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COLOURED AND INDIAN REACTION
TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS:
INDICATIONS FROM RECENT POLLS

LAWRENCE SCHLEMMER

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Centre for Applied Social Sciences

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LAWRENCE SCHLEMMER

Centre for Applied Social Sciences,
University of Natal,
Durban

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1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OPINION POLLS

Opinion polls conducted among coloured and Indian South Africans on the topic of the current proposals for constitutional reform acquire a special significance at the present time. This is because up to now they have presented the only opportunity for the mass of Indian and coloured people to react to the proposals, and hence their only opportunity to participate in a development which will deeply affect their own future.

This fact places a very heavy burden on the opinion polls. It places an even heavier burden on those called upon to interpret the results. Opinion poll results are not objective social facts - they are merely indications of trends and therefore have to be interpreted very carefully. The phrasing of questions and the reputation of the polling organisation involved can influence results. Furthermore, people interviewed often react cautiously and withhold their real views, preferring to give non-committal answers. All these possibilities, and others as well, have to be taken into account in assessing survey findings.

For these reasons one should, as far as possible, check the results of different polls against one another. Similarities between the results of different polls conducted on different occasions are much more meaningful than single findings.

In the brief analysis which follows, the major findings from two different surveys will be assessed, (the IMSA study in collaboration with the *Sunday Times* and this author, and the HSRC study¹). Only very

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1. The brief analysis which follows is based mainly on:
 1. A poll conducted in July 1982 by IMSA (Pty.) Ltd., in co-operation with the author, among quota samples of 250 coloureds and 100 Indians in Cape Town and Durban respectively;
 2. News reports on the Human Sciences Research Council study among 623 coloureds in Cape Town and 1247 Indians in Natal.

broad and tentative conclusions are possible. The tentative nature of the results is an important consideration, since the sample sizes in the IMSA study are very small.

2. GENERAL ATTITUDES TO THE REFORMS

The results below relate to the general reactions to the government proposals for constitutional reform. As such they reveal political sentiments rather than inclinations as to how to respond in political behaviour.

Respondents in the IMSA survey were asked "*From what you know about the proposals, do you think that*":

	<u>Coloureds</u>	<u>Indians</u>
	%	%
The Prime Minister is going too far	8	8
The proposals are about right	10	28
The reforms do not go far enough	62	57
Don't know what the proposals are	19	7

In a separate study conducted for the *Weekend Argus* among coloureds in Cape Town in January 1983; roughly 61 percent of the respondents expressed the view that the reforms are inadequate, thereby verifying the results above to some extent¹⁾.

The impression emerging, then, is that the proposals fall short of the ideal among both coloured and Indian people.

In the HSRC study, however, it would appear that some 45 percent of coloured people and 48 percent of Indians felt that the proposals were close enough to their own ideas to be given a chance to work. Only 13 percent among both Indians and coloureds disagreed with this, with the remainder undecided. Here we see a balance very broadly in favour, and only a fairly small core of what could be called hard

1. See *Daily News*, January 22, 1983.

resistance.

The proposals are claimed by the government to imply power-sharing of a type - the Prime Minister has referred to them as "*healthy*" power-sharing, a somewhat ambiguous term. Among coloureds, 27 percent in the HSRC study felt that the proposals would allow power-sharing and in contrast 28 percent believed that no power-sharing would eventuate, with the rest uncertain. Among Indians in the HSRC study, 41 percent saw the proposals as power-sharing and 25 percent rejected this. Here again, among Indians, more favour the proposals than oppose them.

Generally speaking then, the results would seem to suggest that for both groups the present developments are not as far-reaching as they would like. Substantial uncertainty exists about the real implications of the results. However, more people seem to feel that the proposals will be positive in their effects than those who believe that they should be opposed unconditionally. This is more so among Indian people than among coloureds.

3. ATTITUDES TO THE EXCLUSION OF BLACKS

In this author's study, an overwhelming majority of 86 percent of coloureds and 85 percent of Indians felt that it was "*bad*" that blacks had been excluded from the proposed new constitution. How should this be interpreted?

In the research conducted among Indians for the Buthelezi Commission, only a relatively small proportion of some 20 percent of Indians supported the idea of unconditional majority rule, or "*one-man-one-vote*". However, a majority of some 6 out of 10 Indians or more were in favour of various political options (mainly for Natal and KwaZulu) which suggested black political participation with other groups but with various kinds of minority guarantees or arrangements which would safeguard minority interests.

Generally, it would seem as if a clear majority of Indians

and coloured people see the need for the inclusion of blacks in a constitutional dispensation, albeit stopping short of majority rule. The lack of any provisions for blacks weakens the proposals in the eyes of coloured and Indian people, although in the HSRC survey only a small percentage of both Indians and coloureds would reject the proposals for that reason.

It should be emphasised that the desire to see blacks included is only partly due to fear of retribution by blacks. Although this is undoubtedly an important factor¹⁾, the probable motivations, as revealed by other research, are also that ultimately the problems of the country will only be solved if all groups are included in a political dispensation, with suitable safeguards and guarantees.

4. REACTIONS TO INVOLVEMENT IN THE NEW PROPOSALS

When questioned about Indian and coloured participation in the new dispensation, the respondents in the IMSA study produced the following pattern of results:

"Coloured/Indian political groups should":

<u>Options presented to Respondents</u>	<u>Coloureds</u>	<u>Indians</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Have nothing to do with the proposals	20	25
Try to get them improved <u>before</u> co-operating	31	26
Go into the new system in order to improve them	39	47
Support the proposals as they are	2	2
Don't know	8	-

The HSRC survey gives some fairly similar results. Some 62

1. In the research for the Buthelezi Commission, nearly 100 percent of Indians and 90 percent of coloureds indicated a fear of black reactions should the vote be restricted to whites, coloureds and Indians.

percent of coloureds and 68 percent of Indians stated that leaders should "*negotiate*" with the government so that their community could benefit from the new deal. (These would be broadly similar to the proportions in the IMSA survey indicating that the Indian and coloured leaders should try to get the proposals improved, before or after entering into participation.) The proportions rejecting the proposals outright are very similar in the two studies - roughly 20 percent.

There is, however, a great deal of uncertainty about the proposals revealed in the HSRC study. This varies from item to item but broadly, at least 4 out of 10 Indian people and perhaps a higher proportion among coloureds are very uncertain as to whether the proposals are suitable.

The HSRC survey results suggest that some 57 percent of Indians and 42 percent of coloureds, at the stage of the surveys, would participate in elections for representatives to the new parliament chambers. These percentages are higher than what one would expect from the indications from the IMSA study, in which only 41 percent of Indians and 24 percent of coloureds said that they would vote for the proposals if a referendum were to be held. Majorities in both groups say they would vote against the proposals in a referendum. Admittedly, however, some people might elect representatives for the new parliament even though they have sufficient reservations about the new system to oppose it in a referendum; hence the inconsistency between the two sets of results.

5. TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

Reading these different survey results together suggests broadly the following. Firstly, minorities of roughly 20 percent among both Indians and coloured people believe that the proposals should be ignored, totally opposed or boycotted. However, there seems to be considerable uncertainty among the remaining majorities in both groups, and firm conclusions about their likely behaviour in

a referendum or election are impossible to draw.

Generally, however, there seems to be a balance of opinion in favour of leaders negotiating with the government to improve the proposals, either before or after entering the new system. The proposals, exactly as they have been stated, obtain less than a third of support from Indians and even less from coloured people. The idea of leaders participating in the system without trying to improve it receives very low endorsement - almost insignificant support in fact.

Since the fieldwork for these studies was undertaken, a number of developments have taken place which could influence opinions. In Natal, Chief Buthelezi has very strongly condemned the proposals and the Labour Party's decision to participate on a number of occasions. In the Cape, meetings of the Labour Party held to explain its decision to participate have been disrupted by strong opponents of the proposals.

These developments could conceivably have swung some public opinion against the proposals. This possibility, as well as the great deal of uncertainty about the proposals and the fact that the sample was small in one of the surveys (the IMSA study) indicate a need for caution at this stage.

By and large then, the results of these polls do not offer a firm basis for predicting what the responses of Indians or coloureds would be in a referendum or an election, both of which would be accompanied by very vigorous campaigning for or against the issues.

The polls suggest, tentatively, that the parties or leaders which undertake to try to negotiate an improved dispensation would obtain greatest support, although the size of the percentage poll (voter turnout) is more difficult to assess.

The poll results give Indian and coloured leaders at least the following guidance. The findings tend to suggest that they should neither ignore or boycott the proposals nor that they should accept

and work with the proposals as they are. The results generally are a basis for leaders to grapple actively with the issue of participation and to consider carefully their conditions for such participation. However, vague, this is the most the data can tell one.

Further, more recent and more detailed opinion survey data would help if it were to become available, but without an actual referendum on the issue, leaders will ultimately have to rely on their judgment of their own constituencies' views and of the consequences of their participation on the wider society.



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