Changing lives of ordinary people through human and social sciences
The Diplomacy of Ubuntu: Attitudes towards Foreign Affairs and Policy in South Africa

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Foreign Policy in South Africa

South Africa’s foreign policy basis in the country’s history of racial oppression and the struggle for liberation

National policy documents suggest that South Africa’s international engagements are shaped by:
• a deepening commitment to multilateralism
• and Global South solidarity and cooperation.

Key focuses in White Paper on Foreign Policy:
• the African Agenda, South-South Co-operation, North-South Dialogue, Multilateral and Economic Diplomacy, and bilateral relations with individual countries

Central importance in National Development Plan:
• Address shared challenges of underdevelopment in Global South
• Promote global equity and social justice
• Partner with the Global North to develop a partnership for development
• Strengthen the multilateral system, including its transformation, to reflect the diversity of nations
Background to the study

Hans Morgenthau: "the rational requirements of good foreign policy cannot from the outset count on the support of a public opinion whose preferences are emotional rather than rational“

• Recent work challenge this sentiment: public opinion is important
• Research of revisionists indicates that governments cannot adequately conduct evaluations of their foreign policy in the absence of an understanding of public opinion towards such policies.

Given the importance attached by the national policymakers to South Africa's role in global affairs, there is a need to develop empirical evidence on public evaluations of foreign policy

Funded by the Open Society Foundation’s South African Foreign Policy Initiative we conducted a study on public attitudes towards foreign policy.

Goals of this study:
• promote academic scholarship on foreign affairs
• provide evidence to influence the strategic direction of policy
• help frame media debate on foreign affairs in the country.
Quantitative Methodology

- Survey conducted by **Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)**
- Nationally representative of the population 16 years and older living in private households in the 9 provinces
  - **Primary sampling units**: 500 census enumerator areas (EAs), stratified by province, geography type and majority population group
  - **Secondary sampling units**: 7 household visiting points randomly selected per EA
  - One respondent 16+ years randomly selected per household
- In **2013** the realised sample size was **2,739**
- Responses to the survey voluntary and confidential, collected by **face-to-face interview**
- Data collection: **November-December**
Foreign Affairs Quiz

• **Question:** How knowledgeable South Africans are about foreign affairs with particular reference to important international events and salient policy positions?

   Knowledge concerning important international events and foreign policy positions will be highly coloured by the ideological prism of the respondent. Understanding public knowledge of foreign affairs will further our understanding of how individuals perceive and understand foreign policy in the country.

• **Objective knowledge measures:**
  - Based on four items administered in the form of a quiz.
    - An item on international item, a regional item, a foreign-partnership item and a military item.
  - Covered contemporary foreign policy issues at the time the survey was fielded in late 2013

Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2013.
Quiz Results

• **Objective and subjective knowledge measures:**
  - **Quiz score measure:** around a quarter got none of the items correct, two-fifths got 1-2 correct; a third got either 3-4 items correct (mean=1.7). More than half the adult population was knowledgeable of the **Zimbabwe elections** and **peacekeeper fatalities**, but barely a third were aware of the **Egyptian political situation** and of the **BRICS member countries**

  - **Subjective knowledge question:** 25% lack knowledge; 30% not very knowledgeable; 44% somewhat/very knowledgeable (9% ‘very’)
  - **Comparison:** moderately strong correlation (0.42)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge Quiz</th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
<th>(Don't Know)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Zimbabwe 2013 election</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of 2013 Egypt protests</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of BRICS member countries</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of death of CAR peacekeepers</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2013.*
Comparing Subjective Knowledge with the Foreign Affairs Quiz

Number of correct quiz responses (%)

- 27% with 0 correct answers
- 19% with 1 correct answer
- 21% with 2 correct answers
- 17% with 3 correct answers
- 16% with 4 correct answers

Mean quiz scores by subjective knowledge

- Very knowledgeable: 2.22
- Somewhat knowledgeable: 2.40
- Not very knowledgeable: 1.66
- Not at all knowledgeable: 0.84
- Don't know: 0.66

Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2013.
A Class Divide?

- **Objective and subjective knowledge measures:**
  - **Oneway ANOVA tests:** reveal broadly similar socio-demographic patterns underlying subjective and objective foreign policy knowledge.
    - Men > women
    - White, Indian adults > black African, coloured adults
    - Strong educational and poverty status gradients
    - Employed > labour inactive and unemployed
    - Formal urban areas > former homeland areas, rural farms; informal urban settlements also higher than rural farms based on subjective knowledge
    - Opposition party supporters > ANC supporters

**Disparity in terms of age-related association:** no significant effect based on objective quiz measures; for subjective knowledge, 18-24 and 25-34 year-olds > 65+ years

Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2013.
Foreign Policy Goals

Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2013.

Helping to end conflict in Africa?
- Very important: 63%
- Somewhat important: 27%
- Not important: 5%
- (Don't know): 0%

Combatting world hunger?
- Very important: 62%
- Somewhat important: 29%
- Not important: 5%
- (Don't know): 0%

Promoting and defending human rights in other countries?
- Very important: 51%
- Somewhat important: 33%
- Not important: 5%
- (Don't know): 0%

Strengthening the United Nations?
- Very important: 44%
- Somewhat important: 38%
- Not important: 5%
- (Don't know): 0%
Foreign Policy Goals

Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2013.

- Protecting jobs of South African workers: 74% very important, 20% somewhat important, 13% not important, 2% (Don't know)
- Promoting economic growth: 68% very important, 25% somewhat important, 13% not important, 2% (Don't know)
- Controlling and reducing illegal immigration: 67% very important, 23% somewhat important, 32% not important, 3% (Don't know)
- Protecting the interests of South African business in other countries: 58% very important, 32% somewhat important, 13% not important, 3% (Don't know)
- Building superior military power in Africa: 45% very important, 35% somewhat important, 32% not important, 2% (Don't know)
Foreign Policy Issues

Examples of foreign policy issues confront South Africa

**Zimbabwe:** National President Thabo Mbeki mediated with the opposition and the national government to form a unity government.

**Peacekeeping:** Government has been involved in peacekeeping operations under United Nations and African Union command in Sudan, Burundi, Central African Republic and others.

**Global South Partnerships:** In 2010, South Africa joined the Brazil, Russia, India and China partnership.

**Refugees:** South Africa has signed the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and currently hosts a 67,500 refugees and 233,100.
Foreign Policy Preferences

Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2013.

It is best for the future of our country to be active in world affairs.
- Strongly Agree: 53
- Agree: 26
- Neutral: 10
- Disagree: 6
- Strongly Disagree: 13
- (Don't Know)

The current President spends too much time on foreign affairs and not enough on domestic issues.
- Strongly Agree: 39
- Agree: 27
- Neutral: 14
- Disagree: 13
- Strongly Disagree: 29
- (Don't Know)

Our country should trade with countries who are known to abuse the human rights of their citizens.
- Strongly Agree: 29
- Agree: 13
- Neutral: 13
- Disagree: 22
- Strongly Disagree: 20
- (Don't Know)
# Foreign Policy Preferences

*Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2013.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foreign Policy Preference</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>(Don't Know)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Close the borders to immigrants and refugees</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a tougher approach to the political situation in Zimbabwe</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help other African countries by giving them aid</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send soldiers to keep the peace in other countries</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Future Research

• **Perceptions of the most important foreign policy issues and actions:** It is necessary to evaluate support for key decisions taken by the current administration on foreign policy.

• **Perceptions of the most appropriate foreign policy actions:** South African foreign policy is informed by a commitment to multilateralism, pan-Africanism, and South-South solidarity. It is necessary to gauge *differential* support for these positions.

• **Perceptions of the benefits of foreign policy activities:** An evaluation of national interests would allow a closer examination of support for the interventionist (versus isolationist) role that South Africa seeks to adopt.
QUESTIONS WELCOME