



ROUND 4

UJ-HSRC COVID-19 DEMOCRACY SURVEY

The public's views on electoral postponement: A research briefing

8 July 2021

Summary of key findings

- Nearly two-thirds (61%) of the public support postponing the 2021 local government elections currently scheduled for 27 October 2021.
- Of those who support postponement, just over half (52%) strongly support postponement, demonstrating that the public seem to have clear views on the issue of electoral postponement.
- Support for postponement is largely consistent across various socio-demographic variables, including gender, age, education, employment, and subjective poverty status. This demonstrates that there is a high degree of public consensus on this issue.
- Views on postponement differ somewhat by race, although all population groups mostly support postponement. Indian and Asian adults most strongly favour postponement (82%), while White adults have the lowest relative level of support for postponement (52%). While this is lower than other population groups, it demonstrates that just over half of White adults want to opt for postponement.
- Regardless of political party supported, most prefer postponement. ANC supporters are most likely to favour postponement (67%), but support for postponement amongst EFF and DA supporters is similarly high, 63% and 61% respectively. Supporters of other political parties approve of postponement slightly less (53%), but this group is also more likely to be neutral or unsure than supporters of the three main political parties.
- There was negligible difference in preferences among residents of urban and rural areas. In urban areas, 62% support postponement, compared to 61% in rural areas. Similarly, although there are discernable differences amongst the different provinces in support for postponement, it is nonetheless the primary response in all provinces.
- Those that are unwilling to sacrifice their human rights to support the pandemic response are less partial towards postponement (45%) than those who are willing to sacrifice their human rights (66%). However, this does not mean that this group necessarily prefers going ahead with the local government elections either, as a third (33%) indicated that they were neutral or unsure about the issue. Only 22% of those unwilling to sacrifice their human rights are anti-postponement.
- From a risk assessment perspective, those who believe that the worst is yet to come overwhelmingly favour postponement, 69%, compared to 57% of those who believe the situation will largely remain the same, and 54% who think we are over the worst. While the perception of risk does influence people's views on postponement, postponement is still the most supported option across all three groups.

Introduction

This briefing reports on findings from Round 4 of the University of Johannesburg (UJ)/Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Covid-19 Democracy Survey relating to the public's views on postponing the 2021 Local Government Elections. This survey was launched on 25 June 2021 and is still collecting responses. The survey can be taken [here](#). Only adults living in South Africa were surveyed. We asked: "Given the Covid-19 pandemic, would you support or oppose a postponement of the 2021 local government elections (27 October) to a later date?" Responses were captured using a five-point scale, ranging from strongly support to strongly oppose postponement.

Survey methodology

The online survey was conducted using the #datafree Moya Messenger App. The Moya Messenger app, which is operated by Datafree, has 5 million monthly users, 800,000 of whom use the app every day. The survey was available in six languages: English, Afrikaans, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Setswana and Sesotho. English was the most common language used. The survey was fully completed by 4,728 participants. Most people undertaking the survey did so using a smartphone, access to which has increased rapidly in recent years. However, there is a skew in terms of who has access to smartphones, particularly between older and younger people. For this reason, it was essential to apply weighting to our data. Our quantitative findings have been weighted to match Statistics South Africa data on race, education and age, and can be regarded as broadly representative of the adult population at large.

The public's views on electoral postponement

Figure 1: Views on electoral postponement, aggregated results (%)

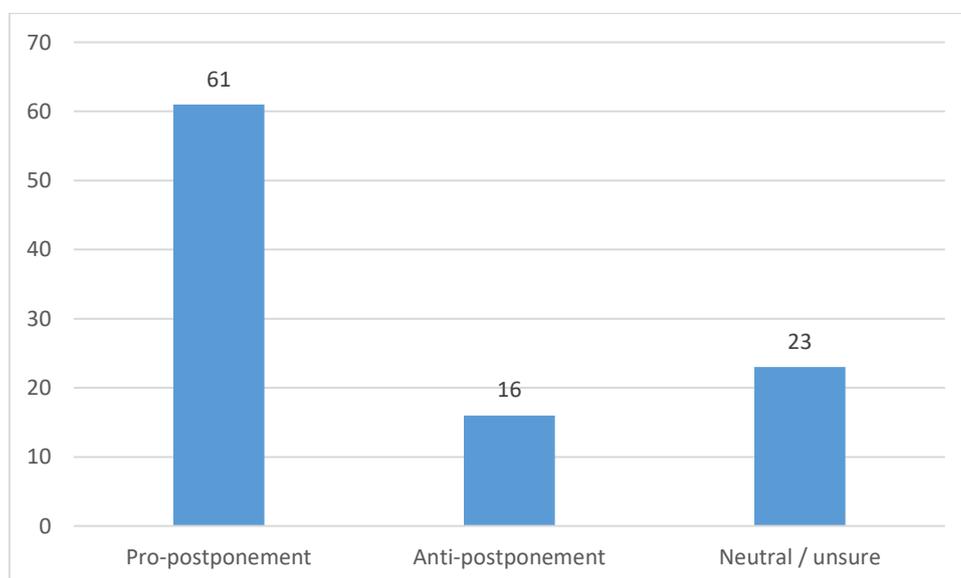
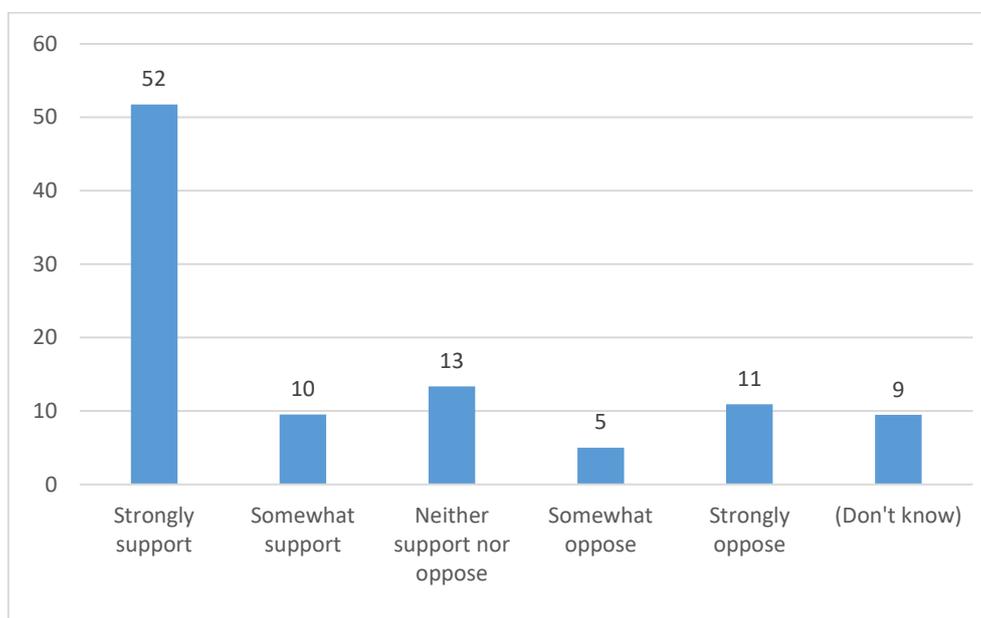


Figure 1 below provides a summary of the public's views on electoral postponement. It demonstrates that 61% either strongly support or somewhat support electoral postponement, whereas 16% are opposed or strongly opposed to postponement. Nearly a quarter (23%) are neutral or unsure.

Figure 2 presents this information in further detail, providing the percentage breakdown for each answer category. What this demonstrates is that just over half (52%), strongly support postponement.

Figure 2: Views on electoral postponement, disaggregated result (%)



Views on electoral postponement by socio-demographics

Table 1 below illustrates the public’s views on electoral postponement by some key demographic and socio-economic variables, such as gender, age, race, education level, employment status, and subjective poverty status. What the results demonstrate is a high degree of consensus amongst the public in their preferences towards postponement.

Support for postponement varies little by gender. Men support postponement slightly more than women (64% compared to 60%). However, anti-postponement sentiment is somewhat stronger amongst women, with 27% of women not favouring postponement compared to 18% of men. However, overall, both genders are largely in agreement with postponement.

While there is some variation across age groups, at least half of each cohort favour postponement. There is consistent support for electoral postponement amongst those aged 25-34 years, 35-44 years, and 45-54 years. The lowest level of support for postponement is evident among older persons aged 55 years and above, at 52%, and conversely, they have the highest anti-postponement sentiment, 28%. As this age group is the one that is most likely to be vaccinated amongst the general public, it is unclear to what extent this may shape their views. Early indications from the survey evidence is that vaccination among this age group reduces support for postponement, with greater proportional shares opting for neutral and anti-postponement responses.

By race, Indian and Asian adults voice the strongest approval of postponement (82%), followed by Black African (62%) and Coloured (59%) adults. White adults display the lowest levels of support for postponement (52%), but it remains the predominant response. White adults are the most unsure about whether the elections should go ahead, with 29% either neutral or unsure,

nearly twice the level observed among Black African or Coloured adults, and significantly more than Indian and Asian adults.

Table 1: Views on electoral postponement by socio-demographics, Jun/July 2021, weighted row %

	Pro-postponement	Anti-postponement	Neutral / Unsure	Total
Male	64	18	18	100
Female	60	27	13	100
18-24	59	28	13	100
25-34	65	20	15	100
35-44	65	21	14	100
45-54	64	18	19	100
55+	52	28	20	100
Black African	62	24	14	100
Coloured	59	24	17	100
Indian/Asian	82	13	5	100
White	52	19	29	100
Less than matric	61	25	14	100
Matric	63	20	17	100
Post-matric	61	19	21	100
Employed	63	19	18	100
Unemployed	63	23	14	100
Student	58	27	15	100
Other labour inactive	53	29	18	100
Non-poor	60	22	18	100
Just get	63	22	15	100
Poor	60	24	16	100

Interestingly, support for postponement differs little by education or by subjective poverty status. Similarly, levels of support for postponement are the same amongst the employed and unemployed, 63% favour postponement across both groups. Students and other people who are not currently active in the labour market (including pensioners) agree with postponement less than either the employed or the unemployed but most still favour postponement overall. 58% of students back postponement and 53% of those otherwise inactive in the labour market favour postponement.

Views on electoral postponement by party support

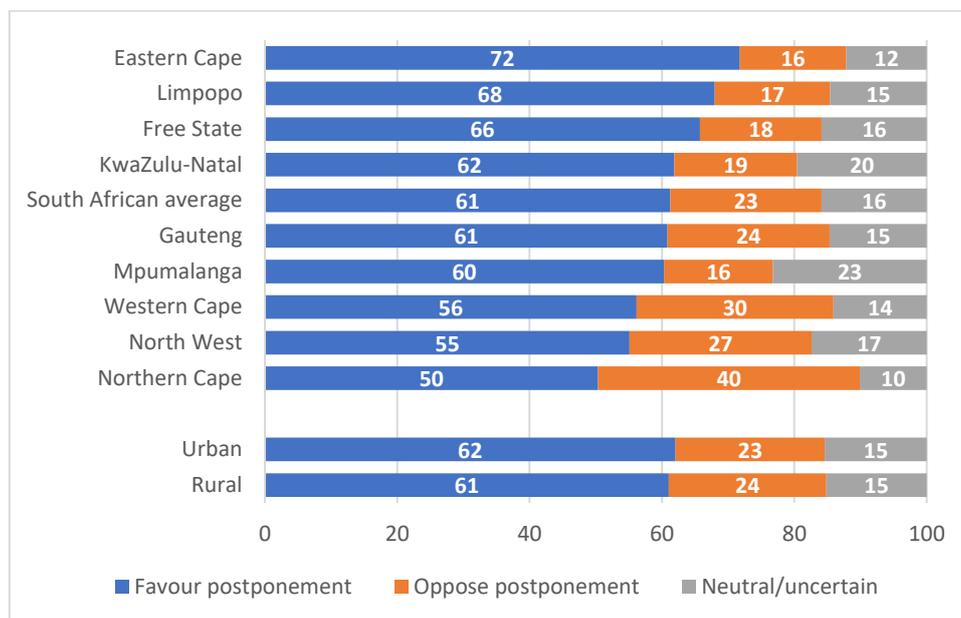
Table 2: Views on electoral postponement by party support, Jun/July 2021, weighted row %

	Pro-postponement	Anti-postponement	Neutral / Unsure	Total
ANC supporters	67	22	11	100
DA supporters	61	15	24	100
EFF supporters	63	17	20	100
Supporters of other parties	53	19	27	100
Would not vote	61	24	15	100

Table 2 shows views on electoral postponement based upon party support. The table shows that regardless of party support that most back postponement. ANC supporters are most likely to favour postponement (67%) but support for postponement amongst EFF and DA supporters is similarly high, 63% and 61%, respectively. Supporters of other political parties approve of postponement slightly less at 53%, this group is also more likely to be neutral or unsure compared to supporters of the three main political parties.

Spatial variation

Figure 3: Views on electoral postponement, by province and urban/rural residence (%)



The third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has been dominated by a relatively large surge in case numbers in Gauteng. Our results show that the share of Gauteng-based residents that favour electoral postponement (61%) is not higher than in the other eight provinces on average (61%). However, there are discernible differences on a province-by-province basis. Above-average support for postponing the election was found in the Eastern Cape (72%), Limpopo (68%) and Free State (66%). The lowest support for postponement was in the Northern Cape (50%), where 40% expressed support for the election proceeding as scheduled. Lower than average support for postponement was also evident in North West province and the Western Cape. Despite this varying depth of support for postponement, this was nonetheless the primary response in all provinces.

There was negligible difference in preferences among residents or urban and rural areas. In urban areas, 62% favoured postponement, compared to 61% in rural areas. Similar shares also provided anti-postponement and uncertain responses.

Views on electoral postponement by social and political attitudes

Table 3: Views on electoral postponement by selected social and political attitudes, Jun/July 2021, weighted row %

	Pro-postponement	Anti-postponement	Neutral / Unsure	Total
Presidential COVID-19 performance evaluation				
President: Good job in handling pandemic	66	22	12	100
President: Bad job in handling pandemic	50	18	32	100
National Government COVID-19 performance evaluation				
National Govt: Good job in handling pandemic	66	22	12	100
National Govt: Bad job in handling pandemic	52	17	31	100
Human rights sacrifice				
Willing to sacrifice human rights to stop spread of COVID	66	20	14	100
Unwilling to sacrifice human rights to stop spread of COVID	45	22	33	100
COVID-19 outlook				
The worst is yet to come	69	18	13	100
The situation will largely remain the same	57	24	19	100
We are over the worst of it - things will begin to improve	54	28	18	100
(Don't know)	41	41	18	100

Table 3 presents views on electoral postponement based upon a range of social and political attitudes that were measured by the survey. As we have found in [our other research](#), evaluations of the President's handling of the pandemic can significantly influence willingness to abide by public health measures, such as mask-wearing, and on the willingness to vaccinate. Similarly, when it comes to views on electoral postponement the evaluation of the President's performance plays a role. Two-thirds (66%) of those who think President Ramaphosa has done a good job in responding to the pandemic favour postponement, compared to 50% of those who think he has performed poorly. Amongst those who think the President has done a bad job, uncertainty and neutrality about the elections is higher, with nearly a third (32%) unsure or neutral about postponement. These patterns are again present when we analyse electoral postponement preferences based by evaluations of the national government's pandemic response (see table 3 above).

As we might expect, those that are unwilling to sacrifice their human rights to support the pandemic response are less partial towards postponement (45%) than those who are willing to sacrifice their human rights (66%). However, this does not mean that this group necessarily prefers going ahead with the local government elections either, as a third (33%) indicated that they were neutral or unsure about the issue. Only 22% of those unwilling to sacrifice their human rights are anti-postponement.

Finally, from a risk assessment perspective, the survey reveals the extent to which views about whether the pandemic will get better or worse shape views on electoral postponement. Those who believe that the worst is yet to come overwhelmingly favour postponement, 69%, compared to 57% of those who believe the situation will largely remain the same, and 54% who think we are over the worst. While the perception of risk does influence people's views on postponement it should still be highlighted that the majority across all three of these categories support postponement. Those who are unsure about whether things will get better or worse are more divided in their views about electoral postponement, with 41% supporting postponement and 41% opposing postponement.

Conclusion

This report has provided an insight into the public's views on whether the 2021 local government elections should be postponed. This analysis reveals that nearly two-thirds (61%) of South Africans favour postponement with 52% strongly supporting postponement. The research further demonstrates that the consensus for postponement is largely consistent across a range of socio-demographic variables, such as gender, age, race, education level, employment status and subjective poverty status.

Of the demographic variables, the largest differences in opinion were by race. Indian and Asian adults most strongly favour postponement (82%). White adults have the lowest levels of support for postponement, but just over half (52%) favour postponement. White adults are more unsure or neutral than other population groups about whether the elections should go ahead. Spatially, there is only marginal variation between urban and rural residents. While the degree of support for postponement varies more provincially, this was the clear preference in all cases.

The analysis has also demonstrated that regardless of which political party is supported, postponement is the most preferred option. Support for postponement is highest amongst ANC supporters. Amongst those who support political parties outside of the ANC, EFF and DA, support for postponement was lower but still represented just over half (53%) of supporter of other parties.

Considering all socio-demographic, spatial, and attitudinal measures jointly, we find that personal characteristics have virtually no statistically significant effect on electoral postponement. This reinforces the idea of a broad societal consensus on the matter. Instead, the basis of varying strength of support for postponement appears to be influenced more by attitudes relating to political trust and performance, COVID-19 risk perceptions, and beliefs about acting in the collective interest of the health of all South Africans during this time of national crisis. While these may modify support for postponement, the broad consensus is still one that favours postponement.

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Submission team

The data analysis and preparation of this submission was prepared jointly by a collaborative team from the University of Johannesburg and Human Sciences Research Council, including Carin Runciman, Narnia Bohler-Muller, Benjamin Roberts, and Kate Alexander.

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