

Optimism reaches a high but thoughts of emigration stay the same

Issued by [Kantar](#)

12 Oct 2009

TNS Research Surveys, South Africa's leading marketing and social insights company, has conducted a series of surveys since 2004 to ascertain whether people feel positive about South Africa and, since February 2009, whether they are thinking of leaving. These surveys were conducted amongst a sample of 2 000 SA adults from the seven major metropolitan areas of South Africa, interviewing them face-to-face in their homes, with a margin of error of under 2.5%.

The latest results (June) indicate that 73% of respondents agreed that they were positive about South Africa and its future, 19% disagreed and 8% said that they don't know. This figure of 73% is well up on the February figure of 60% and the May figure of 68% - there has been an uninterrupted rise since the 56% achieved in November 2008. Further, the figure of 73% equals the previous high of 73% achieved in May 2006 and is an encouraging return to optimism that had fallen to an all-time low of 49% in mid-2008.

Twelve percent said that they were thinking of leaving South Africa, 88% said that they were not and 4% said that they didn't know. This figure for those thinking of leaving the country is essentially the same as the 11% seen in February but we do see a small rise in those saying that they will not be leaving - from 82% to 84%, with a drop in those giving a "don't know" response from 7% to 4%. It seems that the elections may have crystallised a little more the feelings of some people.

Who is feeling positive about South Africa?

Optimism varies considerably by race but all race groups show considerable improvements:

- "I feel positive about South Africa and its future" - 73% agree (up from 60% in February)
 - Blacks - 84% (up from 72% in February); whites - 46% (up from 37%); coloureds - 61% (up from 47%); Indians/Asians - 63% (up from 35%)

Those who disagree that they feel positive about South Africa can be broken down as follows:

- Blacks - 9% (down from 15% in February); whites - 40% (down from 48%); coloureds - 29% (down from 39%); Indians/Asians - 30% (down from 42%).

Hence, the composition of the 19% who are negative is 32% black, 41% white, 19% coloured and 9% Indians/Asians.

There is a slightly higher level of optimism amongst males (75%) than females (71%) though there is a decline amongst those aged 60 and over (56% are positive compared with 77% of those aged 34 years or less) and amongst the more wealthy (though this is partly a function of the differences across race). The most positive in terms of wealth are those in the lower middle classes (LSM 4 to 6) where optimism reaches 82%. Amongst blacks, those whose home language is Sotho are the least positive (78% are positive).

There are considerable differences by area: Soweto and Johannesburg are the most positive and Cape Town and Pretoria are the most negative (figures in brackets are for February - there have been improvements in most areas except for the West Rand and the Vaal Triangle/South Rand):

			%s	
			Positive	Negative
Gauteng	Johannesburg and environs		76 (67)	18 (22)
			78 (69)	14 (20)
		Johannesburg excl Soweto	83 (74)	12 (16)
		East Rand	76 (66)	15 (27)
		West Rand	65 (65)	28 (24)
		Soweto	94 (75)	5 (13)
		Vaal Triangle/South Rand	68 (65)	15 (15)
		Pretoria	66 (58)	30 (30)
Cape Town		61 (44)	28 (39)	
Durban		76 (59)	15 (24)	
Eastern Cape	Port Elizabeth		77 (51)	14 (24)
			77 (55)	15 (21)
		East London	78 (44)	13 (31)
Bloemfontein		65 (70)	13 (25)	

Does this translate into a desire to leave South Africa?

Twelve percent of metro adults agreed that are thinking of leaving South Africa (11% in February). There are much smaller differences by race:

- “I am thinking of leaving South Africa” - 12% agree (11% in February)
 - Blacks - 12% (9% in February); whites - 14% (15% in February); coloureds - 8% (12% in February); Indians/Asians - 12% (12% in February).

Those who disagree that they feel are thinking of leaving South Africa (82%) can be broken down as follows:

- Blacks - 85%; whites - 79%; coloureds - 91%; Indians/Asians - 82%

Hence, the composition of the 12% who are thinking of leaving is 63% black, 23% white, 8% coloured and 6% Indians/Asians.

Interestingly, whilst the incidence of thinking of leaving is highest amongst whites, the majority of potential emigrants are black.

No gender differences are evident. However, and concerningly, younger people are more vulnerable (14% of those aged under 24 years say they are thinking of leaving compared with only 5% of those aged 50 years and over). A correlation with wealth is again evident but, even more concerning is that people currently at university showed a very high response of 23% in terms of thinking of leaving.

Of the people who feel positive about South Africa and its future, only 10% are thinking of leaving. Of the people who are not feeling positive about South Africa, many of whom one would assume are thinking of leaving, only 18% are thinking of leaving. This is somewhat counterintuitive; however, perhaps these South Africans are willing to stay and fight out whatever it is that is making them feel negative about South Africa.

Differences by area are again very evident with Pretoria and East London showing the highest likelihood of moving and Soweto and Port Elizabeth showing the most stability (figures in brackets refer to February - Sowetans showed a rise in their likelihood of leaving, as did those in East London):

			%s	
			Leaving	Not leaving
Gauteng	Johannesburg and environs		12 (11)	84 (83)
			11 (8)	83 (85)
		Johannesburg excl Soweto	13 (8)	85 (85)
		East Rand	11 (10)	86 (85)
		West Rand	11 (10)	86 (79)
		Soweto	11 (6)	89 (92)
		Vaal Triangle/South Rand	8 (5)	80 (81)
		Pretoria	17 (14)	76 (77)
Cape Town		11 (11)	85 (80)	
Durban		10 (16)	85 (78)	
Eastern Cape	Port Elizabeth		11 (7)	89 (85)
			6 (5)	94 (89)
		East London	20 (11)	80 (78)
Bloemfontein		13 (8)	73 (93)	

Our take-out

Although 19% of respondents did not feel positive about South Africa and its future, many more South Africans do feel positive and, even amongst those feeling negative, relatively few are thinking of leaving the country. The feelings of optimism have grown steadily and without interruption since December 2008 and have regained their all-time high levels. But the proportion of people thinking of leaving has not changed over the same time period.

However, that 23% of those at university are thinking of leaving does not augur well for the worsening skills shortage and the future prospects of the country. It is clear that a notable proportion of university students are not certain about their prospects here. There are indications that this sentiment comes more strongly from Black students in Cape Town. Further, younger people in general are also the most positive - and also the most likely to be looking elsewhere. It is just these young people we need to stay.

Technical note

The study was conducted amongst 2 000 adults (1260 blacks, 385 whites, 240 coloureds and 115 Indians/Asians) in the seven major metropolitan areas: it has a margin of error of under 2.5% for the results found for the total sample. The studies were conducted by TNS Research Surveys (Pty) Ltd as part of their ongoing research into current social and political issues and were funded by TNS Research Surveys. For more details, please contact Neil Higgs on 011-778-7500 or 082-376-6312.

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