



INCLUSIVE SOCIETY INSTITUTE

Media Release

LAUNCH OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIAL COHESION INDEX (SASCI) AT THE SOCIAL COHESION ROUNDTABLE HOSTED BY THE NATIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION AT THE UNION BUILDINGS, PRETORIA, ON 26 NOVEMBER 2024

The Inclusive Society Institute (ISI) has, in cooperation with Constructor University, which is based in Bremen, Germany, developed a South Africa Social Cohesion Index (SASCI), that measures the well-being of South African society on a year-to-year basis. The Index was launched at a roundtable dialogue on social cohesion, that was hosted at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, by the National Planning Commission.

The provides a comprehensive assessment of social cohesion in South Africa, focusing on its development over the past three years. The study uses data from the Khayabus Survey conducted by Ipsos South Africa. The study assesses social cohesion in three domains: social relations, connectedness, and focus on the common good. Each of these domains encompasses three dimensions of cohesiveness, namely the **intactness of social networks**, **general trust in people**, and **acceptance of diversity** for the domain 'social relations,' **identification with one's place of residence**, **trust in institutions**, and **perception of fairness** for the 'connectedness' domain, and **solidarity and helpfulness**, **respect for social rules**, and **civic participation** for the domain 'focus on the common good.'

The ISI, concerned by the steady decline of social cohesion in South Africa, identified a need for an index as a tool to monitor the social cohesion trends in the country, since sufficient levels of social cohesion in the country is of extreme importance for purposes of social and economic stability. Empirical evidence shows that where social cohesion is high, societal well-being tends to outperform societies in which social cohesion is low.

Ultimately, the report examines the relationship between social cohesion and subjective well-being among South Africans. It supports the OECD countries' finding that high levels of social cohesion are related to well-being. Empirical evidence shows that higher levels of social cohesion in a geopolitical entity leads to a more **positive outlook on life**, with optimism and subjective well-being being considerably higher with high levels of social cohesion. Cohesion translates the social and economic structures (performance and output of the economy, living conditions) into quality of life (happiness, life satisfaction) directly experienced by individual members of society. In cases where cohesion is neglected, one can expect **societal polarization and political instability**.

Whilst the overall social cohesion index in South Africa is **moderately high**, neither specifically high nor low, there has been a stable **decline** over the past three years; and when compared with the optimism at the dawn of the new South Africa in 1994, the decline has been significant.

The study reveals that the most significant **decline** occurred in the cohesion dimension, **respect for social rules**. Other weakened dimensions include **trust in institutions** and **perception of fairness**. The level of solidarity and helpfulness remained stable, whereas civic participation and general trust in people have become slightly stronger. The current level of cohesion in **South Africa, 51.7**, is almost identical to that found in **Germany** in 2023, where the index score was 52. As for the South African Provinces, social cohesion was found lowest in KwaZulu Natal (46.1), second lowest in Free State (49.4), and third lowest in Gauteng (50.5) in 2023.

What concerns the ISI is that whilst the overall index score is moderately high, there are dimensions that are worryingly low. Driven by a too low a level of acceptance for diversity, low trust in government institutions, and high inequality, 'Perception of Fairness' and 'Respect for Social Rules' was found to be ominously low. If not addressed, it could pose a real threat to continued social and economic stability in South Africa. Thus, it is hoped that the Index could guide public policymakers as to where best focus their energy and resources in order to ensure the longer term stability of the nation.

When one looks at people's subjective experience with social cohesion, the study points to the core driver of deteriorating social cohesion: the **urban-rural split**. Cohesion is considerably higher in rurally dominated South Africa, while metropolitan areas are hotbeds of an intra-societal split.

When focusing on the relationship between the level of social cohesion in nine provinces and the characteristics of the provinces reveals surprising facts. The study shows that social cohesion in the South African provinces is **negatively** correlated with GDP and assets, i.e., higher assets resulting in lower social cohesion. This is mirrored by the finding that poverty positively correlates with social cohesion, with more poor people living in areas with higher social cohesion. The percentage of people living in rural areas is a good predictor of social cohesion, whereas city dwellers report lower levels of subjectively experienced social cohesion.

High levels of language fractionalisation correlate **positively** with social cohesion, and social cohesion tends to be lower when the median age is higher. In contrast, social cohesion elsewhere in the world is higher in countries with a high median age. Language and religious fractionalisation results for South Africa also deviate from what had been reported for, e.g., Asia.

The study also found that social cohesion is perceived as **lower** among intense **Internet users**. These findings contradict the findings of the Bremen Social Cohesion Radar, which suggested that Internet use fosters social cohesion. Cohesion is high where many Whites and Coloureds live and low where many Indians and Blacks live. As one would expect, low percentages of singles in a geopolitical entity and high numbers of married people are related to high social cohesion.

Finally, the results show that identification with the country of South Africa is not a variable that differentiates the classes: All South Africans are **highly identified** with their country.

The findings suggest that higher levels of social cohesion in a geopolitical entity will likely lead to **increased life satisfaction** and overall well-being. Exactly that finding underscores the necessity of political action to improve South Africa's level of social cohesion. Whereas conceptual academic work on social cohesion sometimes claims that too high a level of social cohesion can cement the societal status quo and prevent progress, all **empirical studies** have shown that high levels of cohesion foster peaceful coexistence of various societal groups in respect, dignity, trust, and cooperation.

To access the full report click on the link below:

<https://www.inclusivesociety.org.za/post/the-south-africa-social-cohesion-index-measuring-the-well-being-of-a-society>

Comments by Serame Taukobong, Chief Executive Officer of Telkom, who enabled the research.

“I see telecommunications as more than just infrastructure. For Telkom it is about connecting people, building communities and a better life for all. Human connection drives social cohesion and in our digital age, Telkom is an enabler of social cohesion. Supporting this research resonates deeply with Telkom's purpose of seamlessly connecting South Africans, enabling us to live a better life,” said Telkom Group CEO Serame Taukobong.

“As a company that connects millions of South African lives daily, we have both the responsibility and opportunity to contribute to social cohesion.

“Whether it's through our infrastructure investments, our focus on digital inclusion through initiatives like the Telkom Foundation, or day-to-day operations that create economic opportunities, we recognise that every connection we enable has the potential to strengthen the fabric of our society.

“For example, outside of our commercial activities, Telkom has impacted 221,308 lives through our FutureMakers programme and SMME procurement, has invested R210m in digital literacy projects, and connected over 70,000 township homes to the internet.

“The insights from this Index will be invaluable in guiding not just policy makers, but also corporate citizens like Telkom, on how to improve the society we serve.”

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