

Institute for Justice and Reconciliation
Cape Town, South Africa
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News release

Report card: The Zuma era in South Africa, 2009-2018

In the eyes of his people, former South African President Jacob Zuma's nine-year tenure, which ended late on Valentine's Day, was marked by declining popular trust and lacklustre performance.

Using Afrobarometer data from national surveys in South Africa, this report card looks back at Zuma's tenure and what citizens said about him and the country's democracy and economy on his watch.

Zuma, who was elected president in May 2009 by the National Assembly, resigned on February 14 under pressure from his own party, the African National Congress (ANC), and was immediately succeeded as president by his deputy, Cyril Ramaphosa today after election in Parliament. Zuma became the second head of state and government of South Africa to resign his office. His predecessor, Thabo Mbeki, resigned in September 2008, also following a recall by the ANC.

Key findings

- Zuma's approval ratings were respectable (64%) in 2011 but dropped by almost half over the next four years; only one-third of South Africans (36%) approved of his job performance in 2015 (see Figure 1).
- Public trust in Zuma also declined by almost half. While 62% of citizens said they trusted him "somewhat" or "a lot" in 2011, that proportion had shrunk to 34% by 2015 (Figure 2).
- The Zuma government was seen as performing "fairly well" or "very well" in distributing welfare (84%) but not in fighting corruption (20%) or narrowing gaps between rich and poor (22%) (Figure 3). Over his full tenure, Zuma's government was perceived to have performed especially badly in reducing crime, managing immigration and the economy, and fighting corruption (Figure 4).
- Between 2011 and 2015, the proportion of South Africans who saw their country as a "full democracy" or one with minor problems dropped by 18 percentage points, from 66% to 48%. Similarly, fewer than half of citizens (47%) were satisfied in 2015 with the way their democracy was working, a decline of 13 percentage points from 2011 (Figure 5).

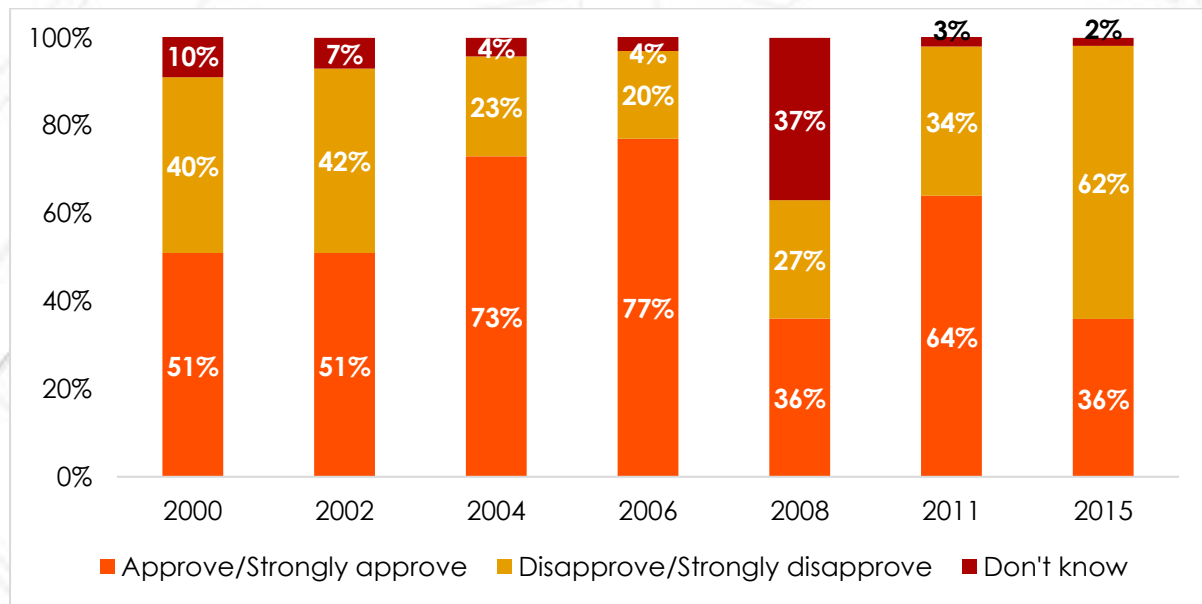
Afrobarometer

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in Africa. Six rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 37 African countries between 1999 and 2016, and Round 7 surveys (2016/2018) are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in South Africa, led by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation and Plus94 Research interviewed 2,400 adult South Africans in 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 have been conducted in South Africa in 2000, 2002, 2006, 2008 and 2011. The next scheduled survey will take place in May 2018.

Charts

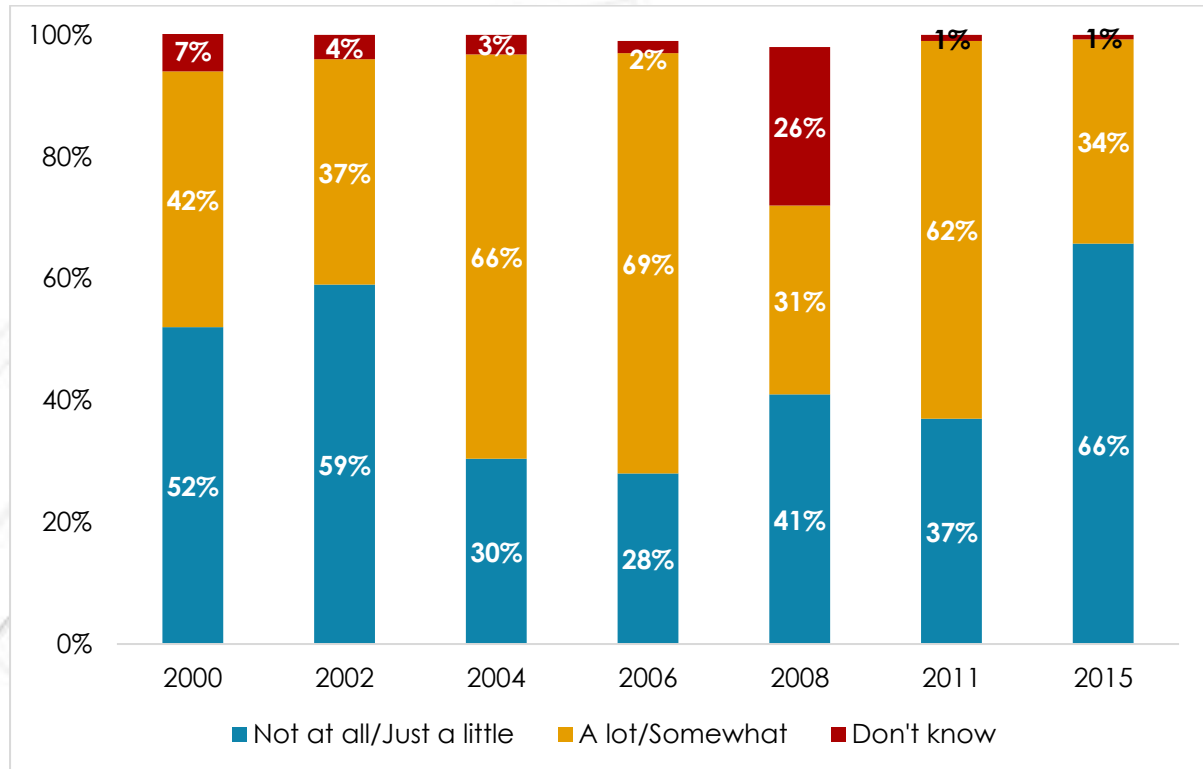
Figure 1: President's performance ratings | South Africa | 2000-2015



Respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: President [insert name]?

¹ The 2008 survey referred to President Kgalema Motlhanthe, who had only been in office for a short time, hence the high proportion of respondents who felt unable to answer the question (37%).

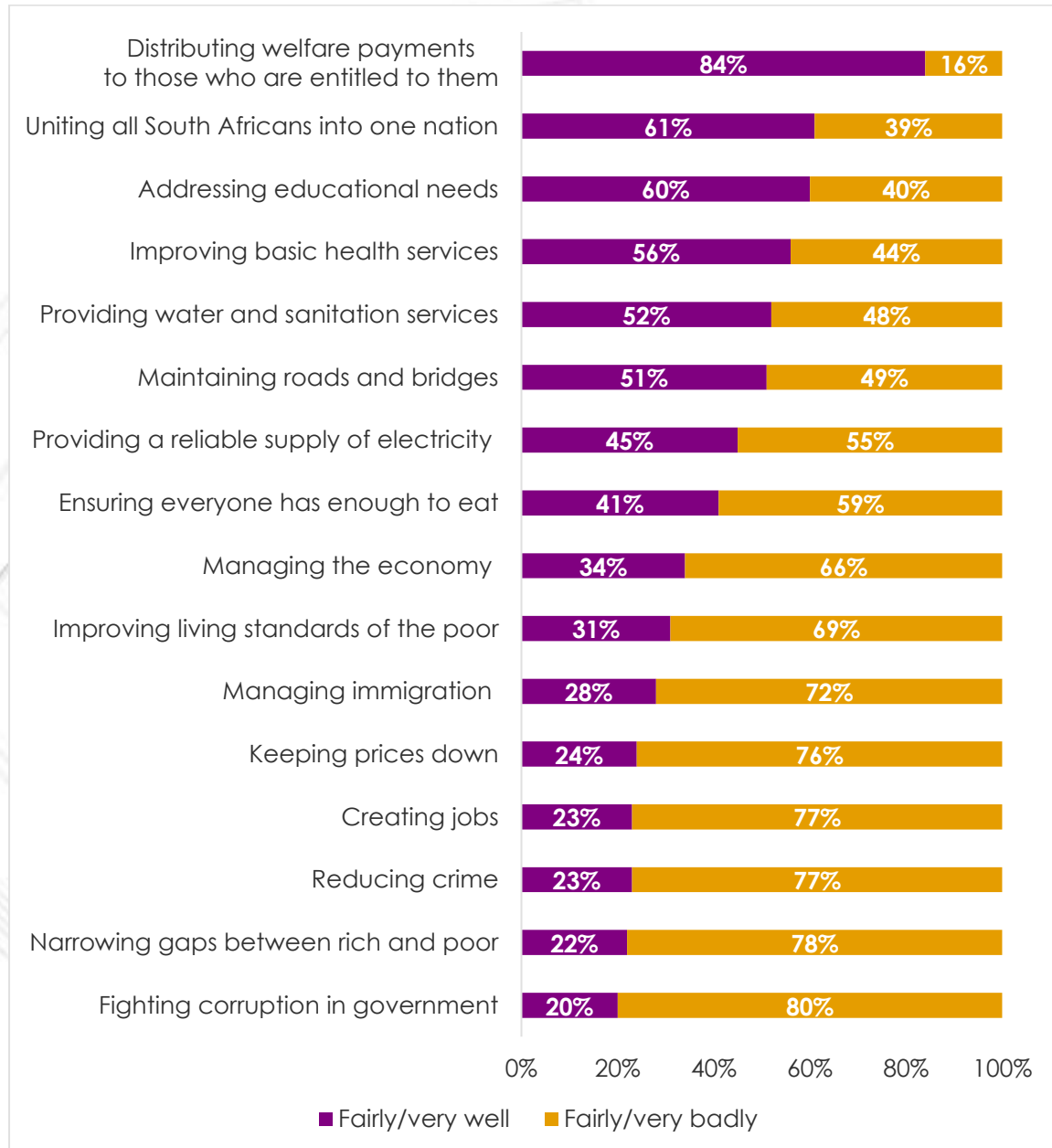
Figure 2: Lack of public trust in the president | South Africa | 2000-2015



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The president?²

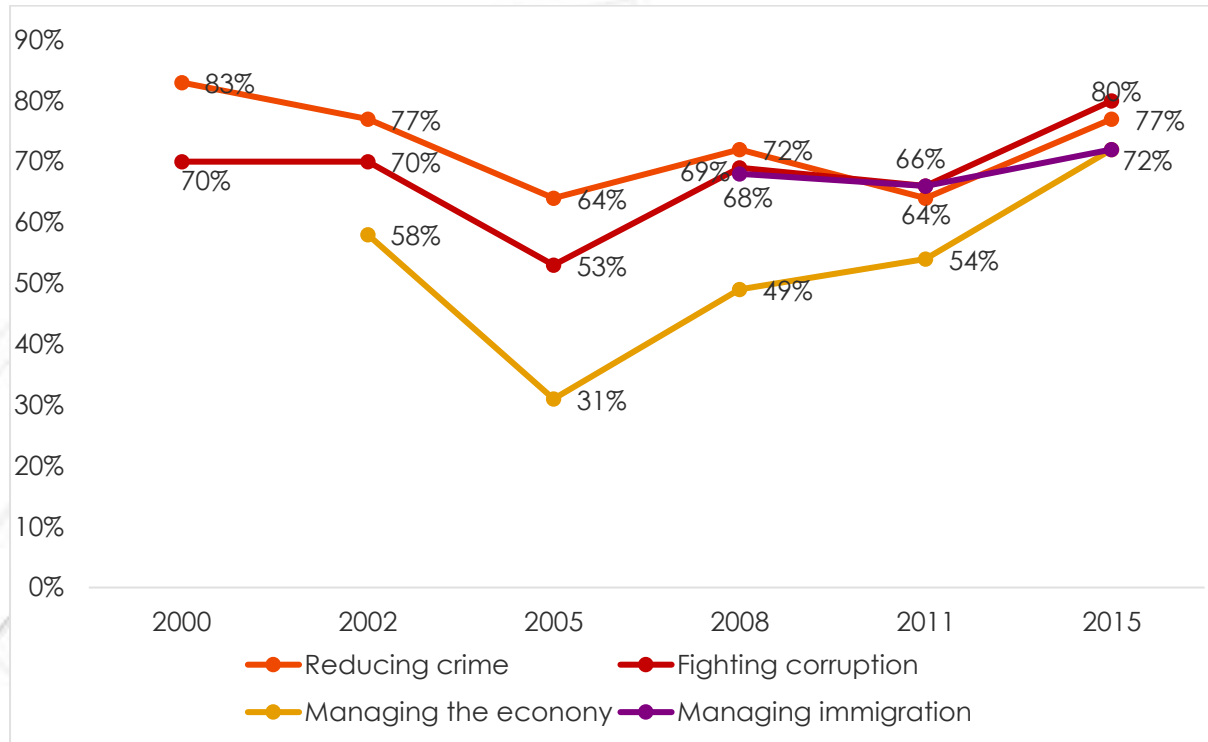
²The response options in 2002 and 2004 were "a very great deal," "a lot," "just a little," and "not at all." In 2000, the question was phrased this way: "How much of the time can you trust President Mbeki to do what is right?" Response options were "just about always," "most of the time," "only some of the time," and "never."

Figure 3: Government performance under Zuma | South Africa | 2015



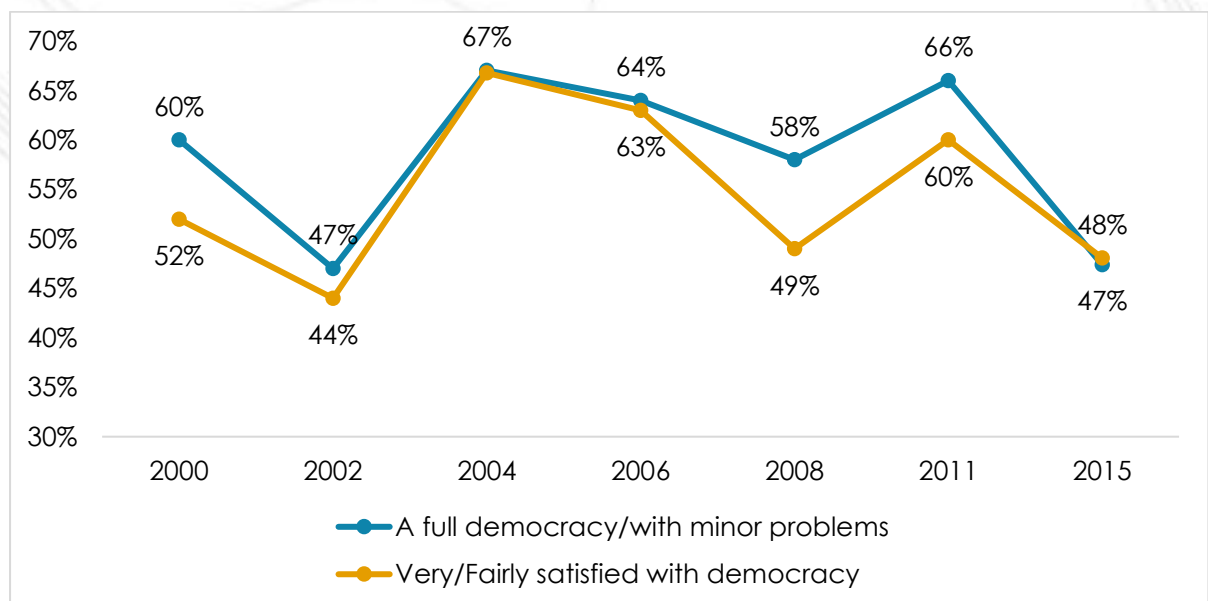
Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say? (Numbers exclude "Don't know" responses, which made up 3% or less of all responses)

Figure 4: Increase in negative ratings | South Africa | 1999-2015



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

Figure 5: Extent of and satisfaction with democracy | South Africa | 2000-2015



Respondents were asked:

- In your opinion how much of a democracy is South Africa today?
- Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in South Africa?

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