

**Changing lives of
ordinary people
through human and
social sciences**

The Diplomacy of Ubuntu: Attitudes towards Foreign Affairs and Policy in South Africa

Benjamin Roberts, Steven Gordon & Jarè Struwig
Democracy, Governance and Service Delivery (DGSD)
Research Programme, HSRC

4th Toyin Falola Annual Conference (TOFAC)
Blue Waters Hotel, Durban
3-5 July, 2014



Foreign Policy in South Africa



South Africa's **foreign policy** basis in the country's history of **racial oppression** and the **struggle for liberation**

National policy documents suggest that South Africa's **international engagements** are shaped by:

- a deepening **commitment to multilateralism**
- and **Global South** solidarity and cooperation.

Key focuses in **White Paper on Foreign Policy**:

- the African Agenda, South-South Co-operation, North-South Dialogue, Multilateral and Economic Diplomacy, and bilateral relations with individual countries

Central importance in **National Development Plan**:

- Address shared challenges of underdevelopment in Global South
- Promote global equity and social justice
- Partner with the Global North to develop a partnership for development
- Strengthen the multilateral system, including its transformation, to reflect the diversity of nations





Background to the study



Hans Morgenthau: *"the rational requirements of good foreign policy cannot from the outset count on the support of a public opinion whose preferences are emotional rather than rational"*

- Recent work challenge this sentiment: public opinion is important
- Research of revisionists indicates that governments cannot adequately conduct evaluations of their foreign policy in the absence of an understanding of public opinion towards such policies.

Given the **importance** attached by the **national policymakers** to South Africa's role in global affairs, there is a need to **develop empirical evidence** on **public evaluations** of foreign policy

Funded by the **Open Society Foundation's South African Foreign Policy Initiative** we conducted a study on public attitudes towards foreign policy.

Goals of this study:

- promote academic scholarship on foreign affairs
- provide evidence to influence the strategic direction of policy
- help frame media debate on foreign affairs in the country.





Quantitative Methodology



- Survey conducted by **Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)**
- Nationally representative of the population 16 years and older living in private households in the 9 provinces
 - **Primary sampling units:** 500 census enumerator areas (EAs), stratified by province, geography type and majority population group
 - **Secondary sampling units:** 7 household visiting points randomly selected per EA
 - One respondent 16+ years randomly selected per household
- In **2013** the **realised** sample size was **2,739**
- Responses to the **survey voluntary and confidential**, collected by **face-to-face interview**
- Data collection: **November-December**





Foreign Affairs Quiz

- **Question:** How **knowledgeable** South Africans are about **foreign affairs** with particular **reference** to important **international events** and **salient policy positions**?

Knowledge concerning **important international events** and **foreign policy positions** will be highly **coloured** by the ideological prism of the respondent.

Understanding **public knowledge of foreign affairs** will further our understanding of how **individuals perceive** and **understand foreign policy in the country**.

- **Objective knowledge measures:**
 - Based on four items administered in the form of a quiz.
 - An item on **international** item, a **regional** item, a **foreign-partnership** item and a **military** item.
 - Covered contemporary foreign policy issues at the time the survey was fielded in late 2013





Quiz Results



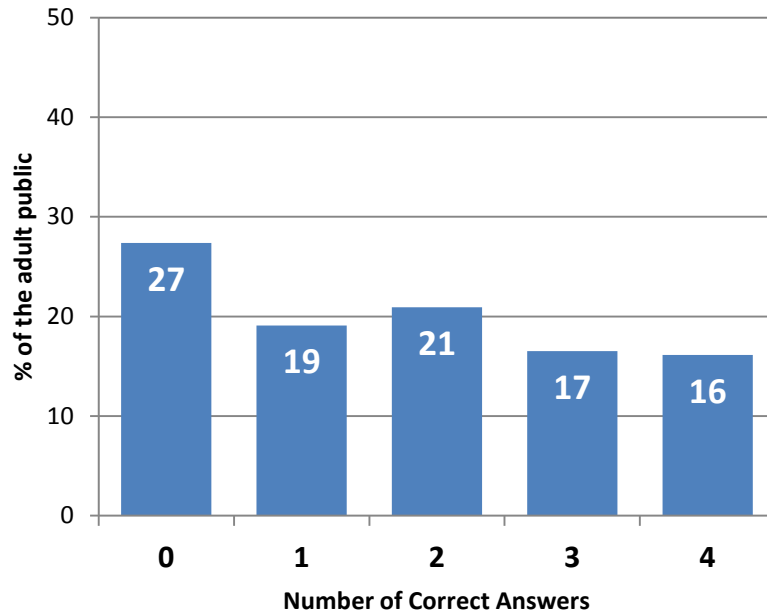
- **Objective and subjective knowledge measures:**
 - **Quiz score measure:** around a quarter got none of the items correct, two-fifths got 1-2 correct; a third got either 3-4 items correct (mean=1.7).
More than **half** the adult population was knowledgeable of the **Zimbabwe elections** and **peacekeeper fatalities**, but barely a third were aware of the **Egyptian political situation** and of the **BRICS member countries**
 - **Subjective knowledge question:** 25% lack knowledge; 30% not very knowledgeable; 44% somewhat/very knowledgeable (9% 'very')
 - **Comparison:** moderately strong correlation (0.42)

Knowledge Quiz			
	Correct	Incorrect	(Don't Know)
Knowledge of Zimbabwe 2013 election	61	7	32
Knowledge of 2013 Egypt protests	32	20	48
Knowledge of BRICS member countries	31	15	53
Knowledge of death of CAR peacekeepers	51	12	37

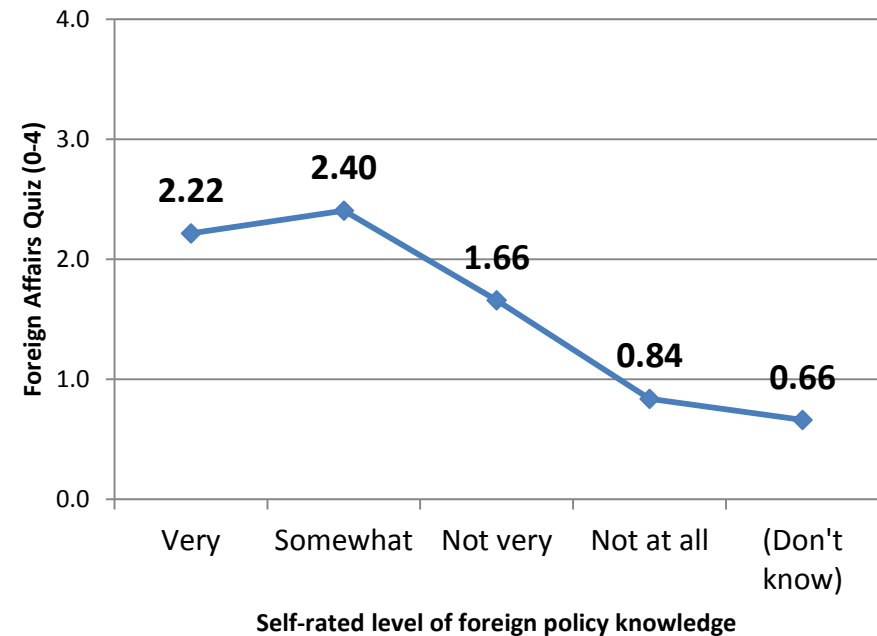


Comparing Subjective Knowledge with the Foreign Affairs Quiz

Number of correct quiz responses (%)



Mean quiz scores by subjective knowledge



Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2013.





A Class Divide?



- **Objective and subjective knowledge measures:**

Oneway ANOVA tests: reveal broadly similar socio-demographic patterns underlying subjective and objective foreign policy knowledge.

- Men > women
- White, Indian adults > black African, coloured adults
- Strong educational and poverty status gradients
- Employed > labour inactive and unemployed
- Formal urban areas > former homeland areas, rural farms; informal urban settlements also higher than rural farms based on subjective knowledge
- Opposition party supporters > ANC supporters

Disparity in terms of age-related association: no significant effect based on objective quiz measures; for subjective knowledge, 18-24 and 25-34 year-olds > 65+ years

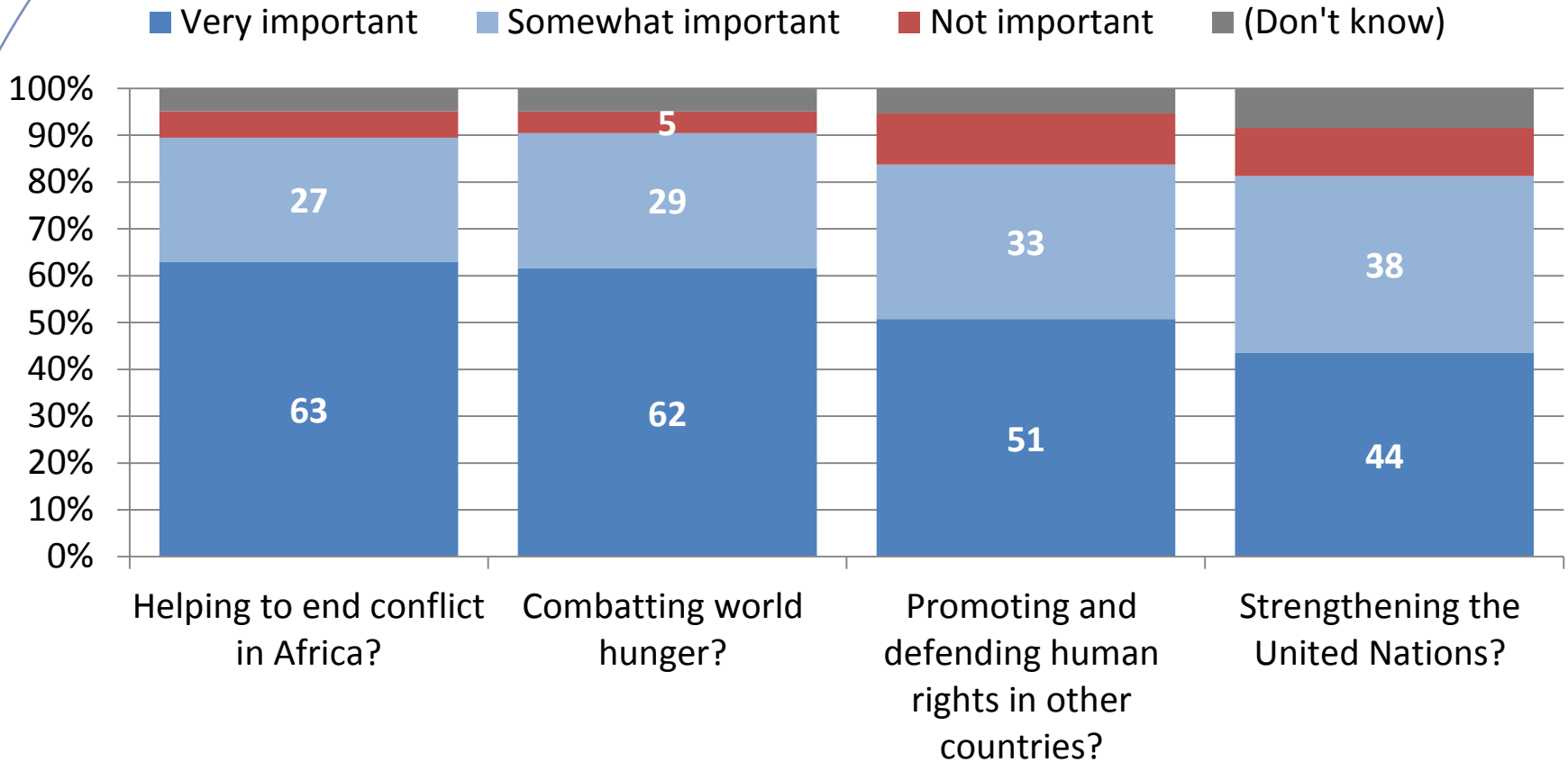




Foreign Policy Goals



Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2013.

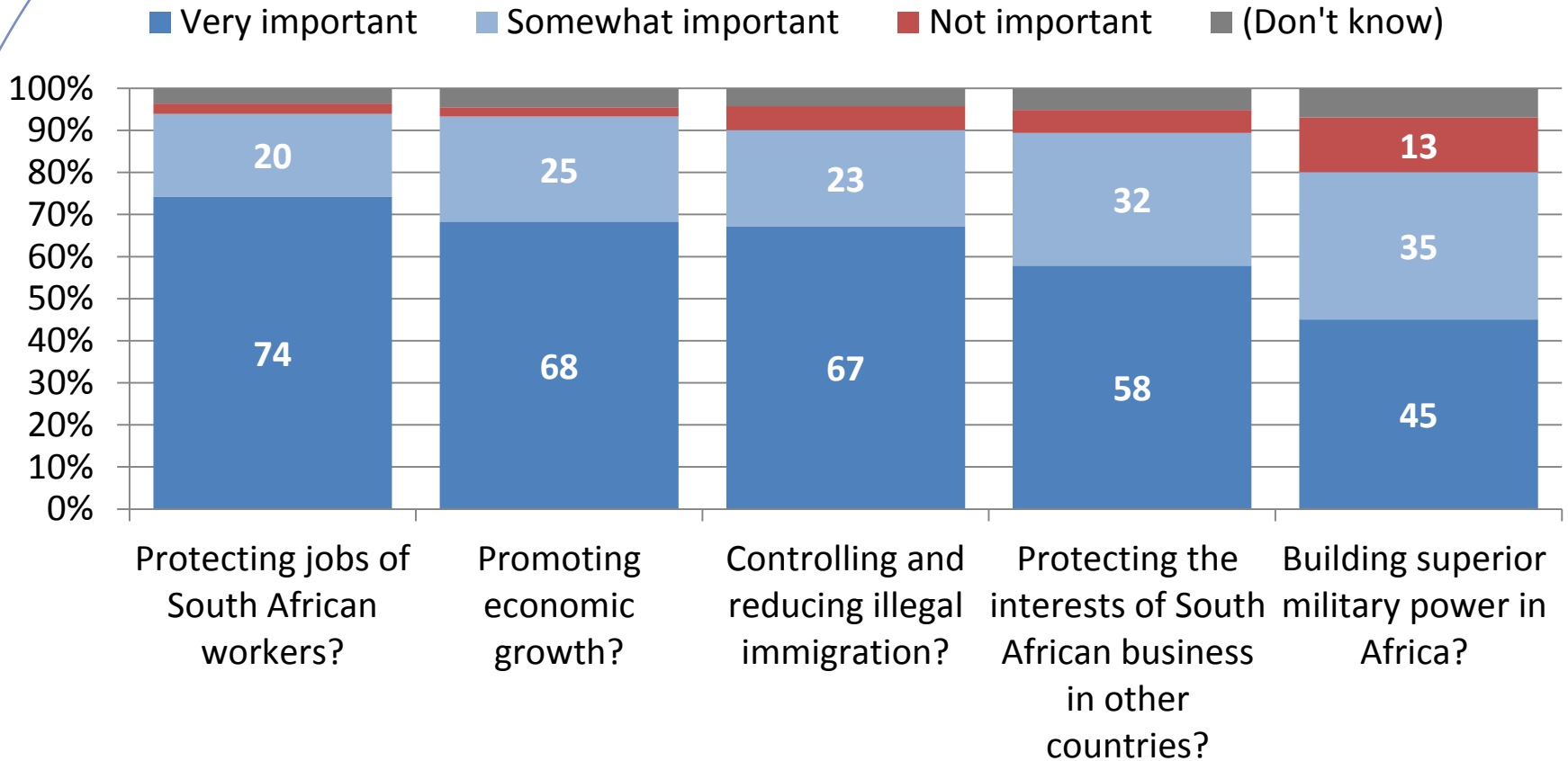




Foreign Policy Goals



Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2013.





Foreign Policy Issues



Examples of foreign policy issues confront South Africa

Zimbabwe: National President Thabo Mbeki mediated with the opposition and the national government to form a unity government.

Peacekeeping: Government has been involved in peacekeeping operations under United Nations and African Union command in Sudan, Burundi, Central African Republic and others.

Global South Partnerships: In 2010, South Africa joined the Brazil, Russia, India and China partnership.

Refugees: South Africa has signed 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and currently hosts a 67,500 refugees and 233,100.



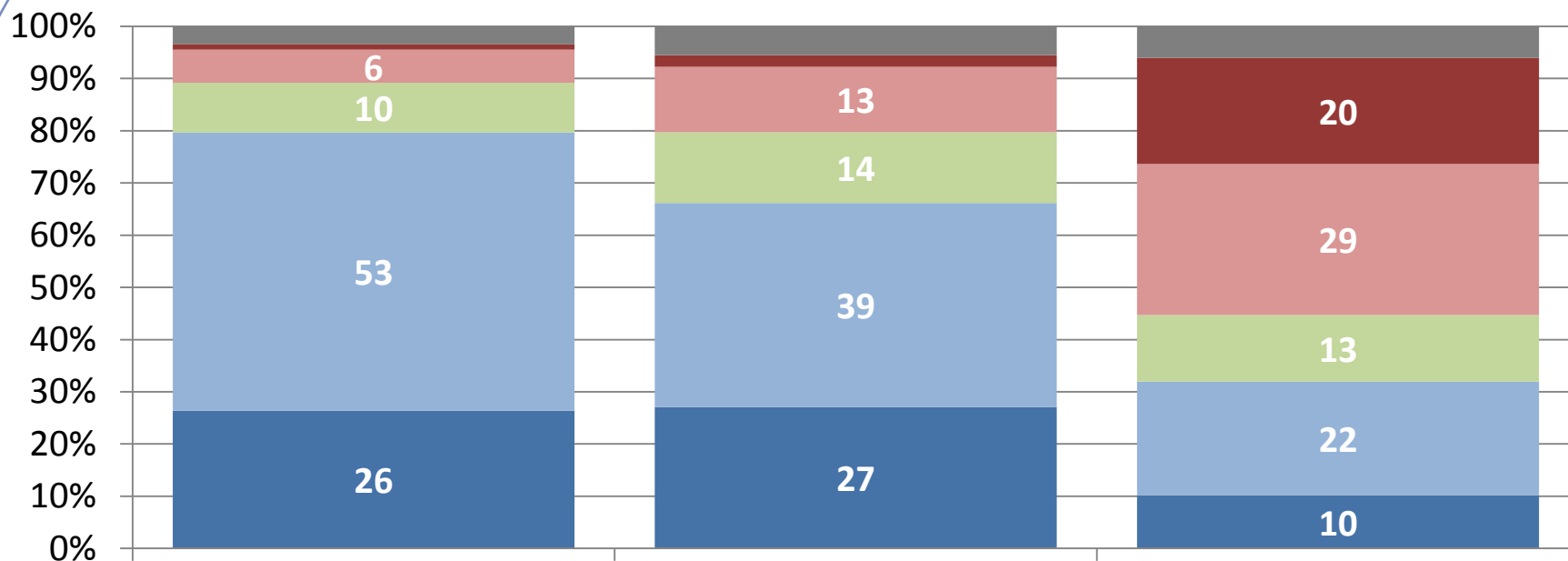


Foreign Policy Preferences



Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2013.

■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree ■ (Don't Know)



It is best for the future of our country to be active in world affairs.

The current President spends too much time on foreign affairs and not enough on domestic issues.

Our country should trade with countries who are known to abuse the human rights of their citizens



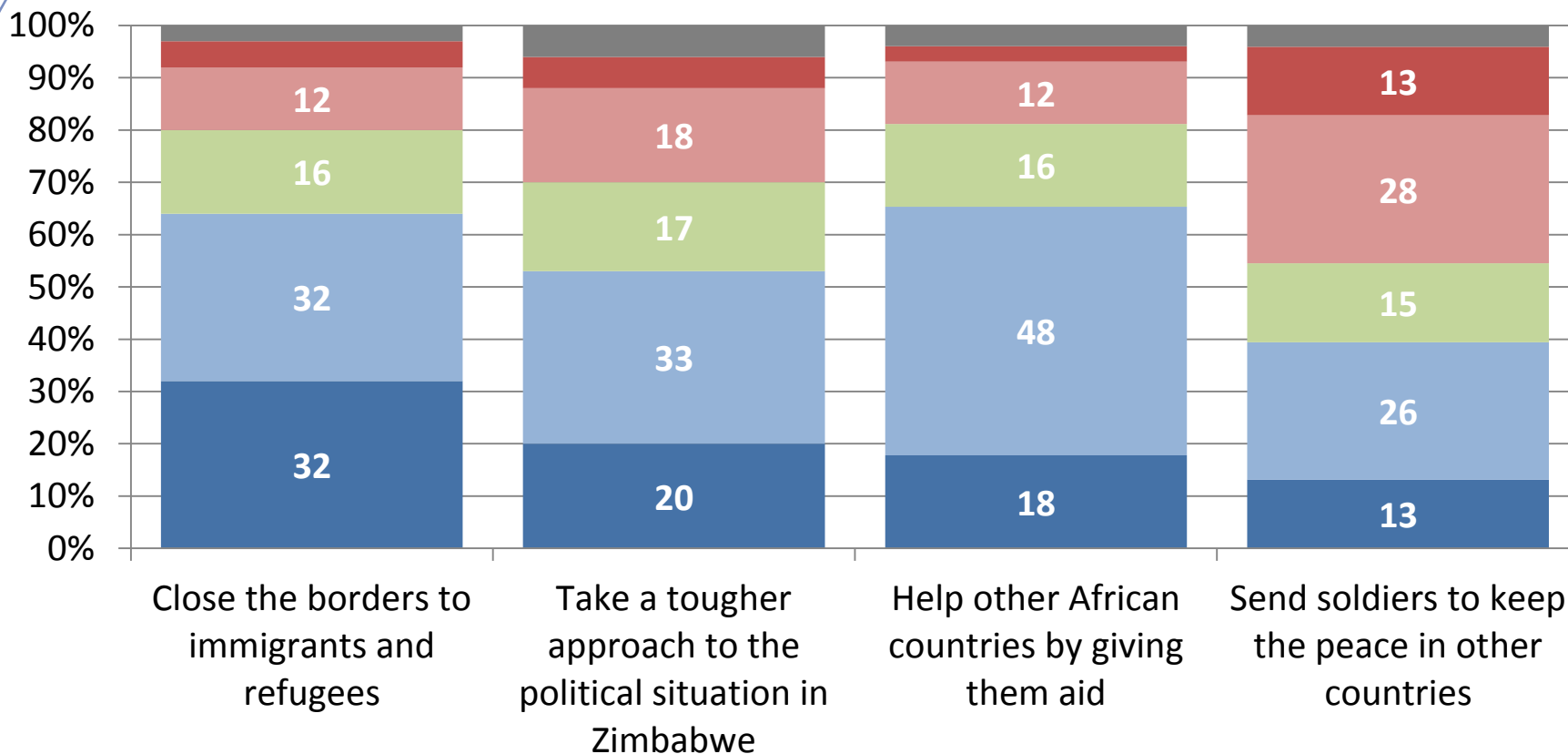


Foreign Policy Preferences



Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2013.

■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree ■ (Don't Know)





Future Research

- **Perceptions of the most important foreign policy issues and actions:** It is necessary to evaluate support for key decisions taken by the current administration on foreign policy.
- **Perceptions of the most appropriate foreign policy actions:** South African foreign policy is informed by a commitment to multilateralism, pan-Africanism, and South-South solidarity. It is necessary to gauge **differential** support for these positions.
- **Perceptions of the benefits of foreign policy activities:** An evaluation of national interests would allow a closer examination of support for the interventionist (versus isolationist) role that South Africa seeks to adopt.





Human Sciences Research Council
Lekgotla la Dinyakisišo tša Semahlale tša Setho
Raad vir Geesteswetenskaplike Navorsing
Umkhandlu Wezokucwaninga Ngesayensi Yesintu
Ibhunga Lophando Ngenzulu-Lwazi Kantu



QUESTIONS WELCOME