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PRO-GROWTH OR PRO-POVERTY: FINDINGS OF IRR POLLING 2025

*REPORT 3:
RACE AND RACE RELATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA TODAY*



HERMANN PRETORIUS

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Executive summary

Polling by the South African Institute of Race Relations (IRR) conducted in 2025 reveals that while racism remains a lived reality for many South Africans the overwhelming majority define their priorities, values, and expectations in non-racial terms. Across all racial groups, respondents consistently place jobs, fairness, security, and cooperation above racial redress. These findings show that South Africans are far less divided than political rhetoric often suggests, and that the electorate has embraced a practical non-racial consensus.

Key Findings

- 1. Race relations since 1994 present a mixed but ultimately hopeful picture.** While 46% of respondents believe race relations have improved, 36% think they have worsened and 18% say they have stayed the same. Despite these differences, 84% of all respondents, including 80% of black voters, agree that the different races in South Africa “need each other for progress.”
- 2. While racism is experienced on the ground, its political use is widely rejected.** Nearly half of South Africans (48%) report personal encounters with racism. Yet three-quarters (76%) agree that “talk of racism and colonialism is used by politicians to excuse their failures,” with this view shared by 73% of black respondents and 91% of whites.
- 3. There is a clear link between higher experiences of racism and racialised policies like BEE and employment equity.** Those segments of the South African population, by race, employment status, and income, most likely to be subjected to racialised policies like BEE and employment equity targets report higher than average personal experiences of racism. Despite broad societal good will, the shadow of race-based policies looms ever larger in the experience of racism in South Africa.
- 4. National priorities are firmly deracialised.** When asked to name their two most pressing concerns, respondents overwhelmingly chose socio-economic priorities such as jobs (38%), corruption (10%), and crime (9%). By contrast, only 2% cited racism and 4% mentioned BEE. There is significant overlap in terms of these priorities across demographic groups.
- 5. On racial inequality, the consensus is that progress will come through opportunity, not racial engineering.** A strong majority of 73% agree that “with better education and more jobs, the present inequality between the races will steadily disappear,” a belief shared across all groups: 71% of blacks, 78% of coloureds, 80% of Indians, and 83% of whites.
- 6. Competition through merit rather than racial quotas is preferred and considered fair.** On government appointments, 84% favour merit-based selection, whether with training for the disadvantaged (53%) or merit alone (31%). In procurement, 54% prefer value-for-money contracts, while only 17% back racial preference even at higher cost. In sport, 92% want national teams chosen on merit, race not quotas.
- 7. Even within the ANC’s own supporters, voters diverge from the party’s aggressive race-based policies.** Among ANC supporters, 73% favour merit-based appointments over quotas and 65% prefer value-for-money procurement over racial targets. These results highlight how far the electorate’s instincts are removed from racial engineering, and how far ANC policy has drifted from the preferences of its voters.

Introduction

This report is the third instalment in the IRR's 2025 opinion-survey series. While *Report 1: The Political State of Play as of April 2025* explored party support amid the VAT-hike debate, and *Report 2: Policy Preferences of Registered Voters* the appeal of policy solutions on offer, this report presents findings on the perceptions of race as a socio-economic and political factor and the overall state of race relations in South Africa.

The IRR's 2025 survey was conducted from 27 March to 3 April 2025 to gauge the public's views on South Africa's socio-political and economic landscape. The survey investigated attitudes on hiring rules, government procurement, a governmental focus on welfare versus work, education, housing, and health-care funding, and perceptions of the Expropriation Act's impact on property rights.

Survey objectives

This report, following on its two predecessors, seeks to answer critical questions relating to the state of race relations and importance of race as a factor in the country, including:

- How do South Africans judge the state of race relations since 1994 across race groups, age groups, and regions?
- To what extent do people report direct experiences of racism, and how do they view the political use of race and colonialism?
- How much importance do citizens place on race and race-based policies such as BEE and quotas when compared with other national priorities?
- What principles of fairness do South Africans support in public appointments, procurement, and sport?
- How do people connect race to inequality, property rights, and expropriation?
- In what ways do race and racial identity still influence voting choices and party loyalties?

The survey responses provide insight into how South Africans understand the role of race in society and politics more than thirty years into democracy.

Methodology*

The IRR's 2025 opinion poll was designed to ensure accurate, representative, and reliable insights into the views of South Africans.

A total of 807 respondents participated in the poll, comprising a diverse demographic cross-section. The results have a margin of error of $\pm 4\%$ at a 95% confidence level, indicating that the findings are highly reliable and represent public opinion within this range.

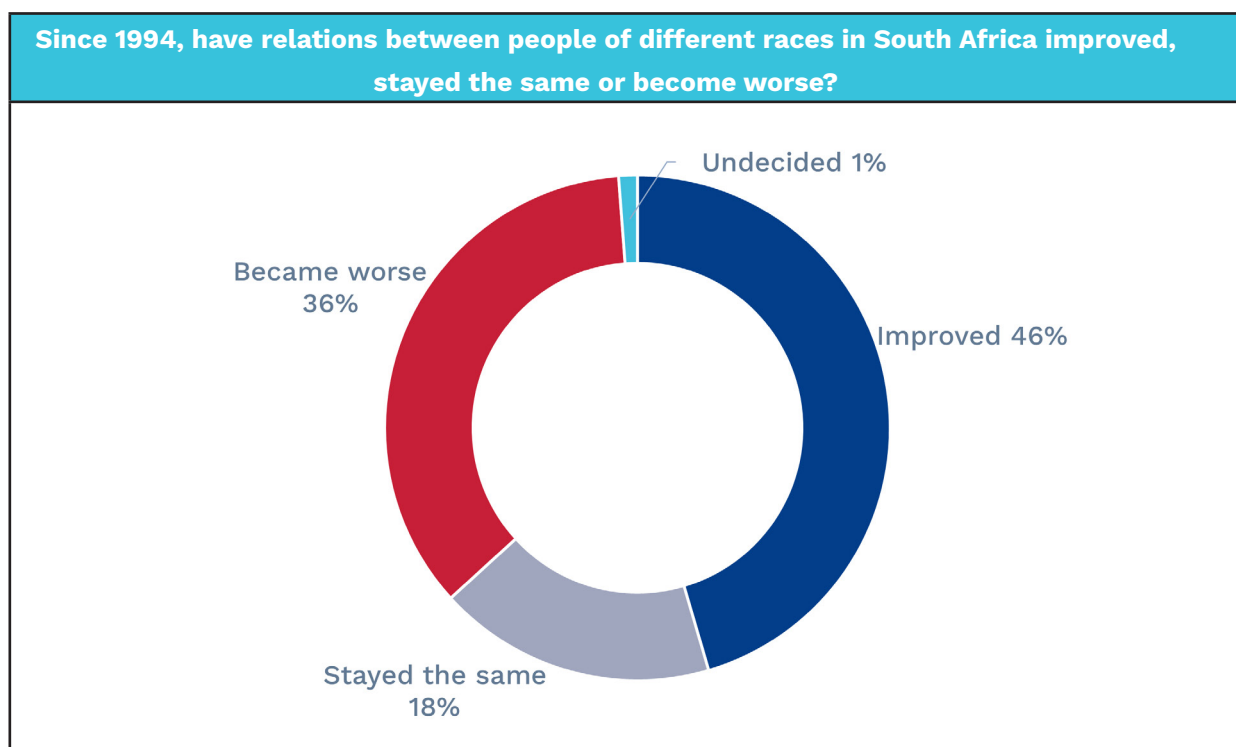
Data were collected using Computer-Assisted Telephonic Interviews (CATI), a reliable method that ensures consistency in questionnaire administration and minimises interviewer bias. The survey was limited to registered voters, ensuring the data reflected the electorate's views. It is important to note that no turnout scenarios were applied.

**For further methodological information on the representativity of the survey sample, see addendum A*

Analysis and findings

Race relations and inequality

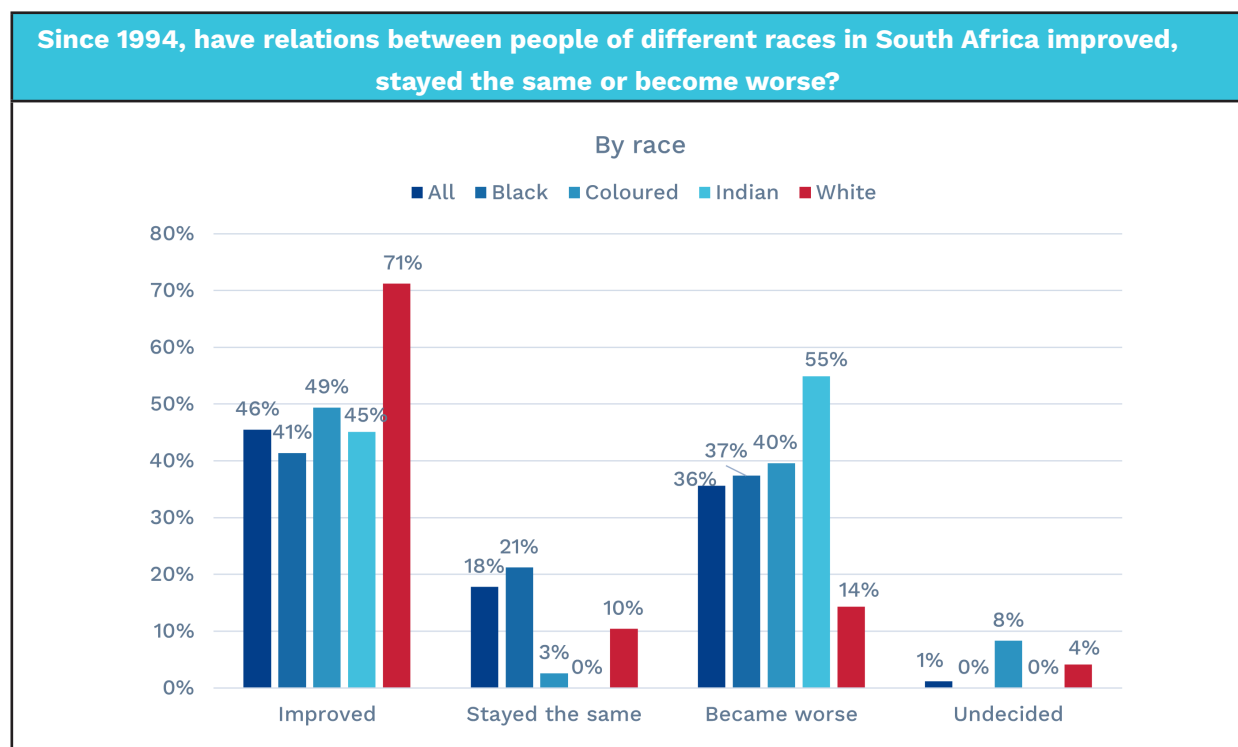
When asked whether relations between people of different races have improved, stayed the same, or become worse since 1994, 46% of respondents said they had improved, 37% said they had worsened, and 18% said they had stayed the same. This distribution points to a country that recognises progress and strain in equal measure, but not a society sliding into racial hostility.



The proportion who believes relations have improved, whilst slightly diminished from earlier years of IRR polling, still outnumbers those who believe they have deteriorated. That optimism, however, is unevenly distributed. Perceptions differ sharply by race, generation, and economic standing, suggesting that attitudes to racial progress are shaped more by experience and opportunity than by identity alone.

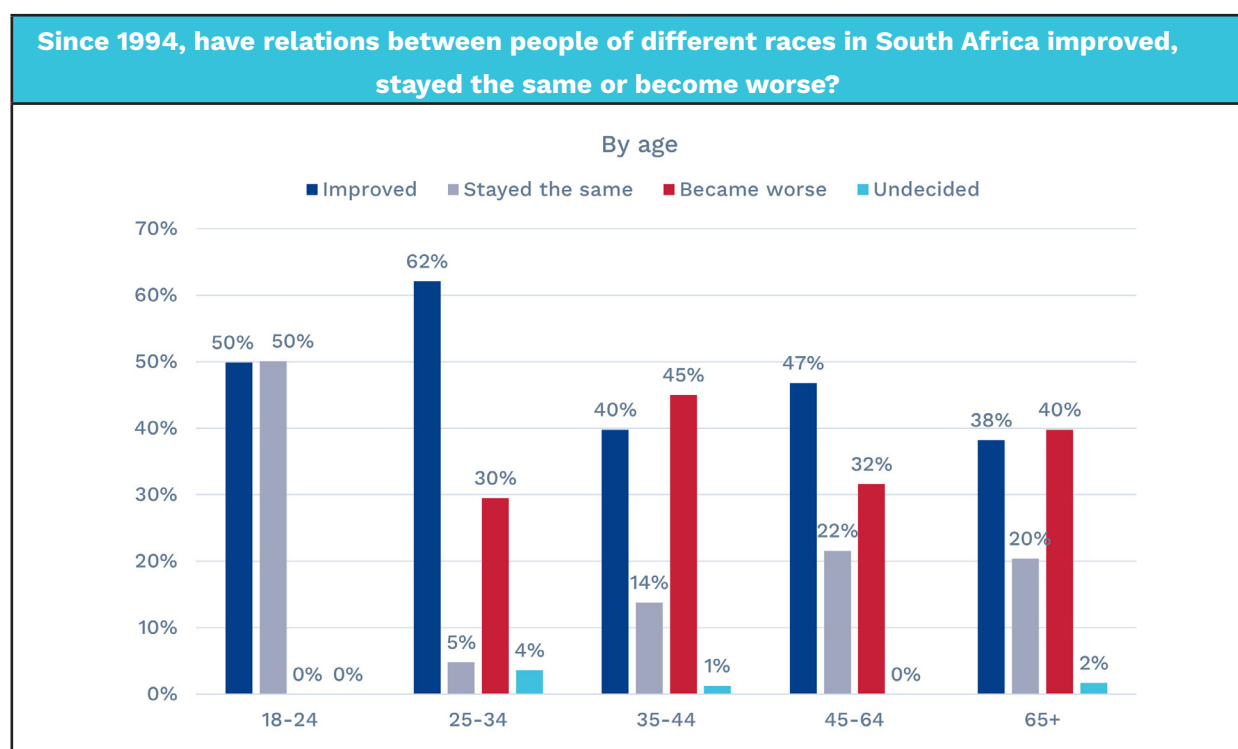
Among white South Africans, 71% said race relations had improved and only 14% said they had worsened. This is a strikingly high level of confidence in social progress, especially given that public discussion frequently portrays white South Africans as retreating into grievance or fear. The result stands as an empirical counterpoint to claims of widespread racial victimhood or narratives such as the so-called “white genocide.” In fact, the proportion of white respondents who view post-1994 race relations as improved closely mirrors the 69% who voted in 1992 to support FW de Klerk’s reform process, suggesting continuity in white support for an integrated, democratic order.

Black South Africans, by contrast, express more ambivalence: 41% say relations have improved, 37% say they have worsened, and 21% believe they have stayed the same. Their divided outlook reflects the tension between the political freedoms gained since 1994 and the economic stagnation and inequality that still characterise much of everyday life. For many, integration and tolerance coexist with frustration at unfulfilled promises. Coloured respondents are slightly more positive than the national average, with 49% saying relations have improved and 40% saying they have worsened. Indians are the most negative group, with 45% perceiving improvement and 55% deterioration, reflecting unease within a small minority community that has often felt politically peripheral.



Differences across generations deepen the understanding socio-economic material experience most likely shapes perception of race relations. The 25-34 age group is the most positive of all, with 62% saying race relations have improved and only 30% saying they have worsened. Among those aged 18-24, half see improvement. Optimism falls among those aged 35-44, where 40% say improved and 45% say worsened, and remains modest among the 45-64 group, where 47% say improved and 32% say worsened. Among those aged 65 and older, only 38% see improvement, with 40% perceiving decline.

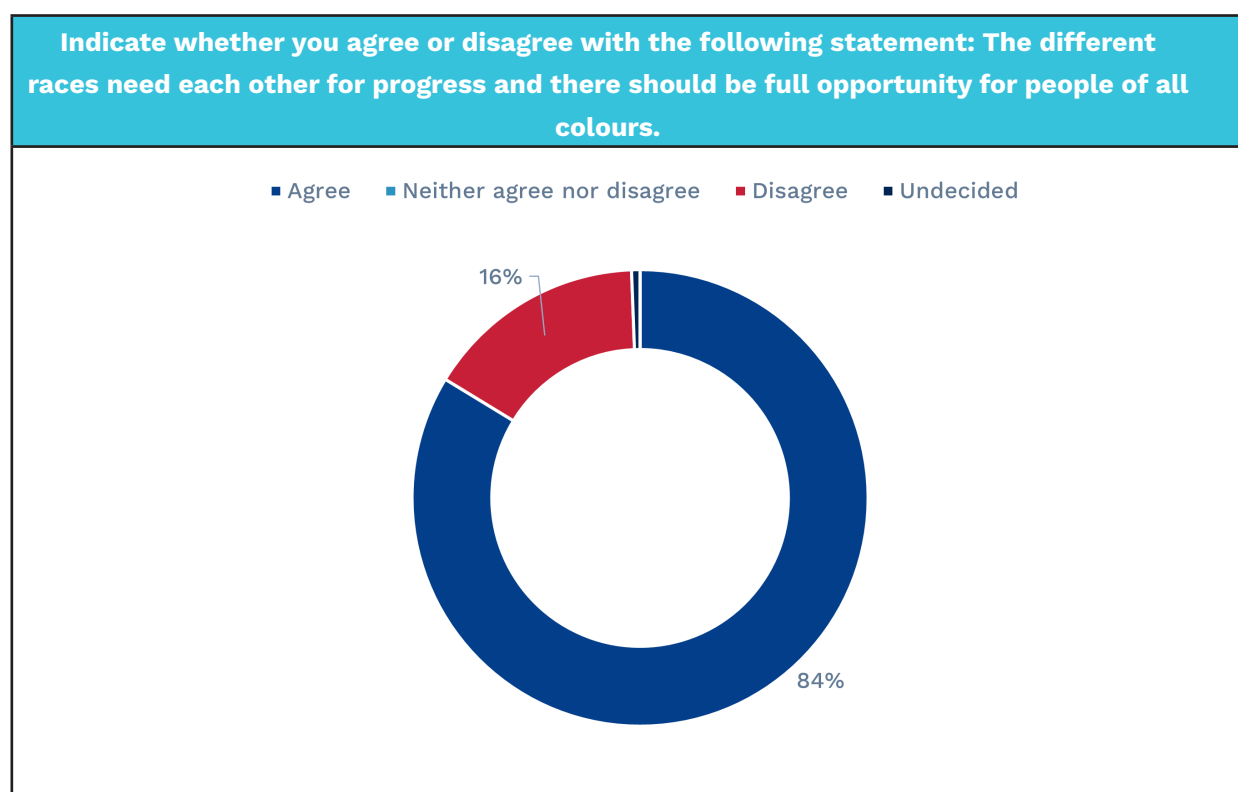
These differences illustrate a clear generational shift. Younger adults, who have lived their entire lives in democratic South Africa, tend to treat inter-racial interaction as an ordinary social fact rather than a fragile political project. Older South Africans, by contrast, carry both the memory of apartheid's divisions and the disappointment of unmet expectations since 1994. The result is that optimism about race relations is concentrated among the younger cohorts.



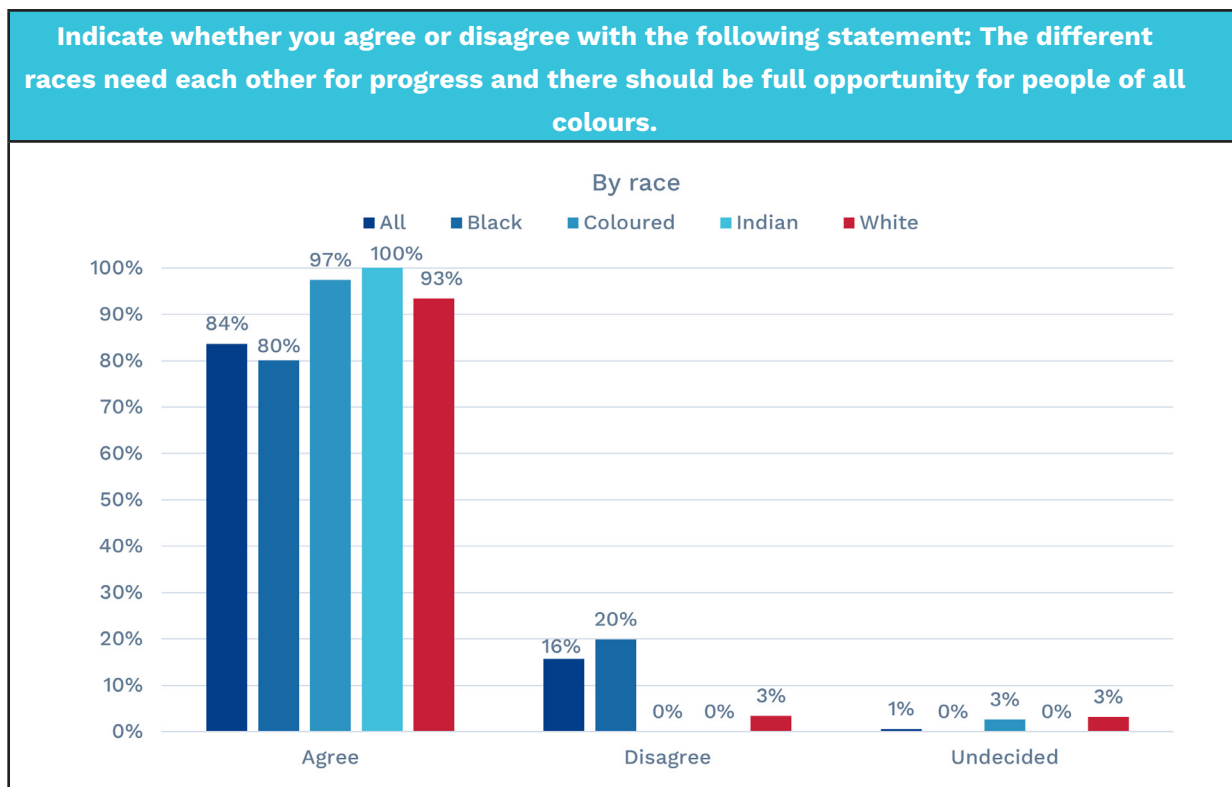
Socio-economic status is another powerful differentiator affirming the importance of socio-economic aspiration and experience in racial perceptions. Optimism increases steadily with income. Only 30% of those in households earning below R2 000 per month say relations have improved, compared with 41% in the R2 000-R8 000 range, 54% in the R8 000-R20 000 range, and 62% in households above R20 000. The same pattern appears in employment status. Among formal business owners, 79% say relations have improved. Among formal workers, 54% agree. Among informal workers, 67% say improved. By contrast, those not looking for work are the most likely to say relations have stayed the same or become worse. This alignment of optimism with employment and income underlines how economic inclusion strengthens social confidence. Where people participate in shared workspaces, markets, and communities, they are more likely to report that race relations have improved. Where exclusion persists, pessimism follows.

Gender differences are small but measurable. 48% of men and 42% of women believe race relations have improved. Women are marginally more likely than men to say relations have worsened, which likely reflects the intersection of economic hardship, unemployment, and vulnerability to social instability rather than a gendered attitude to race itself.

The accompanying attitude data reinforce this broad finding of practical non-racialism. When asked whether “the different races in South Africa need each other for progress,” 84% of respondents agreed. Agreement was high across every population group, including 80% of black respondents, 97% of coloureds, 100% of Indians, and 93% of whites. This near-universal endorsement of mutual dependence stands in stark contrast to the adversarial tone of many political debates. It indicates that ordinary South Africans overwhelmingly accept cooperation across racial lines as essential to national advancement.



Similarly, nearly three-quarters of respondents (73%) agreed that “with better education and more jobs, the present inequality between the races will steadily disappear.” This sentiment again cuts across racial lines: 71% of black respondents, 78% of coloureds, 80% of Indians, and 83% of whites agreed. These views confirm that the public does not see inequality as a permanent racial condition, but as a problem that can be overcome through growth, opportunity, and education. The preference is not for racial engineering but for inclusion through work and learning.



Taken together, these results present a portrait of a society more united in socio-economic and values outlook than its politics might often suggest.

While South Africans might differ in how they perceive the trajectory of race relations, the overwhelming majority believe progress is possible through socio-economic opportunity and upliftment. Economic inclusion, education, and employment correlate directly with optimism, suggesting that material opportunity, rather than racial grievance, is the foundation of national cohesion. The country's social stability depends less on symbolic gestures than on expanding the spaces, like schools, workplaces, and businesses, where ordinary cooperation takes root.

The data, however, also carry an implicit warning. The decline from earlier years of IRR polling on this question in the proportion of respondents saying relations have improved may reflect fatigue with persistent inequality and poor governance. If that trend continues, political actors who trade on division could find more fertile ground, despite the current potential of non-racial politics focused on material progress and upliftment.

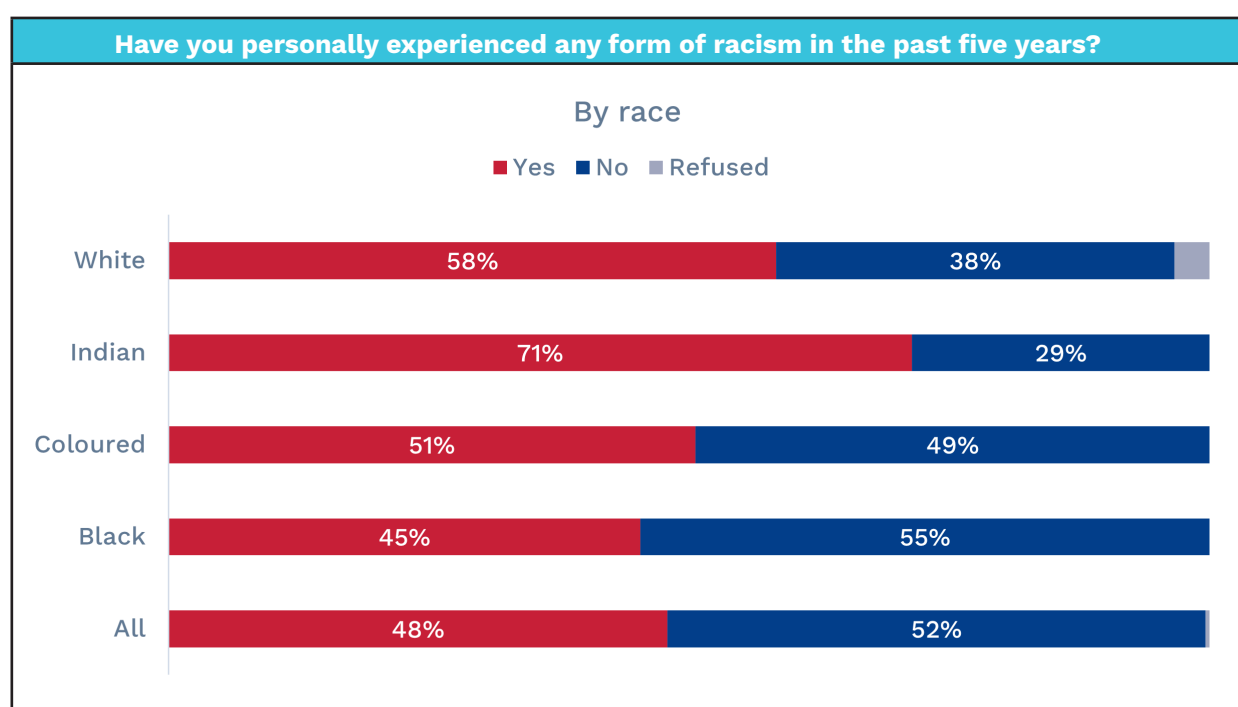
The broader lesson of the IRR's 2025 polling remains hopeful: South Africans' lived experience of cross-racial engagements, especially among the young and economically active, continues to reinforce a shared, pragmatic belief that non-racial cooperation is both desirable and achievable.

The emerging theme across all indicators is that South Africans are not trapped in racial polarisation but are navigating inequality and disappointment within a fundamentally moderate, non-racial consensus. Where opportunity widens, trust and good will grow, but where exclusion persists, pessimism follows. The challenge from this point forward, especially in terms of politics and policy, is to align governmental decisions with this constructive consensus by replacing race-based grievance rhetoric with real material upliftment through economic growth, education, and job creation.

Racism as lived reality and as political rhetoric

Moving beyond perceptions of whether race relations have improved since 1994, the IRR's 2025 polling also examined whether South Africans themselves have personally experienced racism in recent years. The results show that racism remains a lived reality for many, yet not at the scale or along the rigid lines suggested by public debate and political rhetoric.

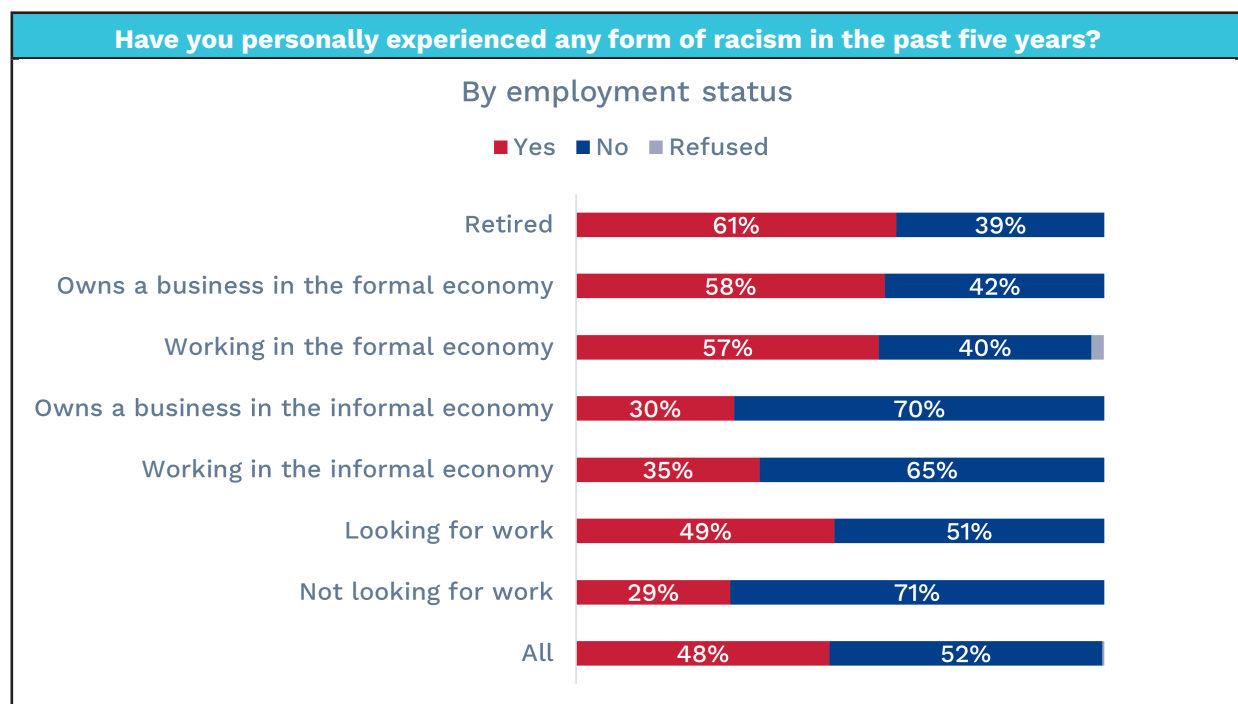
Overall, 48% of South Africans report that they have personally experienced some form of racism in the past five years, while 52% say they have not. These findings confirm that prejudice remains part of social life, but also that a narrow majority of the public does not experience it directly. In a society as diverse as South Africa's, this indicates both progress and friction: prejudice still surfaces, but it does so within a context of growing integration and contact rather than entrenched segregation.



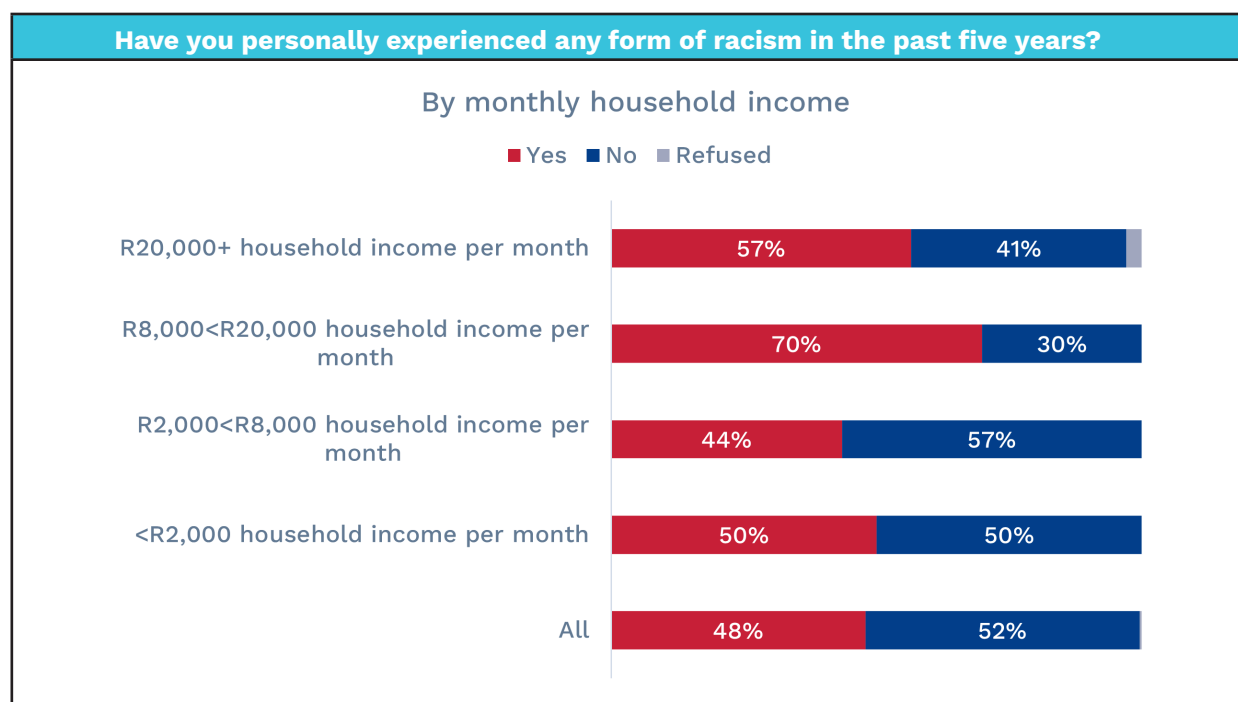
The data reveal striking differences across racial groups. Indians are the most likely to report experiences of racism (71%), followed by whites (58%), coloureds (51%), and blacks (45%). At first glance, this seems to invert South Africa's historic racial hierarchy of grievance. In reality, these patterns reflect exposure and competition within an integrated society rather than evidence of systemic hostility. Minorities, by definition, are more likely to find themselves outnumbered in workplaces, schools, or communities, where prejudice, sometimes casual, sometimes reactive, can occur.

For white and Indian South Africans, higher rates of reported racism likely reflect their strong presence in mixed, economically competitive environments. It is also plausible that the continued presence of explicitly racial government policies, particularly BEE and race-based procurement, reinforces a sense among minorities of being subject to unfair treatment based on race. These policies, despite being justified as redress, have largely failed to uplift the majority of black South Africans and instead keep racial categorisation alive as a bureaucratic fact of life. The outcome is not necessarily greater racial animosity, but heightened sensitivity to being treated through the lens of colour rather than merit.

The relationship between economic participation and experiences of racism is telling of the impact of policy on race relations and experiences. Among those in formal employment, 57% report having faced racism, compared with 30% of informal workers and 35% of informal business owners. Among those looking for work, 49% report experiences of racism, while among those not seeking work the figure falls to 29%.

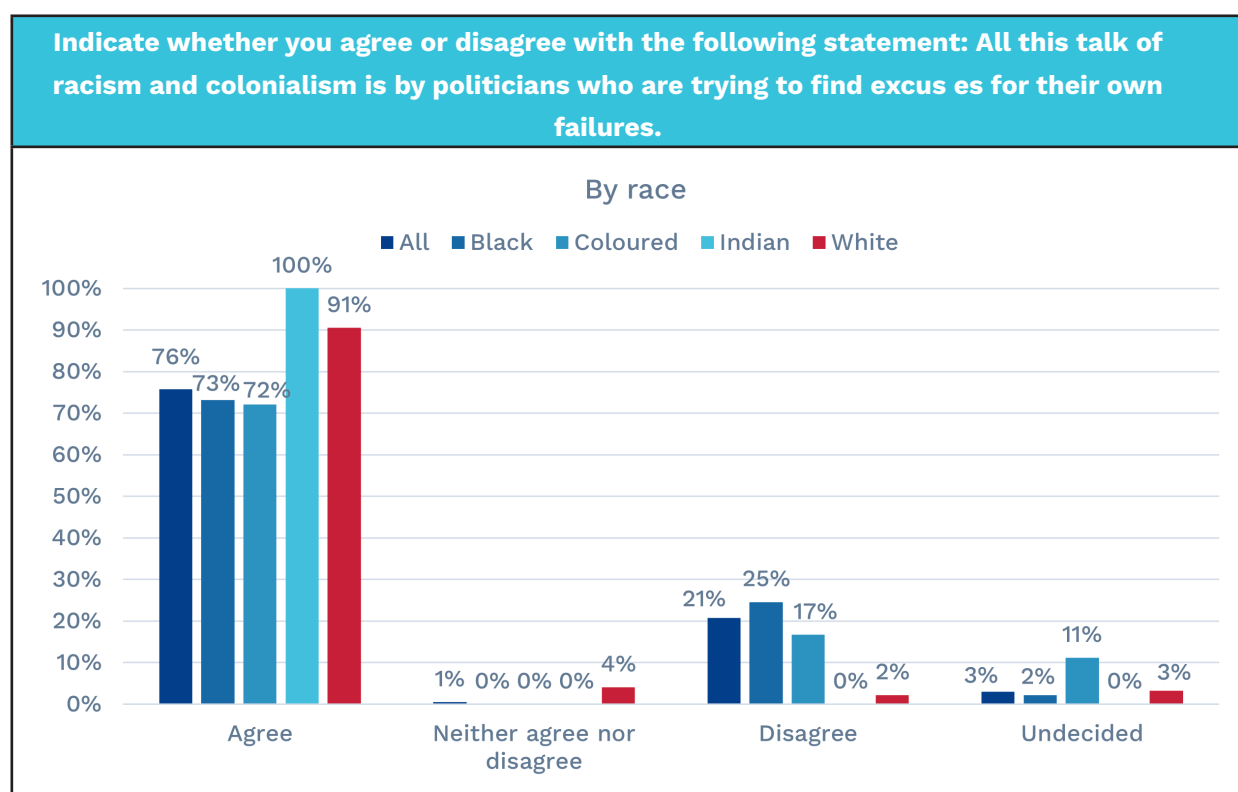


Income follows the same trajectory. 50% of those earning below R2 000 per month say they have experienced racism, compared with 44% in the R2 000–R8 000 range, 70% in the R8 000–R20 000 range, and 57% among those above R20 000. The significance of policies affecting professional relationships in places of work and socio-economic activity, like BEE and employment equity, cannot be ignored in considering the experience of racism.



The findings that personal encounters with racism are most commonly reported by white and Indian South Africans, by those employed in the formal sector, and by individuals whose incomes place them within the middle class are significant. Since racial goodwill is clearly reflected in other survey results, especially in strong agreement that South Africans of all races need one another and that opportunities should be open to everyone regardless of race, the implication is clear: many of the reported experiences of racism arise among groups most exposed to racially defined policies such as BEE and employment equity. The data thus suggest a direct relationship between these policies and the incidence of perceived racism. The conclusion, stark but hopeful, is that eliminating such policies would likely reduce personal experiences of racism and strengthen race relations overall in South Africa.

Importantly, however, the persistence of racism as a social reality, even if in part driven by government policy, does not translate into public acceptance or approval of its political use. While nearly half of respondents report personal experiences of racism, three in four South Africans (76%) agree that politicians use racism and colonialism as excuses for failure. Agreement is high across racial lines: 73% among blacks, 72% among coloureds, 100% among Indians, and 91% among whites.



This consensus indicates that while South Africans recognise prejudice when they encounter it, they also recognise when it is exploited for political gain. Ordinary citizens distinguish between racism as a lived experience and racism as a rhetorical weapon. They are not in denial about discrimination, but they have grown resistant to its use as a substitute for accountability.

The findings also underscore the link between race and opportunity. A strong majority, 73% of all respondents, agree that “with better education and more jobs, the present inequality between the races will steadily disappear.” This belief explains why voters increasingly reject racial grievance politics as basis for electoral loyalty as found in the first report of this series on the IRR’s polling in 2025: they associate progress not with greater racial regulation, but with greater opportunity. The same logic explains why the employed and upwardly mobile report both more experiences of racism and greater confidence in the country’s racial future. Contact generates tension, but it also creates shared purpose.

Interpreting the dual reality

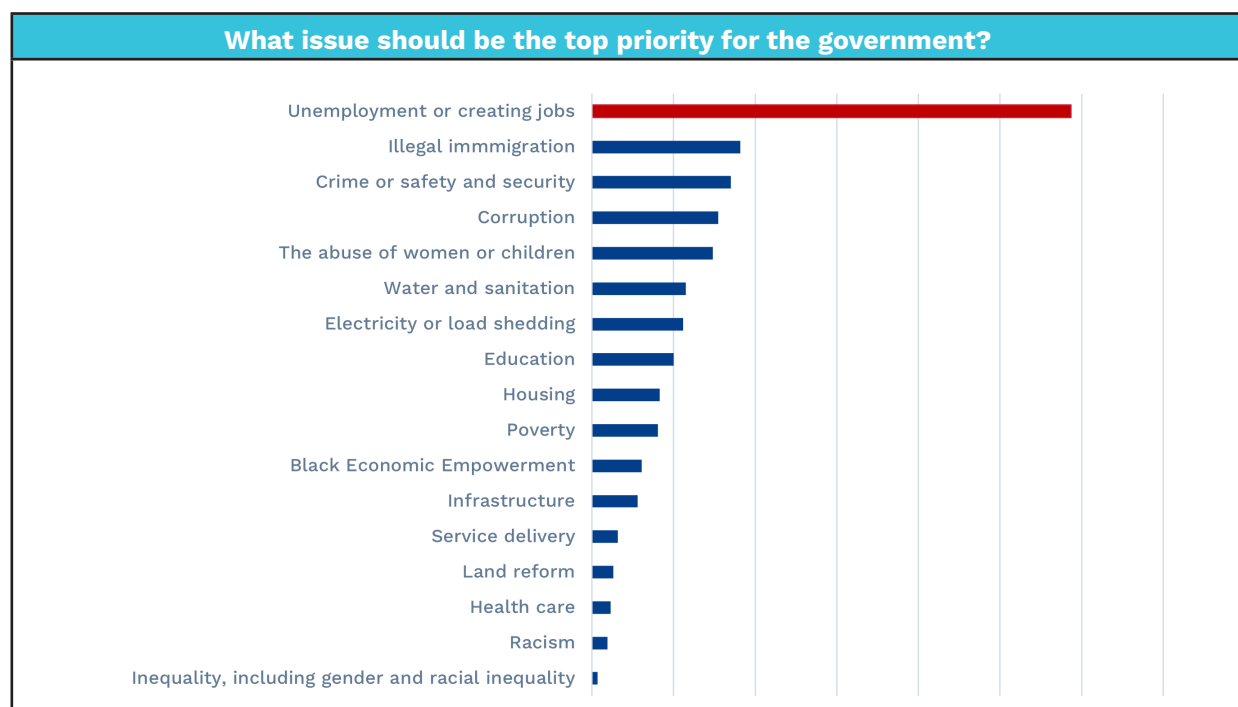
Taken together, the data portray a dual reality. Racism persists as an everyday experience, but it no longer defines South Africa’s social or political order. Prejudice exists within communities, not as a top-down system, and most citizens recognise it as part of the friction of normal life in a mixed society. South Africans have, in effect, normalised difference without accepting discrimination. They reject racism morally, but they also reject its weaponisation politically.

Where South Africans work, study, and live together in shared economic and civic spaces, they encounter racial friction in correspondence to the legal requirements for racialised socio-economic environments. Policy is therefore a destructive driver of damaging racism in South Africa. Yet, at the same time, most people also perceive improvement in race relations over the longer term, and a firm, non-racial cooperative aspiration.

This dynamic exposes the heart of South Africa’s racial reality: sound race relations are not the product of racial policy but of shared opportunity and the foundation of socio-economic aspiration. The more people earn, learn, and interact, the less race defines their prospects and the more they see each other as partners rather than rivals. In this sense, socio-economic experience is not a backdrop to racial harmony, but, as affirmed by the people when asked directly, its engine. Political efforts that divide by race therefore work against the grain of ordinary life, while policies that expand merit-based opportunity encourage the opposite.

National priorities are deracialised

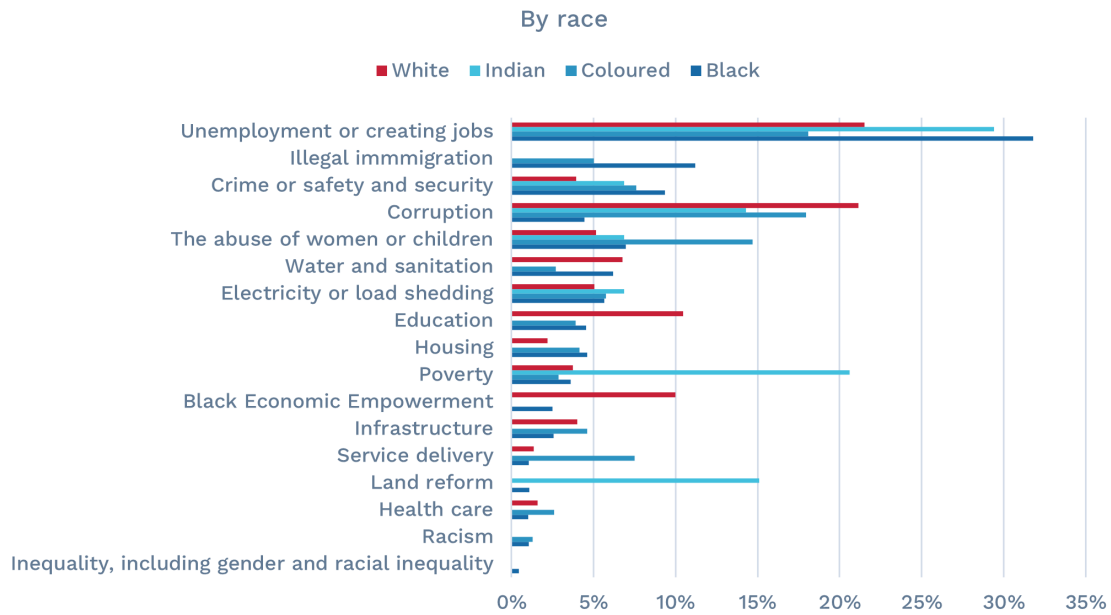
When South Africans are asked to identify the two most important issues government should address, the results show a society focused on delivery rather than race. Unemployment and job creation were chosen by 38% of respondents, followed by corruption at 10% and crime at 9%. By contrast, only 2% mentioned racism, 4% cited black economic empowerment (BEE), and 1% identified inequality.



This hierarchy of concerns has remained consistent across successive IRR surveys. Unemployment has consistently occupied the top position, while corruption and crime have competed for second and third place. Race-related issues have never risen beyond the low single digits of percentages of South Africans considering them one of the top two national priorities. The pattern demonstrates a long-standing stability: public priorities are grounded in economic opportunity and security, the material circumstances of ordinary people, not in racial grievance.

The cross-racial consistency of these priorities is striking. Among black respondents, 39% named jobs as their leading concern, closely mirrored by 36% of coloureds, 42% of Indians, and 37% of whites. Corruption and crime were the main secondary issues across all groups. Race-related concerns scarcely appeared. Only 3% of black respondents and 1% of whites cited racism, while just 5% of blacks and 3% of coloureds mentioned BEE.

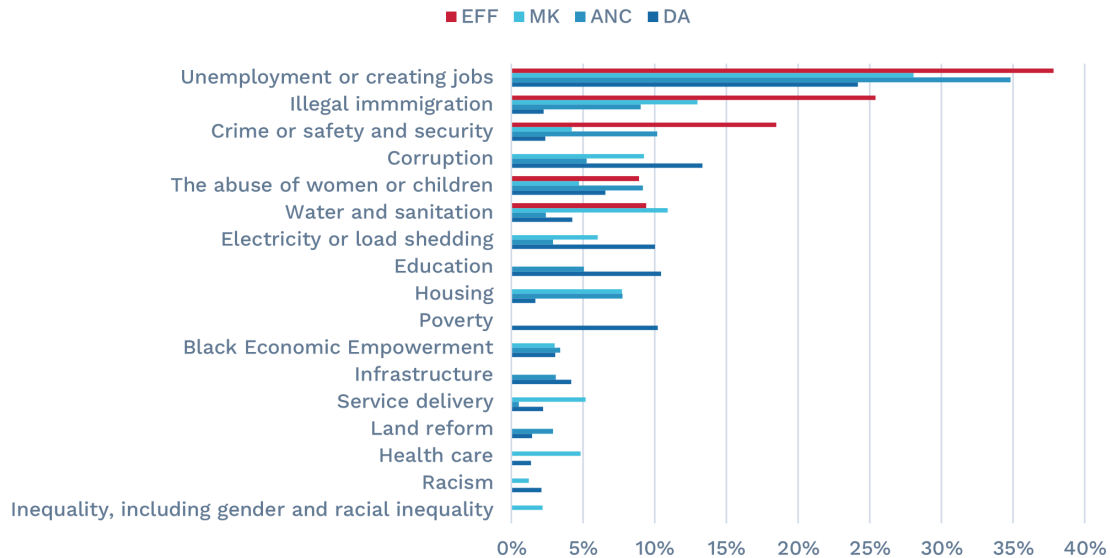
What issue should be the top priority for the government?



This alignment is not confined to race groups but is also evident across political affiliations. Among ANC supporters, 42% chose jobs, 11% corruption, and 9% crime. Among DA supporters, the corresponding figures were 37%, 12%, and 10%. EFF and MK voters gave similar responses, with jobs by far the dominant concern. Even among supporters of parties whose leaders regularly emphasise racial themes, only a handful of voters listed racism or BEE as priorities.

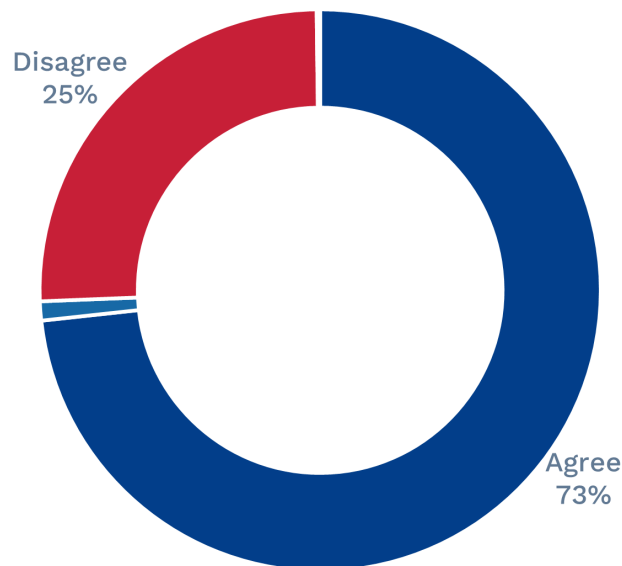
What issue should be the top priority for the government?

By political party support

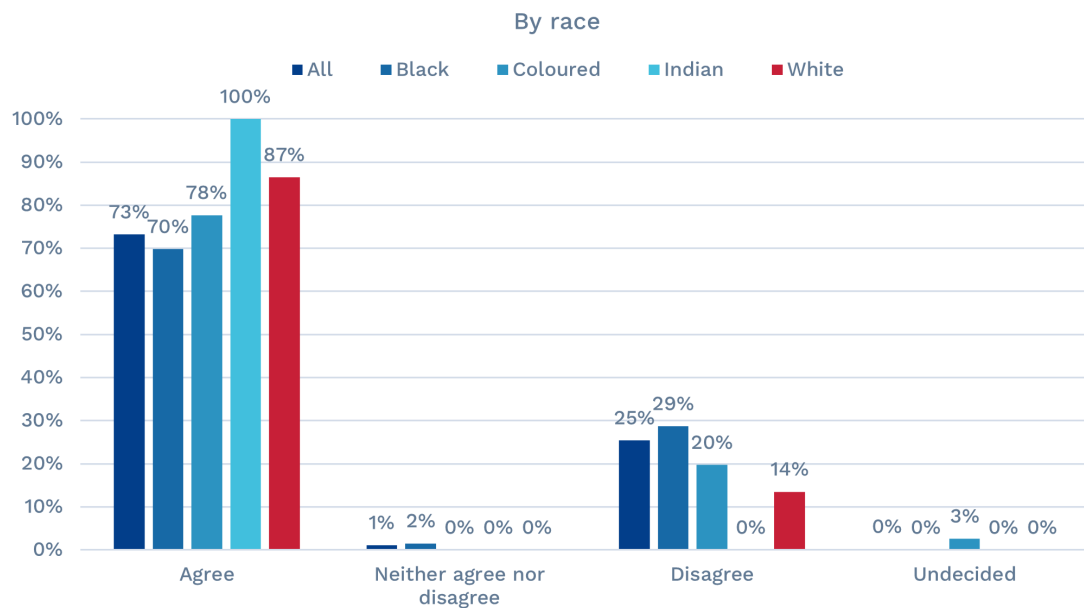


The question of inequality sheds further light on how voters interpret these priorities. Asked whether “with better education and more jobs, the present inequality between the races will steadily disappear,” nearly three-quarters of respondents (73%) agreed. Agreement was high across all groups: 71% of blacks, 78% of coloureds, 80% of Indians, and 83% of whites.

Indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: With better education and more jobs, the present inequality between the races will steadily disappear.



Indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: With better education and more jobs, the present inequality between the races will steadily disappear.



This finding underscores the connection between the electorate's priorities and its view of socio-economic inequality explored earlier in this report and in the previous report in this series. For most South Africans, racial inequality is not seen as an immutable divide. It is understood as the product of poor schooling and high unemployment, and therefore as something that can be resolved through growth and opportunity. Education and jobs are not only top concerns in their own right, but are also widely seen as the most effective means of overcoming inequality between race.

The consistency of these results over several IRR surveys suggests that this is an entrenched pattern, not a temporary response to current events in 2025 at the time of this survey. Even in periods when political leaders have heightened racial rhetoric, voters have kept their focus on jobs, crime, and corruption. The electorate's view of inequality is equally pragmatic: it can and should be addressed through education and work rather than permanent quotas or redistribution.

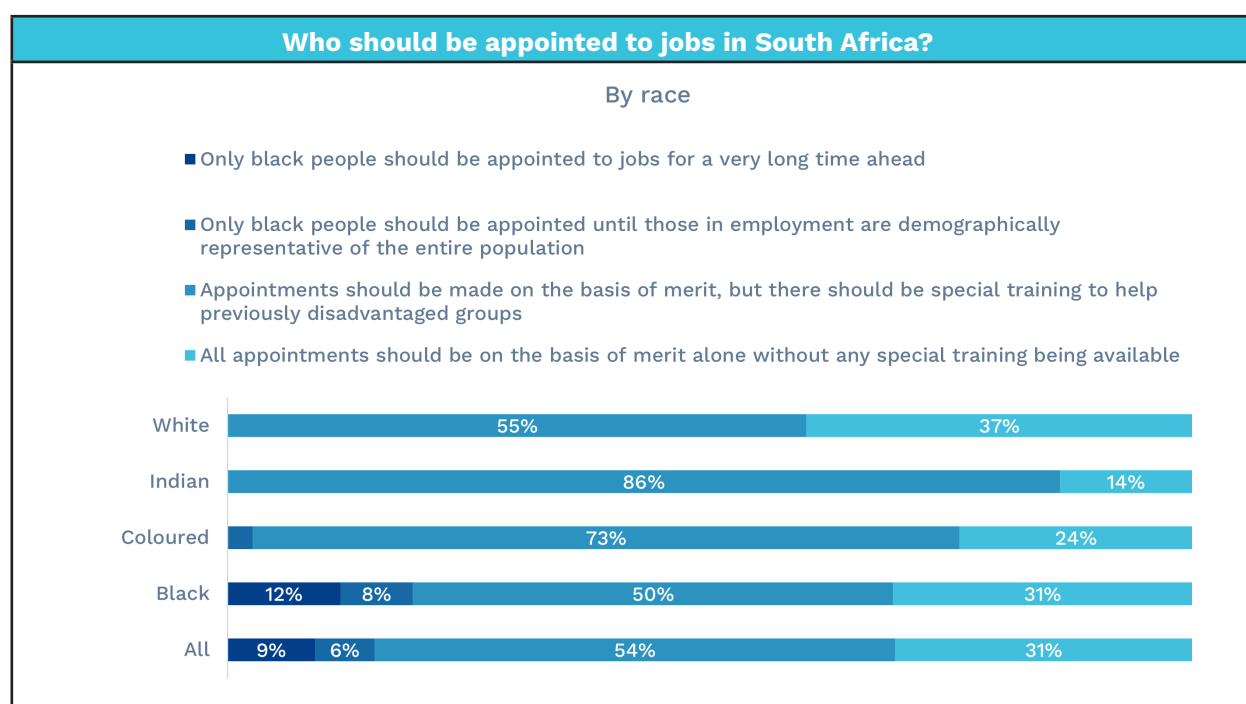
The evidence from the national prioritisation of these issues shows that South Africans are more united by a shared socio-economic developmental and aspirational outlook than divided by racial grievance. The people of South Africa expect government to create the circumstances necessary for opportunity and ensure basic competence in service delivery. Race, while not absent as a source of some friction from the lives of South Africans, does not define national political priorities. In the public mind, reconciliation and equality will come not from race-based redress of grievance, but from the delivery of jobs and skills.

Fairness over racial favouritism in competition as common ground

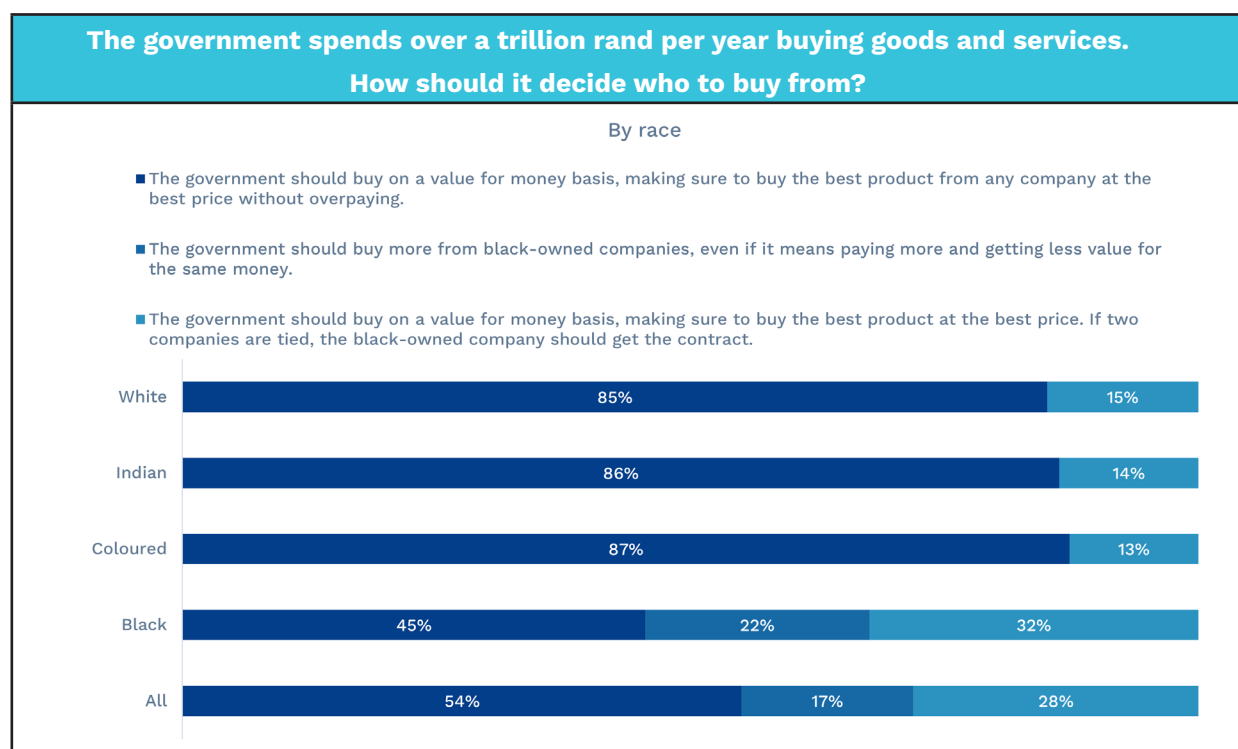
Few legacies of apartheid cut deeper than the denial of fair economic participation through competition. For generations, opportunity was rationed by law, and, through such policies as apartheid-era job reservations, competence counted for less than colour. The post-1994 democratic era has contained significant promise of reversing these unjust exclusions, but has increasingly attempted to do so, at least in public description of government policies, by engineering outcomes through quotas, targets, and preferences in labour markets and through procurement favouritism.

The assumption on which such policies have been based has been that justice must mean a prioritisation of proportional racial representation within the scope of existing opportunity rather than the expansion of opportunity as a rising tide. The findings in this report suggest that ordinary South Africans consider the issue of eradicating historic socio-economic exclusion somewhat differently. For them, fairness and upward social mobility become achievable not through permanent state-driven socio-economic engineering but through an opportunity economy based on fair and open competition, where skills and effort, decide the outcome, yet where those worse off have access to augmentative skills development for merit-based socio-economic contestation.

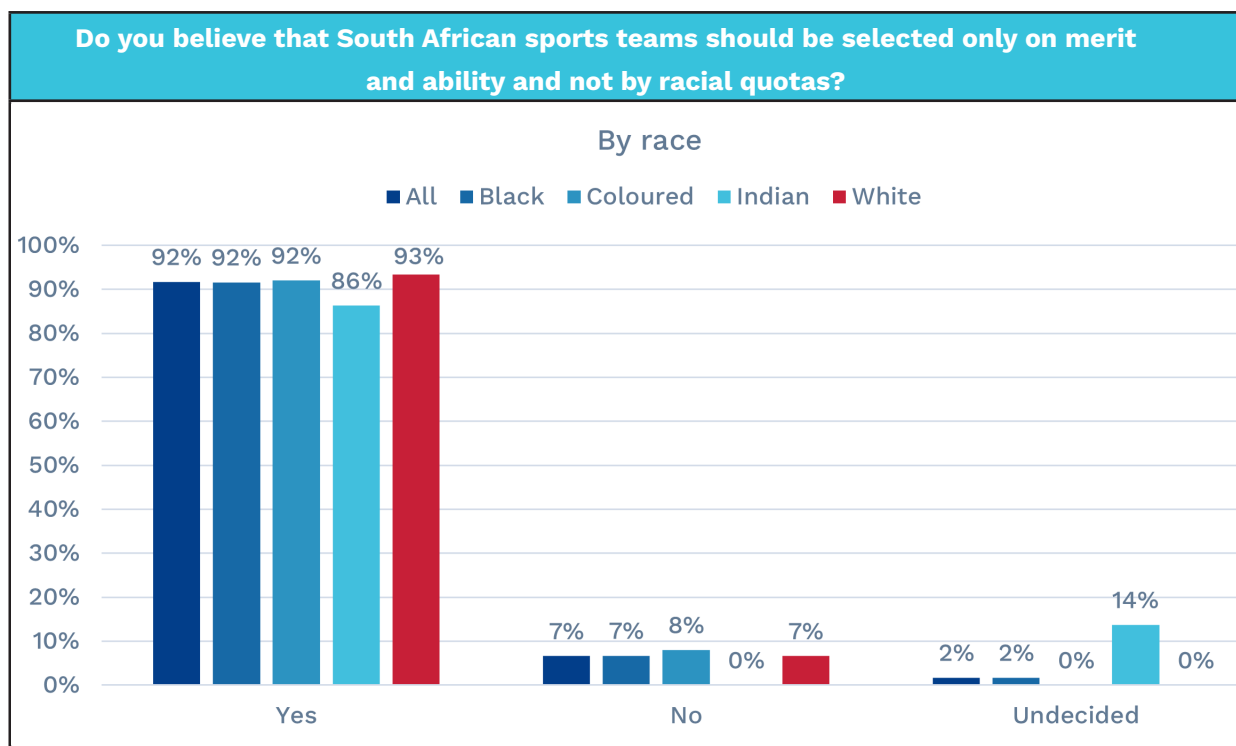
As discussed in the previous report in this series on IRR polling in 2025, on government appointments, the message is overwhelming and illustrative of a cross-racial consensus. 84% of respondents said merit should be the guiding rule. A majority, 53%, chose merit with training for the disadvantaged, recognising that inequality must be addressed but insisting it be done by building capacity, not thumbing labour and equity scales. A further 31% support a purely merit-based approach. Only 15% endorsed race-based criteria. These preferences cut across the lines of race and party: 82% of black respondents, 86% of coloureds, 84% of Indians, and 93% of whites backed merit-based options. Even among ANC supporters, 73% rejected racial quotas in job appointments. Among EFF supporters, nearly all, 94%, did the same.



Public opinion on the issue of public procurement, the policy domain within which policies like BEE have primarily operated, reveals a similar pragmatic and outcomes-focused instinct. Asked whether public procurement contracts should go to black-owned businesses at higher cost or to the best-value supplier, more than half of respondents, 54%, chose value-for-money. Only 17% favoured racial preference. Among black South Africans, nearly half (45%) preferred efficiency over preference, a striking result given how procurement has been presented as a flagship tool of racial redress. Coloured respondents split 62% to 13% in favour of value-for-money, Indians 55% to 15%, and whites 79% to 3%. Across the spectrum, people no longer equate fairness with preference. They equate it with delivery.



Sport, perhaps one of the most visible platforms of national representation, shows this pattern most starkly. 92% of respondents said national teams should be selected on merit alone. Only 6% supported quotas. The majorities for merit-based selection in sports were almost unanimous in every racial group: 92% of blacks, 92% of coloureds, 86% of Indians, and 93% of whites. These findings emulate prior years of polling, indicating a stable basis of opinion rather than an outlier finding. From 2021 to 2024, a consistent overwhelming majority of South Africans, 87-92%, indicated a preference for merit-based national team selection. In an area of policy often politicised as a mirror of society, voters themselves demand excellence, not engineered racial balance.



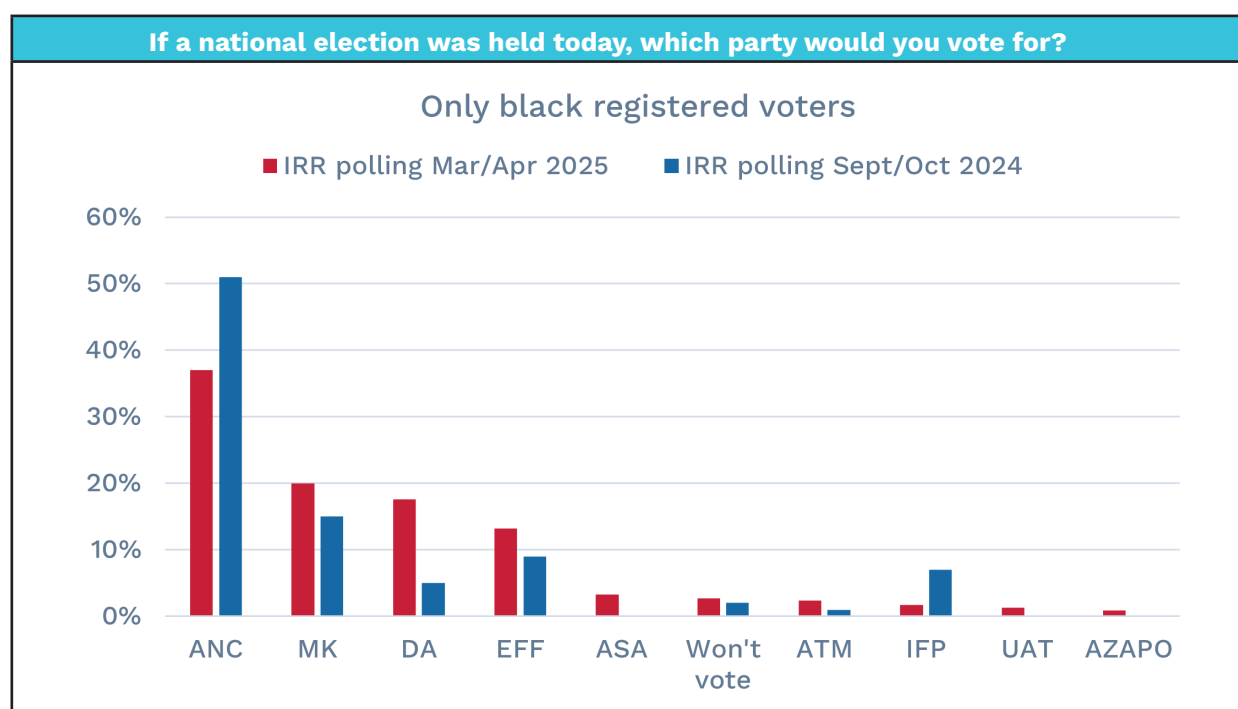
On the matters, therefore, of job opportunities, public procurement, and sport, the non-racial preference is unmistakable. South Africans do not deny disadvantage. They recognise it and want it overcome, yet the preferred means of achieving such is through training, support, and opportunity. The people of South Africa, quite simply, do not want race to govern results. Fairness, therefore, is not the manipulation of outcomes, but the guarantee that everyone can compete to allow ability, not the government, to set the outcomes.

This outlook marks a profound insight at odds with much of the skewed political debate on the matter of racial representativity. The law treats proportional racial representation as a measure of justice, despite ordinary South Africans rejecting this premise. For ordinary people, fairness does not mean matching the ledger of apartheid-era racial categories, but rewarding competence and ensuring that opportunities are not wasted and its skills base expanded at the competitive input stage of merit-based competition. This rejects the outcomes-based obsession of targeted racial box ticking. These policy preferences reflect a vision of social justice rooted in pragmatism and a well-established non-racial consensus.

Race and party politics

For multiple decades, South Africa's politics has been read through the lens of race, before and after 1994: the ANC has been considered by many in politics as the party of black South Africans, the DA as the party of minorities, with the EFF and, more recently also MK as the radical heirs of black grievance. In the IRR 2025 survey, as set out in the first report in this series on IRR polling in 2025, the ANC and DA each stood at roughly 30%, with MK at 16% and the EFF at 10%. Yet beneath those figures lies a quieter change of importance in considering race and race relations in South Africa. The electorate is shifting, and racial boundaries are not as rigid as they once were.

The most telling sign is the DA's advance among black voters. Around 18% of black voters now say they would support the DA, a far higher share than in previous years when the party was more easily dismissed as a "white" party, with only around 5% of black voters indicating support for the DA. This is possibly part of a broader pattern of deracialised thinking: voters are more willing than ever to express a preference for policies that speak to material benefit over racial preference.



Across every major party base, this same pattern emerges. Among ANC supporters, nearly three-quarters favour merit in appointments over race quotas, despite their party's embrace of employment equity. Among EFF supporters, the figure is even higher at 94%. On procurement, ANC, DA, EFF, and MK voters all prefer value-for-money to racial targets. On sport, overwhelming majorities in each party reject quotas. Even on the Expropriation Act, presented as a test of redress and more thoroughly considered in the previous report in this series, opposition runs across party lines, including among ANC and EFF voters.

This is the current paradox of South African politics: many leaders still trade on racial rhetoric, but their voters no longer associate along these simple racial lines in terms of what they expect from those in power. Political competition continues, but it is increasingly taking place within a shared framework of non-racial expectations. People differ on who they trust to deliver, even if they do not differ on what they expect to be delivered.

The implications are significant as political changes continue heading into the 2026/7 local government elections. The electorate has outgrown the racial blocs that dominate political positioning.

Conclusion

The findings of this survey cut through decades of political noise: race still influences experience in South Africa, but it no longer structures the electorate's values or priorities. Almost half of respondents report direct encounters with racism, yet three-quarters regard racial rhetoric as little more than a shield for political failure. Racism exists as a social reality, but it has lost credibility as a political explanation.

The hierarchy of concerns is decisively deracialised. Jobs, corruption, and crime dominate public priorities; racism and BEE scarcely register. Three-quarters believe inequality will diminish through education and work. Overwhelming majorities back merit in appointments, value in procurement, and excellence in sport. These are not isolated datapoints. They form a coherent pattern. South Africans define fairness and justice in non-racial, competence-driven terms.

This consensus carries direct consequences. The ANC's continued reliance on race-based quotas, procurement targets, and expropriation policy is not only misaligned with minority voters but opposed by majorities within its own base. Persisting on this path accelerates estrangement from the electorate and risks turning electoral decline into collapse. Opposition parties cannot assume advantage by default: the DA, EFF, and MK each face the test of proving that their rhetoric can be matched by delivery on jobs, security, and competence.

The conclusion is therefore unavoidable: South Africa's electorate has deracialised, while its political class has not. Race remains a lived experience, but it is no longer the axis on which issues ought to be decided. Political and societal actors who fail to adapt to this reality will not only misgovern, but sacrifice social standing and put at risk their own survival.

Addendum A

Sampling method

The survey employed a random digit-dialling (RDD) method, targeting mobile phone users. The sampling frame included all possible mobile numbers in South Africa, ensuring that every registered voter had an equal probability of selection. This approach is critical for generalisability and reduces potential biases associated with predefined lists.

Sample size and screening

A total of 807 respondents participated in the p, comprising a diverse demographic cross-section. The design effect (DEFF) of 1.5589 was applied to the analysis, accounting for sample design complexities.

The survey was limited to registered voters, ensuring the data reflected the electorate's views. It is important to note that no turnout scenario is applied.

Data collection

Data was collected using Computer-Assisted Telephonic Interviews (CATI), a reliable method that ensures consistency in questionnaire administration and minimises interviewer bias.

Margin of error and confidence level

The results have a margin of error of $\pm 4\%$ at a 95% confidence level, indicating that the findings are highly reliable and represent public opinion within this range.

Questionnaire design

The survey questionnaire was carefully structured to ensure clarity, relevance, and balance. Key design features included:

1. Structure: Questions were grouped thematically, covering governance, economic priorities, race relations, and quality of life.
2. Neutral language: Wording was neutral to avoid influencing respondents' answers.
3. Follow-up questions: Where necessary, follow-ups addressed uncertainty (e.g., "If you had to choose, which party would you support?" for undecided voters).

Data weighting

To ensure the sample accurately reflected the national population, the data were weighted according to key demographic factors, including:

- Age
- Gender
- Province
- Urban *versus* rural residency

This weighting process ensures that findings are representative of South Africa's multifaceted and demographically complex electorate.

Respondent demographics

The survey sample of registered voters represents a diverse cross-section of South African society, ensuring the findings reflect the nation's socio-economic, geographic, and cultural diversity. Below is a detailed overview of the demographic distribution. To the extent that racial categories are used, these have been done purely on the basis of respondents' own racial self-classification.

Geographic distribution

Respondents were drawn from all nine provinces, with the highest representation from Gauteng (23.5%) and KwaZulu-Natal (19%). Smaller contributions came from the Northern Cape (1.5%) and Free State (7.2%).

Province	% of Respondents
Gauteng	23.5%
KwaZulu-Natal	19%
Eastern Cape	12.5%
Limpopo	12.1%
Western Cape	10.7%
Free State	7.2%
Mpumalanga	7.1%
North West	6.5%
Northern Cape	1.5%

Respondents were drawn from the full range of residential area types, with the highest coming from tribal land and township areas, 37.1% and 30.3% respectively.

Residential area type	% of Respondents
Tribal land	37.1%
Township	30.3%
Suburb	18%
Informal	6.7%
Central Business District (CBD)	6.4%
Commercial farm	1.4%
Smallholding	0.1%

Age and gender

The survey skewed toward older respondents, with 35.2% aged between 45 and 64, and 18.9% aged 65 or older. This focus reflects the predominance of older and therefore registered voters.

Age Group	% of Respondents
18-24	3.4%
25-34	14.2%
35-44	28.3%
45-64	35.2%
65+	18.9%

Language

isiZulu speakers formed the largest language group (22%), followed by isiXhosa (18.9%) and Afrikaans (12.4%).

Home Language	% of Respondents
isiZulu	22%
isiXhosa	18.9%
Afrikaans	12.4%
Sesotho	12.2%
English	10.5%
Other languages	24%

Employment and income

Employment data revealed that 39.7% of respondents were seeking work, while 15.7% were retired and 15.6% were employed in the formal sector. Income levels varied, with the largest group earning between R2,000 and R8,000 per month (57.7%).

Income Level	% of Respondents
<R2 000	13%
R2 000<R8 000	57.7%
R8 000<R20 000	10.1%
R20 000+	13%
Did not disclose	6.1%

The socio-economically diverse respondent pool set out above ensures a robust and representative dataset, allowing for nuanced analysis of South Africans' perceptions across regions, age groups, and socio-economic statuses.



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