

# STATE OF THE NATION BRAND REPORT

# Brand South Africa Series:

## The story of the South African nation finding its brand

### Episode 2: Social Cohesion and Social Identities

#### 1. Introduction

The Brand South Africa (BSA) Domestic Perceptions Research Programme was launched in 2017 and has been tracking behavioural group trends for the past five years.

In the first episode of the State of the Nation Brand series, the diverse character of the South African nation was explored through ten behavioural groups. The behavioural groups are expressions of the connection points between Social Cohesion, Active Citizenship and National Pride. These three constructs are composite expressions, through the behavioural groups, of what it means to be a South African. We covered the following:

- 1) In the first year (2017) also referred to as **The Benchmark Year**, the nation was mostly unaware of the depth and reach of the growing levels of corruption and mismanagement, especially in the public sector.
- 2) **The Great Realisation** was the theme in 2018, the year in which several commissions of enquiry led by the new president Cyril Ramaphosa, laid bare the depth of corruption in South Africa.
- 3) In 2019, named **Stumble and Fall**, the nation tried to make sense of what happened to the South Africa envisioned in 1994. This was also a national election year and the year in which several South Africans and teams won awards on the global sport scene. A mixed bag of achievements and concerns.
- 4) In December 2019, the first reports of COVID-19 emerged, leading South Africa, and the globe, into a time of profound change throughout 2020. This year was called **The Great Reset**. The nation looked beyond the pressing political, social, and economic concerns, caring for one another took precedence over these concerns as alert level regulations and economic hardship restricted ability and agency for many.
- 5) In 2021, called **Finding Direction**, the behavioural groups revealed that people are beginning to organise themselves at local and community levels, taking action themselves as the broader public sector services continue to fade in efficacy and frequency. It was noted, with emphasis, that the developing patterns are fragile.

For the past five years, the nation has responded to changes and trends, alternating between distancing themselves from or drawing closer to fellow South Africans when there is uncertainty, crises, or achievements. These trends are broad national trends but variations of it will be found on a much smaller scale in communities or even within communities.

In Episode Two, the building blocks of the behavioural groups in the BSA Domestic Perceptions Research Programme are analysed to illustrate the complexity of nationhood in one of the most diverse countries in the world. In this episode, Social Cohesion and Social Identity will be explored.

## 2. The multi-dimensional nature of social dynamics

Social cohesion and social identity share roots in Social Psychology and, in particular, in Social Identity Theory. Social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner developed the theoretical framework of Social Identity Theory in the late 1970s and refined it in the 1980s. The premise of the theory is that social identities influence willingness to contribute to or participate in groups, which leads to social cohesion among group members, if conditions are favourable.

Although Social Identity Theory is a meaningful lens to interpret the correlating trends between social cohesion and social identities, the results speak for themselves and, therefore, will not rely exclusively or conclusively on the theoretical premise, shortfalls, or variations of similar theories. The BSA data is strong and sufficient to explain the developing trends in the South African context.

### 2.1 Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is a complex concept that emerged out of the literature on social capital. Many definitions are based on the principle that social capital and (in)equality are components of social cohesion. In relation to the findings, the South African Department of Arts and Culture's definition of social cohesion applies:

*"...the degree of social integration and inclusion in communities and society at large, and the extent to which mutual solidarity finds expression among individuals and communities."<sup>1</sup>*

In terms of this definition, a community or a society is cohesive to the extent that the inequalities, exclusions, and disparities based on ethnicity, gender, class, nationality, age, or disability (or any other distinctions which might engender divisions, distrust, and conflict) are reduced and/or eliminated in a planned and sustained manner.<sup>2</sup>

Social cohesion includes, for example, different spheres of life, and several types of social relations, including relations among individuals, between individuals and groups, and between groups and society. Social cohesion refers to trust and solidarity among those who share a common goal and believe in the strengthening of relationships between them towards the achievement of the goal.

Cagney *et al.* (2016) state that collective efficacy and social exchange are the key determinants of a community's capacity to manage problems or achieve shared goals. Collective efficacy expands on the basic concepts of social networks and social capital and emphasises the importance of mutual trust and expectations of action in service of collective goals.<sup>3</sup>

Over the past five years, five social cohesion cohorts were identified. These are collective and high-level expressions of social cohesion clusters that could be present in every community depending on the circumstances and conditions that dictate common goals and individual alignment to the associated goals of the group. Variations may also exist, but at a national level, five dominant clusters or cohorts were identified.

<sup>1</sup> Authors' emphasis

<sup>2</sup> Fair treatment of groups low on online questions and SASAS survey

<sup>3</sup> Bernard, 1999; Chan & Chan, 2006; Garroway & Jütting, 2011

- **Free Constitutionalists:** This group shares a level of confidence in the role of government to maintain social order, deliver services to communities, and promote economic practices that are open to all. In reference to the latter, the government is not seen as responsible for creating jobs but instead for creating and maintaining conditions for everyone to participate in economic activity. This group is not interested in politics and social issues but share a common goal, namely, looking after themselves and those they care about. The group has an internally focussed agenda. They define the role of the judiciary and media as maintaining legitimacy and demand transparency from government and public servants.
- **Public Sector Loyalists:** They view government systems and structures as critical to maintain access to basic services and needs. Their loyalty stems from dependence. Their relationship with government is sustained based on the continued provision of services to meet their needs. In the social cohesion narrative, this group is characterised by vertical social cohesion, that is, the relationship between people and the state. Social grants, financial support for education, and public health facilities are key anchors of dependence. The group believes that the public sector has sufficient internal self-correct mechanisms, such as the Public Protector. Because there is an outward focussed social cohesion dynamic in this group, the state maintains social cohesion for them.
- **The Marginalised:** As the name suggests, this group shares a common sentiment based on their perceived disenfranchisement from social, political, and economic agency. The group recognises inequality and often feel discriminated against. A sense of isolation prevails. The group is composed of slightly more women than men. Social cohesion is maintained through frequent conversations about their exclusion from having agency, and particularly political agency. This group is the least affluent, and share a narrow set of social identities, particularly in terms of race, age, and gender.
- **Inclusive Democrats:** The principal agent that binds this group is democracy. The group participates in and appreciates democratic processes. A deep sense of belonging to and being part of South African society is nurtured by equal opportunity, guaranteed by a democratic dispensation. The group appreciates and supports diversity, not just among South Africans but foreigners as well. In line with their democratic principles, civil society and the right to vote are meaningful governing structures to ensure accountability and to demand responsibility from the elected government representatives. Members of the group engage easily and frequently with others across social, demographic, and economic classes and lines.
- **Social Connectors:** Many would consider this group a true representation of what defines social cohesion. The group values diversity, human connection and building relationships between people irrespective of background, ethnicity, culture, age, or race. In the social cohesion narrative, this group represents horizontal social cohesion, that is, the connection between people. Association with or reliance on government systems or structures is low. Social, political, and economic agency is achieved and maintained from within the group. Social Connectors feel close to people in and outside their communities through a collective sense of unity in diversity.

Having explored the five cohorts of social cohesion in South Africa, it is necessary to do the same for social identity before bringing the two concepts together.

## 2.2 Social Identity

The heart of social cohesion pumps as a result of trust and solidarity among group members. Based on Social Identity Theory, trust and solidarity develop when there are shared views, perspectives, and goals. Such shared views and perspectives are only considered possible if there are shared social identities. Common goals are only deemed possible if the members of the group share common perspectives and ideas and are willing to accommodate or tolerate differences only in view of much stronger and desired goals. The goals, therefore, are worth much more than the individuals contributing to it.

In a complex and diverse society, one would expect that a greater number of social identities would be linked to greater potential for inclusivity. With diverse demographic groups, cultural references, political distinctions, and other created or consequential differences between groups of people, the broader the social identity references, the more likely that individuals will be open to accommodate differences and engage in conversation. Conversely, the fewer social identities a person has, the less likely they will be to tolerate or accommodate other identities that do not align.

Therefore, a rich and complex variety of social identities is more conducive to create the opportunity for social cohesion among people, while fewer social identities lead to smaller social cohesion groups of likeminded people. Although social cohesion may be strong among these likeminded groups, they are more fragile as they tend to be smaller, based on specific perspectives that may exclude diverse views, which ensure sustainability. The latter point references the behavioural group expressions that were gaining strength but were fragile.

In this analysis, eight social identities were identified.

- **Loving Social Identity:** This group is defined by being a loving or caring person who believes in the principle of Ubuntu and does not discriminate against others.
- **Physical Features Social Identity:** People in this group base their identity on aspects of race, gender, heritage, age, ethnicity, or language.
- **South African Social Identity:** People in this group associate with being South African or African. In the current analysis, the former often also includes the latter.
- **Free Social Identity:** This group associates with being free or being unique.
- **Role Social Identity:** Group membership is defined by the person's role in society, for example, being a parent, or playing a specific role in the community or at work. The role is confined to a physical space or context in which the role is fulfilled.
- **Beliefs Social Identity:** Spiritual and personal orientations or beliefs characterise this group. Orientations or beliefs include all forms of religious, sexual, or other orientations that form part of a person's belief system.
- **Political Social Identity:** Affiliation to a political movement defines the social identity of the person as they relate to the world.
- **No Social Identity:** This group includes anyone who did not identify with any of the above classifications. They find no meaning in the above identities as defining characteristics that represent them.

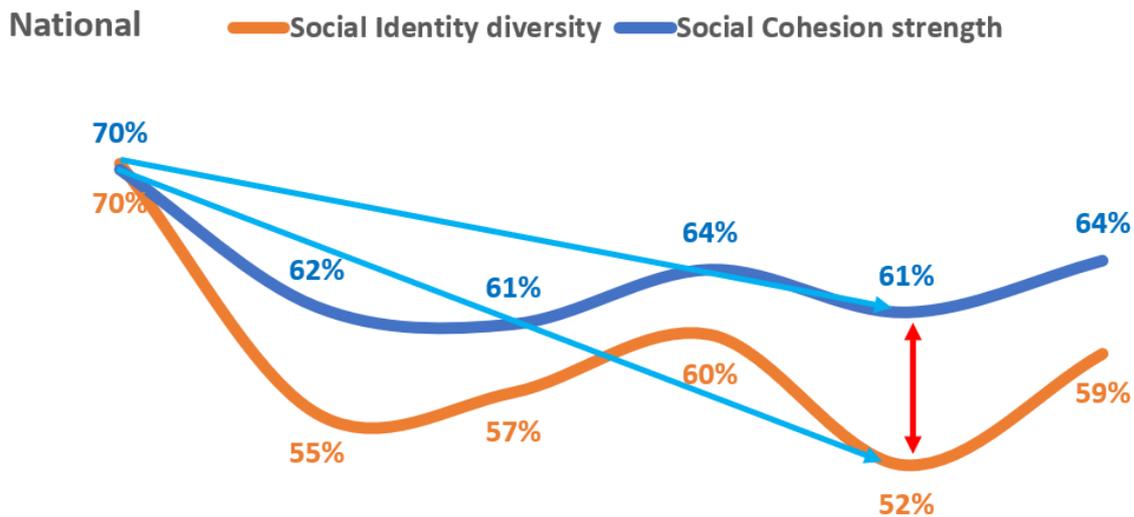
The last group has grown from 13% in 2017 to 29% in 2021, illustrating that more people are distancing themselves from commonly held social identities in South Africa. This finding is highlighted in more detail.

The discussion up to this point has assumed that the more social identities a person has, the more likely they will be to engage in conversations with others. People with fewer social identities may find engagement with others difficult as their views may confine the discussion to specific topics.

### 3. Correlating trends between Social Identity and Social Cohesion

In this analysis, social identity diversity is expressed as a percentage, and the higher the percentage, the greater the number of social identities. For social cohesion, the higher the percentage, the stronger the social cohesion among group members. Plotting these two variables over time show the relationship between them.

The BSA data confirms the theoretical principle of social identity theory that the more complex or diverse the social identities, the greater and more stable social cohesion will be. The positive correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.96$ ) in the graph below, illustrated by the light blue arrows, shows how the variables are linked.



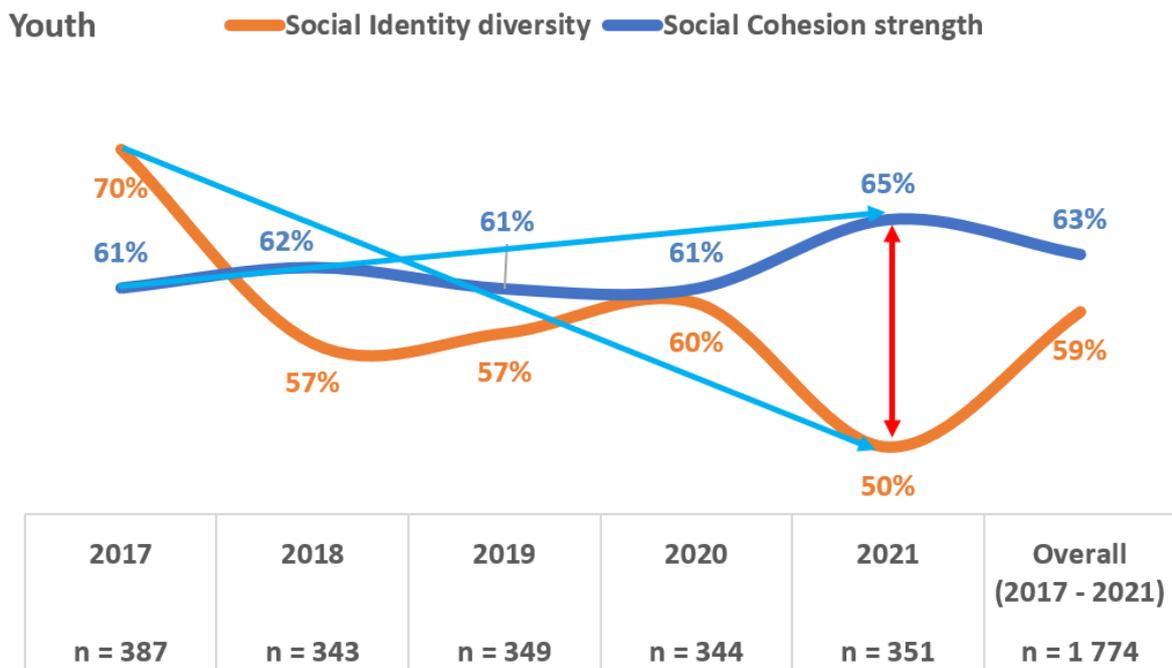
2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Overall (2017 - 2021)
n = 2 468	n = 2 467	n = 2 454	n = 2 450	n = 2 459	n = 12 298

In **The Benchmark Year** (2017), the alignment between social identities and social cohesion was near perfect. In the **Great Realisation** (2018) the behavioural groups illustrated a withdrawal from communities. People disengaged from practices they used to be involved in as they lost the conviction that the political system is in tandem with their commitment to create a better South Africa. Loss of trust in the broader social and political system, and an increased sense of concern about what the

commissions of inquiry uncovered, led to a reduction in the complexity of social identities, resulting in a decline in social cohesion.

There is a slight recovery in 2019 (**Stumble and Fall**) and into 2020 (**The Great Reset**) amidst COVID-19 when many reached out to fellow South Africans to help where needed or where they could. In 2021 (**Finding Direction**) social cohesion decreases slightly but social identities reduce to the lowest levels of complexity ever. The social cohesion scores reflect narrow thinking by group members, not inclusive of the diversity of the South African population. The fragility of the behavioural groups was noted and is confirmed in the above graph through one of the building blocks, namely, social cohesion. The small networks of socially cohesive groups tend to be within similar social identity cohorts. These could either come together over time or drift further apart, the latter being the less-than-ideal option.

In recent publications the predicament of the youth (aged 16 to 24) is often raised as a real concern for the South African social, political, and economic future. The BSA data confirms this, as the below graph illustrates the strong negative correlation ( $r = -0.75$ ) between social cohesion and social identities among the youth. Social cohesion has never been as strong among the youth as in 2021, but the number of social identities has never been this low. This indicates a growing trend towards fragmented and fragile social cohesion cohorts.



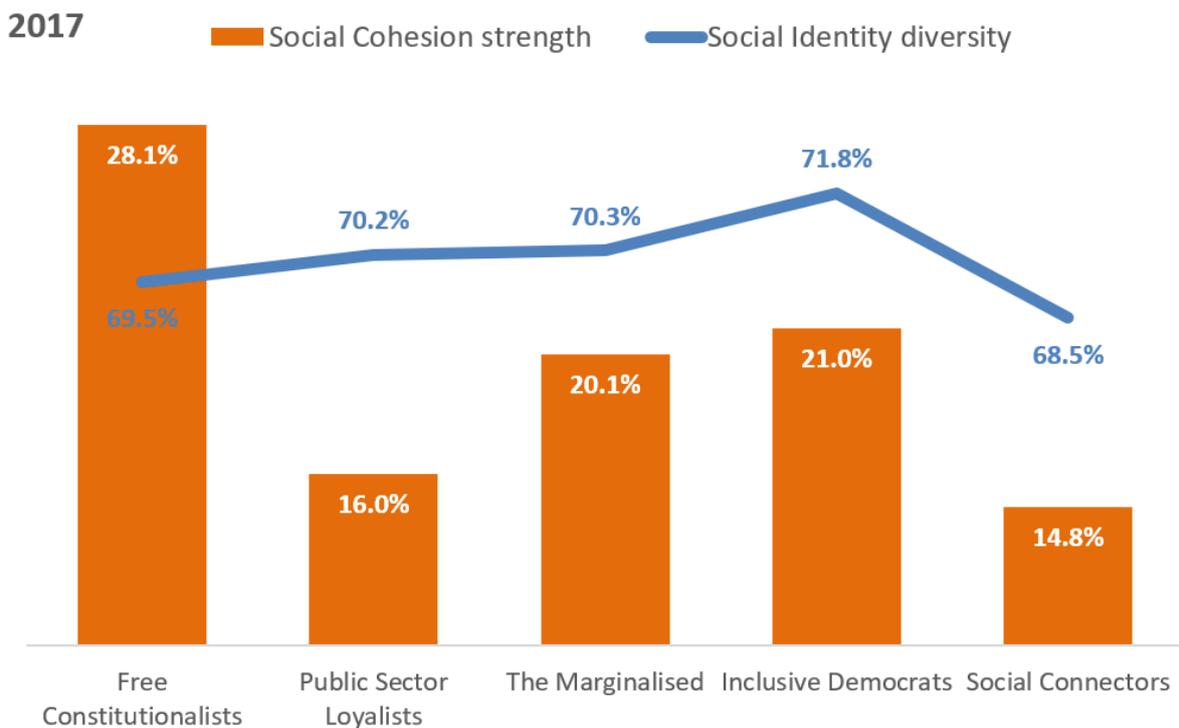
The gaps between social cohesion and social identity in both graphs (red arrows) are the biggest in 2021 compared to previous years.

**4. Political context and Social Cohesion**

The South African government played a critical role in the transition from a draconian Apartheid system to a democracy. The late Desmond Tutu’s “Rainbow Nation” and similar examples were illustrations of the miracle nation transition in the early years. Relics of these initiatives are seen in **The Benchmark Year** (2017) data where the number of social identities and the strength of social cohesion were high and on par.

The first report about state capture was released in May 2017, called the “Betrayal of the Promise”<sup>4</sup>. The nation heard about the longstanding relationship between Jacob Zuma and the Gupta family amidst other controversies such as Bell Pottinger’s involvement in the “White monopoly capital”<sup>5</sup> campaign.

In the Benchmark Year, these findings had not yet permeated the nation to the extent that the impact of it was noted in 2018. In 2017, the **Free Constitutionnalists** cohort was the biggest group supported by a wide and complex social identity index. **Public Sector Loyalists** was the second smallest group. **Social Connectors** had the lowest number of social identities and was also the smallest group. Diversity, expressed in the number of social identities, is noted across the social cohesion cohorts. South Africans saw themselves part of and identified with the diversity of the South African nation, irrespective of social cohesion formations.



However, in 2018, the **Great Realisation** year, several commissions of inquiry initiated by President Cyril Ramaphosa lifted the veil on what was really going on. This resulted in an eight percent decrease in social cohesion and a 15% decrease in the number of social identities. Uncertainty, disbelief, and concern led to withdrawal and decreased engagement. In these circumstances, how people identify narrowed down to a few basic social identities.

It would be safe to say that the continuous reports in the media (including social media), and civil society actions since 2018 up to the recent release of the Zondo Commission findings in early 2022, led to the undoing and maintained lower levels of social cohesion and fewer social identities.

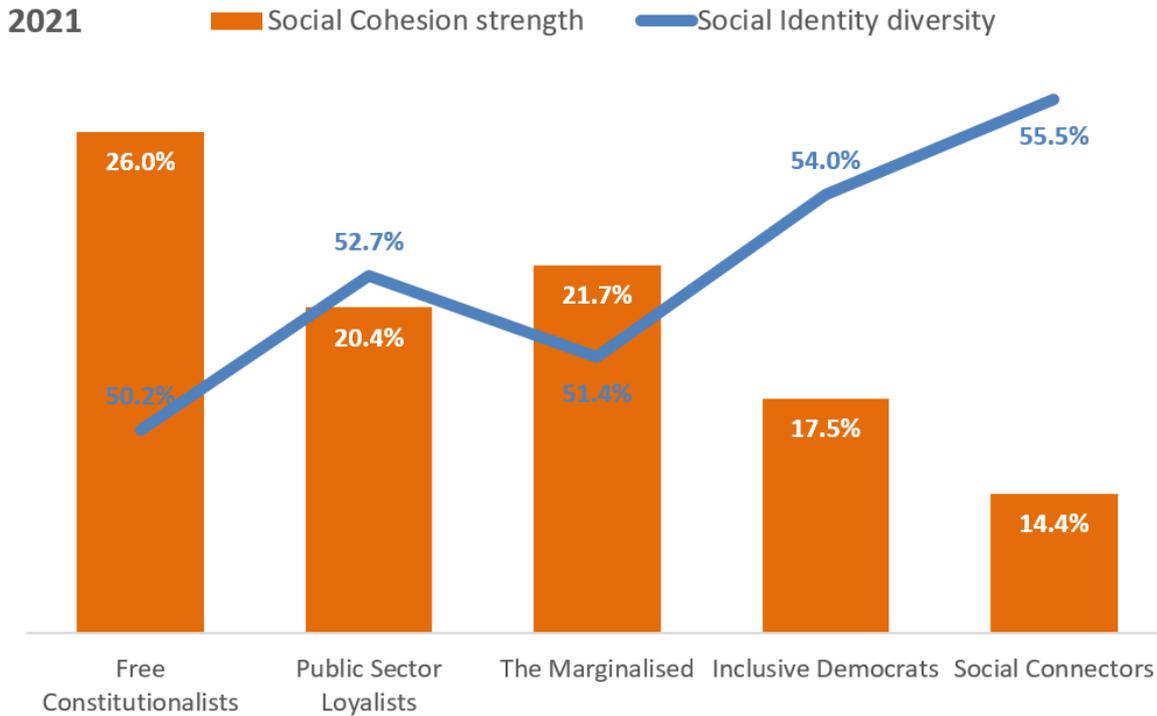
In 2021, compared with previous years back to 2017, **The Marginalised** is the second biggest social cohesion group. **Inclusive Democrats** and **Social Connectors**, the two groups with the greatest number of social identities, are also the smallest social cohesion groups. The size of the **Social Connectors**

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2017-05-26-betrayal-of-the-promise-the-anatomy-of-state-capture/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-06-01-guptaleaks-uk-firm-pushed-white-monopoly-capital-agenda-to-save-zumas-reputation/>

group remained stable. The **Free Constitutionalists** remains the biggest social cohesion group but with the lowest number of social identities.

The Social Identity Theory principles are supported in this graph and raises the concern that even though social cohesion strengthened during COVID-19, the aftermath of the pandemic left fragmented and fragile social cohesion cohorts where small groups of likeminded individuals with less complex social identities support and help one another.



The shift in social cohesion categories between 2017 and 2021 was much less dramatic than the decrease in the total number of social identities.

With the right support, building and emphasising the value of a diverse society could bring the cohorts together, making South Africa richer and more stable in its diversity. The alternative, if groups continue to fragment and become weaker, is that the differences between groups will grow and become more apparent. The key driver, looking at the sudden change between 2017 and 2018, is corruption and political leadership’s disconnect with South African society.

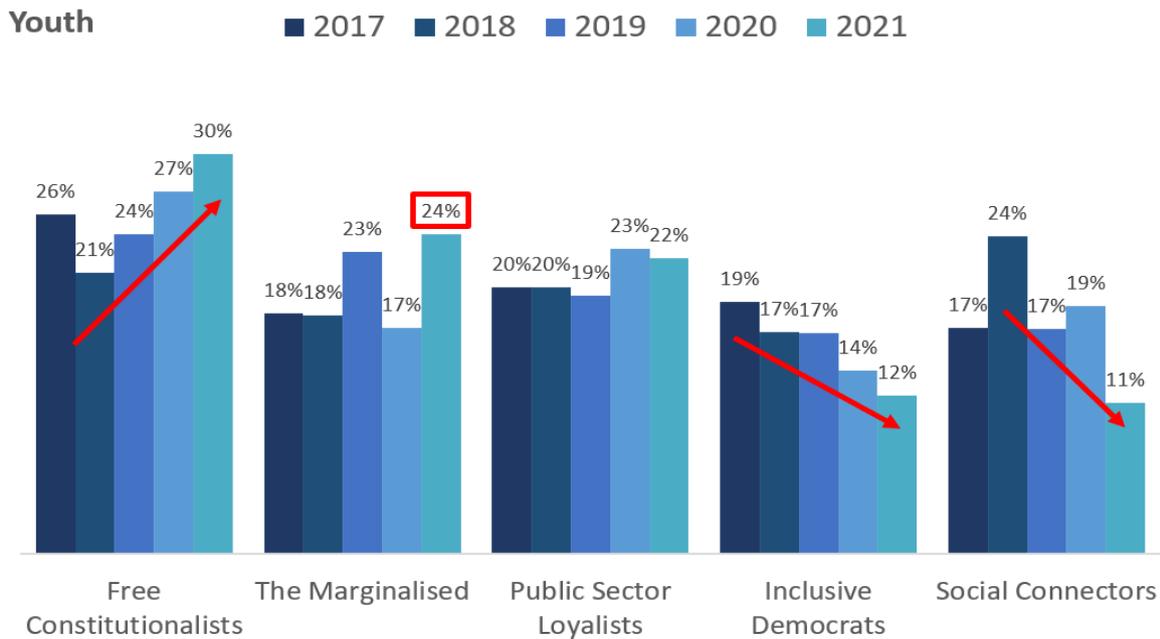
### 5. The South African youth

In the last section, the report explores differences that may lead to greater fragmentation. Looking at the youth sub-sample (i.e., aged 16 to 24), there were four important changes in the social cohesion cohorts between 2017 and 2021. The first is the strengthening of the **Free Constitutionalists** group, by far the dominant group. As illustrated, this group is not interested in social or political matters but rely on the media and the judiciary to ensure accountability and responsibility.

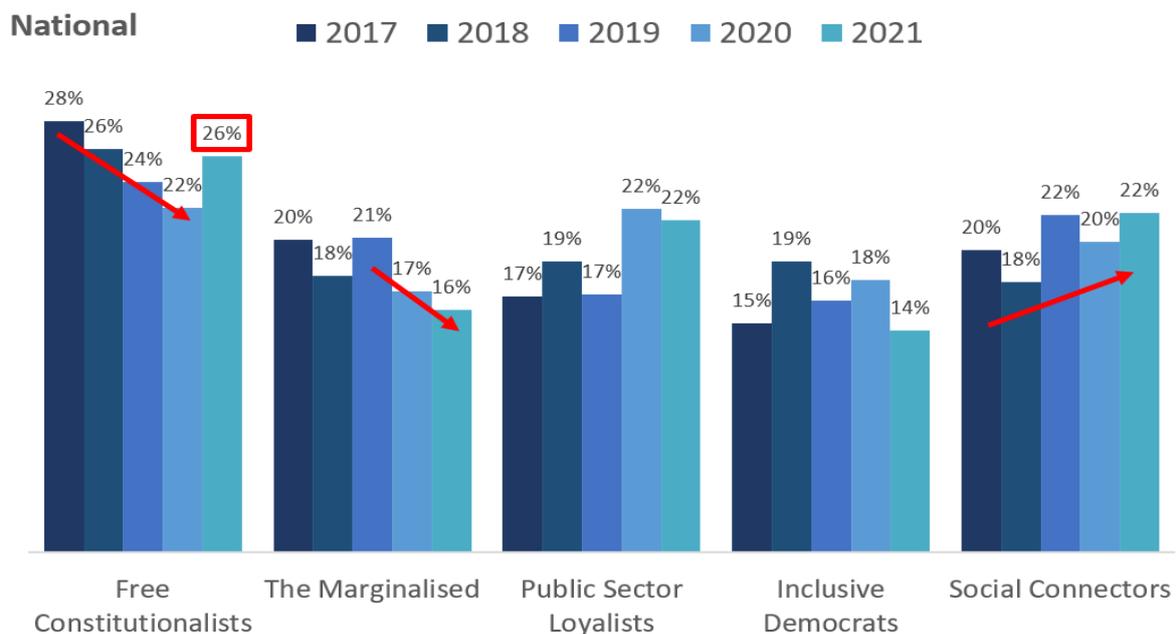
Second largest change is in the size of **The Marginalised** group. If not for 2020 and the concomitant COVID-19 support initiatives, this group may have shown an even greater increase than to the current 24%. Third, a growing disinterest in the collective democratic principles of South Africa is seen in the

**Inclusive Democrats** group. This raises a concern about the absence of youth in national or local government elections, a known trend that is confirmed here.

The **Social Connectors** group was the largest youth group in 2018, at 24%. In 2021 it is the smallest at only 11%. This group may not share the sentiments of **The Marginalised** group but is becoming a small contributor to the social cohesion narrative among the youth, actively disconnecting themselves from political activities.



These patterns are the opposite of the national trends. Nationally, the **Free Constitutionalists** group increased only in 2021, with the trend across the previous years being the opposite of the youth dynamic. **The Marginalised** group decreased on a national level, but among the youth the group increased. The **Social Connectors** group increased on a national level; among the youth it decreased.



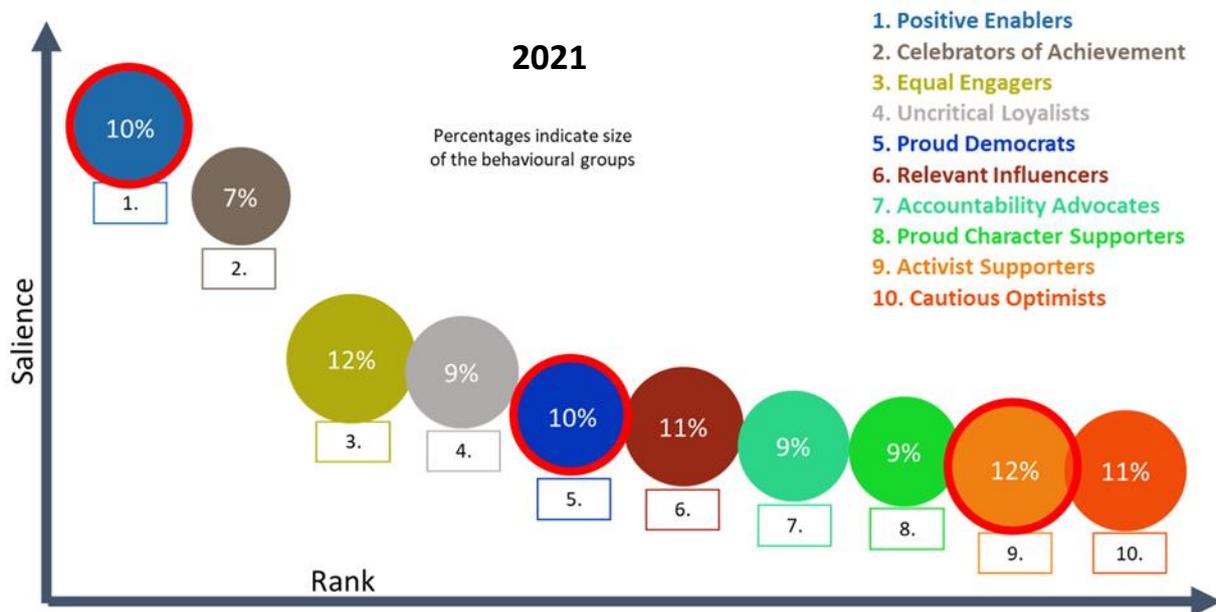
The national and youth trends are notably different. This may add tension to building a collective society where social cohesion is strengthened, as sentiments differ, motivated by diverse needs and expectations.

### 6. The Behavioural Groups as composite expressions

In this analysis, the link between the number of identities as expressions of diversity were linked with social cohesion constructs. The fewer the social identities, the more fragile the social cohesion network. Five social cohesion cohorts emerged, each expressing a different anchor in social cohesion, based on the conditions and circumstances the group members find themselves in. The analysis also compared the youth with the overall market and found that drivers that motivate the youth are different compared to the developing patterns at a national level, further highlighting the fragility and potential risks associated with social cohesion.

Government departments have mentioned their commitment to developing social cohesion as one of their mandates. It will be important to coordinate these efforts with Brand South Africa to strengthen the resolve of developing and maintaining social cohesion as a key pillar of the national identity of the South African nation.

In the 2021 behavioural group analysis, three groups share some of sentiments seen in this analysis. The **Positive Enablers** group share a strong link with the **Social Connectors** group. Both aim to improve conditions for their fellow South Africans as they build relationships.



The **Proud Democrats** group made a comeback from the 2020 analysis. This aligns with the recent increase in the **Free Constitutionlists** group seen in the national data but has been growing year-on-year in the youth sub-sample. In second last place in terms of salience, the **Activist Supporters** group remains large and partially represents **The Marginalised** group.

## 7. What next?

At the start of this analysis, social identity theory was used to illustrate the link between social cohesion and social identities. The more social identities a person has, the more complex and broad the potential connections with other members of a group will be, thereby strengthening social cohesion. Less complex social identities often lead to narrow group interests, creating many but fragile social cohesion clusters.

The analysis shows that the fragility mentioned in the first episode is confirmed. The South African nation is characterised by fewer social identities and a distinct difference between social cohesion interests of the youth and those of the nation as a whole.

Nadia Kaneva defines nation branding as “*a compendium of discourses and practices aimed at reconstituting nationhood through marketing and branding paradigms*” (Kaneva, 2011: 118)<sup>6</sup>, she alludes to the complexity of social identities, which should be recognised and strengthened towards reconstituting nationhood.

## 8. The research team

African Response (Pty) Ltd and MarkData (Pty) Ltd jointly developed the BSA Domestic Perceptions Research Programme for BSA. The statistical analysis techniques are internationally recognised. The programme director is Jan Wegelin, Managing Director at MarkData.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.uio.no/english/research/strategic-research-areas/nordic/research/research-groups/nordic-branding/news/2021/nadia-kaneva-.pdf>