



INCLUSIVE SOCIETY INSTITUTE

Op-ed

WHO REALLY SPEAKS FOR WHITE AND AFRIKAANS-SPEAKING SOUTH AFRICANS?

By Daryl Swanepoel

When an organisation speaks on behalf of a community, whose reality does it describe? That of the people themselves, or the version that best suits its political campaign? This question has become urgent as allegations of persecution of white South Africans have become part of an international diplomatic dispute. Before describing an entire community as victims, we should at least listen to what its members say about their own lives.

Some people suffer disadvantage, experience injustice, and have good reason to be angry or afraid. Their experiences deserve attention. No majority's satisfaction cancels an individual's rights. But the reverse also applies: individual grievances cannot simply be elevated into a description of an entire community's circumstances. The severity of an experience and its prevalence are two different things.

This is precisely where the persecution narrative needs to be tested. The Ipsos Khayabus survey, which feeds into the Inclusive Society Institute's South African Social Cohesion Index, provides an important insight into people's assessments of their circumstances. The latest edition of the index was published earlier this year. The survey involves more than 3,000 respondents, interviewed face-to-face in their homes and home languages. This gives us a much broader basis than selected personal testimonies. Asked how their family lives compared with a year earlier, 79.30% of white respondents say their circumstances are better or about the same. Of these, 34.04% report improvement and 45.26% no substantial change. Almost four in five therefore report stability or progress. This is a striking finding against a portrayal of increasingly intolerable living conditions.

Expectations for the coming year are even stronger. Among white respondents, 82.71% expect their family to be better off or about the same. Of these, 44.98% expect improvement and 37.73% stability. Among Afrikaans speakers, the corresponding total is 85.33%: 48.54% expect improvement and 36.79% stability. Almost half of both groups therefore expect actual improvement, rather than merely a continuation of their present circumstances.

The longer view of children's prospects also shows more hope than pessimism. Among white respondents, 52.71% expect a bright future for their children or those of their friends, compared with 39.36% who expect a poor future. Among Afrikaans speakers, the figures are 53.66% and 36.85%. The question does not specify where that future will unfold. Nevertheless, it is significant that the majority's answer is hopeful.

Then there are race relations. Among white respondents, 71.32% believe relations between the country's different races are improving or staying the same: 35.58% see improvement and 35.74% no change. Among Afrikaans speakers, the total is 71.67%, with 31.13% seeing improvement and 40.54% reporting unchanged relations. Here, too, deterioration is not the predominant response.

We must read these figures honestly. Unchanged relations are not necessarily good relations. Stable family circumstances do not prove that someone never experiences discrimination. Nor are all Afrikaans speakers white or Afrikaners. The questions do not directly measure persecution. But together, the answers show a consistent pattern: large majorities report or expect stability and improvement, while more respondents are hopeful than pessimistic about children's futures.

Where do these people fit into the story being told about them internationally?

Lex Libertas has launched an international campaign concerning the persecution of minorities. Solidarity links the phasing out of racial laws to restoring relations with the United States. Their positions are not identical, but both must account for these findings in their public portrayal of minorities' circumstances. They have every right to oppose particular policies. Creating an impression of a broadly persecuted community, however, requires much more than examples of individual disadvantage.

The Solidarity Movement itself acknowledges that most Afrikaners will remain in South Africa and that refugee status is not a solution for the community as a whole. That is an important acknowledgement. But it sharpens the question: does the reality of that majority receive the same weight in the international message as the experiences of those who wish to leave?

A community does not belong to the organisations that speak on its behalf. Membership, visibility and access to foreign policymakers give no one an exclusive right to define its condition. White South Africans' and Afrikaans speakers' own answers deserve at least as much attention as the claims of their self-appointed or elected representatives. Representation requires listening even when the answers make your campaign uncomfortable.

The same applies to the debate over race-based policy. Its fairness, effectiveness and implementation must be examined and, where necessary, changed. But a preference for abolishing such policies is a political position that must be defended on its merits. The word "persecution" cannot do the evidentiary work for its proponents. A strong argument should be able to withstand the full reality.

This distinction has consequences beyond our borders. President Donald Trump's executive order of February 2025 linked preferential resettlement for Afrikaners to allegations of unjust, government-sponsored racial discrimination. When such a portrayal influences foreign policy, its accuracy becomes a matter of national interest. The survey does not explain all American motivations. It does, however, provide good reason to question the general picture underpinning part of the American justification.

Washington also has a responsibility to assess a community's circumstances independently. Participation in a refugee programme does not, in itself, prove that the wider community is persecuted. Those who leave speak to their own experiences. The large majority who report and expect stability or improvement must be equally audible. Otherwise, the exception is allowed to define the whole.

Exaggeration is not harmless simply because it is presented in the name of community interests. It can deepen fear, weaken trust between communities and help justify foreign pressure whose costs are borne much more widely. It can teach the very people whose interests are supposedly being protected to view their prospects through a lens of inevitable threat. Selective portrayal is therefore irresponsible, however noble the stated purpose.

These findings place a responsibility on Solidarity and Lex Libertas to portray faithfully the communities on whose behalf they speak. Individual grievances and objections to policy do not justify

the leap to a general narrative of community persecution. When large majorities expect stability or improvement in their family circumstances, that reality should be central to any honest account of their position. Making it subordinate to a political campaign does an injustice to those communities and to South Africa.

Serving a community also means acknowledging its hope. Those who speak for white South Africans and Afrikaans speakers owe them the whole truth, with all its problems and possibilities. South Africa's relations with the world should be built on the most honest account of our reality, rather than the most politically useful one.

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