

AFRO BAROMETER

Afrobarometer Paper No. 24

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN SOUTH AFRICA: THE PEOPLE'S VIEW

by Robert Mattes, Christiaan Keulder,
Annie B. Chikwana, Cherrel Africa, and
Yull Derek Davids

**A comparative series of national public
attitude surveys on democracy, markets
and civil society in Africa.**



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Democratic Governance In South Africa: The People's View

Executive Summary

South Africa is now eight years into its inclusive democracy. The overall direction and success of this democratic experiment can be judged with various types of evidence. This report focuses on one type, that is, the opinions of South African citizens about the overall direction of their new democracy. Rather than looking to expert judgments or to measures of formal rights, we believe that the views of ordinary citizens, as the ultimate consumers of what democratic governments supply, can offer perhaps the most conclusive assessment of the quality of democratic governance.

The Afrobarometer

This evidence is supplied by the South African version of the Afrobarometer. The Afrobarometer is an international collaborative enterprise of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa), the Centre for Democracy and Development in Ghana (CDD-Ghana), and Michigan State University. Round 2 of the Afrobarometer is currently conducted in 15 counties across the continent between July 2002 and July 2003. In South Africa, Idasa commissioned Citizen Surveys (Pty.)Ltd. to carry out the fieldwork. Citizen Surveys interviewers travelled to 600 randomly selected sites across the country to interview a random stratified nationally representative sample of 2,400 South Africans between 13 September and 13 October 2002. A sample size of this size yields overall estimates that are accurate to within +/- 2 percentage points.

Key Findings

In general, all South Africans are becoming more positive about the overall democratic regime, and more optimistic about where it will be in ten years time. Yet within that outer shell, South Africans offer a great deal of negative assessments about how the country is actually governed, assessments to which South Africa's government would do well to listen.

- 54 percent now give an overall positive mark to "our current system of government," up 18 points since 1995 when only 36 percent did so. 46 percent of whites offer a positive assessment compared to only 12 percent in 1995.
- 74 percent offer an optimistic evaluation of how they believe the political system will be in 10 years time. Whites' positive assessments have increases from 24 percent in 1995 to 44 percent.

The democratic system enjoys an important, but insufficiently wide base of popular legitimacy. As a form of political authority, the "reach" of the democratic political system is quite limited.

- Just two thirds feel that instruments of state authority such as the Courts (68 percent), Police (67 percent) or Revenue Service (60 percent) have the right to make people abide by their decisions and rules. Only 60 percent feel that the Constitution reflects the values and aspirations of all South Africans.
- Popular trust in political institutions remains at relatively low levels. Just over one third trust the President (37 percent), and just under a third trust Parliament (31 percent). One quarter trust their Provincial Government (28 percent), Premier (28 percent) or Local Government (24 percent).

- Trust in other institutions has declined sharply since 2000 such as the SABC (from 62 percent to 47 percent), the IEC (49 to 31 percent) and SANDF (41 percent to 32 percent).

Public assessments of the amount and quality of democracy supplied by the political system are declining.

- Just one half (47 percent) of all South Africans say that the country is fully or largely democratic, down sharply from 60 percent two years ago. Another one-third (37 percent) say the country is democratic but with “major problems.”
- Just one in ten feel that elected leaders act in their best interests (13 percent) or listen to what they have to say (11 percent) “all” or “most of the time.” More than one third say they “never” do this.
- Forty-four percent are “satisfied with the way democracy works in South Africa,” down from 52 percent in 2000 and 63 percent in 1998.

One of the few positive results to come out of this set of results are that public assessments of the extent of official corruption have improved significantly over the past two years. While large majorities still think corruption exists in government, people seem to think that a smaller proportion of public officials are involved.

- The proportion saying “all” or “most” government officials are involved in corruption fell from 50 to 27 percent in 2002, for MPs it fell from 45 to 22 percent, and for the President’s Office from 25 to 13 percent.

While people are confident that government can solve the major problems facing the country, not everyone is convinced that it has the capacity to enforce its rules. People’s experiences obtaining services from government also suggest important problems of state capacity.

- Over a majority still feel that government can solve “all” (17 percent) or “most” (40 percent) of this country’s major problems. Just one in ten say “very few” (11 percent) or “none” (2 percent).
- While most people have found it easy to obtain government services to register to vote (86 percent), get a place for a child in a primary school (77 percent), or get an official document (70 percent), just one half say its easy to get a household service (50 percent), and four in ten say its easy to get help from the police (40 percent). Just 23 percent say its easy to get a government loan or grant.
- An average of just 1 in 20 tell us that they have been victimized in the past year by corrupt officials while trying to obtain these government services.
- While a wide majority feel that authorities could enforce the law if they commit a crime (78 percent), avoided tax (69 percent), or get services without paying (66 percent), significant proportions feel that they would stand a better chance to get away with such offences.

Public responses confirm that there are strong regional disparities in government capacity.

- For instance, while just one in ten people in Northern Cape (12 percent) or one in five in Western Cape (22 percent) reported difficulty obtaining household services, this was true of four

in ten in Northwest (42 percent), KwaZulu-Natal (44 percent), and one half of people in Limpopo (55 percent).

- An average of one in ten felt they could get away a crime, or not paying taxes or for services in Northern Cape (11 percent), or Western Cape, Free State, Northwest or Gauteng (13 percent each), in contrast to 22 percent in KwaZulu-Natal and 32 percent in Limpopo..
- Just 1 percent reported encounters with corrupt government officials in Free State and Northern Cape, compared to 6 percent in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal and 13 percent in Limpopo.

Following a sharp drop in job approval in 2000, public evaluations of the performance of key political leaders over the past twelve months has remained relatively constant.

- One half the public approve of the job President Thabo Mbeki (51 percent) has done over the past year. Under one half are satisfied with the performance of the Members of Parliament (45 percent), Members of Provincial Legislative Assembly (37 percent), Premier (43 percent) and Local Councillors (23 percent).
- The most popular Premiers are Limpopo's Adv Ngoako Ramathlodi (74 percent), Free State's Ms Isabella Winkie Dariko (59 percent) and Northern Cape's Mr Manne Dipico (53 percent). The least popular are Gauteng's Mr Mbhazima Shilowa (36 percent), Eastern Cape's Rev Makhenkesi Stofile (33 percent) and Western Cape's Marthinus Van Schalkwyk (20 percent).
- Public dissatisfaction with local government continues. No sign that the massive reorganization that culminated in the 2000 local government elections has had any positive impact in terms of greater public esteem. Forty percent of those who live in small towns approved of the performance of their Councillors compared to 34 percent of those who live in rural areas and 27 percent of those who live in a metropolitan local authority.
- Public approval of government policy is strongest with regard to the provision of welfare payments (73 percent), education (61 percent), and health services (54 percent).
- However, government comes in for quite critical evaluations with regard to managing the economy (38 percent), its policy toward Zimbabwe (31 percent), fighting corruption (29 percent), reducing crime (23 percent), making sure everyone has enough to eat (17 percent), narrowing the income gap (19 percent), controlling prices (17 percent) and creating jobs (9 percent).

Of possibly greatest concern, South Africans across the board seem to feel that the country is being governed no better than it was under the apartheid regime.

- Just 32 percent of all respondents (and just 38 percent of blacks) think that government is more trustworthy today than it was under apartheid. Only 24 percent (26 percent of black respondents) feel that it is less corrupt. 39 percent (43 percent of blacks) say it is better able to enforce the law. And 41 percent (46 percent of blacks) feel it is more effective in delivering services.

While much of this may be fuelled by a fading memory of just what life used to be like then, the fact that such perceptions exist signals some deeply rooted problems in how the state and government not only "deliver" services and economic goods to ordinary people, but also how it represents and interacts with citizens.

Democratic Governance In South Africa: The People's View

South Africa is now eight years into its inclusive democracy. The overall direction and success of this democratic experiment can be judged with various types of evidence. This report focuses on one type of evidence, that is, the opinions of South African citizens about the overall direction of their new democracy. That is, rather than looking to measures based on expert judgments or the existence of formal constitutional rights, we believe that the views of ordinary citizens, as the ultimate consumers of what democratic governments supply, can offer perhaps the most conclusive assessment of the quality of democratic governance.

We use public opinion measures to assess democratic governance in South Africa from several different angles. We begin by assessing people's views of the overall authority and legitimacy of the democratic political system, as well as the degree of trust and confidence they place in the occupants of that system. Then we turn to look at popular assessments of the quality of governance, focussing specifically on popular assessments of how much democracy is supplied by the political system, as well as the degree to which it is free of corruption.

We also use public opinion to offer fresh insight into the capacity of South Africa's democratic system: that is, to what extent are citizens confident that it has the capacity to address this society's pressing problems. Do people believe that government is able to enforce its own laws and rules on people who break them. Finally, we ask people about their actual interactions with government to tell us whether government has the capacity to deliver services to its citizens effectively. To what extent are people able to make use of a range of government services, and to do so with ease and without being victimized by corrupt officials?

We then move to a discussion of more traditional measures of public approval of government performance, information that can provide elected leaders and policy-makers with a level of popular feedback that can fill the long gaps between elections, and do so with a level of precision that election results themselves cannot provide.

Finally, we ask people to judge the overall direction of democratic governance by getting them to compare the way government works today to the way it worked during the apartheid era, as well as to express their hopes and fears about the future of democratic governance in South Africa.

Methodology

This evidence is supplied by the South African version of the Afrobarometer. Idasa commissioned Citizen Surveys (Pty.) Ltd. to carry out the fieldwork and draw the sample with the assistance of the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE). The sample was based on the 1996 Census. Enumerator Areas were stratified by province, race, and type of area (urban, rural) and 600 were randomly chosen in with the probability proportionate to population. However, disproportionate oversamples were drawn in Northern Cape and among Indian respondents to ensure sufficient numbers of cases for analysis. A gender quota was introduced to ensure that every other interview was done with a female. All interviews were then post-weighted to ensure that they were reflected proportionately. The questionnaire was translated into all 11 official national languages; interviewers were all fluent in the languages of the areas in which they lived; and each respondent was able to choose the language of the interview.

Citizen Surveys interviewers travelled to the 600 randomly selected Enumerator Areas and conducted four random interviews at each site between 13 September and 13 October 2002 to obtain

a random stratified nationally representative sample of 2,400 South Africans. This sample size yields overall estimates that are accurate to within +/- 2 percentage points.

Legitimacy

The Moral Authority of the State

A democratic government cannot make every decision based on consensus, nor can it afford to take a vote on every policy decision, especially those decisions that are matters of executive and administrative policy (rather than legislation). Almost all legislative and administrative policy outcomes will be opposed by significant minorities, and sometimes even by majorities. As Abraham Lincoln put it: "You can't please all the people, all of the time."

Neither could any government last if it had to coerce people to obey every decision at the point of a gun. Thus, any government depends on a widely held sense of legitimacy amongst the citizenry in order to obtain popular compliance with its decisions without having to resort to force. A sense of legitimacy gives government decisions a form of moral authority. At its broadest, this sense of legitimacy comprises the belief that those in power have a right to make binding decisions, and that those decisions ought to be obeyed even if one disagrees with a specific decision. This sense may flow from the fact that the rules that govern the state (e.g. the Constitution) reflect widely accepted values and norms. It may flow from the fact the occupants of the state (the incumbents) can be trusted to do the right thing most of the time. Legitimacy may also flow from the fact that those in government are free of corruption, respond to public opinion, and tend to govern effectively.

Legitimacy constitutes a form of "diffuse" support for a political system, a form of support that does not have to be earned but rather inheres in the institutions of the political system rather than the current occupants of those institutions (which is referred to as "specific" support).¹ A legitimate political system is one that can depend on compliance from citizens, business, and civil society not simply because they happen to agree with its decisions, but because people understand that the government has the right to make laws, and that those laws ought to be obeyed because, in the words of the South African Broadcasting Corporation's license payment campaign, "it's the right thing to do."² According to David Easton, diffuse support constitutes a "reserve of support that enables a system to weather the many storms when [policy] outputs cannot be balanced off against [popular] input demands. It is a kind of support that a system does not have to buy with more or less direct benefits."³ A legitimate political system is likely to be a more stable political system. Legitimacy acts as a buffer to cushion the system against shocks from short-term dissatisfaction with policy and performance.⁴ It should bring about more cooperative behaviour on the part of its citizens; they are more likely to obey the law and refrain from anti-system behaviour (e.g. protest) if they view the sources of those laws as legitimate.⁵

How much legitimacy has accrued to South Africa's new political institutions? Is there yet a widely shared belief that it has a right to make decisions, and that people ought to comply with those decisions whether or not they agree with them? Responses to this set of questions suggest that while the South African democratic political system enjoys an important base of legitimacy amongst a majority of the population, it is not yet widespread or consensual. Large proportions of the public do not automatically defer to the authority of the Constitution or state enforcement agencies.

While experts say that South Africa has one of the most progressive Constitutions in the world, the public's view is rather different. Sixty percent of South Africans agree that the "constitution expresses the values and aspirations of the South African people." A similar proportion (60 percent) agrees that "the tax department (SARS) always has the right to make people

pay taxes.” A larger proportion of two thirds feel that the Courts have the right to “make decisions that people always have to abide by” (68 percent) and that the police “always have the right to make people obey the law” (67 percent).

There is no evidence that these perceptions are becoming more positive. The proportion who now say that the Constitution symbolizes the hopes and principles of the nation is statistically no different than it was four years ago. However, there is some evidence that this base of legitimacy, while not high may be becoming shared across important societal dividing lines. While we see racial differences in responses, they are not nearly as large as we might have witnessed in past. In terms of respect for the Constitution, black respondents are significantly more favourable than Indian, white and coloured. White respondents have become far more positive about the Constitution over the past five years.

Yet the pattern reverses itself when it comes to the authority of the SARS with four fifths of whites, far more than any other group, adamant that it should always be able to make people pay taxes (though this could also probably result from a perception amongst whites that they shoulder a disproportionate share of the tax burden or that others are able to get away with not paying their fair share).⁶ In 1998, more than double the number of black respondents saw the constitution as legitimate, compared to just a 10 percentage point difference in 2002. We see no real substantial differences in legitimacy when we examine these attitudes by income, education, age, or gender.

State Legitimacy in South Africa (2002)

	South Africa	Black	White	Coloured	Indian
Our constitution expresses the values and aspirations of the South African people.	60	65	55	44	56
The courts have the right to make decisions that people always have to abide by.	68	70	65	62	60
The police always have the right to make people obey the law	67	70	67	54	53
The tax department (SARS) always has the right to make people pay taxes	60	58	80	52	52

% “Agree / Strongly Agree”

State Legitimacy in South Africa (1998-2000)

	November 1998	July / August 2000	September / October 2002
Total	58	59	60
Black	65	67	65
White	30	25	55
Coloured	50	55	44
Indian	49	30	56

“Our constitution expresses the values and aspirations of the South African people.” (% “Agree / Strongly Agree”)

Trust In Political Institutions

A sense of trust or confidence in political institutions is another facet of legitimacy. Ideally, trust should also provide a form of support for the political system that is independent of the type of support gained through popular satisfaction with current policy output.⁷ Our interest in trust is based on the notion that citizens do not have to watch their leaders constantly, that they can trust them to act in their interests in the great majority of cases where democratic leaders are unable to canvass public opinion. As with the sense of the moral authority of the state, a sense of trust in government can serve as a reservoir of support that can take a country through difficult economic periods or the inevitable tradeoffs during severe transformation.

To what degree do South Africans trust their leaders? Evidence from opinion surveys since 1995 suggests the following. While there are some important variations, around one third now place a high level of trust in political and state institutions, and slightly more than one third places a small amount of trust in them. But around one quarter say they don't trust these institutions at all. Where we have over time data, the clear pattern has been a sharp decrease in trust over the past four years.

The 2002 Afrobarometer asked people for their level of trust in 16 different institutions of the political system. To help make sense of public attitudes, we performed what is known as Factor and Reliability Analysis on the responses to all 16 items. Factor Analysis helps us understand whether the electorate see all these institutions in the same light, and respond to all of them in more or less the same general pattern, or whether they see one specific subset of institutions in a different way than others.

What we discovered was that people (at least in the most recent survey) seem to make subtle, but important distinctions when they respond to these items, and differentiate between four subsets of institutions. First, survey respondents offer the same pattern of responses to questions about the African National Congress and the institutions they dominate. That is people tend to offer the same type of responses to questions about Parliament, the President and the "ruling party" (or the ANC). But importantly, they also seem to see the Independent Electoral Commission, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and "public corporations such as Telkom, Eskom and SpoorNet" in the same light. Second, respondents offer a different set of coherent responses to lower level institutions of democracy: their local council, provincial government and provincial premier. Third, there is also a separate cluster or responses to the institutions of state authority and enforcement, the police, army and courts, but which also curiously includes traditional leaders and "opposition parties." A final object of specific attitudes comprise the independent news media (E-TV and newspapers).

We begin by examining changing levels of popular trust in the ANC and the institutions associated with it in the popular mind. As of September-October 2002, just over one third (37 percent) say they have "a lot" or "a very great deal" of trust in President Thabo Mbeki, while another 41 percent say they have "a little bit" of trust in him. This is a slight decrease from 2000, though there has been a small change in the wording of the question responses. At that point, 41 percent felt they could trust the President "most" or "almost all of the time." But both figures recorded during the Mbeki Administration are far lower than those recorded during the Mandela era. While 46 percent of blacks respondents trust Mbeki, just 11 percent of white respondents do.

Similarly, one-third place a high level of trust in Parliament (31 percent), which is down slightly from the 34 percent in 2000 and more sharply from the 57 percent of 1998. The sharpest fall-offs have occurred among black respondents, 70 percent of whom expressed high levels of trust in November 1998, falling to just 39 percent in the last two surveys.

Trust In the President (1997-2002)

	June / July 1997	November 1998	July / Aug 2000	Sept / Oct 2002
Total	61	73	41	37
Black	70	84	48	46
White	25	36	17	11
Coloured	47	49	33	24
Indian	27	44	4	27

1997-2000-- % "Most of the Time / Almost All of the Time"

2002 - % "A Lot / A Very Great Deal"

Trust In Parliament (1995-2002)

	Sept / Nov 1995	June / July 1997	November 1998	July / Aug 2000	Sept / Oct 2002
Total	45	42	57	34	31
Black	53	50	70	39	39
White	24	13	18	11	10
Coloured	33	27	32	30	17
Indian	31	20	26	7	23

1997-2000 - % "Most of the Time / Almost All of the Time"

2002 - % "A Lot / A Very Great Deal"

While only one third say they trust the "ruling party," the ANC (33 percent), 43 percent say they trust "public corporations, such as Telkom, Eskom or Spoornet." Trust has fallen sharply since 2000 in the IEC (31 percent, down from 49 percent in 2000) and the SABC (47 percent, down from the 62 percent registered in 2000). It is not clear to what has triggered the decline in trust of the IEC since it has undertaken no major public activities in this span. It may have suffered from a generalized decline of trust in political authority, and, or suffered from association with other government "commissions" that have been more active during this period. The SABC's image may have been harmed by recent widespread public criticism of government legislation that critics say intended to bring the SABC under tighter governmental control.

Trust in South African Institutions (2000-2002)

	2000	2002
The Ruling Party	NA	33
Public Corporations, such as Telkom, Eskom or Spoornet	NA	43
Electoral Commission	49	31
State Broadcasting Corporation	62	47

2000 - % "Most of the Time / Almost All of the Time"

2002 - % "A Lot / A Very Great Deal"

In general, trust in provincial government has been cut in half, from 49 percent in 1998 to 28 percent in 2002. While there are significant racial differences, the far more interesting variations occur along provincial lines. As was true in 2000, the Free State government enjoys the highest levels of popular trust, while the government of Western Cape has now sunk to the lowest level of all nine provinces.

For the first time in 2002, we also asked about trust in the Premier of the province, and found an identical level of trust (28 percent). Given that the Premier is often the most, if not the only visible part of provincial government in the public eye, we can see a tight linkage between public attitudes toward the Premier and the provincial government in general. There are a few exceptions: the Premiers of Free State, Limpopo and Northern Cape, Winkie Dariko (57 percent), Ngoako Ramathlodi (51 percent) and Manne Dipico (39 percent) enjoy even higher levels of trust than the governments they lead.

Popular trust in local government has never been very high since the creation of transitional local authorities in 1995. This continues to be the case two years since the inauguration of the reinvented local authorities in 2000. Just one-fifth (20 percent) say they trust their local government. When broken down along the new types of local authorities, 15 percent of those citizens who live in a Metropolitan authorities trust it, as compared to 25 percent trust in towns and small towns, and 21 percent in rural areas. Within the specific metropolitan government, only 7 percent of respondents in Cape Town trust their local council (42 percent say they trust it "not at all"); 14 percent in Nelson Mandela metro, 14 percent across the three Gauteng metros, and 29 percent in Durban.

Trust In Provincial Government By Province (1995-2002)

	Sept / Nov 1995	June / July 1997	November 1998	July / Aug 2000	Nov 2002
Free State	47	49	48	45	51
Limpopo	30	50	57	35	41
KwaZulu / Natal	21	28	39	22	35
Northern Cape	38	21	61	20	31
Mpumalanga	57	43	75	19	31
Gauteng	35	42	44	28	23
North West	42	39	64	41	19
Eastern Cape	24	28	52	20	17
Western Cape	32	33	35	27	15
Total	32	37	49	28	28

1997-2000 -- % "Most of the Time / Almost All of the Time"

2002 - % "A Lot / A Very Great Deal"

Trust in Provincial Government and Premier (2002)

	Provincial Government	Premier
Gauteng	23	23
Mpumalanga	31	30
Limpopo	41	51
North West	19	19
KwaZulu / Natal	35	30
Free State	51	57
Eastern Cape	17	15
Northern Cape	31	39
Western Cape	15	12
Total	28	28

Trust In Local Government (1995-2000)

	Sept / Nov 1995*	Sept / Nov 1995**	June / July 1997	November 1998	July / Aug 2000	Sept / Oct 2002
Total	16	33	31	39	23	20
Black	9	41	35	44	25	23
White	36	14	19	23	11	10
Coloured	21	26	23	28	22	10
Indian	13	14	14	21	14	24

1997-2000-- % "Most of the Time / Almost All of the Time"

2002 - % "A Lot / A Very Great Deal"

* View of Old Apartheid Era Local Government

** Expectation of New Town Councils

Over the past two years, trust in the South African Defence Force has declined sharply from 44 to 36 percent, possibly due to the Army's widely publicized problems maintaining readiness. Trust in the police has remained constant, but low at 35 percent, and view of the Courts of Law have declined four percentage points from 43 to 39 percent. Finally, 19 percent say they trust traditional leaders and just 12 percent say they trust "opposition parties" in general.

Trust in South African Institutions (2000-2002)

	2000	2002
Courts of law	43	39
The police	35	35
The Army	44	32
Traditional Leaders	NA	19
Opposition Parties	NA	11

2000 - % "Most of the Time / Almost All of the Time"

2002 - % "A Lot / A Very Great Deal"

Consistent with the fall in trust in several other institutions, we see a sharp fall in expressed trust in newspapers, from 58 to 33 percent. 43 percent say they trust South Africa's independent broadcaster, E-TV.

Trust in Independent Media (2000-2002)

	2000	2002
Independent Press / Newspapers	58	33
Independent Broadcasting Services (E-TV)	NA	43

Trust in Government, South Africa (2002)

	Not at all	A little bit	A lot	A very great deal	Don't Know / haven't heard enough
The President	18	41	27	8	4
Parliament	20	43	25	7	6
Provincial Government	23	40	23	5	9
Provincial Premier	25	36	23	5	12
Your local government	31	38	16	4	10
The Ruling Party	25	35	24	9	7
Opposition Parties	44	32	10	2	12
The Army	24	37	25	7	7
The police	22	41	28	8	2
Courts of law	15	39	29	10	6
Traditional leaders	31	33	14	5	16
Electoral Commission	19	36	22	8	13
State Broadcasting Corporation (SABC TV or Radio)	12	34	33	14	8
Independent broadcasting services (E-TV)	12	33	30	13	12
Independent Press / Newspapers	14	41	26	9	10
Public Corporations (such as Telkom, Eskom and Spoornet)	14	32	29	14	11

How much do you trust each of the following or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

In general, race and province exercise the strongest demographic impact on trust in institutions. In general, all of these institutions are also more likely to be trusted by rural people (rather than urban), and by those with less (rather than more) formal education.

How Democratic?

In a new democracy, whether or not people feel that their political system is legitimate and trustworthy may have a lot to do with a series of questions about the democratic and human rights content of the political system. First, how democratic is the country? Secondly, how satisfied are people with the way democracy works? Third, is the system responsive to people's needs and opinions? And finally, in the context of a country in transition, to what extent do people feel that the new regime has delivered to them political freedoms?

The perceived extent of democracy in South Africa appears to differ sharply depending on whom you ask. International analysts often give the country very favourable ratings. Freedom House, the critical international watchdog of democracy and civil liberties, defines South Africa as “free” meaning that is judged to protect a full range of political freedoms and civil rights.⁸ Larry Diamond has called it a “liberal democracy,” one of the few in Africa.⁹

In contrast, less than one half of all South Africans (47 percent) currently think the country’s level of democracy is acceptable. One in ten (13 percent) say it is a “full democracy” and one third (34 percent) say it’s a democracy “but with minor problems.” Thirty seven percent agree that it’s a democracy, but with “major problems” and almost one in ten (7 percent) say it’s “not a democracy.” This represents a sharp downward revision in the perceived “supply” of democracy from the political system as 60 percent said the country was wholly or largely democratic just two years ago, with the proportion who say the country is “completely democratic” has dropped in half from 26 to 13 percent.

How Democratic Is the Way Your Country Is Governed (2002)

	Total	Black	White	Coloured	Indian
A full democracy	13	14	7	12	14
A democracy, but with minor problems	34	38	28	24	29
A democracy, with major problems	37	34	43	39	36
Not a democracy	7	7	6	7	14
Don't know	7	4	13	12	6
Do not understand question	3	3	3	8	2

In your opinion how much of a democracy is South Africa today?

How Democratic Is the Way Your Country Is Governed (2000-2002)

	July / August 2000	October / November 2002
Total	60	47
Black	65	52
White	42	35
Coloured	52	36
Indian	24	43

% “Full Democracy / Democracy With Minor Problems”

Government Responsiveness to Public Opinion

Besides the existence of regular, free and fair elections, perhaps the ultimate indicator of the health of representative democracy is the extent to which elected officials actually listen to and respond to public opinion and people’s interests. In order to measure people’s perceptions of the extent of government responsiveness to public opinion, we asked people “How much of the time do you think elected leaders, like parliamentarians or local councilors, try their best to look after the interests of people like you” and “to listen to what people like you have to say?” Just 13 percent felt that elected leaders tried to look after the interests of ordinary people “always” or “most of the time” and 11 percent felt they listened to public opinion. Fully one third (35 percent) said they “never” looked after people’s interests and another four in ten (39 percent) felt they “never” listened to ordinary people.¹⁰ This picture of government responsiveness is low across the board, with few important differences by race or any other demographic characteristic like education, gender, income or age.

Governmental Responsiveness, South Africa (2002)

	Never	Some of the Time	Most of the Time	Always	Don't Know / haven't heard enough
Look after the interest of people like you?	35	51	11	2	2
Listen to what people like you have to say?	39	47	9	2	3

How much of the time do you think elected leaders, like parliamentarians or local councillors, try their best to:

Finally, the Afrobarometer also asks a standard international survey question about whether people are “satisfied with the way democracy works” in their country. Less than half (44 percent) are either “very” or “fairly” satisfied, eight points lower than in 2000 (52 percent) and 19 points lower than in 1998 (63 percent).

Satisfaction With Democracy in South Africa (2002)

	Total	Black	White	Coloured	Indian
Very satisfied	10	12	3	11	5
Fairly satisfied	34	35	25	38	28
Not very satisfied	28	28	36	18	27
Not at all satisfied	19	19	20	17	27
South Africa is not a democracy	3	2	4	2	9
Don't Know	7	4	12	15	3

Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in South Africa? Are you:

Satisfaction With Democracy, by Race (1995-2002)

	Sept / Nov 1995	June / July 1997*	November 1998	July / August 2000	October / November 2002
Total	41	38	63	52	44
Black	47	45	74	59	47
White	23	7	28	26	28
Coloured	40	25	44	40	49
Indian	38	13	33	11	33

% “Fairly Satisfied / Very Satisfied”

** 5 pt scale*

How Corrupt?

The other key evaluation that may shape perceptions of government legitimacy and trustworthiness is the public’s judgment as to whether their representatives and government officials govern honestly. Idasa and Afrobarometer surveys from 1995 to 2000 have consistently found a widespread sense that significant proportions of government officials were involved in corruption. In 2002, however, we find important, positive changes in public opinion.

As of September-October 2002, just over one third (38 percent) of South Africans now say that “most” or “all” government officials are involved in corruption: Similarly, 23 percent now think “most” or “all” elected leaders, such as parliamentarians and local government councilors are corrupt. Also, 13 percent think that a similar proportion of officials in the President’s office are corrupt.

These figures represent a significant decline in public perceptions of corruption. The proportions who perceive significant levels of corruption in Parliament have dropped from 45 to 22

percent in 2002. Similarly, the figures for “government officials” have declined from 50 to 27 percent. It is also noteworthy that the stark racial differences in these perceptions seen over the past few years appear to be narrowing considerably.

Perceptions of Government Corruption, South Africa (2002)

	None	Some of them	Most of them	All of them	Don't know / Haven't heard enough to say
The President and Officials in his office	26	42	8	5	18
Elected Leaders, such as parliamentarians or local councillors	13	53	17	6	12
Government officials	11	52	22	5	10
Police	7	49	30	8	7
Border officials (e.g. customs and immigration)	12	36	20	9	25
Judges and magistrates	21	44	11	4	20

How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% "All of them / Most-of them")

Perceived Corruption in President's Office (1995-2002)

	June / July 1997	Sept / Oct 2002
Total	25	13
Black	23	10
White	42	21
Coloured	17	16
Indian	30	30

1995-2000: % "All, Almost All / Most"

2002: % "All of them / Most of Them"

Perceived Corruption Amongst Government Officials (1995-2002)

	Sept / Nov 1995	June / July 1997	July / Aug 2000	Sept / Oct 2002
Total	46	50	50	27
Black	48	49	47	25
White	48	61	67	30
Coloured	31	39	42	26
Indian	35	48	73	41

1995-2000: % "All, Almost All / Most"

2002: % "All of them / Most of Them"

Perceived Corruption Amongst Members of Parliament (1995-2002)

	June / July 1997	November 1998	July / Aug 2000	Sept / Oct 2002
Total	41	44	45	22
Black	39	40	42	21
White	58	59	61	26
Coloured	36	41	35	21
Indian	42	56	78	36

1995-2000: % "All, Almost All / Most"

2002: % "All of them / Most of Them"

(2002) Elected Leaders, such as parliamentarians or local councillors

What should we make of these apparent positive, downward shifts in cynical views of government honesty? First of all, note that large majorities of citizens still perceive some levels of corruption in government. What seems to have shifted is the public's estimate of the scope of the problem. A large number of respondents who in past years have answered that "most" officials were corrupt now seem to have shifted their assessments downward to say that "some of them" are (though there is also a significant jump in the numbers of people who feel that "no" government officials are corrupt).

It is also possible that slight changes in question wording may have had a role to play. From 1995 to 2000, but not in 2002, Idasa and Afrobarometer surveys defined corruption for respondents as "where those in government and the civil service take money or gifts from the people and use it for themselves, or expect people to pay them money or a gift to do their job." This definition may have reminded respondents of the full array of type of corruption that they may not have considered if the question was asked on its own, as in 2002. The phrase "almost all" was removed in 2002, thus forcing respondents to choose the most extreme response to damn every single official in government.

Perceptions of Corruption: Government Officials (2000-2002)

	2000 "Officials in the Government"	2002 "Government Officials"	
All, Almost All	17	5	All of them
Most	34	22	Most of them
A Few, Some	36	52	Some of them
Almost none, None	4	11	None
Or haven't you had a chance to hear enough about them?	10	10	Don't know / Haven't heard enough

2000: "What about corruption? Corruption is where those in government and the civil service take money or gifts from the people and use it for themselves, or expect people to pay them extra money or a gift to do their job). How many _____ do you think are involved in corruption?"

2002: "How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?"

Perceptions of Corruption: Members of Parliament / Elected Officials (2000-2002)

	2000 "People in Parliament"	2002 "Elected leaders"	
All, Almost All	16	6	All of them
Most	30	17	Most of them
A Few, Some	38	53	Some of them
Almost None, None	5	6	All of them
Or haven't you had a chance to hear enough about them?	12	12	Don't know / Haven't heard enough

All that being said, there is no gainsaying the importance of such a trend. Significant proportions of South Africans seem to have revised their estimate of government corruption in a downward direction. What political events might be responsible for this? It could be due to high levels of publicity given to the efforts of the Scorpions, the South African Revenue Service, the censure of MP Winnie Mandela, and the parliamentary investigation into Arms Deal. Even though NGOs and the news media were skeptical the arms investigation, the attention that it and of all these actions drew may have been sufficient for ordinary people to conclude that something was being done to reduce the levels of public corruption.

How Much Capacity?

Another possible factor shaping the legitimacy and trustworthiness of the democratic political system may be people's sense of government's capacity to solve the important problems facing the country, to enforce the law, and to serve them as individuals. The 2002 Afrobarometer asked respondents about each of these.

Ability to Solve Problems

We find little evidence to suggest that South Africans have become cynical about the ability of government to address the major problems confronting the society. After asking people to tell us what the most important problems facing the country that government should address (a separate report focuses on exactly how South Africans define these problems¹¹), we then asked them "What proportion of this country's problems do you think government can solve? Fully four in ten (40 percent) say that government should be able to solve "most" of the problems facing the country; 29 percent expect government to solve at least "some of them." Only one in ten say that government can solve "very few" (11 percent) or "none" (2 percent).

Differences in racial categories and provincial categories appear to be the most important demographic factors that distinguish between perceptions of government capacity. But the direction of the racial impacts is not always consistent. Black respondents are most optimistic about the capacity of government to address most of society's problems, Indians the least.

Ability to Solve National Problems (2002)

	Total	Black	White	Coloured	Indian
All of them	17	19	11	15	8
Most of them	40	43	34	38	29
Some of them	29	27	38	28	30
Very few of them	11	9	13	14	25
None of them	2	2	2	3	8
Don't know	2	1	3	3	2

What proportion of this country's problems do you think government can solve?

An Accessible State?

Another indicator of public perceptions of government capacity is the extent to which they use government services, and feel that it is relatively easy to do so. A well governed state is not only one that is able to command compliance because people respect the law or the ability of the state to enforce the law, but it is also one in which people feel that they could approach the state to obtain important services without encountering a great deal of obstacles. We asked people: "Based on your experience, how easy or difficult is it to obtain the following services? Or do you never try and get these services from government?"

Over four fifths (86 percent) of South Africans feel that it is "easy" or "very easy" to register to vote (86 percent). Three quarters (77 percent) say it is easy or very easy to obtain a place in a primary school for a child. And seven in ten say it is easy to obtain an identity document (70 percent).

These proportions drop quite drastically, however, with regard to three other services. Just over one half (54 percent) of all South Africans say it is easy or relatively easy to obtain household services like water, electricity or a telephone, and just four in ten (41 percent) say it is easy to get help from the police. Indeed, one in ten (12 percent) say they "never try" to get help from the police. Finally, less than one quarter (23 percent) say it is easy to obtain a loan or payment from government

(and 32 percent say they never try). White respondents are most likely to think that the state could enforce the law if they or someone like themselves broke the law.

Accessibility of the State, South Africa (2002)

	Very Easy	Easy	Difficult	Very Difficult	Never Try	Don't Know
Registering to vote	35	51	8	2	3	2
A place in primary school for a child	31	46	10	3	6	3
An identity document (such as a birth certificate, driver's license, or passport)	28	42	19	9	2	<1
Household services (like piped water, electricity, or telephone)	19	36	20	15	8	2
Help from the police when you need it	10	31	27	18	12	2
A loan or payment from government (such as agricultural credit)	8	15	19	14	32	13

Based on your experience, how easy or difficult is it to obtain the following services? Or do you never try and get these services from government?)

Access to the State, by Race (2002)

	Identity document	Primary School placement	Household services	Register to vote	Loan	Police
Black	27 (1)	13 (7)	42 (12)	8 (4)	32 (46)	46 (16)
White	33 (3)	7 (18)	13 (9)	17 (7)	29 (50)	37 (10)
Coloured	16 (2)	13 (7)	25 (5)	5 (6)	33 (30)	50 (10)
Indian	47 (6)	14 (29)	30 (4)	26 (4)	45 (33)	44 (10)

% "Difficult / Very Difficult" (% "Don't Know / Never Try" In Brackets)

Public responses reveal stark regional disparities in government capacity: disparities that parallel the legacies of South Africa's fractured past. In general, government capacity, as manifested in these responses, is weakest in provinces incorporating former bantustan homelands: which means provincial governments that include large numbers of poorly trained former bantustan civil servants. For instance, while just one in ten respondents in Northern Cape (12 percent) or one in five in Western Cape (22 percent) reported difficulty obtaining household services, this was true of four in ten respondents in Northwest (42 percent), KwaZulu-Natal (44 percent) and one half in Limpopo (55 percent).

Yet the same patterns tend to repeat themselves even when it comes to national government responsibilities. For example, 4 percent and 9 percent of Northern and Western Cape respondents respectively report difficulties in obtaining an identity document, in contrast to one quarter of respondents in Mpumalanga (26 percent), Gauteng (28 percent), Limpopo (29 percent), one third in Eastern Cape (35 percent) and four in ten in KwaZulu-Natal (44 percent).

Perceptions of the “User Friendliness” of the State By Province (2002)

	Identity document	Primary school placement	Register to Vote	Household Services	Govt. Payment / Loan	Help from Police
Northern Cape	4 (2)	2 (4)	0 (2)	12 (6)	30 (40)	15 (16)
Free State	22 (1)	9 (20)	4 (5)	21 (10)	29 (49)	31 (11)
Northwest	15 (1)	4 (4)	7 (2)	42 (10)	36 (41)	62 (15)
Gauteng	28 (1)	13 (10)	15 (3)	27 (5)	33 (44)	47 (12)
Western Cape	9 (2)	8 (6)	4 (7)	22 (9)	35 (27)	53 (10)
Mpumalanga	26 (2)	21 (10)	9 (4)	36 (16)	27 (50)	45 (16)
Eastern Cape	35 (4)	16 (11)	15 (5)	38 (27)	26 (53)	49 (14)
KwaZulu Natal	44 (3)	19 (8)	12 (5)	44 (8)	36 (47)	40 (23)
Limpopo	29 (0)	21 (7)	3 (6)	55 (1)	34 (45)	40 (6)

% “Difficult / Very Difficult” (% “Don’t Know / Never Try” In Brackets)

Personal Experience With Government Corruption

Another aspect of the accessibility and usability of the state is the extent to which people are victimized by corrupt officials when they attempt to interact with it. Thus, regardless of whether people think government is corrupt, it is also important to know how much corruption do they actually encounter in their interactions with various parts of government?

We asked people how often in the past year they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for some public official in order to obtain from government a document or permit, receive a household service, get a child into school, cross a border, or avoid a problem with the police. Across all these areas where people interact with government, an average of 5 percent had to do so, ranging from a high of 6 percent who paid a bribe to a police officer to avoid some problem, to a low of 3 percent who encountered problems trying to cross an international border. This confirms our finding in the 1999-2000 Afrobarometer that personal experience or victimization by corruption are far lower than public perceptions thereof.¹²

In racial terms, blacks (6 percent) are only slightly more likely to encounter corruption in everyday encounters with government as Coloured (4 percent) and Indian respondents (3 percent), while all three are more likely than whites (2 percent). There is no evidence that people with lower levels of income, women, the less educated, or the elderly are especially likely to fall prey to official corruption. Of all the demographic factors at our disposal, province of residence appears to be the strongest predictor of whether or not one would be victimized by corrupt officials. Residents of Limpopo report being victimized at double the rate (an average of 13 percent across these different aspects) of provinces with the next highest prevalence, KwaZulu-Natal (6 percent) and Gauteng (6 percent).

Public Experience With Corruption, South Africa (2002)

	Never	Once or Twice	A Few Times	Often	Don't Know
Get a document or permit	94	4	1	1	1
Get a household service (liked piper water, electricity or phone)	94	2	1	2	1
Get a child into school	95	2	1	1	1
Cross a border	95	1	1	1	2
Avoid a problem with the police	93	3	1	2	1

In the past year, how often (if ever) have you had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favor to government officials in order to?

Personal Experience With Corruption, by Province (2002)

	Document / Permit	Household Service	School Placement	Border Crossing	Avoid Problem With Police	Average
Limpopo	11	17	7	14	18	13
KwaZulu Natal	7	7	7	3	4	6
Gauteng	7	6	5	3	9	6
Northwest	5	2	2	4	7	4
Mpumalanga	7	2	4	3	9	3
Western Cape	3	2	2	<1	4	2
Eastern Cape	2	2	2	1	2	2
Northern Cape	2	0	0	0	2	1
Free State	1	1	1	1	1	1

Ability to enforce the law

We have already seen that approximately seven in ten think that law enforcement agencies such as SARS, the Courts or the Police have the right to enforce the law in all occasions. Do, however, South Africans at least feel that such agencies have the capacity to do so? We addressed this issue by presenting respondents with three different types of law-breaking, and then asking them “How likely do you think it would be that the authorities could enforce the law if a person like yourself” did such a thing?

Eight in ten (78 percent) South Africans say it is “likely” or “very likely” that the “authorities could enforce the law” if they or a person like themselves “committed a serious crime.” However, significantly lower percentages felt this would happen if they failed to “pay a tax on some income they earned” (69 percent) or “obtained household services like electricity and water” “without paying failed to pay for a household service (66 percent). Interestingly, the sense that the state will enforce the law is wider than the perceived moral authority of the state’s enforcement agencies.

However, while these are important bases of respect for the state’s capacity to enforce the law, it is quite clearly not widespread enough. This means that 13 percent feel there is a good chance they could get away with committing a crime, 18 percent feel they could conceal tax and get away with it, and 22 percent think it’s quite possible to get their services without paying for them. While the question format and wording have changed slightly since 2000, it appears that there has been a slight increase in public estimates of the capacity of criminal enforcement, no change in the capacity of tax enforcement, and a slight decrease in the capacity of rates and services enforcement.

Perceived State Ability to Enforce the Law, South Africa (2002)

	Not at all likely	Not very likely	Likely	Very likely	Don't know
Committed a serious crime	6	7	34	44	9
Did not pay a tax on some income they earned	8	10	35	34	13
Obtained household services (like water and electricity) without paying	10	12	34	32	12

How likely do you think it would be that the authorities could enforce the law if a person like yourself?

Enforcing the Law

	2000	2002
Total	72	77
Black	74	77
White	66	82
Coloured	77	79
Indian	59	71

2000: What if a person like yourself committed a serious crime? How likely is it that the police would catch and charge them? (% Likely / Very Likely)

2002: How likely do you think it would be that the authorities could enforce the law if a person like yourself committed a serious crime? (% Likely / Very Likely)

Enforcing Tax Collection

	2000	2002
Total	71	69
Black	68	65
White	80	82
Coloured	81	73
Indian	85	70

2000: What about if a person like yourself cheated and did not pay a tax that they owed the government (like a tax on income they get from sources other than a normal salary?) How likely is it that the Receiver of Revenue (SARS) would find out and penalize them?" (% Likely / Very Likely)

2002: How likely do you think it would be that the authorities could enforce the law if a person like yourself did not pay a tax on some income they earned? (% Likely / Very Likely)

Enforcing Payment for Services

	2000	2002
Total	73	66
Black	70	63
White	84	78
Coloured	85	71
Indian	87	65

2000: And if a person like yourself were to obtain their services without paying for them (like water and electricity), how likely is that your local council would find out and cut off their services? (% Likely / Very Likely)

2002: How likely do you think it would be that the authorities could enforce the law if a person like yourself obtained household services (like water and electricity) without paying? (% Likely / Very Likely)

We have seen how provincial disparities in government capacity reflect the legacies of bantustan government. However, we can also see many of the same regional patterns in responses about enforcement capacity, which is largely a national rather than provincial responsibility. Thus, these patterns may also reflect a legacy of a limited presence of the Pretoria government in these

areas. For example, while an average of one in ten respondents feel they could get away with a crime or not paying taxes or rates in Northern Cape (11 percent), or Western Cape, Free State, Northwest or Gauteng (13 percent each), an average of one fifth of respondents in KwaZulu-Natal (22 percent) and almost one third of Limpopo (31 percent) respondents felt they could do so.

Perceptions of State Enforcement Capacity, by Province (2002)

	Commit a Serious Crime	Evaded Tax	Obtained Free Services	Average
Northern Cape	8	12	13	11
Free State	3	11	24	13
Western Cape	8	13	17	13
Northwest	12	14	12	13
Gauteng	8	13	17	13
Mpumalanga	13	20	21	18
Eastern Cape	16	21	26	21
KwaZulu Natal	20	24	26	22
Limpopo	23	34	36	31

% "Not Likely / % Not Likely At All"

Government Effectiveness

We now turn to examine South Africans evaluations of recent government performance, both at the general level, but also at a detailed level of specific policy performance. But before we examine these results, it is important to set the economic stage against which people evaluated government performance.

Recent Economic Trends

As of September-October 2002, more South Africans gave a negative assessment of their own personal living conditions (46 percent) than positive (38 percent). About as many say their own conditions had improved in the past year (32 percent) as had deteriorated (29 percent). However, more people were optimistic that their conditions would get better in the next twelve months (42 percent) than would get worse (13 percent). While there are few racial differences in assessments of present personal conditions (though Indians are significantly more positive), whites are far less positive in their evaluations of recent trends and much less optimistic about the future (along with Indians).

Evaluations of Personal Economic Conditions (2002)

	Very Bad	Fairly bad	Neither	Fairly good	Very good	Don't know
Present living conditions	23	23	17	32	6	1
	Much worse	Worse	Neither	Better	Much Better	Don't know
Your living conditions compared to 12 months ago	6	23	37	27	5	2
Expectations for own living conditions in 12 months time	6	17	24	28	14	11

Evaluations of Personal Economic Conditions, by Race (2002)

	Total	Black	White	Coloured	Indian
Your present living conditions	37	36	38	37	55
Your living conditions now compared to 12 months ago	33	33	21	30	30
Your living conditions in 12 months	42	49	17	41	20
Your living conditions vs. others	49	52	41	38	59

% "Fairly good / Very good" or "Better / Much Better"

However, as of September-October 2002, positive assessments of the national economy (33 percent) and of recent national economic trends (30 percent) were at the highest level recorded by any Idasa survey since 1995. Economic optimism also returned as 41 percent said they expected the national economy to improve over the next twelve months, up from only 29 percent in 2000.

Evaluations of the National Economy In South Africa (1995 to 2002)

	Sept / Nov 1995	June / July 1997	September 1998	Oct / Nov 1998	Feb/ March 1999	April 1999	Aug / Sept 2000	September / October 2002
Past Year	30	27	25	32	29	31	15	33
Present	NA	21	17	25	20	20	15	30
Future	NA	44	34	50	47	51	29	41

*% who says the national economy has improved over the **past year***

% satisfied with present economic conditions

*% who expect the national economy to improve in the **future**.*

Source: September 1998 to April 1999 surveys taken from Opinion '99

Overall, 44 percent felt that the country was headed in the "right direction," a nine percentage point increase over the 2000 survey. It is true, however, that overall optimism is still below the levels witnessed in the run up to the 1999 election, and far lower than those which characterized the country in 1994 and 1995. There are also racial differences in overall outlook: whereas 51 percent of blacks say we are headed in the right direction, 74 percent of Indians and 55 percent of whites think things are going in the "wrong direction."

Overall direction of the country

	June 1994	Nov 1994	May / June 1995	Nov 1995	May / June 1996	Nov 1996	June 1998	Sept 1998	Oct / Nov 1998	Feb / March 1999	April 1999	Aug / Sept 2000	Sept / Oct 2002
Right Direction	76	62	64	66	57	56	43	43	48	54	53	35	44
Wrong Direction	6	18	14	17	25	27	41	44	39	32	28	55	41
Don't know	18	20	22	17	18	17	16	13	14	14	19	10	16

"What about the overall direction of the country? Would you say that the country is going in the right direction, in the wrong direction or don't you know?"

Source: June 1994 to June 1998 surveys provided by Markinor; September 1998 to April 1999 taken from Opinion '99.

Overall Direction of Country, by Race

	June 1994	Nov 1994	May 1995	Nov 1995	May 1996	Nov 1996	May 1997	June 1998	Sept 1998	Oct / Nov 1998	Feb / Mar 1999	April 1999	Aug / Sept 2000	Sept / Oct 2002
Black	80	77	70	76	64	66	62	52	53	59	66	66	42	51
White	70	50	43	38	31	22	18	10	12	11	16	12	9	24
Coloured	73	54	60	58	49	50	35	29	23	26	31	35	25	39
Indian	77	55	57	47	44	28	24	9	17	18	23	17	9	21

% saying the country is going in the Right Direction

General Government Performance

Overall, public approval of political leaders stabilized between the 2000 and 2002 Afrobarometer surveys. As of September-October 2002, one half of all South Africans (51 percent) approved of the job President Mbeki had done in the previous twelve months. This is statistically the same rating as he received in our last Afrobarometer survey in July-August 2000. At that time, Mbeki's ratings had just slipped quite dramatically over the previous six months. While the overall rating has stayed at that level, it has recovered slightly among black respondents, now at 60 percent approval, up from 56 percent in 2000 as well as among Indian respondents.

Public approval of the performance of "Members of Parliament" has also remained steady, at 45 percent. Again, there has been some increase among black respondents, and a large one amongst Indian respondents, there has also been a drop in coloured approval of MPs job performance.

Nationally, approval of the performance of the Members of Provincial Assemblies has dropped two points, down to 37percent. Approval of the performance of Premiers increased by four points. However, both of these aggregate trends mask some important provincial variations. The highest ratings are given by Limpopo residents both to their MPLs and to their Premier Ngoako Ramathlodi. The case of Limpopo also demonstrates that effective political leadership, as well as recent growth in the provincial economy, can overcome many of the problems of a problematic state machinery. The government and Premiers of Free State and Northern Cape also receive relatively positive assessments. At the other end of the spectrum, the government and Premier of Western Cape received significantly worse evaluations than any other province. It should be noted however, that because of recent shuffles in party control of that province, 30 percent said they hadn't heard enough about the job of Marthinus Van Schalkwyk to have an opinion (compared to 12 to 18 percent for all other Premiers, with the exception of Limpopo where only 4 percent said they didn't know enough about Ramathlodi to rate him). The results for evaluations of provincial and local government in Western Cape reported throughout this report also emphasize that ineffective political leadership can squander many of the advantages of a relatively intact and efficient state bureaucracy.

Finally, while local government underwent a major transformation in the late 1990s and a new system was inaugurated in 2000, public approval of the job performance of local councillors stands at 33 percent nationally, about where it was in 2000.

However, we see important differences once we disaggregate the results. For example, 40 percent of blacks approve of their councillors' performance compared to around 20 percent of all other respondents. When broken down along the different types of local government designed by the recent reforms, we find that approval of local councillor performance stands at 40 percent in towns and small towns, compared to just 27 percent across the country's metropolitan local authorities, and 34 percent in rural areas. Looking within the major metropolitan councils, public satisfaction is lowest in Cape Town (21 percent), but not much better in the three Gauteng metro's (24 percent) or Nelson Mandela (26 percent). However, satisfaction is sharply higher in Durban (50 percent). Public approval of local government is highest in Free State (43 percent), KwaZulu-Natal

(41 percent) and Limpopo (41 percent), and lowest in Mpumalanga (31 percent), Northwest (31 percent), Gauteng (26 percent) and Western Cape (22 percent).

Presidential Job Approval

	Sept / Nov 1995	June / July 1997	November 1998	July / Aug 2000	Nov 2002
Total	76	64	79	50	51
Black	85	73	89	56	60
White	54	31	45	25	24
Coloured	61	52	64	48	40
Indian	59	33	45	9	42

% "Approve / Strongly Approve"

Members of Parliament Job Approval

	Sept / Nov 1995	June / July 1997	November 1998	July / Aug 2000	September October 2002
Total	53	46	64	45	45
Black	63	55	78	51	55
White	24	13	20	20	19
Coloured	39	31	41	42	27
Indian	48	24	37	16	29

% "Approve / Strongly Approve"

Provincial Government Job approval Ratings (by Province)

	Sept / Nov 1995	June / July 1997	November 1998	July / Aug 2000	September October 2002
Limpopo	91	40	70	52	60
Free State	86	54	57	64	51
Northern Cape	74	38	63	27	45
KwaZulu / Natal	74	26	48	34	38
Eastern Cape	87	25	57	33	35
North West	90	39	58	54	33
Gauteng	66	44	49	37	32
Mpumalanga	79	46	72	31	31
Western Cape	59	32	53	33	21
Total	76	36	56	39	37

1995-2000: Provincial Government

2002: Members of the Provincial Legislative Assembly

% "Approve / Strongly Approve"

Provincial Premier Job Approval (1998-2002)

	November 1998	July / Aug 2000	Nov 2002
Limpopo	61	54	74
Free State	45	64	59
Northern Cape	56	38	53
KwaZulu / Natal	48	33	47
Mpumalanga	63	31	41
North West	52	55	41
Gauteng	40	34	36
Eastern Cape	49	34	33
Western Cape	41	30	20
Total	49	39	43

% "Approve / Strongly Approve"

Local Government Job Approval, by Race (1997 to 2002)

	June / July 1997	November 1998	Aug / Sept 2000	October- November 2002
Total	30	44	31	33
Black	32	47	34	40
White	21	31	21	18
Coloured	27	46	33	19
Indian	19	29	22	23

% "Approve / Strongly Approve"

Specific Government Performance

We also asked people to offer a more detailed rating of government performance by asking people "How well would you say government is handling" a range of policy areas. The first important finding to emerge from this is the degree to which citizens are ready to discriminate across these policies, and criticize government in some areas and praise it in others.

Since 1994, Government has received quite positive evaluations in the areas of welfare and development. Associated with the Reconstruction and Development Programme. This is true, though to a slightly lesser extent, in 2002: government receives strong evaluations of its attempt to distribute welfare payments (73 percent), address the educational needs of all South Africans (61 percent), deliver basic services such like water and electricity (60 percent), and improve health services (54 percent). Importantly, 46 percent now say government is handling the issue of AIDS "fairly" or 'very well" up from the 38 percent measured in 2000 just following the international AIDS conference in Durban.

In terms of economic redistribution and equality the government received a mixed response. Just one in five (19 percent) say it has done a good job narrowing the income gap, a very significant decline over the past two years. Just one fifth feel it has done a good job making sure that everyone has enough to eat (21 percent). A somewhat positive rating was given to its handling of affirmative action (53 percent).

In the area of nation-building, 59 percent say the government has done a good job uniting all South Africans into one nation though approval of government's performance in this area during the Mbeki administration tends to be significantly lower than during the Mandela years.

However, when it comes to macro economic measures, government had received far less popular credit since 1994. In 2002, just 9 percent approved of its performance in job creation, 17 percent say it has done a good job controlling prices, and 38 percent approve of its performance in managing the overall economy. Ironically, it is in this area that the government has consistently won widespread praise from economic experts, foreign governments and international financial institutions.

The government continues to receive poor evaluations of its performance in reducing crime (23 percent). A new Afrobarometer question also finds that just 38 percent feel the government has done a good job reducing conflict between communities. Even though the public estimate of the extent of corruption appears to have improved, public opinions on government attempts to fight corruption are still negative (29 percent). Finally, public approval of the government's approach to Zimbabwe has moved in the opposite direction, with just 31 percent approving, down from 41 percent in 2000.

Economic Growth

	May-June 1995	Nov 1995	May/June 1996	Nov 1996	May/June 1997	Nov 1997	March 1998	Sept 1998	Oct Nov 1998	Feb / March 1999	April 1999	July 1999	Nov 1999	May 2000	July / Aug 2000	Nov 2002
Creating Jobs	33	31	36	26	36	32	23	12	23	18	24	24	25	20	10	9
Controlling Prices	30	37	38	30	40	39	36	--	33	--	42	40	46	41	17	17
Managing Economy	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	22	37	41	47	47	51	50	28	38

% "Fairly / Very Well"

Economic Redistribution and Equality

	May/June 1995	Nov 1995	May/June 1996	Nov 1996	May/June 1997	Nov 1997	March 1998	Oct/ Nov 1998	April 1999	July 1999	Nov 1999	May 2000	July / Aug 2000	Nov 2002
Narrowing Income Gap	43	46	52	47	52	53	45	57	59	55	59	50	23	19
Affirmative Action	53	53	58	55	62	60	43	63	64	--	63	58	48	54
Enough to eat	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	21

% "Fairly / Very Well"

Welfare and Development

	May/June 1995	Nov 1995	May/June 1996	Nov 1996	May/June 1997	Nov 1997	March 1998	Sept 1998	Oct / Nov 1998	Feb/ March 1999	April 1999	July 1999	Nov 1999	May 2000	July / Aug 2000	Oct/ Nov 2002
Education	61	64	70	60	67	69	52	47	55	--	64	60	65	63	49	61
Housing	34	36	38	32	44	52	47	53	54	54	61	62	65	55	50	--
Basic Services	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	67	68	68	72	74	75	72	61	60
Basic Health Services	69	62	74	68	71	73	67	57	64	68	66	66	68	65	43	54
Welfare Payments	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	65	67	69	71	67	53	73
HIV / AIDS	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	38	46
Combating malaria	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	41

% "Fairly / Very Well"

Law and Order

	May-June 1995	Nov 1995	May/June 1996	Nov 1996	May/June 1997	Nov 1997	Mar 1998	Sept 1998	Oct/Nov 1998	Feb/Mar 1999	April 1999	July 1999	Nov 1999	May 2000	July/Aug 2000	Nov 2002
Reducing Crime	42	40	45	31	41	40	31	17	27	19	26	32	28	36	18	23
Resolving conflicts between communities	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	38

% "Fairly / Very Well"

Good Government

	Sept 1998	Oct / Nov 1998	April 1999	July 1999	Nov 1999	May 2000	Aug/Sept 2000	Nov 2002
Fighting Corruption	26	37	44	45	48	42	30	29

% "Fairly / Very Well"

Nation-Building

	May-June 1995	Nov 1995	May-June 1996	Nov 1996	May-June 1997	Nov 1997	March 1998	Sept 1998	Oct - Nov 1998	April 1999	July 1999	Nov 1999	May 2000	Aug / Sept 2000	Nov 2002
Uniting all SA's Into One Nation	61	63	72	71	67	70	71	62	68	72	69	72	66	53	59

% "Fairly / Very Well"

Zimbabwe

	Aug/Sept 2000	Sept/ Oct 2002
Handling the Situation in Zimbabwe	41	31

% "Fairly / Very Well"

Comparing the Present With the Past

Influential analysts of democratic transitions in Eastern and Central Europe have pointed out that even while large proportions of people in the former communist republics may think their new government are corrupt and ineffective, they still see it as far better than what they endured prior to 1990.¹³ In other words, in new democracies, citizens' relative comparisons of that government with its alternatives may be more important than their absolute assessments of that government.

We have already seen South Africans' views on their trust in government, their sense of responsiveness, perceptions of corruption, and policy effectiveness. Now we review responses to questions that ask people whether their present governments are *more or less* trustworthy, responsive, corrupt, and effective, than government under the previous regime.

Thus we asked people, "Comparing the current government with the former Apartheid government, would you say the one we have now is more or less" trustworthy, corrupt, able to enforce the law, and able to deliver services. Just one fifth of South Africans (22 percent) think that government today is more trustworthy than under apartheid (34 percent actually say "less" and another 27 percent see no difference). Only one quarter say that it is less corrupt (52 percent say corruption has increased and 18 percent see no difference).

The post-1994 democratic government comes off better in terms of enforcement and delivery. Four in ten (39 percent) feel that government today is better able to enforce the law than under the apartheid regime (41 percent say "less" and 17 percent see no difference). Similarly 41 percent say government is more effective delivering services (though surprisingly, 35 percent think the old government did a better job delivering services).

Some of these results are puzzling. While there are strong racial differences, they are not stark and in none of these aspects do an absolute majority of black respondents say government is better now than before. What is more, while the comparative assessment of effectiveness has remained stable since 2000, relative assessments of trustworthiness and corruption have become worse.

None of these invidious comparisons should be taken to signal a desire to return to apartheid. Much of this apparent nostalgia may be fuelled by a fading memory of just what life used be like. But the fact that such perceptions do exist suggests deeply rooted problems in how the government "delivers" development goods and services to ordinary people, but also how it represents and interacts with citizens.

Comparing Government Under Democracy and Apartheid

	Much Less	Less	About the same	More	Much More	Don't Know
Trustworthy	12	22	27	21	11	7
Able to enforce the law	15	26	17	27	12	4
Effective in the delivery of services	12	23	20	31	10	4
Corrupt	10	14	18	32	20	5

"Comparing the current government with the former apartheid government, would you say that the one we have now is more or less:"

Democratic Versus Apartheid Government's Ability to Enforce the Law, by Race (2002)

	Aug / Sept 2000	2002
Total	NA	39
Black	NA	43
White	NA	25
Coloured	NA	37
Indian	NA	23

% "More / Much More"

Democratic Versus Apartheid Government's Effectiveness, by Race (2000 to 2002)

	Aug / Sept 2000	2002
Total	40	41
Black	47	46
White	12	30
Coloured	27	34
Indian	9	30

% "More / Much More"

Democratic Versus Apartheid Government Corruption, by Race (2000 to 2002)

	Aug / Sept 2000	2002
Total	27	24
Black	29	26
White	20	15
Coloured	28	20
Indian	11	23

% "Less / Much Less"

Democratic Versus Apartheid Government Trustworthiness, by Race (2000 to 2002)

	Aug / Sept 2000	2002
Total	37	32
Black	43	38
White	11	15
Coloured	28	21
Indian	11	22

% "More / Much More"

Finally, we report responses to a simple set of questions that set out a scale where 0 is the "worst form of governing a country" and 10 is the "best form of governing a country." It asks people to place on that scale "the way the country was governed" under *apartheid* (or the previous non-democratic regime in other countries), "our current system of government with regular elections where everyone can vote and there are at least two political parties," and finally the "political system of this country as you expect it to be in 10 years' time."¹⁴

As of October-November 2002, 30 percent of South Africans gave a positive evaluation (that is, a score of between 6 and 10) to the *apartheid* system of government, 12 percent neutral (a score of 5) and 57 percent gave it a negative score (from 0 to 4). In contrast, 54 percent gave a positive assessment of the present system of government, with 20 percent neutral, and 26 percent negative. Finally, 64 percent gave a positive rating to the system of government as they expect it to be in 2010, with 9 percent neutral and 21 percent negative.

There are two important trends revealed by the responses to this question since 1995. First, over the past eight years, the popular memory of what life was like under *apartheid* has actually become more nostalgic. This trend is true of *all* South Africans. As might be expected, white South Africans have consistently developed more nostalgic memories of government during those years, but so have coloured and Indian South Africans who, while clearly treated as second class citizens, enjoyed some economic and political advantages relative to black Africans. But even among blacks, we see a similar trend. In 1995, just 8 percent of black respondents gave apartheid a positive rating, that number has now increased to 20 percent, or one fifth. This suggests that as time has passed and memories of what life was really like then become dim, people tend to positively emphasize the things that they do not see under the present system and deemphasize the harsher aspects.

The second important trend revealed by these responses is that, with all of its warts, exhaustively emphasized in the preceding pages of this report, South Africans appear to be busy gradually adopting and accommodating themselves to life in a more democratic, though often less prosperous and more disorderly and violent society. Positive ratings of “the current system of government” were offered by 38 percent in 1995, but now by 54 percent. Perhaps most importantly, while just 12 percent of whites gave a positive evaluation to government under the new regime in 1995, 46 percent now do so in 2002. This trend also holds for coloured and Indian respondents.

Moreover, white South Africans’ views of how the country will be governed in ten years time have also become sharply less pessimistic: 44 percent now think that things will be positive at that point, compared to just 20 percent two years ago. Thus, the converse psychological process seems to be occurring with respect to the democratic regime. As people, especially racial minorities, become more accustomed to the new order, they seem to be coming to terms with it, even as they moan and grumble about its faults.

Beside race, we found that age played an important role in shaping views of these three scenarios. The way the country was governed under apartheid is seen most favourably by the oldest and most negatively by the youngest, especially those who have turned eighteen since 1990. While differences are smaller, it is the middle aged, those who grew up politically between Sharpeville and Soweto, who have the most positive assessments of the present. Finally, it is those who have come of age under the “new” South Africa – since Nelson Mandela walked out of jail in 1990 – who have the most positive views of this country’s political system ten years down the road. This is probably one of the most encouraging findings of this report.

South Africans Compare Past, Present and Future Regimes

	Rating of “the way the country was governed under apartheid”				Rating of “Our current system of government”				Rating of “The political system as you expect it to be in ten years time”			
	1995	1998*	2000	2002	1995	1998*	2000	2002	1995	1998*	2000	2002
Positive	17	21	25	30	36	44	58	54	60	64	53	64
Neutral	18	19	12	12	33	29	18	20	18	16	16	9
Negative	65	60	63	57	31	27	25	26	22	18	32	21
Don't Know	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	6

**10 point scale: thus positive responses are scores 10 to 7, neutral is 5 and 6, and negative is 1 to 4. 1995 data taken from the South African version of the World Values Study.*

South Africans Compare Past, Present and Future Regimes

	Positive Ratings of “the way the country was governed under apartheid”				Positive Ratings of “Our current system of government”				Positive Ratings of “the political system as you expect it to be in ten years time”			
	1995	1998*	2000	2002	1995	1998*	2000	2002	1995	1998*	2000	2002
Black	8	14	17	20	50	55	63	57	80	76	60	74
White	39	44	59	65	12	7	42	46	24	21	20	44
Coloured	11	26	41	33	27	27	44	43	55	55	45	58
Indian	13	34	56	59	28	20	24	66	53	32	25	64

**10 point scale, thus positive responses are seen as scores 6-10-7, neutral as 5 and 6, and negative as 1 to 4.*

Endnotes

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- ¹ David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).
- ² Tom Tyler, *Why People Obey the Law* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp.: 27-28.
- ³ Easton, *A Systems Analysis*, p. 273.
- ⁴ Easton, *A Systems Analysis*.
- ⁵ Tyler, *Why People Obey the Law*, pp. 30-33.
- ⁶ The relationship of race and a average index of responses to the four items is $\eta^2 = .10$ (n=2395), which explains just 1 percent of the variance in legitimacy.
- ⁷ Russell Dalton, *Citizen Politics : Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, 2d. ed. (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1996), ch. 12.
- ⁸ Adrian Karatnycky, "The 2001 Freedom House Survey," *Journal of Democracy* 13/1 (January 2002).
- ⁹ Larry Diamond, "Introduction," *Democratization in Africa*, Diamond, L & Plattner, M. eds. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).
- ¹⁰ These figures are almost identical to similar questions asked in an August 2002 survey by the Electoral Task Team. 19 percent thought that Parliamentarians looked after their interests "always" or "most of the time" (with 36 percent saying "never") and 17 percent felt that MPs listened to public opinion "always" or "most of the time" (with 38 percent saying "never"). The two questions also obtained virtually identical replies when asked about members of provincial legislative assemblies. See Roger South & Robert Mattes, *Popular Attitudes Toward the South African Electoral System: Report to the Electoral Task Team*, Democracy & Governance Occasional Papers No. 1 (Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, September 2002).
- ¹¹ Yul Derek Davids, Annie Dzenga & Robert Mattes, *The Changing Public Agenda? South Africans Assessments of Society's Most Pressing Problems*, Afrobarometer Briefing Paper, No. 6 (Cape Town / Accra / East Lansing: Afrobarometer, 2002) www.afrobarometer.org.
- ¹² Robert Mattes & Michael Bratton, "Viewing Corruption in Southern Africa Through the Eyes of Ordinary Southern Africans," *Global Corruption Report* (Berlin: Transparency International, 2001).
- ¹³ Richard Rose, William Mishler & Christian Haerpfer, *Democracy and its Alternatives: Understanding Post Communist Societies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
- ¹⁴ Rose, Mishler & Haerpfer, *Democracy and its Alternatives*.