

# ***IEC Voter Participation Survey 2023***

## **An Overview of Results**



Developmental, Capable and Ethical State (DCES)  
Research Division, HSRC



# Purpose of the Survey Series

**To provide evidence on the views and behavioural preferences of adult South Africans in order to:**

- Better understand the electoral context and
- Inform the IEC in its electoral management mandate

## **Specific objectives:**

- To determine people's **interest in**, and **perceptions of**, the forthcoming **elections**.
- To **evaluate voting behaviour** in South Africa.
- To assess **perceptions of voters** on the **performance of national, provincial and local government** as it impacts on voter participation.
- To examine the electoral and political involvement of specific groups such as **women, youth and persons with disabilities**.
- To evaluate people's **trust** in the Commission.





# Voter Participation Survey (VPS) Methodology

Survey was conducted by the **Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)**

- **Nationally representative** of the population 16 years and older in private households across the 9 provinces
- **500 Small Area Layers (SALs)** were selected using Census 2011 framework
- **3,500** addresses issued
- Collected by **face-to-face interview**
- Data collection: **August-October 2023.**
- Realised sample: **3,024 respondents**
- Data will be **weighted** using StatsSA's **latest mid-year population** estimates once data quality control and cleaning completed





# Results I

## Political context



+ *Satisfaction with democracy*

+ *Service delivery*

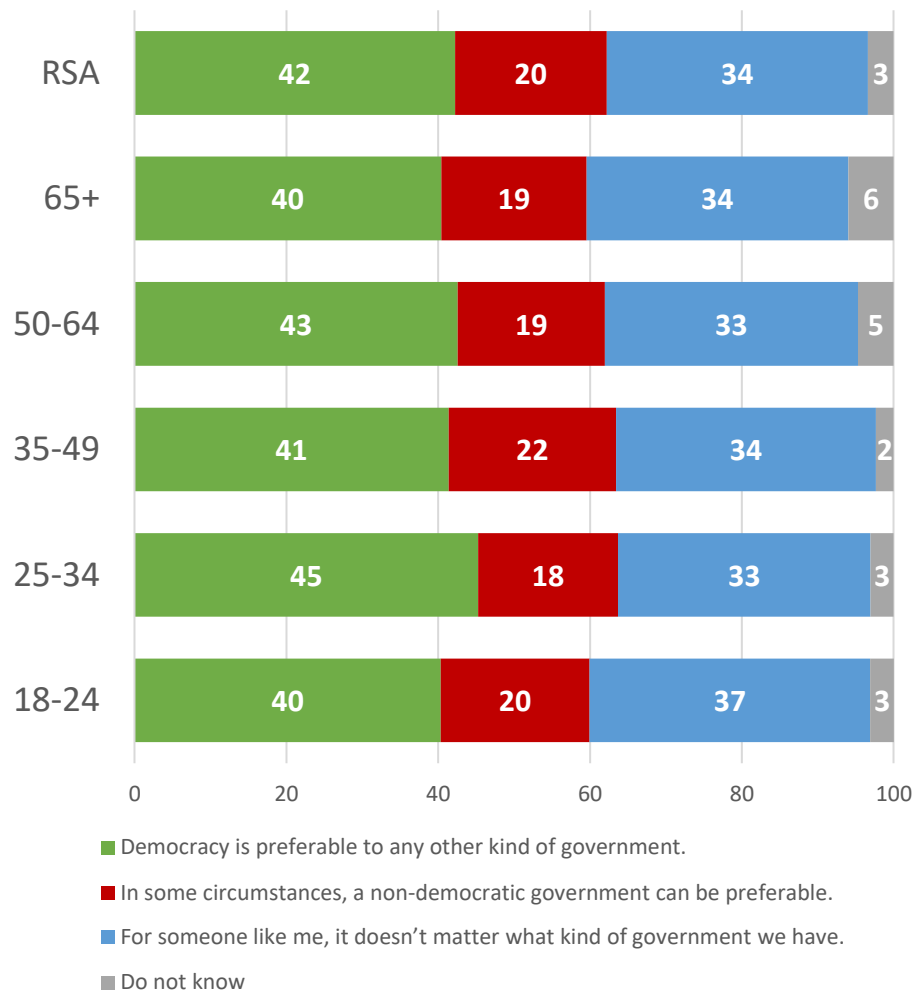
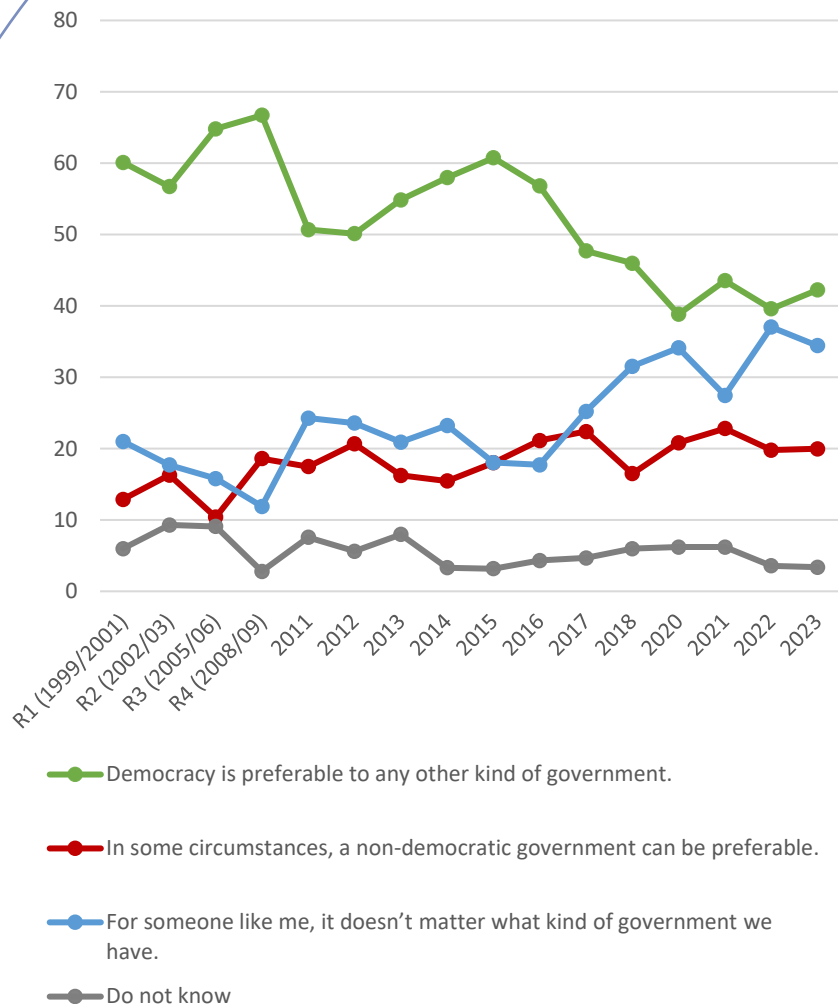
+ *Institutional trust*

# 01



# Demand for Democracy

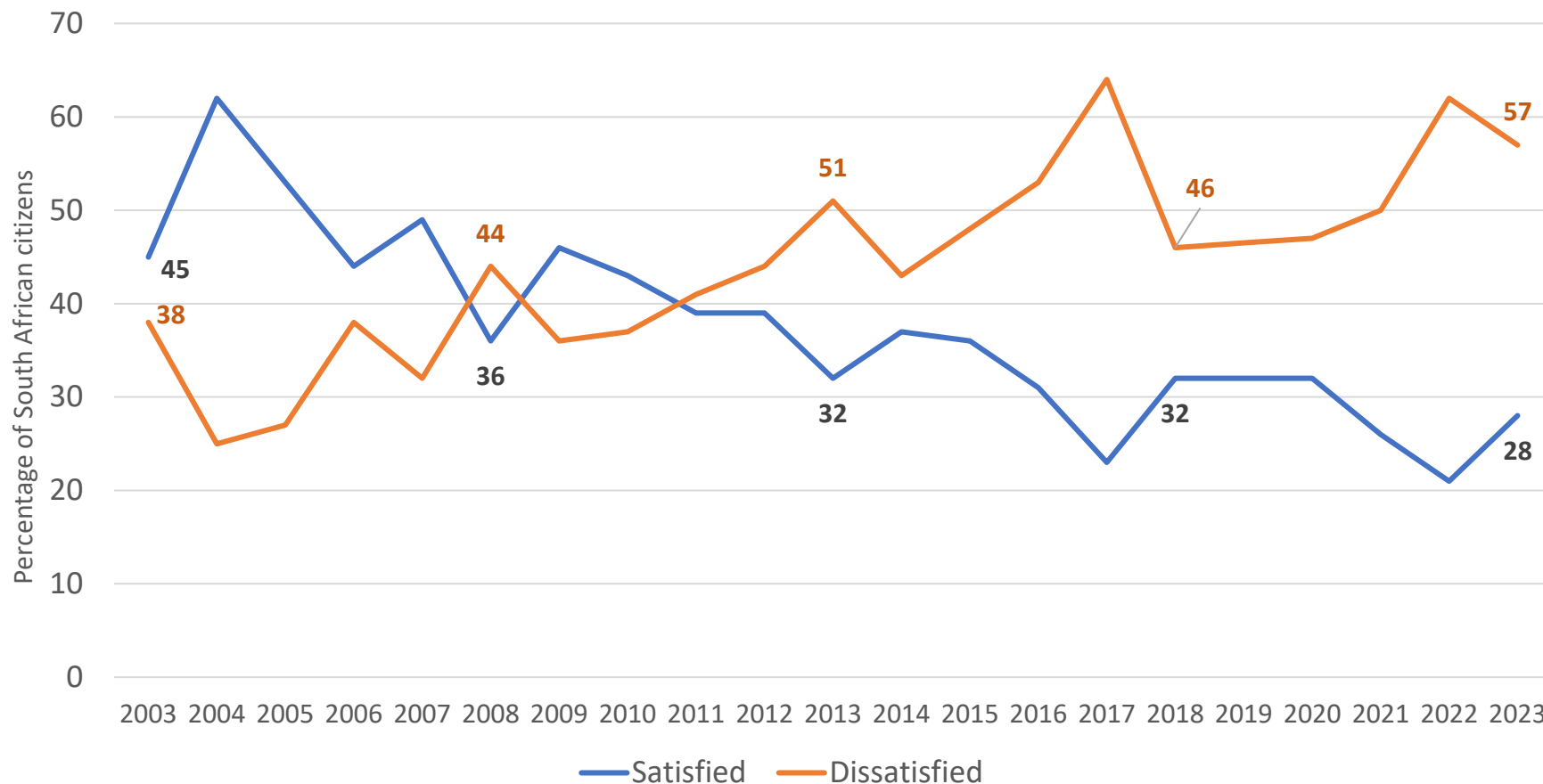
Age group differences in 2023 (%)





# Satisfaction with Democracy

**How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy is working in South Africa?**



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2003-2022; IEC VPS 2023

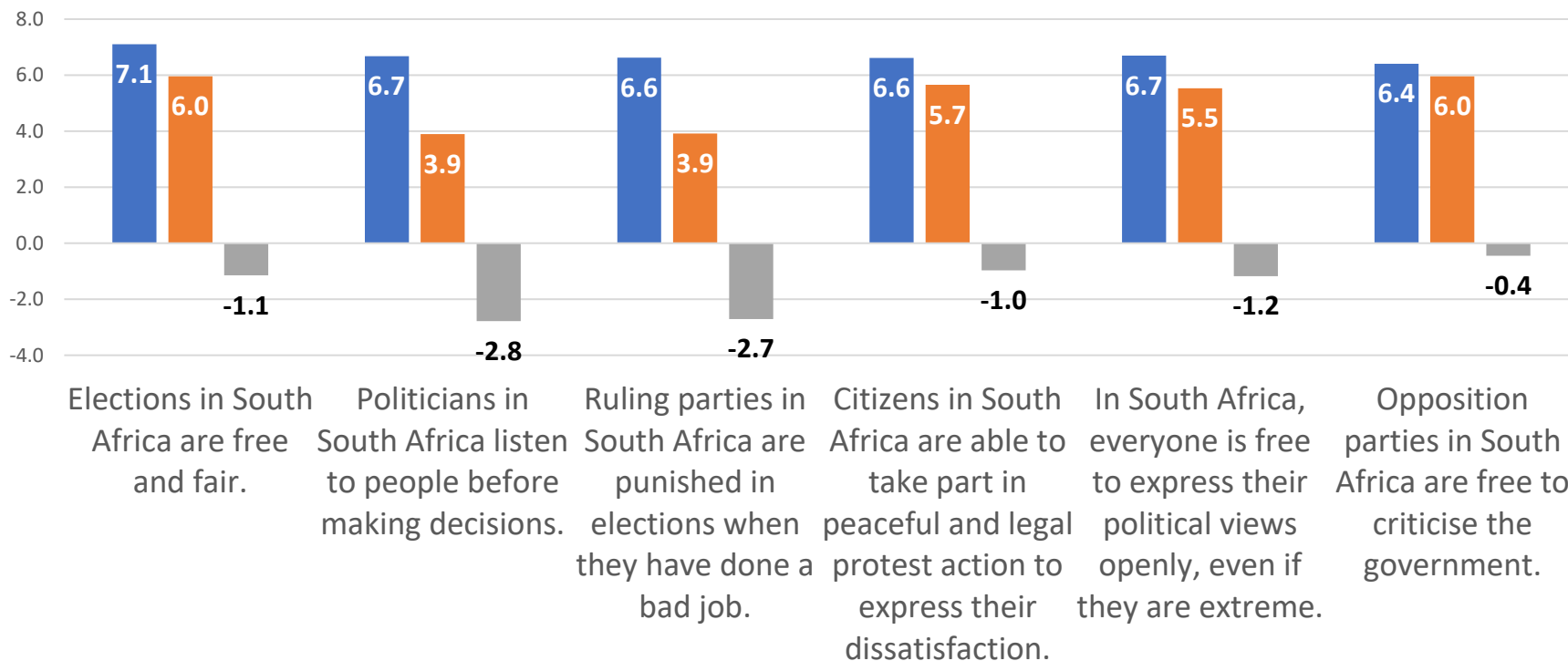
Note: Neutral / uncertain response categories not shown



# Democratic Dimensions

Examination of 6 dimensions, rated in terms of: **(i) importance for democracy** (0=not important; 10=extremely important); and **(ii) application to democracy** in South Africa (0=does not apply at all; 10=applies completely)

**Biggest gaps:** electoral punishment for poor performance; and political responsiveness to the will of the public



■ Importance (0-10) ■ Applies (0-10) ■ Difference



# Democratic Dimensions

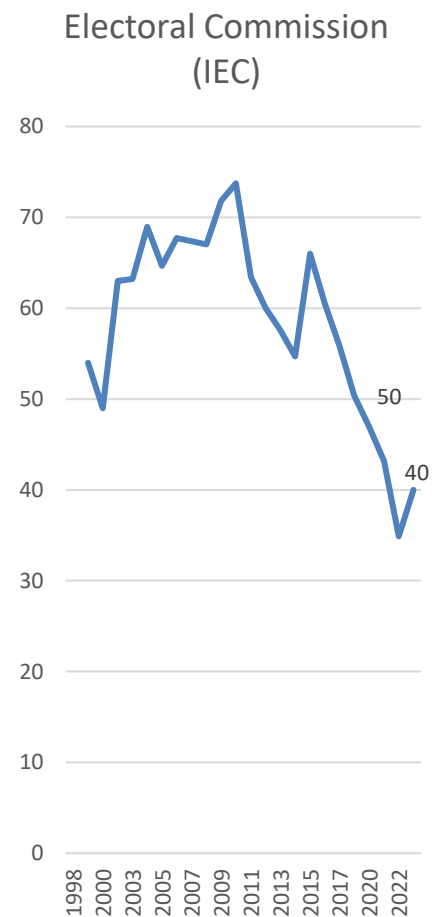
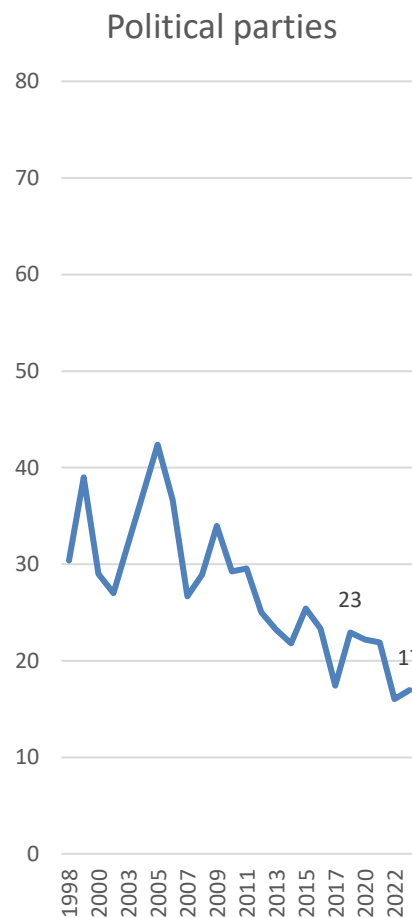
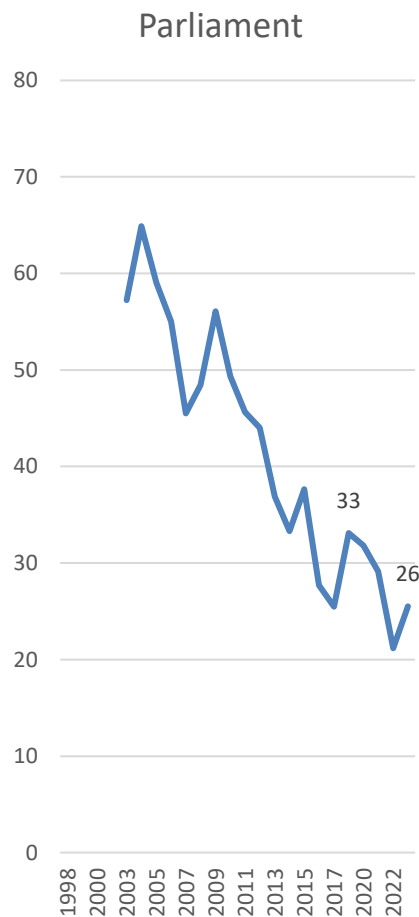
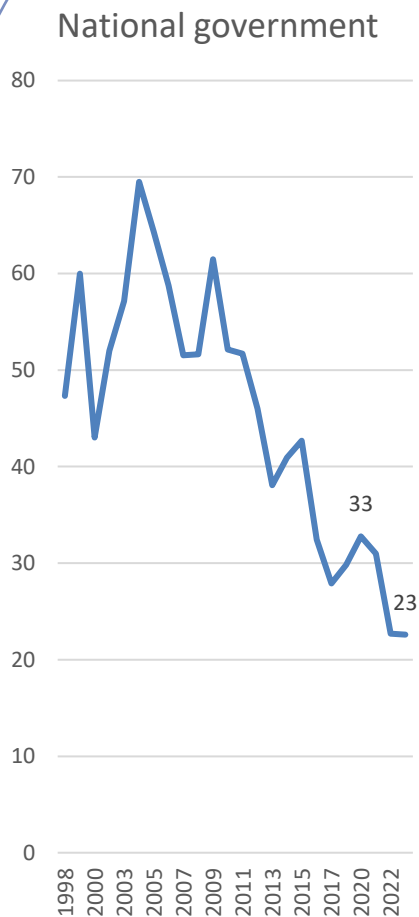
All importance items fell between 2013 and 2023, and all apart for participation in legal, peaceful protest fell since 2021; most application items fell 2013-23, but no further decline 2021-23 (most improved slightly)

IMPORTANCE FOR DEMOCRACY (DEMAND FOR DEMOCRACY)							
	2013	2016	2018	2021	2023	Change 2013-23	Change 2021-23
Free and fair elections	8.18	8.06	7.22	6.70	7.10	-0.4	-1.1
Elected listen to the public	7.40	7.48	6.97	6.40	6.70	-0.3	-0.7
Electoral accountability	7.36	7.38	6.88	6.40	6.60	-0.2	-0.7
Participation in protest	7.59	7.51	6.92	6.40	6.60	-0.2	-1.0
Freedom of expression	7.79	7.59	6.94	7.50	6.70	0.8	-1.1
Viable opposition	7.04	7.38	6.80	6.40	6.40	0.0	-0.6
APPLIES TO DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH AFRICA (SUPPLY OF DEMOCRACY)							
Free and fair elections	7.31	7.30	6.65	5.71	6.00	-0.3	-1.3
Elected listen to the public	4.57	4.52	4.15	3.96	3.90	0.1	-0.7
Electoral accountability	4.44	4.47	4.52	4.00	3.90	0.1	-0.5
Participation in protest	6.13	6.38	6.01	4.00	5.70	-1.7	-0.5
Freedom of expression	6.23	6.38	6.11	5.80	5.50	0.3	-0.7
Viable opposition	6.26	6.82	6.48	5.70	6.00	-0.3	-0.3



# Institutional Trust (1998-2023)

## Confidence in select institutions (%)





# Electoral attitudes



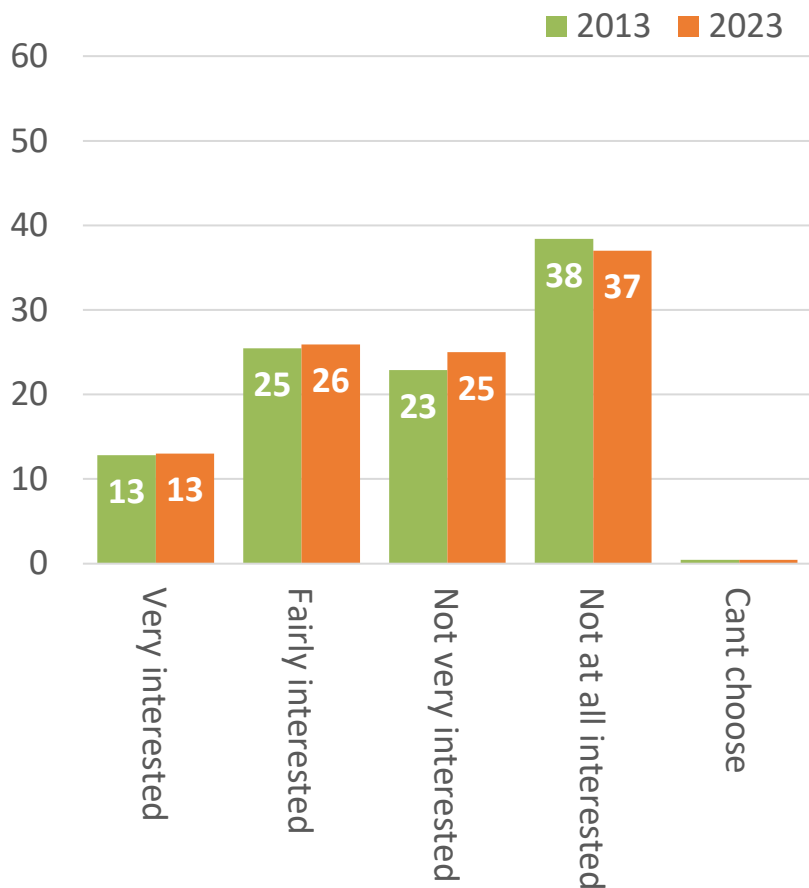
- + *Political interest*
- + *Duty to vote*
- + *Internal political efficacy (belief that vote makes a difference)*
- + *External political efficacy (responsiveness & accountability)*

# 02

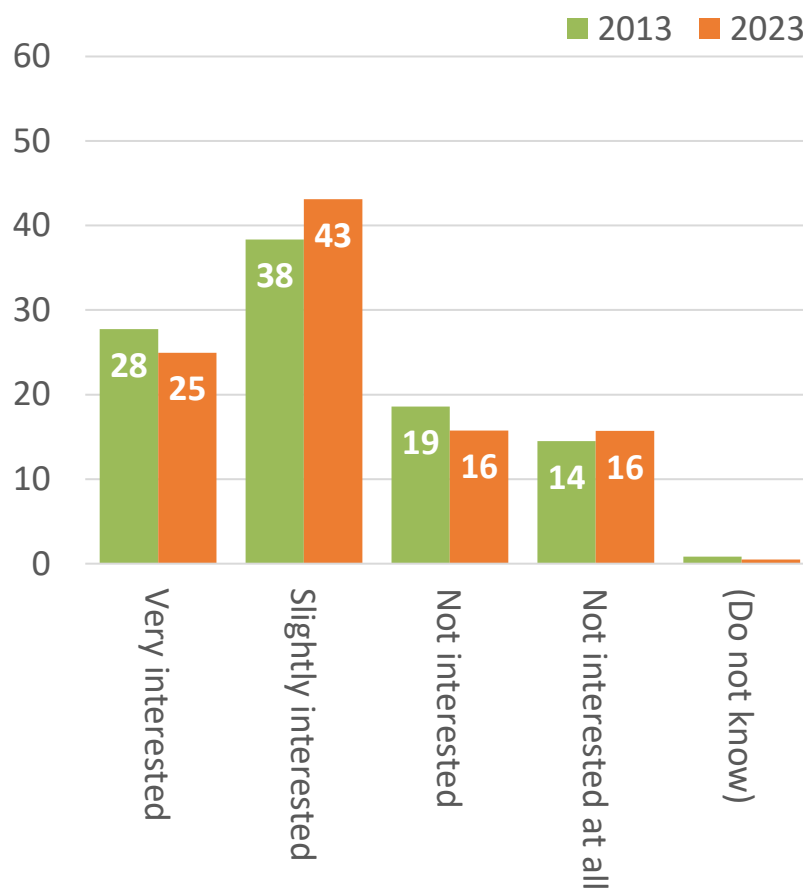


# Political Interest

**“How interested would you say you personally are in politics?”**



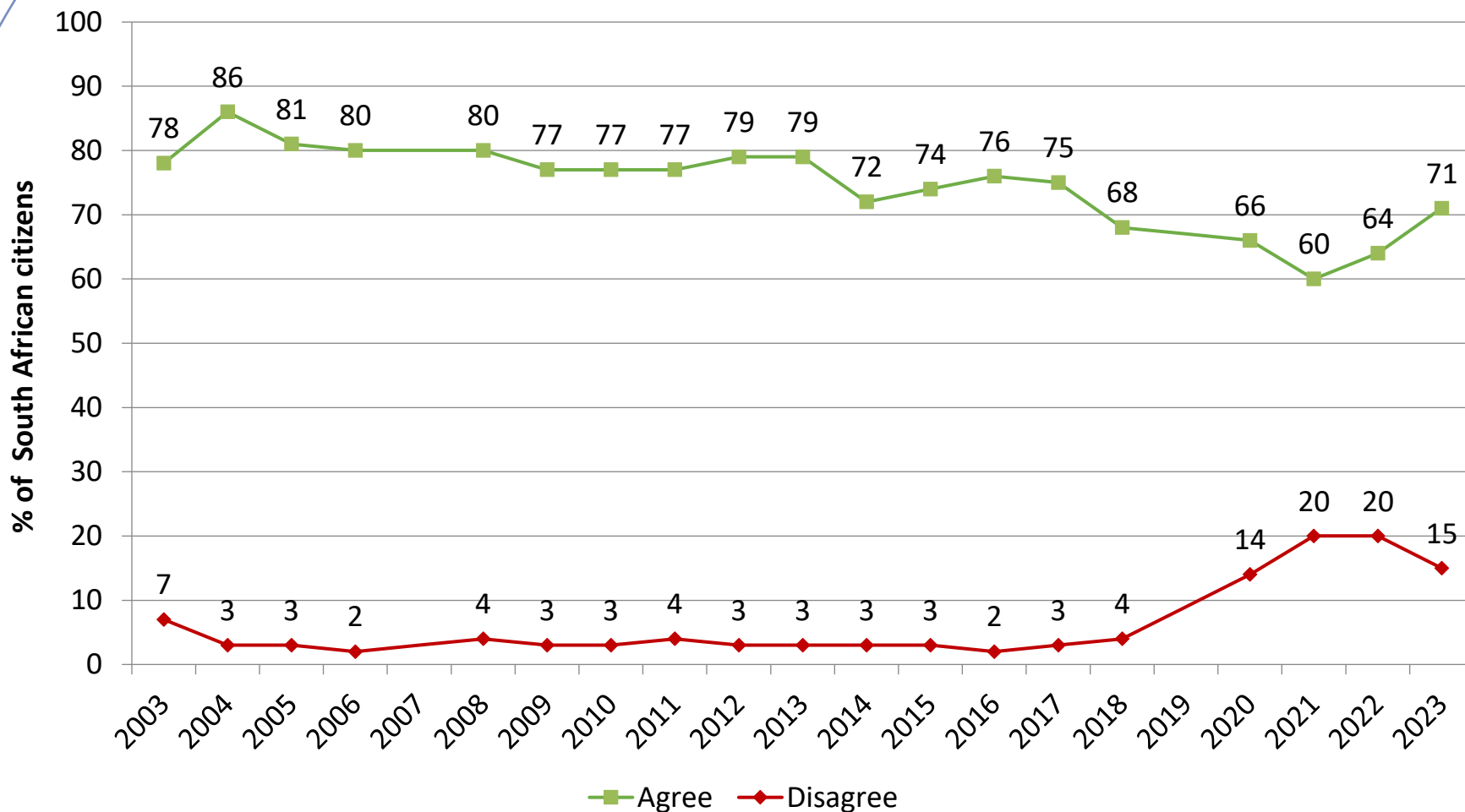
**“In general, how interested are you in South African national and provincial elections”**





# Duty to Vote

“It is the duty of all citizens to vote” (2003-2023)

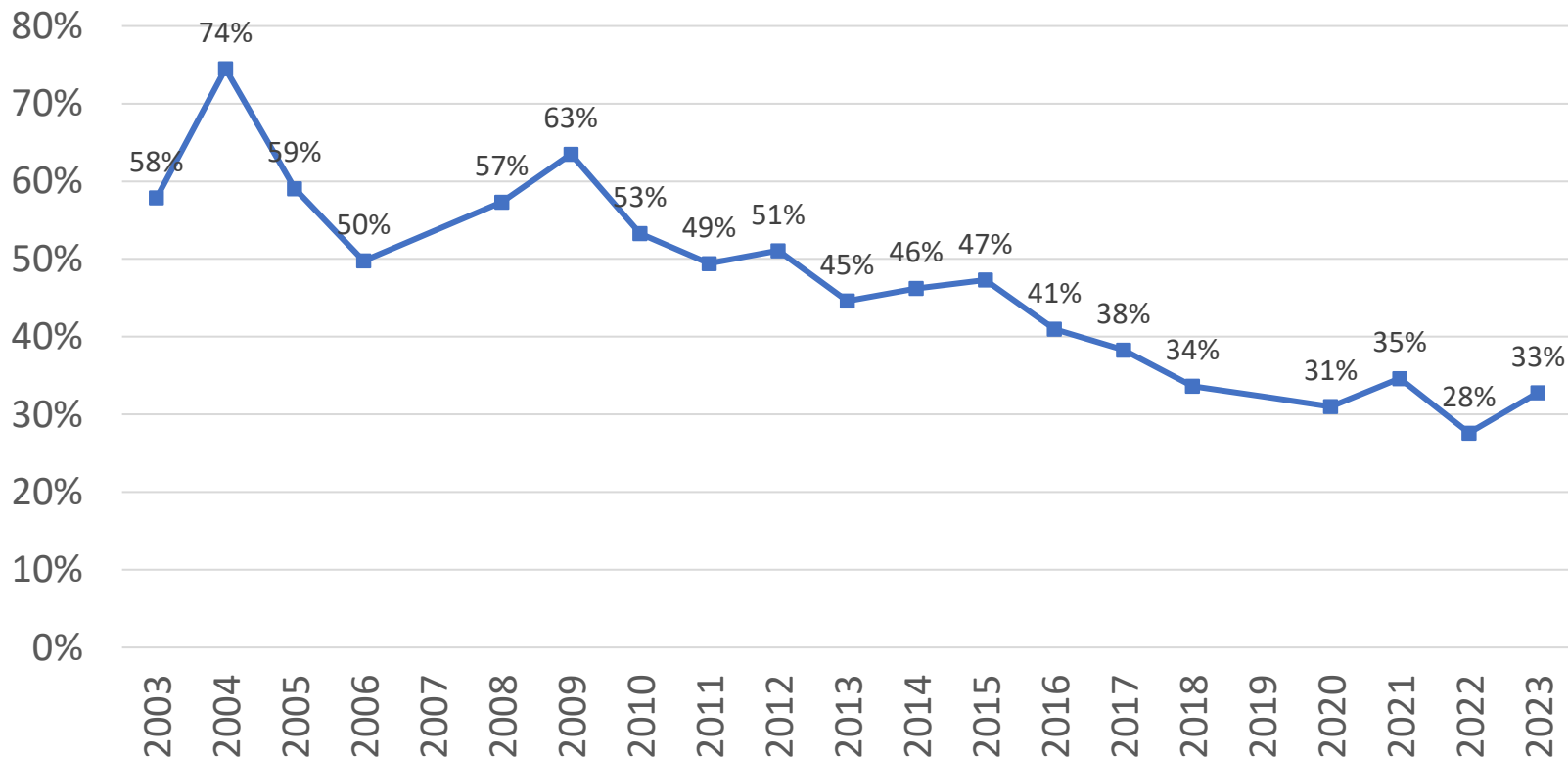




# Internal Political Efficacy

Percentage rejecting the view that “Whether I vote or not makes no difference” (2003-2023, %)

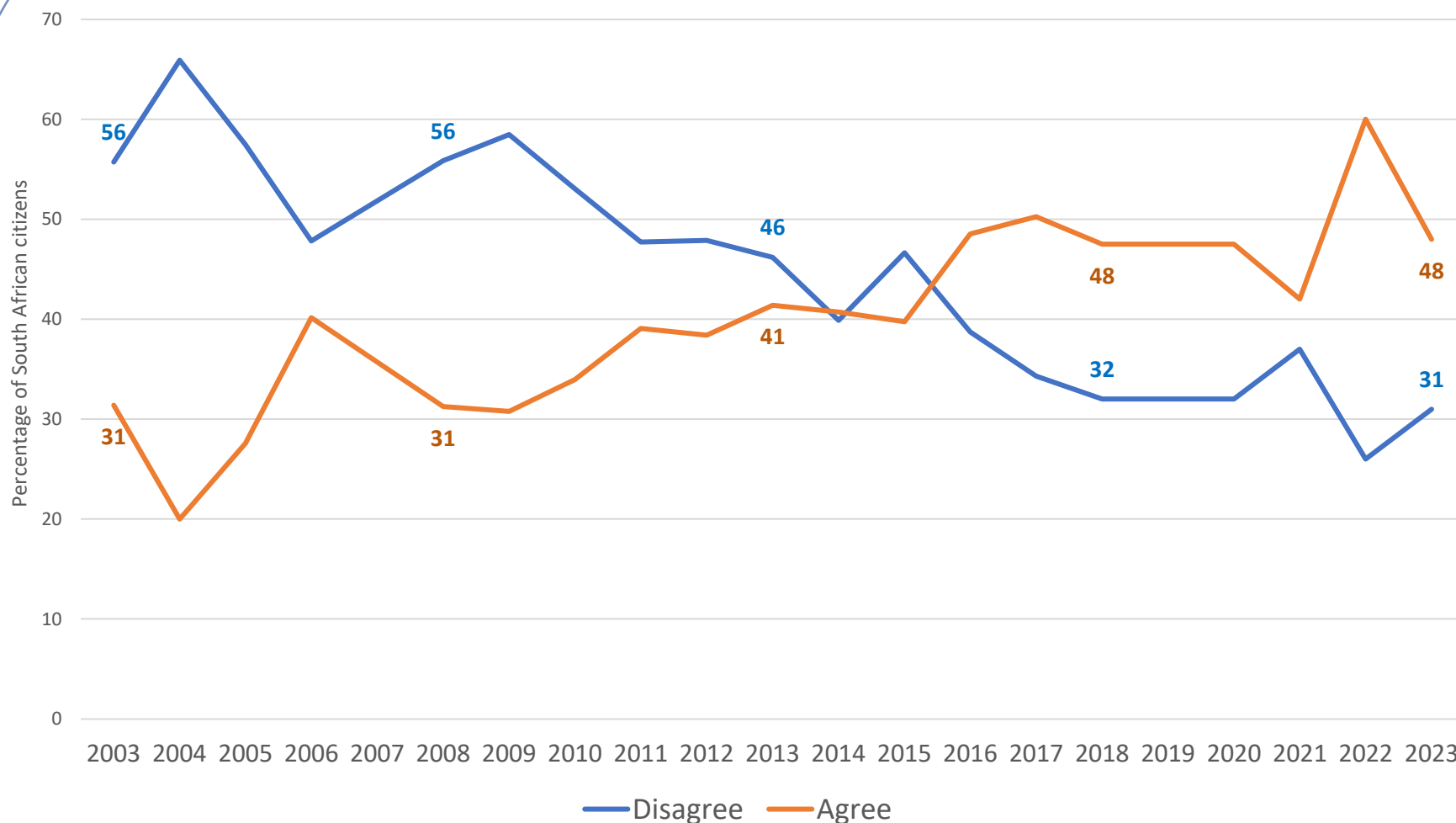
National average





# External Political Efficacy

“After being elected all parties are the same, so voting is pointless” (2003-2023, %)





# Registration Experiences



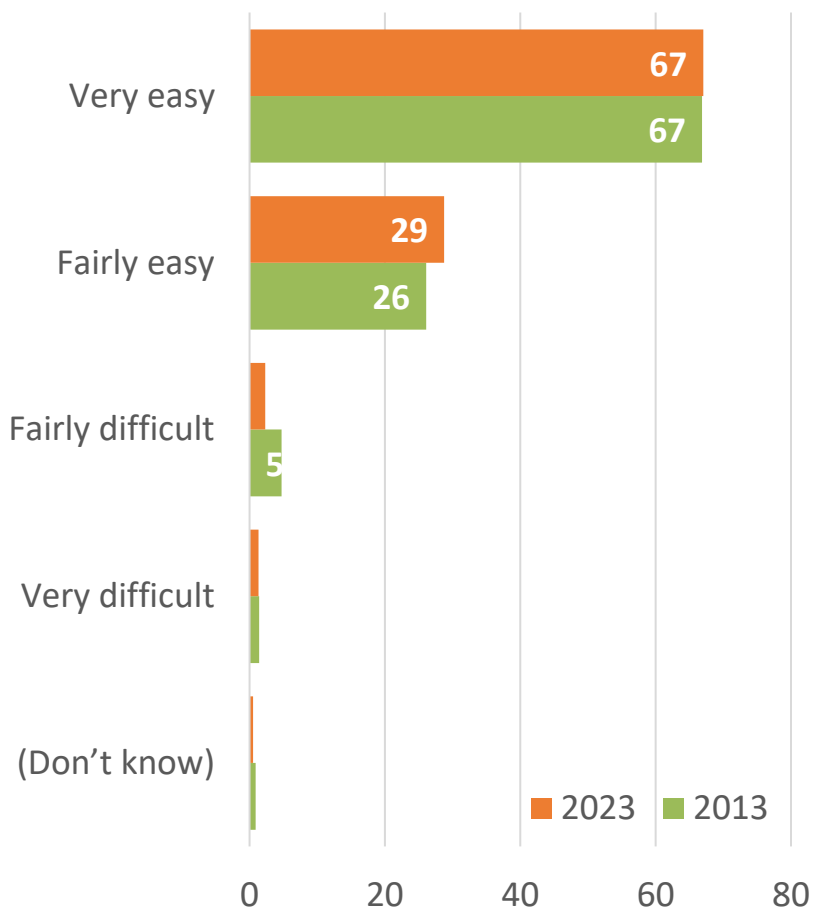
- + *Registration status and reasons for non-registering*
- + *Reported barriers to registration*
- + *Experiences of voter registration*

# 03

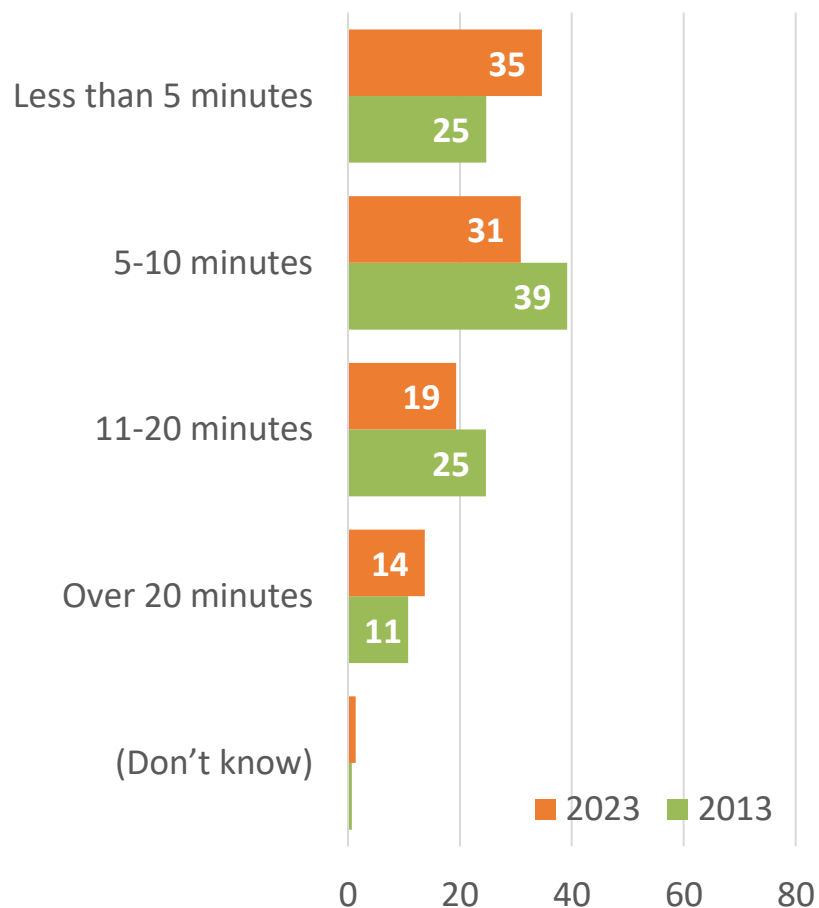


# Recent Registration Experiences

**Did you find it easy or difficult did you find it to register as a voter?**



**How long did it take you to register?**



Source: IEC Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013; 2023

Note: Data is restricted to those who have registered in the five years prior to the survey interview.



# Election Participation



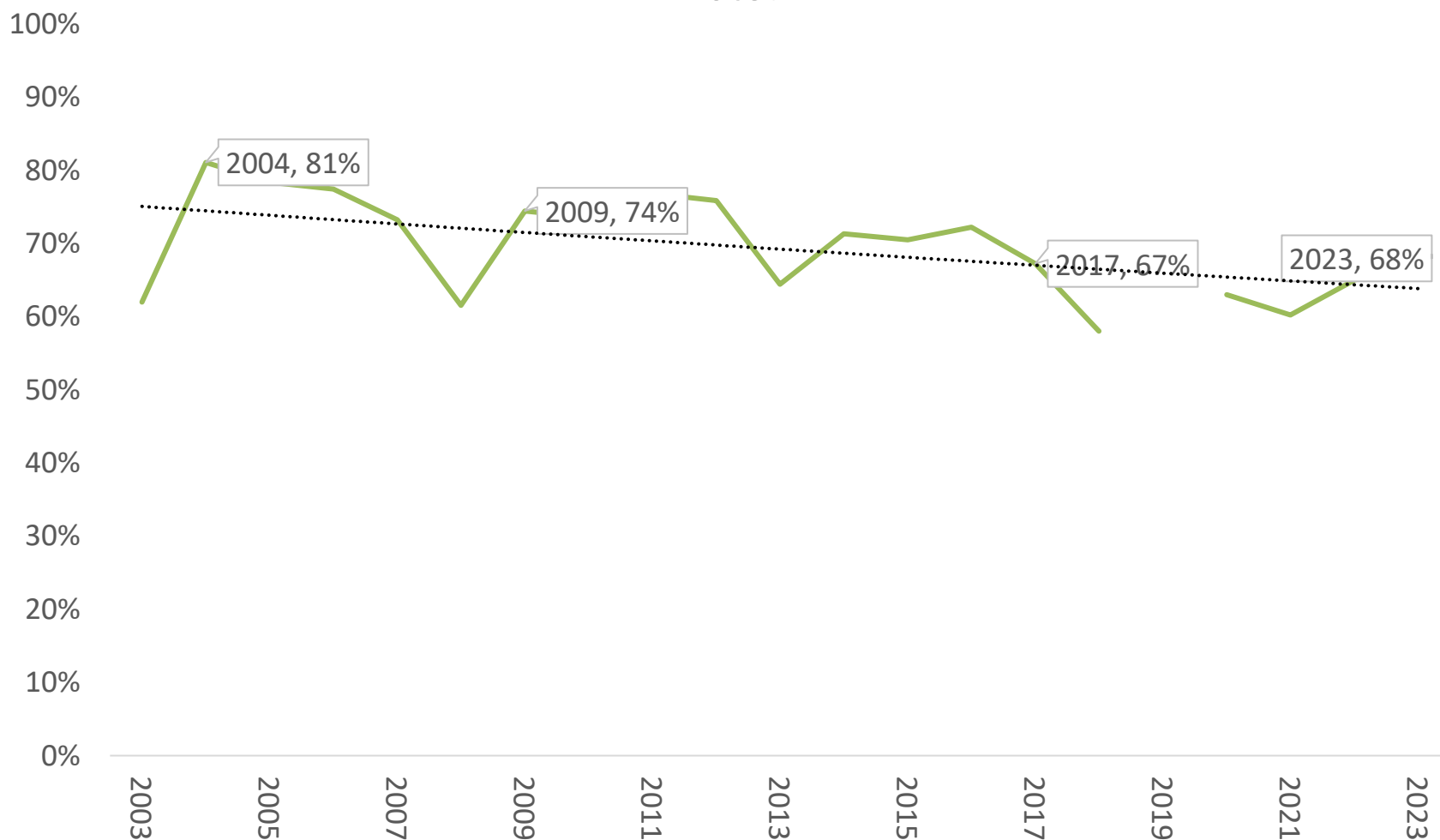
- + *Voting intention*
- + *Main reasons for not voting*
- + *Scenarios that may intention to vote*

# 04



# Voting Intention

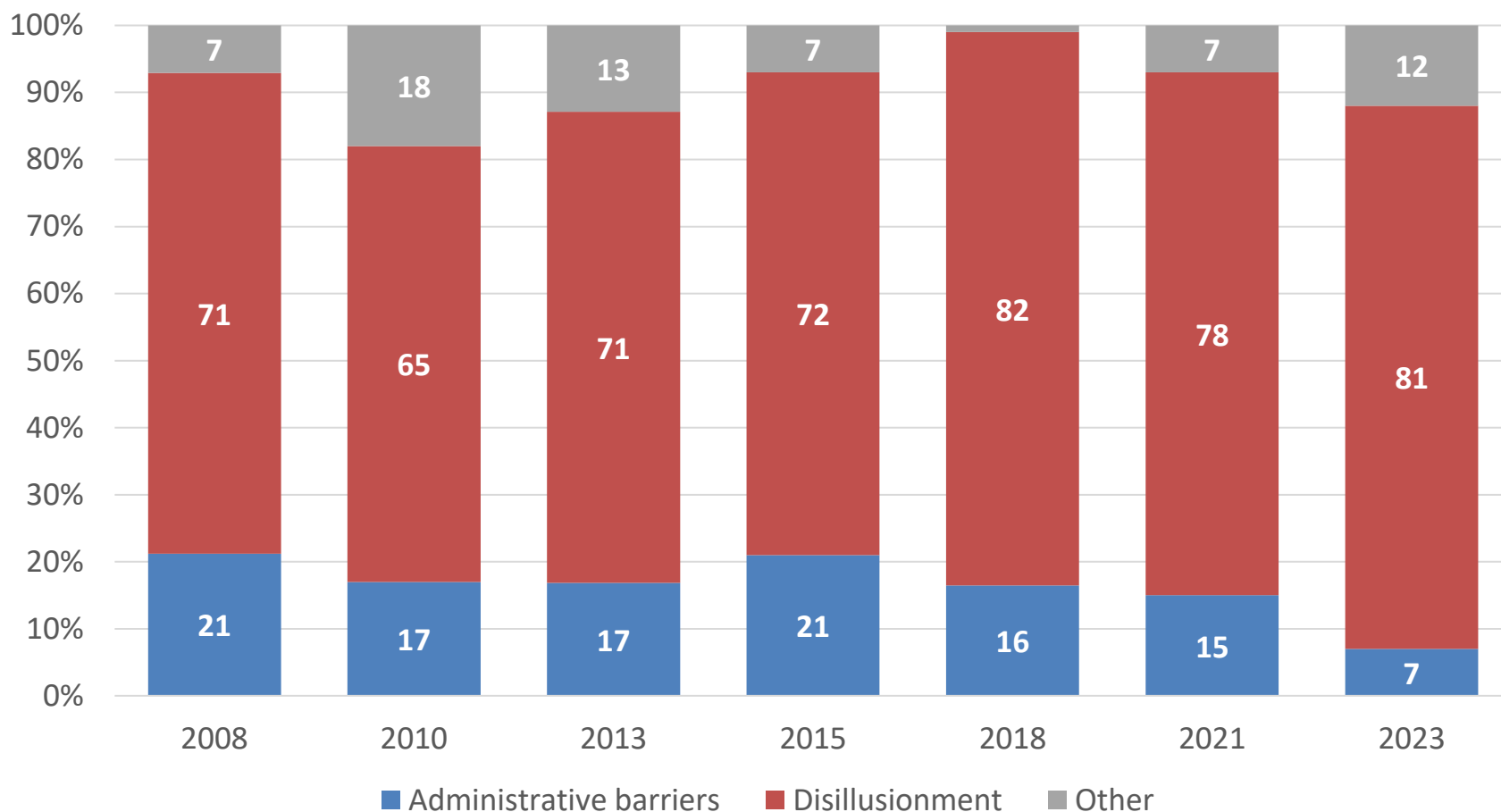
**If national government elections were to be held tomorrow, would you vote?**





# Reasons for Planned Abstention

“What is your main reason for thinking that you may not vote if national government elections were to be held tomorrow?”





# Influences on voting intention in 2023 (%)

## Intention to vote by select characteristics

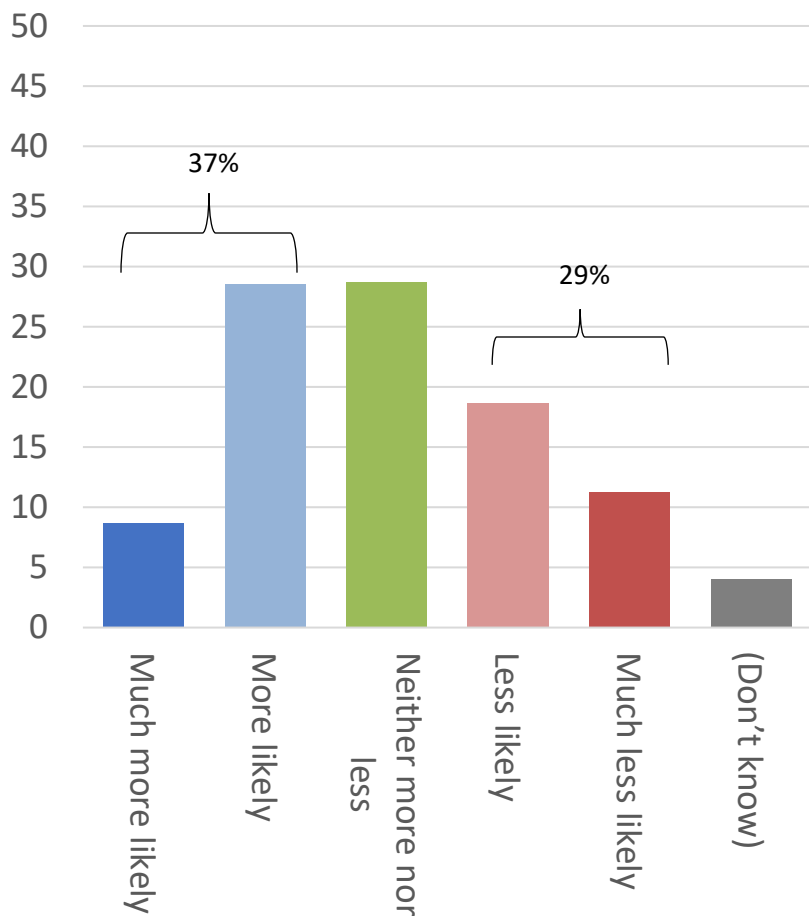


Source: IEC VPS 2023 • Created with Datawrapper

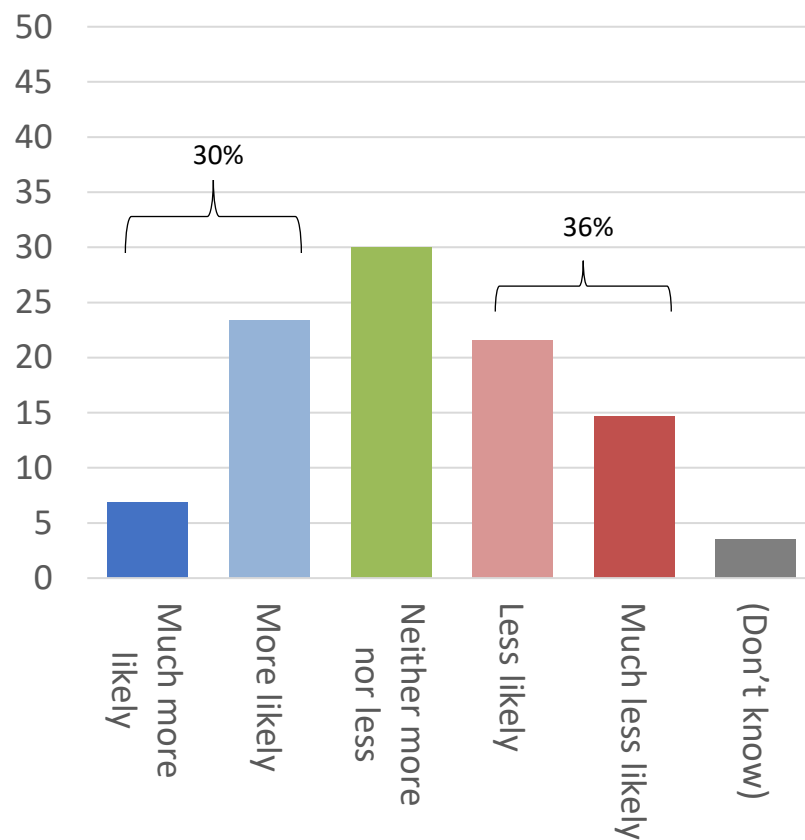


# Party coalitions and independent candidates

**“Do political party coalitions make you more or less likely to want to vote in elections?”**



**“Does the ability to vote for independent candidates in elections make you more or less likely to want to vote in elections?”**



# Conclusion





# Conclusions

- NPE 2019 and LGE 2021 were undertaken amid one of the **harshest political moods** observed since 1994. This is reflected again in the VPS 2023 results.
- The VPS 2023 pointed to increasingly **critical evaluations of electoral democracy** among citizens.
- Findings suggest that the **turnout scenario** seen in the 2019 NPE appears similar for the 2024 NPE.
- Political **discontent** and **disillusionment** emerged as the main reason for **electoral abstention**, consistent with past VPS research.
- They debate needs to urgently turn to what needs to be done to move us from the **current scenario**, and **restore the faith** of the growing number of **disaffected democrats** in the country.



## Recommendations (1)

- Many citizens do not have **enough information** on how to vote; increase **voter education programmes**.
- Data suggests that voters want information about the **timing of elections, location of voting stations** as well as the **electoral procedures**.
- Most citizens are unaware of the **services** provided by the Election Commission; need for campaigns to **popularise the work** of the Commission.
- Need for information campaigns to address **voting irregularities**; lots of **misinformation** on this issue.
- Traditional **broadcast media** (particularly television) should be used to reach the mass public; **television** is the most **preferred channel** for information.



## Recommendations (2)

- Strong civic messaging on **duty** to vote, **power** of the vote, and use of one's vote to **post-election responsiveness**.
- Focus on duty to vote; **duty-bound citizenship** key factor **preventing** a change in citizen norms **away** from democracy.
- Target **fatalism** amongst citizens and **recognise** growing demand for **greater accountability**.
- Online registration has been **favourably received**, need to **address** concerns about **fraud** and **fake voters**.
- Balloting education remains a **specific need**, especially for first time voters. **Independent candidates** present a challenge.



**HSRC**  
Human Sciences  
Research Council

**DCES**  
Developmental, Capable  
& Ethical state



# thank you

English  
Afrikaans  
Ndebele  
Xhosa  
Zulu  
Sepedi  
Sesotho  
Setswana  
Xitsonga  
SiSwati  
Tshivenda  
Nama

Thank you  
Dankie  
Ngiyathokoza  
Enkosi  
Ngiyabonga  
Ke a leboga  
Ke a leboha  
Ke a leboga  
Ndzi khense ngopfu  
Ngiyabonga  
Ndi a livhuwa  
Gangans

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