

Polarised view among ordinary South Africans about the president's State of the Nation Address

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Last week's much awaited State of the Nation Address by President Zuma received significant media attention, both locally and internationally.

Market research agency TNS, in partnership with GeoPoll (a mobile surveying platform), surveyed ordinary South Africans to hear their opinions about the speech.

The vast majority (85%) of South Africans watched or followed the speech live, and opinions among this group were distinctly polarised with just over half (52%) feeling satisfied that President Zuma's State of the Nation Address was either 'good' or 'very good', and 47% saying that they have confidence in the government to accomplish what the president promised during his address. With both of these figures around the 50% mark, it demonstrates that overall public opinion is clearly divided.

The SMS-based mobile survey, conducted amongst 1,100 South African adults, highlighted the extent to which South Africans are split in their opinion of President Zuma's speech. Importantly, the research findings only reflect the opinions of those who claimed to have watched the proceedings on the night itself (85% of South Africans). A further 15% did not watch it on the night.

The variety of the reactions to the speech was clear from responses that were split almost equally along a continuum from 'very good' to 'not good at all' although, with an almost equal proportion of positive and negative perceptions. This outcome held true across most provinces, with a few exceptions. Those who watched the speech in Mpumalanga were most positive, with 46% saying the speech was 'very good'. Reactions were also positive in Limpopo (where the EFF is dominant) with a third saying the speech was 'very good'.

The DA's stronghold, the Western Cape, had a distinctively negative reaction to the speech with 34% of those who viewed the speech on the night saying the speech was 'not at all good' versus the 9% of people who held the same view in Mpumalanga.

The speech seemed to grab the attention of adults between the ages of 25 and 35 years in particular with 89% of them watching it, indicating this group's interest in the government's plans for 2015. From an age group perspective, reactions to President Zuma's speech were also divided. Just over a third (34%) of 45+ year olds who watched the speech thought it was 'not at all good', compared to only 9% of viewers between the ages of 18 - 24 years.

TNS and GeoPoll's study also highlighted the main topics, which South Africans recalled from the speech. With the energy crisis affecting everyday life, over half (52%) of those who watched the speech on the day named Eskom's electricity challenges as one of the main topics which President Zuma addressed. This outweighs their recollection of wages and education as main topics, with 45% remembering wages as a topic that was addressed, and 38% recalling President Zuma's address of education issues as a main topic. Education seems to be more front-and-centre amongst the South African youth, with 44% remembering it as a main point in the speech.

A quarter of those who followed the speech recalled service delivery as a main topic and 20% felt land ownership was a main topic. Issues around crime (17%), Nkandla (13%) and Xenophobia (9%) received little emphasis.

The survey shows that the SONA conversation among ordinary South Africans (and confidence about the government's ability to deliver on its promises) is polarised with roughly half of South Africans expressing a positive response, and the

other half feeling negative towards it but with some distinct differences between the various provinces where specific parties have a particularly strong following.

The mobile survey was administered by TNS in partnership with GeoPoll. It was done as a short message service (SMS) based mobile survey, which has the benefit of reaching across all mobile devices. This survey was conducted on Friday, 13 February in South Africa. GeoPoll sent 5,548 survey invitations and obtained 1,100 completed surveys in under 10 hours, resulting in a 20% completion rate. The sample was designed to be representative of the South African population, at a national level, specifically in terms of age, gender and location.

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About GeoPoll

GeoPoll is the world's largest mobile survey platform, with a network of nearly 200 million users in emerging markets. GeoPoll's platform conducts surveys through the mobile phone and provides results to clients in real-time, giving anyone the ability to make data-driven decisions. Through work with Fortune 500 companies, nonprofits, and governments, GeoPoll provides insights on everything from brand preference to food security. GeoPoll services include both custom research and subscription products.

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