

South Africans have lost confidence in Zuma, believe he ignores Parliament and the law

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 66 | Rorisang Lekalake

Summary

The African National Congress (ANC) has won every national election since South Africa's transition to universal suffrage in 1994. But while the ANC's victory in 2014 – its fifth in a row – confirmed the party's electoral dominance, its share of the vote declined from 66% in 2009 to 62%. New public opinion data from Afrobarometer indicate that the party's leader, President Jacob Zuma, has lost significant citizen support since 2011.

The 2015 data show significant declines in citizens' evaluations of government performance on key indicators and general dissatisfaction with political leaders' performance, particularly the president's (**see Afrobarometer dispatches No. 64 and 65, at www.afrobarometer.org**). Public disapproval of the president's performance and perceptions of corruption in the Presidency are at their highest levels since Afrobarometer conducted its first survey in South Africa in 2000. Furthermore, South Africans' trust in President Zuma dropped by almost half over the past four years, and a majority of citizens believe that he routinely ignores both the legislature and the judiciary. Although negative evaluations are lower among the ANC's traditional support base, a majority of black South Africans disapprove of his performance in the past year and say they trust him "just a little" or "not at all."

President Zuma has been a controversial political figure for a long time, and even self-identified ANC supporters are divided on whether they trust him. These results indicate that while a majority of South Africans continue to support the ANC, a great deal of work needs to be done to restore confidence in its leader.

Afrobarometer survey

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. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 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-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, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2011.

Key findings

- Trust in the president is at its lowest point since 2000¹: Only one-third (34%) of South Africans say they trust President Zuma “somewhat” or “a lot,” down from 62% in 2011. Distrust of the president differs by location, race, and political affiliation, but even among self-identified ANC supporters, half (50%) say they trust him “just a little” or “not at all.”
- Perceptions of corruption in the Presidency are at their highest level since 2000. Almost half (46%) of citizens say that “most” or “all” officials in the Presidency are involved in corruption, an increase of 11 percentage points since 2011.
- Public approval of President Zuma's performance dropped from 64% in 2011 to 36% in 2015. A majority of citizens of all race groups disapprove of his performance in the past year.
- South Africans support limitations on presidential power: More than three-quarters support term limits (78%) and believe that Parliament, not the president, should make laws (76%), and six in 10 (62%) say that the president should have to account to Parliament for government expenditures. Despite strong support for the notion that the president should be subject to the law (77%), a majority believe that President Zuma “often” or “always” ignores laws (59%) and Parliament (57%).

Trust in President Zuma

Public trust in South African presidents has generally been low since 2000: On average from 2000 to 2006, about half (52%) of citizens said they trusted former President Thabo Mbeki “a lot” or “somewhat” – identical to the 2011-2015 average for President Zuma. But while public confidence in Mbeki increased in the latter half of his tenure, the proportion of citizens who say they trust President Zuma “somewhat” or “a lot” has decreased by 28 percentage points since 2011. At two-thirds, distrust of the president is currently at its highest level since Afrobarometer began surveys in South Africa in 2000 (Figure 1).

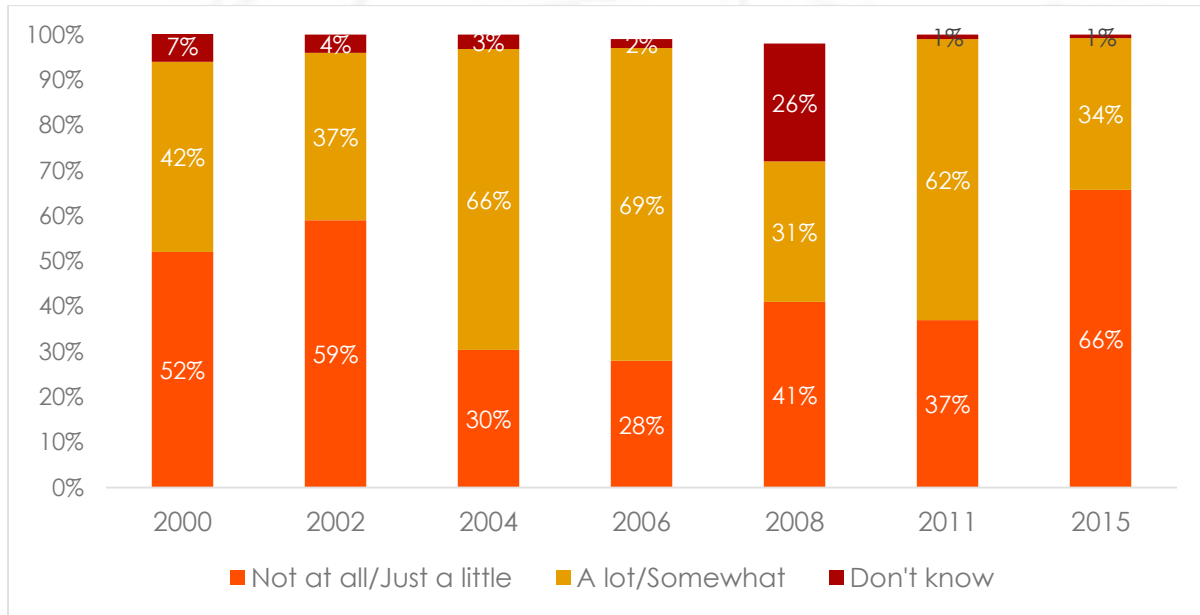
Disaggregating these results by key demographic and political indicators shows that across almost all categories, a majority of South Africans say they trust the president “just a little” or “not at all.”² While there are few differences by gender, dissatisfaction increases with urbanisation, from 58% in rural areas to 69% among urban dwellers. Citizens aged 50 or older are less likely to say they trust the president “just a little” or “not at all” than their younger counterparts. Indian/South Asian (93%) and white (87%) South Africans and opposition supporters (82%) are the most likely groups to express distrust of the president. Remarkably, half (50%) of ANC supporters³ say they trust President Zuma “just a little” or “not at all” – despite the fact that he is also president of their party (Figure 2).

¹ Interpretations of survey findings on attitudes and evaluations since 2000 exclude the 2008 survey, which referred to former President Kgalema Motlanthe, because he was not well known at the time of fieldwork.

² Note that given the smaller sample size of demographic and political subgroups, these findings have significantly larger margins of sampling error than the +/-2% margin for the overall survey.

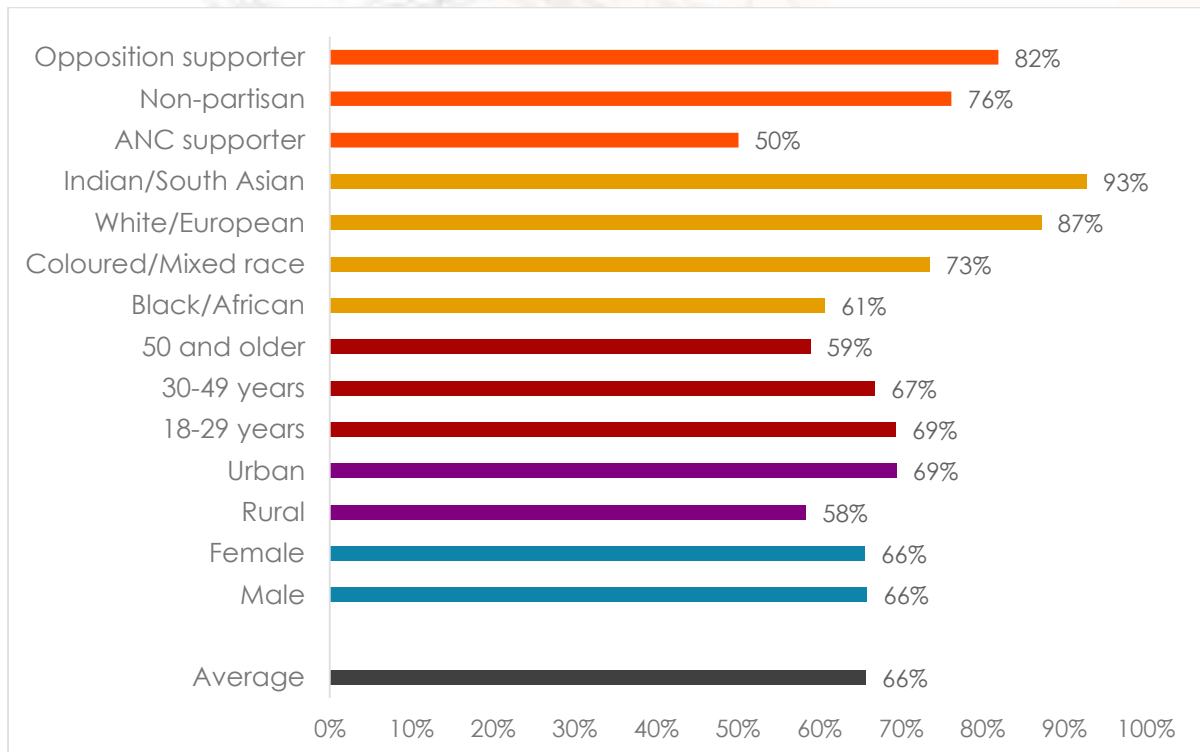
³ Respondents were asked whether they feel “close” to a particular political party and if so, to which one.

Figure 1: 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?⁴

Figure 2: Distrust of President Zuma | by key indicators | South Africa | 2015



(% who say "not at all" or "just a little")

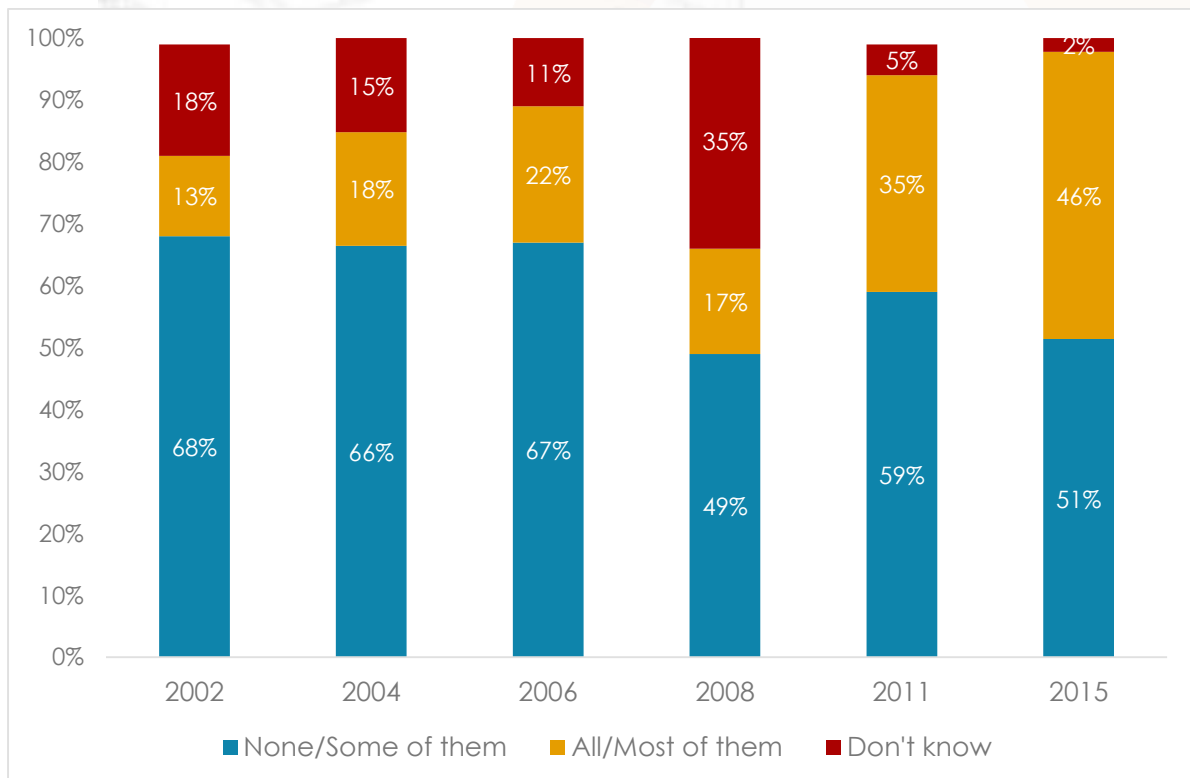
⁴ The response options in 2002 and 2004 were "a very great deal," "a lot," "just a little," and "not at all." In 2000, the question was phrased this way: "How much of the time can you trust President Mbeki to do what is right?" Response options were "just about always," "most of the time," "only some of the time," and "never."

Corruption in the Presidency

In general, South Africans who see the Presidency as largely corrupt have been in the minority. On average since 2000 (excluding 2008), six in 10 respondents (62%) have said they thought that “none” or “some” of its officials were involved in corruption, compared to 27% who believed that “most” or “all” were corrupt. Perceptions of corruption in former President Mbeki’s office were voiced by 13% of respondents in 2002 but increased to 22% in 2015. Unsurprisingly, given recent high-profile corruption scandals, the proportion of citizens who believe that “all” or “most” officials in President Zuma’s office are corrupt has increased by 11 points since 2011, reaching its highest level (46%) since Afrobarometer surveys began (Figure 3).

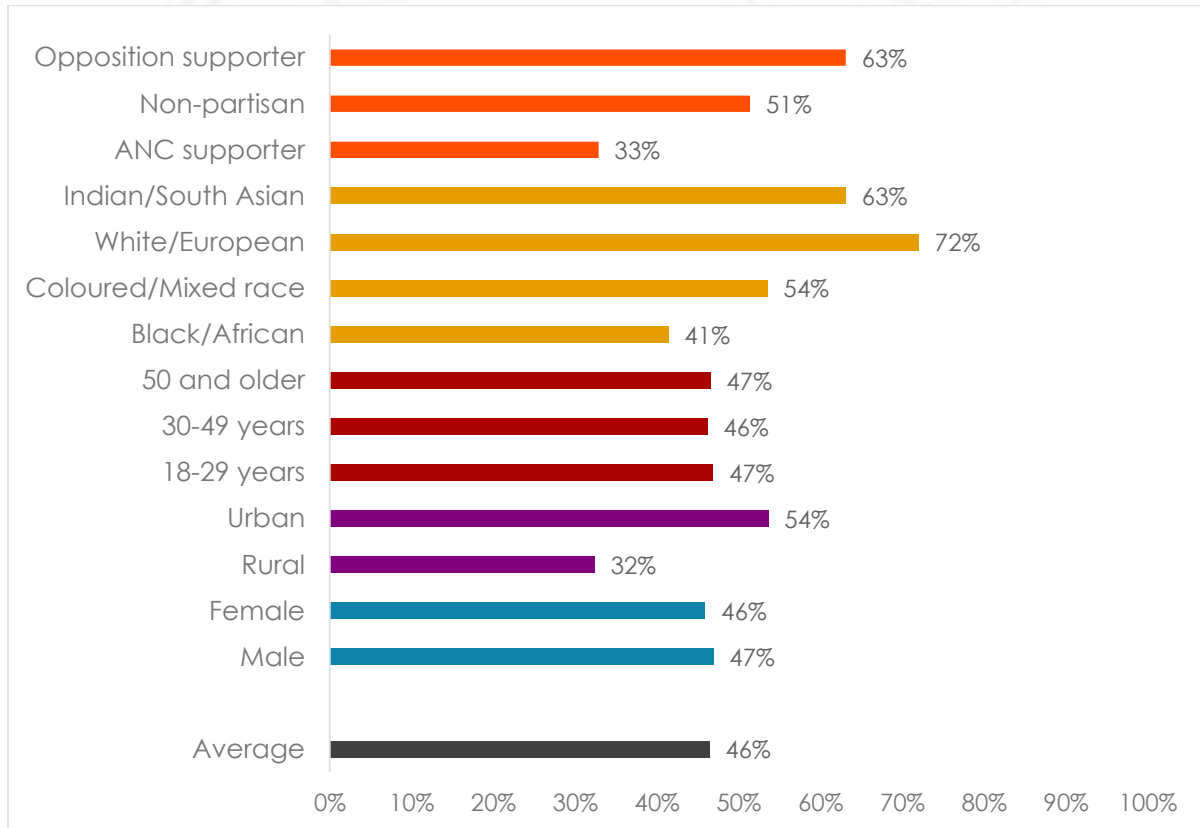
There are no significant differences by gender and age group, but urban residents are far more likely (by 22 percentage points) than rural residents to perceive corruption, and opposition supporters are almost twice as likely to believe that corruption is rife in President Zuma’s office as ANC supporters. In contrast to perceptions of trust, white South Africans (72%) are the most likely race group to believe that “most” or “all” officials in the Presidency are involved in corruption, along with a majority of Indian/South Asian (63%) and coloured (54%) citizens and a substantial minority (41%) of black respondents (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Perceptions of corruption in the Presidency | South Africa | 2002-2015



Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The president and officials in his office?

Figure 4: Perceived corruption in the Presidency | South Africa | by key indicators | 2015



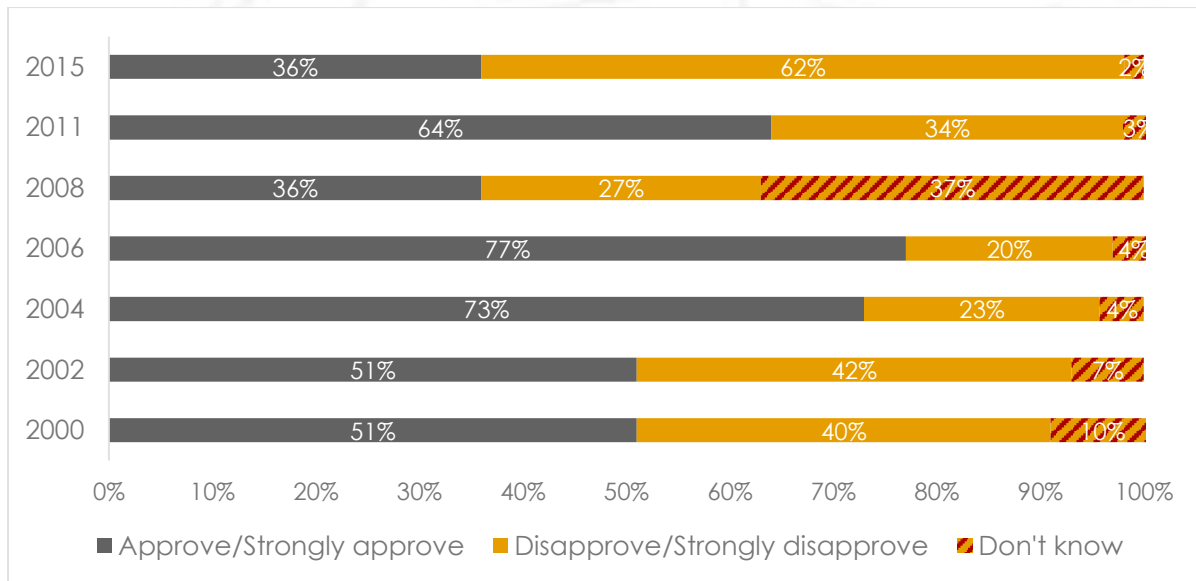
(% who say "most of them" or "all of them")

Disapproval of the president's performance

On average, a majority (59%) of South Africans have approved of their president's performance between 2000 and 2015, compared to 37% who have disapproved. Public approval of former President Thabo Mbeki's performance improved significantly over the course of his tenure, from half (51%) in 2000 and 2002 to three-quarters (77%) of citizens in 2006. In contrast, President Zuma's performance rating has declined by 28 percentage points in the past four years. Excluding the 2008 result, public approval of the president (36%) is at its lowest level since the country's initial Afrobarometer survey (Figure 5).

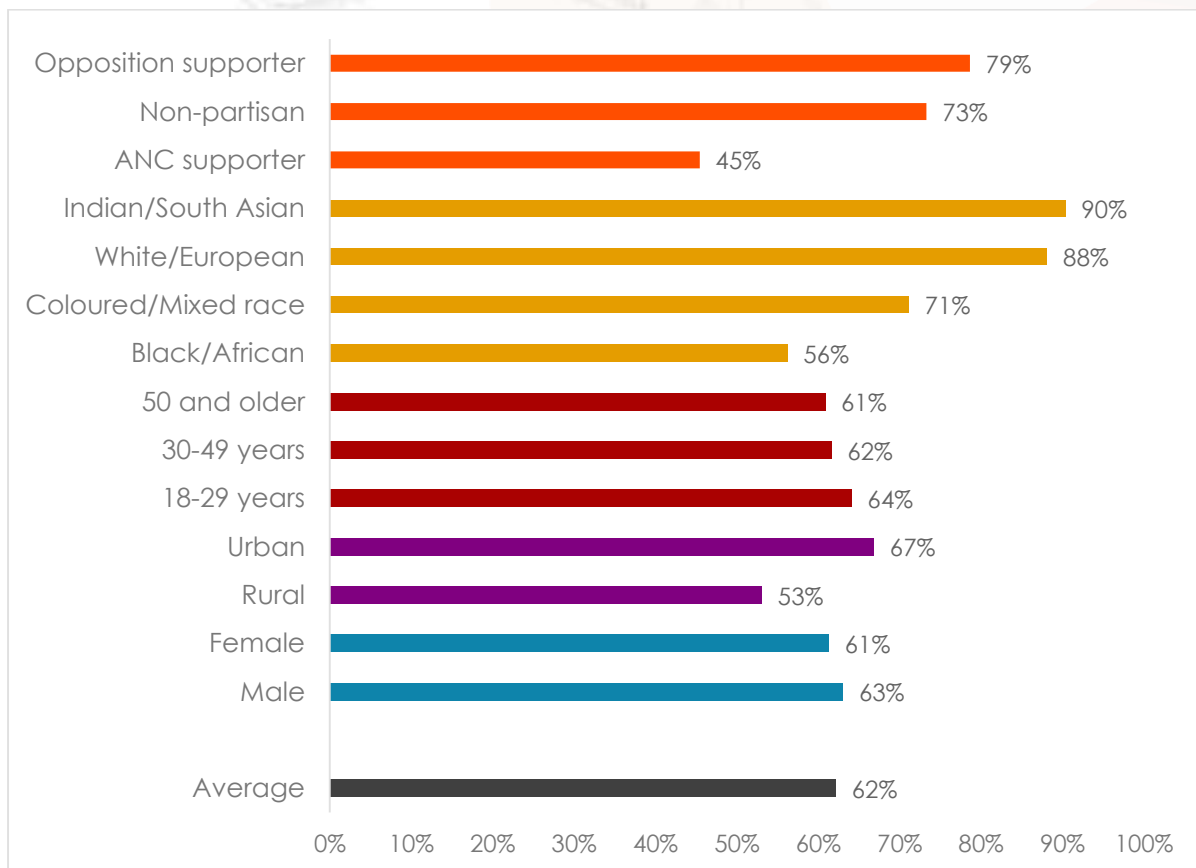
A majority of South Africans disapprove of the president's performance across all categories, except for ANC supporters (45%). While there are few differences by gender or age, dissatisfaction increases with urbanisation, from 53% in rural areas to 67% among urban dwellers. Indian/South Asian (90%) and white (88%) South Africans are more likely to give negative evaluations than other race groups, although a majority of coloured (71%) and black (56%) citizens also disapprove. Dissatisfaction is high not only among self-identified opposition supporters (79%) but also among non-partisan respondents (73%) (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Evaluations of the president's performance | 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]?

Figure 6: Disapproval of President Zuma's performance | by demographic indicators | South Africa | 2015

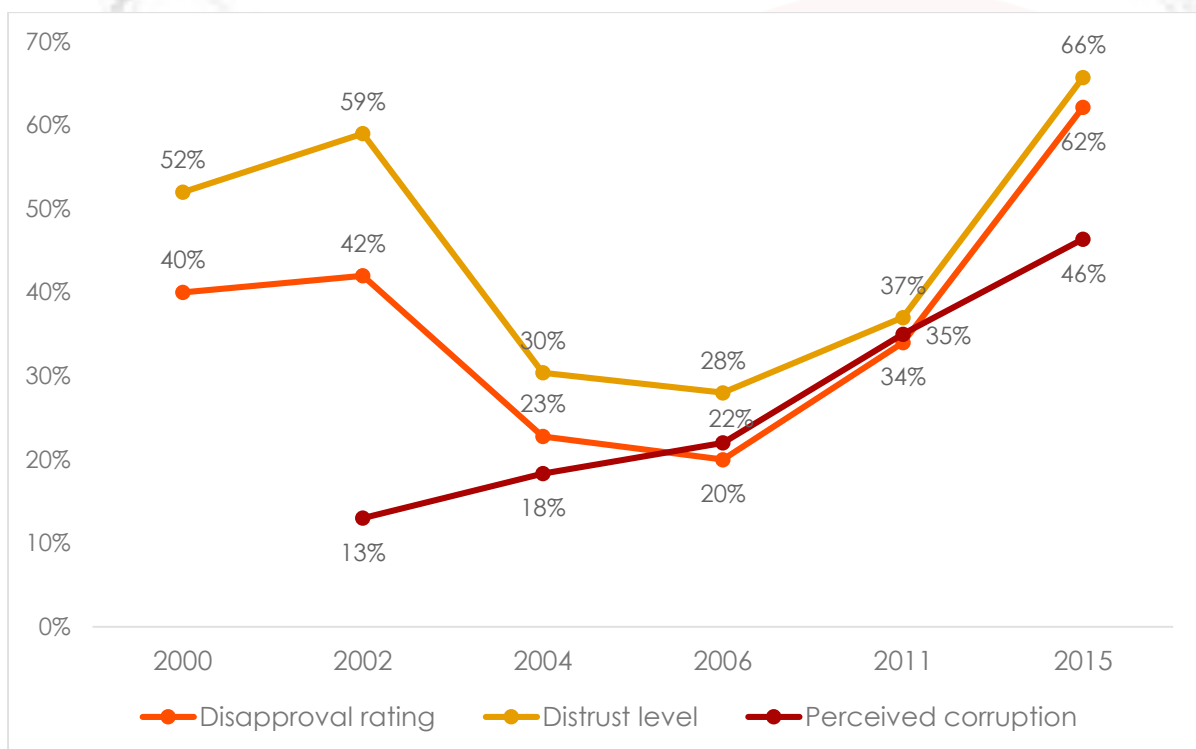


(% who "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove")

In sum, public distrust and disapproval of the South African president have followed roughly the same trajectory since 2000. Both negative measures declined over the course of former President Mbeki's tenure and have risen during President Zuma's tenure. Although perceptions of corruption in the Presidency have been significantly lower than the other two indicators, they have been gradually increasing since 2002. All three measures are currently at their highest levels (Figure 7),⁵ despite the ANC's continued electoral strength at the national level.

President Zuma's current approval rating is significantly lower than the continental average for presidents (by 20 percentage points), as is public confidence in him (by 24 percentage points). However, slightly fewer South Africans see their president's office as corrupt than do citizens of other surveyed countries (see Appendix, Tables 1-3).

Figure 7: Negative evaluations of the president | South Africa | 2000-2015



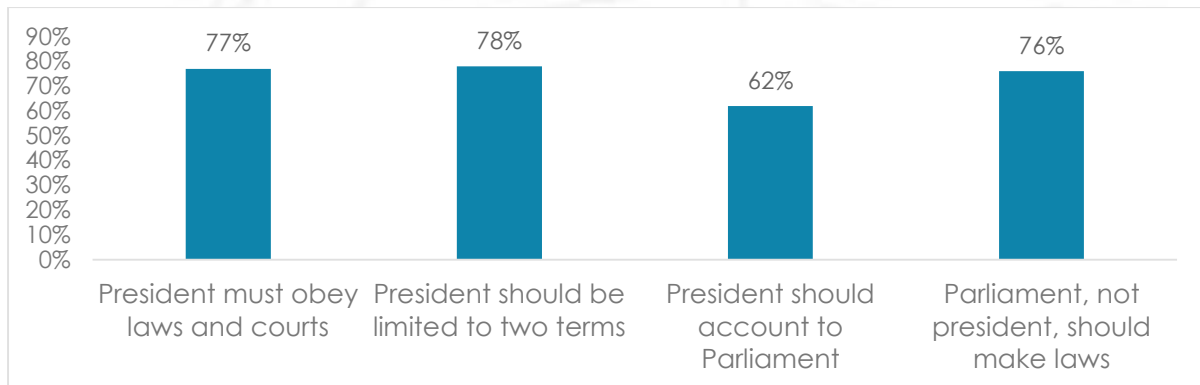
Presidential powers and respect for Parliament and the law

South Africans generally support limitations on the powers of the president: More than three-fourths say that office-holders should abide by the laws of the country (77%) and should be restricted to two terms (78%). Furthermore, six in 10 (62%) say the president should have to account to Parliament for government spending, and 76% affirm that law-making should be led by parliamentarians, not by the president (Figure 8).

In practice, however, six in 10 respondents believe that President Zuma “always” or “often” ignores the laws and courts of the country (59%) as well as Parliament (57%). Both proportions have more than doubled since 2011 (Figure 9).

⁵ In contrast to these national results, support for President Zuma is generally higher in his home province of KwaZulu-Natal (see Appendix, Tables 4-6, for full frequencies by province).

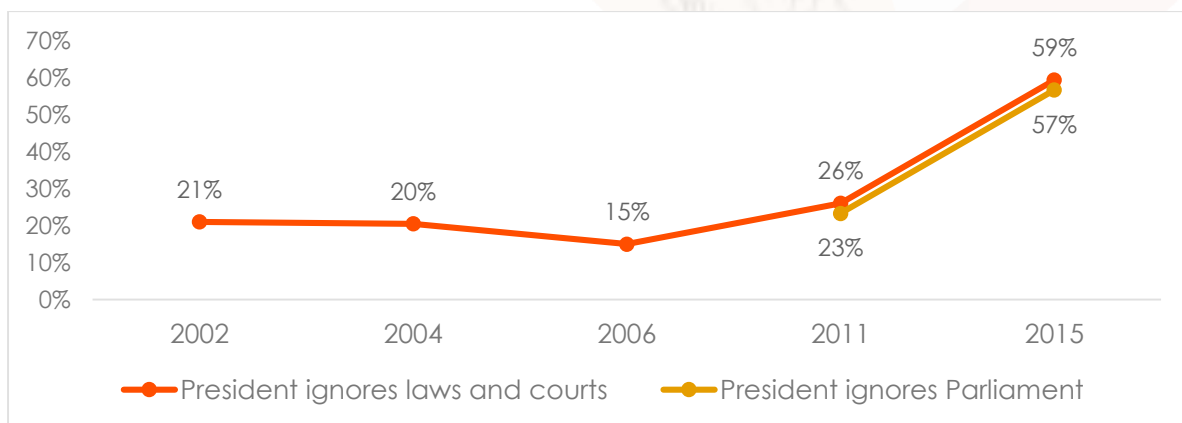
Figure 8: Support for restrictions to presidential powers | South Africa | 2015



Respondents were asked:

- Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.
 Statement 1: Since the president was elected to lead the country, he should not be bound by laws or court decisions that he thinks are wrong.
 Statement 2: The president must always obey the laws and the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong.
- Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.
 Statement 1: The Constitution should limit the president to serving a maximum of two terms in office.
 Statement 2: There should be no constitutional limit on how long the president can serve.
- Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.
 Statement 1: Parliament should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how his government spends taxpayers' money.
 Statement 2: The president should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying his actions.
- Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.
 Statement 1: Members of Parliament represent the people; therefore they should make laws for this country, even if the president does not agree.
 Statement 2: Since the president represents all of us, he should pass laws without worrying about what Parliament thinks.

Figure 9: Perceptions of presidential respect for Parliament and the law | South Africa | 2000-2015



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often, in this country:

- Does the president ignore the courts and laws of this country?⁶
- Does the president ignore Parliament and just do what he wants?
 (% who say "always" or "often")

⁶ In 2002, 2004, and 2006, survey respondents were asked: "In this country, how often does the president ignore the constitution?"

Conclusion

Analysis of new public opinion data clearly indicates that South Africans have lost confidence in President Zuma and are dissatisfied with his performance. Negative evaluations of the president are higher among urban residents and minority race groups, but they are relatively high even among the ANC's traditional support base. Given the level of recent controversy regarding the president – and by extension his party – a concerted effort from both is required to restore public confidence in the country's leader in order to prevent these attitudes from extending into overall dissatisfaction with the party.

To further explore this data, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.

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Appendix

Table 1: Evaluations of president/prime minister's performance | 32 countries | 2014/2015⁷

	Approve/Strongly approve	Disapprove/Strongly disapprove	Don't know/ Haven't heard enough
Algeria	46%	45%	9%
Benin	50%	49%	0%
Botswana	80%	19%	2%
Burkina Faso	N/A	N/A	N/A
Burundi	84%	15%	1%
Cameroon	66%	23%	10%
Cape Verde	67%	16%	16%
Cote d'Ivoire	64%	34%	2%
Egypt	82%	15%	3%
Ghana	37%	60%	4%
Guinea	57%	41%	2%
Kenya	75%	24%	1%
Lesotho	46%	46%	8%
Liberia	33%	66%	1%
Madagascar	40%	59%	1%
Malawi	38%	60%	2%
Mali	71%	29%	0%
Mauritius	59%	35%	6%
Namibia	88%	11%	1%
Niger	80%	18%	2%
Nigeria	39%	60%	1%
Senegal	58%	39%	3%
Sierra Leone	51%	44%	5%
South Africa	36%	62%	2%
Sudan	51%	39%	11%
Swaziland	56%	35%	9%
Tanzania	80%	19%	1%
Togo	61%	33%	6%
Tunisia	N/A	N/A	N/A
Uganda	81%	16%	2%
Zambia	59%	35%	6%
Zimbabwe	57%	37%	6%
Average	56%	34%	4%

⁷ Surveys were conducted in 36 countries. Data from four countries were not available at the time of publication: Gabon, Morocco, Mozambique, and São Tomé e Príncipe.

Table 2: Trust in president/prime minister | 32 countries | 2014/2015

	A lot/ Somewhat	Not at all/ Just a little	Don't know/ Haven't heard enough
Algeria	47%	50%	3%
Benin	47%	53%	0%
Botswana	67%	32%	1%
Burkina Faso	68%	30%	2%
Burundi	81%	18%	1%
Cameroon	67%	29%	4%
Cape Verde	57%	36%	6%
Cote d'Ivoire	54%	45%	1%
Egypt	82%	17%	1%
Ghana	40%	57%	2%
Guinea	59%	39%	2%
Kenya	72%	28%	1%
Lesotho	50%	43%	7%
Liberia	30%	69%	1%
Madagascar	52%	48%	0%
Malawi	29%	68%	3%
Mali	70%	30%	0%
Mauritius	54%	43%	2%
Namibia	80%	19%	1%
Niger	81%	17%	2%
Nigeria	31%	68%	1%
Senegal	66%	33%	1%
Sierra Leone	52%	44%	5%
South Africa	34%	66%	1%
Sudan	54%	43%	3%
Swaziland	58%	40%	2%
Tanzania	80%	19%	1%
Togo	53%	43%	4%
Tunisia	56%	42%	3%
Uganda	79%	19%	2%
Zambia	55%	43%	2%
Zimbabwe	63%	33%	4%
Average	58%	40%	2%

Table 3: Perceptions of corruption in president/prime minister's office | 32 countries
| 2014/2015

	None/Some of them	All/Most of them	Don't know/Haven't heard enough
Algeria	56%	31%	13%
Benin	45%	51%	4%
Botswana	68%	20%	12%
Burkina Faso	68%	27%	5%
Burundi	73%	16%	12%
Cameroon	51%	34%	15%
Cape Verde	47%	12%	40%
Cote d'Ivoire	70%	24%	6%
Egypt	Not asked	Not asked	Not asked
Ghana	43%	48%	9%
Guinea	60%	32%	9%
Kenya	64%	27%	9%
Lesotho	59%	17%	24%
Liberia	35%	63%	2%
Madagascar	70%	28%	1%
Malawi	45%	43%	12%
Mali	63%	35%	2%
Mauritius	69%	16%	15%
Namibia	75%	17%	8%
Niger	69%	22%	9%
Nigeria	43%	54%	3%
Senegal	60%	22%	18%
Sierra Leone	39%	48%	13%
South Africa	51%	46%	2%
Sudan	57%	33%	11%
Swaziland	54%	29%	17%
Tanzania	72%	15%	13%
Togo	45%	37%	18%
Tunisia	61%	18%	20%
Uganda	58%	29%	13%
Zambia	66%	27%	7%
Zimbabwe	58%	30%	12%
Average	56%	30%	11%

Table 4: Evaluations of President Zuma's performance | South Africa | by province | 2015

	Approve/Strongly approve	Disapprove/Strongly disapprove	Don't know/Haven't heard enough
Eastern Cape	39%	60%	1%
Free State	31%	67%	2%
Gauteng	23%	76%	2%
KwaZulu-Natal	56%	39%	5%
Limpopo	28%	72%	0%
Mpumalanga	50%	50%	0%
North West	33%	67%	0%
Northern Cape	23%	75%	2%
Western Cape	31%	66%	3%
Average	36%	62%	2%

Table 5: Public trust in President Zuma | South Africa | by province | 2015

	A lot/Somewhat	Not at all/ Just a little	Don't know/Haven't heard enough
Eastern Cape	29%	71%	-
Free State	19%	78%	3%
Gauteng	19%	81%	0%
KwaZulu-Natal	57%	41%	1%
Limpopo	27%	72%	0%
Mpumalanga	48%	52%	-
North West	36%	64%	-
Northern Cape	29%	69%	2%
Western Cape	32%	67%	1%
Average	34%	66%	1%

Table 6: Perceptions of corruption in the Presidency | South Africa | by province | 2015

	None/Some of them	All/Most of them	Don't know/Haven't heard enough
Eastern Cape	65%	33%	2%
Free State	36%	62%	2%
Gauteng	34%	65%	2%
KwaZulu-Natal	66%	29%	5%
Limpopo	59%	40%	1%
Mpumalanga	68%	32%	1%
North West	43%	56%	1%
Northern Cape	49%	47%	4%
Western Cape	45%	53%	2%
Average	51%	46%	2%