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INSTITUT FRANÇAIS D'AFRIQUE DU SUD
IFAS

Five years into democracy

Elite and rank-and-file perspectives on South African
quality of life and the “Rainbow Nation”

Valerie MØLLER and Helga DICKOW

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Les Cahiers de l'IFAS réunissent des contributions occasionnelles de chercheurs et doctorants en sciences sociales travaillant sur l'Afrique du Sud et l'Afrique australe. Les numéros regroupent des articles de spécialistes de différentes disciplines en une même thématique.

Les Cahiers de l'IFAS are a collection of occasional papers by researchers and students of the social sciences in Southern Africa. Each issue groups articles by specialists in different disciplines under a common theme.

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Revised versions of papers presented at the Third Conference of the International Society for Quality of Life Studies, 20- 22 July 2000, Girona, Spain. The 2nd paper was presented with the title: Perceptions of quality of life in the new South Africa and subjective well-being: Report on surveys of elite and rank-and-file South Africans

Avant-Propos

Voici le premier numéro des *Cahiers de l'IFAS* que publie la section de recherche de l'Institut français d'Afrique du Sud dont l'initiative revient à Lydia Samarbakhsh-Liberge.

Il s'agit avec cette série nouvelle de compléter l'encart « Recherche » du *Newtown Zebra* et non de le supplanter. Le magazine de l'Institut continuera à donner un aperçu de l'éventail de nos programmes de recherche, des travaux que mènent les étudiants que nous accueillons et des manifestations que nous organisons ; et, grâce à sa rubrique « Calendrier », il continuera de fonctionner comme notre lettre périodique d'information.

Les *Cahiers* n'entendent pas plus se substituer aux publications auxquelles nos travaux peuvent donner lieu chez les éditeurs avec lesquels nous travaillons le plus régulièrement, Karthala pour la France et les travaux en langue française et Protea pour l'Afrique du Sud et les travaux en langue anglaise.

Il fallait cependant combler une lacune entre ces deux types de publication et aménager un canal par lequel, sous forme de documents de travail, des résultats de recherche puissent être rendus accessibles à un maximum de nos partenaires individuels et institutionnels.

Les *Cahiers* feront l'objet de deux ou trois numéros chaque année. Les articles publiés le seront dans leur langue d'origine. Si celle-ci est l'anglais, nous estimons que le public francophone s'intéressant aux sciences sociales en Afrique du Sud et en Afrique australe n'y verra pas d'obstacle majeur. En revanche, s'il s'agit du français, nos partenaires anglophones y auront plus difficilement accès et c'est la raison pour laquelle nous privilégierons, mais sans exclusive, des parutions en anglais.

Les thèmes traités résulteront des travaux menés à l'Institut par nos membres, nos partenaires et nos associés : études doctorales ou recherches sur programmes, comptes rendus de colloques ou acquis d'ateliers, etc. Notre objectif, dans tous les cas, sera d'assurer la meilleure diffusion possible aux connaissances accumulées sur l'Afrique australe et nous comptons sur nos lecteurs pour faire bon accueil à cette publication, assurer sa promotion et contribuer à son contenu.

Georges Hérault,
Directeur scientifique

Foreword

This is the first issue of the *Cahiers de l'IFAS* initiated by Lydia Samarbakhsh-Liberge and published by the Research Section of the French Institute of South Africa.

This new series is meant to complement rather than replace the Research Supplement of the *Newtown Zebra* magazine that will continue to give a general idea of our research programmes, as well as the research work of students operating within IFAS, and the events we organise. Thanks to the "Calendar" of the supplement, the magazine will continue to function as a regular newsletter.

Furthermore, the *Cahiers* are not meant to act as a substitute for the publications resulting from our works and that involve the regular collaboration of two publishers, i.e. Karthala (France) for research work written in French, and Protea (South Africa) for research work written in English.

However, it was necessary to fill the gap between these two types of publications and to create a medium through which, in working document form, our individual and institutional partners could access research findings.

The *Cahiers* will come out two or three times per year and articles will be published in the language in which they were written. If the language concerned is English, we consider that the Francophone readership taking an interest in the South and Southern African Social Sciences will have no major difficulty in accessing these publications. However, if the language concerned is French, we feel that our Anglophone partners might find it more difficult to overcome the language barrier, and that is why we shall favour English publications, but not to the exclusion of French publications altogether.

The various studies undertaken by members, partners and associates of the Institute will provide the themes for the publications, whether doctoral studies, programme research, conference reports or workshop conclusions, among others. Our objective will be, at any rate, to ensure that knowledge accumulated on Southern Africa is disseminated in the best possible way, and we are counting on our readers to give a warm welcome to this new publication, as well as to promote it and make contributions to its content.

Georges Hérault
Director of Research

Five years into democracy

Elite and rank-and-file perspectives on South African quality of life and the “Rainbow Nation”

Introduction

In 1994, South Africans entered the new democratic era in anticipation and expectation of many changes in their lives - for better or worse. Five years on, 1999 presented itself as the benchmark year in which to reflect on the achievements of South Africa's new democracy and the challenges which still lie ahead.

The Quality of Life Trends study, initiated as a longitudinal project in the early 1980's, has observed social changes in South Africa over two decades. The project documented the state of euphoria in the nation after the 1994 elections and the quick return to sobriety the following year. In the latter half of the 1990's, the project pursued two main thrusts of inquiry which correspond to the topics discussed in the twin papers in this volume.

The first thrust focuses on the concerns of ordinary South Africans that impact on their expressed well-being. How do aspirations to lead a better life under the new dispensation differ from those held in the past? In 1997 the Quality of Life Trends project inquired into what would make South Africans happier than they were at the moment. The common denominator concerned 'bread and butter' issues to boost material standards of living and the state of the economy. The first paper in this volume picks up this thread of inquiry and asks how much progress has been achieved in securing the material underpinnings of the democracy and safeguarding its future.

The second thrust of inquiry looks at the new image projected by South Africans since democracy. The Mandela era promoted the idea of a winning nation to instil a sense of pride and confidence in the 'rainbow nation' that had achieved a peaceful negotiated settlement. In 1996 the Quality of Life Trends project explored the possible links between attitudes towards the rainbow nation, feelings of national pride, and perceptions of well-being. The second paper in this volume picks up the latest trends.

Introduction

Both lines of inquiry - into social indicators of perceived changes in society and the fate of the 'rainbow nation' - were addressed simultaneously in the latest round of research on quality of life trends. The research was carried out in two phases in the course of 1999. A small but balanced panel of opinion leaders was first consulted on its view of the direction in which South Africa was moving since 1994 elections. Later in the year a representative sample of ordinary South Africans was interviewed in a nation-wide attitude survey to elicit popular views. The results of the panel discussion informed the design of the sample survey.

The papers in this volume were first presented in two different tracks ('assessing quality of life and living conditions to guide national policy' and 'happiness, life satisfaction and subjective well-being') at the Third Conference of the International Society for Quality of Life Studies, 20-22 July 2000, Girona, Spain. Taken together the papers report in full on the 1999 round of research for the Quality of Life Trends project, the last before the new millennium.

Perceptions of changing quality of life in South Africa

Valerie MØLLER and Helga DICKOW

Abstract

The South African Quality of Life Project has tracked subjective well-being, life satisfaction and happiness, since the early eighties at the national level. In most democratic countries around the globe, the average citizen says he or she is satisfied with life in general. In South Africa this is not the case. Since the early 1980s, the trend study shows up disparities between one sector of the South African population that is satisfied with life in general and various aspects of life and another sector that is very dissatisfied. Generally, the better-off report higher levels of satisfaction and happiness than the worse-off.

The most plausible explanation for the South African quality of life constellation is the huge gap in living standards between rich and poor; a legacy of the apartheid era, which discriminated against blacks and to a lesser extent against Indian and coloured people. Euphoria following on the first democratic elections in April 1994, which registered equally high aggregate levels of happiness and life satisfaction among all sectors of the population, was short-lived. Under democracy, expectations “for a better life for all”, the election slogans for the 1994 and 1999 general elections, has risen. South Africa has one of the most enlightened constitutions, which guarantees basic human rights and supports advancement of the previously disadvantaged. As long as South Africans perceive barriers to accessing the material rewards of democracy, they do not see justice has been done.

Since 1994, government programmes and policies have been devised to address the problem of poverty and inequality in South African society. The latest round of research for the South African Quality of Life Trends Project probes popular assessments of the policies and programmes aimed at improving the quality of life of ordinary South Africans. Interviews with a panel of 25 opinion leaders in the run-up to the June 1999 general elections were followed by a nationally representative opinion survey in October 1999. The paper outlines the role of social indicators in monitoring quality of life

in South Africa and reports findings from the elite and rank-and-file surveys. Generally, the winners and losers in the new political dispensation see changes from a different perspective. The disadvantaged are more likely to have seen material gains and recommend increased delivery of services and opportunities for social mobility. The advantaged, who have mainly experienced non-material or no gains since 1994, are more likely to be pessimistic about the future. It is concluded that the groundswell of optimism will sustain the majority of South Africans who are still dissatisfied with life until their dreams of the good life are fulfilled.

INTRODUCTION

Social indicators serve many different purposes. They provide descriptive information on society, are used for setting goals for society, for monitoring or tracking outcomes to inform policy, to hold agencies accountable for improving outcomes, and to evaluate whether programmes are efficient and effective (Brown & Corbett, 1998 cited in Sinet 61/62, 2000: 6).

Descriptive statistics were a contentious issue in South Africa under apartheid. National accounts excluded the bantustans, the so-called independent and self-governing homelands, of the apartheid era and thus distorted the overall picture. Alternative accounting systems were developed in myriad fashion by independent agents, such as the development bank, marketing and media, and academic institutions, to gain more accurate population estimates. There was great demand for the poverty datum lines developed by academics that were updated on a regular basis. Drawing on all these sources of social indicators, the South African Institute of Race Relations published a regular handbook to inform the general public on political and economic developments and living conditions throughout the country, the equivalent of a social report for general public consumption.

Efforts to central South Africa's social accounts began on the eve of the first non-racial general elections held in April 1994. The so-called poverty study, officially called the *Living Standards and Development Survey*, funded by the World Bank and co-ordinated by the University of Cape Town, brought together a wide range of interested parties in academia, government, politics and non-governmental organisations throughout the country to resolve the problem of fragmented statistics. The survey instrument went through over 13

drafts in consultation with bodies countrywide. The results from the survey of 9000 households provided the first baseline statistics on living conditions throughout South Africa for the first democratically elected government in waiting (Saldru, 1994; RDP, 1995). The poverty study provided the model for wide consultation with users in the public and private sectors regarding methods and contents.

Thereafter the Central Statistical Service, later renamed Statistics South Africa, took over the task of updating statistics on living conditions through the annual Household Survey and the 1996 census which included many questions on access to infrastructure and household services. The Household Survey was to become the major source of “performance indicators” for government departments to monitor service delivery in terms of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (Møller, 1995).

A second study of poverty commissioned by the new government, also funded by the World Bank, followed on the first 1993 poverty study. This study, designed to complement the earlier study, was qualitative in nature and used case studies and participatory methods to elicit popular experience and views on poverty. A synthesis report on poverty and inequality drawing on the two studies was produced in 1998 (May, 1998 a, b)

Since 1994, Statistics South Africa has gained credibility for producing sound statistics. Public debate on statistics, such as the unemployment rate and the population count, has become the order of the day. Statistics South Africa has transformed its operations to develop capacity within its own ranks and among users of statistics. It has received generous expert and financial assistance from statistics offices in the Scandinavian countries, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, among others, to fine-tune its methods and add to its repertoire. For example, Statistics South Africa has conducted its first national time-use study aimed at providing more information on women's work and informal sector activities. However, constant upgrading of methods, staff turnover, and changing reference groups among users, combined with financial constraints has also created problems of continuity. Thus some statistics are not available in time series or are not strictly comparable.

The sophisticated and expensive software used to produce instant access to South African census data comes at a cost. Users in academia and government departments, many of whom have been involved in data collection and related

tasks, are not prepared to pay for what they consider to be a free public service. It is probable that many local authorities have never made use of the census data available for their jurisdiction. Currently, too few South African users make full use of the statistical data available for further scientific and policy analysis. It was estimated that perhaps less than one dozen academics had conducted further analysis on the data sets from the quantitative poverty study of 1993. The same may apply to the datasets produced by Statistics South Africa since 1994. One problem is that users are reluctant to pay for the privilege of analysing data, which was formerly issued free or at cost.

Statistics South Africa has adopted a new image based on the 4 R's of relevance (to policy making for growth and development), reliability (in producing timely and accurate statistics), responsiveness (to the statistical needs of users), and representativeness (in staffing and advisory committees). It has sought to package social indicators in “user-friendly” descriptive reports based on the Household Survey to inform the general public. The descriptive report on *Living in South Africa* (CSS, 1996) was followed by a similar report on Gauteng Province (Orkin, 1997), which is the country's centre of commerce and industry, but the series lapsed thereafter.

Although successive governments have projected a good quality of life for the population as an overall goal, there have been few systematic attempts to monitor quality of life and these have tended to rely on objective indicators. The new government has set great store by “key performance indicators” of the objective variety as tools for goal-setting and monitoring activities of government departments. Thus, the government departments involved in public works programmes and land redistribution have commissioned evaluation research under the “quality of life” heading to report on the achievements of their human resource development activities in terms of efficiency and effectiveness (e.g. Department of Land Affairs, 1999). A more controversial application of social indicators arises from pressure put on private sector employers to keep staff records with prescribed racial tags. Racial quotas are used to indicate social transformation and the adoption of affirmative action and equal opportunity policies in the workplace.

Since 1994, commercial and not-for-profit organisations which attract overseas donor funding have been in the forefront of opinion polling and the collection of subjective indicators to document attitudes and opinions during South Africa's transition to democracy. Examples include the Opinion '99

project by the Institute of Democratic Alternatives in Cape Town which tracked voter choice and knowledge in the run-up to the second national elections in mid-1999 (Mattes, Taylor & Africa, 1999). The Reality Check survey (MacGregor, 1999) was initiated by a consortium of media agencies to monitor the mood and pace of attitude change in the new democracy.

For the most part, South Africa follows the tradition of data collection by means of cross-sectional studies. High geographic mobility argues against panel studies. A notable exception is a university-driven follow-up study of the 1993 poverty survey in KwaZulu-Natal, which contacted the original households some years later (May, Carter, Haddad & Maluccio, 2000). With few exceptions, Statistics South Africa only collects hard facts. Statistics South Africa's Household Survey and its forerunner, the 1993 poverty study, monitor improvements in living conditions and access to services and employment in line with the government's election promises of 1994 and 1999 using only objective indicators. A notable exception are the two or three items on perceptions of improvements and deterioration of community safety and household living conditions, which tellingly fall under the heading of "quality of life" indicators.

The South African Quality of Life Trends Study

The Quality of Life Trends project which commenced in the early eighties can be seen as an effort to complement South Africa's hard indicator tradition with systematic studies of trends in life satisfaction, happiness and more recently expectations of future life satisfaction or optimism. The study was launched by a consortium of Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), a state-sponsored research organisation, and university scholars with HSRC funding (Møller & Schlemmer, 1983). The project continues to operate under the auspices of the Institute of Social and Economic Research at Rhodes University. The study uses cross-sectional national surveys to generate its database. Since 1994, attempts have been made to add depth to the study and thus gain a better understanding of the dynamics underlying perceptions of changing quality of life. This has been achieved by adding items on topical issues that may influence overall life satisfaction and domain satisfactions during the transition to democracy (see Møller, Dickow & Harris, 1999).

This paper reports on the descriptive results of the September 1999 update for the Quality of Life Trends project. The 1999 survey inquired into life satisfaction, happiness and projected future life satisfaction in five year's time. Respondents were also asked to review the last five years in terms of positive and negative outcomes and to make policy recommendations to ensure a better quality of life for South Africans in future.

Method

The October 1999 update for the South African Quality of Life Trends Project was commissioned to MarkData, Johannesburg. A nation-wide panel of 25 opinion leaders was interviewed personally in February and June 1999 to inform the study. The panel included persons from all race groups and representatives from across the political and institutional spectrum including education, health, the media, the church, national/provincial and local government, politics, labour, commercial agriculture, mining, business, small business development and training, safety and security, research, and non-governmental organisations. Some panellists drew on their experience of serving in different institutions. The interviews with elites were unstructured. Panellists were initially asked to describe the current situation in the country. The discussion then moved on to achievements and shortcomings of the new democracy, personal experience of change over the past five years and the manner in which government policies and programmes had impacted on the lives of ordinary South Africans. The results from the round of interviews with elites were used to shape survey items, which were placed with a national syndicated study. Questions put to sample survey respondents included 11 items on subjective well-being, national pride and related issues, and perceptions of progress in uplifting quality of life. This paper reports on select findings on subjective well-being, personal gratifications and disappointments, and views on important policies to uplift quality of life in the general population.

MarkData's October 1999 syndicated survey used a multiple stage cluster probability sample design to select 2219 South African residents of 16 years and older in metropolitan, urban and rural areas countrywide. The fieldwork was carried out between 23 September and 8 October 1999. Personal interviews were conducted by trained interviewers in the respondents' homes in their language of choice. The items on subjective well-being, satisfaction

with life-as-a-whole and happiness, were identical to ones used in earlier studies. Responses were recorded on five-point scales with response categories ranging from very satisfied/happy to very dissatisfied/happy with a neutral mid-point. The optimism item read:

“How do you think things will be for people like yourself in five years' time? Taking all things together will things be better, worse or about the same as today?”

Responses were recorded on a five-point scale, similar to that used for life satisfaction and happiness, which ranged from “much better” to “much worse” over a neutral mid-point “much the same”. All other items were closed. Response categories were read out to respondents who chose one option. Results presented are rounded percentages weighted to population size. Columns do not always add to 100% due to rounding.

Results

In the first section, we report on select results of the preliminary discussion with elites. Results are grouped under the headings: current situation in the country, perceptions of personal change and disappointments, policies for improved quality of life and challenges for the future. In the second section, we shall report results on broadly corresponding items in the sample survey.

PART I: RESULTS ON THE ELITE SURVEY

Elites on the current situation

Five years after the first non-racial general elections many of the elites still marvelled at the South African “miracle”. Admittedly they had not expected their country to become a democracy before the turn of the century:

“To have reached a settlement in the way we did was amazing for this country”.

The transformation had gone far more smoothly than anticipated. The changes were dramatic. From an international perspective South Africa had become a different country. A country, which “was starving economically from isolation” under apartheid, was now part of the global economy with its sight

Elites on the current situation

set on achieving “relative autonomy from the dominant north” according to a panellist on the left of the political spectrum. The timing had been such that the liberation movement was more independent than “if the Russian bear were still dominating the world scene” according to a more conservative panellist.

The power-sharing arrangements and the sunset clauses had provided a bridgehead to democracy. The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had assisted South Africans to confront the past and build trust for the future. A number of panellists observed a major transformation of attitudes, which in their view signalled a process of “normalisation”. Slowly South Africans were looking at how issues affected the country as a whole “rather than whites and blacks”. A hopeful sign in a historically deeply divided society was that “today people criticise government not because they are white or black but because government is not performing.”

President Mandela had succeeded in forging a broad national identity. One member of the panel, an Afrikaner himself, was astonished by the goodwill extended to fellow Afrikaners (“There's a great appreciation and understanding that they were willing to give up power”). South African society had opened up and many black people had moved into positions of power and responsibility. There was visible “deracialisation” of the elite. Many panellists saw the emergence of a black “middle class”. “I think we are going to develop a class rather than a race-based society”, was the viewpoint of a black panellist. Opportunities for ordinary people had broadened so that “people dare dream, they dare to think they can do things” according to a provincial government spokesperson.

The very fact that Mandela had taken a principled decision not to extend his presidency beyond the first term set a useful precedence for the rest of Africa:

“Typically in Africa, people want to hang on. Luckily, in this country, they don't”.

Although the new African National Congress government was inexperienced, it had learnt market-related lessons fast and proved itself capable of governing. South Africa had a new constitution and a “liberal democratic framework” which created opportunities for creative solutions. The government had respected constitutional court decisions. Although there had been less investment than expected, a macro-economic policy was in place,

which made South Africa an acceptable partner to the western world. Panellists across the political spectrum admired the government for its openness to new ideas and willingness to reconsider policy options.

The new government was praised for its good housekeeping. The economy had been managed responsibly if not imaginatively.

“They really haven't done a bad job in delivering the kinds of improvements in services and facilities that were expected by the poorest people that is the ANC's constituency.”

On balance, elites agreed that South Africa had achieved a lot in its first five years of democracy. In the words of one panellist:

“We've come a long way. We have a framework established. We have the structures and plans. The new government has to focus on delivery now. Now is the time to build.”

Elites on economic transformation

While some elites cited economic stability and modest economic growth as a major achievement for South Africa's new democracy and praised the government for its restraint in not succumbing to populist demands, others chided the new government for not addressing the urgent needs of the poor. The challenge was not to disappoint big business as well as the grassroots to “ensure that people don't say apartheid was better”.

On the eve of the elections, the ANC government in waiting had announced the highly idealistic and ambitious Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (ANC, 1994). Two years later it introduced the GEAR (Growth, Employment and Reconstruction) as its new macro-economic policy. To a business leader the most “comforting thing” was South Africa's adoption of a “proper” macro-economic policy. Other panellists agreed that GEAR gave the right signals to potential investors and put the RDP in perspective:

“GEAR put on the table the political instrument which gave important indicators to investors”.

“The better you apply the GEAR policy, the better the delivery”.

Elites on perceptions of change at the personal level

In the words of a former parliamentarian:

“We have moved from what appeared to be a fairly solid socialist line with nationalisation of the mines on the agenda towards a Thatcher approach as far as the economy is concerned.”

A historian on the panel wondered how the black elite had come to terms with the somersault they had been forced to make.

A business leader aptly described GEAR as South Africa's self-imposed structural adjustment programme. Predictably panellists sympathetic to ANC's alliance partners in the South African Communist Party and labour were dismissive of GEAR. In their view, GEAR had slowed down social delivery and caused hardship. The dilemma was that “if you're too conservative, you don't deliver. If you're too populist you don't attend to the economic problems”. A panellist on the right commented that GEAR had virtually been “crapped because COSATU (the ANC's trade union alliance partner) reacted so violently”.

A number of elites noted that most prescriptions of GEAR remained incomplete in terms of implementation. GEAR's growth targets of 4-6% had never been reached and jobs had been shed rather than created since 1994. Nevertheless, a spokesperson for commercial agriculture speculated that if South Africa were to grow at 6% per annum for five to ten years, it could solve its unemployment problem (the official unemployment rate is 25% in 2000 according to the strict definition that excludes discouraged workseekers).

“In GEAR at least the priorities are right. But the pressures to deliver are great”.

Elites on perceptions of change at the personal level

Elites were asked how South Africa's transition had affected them personally. As most had belonged to a privileged group even under apartheid, very few had seen dramatic material changes in their lives:

“Psychologically, it changed my quality of life but there weren't a lot of physical changes”.

The very act of voting had been “an emotional affair” according to a first-time voter. “My wife just cried”, he recalled. According to a white panellist, standing in the queue among fellow voters on April 27 1994 had been “an utterly indescribable feeling”. He had experienced an immense sense of relief that he could be proud of South Africa once again. For an ANC parliamentarian, one of the most significant changes was to be free to visit people's homes “whether they be black, coloured or Indian or white” and not to have her home raided at 5 o'clock in the morning by security police. A “coloured” bishop remembered that under apartheid “I would celebrate mass in the cathedral. Once out of the door, some people would hardly acknowledge me afterwards!”. Now both he and his congregation felt more at ease when interacting socially. Generally, panellists noted a more relaxed atmosphere among South Africans. There was now more “openness”, “transparency”, and a “tendency towards friendliness”.

Many panellists, both black and white, marvelled in their newfound freedom of movement:

“You can move around freely”.

A lawyer and political activist on the panel remarked that he had never visited a game park in his youth¹. Now he was excited by the change in the “political geography”. He enjoyed the “widening cultural space” and “multiracial intermingling”. For an educationist “having the vote and the right to live where I want made you feel like a human being with certain rights and you can make certain demands”. Several elites with strong anti-apartheid sentiments stated they were now motivated to assist with government projects and make inputs into government's decision making. This could be done “without hang-ups, with no conscience problems and without fear of contradiction”. “There's real space to initiate very creative developments in our society.”

Elites on policies to promote better quality of life

Elites were asked which government policies and programmes had had the most impact on the quality of life of ordinary South Africans since 1994. Three major themes emerged: the rapid succession of policies and programmes, large differences in service delivery, lack of conceptual clarity and vision, and problems of sustainability of services.

Programmes

The new government's macro-economic policy, GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution) adopted in 1996, was excluded from this discussion:

“GEAR was not about quality of life but about putting the books in order”.

However, according to other panellists, GEAR did put government plans for improving the quality of life in perspective. As one interviewee explained: GEAR was the “supply” side, RDP the “demand” side. Or in the words of a business leader:

“Once GEAR was on the table, everyone knew what was meant by RDP, this is social delivery”.

It was generally agreed that government had been too eager to follow through the RDP manifesto. The election promises of a million houses, and jobs and services for all, had been overambitious. Programmes had been launched with too little thought given to implementation. The new government lacked the ability to prioritise. An example was the housing programme that sought to speed up housing construction while at the same time seeking to empower often inexperienced local contractors. The quick succession of ill-conceived programmes and policies had confused the public and slowed down delivery.

“Five-year plans don't catch on with the people because they are not dim-witted. No one really understood what RDP was about. Masakhane never took off.”

“They've all gone under. The government is coming up with too many political theories, which don't work in reality. They've got into the trap of 'policy, policy, policy' without the ability to translate them... You can't fault the government on policy.”

“They are trying to do too many things at the same time.”

With reference to campaigns to combat crime in the Western Cape, one respondent observed that the public had grown weary of a quick succession of high-flown plans:

“Every year we coin a new phrase... This Good Hope plan. This is the fourth plan we've had. It's made no difference to the lives of people on the ground. So by the time they come up with a fairly good plan, people aren't going to listen any more.”

The Masakhane campaign was singled out as the perfect example of a failed campaign launched too quickly (“Ordinary people don't know the meaning of Masakhane”). The intention was to empower people at local government to take responsibility for community services. Practically, this involved reversing the practice of non-payment for services, which had been adopted as a very successful strategy to make the black townships ungovernable under apartheid. Panellists noted that old habits die hard:

“It takes at least two generations to turn a negative strategy into a positive one... That revolutionary culture which marvellously succeeded in making the old system unmanageable still persisted after '94. I don't see it disappearing”.

“The ideas misfired. Masakhane was based on the wrong notion of quid pro quo social contract.”

Report cards

According to a political analyst, the ANC government really had done a fair job in “delivering the kinds of improvements in services and facilities that were expected by the poorest people... on roughly the kind of scale they promised in terms of the RDP manifesto. Within tight budgets they've achieved maximum spread effect.” Many respondents gave ratings on service delivery and to the various ministers in charge. The approximate rank order started with water, then electricity, housing, health, transport and roads, and lastly education.

Unanimously, water was given top marks, followed by electricity (“made a difference in people's lives”). Delivery of housing was initially slow but had speeded up. With some 750 000 houses built or under construction in 1999, housing delivery had almost reached the RDP target of a million new homes by the year 2000. Health received mixed reviews. Some emphasised the improvement of basic health services delivered to poorer and remote rural areas while others noted that the general standard of health services had plummeted. Many of the newly erected rural clinics were not operating due to shortages of personnel and equipment. The government's AIDS education

Elites on policies to promote better quality of life

programme had been “ham-fisted in every way”. Transport and roads had improved in some areas and deteriorated in others. It was generally agreed that the new education policy was a disaster. Like many other ANC policies, it sounded attractive in conception but was extremely difficult in execution and demanded a larger resource base than was available. Generally the track record for education was poor. South Africa was now spending more on each child than before but the returns had been less rewarding. There was little to show for improved expenditure on black pupils (one fifth of the national budget is now spent on education). Lower proportions of black pupils were achieving school-leaving certificates than in the 1980s.

Some panellists cited the popular viewpoint that the most visible services delivered on a large scale, such as electricity and telecommunications, had already started before the ANC government came into power and were driven by private enterprise:

“Electricity is Eskom: they delivered electricity. The state can only claim delivering water.”

Many panellists remarked that since 1994 services had been downgraded in an attempt to bring services to everyone. This was most evident in the area of health where the emphasis on primary health care had cut the budgets of major hospitals including teaching hospitals. Education had suffered from overzealous transformation, which had allowed experienced teachers to take retirement packages. The unmotivated and inexperienced teachers left behind were not coping with the curriculum reform.

Water delivery was singled out as a success story. Not one panellist thought otherwise. In contrast to other policies, which lacked imagination, the Minister of Water Affairs could “intellectualise the problem” and “make business plans work”. Moreover, the minister was a good communicator who kept the public constantly informed of policy and progress.

“The only element that moved quickly.”

“In water we've connected 3 million more people.”

“In so short a time. It's a tremendous achievement!”

“Done a good job: One of the few departments where, I think, there's been no corruption.”

Education delivery was cited as the “worst example of transformation”. Only one panellist pointed out that “lots more kids are going to school”. Others described education as “an appalling mess” or a failed attempt at overambitious transformation.

“Teachers don't teach, children don't learn.”

“Again, they've imported high-flown theories. What's the use of theories in schools without desks? They're using the school kids as guinea pigs in the transition.”

“They should teach basic skills rather than change the curriculum.”

“The basic problem is that these kids can't read or write. That is what they have to tackle first... Things can be done more simply than outcomes-based education.”

However, as one panellist noted, it was “not too late to backtrack” on the 1999 education policy. With remarkable foresight, one panellist, as an aside, remarked that if the minister of water affairs had been in charge of education, “we might have said it's easy to get education.” Under the Mbeki government, Kadar Asmal, the former Minister of Water Affairs, has been assigned the education portfolio. He has energetically tackled education problems and reviewed the overambitious curriculum change.

According to mainly panellists on the left, affirmative action and equal opportunities policies had had the more significant impact than the delivery of infrastructure and housing. Their argument was that households would only be able to sustain a higher level of living if their incomes improved. Labour market reforms, which opened up the way for redistribution of income, were very important. A spokesperson for white miners had a different viewpoint: affirmative action policy was a major problem for members of his constituency. It had sowed the seeds of pessimism and despondency.

“People feel side-lined, lost out, alienated.”

Nevertheless, according to an Afrikaans business leader, the policy had unlocked entrepreneurship among young Afrikaners and weaned them off government jobs. Along similar lines, one panellist observed that whites had made a mistake by not openly conceding at the negotiation table that apartheid had been an affirmative action programme for the white minority and specifically for Afrikaners. To show their goodwill, whites should have

offered to pay an additional 1 or 2 percent tax as a gesture of reconciliation². In the opinion of a social policy researcher, affirmative action had been successful in that the elite was now racially mixed. It had contributed to black empowerment. However, affirmative action was an elite programme, which would only benefit a “handful”. A political scientist disagreed that affirmative action had acted as a catalyst for speeding up the movement of blacks into managerial positions which was happening in any case.

Finally, the impact of land reform on quality of life was considered only by few panellists but ones on both political poles. It was agreed that land restitution had proceeded very slowly and was far behind target. An unintended consequence of new legislation to protect farm workers was that many farm workers had been displaced and had moved to urban centres to swell the shantytowns. A spokesperson for commercial agriculture regretted the emphasis on restoring land to subsistence farmers rather than on developing black commercial farmers³.

Sustainability

Several panellists on the left and the right raised the issue of sustainability. Not enough attention had been given to outcomes when embarking on ambitious development plans:

“What impacts on people in the street is often the unintended consequences that were really not taken into account.”

A spokesperson for the mining industry noted that mass telecommunications was not a viable long-term proposition:

“They are putting in four phones and taking out three.”

It was noted that social indicators were widely used to set goals for service delivery in terms of the RDP manifesto. Ministers of departments spiked their speeches with statistics on numbers of houses and clinics built, and numbers of water and electricity connections. One panellist declared that he had tired of performance indicators and this “achievement talk” (“Personally, I'm a bit weary of the so-called achievements”). Some panellists were critical of the “numbers game” which emphasised quantity over quality services. They dismissively referred to the new matchbox houses (32 to 40 square metre

core) as “hokkie” [shacks] and “dog kennels which pass as houses”. The tight budgets dictated by GEAR had made a mockery of the RDP:

“Really you are adding insult to injury”.

A political analyst noted that the emphasis in the first five years under ANC rule had been on quantity rather than quality of service delivery. The first stage of putting in facilities and services was relatively simple to organise. The second stage of reconstructing and reorganising the landscape and sustaining these services would be more difficult. Crime and job creation were examples. Many of the new programmes lacked imagination and sound conceptual thinking. Housing construction had not been accompanied by a vision of post-apartheid town planning.

“Turning those matchboxes into a community which will be happy, takes much more.”

Another discussant argued that bringing electricity to people living in shanties and shacks was “damn patronising” and even misleading:

“Once you give people electricity, it means they are never going to have houses.”

Noteworthy was the new government's firm belief in indicators:

“There is still this belief, certainly among government, that if you have identified the target, five million jobs by 2004, that you have solved the problem. Whereas, how you can create the jobs is not very clear.”

Elites on different perceptions among South Africans and optimism

Without prompting, a number of panellists spoke of different perceptions among rank-and-file and better-off South Africans and the different racial groups, whites and blacks in particular. As the agricultural economist on the panel remarked:

“We all came face to face with the new reality: the blacks with the economy; the whites with political reality.”

The reality was that the pie had to be split in many more small slices under the new dispensation than formerly when the lion's share went to service the needs of the white minority. Most panellists were of the opinion that in spite of modest economic growth, the majority of South Africans were not better off than before:

“On the whole life has got a little bit better for most people and it might get better in future though not among whites.”

Service delivery had made a difference to some sectors of society that had had no services previously. Depending if you had been advantaged or disadvantaged under the former political dispensation, your viewpoint would be worlds apart. As two panellists put it:

“If you speak to people that never had anything they will say there is progress. If you speak to people that have had it nice, they will tell you there's been no progress.”

“For whites, health has gone to the dogs, from a black perspective basic medical care is now more available.”

Some panellists hinted that perceptions of change were coloured by relative deprivation and reference standards. Apartheid had conditioned people into seeing their situation in terms of a race hierarchy, which is evident in South Africa's objective social indicators. A Cape Town panellist mused:

“The previous government did a helluva good job on us. They got us to believe in terms of the way they funded and did things, that you get white, then Indian, then you get coloured, and African is right at the bottom. So in coloured people's minds in the Western Cape they are better than African people are.”

A media spokesperson on the panel assured the researchers that change was tangible in the black townships:

“I grew up in Umlazi. I spent 30 years there. Not once did I see an ambulance. Now you see ambulances, fire engines. There are traffic lights. Before it had one set of traffic lights in J Section. You see policemen patrolling, not just when there's been a stabbing. The station has been renovated. The Mangosuthu highway is now a dual carriageway. About one million people live there. For me these are real changes. Obviously there are bigger things,... macro-economic strategies, but people are not really interested in them.”

Panellists saw optimism for the future as an important factor determining the outcome of South Africa's transition to democracy. In one panellist's viewpoint it was a "religious" optimism fired by the notion that things will continue to be better. Under apartheid when there was no hope of getting a house people felt despair. The success of the Ministry of Water Affairs was to make people to believe they were part of "a moving queue". To be part of such a queue, no matter how slowly it moved, was a psychological advantage. A labour researcher felt it was not so much service delivery but the new-found dignity and self-respect brought about by the removal of racist legislation that had promoted a sense of "enhanced expectation of the future":

"That there is progress and you are part of it. We're not just looking forward to throwing government out, but looking forward to development, almost personal development."

The majority of whites still felt disempowered in the opinion of a white panellist. They could not quite come to grips with their loss of influence, which led to a sulky attitude. "It's almost a childish response". Many whites did not appreciate that they lived in a totally different society. Their mindset had not changed significantly since the early nineties. "They need to become part of the solution", was the opinion of a black community development worker.

Two panellists remarked that the 1999 election was still an election of liberation. Only in 2004 would South Africans vote according to interests rather than along racial lines. As a coloured respondent noted: "ethnicity is still very much with us." A number of panellists foresaw that after Mandela's departure racial tensions would re-emerge. A theologian on the panel predicted that as the euphoria of the rainbow nation dies, so the old polarisations would reassert themselves. The debate was really about the extent to which whites were prepared to live in an overwhelmingly black society in which the majority expressed itself in all structures of the country. Another white panellist remarked that living in South Africa was a long-term relationship. It was a difficult time for whites but "you've got to take it".

On the other hand, it was pointed out by a number of panellists that ethnic diversity was also a source of strength. Ethnicity introduced checks and balances in South African society. For example, the historian on the panel explained that the Afrikaners, who considered themselves to be a separate

ethnic group, had the leverage to make demands on government. If concessions were granted to Afrikaners, they would have to be extended to other groupings. This situation created a solid foundation for civil society, one that was more favourable for a democratic dispensation than in other African countries.

Elites on personal disappointments

The panellists were asked about their personal disappointments concerning developments in society since 1994. Only one panellist rationalised that he was not disappointed as many developments could have been foreseen. According to others, the most obvious shortcomings of contemporary South African society were crime and corruption.

“Crime: that's everybody's big issue.”

“I didn't think it was going to be a bed of roses but I didn't expect the levels of crime and corruption.”

“Crime and personal insecurity are spiralling out of control. People here are on edge.”

Economic policy was a disappointment to panellists across the political spectrum for different reasons. Panellists on the left chided government for not developing economic policy that was endorsed by its membership. On the centre and right, issues such as lack of economic growth, high interest rates and the lack of direct foreign investment was a major disappointment. Other disappointments directly related to economic policy included the manner in which the government had failed to address the issue of high unemployment, job losses, and inequality and poverty.

Policies around delivery of services and their implementation, along the lines discussed earlier, were identified as disappointments by a substantial number of panellists. The downgrading of education coupled with overambitious attempts to reform education were singled out as a major disappointment under the policy heading.

Representatives of civil society were concerned that civil society organisations were becoming weaker and losing their independence as much of their funding was channeled through government in post-apartheid era.

Members of minority groups on the panel complained that, contrary to initial expectations, minority constituencies were not being empowered and minority values were not recognised. The insensitive manner in which affirmative action policy had been implemented had disappointed minority groups.

Elites on remaining problems and future challenges for South African society

In the course of the interview many of the elites enumerated the major problems which faced South Africa's fledgling democracy and the challenges for the president-elect, Thabo Mbeki. Problems included many of the issues named as disappointments, namely economic issues such as growth, job creation, and skills development and education to enable South Africans to compete in the global market. Crime and corruption featured on most lists of negative facets of post-apartheid society. In discussing policy to improve quality of life, the elites made it quite clear that Mbeki would be expected to speed up delivery of infrastructure and services to meet the rising expectations of his supporters. Other major challenges for the new government included the integration of the police and security forces, the distribution of power between central and provincial government (some non-ANC panellists feared increasing centralisation if the ANC achieved a two thirds majority in the June 1999 elections), and the transformation of the civil service and virtually every sector of society. Other major challenges for the next government included job creation ("I think we'd be a winning nation if there were jobs"), and the AIDS epidemic which had not been adequately addressed. A church leader thought AIDS would be the decisive factor determining how South Africa would develop.

Select excerpt from the interviews below indicated that most panellists saw many of South Africa's problems as ones typically associated with the transition to democracy in other countries but with uniquely South African overtones. Moreover, South African problems were intimately intertwined with racial tensions, identity issues and mindsets determined by the country's history. For example, crime and corruption and the failure to make the Masakhane campaign a success were attributed to the prevailing morality, or lack of it, in contemporary South African society. What one panellist referred to as signs of the "normalisation process", the opening of previously closed borders, exposure to western materialism, and raised expectations of the good

life following the demise of the old order, all played an important role in shaping the mindset of emergent youthful entrepreneurs. The new mindset clashed with the old mindset of the opposition party, epitomised by the Democratic Party, which was to gain many seats in the 1999 national elections in response to its “fight back” campaign. Due to space reasons this section focuses only problems related to crime and corruption, aspects of affirmative action, and changing mindsets and morality in the new South Africa.

Crime

A black journalist spoke for others on the panel when he claimed that “the country has not got a handle on crime.” “Crime and violence has got out of hand”, echoed a university lecturer. The journalist remarked that in reaction to high levels of crime, 90% of the population wanted the death penalty back after the ANC government had abolished it. However, he was not sure that crime levels had risen as dramatically as popularly thought.

“I don't accept that there is more crime than before.... I grew up in a violent society. People used to stab each other and it was no big deal. You wouldn't hear about it.”

The ANC parliamentarian who thought crime could partly be attributed to widespread poverty, also held responsible the disintegration of families through forced removals and the migrant labour system:

“Families were torn apart for so long. We are a very damaged society.”

A Democratic Party politician asked why the crime rate was so high among contemporary youth.

“In the old days, the youth had something that gave them a personality. They were against the government and they were part of the movement against the government. Now they *are* the government. That inspiration has gone so they are turning to crime”.

Elites repeated what is popular wisdom among South Africans, that high levels of crime are linked to unemployment and poverty.

“When you have got employment, I think you automatically reduce the crime rate because people won't steal when they have got jobs.”

The crime issue had become a bone of contention between government and opposition, which accused the ANC of ignoring spiralling crime in white suburbs and farm murders. Crime deterred foreign investment, which in turn slowed down the growth needed to create jobs.

A safety and security spokesperson gave an overview which summarises many of the crime issues raised by other panellists:

“Crime and security questions are in the three top places of people's concerns along with education and job opportunities. Crime is of great concern to the rich, poor, black and white, because it affects all sectors of the population with the same severity. Whether you live in a shack or a suburb, crime has devastating consequences and undermines the quality of life and increases misery... To some extent, it is due to the fact that we are a typical country in transition where state structures changed overnight. Police are under totally new control. Borders suddenly opened... There is access by tourists, legal and illegal... South Africa has become a key transit point for narcotics... We've also had a significant internal growth of organised criminal activities... It is only during the last 18 months that... crime has started to stabilise at very high levels. At levels which are still alarming as far as the public is concerned. ... If the economy does not improve and job creation is not successful then the higher level of crime will remain and there is always the risk that it may go higher if the poor become poorer and the rich become richer.”

Like other elites in the survey, the safety and security spokesperson was of the opinion that crime had not been given sufficient priority. The transformation of the police force was a major problem in combating crime.

“We have had a police force in '94 which was an arm of the state used to oppressing political opponents through rough tactics. Now, to change those very same police officers, black and white, is a very, very complex task. Police transformation itself has been a problem. To shift a mindset from reactionary to proactive policing, from oppressive conduct to a human rights code of conduct, is a tall order.”

In an aside, a researcher for labour captured the complex South African crime problem in a nutshell:

“You have a situation where you can't put people in jail when you've caught them. There's a huge number of people who are desperate to try to steal because they have no other option. And you have a role model, which says you

can get rich quicker. So all three things converge with such intensity and of course the gender issue: People worship the hystor, he's a hero."

Ironically, South Africa's progressive constitution and the ongoing restructuring of the judicial system, which had created a backlog of court cases, has not helped to curb crime. A number of panellists blamed South Africa's new human rights code of protecting criminals rather than victims⁴.

"We introduced human rights far too fast to the extent that the criminals are using the human rights more than the people who should have been using it. They worked round the legal system."

"Democracy can be misinterpreted, particularly in the area of crime and criminal justice. When prisoners start to exercise their rights over obligations, then justice is obstructed."

"They get arrested and released even before the person is dead. Prisoners have more rights than victims."

Corruption

Corruption issues were usually mentioned in the same breath as crime. The background causes were seen to be quite similar. A spokesperson from the Eastern Cape, a province that had experienced major problems amalgamating two former homeland administrations into a single provincial administration, attributed some corruption to mismanagement on a massive scale in local and provincial government. The implementation of affirmative action, which "put people in place who actually know nothing about the way highly complex civil services run" had contributed to corruption and mismanagement. Other panellists noted that corruption had always been a part of South African society but the transparency of the new system had made corruption more visible. Transformation of South African society had contributed to corruption, as had what some panellists called the lure of the "yuppie-BMW" syndrome, "buppie" syndrome for short. What amazed many former anti-apartheid activists among panellists was how quickly many of their former comrades had made the switch from upholding idealism to becoming slaves to materialism.

"I'm told it happens all over the world but I am nonetheless staggered at the speed with which it has happened here. That people have succumbed to a quite different morality."

Affirmative action

In a 1993 survey of South African elites, it was found that elites across the political spectrum, with exception of the most conservative elites, accepted that it would be necessary to implement affirmative action measures to transform the civil service. There was less agreement on the need for affirmative action in the private sector (Kotzé, 1993). Reviewing trends from opinion polls conducted in 1996 and 2000, Johnson (2000) notes that popular opinion now tends to support appointment on merit in all sectors of the population. However, the overall trend conceals that with the introduction of employment equity laws there has also been a softening of opinion among formerly hostile groups who have learned to live with a degree of affirmative action.

In 1999, our panel of elites generally saw the need for affirmative action as self-evident. “The playing fields need to be levelled because otherwise nothing will change. Or it will take so long we'll have a sort of revolution on our hands”. The discussion now focussed more on the implementation of affirmative action which had been heavy-handed in some instances with many senior civil servants, experienced and motivated teachers in particular, being given expensive retirement packages. The resulting skills vacuum had had disastrous consequences in some areas especially in education. Some civil servants had had to be brought back as consultants (“inexperience is eating into government budgets; we spend too much on consultants”). A representative for white miners on the panel who supported affirmative action policy “because it is part of the country's constitution” spoke firsthand of the demoralising effect it had had on members of his constituency who are mainly white Afrikaners:

“They see no future so they take packages.”

Mindsets and morality

Most panellists were over forty years of age and some very much older. A black panellist who had spent his youth in opposition to the then government spoke of “post-struggle exhaustion” among his contemporaries in the movement. Among whites, a former opposition politician noted that many of his outspoken colleagues had now “pulled back into securer positions in business or in a profession, not to be heard of again.” They felt their role in

the struggle had not been recognised. Although the Democratic Party was an effective opposition party, it was playing the opposition role with a pre-'94 mindset. Democratic Party leaders had been very vocal in drawing attention to corruption and pointing out failures before they were too late to amend. However, they had not accepted that they were living in a totally different society with different power structures and different influences. The coloured community was thought to be in “a bit of a vacuum at the moment. It's not quite sure where they fit in.” According to a coloured participant on the panel, there had been a lot of conditioning of people over the years to think in compartmentalised ways, “the expectation is you think like a coloured because you live in a coloured area”. Democracy and its responsibilities were new for coloured people. The Afrikaners were described as “deeply traumatised” and “saddened that their culture was at risk” according to an ANC spokesperson. There was mention of a general alienation among those who felt “too isolated”, or that they were “not getting a fair slice of the taxpayer cake.”

The historian/politician on the panel attributed political intolerance and opportunism to the dashing of high expectations that things were going to change dramatically when the new government came into power. Many panellists referred to the legacy of the anti-apartheid struggle in shaping mindsets in contemporary society. The lack of respect for authority spawned in the anti-apartheid movement continued in disrespect for the courts of law, jail breaking, and police killings. The lack of experience of new civil servants coupled with a poor work ethic (“people do very little but expect a lot”), and the “culture of entitlement” was holding back productivity in South African society and the distribution of services to the poor. One panellist asked what had happened to the committed core of South Africa on whom you could rely to make the society work.

A black development worker despaired about the loss of values in the new South Africa:

“I was hoping reconstruction would go as far as bringing back those values. But not this entitlement for young kids to rape, to kill anybody.”

The archbishop on the panel wistfully questioned how you developed policy for a revitalised South African morality:

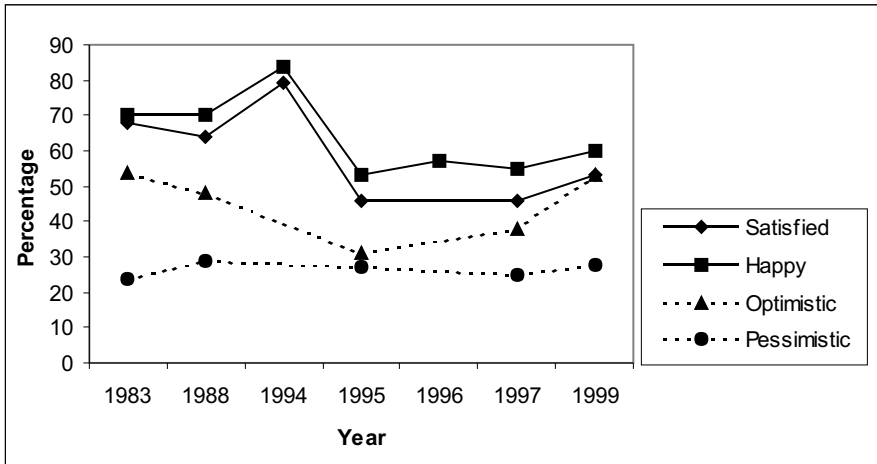
“The greatest vision is hope.. that goodness can actually triumph. How do you encapsulate that in a policy?”

PART II: RESULTS FROM THE SAMPLE SURVEY

In this section, we first give a graphic overview of trends in South African subjective well-being over time by way of background. We then present findings from the October 1999 national survey on life satisfaction, happiness, and expectations for the future. In correspondence to the broad themes explored in the elite study, we review perceptions of positive changes and disappointments, the rationale underlying these evaluations, and lastly, recommendations for future policy options. Results are broken down by race, levels of income, life satisfaction and optimism.

Trends in South African well-being

Graph 1.
South African subjective well-being indicators.



Graph 1 shows trends in happiness, satisfaction and expectations for the future over time. During the strife-torn eighties dissatisfaction rose in 1998. Subjective well-being peaked in the aftermath of the first non-racial elections of 1994 only to drop the following year. Levels are rising again slowly. Noteworthy is that optimism is rising faster than current satisfaction.

Table 1 shows satisfaction and happiness for the current survey for the four race groups and two income groups. Satisfaction with life-as-a-whole and happiness conform to the pattern observed ever since the first measures were

taken in the early eighties. On objective measures of living conditions and subjective measures of well-being and domain satisfaction, whites score highest on positive indicators and blacks score lowest. Coloureds and Indians score somewhere in between. In contrast, current satisfaction and happiness are negatively correlated with optimism. Blacks are most optimistic for the future and whites the most pessimistic. Better-off South Africans are more satisfied than poorer South Africans.

Table 1.
Subjective well-being

	South African	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Rich²	Poor
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Satisfied with life	53	47	58	65	81	60	46
Happy	60	57	66	70	75	67	53
Optimistic¹	53	56	51	50	37	56	52
Pessimistic	28	27	26	31	88	26	28
Weighted n	2219	1658	202	63	296	923	1067

¹Expect life to be better/worse in five years' time.

²Richer/poorer South Africans: Gross monthly household income above or below R580

Winners and losers

What factors have increased the quality of life of ordinary citizens since 1994? As discussed earlier, the new government's service delivery record is by no means negligible (Nedlac, 2000). Between 1994 and 1999, more than 3 million South Africans have gained access to clean water, 2 million people have been provided with electricity, some 750 000 houses have been built or are under construction, and nearly 600 primary health clinics have been erected.

Among the seven options presented to respondents in the October 1999 survey, four dominate in the responses (see Table 2): “RDP” factors, that is, infrastructure and service delivery in the areas of *housing* and *electricity*, greater *freedom of movement*, and a *new mindset*.

Access to basic and improved services such as housing, electricity, health care, education, and water, taken together, account for some 58% of responses. The survey confirms that access to electricity has had a major impact on South Africans' lives in the past five years. Surprisingly, access to water receives few votes. The provision of clean water to rural households was regarded as one of the most successful and popular campaigns to meet 1994 election promises by the opinion leaders in the elite survey. As respondents in the October 1999 survey could only cast a single vote, it is possible that basic needs were crowded out by the non-material and less tangible gains of the past five years.

For a substantial group of South Africans the greatest change in their lives since 1994 has been greater freedom of movement and an improved self image, and confidence when interacting with fellow citizens. No doubt increased freedom is also related to greater choice in all aspects of life.

Only 5% endorse better job prospects in the new South Africa, which reflects the objective economic situation in the country. Just under one fifth state they have not experienced a change for the better in their lives since 1994. Pessimists, who have a negative view of the future, are more likely than others not to have seen any positive changes in their lives since 1994.

Men tend to stress the advantages of freedom of movement. Women and satisfied South Africans are more likely to report better access to health care. Perceptions of a gain in freedom of movement cuts across the racial and income divide. Electricity has made a difference mainly in the lives of poorer South African households. White and Indian South Africans are most likely to state that the major change in their lives is non-material, such as a change in their projection of self which has positively affected interpersonal relations in society. Although numbers are small, twice as many optimists than pessimists (6% versus 3%) have experienced better job prospects.

Table 2.
Experience of positive change since 1994.

Many South Africans say they have experienced real changes for the better in their lives since 1994. For example, some South Africans say they now have access to housing, water, electricity, education, health care, and jobs. Other South Africans say they have greater freedom of movement or feel better in themselves and with others. What is the most important change you have felt in your life in the past five years?

	SA	Race ¹				Richer/ Poorer		Satisfied/ Dissatisfied		Optimist/ Pessimist	
		A %	C %	I %	W %	R %	P %	S %	D %	O %	P %
Housing	16	20	13	2	3	18	16	16	17	17	16
Electricity	16	20	7	2	0	11	20	14	18	16	15
Free to move	13	13	20	18	6	14	12	11	15	15	12
Health care	11	11	21	8	3	11	11	13	8	10	10
Education	9	11	5	5	4	10	9	10	9	9	9
Jobs, jobs prospects	5	6	3	5	2	5	5	5	6	6	3
Feel better in self	6	4	8	21	15	6	6	8	4	6	5
Water	6	7	3		0	5	6	4	8	6	5
Other	1	0	1	2	2	0	0	1	1	1	1
No change	18	8	21	40	65	21	13	20	15	14	24
Weighted n	2219	1658	202	63	296	923	1067	1179	973	1163	623

¹ A African, C Coloured, I Indian, W White

Perhaps the most striking finding is that between eight and nine out of ten black and poor South Africans name a positive change in their lives in the past five years while two out of three white South Africans do not. Objective and subjective indicators of quality of life are still racially polarised five years into democracy. Race is still a defining factor influencing attitudes as revealed in the 1998 Reality Check survey (MacGregor, 1999:26).

Consumerism and quality of life gains

Water and electricity were the election promises that captured the imagination of the nation in 1994. However, their fulfilment appears not to have affected happiness gains among the poor. In fact, dissatisfaction and unhappiness remain above average among respondents who named access to water as the major change in their lives. Rapid adjustments to changing life styles along with rising expectations of what constitutes a decent life style may have intervened. Class differences appear to be the main explanation for perceptions of change.

The South African living standards measure divides the population in eight groups, according to urbanisation and consumption patterns using some twenty indicators. Bigger consumers were consistently more satisfied and happier than smaller consumers. Among “rural have-nots” who enjoy the lowest living standards, some 41% indicated life satisfaction and 45% happiness compared with 80% satisfied and 79% happy among the “progressive affluents” with the highest living standards.

As the elites predicted, perceptions of substantive gains are linked to occupational rank and living standards. The bottom occupational rank in society cites mainly access to water as the major change in its life since 1994. The ranks of the semi-skilled and skilled and the intermediate living standards categories (4-6) mention predominantly health care, education, housing and jobs, in approximately that order. The most affluent consumers and the highest occupational ranks refer mainly to non-material gains or no positive changes in their lives.

Worth noting is that housing is the most frequently mentioned change in the “emerging market” consumer category rather than among poorer categories. While electricity appears to be the major gain since 1994 for rural dwellers, better access to housing is the major gain for urban blacks who may already have access to modern conveniences such as electricity, flush toilets, insurance, banking services and credit cards.

There are signs that consumption has become an important reference standard against which poorer South Africans assess their living circumstances. Among black South Africans, dissatisfaction and unhappiness are definitely associated with consumerism. While it is the most affluent among all South

Africans who tend to see no changes in their lives since 1994, it is the socially excluded among Africans. The most popular consumer goods in South African society include a television, refrigerator, and a music centre along with electricity to operate these amenities. In the total sample, 79% have access to electricity, 68% own a television set, 60% a fridge and 58% a music centre. Black consumption lags somewhat behind; the corresponding percentages are access to electricity (73%), television (58%), fridge (47%), and music centre (50%). It appears that perceptions of social exclusion hinge on access to popular consumer goods, which in turn influence overall evaluations of life. Mainly black South Africans who do not have access to electricity, television, fridge and a music centre see no positive change in their lives.

To sum up, the main contrast in quality of life gains appears to be between perceptions of improved material conditions and ego integrity. Poorer South Africans who gained their freedom in 1994 emphasise RDP factors and service delivery while richer South Africans, mainly whites, stress relief in shedding pariah status and being citizens of a country which is once again integrated into world society.

Perceptions of no change in society since 1994 are concentrated among better-off South Africans and might be interpreted as a sign of disillusionment or disappointment with the new dispensation. More worrying is that a substantial proportion of poorer South Africans, some 13%, say they have no changes. Among blacks who say they have seen no change dissatisfaction and unhappiness is significantly above average: 58% dissatisfied versus 50% average and 52% unhappy versus 38% average.

Disappointed South Africans

What are South Africans' greatest disappointments in the democratic era? Two issues stand out: crime, corruption and nepotism, on the one hand, and unemployment, on the other (see Table 3). Poorer South Africans are disappointed that their hopes for jobs and infrastructure have not materialised.

Mainly richer South Africans tend to feel disappointed that the new elite has been quick to trade their idealism for greed. Unemployment is the primary disappointment of black South Africans followed closely by crime. Among white, Indian and coloured South Africans crime disappoints more than job

scarcity. Dissatisfied South Africans voice their feelings of social exclusion and thwarted expectations as indicated in above-average endorsement of the responses of “unemployment”, “slow delivery of services and infrastructure” and “lack of concern by the newly rich for the situation of the poor”. Satisfieds and optimists are among the few who volunteer that they have experienced no disappointments.

Table 3.
Disappointments with the new South Africa.

Some South Africans say that they have been disappointed by new developments which have occurred in society since 1994.

For example, they say they are disappointed with the increase in corruption and nepotism, crime, joblessness and retrenchments, deterioration in race relations, and lack of concern among the new rich for the majority who are still poor.

Others say they are disappointed that the delivery of services has been slower than expected.

What has been your greatest disappointment with developments in South African society since 1994?

	SA	Race					Richer/ Poorer	Satisfied/ Dissatisfied		Optimist/ Pessimist	
	%	A	C	I	W	R	P	S	D	O	P
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Crime	39	33	47	55	61	40	35	44	31	38	38
Unemployment	37	43	30	26	11	36	40	31	46	37	38
Corruption/nepotism	11	9	9	11	20	12	10	11	10	11	11
Service delivery	5	5	4		3	4	6	4	5	4	5
New rich	4	5	3	2	2	4	5	3	5	4	4
Race relations/issues	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	2
No disappointments	2	2	3	2	0	3	1	3	1	3	0
Other, don't know	1	1	5	4	2	1	1	2	0	2	1

The best way forward

Some 56 % of black and 52% of poorer South Africans are optimistic about their personal future. What are their recommendations for realising their own and South Africa's potential?

Table 4

The way forward: How to improve future quality of life

In your opinion, which of the following government policies and programmes will contribute most to improving the quality of life of South Africans in the longer term?

1. *Fiscal discipline and the macro-economic policy, GEAR (Growth, Employment & Redistribution)*
2. *RDP to deliver services (Reconstruction and Development Programme)*
3. *Labour policy to improve basic working conditions*
4. *Affirmative action and equal opportunities policy to accelerate promotion of previously disadvantaged groups*
5. *Both GEAR and RDP (in the sense that they are linked)*

	SA		Race				Richer/ Poorer		Satisfied/ Dissatisfied		Optimist/ Pessimist	
	%	A %	C %	I %	W %	R %	P %	S %	D %	O %	P %	
RDP	32	38	22	17	7	28	38	30	34	34	29	
Labour policy	18	18	16	23	18	19	16	16	20	17	19	
Affirmative action	17	19	12	19	9	19	15	17	17	18	17	
Economic policy	15	14	11	11	23	15	14	15	14	15	15	
GEAR & RDP	4	3	5	8	6	3	4	4	4	3	6	
Don't know	10	6	25	17	21	11	9	13	7	10	8	
No response	5	3	8	5	16	6	4	6	4	3	6	

South Africans have divergent visions of the best route to improve the quality of life of South Africans in the longer term (see Table 4). Optimists set their hopes on better material standards of living through RDP-type measures coupled with an acceleration of black advancement and labour-friendly policies to achieve sustained quality of life. A substantial proportion of optimists also advise fiscal discipline as the best medicine to achieve the growth needed to provide a better standard of living for South Africans. A higher than average proportion of whites stress the importance of sound economic policies to improve long-term quality of life while blacks back

improved service delivery. Obviously, deciding on policy options is a daunting task for many ordinary citizens. Between 10 and 15% were not capable of projecting policy outcomes for the future or unwilling to try.

OUTLOOK

What are the prerequisites that all South Africans can experience happiness and life satisfaction in the millennium? One factor, already observed by opinion leaders participating in the elite survey, is the creation of a stronger black middle class, neglected in the past. The 1999 survey category assigned 10% of blacks to the top two living standard categories along with 47% coloured, 89% Indian, and 98% white. For the first time since the launch of the Quality of Life Trends Project, there were sufficient numbers of better-off blacks to make meaningful comparisons between black and white elites.

The comparison is striking. Near identical percentages, some 80%, are happy and satisfied with life among black and white higher income earners. In addition, wealthy blacks have the extra advantage of optimism.

According to the elite survey, affirmative action measures will benefit only a small proportion of job seekers. So far, the changing face of wealth in South Africa has created only a small elite. According to a recent report the proportion of black households in the richest 10% of South Africans households has increased from 9% in 1991 to 22% in 1996. However, the gap between rich and poor has widened especially in the black community (Whiteford & van Seventer, 2000). Our 1999 survey finds that rank-and-file South Africans set their hopes on RDP-type interventions and affirmative action to uplift quality of life. While some survey respondents see RDP as the companion policy to GEAR, many of the elites saw RDP merely as a cushion but not a solution for poverty.

Be that as it may, optimism is the dominant mood of South Africa's transition period. Graph 1 shows that optimism is rising in the post-apartheid era. Other research confirms the mood. Commenting on findings from a survey conducted immediately after 1999 elections, political analyst R. W. Johnson

Outlook

describes “the persistence of a deep well of optimism” among ANC voters, particularly black voters, as “perhaps the most fundamental feature of the current political situation”. Despite any material disappointments that ANC voters have experienced since 1994, they have not relinquished “the vision of a better future around the corner” (1999: 34).

Many of the elites we interviewed identified optimism as the driving force for the transition which might sustain poorer South Africans until their expectations of the good life are fulfilled. Our sample survey confirmed widespread optimism, especially among black South Africans who are still far less contented than white South Africans in spite of having achieved political freedom. There may be some years before poorer South Africans catch up on their happiness deficit. The October 1999 survey highlights the perceived importance of living standards and consumption as a quality-of-life booster. Social spending on the poor has been increasing since 1993 and economic growth, sluggish as it has been, has raised black incomes. These factors alone may be sufficient grounds for optimism among all South Africans.

NOTES

1. Game parks catered mainly to white recreational needs under apartheid. Consequently, many wildlife and conservation issues are still widely considered a concern of whites only. Although South Africa's wildlife is a major tourist attraction, environmental issues are low on South Africa's national agenda; a point referred to in the interview with the ANC Member of Parliament.
2. Mbeki in his speech of 31 May 1998 referred to the wealth tax which West Germans had agreed to in order to fund the integration of East and West Germany. He cited Germany's wealth tax as an example for South Africa to follow (Møller, 1999).
3. At the time of writing in 2000, the spectre of Zimbabwe-styled land invasions in the run-up to the general elections in June have brought a new urgency to land reform. A shift in policy has been towards the promotion of South African black commercial farmers.
4. Formerly, harsh detention laws allowed the state to hold suspected dissidents in solitary confinement without trial for months at a time.

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South Africa's “rainbow people”, national pride and optimism: a trend study

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Abstract

Since the first democratic elections of 1994, South Africans are popularly known as the “rainbow people”. The paper reports the acceptance of the rainbow as political symbol of unity among the diverse people of South Africa at three time. Immediately after the 1994 elections, two years later in 1996, and five years later in 1999 after the second general elections. The database for the study are responses to items placed with a syndicated national survey conducted countrywide. The public discourse on the rainbow is reviewed through personal interviews with a panel of 25 elites contacted in the run-up to the second general elections. The researchers revisit conclusions based on the earlier results (Møller, Dickow & Harris, 1999). The third round of research finds that the appeal of the rainbow as political symbol has waned but is still inclusive of all groups in society. Projections of national pride have shifted from the rainbow as symbol of unity and reconciliation to other icons of achievement such as the Reconstruction and Development Programme and prowess in sports. Support for the political symbolism of the rainbow is positively associated with happiness, life satisfaction and optimism. Lack of a focus of national pride is associated with pessimism. Results support the conclusion reached earlier that belief in the “rainbow nation” ideal boosts optimism and promotes happiness during South Africa's transition to a stable democracy, thereby preventing alienation among the losers under the new political dispensation. Linkages between acceptance of the rainbow symbol, subjective well-being and optimism are discussed in the light of the socio-political changes which have taken place in South Africa since democracy.

INTRODUCTION

Before the turn of the century, South Africans had voted in two open elections to affirm their fledgling democracy. Following the first open elections of April 1994, Nelson Mandela, who had spent 27 years in prison, became the country's first charismatic president of the post-apartheid era. President Mandela, who celebrated his 80th birthday in office, handed over to his deputy, Thabo Mbeki, after the second national elections of June 1999.

The major political agenda of the Mandela era between 1994 and 1999 was reconciliation. The rainbow symbol, shorthand for a nation seeking reconciliation and unity after decades of racial and political tensions, best captured the spirit which swept through the nation in the early years of South Africa's democracy. Of necessity, Mbeki's era must now be more concerned with delivery. His role is to ensure that South Africa's new democracy is based on solid economic foundations. In contrast to Mandela's speeches, his public oratories emphasise rather than downplay the still existing social divides in the country. His “two nations” speech of 31 May 1998, delivered one year before he became president, stressed the distinctions between the quality of life of the formerly advantaged and oppressed and the need to transform society to redress injustices of the past (Møller, 1999).

Since 1994, South Africa has impressed by adopting strict fiscal discipline. However, economic policy remains a divisive issue between the ruling African National Congress and its alliance partners in labour who favour populist solutions to uplift the quality of life of the disadvantaged. Affirmative action policy, which necessitates the reintroduction of racial indicators and quotas, has made South Africans more rather than less race-conscious in the new era. The work of the Human Rights Commission, a government appointed body with a mandate to investigate human rights violations, including racism, has had a similar effect.

Against this background, what is the lasting significance of the rainbow as a symbol of reconciliation and unity on the perceived quality of life of South Africans? Since the 1994 elections South Africans have proudly called themselves the “rainbow people”. This paper revisits South Africans' perceptions of the rainbow symbol some five years later.

Research update

Earlier research on perceptions of South Africa's rainbow nation conducted in 1996 by Møller, Dickow and Harris (1999) found that supporters of the political symbolism of the rainbow were happier and more often proud to be South Africans than opponents or non-believers. There were indications that rainbow supporters tended to be more optimistic. Results also suggested that rainbow symbolism had a stronger appeal to collectivists than individualists in that liberal South Africans were prominent among the group of sceptics.

The present 1999 study updates and also extends the 1996 round of research by including standard measures of life satisfaction and optimism as well as happiness. It tests the association between support for the rainbow as political symbol and pride in the rainbow nation and present and future subjective well-being.

Rationale

The rationale for the study is based on considerations of South Africa's happiness deficit. People living in democratic societies, who generally enjoy a higher standard of living, tend to express higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction than people living in poorer countries and in circumstances of oppression. In South Africa under apartheid, the majority of disenfranchised blacks expressed unhappiness while whites expressed contentment in happiness surveys. In the aftermath of the first democratic elections, levels of happiness and life satisfaction among formerly disenfranchised South Africans peaked, completely eliminating the happiness deficit of blacks (Møller, 1994; Møller and Hanf, 1995). The elation proved to be short-lived (Møller, 1989; 1999). Nevertheless, post-election euphoria however fleeting might be interpreted as an expression of pride as well as happiness, especially among first-time voters.

Of particular significance for this study is that the 14-country study undertaken by Cantril in the 1960s found higher positive correlations between national factors and happiness in societies which had recently undergone political upheavals (Veenhoven, 1997). This finding suggests that under

conditions of major political change, national agendas become fused with the personal. In short, national issues become personal ones.

Arguing along these lines, it is proposed that national pride in post-apartheid South Africa might have a personal dimension akin to self-esteem. A surge of national pride caught first-time voters already in the run-up to the 1994 elections (Johnson and Schlemmer, 1996). It was observed that black South Africans were “walking tall”. In the aftermath, white South Africans distinctly remember with pride that their new black president rooted for the team of mainly white players who would win the 1995 World Rugby Cup.

The basic premise for the study is that, in democratic South Africa, national pride is positively correlated with subjective well-being, particularly its affective dimension of happiness. Either national pride is fused with self-esteem or works through self-esteem to boost levels of happiness. Self-esteem, unlike attitudes to the nation, is regularly cited in the literature as a correlate of subjective well-being (Diener, 1994: 115).

While some might contend that national pride among first-time voters is an extension of personal pride, others might argue that national pride is displaced self-esteem. No matter which viewpoint is adopted, the anecdotal evidence is so strong, there can be no doubt that black South Africans perceived the “election miracle” as personal as well as collective triumph after years of oppression. The argument that the national is fused with the personal is particularly cogent when applied to a collectivist society. Fundamental to collectivism is that individuals are bound together in interdependent entities (Triandis, 1995). The individual and the group derive their meaning from coexistence with each other. People are expected to place the common good before their personal interests. In individualistic societies, by contrast, individuals are loosely connected and expected to be self-sufficient. African morality emphasises mutual respect and support as well as group cohesiveness. Important for this study is that the rainbow over South Africa is essentially a strong collectivist and inclusive symbol which defines the group as the entire nation, in contrast to the racial groups defined by apartheid society.

This paper inquires into perceptions of the rainbow as national symbol and happiness, life satisfaction and optimism for the future based on several rounds of research. It is divided in four sections: background, methods, results, and discussion. The brief introduction to the civil religion of the “rainbow people” provides the backdrop for the study. The methods section shows how the 1999 round of research builds on the earlier research. The results section focuses on trends observed in the evidence and finally, the discussion weighs the evidence against the research propositions and explores interpretations in the light of socio-political developments since democracy.

PART I: ORIGINS OF THE CIVIL RELIGION OF THE “RAINBOW PEOPLE”

A central argument in Dickow's doctoral thesis (1996) is that successive South African governments have adopted a civil religion to legitimate their claim to serve the well-being of people. Dickow traces the roots of two distinct traditions of civil religions in South Africa: the Afrikaner civil religion which justified apartheid and the domination of one ethnic group over another and the civil religion of the struggle to end apartheid. The “rainbow nation” is South Africa's new civil religion according to Dickow (1996; 1997; 1999 a, b; and the introduction in Møller, Dickow & Harris, 1999). In contrast to the exclusive civil religion of the apartheid era, which justified the supremacy, and domination of Afrikaners, the civil religion of the post-apartheid government is inclusive of all races.

Civil religions exist in many parts of the world. Dunbar Moodie, the premier analyst of Afrikaner civil religion, defines it simply as the “religious dimension of the state” (1975: 296). Civil religions lend a religious aura to attempts to justify the existence of the state and its legitimacy. The distinction between religion and politics is blurred in that religion is used to implement political goals. All forms of civil religion draw inspiration from the Old Testament, adapting its accounts to the situation of the country in question. There are striking parallels between the National Party's and the African National Congress's use of religious archetypes to legitimate the old and the new order in South Africa.

South African politics contains a strong religious dimension, according to Dickow (1996). Precisely because there was no formal opposition, the

churches played a critical role in the anti-apartheid movement where they filled a vacuum. When apartheid became official policy in 1948, leaders of churches protested against exclusion. By assuming what they saw as a prophetic role, church leaders identified themselves closely with the political demands of the African National Congress, founded in 1912 as a civil rights movement, and with the organisation itself. When the anti-apartheid political organisations were banned in 1988, the churches were the only institutions in the country free to act and with the infrastructure to do so.

The release of Nelson Mandela in February 1990 and the unbanning of political parties ushered in a new era in South African history. Church leaders, such as Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a prominent figure in the anti-apartheid movement, withdrew from politics. However, like many other leading clergymen and politicians, he saw no problem in using religious symbolism to mobilise people and to further the new politics of integration.

It was Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1995) who rediscovered the biblical symbol of peace, the rainbow, as a symbol of unity for South African people. He first used the rainbow symbol during the march of church leaders to Parliament in Cape Town in 1989, and again at ANC leader Chris Hani's funeral in 1993. The rainbow symbol gained widespread popularity in 1994 when Archbishop Tutu led a thanksgiving service to celebrate the peaceful elections and announced to the crowd with the television cameras of the world trained on him:

“We are the rainbow people of God. We are free - all of us, black and white together!”

The symbol of the rainbow is the Old Testament symbol of reconciliation which affirms God's covenant with Noah after the flood. At the thanksgiving ceremony, Tutu spoke not of a covenant with a Chosen People, but of a covenant with all South Africans, irrespective of origin, religion or colour. Two days later, Nelson Mandela again referred to the symbol of the rainbow at his inauguration as President of South Africa on 10 May, 1994.

Research hypotheses

The proposition guiding the 1999 survey for the South African Quality of Life Trends Project is as follows: Persons who subscribe to the civil religion of the rainbow people should feel more at ease or attuned to the new political dispensation and are therefore more likely to project pride in their nation than others. Underlying this proposition is the idea that, in a collectivist society, the “feel good” factor is closely akin to self-esteem. In line with tentative findings from the 1996 round of research (Møller et al., 1999), it is also hypothesised that supporters of the rainbow as civil religion will be more optimistic for the future than others.

PART II: METHOD

A number of items put to South Africans in successive nationwide surveys were used to indicate the changing significance of the rainbow symbol and its relationship to subjective well-being over time. Items were included in three MarkData surveys¹. The first survey was conducted one month after the 27 April 1994 elections which brought the African National Congress into power, the second, two years later in June 1996, and the third in October 1999, a few months after the second national elections. A description of the items which probed acceptance of the rainbow symbol and as a source of national pride follows.

The original rainbow item

Dickow, an eyewitness to the thanksgiving service which gave birth to South Africa's “rainbow nation” in 1994, developed a special item to determine the level of acceptance of the new civil religion. The question designed by Dickow to probe the personal meaning of the rainbow symbol read:

“A lot² has been said by religious and political leaders about the rainbow, symbol of peace, and about a new covenant with God as a sign for the future of South Africa. People differ in what they think about this.
Which of the following opinions is closest to yours?

The updated rainbow item

1. For me, it has no meaning at all.
2. For me, the covenant is a religious matter only and should not be used in politics.
3. I believe, that God has offered to all South Africans, black and white, a new covenant for a peaceful life in a common nation.”

The third option, which refers to a new covenant offered to all South Africans, was taken as acceptance of the new civil religion. Respondents in this group were called the “political rainbow supporters” for easy reference. Respondents who believed the covenant was a religious matter only (option two) were referred to as “political rainbow opponents”, and the remainder as “non-believers” (option one).

The updated rainbow item

In preparation for the 1999 update for the South African Quality of Life Trends Project, the authors interviewed a panel of opinion leaders³ on the situation in their country. Twenty-five personal interviews were conducted with opinion leaders in three metropolitan areas: the first batch in Durban and Cape Town in February 1999, the second batch in Johannesburg and Pretoria around the time of the June 1999 national elections. The panel's perception of social change since the 1994 elections and the rainbow symbol was used as the basis for formulating a slightly extended version of the original item on the rainbow.

The second question on the rainbow put to South Africans in 1999 was less personal than the original and invited projections of meaning onto the symbol of the rainbow for South Africans. The question read:

“The rainbow as symbol for South Africans was introduced in 1994. People see the symbol of the rainbow in different ways. Which one of the following viewpoints comes closest to yours?”

1. The rainbow is a political symbol for nation building
2. The rainbow is a religious symbol and should not be used in politics
3. The rainbow as symbol of reconciliation and unity is an ideal for South Africans
4. The rainbow symbol has divided rather than united South Africans
5. The rainbow message is no longer relevant.”

The original item on “sources of national pride”

Having established that the majority of South Africans were proud of their country⁴, the 1996 MarkData survey probed sources of national pride in a closed-ended question with seven options: the Reconstruction and Development Programme; sporting achievements; the national flag/anthem; reconciliation and unity the “rainbow nation”; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and world acceptance.

Directly or indirectly, all achievements could be construed as contributions to nation building. The pariah status attached to South African citizenship was reversed with the advent of democracy. Excluded from international sports during the apartheid era, South African teams returned to the international playing fields and scored a number of victories in their first year back in the world arena. The symbols of the new nation, the flag and national anthems, featured prominently at these sporting events. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) had been introduced when the new government came into power to deliver services to the previously disadvantaged. The Constitution, which includes a Bill of Rights, was adopted on 8 May 1996, a month before the 1996 survey went into the field, and was amended later in the year. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in the latter part of 1995, under the chairmanship of Archbishop Tutu, to deal with investigations into gross human rights violations during the apartheid era. In 1996, only 6% of survey respondents could not identify with an achievement which inspired pride.

The updated item on “sources of national pride”

The 1999 MarkData survey included an updated version of the original question on sources of national with further options. The item read:

“Which one of the following has made you feel particularly proud of South Africa since 1994? :

1. The RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme);
2. The macro-economic policy (Growth, Employment and Redistribution - GEAR);
3. The sporting achievements like the World Cup etc.;

Results

4. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission - TRC;
5. The Constitution and Bill of Rights;
6. World acceptance/world recognition;
7. The African Renaissance.”

The answer categories were read out to respondents. A single residual category catered for persons who indicated that none of the options inspired pride, as well as persons expressing uncertainty and giving no response. The new response categories referred to a strong economic policy which the panellists had identified as a positive development in South Africa since 1994, and the African Renaissance, still vaguely defined, which the researchers thought might outshine the rainbow or even be cast into the mould of a new civil religion during President Mbeki's term of office.

Subjective well-being

Other items included in the third round of research included satisfaction with life-as-a-whole, happiness, and optimism measured on five-point scales with an indeterminate mid-point. The corresponding five-point optimism item read:

“How do you think things will be for people like yourself in five years' time? Taking all things together will things be better, worse or about the same as today?”

PART III: RESULTS

The section on results first reports on perceptions of the rainbow in response to the two rainbow items in the 1999 MarkData survey and the viewpoints of opinion leaders on the significance of the rainbow. It then reviews perceptions in relation to subjective well-being and optimism for the future.

Table 1.
Acceptance of the civil religion of the rainbow people by race group and political party.

The rainbow¹:

Symbolises a new covenant for black and white South Africans (= "supporter")

Should not be used in politics, the covenant is a religious matter only (= "opponent")

Has no meaning for me (= "non-believer")

	"Supporter"			"Opponent"			"Non-believer"		
	'94 ² %	'96 %	'99 %	'94 %	'96 %	'99 %	'94 %	'96 %	'99 %
<i>Average</i>	65	49	48	24	34	24	11	18	28
Black	67	48	49	20	31	24	12	21	27
Coloured	68	60	50	25	30	20	6	10	30
Indian	75	40	41	16	44	22	9	16	37
White	50	44	41	41	49	26	9	7	33
ANC³	71	51	48	17	30	25	12	19	27
NNP	57	49	44	36	41	25	7	10	31
IFP	48	43	47	42	28	27	10	30	27
FF	40	46	36	57	51	33	3	4	31
DP	36	38	47	27	41	25	37	21	28
UDM	-	-	34	-	-	30	-	-	36

MarkData surveys June 1994, June 1996, October 1999.

Rows for each year may not add to 100% due to rounding.

1. See text for exact wording of item
2. 1994 distributions taken from Dickow (1996: 263).
3. ANC African National Congress (62.6% / 66.4% of votes obtained in the 1994/1999 national elections; NNP New National Party (formerly NP National Party: 20.4% / 6.9%); IFP Inkatha Freedom Party (10.5% / 8.6%); FF Freedom Front (2.2% / 0.8%); DP Democratic Party (1.7% / 9.6%); UDM United Democratic Movement (- / 3.4%) (SAIRR, 1999: 326). 1999 figures refer to multiple party affiliation.

Acceptance of the rainbow symbol

Table 1 shows popular acceptance of the rainbow symbol over time. In 1994, a majority of South Africans, 65%, were political rainbow “supporters” who accepted the civil religion of the rainbow. By 1996, political rainbow supporters accounted for only 49%. Thereafter, the proportion of political supporters remained stable at 48% in 1999. While the number of political rainbow supporters has declined steadily over time, the number of “non-believers” has increased from 11% in 1994 to 28% in 1999. The most dramatic change of perception appears to have occurred among Indians. In 1994, Indians were overwhelmingly believers (75%), in 1996 mainly “opponents” (44%); in 1999 the proportion of “non-believers” (37%) is almost equal to that of “supporters”. In the second round of research, it was observed that personal interpretation of the rainbow had shifted from the political to the religious sphere among substantial proportions of South Africans. In the third round, the most significant shift is to the opposition.

In 1994, supporters of the three parties which originally formed the Government of National Unity (GNU), the African National Congress (ANC), the National Party (NP) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), were most likely to be rainbow supporters. In 1999, since the withdrawal of the NP from the GNU in 1996, the ANC still provides the greatest support for the rainbow, down from 71% in 1994 to 48% in 1999. Least support is forthcoming from the conservative Freedom Front (FF) and the new multiracial opposition party, the United Democratic Movement (UDM). The only party to have increased its support for the rainbow is the liberal Democratic Party (DP), formerly dominant among the rainbow sceptics, possibly due to the inclusion of former NP followers into its ranks.

Elites on the rainbow symbol

In the 1999 survey of opinion leaders, interviewees were asked what the rainbow meant to them. Some opinion leaders chose to speak about their personal opinions while others gave their view of public opinion. A large proportion acknowledged the important role of the rainbow symbol in nation-building and its general popularity. Telling is the manner in which interviewees typified the rainbow. The rainbow was variously referred to in

positive vein as “symbol”, “concept”, “emblem”, “metaphor”, “idea”, and “ideal”. One spokesperson enthused that the rainbow symbol was “fun”, a “punchy” slogan and totally “inoffensive”. More cynical respondents, including political analysts, made reference to the rainbow as “catchword”, “rally cry” or “political rhetoric”.

Most respondents associated the rainbow with the birth of South Africa's democracy. There was overwhelming consensus that the timing of the projection of the rainbow had been right. The rainbow had served to create a sense of unity and destiny among diverse peoples. Its popularity was legendary. The nation-building objective embodied in the concept came through the many nuanced definitions offered by the opinion leaders such as “unity in diversity” and “together but different”. The rainbow “celebrated diversity” according to a leading political analyst. An ANC member of parliament spoke of the “potential of people of all colours and cultures and races living together in harmony”. Specific references to diversity were mainly to race (“colour”) and ethnicity but also to language, religion and class.

The majority of panellists viewed symbols, such as the rainbow, as essential tools for nation building, no matter that they might develop into “jingoism”:

“In a country like ours we need symbols that give hope.”

Furthermore the symbol had worked exceedingly well. The “beautiful” rally cry had diffused tensions in 1994, according to a former politician who thought the rainbow was “fading away”. The rainbow was a very powerful symbol which propelled anxious people forward. For many, it said “let's go for it”. The “rainbow thing” had made good psychological sense at the time. Similarly, a political scientist viewed the rainbow as an essential ingredient of South Africa's democracy:

“It does, should, and has to work as symbol”.

In his opinion, what made South Africa so different from other new democracies was that there was a strong sense of patriotism and pride in the nation. The rainbow appealed to South Africans' strong sense of nationalism. On a more cynical note, a black sceptic on the panel volunteered that South Africans craved catchwords such as the rainbow nation and the African

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Renaissance. He referred to the latter as some sort of “funny” religion. In his opinion, South Africans belonged to a cargo cult nation. They thrived on catchwords which were self-edifying and inspired hope that they would bring the cargo.

Some respondents, mainly sceptics, made reference to the religious origin of the concept and former Anglican Archbishop Tutu's⁵ role in popularising the concept.

“My recollection on this is that the concept was brought into currency by Archbishop Tutu and I assumed that it had religious moorings.”

Others traced the origin of the rainbow concept further back to its “black” American roots. A political analyst gave a concise historical account:

“Like a lot of South African political rhetoric, it is borrowed from the United States... Jesse Jackson was one of the first to use it. It has a religious dimension, coming as it does from the traditional Baptist oratories in the States. It was projected into the South African context by Tutu and was then picked up by the ANC leadership which at that stage in the early nineties wanted to project a multiracial image.”

To others, more important than its origins was the observation that South Africans had made the concept their own. The fact that South Africa's internationally revered first President had promoted the rainbow ideal in the early days of democracy was considered significant by one panellist. Future generations of South Africans would have difficulties rejecting Nelson Mandela's legacy of reconciliation.

Some panellists associated togetherness with other symbols, such as the South African flag and sporting achievements rather than the rainbow nation. For a church leader of colour, the “feel-good” mood associated with the rainbow was closely linked to the “Mandela factor”. Reconciliation was achieved on the sports field in the heady days of the World Rugby Cup victory in 1995.

“... the World Cup was the unifying thing. The concept was alive, a reality. That symbolised South Africa together. Sport did a tremendous job of bringing the nation together. We were on a high in 1994 and 1995. We felt so good about being one, we were prepared to overlook huge problems.”

While most opinion leaders concurred that the rainbow concept was successful even “brilliant” as a popular ideal, mainly political analysts and activists on the left viewed it as a flawed theoretical concept. The rainbow projected a multi-racial image rather than the non-racial ideal embodied in the South African constitution. Moreover, it was a foreign concept borrowed from black America. Two opinion leaders on the political left preferred homegrown metaphors for South Africa such as a mighty southern African river. The indigenous metaphor of the river idealised the notion that every group of people could contribute to the flow of national unity and national consensus.

On the political right, the implementation rather than the concept was considered flawed. Although the concept was acceptable as a vehicle to promote a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-religious nationalism, in practice it did not acknowledge minority identities.

“Many people get the idea it's a 'black' rainbow... The rainbow is not working; it's an ANC ideology.... This is a powerful perception among many black and non-black groups... It's a perception like under Hitler that if the Führer doesn't approve, even art is not acceptable.”

The rainbow and transformation.

The rainbow solution to South Africa's preoccupation with race issues dominated many conversations with elites. A labour spokesperson referred to the rainbow nation concept as essentially a “racial analysis brilliant at the time”. According to another interpretation, the rainbow nation intended to “sanitise the past and put everyone on an equal footing.” The rainbow ideal assumed that all colours in the rainbow would have equal value. A number of panellists affirmed that, owing to this interpretation, the rainbow had become associated with affirmative action measures to promote equality between the colours in the rainbow. A sense of entitlement among the formerly disadvantaged had become entangled with the rainbow ideal and had alienated many South Africans:

“I think there are people out there who are not happy with the rainbow principle”.

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Commenting on still outstanding work to be done in building “the sense of oneness”, a church leader assessed the situation as follows:

“Many in the white community believe things have gone relatively well, so don't rock the boat. In the black community, people say we haven't transformed.”

An educationist, although sympathetic to the losers in the new dispensation, was of the opinion that in order to achieve the rainbow ideal of equality for all groups, one group would inevitably be alienated in the process. Conservative opinion leaders tended to associate the rainbow concept with “political correctness”. The rainbow “principle” was used as a performance indicator to measure if racial quotas had been attained in different institutional settings. A few liberals were equally opposed to the setting of colour quotas according to “rainbow principles” rather than merit:

“I dislike the quota idea. The rainbow is fine but I don't want to see it abused”.

“I am not very happy with people rising in the sporting, business or academic world just because of the colour of their skin. ..It might take a little longer on merit, but we will avoid a lot of disasters...”.

The rainbow as ideal.

A number of panellists spontaneously highlighted their observations of continued goodwill and lack of antagonism among both blacks and whites which augurs well for the realisation of the rainbow ideal:

“I still feel thrilled that there is lots of goodwill and so little antagonism. They don't begrudge the white people generally.”

A coloured interviewee recalled how a local conservative Afrikaans-medium university had straight away opened its doors to his children after the elections.

“After '94, the white people accepted the change over more readily than the so-called coloured people. It amazed me that they went out of their way to accommodate the others. You almost felt embarrassed... And this was a totally white institution I am talking about.”

The rainbow as ideal, vision or almost impossible “dream to strive for” appeared to be most acceptable to opinion leaders across the political spectrum.

“Symbols are enormously powerful. We judge ourselves by the symbols that mean something to us. And the mere fact that we still call ourselves the rainbow nation means that we are constantly impressing on our minds the ideal that we have to work towards.”

The future of the rainbow.

There was general consensus that the rainbow's popular appeal had waned. An extreme view by a mine union spokesperson was that the rainbow had died “a slow death”. A more moderate viewpoint was that the rainbow symbol remained in use but was not as popular as when it was first coined. “The rainbow is dull, it's lost its shine” was how a church leader evocatively put it. “I think it is fading away”, was the opinion of a former politician. However, even persons who saw the rainbow concept bereft of its former popularity regarded the message as still relevant on the eve of the second general elections. Expectedly, progress would be slow, but in time, South Africa would become a unified nation as symbolised in the rainbow. Given South Africa's history of deep racial divisions, it would take many years to realise the potential of people of all colours, cultures and races living in harmony. The time frame for realising the dream or ideal ranged from decades and generations to centuries (“Only those born after 1994 will see it.” “You don't build nations overnight it takes centuries and certainly decades.”). An educationist linked fulfilment of the rainbow ideal with political maturity. Only when South Africans understood the workings of democracy, their rights and responsibilities as citizens would they “start holding hands”.

From election miracle to economic miracle.

The fact that the rainbow concept had suffered from inflation or been replaced by new catchwords appeared self-evident to some opinion leaders. Political leaders rallied their followers with a series of popular slogans. The “feel-good” factor has been overtaken by disillusion with slow delivery of services and the lack of jobs for voters. The focus in South Africa in the post-Mandela era was on the material underpinning of democracy. According to the church leader cited earlier, “today more and more people have become disillusioned

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about delivery... The rainbow nation served a real purpose, but I don't know if it can still carry us without the structures." A business leader whose image of the rainbow nation was South Africans snaking their way peacefully to place their votes on election day, stressed the need for concerted white and black efforts to develop the economy. South Africans from different camps had worked closely together to reach a negotiated settlement. "Now, we want to work closely together to make the economic miracle", a spokesperson for labour concurred. "You can't stop at racial analysis. It's got to be eclipsed by more difficult challenges than trying to get people to identify with the country."

Popular views of the rainbow symbol in 1999

A variation of the original item on support for the rainbow incorporated some of the elite opinions. Respondents in the MarkData 1999 survey were asked to give their views on the significance of the rainbow as symbol for South Africans. Results are shown in Table 2. The modal viewpoint (35%) was that the rainbow served as ideal, a viewpoint shared by the elites. One quarter identified the rainbow as a political tool for nation building. Just under one fifth felt the rainbow was a religious symbol and opposed its use in politics the viewpoint corresponding to that of "opponents" of the rainbow according to the original question. Only a small percentage indicated that the rainbow symbol was "no longer relevant" (7%) or "divisive" (4%). However, a slightly larger percentage remained undecided.

Indians, who were among the staunchest "supporters" of the rainbow as political symbol in 1994, were most likely to endorse the rainbow's political significance with 67%; whites the least (40%). The viewpoint that the rainbow message was no longer relevant was more common among white and Indian respondents. As might be expected, African National Congress followers, with 67%, were most likely to attribute political significance to the rainbow while the conservative Freedom Front was most likely to see the rainbow message as no longer relevant or even as a divisive element in society.

Table 2.
Attitudes towards the rainbow symbol in 1999 by race group and political party.

“...People see the symbol of the rainbow in different ways. Which comes closest to your viewpoint?”

1. *Symbolises the ideal of reconciliation and unity for South Africans*
2. *Political symbol for nation building*
3. *Religious symbol that should not be used in politics*
4. *Rainbow message is no longer relevant*
5. *Rainbow symbol has divided South Africans*

	SA	B	C	I	W	ANC	NNP	IFP	FF	DP	UDM
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Ideal of unity & reconciliation	35	37	26	37	25	35	26	35	20	34	39
Political symbol	25	27	27	30	15	32	24	22	8	18	16
Religious symbol	17	17	13	6	19	18	16	15	26	15	28
No longer relevant	7	3	5	16	25	3	13	13	25	20	8
Divisive	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	8	13	4	5
Don't know, uncertain	13	12	24	6	12	9	17	7	8	10	5

See text for exact wording of item. Columns add to 100% or nearest.

SA South African total (n2219), B Black (n1658), C Coloured (n202), I Indian (n63), W White (n296).

ANC African National Congress (n1750), NNP New National Party (n424), IFP Inkatha Freedom Party (n139), FF Freedom Front (n61), DP Democratic Party (n550), UDM United Democratic Movement (n133). Multiple mentions of political party affiliation possible.

There was good correspondence between the patterns of responses to the original and later version of the rainbow item. Taken together the first two response categories to the later version, rainbow as ideal of reconciliation and tool for nation building, can be equated with support for the rainbow as political vision and tool. These viewpoints correspond broadly to the

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“supporter” response to the original rainbow item. In response to the updated rainbow item, rainbow “supporters” were most likely to describe the rainbow symbol as an ideal (48% of rainbow “supporters”) and as a tool for nation building (26%). Forty-one percent (the modal response category) of rainbow “opponents” on religious grounds chose the corresponding response to the revised version of the question. “Non-believers” accounted for half of the “uncertain” and “don't know” responses to the revised version of the question. Noteworthy is that “non-believers” were twice as willing to recognise the rainbow symbol as political tool (28%) and ideal (23%) than as irrelevant (14%) or divisive (4%).

Overall, 60% of respondents viewed the rainbow as a political vision and tool for nation building, in response to the second rainbow item: 74% of “supporters”, 51% of “non-believers” and 34% of “opponents”. Only 11% in total saw the rainbow as irrelevant or divisive: 28% of “non-believers”, 9% of “opponents” and 7% of “supporters”.

The rainbow nation as a source of national pride over time

Table 3
Sources of national pride in 1996 and 1999

	1996	1999
RDP: Reconstruction & Development Programme	12	30
Sporting achievements	24	19
Rainbow nation	17	11
TRC: Truth & Reconciliation Commission	12	10
Constitution, Bill of Rights	6	7
Flag, anthem	8	6
World acceptance/ recognition	13	6
Macro-economic policy: GEAR	*	3
African Renaissance	*	2
None of above, don't know	6	7
	100	100
N	2233	2219

* Not an option in 1996

In 1996, the “rainbow nation reconciliation and unity” figured as the third most important source of national pride for South Africans after sporting

achievements. After the second national elections in 1999, it ranks in third place after the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and sporting achievements (see Table 3).

Table 4.
Three major sources of national pride in 1996 and 1999 by race and political party.

	Rank 1	%	Rank 2	%	Rank 3	%
1996						
Black	Rainbow	19	TRC	16	Sport/RDP	15
Coloured	Sport	26	Rainbow	25	World accept	19
Indian	World accept	31	Rainbow	26	Sport	20
White	Sport	60	World accept	20	Rainbow	6
ANC	Rainbow	20	RDP	16	Sport	16
NP	Sport	47	World accept	22	RDP	11
IFP	Rainbow	22	TRC	17	World accept	14
FF	Sport	59	TRC	15	World accept	15
DP	Sport	41	World accept	25	Constitution	17
1999¹						
Black	RDP	36	Sport/TRC	12	Rainbow	11
Coloured	Sport	21	RDP	19	Rainbow	14
Indian	Sport	25	Rainbow	23	World accept	14
White	Sport	51	World accept	19	RDP/rainbow/ Constitution	4
ANC	RDP	38	Sports	16	TRC	13
NNP	Sport	36	RDP	16	World accept	14
IFP	RDP	23	Sport	17	Rainbow	16
FF	Sport	56	World accept	17	RDP	13
DP	Sport	40	World accept	17	RDP	14
UDM	RDP	35	Sport	20	TRC	10

Response categories paraphrased: see text and Table 3 for wording of item and response options.

See Table 2 for subsample size.

¹“None of above” category excluded.

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Table 4 shows that the rainbow nation still inspires pride among all race groups in 1999, to a certain degree. However sport and the RDP have overtaken the rainbow nation as a source of national pride. Supporters of all political parties include sporting and RDP achievements among their top ranking options. The RDP is now the most important source of pride for parties with a larger black and lower income following. Sports is the dominant source of pride for opposition parties, particularly those with a mainly white and economically stronger following. While some Inkatha Freedom Party supporters still look to the rainbow as inspiration in 1999, African National Congress and United Democratic Movement voters now give recognition to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Some six years after the world applauded South Africa's "election miracle", world recognition is still important for parties supported mainly by white and Indian voters such as the Freedom Front, the Democratic Party and the New National Party.

Rainbow "supporters", according to the original rainbow item, accounted for 63% of those for whom the rainbow nation was the most important source of pride with the remaining 37% split evenly between "opponents" and "non-believers".

Happiness, life satisfaction, optimism and the rainbow

The 1996 round of research for the South African Quality of Life Trends Project found evidence that rainbow "supporters" were more likely than others to experience happiness and optimism. Table 5 shows that in 1999, on average 60% of South Africans state they are happy ("very happy" and "happy"), 53% are satisfied with life ("very satisfied" and "satisfied") and optimistic (expect things will be "much better" or "better" in five year's time). Rainbow "supporters" score above average on happiness, life satisfaction and optimism while "non-believers" score below average. Persons who regarded the rainbow symbol as a political tool for nation building were among the happiest, most satisfied and optimistic. On the other hand, respondents who regarded the rainbow symbol as divisive or irrelevant were among the most unhappy, dissatisfied and pessimistic.

Table 5.
Percentages happy, satisfied with life and optimistic among rainbow
“supporters” in 1999.

	% of Total sample	Happy %	Satisfied %	Optimistic %
<i>Sample average</i>		60	53	53
Acceptance of the rainbow				
Rainbow ‘supporter’	48	64	57	57
Rainbow ‘opponent’	24	60	50	55
‘Non-believer’	28	54	49	45
	100			
Significance of the rainbow				
Reconciliation & unity	35	58	52	52
Political symbol	25	68	56	60
Religious symbol	17	66	51	56
Irrelevant	7	51	51	29
Divisive	4	46	40	44
Don’t know	13	54	58	50
	101			
Sources of national pride				
Rainbow	11	62	54	52
RDP	30	59	45	55
Sport	19	70	67	51
Cannot name source of pride	7	48	57	50

Optimism among groups “at risk”

In the 1996 study, the most striking contrast in levels of happiness among whites was between those for whom national pride signified sporting achievements, on the one hand, and for those who associated national pride with the rainbow nation. Only 41% of whites who viewed sports as a major national achievement were happy compared to 93% of those who took pride in the “rainbow nation”. The minority of South Africans, mainly whites, who could not identify with a national achievement were among the most unhappy. Optimism among whites has declined significantly in the last decade (Harris, 1997). It was reasoned that whites, and particularly Afrikaners who regard

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themselves as the losers under the new dispensation, are most at risk of pessimism. Belief in the rainbow nation ideal might foster optimism in that it counteracts feelings of exclusion under the new dispensation.

Table 6.
Percentages happy, satisfied with life and optimistic among rainbow “supporters” in 1999: whites and Afrikaners.

	N	Happy %	Satisfied %	Optimistic %
White rainbow “supporters”	218	81 ^a	86 ^b	43 ^b
<i>Subsample n / average</i>	533	75	81	34
White Afrikaner rainbow “supporters”	162	81 ^b	88 ^c	44 ^b
<i>Subsample n / average</i>	384	74	81	33
<u>Extended definition¹:</u>				
White rainbow “supporters”	299	79 ^b	86 ^b	41 ^c
<i>Subsample n / average</i>	539	75	81	33
White Afrikaner rainbow “supporters”	206	79 ^a	86 ^b	41 ^c
<i>Subsample n / average</i>	389	74	81	32

¹ See text for extended definition of “rainbow supporter”

^{a,b,c} Statistically significant difference between “supporters”, “opponents” and “non-believers” and “supporters” (extended definition) and “non-supporters” according to Spearman’s Rho at the 0.05, 0.01, and 0.0001 level.

To test this idea with the 1999 data, we identified white and Afrikaans-speaking respondents among whites who were political rainbow “supporters”, according to the original version of the question. Table 6 shows that rainbow “supporters” in these categories are significantly happier, more satisfied and also more optimistic than others. The same constellation emerged when we applied an extended definition of rainbow supporter. For the extended definition, we included in addition to the rainbow “supporters” according to the original question, respondents who perceived the rainbow as a political tool of nation building or as an ideal of reconciliation, and respondents for whom the rainbow nation was a source of national pride. There was considerable overlap between these categories as indicated earlier.

Some 56% of white respondents (78% among black respondents) were classified as rainbow “supporters” according to the extended definition. We again found that among groups “at risk”, notably whites and Afrikaners in particular, persons who subscribed to the politics of the rainbow symbol were significantly more likely to express happiness, life satisfaction, and, most significantly, optimism in the future.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Firstly, let us consider whether the rainbow symbol still has personal or general significance for South Africans since it was coined in 1994. The latest round of research shows clearly that the rainbow as political symbol has lost its personal significance for a substantial proportion of citizens since 1994. However, one in two are still “supporters” in the strict sense of the civil religion of the rainbow people. A much larger proportion, over three in four among blacks and over half among whites accept the rainbow as an important symbol for South African nation building and national pride.

Substantial majorities of black, coloured and Indians still subscribe to the rainbow as an ideal concept or political symbol for nation building. Only whites, and supporters of political parties on the right, such as the Freedom Front, feel the rainbow symbol is no longer relevant or deny the inclusiveness of the rainbow. Democratic Party supporters who appeared to shy away from political rhetoric and symbolism in the 1996 study are now more prepared to accept the usefulness of the rainbow symbol for reconciliation across the social divides.

Secondly, the proposition that positive acceptance of the rainbow as political symbol would enhance subjective well-being and optimism, even among groups most at risk of alienation, is consistently supported in the latest round of research.

Thirdly, the fact that the rainbow as a political symbol appeals to almost one in two persons across the major racial and political divides in South African society in 1999 suggests that the civil religion remains inclusive to a large degree. Although individualists, in particular, shy away from patriotic sloganeering, our study suggests that not only collectivists are susceptible to

the influence of symbols of national unity and harmony or at least admit its usefulness as a tool of nation building.

The trend study clearly shows a decline in support for the rainbow over time. A number of political analysts foresaw the eclipse of the rainbow as guiding principle for South Africa (see Schlemmer, 1997; Filatova, 1997), a viewpoint shared by many members of the panel interviewed in preparation for the 1999 survey. At issue is the new civil religion's perceived failure to live up to its promise of inclusiveness. To work effectively as a tool of nation building and social engineering, it is imperative that all groups in society feel they can subscribe to the rainbow symbol. However, there are signs in the study that some South Africans consider the inclusiveness of the rainbow as a sham. References to the "blackening" of the rainbow in the elite interviews hinted at emergent feelings of exclusion. The increase in "non-believers" in the national survey may be an indication that many South Africans have lost their faith in the inclusiveness of the new civil religion. Encouraging nevertheless is that only a small percentage of respondents considered the rainbow as 'divisive' and rainbow "supporters" are still widely distributed among all political parties and race groups.

The finding that the Reconstruction and Development Programme and sports have overtaken the rainbow as sources of national pride in 1999 deserves further comment. Also of significance is the fact that blacks pride themselves in the RDP while white, Indian and coloured South Africans project pride onto sports prowess, a reflection of the gap in racial perceptions.

There are several plausible interpretations for the displacement of the rainbow by the RDP. One such interpretation is that South Africans are supportive of the ANC government's attempts to speed up delivery of infrastructure and services. After a slow start the election promise of one million houses before the turn of the century were almost met. Electricity and clean water have been brought to thousands of households since 1994. A variation on this interpretation might be that the majority of South Africans feel that their country needs to move on from symbolic words to deeds, that is from reconciliation, the hallmark of the Mandela era, to strengthening the material foundations of their democracy in the Mbeki era. The RDP option alludes to transformation as the dominant goal for South African society. A variation on this interpretation with negative overtones is that transformation as a vision for society has superseded the ideal of the rainbow.

In short, the negative interpretation of the RDP finding is that the Mbeki era signals the rejection of the founding myth of the rainbow, a viewpoint put forward by David Christianson (1999). Christianson ascribes a similar function to founding myths or legends as Dickow does to civil religions. Founding myths, which give a selective presentation of historical events, explain why a particular type of government and a particular set of institutional arrangements are the “best” way of achieving the basic conditions of order. The function of the legend is to vindicate the present order. Successful founding legends constrain the range of options open to society. They establish premises so overwhelming that most members of society accept them as part of the natural order of things. The healthy legend is useful because it allows citizens to feel more secure in their national identity, giving individuals the confidence to carry on the desirable activities that make up any society. According to Christianson, in stable societies, diametrically opposed policy positions will often appeal the same deep-seated legend of national origin.

South Africa's founding legend began as a healthy one: that of a “miracle” of negotiation and reconciliation amid the threat of civil war, and of a “rainbow nation” informed by Mandela's spirit of magnanimity. Significantly, the eclipse of the “miracle nation” was signalled by Mandela at an ANC conference in December 1997 where he launched a vicious attack on those who sought to separate national reconciliation from transformation⁶. From that moment onward, the transformation founding legend eclipsed the reconciliation legend in ANC public discourse. Christianson argues that although the two impulses, one healthy, the other malign, can still be discerned in South African public life, Mandela's successor, Thabo Mbeki, is much more closely associated with the latter. Mbeki's imagery of “two nations” rich and poor and white and black, invokes the colonial past and weaves the bitter legacy of separateness into the founding legend. It also “humiliates and thus amplifies the despondency of many of South Africa's most productive individuals” (Christianson, 1999: 23).

The RDP option competes with sports as a source of national pride for South Africans. Sports is the elective choice of the opposition parties and better-off South Africans. An intriguing interpretation, alluded to by one of our panellists, is that sports as symbol of unity has taken over from the rainbow. The rainbow symbol is a superb feat of social engineering which inspired a whole nation according to Dickow's historical account. Similarly, Steenveld

and Strelitz (1998) convincingly argue that sports is the arena in which South Africans were weaned onto the concept of the rainbow nation. They trace the chain of events which saw the shift in the signification of rugby, an Afrikaner-dominated sport, culminating in the 1995 Rugby World Cup series hosted by South Africa. Reportedly, the political highlight of 1995 according to leading political commentators, was when South Africa defeated Australia and Nelson Mandela, wearing South African captain François Pienaar's number six jersey, lauded the Springboks on their victory. The Springboks were no longer the team of Afrikanerdom, but the team of the new "rainbow nation" signalled by the participation of a lone black player who marked the transformation. For South Africans, this was the year of being accepted as members of the world sports community. (As an aside, "world acceptance" still features as an important source of national pride in our 1999 round of research). In his opening speech President Nelson Mandela invoked the "rainbow nation" thus using the rugby match as political platform:

"Your presence in South African confirms the unity in diversity and the humanity in healthy contact that our young democracy has come to symbolise. On behalf of our rainbow nation I welcome you all" (Steenveld & Strelitz, 1998: 620).

The speech was seen as Mandela giving his blessing to an occasion that would formerly have symbolised white nationalism (Steenveld & Strelitz, 1998).

Returning to the focus of this paper, the link between subjective well-being and the belief in the rainbow as civil religion or founding myth, it is important to note that only support for the political symbol of the rainbow correlates significantly with happiness, life satisfaction and optimism. The source of national pride appears to have no impact on feelings of well-being. However, lack of national pride, as indicated in not being able to name one's source of national pride, is significantly associated with depressed well-being.

Finally, our study suggests that the new inclusive civil religion or at least its principle symbol, the rainbow, may have served its time and purpose well. It appears that sports and the populist-supported Reconstruction and Development Programme have increasingly become the main focus for feelings of national pride. The dimension of social equality projected onto the rainbow requires that the disadvantaged groups must catch up; the RDP and compensation to victims who testified before the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission on human rights abuses promise to fulfil the material needs of a socially unequal society better than symbolic gestures of goodwill. Nevertheless, the study suggests that the rainbow continues to serve as societal ideal and guiding principle⁷. As the elites in the study pointed out, it will take many generations to realise the potential of the “rainbow nation”. Meanwhile, it appears that South Africans from all walks of life who subscribe to the idea of the rainbow will feel more contented and optimistic in the waiting.

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NOTES

1. The 1999 update for the South African Quality of Life Trends Project was commissioned to MarkData, Johannesburg. The October 1999 syndicated study used a multiple stage cluster probability sample design to select 2219 South African residents of 16 years and older in metropolitan, urban and rural areas countrywide. The fieldwork was carried out between 23 September and 8 October 1999. Personal interviews were conducted by trained interviewers in the respondents' homes in the language of their choice. Provision was made for substitution if the respondent was not available and for quality controls. All items for this study placed in the syndicated survey were closed and respondents chose one option. Results presented are rounded percentages weighted to population size by MarkData.
2. The item used in the earlier survey added a time reference: "These weeks a lot has been said..." (emphasis added).
3. The panel included persons from all race groups and representatives from across the political and institutional spectrum including education, health, the media, the church, national/provincial and local government, politics, labour, commercial agriculture, mining, business, small business development and training, safety and security, research, and non-governmental organisations. Some panellists drew on their experience of serving in different institutions.
4. The majority of South Africans expressed national pride in response to a 1996 MarkData survey conducted nationwide: 65% stated they were "very often" or "often" proud to be South African (Møller et al., 1999: 261). In a Markinor survey conducted nationwide a year earlier, 85% stated they were "very proud" to be South African and a further 14% "quite proud" (Møller et al, 1999: 259).
In 1999, it was assumed that the majority of South Africans would endorse national pride and the question was omitted for cost reasons.
5. In response to the first author's query on the origins of the symbol, Archbishop Tutu claims in a letter addressed to Helga Dickow: "I was not influenced by Jesse Jackson but by biblical concept.... Also the fact that the rainbow seemed to be an apt image for diversity and I used it for the first time after the 13 September 1989 March in Cape Town."
6. According to Christianson (1999: 22), rumour has it that Mandela's speech was drafted by Mbeki.
7. The ode to the rainbow composed by a young white woman in free response to a national letter-writing competition, reprinted in Dickow (1999 b), is a poignant reminder of the need of contemporary South African youth for inclusive symbols to guide race relations in the new era.

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About the authors

The two authors first met in 1996 in Freinburg at an international invited seminar on conflict resolution hosted by the director of the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute of socio-political studies in Freinburg, Germany. their respective papers on South Africa's 'rainbow nation' and the post election euphoria struck a chord and they decided to join forces to research the possible links between their chosen research topics.

Dr Helga Dickow is a research associate attached to the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute, Freiburg, Germany. Her doctoral thesis traced the origins of the 'rainbow nation' as South Africa's new civil religion. Her numerous research assignments in South Africa span the whole of the last decade and include several surveys of elites.

She was a member of the European Union's Election Unit in 1994 and systematically interviewed new members of parliament in 1996. Further opportunities to pursue her studies of the South African democratisation process were afforded in 1997, when Dr Dickow was appointed Jill Nattrass Research Fellow at the University of Natal, and in 1999, when she was awarded a post-doctoral fellowship at Rhodes University.

Professor Valerie Moller is Director of the Institute of Social and Economic Research at Rhodes University, Grahamstown. Her main research interest over the past two decades has concerned the quality of life of South Africans. She was a member of the original research team that developed social indicators to measure the personal well-being of South Africans from all walks of life in the early 1980's. Since this time she oversees the South African Quality of Life Trends Project which produces regular updates for public information and policy purposes. In 2000, she was made Distinguished Research Fellow of the International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies in recognition of her contribution to a better understanding of Quality of life issues.

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