

Press Statement

Idasa and AfroBarometer

14 March 2012, Pretoria



Results of the Afrobarometer Round 5 for South Africa

The Afrobarometer is a comparative series of public attitude surveys, covering up to 35 African countries in Round 5 (2011-2013). It measures public attitudes on democracy and its alternatives, evaluations of the quality of governance and economic performance. In addition the survey assesses the views of the electorate on critical political issues in the surveyed countries. The survey analysis also provides comparisons over time (from 1999 to 2011/12). Afrobarometer's work in South Africa is coordinated by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa).

Field work for Round Five was conducted in South Africa in the last quarter of 2011. The survey interviewed 2400 adult South Africans. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level.

Some of the key findings from the latest survey include the following:

Media Freedom

Since 2008 South Africans have shifted substantially in their views on media freedom. While the latest survey found that six out of 10 (61%) South Africans still believe that the media have a right to publish without government control, this is down from almost 80% of the adult population in 2008. The number of people believing that the government should instead have the right to prevent the media from publishing things which "might harm the society" has doubled, from 16% to 33%.

At the same time the number of people believing that the media should investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption has gone up from 59% to 70%.

A large majority of South Africans (81%) think that the media are either somewhat or very effective in revealing corruption, and they continue to trust the media, both public and private. Seven in ten people trust both government and independent broadcasters somewhat or a lot (72% and 69%, respectively), while the independent newspapers, taken as a whole, elicit similar levels of trust from some six in every ten (60%).

Afrobarometer studies allow analysts to investigate a range of variables, ranging from trust in leaders and institutions, to levels of poverty, corruption and access to the media which might have an influence on the shifts in attitudes towards media freedom which have occurred.

"The coincidence of quite high trust levels, a belief that the media should investigate corruption and yet an increasing willingness to tolerate government intervention suggests that the public do make this judgement on other forms of media coverage and not merely the investigative or watchdog role," said Mr Graham, Executive Director of Idasa. "A debate on the role of the media in society is underway, and these results may be affected by that debate but it is clearly one South Africans should have."

In a separate set of questions asked only of South Africans the Afrobarometer sought to shed light on the controversy on the Protection of Information Bill presently being steered through parliament. Some 48% of people have a narrow view on what information may be restricted while 38% have a broader view. While the views of citizens of Mpumalanga and the Free State match these national figures there are significant differences in other provinces. Limpopo and KwaZulu Natal support the broader view quite strongly, while the Eastern Cape, Western Cape and Northern Cape have majorities supporting the narrow approach. Large numbers of South Africans did not want to express a preference for either of the statements offered. The survey did not permit further interrogation of the respondents on this, but clearly as many as 9% of adults want a more nuanced view on the subject.

Which of the following statements is closest to your view:	National	E Cape	FS	Gauteng	KZN	Limpopo	M'langa	N'West	N Cape	W Cape
Statement 1: The government should be able to restrict access to any information it sees fit, even if this allows it to cover up mistakes and corruption. [BROAD]	38	31	40	33	49	50	38	35	30	26
Statement 2: The government should only be able to restrict access to information that is vital to national security, even if this means it is embarrassed from time to time. [NARROW]	48	61	52	41	47	31	47	38	50	66
Neither	9	3	7	13	3	15	7	22	18	6

Note that the margin of error for the provincial samples is higher, ranging from +/-5% to +/-8% at a 95% confidence level.

Democracy

In other results, South Africans remain positive that their country is a democracy, albeit with minor problems.

In your opinion, how much of a democracy is South Africa today?...		
	2008	2011
Not a democracy	6	3
Democracy with major problems	32	30
Democracy with minor Problems	29	38
A full democracy	29	28

They have become stronger in their belief that democracy is the most preferable form of government for South Africa, and more unwilling to give it up in favour of either law and order or service delivery.

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?		
	2008	2011
Willing	65	64

Unwilling	29	32
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Remarkably, their personal satisfaction with South Africa's own democracy has gone up from 49% in 2008 to 60% in 2011.

South Africans are also positive about improvements in the quality of their government in the last two decades, and they hope to see continued gains in the future. When asked to rate various governments on a scale from 0 (completely undemocratic) to 10 (completely democratic), they give the system of government under apartheid a mean score of just 2.8. The government ten years ago rises to a mean score of 5.4, and the current government rates an even higher 6.1. But South Africans aspire to an even more democratic future: when asked where they would want the country to be in the future, the mean response is 8.7.

Briefings on the headline results of the entire South Africa survey will be released in a series of briefings co-hosted by Idasa and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung on the following schedule:

Pretoria	20 March	10:00 to 12:00	Idasa Offices, 357 Visagie Street, Pretoria
Johannesburg	20 March	15:00 to 17:00	Holiday Inn, Rosebank
Durban (with DDP)	22 March	14:00 to 16:00	Diakonia Centre, Durban
Cape Town	23 March	15:00 to 17:00	Townhouse Hotel, Cape Town

Idasa is an independent public interest organisation committed to building sustainable democratic societies in collaboration with African and global partners. For more information about Idasa please visit our website www.idasa.org

For more information about the Afrobarometer please visit www.afrobarometer.org

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For further comment on the results of the Afrobarometer prior to the briefings please contact Paul Graham or Olmo von Meijenfeldt at 012 392 0500