

# The president, the politician and the people

Issued by [Research Surveys](#)

27 Jun 2003

The involvement of metropolitan South Africans in politics in general is low. Although 80% of respondents claimed to be *aware* of the various South African political parties, only 44% stated that they *follow politics closely*<sup>5</sup>. However, people's views of the various politicians make interesting reading. Research Surveys tracks peoples' views on politicians on a continuous basis.

## Blacks and whites show similar views, while Indians don't

In February 2003, just over one-third (**37%**) of *metropolitan South Africans*<sup>1</sup> felt that **Thabo Mbeki** was doing a good job as president of the country.

Mbeki's popularity was lowest amongst the youth (18-24 year-olds) - 52% felt that he was *not* doing a good job as president compared to 44% of the older generation (50 + years). Black respondents were the least critical of Mbeki – 39% felt he was not doing a good job as president.

**Nelson Mandela**, who naturally benefited from the atmosphere of euphoria and celebration that followed our democratic elections in 1994, demonstrated a significantly higher degree of confidence as president.

In August 1998, **71%** of *Black Males*<sup>2</sup> felt that Mandela was doing a good job as president, while in September 1998, **73%** of *Black females*<sup>3</sup> concurred with this opinion.

In contrast, the results of the February 2003 survey showed that only **48%** of *Black males*, and **48%** of *Black females* felt that Thabo Mbeki was performing as president.

These contrasting opinions were not restricted to Black South Africans only. In September 1998, 30% of White males<sup>3</sup> approved of Mandela, while only 12% of this group felt the same way about Mbeki this year. In October 1998, 21% of White females<sup>4</sup> had a favourable opinion of Mandela in contrast to 11% who were favourable about Mbeki.

These trends were consistent within the Coloured<sup>2</sup> population although the differences were less marked.

It is interesting to note that Indian South Africans interviewed in August 1998 were the only ethnic group that seems to prefer Thabo Mbeki's leadership style – 18% of Indian females<sup>2</sup> were in favour of Mandela in 1998 versus 22% approving of Mbeki in February 2003. This is in line with Indian males' <sup>2</sup> views: 19% were in favour of Mandela in 1998, while 24% felt that Mbeki was doing a good job in 2003.

On the positive side, Mbeki's popularity is improving. In February 2002, only 27% of respondents felt that he was performing, compared to the figure of 37% for 2003.

## Patricia – friend or foe?

More than half (**51%**) of metropolitan South Africans<sup>5</sup> were in favour of **Patricia de Lille** and felt that 'we should have more politicians like her'. Only 26% of respondents disagreed with this statement, while 23% reserved comment.

Not surprisingly, Coloured respondents supported her most strongly, with 75% wanting more politicians like her. Comparable figures for other race groups were 66% for Indians, 50% for Whites, and 47% for Blacks.

Her Coloured following translates into a noteworthy support in Cape Town with just over two-thirds (67%) of Capetonians

rooting for her. This is in contrast to approximately half of respondents in each of the other three regions supporting Patricia – i.e. Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal, and the Eastern Cape/Bloemfontein.

One quarter of respondents (26%) felt that Patricia was a mischief-maker and should not be in power, but 37% felt that her newly formed party would bring about important changes in the politics of South Africa.

## Corruption in the corridors

In April 2003, 82%<sup>5</sup> of metro respondents felt that corruption was a major problem within political parties.

In fact, in another study conducted by Research Surveys in April and May 2002, 39% of respondents<sup>6</sup> (who were senior managers in South African businesses) perceived bribery to be a 'necessary evil' for doing business in South Africa. Forty-nine percent said that it was fairly easy to find a government official who would bend the rules for a bribe.

On a prompted level, 64% of respondents mentioned corruption and fraud as a major obstacle to doing business in South Africa.

Thirty-four percent of the respondents had experienced fraud by employees, 24% by an outsider, 15% had been approached to pay a bribe, and 7% had to pay a bribe. Only 4% mentioned extortion although both bribery and extortion (usually 'protection') are likely to be under-reported.

## Let's get it right

Research Surveys' results regarding public perceptions of our leaders have generally been well received by these leaders. The ongoing challenge is for them to adopt a positive approach to results such as these and use the insights to facilitate the necessary changes.

For more information, please contact either Kim O'Hagan or Neil Higgs at Research Surveys on (011) 712-9700.

<sup>1</sup> ComboChek 1 – February 2003 : Sample of 2000 respondents across all race groups

<sup>2</sup> OmniChek – August 1998 : 500 Black males; 300 Coloured and Indian males; 400 Coloured and Indian females

<sup>3</sup> OmniChek – September 1998 : 500 Black females; 500 White males

<sup>4</sup> White Female OmniChek – October 1998 : 500 White females

<sup>5</sup> ComboChek 2 – April 2003 : Sample of 2000 respondents across all race groups

<sup>6</sup> A nationally representative survey of 1000 interviews was conducted among businesses in South Africa. The study was done on behalf of the South African Government, and in association with an international funding agency to investigate corruption amongst businesses in South Africa

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