THE 2019 SOUTH AFRICAN ELECTIONS
Incumbency and Uncertainty

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ABSTRACT

The 2019 South African elections marked the country's sixth iteration of free and fair electoral contests since its democratisation in 1994. Although the outcome gives the African National Congress (ANC) yet another five-year mandate, the party has not gone unchallenged at the polls. It registered its lowest national vote share since the transition, a major concern for the party of liberation. The most recent contest also demonstrates the resilience of the main opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA), and the continued upward trajectory of its closest rival, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). In this article, we analyse available survey data on South Africans' attitudes and offer some empirical answers to account for the election results. We argue that race continues to feature prominently in electoral decision-making but it does so in ways that deviate slightly from conventional wisdom. Further, we put forth an explanation that the parties' leaders played a central role in shaping citizens' voting behaviour, especially among their own partisan supporters.

Keywords: South Africa, elections, electoral politics, voting behaviour, party politics

INTRODUCTION

The 2019 elections marked the sixth successive post-apartheid contest in South Africa. Voters went to the polls on 8 May partly looking to the past, partly looking to the future. Much had changed in the country's political landscape since the 2014 elections. In the sixth national and democratic elections in South Africa's history, the electorate faced a crucial question – whether to reward the dominant

African National Congress (ANC) with yet another five-year mandate. The party of liberation, in office for 25 years, sought to shore up electoral support from its core constituencies. It suffered widespread losses in the country's 2016 municipal elections, losing control of key municipalities. Its leader, Jacob Zuma, had severely tarnished the party, eroding the moral legitimacy of the organisation. Sensing its profound electoral vulnerability, ANC elites moved to replace Zuma with Cyril Ramaphosa in February 2018. In short, the ANC faced perhaps its sternest electoral challenge since the country's democratisation; citizens were likely to exercise other options – to vote for an alternative party, or not vote at all.

Table 1: Party Vote Share (%) in National Elections Over Time

Party	1994	1999	2004	2009	2014	2019
African National Congress (ANC)	62.7	66.4	69.7	65.9	62.2	57.5
Democratic Alliance (DA)	1.7	9.6	12.4	16.7	22.2	20.8
Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)	--	--	--	--	6.4	10.8
Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)	10.5	8.6	7.0	4.6	2.4	3.4
Freedom Front Plus (FF+)	2.2	0.8	0.9	0.8	1.6	2.4
Vote share total of top 5 parties[*]	97.5*	94.9*	93.1*	95.4*	94.8	94.9
Number of parties competing	19	16	21	27	29	48
Turnout	86.9	89.3	76.7	77.3	73.5	66.0

Source: Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC)

[*]   The National Party received 20.4% of the vote share in the country's first democratic election. In 1999, the New National Party (NNP) received 6.9% of the vote; while the United Democratic Movement (UDM) came fifth with 3.4%. The United Democratic Movement gained 2.3% in the 2004 election, and the Independent Democrats (ID) won 1.7%, rounding out the top five. In 2009, the Congress of the People (COPE) received 7.4% of the vote, placing them third. The final figure of 95.4% for the 2009 election includes these parties in order to keep the row totals consistent across elections.

Like many countries throughout Africa, South Africa has a dominant ruling party with many smaller opposition parties. This year's election featured the continued participation and relatively successful outcomes for several opposition parties – the Democratic Alliance (DA), the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) – long a mainstay in the electoral arena. South Africa thus has a viable opposition with more than one party and relatively high party

system stability, especially when elections are examined over time. Table 1 above illustrates the success of each major party in the six elections from 1994 to 2019. [1]

Table 1 yields interesting findings: the electoral outcomes in South Africa over time illustrate that the 2019 edition continues a handful of historical patterns: First, the ANC's vote share has steadily declined since its peak in 2004. Second, both the DA and the EFF have continued to chip away at the ANC's electoral advantage and victory margin. Third, South African elections are characterised by a relatively high degree of electoral stability in the sense that the major parties have perpetuated their political presence and electoral foothold. This is reflected in both the lack of electoral volatility in the makeup of the top five parties across elections, and the consistent vote share allotted to the top five contenders in each election. This is unique in the African context, as most countries with single dominant parties also experience a large degree of party volatility over time (Bleck & van de Walle 2018).

Fourth, the most recent election seems to suggest a continuing pattern of declining turnout, possibly a consequence of decreasing voter enthusiasm after the initial democratic moment, and as their frustrations with democracy's imperfections manifest (Carothers 2002). In this regard, South Africa is yet again an African outlier as most countries have not experienced the expected trajectory, rather maintaining high and stable turnout levels well past the initial democratic exuberance of a founding election (Kuenzi & Lambright 2007, 2011; Lindberg 2013). Fifth, the most recent elections witnessed the continued proliferation of political parties willing to compete in the national race. The list of contenders has roughly tripled since the inaugural two contests, indicating a boom in political party supply and a possible disequilibrium (a surplus of party options) with citizen demand in the electoral marketplace.

Of the five electoral patterns observed in Table 1, we set out to explain two in this paper. We set our sights on the first two observations – the decline of support for the incumbent ANC, and the steady electoral performance of the major political parties. We briefly touch on the other observed patterns, and do so only to better understand our main research foci. Others (in particular Schulz-Herzenberg 2014, 2019a, 2019b) have extensively explored and explained the country's declining turnout levels, and some have provided descriptive accounts of the main political parties in each electoral cycle (Johnson & Schlemmer 1996; Reynolds 1999; Southall & Daniels 2009; Schulz-Herzenberg & Southall 2014); to the best of our knowledge,

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1   The EFF was created in 2013 and thus their row reflects only the elections they have contested. Similarly, we illustrate the vote share in the 1990s of the Democratic Party (DP) the DA's predecessor. From 2000 onward, the DP was known as the DA after it briefly merged with the New National Party (NNP) and Federal Alliance (FA). Prior to 2004, the FF+ competed as the Freedom Front. It added the plus for the 2004 election when it merged with the Conservative Party and the Afrikaner Unity Movement.

party proliferation has yet to be investigated. In short, we wish to update previous empirical findings, and provide some suggestive evidence for the effects of party leadership in the most recent South African elections.

In this paper, we provide a brief theoretical overview of past voting behaviour studies in the South African context, and develop a new argument – the role of party leadership. For the first time in South Africa's history, all major parties had black leaders at the helm, yet these leaders have significantly different political backgrounds, make use of very different political tactics, and steered their parties' campaigns under very different contexts and circumstances. We rely on South African Citizens Surveys and Afrobarometer survey data to test these dominant explanations. We conclude with the broader lessons to be drawn from the latest electoral iteration.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Role of Race

Race, and to a lesser extent ethnicity, has occupied a dominant role in studies on South African voting behaviour. Scholars have considered the very long sociopolitical and socioeconomic shadow that apartheid has cast on citizens' political attitudes, policy priorities, and on their daily lived experiences. Central to this form of inquiry has been the racial stratification that continues to define the country's social landscape.

Early studies of voting behaviour in the South African context identified race as a key explanatory variable for electoral decision-making (Johnson & Schlemmer 1996; Lodge 1999; Mattes 1995; Reynolds 1994, 1999). Some even went so far as to proclaim that the country's electoral dynamics reflect a 'racial census' of sorts. These studies illustrate the chief racial cleavage that underpinned South African politics – black Africans would vote for the ANC, other racial groups would select from an array of alternative opposition parties. In a more recent study, de Kadt and Sands (2019) use precinct-level data to illustrate that white voters who live in areas that are predominantly white and have few interactions with non-whites are less likely to vote for the ANC. In line with past studies, we posit the following:

Hypothesis 1a: Race strongly predicts voting behaviour
We leave this hypothesis somewhat vague for the moment but will add more specificity in our analyses below. In short, we expect black citizens to be much more likely than non-black citizens to vote for the ANC. In our analyses we examine exactly why they may consider the other 'black' options, the EFF and the IFP. In addition, we consider why coloured, Indian, and white voters may

decide to vote for the ANC and not select the traditionally 'white' parties, the DA and the FF+.

As more democratic contests were held in South Africa, scholars started to explore why exactly the 'racial census' continued to remain highly stable. Later works (Ferree 2006, 2010; Mattes & Piombo 2001) delved deeper into the associations between race and citizens' voting behaviour. Refining past arguments that centred on race, these scholars argued that race on its own does not explain individuals' behaviour. Ferree (2006, 2010, 2013) argued that voters use 'racial heuristics' to distinguish which party will best represent their group's interests. She also argued that racialised images of political parties permeate citizens' perceptions. Specifically, the DA had struggled to diversify its support base because it was viewed as representing the interests of wealthy, non-black communities (Habib & Schulz-Herzenberg 2011).

At the time of these writings, the South African electoral menu offered citizens a stark choice primarily between the ANC and the DA, and to a much lesser extent, the IFP. Further, historically the ANC has successfully portrayed the DA as a 'white party' of the apartheid era. The DA has continuously struggled to refute this image (Ferree 2010), yet its organisational presence in rural black areas and townships has remained relatively weak (Butler 2014). In recent years, the party has gone to great lengths to make electoral inroads with considerable efforts at rebranding, including a racial makeover of its key and most publicly visible leadership positions (Jolobe 2014).

More recently, the EFF has unambiguously claimed to truly and solely represent the interests of the country's marginalised black citizens. As such, the electoral calculus has changed somewhat, with the inclusion of the EFF competing for the black vote. The flip side of this political coin is that the FF+, under the leadership of Dr. Pieter Groenewald, has taken an avowedly exclusive approach to politics, campaigning on the platform of providing a voice for minority groups' rights. During the 2019 electoral cycle, Groenewald tried to buttress this image by recruiting Peter Marais, founder of the Bruin Belange Beweging (Brown Empowerment Movement), to run as his party's candidate for provincial premier of the Western Cape (Davis 2019). In essence, the historical racial cleavages underpinning party support have been amplified and seemingly reinforced in the 2019 electoral cycle.

In line with the above, we next posit:

Hypothesis 1b: Race is associated with party affiliation
Building on the above hypothesis, scholars have convincingly argued that people of different races in South Africa experience political, social, and economic life differently and thus tend to evaluate the government and opposition parties

quite differently. Mattes and Piombo (2001) argue that different racial groups not only diverged in how they saw the same information, they reached different conclusions, and even differed on which issues mattered most for them. Bratton and Mattes (2003) also found that white and black South Africans differ significantly in their support for various policies.

Finally, in line with these arguments, we posit:

Hypothesis 1c: Race is associated with citizens' government evaluations
In our analysis we seek to explore a more nuanced response across racial groups. More recent studies have cautioned against these stark claims across racial groups, and some have even pointed to intra-racial variance. Firstly, we must assess whether or not these racial group differences do in fact exist. Mattes (2015, p. 677) argued that middle-class black citizens were less likely to support the ANC than poor black people, and prioritised corruption more than 'basic survival needs', and crime and security when forming political decisions. Secondly, we must consider whether these attitudes affect voting behaviour. Booysen (2007) convincingly demonstrated that although poor black communities engaged in service delivery protests prior to the 2004 elections, they still overwhelmingly rewarded the ANC at the ballot box. The underlying reason why the ANC increased its vote share from 1999 to 2004 was that poor black voters still trusted the ANC more than other parties to solve their particular grievances.

Leadership Effects

Starting in 2009, the ANC and DA began to run national television advertisements showcasing their policy proposals but also relying on clear political symbols to reach their audience. In particular, these advertisements feature current party leaders, with an emphasis on their backgrounds and political history (Bleck & van de Walle 2018, p. 172). In one sense, the South African electoral campaign season has become more 'personalised' or 'presidentialised' like many countries across the industrialised world, with increasing political and campaign coverage on television (Garzia 2014). The specific effect of party leaders on citizens' voting behaviour and political attitudes has received surprisingly limited empirical examination. In one past study, the authors (Mattes & Piombo 2001, p. 115) found that survey respondents' views of party leaders provided the strongest explanatory power for electoral decision-making among independent (non-partisan) voters. Given that over time nearly half of South African citizens (Mattes 2005) have no party affiliation, this seems to have been an overlooked and understudied explanation. As such, we posit:

Hypothesis 2: Leadership evaluations will predict voting behaviour
Again, our hypothesis is non-directional and purposely vague to allow for examination across parties and their chief figures. We expect that citizens who have less favourable opinions of Cyril Ramaphosa, Mmusi Maimane, and Julius Malema are more likely to consider alternative parties, and this effect will hold even among survey respondents with party affiliations.

METHOD

In this study we make use primarily of the May and June 2019 South African Citizens Surveys (SACS), and rely on the 2015 and 2018 Afrobarometer surveys for South Africa to complement our analyses. The SACS project is nationally representative and has been conducted on a monthly basis since 2015. Each monthly survey polls 1 300 citizens, and achieves a nationally representative sample. For this study, we rely on available data from the surveys conducted on 19 May and 19 June. Together, this pooled sample includes 2 600 citizens, and offers the most temporally proximate data to the actual elections of 8 May. The Afrobarometer data have samples ranging from 1 840 to 2 388 respondents and the field teams collected data in June 2015 and April 2018. Due to the temporal disconnect of these surveys, we rely on them merely as another data picture, offering a reference point for over time changes in citizens' political concerns and evaluations.

In examining the survey data, we employ two statistical techniques to better answer our research questions and test the above hypotheses. First, we examine 'surface-level' national results from the sample to identify which issues South Africans believe to be the most pressing facing the country. We also examine group-level (race, partisanship, and leadership perceptions) perceptions of respondents to investigate the effects, and their interaction, of race, party affiliation, and party leaders' favourability on voting decisions. These analyses are presented in the tables that follow and offer the crosstabulations, or contingency tables, of two or more variables.

Second, we model the voting behaviour of South Africans by using a multi-nomial statistical regression that treats voter choice as our dependent variable.[2] Using this approach instead of other regression techniques (e.g. linear or a series of logistic models) better captures the electoral decision-making process – voters weigh the political party options on their electoral menus before making a selection. This approach models respondents' support for the ANC in relation to

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2   We use the survey question that asks, 'Regardless of whether you voted or not, who would you vote for?'

the other party options (the DA, EFF, IFP, and FF+), and is particularly appropriate for ordered categorical outcomes like party affiliation and voting decisions (Gelman & Hill 2006, p. 119). The approach is increasingly used in empirical studies of South African political dynamics, allowing for more nuanced examinations of categorical explanatory variables (Gordon, Struwig, & Roberts 2018; Schulz-Herzenberg 2019b). We exclude the options of 'uncertain' and 'don't know' from the regression analysis because they constrict the sample too narrowly across categories. However, we include these options in our other analyses below, to probe motivations for citizens' decisions to not turn out.

For each specific analysis, we include the survey questions as footnotes below the table results. Our regression output featured in Table 3 below requires more discussion for us to present the survey questions we used to measure our explanatory variables. In measuring age, we include a survey question that asks the age of the respondent and scores the variable from one to five. Gender is treated as a binary variable in the response; female respondents are coded as zero and serve as the reference group, and males scored as one. Education is a categorical variable that ranges from one to eleven, with a higher score reflecting more years of education. Race includes four categories – black, coloured, Indian, and white. Part of our focus is on how non-black citizens make their electoral decisions in comparison to their black compatriots. As such, we use those who self-identify as black as the reference category, a standard practice for the modal response. Income is another categorical variable, coding respondents from one to fourteen, based on their self-reported monthly income ranging from 'no income' to R10 000 and more.

Our main explanatory variables include measures aimed at examining respondents' perceptions of the country's economic situation, corruption, and their opinions of Cyril Ramaphosa as a leader. Our decision to select these measures stems from the results in Table 2 below, illustrating that economic ills and corruption are two of the most important problems for most South Africans, the other pertinent issues being crime, education, and housing. Unfortunately, the survey design (lack of question availability) does not allow for a test of governmental performance on these issues. Further, the survey did not ask directly about unemployment or poverty. Despite these shortcomings, we include a question asking respondents for their perceptions of the South African economy over the past twelve months ('retrospective' evaluations), and whether they expect the economy to improve over the next twelve months ('prospective' evaluations). Corruption is measured in a question that asks respondents, 'In your opinion is the level of corruption in South Africa increasing, staying the same or decreasing?', and higher levels indicate a more optimistic assessment among citizens. Lastly, to test leadership effects, we include a question that asks,

'Knowing what you know now, do you have a favourable or unfavourable opinion of Cyril Ramaphosa?' Like other variables, higher scores indicate more favourable opinions of the incumbent president.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

A helpful starting point to understanding the voting behaviour of South Africans is uncovering which issues matter most to them. An early study by Bratton & Mattes (2003) argued that members of racial groups differed on their (lack of) support for public ownership of corporations and the size and role of government. Others (Mattes & Piombo 2001) contended that blacks and whites used similar evaluative standards when gauging ANC governmental performance, but often arrived at remarkably differently conclusions.

Our initial empirical foray into the survey data yields a few findings of note. By and large, South Africans' major concerns revolve around economic underperformance (unemployment and poverty), lack of social provisions (housing, education, electricity, water supply, and health), and social ills (crime and corruption). Of these, there is remarkable stability in the most pressing issues as unemployment, crime, and housing are usually the top concerns, while poverty became much more salient in the 2019 survey. These findings direct our analyses below but merit a few quick reflections. We do not *a priori* assume that all South Africans across racial and socioeconomic distinctions will experience each problem to the same degree. Rather, the relative importance each individual and group assigns to these problems provides the focal points of our subsequent analyses, as does a consideration of how individuals and groups assess a suitable political selection from among the political party options on their electoral menus.

Building on the descriptive statistics above, we shift our analytical gaze to our statistical model. The large-N statistical test allows for a broad testing of the common voting behaviour explanations, and allows for theories to be examined systematically, especially at the individual level. The models we include investigate each explanatory variable's relative importance and we add interactive effects between respondents' racial identification and retrospective economic evaluations, as we attempt to tease out the interplay between race and government performance.[3]

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3   We ran identical models for the other performance evaluations on corruption and found similar results. For the cohesiveness of this article, we discuss only economic performance as it registered more statistically significant results across comparisons, and unemployment has dominated citizens' political concerns.

Table 2: The most important problems facing South Africa
(survey response %)[4]

Problem	2015(AB)	2018(AB)	2019 (SACS)
Unemployment	78.0	62.4	73.8
Housing	26.6	23.8	19.8
Crime and security	26.5	29.3	33.6
Corruption	23.5	19.4	26.4
Education	21.5	17.7	13.6
Poverty/destitution	19.4	14.8	27.4
Electricity	15.0	10.3	10.6
Water supply	12.8	16.8	10.9
Health	12.5	8.4	6.2
Infrastructure/roads	10.8	11.9	8.4
Management of the economy	6.3	13.1	7.0

Sources: *Afrobarometer* (AB) Surveys, Rounds 6 (2015) and 7 (2018); 2019 May and June *South African Citizens Survey*s (SACS).

Table 3 illustrates several statistical relationships between sociodemographic factors and electoral decision-making, but also the profound effect of Cyril Ramaphosa as the leader of the ANC and other evaluative considerations, namely economic factors and perceptions of corruption. Compared to the ANC's supporters, the DA draws its support from a younger, more educated, and more female base. As expected, those survey respondents who self-identify as coloured, Indian, and white are much more likely to select the DA at the ballot box. However, three very interesting patterns emerge from the first column. Citizens who view corruption to have improved in the country are much more likely to reward the ANC over the DA when making their electoral choices, and although the results are not statistically significant (P > 0.05), citizens who view the country's economic conditions as having improved over the last year are much more likely to support the ANC than the DA, and this relationship is much stronger when race is taken into account. In short, non-black citizens who consider the DA as a viable political alternative are less enthusiastic in their support for the party if they sense the macroeconomic situation to have improved and have more favourable perceptions of Cyril Ramaphosa.

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4   The surveys asked the same question, 'In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?' Respondents were allowed three responses. The figures in this table represent the frequency of each response.

**Table 3: Multinomial Regression Model for Vote Choice
(ANC as reference)[5]**

Variable	DA		EFF		IFP		FF+	
	Beta	SE	Beta	SE	Beta	SE	Beta	SE
Age (male)	-0.021	(0.08)	-0.427	(0.10)***	-0.087	(0.23)	0.127	(0.27)
Gender	-0.412	(0.20)*	0.994	(0.22)***	-0.379	(0.57)	2.439	(1.09)*
Education	0.012	(0.06)	0.120	(0.06)*	-0.114	(0.20)	-0.121	(0.16)
Race (Coloured)	4.670	(0.69)***	1.117	(1.30)	-7.423	(0.00)***	11.932	(0.00)***
Race (Indian)	3.762	(0.97)***	-14.789	(0.00)***	-5.870	(0.00)***	8.327	(0.00)***
Race (White)	6.039	(0.90)***	1.923	(2.31)	4.832	(0.00)***	45.204	(1.59)***
Income	-0.047	(0.02)+	0.012	(0.03)	0.028	(0.07)	0.000	(0.09)
Economy (better)	-0.215	(0.15)	-0.204	(0.12)+	0.219	(0.28)	4.472	(0.24)***
Prospective economy	0.011	(0.09)	-0.078	(0.10)	-0.057	(0.24)	-0.287	(0.41)+
Corruption (better)	-0.345	(0.09)***	-0.355	(0.11)**	-1.215	(0.28)	-1.123	(0.51)*
Ramaphosa (good)	-0.851	(0.14)***	0.623	(0.14)***	1.213	(0.35)***	0.428	(0.59)***
Economy *Coloured	-0.384	(0.25)	-0.372	(0.52)	-6.968	(0.00)***	-1.382	(0.00)***
Economy *Indian	-0.006	(0.37)	0.091	(0.00)***	-6.876	(0.00)***	-1.481	(0.00)***
Economy *White	-0.446	(0.31)	-1.104	(1.05)	-11.988	(0.00)***	-5.210	(0.24)
Intercept	1.607	(0.69)*	0.061	(0.72)***	0.407	(1.78)	-44.141	(1.59)***

+: P<0.1, *: P<0.05; **: P<0.01; ***: P<0.001

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5   The authors used the R statistical software to obtain these results.

The use of multinomial regression also allows the researcher to investigate the ANC relative to other parties, not just its main oppositional challenger. When comparing the incumbent to the EFF, some similarities with the DA voting patterns emerge but several differences also come to the fore. The EFF, in relation to the ANC, attracts supporters from a younger, more educated base that skews disproportionately male. One major difference with the DA calculus, is that race no longer serves as an explanatory factor, except for self-identifying Indian South Africans. This is not entirely surprising for two reasons. First, the EFF has proudly established and marketed itself as a party that exclusively represents the interests of poor, black South Africans who live in the townships and have been marginalised by dual enemies – a long legacy of racial oppression and continued suffering at the hands of both white economic elites and a narrow black political elite. As such, very few non-black South Africans consider the EFF to be a viable electoral option, suggesting that they view the party as highly exclusive and unlikely to represent their interests. Party exclusivity has been shown to be a political non-starter for potential supporters (Habib & Schulz-Herzenberg 2011). Even more damaging for the party was the confrontational approach its leader, Julius Malema, openly took during the campaign against Indian South Africans. He repeatedly accused Indians of exploiting black Africans, especially domestic workers, and embracing 'whiteness' (Hans 2019).

Much like voters pondering a decision between the ANC and the DA, voters developed their electoral preferences between the ANC and EFF largely on their perceptions of whether corruption had improved, and their opinion of the country's president Cyril Ramaphosa. Similarly with the DA, if citizens had more favourable economic views, they were less likely to select the EFF than the ANC.[6] The consistent voting patterns – the interaction between race and economic perceptions, and, perhaps most importantly, the evaluation of Cyril Ramaphosa – also explain to a large extent whether or not citizens view either the IFP or the FF+ as credible or viable alternative oppositions. Neither party received more than 4% of national votes, and the data illustrate that few survey respondents considered these parties, and did so only if they had extremely negative opinions of both the macroeconomic trajectory and the incumbent president.

Moving from an individual level of analysis to a more aggregate one, we continue to probe the survey data to uncover more nuanced understandings of South Africans' voting behaviour. Previous work by Habib and Schulz-Herzenberg (2011) found that citizens in the country placed a great deal of stock in basing their decisions on how responsive a specific party might be to their racial group's

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6   For survey respondents who identified as coloured and white.

interests. Ferree (2006, 2010) similarly argued that voters use party labels as 'racial heuristics' when making electoral choices in the country's complex environment, especially when they operate with imperfect information. Following these scholars' logics and analytical frameworks, we set out to examine the available survey data that interrogates respondents' perceptions of which party may be best equipped or able to deal with the country's gravest problems. Further, we consider three of the most important issues – unemployment, crime, and corruption.[7] We also list the results first for the full sample, and then bifurcate the outcomes by race – specifically for black survey respondents, and compare these percentages to non-black (coloured, Indian, white) respondents in the sample. Although it may be beneficial to disaggregate the non-black category, the above regression results (in Table 3) suggest that non-black voters operate using similar logics. We also did not find significantly different results across non-black races; at least nothing that would warrant dividing the results even further.

Table 4 below illustrates several findings that provide additional insight into how South African voters cast their ballots in May 2019. On the most important issue and gravest problem facing the country (unemployment), a plurality of survey respondents considered the ANC to be most competent at creating jobs and lowering the unemployment rate. Again, there is a noticeable and sizeable divide between the black and non-black subsets. As expected, black survey respondents have much more faith in the long-ruling ANC, although the unemployment rate has remained debilitatingly high under its tenure. What is of further interest is that the same racial divide characterises respondents' (lack of) confidence in the EFF to manage macroeconomic conditions. Black respondents are more than six times as likely as non-black respondents to place their trust in the EFF as potential economic stewards. Lastly, non-black respondents are also more than twice as likely to exhibit systemic disillusionment or despair, by claiming that no political parties are able to solve the country's lingering economic woes.

When considering the serious issue of crime, the ANC is seen as less capable across the sample. Again, there is a stark racial divide which plays out not just for the ANC but also for the EFF. The non-black subset once again views the DA as the most competent party to combat crime, but this group also indicates considerable and widespread political scepticism. They are even more concerned about crime than about unemployment, as roughly one in six non-black South Africans believe that no party has the political wherewithal to wage an effective campaign against crime.

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7   Similar results were found for the other two major policy issues, housing and education.

Table 4: Respondents' perceptions of the party best able to deal with most important issues

	ANC	DA	EFF	IFP	Other	None	Don't Know
Unemployment							
Full sample	46.3	28.3	7.0	1.3	1.2	10.0	6.1
Black respondents	63.4	12.7	10.7	1.4	0.7	6.6	4.4
Non-black respondents	21.8	50.5	1.6	1.0	1.9	14.7	8.5
Crime							
Full sample	42.1	28.3	9.5	1.4	1.5	10.5	6.8
Black respondents	58.0	12.9	14.4	1.8	0.9	6.7	5.4
Non-black re-spondents	19.4	50.3	2.4	0.7	2.4	16.0	8.9
Corruption							
Full sample	40.1	28.2	10.9	1.6	1.6	11.1	6.5
Black respondents	54.2	13.4	16.7	2.0	1.0	7.7	5.2
Non-black re-spondents	20.0	49.4	2.6	1.0	2.5	16.0	8.5
Voting intention							
Full Sample	49.0	25.9	7.3	1.1	3.6	10.2	2.9
Black respondents	70.9	5.4	11.1	1.6	1.3	2.0	7.7
Non-black respondents	17.7	55.1	2.0	0.3	6.9	4.2	13.8

Source: 2019 May and June South African Citizens Surveys

The ANC is on even less solid footing when respondents consider corruption. Once again, a plurality of the sample views the ANC as the most qualified to root out nefarious practices. However, this is largely driven by the ANC's perceptual dominance among black interviewees, who rightly and demographically correctly

make up the overwhelming majority of the survey sample. As with other issues, there is a considerable racial divide for both the ANC and the EFF, and a consistent pattern of a healthy (16%) number of non-black respondents losing faith in the available political options to solve one of South Africa's most pressing issues.

There are two key takeaways from the above discussion, which all play out in the last few rows of Table 4. First, the stark racial divide between black and non-black respondents on which party (or parties) is most qualified and competent to address the country's vital problems affords both the ANC and the EFF the luxury of majority black support. One major challenge (as yet unaddressed and which may be politically intractable) that lingers for the DA is that it has yet to convince black voters that it can offer solutions to the community's most pressing needs. Previous scholars (Habib & Schulz-Herzenberg 2011; Jolobe 2014) have noted repeatedly that despite the party's concerted efforts and institutional racial makeovers they have been unable to make electoral inroads into poorer black communities across the country. Of more concern for the party, Table 4 above also shows that the DA has yet to convince a commanding majority of the non-black community that it is best able to lead. Although it obtains roughly half of the non-black confidence, this means that it fails to inspire confidence in the other half of its key supporter demographics.

Second, there is a disconnect between votes and groups' perceptions of the party best able to address grave concerns. This holds across racial groups, as black respondents are far more likely to vote ANC than agree they are the best to tackle unemployment, crime, and corruption. The other side of this coin is that the EFF therefore polls slightly lower than its stronger performance in developing credibility among black respondents. Among non-black respondents there is a slight boost for the DA, but this may indicate that no other party offers a credible option for them. Of note is that the 'do not know' responses and electoral uncertainty are much more pronounced among the non-black sectors of the electorate. That would suggest that black voters feel their demands are somewhat met by the electoral supply, benefitting from the two parties that can credibly claim to represent them, the ANC and EFF. In other words, electoral supply and demand are much closer to equilibrium for the black voting population than for their non-black compatriots.

Elaborating on our findings above, we next examine whether these same effects hold for the partisans in each party. Past studies (Bratton & Mattes 2003; Ferree 2006; Mattes 2005) have repeatedly illustrated that levels of partisanship among South Africans have dwindled over time, mimicking developments in other industrialised countries around the world (Dalton 2002). Table 5 below illustrates that partisanship has declined even more than initially thought. When

asked if they feel close to any political party, the top three parties accounted for a combined 46.4% of the sample, while the modal answer was 'no political party' with 48.0% of responses. This should come as a major surprise and concern to all political parties in South Africa as the 'nones' would be the largest party, with the ANC following as a distant second with only 32.4% of the sample.[8]

Table 5: Vote Choice among Partisans[9] (survey response %)

Party Affiliation	Party Loyalists	Vote Defectors	Vote Viable Opposition*	Refused/ Undecided
ANC (N=843)	90.3	4.8	4.0	5.0
DA (N=249)	91.2	3.2	0.4	5.6
EFF (N=115)	88.7	6.9	1.7	4.3

Source: South African Citizen Surveys, May and June 2019

The only saving grace for the major political parties is that those who do feel close to them are highly likely to vote for them on election day. The second column in Table 5 above demonstrates that the three major parties maintain roughly nine out of ten enthusiasts. The DA seems to have the most loyal enthusiasts, with only 3.2% defecting to other parties. Of this small number, 1.6% claimed that they voted for the ANC and 0.4% chose the EFF. Contrary to speculation in many publications and media (Gottschalk & Kotze 2019; Kiewit 2019; Naki 2019) that the smaller FF+ attracted disillusioned DA supporters, only three DA enthusiasts selected other smaller parties, of which *zero* indicated they voted for the FF+.[10] Similarly, ANC enthusiasts largely support their party, and when they do not, they most often select alternatives using a somewhat strategic logic, with most of their supporters choosing the DA or the EFF. The EFF's enthusiasts also displayed a high level of loyalty, and when they defected they generally selected the ANC. We employ a high degree of caution in interpreting these results as the number of vote defectors for both the DA (eight) and EFF (also eight) is relatively small.

    Our final analysis seeks to provide a more nuanced assessment of the effect of leadership, and we extend our purview to consider not only Cyril Ramaphosa but

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8   These percentages reflect these answers from the entire answer menu which includes 'don't know' and 'refused' options. However, the combined total of these two options was merely 2.5%.

9   By 'viable opposition' we mean either the second-placed DA or third-placed EFF. Not all rows add up to 100% due to our rounding practice. In our entire sample, there were only 11 IFP partisans and 10 FF+ supporters. Thus, we do not include those parties in the table above. The modal response is 'no party at all' which registered 48% of our sample of 2 600 respondents.

10 These three DA enthusiasts supported the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), the Congress of the People (COPE), and one responded with 'another political party'.

also the opposition figures Mmusi Maimane and Julius Malema. One contribution we hope to make in this paper is an empirical underpinning of the less frequently, if ever, discussed explanatory variable of leadership effects on voting behaviour.

Leadership seemed to play a major role in how citizens approached the 2019 elections. Jacob Zuma had served as president for nine years, reigning over a regime that witnessed corruption scandals become the political status quo. In the process, Zuma had significantly contributed to undermining the ANC's historical claims to serving the masses with a sense of moral legitimacy.[11] Cyril Ramaphosa was therefore tasked with restoring his party's legitimacy in the eyes of its most ardent supporters, and also shoring up and unifying internal factions that had beset the ANC for several years. Given these dynamics, and with Ramaphosa leading the ANC's campaign efforts, we expect citizen evaluations of him and other party leaders to play a major role in shaping voters' behaviour. We found that perceptions of Ramaphosa were a major predictor for voters in selecting whether or not to vote for the ANC, when compared to all other major parties (see Table 6 below).

Table 6: Party Leader Evaluations and Vote Choice (survey response %)

Party Affiliation	Party Loyalists	Vote Defectors	Vote Viable Opposition	Refused/ Undecided
ANC, positive Ramaphosa	92.5	3.2	2.5	4.3
ANC, negative Ramaphosa	78.3	14.5	13.0	7.2
DA, positive Maimane	91.7	3.6	0.6	4.7
DA, negative Maimane	82.5	5.0	0.0	12.5
Eff, positive Malema	89.6	7.3	1.0	3.1
Eff, negative Malema	72.7	9.1	9.1	18.2

Source: 2019 May and June SACS surveys

Table 6 presents a considerable amount of information to analyse. Across all parties there is a noticeable gap in party enthusiasm among supporters, depending on their opinion of the party's leader. First, negative evaluations of the party leader

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11   Among ANC party officials, Zuma is not alone in his unethical behaviour. However, as the face of the party he has done significant damage to its brand.

seem to play out differently between the ruling and opposition parties. In general, ANC supporters defect to the viable opposition, while the DA and EFF supporters either refuse to answer or are undecided. The latter do not consider the ANC as a viable option.

Second, the leadership effect appears to be much larger for the ANC and EFF than for the DA. For ANC supporters that gap is 14.2%, and those who do not view Ramaphosa in a positive light express their concern by voting DA (7.2%) or EFF (5.8%). When considering leader evaluations DA supporters are more loyal to their party than are the followers of the other two main competitors. The enthusiasm gap is only 9.2%, substantially lower than in other parties. DA partisans are more likely to be uncertain or consider not voting when they hold less favourable opinions of Maimane. The EFF supporters closely resemble the ANC's base in their large enthusiasm gap (16.9%); but, more like DA partisans, they most often consider not voting, while some entertain supporting the DA, when they hold more negative views of Malema.

One curiosity of EFF partisans is that the number of defectors is remarkably similar regardless of their opinions of Julius Malema, with those having negative opinions (slightly higher at 1.8%) more likely to defect. What is even more striking is that all of these respondents claimed they supported the DA at the ballot box. Further study of why these supporters acted in unison is warranted. Again, we exercise a note of caution with some of the conclusions we can draw from the table above. With a limited sample, many of these rows and cells have small numbers, and the percentages therefore reflect the behaviour of only a few individuals.

CONCLUSION

On 8 May 2019, South Africa held its sixth successive free and fair national elections, a noteworthy democratic accomplishment. The country continues to have a competitive political system that regularly facilitates multiparty elections free of interference, intimidation, and other grave irregularities that plague much of the continent. Although many democratic imperfections remain, there is much to celebrate from a democratic institutionalist point of view.

In this article we set out to examine the motivations of South African voters, relying on survey data collected a few days after the election. Past scholarship identified the central role of race in political behaviour and attitudes among citizens. Race has traditionally shaped voting behaviour, partisan affiliations, and the issues that groups find most important and pressing. We find that South Africans are overwhelmingly concerned with the country's economic woes (unemployment and poverty), lack of adequate social provisions (housing, education, electricity, water supply, and health), and widespread social ills (crime and corruption). Racial identifications largely predict which party survey

respondents believe is best able to solve these issues. Unsurprisingly, a majority of black citizens still views the ANC as best for their interests, yet this bloc of citizens views the party less able to address corruption than unemployment and crime. Similarly, among non-black respondents, the DA is seen as the best equipped of all the parties to tackle the country's most pressing problems, although there is cause for concern for the largest opposition parties. A very worryingly trend has emerged (mostly for the DA but also the EFF) in that nearly one in six non-black citizens considers that no political party is able to solve the country's most vital problems. This reflects the view that neither of these parties has offered credible solutions that convince a large proportion of non-black citizens of their potential governing viability.

Although the ANC's credibility among black citizens on the issues stated above indicate that it is still viewed as the party best equipped to improve their lives, this advantage has an increasingly narrow margin. The ruling party, however, does much better when the same sample is asked about their voting intention. As such, racial identification offers a robust explanation for overall voting behaviour. Coloured, Indian, and white supporters are more likely to support the DA than the ANC. However, these associations are not as neatly delineated as the 'racial census' arguments let us believe. When non-black respondents have more favourable views of the country's economic conditions they are more likely to consider voting for the ANC than for any of the other political parties. Further, favourable attitudes towards Cyril Ramaphosa consistently produced statistically significant associations with survey respondents' propensity to vote for the ANC above all other parties. This offers convincing evidence that leadership had a profound influence in South Africans' 2019 electoral decisions. On this last point, when DA and EFF partisans had negative opinions of their party leaders, they were more likely to express electoral uncertainty, whereas ANC supporters probably defected to either the DA or EFF.

Future research should continue to wrestle with the intersection of race, class, language, and policy evaluations to paint a fuller, more complete picture of the South African political environment and electoral context.

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