SA Reconciliation Barometer

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2025 REPORT

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Kate Lefko-Everett

Analyse the data



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I gratefully acknowledge the important contributions of Prof. Rajen Govender, who has provided conceptual and technical expertise that has strengthened the Reconciliation Barometer for the past decade, as well as the steady and thoughtful leadership of Preston Govindasamy as acting head of the Research and Policy Programme in 2025.

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Dedication



This report is dedicated to the memory of our dear colleague, Jan Hofmeyr, who passed away on 24 June 2025. He was one of the most senior and longest-serving staff members of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR).

Jan's interest in politics and governance began in the seminal years of South Africa's transition to democracy. He earned a bachelor's degree in political science and political philosophy at Stellenbosch University in 1995 and, in the years that followed, an honours in journalism (1997) and a Master of Philosophy in Political Management (1999). His induction into sociopolitical survey work came through one of his earliest roles at the University of Stellenbosch's Centre for International and Comparative Politics, where he was a teaching assistant in research methods and public policy and coordinated the South African Opinion-Leaders Survey and country rounds of the World Values Survey. He then spent three years managing the Cape Town office of the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the Democracy Development Programme, its local partner, before joining the IJR in 2005.

With Jan at its heart and helm, the IJR's applied research and policy work grew in scope, depth and geography. He developed and championed the Transformation Audit, which tracked progress towards a just, inclusive and equitable economy. He led and oversaw the South African Reconciliation Barometer – today the longest-running time series survey focused on post-conflict social change in Africa. He provided technical advice and support in the development of reconciliation barometers and peer studies around the world, including in Cyprus, Korea, Rwanda and Somalia, and as a deeply committed contributor to the Sri Lanka Barometer. Through Jan's intellectual contribution, hard work and careful management, the IJR became the core partner of the Afrobarometer project in Southern Africa and today conducts public opinion surveys in Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Jan was also a member of the German International Development Agency's (GIZ) Global Leadership Academy (GLAC) Network and the Bertelsmann Foundation's group of international Transformation Thinkers and had collaborated on the Foundation's Transformation and Sustainable Governance Indices. He returned to Stellenbosch University and completed a Master of Philosophy in Futures Studies, for which he received multiple top-achiever awards.

As a senior leader and manager, Jan was practiced and fastidious, often working long hours and upholding the highest standards. He did not shy away from a principled debate in the boardroom or around the coffee table. At the same time, he was also a thoughtful and caring colleague who supported, encouraged and protected his team. Many young researchers and practitioners thrived and grew under his guidance and mentorship.

Hamba kahle, Jan; we are grateful for our time with you.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACDP	African Christian Democratic Party
ANC	African National Congress
ANOVA	analysis of variance
ATM	African Transformation Movement
AU	African Union
B-BBEE	Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment
BELA	Basic Education Laws Amendment Act
COPE	Congress of the People
CSO	civil society organisation
DA	Democratic Alliance
DEI	diversity, equity and inclusion
DPME	Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
EA	enumerator area
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
FF+	Freedom Front Plus
G20	Group of 20
GI-TOC	Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime
GLA	Global Leadership Academy
GNU	Government of National Unity
GPU	Government of Provincial Unity
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
IES	Income and Expenditure Survey
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
IJR	Institute for Justice and Reconciliation
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
LPI	Lived Poverty Index
MK	uMkhonto weSizwe
NA	National Assembly
NFP	National Freedom Pary
NHI	National Health Insurance
NLI	Neighbourhood Lifestyle Index
NPA	National Prosecuting Authority
ODA	online data analysis
PA	Patriotic Alliance

PAC	Pan Africanist Congress of Azania
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SAPS	South African Police Service
SARB	South African Reconciliation Barometer
SARS	South African Revenue Service
SoI	Statement of Intent
StatsSA	Statistics South Africa
TOR	Terms of Reference
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UCT	University of Cape Town
UDM	United Democratic Movement
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
US	United States of America
VAP	voting-age population

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2025 South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) was conducted one year into the first term of the Government of National Unity (GNU), following the African National Congress's (ANC) loss of its outright majority in the 2024 national elections. This represented a historic shift from single-party dominance to a multiparty national coalition. Acceptance of the 2024 election results after a spate of political violence affirmed citizens' enduring commitment to constitutional democracy and national reconciliation. However, the survey found that public attitudes remained broadly similar to those in 2023: South Africans continued to report low confidence in political leaders and institutions, modest assessments of change since 1994, and deep concern about poverty, inequality and exclusion.

Across the Barometer's six dimensions, results pointed to persistent structural and social fault lines. Confidence in political parties and many public institutions remained low and external political efficacy was weak. Many South Africans felt that national leaders neither listen to nor act in the interests of ordinary people. Socio-economic exclusion remained a central concern: levels of lived poverty were high, black South Africans continued to experience significantly greater deprivation than white South Africans, and relatively few people believed that job opportunities, economic inequality or their own household and financial circumstances had improved. While national identity remained strong, interpersonal trust was low outside of close family and neighbours. Interaction and deeper relationships across historically defined race lines were concentrated among affluent urban groups, and the gap between rich and poor was again identified as the country's main source of division and greatest barrier to reconciliation.

At the same time, the Barometer also found some important areas of resilience and cautious optimism. Large majorities still regarded being South African as central to how they see themselves and to what they want for their children, and most believed that a more united country was both desirable and achievable. Consensus on the core truths of apartheid and recognition of its enduring harms remained broad, and there was continued support in principle for land reform, a racially representative workforce and reparative justice for victims of apartheid abuses. Public evaluations of the GNU and key policy initiatives were mixed, including National Health Insurance (NHI) and the National Dialogue, suggesting some willingness to allow time for the coalition to demonstrate results.

Looking ahead to the 2026/27 local government elections, the findings pointed to four priority areas for the GNU, political parties and broader society:

- **Rebuild trust in institutions and leadership**, including through greater responsiveness and transparency.
- **Deliver measurable progress on poverty, unemployment and inequality**, addressing the profound material divides that South Africans consistently identify as the primary source of division and the main barrier to reconciliation.
- **Deepen social cohesion beyond shared identity**, including through strengthening historical understanding among younger generations and advancing reparative and restorative justice.
- **Renew hope for the future** by showing that the country can deliver improvements in people's lives, strengthening both reconciliation and democratic participation in the years to come.

1. INTRODUCTION

South African democracy and the national reconciliation project have been intrinsically linked since the end of apartheid and the 1994 elections, which laid the foundation for the country's first representative government. On the first official Day of Reconciliation in 1995, President Nelson Mandela reaffirmed South Africans' 'shared allegiance to justice, non-racialism and democracy' and recalled 'our solemn constitutional compact to live together on the basis of equality and mutual respect'.[1] The success of the new democratic state depended on peace, stability and acceptance of the legitimacy of the government, its institutions and leadership.

The 1994 elections ushered in three decades of governance under the liberation-turned-ruling African National Congress (ANC) party. The extent of change in some facets of South African society cannot be overstated. The Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation's (DPME) 30-Year Review counts the following among these changes: improved living conditions for millions of South Africans, post-apartheid legislation and institutions, new public-sector operating models and planning systems, and participatory processes across all spheres of government.[2]

There have also been profound challenges and shortcomings during this period. The structure of the economy has remained exclusive and unequal. Almost two-thirds of South Africans still live in poverty and unemployment is above 40%.[3] Despite desperate and competing needs for public-sector investment and support, state capture, fraud and corruption led to the loss of R57 billion between 2009 and 2018.[4]

While retaining its ruling majority, support for the ANC steadily declined. Its share of the national vote dropped over successive elections, alongside turnout at the polls. New opposition parties were established by former members, from the United Democratic Movement (UDM) in 1997 to the Congress of the People (COPE), Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and, most recently, uMkhonto weSizwe (MK).

The South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) survey, conducted by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) since 2003, has also documented declining public trust in, and approval of, leadership, institutions and democratic processes more broadly. In 2023, public opinion in some dimensions of political culture and governance fell to its lowest-ever recorded levels in the 20-year lifespan of the project. Most South Africans believed the country was divided, was headed in the wrong direction and had not changed enough since 1994.

Amid this national mood of frustration and distrust, the ANC was challenged to retain its outright majority in the 2024 elections. Months of political tension and outright violence in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) led to warnings of possible post-election protests, conflict and instability.[5] In an unprecedented loss, the ANC – which peaked at 70% support in 2004 – won only 40% of the national vote.[6] This seismic shift also

> 'We, the people of South Africa, have made a decisive and irreversible break with the past. We have, in real life, declared our shared allegiance to justice, non-racialism and democracy; our yearning for a peaceful and harmonious nation of equals.'
>
> President Nelson Mandela
>
> 16 December 1995

echoed demand for change among disenfranchised citizens globally, with an estimated 80% of incumbents losing seats or voting shares in democratic polls held around the world.[7]

Defying the worst predictions of violence and instability, citizens and political parties accepted the election results – an endorsement of the strength of South African reconciliation and democracy. Recalling the country's first multiparty national coalition, and after a period of intense negotiations, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in June 2024. The ANC and opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) joined the coalition with eight smaller parties; notably absent were the third- and fourth-biggest electoral winners, MK and the EFF.[8]

The 2025 Reconciliation Barometer was conducted one year into the term of the GNU. Despite the dramatic shift in the national political landscape, survey results revealed a similar picture to 2023 – one characterised by perceptions of distrust, doubt and division. Public opinion remained largely unchanged across many of the Barometer's dimensions and questions, and in fact worsened in some areas. These included diminished feelings of recognition and respect among people of different languages and cultures, as well as deepening divisions along regional, geographic and socio-economic lines.

One possible explanation for this is that it is simply too soon to tell how the GNU will fare in addressing South Africa's intransigent challenges and in inspiring renewed public confidence. Another is that, ultimately, many of the parties, leaders and agendas remained the same after the 2024 election. While future survey rounds may tell a new story, anticipation is already building ahead of the 2026/27 local government elections – which Barometer results suggest may be staged in a comparable climate of discontent.

This report presents the 2025 Reconciliation Barometer findings. Section 2 details the survey design, methodology and data-collection process, which included face-to-face interviews with 2 006 people throughout the country. The result is a nationally representative sample that allows for conclusions about the views of all South Africans.

Section 3 explores the Political Culture sub-dimension and examines public trust in leadership, confidence in institutions and support for key policy changes, one year into the GNU. It also includes a snapshot of public opinion on the Israel–Palestine war and of South Africans' views on the national position with respect to this conflict.

Section 4 presents survey results on the Inclusion dimension, finding continued evidence of racialised poverty, marginal perceived improvements in well-being, and declining evaluations of respect for culture, language and religion among some groups of South Africans. The 2025 Barometer also tested public opinion on key legislation aimed at increasing inclusion through employment equity and land reform.

Section 5, focused on the Apartheid Legacy survey dimension, presents evidence of enduring consensus on the truths of apartheid and the harms it caused, particularly relevant with the 2025 reopening of a number of inquests into the deaths of high-profile anti-apartheid activists. Knowledge about South Africa's past, however, has continued to decline among younger generations and support for reparative-justice interventions was moderate.

Section 6 examines progress in the Racial Reconciliation dimension since 1994, with survey results confirming that both informal and deeper social relationships remained most concentrated among affluent urban South Africans. The concept of reconciliation continued to be most associated with peace, a finding that may reflect national concern over political conflict and violence in the lead-up to the 2024 elections.

Section 7 analyses survey results in the Social Cohesion dimension, in which South Africans have maintained high associations with national identity, yet were distrusting of those outside their immediate social circles and continued to feel closest to others who shared their language or ethnicity.

Finally, Section 8 presents public evaluations of change in the country and expectations of future progress. Only a minority of South Africans believed meaningful change had been achieved across a range of indicators, and agreement that reconciliation is likely to improve in the coming years declined since the last survey round.

The report ends with Conclusions, including potential focus areas for the GNU and country as a whole in the lead-up to the 2026/27 local government elections.

Focus on interviewers

The IJR recognises the immense contribution of the interviewers in the teams responsible for survey data collection, without whom the Reconciliation Barometer would not be possible.

Over 38 000 South Africans have been surveyed since the project began, due in large part to the efforts of thousands of interviewers around the country.

Survey data collection requires talent and a unique set of skills. Interviewers are required to maintain the highest degree of ethical conduct and professionalism at all times. They must be diligent and accurate, neutral yet empathetic, and both patient and persistent. They are adaptive when confronted with challenges and obstacles, from high security gates to winter storms, gaping potholes and service delivery protests.

This year's data-collection team included 167 expert interviewers, employed by MarkData, and we thank you for your critical role in capturing the voices, views and experiences of South Africans around the country.



2. METHODOLOGY

The SARB is the longest-running national survey tracking public opinion on post-conflict reconciliation in Africa. The IJR has partnered in the development of reconciliation barometers in Rwanda and Sri Lanka, and peer projects have been established worldwide, including in Australia, Colombia and Canada.[9]

Conceptualising reconciliation

Reconciliation is a complex social concept that is challenging to measure. Since the first round of the Barometer in 2003, the IJR has defined reconciliation in terms of multiple related concepts or 'dimensions', each with distinct indicators that are tracked through the survey. These dimensions and indicators have been periodically reviewed, confirmed and updated, for example through data analysis and psychometric validation, qualitative focus groups and expert consultations over the 22 years of the project.

The six dimensions of reconciliation measured through the Barometer are shown in Figure 1 (for full hypotheses, see Annex A).

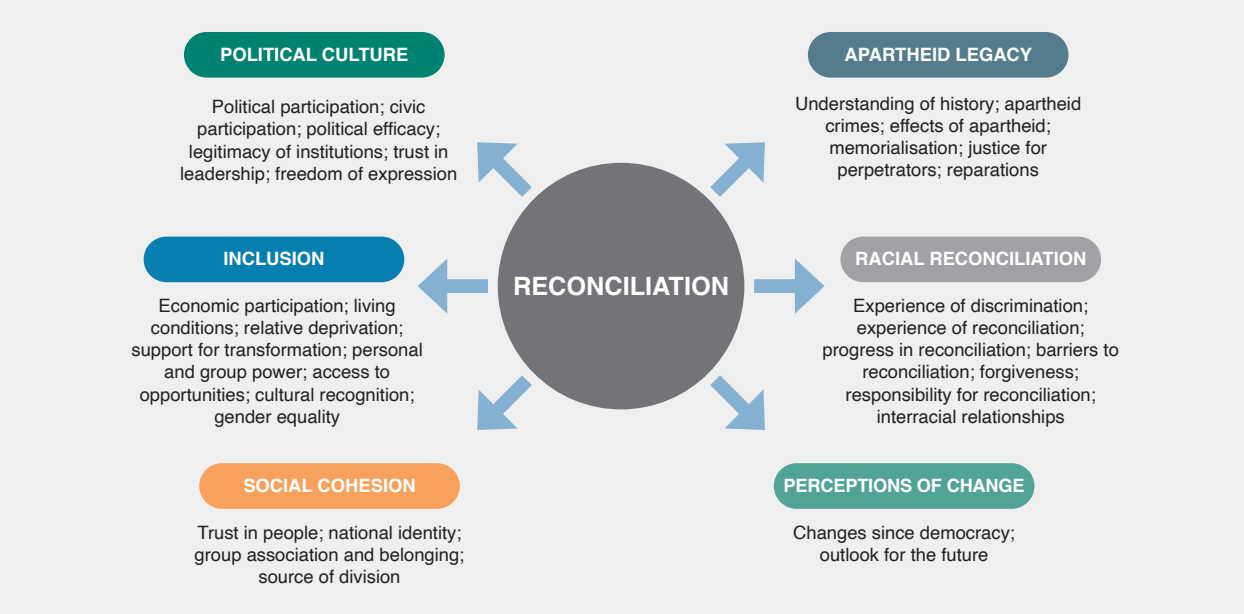
Survey design

The Barometer is a time series survey that currently consists of over 200 closed-ended questions – more than double its original length. Most of the survey questions are in the form of 5-point Likert scales, which has allowed the IJR to develop composite indices constructed using multiple indicators.

The survey has evolved and expanded over time, while still retaining its core conceptual dimensions, indicators and methodological approach. The changes include:

- **Reducing the frequency of iteration.** In 2003 and 2004, immediately following the release of the final volumes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report, the Barometer was conducted twice annually in order to monitor attitudinal trends in a dynamic and transitional sociopolitical environment. The survey was then conducted once a year between 2005 and 2013, and, thereafter, every second year between 2015 and 2025. At the outset, the longevity of and support for the project were unknown – as indeed it was for the reconciliation process as a whole. The transition from a biannual assessment of

Figure 1: Dimensions of reconciliation



short-term change to a study of the long-term, big picture of reconciliation is also evident in some survey questions. These have been adapted from their original formats of assessing change over a period of months, to over several years.

- **Strengthening the survey questionnaire.** The IJR has continually worked to strengthen the Reconciliation Barometer as a robust research instrument, and one that is regularly validated, replicable and generates high-quality results that are available for secondary data analysis by researchers, students, academics, civil society organisations (CSOs), government officials and practitioners worldwide. This process has included periodic revisions and updates to the survey questions, as well as increasing the consistency and reliability of the indicators and scales used.
- **Adapting to changing demographics.** With the passing of time and an increasingly born-free population, some survey questions have been revised and adapted to ensure their continued relevance for all participants.

Data collection

The Barometer is conducted through in-person interviews with adult South Africans in all parts of the country. In previous rounds, data collection was conducted by Ipsos, Kantar Public and MarkData.

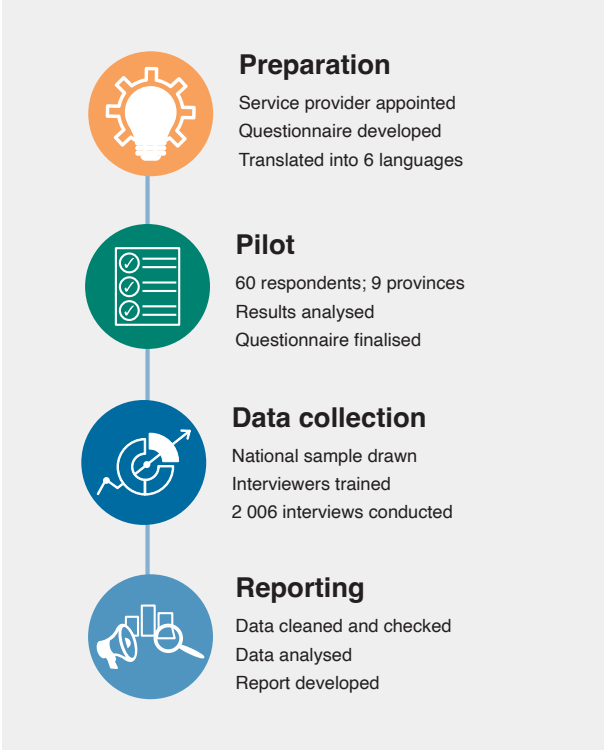
In April 2025, the IJR advertised a Terms of Reference (TOR) inviting bids from qualified service providers. Following a competitive process, MarkData was appointed to conduct data collection for the current survey round.

The draft questionnaire was developed comprising a combination of new and legacy survey questions. It was piloted across all nine provinces of the country, and the results were subjected to psychometric validation testing. The questionnaire was then finalised and translated from English into Afrikaans, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Setswana, Sepedi and Sesotho (Figure 2).

The Barometer is nationally representative, meaning that every adult South African has an equal chance of being selected to participate. On this basis, and with the application of post-survey weighting, the data can be used to draw conclusions about the entire South African population.

The sample frame was developed based on Census enumerator areas (EAs). Six participants

Figure 2: Methodology and data collection

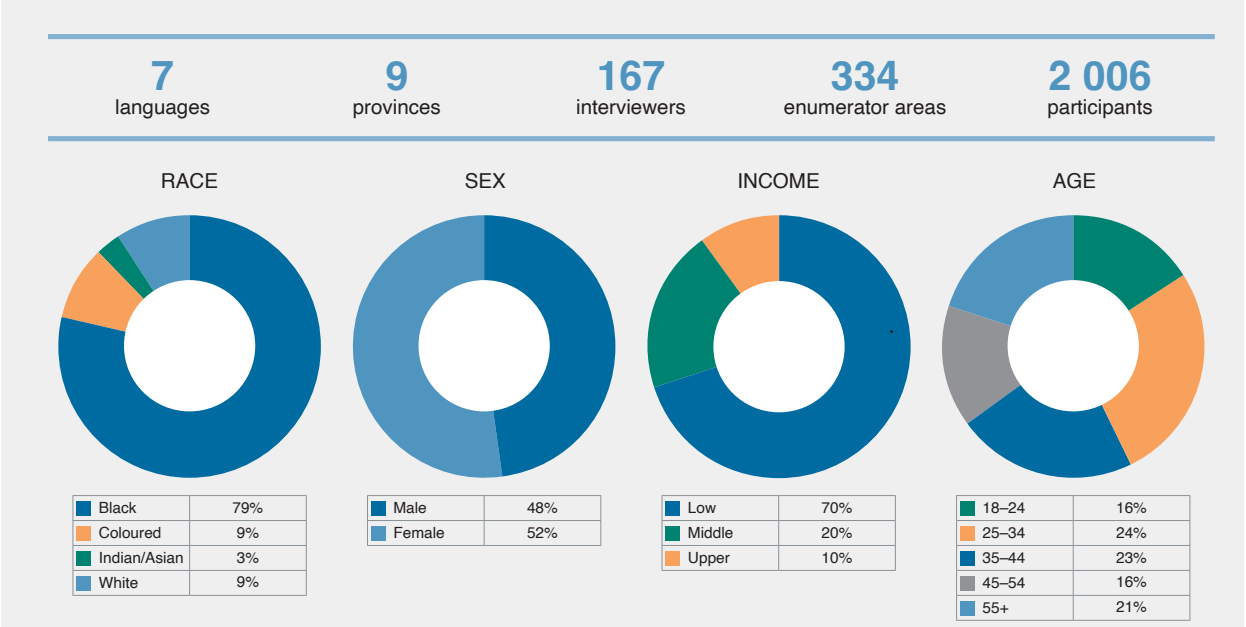


were interviewed in each of 334 EAs selected across the country. Sampling was based on the following key variables:

- **Urbanisation**, including 60% metro area participants, 25% in non-metro urban areas and 15% in rural areas;
- **Province**, with national coverage and oversampling in less populous provinces such as the Northern Cape. In this sample, all provinces were set at a minimum sample of 100 participants;
- **Race**, with oversampling of minority race groups (coloured, Indian/Asian and white) to ensure sufficient representation; and
- **Neighbourhood Lifestyle Index** (NLI), based on a multidimensional income segmentation model.

Data collection started on 28 July 2025 and concluded on 25 August 2025, and a total of 2 006 South Africans were interviewed (Figure 3). The full sample is included in Annex B. All previous survey data and documentation are freely available through the IJR and descriptive analysis can be conducted through our dedicated online data analysis (ODA) portal: https://www.ijr.org.za/resources/sarb-oda-analysis/.

Figure 3: Survey sample, 2025 (weighted)



Notes on reporting

The following relate to the presentation of all data throughout the remaining sections of the report:

Margin of error: The margin of error is 2.19 based on a *p*-value of 0.5, a sample size of 2 006 and a Z-score of 1.96.

Weighting: All data are weighted, allowing for conclusions about the entire national population.

Time series analysis: Where possible, comparative survey results are presented for selected anchor years (2003, 2013, 2023 and 2025) chosen to represent the baseline, midpoint and most recent rounds of data collection and highlight long-term public opinion trends.

Aggregation: Most survey items are in the form of 5-point Likert scales. Results are often reported in aggregate for accessibility and ease of graphic representation through, for example, combining 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree' responses and reporting on agreement levels.

Missing data: 'Don't know' and 'Refused' responses are generally combined in reporting and abbreviated as 'DK/Ref'.

Rounding: Owing to rounding, reported values may not always total 100%.

Sex: Participants were asked whether they described themselves 'as a man, a woman or in some other way' but no responses were received other than the binary categories.

Race: The IJR continues to use race as an important variable in analysing Barometer results, given its historic relevance and continued importance in relation to redress, socio-economic transformation and personal and group identity, among others.

Data access

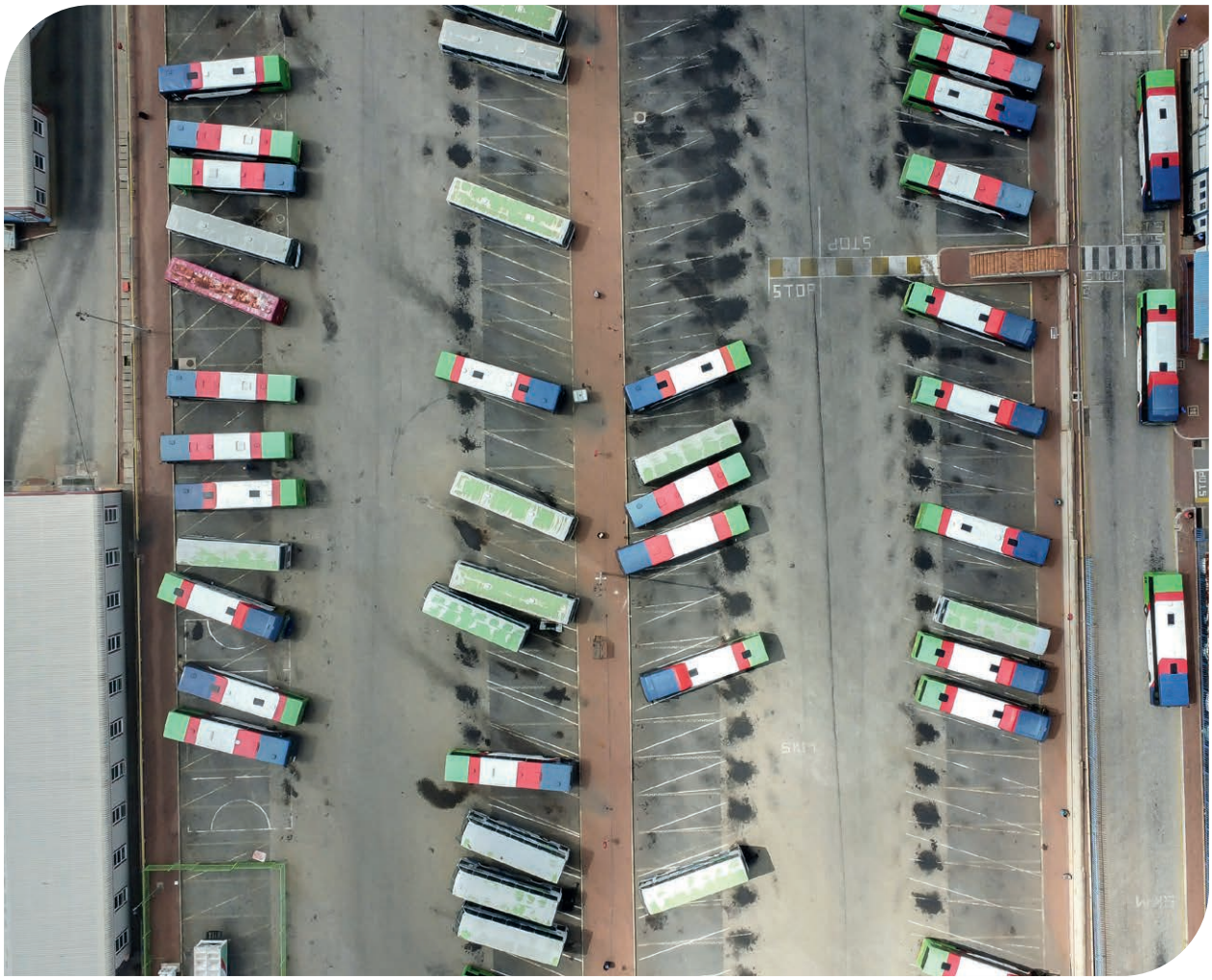
Reconciliation Barometer data is freely available to the public through the IJR's ODA portal. Full datasets with accompanying methodological and narrative reports are also available at no cost through the DataFirst Centre at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at Cornell University. All sites provide full access to legacy data but the 2025 survey results (Round 19) are subject to a one-year embargo until December 2026.

For specific queries or assistance regarding the accessing of Barometer data, please contact info@ijr.org.za.

SARB ODA portal

DataFirst Centre

Roper Center for Public Opinion Research



3. POLITICAL CULTURE

The Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime warned of a 'watershed election year in South Africa's political landscape, with the likelihood of significant party realignments and a risk of post-election violence'.

In the years following the democratic transition, and as the design of the first Barometer was under way, the IJR hypothesised that progress in reconciliation would require South Africans to be tolerant of diverse political views, and to believe in the legitimacy and authority of public and political institutions.

Political culture remains one of the six core dimensions of the Barometer and is measured through indicators including political and civic participation, efficacy, trust in leadership and legitimacy (Figure 1). To what extent have South African attitudes and perceptions changed one year after the historic 2024 elections?

Lead-up to elections

South Africa was gripped by an atmosphere of anticipation and uncertainty in the lead-up to the country's seventh national general elections. This pervasive tension was exacerbated when ousted former president Jacob Zuma announced the launch of the new MK party and the intention to contest the upcoming polls. Zuma maintained that he remained a loyal ANC member but refused to support the ruling party's electoral campaign under the continued leadership of President Cyril Ramaphosa. 'The new people's war starts from today,' Zuma announced. 'The only crucial difference is that instead of the bullet, this time we will use the ballot.'[10]

The MK party was not alone in its political debut. In total, 70 new political parties registered to contest the elections, alongside 11 independent candidates – who were able to appear on national and provincial ballots for the first time with the passing of the 2023 Electoral Amendment Act. With these additions, 14 903 candidates competed for 887 seats in the national and provincial legislatures.[11]

Political violence escalated during this period of tension and uncertainty, fomenting fears of what might happen at the polls. The Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC) documented an estimated 35 assassinations between January and April of 2024 alone: an average of one targeted hit every two weeks and including 10 political killings.[12] An earlier *News24* special investigation counted an estimated 19 assassinations of elected local government councillors in KZN over the 12-month period from September 2022 to 2023, thus bringing the total to over 150 political murders in the province since 2011. Victims included councillors from the ANC as well as the IFP, NFP, EFF and ACDP.[13]

Inflammatory rhetoric fanned fears of possible conflict to come. MK KZN leader Visvin Reddy was charged with inciting violence. He claimed: 'This country will be turned into civil war … there will be riots like you have never seen … there will be anarchy.'[14] The GI-TOC warned that 2024 'could be a watershed election year in South Africa's

political landscape, with the likelihood of significant party realignments and a risk of post-election violence.'[15]

A new political landscape

Elections were held on 29 May 2024 and the country's widely anticipated political upset was confirmed. The ANC lost its outright majority for the first time, with a staggering drop in support from nearly 58% in 2019 to only 40% in 2024. The opposition DA maintained its second position with 22% share of the national vote, while Zuma's MK party won an unprecedented 15%.[16]

Twenty-five thousand South African National Defence Force (SANDF) members were deployed to suspected hotspots and high-risk voting stations in response to threats of election-related violence. While a number of serious incidents did occur, including protests, electricity outages, system glitches and malicious damage, ultimately 'threats of civil war and anarchy did not materialise on election day'.[17]

President Ramaphosa's concession speech following the announcement of the final election results further quelled fears of violence and instability. Acknowledging the ANC's loss, Ramaphosa called the election a 'victory for our democracy' and urged citizens to 'put South Africa first' during the transitional period to come.[18] Invoking the 1994 multiparty coalition, Ramaphosa announced the formation of a new Government of National Unity (GNU) which, after intense and protracted negotiations, included 10 members: the ANC, DA, IFP, Patriotic Alliance (PA), Freedom Front Plus (FF+), United Democratic Movement (UDM), RISE Mzansi, Al Jamah-ah, Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) and the GOOD party.[19] In its Statement of Intent (SoI), the GNU announced a focus on 'pursuing a common programme to eradicate poverty and build a more equal society, to create jobs, and to make government truly work for the people'.[20]

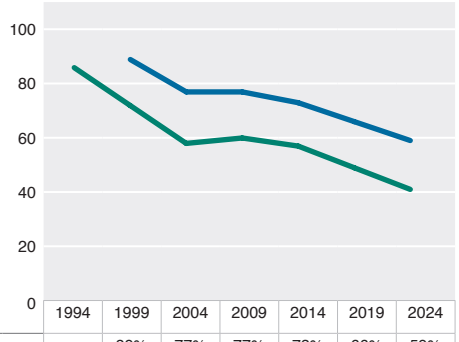
Notably absent from the GNU were the EFF and MK party, which protested the coalition's formation and membership. Zuma termed the GNU a 'white-led unholy alliance between the DA and the ANC' that represented 'nothing but a return of apartheid and colonialism', while the EFF refused to participate in any coalition that included the DA and FF+.[21]

Election anticipation versus participation

In 2023, the Reconciliation Barometer asked South Africans how likely they were to vote in the 2025 elections. Within the highly politicised national climate, 70% answered that they were likely to vote, while 11% were unlikely and 15% unsure. However, as found in previous rounds, voting intent did not always translate into action on election day. As reported by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), official voter turnout fell from 66% in 2019 to 59% in 2024. Moreover, a closer analysis shows that the proportion of the voting-age population (VAP) who cast a ballot declined from 49% to 41% (Figure 4).[22]



Figure 4: Voter turnout, 1994–2024*



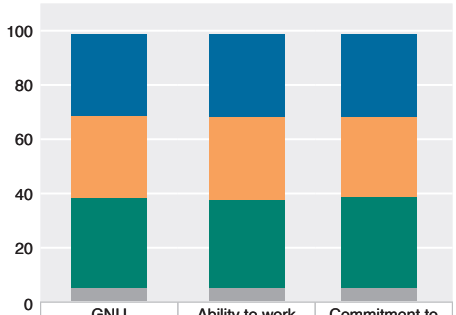
	1994	1999	2004	2009	2014	2019	2024
Voter turnout		89%	77%	77%	73%	66%	59%
Proportion of VAP	86%	72%	58%	60%	57%	49%	41%

**No official turnout rates were published following the 1994 elections.*
Sources: IEC; Schulz-Herzenberg 2020; O'Regan 2024.

One year of the GNU

Data collection for the 2025 Reconciliation Barometer was conducted one year after the establishment of the GNU and South Africans were asked about its performance to date. Results were relatively evenly divided overall: about a third each expressed high (31%, a great deal/quite a lot), moderate (31%, some) and low (34%, little/no) confidence in the effectiveness of the GNU. Responses were similar to questions about the ability and commitment of political parties to work together as members of the GNU, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Confidence in the GNU



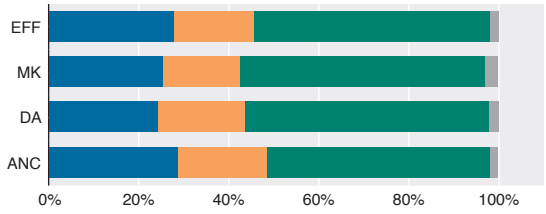
	GNU effectiveness	Ability to work together	Commitment to work together
High	31%	31%	31%
Moderate	31%	31%	30%
Low	34%	33%	34%
DK/Ref	5%	5%	5%

However. a closer analysis of these results found a statistically significant variation in evaluations of GNU effectiveness, thereby highlighting socio-economic and regional differences also evident in some other subdimensions within the 2025 survey. The strongest factor shaping confidence in the effectiveness of the GNU was respondents' province of origin. Average confidence was highest in the Western Cape (*mean* = 3.9), North West (*mean* = 3.2) and Limpopo (*mean* = 3.1) and lowest in the Northern Cape (*mean* = 2.2), KwaZulu-Natal (*mean* = 2.2) and Free State (*mean* = 2.7). Political party preference was the second-strongest determining factor identified, followed by income group and urban–rural context.[23]

Confidence in political parties and institutions

Greater strength of opinion was evident in evaluations of specific political parties and democratic institutions more broadly. Despite differences in candidates, manifestoes and policy platforms, levels of public confidence in political parties were universally low. Half or more of all South Africans expressed little or no confidence in the ANC (50%), DA (54%), MK (54%) or EFF (53%), as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Confidence in leading political parties

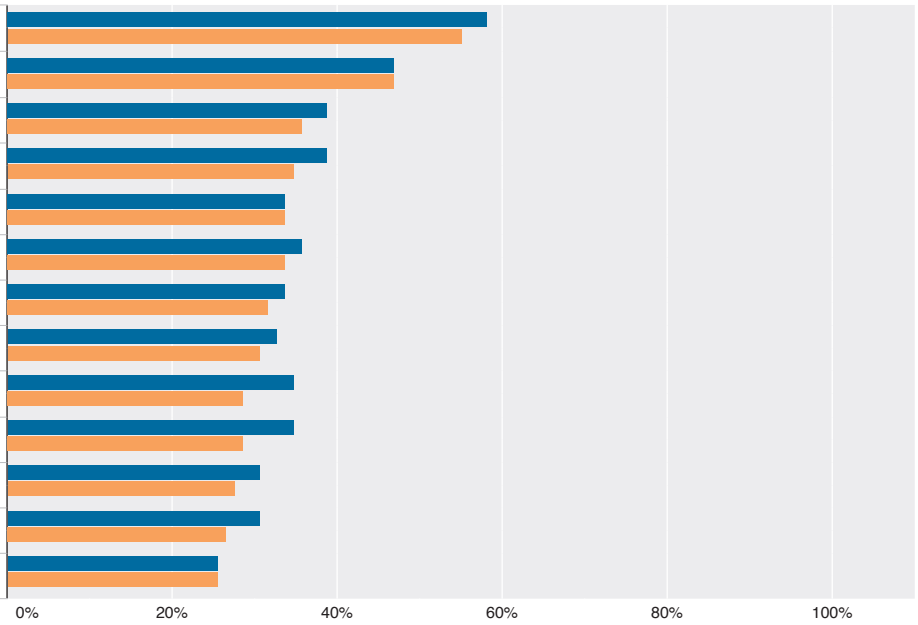


	EFF	MK	DA	ANC
High	28%	25%	24%	29%
Moderate	18%	17%	19%	20%
Low	53%	54%	54%	50%
DK/Ref	2%	3%	2%	2%

In spite of the 2024 change of government, confidence in public institutions remained low in 2025 – and even worsened slightly in some cases. Consistent with successive survey results since 2017, citizens' confidence was highest in the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) at 54% – despite a slight decline from 57% in 2023 – followed by the South African Revenue Service (SARS) at 46%. The third- and fourth-highest levels of confidence were in the Constitutional Court (35%) and South African Police Service (SAPS) (34%), although at considerably lower levels than for either the SABC or SARS. Only a third of South Africans were confident in the legal system in general or the president (33%) and less than a third were confident in any of the other institutions mentioned, as shown in Figure 7. The lowest levels of public confidence, in keeping with 2023 results, were in local government (26%) and the deputy president (25%).

Figure 7: Confidence in institutions

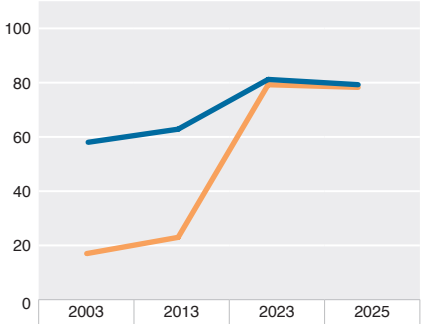
2023	2025	
57%	54%	South African Broadcasting Corporation
46%	46%	South African Revenue Service
38%	35%	Constitutional Court
38%	34%	South African Police Service
33%	33%	Legal system in general
35%	33%	President
33%	31%	Parliament
32%	30%	National government
34%	28%	National Prosecuting Authority
34%	28%	Provincial government
30%	27%	Public Protector
30%	26%	Local government
25%	25%	Deputy president



Perceptions of national leadership

The Barometer tracks public opinion about leadership, and successive results have revealed a dramatic increase in distrust over the 22 years of the survey. In 2003 and 2013, just over half of all South Africans agreed that the people running the country were not really concerned about what happens to ordinary citizens. By 2023, this had risen to 81%, a result that remained largely unchanged in 2025 (79%). Similarly, in 2003 and 2013, only about a fifth of South Africans agreed that leaders cannot be trusted to do the right thing most of the time. As shown in Figure 8, this figure has nearly quadrupled, reaching 79% in 2023 and 78% in 2025. One possible interpretation is that, while the structure and composition of the government changed, many of the faces in national leadership remained the same.

Figure 8: Distrust of leadership



	2003	2013	2023	2025
Leaders are not concerned	57%	62%	81%	79%
Leaders cannot be trusted	18%	21%	79%	78%

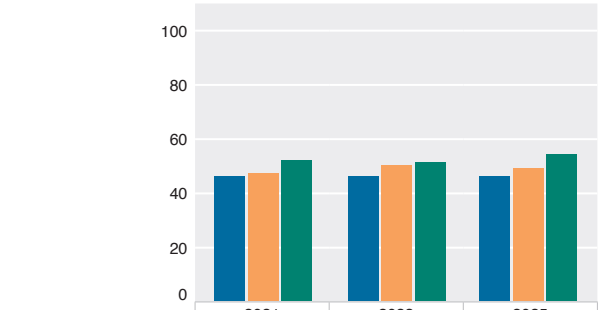
Political efficacy

The Reconciliation Barometer also measures citizen attitudes about a range of facets of political participation beyond voting alone. One of these subdomains is internal political efficacy, which refers to people's belief in their own ability to understand and take part in politics. The survey revealed moderate levels of internal political efficacy in 2023, with about half of all South Africans feeling unqualified to participate in politics (47%), less informed than other people (52%) and that they do not have a good understanding of the important issues affecting the country (51%). Consistent with a number of other political culture indicators analysed in this section of the report, internal efficacy results remained largely unchanged in the 2025 survey round, although the percentage of people who believe they are less informed than others increased marginally to 55%, as shown in Figure 9.

External political efficacy is a measure of the extent people believe that citizens can influence the government, and that officials and institutions are responsive to the public. The Barometer once again found low levels of external efficacy in 2025, in keeping with the results from 2023. About three-quarters of South Africans agreed that citizens should have the final say on important issues by voting directly in referendums (74%), and that people and not politicians should make the most important policy decisions (73%) in the country. A further 77% agreed that politicians should always follow the will of the people. Notably, however, the

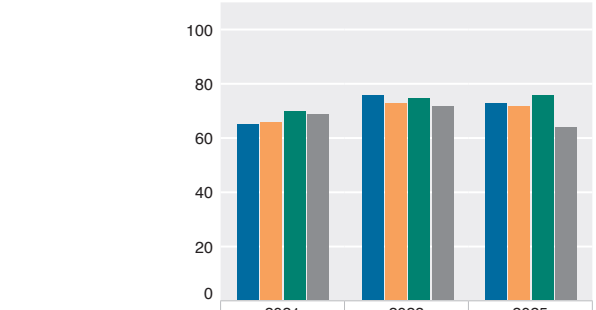
percentage of people who agreed that ordinary South Africans can only rely on each other rather than on elites declined from 73% in 2023 to 65% in 2025 (Figure 10).

Figure 9: Internal political efficacy



	2021	2023	2025
Unqualified to participate	47%	47%	47%
Don't understand important issues	48%	51%	50%
Less informed than others	53%	52%	55%

Figure 10: External political efficacy



	2021	2023	2025
People should have the final say	66%	77%	74%
People should make important policy decisions	67%	74%	73%
Politicians should follow will of the people	71%	76%	77%
South Africans should rely on each other	70%	73%	65%

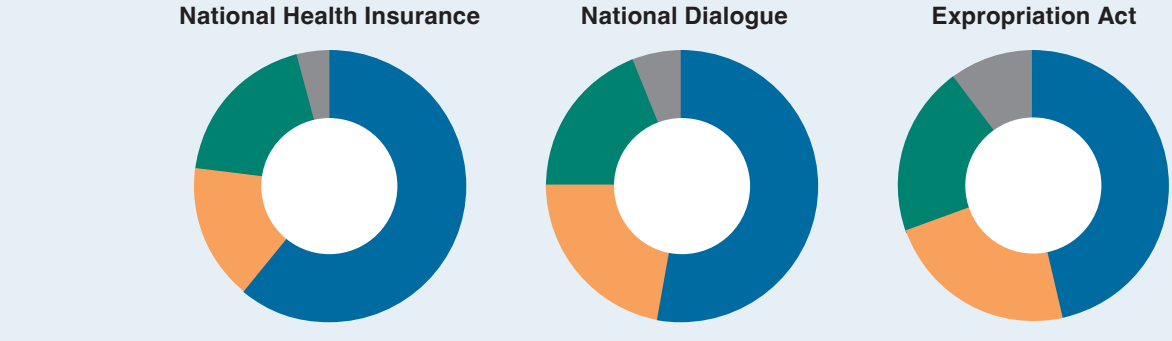
GNU policy agenda

The GNU has also been confronted with a number of challenges in its first year, as former political opponents and adversaries have turned national coalition partners and attempted to balance competing priorities. According to elections expert and emeritus professor Susan Booysen, the GNU has 'tottered from one near-death experience to the next', from disputes over Cabinet appointments to a contested legislative programme, a rejected national budget and ideological conflicts over foreign-policy positions on the Russia–Ukraine and Israel–Palestine wars.[24]

Tensions were particularly evident between the two largest parties, the ANC and DA, surrounding government's legislative programme. The DA opposed the National Health Insurance (NHI) Act and Basic Education Laws Amendment (BELA) Act, both passed in the lead-up to the 2024 elections, as well as the 2025 Expropriation Act.[25] The latter was signed into law in January despite minority-party objections, a move viewed as exemplifying the ANC's tendency to fall back on its dominant position and overrule other coalition members. In early November 2025, GNU members embarked on a retreat aimed at increasing internal cooperation and reaffirming commitment to the 2024 SoI.[26]

The Barometer asked South Africans about their opinions on key policies and new legislation, including those highly contested within the GNU. Figure 11 shows moderate majority support for the NHI, with 61% of South Africans strongly approving/approving, 19% strongly disapproving/disapproving and 16% neutral. Just over half of South Africans (53%) approved of the National Dialogue, announced by President Ramaphosa in the State of the Nation Address and convened in August 2025 with the aim of defining a new collective vision for the country for the next 30 years.[27] About one in five South Africans were neutral (22%) or disapproved (19%) of the National Dialogue. A lower majority of South Africans strongly approved/approved of the Expropriation Act at 46%, while 20% strongly disapproved/disapproved, 23% were neutral and 10% did not know or declined to answer the question.

Figure 11: Approval of new policy and legislation



	National Health Insurance	National Dialogue	Expropriation Act
Approve	61%	53%	46%
Neutral	16%	22%	23%
Disapprove	19%	19%	20%
DK/Ref	4%	6%	10%

Key findings: Political culture

- **Successful, but contested political transition.** While South Africa's historic change from the ruling ANC to a national coalition government was without the widespread conflict or unrest that some predicted, intense partisan contestation has disrupted the work of the GNU and – if underlying issues are not addressed – may foreshadow challenges ahead of the 2026/27 local government elections.
- **Persistent low turnout and external efficacy**. Despite high intent to vote in 2024, participation in elections remained low and most South Africans continued to believe that those in government do not listen to ordinary citizens and that they are unable to meaningfully influence political decisions.
- **Continued low confidence in institutions.** Most South Africans lacked confidence in political parties and public institutions, although the SABC and SARS continued to be viewed most favourably.
- **Mixed evaluations of the GNU.** Overall confidence in the GNU was mixed after its first year in government. However there are significant different perceptions about its effectiveness between South Africans in different provinces in particular.
- **Moderate approval of policy and legislative programme.** Despite contestation between GNU members, a moderate majority of South Africans approved of key new policy and legislation, including the NHI in particular.



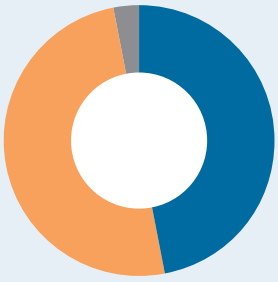
Public opinion on the Israel–Palestine war

In December 2023, the South African government, in its capacity as a State Party to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, approached the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague over concerns regarding crimes against humanity and war crimes committed against Palestinean civilians during Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip.[28] South Africa withdrew its diplomats from Israel and President Ramaphosa reaffirmed the ANC's long-standing solidarity with the Palestinians and their struggle for independent statehood.[29] Other GNU members have refrained from explicit support for either side in the conflict or, in the case of the PA, have aligned with Israel.[30]

The 2025 Reconciliation Barometer asked South Africans about their awareness of the war between Israel and Palestine, as well as their views on if the country should support one side and if they disapproved/approved of the ICJ case. In response, half of South Africans answered that they had not heard about the war between Israel and Palestine, as shown in Figure 12. Of those who were aware of the war, almost half (47%) believed South Africa should be neutral, while a quarter (23%) felt the country should side with Palestine and 13% that it should side with Israel. Forty-one per cent of South Africans who were aware of the Israel–Palestine war strongly approved/approved of South Africa's case at the ICJ, while about a quarter (25%) were neutral or strongly disapproved/disapproved (26%).

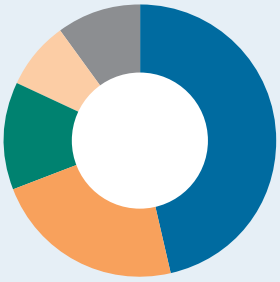
Figure 12: Perceptions on the Israel–Palestine war

Awareness



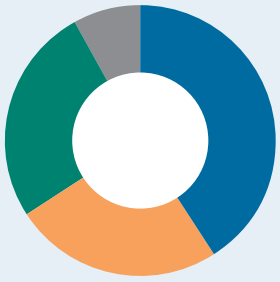
Yes	47%
No	50%
DK/Ref	3%

National position*



Be neutral	47%
Side with Palestine	23%
Side with Israel	13%
Support one, unsure which	8%
DK/Ref	10%

Approval of ICJ case*



Approve	41%
Neutral	25%
Disapprove	26%
DK/Ref	8%

** Question asked only of South Africans who were aware of the Israel–Palestine war.*



4. INCLUSION

Apartheid was built on principles and practices of exclusion, separation, differentiation and intolerance. As official policy and state architecture, apartheid broke families apart, divided communities, entrenched inequality, fomented ethnic tension, exploited women, stigmatised people, and fanned fears about migrants from neighbouring countries.

The IJR maintains that reconciliation depends on tolerance, inclusion and the creation of a society in which all people experience equality of rights, resources and opportunities. But how far has South Africa progressed towards this vision of equality and inclusion?

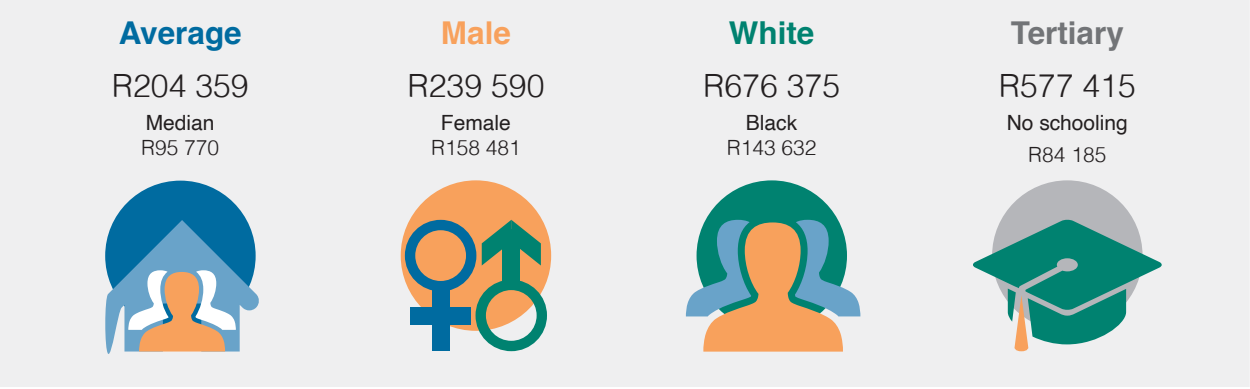
> 'At this historic juncture, we must act to ensure stability and peace, tackling the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality, entrench our Constitutional democracy and the rule of law, and to build a South Africa for all its people.'
>
> GNU Statement of Intent
>
> June 2024

Household income

South Africa's history of colonialism and apartheid created an economy that has remained one of the most exclusionary and unequal in the world. In the 2024 Statement of Intent, GNU members committed the government to addressing the key priorities of 'tackling the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality', which have been enduing challenges for the country since 1994.[31]

Results of the 2022/2023 Income and Expenditure Survey (IES), released by Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) in January 2025, confirmed that this remained the reality in the country. While average household income was R204 359 annually in 2023, median income was R95 770: based on this value, half of all households in the country earn R7 980 or less per month. Average annual income is higher among male-headed households (R239 590) and almost five times higher in white-headed households (R676 375) than black-headed households (R143 632). StatsSA also reported that households 'headed by those with tertiary education received the highest average income of R577 415, which was almost seven times more than the income earned by those with no schooling (R84 185).'[32]

Figure 13: Household income



Source: StatsSA 2025 (own graphic)

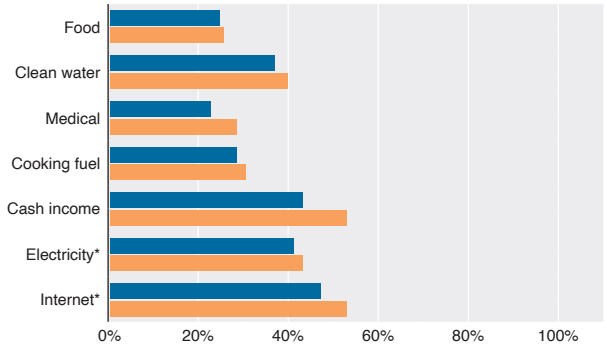
Lived poverty

The Reconciliation Barometer measures people's assessments of their own well-being and financial situation through a series of survey questions and composite indices. The Lived Poverty Index (LPI) asks how often people go without basic necessities: food, water, medicine, fuel for cooking, cash income, electricity and Internet access (both excluding load-shedding). Consistent with national poverty data, the 2025 Barometer results revealed high self-reported levels of deprivation that have in fact increased slightly since 2023.

In 2025, one in four South Africans (26%) went without enough food to eat in the past year, as shown in Figure 14 (cumulative results for several times, many times or always). Forty per cent went without clean water for home use, up marginally from 37% in 2023. Most notably, South Africans who always/many times/several times went without a cash income rose from 44% in 2023 to 54% in 2025.

As in previous rounds, when analysed as a composite index, average LPI scores differed significantly between South Africans of different races. An analysis of variance (ANOVA, $p < 0.01$) showed that white South Africans experienced the lowest levels of lived poverty (*mean* = 1.4), with average scores improving slightly from 2023 (*mean* = 1.6). Black South Africans experienced the highest levels of deprivation (*mean* = 2.4), with marginally worsened scores over the same period (*mean* = 2.3) (Figure 15).

Figure 14: Household deprivation



	Internet*	Electricity*	Cash income	Cooking fuel	Medical	Clean water	Food
2023	48%	42%	44%	29%	23%	37%	25%
2025	54%	44%	54%	31%	29%	40%	26%

**Excluding load-shedding.*

Living conditions and finances

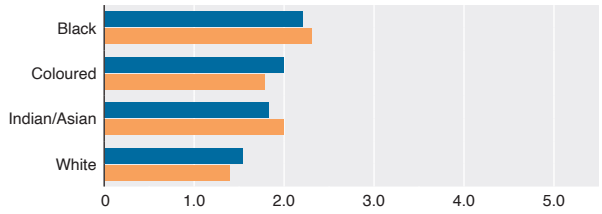
The Reconciliation Barometer also asks South Africans about their household living conditions and financial situation, relative to those of their parents, others in their community and the country as a whole. People tend to compare their own circumstances with those of others, and results can reveal whether they feel they are making progress, falling behind or even losing hope in future mobility.

Consistent with IES results highlighting the extent of poverty and income inequality, a minority (33%) of people believed they were much better off/better off than others in the country as a whole, as shown in Figure 16. Only about a third (35%) felt their household living conditions were much better/better than those of others in their community. A slightly higher percentage (41%) believed they were much better off/better off than their parents, but this declined marginally from 43% in 2023. Results were similar when South Africans were asked about their relative financial situation: 33% answered that they were much better off/better off than others in their community, 28% much better off/better off than the country as a whole, and 37% better off than their parents.

Relative household well-being and financial evaluations have increased gradually over recent years, recovering from a dip in 2021 likely attributable to the Covid pandemic.

However, these increases are from a low base, suggesting that, while some South Africans felt marginally better off, most still did not believe they were advancing significantly compared with others or previous generations.

Figure 15: Average LPI by race



	Black	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White
2023	2.3	2.0	1.9	1.6
2025	2.4	1.8	2.0	1.4

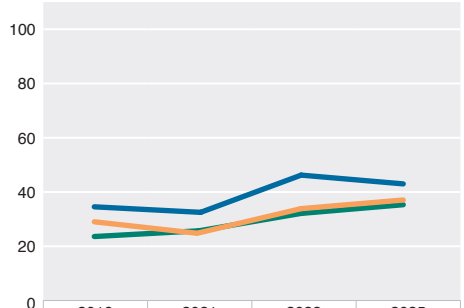
B-BBEE for economic transformation

Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) was among the main policy instruments used by the previous ANC-led government to bring about transformation in the economy and workforce. It has also been highly contested between GNU members, with mounting tension and scrutiny ascribed in part to President Donald Trump's drive to end affirmation action and government diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in the US.[33] In October 2025, the DA introduced a new Economic Inclusion Bill aimed at replacing what it termed years of 'ineffective' empowerment policies that have 'left millions of South Africans unemployed, impoverished, and hopeless'.[34]

Successive rounds of the Reconciliation Barometer survey have confirmed that the majority of South Africans broadly agree with the principle of a racially representative workforce, and this remained true in 2025. Overall, 82% of South Africans agreed that a racially representative workforce should be a national priority, and this was relatively consistent among people of different races, although slightly lower among white South Africans (77%), as shown in Figure 17.

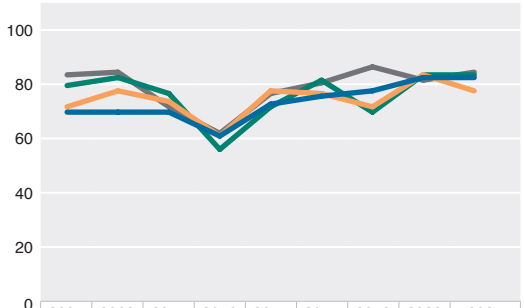
However, survey results also found low levels of support for B-BBEE as well as for preferential practices and the continued use of race categories for measuring transformation. Just over half of all South Africans (54%) strongly agreed/agreed that B-BBEE policies have gone far enough in addressing inequalities and should be phased out, as shown in Figure 18. Three-quarters (76%) of South Africans also strongly agreed/agreed that hiring and promotions should be strictly merit-based, and two-thirds (67%) strongly agreed/agreed that using racial categories does more harm than good.

Figure 16: Better relative household conditions



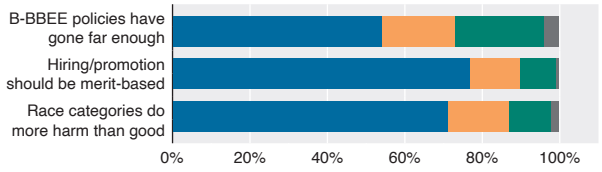
	2019	2021	2023	2025
Parents	35%	32%	43%	41%
Rest of community	29%	26%	33%	35%
Rest of South Africa	25%	27%	31%	33%

Figure 17: Support for racially representative workforce



	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2023	2025
Black	69%	69%	69%	60%	72%	75%	77%	82%	82%
White	71%	77%	73%	60%	77%	76%	71%	83%	77%
Indian/Asian	79%	82%	76%	55%	71%	81%	69%	83%	83%
Coloured	83%	84%	71%	61%	76%	80%	86%	81%	84%

Figure 18: Support for equity policies



	B-BBEE policies have gone far enough	Hiring/promotion should be merit-based	Race categories do more harm than good
Agree	54	76	67
Neither	19	13	17
Disagree	23	9	13
DK/Ref	4	1	2



Land reform

Land reform policy has also been highly contested within the GNU and, as indicated in Section 3, the DA strongly objected to the passing of the 2025 Expropriation Act. Comparable with broad agreement on the need for a racially representative national workforce, the Barometer has consistently found that most South Africans agree that black people were deprived of land and property ownership under apartheid. This remained true in 2025, with overall agreement at 80%. The majority of South Africans also strongly agreed/agreed that land reform is important for reconciliation (69%) and to address inequality (72%). Two-thirds (66%) strongly agreed/agreed that little progress has been made in this area, as shown in Figure 19.

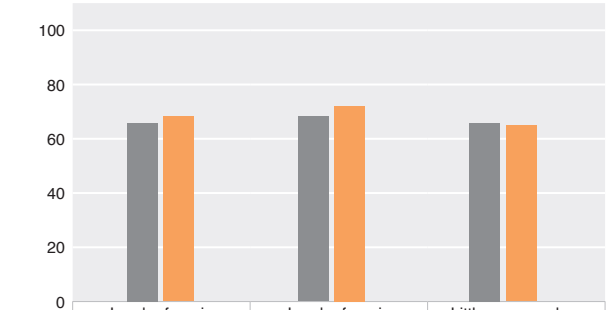
Support is less pronounced with respect to specific legislation. Less than half (46%) of South Africans strongly approved/approved of the new Expropriation Act, while 20% strongly disapproved/disapproved, 23% were neutral and 10% did not answer or were unsure.

Cultural recognition

The Barometer also measures inclusion through tracking perceptions about whether or not people believe their culture, language and religion are adequately recognised and receive the respect they deserve in South Africa today.

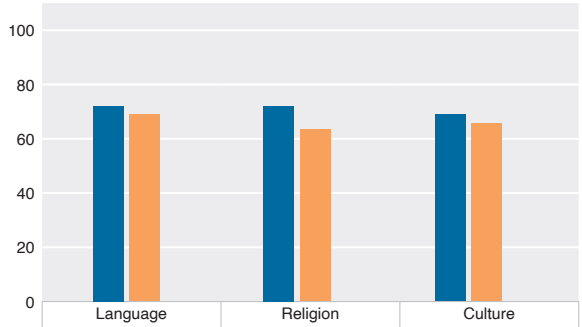
In 2025, most South Africans strongly agreed/agreed that their culture (67%), language (70%) and religion (64%) are respected, as shown in Figure 20. However, percentages have slightly declined since 2023, most notably in lower agreement over respect for religion, which dropped from 73% in 2023. A closer analysis also showed variation between speakers of different South African languages, although it is important to note that some represent very small subgroups within the overall sample. Figure 21 reveals declining agreement that language is respected among mother-tongue speakers of six of South Africa's main language groups between 2023 and 2025, including isiXhosa (87% to 73%) and isiZulu (75% to 60%), the most widely-spoken languages in the country.

Figure 19: Agreement with land reform



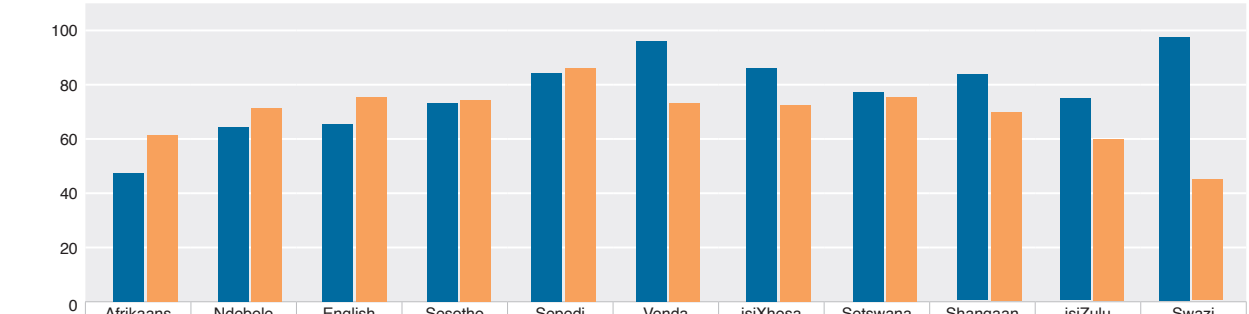
	Land reform is important for reconciliation	Land reform is important to address inequality	Little progress has been made in returning land
2021	67%	69%	67%
2025	69%	72%	66%

Figure 20: Cultural recognition



	Language	Religion	Culture
2023	73%	73%	70%
2025	70%	64%	67%

Figure 21: Respect for language



	Afrikaans	Ndebele	English	Sesotho	Sepedi	Venda	isiXhosa	Setswana	Shangaan	isiZulu	Swazi
2023	48%	65%	66%	74%	85%	97%	87%	78%	84%	75%	98%
2025	62%	71%	76%	75%	87%	74%	73%	76%	70%	60%	45%

Key findings: Inclusion

- **The reality of lived poverty.** Profound poverty and income inequality remained deeply entrenched, and black South Africans continued to experience higher levels of deprivation than white South Africans.
- **Relatively better off, but just barely.** South Africans felt marginally better off than in recent years, but the majority did not believe their well-being or financial circumstances have improved significantly compared with others or previous generations.
- **Support for workplace representation, not B-BBEE.** Most South Africans continued to support the principle of prioritising a racially representative national workforce but disagreed with B-BBBEE, preferential hiring/promotions and using race categories to measure progress in transformation.
- **Land reform important, but lukewarm approval of expropriation.** Most South Africans continued to agree about the importance of land reform for the country but support for the new Expropriation Act was moderate.
- **Cultural recognition.** Belief that culture, language and religion are respected has declined slightly since 2023 and variation was more pronounced between different demographic groups within the sample.



5. APARTHEID LEGACY

Only about a third of young adults knew quite a lot/a great deal about apartheid or the democratic transition.

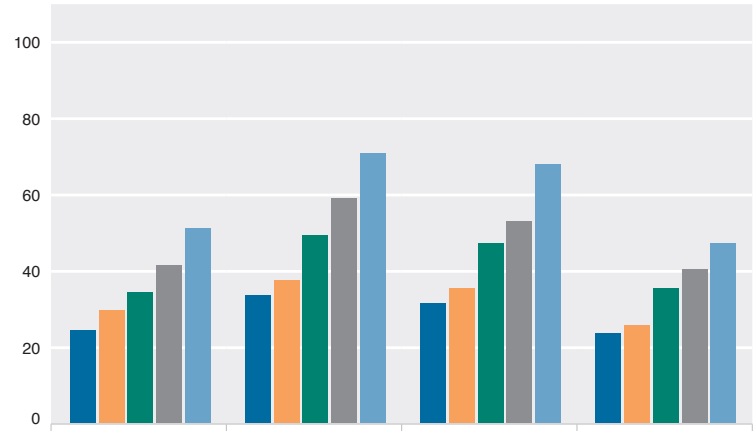
The Reconciliation Barometer has tracked public opinion about South Africa's past since 2003. This has included testing attitudes about teaching history, replacing symbols of apartheid and colonialism, paying reparations and prosecuting past crimes. Critically, the Barometer also measures consensus regarding 'the truth' about the past – as investigated and reported by the TRC – which remains an important foundation for reconciliation, national unity and democracy. How do we understand the past and its legacy in the country today?

Knowledge of the past

The first round of the Reconciliation Barometer was conducted in 2003, the year the TRC released its final report. Only a few years into democracy, survey subdimensions and questions about issues such as apartheid, the TRC, prosecutions and reparations featured frequently in national discourse and were top of mind for many South Africans.

By 2025, 22 years into the project, the youngest survey respondents were born more than a decade into democracy and don't share the same lived experience of apartheid as older generations. In 2023, the IJR introduced a series of survey questions aimed at creating a baseline understanding of knowledge about the past. Consistent with findings from the previous round, the 2025 survey found self-reported

Figure 22: Knowledge of history



	Colonialism	Apartheid	Democratic transition	TRC
18–24	25%	34%	32%	24%
25–34	30%	38%	36%	25%
35–44	35%	50%	48%	36%
45–54	42%	60%	54%	41%
55+	52%	72%	69%	48%

knowledge of the past was far higher among older South Africans than younger people. Only about a third of young adults aged 18 to 24 knew quite a lot/a great deal about apartheid (34%) or the democratic transition (32%), compared with around seven in ten older South Africans aged 55 and above (72% and 69%, Figure 22). Even fewer young South Africans were knowledgeable about colonialism (25%) or the TRC (24%). Most South Africans (70%) strongly supported/supported teaching children the history of colonialism and apartheid in schools and only 16% strongly opposed/opposed this practice.

South Africa's shared truth

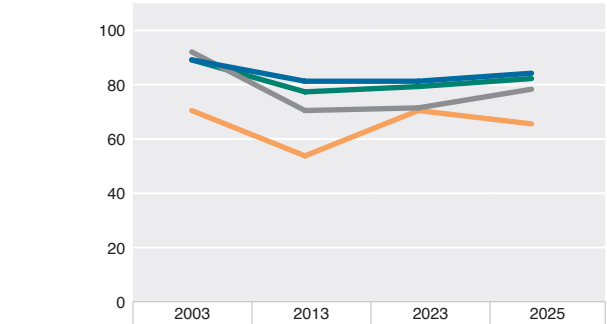
The TRC investigated and reported on 'the truth' concerning what happened in South Africa during apartheid, specifically between 1960 and 1993. Establishing this common truth, maintaining consensus and refuting denialism and misinformation have been important to reconciliation and democracy and provided the foundation for reparative-justice interventions.

The United Nations (UN) declared apartheid a crime against humanity in 1966, and this remains intact in international jurisprudence. In July 2024, the ICJ ruled that Israel had committed multiple and serious international-law violations in Palestine, including the crime of apartheid.[35] For the first time since the conclusion of the TRC process, two individuals were charged with apartheid as a crime against humanity in South Africa in April 2025, in the case of the 1982 murder of teenage anti-apartheid activists known as the COSAS 4.[36]

The first round of the Reconciliation Barometer in 2003 found that an overwhelming majority of South Africans (87%) agreed it was certainly/probably true that apartheid was a crime against humanity. This consensus remained largely intact in 2025 but declined slightly to 82%. In this and other questions in the Apartheid Legacy conceptual dimension of the survey, agreement has tended to be far lower among white South Africans than people of other races and the overall sample result. In 2025, strong agreement/agreement that apartheid was a crime against humanity was lowest among white South Africans (65%) and highest among black South Africans (84%) (Figure 23).

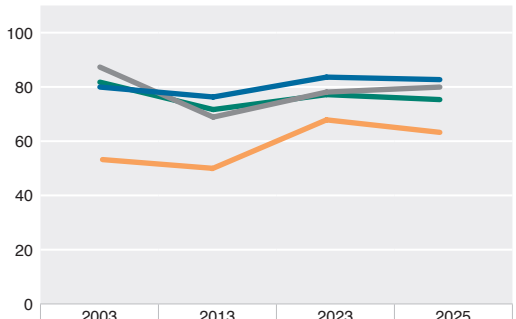
South Africans responded similarly to the question of whether or not the apartheid government committed atrocities against anti-apartheid activists, as documented by the TRC and at the heart of recently reopened inquests into the COSAS 4 as well as the deaths of Black Consciousness Movement founder Steve Biko and former ANC President-General and Nobel laureate, Chief Albert Luthuli.[37] Eighty per cent of South Africans strongly agreed/agreed in 2025 that the state committed atrocities against anti-apartheid activists, but agreement was lowest among white South Africans at 62% (Figure 24).

Figure 23: Apartheid was a crime against humanity*



	2003	2013	2023	2025
Black	89%	81%	81%	84%
Coloured	92%	70%	71%	78%
Indian/Asian	89%	77%	79%	82%
White	70%	53%	70%	65%

Figure 24: State committed crimes against anti-apartheid activists*



	2003	2013	2023	2025
Black	80%	76%	84%	83%
Coloured	88%	68%	78%	80%
Indian/Asian	82%	71%	77%	75%
White	56%	50%	67%	62%

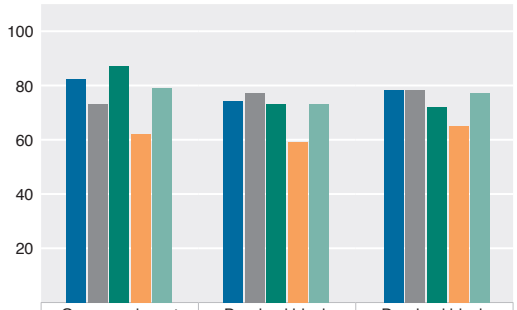
**Note: In 2003 and 2013, these questions were asked using 4-point Likert scales with the following response categories: certainly true, probably true, probably untrue, certainly untrue. In 2017, these were converted to 5-point Likert scales, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.*

Apartheid oppression

Consensus about the country's past is also important to understanding how colonialism and apartheid continue to impact South Africa today, and to determine and implement reparative-justice interventions.

In 2025, most (79%) South Africans still strongly agreed/agreed that the apartheid government oppressed the majority of people in the country. Most also agree that apartheid deprived black South Africans of the opportunity to earn decent livelihoods (73%) and access quality education (77%), as shown in Figure 25. Agreement was once again lowest among white South Africans by at least 10 percentage points less than the overall total. A further 80% also strongly agreed/agreed that black South Africans – a term that includes all people historically classified as African, coloured and Indian – were subjected to violence because of their race.

Figure 25: Apartheid oppression



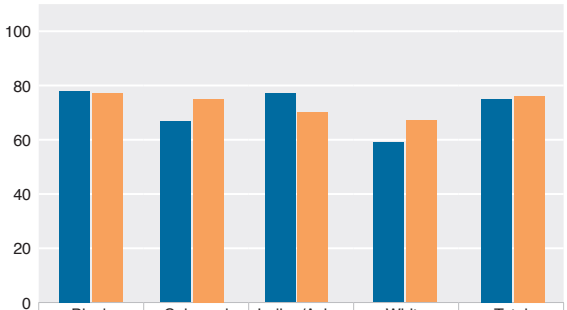
	Oppressed most South Africans	Deprived black people of decent livelihoods	Deprived black people of quality education
Black	81%	74%	78%
Coloured	72%	77%	78%
Indian/Asian	87%	73%	72%
White	62%	59%	65%
Total	79%	73%	77%

Reparations and restitution

In recent years, there have been mounting global calls for reparations for historic crimes and injustices. The African Union (AU) announced that its theme for 2025 was the Year of Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations.[38]

The 2023 and 2025 survey rounds explored South Africans' support for both the principles underlying apartheid reparations and specific models that have been debated and, in some cases, applied in other contexts.[39] In 2025, three-quarters of South Africans (76%) strongly agreed/agreed that it is still important to support victims of apartheid human rights abuses. Agreement rose among coloured (75%) and white (67%) South Africans from the previous survey round (Figure 26).

Figure 26: Still important to support apartheid victims



	Black	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White	Total
2023	78%	65%	77%	59%	75%
2025	77%	75%	70%	67%	76%



Results also revealed continued majority support for reparations, although at slightly lower rates than in 2023. Figure 27 shows that almost two-thirds (63%) of South Africans strongly agreed/agreed that black people should be repaid in some way for colonialism and apartheid. Fifty-nine per cent strongly agreed/agreed that white people should take action for repairing the damages of the past, although agreement declined slightly from 2023 in response to both questions.

More than six in ten (62%) South Africans also strongly agreed/agreed that a fund should be set up to compensate black South Africans for what happened during colonialism and apartheid. In form, this could be similar to the President's Fund set up through the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995, which paid some reparations grants and is mandated to support community rehabilitation. As of March 2025, the Fund was valued at R2.2 billion.[40] A moderate 58% strongly agreed/agreed with the principle of a wealth tax to fund compensation for black South Africans, a proposal that was explored by the 2013 Davis Tax Committee but never implemented (Figure 27).

Support for renaming and memorialisation

Many South African places are named after colonial and apartheid leaders, and memorials and symbols of these eras remain at sites throughout the country. South Africans have frequently debated the significance and value of renaming and replacing these symbols, often weighing up costs against the country's other many competing needs. The opposition EFF has called for the renaming of the Kruger National Park and the African Transformation Movement (ATM) has proposed that the country be renamed the Republic of Azania.[41] Renaming was ongoing in provinces and cities around the country and, in January, the South African Geographical Names Council Amendment Bill was introduced and includes potential changes to the operations of the South African Geographical Names Council and provincial committees.[42]

On Heritage Day in September, the EFF also tabled a motion in Parliament to establish an ad hoc committee to investigate the removal of apartheid-era statues and memorials.[43] Party chief whip, Nontando Nolutshungu, explained that these are 'not neutral symbols of history' but rather 'monuments of colonialism' and reminders that the 'ideological, cultural, and economic structures of conquest remain intact'.[44]

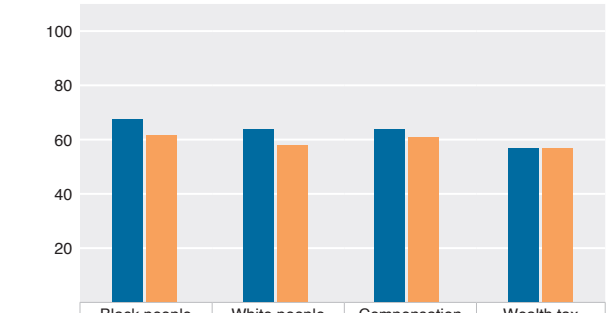
The 2025 Barometer survey found that public support for renaming and the removal of memorials and other symbols continued to wane from already-moderate levels in 2023.

Just over half (53%) of South Africans strongly supported/supported renaming cities and places, down from 58%. Only 47% strongly supported/supported the removal of memorials and symbols of colonialism and apartheid, a decline from 56% in 2023 (Figure 28).

Reopening apartheid prosecutions

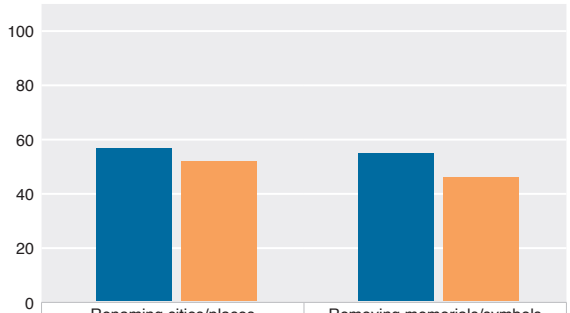
As discussed earlier in this section of the report, 2025 saw new developments in the prosecution of apartheid-era crimes after many years of delays, inaction and civil society advocacy. In January 2025, families brought a High Court application against the government and President Cyril Ramaphosa

Figure 27: Support for reparations



	Black people should be repaid	White people should take action	Compensation fund	Wealth tax
2023	69%	65%	65%	58%
2025	63%	59%	62%	58%

Figure 28: Support for memorialisation



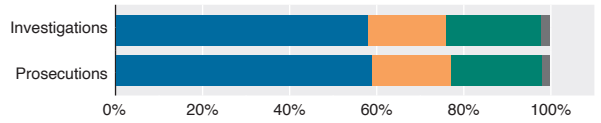
	Renaming cities/places	Removing memorials/symbols
2023	58%	56%
2025	53%	47%

seeking damages for 'gross failure to adequately investigate and prosecute apartheid-era political crimes' following the TRC process. This included survivors of the 1993 Highgate Hotel Massacre as well as family members of 'the Cradock Four', Richard and Irene Motasi, Caiphus Nyoka, the PEBCO 3, the COSAS 4, Nokuthula Simelane, Rick Turner, Musawakhe 'Sbho' Phewa, Hoosen Haffejee, Mxolisi 'Dicky' Jacobs, Imam Abdullah Haron, Deon Harris, Matthews 'Mojo' Mabelane, Ntombikayise Priscilla Kubheka, Ignatius 'Iggy' Mthebule and Nicholas Ramatua 'Boiki' Tlhapi.[45]

In addition to the reopening of inquiries into the deaths of Steve Biko and Chief Albert Luthuli, a Judicial Commission of Inquiry headed by Judge Sisi Khampepe was established to investigate efforts to block the prosecution of apartheid-era crimes referred to the NPA by the TRC.[46]

The 2025 Barometer survey found that a moderate majority (59%) of South Africans strongly agreed/agreed that perpetrators of apartheid-era human rights abuses should still be prosecuted today, while 21% strongly disagreed/disagreed, as shown in Figure 29. Similarly, 58% strongly agreed/agreed that more government resources should be dedicated to investigating unsolved apartheid-era crimes, while 22% strongly disagreed/disagreed.

Figure 29: Support for apartheid investigations and prosecutions



	Investigations	Prosecutions
Agree	58%	59%
Neither	18%	18%
Disagree	22%	21%
DK/Ref	2%	2%

Key findings: Apartheid legacy

- **Generational knowledge gaps are widening.** Younger South Africans continued to report lower knowledge of apartheid and the democratic transition than older generations, though support for teaching this history in schools remained firm.
- **Broad agreement about apartheid.** Consensus on the core truths established by the TRC remained largely intact. Future survey rounds may reveal changes in this measurement dimension as a result of renewed efforts to prosecute apartheid crimes.
- **Resilient recognition of apartheid's enduring harms.** Most South Africans continued to acknowledge the systemic oppression and long-term harms caused by apartheid, though agreement was also notably weaker among white people.
- **Persistent but declining support for reparations.** Despite majority agreement about past harms and the importance of supporting victims, support for reparations was moderate and marginally declined across some measures since the last survey round.
- **Lukewarm endorsement of renaming and removing memorials.** Despite ongoing and new efforts to rename places and remove symbols of apartheid and colonialism, public support is moderate and has dropped from previously recorded levels.

6. RACIAL RECONCILIATION

Apartheid was designed to keep South Africans of different races separated from one another. Racial segregation was entrenched in all aspects of daily life, from residential communities to schools, public amenities, and marriage and families.

Although South Africa remains an unequal and exclusive society in some respects, have relationships between people changed over time?

Building new relationships

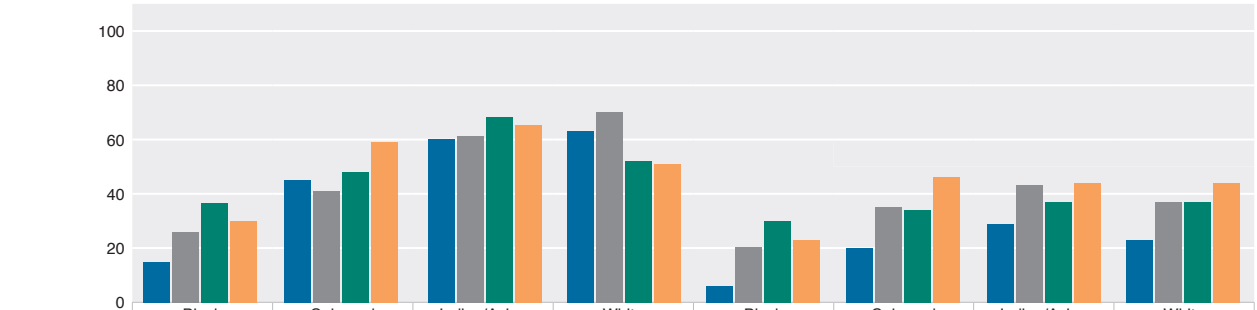
In 2003, and nine years after the first democratic elections, the first Barometer survey found low levels of interaction between South Africans of different historically defined race groups. At the time, only 15% of black South Africans always interacted/often interacted with people of different races – far lower than coloured (45%), Indian/Asian (60%) or white (63%) people (Figure 30). This more than doubled to 37% by 2023 but fell to 30% in 2025. Comparatively, coloured South Africans reported increased interaction in 2025 at 59%, up more than 10 percentage points from 48% in 2023. Interaction with South Africans of other races decreased slightly among both Indian/Asian (65%) and white people (51%).

Daily interaction occurs in public spaces, institutions and workplaces, but the Barometer also asked about the extent to which South Africans formed deeper relationships through socialising in their own homes or the homes of friends. By 2025, the percentages of white, coloured and Indian/Asian South Africans who socialised with people of other races increased to the highest recorded levels in the lifespan of the survey. However, the percentage of black South Africans who always socialised/often socialised with people of other races declined from 30% in 2023 to 23% in 2025 (Figure 30).

Multiple demographic, socio-economic and geographic factors influenced interaction and socialisation between people of different races. On average, both interaction and socialisation were significantly higher among middle- and upper-income South Africans than lower-income South Africans (ANOVA, $p < .001$), as shown in Figure 31. Average interaction and socialisation were also lowest in rural areas and highest in metropolitan urban areas (ANOVA, $p < .001$), demonstrating the impact of spatial context in shaping social relationships (Figure 32).

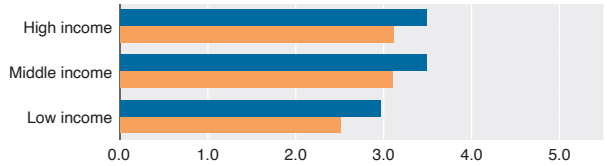
The highest percentage of South Africans believed poverty and income inequality were the biggest barriers to reconciliation in 2025, followed by racism and corruption.

Figure 30: Inter-racial contact and socialisation



	Contact				Socialisation			
	Black	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White	Black	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White
2003	15%	45%	60%	63%	6%	20%	29%	23%
2013	26%	41%	61%	70%	20%	35%	43%	37%
2023	37%	48%	68%	52%	30%	34%	37%	37%
2025	30%	59%	65%	51%	23%	46%	44%	44%

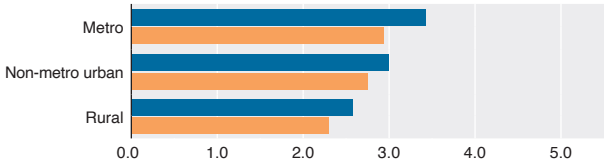
Figure 31: Average contact and socialisation by income*



	Low income	Middle income	High income
Contact	2.9	3.5	3.5
Socialisation	2.5	3.1	3.1

**As measured by the Neighbourhood Lifestyle Index (NLI).*

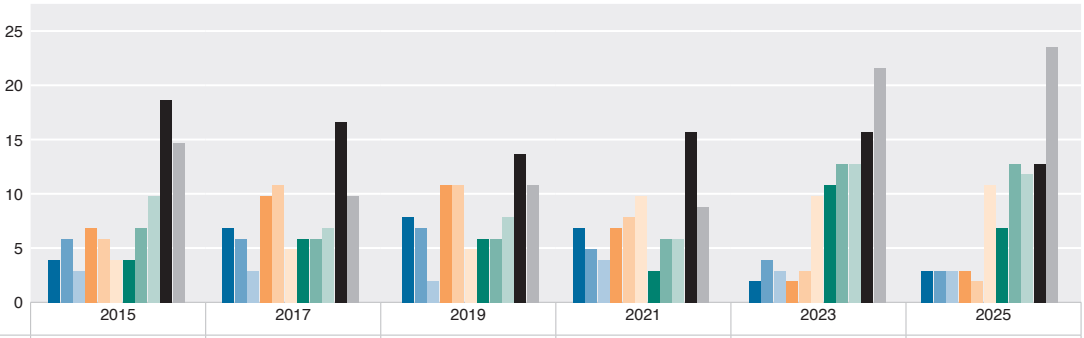
Figure 32: Average contact and socialisation by urbanisation



	Rural	Non-metro urban	Metro
Contact	2.6	3.0	3.4
Socialisation	2.3	2.7	2.9



Figure 33: Meaning of reconciliation



	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023	2025
Respect	4%	7%	8%	7%	2%	3%
Democracy	6%	6%	7%	5%	4%	3%
Retribution	3%	3%	2%	4%	3%	3%
Establishing the truth	7%	10%	11%	7%	2%	3%
Moving on	6%	11%	11%	8%	3%	2%
Making amends	4%	5%	5%	10%	10%	11%
Nothing	4%	6%	6%	3%	11%	7%
Improving relationships	7%	6%	6%	6%	13%	13%
Justice and redress	10%	7%	8%	6%	13%	12%
Forgiveness	19%	17%	14%	16%	16%	13%
Peace	15%	10%	11%	9%	22%	24%

Meaning of reconciliation

Reconciliation is a complex and multidimensional concept. The Barometer has tracked how South Africans understand the term 'reconciliation' since 2015. Figure 33 shows that, between 2015 and 2019, the highest percentages of South Africans associated reconciliation with forgiveness, comprising between 14% and 19% of responses. In 2023, the leading response was that reconciliation means peace (22%). This continued in 2025 with almost a quarter (24%) of South Africans answering in this way.

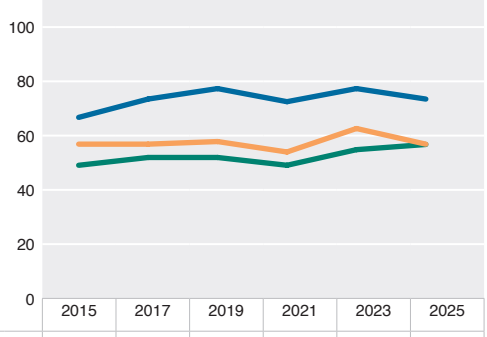
Experiences of reconciliation

The Barometer also asked South Africans about whether or not they believed reconciliation is still needed, whether progress has been made and about the experiences of their family and friends. Most South Africans (73%) strongly agreed/agreed that the country still needs reconciliation in 2025, but this declined slightly from 77% in 2023. A moderate 56% strongly agreed/agreed that progress has been made in bringing about reconciliation, declining from 62% in 2023 to the lowest level recorded since 2015. Similarly, 56% of South Africans strongly agreed/agreed that their friends and family had experienced reconciliation since the end of apartheid, which reflected a gradual increase from 48% a decade ago in 2015 (Figure 34).

Statistically significant (ANOVA, $p < .001$) differences were once again evident in public evaluations of need, progress in and experiences of reconciliation – which was most pronounced between South Africans living in different provinces and speaking different home languages. Agreement that progress has been made in bringing about reconciliation was highest on average in the Western Cape ($m = 3.8$) and North West ($m = 3.8$) and lowest in KZN ($m = 3.0$) and Mpumalanga ($m = 3.1$).

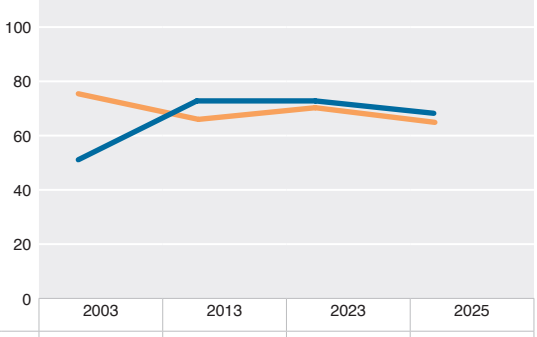
Home language also explained the substantial variation in responses in 2025, although it is important to note some very small subsamples. First-language English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa speakers tended to report higher average perceived progress in and personal experiences of reconciliation. Averages were comparatively lower among home-language isiZulu, Swazi and Ndebele speakers but the perceived need for reconciliation was higher.

Figure 34: Evaluations and demand for reconciliation



	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023	2025
Still need reconciliation	66%	73%	77%	72%	77%	73%
Made progress in reconciliation	56%	56%	57%	53%	62%	56%
Experienced reconciliation	48%	51%	51%	48%	54%	56%

Figure 35: Forgive* and forget



	2003	2013	2023	2025
Forgive	55%	74%	74%	70%
Forget	76%	64%	71%	64%

**The phrasing of this question has been updated over time, given demographic changes in the country and as the original referred to forgiveness of 'those who hurt me during apartheid'.*

Forgive or forget?

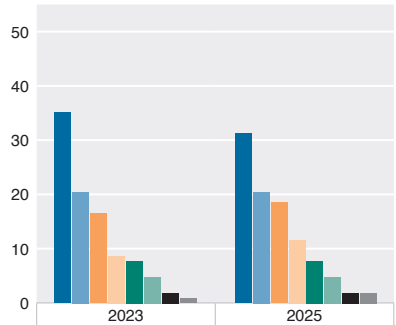
For the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Chair of the TRC, forgiveness was central to the work of restorative justice and consistent with both the 'spirit of ubuntu' and traditions of African jurisprudence.[47] The Barometer has asked South Africans since 2003 about the extent that they are trying to forgive others who hurt them or their family during apartheid. Overall support for forgiveness increased substantially from 55% in 2003 to 74% in 2013, as shown in Figure 35. Ten years later, in 2023, this result remained the same at 74% before falling slightly to 70% in 2025.

The Barometer also asked about agreement with the statement that South Africans should try to forget about apartheid and just move forward together as a country. Time series responses to this question have followed a different pattern than opinions about forgiveness. In 2003, more than three-quarters of South Africans (76%) supported the idea of forgetting about apartheid and moving forward together as a country, but this dropped to 64% by 2025 (Figure 35).

Barriers to reconciliation

Finally, South Africans were asked about the biggest barriers to further reconciliation in the future. Response categories were based on previous qualitative data, and the highest percentage (32%) of South Africans believed poverty and income inequality were the biggest barriers to reconciliation in 2025, consistent with 2023. Racism was identified as the second-biggest barrier (21%), followed by corruption (19%), as shown in Figure 36.

Figure 36: Barriers to reconciliation



	2023	2025
Poverty and inequality	36%	32%
Racism	21%	21%
Corruption	17%	19%
Gender-based violence	9%	12%
Political party membership	8%	8%
Using race categories	5%	5%
None – there are no barriers	2%	2%
DK/Ref	1%	2%

Key findings: Racial reconciliation

- **New relationships among the urban and affluent.** Interaction and socialisation between South Africans of different historically defined race groups remained uneven and are most concentrated among affluent people in urban areas.
- **Reconciliation associated with peace.** An increasing share of South Africans associated reconciliation with peace, and this may reflect concern over political tension and violence.
- **Demand consistent, progress wanes.** Public consensus that the country still needs reconciliation remained strong, but perceptions of national progress have weakened and vary significantly, including between provinces.
- **Forgive but not forget.** Majority support for forgiveness remained relatively steady over time, but acceptance of 'forgetting' apartheid and simply moving forward has declined over time.
- **Poverty and inequality prevent reconciliation.** Poverty and inequality are viewed as the most significant barriers to reconciliation, followed by racism and corruption.



7. SOCIAL COHESION

'Social cohesion' refers to the many factors that bind people together in a community or country, which can include a common identity, shared values, trust and solidarity. The Barometer has tracked this complex dimension since the first survey round in 2003 by exploring what holds South Africans together – or keeps us apart – after more than three decades of democracy.

> Survey results revealed pockets of growing regional divisions, and South Africans associated most strongly with others of the same language or ethnic group

Strong national identity

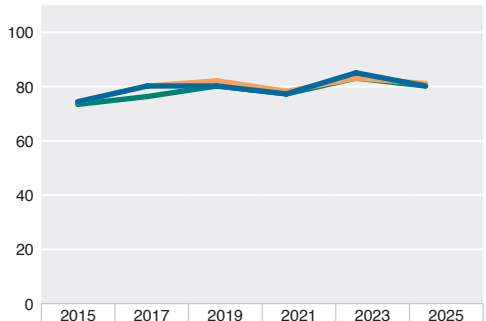
The 2025 Barometer results showed that national identity remained very strong in South Africa, consistent with previous survey rounds and even amid the low levels of confidence and underlying divisions outlined in earlier sections. Eight in ten people strongly agreed/agreed that being South African is an important part of how they see themselves (80%) and want their children to think of themselves as South African (81%). A further 80% also strongly agreed/agreed that people in the country should 'realise we are South Africans first, and stop thinking of themselves in terms of the group they belong to', as shown in Figure 37. While these levels declined slightly since 2023, they remain robust overall and are higher than a decade ago in 2015.

Trust

Despite South Africans' enduring strength of national identity, the Barometer continued to show low and diminishing levels of interpersonal trust. In 2019, more South Africans described themselves as very trusting/trusting of others (39%) than very distrusting/distrusting (24%), as shown in Figure 38. By 2023 a higher percentage were very distrusting/distrusting (37%), and this remained almost unchanged in 2025 at 36%.

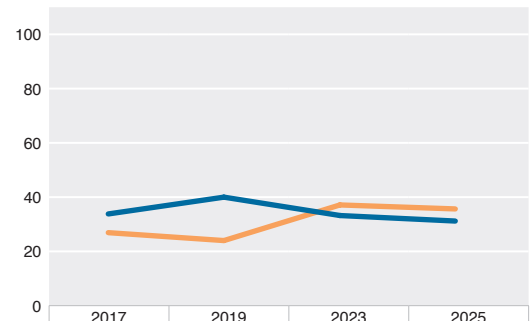
Against this backdrop, successive Barometer rounds have found that South Africans trusted their relatives much more than other social groups – although even those trusting of their relatives fell sharply from 63% in 2021 to 45% in 2023, before recovering slightly to 50% in 2025. Attitudes towards neighbours, the next most trusting group, followed a similar pattern – declining from 45% to 36% over the same period before increasing slightly to 38% in 2025, as shown in Figure 39. Trust in others was markedly lower beyond these immediate circles: less than a third of South Africans trusted people of other religions, colleagues or those of a different sexual orientation, language, race or from elsewhere on the continent. Notably, for the first time since 2017, trust in people of other races was the lowest of all groups at 23%.

Figure 37: National identity



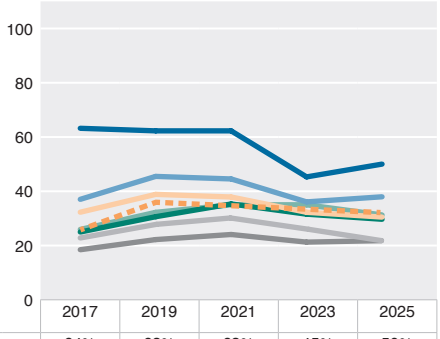
	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023	2025
South African important	74%	80%	80%	77%	85%	80%
Children South African	74%	80%	82%	78%	83%	81%
South African first	73%	76%	80%	77%	83%	80%

Figure 38: Trust in others



	2017	2019	2023	2025
Trusting	34%	39%	34%	32%
Distrusting	27%	24%	37%	36%

Figure 39: Trust in groups



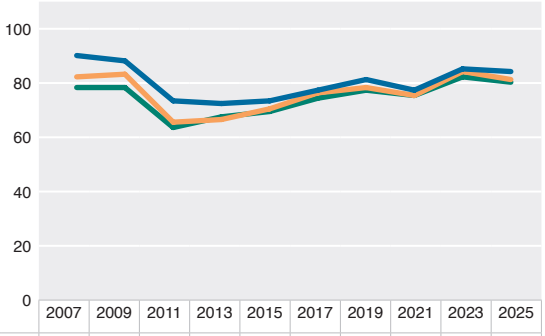
	2017	2019	2021	2023	2025
Relatives	64%	63%	63%	45%	50%
Neighbours	37%	46%	45%	36%	38%
Other religions	26%	35%	34%	33%	31%
Colleagues	32%	39%	35%	29%	30%
Other sexual orientation	25%	31%	36%	32%	30%
Other languages	26%	32%	32%	32%	28%
Migrants from Africa	19%	21%	22%	21%	23%
Other races	24%	28%	30%	27%	23%

Note: Trust in people of other religions was omitted from the 2021 survey and the table includes the midpoint value for 2019 and 2023.

Group association

Across measurement dimensions, the 2025 Barometer results revealed pockets of growing regional, provincial and language divisions. When asked about social groups, the highest percentage associated most strongly with others of the same language or ethnic group – rising from 37% in 2023 to 41% in 2025. Associations with other groups declined slightly over the same period (Figure 40). These strong associations remained a source of affirmation: more than eight in ten South Africans agreed that primary group associations made them feel good about themselves (84%), important (81%) and secure (80%) (Figure 41).

Figure 41: Feelings of group association



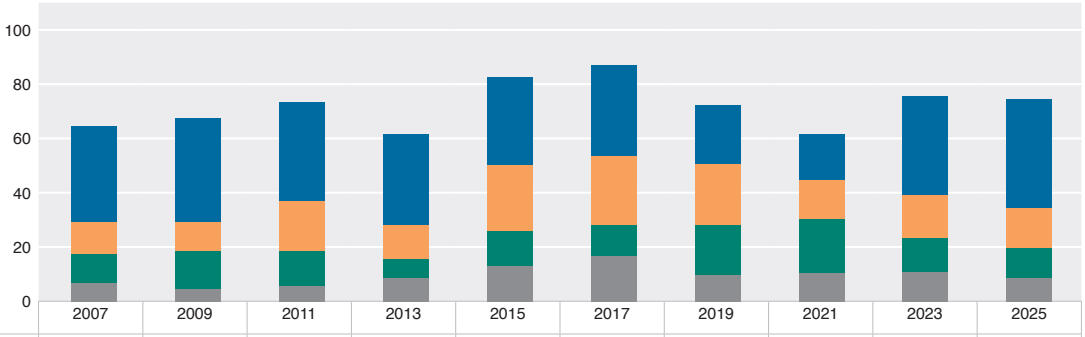
	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023	2025
Good	90%	88%	73%	72%	73%	77%	81%	77%	85%	84%
Important	82%	83%	65%	66%	70%	76%	78%	75%	84%	81%
Secure	78%	78%	63%	67%	69%	74%	77%	75%	82%	80%

Biggest division

As outlined in earlier sections, South Africa experienced periods of political tension and even violence in the lead-up to the 2024 elections. Against this backdrop, public assessments of national unity in 2025 showed gradual but cautious improvement. The largest share of people (44%) viewed the country as somewhat or very divided – an improvement from 48% in 2023 – while one-third (33%) believed South Africa to be somewhat or very united, up from 30% in 2023 (Figure 42).

Twenty-two per cent of South Africans identified divisions between supporters of different political parties as the biggest source of division in the country, a marginal increase of three percentage points since 2023 (19%, Figure 43). Yet, as in every Barometer round since 2003, the gap between rich and poor remained the most prominent fault line, cited by 35% of respondents.

Figure 40: Strongest group association

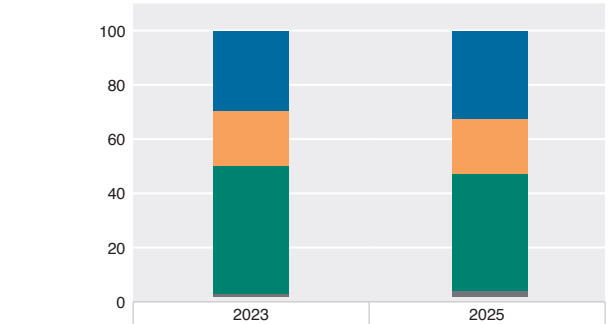


	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023	2025
Language/ethnicity*	36%	39%	37%	34%	32%	34%	22%	17%	37%	41%
Race	12%	11%	19%	13%	24%	26%	23%	15%	16%	15%
South African first	11%	14%	13%	7%	13%	12%	19%	20%	13%	11%
Class	7%	5%	6%	9%	13%	17%	10%	11%	11%	9%

**Previously asked separately and then consolidated.*

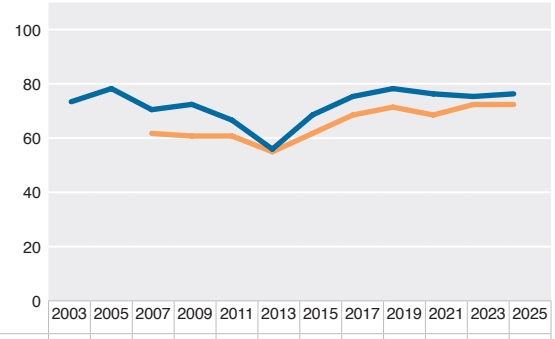
Despite these challenges, aspirations for unity remained strong. Three-quarters of South Africans continued to believe that a more united country is desirable in 2025 – a level that has held steady since 2017 after declines earlier in the decade (Figure 44). A further 72% felt that greater unity is possible.

Figure 42: How united or divided



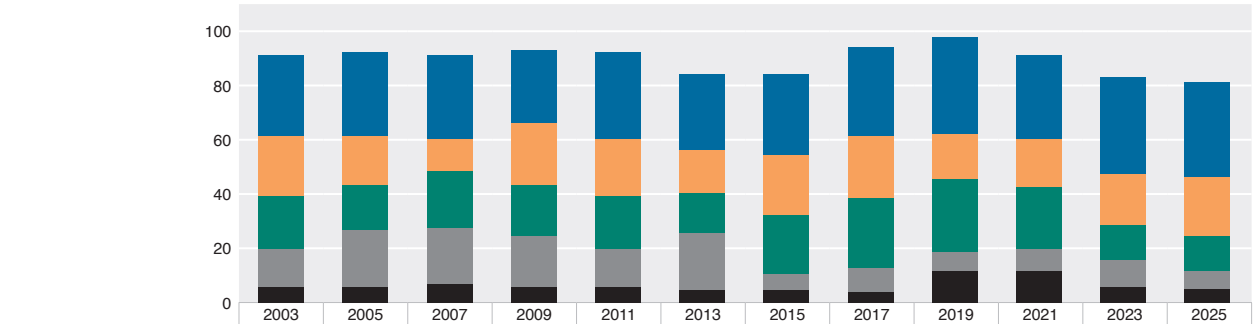
	2023	2025
United	30%	33%
Neither	21%	21%
Divided	48%	44%
DK/Ref	1%	2%

Figure 44: Unity is desirable/possible



	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023	2025
Desirable	73%	78%	70%	72%	66%	55%	68%	75%	78%	76%	75%	76%
Possible			61%	60%	60%	54%	61%	68%	71%	68%	72%	72%

Figure 43: Biggest division



	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023	2025
Gap between rich and poor	30%	31%	31%	27%	32%	28%	30%	33%	36%	31%	36%	35%
Political party	22%	18%	12%	23%	21%	16%	22%	23%	17%	18%	19%	22%
Race	20%	17%	21%	19%	20%	15%	22%	26%	27%	23%	13%	13%
Disease	14%	21%	21%	19%	14%	21%	6%	9%	7%	8%	10%	7%
Language	6%	6%	7%	6%	6%	5%	5%	4%	12%	12%	6%	5%

Key findings: Social cohesion

- **Stable national identity.** Large majorities of people continued to view being South African as central to how they saw themselves and to what they wanted for their children.
- **Low interpersonal trust.** Most South Africans continued to describe themselves as distrustful of others.
- **Trust limited to close social circles.** South Africans were most trusting of relatives and neighbours, while trust in more distant or diverse social groups remained persistently low.
- **Stronger language and ethnic associations.** More South Africans associated most strongly with others of the same language or ethnic group, and this continued to result in feelings of affirmation and security.
- **Slight improvement in perceptions of national divisions.** Most South Africans continued to view the country as divided and identified the gap between rich and poor as the main fault line. Nonetheless, the majority still agreed that a more united country was both desirable and achievable.

Attitudes towards Emigration

South Africa featured prominently in international headlines in 2025 after US President Donald Trump alleged that a 'white genocide' was taking place in the country – claims he used to justify expelling the South African ambassador, cancelling aid and offering refugee status to Afrikaners.[48] The US also criticised South Africa's International Court of Justice (ICJ) case against Israel and signalled its intention to boycott the G20 Summit scheduled for Johannesburg in November.[49]

South Africa has experienced significant migration, both in terms of citizens leaving the country and nationals from elsewhere arriving. A 2025 StatsSA report drawing on the 2022 Census and other data sources estimated that approximately 2.3 million migrants were living in the country, most originating from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region.[50] Reports suggested that more than a million South Africans have emigrated to other countries, although, according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), only 6 120 were refugees or asylum-seekers as of the end of 2024.[51]

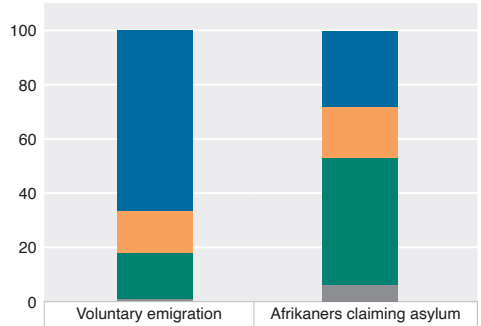
The 2025 Barometer revealed that over half (56%) of South Africans have given little or no consideration to moving to another country, as shown in Figure 45. Two-thirds (66%) strongly approved/approved of South Africans voluntarily moving to other countries to pursue opportunities such as employment or academic studies. The same was not true with respect to Afrikaners claiming persecution and seeking refugee status in the US: most South Africans (47%) strongly disapproved/disapproved of these claims and only 28% strongly approved/approved (Figure 46).

Figure 45: Emigration interest



A great deal	8%	Not very much	15%
Quite a lot	15%	Not at all	41%
Somewhat	19%	DK/Ref	3%

Figure 46: Emigration approval



	Voluntary emigration	Afrikaners claiming asylum
Approve	66%	28%
Neither	15%	19%
Disapprove	17%	47%
DK/Ref	1%	6%

8. PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGE

Since the first round of the Reconciliation Barometer in 2003, the IJR has hypothesised that, in order for reconciliation to progress, it is important for people to believe that positive change is occurring in society and to hope that the future will be better than the past. To what extent has this been achieved, and what is the national outlook going forward?

Just over half of South Africans believed reconciliation is likely to continue to progress in future.

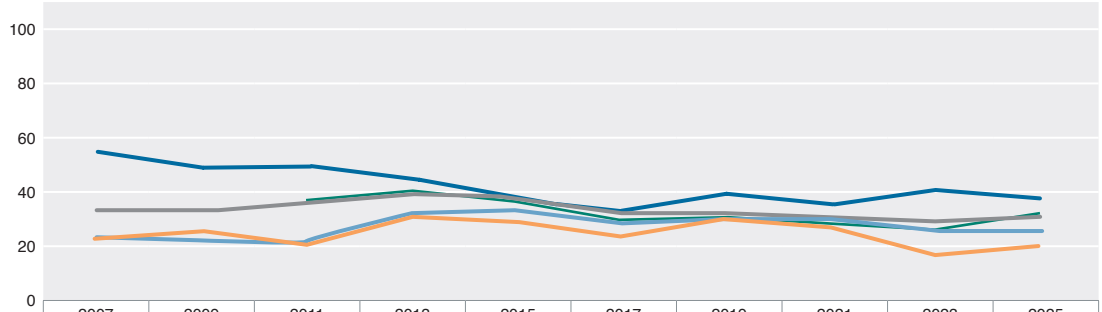
A country in transition

The Barometer asked South Africans to reflect on how much had changed in the country since the transition to democracy in 1994. Assessments of progress have been continually modest since early survey rounds: in 2007, less than a third of South Africans felt that personal safety (32%), access to job opportunities (22%) or economic inequality (22%) had improved somewhat/a great deal. As shown in Figure 47, these evaluations had hardly shifted by 2025. Only 39% believed race relations had improved – up from a low of 32% in 2017, yet still well below the 54% recorded in 2007. Around a third felt their personal economic situation (31%) or personal safety (30%) had improved. Only 24% believed job opportunities had improved and one in five (20%) that progress had been made in addressing economic inequality.

Changes in well-being

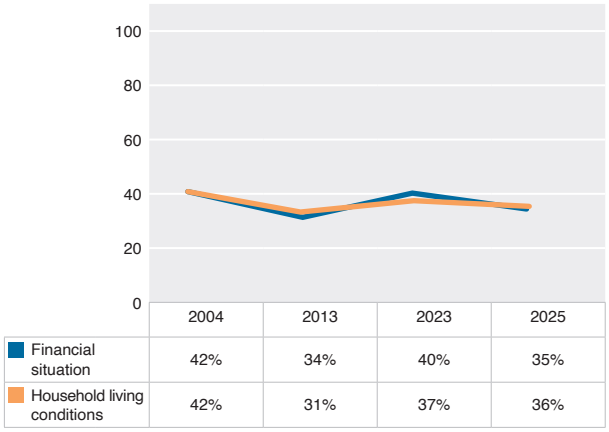
A closer look at evaluations of change also confirmed that consistently low percentages of South Africans believed their personal financial and household living conditions had improved over the last few years. In 2025, just over a third (35%) of South Africans answered that their personal financial situation was much better/better, a decline from

Figure 47: Improvements since 1994



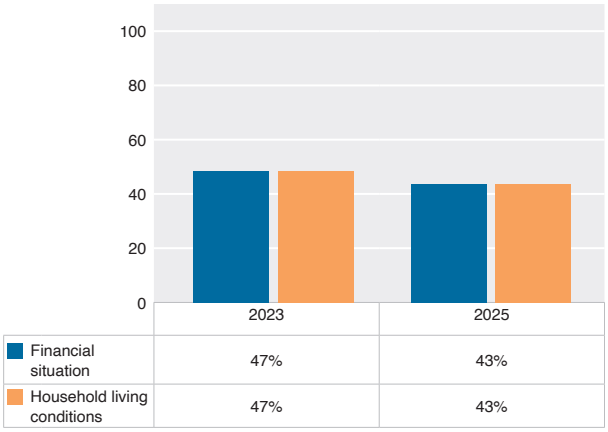
	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023	2025
Race relations	54%	48%	49%	44%	36%	32%	38%	35%	40%	39%
Own economic situation	–	–	36%	40%	36%	29%	30%	28%	26%	31%
Personal safety	32%	32%	35%	38%	38%	31%	32%	29%	28%	30%
Jobs	22%	21%	21%	31%	32%	27%	29%	29%	25%	24%
Inequality	22%	25%	20%	30%	28%	23%	29%	26%	17%	20%

Figure 48: Better financial and household conditions



	2004	2013	2023	2025
Financial situation	42%	34%	40%	35%
Household living conditions	42%	31%	37%	36%

Figure 50: Future improved financial and household conditions



	2023	2025
Financial situation	47%	43%
Household living conditions	47%	43%

40% in 2023. Similarly, 36% believed their household living conditions had improved in 2025 – six percentage points lower than the 42% who reported improvement in 2004 (Figure 48).

Likelihood of future improvement

Reconciliation Barometer data has continued to show low and relatively unchanging assessments of progress since 1994 as well as improvements in recent years. With many South Africans believing that the situation in the country has not changed much, how much optimism is there about the future?

In 2025, the highest percentage of South Africans (39%) felt their hope for the future was likely to improve in the coming years, but this was down slightly from 43% in 2023. Just over a third believed their own economic situation (36%), race relations (35%) and personal safety (35%) were likely to get better. Expectations of progress were lowest in relation to economic inequality (20%) and corruption (17%), where only one in five anticipated improvement (Figure 49).

Less than half expected their personal financial situation (43%) or household living conditions (43%) to improve in the years ahead (Figure 50).

The Barometer also asked South Africans whether respect for their language and cultural group was likely to improve – an important question in 2025 given the declining perceptions of cultural recognition analysed in Section 4. Just over half expected future improvement, with 55% anticipating greater respect for their cultural group and 56% for their mother-tongue language. These levels were slightly higher than those recorded in 2023 and reflected more optimism than was shown for anticipated change in most other areas (Figure 51).

Figure 49: Likely to improve in the coming years

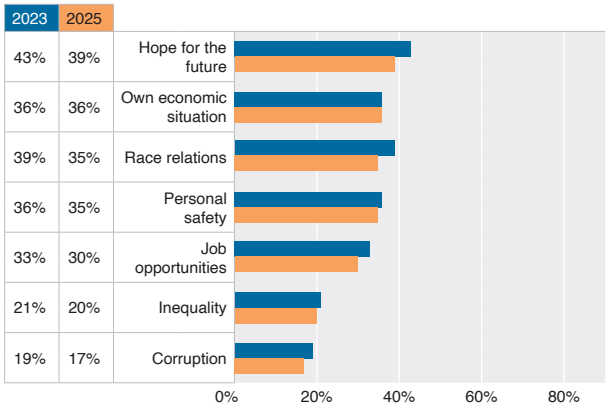
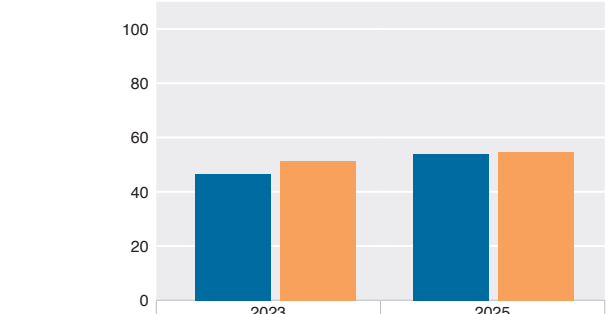


Figure 51: Future improved respect for language and culture

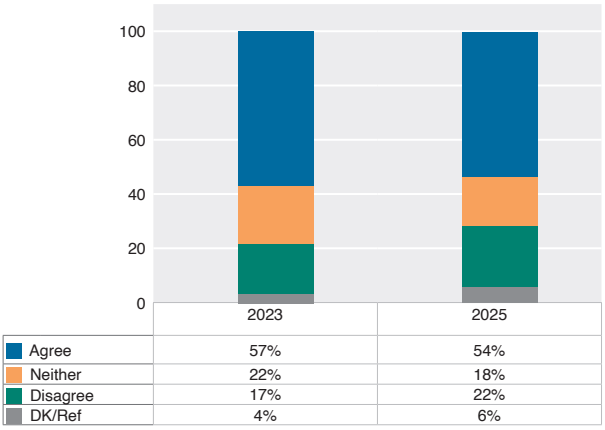


	2023	2025
Cultural	48%	55%
Language	51%	56%

Progress in reconciliation

Finally, South Africans were asked about whether or not they believed reconciliation is likely to progress in the future. A moderate 54% strongly agreed/agreed, but this declined slightly from 57% in 2023. The percentage of South Africans who strongly disagreed/disagreed that reconciliation is likely to progress, increased by five percentage points from 17% in 2023 to 22% in 2025, as shown in Figure 52.

Figure 52: Reconciliation likely to progress in future



	2023	2025
Agree	57%	54%
Neither	22%	18%
Disagree	17%	22%
DK/Ref	4%	6%

Key findings: Perceptions of change

- **Low perceptions of change since 1994.** Consistent with previous survey rounds, the Barometer found that only a minority of South Africans believed personal safety, job opportunities, inequality or race relations had meaningfully improved since 1994.
- **Limited economic improvements for individuals and households.** Only about a third of South Africans believed their financial situation or living conditions had improved in 2025.
- **Subdued optimism about the future.** Less than half of South Africans expected that the situation in the country will get better in the coming years across a range of indicators, and this may have consequences for progress in reconciliation.
- **Comparatively higher expectations of future cultural and language recognition.** South Africans were relatively more optimistic about future improvements in respect of their culture and language – an important finding given regional, provincial and language differences found in the 2025 survey results.
- **Declining confidence in future reconciliation.** South Africans were less optimistic than two years ago that reconciliation will continue to increase in future.



9. CONCLUSION

South Africa underwent a seismic political transition in 1994. ANC at its helm, the country successfully navigated the change to a national, multiparty coalition government following the ruling party's loss in the 2024 elections. Both transitions are testimony to South Africans' enduring commitment to democracy and national reconciliation.

At the same time, as the results of the 2025 Reconciliation Barometer demonstrate, many of the country's intransigent challenges have persisted. Public dissatisfaction and distrust have not abated with the establishment of the GNU – at least not yet. In a continuation of the trends of recent survey rounds, many South Africans believed government is not responsive and changes since 1994 have been limited.

Survey results from the Political Culture and Inclusion dimensions, in particular, confirmed deep and enduring fault lines in the country. Public confidence in the key institutions entrusted with the daily work of a functioning democracy remained low, alongside opinions on all of the largest political parties. Consensus that national leaders are untrustworthy and unconcerned about the needs of ordinary people reached an all-time high in 2023, and remained unchanged this year.

With limited changes in the structure of the post-apartheid economy, income inequality and socio-economic exclusion remained primary concerns for many citizens. Black South Africans continued to experience significantly higher levels of lived poverty than their white counterparts and only a minority of citizens believed that job opportunities, economic inequality or their own household financial situation had improved in recent years. Optimism about future economic improvements was subdued and with income inequality again identified as the biggest barrier to reconciliation – consistent with the results of every other survey round since 2003 – prospects of future progress remained in the balance.

Despite South Africans' strong embrace of national identity, interpersonal trust remained low outside of close social circles. Where interaction and deeper relationships have developed across historically defined race lines, these were concentrated in affluent and urban communities. In 2025, fewer South Africans than two years ago believed reconciliation was progressing or likely to progress in future.

The Reconciliation Barometer nonetheless also found important signs of resilience and cautious optimism. Public evaluations of the GNU and its recent policy and legislative programme were mixed, revealing some pockets of greater confidence and potentially signalling a degree of patience as the work of the new government gets underway.

National identity remained a powerful unifier and most citizens continued to regard being South African as central to how they saw themselves and to what they wanted for their children. Most also

> While the transition to a multiparty national government confirmed enduring commitment to democracy and reconciliation, many intransigent challenges have persisted.

continued to believe that a more united country was both desirable and possible. The majority agreed that South Africa still needed reconciliation. Support remained strong for the principles of land reform, achieving a racially representative workforce and addressing the continued harms caused by apartheid, despite differences in opinion concerning specific interventions and policies.

These findings suggested that, despite a widespread sense of inertia and discontent, there remained a reservoir of aspirations for a more peaceful, inclusive and democratic society.

This report has provided a predominantly retrospective analysis, yet also points to key priorities for the GNU, political parties and the country as a whole. First, rebuilding trust in institutions and leadership remains a central priority and – survey results suggested – will require substantive and visible progress in areas such as government responsiveness and combating corruption.

Second, addressing profound poverty, unemployment, inequality and economic exclusion remains essential for both reconciliation and democratic stability. The gap between rich and poor remained – according to South Africans – the biggest source of national division and the main barrier to reconciliation. While debates continued about the optimal policy and legislative solutions to increase inclusion and participation, much time has passed and the urgency of these priorities cannot be overstated, particularly for South Africans who have experienced little or no progress since 1994.

Third, the enduring strength of national identity alone has not been sufficient to build interpersonal trust, deconstruct historic racial barriers and solidify mutual recognition and respect, as President Mandela entreated on the Day of Reconciliation in 1995. Greater efforts to deepen historical understanding among younger generations, maintain consensus on the core truths of apartheid and enact reparative-justice interventions could support deeper social cohesion beyond identification and pride in South Africanness.

Finally, sustaining hope about the future is an often overlooked yet important challenge. The Barometer has found time and again that many South Africans have not seen clear signs of change in the country and are reticent to expect improvements in future. It is critical that the GNU and political leadership demonstrate that democracy can deliver meaningful improvements in people's lives since the end of apartheid. This is particularly important, as the country has already begun preparing for the upcoming 2026/27 local government election season, which it enters with potentially comparable levels of public dissatisfaction and division. Without evidence of progress and hope for the future, low trust, high discontent and widespread disengagement risk further eroding South African democracy and reconciliation in the years to come.



ANNEX A: SARB HYPOTHESES

The following tables contain the Reconciliation Barometer hypotheses used during the first and second decades of the survey.

Table 1: Reconciliation Barometer hypotheses and indicators, 2003–2013

Hypothesis	Indicators
Human security: If citizens do not feel threatened, they are more likely to be reconciled with each other and the larger system.	Physical security; economic security; cultural security.
Political culture: If citizens view the institutions, leadership and culture of the new system as legitimate and accountable, reconciliation is more likely to advance.	Justifiability of extra-legal action; legitimacy of leadership and Parliament; respect for the rule of law.
Cross-cutting political relationships: If citizens are able to form working political relationships that cross divisions, reconciliation is more likely to advance.	Commitment to national unity; multiracial political parties.
Historical confrontation: If citizens are able to confront and address issues from the past, they are more likely to be able to move forward and be reconciled.	Acknowledgement of the injustice of apartheid; forgiveness; reduced vengeance.
Race relations: If citizens of different races hold fewer negative perceptions of each other, they are more likely to form workable relationships that will advance reconciliation.	Interracial contact; preconceptions; tolerance.
Dialogue: If citizens are committed to deep dialogue, reconciliation is more likely to be advanced.	Commitment to more dialogue.
ONLY 2003 ROUND – Commitment to socio-economic development: If citizens are able to commit themselves to transformation and redress, the national reconciliation process is more likely to progress.	Willingness to compromise.

Table 2: Reconciliation Barometer hypotheses and indicators, 2015-2021

Hypothesis	Indicators
Power relations: Unjust/unequal power relations between social groups (e.g. race/class) hinder progress towards reconciliation. More just and equitable power relations would create a more fertile environment for reconciliation. Limited to perceptual data, we have chosen to measure this by asking about access to economic, social, cultural and spatial resources within society. This concept is measured through these sub-indicators, each of which demonstrates difference perceptions of access to realms of power in society.	Economic access; social access; cultural access; spatial access.
Democratic political culture: Reconciliation is more likely to thrive in a society where there is a growing democratic political culture. This is evident when citizens feel part of an inclusive nation, participate in the political process, feel the government is legitimately elected, respect the rule of law, and support democratic political institutions.	Political community; political efficacy; the rule of law; confidence in democratic institutions.
Apartheid legacy: In order for reconciliation to take root in South Africa, it is necessary, firstly, to acknowledge and deal with the legacy of direct, structural and symbolic violence and oppression suffered under apartheid, and, secondly, to support initiatives aimed at the redress of this legacy.	Acknowledging the injustice of apartheid; acknowledging the legacy of apartheid; support for redress and transformation.
Racial reconciliation: Progress towards reconciliation cannot take place without the opportunities and willingness to engage in meaningful connection between different race groups in South Africa.	Willingness to tolerate; willingness to confront racism; formal opportunities to engage; spontaneous opportunities to engage.
Improvement in reconciliation: For reconciliation to advance, South Africans should feel connected to the concept (i.e. they can understand and articulate the meaning of reconciliation) and have experienced it in their own lives. Reconciliation is a complex concept with different meanings. This indicator attempts to ascertain the subjective meaning of reconciliation held by respondents, and, according to their subjective meaning, to measure perceptions of improvement.	Meaning of reconciliation; perceived improvement in reconciliation.
Perceptions of change: For reconciliation to advance, it is important for citizens to perceive positive change within society with regard to the past and the future.	Material change; psychological change; hope for the future.

ANNEX B: SARB SAMPLE

Table 3: Reconciliation Barometer unweighted sample, 2025

Race	N	%
Black	1 240	62
Coloured	388	19
Indian	158	8
White	220	11
Sex	**N**	**%**
Man	942	47
Woman	1 054	53
Age group	**N**	**%**
18–24	221	11
25–34	453	23
35–44	569	28
45–54	372	19
55+	391	19
Province	**N**	**%**
Eastern Cape	263	13
Free State	171	9
Gauteng	442	22
KwaZulu-wwNatal	360	18
Limpopo	103	5
Mpumalanga	100	5
Northern Cape	103	5
North West	102	5
Western Cape	362	18
Annual household income (using NLI)	**N**	**%**
Low income	934	47
Middle income	721	36
Upper income	351	17

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