

The challenges facing the new Zuma administration: a crisis of expectations

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A fast-moving, decisive and visible US President Barack Obama last week reached his milestone 100 days in office with an approval rating of 68% - on a par with ex-President Mbeki's highest score of 66%, and well above the pre-election approval ratings of 41% for then-President Motlanthe and the expectations that Jacob Zuma will do a good job as President (40%).

In South Africa, Barack Obama is held in higher regard than both President Jacob Zuma and ex-President Kgalema Motlanthe with 81% of people recently interviewed agreeing with the statement, "You think that it is a good thing that Barack Obama has become the new president of the United States". Only 6% disagree with the statement and 18% say that they don't know. When asked to respond to the statement, "The election of Barack Obama as president of the United States will be good for Africa", 66% agreed, 11% disagreed and 29% said that they don't know.

These results arose from a study conducted by TNS Research Surveys, South Africa's leading marketing and social insights company, amongst a sample of 2 000 SA adults from the seven major metropolitan areas of South Africa, interviewed face-to-face in their homes, with a margin of error of under 2.5%. Interviewing was in February 2009.

President Zuma's 100-day milestone will be reached on 17 August.

So what are the challenges?

Looking at research conducted by TNS Research Surveys over the last three years, challenges facing the new administration fall into two main areas: civil and economic.

Under the heading of civil, the main three challenges are crime, health services and HIV/AIDs and service delivery.

- A 2006 TNS Research Surveys study of 2 000 metro dwellers showed that 75% of people feel unsafe because of crime. Grant Thornton's 2009 International Business Report survey, released today, shows an increase in respondents considering emigrating when compared to last year - 93% of respondents cite the high crime rate as the reason for considering emigrating. Six out of ten metro dwellers give this as one of SA's top problems
- A third of metro dwellers mention health services and, especially HIV/AIDS, as major problems facing the country.
- A 2007 TNS study of urban areas showed that almost one in three people are dissatisfied with the performance of their local authority - this is a critical level at which violence can be predicted to break out - with the worst provinces being Mpumalanga, Limpopo and Gauteng. Only two provinces fared well: Free State and Northern Cape.

Under the heading of economic, the main challenges are job creation and poverty alleviation, inflation control and the creation of a climate suitable for economic growth.

- TNS Research Surveys quarterly consumer confidence measure, the Market Sentiment Index (MSI), released today, showed that ease of obtaining jobs is the top economic issue with 89% of people saying that jobs are difficult to find at present. Unemployment and poverty alleviation taken together are cited also by 89% as one of the top issues facing South Africa.
- Inflation is a dominant issue when considering the economy with a net of 64% of people saying that their income does not keep up with inflation. This perception has worsened in recent quarters but there are very high hopes that inflation will improve in the next six months with this net figure dropping to 26%. This puts the new administration under considerable pressure.
- Creating a climate for growth is the sub-text with more people feeling that business conditions are poor now (43%)

rather than good (35%) but with 47% feeling they will improve as against 30% expecting them to worsen. This too suggests high expectations.

The MSI data has two components: how people are feeling now about the economy and what they are expecting in six months' time. For the first time since 2002, the expectations component is higher than the current component, suggesting that the new government faces very high expectations in the short term as to the economy improving.

How can this be achieved?

From the point of view of the new administration, it seems that the four Cs might provide a road map:

- **Corruption**
Almost 90% of metro dwellers in a 2008 TNS study feel that corruption has become a way of life in South Africa; 85% feel that there is corruption in senior levels of Government - 90% of people feel that this need to be eliminated. These figures are unchanged since 2005.
- **Competence and cronyism**
The lack of service delivery as well as the broken promises evinced by many protestors as the reason for becoming violent over the last two years suggest an urgent need for competent people to be appointed to service delivery positions. Finance Minister Trevor Manuel himself has alluded to the seriousness of the issue of cronyism leading to incompetence leading to a lack of service delivery.
- **Confidence**

The Grant Thornton survey mentioned earlier also alluded to the fact that 72% of business people surveyed who are thinking of leaving were doing so because of political uncertainty. That only 40% of metro dwellers feel confident in the incoming administration whilst 40% do not shows that there is an urgent need to provide clear, visible and decisive action surrounding all these issues: is President Obama a role model here? The cloud still surrounding the withdrawn charges against the new President suggests that he will need to show exemplary leadership and morality in the face of this uncertainty.

Where does this leave us?

Any incoming administration leads to a rise in expectations. In the case of our fourth true democratic administration, these are even higher due to the controversy that has surrounded the personalities involved, the global economic crisis as well as the ongoing South African problems of crime, health and HIV/AIDS, service delivery, unemployment and poverty alleviation and, at present, inflation and poor business conditions. For the first time, future economic expectations exceed current sentiment. Clear, visible and decisive leadership on all these issues is required.

Technical note

The studies were conducted amongst 2 000 adults (1260 blacks, 385 whites, 240 coloureds and 115 Indians/Asians) in the seven major metropolitan areas: they have a margin of error of under 2.5% for the results found for the total sample. The studies were conducted by TNS Research Surveys (Pty) Ltd as part of their ongoing research into current social and political issues and were funded by TNS Research Surveys. The data quoted is derived from several studies over the past three years. For more details, please contact Neil Higgs on 011-778-7500 or 082-376-6312. www.tnsresearchsurveys.co.za

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