

Press Release

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South African Institute of Race Relations
The power of ideas

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SONA 2017 press release: Race relations in South Africa still sound, but fraying at the edges

Despite the damaging vitriol so often found on social media, race relations in South Africa remain sound, says the IRR in a report released today.

The IRR's comprehensive field survey of public opinion on racial issues shows that only 3% of South Africans see racism as a serious unresolved problem. Most are far more concerned about unemployment (cited by 40%), poor service delivery (listed by 34%), inadequate housing (18%), crime (15%) and bad education (likewise cited by 15%).

In addition, some 72% of the 2 291 respondents whose views were canvassed via in-depth one-on-one interviews report no personal experience of racism in their daily lives. An overwhelming majority (84%) agree that the different races need other and that there should be full opportunities for people of all colours.

Most have little faith in the race-based laws and racial quotas on which the government insists. Fewer than 3% think 'the best way to improve lives' is through 'more BEE and affirmative action in employment'. Only 1% believe this can be done 'through more land reform'.

Roughly 11% agree that 'only black people should be appointed until those in employment are demographically representative'. Since this is what the Employment Equity Act of 1998 requires, it is striking that the proportion in its favour is so limited. More than 73% think sports teams should be selected on merit, not quotas.

Like the IRR's 2015 field survey, the results of the 2016 one should fill the country with hope. Despite the insulting and sometimes hostile comments that seem to dominate the race debate, most South Africans are well aware that the invective of the few is not representative of the many.

However, there are danger signals too. In the IRR's 2015 field survey, 62% of South Africans agreed that 'all this talk about racism and colonialism is by politicians trying to find excuses for their own failures'. In 2016, that proportion was down to 50%. This downward shift seems to reflect a heightened political and media focus on racism and colonialism over the past year.

More...

It also suggests that ordinary people are increasingly buying into the ANC/EFF ideology that puts the blame for persistent poverty on white racism and white privilege. This scapegoats whites and undermines social trust. It also overlooks far more important barriers to upward mobility: from low growth and poor schooling to widespread joblessness and the pervasive family breakdown that sees 70% of black children growing up without the support and input of both parents.

Hence, though the fabric of race relations is still sound, it is also beginning to fray. The more complex problems are simplistically blamed on the white minority, the harder it may be for ordinary South Africans to keep seeing through this racial rhetoric. Race relations may then suffer.

For now, however, that racial goodwill is still so strong gives the country major reason for hope. It also provides a strong foundation on which to tackle the key problems and build a common prosperity.

Download the report [here](#).

This report on race relations forms the second of a three-part release ahead of the 2017 State of the Nation Address. The three reports from the IRR will cover transformation, race relations, and an analysis of the country's economic 'silver lining'.

Ends.
