

***Electoral Commission
Research Workshop***

**The dynamics of democratic evaluations, electoral
attitudes and behavioural intentions in South Africa**



Dr Ben Roberts

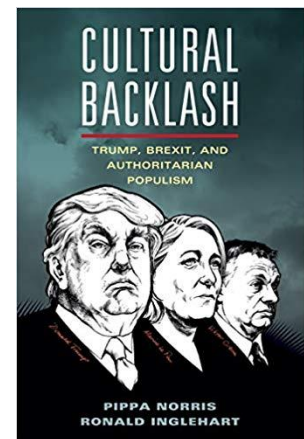
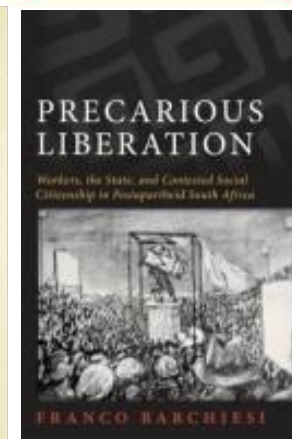
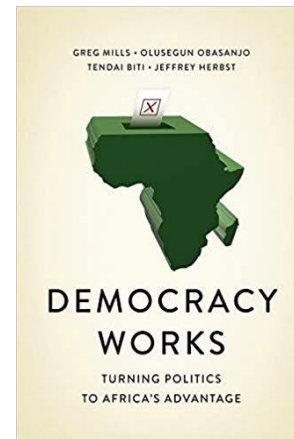
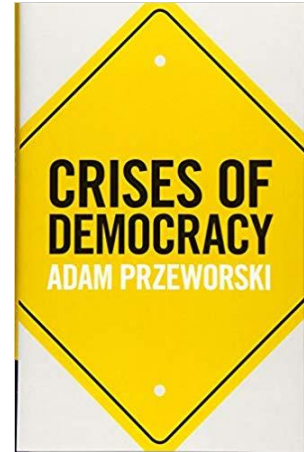
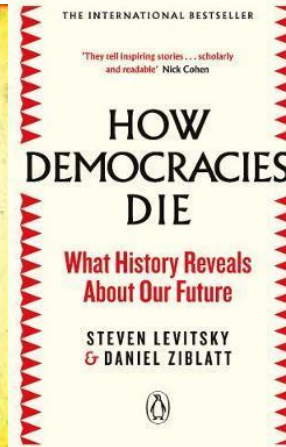
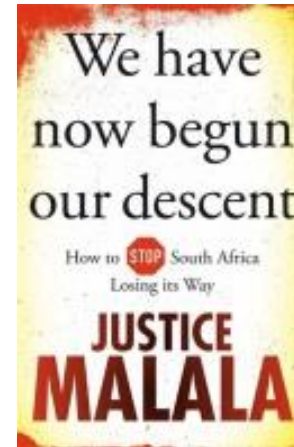
Developmental, Capable and Ethical State (DCES)
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Holiday Inn, Sandton

Date: 21 Sep 2022

Democratic context

- Ongoing debate about the **quality and performance of democracy**
- Mounting **public discontent** and its bearing on political legitimacy and behaviour
- **Changing electoral norms, active citizenship**



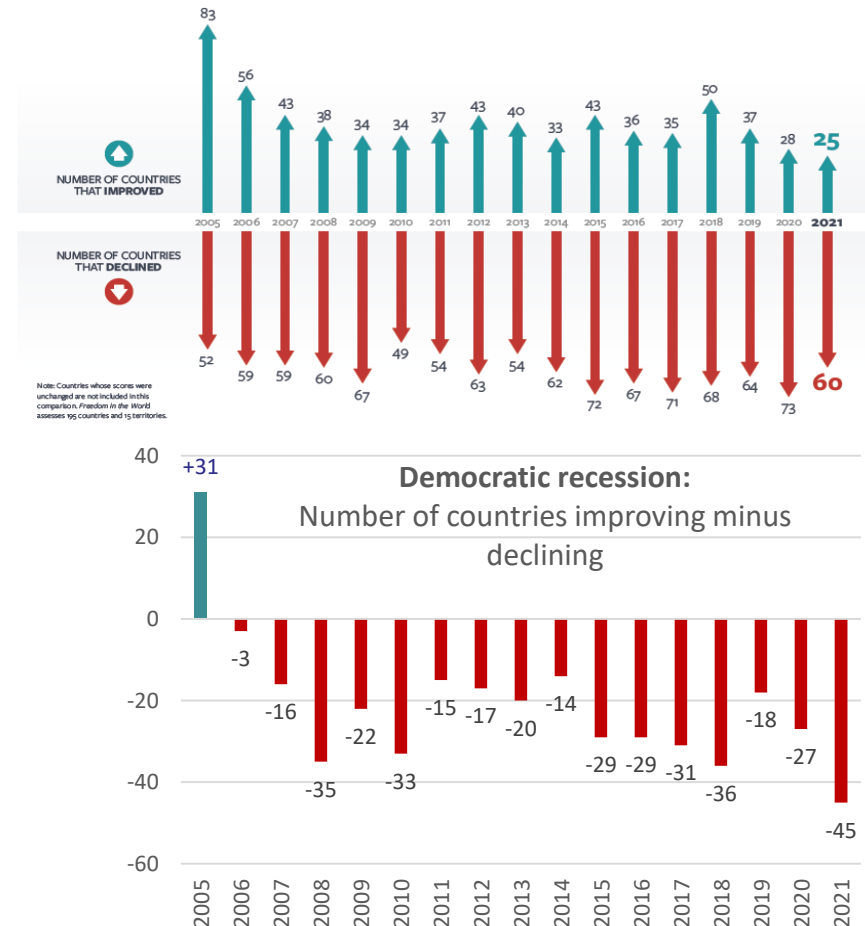
Recent global dynamics of democracy

- **1990s/early 2000s**: optimism about future for democracy
- **Since mid-2000s**: period of global democratic recession
- Freedom House FIW: **16 consecutive years of decline**
- **Last 5-6 years**: deterioration of democratic norms and institutions; authoritarianism
- **Concern**: moving **from democratic recession to gathering crisis of liberal democracy (?)**

Freedom House – Freedom in the World, 2022

A GROWING DEMOCRACY GAP: 16 YEARS OF DEMOCRATIC DECLINE

Countries with aggregate score declines in *Freedom in the World* have outnumbered those with gains every year for the past 16 years.



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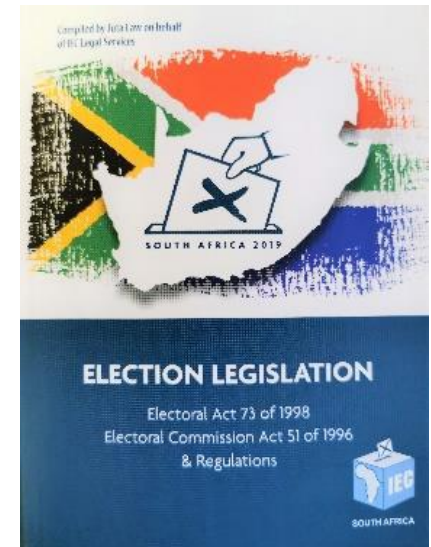
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A research-driven election management body (EMB)

Since the late 1990s, the Electoral Commission has partnered with the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) to undertake a programme of electoral research.

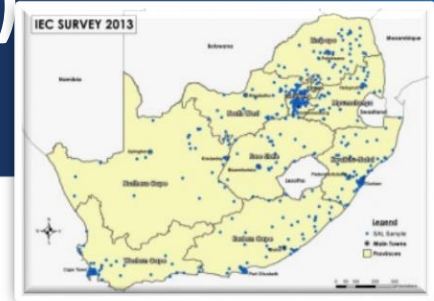
This focuses on generating survey-based as well as qualitative insight to inform operational planning and outreach.

- **The Power of the X: Monitoring electoral predispositions through the Voter Participation Survey (VPS) series: 23,806 surveyed to date**
- **The Voter's Voice: Evaluating electoral experiences through the Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) series; 118,541 surveyed to date**
- **Development of the Election Indicators Report**



Voter Participation Survey (VPS) Methodology

- **Purpose:** provide information on the views and behavioural preferences of adult South Africans in order to (i) better understand the electoral context and (ii) inform the Commission in its electoral management mandate
- Survey conducted **using HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS)** research infrastructure
- **Nationally representative** of the population 16 years and older in private households across the 9 provinces
- **500 Small Area Layers (SALs)** selected using Census framework, and **3,500** addresses issued
- Collected by **face-to-face interview in the lead-up to election**
- Data **weighted** to StatsSA's **2021 mid-year population** estimates

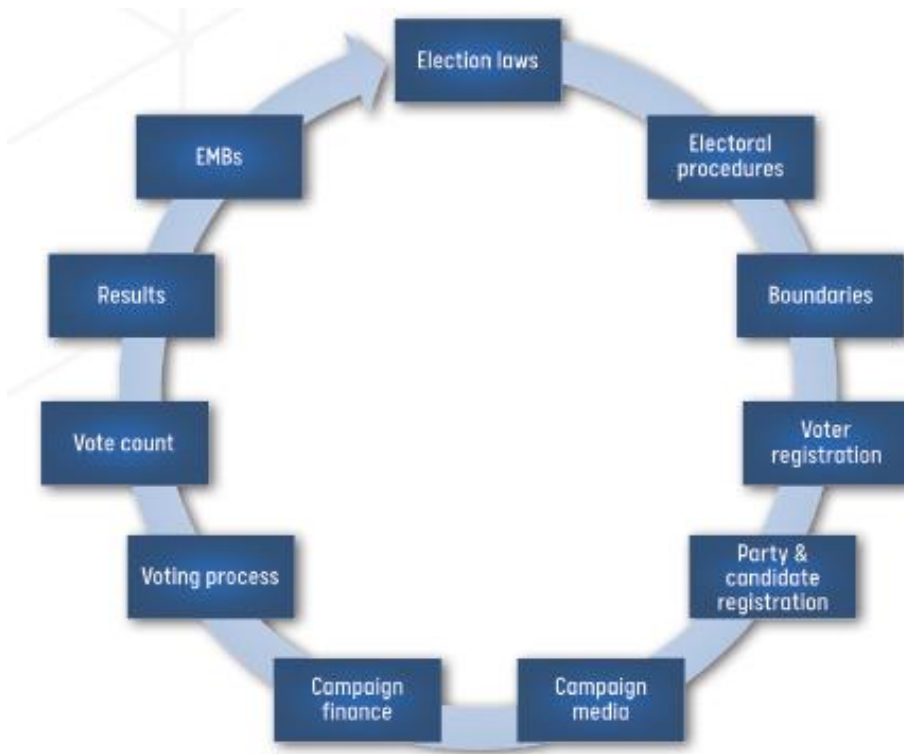


Election Satisfaction Survey (ESS) series

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** selected 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.

The conceptual approach

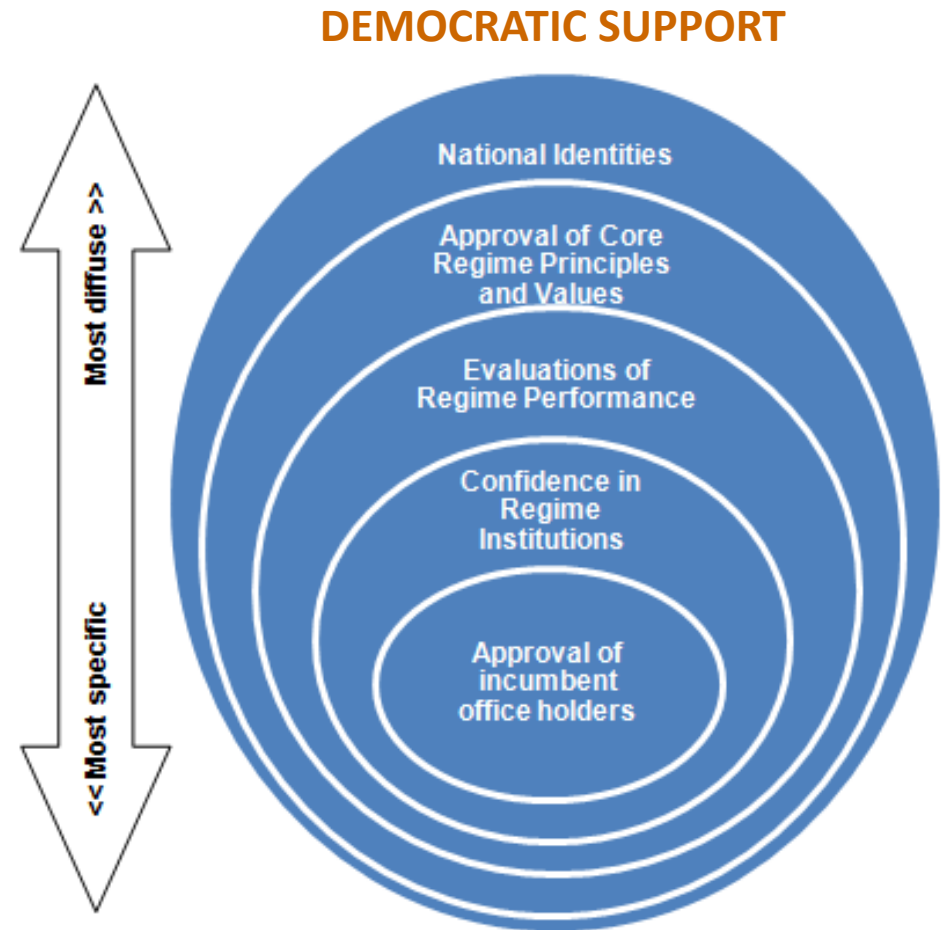


Electoral integrity

- **Rapid growth in interest** in concept last decade
- **Assessing quality of elections over time:** evaluating different election management structures, processes
- **Positive, human rights framing of electoral integrity:** integrity achieved when electoral procedures meet established norms and standards at each of the stages in the election cycle (pre-election, campaigning, election day, immediate postelection)

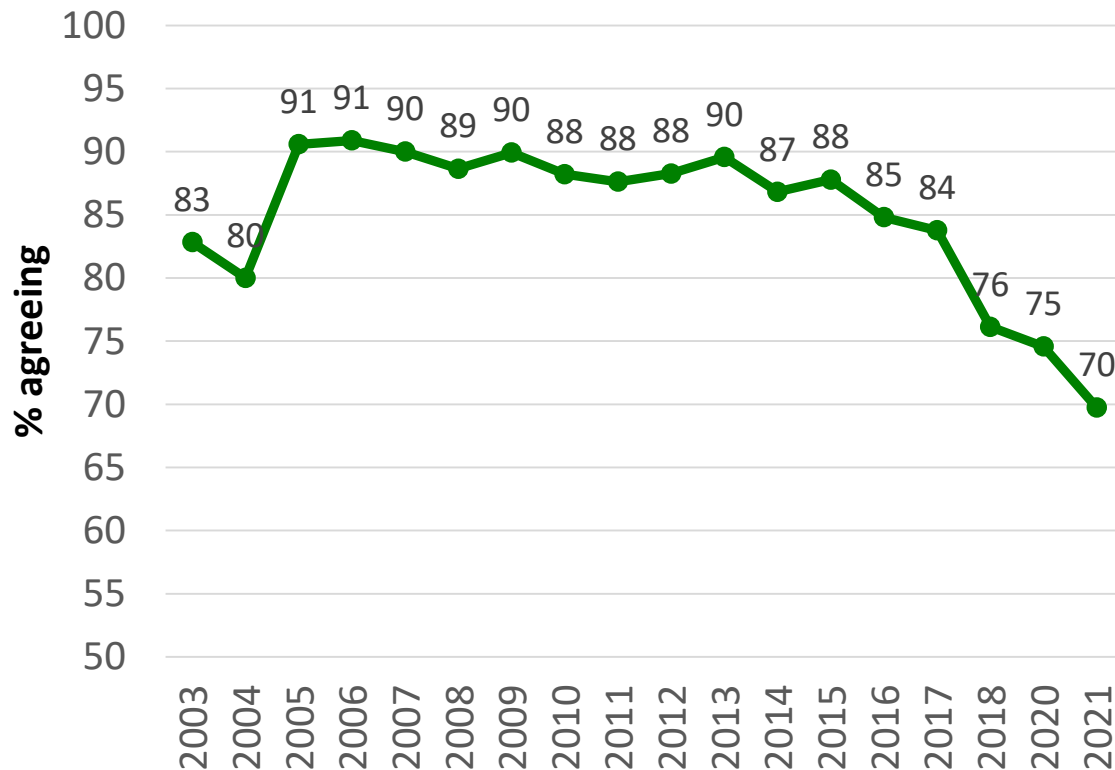
The conceptual approach

- **Scope of analysis**
 - Assess people's attachment to democratic values and principles;
 - Test opinion on the performance of government and other political institutions;
 - Investigate attitudes to electoral participation and other political activities;
 - Examine generational and other salient subgroup differences
- The **analytical and conceptual framework of Norris (2011) on democratic support** guided the choice of indicators.



National Pride (2003-2021)

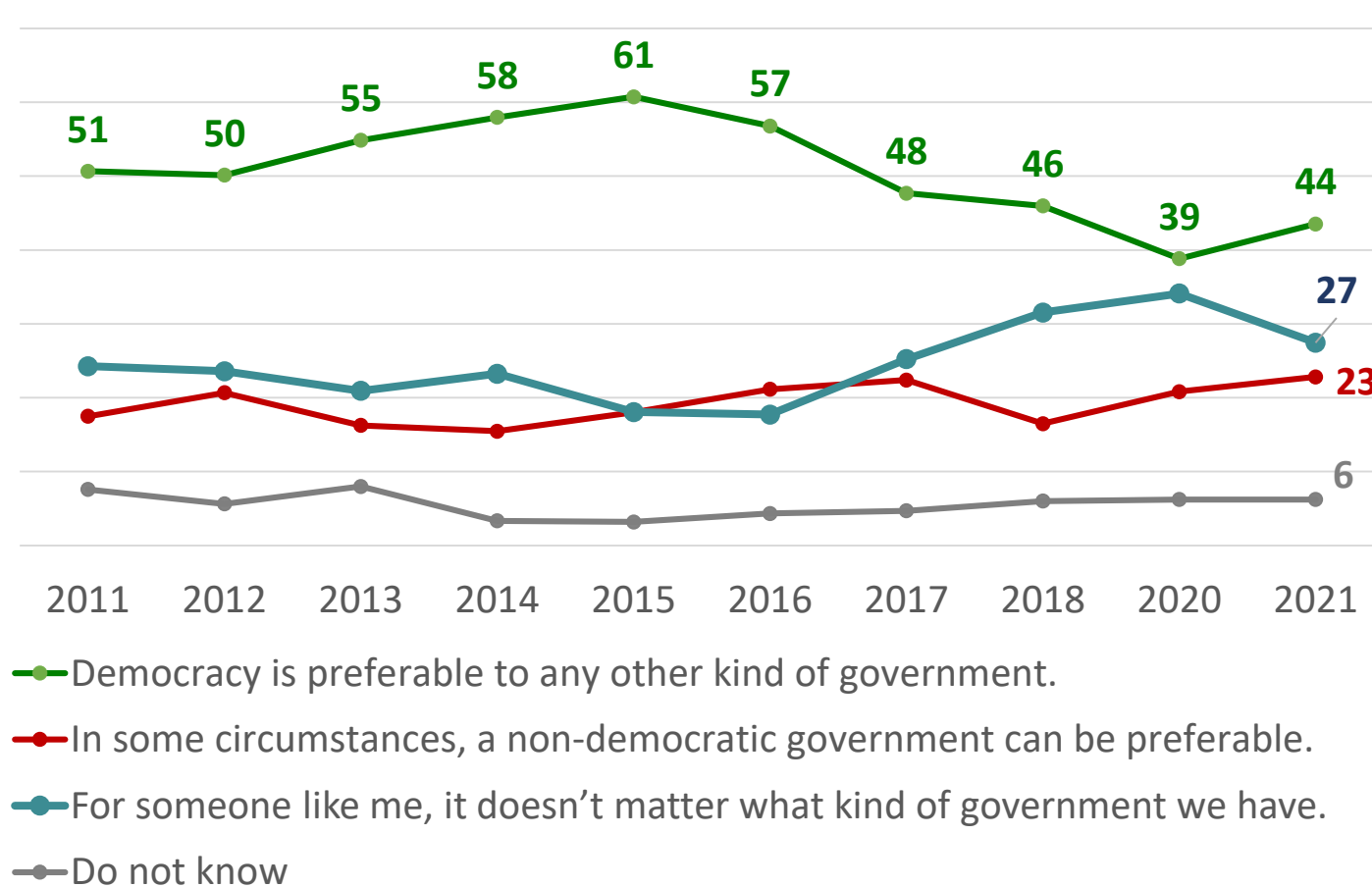
“I would rather be a citizen of South Africa than of any other country in the world” (% agreeing)



- South Africans are resolutely proud citizens comparatively
- Yet, there are clear signs of a downturn since the mid-2010s
- Recent figures are the lowest recorded over past 20 years

Demand for democracy

Support for political regime type, 2011-2021 (%)

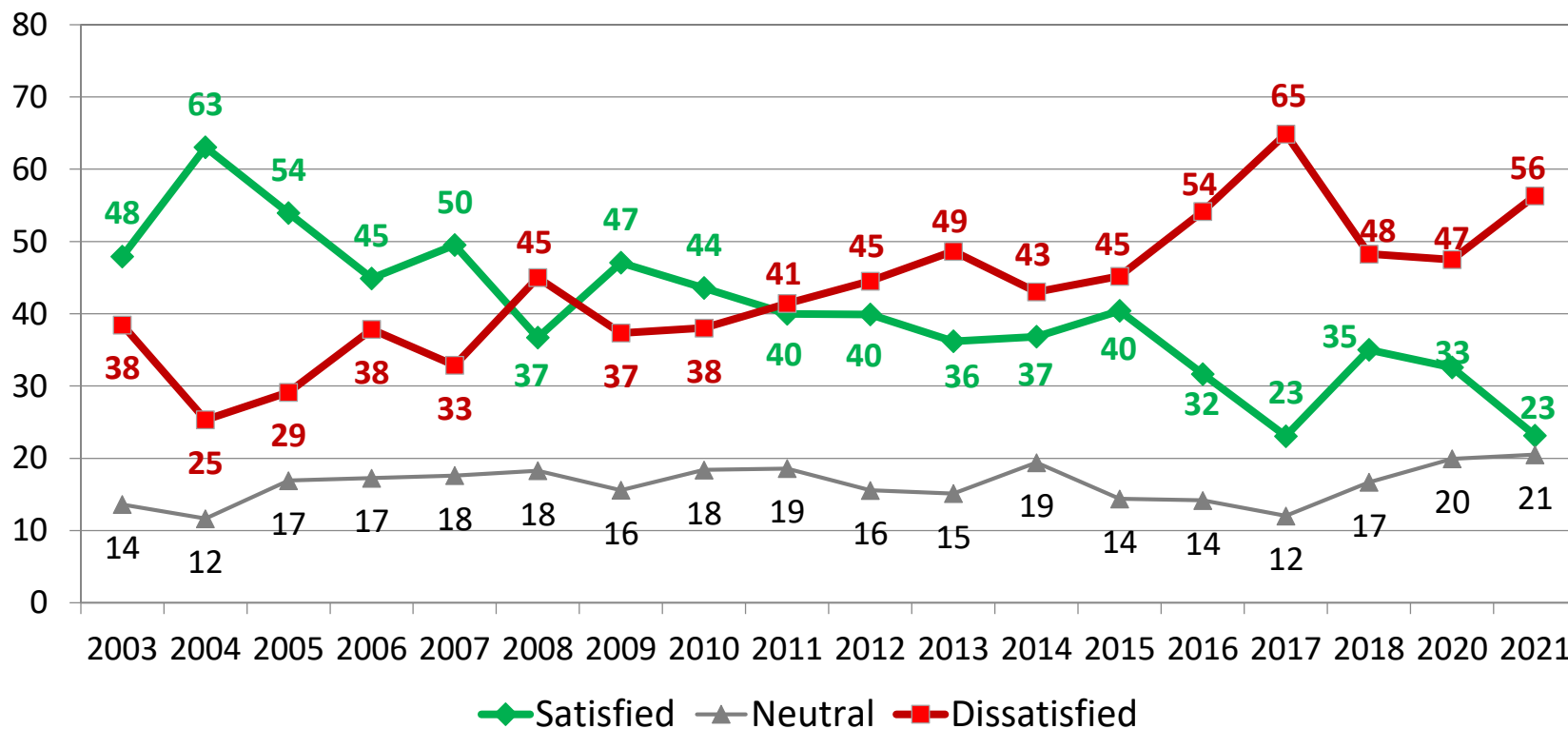


- **Popular support for democracy dipped** from mid-2010s
- Corresponding rise in **fatalistic view** (type of political regime 'does not matter')
- **Non-democratic regime** seen as sometimes better by 23% in 2021

Supply of Democracy

Satisfaction with democracy (2003-2021)

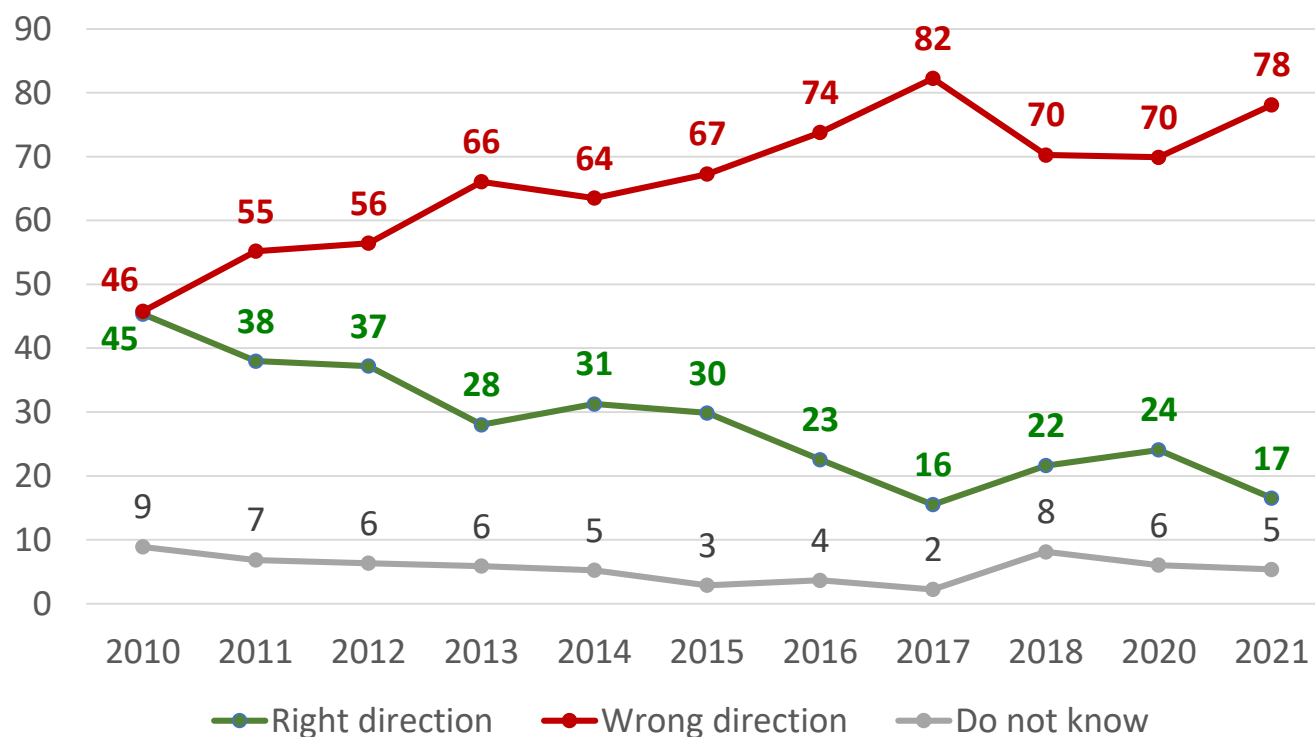
“How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy is working in South Africa?” (%)



Supply of Democracy

Country going in the right/wrong direction (2010-2021)

“Generally speaking, do you think that things in this country are going in the right direction or going in the wrong direction?” (%)

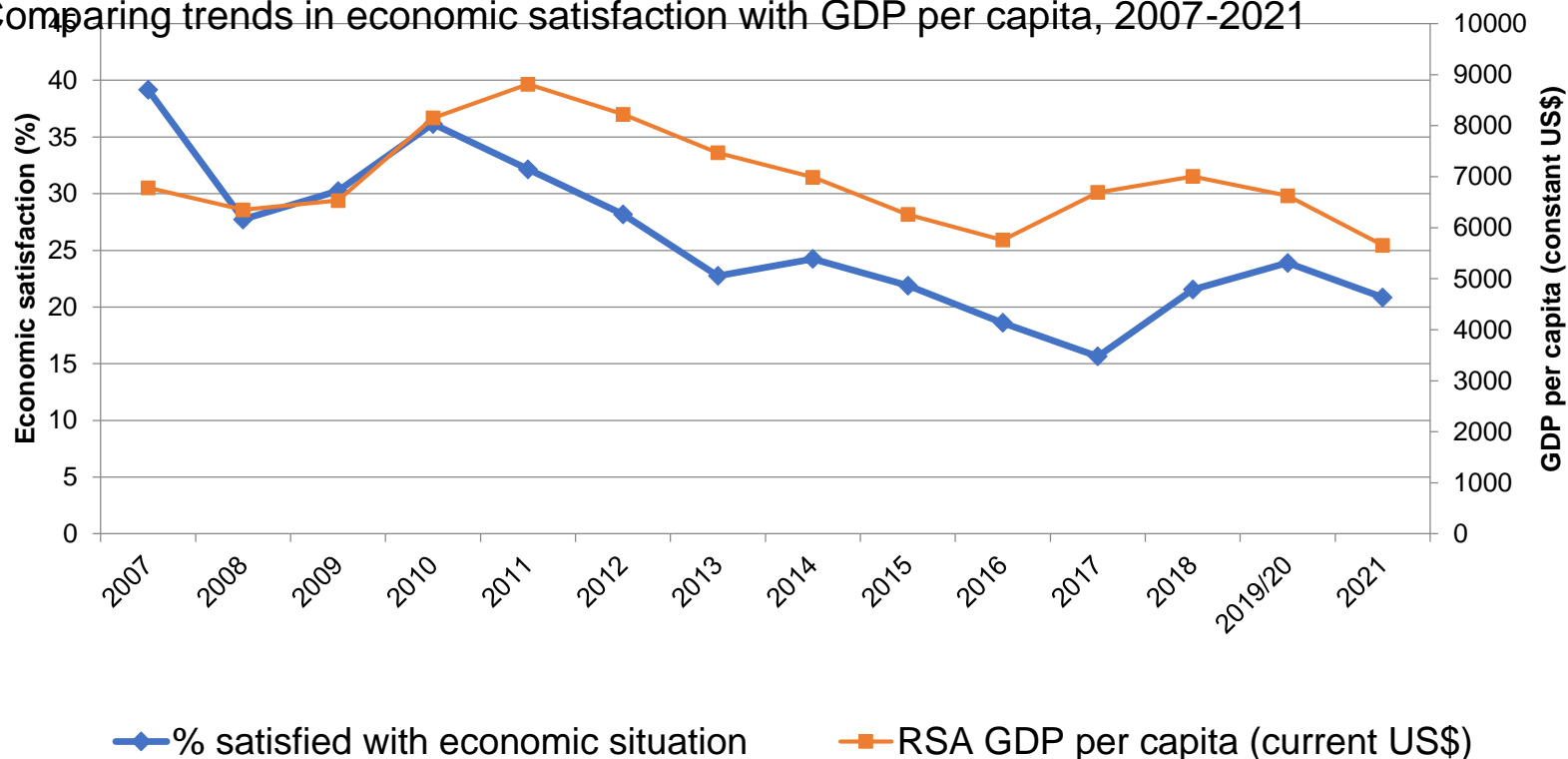


Economic satisfaction

Percentage satisfied with economic situation in SA (2007-2021)

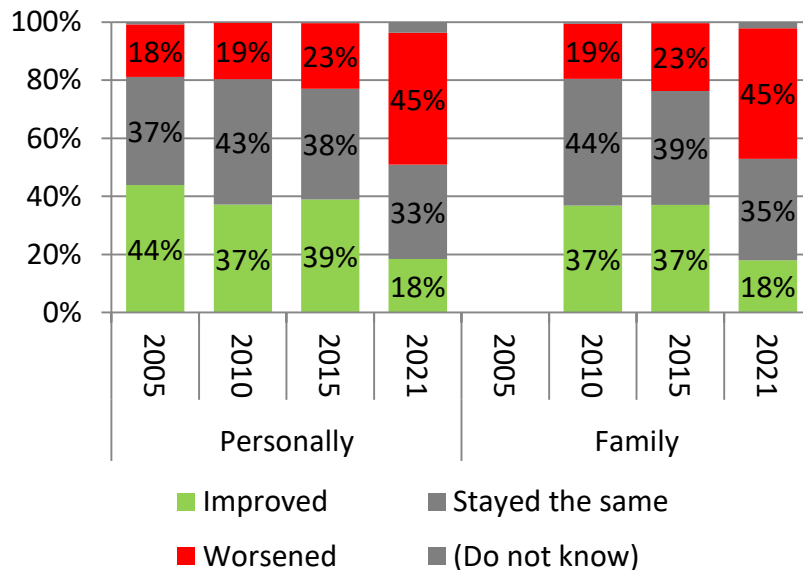
Economic satisfaction following economic performance in South Africa

Comparing trends in economic satisfaction with GDP per capita, 2007-2021

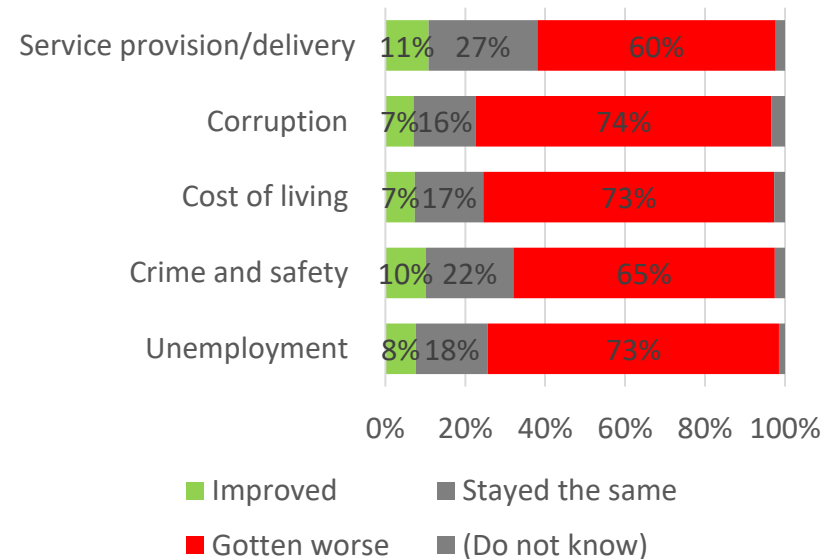


Change In Living Standards

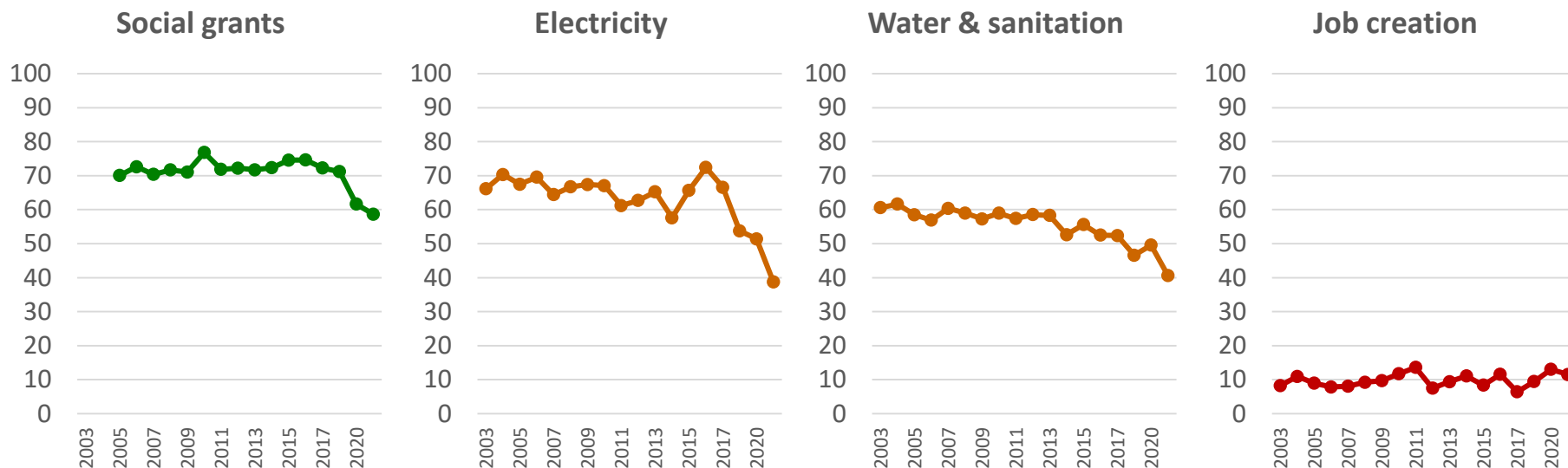
Can you please tell me, in the last 5 years, has life improved, stayed the same or has it worsened for...?



Do you think the following have improved, stayed the same or gotten worse in the last 5 years?



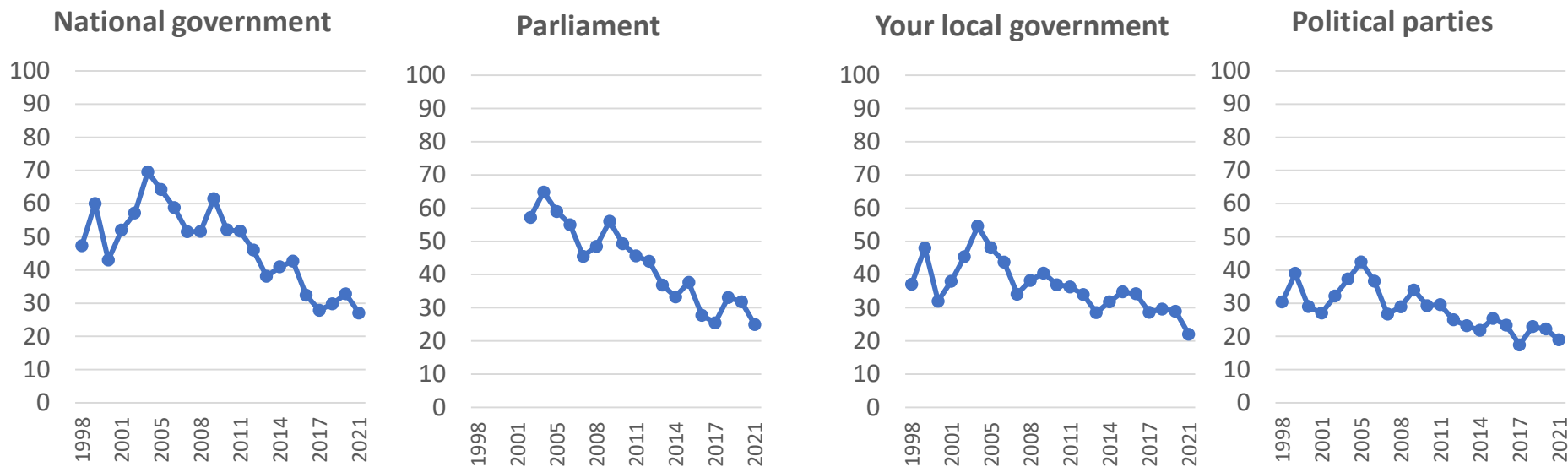
Satisfaction with select aspects of government performance, 2003-2021 (%)



- Some elements of government performance positively evaluated, with only a recent decline (e.g. social grants) – sign of economic duress?
- Decline in satisfaction with certain household services – precipitous for electricity, moderate for water & sanitation
- Persistent concern over employment creation (less than 20% satisfied over last 20 years); also anti-corruption and crime reduction efforts.

Institutional trust

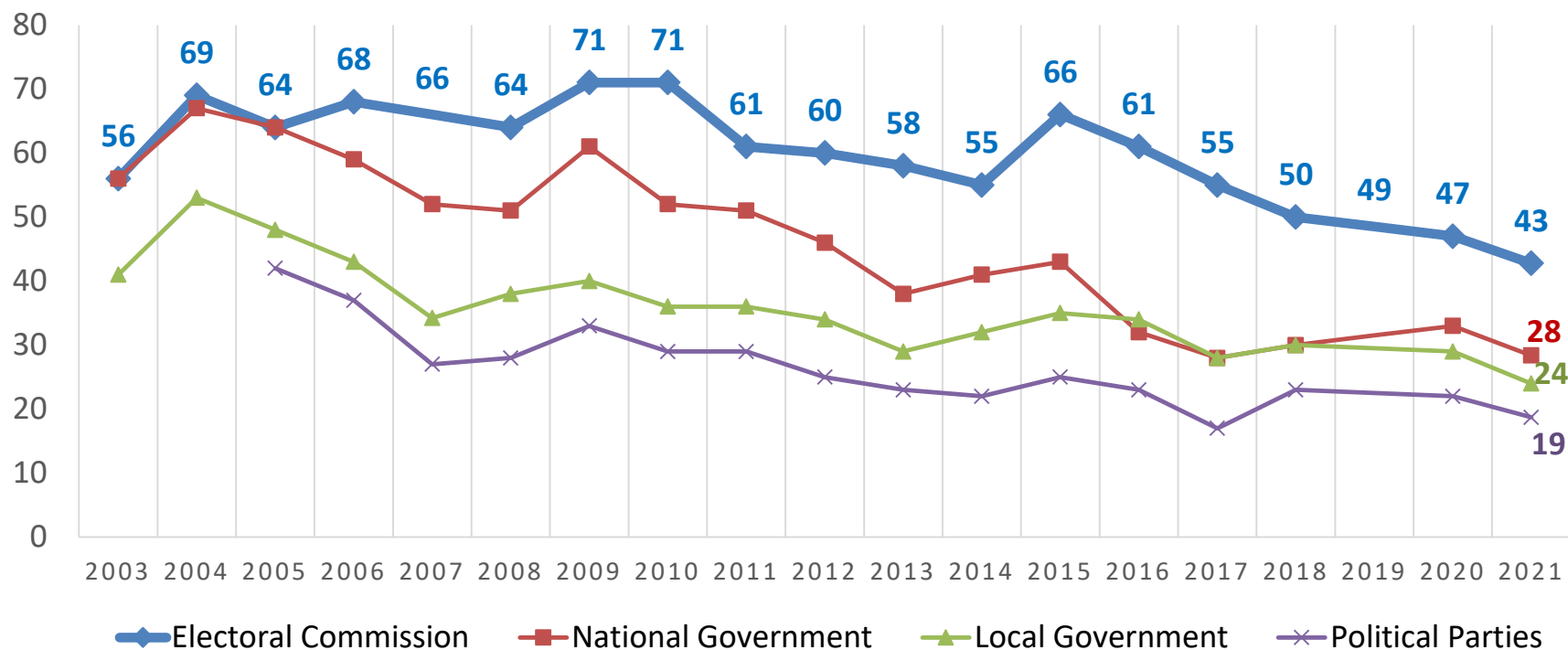
Confidence in core political institutions (1998-2021)



- Appreciable decline in trust in core political institutions, especially national government and Parliament
- Signs of diminishing trust date back to the mid-2000s, intensifying during the 2010s

Institutional trust

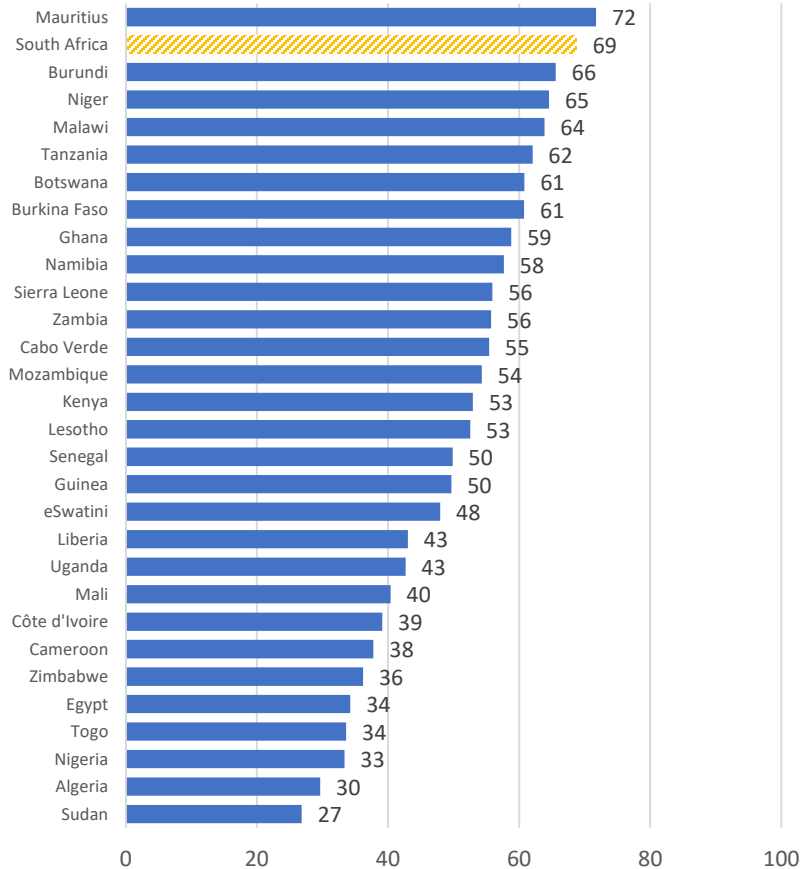
Electoral Commission in relative perspective (2003-2021)



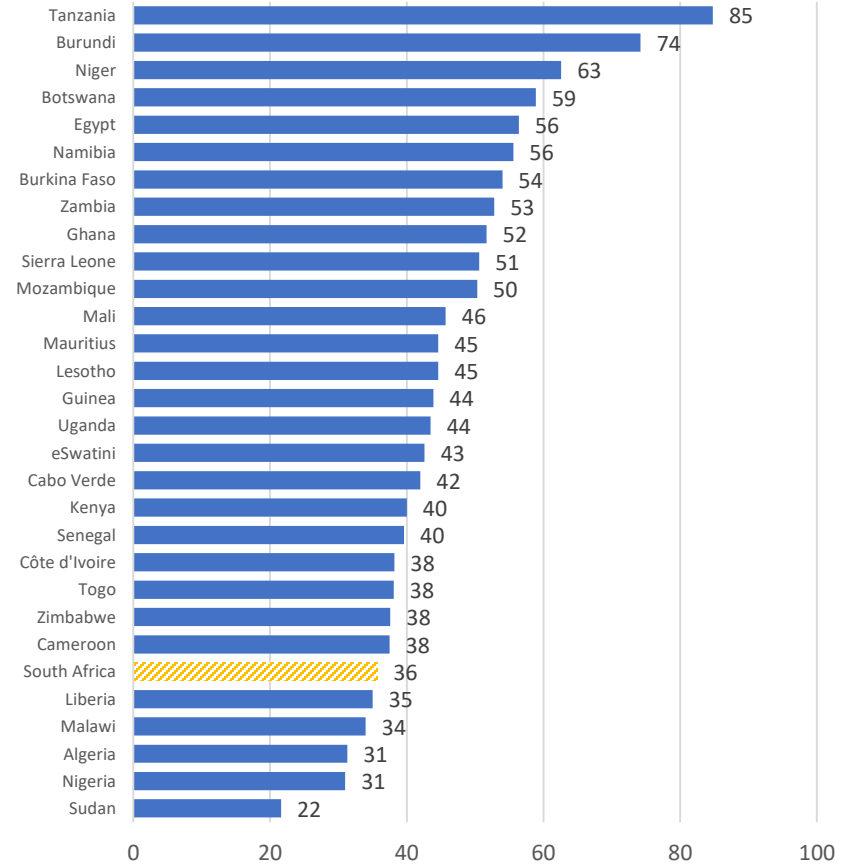
- Commission is evaluated favourably compared to other core political institutions (national and local government, political parties)
- But not immune to the declining tendency seen with other institutions

Electoral Commission trust in comparative perspective: 30 African nations

AB Round 5 (2011-13)

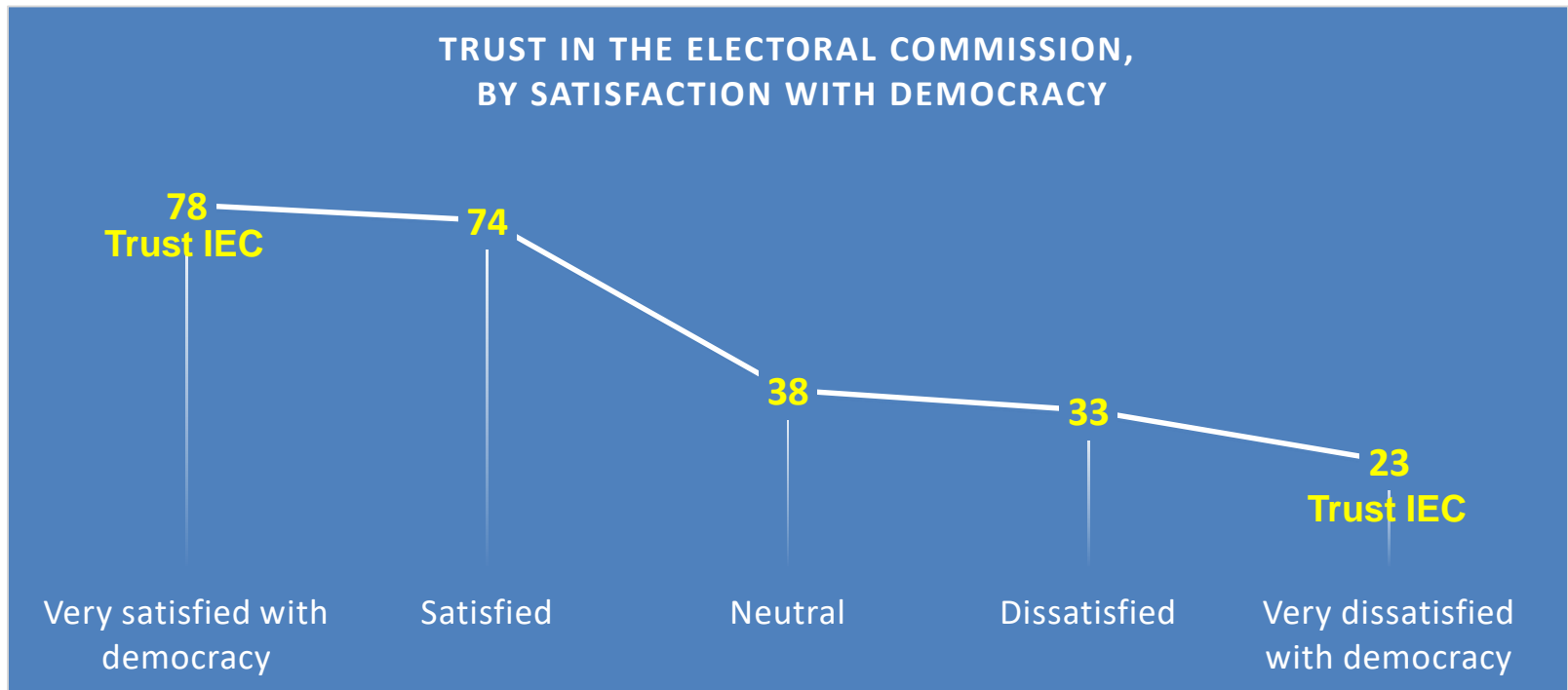


AB Round 8 (2019-21)



The pull-down effect

Trust in the Commission linked with overall views on democracy

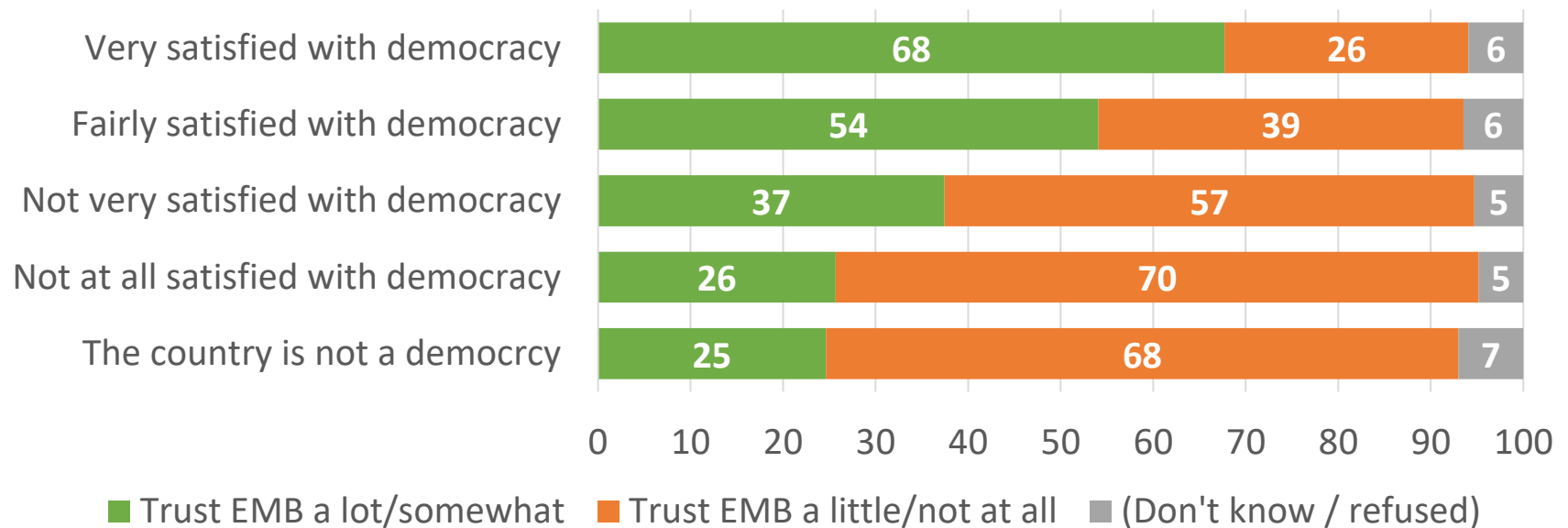


- Confidence in Commission strongly linked to evaluations of democratic performance
- 78% of those that are 'very satisfied' with democracy trust the Commission. This declines sharply as views on democracy become more critical.

The pull-down effect in comparative perspective

Trust in the Electoral Commission is linked with levels of satisfaction with democracy across Africa

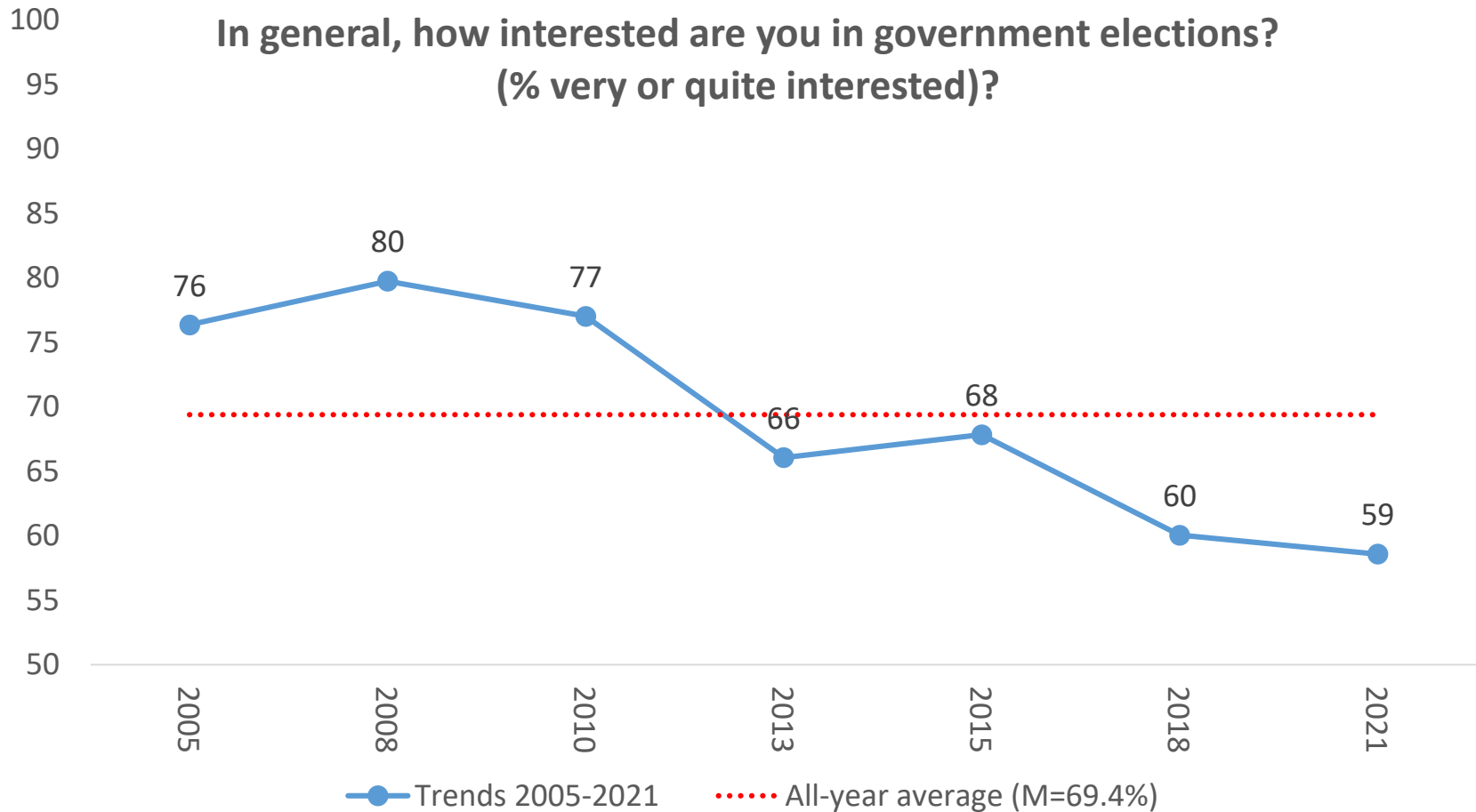
Pull-down effect, AB R7 (2016-18), average for 34 countries



- This pull-down effect is common to all 34 countries participating in Afrobarometer Round 7 (2016-18)
- Regression analysis confirms the positive association in all countries

Electoral Interest

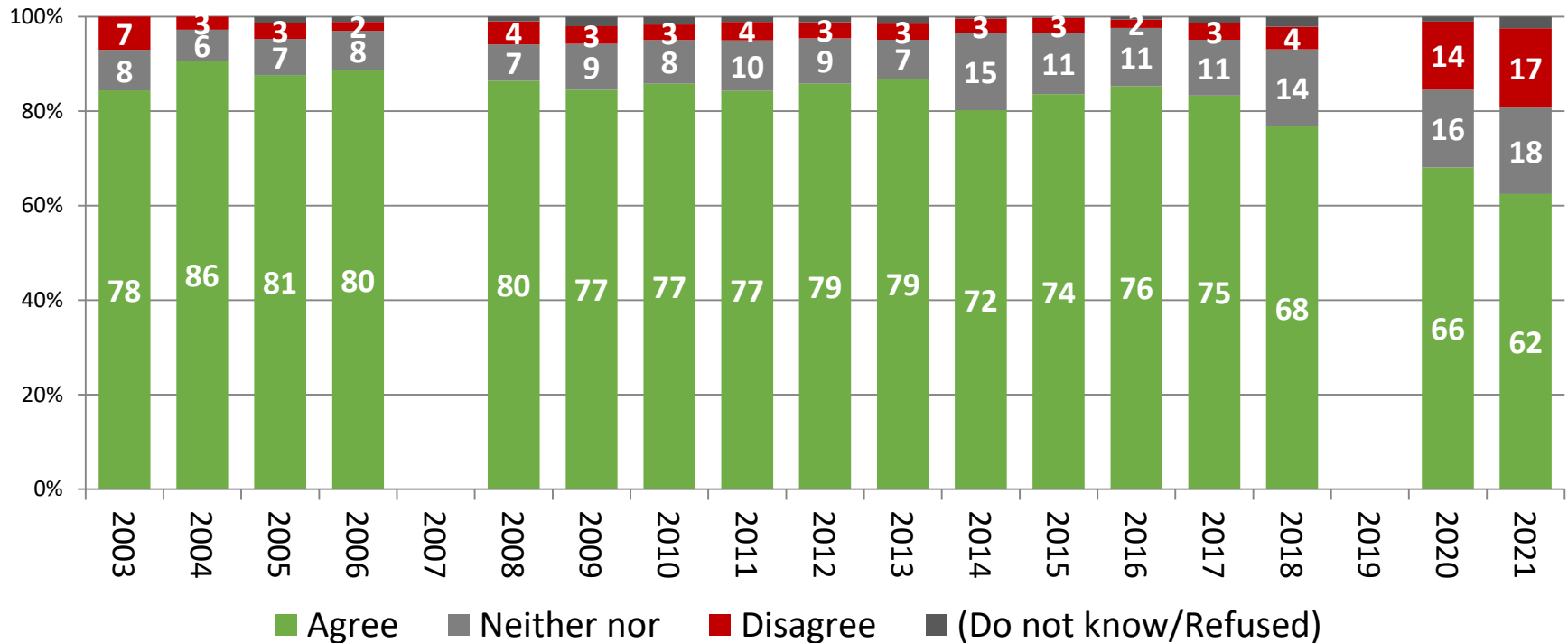
2005-2021



Duty to Vote

A key factor informing citizenship norms in South Africa

“It is the duty of all citizens to vote” (2003-2021, %)



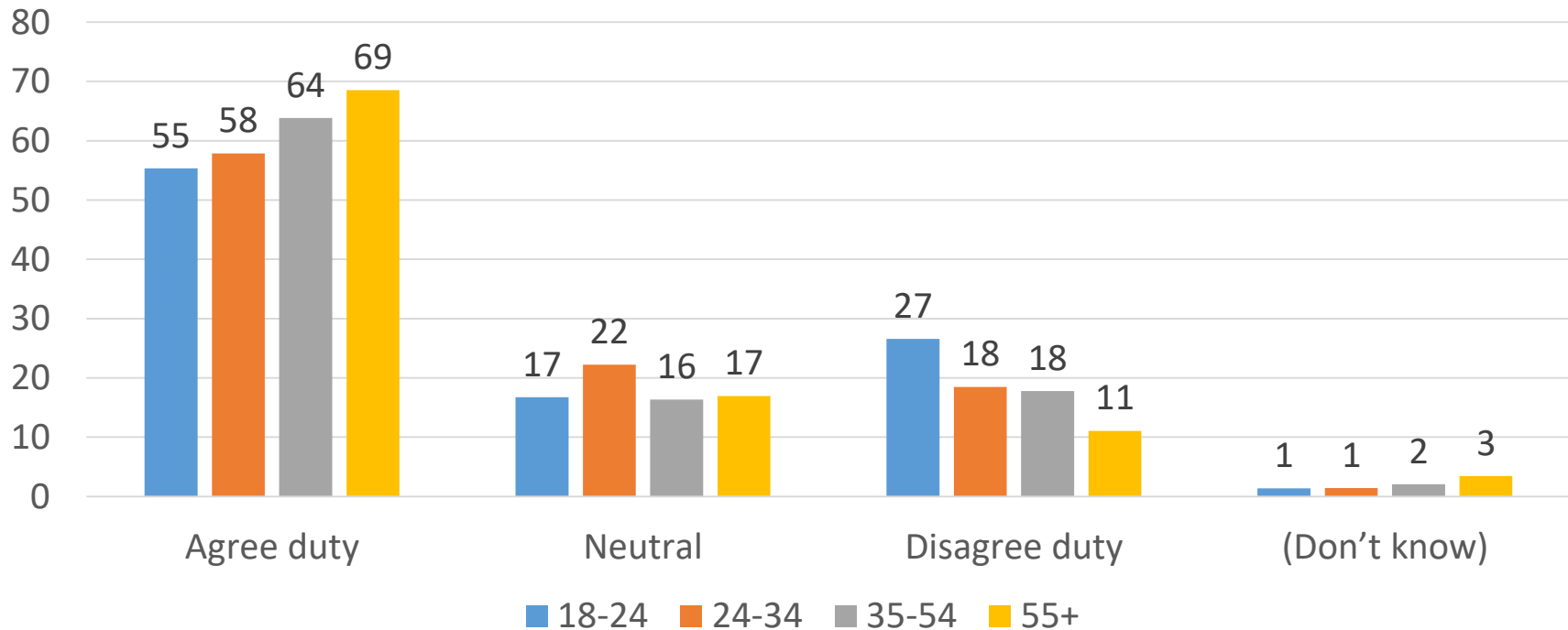
- Historically robust belief that “It is the duty of all citizens to vote”; dipped since 2017
- LGE 2021 occurred in a context of the lowest ‘duty to vote’ figures observed over the last two decades; likely to have had a bearing on turnout

Age differences in Duty to Vote

A key factor informing citizenship norms in South Africa

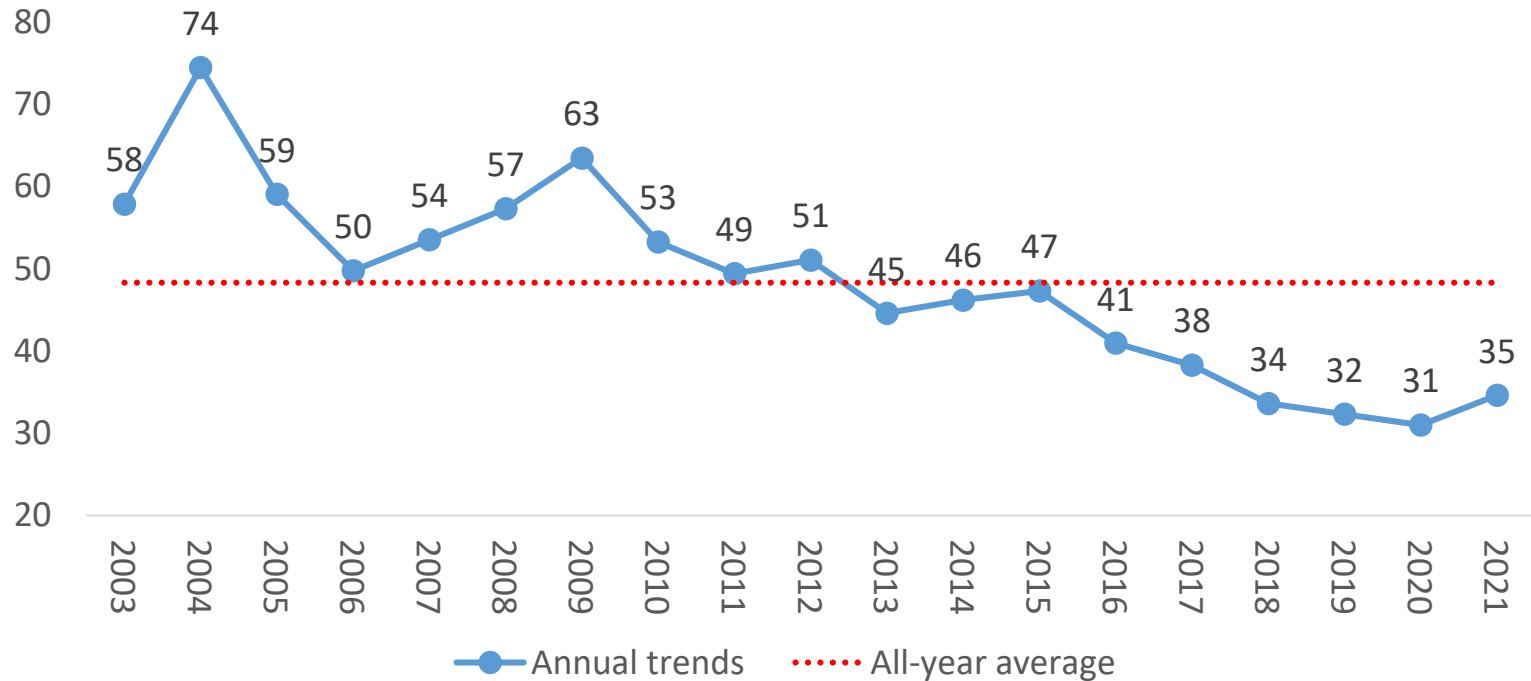
“It is the duty of all citizens to vote” (2021, %)

Duty to vote by age group



Internal political efficacy

Proportion of the public who disagreed with the statement: “whether or not I vote makes no difference”, 2003-2021 (%)

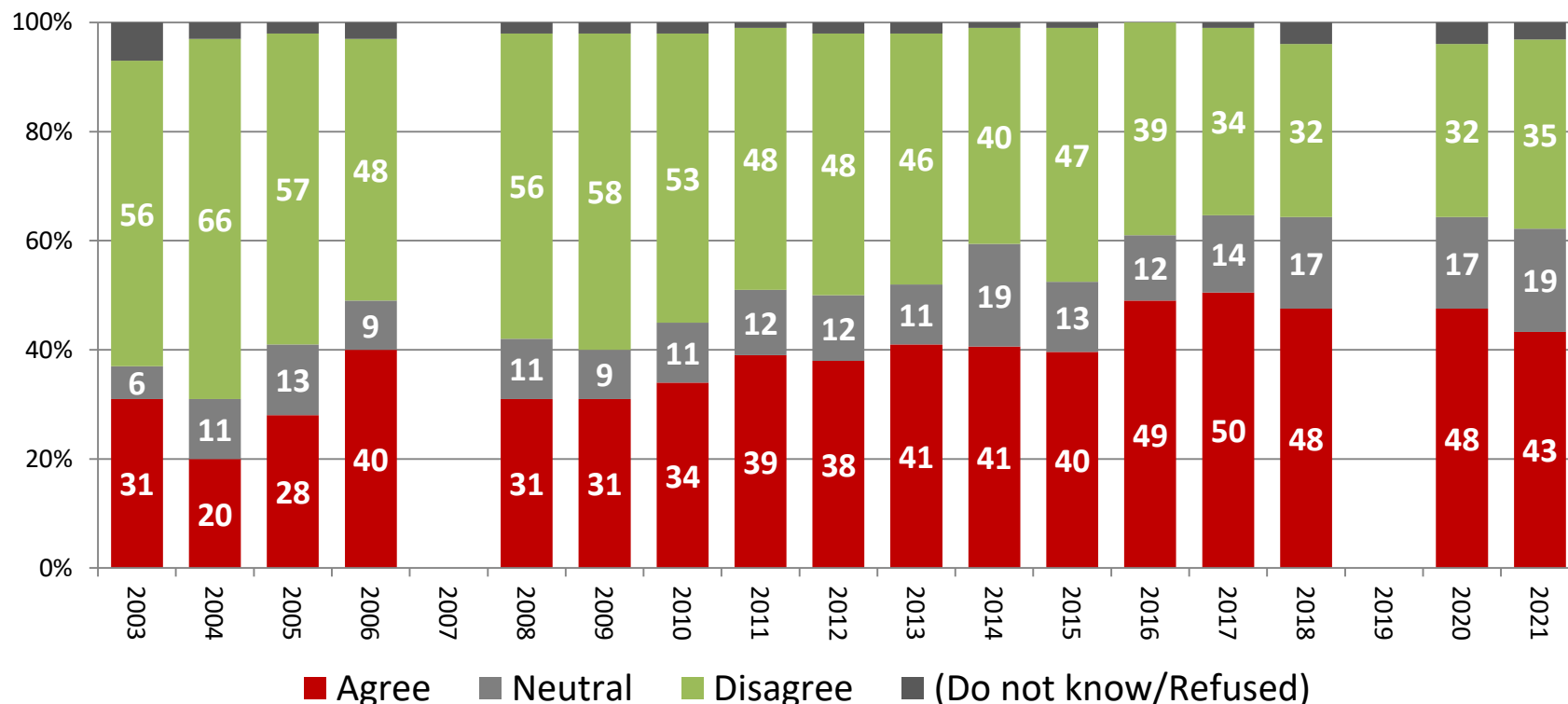


- Fairly critical assessment of the contribution one’s vote makes.
- Signs of decline since late 2000s, which may have impacted on LGE 2021

External political efficacy

Critical determinant of intention to vote

“After being elected all parties are the same, so voting is pointless” (2003-2021, %)

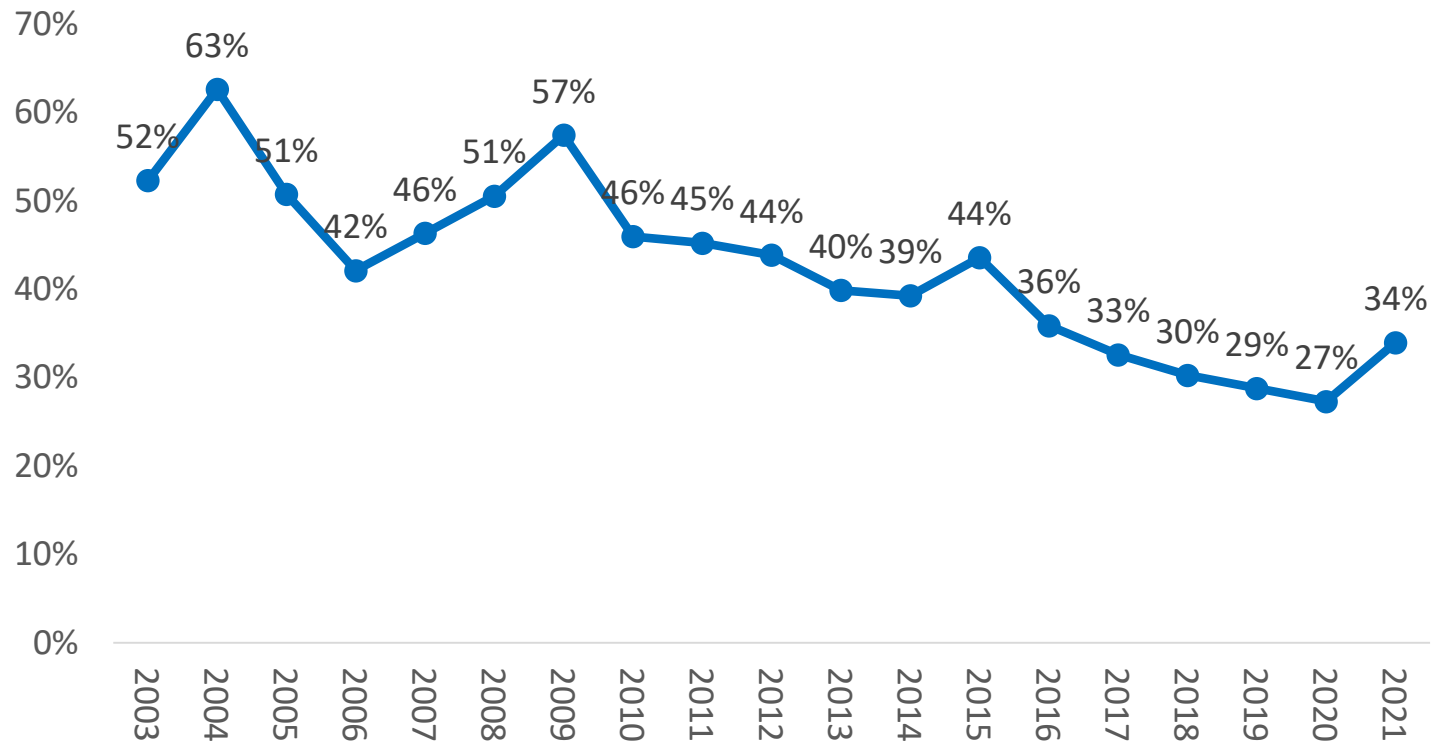


- Public critical of the degree of responsiveness of elected to electorate
- Declining efficacy over time, slight improvement ahead of LGE 2021

External political efficacy (2)

Critical determinant of intention to vote

“Voting is meaningless because no politician can be trusted” (2003-2021, % disagreeing)



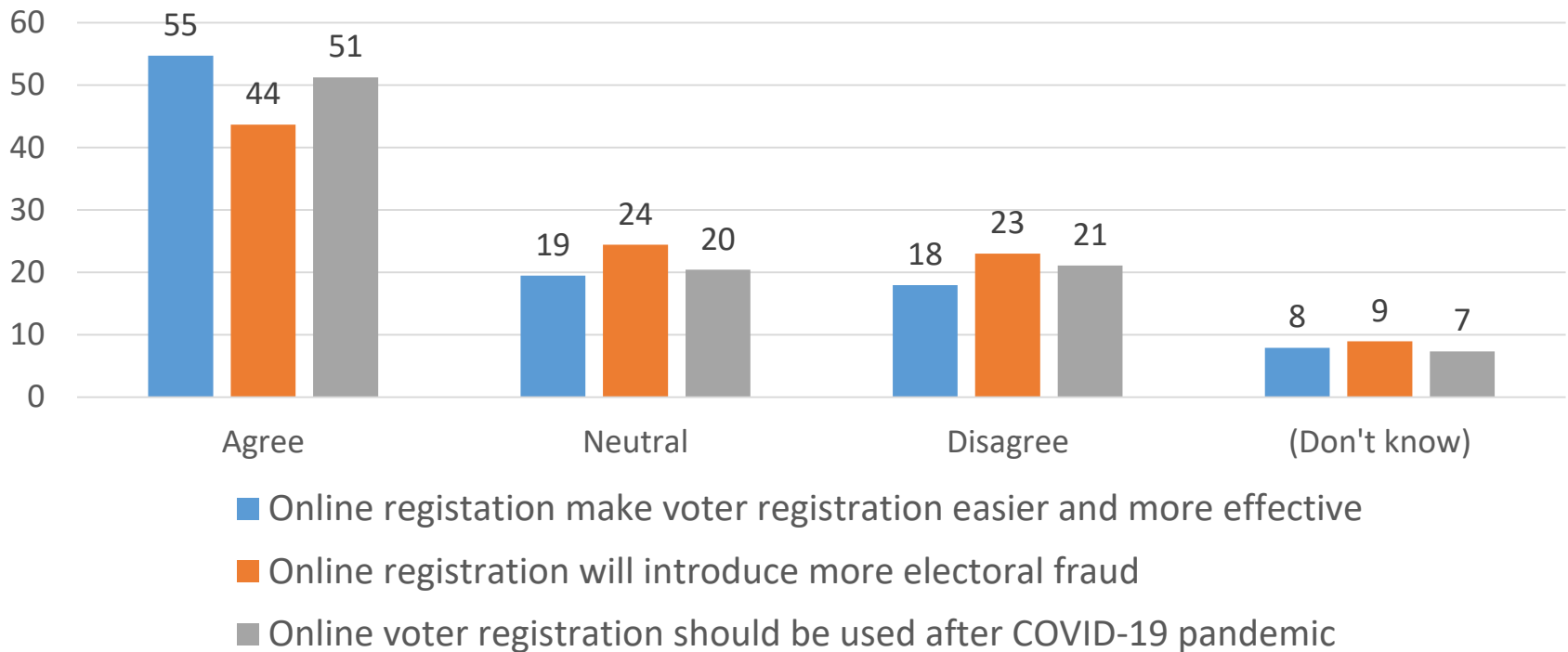
- Public critical of the degree of responsiveness of elected to electorate
- Declining efficacy over time, slight improvement ahead of LGE 2021

Reported barriers to voter registration (VPS 2005-2021)

| | 2005 | 2008 | 2010 | 2013 | 2015 | 2018 | 2021 |
|------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Political disinterest | 74 | 71 | 74 | 67 | 70 | 78 | 65 |
| Administrative barriers | 5 | 12 | 3 | 8 | 5 | 4 | 6 |
| Have not yet got round to it | 14 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 6 |
| Political intimidation | 0 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Religious reasons | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| High crime rate in my area | 6 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Other | 0 | 7 | 10 | 19 | 17 | 5 | 12 |

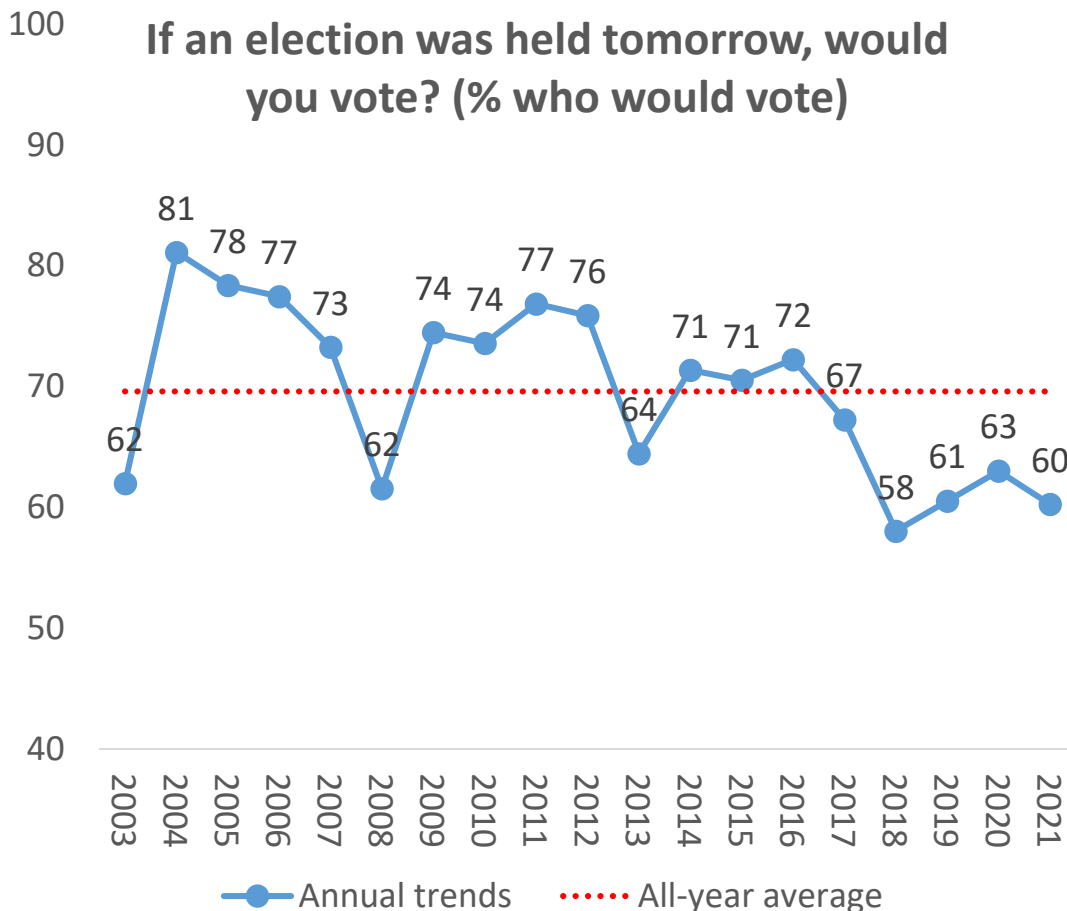
- Political disinterest consistently the main reason for not intending to vote since 2005

Views on online voter registration (VPS 2021)



- Positive view on efficiency gains and future usage of online registration; concern about potential for fraud

Reported intention to vote 2003-2021



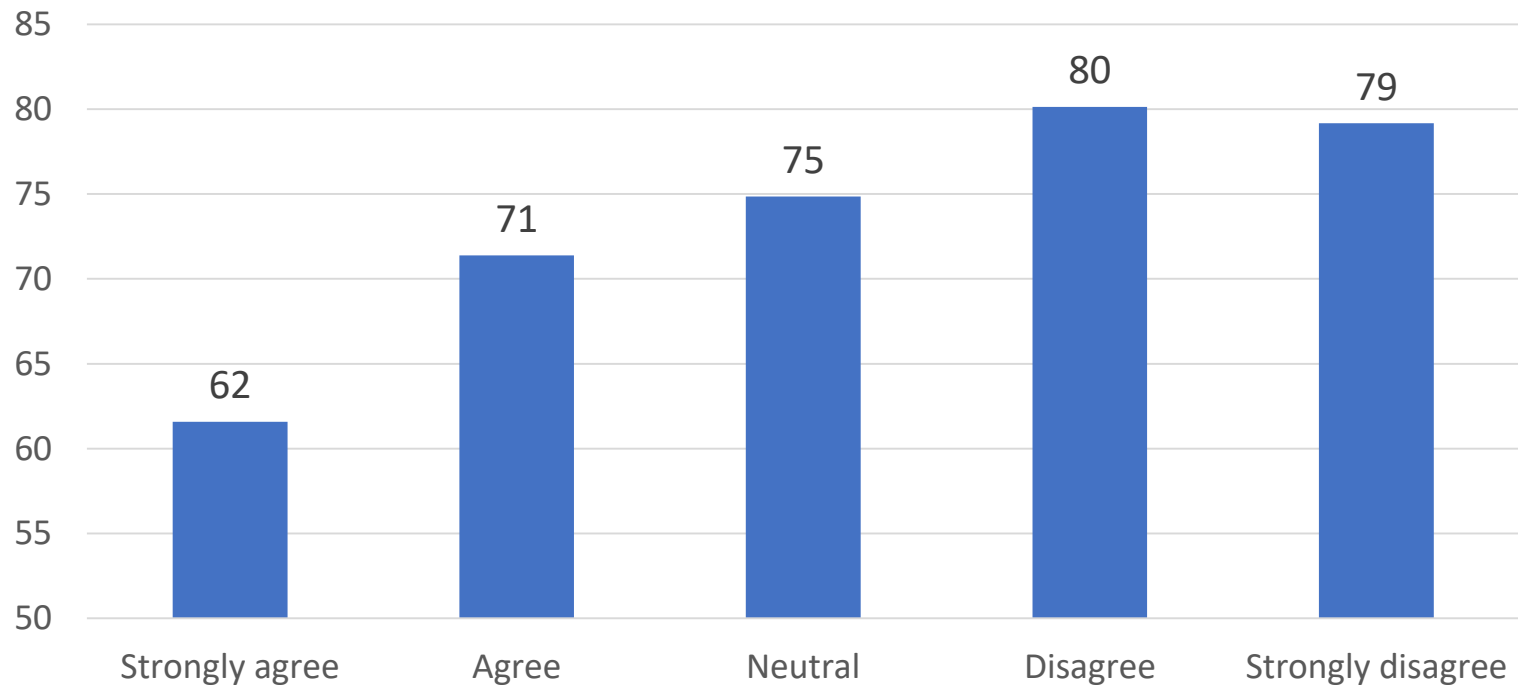
- **Voting intention generally been high** (higher than actual turnout): 70% 2003-21
- **Modest variation over time**, with short-lived downturns every few years
- **Post-2016 period is distinctive**: longest below-average level of voting intention observed to date.
- **Risk of further decline** in coming years due to falling duty to vote and political efficacy

Reasons for not intending to vote (VPS 2008, 2013, 2018, 2021)

| | 2008 | 2013 | 2018 | 2021 |
|---|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Administrative barriers | 21 | 17 | 15 | 12 |
| Not registered | 14 | 13 | 10 | 9 |
| Do not possess necessary documents to register | 6 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Polling station too far away | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Very long queues | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Do not know where to vote | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Disinterest and disillusionment | 71 | 71 | 79 | 77 |
| Not interested | 48 | 49 | 58 | 48 |
| My vote would not make a difference | 9 | 8 | 8 | 16 |
| Disillusioned with politics | 5 | 5 | 4 | 3 |
| Not interested in any of the existing political parties | 8 | 9 | 7 | 7 |
| Too much effort required | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Only one party could win | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Intimidation | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| My employer would not allow me to vote | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Individual barriers | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| I am away from home | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Other | 6 | 12 | 4 | 10 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

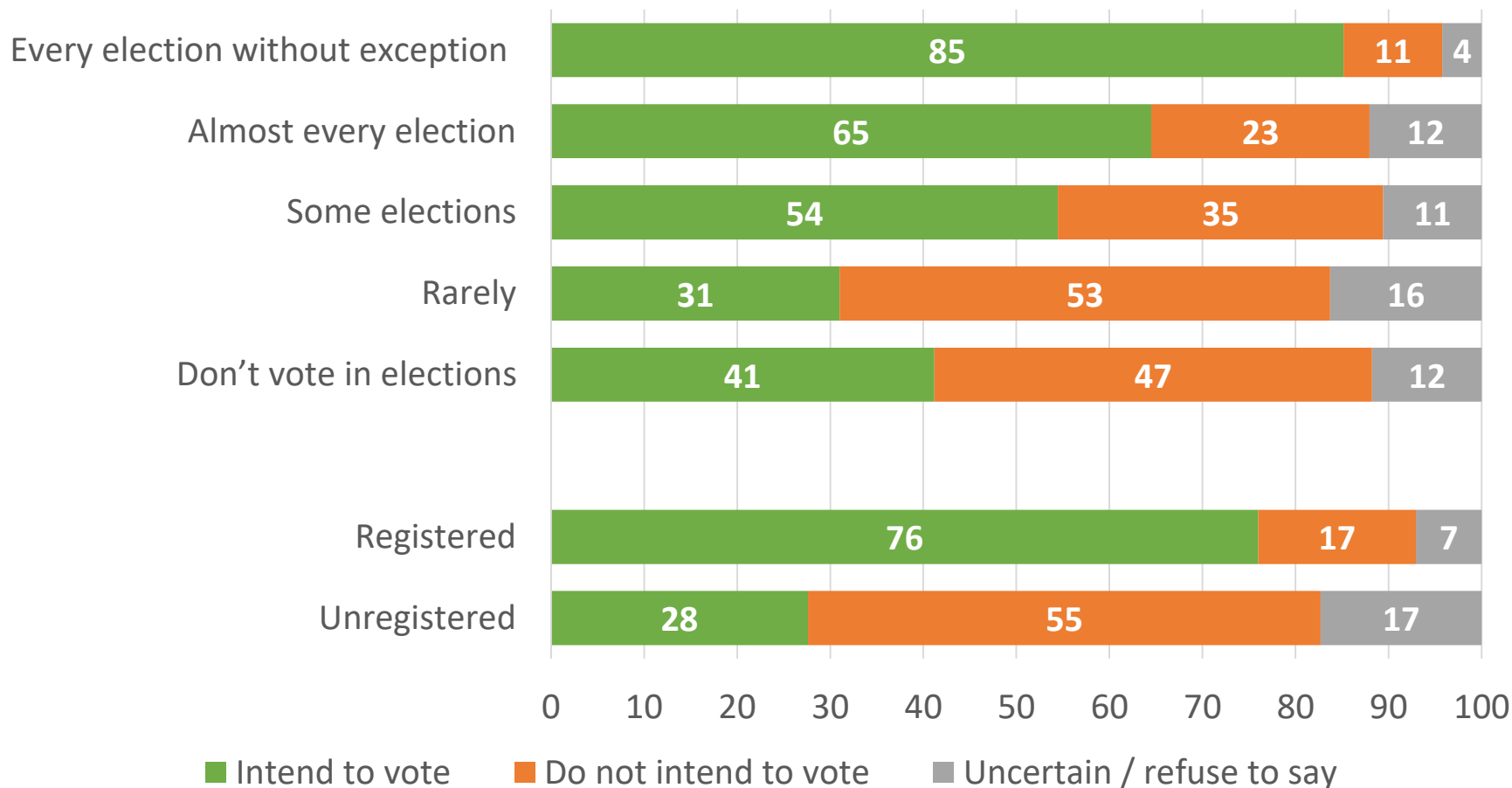
Views on the accountability of the elected to the electorate matters for intended turnout

Intention to vote, based on response to statement "The party that I voted for did not protect my interests"

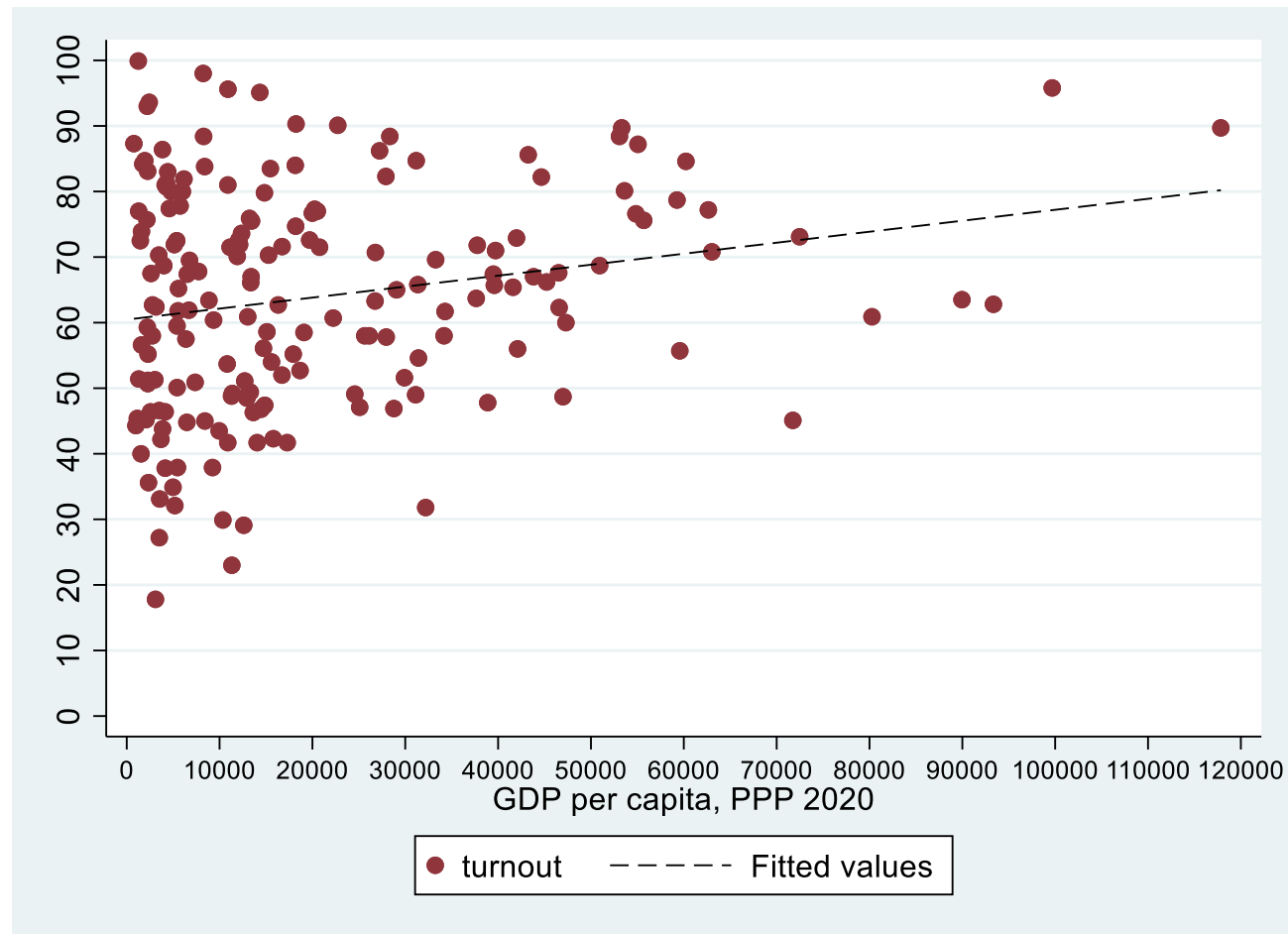


A culture of voting?

Intention to vote by frequency of electoral participation (VPS 2021)



National economic wellbeing has a modest influence of on turnout



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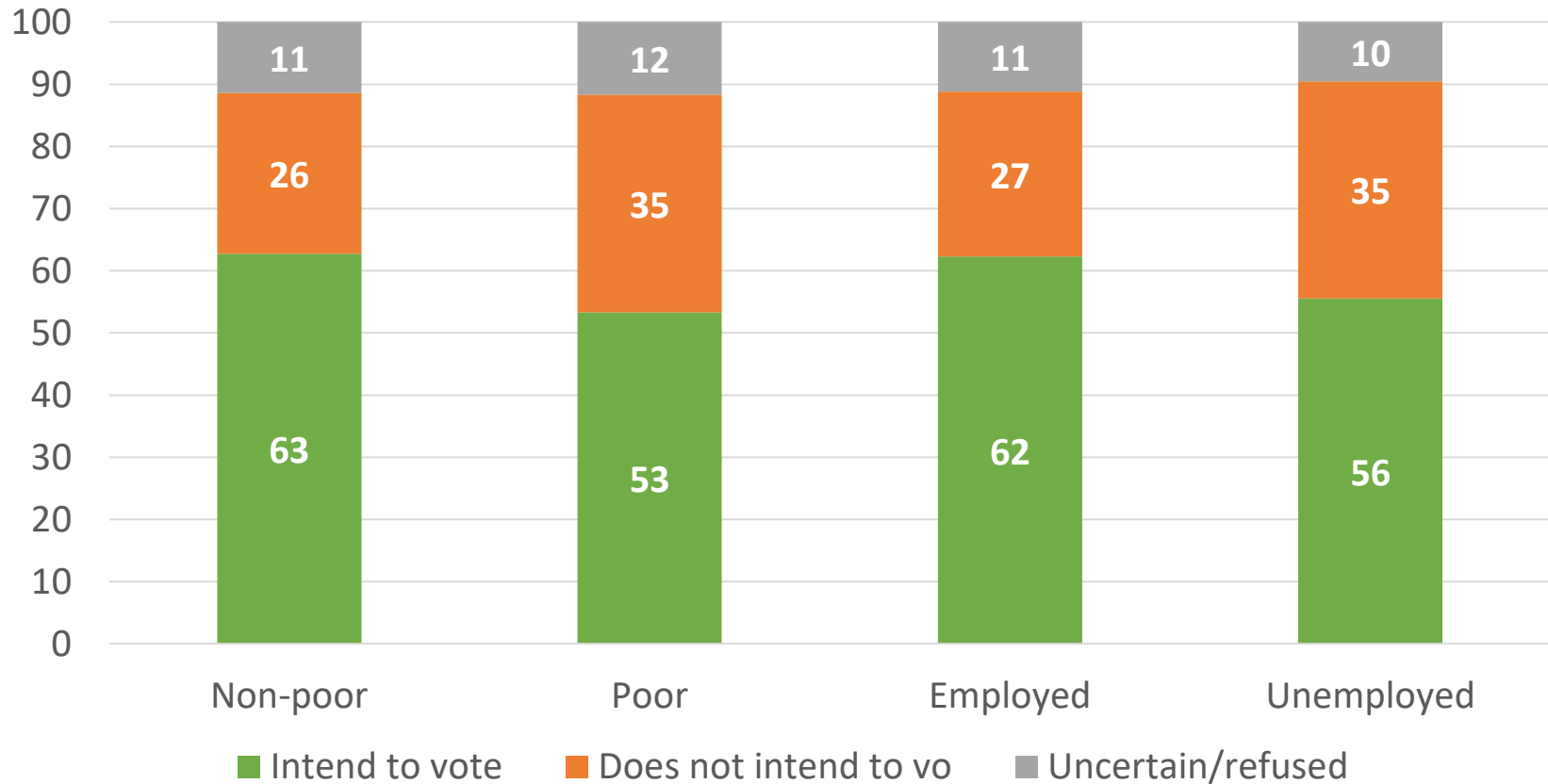
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Source: IDEA turnout (most recent election) and World BANK WDI 2020 GDP per capita PPP data



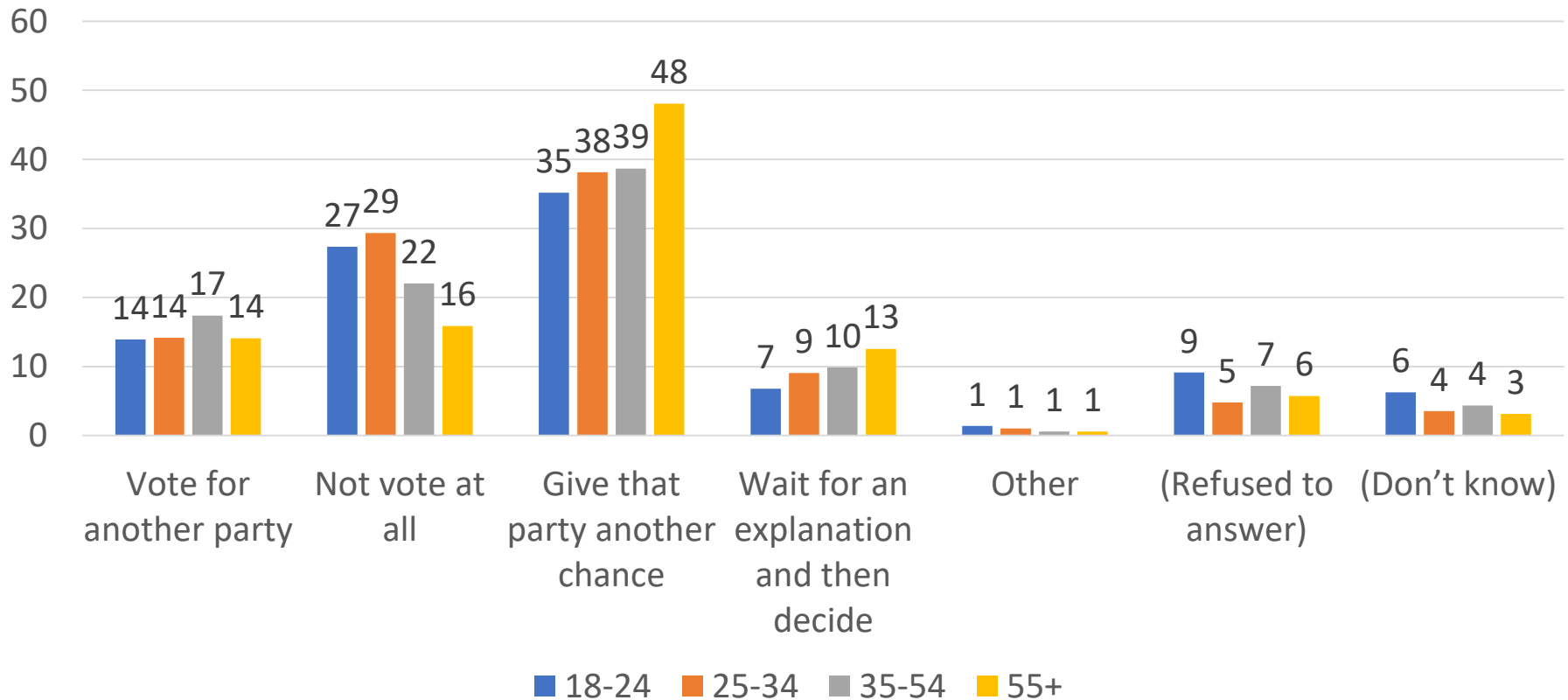
Personal economic situation has a modest influence of on intended turnout

Intention to vote by class (2021)



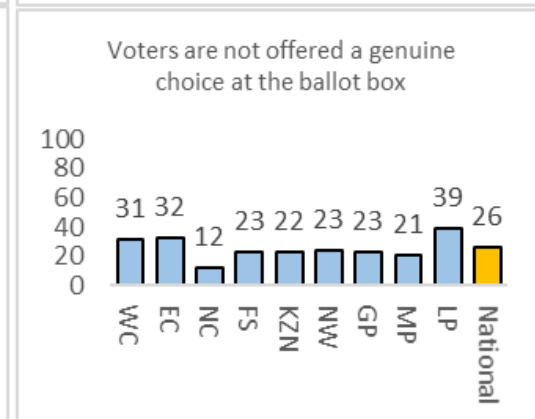
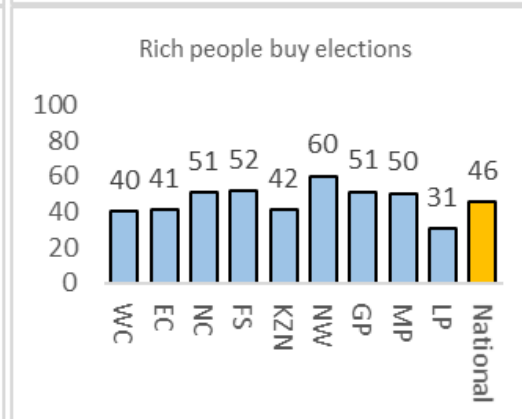
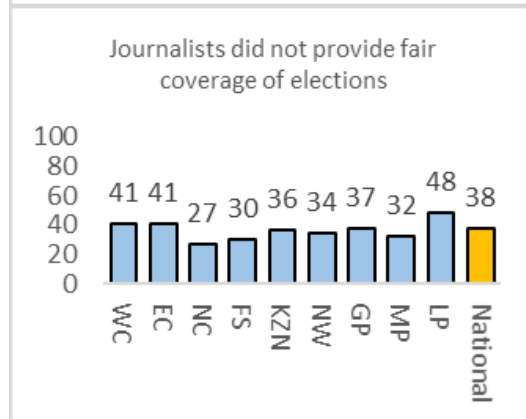
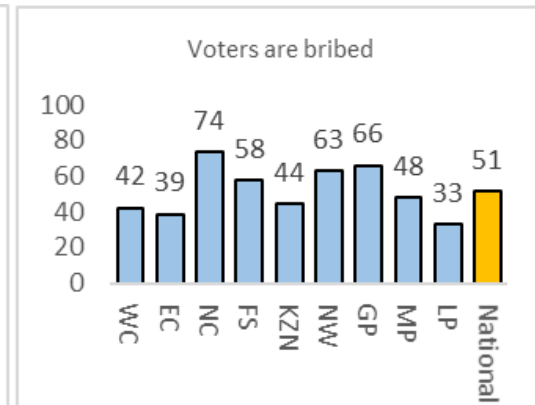
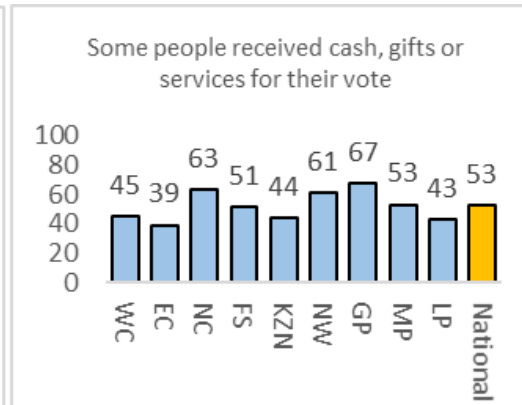
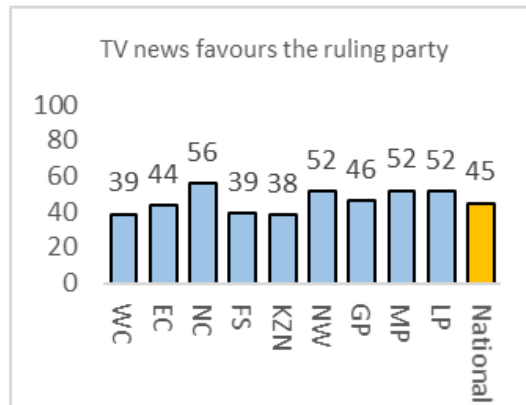
Electoral responses to unfulfilled expectations in 2021, by age group

All age-eligible adults



Campaign integrity 2013

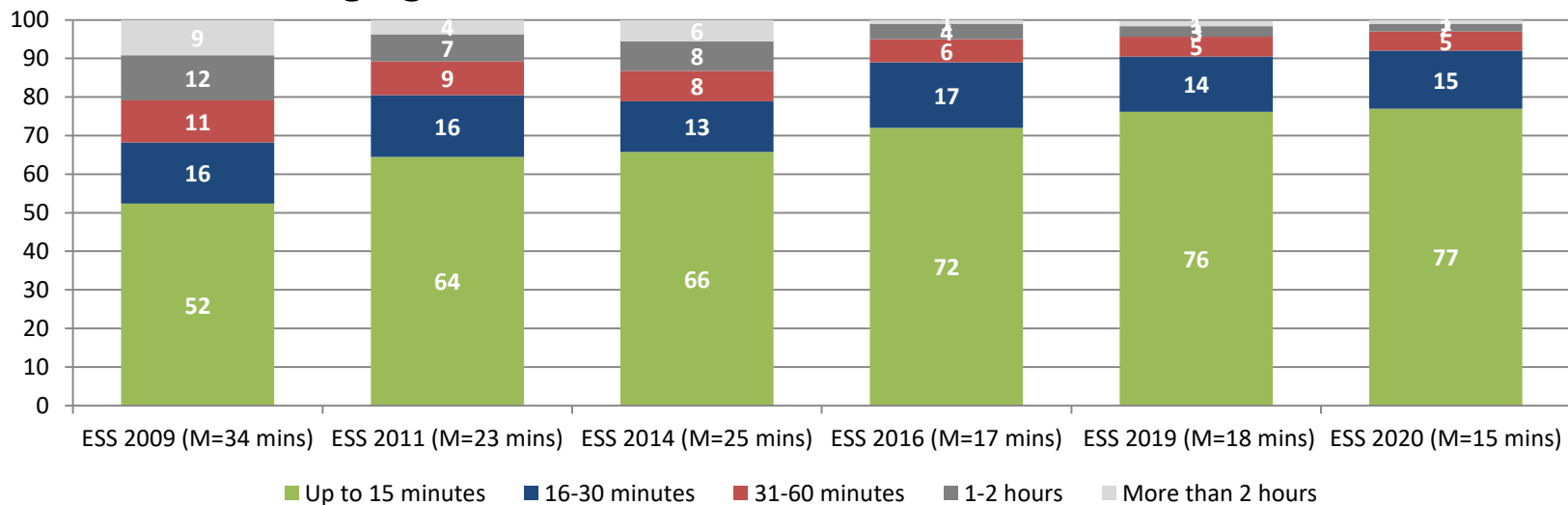
In your view, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections?
(% very/fairly often)



Source: Voter Participation Survey 2013, 2021

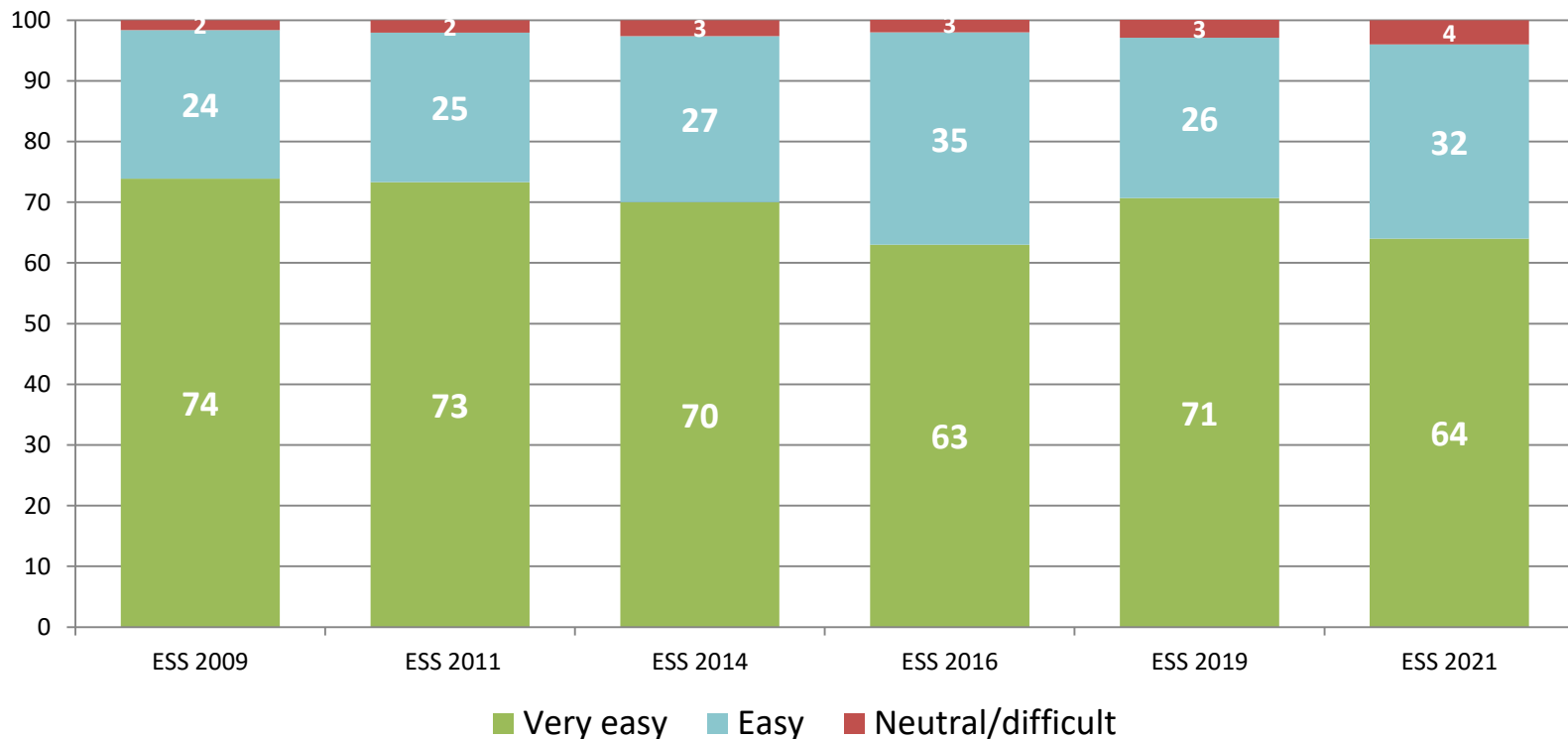
Queuing Time at the Voting Station

- More than three-quarters of voters (77%) **queued for less than a quarter of an hour**, with 15% queuing between **16-30 minutes**, 5% taking between **31-60 minutes**, 2% **waiting for between one and two hours**, and 1% **waiting in excess of two hours**.
- **Trends:** progressive improvement since 2009 election – average queuing time **fell from 34 minutes in 2009 to 15 minutes in 2021**. Queuing time seen as key factor encouraging turnout.



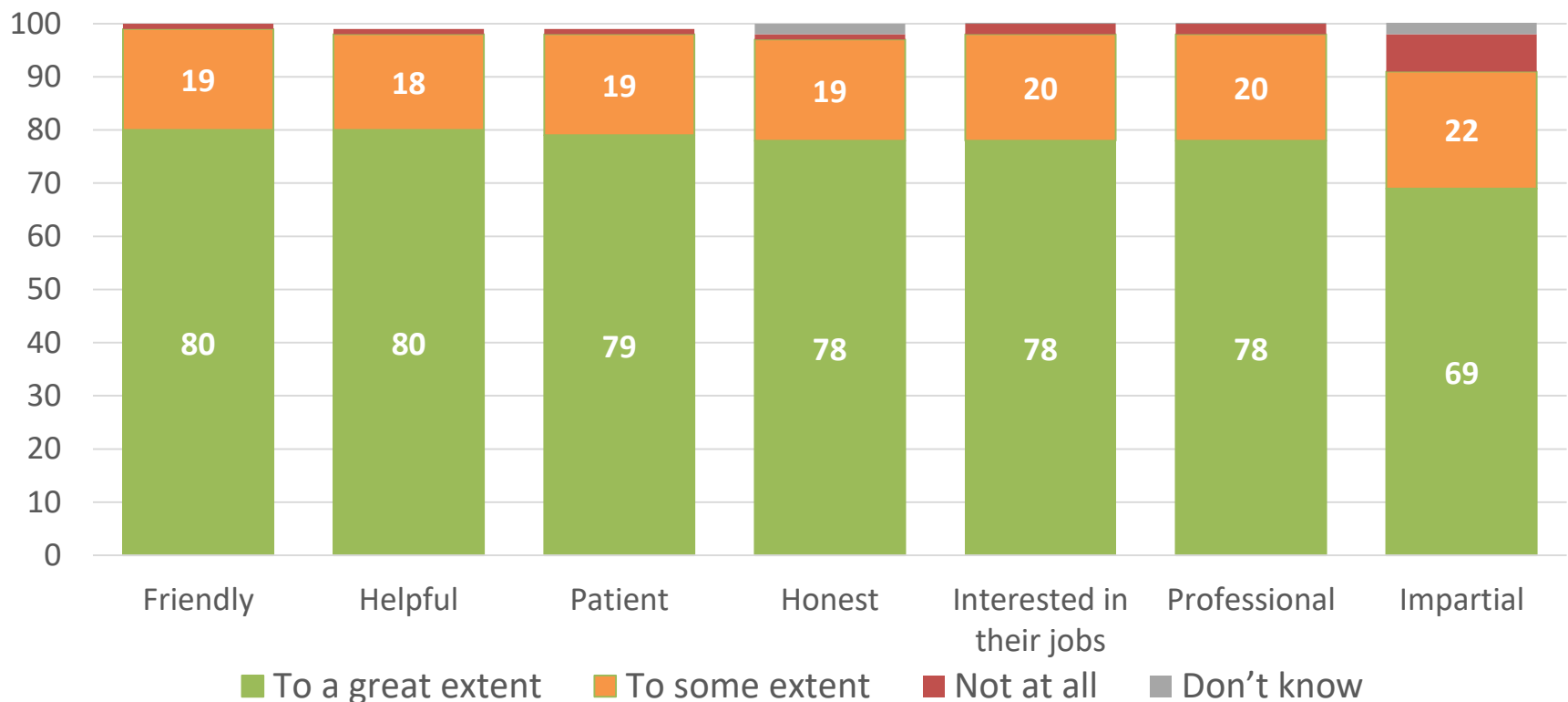
Procedure inside voting station easy to understand

- A large majority (96%) of voters were satisfied with **the procedures inside the voting station**



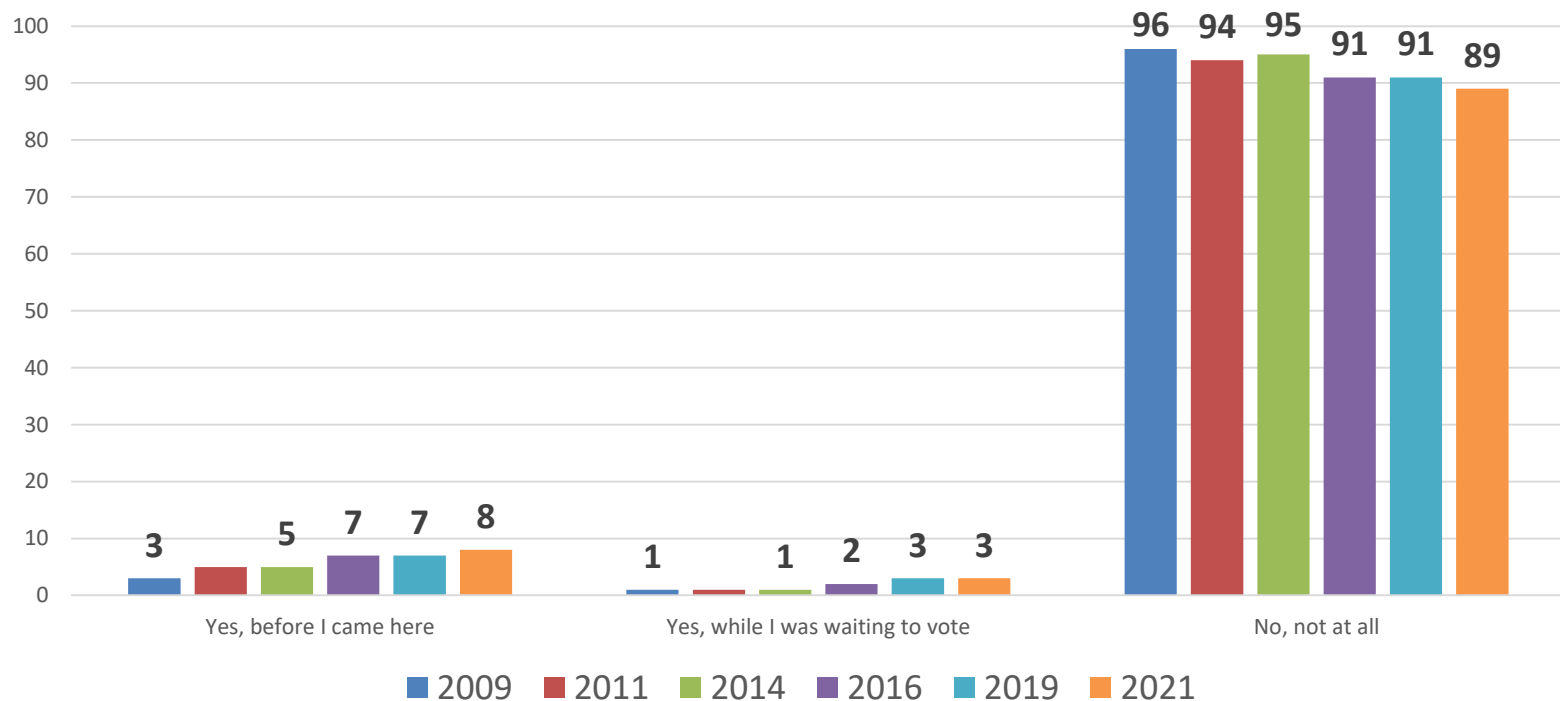
Conduct of Electoral Officials

- A large majority of voters were satisfied with **the conduct of the Electoral officials. The lowest rating was in relation to impartiality**



Experience of political coercion

- **Political coercion** has increased since 2009 to over a tenth. This needs to be monitored in coming elections
- Political coercion mostly from **family and friends**

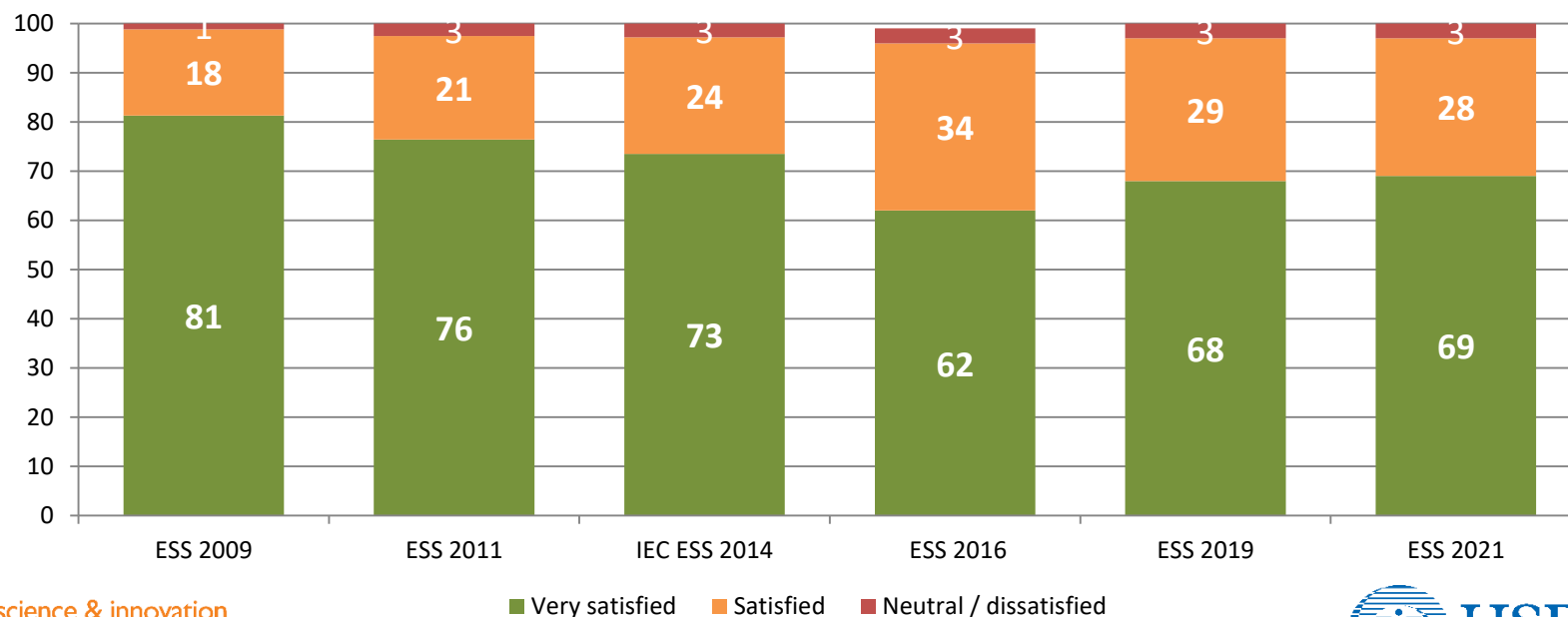


Perceived Secrecy of Vote

Majority (97%) of **voters expressed satisfaction with the secrecy of their vote** (69% very satisfied; 28% fairly satisfied)

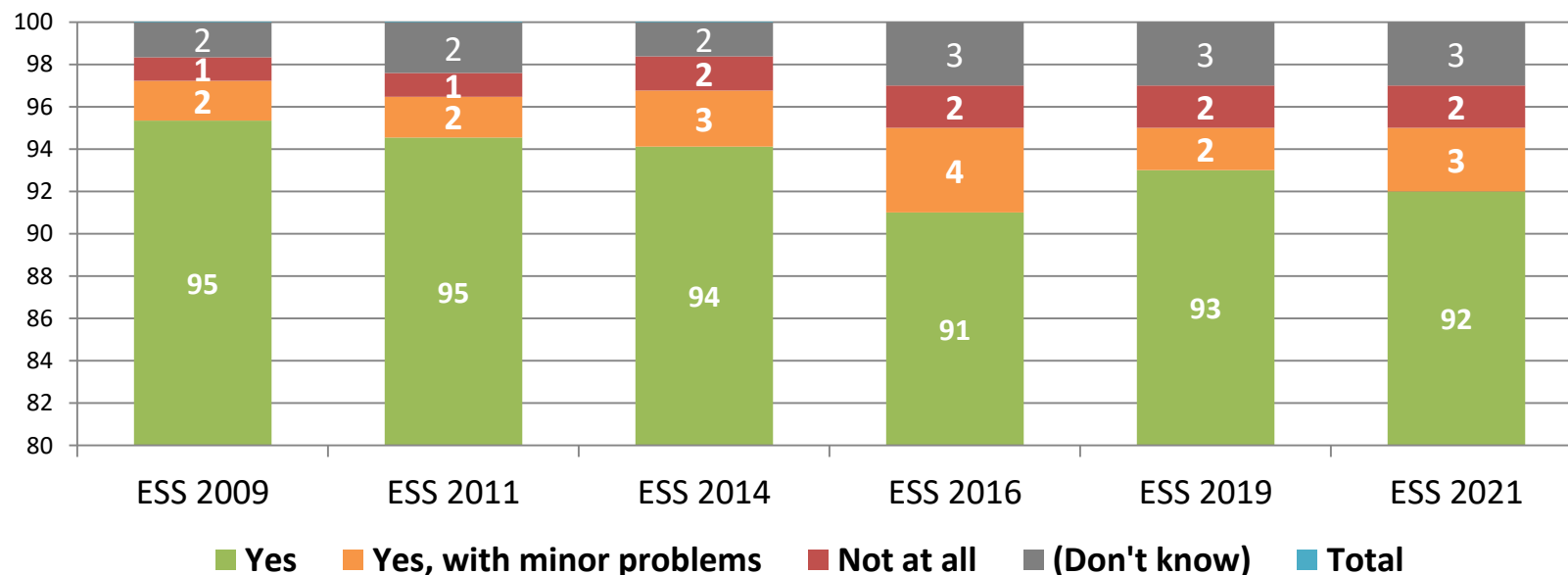
Decline over time in share “very satisfied” between 2009 and 2016 (**81%-62%**). Trend reversed from 2016

Future **electoral management efforts** need to continue to ensure that **measures to preserve the secrecy of the vote** are **effectively implemented**.



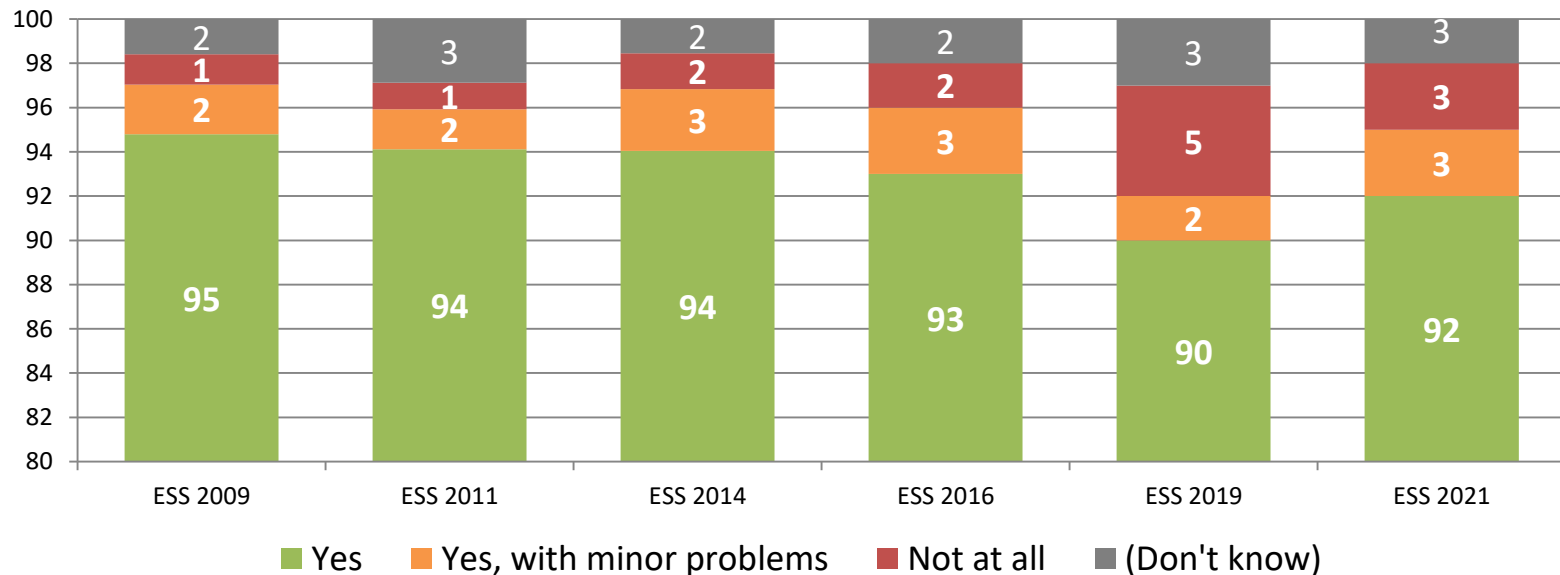
Perceived Electoral Freeness

- An **overwhelming majority of voters** in the 2021 elections (92%) felt that the **election procedures were free**. A further 3% said they were free with minor problems, and 2% said they were not at all free.
- Resolutely positive, but there **has been a modest decline**; the share rating the election as completely free was lower than in the first three prior elections



Perceived Electoral Fairness

- A similar share (92%) rated the election procedures as **unconditionally fair** in 2021, with 3% indicating that the elections were fair apart from minor problems and 3% rating them as unfair.
- Lowest perceptions of electoral fairness in 2019. This was reversed in 2021.



Conclusion

- NPE 2019 and LGE 2021 were undertaken amid **some of the harshest electoral attitudes and behavioural predispositions** since 1994
- Diminished electoral turnout, with a majority of VAP abstaining
- **Electoral attitudes are beginning to change** alongside democratic evaluations
 - declining sense of the civic duty to vote
 - diminishing political efficacy
- **Disillusionment remains the core motivation** for non-registration and planned electoral abstention.
- **Growing polarization** between contented voters and disillusioned masses

Conclusion

- In past elections, the survey pointed to increasingly critical evaluations of electoral democracy among the VAP.
 - This was seen as an appeal for **greater accountability**.
 - The latest results suggest that this may be spilling over in a **degree of fatalism**.
- Duty to vote was also a key factor **preventing a change in citizen norms** away from duty-bound citizenship
 - If this declines further, together with other views on democracy, it may lead to a further turn away from the ballot box

Conclusion



- The dynamics that contributed to the **low turnout scenario** seen in the 2021 Local Government Elections will become especially crucial for the 2024 election and beyond.
- 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.
- This **matters particularly for South Africa's youth**, many of whom are disengaging from the politics of the ballot box and have not had a formative electoral experience.



thank you

| | |
|-----------|--------------------|
| English | Thank you |
| Afrikaans | Dankie |
| Ndebele | Ngiyathokoza |
| Xhosa | Enkosi |
| Zulu | Ngiyabonga |
| Sepedi | Ke a leboga |
| Sesotho | Ke a leboha |
| Setswana | Ke a leboga |
| Xitsonga | Ndzi khense ngopfu |
| SiSwati | Ngiyabonga |
| Tshivenda | Ndi a livhuwa |
| Nama | Gangans |

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