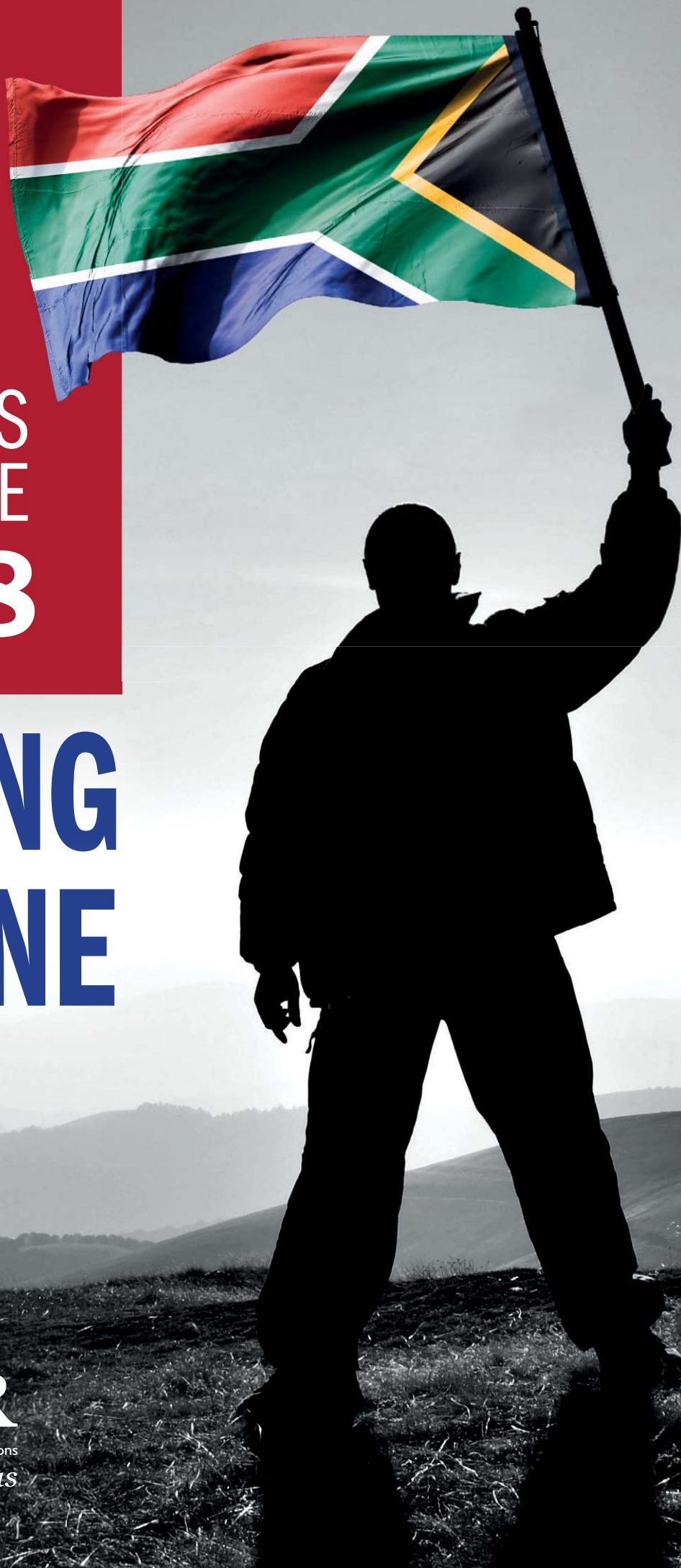


Race Relations
in South Africa

REASONS
FOR HOPE
2018

**HOLDING
THE LINE**



South African Institute of Race Relations
The power of ideas



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The state of South Africa's race relations

There were various disturbing racial incidents in 2017. At a Spur restaurant in Johannesburg in March 2017, a black woman and a white man, both customers at the restaurant, hurled abuse at each other in front of children and families. At a KFC outlet north of Pretoria some months later, black customers were allegedly abused and beaten by white customers in a sudden racial altercation.¹

There were also assaults across the colour line which gained the media's attention. In September a white farmer, Johannes Potgieter, and his employee, Hendrick Dumas, allegedly tied a nine-year-old black girl to a tree and then pointed a rifle at her, saying they wanted to question her about her companions – a group of youngsters supposedly hunting for buck on the game farm. At much the same time, a black farmer in the Brits area, Muraga Mavula, was reportedly assaulted and killed by a building contractor, Schalk Myburgh, and his son, who accused the emergent farmer of stock theft and of having attacked them first.²

However, there were also some attacks which the press seemed entirely to overlook. Soon after the KFC incident, for instance, a black minibus taxidriver forced a white motorist Carel Kruger off the road, while two of the taxi's passengers then reportedly assaulted him as the police looked on. Shortly thereafter, a white woman, Carien van Staden, was shot in the chest by a black soldier who had nearly run her and her boyfriend off their motor bike. According to Kallie Kriel of AfriForum, the attack on Kruger and the killing of Van Staden were largely ignored by the media because the racial identities of victims and perpetrators did not fit the accepted paradigm for a 'racial' attack.³

A particularly notorious incident was the coffin assault of 2016, which came before the courts during 2017. Here, two white farmers, Theo Martins Jackson and Willem Oosthuizen, found a black youth, Victor Mlotshwa, on their farm and forced him into a coffin.

A particularly notorious incident was the coffin assault of 2016, which came before the courts during 2017. Here, two white farmers, Theo Martins Jackson and Willem Oosthuizen, found a black youth, Victor Mlotshwa, on their farm and forced him into a coffin. They pressed the lid down with their boots and threatened to burn him, while he begged for his life. The two accused claimed that Mlotshwa had stolen copper cables from their farm and had also threatened to kill their families and burn their crops. Hence, their aim in pushing him into the coffin, they said, was to frighten him and keep him away.⁴

The two accused were convicted of attempted murder and sentenced to prison terms of 19 and 14 years respectively (each time suspended for five years). These long prison terms were widely applauded, but seemed disproportionate to the severity of the crime. Mr Mlotshwa had clearly been traumatised and terrorised, but he had suffered no physical injury. In the Waterkloof Four case, by contrast, where four young whites had killed a black man they had come across in a park, the sentences handed down had been shorter, at 12 years' each. The coffin sentences were thus disproportionate, but this was generally overlooked in the anger surrounding the assault.⁵

The gravest racial incidents during 2017 came at Coligny, a small farming town in North West, in April and May. The previously peaceful town seemed to explode with racial hatred after two white farm employees, Pieter Doorewaard and Phillip Schutte, were accused of murdering a 16-year-old black youth, Matlhomola Mosweu, who had allegedly been stealing sunflowers on the farm where they worked. The two said they had put the youth on to the back of their bakkie, intending to take him to the local police station to report the theft and have him released with a warning, as they had often done

in the past six months (a fact which the police confirmed). However, when the bakkie slowed down for a corner, Mosweu jumped off the moving vehicle and broke his neck. But a supposed eyewitness contested this, saying the managers had thrown Mosweu off the bakkie, beaten him to a bloody pulp, and then threatened to murder the witness if he came forward to report their vicious assault.⁶

Four days after Mosweu's death, school children staged a protest march through Coligny. Later, however, both they and a group of adults suddenly began burning and looting shops, torching homes, and ransacking the local hotel in what seemed like an orchestrated upsurge of violence that lasted some 24 hours. Instead of condemning these attacks, ANC leaders then helped to stoke yet further outrage. Speaking at an emotive funeral service for Mosweu, North West premier Supra Mahumapelo stated that 'there was no doubt that the teenager had died at the hands of white racists'. Mahumapelo also criticised whites for continuing to own the land and the banks, and urged the crowd to remind whites that they had come with nothing and were 'visitors to this country'. South African Democratic Teachers' Union representative, Mxolisi Bomvana told mourners that the child was gone because 'the racists of our time decided to kill a black person'. South African National Civics Association provincial secretary, Packet Seakotso, followed up by explaining to the crowd the plans for the protest marches and road closures to be implemented the following Monday to oppose any granting of bail.⁷

However, the local magistrate ignored the mounting political pressure and granted the two accused bail in any event. Soon afterwards, hundreds of black protesters barricaded the streets with burning tyres and rocks. "We are going to burn all the shops and farms owned by white people in the area," they shouted. "We have had enough of these white people who still think they can do as they please in our country", they added. Some said they had "declared war on all whites and were prepared to kill them".⁸

As journalist Rian Malan records: "Within minutes, a white-owned farm on the outskirts of town was set on fire. By the time police arrived, a second fire had been set elsewhere, and then a third and a fourth, this time the home of an Indian businessman."

As journalist Rian Malan records: "Within minutes, a white-owned farm on the outskirts of town was set on fire. By the time police arrived, a second fire had been set elsewhere, and then a third and a fourth, this time the home of an Indian businessman. Unhinged by the loss of his house, a farmer pulled a gun and attacked a cameraman for trespassing on his land. Police fought running battles with stone-throwing youth, using rubber bullets and stun grenades. By sunset, a measure of order had been restored, but the situation remained extremely tense, and racial minorities faced the night in a state of dread. 'South Africa is finished,' an old Indian gentleman told me. 'Soon this will spread everywhere.'"⁹

However, there were also many individual acts of kindness across the race line at Coligny. Henk Keyser had his house burnt down and lost most of his possessions, but "two black guys" he says, "came to help me with a fire-fighting vehicle". No one had told them to come, he went on. Rather, as they told him, they were also farmers in the area and they wanted to "come to help him". In similar vein, when he went into a local shop to buy replacement clothes, the bill came to R12 000 but the local Indian trader charged him only R2 000 instead. Those who suffered the greatest losses were probably the 53 Bangladeshis, Somalis and Ethiopians whose shops and stock were burnt in the initial upsurge of violence, costing them their livelihoods.¹⁰

In many ways, Coligny seems a microcosm of the racial tensions witnessed in the year. Most of the racial invective and the seemingly organised violence came from senior figures in the ANC and its allies. Ordinary people, both black and white, seemed astonished at how quickly the tensions and the burnings escalated. Some still tried to help each other, overlooking the racial divisions the ANC had sought to encourage.

Against this background, the IRR in 2017 commissioned another survey of public opinion to find out how South Africans themselves view race relations in the country. This field survey was carried out during December 2017 by Victory Research. It generated 1 000 telephone interviews with adults (aged 18 or more) across the country. Of these respondents, 292 were from minority groups, made up of whites, Indians, and so-called ‘coloured’ people. The remaining 708 respondents were black people. Interviews were conducted by experienced field workers in the languages chosen by respondents.

Since the methodology used in 2017 differs from the face-to-face interviews that were conducted in our previous surveys, we have not tried to draw comparisons between the 2017 data and the information gathered in previous years.

The results of the 2017 survey are mainly positive and should once again fill the country with hope. According to the data gathered, 77% of black respondents have never personally experienced racism directed against them. The same percentage (77%) believe that, ‘with better education and more jobs, the differences between the races will disappear’. In addition, 90% of black respondents believe that ‘the different races need each other for progress and there should be equal opportunities for all’. However, there is also little reason for complacency, for politicised racial rhetoric is having an impact and 61% of black respondents now agree that ‘South Africa is a country for black Africans and whites must take second place’.

The top two priorities for the government

Respondents in the 2017 survey were asked to choose, from a list of possible answers supplied to them, ‘which two of the following issues should be the top priorities for the government’. Their answers are shown in *Table 1*. (Proportions exceed 100% because more than one such issue could be mentioned.)

The three top issues identified were ‘creating more jobs’, ‘improving education’ and ‘fighting crime’. In total, 35% of South Africans – and 38% of black respondents – identified ‘creating more jobs’ as the key issue for the government to tackle. Other key concerns were ‘improving education’ (cited by 27% of all respondents and by 26% of blacks) and ‘fighting crime’ (mentioned by 26% of all respondents and also by 26% of blacks). Other important concerns were ‘fighting corruption’ (mentioned by 22% of all respondents), ‘fighting drugs and drug abuse’ (cited by 20%), ‘speeding up service delivery’, and ‘building more RDP houses’ (both of which were cited by 16% of all respondents).

By contrast, only 5% of all respondents (and 4% of blacks) wanted the government to focus on ‘fighting racism’. In addition, a mere 1% of black respondents wanted the government to focus on ‘speeding up affirmative action’, while the same proportion of blacks (1%) wanted it concentrate on ‘speeding up land reform’. These results show that relatively few black South Africans want the government to focus its efforts on ‘fighting racism’, while fewer still think the state’s emphasis should be on accelerating the pace of either affirmative action or land reform.

Table 1: 2017 IRR field survey

<i>Two top priorities for the government (from list supplied by the interviewer)</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Coloured</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>White</i>
Creating more jobs	35%	38%	42%	30%	16%
Improving education	27%	26%	21%	31%	46%
Fighting crime	26%	26%	24%	42%	26%
Fighting corruption	22%	17%	21%	36%	53%
Fighting drugs, drug abuse	20%	22%	20%	19%	3%
Speeding up service delivery	16%	18%	12%	1%	11%
Building more RDP housing	16%	19%	6%	0%	2%
Fighting illegal immigration	12%	14%	4%	7%	5%
Improving healthcare	7%	7%	9%	0%	13%
Fighting racism	5%	4%	5%	0%	4%
Speeding up affirmative action	1%	1%	0%	5%	0%
Speeding up land reform	1%	1%	2%	4%	1%

Have race relations improved?

Respondents were also asked whether they thought that ‘relations between people of different races’ had improved, stayed the same, or become worse since 1994. Their answers are provided in *Table 2*. More than 60% of black respondents thought race relations had improved since the political transition, while 16% of blacks said they had stayed the same. The percentage of blacks who thought race relations had ‘gotten worse’ since 1994 was very much smaller, at 20%.

Among respondents as a whole, 60% saw an improvement in race relations and 21% a deterioration. Only among coloured and white respondents were concerns about deterioration stronger, with 28% of coloured people and 25% of whites saying that race relations had become worse since 1994.

Table 2: 2017 IRR field survey

<i>Race relations since 1994</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Coloured</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>White</i>
Improved	60%	63%	53%	60%	48%
Stayed the same	16%	16%	16%	26%	14%
Became worse	21%	20%	28%	13%	25%
Don’t know or refused	3%	1%	3%	1%	12%

How do South Africans want job appointments to be made?

The basis on which people should be appointed to jobs is often a controversial issue. Government policy seeks demographic representivity at every level, even though the poor quality of schooling and a narrow skills pool makes this objective difficult to achieve. The government nevertheless seems willing to sacrifice the principle of merit-based job appointments to the attainment of what it considers the ‘right’ racial balance. Whites, by contrast, are often accused of overlooking the importance of providing redress for apartheid wrongs.

The IRR’s 2017 field survey probed these perceptions by asking respondents which of two statements most closely coincided with their own views. The first statement was as follows: ‘When it comes to hiring, the person who is best able to do the job right now should always be appointed. The race of the person should not be considered.’ The second statement, by contrast, ran as follows: ‘When it comes to hiring, black people should be appointed over white people, as long as they have the potential to do the job and are given development opportunities.’ The results obtained are set out in *Table 3* below:

Table 3: 2017 IRR field survey

<i>When hiring, the person best able to do the job should always be appointed. The race of the person should not be considered</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Coloured</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>White</i>
Agree	67%	62%	85%	74%	84%
<i>When hiring, black people should be appointed over whites, if they have potential, are trained</i>					
Agree	31%	38%	13%	16%	9%

More than two-thirds of all respondents (67%) agreed that the focus in hiring should be on merit, rather than race, with 62% of blacks endorsing this view. Support for the merit principle was particularly strong among coloured people (85%) and whites (84%), while 74% of Indian respondents also shared this view.

By contrast, the idea that blacks with potential should automatically be given preference over whites was endorsed by very few coloured, white, or Indian respondents. Even among black respondents, fewer than four in ten (38%) agreed with this approach.

How should sports teams be selected?

We then explored further by asking people whether the selection of sports teams should be based strictly on merit or should put more emphasis on demographic representivity. Part of the background here was the data on racial targets which trade union Solidarity had managed to prise out of the state (under the Promotion of Access to Information Act of 2000) in March 2017. This shows that the government is intent on stepping up race quotas in various sports and plans to impose major financial penalties on federations which fail to achieve these targets. According to the state, 45% of male national rugby players are expected to be black by 2018, as are 80% of national female players. Some 60% of national cricket players, both male and female, would need to be black by 2019, while targets in netball are higher (95% black for male players and 71% black for female ones by 2018). By contrast, 'black African representation in soccer is to be reduced by 13 percentage points (from 88% in 2014 to 75% in 2018)', though 'generic black' players are to be increased by the same proportion.¹¹

Against this background, respondents were asked to say which of two contrasting statements came closer to their own views. The first statement was as follows: 'South Africa's national sports teams should pick the best player in every position, even if it means that the team doesn't broadly reflect the racial make-up of our country'. The second statement, by contrast, was the following: 'South Africa's national sports teams should broadly reflect the racial make-up of the country, even if it means that we lose some matches that we otherwise might have won.' The choices made by respondents are set out in *Table 4* below:

Table 4: 2017 IRR field survey

<i>Sports teams should always pick best players, even if team not broadly representative</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Coloured</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>White</i>
Agree	58%	51%	77%	67%	91%
<i>Sports teams should be broadly representative, even if we then lose some matches</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Coloured</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>White</i>
Agree	39%	48%	20%	11%	7%

Almost 60% of all respondents agreed that the best players should always be picked, even if representivity was then not evident. Support for this statement was particularly strong among whites (91%), coloureds (77%) and Indians (67%). A little over half of black respondents (51%) also endorsed this perspective.

Overall support for an emphasis rather on racial representivity was significantly more limited, with 39% of all respondents agreeing with this approach. However, close on half (48%) of black respondents endorsed this statement, suggesting that black respondents were virtually equally balanced in their views. A greater proportion, though by only a narrow margin, nevertheless thought that merit should be the overriding criterion.

How important to parents is the race of their children's teachers?

Since most parents (naturally) want the best for their children, we wanted to probe whether people would prefer their children to be taught by a school teacher of the same race as themselves. Respondents were thus again asked to choose which of two statements most closely reflected their views.

The first statement put to respondents was as follows: 'When two teachers of different races have equal ability, children learn best when taught by the teacher of the same race as theirs.' The second statement, by contrast, was worded thus: 'When two teachers of different races have equal ability, children learn equally well from either one of the teachers.' The results obtained are set out in *Table 5*:

Table 5: 2017 IRR field survey

<i>When two teachers of different races have equal ability, children learn best when taught by the teacher of the same race as theirs</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Coloured</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>White</i>
Agree	40%	43%	38%	16%	24%

<i>When two teachers of different races have equal ability, children learn equally well from either one of the teachers</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Coloured</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>White</i>
Agree	58%	55%	60%	83%	65%

Close on 60% of all respondents agreed that the race of their children's teachers was essentially irrelevant. Among black people, this figure stood at 55%. By contrast, only 43% of black respondents through their children would learn best when taught by a teacher of the same race. A similar proportion of coloured respondents (38%) took this view, while very few Indian or white respondents thought their children would learn best if taught by a teacher of the same race.

How much do people experience racism?

We then asked people to tell us whether they had 'ever personally experienced racism that was directed at them'. The answers are striking, for 72% of respondents said they had never personally experienced racism in this way (see Table 6). The proportions of blacks (77%) and Indians (80%) who gave this answer were roughly the same. A little more than half of coloured respondents (52%) also said that they had not personally experienced any racism directed at them, while the equivalent proportion among whites was a little less than half (46%).

Table 6: 2017 IRR field survey

<i>Have you ever personally experienced racism that was directed at you?</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Coloured</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>White</i>
Experienced racism	28%	23%	47%	20%	53%
Experienced no racism	72%	77%	52%	80%	46%

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

Some of the comments made by the ANC and other politicians suggest that black people want to turn the tables on whites and relegate them to the status of second-class citizens. The IRR survey thus asked respondents whether they agreed that 'South Africa today is a country for black Africans, and white people must learn to take second place'. The results obtained are shown in Table 7:

Table 7: 2017 IRR field survey

<i>SA is now a country for black Africans and whites must take second place</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Coloured</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>White</i>
Disagree	49%	38%	82%	97%	80%
Agree	50%	61%	17%	4%	18%

Opinions seem equally divided among respondents in general. In addition, 61% of black respondents now agree that South Africa is a country for blacks rather than whites, while only 38% disagree. This suggests that ANC and EFF rhetoric castigating whites and demanding a major shift in the ownership and management of the economy may be having significant impact on black opinion. This rhetoric also seems to have made the minority groups more insecure. No fewer than 97% of Indians now reject the idea that South Africa has become 'a country for black Africans', as do 82% of coloured people and 80% of whites.

Racism and the role of politicians

The ruling party often blames the country's current problems of high unemployment, low growth, poor education, and persistent inequality on 'racism' and 'colonialism'. The IRR's 2017 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'. The results are set out in *Table 8*.

Table 8: 2017 IRR field survey

<i>Talk of racism/colonialism is from politicians seeking excuses for own failures</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Coloured</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>White</i>
Agree	66%	62%	61%	90%	86%
Disagree	33%	37%	38%	10%	11%

Two thirds of all respondents agreed that politicians are exaggerating the problems posed by racism and colonialism in order to excuse their own shortcomings. A high proportion of black respondents (62%, or close on a two-thirds majority) also agreed with this statement. Indians and whites seem to see this as a particular problem, with 90% of Indians and 86% of whites effectively agreeing that politicians are playing the race card for their own ends.

The route to sound future race relations

We also wanted to know what South Africans think should be done to promote sound race relations in the future. We therefore asked respondents whether better education and more jobs – the well-established building blocks for upward mobility in most societies – would in time 'make the present differences between the races steadily disappear'. Close on 80% of all respondents agreed with this proposition, as did 77% of blacks (see *Table 9*). Politicians may seek to play up racial differences for their own purposes, but most South Africans are well aware of the key role of better skills and increased earnings in reducing racial inequalities and building inclusive prosperity.

Table 9: 2017 IRR field survey

<i>With better education and more jobs, differences between races will disappear</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Coloured</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>White</i>
Agree	78%	77%	79%	95%	83%
Disagree	22%	23%	17%	1%	16%

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 10* shows, 92% of all South Africans – and 90% of black respondents – agree that 'the different races need each other for progress and there should be full opportunity for people of all races'. These are very significant majorities.

Table 10: 2017 IRR field survey

<i>Different races need each other for progress, there should be full opportunities for all</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Coloured</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>White</i>
Agree	92%	90%	100%	96%	98%
Disagree	8%	10%	0%	0%	2%

The IRR's conclusions

The IRR's 2017 field survey once again cuts through the increasing political 'noise' around race to provide vital insights into what ordinary South Africans think on race-related issues. Contrary to mainstream media perceptions and the hostile accusations often aired on Twitter and other social media, 72% of South Africans – and 77% of black people – say that they have never personally experienced racism directed at them. These are vastly encouraging figures, for they indicate that the problem of racism is less acute and less intractable than many commentators seem to assume.

In addition, 63% of black South Africans (close on a two-thirds majority) think race relations have improved since 1994, which 16% think race relations have remained much the same since then. These proportions far outweigh the 20% of blacks who think that race relations have become worse since the political transition. At the same time, an overwhelming majority of South Africans (92%) – and no fewer than 90% of black respondents – agree that the different races need each other in order to make progress and that there should be full opportunities for people of all colours.

In addition, very few South Africans regard 'fighting racism' as a 'top priority' for the government to address, with only 5% of respondents (and 4% of blacks) identifying it in this way. Instead, people of all races generally agree with one another in identifying the most important issues for the government to address as 'creating more jobs' (35%), 'improving education' (27%) and 'fighting crime' (26%).

However, that race relations still remain generally sound is no reason for complacency, as the IRR has previously warned. 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 is politically useful, of course, because it distracts attention from the ANC's many policy failures over the past 24 years.

Very few South Africans regard 'fighting racism' as a 'top priority' for the government to address, with only 5% of respondents (and 4% of blacks) identifying it in this way. Instead, people of all races generally agree that the government should focus on 'creating more jobs' (35%), 'improving education' (27%) and 'fighting crime' (26%).

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. Often, they have often made them worse. These barriers include:

- a meagre economic growth rate, which has averaged around 1% of GDP a year over the past four years and has never been brought up to the levels (6% or more) needed to generate millions more jobs;
- an appalling public schooling system which, despite the massive tax revenues allocated to it, leaves 78% of Grade 4 pupils unable to read for meaning in any language and sets them up for failure throughout their school careers;
- poor through-put rates at universities, where only 20% of students – most of them inadequately prepared for the rigours of university study – manage to complete a three-year undergraduate degree within that period;
- stubbornly high unemployment rates, made worse by labour laws that deter job creation and increase entry level wages to the point where the inexperienced and poorly skilled are priced out of the labour market;

- pervasive family breakdown, as a result of which some 70% of black children grow up without the financial support and guidance of both parents;
- a costly and inefficient public service, which battles to deliver essential basic services or to maintain and extend the country's vital infrastructure;
- a limited and struggling small business sector, which is 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 not alleged white racism but rather factors such as these which make it so difficult to expand opportunities and give the disadvantaged a realistic prospect of upward mobility. Poverty thus remains acute among the unemployed, in particular. Politicians and other commentators then use the persistence of poverty, not to embark on necessary socio-economic reforms, but rather to scapegoat whites and inflame racial tensions. They often 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 could in time have an increasingly negative impact on race relations, turning warnings of rising racial animosities into self-fulfilling prophecies.

As the IRR's 2017 field survey shows, race relations are generally still far sounder than many people seem willing to believe. However, racial rhetoric has increased minority fears and encouraged blacks to see South Africa as a country in which whites, in particular, must now take second place. Hence, if the ANC, the EFF, and various other commentators persist in blaming white racism for complex socio-economic problems – which in fact stem primarily from the government's own damaging policies – then ordinary South Africans will in time find it more difficult to see through this racial rhetoric. Race relations will then suffer.

Politicians and other commentators use the persistence of poverty, not to embark on necessary socio-economic reforms, but rather to scapegoat whites and inflame racial tensions. Unchecked conduct of this kind could in time have an increasingly negative impact on race relations.

At present, racial goodwill remains strong, as the IRR's 2017 field survey shows. This is an important and very positive phenomenon. It is also a tribute to the perceptiveness and sound common sense of most South Africans. Despite the urgings of politicians and many other commentators, most ordinary people have avoided over-simplifying complex issues by blaming them on race. This provides the country with important reason for hope.

There are also other reasons for increased optimism at the present time. Jacob Zuma has resigned as president and is finally to have his day in court on the many charges of corruption and other crimes first brought against him more than ten years ago. The illegal activities of the Gupta family and others involved in the capture of vital state-owned enterprises is finally to be probed. President Cyril Ramaphosa has promised a 'new dawn' for South Africa, along with measures to avert further sovereign credit downgrades, boost business confidence, and stimulate growth.

Many questions still remain as to whether these goals can in fact be attained, when Mr Ramaphosa has also given his (qualified) support to changing the Constitution to allow expropriation without compensation. The national minimum wage to be introduced in May 2018 could also cost jobs and deepen poverty. In addition, insisting on more local procurement could raise prices and make South Africa less competitive in the global arena.

The country's mood has nevertheless changed profoundly since Mr Ramaphosa assumed the national presidency in February 2018. Business confidence has increased, growth rates have gone up (though not nearly enough), and visible measures to curb 'Zupta' corruption are finally being taken. Equally encouraging are the results of the IRR's 2017 field survey, with their confirmation that race relations are generally still sound. This in itself provides a vital foundation for building on the country's many strengths and helping South Africa to realise even more of its enormous potential.

— Anthea Jeffery
Jeffery is Head of Policy Research at the IRR

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