



Popular Attitudes toward Democracy in South Africa: A Summary of Afrobarometer Indicators, 2000-2008

5 August 2009

This document provides a summary of popular attitudes regarding the demand for and supply of democracy in South Africa as revealed over the course of five Afrobarometer surveys conducted between 2000 and 2008 (July-Aug. 2000, N=2200; Sept.-Oct. 2002, N=2400; Oct.-Nov. 2004, N=2400; Feb. 2006, N=2400; Oct.-Nov. 2008, N=2400). Samples of this size yield a margin of error of +/- 2 percent at a confidence level of 95 percent. The charts that follow capture perceptions of:

- The meaning of democracy;
- The demand for democracy (including individual support for democracy, patience with democracy and rejection of military rule, one-party rule, and one-man rule);
- Support for democratic institutions (including attitudes towards elections, term limits, multi-party rule, and checks on presidential powers); and
- The supply of democracy (including satisfaction with democracy and the perceived extent of democracy, quality of elections and the protection of key freedoms).

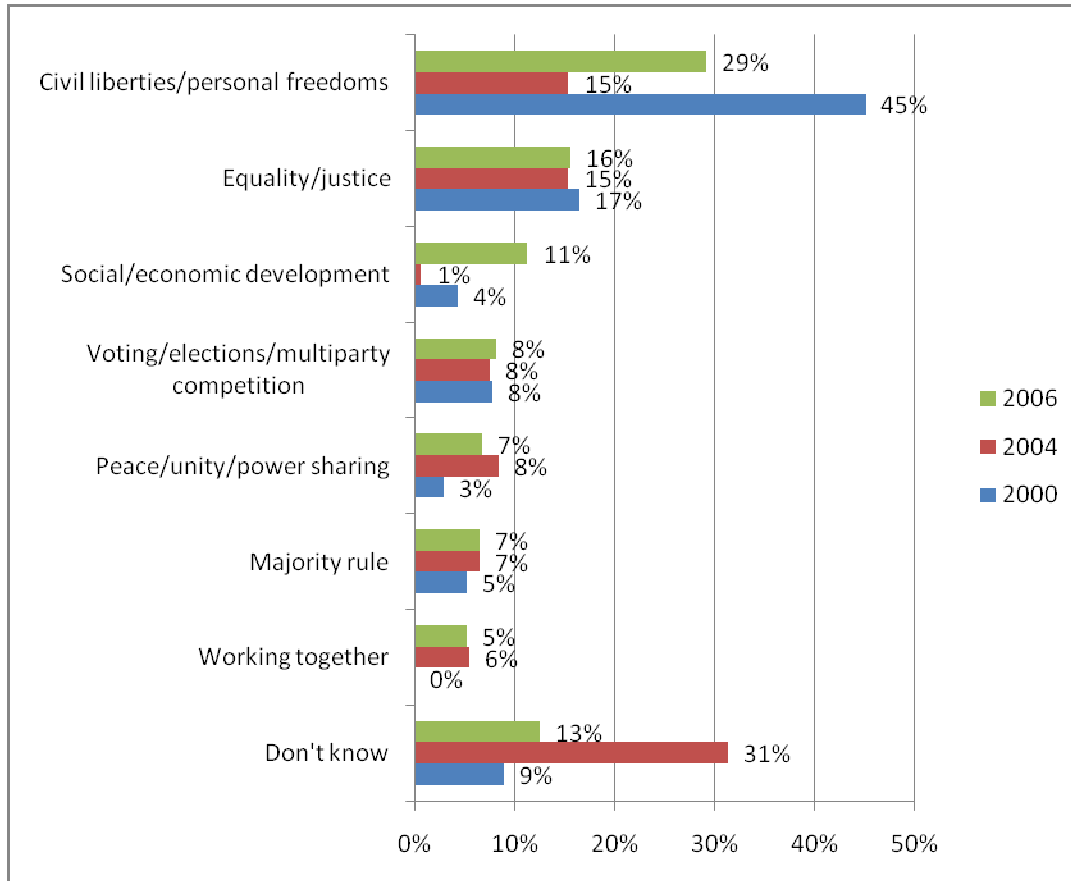
Points of Interest

- Overall, support for democracy has remained high over time in South Africa. Support for democracy has increased somewhat since 2000, and rejection of authoritarian alternatives has held relatively steady on average (2.1-2.4). Patience with democracy has, however, dropped considerably between 2006 and 2008 (2.5)
- South Africans are generally very supportive of democratic institutions, but a decline in the percentages of individuals who support elections and parliamentary power to create laws (as opposed to presidential) may bear watching (3.1, 3.4). Support for multiparty competition has, however, grown steadily since 2002 (3.3). Interestingly, less than half of South Africans feel that parliament and opposition parties should be responsible for monitoring the government, yet 59% of South Africans feel that the media should fulfill this obligation (3.6-3.8)
- The perceived extent of democracy has generally remained relatively high over time, with the exception of a sharp drop in 2002. This was followed by a steep rebound in 2004, but ratings of extent have been declining since reaching this high point (4.1). Satisfaction with democracy has followed a similar pattern, but the drop in satisfaction in 2008 is much more substantial than the decrease in perceived extent, and as in 2002, less than 50 percent now express satisfaction with democracy (4.2).
- Ratings of election quality have consistently been quite positive (4.3).

MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

1.1 Variable: Meaning of democracy

Question: What if anything does democracy mean to you?



* In 2004 and 2006 respondents could offer up to three meanings. Figures shown are the percentage of all substantive responses offered.

DEMAND FOR DEMOCRACY

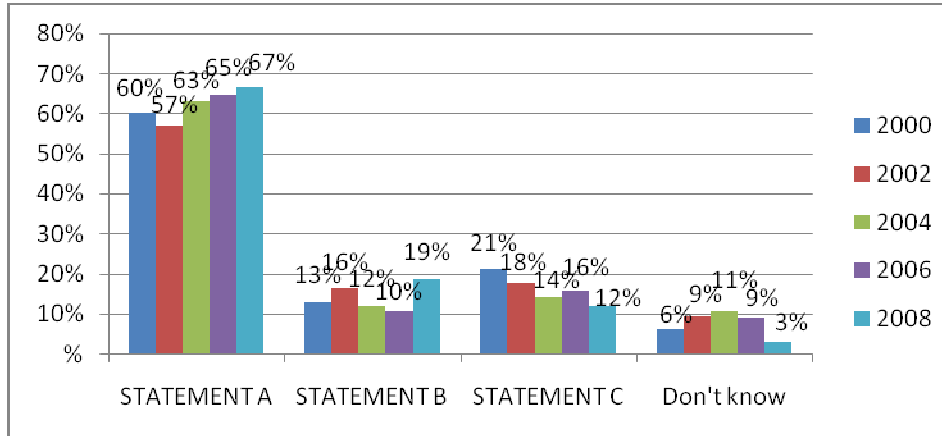
2.1 Variable: Support for democracy

Question: Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

A: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.

B: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.

C: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.



2.2 Variable: Reject military rule

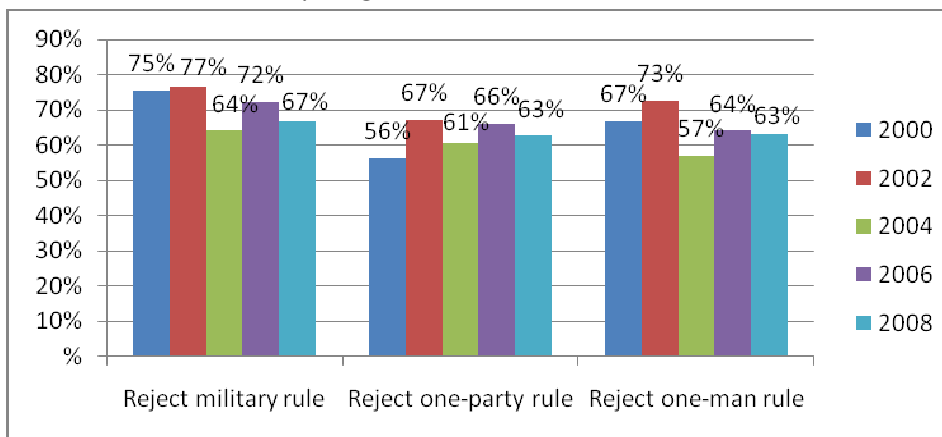
Question: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: The army comes in to govern the country?

2.3 Variable: Reject one-party rule

Question: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office?

2.4 Variable: Reject one-man rule

Question: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: Elections and Parliament/National Assembly are abolished so that the President/Prime Minister can decide everything?



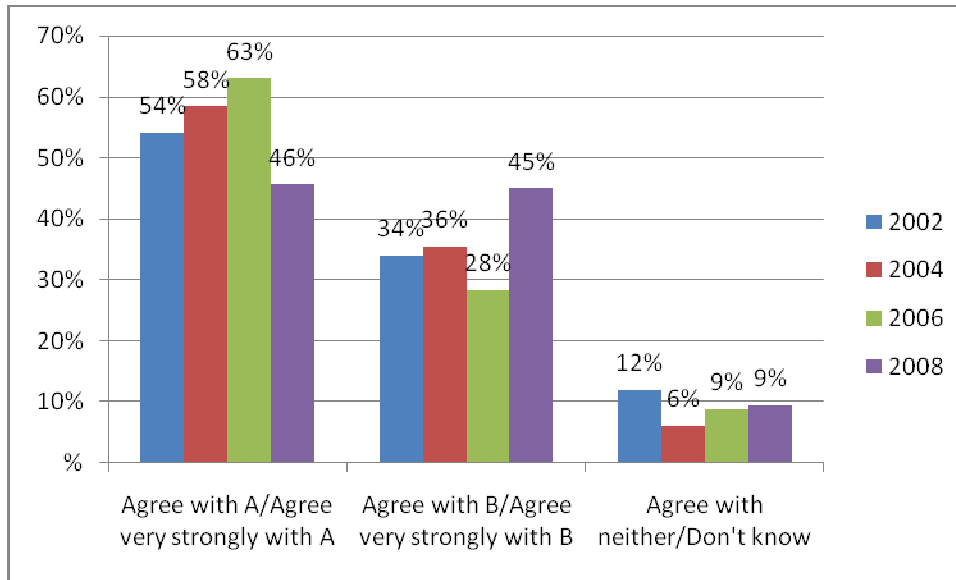
(Percent who disapprove/strongly disapprove of military rule, one-party rule and one-man rule)

2.5 Variable: Patience with democracy

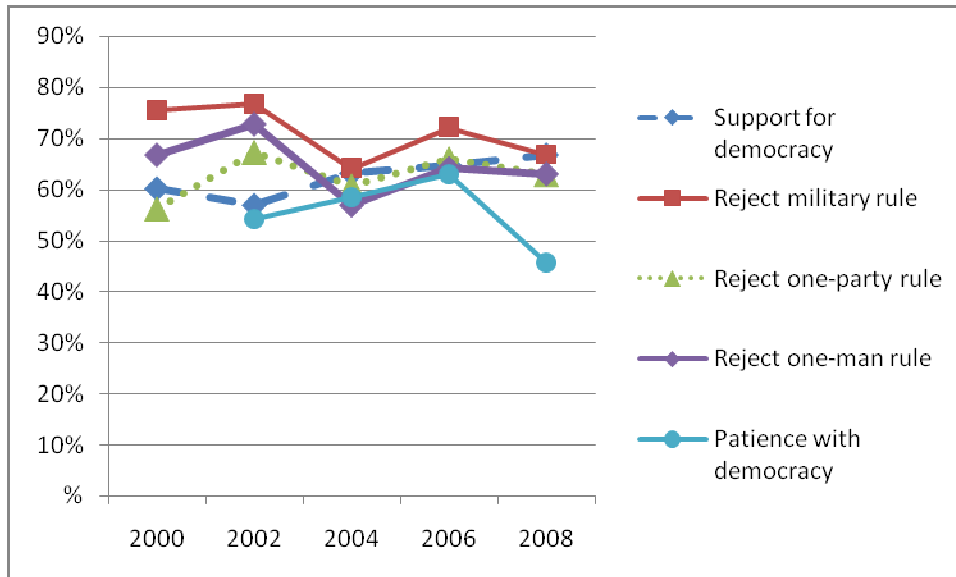
Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: Our present system of elected government should be given more time to deal with inherited problems.

B: If our present system cannot produce results soon, we should try another form of government.



Summary of demand for democracy



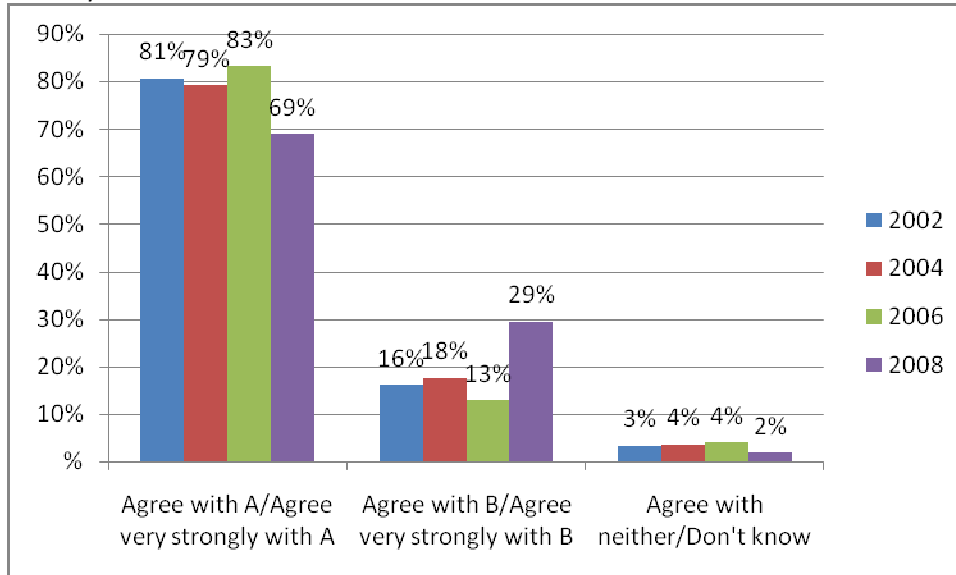
DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

3.1 Variable: Choose leaders through elections vs. try another form

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open and honest elections.

B: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders.

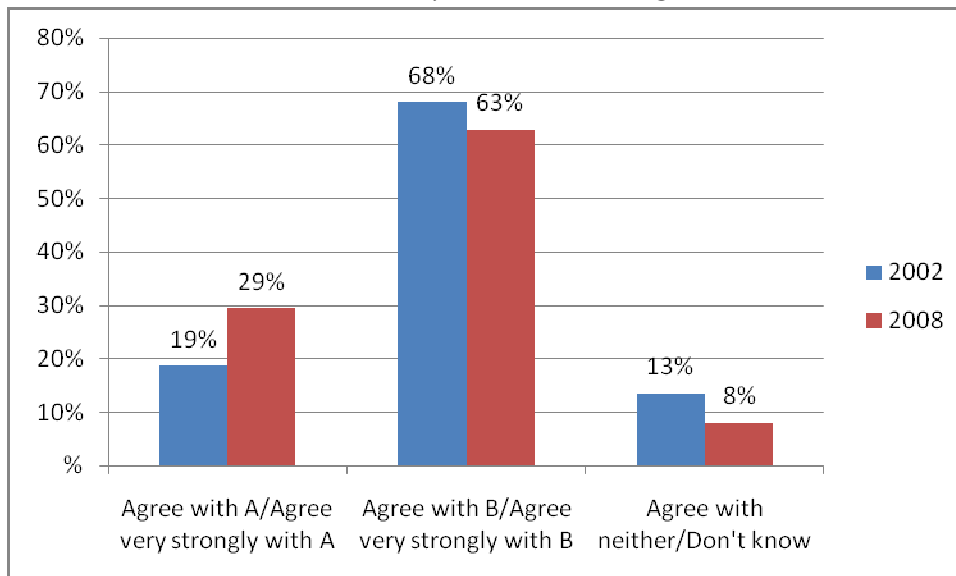


3.2 Variable: No term limits for the president vs. two terms only

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: There should be no constitutional limit on how long the president can serve.

B: The constitution should limit the president to serving a maximum of two terms in office.

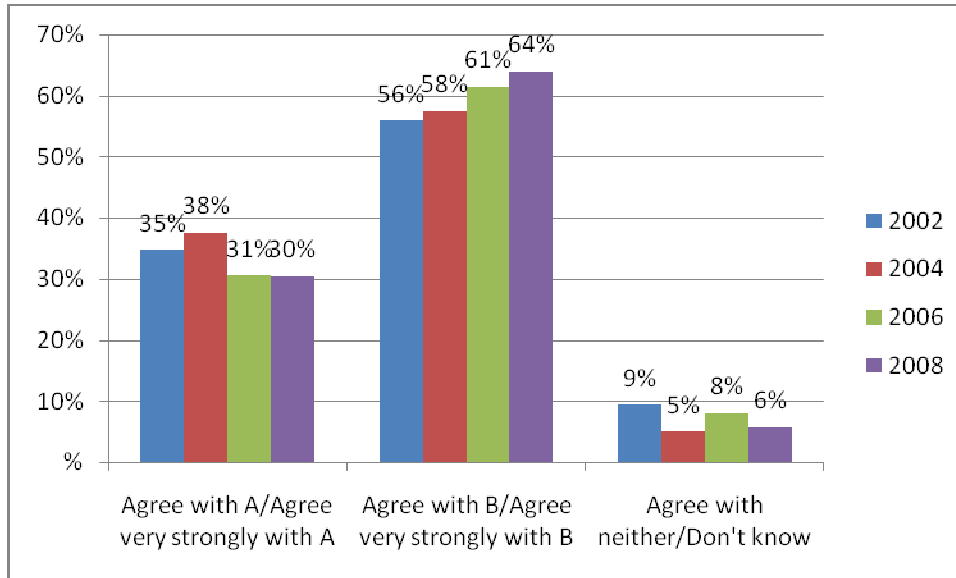


3.3 Variable: Political parties divisive vs. many parties needed

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: Political parties create division and confusion; it is therefore unnecessary to have many political parties in South Africa.

B: Many political parties are needed to make sure that South Africans have real choices in who governs them.

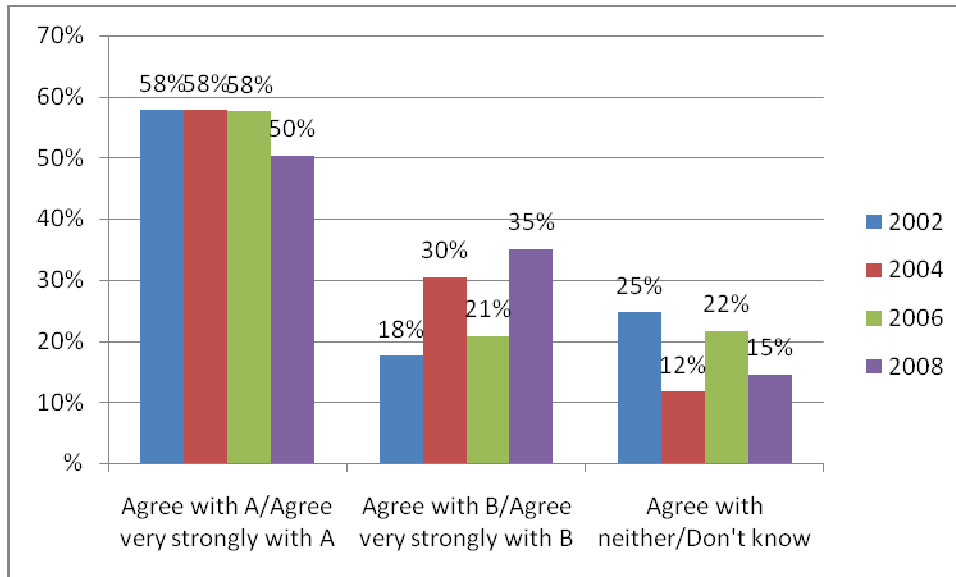


3.4 Variable: Parliament makes laws vs. President does

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: The members of Parliament/National Assembly represent the people; therefore they should make laws for this country, even if the President/Prime Minister does not agree.

B: Since the President/Prime Minister represents all of us, he should pass laws without worrying about what the Parliament/National Assembly thinks.

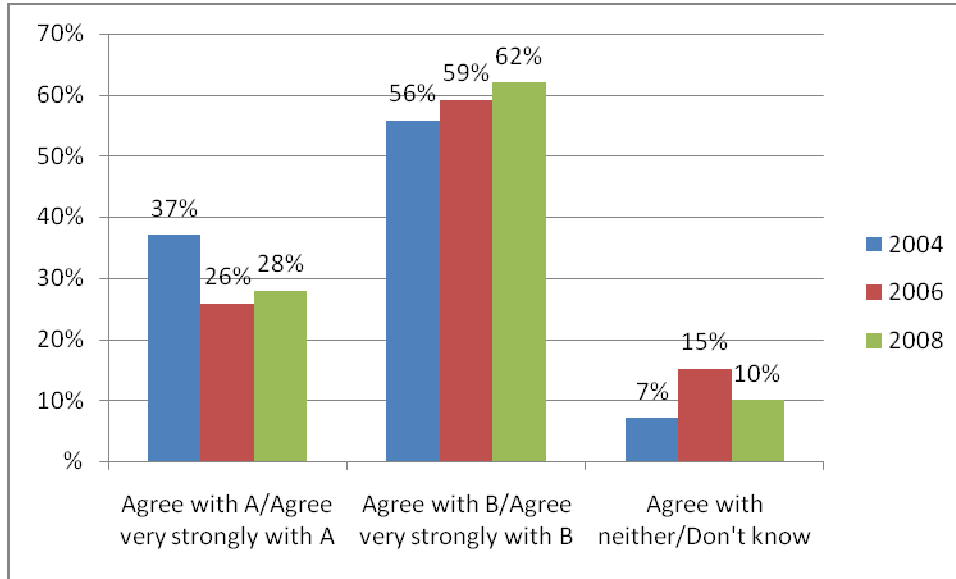


3.5 Variable: President free to act vs. obey the laws and courts

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: Since the President/Prime Minister was elected to lead the country, he should not be bound by laws or court decisions that he thinks are wrong.

B: The President/Prime Minister must always obey the laws and the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong.

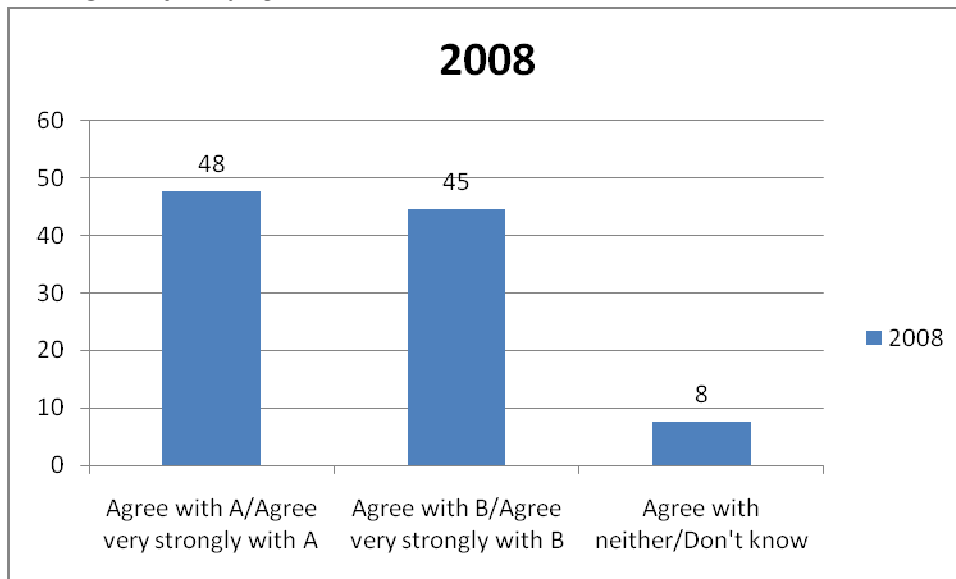


3.6 Variable: Parliament monitors President vs. cooperate

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: Parliament should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how his government spends the taxpayers' money.

B: The President should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying his actions.

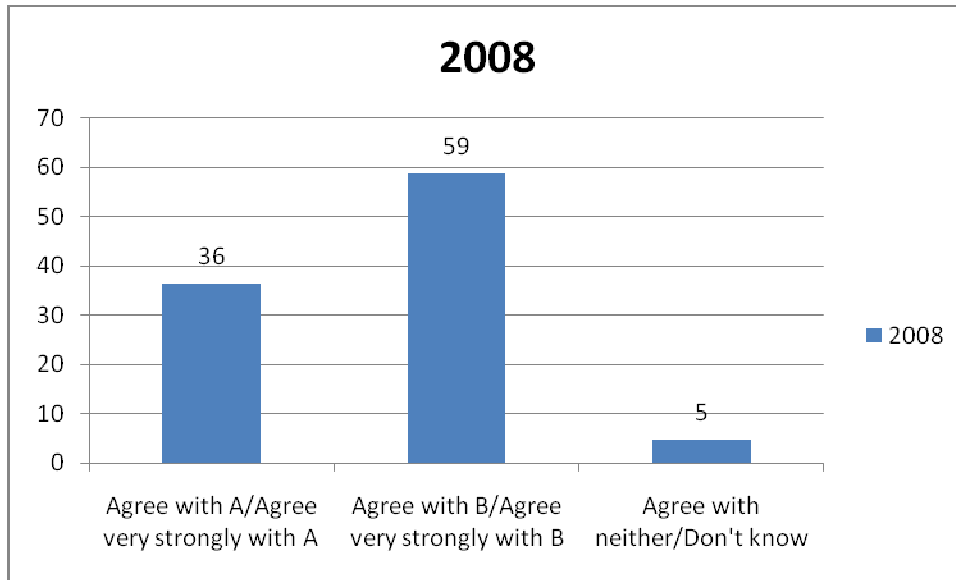


3.7 Variable: Opposition parties examine government vs. cooperate

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: Opposition parties should regularly examine and criticize government policies and actions.

B: Opposition parties should concentrate on cooperating with government and helping it develop the country.

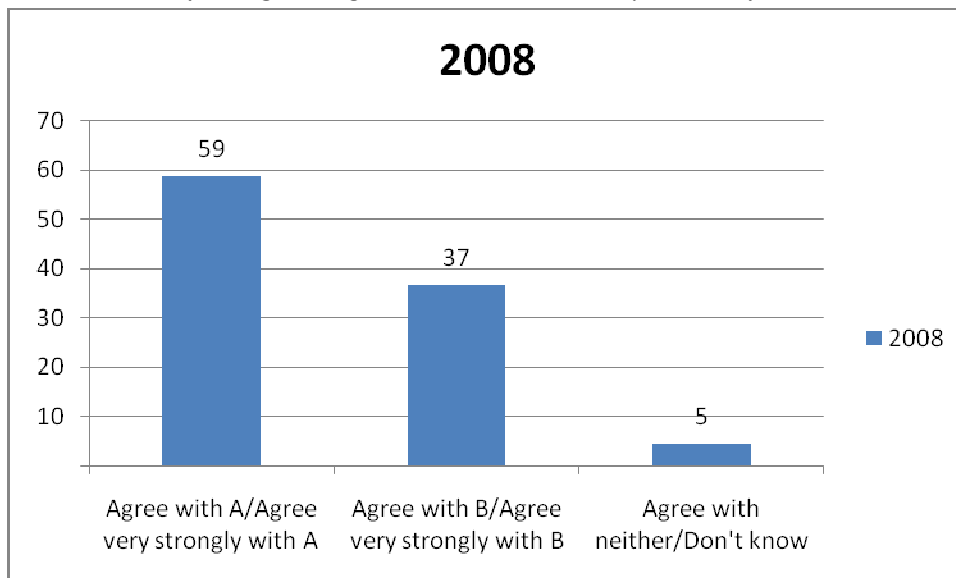


3.8 Variable: Media examines government vs. cooperate

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: The news media should constantly investigate and report on corruption and the mistakes made by the government.

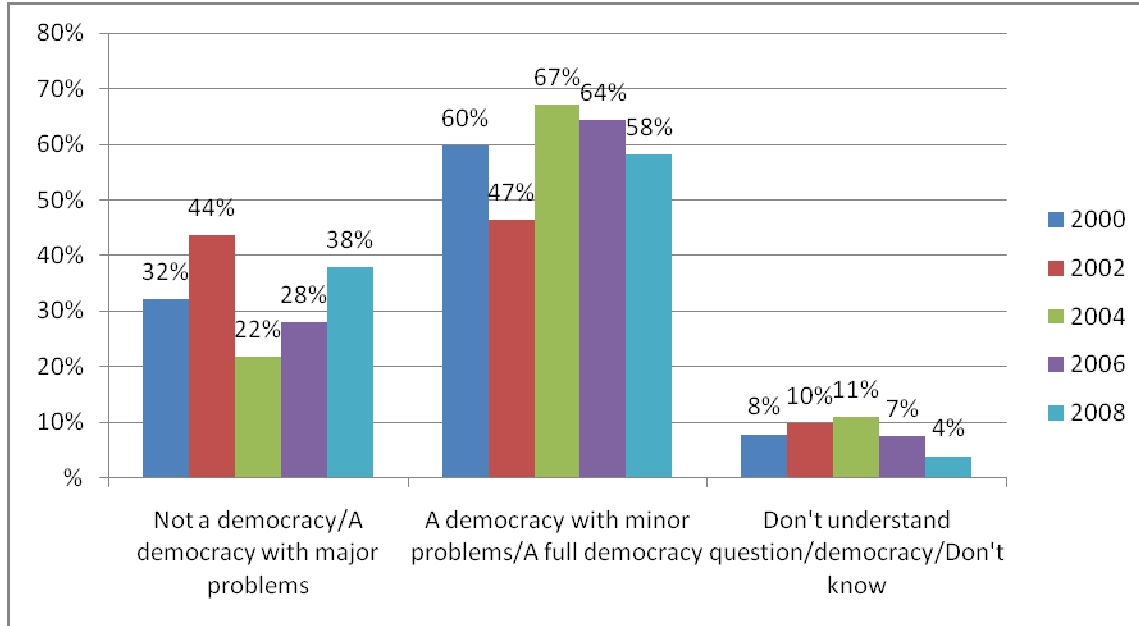
B: Too much reporting on negative events, like corruption, only harms the country.



SUPPLY OF DEMOCRACY

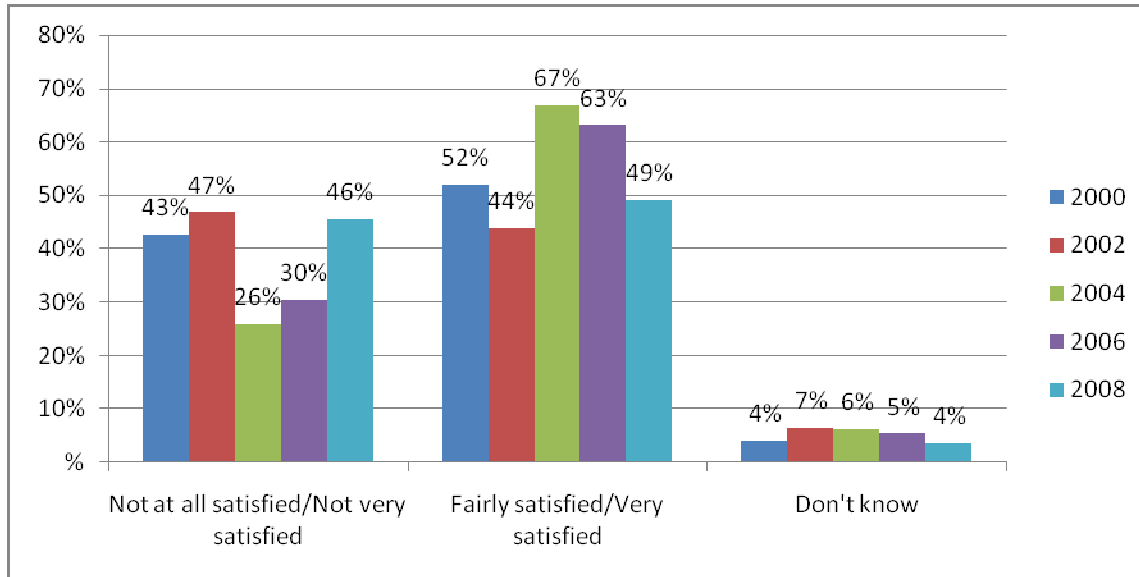
4.1 Variable: Extent of Democracy

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



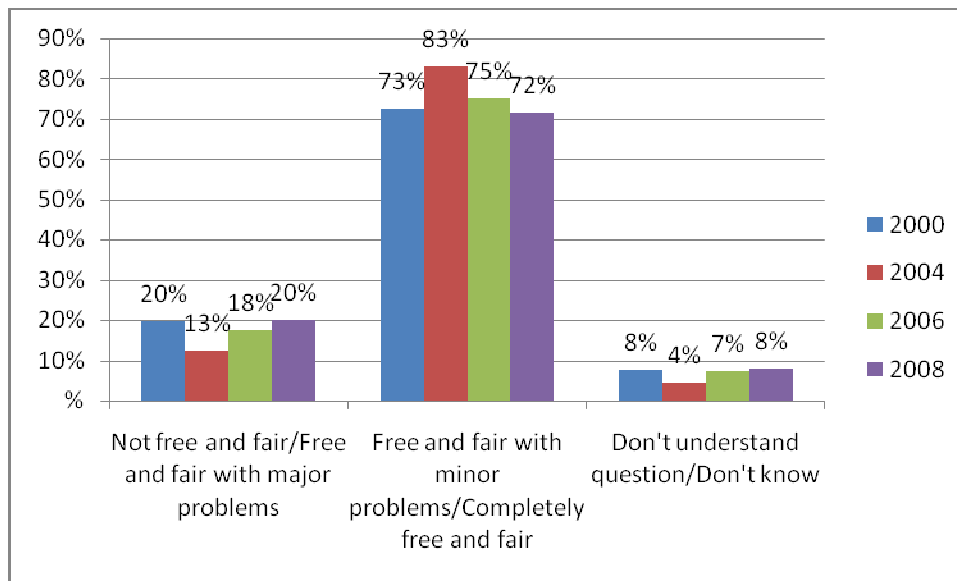
4.2 Variable: Satisfaction with democracy

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



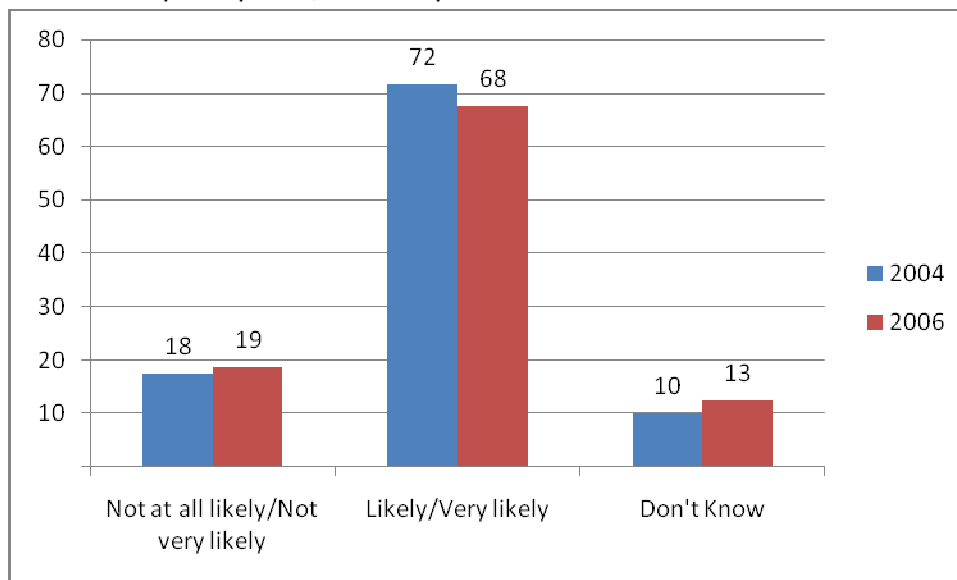
4.3 Variable: Elections free and fair

Question: On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [20xx]. Was it:



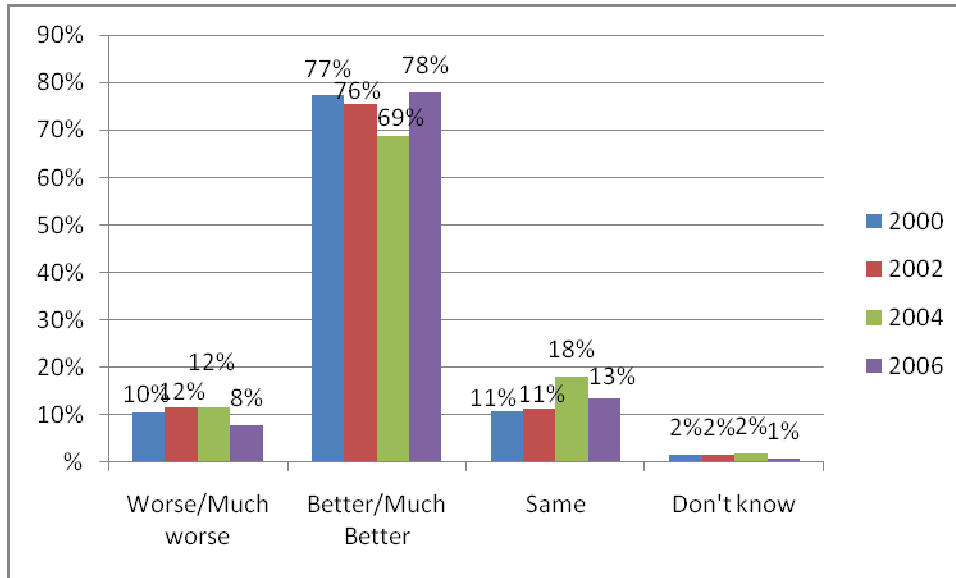
4.4 Variable: Future of democracy

Question: In your opinion, how likely is it that South Africa will remain a democratic country?



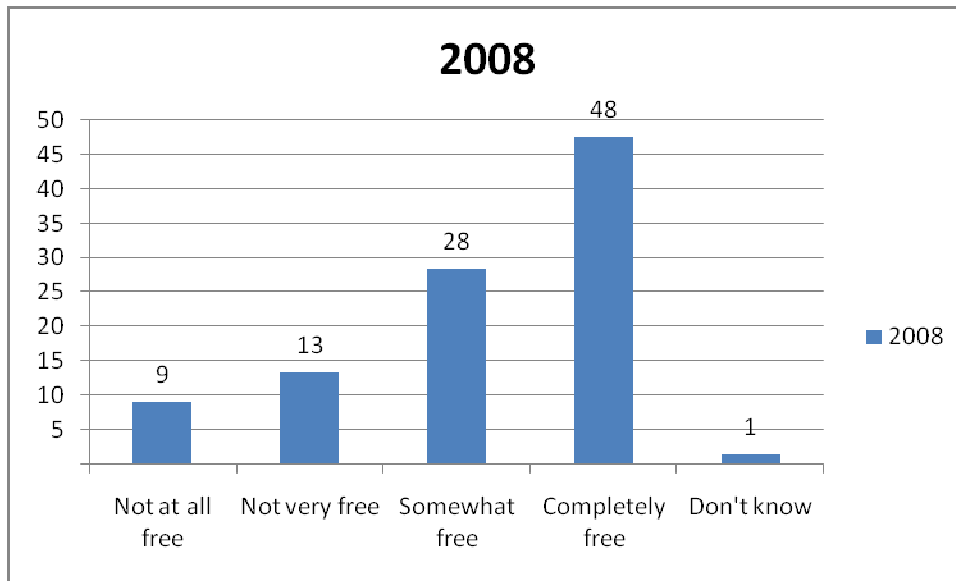
4.5 Variable: Freedom of speech (2000-2006)

Question: Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Freedom to say what you think?



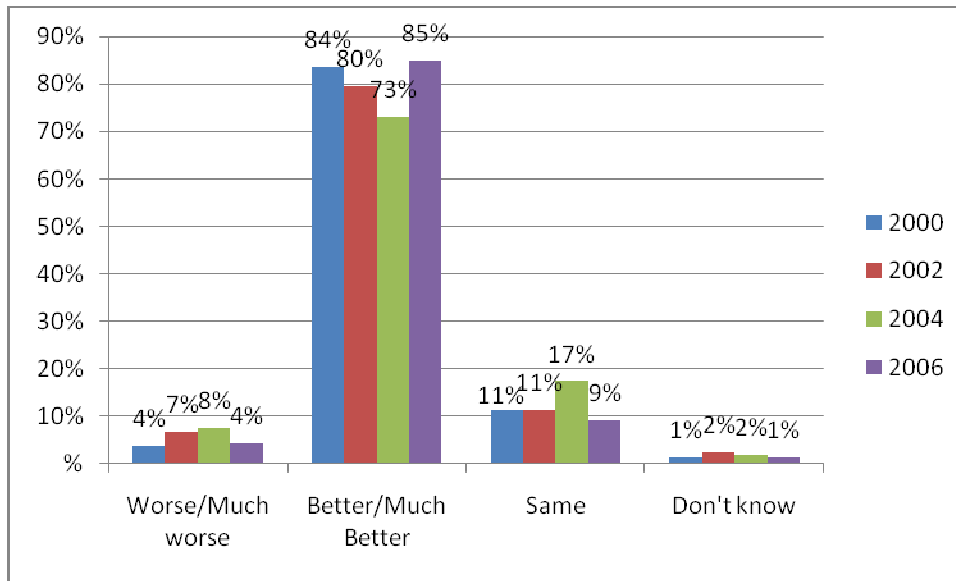
4.6 Variable: Freedom of speech (2008)

Question: In this country, how free are you: to say what you think?



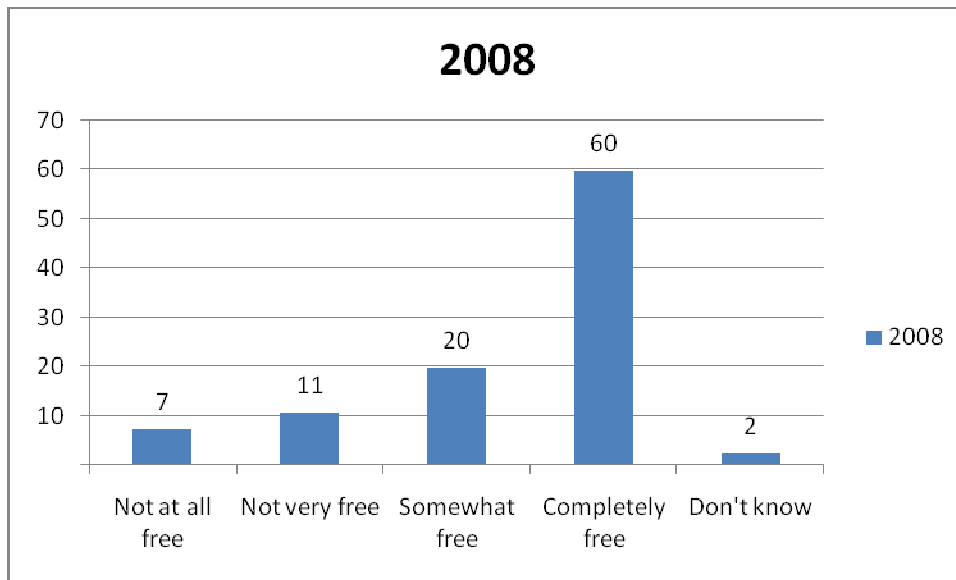
4.7 Variable: Freedom of association (2000-2006)

Question: Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Freedom to join any political organization you want?



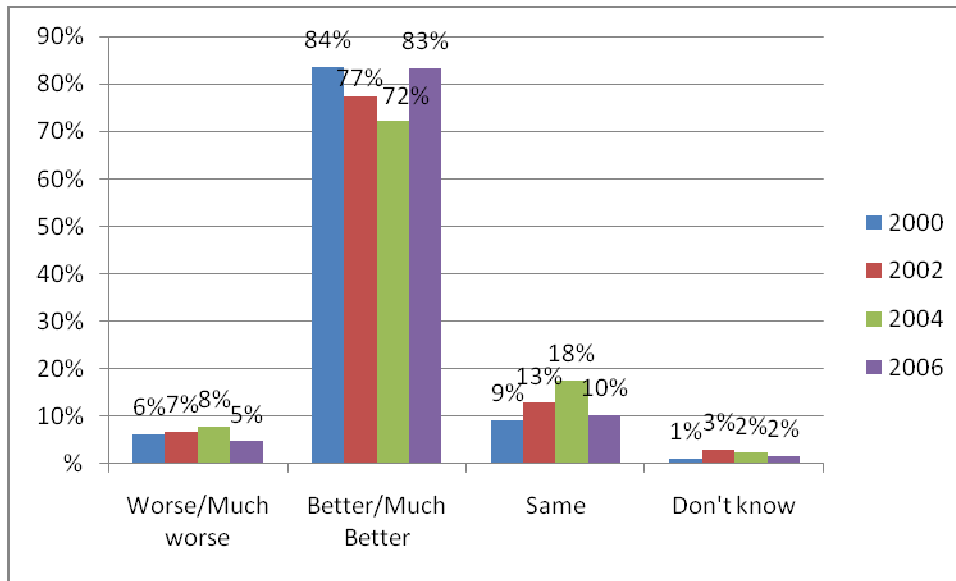
4.8 Variable: Freedom of association (2008)

Question: In this country, how free are you: to join any political organization you want?



4.9 Variable: Voting freedom (2000-2006)

Question: Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Freedom to choose who to vote for without feeling pressured?



4.10 Variable: Voting freedom (2008)

Question: In this country, how free are you: to choose who to vote for without feeling pressured?

