

Race Relations in South Africa  
**REASONS FOR HOPE 2017**



**SOUND**

**But Fraying at the Edges**



**IRR**

South African Institute of Race Relations  
*The power of ideas*



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## The state of South Africa's race relations

In December 2016, roughly a year after Penny Sparrow's hurtful and insulting comments equating black beachgoers in KwaZulu-Natal to 'monkeys', remarks of a similar kind were made in another *Facebook* post. Commenting on a photograph of a packed Durban beach, Sandton resident Ben Sasanof wrote that the crowded beach 'must have smelt like the inside of Zuma's asshole'. When critics accused him of racism for this incendiary analogy, Mr Sasanof responded with yet more outrageous remarks. He also called one commentator 'a monkey'.<sup>1</sup>

Several other racially offensive comments also came to light during 2016. Estate agent Vicki Momberg, the victim of a smash-and-grab robbery, was caught on video using the 'k-word' and reportedly saying that she would drive over black people and shoot them if she had a gun.<sup>2</sup> Matthew Theunissen, a young Cape Town resident, called the government 'a bunch of k\*\*\*\*\*s' after sports minister Fikile Mbalula banned four sporting codes, including cricket and rugby, from bidding for international tournaments because of their failure to comply with racial quotas.<sup>3</sup> Another Cape Town resident, Vanessa Hartley, likened black people to 'stupid animals' who 'flocked to Hout Bay' and should be 'tied to a rope...before there was nothing left' of the town.<sup>4</sup>

Various threats of violence against whites were also reported. Velaphi Khumalo, an employee of the Gauteng provincial administration, tweeted that whites should be 'hacked and killed like Jews' and their children 'used as garden fertiliser'. Other comments by black South Africans called for whites to be 'poisoned and killed', urged 'the total destruction of white people', and advocated a civil war in which 'all white people would be killed'.<sup>5</sup> In August 2016 a member of the students' representative council (SRC) at the University of Pretoria, Luvuyo Menziwa, cited 'white previllage (sic), white dominance, and white monopoly capital' as some of his reasons for 'hating white people'. His post concluded: 'F\*\*\* White People, just get me a bazooka or AK47 so I can do the right thing and kill these demon possessed (sic) humans'.<sup>6</sup>

*During 2016, many damaging racial comments were given persistent and splash coverage by the media, reinforcing perceptions that South Africa might yet descend into a racial war. The IRR thus again commissioned a field survey to find out how South African themselves view race relations.*

Julius Malema, leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), added to the threats of violence against whites. Having been charged under the Riotous Assemblies Act of 1956 for inciting land invasions, he emerged from a court appearance in Newcastle (KwaZulu-Natal) in November 2016 to say: 'They (white people) found peaceful Africans here. They killed them. They slaughtered them, like animals! We are not calling for the slaughter of white people, at least for now!'<sup>7</sup>

Comments of this kind have been given persistent and splash coverage by the media, reinforcing perceptions that South Africa might yet descend into a race war. Against this charged background, the IRR once again commissioned a field survey aimed at cutting through the rhetoric and finding out how South Africans themselves view race relations in the country.

The 2016 field survey was a follow-up to an earlier one carried out in September 2015. (The IRR reported on the results of this survey in March 2016 under the title *Race Relations in South Africa, Reasons for Hope*.) The 2016 survey canvassed the views of a carefully balanced sample of 2 291 people from all nine provinces. It covered both rural and urban areas and all socio-economic strata. Of the respondents, 78% were black, 9.2% were coloured, 2.8% were Indian, and 9.9% were white.

The sampling, fieldwork, and data-processing for the IRR's 2016 opinion survey were again carried out by MarkData (Pty) Ltd, an organisation with some 30 years' experience in conducting field surveys for public, private, and civil society organisations. The survey was an 'omnibus' one, which was carried out across the country by means of personal face-to-face interviews. All of these interviews were conducted by trained and experienced field teams in the languages chosen by respondents themselves.

Most of the questions posed in 2016 echoed those asked in 2015. Some of the 2016 questions, like the 2015 ones, were also modelled on questions first posed by the IRR in 2001, in a much earlier field survey of racial issues likewise carried out by MarkData. The aim of repeating some of the questions posed in 2001 was to track trends over the intervening years.

The most important differences in the outcomes of the 2015 and 2016 field surveys are highlighted in the text that follows. The overall differences in these survey results are set out in *Table 13*. Key differences in the IRR's survey results over the 15-year period from 2001 to 2016 are to be found in *Table 14*.

*The results of the 2016 survey are again mainly positive, for the views of the overwhelming majority of South Africans are very different from the damaging vitriol to be found on social media.*

The results of the 2016 survey are again mainly positive and should once more fill the country with hope. The views of the overwhelming majority of South Africans are very different from the damaging vitriol to be found on social media and that often seems to dominate the race debate. Contrary to what many commentators claim, the 2016 survey shows that some 72% of South Africans report no personal experience of racism in their daily lives. In addition, more than half of respondents (55%) believe race relations have improved since 1994, while a much smaller proportion (13%) think they have worsened. Few South Africans regard racism as a serious unresolved problem, with 3% of respondents identifying it in this way. An overwhelming majority (84%) agree that the different races need each other and that there should be full opportunities for people of all colours.

These findings confirm how important it is for South Africans across the colour line to be able to slice through the racial rhetoric and identify what their fellow countrymen truly think on a range of race-related issues. They can then base their understanding on sound data, rather than damaging conjecture. The IRR's field surveys help to fulfil this important need.

### **South Africa's most serious problems**

The 2016 field survey began by asking respondents to identify what they themselves regarded as the two most serious problems not yet resolved since 1994. No prompting was provided and respondents were free to list any issue that was important to them. Their answers are shown in *Table 1* below. (Proportions exceed 100% because more than one problem could be mentioned.)

The two top problems identified in 2016 were joblessness and poor service delivery. In total, 40% of South Africans saw unemployment as the most pressing problem. In addition, 34% cited problems with service delivery, which they saw as including a lack of water, electricity, roads, and street lighting. Other key concerns were a lack of housing (cited by 18%), crime (15%) and problems in education (cited also by 15%). By contrast, some 6% of respondents identified racism, together with inequality and xenophobia, as a serious unresolved problem. Racism alone was cited by 3% of all respondents and by 2% of blacks. This is a particularly noteworthy outcome because answers were not prompted in any way and respondents were free to list any issue important to them.



**Table 1, 2016 IRR field survey**

<b>Most serious unresolved problems</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Coloured</b>	<b>Indian</b>	<b>White</b>
Unemployment	39.7%	42.0%	36.8%	30.7%	25.8%
Service delivery/water/electricity/roads	33.6%	37.4%	15.5%	22.5%	23.1%
Lack of housing	18.2%	19.8%	17.3%	8.3%	9.6%
Crime	14.9%	10.8%	24.5%	40.3%	31.3%
Education (cost, quality, access)	14.7%	15.8%	14.5%	8.7%	9.1%
Corruption/nepotism	8.5%	6.7%	6.9%	27.5%	19.0%
Poverty	6.9%	5.7%	12.7%	11.1%	10.4%
<b>Racism (including inequality, xenophobia)</b>	<b>6.4%</b>	<b>6.0%</b>	<b>4.5%</b>	<b>11.8%</b>	<b>10.4%</b>
<b>Racism (alone)</b>	<b>3.2%</b>	<b>2.4%</b>	<b>3.0%</b>	<b>7.2%</b>	<b>9.0%</b>
Land distribution	0.6%	0.5%	0.9%	0.0%	1.3%

### Have race relations improved?

The 2016 field survey also asked respondents if, in their view, race relations had improved, stayed the same, or worsened since 1994. Their answers are set out in *Table 2*. Significantly, more than half (55%) of respondents thought they had improved, while just over a quarter (27%) felt they had stayed the same. Overall, more than 80% of respondents thought race relations had either improved or stayed the same, while roughly 5% said they did not know.

Some 13% thought race relations had become worse, with 11% of blacks expressing this view. Most of the concern about worsening race relations came from coloured, Indian, and white people.

**Table 2, 2016 IRR field survey**

<b>Race relations since 1994</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Coloured</b>	<b>Indian</b>	<b>White</b>
Improved	54.5%	58.7%	33.6%	33.7%	46.5%
Stayed the same	27.0%	25.4%	37.8%	25.4%	29.3%
Became worse	13.4%	10.7%	21.9%	32.6%	21.3%
Don't know	5.2%	5.1%	6.7%	8.3%	2.9%

### The best way to improve people's lives

The 2016 field survey also asked respondents how best people's lives could be improved. This time, it gave them four options to choose from, as set out in *Table 3*. Most people saw 'more jobs and better education' as the best way to improve people's lives, with 75% of all respondents endorsing this option. Similar proportions of black and white South Africans (73% of blacks and 77% of whites) shared this perspective. Close on 22% saw the key solution as lying in better service delivery. Only 3% thought people's lives could best be improved through 'more BEE and affirmative action in employment policies'. A mere 1% thought this outcome could be achieved via 'more land reform'.

**Table 3, 2016 IRR field survey**

<b>Best way to improve lives</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Coloured</b>	<b>Indian</b>	<b>White</b>
More jobs and better education	74.5%	73.0%	87.2%	66.5%	77.0%
Better service delivery	21.6%	22.8%	10.8%	27.3%	20.5%
More BEE/AA in employment	2.8%	3.0%	0.6%	5.5%	1.7%
More land reform	1.0%	1.0%	1.3%	0.6%	0.7%

## How do South Africans want job appointments to be made?

Whether racial targets should be used in appointing people to jobs often generates heated debate and sometimes a sense of racial antagonism. Blacks are sometimes seen as overlooking the importance of the merit principle, while whites are accused of discounting the need for redress for apartheid wrongs.

The IRR's field survey tested these perceptions by asking (see *Table 4*) whether the best person should be given the job, irrespective of race. An overwhelming majority (82%) agreed that merit should be the dominant factor in job appointments, with 80% of black people endorsing this view.

**Table 4, 2016 IRR field survey**

<b><i>Do you believe that the best person should be given the job, regardless of race?</i></b>	<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>Black</i></b>	<b><i>Coloured</i></b>	<b><i>Indian</i></b>	<b><i>White</i></b>
Yes	82.4%	79.4%	96.1%	79.5%	93.5%
No	17.6%	20.6%	3.9%	20.5%	6.5%

The IRR then probed further by asking on what basis people should be appointed to jobs and giving respondents a series of options to choose from. Some 8% of people supported the first option, that 'only blacks should be appointed for a long time ahead'. Roughly 11% of people supported our second option: that 'only black people should be appointed until those in employment are demographically representative'. Since this is essentially what the Employment Equity Act of 1998 requires, it is striking that the proportion in its favour was so limited. Though support for this option was strongest among black South Africans, only 13% endorsed it.

The majority view, endorsed by nearly two-thirds of respondents, was that 'appointments should be based on merit, with special training for the disadvantaged'. This option was supported by 63% of blacks, by 66% of coloured people, by 68% of Indians, and by 58% of whites, as set out in *Table 5*.

**Table 5, 2016 IRR field survey**

<b><i>Who do you think should be appointed to jobs in South Africa?</i></b>	<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>Black</i></b>	<b><i>Coloured</i></b>	<b><i>Indian</i></b>	<b><i>White</i></b>
Only blacks for a long time ahead	8.1%	9.6%	2.1%	1.1%	3.9%
Only blacks till demographically representative	11.3%	12.9%	2.8%	15.2%	5.6%
Appointments should be made on merit, with special training for the disadvantaged	62.7%	62.8%	66.4%	67.8%	57.5%
All appointments should be made on merit alone, without such training	17.6%	14.6%	26.9%	15.9%	33.0%

Some of the responses were significantly different from what the IRR found in its 2015 survey, when the same question was posed. Then, 6% of South Africans and 7% of blacks supported the second option: that only blacks should be appointed until demographic representivity had been achieved. In 2016, by contrast, the equivalent proportions were 11% and 13%. Why this shift should have occurred is unclear, especially as a mere 13% of black South Africans report any personal benefit from the Employment Equity Act (as will be set out in a forthcoming issue of *@Liberty*). However, recent amendments to the Act that strengthen the government's insistence on racial quotas (by tripling the penalties for failing to fulfil them) may have contributed to these changes in people's perceptions. So too may the ANC's increasing condemnation of alleged white 'over-representation' at

senior levels in the private sector. In repeatedly making this charge, the ANC and a host of other commentators overlook the fact that business cannot easily attain 77% black representation in senior posts when more than half South Africans are under the age of 25 and only 5% of blacks have the tertiary qualifications often needed or advisable for such positions.

The shift evident on the second option has also had an impact on responses to the third option: that appointments should be made on merit, with special training for the disadvantaged. In 2015, this option was endorsed by 70% of all respondents and by 71% of blacks. In 2016, support for this option came down to 63% among respondents in general, and also among blacks. This roughly eight percentage point decline within the black group suggests that some black people who earlier endorsed merit appointments backed by special training now want a focus on black appointments alone until demographic representivity has been reached. This is a disturbing outcome when the age and skills profile of the black population makes this goal difficult to achieve, especially at senior levels.

### How should sports teams be selected?

We then explored further by asking whether South African sports teams should be selected 'only on merit and ability and not by racial quotas'. This issue became particularly salient in 2016, after Mr Mbalula barred the South African Rugby Union, Athletics South Africa, Netball South Africa, and Cricket South Africa from hosting international events because of their failure to meet 60% targets for black players at both national and provincial levels.<sup>8</sup> This decision dealt a major blow, among other things, to South Africa's hopes of hosting the Rugby World Cup in 2023.<sup>9</sup>

Explaining his decision, Mr Mbalula said: 'There is no federation in this country that can host any mega event without government. They cannot organise anything and it is the absolute law, and our right. Revoking government support for hosting international events is one of the punitive measures we can implement against federations that do not transform.'<sup>10</sup>

However, there is no legislation entitling the government to enforce rigid racial quotas in sport. Quotas of this kind also contradict international rules prohibiting racial discrimination and government interference in sport.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the minister's stance clearly goes against the views of most South Africans.

As set out in *Table 6* below, 74% of respondents supported merit-based selections, without regard to racial quotas. Some 69% of blacks endorsed this view, as did the overwhelming majority of coloured people (86%), Indians (78%) and whites (92%).

**Table 6, 2016 IRR field survey**

<b><i>Sports teams should be selected on merit, not quotas</i></b>	<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>Black</i></b>	<b><i>Coloured</i></b>	<b><i>Indian</i></b>	<b><i>White</i></b>
Yes	73.5%	69.4%	86.0%	77.7%	92.2%
No	25.9%	29.8%	14.0%	20.5%	7.7%

Outcomes here are nevertheless significantly different from what the IRR found in its 2015 survey, when the same question was posed. At that time, there was wider implicit support across the colour line for racial quotas in sport, with 15% of whites tacitly endorsing this option, along with 23% of blacks. Since the minister's intervention, the proportion of whites supporting quotas has dropped sharply to 8%, while the proportion of blacks in favour of them has risen to 30%. The government's prohibition has thus added to racial division on the issue. It has also done little to address the absence of proper sports facilities at most state schools, which is the primary reason for the continuing shortage of black South Africans qualified to compete at the international level.

## The acid test – what do parents want for their children?

What people want for their children is an emotive issue and hence a good basis for testing their real beliefs about race relations. We thus asked people if they would prefer their children to be taught by a school teacher of the same race as themselves. Tellingly, 89% of respondents said it did not matter to them what race their children's teachers were (see *Table 7*). Among black people, this figure rose to 91%. Some 86% of coloured people took the same view, as did 79% of whites. The results indicate that the race of a teacher matters to close on two out of ten white and Indian South Africans, and to roughly one in ten among coloured and black people. However, that it does not matter to the other eight or nine out of ten people is far more significant.

**Table 7, 2016 IRR field survey**

<b>Would you prefer your child's teachers to be:</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Coloured</b>	<b>Indian</b>	<b>White</b>
The same race as you	10.5%	8.3%	13.8%	24.4%	21.2%
Doesn't matter as long as teacher is good	88.7%	90.7%	86.2%	75.6%	78.8%

## How much do people experience racism?

We then asked people to tell us whether they experienced racism in their daily lives and, if so, in what way they encountered it. We did not prompt any answers, but simply asked: 'If you do notice racism in your daily life, in what ways do you notice it?' The answers are striking, for 72% of respondents said they experienced no such racism at all (see *Table 8*). The proportions of blacks (71%) and whites (74%) who gave this answer were roughly the same.

**Table 8, 2016 IRR field survey**

<b>If you do notice racism in your daily life, in what ways do you notice it?</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Coloured</b>	<b>Indian</b>	<b>White</b>
Experience no such racism	71.9%	71.2%	77.7%	62.5%	74.1%
<b>Examples of personal experience of racism</b>					
Offensive name calling/insults	7.2%	8.0%	6.8%	0.7%	3.2%
Discrimination based on skin colour	7.0%	6.8%	5.0%	21.4%	6.1%
General and social racism	6.7%	6.4%	2.7%	7.8%	12.4%
Discrimination in the workplace	5.0%	5.4%	5.0%	0.9%	3.1%
Xenophobia	1.4%	1.5%	1.1%	1.5%	0.3%
Land distribution and ownership	0.4%	0.4%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%
See racism on TV	0.3%	0.2%	1.1%	0.9%	0.4%

Responses to this question differ significantly from those obtained the previous year. In 2015 some 76% of all respondents and 80% of black South Africans said they did not notice racism in their daily lives, whereas the equivalent percentages in 2016 were 72% for respondents in general and also among blacks. The shift among black South Africans is particularly marked, amounting to a decrease of nine percentage points.

This is a worrying development, especially as people were asked to focus on their own experiences and only a tiny proportion talked about having 'seen racism on TV'. Hence, racial rhetoric should not have influenced their responses. The growth of social media may perhaps have fuelled an increase in racist comments, for which there was less public outlet in the past. Important too perhaps are the socio-economic tensions resulting from declining growth and rising unemployment. This economic malaise has made it harder for many people to get by. It may also have sharpened competition for good jobs, good schools, and the like.



## Do black people see whites as 'second-class' citizens?

Some of the comments made by Mr Malema and other politicians suggest that black people hate white people and want to drive them out of the country or, at the very least, relegate them to the status of second-class citizens. The IRR survey thus asked people if this was how they really felt. As shown in *Table 9*, 60% of respondents rejected the view that 'South Africa is now a country for black Africans and whites must take second place'. Among black people, 58% disagreed with this perspective, while 29% endorsed it. Though this last is certainly not an insignificant percentage, the minority view is less important than the clear majority position. In addition, despite the increased racial rhetoric so evident in 2016, responses to this question were little changed from those obtained in 2015 (see *Table 13*).

**Table 9, 2016 IRR field survey**

<b><i>SA is now a country for black Africans and whites must take second place</i></b>	<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>Black</i></b>	<b><i>Coloured</i></b>	<b><i>Indian</i></b>	<b><i>White</i></b>
Disagree	60.0%	58.4%	62.3%	61.8%	69.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	12.3%	12.8 %	11.4%	12.3%	9.0%
Agree	27.6%	28.6%	26.3%	26.0%	21.4%

## Racism and the role of politicians

The ruling party and the EFF, in particular, often blame the country's current problems of high unemployment, low growth, poor education, and persistent inequality on 'racism' and 'colonialism'. The IRR's 2016 survey thus asked if people agreed that 'all this talk about racism and colonialism is by politicians trying to find excuses for their own failures'. While 26% of respondents disagreed with this statement, roughly half (49%) endorsed it (see *Table 10*). Divergence across the colour line was marked, for 46% of black people supported this view, compared to 68% of whites. The proportion of respondents unsure about whether they agreed or disagreed with this perspective was also high, standing at 25%.

**Table 10, 2016 IRR field survey**

<b><i>Talk of racism/colonialism is from politicians seeking excuses</i></b>	<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>Black</i></b>	<b><i>Coloured</i></b>	<b><i>Indian</i></b>	<b><i>White</i></b>
Agree	49.3%	45.9%	55.6%	58.7%	68.3%
Disagree	25.8%	29.2%	13.8%	17.7%	12.2%
Neither agree nor disagree	24.9%	24.9%	30.6%	23.6%	19.5%

Results here are strikingly different from those obtained in 2015, when the same question was posed. At that time, 62% of all respondents and 59% of blacks agreed that much of the talk about racism and colonialism in the country was by politicians trying to excuse their own failures. That the equivalent percentages have since dropped to 49% in general and to 46% among blacks (showing a decline of 13 percentage points) suggests that racial rhetoric in 2016 has had a large impact on public perceptions here.

## The route to sound future race relations

We wanted to know what South Africans think needs to be done to promote sound race relations in the future. Hence, we also asked respondents whether better education and more jobs, the building blocks for inclusive prosperity around the world, would make the

differences between the races steadily disappear. In all, 71% of respondents agreed with this proposition, while 9% rejected it (see *Table 11*). Some 72% of blacks supported this view, while 8% disagreed. Those who beat the racial drum commonly overlook the vital importance of education and jobs in a growing economy, but ordinary South Africans are well aware that these are the factors vital to upward mobility.

**Table 11, 2016 IRR field survey**

<b><i>With better education and more jobs, differences between races will disappear</i></b>	<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>Black</i></b>	<b><i>Coloured</i></b>	<b><i>Indian</i></b>	<b><i>White</i></b>
Agree	71.4%	72.2%	72.8%	76.5%	62.8%
Disagree	9.1%	8.2%	11.4%	9.9%	12.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	19.5%	19.6%	15.8%	13.7%	24.2%

However, with economic growth in 2016 having dropped so low (to roughly 0.5% of GDP), with the unemployment rate now up at 27%, and with South Africa's education system once again rated one of the worst in the world, confidence in this key route to upward mobility for the disadvantaged may also now be faltering. This may help explain the differences between the 2016 results and the ones obtained in 2015.

In 2015, some 82% of all respondents and 83% of blacks believed that better education and more jobs would in time put an end to racial inequality. The equivalent proportions in 2016 have dropped by roughly ten percentage points to 71% and 72%, respectively. At the same time, uncertainty on this issue has risen by ten percentage points. In 2015 some 10% of all respondents said they neither 'agreed nor disagreed' with this statement, but in 2016 that proportion was up at 20%.

If it is indeed the current malaise in growth, jobs, and education that is undermining confidence in this important route out of racial inequality, this is concerning in itself. However, there is also a more disturbing possible explanation. A constant stream of racial rhetoric, buttressed by repeated calls for massive redistribution as the best antidote to poverty, may also have contributed to this shift in views from one year to the next.

### **Do black and white South Africans want to work together for progress?**

Lastly, the IRR wanted to know whether South Africans understand and value their mutual inter-dependence and want full opportunities for all. As *Table 12* shows, 84% of all South Africans, and the same percentage of blacks, agree that 'the different races need each other and there should be full opportunity for people of all races'. Again, these are very significant majorities. By contrast, the proportions who disagreed were 5% among blacks, 3% among coloured people, and 6% among both Indians and whites.

**Table 12, 2016 IRR field survey**

<b><i>Different races need each other, and there should be opportunities for all</i></b>	<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>Black</i></b>	<b><i>Coloured</i></b>	<b><i>Indian</i></b>	<b><i>White</i></b>
Agree	83.9%	83.7%	91.0%	76.5%	81.1%
Disagree	4.5%	4.5%	2.6%	6.3%	6.2%
Neither agree nor disagree	11.3%	11.7%	6.5%	12.0%	12.6%

## Major differences between the outcomes of the IRR's 2015 and 2016 field surveys

The IRR's 2015 field survey was carried out in September that year, some months before the start of the Penny Sparrow scandal and the racial recriminations this helped to foster. The 2016 survey was carried out in September this year, against the background of this more polarised environment.

The IRR has long been concerned that politicians and other commentators might seek to foment racial divisions for political or ideological gain. It is also well aware that the more the economy falters and joblessness grows, the easier it may be to promote racial hostility. Fortunately, however, the outcomes of the 2016 survey are very much the same as those evident in 2015. This confirms that race relations in the country – despite worsening economic conditions, high unemployment, poor education, and the very real inequalities that still bedevil South Africa – remain generally sound.

Differences in the results obtained from one year to the next are generally minor, with divergences limited to a few percentage points. The overall trend is mixed, with some changes pointing in a negative direction and others showing the opposite. However, significant negative differences are evident in five key spheres:

- whether blacks alone should be appointed to jobs until demographic representivity has been reached;
- the related issue of whether job appointments should instead be based on merit, with special training for the disadvantaged;
- the proportion of people who report no personal experience of racism in their daily lives;
- the extent to which South Africans agree 'that all this talk about racism and colonialism is by politicians trying to find excuses for their own failures'; and
- the percentages of people who continue to believe that, with more education and employment, the present differences between the races will disappear over time.

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In each of these five areas, a deterioration in how South Africans regard important racial issues is evident. The underlying reasons (as earlier outlined in the text accompanying Tables 5, 8, 10, and 11) are complex, but must surely include the increased racial rhetoric so evident in 2016.

Overall, the 2016 survey results show that the fabric of race relations in South Africa is still generally sound. However, that fabric is also now fraying, as indicated by the outcomes in the five spheres highlighted above. If this negative trend persists over a number of years, our current sound fabric could fray to a disturbing degree.

In 2001, in words that are no less apposite today, the late Professor Lawrence Schlemmer, a social scientist, outlined the relevant dangers, saying: 'If current socio-economic problems [and persistent racial inequality] continue to be blamed on racism, the racism debate could in time penetrate through to the rank and file, causing levels of mistrust and tension to rise. This would feed the uncertainty of investors, lead to a drain of skills and capital, and undermine workplace harmony and productivity. The economy would suffer.' This, he warned, would worsen the structural conditions which had fed the racism debate in the first instance and set a vicious cycle in motion.<sup>12</sup>

Against this background, *Table 13* provides an overview of differences in the 2015 and 2016 survey results. ***Bold italics*** have been used to highlight divergences in the data where the difference is five percentage points or more.

**Table 13, key differences between the 2016 and 2015 survey outcomes**

	2016		2015	
	All	Black	All	Black
<b><i>Most serious problems</i></b>				
Unemployment	<b>39.7%</b>	<b>42.0%</b>	<b>55.9%</b>	<b>58.6%</b>
Service delivery (2016), crime (2015)	33.6%	37.4%	28.8%	26.0%
Race relations have improved since 1994	54.5%	58.7%	54.0%	59.7%
<b><i>Best way to improve lives</i></b>				
More jobs, better education	74.5%	73.0%	78.3%	77.8%
Better service delivery	<b>21.6%</b>	<b>22.8%</b>	<b>14.8%</b>	<b>14.8%</b>
More BEE/AA in employment	2.8%	3.0%	4.6%	5.1%
More land reform	1.0%	1.0%	2.2%	2.1%
Job appointments on merit, not race (agree)	82.4%	79.4%	87.1%	84.7%
Only blacks to be appointed for long time	8.1%	9.6%	4.7%	5.5%
Only blacks till demographically representative	<b>11.3%</b>	<b>12.9%</b>	<b>5.8%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>
Jobs on merit, with special training	<b>62.7%</b>	<b>62.8%</b>	<b>70.0%</b>	<b>71.2%</b>
Jobs on merit only, with no such training	17.6%	14.6%	19.4%	16.1%
Sports teams to be selected on merit (agree)	73.5%	69.4%	77.0%	74.2%
Teachers' race irrelevant (agree)	88.7%	90.7%	90.8%	91.9%
Report no personal experience of racism	<b>71.9%</b>	<b>71.2%</b>	<b>78.5%</b>	<b>79.4%</b>
Whites should take second place (agree)	27.6%	28.6%	30.2%	28.5%
Racism talk is by politicians seeking excuses (agree)	<b>49.3%</b>	<b>45.9%</b>	<b>62.0%</b>	<b>58.8%</b>
With more education/jobs, differences between races will disappear (agree)	<b>71.4%</b>	<b>72.2%</b>	<b>82.2%</b>	<b>82.8%</b>
Different races need each other (agree)	83.9%	83.7%	85.4%	85.1%

### Some major differences in the outcomes of the IRR's 2016 and 2001 field surveys

Where possible, survey questions in both 2016 and 2015 were modelled on questions first posed in 2001, so as to help track relevant trends over time. The salient differences over this 15-year period are generally much greater than those between the 2015 and 2016 surveys. The key differences are set out in *Table 14*.

**Table 14, most salient differences in 2016 and 2001 survey outcomes**

	2016		2001	
	All	Black	All	Black
Race relations have improved since 1994	54.5%	58.7%	48.0%	49.0%
Have no personal experience of racism	71.9%	71.2%	49.0%	46.0%
Whites should take second place (agree)	27.6%	28.6%	50.0%	53.0%
Talk of racism is from politicians seeking excuses (agree)	49.3%	45.9%	62.0%	58.0%
With more education/jobs, differences between races will disappear (agree)	71.4%	72.2%	82.0%	81.0%
Different races need each other (agree)	83.9%	83.7%	91.0%	93.0%

## The IRR's conclusions

Against the background of the often fractious race debate during the past year, the results of the IRR's 2016 survey provide an important reality check. Contrary to what many commentators claim, some 72% of South Africans report no personal experience of racism in their daily lives. This percentage, though down from the 80% figure reflected in 2015, has gone up significantly from the 49% who reported this in 2001. More than half of South Africans (55%) think race relations have improved since 1994, which is well up on the 48% who endorsed this view in 2001. Some 11% of black people think race relations have worsened since 1994, which is not insignificant, but is also well down on the 23% who spoke of deterioration in 2001. An overwhelming majority (84%) agree that the different races need each other and that there should be full opportunities for people of all colours.

In addition, very few South Africans regard racism (linked here with inequality and xenophobia, for comparative purposes) as a serious problem. Some 6% identified it in this way in 2016, down from 8% in 2001. Instead, people generally saw the most important problems confronting the country as unemployment, followed either by service delivery failures (highlighted in 2016) or by crime (listed in second place in both 2015 and 2001).

However, that race relations still remain generally sound is no reason for complacency, as the IRR has previously warned. This is especially so given the significant decline over 15 years in the proportion of people who agree that the different races need other for progress and that there should be equal opportunities for everyone. In 2001, 93% of blacks and 91% of all respondents agreed with this proposition. But in 2016 those proportions were down to 84% among both blacks and respondents in general. This marked decline could well be a response to damaging political rhetoric from politicians and other commentators.

*There are many ideologues in the ruling party and the EFF with a vested interest in playing up racial incidents and portraying the repugnant words or conduct of the few as representative of the many.*

There are many ideologues in the ruling party and the EFF with a vested interest in playing up racial incidents and portraying the repugnant words or conduct of the few as representative of the many. These ideologues also seek to identify white racism – and the white privilege this supposedly sustains – as the key reason for persistent poverty and inequality within the country. This perspective plays a useful part in distracting attention from the ANC's many policy failures over the past 22 years.

Since 1994, the ANC has put its primary emphasis on redistribution rather than economic growth, even though a different way of dividing up the existing economic pie will never be enough to meet the needs of an expanding population. The ruling party's policies have also failed to overcome a host of barriers to upward mobility and have often made them worse. These barriers include:

- a meagre economic growth rate, currently standing at around 0.5% of GDP a year instead of the 6% or more required;
- one of the worst public schooling systems in the world, despite the massive tax revenues allocated to it;
- poor through-put rates at tertiary institutions, with only 15% of university students, for example, managing to complete a three-year undergraduate degree within that period;



- stubbornly high unemployment rates, made worse by labour laws that encourage violent strikes, deter job creation, and price the unskilled out of work;
- pervasive family breakdown, as a result of which some 70% of black children grow up without the financial support and guidance of both parents;
- electricity shortages and costs, compounded by general government inefficiency in the management and maintenance of vital economic and social infrastructure;
- a limited and struggling small business sector, unable to thrive in an environment of low growth, poor skills, and suffocating red tape; and
- a mistaken reliance on affirmative action measures, which (like similar policies all around the world) generally benefit a relative elite while bypassing the poor.

It is these factors, rather than white racism, that currently make it so very difficult to expand opportunities for the poor and overcome inequality between the different racial groups. As we have seen, politicians and other commentators can then use this persistent poverty and inter-racial inequality to inflame tensions. They can also take the hurtful views and actions of a small minority of individuals and project them as the pervasive views of entire racial groups. Unchecked conduct of this kind may in time have an increasingly negative effect on race relations, turning warnings of rising racial animosities into self-fulfilling prophecies.

*Though the fabric of race relations is still sound, it is now fraying. If the ANC persists in blaming white racism for complex socio-economic problems ordinary South Africans will in time find it more difficult to see through this racial rhetoric.*

The dangers in this approach are already evident in many of the key differences in the outcomes of the 2015 and 2016 field surveys. As earlier noted, the 2015 field survey was carried out in September that year, some months before the massive media focus on Penny Sparrow's hurtful words and a small number of other racist utterances by whites. In September 2015 there was thus relatively little focus on racism either in the press or on social media. In addition, racial rhetoric by the ruling party had greatly declined in the seven years since Thabo Mbeki was recalled from the presidency.

In Mr Mbeki's time, many merited criticisms of ANC failures on AIDS, Zimbabwe, service delivery and corruption were blamed on white racism by both the president and his key spokesmen. However, when Jacob Zuma became president in 2009, he seldom played the race card in this way. For some years, this encouraged a more accurate focus on low growth, poor skills, and high unemployment as the key reasons for persistent poverty and inequality. It also meant that ordinary South Africans were less directed by the ruling party to focus on racial issues and more able to develop their own views on the state of race relations. But all this changed dramatically in January 2016, after the Penny Sparrow incident. Though her insulting utterances merited strong condemnation, the ANC was also increasingly intent on using the race card to discredit the DA and distract public attention from its policy failures in the run-up to the 2016 municipal election.

The warning signals are thus clear. Though the fabric of race relations is still sound, it is now fraying. If the ANC persists in blaming white racism for complex socio-economic problems stemming primarily from its own *dirigiste* and damaging policy interventions, then ordinary South Africans will in time find it more difficult to see through this racial rhetoric. Race relations will then suffer.

However, that racial goodwill is still as strong as the 2016 survey shows it to be gives the country major reason for hope. It is also a tribute to the perceptiveness and sound common sense of most South Africans. Despite the urgings of politicians and a host

of other commentators, most ordinary people have avoided over-simplifying complex issues by blaming them on race.

There are also other reasons for increased optimism at the present juncture. Ratings downgrades have been averted for now and could yet be avoided altogether. For the first time in many years, business is working more closely with the government and labour in an attempt to bring about key structural reforms – through the jury is still out on whether these positive policy shifts can be achieved. Commodity prices have risen off their lows, food prices should diminish as the drought recedes, and growth prospects in 2017 are looking better. In addition, the IRR's 2016 field survey shows once again that race relations – despite the hurtful rhetoric of a small number of white and black South Africans – remain generally sound. This in itself provides a vital foundation for building on the country's many strengths and helping South Africa rise far above its present travails.

— Anthea Jeffery

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