

No To Pulpit Politics: Survey

Written by Rudi Prinsloo

Tuesday, 31 March 2009 08:53 -



Most South Africans believe religion and politics should be separated, a recent Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) survey has found.

"A considerable majority (72 percent) stated that religious leaders should not try and influence votes during elections, while two thirds of South Africans stated that they were opposed to religious leaders influencing government decisions," the latest round of the annual SA Social Attitudes Survey, conducted nationally by the HSRC has found.

There was a "broad consensus around supporting the idea of separating religion from politics", according to an HSRC statement.

The poll used 3173 "nationally representative" participants, aged 18 and older.

Wealthier South Africans were found to be more tolerant toward religious leaders influencing political decisions.

Young people aged between 25 and 29 were found to be "less inclined" than any other group to want to separate religion from politics.

The study also found that South Africans from all religions agreed that religion should not influence politics.

"Irrespective of whether one belongs to no religion or declares belonging to a specific religious denomination, whether Protestant, Catholic, Zionist/Shembe, Hindu, Muslim, or other faith, there was a commonly-held viewpoint that there should not be a religious influence on political decisions."

Some political leaders had recently been accused of using the pulpit to promote their parties. Religious institutions had also come out in support of particular political parties and their leaders.

According to HSRC researchers Jare Struwig and Benjamin Roberts the study, however, did not indicate that religion did not play an important role in society.

"South Africa is a deeply religious society, with approximately 85 percent declaring a religious affiliation."

Eighty-three percent of South Africans showed a high level of trust in religious institutions, as opposed to the 29 percent who had confidence in politicians.

The study was conducted between late November and early December 2008.

Source : Sapa /nm/th

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Date : 30 Mar 2009 14:38