

Durban, South Africa  
13 June 2023

## News release

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### **South Africans support elections but doubt their efficacy, express little trust in Electoral Commission**

Most South Africans value elections, but majorities do not believe that elections work well to ensure that voters' views are reflected in Parliament and to enable voters to remove leaders from office who don't do what the people want, an Afrobarometer survey indicates.

While about half of citizens consider their 2019 elections to have been free and fair, trust in the South African Electoral Commission is weak. A majority say they did not fear political intimidation or violence during the last national election campaign, but views on ballot secrecy are mixed.

As the country looks ahead to the 2024 election, the restoration of citizens' trust in institutions underpinning constitutional democracy is essential.

#### **Key findings**

- About two-thirds (65%) of South Africans support elections as the best way to choose their leaders, while three in 10 (30%) say other methods for choosing the country's leaders should be adopted (Figure 1).
- Majorities think their elections do not work well to enable voters to remove leaders who don't do what the people want (64%) and to ensure that members of Parliament reflect voters' views (61%) (Figure 2).
- About half (49%) of the population describe their 2019 election as having been largely free and fair: 29% say it was "completely free and fair," while 20% consider it "free and fair with minor problems." Fewer than four in 10 (37%) say it was either "free and fair with major problems" (23%) or "not free and fair" (14%) (Figure 3).
- Most citizens (64%) say they did not fear political intimidation or violence "at all" during the last national election, while 28% report feeling fearful "a little bit" (12%), "somewhat" (11%), or "a lot" (5%) (Figure 4).
- Fewer than half (47%) express confidence in ballot secrecy, saying it is "not very likely" (17%) or "not at all likely" (30%) that powerful people can find out how they voted. But almost as many (43%) consider it "somewhat likely" (21%) or "very likely" (22%) that their ballots are not secret (Figure 5).
- The Electoral Commission musters trust among fewer than three in 10 citizens (28%), while a majority (64%) trust it "not at all" (39%) or "just a little" (25%) (Figure 6).

#### **Afrobarometer surveys**

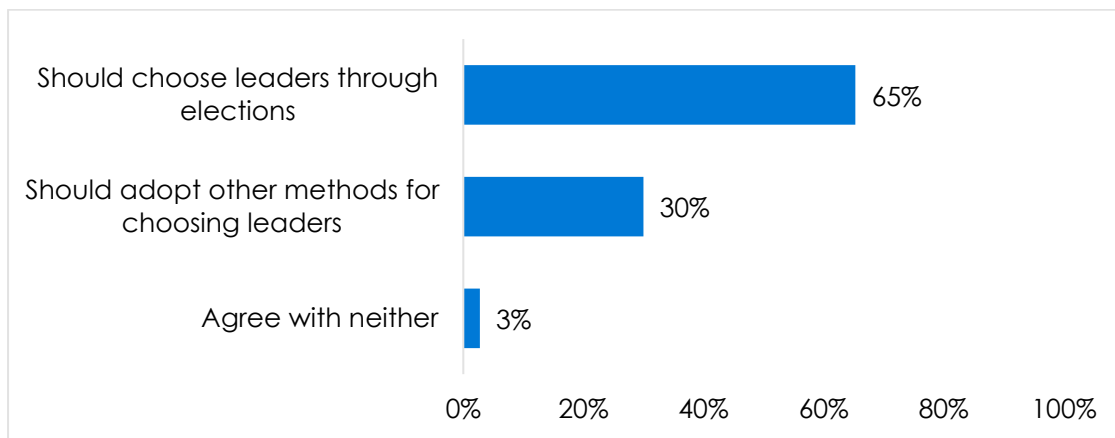
Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight survey rounds in up to 39 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys

are being completed in 2023. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in South Africa, led by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,582 adult South Africans in November-December 2022. 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 have been conducted in South Africa in 2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015, 2018, and 2021.

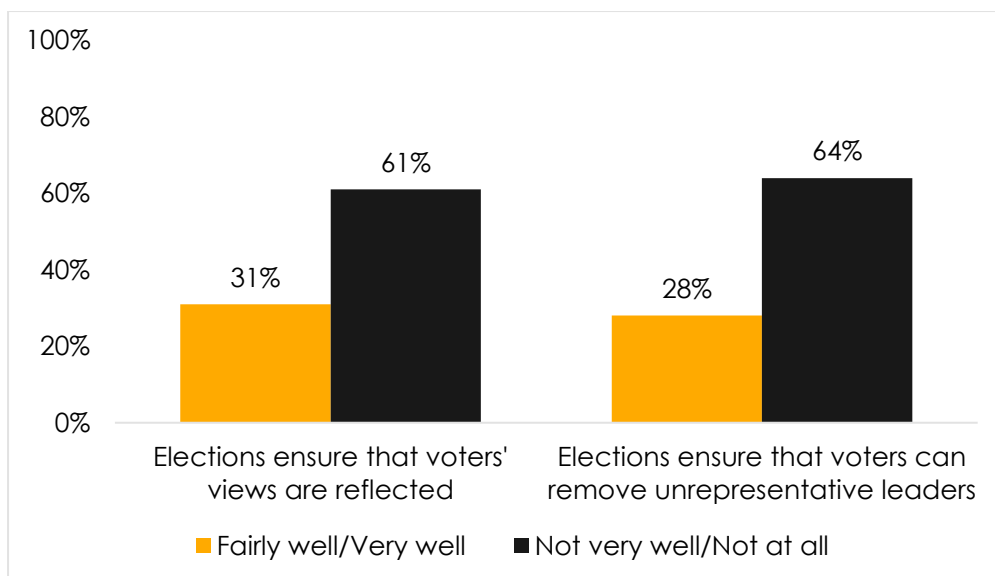
**Charts**

**Figure 1: Support for elections as the best way to choose leaders | South Africa | 2022**



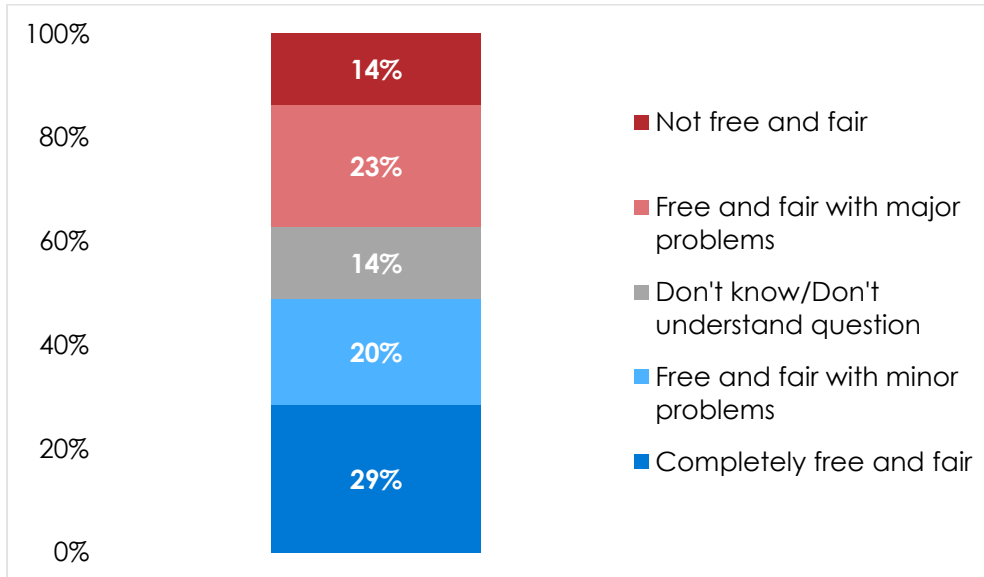
**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections.  
 Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders.  
 (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

**Figure 2: Efficacy of elections | South Africa | 2022**



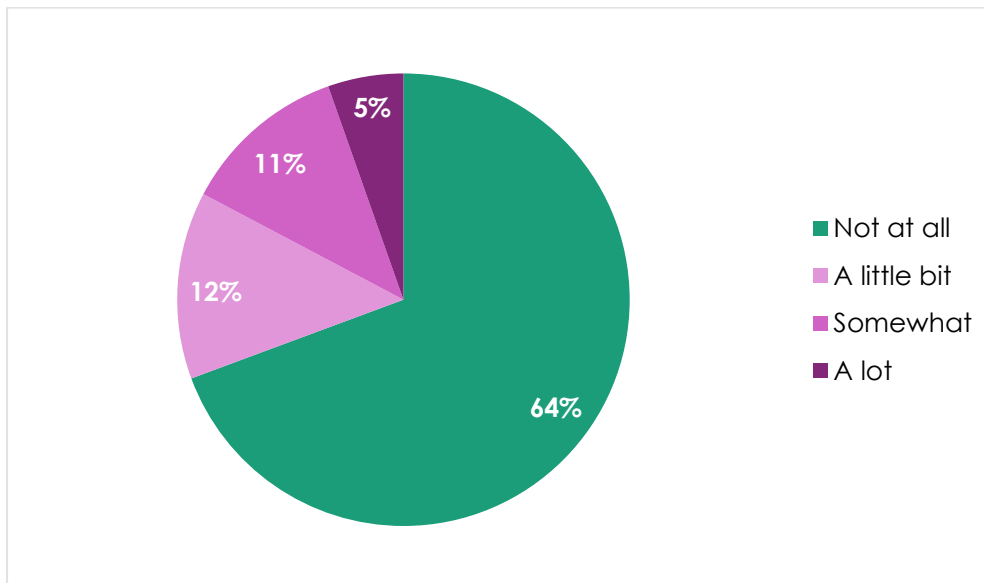
**Respondents were asked:** Thinking about how elections work in practice in this country, how well do elections: Ensure that members of Parliament reflect the views of voters? Enable voters to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want?

**Figure 3: Freeness and fairness of 2019 election** | South Africa | 2022



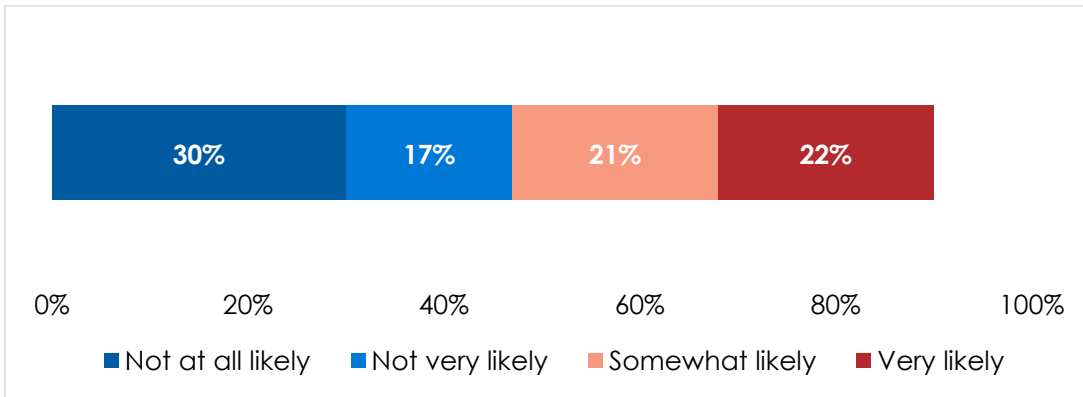
**Respondents were asked:** On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in 2019?

**Figure 4: Fear of intimidation or violence in 2019 election** | South Africa | 2022



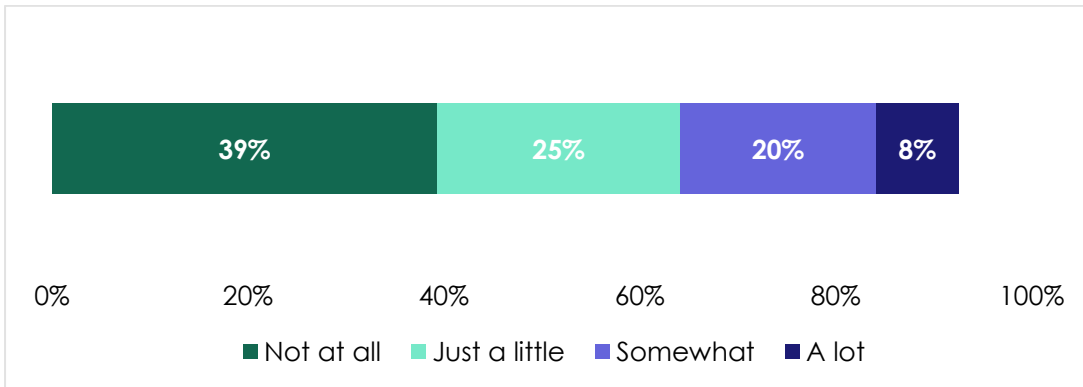
**Respondents were asked:** During the last national election campaign in 2019, how much did you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?

**Figure 5: Can powerful people find out how you voted?** | South Africa | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** How likely do you think it is that powerful people can find out how you voted, even though there is supposed to be a secret ballot in this country?

**Figure 6: Trust in South African Electoral Commission** | South Africa | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust the South African Electoral Commission, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

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