

# *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.

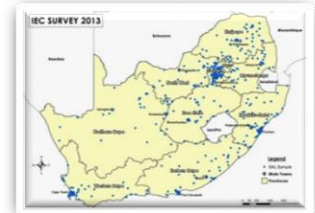




# Voter Participation Survey (VPS) Methodology

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*

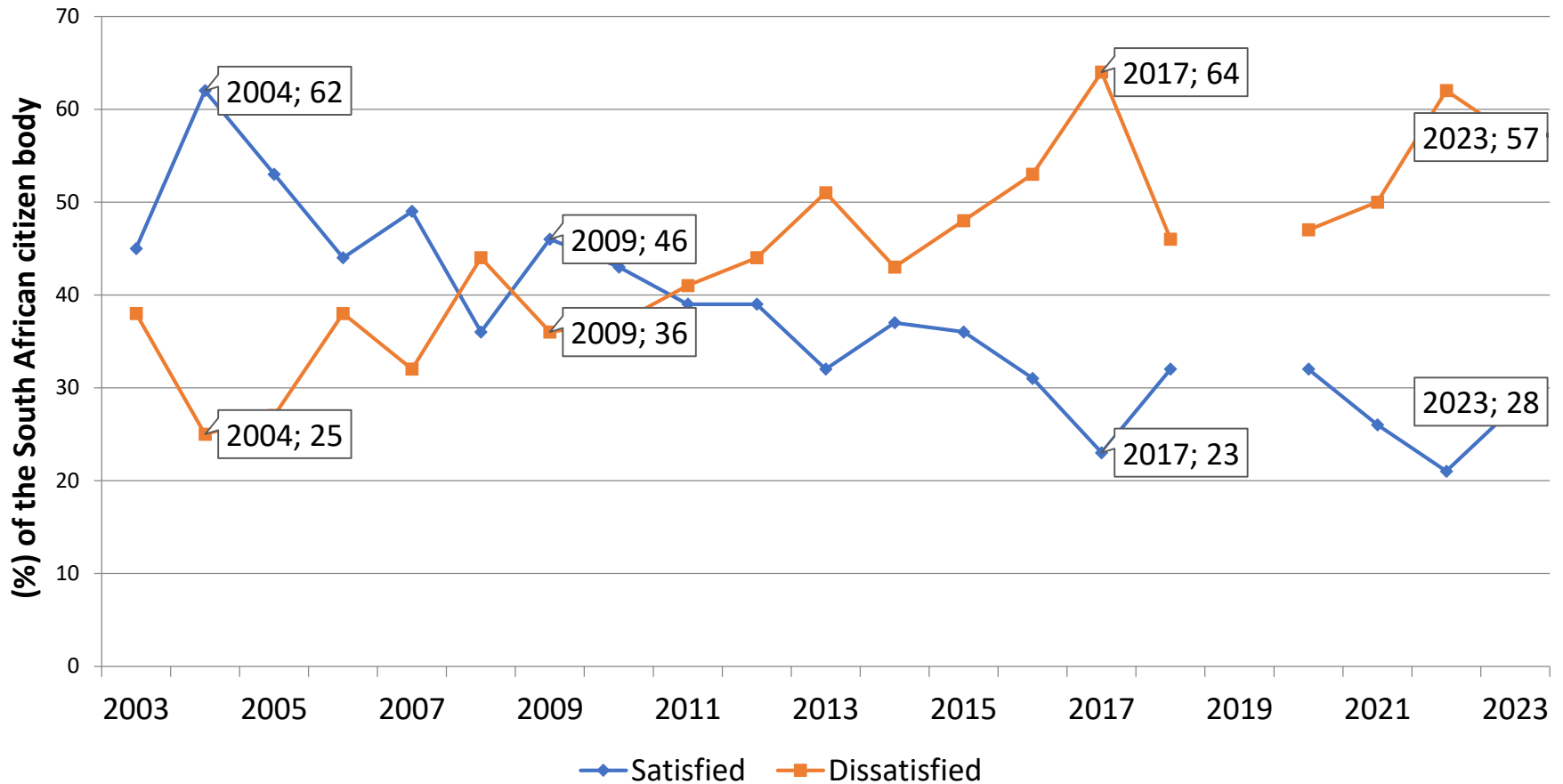
+ *Institutional trust*

# 01



# Satisfaction with Democracy

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

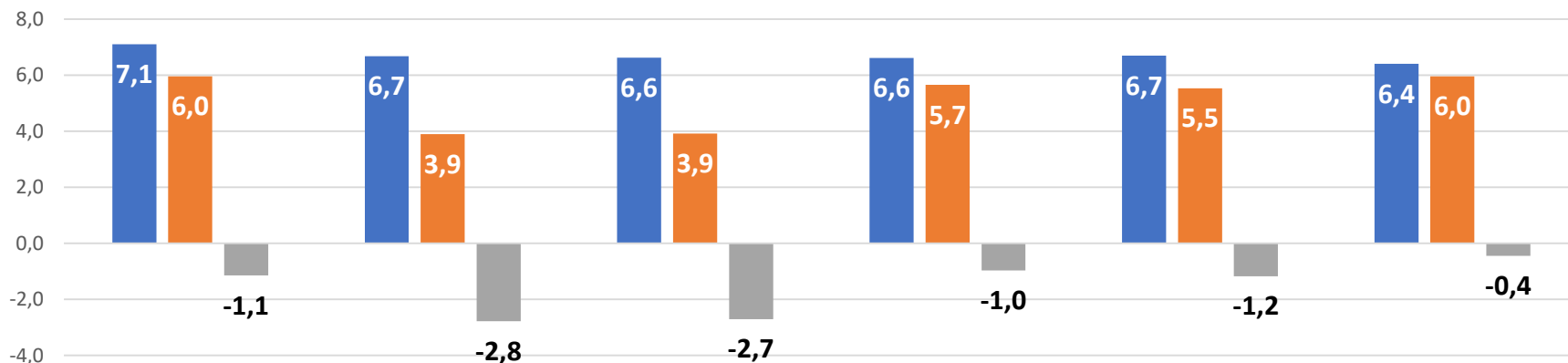




# Democratic Dimensions

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



Elections in South Africa are free and fair.

Politicians in South Africa listen to people before making decisions.

Ruling parties in South Africa are punished in elections when they have done a bad job.

Citizens in South Africa are able to take part in peaceful and legal protest action to express their dissatisfaction.

In South Africa, everyone is free to express their political views openly, even if they are extreme.

Opposition parties in South Africa are free to criticise the government.

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



# Democratic Dimensions

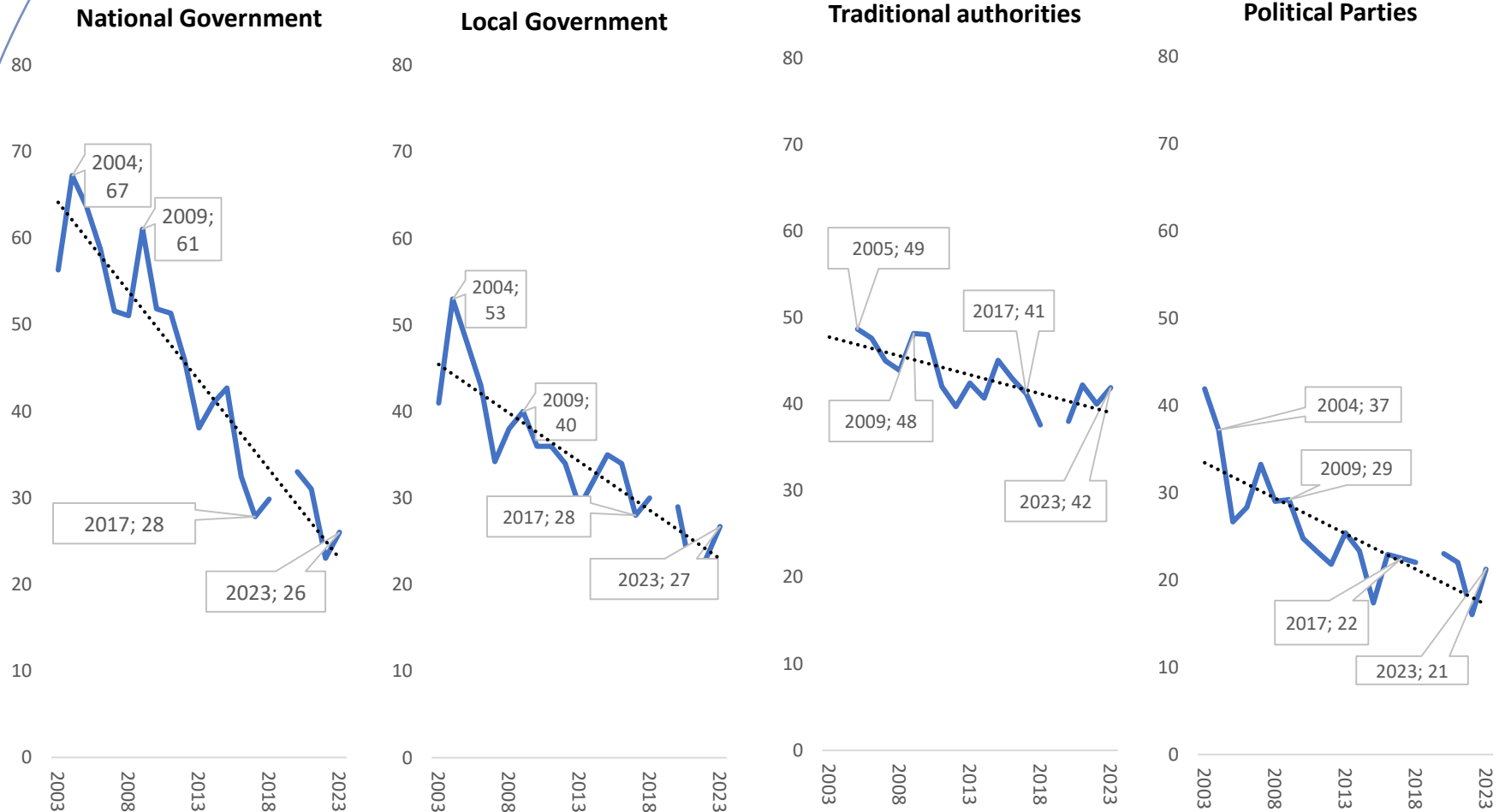
All importance items fell between 2013 and 2023, and all apart for participation in legal, peaceful protest fell since 2021; most application items fell 2013-23, but no further decline 2021-23 (most improved slightly)

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	6.7	7.1	-0.4	-1.1
Elected listen to the public	7.4	7.48	6.97	6.4	6.7	-0.3	-0.7
Electoral accountability	7.36	7.38	6.88	6.4	6.6	-0.2	-0.7
Participation in protest	7.59	7.51	6.92	6.4	6.6	-0.2	-1.0
Freedom of expression	7.79	7.59	6.94	7.5	6.7	0.8	-1.1
Viable opposition	7.04	7.38	6.8	6.4	6.4	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	6.0	-0.3	-1.3
Elected listen to the public	4.57	4.52	4.15	3.96	3.9	0.1	-0.7
Electoral accountability	4.44	4.47	4.52	4.0	3.9	0.1	-0.5
Participation in protest	6.13	6.38	6.01	4.0	5.7	-1.7	-0.5
Freedom of expression	6.23	6.38	6.11	5.8	5.5	0.3	-0.7
Viable opposition	6.26	6.82	6.48	5.7	6.0	-0.3	-0.3



# Institutional Trust (2003-2023)

## Confidence in select institutions (%)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2003-2012 IEC VPS 2023



# Electoral attitudes



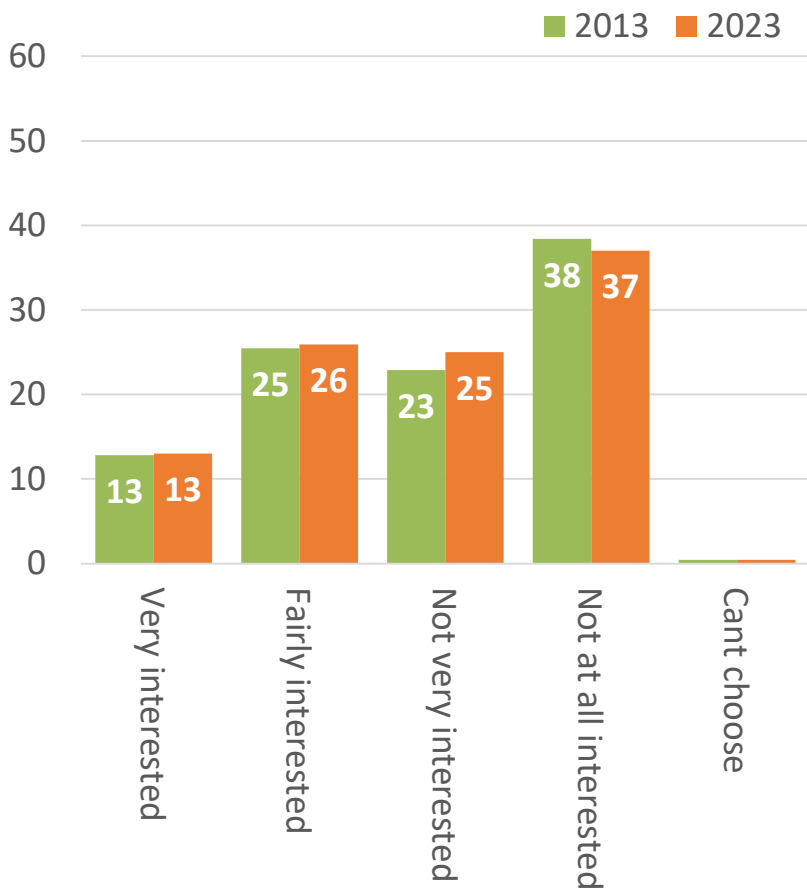
- + *Political interest*
- + *Duty to vote*
- + *Internal political efficacy (belief that vote makes a difference)*
- + *External political efficacy (responsiveness & accountability)*

# 02

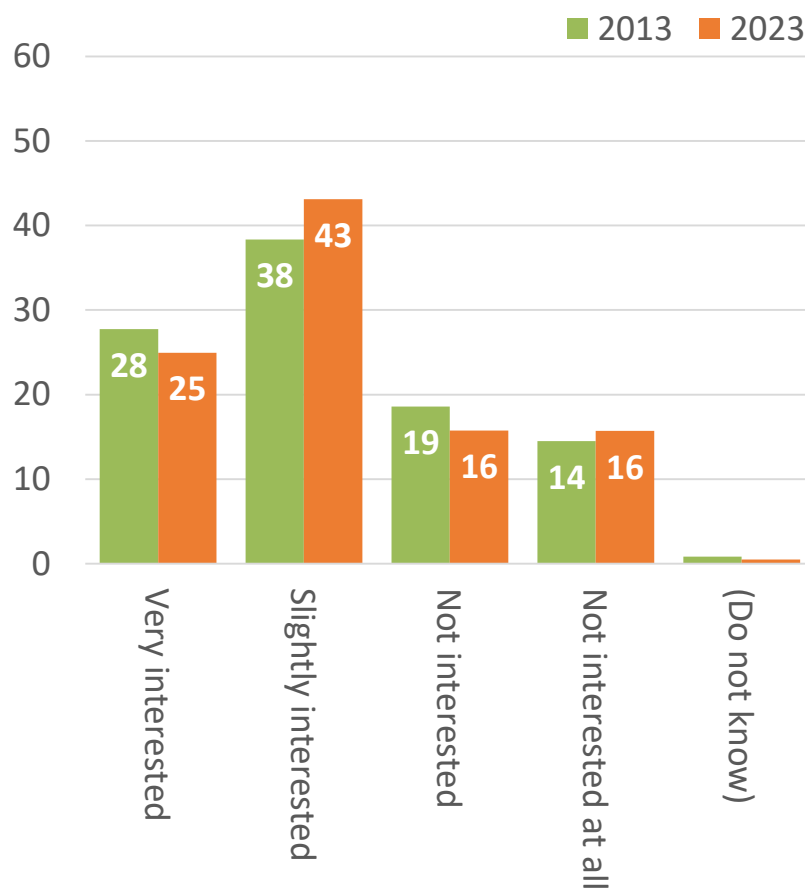


# Political Interest

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



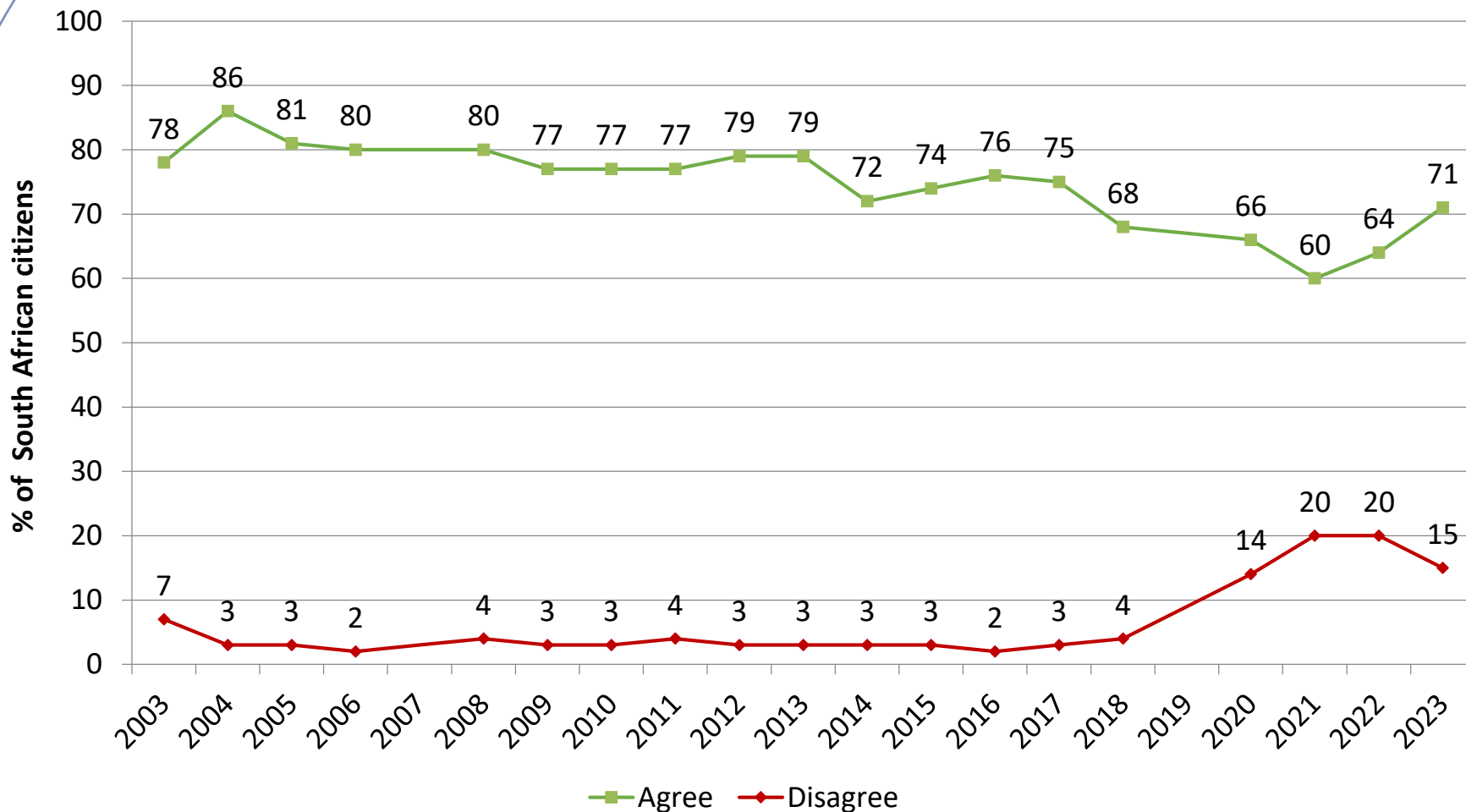
“In general, how interested are you in South African national and provincial elections?”





# Duty to Vote

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

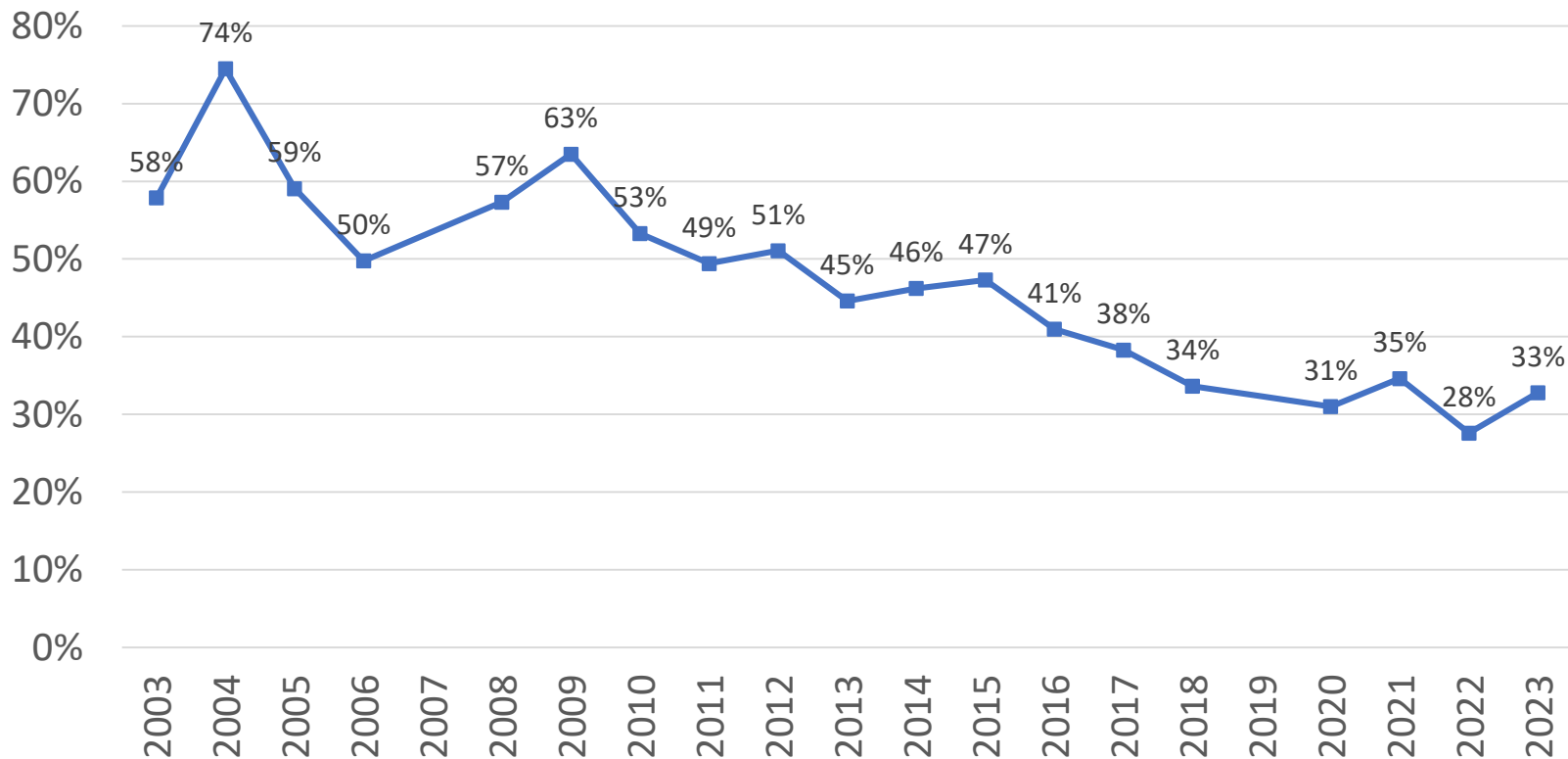




# Internal Political Efficacy

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

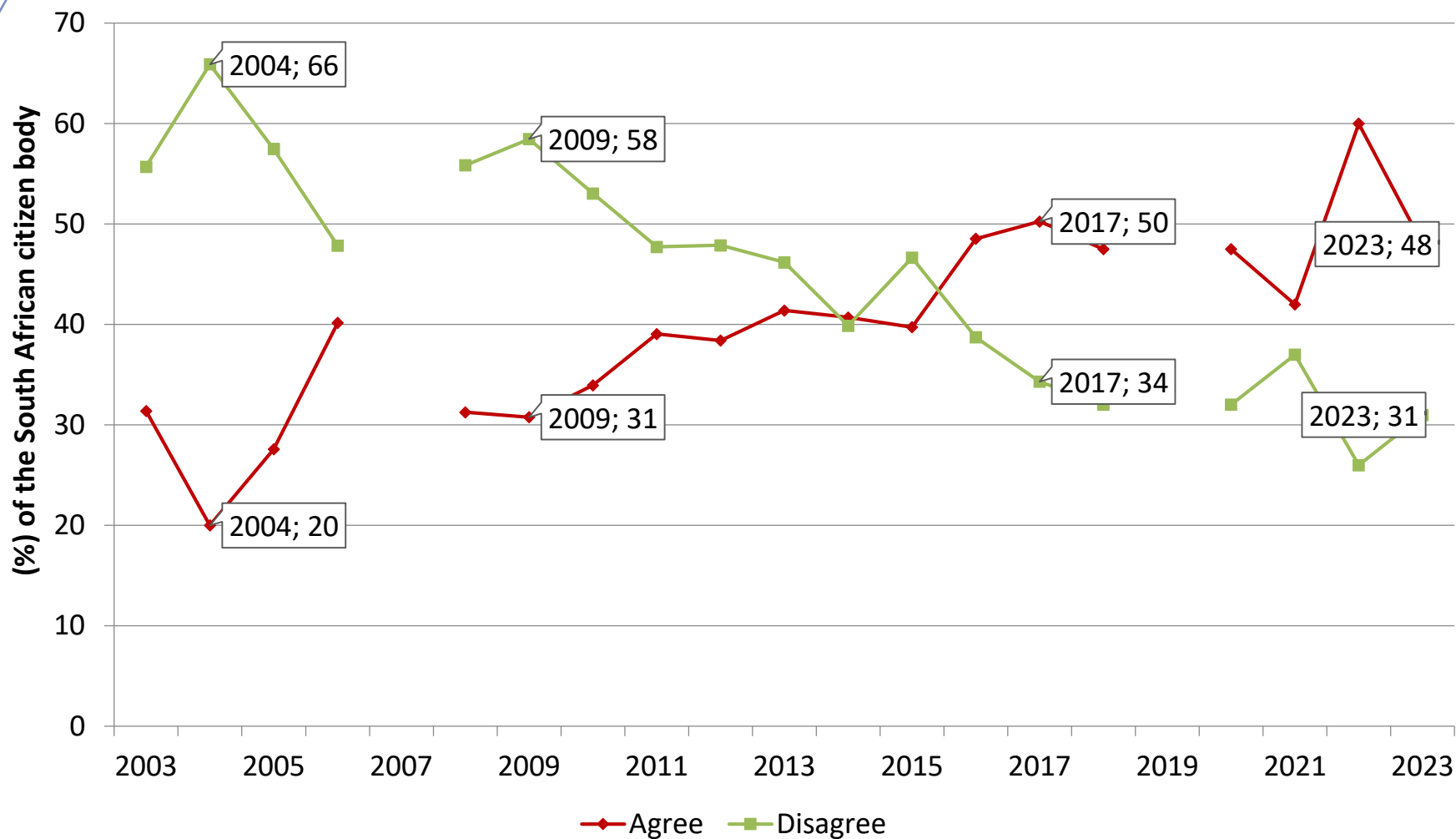
National average





# External Political Efficacy

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





# Registration Experiences



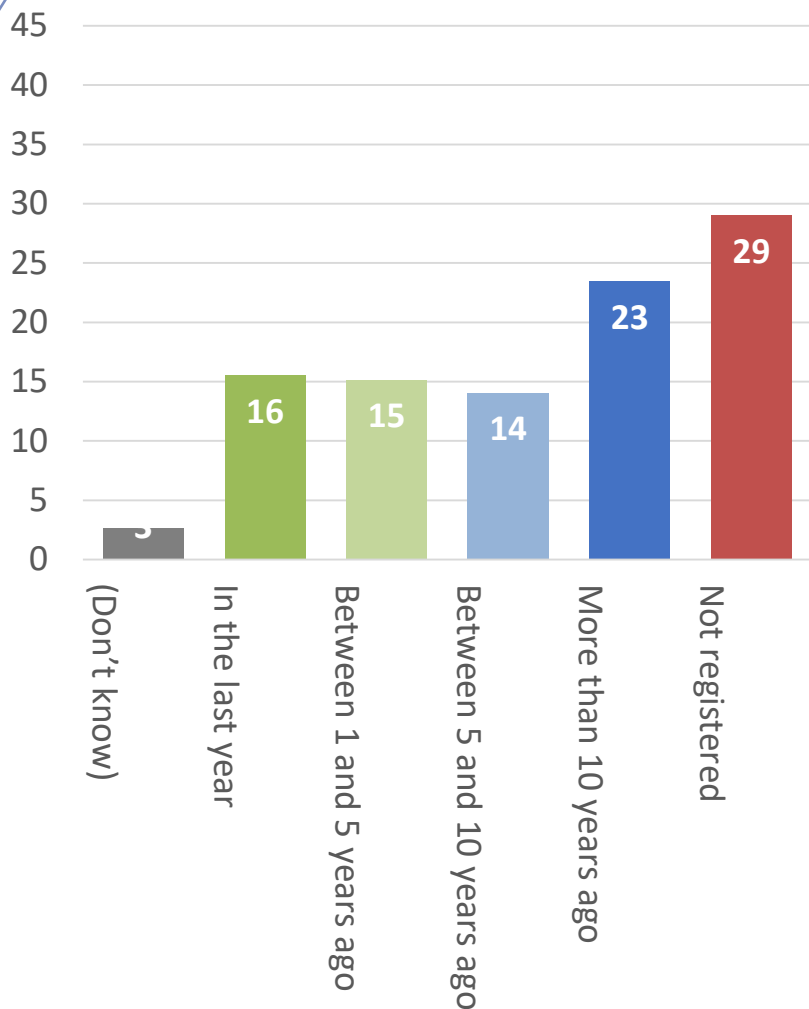
- + *Registration status and reasons for non-registering*
- + *Reported barriers to registration*
- + *Experiences of voter registration*

# 03



# Registration Status

## When did you register as a voter?

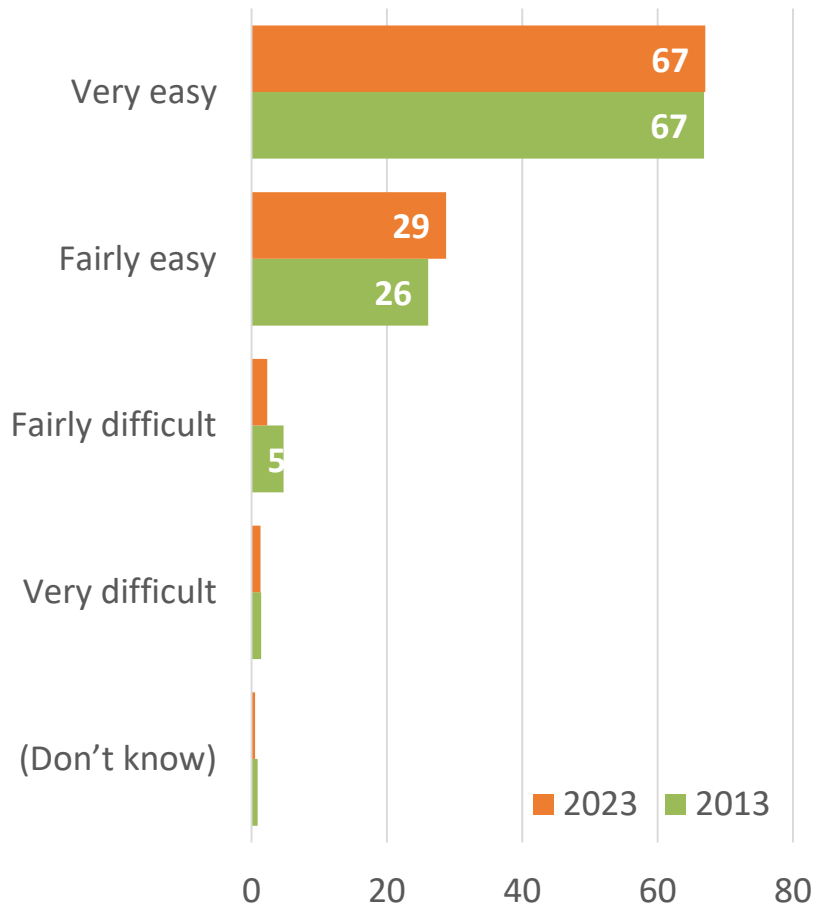


- There were **26.1 million** people registered to vote in 2023.
- The majority of the registered (89%) said that they were **registered** in the voting district in which they **currently resided**.
- Most registered adults (75%) said that they were **aware** that they were **moved to another voting district** they would have **re-register**.
- Of those who said that they were unregistered, 49% said that they **intended** to register **soon**.

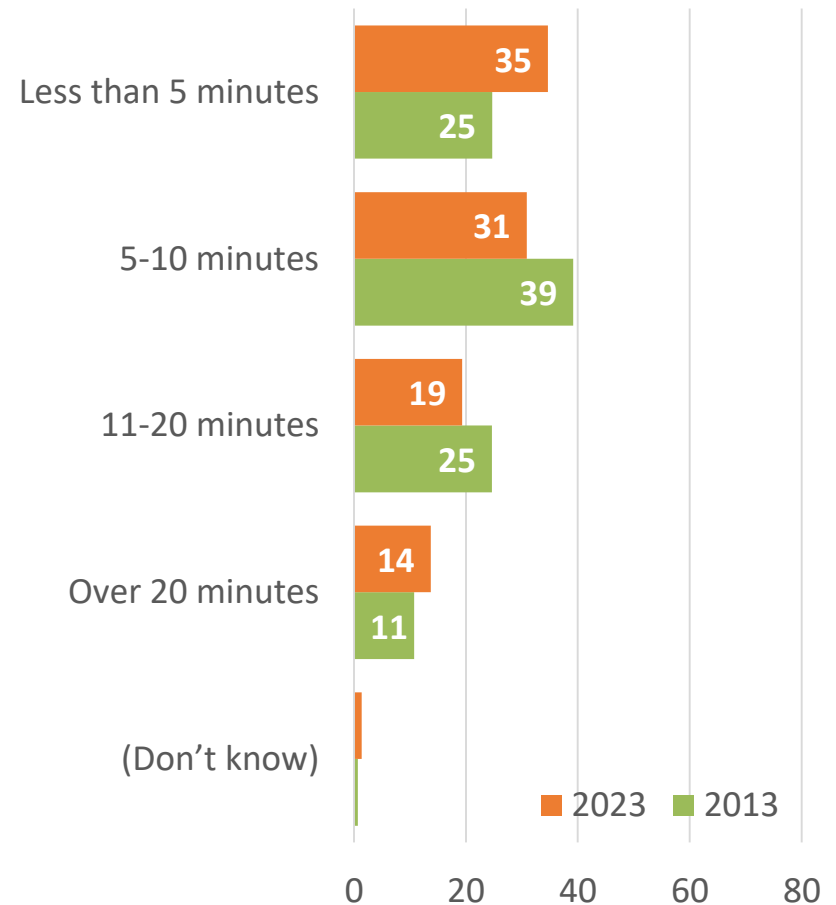


# Recent Registration Experiences

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



## How long did it take you to register?



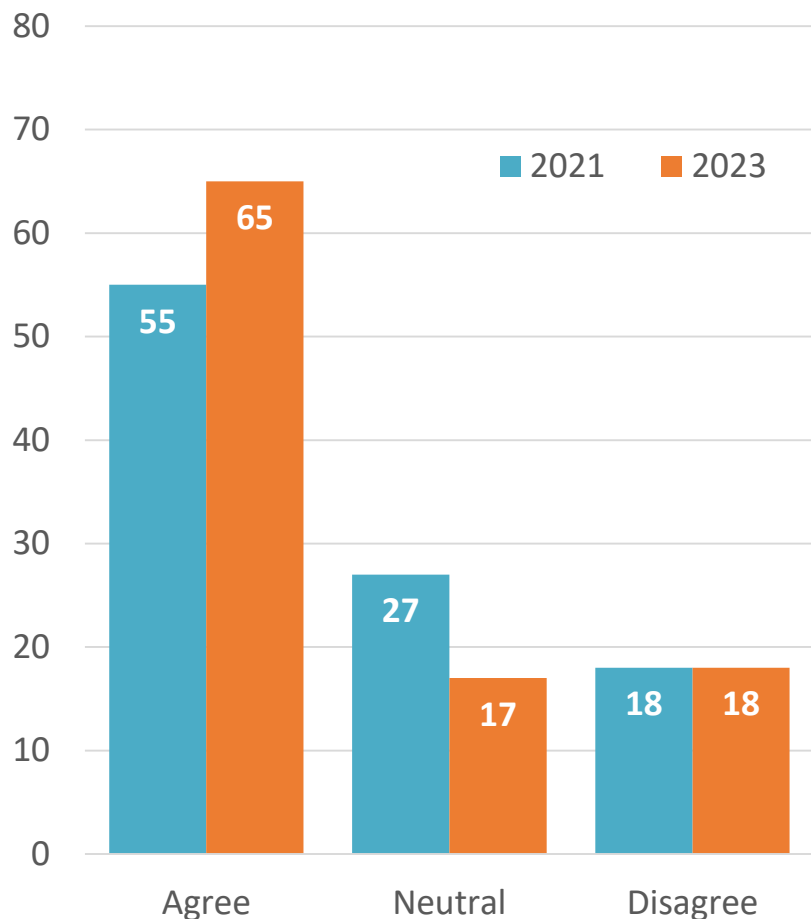
Source: IEC Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013; 2023

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

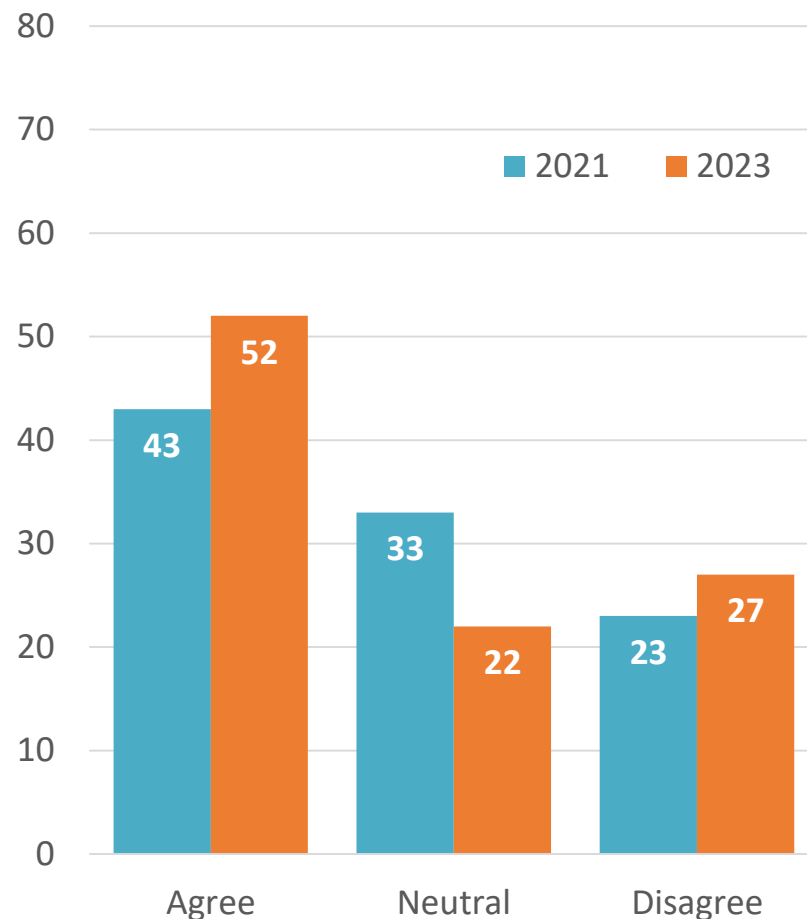


# Online Registration

**“Online registration will make voter registration easier and more effective”**



**“Online registration will introduce more electoral fraud”**





# Electoral Knowledge



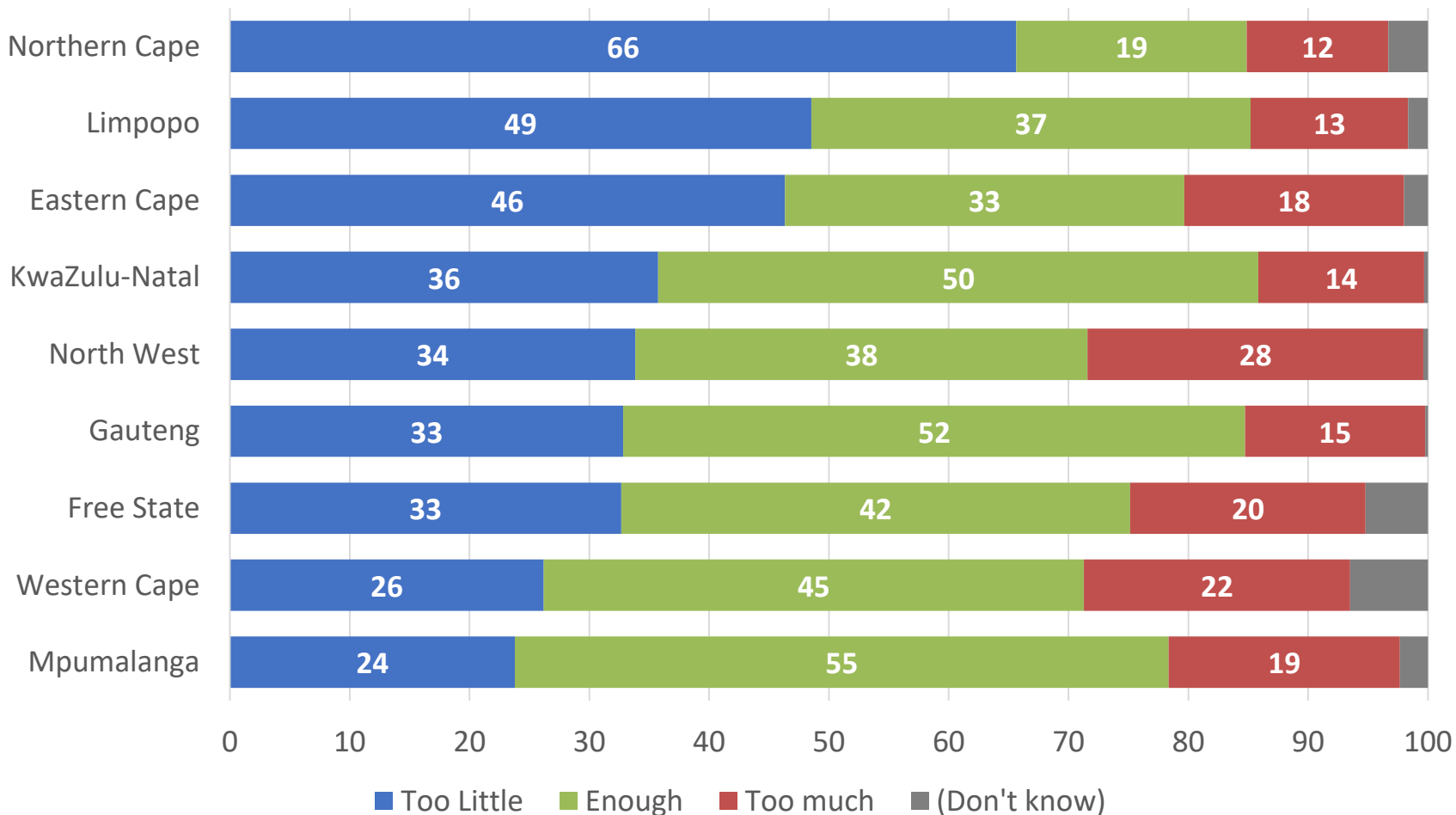
- + *Self-reported level of knowledge*
- + *Demand for knowledge about voting*
- + *Preferred method of receiving knowledge*

# 04



# Supply of electoral information

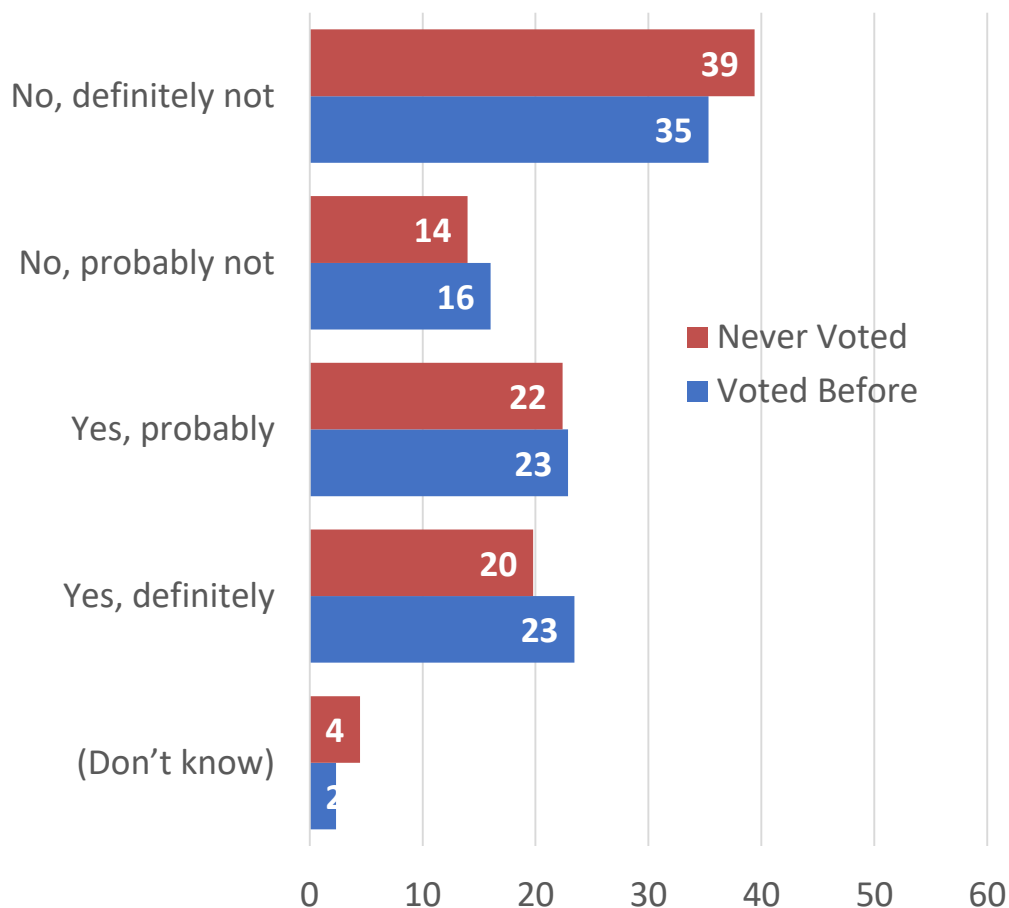
**“Do you have too little or too much information about how to vote?”**





# Knowledge Demand

“Would you be interested in receiving any additional information or education about voting and elections?”

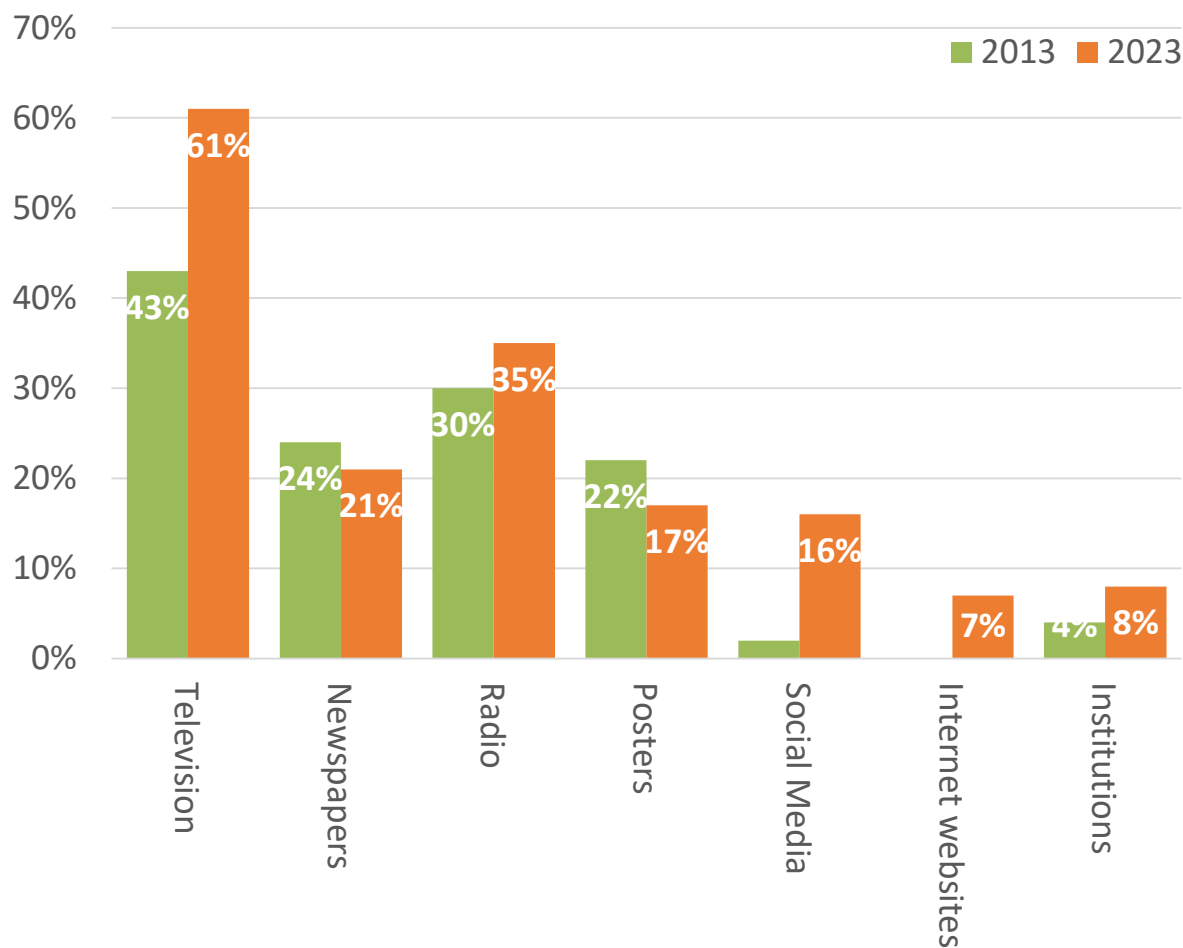


- Approximately a third (33%) of adult citizens stated that they had **received information** from IEC voter education campaigns/programmes.
- More than a third (39%) of those who did not **vote in the 2021 election wanted more** information on voting.
- What asked about what kind of voting information wanted, the dominant responses included **timing, voting station location** and **procedures** inside the voting station.



# Channels for Information

“Where do you usually get information about voting?”



- Television is most used in the **Western Cape** (70%) and lowest in **Limpopo** (46%).
- Social media is most used in **Limpopo** (23%) and **Gauteng** (18%)
- When asked, a **near majority** (49%) of the population said that would **prefer** to information from **television** in 2023.



# Past Voting Experiences



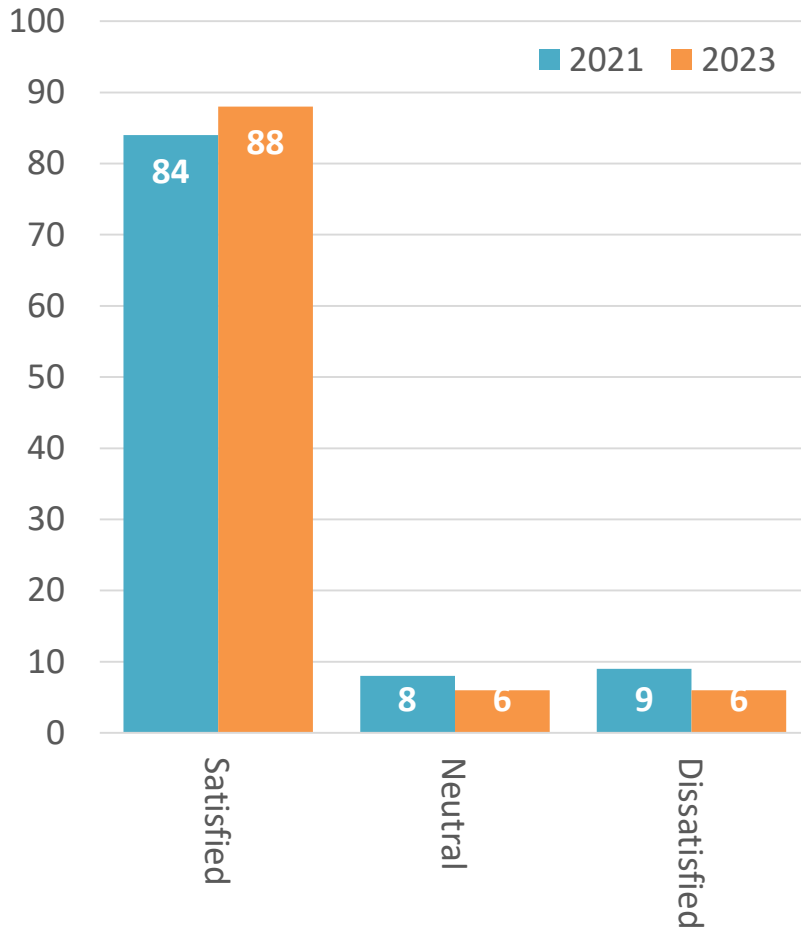
- + *Self-reported time to the voting stations*
- + *Perceived security at the voting station*
- + *Freeness and fairness of elections*

# 05

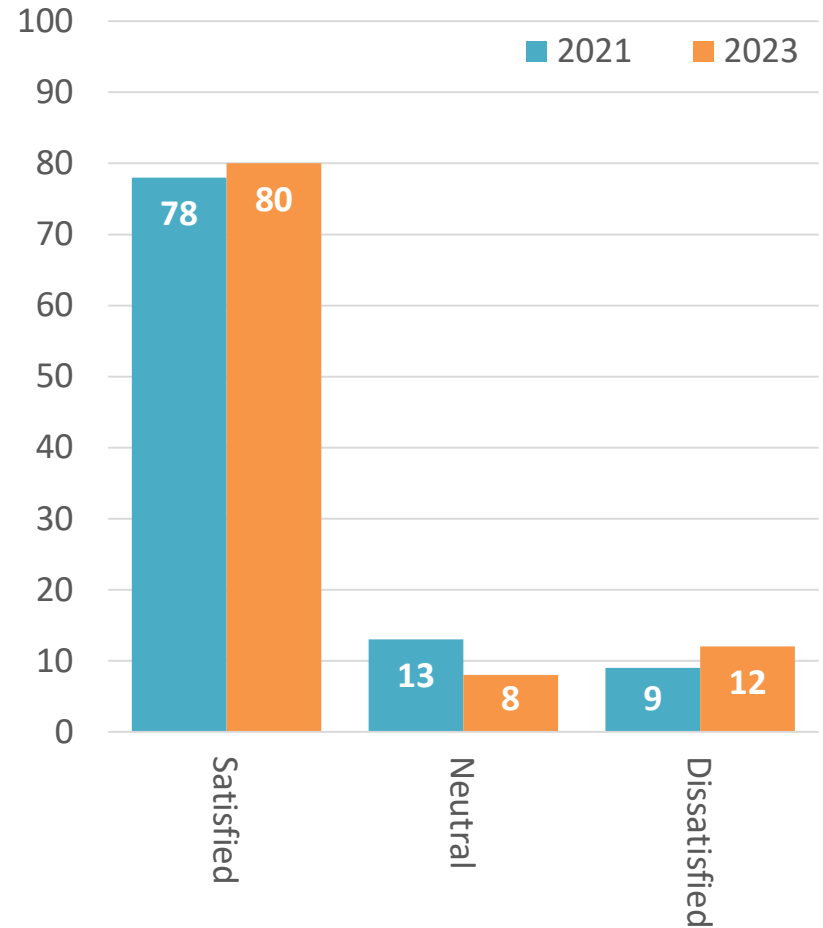


# Self-Reported Time to Vote

## “The time it took to get to the voting station”



## “The time that you had to stand in the queues”



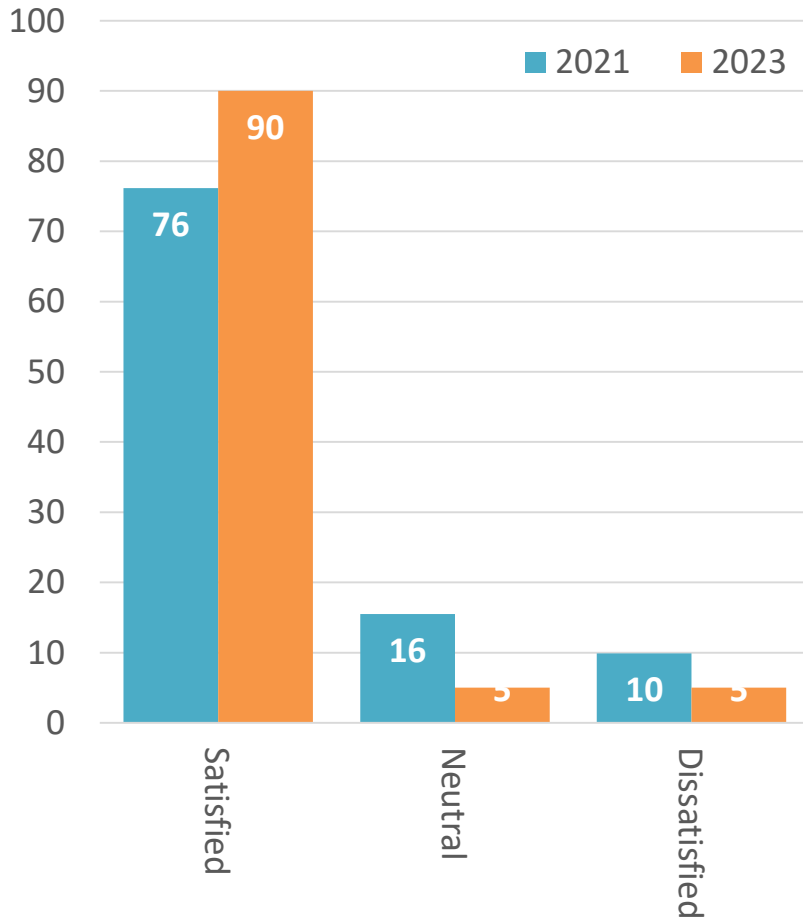
Source: IEC Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021; 2023

Note: Data is restricted to those who voted in the last major government election held prior to the survey interview.

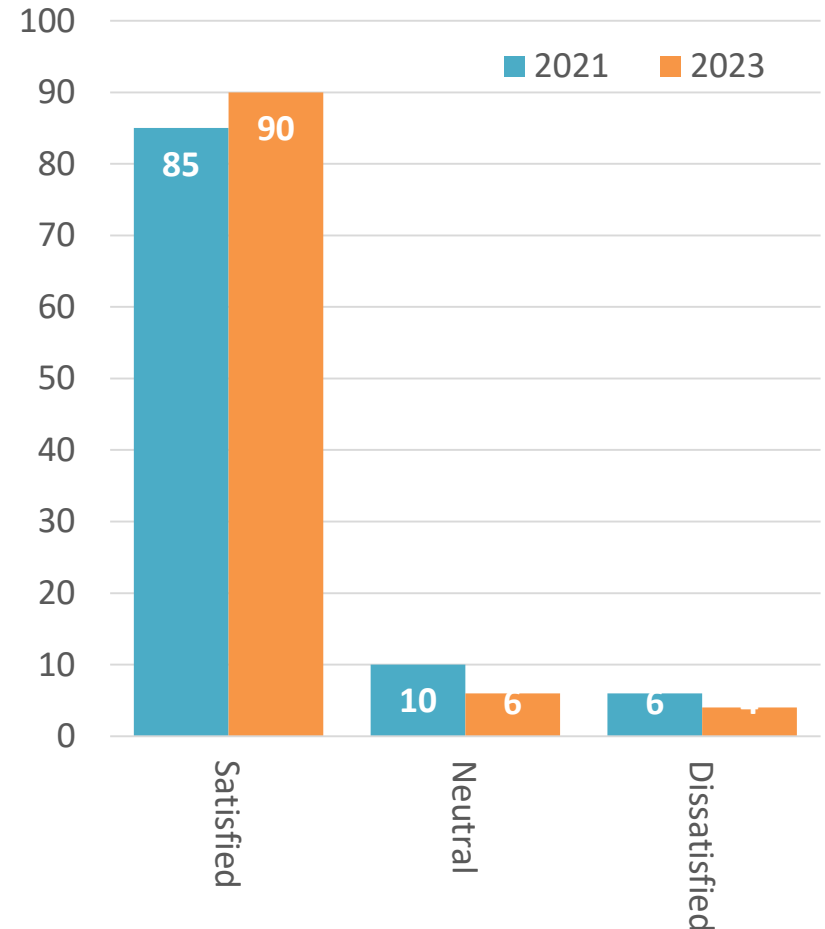


# Perceived Security

## “Safety and security at the voting station”



## “Secrecy of your vote”



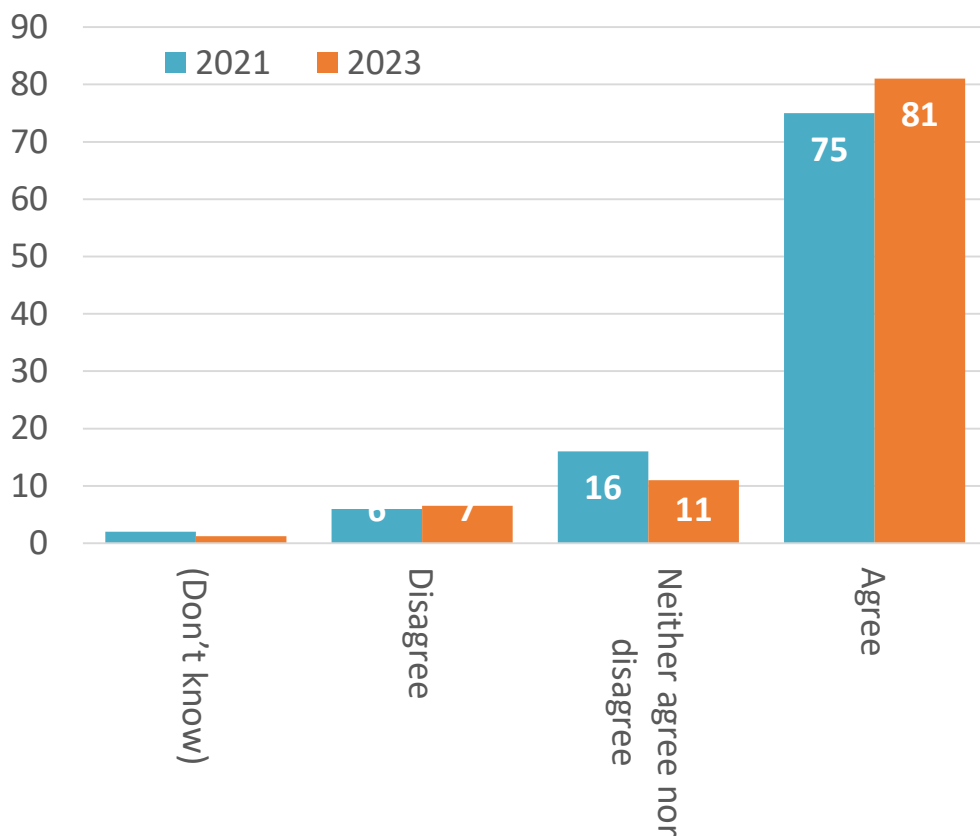
Source: IEC Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021; 2023

Note: Data is restricted to those who voted in the last major government election held prior to the survey interview.



# Freeness and Fairness

**To what extent do you agree or disagree that the election procedures were free and fair the last time you voted?**



- Disagreement amongst recent voters was highest in **Gauteng** (9%) followed by **KwaZulu-Natal** (6%) and **North West** (6%).
- Most (82%) recent voters were **satisfied** with the way that electoral officials **prevented irregularities** at their voting stations.
- A minority (16%) of past voters claimed that **electoral officials** tried to **influence** their voting choice and/or **interfered** with the secrecy of their vote.

Source: IEC Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021; 2023

Note: Data is restricted to those who voted in the last major government election held prior to the survey interview.



# Election Participation



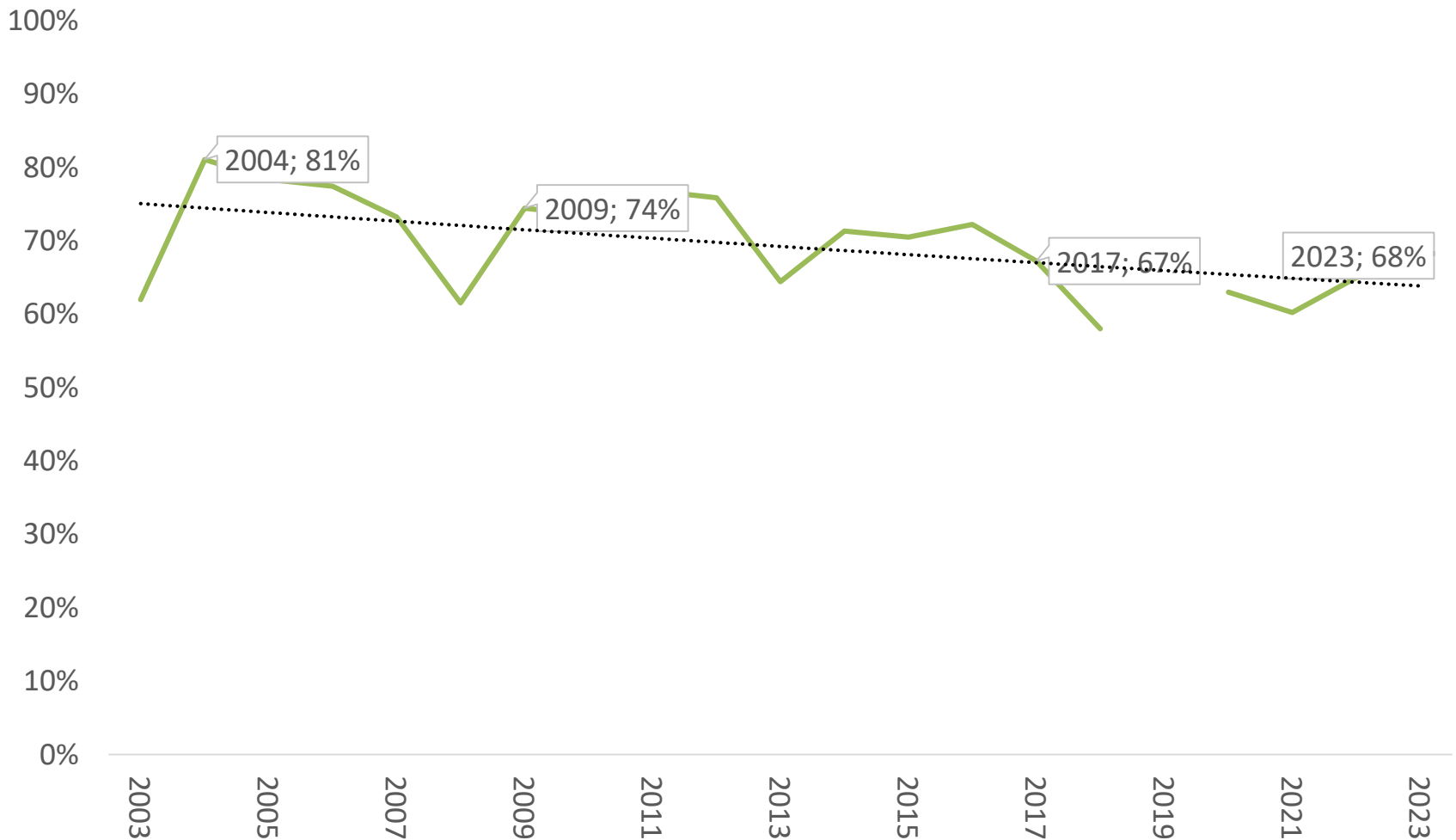
- + *Voting intention*
- + *Main reasons for not voting*
- + *Scenarios that may intention to vote*

# 06



# Voting Intention

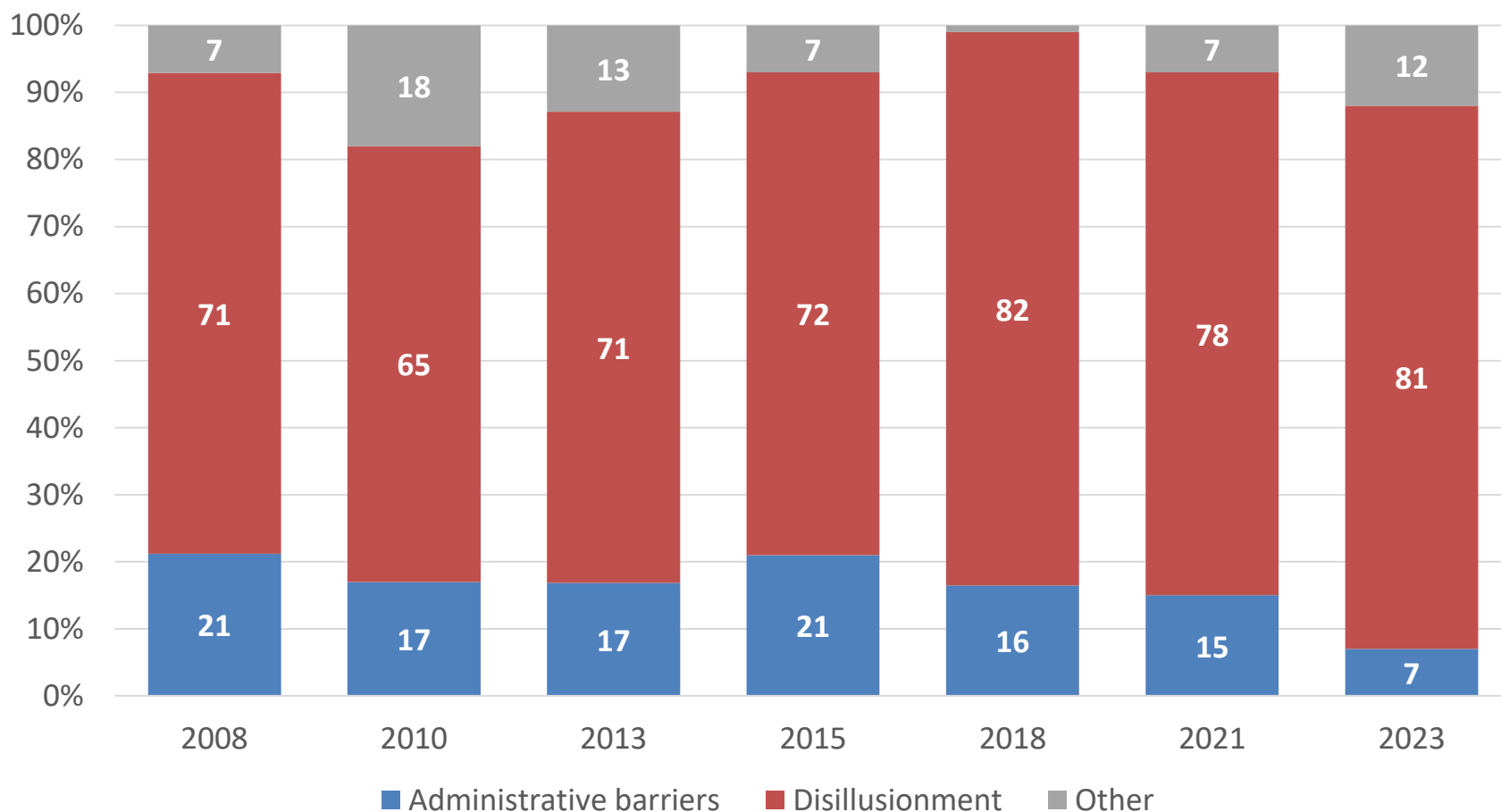
**If national government elections were to be held tomorrow, would you vote?**





# Reasons for Planned Abstention

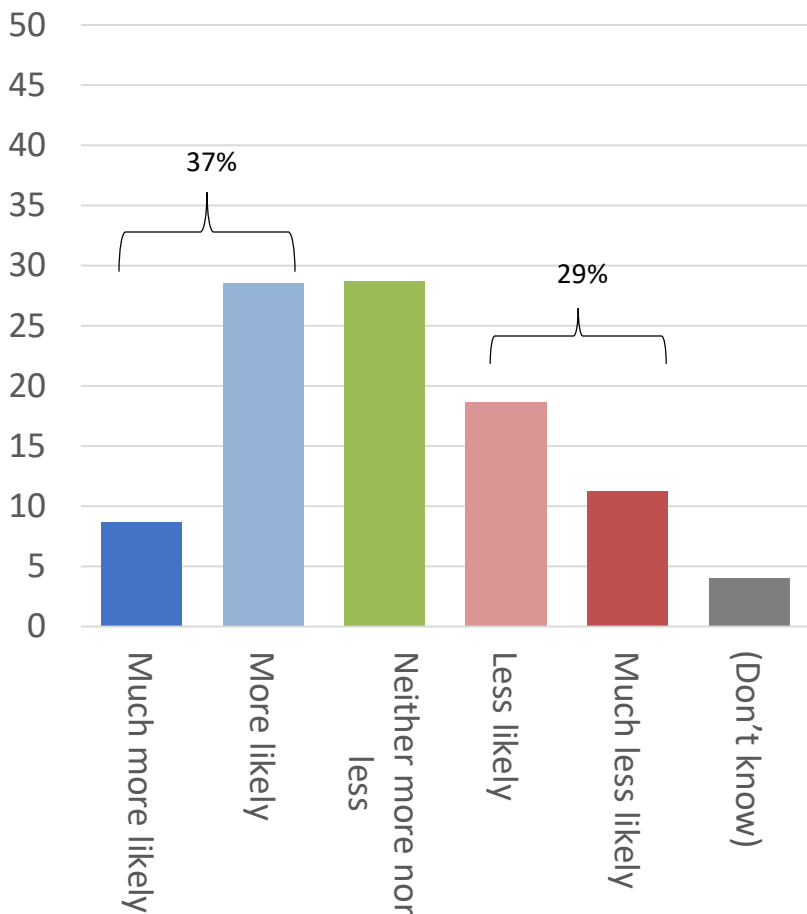
“What is your main reason for thinking that you may not vote if national government elections were to be held tomorrow?”



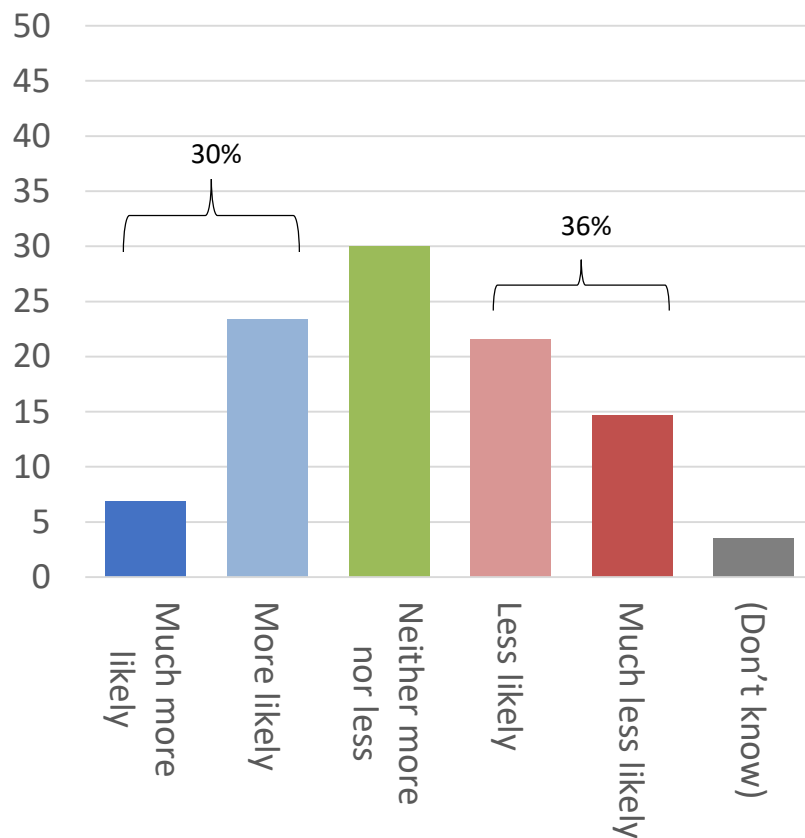


# Electoral Possibilities

**“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?”**



# Election Commission Appraisals



- + *Knowledge of the Commission*
- + *Evaluations of Commission Activities*
- + *Overall Assessment of the Commission*

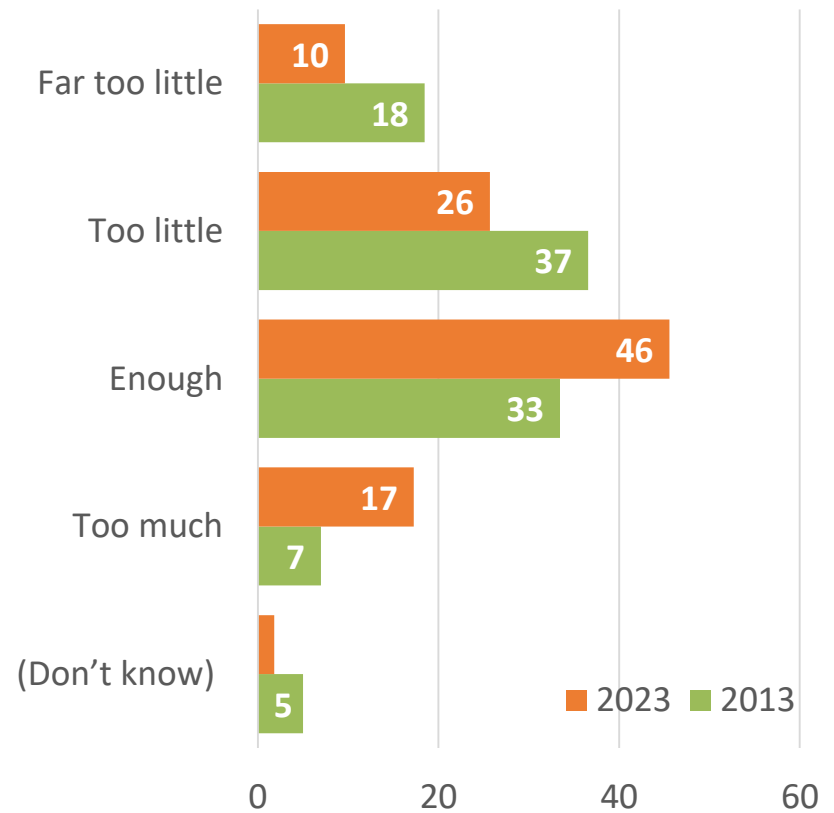
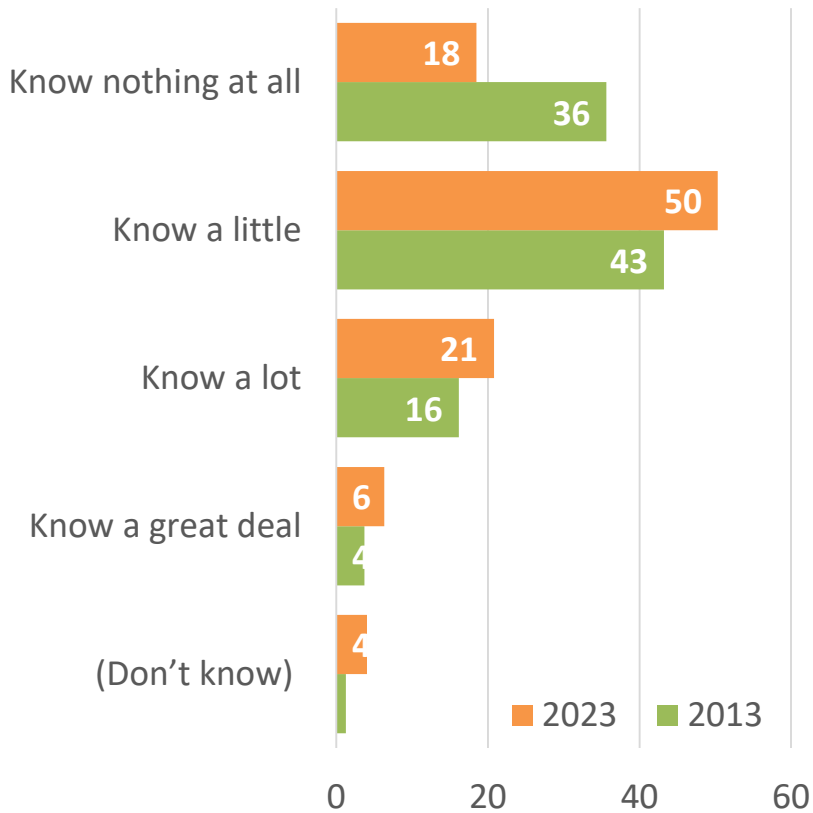
# 07



# Knowledge of the Commission

**How much would you say you know about the Electoral Commission?**

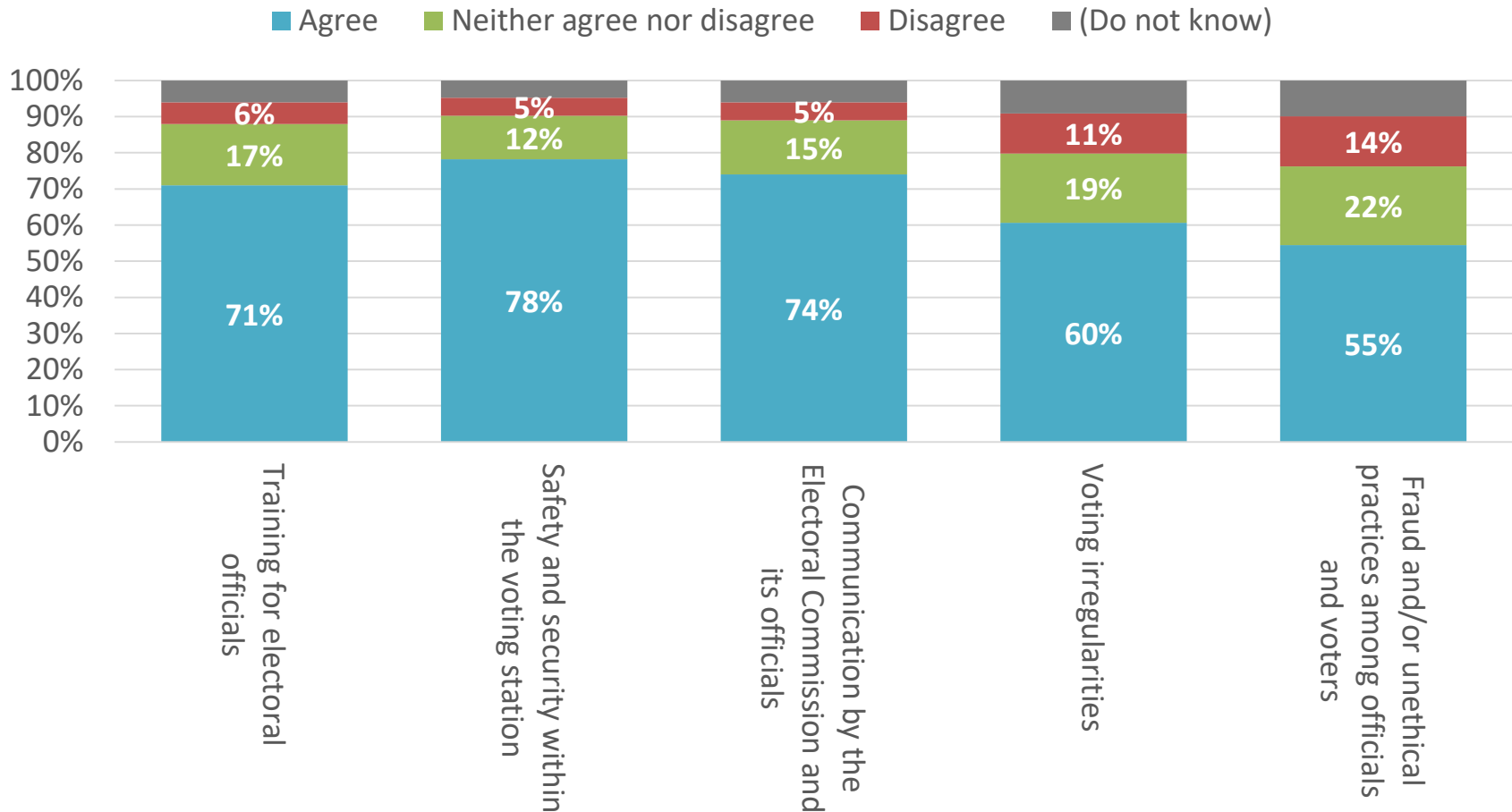
**Do you think you have too little or too much information about the services provided by the Electoral Commission?**





# Evaluations of Commission Activities

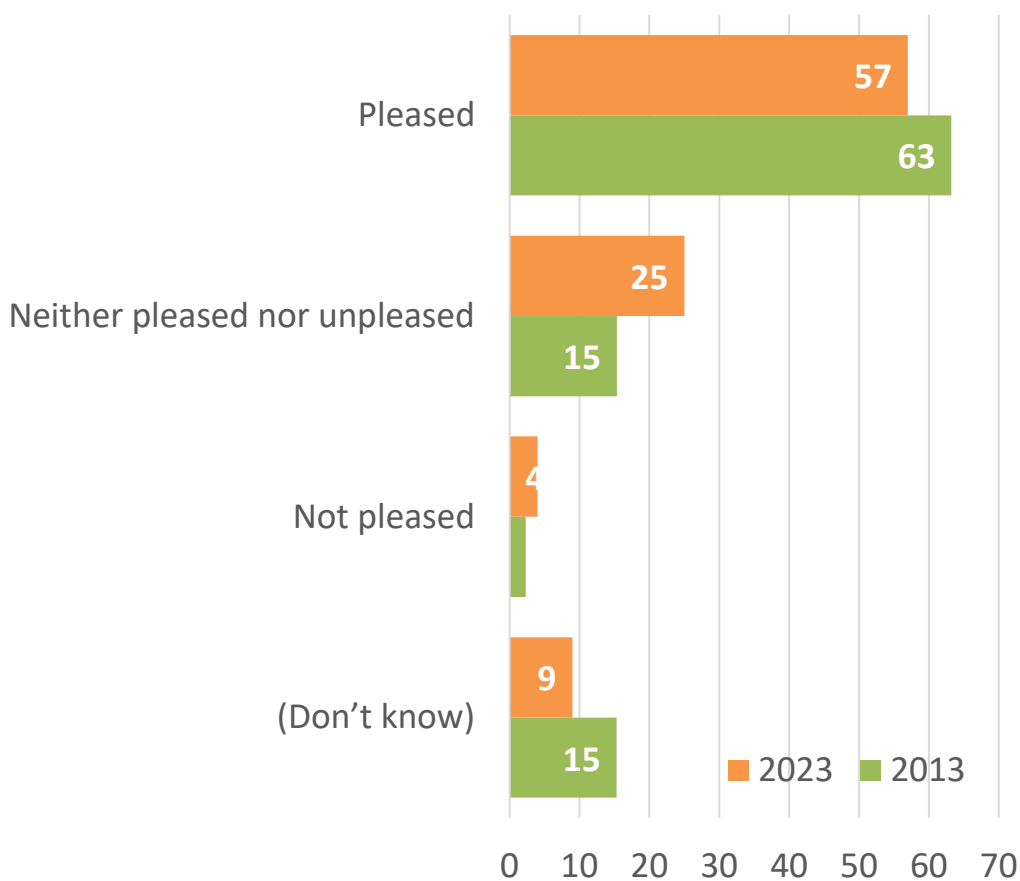
*“Do you agree or disagree that the Electoral Commission deals with the following issues adequately?”*





# Overall Commission Appraisals

**How pleased were you with the performance of the Electoral Commission during previous elections?**

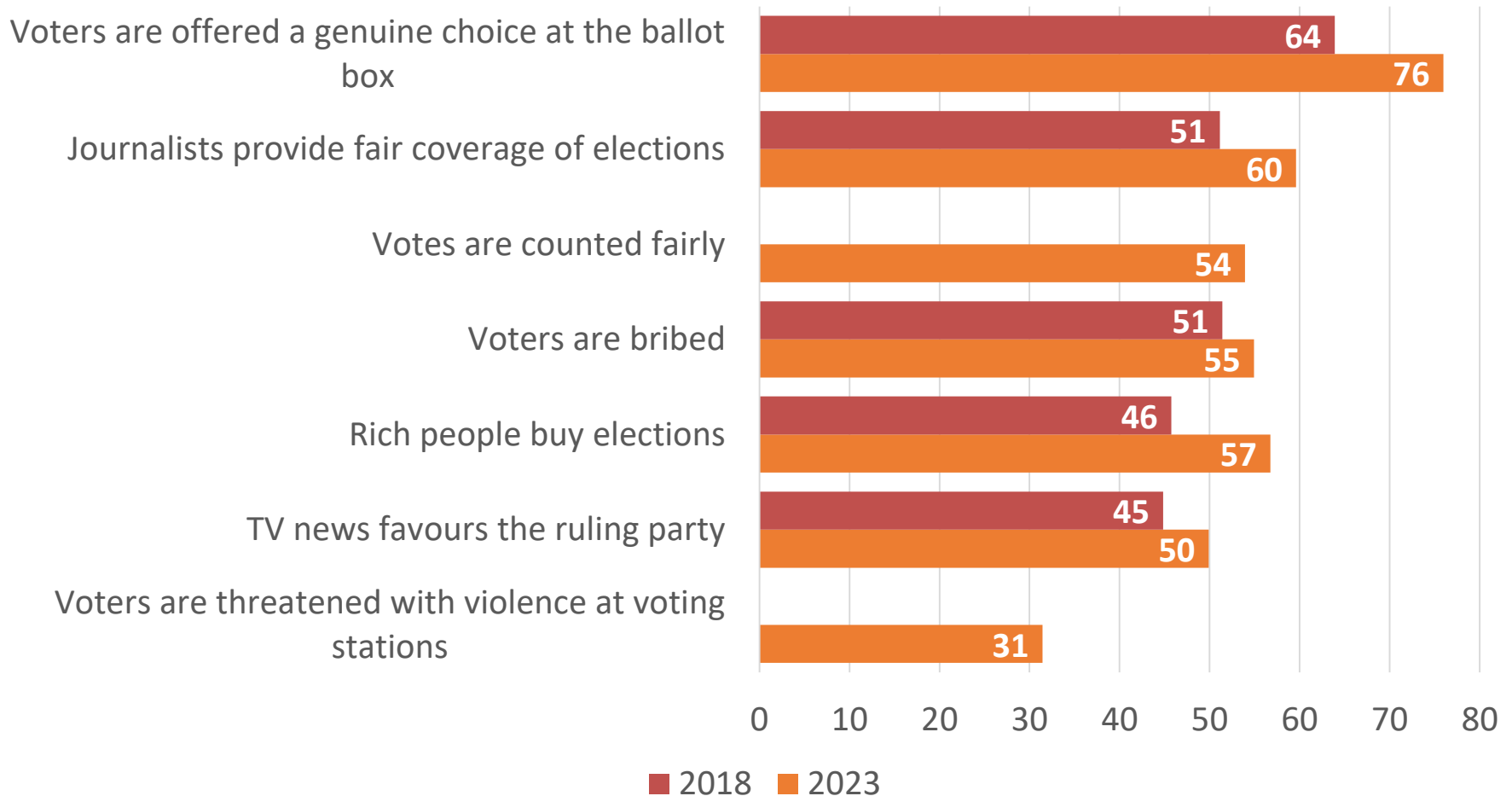


- Performance is highest amongst **North West** (63%) adults and lowest amongst **Limpopo** (49%) adults.
- 72% of **recent voters** were pleased with the performance of the Commission, 14 percentage points above **non-recent voters** and 44 points above **non-voters**.
- The vast majority of recent voters were satisfied with **efficiency, impartiality** and **friendliness** of the electoral officials at their **voting station**.



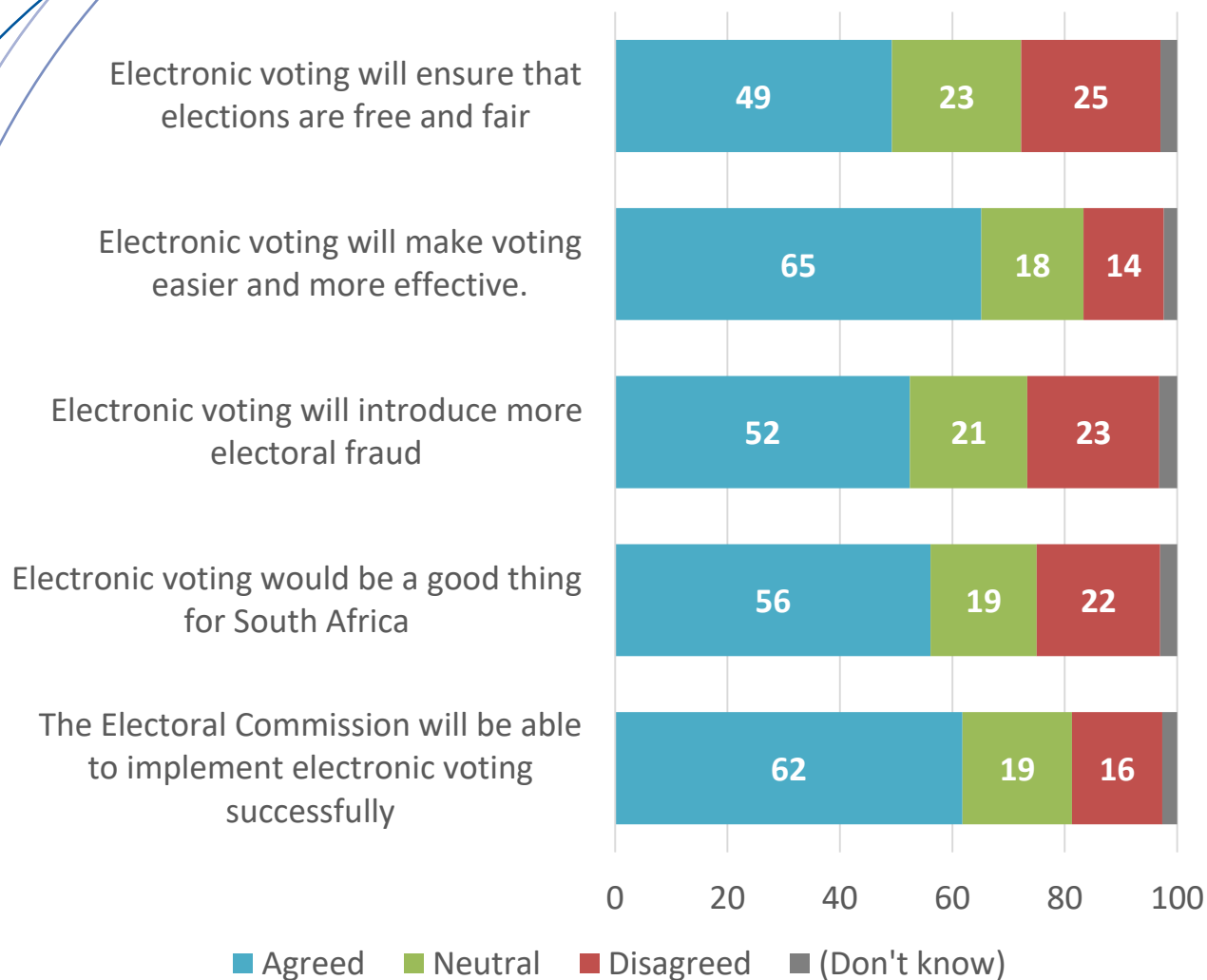
# Perceptions of Campaign Integrity

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





# Electronic Voting



- Electronic voting will **promote convenience** and usability (65%)
- The IEC will be able to **implement** e-voting (62%)
- E-voting would be **beneficial** for the country (56%)
- Weaker agreement that it will promote electoral **freeness** and **fairness** (49%)

# Conclusion





# Conclusions

- NPE 2019 and LGE 2021 were undertaken amid one of the **harshest political moods** observed since 1994. This is reflected in the VPS 2023 results.
- The VPS 2023 pointed to increasingly **critical evaluations of electoral democracy** among citizens.
- Findings suggest that the **low turnout scenario** seen in the 2019 NPE will be repeated for the 2024 NPE.
- Political **discontent** and **disillusionment** emerged as the main reason for **electoral absenteeism**, 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

## Dr Benjamin Roberts

SASAS Coordinator

Tel: (031) 242 5606

Cell: 0845230374

email: [broberts@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:broberts@hsrc.ac.za)

## Dr Jarè Struwig

SASAS Coordinator

Tel: (012) 302 2511

Cell: 0827745749

email: [jstruwig@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:jstruwig@hsrc.ac.za)

### contact information

For more info, please  
contact us at