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‘Dark Cloud with a Silver Lining’? The Prospect of a Rise in Material Values or a Post-Material Turn in Post-Pandemic South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The quarter century following the historic 1994 elections in South Africa and the establishment of a democratic dispensation was a period of transformative change. During this time, nation-building efforts were undertaken as a means of promoting redress, overcoming the country’s colonial, segregationist and apartheid past, and challenging traditions of racialised citizenship. Progressive legislation was adopted that challenged traditional apartheid-based norms and laid the foundation for a fairer society based on the principles of “*ubuntu*”, encouraging a sense of community-oriented reciprocity. However, the policy choices made by the post-apartheid state have not translated into economic opportunities for millions of South Africans. Poverty, unemployment and inequality persist as pressing societal concerns, which has fostered widespread disenchantment and forced many to depend on survivalist strategies. This has created barriers to the attainment of a more caring society. The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply affected South African society, with a hard national lockdown triggering untold suffering and what promises to be one of the worst economic recessions. This article uses historical and current data to draw inferences about the likely impact of COVID-19 on South Africa. It considers whether the country’s post-pandemic society will be characterized by a rise in materialistic values or alternatively new demands for a more humane society.

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“We have to reset the structure of our economy. We need to relook the way we have been doing things. This is the moment that should herald new things ... COVID-19 is a dark cloud, but with a silver lining ... I have often said we need to look at the post-COVID economic landscape as equivalent to a post-war economic landscape ... The state has to play a critical role ... The post-war situation must be state-led ...” – President Ramaphosa, Parliamentary Q&A Session, 18 June 2020

Introduction

A legitimate question has been raised about why the world has come to a virtual standstill and lockdowns instituted despite COVID-19 being far less fatal (Case Fatality Rate

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(or CFR) around 4%) than other Coronaviruses such as SARS (CFR 10%) or MERS-CoV (CFR 34%) (Gavi 2020). The answer can ironically be attributed to this low fatality rate; because COVID-19 is not as fatal, infected people can unknowingly spread the virus. As a result, the pandemic is extremely difficult to control (Tepperman 2020). Governments, leaders and health practitioners have the unenviable task of trying to control the spread of this “hidden” disease. The mysterious nature of this invisible enemy has made it especially terrifying and has instilled a sense of fear in many people, communities and countries (Gavi 2020). The global reaction and subsequent government responses to this pandemic has forced many into a surreal state of concern.

In some societies, the pandemic has prompted intense anxiety and fueled sentiments around issues of globalization, immigration and xenophobia (World Economic Forum 2020). In South Africa, as with other developing countries, the pandemic has exacerbated economic vulnerability and deepened a preexisting financial crisis that most adversely affects the poorest (Gavi 2020). It has exposed extreme inequalities related to basic services such as water, housing, education and other forms of infrastructure. It has further highlighted failures in systems designed to support the poor, such as food parcel distribution, the processing and disbursement of social relief grants, and health-care provision (Habib 2020).

Apart from drawing attention to social inequality and class divisions, the pandemic has also reminded the more affluent of their own vulnerability and dependence on broader societal structures. In a context of extreme inequality, the affluent tend to remove and distance themselves from the everyday lived realities of the more socially disadvantaged. The COVID-19 pandemic has, however, highlighted the shared nature of vulnerability, irrespective of class position; high walls and security fences cannot serve as an effective barrier against the virus. It has created a renewed appreciation for certain occupations, such as nurses, domestic workers, teachers, cleaners, doctors and garbage collectors. Scholars have argued that crisis situations such as these promote heightened awareness and greater levels of solidarity, empathy and sympathy (see Nový et al. 2017). Under such conditions, people tend to act more altruistically since they feel they have something in common with other people facing similar situations. Increased efforts to help the vulnerable and marginalized has been evident across a variety of countries, with welfare organizations and individual volunteers stepping in to provide much-needed emergency relief alongside government efforts in this regard.

Recognizing this, the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to unite people and bring about change, creating a social compact against a common enemy. The post-pandemic society will be burdened with severe economic challenges, and the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, has argued that the pandemic presents an opportunity to reset our thinking and could serve as a catalyst for positive transformation (Ramaphosa 2020). He stated that South Africans should prepare for change, since the country will not return to a pre-pandemic scenario. However, as Valodia (2020) notes, a key challenge will be to convince people to sacrifice their short-term personal interests in service of longer-term collective goals. In response, this article uses survey data to draw inferences about the likely impact of COVID-19 on South Africa. It considers whether the country’s post-pandemic society will be characterized by a rise in materialistic values or alternatively by intensified demands for a more humane society.

Theoretical overview

According to post-materialism theory (Inglehart 1971, 1977, 1997, 2008), times of uncertainty, scarcity and fear tend to induce a sense of insecurity among people, which translates into values typically associated with materialism. Inglehart emphasizes that country-level shifts from material toward post-material values are generally brought about over long periods of time through processes of socialization and in the context of material wellbeing. During times of deprivation, the scarcity hypothesis (Inglehart 1971) maintains that societies and people will focus on their own socio-economic situations and place a greater priority on securing their own material needs. In other words, given a perception of relative need, people tend to emphasize utilitarian values at the expense of autonomy and humanism.

Negative and positive contextual events or periods could instrumentally affect material and post-material orientations. According to Inglehart (1977), short-term changes, shocks or events have an impact on a society or, at the very least, influence certain people within a country (Nový et al. 2017). Given the scale of risk posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, including wide-ranging economic impacts, general uncertainty and fear, it is not unrealistic to assume that value change might ensue as a result. Inglehart's scarcity hypothesis is well-established and extensively employed, and in this short paper we reflect on the applicability of the scarcity hypothesis to the South Africa case.

In the context of general economic scarcity, the emphasis of the South African government over the past 25 years has been on social cohesion and nation-building. This has been informed by a locally-rooted set of values that emphasize humaneness and a caring ethic, also known as “ubuntu”. Although there is great historical variation in how ubuntu has been understood (Gade 2011), it is possible to identify certain key elements associated with the philosophy. Ubuntu can be defined as a moral theory that attributes dignity to human beings by virtue of their capacity for community, solidarity and compassion (Metz 2011). Incorporating notions of social justice and human rights, it is associated with behaviors such as empathy, charity, respect and selflessness (Metz 2007). This conception of ubuntu has distinct parallels with certain dimensions of post-materialistic values (Inglehart 1977), self-expression values (Inglehart 1997), emancipative values (Welzel et al. 2017) and the prosocial values of benevolence and universalism (Schwartz 1992; Schwartz and Bilsky 1987), all of which include solidarity or concern for the welfare of others. Therefore, despite being a developing country, post-materialism values have been strongly espoused by the South African government in the hope of fostering greater unity and commitment to the developmental state.

The question remains whether South Africans will become more materialistic in their value orientation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, or alternatively whether the emphasis on the “ubuntu” principles will become stronger? According to Schwartz (1992, 2004, 2006), collective-oriented cultures, as is prevalent throughout sub-Saharan Africa (including South Africa), tend to display group embeddedness and derive meaning in life through group identification, social relationships and the pursuit of shared goals. In such societies, people might display materialist values while simultaneously remaining embedded in collective and solidaristic relationships, although as Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) suggest, this can lead to psychological tension that has the potential to erode personal wellbeing. In sum, while the scarcity hypothesis dictates that

the immiserating effects of a covariate shock such as COVID-19 would be expected to induce a turn toward greater materialism, this may not necessarily occur at the expense of select postmaterial values that resonate closely with the embedded nature of collectivist cultures, especially concern over the welfare of others

Methodology

This article relies on several data sources to construct a narrative illustrating the possible impact of general periods of economic downturns and national crisis on material, post-material and prosocial values. Our analysis begins by using South African trend data from the World Values Survey (WVS),¹ covering a period from 1990 to 2013 and focusing specifically on the 12-item materialism/post-materialism scale (Inglehart 1977: 1990) included in this series. Our WVS analysis shows that there was an increasing move from materialism to a mixed material/post-material position based mainly on an increasing emphasis on postmaterial goals focusing on a 'better society' ('humane society', 'society where ideas count') alongside basic economic concerns. Since the WVS data only covers up to 2013, we supplement this analysis with a brief examination of prosocial concern covering the period 2010 to 2018 using data from the representative South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS).² While prosocial concern represents an imperfect proxy for the 'better society' values in the post-materialism scale, it nonetheless, provides a indicative sense of whether there have been significant swings in these specific values in the years leading up the COVID-19 pandemic.

A final set of results will focus on data from the University of Johannesburg-Human Sciences Research Council (UJ-HSRC) COVID-19 Democracy Survey. This study consisted of two survey rounds, the first taking place between 13 April and 11 May during the country's initial hard lockdown phase (n = 12,312, UJ-HSRC 2020a), and the second being conducted between the 8 to 17 July during a less restrictive period in the national lockdown (n = 2,569, UJ-HSRC 2020b). Results from this study are used to establish the public's views on COVID-19 and social solidarity as a basis for considering the type of society we might expect post-pandemic.

It is important to point out that a methodological limitation of our paper is that the WVS and SASAS measures ask what the future society should look like (what is important to the individual), while the question in the COVID-19 study asks respondents to consider the way society will look in future (a forecast). Despite these methodological differences, the authors are of the view that this article will contribute to the understanding of value change in a society such as South Africa.

The 'ubuntu' nation? the nature of South African society before the pandemic and lockdown regulations

Trends in materialist/post-materialist values

South Africa is a highly unequal society that has been dealing with the triple-bind of persistently high levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality since the end of apartheid and transition to democracy in 1994. In the lead-up to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country was already grappling with an economic crisis. In the

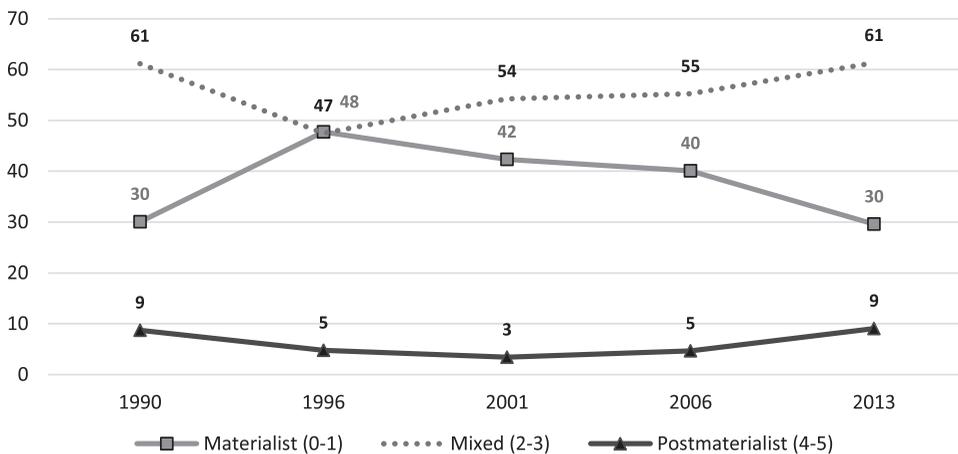


Figure 1. Inglehart's twelve-item post-materialist index for South Africa, 1996–2013 (%).
Sources: World Values Survey, Rounds 2–6 (1996–2013).

third quarter of 2019, the South African economy contracted by 0,8% followed by a 1,4% contraction in the fourth quarter. The implication of this was that the country entered its third economic recession since the establishment of democracy in 1994. The 2019 recession came only sixteen months after a recession experienced in the first and second quarters of 2018 (Stats SA 2020). Two recessions so close apart clearly indicates how economically fragile South Africa was in the lead-up to the pandemic. Rising unemployment levels and the downgrading of South Africa by international rating agencies further demonstrates the fiscal weakness of the nation's economic system. As the financial effects of the global COVID-19 depression worsen, it is a reasonable assumption that the pandemic will have far-reaching social, economic and psychosocial effects on South Africa.

In order to understand how COVID-19 might impact South African values in the longer-term, in this section we undertake a retrospective analysis of Inglehart's twelve-item post-materialist index using WVS data for South Africa covering a quarter-century. From Figure 1, it is evident that the share of the South African public that are classified as pure post-materialists remains circumscribed, constituting less than 10% of the adult public over the full period.

With regard to materialist values, we notice that in 1990, during the run-up to the country's first democratic elections in 1994, the proportion of materialists was relatively lower than in 1996, when the share falling into this category was at its highest. This could plausibly be explained by a substantive rise in material expectations associated with the transition to a post-apartheid, democratic regime. Since 1996, the percentage of materialists has been slowly tapering off. The most interesting part of the graph is the rise of the mixed (hybrid) point of view, which has been edging upwards post-1996, but increased most distinctively in the 2006–2013 period. This growing inclination toward a hybrid approach is somewhat unexpected, since it comes in the aftermath of the first post-1994 recession, which occurred during the Great Recession of 2008/09. During this period, South Africa experienced low levels of economic growth and mounting unhappiness with the neoliberal economic policies adopted in the mid- to

late-1990s. One might have expected a return to materialism during this period, but, in contrast, the proportion of the public who displayed mixed values increased.

In order to better understand this trend, we need to consider the individual indicators that form the twelve-item index ([Appendix 1](#)). When considering these constituent elements, we note that the material values of “maintaining a high level of economic growth” and “maintaining stable economic growth” received the highest support on average over the period, with more than three-quarters of South Africans indicating that these were essential in their view. Support for “progress toward a less impersonal and more humane society” and “progress toward a society in which ideas count more than money” were supported, on average, by about a quarter of people during this period.

A key shift in specific societal values occurred between 2006 and 2013. An increase in the two indicators most related to community and humanism can be observed, with the proportion citing “progress toward a less impersonal and more humane society” and “progress toward a society in which ideas count more than money” increasing by 14 and 15 percentage points respectively. In addition, we saw growth in the materially-focused “fighting rising prices” indicator (+15 percentage points). On the other hand, concern over a “high level of economic growth” fell by 11 percentage points during this seven-year period. The public appeared to become less concerned with pure economic growth and fiscal matters, and were more concerned about the cost of living and livelihoods, and expressed a rising preference for a more humane society. This could signal a rejection of the neoliberal turn in South African economic policy following the mid-1990s, and recognition that South Africa requires something different. This growing discontent might explain the rise in populism that occurred during the term of office of President Zuma from 2009 to 2018.

Based on the general trends in [Figure 1](#), we can infer that there is a tendency among South Africans to understand the need for economic growth, but with a definite focus on a more caring “ubuntu” ethic. The decline in materialism described above appears to have occurred amongst all class groups, with a similar percentage point reduction evident across the full time period ([Figure 2a](#)). This suggests the cross-cutting nature of the observed pattern of change. Similarly, irrespective of class, there has been an increase in hybrid values and a marginal rise in post-materialism, especially between 2006 and 2013.

A notable generational effect can be observed in [Figure 2b](#). As previously mentioned, a steady decline in pure materialist values is apparent from 1996 onwards, with an associated increase in the share of people with a hybrid value orientation. This trend can be observed for all birth cohorts, suggesting a socialization effect. The decline in materialist values is even apparent among the youngest cohort, the so-called “born frees” (born 1980 and after). This trend implies a definite societal shift toward a mixed material/post-material orientation, one where the economy is deemed important, but co-exists with an emphasis on a caring society.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we expect this tendency to continue. The pandemic has resulted in extreme financial vulnerability and strain, high inflation on basic commodities such as electricity, and reduced employment rates (UNDP 2020). New debates have also emerged around the pricing of goods and the necessity of new and more

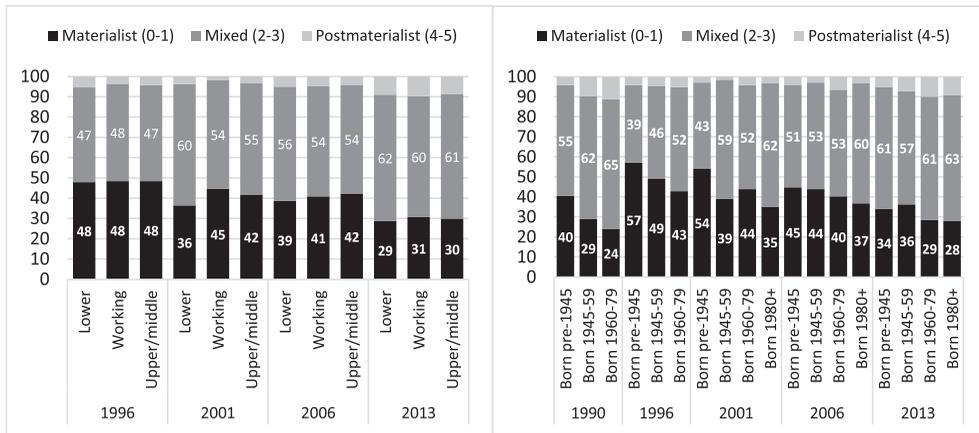


Figure 2(a-b). Inglehart's twelve-item post-materialist index for the period 1996–2013, by subjective class and cohort (%).

Source: World Values Survey, Waves 2–6, cumulative data for South Africa (weighted).

generous social grants. We might therefore see a reinforcement of aspects of the material dimension, but envisage that these increases will go hand-in-hand with the need for a more caring and humane society.

The pattern during the latter half of the 2010s

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 7th round of the WVS fieldwork in South Africa could not be completed, and is likely to only be conducted during 2021. As such, there is a lack of data from the WVS on material/post-material values and trends covering the 2013–2020 period. It is, however, important to examine this period to determine whether or not the demands for a caring, humane society continued to rise. The last seven years have seen numerous socio-political changes that could feasibly have had an indelible influence on South African society, including the controversial Zuma presidency (2009–2018), the 'state capture' corruption scandal, the rise of the Economic Freedom Fighters, a left-wing, authoritarian populist party, and a significant reduction in trust in government and Parliament. We need to determine whether these developments produced a continuation or disruption to the trend toward a hybrid material/post-material value orientation in the country.

For the purpose of this section, we rely on SASAS trend data on prosocial concern collected throughout the 2010s as a proxy measure to gauge the relative emphasis on reciprocity versus self-interest. In the 2010 SASAS round, researchers introduced a question on whether helping people (either materially or in-kind) was an important part of a respondent's life. This question was designed to help researchers measure prosocial concern amongst the general population. When it was first asked in 2010, 71% of the adult population agreed that helping people was a central element in their lives (Figure 3). Although agreement with this statement declined somewhat over the decade, it is clear that the majority of South African's generally report a prosocial ethic.

When disaggregating these results by subjective poverty status, it becomes evident that the poor, those just getting by, and the non-poor all generally subscribe to

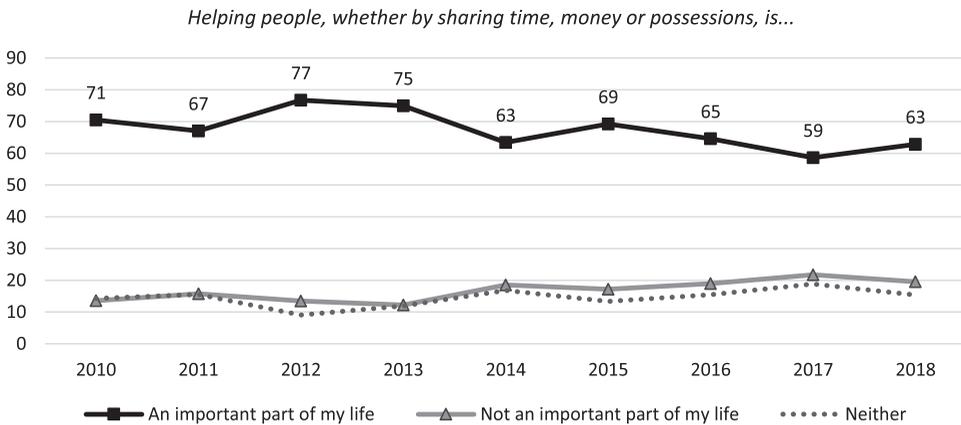


Figure 3. Self-reported prosocial sentiment, 2010–2018 (%).

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS), 2010–2018.

prosocial values. In 2010, 66% of the poor, 71% of those just getting by and 75% of the non-poor indicated that helping others was an important part of their life. Over time, prosocial concern diminished, reaching a low-point in 2017. This occurred for all subjective poverty groups, falling 16 percentage points among the non-poor and 15 percentage points among the poor between 2010 and 2017. The 2010s were characterized by a series of high-profile government corruption scandals. It could be that these scandals weakened the public's prosocial concern. Indeed, the period was one of growing distrust in political institutions.

A covid-19 effect? Emerging survey-based evidence

Following the first confirmed COVID-19 case in the country on 5 March 2020, a national state of disaster was declared by President Ramaphosa on 15 March, and immediate restrictions were announced (such as travel bans and the closure of schools). A National Coronavirus Command Council was established to manage the pandemic and, on 26 March, a national lockdown was implemented. On 1 May, a gradual and phased easing of the lockdown restrictions began lowering the national alert. From 1 June the national restrictions were lowered further. In response to the pandemic, an unprecedented €25 billion stimulus package was announced to assist small businesses as well as people whose jobs were affected by the pandemic. This package included an augmentation of €13 per month for six months to all existing social grants. A special COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress grant of €18 per month was also given to those not covered by other grants or the Unemployment Insurance Fund (Webb and Vally 2020). Despite struggling to execute this mandate, government's efforts to assist citizens during these difficult times were generally commended. Apart from government efforts, there was also a substantial increase in charitable giving during the national lockdown period, with monetary contributions to social solidarity funds, in-kind contributions in the form of food parcels and other basic needs support, as well as volunteering time. This reaffirms past research indicating that South Africans are a nation of social givers,

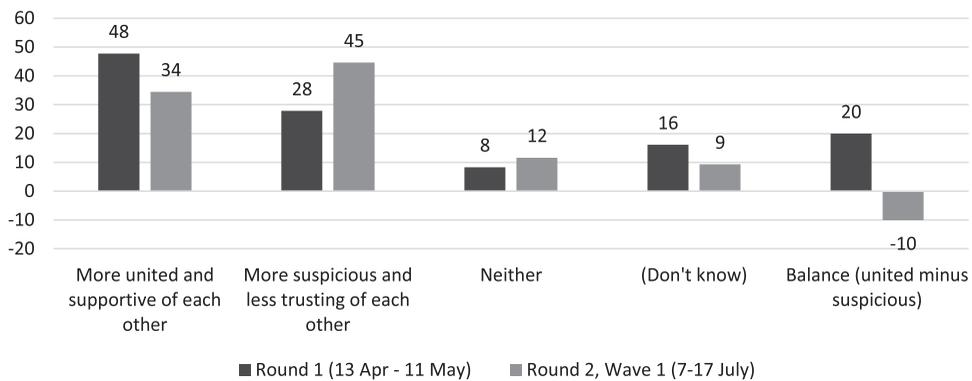


Figure 4. Perceived COVID-19 impact on social solidarity, national average 13 Apr–11 May 2020 and 8–17 July 2020 (%).

Source: UJ-HSRC COVID-19 Democracy Survey Rounds 1 and 2 (UJ/HSRC 2020a, 2020b).

donating time, money and in-kind goods and services (Everatt et al. 2005; Habib and Maharaj 2008; Mottiar and Ngcoya 2016).

To assess the pattern of post-material values of benevolence and solidarity during the pandemic, characterized by concern for the welfare and interests of others (Schwartz 2007), we turn to evidence from the online UJ-HSRC COVID-19 Democracy Survey. As previously described, the survey was conducted in two rounds, the first between 13 April and 11 May 2020 and another between 8–17 July 2020. In both rounds, a question was included that asked respondents: ‘In the immediate future, is the Coronavirus pandemic more likely to make South Africans more united and supportive of each other, or more suspicious and less trusting of each other?’ In Round 1, 48% on aggregate felt that the crisis would promote greater social solidarity, while 28% felt it would erode social ties (Figure 4). Less than a tenth (8%) said neither of these scenarios would materialize and the remainder (16%) were uncertain. This predominance of the solidarity perspective suggests that the ubuntu ideal of a caring, humane society rather than a materialistic one informed the outlook of South Africans during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is largely consistent with the pre-pandemic emphasis on solidarity, and was evident in spite of widespread worry about the personal financial impact of the pandemic (85% very concerned) and a common view (66%) that one’s personal financial situation would worsen in coming months.

However, South Africans became considerably more pessimistic about the prospect of solidarity by Round 2 of the survey. The proportion who felt the pandemic would unite South Africans fell by 14 percentage points, whereas the pessimistic view grew by 17 percentage points. The implication is that the predominant outlook was now one of division rather than solidarity (45% vs. 28%). This substantive change in viewpoint on the solidarity effect of the pandemic was broad-based in character. In Round 1, there was a uniform inclination toward the belief that South Africans would become more united and supportive rather than more divided and mistrusting across a range of socio-demographic attributes, including age, gender, race, education, employment status, subjective poverty status, personal income and place of residence. By Round 2, the primary response across the same set of personal traits was almost unequivocally the divided and mistrusting option. This signifies that a generalized skepticism emerged among

South Africans between the initial hard lockdown period and the subsequent less restrictive lockdown phase.

What might explain this change in orientation, especially given the WVS and SASAS results on the importance of solidarity as a personal and societal objective? By the time of Round 2 of the UJ-HSRC COVID-19 Democracy Survey, South Africa's case numbers and mortality levels were surging, with the country ending up ranked fifth globally in terms of conformed Coronavirus cases. The economic and health burdens resulting from the pandemic had begun to test the limits of both institutional and interpersonal reciprocity. It could be argued that this strain on network resources, coupled with faltering confidence in the performance of executive leadership in responding to the crisis, had an adverse bearing on the sense of solidarity and envisaged outcome of individual and collective action in addressing preexisting inequalities and social tensions in society. We examine some of these potential explanations below.

Institutional performance, political division and economic self-interest

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented world leaders with an unprecedented test of governance. This situation has required resolute action to promote public awareness of preventative measures, ensure that health care systems cope with increased demand, and minimize suffering resulting from lockdowns and curfews. It has been suggested that the leadership factor - and by extension confidence in government's performance - is crucial to whether or not pandemic responses will ultimately be effective. Fukuyama (2020: 26) maintains that "the factors responsible for successful pandemic responses have been state capacity, social trust, and leadership" and that "countries with all three - a competent state apparatus, a government that citizens trust and listen to, and effective leaders - have performed impressively, limiting the damage they have suffered." Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (2020) further argues that listening to the public and making governance decisions on that basis is likely to lead to more responsive COVID-19 interventions. This, in turn, would bolster trust in government and leadership. Qualities such as strength, integrity, accountability, empathy and humility are likely to reinforce positive perceptions of national (and subnational) leadership and governance during these times, whereas weakness, inconsistency, lack of responsiveness and corruption are likely to erode stocks of public confidence. Such confidence is likely to affect beliefs about the risk of threat, adherence to lockdown regulations, and general outlook.

South African survey evidence suggests that views on social solidarity are associated with confidence in the handling of the pandemic by President Ramaphosa and national government (Roberts et al. 2020). The diminishing levels of confidence are therefore partly responsible for the shift in solidarity perspective from an optimistic to more critical stance. The president received resolutely positive performance ratings for his initial handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Round 1 of the UJ-HSRC COVID-19 Democracy Survey revealed that 85% believed that the president was doing a good job in responding to the pandemic and instituting a hard lockdown (UJ/HSRC 2020a). This high level of confidence remained throughout May 2020, but dipped slightly during early June (Ask Afrika 2020). By mid-July, Round 2 of the UJ-HSRC COVID-19 Democracy Survey found that confidence levels had fallen 24 percentage points to 61% (UJ/HSRC

2020b). This followed a move to lower lockdown restrictions, amid mounting concerns over corruption in food parcel distribution and personal protective equipment (PPE) procurement processes, and polarizing debates over a ban on tobacco sales and returning children to schools. In both UJ/HSRC survey rounds, those believing the president was performing well were more likely to believe in a unifying than a divisive effect of the pandemic.³ Although presidential confidence appears similar to – if not higher than – pre-pandemic levels, its association with social solidarity outlook means that the reduced presidential performance ratings have contributed to the shift to the critical solidarity outlook.⁴ A similar pattern is found in relation to evaluations of national government's pandemic response.⁵ Those with positive performance ratings were more partial to a favorable solidarity outlook than those providing harsh assessments of government's pandemic response (48% vs. 18%). In sum, the findings indicate that confidence in pandemic leadership is part of the explanation for the changing views on social solidarity during the pandemic.

Another possible related explanation is the emergence of public divisions along political party lines. At the outset, there was broad inter-party consensus about the need for a strict national lockdown to curb the spread of the virus. However, political divisions emerged as the lockdown progressed, with criticism being leveled against the quality of leadership, specific regulations and the economic cost of government decisions. This is reflected among the public when examining views on social solidarity by party support. Round 2 of the UJ/HSRC Survey found that 50% of supporters of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) believed that the pandemic would promote solidarity in the immediate future, compared to between 25 and 28% among supporters of the main opposition and other parties.

A final observation of note, relating to Inglehart's scarcity hypothesis, is that the swing in solidarity perspective occurred in spite of persisting worry about the financial impact of the pandemic on others, alongside personal economic worry. In Round 1 of the UJ/HSRC Survey, 87% were very concerned about the effect of the Coronavirus pandemic on the financial situation of all South Africans, with 85% very concerned about the impact on their own position. The corresponding figures by the time of Round 2 of the survey in mid-July were virtually unchanged at 89% and 85%. While material need has become more acute in South Africa due to the pandemic, any growing influence that economic self-interest may have on solidarity outlook is not a blind self-interest. A strong concern for the wellbeing of others continues to inform the values of South Africans, even in the hardest of times when the resources needed to translate this concern into concrete supportive actions are likely to be highly constrained.

Conclusion: toward a fairer or more insular society?

At the societal level, the COVID-19 crisis can be viewed as a real test of values such as benevolence, voluntarism and other solidaristic values that are desperately needed in times of crisis. The hopeful among us believe that the disruptive effect of COVID-19 might constitute the basis for a positive societal transformation that will have a lasting positive influence on our core values, and serve as a catalyst for a social compact that will promote unity to fight against poverty and inequality, protect the environment, and

strive for more humanitarian global solutions. Much depends on underlying, commonly-shared values. One of the most notable risks to the realization of such a future is a reduced commitment to pro-social values as a result of growing material hardship, diminished confidence in government's pandemic response, and resurfacing social and political divisions.

In support of the scarcity hypothesis, we envisage that the COVID-19 pandemic will intensify the demand for securing basic material needs. The pandemic has led to greater unemployment, new vulnerability and a fairly bleak economic outlook in the short- to medium-term. Despite this deprivation, we expect that the associated value change this produces among South Africans will not necessarily be a simple turn toward pure materialism. It is likely to be accompanied by an equivalent concern for a more humane, ubuntu-informed ethic. The survey results showed that, during the early phase to the Coronavirus crisis and national lockdown, there was significant optimism that the pandemic would produce this type of society, perhaps reflecting the widespread display of solidarity that characterized this period. The fact that this positive perspective did not sustain during subsequent months is probably attributable to a combination of surging COVID-19 cases, growing criticism of government's handling of the pandemic response, high-profile corruption scandals that negatively affected the distribution of emergency relief to needy citizens, and growing polarization among the public.

This does not necessarily favor the scarcity hypothesis, as we contend that the increasingly negative public outlook represents a critical commentary on the *supply* of support and ubuntu-style solidarity rather than an overarching rejection of the post-material 'better society' items. We believe that the collectivist goal of a caring, humane society will in fact become more broadly *demande*d. As such, we expect that the mixed material/post-material value orientation will continue to exhibit a further upward tendency when the next round of World Values Survey data is collected in the country. If this proves to be the case, and the government is responsive to this public vision of society, then there may indeed be a silver lining to the COVID-19 period after all.

Notes

1. The World Values Survey (WVS) is an international global research project that explores values and beliefs, how they change over time, and what social and political impact they have. For this paper only South African data will be used.
2. The South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) is an annual nationally representative survey of South African adults (16+ years) conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa.
3. In Round 1, 52% of those voicing confidence in the president's handling of the pandemic believed in the unifying effect, compared to only 14% of those critical of presidential performance. The corresponding figures for Round 2 of the survey were 46% and 18% respectively.
4. This is based on surveys conducted between President Ramaphosa's ascendancy in early 2018 and the start of lockdown in late March 2020. The HSRC SASAS survey found that 53% of adults voiced trust in President Ramaphosa in late 2018/early 2019. IPSOS Markinor estimated trust in President Ramaphosa at 70% in May 2018, 62% in November 2018, 58% in May 2019 and 62% in November 2019 (<https://www.ipsos.com/en-za/cyрил-ramaphosa-popular-amongst-south-africans-political-parties-questionable>).

5. An online ISPOS Markinor poll revealed in the early days of the pandemic that 61% of adults expressed confidence in the South African Government being able to deal with COVID-19, while Round 2 of the UJ-HSRC COVID-19 Democracy Survey suggest that this had dipped to 51% (UJ/HSRC 2020b). Ipsos South Africa's Online platform, with a sample of 1,008 adults aged 18-65 years (<https://www.ipsos.com/en-za/online-south-africans-have-more-confidence-government-business-when-it-come-covid-19-0>)

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Appendix

Appendix Table 1. Pattern of responses to WVS Material-Post-material Index items in South Africa, by survey round 1990–2013.

| Statement | WVS R2 1990 | WVS R3 1996 | WVS R4 2001 | WVS R5 2006 | WVS R6 2013 | Avg. R2-6 Total | Change 1990-2001 | Change 2001-2013 | Change 1990-2013 |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Aims of country (WVS E001/E002): | | | | | | | | | |
| A high level of economic growth | 79 | 81 | 81 | 80 | 69 | 78 | +2 | -12 | -10 |
| Making sure this country has strong defence forces | 32 | 30 | 31 | 29 | 42 | 33 | -1 | +11 | +11 |
| Seeing that people have more say about how things are done at their jobs and in their communities | 60 | 57 | 57 | 62 | 65 | 60 | -2 | +7 | +5 |
| Trying to make our cities and countryside more beautiful | 23 | 24 | 26 | 24 | 24 | 24 | +3 | -2 | +1 |
| Aims of respondent (WVS E003/E004): | | | | | | | | | |
| Maintaining order in the nation | 66 | 77 | 69 | 66 | 49 | 65 | +4 | -20 | -16 |
| Giving people more say in important government decisions | 45 | 38 | 40 | 45 | 55 | 45 | -5 | +15 | +10 |
| Fighting rising prices | 64 | 60 | 62 | 62 | 77 | 65 | -2 | +15 | +13 |
| Protecting freedom of speech | 20 | 22 | 26 | 23 | 18 | 22 | +6 | -8 | -2 |
| Most important (WVS E005/E006): | | | | | | | | | |
| A stable economy | 73 | 81 | 79 | 76 | 71 | 76 | +6 | -9 | -2 |
| Progress toward a less impersonal and more humane society | 38 | 20 | 17 | 20 | 34 | 26 | -21 | +18 | -3 |
| Progress toward a society in which ideas count more than money | 25 | 18 | 17 | 20 | 35 | 23 | -8 | +18 | +10 |
| The fight against crime | 59 | 77 | 84 | 81 | 60 | 72 | +25 | -24 | +1 |

Source: World Values Survey, Waves 2-6, cumulative data for South Africa (weighted).

Notes: (1) Shaded rows indicate items in the scale that are associated with post-material values, while non-shaded rows refer to material values items. (2) The percentages refer to the share of adults mentioning each statement, whether as a first or second priority.

Question phrasing:

E001-E002. People sometimes talk about what the aims of this country should be for the next ten years. On this card are listed some of the goals which different people would give top priority. Would you please say which one of these you, yourself, consider the most important? (Code one answer only under "first choice"). And which would be the next most important? (Code one answer only under "second choice").

E003-E004. If you had to choose, which one of the things on this card would you say is most important? (Code one answer only under "first choice"): V63. And which would be the next most important? (Code one answer only under "second choice").

E005-E006. Here is another list. In your opinion, which one of these is most important? (Code one answer only under "first choice"). And what would be the next most important? (Code one answer only under "second choice").