



FREEDOM DAY

INTRODUCTION



This newsletter focuses on the significance of Freedom Day within the context of us celebrating 20 Years of Freedom. It captures the views and perceptions of South Africans on Freedom Day and gives a snapshot of media reporting during this year's celebrations.

Its aim is to tease out a better understanding of what freedom means to all of us. The connotation of freedom varies from person to person and is often influenced by life experiences.

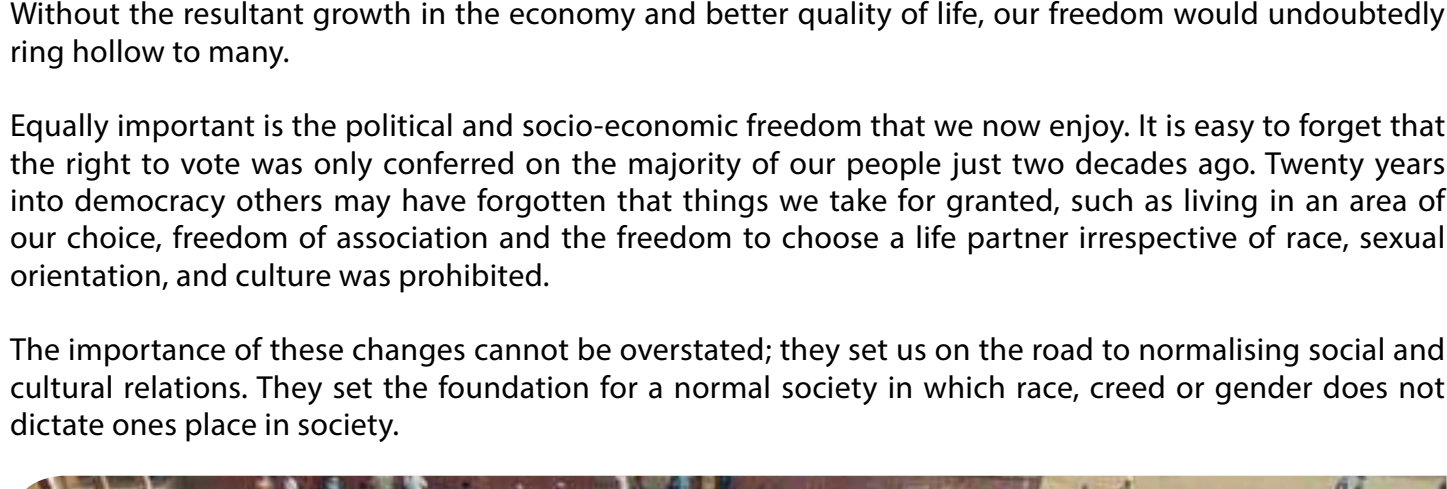
As we continue our commemoration of 20 Years of Freedom many South Africans will no doubt also ponder what freedom means? Some point to our maturing democracy which entrenches the rights of all as evidence of our freedom. Others highlight important issues like freedom of speech, or human dignity. For many, freedom can be felt in the tangible change in their lives since 1994.

The change is undoubtedly evident in the freedom that all South Africans now have to participate in the economy. The apartheid economy was based on exclusion of the majority and job, and economic reservation for only one small segment of the population.

Democracy and freedom saw the removal of these artificial, limiting and damaging boundaries. The net result has been a thriving economy that benefits from the innovation and hard work of all South Africans. Without the resultant growth in the economy and better quality of life, our freedom would undoubtedly ring hollow to many.

Equally important is the political and socio-economic freedom that we now enjoy. It is easy to forget that the right to vote was only conferred on the majority of our people just two decades ago. Twenty years into democracy others may have forgotten that things we take for granted, such as living in an area of our choice, freedom of association and the freedom to choose a life partner irrespective of race, sexual orientation, and culture was prohibited.

The importance of these changes cannot be overstated; they set us on the road to normalising social and cultural relations. They set the foundation for a normal society in which race, creed or gender does not dictate ones place in society.



FREEDOM DAY IN CONTEXT

Freedom Day is observed annually on 27 April and marks the occasion on which we commemorate our journey to freedom and democracy. It is a celebration of our nation; an affirmation of all South Africans moving away from hatred, divisions and a painful history to build a common future.

This day represents peace, unity and the restoration of human dignity of all South Africans.

It is a confirmation that we have made strides away from the past of exclusion and discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, colour and creed. It further guarantees our freedom and that the abuse and violations of the past will never be repeated.



PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF NATIONAL DAYS

The public's perception on Freedom Day should be viewed in context with the findings from the GCIS National Quantitative Tracker Survey Quarter 4 (October – December) of 2013. These offer fascinating insight into the views of ordinary South Africans on national days.

The study primarily investigated:

- The South African public's awareness of national days; and
- South Africans' attitudes towards national days.

South Africans aged 15 years and older were asked which national day they viewed as the most important.

Almost **four-in-ten** respondents mentioned Freedom Day (39 per cent), closely followed by Youth Day (23 per cent). On the other end of scale only 8 per cent of South Africans mentioned Human Rights Day with Heritage Day and the Day of Reconciliation hardly registering at 6 and 5 per cent respectively.

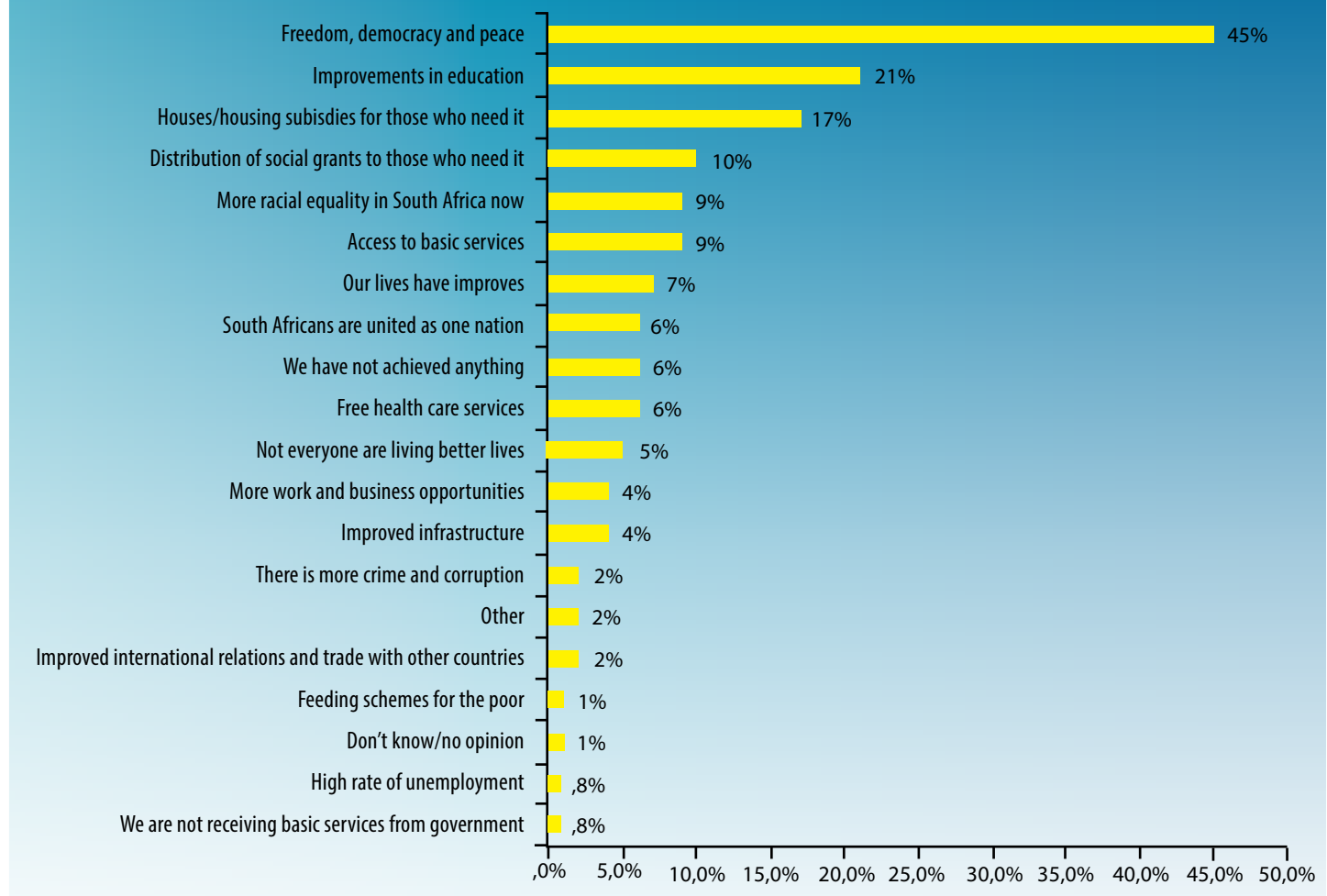


Interestingly, the survey showed that Freedom Day followed by Youth Day and Human Rights Day elicited strong feelings of patriotism.

In addition, Freedom Day, along with Human Rights Day and the Day of Reconciliation were highlighted as significant to build national unity.

These findings are underscored by the results of a separate study which focused on 20 Years of Freedom. The findings from the GCIS Tracker Survey, (April - June 2014) on 20 Years of Freedom confirm that most respondents view **freedom, democracy** and **peace** as our greatest achievements.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF 20 YEARS OF FREEDOM



Source: GCIS National Tracker Survey

When asked about these achievements, the vast majority of respondents again pointed to freedom, improvements in education and the provision of housing and services.

It would be remiss to reflect on the meaning of freedom without due consideration to the way in which the lives of many South Africans have been changed since 1994.

Census 2011 indicates that income levels have increased, education levels are up and millions of people now have access to water, electricity, sanitation and housing.

THE VIEW OF THE MEDIA

An analysis of media reporting in the run-up to this year's Freedom Day shows that there was significant media interest around the celebration of 20 Years of Freedom and the day itself. This is attributed to the fact that the commemoration was held against the backdrop of the general elections and coincided with the celebration of 20 Years of Freedom.

Media reported mainly on the country's successes and achievements over the past 20 years. However, positive coverage was to an extent tarnished by the spate of violent protests around the country with aggrieved communities voicing their dissatisfaction on issues relating to service delivery.

Commemorative events and government communication initiatives attracted significant media interest.

Government's voice was however largely absent in opinion and analysis sections which tended to be dominated by other commentators, including editorials.

COMMUNICATION IMPLICATIONS

It is clear from both research and media reporting that Freedom Day and 20 Years of Freedom has found resonance in the hearts and minds of most South Africans.

Therefore government needs to engage with media and encourage them to play an educational and constructive role as we strive for a more inclusive society.

We need to encourage media to more constructively reflect on the challenges that government inherited in 1994, and the progress that has been made to correct the past imbalances.

The intensely personal way in which most people view Freedom Day stems from the personal connection they attach to our freedom. The essence and spirit of Freedom therefore lives and thrives in the DNA of all South Africans. It is encouraging that Freedom Day is viewed as the most important national day.

It has also been found to be strongly associated with patriotism and evokes a sense of national pride.

We must do more to instil a sense of common purpose in our nation and we should highlight the sacrifices of the past, without which we would never have won our freedom

Awareness around Freedom Day and its sentiment is higher than any other national day. This presents an opportunity to both reinforce what freedom means and to tap into its sentiment and cascade it to other national days.

