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## **PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA, JACOB ZUMA**

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### **Introduction**

In May 2012, a display of art entitled “Hail to the Thief II” caused a national controversy because of a single element hung on a separate wall. This was a pastiche of a well-known image of Lenin with the face of the President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma. The piece was entitled “Spear of the Nation”.

The controversy centred on issues of respect and dignity versus those of freedom of artistic expression. An unresolved court case was withdrawn after the image was serially defaced by two individuals, a public march on the gallery and a subsequent press conference between the African National Congress and the gallery owner.

So the courts did not get an opportunity to provide guidance on the balancing of the various rights at play. But it was noteworthy that most of the protagonists who originally supported the rights of the artist to free expression subsequently backed away from this stance, taking account of the anger of those who rejected the display of genitalia and the disrespect for the President, his office and his person. The entire incident left wounds and revealed fault lines in South African society that have yet to be fully explored or resolved.

But “Hail to the Thief” expressed a view of the President and of the party he represents that is frequently referenced in public debate and the urban media. In particular, the President has been criticized for his performance, his absence from public debate, his disingenuousness on constitutional matters, his assumed corruption, and his personal lifestyle choices. He has been called a dictator by individuals both inside and outside his own party. The membership of the ANC is presently embroiled in nomination battles for its top leadership which suggest that a substantial number would prefer President Zuma not to be re-elected for a further five year term at the head of the party.

Yet in an Afrobarometer survey conducted in South Africa in October and November 2011, he garnered a 66% percent approval rating, and 63% of South Africans say they trust him somewhat or a lot.

Are there ways to understand this apparent gap between the image of the President in the media

and apparently amongst political, business and civic elites, and that revealed by public opinion by looking at the Afrobarometer results alone? This briefing considers a number of factors that might explain why one person might rate President Zuma highly, while another tweets approvingly of his depiction as the “Spear of the Nation”.

## **The Survey**

During Round 5, Afrobarometer surveys will be conducted in up to 35 countries in Africa, using a common survey instrument and methodology. The findings reported here draw from the most recent survey in South Africa conducted between October and November 2011. This is the sixth Afrobarometer survey conducted in South Africa (others were conducted in 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006 and 2008). The survey was based on a nationally representative random sample of 2399 adult South Africans drawn from all nine provinces of the country. The findings reported here have a margin of sampling error of +/- 2 percent at a 95 percent confidence level.<sup>1</sup> Fieldwork was conducted by Citizens Surveys Ltd., with technical support from Idasa.

## **Context of the Fieldwork**

At the time of fieldwork President Zuma had been in office for 30 months. While the Afrobarometer is confident that its design enables respondents to voice deep-seated attitudes that are relevant irrespective of the timing of the survey, there will nevertheless be an extent to which the affairs of the day have an impact on the results. During the Afrobarometer fieldwork, we note that the media coverage of President Zuma included a number of positive aspects particular to this period. The ANC disciplinary committee concluded its hearings on Mr Julius Malema, head of the ANC Youth League, vociferous critic of Mr. Zuma, and promoter of an economic freedom agenda including nationalisation. He was suspended by the party on 10 November 2011.

In addition, on 16 September President Zuma announced a judicial commission into a long standing South African corruption controversy, an arms procurement package from 1999 in which he himself was allegedly implicated. He announced the name of the judicial officer who would chair the commission on 24 October.

On that same day he announced the suspension of the National Commissioner of Police in order to investigate allegations of misconduct regarding the award of rental agreements for police headquarters. He simultaneously re-shuffled his cabinet, ejecting the Minister of Public Works, who was also implicated in the rental agreement controversies, and the Minister of Cooperative Government and Traditional Authorities, also found by the Public Protector to have abused his office.

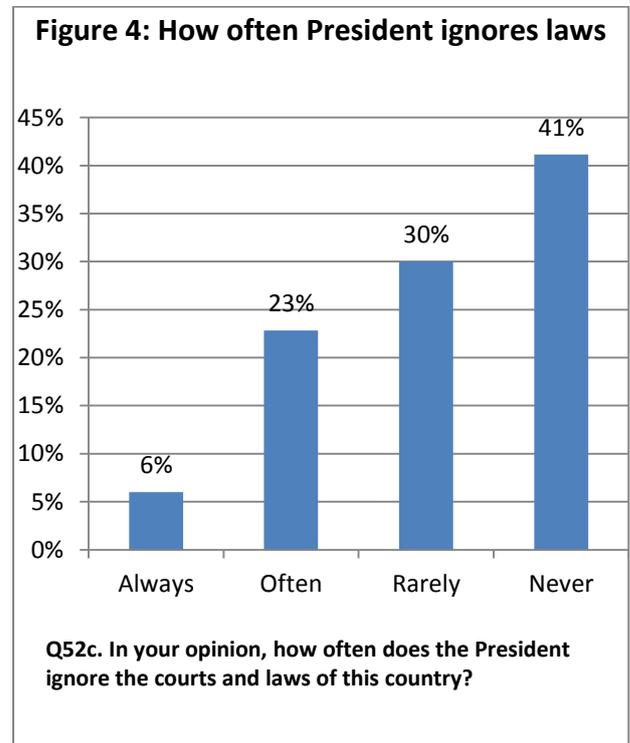
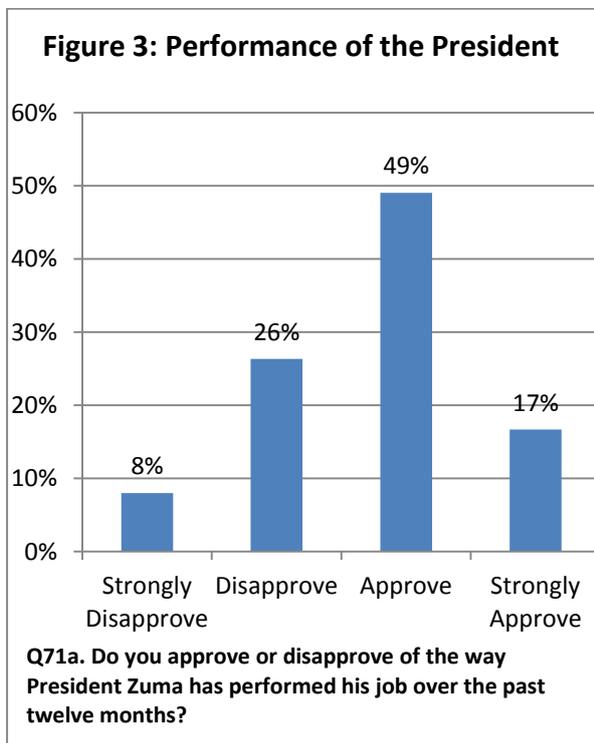
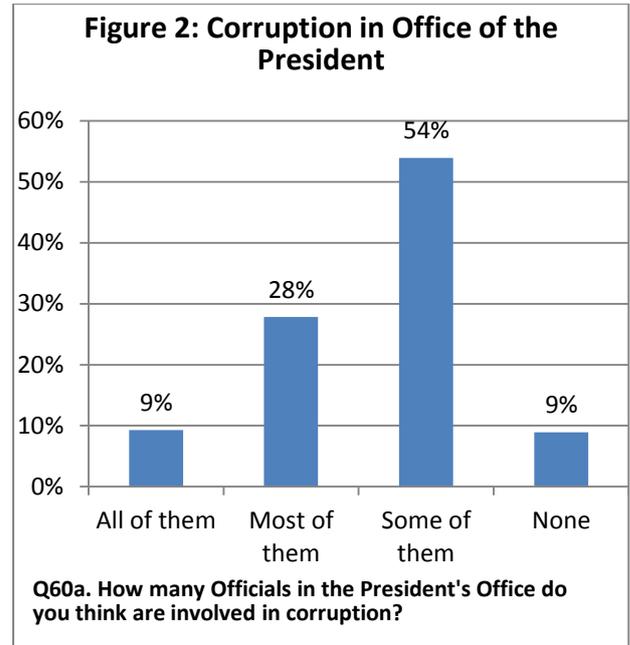
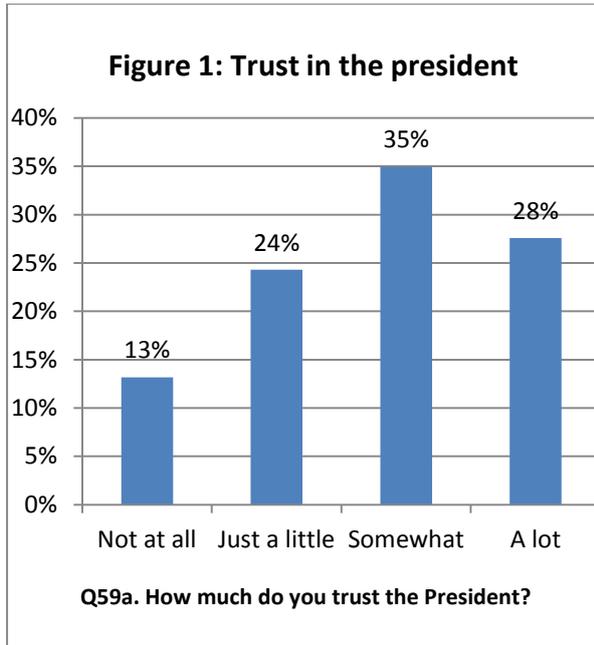
These decisive moves by the President were generally welcomed by the public, and may have had some impact on the survey findings reported below.

## **Attitudes towards the President**

Afrobarometer contains four questions specifically related to the President. These measure: trust in the President, perceptions of corruption in the Office of the President (OP), approval ratings for the way the President has performed his job over the previous year, and evaluations of how often the President ignores the courts and laws of the country. Findings for these questions are presented in Figures 1 to 4.

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<sup>1</sup> All differences highlighted in the paper are statistically significant at a 95 percent confidence level or higher.



The data shows that 63% of South Africans trust the President somewhat or a lot, and two-thirds of citizens (66%) approve or strongly approve of the way he performed his job in the previous year. The majority of South Africans (71%) also believe that the President rarely or never ignores the courts and laws of the country. In addition, similar numbers (63%) believe that corruption is relatively uncommon in the OP (“none” or only “some” officials involved), compared to about one-third (37%) who see it as a more serious problem (“most” or “all” involved).

The analysis excludes “Don’t know” responses, but it is worth noting that overall citizens rarely did not know what to answer. Respondents had clear opinions about how much they trusted the president (only 1% of respondents did not know), his performance (only 3% of “don’t know” responses) and levels of corruption (5% of “don’t know” responses), but less so on the President’s law abiding behaviour (9% of respondents did not know).

These four questions appear to be interrelated in the expected direction: high levels of trust are associated with high ratings of performance and law abiding behaviour, as well as low reported levels of corruption.<sup>2</sup> Therefore a composite measure of attitudes towards the president was created to simplify the analysis by combining these four questions into a single indicator.<sup>3</sup> Each individual can then be ranked, according to this indicator, as having either negative, neutral or positive attitudes towards the President.

### **Are these attitudes all to do with party allegiance?**

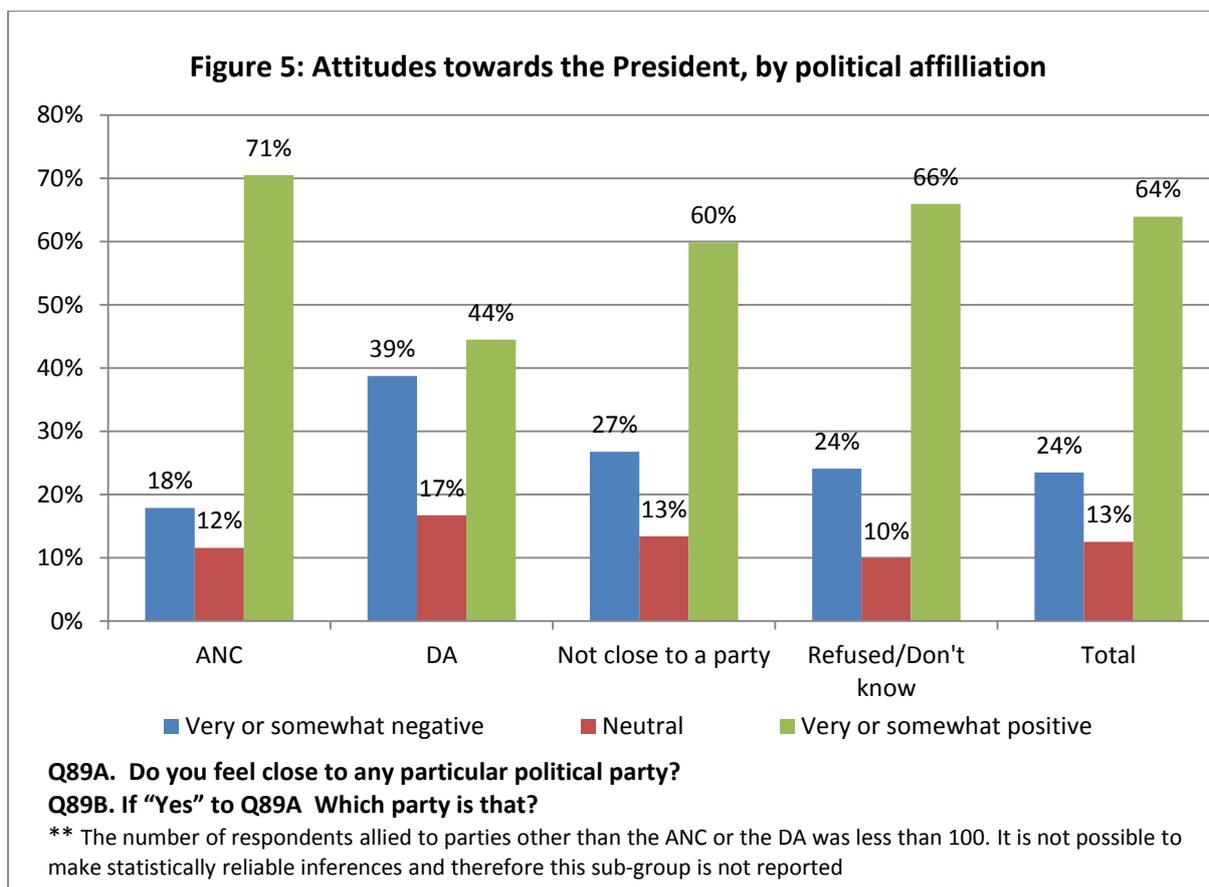
It is to be expected that party loyalty would be closely associated with differing attitudes towards the President, and the data partly corroborates this (Figure 5). ANC supporters have more positive attitudes, whereas those supporting the main opposition party had more negative views towards Zuma than the average. However, a sizeable proportion of respondents who were close to the DA nonetheless had positive views of the President (44%), while at the same time a substantial minority of ANC supporters had negative views of Zuma (18%). Those respondents who said they were not close to a political party exhibited more negative views of the President than the average.

This needs to be unpacked and here we attempt to explore some of the factors associated with differing attitudes towards the President. In addition, the paper makes an attempt to answer the question of whether those citizens dissatisfied with the President constitute a homogeneous group, or whether they come from different communities and socio-economic backgrounds.

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<sup>2</sup>Cross-tabulations and Chi-square statistics were run. All relationships were found to be statistically significant at the 95 per cent level or higher.

<sup>3</sup>Average scores were calculated across the 4 questions.



## Which factors are associated with differing attitudes towards the President?

### Demographics: Age, Education, Poverty and Region

There were significant associations between the age, education, poverty level and province of respondents and their attitudes towards Zuma. Younger citizens tend to be more positive than average, while older respondents are more negative (Table 1).

**Table 1: Attitudes towards the president, by age of respondent**

Age	ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE PRESIDENT		
	Very or somewhat negative	Neutral	Very or somewhat positive
18-25	21%	9%	70%
26-35	21%	12%	67%
36-50	24%	15%	61%
Over 50	30%	14%	56%
Total	24%	12%	64%

Figures are weighted row per cents and are based on responses from adult South Africans.

As shown in Table 2, higher education levels were also associated with more negative views of the president, while those with only primary schooling exhibited the most positive views. Those with no formal education were the most likely to be ranked as neutral in their attitudes toward the president.

**Table 2: Attitudes towards the president, by education level of respondent**

Education level	ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE PRESIDENT		
	Very or somewhat negative	Neutral	Very or somewhat positive
No formal education	17%	17%	65%
Primary	19%	11%	70%
Secondary	25%	12%	63%
Post-secondary	27%	13%	61%
Total	24%	12%	64%

Figures are weighted row per cents and are based on responses from adult South Africans.

Regional variations in attitudes towards the president were very substantial (Table 3). Citizens in the Eastern and Western Cape were the most critical of Zuma, with the highest proportions with negative views of the President (both 39%). Residents in the North West, on the other hand, were the most positive, with fully 82% ranked as having positive attitudes, closely followed by residents in the Free State (80%), Mpumalanga (78%), Kwazulu Natal (74%) and the Northern Cape (73%).

**Table 3: Attitudes towards the president, by region of respondent**

Province	ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE PRESIDENT		
	Very or somewhat negative	Neutral	Very or somewhat positive
Eastern Cape	39%	12%	49%
Western Cape	39%	18%	43%
Limpopo	26%	9%	65%
Gauteng	24%	18%	59%
Northern Cape	19%	8%	73%
Kwazulu Natal	17%	8%	74%
Mpumalanga	13%	9%	78%
Free State	13%	7%	80%
North West	7%	11%	82%
Total	24%	12%	64%

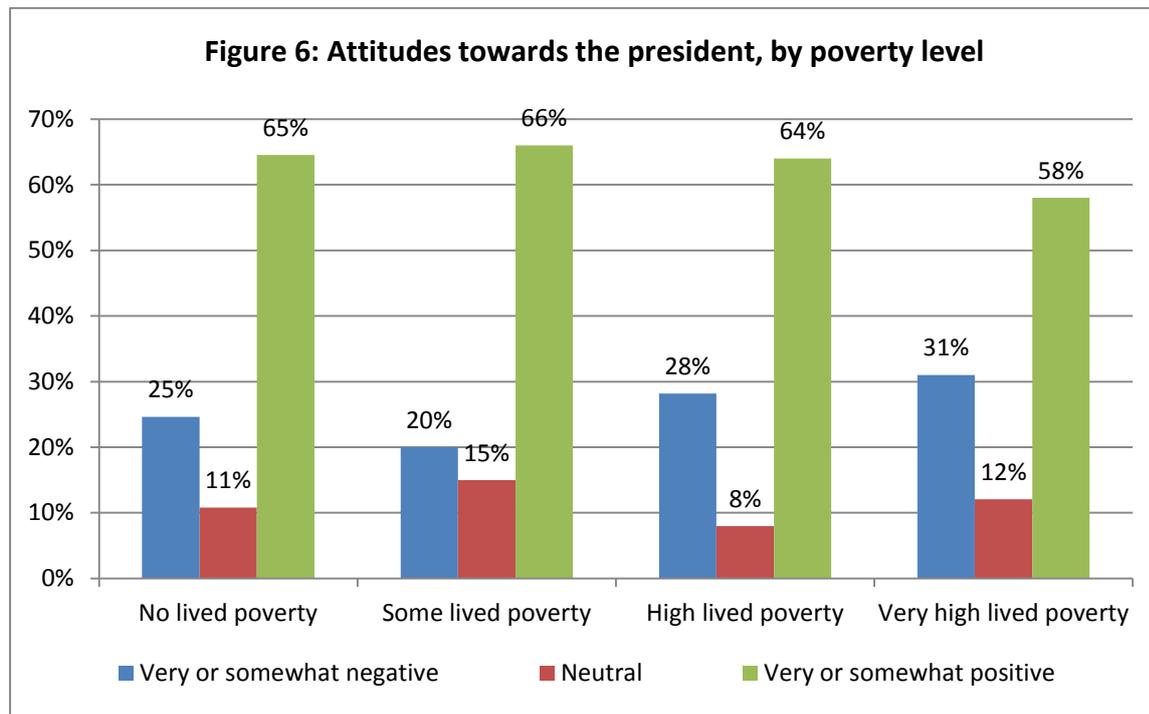
Figures are weighted row per cents and are based on responses from adult South Africans.

The South African Afrobarometer has a battery of six questions on the experience of poverty which assess how frequently people go without basic necessities (enough food to eat, clean water, medicines or medical treatment, cooking fuel, a cash income and electricity) during the course of a year. A composite measure can be created as an average across these six indicators to measure each respondent's overall "lived poverty."<sup>4</sup>

The data shows differences in the attitudes towards Zuma depending on the degree of lived poverty that respondents experience (Figure 6). The most distinctive finding is that those who experienced *very high* levels of poverty, i.e., reflecting a frequent absence of basic necessities, had the most negative views of the President: almost one-third (31%) express critical views, compared to only one-fifth (20%) of those who experienced *some* lived poverty. Similarly, a greater proportion of those who experienced *high* levels of lived poverty (28%) also showed

<sup>4</sup>This was done by aggregating all the scores to these six questions for each individual, and then condensing all the scores across individuals into four bands to depict various levels of lived poverty.

negative views of Zuma than those who experienced *some* lived poverty. Interestingly, those who did not experience poverty did not necessarily have the least critical views, with up to a quarter of these (25%) expressing negative views towards the President. This apparent dichotomy is further dissected in the two additional indicators that follow.



Afrobarometer has an additional question that can be used as a proxy for relative poverty. This question asks respondents to rate their living conditions compared to those of other South Africans. Respondents who rated themselves as experiencing higher levels of poverty relative to others were the most likely to report negative attitudes towards Zuma (32% compared to an average of 24%), and the least likely to express positive attitudes towards him (55% compared to an average of 64%). In contrast, those respondents who saw themselves as being better off compared to fellow South Africans were the most positive about the President (Table 4).

**Table 4: Attitudes towards the president, by relative lived poverty of respondent**

Relative poverty: Your living conditions vs. others	ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE PRESIDENT		
	Very or somewhat negative	Neutral	Very or somewhat positive
Worse	32%	13%	55%
Same	22%	14%	64%
Better	18%	10%	71%
Total	24%	12%	64%

**Q4. In general, how do you rate your living conditions compared to those of other South Africans?**

Figures are weighted row per cents and are based on responses from adult South Africans.

Afrobarometer has two additional questions that can be used as indicators for relative affluence: whether respondents owned a motor vehicle and whether they used the internet. When examining the data for those respondents who did not experience poverty and who both owned a car and used the internet, the disparities in negative attitudes shown in Figure 6 are further increased. Respondents with a certain level of affluence were the most likely to report negative attitudes towards Zuma (35% compared to an average of 24%), and the least likely to express positive attitudes towards him (54% compared to an average of 64%) (Table 5).

**Table 5: Attitudes towards the president, by affluence of respondent**

Affluence	ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE PRESIDENT		
	Very or somewhat negative	Neutral	Very or somewhat positive
No	23%	12%	65%
Yes*	35%	12%	54%
Total	24%	12%	64%

\* Respondents who did not experience lived poverty and answered YES to both:

Q90C. Do you personally own a Motor Vehicle, Car or motorcycle?

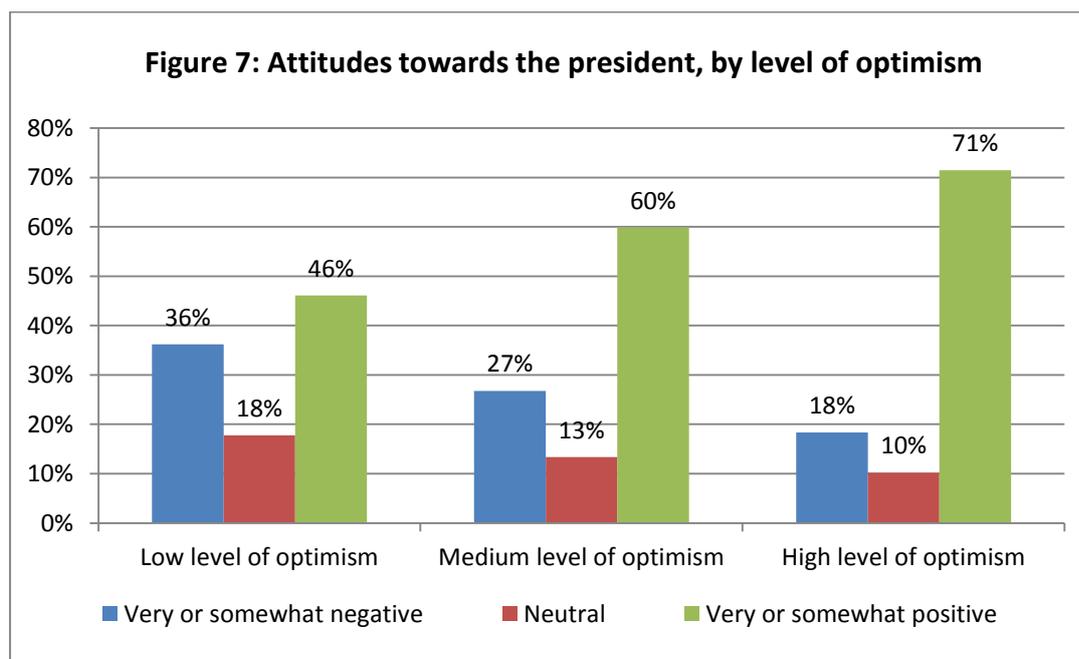
Q91b. How often do you use the internet?

Figures are weighted row per cents and are based on responses from adult South Africans.

### Levels of optimism and attitudes towards the President

Afrobarometer has two questions that can measure the level of optimism of respondents. The first of these questions asks whether respondents expect economic conditions in South Africa to be worse, the same, or better in twelve months’ time. The second question asks whether respondents expect their own living conditions to be worse, the same, or better in twelve months’ time. The data from these two questions were combined to create a proxy variable for overall level of optimism.

The data show that optimism is very strongly associated with attitudes towards Zuma. As shown in Figure 7, the least optimistic respondents (i.e., those who expected their living conditions and the situation of the country to worsen) were the most critical of the President (36% expressed negative views and 46% positive views, compared to the average 24% and 64% respectively), while the most optimistic respondents were the most positive towards Zuma.



A second measure of optimism comes from a question asking whether respondents think the country is going in the right or in the wrong direction. The data again show that responses are strongly associated with attitudes towards Zuma, corroborating the findings above (Table 6). Those respondents who shared the view that the country was going in the wrong direction were

the most critical of the President, while those who considered that the country was going in the right direction were the most positive.

**Table 6: Attitudes towards the president, by respondents' views on the country**

Overall direction of the country	ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE PRESIDENT		
	Very or somewhat negative	Neutral	Very or somewhat positive
Going in the wrong direction	31%	13%	55%
Going in the right direction	15%	11%	73%
Total	24%	12%	64%

Figures are weighted row per cents and are based on responses from adult South Africans.

### Active citizenship and attitudes towards the President

The South African Afrobarometer has a battery of nine questions on active citizenship. These measure the number of actions that people have taken as citizens in the previous year. Actions include: attendance at a community meeting; getting together with others to raise an issue; contacting a government department to raise an issue; contacting radio, TV or a newspaper to complain about an issue; refusing to pay for services provided by government like water, electricity or property rates; refusing to pay a tax or fee to government; attending a demonstration or protest march; going on strike in order to demand a higher salary or better working conditions; and, (for comparative and analytical reasons) using force or violence for a political cause. A composite indicator was created to measure overall active citizenship by averaging responses for each individual across these nine indicators. Each individual can then be ranked, according to this indicator, as being either a very active, somewhat active, or not active citizen.

The data shows differences in the attitudes towards Zuma depending on the degree of active citizenship (Table 7). The highest proportion of people with negative attitudes towards Zuma was amongst the most inactive citizens (those who had not taken part in any of the listed actions). Almost one third of these (32%) had negative attitudes towards Zuma. The most active citizens were also slightly less positive towards Zuma than the average, while those who were somewhat active had average views of him.

**Table 7: Attitudes towards the president, by active citizenship.**

Active citizenship	ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE PRESIDENT		
	Very or somewhat negative	Neutral	Very or somewhat positive
Not active citizenship	32%	12%	56%
Somewhat active citizenship	22%	12%	66%
Very active citizenship	25%	16%	60%
Total	23%	12%	64%

Figures are weighted row per cents and are based on responses from adult South Africans.

When examining the characteristics of those less likely to engage in civic action, the data shows that they tend to come from more affluent backgrounds. As shown in Table 8, up to one third of such respondents did not engage in any of the named civic actions. In contrast, those experiencing the highest levels of lived poverty were the most likely to engage in such actions (Table 9).

**Table 8: Active citizenship, by affluence.**

Affluence	ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP		
	No active citizenship	Somewhat active citizenship	Very active citizenship
No	13%	83%	4%
Yes	33%	65%	2%
Total	15%	82%	4%

Figures are weighted row per cents and are based on responses from adult South Africans.

**Table 9: Active citizenship, by poverty level.**

Poverty level	ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP		
	No active citizenship	Somewhat active citizenship	Very active citizenship
No lived poverty	30%	68%	2%
Some lived poverty	10%	87%	3%
High lived poverty	9%	85%	6%
Very high lived poverty	10%	76%	14%
Total	15%	81%	4%

Figures are weighted row per cents and are based on responses from adult South Africans.

## Conclusions

Public opinions do not always coincide with expert evaluations of a society, and public reaction to President Zuma is a case in point. Further analysis of the rich data presented here is welcomed. But this briefing makes some tentative suggestions about some factors that make a difference in one's evaluation of the President.

Those who are pessimistic about their own and the country's future hold more negative views, as do those who evince limited support for a political party. The less civically active also hold more negative views. Citizens in the Cape region and in particular in the Eastern and Western Cape are particularly negative. The very poor also seem to hold more negative views.

On the other hand younger and less educated people hold more positive views, as do those in the North West, Free State, Mpumalanga, Kwazulu Natal and the Northern Cape.

It is entirely possible that those who feel most marginalised and disaffected from society and therefore least optimistic, and who are also least likely to take part in civic activity, also feel most disaffected and dissatisfied with their government, including its current leader.

Furthermore, our initial analysis suggests that this is not a homogeneous group, and it appears to come from different communities and different socio-economic strata. Indeed, more affluent South Africans, as identified by the indicators outlined above, seem particularly passive on the types of citizen engagement measured by the survey.

Mr Zuma is a President who, despite the controversies surrounding him, is viewed positively by the majority of South Africans. However, South Africans and the President himself will want to reflect on the manner in which marginalisation increases negative attitudes towards the country's leader.

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