

How do South Africans view key Government foreign policies?

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RS, South Africa's leading marketing insights company, conducted a survey in October amongst a sample of 2 000 SA adults from the seven major metropolitan areas of South Africa, interviewing them face-to-face in their homes, and asking their views on key issues.

One such issue concerned people's views on some of South Africa's foreign policies and how people feel about some key countries affecting South Africa.

What about Zimbabwe?

Adult South Africans in metro areas do not think much of Robert Mugabe. Only 11% feel he is doing a good job as President of Zimbabwe (compared with 59% feeling that President Mbeki is doing a good job as President of South Africa). Although there is some variation in the figure across different race groups, President Mugabe's approval rating is universally low:

- Black Africans - 14% feel President Mugabe is doing a good job (especially males at 18%)
- Coloureds - 8%
- Whites - 4%
- Indians - 4%

Similarly, only 11% feel that Zimbabwe has a positive future with President Mugabe in power. Again, this was highest amongst black Africans (15%) and particularly low amongst white males (2%).

Seven out of ten people disagree that President Mugabe is doing a good job and that Zimbabwe has a positive future under him. A surprisingly high number of people are not sure - one in five in both cases.

Perhaps not surprisingly in the light of these perceptions, 58% of people feel that current policies in Zimbabwe ignore basic human rights. However, whilst only 13% disagree with this perception, a high three out of ten don't know. Differences by population group are high:

- White - 72% feel that current policies in Zimbabwe ignore basic human rights
- Coloureds - 67%
- Indian - 64%
- Black - 53%

When people were asked about South Africa's role in relation to Zimbabwe, there is ambivalence:

"Should South Africa be doing more to intervene in policies in Zimbabwe?"

- Yes - 41% (whites 51%, blacks and coloureds 39%, Indians 33%)
- No - 40%
- Don't know - 19%

"Should South Africa impose sanctions on Zimbabwe?"

- Yes - 37% (whites 49%, coloureds 47%, Indians 43%, blacks 31%)
- No - 34%
- Don't know - 29%

Again, the high proportion of people saying "don't know" suggests a fair amount of uncertainty in people's minds around the issue of Zimbabwe.

What about Iraq?

Only 15% of metro adults feel that America was right to invade Iraq, whilst 59% disagree and a quarter are not sure. Whites at 30% (and especially males at 37%) are the most likely to feel America's course of action was correct; 21% of coloureds, 18% of Indians and only 9% of blacks feel this way. People aged 50 years and older are also more militant in this regard with 19% agreeing.

What about the Israel and the Palestinian question?

When asked whether South Africa should impose sanctions on Israel because of what it is doing in Palestine, 26% agree, 36% disagree and a massive 38% don't know. Males are more likely to agree, especially black males at 32%. People aged 50 years and older are less likely to agree (19%), whilst younger people (under 24 years old) are more likely to agree (29%)

What about President Mbeki's role in foreign affairs?

People were asked questions about the amount of time they feel the President spends on South Africa compared with other countries:

"Thabo Mbeki spends too much time out of South Africa"

- Agree - 68% (coloureds 79%, Indians 75%, whites 73%, blacks 65%)
- Disagree - 15%
- Don't know - 17%

"Thabo Mbeki devotes too much time to Africa and too little time to South Africa"

- Agree - 62% (coloureds and Indians 75%, whites 70%, blacks 57%)
- Disagree - 19%
- Don't know - 19%

From this it is clear that, perhaps not surprisingly, people see Africa as a higher priority than elsewhere.

In summary

- The research indicates that on Zimbabwe, South Africans generally acknowledge that Robert Mugabe is not doing a good job as president and that the future of the country is not rosy. However, there is not a clear mandate from South Africans as to what needs to be done from a South African viewpoint - while there is a high percentage of people who simply don't have a view, the balance is split between those who feel that SA should intervene in some form or another and those who don't agree with this approach.
- On foreign policy issues such as Iraq and the Israel/Palestinian situation, six in ten South Africans feel that America was not right to invade Iraq, with a further one in four not casting an opinion. On the Israel/Palestinian situation, the situation is not as clear - over one in three do not have a clear opinion. This issue is highly complex judging by the responses.
- Regarding Thabo Mbeki's role in affairs outside of South Africa, there seems to be considerable agreement with the notion that the President spends too much time out of S.A. and that his time could be spent more productively in S.A. Here, the results, not surprisingly, show that people see South Africa as a higher priority than elsewhere.

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