

Understanding Nature's Impact: South Africans' Awareness, Interest and Concern

The 2022 South African Public Relationship with Science (SAPRS) Survey asked the public about their knowledge of, and concern about, several environmental issues. Here we present the public's self-reported knowledge, interest and concern about environmental issues. We include a focus on two natural disasters by province: droughts or water shortages, and floods, both of which have affected the country extensively over the last few years.



69%

of the public reported being 'very' (26%) or 'somewhat' (43%) knowledgeable about environmental issues (such as climate change)



74%

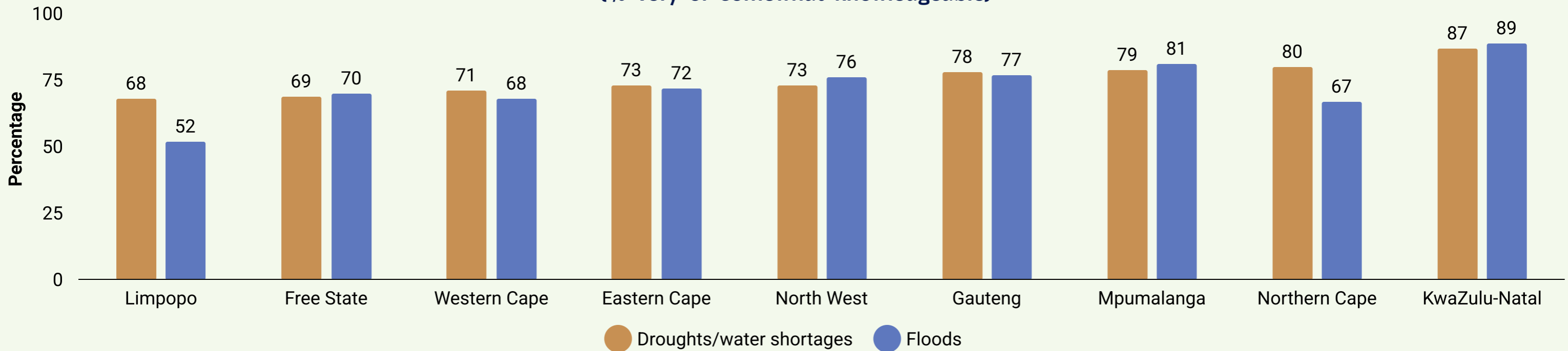
of South Africans were 'very' (35%) or 'somewhat' (39%) interested in environmental issues (such as climate change)



25%

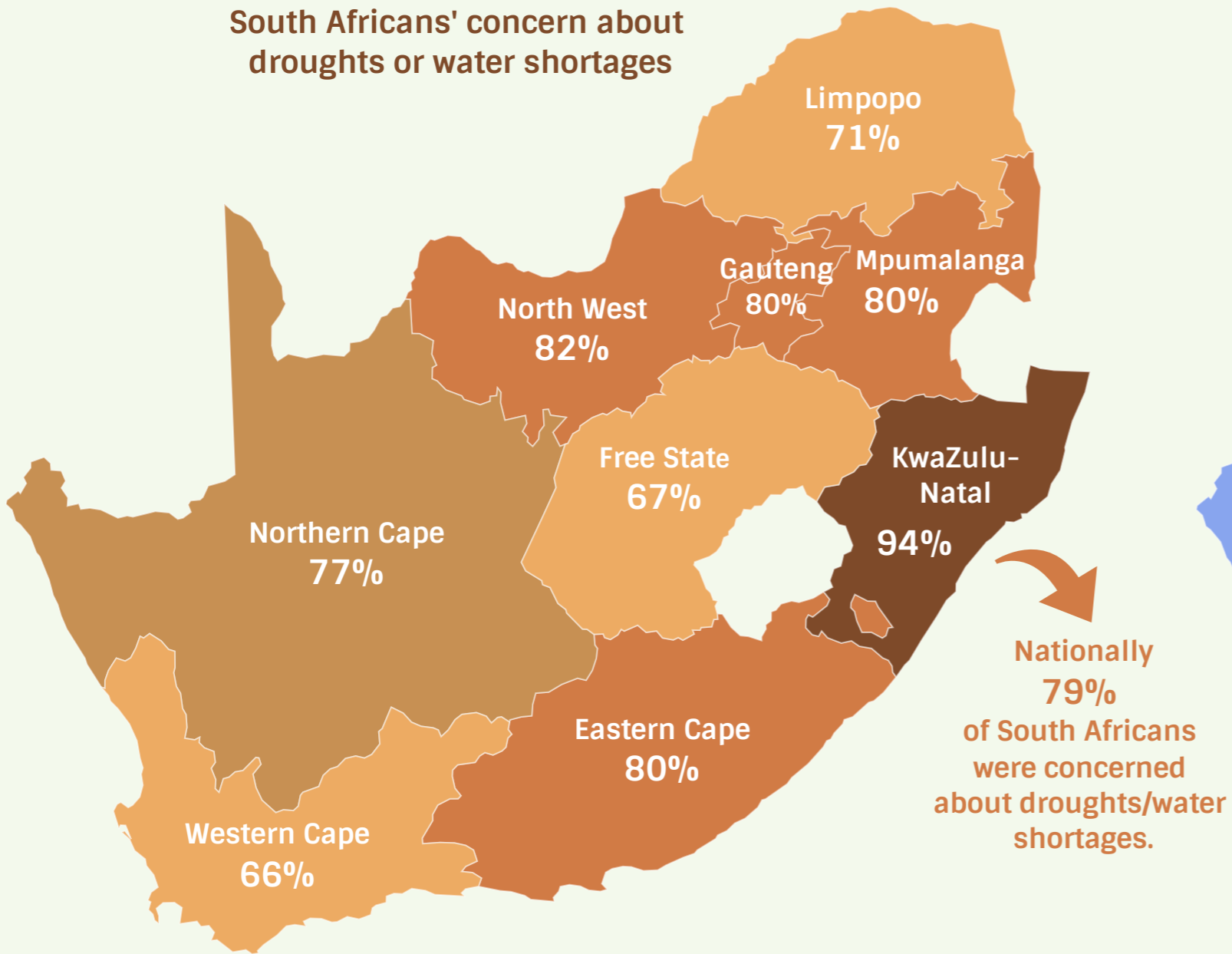
of the public selected environmental issues (such as climate change) as one of their top 4 priority areas for research funding

Knowledge about droughts/water shortages and floods by province (% 'very' or 'somewhat' knowledgeable)



The national levels were 77% for droughts or water shortages, and 75% for floods being 'very' or 'somewhat' knowledgeable, with generally quite high levels of knowledge across the provinces. Knowledge of droughts or water shortages was lowest in Limpopo, Free State, and the Western Cape, and highest in Mpumalanga, Northern Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal. For floods, knowledge was lowest in Limpopo, Northern Cape, and the Western Cape, while Gauteng, Mpumalanga, and KwaZulu-Natal reported the highest levels.

South Africans' concern about droughts or water shortages

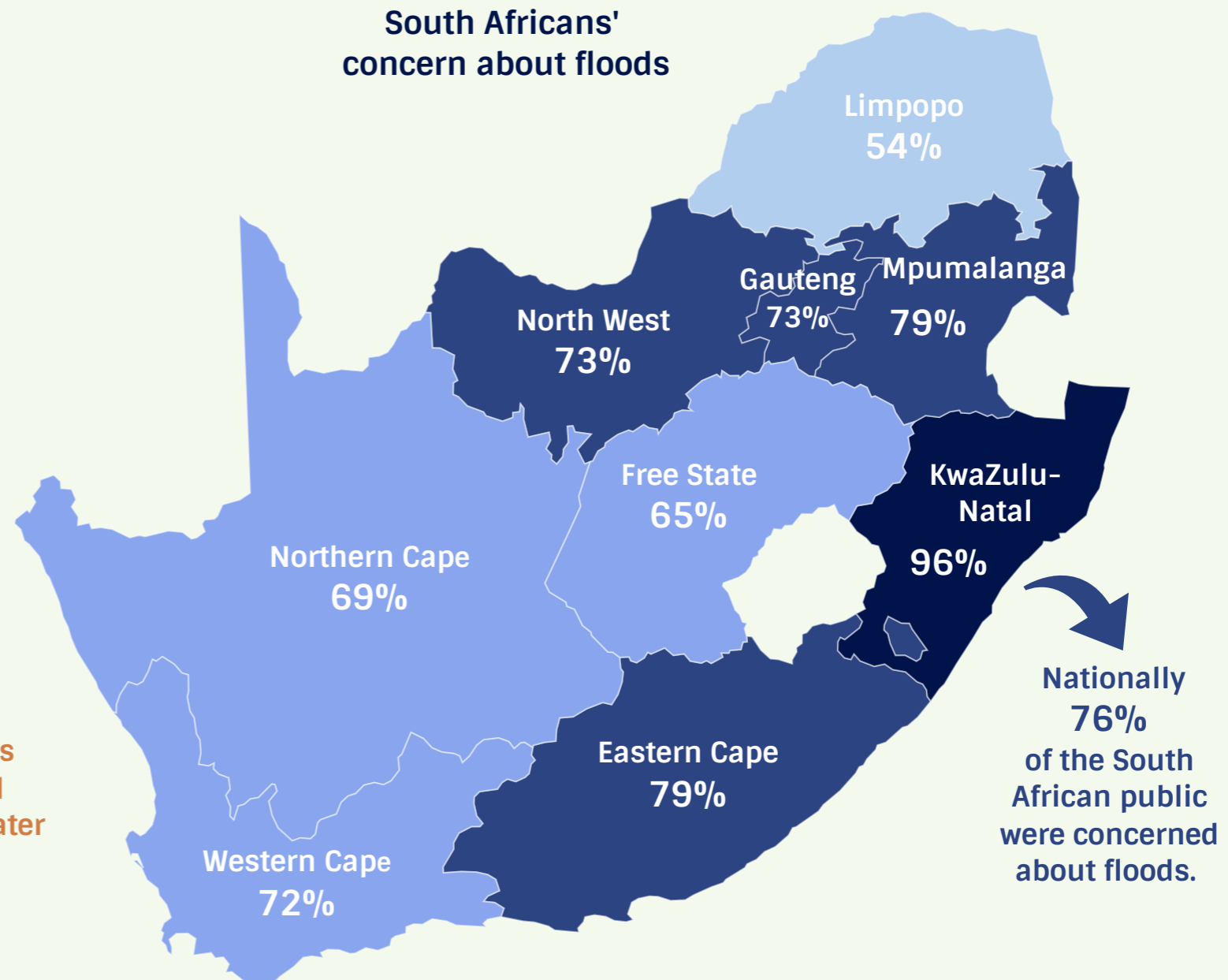


Percentage concerned
 < 71 72 - 77 78 - 82 83 - 88 > 89

It is interesting that the lowest concern was found in the Western Cape, which experienced severe water shortages between 2015 and 2020.

The highest concern was in KwaZulu-Natal and North West, both of which have been affected by droughts and water shortages.

South Africans' concern about floods



Percentage concerned
 < 61 61 - 70 71 - 75 76 - 80 > 81

Despite being prone to flooding, Limpopo's population were the least concerned.

Concern was highest in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), Eastern Cape (EC) and Mpumalanga (MP). KZN and EC have experienced severe storms and flooding in recent years, and MP is vulnerable to flooding.

A moderate but significant relationship exists between knowledge and concern in South Africa, but the relationship is not straightforward. This highlights the need for more nuanced science communication that goes beyond the assumption that more knowledge automatically leads to more concern. Instead, disaster risk management requires tailored approaches that consider provincial contexts, strengthen both understanding and concern, and ultimately build more effective preparedness and resilience.