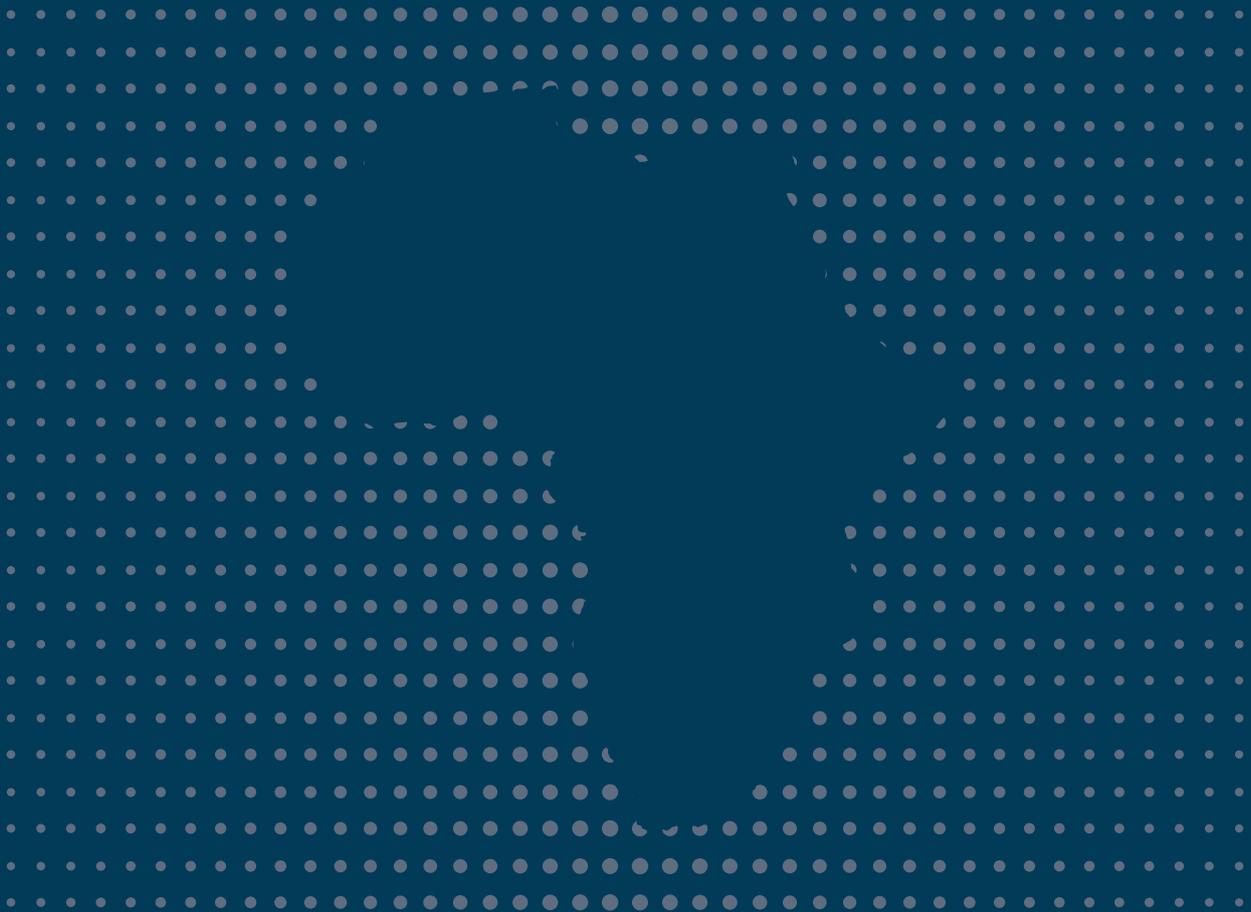




# RECONCILIATION & DEVELOPMENT

WORKING PAPER SERIES | PAPER 1

## Towards a social cohesion index for South Africa using SARB data



RECONCILIATION & DEVELOPMENT  
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## About the Reconciliation and Development series

The Reconciliation and Development series is a multidisciplinary publication focused on the themes of peacebuilding and development. Peacebuilding research includes the study of causes of armed violence and war, processes of conflict, the preconditions for peaceful resolution and peacebuilding, and the processes and nature of social cohesion and reconciliation. Development research, in turn, is concerned with poverty, structural inequalities, reasons for underdevelopment, issues of socioeconomic justice and the nature of inclusive development. This publication serves to build up a knowledge base of research topics in the fields of peacebuilding and development, and the nexus between them, studying the relationship between conflict and poverty, and exclusion and inequality, as well as between peace and development in positive terms.

Research in the publication follows a problem-driven methodology, in which the scientific research problem decides the methodological approach. Geographically, the publication has a particular focus on post-conflict societies on the African continent.

## About the authors

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## About the South African Reconciliation Barometer

The South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) is a public opinion survey conducted by the IJR. Since its launch in 2003, the SARB has provided a nationally representative measure of citizens' attitudes to national reconciliation, social cohesion, transformation and democratic governance. The SARB is the only survey dedicated to critical measurement of reconciliation and the broader processes of social cohesion, and is the largest longitudinal data source of its kind globally. The 2015 SARB survey was conducted during August and September 2015. The survey employed a multistage cluster design in which enumerator areas (EAs) were randomly selected and, within each of these, households were randomly selected with a view to visiting such households. At each household, a systematic grid system was employed to select the specific respondent for an interview. The final sample of 2 219 respondents was then weighted to represent the adult population of South Africa adequately.

Published by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation  
105 Hatfield Street, Gardens, Cape Town 8001, South Africa  
[www.ijr.org.za](http://www.ijr.org.za)

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Designed and produced by COMPRESS.dsl | [www.compressdsl.com](http://www.compressdsl.com)

Orders to be placed with the IJR:

Tel: +27 (21) 202 4071

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## Summary

The aim of this paper is to create a measurement for national-level social cohesion in South Africa, by creating an index of variables that provide insight into what it is that holds our society together and, conversely, what causes division within it. More specifically, we reconstruct a social cohesion index developed by researchers at the Centre for Research on Peace and Development (CPRD) at Katholieke Universiteit (KU) Leuven in Belgium, by using data from the 2015 round of the South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) survey. The social cohesion triangle measure operationalises the concept of social cohesion by providing an overall measure based on the scores for three sub-indicators: (i) equality and social inclusion, (ii) social and institutional trust, and (iii) shared identity. The first sub-indicator shows relatively low scores for economic inclusion and equality at the national level, with substantial variation across race groups. The trust indicator highlights the extremely low levels of trust in South African society, especially inter-group trust. There is little variation between race groups for inter- and intra-group trust, whilst there is substantial variation for trust in institutions. The national-level measure produced for a shared South African identity is the most positive indicator for social cohesion of the three sub-indicators. It shows the high level of identification with the national identity across all race groups.

The indicator produced provides a measure by which to track social cohesion in relation to social, economic and political developments over time. The index also provides a means to test for potential relationships between the constitutive indicators (trust, identity, equality and inclusion) over time. Tracking these developments can highlight important policy considerations in national priority areas of reconciliation, nation-building, the capacity and quality of political institutions, and governance, redistribution, inclusive growth and development, amongst others.

# 1. Introduction

The need to identify and understand what holds a society together becomes an especially prominent topic in times of deepening social divisions. It is during times of instability, insecurity and/or crisis that policy-makers, researchers and societies more broadly carry out introspection into what exactly it is that their social fabric consists of. The issues that divide societies usually relate to challenges of economic inequality, insecurity and migration trends.<sup>1</sup> In the current global climate, the relevancy of social cohesion is highlighted, for example, in what has been occurring within many countries within the global North, where an increase in anti-immigrant nationalism has been accompanied by an increase in anti-establishment sentiment and frustration with increasing levels of income and wealth inequality.

*“It is during times of instability, insecurity and/or crisis that policy-makers, researchers and societies more broadly carry out introspection into what exactly it is that their social fabric consists of.”*

Domestically, South African society continues to be plagued by multiple divisions: i) structural exclusion that still correlates with apartheid boundaries, ii) vast disparities in income and wealth between different class and racial groupings,<sup>2</sup> iii) perpetual incidences of racist and xenophobic confrontations (and the persistence of their underlying sentiments),<sup>3</sup> iv) high levels of civil unrest and demands for increased resource allocation in a stagnating macro-economic environment,<sup>4</sup> and v) large sections of the governing executive and public institutions that stand accused of large-scale, systemic nepotism, corruption and being ‘captured’ by private interests.<sup>5</sup> Not only does this sketch a society and social groupings that are divided amongst themselves, but it also highlights the lack of trust in a central authority that should act as a unifying, progressive and developmental force.

Three interrelated societal challenges are especially pertinent to the question of social cohesion in the South African context. First, there is a need for mechanisms to overcome disagreements and potential social instability in a stagnant economic environment with widespread inequality and social exclusion. Second, there is a trust deficit amongst broader South African society. Networks of trust are necessary for the establishment of a developmental consensus, or social compact, between the major societal stakeholders (business, government, labour and civil society), with such a developmental consensus in turn required to bring about durable and stable institutions that foster inclusive economic growth.<sup>6</sup> Finally, in a society in which there are high levels of division and distrust, social groupings are unlikely to come together to hold their political leaders accountable.

Conversely, in such a society, opportunistic political actors are presented with a greater opportunity to capitalise on these cleavages for their personal gain.

The aim of this paper is to create a measurement for national-level social cohesion in South Africa, by creating an index of variables that provide insight into what it is that holds our society together, and, conversely, what causes division within it. More specifically, we reconstruct a social cohesion index developed by researchers at the Centre for Research on Peace and Development (CPRD) at Katholieke Universiteit (KU) Leuven in Belgium,<sup>7</sup> by using data from the 2015 round of the South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) survey. The SARB is a biannual<sup>8</sup> public opinion survey conducted by the IJR. Since its launch in 2003, the SARB has provided a nationally representative measure of citizens' attitudes towards national reconciliation, social cohesion, transformation and democratic governance. The SARB is the only survey in South Africa dedicated to critical measurement of reconciliation and the broader processes of social cohesion, and is the largest longitudinal data source of its kind globally.

## 2. Operationalising a definition of social cohesion and its constitutive dimensions

Social cohesion as a concept is multidimensional in nature, flexible to interpretations in different social contexts and from divergent academic disciplines (and their respective methodologies). Collectively, the literature on social cohesion refers to the aspects of social cohesion as 'strength of social relations, shared values and communities of interpretation, feelings of a common identity and a sense of belonging to the same community, trust among societal members as well as the extent of inequality and disparities.'<sup>9</sup> At its heart, social cohesion refers to the proverbial glue, cement or fabric that holds a group or society together – be that group defined at a familial, communal, cultural, regional, nation state, or any other level. The challenge for the purposes here, however, lies in operationalising such a nebulous and multifaceted concept into a concise and usable indicator at the national level. Taking a step towards measuring social cohesion at a national level in a multi-dimensional way, variables for a social cohesion index are distilled here from shared components of prominent definitions of social cohesion and its constitutive components in international policy analysis literature. The dimensions of social cohesion are operationalised with respect to the relevant data available in the 2015 SARB.

*"At its heart, social cohesion refers to the proverbial glue, cement or fabric that holds a group or society together – be that group defined at a familial, communal, cultural, regional, nation state, or any other level."*

Different definitions conceptualise, group and organise the dimensions that collectively indicate social cohesion differently, depending on the conceptual frameworks from, and purposes for which, it is investigated. However, two key tenets permeate the literature on social cohesion. The range of dimensions are usefully conceptualised, for the purposes here, by the UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery's<sup>10</sup> differentiation between two analytically distinct, but constitutive, conditions for social cohesive societies:

- i. the reduction of inequalities, disparities and social exclusion; and
- ii. the strengthening of social relations and ties.

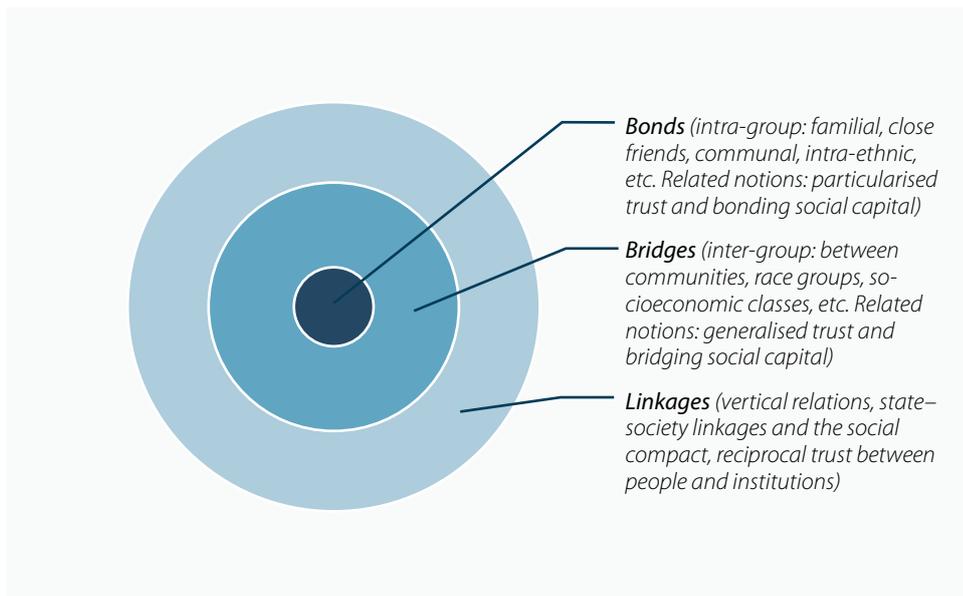
*“a cohesive society recognises that its various groupings have a shared fate, and that there is both a necessity and responsibility to look after those without access to resources and opportunities”*

These two conditions are also the differentiating foci of what has been termed the two distinct approaches to social cohesion: the so-called institution-driven (or European) and society-driven (or North American) approaches.<sup>11</sup> The former predominantly emphasises the role that social exclusion, inequality and marginalisation play in dividing a society and weakening social cohesion. This approach highlights the fundamental role that perceptions of fairness in the distribution of power and material resources play in a society’s cohesiveness. The assumption is that a society consents to the distribution and redistribution of resources based on need (predominantly by means of progressive taxation and social welfare policies) to the extent that ‘they regard themselves as bound to the beneficiaries by strong ties of community’.<sup>12</sup> This approach touches on a fundamental characteristic of cohesive societies: that it requires its different individuals and groupings to recognise their interdependence.<sup>13</sup> Within this conceptualisation, a cohesive society recognises that its various groupings have a shared fate, and that there is both a necessity and a responsibility to look after those without access to resources and opportunities.<sup>14</sup> This approach infers that state institutions and policies play a central role in the objective of achieving a fair distribution of power and resources, by confronting exclusions and inequalities.<sup>15</sup> The effectiveness of state institutions and policies in addressing the needs of citizens, the government’s perceived levels of corruption, and the amount of trust that it enjoys from the public provides insight into the extent to which the state contributes to the detriment or benefit of social cohesion.<sup>16</sup>

*“a cohesive society is one that creates communities or networks of shared understanding and has high levels of generalised mutual trust”*

On the other hand, the society-driven approach relates closely to social capital theory and places more emphasis on the beliefs, behaviours and linkages that individuals and societal groupings have in relation to one another.<sup>17</sup> The focus is the glue/essence of what holds a society together; on the shared identities, norms and values, as well as civic participation and the fostering of networks and relationships.<sup>18</sup> From this perspective, a cohesive society is one that creates communities or networks of shared understanding and has high levels of generalised mutual trust. It emphasises the stimulation of civic engagement, political participation, nurturing societal connections and a sense of belonging.<sup>19</sup> This approach resonates with discourses on nation-building, unity, reconciliation and the symbolism of a rainbow nation in the post-apartheid South African context.<sup>20</sup> These two dimensions of social cohesion, as identified in the two approaches, collectively characterise that which holds a society together and that which tears it apart. Building on these two dimensions, it is also necessary to highlight, for the purposes of this paper, three levels at which a society’s cohesiveness can be investigated.

Figure 1: Social cohesion levels of analysis



Differentiation can be made between three types of relationships/connections that impact upon a society’s overall cohesiveness:<sup>21</sup> relationships of individuals within the same group (referred to as bonds), relationships of individuals across groups (bridges), and the relationship of a society (and its respective groups) with the state (linkages). Both the connections within a society, and between the state and society, contribute towards social cohesion. In a diverse (in terms of race, ethnicity, language, class, etc.), post-conflict society still dealing with the legacies of a divisive colonial and apartheid past, inter-group cohesion and the role of a legitimate state in facilitating that cohesion are especially important in the South African context. Consequently, with the aim of creating an index for social cohesion at the national level, horizontal inter-group bridges and vertical state–society linkages are presumed to be especially pertinent in fostering a cohesive South African society at the macro (or national) level.

With regards to the analysis of inter-group bridges, it is important to disaggregate and compare perceptions across prominent societal group identities. For example, if the aggregate indicators for social cohesion are high, but there are vast differences in perceptions when disaggregated between groups, that in itself indicates a disjuncture in inter-group lived realities that would be unlikely to show in an aggregated national measure. A divergence in experiences and perceptions would in itself highlight a society’s lack of cohesiveness. Therefore, if different racial groups have noticeably divergent perceptions on the dimensions of the composite index, that in itself would indicate a schism in public sentiment amongst these groups. Although group identities are necessarily social constructs, they provide an important insight into the extent of horizontal inequalities<sup>22</sup> and a sense of injustice and/or interdependence between groupings perceived to be salient in the particular context.

*“if the aggregate indicators for social cohesion are high, but there are vast differences in perceptions when disaggregated between groups, that in itself indicates a disjuncture in inter-group lived realities”*

**Table 1: Primary sources of social division (%)**

	1st choice	2nd choice
Inequality (rich and poor)	30.3	23.9
Race	23.5	25.3

As is to be expected in one of the most unequal societies in the world,<sup>23</sup> public perception data indicates that inequality between the rich and poor is most cited as the greatest source of social division (see Table 1). As perceptions of inequality, however, are already built into the index (discussed later), the data will only be disaggregated according to the second-most-identified source of social division: race. The aim here is not to perpetuate racialised thinking and the division of South African society into the racial colour categories that it has inherited from its past. Instead, the disaggregation according to racial groupings provides a source of triangulation by which to check the aggregate measure of social cohesion produced.

*“As is to be expected in one of the most unequal societies in the world, public perception data indicates that inequality between the rich and poor is most cited as the greatest source of social division.”*

Apart from being identified as a major source of social division in the data, there are two complementary reasons for presuming that racial identities are important categories by which to disaggregate a social cohesion measure in South Africa. Both these reasons directly relate to the country’s colonial and apartheid past. First, in terms of access to resources and opportunities, historical divisions based on race still manifest in the composition of South African society’s economic strata and the distribution of resources.<sup>24</sup> This is especially true with regards to lower economic classes, which are, in the large majority, still black, poor and without access to resources and opportunities.<sup>25</sup> Second, and relatedly, the colonial and apartheid legacy of thinking in racialised terms still permeates contemporary South African society. This is evidenced by the divergent public sentiment often elicited in the IJR’s own survey data.<sup>26</sup>

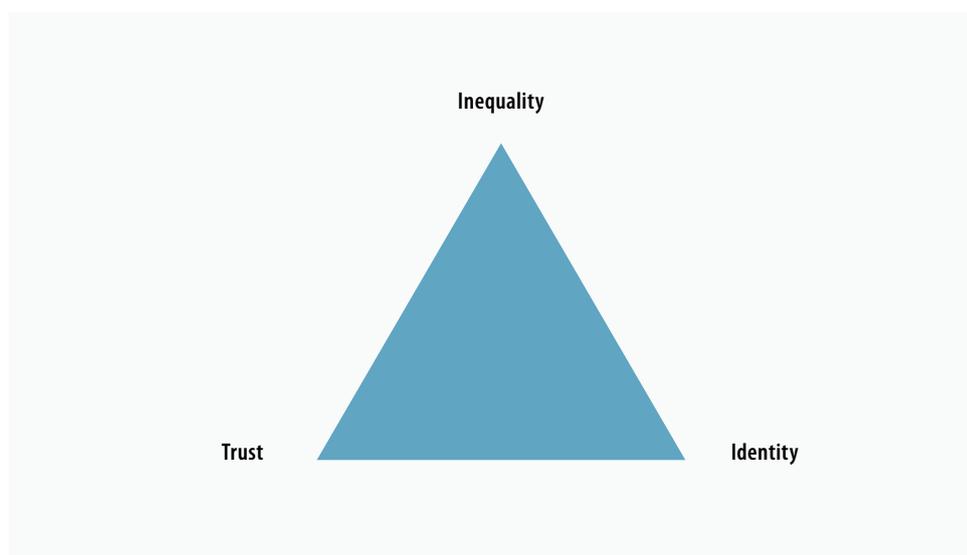
Furthermore, the approach followed here is constructivist in nature. It assumes that national social cohesion is fundamentally a matter of how individuals perceive societal phenomena and functioning of state institutions,<sup>27</sup> as opposed to more objective measures. Perceptions are likely the result of actual interactions and the lived experiences of objectively measured circumstances, and therefore considerable correlation is expected between objective and subjective measures of constitutive indicators of social cohesion (like subjective and objective measures of inequality, for example). However, people’s behaviour and beliefs are invariably shaped by their perceptions of reality, perceptions of multidimensional and complex phenomena that are further filtered by personal conversion factors. These phenomena are therefore not necessarily captured in one-dimensional objective data, and perception data are preferred for the exercise here.

If, for example, people's perceptions of inequality do not correspond with narrower, objective measures of income and/or wealth inequality, it is not to the detriment of a perception-based index. The argument here is that it is exactly the perceptions of inequality that play a crucial role in the formulation of ideas and behaviour and, therefore, it is perceptions that are of central importance to our index. This assumption has empirical basis in the work of Posel and Casale,<sup>28</sup> who find considerable differences between objective and subjective measures of individuals' relative rankings of themselves in the national income distribution (as a measure of inequality). Importantly, they also find that perceived relative standing in the income distribution has a significantly larger effect on subjective well-being than objective income measures of relative standing. Comparisons between perception-data-based indices and more objective measures, along with how both these measures relate to the societal phenomena that are observed in practice, are important exercises done elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> They differ from the exercises conducted here: the construction of a perceptions-based social cohesion index for South Africa.

*“The argument here is that it is exactly the perceptions of inequality that play a crucial role in the formulation of ideas and behaviour”*

In light of the analysis of the constitutive dimensions of social cohesion provided, the broad and nebulous concept can now be categorised into measurable elements. This is done by operationalising perception data on three aspects, in line with the constitutive dimensions identified earlier: perceived inequalities and social exclusion, societal trust and shared identities. These constitutive dimensions are depicted by Langer et al.'s social cohesion triangle in Figure 2 below, with the questions used as indicators for the respective dimensions indicated in Table 2.

**Figure 2:** Social cohesion triangle



Source: Langer et al. 2015

**Table 2: Survey items used in the Social Cohesion Index**

Question	Social cohesion indicator
<b>Inequality and social exclusion</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How would you describe your financial situation in relation to others? In relation to the rest of South Africa, your financial situation is ...</li> <li>2. In thinking about the goals you have in life, how much do you agree with the following statements?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. I have access to the financial resources I need to achieve my goals.</li> <li>b. I have access to groups of people who can help me achieve my goals.</li> <li>c. I have the education I need to achieve my goals.</li> <li>d. I can easily get (or travel) to the places I need to in order to achieve my goals.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Proportion of respondents who believe that, in relation to the rest of South Africa, their financial situation is the 'same'.</li> <li>2. Proportion of respondents who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the respective statements.</li> </ol>
<b>Trust (intra-group, inter-group and institutional)</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How much do you trust the following groups of people?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Relatives</li> <li>b. Neighbours</li> <li>c. Colleagues</li> <li>d. Other race groups</li> <li>e. Other language groups</li> <li>f. Foreigners living in South Africa</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Please indicate how much confidence you have in each of the following institutions, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. National government</li> <li>b. Local government</li> <li>c. Legal system in general</li> <li>d. Parliament</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p><b>1. Intra-group trust:</b> <i>Proportion of respondents who trust 'a lot' in relatives, neighbours and colleagues for intra-group cohesion;</i></p> <p><b>Inter group trust:</b> <i>Proportion of respondents who trust 'a lot' in other race groups, other language groups and foreigners living in South Africa.</i></p> <p><b>2. Institutional trust:</b> <i>Proportion of respondents who trust have 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal' of confidence in the respective institutions.</i></p>
<b>Identity</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The following questions ask about your South African identity, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree. Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Being a South African is an important part of how you see yourself.</li> <li>b. People should realise we are South Africans first, and stop thinking of themselves in terms of the group they belong to.</li> <li>c. You would want your children to think of themselves as South African.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Proportion of respondents who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement.</i></li> </ol>

### 3. Sub-indicators for social cohesion

#### Inequality and social exclusion

##### i. Indicator rationale

Perceptions of exclusion and inequality are important to the extent that they provide insight into the social distances between individual members and groups within a society, social distances within which distrust and prejudice can fester.<sup>31</sup> As discussed earlier, perceptions on exclusion and inequality also shed light on two underlying sentiments that are assumed to be important for a cohesive society: (i) the recognition of interdependence amongst broader society and feelings of being engaged in a shared enterprise, and (ii) perceptions of fairness in the distribution of power and resources. Political, cultural, social and economic inequalities are relevant, but only economic inequalities are considered here (due to data availability). Importantly, as discussed above, it is people’s perceptions of being in an equal or unequal society that is assumed to impact upon societal cohesion.

*“Perceptions of exclusion and inequality are important to the extent that they provide insight into the social distances between individual members and groups within a society”*

Additionally, and in divergence from the methodology on which this paper is based, a measure for social exclusion is also incorporated into the index. Social exclusion is measured here by the extent to which people feel they have access to the financial resources, groups of people, education and geographic/physical accessibility to achieve their goals. Similarly, social mobility could be used as a measure for social cohesion, as is done elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> The assumption of using a measure of social mobility is that the impact of inequality and exclusion on social cohesion is not only important as it relates to frustration/content with the status quo, but also with regards to hopes and prospects for the future.<sup>33</sup> The indicator used for social exclusion is preferred here, however, as it already captures four dimensions of access required for mobility.

##### ii. Indicator results

	Equality	Inclusion	Combined
Black	39.0	40.0	39.5
White	36.9	65.6	51.2
Indian/Asian	54.4	50.9	52.7
Coloured	38.3	25.5	31.9
<b>South Africa</b>	<b>39.1</b>	<b>41.6</b>	<b>40.4</b>

*For the survey questions used for the equality and inclusion indicators, see Table 2. The Combined indicator is the arithmetic mean of the two sub-indicators Equality and Inclusion.*

Figure 3: Perceived relative standing in South African economic distribution

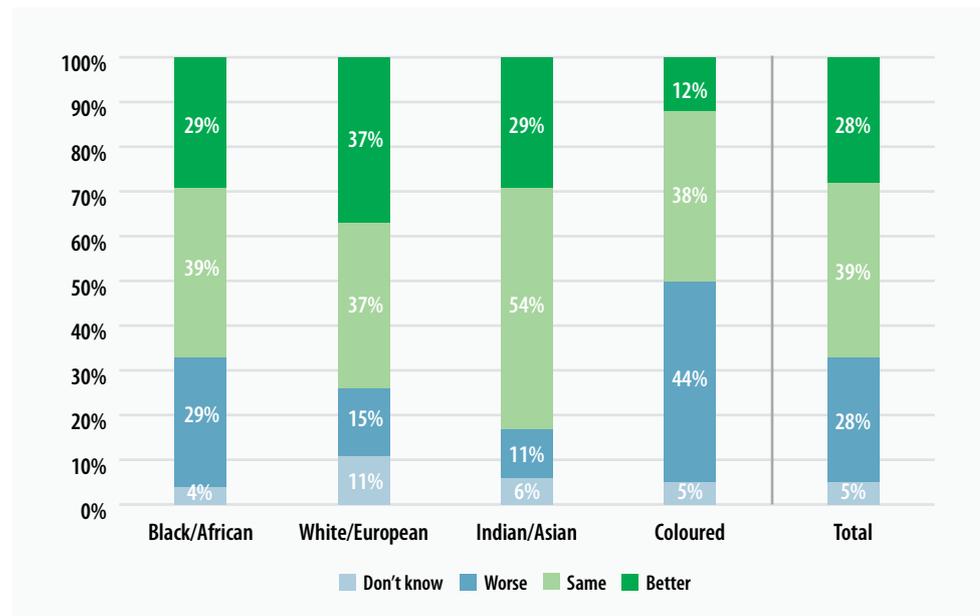


Table 3 shows the proportions of respondents who (i) regard their financial situation as ‘the same’ as that of their compatriots (as an indicator of equality) and (ii) who believe they have access to the resources necessary to achieve their goals (as an indicator of inclusion).<sup>34</sup> Figure 3 focuses specifically on the equality indicator, showcasing respondents’ perceptions of their relative standing in national distribution of economic welfare.

In terms of perceived relative standing, the greatest proportion of South Africans see their financial situation as ‘the same’ as that of their compatriots. When disaggregated by race, the finding that the majority of the group regards their financial situation as the same as other South Africans is consistent across black and Indian/Asian race groups. However, with 37 per cent of white South Africans also perceiving of themselves as ‘better’ or ‘much better’ off, this group has the highest percentage of respondents who see themselves as fitting into the top ends of the distribution. Conversely, 44 per cent of Coloured South Africans regard themselves as ‘worse’ or ‘much worse’ off than their compatriots, making them the grouping with highest proportion of respondents who perceive themselves as belonging to the lower end of the distribution.<sup>35</sup> Coloured respondents were also substantially less likely than other groups to ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that they had access to the financial resources, people, education and geographic/physical access to achieve their goals. White respondents were the most likely to agree that they have access to the resources required to achieve their goals.

Overall, the national averages for both indicators are close to 40 per cent, indicating that four out of ten respondents provided answers that are indicative of a cohesive society, within the theoretical framework of this paper. What is noteworthy is that there is substantially more variance across race groups for the inclusion indicator than for the equality indicator. Even though the composite

equality and inclusion indicator produces a lower-middle-range figure, some might still find it surprisingly high for one of the most unequal societies in the world.<sup>36</sup> This is attributable to the fact that the largest proportion of respondents perceive their financial situation to be approximately similar to that of other South Africans. This brings to the fore important questions about who respondents take as their reference group when thinking of ‘the rest of South Africa’, but these are questions that are not explored here.

## Trust (intra-group, inter-group and institutional)

### i. Indicator rationale

The second component concerns particularised trust amongst people within particular groups, generalised trust across different groupings, and trust in government institutions. Trust serves as important indicator of the glue that binds a society together, acting as the foundation of the relationships needed to overcome tensions and create an environment favourable to sustainable ties within a society. Trust functions as the basis for contractual agreements and cooperation within a society, lowering the ‘transaction costs’ for people in a society to make mutually advantageous and positive transactions (be these transactions emotional, social, political, or economic in nature). Trust in government institutions is relevant here due to the role these institutions play in shaping the economic and social relationships of members of a society. A lack of trust in the state may lead to increased frustration within a society, instability and violent protest – that is, symptoms of a society that lacks social cohesion.

*“Trust functions as the basis for contractual agreements and cooperation within a society”*

### ii. Indicator results

Table 4: Trust indicators				
Trust (%)				
	Horizontal (Bonds and bridges)		Vertical (State-society linkages)	Combined
	Intra-group	Inter-group	Institutional	
Black	24.1	5.5	44.6	29.7
White	29.3	6.8	31.7	24.9
Indian/Asian	16.3	4.0	32.8	21.4
Coloured	25.1	5.4	22.8	19.0
<b>South Africa</b>	<b>24.5</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>41.0</b>	<b>28.0</b>

For the survey questions used for the intra-group, inter-group and institutional trust indicators, see Table 2.

The Combined indicator is the arithmetic mean of the two sub-indicators Horizontal bonds and bridges and Vertical linkages.

Table 4 shows (i) the proportion of respondents who had ‘a lot’ of trust within and between groups (bonds and bridges), as well as the (ii) proportion of respondents who have ‘quite a lot’ or ‘a great deal’ of confidence in political institutions (linkages).<sup>37</sup>

*“for trust within and between groupings is particularly low, especially for trust in people or groupings that are regarded as distinctly ‘other’ than the group of the respondent”*

The indicators for trust within and between groupings is particularly low, especially for trust in people or groupings that are regarded as distinctly ‘other’ than the group of the respondent. To some extent, these low levels of trust indicated are the result of the answering options presented to questionnaire respondents, and the responses taken to indicate ‘socially cohesive’ for the purposes of this paper. For the trust in people and groups indicators, four answering options were provided for in the questionnaire: whether respondents trust the given category of person (i) ‘not at all’, (ii) ‘just a little’, (iii) ‘somewhat’, or (iv) ‘a lot’. Only ‘a lot’ of trust was taken as an indicator of social cohesion. The indicator of levels of trust might, however, have been higher if there was another answer category between ‘somewhat’ and ‘a lot’, if ‘somewhat’ was included as a positive measure for cohesion, or if the answering categories were phrased differently. Nonetheless, given the caveat of questionnaire framing, levels of trust in other people, especially those who are susceptible to being regarded as an ‘other’, remain low.

On average, fewer than one in four, or 25 per cent, of respondents trust relatives, neighbours or colleagues ‘a lot’. This figure is the lowest within the Indian/Asian grouping, where intra-group trust averages at 16.3 per cent. Particularised trust, as a measure of intra-group bonds, is therefore relatively low and points to a general lack of strong ties within groups. Inter-group trust, as the trust that respondents have in other language groups, races, and foreigners, is even lower, at just over 5 per cent. These low levels of trust are indicative of a society with very weak inter-group bridges. Overall, horizontal trust levels between people and groupings within South African society are very low.

Low levels of generalised social trust are not unique to South Africa, but are the global norm. Longitudinal results for social trust across the world from the World Values Survey (WVS) make it apparent that generalised trust between people is a rare phenomenon.<sup>38</sup> The WVS figure for generalised trust in South Africa is 24 per cent, comparable to the levels of intra-group trust reported in the 2015 SARB (and much higher than the levels of inter-group trust). However, levels of generalised trust<sup>39</sup> in South Africa actually compare relatively favourably to other ‘new democracies’<sup>40</sup> surveyed, ranking eighth out of 27 new democracies surveyed in waves five and six of the WVS.<sup>41</sup>

*“Low levels of generalised social trust are not unique to South Africa, but are the global norm.”*

Regarding trust in institutions, Holmberg et al.<sup>42</sup> highlight that it is a normative ideal that trust in institutions should be at a high level and reasonably evenly spread across diverse groupings. However, the partisan nature of political elections (and, by extension, the partisan composition of institutions like parliament, national government and local government) points towards the high likelihood of differences in institutional trust between groups of individuals with varying political affiliations. Supporters of the ruling party represented in political institutions can be expected to have higher trust in the legislature compared to citizens who voted for the opposition.

The national average levels of confidence in national and local government, parliament and the legal system in general<sup>43</sup> are at a relatively high level. South Africans also have a relatively high level of trust in institutions by global standards.<sup>44</sup> For example, in rounds five and six of the WVS, South Africa ranked fifth out of 27 ‘new democracies’ for trust in parliament (with 45 per cent of South Africans trusting parliament, higher than both the ‘new democracy’ average of 29 per cent and the ‘established democracy’ average of 40 per cent of citizens who trust parliament).

*“South Africans also have a relatively high level of trust in institutions by global standards”*

However, the relatively high national average can be attributed to relatively high levels of confidence that institutions enjoy among black respondents, as the largest group of respondents. Other racial groupings have substantially lower levels of confidence in the country’s political institutions, with the lowest levels of confidence amongst Coloured respondents (22.8 per cent). This divergence in levels of vertical/institutional trust between groupings is noteworthy and must be taken note of when interpreting the aggregate measure for vertical trust at the national level.

## Identity

### *i. Indicator rationale*

One’s sense of identity relates to one’s ascribing to certain norms and values that govern one’s behaviour.<sup>45</sup> Individuals who share an identity and its accompanying norms and values tend to abide by the same behavioural prescripts and, in that sense, view one another as ‘included’ in the identifiable group. This common identification facilitates cooperative interactions and social capital.<sup>46</sup> Of particular importance in a diverse South African society is the extent to which people adhere to a national identity in relation to their group identity. Tensions and conflict between groups are more likely when group identities are perceived to be more important than national ones.<sup>47</sup> The negative impact of strong group identities is compounded when distributional inequalities and exclusions from power and resources are perceived to align with these identities (referred to as horizontal inequalities).<sup>48</sup> Group identities and inequalities then reinforce a dynamic that is to the detriment of social cohesion. Conversely, if people put major emphasis on shared national identities, it indicates that they regard themselves as involved in a shared national project.

*“The negative impact of strong group identities is compounded when distributional inequalities and exclusions from power and resources are perceived to align with these identities (referred to as horizontal inequalities).”*

### *ii. Note on the shared identity indicator*

It is important to note, however, that identities, as structural concepts, are inherently exclusionary. Shared identities necessarily emphasise a level of behavioural conformity and distinguishing of in-group members from out-group members. Developing a common identity among citizens (like ‘South Africans’) can foster a greater sense of inclusion among the population, but inevitably requires differentiating one group from another (South Africans from non-South Africans, in this case).

Identities become problematic when they lead to exclusionary intra-group relations in conjunction with a lack of inter-group cohesion, what Manole<sup>49</sup> refers to as 'social insularity'. In this scenario, societal groupings become closed off to whomever they regard as 'the other' (be it another class, language, ethnicity, nationality, etc.). If it is the case that an abundance of intra-group cohesion is not accompanied by inter-group cohesion and shared unifying force (such as transcending identities and norms), isolated and exclusionary communities exist side by side. This does not inevitably have to result in conflict. However, the in-group–out-group dynamics that accompany it can at best be referred to as a negative form of social cohesion (within groups) that is detrimental to national-level social cohesion. Put more simply, Jenson argues:<sup>50</sup>

*Communities are not only 'bad' when they lack internal ties, when there is not sufficient interpersonal contact and caring. They may be very, very bad if they are exclusive and only inward looking. In this sense, cohesive communities can suffer from too much 'bonding'.*

At a national level, a socially cohesive South African society requires a central source of identification that is grounded in a tolerance of, and respect for, heterogeneity and diversity.<sup>51</sup> It cannot be founded on a common political identity based on a single common ethnicity, language, culture, or nationality. There can be no unitary ethno-cultural source of identification, where all aspects of the society are common to everyone, in a context as diverse and contested as the South African one.

For a society to have a sustainable primary source of identification, it must identify unifying norms and values (as opposed to ethno-cultural traits and characteristics) that undergird its collective identity. It must develop, as a central source of identification, a shared moral consciousness on universally agreed upon norms and values. This is often embodied in a kind of 'constitutional patriotism',<sup>52</sup> where central values (such as those potentially found in a national constitution) provide the foundational values on which a society should function and find its common identity. As Chipkin and Ngqulunga<sup>53</sup> argue in the case of South Africa:

*Social cohesion is to be achieved on the basis of common attachment to the ethical principles of the constitution ... by a shared commitment to the principles of diversity, equality and justice.*

A cohesive South African society requires both unity and diversity,<sup>54</sup> where shared values serve as the fundamental source of identification. Practically, this serves as a caveat to the identity measure in the index, as it cannot measure the extent to which a common identity is found in the shared values of the Constitution. However, the measure allows for strong group identities (diversity) to the extent that they are not primary or exclusionary to a national identity (unity).

*iii. Indicator results*

Table 5: Identity indicator	
	Identity (%)
Black	71.7
White	77.8
Indian/Asian	74.1
Coloured	82.2
<b>South Africa</b>	<b>73.4</b>

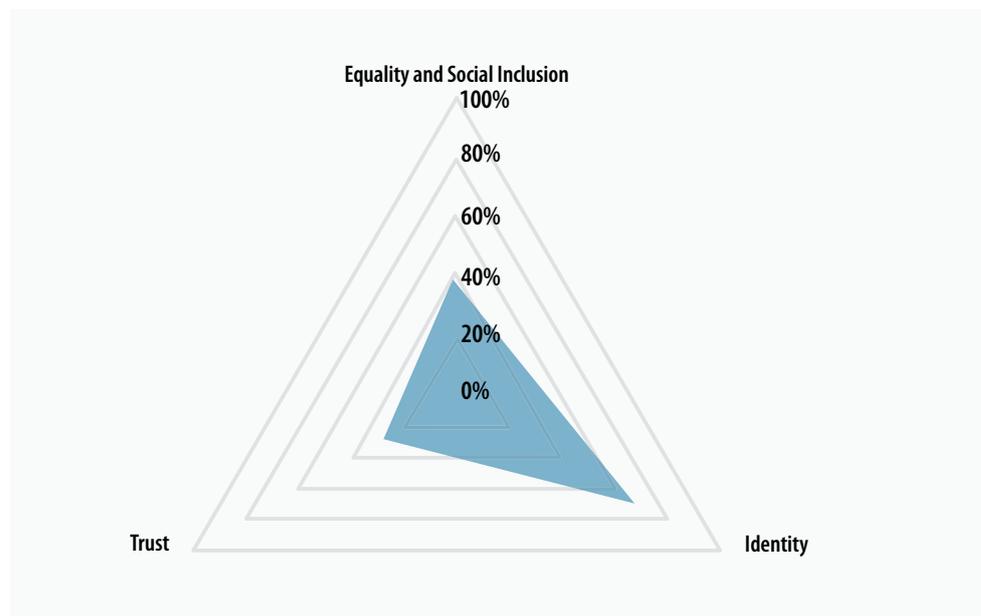
*For the survey questions used for the identity indicators, see Table 2.*

Table 5 indicates that a large majority of respondents ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ with questions inquiring the strength of their adherence to a South African identity.<sup>55</sup> Despite the increasing amount of public and academic critique of the nation-building project in post-1994 South Africa, the South African identity resonates strongly with respondents across all race groups. In light of the fact that Coloured respondents scored the lowest on all of the trust, equality and inclusion sub-indicators, it is interesting to note that, as a group, they have the strongest adherence to the South African national identity.

## 4. Aggregate indicators for national-level social cohesion

Two important considerations for a multidimensional indicator are (i) the number of sub-categories into which an indicator of the target concept is divided, and (ii) the weights attributed to the respective sub-categories. The approach here follows Langer et al. in delineating three aspects shared by prominent definitions in the existing policy analysis literature, and operationalising it into a composite measure based on the data source used. The concept of social cohesion is disaggregated into three constitutive dimensions – trust, identity and inequality – with the aggregated measure represented below in the form of a social cohesion triangle.

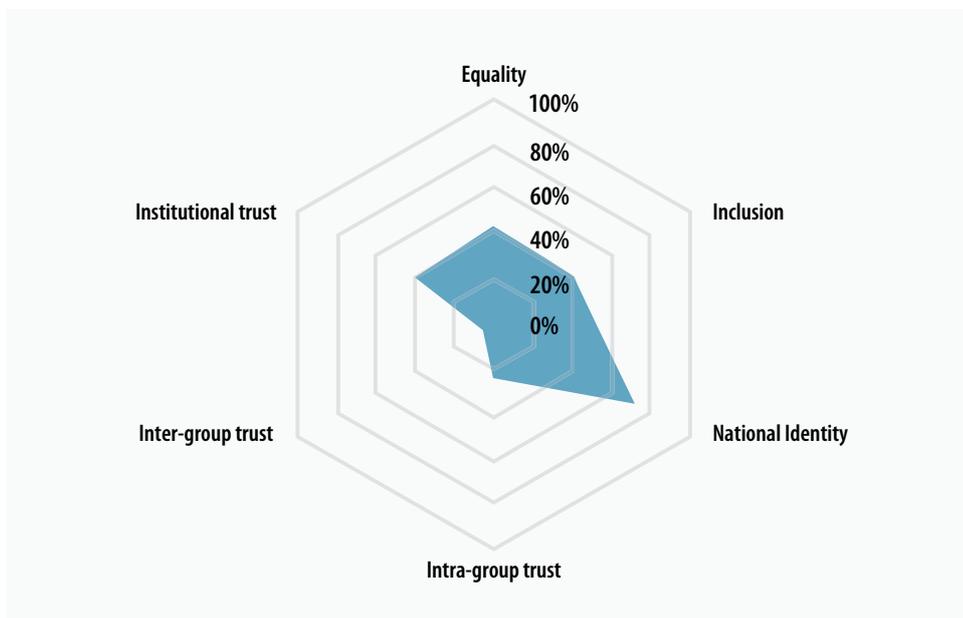
Figure 4: Social cohesion triangle for South Africa



The social cohesion triangle is a graphical way of representing and summarising the composite indicator. The greater the area of the triangle, the greater a society's level of social cohesion. The indicator represents the extent to which respondents provided answers to survey questions that indicate a presence of social cohesion (as circumscribed and classified in sections 2 and 3 above). However, limited value lies in comparing the three respective dimensions of the triangle per se, as these are, to a large extent, dependent on the framing of the survey questions and categorisation of what constitutes 'cohesive' responses. The greatest value of the social cohesion triangle indicator lies in comparing its movement over time, in relation to social phenomena and indicators thereof, and with regard to how the three sub-indicators change in relation to one another. For example, the usefulness of the indicator would lie in its ability to predict social unrest, stable political institutions and economic growth; or in highlighting potential relations between sub-indicators, such as between perceptions of inequality and levels of trust in institutions or other societal groupings.

Nevertheless, it is clear that South Africans, to a significant extent, share a common sense of national identity, whilst performing poorly in terms of exclusion and inequality indicators and scoring very low in trust indicators in particular. In the social cohesion triangle, the three sub-indicators are each attributed an equal weighting, as there is no empirical reason to assume that any one of them plays a more or less important role in the society's level of social cohesion. However, as the categorisation and weighting of sub-indicators is important, these must be open to change and reconfiguration from new insights and further research. A more refined indicator of South Africa's level of social cohesion is provided by Figure 4, which further sub-categorises indicators and distinguishes between perceived equality, inclusion, institutional trust, inter-group trust and intra-group trust sub-indicators, along with the original indicator of a shared national identity.

**Figure 5:** Disaggregated social cohesion indicator



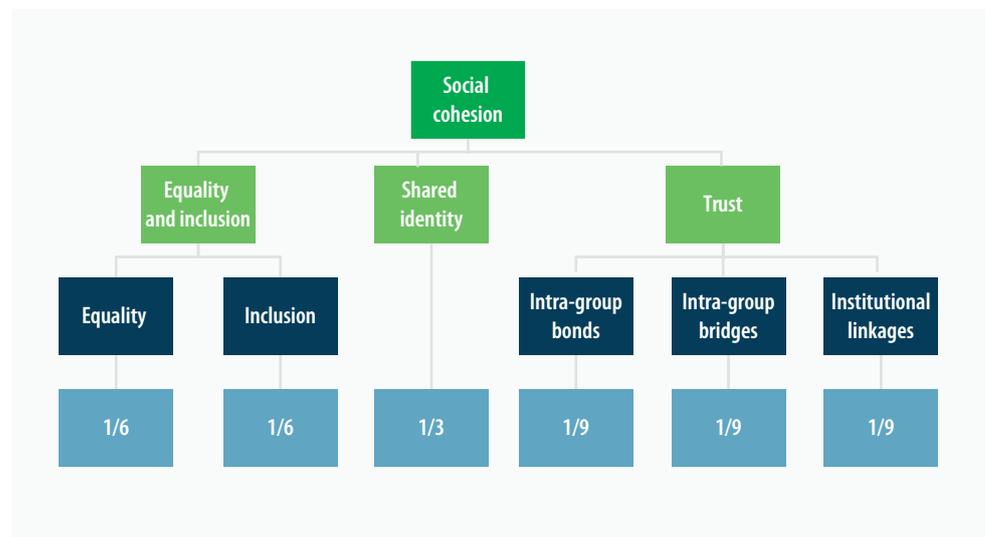
*“It is clear that South Africans, to a significant extent, share a common sense of national identity, whilst performing poorly in terms of exclusion and inequality indicators and scoring very low in trust indicators in particular.”*

Figure 5 illustrates the extent to which a lack of trust, and especially a lack of trust in those who can be perceived as ‘the other’ (other language, race, or nationality groups), undermines social cohesion. High levels of perceived economic inequality and a lack of access to financial resources, education, social capital and geographic/physical access to opportunity also contribute to an indicator that suggests low levels of social cohesion. Again, a strong sense of a shared national identity greatly contributes to the overall indicator of national social cohesion.

*“Distribution of social-cohesion-relevant sentiment is approximately similar across all racial groupings”*

Figures 4 and 5 only account for responses that indicate positive responses to questions indicative of social cohesion, omitting non-positive data that provide insight into the spread of responses that broadly range from very negative, negative, neutral, and positive to very positive. Figures 7 and 8 below capture the range of responses given to questions about social cohesion (trust, identity and inequality) by means of a reconstructed social cohesion index. The weight given to each sub-indicator’s contribution to the social cohesion index is indicated in Figure 6. This index captures, on a colour scale, the range of sentiments indicative of social cohesion,<sup>56</sup> ranging from darker blue on the left (i.e. respondents whose aggregated answers are the least indicative of a cohesive society) to darker green on the right (i.e. respondents whose aggregated answers are the most indicative of a cohesive society).

**Figure 6:** Variable contribution to aggregate Social Cohesion Index



Apart from again illustrating the arbitrariness of the delineation of categories on the scale from less to more cohesive, the reconstructed index highlights two important findings. First, the distribution of social-cohesion-relevant sentiment is approximately similar across all racial groupings. This suggests that aggregate indicators of social cohesion provide useful snapshots of overall national-level social cohesion, and that there are not vast disparities in aggregate sentiment between the different race groups.

Second, both Figures 7 and 8 highlight that the greatest proportion of respondents' sentiments are distributed in the middle-to-positive sections of the distribution of possible responses, with relatively few respondents' aggregate sentiment situated in the extremes, or tails, of the distribution. What the practical implications of changes in this distribution of sentiment would be for South African society would have to be the subject of further empirical investigation. However, it is likely that a small proportion of negative and very negative sentiment (light blue and darker blue) bodes well for societal stability and peace. Conversely, a small proportion of very positive (darker green) sentiment is likely to indicate a lack of a strong sense of national cohesion, inclusion and the foundational relations necessary to bring about durable political institutions, inclusive economic growth and a flourishing national society.

Figure 7: Social Cohesion Index by group

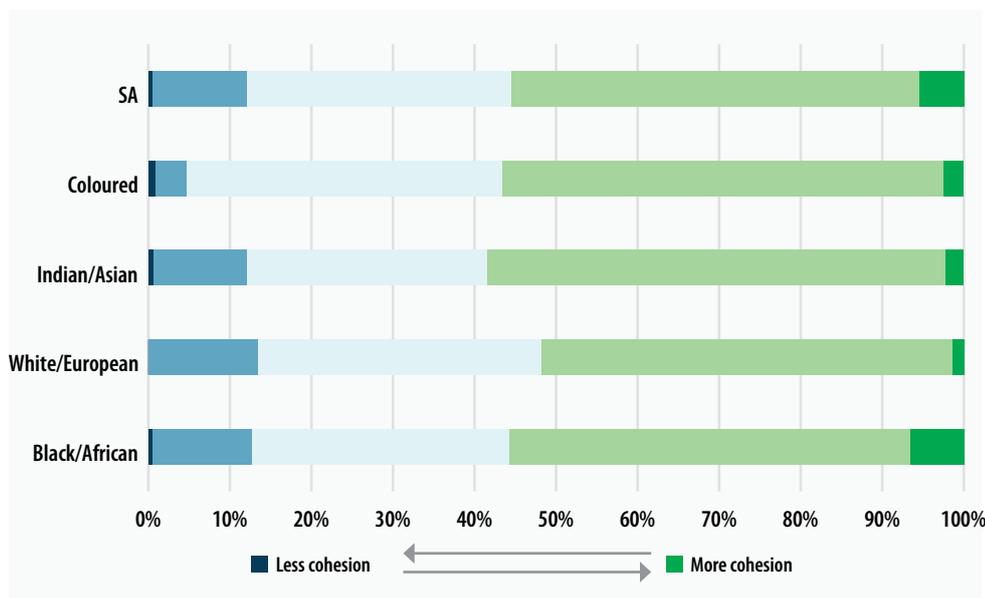
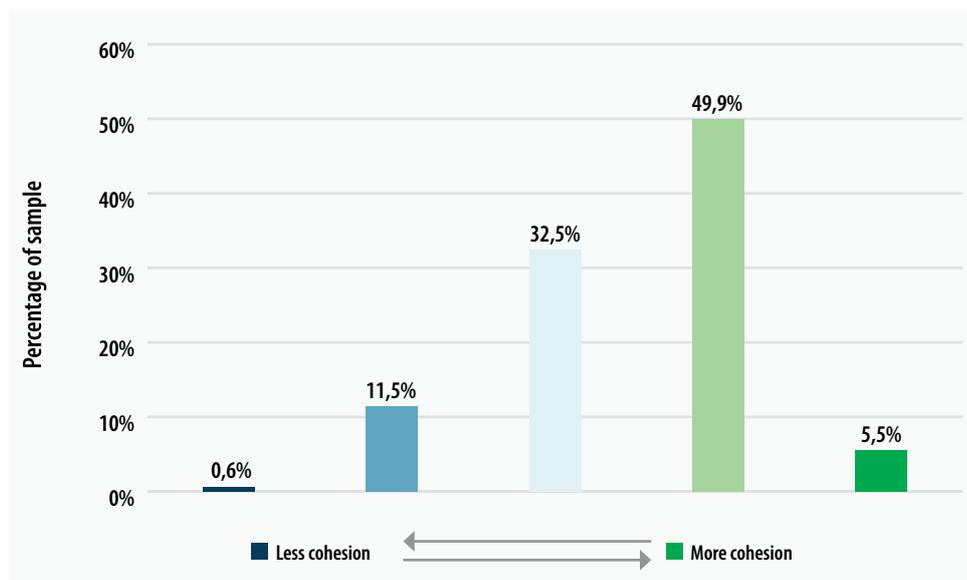


Figure 8: Social Cohesion Index distribution



## 5. Key insights and conclusions

This paper has conceptualised and operationalised a multi-dimensional national-level social cohesion measure for South Africa. The social cohesion indicator was reconstructed from the social cohesion index developed by Langer et al.,<sup>57</sup> identifying three constitutive components (equality/inclusion, trust and identity) and their respective measurements. The indicator is based on data from the 2015 round of the South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) survey.

At this stage, only tentative conclusions can be made from the extent to which the three sub-indicators provide insight into national-level cohesion. Nonetheless, certain patterns do emerge, and data differentiating by race groups are directly comparable. In line with the finding that the economic divide between rich and poor is the largest perceived cause of division in South African society,<sup>58</sup> the indicator shows low scores for economic inclusion and equality. There is some variation in responses across race groups. The sentiments of Coloured respondents stand out for perceiving of themselves as the worst off in the national distribution of economic welfare, as well as indicating the least access to resources and opportunities (that is, the grouping indicated the highest degree of exclusion). By contrast, white respondents had the greatest proportion per group of perceptions of being better off than their compatriots in terms of financial situation, whilst also indicating a substantially higher access to resources and opportunities (or inclusion). The equality and inclusion variable elicits the most variation between race groups of the three cohesion sub-indicators, an important consideration to keep in mind when interpreting the aggregate national level indicator of social cohesion.

The trust indicator highlights the extremely low levels of trust in South African society, especially inter-group trust. There is little variation between race groups for inter- and intra-group trust. There is a relatively high level of variation in trust in institutions, however. When compared with Coloured respondents, double the proportion of black respondents indicate confidence in political institutions. On aggregate, the trust indicator also bodes poorly for national cohesion.

The national-level measure produced for a shared South African identity is the most positive indicator for social cohesion of the three sub-indicators. It shows the high level of identification with the national identity across all race groups. Despite the increasing amount of public and academic critique towards the nation-building project in post-1994 South Africa, the South African identity resonates strongly with respondents across all race groups.

The indicator produced provides a measure by which to track social cohesion in relation to social, economic and political national developments over time. The measurement will also be useful in tracking potential relationships between the constitutive indicators (trust, identity, equality and inclusion) over time. Tracking these developments will highlight important policy considerations in national priority areas of reconciliation, nation-building, the capacity and quality of political institutions and governance, redistribution, inclusive growth and development, amongst others.

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56. Figures 7 and 8 only provide the distribution for a 69 per cent sample of the 2 219 respondents who provided answers to all the relevant questions on trust, identity, inequality and exclusion. The sample size is too small to make accurate inferences about smaller sub-groups (like white, coloured and Indian/Asian sub-groups) at the nationally representative level, but the disaggregation remains useful to indicate the similar distribution pattern of responses across racial-groups.
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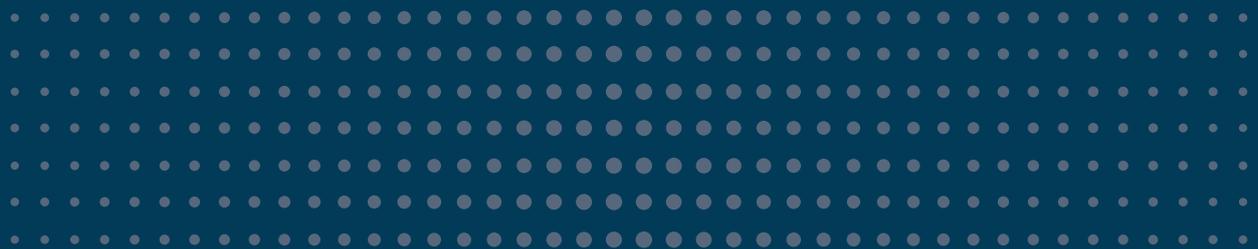
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The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) was launched in 2000 by officials who worked in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with the aim of ensuring that lessons learnt from South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy are taken into account and utilised in advancing the interests of national reconciliation across Africa. IJR works with partner organisations across Africa to promote reconciliation and socio-economic justice in countries emerging from conflict or undergoing democratic transition. IJR is based in Cape Town, South Africa. For more information, visit <http://www.ijr.org.za>, and for comments or enquiries contact [info@ijr.org.za](mailto:info@ijr.org.za).



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