

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and Independent Newspapers

REALITY CHECK:
SOUTH AFRICANS' VIEWS
OF THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA

A REPORT ON A NATIONAL SURVEY
OF THE SOUTH AFRICA PEOPLE, 1999

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and Independent Newspapers

REALITY CHECK:

**SOUTH AFRICANS' VIEWS
OF THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA**

**A REPORT ON A NATIONAL SURVEY
OF THE SOUTH AFRICA PEOPLE, 1999**

Mollyann Brodie, Ph.D

Drew Altman, Ph.D

Michael Sinclair, Ph.D

REALITY CHECK:

SOUTH AFRICANS' VIEWS OF THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

South Africa's dramatic transition to democracy, marked by the 1994 election of Nelson Mandela to the Presidency, was watched closely all over the world. Since this landmark event, South African citizens have experienced enormous changes in their government, their society, and their lives.

Reality Check, a joint project of the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and Independent Newspapers, was based on a national survey conducted just before the June 1999 elections. Its purpose was to give South Africans a way to talk about their feelings on the new South Africa beyond the vote they would cast at the ballot box. The survey explored South Africans' perceptions of democracy, their assessment of the transition years, and their attitudes towards the future. The survey also sought to shed light on how South Africans think and feel about race, reconciliation, and national unity; and about issues like the economy, crime, education, and health. The survey was reported in Independent Newspapers from April 19 to April 23, 1999 with a special supplement of the findings reported on April 28, 1999.

The survey found the expected: strong concerns about crime and the economy and real differences between African and white South Africans on many issues. It underscored South Africa's essential challenge: how to create a more equitable society without pushing underlying tensions to the breaking point. But the strongest message that came through in the survey was an unequivocally positive one. Finding after finding underscored the South African people's commitment to democracy and national unity; their confidence in South Africa's major institutions; their realism about the pace of change; and their optimism for the future.

This survey report is divided into four sections. Section I provides an overview of how South Africans feel about the transition to the new South Africa, their perceptions of democracy and their feelings towards their government and other political and social institutions. Section II seeks to go beneath the surface by exploring attitudes towards different issues and by different sub-groups of the population. Section III looks specifically at what South Africans have to say about the road ahead and how the country should be meeting its challenges. Finally, Section IV looks at where the public and members of parliament agree and disagree about their perceptions of the country's progress over the past five years, their expectations for the next five years, and their top priorities for the country.

METHODOLOGY

The survey questionnaire was jointly developed by the Kaiser Family Foundation, Independent Newspapers, and the South African research firms -- Strategy & Tactics and the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE). In addition to the national survey reported on here, the study included focus groups, a survey among four key constituency groups, and a media content analysis. This report summarizes the key findings from the national survey of South Africans and their political leaders in Parliament.

National Adult Survey. A nationally representative sample of 3,000 South Africans was surveyed via face-to-face interviews in November and December of 1998. The sample provides statistically valid results for the South African population as a whole, as well as for South Africa's major racial groups and provinces. The margin of sampling error for this survey was plus or minus two percent.

Constituency Interviews. Between October 1998 to January 1999 members of four different constituency groups were also interviewed face-to-face in order to provide comparisons between what the public thinks and what different interest groups think, regarding key political, social, and economic issues in South Africa. The four groups surveyed included business, civil society, labor, and members of parliament (both national and provincial). The findings from the constituency surveys should not be taken as representative of these constituencies because random sampling was not applied. Instead, the sample was drawn to ensure an adequate spread from each constituency. In this regard, the data gathered provide an indicative view of each of the constituencies. Only findings from interviews conducted with members of parliament are reported on here.

Data analysis was led by David Everatt and Ross Jennings of Strategy & Tactics, and by Mollyann Brodie, vice-president for Public Opinion Research at the Kaiser Family Foundation. Richard Morin, Director of Polling at *The Washington Post*, provided valuable assistance to the project. The findings reported here were compiled by Dr. Brodie and Dr. Drew Altman, President and CEO of the Kaiser Family Foundation, and were presented by Dr. Altman at briefings in Capetown, Durban, and Johannesburg during the week of April 15, 1999.

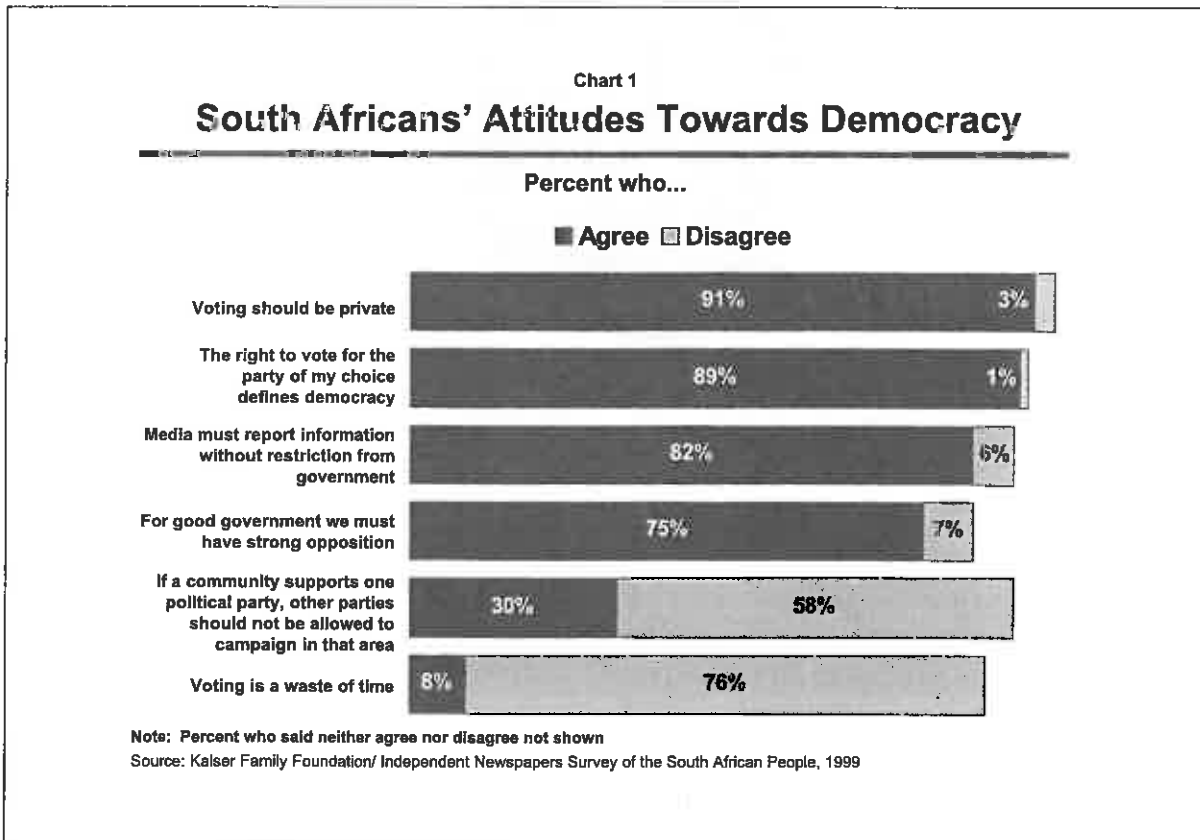
KEY FINDINGS

Section I. Overview: Beliefs About the New South Africa

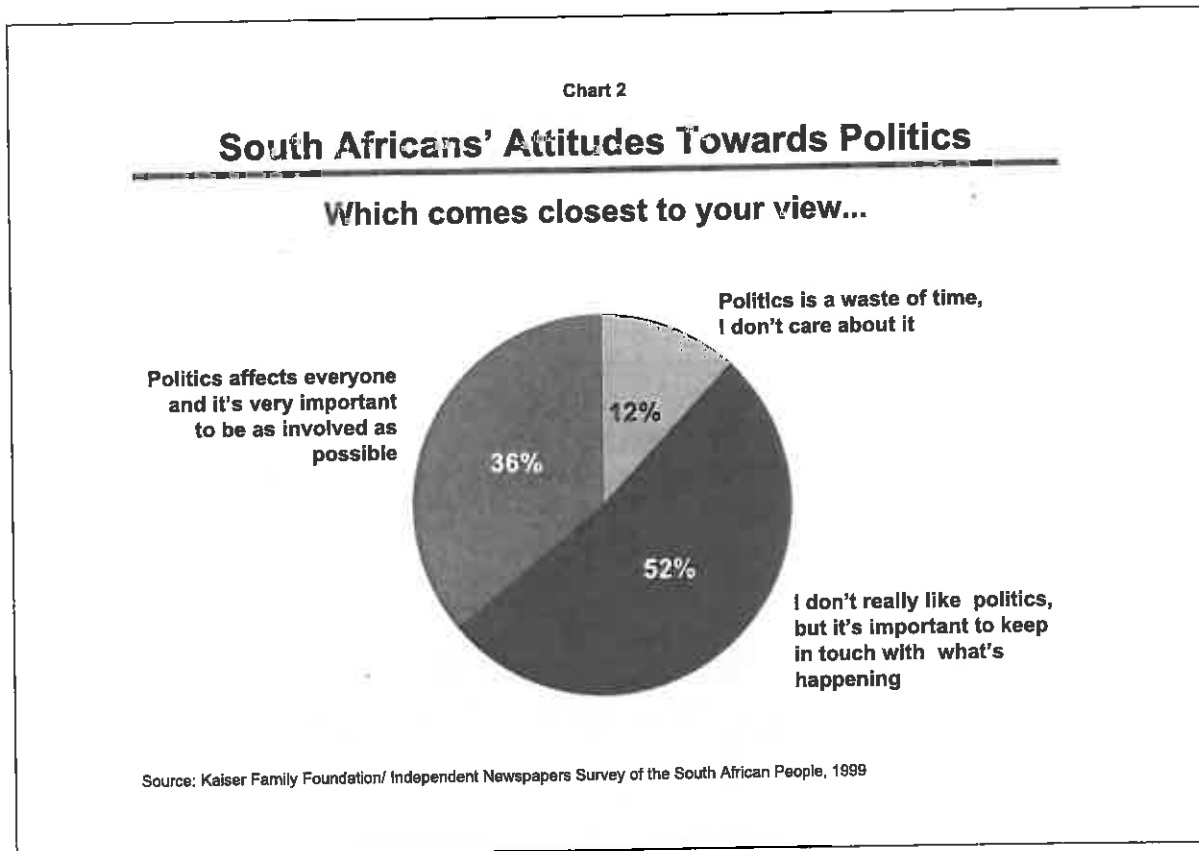
Overall, South African citizens believe strongly in the fundamental principles of democracy, the democratic process, and about being on the road towards national unity. They also report confidence in a variety of political and social institutions and have a generally positive attitude toward government.

Democracy, Importance of Politics, and the Road Towards Unity

South Africans believe strongly in the right to private voting, the right to vote for the party of their choice, and the freedom of the press. Only eight percent believed that voting was a waste of time. However, 30 percent of South Africans agree that "if a community supports one political party, other parties should not be allowed to campaign in that area," a concept contrary to the principle underlying democratic elections (Chart 1).



South Africans believe that politics are important and are realistic and pragmatic in thinking about the role of politics in their country. Fifty-two percent of South Africans say they dislike politics, "but recognize that it is important to keep in touch with what is happening" politically in the country. Thirty-six percent of South Africans acknowledged that politics affect everyone, and agree that it is important to be as involved as possible. Only 12 percent said that politics is a "waste of time" (Chart 2).



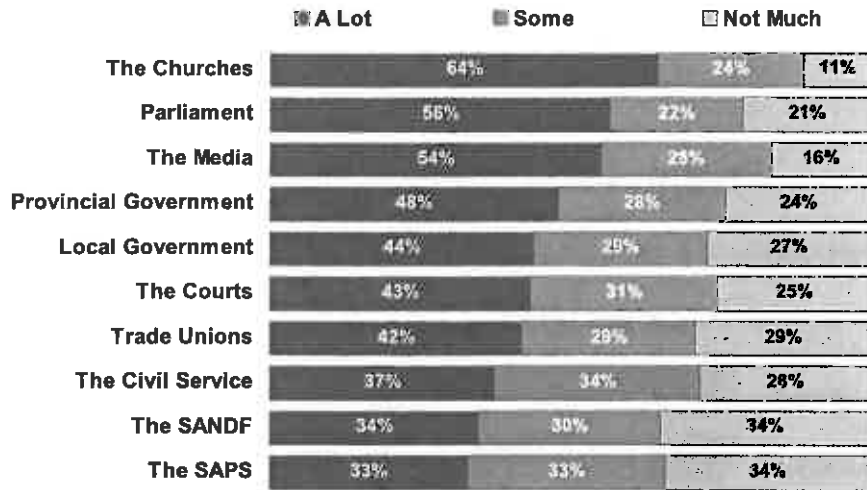
When asked about the prospects for unity, 63 percent believe that eventually the country will become united, and 14 percent believe that the country is becoming united. About one in five (22%) believe that South Africa will always be divided.

Confidence in Government and Other Institutions

Another fundamental issue is how much the citizens trust the government to "do the right thing" in a time of intense change. While there have been many bumps in the road during the transition, the survey showed that the honeymoon is not yet over. Seventy-nine percent of South Africans expect the National Government in Pretoria to do the right thing by the people. This is in striking contrast with the United States, where only about one-third (32%) of Americans believe that their national government usually does the right thing.

Not only do South Africans have confidence in their government, but other political and societal institutions fare pretty well in the public's eyes. Overall, South Africans show the strongest level of confidence in their religious organizations (64% have "a lot" of confidence), followed by Parliament (56%) and the media (54%). Yet even those organizations at the bottom of the list, namely the defense forces and the police, still receive respectable votes of confidence from the public. For example, more than six in ten had either "a lot," or "at least some," confidence in the SANDF and the SAPS (Chart 3).

Chart 3
How Much Confidence Do You Have In...



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation/ Independent Newspapers Survey of the South African People, 1999

Section II. Beneath the Surface: A Closer Look at South Africans' Views

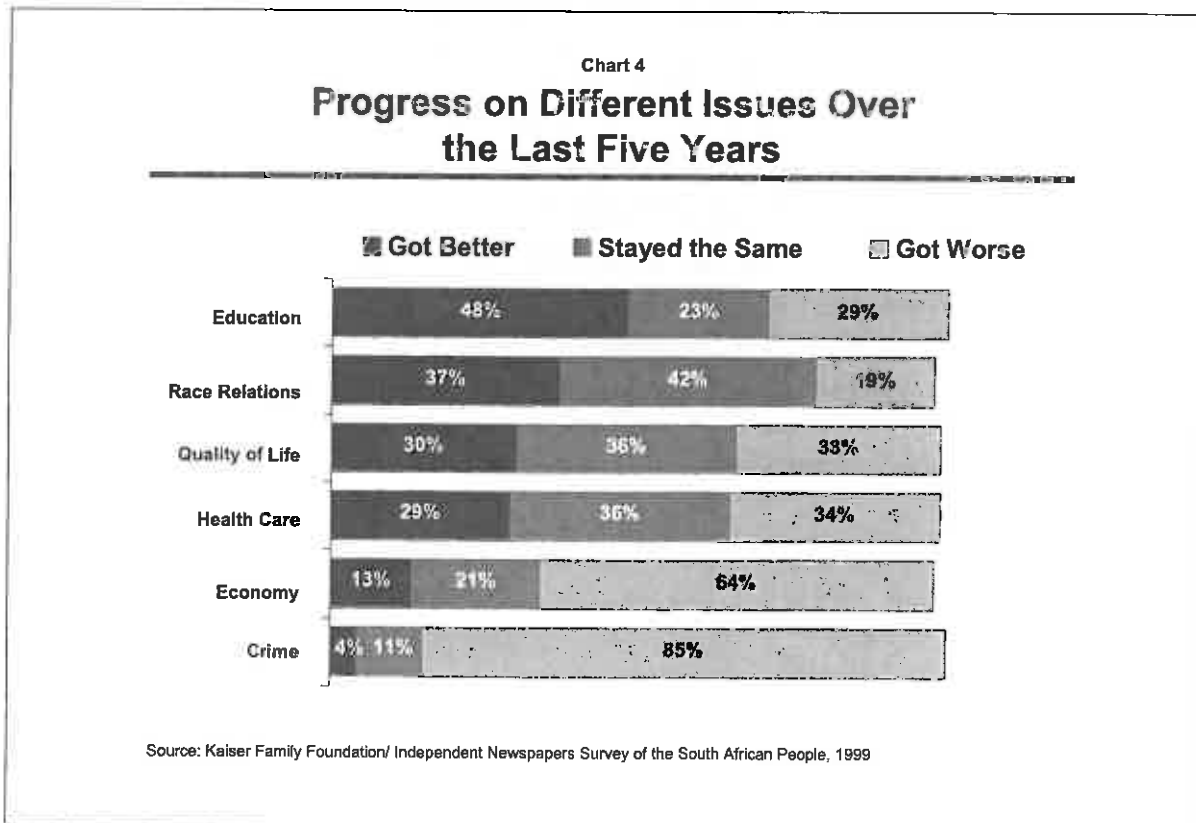
On the surface South Africans feel optimistic about the state of their nation, but it is an optimism tempered by realism about the struggles of today and the future. The survey shows a strong commitment to the basic principles of democracy, and confidence in national institutions. Beneath the surface, however, the picture is murkier. Looking at South African perceptions across different issue areas, across racial groups, and provinces shows a more complicated picture highlighting both opportunities and challenges for the future.

Beneath the Surface: Opinions Across Issue Areas

South Africans gave mixed reviews of progress over the past five years in specific issue areas, including education, race relations, quality of life, health care, the economy, and crime. In each issue area, people were more likely to say things have "stayed the same" or "got worse" than to say things have improved.

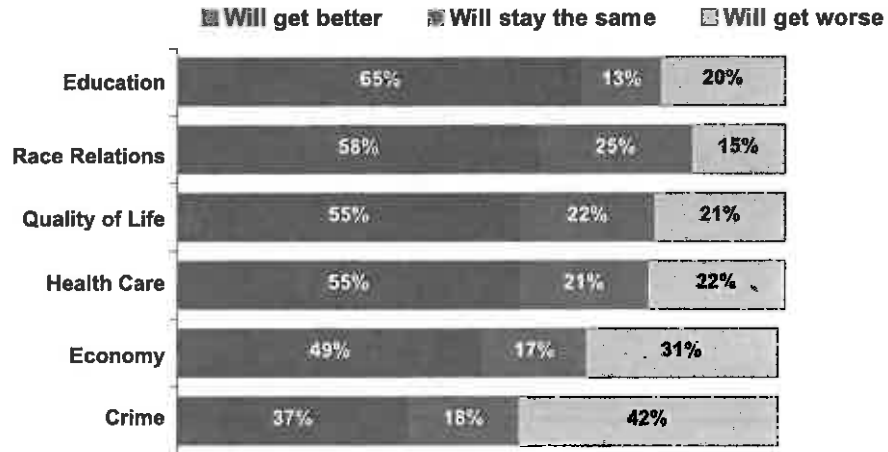
South Africans feel that the most progress has been made in the area of education with close to half (48%) saying things have improved. Race relations follows, with 37 percent believing that things have improved in this area.

Crime and the economy stand out as major topics of concern. More than eight in ten (85%) say crime has "gotten worse" over the past five years and close to two-thirds (64%) say the economy has "gotten worse." These perceptions from South Africans resonate with the conventional wisdom that the economy and crime are the areas in which the people believe the country is struggling the most (Chart 4).



Yet a more optimistic picture emerges when South Africans share their thoughts about the future. In four areas a majority think things will get better over the next five years -- education (65%), race relations (58%), quality of life (55%), and health (55%). Nearly half thought that the economy (49%) would improve as well. In only one area - crime - did a plurality of people fear that things will get worse (Chart 5).

Chart 5
Expectations on the Issues for the Next Five Years



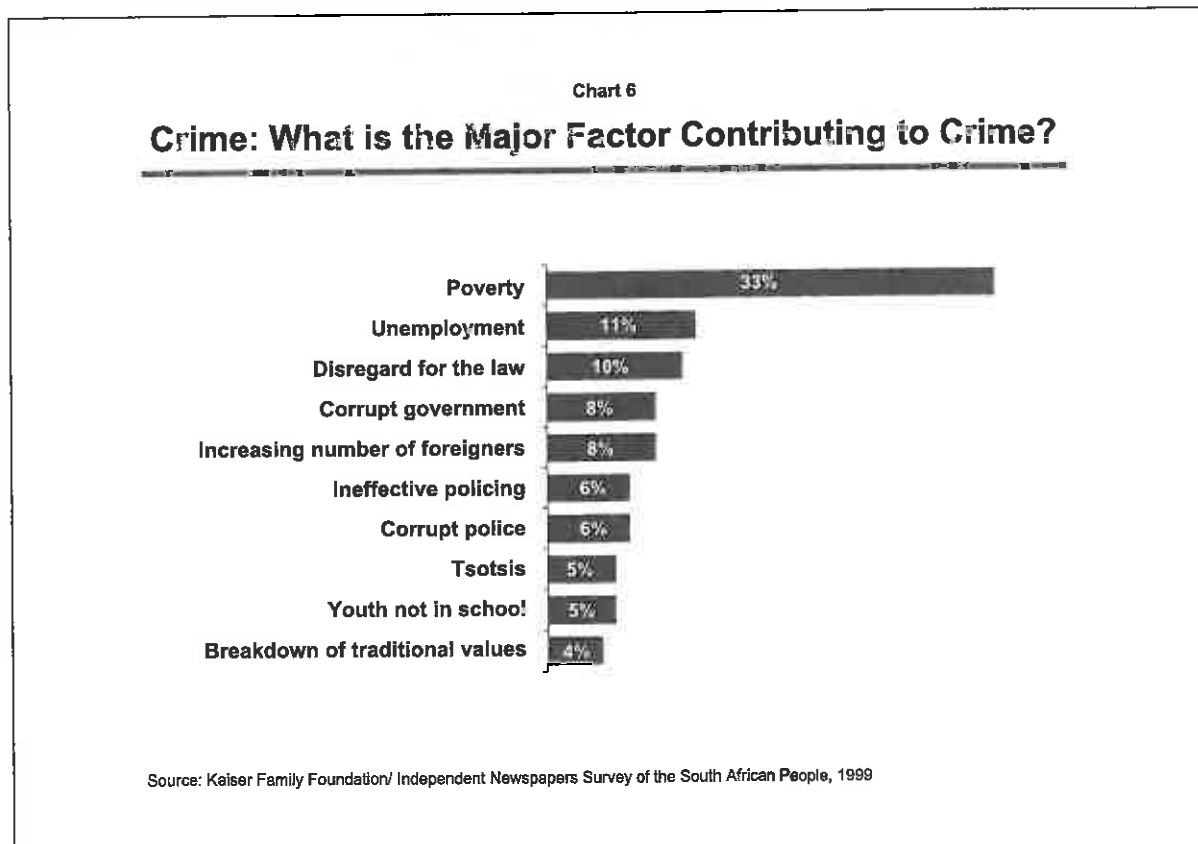
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation/ Independent Newspapers Survey

A Closer Look at Crime and the Economy

Given the concerns South Africans express about both crime and the economy, and their relative pessimism about these areas in the future, it's important to examine perceptions about these two issues in greater depth.

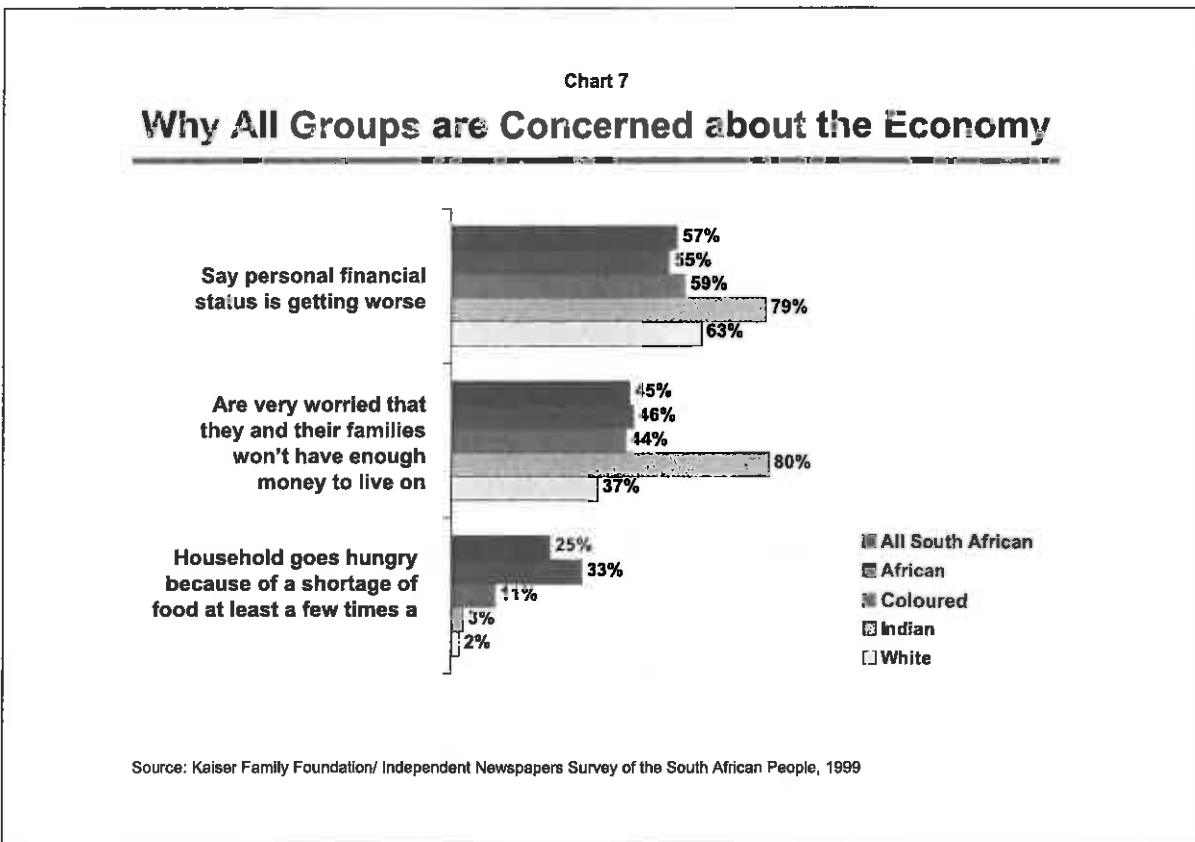
Crime. Most South Africans believe that crime has gotten worse over the past five years. This perception may stem partly from direct experience - 25 percent of South Africans say they have been a victim of crime in the past five years. However, even those who have not had direct experience with crime live in an environment where reports of crime, stories of crime experienced by friends or family, and fear of crime are all part of daily life.

When asked about the major factors contributing to crime, South Africans link crime to economic issues, with poverty cited most often as the largest contributor to crime. Rather than blaming the crime problem on moral decay or police corruption, South Africans are more likely to see the unequal distribution of wealth and unemployment in their country as the major cause of crime. Even whites cite poverty as the number one reason for crime, though they are stronger believers than other groups that "disregard for the law" and "corruption" are also important contributors to the high crime rate (Chart 6).



Economy. South Africans are very concerned about the economy. Chart 7 shows that these concerns stem not necessarily from fear or anxiety reported; but rather, from tangible, personal experiences.

- The majority of all groups noted that their personal financial status has gotten worse in the past five years. Seventy-nine percent of Indians perceive their financial situation sliding downwards, followed by 63 percent of whites, 59 percent of coloureds, and 55 percent of Africans.
- A large percentage of people are worried that they will not have enough money to live on in the future.
- One-third of Africans report that they go hungry at least a few times a month or more.

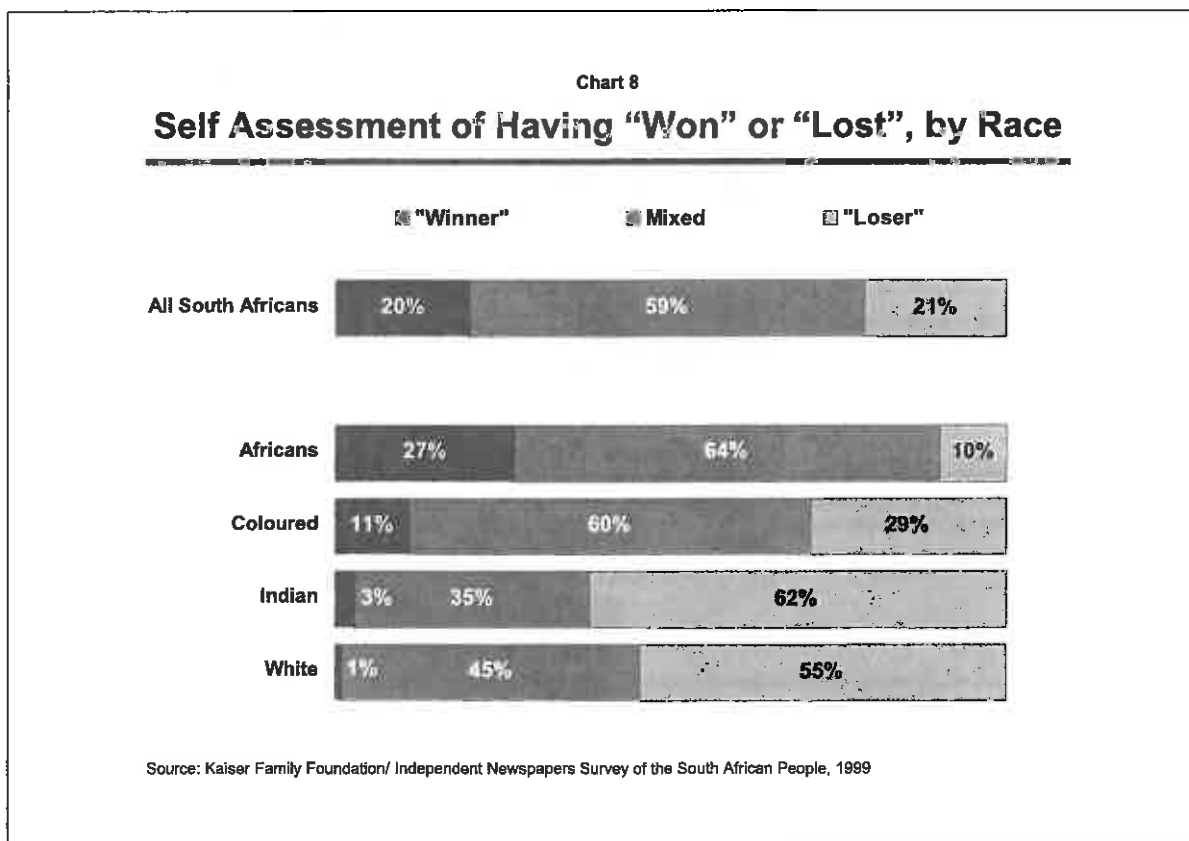


Beneath the Surface: By Race

Given South Africa's unique history, understanding the perceptions of people from different racial groups is important to understanding South Africa's current problems and prospects for the future.

Looking across questions that assessed South Africans' self-perception of how they fared over the last five years in a variety of areas shows major divides among South Africa's racial groups - African, coloured, Indian, and white. People were classified as "winners" if, across the wide range of areas including their personal finances, safety, health care and education, they felt that they had won more often than if they had lost. The reverse is true for "losers." Those who felt that they had won in some of the areas, but lost in others, were classified as having "mixed" feelings.

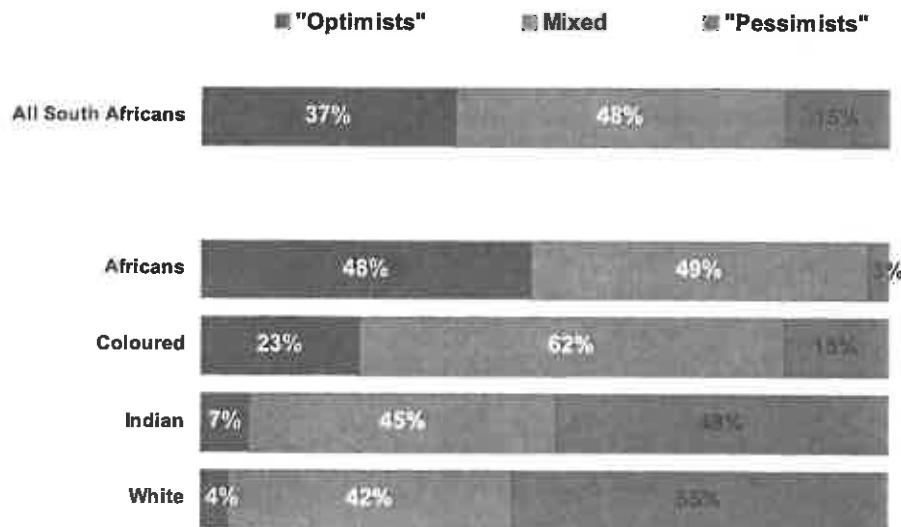
Chart 8 shows the sharp differences among Africans on the one hand, and Indians and whites on the other. Coloured respondents come out somewhere in between.



- Africans feel they have fared the best, with 27 percent believing that they have "won," 64 percent thinking that they have "won" in some areas but "lost" in others, and 10 percent feeling more often like they had "lost" over the last five years.
- In contrast, 55 percent of whites feel that they have "lost", 45 percent feel that they have "won" in some areas but "lost" in others, and only one percent of whites feel they have "won" in the last five years.

Differences also emerge across racial groups when South Africans think about how things will be in the future. After looking across questions assessing whether they believe things will improve or get worse over the next five years, people were classified as "optimists," "pessimists," or "mixed" (those who feel some things will improve, but others will get worse). Chart 9 shows substantial optimism among Africans (48%), but it was tempered by equally substantial uncertainty (49%). Sixty-two percent of coloureds share the feeling of uncertainty, as do 45 percent of Indians. Indians (48%) and whites (55%) are considerably more likely to be pessimistic, with few classified as "optimists" (7% of Indians, 4% of whites).

Chart 9
"Optimists" and "Pessimists", by Race



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation/ Independent Newspapers Survey of the South African People, 1999

Chart 10 shows how the different groups feel about how South Africa is doing in different areas of society, again highlighting the different perceptions across the racial groups. Non-Africans see things getting worse across the board. In contrast, Africans believe that things are improving. Their optimism spans all issues except for crime and the economy, again underscoring the concern about those issues.

Chart 10
Assessment of How the Overall Situation Changed During the Past Five Years for Each Issue, by Race

	African	Indian	Coloured	White
Education				
Got better	61	10	26	10
Got worse	15	84	44	68
Crime				
Got better	5	-	3	1
Got worse	81	95	90	94
Health Care				
Got better	37	14	20	4
Got worse	25	44	39	67
Race Relations				
Got better	42	12	28	27
Got worse	12	49	24	40
Quality of Life				
Got better	38	4	19	4
Got worse	24	68	44	58
Economy				
Got better	17	2	8	1
Got worse	56	89	64	91

Note: The percent answering "about the same" is not shown in the table.

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation/Independent Newspapers Survey of the South African People, 1999

Beneath the Surface: By Province

One final way to look beneath the surface is to examine differences by province. The interesting thing about provincial differences is that while these regions have faced a variety of circumstances, the attitudes of people who live in them are generally more similar than different. However, a few notable variations exist (Chart 11).

- Confidence in Parliament is substantially lower in the Western Cape than nationally.
- Generally, the Western Cape is less optimistic than the other provinces.
- KwaZulu-Natal is especially optimistic about education improving in the near future.

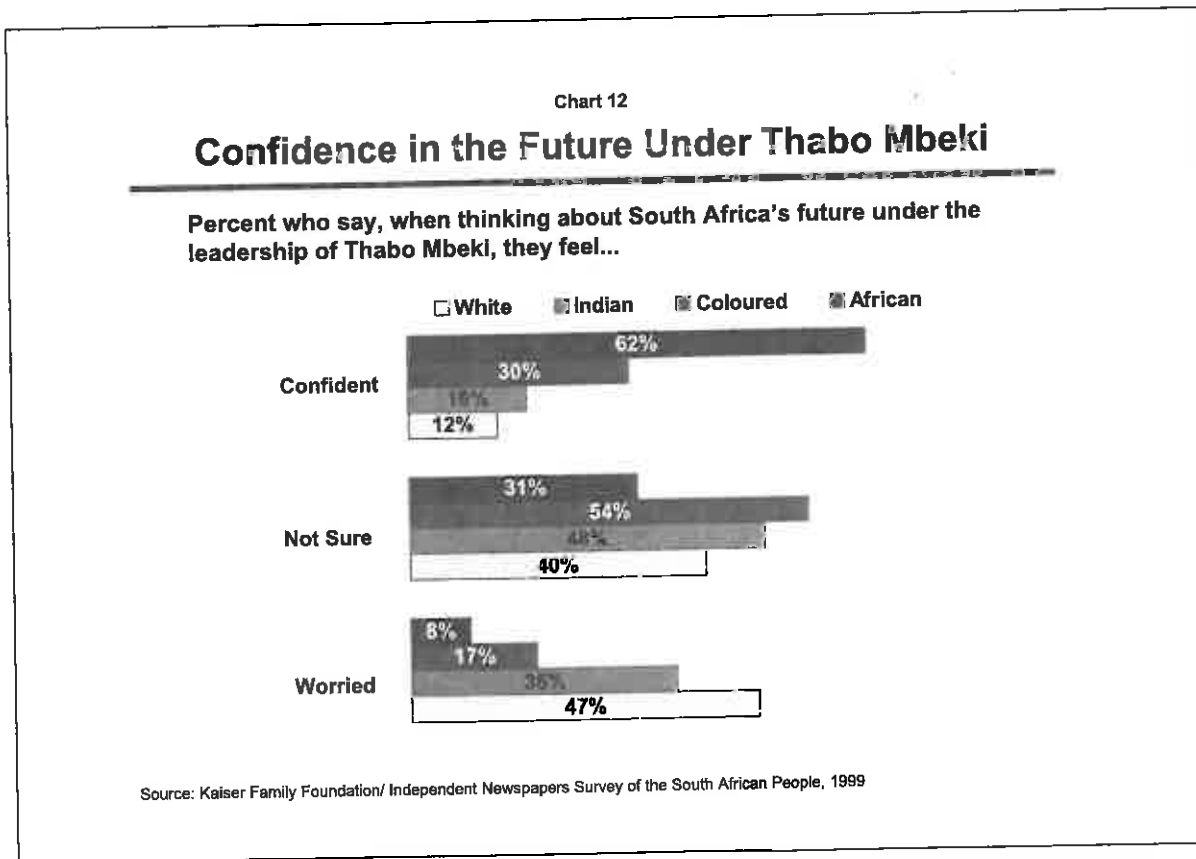
Chart 11
Variations by Province

	All South Africans	Gauteng	KwaZulu-Natal	Western Cape
Have "a lot" of confidence in Parliament.	56%	56%	54%	31%
Think race relations got better over the last 5 years	37%	36%	46%	29%
Think education will get better in the next 5 years	65%	60%	70%	48%
Think crime will get better in the next 5 years	37%	29%	39%	31%
Optimism about South Africa meeting its future challenges	48%	47%	54%	40%

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation/ Independent Newspapers Survey of the South African People, 1999

Section III. What Does the Future Hold?

While "optimism" strongly outweighs "pessimism" about the country's future in most of the specific areas examined, South Africans hold divergent views on whether or not confidence in South Africa's new leadership is warranted. Forty-seven percent of whites are worried about the short term future under Thabo Mbeki, while 62 percent of Africans are confident. About half of coloured and Indian respondents are uncertain about the future, and 31 percent of Africans also responded that they are "not sure" whether or not to feel confident (Chart 12).

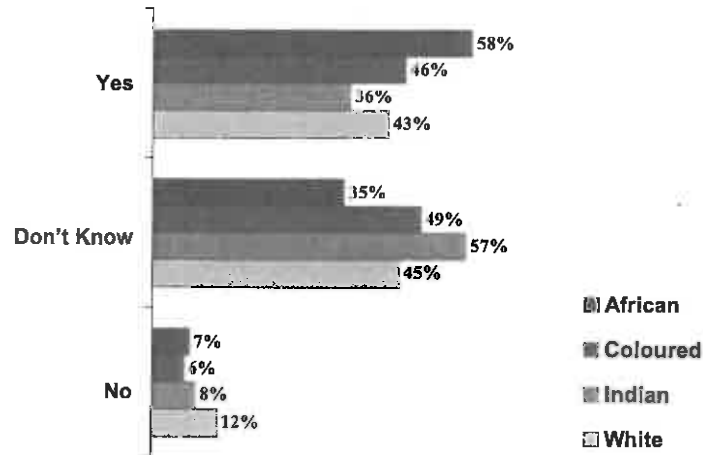


However, when asked to think about the future beyond the new government, South Africans were much more optimistic. A majority (54%) believed that South Africa would continue to be a democratic nation. Thirty-eight percent were uncertain, and perhaps remarkably, only 8% said they did not think that democracy would be sustained. Across the different groups, Africans (58%) were the most confident about South Africa's future, Indians the most uncertain (57% said don't know), and whites were the most likely to be pessimistic. Notably however, only a small percentage of whites were outright pessimists, with only 12% saying that the country would not remain democratic (Chart 13).

Chart 13

Expectations About Democracy in the Future, by Race

Thinking ahead to when President Mandela leaves office, will South Africa remain a democratic country?



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation/ Independent Newspapers Survey of the South African People, 1999

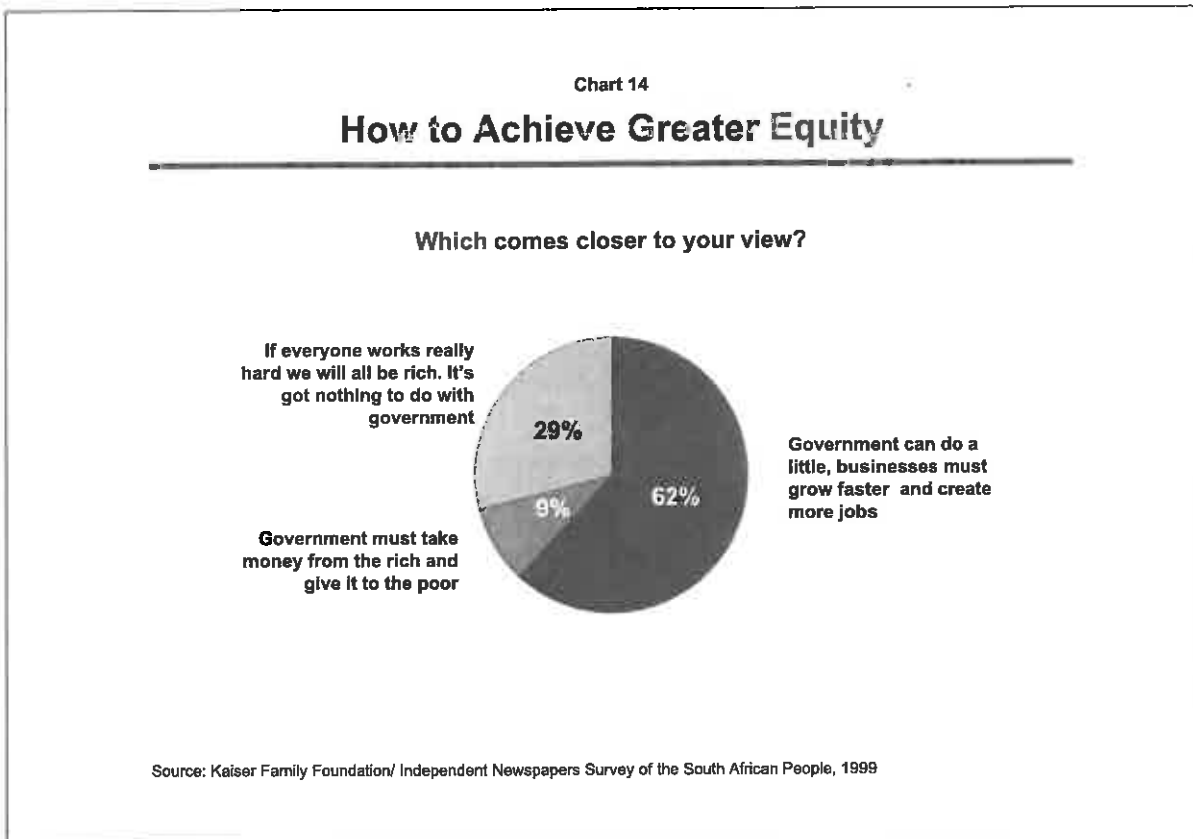
An examination of what South Africans see as the main challenges for the nation showed remarkable consensus. Most people want to see more jobs created and crime brought to a halt. Africans are more optimistic about addressing these problems than other groups (Table 1).

Table 1				
	African	Indian	Coloured	White
Main Challenge by Ranking	1. Creating Jobs 2. Stopping Crime 3. Improving Education	1. Creating Jobs 2. Stopping Crime 3. Improving Education	1. Creating Jobs 2. Stopping Crime 3. Improving the Economy	1. Stopping Crime 2. Improving the Economy 3. Creating Jobs
Can South Africa Meet that Challenge?				
Optimistic	56%	22%	44%	25%
Pessimistic	8%	28%	9%	34%
Not Sure	35%	49%	45%	39%

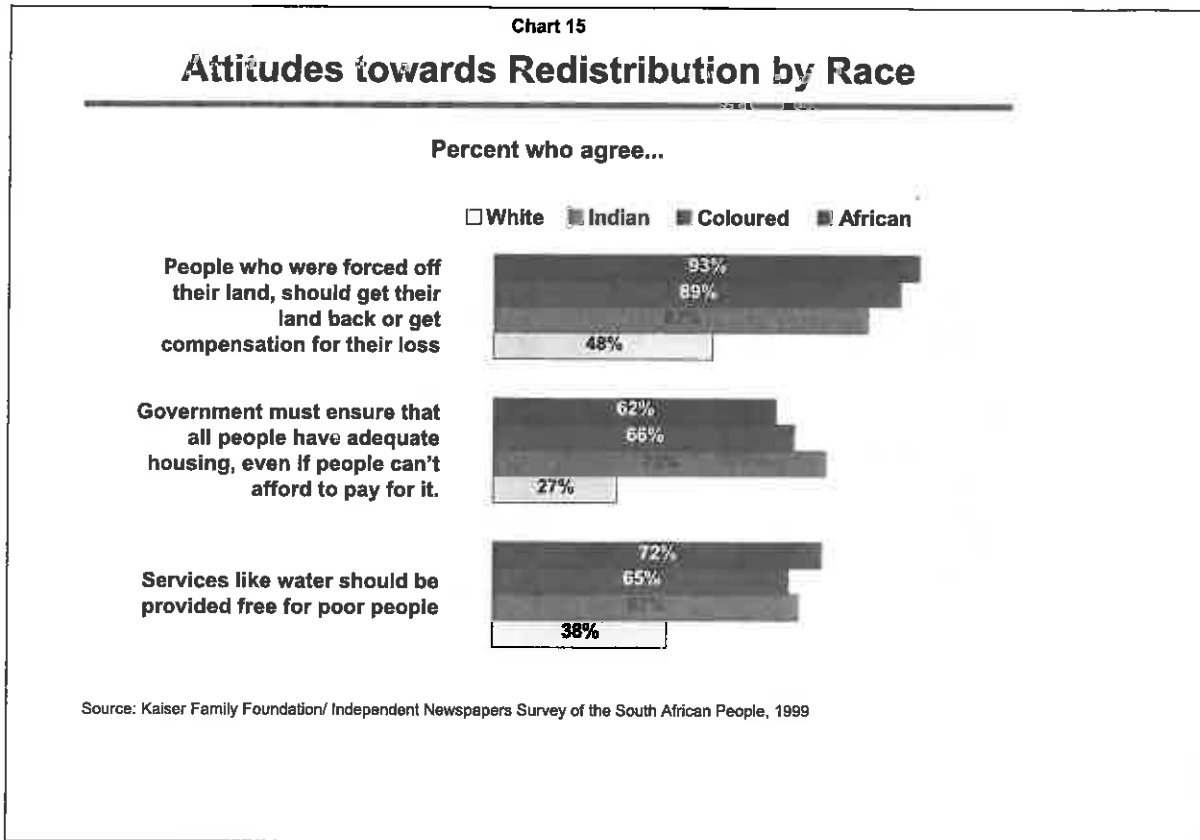
The Way Forward

A fundamental question for the future is whether South Africa addresses its problems through redistribution of wealth, economic growth, or some combination of the two strategies.

When asked how to achieve greater equity, the results are perhaps surprising. The public is not clamoring for aggressive redistribution (only nine percent supported that approach). Rather, the majority of South Africans gravitate toward a moderate path, agreeing that "government can do a little, but business must grow faster and create more jobs." (Chart 14).



However, a more complex picture emerges when the idea of redistribution is addressed on an issue-specific basis. Here, not surprisingly, there is a real difference in answers among racial groups. Nearly all Africans, Indians, and coloureds believe that people who were forced off their land should get their land back or be compensated for the loss of their property. Only about half of whites agree. This disparity in responses is mirrored when similar questions were asked about adequate housing and clean water (Chart 15).

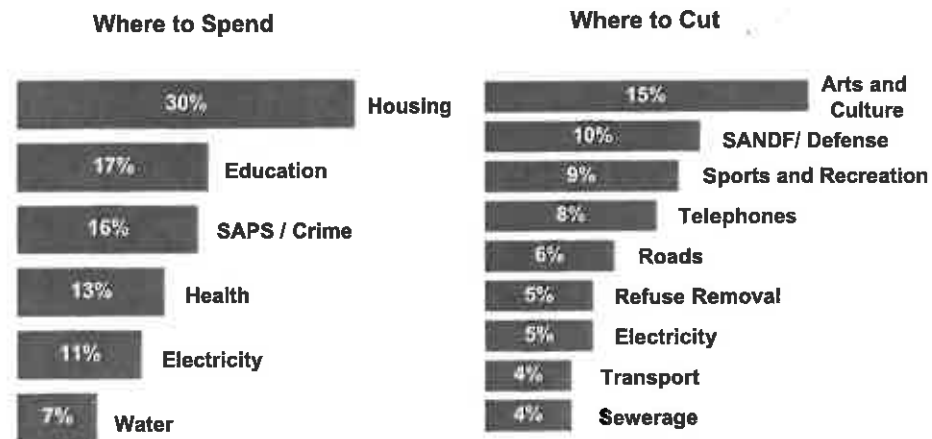


The results show that the public wants past injustices addressed, and obvious needs met, but within the context of a moderate approach to redistribution overall. The challenge will be how to balance economic growth and redistribution of wealth to improve the standard of living for South Africans as a whole.

South Africans believe that housing, education, and crime deserve the most government support. To address these problems, the people are most willing to forego funding for Arts and Culture, and Defense (Chart 16).

Chart 16

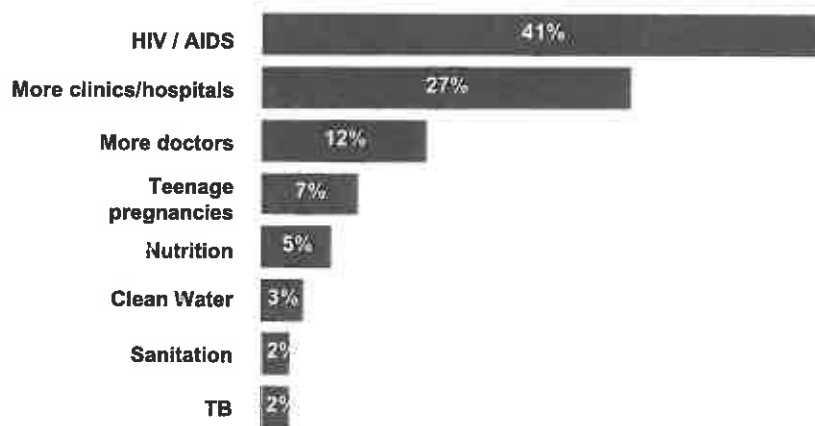
South Africans' Priorities for Government Spending



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation/ Independent Newspapers Survey of the South African People, 1999

Thinking specifically about priorities for health care over the next five years, South Africans rank HIV/AIDS, as the number one priority, followed by efforts to increase the supply of health services and personnel. Generally, sickness and death are seen as immediate problems while prevention takes a back burner. Therefore, prevention-related interventions such as the provision of clean water, sanitation, and good nutrition are seen as less pressing than access to health care. This may underscore the need for greater efforts to educate the public about the connection between water, sanitation, food, and health. However, at present, South Africans expect to get sick, and want to be able to get necessary medical care if and when illness occurs (Chart 17).

Chart 17
**South Africans' Priorities for Health Care
 Over Next Five Years**



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation/ Independent Newspapers Survey of the South African People, 1999

Section IV. The General Public and Members of Parliament: Do They Agree?

Looking Back and Looking Forward on Key Issues:

While there is some basic agreement between the public and members of parliament, particularly in the case of education, members of parliament in general are more positive about their assessments of how things have gone over the past five years (Table 2). For example, more than six in ten (61%) of the members of parliament think that health care has improved, whereas only 29% of the public agree.

Table 2
Assessment of How the Overall Situation Changed During the Past Five Years
for Each Issue: Public and Members of Parliament

	Public (n=3000)	Members of Parliament (n=173)
Education		
Got Better	48%	54%
Got Worse	29%	23%
Health Care		
Got Better	29%	61%
Got Worse	34%	25%
Race Relations		
Got Better	37%	49%
Got Worse	19%	19%
Quality of Life		
Got Better	30%	48%
Got Worse	33%	24%
Economy		
Got Better	13%	28%
Got Worse	64%	40%

Note: The percent answering "about the same" is not shown on the table

Furthermore, members of parliament are more optimistic about improvements to come, with two-thirds believing quality of life will improve and 62% believing that the economy will get better, as compared to 55% and 49% for the public respectively (Table 3).

Table 3
Expectations for the Future for Each Issue: Public and Members of Parliament

	Public (n=3000)	Members of Parliament (n=173)
Education		
Will get better	65%	67%
Will get worse	20%	18%
Health Care		
Will get better	55%	65%
Will get worse	22%	18%
Race Relations		
Will get better	58%	62%
Will get worse	15%	15%
Quality of Life		
Will get better	55%	66%
Will get worse	21%	20%
Economy		
Will get better	49%	62%
Will get worse	31%	19%

Note: The percent answering "about the same" is not shown on the table

Challenges and Spending Priorities for the Future:

By and large, the public and their elected leaders share the same views in terms of priorities for national spending. Housing, education, health, and crime/security appear on both "top five" lists. However, members of parliament are more focused on sanitation, and the public wants more spending on the provision of electricity (Table 4).

Public	Members of Parliament
1. Housing	1. Education
2. Education	2. Health
3. Crime	3. Housing
4. Health	4. Police/Security
5. Electricity	5. Sanitation/Water

Table 4
Spending priorities of the Public and Members of Parliament

Both members of parliament and the public tend to agree about the challenges for the future, with both naming job creation as the biggest challenge facing South Africa. While members of parliament rank economic growth ahead of other challenges, the public is more focused on crime (Table 5).

Public	Members of Parliament
1. Jobs	1. Jobs
2. Crime	2. Economic Growth
3. Economy	3. Improving Quality of Life/Meeting Basic Needs

Table 5
Main Challenges for the Future: Public and Members of Parliament

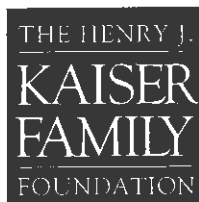
Members of parliament are more optimistic than the general public about the ability of the country to meet these challenges. When asked if South Africa would be able to meet its challenges, 53 percent of members of parliament are "very optimistic," 34 percent are "somewhat optimistic," and only 12 percent are "pessimistic." On the flip side, only 18 percent of the public are "very optimistic" and 30 percent are "somewhat optimistic," 14 percent are pessimistic, and 37 percent are "not sure."

CONCLUSION

When Nelson Mandela became President, the world hailed his rise to power as the glorious ending of a bitter era. Indeed, it was. Yet, in terms of equalizing South African society and rectifying the problems wrought by apartheid, the election of Nelson Mandela was only the beginning.

Importantly, South Africans believe strongly in the fundamentals of democracy, and a large majority has confidence in the government and other institutions. Government priorities also seem to mesh well with the priorities of the public, and there is a general sense of hopefulness about the future. But South Africans are also worried about crime and the economy.

This survey of South Africans certainly underscores South Africa's challenges but it also shows that the new South Africa has made a good beginning and there is cause for guarded optimism about the future. When viewed in the context of South Africa's history and what might have been, the survey illuminates South Africa's standing as perhaps the leading example of democratic transformation in the world.



The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation
2400 Sand Hill Road
Menlo Park, CA 94025

650-854-9400 Facsimile: 650-854-4800

Washington Office:
1450 G Street N.W., Suite 250
Washington, DC 20005

202-347-5270 Facsimile: 202-347-5274

<http://www.kff.org>

Additional free copies of this publication (#1512)
are available by calling the Kaiser Family Foundation's
publication request line at 1-800-656-4533