

# President Zuma's approval levels soar at the 100-day mark

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Although eschewed by politicians, the 100-day mark of a new administration has become something of a media event. US President Barack Obama reached his milestone 100 days in office with an approval rating of 68% - on a par with ex-President Mbeki's highest score of 66% - although this slipped last week to just 50%.

TNS Research Surveys, South Africa's leading marketing and social insights company, has released the results of a survey to ascertain what South Africans feel about our new president, President Jacob Zuma. The study was 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%. Interviewing was in the last two weeks of June, 2009.

## President Zuma's approval levels rise sharply

By late June, 57% of the adult metro population felt that President Zuma was doing a good job as president. This represents 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 addition, last year, TNS Research Surveys measured how people felt about Mr Zuma as President of the ANC. In February and April, he achieved a 36% approval rating, this barely shifting to 37% mid year.

Hence, for all of 2008, his approval rating essentially remained the same at 36%. It began to rise in February and has continued this rise unabated since then.

By comparison, Mr 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%.

## But this is also tinged with fence-sitters

The latest study shows that, whilst only 13% of people feel he is NOT doing a good job, 31% gave a "don't know" response. This compares with 29% giving a negative response over the election period and 19% giving a "don't know" response. Hence, many people have moved from a negative stance to either a positive or a "don't know" response.

| %          | 2008 | February 2009 | April 2009 | June 2009 |
|------------|------|---------------|------------|-----------|
| Approve    | 36   | 40            | 52         | 57        |
| Disapprove | 40   | 40            | 29         | 13        |
| Don't know | 24   | 20            | 19         | 31        |

## 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 |     |     |     | Coloureds |     |     |     | Indians/Asians |     |     |     |
|---------------|--------|-----|-----|-----|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----------|-----|-----|-----|----------------|-----|-----|-----|
|               | Nov    | Feb | Apr | Jun | Nov    | Feb | Apr | Jun | Nov       | Feb | Apr | Jun | Nov            | Feb | Apr | Jun |
| Approve       | 51     | 58  | 73  | 75  | 4      | 5   | 16  | 24  | 10        | 12  | 11  | 23  | 27             | 12  | 25  | 35  |
| Disapprove    | 25     | 22  | 9   | 4   | 66     | 77  | 64  | 36  | 71        | 71  | 68  | 19  | 45             | 52  | 49  | 23  |
| Don't know    | 24     | 20  | 17  | 21  | 29     | 17  | 21  | 40  | 18        | 18  | 21  | 58  | 28             | 36  | 26  | 43  |
| Net positives | 26     | 36  | 64  | 71  | -62    | -72 | -48 | -12 | -61       | -59 | -57 | 4   | -18            | -40 | -24 | 12  |

\* 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.
- For whites, there has been a remarkable positive shift, beginning over the election period - whilst there is still a net negative score, this has dropped from -72 to -12. However, 40% are fence-sitting.
- For both coloureds and Indians/Asians, the score has moved into positive territory but, again, the proportion of those giving a “don't know” response is very high.

From these results, it is clear that President Zuma is achieving high approval ratings very early into his administration. For all race groups except blacks, however, there is a strong “wait and see” sentiment.

## Differences by area

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

- Gauteng - 63%%
  - Johannesburg and environs - 65%
    - Johannesburg excluding Soweto - 70%
    - Soweto - 71%
    - East Rand - 62%
    - West Rand - 55%
    - Vaal Triangle and South Rand - 62%
  - Pretoria - 59%
- Cape Town - 29% (lowest)
- Durban - 63%
- Eastern Cape - 52%
  - Port Elizabeth - 49%
  - East London - 60%
- Bloemfontein 73% (highest)

The low figure in Cape Town should be no surprise given the election results.

## Other notable differences

Whilst trends by wealth are confounded with race to some extent, it is interesting to note that, amongst blacks, the very poorest people give lower approval ratings than do even more slightly wealthy blacks. Further, amongst blacks, whilst 80% of those whose home language is isiZulu, this drops to 65% for those whose home language is isiXhosa, falling into the mid-70s for the other language groups.

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 38% for those aged 60 years and more.

## How do people feel about the charges against Mr Zuma being dropped?

This question was posed to people in the April study. At that time, 44% felt that the dropping of charges was the correct thing to do whilst 41% disagreed with 15% giving a “don't know” response. As usual, there were strong differences by race:

- Agree that dropping the charges was the correct thing to do - 44%
  - Blacks - 61%, whites - 12%, coloureds - 13%, Indians/Asians - 19%
- Disagree that dropping the charges was the correct thing to do - 41%
  - Blacks - 22%, whites - 73%, coloureds - 74%, Indians/Asians - 71%
- Don't know - 15%
  - Blacks - 16%, whites - 15%, coloureds - 13%, Indians/Asians - 10%

It is clear that views are sharper here but are very divided.

## Our take out

The President has seen a marked rise in approval levels with many formerly negative people either becoming positive or adopting a wait-and-see attitude. His ratings amongst blacks are very high and there have been remarkable swings in his favour in the minority groups - although it is here that many people are undecided.

It remains to be seen whether President Zuma's ratings will drop with the honeymoon period expiring or whether the momentum he has already achieved will continue. Given the recent spate of service delivery protests, it may be that expectations are high. The fact that the very poorest people are less positive is also telling. However, there is no doubt that there is a more positive sentiment than ever at present in favour of the President.

## 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](http://www.tnsresearchsurveys.co.za)

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