

# **SA RECONCILIATION BAROMETER | 2008**

## **8<sup>TH</sup> ROUND MEDIA BRIEFING**



Institute for Justice and Reconciliation  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document reflects on key findings of the 8<sup>th</sup> Round of the SA Reconciliation Barometer Survey that was conducted during April and May of 2008. The survey tracks public sentiment towards socio-political change and how it impacts on the broader South African national reconciliation project. Since its inception in 2003 the survey's methodology has been based on the measurement of six key reconciliation hypotheses relating to human security, political culture, cross-cutting political relationships, dialogue, historical confrontation and race relations by tracking those indicators that underpin their primary variables. The project recognises that all of these facets of reconciliation does not always carry equal weight and that emphasis may shift depending on circumstances.

Given the current global context of economic uncertainty, this briefing focuses on the human security hypothesis, which posits that if citizens do not feel threatened, they are more likely to be reconciled with each other and the larger system. Such threat is understood in economic, physical, and also cultural terms.

The results of this round of the survey shows that there was a marked level of volatility, brought on by a general deterioration of material circumstances, within the South African society at the time that it was conducted. Citizens felt economically less secure, physically more unsafe, and less confident about their future, particularly as such confidence pertains to relations between South Africans of different races. This points to the possible strain that such levels of insecurity may be putting on the cohesion of society. As in most developing societies, such strain tends to expose key social faultlines, and when it erupts in violent demonstrations of discontent, it tests the robustness of systems of governance. In these circumstances trust becomes a vital commodity to the institutions that constitute such systems and those that are in charge of them. The SARB Survey data shows that while significant levels of trust are still vested in these entities, much of it has been eroded in recent years. Capacity and skills deficits that retard government efforts to reduce citizen vulnerability may be at the heart of this. As government revenues are likely to dwindle during the economic slowdown, such skills and capacity may be put under further pressure. If this is not managed correctly, we may witness growing levels of social discontent and violent protest. The xenophobic violence of May this year has reminded us how vulnerable we are in such a situation.

The briefing, in conclusion, warns that in the run-up to the 2009 general elections, political parties and individuals ought to be aware of the volatility that currently permeates South African society. Many that live in material deprivation may under the current circumstances be highly susceptible to the increasingly radical rhetoric of political parties. Great care should be taken that such inflammatory language does not jeopardise the relative political stability that we have enjoyed since 1994.

## BACKGROUND TO THE SA RECONCILIATION BAROMETER PROJECT

The SA Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) Project of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) tracks national reconciliation processes by means of a quantitative survey instrument, the SARB Survey. Given the conceptual density of the concept “reconciliation”, the Institute is fully aware of the difficulty and limitations involved in such a project. It does therefore not claim that this survey is able to capture the full nuance of the concept, but it does try to measure those aspects that are quantifiable. To be able to do this, a clear conceptual definition of reconciliation is required. Yet, such a definition also needs to be operationalised into a set of indicators that measures as many of its facets as possible.

**“Inevitably ... some dimensions have to be sacrificed to achieve maximum measurability possible”**

This is a complex task because consensus rarely exists on the weight that ought to be allocated to particular facets of reconciliation and their respective indicators. Inevitably, and particularly in surveys that are constrained in length, some dimensions have to be sacrificed to achieve the maximum measurability possible. One of the biggest challenges of a survey of this nature is therefore to avoid reductionism of the kind that strips the concept “reconciliation” of its most important attributes.

To avoid such reductionism, the survey does not use a single definition of reconciliation. It instead recognises the difference in emphasis that various scholars and observers employ in describing this phenomenon. It furthermore also accepts that such emphasis may vary depending on the unique contexts within which reconciliation takes place. The project has taken note of such variations in thematic and temporal emphasis in its development. There is, for example, a non-racial approach to reconciliation that espouses the objective disbanding of pre-apartheid identities and reconstructing new, non-racial ones.<sup>i</sup> The multi-cultural approach again places emphasis upon “the institutionalisation of consensus seeking”<sup>ii</sup> by means of normative and legal boundaries that facilitate interaction and peaceful coexistence. Then there are also a number of religious approaches, within which the concepts of “repentance” and “forgiveness”, play an important role.<sup>iii</sup> The connection between reconciliation and ubuntu<sup>iv</sup> informs another approach, which departs from the point of view that reconciliation amounts to a profound recognition of a common humanity. The individual who denies this common humanity to others is being dehumanized him- or herself.<sup>v</sup> The developmental paradigm, in turn, advocates that reconciliation cannot “develop in a sustainable way if structural injustice in the political, legal and economic domains remain”.<sup>vi</sup> In terms of this perspective, the structural imbalances created by oppression have to be eradicated before we can consider the possibility of creating a united nation.<sup>vii</sup> This, of course, is not an exhaustive list of definitions, but it does capture some of the main streams of thought around the reconciliation discourse in South Africa.

In order to measure progress along the path of reconciliation, the project has attempted to incorporate elements of each approach in its

measurement. To this end it has identified six guiding hypotheses – each with its own variables and indicators – that has been informed by these theories, a consultative process with numerous researchers, social theorists and practitioners that are working in the field, and the results of an exploratory national survey that was conducted in 2002. For the past six years this survey has measured fluctuations in these indicators. Where necessary, items have been added to amplify their measurement.

Table 1: Conceptual overview of variables, hypotheses and indicators		
Variable	Hypothesis	Indicator
<b>Human Security</b>	If citizens do not feel threatened, they are more likely to be reconciled with each other and the larger system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical Security</li> <li>Expanded Economic Security</li> <li>Cultural Security</li> </ul>
<b>Political Culture</b>	If citizens view the Institutions, Structures and Values of the new system as legitimate and accountable, reconciliation is more likely to progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Justifiability of Extra-legal Action</li> <li>Legitimacy of Leadership</li> <li>Legitimacy of Parliament</li> <li>Respect for the Rule of Law</li> </ul>
<b>Cross-cutting Political Relationships</b>	If citizens are able to form working political relationships that cross divisions, reconciliation is more likely to advance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commitment to National Unity</li> <li>Commitment to multi-racial Political Parties</li> </ul>
<b>Dialogue</b>	If citizens are committed to deep dialogue, reconciliation is more likely to be advanced.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commitment to more dialogue</li> </ul>
<b>Historical Confrontation</b>	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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledgement</li> <li>Forgiveness</li> <li>Reduced levels of Vengeance</li> </ul>
<b>Race Relations</b>	If citizens of different races hold fewer negative perceptions of each other, they are more likely to form workable relationships that will advance reconciliation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cross-racial Contact</li> <li>Cross-racial Perceptions</li> <li>Cross-racial Social Distance</li> </ul>

Table 1 depicts a tabular conceptual overview of the hypotheses and their critical indicators. It is hypothesised that when the indicators strengthen or improve, reconciliation is likely to be advanced. As noted above, we recognise the fluctuating importance of particular variables at specific junctures. Given the escalating global economic volatility and the real prospect of a deep recession, this briefing emphasises the link between reconciliation and our human security variable.

## DESIGN OF THE SARB SURVEY

The 2008 SARB Survey was attached to the first of survey company, Ipsos-Markinor's two annual KhayaBus Surveys<sup>viii</sup> (an omnibus survey conducted on a nationally representative sample of South Africans, which is primarily aimed at measuring socio-political trends). This survey was conducted in April and May 2008 and was preceded by a pilot survey in March. Most of the questions and statements in the latest questionnaire have appeared repeatedly in the

survey since the first round in April 2003, but the Institute has in recent years also supplemented the original questionnaire with new measurement items, and excluded those that might have lost their relevance in the current socio-political context. In addition, we have also obtained the right from Ipsos-Markinor to access and use data for a number of key measurements that appear in each round of the KhayaBus Survey.

The standard sample size of this nationally representative survey is 3 500. The survey measures public opinion of South Africans aged 16 years and older, and is conducted both in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. All settlements with a population exceeding 250 000 were categorised as metro areas. Those with less than this number were divided into the following sub-categories: cities, large towns, small towns, villages, and rural areas.

Multistage area-probability sampling was employed. This included South Africans living in informal housing settlements. Enumeration areas were drawn from the 2001 Population Census, and sampling points were allocated to sub-places in each of the metros. The data for the Metro KhayaBus was weighed in terms of the race, metro, gender, and age variables, whilst weighting for the Non-Metro KhayaBus was done in terms of the community size, age group, gender, and province variables. Weighting of the KhayaBus Survey was based on the adjusted universe from the All Media Products Survey (AMPS) 2006 data. We can, therefore, with a substantial amount of certainty, project our findings regarding respondent attitudes and perceptions to the adult South African population.

## THE CONTEXT IN 2008: GLOBAL AND DOMESTIC VOLATILITY

**“The emphasis on ubuntu has become one of the defining components of brand South Africa’.”**

Over the past 15 years, South Africa’s stature as an influential global actor has been closely linked to the historic moral triumph of reconciliation over violence, which marked the end of apartheid. This attribute, combined with its geo-strategic significance in sub-Saharan Africa, has allowed the country to engage with authority at levels that are rarely afforded to comparable developing states.<sup>ix</sup> It has therefore been consciously injected as a recurring theme in the country’s foreign relations, but also in South African public life. By reinforcing this legacy, social elites across different spheres of society have gone to great lengths to entrench this image of a country that prides itself on its humanity. The emphasis on *ubuntu* has become one of the defining components of ‘brand South Africa’.

Against this background, the wave of xenophobic violence that swept across South Africa in May this year represented one of the lowest points in its short post-apartheid history. The disturbing front page images of a Mozambican migrant worker, enveloped in flames after having been set alight by a mob of Alexandra residents, not only inflicted immeasurable damage on the country’s international image, but

the South African public's reaction to it also posed important questions about the country's post-apartheid identity.

In this regard a distinction can be made between the response of more affluent middle class South Africans, which incorporates a multiracial political, business, media, religious, and civil society elite, and that of those who reside in the areas where these atrocities occurred. The reaction of the former group, whether it manifested in voluntary action, letters to newspapers, calls to radio talk shows or public news briefings, reflected shame and abhorrence for the radical diversion from what it perceived to be an integral part of the country's nascent national identity. Its brutality was completely at odds with the sense of harmony that has become such an integral part of high-profile national public relations exercises, like the one that won the country the right to host the 2010 Football World Cup. In this regard, the political response from the ruling party was particularly interesting. Almost immediately after the outbreak of the violence it proclaimed, without substantiating evidence, the involvement of a 'third force' that was intent on destabilising the country. The subtext was one of denial - such behaviour cannot be South African.

While several inhabitants, living in communities where these atrocities were committed, distanced themselves from these acts and became part of communal efforts to reign in the violence, sporadic hostility to foreigners, albeit at lower levels of intensity, continue to this day. Several, such as the community of Masiphumelele that received the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation's 2008 Reconciliation Award, have demonstrated their resilience by forging permanent preemptive structures to prevent recurrences of such hate crimes. But it remains an uphill battle. Even on the eve of the award ceremony, an Ethiopian shopkeeper was killed in his store in Masiphumelele.

Survey results of the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP), which were released in the wake of the xenophobic attacks, have dispelled inferences that some have made about the profiles of South African communities that were most likely to display hostile attitudes towards migrants from other African states.<sup>x</sup> The SAMP survey strongly pointed to the fact that such prejudice has not only been prevalent amongst poor South African township dwellers, but that it cuts across race and class lines. Ironically, despite the country's several internal differences, a distrust of foreign African nationals, appear to be a shared concern amongst a significant proportion of the South African population. Yet, it may be asked why it has predominantly been poor black Africans who have been at the centre of the attacks on foreign nationals.

**"... economic insecurity has either instigated violence or deepened conflict along existing domestic or regional fault lines."**

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It may be instructive in this regard to revisit the broader global context within which these unfortunate events occurred. According to the 2008 World Economic and Social Survey of the United Nations (UN), the past year has seen an upsurge in global volatility, which has manifested in a significant increase of protest activity.<sup>xi</sup> The vast majority of these have been related to economic vulnerability in the wake of rising food-

and oil prices, as well as an international economy that has been cooling down since the third quarter of 2007. In many instances such economic insecurity has either instigated violence or deepened conflicts along existing domestic or regional faultlines.

Early in 2008, prior to the eruption of violence in South African townships, marginalised slumdweller in several developing countries revolted against a dramatic rise in food prices. Their ire was directed at those in their countries who they perceived to be the beneficiaries of skewed systems of economic distribution. In several instances the difference between advantage and disadvantage correlated with significant social fault lines that ran through these societies. Kenyan slum communities, mainly from the Luo ethnic group, were amongst those rebelling against the growing threat that excessive pricing of basic foodstuffs posed to their livelihoods. Such economic vulnerability provided fertile ground for political mobilisation by Raila Odinga's Orange Democratic Movement during the country's 2008 general election. As a result, the political violence that followed in the wake of the country's contested election results, took on a distinctly ethnic character, which pitted the marginalised Luo, against the ruling Kikuyu elite of President Mwai Kibaki. Although some contestation still exists around the question whether this conflict was indeed ethnically motivated, it is nevertheless clear that economic vulnerability in this instance exposed a key fault line that has been obscured in Kenyan public life.

If we are to analyse the major accusations that perpetrators levelled against their victims during the spate of xenophobic attacks during May this year, it becomes apparent that while this conflict has manifested along an existing faultline of prejudice against African migrants, as suggested in the SAMP research, its roots were essentially located in the same economic vulnerability that has been experienced by poor communities elsewhere around the world. Their charges centred on three key issues: That foreigners took away jobs from South Africans; that their uncompetitive business practices undermined the ability of local entrepreneurs to make a living; and that they were behind the high levels of criminality within the areas where they reside. All of these issues essentially related to the question of human security. It is therefore not implausible to argue that the anxiety, caused by a rapid increase in the cost of living (in April the year-on-year increase in the global price of maize amounted to 80 per cent, while the price of wheat doubled)<sup>xii</sup>, has been a catalyst to confront that which they – incorrectly – regarded as the most immediate threat to such security.

This chain of unfortunate events should serve to alert us against the threat that rapid economic decline, such as the current global financial crisis, pose to social instability in contexts of extreme inequality. Where vulnerability at the bottom of the social ladder may amount to the threat of starvation, the battle for survival will be taken to those that are perceived to threaten it, regardless of the costs. In this regard the 2008 World Economic and Social Survey warns that:



*In some states, increased economic insecurity has become part of a compounding process of deepening social divisions and increasing political instability. Their fragile societies are vulnerable to a multiplicity of threats ranging from natural disasters and food shortages to financial shocks, rising inequality, and badly handled elections, any of which could tip them into widespread, and even genocidal, levels of violence. Under these conditions, the threat exists of the state's losing, not only of its ability to deliver basic services, but also of its traditional monopoly over the forces of law and order, and ultimately, its hold on political legitimacy. (2008 UN World Economic and Social Survey, xvi)*

In similar vein the Oxford Research Group, in reference to the global financial crisis, warns in its 2008 International Security Report that:

*Unless the response to the current global economic crisis extends to far-reaching programmes to redress the world's deep divisions, the most serious effect of the crisis will be a substantial increase in radical and violent social movements in direct response to marginalisation. These, in turn are likely to be controlled by forceful state action, leading to further conflict. (ORG International Security Report 2008, 11)*

The impunity with which vigilante mobs openly displayed their aggression at the height of the xenophobic violence, while the country's law enforcement agencies looked on in despair, highlighted just how exposed South Africa is to the scenarios that have played themselves out elsewhere in the developing world. Obviously this message becomes amplified when viewed against the background of the proliferation of violent public protest against insufficient service delivery in recent years.

When Finance Minister, Trevor Manuel, in mid-November briefed Parliament on the country's preparedness for the escalating global crisis, he also articulated this concern when he remarked that it would put strain on the government's social contract with the South African people. Manuel went on to suggest that it may compel the government to consider its 'ability to contribute to a deep and durable democracy that will lift millions of people out of poverty'.<sup>xiii</sup> The message is clear. As unemployment rises and more South Africans are added to the ranks of the impoverished, the government will come under increased pressure to expand its support to the marginalised citizens under circumstances that will almost certainly see a contraction in the resources at its disposal. How these circumstances are managed will be critical to the longer-term resilience of the South African state.



## SURVEY FINDINGS

The findings of the 2008 round of the SA Reconciliation Barometer Survey provide a quantitative affirmation of the growing sense of unease amongst the South African population. The survey, which was conducted amongst a representative sample of South Africans in April and May at the height of the xenophobic violence, shows a marked decline in optimism relating to the perception of human security amongst ordinary citizens. Significantly more South Africans are fearful about their economic circumstances, their physical security, the health of race relations and, in general, the direction in which the country is moving. Moreover, trust in key public institutions to address their plight is waning. As the material conditions of many South Africans progressively deteriorated in the course of the year, so it is very likely that positive responses to each of these issues may have declined concomitantly over this period. This sense of volatility will have to be managed carefully as the country approaches a general election, which – as is often the case with elections – has the potential to polarise a society. In the following section we look at some of the key findings of the SA Reconciliation Barometer Survey, which does provide a measure of insight into the public sentiment that may inform the context within which this election campaign will be conducted.

### Optimism Declines

Poverty and inequality are two defining features of life in post-apartheid South Africa. As the IJR's *2008 Transformation Audit: Risk and Opportunity* (forthcoming) suggest, significant headway has been made, particularly since the turn of the millennium, to push back their boundaries, both in terms of percentages and actual numbers.<sup>xiv</sup> Robust growth in the economy and the creation of new employment opportunities, which has followed in its wake, have been important catalysts in this regard. Increased tax revenue, however, also allowed the government to expand its capacity to provide social security to a growing number of citizens that continued to be marginalised from the formal economy. At present it is estimated that in the region of 12 million South Africans (about a quarter of the population) receive some form of social grant. The benefits of increased provision for the poor have been obvious. This form of access to monetary resources improved the quality of life of millions, provided seed money for small enterprises, but importantly also, stimulated consumption, which has been a major driver of growth in recent years. Yet, while poverty levels declined in this period, inequality has persisted and even increased since 1994. During this period the country's Gini coefficient, a measure of equality where 0 represents complete equality and 1 complete inequality, grew from 0.67 in 1994 to 0.68 in 2006.<sup>xv</sup>

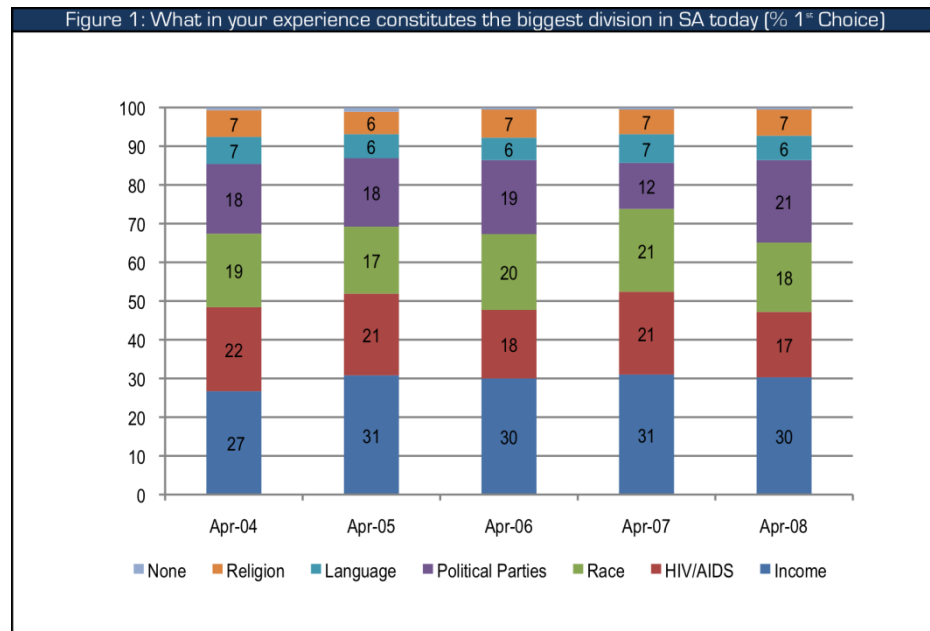
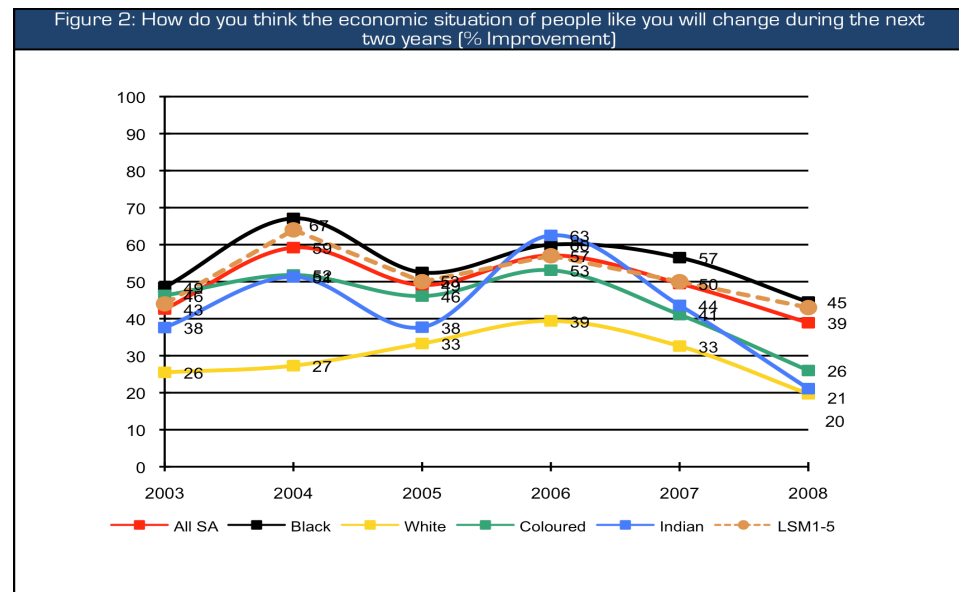


Figure 1 shows that, when asked by the SARB Survey about their experience of the two primary sources of division within the country, income inequality, averaging at around 30 per cent, has featured as the single most mentioned response since 2004. While growing income inequality has been a disquieting global phenomenon in recent decades, its manifestation in South Africa also has a perturbing racial dimension. This is evident in the strong correlation that exists in this survey between race and household income, as well as race and living standard measurement categories (LSMs), which this survey primarily employs as a measurement of material wellbeing. Not surprisingly, therefore, the majority of those who selected income inequality as the primary source of division, selected race as their second option. Conversely, those who mentioned race as the main source of division between South Africans, primarily opted for income inequality as their second choice. Race, through historic political, financial and educational privilege, therefore continues to be a strong predictor of well-being, despite material advances of a steadily growing black middle class. When understood in conjunction with previous findings of the SARB Survey regarding the greater likelihood of mobile, economically active South Africans to be exposed to inter-racial contact, it does suggest that significant changes in the experience of material circumstances of the majority of South Africans, whether positive or negative, may also have a spillover effect to relations between South Africans from different racial backgrounds. Sporadic instances of conflict between impoverished coloured and black African communities, relating to public housing in the Western Cape, have been a prime example of such racial polarisation around the competition for resources under conditions of scarcity.

Against this background the SARB Survey has since its inception gauged the opinions of ordinary South Africans regarding the degree to which they feel materially secure. It has done so primarily by posing questions relating to economic security, but also regarding their sense of physical security, since both form integral components of the larger

human security variable that has been measured by the Institute since 2003. Figure 2 shows that over the past two years there has been a



significant decline in the percentage of South Africans that are optimistic about their personal economic prospects. This applies to the country as a whole, but also to each of the country's four main population groups. It furthermore shows that in LSMs 1-5, which accounts for the poorest and most vulnerable section of the population and represents between 55 and 60 per cent of all South Africans, this decline has also been noteworthy. Although the decline in this category may be slightly less pronounced than that for the remainder of South Africans, a worsening of circumstances for the former group has got more profound implications for their material vulnerability. Whereas a perceived decline in economic prospects may, for example, force some to reconsider their longer term planning in terms of provision for retirement, it has a very direct and immediate impact on perceptions around survival for a large proportion of South Africans. Taking into account that this survey was conducted prior to the full eruption of the global financial crisis on the world's stock markets, we are most likely to see a further decrease in optimism - and for many an increase in nervous apprehension - in months to come. As industries here and abroad start to lay off workers as a result of a plunge in consumer demand, it is obvious that a slowdown in the economy will work its way upwards from those on the factory floor and down in the mineshaft.

Such layoffs will inevitably swell the ranks of those that will either directly or indirectly become dependent on social grants and pensions as a means to survive. Given an expected decline in tax revenue amidst deteriorating economic conditions, it will be difficult for the government to broaden the coverage of grants and pensions and, at the same time, adjust them to cater for the rapid increase in the cost of living. Although Trevor Manuel has indicated that counter cyclical planning within the Treasury has accommodated such considerations in its planning, it is becoming increasingly clear that little certainty exists

around the depth and projected duration of the economic downturn. Until very recently the consensus opinion appeared to be that the South African economy may be in for a ‘soft landing’ as the international environment cooled down. The precipitous declines of global stock markets in recent weeks, coupled with a domestic current account deficit, which looks increasingly toxic as the stream of foreign portfolio flows starts to narrow down, have seen such confidence disappear. Instead the Bureau for Economic Research at the University of Stellenbosch, in a briefing on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November, indicated that real GDP growth next year might be the lowest since 1998 and that the possibility of a recession cannot be taken discarded.<sup>xvi</sup> Such speculation has been fuelled further by Statistics South Africa’s announcement that third quarter GDP up to September 2008 has only shown a meagre 0.2 per cent year-on-year increase.<sup>xvii</sup>

**“... significant economic shocks do expose social fault lines and hence impact on the cohesion of societies”**

It may still be too early to predict the full implications of the current downturn, but indications are that several developing nations, including South Africa, will be unable to achieve their Millennium Development Goals (MDG’s) on schedule, particularly as they relate to poverty and the connected issue of inequality. As the cited 2008 UN World Economic and Social Survey and 2008 ORG Security Report suggest, significant economic shocks do expose social faultlines and hence impact on the cohesion of societies. Crime counts amongst its knock-on effects and therefore further elevates levels of human insecurity. In such circumstances law enforcement agencies either respond harshly, which sustains the cycle of violence, or in circumstances where they are perceived to be impotent, communities may take the law into their own hands to counter those elements that they regard as a threat.

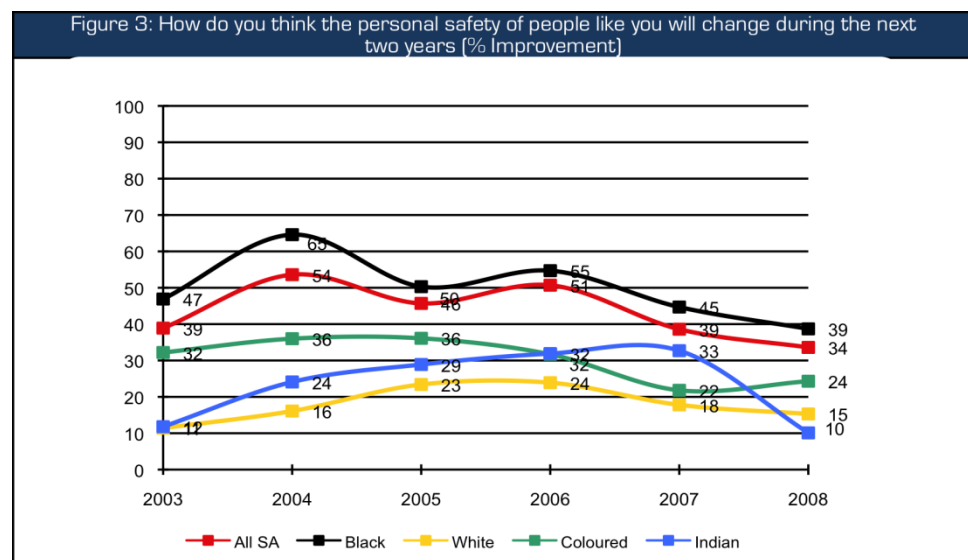


Figure 3 indicates how confidence about an improvement in the personal physical security amongst all South Africans has declined by about 17 per cent over the past two years. At 34 per cent this has also been the lowest recorded level of optimism since the inception of the survey in 2003. None of the country’s four major population groups recorded an increase in optimism during this period, while the largest

decreases occurred amongst black Africans (16 per cent) and Indian South Africans (23 per cent). Very interestingly, the response patterns to questions relating to economic security and physical security largely mirror each other. This also highlights the interrelatedness of public perception around these two component parts of human security. Although such a finding regarding public perception does not necessarily prove that they are related in practice, it shows how opinion of one can influence sentiment towards the other. Here, and in relation to several other key variables, we are of the opinion that perceptions of economic security have a significant impact on how ordinary people perceive them. Again, it is worth remembering at this point that a significant proportion of the fieldwork for this survey was conducted at the height of the xenophobic violence where material deprivation, accusations of criminality, and vigilante retaliation were key themes.

In the light of the abovementioned declines in perceived economic and physical security, it can be asked how ordinary South Africans perceive their future, that of the country, and the prospect for a prosperous future that is shared by all races.

Responses to the statement that gauges sentiment regarding personal prospects of the respondent and that of his or her family (Figure 4) show a significant decline of 13 per cent amongst the overall population over the past two years, while similar declines were recorded for each of the respective population groups. Amongst them the biggest declines occurred amongst Indian South Africans with 42 per cent and Coloured South Africans with 25 per cent.

**“26 per cent of South Africans were less upbeat about the direction the country was taking in 2008 than was the case two years ago in 2006.”**

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Optimism has declined in equal measure in response to the question about the general direction of the country (Figure 5) over the next twelve months. 26 per cent of South Africans were less upbeat about the direction the country was taking in 2008 than was the case two years ago in 2006. Again Indian and Coloured South Africans registered the largest declines in positive sentiment with 40 per cent and 27 per cent respectively. An equally significant contraction of 26 per cent occurred amongst black Africans, while the decline amongst whites were comparatively smaller. Yet, in real terms black Africans (43 per cent) remained the most confident about the general prospects of the country over the next year, while whites, with 17 per cent remained the most skeptical.

Figure 4: Thinking about how your family lives, how do you think your lives will change over the next year (% Improvement)

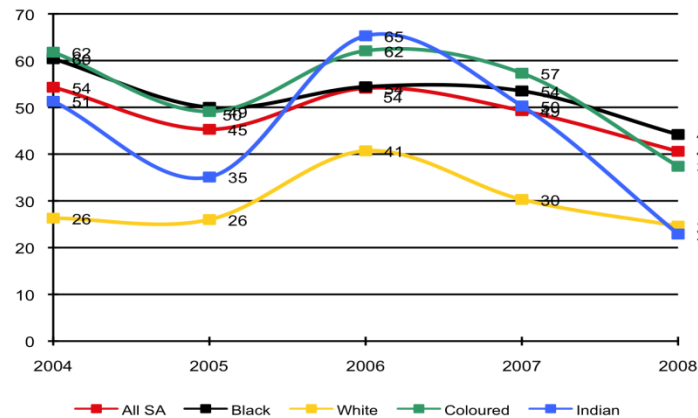


Figure 5: Would you say that this country is moving in the right direction? (% Optimism/Agreement)

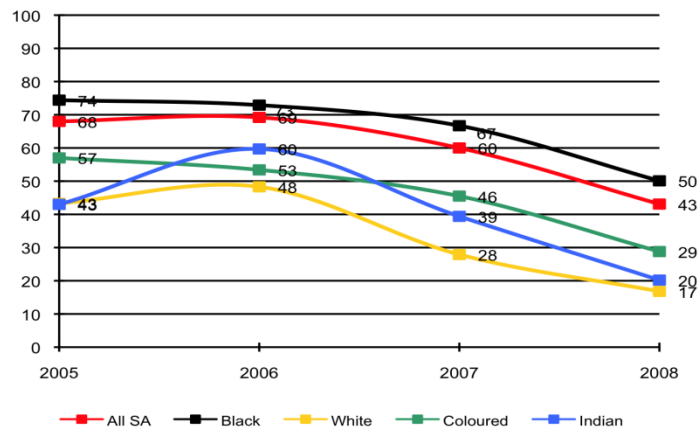
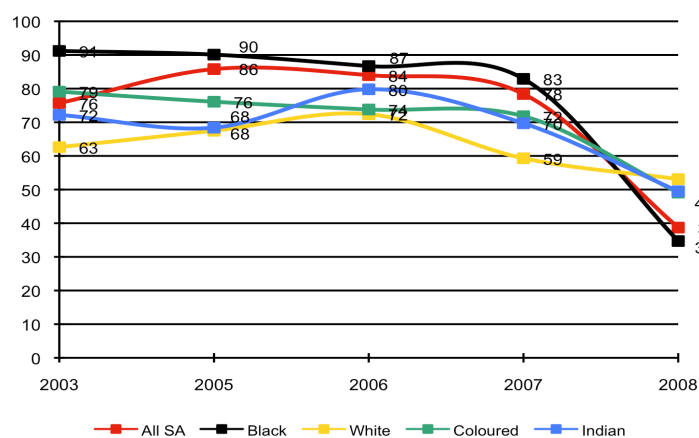


Figure 6: How confident are you of a happy future for all races in SA? (% Optimism)



Such findings, within the context of declines in optimism around physical safety and economic security, could probably have been expected. Yet, the magnitude of the decrease in optimism towards the third measurement, relating to the peaceful coexistence of people of different races, has been the most surprising. The year-on-year decline of close to 40 per cent is indeed extremely worrying, given the fact that race and ethnicity does constitute significant faultlines within our society. As is evident, the biggest year-on-year decline of 48 per cent occurred amongst black Africans. Similarly marked declines were recorded amongst Coloured-, Indian and white South Africans.

Figure 7: On a typical day during the week, whether at work or otherwise, how often do you talk to people from racial groups other than your own? (% that responded 'never')

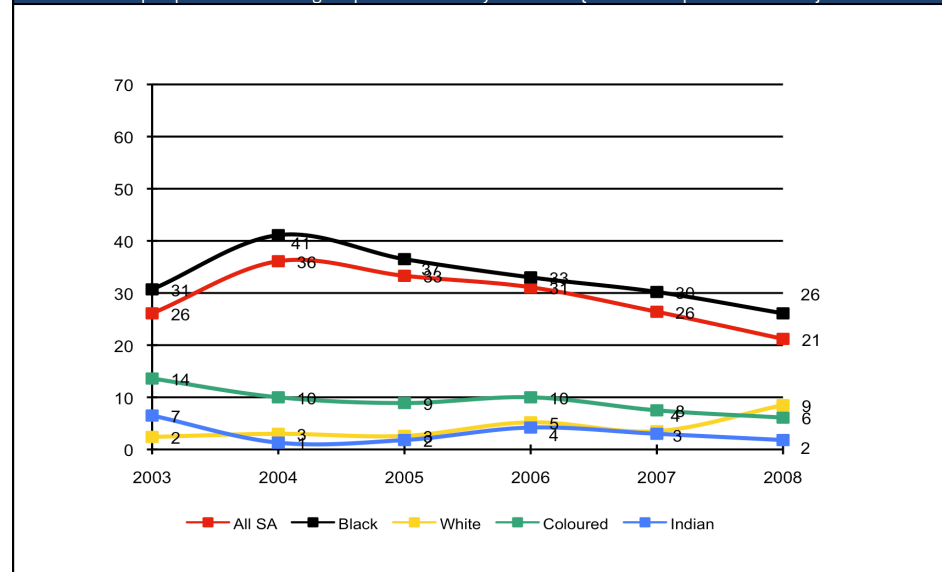
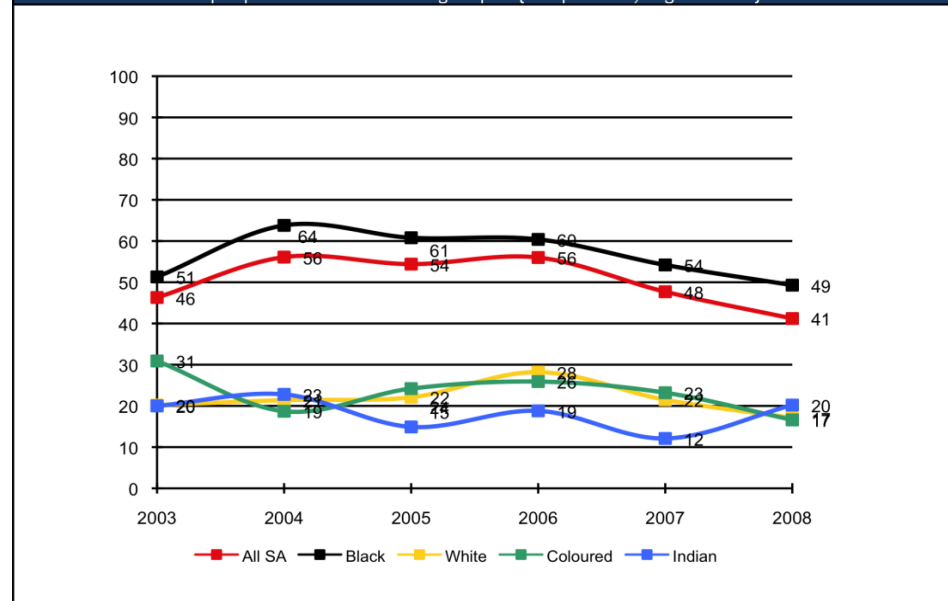


Figure 8: When socialising in your home or in the homes of friends, how often do you socialise with people from other racial groups? (% Optimism/Agreement)





Figures 7 and 8 suggests that this unusual decline in optimism about the prospects for a 'happy future for all races' has occurred at a time where basic contact and social interaction between the country's four main constitutive groups have increased. Between April 2004 and April 2008 the number of South Africans who have indicated that they have no contact with somebody from another race on an average day has decreased from 36 per cent to 21 per cent. Those who indicated that they have never had any informal social contact across racial boundaries decreased from a high of 57 per cent in 2004 to 41 per cent in 2008. Levels of interaction on both measurements remained higher for the smaller population groups. This is the case, because statistically their likelihood to interact with individuals from a group that constitute close to 80 per cent of the population is more probable than the other way around. As indicated earlier, interaction does however also have a strong class dimension where the degree of an individual's social mobility is largely dependent on his or her level of income. Within the context of substantial GDP growth and a moderate increase in employment during this period, such a decrease in the percentage of respondents who generally does not have any cross-racial contact does make sense. However, when read in conjunction with the negative finding relating to optimism about the co-existence between people of different races, it does suggest that increased exposure has not necessarily lead to greater understanding between people from different backgrounds. This gives further substance to the contention that even 15 years after the end of apartheid, we can not afford to let the quest for national reconciliation be watered down to simply amount to 'forgiving and forgetting'.

In explaining the significant finding regarding race relations, it has to be noted that a number of high-profile incidents, which almost certainly have had an impact on public opinion, occurred just prior to- and during the field work phase of the survey. These included the xenophobic attacks in May, the outcry that followed the notorious Reitz video at the University of the Free State in March, and the Skierlik massacre, where a young white man went on the rampage and killed four residents of the informal settlement, Skierlik, near Swartruggens in January. Because of their seriousness and the emotive response with which each was met, it is difficult to establish to what extent the abovementioned human security conditions may have contributed to this plunge in optimism around race relations. If we take our cue from the year-on-year decline in optimism between 2006 and 2007 and compare it to the concurrent decreases for both economic and physical security during the same period, it is possible to argue that human security considerations, at least partially, contributed to this large decline. Regardless of its contributing factors, this measurement does suggest that public perception relating to the depth of the faultline of race has increased significantly. Sudden and severe economic insecurity does therefore have the potential to aggravate what remains a very raw wound in our society.

## The Political Response

As has been noted above, economic turmoil, particularly in developing nations does put pressure on governments to alleviate the material insecurity of the most marginalised in their societies. Whereas sophisticated welfare systems, such as those in Western Europe, have the capability to act as shock absorbers in such periods of volatility, developing nations with larger and vulnerable communities, experience far more strain on the resources and capacity at their disposal. The ability of states in the latter category to deliver on the expectations of their populations often becomes the single most important determinant of their legitimacy, and hence also their ability to administer the rule of law in an efficient and consistent manner. In the absence of the material means to expedite delivery on material backlogs, trust in the institutions of democracy and their leadership to do so gradually becomes critical.

The legacy of apartheid's developmental backlogs is well documented and will not be repeated here. Neither is it necessary to repeat here the skewed nature of income distribution and the extreme deprivation of those that find themselves at the bottom of the social equation. What is of importance is to note that while a minority of South Africans are fairly well shielded from the effects of capricious global markets, a large majority, like their counterparts in the rest of the developing world, is acutely vulnerable to its effects. This leaves the legitimacy that is vested in the country's democratic institutions highly exposed to economic downturns. In turn, it leads to the question about how South Africans have perceived the level of government responsiveness to their key expectations.

**“If one accepts that the availability of government resources will be more constrained ... then only higher levels of efficiency would allow it to absorb the pressure of increased expectations for support and assistance.”**

Table 2 presents a number of responsibilities that citizens would typically expect from a functioning democratic government. A quite striking feature of this table is the extent to which citizens have experienced significant declines in their satisfaction with each of these aspects of governance performance. Key human security-related expectations, such as the government's ability to contain the cost of living, inflation, unemployment, and crime all received approval from less than a third of the representative sample. Others, such as the ability to fight corruption, the narrowing of the income gap, transparency and accountability and the management of the economy all received the thumbs up from less than half of all respondents. It is, however, not only the margins of approval, but also the magnitude of the declines that are disconcerting. Since 2003 thirteen out of the twenty three measurement areas recorded declines of more than 20 per cent. If one accepts that the availability of government resources will be more constrained, at least in the short to medium term future, then only higher levels of efficiency would allow it to absorb the pressure of increased expectations for support and assistance.

Table 2: Evaluation of Government Performance			
Delivery Area	Well 2006	Well 2007	Well 2008
Retaining skilled people	48%	28%	25%
Implementing Affirmative Action	69%	46%	44%
Transparency and Accountability	67%	39%	35%
Encouraging Intl. investment	72%	57%	50%
Controlling Inflation	63%	41%	25%
Correct Appointments	62%	38%	32%
Managing the Economy	71%	52%	34%
Cost of living	61%	37%	24%
Access to land	72%	57%	56%
Narrowing the Income Gap	65%	45%	42%
Fighting corruption	63%	43%	42%
Ending Political Violence	74%	62%	53%
Educational Needs	78%	65%	59%
Gender Equality	83%	74%	69%
HIV/Aids	71%	63%	57%
Uniting All South Africans	78%	63%	56%
Police Closer to Community	69%	56%	53%
Welfare Payments	85%	80%	77%
Building Houses	67%	54%	60%
Reducing Unemployment	40%	32%	29%
Improving Basic Health Services	73%	64%	60%
Reducing the Crime Rate	54%	33%	30%
Delivering Basic Services	75%	68%	56%

It may be asked to what extent these declines in satisfaction with government delivery has impacted on confidence in the country's key institutions. The 2007 SARB Survey Report has highlighted noteworthy declines in public confidence in a number of key democratic institutions, particularly those, such as the presidency, the three spheres of government and political parties, which all can be categorised under the broad rubric of representative democratic institutions. These responses however only represented scores that have been obtained at two measurement points. It has, however, been noted in IJR's 2007 Transformation Audit publication that the size of the year-on-year declines between 2006 and 2007 could not be overlooked, and should such declines continue at similar levels in 2008, they may become a more immediate cause for concern.

Table 2 indicates that this downward tendency for approval of representative democratic institutions has persisted in 2008. Approval for the Presidency declined by 13 percentage points to 55 per cent; for National government by 8 percentage points also to 55 per cent; for Provincial government by 8 percentage points to 49 per cent, for local government by 3 percentage points to 40 per cent; and for political parties by 2 percentage points to a dismal 35 per cent. Since 2006 the cumulative declines for the Presidency has been 22 per cent; National Government, 18 per cent; Provincial Government 17 per cent, Local Government 10 per cent and political parties 13 per cent. Another source of concern should be the performance of the 'Constitutional Court' and 'Legal System in General' items in the table. Both stand at the heart of the rule of law and the constitutional values that ought to

underpin the South African nation. Declines of 11 percentage points for both over the past two years are disconcerting, as more testing economic conditions may, as suggested above, also have an indirect, yet considerable impact on the ability of the state to enforce law and order through these institutions. Non-political actors, such as the broadcast- and print media, as well as the religious institutions, have remained the most consistent in their performance since our first measurement two years ago at rates above the 60 percentage point mark.

**Table 3: Confidence in selected institutions**

Institution	2006	2007	2008
Presidency	77	68	55
Broadcast Media	74	68	70
National Government	73	63	55
Religious Institutions	70	69	68
Parliament	69	62	55
SA Human Rights Commission	67	60	59
Constitutional Court	66	61	55
Provincial Government	66	57	49
Big Companies	65	60	61
Print Media	64	58	63
Legal System in General	61	55	50
Local Government	50	43	40
Political Parties	48	37	35

In recent years much of the blame for the poor performance by government institutions, and their commensurate deficits in public trust, has been blamed on a lack of skills and capacity as well as wasteful management and corruption.<sup>xviii</sup> Yet, an important link also exists between confidence in institutions and the nature and quality of leadership, as has been shown in the Institute's 2007 Transformation Audit publication (Hofmeyr, 2007). As the year progressed, the question of leadership gained increasing prominence within the South African body politic. Strong and unified leadership by the ruling African National Congress has been a trademark of governance in post-apartheid South Africa. In the wake of Mr Jacob Zuma's defeat of former president Thabo Mbeki in the contest for the movement's presidency in 2007, two centres of leadership, one in government and one in Luthuli House emerged. This new political power dispensation pitted comrade against comrade and required of senior party deployments in government and the civil service to carefully weigh their loyalties. This created an untenable situation where conflicting interests contributed to policy inefficiency, which culminated in the recall of several provincial premiers and ultimately that of Mbeki, who was replaced by the party's vice president, Kgalema Motlanthe.

Since the most recent round of the SARB Survey was conducted in April and May 2008, public opinion on matters of leadership has not been informed by this recall of provincial premiers and the president, which occurred later in the year. It is however likely that the tensions, which were already present within the ruling party at the time of the survey

could have contributed to the shaping of the sentiments. Figures 9 and 10 suggest that confidence in national leadership has waned over the past two years amongst South Africans from all backgrounds. In 2008 more than half of respondents indicated that they do not think that the government cares about people like them. This represents an increase of 5 per cent over the past two years. A more significant decline of 18 percentage points was recorded for the level of agreement with a statement suggesting that government can be trusted to do the right thing most of the time over the same period. In 2006, 65 per cent of respondents agreed with this statement. The comparative figure for 2008 is 47 per cent. The decline in agreement for this measurement since 2006 amongst black Africans amounted to 16 per cent, for whites 15 per cent, for Indians 14 per cent, and for Coloured South Africans 13 per cent.

**“... while confidence levels in democratic institutions and national leadership remain substantial, it has waned over the past two years ...”**

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Within a context of growing uncertainty and insecurity, it is needless to say that decisive, but also inspirational leadership will be necessary to carry South Africans through the stormy period that may lay ahead. It will require of the government to take citizens into its confidence about the limitations that a restrictive economic environment will impose upon the capacity to deliver that what is expected of it, but also to explain the rationale behind potentially painful policies that may be needed to weather the storm. This will only be possible in a context where a highly exposed citizenry feel that they can entrust government with their vulnerability. In the absence of such trust, their material insecurity may drive them to act upon their fears and the rule of law may become a casualty. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the susceptibility of poor township dwellers to xenophobic mobilisation earlier this year. When close to 60 per cent of respondents indicate that they are not convinced that government cares about people like them (see Figure 9) and just less than 50 per cent feel that they can always trust the government to do the right thing (see Figure 10), then it suggests that such trust cannot be taken for granted.

The survey results that have been cited above shows that while confidence levels in democratic institutions and national leadership remain substantial, it has waned over the past two years, and quite significantly so in a number of key areas. If social capital is therefore to be understood in terms of relational trust that citizens extend towards the state, which in turn enables it (the state) to exercise its authority over society, this important commodity may have been exposed to erosion in recent years. This is highly undesirable, particularly during this period where economic pressure may put social cohesion in South Africa under strain.

Figure 9: The people who run the country are not really concerned with what happens to people like me. [% Agreement]

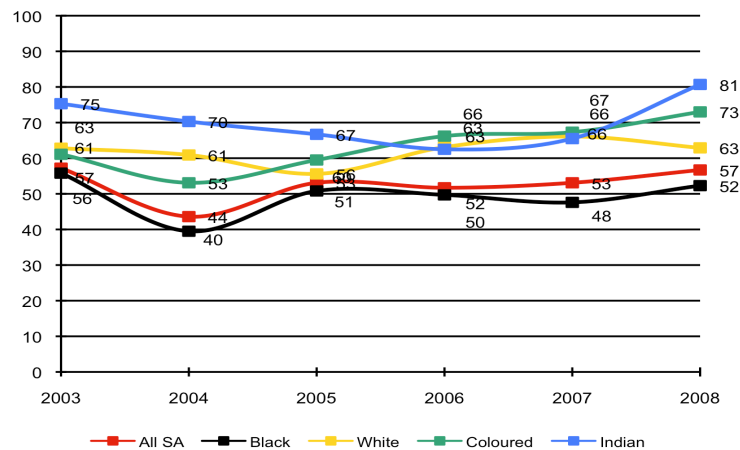
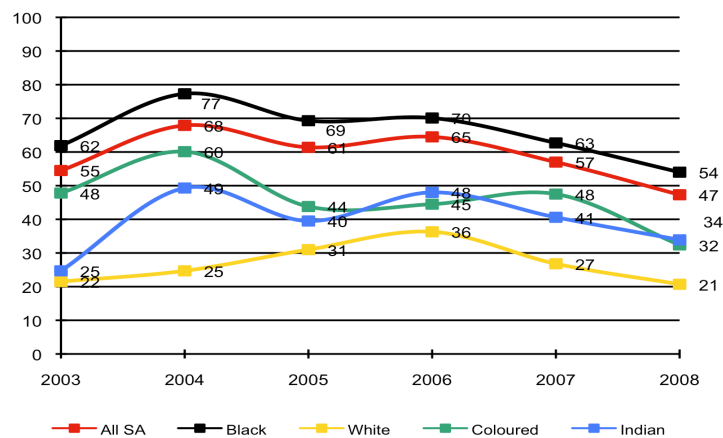


Figure 10: Most of the time I can trust the country's leaders to do what is right. [% Agreement]



Some of the decline in trust may be understood in terms of a lack of capacity and resources to hasten the undoing of the massive backlogs that is associated with apartheid's legacy. Although it has not been covered by the scope of this survey, the discontinuities that have been created by the transition in power within the ruling party, may also have had a significant impact on the quality of governance. It is therefore desirable that the consolidation of this transition within the ruling party should occur sooner rather than later, since it inevitably also impacts on the efficiency with which its deployments in the civil service pursue their mandate.

## CONCLUSION

As the world economy teeters on the brink of recession, many developing economies brace themselves for the potential developmental fall-outs that such economic contractions may have. Ironically, while the epicentre of this crisis is located in the developed North, developing nations, are likely to be affected disproportionately



by its impact. From a policy perspective it is therefore of critical importance for South Africa to take preemptive action to limit the potential damage that can be caused.

In this regard the Treasury's prudent counter-cyclical planning in recent years will for the time being allow it to provide a buffer to protect the vulnerable within our society. Yet, the country will not fully escape its economic impact, which will also put significant social pressure on the many faultlines that run through South African society. Our forward planning therefore should not only involve rands and cents calculations, but also the potential impact that this may potentially have on social cohesion, and not least as this pertains to relations between the country's historically categorised population groups. Because the economic insecurity fault line continues to intersect at several points with these historical categories, its entrenchment will erode those gains that have been made over the past decade and a half.

The results of the 2008 SARB Survey shows that there was a marked level of volatility within the South African society at the time that it was conducted. Citizens felt economically less secure, physically more unsafe, and less confident about the future, particularly as such confidence pertain to relations between South Africans of different races. This points to the possible pressure that such levels of insecurity may be putting on the cohesion of society.

Good leadership and robust democratic institutions have a critical role to play in keeping such diverse societies together at times when internal or external factors threaten to pull it in different directions. Such trust and confidence do still exist, but it has been shown that confidence in democratic institutions and trust in national leadership have decreased quite rapidly over the past two years. These may come under further pressure, should a prolonged dwindling in tax revenues keep the state from providing sufficiently for a growing number of citizens that will become dependent upon state welfare under adverse circumstances.

Such trust will be critical in order to manage expectations which, if not toned down, will further exacerbate public uncertainty and frustration. In this regard the way in which political parties will conduct their campaigns in the run-up to the 2009 general elections will be of great significance. Citizens, more than in previous election years, may be looking towards political parties for solutions and assurances. This may have the positive effect of forcing parties to fine-tune their policy, but in instances where the race may become tight, unrealistic promises may create expectations that will ultimately end up in further disillusion and fuelled frustration. A disconcerting aspect of the campaigns to date, particularly as it relates to the ANC and the yet to be launched Congress of the People (Cope), which splintered from it, has been the inflammatory language that has characterised their exchanges. By constantly upping the ante in terms of the extremity of the language that form part of their rhetoric, they may be playing a dangerous game in a society that is already highly-strung as a result of the material insecurity of its citizens.



## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>i</sup> Hamber, B. (2002) "Ere their story die': Truth, Justice and Reconciliation in South Africa" in *Race & Class*. Vol. 44, Iss. 1, Pp. 66.
- <sup>ii</sup> Gerwel, J (2000) "Anticipating a Different Kind of Future" in Villa-Vicencio (ed.) (2000) *Transcending a Century of Injustice*. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation: Cape Town. Pp. 122.
- <sup>iii</sup> Philpott, D (2006) *The Politics of Past Evil*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, p.25.
- <sup>iv</sup> The African concept, which literally posits that a person can only be person through other people.
- <sup>v</sup> Tutu, D. M. (1999) *No Future without Forgiveness*. Random House: New York.
- <sup>vi</sup> Huyse, L. (2003) "The Process of Reconciliation" in Bloomfield, D, Barnes, T and Huyse, L. (eds.) (2003) *Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: A Handbook*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance: Sweden. p. 21.
- <sup>vii</sup> Esterhuyse, W (2000) "Truth as a trigger for transformation: from apartheid injustice to transformational justice" in Villa-Vicencio, C and Verwoerd, W. (eds.) (2000) *Looking Back Reaching Forward: Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa*. University of Cape Town Press: Cape Town.
- <sup>viii</sup> In previous years it was known as the M-Bus Survey
- <sup>ix</sup> In recent years South Africa, together with China, India, Brazil, Mexico, has attended G8 summits by virtue of the strategically important role that they play within the developing world.
- <sup>x</sup> Crush, J. (2008) "The Perfect Storm: The Realities of Xenophobia in Contemporary South Africa", *Migration Policy Series*, Nr. 50, Southern African Migration Project. p. 33.
- <sup>xi</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, (2008) *World Economic and Social Survey 2008: Overcoming Economic Insecurity*. p. iii.
- <sup>xii</sup> Boyle, B. (2008). "World food riots spread", *The Times*, 16 April, p.4.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Business Day, 18 November 2008, p.9.
- <sup>xiv</sup> IJR, (2008) *Poverty and Inequality Scorecard, 2008 Transformation Audit: Risk and Opportunity* (forthcoming), Hofmeyr, J.H. (ed.), p.73. Institute for Justice and Reconciliation: Cape Town
- <sup>xv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xvi</sup> BER, (2008) "GDP growth in 2009 set to be weakest since 1998", BER Press Release (20 November), <[www.ber.ac.za](http://www.ber.ac.za)>
- <sup>xvii</sup> The Citizen, (2008) Third quarter GDP slows to 0,2 per cent, <[www.citizen.co.za/index/article.aspx?pDesc=83847,1,22](http://www.citizen.co.za/index/article.aspx?pDesc=83847,1,22)>
- <sup>xviii</sup> Koelble, T. (2007) *Corruption and the Politics of the belly*, SA Reconciliation Barometer Newsletter, Vol. 5 Issue 2, p.8.