

## The Moods and Minds of South Africans - a Roller Coaster Ride

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Take yourself back two decades.

The late 80's were a depressed period for most. The South African population lived in a funk of despair, rugby aficionados were in the doldrums because of the sports boycotts and we wondered if life could ever normalize and afford dignity and pride in being South African to all citizens.

Then along came the release of Nelson Mandela, the unbanning of several political parties and CODESA. This was followed by the extraordinary first democratic elections in 1994 where all our citizens finally had the opportunity to cast their votes and the inauguration of a new president with iconic stature. This heralded in an era of opportunities for many but the scourge and seemingly unbreakable cycle of poverty remained.

In 1998, a survey called *futurefact* came into being. Since then *futurefact* has been tracking the moods and minds of citizens of this country. Each year it identifies the changes in the mindsets of South Africans and reveals the fascinating shifts in the social fabric of the society. We have seen shifts that are optimistic and upwards, we have seen sideways shifts, and in the latest survey we have seen a decided degree of disaffection and sense of alienation and anxiety underpinning the moods and minds of significant numbers of South Africans. We can clearly see that many feel excluded in the context of the new South Africa, though they are unlikely to rise and protest as they did during the struggle years when the injustice to the majority was clear and unambiguous.

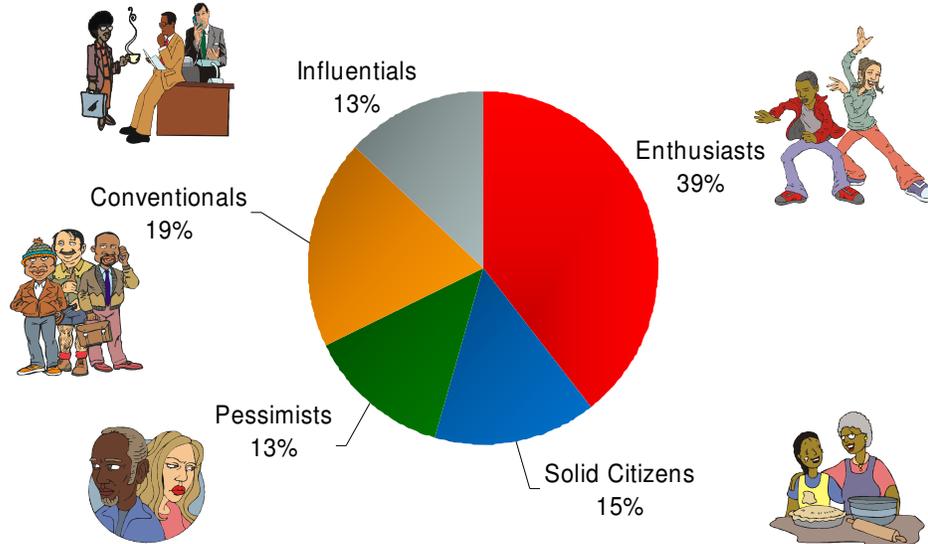
Today, not only do many feel excluded, but across the board there is insecurity with regard to crime, unemployment, economic sustainability and political leadership. Protesting voices such as those against the dissolution of the Scorpions and protests on immigration and crime, seem not to have been heard (or heeded). And so many citizens feel side-lined, despite the recognized improvements in living standards and palpable class mobility. A sense of belonging and worth is essential if citizens of the country are to feel they are citizens not subjects (Cass Sunstein, Harvard Law Professor, quoted in the '*The new liberalism*' by George Parker in the New Yorker, November 2008).

Hopefully 2009 is bringing in a new period of hope and possibility with petrol price reductions, potentially a knock-on effect on food prices and interest rates, and a new president in the White House who has performed well in his first 100 days according to the polls. Jacob Zuma is now making conciliation a theme, a la Mandela and as Theodore Roosevelt, 26<sup>th</sup> US President (1858 - 1919) said of the USA: "*This country will not be a permanently good place for any of us to live in unless we make it a reasonably good place for all of us to live in*".

But what are the mindsets of South Africans? What distinguishes the various groups of people? Based on a national probability sample of 2500 adult South Africans (only excluding communities of fewer than 500 people) surveyed from mid August to mid

September 2008, the following 'Mindsets' emerged from a statistical factor analysis conducted on behalf of the International Marketing Council (IMC).

## The South African Mindsets 2008



Source: *futurefact* 2008

*futurefact*

The **Enthusiasts** have been around as a pretty solid group for several years. They have seen a significant move into the middle and upper middle classes since their parents' day with major improvements in their economic circumstances compared to their parents. They could also be called the 'optimists', because they have a glass is 'half full' rather than 'half empty' view of life in SA. What is fascinating about them now is that while being optimistic about the future, they show a realistic attitude to the problems of South Africa and are not blindly ignoring them.

The **Influentials** have also been around for some time, being reflective of all race groups, well educated and fairly affluent, but are unfortunately showing a steep decline into lowered confidence in the country. They are unhappy about the perceived lack of accountability and capacity or skills to implement policy and are finding it difficult to hold onto the good things that are happening in the country. They are fearful that there will be conflict between the various ethnic groups in SA and that the country will go the way of Zimbabwe. They still see that the country has a lot of potential but there will have to be intrinsic change in the political and social milieu to prompt them to a change in spirit.

**Solid Citizens** are a principled group of people, but with low levels of income and education that do not equip them to rise above the everyday demands in making ends meet. They believe that SA has better prospects now than prior to 1994 but are not so sure about the prospects currently.

Then we have the **Conventionals**, basically Mr and Mrs Average, but more likely to be small town dwellers. There is a general sense that they are not particularly socially or politically conscious and that they just live their lives on a somewhat routine level. They

can best be described as people who do not have a world or country view - their lives are contained within their own immediate communities. One has a sense of a group of people who just want to be left alone with their lives, not participate in democratic institutions nor in mobilizing to do their bit for the country.

A new group that has just emerged in the last survey can only be called the **Pessimists**, who by and large are the opposite of the Enthusiasts and tend to have a 'glass is half empty' state of mind or perhaps for them the glass is empty. They are not just apathetic, they are negative in their attitudes and see little chance of things coming right, nor are they prepared to do their bit to help. There is an almost active resistance because of their lack of belief in the country and its future. They have serious concerns about the future political leadership of the country and reflect the lowest confidence in key political leaders and institutions of all the mindsets.

They express the strongest levels of fear that there will be violence between the different ethnic groups and also that there are black racists in the country. They tend to be above average white and coloured, older (50 plus) and female. Members of this mindset have lost hope that they can make a difference or succeed in this country, and their feeling of belonging appears compromised. Nonetheless, this loss of hope appears to be fairly recent, in that they claim to have previously been optimistic and to be losing hope for the first time. It is always possible that conditions will change under the new administration which will allow this group to reclaim a more hopeful space in the future.

Perhaps it is fitting to quote the economic historian Arthur Toynbee (1852 -1883), who noted that "*The ability to respond to crises is the critical difference between societies that succeed and those that fail. Progress does not come from having no challenges; rather it comes from societies responding successfully to the inevitable challenges that come their way*". Let us hope that we and our leaders will respond well to the global and local challenges that lie ahead. It will be fascinating to examine the mindsets that emerge in the 2009 survey due to go into field in September. See [www.futurefact.co.za](http://www.futurefact.co.za)