

South Africans generally tolerant but report racial discrimination by employers and courts

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 84 | Rorisang Lekalake and Sibusiso Nkomo

Summary

2016 is a landmark year in South Africa's nation-building process. April 15 marked the 20th anniversary of the first hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which sought "to provide for the investigation and the establishment of as complete a picture as possible of the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of human rights" committed during apartheid (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2009). The TRC has served as a model for transitional justice in Africa and globally, though it has faced criticism for failing to address structural injustices.

Over the past few months, racist rhetoric on social and traditional media has renewed the national debate on discrimination and the lack of socioeconomic transformation since the transition from apartheid. A number of prominent digital media companies, including the Daily Maverick and Independent Newspapers Online, have suspended the comments function on their websites due to the large number of offensive posts.

During the most recent State of the Nation Address, President Jacob Zuma announced that Human Rights Day 2016 (March 21, the date the United Nations has designated as International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination) would be observed as a "national day against racism ... as a foundation to lay a long-term programme on building a non-racial society" (Presidency, 2016). On March 17, the Department of Justice launched the Anti-Racism Network of South Africa (Isaacs, 2016), which forms part of the #TakeonRacism campaign and the department's draft national action plan to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2015).

Findings from Afrobarometer's 2015 survey in South Africa provide some evidence that these initiatives are indeed needed. While a majority of South Africans have consistently expressed tolerant attitudes and said they do not believe that the government discriminates against their ethnic group, perceptions of government discrimination have increased significantly since 2011 amongst citizens from minority race groups. Furthermore, majorities of South Africans say that the courts and employers regularly discriminate against people based on their race, while more than one-third say the same about landlords. These perceptions are particularly common among Indian citizens.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. After five rounds of surveys between 1999 and 2013, results of Round 6 surveys (2014/2015) are currently being published. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of 1,200 or 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in South Africa, led by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) and Plus 94 Research, interviewed 2,400 adult South Africans in August and September 2015. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in South Africa in 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2011.

Key findings

- Although consistently low since 2006, the proportion of South Africans who believe that the government “always” or “often” discriminates against members of their ethnic community increased by 15 percentage points, on average, among citizens of minority race groups between 2011 and 2015.
- A majority of citizens believe that employers (56%) and the courts (54%) “always” or “often” treat people differently based on their race, while 36% say the same about landlords.
- Perceptions of frequent racial discrimination by employers, the courts, and landlords are far higher among Indian respondents (73% on average) than among other race groups. They are also above average among urban residents, citizens with high levels of education, and residents of North West, Gauteng, and Western Cape provinces.
- Tolerance for other ethnicities is high in South Africa: 92% of citizens say they would “strongly like,” “somewhat like,” or “not care” about having them as neighbours. Indian citizens are the most welcoming group (96%), followed by black (93%), Coloured (90%), and white citizens (90%).

Government discrimination against ethnic groups

South Africa is a racially and ethnically diverse country. As used in Afrobarometer surveys, race¹ is identified by interviewer observation, and ethnicity is self-identified by respondents.

(See Appendix Table A.1 for racial and ethnic categories and frequencies.)

To further explore this data, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

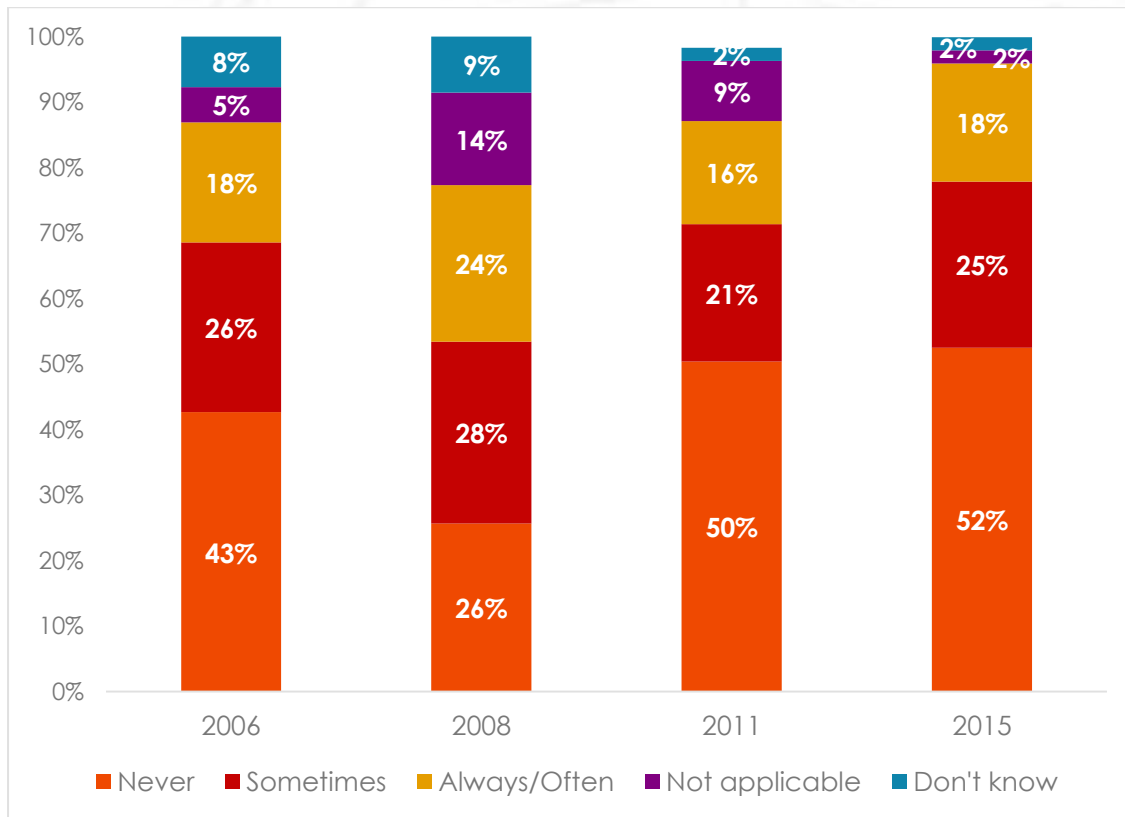
In each of the four Afrobarometer surveys over the past decade, less than one-quarter of South Africans have said that the government “often” or “always” discriminates against their ethnic group. As of

2015, about half (52%) of citizens say that the government “never” treats members of their ethnic group unfairly – twice the level of fair treatment perceived in 2008. One-quarter (25%) say discrimination “sometimes” occurs. About one in five respondents (18%) say the government “often” or “always” discriminates (Figure 1).

¹ Statistics South Africa groups citizens into five population groups (i.e. “races”): “Black African,” “Coloured,” “White,” “Indian or Asian” (includes South Asian, East Asian, and South-East Asian), and “Other.”

Using similar categories, the racial breakdown of the Afrobarometer South Africa survey sample is: 1,665 black/African (70% of the total), 251 white (11%), 321 Coloured (14%), 142 Indian (includes South Asian, 6%), and five “Other” (includes East Asian and South-East Asian, less than 1%). The sample is then weighted to reflect the country’s population distribution. Margins of uncertainty surrounding generalizations about population subgroups are wider than for country-level results, calling for caution in interpreting associated numerical results.

Figure 1: Perceptions of government discrimination | South Africa | 2006-2015



Respondents were asked: How often, if ever, are [members of respondent's ethnic group] treated unfairly by the government?²

However, perceptions of discrimination differ significantly by race group. In contrast to black South Africans, the proportion of citizens of minority race groups who say the government “always” or “often” discriminates against members of their ethnic group has increased by 15 percentage points on average, from 25% to 40%, since the last survey in 2011. Half (49%) of Indian respondents say that the government regularly treats members of their ethnic community unfairly, followed by 40% of Coloured, 31% of white, and 12% of black citizens (Figure 2).³

This perception has increased most dramatically among Indian citizens; in 2006, only 7% felt that way.

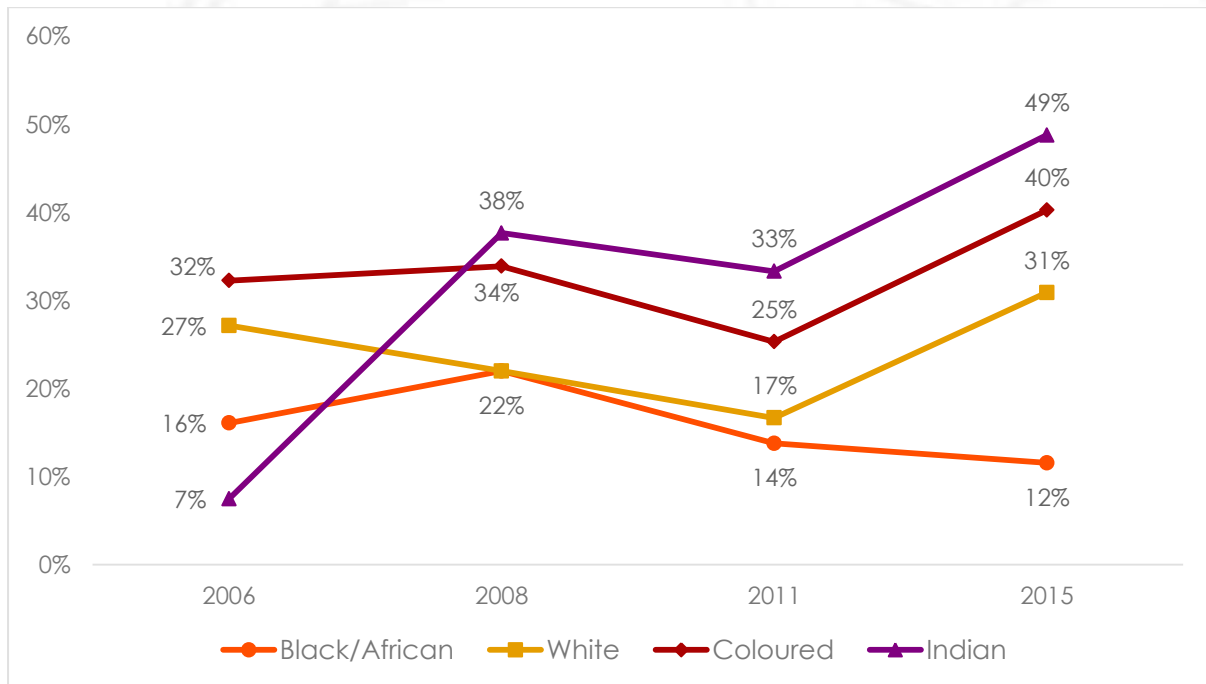
Analysis by ethnic group (as opposed to race group) also shows substantial differences in perceptions of government discrimination, largely between black/African and minority ethnic groups (see Appendix Table A.2).⁴

² “Not applicable” refers to respondents who declined to select an ethnic identity or answered “Don’t know” or “South African only.”

³ Differences by race in South Africans’ perceptions of government discrimination are statistically significant, as shown by an ANOVA statistical test ($F(3, 2284) = 117.03, p < .01, \eta^2 = .133$). A Post-hoc Tukey’s HSD test shows that responses of black/African citizens differ significantly from those of other race groups at $p < .01$. Differences between other race groups are not statistically significant.

⁴ Perceptions are also statistically significant by ethnic group, $F(13, 2275) = 41.08, p < .01, \eta^2 = .190$.

Figure 2: Perceptions of government discrimination against ethnic groups | by race
 | South Africa | 2006-2015



(% "always" or "often")

Racial discrimination in courts, employment, and real estate

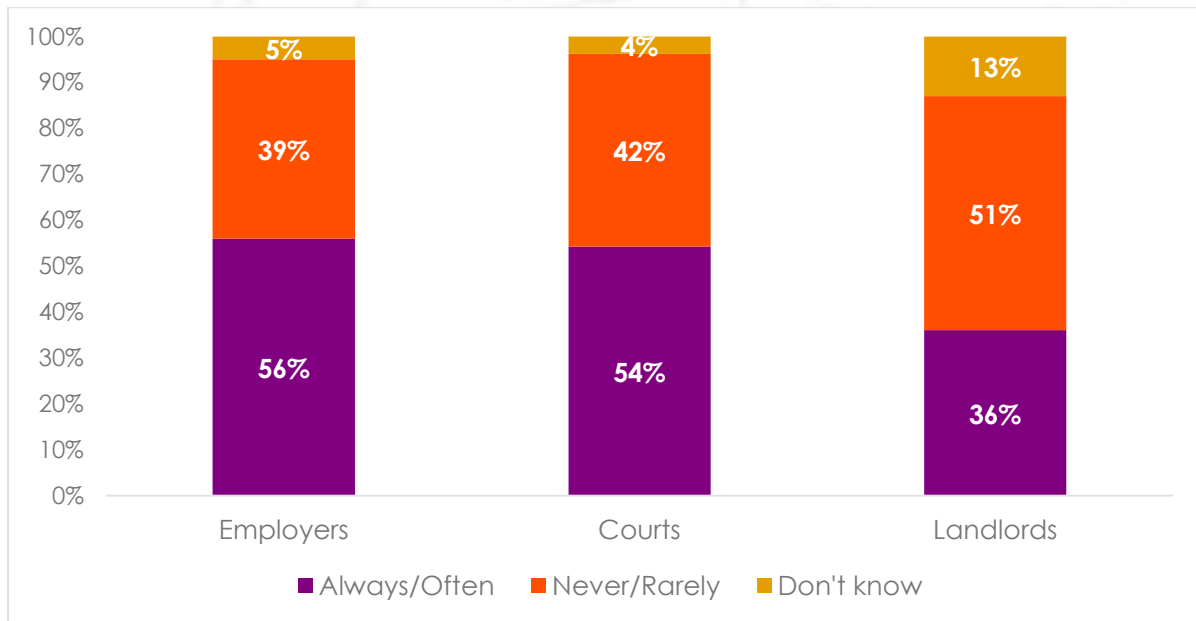
A majority of citizens believe that employers (56%) and the courts (54%) "always" or "often" treat people unequally based on race. More than one-third (36%) of respondents say the same is true for potential landlords (Figure 3). Significantly more respondents felt unable to respond to the question about landlords (13%) than in the case of employers and the courts. Since this question was not asked in previous survey rounds, no over-time comparison is possible.

Perceptions of racial discrimination by current or prospective employers vary by urban/rural location, education level, and race, but very little by age group and sex (Figure 4). Six in 10 urban residents (59%) believe that employers "always" or "often" treat people unequally because of their race, compared to 50% of their rural counterparts. A similar proportion (58%) of respondents with at least secondary education say the same, compared to 52% with primary or no formal schooling. Indian South Africans (73%) report significantly higher levels of perceived racial discrimination than black (57%), white (51%), and Coloured (51%) citizens.

Indian respondents are also the most likely group to believe that the courts regularly discriminate against people based on race (83%), followed by Coloured (62%), white (59%), and black (51%) citizens (Figure 5). Perceptions of discrimination by the courts are higher among urban residents and better-educated citizens.

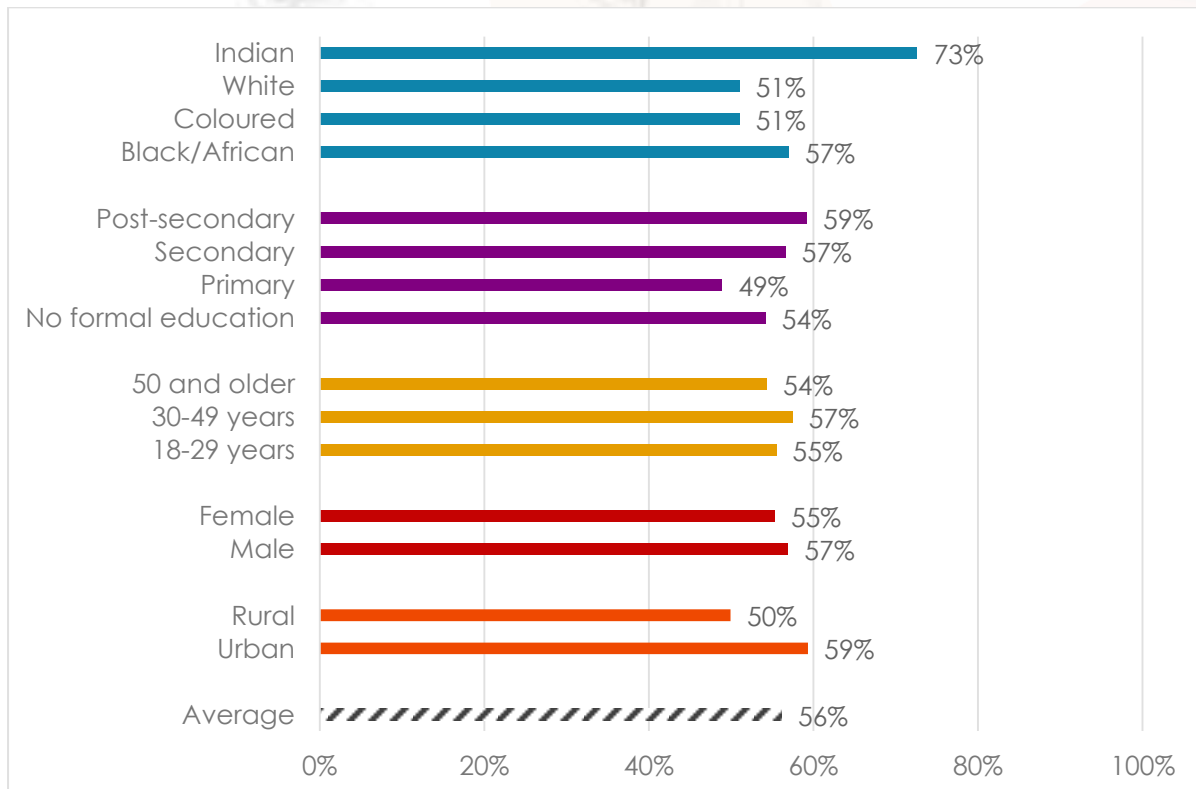
A similar pattern obtains with regard to discrimination against prospective tenants (Figure 6). Indian citizens are the only group in which a majority (63%) say landlords "always" or "often" discriminate based on race.

Figure 3: Perceptions of racial discrimination | South Africa | 2015



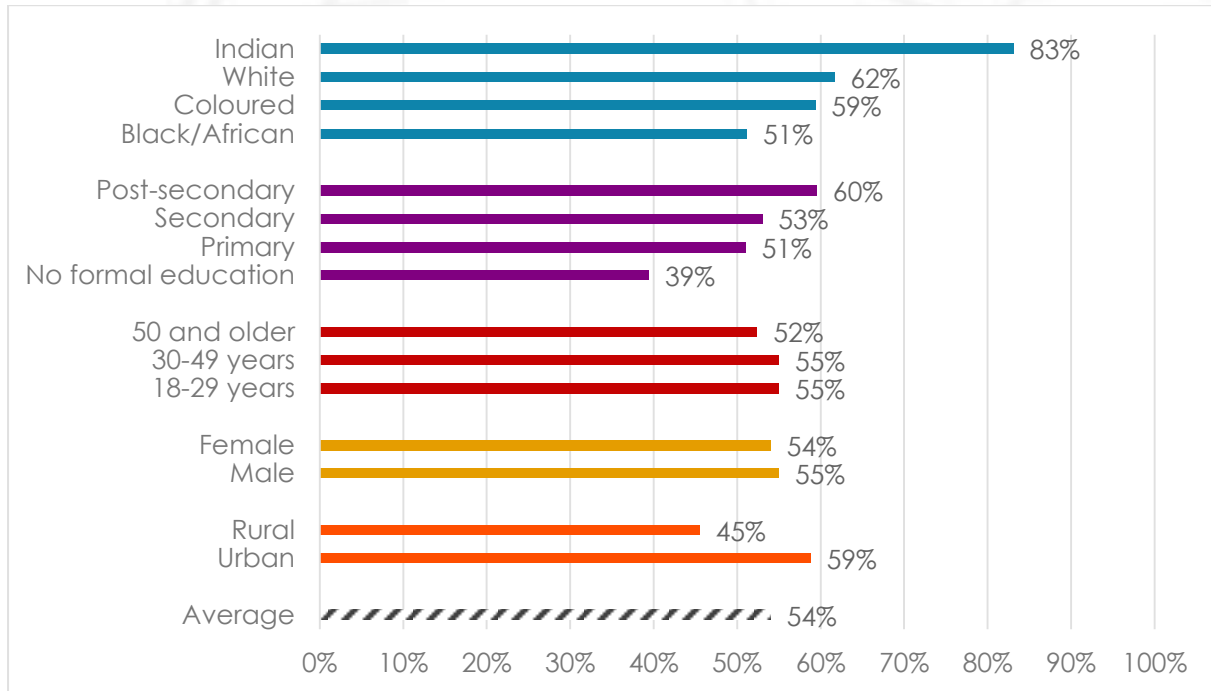
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often in this country are people treated unequally because of their race by: Their current or prospective employers? The courts? Potential landlords?*

Figure 4: Racial discrimination by employers | by race, education, age, sex, and location | South Africa | 2015



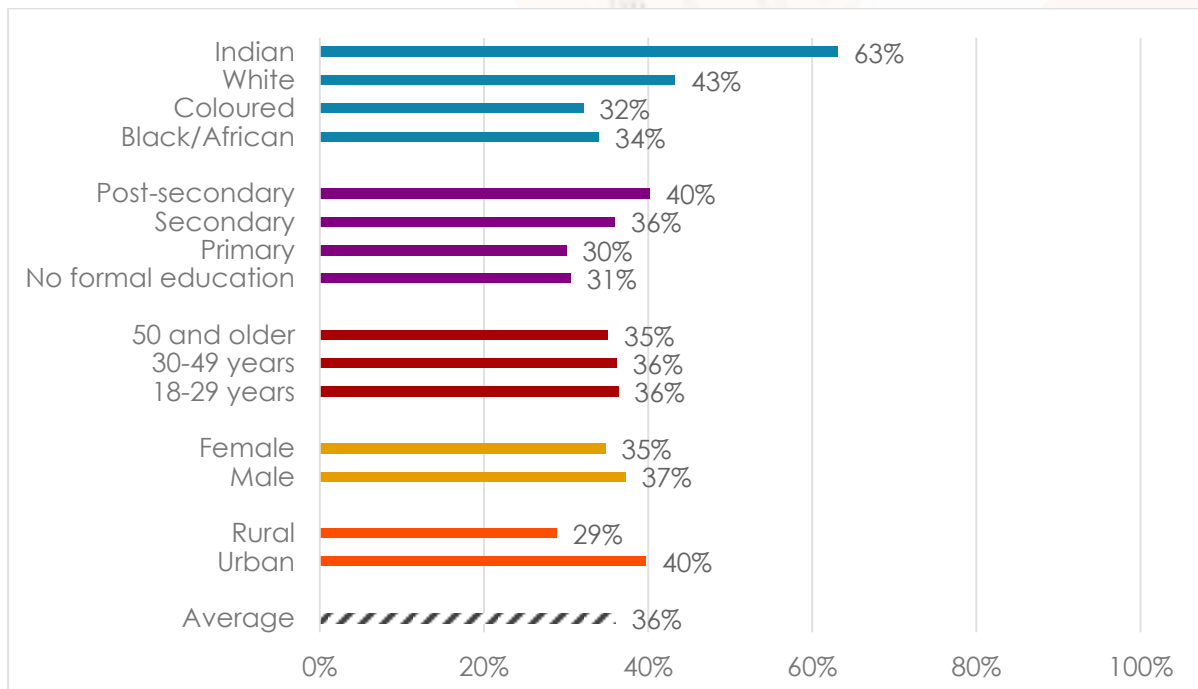
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often in this country are people treated unequally because of their race by their current or prospective employers? (% "often" or "always")*

Figure 5: Racial discrimination in the courts | by race, education, age, sex, and location | South Africa | 2015



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often in this country are people treated unequally because of their race by the courts? (% "often" or "always")

Figure 6: Racial discrimination by potential landlords | by race, education, age, sex, and location | South Africa | 2015



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often in this country are people treated unequally because of their race by potential landlords? (% "often" or "always")

Analysis by province reveals further differences in perceived racial discrimination in the workplace, legal system, and real-estate market. On average, residents of the North West province are most likely to report discrimination (59%), followed by residents of Gauteng (56%) and the Western Cape (55%). In contrast, only a quarter (25%) of Mpumalanga residents believe that employers, courts, and landlords “always” or “often” treat people unequally (Table 1).

Proportions of respondents who say employers “always” or “often” discriminate range from four in 10 (37%) in Limpopo to seven in 10 (70%) in the North West province. Differences in opinion regarding the courts are even larger, stretching from two in 10 residents of Mpumalanga (16%) who believe that the courts always/often treat people unequally to seven in 10 Gauteng residents (69%). Residents of Mpumalanga are also least likely to report discrimination (4%) by potential landlords, followed by Limpopo (18%). At the other extreme, this is the majority opinion in North West (54%) and Western Cape (52%) provinces.

Table 1: Racial discrimination by employers, courts, and landlords | by province | South Africa | 2015

Province	Employers	Courts	Landlords	Average
North West	70%	54%	54%	59%
Gauteng	64%	69%	35%	56%
Western Cape	51%	61%	52%	55%
KwaZulu-Natal	57%	59%	40%	52%
Free State	65%	54%	32%	50%
Eastern Cape	48%	51%	41%	47%
Northern Cape	43%	48%	35%	42%
Limpopo	37%	37%	18%	31%
Mpumalanga	56%	16%	4%	25%

Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often in this country are people treated unequally because of their race by: Their current or prospective employers? The courts? Potential landlords? (% who say “often” or “always”)*

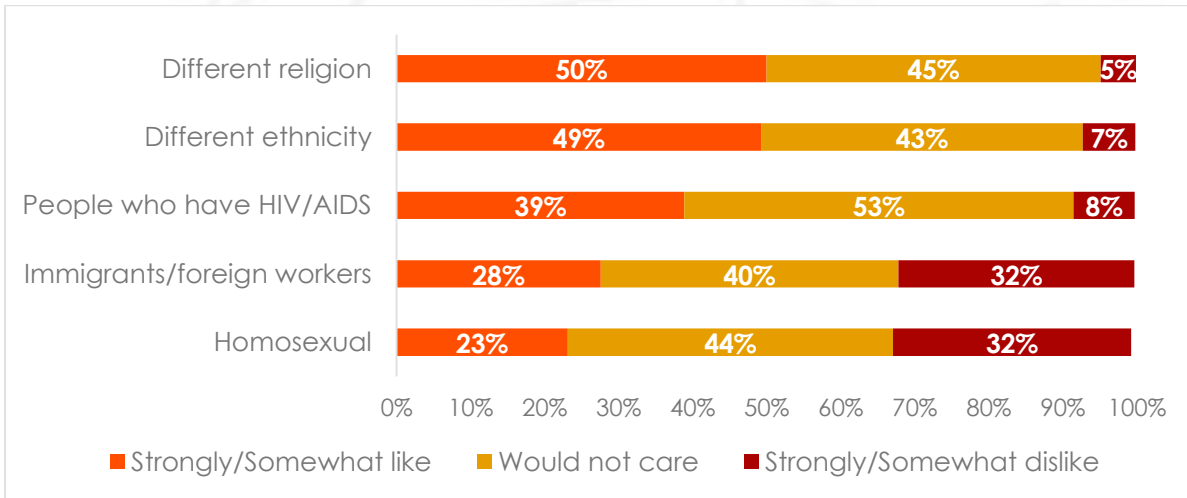
Openness toward citizens of other ethnicities

Recent analysis of data from 33 countries surveyed by Afrobarometer found that large majorities of Africans express tolerance for people from different ethnic groups (91%) as well as people of different religions (87%), immigrants (81%), and people living with HIV/AIDS (68%). However, Africans are largely intolerant of sexual minorities: An average of 78% of respondents say they would “somewhat dislike” or “strongly dislike” having a homosexual neighbour (see Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 74, available at www.afrobarometer.org).

South Africans generally rank among the most tolerant citizens on the continent: Significant majorities of respondents say they would “strongly like,” “somewhat like,” or “would not care” about living next to people of a different religion (95%) or ethnicity (92%) or people living with HIV/AIDS (92%) (Figure 7). Two-thirds of citizens (67%) also indicate tolerance for homosexuals, the second-highest level among the 33 countries (after Cape Verde, 74%).

Although a majority (68%) of South Africans indicate tolerance for immigrants, this is significantly below the continental average (81%), and further findings from the 2015 survey suggest that there has been little change in South Africans’ unwelcoming attitudes toward foreigners (see Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 72, available at www.afrobarometer.org).

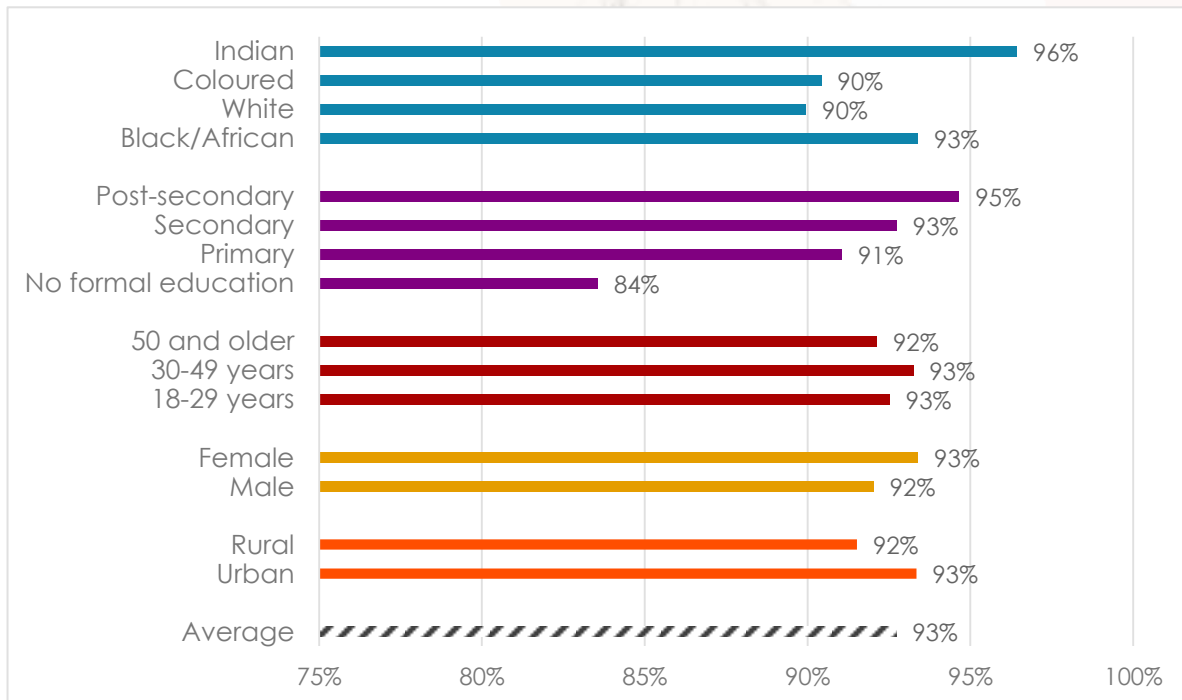
Figure 7: Social tolerance | South Africa | 2015



Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: People of a different religion? People from other ethnic groups? People who have HIV/AIDS? Immigrants or foreign workers? Homosexuals?

With regard to people from different ethnic groups, tolerance levels increase with education, and analysis by race shows that Indian citizens are the most tolerant group (96%), followed by black (93%) respondents (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Tolerance for other ethnicities | by race, education, age, sex, and location | South Africa | 2015

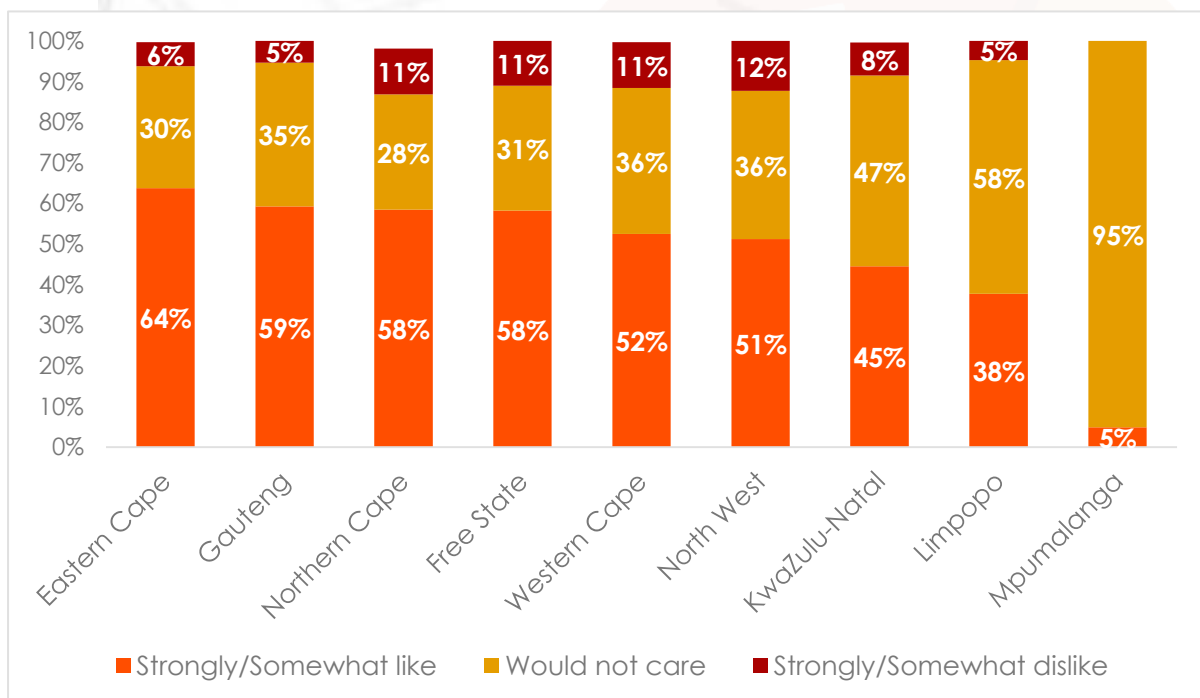


Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: People from other ethnic groups? (% who say they would "strongly like," "somewhat like," or "not care")

Although tolerance for people from other ethnicities is high (92%) in South Africa, only half (49%) of respondents are actually welcoming in their attitudes (i.e. say they would “strongly like” or “somewhat like” living among these neighbours, as opposed to not caring). Levels of openness toward people of other ethnicities vary among the country’s nine provinces (Figure 9). Intolerance levels (i.e. those who say “strongly dislike” or “somewhat dislike”) are generally low, ranging from 12% in the North West province to 0% in Mpumalanga. However, only 5% of Mpumalanga residents say they would “strongly like” or “somewhat like” having a neighbour of a different ethnicity, which is significantly lower than the levels reported in all other provinces.

Openness toward other ethnic groups is highest in the Eastern Cape, where almost two-thirds (64%) of respondents say they would like having neighbours of a different ethnicity, followed by Gauteng (59%), the Northern Cape (58%), and Free State (58%). A slight majority of residents of the Western Cape (52%) and North West province (51%) say the same.

Figure 9: Attitudes toward people of other ethnicities | by province | South Africa | 2015



(% “strongly like” or “somewhat like”)

Conclusion

As government and civil-society campaigns take on racism and discrimination, Afrobarometer survey findings suggest that these actions are indeed necessary. While South Africans’ attitudes reflect a relatively tolerant society, perceptions of frequent government discrimination have increased significantly among minority race groups. A majority of South Africans believe that employers and courts “always” or “often” treat people differently based on race, while more than one-third say the same about landlords. Perceptions of discrimination are higher among Indian citizens, urban residents, and those with post-secondary education.

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Appendix

Table A.1: Ethnicity in South Africa | by race | 2015

		Race*			
		Black/ African	White	Coloured	Indian
Ethnic group	English	0%	32%	4%	23%
	Afrikaans/Afrikaner/Boer	0%	44%	27%	-
	Ndebele	1%	-	-	-
	Xhosa	19%	1%	1%	-
	Pedi/North Sotho	13%	-	-	-
	Sotho/South Sotho	8%	-	-	-
	Tswana	13%	-	0%	-
	Shangaan	7%	-	-	1%
	Swazi	4%	-	-	-
	Venda	3%	-	-	-
	Zulu	30%	-	-	-
	White/European	-	15%	1%	1%
	Coloured	0%	-	65%	1%
	Indian	0%	-	0%	73%
	South African only, or "doesn't think of self in those terms"	1%	8%	2%	-
	Other	0%	-	-	-
	Don't know	0%	-	-	-
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Respondents were asked: What is your ethnic community, cultural group, or tribe?

* The Afrobarometer survey identifies race based on interviewer observation.

Notes: A result of "0%" indicates that less than 0.5% of respondents gave that answer; a result of "-" means that no respondent gave that answer.

Due to rounding, categories may not always sum to 100%.

Table A.2: Perceptions of government discrimination | by ethnic group | South Africa | 2015

	Always/ Often	Sometimes	Never	Don't know
Afrikaans/Afrikaner/Boer	43%	31%	23%	1%
Coloured	43%	36%	21%	1%
Indian	40%	19%	39%	2%
English	38%	32%	24%	7%
White / European	25%	47%	28%	-
Average	18%	25%	53%	2%
Xhosa	17%	23%	58%	1%
Tswana	17%	46%	35%	2%
Shangaan	16%	27%	56%	1%
Venda	15%	40%	45%	0%
Sotho/South Sotho	10%	14%	71%	4%
Pedi/North Sotho	10%	30%	58%	2%
Zulu	6%	14%	77%	2%
Ndebele	4%	22%	74%	-
Swazi	1%	8%	89%	0%

Respondents were asked: How often, if ever, are [members of respondent's ethnic group] treated unfairly by the government?⁵

Notes: A result of "0%" indicates that less than 0.5% of respondents gave that answer; a result of "-" indicates that no respondent gave that answer.

Due to rounding, categories may not always sum to 100%.

⁵ Margins of uncertainty surrounding generalizations about population subgroups are wider than for country-level results, calling for caution in interpreting associated numerical results. Groups that have small subsamples (<100): Swazi (74), Indian (62), Venda (53), White/European (35), and Ndebele (23).

Rorisang Lekalake is Afrobarometer assistant project manager for the Southern Africa region, based at the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in Cape Town, South Africa. Email: rlekalake@afrobarometer.org.

Sibusiso Nkomo is Afrobarometer communications coordinator for the Southern Africa region, based at IJR. Email: snkomo@afrobarometer.org.

Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.

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