

President Zuma's approval levels end 2009 on a high as fence-sitters make up their minds

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Although US President Obama's approval ratings have fallen from his 100-day level of 68% to just below 50%, the same is not true of President Jacob Zuma: his 100-day approval rating was 57%. This dropped to 53% in September but regained this ground in November to end the year on 58%.

TNS Research Surveys, South Africa's leading marketing and social insights company, has been tracking approval levels of the incumbent President for many years, including our new president, President Jacob Zuma. The three 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 reach an all-time high

In late June, 57% of the adult metro population felt that President Zuma was doing a good job as president. This represented a rise from the 52% who felt he would do a good job as president when they were interviewed in an identical study over the election period in April and a substantial rise from the 40% who felt he would do a good job as president when interviewed in February 2009 and from the 36% in a November 2008 study.

In September, 53% approved of President Zuma's performance and 58% approved in November, his highest rating yet.

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%.

Attitudes are beginning to crystallise: the fence-sitters have begun to make up their minds

The latest study shows that, whilst 23% of people feel he is NOT doing a good job, 19% gave a "don't know" response. This compares with 13% giving a negative response in June and 31% giving a "don't know" response. Hence, many people have moved from a wait-and-see attitude to either a positive or negative stance. This means that, whilst the simple approval levels have risen, the net sentiment (approve minus disapprove) is down since June.

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

* 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 President's visit to Zimbabwe in August, his new Zimbabwe task team's first meetings in November, his nomination of the new Chief Justice on 1 October, his appointment of Mo Shaik as Head of the Intelligence Service on 2 October and the launch of the Presidential hotline on 7 October.

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

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

* 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, approval levels rose sharply over the election period with the net positive figure continuing to rise in June. However, it has since declined as those giving a “don't know” response make up their minds. Nonetheless, the proportion of people approving of the President's performance remains high at 75%.
- For whites, there was a remarkable positive shift beginning over the election period and continuing into September - but sentiment declined in November. However, 32% are still fence-sitting.
- For coloureds, the major move is out of the “don't know” response category.
- For Indians/Asians, the score has moved into strong negative territory.

Differences by area

There are usually strong regional differences in such ratings. These are outlined below:

- Gauteng - 64%
 - Johannesburg and environs - 64%
 - Johannesburg excluding Soweto - 61%
 - Soweto - 70%
 - East Rand - 67%
 - West Rand - 61%
 - Vaal Triangle and South Rand - 60%
 - Pretoria - 61%
- Cape Town - 35% (lowest)
- Durban - 61%
- Eastern Cape - 53%
 - Port Elizabeth - 44%
 - East London - 71%
- Bloemfontein 83% (highest)

Other notable differences

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

Our take out

Whilst the net positive sentiment has declined since the 100-day mark of President Zuma's new administration, it is clear that those who have been sitting on the fence are beginning to make up their minds. This has resulted in his approval levels rising to their highest - but there has also been an equally strong movement into the “disapprove” category.

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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