

Cape Town, South Africa
8 October 2021

News release

South Africans' trust in their police drops to new low amid instability in leadership, Afrobarometer survey finds

South Africans' trust in the country's police is at historically low levels, new Afrobarometer survey findings show.

Popular trust in the South African Police Service (SAPS) has declined by about half over the past decade. A majority of citizens think most police officials are corrupt, and some citizens report having to pay bribes to obtain police assistance or avoid problems with the police.

These findings point to a crisis of confidence in the SAPS, which has been plagued by scandals over the past decade. Four of the country's seven post-apartheid National Police Commissioners have been dismissed from office and convicted on charges ranging from fraud and corruption to dishonest conduct.

On 7 October, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that National Police Commissioner Khehla Sitole had been served with a notice of intention to suspend him, stoking speculation that the country's top police official may be dismissed in the coming weeks. Sitole, who was appointed in 2017 by former President Jacob Zuma, has been accused of misconduct in connection with his alleged role in frustrating internal police investigations.

Key findings

- Only one-fourth (26%) of South Africans say they trust the police "somewhat" or "a lot" – about half as many as in 2011 (49%) (Figure 1).
 - Distrust of the police is at its highest level of the past two decades, with 73% of citizens saying they trust them "just a little" or "not at all."
 - The police trail other public institutions in popular trust, including the army (53% "somewhat" or "a lot"), the courts (43%), and the president (38%) (Figure 2).
- More than half (55%) of South Africans believe that "most" or "all" police officials are involved in corruption, the worst assessment recorded over the past decade. In addition, 36% think that "some" police officials are corrupt (Figure 3).
- Among citizens who say they had contact with the police during the previous 12 months, one in four (24%) report having to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour in order to avoid problems, while 15% say they did so to get the assistance they needed (Figure 4).

Afrobarometer surveys

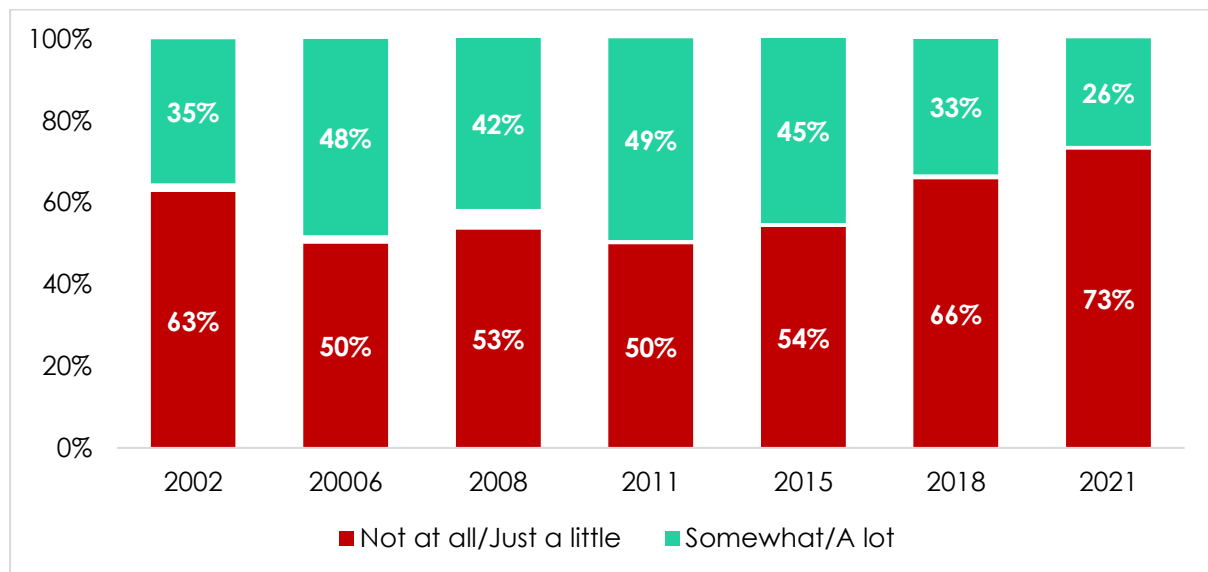
Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight rounds of surveys have been conducted in up to 39 countries since 1999. Round 8

surveys in 2019/2021 cover 34 countries. 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 Plus 94 Research, interviewed 1,600 adult South Africans in May-June 2021. 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 were conducted in South Africa in 2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015, and 2018.

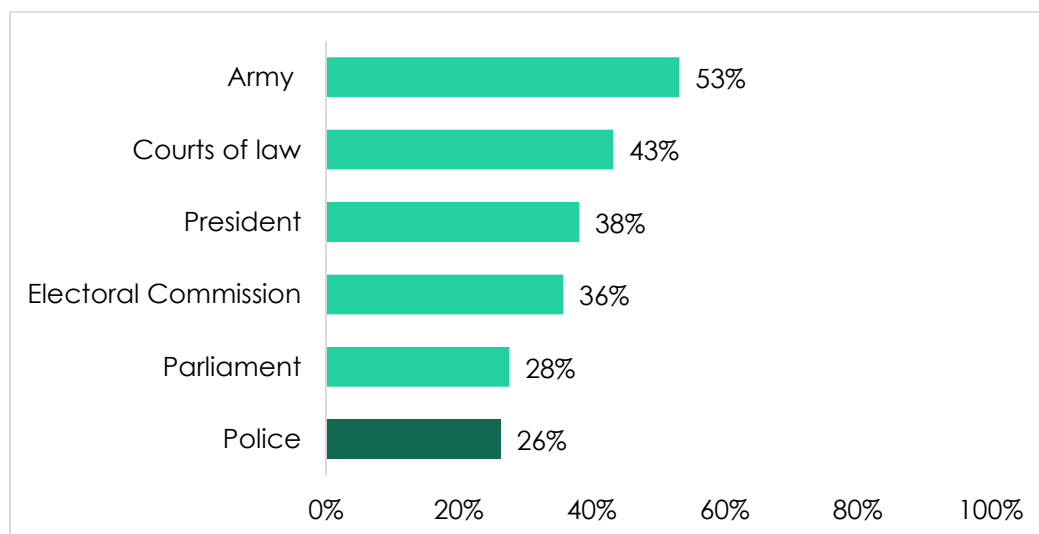
Charts

Figure 1: Trust in the police | South Africa | 2002–2021



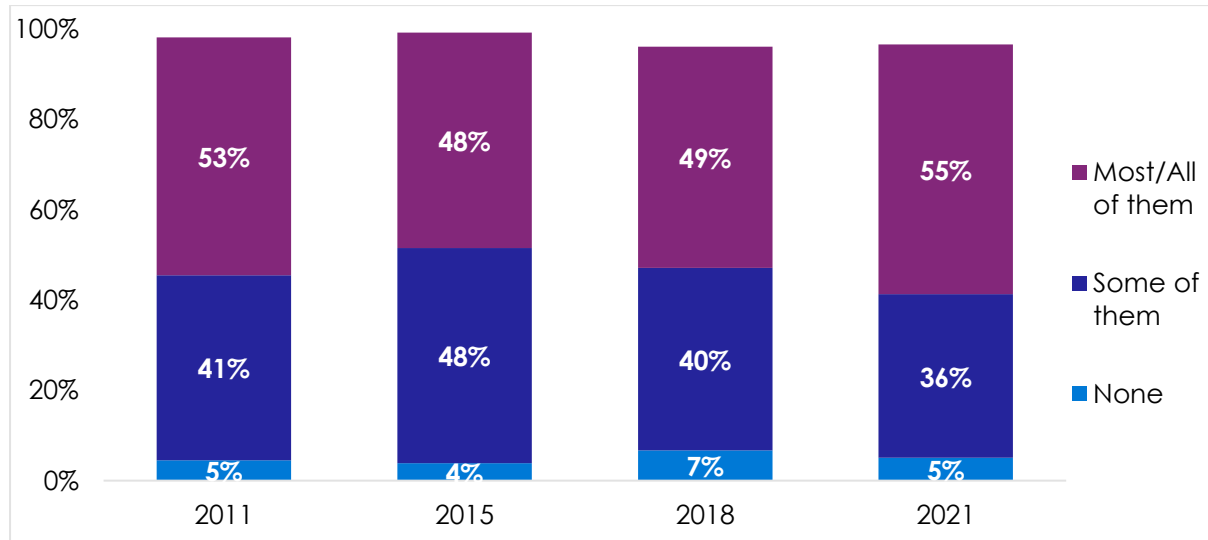
Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The police?

Figure 2: Trust in public institutions | South Africa | 2021



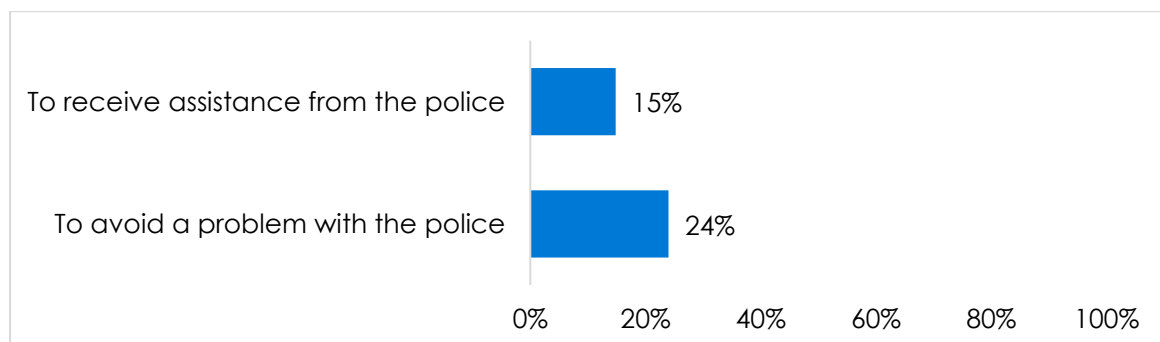
Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

Figure 3: Perceptions of police corruption | South Africa | 2011–2021



Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption or haven't you heard enough to say: Police?

Figure 4: Paid the police a bribe | South Africa | 2021



Respondents who said they had contact with the police during the previous 12 months were asked:

In the past 12 months, how often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police officer in order to:

Get the assistance you needed?

Avoid a problem during a situation like a checkpoint stop, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation?

(% who say "once or twice," "a few times," or "often") (Respondents who had no contact with the police are excluded.)

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