



The Public Agenda: Change and Stability in South Africans' Ratings of National Priorities

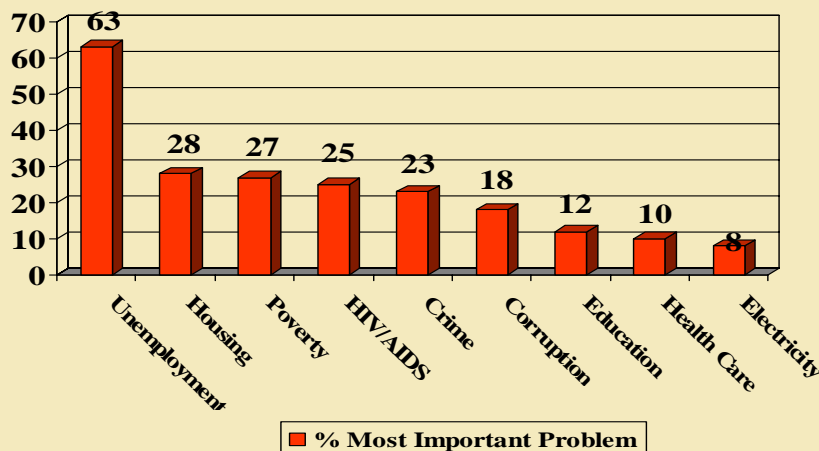
Unemployment, Housing, Crime, Poverty and HIV/AIDS are rated by South Africans as their top five priorities for government action.

This is one of the many important results revealed by the recent Afrobarometer survey of a representative sample of 2,400 South Africans, conducted in January and February 2006 by Citizen Surveys.

Since 1994, Idasa and Afrobarometer surveys have asked South Africans: "What are the most important problems facing this country that the government ought to address?" Respondents can offer up to three answers. Results from the most recent January-February 2006 survey show the following:

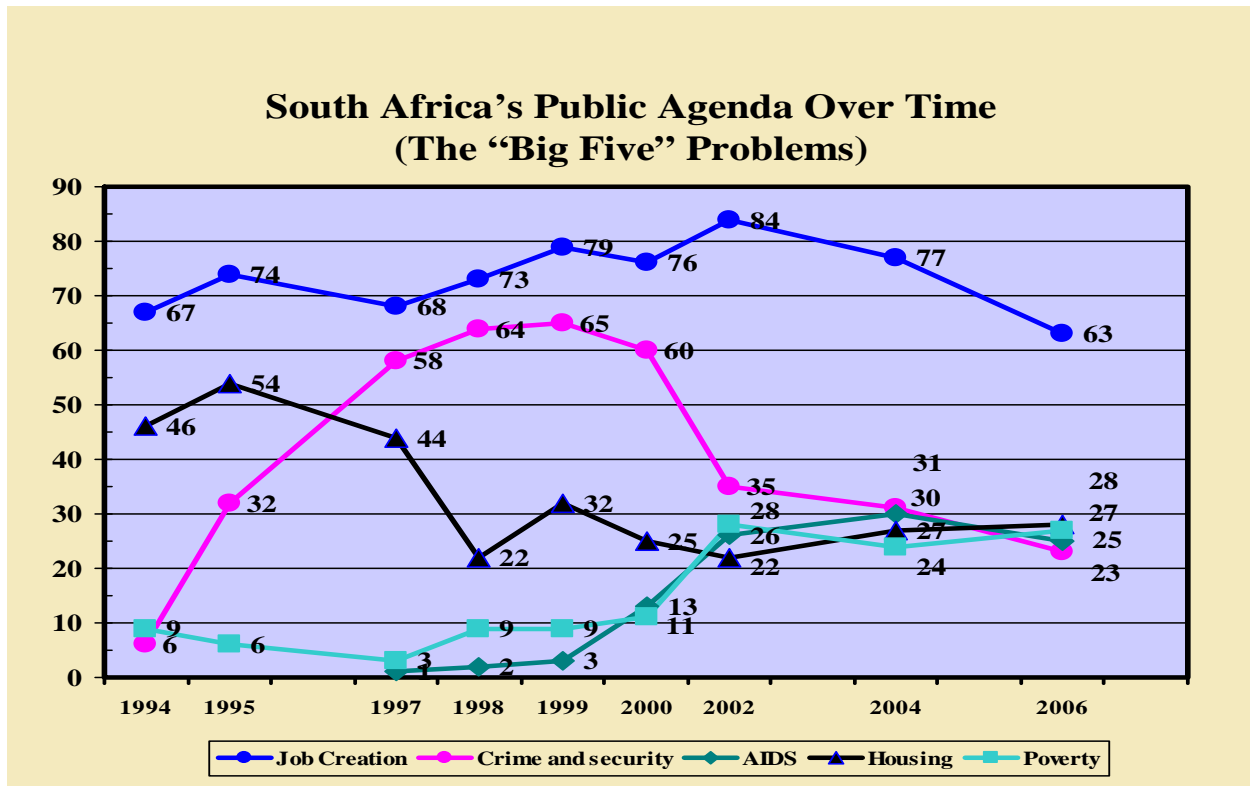
- **Unemployment** (63 percent) remains, by far, the issue that South Africans are most likely to cite as the problem government should address.

South Africans' Public Agenda 2006



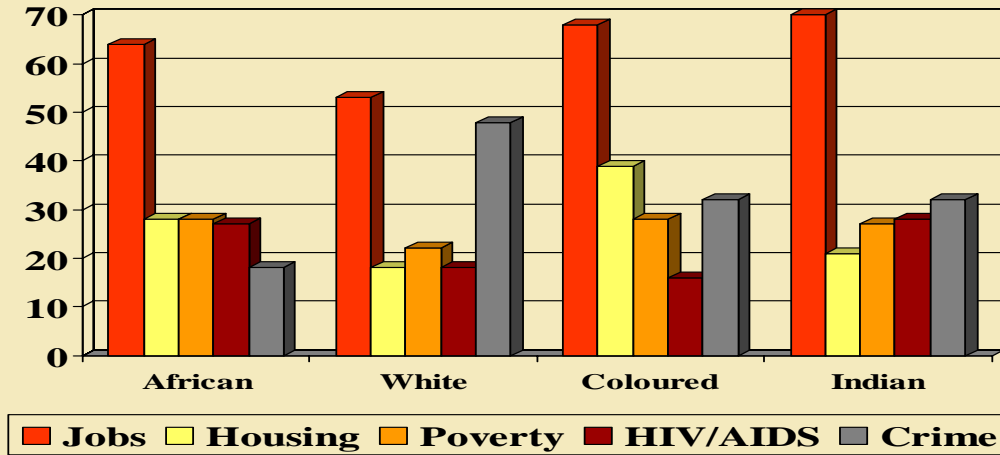
- The survey also uncovered some important shifts in "the public agenda." First of all, the public's prioritization of **Crime** continues to decline. While still mentioned by 23 percent, it has lost its long held position as the second most frequently cited problem. **Housing** (28 percent) is now cited by a significantly larger proportion of citizens than crime. Crime now sits in third place, in a statistical tie with **Poverty** (27 percent), and **HIV/AIDS** (25 percent).

- **HIV/AIDS** has been steadily escalating up the public conscious ever since 2000, but the 25 percent figure measured in early 2006 marks the first time since then that there has been a decline in the numbers of South Africans prioritizing the issue.



- Moving to the problems mentioned by less than 20 percent, the survey shows that that **Corruption** continues its ascent up the ladder of national concerns. Referred to by less than 1 percent in our first survey following the 1994 election, almost one in five South Africans (18 percent) now see it as one of the most important problems in the country. Along with HIV/AIDS, growing public concerns over Corruption constitute the largest increases we have seen since 1994.
- **Education** (12 percent) and **Health Care** (10 percent) round out the list of problems cited by 10 percent or more.
- In contrast to the common wisdom, the survey does not find major differences across racial groups. For example, a majority of respondent from each race group rate unemployment first, and around one quarter of each group pick poverty. Yet there are some notable differences on other issues. African respondents were far *more* likely to mention HIV/AIDS (27 percent), Roads and Infrastructure (18 percent), Water (17 percent), and Electricity (9 percent) than white, coloured or Indian respondents. Africans were *less* likely to mention Crime (18 percent) or Corruption (15 percent) than other respondents.

Public Agenda (2006) (by Race Group)



- Finally, people expect government to be able solve their important problems. Referring to the problem or issue they mentioned first, we asked respondents “how likely is it that government will solve your most important problem within the next few years?” Almost six in ten say that it is “likely” (38 percent) or “very likely” (21 percent).
- Notably, respondents were most optimistic about the government’s ability to solve unemployment and the AIDS crisis: 63 percent of those who mentioned either problem thought the government would resolve the problem “within the next few years.” Less than half of those who prioritized Corruption (48 percent) or Crime (47 percent) thought the government could solve these problems.

The Survey

Face to face interviews were conducted in the eleven official languages with a nationally representative, area probability sample of 2400 respondents across all nine provinces in January and February 2006. In the first stage of sampling, 600 Census Enumerator Areas (EAs) were randomly selected from a frame of all EAs, stratified by province and race, with the probability of selection proportionate to population size based on the most recent Statistics SA midyear 2005 population estimates. This ensures that every eligible adult has an equal and know chance of being selected. The realized sample was weighted by age, gender, race and province to ensure it matched current population estimates. In the second stage of sampling, four households were randomly selected within each EA. In the third and final stage, one South African citizen over the age of 18 was randomly from a list of all household members to be interviewed. The final sample size of 2,400 supports estimates to the national population of all adults that is accurate to within a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points at a confidence level of 95 percent.

Fieldwork for this survey was conducted by Citizen Surveys. For more information about Citizen Surveys, see www.citizensurvey.com or email them at info@citizensurvey.com.

Afrobarometer

The Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from 18 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa), the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) and Michigan State University. For more information, see: [**www.afrobarometer.org**](http://www.afrobarometer.org)

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