Post-1994 South Africa: Better than apartheid, but few gains in socioeconomic conditions

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 82 | Rorisang Lekalake

Summary

Since South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy in 1994, the government's development plans have focused on redressing racial inequalities in socioeconomic outcomes. The National Development Plan 2030 highlights broadened access to education and other essential services, along with rising incomes, as indicators of the country's "remarkable progress" over the past two decades: "In nearly every facet of life, advances are being made in building an inclusive society, rolling back the shadow of history and broadening opportunities for all" (National Planning Commission, 2013, p. 14).

Public opinion data from the 2015 Afrobarometer survey in South Africa show that citizens rate the current political system more highly than apartheid, as they have done since the first survey in 2000. However, a majority of South Africans believe that the country has failed to advance on a range of socioeconomic indicators, including personal safety, economic circumstances, employment opportunities, racial relations, and disparities between rich and poor. Among racial groups, Indian citizens are generally the most critical of the country's development since the transition to democracy.

This critical attitude seems counterintuitive given that Indian and Asian citizens in South Africa enjoy significantly higher average levels of educational attainment and employment than other previously disadvantaged groups (i.e. black and Coloured citizens) (Statistics South Africa, 2015).[1] Furthermore, census data indicate that the average annual income of Indian/Asian-headed households increased by 145% between 2001 and 2011 and was well above those for black- and Coloured-headed households (Statistics South Africa, 2012). Although white South Africans continue to account for a majority (69%) of the country's high–net-worth individuals, this share has declined from more than 80% in 2007 (Fin24, 2015).[2]

Similarly, Afrobarometer data indicate that white and Indian citizens report the lowest levels of material deprivation (or "lived poverty") in the country.

Public discontent with post-1994 progress is concerning given the government's objective of achieving an inclusive, united society by 2030. Moreover, a significant proportion of South Africans currently believe that there is frequent racial discrimination in employment, the justice system, and housing (see Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 84, available at

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[1] Statistics South Africa groups residents into five population groups: "Black African," "Coloured," "White," "Indian or Asian" (includes South Asian, East Asian, and South-East Asian), and "Other."

[2] The 2015 South Africa Wealth Report defines a "high-net-worth individual" (HWI) as a person with a net worth of at least USD 1 million (or R12 million at the time). Between 2007 and 2014, the number of white millionaires in South Africa declined by 13%, compared to significant increases in the number of Indian/Asian (172%) and black (113%) millionaires.

www.afrobarometer.org). However, findings on national identity and social cohesion show that citizens, particularly those of Indian descent, identify strongly with being South African and believe that national unity is both desirable and possible.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. After five rounds of surveys between 1999 and 2013, results of Round 6 surveys (2014/2015) are currently being published. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of 1,200 or 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in South Africa, led by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) and Plus 94 Research, interviewed 2,400 adult South Africans in August and September 2015. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in South Africa in 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2011.

Key findings

- South Africans' ratings of current and past political systems remain largely unchanged since 2011, at an average of 6.1 out of 10 points for the post-1994 regime and 3.4 for the apartheid system. However, optimism about the political system in 10 years' time has declined significantly (from an average of 8.2 points in 2011 to 6.8). As of 2015, white and Indian citizens give apartheid a higher rating than both the current political system and their expectations for the future.

- On average, only 37% of citizens believe that life has improved since 1994 on a range of socioeconomic indicators, while 24% believe that conditions have remained the same and 38% that they have deteriorated. The largest proportion of respondents see an improvement in race relations (52%), while only 17% perceive an improvement in differences between the rich and the poor.

- Among racial groups, Indian citizens are the most critical of post-1994 developments. On average, only 16% say that personal safety, economic circumstances, employment opportunities, racial relations, and disparities between rich and poor are "better" or "much better" than in 1994, compared to 39% of black, 33% of Coloured, and 29% of white citizens. Assessments of progress also differ significantly by party affiliation, age, and education level.

- Despite expressing higher levels of dissatisfaction with these developments, white and Indian South Africans report the lowest levels of lived poverty in the country: Eight in 10 respondents in these groups "never" experienced a shortage of basic necessities in the preceding year, compared to 47% of Coloured and 28% of black citizens.

- Despite their dissatisfaction with the rate of change, South Africans remain committed to their national identity and to nation-building efforts. More than eight in 10 "agree" or "strongly agree" that creating a united country is desirable (87%) and possible (83%).

Ratings of apartheid, the current political system, and expectations for the future

Since 2000, Afrobarometer has asked South Africans to evaluate their current system of government on a scale of 0 (worst form) to 10 (best form). Average scores peaked at 7.1 in 2004 before gradually declining to 6.1 in 2015. Public evaluations of the apartheid system have been considerably lower (3.4 out of 10 in 2015). Citizens have generally been optimistic about prospects for the political system in 10 years' time, but average scores declined from 8.2 to 6.8 between 2011 and 2015 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Average ratings of political systems | South Africa | 2000-2015
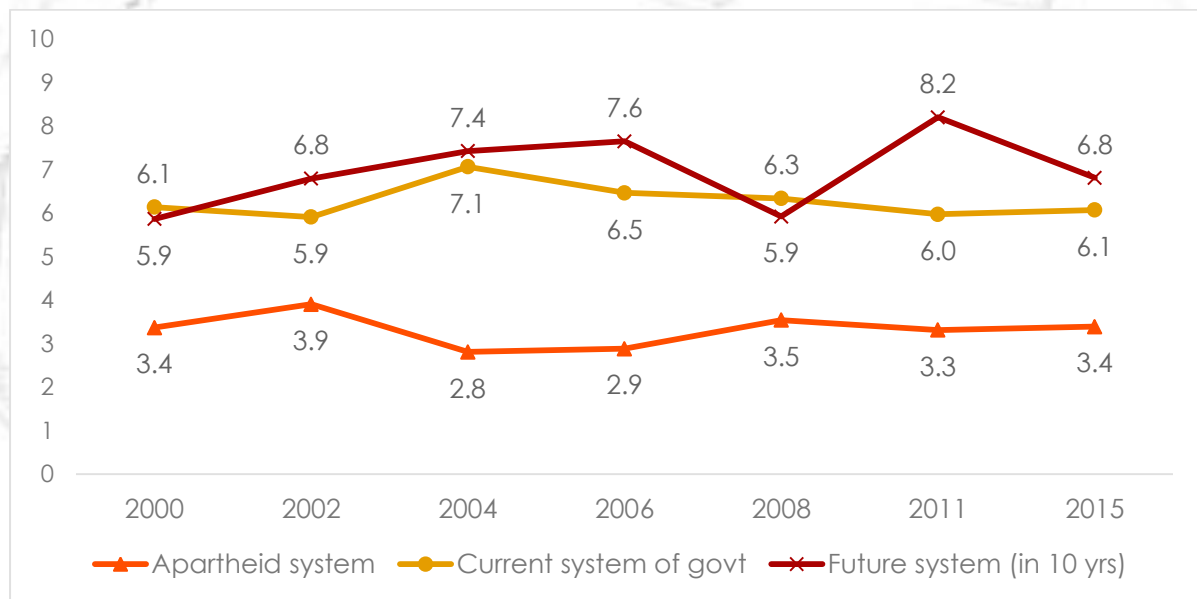
Respondents were asked: *We are now going to discuss how you rate different forms of government. I would like you to give marks out of 10. The best form of governing a country gets 10 out of 10, and the worst form of governing a country gets no marks at all. What grade would you give to:*
1. *The way the country was governed under apartheid?*
2. *Our current system of government with regular elections where everyone can vote and there are at least two political parties?*
3. *The political system of this country as you expect it to be in 10 years' time?*

Analysis by race[3] shows that black and Coloured South Africans give the current regime the highest ratings (6.3 and 5.8, respectively) and that they are also the most optimistic about the country's political system in 10 years' time. Conversely, white and Indian citizens give apartheid higher ratings than the current system (both by 0.7 points) as well as their expectations for the political system a decade from now (by 0.5 and 0.9 points, respectively) (Figure 2).

Previously reported findings from the 2015 survey show that 30% of white and 22% of Indian citizens would approve of returning to the apartheid regime (see Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 71, available at www.afrobarometer.org).

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[3] The racial breakdown of the South Africa survey sample is: 1665 black/African (70% of the total), 251 white (11%), 321 Coloured (14%), 142 Indian (6%), and 5 "Other" (less than 1%). The sample is then weighted to reflect the country's population distribution. Margins of uncertainty surrounding generalizations about population subgroups are wider than for country-level results, calling for caution in interpreting associated numerical results.

Further analysis of these trends suggests that the current pessimism among white and Indian citizens is a direct reflection of recent political scandals. South Africans of all races were increasingly optimistic about the future between 2000 and 2006; these assessments took a plunge following the electricity and political crises of 2008 (Figure 3). That year, the then-"current" political system received a higher average score than citizens' expectations for the future across all race groups, although the gap was highest among white and Indian respondents (see Appendix, Table A.1, for full frequencies).

Figure 2: Average ratings of political systems | by race | South Africa | 2015
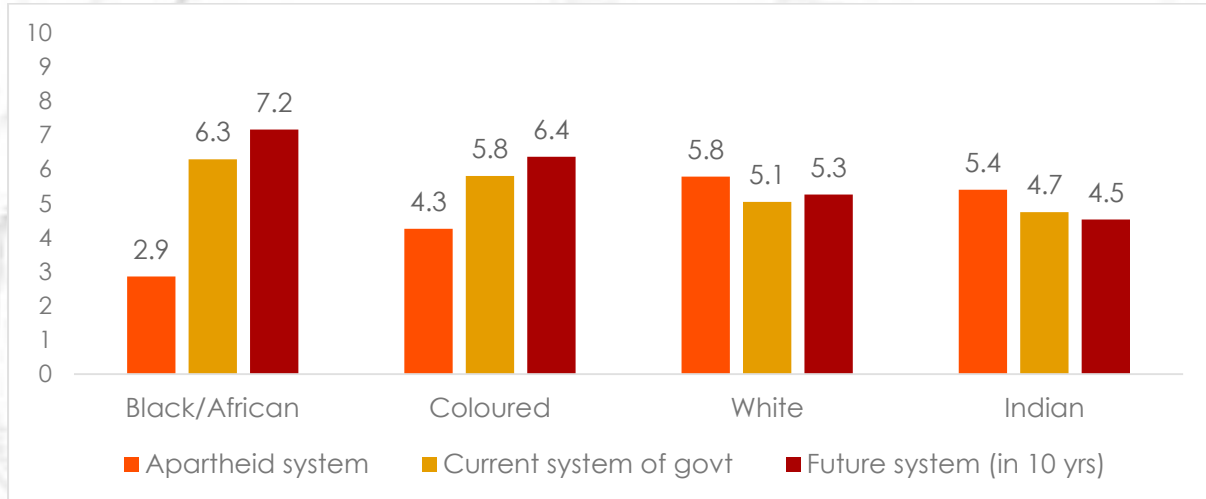
Respondents were asked: *What grade would you give to: The way the country was governed under apartheid? Our current system of government with regular elections where everyone can vote and there are at least two political parties? The political system of this country as you expect it to be in 10 years' time?*

Figure 3: Average ratings of political system in 10 years' time | by race | South Africa | 2000-2015
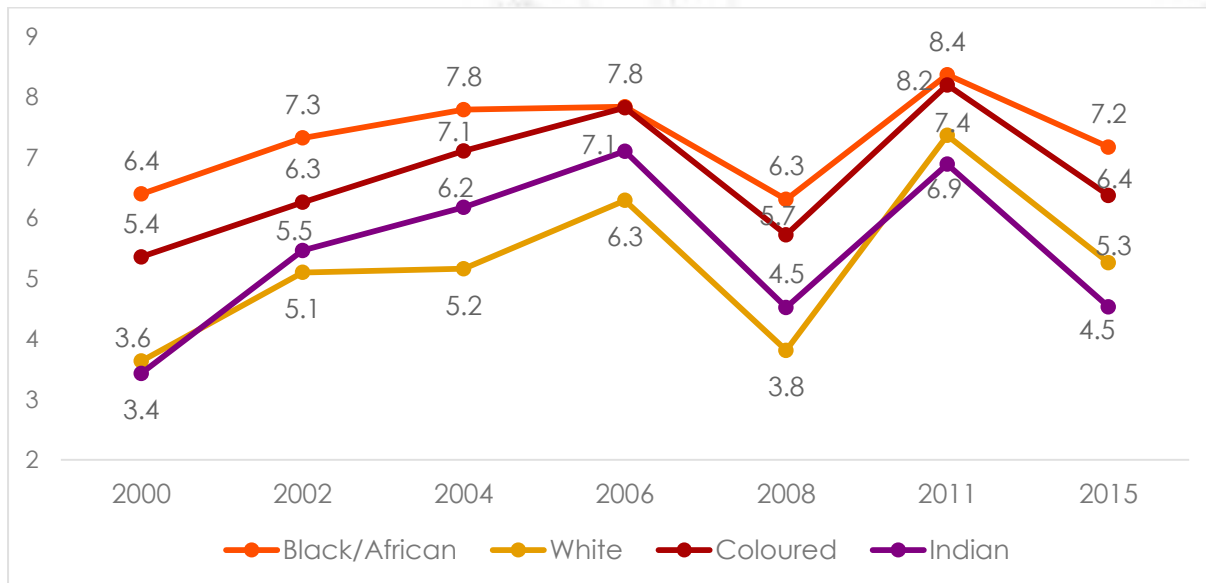

Respondents were asked: *What grade would you give to: The way the country was governed under apartheid? Our current system of government with regular elections where everyone can vote and there are at least two political parties? The political system of this country as you expect it to be in 10 years' time?*

Lack of improvement in socioeconomic conditions since 1994

Between 2002 and 2008, Afrobarometer asked South Africans whether their lives were better, the same, or worse than under the apartheid regime. The proportion of respondents who reported "better" or "much better" overall living conditions increased between 2002 (47%) and 2006 (61%) before dropping to 45% in 2008. That year, three in 10 (29%) respondents reported living under worse conditions than they had during the apartheid era (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Present life compared to apartheid | South Africa | 2002-2008
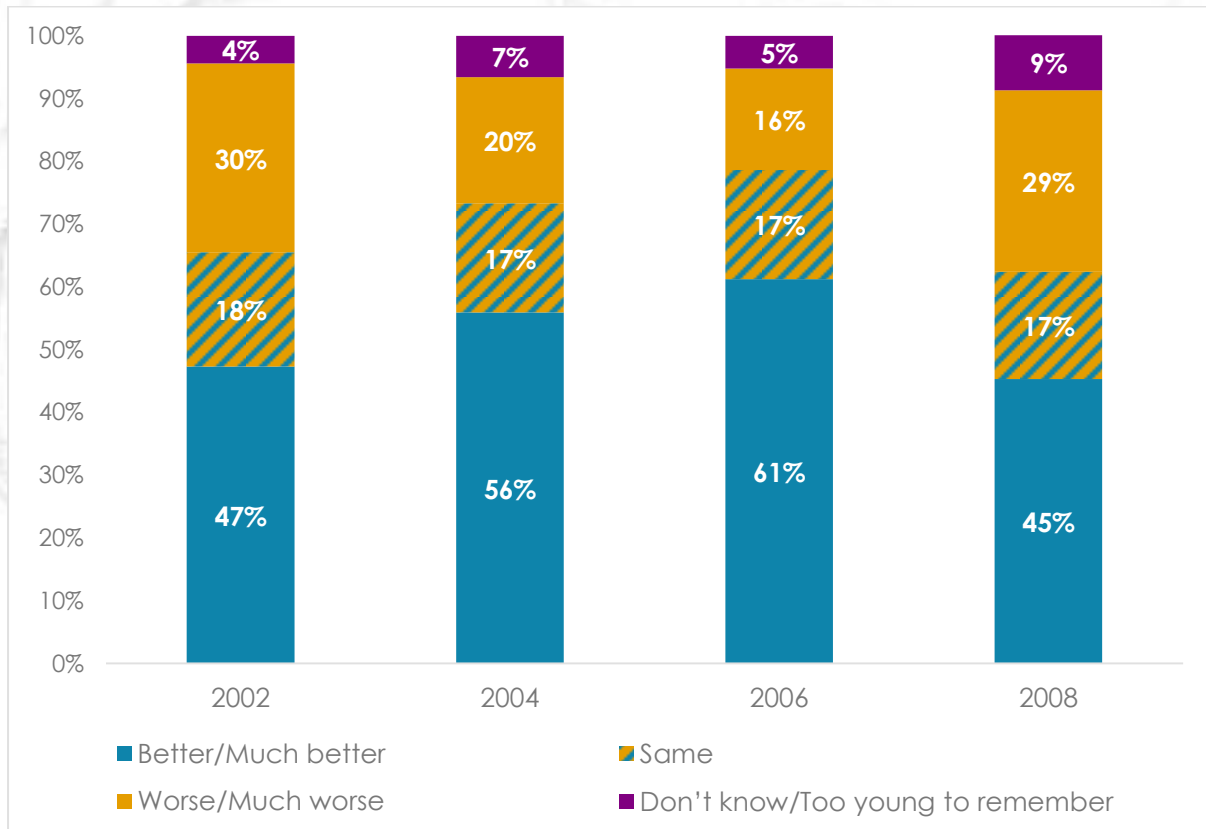

Respondents were asked: *Is your life today better, about the same, or worse than it was under apartheid?*

In 2015, a majority of South Africans report a lack of improvement on a range of socioeconomic indicators, including personal safety, economic circumstances, employment opportunities, race relations, and inequality between rich and poor (Figure 5). On average, less than four in 10 citizens (37%) believe that these conditions are "better" or "much better" than in 1994, while six in 10 (62%) say they have either stayed the same or deteriorated. Race relations are the only area in which a majority (52%) of citizens see improvement, and only 17% perceive gains in reducing income inequality.

A similar question asked in 2000 found that large majorities of South Africans believed that there had been improvement in civil liberties, including freedom of association (84%), voting freedom (84%), freedom of expression (77%), and freedom from unjust arrest (75%). However, only a slim majority believed that progress had been made toward equality (52%) and access to basic necessities (50%), and even fewer felt that South Africans' standard of living (39%) and safety (21%) had improved. Perceptions of public safety have shown the largest shift in opinion in the past 15 years, as the proportion of citizens who believe that it has improved doubled by 2015 (42%) (see Appendix Table A.2).

Figure 5: Changes in socioeconomic conditions since 1994 | South Africa | 2015
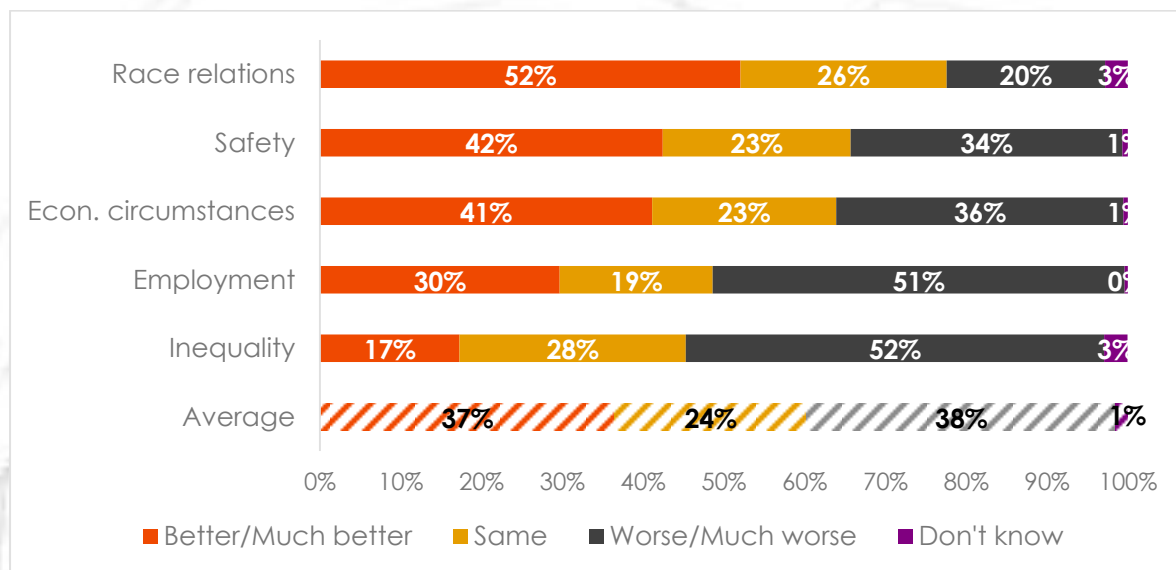
Respondents were asked: *How would you say the following has changed since the transition in 1994: 1) Your personal safety and that of your family? 2) Economic circumstances for you and your family? 3) Employment opportunities for you and your family? 4) Relations between members of different race groups? 5) The gap between the rich and poor?*

Average evaluations show no significant differences by respondents' urban/rural location and gender. However, older and less educated respondents tend to be more critical than average, and there are significant differences in opinion by political affiliation[4] and race.

Unsurprisingly, African National Congress (ANC) supporters are significantly more likely to believe that these conditions have improved than supporters of the main opposition, the Democratic Alliance (DA) (41% vs. 26%). Among citizens close to the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), on the other hand, perceived improvement (38%) is close to that of the ANC, which likely reflects the shared political traditions and racial makeup of the two parties' support bases.[5]

Among racial groups, black citizens (39%) are the most likely to say that conditions have improved since 1994, followed by Coloured (33%) and white (29%) respondents. Indian respondents are significantly more critical: On average, only 16% say that these conditions have gotten "better" or "much better" since 1994 (Figure 6).

Indian citizens are significantly less likely than other race groups to perceive improvement on any of these five socioeconomic indicators except for income inequality, where assessments are uniform across population groups (see Appendix Table A.3). This finding runs counter to perceptions of overall living conditions between 2002 and 2008, when Indian citizens were less critical than white citizens. Furthermore, during the 2002-2008 period, the proportion of Indian respondents who reported "better" or "much better" overall conditions was increasing (see Appendix Table A.4).

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[4] Political affiliation was determined by asking respondents: *Do you feel close to any particular political party?* (If yes:) *Which party is that?*

[5] In the 2015 survey, 93% of self-identified ANC supporters are black, as are 96% of EFF supporters. By contrast, the DA's support base is disproportionately from minority population groups: Coloured (36%), black (28%), white (28%), and Indian (8%).

Figure 6: Improvement in socioeconomic conditions since 1994 | by party affiliation, race, education, age, sex, and location | South Africa | 2015
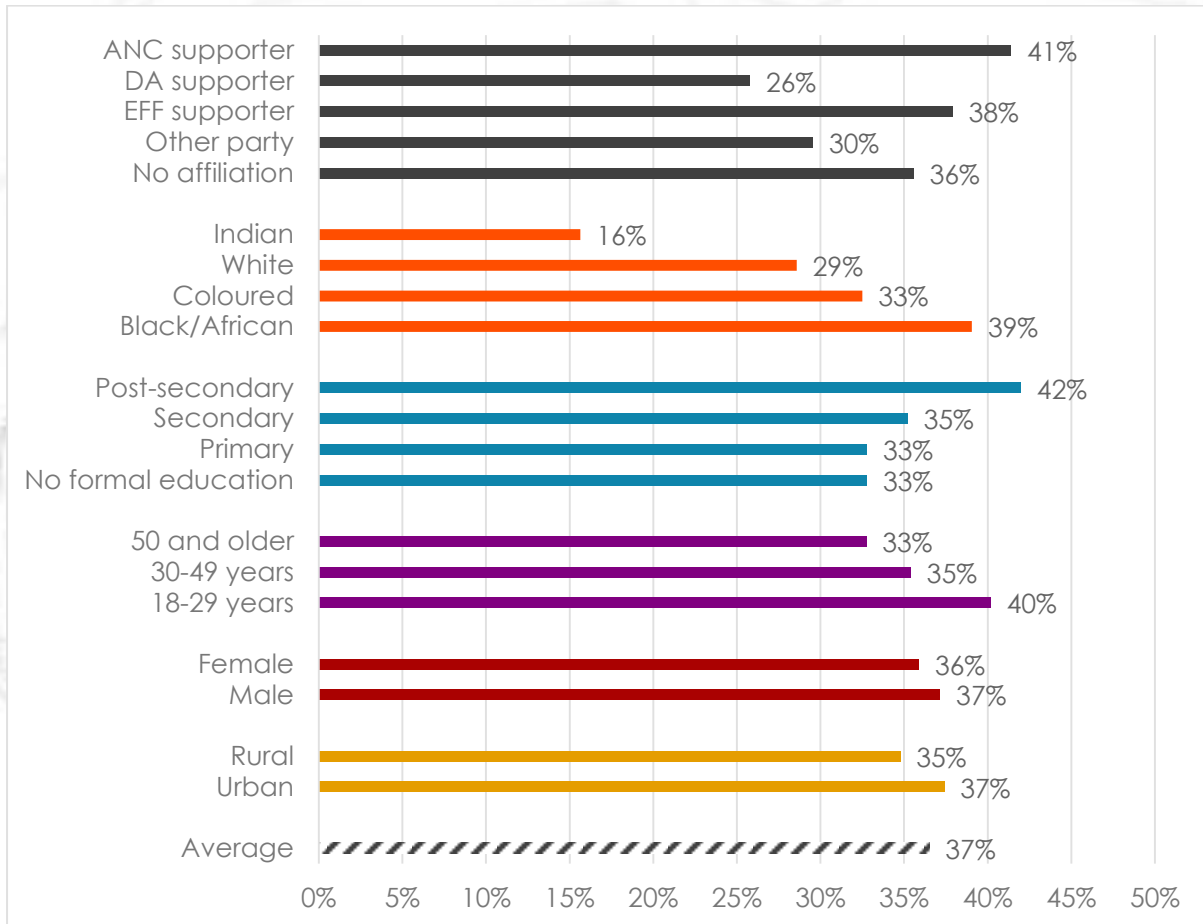
(Figure shows average % of "better" or "much better" responses across the questions regarding personal safety, economic circumstances, employment opportunities, race relations, and inequality between rich and poor)
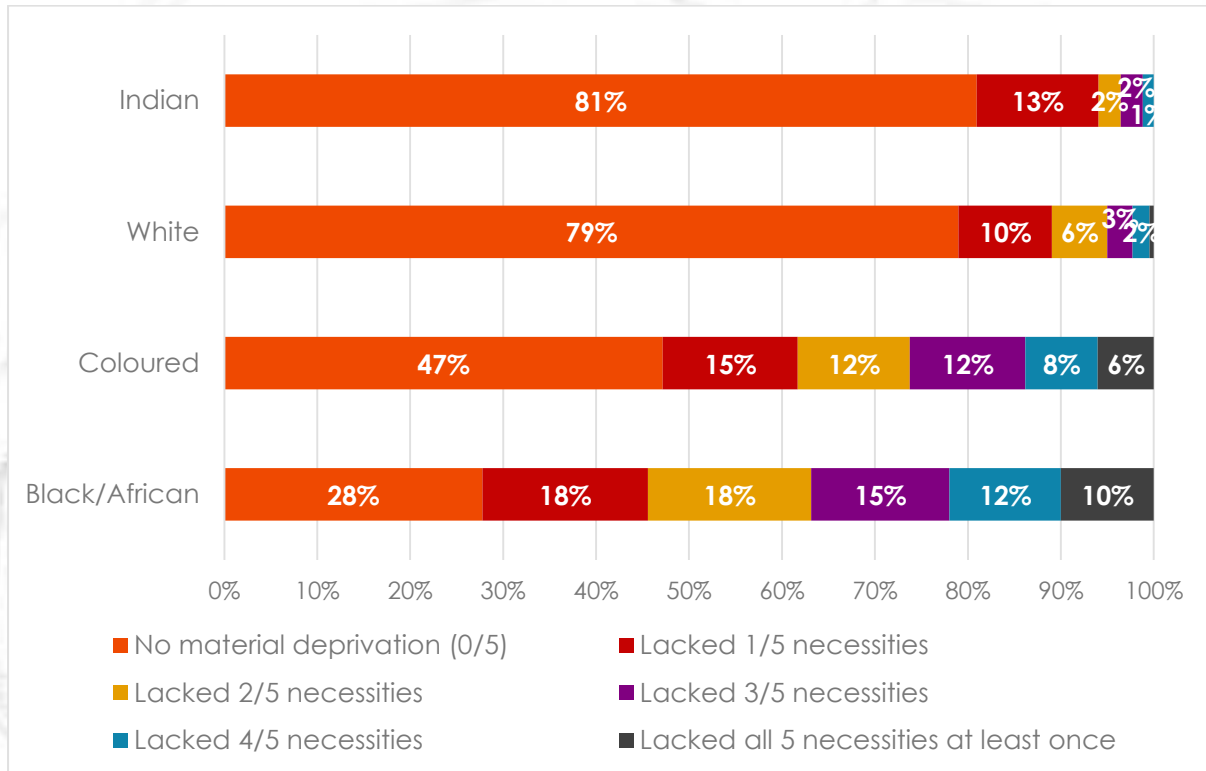
Racial inequalities in access to basic necessities persist

Recent analysis of "lived poverty" (measured as the frequency with which people go without five basic necessities) shows that South Africans are better off than the continental average and that the country has experienced significant improvement on this measure since 2011 (see Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 29, available at www.afrobarometer.org).

Unsurprisingly, given the country's history, there are large differences in lived poverty by race. Despite their dissatisfaction with the country's socioeconomic progress since 1994, eight in 10 Indian respondents (81%) report having "never" gone without enough food, enough clean water, medicine or medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income in the year preceding the survey (Figure 7). This is comparable to the figure for white citizens (79%) and is significantly higher than those for black (28%) and Coloured (47%) respondents.
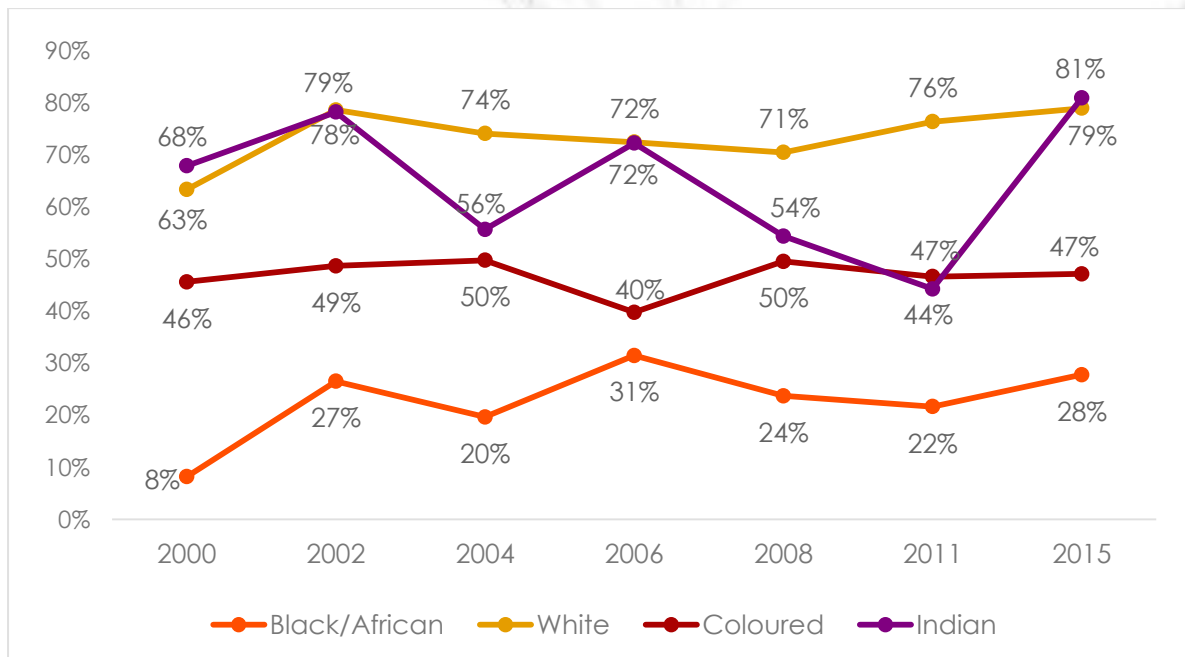
Analysis over time shows that white South Africans have generally enjoyed the highest levels of adequate access to basic necessities since 2000 (74% on average), while black citizens have consistently faced the lowest levels (Figure 8). This measure has fluctuated the most among Indian respondents, who report almost double the level of material security (81%) as in the 2011 survey (44%).

Figure 7: Access to basic necessities | by race | South Africa | 2015

Indian	81%	13% 2% 2% 1%	
White	79%	10% 6% 3% 2%	
Coloured	47%	15% 12% 12% 8% 6%	
Black/African	28%	18% 18% 15% 12% 10%	

Legend:
- ■ No material deprivation (0/5)
- ■ Lacked 1/5 necessities
- ■ Lacked 2/5 necessities
- ■ Lacked 3/5 necessities
- ■ Lacked 4/5 necessities
- ■ Lacked all 5 necessities at least once

Respondents were asked: *Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: 1) Enough food to eat? 2) Enough clean water for home use? 3) Medicines or medical treatment? 4) Enough fuel to cook your food? 5) A cash income?*
(Additive index ranging from never going without any of the five basic necessities to going without all five measures at least once)

Figure 8: Never went without basic necessities | by race | South Africa | 2000-2015

	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2011	2015
Black/African	8%	27%	20%	31%	24%	22%	28%
White	63%	78%	74%	72%	71%	76%	81%
Coloured	46%	49%	50%	40%	50%	47%	47%
Indian	68%	79%	56%	72%	54%	44%	79%

*(% who "never" went without any of the five basic necessities)*

National pride despite discontent with post-1994 development

Despite different levels of discontent regarding the current state of South African society, strong majorities of citizens of all race groups are attached to their national identity. On average, nine in 10 (91%) say that being South African is an important part of their identity and that they would want their children "to think of themselves as South Africans," with almost universal agreement among Indian respondents (Figure 9). Furthermore, almost nine in 10 citizens (87%) "agree" or "strongly agree" that people should think of themselves as "South Africans first."

On another question, however, only half (49%) of South Africans say they think of themselves primarily in terms of their national, rather than their racial or ethnic, identity. One-third (34%) think of the two as equally important. Coloured citizens are the most likely to prioritise group over national identity (28%), followed by white (20%), Indian (13%), and black (12%) citizens (see Table A.5 for full frequencies).

When asked for their opinion on national unity, 87% of South Africans say "it is desirable to create one united South African nation out of all the different groups who live in this country." Slightly fewer (83%) believe that it is in fact possible to do so, with significant gaps between desirability and perceived attainability among Indian (15–percentage-point gap) and white (10-point-gap) respondents (Figure 10).

Figure 9: Attachment to national identity | by race | South Africa | 2015
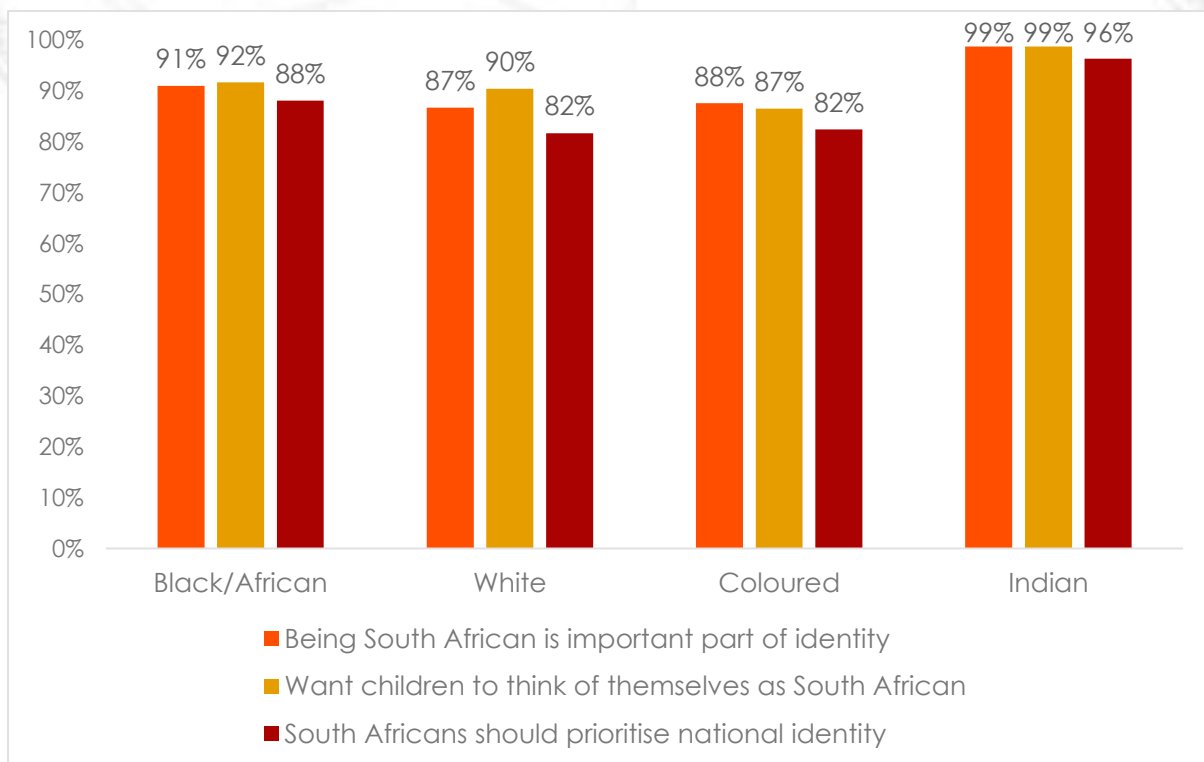

Respondents were asked: *Here are some things people say about the way they feel about South Africa. There are no right or wrong answers. We are simply interested in your opinions. Please tell me whether you disagree or agree with these statements.*
1. *Being South African is a very important part of how you see yourself.*
2. *You would want your children to think of themselves as South African.*
3. *People should realise we are South Africans first, and stop thinking of themselves in terms of the group they belong to.*

(% "agree" or "strongly agree")

Figure 10: National unity | by race | South Africa | 2015
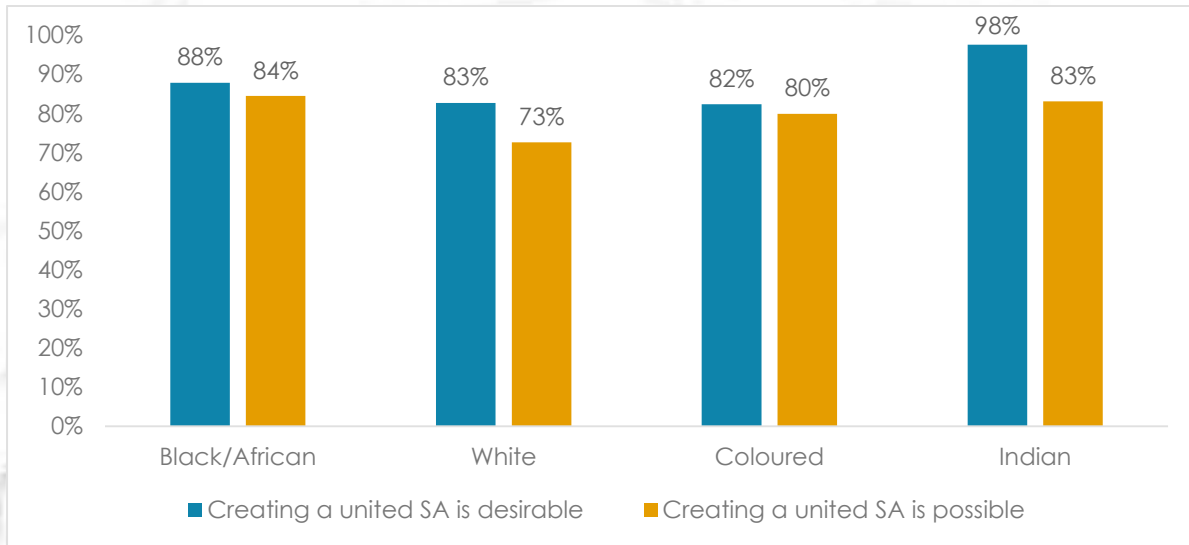
Respondents were asked: *Please tell me whether you disagree or agree with these statements.*
   1. It is desirable to create one united South African nation out of all the different groups who live in this country.
   2. It is possible to create such a united South African nation.
(% "agree" or "strongly agree")

Conclusion

South Africans' evaluations of their post-1994 political system remain lower than a decade ago, and optimism about the future has decreased significantly. While black and Coloured citizens give the apartheid regime low marks and expect further improvement in 10 years' time, white and Indian citizens give apartheid a higher rating than both the current political system and their expectations for the future.

Indian citizens are the most dissatisfied with the post-apartheid system's social and economic outcomes, despite continuing to experience better socioeconomic outcomes than black and Coloured citizens. Nonetheless, like other race groups, Indian citizens are highly supportive of their national identity and of building a unified South Africa, which could help to promote future efforts at nation building and social cohesion.

To further explore this data, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

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Appendix

Table A.1: Average ratings of political systems | by race | South Africa | 2000-2015

	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2011	2015
Apartheid system							
Black/African	2.6	3.1	2.3	2.5	3.0	3.0	2.9
White	6.1	6.3	5.6	5.3	6.5	4.2	5.8
Coloured	4.6	4.5	3.3	3.4	4.1	4.2	4.3
Indian	6.3	6.0	4.5	3.2	5.0	5.7	5.4
Current system							
Black/African	6.4	6.1	7.3	6.5	6.5	6.0	6.3
White	5.5	5.5	5.8	5.8	5.8	5.8	5.1
Coloured	5.3	5.3	7.0	6.6	6.2	5.9	5.8
Indian	4.0	6.1	6.2	6.5	5.8	5.2	4.7
Future system (in 10 years' time)							
Black/African	6.4	7.3	7.8	7.8	6.3	8.4	7.2
White	3.6	5.1	5.2	6.3	3.8	7.4	5.3
Coloured	5.4	6.3	7.1	7.8	5.7	8.2	6.4
Indian	3.4	5.5	6.2	7.1	4.5	6.9	4.5

Respondents were asked: *We are now going to discuss how you rate different forms of government. I would like you to give marks out of 10. The best form of governing a country gets 10 out of 10, and the worst form of governing a country gets no marks at all. What grade would you give to:*
1. *The way the country was governed under apartheid?*
2. *Our current system of government with regular elections where everyone can vote and there are at least two political parties?*
3. *The political system of this country as you expect it to be in 10 years' time?*

Table A.2: Life in current system of government vs. apartheid | South Africa | 2000

	Better/ Much better	Worse/ Much worse	Same	Don't know
People can join any political organisation they choose.	84%	4%	11%	1%
Each person is free to choose who to vote for without feeling forced by others.	84%	6%	9%	1%
Anyone can freely say what he or she thinks.	77%	10%	11%	2%
People can live without fear of being arrested if they have not done anything wrong.	75%	10%	13%	2%
Everybody is treated equally and fairly by government.	54%	24%	18%	3%
South Africans are equal to each other.	52%	23%	23%	2%
People have access to basic necessities (like food and water).	50%	26%	23%	1%
People have an adequate standard of living.	39%	34%	25%	3%
People are safe from crime and violence.	21%	65%	13%	1%

Respondents were asked: *Some people say that today, under our current system of government, our political and overall life is better than it was under apartheid. Others say things are no better, or even worse. For each of these following matters, would you say things today are worse, about the same, or better?*

Table A.3: Improvement in socioeconomic conditions since 1994 | by race
| South Africa | 2015

	Race relations	Safety	Economic circumstances	Employment	Inequality (rich vs. poor)
Black/African	54%	48%	44%	31%	18%
White	55%	19%	30%	24%	15%
Coloured	45%	37%	36%	29%	15%
Indian	26%	7%	18%	10%	17%
Average	**52%**	**42%**	**41%**	**30%**	**17%**

Respondents were asked: *How would you say the following has changed since the transition in 1994:*
1. *Your personal safety and that of your family?*
2. *Economic circumstances for you and your family?*
3. *Employment opportunities for you and your family?*
4. *Relations between members of different race groups?*
5. *The gap between the rich and poor?*
(% "better" or "much better")

Table A.4: Improved living conditions compared to apartheid | by race | South
Africa | 2002-2008

	2002	**2004**	**2006**	**2008**
Black/African	55%	61%	66%	51%
White	21%	21%	35%	16%
Coloured	39%	57%	47%	38%
Indian	38%	41%	41%	47%
Average	**47%**	**56%**	**61%**	**45%**

Respondents were asked: *Is your life today better, about the same, or worse than it was under apartheid? (% "better" or "much better")*

Table A.5: Attachment to national vs. group identity | by race | South Africa | 2015

	Only/More South African	Equal	Only/More ethnic group	Not applicable[6]
Black/African	51%	35%	12%	1%
White	44%	27%	20%	8%
Coloured	36%	33%	28%	2%
Indian	59%	28%	13%	-
Average	**49%**	**34%**	**15%**	**2%**

Respondents were asked: *Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a South African and being a _____ [respondent's ethnic group]. Which of the following statements best expresses your feelings?*
- *I feel only South African.*
- *I feel more South African than _____ [respondent's ethnic group].*
- *I feel equally South African and _____ [respondent's ethnic group].*
- *I feel more _____ [respondent's ethnic group] than South African.*
- *I feel only _____ [respondent's ethnic group].*

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[6] Refers to respondents who declined to give an ethnic identity in a preceding question.