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News release

Positive perceptions of foreign powers decline in South Africa; China viewed more favourably than U.S., Russia

After South Africans' positive perceptions of foreign powers declined between 2021 and 2022, China's influence is more widely seen as positive than that of the United States, a new Afrobarometer survey indicates.

Trailing both China and the United States, Russia receives positive and negative assessments of its influence in almost equal shares.

Close to six in 10 citizens say China's economic activities have "a lot" or "some" influence on South Africa's economy.

Large minorities say they "don't know" enough to assess the economic and political influence of China, the United States and Russia. A majority say the same about the influence of the European Union (EU).

With the BRICS Summit 2023 in session, citizen perceptions about foreign influence hold value for the political and economic dialogues taking place.

Key findings

- China's economic and political influence on South Africa is viewed as positive by 37% of respondents, exceeding positive perceptions of the influence of the United States (32%) and Russia (25%) (Figure 1).
 - Positive perceptions of foreign influence declined between 2021 and 2022 – sharply so in the case of the United States (by 16 percentage points) and marginally for China (3 points) and Russia (5 points).
- Negative perceptions of Russia's influence almost match positive ones (22% vs. 25%). Negative assessments are higher for China (20%) than for the United States (15%) (Figure 2).
 - Large shares of the population say they "don't know" enough to assess the economic and political influence of China (33%), the United States (40%), Russia (42%), and the EU (52%).
- More than four in 10 South Africans (43%) say China's economic activities have "a lot" of influence on the country's economy, while about three in 10 (31%) say they "don't know" enough to assess China's economic influence (Figure 3).

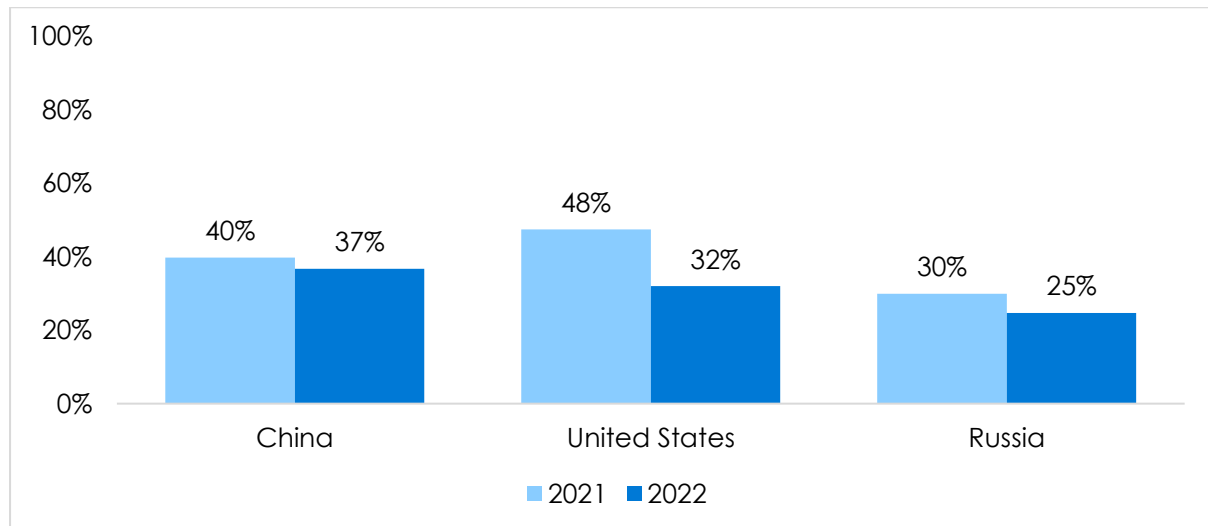
Afrobarometer surveys

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. Nine survey rounds in up to 42 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. 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.

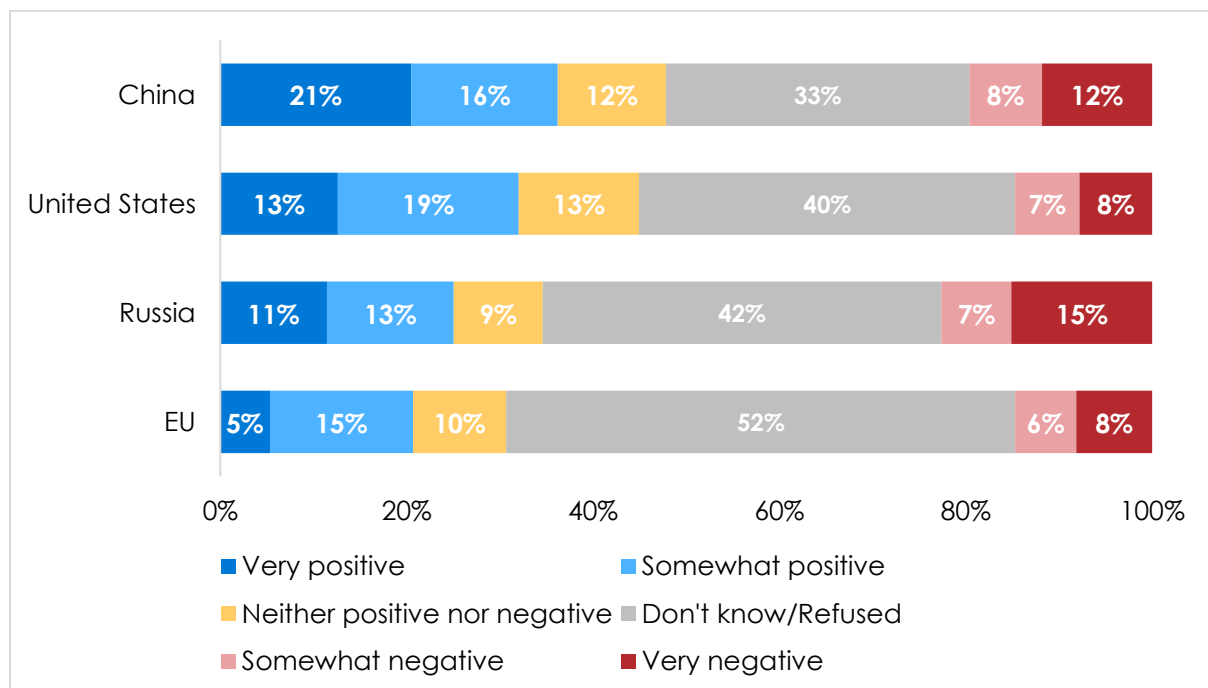
Charts

Figure 1: Changes in positive perceptions | South Africa | 2021-2022



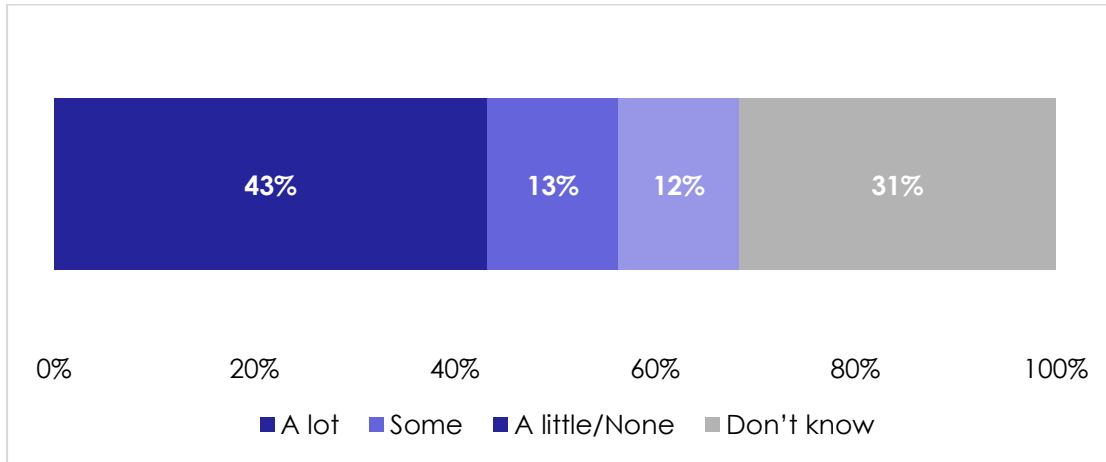
Respondents were asked: Do you think that the economic and political influence of each of the following countries on South Africa is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "somewhat positive" or "very positive")

Figure 2: Perceptions of foreign influence | South Africa | 2022



Respondents were asked: Do you think that the economic and political influence of each of the following countries on South Africa is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Figure 3: Chinese influence on the economy | South Africa | 2022



Respondents were asked: How much influence do you think China's economic activities in South Africa have on our economy, or haven't you heard enough to say?

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