

From Mandela to Malema:
Assessing Twenty Years of Democracy and Race Relations in South Africa

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Abstract: *This month marks the twenty year anniversary of the election of Nelson Mandela in South Africa. Two decades into their democratic, post-apartheid transition, what is the status of democracy and race relations in South Africa? This paper utilizes aggregate data to empirically answer these two questions, focusing particularly on trends over the last twenty years. I find that democracy in South Africa remains in a state of transition, neither fully consolidated nor in a state of reversal. The study of race relations in South Africa presents a mixed picture as well, as South Africans are in increasing contact with one another and are optimistic about the level of reconciliation achieved since 1994. However, levels of trust and socialization across racial groups remain low, and racial marginalization remains high. Therefore, South Africa is a “neither/nor” new democracy, as it is neither at high risk for failure, nor is it totally thriving. Instead, it remains in a middle category, though slowly moving in the right direction.*

When Nelson Mandela, the leader of the African National Congress (ANC), walked free in February 1990 after twenty seven years in prison, few doubted that he would quickly become the political leader for all of South Africa. Indeed, four years later the country held its first democratic election – allowing black South Africans to vote for the first time – and Mandela became the country’s first black president when the ANC swept the election with 63% of the vote. Once called a political terrorist and a dangerous communist, this former political prisoner was now touted as the statesman that would peacefully transition the country into a new democratic era. He became the “great reconciler” who publicly showed no anger toward his oppressors, stating instead that he “could not wish what happened to me and my people on anyone” (Graybill 2002, p. 11). South Africans began to call their country the “Rainbow Nation,” in the hopes that the races and ethnicities that had long been institutionally segregated and officially unequal would now stand together as “South Africans” only. Archbishop Desmond Tutu emphasized Ubuntu theology and African tradition, calling on South Africans to see the humanity in each and every individual – perpetrator and victim.

Twenty years after Mandela’s election, what is the status of democracy and race relations in South Africa? When the apartheid system of government ended after forty two years, the world celebrated the possibility and promise of what could become the freest country on the African continent. During those four decades in power, the minority white government stripped non-whites of their citizenship, forcibly moved them from their cities and villages into racially homogenous bantustans or townships, and severely limited their educational and career opportunities. However, under great international pressure, President F.W. de Klerk declared an end to the segregationist policies of apartheid in 1990 and the country very quickly moved from being a human rights pariah to a revered beacon of post-conflict democratic hope. But how much has this been realized? How do South Africans of every race experience “democracy” in their daily lives? How much are they truly reconciled to one another – particularly after so many years of painful and violent race relations? This paper seeks to

explore the status of democracy and race relations on the twentieth anniversary of Mandela's historical election. Indeed, just days after we meet in Seattle for the 2014 Western Political Science Conference, South Africans will be celebrating this important milestone in their country's history. It is thus a fitting time for political scientists – and interested observers – to assess democracy and race relations in South Africa.

From Mandela to Malema: Initial Thoughts

The title of the paper is meant to succinctly capture this twenty year transition, as epitomized in two individuals – both political leaders but very different in style and approach. Most political observers are deeply familiar with Nelson Mandela's legacy, but perhaps not as many are familiar with the more recent political actions of Julius Malema. As a young attorney in Johannesburg, Mandela became a leader in the resistance movement, joining first the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) and then becoming active in the ANC and the Defiance Campaign, and eventually becoming leader of the armed ANC struggle (*Umkhonto weSizwe*). When he was sent to prison for life in 1964 – on charges of treason and sabotage – he remained adamant in his readiness to fight, but also clear about his willingness to see beyond race in his own leadership style. His dedication to building bridges across the racial divide was realized almost three decades later, when he and president de Klerk shared the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize for their dedication to true democratic negotiation during the difficult transition out of apartheid.

In contrast to Mandela's more forgiving approach to post-apartheid relations, Julius Malema is a young, firebrand activist that often intentionally stokes racial animosity. He rose to power in the party at a young age, becoming president of the ANCYL in 2008 at the age of twenty seven. His tenure with the ANCYL was not without scandal. Almost immediately, Malema came under fire for making inflammatory and controversial statements and in 2010, he was convicted of hate speech for publicly claiming that the woman accusing President Zuma of rape had "liked it." The following year, Malema was again found guilty of hate speech and publicly rebuked by ANC leaders, including President Zuma, for inciting racial

divisions, in part because of his publicly singing the anti-apartheid anthem “Kill the boer, kill the farmer” in reference to white Afrikaners. In 2012, he was expelled from the party entirely.

The contrast between the two men is notable and perhaps a reflection of the somewhat negative trajectory of South African democracy and race relations over the last two decades. There are many positive aspects of South Africa’s democracy, including the fact that, despite sweeping all national elections since 1994, the ANC has not moved to formally establish a one party state, as we witnessed in Kenya and Zimbabwe (Shapiro and Tebeau 2011). And with regard to race relations, there certainly has been an incredible shift in racial integration – in terms of education, housing, and professional life. However, democracy remains unconsolidated and racial segregation remains an enormous problem. As Robert Mattes (2011) argues, “only around six in ten [South Africans] prefer democracy, and between five and seven in ten reject nondemocratic forms of government for South Africa” (p. 94). In addition, public support for democracy has flat-lined, as the “out of the gates” bump in support for democracy that we saw in the early 1990s quickly moved to a stable percentage and has remained there for the last fifteen years (Mattes 2011, p. 86). Further, in 2013, nearly a quarter of all South Africans disagreed with the statement “the Apartheid government wrongly oppressed the majority of South Africans,” with only half of the whites surveyed agreeing with the statement (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2013, p. 37). Finally, most South Africans do not regularly speak with people of another race, even on a more non-personal level, such as in the workplace (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2013, p. 33).

However, this paper argues that South Africa is continuing on its democratization journey, albeit slowly. Its progress is steady and stable and though not unflawed, is cause for optimism. In addition, I argue here that race relations in South Africa are improving and that racial reconciliation, while far from the ideals espoused by Archbishop Tutu and others, continues to be the hope and desire of an overwhelming number of South Africans.

Concepts: Democracy and Race Relations

In exploring the status of democracy and race relations in South Africa, this paper draws upon the vast academic literature surrounding both topics. Combining the two allows for a more holistic view of South African politics, since democracy is largely measured institutionally and race relations tends to be more of a psycho-sociological concept. As such, this paper uses a two pronged approach in analyzing the twenty year anniversary of the new South Africa, exploring the status of both democracy and race relations. The conceptual framework for each is described below, followed by a specific examination of the two in South Africa.

Democracy and Democratic Transitions

Democracy scholars often fall into one of two camps in defining democracy. According to the procedural definitions, as described by Joseph Schumpeter (1942), democracy is simply an institutional arrangement and not an end in and of itself. Individuals compete for votes and acquire the power to make political decisions, thereby the role of the people is simply to produce a government and participate in this selection process. In contrast, the substantive definitions of democracy, sometimes associated with Robert Dahl (1998), often focus on the substantive ends of democracy. In this sense, democracy is an ideal – as opposed to the procedural definitions where democracy is merely a procedure for selecting leaders.¹ One can see then, that the procedural definition flows from elite theory whereas the substantive definition flows from pluralist theory.

In terms of assessing a democratic transition that follows the typical path of liberalization (a partial opening), transition (of elites and institutions), and finally, consolidation (at a minimum, a new constitution is implemented), how one defines democracy is important as it will inevitably affect the standard used to assess the post-transition stage of consolidation in the newly democratic system. In analyzing whether or not consolidation has occurred, those utilizing a procedural definition of democracy will often focus on whether or not certain democratic processes have been institutionalized,

¹ The procedure, of course, can produce very undemocratic outcomes. In distinguishing democracy from liberty, Fareed Zakaria (2007) wryly notes: “After all, Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany via free elections” (p. 17).

such as adoption of a new constitution, a founding election, or a second turnover in power to a new political party. In contrast, in this paper I use the more stringent and substantive definition of democracy, and therefore the higher standard of consolidation. Linz and Stepan (1996) offer a description of consolidation that “combines behavioral, attitudinal, and constitutional dimensions...[whereby a consolidated democracy is] a political situation in which, in a phrase, democracy has become ‘the only game in town’” (p. 5). As such, there are no attempts from rival groups to overthrow the regime, the “overwhelming majority” of people believe that change should stem from democratic processes, and finally, that those living in the political system internalize and accept that political conflict will be resolved by established democratic norms (Linz and Stepan 1996, p. 5). Therefore, this more substantive definition of democratic consolidation looks beyond whether or not the democratic procedures are in place and focuses additionally on the lived experience for those within the polity.

Taking into account this understanding of democracy and democratic transition, I will use the following indicators in analyzing the status of democracy in South Africa: civil liberties, political rights and the electoral process, and democratic political culture. Civil liberties include certain key individual freedoms, such as access to a free media, freedom of assembly and movement, freedom of religion, and protection of private property. As Sorensen (2008) states, civil liberties exist where “social relations, including private business, nonstate institutions, family, and personal life, [can] evolve without state interference” (p. 6). Political rights include universal suffrage, free, fair, and frequent elections, freedom to organize political groups and parties, and free and transparent campaign opportunities. Finally, a democratic political culture consists of what Larry Diamond (2008) calls the “democratic spirit” and includes “political knowledge and participation, the toleration of dissent and opposition, the inclination to political moderation and restraint, the desire for freedom and accountability, and the propensity to form and join independent organizations that made democracy possible” (p. 11). As Dahl (1998) notes,

this democratic culture exists where people are supportive of and value personal freedom, and this culture therefore supports political rights and civil liberties (p. 51), thereby providing the cultural scaffolding to support and sustain democracy.

Race Relations

I draw on three areas of the race relations literature that I believe speak most clearly to the South African experience: nonracialism, conflict vs. tolerance, and reconciliation. The study of race relations is analytically difficult, as scholars are often seeking to explain a number of different phenomena, including “how patterns of ethnic differentiation emerge, how they are stabilized and maintained through time, and how they ultimately disintegrate or are transformed” (Barth and Noel 1980, p. 432-433). If we define race relations generally as the interaction between different races in a given society, then we necessarily must assess the level of assimilation or tolerance on the one hand, and the level of segregation or intolerance on the other. Each of the three areas described below speaks into this assessment of whether race relations are generally “positive” or “negative” in a political system.

Nonracialism is an ideology that seeks to eradicate racial divides by propagating a societal blindness toward race, essentially erasing racial categories from society (Spencer 1997). In short, a nonracial society exists where race is invisible. Though not unique to South Africa, it is most prominent in this post-apartheid culture and is often contrasted with the United States’ focus on multiracialism, which upholds a recognition of racial categories but celebrates first, the contributions of the many different cultures and races, and second, the increasing occurrence of multiracial families and individuals. In South Africa, the concept of nonracialism is the founding principle of the more generally used “Rainbow Nation” term. Indeed, on the day of his release from prison, as Mandela spoke to a crowd in Cape Town, he noted his goal for a “united, democratic, nonracial South Africa” (Mandela 1990).

The next area of the literature that I draw upon is that of racial conflict vs. racial tolerance. The major theoretical perspectives of the study of race relations can be classified as either emphasizing a trajectory toward assimilation, stability, and tolerance on the one hand, or a trajectory toward segregation, conflict, and intolerance on the other hand. Barth and Noel (1980) lay out the four major conceptual frameworks for studying race relations: the race-cycle framework, consensus framework, interdependence framework, and the conflict framework. For purposes of this research, I draw on the first and the fourth framework, as they represent the “ideal type” extremes of race relations, with the first emphasizing tolerance and the second emphasizing conflict. First, based on the work of Robert E. Park, the race-cycle framework stipulates that race relations are a unilinear process moving societies from an initial point of contact to an eventual point of assimilation. In contrast, the conflict framework offers a zero-sum paradigm through which to view race relations, whereby relations are often characterized by competition over incompatible goals. This framework is essentially Marxist in nature, as it emphasizes the inevitable “clash between groups with diverse interests” (Barth and Noel 1980, p. 431). In sum, while the first framework argues that social change with regard to race relations will tend to move society toward positive interactions, the second argues that social change with regard to race relations will tend push society into chaos and conflict. As a country that has undergone massive social change in the last twenty years, South Africa could veer in either direction and this research seeks to analyze its path – as South Africans are in greater contact with other racial groups, are they building relationships or are they feeling more threatened than ever before?

The third area of the race relations literature that I review here is reconciliation. The concept of reconciliation is one most commonly associated with post-conflict societies, where two or more groups have been entrenched in a divisive and often violent struggle. Andrew Rigby (2001) writes, “At the core of any reconciliation process is the preparedness of people to anticipate a shared future. For this to occur they are required not to forget but to forgive the past, and thus be in a position to move forward

together” (p. 12). Reconciliation is therefore about reaching a kind of societal harmony and one that Nelson Mandela saw as a main goal of his presidency. Upon winning the presidency, Mandela declared his mission to be one of “preaching reconciliation, of binding the wounds of the country, of engendering trust and confidence” (Graybill 2002, p. 18). But how do we scientifically assess such nebulous concepts in present day South Africa? Empirical studies of reconciliation have relied upon Gibson’s (2004) work in post-apartheid South Africa and he frequently notes four pillars of reconciliation: intergroup tolerance, support for human rights culture, political tolerance, and the extension of legitimacy to the new political institutions (Gibson and Claassen 2010; Gibson 2004a; Gibson 2004b). This research relies on Gibson’s work to analyze the status of reconciliation in South Africa, twenty years after Mandela preached his message of reconciliation.

In assessing these three areas of the race relations literature, I use the following indicators to analyze race relations in post-apartheid South Africa: primary identity, level of trust between races, perceived level of reconciliation, perceived level of race relations improvement, level of contact between races, and extent of racial marginalization. With regard to identity, this research will look at the extent to which individuals continue to primarily associate with identity groups that fall along the apartheid-constructed racial categories (Lefko-Everett 2012). Similarly, I report on three indicators that draw on individuals’ perceptions of their race relations: trust toward individuals of another race, feelings about racial reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa, and ideas about progress made (or reversals) with regard to race relations. In addition, I look at two group-level indicators. First, I report levels of intergroup contact and interaction between individuals of different racial groups. Second, racial marginalization will look at perceived levels of exclusion, as well as actual level of residential and economic segregation based on race.

Assessing Democracy and Race Relations: Twenty Years of a “Rainbow Nation”

Democracy

Scholars of the transition to democracy in South Africa often note that democratization is still in progress, and therefore falls short of consolidation (Mattes 2011; Gibson 2004). In terms of direction, there is little consensus on whether the country is moving closer to a democratic ideal, or in fact reversing course – though not back to a racial oligarchy, but rather toward a non-democratic, corrupt, one-party state. Indeed, there are a number of challenges that threaten democracy in South Africa, including a lack of internal democracy within the ANC (Lotshwao 2009), a move toward populist politics in recent years (Vincent 2011), lack of support for rule of law (Gibson 2004), widespread corruption (Camerer 2011), and persistent poverty and inequality (Seekings 2011). But despite these threats, democracy has been sustained and, as I argue here, is not reversing course and is instead moving closer to consolidation, making the South African democratic experience a “partial success” (Mattes 2011).

In short, South Africa remains in a state of democratic transition – with slight fits and starts forward – and is not yet consolidated. The lived experience for residents of South Africa is certainly freer than twenty years ago, but still falls short of the full behavioral, attitudinal, and constitutional elements described by Linz and Stepan (1996) and discussed above. Indeed, the Freedom House organization has categorized South Africa as “free” since the landmark 1994 election (it was previously “partly free”), but the research organization recognizes persistent problems in this new democracy, including frequent and sometimes violent squabbles within the ANC, corruption at the highest levels of government, de facto government restrictions on media, and high levels of violent crime that threaten general security and stability (Freedom House 2013). I turn now to a discussion of the specific indicators of democracy (civil liberties, political rights, and democratic political culture) to more fully analyze the nuances of this mixed picture of democratization.

In looking generally at the three indicators of democracy, South Africa can be classified as a fairly open, democratic society. First, with regard to civil liberties, Freedom House has rated South Africa as a 2 (on a scale of 1-7 with 1 being the most free) since 1995. As a point of comparison, for many of the latter years of apartheid, the country received a rating of 5 or 6. The Freedom House indicators of civil liberties include freedom of expression and belief (media, religious, and academic freedoms, and free private discussion), associational and organization rights (free assembly, civic groups, and labor union rights), rule of law (independent judges and prosecutors, due process, crime and disorder, and legal equality for minority and other groups), personal autonomy and individual rights (freedom of movement, business and property rights, women's and family rights, and freedom from economic exploitation) (Freedom House 2014). Thus, South Africa's consistent, two decade rating of 2 for civil liberties indicates that while we may not categorize it as a liberal democracy, it is certainly not an illiberal democracy or even an electoral democracy.

But many will claim that the Freedom House measures are too "thin" (or non-substantive) to be truly valid measures of democracy, thereby not really capturing the lived experience for those residing in the polity. As such, I include here the Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) assessment of democracy in South Africa. Their assessment of civil liberties focuses on individual human rights, not only for the democratic majority, but also for the minority. Therefore, civil liberties include freedom of speech, expression and the press, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly and association, and the right to due judicial process (Kekic 2007). In 2007, South Africa scored 8.82 (on a 1-10 ranking, with 10 representing the highest level of liberty) in civil liberties – the same as Italy, Slovenia, and Panama (and higher than the United States). By the end of 2012, it had dipped slightly to 8.53 – the same as France, the United States, and South Korea. Therefore, even by the more rigorous, "thick" standards of EIU, South Africa can be categorized as a moderately liberal democracy – and has been since its inaugural election.

Second, in rating the country's level of political rights, Freedom House rated South Africa as a 1 (representing the highest level of freedom possible) for its first full decade of democracy (1995-2005). Since 2006, the country has been annually rated as a 2. The indicators for political rights include the electoral process (executive elections, legislative elections, and electoral framework), political pluralism and participation (party systems, political opposition and competition, political choices dominated by powerful groups, and minority voting rights), and the functioning of government (corruption, transparency, and ability of elected officials to govern in practice). Thus, though the country dipped in its rating after the first decade, Freedom House's twenty year assessment of political rights in South Africa illustrates a stable, politically open society. Substantiating these numbers, the EIU rated the electoral process and level of pluralism in South Africa in both 2007 and 2012 as 8.75 out of 10, placing South Africa at the same level of political freedom as Israel and Argentina (yet lower than every advanced, industrial democracy). Roughly similar to Freedom House's political rights indicator, EIU's electoral process measurement looks at whether elections are free, frequent and competitive.

However, in assessing political freedom, we should look beyond institutional measures, taking into consideration citizens' perception of democratic openness in the electoral process. The Afrobarometer survey asks a series of questions regarding individuals' sense of political freedom and in South Africa, when asked about vote choice ("how free are you to choose who to vote for without feeling pressured?"), 61% responded "completely free" and 21% "partly free" (Afrobarometer 2008), indicating that a vast majority feel a sense of freedom in the electoral arena. And when asked about how free and fair the last election was, half of all South Africans responded that it was "completely free and fair," while another 22% responded "free and fair but with minor problems." Table 1 below reports the entirety of the results.

On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last election, held in 2004? Was it:

	Urban	Rural	Total
Not free and fair	8%	4%	7%
Free and fair, but with major problems	13	14	14
Free and fair, but with minor problems	22	21	22
Completely free and fair	50	50	50
Don't understand the question	1	2	1
Don't know	6	9	7

Table 1: South Africans' Perception of Elections

Finally, the third indicator that I utilize here – democratic political culture – is measured by the EIU according to level of political tolerance, moderation, and willingness to peacefully rotate power. Specifically, the EIU states that a “successful democratic political culture implies that the losing parties and their supporters accept the judgment of the voters, and allow for the peaceful transfer of power” (Kekic 2007, p. 2). As with most countries in the EIU index, South Africa’s rating for democratic political culture is the lowest of their five categories. In 2007, South Africa is rated as 6.88 – the same as Belgium, Costa Rica, Uruguay, and Botswana. By 2012, this number had dropped to 6.25, putting it at the same level as other third wave democracies such as Lithuania, Slovenia, and Chile.

Though these numbers do not display a particularly robust political culture in post-apartheid South Africa, the cultural perspectives of South Africans themselves appear more democratically inclined. For instance, when asked about type of government, a strong majority of South Africans prefer democracy under all circumstances, though the percentages vary by region and province (Table 2).

Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.

Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.

Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

	Urban	Rural	E. Cape	Free State	Gauteng	KwaZulu Natal	Limpopo	Mpumalanga	NW	Northern Cape	Western Cape	Total
Statement 3	11	14	15	5	7	8	19	7	17	15	22	12
Statement 2	17	21	17	12	13	14	29	23	19	9	15	19
Statement 1	70	61	65	81	70	75	46	68	62	62	61	67
Don't Know	2	4	4	2	1	3	6	3	1	14	1	3

Table 2: Support for Democracy (Source: Afrobarometer 2008)

Thus, on average, two out of three South Africans still prefer democracy to any other form of government – far outnumbering those who see the benefit of a non-democratic system under some circumstances. However, it is worth noting that while only 19% of South Africans indicate that a non-democratic system of government is at times preferable, the Limpopo region stands out as unusually unsupportive of democracy. These low levels of support likely stem from perceptions of democratic performance, as Limpopo is the most impoverished of the South African provinces. In addition, residents of Limpopo continue to retain close ties with their traditional, tribal past; it has one of the highest rates of trust in traditional leaders as compared to the other South African provinces (with 25% of the population responding that they have “a lot” of trust in traditional leaders as compared to 17% nationwide) (Afrobarometer 2008).

However, this research is not just interested in current levels of democratic political culture. Rather, it is important to also look at these numbers from a longitudinal perspective so that we can see how (or if) the level of support for democracy has changed in the two decades since the transition. The 67% of South Africans that agreed with statement 1 (“Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government”) in 2008 can be compared to the 63% that agreed with the statement in the late 1990s, just after the first election, indicating relatively little change since Mandela’s election. Support for democracy did dip in the early 2000s (to a low of 57%) but has since ticked back up and is now at the

highest level since the end of apartheid (Mattes 2011, p. 86). In short, support for democracy has remained steady – and moderately high – since the country’s founding election and passage of the constitution. Perhaps it is useful to compare the South African transition to the Russian transition, where growing numbers of Russians indicate lack of support for democracy and increased support for a strong-fisted president.

These numbers surrounding perceptions and support for democracy are indeed revealing and helpful in analyzing democratic political culture. However, if we make the assumption that the term “democracy” means different things to different people, and indeed could be misunderstood or mischaracterized in a new democracy, then it becomes critical to look deeper at some indicators of democracy that avoid the use of the actual term but that still allow us to capture Diamond’s concept of a “democratic spirit.” Tables 3 and 4 below seek to provide a glimpse into South Africa’s level of democratic political culture, indicating how South Africans feel about some of the underlying principles and beliefs of a truly liberal democracy.

There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.

	Urban	Rural	E. Cape	Free State	Gauteng	KwaZulu Natal	Limpopo	Mpumalanga	NW	Northern Cape	Western Cape	Total
Strongly disapprove	36	25	31	43	35	27	14	37	39	35	34	32
Disapprove	32	30	31	25	30	31	43	21	20	26	43	31
Neither approve or disapprove	11	14	14	13	10	12	18	11	14	10	9	12
Approve	13	19	18	15	18	16	16	13	18	7	9	15
Strongly Approve	5	8	5	2	6	7	3	18	7	3	4	6
Don't Know	3	5	2	2	1	8	6	0	1	19	1	4

Table 3: Number of Political Parties (Source: Afrobarometer 2008)

Statement 1: Government should not allow the expression of political views that are fundamentally different from the views of the majority.

Statement 2: People should be able to speak their minds about politics free of government influence, no matter how unpopular their views may be.

	Urban	Rural	E. Cape	Free State	Gauteng	KwaZulu Natal	Limpopo	Mpumalanga	NW	Northern Cape	Western Cape	Total
Agree very strongly with 1	4	7	5	5	4	8	8	13	2	4	2	6
Agree with 1	12	14	6	5	16	11	19	24	15	5	8	13
Agree with 2	39	35	41	30	45	32	35	26	33	45	43	38
Agree very strongly with 2	42	37	44	56	34	43	33	33	44	28	47	40
Agree with neither	1	4	2	2	1	3	4	5	1	4	N/A	2
Don't Know	2	3	2	1	1	4	2	N/A	4	14	N/A	2

Table 4: Freedom of Expression (Source: Afrobarometer 2008)

Thus, a majority of South Africans disapprove of only one party being allowed to run for office (63%), up 3 points from 2004. And with regard to political expression, a strong majority (78%) believe in free expression of political views, even for an unpopular minority, a number that is up 14 points since 2004 (Afrobarometer 2004). The data in Table 3 and Table 4 therefore points to a democratic political culture that is hobbling along in this new democracy. Though certainly not robust, it remains notable that South Africa, a country that experienced over 13,500 political deaths in the four years between the end of apartheid and the founding election, remains largely dedicated to the concept and principles of democracy.

In sum, two decades of democracy in South Africa have resulted in a free, though not untarnished democratic society. Using a more substantive definition of democracy, it is not consolidated and it is not the “only game in town.” The ANC’s hold on power – and the party’s frequent abuse of such power – remains problematic both in the near-future and in the long-run. However, South Africans remain optimistic about their own level of freedom. With regard to perceived level of freedom, over three-quarters of South Africans responded that they were either “completely free” (48%) or “partly

free” (28%), displaying a society that, though not perfectly democratic, is striving for the “lived experience” of true democracy.

Race Relations

Race relations in South Africa remain contentious, though improved since the founding election. The political and social discourse of the last twenty years has centered on the idea of building “one nation” out of an incredibly fragmented society where every aspect of one’s personal and professional life was dependent on their official racial classification. This movement toward a nonracial society – despite being constitutionally mandated – has been slow and very rocky (Maré 2005; Lefko-Everett 2012). Indeed, despite increased levels of contact between races, one’s ethnicity and race still matter greatly in terms of their own identity (Bornman 2010) and racial prejudice remains a problem, perhaps even increasing among black South Africans (Gibson and Claassen 2010). In addition, blacks remain heavily isolated from other racial groups (Durrheim and Dixon 2010). The result is a society that is neither a harmonious and reconciled “Rainbow Nation,” nor a deeply fragmented, resentful society on the brink of racial strife. I turn now to the six indicators of race relations to assess the status of racial interaction in South Africa: primary identity, level of trust between races, perceived level of reconciliation, perceived level of race relations improvement, level of contact between races, and extent of racial marginalization.

With regard to identity, race and ethnicity have not lost their hold on individuals’ self-identification, though language, neighborhood, and social class are increasing in importance. Most notably, the number of South Africans that respond “South African First” to a question of primary identity has decreased in the last decade, indicating that the country is becoming *less of* a Rainbow Nation. Table 5 below illustrates South Africans’ primary source of identity over just the last five years.

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Language	20.4%	24.1	19.3	20.7	18.3	17.0	23.2
Ethnicity	15.1	18.4	19.3	18.5	18.6	15.8	11.1
Race	11.8	12.0	10.9	14.5	19.0	18.4	13.4
Economic Class	6.9	6.3	5.2	5.4	6.1	10.6	8.8
Neighborhood	8.9	7.1	8.4	8.7	7.2	8.9	12.0
Religion	6.9	5.2	7.1	6.4	6.3	4.8	6.0
South African First	11.2	11.9	14.2	13.7	12.6	8.3	7.1

Table 5: Primary Identity Association in South Africa (2007-2013) (Source: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2013)

The data in Table 5 reveal the power of language and neighborhood – even over race and ethnicity. Even if we combine race and ethnicity, in 2013, the category would only barely surpass language as the primary identity association for South Africans. Thus, we get a mixed report from these numbers. On the one hand, South Africa is still a heavily fragmented society and is in fact moving away from the concept of a Rainbow Nation. On the other hand, race is not the end-all-be-all of self-identification, as one might expect from a post-apartheid society where race defined all aspects of life. Indeed, language association in South Africa could actually bridge some racial groups; for instance, many South African Coloureds speak Afrikaans, the language of the former white oppressor.

The second indicator, level of trust between races, shows that South Africans have become more optimistic in the last five years, though the numbers still indicate a strong sense of societal distrust. Since 2007, the number of respondents answering positively to the question “people of different racial groups do not really trust or like each other” has decreased from 74% in 2007 to 64% in 2011 (Human Sciences Research Council 2013). And just over half of all South Africans (51%) agreed that “people of different racial groups will never really trust or like each other” – down from 58% in 2007. In

addition, it may not be just people of other races that South Africans distrust. When asked about their level of trust of “other South Africans” (the previous question asked about “people you know”), a quarter responded “not at all” and another 40% responded “just a little” (Afrobarometer 2008). On average, only 28% of South Africans responded “somewhat” and 7% responded “a lot.” Trust may be increasing, but at a very slow pace (Human Sciences Research Council 2013, p. 5) and it has a very long way to travel.

The next two indicators - perceived level of reconciliation and perceived level of race relations improvement – illustrate a similarly slow but steady crawl forward. The transition away from the apartheid policies was a unique process in South Africa, anomalous in its strong emphasis on truth, reconciliation, and in particular, forgiveness. Led by Archbishop Tutu and other anti-apartheid activists, the movement focused on the moral imperative of moving beyond racial reconciliation to a place of true forgiveness and a living out of the Ubuntu philosophy. Thus, in a country where such language of interdependence and reconciliation is part of the national discourse, how do South Africans perceive reconciliation and the current state of race relations? With regard, to reconciliation, only 15.1% of South Africans disagree with the statement that progress has been made toward reconciliation since 1994, while 61.4% agree with this statement (Institute of Justice and Reconciliation 2013).² Table 6 reports the numbers by race.

² The IJR Reconciliation Barometer reports only “agree” and “disagree” and it is not clear why the percentages do not total to 100%.

		Black	White	Indian/Asian	Coloured	Total
Progress in reconciliation since 1994	Agree	65.3%	44.9%	65.4%	50.0%	61.4%
	Disagree	13.6	26.1	13.3	13.3	15.1
Have experienced reconciliation in own life	Agree	51.0	28.3	55.5	32.4	47.4
	Disagree	18.2	28.2	13.7	21.1	19.5
We should forget apartheid and move on	Agree	62.5	69.2	72.6	66.8	64.0
	Disagree	10.1	7.8	6.6	3.2	9.1
We should forgive those hurt others	Agree	60.8	64.2	64.0	67.7	61.9
	Disagree	11.6	7.0	8.8	2.8	10.2
The gov't should support victims of apartheid	Agree	61.8	33.3	63.7	52.9	57.6
	Disagree	11.8	31.5	6.5	10.4	10.4
Reconciliation is impossible without economic redress	Agree	57.7	28.5	54.9	36.4	52.2
	Disagree	14.4	32.7	6.7	15.6	16.5

Table 6: Perceptions of Reconciliation by Race (Source: Institute of Justice and Reconciliation 2013)

The 2013 Reconciliation Report from the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation notes the following regarding the above numbers: “Across race groups, South Africans hold similar perceptions on the desire for forgiveness and moving forward. However, when it comes down to how this process of moving forward should take place, South Africans do not agree with one another across racial lines” (Institute of Justice and Reconciliation 2013, p. 37). Indeed, the percentages illustrate a society that overwhelmingly desires reconciliation and even forgiveness. In addition, most South Africans – of all races – report that that the last two decades have seen an increase in reconciliation and almost half have personally experienced it (though it is important to note that whites are much less likely to have experienced reconciliation in their own life). But there is much less consensus about the role of government in a post-apartheid society or the importance of addressing economic inequalities that largely fall along

racial lines. Therefore, while South Africans largely agree on the “what” of reconciliation, there is less agreement about the “how,” which will continue to pose problems in terms of the practicalities of a post-conflict society.

Further, when asked about some characteristics and attributes of the opposite race group, South Africans tend to still express some stereotypical or essentialist attitudes. For instance, when asked in 2004 if it was “difficult to understand their customs and ways,” 73.1% of blacks agreed, as did 43.6% of whites, 43.8% of Coloureds, and 42.2% of Asians (Gibson and Claassen 2010, p. 262). However, this question is rather general and is perhaps not an indicator of lack of reconciliation. But when asked about whether it would be “hard to imagine ever being friends with one of them,” 57.7% of blacks agreed, as did 22.7% of whites, 11.5% of Coloureds, and 9.8% of Asians (Gibson and Claassen 2010, p. 262). Both questions saw an increase in percentages among blacks between 2001 and 2004, illustrating an increasingly less reconciled society, at least for black South Africans (Gibson and Claassen 2010). Yet, these two questions could indicate merely a lack of understanding of whites on the part of blacks. But when asked whether the opposite race is “selfish, only look[ing] after their group interests,” blacks agreed at a rate of 68.9%, portraying more than just an unfamiliarity with other races; indeed, “black South Africans’ racial attitudes toward whites hardened a bit between 2001 and 2004” (Gibson and Claassen 2010, p 266).

In terms of perceived level of race relations improvement, since 2008 the Human Sciences Research Council has been asking the question of whether race relations have improved in the last year. Each year, over half of South Africans have replied that race relations have improved in the last year (ranging from 51% in 2011 to 64% in 2010) (Human Sciences Research Council 2013). At most, only 15% of the population (in 2011) has responded that race relations have gotten worse. Figure 1 below shows the percentages as they have adjusted over the last few years.

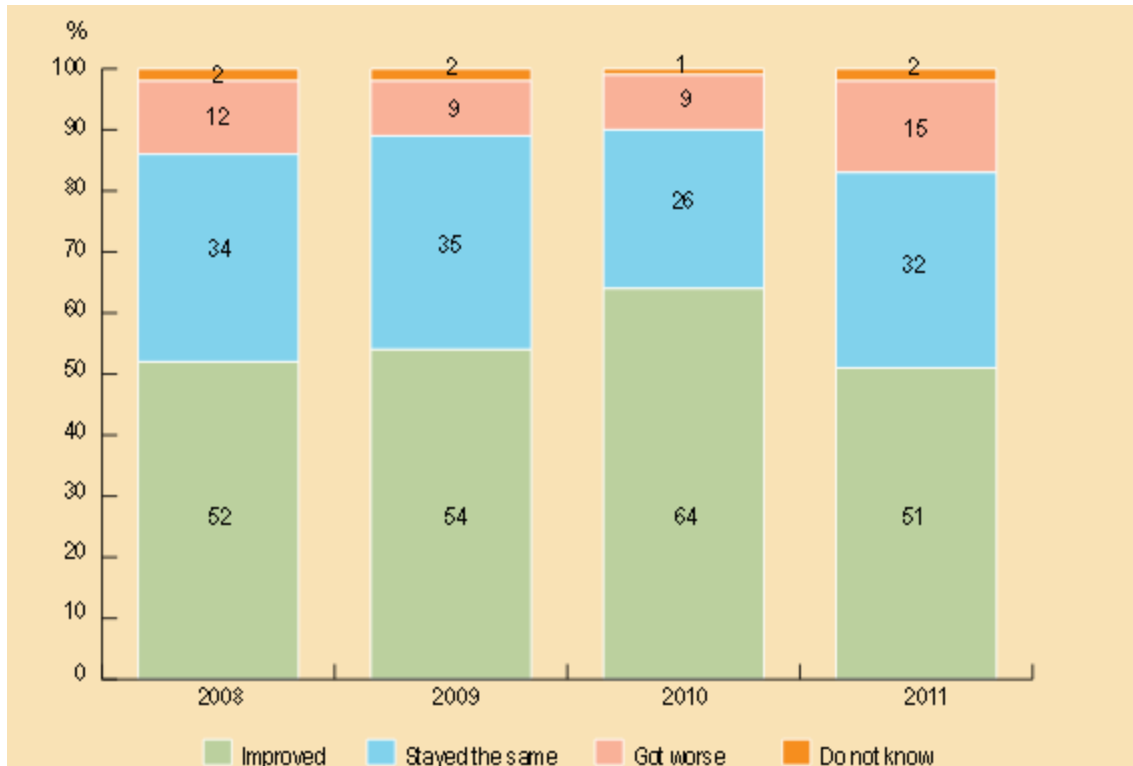


Figure 1: Have Race Relations Improved in the Last Year? (Source: Human Sciences Research Council 2013)

Interestingly, focus groups have shown that South Africans feel a greater sense of interaction in public spaces, including beaches, shops, and sporting events, and that this public interaction has led to improved race relations and perhaps progress toward nonracialism (Lefko-Everett 2010). However, South Africans feel less optimistic about interracial relationships in their private lives. I turn now to the last two indicators of race relations - level of contact between races and extent of racial marginalization – in order to assess how race relations plays out in the public sphere as opposed to the private lives of South Africans.

The Reconciliation Barometer measures levels of interracial contact between South Africans at two different levels: the frequency with which South Africans speak to individuals from another race “at work or otherwise” (“interracial talk”) and the frequency with which South Africans speak to individuals from another race “in your home or the homes of friends” (“interracial socialization”). The former

measures a more distant, public level of racial contact, whereas the latter measures a closer, personal level of interaction. Racial contact theory purports that increased contact – particularly of the more personal kind – between racial groups will improve race relations and attitudes and lead to reduced levels of prejudice (Allport 1954; Wagner et al 2006). In 2013, 19.2% of South Africans reported that they “never” engage in interracial talk and another 21.8% report that they “rarely” do (Institute of Justice and Reconciliation 2013). However, the percentages for the other categories – “sometimes,” “often,” and “always” – are at similar levels (23.2%, 19.7%, and 13.4% respectively), resulting in a rather equal distribution of levels of interracial contact in more public settings. With regard to interracial socialization, it is not surprising that the numbers skew in the direction of less contact, with almost one in three (32.4%) South Africans responding that they “never” engage in interracial socialization. An additional 21.5% report that they “rarely” do, indicating that over half of the South African population never or rarely interacts with another racial group in their own home or in the homes of their friends. Almost 20% respond that they “sometimes” do, 15.3% respond that they “often” do, and 8.2% respond that they “always” do. The picture that emerges from this data suggests that South Africans do speak to and interact with one another across racial lines, but that more personal types of racial contact are rare.

However, racial contact of both types is increasing overall, albeit at a very slow rate. Figure 2 below illustrates the levels of both types of interracial contact as they have slowly inched up over the years.

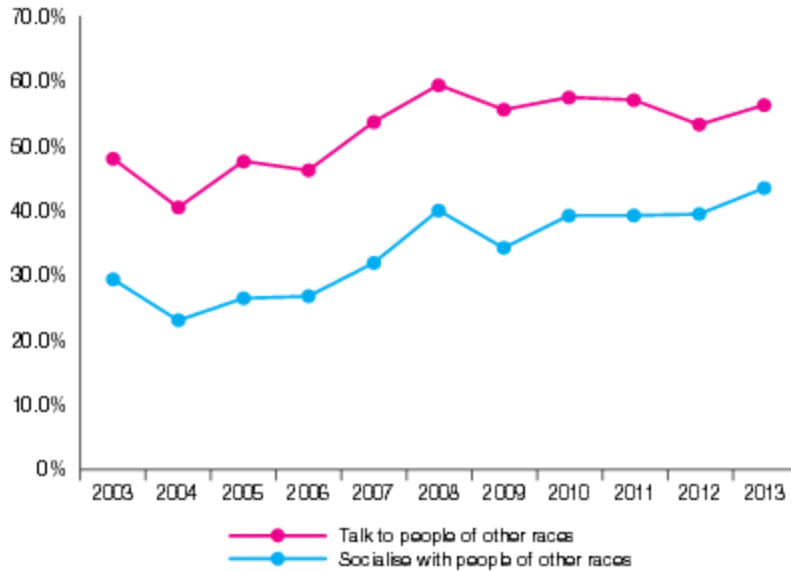


Figure 2: Level of Racial Contact in South Africa, 2003-2013 (Source: Institute of Justice and Reconciliation 2013)

Focus groups have shed light on these figures, as participants often speak of their discomfort in socializing across racial boundaries. One young man from Paarl (a predominantly Coloured community in the Western Cape) stated that “it is possible to be friends with all the other races, but I just don’t feel at ease mixing with them” (Lefko-Everett 2010, p. 141). Such a statement is perhaps representative of the perspective of many South Africans, in that they are very hopeful and optimistic about the promise of nonracialism, increased interracial contact, and reconciliation, but are perhaps more pessimistic about the realities of such a society coming to fruition.

Finally, the levels of perceived and actual racial marginalization in present-day South Africa offer a glimpse into race relations. Figure 3 below illustrates South Africans’ fears of racial marginalization.

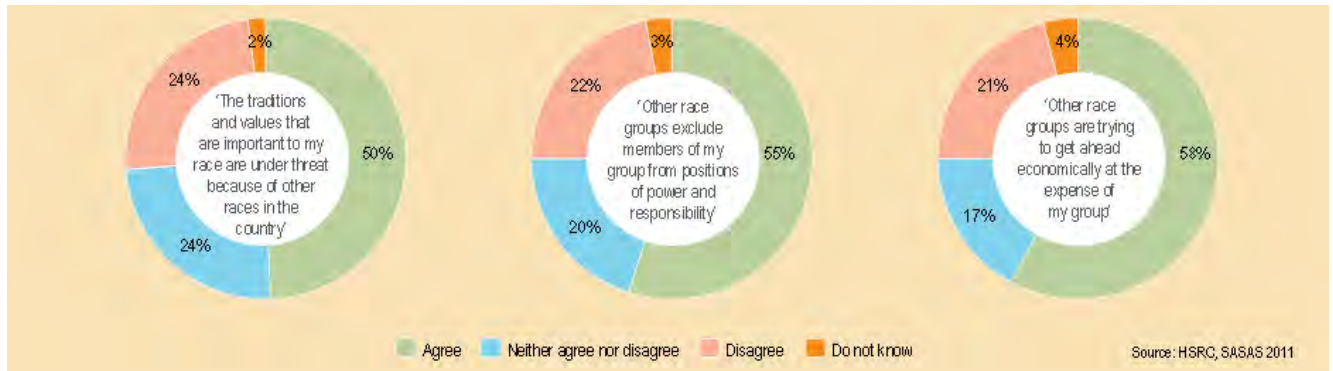


Figure 3: Fear of Racial Marginalization, 2011 (Source: Human Sciences Research Council 2013)

With all questions asked about marginalization, at least half of the population shared concerns about their group being marginalized in the new Rainbow Nation. In addition, these concerns were shared by whites, blacks, Coloureds, Asians, and Indians, “with a majority in each group expressing concerns about the marginalization of their own group” (Human Sciences Research Council 2013, p. 5).

In terms of residential marginalization, it remains the case that the poorest South Africans are almost exclusively black. The apartheid policies that prevented blacks from living in or even visiting the urban city centers created a system of widespread residential marginalization that continues today, as blacks remain segregated from the middle and upper class neighborhoods that tend to be more multiracial in nature (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2013, p. 34). In essence, South Africa tends to have pockets where the Rainbow Nation is realized, namely in the more affluent urban areas. However, the surrounding townships – overwhelmingly poor and lacking in basic services – remain exclusively black. Indeed, “in general, South Africans report that race relations are improving in South Africa and class relations are deteriorating” (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2013, p. 15). Therefore, a mixed picture of race relations begins to emerge, as the relationship between race and class cannot be disentangled. If pessimism surrounding class issues is growing – and if class is highly correlated with race – then race relations are likely not improving as much as South Africans are hoping that they are.

Discussion

The data above portray a post-conflict African country still in transition. The transition toward democracy and the improvement in race relations are both still in progress, with each moving slowly along a path toward a freer, more tolerant society. As general observers of this transition, we should be cautiously optimistic. The country continues to fare well with regard to political rights and civil liberties and though the country does not yet have a robust, thriving democratic political culture, the majority of South Africans continue to support democracy and the principles underlying it. Indeed, while democratic consolidation has not yet occurred, it remains the case that South Africa is a country slowly transitioning to a fully liberal democracy. In addition, South Africans remain hopeful of the status of race relations in the country. Six in ten South Africans say that progress has been made in reconciliation since 1994, and given the very high expectations for reconciliation at that time, this is an incredibly positive step forward as more than half of South Africans believe that the country has lived up to those expectations.

In sum, South Africans are freer and more tolerant than ever. Elections are free and fair, political expression is open and tolerant, opposition groups are allowed to freely run for office and critique the government, a free press operates largely free from government interference, protest activity is common and tolerated, and minority groups are heavily protected. In addition, the national discourse continues to focus on racial reconciliation, healing, and forgiveness, making the cost of non-tolerance very high. In short, South Africans vote freely, mingle in grocery stores, complain about the government loudly, and are beginning to trust one another a bit more. In a country that experienced half a century of race-based violence and repression, these small steps forward are cause for celebration. The country is indeed moving forward – not backward – and though the process is very slow, we should remember that it is just now exiting its adolescent stage. We would not expect a twenty year old college student to have their life figured out or to never again make a mistake, therefore we should extend some grace to this new democracy, and allow it to inch slowly forward toward democracy and more positive race relations.

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