

# EMBRACING THE RAINBOW NATION COULD HELP BRIDGE THE COLOUR DIVIDE

Does a strong national identity or patriotism matter for the formation of a non-racist and united South African society? MARLENE ROEFS asks this question, based on the findings on nation building in the HSRC's South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2003.

The nation-building project seems to be bearing fruit. The majority of African, white, coloured and Indian South Africans do feel strong ties with the nation and show patriotism. At the same time, both whites and Africans think that fellow South Africans of another colour are more racist than their own race group.

Findings from the HSRC's South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2003 raise the question of whether strong national identity or patriotism actually matters for the formation of a non-racist and united South African society.

Almost 2 500 South Africans were asked three questions about their relationship to the nation, or what we call "national identity". In answer to the question whether "the world would be better if countries were more like South Africa", over half (58%) said they (strongly) agreed. The strongest agreement was among Africans (64%) and whites – with more than a quarter of the respondents being indecisive.

Approximately two-thirds (64%) of the group were of the opinion that "South Africa is better than most other countries". Again, Africans agreed most strongly (70%), and whites the least strongly (45%).

A large majority of all respondents (83%) would "rather be a citizen of South Africa than of any other country". Over two-thirds of whites (65%) and four-fifths of Africans (88%) agreed with this statement. Overall, coloureds showed a similar pattern to that of whites, whereas Indians were more similar to Africans. These percentages and findings from earlier studies show that patriotism and national identity are widely shared within the nation.

In addition, it was found that a strong national identity does not preclude a strong

racial identity. As with national identity, race identity was stronger among Africans than among the other three race groups. Most people seem to combine an African, white, coloured or Indian race identity with a strong national identity.

Although a sense of national identity has been formed, the SASAS findings show that there is definitely a need for improvement in race relations. We found that the different race groups equivocally think people from other race groups are racist. What is more worrying is that a clear majority of South Africans seem to believe people of other race groups are racist. Especially among African

Would racial identification have less negative consequences if one at the same time strongly identifies with the nation? Indeed, among Africans such a combination of race and national identity, or what we call "dual identity", coincides with more positive views of other race groups. Among the racial minorities, in contrast, national identity is more contested, especially when combined with a strong group identity. Interestingly, this contestation tends to result in more negative perceptions of racism among other "fellow" minority groups.

This study suggests that a national identity is in the process of formation and that this

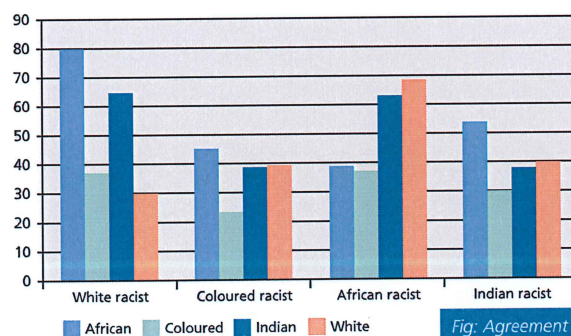


Fig: Agreement with the statement that whites/coloureds/Africans/Indians are racist (%).

**83% of respondents would rather be a citizen of South Africa than of any other country**

and white South Africans, racism is reciprocal, with Africans thinking whites are racist and whites thinking Africans are racist.

With regard to each of the four race groups, we asked the respondents whether they agreed that most members of a particular race group had racist attitudes. As is shown in the graph, whites were most negatively perceived, especially among Africans. The historical African-white schism is confirmed by the mirroring pattern that most whites regard Africans as racist. Coloureds and Indians were generally regarded as less racist than the other race groups.

might contribute to unifying, rather than excluding and dividing, various population groups. Even if, as some argue, South Africans are claiming their South African identity only because it was previously denied to them, this is not necessarily happening at the expense of minority race groups. Rather, national identity seems to be associated with some rivalry among minority groups in terms of maintaining each other's stereotypes of racism. •

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# review

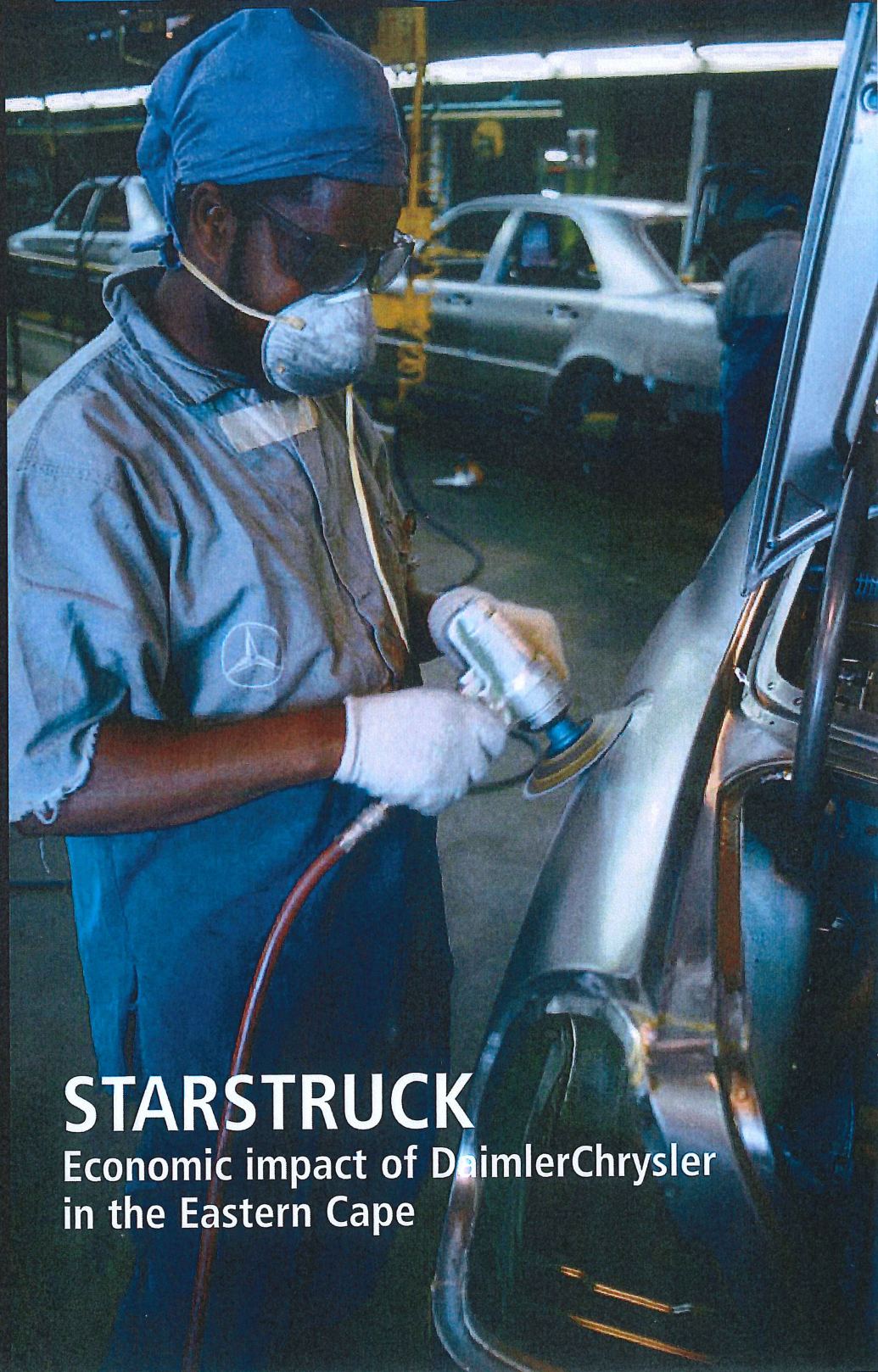
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