



ROUND 2

# UJ-HSRC COVID-19 DEMOCRACY SURVEY

## Summary national results, Round 2 (3 July – 8 Sept)

22 October 2020

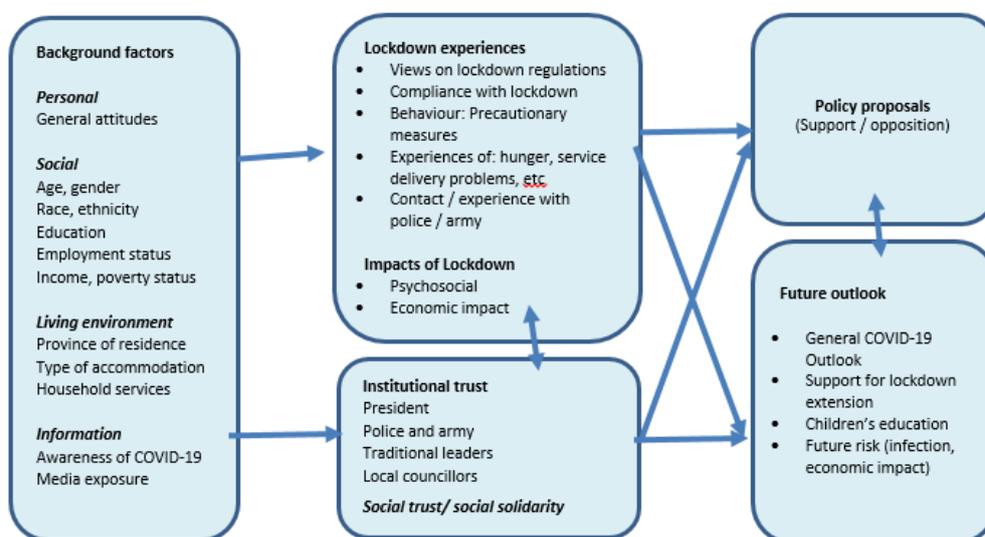
## UJ-HSRC Covid-19 Democracy Survey Summary Findings Wave 2

2 October 2020

### 1. Background

The University of Johannesburg's Centre for Social Change and the Human Sciences Research Council's (HSRC) Developmental, Capable and Ethical State (DCES) research division is conducting an ongoing online survey among South African adults to determine the social and economic impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic, with a particular emphasis on lockdown experiences, attitudes and behaviour.

The main aim of the Coronavirus Impact Survey is to determine public perceptions of the economic, social and political impact of Covid-19 on life across the country, and how this is changing over time and across different lockdown levels. Conceptually, the survey questionnaire has been designed to examine the themes and relationships illustrated in the conceptual diagram below.



### 2. Survey methodology, characteristics and limitations

We are conducting the longitudinal online survey using the Moya Messenger App, a platform which is similar to WhatsApp and currently used by 4 million people across the country. Approximately 1,6 million people make use of the platform at least every month, and 800 000 of these use it every day. The platform is operated by biNu, which has collaborated with the HSRC on several surveys to date. Anyone with a mobile phone is able to receive and respond to the survey, whether or not they have airtime or data available.

Users of the Moya Messenger platform are predominantly younger South Africans aged less than 40, and mainly black or coloured. For this reason, we are also distributing a URL to the online survey by means of other media, to obtain responses from minority components of the population that are under-represented amongst users of the Moya platform. The responses are anonymous and we will not disclose the IP addresses from which we are receiving responses.

A first round of data collection was conducted between 13 April and 11 May, mainly during the initial Level 5 period of the national lockdown. A second round of interviewing was initiated on the 3 July, and ran until the 8 September. The data comprise 12,312 respondents for the first round of surveying, and 7,966 respondents for our second round. Results are based on an opt-in sample using cellphones or computers, and weighted by race, education and gender to match Stats SA's demographic data, making them broadly indicative of the attitudes, preferences and behaviours of South Africans.

The survey collected responses about levels of awareness and information sources that are being used. We asked whether people think the pandemic is being exaggerated, and whether people are prepared to sacrifice some of their human rights in the national fight against the spread of the virus. Amongst the other questions, we tested the extent to which the public trusts the leadership of the President, the police and the army, in managing the situation, the emotions that people have been feeling as a result of the lockdown, as well as compliance with lockdown safety regulations, such as wearing a face mask in public.

### 3. Coronavirus Impact Survey Results

#### ***COVID-19 awareness and information sources***

- **Levels of awareness** about COVID-19 is widespread among South Africans, pointing to widespread policy and media coverage and uptake by the public. Three-quarters (**75%**) **reported that they know a lot or a fair amount** about the Coronavirus outbreak (31% and 44% respectively). This suggests that knowledge has remained virtually identical relative to Round 1 of the survey. By contrast, and rather disconcerting after five months of pandemic response and communications campaigning, approximately a fifth (19%) said they know 'a little', while 2% reported that they 'know nothing at all' about the outbreak.
- In terms of the **main sources of information about Coronavirus**, the dominant channel by a significant degree is television (72%). This is followed, to a significantly lesser degree, by radio (45%), news sites (either on the internet or newspapers, 42%), Government health officials (incl. Minister Mkhize) (26%). Approximately a third of respondents reported relying on social media (37%) or WhatsApp (31%). Friends, family and colleagues are regarded as a key source of information by 27%, with circumscribed reliance on medical professionals (16%), and flyers, pamphlets or information sheets (14%). This pattern largely remains the same relative to Round 1 of our survey, with a slight decline in television and government health officials, and a modest increase in social media.

#### ***General attitudes towards Coronavirus***

- **Exaggerated threat of COVID-19:** Four in ten South Africans (41%) express the view that 'the threat of Coronavirus is exaggerated' (21% strongly believe this). This is a substantial minority share of the adult public, and has increased eight percentage points relative to the

Level 5 period. Furthermore, between Rounds 1 and 2 of survey, the share strongly disagreeing that the risk of COVID-19 is exaggerated fell by 13 percentage points. This is likely to have an impact on adherence to safety regulations in future if left unaddressed. A marginally lower share (31%) disagreed with this perspective, while 28% were either neutral or unsure in response.

- **Willingness to sacrifice some human rights to prevent virus spread:** 72% of survey participants agreed that they would sacrifice some human rights if it contributed positively towards the prevention of the spread of Coronavirus in the country. This has reduced from 78% during the hard lockdown phase, but the pattern remains broadly consistent.

Newly included in Round 2 of the survey were follow-up questions on which human rights would respondents be willing to temporarily forego to halt the spread of the pandemic. The dominant responses were the right to attend one's place of worship (56%) and the right to travel from place to place (51%). Around a third were willing to sacrifice the right to attend school and university (33%), the right to protest (31%), and slightly over a quarter the right to work (27%). The least favoured of the rights options included in the questionnaire was the right to be private and not share information with government (16%). Only a fifth (20%) said they were not prepared to sacrifice any of these rights.

### *Institutional trust in the handling of the COVID-19 response*

- **Trust in government and other core political institutions** is regarded as a critical determining element in effective responses to the COVID-19 crisis. This includes a belief that government has the technical expertise, knowledge and capacity to make fair, effective decisions, as well as confidence in the President himself at the apex of the South African governance system.
- An estimated **65% believe that the President is doing a good job** in handling the Coronavirus outbreak. This has fallen from 85% during Round 1 of our survey during the hard lockdown phase. Despite this decline, the percentage providing positive evaluation (65%) exceeds those providing a critical appraisal (12%) by 53 percentage points. So trust is still strongly vested in presidential performance.
- **Trust in national government's handling of the pandemic response is slightly lower (57%),** but again is appreciably higher than the proportion offering a negative evaluation (18%).
- **More moderate evaluations are provided of the Police (36% good job) and the SANDF (37% good job)** enforcement of the lockdown regulations, with almost equivalent shares displaying negative views of performance. This represents a double-digit decline in confidence relative to lockdown Level 5. Local councillors receive the lowest performance ratings (26% good job, 40% bad job), meaning that on aggregate they have lost the support of the public.

### *Lockdown experiences*

- **Perceived adherence:** 77% believe that people across South Africa are not taking lockdown restrictions seriously enough. Only 8% felt that people are adhering in an appropriate way while 13% felt that the public was responding to the lockdown in too serious a manner. This

patterns remain very similar to what was observed during Round 1 of the survey (82%, 6% and 11% respectively)

- Social distancing regulations:** Since Lockdown Level 3, 70% of respondents indicated that they had personally experienced a situation in a supermarket where others were not adhering to social distancing regulations while queuing. Approximately half said that they had travelled in a minibus taxi that was full (50%) or where passengers were not wearing masks (45%). Around a third had experienced people not keeping a safe distance while queuing for a food parcel (38%) or at a clinic, hospital or doctor's room (35%). Between a fifth and a quarter had been to a religious service or funeral where more than 50 people were attending (23%) or had experienced a lack of social distancing protocols at work. Only 9% had not experienced any of the previously-mentioned situations. This suggests that exposure to risk of COVID-19 remains high in South Africa, and warrants a sustained health promotion campaign in coming months.
- Compliance with face mask regulations:** 72% of respondents indicated that they 'always' wear a face mask when they leave their home. A further 18% say that they wear a mask 'most of the time', while a tenth (10%) wear a mask less regularly or never. With the move to Level 1, and the greater burden of responsibility on citizens to stop the spread of Covid-19 through individual actions, the fact that 28% are not always wearing masks is cause for concern and again requires constant messaging campaigns. This does not even take into account whether the 72% wearing masks always are in fact wearing them properly.
- Alleged abuse of power by Police / Army:** Since the start of lockdown on the 26 March, **7% of respondents allege that the police or army had treated them badly**, with a further 15% saying that they had received acceptable or positive treatment from the police. A sizable majority (74%) had no personal interaction with the police or army during this period.
- Hunger:** This has become an increasing pressing issue in the South African lockdown experience. This theme came through strongly in the survey, with 41% of survey participants personally reporting that they had gone to bed hungry since lockdown, while 27% also indicated that someone else in household had experienced this. This represents only a modest increase relative to Round 1 (38% and 22% respectively).
- Other lockdown challenges:** ensuring reliable access to basic household services during lockdown has also been challenging for many, with 51% reporting electricity supply problems, and 21% battling with access to water. Getting public transport when needed was mentioned by 18% of respondents. Electricity and water problems have substantially increased relative to Round 1, with electricity supply issues increasing from 19% to 51%, most likely a reflection of the reintroduction of loadshedding, and water supply problems rising from 10% to 21%. Ensuring a reliable supply of these basic household services is key in ensuring that the adverse effect of lockdown on individual quality of life is not made instrumentally worse.

### ***Emotional experiences***

- Dominant emotions experienced often in past week:** Respondents were asked to list which emotions they experienced on a regular basis in the week prior to interviewing. A list of nine different emotions was presented to choose from. **The most commonly experienced emotion was stress (57%).** This was followed (in descending order) by fear (42%), frustration/irritability (39%), depression (36%), and boredom (30%). Sadness was mentioned

by 27%, loneliness by 27% and anger by 24%. By comparison, only 17% reported feeling frequently happy. The most distinct changes relative to Round 1 are increases in anger (from 18% to 27%), frustration/irritability (from 35% to 39%) and depression (from 33% to 36%), while boredom fell by 15 percentage points (from 45% to 40%).

### ***Economic impact***

- While the general economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa has received much attention, what are the views of citizens about the financial consequences of the outbreak?
- **Strong economic concern:** 87% were very concerned about financial situation of all citizens, while 85% voiced strong concern for themselves. The deep-set financial anxiety has not diminished since Round 1.
- **Difficulties keeping up with expenses:** 81% reported that they were struggling paying for their expenses, given their financial situation under lockdown (66% expressed strong views in this regard). This represents a modest increase in reported difficulty compared to the hard lockdown period, suggesting that the economic consequences of the pandemic continue to hit the pockets of South Africans hard.
- **Employment challenges:** 15% of participants reported being laid off work and been unable to find new employment since the start of lockdown. A tenth (11%) report that they have kept their job but that their hours or pay are different. A further 13% said they had the same job with unchanged hours and remuneration while, only a modest share (2%) indicated that they were previously unemployed but managed to secure a job. The largest share (48%) were unemployed before lockdown and remain without a job.

### ***Social solidarity***

- **Hope for social solidarity:** 36% feel the pandemic will make South Africans more united and supportive of each other; 43% adopt a more sceptical view (growing social distrust / self-interest); while the remaining 22% are neutral (11%) or uncertain (11%) in this regard. This is a profound shift compared to Round 1 of the survey during the hard lockdown period. The latter found that 45% believed the pandemic would promote social solidarity while 29% were sceptical. This reversal in the dominant response to the question suggests that there has been a clear loss of faith in the collective ('we are in this together') response to dealing with the wide-ranging challenges posed by the pandemic.

### ***Views on policy options***

- **Perceived harshness of lockdown restrictions:** Only a quarter (24%) of respondents believe that the lockdown restrictions are about right in character, while a further 41% believe that they are not harsh enough. A notable minority share (28%) however believes that the lockdown measures are too harsh.
- **Most favoured policy propositions:** Survey participants were provided with a set of 13 policy proposals and asked to indicate which they favoured. From this list, food parcels (70% support), increasing the value of social grants (69%), and the R350 Covid relief grant (69%), and were the top ranked policy options. This speaks to the resolute demand for social

protection measures to address the lack of cash income and basic food needs that has intensified under lockdown. This was following, in descending order, by the introduction of a basic income grant (BIG) (61%), payment holiday on accounts, rent, taxes (46%), allowing people to stop paying and be refunded school fees for the time schools are closed (44%), and providing free cellphone data (41%). By contrast, more circumscribed support was evident for the removal of the ban on cigarette sales (29%), allowing places of worship to open (22%), the removal of restrictions on alcohol sales (18%) sales, wealth taxes (17%), removal of all restrictions on movement (12%), and removing limits on the number of funeral attendees (11%).

In terms of change since Round 1 of the survey, the greatest increase in policy support was for the removal of the cigarette ban (from 20% to 29%) and alcohol ban (from 12% to 18%), while the largest observed decline in support was for payment holidays (from 60% to 46%) and free cellphone data (from 54% to 41%).

### ***Views on schooling***

- The decision to re-open schools was one of the more contentious and widely-debated issues during the last two months, and is proving a key point of policy contestation globally. Our data shows that 55% of respondents believed that schools should not re-open this year. By contrast, 18% feel that schools should be open for all grades, while a fifth (21%) maintain that schools should only be open for Grade 7 and Grade 12 learners. Despite this aggregate pattern, there is an apparent swing during August and early September, with a growing inclination towards re-opening schools for all grades, and an associate decline in support for closing schools for the rest of the year.

### ***Future outlook***

- In terms of **short-term Coronavirus outlook** over the coming month, 59% believe the worst is yet to come, 18% believe the situation will remain the same, 17% feel that we are over the worst of it and that things will begin to improve, while 6% were unsure.

Compared to Round 1, this represents a modest increase in worry about the pandemic (from 53% to 79% believing the worst is yet to come), but it masks important variation over time. In the early part of Round 2 of surveying (3-18 July), as COVID-19 cases and mortality spiked, a distinctly fearful outlook was present among 76% of respondents. This diminished slightly to 60% in the latter half of July, following by a significant drop in August and early September (32%). There has been a corresponding tripling of those believing that we are over the worst of it (from 7% in the first half of July to 30% in August and early September).

- In terms of **future risk**, 32% believe that it is likely that they will contract the virus in the next few months, while 46% regard it as an unlikely prospect. A small share of respondents (2,5%) reported that they had already been infected with COVID-19.

### ***Personal messages for the President***

- As a final question in the survey, respondents were asked to provide, in their own words, a personal message for President Ramaphosa. Many provided messages they wished the

President to hear. While we cannot detail all of these in this summary of findings, below are a few examples: -

“As a youth I appreciate the efforts of trying to keep the country safe and still running. Our economy should always be kept safe and so too our people.”
“A president is supposed to lead and everything we’ve seen after his address has been everything but. Once a month address updating us is pathetic!”
“Alcohol sale should be banned. We need more police visibility. Crime is spiking once again.”
“Any restrictions on our rights need to be logical and transparent. If we don't see the point of them or they seem arbitrary (as is now the case) then it is difficult to distinguish which make sense (such as masks) from those which are nonsense (such as what clothes we can buy or buying cigarettes)”
“Bring back level 4. People are sick and dying”
“Cancel the current school year please, once a life is lost you can never recover, and school there is always next year”
“Make choices for the people not the Party. We need stable houses and safety for all children in this country. Ubuntu must prevail ... Stay strong Mr President. There is no way to know what the best way is. Nobody had dealt with this before. We need a strong, decisive leader to take us forward. People are hungry, fearful and cold .... Be strong with us, for us so that we can walk tall together”
“Corruption has cost South Africa greatly and people have to be held accountable`
“Dear Mr president. I know you need a council to help you make difficult decisions but I think you are giving them too much decision making options. The final say should still come from YOU.”
“Do you think R350 can be enough for a home that has no bread winner”
“Don't give up, continue to do your work and save the people of SA from the pandemic.”
“I still trust you Mr President”

#### 4. Next steps

Over the coming weeks and months, the project team will continue analysing the attitudes, behaviours and experiences based on weighted data from the online survey of South African adults, and providing in-depth insight on specific aspects of the lived experience of Coronavirus-related lockdown in the country. Such information will be critical in continuing to provide social science evidence to inform ongoing national and more localised decision-making in response to the pandemic at lower lockdown levels, and distilling key lessons from the pandemic for future consideration.

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The following articles based on Round 2 of the UJ-HSRC Covid-19 Democracy Survey data have been published in Daily Maverick to date.

[The Ubuntu Nation? Changing views on social solidarity and the Covid-19 pandemic](#)

[How the Covid-19 lockdown impacted on SA's mental health](#)

[Human rights sacrifices during the pandemic: Who and Why?](#)

[Masks – Who wears them and Why it matters](#)

[The Calculus of Trust: Diminished public confidence in the president's performance](#)

[Smoke and mirrors? Public perceptions on banning the sale of cigarettes](#)

[Survey shows government's schools policy is opposed by a large majority](#)

Links to previous Daily Maverick articles based on Round 1 of the survey data are listed below:

[Unlocking the public's preferences: What South Africans think of lockdown and policy responses](#)

['We are getting cold': Lifting of clothing-sale ban comes not a moment too soon](#)

[Up in Smoke: Public reflections on decision to extend the ban on tobacco sales](#)

[Human rights remain essential during the Covid-19 crisis](#)

[Reopening of schools: Bold leadership and planning required](#)

[Calls for bolder action as lockdown exposes fault lines of inequality](#)

['Hungry – we are starving at home'](#)

[President Cyril Ramaphosa's job performance](#)

[The hidden struggle: The mental health effects of the Covid-19 lockdown in South Africa](#)

[Class and the Covid-19 crisis: questions of convergence and divergence](#)

[Survey shows government's schools policy is opposed by a large majority](#)

[Smoke and mirrors: Public perceptions on banning the sale of cigarettes](#)