



Institute for Justice and Reconciliation
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News release

As South Africa's local elections approach, public confidence underpins a system in turmoil

South Africa's fourth democratic local government elections in August 2016 will be a test for the long-ruling but troubled African National Congress (ANC), for opposition parties hoping to claim some major cities, for an Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) caught between court orders and logistical realities, and for local government councillors facing their constituents.

The IEC, in particular, confronts a mammoth task and a legitimacy test after the Electoral Court ruled last year that certain by-elections were not free and fair because of incomplete voter rolls. The court ordered the IEC to make sure all voters' formal addresses are verified – a requirement that the IEC is challenging as unrealistic at the Constitutional Court.

The latest Afrobarometer survey in South Africa, conducted in August-September 2015, sheds some light on an election system in turmoil. Most South Africans are still confident that the electoral system has integrity and elections are free and fair without intimidation or violence. But South Africans have become more skeptical about elections ensuring that voters' views are represented and that voters are able to remove non-performing leaders from power. Survey responses indicate that if national elections had been held last year, the ANC would have seen its majority shrink while opposition parties gained ground.

For more information, see Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 89, available at www.afrobarometer.org.

Key findings

- Less than half of South Africans believe that elections ensure that their views are represented (44%) or enable them to remove non-performing leaders (36%). Both measures have decreased from previous surveys.
- Seven in 10 respondents (72%) say that elections in South Africa are “completely free and fair” or “free and fair, but with minor problems.” Two-thirds say that elections guarantee they have genuine choices (68%) and that votes are “often” or “always” counted fairly (66%).
- Support for the idea that it is voters' responsibility to make sure that councillors do their job is still a minority view (28%) but has doubled since 2008.

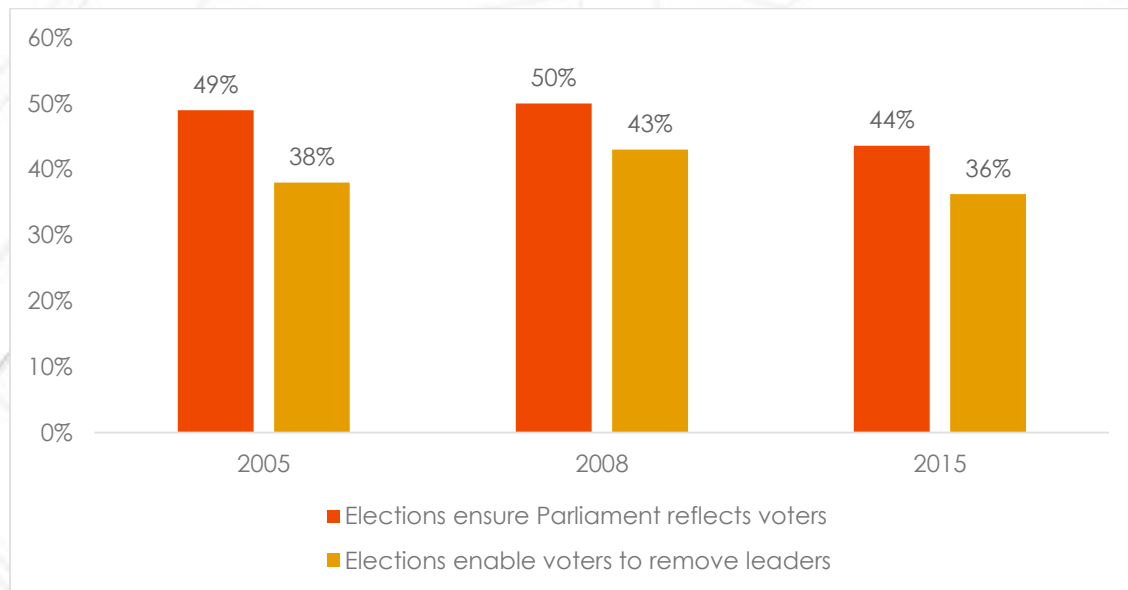
Afrobarometer

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. After five rounds of surveys between 1999 and 2013, results of Round 6 surveys (2014/2015) are currently being published. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of 1,200 or 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in South Africa, led by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) and Plus 94 Research, interviewed 2,400 adult South Africans in August and September 2015. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in South Africa in 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2011.

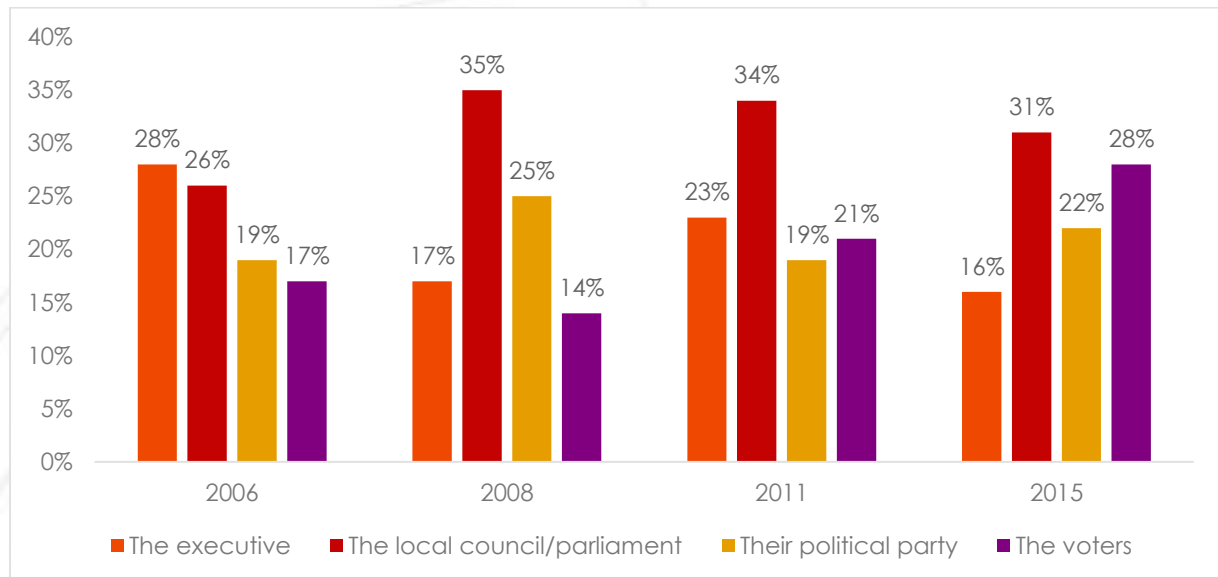
Charts

Figure 1: How well do elections work? | South Africa | 2005-2015



Respondents were asked: Think 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
 (% who say "well" or "very well")

Figure 2: Who should make sure local government councillors do their job? | South Africa | 2006-2015



Respondents were asked: Who should be responsible for making sure that, once elected, local government councillors do their jobs?

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