The grandeur and precision of the pageantry and performance displayed by China during the Beijing Olympic Games ultimately seemed to eclipse the political tensions pertaining to the country’s human rights record that characterised the lead up to the mega-event. With Beijing’s political baggage presumably packed away, the global sporting event focus rapidly shifted to South Africa and its ongoing preparations for the 2010 Football World Cup.

The 1995 Rugby World Cup, 1996 African Cup of Nations, and the 2003 Cricket World Cup are notable examples of international events that South Africa successfully hosted. Politically, they were used to effectively and symbolically demonstrate how the country has progressed in transcending social divides, and amplify its reputation as a ‘rainbow nation’.

Yet, a rip has appeared in the weave of multicultural post-apartheid identity. In Beijing to promote the World Cup, Minister in the Presidency and member of the Board of the 2010 World Cup Organising Committee, Dr Essop Pahad, was recently reported as saying that “Even though they are a minority, there are still a lot of whites who don’t support Bafana Bafana”. In addition, he reportedly stated: “They also don’t care that the World Cup is being staged in South Africa”.

These sentiments have understandably provoked much controversy. For a prominent government official tasked with ensuring a successful event, trading in stereotypes could serve to undermine international confidence and, more importantly, efforts to promote national unity and social cohesion. In response to Minister Pahad, politicians, political commentators have questioned the veracity of his statement and whether any scientific evidence exists to support the claims made. Some have even gone as far as approaching the Human Rights Commission claiming the remarks as hate speech.

**Perceived benefits of hosting 2010**

In fact, the HSRC’s annual, nationally representative, longitudinal survey provides insight into the attitudes of all South Africans towards both the 2010 World Cup and sport and recreation activities. The survey suggests that, like other population groups, white South Africans do care about the World Cup. What is caring and how does one measure it? Implicit in the notion of care, are elements of concern, worry and even trouble but also pride and anticipation.

Over the past three years, at least 95% of white South Africans...
(aged 16 years and older) have consistently perceived there to be some form of benefit accruing to South Africa from the hosting of the World Cup (Figure 1). These benefits are seen mostly to be in the form of economic growth, job creation, putting South Africa on the map and increased tourism. In citing such benefits, white South Africans do not differ appreciably from other population groups, although they do have significantly higher expectations of tourism benefits than do black South Africans. In addition, while all South Africans share high expectations of the other three perceived benefits, their relative ranking varies somewhat.

![Figure 1: Main benefit of South Africa hosting the 2010 Football World Cup, by population group in 2007 (%)](source: HSRC SASAS 2007)

**Economic growth**
- White: 40%
- Indian/Asian: 41%
- Coloured: 45%
- Black African: 33%

**Job creation/job opportunities**
- White: 46%
- Indian/Asian: 42%
- Coloured: 43%
- Black African: 51%

**Putting South Africa on the international map**
- White: 52%
- Indian/Asian: 50%
- Coloured: 47%
- Black African: 46%

**Increased tourism**
- White: 51%
- Indian/Asian: 45%
- Coloured: 40%
- Black African: 35%

**Other**
- White: 3%
- Indian/Asian: 4%
- Coloured: 6%
- Black African: 3%

**No benefit to country**
- White: 10%
- Indian/Asian: 9%
- Coloured: 9%
- Black African: 9%

On the issue of readiness, white South Africans do emerge as more sceptical than Indian and coloured South Africans and significantly more so than black South Africans. Although white respondents are relatively more concerned that the country will be ready to host the World Cup in 2010, this by no means implies that they care less about hosting the mega-event. Rather than signifying indifference, their concern could be interpreted as a sign of caring that the country is presented in the best possible light.

**Unity, pride and performance**

The 2007 survey data further reveal that approximately 8 out of 10 white South Africans believe in the unifying power of sport (Table 1). Indeed, all population groups hold similar sentiments that sport brings different groups and races inside South Africa closer together. All are likewise very proud when South Africa performs well at international sporting competitions – 88% of white, 85% of Indian, 83% of coloured and 80% of black respondents are of this opinion.

Table 1: Sports bring different groups and races inside South Africa closer together, by population group, 2007 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black African</th>
<th>Coloured</th>
<th>Indian/Asian</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>South Africa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: HSRC SASAS 2007

These statistics suggest that the issue is not one of race but one of performance. Fans are quick to desert underperforming teams. Witness the outrage over the recent South African Olympic, rugby and cricket performances. Support is not guaranteed, it is earned. When Bafana Bafana starts performing its support base will increase – across all population groups.

**Legacy and readiness**

Furthermore, if one examines attitudes to the likely legacy of 2010, it appears that white South Africans do not differ substantially from Indian South Africans in their view that benefits will be transitory in nature (Figure 2). The pattern of responses for white and coloured respondents is again similar, though slightly more divergent due to the relative ambiguity expressed by the latter group in relation to legacy effects. Black respondents, however, were the most optimistic about the lasting impact of the World Cup, exceeding white respondents by 18 percentage points (55% compared to 37% in 2007). Even so, this point of disagreement does not negate the near universal view that the World Cup will bring benefits to South Africa.

![Figure 2: Legacy of the 2010 Football World Cup, by population group (%)](source: HSRC SASAS 2005, 2006, 2007)

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**The analysis shows that white South Africans – like others – are engaged and care about the World Cup**

For all the progress that has been forged over the last 15 years, the inescapable reality is that social cohesion in South Africa remains fragile. The recent xenophobic attacks across the country have starkly highlighted the tenuous nature of social inclusion. The leaders of our 2010 endeavour have a responsibility to ensure that their messaging is articulate and empirically grounded, instills confidence and positions the mega-event as a fillip to inspire progress towards a unified society. The analysis shows that white South Africans – like others – are engaged and care about the World Cup. To suggest otherwise undermines the very commonalities that should be promoted.

**The final scoreboard**

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