

Are we morally corrupt?

Issued by [Kantar](#)

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Against a background of the ANC Youth League claiming “it is prepared to kill for Jacob Zuma” if his corruption trial proceeds, Robert Mugabe declaring war against the ballot box (without any official comment from South Africa), xenophobia, the Hlope affair that threatens to slide into a racial divide, the Black Journalists' Forum and the admission criteria outcry, the Amazon/Post Office issue and with crime as South Africa's number one current problem, the question is “Are we as a nation morally corrupt?”.

- One in five metro adults claim they are quite happy to buy pirated DVDs and CDs. A quarter of adults say they know people who have bought stolen goods. Four out of ten people would keep the money if a cashier or teller gave them R50 too much change. This cuts across all demographics and religious groupings. And 84% do not feel that crime levels are dropping.
- An astounding one-third of metro drivers have driven a vehicle in the last six months having *knowingly* had more alcohol than they should.
- Almost 90% feel that corruption has become a way of life in South Africa; 85% feel that there is corruption in senior levels of Government - 90% of people feel that this need to be eliminated.
- Only 29% feel that *refugees* from Zimbabwe should be allowed to stay and only 65% feel that people from other countries but here *legally* should be allowed to stay. That means that 71% of people feel refugees should be returned to Zimbabwe and a third of people want even those here legally to leave.
- And one in five feel that it is quite acceptable to refuse people admission to places, meetings or events because of their race.

These disquieting results come from a series of surveys conducted by TNS Research Surveys (Pty) Ltd, South Africa's leading marketing and social insights company, over the past few months. Commenting on the findings, Neil Higgs, Director of Innovation and Development at TNS Research Surveys, said, “This suggests a level of disregard for the law and for the basic human rights and human dignity of others that is alarming.” He added, “These results come from all demographics and from people from all the major religions, indicating that a society-wide effort is now needed.”

The results in more detail

The results outlined above come from series of studies of 2 000 adults in the seven major metropolitan areas conducted over the past year or so. In each study, people were asked to agree or disagree with various statements covering these (and other) issues. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in people's homes, with a margin of error of under 2.5%. The surveys each consisted of 1 260 blacks, 385 whites, 240 coloured and 115 Indians/Asians. Probability sampling procedures were employed.

Here are some of the key findings:

%	Total metro	Blacks	Whites	Colour -eds	Indians/Asians	Date
I am quite happy to buy pirated DVDs and CDs	18*	20	15	20	14	April 2008
I know people who have bought stolen goods	27	26	18	40	34	April 2008
If a cashier/teller gave me R50 too much change, I would keep it	38	47	20	26	25	April 2007

Crime levels are dropping	13	15	6	10	16	April 2008
Corruption has become a way of life in South Africa	87#	84	87	92	95	April 2008
There is corruption in senior levels of Government	85#	84	86	86	88	April 2008
Corruption needs to be eliminated in Government	89#	87	90	91	96	April 2008
Refugees from Zimbabwe should be allowed to stay in South Africa	29	30	27	27	29	April 2008
Blacks who were not born in South Africa but who live here legally should be allowed to stay and not forced to leave	65^	72	52	58	58	April 2005
It is quite acceptable to refuse people admission to places, meetings or events because of their race	20	20	15	20	31	April 2008

*This figure was 20% in April 2007 - no change

Red figures indicate particularly alarming responses

#These figures are unchanged since 2005

Green figures indicate more optimistic views

^This figure was also 65% when posed with respect to whites

The drink-driving figure (October 2007) was derived as follows:

- “In the last six months, you have driven a vehicle having drunk more alcohol than you should have.”
 - Agree - 16% (blacks 18%, whites 14%, coloureds 13% and Indians/Asians 8%)
 - Disagree - 82%
 - Don't know - 2%

This translates to about 1.9 million ($\pm$ 0.3 million) people out of the total metro population of around 12 million. It is very roughly estimated that there are about eight million licensed drivers in South Africa of which probably about six million are in metropolitan areas. **This means that an astounding one-third of metro drivers have driven a vehicle in the last six months having knowingly had more alcohol than they should.**

Our take-out

Over eight out of ten people feel that crime levels are not dropping - yet a fifth of these very people admit their willingness to buy pirated goods. Buying pirated goods is a crime. Four out of ten of these people are willing to pocket incorrect change - which the cashier or teller will almost always have to make up out of her or his own pocket. A quarter of people know others who have bought stolen goods. Had these people been reported to the police, the market for stolen goods would disappear. There are anonymous tip off lines such as Primedia's Crime Line that exist for this very purpose.

People cannot **but** be aware of the dangers of drink-driving - yet a third of metro drivers admit to doing this in the last six months.

Corruption is felt to be endemic - and should be stopped. Yet the morality of many of those who feel this is questionable.

And the attitudes of many people towards their fellow human beings is highly questionable. Refugees are not at all welcome by the majority and even people from other countries here legally are not tolerated by a third of metropolitan adults.

And a fifth of people (coming from all races) feel that race is still a valid criterion for exclusion.

Whilst in all cases, it is a minority of people whose morality is clearly questionable, these figures are no cause for any complacency. They suggest a very volatile society where, for very many people, there is no concern for the law, for the

rights or welfare of others, where only “I” matter.

Of course, much of this may have its roots in the past - when getting around the “system”, however it was perceived, was laudable. The vast inequalities in the country, too, are a driver: fear of additional competition and the need just to survive are understandable drivers of a “me first” syndrome that says that “I don’t need to bother with the rules - they are for other people”.

Frustration with the slow pace of service delivery is another key factor. A year-long study of people's satisfaction with service delivery levels in 2006 and 2007 by TNS Research Surveys warned that these had become so poor in certain areas that violence was likely to follow - which, tragically, it did. The recent xenophobic violence is partly a manifestation of all this coming together.

Clearly, it is time for all levels of Government and of civil society to turn to a genuine programme of moral regeneration, to turn up the heat on people who feel that they are above the law and the judicial system, above the rules of basic human dignity and human rights, and who do not feel accountable for their actions. Organisations need to adopt values for themselves and their staff to live by. Government needs to act quickly and visibly on all issues pertaining to corruption. Parents need to instill good values in children and, in particular, take care not to pass on racist views. Schools must play an active role in promoting and living good values.

There are already some initiatives in civil society such as the Movement for Good (www.itstartswithyou.co.za) (a network of organisations that have come together to inspire and mobilise South Africans to become **active citizens for good** with a vision to build a country that lives its constitutional values, is safe, and has opportunity for all to build hope in our future) and Heartlines (www.heartlines.co.za) (an initiative to get people thinking, talking and acting on values). These need to be supported. We need to be aware of the sort of society we could become - it is time to get back to basics as far as values are concerned.

Technical note

The studies were conducted amongst a sample of 2 000 adults (1260 blacks, 385 whites, 240 coloureds and 115 Indians/Asians) in the seven major metropolitan areas: they have a margin of error of under 2.5% for the results found for the total sample. The studies were conducted by TNS Research Surveys (Pty) Ltd as part of their ongoing research into current social and political issues and were funded by TNS Research Surveys. For more details, please contact Neil Higgs on 011-778-7500 or 082-376-6312.

Website: www.tnsresearchsurveys.co.za

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