

# THE JOY — REVOLUTION

## South Africa's Next Chapter

TimeOut

SOUTH AFRICA





# The Joy Revolution: From Recovery to Renewal

In 2025, South Africans leaned into gratitude, **contentment, and rest**, a survival mindset after years of challenge. But as we look ahead to 2026, **the mood is shifting.** People no longer want to simply recover; they are ready **to thrive.** Energy, confidence, and joy are taking centre stage. Gauteng's ambition is setting the pace, KwaZulu-Natal's optimism is spreading positivity, and the Western Cape's calm inspiration is offering balance.

The Joy Revolution is about this transformation, the collective spirit of South Africans seeking **connection, meaning, and balance.** It's about a country ready to embrace life more fully, to move from surviving to thriving, and to find joy in both the everyday and the extraordinary.



# 1

The people  
behind the  
insights







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Through the SoundInsights panel, we are able to **connect with over 5,000** South Africans- listening to their stories, daily realities, and the moments that spark joy. To truly understand the heartbeat of the nation, we set out to explore lifestyles and psychographics, uncovering how people **find balance, connection, and meaning in their lives.**

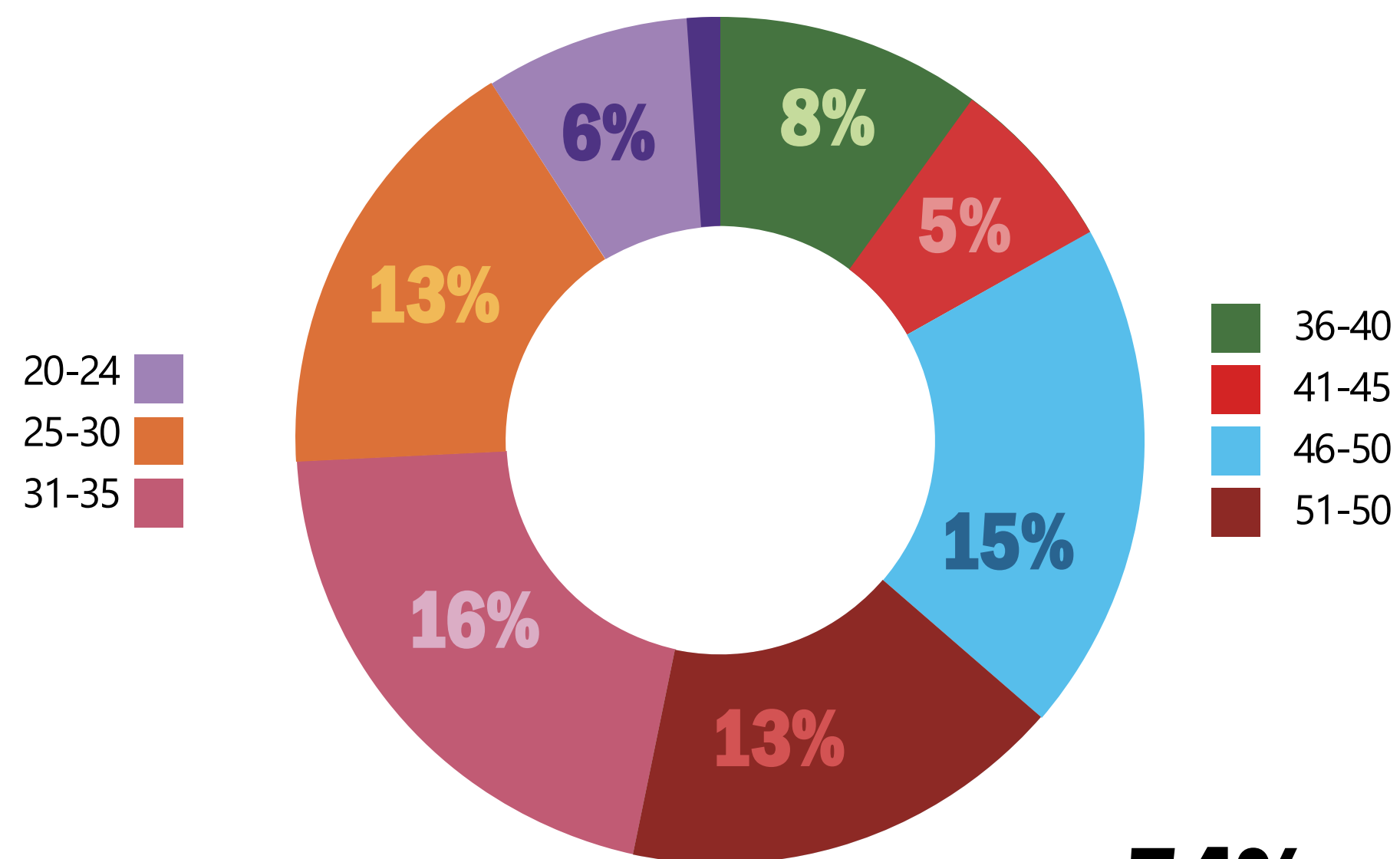
**This study engaged 1,079 South Africans,** balanced by gender to ensure a representative view. Behind every data point is a lived experience- shaping a richer picture of how South Africans are moving from recovery **in 2025 to thriving in 2026.**

At its core, this is more than research- it's about capturing the spirit of the Joy Revolution: **how people connect, restore, and embrace joy in ways that are deeply human.**



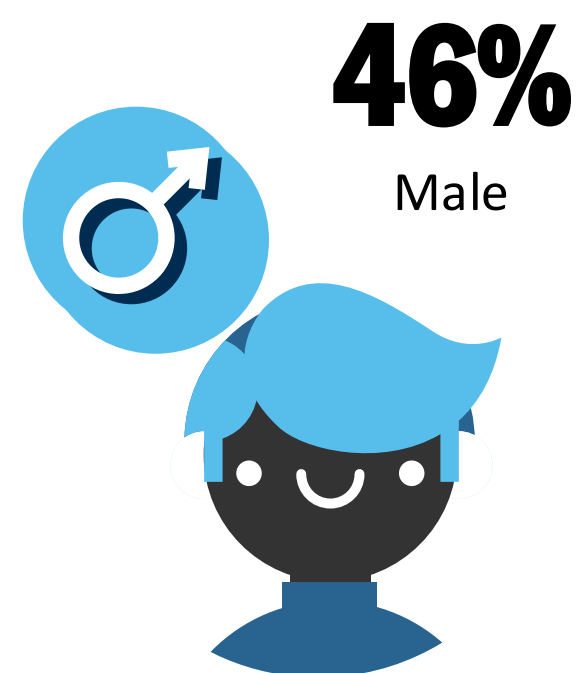
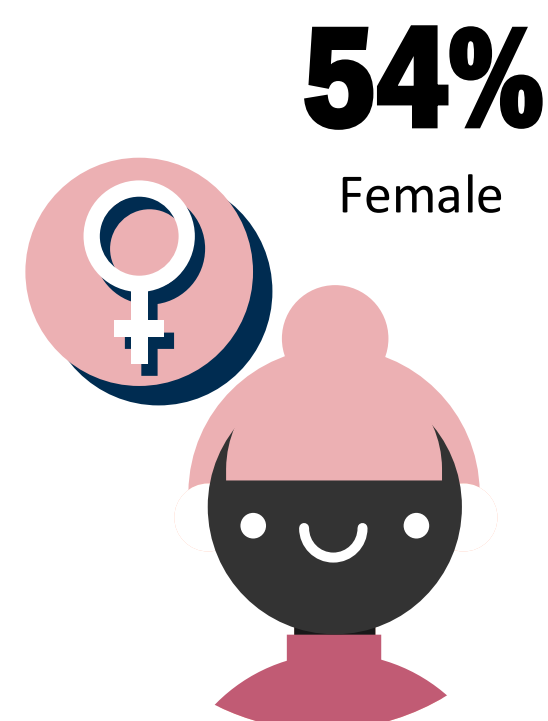
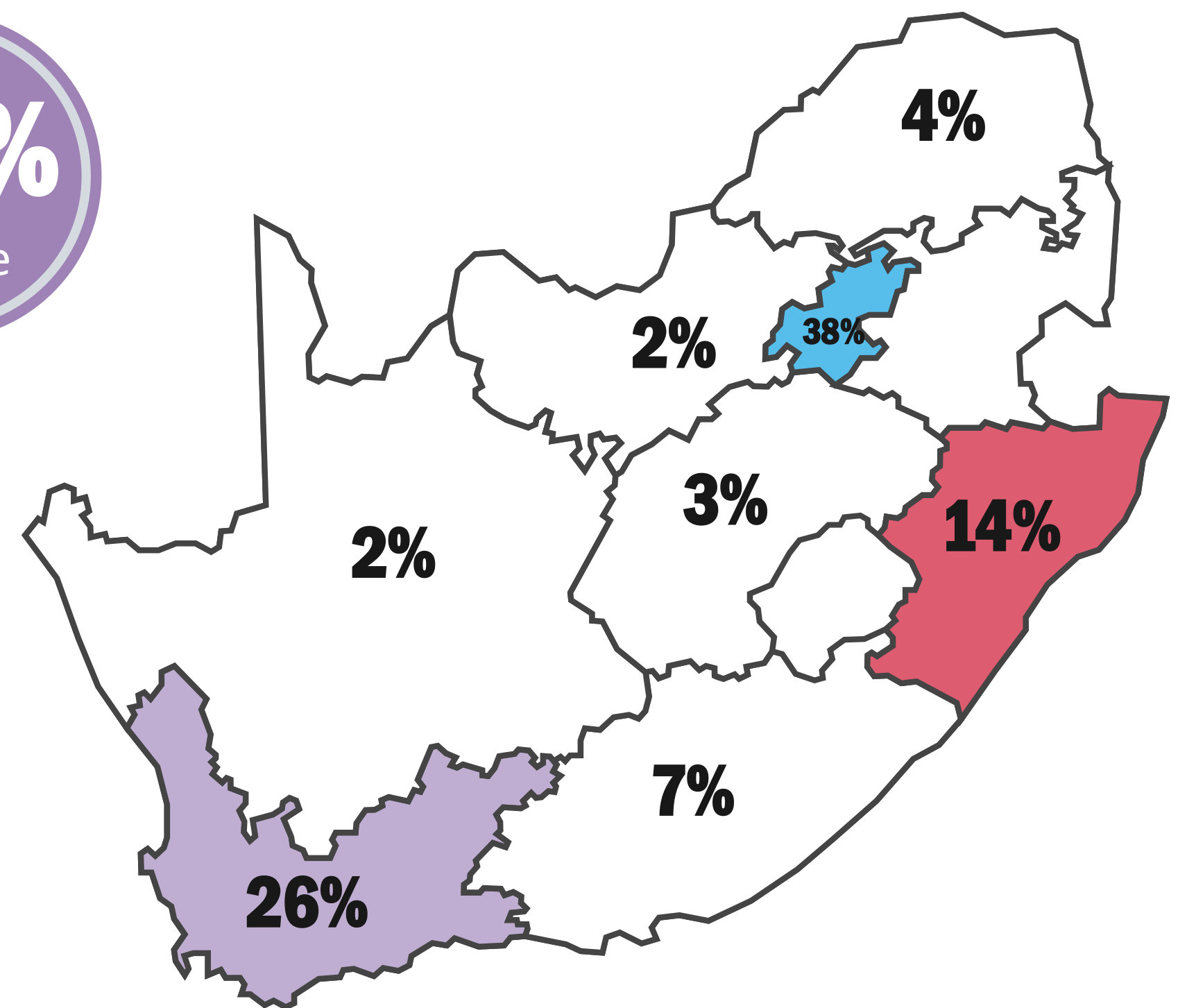
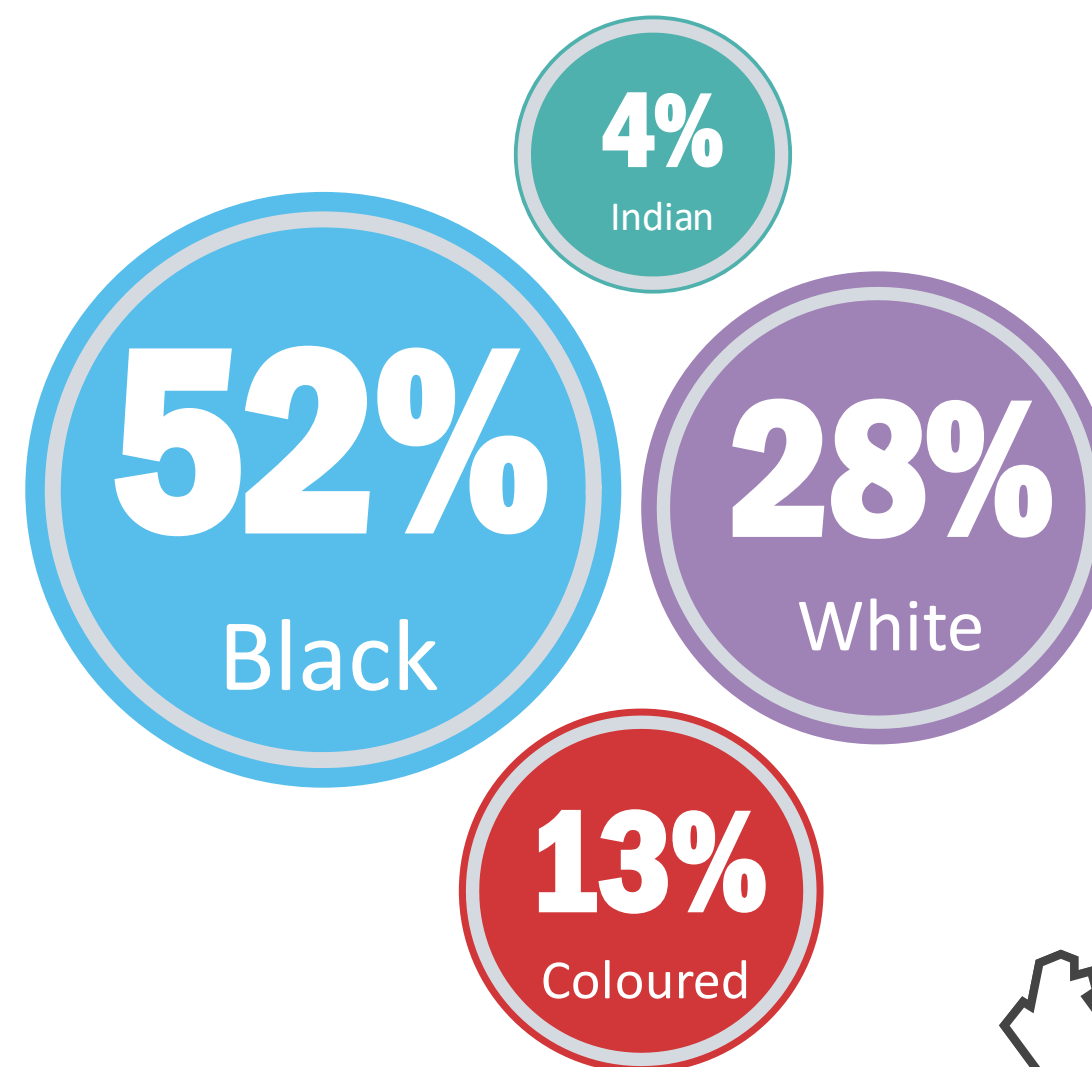
# Complexity in Who We Are, Simplicity in What We Seek:

**Connection and Joy**



20-24  
25-30  
31-35

36-40  
41-45  
46-50  
51-50





# 2

## The heartbeat of South-Africa

Uncovering the emotions and connections that  
unite South-Africans across regions and lifestyles.





## Feeling in 2025



## Want to feel in 2026



**South Africa's spirit  
is reawakening:**

**2026 is  
the year of  
THRIVING,  
OPTIMISM  
& GROWTH**

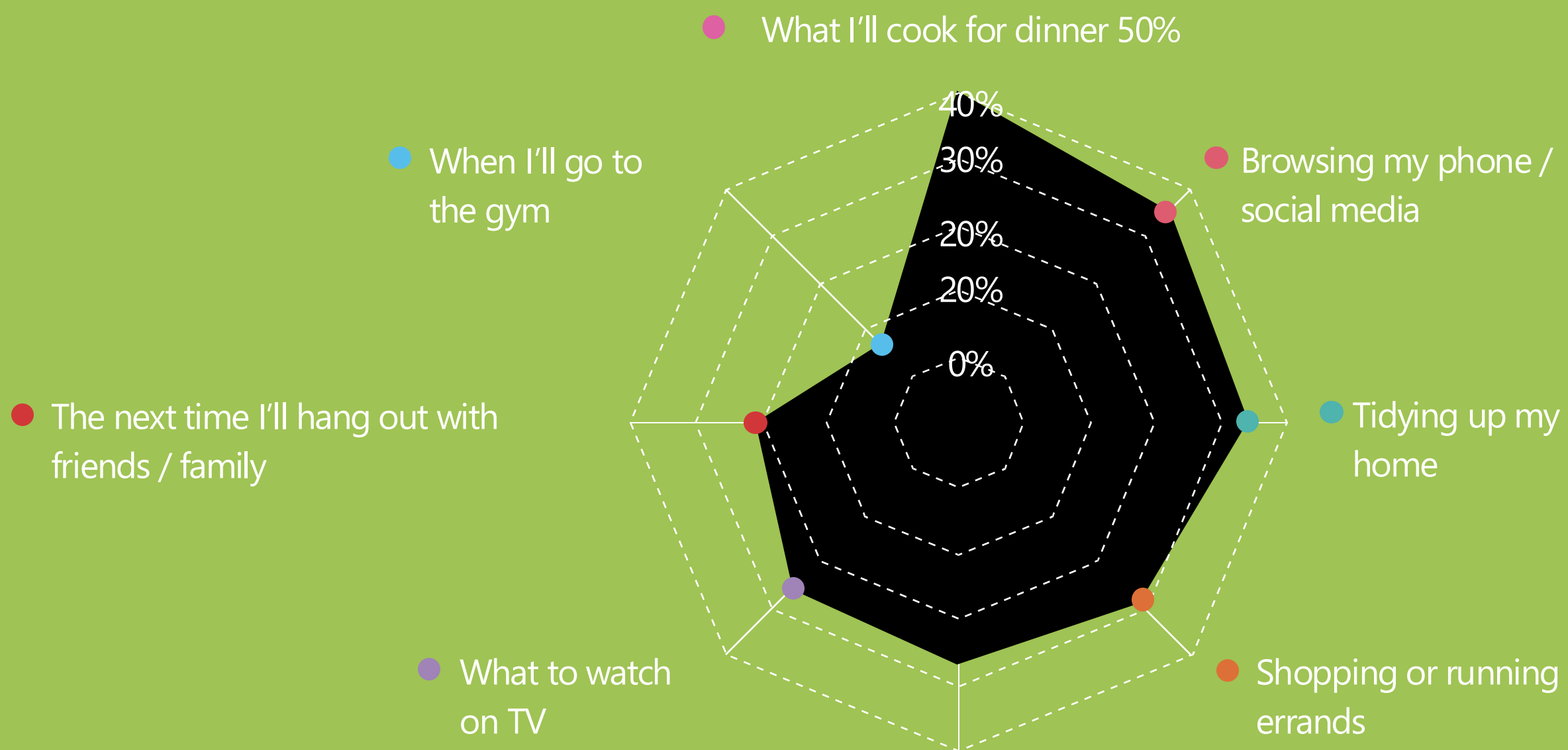
**Looking ahead to 2026, the data shows  
a pivot to growth and action:**

People want to feel energized (Excited, Celebratory) They want control and confidence (Confident, In control) They seek meaning and positivity (Inspired, Optimistic, Joyful) In other words, next year is about thriving, not just surviving.



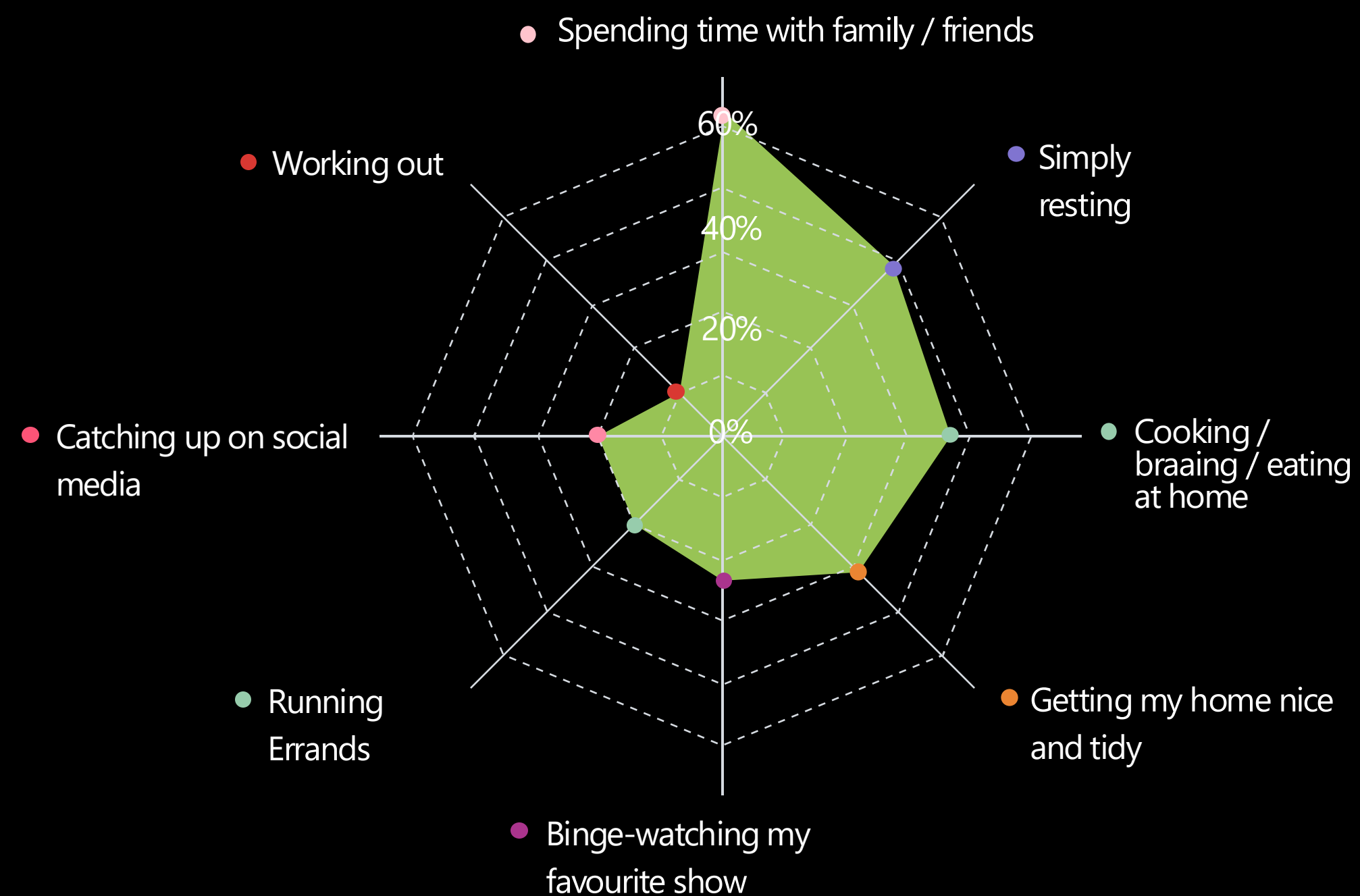
# Joy Lives in the Everyday:

Small Routines, Big Impact, it's in cooking, tidying, or simply scrolling that South Africans find balance, energy, and connection.





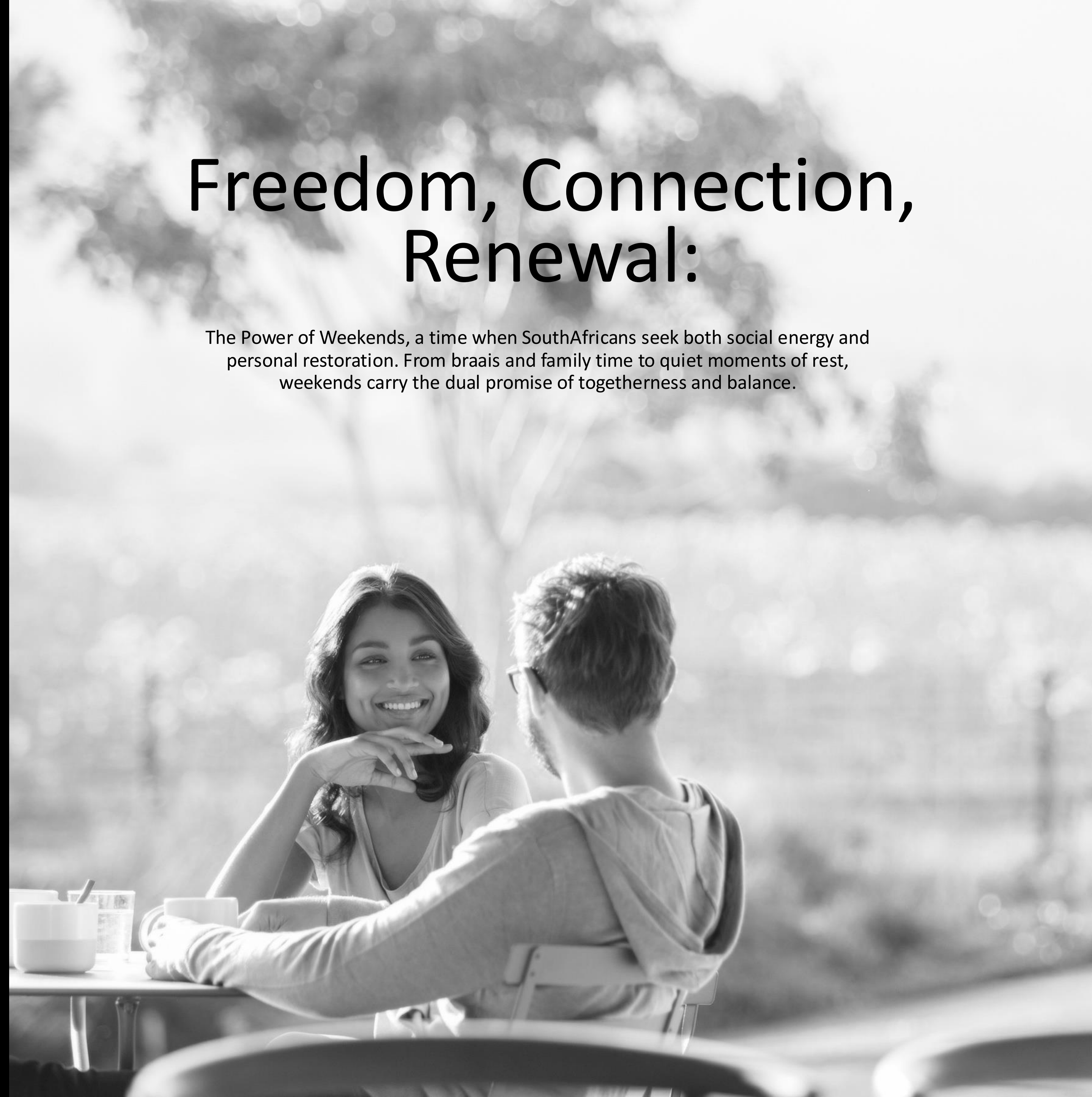
Thinking about the weekends... When you're making weekend plans, what are you more excited about?



Source: Sound Insights Panel TimeOut Joy Revolution Survey  
September 2025

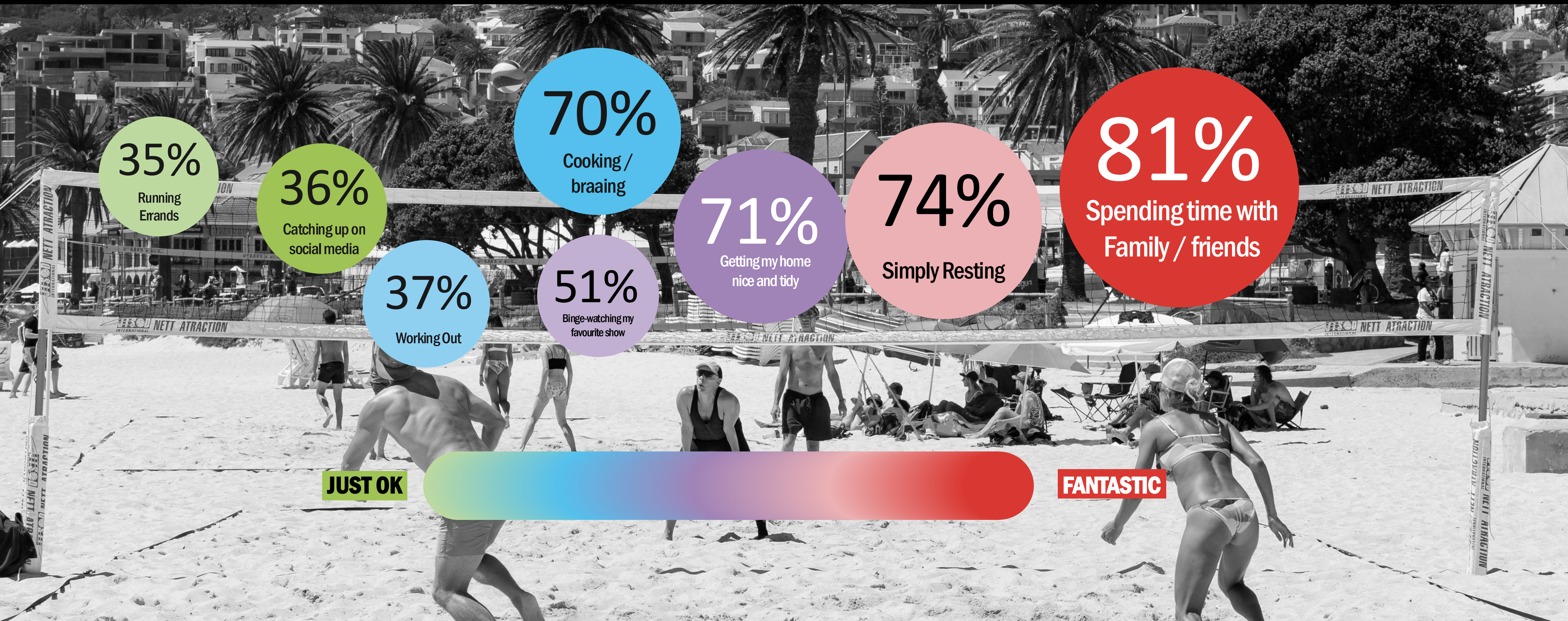
# Freedom, Connection, Renewal:

The Power of Weekends, a time when South Africans seek both social energy and personal restoration. From braais and family time to quiet moments of rest, weekends carry the dual promise of togetherness and balance.





**Connection is at the heart of joy,** people feel most positive when spending time with loved ones, yet equally value the restorative power of rest. This duality shows that **satisfaction comes not only from shared experiences, but also from recharging alone.**





# Despite busy lives, people crave meaningful human connection above all else, especially spending time with family and friends.

When given extra time, South Africans choose connection first - spending more moments with loved ones. But they also value balance, blending social nourishment through shared meals with the deeply personal need for rest and restoration. The real story is that joy is found in both togetherness and stillness.

213

Cooking / braaing /  
eating at home

Spending time with  
family / friends

Simply resting

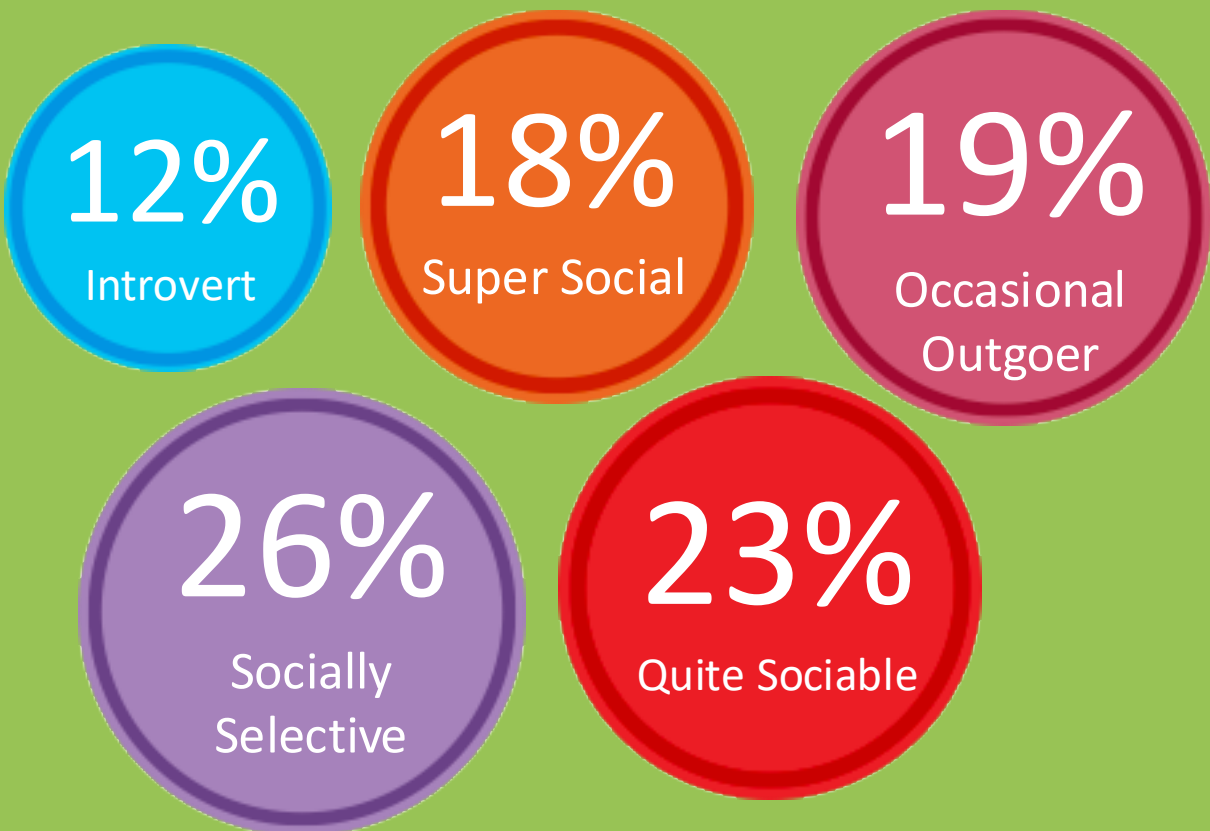


# It's Not About Going Out More, It's About Going Out Meaningfully

South Africans are selective with their social energy, they plan ahead for moments that feel worth their 'social battery,' but they also leave space for spontaneity when the vibe feels right. The real priority isn't quantity, but quality: **connections that feel authentic, intentional, and restorative.**

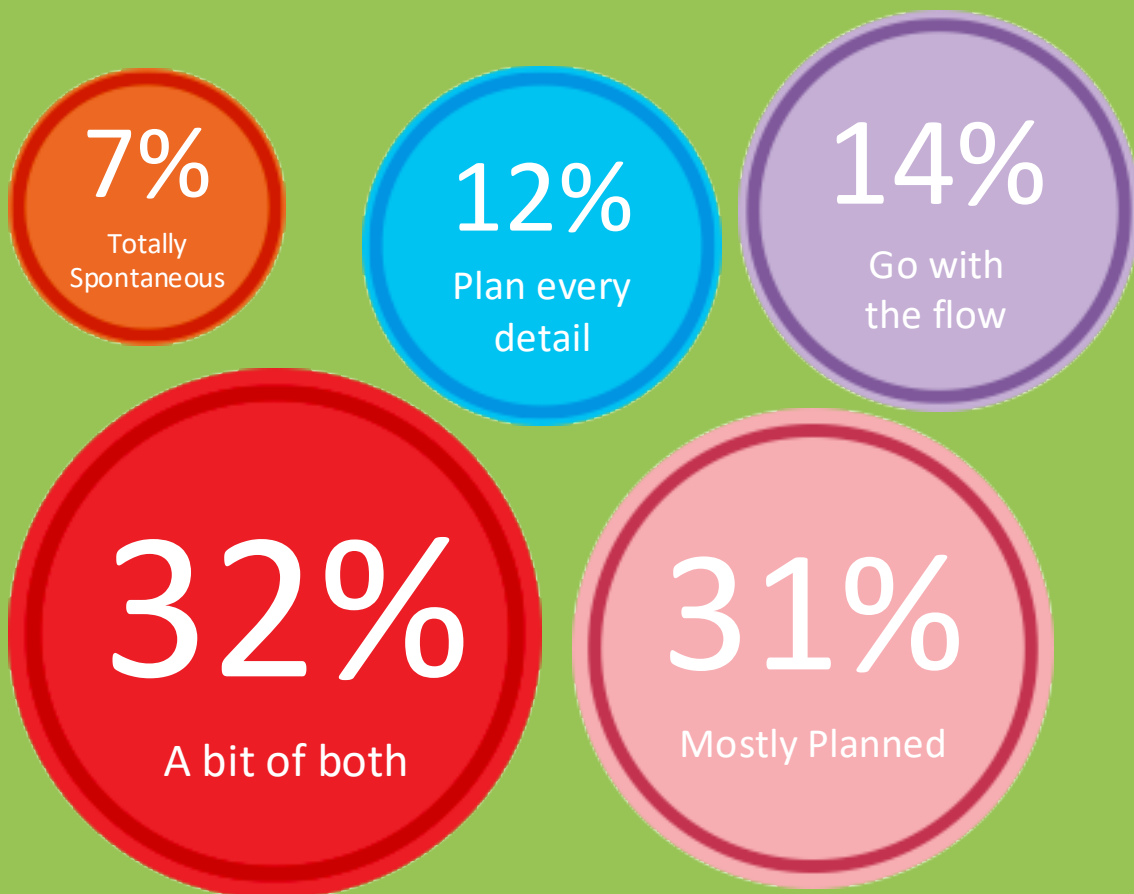
We've listed different approaches to socialising. Which one sounds the most like you?

- **Socially Selective** – I prefer smaller gatherings with close friends rather than big groups.
- **Quite Sociable** – I enjoy going out and chatting with others but like a balance with time alone.
- **Occasional Outgoer** – I go out when I feel like it, but I don't always need it to have a good time.
- **Super Sociable** – I find socialising easy, I love meeting new people and talking to everyone.
- **Introvert** – I'm more comfortable staying in and find socialising a bit draining.



When it comes to planning a night out, where do you fall on the scale between planning and spontaneity?

- **Plan every detail** – I like to know exactly what's happening, down to the last minute.
- **Mostly planned** – I prefer to have most things organised but leave a little room for flexibility.
- **A bit of both** – I like a balance of planning some details and leaving the rest to chance.
- **Go with the flow** – I don't plan much at all, I prefer to see where the night takes me.
- **Totally spontaneous** – I never plan, I just show up and enjoy whatever happens.



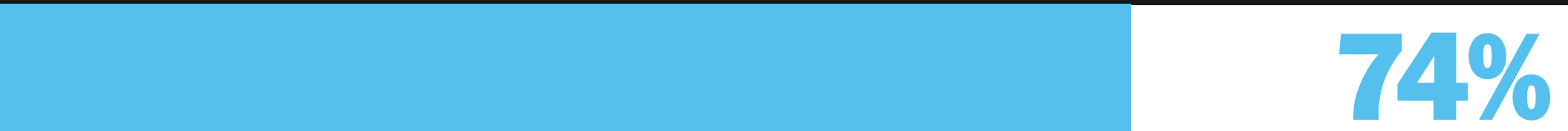


# Connection Fuels Energy and Productivity, But Flexibility Matters.

For most South-Africans, social plans are a powerful energy boost, recharging their mood, making them feel more productive, and giving them something to look forward to. But not everyone experiences connection in the same way. For some, too many plans can feel like pressure, which is why flexibility and choice are just as important as the plans themselves.



I totally enjoy planning to go out - it's a pleasure to research it!



Spending time with people I know and like gives me energy like nothing else.



Having social plans makes me feel more productive during the week.



I find myself working harder during the day if I know you have social plans later.





# The New Social Priorities: Meaningful, Active, and Refined in 2026

Looking ahead, what kind of social events do you want to see more of in 2026? Pick all that you'd fancy

1.

## Culture as a Social Catalyst

South Africans are drawn to shared cultural and culinary moments -whether through theatre, museums, art, wine tastings, or food festivals. These aren't just outings, they're purpose-driven experiences that bring people together around meaning and discovery.

2.

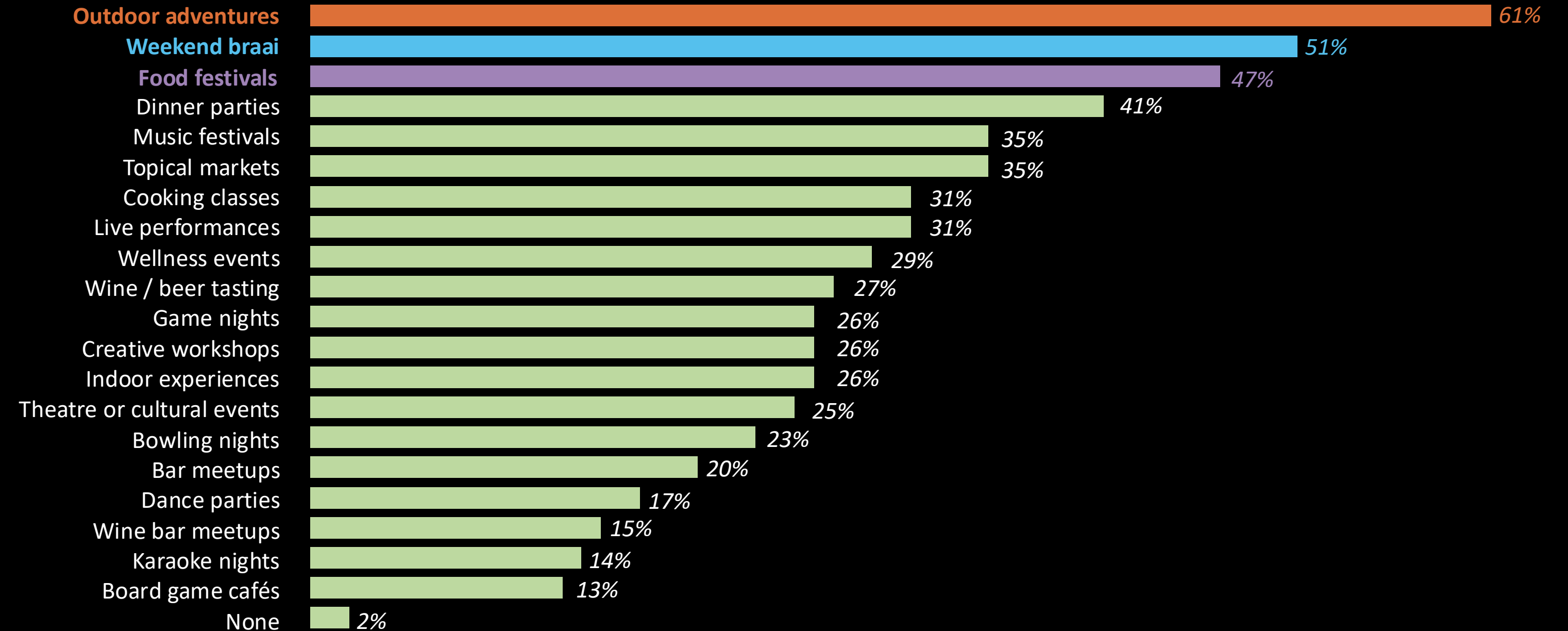
## The Preference for Active Participation over Passive Spectating:

People don't just want to watch, they want to take part. From tastings to interactive exhibits, there's a strong appetite for immersive, participatory experiences that make them feel involved rather than just entertained.

3.

## Sophistication over High-Energy Partying

While bars and clubs still hold some appeal, there's a stronger pull towards more refined, balanced environments. Wine tastings, curated dinners, and moderated social spaces create room for quality conversation, connection, and a sense of belonging.





# We Go Out to Feel Connected, Inspired, and Alive.

**31.6%** Social Connection & Belonging

“Makes me feel connected”

- Female, 36-40, Gauteng (B)

**28.8%** Mental & Emotional Well-being

“Good for the soul”

- Male, 55+, Western Cape (W)

**14.9%** Strengthening Bonds & Relationships

“It’s time to reconnect”

- Female, 36-40, Gauteng (B)

**8.8%** Escapism & Change of Scenery

“A break from the solitude and monotony”

- Male, 36-40, KZN (C)

**7.4%** Personal Growth & Learning

“Get different insights about life”

- Female, 25-30, KZN (B)

**5.1%** Joy & Fun

“The mood is contagious”

- Female, 46-50, Mpumalanga (W)



# Emotional States Derived from Going Out

1. Positive Affect & Happiness	50.1%	The most common response, encompassing simple, powerful feelings of joy, contentment, and general well-being."Happy," "Good," "Great," "Fantastic," "Awesome," "Amazing," "Joyful."
2. Relaxation & Stress Relief	17.7%	The feeling of unwinding, decompressing, and being freed from daily pressures and anxieties."Relaxed," "Stress-free," "Chilled," "Calm," "At ease," "Peaceful," "De-stressed."
3. Energy & Excitement	14.5%	Feelings of being energized, invigorated, stimulated, and looking forward to an experience."Excited," "Energetic," "Alive," "Energized," "Invigorated," "Vibrant," "Rejuvenated."
4. Connection & Belonging	7.5%	Feelings of being socially integrated, valued, and part of a community or relationship."Loved," "Wanted," "Appreciated," "Connected," "Like I belong," "Part of something," "Valued."
5. Personal Fulfilment & Meaning	4.4%	Deeper feelings of purpose, satisfaction, and personal growth derived from social interaction."Fulfilled," "Content," "Whole," "Grateful," "Blessed," "Hopeful," "Optimistic."
6. Negative States	5.7%	Feelings of anxiety, discomfort, or exhaustion associated with socializing. This includes a preference for solitude. "Anxious," "Drained," "Tired," "Uncomfortable," "I hate it," "Bored," "Prefer to be alone."



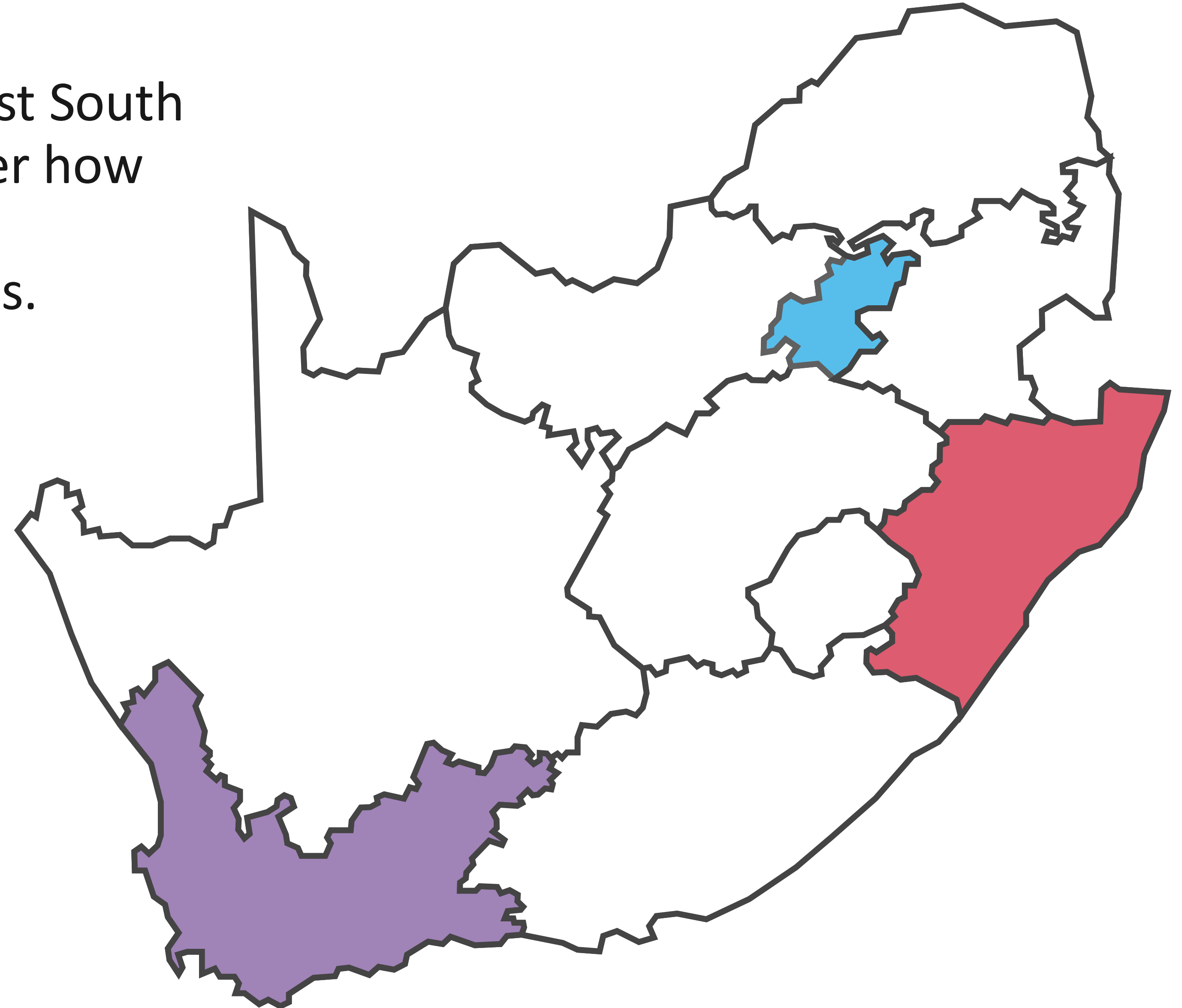
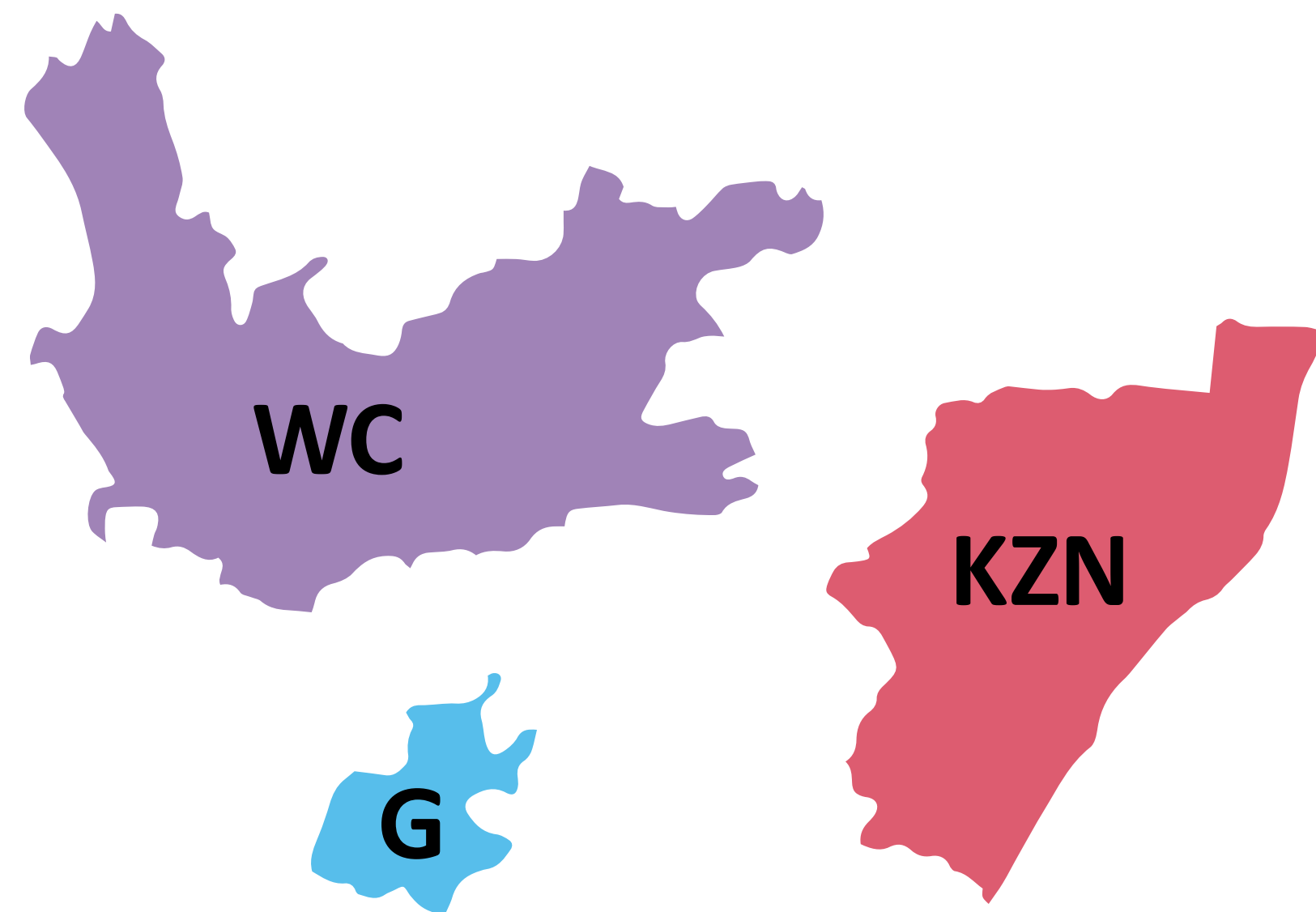
# **Regional Rhythms: How Joy Shows Up Across South Africa.**

From Gauteng's ambition to KZN's optimism and the Western Cape's calm balance, each region expresses joy in its own way- but together, they reflect a shared national spirit of connection and renewal



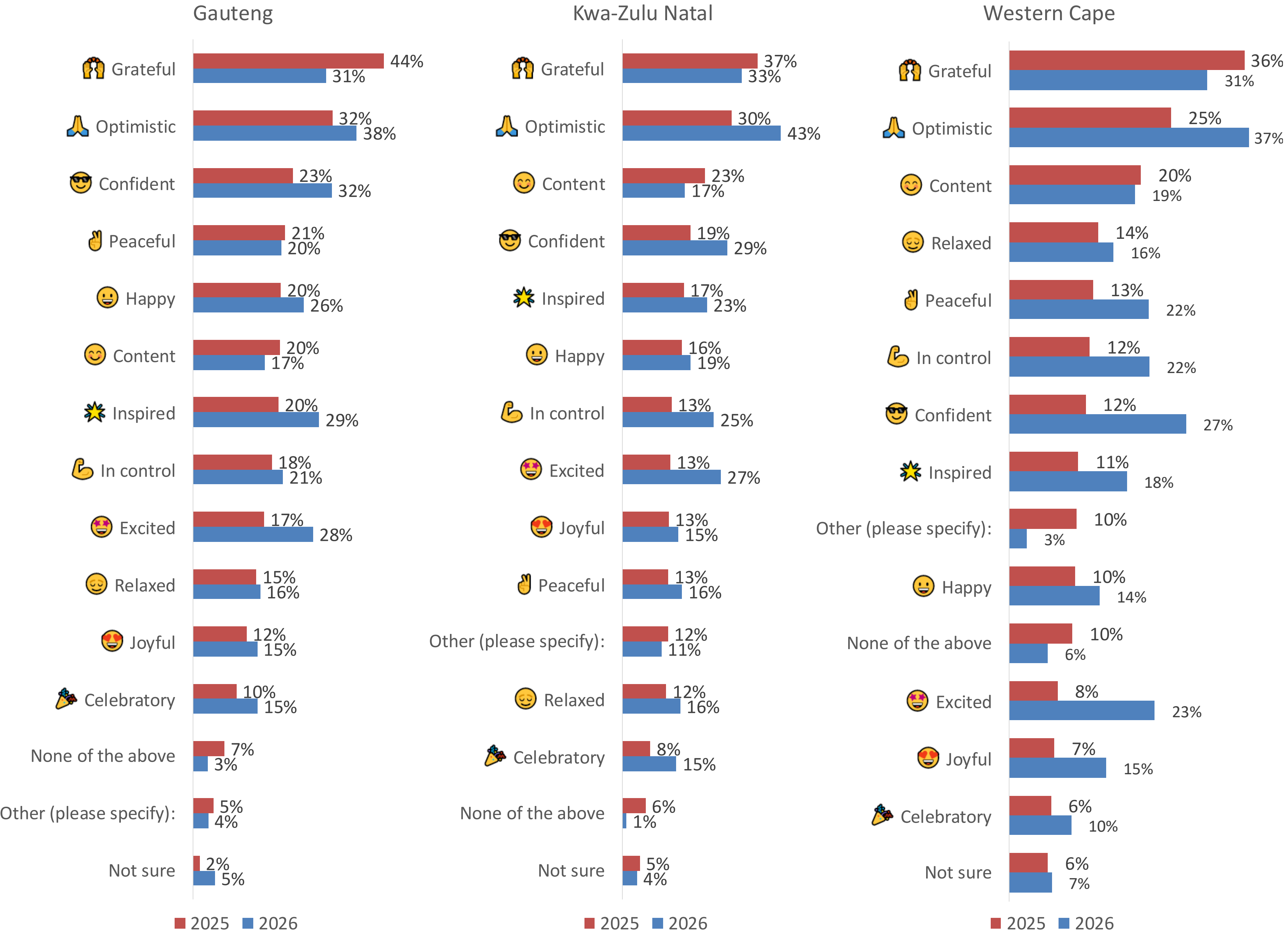


Now that we see what unites most South Africans, we should also uncover how regional nuances shape more personal expectations.





Across regions, sentiment is shifting from recovery to renewed optimism. In 2025, South Africans leaned into gratitude, contentment, and survival-driven emotions. By 2026, Gauteng’s rising confidence is spreading nationally, KwaZulu-Natal shows more optimism, while the Western Cape shifts toward peace and inspiration. The collective mood is more balanced, with joy, confidence, and hope becoming stronger drivers for the year ahead.





# Emotional States Derived from Going Out

	2025 Outlook	2026 Outlook	What this suggests
Overall Leader	Gauteng dominated nearly every positive emotion.	KwaZulu-Natal is the new leader in key emotions like Optimism.	A significant shift in sentiment from one province to another, suggesting changing economic, social, or political dynamics.
KwaZulu-Natal	Showed moderate levels, with a notable "Other" category.	Shows dramatic growth in optimism and empowerment (In Control).	KZN's outlook has improved drastically. The high "Other" category in both years suggests unique local factors are at play.
Western Cape	Consistently had the lowest scores for most positive emotions.	Still lower on excitement but now leads in Peacefulness and is on par on Control.	A shift from a potentially negative outlook to a more stable, calm, and secure one. The outlook is less about joy and more about tranquility.
Gauteng	Clearly the most positive, confident, and in control.	Still confident and inspired, but no longer the dominant outlier.	Gauteng's exuberance has moderated slightly, moving from an extreme high to a more sustainable positive outlook.





While outdoor adventures and food culture dominate in the Western Cape, KZN thrives on social games and casual gatherings, and Gauteng leans toward curated experiences like cooking classes and live performances. The common thread is connection-but expressed through local nuance.

Western Cape Cape Leads in "Outdoor" & "Gourmet" Culture:

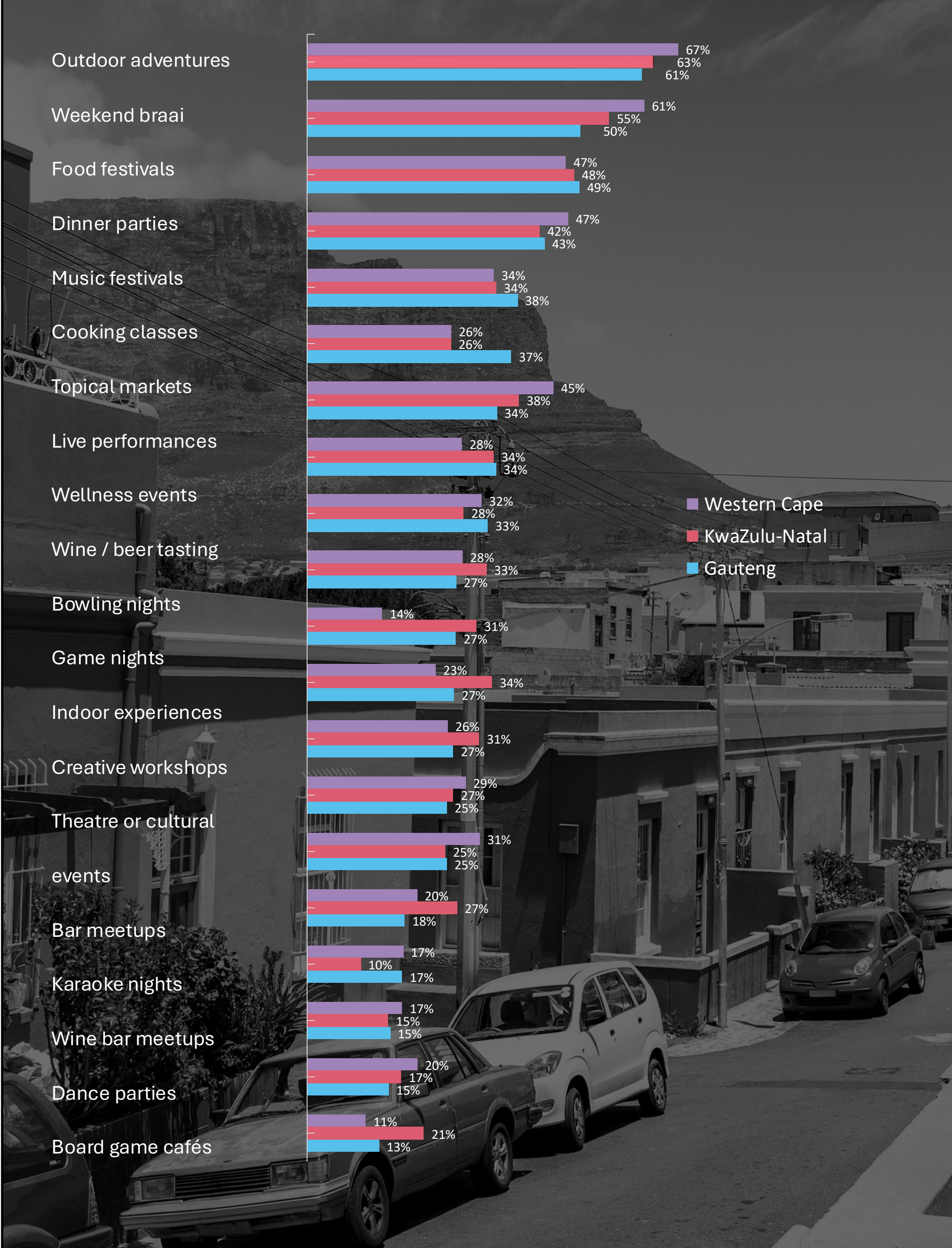
WC has the highest preference for Outdoor adventures, Weekend braais, and Topical markets, reinforcing its reputation for an outdoor-centric and foodie culture.

KwaZulu-Natal Enjoys Social Games & Bars:

KZN shows a distinct spike in Game nights, Bowling nights, and general Bar meetups, indicating a strong preference for casual, structured social gatherings.

Gauteng is Mixed but Leads in "Experiences":

Gauteng's profile is more rounded, but it shows relative strength in Cooking classes and Live performances/comedy, suggesting a preference for curated urban experiences.



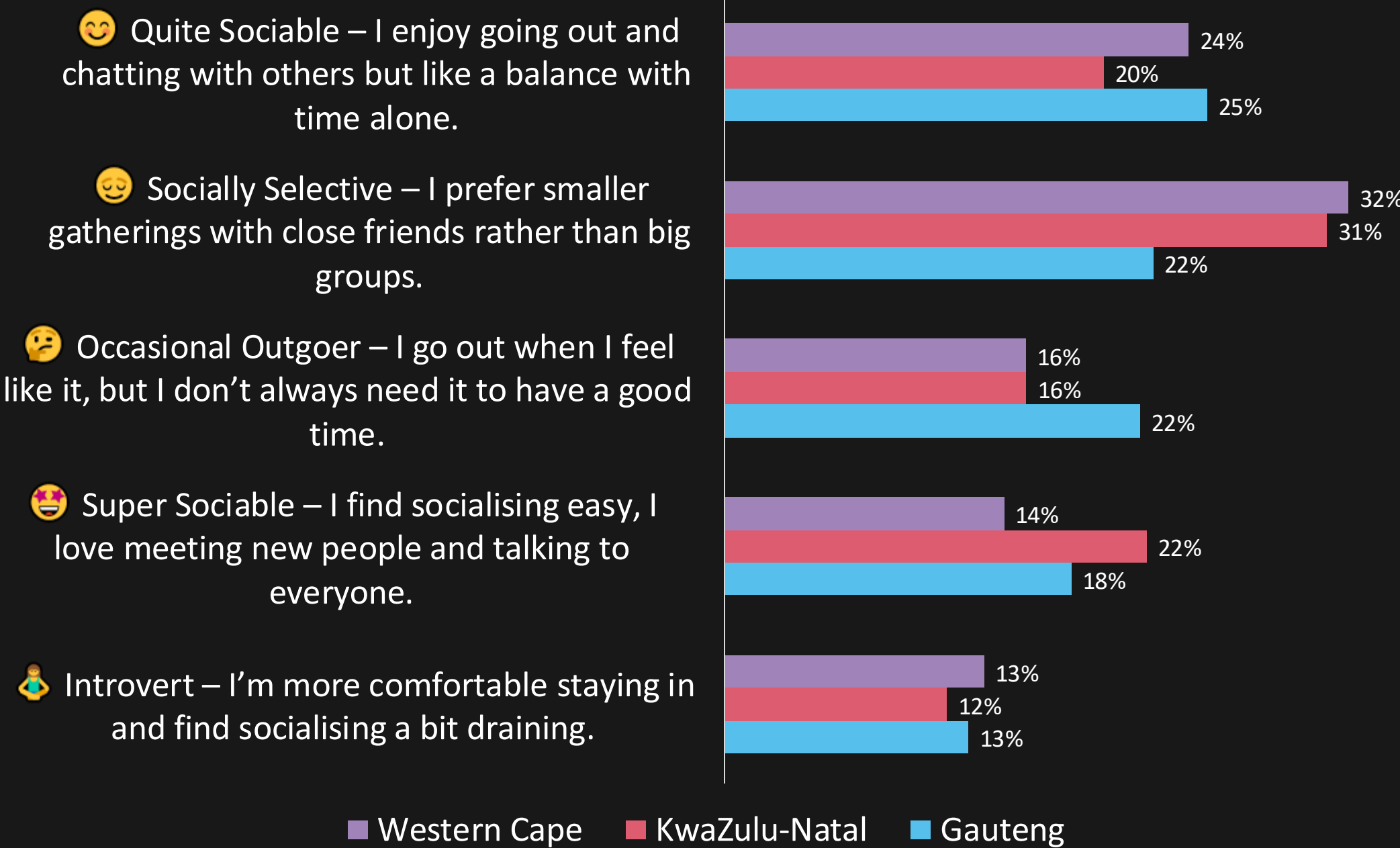


# Connection thrives on balance across the regions: planned, but never over-planned.

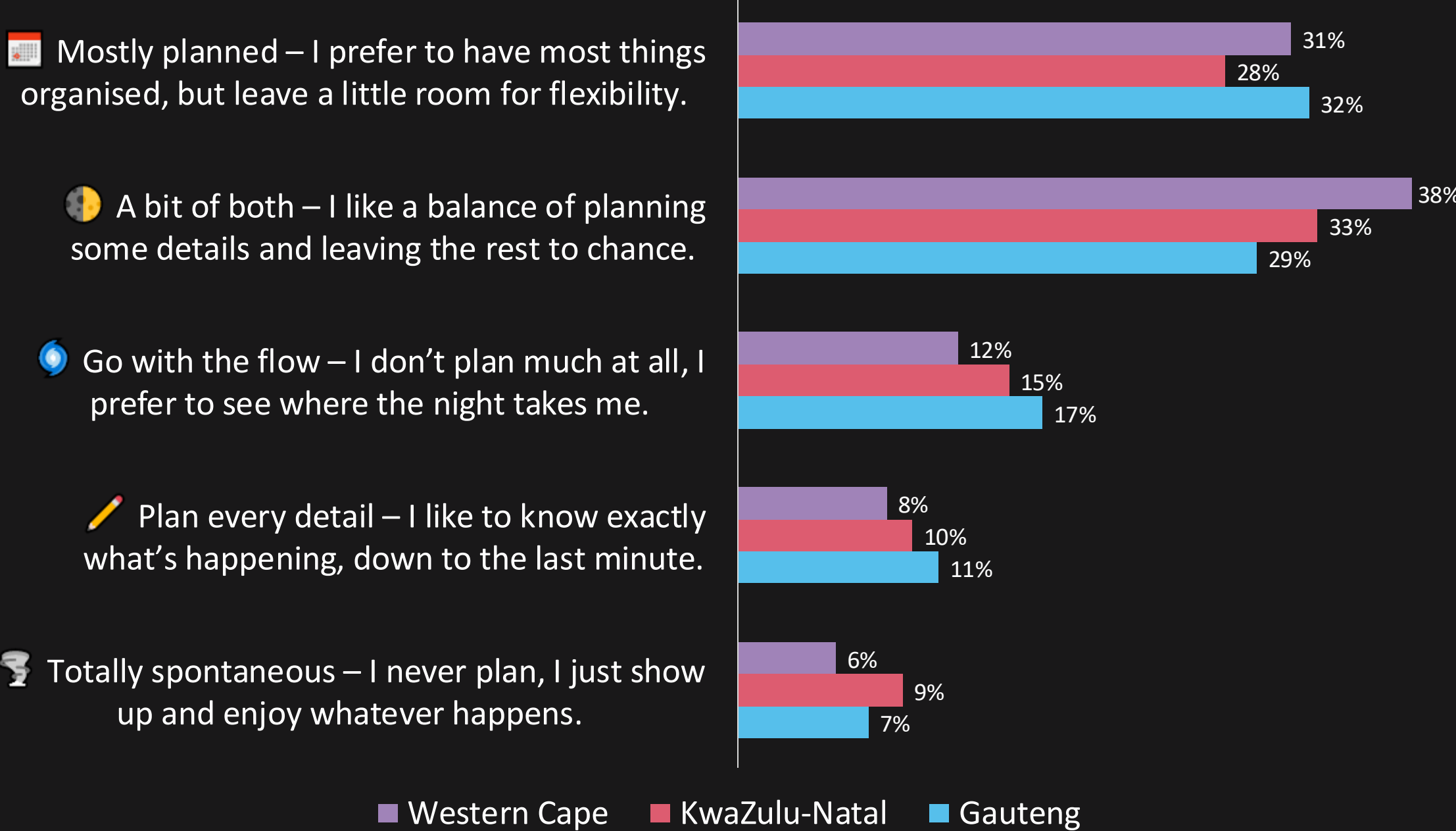
Most South Africans prefer a middle ground: smaller, meaningful gatherings with enough structure to feel intentional, but flexible enough to allow spontaneity.

**The Western Cape** stands out for its strong collective preference for this flexible, "bit of both" approach, suggesting a culture that values intention but thrives on a little organic discovery.

## Personality



## Planning





# South Africa's regions share a common desire for connection but express it in distinct ways.



G

**Ambitious and intentional:**  
driven by curated, quality experiences

## **Social Style:**

Balanced; enjoys curated experiences (dinner parties, cooking classes) and quality connections

## **Mindset:**

Confident, grateful, and in control; focused on quality outcomes

## **Planning:**

Prefers mostly planned structure with some flexibility.

## **Vibe:**

Ambitious and intentional.



KZN

**Optimistic and spontaneous:**  
thriving on energy and adaptability.

## **Social Style:**

Energetic and dual-natured; loves both big spontaneous meetups and close-knit braais.

## **Mindset:**

The nation's optimist; feels in control and upbeat about the future.

## **Planning:**

Leans spontaneous; enjoys going with the flow.

## **Vibe:**

Infectious and adaptable energy.



WC

**Calm and deliberate**  
valuing balance, tranquility, and experiences.

## **Social Style:**

Selective; prefers small gatherings, outdoor adventures, and topical markets.

## **Mindset:**

Peaceful, content, and stable; values tranquility

## **Planning:**

Prefers a balanced "bit of both" approach

## **Vibe:**

Calm, deliberate, and experience-focused.





4

South Africa's  
Next Chapter:

Confident  
Connected



# From Surviving to Thriving: **The Future Unfolds**

2025 was defined by gratitude, rest, and recovery- a nation catching its breath. But 2026 brings a shift. South Africans are stepping into a new chapter of **energy, confidence, and joy.**

Across Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Western Cape, each region expresses this spirit in its own way-curated ambition, infectious optimism, calm inspiration- yet they are united by one truth: **people want connection, meaning, and balance.**


Joy is no longer just about escape or survival. It is found in the everyday moments that shape our lives: family braais, cultural festivals, outdoor adventures, quiet rest, and spontaneous gatherings.

These are the rhythms that make South Africans feel alive.

For brands, the message is clear: To matter in 2026, you must show up where people truly live, in the balance of **togetherness and restoration, discovery and comfort, spontaneity and intention.**

The Joy Revolution is not just a trend- it is the reawakening of South Africa's spirit.  
And the future is confident, connected, alive.





“To thrive in 2026, we don’t need more, we need each other”

“Going out is a way to bond with friends or family and feel closer to them. I believe that spending time with others helps you feel part of a group, which is a basic human need.”

“I love to go out with a select few friends but mostly my kids and partner, it make our family bond more and I love spending time with them as I feel it does good for your mental wellbeing.”

“I feel it's very important to socialise with people and as a person with all that's going on you can't go through this life alone.”

“I feel relaxed, takes out my mind a bit not to think much. It is nice because we share information and learn new things. Socialising open(s) our minds, different opinions matter, give us knowledge and wisdom, even when you make decision you select wisely. It also help forget if you have problem and different views help you tackle them”



The background image shows a wide beach with many people walking and playing. In the distance, a city skyline is visible, featuring several tall buildings. A large, modern stadium with a distinctive white, curved roof and a large archway is the central focus of the background. The sky is clear and blue.

**5**

**What does this  
mean for  
your brand?**



# 1. The power of emotion

**Confident and connected, that is what people want to feel and your brand can tap into this well of positive sentiment and desire for connection.**

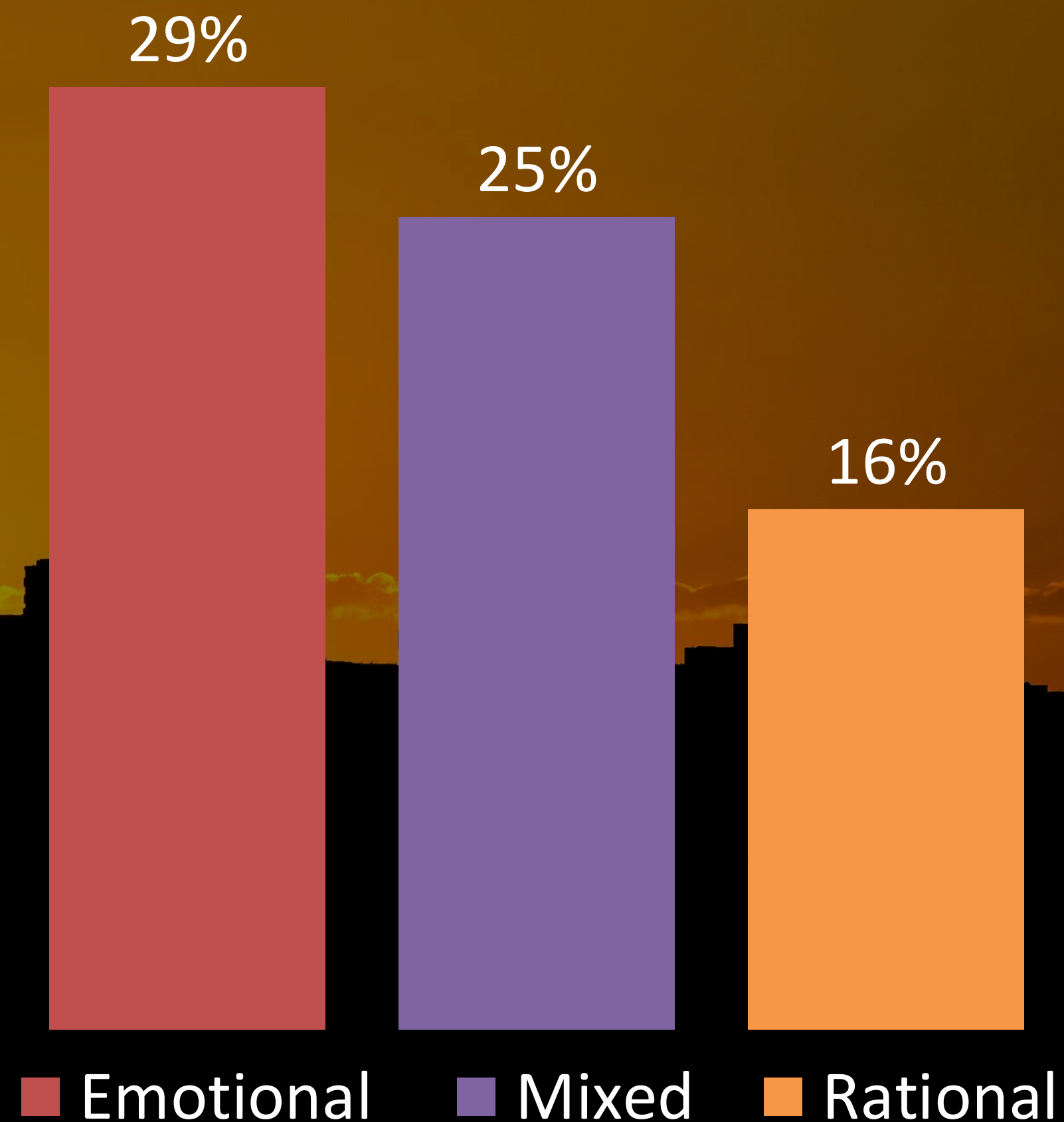
In 2026, South Africans aren't seeking facts - they're seeking feeling.

Campaigns that spark emotion drive almost double the profit growth of those anchored in logic.

Joy, confidence, and optimism are the national mood music - and brands that tune into it win hearts and share of wallet.

Source: IPA Effectiveness Awards analysis 2020-2025"

## % Profit Growth per Campaign Type





# Thank you!

**TimeOut**

**SOUTH AFRICA**



**SoundInsights**

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bringing people & media together

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