

# ***Towards Consensus on a Decent Living Level in South Africa: Inequality beliefs and preferences for redistribution***

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**Towards a Decent Living Level – Income Levels  
and Socially Perceived Necessities  
Pretoria, 17 March, 2015**



# Why inequality attitudes matter

- **Inequality remains an indelible feature** of the socio-economic structure of South Africa
- **Growing interest in inequality** due to evidence that a high level of inequality may cause socio-economic problems
- **Government's transformative social policy programme** to address colonial and apartheid legacies of deprivation and marginalisation
  - Increasing prominence of inequality reduction alongside poverty alleviation and economic growth as national objectives (NDP)
- Continuing waves of service delivery protests, coupled with recent developments in the mining and agricultural sectors
  - Raises fundamental questions about the nature of mass and elite opinion regarding inequality in our society



# Why inequality attitudes matter

- **Argument**: Need for a nuanced understanding of the general beliefs, preferences and policy attitudes in relation to inequality and redress and how these are changing over time.
  - We know relatively little about public attitudes to inequality and redistribution
  - Possible association with political behaviour or action: incl. electoral participation /choice; social movements; protest action
  - Perceived fairness of policies may facilitate or impede their effective implementation
  - Examining and understanding recent trends in inequality attitudes may serve as a basis for predicting and monitoring changes in the medium- to long-term



# Why inequality attitudes matter

- This presentation draws on a study examining three principal questions
  - What are public attitudes to economic inequality?
  - What is the public preference for state-led redistribution?
  - What are public attitudes to policy responses to economic inequality?
- A number of additional sub-questions also examined:
  - What variations in attitudes are there by key dimensions, e.g. social class, gender, race and age?
  - How have public attitudes to inequality changed over time?
  - How do attitudes in the South Africa compare with other countries?



# Methodology

- South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS)
- Nationally representative; conducted annually by HSRC since 2003
- Gathers information on the attitudes, beliefs, behaviour patterns and values of a representative sample of South African individuals aged 16 and older in private households
- Intention: measure specific attitudes and opinions on a diverse set of topics of national relevance.



- Collected by face-to-face interviewing in Qtr. 4
- Use of SASAS rounds 2003-2012 with a particular focus on Round 7 (2009).
- SASAS part of International Social Survey Programme (ISSP): 48 countries annually field an agreed module on a predefined topic
- 2009 module focused on social inequalities.



# General Beliefs about Inequality

- + *Aversion to income inequality*
- + *Images of society*
- + *Perceived class tensions*
- + *Legitimate pay earnings*

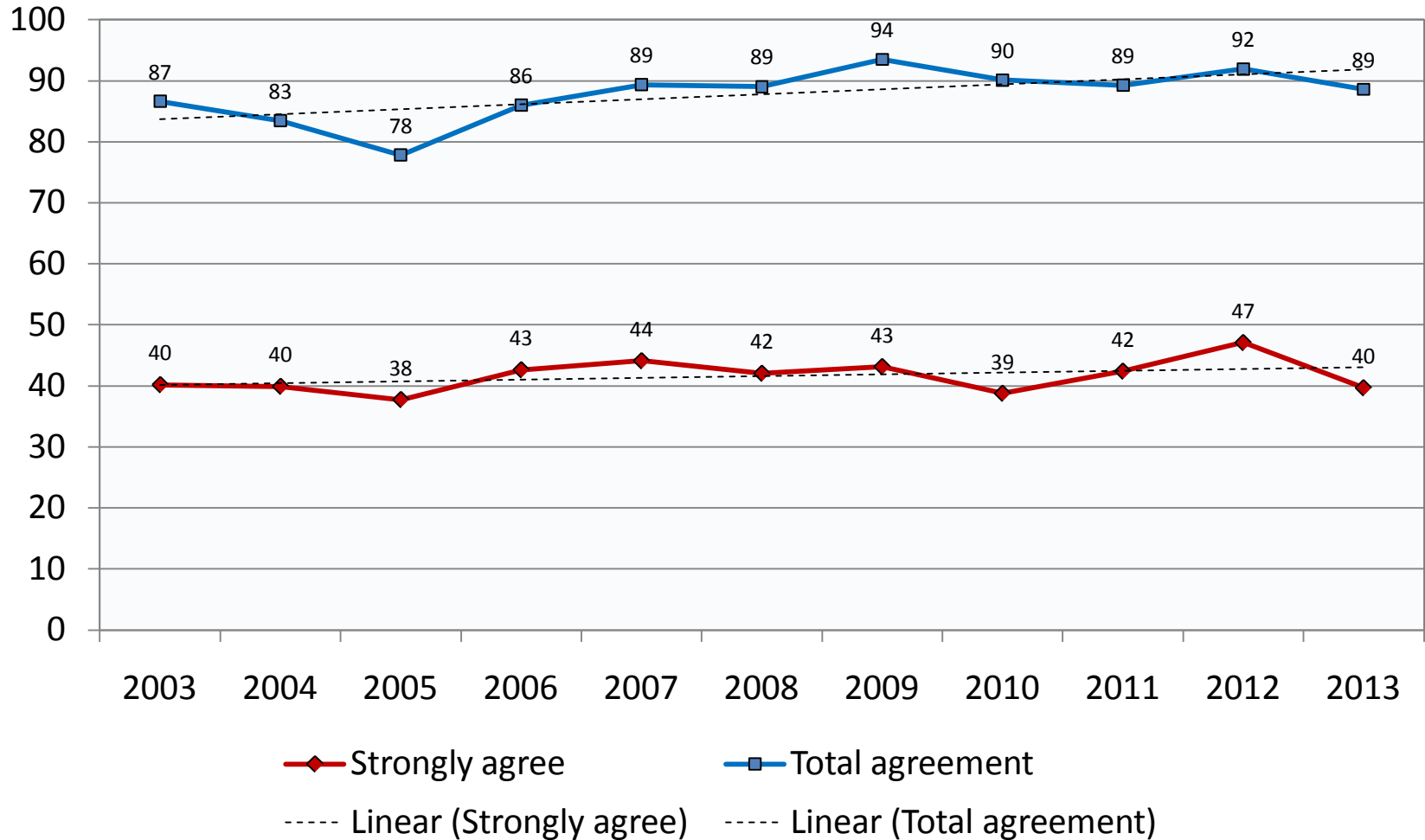


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# Aversion to Income Inequality

“Income differences in South Africa are too large”

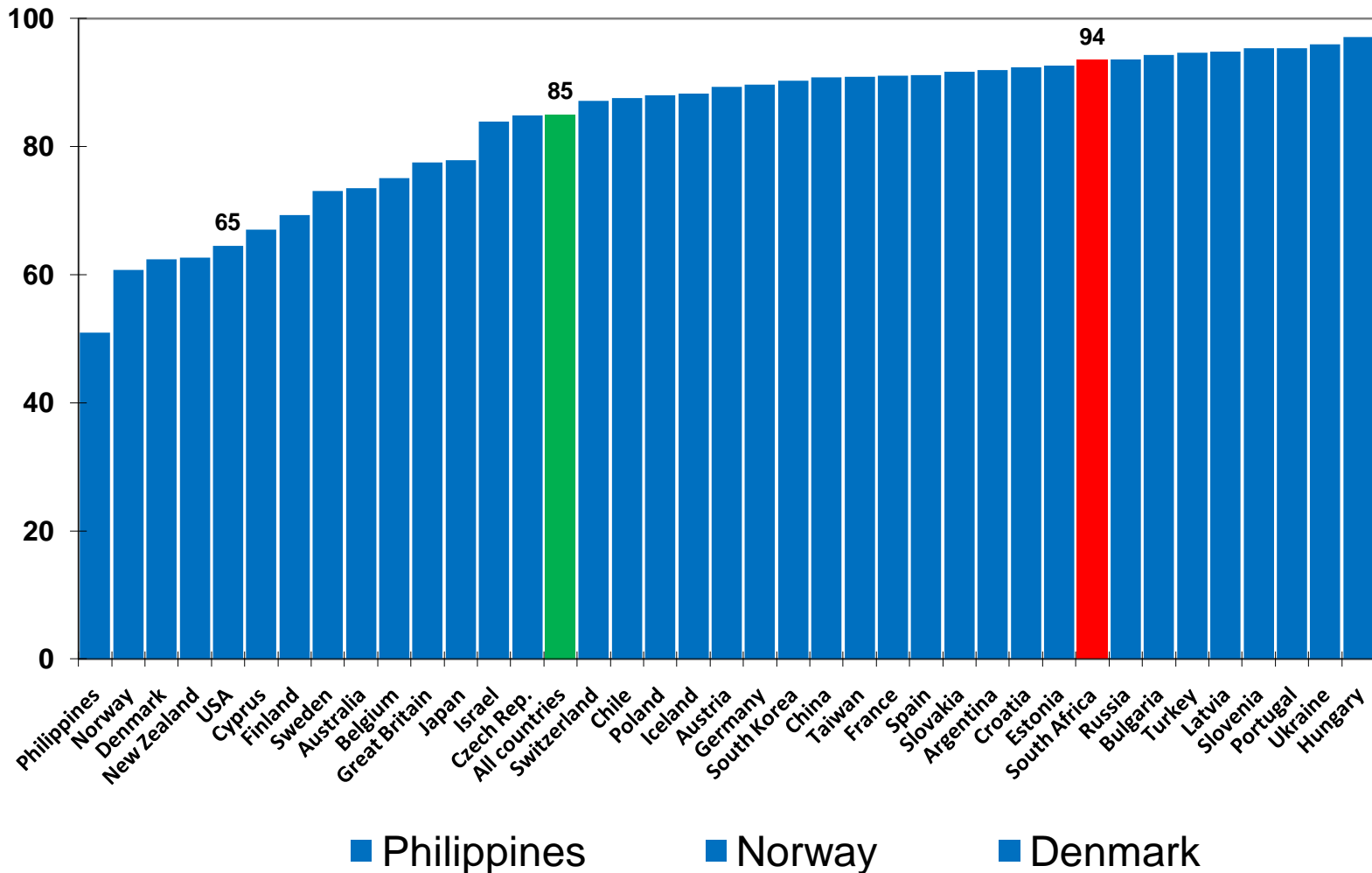


Source: HSRC SASAS 2003-2013








# Aversion to Income Inequality

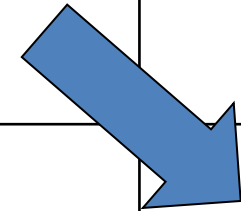
“Differences in income in [country] are too large” (ISSP)





# Image of South African Society: Reality vs Ideal

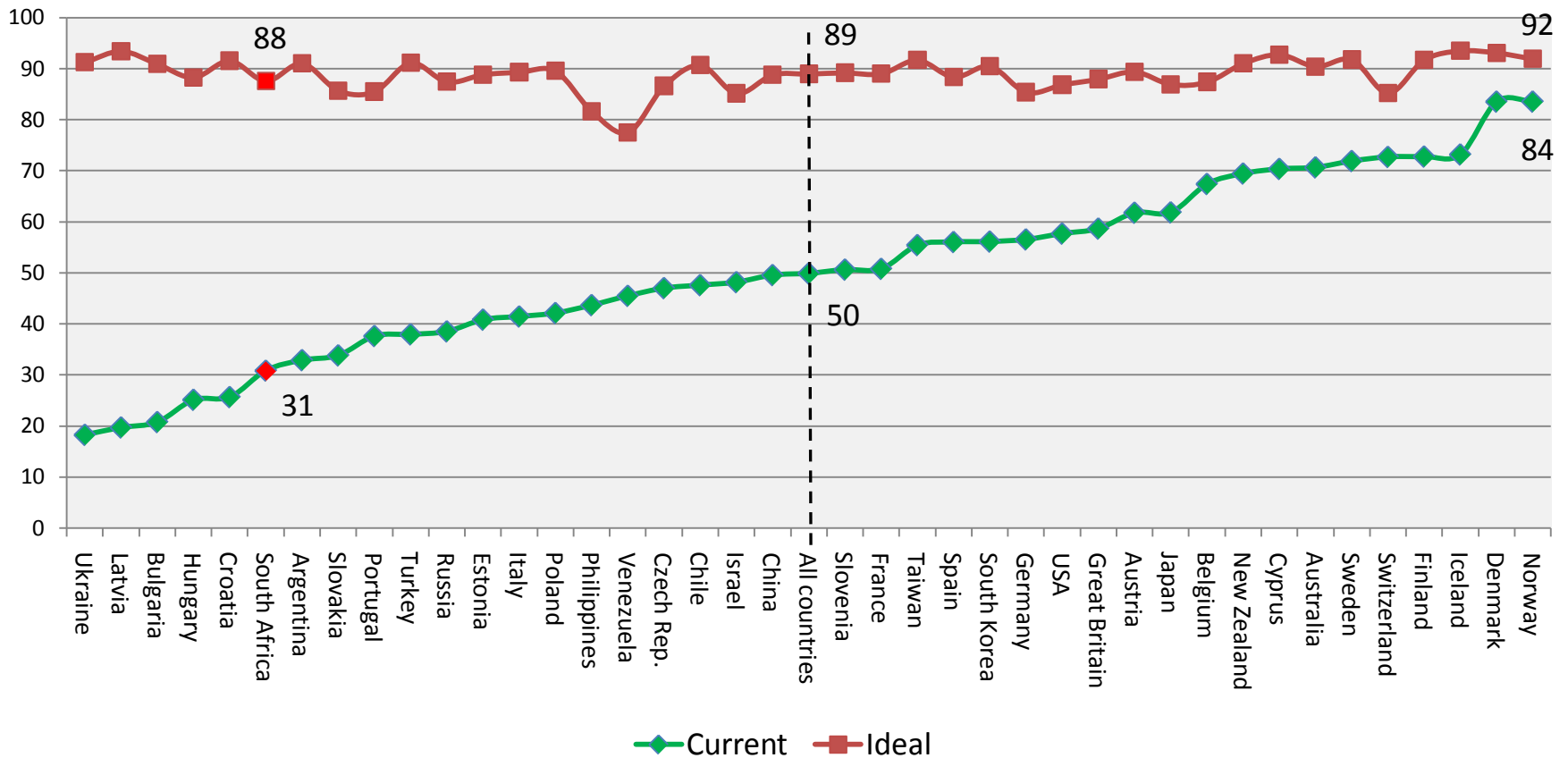
		Type of society South Africa is today	Type of society South Africa ought to be like
Type A	 A small group of rich people at the top, very few people in the middle and the great majority of people at the bottom.	50	3
Type B	 A society with a small group of rich people at the top, more people in the middle, and most at the bottom.	29	8
Type C	 Similar to Type B except that just a few people are at the bottom	8	9
Type D	 A society with most people in the middle.	8	45
Type E	 Many people near the top, and only a few near the bottom.	3	32
(Can't choose)		3	4
Total		100	100
Mean*		30.9	87.6





# Image of Society: Reality vs Ideal in Comparative Perspective

Type of society country is currently perceived to be, compared with ideal structure of society (ranked by mean current image score, n=40)





# Perceived Class Tensions

Perceived level of tension between different social classes (%)



■ Very strong conflicts ■ Strong conflicts ■ Not very strong conflicts ■ There are no conflicts ■ (Can't choose)



# Perceived Class Tensions: A cross-national perspective

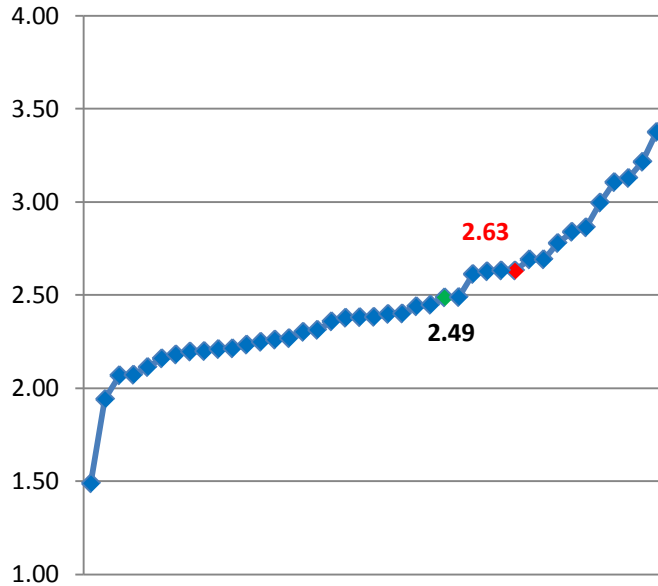
Perceived level of tension between different social classes  
(ranked mean scores, n=40)

(1=no conflicts; 2=Not very strong conflicts; 3=Strong conflicts; 4=Very strong conflicts)

### Perceived tension between rich & poor

Highest ranked:  
1=Hungary  
2=S. Korea  
3=Russia  
4=Turkey  
5=Italy  
6=Venezuela  
10=RSA

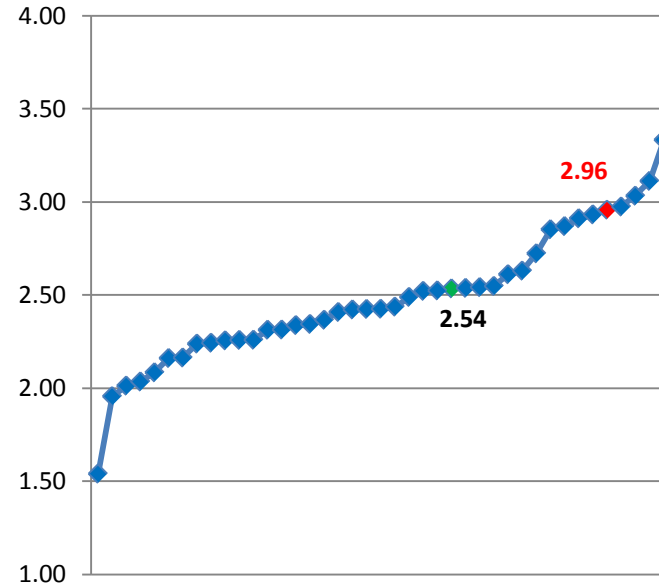
Lowest ranked:  
35=Norway  
37=Iceland  
38=Taiwan  
39=Denmark  
40=Cyprus



### Perceived tension between management & workers

Highest ranked:  
1=S.Korea  
2=Hungary  
3=France  
4=Portugal  
5=RSA

Lowest ranked:  
35=Latvia  
37=Bulgaria  
38=Iceland  
39=Denmark  
40=Cyprus





# Perceptions of Pay Differentials in South Africa

Individual subjective estimates of actual and preferred occupational earnings  
for different types of jobs in 2009 ZAR, gross per month

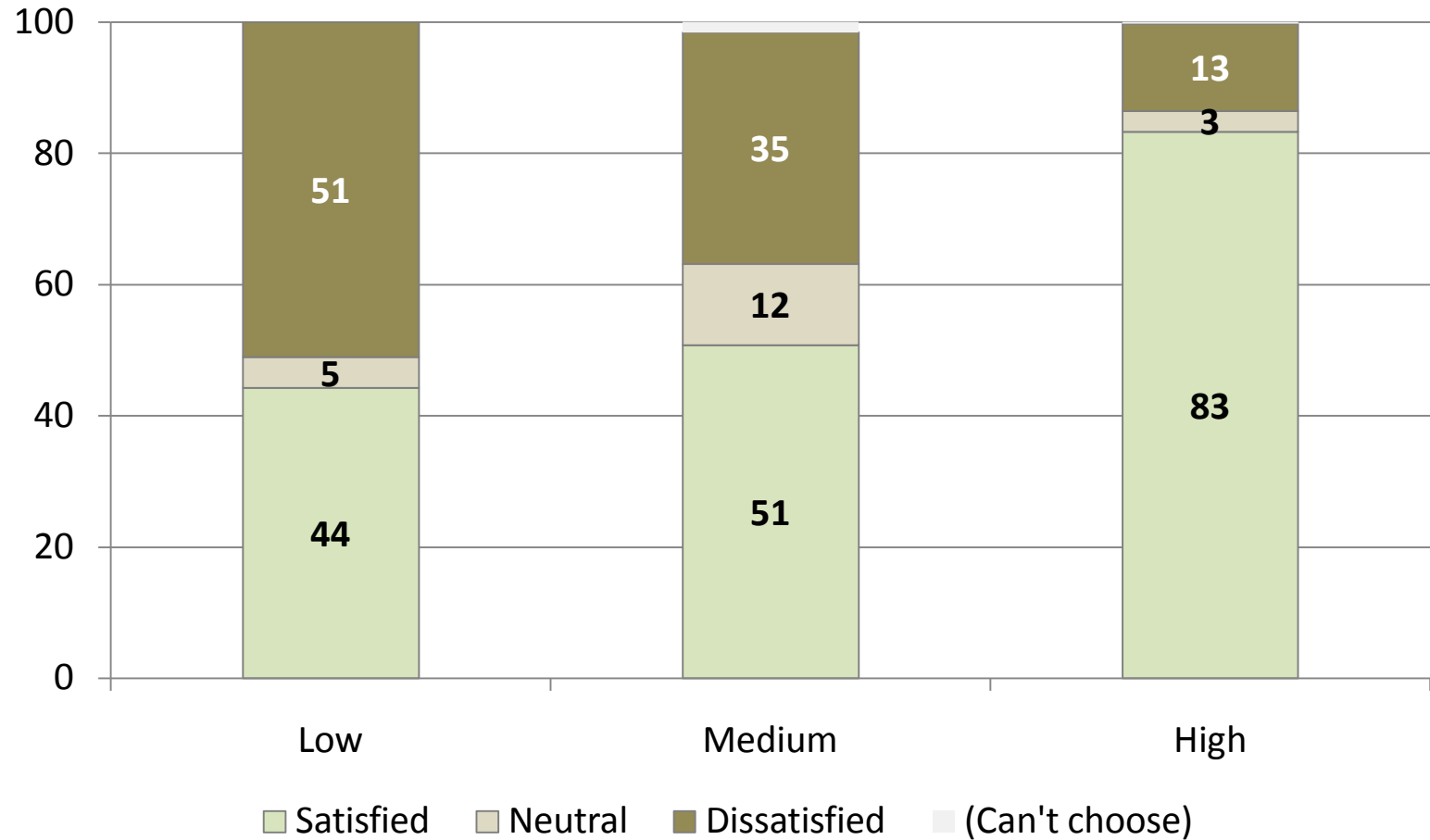
	Perceived actual monthly wage		Preferred ethical wage		Difference (Preferred vs. actual) (%)
	Rands	Ratio	Rands	Ratio	
Unskilled worker in a factory	R 2,308	1.0	R 3,334	1.0	+44.5
Shop assistant	R 2,882	1.2	R 4,023	1.2	+39.6
Doctor in general practice	R 33,287	14.4	R 28,918	8.7	-13.1
Chairperson of a large national company	R 41,809	18.1	R 39,974	12.0	-4.4
Cabinet minister	R 86,745	37.6	R 62,755	18.8	-27.7

Source: HSRC SASAS 2009

- South Africans perceive sizable differences in earnings between occupations
- Strong preference for wages of unskilled / low-skilled workers to increase, and lower pay among higher skilled occupations
- Ranking of occupations remain unchanged; fairly broad tolerance of large earnings differentials despite recognition of need for narrowing the gap.



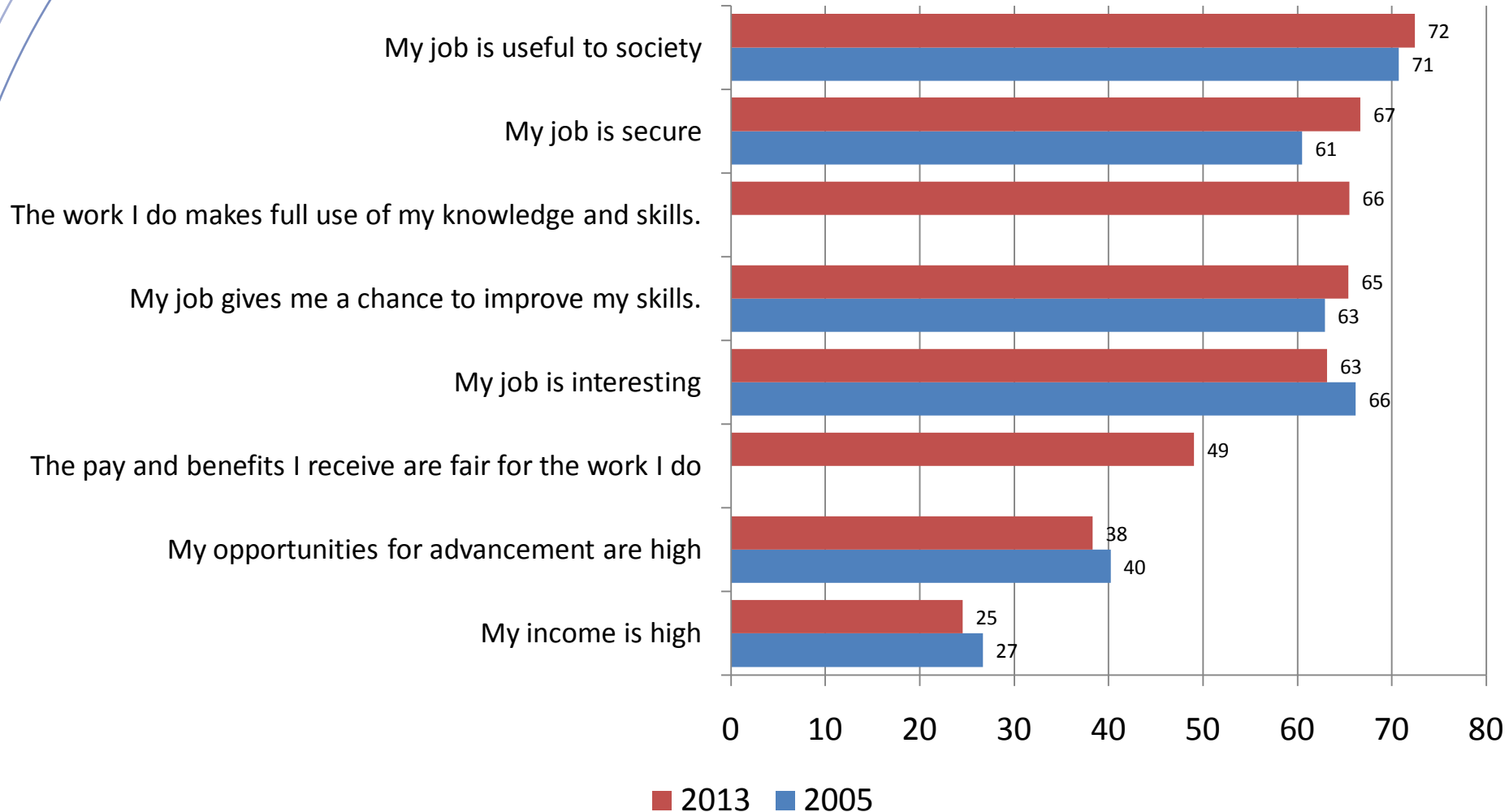
# Perceived job satisfaction by living standard level, 2013



Source: HSRC SASAS 2013 LMIP module (Mncwango)

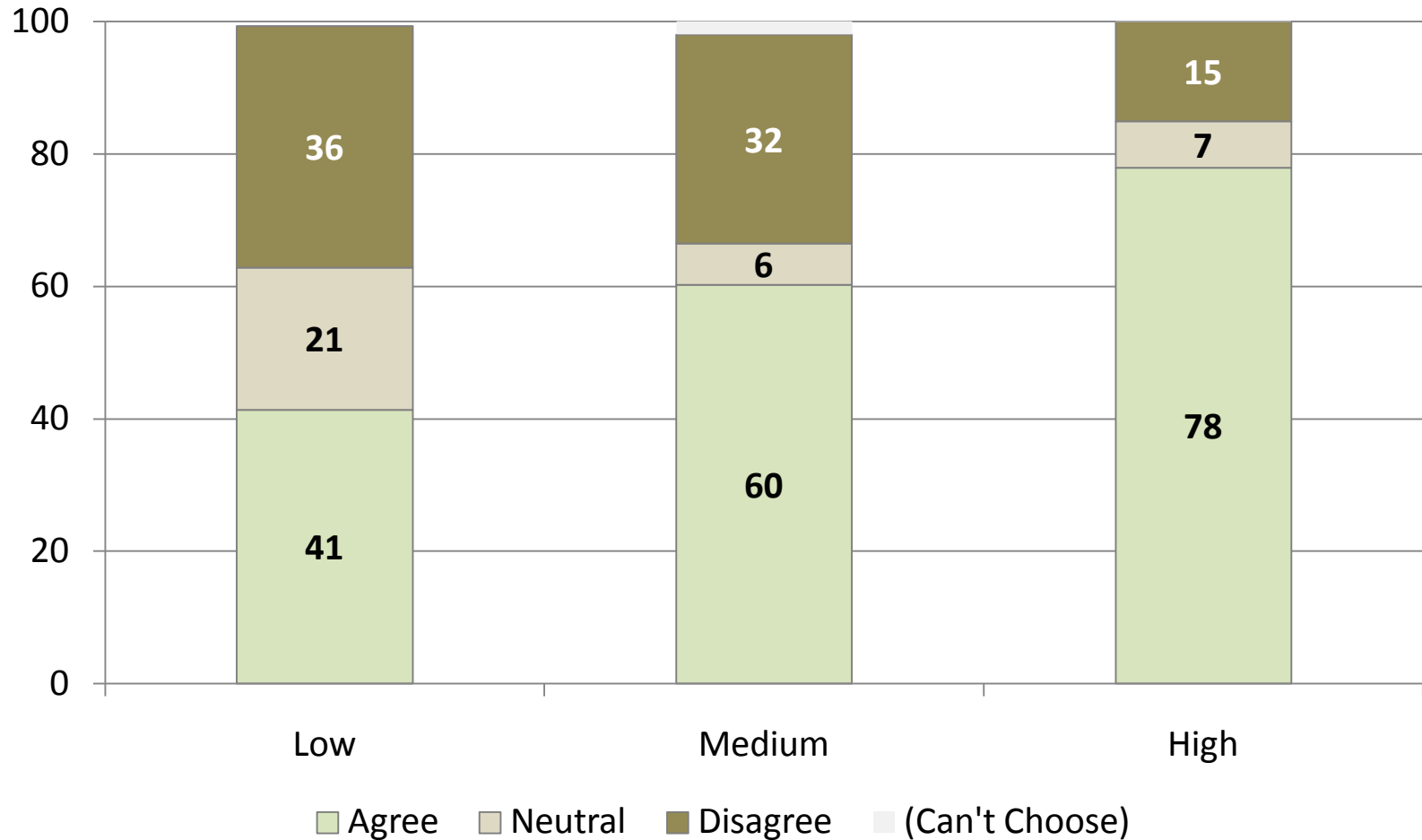


# Perceived job characteristics among those working for pay, 2005 and 2013





# Perceived job security by living standard level, 2013

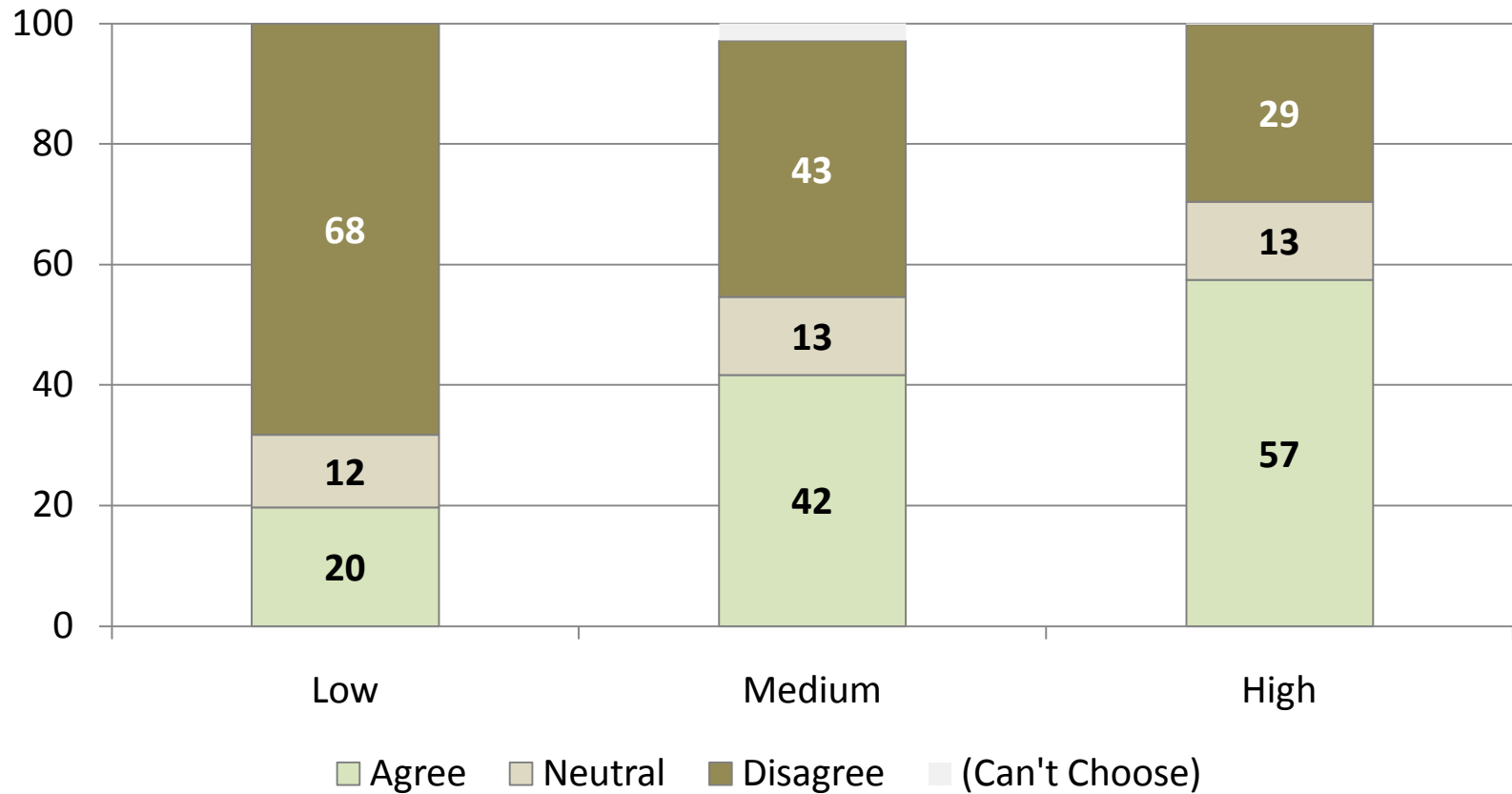


Source: HSRC SASAS 2013 LMIP module (Mncwango)



# Perceived fairness of earnings, 2013

“The pay and benefits I receive are fair for the work I do”





# Preferences for state-led redistribution and support for redress policies

- + *Preferences for redistribution*
- + *A cross-national perspective*
- + *Support for redress policies*
- + *Class and cohort variation*

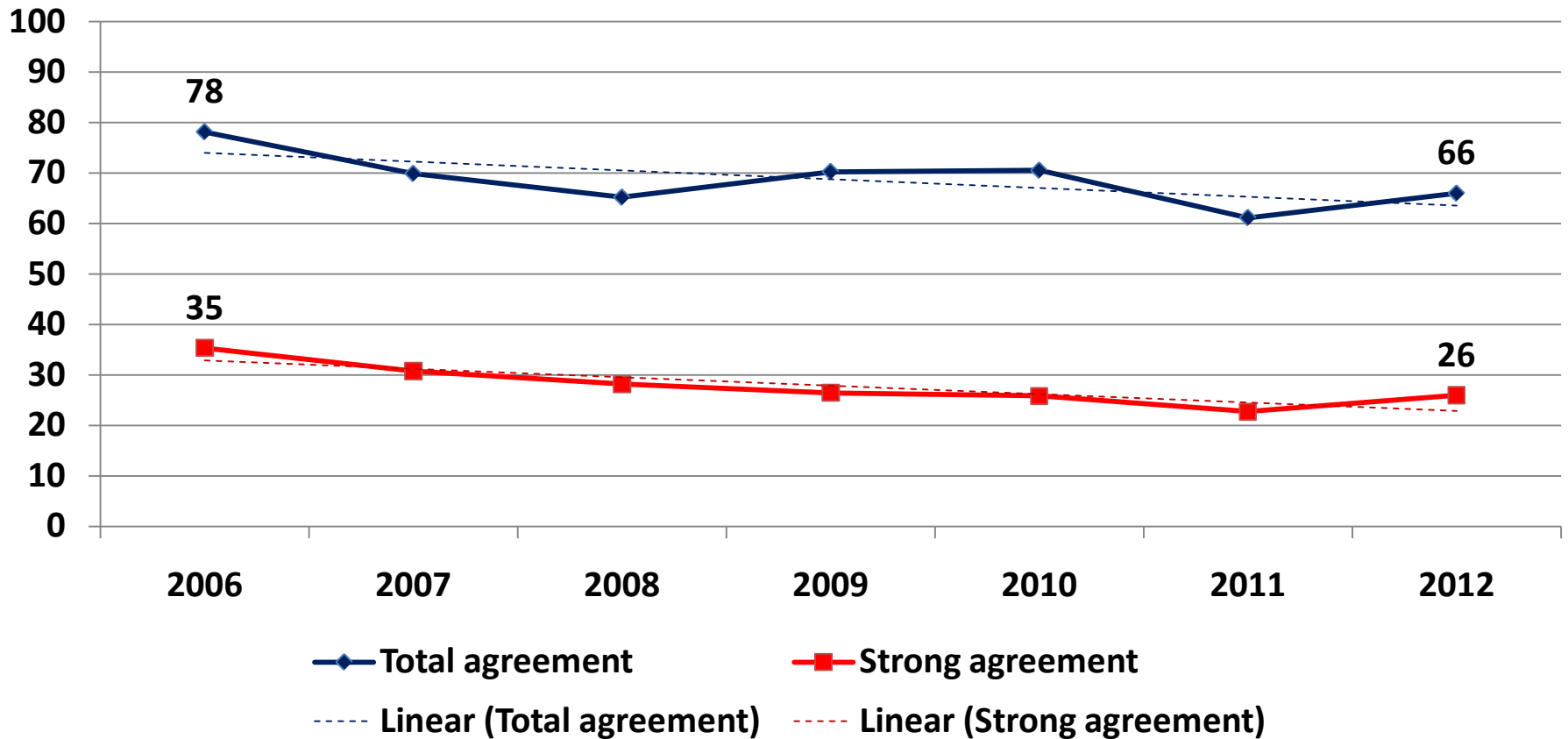


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# Preferences for Redistribution

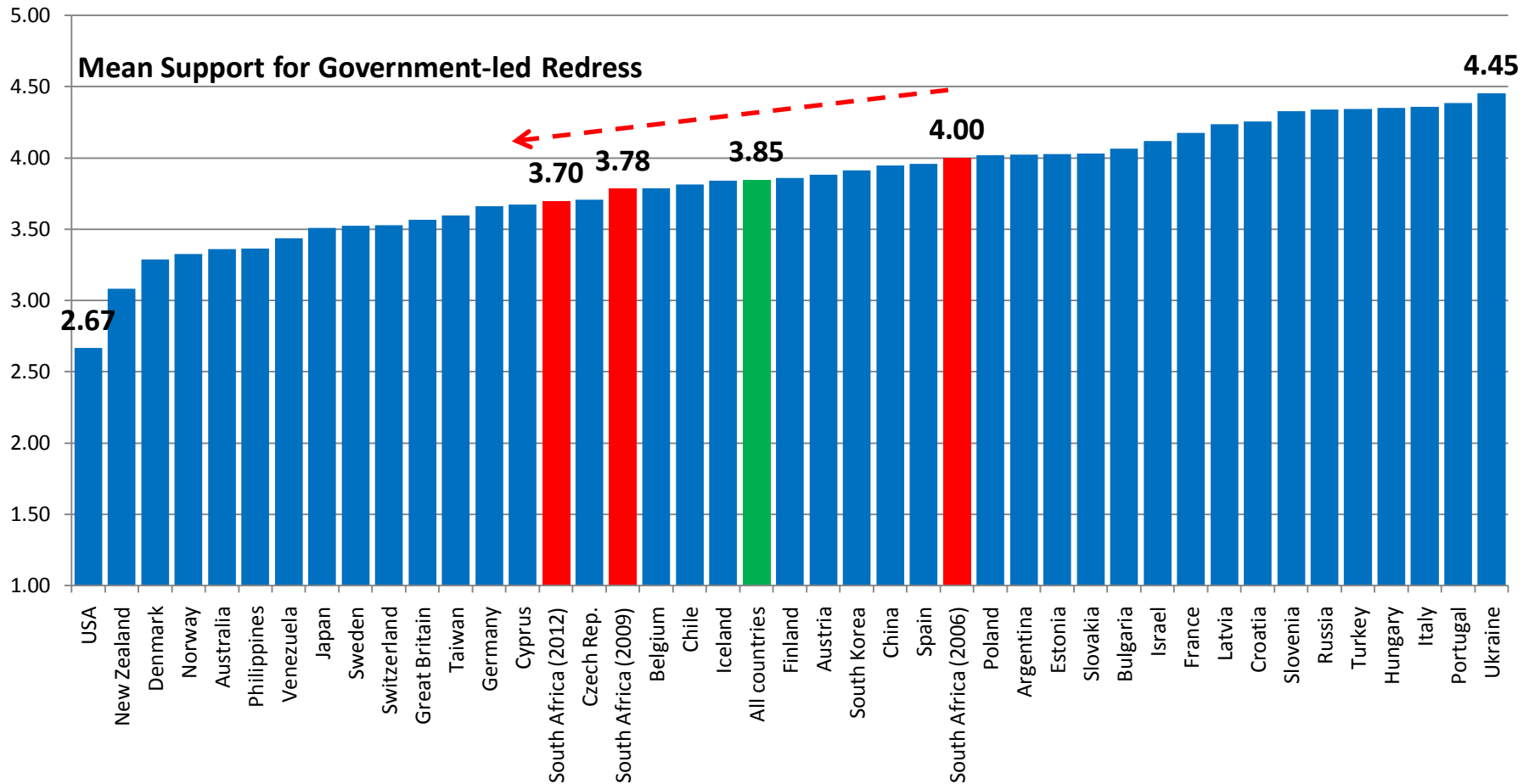
“It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes”





# Cross-National Preferences for Redistribution

“It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes”

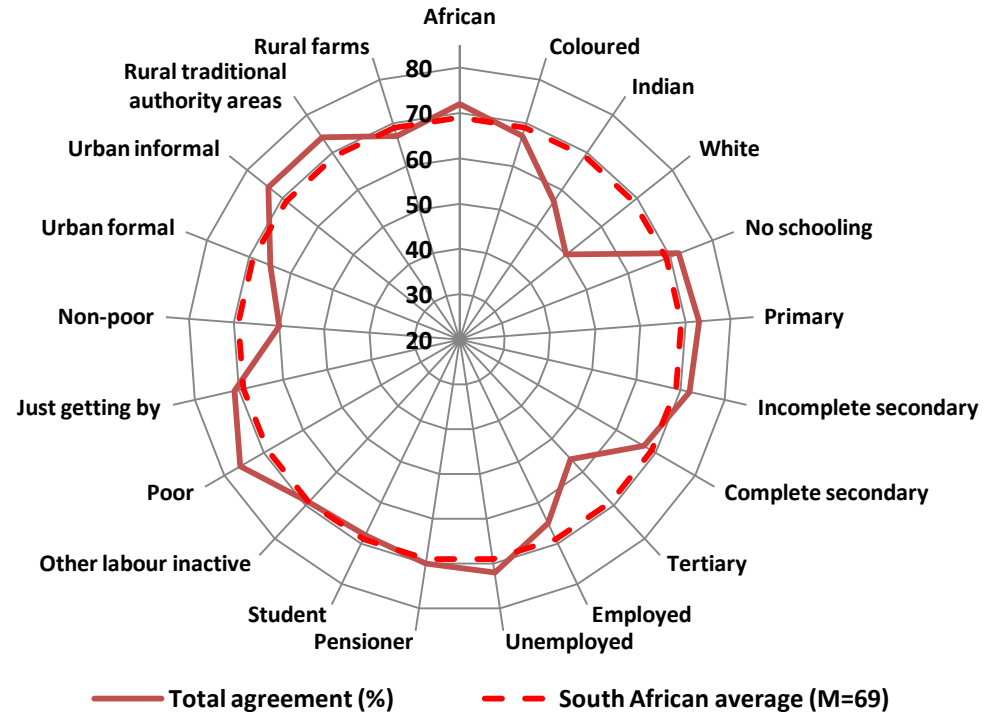




# Preferences for Redistribution

**“It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes”**

- South Africans: less uniformity in preferences about role of government in redistributing income
- Significant differences based on: race, education, employment status, subjective poverty status, and geographic location.
- Nonetheless, more than half of white, tertiary educated and non-poor South Africans support state-led redress in principle



Source: HSRC SASAS 2006-2012



# Support for Redress Policies

## Support for different types of redress measures, 2009 (percentage agreeing and mean scores)

	% support	Mean*
<b><i>Class-based redress measures:</i></b>		
The government should provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed.	81.7	4.06
The children of the economically well-off and the poor should be educated together	79.3	4.01
The government should provide more chances for children from poor families to go to university, even if it has to increase taxes	75.2	3.95
<b><i>Race-based redress measures:</i></b>		
Government should redistribute land to black South Africans.	67.7	3.77
There should be preferential hiring and promotion of black South Africans in employment	63.7	3.62
There should be racial quotas in national sports teams.	53.2	3.36

Note: \* The mean scores are based on reversed scales where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither nor, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree. 'Do not know' responses were excluded from analysis.

Source: authors' calculations based on HSRC SASAS (2009)



# Support for Redress Policies: By Race

	Race				<i>Diff. high to low</i>
	Black	Coloured	Indian	White	
<b><i>(A) Race-based redress measures:</i></b>					
1. Land reform	80	32	31	17	63
2. Affirmative action	76	29	27	16	60
3. Sports quotas	63	40	45	23	40
4. Apartheid compensation	74	37	24	20	54
<b><i>(B) Class-based redress measures:</i></b>					
5. Support for unemployed	84	79	82	65	19
6. School integration	77	75	83	69	14
7. Tertiary education opportunities for poor	78	78	45	62	33
8. Satisfaction with social grant provision	77	54	54	34	43
9. Increased social grant spending	68	67	53	50	18
10. Progressive taxation	67	65	64	51	16

Source: HSRC SASAS 2003-2012, pooled data.



# Support for Redress Policies: By Class

	Class			Diff. high to low
	Poor	Just getting by	Non-poor	
<b>(A) Race-based redress measures:</b>				
1. Land reform	76	69	53	23
2. Affirmative action	72	66	51	21
3. Sports quotas	62	57	49	13
4. Apartheid compensation	71	65	48	23
<b>(B) Class-based redress measures:</b>				
5. Support for unemployed	89	82	74	15
6. School integration	76	78	74	4
7. Tertiary education opportunities for poor	85	75	67	18
8. Satisfaction with social grant provision	72	74	63	11
9. Increased social grant spending	76	65	57	19
10. Progressive taxation	70	67	59	11

Source: HSRC SASAS 2003-2012, pooled data.



# Support for Redress Policies: Cohort differences within race groups

	Cohort differences:	Land reform	Affirmative action	Sports quotas	Unempl support	School integration	Grant satisfaction
<b>Black</b>	16-19 years	77**	73**	60**	85 <sup>n.s.</sup>	77 <sup>n.s.</sup>	80 <sup>n.s.</sup>
	20-29 years	80	77	66	84	78	78
	30-49 years	80	76	63	84	77	77
	50+ years	81	78	62	83	77	77
<b>Coloured</b>	16-19 years	33 <sup>n.s.</sup>	36**	46**	79 <sup>n.s.</sup>	80**	63**
	20-29 years	34	33	42	79	75	57
	30-49 years	31	29	40	79	76	50
	50+ years	31	26	37	80	72	53
<b>Indian</b>	16-19 years	32 <sup>n.s.</sup>	27 <sup>n.s.</sup>	58**	84 <sup>n.s.</sup>	76*	69**
	20-29 years	32	28	44	83	82	53
	30-49 years	29	26	47	80	84	55
	50+ years	33	28	42	86	84	50
<b>White</b>	16-19 years	16**	16 <sup>n.s.</sup>	25 <sup>n.s.</sup>	64 <sup>n.s.</sup>	78**	45**
	20-29 years	13	17	23	72	69	34
	30-49 years	17	16	24	63	66	35
	50+ years	20	15	21	64	70	33

Source: HSRC SASAS 2003-2012, pooled data.



# Support for Redress Policies: Class differences within race groups

Class differences:		Land reform	Affirmative action	Sports quotas	Unempl support	School integration	Grant satisfaction
<b>Black</b>	Poor	82**	78**	66**	89**	77**	74**
	Just getting by	80	76	62	84	79	80
	Non-poor	76	73	61	77	76	77
<b>Coloured</b>	Poor	33 <sup>n.s.</sup>	32 <sup>n.s.</sup>	39 <sup>n.s.</sup>	86**	72*	50*
	Just getting by	31	29	40	80	76	55
	Non-poor	32	28	40	75	76	54
<b>Indian</b>	Poor	46**	36**	51*	88**	76**	62**
	Just getting by	33	28	43	88	86	59
	Non-poor	27	25	45	79	82	50
<b>White</b>	Poor	16 <sup>n.s.</sup>	14 <sup>n.s.</sup>	23*	68 <sup>n.s.</sup>	64**	34*
	Just getting by	18	15	20	67	72	31
	Non-poor	17	16	23	64	69	35

Source: HSRC SASAS 2003-2012, pooled data.



# Concluding reflections

*Towards a decent living level and the quality of society we want*

03



# Conclusions (1)


- **Considerable - and unwavering - public concern with economic inequality in country**
  - Acute awareness of inequality, and a strong preference for a more equitable social structure, especially in relation to the labour market.
- **Majority support for state action to reduce inequality**, despite declining trend
- **Confirmatory evidence for a principle-implementation gap:**
  - Redress policy support lags behind general support for social justice
  - Greater opposition for policies that are more race-preferential in nature relative to those designed more as anti-poverty measures.
  - Links to current debate about race-based versus class-based redress



## Conclusions (2)

- **Signs of generational change:**
  - 'Born Free' generation seem to exhibit similar ideological preferences to redress as older cohorts in relation to redistributive policies
- **Firmer basis for a social compact** about preferences for interventions designed to produce a more just society than typically assumed.
  - South Africans may not fully agree on specific elements comprising a socially just response to persistently high levels of inequality....
  - Yet, common recognition of and concern with injustice AND a broad-based commitment to government redistribution and class-based social policies....
  - This could serve as a solid foundation on which to promote social solidarity and forge progress towards a more equitable society.



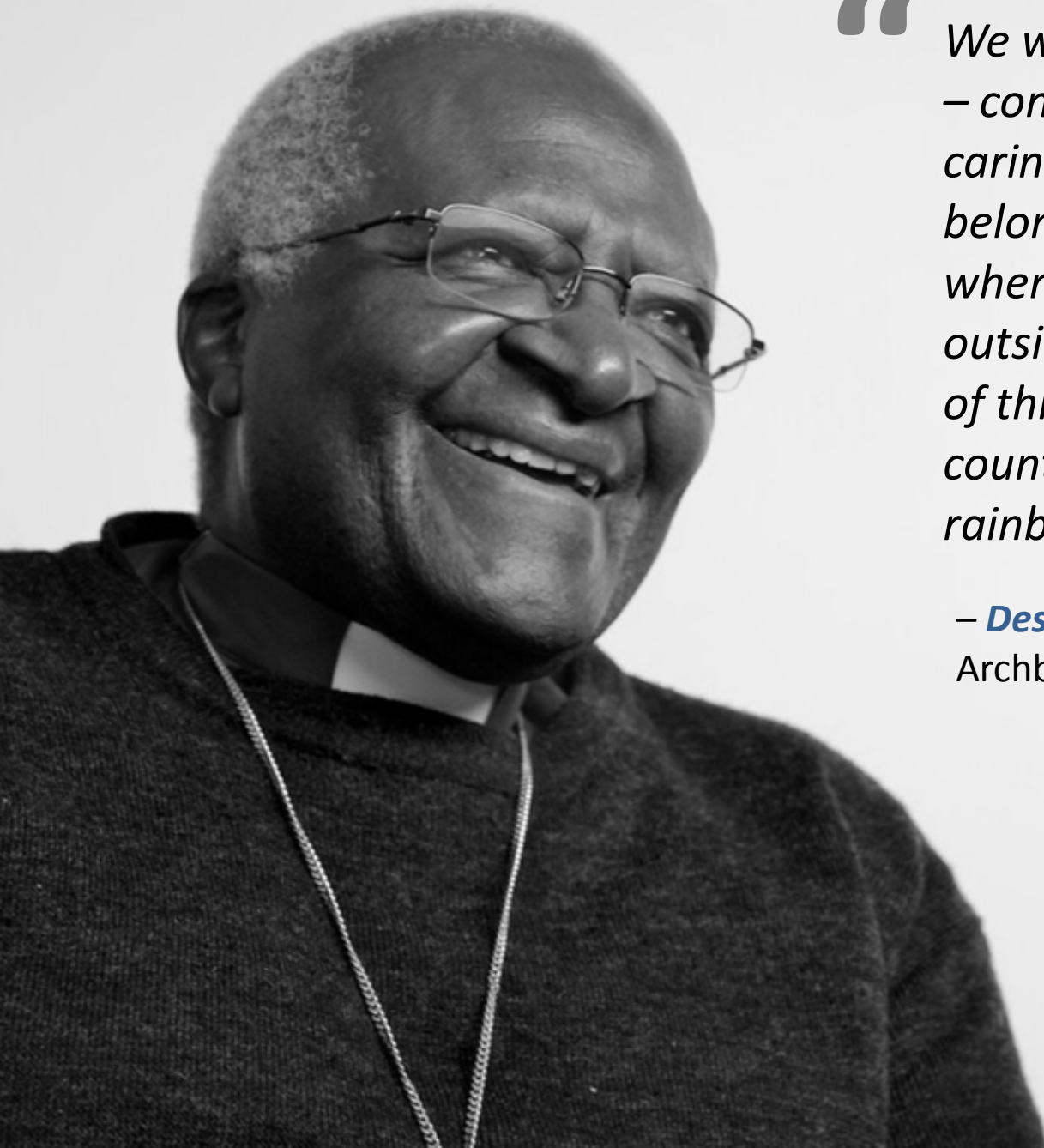
A black and white close-up portrait of Peter Townsend, an elderly man with glasses, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is dark and out of focus.

*“ Low pay has a direct, immediate effect on the numbers in or on the margins of poverty. But it also has specific indirect effects .... Low pay in the past can cause indebtedness for years to come, prevent the accumulation of assets, reduce capacity to overcome such sudden adversity as sickness or unemployment when it arises, result in under-nutrition, restrict activities and social experience, and hence leaves permanent scars*

*– Peter Townsend*

Sociologist, UK (1928-2009)

*”*



“ *We want a new quality of society – compassionate, gentle and caring... A nation where all belong and know they belong; where all are insiders, none is an outsider, where all are members of this remarkable, this crazy, country, they belong in the rainbow nation.* ”

– **Desmond Tutu**

Archbishop Emeritus, South Africa



# thank you

## **contact information**

For more info, please  
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