SA Reconciliation Barometer 2015

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POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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South African Reconciliation Barometer, Briefing Paper 3
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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 is to shape national approaches to transitional justice and reconciliation in African countries by drawing on community intelligence as well as on 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 by 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 the international market research company, TNS. The survey employed a multistage cluster design whereby enumerator areas (EAs) were randomly selected, and, within each of these, households were randomly selected with a view to visiting such households. At each household, a systematic grid system was employed in order to select the specific respondent for an interview. The final sample of 2 219 respondents was then weighted so as to adequately represent the adult population of South Africa.

Summary

Many South Africans feel out of touch with key representative institutions and the elected political leaders who preside over them. As a result, close to half of the respondents surveyed during the 2015 South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) Survey, which was conducted in August and September of 2015, indicated that voting in elections has little impact on the course that the country takes. In spite of this scepticism regarding the power of their vote, most respondents indicated a preference for peaceful means of democratic expression. However, around 15% indicated that they had used violence or force to achieve their political objective in the preceding 12 months. Another 10% indicated that, although they had not engaged in such activities, they would if the circumstances demanded. That one-quarter of voting-age respondents indicated receptiveness to violent forms of political engagement in the run-up to local-government elections in August 2016, should be a source of concern. To date, several observers have expressed their disappointment with the polarising rhetoric of the political campaigns thus far and the impact that this may have on the conduct of the elections. High levels of distrust still exist among South Africans of different, historically defined racial categories, as previously reported results of the 2015 SARB Survey have shown. As such, it will be incumbent on political organisations to act in ways that do not exacerbate these racial schisms, and, more broadly, also avoid any other forms of mobilisation that may cast doubt on the ultimate outcome.

Key findings

- Six out of every ten South Africans feel that politics and the system of governance within which it functions is too complex for them to understand.
- Only four out of ten South Africans trust Parliament to execute its mandate.
- South Africans do not have much confidence in the functionality of local government. Close to a quarter (22%) indicated that they have absolutely no confidence in their local authority, while almost a third (32.4%) said that they 'don't trust it very much'.
- Two-thirds of respondents noted that political leaders don't really care about what people like them think, while another 57.9% felt that they have no influence over the actions of politicians.
- A quarter of South Africans indicated that they have either used force or violence for political ends, or are willing to do so should the circumstances require it. Of those that have responded in this way, the majority are young males who fall in LSM6 and below.

Background

Post-apartheid South Africa has seen better days. Gross domestic product (GDP) growth since the 2009 recession has been anaemic and, at the time of writing in mid-2016, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had once again revised its growth projection for the country downward to 0.1% from an already paltry 2% at the beginning of the year.[1] During the first quarter of 2016, the economy shrank by 1.2%;[2] unemployment reached its highest level in almost a decade;[3] and the cost of living, particularly prices of basic foodstuffs, was rising at an alarming rate. While the South African Reserve Bank is doing its level best, it has the almost impossible task of trying to curb inflation without dampening the little life that is left in the system. In these circumstances, South Africans, more than ever before, will be looking to government for relief through redistributive mechanisms, such as pensions, grants, and subsidised services. Also expect workers in the public sector, with an already unsustainably high wage bill, to push their employer even harder in order to make ends meet.

At a time when the financial pain seems to be spreading beyond the poorest households to those who have been the major beneficiaries of its policies – the small but vulnerable emerging middle class – government has all but run out of fiscal space to balance support for the needy, on the one hand, and stimulate the economy, on the other. These circumstances, which are likely to persist for the foreseeable future, will present severe obstacles for the country's policymakers to address developmental targets for 2030, as set out in the National Development Plan (NDP).[4] Such circumstances also have implications for the pursuit of reconciliation and the broader quest for a socially cohesive society.

In December 2015, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) released the first briefing paper in respect of its 2015 South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) Survey. This paper highlighted the deep social schisms that still persist in South Africa, almost two decades after the country's political transition in 1994. The paper pointed out, for example, that more than six out of ten (61%) South Africans felt that race relations in South Africa had either deteriorated or stayed the same since the country's political transition in 1994.[5] It also reported that a similar proportion of respondents believed that national reconciliation would remain impossible for as long as those who were disadvantaged under apartheid remained poor.[6] In terms of this prevailing view, and given the current economic context, the prognosis for the creation of a more reconciled, unified nation is weak. As things stand, levels of trust among ordinary South Africans of different races are low. According to the briefing paper, more than two-thirds of respondents (67.3%) indicated that they had little or no trust in South Africans from groups other than their own.[7]

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1   Lipton, D. 2016. 'Bridging South Africa's economic divide'. Address at the University of the Witwatersrand. Accessed online: https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2016/07/18/20/15/SP071916-Bridging-South-Africas-Economic-Divide, 25 July 2016.

2   Statistics South Africa. 2016. 'Gross domestic product: Quarter 1 2016'. Accessed online: http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0441/P04411stQuarter2016.pdf, 25 July 2016.

3   Statistics South Africa.2016. 'Quarterly Labour Force Survey: Quarter 1 2016'. Accessed online: http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02111stQuarter2016.pdf, 25 July 2016.

4   South African National Planning Commission. 2012. 'National Development Plan 2030: Our future – make it work. Accessed online: http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/Executive%20Summary-NDP%202030%20-%20Our%20future%20-%20make%20it%20work.pdf, 25 July 2016.

5   Hofmeyr, J. & Govender, R. 2016. 'National reconciliation, race relations, and social inclusion.' *SA Reconciliation Barometer Survey, Briefing Paper 1*. Accessed online: http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0441/P04411stQuarter2016.pdf, 25 July 2016.

6   Ibid.

7   Ibid.

In the absence of a conducive economic climate, government will have to play a much more active role with fewer resources in ensuring that the country's post-1994 nation-building project remains on track. This will require transparency and accountability to convince ordinary citizens that its conduct is fair, even-handed, and responsive, particularly for those most in need. In the presence of economic forces that have the potential to pull South Africans further apart, it will have to be the cohesive actor that counters these forces. But is it capable of taking on this responsibility? And, importantly also, do citizens have confidence in their representative institutions and the elected political leaders who preside over them, to play this role?

This third briefing paper in respect of the 2015 SARB Survey, which was conducted in August and September 2015, will take a closer look at these questions and present some of its key findings.

Trust in representative institutions

Citizen participation in the processes that affect citizens' lives is a hallmark of democratic dispensations. Whether it is in direct referendums to decide on particular issues, or through the mandate that is given to parties or individuals to decide on their behalf, democracy gives citizens the opportunity to co-determine the conditions under which they are governed. But for them to submit to these processes and their outcomes, there needs to be trust in the fairness of the political system that regulates their participation. Trust, in turn, presupposes an understanding of how the system works. In a divided society like South Africa, representative institutions have an important role to play in mitigating the tensions that may exist among ordinary citizens, and therefore the conduct of such institutions and the fairness with which they conduct themselves need to be beyond reproach. To make this possible, it is critical that ordinary people understand how the system functions by ensuring that its constitutive institutions are accountable and transparent. Is this the case in South Africa? The 2015 SARB Survey has prompted respondents to indicate their level of agreement with a statement that our system is too difficult to comprehend.

Figure 1: Sometimes politics and government are too difficult to understand
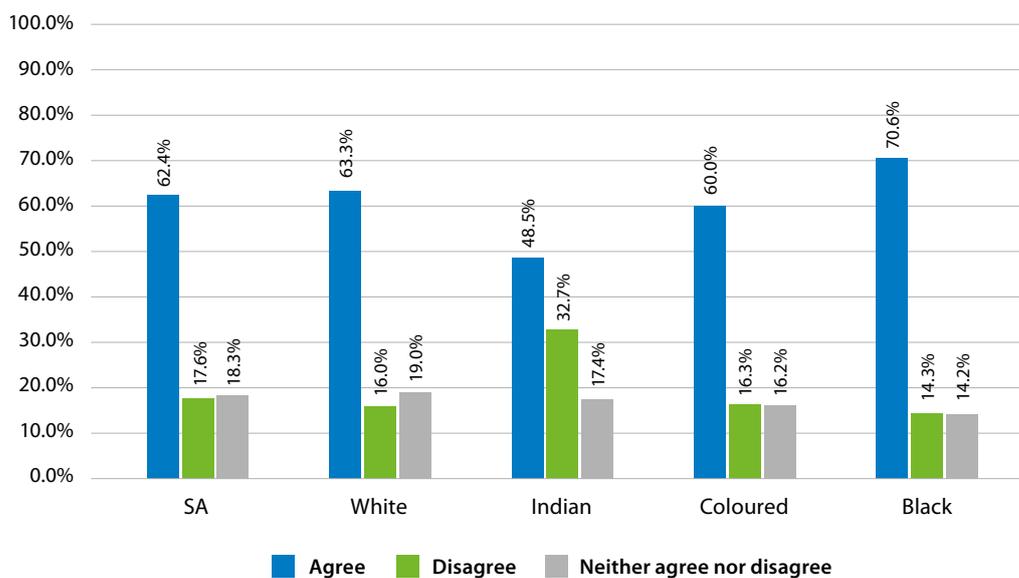
The results presented in Figure 1 show that at least six out of every ten South Africans feel that politics and the system of governance within which it functions is too complex for them to understand. In a country where a large section of the population is rendered vulnerable by poverty and insufficient access to basic necessities, such as housing, water, and sanitation, this vulnerability is further entrenched by the sense that a technocratic behemoth, whose workings they don't understand and, by extension have no control over, determines their livelihoods. Even in instances where the appropriate institutions do exist to address their plight, few people are aware of these and may therefore opt for means of engagement that either fall on deaf ears or contravene the law, as has been the case with the destruction of public property such as schools, libraries and different means of public transport in recent months. This alienation from the system seems to be most pervasive among coloured respondents, of whom 70% indicated that they found the system of governance too complex to understand. They are followed by 63.3% of black respondents and 60% of Indian respondents who agreed with this statement. Among white participants, just less than half (48.5%) said that they felt overpowered by the magnitude of government.

In the light of the above, it is worth asking to what extent South Africans display confidence in the institutions that one would typically associate with a representative democracy – in other words, those that they directly or indirectly mandate to govern on their behalf. Figure 2 below presents the 2015 SARB Survey results for confidence in three of these, namely the national Parliament, the national government, and local government.

**Figure 2: Confidence in representative institutions**
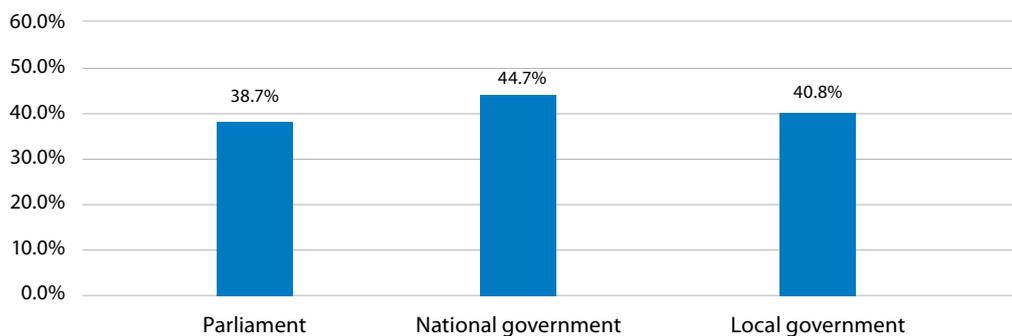
The findings that we report on in Figure 2 combine the responses of respondents who indicated that they either have 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of trust in each of the three institutions. The results are not encouraging. They show that none of these institutions managed to muster the trust of more than half of respondents in this nationally representative sample. The fact that fewer than four out of ten South Africans trust Parliament to execute its mandate does, however, not come as a complete surprise. In the period that preceded the survey, South Africans had become accustomed to chaotic skirmishes between parliamentarians and heavy-handed members of the security establishment who were instructed to intervene by presiding officers who looked on helplessly as they (the presiding officers) lost control over proceedings. Much of this could have been avoided were it not for the weak oversight that the legislature displayed in key matters such as the notorious Nkandla saga where its soft approach to unconvincing explanations of seemingly unaccountable relevant ministries and the subsequent scapegoating of the Public Protector, left many at a loss for words. In March this year, the Constitutional Court also affirmed Parliament's neglect of its duties when it noted in

its ruling on the Nkandla matter that Parliament had failed in its constitutional duty to hold the executive to account.[8]

For similar reasons, the finding with regard to trust in the national government (44%), which in instances like those referred to above appeared to obstruct rather than facilitate the democratic process, should not raise eyebrows. The Afrobarometer, the SARB's sister survey, which conducts public-opinion surveys on governance issues across Africa, has, for example, shown how the support of President Zuma, who heads the ANC (African National Congress) government, dropped from 62% in 2009 to 34% in September 2015 when the survey was conducted.[9] Equally unsurprising, but probably most relevant in a local-government election year, is the weak trust levels (40.8%) that this sphere of government, which is closest in its interactions with citizens, continues to elicit. Figures 3 and 4 look at these findings in more detail.

Figure 3:   Trust in local government
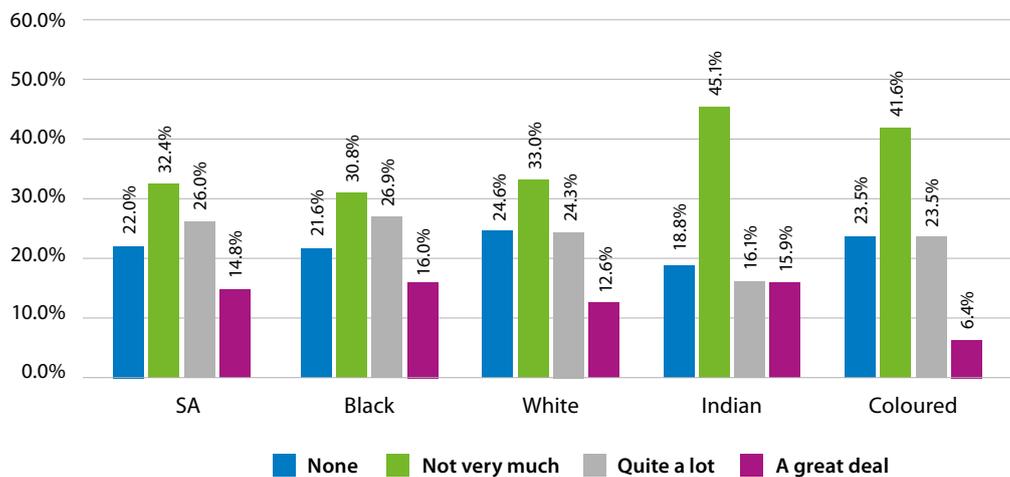
South Africans' trust in their local governments to perform according to their mandate is limited. Figure 3 points out that close to a quarter of the overall sample (22%) has absolutely no confidence in this sphere of government, while another 32.4% – almost a third – noted that they don't trust local governments very much. The combined figure for the two adds up to 54.4%, which means that, at the very least, a majority of citizens have their reservations about this sphere of government's capacity and/or willingness to act in their best interest. This sentiment cuts across the country's historically constructed racial categories, with the highest levels of distrust located in the Indian (63.9%) and coloured (64.5%) communities. While somewhat lower, this view is shared by the majority of white (57.6%) and black (52.4%) respondents.

It may, however, be possible that, in a highly unequal society like South Africa, sentiment may vary strongly among people who find themselves in different layers of society. To test this, we looked at the same responses to confidence in the local-government sphere through

8   Merten, M. 2016. 'Nkandla ruling: Concourt slams National Assembly., *Daily Maverick*. Accessed online: http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-03-31-nkandla-ruling-cons-court-slams-national-assembly/#.V5Xgafm7hHw, 25 July 2016.

9   Chingwete, A. 2016. 'In South Africa, citizens' trust in president, political institutions drops sharply'. *Afrobarometer Despatch* No. 90, p. 3.

Figure 4: Trust in local government (by LSM)
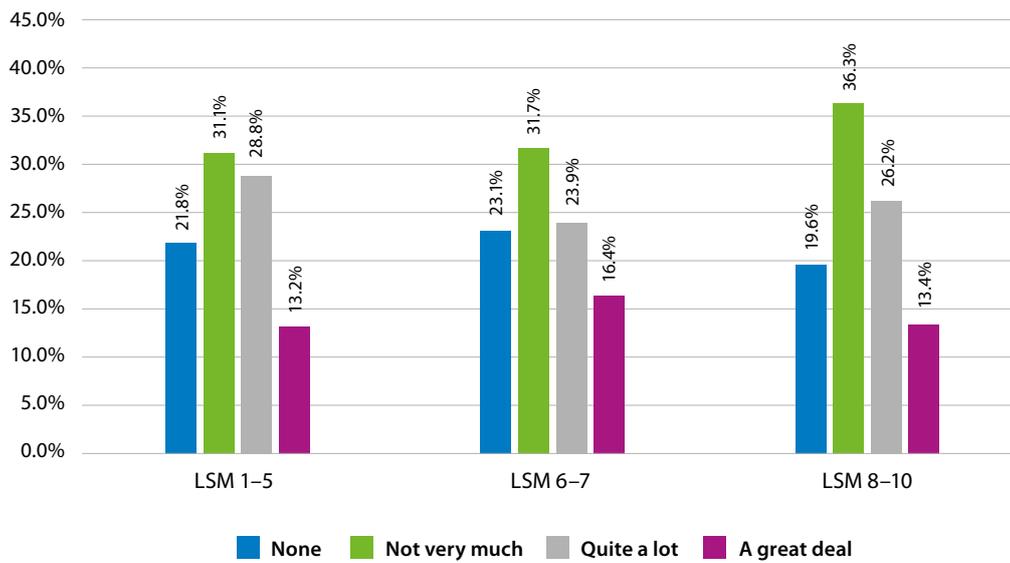
the lens of the Living-Standard Measurement Categories (LSMs).[10] For the purpose of this analysis, we clustered them together in LSMs 1–5, 6–7, and 8–10. In this instance, our expectation of a more diverse response pattern does not seem to hold. While the complete absence of confidence is slightly higher in LSMs 7 and below, this sentiment cuts across the selected categories. When the combined responses for 'None' and 'Not very much' for the three categories are compared, those in the LSM 1–5 category score 52.9%, those in LSM 6–7 score a total of 54.8%, and those in LSMs 8–10 score 54.9%. However, if one looks at each of the LSMs individually, there is one result that does diverge somewhat from the uniformity in responses across LSM categories. In LSM 2, 40% of respondents indicated that they have absolutely no confidence in this institution. This category represents some of the most deprived citizens, who lack both income and access to the means they require to improve their lives. While this category may not constitute the single biggest LSM category, their despondency – and, one would assume, existential fears as a result of it – is something that needs to be taken into consideration when we try to understand why protests in low-income neighbourhoods are often characterised by methods that bypass lawful and democratic channels.

Party representation

In democracies, it is the responsibility of political parties to champion the diverse causes of social groups that coalesce around common interests and beliefs about how they ought to be governed. They are the primary political vehicles for citizens to participate in the shaping of their lives within the legal confines of a system of governance. While it is impossible for parties to craft policy agendas that overlap with the exact needs of each individual, electoral success will depend on their ability to offer a broad set of solutions

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10 The living-standard measure (LSM) developed by the South African Audience Research Foundation (SAARF) provides a useful indication of degrees of wealth and material inclusion/exclusion experienced by South African citizens. It is a composite score which draws on a number of variables in order 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.

that generally approximates the policy preferences of a sizeable portion of the citizenry.

It is important that ordinary people feel that they have a stake in government, that their voice matters, and that those who represent them are responsive to both their political preferences and fears. A vibrant political system where political parties cover the broad range of interests that are present in a society also strengthens the system of governance and discourages the search for alternatives that may undermine its legitimacy. In those systems that are successful, parties tend to moderate the expectations of citizens and voter support is more likely to converge around parties that occupy the political centre. Where they fail, and the political centre is seen as complacent or protecting its own vested interests, polarisation occurs and radical parties to the far left or the far right often emerge. In more extreme cases, some citizens may choose to opt out of the system altogether and actively undermine or even seek to replace it.

Pure interest-based politics becomes more complex in divided societies where questions of identity permeate almost every aspect of society and questions of race, class or religion shape the contours of the relevant interest groups. In these societies, responsible political parties are expected to pursue the interests of their distinct constituencies in ways that sustain their faith and participation in the political system, without entrenching or deepening its existing fault lines. When these interests and expectations are not being met, the system's capacity to hold a society together is put under strain.

As such, an alienation from representative politics as a result of complacency or political arrogance can be particularly detrimental to a country like South Africa where social justice and reconciliation have to be pursued concurrently. If people view the political system, which should be at the heart of this process, as removed from the lives of ordinary citizens, its capacity to unite and move the country forward is compromised.

It is, therefore, important to get a sense of the extent to which South Africans feel that they are heard by the politicians and the parties that represent them. For more than two decades now, the ANC has dominated the political centre in South Africa, but in recent years its image has become increasingly tarnished by allegations of patronage, corruption, and, in the course of the past year in particular, state capture, whereby the apparent influence of wealthy individuals seems to override the broader public interest.[11] To some, this suggests complacency on the part of the ANC and a disregard of its mandate to govern. To others, it may imply a broader failure of the system of representative politics, which includes opposition parties, in terms of providing transparency and accountability to citizens.

It is, therefore, important for us to know whether South Africans still have faith in political leaders and parties to represent their best interests. To this end, the 2015 SARB Survey has presented respondents with a number of statements that gauge these issues. Two of these are reported here. The first posits that political leaders do not really care what ordinary people think about the matters that affect their lives (see Figure 5), while the second states that citizens have no say in the decisions that politicians make (See Figure 6).

Following on the results presented in Figure 1, which suggest that most South Africans feel overwhelmed by the complexity of politics and governance in general, the question arises as to whether they trust those that have been mandated through the democratic vote to represent their best interests in these complex institutions. Put differently, are they satisfied that, although the workings of the governance system may be too intricate for them to fathom, they can still trust their elected representatives to act in their best interest. The results presented in Figure 5 suggest that for two-thirds of respondents (66.3%) the short answer to this question is 'No', while a further 20.1% were undecided, indicating that
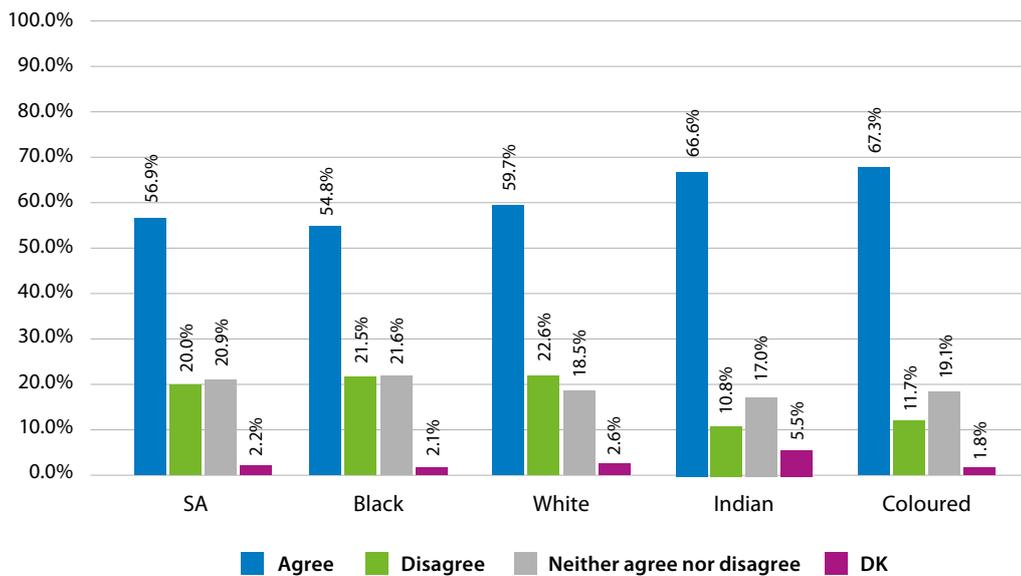
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11   Jonas, M. 2016. 'Mcebisi Jonas opens up on state capture'. *Fin24*. Accessed online: http://www.fin24.com/Opinion/
mcebisi-jonas-opens-up-on-state-capture-20160422, 25 July 2016.

Figure 5: Political leaders don't really care about what I think
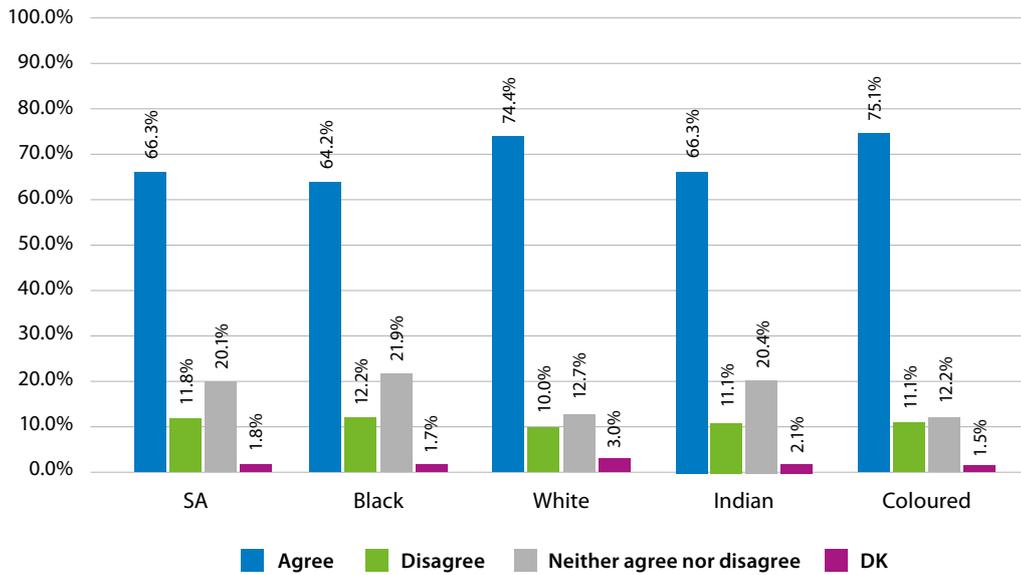
Figure 6: I don't have a say in what political leaders and politicians do

they neither agree nor disagree. Only 11.8% were unequivocal in their opinion that political leaders actually are interested in what people like them think. This sense that politicians largely ignore their plight is strongest among coloureds and whites, where around three-quarters of respondents in these respective categories indicated that politicians ignore their interests. Two-thirds of Indians (66.3%) felt that this is the case, while slightly fewer black South Africans (64.3%) shared this sentiment.

Not only do a majority of South Africans feel that politicians don't care about their plight; most also sense that they have no influence over the decisions that are made in their name. Almost six out of ten respondents (56.9%) agreed with the statement that they don't have a say in the way that political leaders and politicians conduct themselves. This sentiment

was strongest among coloured and Indian respondents, where two-thirds of respondents in the respective groupings felt that it is the case. Among whites, the corresponding figure was 59.7%, and, for black South Africans, it was 54.8%.

When read in combination, the findings that have been presented in Figures 5 and 6 point to a weak relationship between citizens and their political representatives. Not only are the levels of confidence in representative institutions low, but many also doubt the commitment of the political figures that are elected to represent them in these institutions. Whether the blame for this should be put on the country's proportional-representation system is a matter that have been discussed extensively elsewhere and will be discussed at length in this document. What is important to note at this point is the apparent disjuncture between the transparency and accountability that our democratic system promises, on the one hand, and the opaqueness that citizens experience, on the other.

Voting as a means of participation

Voting within a democratic dispensation can sometimes take the form of a referendum, where citizens vote directly on a particular issue, but in the most instances it occurrs in the context of elections where parties or individuals obtain a mandate from voters to represent them in institutions of decision-making. Whether citizens vote or not will depend on the degree to which they trust the fairness of the process and the efficacy of the representative institution to ensure that their views are reflected in policies, or at least find bearing in the processes according to which such policies are crafted.

In the preceding sections, we have seen, firstly, that the complexity of our governance system and its respective institutions has an alienating effect on ordinary citizens. Secondly, we know that the confidence levels in three of South Africa's key representative institutions, Parliament, national government and local government, is exceptionally low. Thirdly, we are aware that a majority of citizens are convinced that politicians don't care about people like them. As a result, a majority of respondent also feel that they have very little influence over the behaviour of their elected representatives.

If this is the case, such citizens might rightfully ask whether there is any point at all in voting in elections, such as those coming up in August this year. For this reason, the 2015 SARB Survey asked respondents a number of questions related to their attitudes to voting. Here we are reporting the response to one of them that pertains to the utility of voting. Respondents were presented with the simple statement, 'Voting doesn't really make a difference', and were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with it.

From the findings that we present in Figure 7, it is clear that almost half of the South African population (48%) doubt the impact that their vote has on broader decision-making processes in the country. This is also the case for majorities within each of the respective population groups. Among coloured South Africans, this view is the strongest, with close to six out of ten (58.7%) believing that this is the case. Albeit somewhat lower, there was also a substantial portion of black and Indian respondents who believed that this may be the case. White respondents, at 40.3%, were the least likely to doubt the efficacy of their vote.

A look at responses to the same statement through the lens of the LSM categories reveals little difference among the respective groups. In all of the categories, between four and five out of ten respondents agreed that the act of voting is unlikely to make a material difference to their lives. The highest level of agreement was among respondents in LSM 6–7, while the highest level of disagreement was recorded among the upper LSM 8–10 categories.

Overall, it is therefore evident that the broad disillusionment with representative institutions, and the politicians that are mandated to occupy them, finds strong bearing

Figure 7: Voting doesn't really make a difference
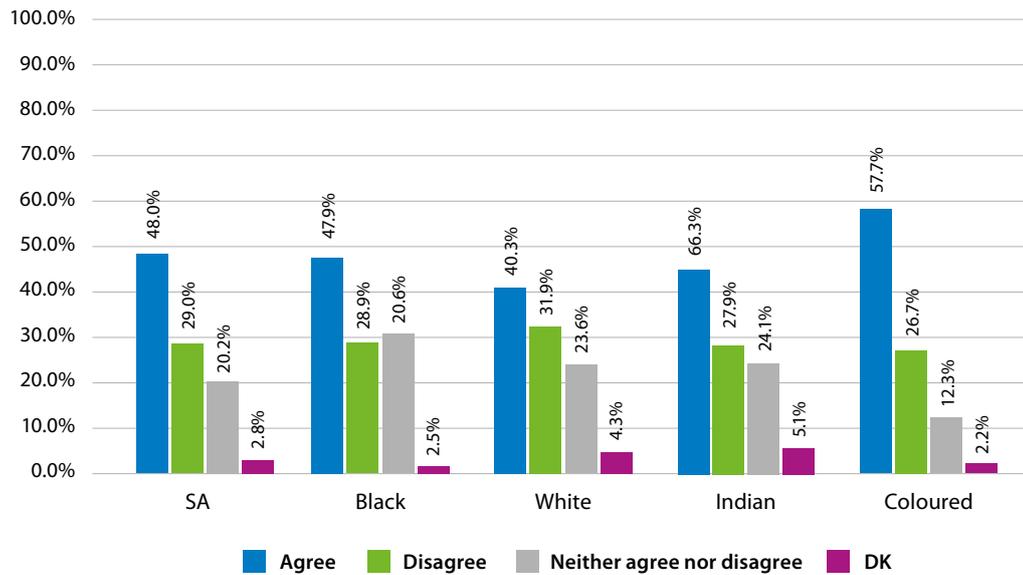
**Figure 8: Voting doesn't really makes a difference (by LSM)**
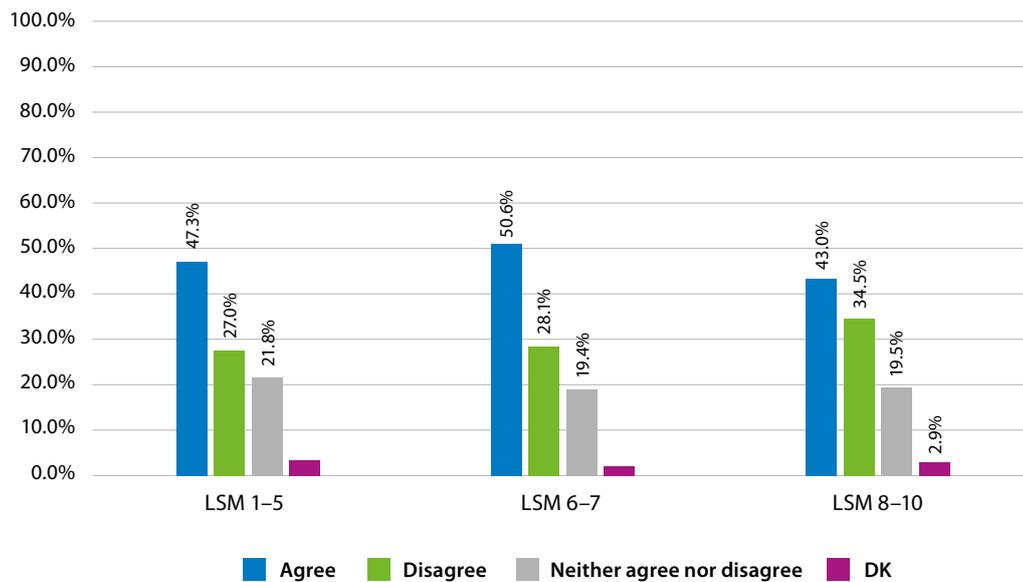
in the results that gauge people's views on voting. These results are also backed up by overall voter participation rates in successive general elections since the country's democratic transition. In 1994, 85% of South Africa's voting-age population cast their ballot in the first democratic elections. Twenty years later in 2014, the comparative figure was 53.7%.[12] The picture that these results paint thus begs the question how people express and assert themselves politically in South Africa, with its extreme inequalities that impede citizens from fully asserting their constitutional rights.

12   See International IDEA website. Accessed online: http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=246, 21 July 2016.

Other means of political participation

If such broad disillusionment with the act of voting indeed exists, how then do South Africans make their voices heard? The 2015 SARB Survey presented respondents with a number of actions that people sometimes take as citizens so as to assert themselves. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had participated in any of these actions over the past 12 months, and, if they hadn't, whether they would consider doing so over the next 12 months.

Figure 9: Citizen actions that South Africans take to assert themselves politically
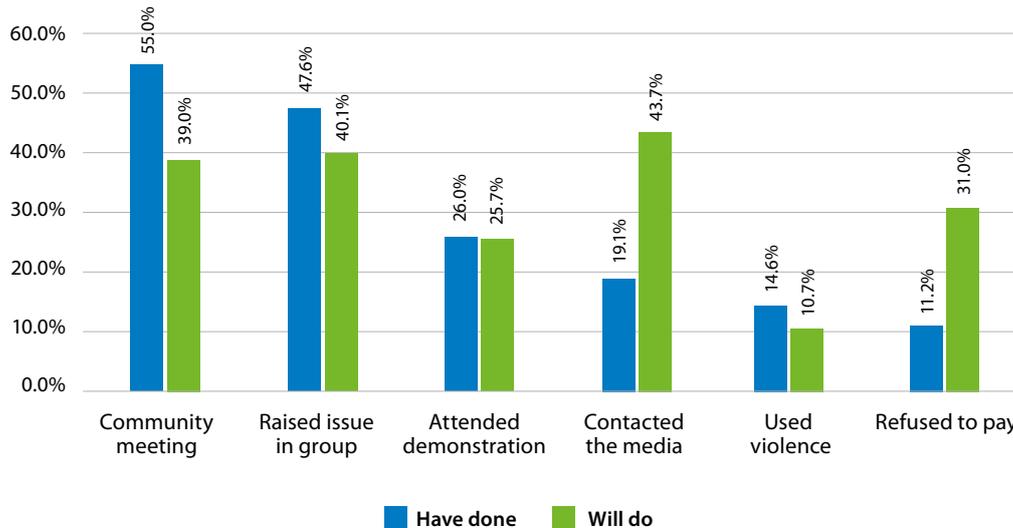
The results that we report on in Figure 9 suggest that, over the past year, the vast majority of respondents have engaged in citizen action through legal, non-violent means, such as community meetings, group mobilisation, peaceful demonstrations, and the articulation of their views through the media. Many others have indicated that, although they may not have done so, they regard these as acceptable ways of asserting their rights as citizens. Smaller percentages have indicated that they had engaged, or are willing to engage, in illegal activities to protect their rights. Just more than one in ten (11.2%), for example, indicated that they had refused to pay tax over the past 12 months. However, about three times as many (31%) indicated that they would consider doing so if the circumstances necessitate it.

Given the widely discussed speculation on a possible uptick in violence in the run-up to South Africa's 2016 local-government elections, the findings pertaining to the use of force or violence hold particular relevance for this discussion. Close to 15% of respondents indicated that they had used force or violence for a political cause in the 12 months prior to the survey, while a further 10.7% noted that, although they had not participated in such actions, they would resort to them in certain circumstances. Put differently, just over a quarter of South Africans (25.3%) have either committed an act of political violence over the past year or are willing to do so over the next.

It is important that we contextualise this finding. While it would be a mistake to use it as proxy to accurately predict the levels of violence that we should expect during and after the local-government elections, it does point to the latent potential for violence to erupt if provoked. Evidently, the high prevalence of this sentiment suggests deep disillusionment with, or an alienation from, an impenetrable political system that, in the view of respondents,

cannot be fully trusted to accommodate their political – and related material – objectives.

Thus far, the available evidence seems to point to conflicts around positions on party lists, and the patronage linked to this, as the major cause for election-related political violence this year. This kind of violence, driven by greed, is different from that committed in the course of a mass service-delivery protest, where citizens feel marginalised and overlooked. Nevertheless, it should serve as a caution that fertile ground does exist for political entrepreneurs to exploit this disillusionment with democratic channels for their own sectional interests.

To address this, not only for the purpose of the election campaigns, but also in order to gain an understanding of where and how widely this endorsement of violence as a political tool is located in society, we present a number of findings below that provide different perspectives on the pervasiveness of this sentiment. Our focus here will fall on the provinces where respondents have shown a predisposition to political violence, be it through their conduct or their orientations, the LSM categories that they find themselves in, their age categories, and whether these sentiments may also have a gender dimension to them.

Figure 10: Those who have engaged in, or are willing to engage in, political violence (by province)
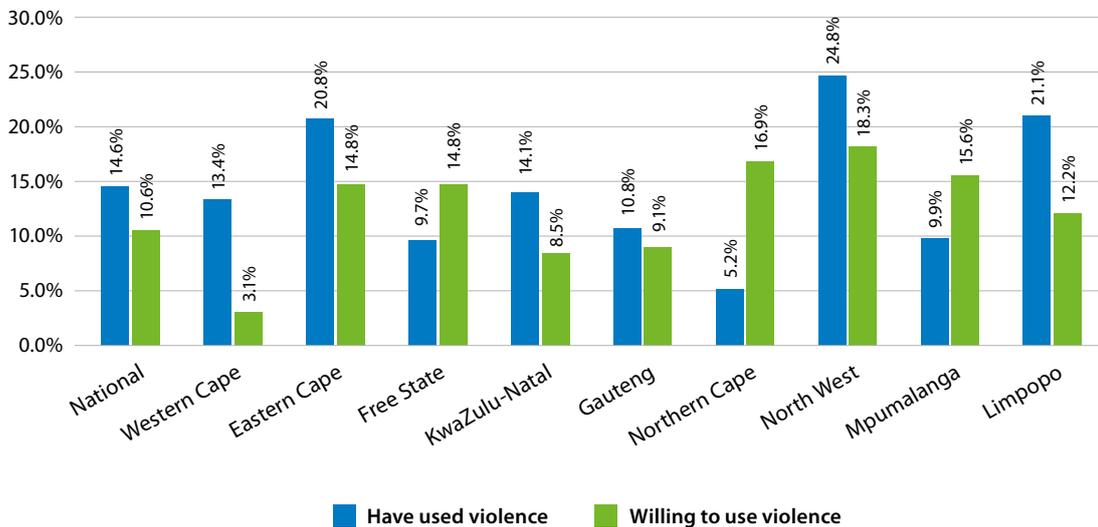
In Figure 10, we report on the pervasiveness of the predisposition to violence as a means to solve political differences in the nine different provinces. Our findings show that this sentiment was strongest within the North West province, where almost one in four respondents (25%) indicated that they had asserted themselves politically in this way over the preceding 12 months, while another one in five said that they were willing to engage in violent or forceful ways should the circumstances demand it. Combined, therefore, 43.1% of residents in the North West have been, or are, willing to consider illegal means of engagement to assert their political preferences. Limpopo ranks second in terms of respondents who actually committed acts of violence (21.1%), while 12.2% of those who had not done so indicated that they would in certain circumstances. The Eastern Cape ranks third in terms of the provinces where respondents indicated that they had participated in acts of political violence. Here, 20.5% indicated their complicity in such acts, while another 14.8% indicated that this might still become an option. In some provinces, like the Northern Cape, reported participation in acts of violence is relatively low (5.2%), but willingness to participate in future is quite high (16.9%). In other provinces, such as the Western Cape, reported participation (13.4%) is much higher than people's intentions to

engage in violence or force. In KwaZulu-Natal, the province that has thus far made most headlines as far as politically motivated killings are concerned, 14.1% reported participation in political acts that involved force or violence, while another 8.5% indicated that they would consider such actions as a possibility in future. In Gauteng, the province with the highest population density, the corresponding figures were 10.8% and 9.1%, respectively.

When we do a risk analysis based on these findings, it is, however, important to bear the following considerations in mind:

1. Firstly, a higher prevalence, either in terms of the acts committed or the intention to do so, does not automatically imply that a particular province may be more violent than another. A populous province, such as Gauteng, with low percentages on both scores, may record more actual incidences of violence than sparsely populated provinces, such as the Free State.
2. Secondly, much depends on the nature of the conflict. In instances where the primary driver of a conflict is patronage for a few, such conflicts are settled quickly, violently, and, most of the time, do not involve the mobilisation of big crowds. The series of political murders in KwaZulu-Natal is an example of this.
3. Thirdly, the number of those who are willing to engage in such acts may be less important than the means that they have at their disposal. A small, armed militia of 20 fanatics can, for example, cause far more damage than an angry crowd of a 1 000.

The second dimension that we want to look at is the material disposition of respondents. For this purpose, we have made use of the LSM categories. Because this survey does not sample for these categories, we will not look at the distribution of reported violence among LSM groups, but will focus rather on the prevalence of self-reported acts of force or political violence within the respective categories. This may not be a perfect measure, but it can give us an approximate indication of the material conditions of those who commit, or are willing to commit, political acts that involve violence or other illegal means of force.

**Figure 11: Respondents who have used violence for political purposes (by LSM)**
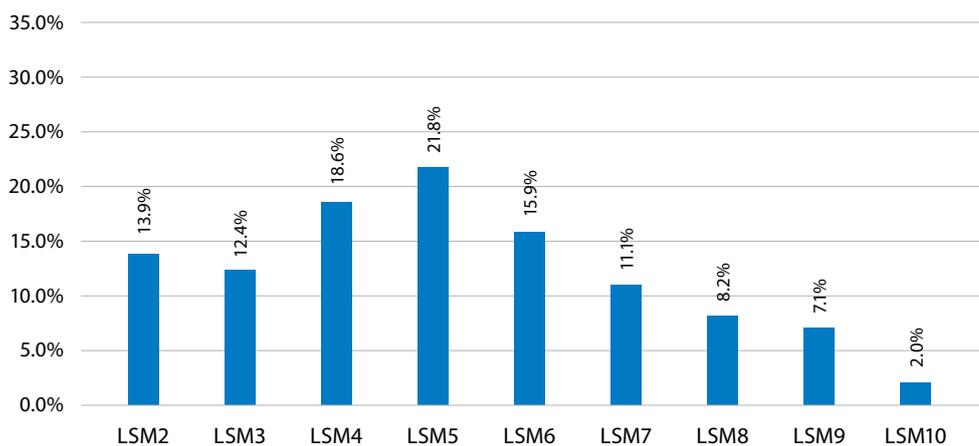
The results that we present in Figure 11 show that the prevalence of violent or other political acts that involved force were most prevalent within the first six LSMs, peaking within the middle LSMs of 4–6. In LSM 5, just over one-fifth, or 21.8%, indicated that they had participated in such acts over the preceding 12 months. The corresponding figures for LSMs 4 and 6 were 18.6% and 15.9%, respectively. Within the broader context of high unemployment,

anaemic GDP growth, and the widely held perception that the political system is not responsive to their needs (as reported above), these results should not come as a surprise. Given the current scenario where growth forecasts are consistently being downgraded, we can probably expect an increase in such responses within the lower LSMs, but it would not be surprising if they manifest more strongly within the higher LSMs.

Given the growing prominence of youth activism, as part of the Rhodes Must Fall (RMF), Fees Must Fall (FMF) and other related political formations, it is worth asking whether there has been a particular age dimension to the use of violence and force in order to achieve political ends. In Figure 12 below, we report on the actual participation in such acts, as well as the willingness to do so if required by circumstances, in terms of age categories.

Figure 12: Respondents who have used, or are willing to use, violence for political purposes (by age)
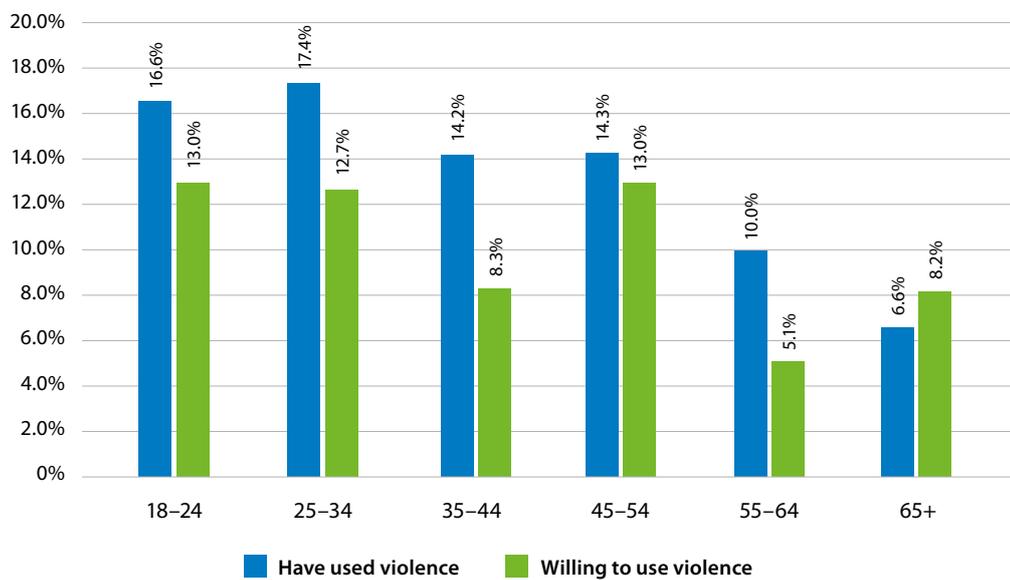
The age profile of respondents that we report on in Figure 12 shows that those who have participated in violent or forceful political acts, or reported a predisposition to such action, are predominantly young and under the age of 35. Almost 30% of 18- to 24-year-olds have participated in, or contemplated, the use of force or political violence. This figure is the same for 25- to 34-year-olds, and just slightly lower for 35- to 44-year-olds. When making sense of this, it is worth bearing in mind that close to two-thirds (65%) of the country's unemployed are younger than 35.[13] A smaller percentage of those falling in this category may also find themselves somewhere in the tertiary education system, preparing to enter a precarious labour market where over a quarter of jobseekers cannot find employment. In this context, talk of a 'ticking generational time bomb' may, therefore, not be exaggerated.

Lastly, we now turn to the gender dimension of our findings, which is reported on in Figure 13. We combine this with a perspective on how this dimension intersects with the issue of age. Note that we report here only on those who have indicated their participation in violent and forceful political acts, and not those who have reported their willingness to participate.

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13   See Statistics South Africa. 2016. *Quarterly Labour Force Survey: Quarter 1 2016.*

Figure 13: Respondents who have used violence for political purposes (by gender and age)
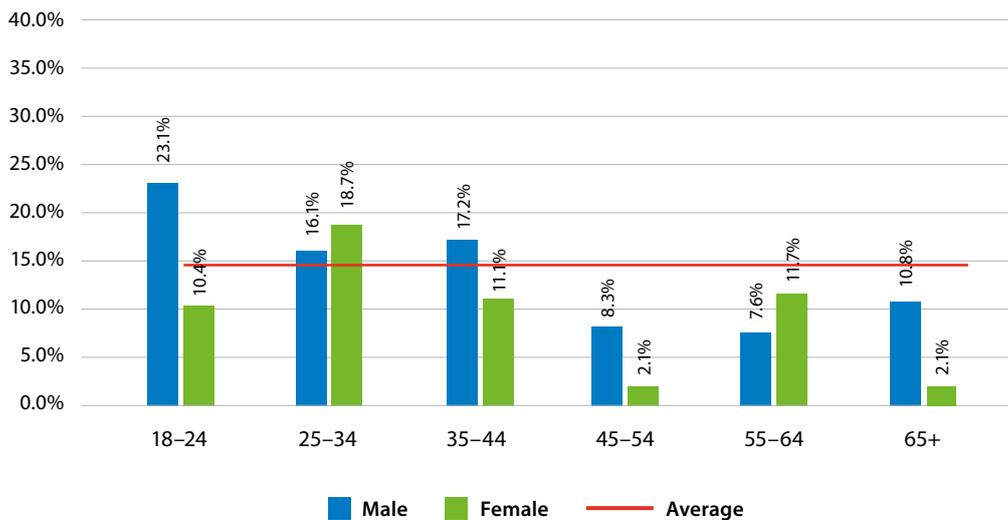
The results in Figure 13 show that young males below the age of 25 were the most likely to indicate their participation in acts of political violence over the preceding 12 months. Close to one in four (23.1%) males in this category responded in this way, which is ten percentage points higher than the national average of 14.6%. The same is the case for their male counterparts in the 25 to 34 and 35 to 44 age categories, at 16.1% and 17.2%, respectively. Given previous studies on the propensity of young men to be more predisposed to acts of violence, these findings do not come as a surprise.[14] What does appear interesting and may require further research is the relatively high reported instances of violent or forceful acts committed by young women in the category 25 to 33. Over the past two years, women in this category have over the past two years emerged as prominent leadership figures in the RMF and FMF movements, which, on occasions during this period, came into direct confrontation with law-enforcement agencies. Given the relatively small percentage of women in tertiary institutions as a percentage of the total population, the data set at hand does not, however, allow us to test whether this may have been part of a broader phenomenon.

Our findings, as presented in this section, show that the majority of South Africans prefer to express their political preferences in peaceful ways. In addition to voting, they communicate their choices through different channels of free speech that a democracy offers. These may include community meetings, peaceful protests, and engagement with different forms of media. However, in a country where millions live in conditions of severe deprivation, and where questions of life and death turn on the ability to be heard or not, many who need it most lack access to the relevant institutions and channels to communicate their plight. Often, therefore, they have to seek means outside the political system to do so, and this may include the use of violence. The fact that almost a quarter of respondents in this survey indicate that they have had to resort to violence, or are contemplating its use, and that those who do so are predominantly young, is an indictment of the accessibility of our political system.

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14 *The Economist*. 23 January 2016. 'Of men and mayhem'. Accessed online: http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21688587-young-single-idle-males-are-dangerous-work-and-wedlock-can-tame-them-men-and-mayhem, 25 July 2016.

Conclusion

In deeply divided societies, characterised by low growth and high inequality, it is imperative for political parties, elected leaders, and the democratic institutions over which they preside to conduct themselves in ways that do not further entrench existing fault lines. This becomes especially critical during election campaigns where the most desperate may be tempted to resort to the lowest common denominator. As such, it requires political parties to conduct themselves in ways that strengthen the longer-term integrity of the system itself.

Unfortunately, the results of the 2015 SARB Survey show that many South Africans have lost faith in their capacity to do so. Confidence levels in representative institutions, such as Parliament, the national government and local government are underwhelming. Respondents, furthermore, have serious doubts about the commitment of elected representatives to act in their leaders' and institutions' best interest. As a consequence, almost a quarter of our respondents indicated that they had either used force or violence for political means in the 12 months preceding the survey, or were contemplating doing so should circumstances demand it of them.

Within a deteriorating economic context, where the likelihood of protest is expected to rise, it would, therefore, serve government well to listen and open up the channels of communication, rather than suppress the articulation of legitimate fears. In the run-up to the 2016 local-government elections, this responsibility equally extends to all political parties that will canvas their constituencies. Now is not the time to claim easy victories.

The 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**, the Reconciliation Barometer blog at **www.reconciliationbarometer.org**, or follow us on Twitter at **@SABarometer**.