# IEC Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2026

## Voters' experiences of the Local Government Elections (LGE) 2026




Research conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) on behalf of the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC)

**National Briefing**

SOUTH AFRICA

**6 November 2026**

science, technology & innovation
Department:
Science, Technology and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

HSRC
Human Sciences Research Council

# A research-driven Election Management Body

Since the late 1990s, the **Electoral Commission has appointed the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)** to undertake an independent programme of electoral research.
This focuses on generating survey-based as well as qualitative insight to inform operational planning and outreach.

- **The Power of the X**: Monitoring electoral predispositions through the Voter Participation Survey (VPS) series: 29,979 surveyed to date
- **The Voter's Voice**: Evaluating electoral experiences through the Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) series; 145,042 surveyed to date





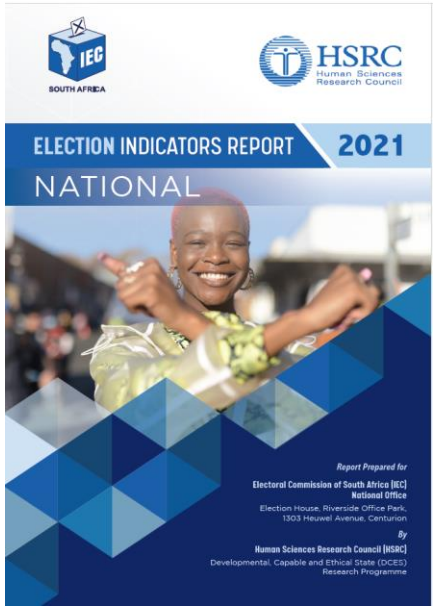




# An evidence-based Electoral Commission:
## (1) Voter Participation and Election Satisfaction Surveys

## Voter Participation Survey (VPS) series

- Voter Participation Survey: provides information on the views and behavioural preferences of adult South Africans ahead of elections.
- **VPS findings used to directly inform operational planning:** including voter registration drives, voter and balloting education (CDE), and campaigns address growing fatalism amongst citizens




## Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) series

- Representative survey of the views and experiences of voters on Election Days, conducted by HSRC since 1999 on behalf of IEC
- ESS methodology adopted as one of the measures to determine whether elections in South Africa are **free and fair; results read out as part of official election declaration**



# 2026 South African Elections: Measuring Voter Satisfaction and Electoral Integrity

- On the 4th November 2026, the seventh **Local Government Elections** (LGE) in South Africa took place.
- The **Human Sciences Research Council** (HSRC) was commissioned by the **Electoral Commission of South Africa** (IEC) to conduct a survey on the day of the elections.
- The intention was to establish the opinions and perceptions of voters on election day, understanding the electoral experience of voters.
- In the **Election Satisfaction Survey** (ESS), voters were asked a series of questions about the election process, including whether the 2026 LGE were free and fair.










# Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) series Methodology

- **Aims:** (i) to determine perceptions of voters regarding the freeness and fairness of the electoral process; (ii) to assess the operational efficiency of the IEC in managing elections.
- **Sample design**: included **stratification; multi-stage** procedure
  - Database of **voting stations** obtained from Electoral Commission merged with **Census Enumerator Areas**.
  - **National representative sample of 300 voting stations** countrywide, proportional to race, geographic type and the number of voting stations in each province.
- **At voting stations**, fieldworkers **randomly select 50 voters for interviewing during Election Day** to ensure a fair representation of voters. Tablet-based, interviewer-administered.
- **Interviews conducted throughout Election Day** clustered into four time periods: Opening-10:30 (23%); 10:31-14:30 (27%); 14:31-17:30 (31%); 17:31-closure (19%)
- **Realisation rate** of 88%, 13,198 interviews completed with respondents in nine provinces.
- **Margin of error**: Less than 1%



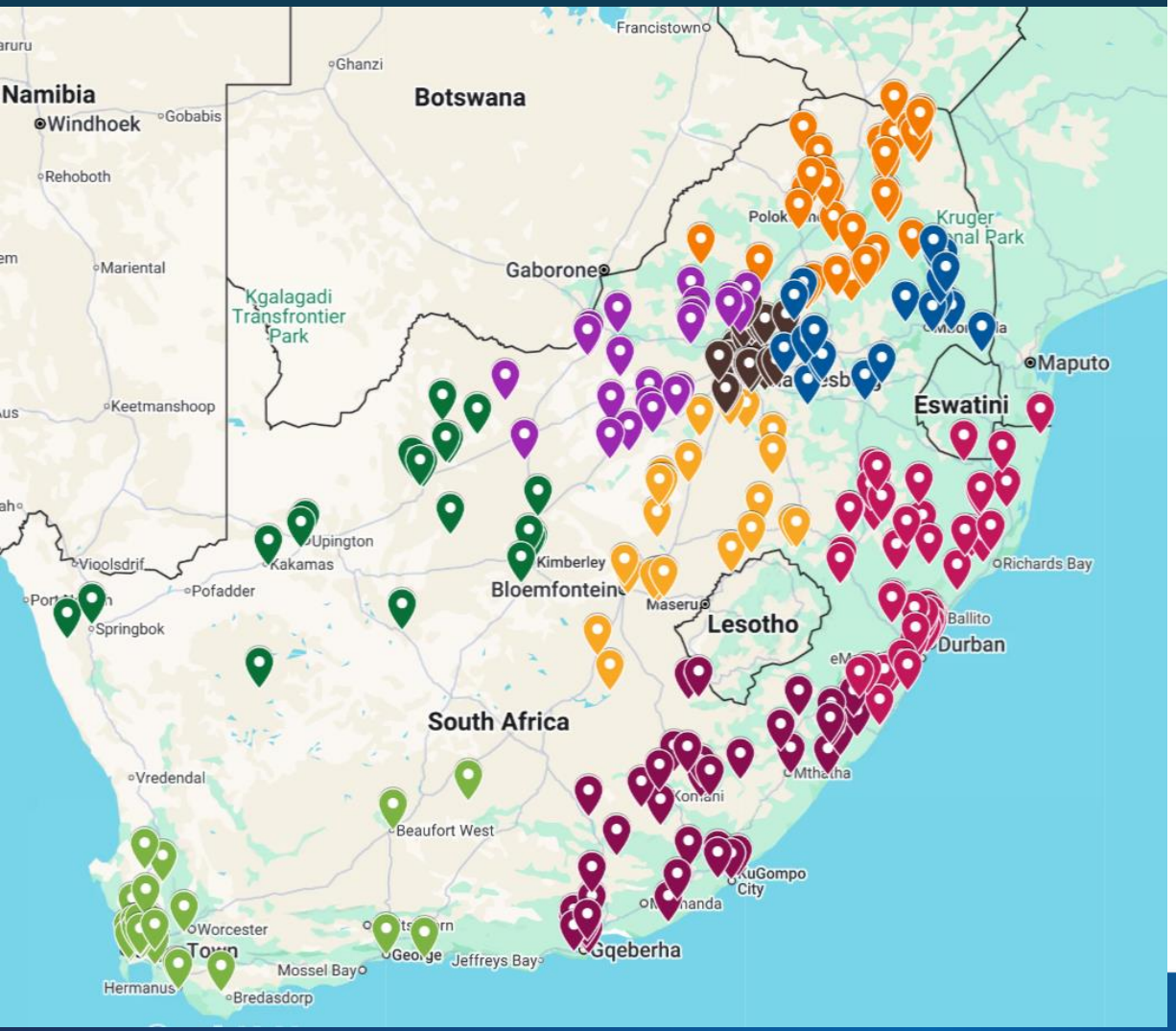






# VPS Sample Mirrors the National Population Distribution

IEC ESS 2026 sampled voting stations (300)




- 300 Voting Stations sampled countrywide

| | |
|---|---|
| • Eastern Cape | 47 |
| • Free State | 26 |
| • Gauteng | 39 |
| • KwaZulu-Natal | 49 |
| • Limpopo | 36 |
| • Mpumalanga | 24 |
| • North West | 28 |
| • Northern Cape | 20 |
| • Western Cape | 31 |

- 45% urban formal; 15% urban informal; 40% rural

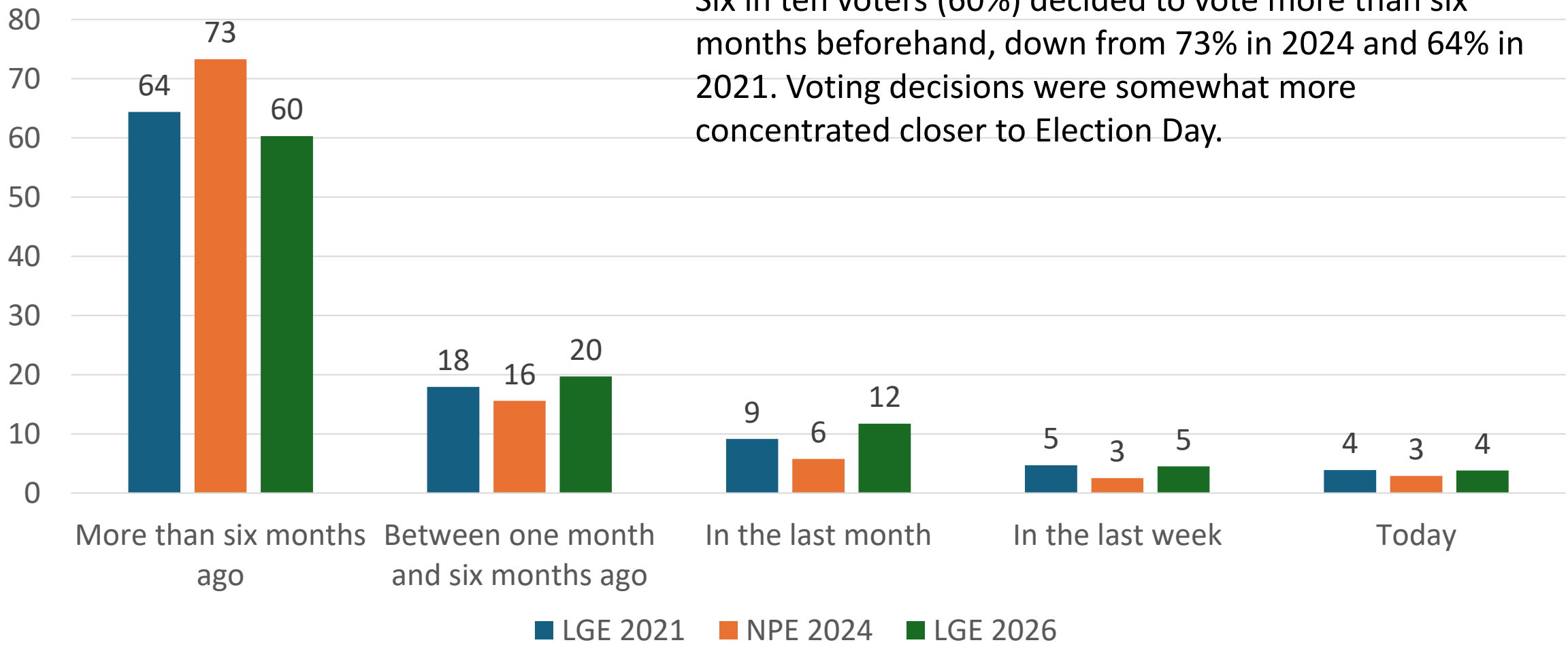
# Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2026 Results




IEC
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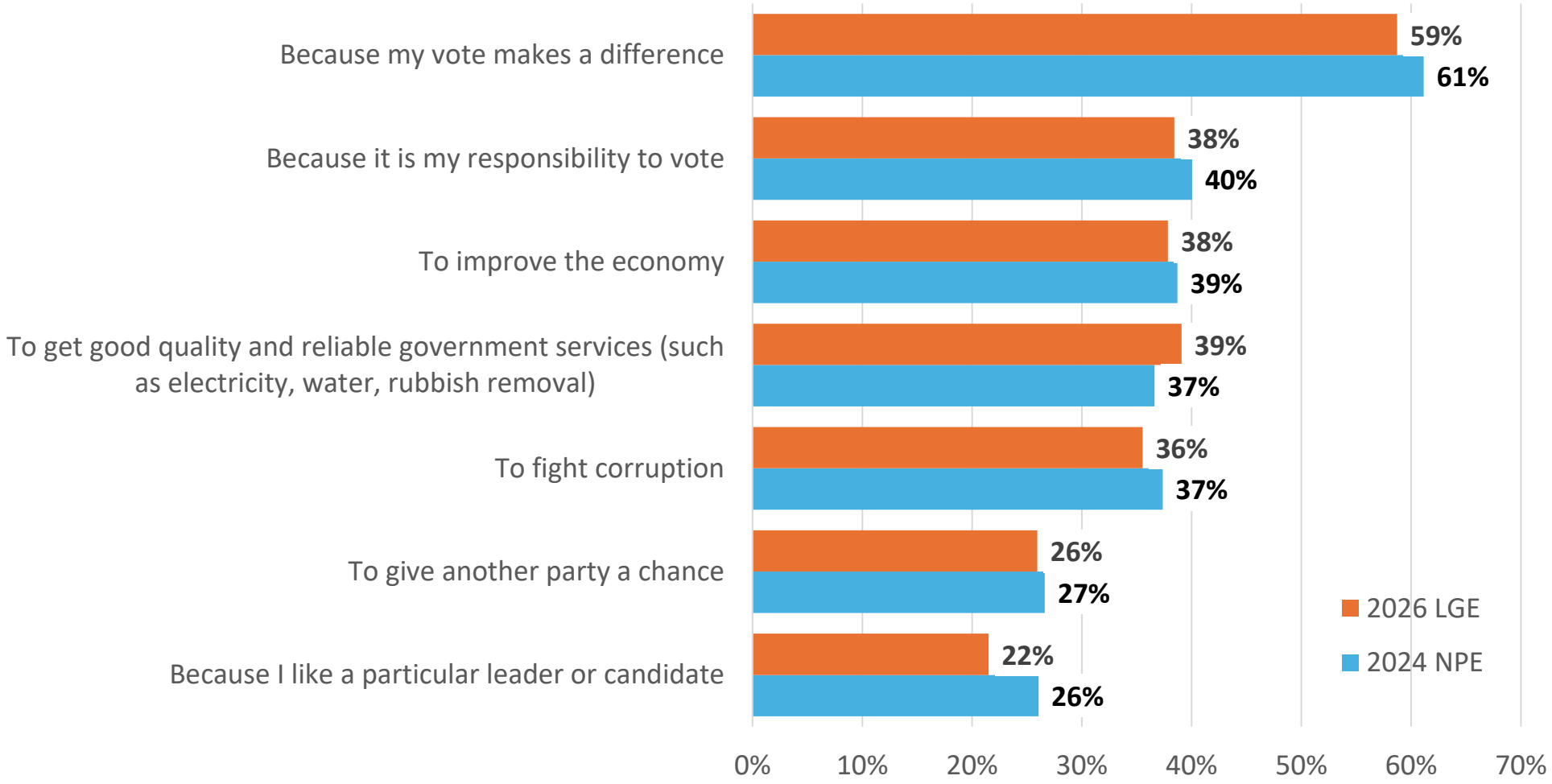
# Voter responses to the question, “When did you finally decide to vote in this Election?”, 2021, and 2026

Six in ten voters (60%) decided to vote more than six months beforehand, down from 73% in 2024 and 64% in 2021. Voting decisions were somewhat more concentrated closer to Election Day.




***Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2019; 2024; 2026**

# How voters responded to the following question, “Did ANY of the following reasons have a BIG influence on your decision to vote today? I voted…”, 2024 and 2026 compared

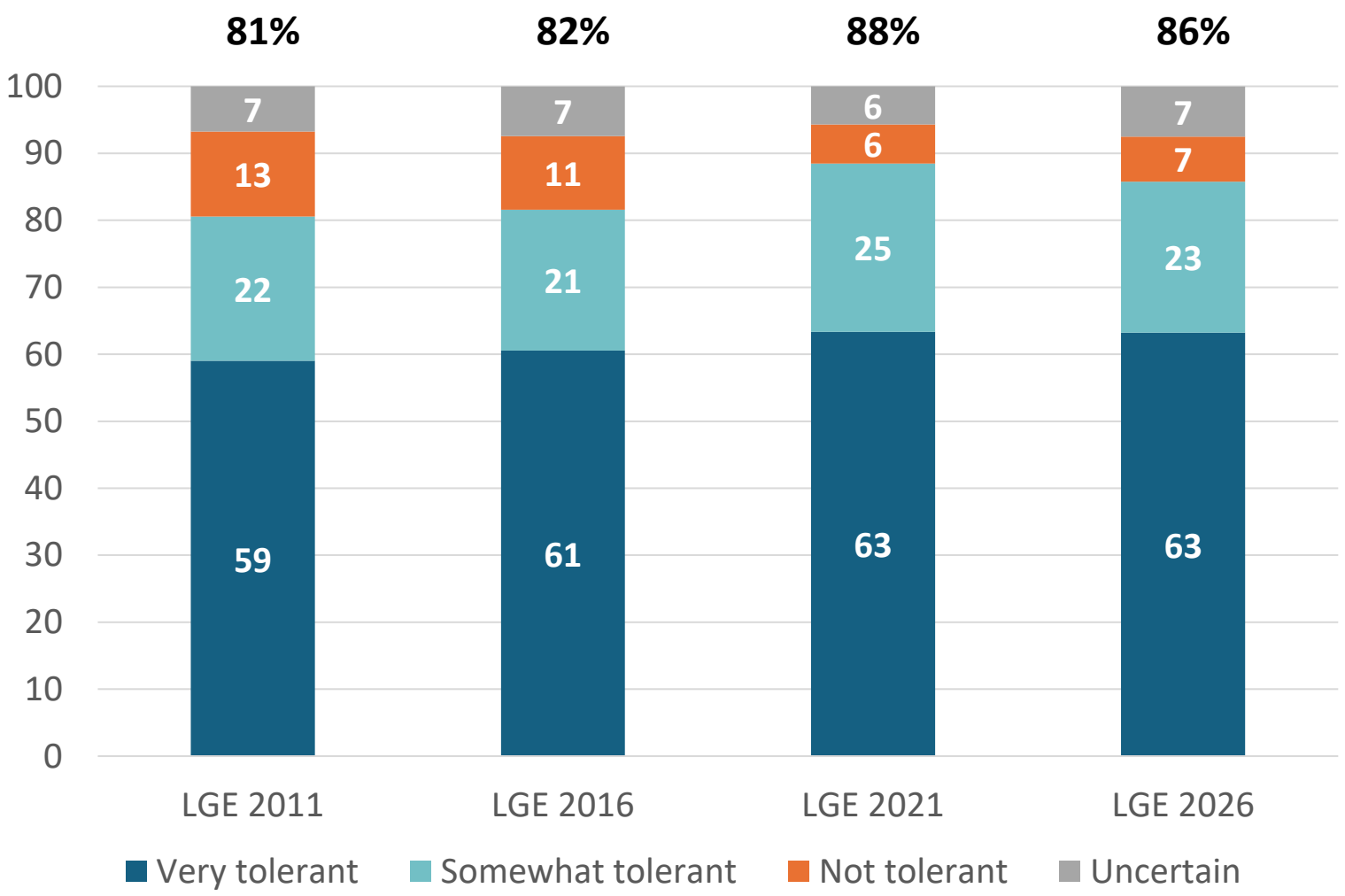



In LGE 2026, belief that one’s vote makes a difference remained the leading motivation (59%).

Followed by civic responsibility (38%) and core issues including service delivery (39%), and economic improvement (38%) and anti-corruption (36%) .

*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2024; 2026

# Perceptions of Political Tolerance during the Election 2026 campaign period




Perceptions of political tolerance during election campaigns remain strongly positive and have improved over time.

In 2026, 86% of voters regarded political parties and candidates as either very tolerant (63%) or somewhat tolerant (23%), compared with 81% in 2011.

The proportion perceiving political intolerance has declined from 13% in 2011 to 7% in 2026.

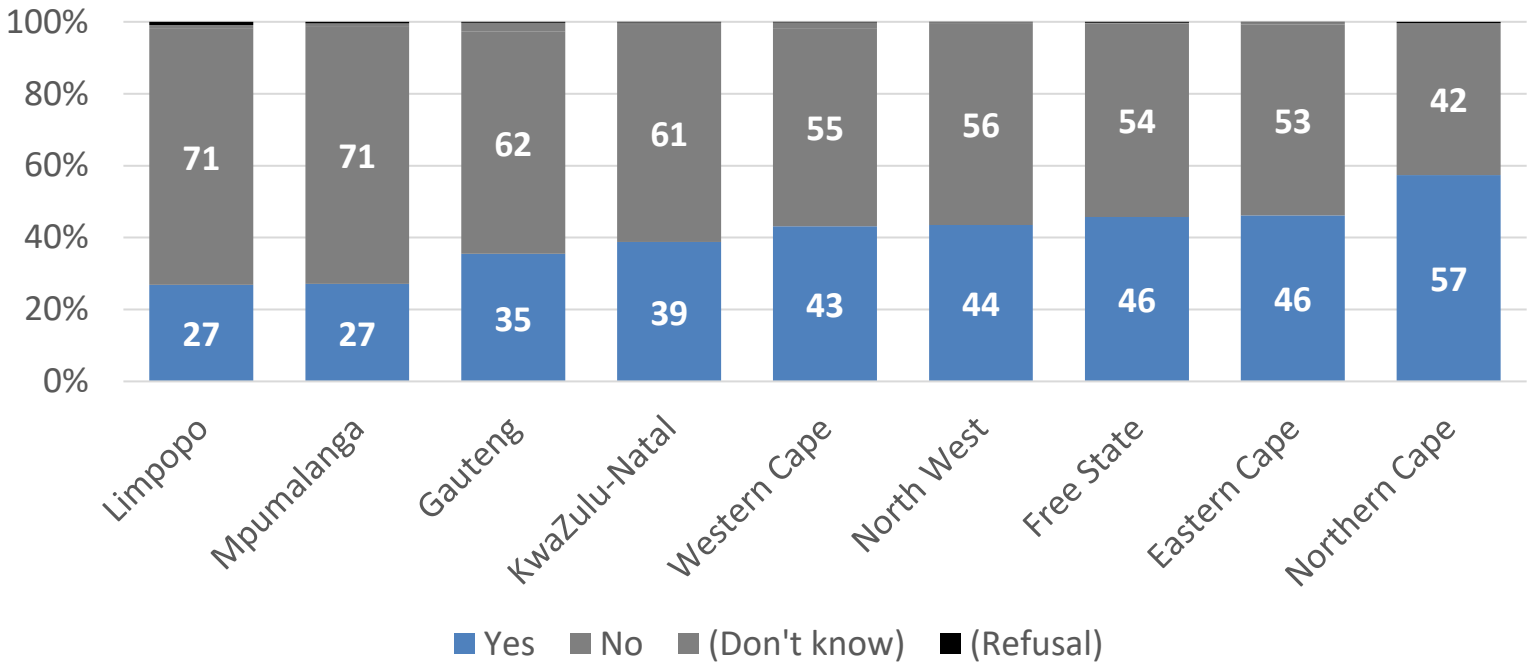
These findings suggest a modest improvement in voters' perceptions of political tolerance during local government election campaigns, with assessments remaining broadly stable since 2021.

*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2011; 2016; 2021; 2026

# Political Party Representatives outside the perimeter of Voting Stations

- 93% of voters interviewed were at stations which had political party representatives outside. Furthermore, 40% of voters said a party agent or independent candidate approached them to offer assistance or check their details against a voters' list  before entering the station (ranges between 27-57% across provinces)

*Just before you entered the voting station today, did a representative of any political party or independent candidate approach you to offer assistance or to check your details against a voters' list or other list?*







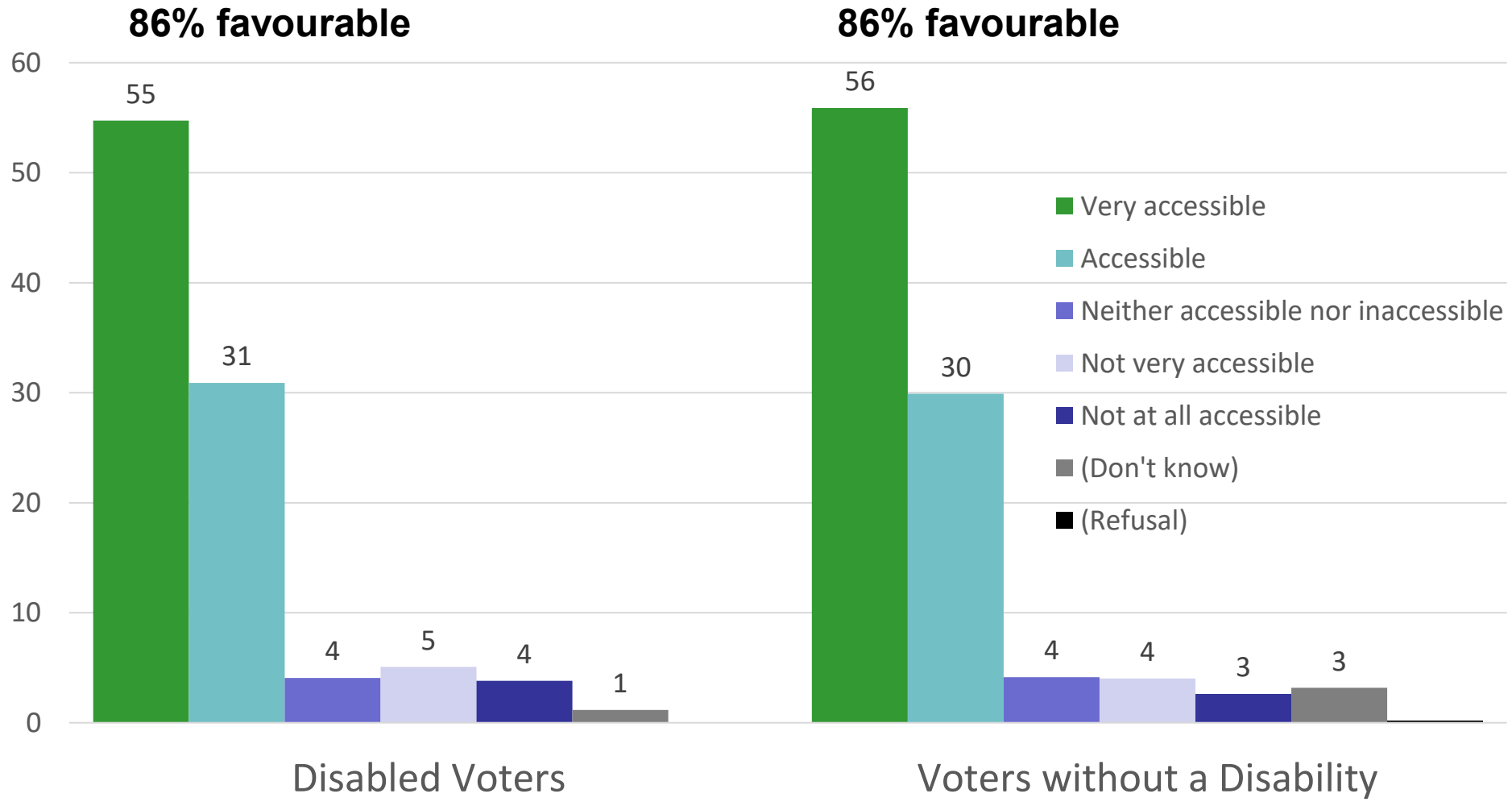
*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2026

# Voting station accessibility

**Voter responses to the question, "How easily accessible was the voting station to persons with disability/elderly?" by disability status (2026, %)**

**Voting stations were perceived as highly accessible by voters both with and without disabilities.**

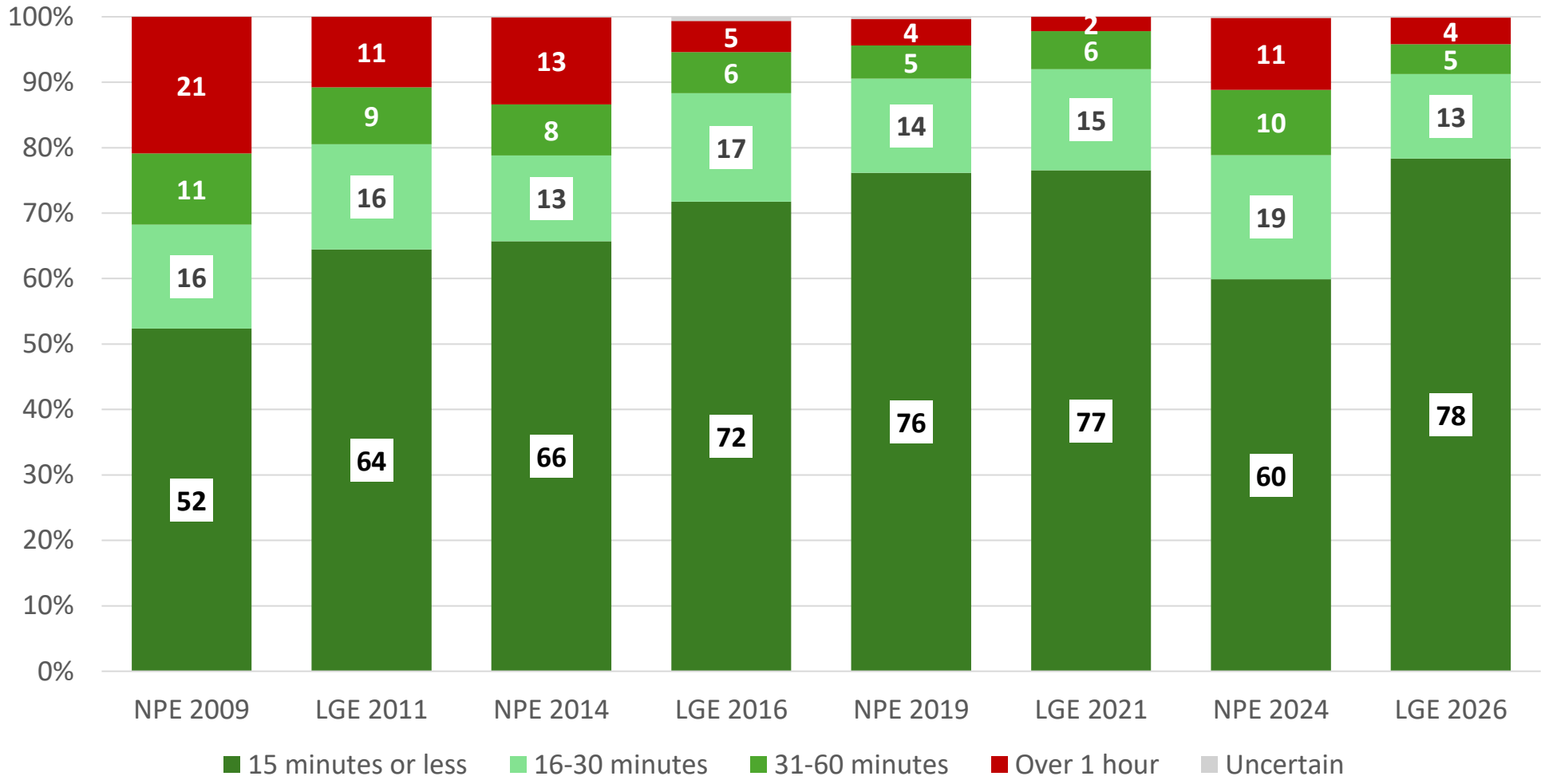
In 2026, the findings indicate broadly comparable and overwhelmingly positive experiences across the two groups.




*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2026

# Queuing Time

## Voter responses to the question: "How long did you queue before voting?", 2009-2026




Voting was generally convenient: 90% travelled no more than 30 minutes (not shown) and 91% queued no longer than 30 minutes.

Short queuing times improved markedly compared with 2024, returning to 2021 levels.

*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2009-2026

# Views on, and information about, Voting Procedures

- We found that 58% of voters thought the procedures inside their voting station were **'very easy'** to understand and 38% stated that they were **'easy'**.
- Roughly a tenth (13%) stated that they had **far too little information** and 13% said they had **too little information** about the voting procedures.
- **Eastern Cape voters** were the most likely to state that they had too little information on voting procedures. **Northern Cape voters** were the least likely to state that they had too little information.
- Even voters who said that they had too little information said that procedures were easy to understand.

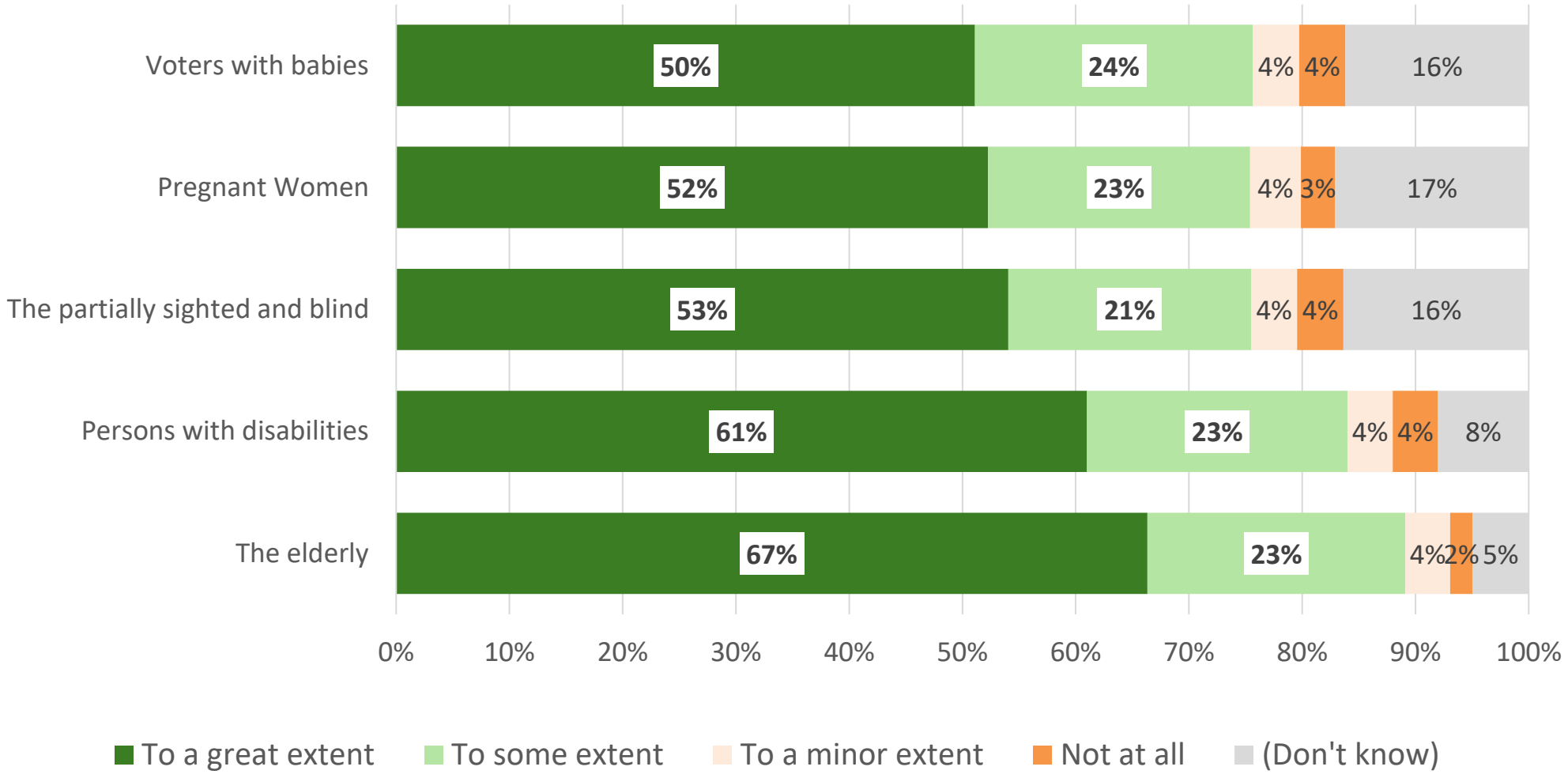









# Voter responses to the question: “To what extent did the voting procedure at this voting station consider the needs of special groups?”, 2026

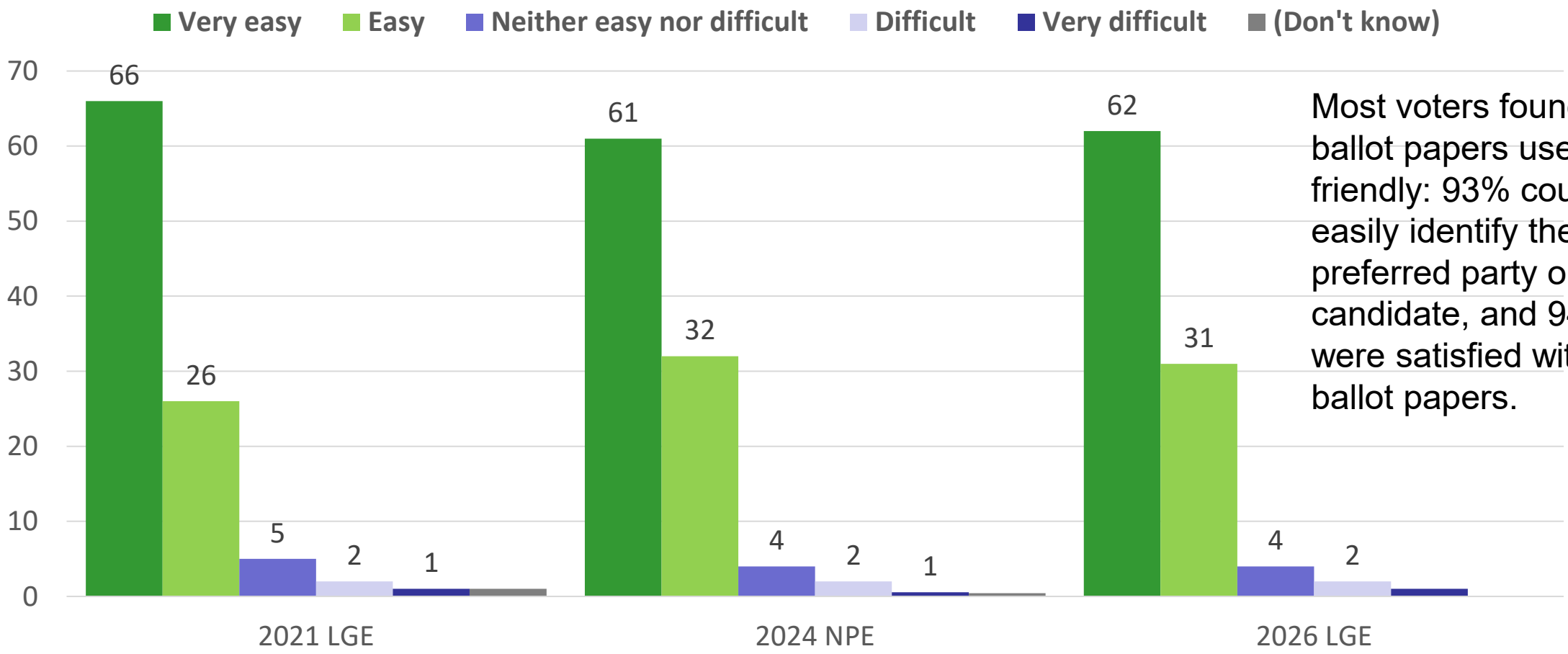



**Most voters viewed arrangements for vulnerable groups positively**, although assessments were less favourable for visually impaired voters, pregnant women and voters with babies (due mainly to uncertainty).

*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2026

# Ballot Paper Evaluations

## Voter responses to the question, "How easy or difficult was it to find your party or candidate of choice on the ballot papers?", 2021, 2024 and 2026 compared (%)

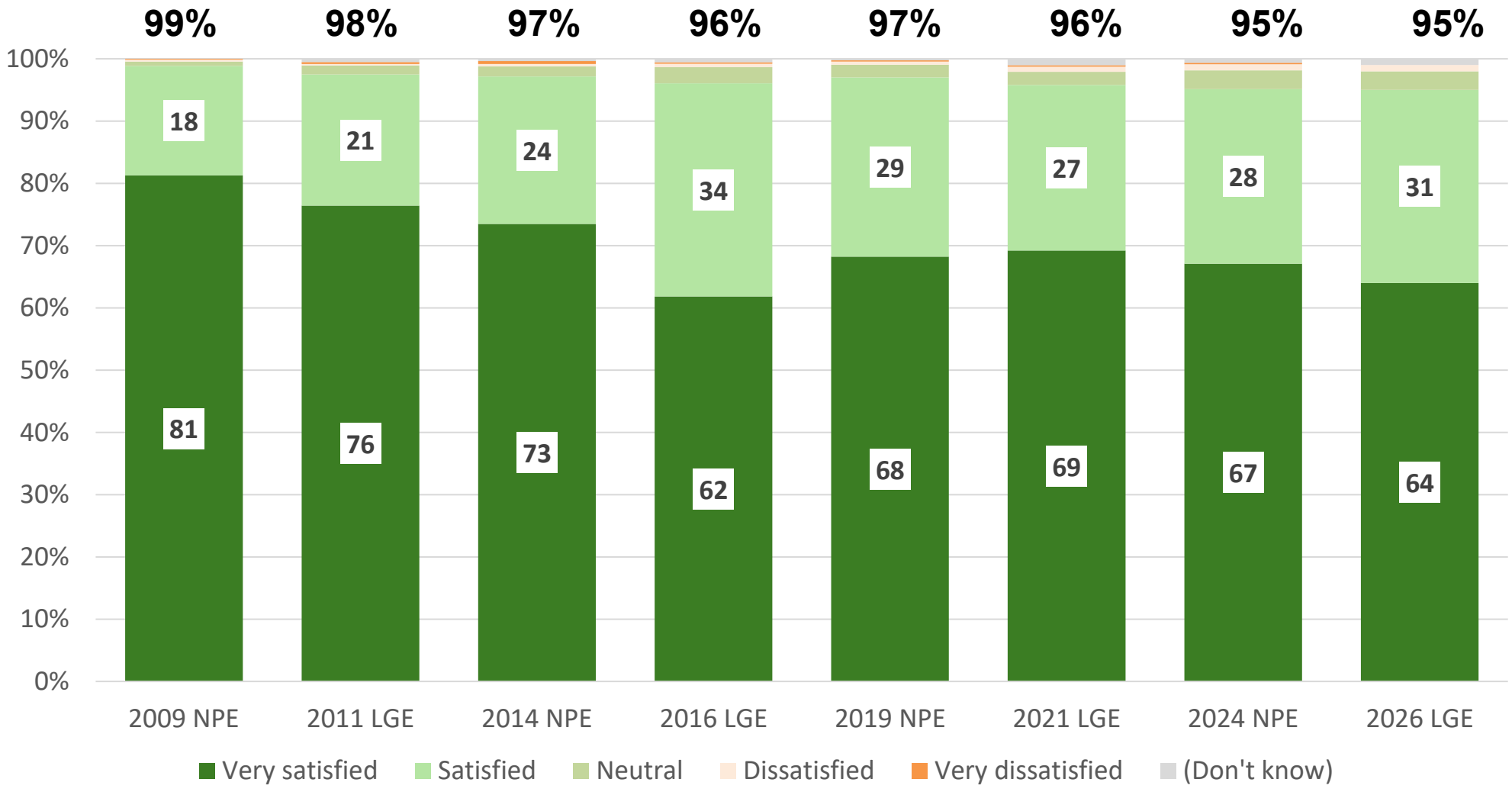



Most voters found the ballot papers user-friendly: 93% could easily identify their preferred party or candidate, and 94% were satisfied with the ballot papers.

*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2021; 2024; 2026

# Perceived secrecy of the vote

## Voter responses to the question: “Are you satisfied that your vote in this voting station was secret?", 2009-2026




**Voter confidence in ballot secrecy remains exceptionally high** and remarkably consistent over time.

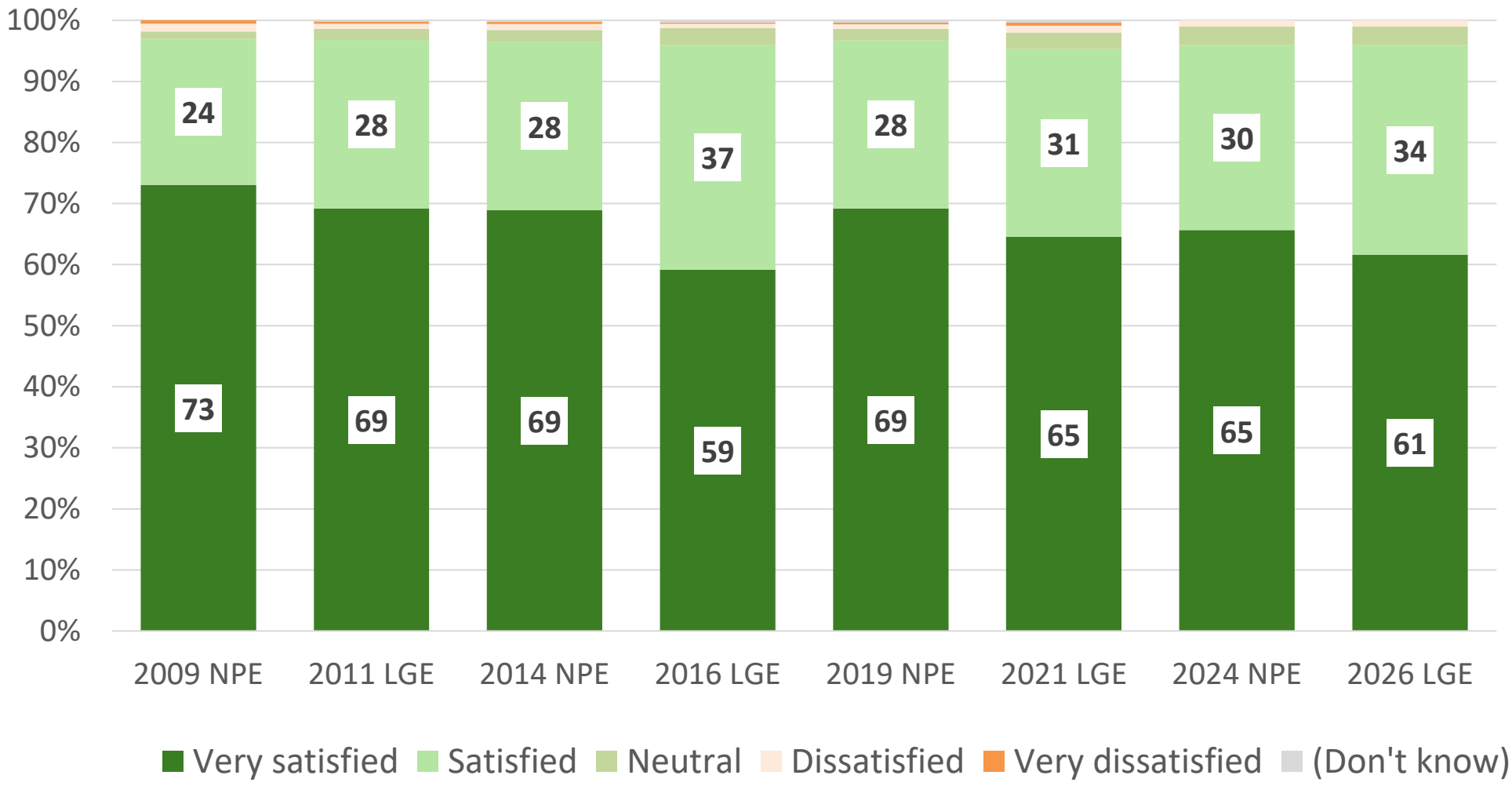
In 2026, 95% of voters were satisfied that their vote remained secret.

Overall satisfaction has ranged between 95% and 99%, since the late 2000s

*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2009-2026

# Service Provided By Electoral Staff at Voting Stations

## Voter responses to the question: "Are you satisfied with the quality of service that the IEC officials provided to voters?", 2009-2026 (%)

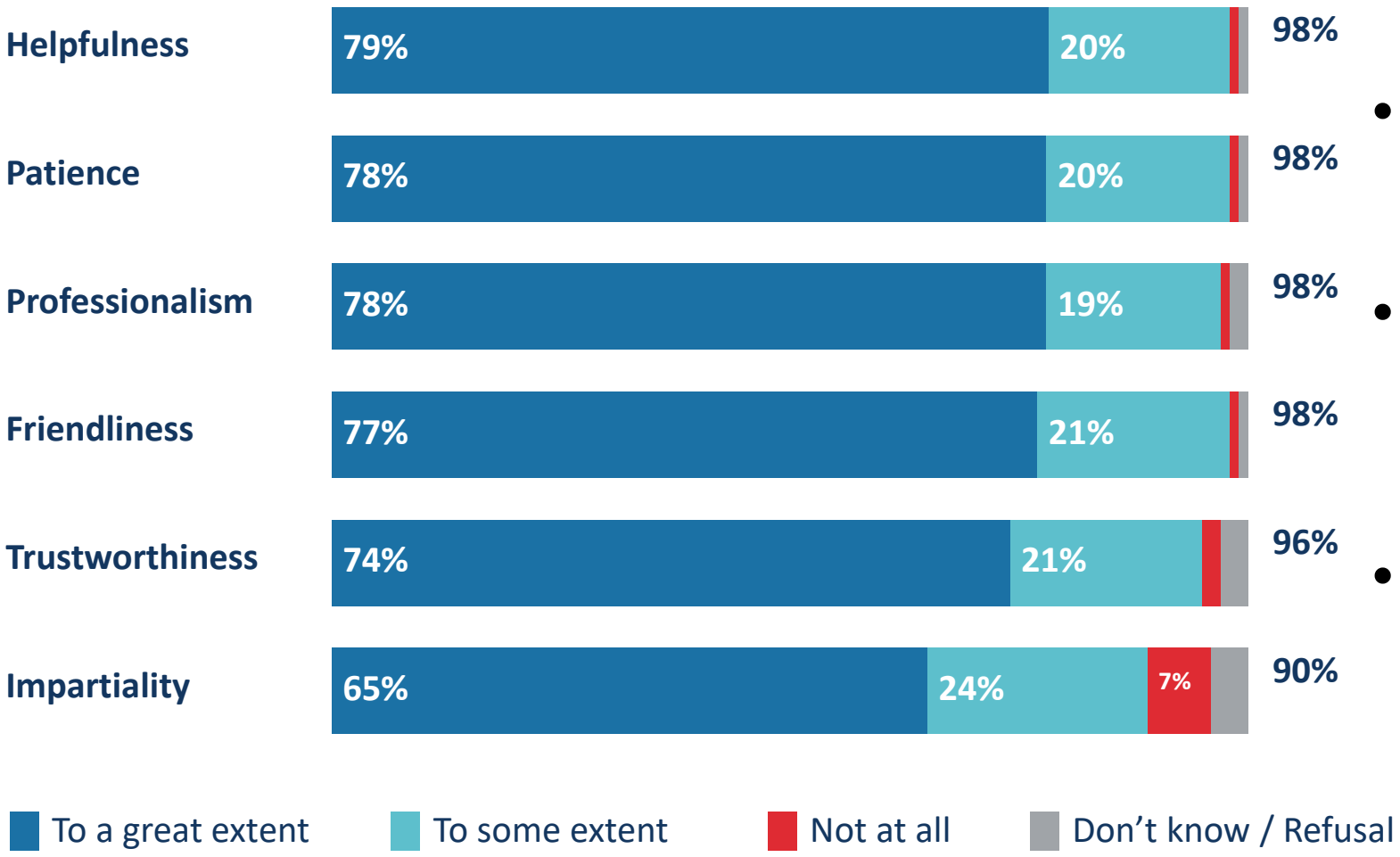



**Satisfaction with IEC officials remained exceptionally high at 95%**

Broadly consistent with previous elections.

*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2009-2026

# Voter evaluations of the performance and conduct of the Election Commission officials

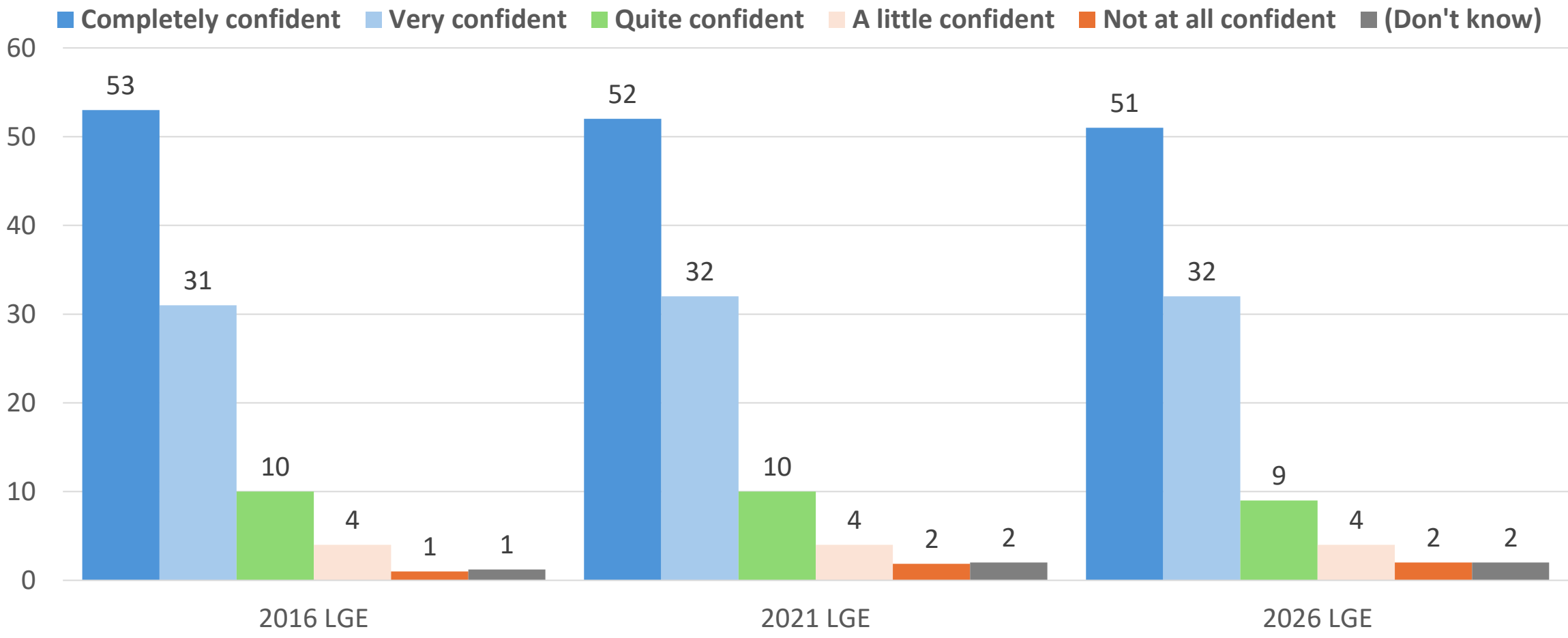



- Voters were asked to rate officials on **six different IEC staff attributes**
- A **clear majority** gave electoral officials a positive rating on all six indicators in LGE 2026.
- Most positive evaluation from voters was **'helpfulness'**, with 79% of voters describing officials as helpful to **'a great extent'**.
- The lowest rating was **'impartiality'**. 65% said this applied 'to a great extent', while close to a tenth stated that officials were **not at all** impartial (7%).

***Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2009-2026; Preliminary unweighted results (n=13,198)**

# Confidence in the Vote Count

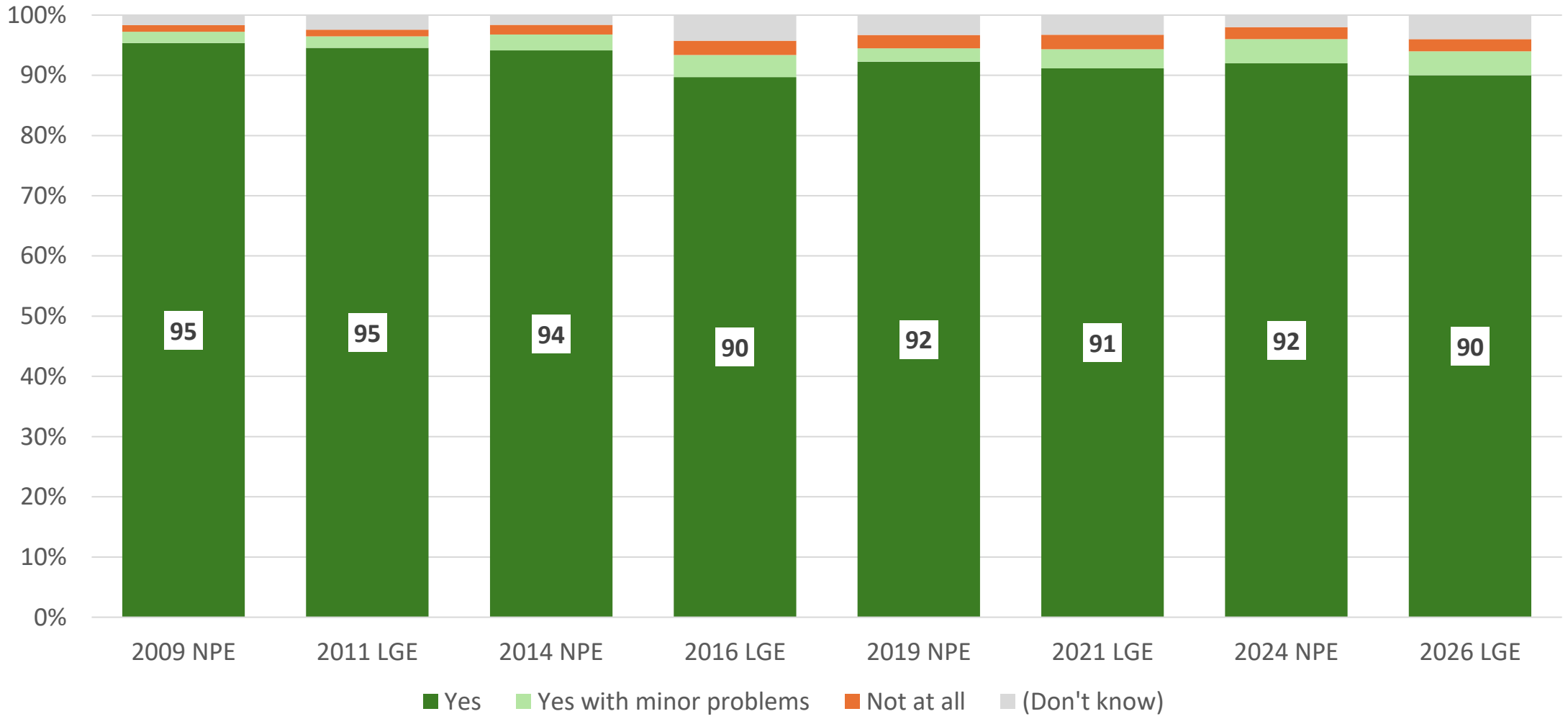
## Voter response to the question, "How confident are you that your vote will be accurately counted?" – 2016, 2021 and 2026 compared




*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2016; 2021; 2026

# Perceptions of Freeness of Elections, 2009-2026 (%)

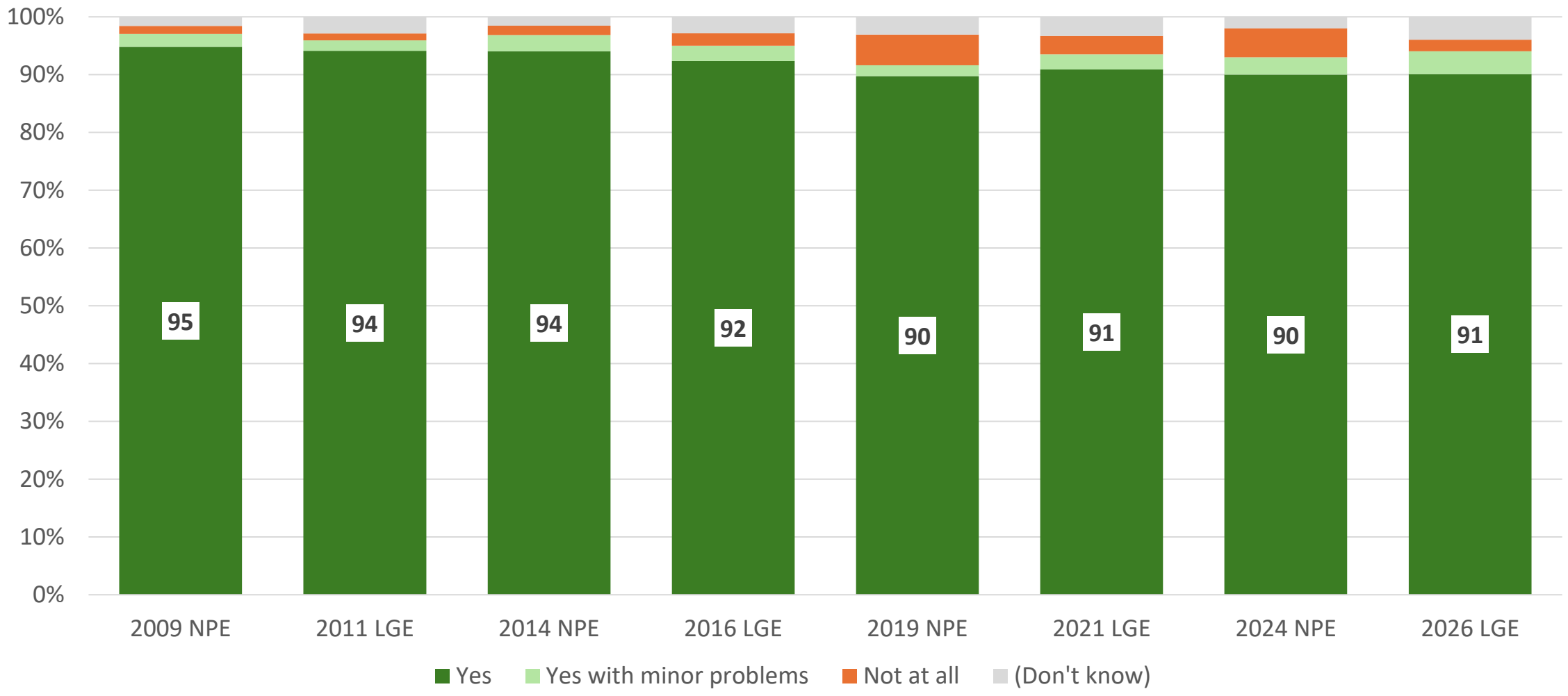
## Voter responses to the question: Do you think that the election procedures were free?"




*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2009-2026

# Perceptions of Fairness of Elections, 2009-2026 (%)

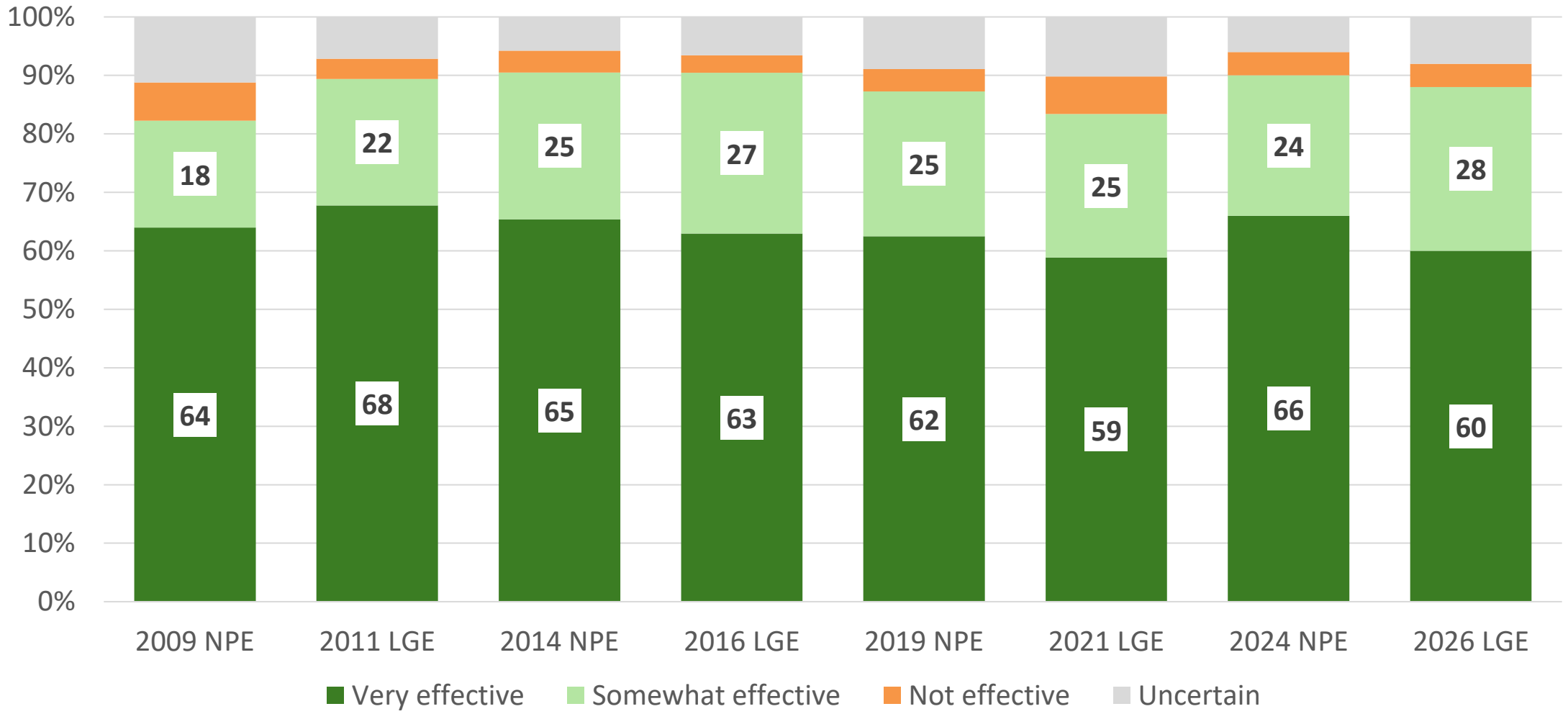
## Voter responses to the question: Do you think that the election procedures were fair?"




*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2009-2026

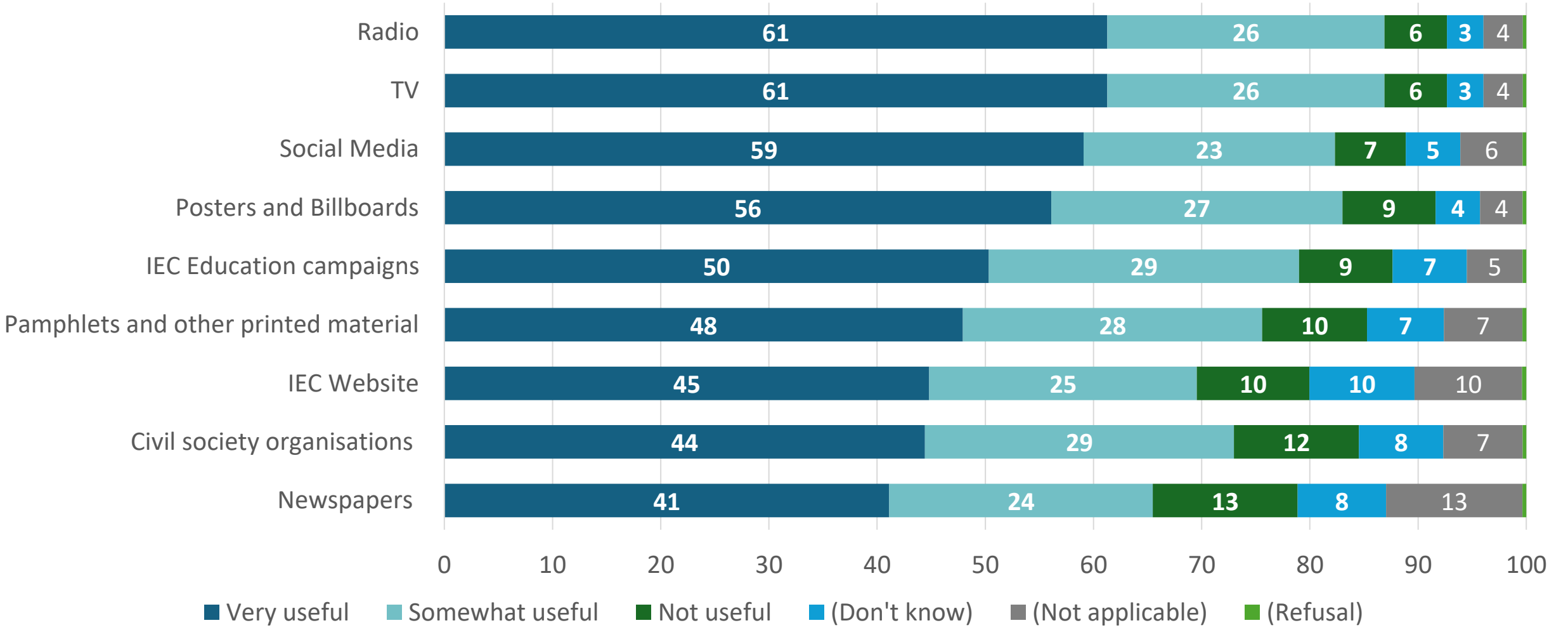
# IEC Voter Education Campaign

## Voter responses to the question: “How effective was the IEC’s voter education campaign for these elections?", 2009-2026



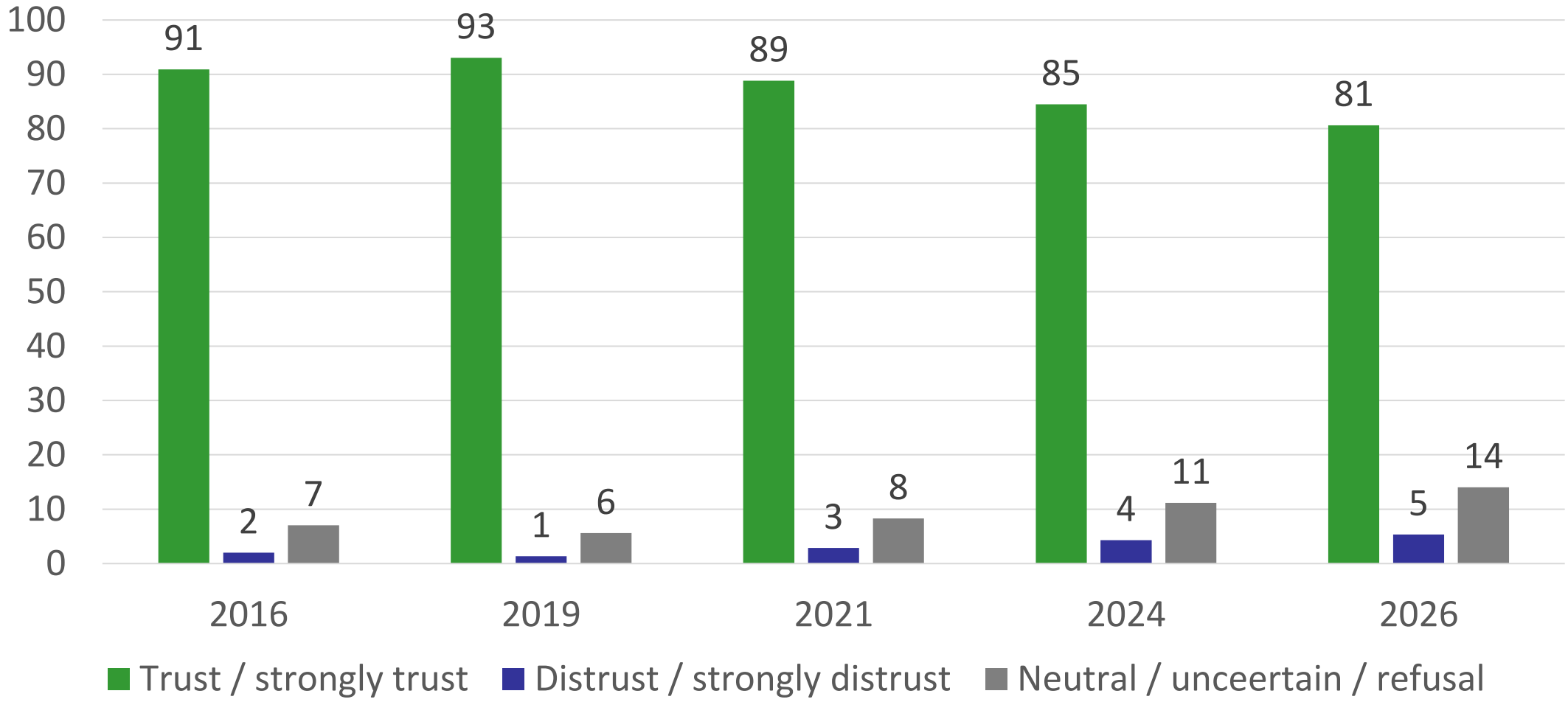

*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2009-2026

# Public perceptions about the usefulness of various media in providing information and voter education



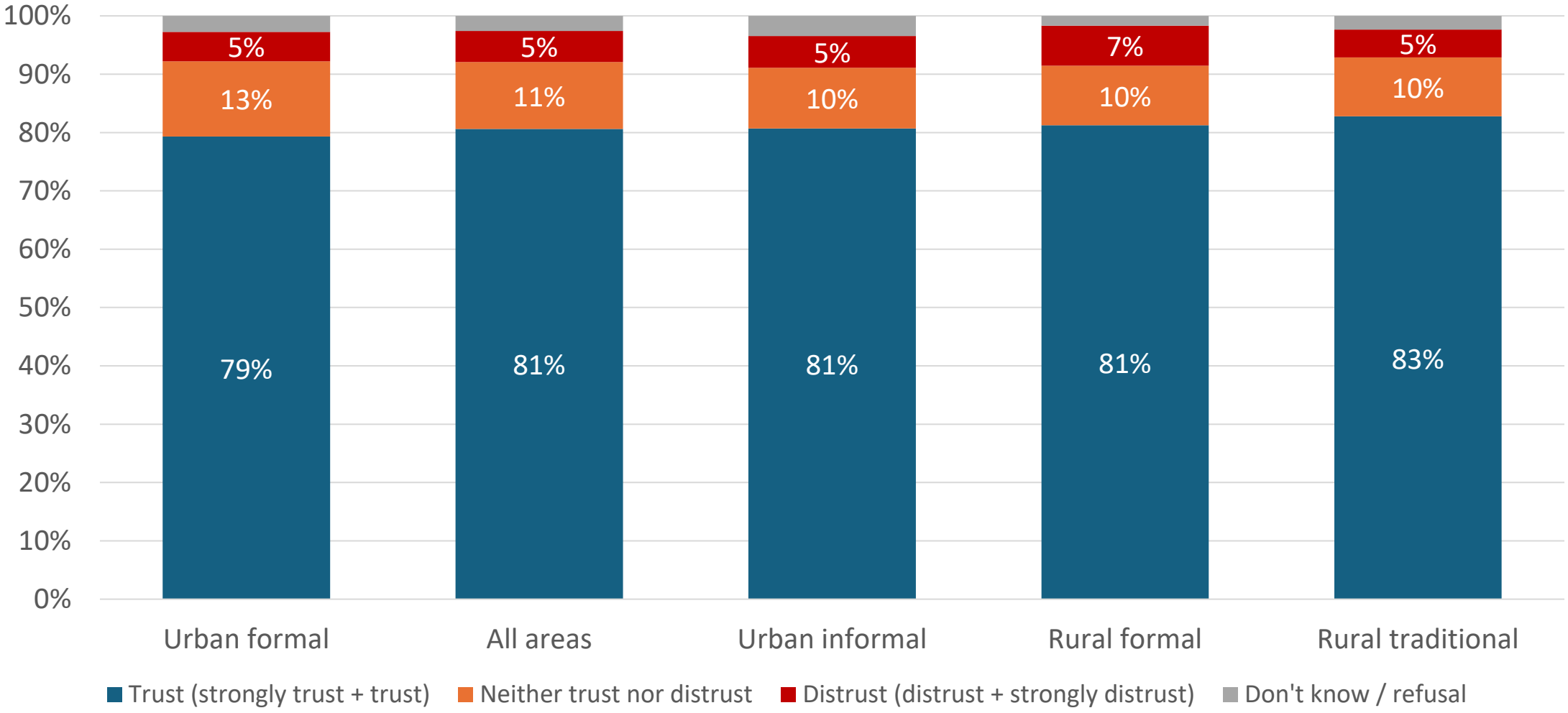

*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2026

# Trust in the Electoral Commission among the voting public, 2016-2026 (%)



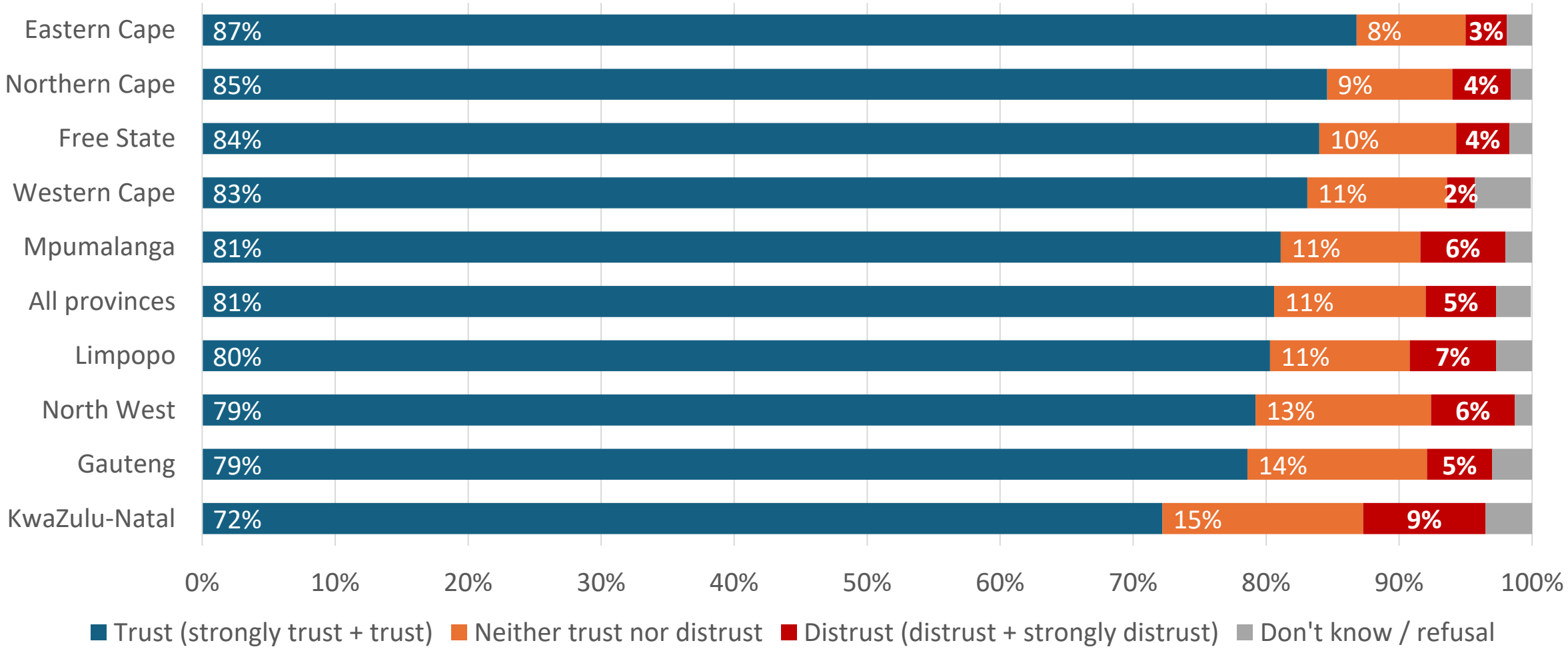

*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2016-2026

# Trust in the Electoral Commission, by type of geographic location (2026, %)




*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2026

# Trust in the Electoral Commission, By province (2026, %)




*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2026

# Self-reported reasons for trust in the Electoral Commission (81% of voters)

| Theme | Main finding |
|---|---|
| **1. Professionalism and competence** | Confidence in well-trained, knowledgeable and professional IEC officials who perform their duties effectively. |
| **2. Fairness, impartiality and independence** | Belief that the IEC treats voters and political parties equally, operates independently and conducts free and fair elections. |
| **3. Accurate vote counting and electoral integrity** | Confidence that votes will be counted correctly, protected from interference and accurately reflected in election results. |
| **4. Positive historical track record** | Trust accumulated through years of successful election administration, often referencing the IEC's experience since 1994. |
| **5. Helpful and respectful service** | Positive personal experiences with friendly, patient and helpful officials, alongside orderly and efficient voting procedures. |
| **6. Ballot secrecy, safety and transparency** | Reassurance that voting is confidential, ballot papers are protected, and electoral procedures are transparent and secure. |
| **7. Absence of negative experiences or evidence of wrongdoing** | Many respondents trust the IEC because they have never personally experienced problems, corruption or electoral misconduct. |

- "I think the IEC has one of the most difficult jobs to do in this country and they do it well."
- "They don't favour any political party they are neutral."
- "I believe our votes will be counted correctly."
- "They've never let me down."
- "officials were kind helpful and explained procedures"
- "My vote was kept a secret"
- "They haven't given me a reason to doubt them"
- "They are too professional and they are not even bias towards political parties.

*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2026

# Self-reported reasons for distrust in the Electoral Commission (5% of voters)

- **Perceived corruption and dishonesty**: Allegations of corruption, bribery and fraudulent practices are prominent reasons for distrust.
- **Concerns about vote counting and electoral results**: Respondents express doubts about whether votes are accurately counted, properly accounted for and reflected in the final results.
- **Perceived political bias**: Some believe the IEC is influenced by political parties, particularly the governing party, raising doubts about its independence and impartiality.
- **Past controversies and media reports**: Previous electoral disputes, rumours and information circulating through news and social media contribute to mistrust.
- **Generalised political distrust:** Some respondents associate the IEC with wider government corruption, political dissatisfaction and a broader lack of confidence in public institutions.

"There is always corruption."
"They are all corrupt."

"Votes are not counted accurately."
"They might omit other votes."

"I think they favour the ruling party."
"They work with another political party."

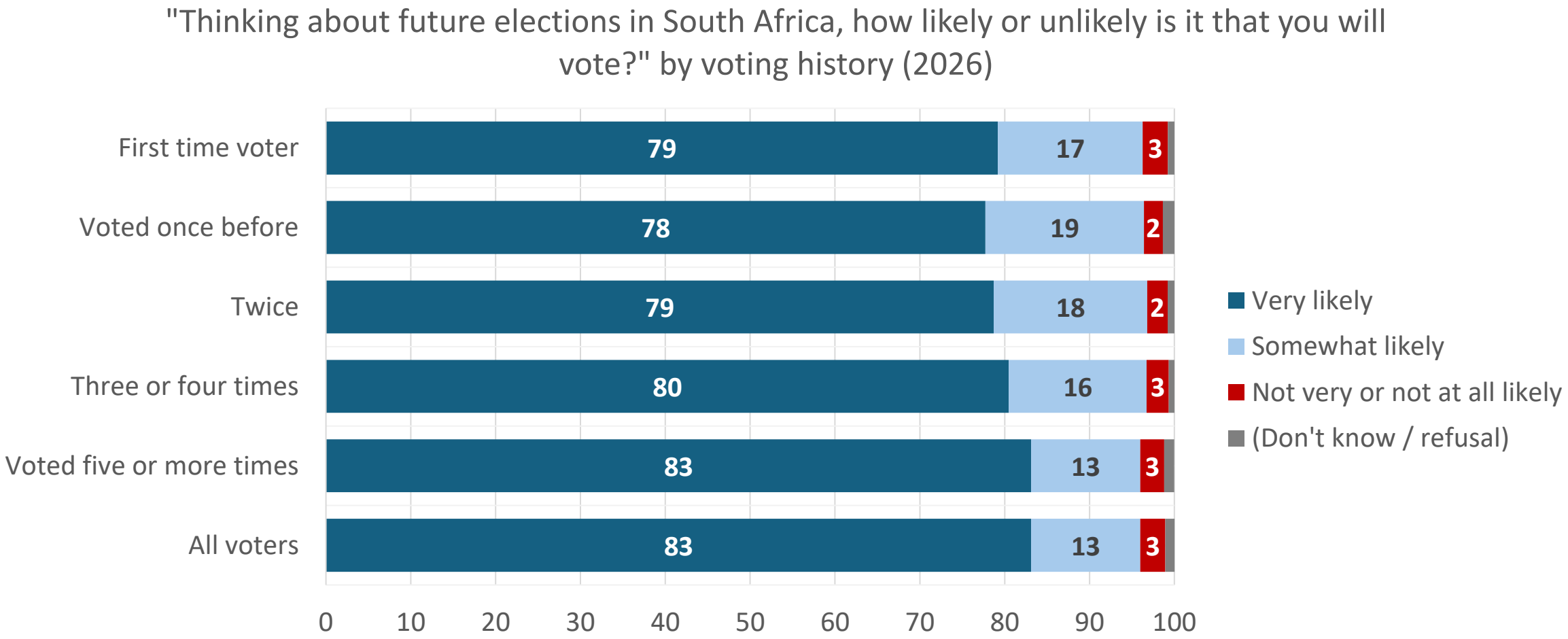
"The IEC cheated in the last elections."
"Things we hear about the IEC."
"Social media rumours."

"Too much corruption in this country."
"Don't trust the government."
"No one can be trusted these days."

*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2026

# A Culture of Voting:

## Intention to vote in future elections, by voting history(%)




*Source*: Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) 2026

# Concluding Remarks

- The ESS 2026 assessed voters' views on the **election process**, including its **integrity**, and evaluated the **operational efficiency** of the IEC.
- **Electoral integrity remains strong**: 90% regarded election procedures as free; 91% as fair.
- **Election administration evaluated as performing well**: 95% were satisfied with IEC services and 91% queued for no longer than 30 minutes
- **Confidence in voting procedures remains high**: 95% satisfied with ballot secrecy and 83% were highly confident in accurate vote counting (increased queuing time in 2024 reversed).
- Trust in **Election Commission** remains high at 81%, but has gradually declined from 93% in 2016 in a general context of declining institutional trust in the country.
- **Some concerns require targeted attention**: Intimidation, impartiality, inclusive voting and information gaps remain important areas for improvement.
- **The electoral process retains public confidence among voters**: Positive Election Day experiences coexist with wider dissatisfaction about democracy and political institutions.

# Thank you!

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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