

President Zuma's approval levels drop from 58% to 43% in the first quarter of 2010

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President Jacob Zuma's 100-day approval rating was 57%. This dropped to 53% in September but regained this ground in November to end 2009 on 58%. However, his figures in February this year showed a drop to 43%. This is according to a survey released by TNS Research Surveys, South Africa's leading marketing and social insights company, which has been tracking approval levels of the incumbent President for many years, including our new president, President Jacob Zuma. The four studies were each conducted amongst a sample of 2 000 SA adults from the seven major metropolitan areas of South Africa, interviewing them face-to-face in their homes, with a margin of error of under 2.5% in June, September and November.

President Zuma's approval levels drops to its pre-election level

The drop to 43% in the President's approval level in metropolitan areas in February 2010 represents a return to levels seen before the 2009 election. From the election to the end of 2009, his levels approval levels were in the 50s, ending the year on a high of 58%.

By comparison, former President Mbeki's approval ratings were in the mid to low 30s from 1999 to 2002, only beginning to rise in 2003 before hitting a high of 66% in both 2004 and 2005. He ended his term on a rating of 34%.

This represents a firm negative trend

The latest study shows that the proportion of fence-sitters has dropped to 17% - still quite high, but a decline from the low 30s and high 20s seen in 2009. This means that this drop in approval is a real swing from positive to negative and not a function of fence-sitters making up their minds as in November 2009. This also means that the net sentiment (approve minus disapprove) is down dramatically since 2009.

%	2008	February 2009	April 2009	June 2009	September 2009	November 2009	February 2010
Approve	36	40	52	57	53	58	43
Disapprove	40	40	29	13	19	23	41
Don't know	24	20	19	31	28	19	17
Net positives	-4	0	23	44	34	35	2

* Net positives are given by subtracting those who feel he will NOT do a good job from those who feel he WILL do a good job.

This is against a background of the various issues that have surrounded his personal life - the multiple wives and the revelations of his love child - and the continuing stalemate in Zimbabwe and growing service delivery protests. Indeed, it is important to note that the interviewing for this study was conducted in the week of the revelations of his love child and his subsequent apology to the nation.

Who is more or less positive?

Unfortunately, political views in South Africa tend to have a strong correlation with race. This is best illustrated in the following table:

%	Blacks 2008/9						2010	Whites 2008/9						2010
	Nov	Feb	Apr	Jun	Sept	Nov	Feb	Nov	Feb	Apr	Jun	Sept	Nov	Feb
Approve	51	58	73	75	67	75	58	4	5	16	24	29	22	17
Disapprove	25	22	9	4	9	11	27	66	77	64	36	43	45	64
Don't know	24	20	17	21	24	14	15	29	17	21	40	28	32	19
Net positives	26	36	64	71	58	64	29	-62	-72	-48	-12	-14	-23	-47

%	Coloureds 2008/9						2010	Indian/Asians 2008/9						2010
	Nov	Feb	Apr	Jun	Sept	Nov	Feb	Nov	Feb	Apr	Jun	Sept	Nov	Feb
Approve	10	12	11	23	31	38	15	27	12	25	35	38	29	18
Disapprove	71	71	68	19	26	35	66	45	52	49	23	35	50	65
Don't know	18	18	21	58	43	27	18	28	36	26	43	27	21	17
Net positives	-61	-59	-57	4	5	3	-51	-18	-40	-24	12	3	-21	47

* Net positives are given by subtracting those who feel he will NOT do a good job from those who feel he WILL do a good job.

- For blacks, after a strong rise in approval levels from the elections onwards, they are now at the poorest since November 2008.
- For whites, there was a remarkable positive shift beginning over the election period and continuing into September - but sentiment declined in November. However, sentiment has now moved to the same levels seen over the election period.
- For coloureds, initially sentiment moved from the negative into a “don't know” area - but this has now reverted back to a negative stance.
- For Indians/Asians, the score is at its most negative.

Differences by area

There are usually strong regional differences in such ratings. These are outlined below (figures in brackets represent November 2009 - there are universal declines):

- Gauteng - 47% (down from 64%)
 - Johannesburg and environs - 50% (64%)
 - Johannesburg excluding Soweto - 48% (61%)
 - Soweto - 50% (70%)
 - East Rand - 54% (67%) (highest)
 - West Rand - 47% (61%)
 - Vaal Triangle and South Rand - 49% (60%)
 - Pretoria - 35% (61%)
- Cape Town - 23% (35%) (lowest)
- Durban - 49% (61%)
- Eastern Cape - 39% (53%)
 - Port Elizabeth - 36% (44%)
 - East London - 47% (71%)
- Bloemfontein 48% (83%)

Other notable differences

Partly in line also with race, younger people are more positive about the President (45% of those under 34 years approve of the way the President is doing his job (down from 63% in November)), this dropping to 32% (down from 44%) for those aged 50 years and more.

Our take out

President Zuma's approval levels, as measured in the week of February when all the revelations about his personal life

emerged, as well as his third wedding, are at their lowest since he took office and stand at pre-election levels. This decline is across the board, in all metro demographics. However, at 58%, the black metro population shows the highest approval levels (down from the 75% of June 2009, though).

Technical note

All the studies were conducted amongst 2 000 adults (1260 blacks, 385 whites, 240 coloureds and 115 Indians/Asians) in the seven major metropolitan areas: it has a margin of error of under 2.5% for the results found for the total sample. The studies were conducted by TNS Research Surveys (Pty) Ltd as part of their ongoing research into current social and political issues and were funded by TNS Research Surveys. For more details, please contact Neil Higgs on 011-778-7500 or 082-376-6312. www.tnsresearchsurveys.co.za

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