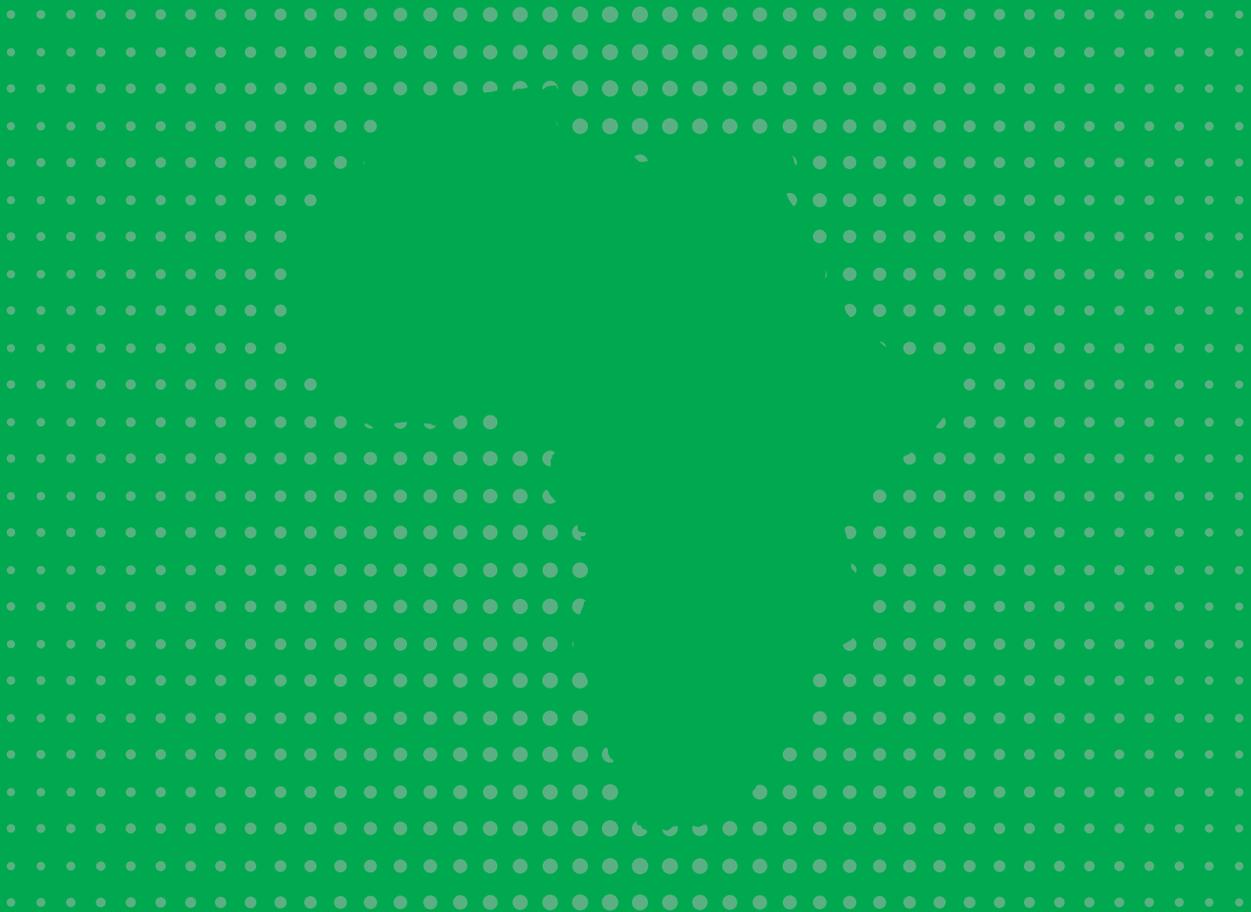


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RECONCILIATION & DEVELOPMENT

OCCASIONAL PAPERS | NUMBER 4

Social cohesion among South Africans, and between South Africans and foreigners: Evidence from the South African Reconciliation Barometer 2017



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Presentation to the South African Human Rights Commission's
**National Investigative Hearing on Migration, Xenophobia and
Social Cohesion in South Africa**

About the Reconciliation and Development series

The Reconciliation and Development Series is a multidisciplinary publication focused on the themes of peacebuilding and development. Peacebuilding research includes the study of the causes of armed violence and war, the 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, the reasons for underdevelopment, issues of socio-economic 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, by studying the relationship between conflict and poverty, and exclusion and inequality, as well as between peace and development, in positive terms.

Research in the publication follows a problem-driven methodology in which the scientific research problem decides the methodological approach. Geographically, the publication has a particular focus on post-conflict societies on the African continent.

About this paper

This presentation was delivered by Elnari Potgieter, Project Leader of the South African Reconciliation Barometer, on 7 February 2018, to the South African Human Rights Commission's National Investigative Hearing on Migration, Xenophobia and Social Cohesion in South Africa. It was compiled by Elnari Potgieter and Mikhail Moosa, Intern to the IJR's Research and Policy team.

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

IJR	Institute for Justice and Reconciliation
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SARB	South African Reconciliation Barometer
SJC	Social Justice Coalition
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity for the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) to contribute to your investigation in this manner. The IJR was launched in the year 2000, in the wake of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). 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 helps to build fair, inclusive and democratic societies in Africa through carefully selected engagements and interventions.

For our contribution, we draw on research from our Research and Policy team – in particular from our two survey projects hosted at the IJR, namely the South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB)¹ and the Afrobarometer² – as well as some insights from our dialogues hosted by the IJR.

Our findings tie in with social cohesion through the 'social cohesion triangle' as developed by Langer et al. (2015)³, which will be used as a conceptual framework for our contribution. The constituent elements of the social cohesion triangle are as follows: (in)equality, trust, and identity. These will be unpacked using SARB data – in particular, from the most recent round conducted in 2017 – through perceived equality and social inclusion, societal trust (on the interpersonal and institutional level), and shared identities. Afrobarometer and dialogue insights will be used in combination with these findings – in particular, by exploring how these relate to attitudes to foreigners.

1. What in your view are the underlying causes of ongoing stigma and discrimination experienced by migrant communities in South Africa?

In this section, we consider the state of social cohesion among South Africans, and how this may relate to sentiments regarding people from other (particularly African) nationalities. As mentioned earlier, Langer et al. (2015) provide a useful framework analysing social cohesion – namely trust, identity and inequality – and, through a brief exploration of the key concepts and findings from SARB 2017 data, this section outlines a lack of social cohesion. Furthermore, we consider the underlying causes of negative stigma and discrimination experienced by foreign nationals in South Africa.

Key concepts

Identity

Our sense of *identity* refers to our ascribing to certain norms and values that govern our behaviours. Individuals who share an identity and its accompanying norms and values tend to abide by the same behavioural prescripts, and, in that sense, view one another as ‘included’ in identifiable groups. This common identification facilitates cooperative interactions and social capital.⁴ In the South African context, the importance of the extent to which people adhere to a national identity in relation to their group identity is often highlighted for nation-building. It can also, however, be problematic when shared identities lead to exclusionary intragroup relations in conjunction with a lack of intergroup cohesion – in other words, closing off to whoever is deemed ‘the other’.

Social identity also refers to group belonging, as well as the way in which we associate and connect with others on the basis of this belonging. Individuals may subscribe to multiple identities at any given time, based on their patterns of social, political and economic interactions. Alternatively, they may single out any of these to exclude others from membership of their group. SARB 2017 considered the primary and secondary identity associations of South Africans. In terms of primary identity association, the highest-ranked basis for group association in the 2017 survey was *language* (mother tongue), followed by *race* and, thereafter, *economic class*. *South African* as a primary group association and identity ranked fourth. Despite only 11.1% of South Africans reporting their South African identity as their primary identity, 79.9% of South Africans noted that being South African is an important part of how they see themselves. *Language* has shown its salience as primary identity association since the inception of the SARB. This provides both opportunities and challenges, which will be elaborated on later.

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Inequality

SARB 2017 requested respondents to indicate what they considered the primary source of social division in the country. *Inequality* was ranked as the biggest source of division. *Race* was ranked second and *political parties* were

ranked third. The ranking of inequality as the greatest source of social division in the country has prevailed since the inception of the SARB in 2003 – the only exceptions being in 2004 and 2010 when political parties were identified as the biggest source of division.

In addition, SARB 2017 showed that 46% of South African believed that inequality (the gap between rich and poor) had worsened since 1994. It is also the aspect of society measured that has shown the least perceived change since 1994.⁵ Inequality was thus perceived as both the most divisive and pervasive aspect of society. In addition, 38% believed that their economic circumstances had worsened since 1994, 42% believed that their employment opportunities had worsened since 1994, and 38% believed that safety had worsened since 1994.⁶ Inequality, however, manifests in more than just economic outcomes. It also manifests, for example, in terms of inequalities of opportunities, power relations and access to certain resources.

It is within this environment of perceived inequalities and divisions that social cohesion processes among South Africans, as well as between South Africans and foreigners from other countries, take place. This holds implications for intergroup contact.

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Language

In terms of inter-group contact it is important to refer to SARB's findings pertaining to *language*. Language ranked quite low as a source of social division, an encouraging sign given that it was associated with primary group identity by the majority of adults. That is to say, while language may be pre-eminently important for South Africans in terms of how they differentiate themselves from others, it is not considered a basis for discriminating against other South Africans.⁷ However, South Africans' emphasis of language as a primary feature of identity can present a barrier to social cohesion, especially in relation to people who speak languages not indigenous to South Africa. Language furthermore manifests as one of the main barriers to interaction between different race groups – providing for both opportunities and challenges in terms of intergroup interaction.⁸ We could argue that such barriers exist between South Africans, but also between South Africans and people who speak 'foreign' languages.

Building on contact theory – attributed to Gordon W. Allport (1954)⁹ – contact between groups may aid in reducing prejudices. It should be noted, however, that Allport posits that the most effective way to reduce prejudice between groups is through interpersonal contact under the correct conditions, 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. There is, however, also a growing awareness of a possible 'paradoxical' effect of intergroup contact, that is, increased contact may also reinforce previously held stereotypes and prejudices and thus increase, rather than decrease, ingroup–outgroup distinctions and enmity.¹⁰ It may thus be

argued that increased levels of social interaction may not always lead to improved interpersonal relationships. Nevertheless, it must be considered that higher levels of intergroup contact are a necessary minimum requirement for this to come to fruition.¹¹ Here, it should also be highlighted that intergroup contact is taking place in an environment that is both perceived to be unequal and, in many places, is unequal – thus not necessarily in optimal conditions according to contact theory. Such processes therefore require care and consideration to ensure that conditions are optimal in order to reduce rather than affirm prejudices.

Trust

Trust is often regarded as an important indicator of the 'glue' that binds a society together, acting as the foundation for relationships needed to overcome tensions and create an environment favourable to sustainable ties within a society.

Trust is often regarded as an important indicator of the 'glue' that binds a society together, acting as the foundation for relationships needed to overcome tensions and create an environment favourable to sustainable ties within a society. Trust also functions as the basis for contractual agreement and cooperation in a society. Trust in institutions is as important as interpersonal trust, given that the former plays vital roles in shaping the economic and social relationships of members of society.¹²

Levels of interpersonal trust among South Africans are low. 'Relatives' are trusted by most South Africans (63%), followed by 'Neighbours' (36%). Only 26% reported trusting their colleagues, with only 23% reporting trusting people from 'Other religions', 23% trusting people from 'Other language groups', 23% trusting people of 'Different sexual orientations', and 21% trusting people from 'Other race groups'. The least-trusted groups are 'Foreigners not from African countries' (15%) and 'Foreigners from African countries' (16%). The latter is of particular concern, as – different from the other 'Other' groups – very few South Africans find themselves in the middle ground when it comes to trusting foreigners, with half of the population and more indicating they distrust foreigners.

Figure 1: South Africans' trust in various groups, SARB 2017¹³

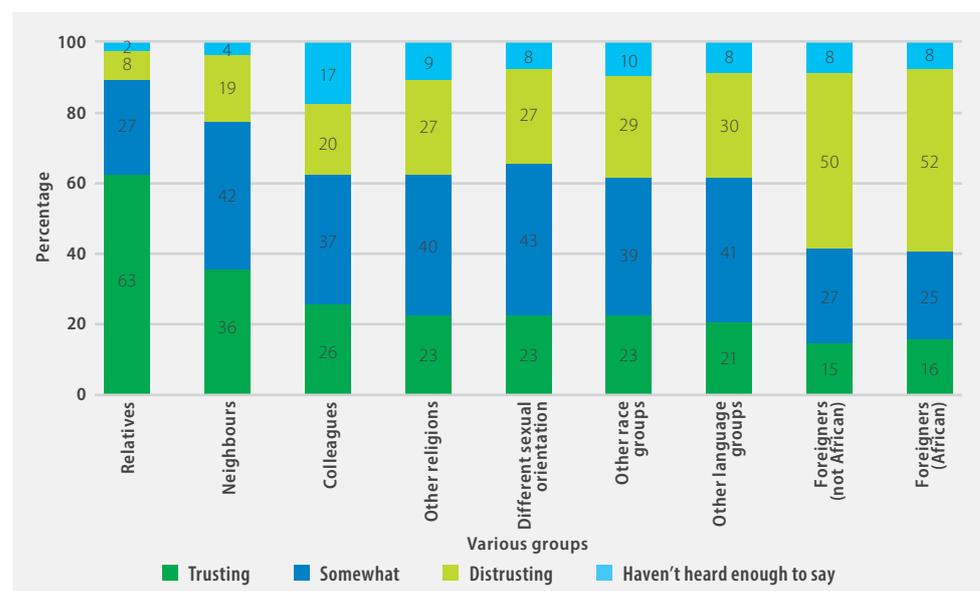


Figure 1 demonstrates that South Africans are relatively trusting of those they are familiar with or those within their immediate social space. However, once South Africans interact with those who might have different beliefs, preferences or histories, they are significantly less trusting. Figure 1 also shows that about 8% of respondents indicated that they ‘Haven’t heard enough to say’ whether they trust foreigners from both African and non-African countries. There may be many reasons why such a response is possible, but what is of interest here is the levels of trust of those who had an opinion in this regard. Of those that had an opinion on whether they trust or do not trust foreigners, 56% indicated that they do not trust foreigners from other African countries, while 55% indicated that they do not trust foreigners that are not from African countries (see Table 1).

South Africans are relatively trusting of those they are familiar with or those within their immediate social space. However, once South Africans interact with those who might have different beliefs, preferences or histories, they are significantly less trusting.

Table 1: Trust in foreigners, SARB 2017 ¹⁴		
	Foreigners – African	Foreigners – not African
Distrust	56	55
Somewhat	27	30
Trust	17	16

It is not only interpersonal trust, but also trust in institutions that is important for social cohesion. SARB 2017 shows low confidence levels in key governance institutions, such as national government, local government, Parliament and the President. Confidence levels in the legal system, Constitutional Court and Public Protector are somewhat higher than for elected representatives and government departments, although they are still fairly low. In addition, confidence levels in key institutions declined significantly from 2006 to 2017 – including confidence in Parliament, national government and provincial government. This is a worrying trend which holds implications for South Africa’s democratic political culture. Most importantly, as this finding is coupled with low political efficacy – and, in particular, voting efficacy – there is an increase in the propensity for violence for a political cause.¹⁵

A community example

These dimensions play out in various ways in society. We encountered such an example through dialogue work conducted in Cape Town during 2017. This dialogue session was intended to explore the ways in which racism and discrimination function within their respective communities and the strategies to address these prejudices.

Participants identified the primary source of division as language barriers, which makes it difficult for members of the same community to understand one another. Moreover, participants felt that in areas such as the Cape Flats, there is a lack of sufficient community spaces to facilitate and create an environment where members of the community can engage and integrate with one another. However, an issue which some participants seemed to agree on was their mutual *distrust* of foreigners, who were perceived to be the primary cause of illegal activities in their communities – participants were

The above dialogue showed how perceived and experienced inequalities, perceptions and experiences in terms of access (or non-access), identity (specifically religious and language), distrust (intergroup and institutional), and perceptions of safety form part of broader sentiments regarding people from other African countries.

particularly distrustful of Somalians and Nigerians. Curiously, Muslim participants were less distrustful of foreigners who shared their religious beliefs. In addition, crime levels coupled with low levels of trust in local authorities – in particular, the police in addressing criminal activities – were highlighted. In conclusion, participants indicated that an emphasis on shared interests and sharing experiences can help facilitate opportunities for community members to meet and break down prejudicial barriers. However, distrust hampers progress in this regard.

The above dialogue showed how perceived and experienced inequalities, perceptions and experiences in terms of access (or non-access), identity (specifically religious and language), distrust (intergroup and institutional), and perceptions of safety form part of broader sentiments regarding people from other African countries.

2. What specific challenges do migrant communities face in relation to issues surrounding community integration?

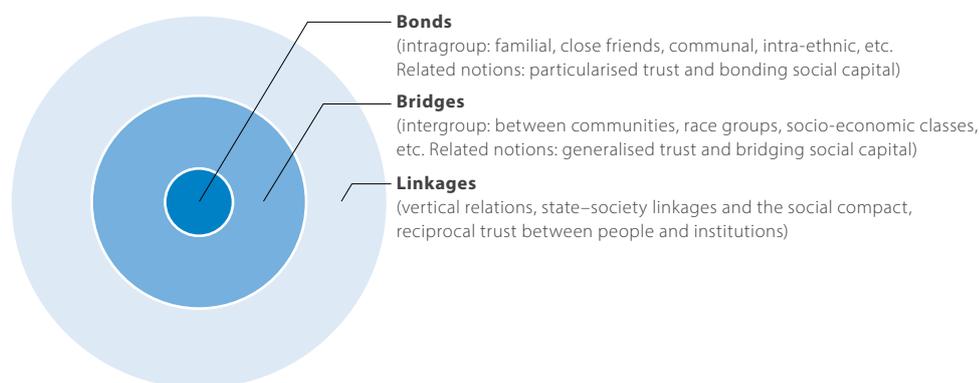
South Africans' low level of trust in foreigners, and specifically African foreigners, brings with it a host of challenges to social cohesion. Discriminatory attitudes and xenophobic utterances are not uncommon in South Africa. These sentiments, however, take place in a very particular and broader societal context. To refer back to the social cohesion triangle, South Africans are proud of their national *identity* and, above all, their linguistic and cultural heritage. This can be exclusive or inclusive of 'others'. Perceptions pertaining to *inequalities* indicated that this is regarded as both the most divisive and pervasive aspect of society. It furthermore indicates that South Africans believe some are benefitting from past and present circumstances more than others. In addition, low levels of *inter-trust*, in particular in foreigners, breeds dangerous stereotypes and hampers social cohesion, while decreasing levels of trust in institutions further hamper social cohesion processes.

On a conceptual level, South Africans exhibit strong 'bonding' trust and weak 'bridging' and decreasing 'linking' trust. 'Bonding' trust can be understood as *intragroup* relations – such as at the familial, communal, intra-ethnic level. 'Bridging' trust refers to *intergroup* relations – such as between communities, race groups, and socio-economic classes. 'Linking' trust refers to the relationship of society – which is made up of many groups – towards the state (as indicated by Figure 2).

In the historical and current context of South Africa, building the latter two (bridging and linking) is of importance – as the predominance of bonding trust may foster the transfer of prejudices and attitudes between generations and groups, rather than address prejudices and foster social cohesion on a national (and even beyond a national) level.¹⁶ More specifically, in the context of social cohesion and xenophobia, efforts to strengthen 'bridging' and 'linking' trust and to minimise the potentially adverse effects of exclusionary 'bonding' trust will improve relations between South Africans and foreigners.

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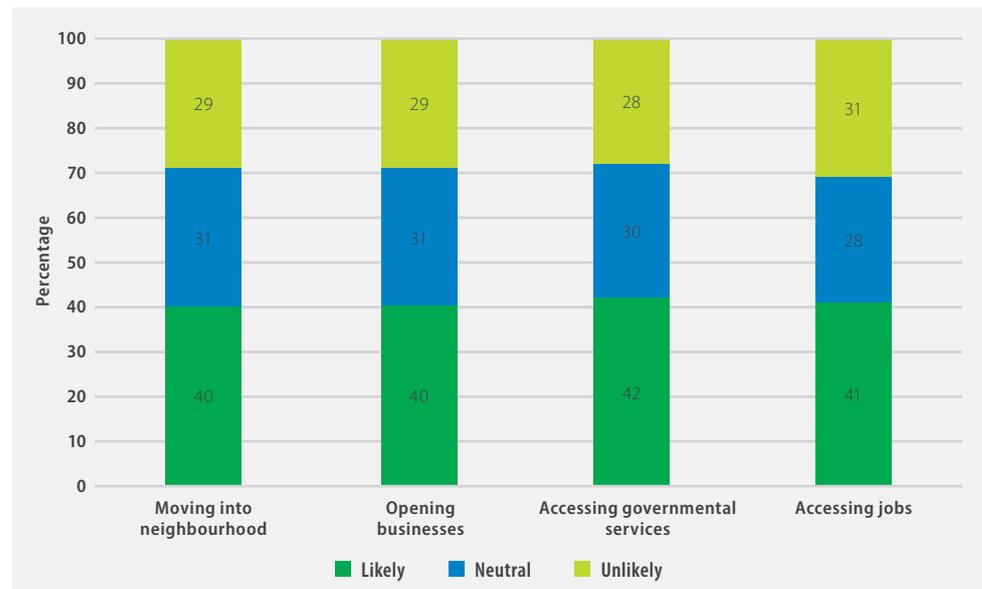
Figure 2: Social cohesion and trust – levels of analysis¹⁷



South Africans' limited openness towards foreigners can be found in the fact that about four in ten South Africans indicated that they would prevent Africans from other African countries from accessing jobs, government services, operating a business in their area, and moving into their neighborhood.

South Africans' distrust in foreigners, however, may impact their beliefs concerning the rights of foreigners. South Africans' limited openness towards foreigners can be found in that about four in ten South Africans indicated that they would prevent Africans from other African countries from: accessing jobs (41%), accessing government services (42%), operating a business in their area (40%), and moving into their neighbourhood (40%). Only about three in ten South Africans reported not being likely to do so, while about three in ten reported being 'neutral' (see Figure 3 below).¹⁸

Figure 3: Likelihood of preventing foreigners from other African countries from accessing certain benefits and services, SARB 2017¹⁹



Xenophobic attitudes, then, are worryingly common in South Africa, such that many citizens would prefer foreigners not to access basic services (Figure 3). Afrobarometer data shows similar findings. Afrobarometer furthermore shows that, if these findings are disaggregated, especially in relation to levels of education or socio-economic standing, there is no significant difference. Afrobarometer data also suggests that most South Africans do not trust foreigners and, if given the opportunity, 'one in five citizens would like the government to deport all foreigners, irrespective of their legal status'.²⁰ Xenophobia is thus widespread across South African society, and extreme anti-foreigner views are not entirely uncommon in South Africa.

A personal example

While physical violence is a real threat to foreigners, the structural and institutional violence perpetuated by police biases is more systemic and enduring. As an example, we provide a personal anecdote shared with us.

Anthony (not his real name) works in South Africa. He is highly qualified, experienced and respected in his field. He is from a French-speaking African country and frequently travels to other African countries for work. On one

occasion, Anthony was travelling from Cape Town. He carried an extra phone as a gift from a friend to a family member. He arrived at the airport rushed, as he was concerned he might miss his flight. The panic in Anthony's face must have shown, as police officers approached him for questioning. They searched him, found the extra phone he was carrying, and arrested him, as they suspected the phone was stolen. The police handcuffed him at the airport and took all his belongings, including extra cash he was carrying for travel purposes. Anthony was locked in a cell until his lawyer bailed him out, while his home was searched without a warrant. Police investigated his work status, despite Anthony providing all the necessary documentation. Once the police realised his position at the organisation, he was treated much better. Throughout his stay in custody, police officers spoke exclusively in Afrikaans, making jokes, knowing he would not understand them. After some time, his belongings were returned – minus some of the money he had been carrying. To this day, he has not received a response as to why he was treated this way, and he now has a deep distrust of the police.

This experience demonstrates that no matter one's level of education, expertise or income, foreigners are systematically discriminated against and distrusted. While this anecdote does not indicate physical xenophobic violence, it demonstrates the violent nature of institutional discrimination in addition to xenophobic sentiments exhibited by some South Africans.

3. What role, if any, have the media and public figures played in combatting or perpetuating stereotypes relating to migration and migrant communities?

Two aspects of xenophobic rhetoric are important: (1) the actions and language of state institutions, and (2) the portrayal of African immigrants as the 'other' in popular culture.

The relationship between public sentiment and media portrayals is often reciprocal. Inasmuch as citizens are likely to be influenced by media portrayals, the media frequently acts as a reflection of already-existing views. However, the continued portrayal of foreigners, specifically Africans, by the media and the state as a threat to the nation and as detrimental to local growth perpetuates the existence of xenophobia. Two aspects of xenophobic rhetoric are important: (1) the actions and language of state institutions, and (2) the portrayal of African immigrants as the 'other' in popular culture.

The post-apartheid South African state has a long history of stigmatising African foreigners and treating European foreigners as tourists. For example, democratic South Africa's first Minister of Home Affairs, Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi publicly claimed that, 'if we as South Africans are going to compete for scarce resources with millions of *aliens* who are pouring into South Africa, then we can bid goodbye to our Reconstruction and Development Programme'.²¹ Such a statement is important in understanding South Africans' conception of xenophobia. This statement reveals, firstly, the idea that South Africans 'compete' for resources with foreigners, reinforcing the idea that jobs, services and resources are severely limited by the presence of immigrants; and, secondly, that the presence of 'aliens' presents a direct threat to the success of macroeconomic government policy.

The news media is furthermore integral to the continued perpetuation of xenophobic attitudes. Studies have shown that newspapers in particular, including English-language newspapers which attract more affluent audiences, have covered issues surrounding foreign nations very negatively.²² It is not wholly uncommon for news stories to claim that foreigners are 'encroaching on the livelihoods of our huge number of unemployed people' or that 'the high rate of crime and violence ... is directly related to the rising numbers of illegals in South Africa', without ever citing evidence to support these xenophobic assertions.²³

It is, however, not only the print media that should be monitored in this regard. SARB 2017 explored how South Africans perceive, and engage with, various types of news media. The most used and trusted sources of news are television and radio.²⁴ Importantly, South Africans' usage of news sources correlates with their levels of trust in institutions: of all public institutions included in the SARB survey, the public broadcaster, namely the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), was the most trusted institution – with 51% of respondents saying they trust the SABC.²⁵ The SABC broadcasts on television on three different channels and on more than a dozen radio stations across the country in several languages. Clearly, then, SABC broadcasting in respect of news and popular entertainment across their large radio and television audiences shapes how South Africans relate to specific issues.

The xenophobic outlook of influential institutions speaks to the deeply ingrained mistrust of foreigners in South African society. It is likely – to refer to the social cohesion triangle once more – that continued inequality and identity structured around indigeneity and narrow conceptions of nationhood reinforce xenophobia in South Africa.

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4. What steps can be taken to continuously advance social integration and ultimately reduce inequalities associated with exclusion in national identity, and which actors are best placed to take these steps?

Historical and current inequalities in South Africa will take many years to resolve, as will the building of trust between various groups. These processes take time and require the involvement of various sectors – business, government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academia, and individuals.

Historical and current inequalities in South Africa will take many years to resolve, as will the building of trust between various groups. These processes take time and require the involvement of various sectors – business, government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academia, and individuals. Tensions resulting from such divisions thus need to be managed in a way that conflict plays out constructively, rather than destructively. In this regard, trust in institutions that are managing such processes is vital – in particular, trust in elected representatives and governmental institutions. The (re)building of confidence in institutions is thus imperative in addressing many long-term societal challenges. As such, it is important that the decrease in confidence in institutions is unpacked and understood in order to reverse this trend by addressing its causes. In particular, low political efficacy impacting on democratic political culture must be unpacked and understood in order to ascertain why South Africans feel that formal processes of accountability are not effective in getting their message across to authorities.

An institution of particular importance is the police, an institution which South Africans perceive to be riddled with corruption.²⁶ The capacity of the police should most certainly be taken into account, but it cannot be emphasised enough that treating foreigners, particularly Africans, as a high-crime population and targeting their forced removal from communities has wide-ranging implications for interpersonal trust between South Africans and foreigners and for social cohesion generally. All citizens in South Africa, regardless of their national identity or citizenship status, rely on the police to provide basic services and security. Xenophobic prejudice in the police and security apparatus needs to be eliminated as a precondition to social cohesion between South Africans and foreigners.

In addition, our findings do suggest a few possible avenues to aid in such processes and assist in the short to medium term in addressing xenophobic attitudes and prejudices. Given the findings regarding language as both a primary source of identity to many South Africans and as a barrier to interaction between groups, promoting mutual learning of languages could aid in helping migrants from other countries integrate and navigate their respective communities more easily. It could also lead to greater intergroup interaction, although we should be mindful of the possible paradoxical effects of such if it does not take place with the necessary conditions as indicated above.

Finally, inasmuch as media sources may be regarded as a source of xenophobic sentiments, the findings that most South Africans access and trust political news through radio and television, as well as that the SABC was the most trusted institution in 2017, show the importance of the involvement of the media

in combatting xenophobic prejudices. Media sources may 'mediate' how we see those with whom we are not frequently in contact, and could thus play a vital role in showing what South Africans may have in common with foreigners residing here, as well as address prejudices by not portraying foreigners in stereotypical ways. In addition, the media may play an active role in promoting anti-xenophobic sentiments.

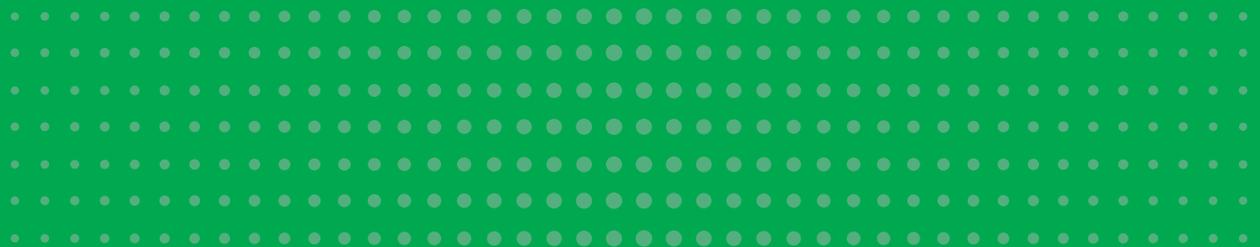
Endnotes

1. The South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) Project – hosted by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) – has been tracking national reconciliation in South Africa since its inception in 2003. Through its South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) Survey, the project collects reliable and accurate public opinion data through a nationally representative public opinion survey that gauges public sentiment regarding national reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa.
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13. Survey question: 'How much do you trust the following groups of people?'. 'Quite a lot' and 'A great deal' combined to form 'Trust' in Figure 1; 'Somewhat' remains as 'Somewhat' in Figure 1; 'Not very much' and 'Not at all' responses combined to form 'Distrust' in Figure 1. 'Haven't heard enough to say' responses included in analysis.
14. 'Haven't heard enough to say' responses rendered missing.
15. SARB 2017 (n 5 above).
16. Meiring, T. and Potgieter, E. 2017. Towards a social cohesion index for South Africa using SARB data. Reconciliation and Development Working Paper Series, 1. With reference to Aldrich, D.P. 2012. *Building Resilience: Social Capital in Post-Disaster Recovery*. Chicago: Chicago University Press; Fukuyama, F. 2002. Social capital and development: The coming agenda. *SAIS Review*, 22(1): 23–37; Langer, A., Stewart, F., Smedts, K. and Demarest, L. (fn 3), p. 6.
17. Meiring, T. and Potgieter, E. 2017. Towards a social cohesion index for South Africa using SARB data. Reconciliation and Development Working Paper Series, 1.
18. 'Likely' and 'Very likely' responses combined to form 'Likely' category in figure. 'Unlikely' and 'Very unlikely' combined to form 'Unlikely' in figure.
19. 'Don't know' responses rendered as missing and not included in the data analysis. Percentage of 'Don't know' responses per questions prior to 'Don't know' responses rendered missing: Accessing jobs 4%; Accessing government services 4%; Operating a business in your area 3%; Moving into your neighbourhood 2%.
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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. The IJR works with partner organisations across Africa to promote reconciliation and socio-economic justice in countries emerging from conflict or undergoing democratic transition. The 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.



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