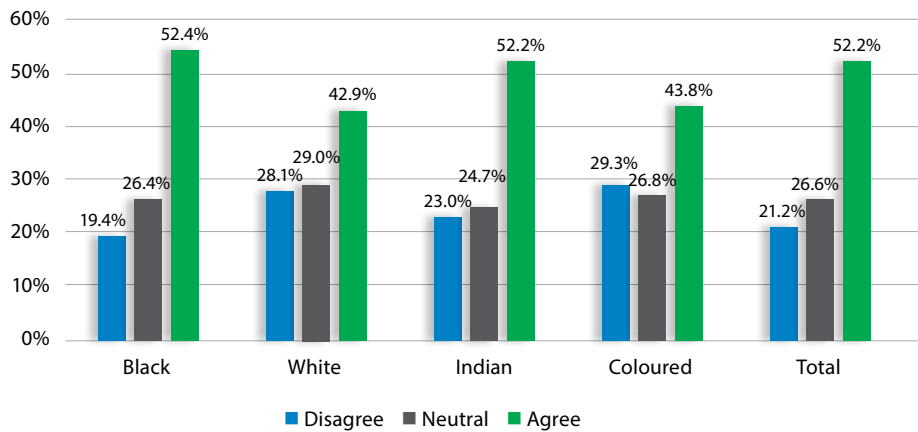
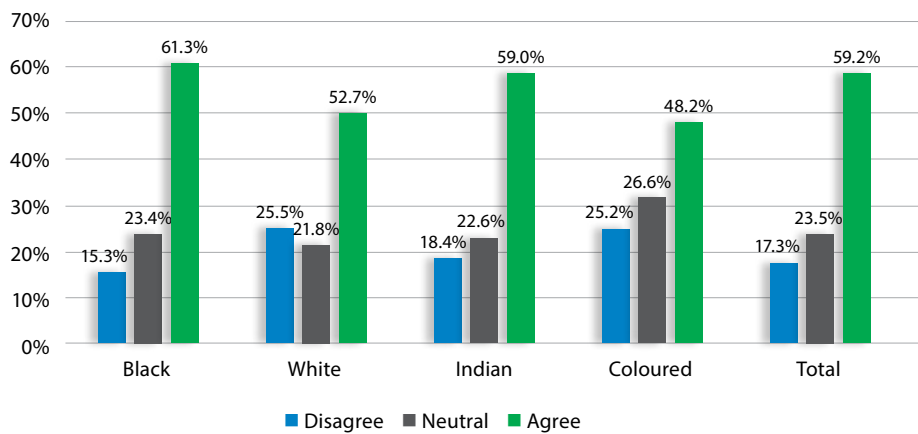
<i>Question: What, if anything, does reconciliation mean to you?</i>	<b>First choice</b>	<b>Second choice</b>	<b>Third choice</b>	<b>Top three</b>
Past victims forgiving past perpetrators	19.2	16.5	11.9	47.6
The reduction of violence and establishment of peace	15.2	10.1	10.8	36.1
Establishing the truth about the past	6.9	9.1	9.3	25.3
Redressing injustice/creating a more equal society	10.0	7.9	6.9	24.8
Improving relationships between past enemies	7.3	8.8	7.2	23.3
Building a democratic culture	5.6	8.9	8.6	23.1
Moving on - moving forwards from the past	6.5	6.7	8.8	22.0
Respecting people's humanity	4.5	6.5	7.0	18.0
Past perpetrators taking responsibility for their actions	4.2	5.4	6.7	16.3
Don't know	7.8	3.2	2.9	13.9
Addressing racism	2.6	4.1	5.9	12.6
Two sides making compromises	1.3	3.8	4.3	9.4
Nothing - it has no meaning	3.6	2.8	2.9	9.3
Past perpetrators punished for their actions	2.8	2.5	2.8	8.1
Remembering the past	1.2	1.8	2.1	5.1
Finding ways to talk about the past	1.3	1.9	1.8	5.0

Table 1 reports on the answers that have been given to a question in the SARB 2015 Survey that asks respondents which, if any, connotation they attach to the word 'reconciliation'. The survey allowed respondents to select three responses as first-, second- and third-mention options. From these responses it is apparent that the original conception of reconciliation still holds the strongest currency in present-day South Africa. The top five statements when first-, second-, and third-mention choices were combined are 'past victims forgiving past perpetrators' (47.6%); 'the reduction of violence and the establishment of peace' (36.1%); 'establishing the truth about the past' (25.3%); 'redressing injustice/creating a more equal society' (24.8%); and 'improving relationships between past enemies' (23.3%). It is noteworthy that statements implying punitive action, such as 'past perpetrators punished for their actions', are ranked quite low down in this list of statements (in position 15 of 17).

Does this present-day convergence with the sentiments about the meaning of reconciliation therefore mean that South Africans have personally experienced reconciliation and that the country, by extension, has been successful in reconciling a society that has been deeply divided over centuries?

Figure 1 provides a breakdown of individuals who have reported personal examples of what they perceive reconciliation to be within their own circle of family and friends, while Figure 2 provides a more general assessment of how successful the country has been on its journey towards a more reconciled society.

Figure 1 shows that, on average, just over half of South Africans (52.2%) reported instances of reconciliation among those who are close to them. As far as individual groups are concerned, just over half of black and Indian South Africans also record personal experiences of reconciliation. The corresponding figures for white and coloured respondents are lower, at 42.9% and 43.8% respectively. As far as the country's general success in the pursuit of national reconciliation is concerned, 59.2% of all South Africans have indicated that they agree with

**Figure 1: My friends and family have experienced reconciliation since the end of apartheid****Figure 2: South Africans have made progress in reconciliation since the end of apartheid**

the statement that the country has made progress in this regard. This figure is highest among black South Africans (61.3%), followed by Indian respondents (59%) and white respondents (52.7%). Coloured respondents represent the only group in which fewer than half of those surveyed indicated that the country has made headway on the road to reconciliation.

During both the RMF and FMF campaigns, some suggested that a clear generational schism may be developing between South Africans. In her brilliant essay in the wake of the RMF campaign at the University of Cape Town, Sisonke Msimang cautions older generations that their time for bringing meaningful change in South Africa has come and gone: 'Your role in the revolution will not save you. Your history of speech-making and sleeping in a cold detention cell will not save you. Not even back-breaking labour on Robben Island will spare you the scepticism of today's champions of freedom'.<sup>1</sup> The time of the 'young ones' has come to transform society, says Msimang, and with them '[s]omething new and clean and wondrous is taking flight. It doesn't need permission: it is its own authority'.<sup>2</sup> In the light of Msimang's assessment, it may be asked whether such a generational split is also evident in the way that South Africans from different age categories view reconciliation.

1 Msimang, S. 2015. 'The old is dying and the young ones have just been born'. Africa is a Country. Accessed online: <http://africasacountry.com/2015/05/the-old-is-dying-and-the-young-ones-have-just-been-born/>, 1 December 2015.

2 Ibid.

**Figure 3: South Africans have made progress with reconciliation since the end of apartheid (agreement)**

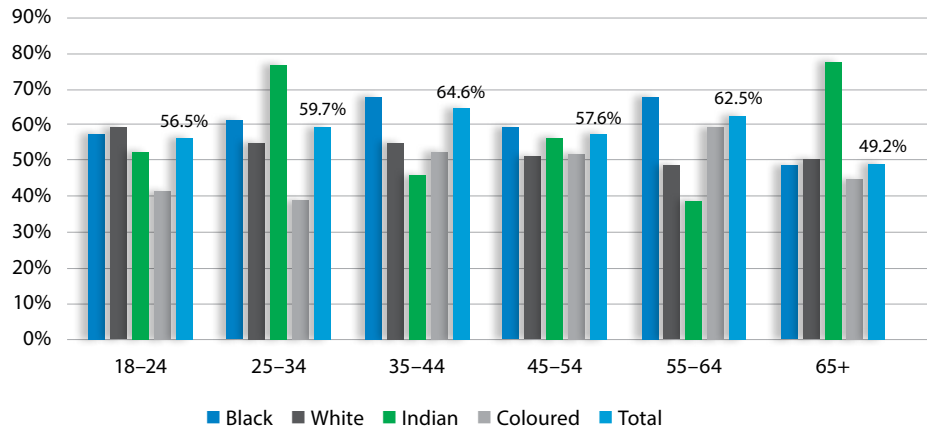
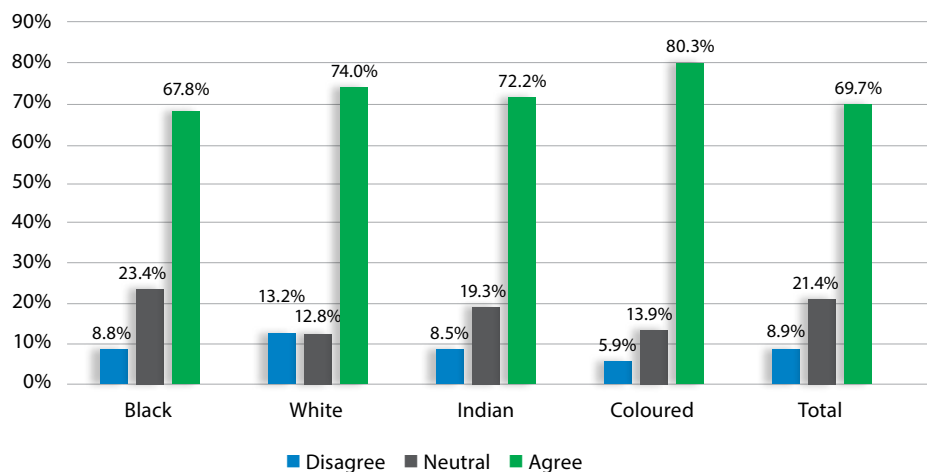


Figure 3 provides a breakdown of responses in terms of age and racial categories to the question about the country’s progress on the road to reconciliation. Overall, South Africans older than 65 seem to be the most sceptical about such progress (49.2%), followed by those aged 18–24 (56.6%), with respondents aged 35–64 years being most in agreement about such progress. Among those in the younger age categories, coloured South Africans appear to be significantly less optimistic than their contemporaries in other groups. The general pattern in these responses, however, shows little evidence of a generational gap between South Africans in general, but also within each of the racial categories. If anything, the racial differences reported in Figure 2 seem to be more pronounced.

The findings above relay public opinion on the degree to which South Africans feel that the pursuit of reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa has been successful. But has it run its course? Should it, as a general approach to nation-building and social transformation, be jettisoned along with everything else that we have come to associate with the country’s initial transitional phase of the early 1990s?

**Figure 4: South Africans still need reconciliation**



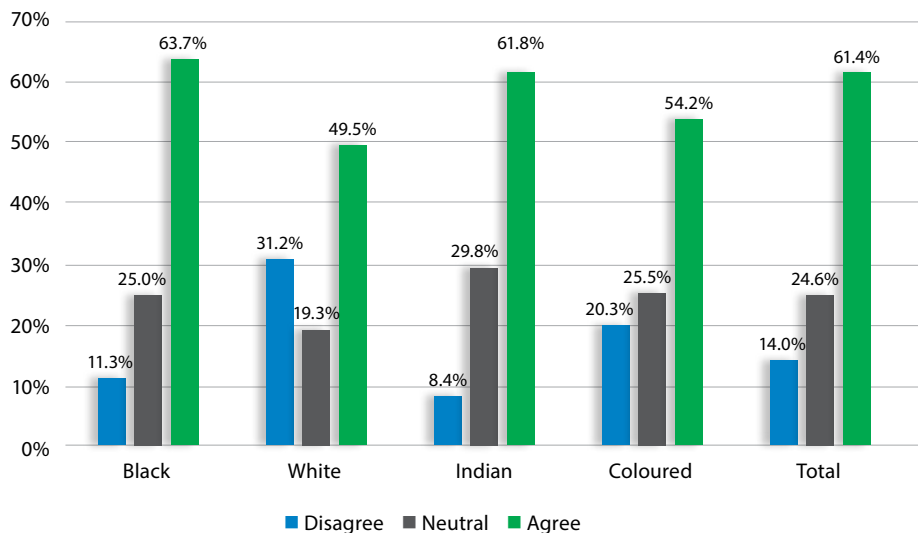
The findings reported in Figure 4 are quite emphatic in their endorsement of the continued pursuit of national reconciliation, and cut across the country’s different racial categories. On average, 69.7% of respondents indicated that South Africa still needs reconciliation, with

the endorsement lowest for black respondents (67.8%) and highest for coloured respondents (80.3%). While there may, therefore, be resistance that has developed towards this concept over the past two decades, these findings suggest that the idea of reconciliation still holds currency with the majority of South Africans. As a result, it would be unwise simply to erase it from the national discourse at a time when many still attach value to it and vest their hopes in it.

But the challenges remain significant. While Figures 1 and 2 point to majorities that have experienced reconciliation within their immediate environment and progress on this score in the country as a whole, the minorities who have not responded in the affirmative to these questions are not insignificant. What, then, stands between South Africa and the achievement of a more reconciled society? A refrain repeated by many, and which also became strongly articulated in 2015's protests, is that reconciliation cannot only mean a 'non-racial' society. In fact, some, like social commentator and author Eusebius McKaiser, have called for the rejection of the term 'non-racialism', because it obfuscates the greater schisms in a society in which white privilege is kept in check by unequal access to economic opportunity and power.<sup>3</sup>

Is this a view that is commonly shared by South Africans?

**Figure 5: Reconciliation is impossible if those disadvantaged under apartheid remain poor**



The responses reflected in Figure 5 confirm that most South Africans (61.4%) agree that reconciliation remains impossible for as long as those disadvantaged under apartheid remain poor. Both black and Indian respondents recorded agreement ratings in excess of 60%, with 63.7% and 61.8% respectively. A total of 54.2% of coloured respondents showed their agreement, and just under half of white respondents – 49.5% – responded in this way. Interestingly, just over 30% of white respondents disagreed with this statement, suggesting that a significant proportion within this grouping does not draw a causal link between reconciliation and greater economic equality. Taken together, the results shown in Figures 4 and 5 indicate that the majority of South Africans not only continue to value the importance and necessity of reconciliation, but they also attach significant connotations of redistributive justice to it. This has considerable implications in a country that routinely vies for the inglorious honour of being the world's most unequal nation.

<sup>3</sup> McKaiser, E. 2015. 'The F\*\*\* Whites-Olympiad', Independent Online News. Accessed online: <http://www.iol.co.za/news/the-2015-f-whites-olympiad-1.1903876#VI2ZK3YrLIU>, 1 December 2015.

Finally, in the light of the results above, it may be worthwhile to test public sentiment about the impact that the TRC – the pre-eminent institution charged with laying the groundwork for a new, united South Africa – has had on society. In the years since it has concluded its work, the Commission has, on a number of occasions, been criticised for being ineffectual, half-hearted, lacking follow-through, and ultimately letting perpetrators off the hook. While many of the issues relating to its structure and mandate remain hotly contested within academic circles, it has often been unfairly criticised for its lack of prosecution of perpetrators, victim compensation, memorialisation and other forms of restitution. These perceived failures were, in most instances, due to the government’s reluctance to follow up on the Commission’s recommendations that pertained to these specific issues. While the TRC had a limited lifespan, it was up to government to give effect to its recommendations.

Unfortunately, this inaction tainted the reputation of the TRC well after it had completed its limited mandate. Given its symbolic association with reconciliation and a particular juncture in our history, it remains important to test how South Africans today, in retrospect, view the role that the TRC has played in the country’s transformation.

**Figure 6: The TRC provided a good foundation for reconciliation**

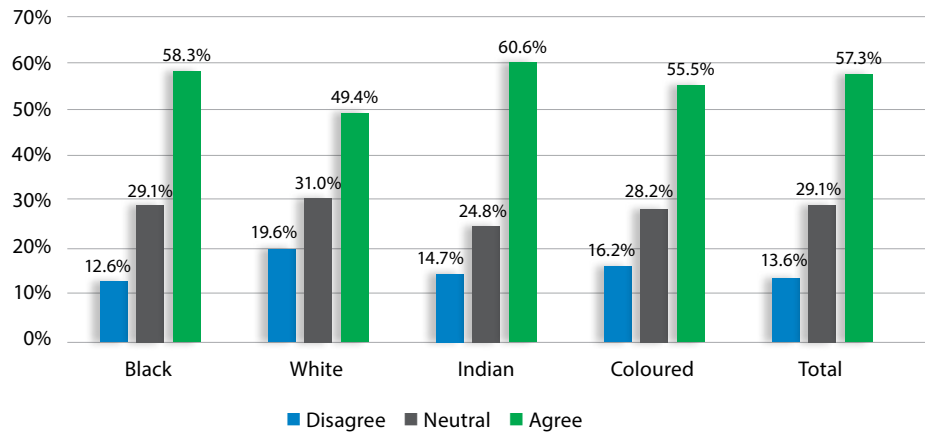
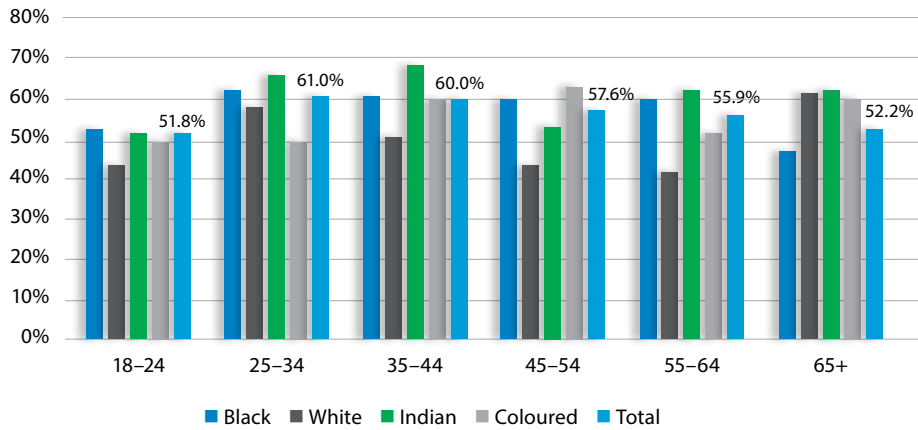


Figure 6 reports the SARB 2015 Survey findings on responses to a statement about the TRC providing a good foundation for South Africa to achieve reconciliation. More than half of the sample of respondents (57.2%) responded in the affirmative. Support of this statement within each of the country’s racial categories exceeded 50%, with the exception of white respondents, of whom 49.4% signalled a positive evaluation for the role that the TRC has played in promoting reconciliation. It could be argued that there may be generational differences in the evaluation of the work of the commission, given that a large proportion of the sample may have been too young to have followed the daily work of, and reporting on, its hearings. For this reason, Figure 7 provides a generational breakdown of responses for each of the racial categories.

Again, there does not seem to be a distinct generational response pattern between generations for the overall population or within the respective racial categories. While the lowest average positive response came from those in the youngest age category of 18–24, and may confirm the expectation of some that young South Africans are the least likely to approve of the work of the TRC, they are closely followed by the oldest age category of 65 and older. Also interesting is the fact that black South Africans in the oldest age category have shown lower levels of approval than black South Africans in the youngest category.



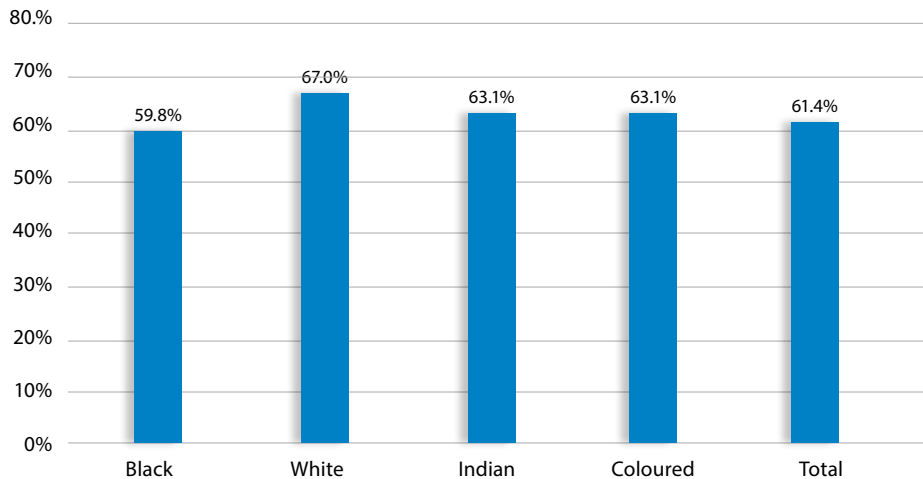
**Figure 7: The TRC provided a good foundation for reconciliation (agreement)**



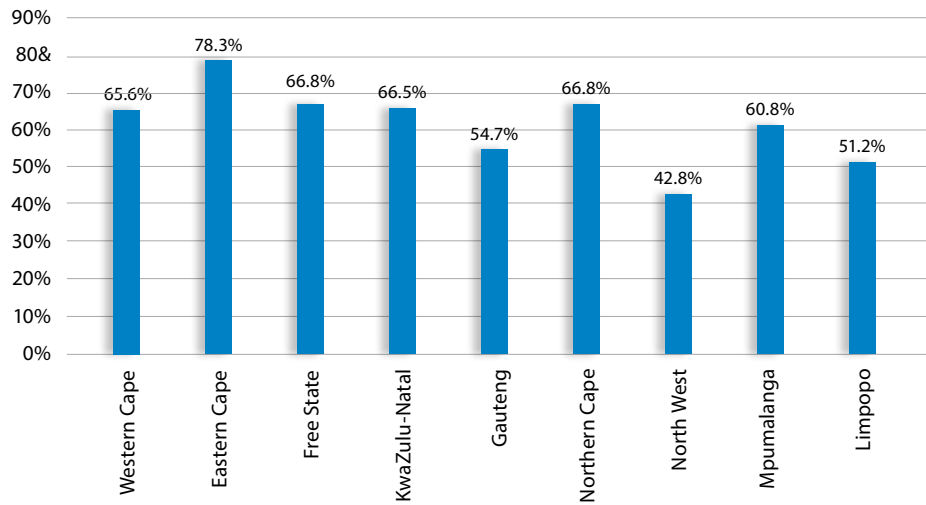
### The legacy of racism: Are we making progress in slaying the demon?

Legislated race-based discrimination was the defining feature of apartheid. Where you lived, where you worked, where you socialised, who you loved and, ultimately, where you died was largely predetermined by the colour of the skin in which you were born. Since South Africa’s first democratic elections, institutionalised racial discrimination has been removed from the statutes, but the apartheid geography of our cities and towns – as well as the distributional patterns of our economy – have largely remained in place to reinforce the template created by the architects of apartheid. Legislation is no longer required to sustain apartheid. It has evolved in ways that allow it to sustain itself up to the present day. While material inequities as tangible and incontrovertible manifestations of apartheid’s legacy have received their due attention in our public discourse over the past two decades, many have preferred to gloss over the persistence of racial prejudice that they continued to reproduce. But the country’s reluctance to confront this in a forthright manner has caught up with it. Many, today, experience a sense of deep social polarisation in which our separateness reinforces racial prejudice.

**Figure 8: South Africans who feel that race relations have worsened or stayed the same since 1994**



**Figure 9: South Africans who feel that race relations have worsened or stayed the same since 1994 by province**

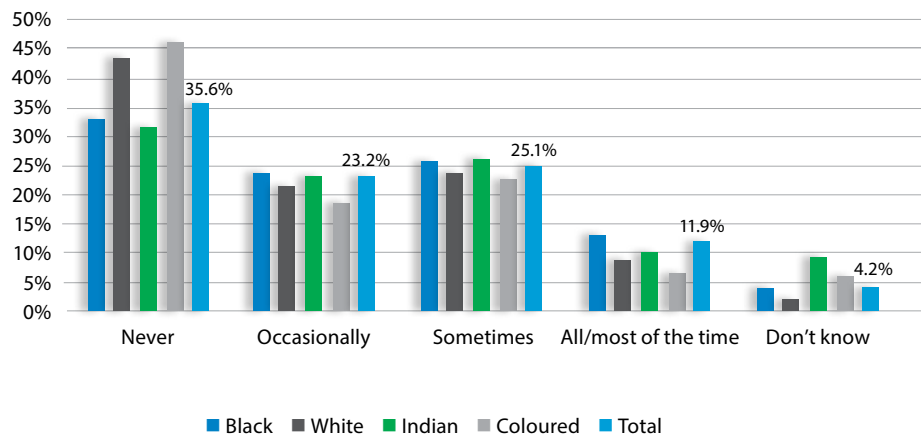


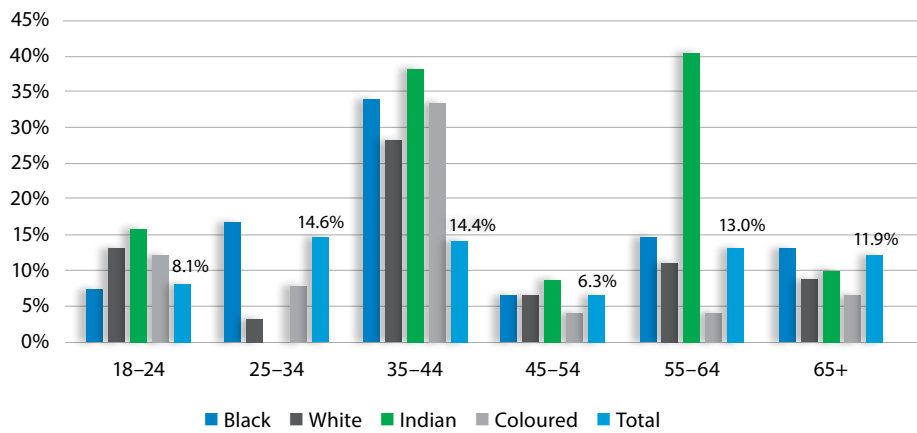
The findings reported in Figure 8 confirm this sentiment. The SARB 2015 Survey prompted respondents to evaluate the country’s progress in the realm of race relations since 1994. Possible responses ranged on a scale from ‘have worsened a great deal’ to ‘have improved a great deal’. In this instance, over 61.4% of the overall sample of respondents indicated that race relations have either stayed the same or deteriorated since 1996. The figures for the respective racial groups are fairly equivalent. Among black respondents, 59.8% said that race relations had either stayed the same or deteriorated since 1994. For white respondents, the corresponding figure was 67%; for both coloured and Indian respondents, it stood at 63.1%.

Figure 9 provides a provincial breakdown of the areas in which these sentiments appear to be the strongest – the Eastern Cape (78.3%), Northern Cape (66.8%) and Free State (66.8%) provinces. On the other side of the spectrum, respondents in the North West (42.8%) and Limpopo (51.2%) provinces were the least likely to respond that race relations had stayed the same or deteriorated.

Figures 8 and 9 provided a picture of respondents’ overall assessment of race relations in South Africa. But to what extent do they experience, or have they personally experienced, instances of racism? In the section below we report our findings in this regard.

**Figure 10: How often do you experience racism in your life?**



**Figure 11: How often do you experience racism in your life (all/most of the time)?**

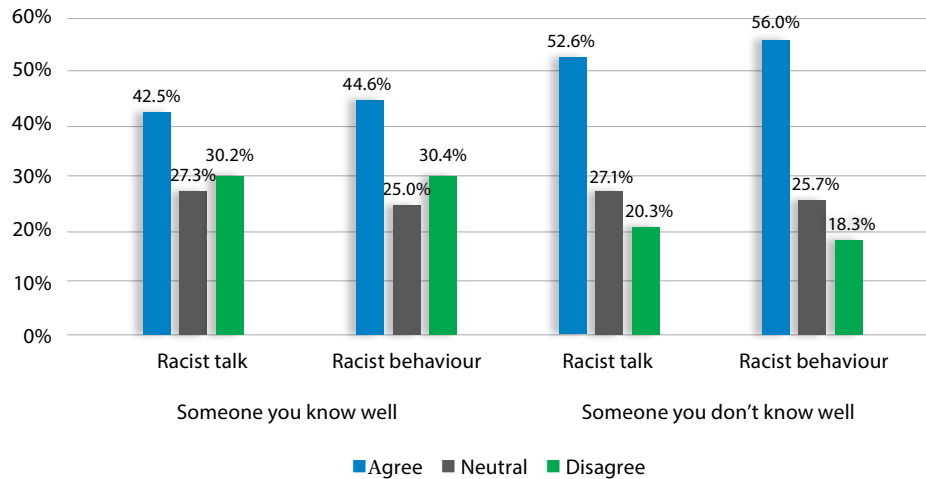
Figures 10 and 11 show responses to the question of how frequently respondents experience racism in their daily life. Figure 10 looks at overall responses in comparison with those of individual racial groups, while Figure 11 offers a breakdown of reported experiences of racism by age group.

The results of Figure 10 show that just over a third of respondents (35.6%) indicated that they never experience any form of racism, with white (43.5%) and coloured (46.1%) respondents recording the highest percentages for individual groups. On the other end of the spectrum, 11.9% of the total sample of respondents reported that they experience racism all or most of the time. Black respondents (13%) were most likely to respond in this way, followed by Indian (9.9%), white (8.8%) and coloured (8.8%) respondents. If all reported cases of racism ('All/most of the time', 'Sometimes' and 'Occasionally') are added up, we note that 60.2% of all respondents have reported varying degrees of experience of racism in South Africa. If we do the same for individual racial categories, this figure is highest for black South Africans (62.4%) and lowest for white South Africans (54.1%).

As is evident from Figure 11, there does not seem to be a strong age pattern in responses to experienced racism, both as far as the overall sample and the individual racial groups are concerned. The 45-55-year-old and 18-24-year-old categories reported the lowest levels of experienced racism among those who said that they encounter it all or most of the time, with 6.3% and 8.1% respectively, while 25-34-year-olds recorded the highest levels on this score, with 14.6%. As far as responses for individual racial categories are concerned, we observe the highest single response for Indian South Africans, with 40.4%. Given the small sample of Indian respondents in this category, we do, however, suggest that this figure be interpreted with caution.

Given the continued pervasiveness of racism in South African society, it is important to understand how people confront racial discrimination when they encounter it. For this reason, the SARB 2015 Survey asked respondents whether they find it difficult to respond to incidences of racist talk or racist behaviour in two different contexts. The first relates to people whom they know well, and the second to those whom they don't.

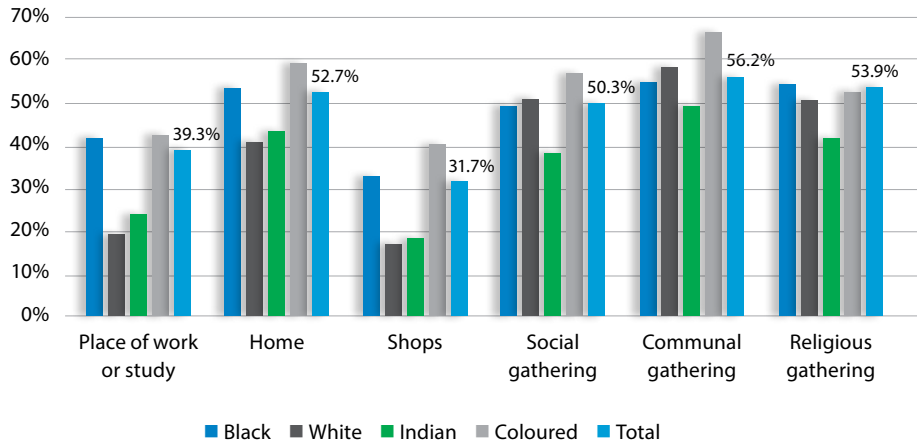
**Figure 12: Difficulty confronting racism**



South Africans generally find it difficult to confront racist behaviour. The results reported in Figure 12 show, firstly, that respondents find encountering instances of racist talk and racist behaviour equally difficult and, secondly, that there is not a big difference between whether such acts occur within the context of people with whom they are familiar or unfamiliar. Agreement about the difficulty of doing so when strangers are involved is, as expected, somewhat higher than is the case with people with whom the respondent is familiar. As far as the confrontation of racist talk in familiar circles is concerned, 42.5% of respondents indicated that they found it difficult to counter such an act. The corresponding figure for interaction with strangers is 52.6%. When it comes to countering racist behaviour, 44.6% responded that they find it difficult to do so among acquaintances, while 56.0% reported this to be the case with strangers. Reassuringly, about one in three people did not believe that it was difficult to confront someone they knew when he or she spoke or behaved in a racist manner. The corresponding figure for incidences involving strangers is about one in five people. This suggests that there do exist challenges to such racist speech and behaviour by ordinary South Africans in their daily lives and that, even if the incidence of this is lower than we might expect, it provides some succour for the future when we can hope to reduce such speech and behaviour significantly and even eliminate it. At present, that road still seems a long one to travel.

## Interaction between South Africans of different racial groups

In the previous section we noted that even though apartheid laws may have been removed from South Africa’s statutes, the physical infrastructure that was created to enforce it – such as segregated residential neighbourhoods, public amenities and transport services – has continued to reinforce apartheid’s economic legacy of poverty and inequality. This, inevitably, also sustains patterns of social interaction that we have inherited from the past. Increased levels of social interaction may not always lead to improved interpersonal relationships, the dismantling of racist attitudes and, ultimately, reconciliation between the country’s historically divided racial groups. Nevertheless, it must be considered that higher levels of interracial contact are a necessary minimum requirement for any of this to come to fruition. In the light of this, the SARB 2015 Survey prompted respondents to indicate the settings and the frequency of their interaction with South Africans from other racial groups. These settings included places of work or study, private homes, shops, social gatherings, communal gatherings and religious gatherings.

**Figure 13: South Africans who never or rarely interact with other groups in different settings**

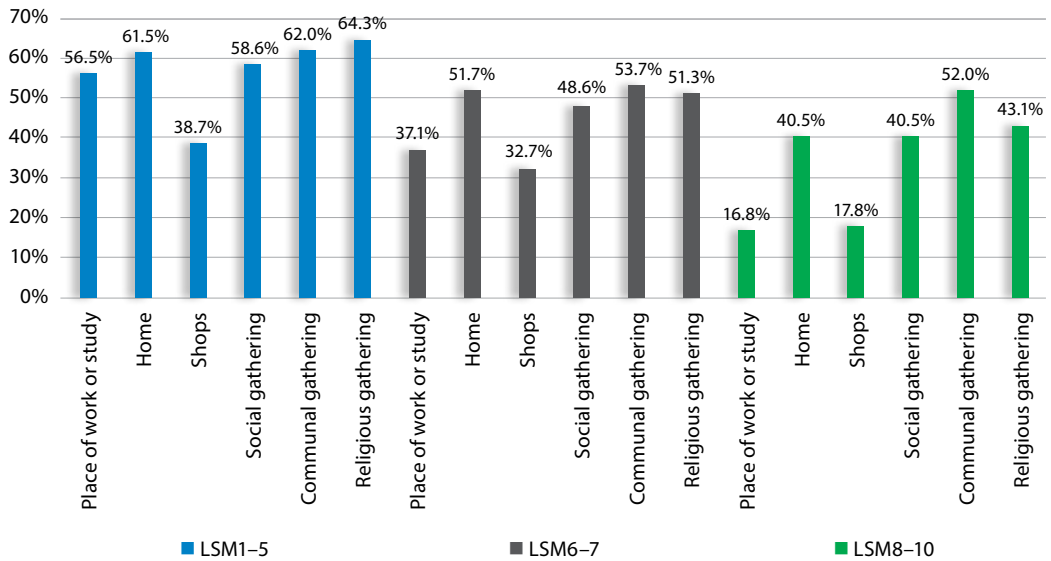
The results in Figure 13 show the percentages of respondents, by racial group, who indicate that they ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ interact with people from other racial groups. From the findings it is evident that shared spaces, such as shops and places of work and study, have had the lowest percentages of respondents who report no or very little interaction. For ‘Shops’ this figure is 31.7%, and for ‘Places of work and study’ it is 39.3%. Increased integration within commercial spaces may be ascribed to the growth of a larger, multiracial consumer class over the past two decades. Although the black, coloured and Indian South African middle classes may constitute a smaller percentage of their respective groupings than is the case for white South Africans, they are, today, in a numerical majority with significant buying power. As such, these ‘new’ middle classes occupy the same spaces as their white middle-class compatriots. Lower negative responses for places of work and study – in other words, fewer respondents who reported no or little interaction – also do not come as a surprise. Great effort has been made to enact measures for integrating workplaces in order to ensure more equitable racial representation in the workforce and companies’ ownership structures since the end of apartheid. Such measures include affirmative action through the Employment Equity Act, and broad-based black economic empowerment (BBBEE) through the Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment Act.

In the more intimate, ‘non-legislated’ spaces, such as private homes, the proportion of non-interaction is significantly higher: in excess of 50%. This means that more than half of South Africans have very limited interaction at social gatherings, communal gatherings, religious gatherings, and also within their private homes. These findings underscore the continued segregated nature of the private lives of South Africans. When we look at each of the respective racial groups individually, coloured respondents have recorded the lowest levels of interaction for five out of the six categories. White and Indian respondents, on the other hand, have each recorded the highest frequency of interracial interaction in three of the tested categories.

If our assumption is correct that material factors, such as the growth of the black middle class, have had an impact on levels of social interaction, it is reasonable to expect that this pattern may be visible when examining such responses in terms of measures of material well-being, such as the Living Standards Measures (LSMs).<sup>4</sup> LSM1 represents respondents having the lowest level of material security, while those in LSM10 are economically most secure. The expectation would be that the higher the LSM category, the higher the level of social interaction reported for that category.

4 The Living Standards Measure (LSM) developed by the South African Audience Research Foundation (SAARF) provides a useful indication of the degrees of wealth and material inclusion/exclusion that South African citizens experience. It is a composite score that draws on a number of variables to provide a measure of an individual’s standard of living. It takes into account, among other things, the degree of urbanisation, dwelling type, levels of consumption, access to services, social activities, ownership of assets and employment of household helpers.

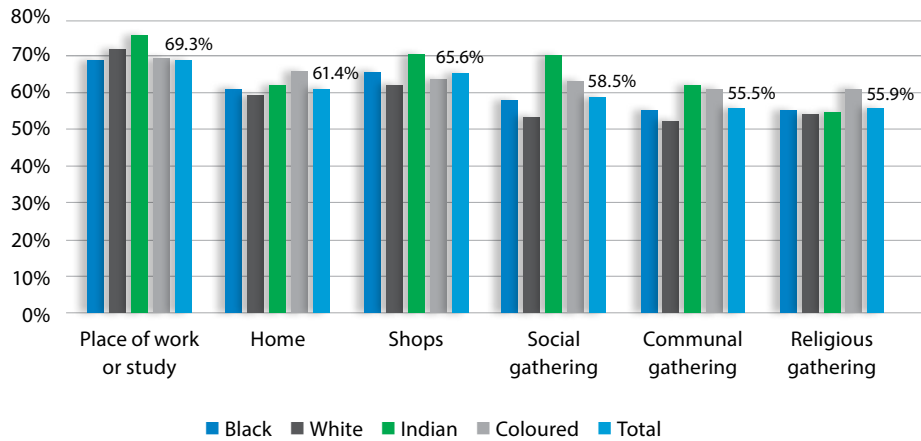
**Figure 14: South Africans who never or rarely interact with other groups in different settings, by LSM**



The findings reported in Figure 14 largely confirm our expectations with regard to the linkage between social interaction and respondents’ material well-being. Those falling within LSM categories 1-5 were the most likely to respond that they ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ interact with people from other racial groups in each of the potential settings for contact. The feedback from LSM 6-7 respondents shows slightly lower levels of non-interaction, while those in LSM 8-10 reported the highest levels of interracial interaction. When we look at the ‘Place of work or study’ and ‘Shops’ categories in particular as proxies for employment and affluence (given the strong correlation between employment status and affluence) respectively, we see particularly stark differences between the different LSM categories. However, in more intimate spaces, such as homes and social gatherings, respondents within the highest LSM categories recorded much lower frequencies of ‘rarely’ to ‘never’ responses for contact. The findings with regard to the latter may point to the possibility that increased interaction in formal spaces, such as the workplace, is spilling over into the private sphere. Such a finding does further underscore the imperative for sustained and inclusive growth. Given the country’s current growth prospects, the implication of this may call for an escalated emphasis on the quality of economic expansion.

While there are structural enablers and disablers that may encourage or obstruct contact between South Africans from different racial backgrounds, much also depends on the willingness and desire of citizens to engage with each other across historical boundaries. To establish whether such a broad desire exists, the SARB 2015 Survey asked respondents whether they feel the need for more interaction within the different social settings in Figures 13 and 14.

Figure 15 shows the findings for respondents who indicated that they would like to see an increase in the levels of interaction between South Africans of different racial backgrounds. The data show that in each of the respective settings, more than half of respondents indicated that they have a desire for more, rather than less, interaction. This is the case for the entire sample, but also for each of the respective racial categories. When we look at the respective social settings, it is apparent that this desire is strongest for what can be termed the ‘shared-spaces’, namely places of work and study (69.3%), as well as commercial spaces (65.6%), but there is also strong support for more contact in private spaces, such as private homes (61.4%) and social gatherings (58.5%). This implies that although there still be many structural and ideological obstacles to increased personal interaction between South Africans of different

**Figure 15: South Africans who desire increased interaction in different social settings**

groups, and many are sensing heightened levels of social polarisation, a sufficient quantum of goodwill exists among a core majority of adults to aspire towards an increase in opportunities for contact beyond their own group.

One of the reasons why the above finding is particularly important is the fact that trust between the country's historically defined racial categories remains critically low. While increased contact may not repair South Africa's fissures overnight, it is important to start a trust-building process between communities that have been kept separate from each other for centuries.

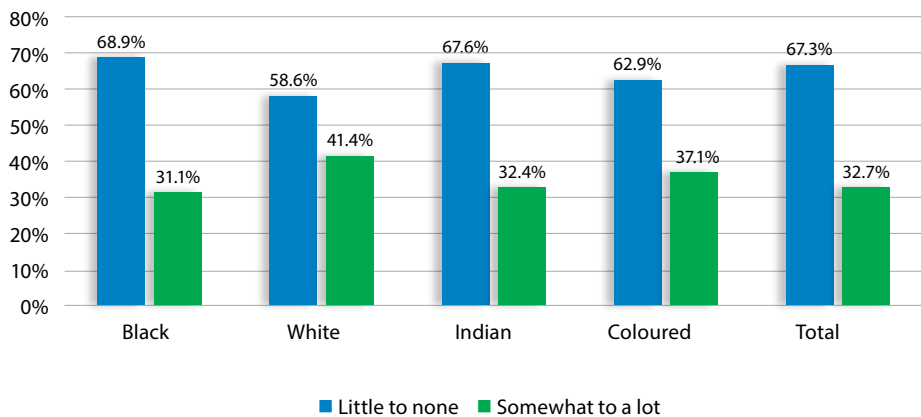
**Figure 16: How much trust do you have in South Africans of other racial groups?**

Figure 16 reports the level of trust that respondents have in South Africans of racial groups other than their own. Overall, 67.3% of respondents indicated that they generally have little to no trust in people of other racial groups. The responses for all of the racial groups, with the exception of white respondents (58.6%), range from 60% to 70%, with black respondents showing the highest level of distrust at 68.9%. These results cast the previous findings of a desire for greater interracial contact in a very different light, as they suggest that while the aspiration may be present, the realisation of this aspiration may have significant hurdles to overcome. Greater social cohesion can be attained only when both the degree of interaction is increased and the quality of that interaction is of the desired (trusting) nature. After all, greater interracial interaction in a climate of heightened distrust suggests very little progress towards a reconciled nation.

## What continues to divide us, and what are the prospects for a more reconciled nation?

The findings on which we have reported above underscore what many of us strongly and intuitively perceive in our daily social interactions with fellow citizens: South Africa remains a highly fragmented society, with many deep-seated fault lines. Yet, in many situations it becomes difficult to perceive exactly what these are, because they intersect at different points in a variety of daily interactions. It may, therefore, be difficult to single out just one that, if addressed, will result in everything else falling into place. Well aware of this, we nevertheless asked respondents to identify what they consider to be the two most prominent factors (ranked first and second) that they regard as the primary sources of social division in South Africa in 2015.

**Table 2: Primary sources of social division**

	First choice	Second choice	First and second choices combined
Inequality (rich and poor)	30.3	23.9	54.2
Race	23.5	25.3	48.8
Political parties	20.9	18.1	39.1
Language	4.2	16.2	20.4
Prejudice about communicable diseases	6.2	7.7	13.9
None	7.2	4.8	12.0
Don't know	5.5	3.0	8.5

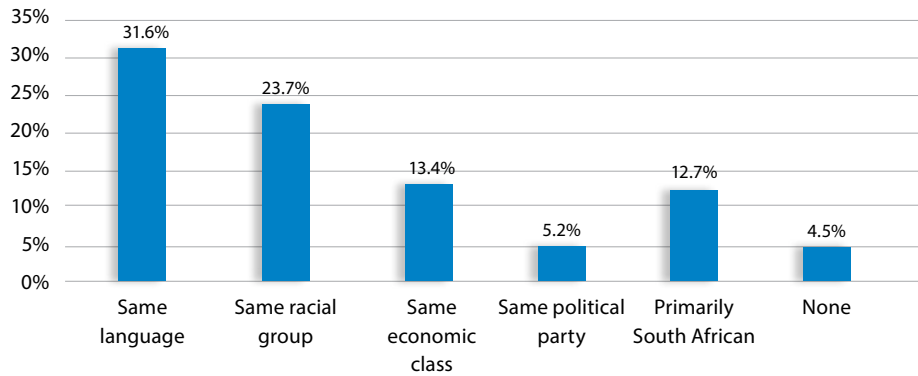
The results in Table 2 show that the first choice of the majority of respondents relates to the differences between rich and poor, with almost one in three people indicating so (30.3%). When the first- and second-option responses are combined, this proportion increases to one in two people. This figure is almost three percentage points higher than our most recent measurement in 2013. Following the division between rich and poor, the division across race groups is identified as the second-most divisive first-choice option (23.5%) and combined first- and second-option choices (48.8%). There has been a notable rise in the percentage of respondents who have chosen race as a first or second option since the most recent previous measurement in 2013. In the 2013 survey, 15.5% of respondents chose race as a first source and 36.7% chose it as either a first or second option – increases of 8% and 12% respectively. This suggests that the question of race has, over the past two years, come to feature more prominently in the minds of ordinary South Africans.

As in previous years, we would like to caution that these findings do not suggest that either income or race have become the definitive sources of division in South Africa, because they largely overlap. Rather, the findings' significance lies in which aspects of daily life are foremost in the minds of respondents when they observe society and, in particular, the cleavages they perceive therein. Apart from the two most prominently discussed sources of division, namely socio-economic class and race, the question of political party affiliation (39.1%) also features strongly among respondents. It is, therefore, not unlikely that in the run-up to the 2016 local government elections, this source of division will become increasingly pronounced.

If the items that have been listed above give us an idea of what South Africans regard as the most divisive aspects of society, it may also be interesting to know with whom they associate and feel closest to. Put differently, in which contexts do they feel at home, united as part of a group? Importantly, also, how do these identities relate to their sense of a national identity? Here, the SARB 2015 Survey asked respondents to identify the primary and secondary social groupings with which they identify in their daily interactions. Figure 17 reports on the primary associations that our respondents identified.



**Figure 17: Which group do you associate with most strongly in your daily interactions (first and second mentions)?**



An interesting finding that emerges from the results in Figure 17 is that the two most selected groups, namely the same language group (31.6%) and the same racial group (23.7%), are two exclusive categories that do not allow for any form of integration. Put differently, over 55% have responded that they primarily associate with people that look and speak like them, which does not offer the possibility of inclusion for outsiders. Economic class, at 13.4%, is the third-most selected category, while an inclusive South African identity, at 12.7%, only features in fourth place.

Do these findings suggest that the achievement of an inclusive South African identity is not important to ordinary South Africans?

**Figure 18: Being South African is an important part of how I see myself (agree)**

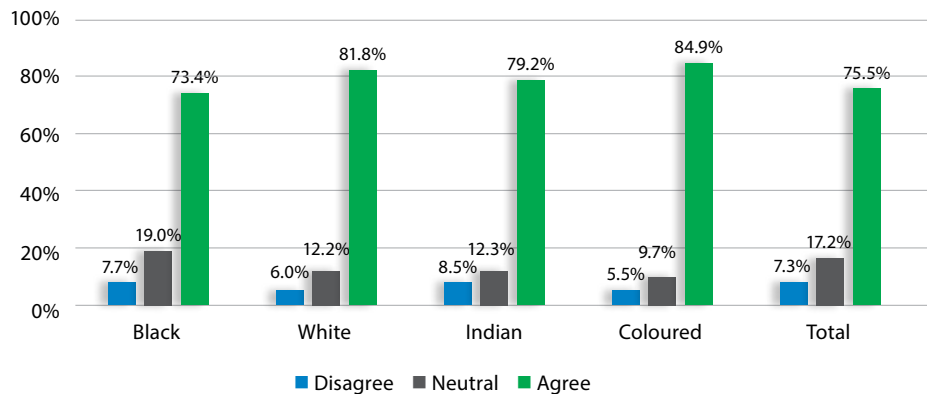


Figure 18 suggests that this is not the case and that respondents do take a more nuanced view. Although most choose to associate in their daily interactions with people like them, they do not discard the importance of an overarching national identity. On average, three quarters of all respondents (75.5%) have indicated that being South African is an important part of how they see themselves. This positive response cuts across the different racial categories, with 73.4% of black respondents, 81.8% of white respondents, 79.2% of Indian respondents and 84.9% of coloured respondents agreeing with this statement.

So, what are the prospects for further nation-building? Is it desirable actively to continue to work towards nation-building? Importantly, is it all possible to do so against the background of deep fragmentation and trust deficits?

**Figure 19: Desirability vs possibility of one united South African nation**

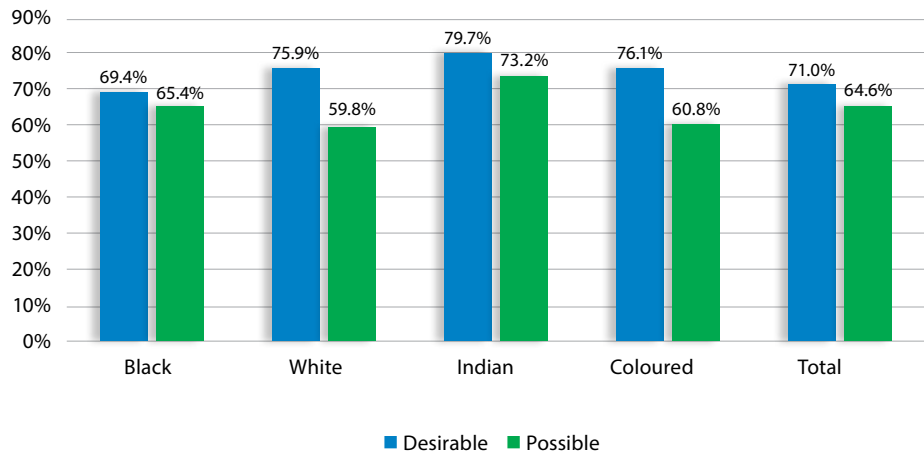


Figure 19 reports on the proportions of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the following two statements: 1) It is desirable to create one united South African nation out of all the different groups who live in this country; and 2) It is possible to create one united South African nation out of all the different groups who live in this country. Once again, the findings that we can report here are positive. Nationally, 71% of respondents indicated that it is desirable to create one nation, with such agreement ranging roughly between 70% and 80% for all race groups. Responses to whether it is a realistic ideal to pursue are somewhat more measured. Overall, close to two-thirds of all respondents (64.6%) are optimistic that a united South Africa is possible. The responses for the respective racial groups are more varied. White and coloured respondents are the least optimistic, but their positive response levels of 59.8% and 60.8% remain relatively high. Among black respondents, the corresponding figure is 65.4%. Indian South Africans have recorded the highest positive response on this score, with 73.2% of them agreeing with the statement.

## Conclusion

Even though most South Africans desire to live in a united, reconciled South Africa, the historical and structural legacies of apartheid continue to reinforce old patterns of socialisation and prejudice. Most opportunities for racial interaction (and the potential for better understanding) exist among the better-off, more mobile sections of the South African population. This once more underscores the need for broad and inclusive economic growth.



**T**he Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) is an independent, non-governmental organisation, which was established in 2000 in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) with the aim of ensuring that the lessons of South Africa's successful transition to democracy remain fundamental principles central to government and society as the country moves forward. Today, the IJR works to build fair, democratic and inclusive societies across Africa after conflict.

Since 2003, the IJR's Policy and Analysis programme has conducted the South African Reconciliation Barometer survey: an annual national public opinion poll that measures citizen attitudes towards reconciliation, transformation and national unity in post-apartheid South Africa. As one of the few dedicated social surveys on reconciliation in Africa and worldwide, the Barometer has become an important resource for encouraging national debate, informing decision-makers, developing policy and provoking new analysis and theory on reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

For more information, visit the IJR website at [www.ijr.org.za](http://www.ijr.org.za), the Reconciliation Barometer blog at [www.reconciliationbarometer.org](http://www.reconciliationbarometer.org), or follow us on Twitter at [@SABarometer](https://twitter.com/SABarometer).

