

4. Headspace & happiness

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The GCRO Quality of Life survey asks a range of questions into social and political perceptions and opinions on issues of race and transformation, belonging, sexuality and acceptance of violence. Has confidence in political institutions and the political process stayed the same, improved or declined? Whose confidence has been most affected? Are we becoming a more socially cohesive and inclusive society? Or have our attitudes to who belongs in South Africa hardened? Who do we think South Africa belongs to?

Here we present some initial findings to these questions.

Political opinions and perceptions

There are high levels of pessimism about the state, politics in general and the institutions that protect South Africa's democracy (Figure 1). Furthermore, perceptions seem to be souring over time.

Indicatively, 61% of respondents agree with the statement *'The country is going in the wrong direction'*, up slightly from 60% in 2013. 23% disagree with the statement in 2015, which is down quite sharply from 30% in 2013 (Figure 2). Interestingly, the results do not differ significantly by race, all ranging between 60% (African) and 65% (white) (Figure 3).

In 2011, 68% of respondents agreed that the 2011 municipal elections were free and fair, which declined to 62% for the 2013 national government elections. The 2015 results show that only 52% agree that the upcoming municipal elections will be free and fair, while a further 29% do not know (Figure 4).

In 2011, 41% agreed that the judiciary was free from government interference. In 2013 this number increased to 48% with only 26% disagreeing. However, in the 2015 survey 42% agree with this statement and a further 31% don't know. This signals a return to uncertainty about the judiciary's ability to function independently.

In 2011 64% felt that the press was able to report independently and express itself freely. In 2013 this number decreased to 54%. In 2015 only 50% agree that the press is free to write and say what it likes.

Despite these negative perceptions, residents in Gauteng do not feel completely powerless or unable to effect change. 90% of respondents who are registered voters indicated that they do intend voting in the upcoming

elections. People still believe that they are able to influence situations in their communities, with 51% disagreeing with the statement *'People like you cannot influence developments in your community'*.

A further 49% disagree with the statement *'Politics is a waste of time'*, compared with 47% who disagreed in 2013 (Figure 5). However, there is also a current of scepticism, with 31% feeling that they cannot make a difference in their communities and 37% agreeing that politics is a waste of time.

Social cohesion, identity and belonging

Notwithstanding recent robust debates around race, fuelled in part by racist incidents highlighted on social media, attitudes towards race have largely stayed the same or softened somewhat since 2011 and particularly since 2013. Despite the xenophobic attacks of 2015, xenophobic attitudes have also softened since 2013. However the strong exclusionary attitudes to gay and lesbian people held by a sizeable and increasing minority of respondents are worrying.

Questions in the 2015 QoL survey relating to social cohesion, identity and belonging, found the following.

76% of residents call Gauteng home, rising to 94% for people born in Gauteng, but falling to 45% for internal migrants and 41% for international migrants.

Residents were most likely to identify themselves through nationality (22%), race (20%), gender (18%), religion (10%), or as 'an individual' (17%).

In 2013 66% of respondents agreed with the statement that *'blacks and whites will never really trust each other'*. In 2015 this dropped to 58% across Gauteng. The results differ noticeably by race (Figure 6). 62% of African respondents agreed that blacks and whites will never trust each other, hearteningly down from 73% in 2013. However, the proportion of white respondents agreeing that blacks and whites will never trust each other increased from 40% in 2013 to 44% in 2015. Over the course of the survey, it dropped to as low as 34% in December 2015, but then rose to over 50% in interviews conducted in February and March 2016, shortly after the Penny Sparrow incident was communicated on social media.

Across the province, over half of respondents said that affirmative action and BEE must be sped up, with white residents being least likely to agree (Figure 7). Not all residents agree that all previously disadvantaged people should benefit from affirmative action, as 31% of African respondents, 26% of coloured, 15% of Indian and 22% of white respondents – with an average of 29% across the sample – agreed with the statement that *Indians do not deserve to benefit from affirmative action*.

A third (34%) of respondents agreed with the statement that *South Africa belongs more to black Africans than coloureds, Indians or whites*, whilst almost half (49%) disagreed.

22% agreed that *there is no place for white people in South Africa today*, but the majority (62%) disagreed.

Only 56% agreed that gay and lesbian people deserve equal rights with all South Africans (29% disagreed). This is a significant fall from 2013 when 71% agreed with the statement (Figure 8). It is even more disturbing seen alongside the 14% of residents who think it is acceptable to be violent towards gay and lesbian people (Figure 9).

Given high rates of urbanisation in Gauteng, interviewees were asked if they agreed that *there are too many people coming to Gauteng, we should bring back influx control*. A surprising 43% agreed, a higher proportion than disagreed (38%). 44% of black African, 44% of coloured, 39% of Indian and 40% of white respondents agreed. Surprisingly, age did not make a difference. However there is a significant distinction in agreement with bringing back influx control between those born in Gauteng (46%), South African internal migrants (41%) and international migrants (26%).

Despite the xenophobic attacks in Gauteng in 2015, the proportion of South Africans who agreed with the statement *Gauteng belongs to South Africans only, send all foreigners home* fell to 24% in 2015 from 38% in 2013. The proportion of people who said *legal foreigners are OK* increased from 45% in 2013 to 58% in 2015.

What are respondents' opinions of the independence of institutions designed to protect South Africa's democracy?	
The upcoming elections will be free and fair	52% agree
The judiciary is free from government influence	42% agree
The press is free to say or write what it likes	50% agree
Corruption is the main threat to South Africa's democracy	82% agree

Figure 1: What are respondents' opinions of the independence of institutions designed to protect South Africa's democracy?

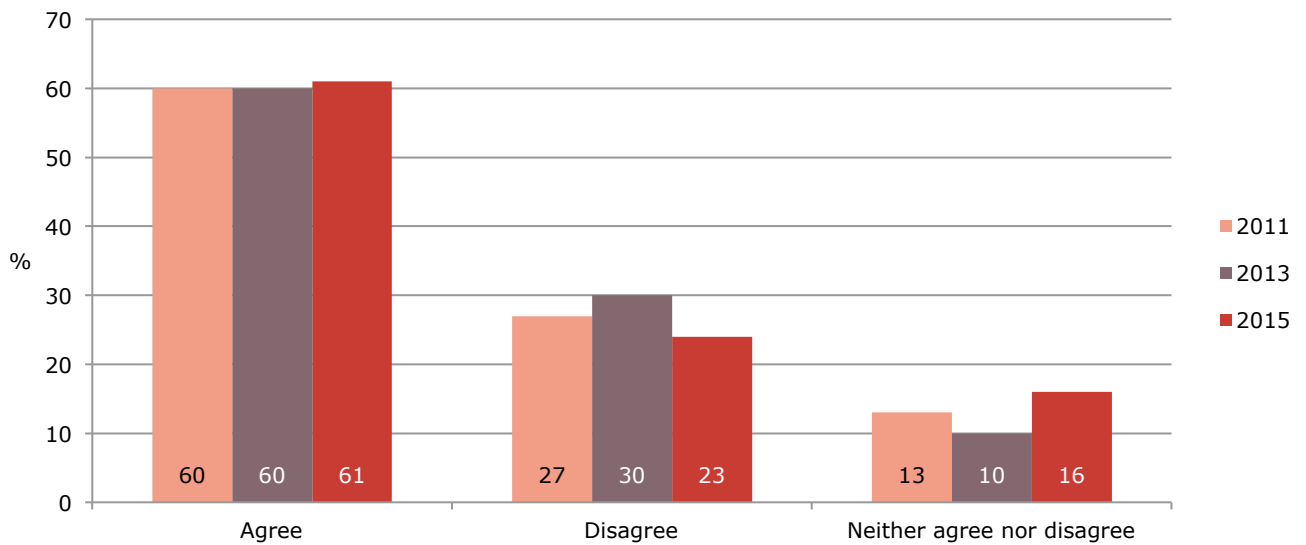


Figure 2: The country is going in the wrong direction (2011, 2013 & 2015). Pessimism about the direction the country is going in remains high: between 2013 and 2015 the number of people agreeing that the country is headed in the wrong direction remained stable at around 60%. However, the number of people who disagree with the statement decreased across all race groups, whilst the proportion who are uncertain increased. This pattern indicates that the majority of respondents are unhappy with the direction the country is headed in and proportionally fewer respondents are able to say with certainty that they see positive developments in the country.

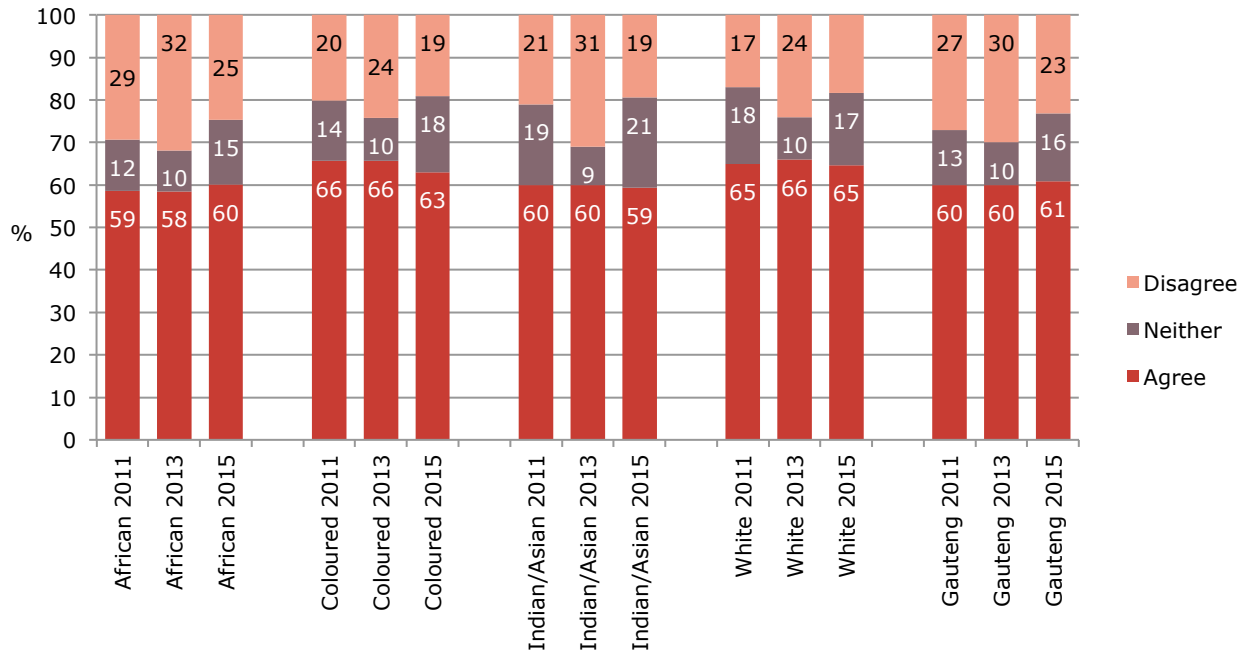


Figure 3: The country is going in the wrong direction – comparison by race (2011, 2013 & 2015). Whilst the white and coloured populations have shown the highest levels of dissatisfaction with the direction South Africa is headed in across all three surveys, there are not significant differences between their opinions and those held by Africans and Indians. Although Africans have tended to have the most favourable impressions, their perceptions about the direction the country is going are converging with the other groups as levels of negativity rise.

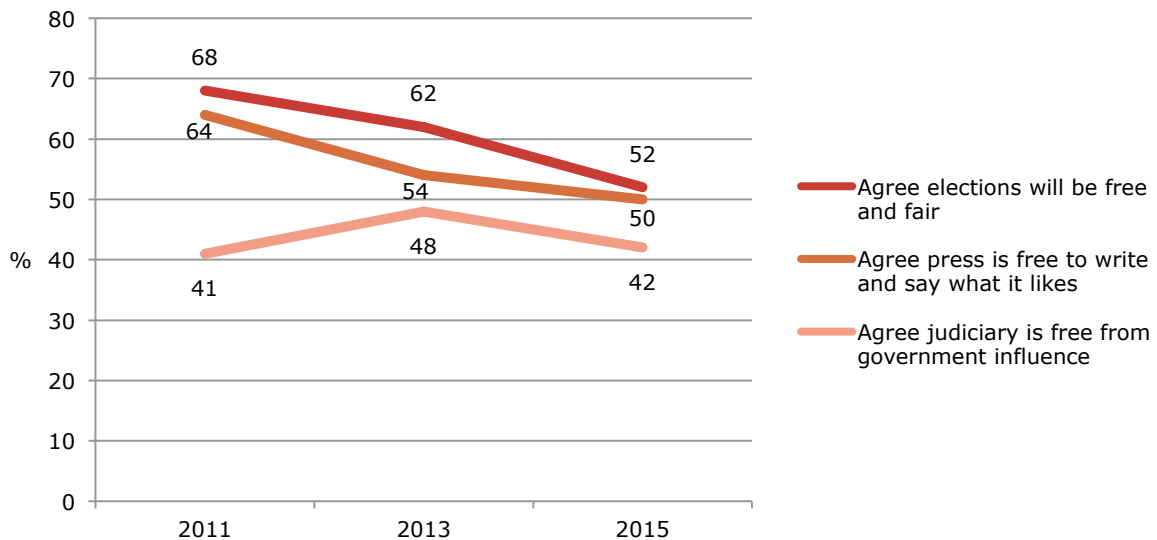


Figure 4: Declining faith in democratic institutions (2011, 2013 & 2015).

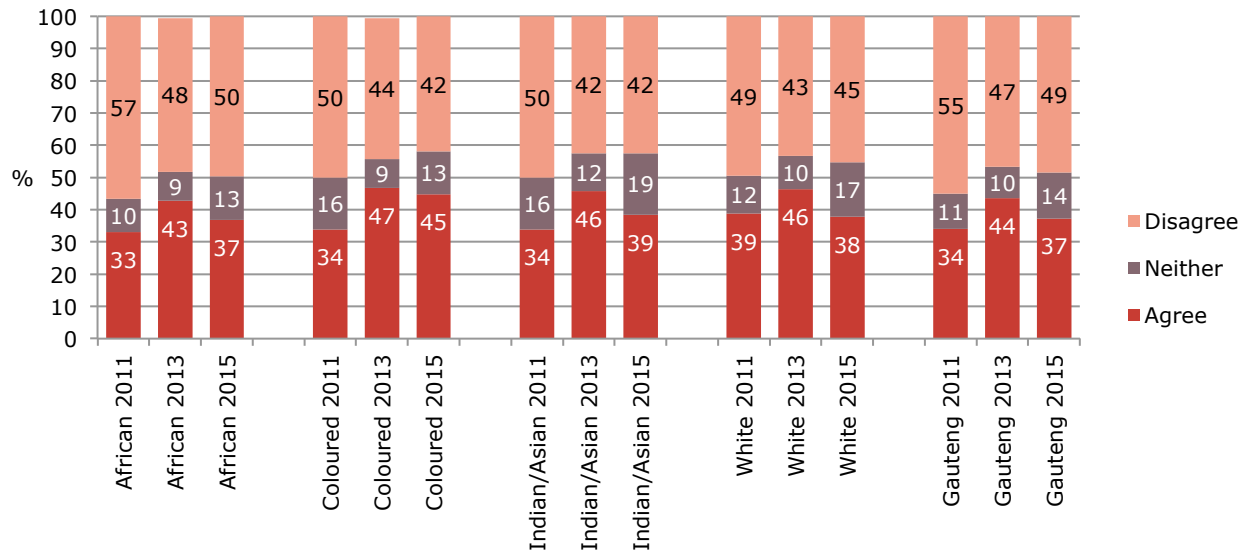


Figure 5: Politics is a waste of time – comparison by race (2011, 2013 & 2015). The increasing suspicion about the state of the country’s democratic institutions is coinciding with people becoming disillusioned about politics. Between 2011 and 2013 there were significant increases in the numbers of respondents agreeing with the statement ‘Politics is a waste of time’, particularly amongst the African population (33% agreed in 2011 compared to 43% in 2013). In 2015 the total number of Gauteng residents who disagreed with this statement remained relatively stable (47% disagreed in 2013 and 50% disagreed in 2015). Whilst the number who agree with the statement has decreased (37% in 2015 compared with 44% in 2013), the number who are uncertain has increased, particularly in the white and Indian populations. This shows that whilst less people are willing to regard politics as a waste of time, more people are uncertain whether it is worthwhile to engage with politics or not. However, the number of people who intend to vote is high, at 80%.

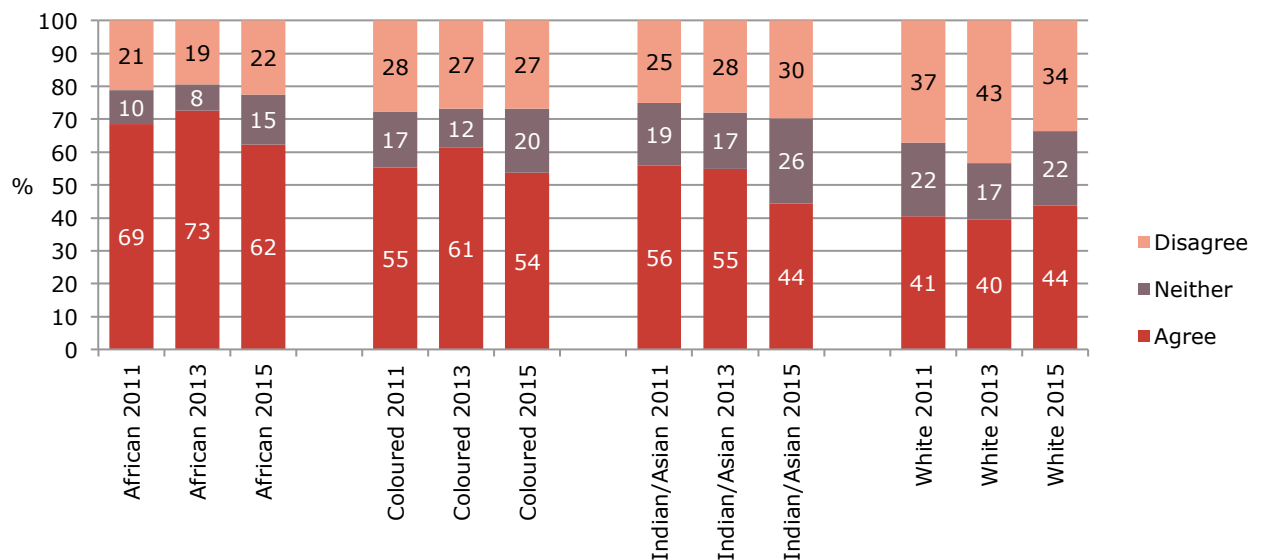


Figure 6: Blacks and whites will never really trust each other (2011, 2013 & 2015). Recent debates around race suggest that attitudes are hardening. Yet, amongst African, coloured and Indian residents there has been a decline in the proportion of people who think blacks and whites will never trust each other. This suggests suspicions are weakening. White people are least likely to agree with the statement. But, suggesting white attitudes may be hardening, as the proportion of whites who disagreed with the statement has dropped.

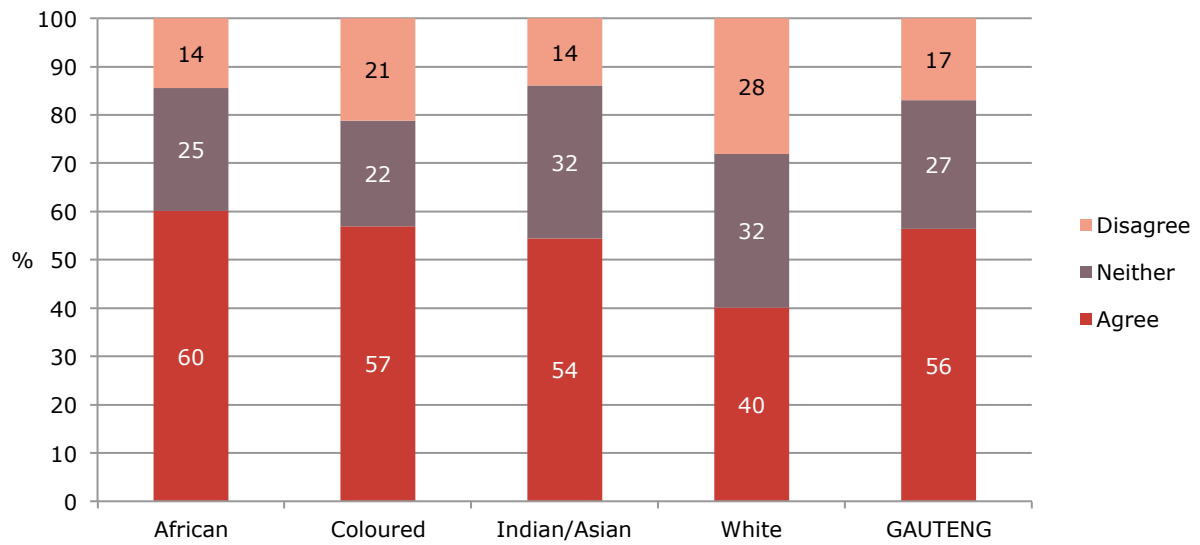


Figure 7: Affirmative action and BEE must be sped up (%).

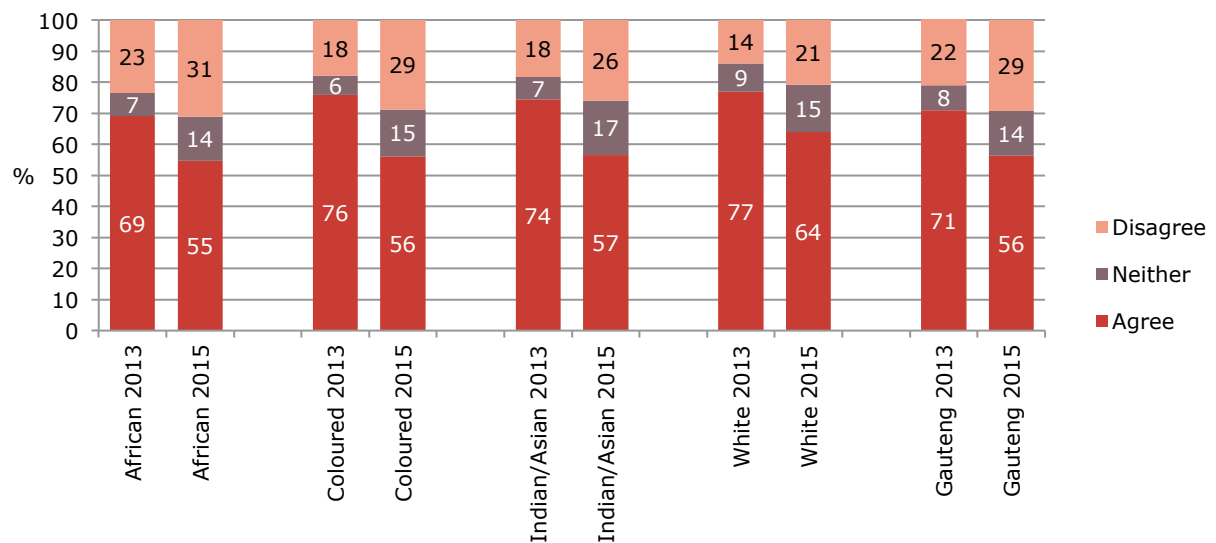


Figure 8: Gay and lesbian people deserve equal rights with all other South Africans (2013 & 2015).

Disturbingly, the proportion of respondents who agreed with the statement that gay and lesbian people deserve equal rights with all South Africans fell from 71% in 2013 to 56% in 2015. It is not clear why the proportion of people who want to deny rights to gay and lesbian people has risen – or why more people are unsure or have no opinion. What is even more disturbing is the high proportion of people who think that it is acceptable to be violent towards gay and lesbian people (14%). Where does this de-humanisation come from?

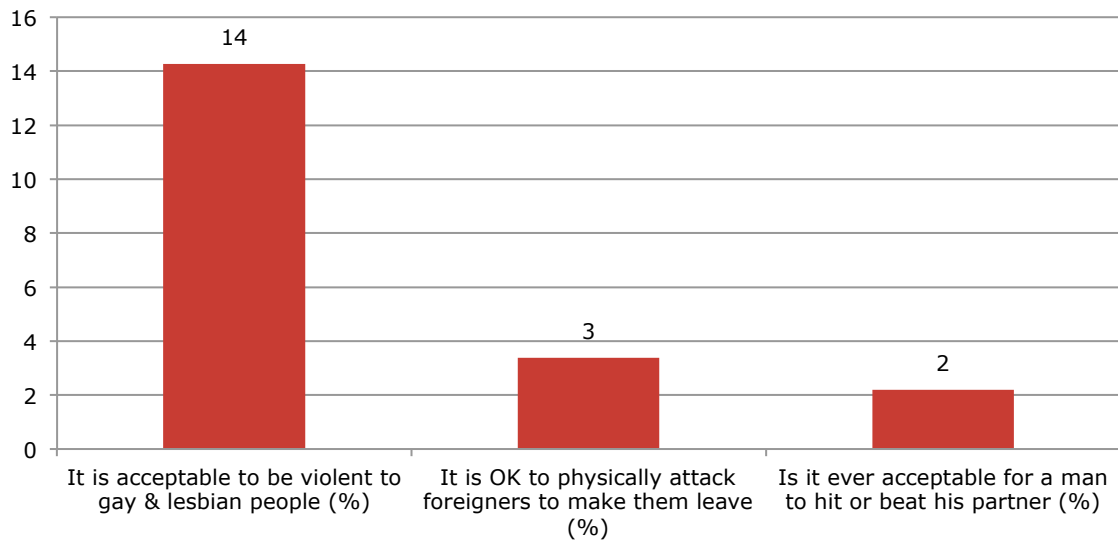


Figure 9: Percentage of respondents who think it is acceptable to be violent towards people just for being who they are, or for violence to be part of a relationship. To put these percentages into perspective, 14% of respondents who believe it is acceptable to be violent to gay and lesbian people translates to around 1.26 million people, 300 000 people believe it is OK to physically attack foreigners and 190 000 people believe it can be acceptable for a man to hit or beat his partner.

OTHER RECENT RESEARCH IN THIS THEME:

- Pathways to anti-racism (2016 forthcoming) by Caryn Abrahams, GCRO Research Report
- What is the biggest problem facing your community (August 2015) by Kerry Bobbins, GCRO Map of the Month
- Xenophobic attacks – are migrants the only victims? (May 2015) by Dr Sally Peberdy, GCRO Vignette
- LGBTI attitudes in the GCR (March 2015) by Guy Trangoś, GCRO Vignette
- Social isolation in the GCR (February 2015) by Guy Trangoś et al., GCRO Vignette