

SA Reconciliation Barometer 2009

SA RECONCILIATION BAROMETER SURVEY REPORT



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INTRODUCTION

The South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) is a nationally-representative public opinion survey, which has been conducted by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR)¹ since 2003.

The SARB focuses primarily on public opinion related to socio-economic and political change and, in particular, how these impact on national reconciliation in South Africa. While recognising the conceptual complexity of reconciliation, and therefore the potential limitations of tracking progress through a survey, the SARB does attempt to measure some of its key quantifiable indicators across the South African population.

After seven years and nine rounds of the SARB,² its outputs provide a multi-faceted perspective on the impact of key economic, social, and political indicators on reconciliation and the broader process of creating a truly inclusive society.

It is important to note that fieldwork for this year's round of the SARB was carried out in the two months leading up to South Africa's fourth democratic national and provincial elections in April. The year between the 2008 and 2009 rounds of the SARB saw, among other events, the recalling of Thabo Mbeki from the Presidency, the resignation of fourteen members of Cabinet, the emergence of a new opposition political party, the Congress of the People (COPE), and the controversial incorporation of the Directorate of Special Operations (known as the Scorpions) elite crime-fighting unit into the South African Police Service (SAPS).

Given the political fluidity of this period, the SARB, in line with other recent national public opinion surveys, has recorded declining levels of confidence in public institutions and political leadership among South Africans, particularly between 2006 and 2008. Furthermore, the finding that citizens have identified the differences between political parties as one of the most significant social cleavages in the country is a telling commentary on this particular time.

However, results of the 2009 SARB also reflect – across many indicators – a levelling off of the steep declines in opinion measured between 2006 and 2008. The 2009 SARB results provide insight into the public mood just prior to elections, and also provide an opportunity for the new administration in government to decisively address the issues and concerns of South Africans in policy and programming over the next five years.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Reconciliation, in both theory and practice, is conceptually complex. The principles underpinning the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) approach to reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa included the needs for "understanding but not for vengeance", for "reparation but not for retaliation", and for "*ubuntu* but not for victimisation".

The process of reconciliation was posited as a form of restorative justice that would bring together perpetrators of apartheid crimes with victims and the broader public, with the goal of "correcting imbalances, restoring broken relationships with healing, harmony and reconciliation".³ Reconciliation between individuals, or in some cases within oneself, is often "associated with either a religious paradigm or a medical/therapeutic one", the latter of which focuses on the "healing of individual victims, their experience of catharsis, and/or the restoration of broken relationships."⁴

The restorative justice approach taken by the TRC, however, also emphasised the crucial importance of transformation away from "conditions of gross inequality and oppression", in addition to acknowledgment and condemnation of suffering.⁵ Although a central feature of the TRC, this aspect also speaks more broadly to the national reconciliation project in the post-Commission period, and to ongoing reconciliatory efforts.

James Gibson (2005) observes that the Act through which the TRC was created specified that the Commission's goal would be to "promote national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends the conflicts and divisions of the past".⁶ The national unity and reconciliation model (NUR), according to Tristan Anne Borer (2004), is more distinctly political in its ends than individual reconciliation (IR), and emphasises transformation within "socio-political institutions and processes."⁷

In South Africa, TRC Commissioner Wynand Malan described NUR as the emergence of commitment to building a shared future, as well as to respecting the law and the procedures and processes laid down by the Constitution.⁸ According to Richard Wilson (1996), an NUR process should involve the state striving to build legitimate and representative state institutions which respect fundamental human rights", as well as to "create a culture of rights based upon an inclusive and democratic notion of citizenship".⁹ Further, Jonathan Allen (1999) suggests that NUR should bring about an "understanding that cultural diversity is not to be regarded as a threat but as an asset, or at least a reality", as well as:

an acceptance (and even a welcoming) of an element of political discord as a healthy sign; the existence of free institutions, political competition, and the rule of law to mediate political unity; an understanding of political unity in

Table 1: Conceptual overview of variables, hypotheses and indicators		
Variable	Hypothesis	Indicators
Human security	If citizens do not feel threatened, they are more likely to be reconciled with each other and society at large	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical security • Economic security • Cultural security
Political culture	If citizens view the institutions, structures and values of government as legitimate and accountable, progress in reconciliation is more likely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justifiability of extra-legal action • Legitimacy of leadership • Legitimacy of Parliament • Respect for rule of law
Cross-cutting political relationships	If citizens are able to form working political relationships that cross divisions, progress in reconciliation is more likely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to national unity • Commitment to multi-racial political parties
Dialogue	If citizens are committed to genuine and meaningful dialogue, reconciliation is more likely to advance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to more dialogue
Historical confrontation	If citizens are able to confront and address issues from the past, they are more likely to move forward and reconcile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledgement • Forgiveness • Reduced levels of vengeance
Race relations	If citizens of different races hold fewer negative perceptions of each other, they are more likely to form workable relationships that will advance reconciliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-racial contact • Inter-racial perceptions • Inter-racial social distance

terms of an allegiance to a framework of institutions, laws and practices that guarantee the negative liberty of individuals; and an insistence that political is compatible with – or even requires – certain kinds of political divisions and disagreements.¹⁰

A number of theorists have commented on the difficulty of assessing the extent to which reconciliation has been achieved, or in the words of Rosemary Nagy (2002), “what a reconciled people or persons ought to look like”.¹¹ Borer (2004), citing Timothy Garton Ash (1997), raises the difficulty of measuring the extent to which reconciliation is achieved, the degree of individual healing that takes place, and progress in national unity. If the goals of truth commissions include the pursuit of a human rights culture and the restoration of the dignity of victims, she suggests, it follows that it is important to consider how the existence of such a culture can be confirmed, and how dignity is defined and understood.¹² Moreover, she questions whether the witnessing of reconciliation, or the perception of an increase in “people getting along”, can constitute indicators of the “presence or absence of reconciliation”.¹³

The IJR recognises the difficulty of measuring progress in reconciliation through quantitative research such as the SARB. There is no question that some of the more complex and layered nuances of reconciliation are beyond statistical expression, and the project’s attempt to measure it in such terms therefore targets key quantifiable indicators. The survey instrument, in its current form, is grounded in a 2003 exploratory study conducted by the IJR, which sought to identify those indicators of reconciliation that are foremost in the minds of the South African public.¹⁴ The results of this exploratory survey were used to develop six key conceptual variables related to the measurement of South African reconciliation, which included: human security; political culture; cross-cutting political relationships; dialogue; historical confrontation; and race relations.

Table 1 provides a conceptual overview of the hypotheses used in the SARB survey, and their critical indicators. It is hypothesised that when the indicators strengthen or improve, reconciliation is likely to be advanced.

METHODOLOGY

The SARB project was initiated by the IJR in 2002, when Ipsos-Markinor was contracted to undertake a qualitative, exploratory survey of attitudes towards, and understanding of the reconciliation process in South Africa.¹⁵ The findings of this exploratory survey were used to develop the quantitative survey instrument administered through the SARB.

Since the initial exploratory study, nine rounds of the SARB have been conducted by Ipsos-Markinor.¹⁶ The SARB is administered through the first of two rounds of the annual KhayaBus¹⁷ opinion poll: an omnibus survey conducted using a nationally representative sample of South Africans, which focuses primarily on the measurement of socio-political trends. The use of a nationally representative sample allows for projections of the survey results onto the national population.

This year, the full KhayaBus research instrument, including the SARB indicators, was tested during the week of 16 March. Fieldwork was then carried out between 31 March and 21 April – of particular significance because it coincided with the run-up to national and provincial elections, held on 22 April. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with South Africans in 3 487 households, with respondents of sixteen years and older and an equal gender split. Approximately 2 000 respondents were interviewed in metro areas and 1 500 in non-metro areas.

Multi-stage area probability sampling was used, which included conducting interviews with respondents in households in informal settlement areas. Enumeration areas used to develop the sampling frame were drawn from the 2001 Population Census.

Data for the Metro KhayaBus sample is weighted according to the variables of race, gender, age and metro area, and the Non-Metro sample, by community size, age, race, gender and province. Weighting for the KhayaBus survey was based on the adjusted universe from the 2008 All Media Products Survey (AMPS). Table 2 below shows the achieved sample, as well as the projections made to the national population when weighted.

In the administering of the survey, a confidence interval of 95% was achieved, with a sampling error of 1.7%. Ipsos-Markinor ensured a minimum back-check of 20% of each interviewer's work.¹⁸

Many of the questions used in the 2009 SARB have been used consistently over the nine rounds of the survey since 2003. However, more recently the IJR has also supplemented the original questionnaire with new measurement items, and excluded those that have lost relevance in the current socio-political context. The IJR has also obtained the right to access and use data for a number of key survey items that appear in each round of the KhayaBus survey from Ipsos-Markinor.

Table 2: KhayaBus sample, 2009

	Achieved sample	% split	Weighted sample	% split
Female	1 744	50.0	15 740	50.4
Male	1 743	50.0	15 495	49.6
Black	2 626	75.3	23 809	76.2
Coloured	385	11.0	2 723	8.7
Indian	113	3.2	777	2.5
White	363	10.4	3 926	12.6
16–24 years	954	27.4	8 357	26.7
25–34 years	756	21.7	7 457	23.8
35–49 years	890	25.5	8 343	26.7
50+ years	887	25.4	7 078	22.6

Source: Ipsos-Markinor, 2009

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2009: JANGLING DISCORDS OR A BEAUTIFUL SYMPHONY?

It is important to consider the socio-political context in which this year's round of the survey was conducted. Speaking on National Reconciliation Day in 2004, several months after the beginning of his second term in the Presidency, Thabo Mbeki expressed his confidence in South Africa's progress in national reconciliation, after ten years of democracy. Evoking Martin Luther King Jr's famous *I Have a Dream* speech, Mbeki assured South Africans that he had seen the country's transformation "with his own eyes":

I have seen this with my own eyes that little black boys and black girls have been able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walked together as sisters and brothers. I know it as a fact that we have begun to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood and sisterhood.¹⁹

However, five years later in 2009, questions remain as to the extent that South Africa has indeed continued in transforming the "jangling discords of the nation". Recent rounds of the SARB have shown marked declines in indicators of individual security and optimism about the future. In relation to progress in NUR, and the socio-political dimensions of reconciliation in particular, the SARB has found receding levels of confidence in a range of public institutions, less trust in political leadership, and worsening evaluations of the performance of government. Agreement among South Africans that the country has improved since 1994, across a number of economic and social indicators, has declined.

Critically, this year's round of the SARB was conducted in the highly emotive and politically charged run-up to South Africa's fourth democratic national and provincial elections. The fact that South Africans viewed the division between political parties as one of the most significant social cleavages in the country is therefore a telling reflection on this particular time.

The narrative of the country's changing political landscape in recent years is a familiar one to most South Africans. Over the course of nine months in 2008 and 2009, three sitting presidents occupied the Union Buildings. Cabinet has been shuffled and re-shuffled, and a new political opposition – COPE – has emerged and gained traction in a number of provinces.

In the months prior to the 2008 SARB, Jacob Zuma robustly defeated Thabo Mbeki in the race for the Presidency of the African National

Congress (ANC), following several years of public political rivalry and the growth of two divergent partisan camps within the ruling party. In the year between the eighth and ninth rounds of the SARB, and a mere nine months after his unseating at the ANC's Polokwane conference, Mbeki resigned from the Presidency in September of 2008. His resignation came in response to a request from his own party, following broad allegations of abuse of the justice ministry and National Directorate of Public Prosecutions (NDPP) for political ends. However, Mbeki's departure also sparked the resignation of fourteen Cabinet members. Kgalema Motlanthe was elected president, but – and in no uncertain terms – in an interim capacity until the 2009 elections only.

The months following Mbeki's resignation also saw the formation of COPE, touted to become the most significant challenger to the ANC's one-party dominance since 1994. With the call for "a new agenda for change and hope" and under the leadership of former ANC members Mosiuoa "Terror" Lekota and Mhazima Shilowa, COPE's election campaign emphasised constitutionalism, political tolerance, and the building of a multi-racial opposition movement.²⁰

Over this period changes within government and the ruling party have frequently been linked to a growing sense of insecurity among ANC members, and South Africans more broadly. Public opinion polls conducted by Ipsos-Markinor in October 2008 found that "almost half of ANC supporters [felt] uneasy about the events which took place at Polokwane and [agreed] that the ANC is a different party in the aftermath of the conference". Moreover, 15% of ANC supporters indicated that they would vote for an opposition party in the April elections.²¹ As elections drew closer, Ipsos-Markinor also found that almost half of all likely voters (47%) agreed that they trusted the ANC "less than they did in 1994".²²

This sense of transition and insecurity among South Africans was, arguably, also heightened by a number of high-profile cases in the courts. On 6 April, just two weeks before elections – and in the midst of KhayaBus fieldwork – the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) announced, controversially, that the corruption charges Zuma had faced since 2005 would be dropped.²³ The trial of former National Police Commissioner Jackie Selebi, charged with corruption in January of 2008, was set to begin in the Johannesburg High Court. Cape Judge President John Hlophe was accused of attempting to influence constitutional court judges ruling on Zuma's case.²⁴ Further high-profile developments at the time included the suspension and eventual

dismissal of Advocate Vusi Pikoli, National Director of Public Prosecutions over his handling of Selebi's arrest warrant, and the unpopular decision to incorporate the Scorpions into the SAPS.

SARB results from 2006 to 2008 suggest that these events may have contributed to declining trust in political leadership and confidence in public institutions. Findings by the IJR in this respect are not isolated: the Presidency, for example, reports on "faltering trust" in public institutions including government, Parliament, political parties and the justice system over the last two years, beyond "what would be expected as only an effect of the cycle of electoral politics". Particularly in relation to court judgements "seen as reflecting racial or gender stereotypes, or as having political motivation", the Presidency cautioned that "such challenges could be beginning to detract from the popular legitimacy of the courts".²⁵

The Public Service Commission (PSC), citing research conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council, suggests that trust in national government declined significantly between 2004 and 2007, and recommends serious consideration of "what public institutions may not be doing right to win the confidence of the public, especially considering that such mistrust may emanate from perceptions of unethical conduct among officials."²⁶

Two months before the April elections, Ipsos-Markinor reported that "for the first time since the Government Performance Barometer was conducted nationally in the mid-90s, more adult South Africans feel that the country is going in the wrong direction (42%) than in the right direction (38%)".²⁷

Moreover, the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) for 2009-2014, released in July, identifies the following as the country's main governance challenges: capacity gaps in local government; poor quality of some public services; declining trust and confidence in some public institutions such as the judiciary, legislatures and the executive branch of government; and weak planning capacity across the three spheres of government. Government's long-term goal, according to the MTSF, "remains the building of an effective and accountable state as well as fostering active citizenship".²⁸

Given the political fluidity and economic insecurity of recent years – as well as insecurity brought about by South Africa's slide into recession – the findings of the SARB show declining confidence in public institutions, lower levels of trust in political leadership, worsening evaluations of the performance of public institutions, and growing pessimism about the future.²⁹ For example, between 2006 and 2009, confidence in the ability to trust leaders to "do what is right" most of the time dropped by 15%, and evaluations of the Presidency, Parliament, and national government by 16%–25%. Agreement that the country is "going in the right direction" dropped by 26%.

However, analysis of the results of the 2009 round of the SARB also suggests that the most significant recent changes in public opinion appear to have taken place between 2006 and 2008. In 2009, public opinion appears to have stabilised somewhat, with the overall picture generated by survey results comparable to that produced in 2008.

The levelling off of major declines in confidence, trust and optimism points to two important findings: first, while this stabilisation is a positive development, at the time of the survey, public opinion overall remained as negative as in 2008, and thus there is still room for improvement; secondly, however, given that the survey was conducted just weeks before elections, this also presents an opportunity for the new administration to demonstrate a commitment to overcome these unfavourable perceptions.

The following sections provide an overview of some of the findings of the 2009 SARB, including indicators related to: confidence in public institutions; trust in political leadership; participation in collective actions; the rule of law; changes in South Africa since 1994; views on apartheid and the past; human security inter-group contact; and divisions within the country.

CONFIDENCE IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS DROPS

As discussed above, key elements of the NUR process include the building of independent, legitimate and representative state institutions, as well as "allegiance to a framework of institutions, laws and practices".³⁰

The SARB has been measuring confidence in a range of public institutions since 2006, including national, provincial and local government, the legislature and the judiciary. As the Presidency's *Fifteen-Year Review* suggests, citizen confidence in public institutions – in addition to evaluations of government performance – are an important measure of government legitimacy.³¹ According to Bruce Gilley (2006), there is a general presumption that the absence of legitimacy "has profound implications for the way that states behave toward citizens and others. States that lack legitimacy devote more resources to maintaining their rule and less to effective governance, which reduces support".³²

Consistent with the findings of other national public opinion polls, such as those conducted by Ipsos-Markinor and Afrobarometer,³³ recent rounds of the SARB have found declining confidence in a range of public institutions. Perhaps most notable, as shown in Table 3 is the decline in confidence in the Presidency from a high of 77% in 2006 to only 52% in 2009 – a drop of 25%. Levels of public confidence in the Presidency also declined more than in any other institution between the 2008 and 2009, falling by 5%.

All three spheres of government have suffered significant declines in public confidence across recent rounds of the SARB. Confidence levels in both national and provincial government have dropped by 19% since 2006, and have continued to fall between 2008 and 2009, although at a lesser pace than between prior rounds. Of particular concern is that only 39% – or about two in every five South Africans – expressed confidence in local government, which is the most direct point of contact between citizens and government. As shown in Table 3, confidence in political parties has also declined sizeably (-14%), as has confidence in the Constitutional Court (-10%) and the legal system overall (-10%).

Table 3: Confidence in institutions, 2006–2009 (%)						
Please indicate how much confidence you have in each of the following institutions:	2006	2007	2008	2009	08–09	06–09
Presidency	77	68	57	52	-5	-25
National government	73	63	58	54	-4	-19
Provincial government	66	57	50	47	-3	-19
Parliament	69	62	56	53	-3	-16
Political parties	48	37	35	34	-1	-14
Legal system in general	61	55	49	51	2	-10
Constitutional Court	66	61	54	56	2	-10
Local government	50	43	40	39	-1	-11
SA Human Rights Commission	67	60	57	60	3	-7
Big companies	65	60	61	64	3	-1
Broadcast media	74	68	70	65	-5	-9
Religious institutions	70	69	67	71	4	1
Print media	64	58	62	64	2	0

Significantly, public confidence in Parliament has also continued to decline between 2006 and 2009, falling by 3% to 53% between the last two rounds of the survey. A closer look at this institution, which is constitutionally mandated to “represent the people and to ensure government by the people”,³⁴ shows that less than half of all South Africans (46%) agree that Parliament “treats all people who come before it” the same, irrespective of the historically defined population group they belong to. Barometer findings suggest that public confidence in equal treatment by Parliament was highest in 2004 at 57%, but by 2009 had declined to levels lower than those recorded in the first survey round in 2003 (49%).

Nonetheless, in 2009 60% of South Africans still agree that Parliament can “usually be trusted to make decisions that are right for the country as a whole”, though this represents a noteworthy drop from agreement levels of 73% in 2004. About 41% of South Africans agree that “if Parliament started making a lot of decisions that most people disagree with, it might be better to do away with Parliament altogether”. Even though this represents an overall decline of five percentage points from levels of agreement in 2003, the actual level of agreement with this measurement remains considerable.

Survey results also reveal a substantial divergence in responses related to confidence in Parliament between different racial groups, although confidence levels appear to follow a similar trajectory across all groups, peaking in 2004 and declining from 2005 onwards. In 2009, for

example, 67% of black South Africans agreed that Parliament could be trusted to make decisions that are right for the country as a whole, while agreement levels were far lower among white (27%), coloured (39%) and Indian (38%) respondents, as shown in Figure 1.

LOWER LEVELS OF TRUST IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Also within the conceptual area of political culture, the SARB tests levels of citizen trust in political leadership and confidence in the ability of citizens to influence decision-making within government.

Since 2003, the SARB has found consistently high levels of agreement with the statement that the “people running the country are not really concerned with what happens to people like me”. The first round of the SARB, conducted in April of 2003, found that close to 60% of South Africans shared this sentiment. Agreement that political leadership is unconcerned with ordinary people dropped during 2004 – an election year, and also one in which the SARB found high levels of confidence in Parliament as discussed above – but rose once again to 58% by 2009 (see Figure 2).

Similarly, there has been a considerable decline in the percentage of South Africans who agree that they can “trust the country’s leaders to do what is right”, from a high of 68% in 2004 to only 50% in 2009.

Between 2006 and 2008, agreement on the trustworthiness of leaders dropped by 16%, and remained low in 2009. Because government legitimacy hinges on factors including the belief that processes and policy choices are deliberative and just, and that government serves the common good and does so in a “relatively equitable manner”,³⁵ such high levels of doubt related to the integrity and motives of national leaders deserve close attention (see Figure 2).

Furthermore, the SARB also measures perceptions related to the extent to which citizens can exert influence or impact on public officials and decision-making processes within government. In 2003, public agreement with the statement that there is “really no way” to make public officials listen if they are “not interested in hearing what people like me think” stood at 53%. Although agreement has declined slightly over the nine rounds of the survey, it remains high at 49% in 2009. These results appear consistent with recent conclusions of the Public Service Commission that there are persistent “inadequacies in the nature and extent of government–citizen engagement in the country”, and that these “chasms in participatory governance” may have contributed to the rise in service delivery protests in recent years³⁶ (see Figure 2).

INCREASED WILLINGNESS TO PROTEST

Given the finding that since 2003, about half of all South Africans have consistently agreed that government is disinclined to respond to their concerns, it is perhaps to be expected that the SARB results show citizens to feel increasingly justified in taking part in collective actions, including demonstrations and strikes. According to Patrick Bond, recent research confirms that the number of protests in South Africa has continued to escalate since 2004.³⁷

In 2003, the first round of the SARB found that 47% of South Africans would take part in demonstrations if they felt government was “disregarding, going against or violating” their human rights. By 2009, the comparable figure had risen to 53%. Similarly, as shown in Figure 3, the percentage of South Africans who felt they would be justified in joining strikes around the same circumstances rose from 42% to 51%.

The percentage of South Africans who would feel justified in using force or violent methods, such as the destruction of public property or the taking of hostages if their human rights were violated by government, remained relatively low at 13% in 2009, but increased slightly from 9% in 2007 (see Figure 3).

GROWING COMPLIANCE WITH THE RULE OF LAW

A particularly interesting finding of the 2009 round of the SARB is that, in spite of declining confidence in public institutions (including the constitutional court and the legal system in recent years, although levels have improved marginally in 2009) agreement has continued to rise around the necessity of following the rule of law.

This is an important finding for the consolidation of democracy, as well as for ongoing efforts to reduce crime in South Africa. It may also,

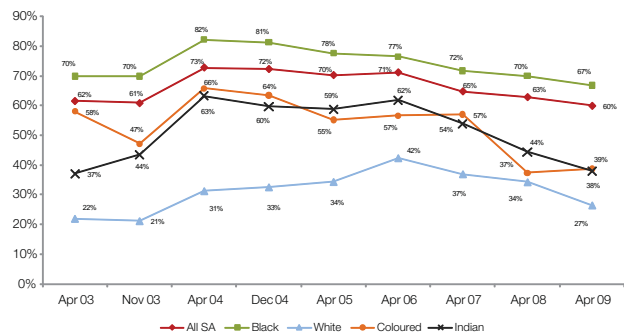


Figure 1: Agreement that Parliament can usually be trusted to make decisions that are right for the country as a whole, 2003-2009 (%)

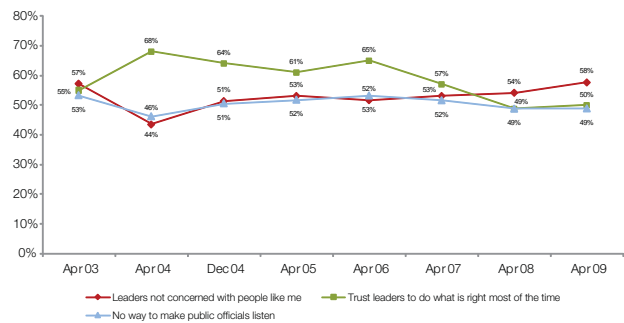


Figure 2: Perceptions of political leadership and public officials, 2003-2009 (%)

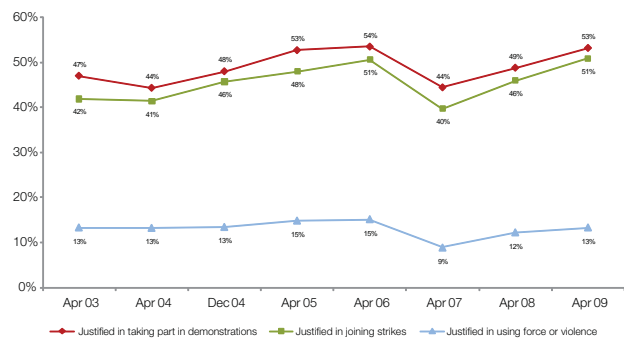


Figure 3: Justification in joining collective actions in response to human rights violations, 2003-2009 (%)

however, reflect a public response to – as described by the Presidency – perceptions that public institutions, the legal system, and court judgements have been politically influenced or motivated, or “linked to party-political dynamics”.³⁸

SARB results show that the percentage of South Africans agreeing that it is “alright to get around the law, as long as you don’t actually break it” has dropped by 12% since 2003, and by 6% in the last four rounds of the SARB alone. At the same time, as shown in Table 4, there has been a rise in the percentage of South Africans who agree that the “rulings of the courts should be in accordance with the constitution, even if it contradicts what the majority of South Africans want”, from 49% in 2007 to 58% in 2009. The percentage of South Africans who agree that that it is “not necessary to obey the laws of a government” they did not vote for has declined considerably over the nine survey rounds, from 28% in 2003 to 18% in 2009. However, more than one-third (34%) still believe that it sometimes is “better to ignore the law and solve problems immediately, rather than wait for legal solutions”. In spite of some fluctuation, this finding has remained relatively consistent over the last six years.

MODERATE AGREEMENT THAT SOUTH AFRICA HAS IMPROVED SINCE BEFORE 1994

After 15 years of democracy, the SARB survey also measures public opinion on whether life in South Africa has improved compared to what it was like before 1994. A number of indicators are used to measure perceptions of relative improvement since 1994, related to social relations, the economy, and personal outlook on life.

This year, SARB results suggests that perceptions about the level of improvement in the country since 1994 are moderate to low. Only about half of all South Africans (49%) believe that race relations in the country have improved since 1994. Other indicators are also moderate: 40-45% of South Africans feel there has been an improvement in family life (45%), hope for the future (43%) and moral values.

However, perceptions related to improvements in the economy and personal safety remain negative. In 2009, only one in four South Africans believe (25%) that there has been any improvement in the gap between rich and poor since 1994. Given that recent research shows South African society to be the most unequal in the world, with a Gini coefficient of 0.679,³⁹ this perception appears accurate. Further, only 21% believe there has been any improvement in employment opportunities, and 32% in personal safety (see Table 5).

LESS WILLINGNESS TO FORGET ABOUT THE PAST

Nine rounds of the SARB show wide consensus and condemnation of apartheid among South Africans. In 2009, there continues to be extensive agreement that apartheid was a crime against humanity (84%), and that “in the past the state committed horrific atrocities against those struggling against apartheid” (79%). Nagy (2002) writes that “although the ‘truth’ gathered by the TRC has been subject to much criticism, at the very least, it is now difficult for any South African to deny that torture, killings, severe ill-treatment and disappearances

were committed in an effort to maintain apartheid”. This truth, she suggests, “at minimum is pivotal to reconciliation”.⁴⁰

However, SARB results also suggest that many South Africans are not completely reconciled with the past. Only 35% agree that that government has “done enough” to prosecute perpetrators of crimes under apartheid. Further, as shown in Table 6, the SARB has found a decline between 2006 and 2009 in both the percentage of South Africans who want to “forget about the past” and move on with their lives (-11%), and who are “trying to forgive” those who hurt them under apartheid (-11%).

At the same time, the survey has also recorded a decline in those who agreed that “people who discriminated against others during apartheid” should “feel what it is like to be discriminated against”, from 49% in 2003 to 36% in 2009. This finding appears consistent with the TRC’s goals of promoting “understanding but not for vengeance”, “reparation but not for retaliation”, and “*ubuntu* but not for victimisation”.⁴¹

PERSONAL SECURITY AND OPTIMISM DECLINE

SARB results suggest that perceptions of both individual security and optimism about the future have declined considerably in recent years. In 2009, only 29% of South Africans indicated that their satisfaction with their own life had improved, compared to 48% in 2004.

Perceptions related to economic and financial insecurity are to be expected: this year South Africa, along with many other countries, slid into a recession, resulting in a year-on-year loss of 770 000 jobs between September 2008 and September 2009. When asked about their personal situation at the time the SARB was conducted, in comparison to twelve months earlier, only 28% of South Africans agreed their financial situation had improved. This represents a sizeable decline from the 43% who felt their situation had improved from the previous year in 2006. Further, in 2009, only about one in three South Africans (32%) felt the way that their family lives had improved over the previous twelve months. Perceptions about the chances of finding a job declined by 11% between 2006 and 2009, with only 22% of South Africans agreeing that the likelihood that they would be able to find a job had improved in the previous twelve months (see Table 7).

In looking to the next twelve months, expectations related to the loss of a house, property or land rights appear relatively low, but there has been a distinct drop in the percentage of South Africans who believe their family will be better off one year after the survey was conducted, from 54% in 2006 to 41% in 2009. Positive outlook for the next two years has furthermore declined: only 38% of South Africans feel that their economic situation will improve over the next two years, compared to 59% in 2004, and only 35% believe their personal safety situation will improve (see Table 7).

LITTLE CHANGE IN INTER-GROUP CONTACT

The results of nine rounds of the SARB survey show that public perceptions of inter-group contact have changed little over the past six years. Whereas in 2006, 61% of South Africans agreed that “the

Table 4: Agreement with the rule of law, 2003–2009 (%)								
Agreement	2003	2006	2007	2008	2009	08–09	06–09	03–09
It's alright to get around the law, as long as you don't actually break it	54	48	41	40	42	2	-6	-12
The ruling of the courts should be in accordance with the Constitution, even if it contradicts what the majority of South Africans want	-	55	49	50	58	8	3	
Sometimes it is better to ignore the law and solve problems immediately rather than wait for legal solutions	35	35	31	32	34	2	-1	-1
It is not necessary to obey laws of a government that I did not vote for	28	23	17	20	18	-2	-5	-10

Table 5: Improvement since 1994, 2007–2009 (%)				
How would you compare South Africa of today with the country it was before 1994? (Improvement)	2007	2008	2009	08–09
Race relations	54	46	49	3
Moral values	42	38	41	3
Family life	47	48	45	-3
Gap between rich and poor	22	22	25	3
Employment opportunities	22	21	21	0
Hope for the future	38	37	43	6
Personal safety	32	27	32	5

Table 6: Outlook on apartheid and the past, 2003–2009 (%)								
Agreement	2003	2006	2007	2008	2009	08–09	06–09	03–09
Apartheid was a crime against humanity	87	88	86	83	84	1	-4	-3
State committed horrific atrocities against anti-apartheid activists	77	80	78	76	79	3	-1	2
I want to forget about the past and just get on with my life	76	81	72	77	70	-7	-11	-6
I am trying to forgive those who hurt me during apartheid	55	68	58	63	57	-6	-11	2
It is fair that people who discriminated against others during apartheid feel what it is like to be discriminated against	49	45	42	38	36	-2	-9	-13

Table 7: Economic and personal security, 2004–2009 (%)								
Improvement since 12 months ago	2004	2006	2007	2008	2009	08–09	06–09	04–09
Financial situation	42	43	34	30	28	-2	-15	-14
Chances of finding a job	32	33	26	24	22	-2	-11	-10
Way family lives	42	43	40	33	32	-1	-11	-10
Situation in next 12 months	2004	2006	2007	2008	2009	08–09	06–09	04–09
Likelihood of losing house, property or land rights	9	13	13	15	12	-3	-1	3
Family better off (in 1 year)	54	54	49	41	41	0	-14	-13
Improvement in next 2 years	2004	2006	2007	2008	2009	08–09	06–09	04–09
Economic situation	59	57	50	40	38	-2	-19	-21
Personal safety situation	54	51	39	35	35	0	-16	-19

relationship between the various races” is improving, this had fallen to 49% by 2009. Confidence in a “happy future for all races” in South Africa, which peaked at 86% in 2005, has fallen to 62% in 2009.

Results also show that many South Africans still do not interact with persons from different race groups in their daily lives, either in the workplace or at home. The 2009 survey reveals that about one in four (24%) South Africans indicated that they never speak to people of other races “on a typical day during the week, whether at work or otherwise”. Close to half of all South Africans (46%) indicated that they never socialise with people from other race groups in their own home, or in the homes of friends. Further, less than one in three (28%) agree that they would talk to people of other races more often if given the choice (see Figure 4).

Results also suggest that few inroads have been made in promoting greater understanding, trust and integration between South Africans of different races. The first round of the SARB in 2003 found that 59% of South Africans agreed it was “difficult to understand the customs and ways” of people of other races groups; in 2009, 59% answered in the same way. Similarly, in 2003 38% of South Africans agreed that they found people of other race groups to be untrustworthy, and 39% responded in the same way in 2009. Finally, as shown in Figure 5, 40% of South Africans agreed in 2003 that they could “never imagine being part of a political party” that was made up mainly of people of other races, and 42% answered the same way in 2009.

At the same time, there is moderate to high agreement that the different cultural and ethnic groups in South Africa enjoy equal rights and recognition. In 2009, 62% of South Africans agree that all of the different religious groups in the country enjoy equal rights, and 68% that their “mother tongue language gets the recognition it deserves in a democratic South Africa”. However, 45% also feel that the promotion of the rights of other social or cultural groups is done to the detriment of their own.

POLITICAL PARTISANSHIP AN INCREASING SOURCE OF DIVISION

Finally, the SARB also asks respondents to identify what they believe to be the biggest division in South Africa today, and a potential cause of exclusion, discrimination and even violence.

In 2007, when asked about the biggest division in the country, 32% of South Africans felt the country was most divided between the poor and the middle class or wealthy, or according to class. A further 22% felt the country was most divided by race, and 21% according to HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases. Cumulatively, these three sources of division constitute 75% of all responses.

However, between 2007 and 2008 – coinciding with the ANC’s Polokwane conference and Zuma’s election as party president – there was a marked increase in the percentage of South Africans who view the “division between the supporters of different political parties” as the largest social cleavage in the country, from 12% to 21%. The percentage of South Africans who answered this way in the 2009 round of the SARB also increased to 24% overall, while responses to all other indicators have remained the same or declined (see Table 8).

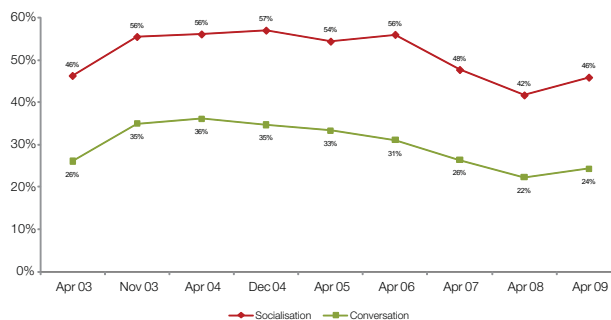


Figure 4: South Africans who never speak to or socialise with people from other race groups, 2003-2009 (%)

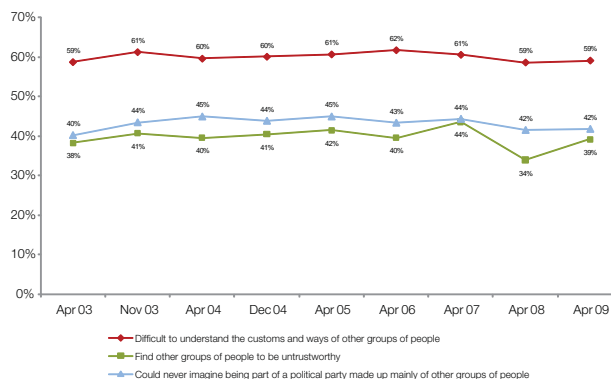


Figure 5: Social distance between groups, 2003-2009 (%)

Table 8: Biggest division in South Africa, 2007-2009 (%)				
Division	2007	2008	2009	07-09
Political parties	12	21	24	12
Class	32	30	27	-5
AIDS/disease	21	17	17	-4
Religion	7	7	7	0
Race	22	18	18	-3
Language	7	6	6	-1

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The SARB has tracked public opinion on progress in reconciliation in South Africa across a number of key economic, social and political indicators since 2003. Over the past few years, the results of the SARB – consistent with other South African public opinion polls – have alluded to declining confidence in public institutions, less trust in political leadership, worsening evaluations of the performance of government, and growing insecurity and pessimism about the future.

In 2009, and in the context of the lead-up to elections, this decline in public opinion appears to have stabilised across a number of indicators. While, on the one hand, this confirms that South African public opinion in March and April was consistent with some aspects of the unfavourable sentiment found in 2008, on the other hand these results provide an important opportunity for the new administration to demonstrate commitment to overcoming these views.

The following conclusions and recommendations therefore emerge from the 2009 round of the SARB:

- Confidence in public institutions has dropped significantly in recent years, and has continued to decline between 2008 and 2009, particularly in respect of governance institutions. The PSC has recommended serious consideration of the causes of this decline, and ways in which these institutions can begin to regain public confidence and trust.⁴² Given that a new administration is now in office, this is an opportune time for government to work to rebuild – and maintain – improved levels of public trust and confidence.
- Regarding Parliament, the SARB results reveal a drop in agreement on the institution's ability to make decisions that are right for the country as a whole. These perceptions are contrary to the mandate of Parliament envisioned by the constitution: namely, that it acts as the representative voice of all citizens, and allows the electorate to hold government to account. Therefore, significant scope remains for the national legislature to improve its linkages and communication with citizens.
- A significant percentage of South Africans feel that the country's leadership is untrustworthy and unconcerned with the views of ordinary people. The survey results also suggest that many South Africans feel unable to influence or have an impact on decision-making within the different spheres of government. On this basis, the finding that citizen's willingness to participate in strikes and demonstrations when their rights are being violated does not come as a surprise. Government's commitment to a more accountable state and more active citizenship, as conveyed in the MTSF, signals recognition of the need for more participatory governance. However, participation must be meaningful and result in clear outcomes.
- Survey results show that South Africans increasingly value the imperative of the rule of law. This is particularly significant and should be read within the context of perceptions of physical security that remain low. Such sentiment must be nurtured. This will require consistency in the independent relationship between government and the judicial system, as well as respect for those statutory bodies that have to ensure the state's adherence to basic tenets of the Constitution.
- A widespread acceptance exists – across all of the country's population groups – that apartheid was a crime against humanity, and that under apartheid the state committed atrocities to sustain its dominance. As Nagy (2002) suggests, this acceptance remains a crucial element in the national reconciliation process. However, only about one in three South Africans feel that the government has done enough to prosecute perpetrators of apartheid crimes, and SARB results show less willingness to forget about the past and forgive perpetrators than in previous years.
- Levels of inter-racial contact have remained relatively static since the first round of the survey was conducted in 2003. According to the latest round, a quarter of South Africans never speak to a person from a different historically defined population group on an ordinary day. In more intimate settings, such as one's own home or the homes of friends, nearly half of all South Africans have indicated that they never socialise with people of other racial groups. While this is symptomatic of a lack of progress in social integration, it also speaks to continued physical separation and exclusion. As Kader Asmal recently commented at a public dialogue hosted by the IJR, "one of apartheid's biggest crimes was geographic separation".⁴³
- Finally, the results suggest that in 2009 South Africans view political partisanship as an increasingly significant source of social division. After economic inequality, this is perceived to be the second most divisive aspect of life in South Africa. Differences between the country's historically defined population groups rank third on this list. This finding should be read within the context of the election campaign taking place as fieldwork was conducted. While open political competition is a healthy sign of democracy, it does remain critical that robust contestation never result in social polarisation. On these grounds, it is important that South African continues to strive for a society that is accepting and encouraging of free political opposition and competition, and without threats of violence, intimidation or repression.

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- 19 Speaking at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington DC in 1963, King stated, 'I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of "interposition" and "nullification" – one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.' Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3170387.stm>;
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