

Census 2011

8 November 2012

The long term trends are beautifully revealed in the first results of Census 2011. It is simply the story of a country incrementally improving itself. We can unambiguously state that SA is a better place than it was 10 and 20 years ago.

Immigrants:

It is important to note that the Census also counted the immigrants in SA, be they legal or not. As the head of Stats SA said: "it is our duty to count people, not to ascertain their legal status". In fact, prior to the census in 2011, it was reported that Stats SA specifically recruited members of the immigrant communities to help count those communities.

So immigrants are part and parcel of the numbers we discuss below.

Population growth:

The census confirms the already known fact that SA's population growth has slowed down.

In the five years between 1996 and 2001 (SA's first two censuses) population growth was 2% p.a. Over those 5 years 4 million people were added to the population.

In the ten years between 2001 and 2011 population growth moderated to 1.45% p.a. Over the decade 7 million people were added to the population.

So we started the ten year period covered by Census 2011 with 2% p.a. Then we averaged 1.45% p.a. for the ten years. There is only one conclusion possibletowards the end of the ten year period (2011) population growth must have been close to 1%.

This confirms pre-results projections by demographers that SA's current population growth is about 1% p.a. The trend is crystal clear: from 2% to 1.45% to 1%.

Will we continue to see a declining growth rate?

The key is the fertility rate and Stats SA will publish a report on that in 2013, once they had a chance to mine all the raw data.

But demographers estimate that SA's population growth rate will be less than 1% by 2014. Their consensus number is 0.9%. We will have to wait for them to put the Census 2011 results into their computers and see what they forecast for the next few years. But it is already very clear that population growth is not going to be much more than 1%.

Household size:

Whilst the population increased by 7 million people or 16% over the ten years covered by Census 2011, the number of households in the country increased by 3.2 million or 29%. As a result the average size of households has declined from 3.8 people per household in 2001 to 3.4.

These are amazing figures telling the story of social progress.

The smaller average household is the result of many more houses in the country (more than 3 mil RDP houses have been built, to which one can add the millions of dwellings put up by the private sector);

people moving out from communal living; and fewer children per family. All these are indications of social progress.

Age structure:

Demographers classify a population as "young" when the median age is below 20; "old" when it is more than 30; and "intermediate" when the median age is between 20 and 30. (Median simply means that 50% is above that number and 50% is below - it is NOT the average.)

SA's population is "intermediate" with a median age of 25. The age has consistently crept up from 22 in the 1996 census to 23 in 2001 and now 25 in the 2011.

In demography, like so much else in life, one does not want to be at extremes - the population must not be too old and also not too young. Each condition brings its own sets of problems. With an intermediate population that is slowly getting older, SA does seem to be well placed.

Household income and inequality:

Over the ten years household income increased by 113%. Inflation over the same period was 78%. Bottom line: South Africans got richer and are improving their living standards. This is confirmed by other non-census sources like the LSM surveys.

It is interesting to note that White-headed households achieved an average increase in income of 88% over the period. It was ahead of inflation, but lower than the 169% of Black households, the 145% of Indian households and the 118% of Coloured households.

Of course, the Black families come from a much lower base, so one should not be blinded by the percentages. White households still earn about 6 times as much as Black households. We have discussed inequality extensively on our road shows and the 6 times difference in income will not come as a surprise to clients. White households earn 1.5 times what Indian households earn and 3.25 times what Coloured households earn.

Nevertheless, if these trends continue - and there is no reason they should not - we will over time see a significant narrowing of the income gap between different race groups. The trend is certainly in the right direction.

So What?

- The full census results will only be available towards the end of next year. Non-Stats SA analysts will now also mine the numbers for their own conclusions and insights. We will report on all these as they become available.
- The main narrative from the data is one of consistent and certain progress in SA. The country is a better place than it was 10 years ago.
- This progress was recorded despite a very severe global and local recession during the period covered by the census (2009). Recessions undermine social progress. Yet, in spite of that
- The data refutes the shallow and superficial narrative of The Economist that SA is a country in decline.

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