

# A STUDY OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS JEWS AMONG BLACK SOUTH AFRICANS

## Why conduct a survey to measure the attitudes and perceptions of Black South Africans towards the Jewish community?

Despite considerable discussion in the South African press about Jews, the Jewish community, and Israel – some of it heated and intemperate – relatively little is known about the perceptions of Jews within South African society, and particularly among Black South Africans.

Building upon pioneering work done to gauge the attitudes of Black South Africans in the 1970s, this study is intended to ‘take the temperature’ of a group that constitutes around 80 percent of the South African population, and to create a baseline and a benchmark against which future research can be compared.

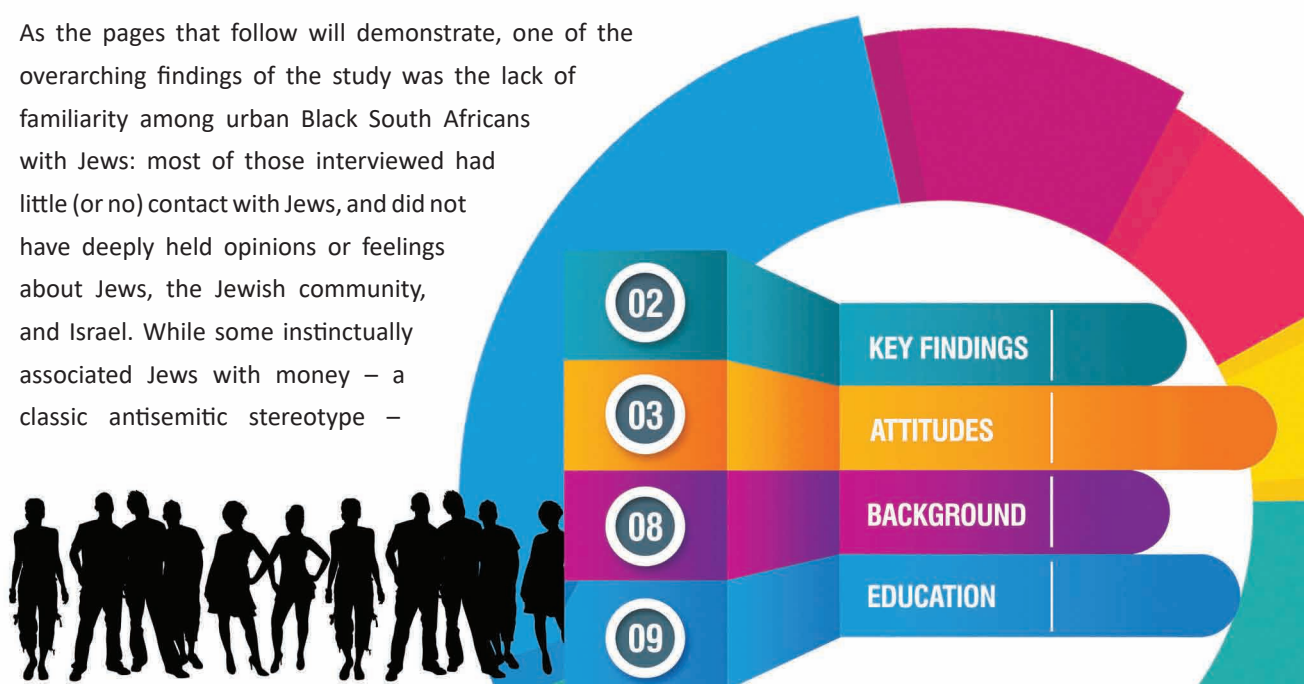
As the pages that follow will demonstrate, one of the overarching findings of the study was the lack of familiarity among urban Black South Africans with Jews: most of those interviewed had little (or no) contact with Jews, and did not have deeply held opinions or feelings about Jews, the Jewish community, and Israel. While some instinctually associated Jews with money – a classic antisemitic stereotype –

other hostile tropes were absent or insignificant. More frequent contact with Jews, however, appears to produce more positive feelings toward the Jewish community.

The Kaplan Centre worked closely with Mthente Research and Consulting Services to design the survey questionnaire and adjust it after its initial pilot. Mthente conducted the survey in three selected metros (Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban), tabulated and analysed the data, and produced a detailed report. All of this material is available from the Kaplan Centre website, [www.kaplancentre.uct.ac.za](http://www.kaplancentre.uct.ac.za)

**Adam Mendelsohn**

*Director of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research  
University of Cape Town*



## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS



The survey entailed face-to-face interviews with 800 respondents in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban. All respondents were Black Africans and South African citizens.

The sample was broadly representative of urban Black Africans in South Africa aged 18 and over. Education levels and incomes were on average higher than the general population, but that reflected the urban nature of the sample.

The majority of respondents identified as strongly religious. Although those surveyed expressed a strong interest in local politics, interest in international politics was weak.

The survey sought to place Jews into a larger matrix of attitudes toward other minorities and racial groups within South Africa in order to facilitate comparison.

When asked about their impression of Jews, respondents, for example, regarded Jews significantly less favourably than other groups. This, however, appears to reflect shallow negative associations with the term “Jew” rather than an elaborate and sustained set of negative views.

This was corroborated by responses to questions on positive and negative stereotypes. Jews were the group that the respondents were least likely to associate with positive stereotypes (social contribution and patriotism) but they were also least likely to associate Jews with negative stereotypes (selfishness and disloyalty).

The overall impression created by these responses is that Black South Africans are largely unfamiliar with Jews, how they live their lives, and what defines their ‘Jewishness’.

There is further evidence to support this interpretation. Two-thirds of respondents claim to have never met a Jew.

When the remaining third were questioned about their contact with Jews, their answers suggested a high degree of confusion about who and what Jews are.

Respondents were on the whole poorly informed about the Israel-Palestine conflict. Of the three in ten respondents who reported having heard of the conflict, support was equally divided between the two sides. When asked with whom they sympathised, respondents were more likely to choose ‘neither’ or ‘both’ sides than they were to choose ‘Israel’ or ‘Palestine’.

When asked about the word ‘Zionism’, respondents overwhelmingly associated the word with the Zionist Christian Church, the largest religious denomination in South Africa. Only a small portion (less than one out of fifty of respondents) who identified Zionism, associated Zionism with Jews or Israel.

Only two in ten of those surveyed associated Jews with apartheid, but most of those who made the association believe that Jews supported apartheid.

Jews were also perceived as more loyal to the State of Israel than to South Africa by a margin of three to one – but again, most respondents weren’t sure or didn’t have a strong opinion about Jewish loyalty.

Although the survey results don’t paint black South Africans as strongly positive towards Jews, there are some suggestive trends and correlations in the data. Respondents from Johannesburg, where there is more contact with Jews, for example, exhibited significantly more positive attitudes towards Jews than their peers in Cape Town and Durban.



# ATTITUDES TOWARDS JEWS

## WHAT IS YOUR OPINION OF...



Group	Favourable	Unfavourable	Not Sure	Null
WHITES	78%	12%	9%	1%
INDIANS	38%	47%	14%	1%
JEWS	34%	38%	27%	1%
MUSLIMS	47%	38%	14%	1%
BLACK FOREIGNERS	47%	36%	12%	5%
WHITE FOREIGNERS	53%	27%	15%	5%

Jews had the lowest positive rating out of six ethnic/racial groups that respondents were asked about – only 34 percent of respondents had a favourable opinion of Jews. Whites (78 percent favourable) and white foreigners (53 percent) had the highest ratings but other minority groups (Indians, Muslims and black foreigners) had higher favourability ratings than Jews.

Jews also had one of the highest negative ratings with 38 percent of respondents having an unfavourable opinion of them. Only Indians (47 percent) had a higher negative rating.

Jews were also the group least likely to be associated with positive stereotypes by the respondents. Whites were the group that was overwhelmingly chosen in response to questions such as ‘Who is most likely to help others?’ and ‘Who is the cleverest?’

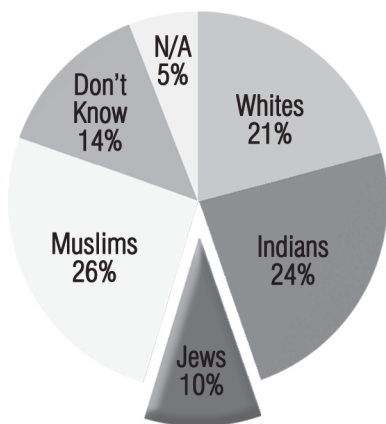
The only group which scored as poorly (or nearly as poorly) was Indians. Muslims were deemed to be more helpful and charitable than Jews – for some questions Muslims were favoured by three times as many respondents as were Jews.

But Jews were also the group least likely to be associated with negative stereotypes by those surveyed. For many questions that tracked negative qualities, Jews were the group voted least likely to embody these qualities.

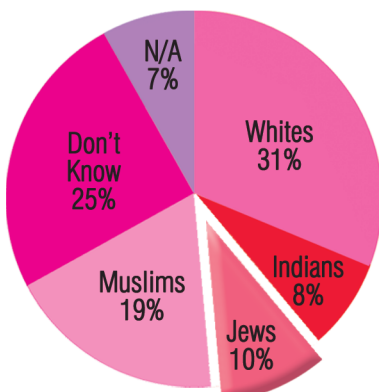
Jews were considered least likely to dabble in shady business practices, least likely to care most for their own kind and, along with Indians, least likely to have too much power in the business world.

We interpret these seemingly contradictory findings – low favourability ratings and the relative weakness of several classic stereotypes – as suggesting that most Black South Africans are largely unfamiliar with Jews and, for the most part, do not have deeply-held positive or negative opinions about them. The low favourability rating likely reflects shallow negative associations with the term “Jew” rather than an elaborate and sustained set of negative views toward Jews as a group. There is little evidence that classic antisemitic stereotypes – excepting those relating to money – are prevalent and powerful.

## Who is most likely to use shady practises to get what they want?



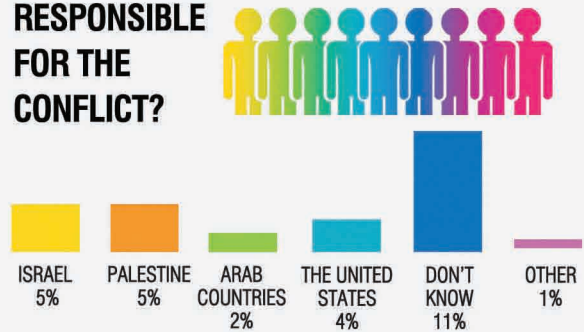
## Who is the least loyal to SA?



# ZIONISM / ISRAEL / PALESTINE



## IF YES, WHO IN YOUR OPINION IS MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CONFLICT?



Most of the Black South Africans surveyed knew little about Israel, Palestine and Zionism. Only 28 percent had heard about the Israel/Palestine conflict, and almost half of these had no strong opinion on who was responsible for the conflict.

Only half of all respondents thought that Jews had a right to have their own homeland and 21 percent thought that Jews didn't have a right to a homeland, with 29 percent not sure. These views were largely similar to respondents' views on whether Palestinians had a right to a homeland: 50 percent said that they did, 24 percent said that they did not and 26 percent were unsure.

The overwhelming majority of those surveyed had not heard of movements or organisations in South Africa that have an Israel- or Palestine-specific focus, such as BDS South Africa and the South African Zionist Federation. The minority that did claim knowledge of such organisations were often unable to name the organisations or named organisations that were at best tangential to the conflict (e.g. Qibla or PAGAD).

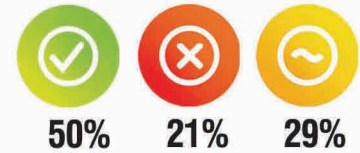
The general impression created by the responses is that black South Africans are largely unfamiliar with Zionism and the Israel-Palestine conflict, and they do not prioritise it.

Despite the perceived bias of South African media, there is no evidence that media coverage of the conflict has influenced the opinions of Black South Africans.

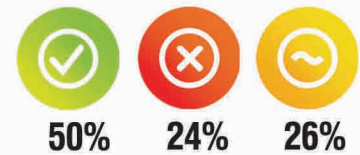
## ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE TERM 'ZIONISM'?



### DO YOU THINK JEWS HAVE THE RIGHT TO A HOMELAND?



### DO YOU THINK PALESTINIANS HAVE THE RIGHT TO A HOMELAND?



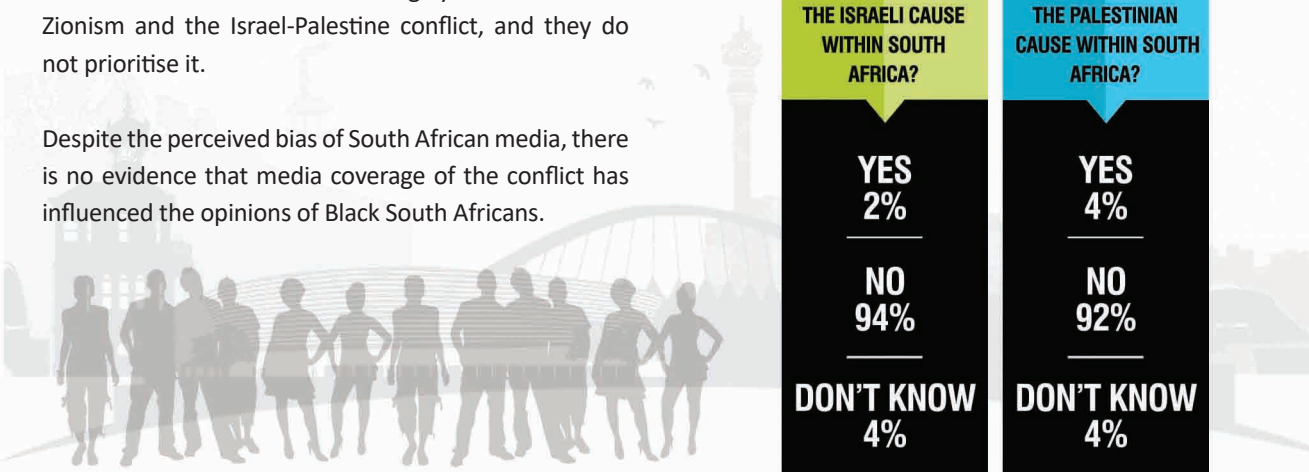
## DO THE ACTIONS OF ISRAEL INFLUENCE YOUR ATTITUDES ABOUT JEWS IN SOUTH AFRICA? IF YES, DOES IT RESULT IN YOU VIEWING JEWS IN SOUTH AFRICA?



### HAVE YOU HEARD OF ANY MOVEMENTS/ ORGANISATIONS THAT ARE WORKING FOR THE ISRAELI CAUSE WITHIN SOUTH AFRICA?



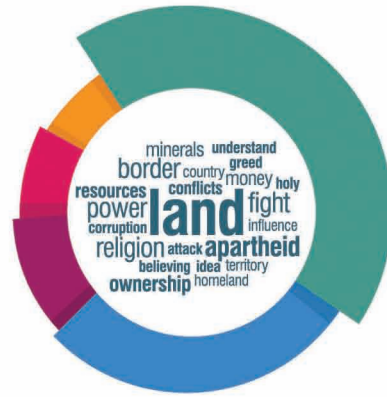
### HAVE YOU HEARD OF ANY MOVEMENTS/ ORGANISATIONS THAT ARE WORKING FOR THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE WITHIN SOUTH AFRICA?



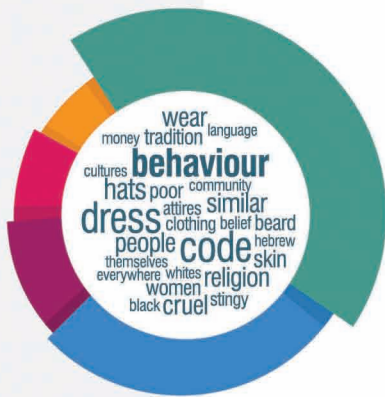
# WORD CLOUDS TO IDENTIFY JEWS



**WORDS MOST ASSOCIATED WITH JEWS**



**WHAT IS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE OF CONFLICT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE?**



**WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN JEWS AND MUSLIMS?**



**WHAT IS THE NATURE OF INCIDENTS OF HATE DIRECTED AT THE JEWISH COMMUNITY?**



**WHY DO YOU THINK THESE INCIDENTS OCCURED?**

Respondents were asked a number of open questions, where their responses weren't limited to a selection from a predetermined list of answers. These questions have been interpreted using word clouds, where the size of a word in a 'cloud' corresponds to the word's frequency in respondents' answers.

## ANTISEMITISM: AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING

Respondents were asked if they were aware of any incidences of hate directed at Jews. 7% of the respondents were aware of incidents against Jews, 93% were not. If they answered 'yes' they were asked to describe these incidences and to give their opinions of why these incidences occurred.

Respondents frequently referred to the Holocaust. When asked to explain these instances, people were likely to refer to 'Jews' and 'hatred.'

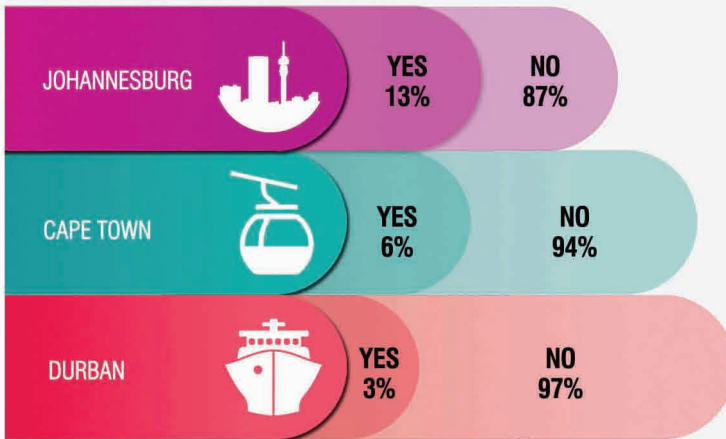
## THE ISRAELI/PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

28% were aware of the Israel/Palestine conflict and 72% were not. Respondents overwhelmingly referred to 'land' as the reason behind the conflict in the Middle East, although 'religion' was the second-most common factor cited. Words such as 'homeland', 'minerals', 'territory' and 'resources' can also be included with 'land' if the conflict is cast as a territorial dispute.

Respondents did not think of Zionism as a Jewish socio-political concept. When they were asked what the word 'Zionism' meant to them, the first – and only - association made was with the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC). Words like 'church', 'religion', 'Christian' and 'black' featured prominently in their answers.

# APARTHEID, ANTISEMITISM AND PATRIOTISM

## ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY INCIDENTS OF HATE DIRECTED AT JEWS?



## DO YOU ASSOCIATE JEWS WITH APARTHEID?



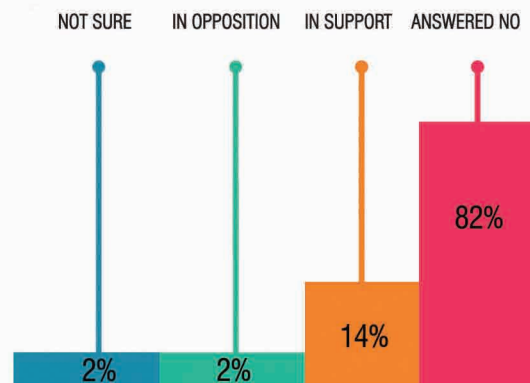
Respondents were unlikely to associate Jews with apartheid; only 18 percent made this association. Of this 18 percent, however, over three quarters believed that Jews supported apartheid with the remainder divided equally between those believing that Jews opposed apartheid and those who weren't sure.

It is not clear whether these associations are a reflection of the belief that Jews supported apartheid more than other beneficiaries, or whether this is part of a view that Jews are indistinguishable from other beneficiaries, or if other beliefs and factors are involved. There certainly seems to be little to no recognition of the role that prominent Jewish activists played in the struggle against apartheid.

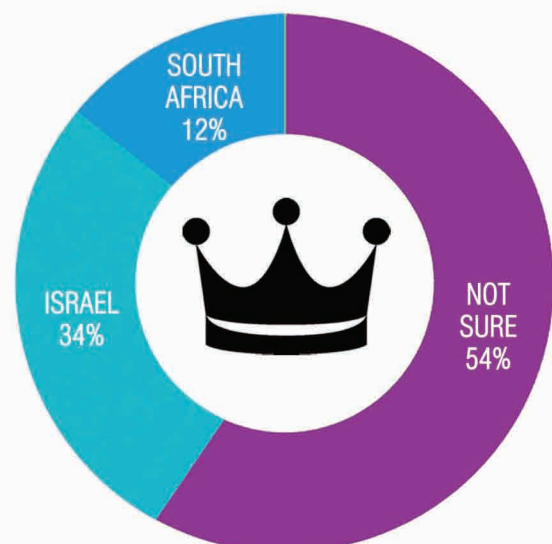
More than half of all respondents (54 percent) weren't sure whether Jews in South Africa were more loyal to South Africa or to Israel; 34 percent believe that South African Jews are more loyal to Israel and just 12 percent believe that South African Jews are more loyal to South Africa.

Again, it is not clear whether these answers reflect a strongly or a weakly held view on the patriotism demonstrated by South African Jews. In earlier questions (see page 6) Jews were not seen as a group that was particularly disloyal to South Africa.

## IF YES, DO YOU ASSOCIATE JEWS WITH BEING...?



## ARE JEWS IN SOUTH AFRICA MORE LOYAL TO...?

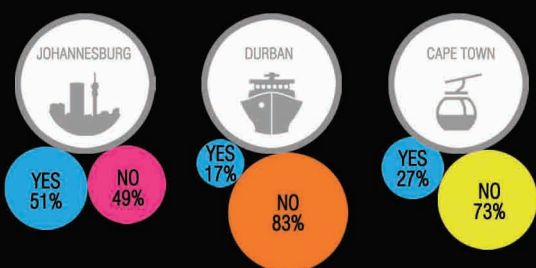


# DIFFERENCES ACROSS THE THREE CITIES, AND OTHER CROSS-TABULATIONS

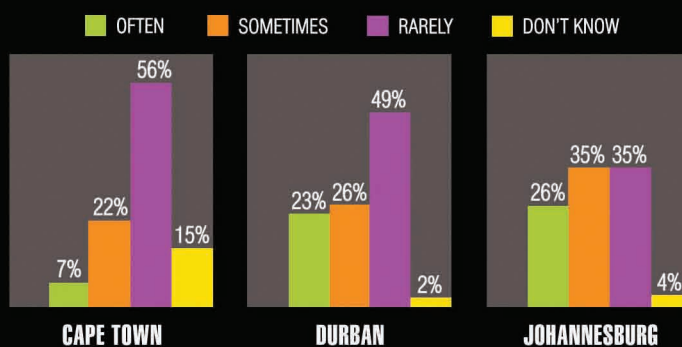
## ATTITUDES TOWARDS JEWS



## HAVE YOU MET A JEW?



## HOW FREQUENT IS YOUR CONTACT WITH JEWS?



There appear to be significant differences in some of the responses of the Johannesburg cohort, compared with the other two cities.

Respondents from Johannesburg were much more likely (46 percent) to feel favourably to Jews. Johannesburg is also the only city where more respondents harboured favourable attitudes than unfavourable ones.

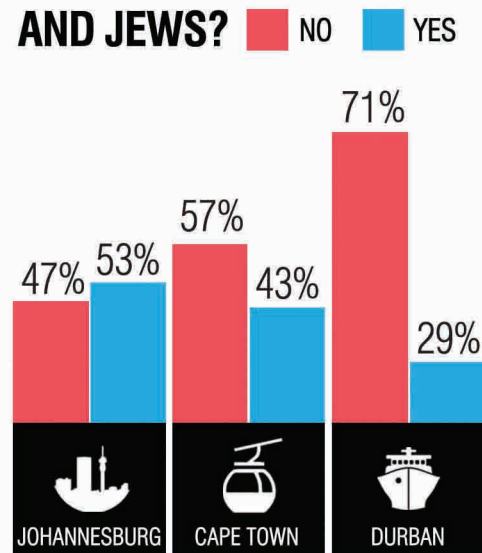
Respondents from Johannesburg were far more likely to report meeting a Jew – over half of all respondents reported having done so, compared with less than a quarter of those from the other two cities. Unsurprisingly, Johannesburg respondents also met with Jews far more frequently, with over half meeting Jews frequently or sometimes, compared with less than 30 percent in Cape Town.

A majority (53 percent) of Johannesburg respondents believe there is a difference between Muslims and Jews compared with 43 percent in Cape Town and 29 percent in Durban.

Johannesburg is arguably more diverse than the other two metros – there is a far greater diversity of home languages which reflects the immigrant nature of the city and its role as a centre of commerce and opportunity.

There is a noticeable correlation between the respondents' contact with Jews and their propensity to view Jews favourably. The survey results don't speak to the causality of this relationship, but it is fair to assume that Jews can and do shape public opinion about themselves through their interactions with the broader society.

## IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND JEWS?

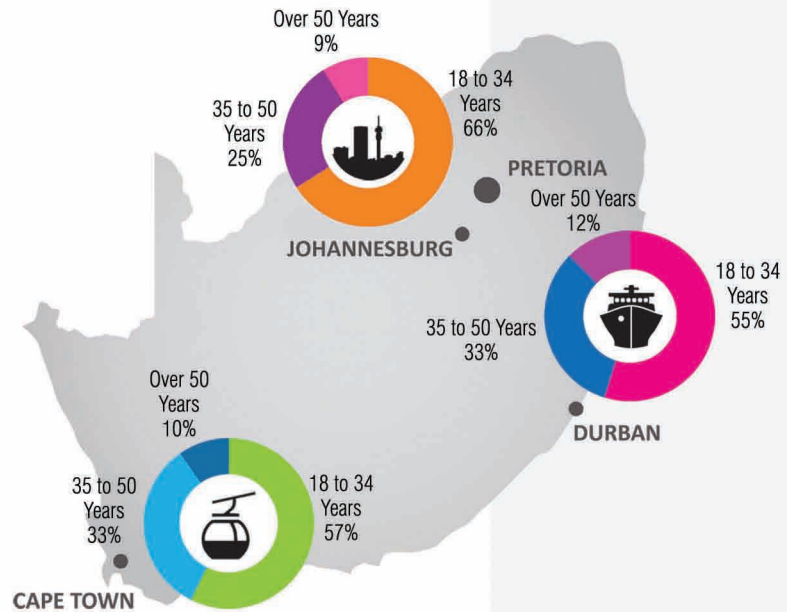


## BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY OF THE SURVEY

Respondents answered 66 questions across five subject areas:

- demographics (e.g. age, education levels),
- behaviour patterns, such as media consumption and religious observance,
- knowledge of the Jewish community,
- attitudes to the Jewish community, and
- perceptions and understanding of the Jewish community.

Since the survey was quantitative in nature, and respondents were asked closed questions (i.e. they had to choose from a list of possible answers). There were, however, few open, qualitative questions where respondents were asked to make word associations, or were asked about their familiarity with certain issues.



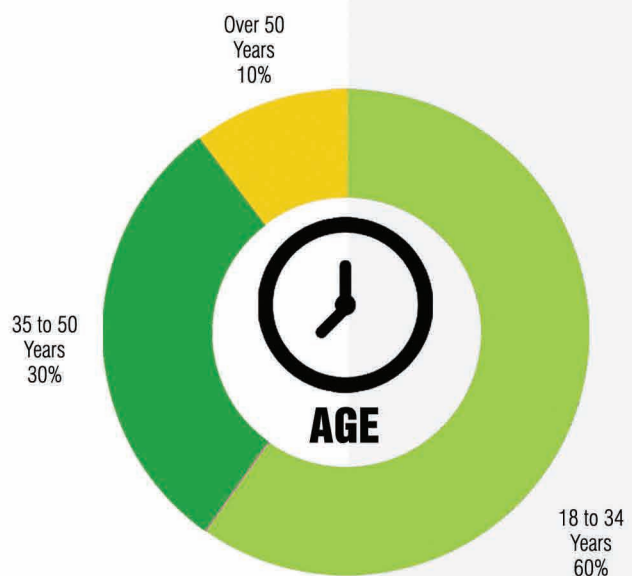
## DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

All respondents were Black South Africans. The survey was confined to three cities and, as such, it has a strong urban bias. Respondents were also at least 18 years old, while well over a third of the country's population is under 18 years old.

Apart from these qualifications, a concerted effort was made to ensure that the survey was demographically representative of Black South Africans in terms of gender, education, income, and living conditions.

### AGE

Most of the respondents were younger than 40, and the average age was significantly younger in Johannesburg, where two-thirds of those surveyed were aged 18 to 34 – about ten percentage points higher than in the other two cities. This is roughly reflective of national demographics, where the largest age cohort in Gauteng is aged 25 to 35.

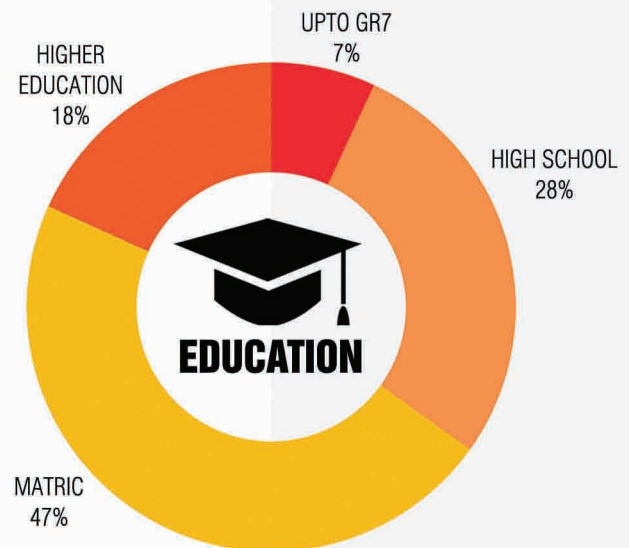




## EDUCATION

47 percent of respondents had passed matric and another 18 percent had gone on to complete some form of tertiary education. Only 7 percent of the sample had ended their formal education after primary school.

These results are higher than the general population but are in line with the educational average of the big, urban metros and provinces (Gauteng, Johannesburg, etc).



## EMPLOYMENT STATUS



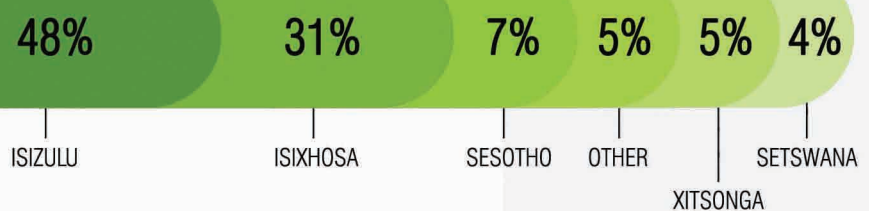
About 55 percent of the respondents were employed at the time of the survey (36 percent full-time, 11 percent part-time or seasonally, and 8 percent self-employed). Another 33 percent were unemployed (3 percent had given up looking for work) and 12 percent were retired, studying or out of the workforce for other reasons. This compares favourably to the national average, where less than 45 percent of people aged 18 and older have jobs.

## MONTHLY INCOME



68 percent of those surveyed earned less than R5 000 per month – 29 percent claimed to earn nothing. Only 18 percent of respondents earned more than R5 000 per month, 2 percent didn't know how much they earned and 12 percent wouldn't say. Income levels are notoriously difficult to capture and compare accurately, but the average monthly income for those surveyed seems to be significantly lower than the national average. This is probably due to the relatively young age of the survey sample and the challenges of relying on interviews to gather this data.

## HOME LANGUAGE



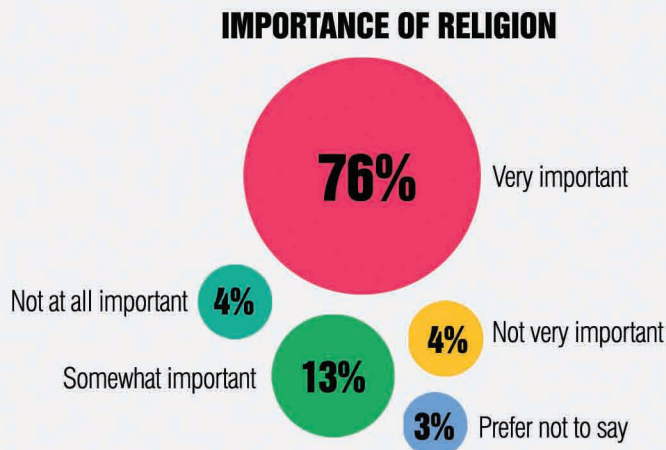
IsiZulu is the home language of 42 percent of respondents and 31 percent speak IsiXhosa, reflecting the dominant languages of Durban and Cape Town respectively. Of the three metros, Johannesburg has the most diverse mix of languages.

# BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS AND ATTITUDES

## IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION

Over three quarters (76 percent) of the respondents said that religion was very important to them and a further 13 percent said it was somewhat important.

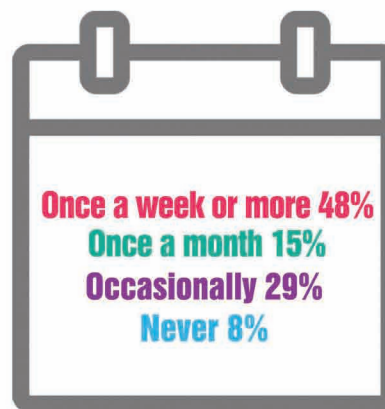
Only 8 percent said that religion was not important to them: 4 percent claiming that it was not very important and 4 percent claiming it was not important at all.



## RELIGIOUS ATTENDANCE

Almost half (48%) of respondents reported that they attended worship services at least once a week and another 15% attended at least once a month. Only 9 percent of respondents claimed to never attend a religious service.

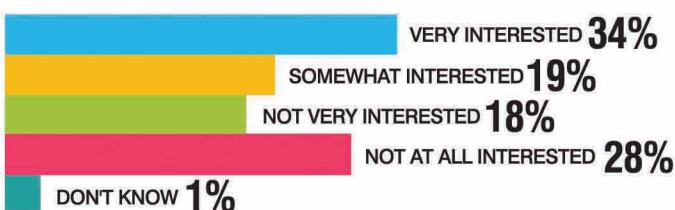
These findings are broadly in line with other surveys which find that between 60 percent and 80 percent of South Africans identify as 'religious'.



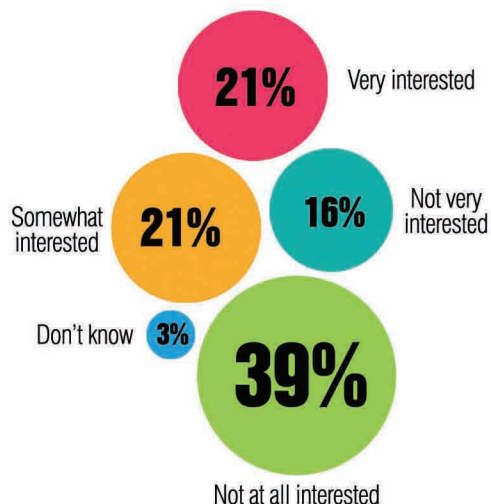
## INTEREST IN POLITICS

Respondents showed much more interest in local than in international politics. Over half described an interest in local politics (34 percent were very interested and 19 percent were somewhat interested). However, only 42 percent were interested in international politics.

While 28 percent were not at all interested in local politics, this share rose to 39 percent for international politics. About 18 percent were not very interested in either local or international politics. About 23 percent of those surveyed claimed to discuss politics frequently with their friends and families. Another 53 percent occasionally discuss politics with their friends and families, and 24 percent claimed to never discuss politics.



## INTEREST IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS



## INTEREST IN LOCAL POLITICS