

## The Status of African Patriotism

### Introduction

Africa is a continent that is associated with war, disease, famine and strife. Economic and social factors afflicting the continent have combined to make the continent a breeding ground for the worst yet HIV onslaught on the world. Despite being rich in minerals and other natural endowments, Africans are some of the poorest people in the world. In many countries around Africa per capita GDP is less than US\$200 per year. Allegations have been made in various publications that after 50 years of independence from colonial rule, most Africans tend to be worse off economically than they were during colonialism. Africans, it would appear seem to have this immense potential to self-destruct with the continent being viewed largely as a trail of missed opportunities. This survey was conducted among South Africans to understand from their perspective the pride associated with being an African, and to reflect on factors that contribute towards Afro-pessimism.

The study was completed in September 2007. It was conducted by Plus 94 Research among 2000 South Africans in all provinces and languages. Both urban and rural dwellers were surveyed. The methodology used was face to face interviews. A stratified probability sample was used.

### Declared African Patriotism

All respondents were asked a question to describe the pride that they had in being Africans. They rated their pride on a 10 point scale where 10 meant that they were completely proud and 1 meant that they were completely dissatisfied with being Africans.

Revealingly, 53% of the total have complete and without reservations pride in being Africans. This was on account of 59% of blacks, 55% of coloureds, 43% of Indians, and 22% of whites. Interestingly, when asked about pride in their race, 71% of all races were completely satisfied with no reservation, the most satisfied groups being blacks (71%), Coloureds (72%), and Indians (72%). Surprisingly, only 61% of whites expressed complete satisfaction and pride in their own race. The biggest source of whites not expressing as much pride in their own race as did other races was the feeling among them that they were "not as united as blacks were". On the other hand blacks who were not proud to be black felt that they were economically disadvantaged and could not catch up with whites. Some hope was expressed that BEE strategies were creating more opportunities for blacks and therefore that some blacks were already better off than they used to be. Whites saw themselves as having limited access to such opportunities and were more likely to be more pessimistic in their self-perception.

Regarding the broader subject of African pride, an additional 30% of the total are proud to be Africans, however, with some reservations, and would typically score their pride at between 7 and 9 out of 10. Leading in this pack are whites (40%), blacks (29%), coloureds (22%) and Indians (22%).

Just over 1 in 10 (11%), were indifferent about being Africans, with a score of between 5 and 6 out of 10, on their African Pride scale. The most indifferent racial group were Indians (23%), followed by whites (18%), coloureds (12%) and blacks (9%).

What was reassuring however was that only 6% were negative about being African with scores of between 1 and 4. A large proportion of whites fell into this category (19%). The second most negative group were Indians (12%). By comparison 11% of coloureds and 3% of blacks were negatively disposed towards being African. While all races were likely to experience varying levels of pride in being Africans, it emerged that blacks and coloureds embraced being Africans significantly more than whites and Indians.

Respondents who were most negative about being an African were asked to give reasons for this disposition. The primary cause for this was crime and lack of citizen security (31%). This point was mentioned by more than half of whites and Indians who were negatively disposed towards Africa as a continent.

	Total	Black	Coloured	Indian	White	Urban	Rural
	1292519	417103	204625	44298	626493	1029026	131800
Crime/ not safe	31%	8%	11%	51%	52%	34%	12%
Corruption	23%	11%	2%	-	40%	26%	15%
Government is not doing enough/ nothing	13%	14%	20%	25%	9%	12%	24%
Financial problems/ poor standards of living/ poor economy	12%	12%	40%	-	3%	12%	3%
Racism	11%	8%	2%	-	17%	11%	15%
Unfair treatment/ discrimination	11%	11%	25%	25%	5%	7%	7%
Unemployment/ lack of jobs	7%	11%	-	25%	6%	5%	20%
Poverty	6%	11%	6%	-	4%	5%	23%

Another factor seen to erode African pride was corruption (23%). Up to 40% of those whites who were negative mentioned it as a cause of their poor rating. There was also a feeling among 13% of the negative group that the government was somewhat ambivalent and seemed to prevaricate when it came to addressing pressing issues that needed attention. Added to this cause was financial problems and the poor standards of living mentioned by 40% of coloureds who questioned their Africaness. Other important considerations responsible for blunting African pride were racism affecting mostly whites (17%), but also mentioned by blacks (8%), and discrimination and unfair treatment, which affected 25% of coloureds and Indians. Unemployment was mentioned by

20% of those who were negative and residing in rural areas, while 23% of the rural residents further mentioned poverty as a cause of lack of pride in their continent.

Respondents who were most positively disposed towards being Africans with scores of 8 to 10, out of 10 gave reasons for their rating. The one predominant cause of such pride was that Africa was their place of origin and birth. This alone explained their sense of belonging and why they were proud of it. A resounding 67% of all positively disposed respondents gave this answer. Other minor causes of continental pride, all mentioned by 7% or fewer respondents, were cultural diversity, democracy in South Africa, and business opportunities.

### Top of Mind Associations With Africa

At the mere mention of the name Africa a mix of good and bad images are evoked. There is a tendency for bad associations to dominate. Key among these is poverty and food shortages, mentioned by 23% of respondents, violence (11%), diseases (10%), and unemployment (9%). An assertion that Africa is dirty, corrupt and greedy was made spontaneously by 7% of the sample, while 6% were aggrieved by the perception that civil wars were rife in Africa. When confronted with the question on what caused corruption in Africa, a lot of the social ills such as poverty, greed, and unemployment surfaced. However, there seems to be a feeling that some government officials in Africa carry corruption in their genes, being generically corrupt. The table below shows the main causes of corruption as viewed by South Africans.

	Total	Black	Coloured	Indian	White	Urban	Rural
	30903010	23266938	2708513	822416	4105143	21321995	4893977
Poverty causes people to commit crime/ theft/ fraud	24%	28%	10%	15%	10%	21%	28%
Lack of job opportunities/ unemployment	21%	25%	11%	4%	6%	18%	36%
Greedy leaders/ people	20%	19%	19%	21%	24%	20%	13%
Government is corrupt	15%	12%	21%	36%	21%	14%	14%
Poor leadership/ leaders should be fair	10%	9%	14%	14%	13%	11%	9%
Self enrichment of governments	6%	5%	3%	5%	13%	6%	4%
Funds meant for the people embezzled by corrupt officials	5%	3%	8%	6%	11%	5%	2%

It seems further that poor governance in general gets singled out as a problem in Africa as perceived by respondents. They see this as the main reason why some of the social ills like poverty and disease persist. The causes of poor governance were largely ascribed to lack of leadership skills (18%), power obsession and greed (16%), government officials pursuing personal agendas (14%), pathological corruption (14%), and lack of appropriate academic qualifications among some of the leadership ranks.

## Comparison of Top of Mind Associations of Africa with Other Continents

Africa was also associated with its people, being more readily recognised as black people (15%). Some 12% of respondents described Africa as a “beautiful continent”, their home (8%), and a place rich in cultural diversity (8%). All this was accentuated by richness in natural resources and game reserves (5%).

To contextualise views about Africa, respondents were also asked to give top of mind associations with other continents. Like Africa, Asia was associated with its people, broadly recognised as Indians and Chinese. It was perceived to be overpopulated by 10% of the sample, and yet to be at the forefront of technology, mentioned by another 10% of the sample. Some 5% of the respondents associated Asia with Terrorism and Wars.

Europe was associated with its indigenous people to a more limited degree by 6% of the respondents, who described the people as white. What stood out about Europe mainly was that it was perceived to be wealthy, developed and beautiful. Interestingly, it was also seen to be continuing in its development path. There were no significant negatives mentioned spontaneously about Europe.

America was seen as the glossy continent steeped in wealth and fame (14%). It produced the biggest celebrities, fashion and trends. Respondents saw it as the world’s capital of entertainment, and of generally living life in splendour and opulence. Interestingly, it was not significantly associated with any particular race of people as its primary inhabitants. To the respondents, America was perhaps the epitome of development and wealth, there being no significant negatives. Political interference in other countries was mentioned by less than 5% of the sample as a negative.

## Biggest Problems Facing Africa

When asked about the biggest problems facing Africa it was clear that poverty and its linked consequences was the biggest scourge on the continent.

	Total	Black	Coloured	Indian	White	Urban	Rural
	30903010	23266938	2708513	822416	4105143	21321995	4893977
Poverty/ malnutrition/ food shortage	41%	44%	31%	53%	33%	40%	40%
Crime/ violence/ drugs	33%	32%	36%	63%	30%	33%	33%
Unemployment	32%	36%	17%	21%	19%	28%	35%
Health /Diseases (HIV/ Aids, malaria)	29%	29%	27%	32%	29%	29%	27%
Lack of skills, education, knowledgeable people	9%	9%	3%	7%	12%	9%	6%
Corruption	6%	5%	2%	7%	13%	6%	6%
Over population	6%	6%	7%	4%	4%	6%	7%
Poor governance/ victimization	5%	5%	3%	6%	10%	5%	3%
War/ civil war	5%	5%	3%	10%	3%	4%	5%

Crime, violence and drugs were mentioned by 1 in every 3 respondents as significant problems affecting the African continent. This was the same extent to which unemployment was highlighted as one of the continent's biggest stumbling blocks. To complete the top four problems affecting Africa was the mention of HIV/AIDS by 29% of the sample. Lack of education and skills was recognised as a problem in this regard by 9% of respondents.

Other concerns about Africa that are worth mentioning were corruption (6%), over-population (6%), poor governance and victimisation of the people (5%), and civil wars (5%).

### African Collaboration in Bringing About Change

Concerning the way forward in addressing African pride and the African renaissance it is interesting to note that only 15% are fully aware of the African Union and what it does. In rural areas the number that was fully aware of what the African Union was all about was only 8%. Overall, a further 21% have only a partial knowledge of what the African Union does. Therefore, 36% are aware at least of some of the activities and initiatives of the AU. A staggering 34% knew the name only, while a further 30% knew nothing at all about the AU. In all, therefore, 64% either know the AU only by name or know nothing at all. Given the importance of the AU as a mechanism for development and change in Africa, its functions and operations remain a privy of the elite and politicians. This suggests that an African government involving all Africans, especially the poor, who have representatives in parliament, is still far from being a practical reality.

A similar picture was noted for the African Parliament where 63% only knew the name or nothing at all. 92% of all respondents knew nothing at all, or just knew the name African Peer Review Mechanism. A similar percentage (89%) knew nothing at all about, or had just heard the name NEPAD. The important instruments of delivering change in Africa, therefore remain relatively conceptual there seeming to be little evidence that such concepts will be transformed into tangible benefits for the masses of people in Africa. It was therefore unsurprising that the entire concept of an African Renaissance was poorly understood by South Africans in what it stood for, and what short or long term benefits it would offer them. Thus while such instruments as AU, NEPAD and African Peer Review Mechanism remain necessary as ideals, their implementation has been far from convincing to the ordinary person in the street. Such well meant ideals run the risk of being white elephants like Nkrumaism and Nasserism unless something is done to redefine their specific everyday roles and responsibilities. This is particularly more important now that all African states are independent.

## Conclusion

South Africans feel African patriotism to varying degrees depending on their circumstances. A significant proportion of whites and Indians are in this way alienated, feeling less African than they would be expected to. Overall and across all races, it is clear that national pride varies directly with self-perception of well being, safety, and having realistic opportunities of achieving one's dreams in life. Given the depth of poverty and disease in Africa, it is therefore not surprising that only 53% declared their patriotism without any reservations, a lot of it being driven largely by allegiance to the motherland. A successful continent requires committed and patriotic citizens. This means that government in Africa has to address the multitude of socio-economic problems afflicting its people. It is quite ironic that Africans live in relative abject poverty in the world, given the richness of mineral resources and other natural endowments on the continent. However, confidence that the situation can be turned around is low, especially in view of the trend of past government failures, perceptions around poor governance, greed, selfishness, and lack of leadership skills. Africa needs a serious dialogue with itself if it is emerge from being a continent to be pitied by continents that are intrinsically poorer than itself. Collaborative efforts like the African Union, African Parliament, NEPAD, African Peer Review Mechanism at this stage remain expensive luxuries without any visible impact on the lives of ordinary people.

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