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South Africa Public Opinion Monitor: Baseline Survey Results

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1 Scope and aims of the South African Public Opinion Monitor

The South African Public Opinion Monitor (SAPOM) is a longitudinal panel of 2,526 opinion leaders from across South Africa that aims to provide an ongoing monitor of opinions and perspectives on the economic and social development of South Africa and its place in the wider world. A particular sub-theme is South Africa's relations with other emerging and developing economies in South Asia and globally.

Reflecting the logistical difficulties and costs associated with surveys involving a representative sample of the South African population, the SAPOM specifically focuses on opinion leaders. Here, opinion leaders are defined as individuals who are engaged actively in economic and/or political issues in South Africa and are willing to participate in an ongoing panel, meaning that they will be asked to respond to questions on an ongoing basis. A further rationale for the focus on opinion leaders is that they both provide an effective 'pulse' on opinions on economic and social issues in South Africa, and are also key drivers of these opinions.

The SAPOM is an internet-based survey platform through which members are presented with short questionnaires every two months. Members were recruited by a professional survey organisation using a short telephone survey. Potential panel members were asked if they had an interest and were engaged in economic and/or political issues in South Africa, and would be able and willing to complete short internet-based surveys on an ongoing basis. Demographic information on each panel member was collected. Members are sent an email inviting them to participate in each survey, which contains a link to the survey. After a period of seven days, members who have not responded are sent a reminder.

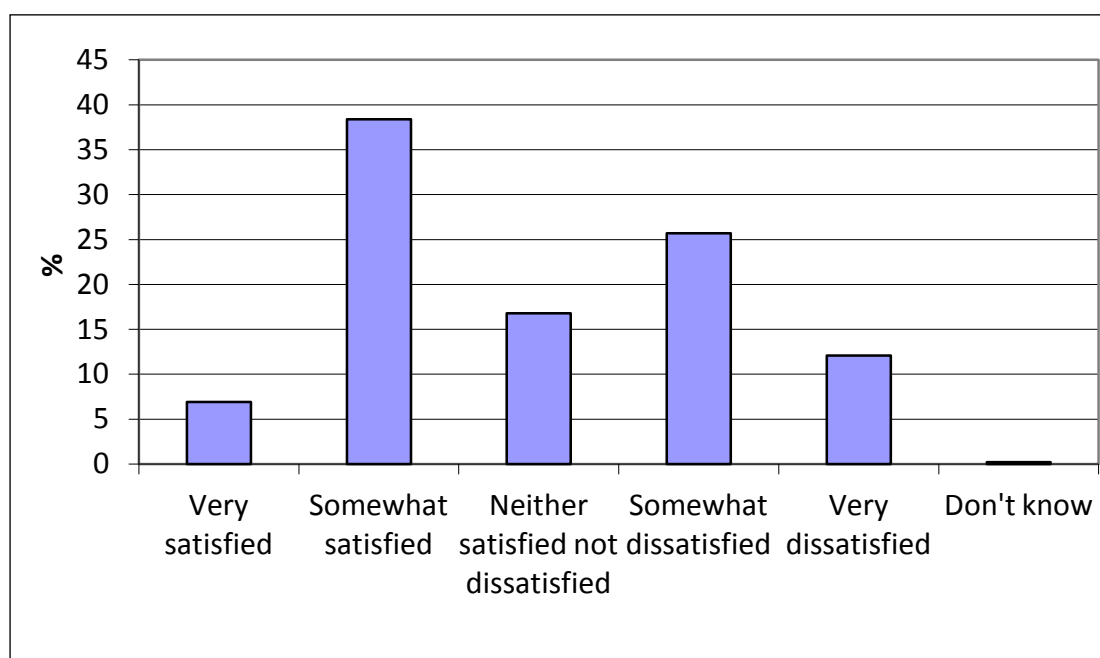
The current survey was undertaken in July 2013. Of the 2,526 members of the panel, 2,439 returned fully completed questionnaires. A summary of the results is provided below.

These results, and those of the surveys through the remainder of 2013, aim to provide a baseline on opinions and perspectives on the economic and social development of South Africa, and on South Africa's place in the wider world. Surveys in future months and years will enable changes in opinions relative to this baseline to be tracked. More importantly, the longitudinal nature of the panel makes it possible to identify who has changed their opinions and to pinpoint the key factors driving such changes.

2 Broad sentiment on life in South Africa today and into the future

In order to obtain a broad indication of the overall sentiment of panel members with respect to life in South Africa, they were asked how satisfied they were with their own life today. The results suggest a somewhat divided view on life in South Africa today; while 45 per cent of panel members were satisfied with their life, almost 38 per cent were dissatisfied (Figure 1). While fewer than 7 per cent were 'very satisfied' with their own life in South Africa today, over 12 per cent were 'very dissatisfied'.

Figure 1 Overall, how satisfied are you with life in South Africa today?



Looking to the future, there was a degree of pessimism in how opinion leaders saw life changing in South Africa for people like themselves over the next five to ten years. Thus, almost 40 per cent saw life changing for the worse, while only 25 per cent were of the view that life would get better (Figure 2). Around 44 per cent thought there would be little or no change in life for people like themselves.

Panel members were even more pessimistic about the life of poor people in South Africa over the next five to ten years. The majority (54 per cent) thought life would get worse, with over 23 per cent expecting the life of poor people to get 'much worse' (Figure 3). Only 14 per cent were of the view that the life of poor people would improve, with very few (2 per cent) expecting their life to get 'much better'.

Figure 2 Over the next five to ten years, how do you see life changing for people like you in South Africa?

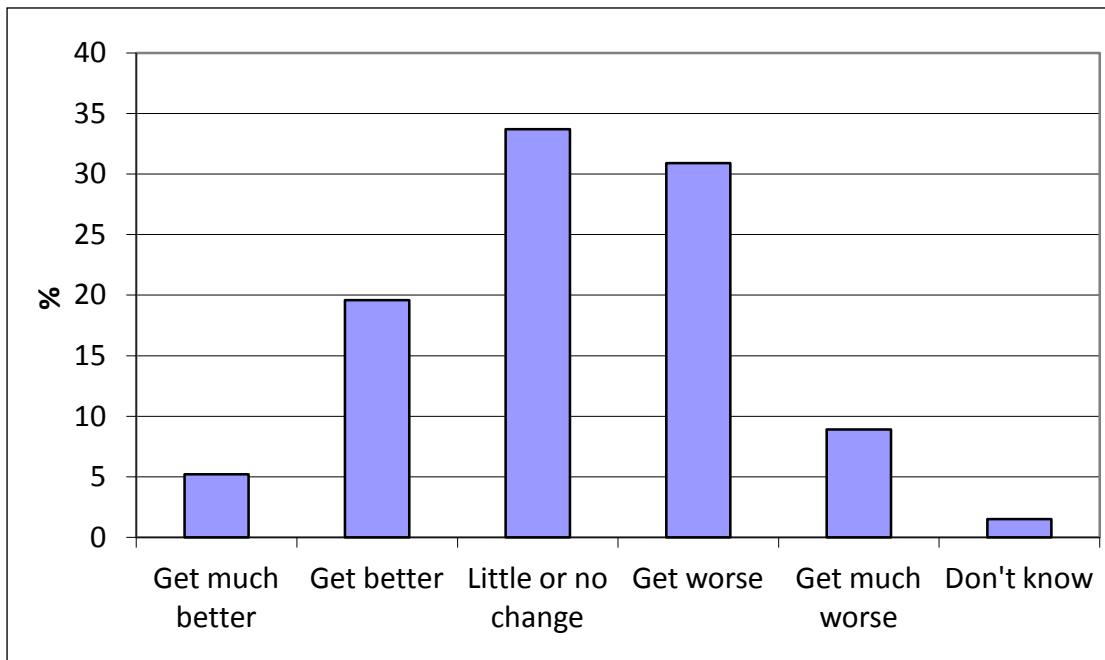
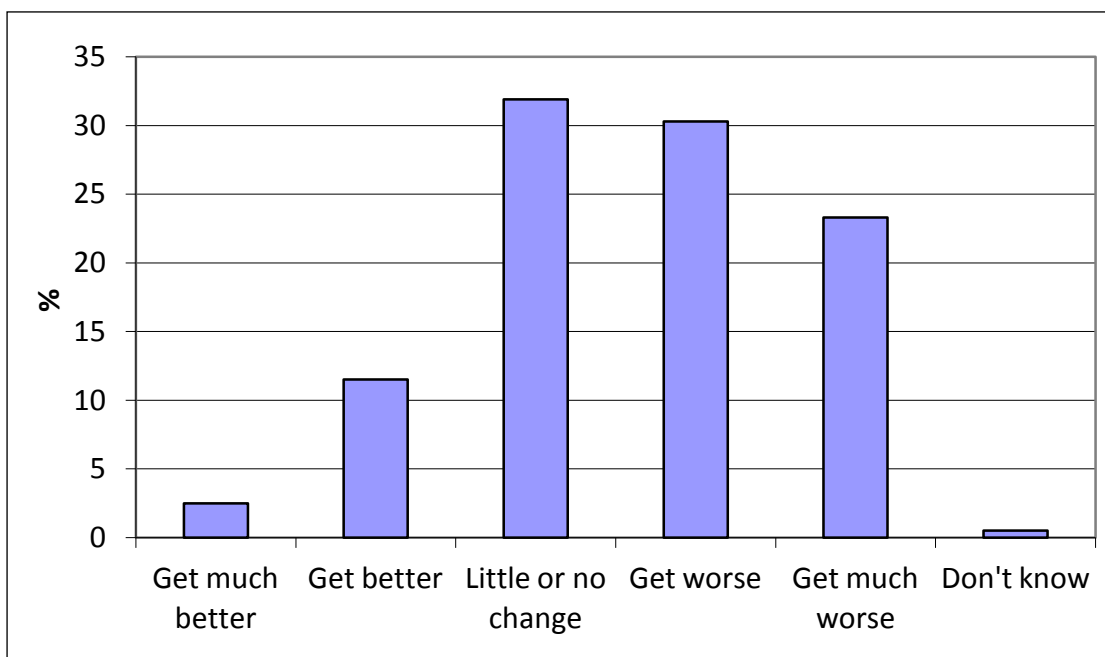


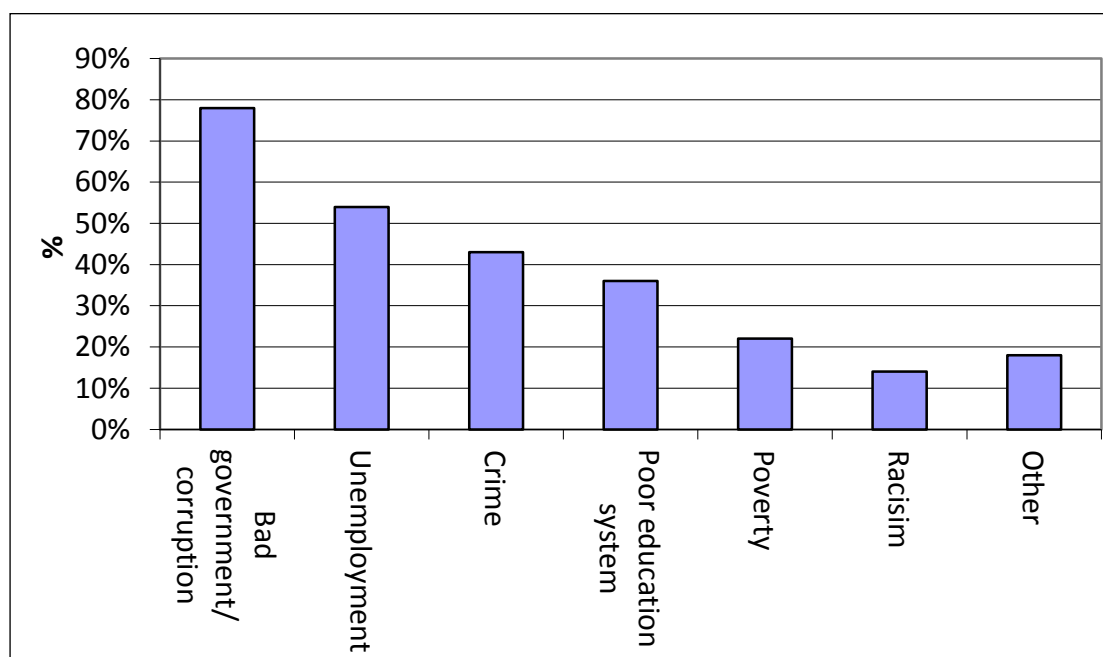
Figure 3 Over the next five to ten years, how do you see life changing for poor people in South Africa?



3 Major challenges facing South Africa today

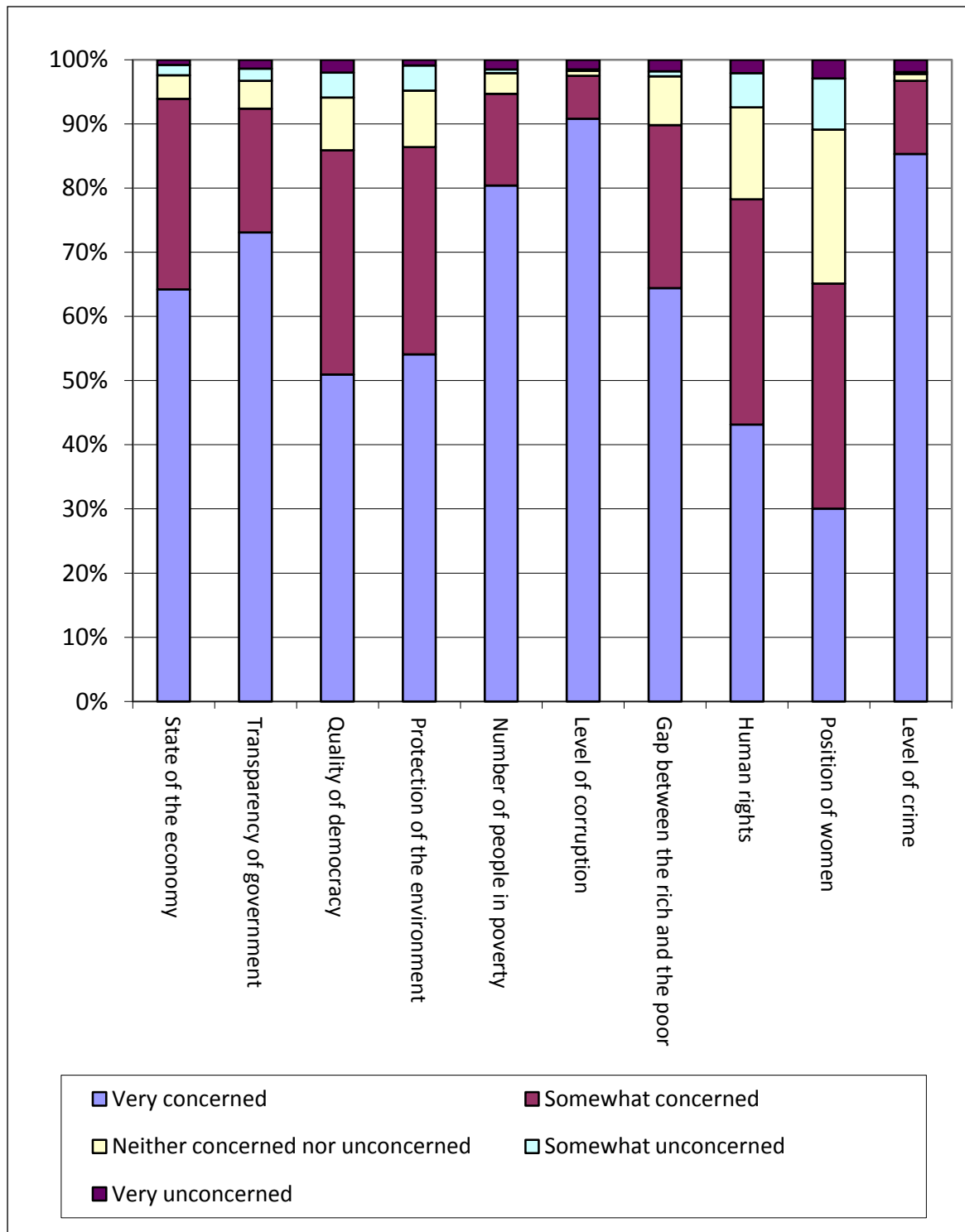
Panel members were asked to identify the number one challenge facing South Africa today – they were unprompted to make sure their foremost concerns were identified. In practice, responses tended to include multiple issues that were divided for the purposes of the analysis. The top issue by far was bad government and/or corruption, being cited by 78 per cent of respondents (Figure 4). Other issues raised by significant numbers of respondents were unemployment (54 per cent) and crime (43 per cent).

Figure 4 What do you see as the number one challenge facing South Africa today?



To get a broader picture of the concerns of opinion leaders about the economic, political and social situation in South Africa today, including issues that may not be most salient, respondents were presented with a series of 11 issues and asked to indicate how concerned they were on a five-point scale from 'very concerned' to 'very unconcerned' (Figure 5). The issue of greatest concern to panel members was corruption, mirroring the results presented in Figure 4, with around 91 per cent of respondents being 'very concerned'. Crime and the number of people living in poverty were also issues of great concern, with 85 per cent and 80 per cent of respondents respectively indicating that they were 'very concerned'.

Figure 5 Overall, how concerned are you about the following issues in South Africa today?



4 South Africa and the wider world

Looking to how the rest of the world sees South Africa, opinion leaders on the panel had a very negative perspective. Thus, the majority (51 per cent) were of the view that the rest of the world sees South Africa negatively (Figure 6), with only 28 per cent thinking South Africa was viewed positively. Fewer than 4 per cent of panel members thought South Africa was seen 'very positively' by the rest of the world.

Figure 6 Overall, how do you think the rest of the world sees South Africa?

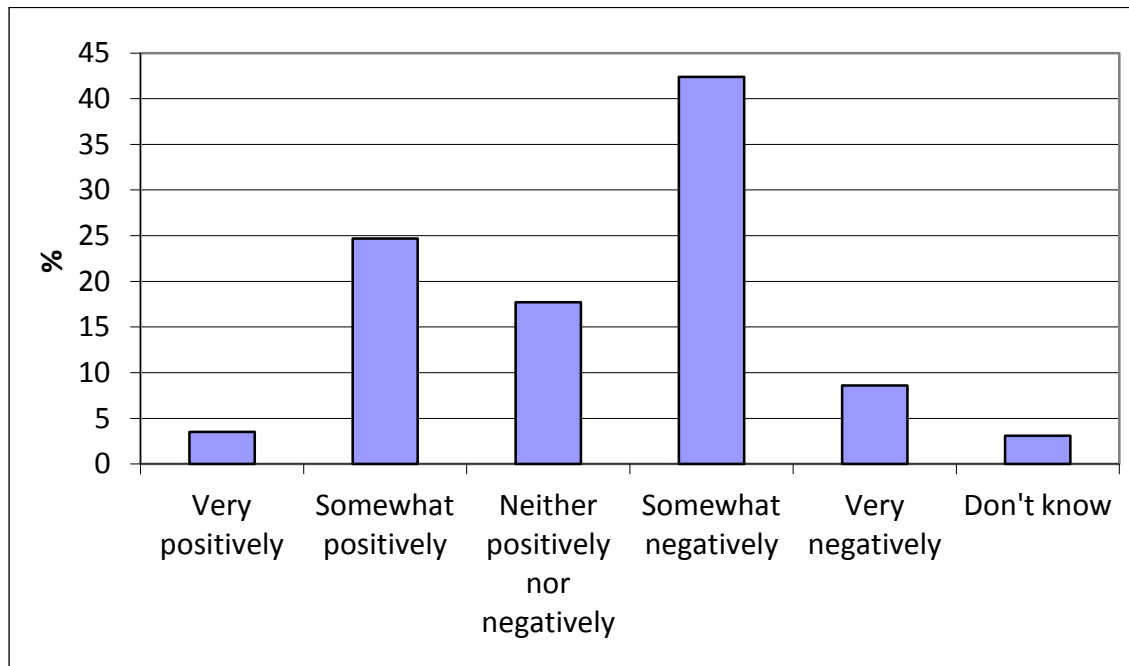
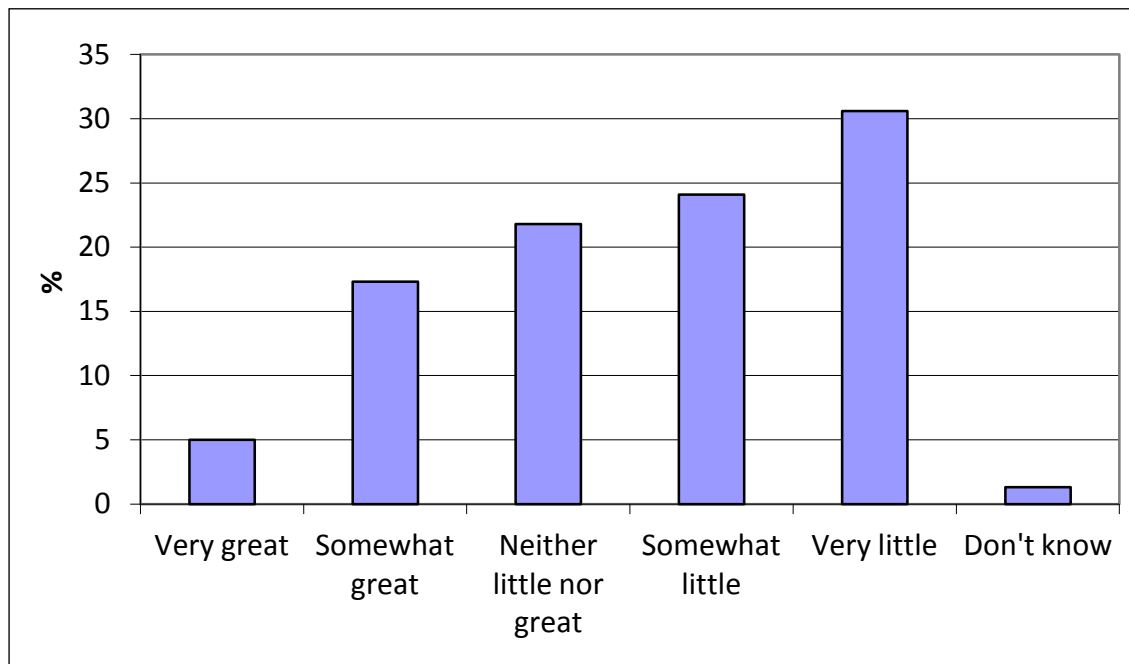
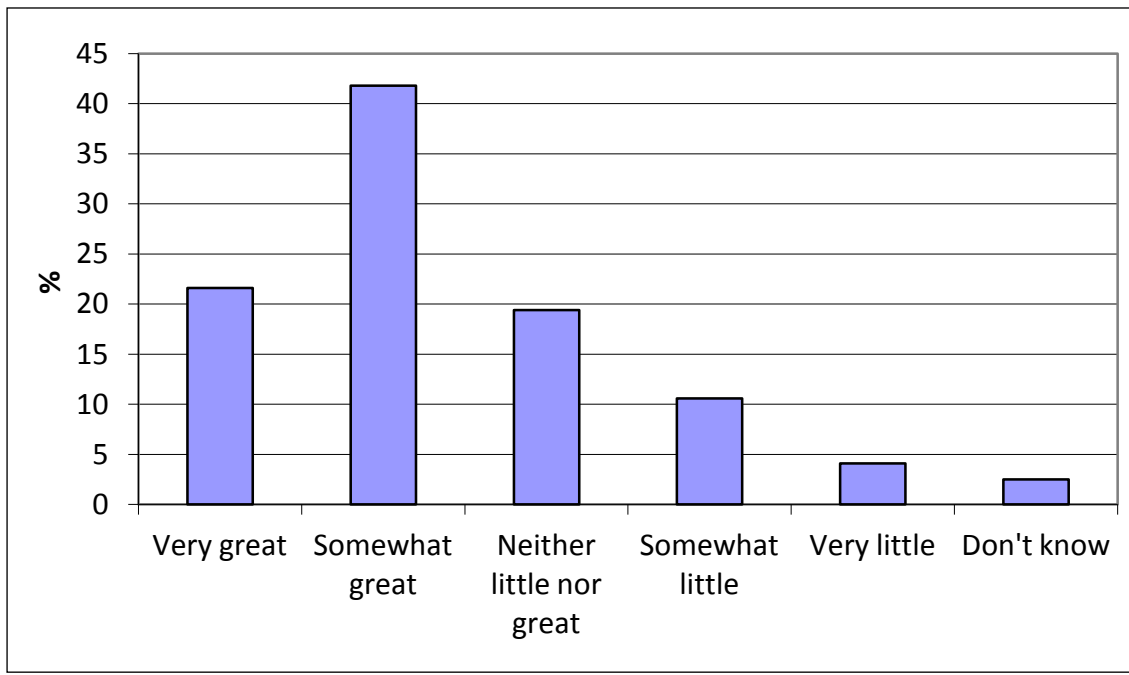


Figure 7 How much political influence do you think South Africa has in the world today?



South Africa was also seen as having limited political influence in the world. Around 55 per cent of panel members considered South Africa to have little political influence, with 30 per cent considering its influence to be 'very little' (Figure 7). Only 22 per cent were of the view that South Africa has great political influence globally. Conversely, around 63 per cent considered South Africa to have appreciable political influence within Southern Africa, with 22 per cent indicating that this was 'very great'. Only 15 per cent were of the view that South Africa has little political influence in the region.

Figure 8 How much political influence do you think South Africa has in Southern Africa today?



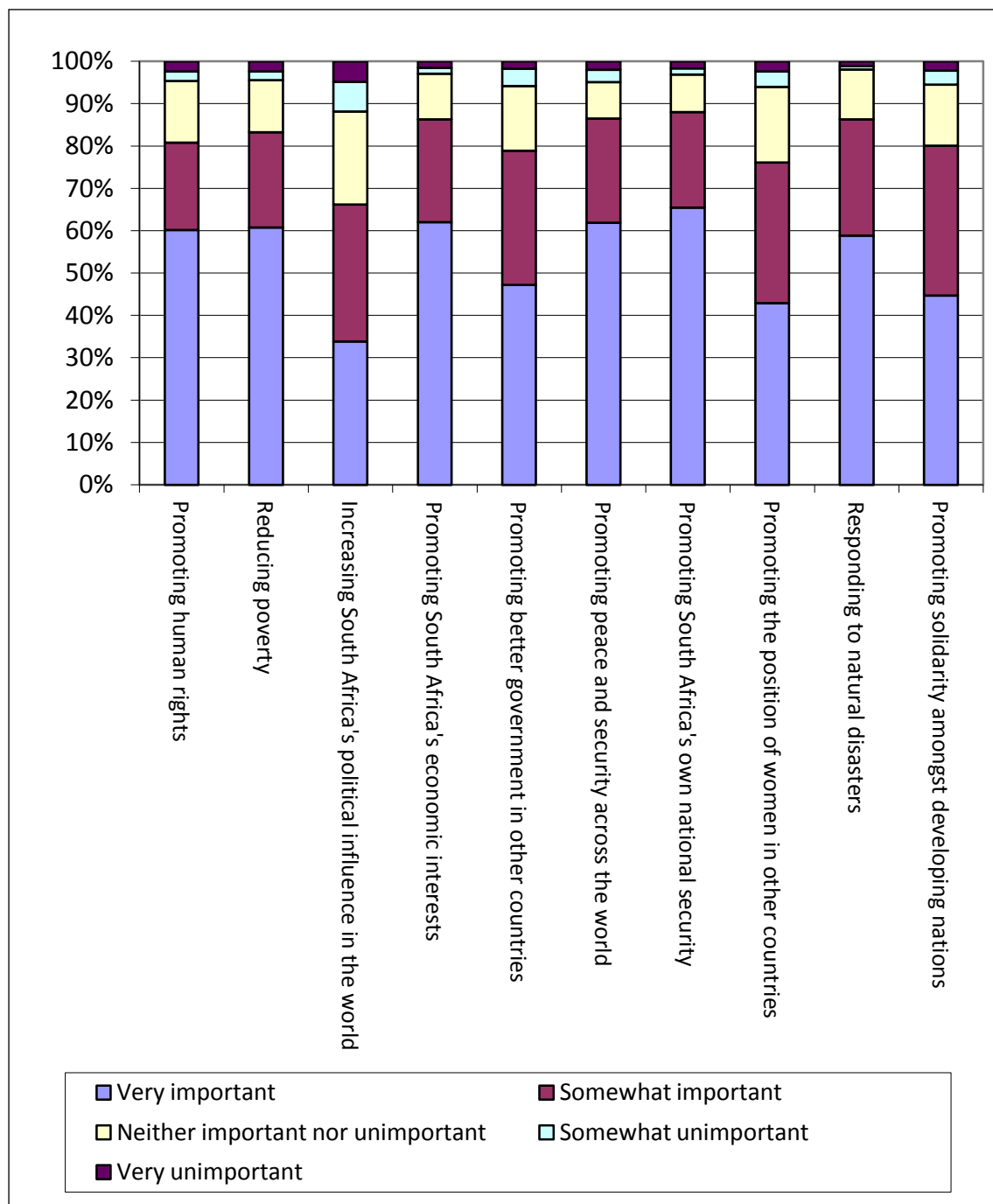
Looking to the future, panel members had a rather divided view on the ability of South Africa to enhance its political influence. Thus, while 48 per cent were of the view that South Africa lacked the capabilities needed to increase its global influence, 41 per cent considered that it did indeed have such capabilities. Around 11 per cent did not know.

4 South Africa and aid

Finally, panel members were asked about aid to South Africa, and South Africa's own role in providing aid to other emerging and developing countries.

Around 69 per cent of opinion leaders on the panel believed that South Africa receives financial or other forms of assistance from other countries. Only 6 per cent indicated that South Africa did not receive such aid, but almost 25 per cent did not know. When asked which countries provide aid to South Africa, the most frequently cited countries were China (69 per cent), United States (43 per cent) and the UK (38 per cent). While 60 per cent of respondents were of the view that South Africa should receive such aid, 25 per cent did not consider this to be appropriate and 15 per cent did not know.

Figure 9 How important should each of the following factors be in determining the financial and other assistance provided by South Africa to other developing countries?



Around 80 per cent of panel members believed that South Africa provides financial or other forms of assistance to other developing countries. However, only 47 per cent were of the view that South Africa should provide such assistance, with 45 per cent considering this not to be appropriate.

When asked what factors should determine the financial or other forms of assistance provided by South Africa to other developing countries, promoting South Africa's own national security and promoting South Africa's economic interests were considered most important, with 67 per cent and 66 per cent of respondents respectively considering these to be 'very important'.

Other factors considered most important were responding to natural disasters and promoting peace and security across the world. Increasing South Africa's political influence in the world was considered to be of least importance.

Further information

If you would like any further information about the SAPOM and/or additional results, please do not hesitate to contact Spencer Henson (s.henson@ids.ac.uk). In addition, information about the SAPOM and similar panels in India and Brazil is available at www.ids.ac.uk/ipom.



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