

Ordinary South Africans give their views on corruption and state capture

Earlier this year, Ask Afrika and Infusion Knowledge Hub were commissioned by the Centre for Communication and Reputation Management at the University of Pretoria to look into the views of ordinary citizens around corruption and state capture.



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After four months of rigorous qualitative and quantitative research the results give voice to 37-million South Africans, and highlights high levels of distrust and dissatisfaction with the current government, with 77% of people saying they thought the country was going in a negative direction. The majority believe that their basic needs are not being met as a result of state capture and the high levels of corruption in South Africa.

On a more proactive note, two thirds of respondents feel that living conditions improved after the end of apartheid. Most respondents are confident that there is a happy future in store for all races in South Africa and 90% of respondents said that corruption would affect the way people vote.

Research methodology

The starting point of the research was to evaluate awareness of corruption and the state capture concept among the general population and to assess people's perceptions around the cause and effect of corruption and state capture, as well as to determine the level of impact it has on ordinary citizens.

It also aimed to assess satisfaction with political performance (leaders, parties, spheres of government); South African voting patterns and tendencies; and to gain a thorough, scientifically-verified understanding of how the majority of South Africans believe corruption and state capture will affect the future of the country.

Initially, 10 focus groups were held across three provinces to investigate the way in which ordinary South Africans frame the discourse on state capture and to inform the questionnaire format for phase two. The themes were formulated in in-depth focus group settings, and the quantitative questionnaire was designed based on the topics, issues and problems discussed within the group sessions.

To ensure that the views of all South Africans were represented a rigorous sample group was drawn to include 80% of South Africans from the lowest income groups and 20% in higher income brackets.

Forty-five minute, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the respective respondents and the questionnaire was drawn up in English and translated into five of the official languages – seSotho, isiXhosa, Afrikaans, seTswana/Sepedi and isiZulu, although the questionnaire was administered in the remaining official languages where necessary.

South African government performance rating

Overall the study revealed that levels of dissatisfaction around government performance are high, with 49% of respondents saying they were dissatisfied with the national government; 48% were dissatisfied with local government and 45% with provincial government. The figures for those South Africans who were satisfied with government performance were 28%, 29% and 28% respectively.

The research also raised a red flag in terms of South Africans understanding of how the government works with most respondents battling to describe the three tiers. It revealed a culture of blind following and apathy, which allows leadership to get away with underperformance. Just under half (41%) of respondents said they would automatically follow the direction of political leaders.

Corruption and state capture

Most South Africans are aware of the concept of corruption. Of the people interviewed, 89% have heard of the term “corruption” and 99% think it is unacceptable. Half the respondents know someone who is corrupt.

Meanwhile, 77% have not heard of “state capture” before; after providing a detailed explanation, 68% think it happens in South Africa; 91 % think it is unacceptable and 91 % think it will change the way people vote.

They also believe that it is a punishable offence – 62% expect a prison sentence and criminal charges to be laid against corrupt officials and 41% said they would vote corrupt politicians out.

The impact of corruption and state capture on the national psyche

The biggest impact of corruption and state capture on citizens is that it creates a personal sense of disempowerment with 73% of people feeling disempowered as a result of corruption and 71% as a result of state capture. Ordinary South Africans believe it reduces trust in the government (corruption 71% and state capture 71%) and discourages foreign and local investment (corruption 72% and state capture: 70%).

Hope for the future

Despite all this, the majority of respondents (84%) are proudly South African, 61% are confident that we will have a happy future for all races in South Africa. Further unifiers are a willingness to fight corruption (51%) and a desire to see

employment created for everyone (46%). In addition to the majority of South Africans confirming that they are willing to fight against corruption and racism, state capture and xenophobia, the overwhelming majority say corruption will undeniably impact their voting behaviour.

The data and results remain to be the voice of the citizens and is aimed to be used as a catalyst for positive change in South Africa.

The qualitative and quantitative data is available in open source format through the Centre of Communication and Reputation Management (CCRM UP). For enquiries, contact Prof Ronel Rensburg on +27 12 420 3395 or email her at ronel.rensburg@up.ac.za.

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