

Is Thabo Mbeki doing a good job as President?

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How do people living in South African feel about the job that Thabo Mbeki is doing as president of South Africa? This is an issue that tends to evoke interest and emotion as it plays on South Africa's past and the legacy of apartheid.

Sentiments differ across race groups and are also largely dependent on where people live - be it in the major metropolitan areas, smaller urban, or rural areas in our country.

A total of 3500 respondents over the age of 18 years were interviewed in August 2003 - 57% were in the major metropolitan areas, 25% in rural areas, and the remaining 18% in small urban areas.

The metropolitan figures can be tracked over time, but it is the first time that Research Surveys has asked this question of the small urban and rural populations.

Thabo Mbeki's popularity is improving

- Twelve percent of *all South African adults could not comment* on whether or not they felt Thabo Mbeki was doing a good job as president of South Africa. Those who thought *he is doing a good job* amounted to 46%, slightly more than the 43% who feel he is not.
- The results for the *metropolitan population* have improved significantly over time: In February 2002, only 27% of metropolitan South Africans felt Thabo Mbeki was doing a good job. In February 2003, this figure rose to 37%, and in August 2003, it stands at 43%.

The age of respondents reflects an interesting picture

- In terms of *age* of respondents, Mbeki's popularity was lowest amongst the youth (18-24 year olds) and the senior citizens (50+ years old) - scoring 43% for both.
- Amongst *metropolitan respondents*, those who are 50+ also score Mbeki lowest in terms of his doing a good job (38%), while respondents aged 25-34 years old score highest (49%).
- The skew to the senior citizens is mirrored in the *rural population* - although much higher relative to the metropolitan and small urban populations, only 50% of 50+ year-olds feel Mbeki is doing a good job, compared with 55% across all other rural age groups.
- *Small urban* people seem to stand apart from the rest - the lowest proportion of people who think Mbeki is serving his term well is amongst the 25-34 year olds, at 32%.

Rural and racial skews are evident

- Figures were strongly skewed towards the black population - 54% had positive feelings about Mbeki's presidency, compared to 26% of coloureds feeling this way. The figures for whites and Indians are lowest - in the region of 20% .
- More than half of the *rural population* that was interviewed (54%) felt that Thabo Mbeki was doing a good job. This is significantly higher than the figures for *metro* and *small urban* areas, which were 43% and 39% respectively.
- It is interesting to look at the differences in responses across metro, small urban and rural areas. Fifty-eight percent of *metropolitan blacks* feel Thabo Mbeki is doing a good job, versus 45% of *small urban blacks* and 56% of *rural blacks*. Amongst whites, the proportion in favour of Thabo Mbeki is roughly 20% across all areas.

Income and area play a role

- *Positive sentiment* towards Thabo Mbeki *decreases with affluence* - 57% of those who earn less than R800 a month per household think Thabo Mbeki is doing a good job, while only 27% of those earning R15 000 household income a month, or more, agree. This is obviously a function of race.
- Surprisingly, the figures for the *unemployed sectors* of the population are slightly higher than for working or retired individuals - 48% were happy with Thabo Mbeki versus 45% for both *working individuals* and *retired/student/housewife* populations.
- Inhabitants of Western Cape and kwaZulu Natal are the most disgruntled with Thabo Mbeki - only 31% of those in the Western Cape, and 38% of those in kwaZulu Natal feel that Mbeki is doing a good job, compared to the highest figure of 55% in the Free State.

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