

Cape Town, South Africa
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News release

South Africans' trust in state institutions and political parties reaches new low

Fewer than two in five South Africans trust the president "somewhat" or "a lot," and more than two-thirds have "just a little" or "no trust at all" in Parliament, the police, and their local council, according to a new Afrobarometer survey.

Public trust in elected representatives is particularly low, and only a quarter of South Africans express trust in either the ruling or opposition parties. Several rounds of the Afrobarometer survey reveal a clear downward trend in South Africans' trust in public institutions over the past decade.

In the wake of widespread rioting and looting that gripped South Africa's two most populous provinces in July 2021, Afrobarometer data from May-June 2021 point to a lack of trust in state institutions as a possible factor undermining government authority and legitimacy.

Key findings

- Trust in nearly all institutions is low – and declining. Only media broadcasters, both independent (63%) and government (61%), and the Department of Health (56%) enjoy the trust of most citizens (Figure 1).
- Only a minority of South Africans say they trust the president "somewhat" (17%) or "a lot" (21%). Close to one-third of South Africans say that they do not trust the president "at all" (30%), while a similar share say they trust the president "just a little" (29%) (Figure 2).
- Trust in both the ruling party (27% "somewhat" or "a lot") and opposition parties (24%) continue to decline. Over the past decade, trust in the ruling party and opposition parties has declined from 61% and 40%, respectively (Figure 3).
- Two-thirds (67%) of South Africans would be willing to give up elections if a non-elected government could provide security, housing, and jobs. Nearly half (46%) say they would be "very willing" to do so (Figure 4).

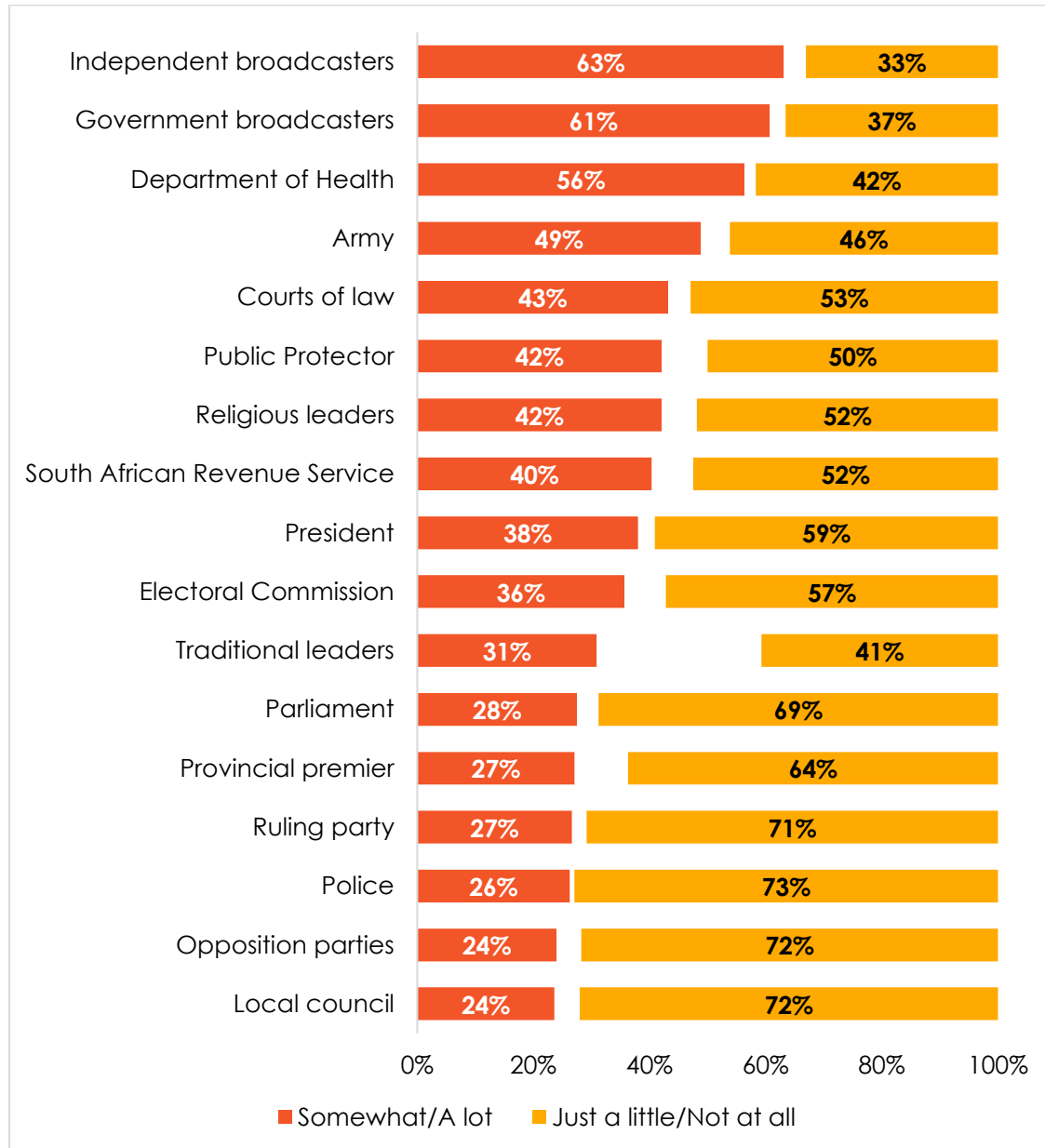
Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Seven rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys in 2019/2021 cover 34 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in South Africa, led by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation and Plus 94 Research, interviewed 1,600 adult South Africans in May-June 2021. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2.5 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in South Africa in 2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015, and 2018.

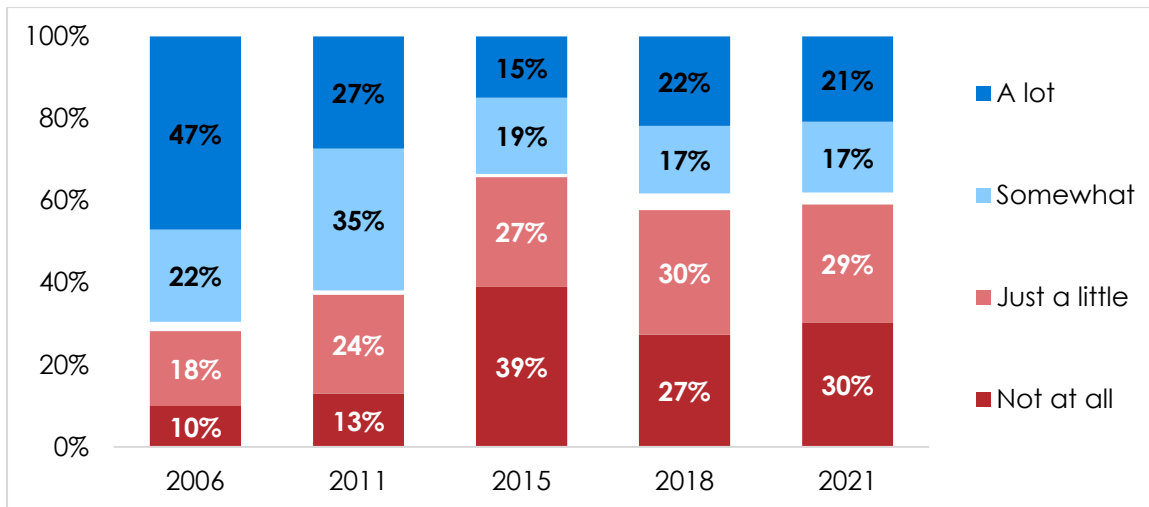
Charts

Figure 1: Trust in various institutions | South Africa | 2021



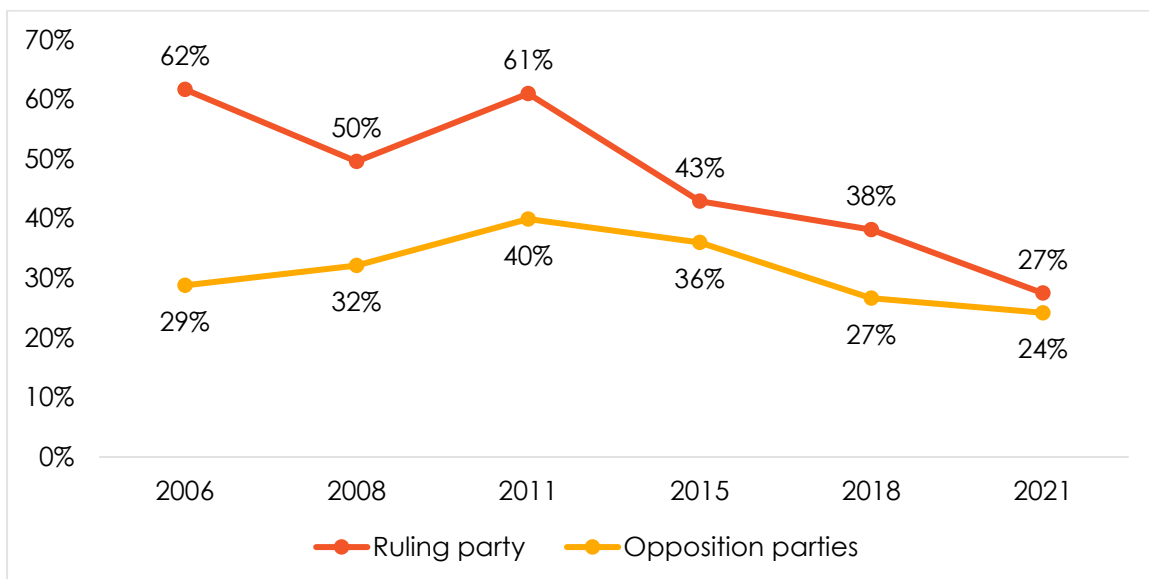
Respondents were asked: How much do you trust the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

Figure 2: Trust in the president | South Africa | 2006-2021



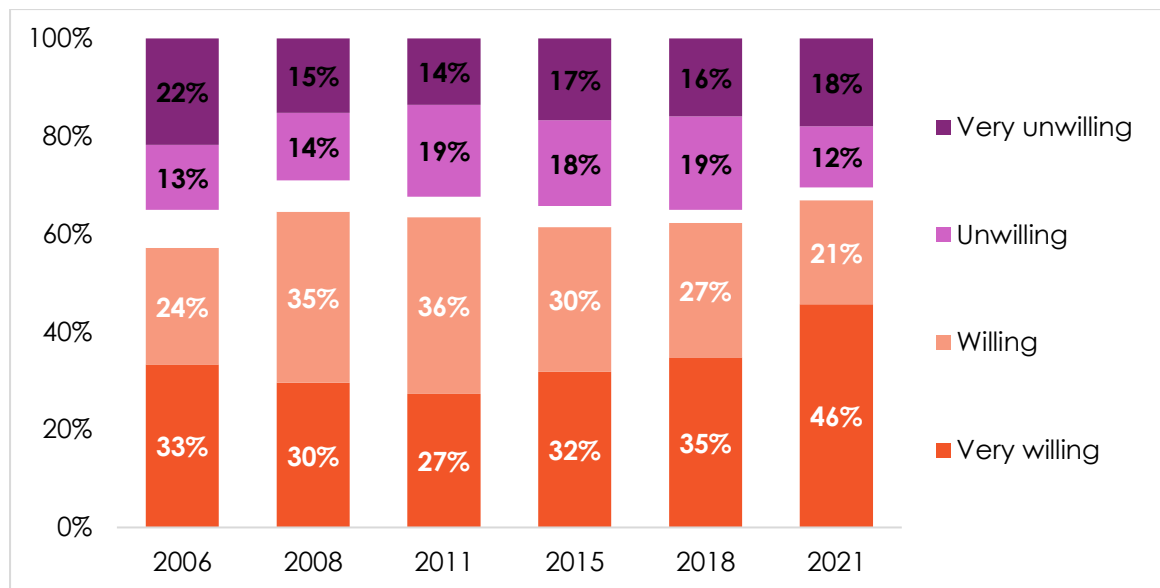
Respondents were asked: How much do you trust the president, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (Note: Figure 2 omits 2008 Afrobarometer Round 4 data, as that survey was conducted less than two months into the short-lived administration of Kgalema Motlanthe.)

Figure 3: Trust in political parties | South Africa | 2006-2021



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The ruling party? Opposition political parties? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

Figure 4: Willing to forego elections | South Africa | 2021



Respondents were asked: *If a non-elected government or leader could impose law and order, and deliver houses and jobs, how willing or unwilling would you be to give up regular elections and live under such a government?*

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