



ACT UBUMBANO

South African Voices:

Citizens' Perceptions and Expectations 2025 Survey

Assessing public sentiment one year after the Government of National Unity took office. A comprehensive survey of 3,156 citizens across all nine provinces reveals deep insights into South African democracy, governance, and citizen expectations.



Survey Overview and Context

The Historic Moment

South Africa's 2024 elections marked a turning point: no party won an outright majority, leading to the formation of a Government of National Unity (GNU) in July 2024. After 30 years of ANC dominance, this coalition represents a significant shift in the country's democratic journey.

This survey, conducted in August 2025, captures public sentiment after the GNU's first year in office, using a nationally representative sample of 3,156 citizens across all nine provinces.



FAQs

What the CPE Survey Is

- A nationally representative public opinion survey capturing citizens' views on governance, service delivery, economic conditions, and social wellbeing.
- Designed to measure satisfaction, expectations, and confidence in government institutions and leaders.
- Provides evidence-based insights to inform policy, strengthen accountability, and amplify citizen voices in democratic processes.

Why It Exists

- To understand how citizens experience government performance in real time.
- To identify gaps between public expectations and actual delivery.
- To support civil society, policymakers, and researchers with credible, citizen-driven data.
- To track shifts in public sentiment over time, especially during periods of political or economic transition.

Where It Started

- First launched in Zimbabwe in 2018, conducted annually to monitor governance and service delivery trends.
- Developed by SIVIO Institute as a tool to deepen democratic participation and evidence-based advocacy.

Expansion to South Africa

- Implemented in South Africa for the first time in 2025, following the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU).
- Aimed to assess public sentiment after the GNU's first year in office and to understand citizens' priorities across all nine provinces.
- Marks the beginning of a regional approach to citizen-driven governance monitoring.



Who we surveyed

TOTAL RESPONDENTS

3,156

Citizens aged 18+ across all nine provinces

WOMEN

52%

Gender balance maintained throughout survey

YOUTH

41%

Ages 18-35, representing the future

PROVINCIAL AVERAGE

351

Ensuring regional representation

Living Areas

- 54% Urban residents
- 27% Rural residents
- 19% Peri-urban residents

Education Levels

- 44% completed Matric
- 21% pursued post-Matric education
- 10% unable to read/ write

Marital Status

- 58% Single
- 26% Married
- 16% Widowed/ Divorced/ Separated

Living Arrangements

Respondents live in a wide range of housing situations, reflecting South Africa's mixed formal–informal settlement patterns. Living with family or friends is the most common arrangement, highlighting economic pressure and shared-living norms.

Key Findings

- 24% live with family or friends — the largest group.
- 20% are renting, showing significant reliance on the private rental market.
- 13% live in informal settlements, underscoring ongoing housing insecurity.
- 13% live in fully paid-off homes, while 3% have mortgaged homes.
- 13% live in rural homes they own, reflecting strong rural–urban linkages.

Accommodation Types

- 53% live in a full house — the dominant housing type.
- 16% live in an informal dwelling.
- 16% live in rooms within a house.
- Flats/apartments (11%) and cottages (4%) make up smaller proportions.

What This Tells Us

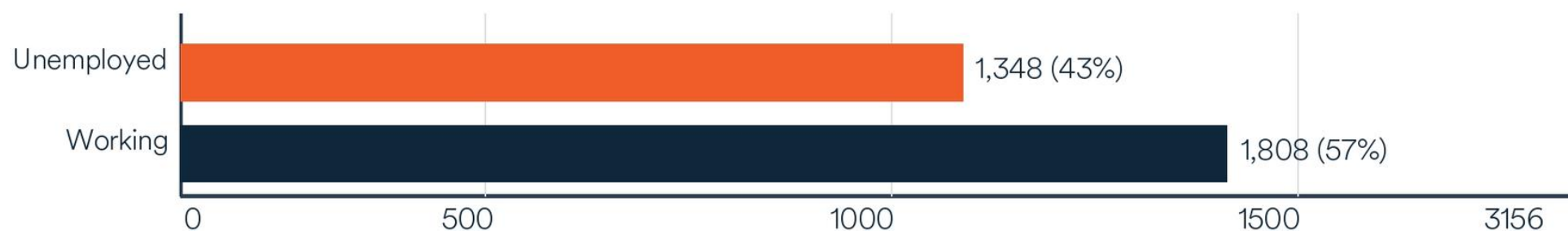
Housing stability in South Africa remains uneven, with a significant share of citizens relying on shared or informal living arrangements rather than secure, independent housing. Formal homeownership is limited, and many households depend on rental markets or extended family networks to meet their housing needs. At the same time, informal settlements continue to play a major role in urban housing, highlighting persistent affordability challenges and ongoing gaps in service delivery that shape where and how people live.



The Unemployment Crisis

When asked about their employment status, 57% (n = 1,808) reported being employed, 45% (n = 1,413) indicated they were employed, and an additional 12% (n = 395) stated they were self-employed. Two-fifths of the respondents (43%, n = 1,348) indicated that they were unemployed. A third of respondents (34%) indicated that they had no income at all.

Employment status



Geographic Disparities:

- Limpopo: 63% unemployed
- Western Cape: 53% unemployed
- Rural areas: 52% unemployed
- Urban areas: 41% unemployed

Demographic Impact:

- Women: 46% unemployed
- Men: 39% unemployed
- Youth (18-35): 47% unemployed
- Adults (36+): 39% unemployed



Critical Finding: 70% of those without income depend on government grants, with social relief grants supporting 50% of grant recipients. This highlights the fragility of household incomes and limited economic empowerment.

Civic Participation

Associational Life

Community engagement remains vital to South African democracy.

When asked about their involvement in community organisations:

- **43%** participate in religious groups
- **12%** belong to Stokvels (savings clubs)
- **11%** are members of burial societies

32% are not involved in any associations

This level of associational life demonstrates that, despite governance challenges, citizens maintain strong community bonds and mutual support systems.



Election Participation

69% voted in the 2024 elections

Of those who voted, **53%** said their chosen party won

Policy Involvement

Only **12%** have participated in policy formulation processes

The most common form of participation was in ward committee meetings (**53%**)

Future Participation

55% feel there is no room for input in policy processes

37% see scope for ward committee participation

Representatives

When asked to evaluate their local government representatives, citizens expressed overwhelming dissatisfaction. An average of 60% rated performance as very poor or poor across all categories of leadership.



Ward Councillors

Rated very poor or poor



Provincial Premiers

Rated very poor or poor



MECs

Rated very poor or poor



Mayors

Rated very poor or poor



Municipality Councillor

Rated very poor or poor



Provincial Legislature

Rated very poor or poor



Local Municipalities

Rank the performance of your local municipality since the last elections



Geographic Variations

- Peri-urban: 74% rate performance as low
- Rural: 73% rate performance as low
- Urban: 67% rate performance as low

Provincial Ratings

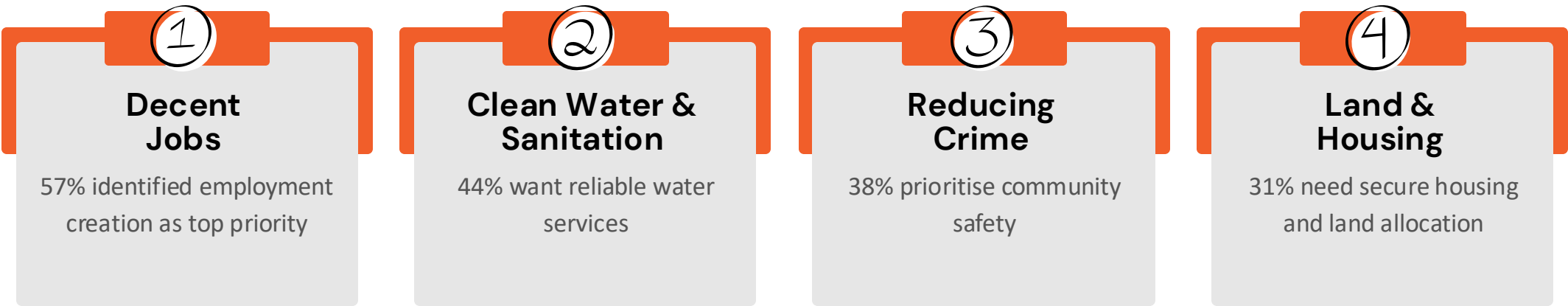
- KwaZulu-Natal: 93% of residents dissatisfied (Worst performing)
- Mpumalanga: 90% of residents dissatisfied
- Western Cape: 52% of residents dissatisfied (Best performing)



The Corruption Factor

When asked what hinders municipal performance, 69% said corruption, 13% cited incompetence, and only 5% mentioned lack of oversight. Citizens clearly identify corruption as the primary obstacle to effective local governance.

Citizen Expectations of Their Local Municipality



National Government

Rank the performance of the national government since the last elections



Geographic Variations

- Peri-urban areas: 77% dissatisfied
- Rural areas: 72% dissatisfied
- Urban areas: 68% dissatisfied

Provincial Ratings

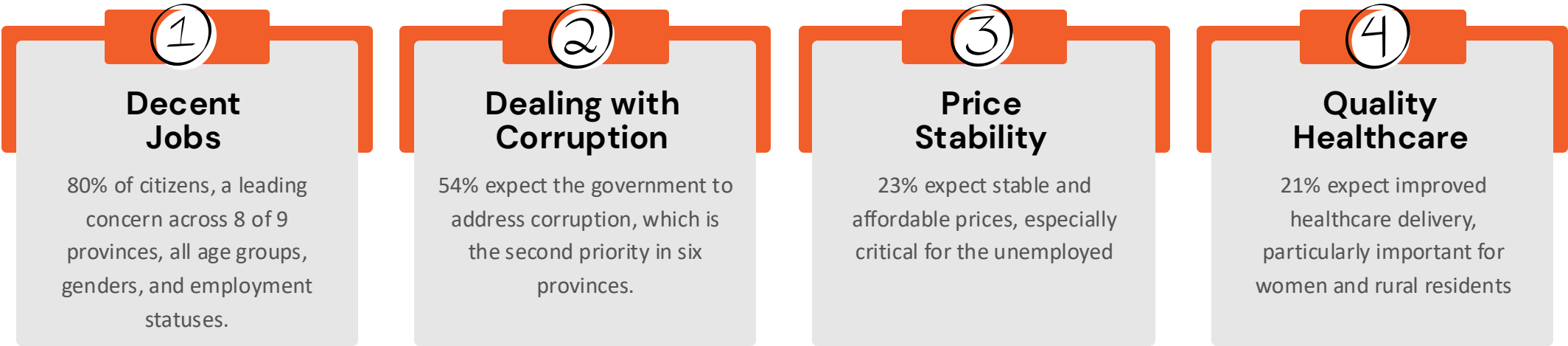
- Mpumalanga: 94% rate performance as low
- KwaZulu-Natal: 91% rate performance as low
- Free State: 91% rate performance as low



Resource Perception

Interestingly, 63% believe the government has adequate financial resources to address challenges. When asked how to mobilise more resources, 79% suggested fighting corruption—reinforcing the view that the problem isn't money, but how it's managed.

Citizen Expectations of The National Government



Citizen Definition of Success

Despite deep dissatisfaction, South Africans maintain a clear vision of what success looks like. When asked to describe indicators of a successful South Africa, citizens painted a picture of a nation transformed.



Well-Paying Jobs

32% identified decent employment as the primary indicator of success



Corrupt Elements Imprisoned

25% want to see justice served and corruption eliminated



Home Ownership

9% envision a nation where citizens own their homes



Stable Prices

9% want affordable, stable prices for basic goods

South Africa stands at a crossroads. For the GNU to meet public expectations, it must prioritise transparency, fight corruption decisively, stimulate inclusive economic growth, and strengthen participatory governance. Rebuilding confidence requires tangible improvements in service delivery, accountability, and social justice—the core pillars for achieving citizens' vision of a prosperous and united South Africa.

Read the full report

The full report with all the findings is found on the SIVIO Institute website (www.sivioinstitute.org/insights)

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