

# South Africans fairly optimistic despite country's challenges

By [Leanne Freeman & Michelle Daines](#) , issued by [BMI Research](#)

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There is, surprisingly, a certain optimism among South Africans, with some citizens feeling reasonably satisfied with their lives.



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This perspective seems contrary to what many people believe *should* be the case in the country right now, yet it was the outcome of a recent snapshot survey\* we conducted to assess current consumer sentiment and South Africans' outlook for 2020.

The survey was based on a representative cross-section of respondents. A collective majority of respondents said they were 'very satisfied' (11%) and 'satisfied' (46%) with their lives in general, while a third of respondents were on the fence, saying they were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' with their lives.

The total average weighted score for this question, however, was 6.3 (out of 10), showing that while the South Africans sampled were reasonably satisfied, there was room for greater contentment.

These citizens are mostly satisfied, but not overwhelmingly positive. When viewed in context with answers from the other questions, however, we see these respondents are surprisingly optimistic and quite resilient, as they are looking forward to

the future despite the challenges our country is facing.

For example, nearly half the respondents were hoping for a 'better financial position' (45%). This was underpinned by 'a new or better job' (38%); 'graduating or acquiring new skills' (24%); and 'growing (their) own business' (21%). All of these contribute to greater wealth and comfort – the primary links to achieving greater satisfaction.

Only 3% of those surveyed spontaneously mentioned that they were looking forward to a 'better government with reduced corruption/poverty' within the next year. The underlying rationale for this may be that the majority of these citizens do not foresee an improvement in this in the short term.

Surprisingly, all the respondents claimed they were looking forward to something, leading us to believe that there remains hope among many South Africans that something positive in some shape or form is coming in the lead up to 2020.

To the point of South Africans being fairly optimistic right now, there were more aspects that they were looking forward to in the future than challenges they were concerned about.

By far, the biggest challenge South Africans currently see on the horizon is the financial squeeze expected to come from the increased cost of living. Nearly half (49%) the respondents identified with this aspect, which is actually the flipside of the greater financial freedom they are looking forward to.

Aside from this key concern, the other challenges listed were fragmented (i.e. job challenges, relationship issues, lack of time, etc.), illustrating that most citizens see a diverse set of trials ahead.

The country's 'poor economy, inflation, electricity and fuel prices, food prices and interest rates' were flagged as a challenge by 13% of respondents, while crime was only raised by 1% of those surveyed. It may be hypothesised that crime is not automatically top of mind for these citizens in the face of other, more certain, daily challenges, or alternatively that crime is increasingly being accepted as a way of life.

Another key factor supporting our belief that these particular South Africans were fairly optimistic was the finding that two-thirds of respondents were hopeful of having access to greater disposable income in 2020.

We found it interesting that the citizens surveyed were so optimistic at the moment, given the country's current political, social and economic climate.

One possible reason for these results may be that South Africans may not fully understand the extent of current conditions and the impact on their lives. Another is that many peoples' satisfaction levels are just 'good enough' given their economic circumstances, leading to slightly more positive sentiment. And a third possibility is that the demographic surveyed (LSM 5+) currently shares a more optimistic outlook compared to people in lower demographics, who might see the country differently at this time.

All in all, it is evident that South Africans approach daily life with a degree of resilience in the face of challenge.

*\*Consumer 2020 Vision: South Africans and their outlook* was an online poll of 200 respondents conducted by BMi Research's Customised Insights Division – a research unit dedicated specifically to understanding South African consumers. Its customised research and surveys provide a solid context for businesses that are looking for tangible insights into the thoughts and feeling of South Africans on pressing issues.

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Leanne Freeman is head of Customised Insights at BM Research, and Michelle Daines is a Senior Research Executive at BM Research.

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