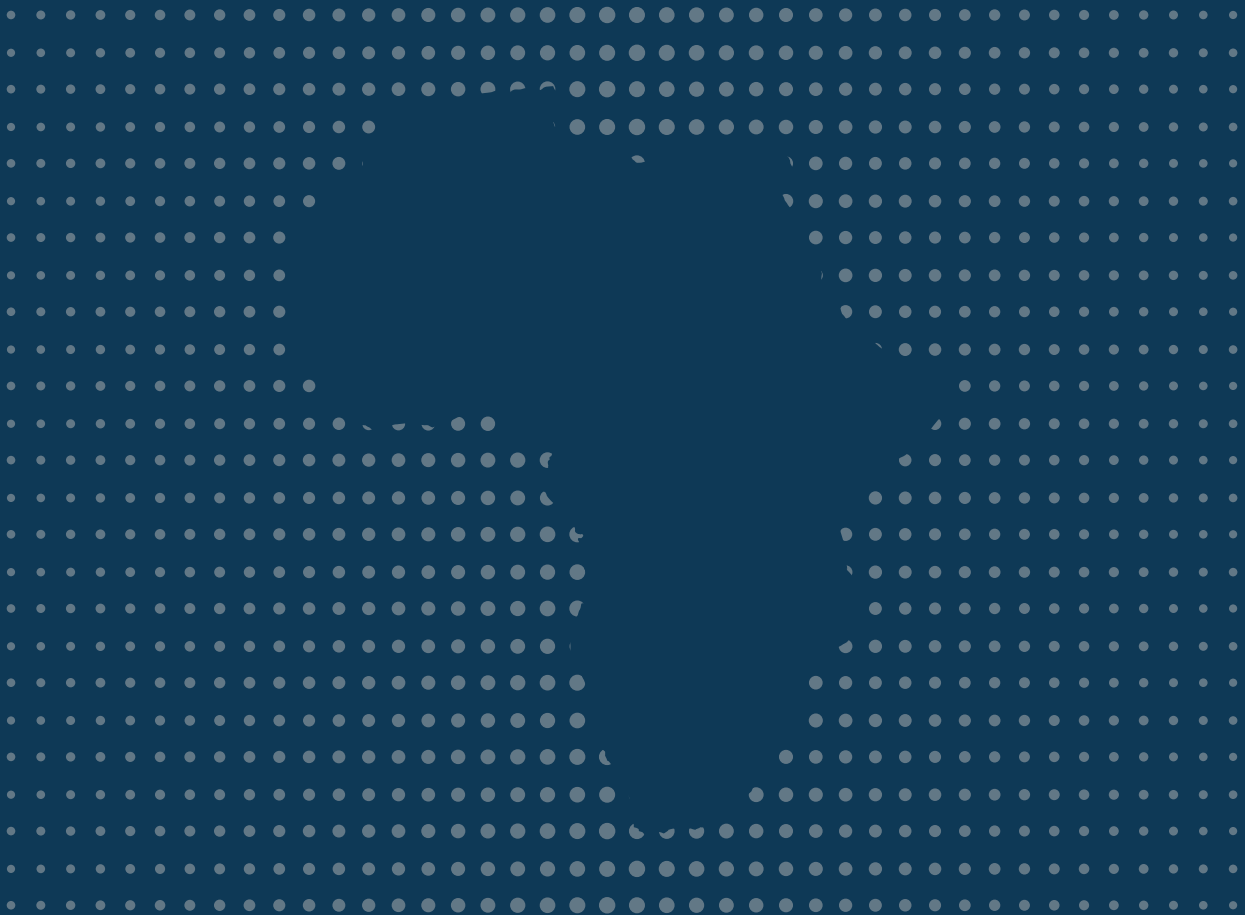




# RECONCILIATION & DEVELOPMENT

WORKING PAPER SERIES | PAPER 2

## Interracial marriages in South Africa: Attitudes and Challenges





RECONCILIATION & DEVELOPMENT  
WORKING PAPER SERIES | Number 2

## **Interracial marriages in South Africa: Attitudes and challenges**

By Elnari Potgieter

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The Reconciliation and Development series is a multidisciplinary publication focused on the themes of peacebuilding and development. Peacebuilding research includes the study of causes of armed violence and war, processes of conflict, the preconditions for peaceful resolution and peacebuilding, and the processes and nature of social cohesion and reconciliation. Development research, in turn, is concerned with poverty, structural inequalities, reasons for underdevelopment, issues of socioeconomic justice and the nature of inclusive development. This publication serves to build up a knowledge base of research topics in the fields of peacebuilding and development, and the nexus between them, studying the relationship between conflict and poverty, and exclusion and inequality, as well as between peace and development in positive terms.

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## About the author

Elnari Potgieter is the Project Leader for the IJR's South African Reconciliation Barometer, located in the Policy and Research programme.

## About the South African Reconciliation Barometer

The South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) is a 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.

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## 1. Loving v. Virginia: Five decades later (USA)/Leclerc and Madlala: Three decades later (RSA)

June 12, 2017 marked fifty years since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the *Loving v. Virginia* case that marriage across racial lines was legal throughout the United States of America (USA).<sup>1</sup> In a landmark Supreme Court decision – erasing laws banning interracial marriage in Virginia and 15 other states in the USA at the time<sup>2</sup> – Mildred and Richard Loving made civil rights history.<sup>3</sup>

Since this ruling in 1967, the percentage of newlyweds marrying a person of a different race or ethnicity in the USA increased from 3 per cent in 1967 to 17 per cent in 2015. In 2015, among all married people in the USA (not only newlyweds), 10 per cent were in interracial or inter-ethnic marriages (11 million in total).<sup>4</sup> Research conducted by the Pew Research Center furthermore shows that an increasing percentage of adults in the USA agree that interracial marriage is generally a good thing for American society. Showing an increase from 24 per cent in 2010 to 39 per cent in 2015, more American adults now agree that the growing number of people marrying someone of a different race is good for American society. Opposition to a close relative marrying someone of a different race or ethnicity also declined. In 2000, 31 per cent of respondents indicated that they would oppose a close relative marrying someone from a different race or ethnicity, with the most recent survey in 2017 showing that only 10 per cent of respondents indicated the same.<sup>5</sup> Five decades after legal barriers to interracial marriages were removed, however, interracial couples still report some pushback from family members.<sup>6</sup>

In South Africa, marriage and sexual relationships between historically defined race groups were similarly prohibited by the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (Act No. 55 of 1949) and the Immorality Act of 1950.<sup>7</sup> These laws were introduced by the apartheid government and formed part of its overall policy of separateness, which included pieces of legislation such as the Population Registration and Group Areas Act.<sup>8</sup> The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act was eventually repealed in June 1985, and replaced by the Immorality and Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Amendment Act that allowed interracial marriages and relationships.<sup>9</sup> The first couple to marry in South Africa following this change was Suzanne Leclerc and Protas Madlala. At the time, the rules of apartheid still dictated where they could live and work based on their racial classification, causing them to live separately for a while. The couple furthermore reported facing hostility and curiosity from many a passerby on the occasions that they were out in public together.<sup>10</sup>

More than three decades later, a study conducted by researchers at North-West University in Mafikeng shows that the likelihood of an individual marrying someone of the same race decreased from 303:1 in 1996, to 95:1 in 2011 – thus showing an increase in interracial marriages in South Africa. The researchers attribute this to 1) ‘general changes in attitudes in society’; and, 2) ‘mutual tolerance’ of people from various historically defined race groups. This, according to them, is attained through increased contact in contexts such as education, religion and residential neighbourhoods. In particular, increased access to education and educational attainment by previously disadvantaged groups (the researchers in particular mention African and Coloured South Africans) was cited as a major reason for the finding. Over time, the effect of education on this trend is declining. According to the researchers, this alludes to the ‘erosion of social-class differences between races in South Africa’.<sup>11</sup> The study furthermore reports that approximately 5 per cent of Coloureds, Asians and Indians marry outside their historically defined racial groups, while White South Africans remain the least likely of the race group categories to do so; and, that the most common interracial marriages are those between Africans and Coloured South Africans.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Incidence of and attitudes towards interracial marriages

### 2.1 Incidence of interracial marriages

*The incidence of intergroup marriage is considered a measure of the dissolution of social and cultural barriers, therefore of social and cultural integration. Despite coming from different backgrounds, partners in intergroup (for the purposes of this article, interracial) marriages are likely to share some common values and aspirations.*

The incidence of intergroup marriage is considered a measure of the dissolution of social and cultural barriers, therefore of social and cultural integration. Despite coming from different backgrounds, partners in intergroup (for the purposes of this article, interracial) marriages are likely to share some common values and aspirations. These elements are seen to be enabling of social cohesion in multicultural societies.<sup>13</sup>

In looking at understanding trends in terms of interracial marriage in a society, several theories bring perspectives to patterns observed in terms of interracial marriage, as summarised by Jacobson et al.<sup>14</sup> and briefly presented here. Firstly, the **assimilation** perspective explains that greater tolerance of ‘other’ groups will lead to higher levels of interracial marriage. Assimilation, however, can be slowed by ‘third party constraints’ such as cultural preferences for languages, beliefs, values and behaviour. In a diverse country such as South Africa, with eleven official languages, linguistic differences and other cultural factors or cultural sanctions may serve as barriers to outgroup marriages. Legal and extra-legal sanctions separating groups – such as was the case in South Africa during apartheid – can also be constraints or barriers. Secondly, **exchange theory** postulates that potential partners are evaluated in terms of resources they can offer, and can offer in return. Such ‘resources’ may include socioeconomic status and cultural resources. Thirdly, **status-exchange theories** emphasise the educational aspects of socioeconomic status. Education, as well as urban life, is said to increase the chance that individuals from various groups meet. In addition, higher education levels in general are associated with less-negative attitudes towards people from



'other' groups, more resources, and sometimes less conformity to norms<sup>15</sup> (some that may have prohibited interracial marriage). The 'third-party constraints' mentioned earlier may also have an impact in this regard. Lastly, **relative group size** may also determine the amount of outgroup contact that individuals may experience. Relative group size and the chance that individuals will marry out of their own group are presented as inversely related. Thus, individuals from relatively smaller groups are more likely to have increased contact with outgroups, which may lead to an increased rate of interracial marriage.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.2 Contact theory

Mere contact, however, does not necessarily mean that two people will fall in love or get married. An extensive discussion considering attraction, love or the desire for a strong union with another individual, and the institution of marriage, is beyond the scope of this paper. It is however safe to say that, for people to fall in love and/or to get married, they need to meet.

The above-mentioned theories also state the importance of intergroup contact as a factor playing a role in understanding trends in terms of incidence of interracial marriage. Contact between groups may worsen relationships between groups – should fears or preconceived notions about other groups be confirmed through interactions, promoting prejudice and discrimination – or improve intergroup relations.<sup>17</sup> Formulating the positive version of contact theory, Gordon Allport<sup>18</sup> names four conditions for intergroup relations to improve with contact, namely: 1) equal status, 2) intergroup cooperation, 3) common goals and 4) support provided by social and institutional authorities. Evidence has shown positive outcomes (such as peace and accord) from intergroup contact – which may apply to both minority and majority groups. In some instances, prejudice was reduced even without the four conditions framed by Allport.<sup>19</sup>

In the South African context, contact between groups from different historically defined race groups was reduced to an absolute minimum during apartheid, making it unlikely that people could meet. Even if people from different groups managed to meet at the time, it would have been illegal to be in a relationship should they have wished to be.

## 2.3 Attitudes towards interracial marriages

### 2.3.1 Historical

Contact and legislation were not the only barriers to interracial marriages during the apartheid years. Prior to legislation, the topic of 'mixed marriages' formed a central part of the political discourse of South Africa in the 1930s – particularly during the election in 1938 in competition between the GNP (Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party/Purified National Party), which campaigned to ban mixed marriages through legalisation, and the United Party (UP). According to Hyslop (1993),<sup>20</sup> racist sexual stereotypes were used to arouse anxiety among white voters at the time. Attitudes towards interracial marriages, however, were not always intolerant. During the early period of Dutch settlement at the Cape (17th century), marriages between

white men and black women were not uncommon and it is noted that race and skin colour did not play a big part in attitudes in this regard, but rather baptism, which led to a rise in legal and social status.<sup>21</sup> Attitudes towards interracial marriages during the 18th and 19th century continued to be much more tolerant than the years following the victory of the National Party and the formation of the apartheid government.<sup>22</sup>

### 2.3.2 *Post-apartheid attitudes*

*More than two decades after the advent of democracy in 1994, and over three decades since the ban on interracial marriages was lifted in South Africa, third-party constraints to interracial marriages in the form of legal barriers no longer exist. Although legal barriers to interracial marriage diminished, this does not necessarily mean that attitudes towards interracial marriages have changed.*

More than two decades after the advent of democracy in 1994, and over three decades since the ban on interracial marriages was lifted in South Africa, third-party constraints to interracial marriages in the form of legal barriers no longer exist. Although legal barriers to interracial marriage diminished, this does not necessarily mean that attitudes towards interracial marriages have changed. Emily Mapula Mojapelo-Batka (2008)<sup>23</sup> reports a growing body of empirical and theological work on interracial couples – or, then, ‘mixed-race’ relationships – within the South African context. This forms an important part of the research conducted on the social, political, cultural and economic relations between racial groups in the country. However, very little local research has been done in this regard. Similarly, Jaynes reports a dearth of research and information available on the discourse surrounding interracial intimate relationships in South Africa.<sup>24</sup> Herewith a brief introduction to some of the qualitative research conducted in this regard.

#### 2.3.2.1 *Discourse: Interracial relationships and racism*

Some scholars suggest that opposition to interracial intimate relationships is a manifestation of racism – but often a less overt manifestation. Although overt racism may be less tolerated than in the past, some scholars posit that ‘subtle’ racism – a more covert racism which still holds essential conceptions of race at its core – developed.<sup>25</sup> According to Jaynes, ‘[d]iscourse on interracial intimate relationships may [...] be seen as indicative of the broader societal belief system, and thus may represent racist or non-racist attitudes on the macro-level’. Exploring discourse on interracial intimate relationships through focus group discussions, and the possible overlaps with discourses on racism, Jaynes found that such intersections can be found on three main themes, namely: 1) ‘experimentation’ – as depicted by discourses on developmental psychology; 2) geographical locations and socio-economic statuses/class – depicted by statements such as ‘it depends on where you go’; and 3) the ideological construction of the family – and its function in maintaining a racially stratified society and status quo.<sup>26</sup>

The first, according to Jaynes, interconnects with the theme ‘drawn to difference’, constructing interracial intimate relationships as a result of individuals being drawn or attracted to someone from a different racial group than an individual’s own, or that such relationships are part of a phase of experimentation.<sup>27</sup> Relating to this discourse are theories suggesting that interracial relationships are motivated by ‘sexual curiosity, preoccupation or revenge on the people of the out-group, the desire for social or economic mobility and exhibition’ as more conscious motives,

while ulterior motives presented include a deep-seated resentment of parents, an inferiority complex or rebelling against a system.<sup>28</sup> Such theories lack empirical evidence, and it has been posited that such racist formulations of interracial relationships are socially and historically constructed in an effort to maintain a dominant culture.<sup>29</sup>

The second, that discourse regarding interracial relationships ‘depends on where you go’, relates to how geographical locations and socioeconomic status or class and the discourse on interracial relationships. According to Jaynes, her research showed that a greater prevalence and acceptance of such relationships are evident in bigger cities (as opposed to smaller towns), in ‘liberal’ spaces (rather than conservative ones), and in educational spaces or centres of learning – such as universities.<sup>30</sup>

The third, regarding the construction of the family, relates – in Jaynes’s research<sup>31</sup> – to how the institution of the family is used in ‘denial, negation, and justification of racism’ as manifested in the opposition to interracial relationships. An example of this can be found in the sentiment that: ‘it’s not racism; it’s concern for the parents’, justifying resistance to interracial intimate relationships as being obedient and dutiful to parents. According to Jaynes, this is in line with discourse presenting family as the provider of people’s needs, whilst antagonising family may result in being left to depend on society.

#### *2.3.2.2 Challenges, perceptions, experiences*

Further research has been conducted on how interracial couples construct or reconstruct the challenges they face in coping within the specific socio-political context (of post-apartheid South Africa), and how they cope with their experiences. Mojapelo-Batka<sup>32</sup> explores the challenges that participants in her study found on the intrapersonal or individual level, the interpersonal level, and the intergroup level, and challenges couples experience in the South African context. She found that, as with any intimate relationship, interracial couples went through phases and processes of adjustment. On an individual level, relationships were mainly described in a positive manner – defying theories that showed motives of interracial couples as different from those of same-race couples. Interpersonal rewards cited by participants in Mojapelo-Batka’s study included love, companionship and fidelity, while intergroup rewards mentioned included learning more about other groups and changing racial stereotypes and breaking bondages of racism. However, strong emotional experiences reported by participants were related to family and social reactions towards interracial couples, and most participants acknowledged the negative effect that the socio-political context of apartheid and racism had on perceptions of people from the ‘out-group’. The study’s findings highlight that, although the process of adjusting to being in an interracial relationship is a ‘private and intra-psychic’ process, it still forms part of interpersonal and intergroup contexts and processes.

On an interpersonal and intergroup level, Mojapelo-Batka’s study<sup>33</sup> found that those – in particular families – who opposed a friend/family member being in an interracial relationship used various actions and strategies ‘to enforce and

encourage' the social category to which the person belongs. Family and social reactions towards interracial relationships – as reported by participants to her study – were mainly aimed at 'enforcing collectiveness rather than difference or individualism'. Initial reactions from white families of participants in her study were more negative or distant – a finding confirmed in other studies conducted. Participants to the study reported that older family members and fathers were more disapproving of the relationship, and the initial negative reaction was often followed by comments or actions aimed at discouraging the relationships from continuing. Furthermore, most participants in her study found it difficult to speak to their friends and family about their interracial relationships – particularly if they knew that family members or friends held racist or conservative attitudes in this regard.

On an interpersonal level, Mojapelo-Batka's study<sup>34</sup> found that interracial relationships seemed to 'threaten' group membership, and the family and social system – sometimes to the extent that it resulted in family divisions, disruption, pain and even the end of valuable relationships. Participants report using strategies – like convincing, negotiation, persuasion and even threatening to end the relationship with disapproving parents – to deal with parents' negative reactions. Some participants reported an attitude change in parents mainly due to persuasion or the seriousness of the relationships, and in friends mainly due to contact or voluntary change. Reaction from general society, however, frequently reminded couples about their racial differences [and attitudes] in this regard.

According to Mojapelo-Batka,<sup>35</sup> interracial relationships tend to attract social attention and are often the subject of public discourse – despite being a private affair between two people. The continued reactions towards such relationships may perpetuate the idea that such relationships are uncommon, which in turn requires higher levels of self-differentiation and individuation from interracial couples in challenging norms and cultural collectivism. Furthermore, Mojapelo-Batka writes that, although individuals in such relationships may have worked towards dissolving racial categories, the reported social resistance of such relationships experienced by participants suggests that the environment in post-apartheid South Africa is not yet entirely conducive to a 'non-racial' life in South Africa – which continues to pose challenges to mixed race couples and their children.

### *2.3.3 Attitudes towards interracial marriage as part of a bigger picture of integration and reconciliation*

Exploring attitudes towards interracial marriages helps us understand society at a broader level. It is essentially still up to individuals whom they marry and have a relationship with; therefore, the incidence of interracial marriages is rather seen as an outcome of integration and the dissolution of barriers. Attitudes towards those who are in interracial marriages and relationships, however, give further insights into acceptance of the dissolution of social and cultural barriers – even if individuals themselves are not part of an intergroup relationship. Such sentiments, of course, form part of a much bigger picture of progress made in terms of reconciling South Africans after apartheid, and can be regarded as an indicator

(although not the only one) that helps us understand how far South Africans have come in terms of integration and addressing prejudices.

Approval trends,<sup>36</sup> furthermore, do not necessarily follow the same trends as incidence of interracial marriage. The same factors explaining incidence of marriages may not necessarily apply in terms of attitudes towards interracial marriage. They may, however, provide some clues as to what to consider when disaggregating perception data pertaining to the attitudes towards interracial marriages in order to provide further insights in this regard.

To explore attitudes towards interracial marriages, data from the South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) can help to identify trends.<sup>37</sup>

### 3. The South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB)

The South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) project conducts applied social research on reconciliation in South Africa. It is one of only a handful of projects of this kind in the world, and the primary data, research findings and publications produced by the SARB have become an established resource for governments, civil society organisations and researchers alike in the processes of developing policy, encouraging national debate and broadening the theory and study of reconciliation. As an integral part of the SARB project, the SARB survey is a national public opinion poll that tracks progress in reconciliation across a range of multi-dimensional indicators, including political culture and relations, aspects of social integration and social cohesion, human security, dialogue, historical confrontation, socioeconomic justice and social relations. In South Africa, it is currently the only dedicated social survey on reconciliation.<sup>38</sup>

One of the questions in the survey asks respondents whether they would approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove of a close relative marrying someone from a different race group. This forms part of a list of questions about attitudes towards racial integration in various contexts, which includes interracial marriage, integration at school and integration in neighbourhoods. Among these, interracial marriage was consistently the least approved of the list from 2003–2013.<sup>39</sup> This particular indicator is further investigated in the section below.

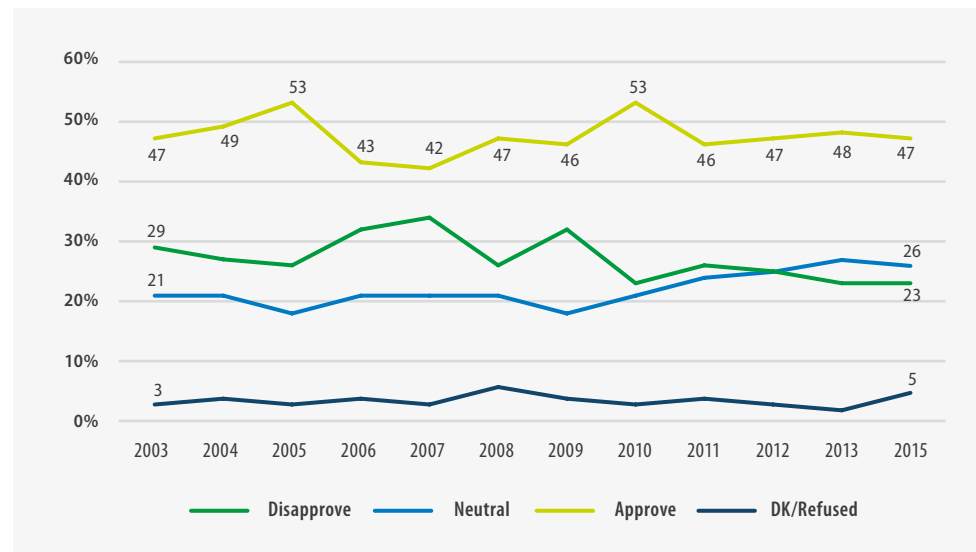
## 4. SARB findings

### 4.1 National Attitudes

Although overall approval of a close family member marrying someone from another race group remained the same from 2003 (47 per cent) to 2015 (47 per cent), approval levels exceeded 50 per cent (53 per cent) in 2005 and 2010. Furthermore, the percentage of respondents indicating disapproval of such marriages decreased from 2003 (29 per cent) to 2015 (23 per cent), while respondents who indicated that they are neutral (neither approving nor disapproving) increased from 2003 (21 per cent) to 2015 (26 per cent).

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Figure 1: Attitudes towards interracial marriage, 2003–2015 (SARB)<sup>40</sup>



*Overall, positive change (albeit incremental) in terms of approval of a close relative marrying a person from another race group has happened – as can be seen in the decrease in disapproval, as well as the increase in neutral responses. However, much work lies ahead in tackling prejudices in this regard – in particular given the reported increase of interracial marriages, while attitudes towards such marriages – here, of a close relative – have been slower to adjust.*

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Taking from the above-mentioned theories to explain incidence of interracial marriages, as well as considering South Africa's history, approval of interracial marriage is disaggregated in terms of historically defined race groups, age groups, Living Standards Measures (LSMs), highest education level achieved, and metro vs non-metro responses.

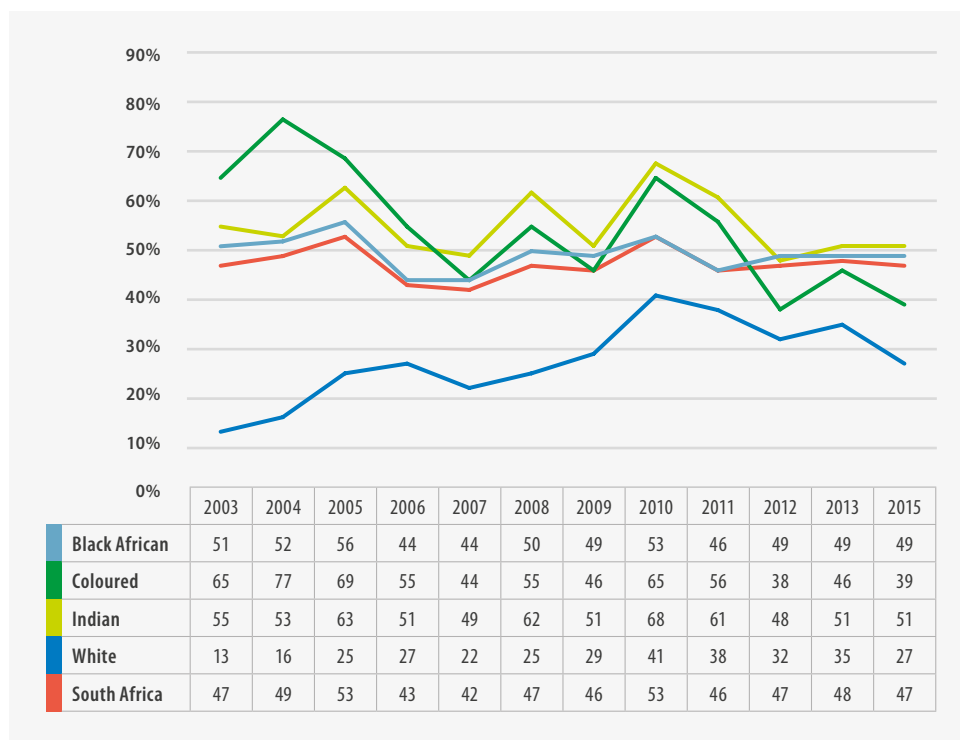
## 4.2 Approval by historically defined race group

As mentioned earlier, researchers at the North-West University found that about 5 per cent of Coloureds, Asians and Indians marry outside their race groups. The most common interracial marriages are between [Black] African and Coloured South Africans, while White South Africans were the least likely to enter into interracial marriages. Figure 2 offers insights in terms of attitudes towards family members entering into interracial marriages by historically defined race groups – painting a somewhat different picture.

Important findings include an increase in approval of interracial marriage within their family among White respondents. From 13 per cent in 2003 (much lower than the national percentage than is the case for all of the other race groups), this figure increased to 41 per cent in 2010, and then declined again to 27 per cent in 2015. Approval among Black Africans respondents also peaked in 2010 (53 per cent), with approval decreasing again to 2015 to slightly lower levels than in 2003, but still above the national average. Approval among Indian respondents similarly peaked in 2010, with 68 per cent of respondents approving – a 13 per cent increase from 2003. This proportion decreased by 17 per cent from 2010 to



Figure 2: Approval by historically defined race groups, 2003–2015 (SARB)



2015 (51 per cent) to a lower rate of approval than in 2003 – but still above the national percentage. Approval among Coloured respondents decreased by 26 per cent, from 2003 (65 per cent) to 2015 (39 per cent), reaching a low of 38 per cent in 2012. Commencing well above national approval levels, and then dipping to well below these, approval trends for interracial marriage amongst this group is distinct from that of other minority race groups and broader national trends. There is thus a need for further research on the experiences of, in particular, Coloured communities (which are diverse within themselves) in order to understand what appears to be a disconnect between the attitudes towards interracial marriages, and the extent to which interracial marriages with Coloured individuals as one of the partners are occurring.

Although approval among White respondents increased by 14 per cent from 2003 to 2015, their approval rate remains well below the average. What can also be noted is that South Africa’s population has grown significantly. The country’s population reached 55,7 million in 2016 – up from 40,6 million in 1996. All race groups have shown an increase in numbers – except for the country’s white population, which declined from 4,59 million in 2011 to 4,52 million in 2016 (less 70 147 people or a 1,5 per cent decline). Much of the decline is due to emigration, according to StatsSA, and a big portion of the decline is among young White South Africans, with a 4,2 per cent decline in this demographic recorded between 2011 and 2016. This, in addition to factors such as ‘cultural barriers’ or limited contact (due to space or socio-economic distance), may help explain may help explain the slow change in lower rates of approval, and lower incidence of interracial marriages, in that young White South Africans (mostly educated) who grew-up at least partly post-apartheid<sup>41</sup> – and would thus be more likely to have

contact with people from other race groups in educational, urban or other contexts without legal barriers – have left the country.

### 4.3 Approval by highest education level

**Table 1: Approval by highest education level, 2003–2015 (SARB)**

	No schooling	Completed primary school	Matric/Grade 12	University degree obtained	Professional	South Africa
2003	37	46	45	35	39	47
2004	36	43	50	42	56	49
2005	37	56	55	45	51	53
2006	30	43	42	29	46	43
2007	33	43	42	32	41	42
2008	34	43	47	50	58	47
2009	29	37	52	45	45	46
2010	30	45	58	63	70	53
2011	34	35	49	48	63	46
2012	46	41	47	46	48	47
2013	27	46	47	51	77	48
2015	31	51	47	27		47

*\*Some primary school, some high school, Artisan's certificate obtained, Technikon diploma/degree completed, Technical, Secretarial and Other categories not indicated on the graph\*\* Professional category not an option in 2015.*

Rates of approval are the lowest for respondents with no schooling. Approval rates for respondents with professional qualifications are broadly higher than national approval. Approval rates of respondents with matric mostly resemble the national trend closely. However, approval rates by respondents with university degrees (which are expected to be high) fluctuates – increasing from 35 per cent to 63 per cent, and then dipping again to 27 per cent in 2015. The SARB's data is not specifically weighted to be representative of each education level, and therefore the findings should be interpreted as merely representative of respondents' attitudes. It may also be that, although legal and/or socioeconomic barriers to interracial contact are removed, cultural barriers and/or prejudices towards interracial contact and relationships are still prevalent. As mentioned before, higher incidences of interracial marriages may be attributed to increased contact in contexts such as education, religion and residential neighbourhoods. This, however, does not necessarily mean that everyone's attitudes towards interracial relationships will follow suit. In addition, integration in public spaces does not necessarily guarantee improved contact. For example, a number of case studies in South Africa show that individuals tend informally to self-segregate in schools or other public spaces.<sup>42</sup> Considering these findings, it can be said that addressing inequalities, education and spatial separations alone will not necessarily guarantee attitudinal changes or the overcoming of remaining prejudices and interracial mistrust. To identify possible barriers to overcoming remaining prejudices, Gordon Allport's (above-mentioned) conditions for intergroup relations to improve with contact – 1) equal status, 2) intergroup cooperation, 3) common goals, and 4) support provided by social and institutional authorities – are worth considering, in particular to consider which conditions are present in educational contexts (schools and tertiary education institutions), and which are not.



## 4.4 Approval by age group

**Table 2: Approval by age group, 2003–2015 (SARB)**

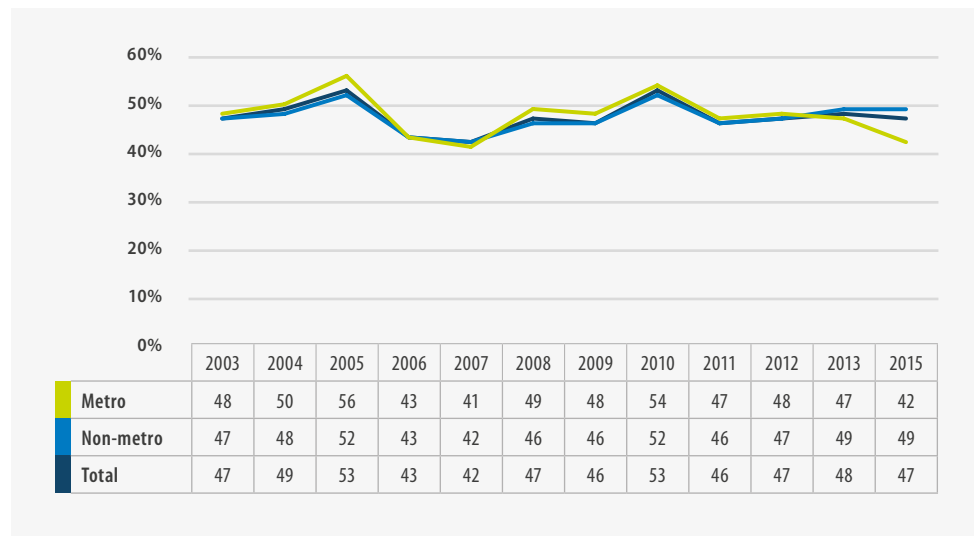
	15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55+	South Africa
2003	54	51	45	45	37	47
2004	54	56	51	44	34	49
2005	57	59	55	50	40	53
2006	46	47	45	41	33	43
2007	41	49	41	40	35	42
2008	53	47	47	41	43	47
2009	53	47	49	46	33	46
2010	58	51	53	55	45	53
2011	50	49	44	45	37	46
2012	48	48	45	43	49	47
2013	50	49	49	50	36	48
2015	47	48	43	53	41	47

Table 2 shows a slight increase in approval among older generations between 2003 and 2015, and a slight decrease in approval among younger age groups. For example, 45 per cent of respondents between 45 and 54 years of age in 2003 approved of interracial marriage, whilst 53 per cent of respondents between 45 and 54 years of age approved in 2015. Likewise, 37 per cent of respondents aged 55 years and above indicated approval in 2003, while 41 per cent approved in this category in 2015. On the other hand, approval rates dropped from 2003–2015 for respondents 15–24 years of age (54 per cent to 47 per cent), respondents 25–34 years of age (from 51 per cent to 48 per cent), and for respondents 35–44 years of age (45 per cent to 43 per cent). When following specific generations, a decline in approval is observed for all groups, except respondents who were 45–54 years of age in 2003. In 2003, 54 per cent of respondents aged 15–24 years approved of interracial marriage. Ten years later, in 2013, those respondents now fall in the 25–34 years of age category, which shows a 49 per cent rate of approval in 2013. Similarly, in 2003 the 25–34 years category shows a 51 per cent rate of approval, but in 2013 (ten years later), the 35–44 years category shows a 49 per cent rate of approval. However, in 2003 the 35–44 years category showed a 45 per cent rate of approval, while ten years later the 45–54 years category shows a 50 per cent of approval. Trends thus seem to be generational, rather than age specific.

## 4.5 Approval by area: Metro vs non-metro areas

Figure 3 shows that approval among metro respondents decreased from 48 per cent in 2003 to 42% in 2015, while approval increased among non-metro respondents from 47 per cent in 2003 to 49 per cent in 2015. In qualitative research, researchers found that couples in interracial relationships experienced certain cities – Johannesburg was mentioned in particular – to be much more open to interracial relationships than is the case in other cities (Pretoria and Cape Town was mentioned specifically); and that bigger cities are more tolerant than small towns. There is thus scope for more analysis of what enables more approval or tolerance in certain cities than others, and the above slight decline in approval

Figure 3: Approval by area (metro vs non-metro), 2003–2015 (SARB)



in metros. Here, again, investigating cultural barriers or sanctions may be key to understanding these dynamics.

#### 4.6 Approval by Living Standards Measure (LSM) group

Figure 4: Approval by LSM group, 2003–2015 (SARB)<sup>43</sup>

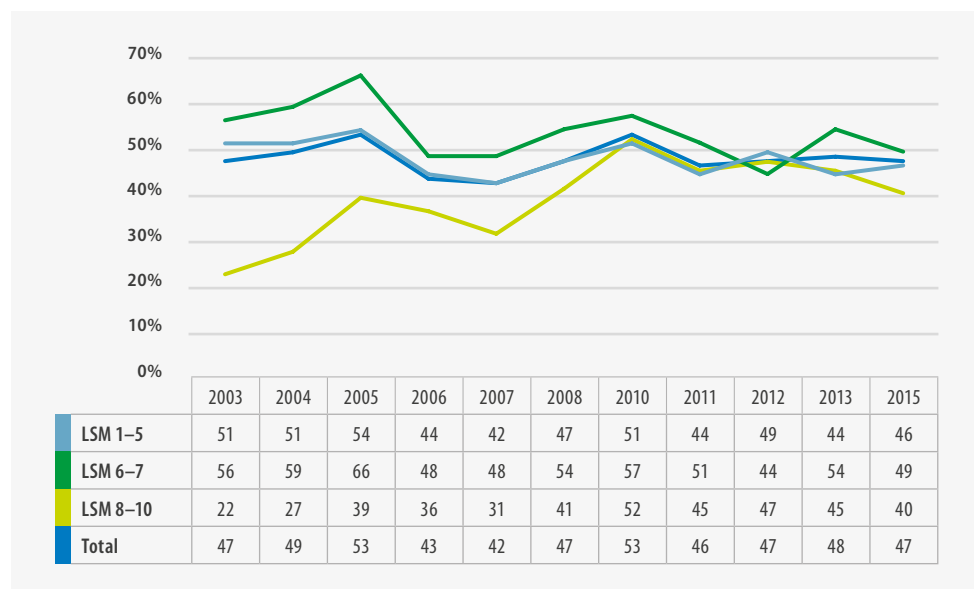


Figure 4 shows that middle LSM groups 6–7 are the most approving of interracial marriages. Respondents in higher LSM groups (8–10) were the least approving of interracial marriages in 2003 (22 per cent), while this proportion increased to 40 per cent in 2015. A closer look shows that the higher LSM groups mostly consisted of White respondents (82,4 per cent) in 2003, while in 2015 35 per cent of respondents in the higher LSM group category were Black, 44,6 per cent White, 10,2 per cent Indian and 10,1 per cent Coloured. The change in racial distribution within the LSM groups helps to explain the change in approval rates in the higher LSM categories. White respondents – as we have seen – show the

lowest rates of approval. Given that the higher LSM groups primarily consisted of White respondents in 2003, the low rate of approval among higher LSM groups is understandable. However, as Black, Coloured and Indian South Africans increasingly fall in higher LSM groups, the findings in terms of approval change. In addition, it is possible that, as individuals from other race groups enter higher LSM groups and improve their socioeconomic situation, contact between different race groups with similar socioeconomic circumstances become more likely – eroding the effect of social class of race groups (as Amoateng et al. have mentioned).<sup>44</sup>

As mentioned before, as legal barriers to contact and interracial relationships are removed, and should it be that the effect of social-class of race groups on interracial contact is eroded, the remaining barrier to interracial relationships or the acceptance of such relationships remains cultural or attitudinal.

## 5. Conclusion and recommendations

The incidence of interracial marriage is considered a measure of the dissolution of social and cultural barriers, and therefore of social and cultural integration. Attitudes towards those who are in interracial marriages and relationships, however, give further insights into acceptance of the dissolution of social and cultural barriers – even if individuals themselves are not part of an intergroup relationship. Such sentiments form part of a much bigger picture of progress made in terms of reconciling South Africans after apartheid. Thus, attitudes towards interracial marriages are regarded as an indicator that helps us understand how far South Africans have come in terms of integration and addressing prejudices.

The incidence of interracial marriages in South Africa is increasing following the removal of laws banning interracial relationships in South Africa in 1985, and the end of apartheid in 1994. Approval, however, of interracial marriages – in particular, in terms of a close relative marrying someone from another race group as portrayed through SARB data from 2003–2015 – has been slow to adjust. Some positive change (albeit incremental) in terms of approval of a close relative marrying a person from another race group has happened – as can be seen in the decrease in disapproval, as well as the increase in neutral responses. Overall approval rates, however, have remained mostly unchanged.

From the findings, it is safe to assume that many interracial couples are having tough conversations – with each other, and with their respective families – should family members disapprove of their relationship purely on the basis of differences in terms of race, while navigating their relationship within a much bigger picture of progress (or non-progress) made in terms of reconciling South Africans after apartheid. This is confirmed by findings from qualitative research conducted on the topic. In addition, generational (not necessarily age group) differences in attitudes towards interracial marriages – found in both qualitative and survey research on the topic – allow scope for future research to consider inter-generational dynamics in this regard. It is in this light, furthermore, that it is

*As mentioned before, as legal barriers to contact and interracial relationships are removed, and should it be that the effect of social-class of race groups on interracial contact is eroded, the remaining barrier to interracial relationships or the acceptance of such relationships remains cultural or attitudinal.*

imperative for research on the experiences of interracial couples in South Africa to continue – in particular with the aim of finding ways to support individuals, couples and families in navigating the socio-political environment in which they find themselves. At the same time, adding pressure to interracial marriages as the only way to bring about reconciliation, or to be representative of reconciliation and anti-racism, should be guarded against – as such an emphasis affirms the notion that these relationships are ‘uncommon’, feeding into unfounded discourse in this regard.

Findings about education levels leave scope for future research about the experiences and conditions of intergroup contact at educational institutions, and how this relates to attitudes towards integration. Findings about metro/non-metro areas and age groups similarly leave scope for further research of generational differences in attitudes towards interracial marriages, as well as city-specific attitudes. Change in attitudes disaggregated in terms of LSM groups shows change in terms of the racial composition of higher LSM groups, as well as the increase in approval among higher LSM group respondents. Further studies could investigate the dynamics between socioeconomic standing (real and perceived) and attitudes towards integration and race in greater depth. Disaggregating response by race group, a decrease in approval is evident among Coloured respondents in particular, while a slight decrease is also found among Indian respondents. At the same time, approval among white respondents has increased (from a very low base in 2003), but remains well below national approval. From these findings, it seems that, as legal barriers to interracial marriages have been removed, and should it be that the socioeconomic barriers to interracial contact change or erode, the remaining barriers to acceptance of such relationships are attitudinal or ‘cultural’. Further investigation may consider looking into the specific experiences and attitudes of respective groups in more depth.

## Endnotes

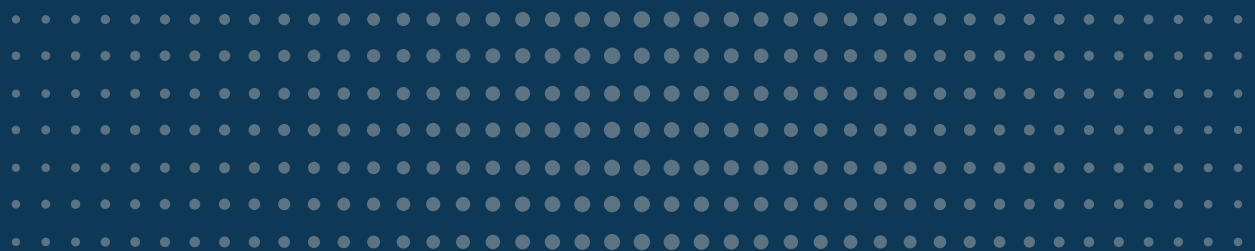
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- 36 Incidence of interracial marriage does not capture the number of interracial relationships – the latter for which data is not available.
- 37 The use of historical racial categories in the SARB are for analytic purposes only, and are only used where it is analytically meaningful and deemed relevant to the tracking of public opinion in post-apartheid South Africa. The paradox of working towards addressing racism and the legacy of racial segregation in South Africa is found in the use of historically defined race groups, the concept of ‘interracial’ marriage and the concept ‘race’ for analytical purposes – which is acknowledged.
- 38 Conducted annually since 2003–2013 (two rounds in 2003 and 2004). From 2003–2013 surveys were administered using a quantitative questionnaire consisting of 100 items (mostly five point Likert scales). Validity and reliability tests were conducted in 2014 after which a new iteration started in 2015. Most items remained from 2003–2013 to yield longitudinal, comparable data. Sample sizes from 2003–2013: 2 000 metro, 1 500 non-metro; equal representation of male/female respondents; sample frames were based on census enumerator areas. Data weighted to represent the adult population of South Africa.
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- 40 In all instances: ‘Not applicable’ was rendered ‘Missing’; ‘Strongly Disapprove’ and ‘Disapprove’ combined to form ‘Disapprove’. ‘Strongly Approve’ and ‘Approve’ combined to form ‘Approve’. ‘Neutral’ in some years framed as ‘Neither disapprove nor approve’. For years up until 2006 the question referred to people from all other groups (other than that of the respondent); from 2006 onwards respondents were first asked which racial group (other than their own) the respondent found it difficult to associate with. This question is then followed with questions relating to integration with reference to the mentioned group.
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## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) was launched in 2000 by officials who worked in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with the aim of ensuring that lessons learnt from South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy are taken into account and utilised in advancing the interests of national reconciliation across Africa. IJR works with partner organisations across Africa to promote reconciliation and socio-economic justice in countries emerging from conflict or undergoing democratic transition. IJR is based in Cape Town, South Africa. For more information, visit <http://www.ijr.org.za>, and for comments or enquiries contact [info@ijr.org.za](mailto:info@ijr.org.za).



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