

SA tax-payers speak truth to power

Issued by [BrandMapp](#)

14 Mar 2023

BrandMapp publishes SA Blackout Report.



Load shedding, South Africa's euphemism for rolling blackouts, has been a part of the country's reality since 2007. According to Stats SA, 65% of South Africans live in urban environments, dependent on the country's power grid in a myriad of ways from cooking daily meals to studying for a qualification or getting their jobs done.

After 16 years of being unpredictably plunged into darkness and wilfully disconnected, it's not easy to put a finger on all the damage done. But we can find out how South Africans are feeling and how they are dealing with Eskom's scheduled blackouts and other power failures.

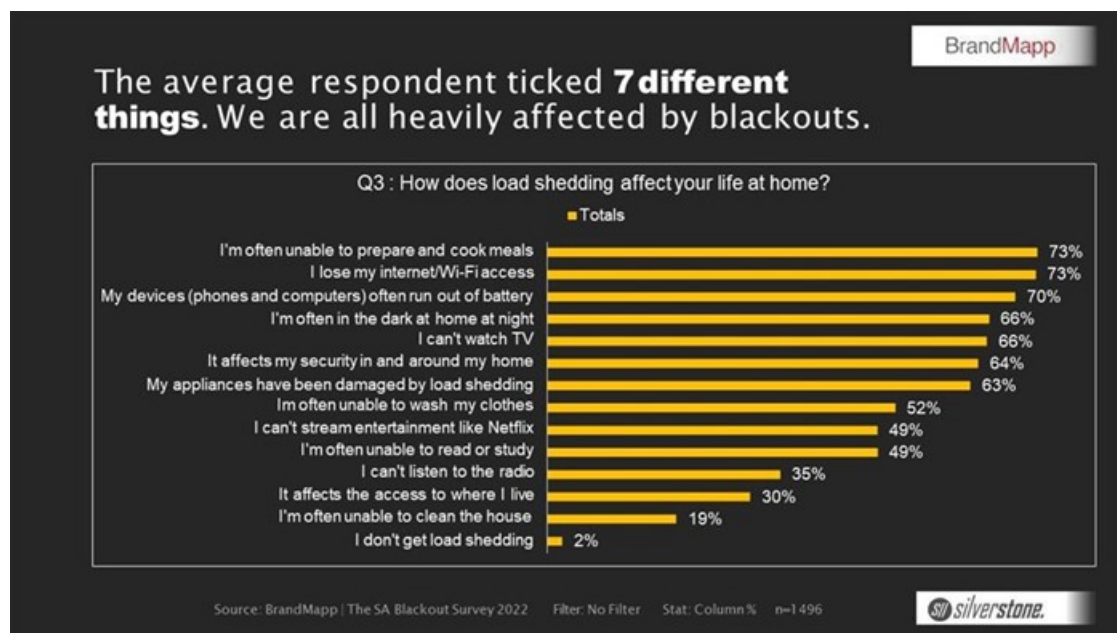
BrandMapp, the country's leading consumer insights researcher into middle to top income South African consumers has joined forces with SilverstoneCIS to conduct a unique survey into the impacts of rolling blackout on the country's taxpaying base. The online study targeted respondents living in households with R10k+ income, those most able to mitigate the many debilitating impacts of Eskom's load shedding, and the first-ever SA Blackout Report has been released in March 2023.

BrandMapp's director of storytelling, Brandon de Kock says, "We focus on the estimated 13 million individuals who comprise 100% of the personal taxpayer base. They are the lucky ones, the most resilient segment of society, who are best positioned to be able to buy themselves out of blackouts. If we can get a measure of how they are handling things, it might allow us to plan better, or differently for the future, and at very least give us insight into some of the hidden costs of our energy crisis. And at the same time, it will give us an idea of just how hard life in the dark must be for the millions of lower-income citizens who have far fewer options."

An interesting caveat to the BrandMapp SA Blackout Report is that the survey field work of almost 1 500 South Africans were completed four days before Eskom's ex-CEO, Andre de Ruyter's explosive 'whistle-blower' interview was televised. De Kock says, "As we consider the results today, it is with the awareness that whatever views are expressed by respondents, it was well before they could be swayed or influenced by any of the startling revelations and accusations that came to light

about crime cartels, sabotage, potential political collusion and outright treason against we, the people of South Africa.”

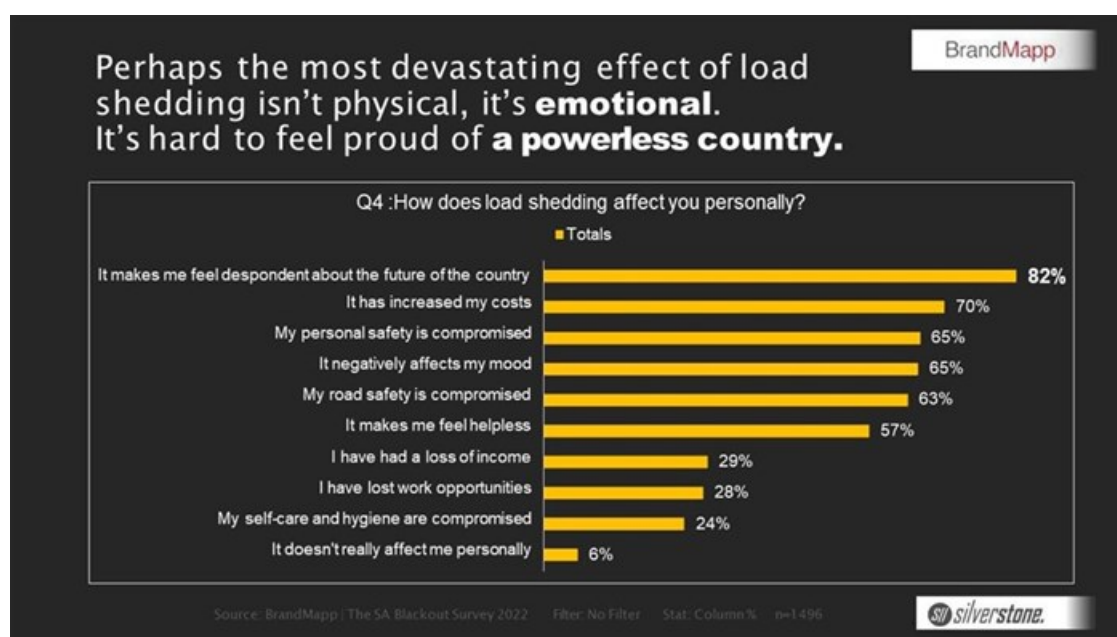
The blackout impact on our home lives



The average SA Blackout Report respondent ticked no less than seven different ways that they are impacted by blackouts at home. De Kock says, “There’s no doubt that we are heavily impacted by blackouts. More than 70% of mid to top income South Africans can’t reliably prepare meals at home, stay connected to the internet and keep their devices charged up.

“Over 60% are left in the dark without functioning security services and have broken appliances due to power surges. More than 50% can’t watch TV or stream entertainment such as Netflix. Thirty-five percent (35%) can’t listen to the radio. Almost 50% said that they cannot study or read, and when you isolate the students, that number rockets up to 80%. Tech issues aside, it also affects the basics of life with more than 50% unable to wash their clothes and 19% finding their house cleaning disrupted.”

How does it feel?



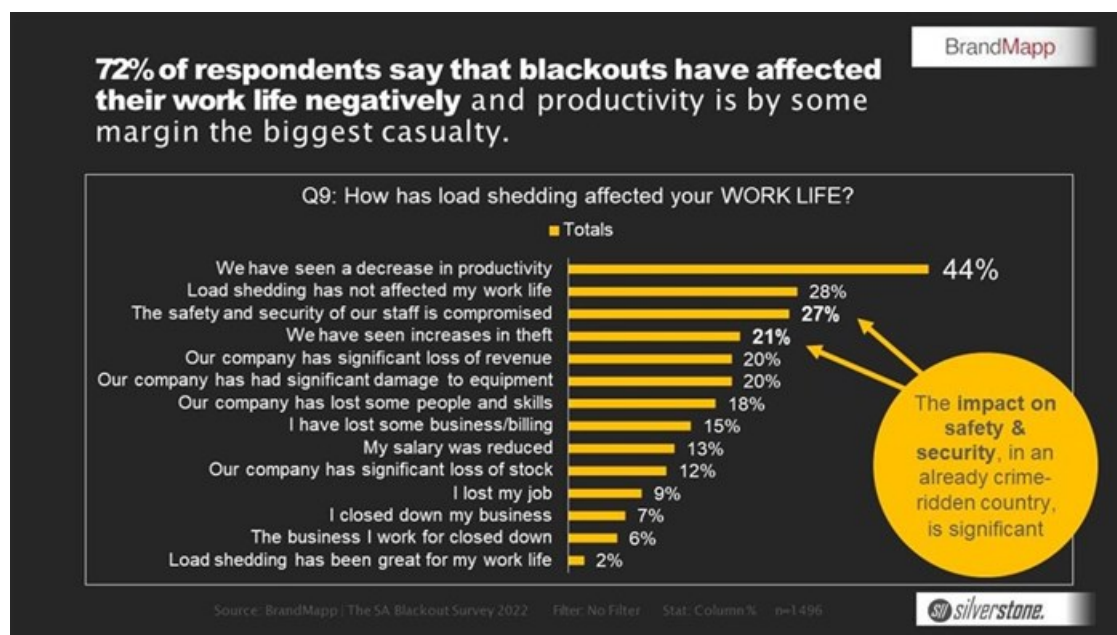
Eighty-two percent (82%) of mid to top income South Africans say that load shedding makes them despondent about the future of our country. It is the most impactful personal effect of load shedding with ‘increased costs’ in second place with

just 70%. “Let that sink in,” says De Kock. “Our legendary sense of hopefulness as a nation, that has seen us through so much in the past 30 years, might just be the biggest casualty of this whole mess.”

Sense of safety is also shattered, something that can’t be afforded in South Africa with its endemic high crime rates.

“65% of mid to top income South Africans believe that their personal safety is compromised by power failure,” says De Kock. “Can you imagine the mental health impacts of this? This speaks to the very basics of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, and if our mid to top income earners who can generally afford security systems and services, but they can’t tick the safety box because of blackouts, where does that leave our low income earners?”

The blackout impact on our work lives



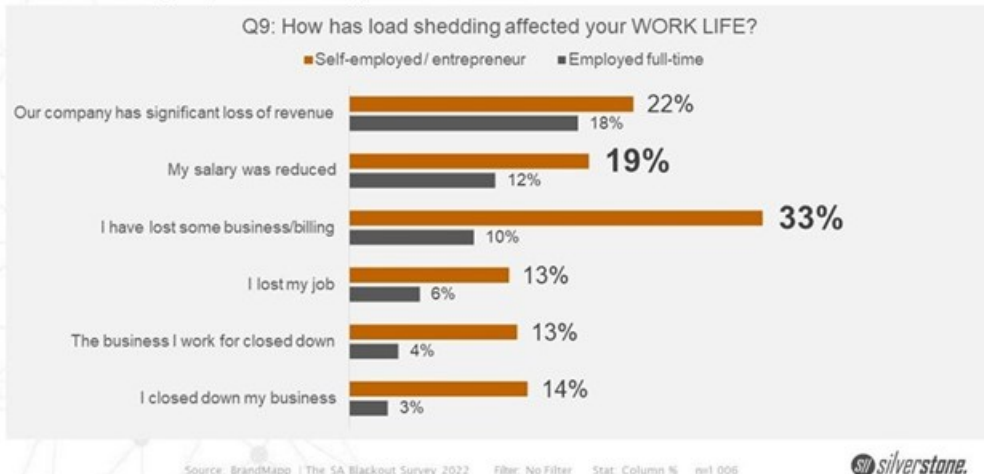
Seventy-two percent (72%) of South Africa’s taxpayers say that blackouts have affected their work life negatively, and productivity is the biggest casualty. Young people are disproportionately affected by the loss of work opportunities, which is deeply concerning in the context of the country’s high youth unemployment rate.

De Kock says, “What is also significant here is that almost 30% of respondents reported that staff safety and security are compromised during load shedding, and 21% note an increase in theft during blackouts. South Africa is crime-ridden with the lights on, but the emotional heft and financial losses due to crime are significantly amplified during power outages.”

What is happening to South African SMEs?

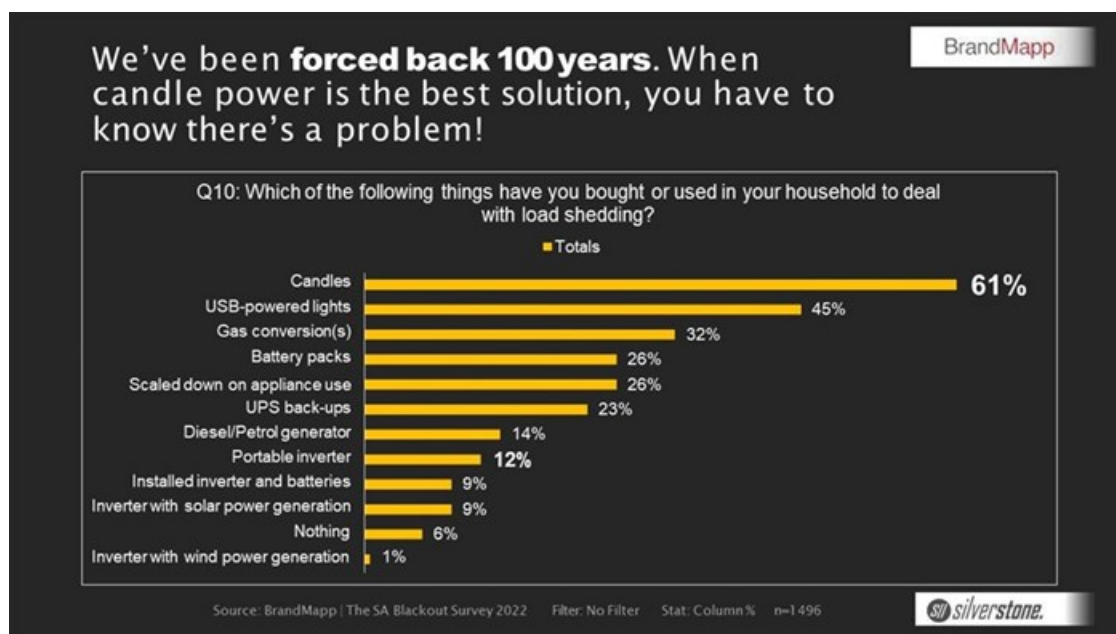
But there are significant material ways in which **entrepreneurs have been extremely adversely affected**, specifically, turnover.

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Twenty-two percent (22%) of business owners have experienced a significant loss of business revenue, and 33% say that they have lost some billings due to blackouts. De Kock says, “We’re talking here of a total 44% of self-employed entrepreneurs losing money when the power goes down. 75% also say their personal costs have increased. These are the risk-takers, the sole businesspeople and founders of start-ups who are vital to our economic health and play an outsized role when it comes to generating much-needed employment. They also face barriers to accessing finance to get them through tough times. In the fullness of time, we will have a better view of load shedding impacts on the multitude of small-businesses which we rely on to drive innovation and create employment, but given that they were only just starting to recover from the craziness of Covid, one can’t help feeling a bit bleak about the short-term health of the sector.”

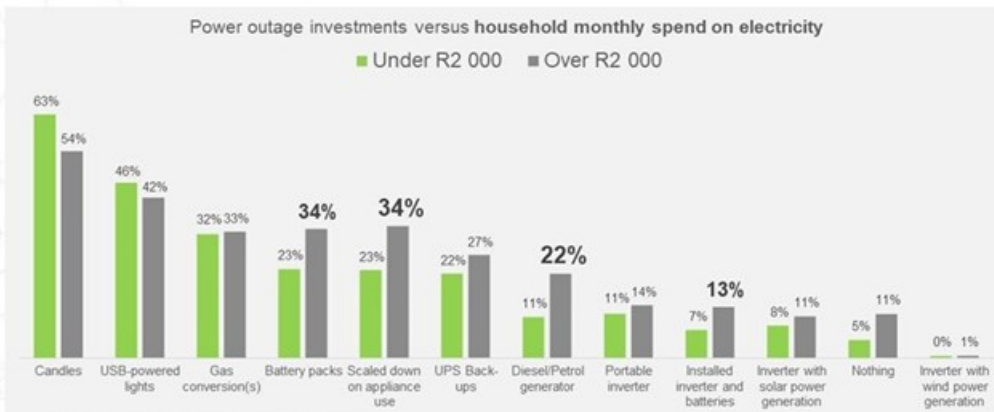
Coping by candlelight and the costs of resilience



Sixty-one percent (61%) of mid- to top-income South Africans resort to candle power during load shedding hours. De Kock says, “We’ve been forced back 100 years! When candle power is the best solution, you have to know there’s a problem. Only 32% have pivoted to gas. Battery packs and UPS back-ups help some get through the load shedding hours. However, the deployment of full solutions such as inverters and generators is low, and no doubt that is linked to high costs that are simply out of reach for most middle-income South Africans.”

The 25% of **people who spend the most on electricity** are significantly **more likely to be looking to solve the problems**: scaling down alone doesn't cure the problem.

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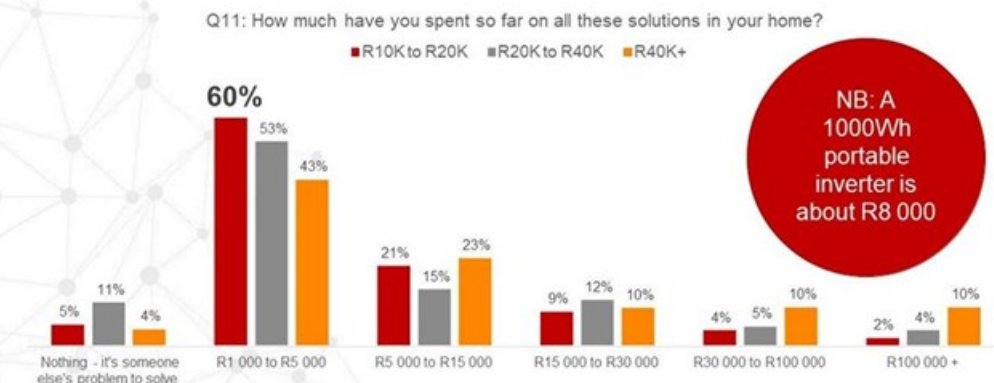
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As you would expect, we see from the SA Blackout Report that the lower income households have less to spend on power solutions, and it's only the top-income households that can invest in technologies such as solar powered inverter systems.

The vast majority of lower income households has not been able to spend more than R5 000 solving the problem unlike **20% of wealthy households** who have been able to throw **more than R30K** at the problem

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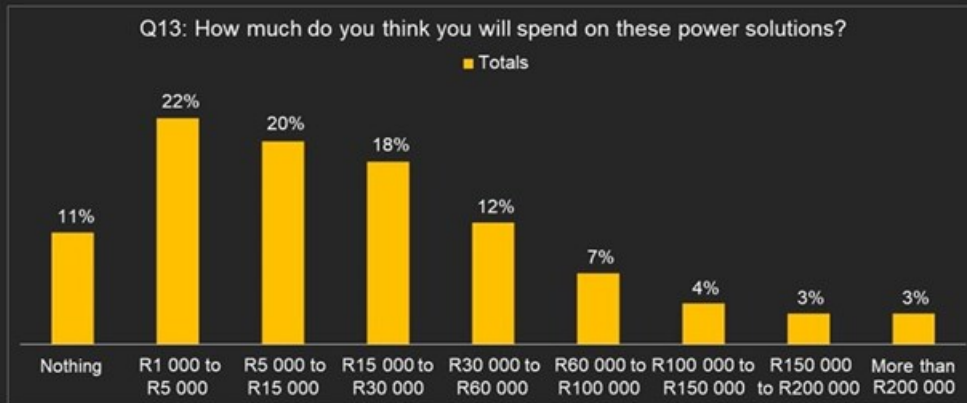
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The vast majority of lower income households have not been able to spend more than R5,000 to keep the lights on and stayed connected, unlike 20% of wealthy households who have been able to throw more than R30,000 at the problem. There's strong awareness that solar generated power would be a sustainable solution to our blackout woes, and it's on 39% of the respondents' wish lists.

79% of respondents are planning to **spend money to fight blackouts** – and about half of them can spend more than R15K doing so.

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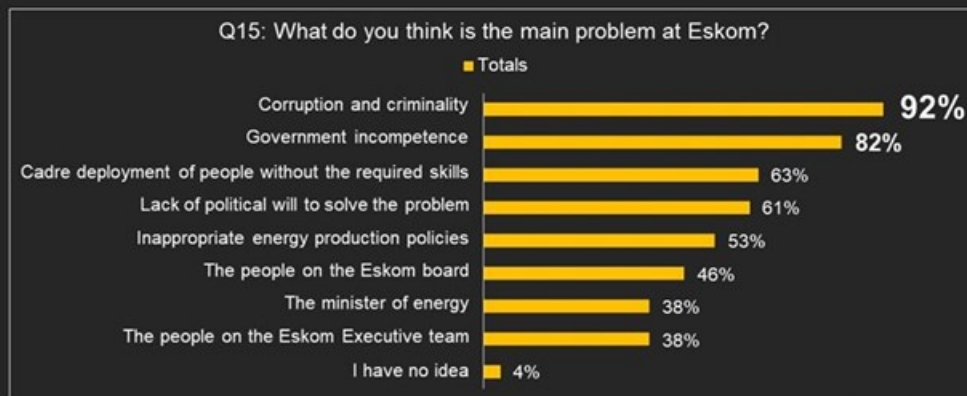
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Almost 90% of respondents said they are still planning to spend more of their hard earned cash on power solutions and around half of them say they can invest more than R15,000 to fight black outs.

Laying the blame, finding fixes and facing the future

Given a range of possible causes, respondents ticked an average of 5 out of 8. It means that **taxpaying adults do realise just how 'big' the problem is**. Still, corruption and criminality is on top of just about everyone's list.

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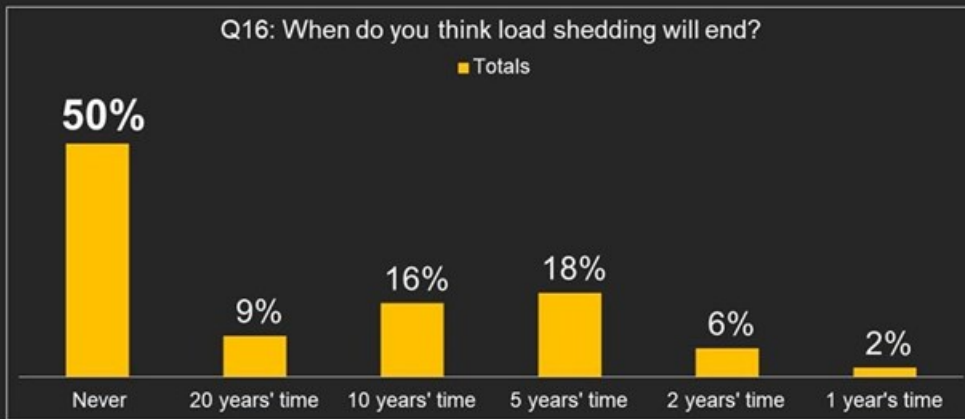
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Presented with a range of possible causes, the SA Blackout Report respondents ticked an average of 5 out of 8. De Kock says, "This indicates that the **taxpaying adults do realise just how big and complex the power problem is**. Not surprisingly, corruption and criminality is on top of just about everyone's list, with 92% recognising that their country is being fleeced by criminals."

The future is not so bright

Half the mid-market+ don't think blackouts will ever end.

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De Kock says, “BrandMapp typically favours taking a glass half-full point of view, but to be honest, that’s extremely hard right now. When the most positive thing you can say is that there is clearly a heightened sense of urgency and anxiety in the populace, well that still sounds half-empty, doesn’t it! We’ve got face that 50% of mid- to top-income consumers don’t believe that load shedding will ever come to an end. That level of despondency is reflected also in other survey data that shows that 58% of young adults say they are considering emigrating because of load shedding.”

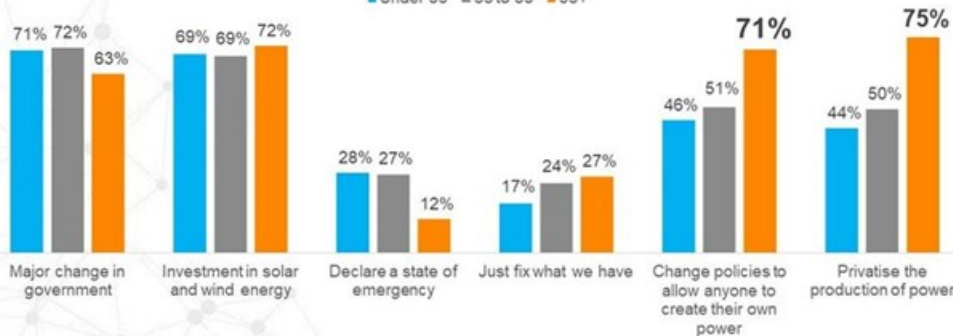
What will it take to fix the crisis?

While everyone seems to agree on a change of government and looking to the sun, **older people are significantly more likely to know more about the importance of political ‘policy’.**

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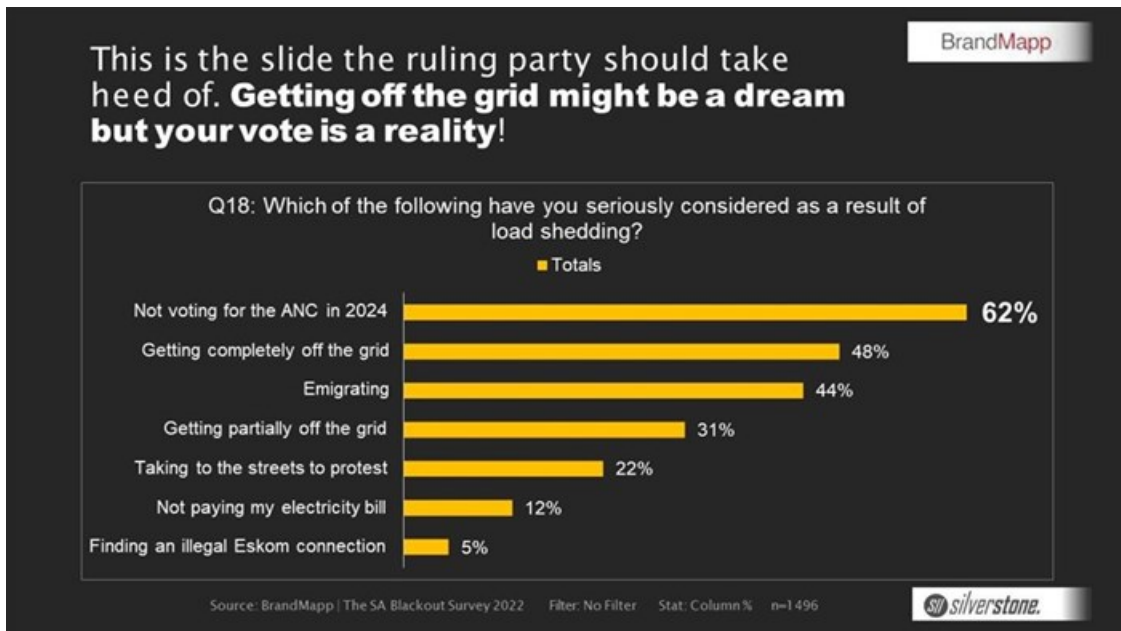
Q17: What is the solution to fix the SA power problem?

Under 35 35 to 55 55+



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Seventy percent (70%) of respondents believe that investments in sustainable energy solutions and policy change are the top two ways to cure the country's load shedding ills. De Kock says, "While there's high awareness that getting off the grid is a sustainable solution, the reality is that it's not affordable for most South Africans. However, they can use their vote, and 62% think that not voting for the ANC in 2024 is a necessary response to load shedding."

De Kock concludes, "What the SA Blackout Report lays out clearly is that the South African taxpayers are being pushed to the limits – not just of their tolerance, but of their ability to remain resilient, productive and positive about the future. At this point, the only thing that I can see that will shift the needle is some sort of meaningful action on the part of the state. Mid-market adults all seem to agree that words alone won't keep the lights on."

Join Brandon De Kock and Ferial Haffajee for a live Daily Maverick webinar on the results of the SA Blackout Report - hosted by Business Maverick editor, Neesa Moodley on Tuesday, 14th March at 12pm. Register now on this link - https://bit.ly/TheSABlackoutReport_DM-webinar

The full SA Blackout Report is available for download on the WhyFive [website](#).

- "How healthy are the taxpayers of South Africa?" 13 Mar 2024
- "South Africans are sticking to hybrid work" 30 Jan 2024
- "Engaging the SA youth vote" 19 Dec 2023
- "Are you data rich, but insight poor?" 30 Oct 2023
- "Does SA's growing middle market offer hope for the future?" 3 Aug 2023

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BrandMapp is a unique South African dataset that uses a mega-sample of more than 30 000 respondents to profile the 12 million adults who live in mid to top-income households earning in excess of R10 000 per month. Now in its eighth year, the BrandMapp survey is a bespoke, independent survey that powers the WhyFive consumer insights consultancy.

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