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The Gulf War is now in its fourth week. It has attracted saturation press coverage and made CNN a player in big-league international television. One stated aim of US policy was to restrict Iraq's ability to wage a sustained campaign. The more than 2,000 air sorties a day were intended to help achieve this objective. During the first 14 days of the war 30,000 sorties were flown although some were reconnaissance flights and not bombing missions. It is not US policy to destroy Iraq. However the bombardment of civilian installations which, it is claimed, support the war, makes it seem as though the policy aim is to destroy Iraq. The destruction of government buildings and power stations in Iraq appears unrelated, in the public eye, to the liberation of Kuwait.

The ferocious bombing campaign was bound to affect public opinion. We set out to establish what South Africans thought about some of the Gulf War issues.

Faced with the question: Do you think the allied forces acted correctly or incorrectly when they attacked Iraq on 16 January, 1991? 37% of the respondents thought they had acted correctly, while 39% said they had acted incorrectly. If we break the result down by race we have 22% of (so called) blacks saying the Allies acted correctly, but 56% saying they acted incorrectly. The general result is that whites' views were positive and those of the blacks negative. Only 16% of the whites thought that the Allies had acted incorrectly, but 65% thought they had acted correctly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acted correctly</th>
<th>Acted incorrectly</th>
<th>Had no choice</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
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Sample N = 1959
Political Developments

Political developments over the past year have clearly shown that President F W de Klerk's speech on 2 February last year represented not only a watershed in the political process in South Africa, but also in public perceptions of politics as such. Research undertaken at the time revealed that as a white politician F W de Klerk had reached an unprecedented level of popularity among South Africans: 77% of PWV blacks, for instance, thought that he was a democratic leader, while between 72 and 87% of people living in the metropolitan areas agreed with the general content of his speech of 2 February 1990.

The impact of that speech can perhaps partially be attributed to its surprise effect, given the stalemate that government politics had reached in the late eighties. A crucial question at present is, however, whether he has maintained his support. Two sets of issues were considered in the present research, namely the reception of Mr De Klerk's opening of parliament speech on 1 February 1991, and the public's choice of a national leader.

The majority (74%) of South Africans in the sample, agreed with the overall content of Mr De Klerk's speech. This positive reception was corroborated by the public's response to specific issues addressed in the speech, namely the announcement of the government's intention to repeal the last three pillars of apartheid. They are the Group Areas Act, the Population Registration Act and the 1936 Land Act. The responses to these issues are reflected in the figure below.

![Response to the repeal of apartheid laws](image)
To explore the impact of tension between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Gulf on intergroup relations in South Africa we asked whether the effects would be positive, negative or have no effect. On this issue 20 % of the respondents thought the effect would be positive, 31 % opted for negative, and 27 % thought it would have no effect. Some 22 % did not have any views on the matter.

The overall picture was that the respondents were divided on the issues we put to them. The black respondents thought that the SA Government should have adopted a neutral stance, that the Allies had acted incorrectly, and the majority were unsympathetic to President Bush’s stance. The whites were generally positive, supporting the government, the Allies and President Bush. The coloured respondents thought the Allies would win, and supported President Bush and the Allies, although 31 % did not know whether the Allies had acted correctly or not. The Asian respondents thought that the Allies had acted incorrectly, but given that the war was a reality, supported President Bush’s stance. However, the majority thought that the SA Government should have remained neutral.

Public opinion is fickle

Public opinion is notoriously fickle. According to Le Figaro 57 % of the French population supported French involvement in the Allied campaign before the commencement of hostilities, whereas 65 % were positive in their 25 January poll. French opinion on president Bush’s stand climbed from 53 % to 71 %.

A similar pattern emerged in Germany with 66 % in favour of the Allied campaign in a Der Spiegel poll at the end of January. The view which emerged was that although Germans would have preferred it if the war had never happened, after it became a reality, it was considered ‘necessary’ for European and US policy in the Gulf.

According to the weekly international papers public opinion in England and Japan support both president Bush’s stand, and the Allied campaign. But if there were major setbacks in the Allied campaign support for the Allies and president Bush’s moral stand could weaken overnight. It will be interesting to see how South African public opinion compares with European opinion in the coming weeks.
Support for the repeal of these three acts far outstripped support for retaining them on the statute book. It is interesting to note that while the findings with regard to all three acts were practically identical, the number of people responding "uncertain" to the repeal of the Land Act and the Population Registration Act was somewhat higher than for the Group Areas Act, indicating somewhat more doubt about the wisdom/acceptability of the repeal of the former two acts.

Interesting patterns emerged when possible subgroup differences were considered. The results of comparisons between population categories are reflected in the following figure.

![Overall response to De Klerk's speech](image)

Clearly the white population category was the most restrained in its agreement with Mr De Klerk's speech, although a substantial majority still supported it.

Secondary analyses showed that among the whites, 50% of the Afrikaans speakers agreed with the content, while 27 and 23% respectively were in disagreement and uncertain.

The pattern of results to the questions on support for the repeal of the three specific acts correlated fairly closely with the general reaction to the speech as such and is therefore not given here.

Mr De Klerk and Mr Mandela remain the two most acceptable persons to lead the country according to the responses of the sample to the question, "If you ... had to choose one person ... to lead South Africa, who would you choose?" The results are shown in the following figure.
The figure shows that Mr De Klerk's support base was broader than that of Mr Mandela. While less than half of the white Afrikaans respondents supported Mr De Klerk, his support among the other four categories ranged from 66% of the coloureds to 25% of the black sample. On the other hand, Mr Mandela's support of 44% of the black sample was more or less comparable to that of Mr De Klerk among the Afrikaans whites. However, Mr Mandela did not obtain any support at all among whites and meager support from the Asian and coloured samples.

These results produce a fairly coherent picture in that agreement with the opening of parliament speech is associated with the view that the future of South Africa is

* challenging rather than frightening
* bright rather than gloomy
* safe and unsafe for similar proportions of the sample

The observation of relative optimism - "challenging" and "bright" - was tempered by the fact that approximately half of the respondents thought that the future of the country would be unsafe.

This made the question on the public's expectations concerning the effects of the peace talks between Chief Buthelezi and Mr Mandela in February even more relevant. Less than half of the total sample thought that the meeting would lead to a decrease in the conflict, while 21% expressed the opinion (fear?) that the conflict would increase. 36% stated that it would have no effect. Important differences were found between the perceptions of the various population categories.
The black sample was clearly more optimistic than the other groups, while the whites were the least hopeful about constructive results. Further analyses indicated that, other things being equal, the younger the respondent the more optimistic the person was that the talks would lead to a decrease in conflict.

To sum up, the findings indicate that Mr De Klerk has succeeded in maintaining a broad base of support for his sociopolitical initiatives, although the base is in the process of being redefined. In addition his support exceeds that of Mr Mandela in breadth and depth. Both leaders are significantly more popular choices than any of the other political leaders, including Dr Buthelezi and Dr Treurnicht whose national support is negligible. In general, the Afrikaans-speaking whites were more restrained in their support for sociopolitical democratization than any of the other groups in the sample. While preceding results could be construed as meaning that the public has a reasonably optimistic view of the country and its future, the question of safety, violence and conflict could possibly confound the process of change.
Widespread ignorance about VAT

In October of this year, General Sales Tax will be replaced by Value Added Tax. During the past few months, the campaigns in the media to explain VAT have been stepped up. So one would expect that by now, South Africans would have a reasonable degree of understanding about the meaning of VAT. But this is not the case!

An overwhelming 86% of the people sampled in February indicated that they knew very little or nothing about VAT. A mere 4% said that they knew a lot about the system.

![Pie chart showing understanding about VAT]

Ignorance about VAT is widespread. There were no significant differences between the various subgroups in the sample. Large majorities of all the race groups indicated that they knew very little or nothing about VAT:

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<tr>
<th>Race Group</th>
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<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloureds</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asians</td>
<td>84%</td>
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As one would expect, differences in educational level accounted for a significant difference in knowledge, with the more highly educated respondents in the sample clearly better informed - or at least saying that they were - than the less well educated.
UPDATE INDICATORS

10 January
AZAPO rejects call for all-party congress.

10 January
More than 10% of White provincial schools in SA will be opened to all races this year.

11 January
Zulu king, King Goodwill Zwelithini, refuses meeting with ANC President.

12 January
Sebokeng Massacre. Gangsters firing AK-47 assault rifles at mourners attending a funeral vigil held for a slain ANC activist kill at least 38 people and injure 50 more.

14 January
Soccer Sadness. Forty-two soccer fans die and 50 are injured in a stampede at a friendly match between Iwisa Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates at Orkney.

15 January
Chief Minister Buthelezi slams ANC talks claim.

16 January
Orde Boerestaat members go on hunger strike in protest against what was called the government's one-sided approach in extending immunity from prosecution to Leftists, but not Right-Wingers.

16 January
State President F.W. de Klerk telephones President Bush to offer support for his Gulf policy.

17 January
Property Bill outlaws racial discrimination. The Government will introduce legislation outlawing racial discrimination in the ownership, occupation and letting of land and property during the forthcoming parliamentary session.

18 January
Police general Lober Neethling's R1.5m damages claim against Vrye Weekblad and Weekly Mail is rejected by the Rand Supreme Court.
A similar pattern was found with regard to the relation between income category and degree of understanding - the respondents from the higher income brackets [R4 000+ per month per household] indicating higher levels of understanding [approx. 40% said they knew quite a lot or a great deal about VAT] compared to the approximately 8% in the lower income categories [less than R1 000 per month per household] who knew comparatively little.

Overall, however, the level of understanding is extremely low. A far more intensive public information programme on VAT is called for before the VAT system is introduced in seven months-time.
Update Indicators

Perceptions of the future

19-20 January
Cabinet ministers and senior MP’s hold indaba on Robben Island.

24 January
Independent Development Trust is to allocate R600 million to provide improved living conditions for about 750 000 impoverished South Africans over the next two years.

24 January
Government sources deny speculation that a single unified education system would be implemented during this session of Parliament.

28 January
ANC release bill of human rights.

29 January
Farmers from all over the country block off Pretoria streets in protest against the Government’s agricultural policies.

29 January
Mr Nelson Mandela and Chief Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi meet for peace talks.

1 February
State President F.W. de Klerk opens Parliament and announces the scrapping of all the Apartheid Laws.

4 February
A court case against Mrs Winnie Mandela starts.

5 February
European Community ministers agree to lift sanctions against South Africa.

5 February
Government launches a R3 million campaign with the slogan “Let’s put peace first” to help promote a spirit of tolerance and an end to violence.

8 February
Japan ease curbs on South Africa’s coal exports.

Note on the representativeness of the sample

Given the current ownership of telephones in South Africa, the sample of 2 000 used in this survey can be regarded as being representative of the following:

- the total white population
- approximately 10 % of the total black population
- approximately 40 % of the total coloured population
- approximately 75 % of the total Asian population

Given the current level of urbanization in South Africa, [approximately 60 %], the sample can be regarded as being representative of approximately 40 % of the total population.

It must also be kept in mind that this group is in fact the more influential group in any society and are in fact the opinion formers and leaders of any country. Research undertaken at the HSRC over the years, has furthermore shown that responses in a telephone interview do not necessarily differ from responses in personal interviews. The research team is therefore of the opinion that the results reported in Information Update provide the reader, not only with a topical, but also reliable and accurate account of current events in South Africa.
Significant differences among South Africans on the issue of privatization

One of the most far-reaching measures introduced by the De Klerk government over the past few years has been the privatizing of large corporations such as Iscor and SATS. These measures have come under increasing criticism by the ANC and other political organizations in recent times. A question that is raised by this debate is whether South Africans in general are in favour of or opposed to privatization, and if there are differences between certain sub-groups, whether these are mainly racial - and therefore unavoidably also political - or economic.

Of the sample of 1 900 people who responded to the question, a majority of 50% support privatization, with 24% opposed, 11% uncertain and 16% don't knows.

But these results do not reveal the whole picture. A breakdown shows that there were significant differences between whites on the one hand (76% in favour) and blacks, coloureds and Asians on the other hand (ranging from 41 - 48% in favour) on the issue of privatization.

A comparison between supporters of the major political parties on this question confirms the general trends revealed in the previous chart. It is noteworthy that a substantial proportion (23%) in the sample indicated a neutral stance on political affiliation - suggesting an important floating vote.