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CHOOSING GOOD NEIGHBOURS: Social tolerance and prejudice

In the past year the South African media has run a number of stories – the controversy of the Spear painting at the Goodman affair for example – that seem to suggest a fraying of social tolerance in post-apartheid society. But is this an accurate portrayal of the national landscape? Using recent nationally representative data, *Steven Gordon, Jarè Struwig and Ben Roberts* tested levels of social tolerance in South Africa and although there is evidence of prejudice towards certain groups, they found cohesion at the local societal level.

The South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) was used to measure tolerance among the adult population in South Africa. The survey, a repeated cross-sectional research instrument that has been conducted annually by the HSRC since 2003, consists of nationally representative samples of South African adults, aged 16 years and older and living in households.

Indicators developed by the World Value Survey (an international survey that captures values and beliefs in over 50 countries) were adapted for the South African landscape by SASAS researchers enabling them to measure intolerance in the 2011 SASAS survey round. In all, 3 057 individuals participated in the 2011 SASAS round.

By investigating how satisfied or dissatisfied an individual would be living next door to someone who was different from them, it was possible to measure animosity towards different groups in post-apartheid society.

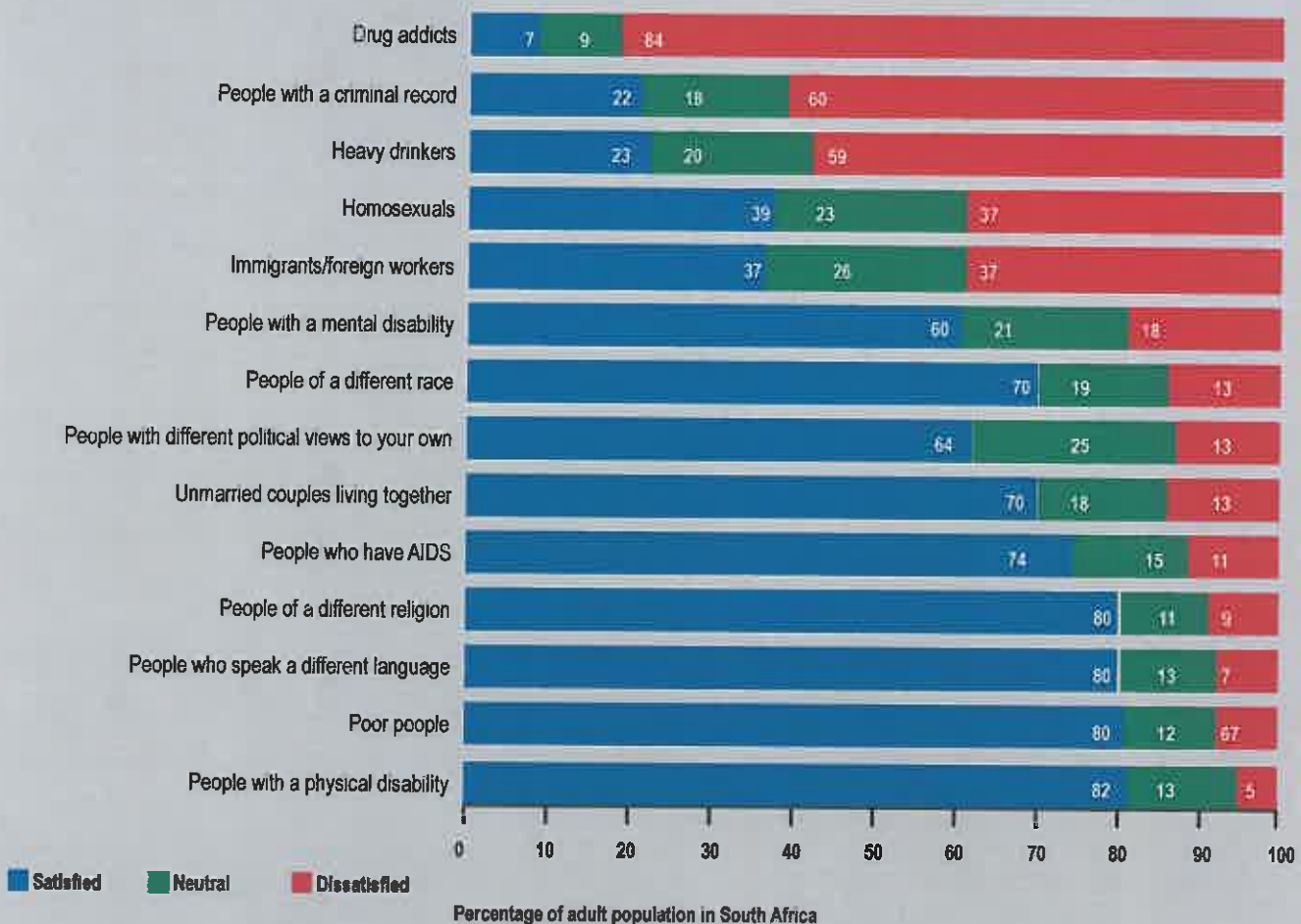
Tolerance in the rainbow nation

South Africans tend to be remarkably tolerant, and there was little evidence of prejudice against the more obvious out-groups. Eight out of every ten South Africans reported that they would be satisfied with a neighbour who was of a different religion, spoke a different language, was physically disabled or was poor.

Moreover, 70% of the nation's adults would be satisfied to have a neighbour of a different race, indicating the level of

This finding seems to suggest the success of the post-apartheid education system in promoting pluralism and an acceptance of diversity.

Satisfaction with different groups as neighbours in South Africa, 2011.



>> CHOOSING GOOD NEIGHBOURS: Social tolerance and prejudice (continued)

Measuring social intolerance is important for understanding and promoting national unity in South Africa, a nation still rebuilding itself.

progress that post-apartheid society has made in overcoming racial prejudice

In addition, there is evidence of progress made in combating the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS. Almost three quarters of the national population reported that they would be satisfied living next to a person with HIV/AIDS

Clouds across the rainbow

The picture presented above should not blind us, however, to forms of intolerance that persist in our multicultural society. Certain groups seem to have been commonly identified by the public as objectionable. A strong aversion, for example, was found towards individuals with a criminal

record. More than six out of every ten adult South Africans reported that they would be dissatisfied living next to a person with such a record. Although this aversion is perhaps justifiable given the extensive prevalence of crime in the country, it does suggest challenges for the reintegration of paroled criminals into post-apartheid society. Two of the most despised groups in South Africa seem to be homosexual people and foreign nationals. Less than two-fifths of the public would be satisfied living next to such individuals. Social intolerance towards homosexual people may be related to a moral objection to homosexuality.

More than 80% of those who would be very dissatisfied to have a homosexual neighbour believed that it is always wrong for two adults of the same sex to have sexual relations. Of those who would be satisfied with a homosexual neighbour, only 41% shared this belief.

Intolerance towards foreigners may be associated with a perception of immigration and social ills. Of those who indicated that they would be very dissatisfied to live next to a foreign national, more than 83% believed that immigrants caused crime and unemployment.

A significant minority of South Africans are opposed to sharing their neighbourhoods with those who have different political positions. Two fifths of adults in the rainbow nation would be dissatisfied if they had a neighbour that did not share their political views.

Who are the most tolerant?

The social acceptance of difference was particularly evident among the well-educated and those South Africans with a matric or

tertiary education. They were considerably more tolerant than their less educated counterparts.

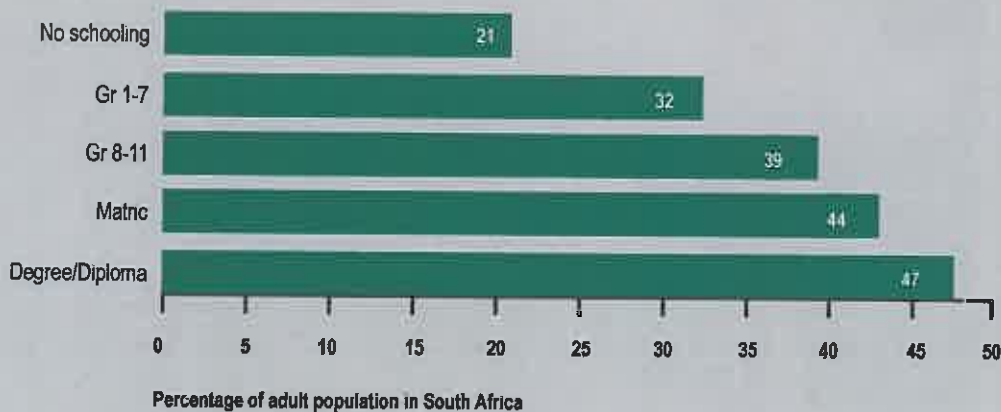
For example, the well-educated were found to be more tolerant of homosexual persons than their less educated counterparts as the figure below attests. A strong relationship was also most evident when considering attitudes towards people of a different race, a different religion, and a different language.

This finding seems to suggest the success of the post-apartheid education system in promoting pluralism and an acceptance of diversity. Age was also found to be associated with progressive attitudes. Being born during the 1990s - the years when the apartheid laws were repealed and the nation was transformed into a democracy - was found to be a significant predictor of tolerant attitudes.

The government has invested sustainably in promoting the cohesiveness of post-apartheid society. The wisdom of such an investment is supported by the positive association in this survey between tolerance in post-apartheid South Africa and neighbourhood solidarity.

Those individuals who felt that they could rely on their neighbours for help and support were found to be most tolerant of differences. Individuals who reported living in neighbourhoods with low social cohesion reported high levels of animosity towards individuals who were different from them. In particular, low neighbourhood solidarity was associated with prejudice towards people who had AIDS, immigrants, the physically disabled and individuals with opposing political views.

Tolerance of homosexuality



Building tolerance through social cohesion

Measuring social intolerance is important for understanding and promoting national unity in South Africa, a nation still rebuilding itself, less than 20 years after the end of apartheid. Using a Neighbourhood Solidarity Scale (NSS), with '0' representing a complete lack of solidarity and '100' complete solidarity

it is possible to measure cohesion in South African neighbourhoods

This scale was based on questions on whether South Africans would be comfortable seeking help from their neighbours. There is a strong relationship found between this score and social tolerance in South Africa.

Employing this measure reveals that many communities in South Africa report high

levels of solidarity. Of the adult population, a third reported an NSS score of 78, indicating the high level of community solidarity present in many South African neighbourhoods. However, certain provinces, particularly the North West, score very low on the NSS scale, which might partly explain recent incidences of social unrest, given the link between social intolerance and neighbourhood solidarity.

Neighbourhood Solidarity Scale (0-100) by province



If the ideals of our democratic Constitution are to be maintained and realised, neighbourhood solidarity should be encouraged.

Conclusion

Promoting social tolerance is a key aim of not only the current South African government but the South African Constitution. There is a need for an even greater effort to study and encourage social cohesion at the community level. If the ideals of our democratic Constitution are to be maintained and realised, neighbourhood solidarity should be encouraged.

The importance of current government efforts to promote social tolerance, through the national strategy on social cohesion and nation building, cannot be overestimated. To ensure the success of former President Nelson Mandela's rainbow national project, and the spirit of tolerance and togetherness that project embodied, it is essential that neighbourhood solidarity is understood and researched.

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