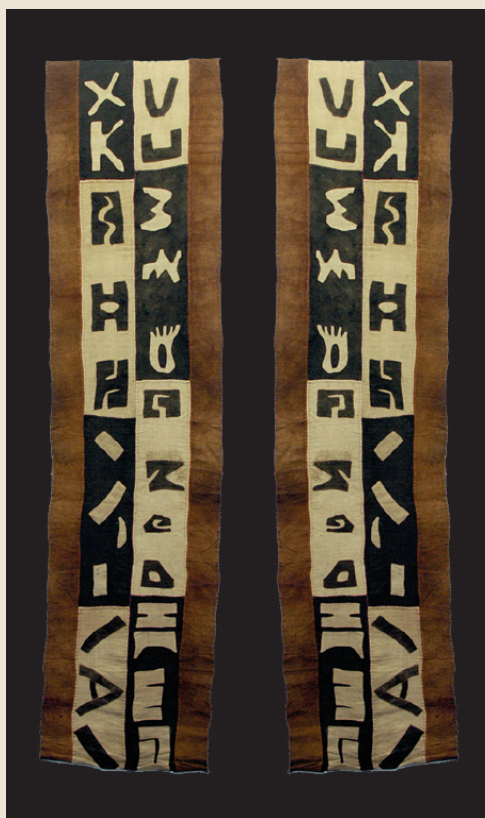


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EDITOR

Denis Kadima

FOREWORD

Heather Acott

ARTICLES BY

Susan Booyesen

Rekgotsofetse Chikane

Michelle Small

Admire Mare

Jan Hofmeyr

Sithembile Mbete

Naphtaly Sekamogeng

Chinwendum Blossom Egbude

William Bird

Thandi Smith

Published by EISA
14 Park Road, Richmond, Johannesburg, South Africa

P O Box 740, Auckland Park, 2006, South Africa
Tel: +27(0)11 381 6000 Fax: +27(0)11 482 6163
e-mail: publications@eisa.org

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Editorial correspondence, including manuscripts for submission and books for review, should be sent to:

The Managing Editor, Journal of African Elections

EISA: P O Box 740

Auckland Park 2006, South Africa

Tel: +27(0)11 381 6000 | Fax: +27(0)11 482 6163 | e-mail: jae@eisa.org

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EISA: P O Box 740

Auckland Park 2006 South Africa

Tel: 27(0)11 381 6000 | Fax: +27(0)11 482 6163 | e-mail: publications@eisa.org

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FOREWORD

South Africa Post 2024 Election Review

The 2024 national and provincial elections in South Africa marked a pivotal moment in the nation's political landscape. After 30 years of democracy the political mood in the country was notably depressed. Since 1994 South Africa has continued to be plagued by high levels of poverty, unemployment, corruption and crime, all of which have contributed to citizen dissatisfaction with the government.

On 29 May voters had an unprecedented 52 political parties and 11 independent candidates to choose from; but on election day, more than 11 million registered voters chose not to cast their ballots, resulting in a voter turnout of 58.6%, the country's lowest level since 1994. Despite initial concerns the elections passed with very few security incidents and the results were pronounced by election observer groups as 'reflecting the will of the people'.

Nevertheless, the election processes, results and subsequent governance arrangements demonstrate maturity and resilience within South Africa's democracy. Election observers and analysts have, however, identified flaws and areas that require strengthening.

On 15 October 2024, the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), together with its project partners the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) and Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), hosted a post-election seminar to review the elections. The conference was held in Johannesburg. Prominent members from the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), political parties, civil society and academia were invited to unpack the social, economic and political factors that had influenced the 2024 elections and subsequent formation of a government. During this event, participants considered how the IEC and other relevant stakeholders can support an electoral system and processes that contribute to peaceful, inclusive, accessible and credible elections in the future.

The papers in this special edition of the *Journal of African Elections (JAE)* were first presented at that post-election review seminar. Following the event, EISA offered the authors an opportunity to incorporate feedback from the discussions into their papers before submitting them to the journal. The papers have been edited by the *JAE* editorial team to ensure that publication standards are consistent with those of regular issues.

*Heather Acott
Managing Editor
December 2024*

ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPRESENTATION IN SOUTH AFRICA'S 2024 ELECTIONS

A Reshaping of the Political Landscape

Susan Booyesen

Susan Booyesen is emeritus professor at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa and research consultant and author

South Africa's 2024 national government coalition deal, the so-called Government of National Unity (GNU), has been characterised as an inclusive government in that it incorporates a range of political parties, ideologies and perspectives. It brings together parties that are willing to cooperate in governance, share power and perhaps extend their individual party prospects. In many respects it embodies broader representation, more transparency, and brings in prospects for heightened accountability. Yet, early practice in the short-term aftermath of the conception of the GNU also raised important questions not just about the exact character, depth and sustainability of these advances, but also about the consequences of non-participation by the parties associated with the Radical Economic Transformation (RET) faction of the ANC.

The outcome of South Africa's 2024 elections saw the ANC lose its outright majority nationally and in three of the nine provinces. For the second time in South Africa's three decades of parliamentary democracy it became necessary to form a national coalition government – the 'GNU'. This was a voluntary political act of building a majority by extending party political participation; it contrasted with the 1994 coalition experience, which had been a constitutionally mandated act of transitional reconciliation that included the three largest parties.

The paper analyses this transitional period in South Africa's post-apartheid political evolution, and specifically this early period of post-ANC hegemonic rule with a view to understanding the notions of party representation and accountability in the 2024 context. The three decades of uninterrupted African National Congress (ANC) governance at national level, from 1994 to 2024, had been synonymous with de facto ANC one-party dominance within a system of competitive, multiparty democracy that is entrenched through constitutionalism. The elections of 2024 opened up a new party political landscape.

Given the ANC's antecedent, uninterrupted three decades of literally all-round power, there has been much fusion between party and state. Come the

moment of party political transition following the 2024 elections there would be no guaranteed and rapid transition in state and government. At the end of these three decades of mostly exclusive ANC rule, there was also widespread evidence of the fragility of public institutions, of parallel systems of de facto governance that challenged notions of the rule of law and formal institutions of government. These contexts were an essential aspect of the parties' handling of the 2024 transition. There was a rapid transition to multi-party, cooperative, coalition government representing over 70% of South Africa's participating electorate; at the governance level there was a continuation of entrenched government processes and plans; and at the state bureaucratic level there were high levels of continuity short of the appointment of a new and more inclusive executive, and small bands of advisors and other aides that accompanied the high level executives.

At the popular level and supplementing the election's lowered levels of voter participation, populism and xenophobia increased, matching the declining levels of public trust in state institutions and processes (see Afrobarometer 2023). South Africa faced a polycrisis that includes the intractable problems of unemployment; urbanisation, migration and homelessness; deindustrialisation and a lack of substantive economic growth; along with growing lawlessness and gender-based-violence. These problems were accompanied by high levels of decay in public infrastructure. The coalition parties had a massive set of tasks – and representation, transparency and accountability will help define their success and the credibility which they forfeit or accumulate.

Using the focus of representation and accountability, the paper thus assesses the interregnum of changing from one-party dominance and liberation movement majoritarianism to the politics of national and provincial coalitions and coalition government. It reflects on the ways in which party representation and accountability impact the 2024 transition to coalitions. It records the hope that the moment may carry the seeds of greater responsiveness and effectiveness in service delivery and addressing citizen needs. It documents and reviews this period in South African politics focusing on links between the election result, coalition formation and the representation of 10 out of 18 political parties (the bulk being small and minor) in the coalition government executive.

The analysis deals with both national and the three provincial coalition governments. It details how the ANC's decline opened the opportunity for greater representation and accountability, while noting the ANC's ongoing resistance and efforts to minimise incorporation of new coalition partners into high-level government. This was manifested in, among others, the coalition negotiation process, the allocation of executive portfolios, and the willingness (or not) to reinvent government substantially.

The paper is based on the author's multi-year study of electoral politics, the ANC (Booyesen 2011; 2015; 2021), and policy and governance in the era of political

democracy in South Africa. It incorporates insights from her recent research on unfolding coalition politics and governance in South Africa (Booyesen 2024c; Booyesen 2021; Booyesen et al. 2024).

REPRESENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

South Africa's 2024 Conjunction and Promise of Change

Evidence suggests that higher levels of representation, which combine with the opportunities for citizen participation, will help hold government and state agencies or frontline providers accountable, and that these processes have sound prospects of positive impact on outcomes (Devarajan, Khemani & Walton 2011). Devarajan et al. (2011, p. 182) add the proviso of the political actors' orientation that provides essential leveraging:

We have argued that there is a potential role for civil society action in these contexts. The most important domain for greater accountability is via power and politics. If politicians, and especially leaders, do not have the incentives to deliver on development, putting extra pressure on bureaucratic state agencies is likely to have limited, or local effects. When the political leadership has some commitment to development, civil society may have a role to play in how internal state mechanisms work, including in front-line interactions.

Through its six national elections in the democratic period until 2024, South Africa had maintained a de facto system of ANC one-party dominance within a multiparty democracy. Throughout this period, accountability has been ineffectual (see, for example, Ijeoma & Sambumbu 2013; Munzhedzi 2016; Sindelo & Cronjé 2024). Then, for the first time in South Africa's 30-year history of constitutionally mandated multiparty democracy (Constitution of the RSA, 1996), in the seventh set of general elections of 2024, the ANC lost its outright national majority. The ANC accepted the 2024 election result (Ramaphosa 2024a), was reasonably well prepared for the eventuality (see Haffajee 2024) and promptly entered into coalition negotiations and agreements to establish a majority national coalition government in the form of the GNU (see also Shoba et al. 2 June 2024). These steps were the likely entry points into a post-ANC-dominance epoch. Moving forward, there would be greater, more inclusive representation; this may very well help leverage greater accountability (inclusive of corruption-free or corruption-reduced governance, and responsiveness to citizen need and actual delivery); but accountability was not guaranteed.

In assessing these interrelated, conditional prospects, it is useful to consider the connotations attached to the concepts of representation and accountability, especially accountability. Transparency and openness become key values of accountability (see Gumede 2021). Bovens, Goodin and Schillemans (2014, also cited in Gumede 2021, p. 14) point out that accountability requires more than documents such as citizen charters and protocols for implementing processes of, for example, quality control systems and benchmarks. In their own right, these do not constitute accountability – they need supplementation through a forum (possibly external) that exercises powers of sanction. Han and Demircioglu (2018, pp. 68-75) highlight the centrality of politics and power in mediating accountability. Yet, and as evident in the argument of Thakur (2020), accountability denotes that public representatives and officials will personally *assume responsibility* for their actions (or inactions); mere reporting, accounting, or nominal sanction is insufficient. As Gumede (2021) highlights, this could be what the drafters of the Constitution of South Africa (section 1(d), 1996) envisioned through their inclusion of the term ‘responsiveness’.

Accountability is also not fully constituted by participation, and perhaps even by responsiveness – as is evident in the greater inclusion of political parties in coalition government, and the processes of representative deliberation that may result. Transparency does not equate with accountability; for example, the mere publication of a report, or adoption of a declaration – or Statement of Intent (2024) such as in coalition practice in South Africa – is no guarantee of accountability. In South Africa, in addition, the new coalition executive, in as far as it may elicit enhanced accountability, stands against the background of existing institutions of accountability, such as the Public Protector, Chapter Nine institutions, and courts that are designed to hold government departments and their individual role-players accountable for public services. Institutional checks and balances to control the actions of government are essential. Yet these institutions and their processes have had partial effects. As Gumede (2021) notes, ‘... if these institutions are packed with incompetent and politically connected staff, they are also unable to play their constitutional role and therefore undermine state capacity’.

Furthermore, the processes for accountability in South Africa are often obfuscated through diversion into opaque internal party processes. The party political processes are used to provide buffers between accountability and sanction, and the public processes tend to be moderated or neutralised. It will be important to monitor the extent to which South Africa’s system of coalition government with its extended levels of representation will be able to extract undiluted accountability. The paper addresses this question from the perspective of the early coalition government aftermath of the 2024 elections.

PARTY POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

In 2024 an unabated proliferation of political parties contested the elections. This enhanced competitiveness (see EISA 2024), but also held negative consequences. The considerable number of party political contestants extended representation yet contributed to vote fragmentation. South Africa's local government elections of 2016 and 2021 (see MISTRA 2021), and the national-provincial elections of 2019 set the groundwork for the 2024 trend of large numbers of parties registering and paying their participation deposits to the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC). Of the 52 parties contesting 2024's national elections, 18 achieved representation and kept their deposits.

The party political compulsion to contest contradicted the decline in participation by individual voters (see select papers in this collection about the decline in voter turnout), and helped forge fragmentation. Vote fragmentation is linked to both the electoral system of proportional representation (PR) and the rise of coalition government, which is known to encourage political parties to enter the ring (see Skibba 2024). Of the 18 successful parties (see Table 1), 13 parties achieved one, two or three seats each, namely GOOD, Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC), United Africans Transformation (UAT) – one seat each; African Transformation Movement (ATM), Al Jama-ah, Build One South Africa (BOSA), National Coloured Congress (NCC) and Rise Mzansi – two seats each; and the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) and United Democratic Movement (UDM) – three seats each. The Freedom Front plus (FF+) and ActionSA won six each; and the Patriotic Alliance (PA) nine. Diversity of party representation hence also came with limited support.

The flip side of this proliferation of contesting parties was that many entered the race as inexperienced, poorly resourced and relatively unorganised participants. There was great inequality in skill and resources between the bigger and smaller, and established and new, participants. Results nevertheless showed that popular traction – in for example for uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) and the PA – substituted for existing funding and established, conventional party structures.

The admission of independent candidates into the 2024 elections further reinforced the fragmentation of representation. Despite prominent levels of public discourse and court action to enable independent participation alongside political parties, only a handful of independent candidates enlisted. No independents won seats, neither nationally nor in any of the five provinces where they participated (Head 2024).

A key explanation for the high number of party contestants in South African elections was the major political influence small parties had been gaining in municipal coalition politics, especially since 2016 (see MISTRA 2024). These parties

bargained for high office-holding and influence in decision-making. A culture of king-making took hold where small parties held the balance of power. Due to their disproportionate roles, the proposal to introduce a threshold for representation in municipal councils gained traction and was included in draft legislation to regulate local-level coalitions (Department of Cooperative Governance 2024), but there were no legal constraints at the time of the elections.

ANC's Ceding of Majorities Allowed for More Inclusive Representation

The change in the party political landscape built on the decline of the ANC. Not only was there more space for opposition parties to enter the legislative institutions, but the coalition government opened opportunities for opposition parties to enter executive government.

The regression in ANC status unfolded over multiple elections, mostly since 2004. The details in Table 1 show the decline from 2019 to 2024, which indicates that the ANC might have lost its outright majority even without the rise of the MK party. This would probably have amounted to a modest shortfall below 50%, which the ANC might have been able to supplement through cooperation with a handful of small parties. The public opinion polls done by agencies such as Ipsos (2024) and MarkData (2024) in the run-up to the 2024 elections confirmed the scope of these support gaps.

The advent of the MK party, however, pushed the ANC into a severe deficit. It forced the ANC to include either the Democratic Alliance (DA) (see Mbalula 2024a) or the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in its coalition plans (see also Malema 2024). The ANC did not see MK as an option (Mbalula 2024b). The EFF plus one minor party would also have fitted the numerical bill to gain an outright majority. However, the ANC was wary of the EFF's unpredictable municipal coalition behaviour, its pre-election policy preconditions, and its initial insistence on not cooperating with an ANC under the leadership of President Cyril Ramaphosa (see EFF 2024). The ANC was aware of the soothing effect that an alliance between the ANC and DA would have on a conservative investor community. The other small parties that would enter the GNU came largely without policy demands.

The ANC's national decline was manifested across the provinces (Booyesen 2024c), not only in the provinces where the ANC ceded its outright majorities (Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and the Northern Cape). Yet, the ANC's declines in the populous KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng pivoted the ANC's 2024 electoral collapse. Gauteng ANC support declined tangibly and MK in KZN annihilated the ANC, pushing it from 54% to 17% of the provincial vote. The space that opened for broader party representation was taken largely by MK. The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) regained support, but far less than had been anticipated before MK's

rise. The EFF in KZN suffered a reversal of its previous foothold, confirming convergence in the EFF-MK support bases.

Table 1: Coalitions and Alliances in the National Assembly (June – October 2024): Government of National Unity, Progressive Caucus, and not aligned

Parties in National Assembly	National seat count in 2019	National percentage support in 2024	Government of National Unity	Progressive Caucus	Not aligned
			Number of seats		
ANC	230	40.18	159		
DA	84	21.81	87		
MK	Registered 2023	14.58		58	
EFF	44	9.52		39	
IFP	14	3.85	17		
PA	Did not participate	2.06	9		
FF+	10	1.36	6		
ActionSA	Established 2020	1.2			6
ACDP	4	0.6			3
UDM	2	0.49	3		
Rise Mzansi	Founded 2023	0.42	2		
BOSA	Launched 2022	0.41			2
ATM	2	0.4		2	
Al Jama-ah	1	0.24	2		
NCC	Established 2020	0.23		2	
PAC	1	0.23	1		
UAT	Registered 2023	0.22		1	
GOOD	2	0.18	1		
TOTAL	400		287	102	11
Percentage	100	100	71.75	25.5	2.75

Notes: This table was last updated on 10 October 2024. In-table acronyms not explained in text: ATM: African Transformation Movement; ACDP: African Christian Democratic Party; NCC: National Coloured Congress; PAC: Pan Africanist Congress of Azania; UAT: United Africans Transformation; UDM: United Democratic Movement

Source: Booysen's compilation, based on data from <https://results.elections.org.za/home/downloads/npe-results>

In the Northern Cape, the ANC ceded its outright majority and entered into agreements with the Freedom Front Plus (FF+) and PA, hence also extending opportunities for former opposition parties to enter government. The ANC's three strongest provinces, Limpopo, Eastern Cape and North West still showed substantial majorities for the ANC. However, not only had these majorities been declining, but they were anchored in reduced turnout rates. This meant that the ANC paid a price in not getting larger numbers in overall support, which would have helped it to maintain national vote numbers and proportions. Mpumalanga and the Free State, former bulwark provinces for the ANC, still registered outright majorities; but the ANC's edge over the opposition parties dwindled.

Approaches to Coalition Formation to Extend Participation and Build Majorities

An intensive period of negotiations, spanning roughly two weeks, undergirded the formation of South Africa's 2024 coalition government (Booyesen 2024a; Boonzaaier & Masungwini 2024). Internally, the ANC worked to counter resistance against whether the ANC had to form a coalition government instead of trying to run a minority government; and, if a coalition initiative were to be the choice, which opposition parties would be suitable ANC government partners.

The ANC's approach was one of calculated inclusivity. It aimed at parties with support targets different from the ANC's, arguing that cooperation with the EFF would be detrimental to the ANC's future electoral prospects. Many in the ANC would have preferred that the ANC constitute a minority government (informant interview 14 June 2024). It could govern with the occasional support of several political parties, which may have congealed in confidence-and-supply arrangements (see also De Vos 2021). The ANC could have achieved this with occasional support on crucial measures such as the election of officials and passing budgets, but it preferred the stability and public support that a formally agreed coalition government could offer. There was also much public support for a coalition government (see SRF 2024; Marrian 2024). The DA moved from initial preference for a confidence-and-supply arrangement to commitment to a coalition deal (Merten 2024; Booyesen 2024a).

The ANC's internal divisions on the nature of the bailout it sought from smaller parties for the ANC in essence to retain power, as leading party in the emerging coalition government, leveraged the deliberations to form a coalition government. After the ANC's early, principled decision to work with the DA it had to find ways to counter internal resistance against coalescing with the DA. Hence, ANC secretary-general Fikile Mbalula denied that the ANC had formed a 'coalition' with the DA – the GNU became the chosen designation (Mbalula, interview with Shoba et al. 16 June 2024):

There is no DA-ANC coalition, it's finding expression in a GNU... Six million people want the ANC to lead and survive. They want us to serve the national democratic revolution, including our allies. There is no issue like... we've got a deal with the DA.

The ANC used GNU inclusivity of multiple small and minor parties to minimise perceptions of (and internal resistance to) a deal with the DA. The broad, multi-party GNU stake-holding became an ANC instrument to publicise its resistance to DA cabinet aspirations and the conduct of coalitions. In relation to the executive, the bolstered ranks of deputy ministers would also help accommodate many ANC leaders, thereby building endorsement of its 'not-a-coalition' GNU executive. ANC-DA haggling on the allocation of cabinet portfolios, both in numbers and domains, propelled the negotiation process (Booyesen 2024b) and ensured that the ANC could flag its dismissal of some DA demands. The DA accepted the inclusive 'GNU' approach.

Inclusivity and Composition of the Coalition National Executive

The two-week negotiations culminated in parties (mainly the ANC, DA and IFP) signing the Statement of Intent (2024) on 14 June 2024, and then electing the president and National Assembly office-bearers, followed by the finalisation and inauguration of the cabinet. The ANC took the lead; the composition reflected its approach of retaining control and capturing portfolios central to ANC identity and national power. A select number of sufficiently important portfolios went to the GNU partners.

Eventual numerical representation of parties in cabinet diverged from proportionality, and confirmed that the ANC remained largely in charge, despite electoral losses and the give-and-take of negotiations. The DA had hardened its negotiation attitude when the ANC refused to sacrifice certain positions and offer better proportionality (see Ferreira & Mzangwe 28 June 2024). At one point it had added claims for either the deputy presidency or a ministry in the Presidency of South Africa. The addition of micro parties to the GNU executive exacerbated this disproportionality.

The announcement of cabinet on 30 June 2024 reduced tensions pertaining to character of the coalition government. New cabinet portfolios were added, mostly by splitting existing portfolios. Nine of the ten parties in the GNU were included in the executive – either in the 32-member cabinet, or in the ranks of 43 deputy ministers. The ANC held a total of 20 of these 32 cabinet positions, including all portfolios in the economic cluster and in the Presidency, and International Relations, and the DA had six, the IFP two, the PA one, GOOD one, the PAC one,

and FF+ one. The ANC took two-thirds of the deputy ministerial positions. The DA accepted deputy ministries in six departments.

The ANC designated the coalition government arrangement an open-door GNU, rather than in essence a coalition with the DA and IFP; the open door guaranteed more, higher positions to the micro-parties. The ANC encouraged broad inclusion, saying: 'The ANC once again takes this opportunity to invite political parties who resolved to define themselves outside this effort to reconsider and join the GNU' (ANC 17 June 2024). Several small parties heeded the call, probably lured by the possibility of cabinet posts.

Besides the process of including a high number of parties in the coalition government – 10 of the 18 in Parliament – it is significant that the parties in the executive represented over 70% of the electorate that voted (see Table 1). While the ANC and DA as the two biggest parties represent just over 60% of the voting electorate, it is possible that the ANC and the range of small GNU parties could also constitute a majority should parties like the 'non-aligned' ActionSA and/or the ACDP assist. The ANC at national level also had a third alternative: aligning with the EFF and a micro party or two. This would be in line with the Gauteng ANC approach, and would heighten pressure on the national ANC accordingly.

The composition of South Africa's executive thus revealed much about the ANC's strategy to retain power despite extending party political participation following the election result. The balance of power between the political parties in the executive tilted in favour of the ANC. The cabinet reflected the co-option of opposition parties, rather than the outcome of substantive power-sharing where no party enjoyed definitive control on its own. From its controlled negotiation process the ANC gained an overwhelming dispensation of retaining power, although it would have to sacrifice some of its old ways and risk more transparency and accountability (see Booysen 2024b). Yet, it had a guaranteed majority. It proclaimed, as in the July 2024 Cabinet report-back to Parliament, that it was simply operating on the basis of the sound work of the (previous) sixth ANC administration.

In the process of constituting the relatively inclusive government executive, several small and micro-parties moved into the GNU and cabinet on the basis of their modest election results; others gained powerful positions chairing parliamentary committees. They were useful to the ANC, which could use their inclusion into the GNU executive and parliamentary committee leadership to counter pushback from the broader ANC community against the ANC's GNU association with the DA. This grouping included trade union association the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and the South African Communist Party (SACP).

Diffusion of the Coalition Agreement to the Provinces

The absence of synchrony in South Africa's transition from one-party dominance to coalitions was evident in the varied interpretations of what coalition government entails. The differences became even more pronounced in the formation of coalition governments in the three coalition provinces of Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Northern Cape.

Only KwaZulu-Natal approximated the formula of the national coalition, as envisaged in the SOI (2024). The province determined a power-sharing dispensation in which the IFP, DA, ANC and NFP shared in the provincial portfolios. The legislature's seat division following the election was: MK 37, IFP 15, ANC 14, DA 11, EFF 2 and the NFP 1, with the coalition totalling 41 of the 80 seats. The KZN premier (Thami Ntuli, IFP) was elected, and the NFP with its one seat made it onto the provincial executive council. The KZN coalition deal came through just hours before the election of parliamentary office-bearers and the president of South Africa, signalling that the national coalition deal would materialise.

Following the 2024 elections, Gauteng was the last of the provincial coalition deals to be finalised, and the GNU formula was not sustained. The executive arrangements followed *after* the DA had helped elect Lesufi as ANC premier, when it was still anticipated that the SOI style agreement would find traction in Gauteng. Gauteng chairperson and subsequently premier, Panyaza Lesufi, refused to share executive portfolios proportionately or approximately proportional with the DA, instead offering it just a few minor portfolios which the DA refused to accept. It had insisted on three out of ten MEC positions (the ANC-DA support ratio in the legislature being 34.76 to 27.44%). Lesufi announced a minority coalition; the ANC shared power with three minor parties, the PA (two legislature seats), and IFP and Rise Mzansi (one seat each). The four coalition parties' seat total in the legislature was 32 out of 80 (the ANC contributed 28). Lesufi had obtained undertakings from the EFF to offer confidence-and-supply support when outright majorities were required. Earlier, the ANC had been close to sealing a formal power-sharing deal with the EFF.

In the Northern Cape the ANC was one seat short of an outright majority. It entered a confidence-and-supply arrangement with the FF+, through which it retained full provincial executive power. It signed in the PA for additional assurance of its provincial majority. The FF+ had one legislature seat and the PA three. The trade-off was that the FF+ would help elect the ANC's Zamani Saul as premier. In exchange, the FF+ gained recognition for the white Afrikaner enclave Orania's 'self-sufficiency' – to care for its own management, free of obligation to use services from the faltering Thembelihle local municipality. The FF+ also

took on the chairpersonship of the oversight committee on local government (see Stone 30 June 2024).

These divergent provincial coalitions reveal the extent to which provincial specificities altered the national SOI agreement (2024, article 22). The three provinces all had broadened representation of political parties and their constituencies; yet there were many exclusions and much divergence from the national model, which enjoyed continuous legitimation through official government and presidential narratives. Beyond the set of governing coalitions, the exclusions included the EFF and MK, both awake to opportunities that could let them access the new porous coalitions core of South African politics.

ACCOUNTABILITY DERIVED FROM BROADER REPRESENTATION

The South African citizenry craves higher levels of representation of interests and accountability from their government. This has been evident in, among others, the declining levels of trust in politicians and public institutions (Krönke & Cumanzala 2024); shrinking vote loyalty to political parties; public outcries against corruption and malfeasance in governance; ongoing insistence that perpetrators must face consequences; and the public's welcoming of the formation of South Africa's GNU-type coalition government (see SRF 2024).

The immediate expectation in the aftermath of instituting this coalition government in June-July 2024 was that the relative inclusivity of the formation – presented in the details above – would also lead to greater transparency of the processes of decision making, policy implementation in the state institutions, and in extracting responsiveness and accounting to the citizens and voters that gave the mandate to this supermajority group of government actors. This section explores altered prospects for accountability in the new phase in South African politics.

GNU Agreement, Convergence and Template for Accountability

In taking the decision to embark on an inclusive coalition government, the leading parties were informed by public opinion poll trends that affirmed elevated levels of support for a coalition government. For example, the Social Research Foundation (2024) found that around 55% of a survey of ANC and DA voters support a GNU very strongly; another 20% was somewhat positive about it. The question was how they would feel if President Cyril Ramaphosa were to constitute a grand coalition of parties that agreed to share national power and cooperate to deliver to the people through a single policy programme. Only 10% would find such a government very or somewhat undesirable. Such findings (along with lack of viable alternatives), helped motivate the ANC and DA.

South Africa's 2024 GNU coalition model is evolving continuously. Components up to October 2024 included:

- On 6 June 2024, following an ANC NEC meeting, ANC President Ramaphosa announced that the party was inviting all political parties to join negotiations to establish a GNU;
- The adoption of the Statement of Intent (SOI) on 14 June 2024, intensely negotiated between the ANC and DA, and others, was first endorsed by the IFP, and adopted without query by the smaller coalition parties. The SOI outlined the principles and the minimum programme of priorities upon which the GNU was founded: the decision-making procedures (dispute resolution structures and mechanisms for communication and coordination were not specified); the GNU committed to focusing on nine priorities, including economic growth, tackling poverty, correcting local government, elevating education skills and health care, building state capacity and a professional civil service, and strengthening both law enforcement and Parliament;
- The election and inauguration of the ANC's Ramaphosa as president of South Africa were on 14 June and 18 June, respectively;
- The negotiation of the Cabinet composition, especially in deliberations between the ANC and DA: Cabinet was announced on 30 June 2024;
- The Minister in the Presidency, Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, called new, non-ANC members of Cabinet to order, cautioning them that the GNU's choice of priorities would have to be aligned with the National Development Plan (NDP) of 2012;
- The Cabinet lekgotla of 13 to 14 July 2024 decided on a joint governance programme focusing on convergence around resuscitating the economy. The outcomes agreed upon at the Cabinet lekgotla would trickle down to all provincial and local governments;
- The new Cabinet members assumed office, taking modest new initiatives that fell within the ambit of existing legislation and government programmes;
- Agreement, in broad terms, to a coalition conflict resolution mechanism in September to October 2024, following a dispute about the Basic Education Laws Amendment Bill and Act; and
- The GNU coalition absorbed the fallout and divergence into non-GNU arrangements at the local level, including the case of Tshwane's mayorship, in October 2024.

Continuity and the ANC Assuming Coalition Power

These developments concerning the outcome of the 2024 elections and the formation of South Africa's GNU coalition government indicate that a new political order was being established, that citizens wished to have such an order, and harboured expectations that effective representation and accountability would be rendered by the political parties and their leaders. The coalition government came with emphases on convergence in policy programmes (see Omar 2024). Inter-party agreements indicated reinvigorated attention to solving South Africa's protracted policy and governance problems (largely related to implementing and enforcing prevailing policies), and thus that there might be more representative, responsive and accountable government.

The ANC projected the 2024 government as an inclusive and consensus-seeking 'GNU party' in power (Ntshavheni, quoted in Goba 13 July 2024). It attempted to limit intra-GNU policy contestation, while preserving the ANC's ownership of the coalition government. As argued by the Dullah Omar Institute (2024, p. 42), the elections and their early aftermath displayed hallmarks of a 'stable, competitive constitutional democracy'. The SOI stressed acceptance and loyalty to the Constitution, and also, in particular, to the president's powers. Amid indications that South Africa's politics of the winner-takes-all was over, the election results were accepted in essence by all parties, and governments were formed in accordance with the constitutional provisions.

Yet, several counter-indicative issues were flagged, impacting either inadvertently or by design. There were strategic silences about inconvenient aspects of the GNU agreement, which detracted from the representativity of the new consensus and held implications for accountability. The ANC had forged a 'consensus', using among others the power it had accumulated across the state apparatuses, and had then limited or discouraged the expression of divergent opposition voices. It had made full use of the weakness of its coalition partners and fostered alternative back-up majorities that it could achieve with the host of small and micro coalition partners. The DA was a strong coalition partner but weak in that it needed the coalition with the ANC even more than the ANC needed it. The ANC kept an escape clause in its arsenal, an alternative National Assembly coalition with the EFF, in which case a majority would be achievable with minimal help from one or two micro parties (see Goba 14 June 2024).

The constraints on broadened representation in government and enhanced accountability of government to the citizens and voters of South Africa were evident at both the party political and state-bureaucratic levels.

At the *party political and party-government levels*, the ANC had no qualms about taking an early lead in establishing the coalition government. It

asserted continuity of state and governance at a time when the ANC lost its outright national majority, in May 2024. Convergence, consensus and renewed reconciliation were its messages. In cooperation with the other nine coalition parties, the ANC asserted the existence of good prospects for a constructive and accountable exercise of power. The GNU's apparent dedication to principles of nation-building, social cohesion, unity, non-racialism and non-sexism underscored the GNU aims of promoting inclusion and cooperation (DOI 2024). In the subsequent months – up to just beyond 100 days of the GNU – there were modest indications of problems being solved and de facto improved accountability being manifested. The changes, however, were rare, and progress slow.

Opposition parties, including the DA, remained weak and were reminded continuously of their subordinate positions in the GNU, being subject to the SOI and the ANC's interpretation of the constitutional prerogatives and the rights of the president. The ANC's early initiatives in directing the formulation of the SOI principles, and the modus operandi of the GNU through the deliberations of the June 2024 cabinet *lekgotla*, were supplemented later through public discourse on the rights and roles of participating parties by the Minister in the Presidency. These went a long way to ensuring that the ANC would retain most, if not almost all, of the policy and governance initiatives.

In the words of Malan (2024) this was due to effective strategy:

(T)he ANC is currently occupying a much stronger position than its electoral support justifies. Judging by events since 31 May in relation to government formation, we have clearly not entered a new era of benevolent cooperation and partnership... the ANC had engaged in a deft strategy of deceit in the manner of the fox... such outsmarting of an adversary is no cause for moral indignation, but for accolades for clever tactics.

Accountability was bolstered in that the inclusion of nine parties besides the ANC in the coalition forced the ANC-led civil service, especially at top level in the Presidency of South Africa, to integrate policy priorities of participating parties into government programmes. The ANC as a 40% party had stepped in, and was still close to twice the size of the second-largest party, the DA. The ANC held on tightly to state power, irrespective of the transition in party politics and the institution of coalition government, to the extent that the ANC's minority-level dominance of party political coalition initiatives and the government formation process defined the early-GNU period.

In this process, and at the *state-bureaucratic level*, the ANC benefitted from a widely supportive (although often also crippling unprofessional and ineffective)

civil service, which came equipped with planning instruments and processes. Much of the ANC's retention of state power throughout the time of ceding party political power was anchored in the Presidency of South Africa, where governance plans had been operationalised both before the elections and while the electoral transition was unfolding. The Presidency's planning unit adjusted planning instruments to reflect a consensual coalition core. This happened in great haste following the 2024 elections and helped create credibility and legitimacy for the Presidency of South Africa in the eyes of the GNU partners.

The multiparty thrust of the coalition government was paired with the government's Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP). In the months preceding the elections the bureaucrats in the Presidency had been updating this document in preparation for the seventh administration. In many respects it mirrored the ANC's election manifesto – the pre-election focus was still on translating the ANC manifesto into a government planning document. Post-election amendments reflected shared thrusts of the manifestos of all GNU parties, although the ANC stressed at the point of 100 days of GNU that it was the ANC manifesto that the GNU was implementing (Ramaphosa 14 October 2024). Nevertheless, the bureaucrats were said to be working on the basis of the GNU coalition's SOI, while claiming the guiding light of the National Development Plan (NDP) which had been supported by all parliamentary parties when it was launched in 2012 (see Omar 2024). Policy compliance was expected from the GNU partners; even the ANC as party issued a statement to 'clarify' the limited say the GNU partners would have (ANC 4 July 2024):

There is no agreement that exists of 'sealed mandates' where each Minister in the GNU pursues their sectarian party policies. Such an agreement would run counter to both the letter and spirit of the constitution, which all GNU party signatories have agreed to act on the basis of.

Ramaphosa (18 July 2024) outlined the priorities that emerged from the Cabinet *lekgotla* when he delivered the opening of Parliament address, stating that the GNU 'has resolved to dedicate the next five years to actions that will advance three strategic priorities: drive inclusive growth and job creation, reduce poverty and tackle the high cost of living, and build a capable, ethical and developmental state'.

In the subsequent months there were tentative advances in accountability through some improved scrutiny of contracts and tenders by especially the national departments under opposition party ministers. There was evidence of fresh perspectives on ineffective ways of implementing policies. The opportunities for corruption, capture and misappropriation arguably decreased. When problems became known, there were fewer prospects of these being swept under the carpet

or accountability being delayed and avoided. Although only a few incidences of malfeasance, tips of the icebergs, were revealed and addressed, they were potential signals to better future practice.

The 'BELA moment' – the GNU fallout regarding the Basic Education Laws Amendment Act – of September 2024 shed further light on the GNU government's unfolding processes of representation and accountability. Part of the controversy was in the Bill and Act spanning the sixth and seventh administrations. Shortly before the May election, the sixth Parliament had hastily adopted the BELA Bill, obligating the President to sign it into law unless he deemed it unconstitutional. Signing followed in September 2024. (Ramaphosa had signed a similarly controversial National Health Insurance Act just before the election.) The BELA Bill had been flagged as a contested matter in the GNU negotiations. Several GNU parties – the DA, FF+ and UDM – as well as the non-GNU ACDP and ActionSA were opposed to the Bill, but Ramaphosa proceeded, on the grounds of not having any choice. Wide-ranging mobilisation for better accountability followed, including by civil society groupings surrounding the core coalition parties. AfriForum and Solidarity bolstered the hand of the DA and FF+ in opposing the Act. Ramaphosa's compromise was to sign the Bill but suspend the implementation of the two clauses concerning mother tongue education and the powers of school governing bodies to control the language status of schools. Ramaphosa (16 September 2024) argued:

In taking this approach, we are seeking to establish a culture of openness and dialogue among the GNU parties. We are also drawing on a long history in South Africa of engagement among parties on matters on which they seem far apart.

The BELA moment hence demonstrated how conflicts push and alter the boundaries of the minimally defined coalition government arrangement. The incident highlighted the necessity of creating a coalition conflict resolution mechanism. The ANC agreed reluctantly and a 'process committee' style of mechanism saw the light. The ANC at first resisted affording the mechanism formal status, arguing that the mechanism could not usurp the power of the president. Subsequently, a clearing house dispute resolution mechanism, also referred to as a multiparty, issue-specific negotiating committee, took shape. Its limited powers were confirmed: its decisions would not override those of cabinet.

CONCLUSION

The true test of whether heightened accountability in the new coalition order is both acceptable and sufficient will only emerge over time. There have been

significant yet still tentative advances. Sound templates emerged, but advances often remained concealed by political party contests. The ANC does not yet accept the GNU coalition as an unadulterated new epoch in South African politics. Up until at least November 2024, parties were approaching the coalition largely as a new weapon to recover or win future electoral support.

The parties involved in the 2024 coalition will continuously monitor their progress among the electorate. Citizens and voters will interpret and decide on the level of credibility and legitimacy that coalition involvement brings to individual parties. By-election results and public opinion polls are bound to be watched closely as key future moments approach. These include the ANC's mid-2027 National General Council meeting (a stock-taking event mid-way between its national elective conferences where future leadership candidates start emerging); the next round of local government elections scheduled for late 2026, possibly early 2027; and the ANC's next elective conference in December 2027. The DA's next elective federal congress in 2026 will also be monitored for ongoing coalition endorsement or rejection and possible withdrawal.

A large part of the ANC's motivation will be to use the GNU to rebuild and gain support from the constituencies that its GNU partners represent. Early indications also include that the ANC will go to great lengths to demonstrate distance from especially its main GNU partner, the DA, despite its assertion that the coalition represents a GNU party. This will be to appease internal factions and possibly retain credibility in the eyes of MK and EFF followers. In relation to the GNU, it may make some concessions on policy and be seen to act against its own deployees on the corruption front while it pursues its objective to recover and regain support. Issues of representation and accountability will be core determinants of possible ANC advances, but also of overall coalition credibility. Constructive GNU coalition behaviour will build reassurances of representation and accountability, while strategic party political priorities remain main drivers up until and after the national and provincial elections of 2029.

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ELITE MONEY AND VOTES

The Political Economy of South Africa's 2024 Elections

Rekgotsofetse Chikane

Rekgotsofetse Chikane is a lecturer at the Wits School of Governance,
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
ORCID <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2052-93933>

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 elections in South Africa represented a watershed moment in which the nation's political landscape underwent an unprecedented transformation. For the first time in South Africa's democratic history, the African National Congress (ANC) lost its majority, ushering the country into an era of coalition governance at a national level. This shift raises a critical question: could this election mark the beginning of a more inclusive, transparent democracy, or does it signal a new phase of elite dominance wrapped in the guise of coalition politics? Furthermore, could this election represent a meaningful shift in the extractive nature of political and economic elites or was it merely a continuation of entrenched elite interests. This study focuses on the changing 'deals environment' in which business elites negotiate and interact with political parties and state institutions, often reinforcing existing power structures. As these elites and political actors navigate a more complex environment, the power, influence, and wealth concentration dynamics associated with South Africa's minerals-energy-finance complex (MEFC) remain central to the nation's political economy.

The paper explores the broader implications of the 2024 elections by analysing the evolving relationships among business elites, political parties, and state institutions from the 1980s to 2024. A key component of this analysis is the Political Party Funding Act 6 of 2018, a recent legislative change aimed at regulating and disclosing private donations to political parties, and which sheds light on the financial dependencies that shape political agendas. To understand this transformation, the paper draws on literature on the 'deals environments' among political and economic elites. The literature reveals how agreements among elites frequently circumvent formal regulations to secure preferential outcomes. In this context, while they appear broadly inclusive, South Africa's political institutions contrast sharply with economic institutions that remain heavily extractive. These extractive structures perpetuate inequality, limit social mobility, and concentrate wealth and power within a small elite. The paper investigates closed-ordered

deals and power dynamics within the MEFC and considers how these dynamics affect the broader economic and political landscape. Assessing South Africa's deals-based governance provides a critical perspective on whether coalition politics can genuinely disrupt elite power, or if the emerging environment remains entrenched in historically extractive arrangements.

SOUTH AFRICA'S DEALS ENVIRONMENT

Deals Between the Political and Economic Elite

The debate about the intent and purpose of South Africa's political economy has been extensively examined and discussed since the country achieved democracy in 1994. In their *Oxford Handbook on the South African Economy* (2021), Oqubay, Tregenna and Valodia provide an extensive discussion regarding the nature and alteration of the South African economy before and after the country's democratic transition. However, while the country's economic institutions remained largely intact within the context of the 2024 elections, its political institutions experienced extensive alterations. The establishment of coalition governments, the increasing ineptitude of local government in-service delivery, systemic forms of corruption hampering governance across all levels, and the pervasiveness of inequality, unemployment, and poverty have all impacted societal trust in political institutions. This paper utilises two theories of political economies of nations to understand South Africa's political context in the lead-up to elections: (1) phase transitions in societies, and (2) deal-making within and between political and economic institutions.

The distributional effects of South Africa's political and economic institutions, as understood by Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), and whether they are inclusive or extractive, are of primary concern for this study. In this sense, inclusive institutions broadly share political power and economic gains across a diverse polity of society. In contrast, extractive institutions are characterised by a small elite that concentrates the power and benefits of these institutions for a narrow polity of society (Acemoglu & Robinson 2019). This is despite South Africa being a relatively liberal constitutional democracy, characterised by electoral politics, parliamentary debate, and institutions such as collective bargaining, land claims, black economic empowerment, and constitutional law (Von Holdt 2013).

South Africa's economic institutions are largely extractive and remain characterised, according to Mondliwa and Roberts (2021) by the continued concentration of ownership and control of economic activity across a multitude of sectors. The link that Acemoglu and Robinson (2019) draw between economics and politics is that inclusive economic institutions depend on inclusive political

institutions. Inclusive political institutions should have a broad distribution of political power and an effective state. If these institutions do not distribute power effectively and are weak, they are considered extractive, creating extractive economic institutions. While South Africa's political institutions seem to be, in the main, broadly inclusive, the inability to create inclusive economic institutions is considered to be the result of either an ineffective state or an ineffective democratic dispensation.

South Africa's political institutions underwent a phased transition in 1994 through the creation of constitutional democracy with the rule of law being equally applicable to all who reside in the state. Since then, a point of discussion has been that while the country's formal economic institutions have undertaken a variety of alterations, the same is not true for elements of its informal institutions. Thus, to understand this lack of alteration in South Africa, this study adopts a 'deals' rather than a 'rule' approach to understanding institutional change.

It is often inferred that rules are impersonal and apply equally to everyone. Pritchett and Werker (2012, p. 45) argue that the idea of 'deals' allows for an understanding of personalised and discretionary decision-making. In this sense, 'deals' are:

a specific action between two (or more) entities in which there are actions that are not the result of the impersonal application of a rule but rather are the result of characteristics or actions of specific individuals which do not spill-over with any precedential value to any other future transaction between other.

More mature and developed countries exhibit inclusive political and economic 'rules'. Most countries operate in an environment characterised by deals within inclusive political and economic institutions and combinations of inclusive and extractive political and economic institutions (Pritchett & Werker 2012). Within this context, deals can be divided into a variety of iterations. The first relates to ordered deals. These refer to deals that, once agreed upon, are maintained and thus viewed as predictable. Disordered deals are unpredictable, as they can be abandoned. Secondly, deals can also be understood to be widely available (open) or limited (closed) to a select group of the polity.

Two combinations are of particular concern for South Africa: (1) open-ordered, which characterise inclusive political and economic institutions, and (2) closed-ordered societies that are exemplified by an elite who have developed a system wherein institutional arrangements are honoured but are not made accessible to the wider polity. Closed-ordered societies may create stable and predictable deals that accelerate growth due to concentrated economic gains,

and inhibit the development of institutions that impartially implement policy. In 1994 South Africa attempted to shift from a closed-ordered society towards one more akin to open-ordered. However, the gains of this transition have remained concentrated in elite segments of society.

The evolution of elite negotiations in South Africa has been extensively examined elsewhere (Hirsch 2005; Van Wyk 2009). Within the context of the 2024 national elections, the focus of this study is on the notion of economic elites and the deal-making environment created by the political transition towards coalition governments. Economic elites in this study refer to individuals who wield influence through their positions as owners, board members, or high-level executives of leading firms in South Africa. Whether acting individually or as part of influential groups and institutions, they can significantly and consistently shape political and economic outcomes (Atria et al. 2020; Barnard & Luiz 2024; Higley & Burton 1989; Robinson 2012; Van Wyk 2009).

In a similar manner in which elites reproduce across other developing countries, often those with a colonial past, elites here are viewed as historical elite groups who benefit rather than lose during transitional periods (Barnard & Luiz 2024). The power of elites in the South African context is their ability to uphold or counterbalance their loss of de jure power during political transitions by investing in de facto political influence – power that is not allocated by institutions, e.g. elections – through activities such as lobbying and leveraging their concentration of economic power (Acemoglu & Robinson 2008; Robinson 2012).

Deals Between Economic Institutions and the creation of the MEFC

The current deal environment between the political and economic elites can be understood as the emergence of the negotiated settlement between the apartheid state and the ANC during the transition years. Although the deals environment could find its roots within South Africa's colonial history, the current modern framework was undoubtedly informed by the country's economic and political crisis during the 1980s. At that point, the country began its phased transition through an initial consolidation of economic interests within the state and the emergence of new political attitudes and institutions (Gelb 2007). The crisis was linked to the after-effects of the 1970 oil crisis, the gold boom and bust, a growing debt burden and increasing internal and external opposition to apartheid, which led to the international condemnation of state actions and the outflow of foreign investment (Bhorat et al. 2020, p. 4; & Finnoff 2005; Schneider 2000). More importantly, this period also marked the historical foundations of South Africa's current economic institutions and elite players.

The apartheid state responded to the economic and political pressures of the 1970s and 1980s in three ways relevant to the debates regarding South Africa's development trajectories after apartheid and the current deals environment of its political economy. The first was the result of the shift in focus of macroeconomic policy towards mining exports to take advantage of the gold-led commodity price boom of the 1970s. As a result, the surge in foreign exchange led to an appreciation in the value of the Rand and substantial foreign exchange windfalls (Bell & Madula, 2001; Bhorat et al., 2020). However, rising exchange rates pressured the non-natural resource-based manufacturing sectors as their profitability decreased due to import cost increases hindering their competitiveness (Bhorat et al. 2020; Gelb 2007). This was despite the sector having been historically safeguarded by import substitution, state financing, the imposition of protectionist measures, and strong exchange controls that led to the manufacturing sector replacing the mining sector as the largest sector of the economy (Schneider 2000).

The economic crisis stifled the sector as manufacturing's contribution to GDP and formal sector employment decreased throughout the 1980s (Mnguni & Simbanegavi 2020). Black (2021) argues that by 1994 the sector resembled a distorted pattern of development manifested in the minerals-energy complex, which resulted from heavy state support and artificially cheap energy. The outcome of this, he argues, is South Africa's extraordinary economic structure comprising a high level of resource dependence, a capital-intensive export profile, and massive structural unemployment (Black 2021).

The second response by the state to this political and economic crisis was informed by the consequences of the country's international isolation due to growing political instability and the fall in gold prices in 1982 (Freund & Padayachee 2021). During this time, there was a significant amount of capital flight. The state devalued the rand to prevent the depletion of foreign exchange reserves, leading to deflation in the domestic economy. At the same time, the state made substantial investments in the mineral and energy sectors and increased expenditure on the military and state-owned arms industry. These measures were taken in response to political dissent in South Africa and the southern African region (Lowenberg 1997; Mohamed & Finnoff 2005).

South Africa attempted to liberalise its financial markets in 1980; however, the country had at this point become a capital importer and exhibited high current account deficits. The result of the decrease in foreign direct and indirect investment eventually led to a debt crisis in 1985 and the closure of the country's foreign exchange market for three trading days (Hirsch 1989; Mohamed & Finnoff 2005). President PW Botha's Rubicon speech, which reaffirmed the state's commitment to apartheid policies, was met with continued international condemnation that resulted in accelerated disinvestment. This further increased concentration within

the financial sector as 'large South African corporates bought out the stakes of international investors in companies across the board' (Isaacs 2018, p. 146).

The allowance for an increased concentration of ownership of financial institutions through mergers and acquisitions due to foreign corporation disinvestment resulted in six mining and finance conglomerates controlling 80% of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (Gelb 2007; Isaacs 2018). These conglomerates, further elaborated upon in Table 1 below, often signify the institutional representation of South Africa's minerals and energy complex, which refers to South Africa's evolving political and economic systems centred on sectoral linkages designed to accumulate capital in and around South Africa. Isaacs (2018) argues that South Africa's mining-energy complex goes beyond the productive processes related to mining and energy and extends into adjoining supply chains, labour markets, public infrastructure, and financial services. He further believes that the financial sector, which played a prominent role in the liberalisation of the apartheid state, should be included within this minerals-energy-complex and the complex should be understood as the minerals-energy-financial complex (Isaacs 2018). For Isaacs (2018), this complex relationship influences the relationship between private capital and the state and the creation and execution of macroeconomic and industrial policies that shape the economy according to that sector's particular interests.

Table 1: Minerals-Energy-Financial Complex

	Established	Non-Financial		Financial		Control	South African Holdings in 2014
		Mining	Industrial	Banking	Long-term Insurance		
Anglo American Corporation (AAC)	Established in South Africa in 1917 by Ernest Oppenheimer, listed on the JSE the same year with substantial backing from US investor.	AngloGold Amcoal De Beers Johannesburg Consolidated Investments	AMIC AECI Premier Group	First National Bank First Western First Industrial First Corporate Bank	Southern Life	Oppenheimer Family	Anglo American Platinum Limited Anglo Coal De Beers (1926) Kumba Iron Ore

	Established	Non-Financial		Financial		Control	South African Holdings in 2014
		Mining	Industrial	Banking	Long-term Insurance		
Stanbic/ Liberty Life	Established in 1862 as the first foreign bank present in South Africa.			Standard Bank Standard Merchant Bank Stannic	Liberty Life	Gordon Family	Liberty Holdings The Standard Bank of South Africa Standard Insurance Limited Stanlib Limited
Rembrandt/ Remgro/ Volkskas	Established in South Africa in 1948, it was listed on the JSE in 1956. Rembrandt was restructured in 2000 and renamed Remgro, listed on the JSE in September 2000.	Remgro GFSA		Volkskas Boland Bank Merchant Bank Rand Merchant Bank Allied United Building Society	Lifegro Federated Life	Rupert Family	VenFin Associates (<50%): Grinrod Limited, PGSI Limited RMB Holdings Limited RMI Holdings Limited Medi-Clinic International
SA Mutual/ Old Mutual	Established in 1845. Nedbank's origins can be traced back to the foundation of the Cape of Good Hope Bank, established in 1831.	Rand Mines	Barlow Rand CG Smith Safren Plate Glass CGS Foods Tiger Oats ICS	Nedbank Nedfin UAL Mutual Bank Perm Building Society	SA Mutual	Mutual Organisation	Nedbank Group, Old Mutual South Africa
Anglo vaal		Anglovaal	South Atlantic			Men-nell and Hersov Families	

Source: Fine, 2018; Isaacs, 2018; Karwowski, 2016

The unbundling and repurposing of this economic logic within the context of a democratic transition necessitated a political negotiation predicated on competing ideas of the country's post-apartheid developmental trajectory. This was between industrialists seeking renewed focus on the manufacturing capabilities within the state, actors within the mining-energy-financial complex (MEFC), the National

Party, and the African National Congress alongside its alliance partners. This necessitated a negotiation for not only the country's political institutions but also for its economic institutions.

*Deals between Political Institutions:
Coalitions (1994-2016) and the Role of the 'Amorphous Market'*

Before the 2024 national and provincial elections, South Africa exhibited an initially eventful but eventually muted experience of coalition government at a national and provincial level. Between 1994 and 2009, national and provincial coalitions functioned as a combination of a surplus majority or minimum winning coalition as the exception to the ANC's electoral dominance. Beginning in 1994, the interim constitution instituted a Government of National Unity between the ANC (62.65%), National Party (NP, 20.39%) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP, 10.54%), which Kotzé (2006) argues served two purposes: (1) enforcing the negotiated agreement; and (2) stabilising the transition and building confidence in the democratisation process. Sections 84 and 88 of the interim constitution codified this power-sharing agreement within the GNU by distributing power in the offices of the deputy presidents and the Cabinet. This was done by ensuring that any party with 80 or more seats could nominate an executive deputy president, and a party with 20 or more seats could have representation in the Cabinet. Cabinet membership was based on proportionality rather than solely on the majority party or at the request of the elected president (Graham 1996).

The NP's withdrawal from the GNU in 1996 was primarily due to the decision to depart from the power-sharing agreement after the 1999 elections (De Klerk 1996). However, Jolobe (2018, p. 88) argues that the 'adhesion by the ANC to neo-liberal policies [through the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Plan] made the presence of the NP in the GNU irrelevant'. This was an important point considering FW De Klerk's (1996) assertion (in the NP's announcement of their withdrawal) that the 'basic economic policies of the Government of National Unity are sound. [Furthermore] We have no reason to believe that the ANC intends to deviate from the course that they themselves have been co-instrumental in charting'. This statement by De Klerk, while seemingly innocuous, indicates the closed-ordered deals environment that continued to exist within the country's democratic dispensation, despite the establishment of a democratic system predicated on an open-ordered environment.

This closed-ordered deals environment can be seen in the shift by the ANC from the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP). This had emphasised the government's leading and enabling role in the development of the country's mixed economy, and the proposed establishment of a living wage as a necessary

condition for any form of economic growth (Adelzadeh 1996). This was the basis for the ANC's 1994 election manifesto (African National Congress 1994). In its stead was the establishment of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macroeconomic strategy in 1996, which focused on generating economic growth by establishing a competitive, outward-orientated economy (Department of Finance 1996). And this choice disproportionately favoured the MEFC at the expense of the manufacturing sector. As Naidoo and Maré (2015) explain, GEAR proposed seemingly antithetical policies when compared to the RDP, such as a fiscal deficit reduction programme, a consistent anti-inflationary monetary policy, further relaxation of exchange controls and tariff reductions, tax incentives to stimulate investment in competitive and labour-absorbing projects, an exchange rate policy aimed at stabilising the real exchange rate at a competitive level, and the privatisation or establishment of public-private partnerships in certain state-owned enterprises.

The establishment of GEAR marked the final step in the ANC's political and economic transition away from the RDP. This shift reflects a changing relationship within the country's closed-deal environment among different factions of the ANC. Some members viewed the party primarily as a liberation movement committed to the principles of the Freedom Charter and the 1993 RDP. In contrast, other ANC members recognised it as a governing party operating within the macroeconomic realities of the time. This dynamic illustrates the interaction between these internal groups, local and global businesses, and the National Party as a partner in the Government of National Unity (GNU). Van Vyck and Grobler (2007) argue that adopting GEAR represented the gradual political convergence between the NP and the ANC, eventually leading to economic collusion between the two parties reflecting an economic balance of power in South Africa. This political and economic collusion arguably represents the post-1994 closed-ordered deals-making environment within South Africa's economic and political institutions.

The withdrawal by the NP from the GNU did not destabilise this closed-ordered environment but represented its entrenchment, as alluded to by De Klerk, who went on to further mention in the withdrawal statement (1996) that:

[the] framework of economic realities within which any Government in South Africa would have to operate will not change as a result of our withdrawal. The "amorphous entity" of the market will continue to make its presence felt. Whether or not we or the ANC Alliance like it, the market will continue to pass its judgements on our management of the economy. No Government can afford to ignore these judgements.

ECONOMIC SITUATION PRIOR TO 2016

While South Africa's political landscape has undergone a transition towards coalition governments, its economy has remained largely extractive over the last thirty years. To illustrate this point, Francis et al. (2021) quote Alan Hirsch (2005, p. 112) who wrote:

To any economic observer in South Africa in the early 1990s, it was clear that the country had entered an economic cul-de-sac. The economy was shrinking. Its assets were being run down—gross fixed investment was negative for four consecutive years to 1994, and capital was in full flight. National income was stagnating, and per capita income had declined every year since 1982, except 1988. Government debt was rising to dangerous levels, with the general fiscal deficit over 9% of gross domestic product in 1993.

Francis et al. (2021) indicate how Hirsch's comment accurately sketches South Africa's macroeconomic situation in 2020. While the country's macroeconomic objective was to stabilise prices, ensure full employment, and sustain economic growth, it remains characterised by chronic high unemployment, poverty, systemic and often racialised inequality in both income and wealth, low per capita income and high inflation (Clarno & Vally 2024; Creamer 2021; Francis et al. 2021; Gumede 2021; Ngubane et al. 2023; Sekwati & Dagume 2023).

Despite the challenges depicted in this picture, the government has attempted to address the situation through various macroeconomic and socio-economic interventions. These interventions spanned several initiatives such as the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) in 1995, the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Plan (GEAR) of 1996, the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGI-SA) in 2004, the New Growth Path in 2009, and the National Development Plan of 2011 (Francis et al. 2021; Gelb 2007; Munyeka 2014). While these plans have varied in their impact, they have been largely contested by various elite players within the country's deal-making environment. Their impact has, as seen in Figure 2, undoubtedly assisted in stimulating economic growth between 1997 and 2007 which in turn led to a significant increase in GDP per capita during the same period. After 2010, with the economy still reeling from the 2008 financial crisis, GDP growth experienced a steady decline which GDP per capita, for all intent and purpose, flatline after 2010.

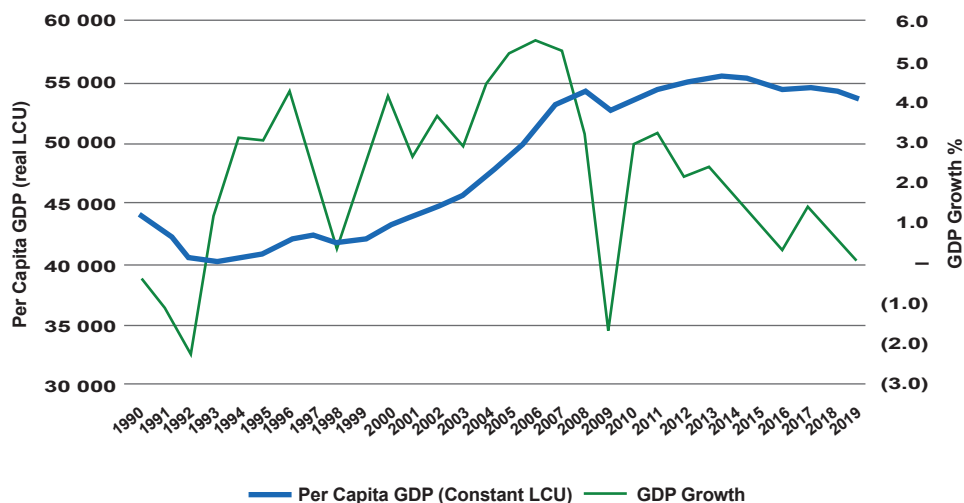


Figure 1: GDP growth and GDP per capita in South Africa

Source: Francis et al. 2021

While an extensive discussion of these macroeconomic policies is beyond the scope of this paper, what is generally understood across all approaches is the state's pursuit of policies aimed at boosting investment (both internally and externally) and reducing poverty, inequality and unemployment. Policies intended to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) were usually exemplified through measures such as trade liberalisation, regionalisation, and industrial development (Magombeyi & Odhiambo 2018). Additionally, policies were aimed at directly facilitating FDI through tools such as exchange rate liberalisation, investment incentives, industrial development zones and special economic zones, and bilateral investment treaties, among other initiatives (Magombeyi & Odhiambo 2018).

Regarding socio-economic development, the country implemented interventions primarily to reduce poverty and inequality by assisting poor households through social grants. Economic empowerment initiatives were also implemented to expand economic participation and extend social services such as education, health, housing, and water (Salahuddin et al. 2020). Gumede (2021) argues that although poverty has decreased in South Africa since 1994, the severity and the concentrated nature of poverty in specific demographic groups had not changed substantially by 2021. Furthermore, he states that interventions to mitigate and decrease poverty have been timid at best, making extreme poverty manageable but not effectively or sustainably reducing poverty (Gumede 2021).

A similar claim is made by Leibbrandt and Diaz Pabón (2021) regarding inequality; they assert that interventions by the state through the use of grants to lower inequality were starting to become ineffective before the COVID-19 pandemic. They highlight that the gap between top-end income earners had been driving the rapid increase in inequality, with data from 2003 to 2016 highlighting a significant disparity in income growth (Leibbrandt & Díaz Pabón 2021). During this period, the real incomes of the top 5 per cent of earners grew at an annual rate of 5.1 per cent, more than double the growth rate of gross national income (GNI) after 2008. In contrast, the incomes of the remaining 95 per cent of the population either remained stagnant or experienced only slight growth, especially for those at the bottom of the income distribution (Leibbrandt & Díaz Pabón 2021, p. 178)

The same story can be told regarding unemployment in South Africa. Despite the influx of labour participation after the end of apartheid and a litany of interventions in the labour market, unemployment increased from 2.4 million in 1994 to 6.7 million in 2019 (Heintz & Naidoo 2021). Youth unemployment, which has grown faster than that of any other age group in South Africa (Statistics SA 2022), was further exacerbated, with 35.2% of youths unemployed and without education or training in 2022 (Statistics SA 2022). The continued impact of youth unemployment on the country creates long-term challenges in South Africa and poses significant risks, potentially creating lost generations in the future (Chikane 2018).

Creamer (2021) argues that regardless of the interventions put in place, growth in the country's economy remains constrained due to a series of interconnected domestic, global, structural, and political-economic factors. These include, (1) the historic exclusion based on race and gender; (2) changes in the global economy; (3) policy decisions and macroeconomic imbalances that have led to reduced levels of investment, especially in social and economic infrastructure that promotes growth; and (4) state capture, corruption, and other weaknesses in state capacity.

The persistence of income inequality, unemployment, and poverty, despite state interventions, raises two important questions about the political economy of the state in the lead-up to the elections. Firstly, it raises concerns about the state's ability to effectively and successfully implement interventions with a measurable and discernible impact. Secondly, it raises questions about whether the structure of the economy and, by extension, its institutions, are inherently extractive and serve only to perpetuate the old apartheid logic regarding the role of the state. While the reasons for the persistence of this economic structure are varied and contested, much of it finds its roots in the decisions made by the state after 1994 that were informed by the economy inherited by the ANC at the time, and the economic institutions that maintained it.

COALITION CURRENTS

Transforming the Deal-Making Landscape

In the lead-up to the 2024 elections, South Africa's political environment was starting to be dominated by coalition politics across its 257 local municipalities. This, it can be argued, has created a window of opportunity for altering the coalition deal environment in South Africa. Subsequent electoral outcomes resulted in vestiges of GNU-esque coalitions at both national and provincial levels through the early 2000s. In 1999, the ANC won 62.65% of the national vote and formed a minimum-winning coalition with the IFP in the province of Kwa-Zulu Natal, which led to the appointment of IFP leader Prince Mangosothu Buthelezi as deputy president. A minimum-winning coalition was eventually formed in the Western Cape province between the ANC and the New National Party (NNP – formerly the NP) in 2000. This was after the province's previous coalition between the Democratic Party (DP) and the NNP collapsed after the 1999 election. The ANC would eventually lose the Western Cape to the Democratic Alliance (DA – formerly the DP) during the 2009 provincial elections. However, these various coalitions did not have a noticeable impact on the country's deal environment as the ANC maintained strong electoral dominance across all levels of government during this period.

This political transition to an age of coalition politics arguably started after the 2016 local elections, which established coalition governments in four of the country's eight metropolitan regions and 27 hung legislatures (Booyesen et al. 2023). While the ANC maintained its majority, the election marked a shift in the ANC's political support in the country's urban heartlands and an increasing willingness by the electorate to shift support towards other parties (Schulz-Herzenberg 2016). Justesen and Schulz-Herzenberg (2018) argue that this shift can be attributed largely to a 'growing trust deficit towards the ANC and perceived service delivery failures at the local level' and indicated that support for the ANC could no longer be considered unconditional. Moreover, the elections highlighted the growing focus opposition parties placed on highly contested municipalities through various forms of electoral clientelism in municipalities with intense electoral competition (Dawson et al. 2023).

The importance of this moment in the country's political landscape and the closed-ordered nature of its deal environment was two-fold. The first was the departure of the results from previous elections in which the ANC routinely won large-scale support from voters, even though the ANC retained control of 161 of a total of 213 councils as well as 53.9% of the national vote share. These results indicate an increased weakening of the ANC's role within the deals environment and an opening of different forms of policy change linked to shifts in policy goals,

rather than routine adjustments to policy instruments or alterations to policy instruments themselves. Secondly, the shift provided for adding new political actors into the country's deals environment, necessitating the emergence of new economic actors.

After the losses faced by the ANC in 2016, the 2019 national elections were similarly disappointing for the party as they received less than 60% of the national vote for the first time in South Africa's democratic history, receiving 57.5% of the vote compared to 65.9% in 2014 (Akinduro & Gumbi 2020; Kotze & Bohler-Muller 2019). Of particular importance during these elections was the relatively low voter turnout, indicating a decrease in trust and belief in South Africa's democratic system and the political parties in it. As Friedman (2019) explains, 'only 50% of eligible voters went to the polls, thus around 28% of people eligible to vote voted for the ANC, 10% for the DA and 5% for the EFF'. The election further indicated that ANC supporters were willing to shift their vote to other parties so long as these dissatisfied supporters 'see one or more opposition parties, or their leading candidates, as an effective or legitimate alternative' (Schulz-Herzenberg & Mattes 2023, p. 13). Indications are that voters also considered withdrawing from the electoral processes as a reasonable option if no opposition party won their support.

As South Africa's political elite adjusted their strategies in response to the rise of coalition governments, its economic elites began to exert significant influence on electoral politics through political funding. Before the 2021 elections, private political funding was not regulated within South Africa. Public funding was regulated by Section 236 of the South African Constitution, which required legislation that allocates funds on a proportional (90%) and equitable (10%) basis (Friedman 2017; Steytler 2004). This was done through the Public Funding of Represented Political Parties Act of 1997 (PFRPA). The act regulates how public money is allocated to political parties in the National Assembly or provincial legislatures. It also outlines the requirements for this money, which is audited annually. The management and administration of the fund are handled by the country's chief electoral officer (Friedman 2017).

However, a court case put forward by the civil society organisation My Vote Counts challenged the secrecy of private political funding towards political parties. A ruling from the Western Cape High Court in 2017 found that the Promotion of Access to Information Act of 2000 was unconstitutional as it did not allow for the disclosure of private funding. The ruling was upheld by the Constitutional Court in 2018 and resulted in the eventual enactment of the Promotion of Access to Information Amendment Act in 2021, which requires private funding of political parties and independent candidates to be recorded, preserved and made available if the value exceeds R100 000 or if made in-kind (My Vote Counts 2021).

In the case of the Democratic Alliance, during the 2024 elections they declared R164.3 million in donations, with 42% coming from individual contributions by Martin Moshal and Mary Slack and a further third from two organisations (Fynbos Ekwiteit and Fynbos Kapitaal), both of which are owned by the Capitec Founder, Michiel le Roux (*Business Tech* 2023; *The Outlier* 2024). The ANC reported receiving R148m in donations, with half of the funding coming from Batho Batho and Chancellor House Trusts, which have often been utilised by the party to fund its political activities, and a further third coming from a variety of mining companies or organisations linked to mining. The ANC received an additional R11.6 million from Patrice Motsepe through his commercial mines, African Rainbow Minerals and Harmony Gold. The two leading parties of the Progressive Caucus, MKP and the EFF, publicised their funding after the elections, with the MKP receiving R380 555 from an NPO called the South African Policy Education Initiative, which was registered as an organisation only three months before the elections. The EFF received an in-kind donation by MTN, the country’s leading telecommunications company totalling R515 313 (Moodley 2024).

As seen in Figure 2 below, individual elites provided significantly greater financial support to political parties compared to other sectors. This was either in their personal capacity, through companies, or political investment vehicles that either function within sectors related to the MEFC or which accrued their wealth through MEFC-related activities. The only other sector that significantly funded political organisations was that of technology; this funding was primarily accrued through Martin Moshal.

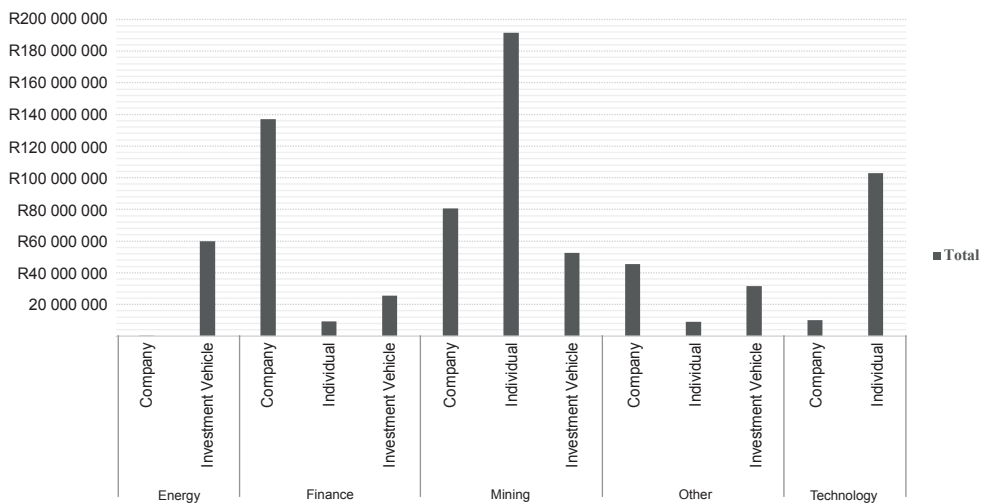


Figure 2: Total Sectoral Funding to Political Parties since 2021

Source: Author’s adaptation from IEC 2021-2024

Both the mining and finance sectors received significant contributions from private companies linked to the economic elite. However, an interesting distinction can be made between the two. In the finance sector, funding was primarily sourced from various companies. In contrast, the mining sector relied heavily on just six individuals for most of its funding. Five of these individuals were connected to the Oppenheimer family, while one was associated with the Hersov family, who accumulated their wealth through Anglovaal, illustrating the continued influence of both families on the country's political economy.

Figures 3 and 4 offer an overview of the financial contributions made by the MEFC between 2021 and 2024 at the political party level, revealing significant trends in support from the various sectors in anticipation of the 2024 elections. The financial sector strategically concentrated its monetary backing on the leading opposition party, the Democratic Alliance. This focused support suggests that the financial sector actively favoured a particular political outcome, reflecting its interests and priorities as the election drew closer. The alignment with the DA suggests a strategic decision to shape governance that supports the sector's financial goals and regulatory requirements. However, what is more likely is the sector's growing dissatisfaction with the ANC.

Conversely, the mining sector adopted a different approach by diversifying its financial support across a broader spectrum of political parties rather than aligning with just one. A noteworthy aspect of this strategy is the substantial contributions directed towards the ANC. This funding strategy towards the ANC occurred primarily through the party's various investment vehicles, highlighting the mining sector's intention to influence the ANC significantly. As stated earlier, non-ANC-directed funding came primarily from individuals who funded multiple opposition parties. By supporting the ANC alongside other parties, the mining sector seemingly sought to navigate potential changes in the political landscape and ensure its interests were protected regardless of which party emerged victorious.

Moreover, the energy sector almost exclusively supported the ANC through its investment mechanisms, reinforcing the ruling party's financial backing as it approached the elections. This concentrated support could reflect the sector's belief that a stable relationship with the ANC was crucial for its continued operations and future investments. In contrast, the technology sector, represented notably by Martin Moshal, took a more varied approach. Moshal, in particular, sought to spread his financial support among various opposition parties, many of which were breakaway parties from the Democratic Alliance. This move illustrates a strategic attempt to engage with various ideologically aligned political entities and position himself favourably within the evolving political landscape.

Overall, the divergent strategies of these influential sectors reflect their respective goals and the complex dynamics of the upcoming elections.

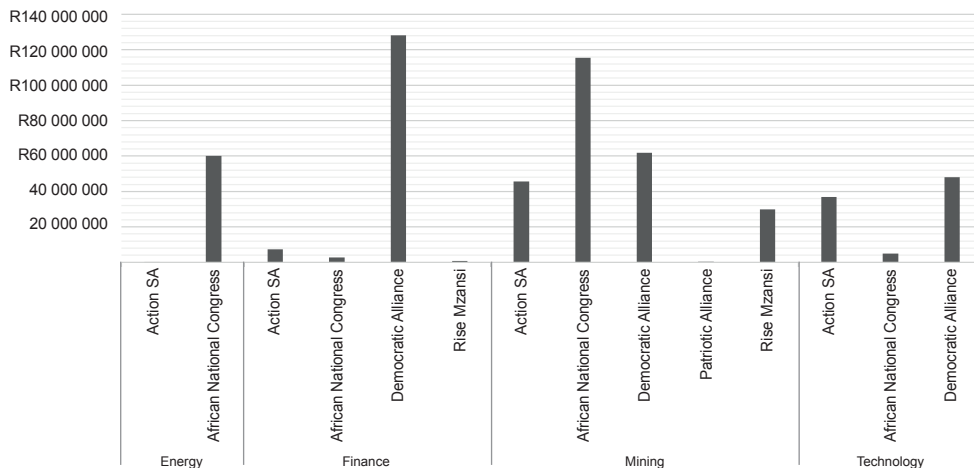


Figure 3: Largest Recipients of MEFC and Technology Sector Funding

Source: Author’s adaptation from IEC, 2021-2024

The above highlights the concentrated power held by a small group of elite individuals whose wealth primarily derives from the MEFC, allowing these actors to exert significant influence over the political landscape. Figure 4 illustrates the trajectory of financial contributions to political parties over time, focusing on the parties that derived the most political funding from the MEFC, namely the ANC, DA, IFP, Action SA, BOSASA, Change Starts Now and Rise Mzansi. Notably, there are significant peaks in contributions during the quarters leading up to elections. These peaks suggest a heightened interest and strategic investment by a select group of economic elites in financing political parties that have traditionally taken business-friendly postures towards the closed-ordered deals environment. This trend indicates that the financial backing from these elites is directly linked to their desire to shape the political environment in favour of their interests. The interplay between the MEFC’s concentrated economic power and political funding in South Africa highlights a system where financial contributions can influence political party dynamics and broader national policy decisions.

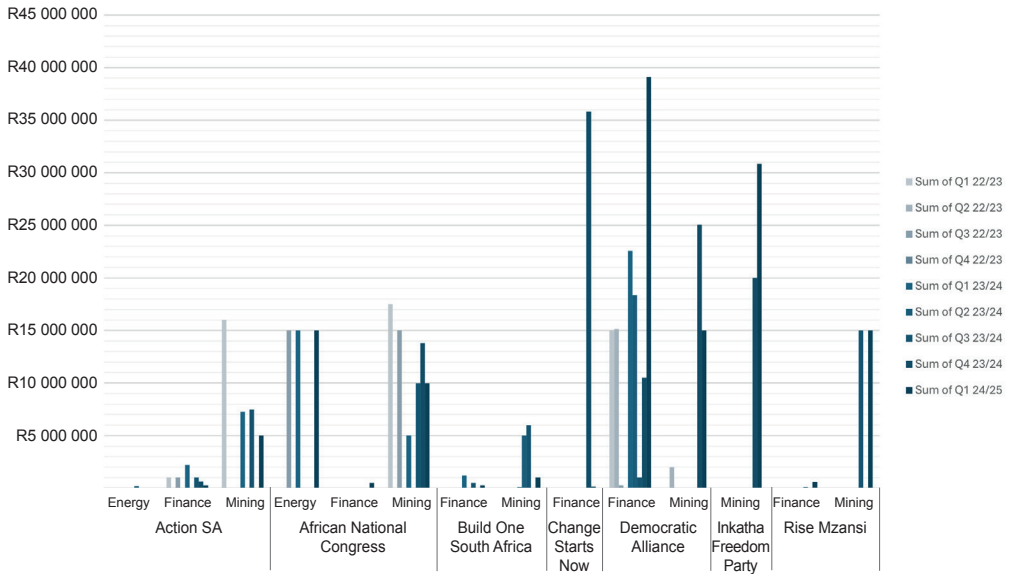


Figure 4: Quarterly view of Largest Recipients of MEFC Funding

Source: Author’s adaptation from IEC 2021-2024

While political funding played an extensive role in the lead-up to elections, it can be argued that elite economic actors further sought to influence the closed-ordered deals environment. This was by bypassing the traditional institutions designed to mediate relationships between the state, labour, and business – such as the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) – through the collaborative effort by leading companies in the country to create a parallel structure.

This new establishment, Business for South Africa (B4SA), operates under the guise of strengthening the state’s capabilities in critical strategic areas. Representing 130 CEOs of South Africa’s largest corporations, B4SA sought to coordinate the private sector’s support for the state by providing specialised skills and assistance during the pandemic (Campher 2020; Kingston 2020). This pact between the country’s largest corporations (representing companies in the mining, energy, and financial services sectors) and the state signified a renewed interest by elite business actors in improving state capabilities. In 2023, B4SA and the government entered into a formal agreement focused on economic reconstruction; this was organised across three workstreams focused on energy, transport and logistics, and crime and corruption (Nyamwena & Bell 2021; South African Government News Agency 2023).

According to B4SA, during 2024 they contributed to reducing loadshedding (electricity blackouts and power cuts) through the recovery of 2.6GW of energy;

the provision of expert skills to Eskom (the country's national electricity provider); and the 65% reduction in criminal incidents along the country's northern corridor, which carries the coal supply between the country's northern mines and its ports. They also claim to have assisted the state in improving law enforcement by providing business information and resources and modernising the country's emergency hotline.

The establishment of B4SA represents a shift in business approach towards the state through its active attempts to provide capacity for state-owned entities and other similar public institutions. At the same time, these interventions are primarily earmarked for sectors of the economy that directly benefit the companies that have provided the services to B4SA. However, as Nyamwena and Bell (2021) warn, although the approaches of both B4SA and the state align across various policy areas, they remain unable to agree on the economy's structural transformation.

CONCLUSION

The 2024 national elections in South Africa marked a critical juncture in the country's political and economic evolution, leading to the formation of a coalition government following the ANC's loss of its majority for the first time in the country's democratic history. This phase transition in the political landscape challenges the dominance of single-party rule and introduces new dynamics in governance through the coalition government arrangement. However, while the political shift offers opportunities for greater democratic engagement, South Africa's economy remains anchored in extractive institutions dominated by the MEFC, which continues to concentrate economic power and benefits among a narrow elite.

As South Africa's Government of National Unity seeks to navigate these complexities, it faces the critical challenge of balancing elite business interests with the need for meaningful structural reforms. The sustainability of South Africa's democratic and economic systems will depend on the GNU's ability to foster a shift from a deals-based governance model to a rules-based framework that prioritises broad-based development over elite gains. Without structural reform, the current coalition arrangement may merely perpetuate the extractive tendencies of the existing political economy, benefiting a narrow elite at the expense of inclusive growth. Whether this coalition era can shift South Africa toward a more equitable, sustainable path will be central to the country's future, determining whether democracy and economic inclusivity coexist within a system historically shaped by elite dominance.

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PEACE AND SECURITY ISSUES IN SOUTH AFRICA'S 2024 NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

Security Planning, Implementation, and Results

Michelle Small

Michelle Small is a lecturer in international relations at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa and an independent expert on special procedures for the United Nations Working Group on Mercenaries
ORCID <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2670-9352>

Election security entails careful planning and coordination among a range of stakeholders throughout the electoral cycle to create and maintain a safe and secure environment in which elections can proceed. The security of an election is paramount to the integrity of, and trust in, the electoral process, institutions, conduct, and outcome. Since its first democratic elections of 1994, South Africa has developed a strong, tolerant political culture underpinned by confidence in a safe, secure, and orderly electoral environment. Elections and electoral campaigns have largely been politically and socially peaceful. However, targeted political violence and killings have increased, and the country contends with a high degree of persistent everyday violence that plays a seen and unseen role during electoral contests.

The aim of the chapter is to establish what peace and security issues dominated South Africa's 2024 national and provincial elections and how these were mitigated and managed, using an election security framework.¹ First, the chapter provides a conceptual overview of the election security framework, applying this to the South African context by outlining the institutions, processes, and actors within South Africa's election security architecture ('planning phase'). The chapter then provides an overview of peace and security issues in South Africa with specific emphasis on political violence in previous elections and the runup to the 2024 elections.

1 A core limitation of this chapter is that it relies on open-source publicly available briefings, interviews, and statements by the IEC and Security Clusters on peace and security issues during the 2024 elections. Specific intelligence and numbers (e.g. troop deployment, results of pattern analysis) remain classified.

Second, the chapter details what security issues manifested during the election period and how these security issues were mitigated and managed by state and non-state stakeholders within an election security framework in order to ensure a safe, peaceful, and orderly electoral environment ('implementation phase'). Third, the chapter highlights what security disputes and issues arose during the counting, tabulation, announcement, and post-election period of the election and how these were managed within the election security framework ('results phase').

The research finds that despite threats made to disrupt the elections with shutdowns, blockades, and anarchy in the pre-election phase, followed by claims of vote rigging and demands for a recount² in the post-election phase, the 2024 elections proceeded without large-scale violence or security incidents. Politically targeted killings, however, form part of the electoral (in)security landscape and show persistence. Further, insecurities and vulnerabilities rooted in everyday violence and crime manifested in direct and indirect ways during the electoral cycle. Going forward, the South African government and policing and law enforcement should implement crime-specific interventions in the runup to and during elections, so that everyday violence and politically targeted violence do not impede the electoral peace and security climate of the country.

ELECTION SECURITY FRAMEWORK

Election security is both normative and practical. Normatively, election security is underpinned by ensuring that four core principles and conditions are met during an election, namely, transparency, legality, impartiality, and inclusiveness.³ *Transparency* needs to be present in electoral institutions (i.e. the electoral commission), throughout the electoral process (inclusive of transparency in rules, laws, codes of conduct, and relaying of information in the public interest), and among stakeholders who are part of electoral institutions and the electoral process (i.e. the appointment and deployment of election, security, and law enforcement officials). *Legality* refers to the promulgation, observance, and implementation of the national laws of a country, inclusive of specified electoral laws. Elections are essentially rights-based events. An integral component of transparency and legality is *impartiality*; laws, institutions, processes, and officials must be de-

2 As claimed by Zuma when he stated: 'uMkhonto weSizwe is of the strong view that the 2024 elections were rigged and that the results announced by the IEC are not a true reflection of the will of the people' (Grootes, S 2024, 'Chaos is the Point: Zuma's Empty and Violent Rhetoric Aims to Hurt South Africa's Democracy'. 17 June. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-06-17-chaos-is-the-point-zumas-empty-and-violent-rhetoric-aims-to-hurt-south-africas-democracy/>)

3 Dunne, S 2006, 'ACE: Focus on elections and security', Ace Project, <https://www.aceproject.org/ero-en/topics/elections-security/Elections%20and%20Security%20Sean%20Dunne.pdf>

politicised and non-partisan and fulfil their mandates without favour or bias. The final principle and condition that must be met to attain election security is *inclusiveness*. Inclusiveness refers to the fair and equal representation and involvement of all constituencies across and during the election cycle (enlisting, participating, and contesting).⁴ Pursuit and respect of these intersectional and interdependent norms generates trust and confidence in the electoral process and thus security of the election.

Practically, election security must achieve the physical conditions of security: protecting and safeguarding voters and state, legal, and electoral institutions as well as processes, materials, systems, and infrastructure (referred to as ‘critical assets’). Critical assets are vulnerable to multiple risks and threats throughout the three phases of the electoral cycle (before, during, and after elections),⁵ as detailed in Figure 2. Risk to an election encompasses the not-always-benign possibility of something occurring that entails a loss within the electoral cycle. By contrast, a threat to an election is conceived of as something that is malicious and seeks to attack, exploit, damage, or destroy, in whole or part, the election. Some risks and threats occur throughout the electoral cycle (e.g. intra-party or inter-party violence or incitement to violence as a result of informational manipulation or hacking of the election database). Others are specific to a particular phase within the electoral cycle (e.g. theft and stuffing of ballot boxes during the counting or tabulation phase of the election period).

While many election security concerns are universal (i.e. freedom from fear, harm, intimidation throughout the electoral cycle, and the safety and security of the voter and ballot during the election), the security environment of an election is to a large degree determined by context-specific structural conditions that vary among states. Post-conflict or transitional states, for example, have different security considerations from those of authoritarian or hybrid regimes or ‘ideationally’ charged political environments (i.e. where there are pre-existing ethnic, racial, or religious tensions).⁶ Electoral system designs can also present a risk to an election. A winner takes all first-past-the-post (FPTP) design is particularly likely to result in a highly competitive electoral environment, which, if overlain with ideational tensions, can lead to violence or conflict, especially on the announcement of election results in the post-election phase.

In operationalising an election security framework, it is critical to conduct an electoral **security assessment** to determine and map out risks and threats and

4 Leterme, Y 2017, ‘Inclusive Politics for Sustainable Democracy’, *International IDEA*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmGWhYb8d0o>

5 The electoral cycle conceptualises what electoral activities take place at each stage of an election and who is tasked with their implementation.

6 Dunne, S 2006 [note 3].

to identify priority areas and hotspots for security intervention.⁷ Following this, determining who the stakeholders are and what activities need to be carried out by whom, and when, are core to the **security planning** of an election. Once security planning is complete, delegating duties to each stakeholder results in **security implementation** across the electoral cycle (see Figure 1).

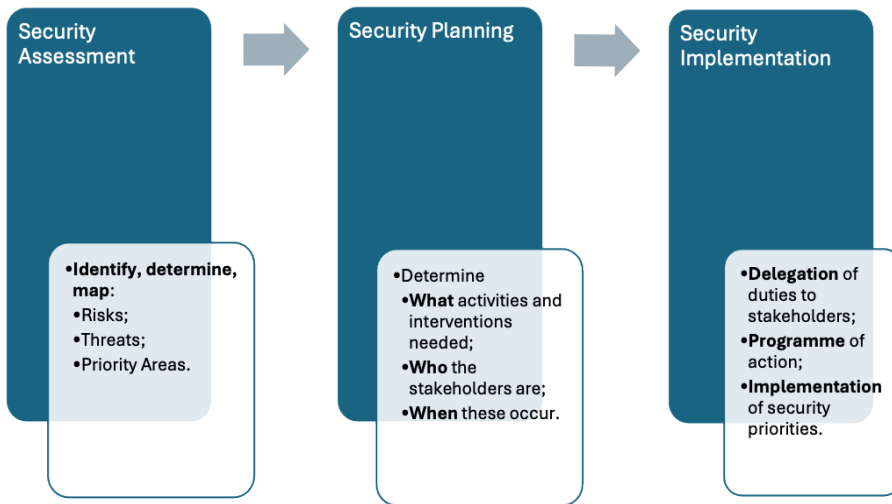


Figure 1: Election Security Framework

Source: Author's own depiction

Security implementation arrangements may include establishing joint command or operation centres, developing enhanced communication systems, hosting community security liaison forums, conducting specialised security training, implementing weapon-free zones, applying a cooling off period between campaigning and voting, and establishing an electoral code of conduct.⁸ Security implementation may be static (e.g. protection of voting stations, election warehouses), mobile (e.g. protection of election officials, mobile voting stations), and/or contingent (e.g. reserve capacities, resources, planning). The designation of security provisions during the elections falls normally to the police, with limitations or prohibitions placed on the military; however, this again depends on the country context.⁹ As with phases in the electoral cycle (see Figure 2), some security activities and duties occur throughout the cycle, while others are specific to a phase (as per Figure 1).

7 USAID 2010, 'Electoral Security Framework' https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNAEA453.pdf

8 Dunne, S 2006 [note 3]

9 Dunne, S 2006 [note 3]



PRE-ELECTION PHASE RISKS:

- Chief Electoral Officer takes ill and dies in office;
- Voter registration database experiences technical delay;
- Incorrect information is promulgated;
- Natural disaster (e.g. flood) renders national key point unusable;
- Electoral system design (e.g. FPTP)

PRE-ELECTION PHASE THREATS:

- Chief Electoral Officer/ other key electoral or political official is assassinated;
- Voter registration database is hacked;
- Fake news is spread announcing different voter registration dates;
- National key point experiences are targeted, attacked, or damaged, rendering them unusable;
- Interactional violence occurs between or within political parties;
- Political demonstrations boycotting election.

ELECTION PERIOD RISKS:

- Voting station runs out of ballot papers;
- Connectivity issues prevent use of digital voting devices;
- Collision during transport of electoral officials or electoral materials.

ELECTION PERIOD THREATS:

- Ballot papers/boxes stuffing, tampering at voting station;
- Election materials (ballot boxes) taken from voting station;
- Voting station electricity connection is sabotaged or cut;
- Interactional violence between or within political parties;
- Act of terrorism.

POST-ELECTION PERIOD RISKS:

- Technology/software program of election results failure;
- Understaffing of ballot counting electoral officials;

POST-ELECTION PERIOD THREATS:

- Hacking of election results database to change outcome;
- Incumbent suffering election loss does not concede electoral outcome.
- Interactional violence between and/or within political parties;
- Act of terrorism.

Figure 2: The Electoral Cycle

Source: ACE Electoral Knowledge Network 1998–2024

Election security is therefore made up of a complex series of interdependent parts which have knock-on effects throughout the electoral cycle. This is significant in the realisation of security and the generation of potential insecurity; for example, during the election phase, trust and confidence in the voters' roll is contingent upon an enabling environment for voter registration in the pre-electoral period. Inversely, a conflictual, intimidatory, disorderly pre-election phase – whereby voters are not able to freely and safely register to vote – will determine the final voters' roll on election day and shape the electoral outcome. This could lead to disputed and violent outcomes in the post-election phase. An election security framework is thus anticipatory, proactive, and flexible.

Using the concept of the electoral cycle, Figure 2 (adapted from ACE Electoral Knowledge Network) depicts what threats and risks there could be to an election in each phase of the electoral cycle.

SOUTH AFRICA'S ELECTION SECURITY PLANNING

South Africa's 2024 national and provincial elections were highly competitive and occurred within a politically charged environment.¹⁰ Seventy (70) new political parties surfaced alongside 11 independent candidates: this represents 14 903 candidates competing for 887 seats in the provincial and national legislatures.¹¹ The security of critical assets during the elections, in addition to ensuring a safe, calm, and peaceful electoral environment thus featured high on the agenda of the South African government, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), and security actors.¹²

Security, law, and order are guided by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), which serves as the founding legal document upon which all laws and legal, security, and electoral architecture are derived. Chapter 9 of the Constitution establishes state institutions which support the constitutional democracy of the country, such as the IEC of South Africa (Article 190). Chapter 11 establishes the powers and functions of the security services of the state in the attainment of national security (such as the police, defence force, and intelligence agencies), as well as the principles of national security for the Republic of South Africa, including the right to live in peace and be free from fear (Article 198 a). Chapter 3 is core to the operationalisation of South Africa's national security

10 European Union (EU) 2024 Election Expert Mission, *South Africa 2024: Final Report National and Provincial Elections 29 May 2024*, <https://www.eods.eu/library/EU%20EEM%20ZAF%202024%20FR.pdf>

11 South African Government Information Service 2024, 'Justice, Crime Prevention, and Security Cluster Ministers outline state of security readiness for 2024 elections', <https://www.gov.za/news/media-statements/justice-crime-prevention-and-security-cluster-ministers-outline-state> and SA News 2024, 'Security Plan in Place for Upcoming Election', April 28, <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/security-plan-place-upcoming-elections>

12 SA Government Information Service 2024 [note 11]

and election security framework as it establishes principles of cooperative government and inter-governmental relations. Elections are specifically governed and regulated by the Electoral Act (1998), Electoral Amendment Bill (2024), and Electoral Code of Conduct (2024). Other additional legislation relevant to governing the security dimensions of elections includes the Riotous Assemblies Act (1956), Intimidation Act (1982), Criminal Matters Amendment Act (2015), Firearms Control Act (2000), Protection of Constitutional Democracy Against Terrorist and Related Activities Act (2004), Critical Infrastructure Protection Act (2019), and the Cybercrime Act (2020).¹³

The main aim of the security services during an election is to create and maintain a safe and secure enabling environment in which the public can cast their votes and electoral actors may fulfil their duties. To this end, South Africa's election security framework leverages off its pre-existing national and provincial security frameworks in the form of the Justice, Crime Prevention, and Security Cluster (JCPS). The JCPS is an organisational entity made up of and led by the South African Police Services (SAPS), the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), and the State Security Agency (SSA). The JCPS cluster coordinates crime prevention, security, and justice across seven inter-departmental priority sub-committees¹⁴ drawn from the Departments of Justice, Home Affairs, Correctional Services, Finance, SAPS, SANDF, and the SSA.

Collectively, the JCPS cluster is mandated with providing safety and security to the South African public and the country's strategic installations, infrastructure, and national key points. The police services are the primary providers and responders of security in and outside of elections. In its pursuit of a safe and orderly electoral environment, the JCPS cluster also engages with other stakeholders such as Business Against Crime South Africa (BACSA), the private security industry (PSI), and community policing forums (CPFs) through joint public-private security initiatives (e.g. the E2 Initiative). Civil society organisations (CSOs) and multistakeholder CSO initiatives form an important component in generating a safe and orderly enabling electoral environment (e.g. Media Monitoring Africa, Africa Check, Defend Our Democracy). Figure 3 provides an overview of South Africa's JCPS.

13 South African Police Service Resource Centre Acts (n.d.), https://www.saps.gov.za/resource_centre/acts/acts.php

14 The seven sub-committees are (i) the National Joint Operational & Intelligence Structure (NatJoInts); (ii) National Intelligence Co-ordinating Committee (NICOC); (iii) National Development Committee (NDC); (iv) the Integrated Justice System (IJS) Board; (v) the Border Control Coordinating Committee (BCOCC); (vi) the Anti-Corruption Task Team (ACTT); and (vii) the Strategy Task Team.

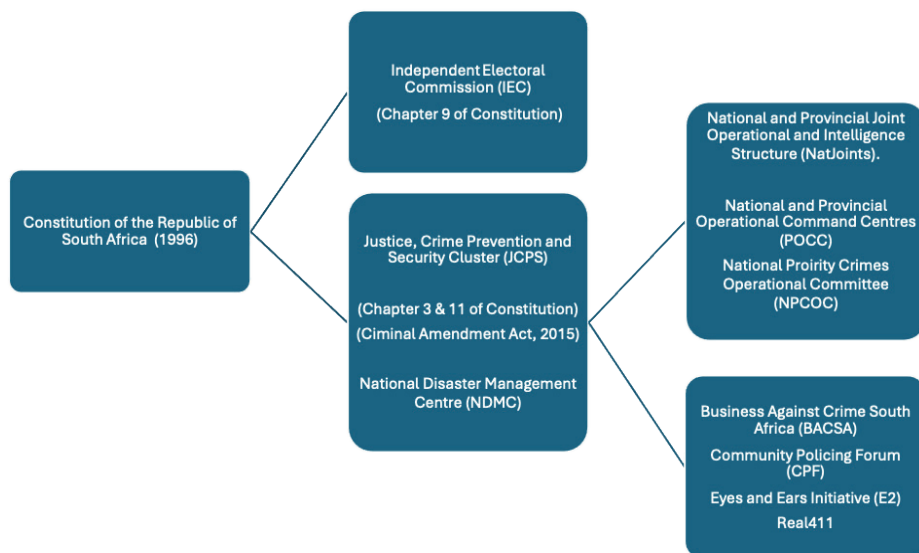


Figure 3: South Africa’s Justice, Crime Prevention, and Security (JCPS) Cluster (National Security Structure)

Source: Author’s own depiction

In the year leading up to the 2024 election, a National Priority Committee (NPC) was established within the JCPS to conduct election security assessments and identify security priority areas. The NPC, co-chaired by the IEC, SAPS, SANDF, and SSA, showed strong multistakeholder engagement, coordination, and collaboration.¹⁵ Nineteen security priority areas¹⁶ derived from the seven chapters and four schedules of the Electoral Act (1998) were identified by JCPS and NatJoints, as follows:

Phase 1: Pre-Election Security Priority Areas (May 2023–May 2024)

1. screening and registration of voters;
2. policing of gatherings;
3. policing of celebrations and demonstrations;
4. monitoring campaigning;
5. protection of national key points;
6. enforcement of Electoral Act;

15 South African Police Services 2024, Natjoints Media Briefing, 19 May 2024. <https://www.saps.gov.za/newsroom/msspeechdetail.php?nid=53296>

16 See for detailing of security priority areas by JCPS and NatJoints: South African Government Information Service 2024, ‘NatJoints on State of Readiness for Upcoming Elections’, <https://www.gov.za/news/media-statements/natjoints-state-readiness-upcoming-2024-elections-19-may-2024>

Phase 2: Election Period Security Priority Areas (22 May–9 June)

7. static deployment of SAPS at voting stations;
8. movement/escort of election voting materials;
9. movement/escort and protection of IEC and election officials;
10. security of election warehouses;
11. accompaniment of mobile voting stations;
12. control of firearms from entering voting stations;
13. assisting presiding officers with crowd control, removal of unbecoming behaviour, unruly voters, or anyone who threatens IEC officials or voters;
14. removal of political campaigning within boundaries of the voting station;
15. provision of security and safety of the voting station and other national key points;
16. enforcement of Electoral Act;

Phase 3: Post-Election Security Priority Areas (29 May–15 June)

17. provision of security and safety of the voting station and other national key points following announcement of results;
18. policing of celebrations, protests, and demonstrations (e.g. expanded public workers programme protests in Ethekewini, KwaZulu-Natal [KZN])¹⁷;
19. enforcement of Electoral Act (e.g. damage to property, defacement).

The pre-election NPC was dissolved on 19 May 2024, marking the end of the pre-electoral security assessment phase. In its place, a dedicated NatJoints election Coordination Centre (CC) was launched on 22 May focusing on election security planning, deployment, and implementation. This remained in place throughout the election period, until 9 June, when the final election results were announced and the final list of elected representatives was promulgated. According to NatJoints 2024,¹⁸ the CC serves ‘as a central point of contact for coordination of information and the reporting of incidents to ensure a swift, prompt and coordinated response. This is where all operations in relation to major events in the country including the National and Provincial General Elections’ are coordinated. Importantly, the NatJoints CC engaged in:

17 South African Government Information Service 2024, ‘Minister Dean MacPherson on Violent Protests by EPWP Workers’ <https://www.gov.za/news/media-statements/minister-dean-macpherson-violent-protests-epwp-workers-24-jul-2024>

18 SAPS 2024 [note 15]

- Threat and crime pattern analysis;
- Identification of voting and police stations that received threats;
- Identification of crime and violence hotspots;
- Identification of areas prone to service delivery issues and community protests.

Matuta (2024) argues that by leveraging off pre-existing national security arrangements, the IEC's approach to election security is one of risk management.¹⁹ Identifying, assessing, monitoring, and reporting on risks and threats, while implementing controls and mitigations on a day-to-day basis, mean that risk mitigation is achieved. As part of the risk mitigation approach, a range of non-state actors was included in the election security framework to provide specific expertise, skill, and capacity in digital, cyber, informational, and surveillance spheres.

Other Stakeholders:

Business Against Crime, Community Policing Forums, and 'Eyes and Ears'

Throughout the electoral cycle, an additional arm in election security assessment, planning, and deployment included non-state stakeholders. Key players here included BACSA,²⁰ the PSI, and CPFs. The Eyes and Ears (E2) Initiative, set up during the 2019 local elections, is a collaborative initiative formed between the SAPS and PSI to coordinate operational responses to crime and violence during elections; it has remained in effect outside of elections, given its value. Through the E2 Initiative, the network of over 350 private security companies assists the SAPS with day-to-day intelligence and information gathering at the local community level, relaying information on criminality, violence, disruption, and/or intimidation to the command centre for action by SAPS.²¹ In this way representatives of the E2 Initiative also sit in the national and provincial operational command centres (POCCs) of the SAPS. During the elections, the E2

19 Matuta, N 2023, 'Protecting Electoral Integrity: The Case of South Africa', <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/2023-11/protecting-electoral-integrity-the-case-of-south-africa.pdf>

20 Business Against Crime South Africa (BACSA) was formed as a division of Business Leadership South Africa (BLSA) in 1996 in response to former President Nelson Mandela's appealing to businesses to join the fight against crime.

21 During the July 2021 riots, E2 disseminated information on the ground via the POCCs to the SAPS and other authorities. E2 also played a critical role in coordination during the 2022 KZN floods. In the runup to the 2024 election, E2 played its network on high alert and standby following the 23 March 2024 National Shutdown threat that circulated on social media engaging in high visibility patrols, drone, CCTV and aerial helicopter surveillance. *Protection Web* 2024, 'Election 2024: More Than 350 Private Security Companies Enlisted to Assist Police', <https://www.protectionweb.co.za/election-2024/elections-2024-more-than-350-private-security-companies-enlisted-to-assist-police/>

Initiative served as an early-warning mechanism and an extension of the crime, justice, intelligence, and policing infrastructure, as well as a responder mechanism during elections. In the runup to the 2024 election, the executive project manager of BACSA Fouché Burgers stated that during the election, the E2 Initiative would

focus on being better eyes and ears for police, with our geographically broadened footprint of the private security industry across the country, and of course with technology such as helicopters and cameras. We will feed the police with situational information, what's happening on the ground constantly, to make sure they are able to respond quicker.²²

Methods of E2 intelligence-gathering included road patrols, drone surveillance, and CCTV cameras, as well as live-feed aerial helicopter streaming.²³ The CPFs also fed into the E2 Initiative by observing the security environment at the local community level and gathering and reporting intelligence on security incidents to E2 ProvJoints command centres.

Cybersecurity of the IEC electoral system and digital infrastructure (e.g. website, voter registration database, voting results, tabulation database, electronic voting devices) was critical throughout the electoral process. On average, South African government entities – including the IEC – experience over 1000 cyber-attacks a week.²⁴ The Presidency, SAPS, the African National Congress (ANC), and Transnet websites have previously been targeted and hacked. The IEC and JCPS worked with dedicated IT providers to conduct security readiness assessments of information and digital systems ahead of the elections and ensured the integrity of electoral systems and infrastructure throughout the election period.

Other Stakeholders:

Civil Society Organisations – Real 411, Fact Check Coalition, and the Voluntary Cooperation Framework

'Informational manipulation' includes the spreading of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news as well as the incitement to violence utilising digital and social media platforms. It has been termed the new battlefield during

²² Protection Web 2024 [note 21]

²³ Naledi Molele interviewed Roelof Viljoen of BACSA, *Newzroom Africa*, 2 May 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9W0Xnktdk>

²⁴ 'Check Point Responds to Increased Institutional Vulnerability During 2024 Election Period', 2024, <https://novuspressbulletin.co.za/blog/check-point-responds-to-increased-institutional-vulnerability-during-2024-election-period>

elections.²⁵ Artificial intelligence has further amplified informational threats through the artificial replication of public-figure voice and videos that often convey misinformation, disinformation, and/or fake news. Informational manipulation represented a significant security challenge to the IEC and JCPS given its diffuse, remote, and virtual nature. Furthermore, traditional static security arrangements and deployments were not fit for purpose in this realm.²⁶ In response, the IEC collaborated with stakeholders to engage in

- (i) enhanced detection and fact-checking;
- (ii) transparency and user education;
- (iii) implementation of regulatory and policy frameworks.²⁷

This included establishing a Digital Disinformation Complaints (DCC) process and disinformation reporting platform, Real 411, with stakeholders such as Media Monitoring Africa (MMA). The Real 411 platform was an anonymous mechanism to report informational manipulation incidents. Submissions were investigated as per the Electoral Code of Conduct and Section 89 (2) of the Electoral Act of 1998, which states that

- a. No person may publish any false information with the intention of
- b. disrupting or preventing an election;
- c. creating hostility or fear in order to influence the conduct or outcome of an election; or
- d. influencing the outcome or conduct of an election (Electoral Act, 1998).²⁸

The DCC process was further strengthened by the Electoral Commissioners Directorate of Electoral Offences, established in 2016, to investigate breaches to the Code of Conduct and Electoral Act: disinformation falls firmly within this mandate. Another important collaboration to meet the informational security needs of the election was a Voluntary Cooperation Framework signed between the IEC and social media powerhouses such as Meta, Google, and Tik Tok. Under this framework, social media partners committed to remove content, issue advisory warnings, and delist users where digital harms and disinformation were spread on

25 Media Monitoring Africa 2024, 'Disinformation destroys democracy', <https://elections.real411.org.za/learn>

26 Ngubane, S 2024, 'Countering disinformation in South Africa's elections: the role of social media platforms', <https://www.gcis.gov.za/gcis.gov.za/countering-disinformation-in-south-africa-s-elections-the-role-of-social-media-platforms>

27 Ngubane 2024 [note 26]

28 Electoral Act of South Africa, 1998.

their platforms.²⁹ Further stakeholder support initiatives to ‘cut through the noise’³⁰ and prevent, monitor, and respond to informational manipulation included the creation of a fact-checking coalition of civil society and media actors. This coalition tracked and monitored claims made by political parties and actors during the election; the aim was to ‘provide voters with reliable, non-partisan information on key issues, and equip the public with the skills they need to identify election misinformation’.³¹

To assist with informational tracking, monitoring, and mitigation efforts, the South Africa National Editors Forum (SANEF) established eight informational risks across four categories, each with a priority assessment ranging from A to C (A = dedicated personnel required to act; B = proactive monitoring required by stakeholders; C = plan required to be in place should risk arise). The risks were as follows (see Table 1 below):

Table 1: Informational Risks During the 2024 Elections

Priority	Type of Risk	Broad Preparation	Communicate to Public
A	Journalist attacked	Dedicate staff to act	✓
A	Incitement via social media	Dedicate staff to act	✓
B	Silencing voice by intimidation	Monitor	✓
B	Hacking and impersonation of IEC social media presence	Monitor	✓
B	Manipulated media	Monitor	✓
B	Attacks on electoral integrity	Monitor	✓
C	Disinformation on election	Backup plan	✓
	Other risks	Keep on radar	✓

Source: SANEF 2024³²

29 IEC 2024, <https://www.elections.org.za/content/About-Us/News/Electoral-Commission-partners-with-social-media-giants-to-combat-disinformation-in-2024-National-and-Provincial-Elections/>

30 Africa Check 2024, ‘Africa Check, South African media and Google create election fact-checking coalition’, <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/blog/press-release-africa-check-south-african-media-google-create-coalition-fact>; SANEF 2024, <https://elections.sanef.org.za/2024/04/16/africa-checks-election-information-hub/>. Actors included Africa Check, AFP Fact Check, Daily Maverick, Mail & Guardian, Caxton Media, SABC News, Tuks FM, 107.2 FM, and Section 27.

31 Africa Check 2024, ‘Africa Check’s Election Information Hub’, <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/blog/press-release-africa-check-south-african-media-google-create-coalition-fact>

32 SANEF 2024, ‘South Africa’s 2024 elections: mitigating online risks to freedom of expression and access to information’, <https://sanef.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/SANEF-Mitigating-Online-Risks-for-the-2024-Elections.pdf>

The control of information security was thus a central issue and consideration for the IEC and JCPS cluster. Through partnerships with CSOs, media coalitions, and social media entities, the JCPS and IEC were able to develop and identify (security assessment), demarcate (security planning), and bring (security implementation) informational security into the election security framework.

Peace and Security Issues in South Africa: A Violent Country, at Peace

‘Blood, bodies, and bullets have become a way of life.’³³

An election security framework was firmly in place for South Africa’s 2024 national and provincial elections. However, as established in the conceptual section above, structural conditions and context play a determining role in the peace and security of an election. In the case of South Africa, high rates of crime and violence are structural conditions which influence its national security environment.

South Africa has variously been labelled as the ‘crime capital of the world’³⁴ and as ‘under siege from violent criminals’.³⁵ A report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime ranked South Africa seventh globally in terms of the highest crime rates.³⁶ On average, every day the country endures 75–84 murders,³⁷ 110 reported rapes,³⁸ 66 hijackings,³⁹ 588 common assaults,⁴⁰ 51 kidnappings,⁴¹ and 453 residential burglaries with ‘aggravating circumstances’.⁴²

33 YusufAbramjee cited in Hill, G 2023, ‘A Searing Debate of Soaring Crime as A Celebrated Murderer Walks Free’, *Washington Post*. 6 December. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/2023/dec/6/searing-debate-of-soaring-crime-as-celebrated-murd/>

34 Altbeker, A 2005, ‘Is South Africa Really the World’s Crime Capital?’ *SA Crime Quarterly*. No. 11. <https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/EJC47545>.

35 Sadike, M 2024, ‘Five Cities Among Top 20 Most Crime Ridden In the World’. *IOL*. 3 April, <https://www.iol.co.za/the-star/news/five-sa-cities-among-top-20-most-crime-ridden-in-the-world-9c0ce0e9-e657-4e04-b784-1a4ad961464b>

36 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime 2023, ‘The Global Organized Crime Index 2023’, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/ocindex-2023/>

37 *BusinessTech* 2024, 16 February, ‘84 people murdered every day in South Africa- these are the most dangerous areas’, <https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/752495/84-people-murdered-every-day-in-south-africa-these-are-the-most-dangerous-areas/>

38 Gouws, A 2024, 4 August, ‘Rape is endemic in South Africa. Why the ANC government keeps missing the mark’, <https://theconversation.com/rape-is-endemic-in-south-africa-why-the-anc-government-keeps-missing-the-mark-188235>

39 Legodi, K 2024, 3 August, ‘Spike in hijackings leads to rise in enhanced security’, <https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/spike-in-hijackings-leads-to-rise-in-enhanced-security/>

40 *BusinessTech* 2024, 25 February, ‘Worst areas for break-ins and home robberies in South Africa’, <https://businesstech.co.za/news/lifestyle/753413/11-worst-areas-for-break-ins-and-home-robberies-in-south-africa/>

41 *BusinessTech* 2024, 7 March, ‘This type of crime has quadrupled in South Africa and everyone is at risk’, <https://businesstech.co.za/news/lifestyle/758223/this-type-of-crime-has-quadrupled-in-south-africa-and-everyone-is-at-risk/>

42 *BusinessTech* 2024 [notes 40, 41]

According to the 2023 State of Security Report, 76% of South Africans have been victims of at least one type of crime during their lifetimes.⁴³ An Afrobarometer survey showed that 75% of South Africans felt unsafe walking in their neighbourhoods, and 65% felt unsafe in their own homes.⁴⁴ Trust in the police and law enforcement agencies is consequently low: 61% of Afrobarometer respondents believed that police were corrupt, while 76% believed the police engaged in illegal activities some of the time.⁴⁵ Given that only 15% of murder cases are solved (from investigation to prosecution, conviction, and incarceration), trust in the criminal justice system is also correspondingly low⁴⁶; only 36% of respondents trusted the police.⁴⁷ A survey by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) found that South Africans' overall trust in state institutions had declined from 63% in 2007 to 32% in 2023.⁴⁸ Further, 85% of South Africans believed the country was 'heading in the wrong direction.'⁴⁹

Violence and criminality are deeply embedded in the socio-economic fabric of South Africa. High rates of violence and criminality are, it is argued, connected to high rates of unemployment, disproportionate wealth inequality, easy access to firearms, well-orchestrated criminal syndicates, under-resourced national policing, historical legacies of violence, and high rates of frustration and psycho-social aggression resultant within this context.⁵⁰ Taylor argues that 'violence has to be understood in terms of a matrix of integrated issues that are rooted in what is a systemic problem (underlying all events and cases), in which the forces of law and order are also implicated.'⁵¹

South Africa thus sits strangely – as a 'country at peace' since the formal ending of apartheid in 1994, but with sustained 'everyday violence' akin to living in a 'war zone'.⁵² 'Blood, bodies, and bullets' feature not as an appendage to socio-

43 Automobile Association of South Africa 2023, 30 May, 'Only 31% of citizens feel safe in South Africa' <https://aa.co.za/only-31-of-citizens-feel-safe-in-south-africa/#:~:text=The%20majority%20of%20South%20Africans,a%20crime%20in%20South%20Africa>.

44 Mpako, A & Ndumo, S 2024, 'South Africans' view of police marred by pervasive corruption, lack of professionalism', <https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/ad836-south-africans-view-of-police-marred-by-pervasive-corruption-lack-of-professionalism/>

45 Mpako & Ndumo 2024 [note 44]

46 Faull, A & Bruce, S 2023, 'Reducing murder must be a top SA government priority', <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/reducing-murder-must-be-a-top-sa-government-priority>

47 Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2024, 'Trust in the Government and its institutions. What support for a GNU governing coalition in South Africa?' <https://www.ijr.org.za/2024/07/trust-in-the-government-and-its-institutions-what-support-for-a-gnu-governing-coalition-in-south-africa/>

48 IJR 2024 [note 47]

49 IJR 2024 [note 47]

50 Taylor, R 2002, 'Justice Denied: Political Violence in Kwa Zulu Natal After 1994', *Violence and Transition*, vol. 6, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVr). <https://csvr.org.za/docs/politicalviolence/justicedenied.pdf>

51 Taylor, R 2002 [note 50], p.4.

52 South African Police Minister Bheki Cele cited in 'South Africa Crime: Can the Country Be Compared to a War Zone?' 2018, BBC, 18 September. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-45547975>

economic and political life in South Africa, but as integral to socio-economic and political life. These realities play out in direct and indirect ways during elections.

Political Violence 1994–2024

Local or municipal and national elections in South Africa have consistently been lauded as ‘overall peaceful’.⁵³ However, political violence has continued to occur in each successive election since 1994 (see Figure 4). In April 1994, the month of South Africa’s first democratic election, the Human Rights Committee (HRC) recorded 487 politically motivated deaths, followed by 195 in the month after the election.⁵⁴ While this number has decreased considerably (e.g. between 2000 and 2023 there were 488 politically motivated assassinations in total⁵⁵), violence has continued to be a feature of political life and contestation. Political ‘hits’ on local councillors, ward officials, party agents, and government administrators in contested ‘no-go’ areas, regions, districts, and wards have become a standard feature that accompanies elections. For example, the assassination of former (and expelled) ANC member Sifiso Nkabinde in January 1999 in Richmond, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) was followed by the killing of 11 ANC supporters on the same day.⁵⁶ These events set the tone in the runup to South Africa’s second national election in 1999. Former paramilitary forces were implicated in these assassinations.⁵⁷ A further 20 people were killed in the same year, including seven Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) leaders and six ANC leaders.⁵⁸ In subsequent elections, targeted political hits have persisted, often showing a gradual rise:

- In national elections there were seven hits in 2004; 17 in 2009; 14 in 2014; and 42 in 2019. There were also ten hits in the first

53 African Union Electoral Observation Mission to the 29 May 2024 General Elections in the Republic of South Africa, 2024, ‘Final Report’, https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/44062-doc-Final_Report_General_Elections_-_South_Africa_2024.pdf and SADC 2024, ‘Preliminary Statement by His Excellency Mr. Enock Kavindele, Former Vice-President of the Republic of Zambia and Head of the SADC Electoral Observation Mission (SEOM) to the 2024 National and Provincial Elections of the Republic of South Africa’, <https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2024-05/SEOM%20RELEASE%20PRELIMINARY%20STATEMENT%20FOR%20RSA%202024%20ELECTION.doc.pdf>

54 Coleman, M 1998, ‘Post-Election Political Violence’, in *A Crime Against Humanity - Analysing the Repression of the Apartheid State*, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/post-election-political-violence>

55 Matamba, R & Thobela, C 2024, ‘The politics of murder: Criminal governance and targeted killings in South Africa’, *The Global Initiative Against Organised Crime (GI-TOC)*, Geneva. <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/the-politics-of-murder-criminal-governance-and-targeted-killings-in-south-africa/>

56 Taylor 2002 [note 50]

57 Taylor, R 2002, ‘SANDF Intelligence linked politicians to hit squad activity between the ANC and IFP. R200 000 had been paid for the hit on Nkabinde’, *Violence and Transition*, vol. 6, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR); see also Taylor R 2002 [note 50].

58 Taylor 2002 [note 50]

four months of 2024, with another 31 recorded in 2023 in the runup to the 2024 election.⁵⁹

- In the **local and municipal elections** of 2000, there were 16 hits; 13 in 2006; 19 in 2011; 27 in 2016; and 30 in 2021.⁶⁰

Political killings tend to be higher during local or municipal elections (56%) than national elections (44%) and occur mainly in the pre-election period⁶¹ (see Figure 4). These spikes are the result of the fierce competition for local government positions and access to municipal finances, which often comes to a head during municipal elections as changes in control are anticipated and sometimes averted through hits.⁶²

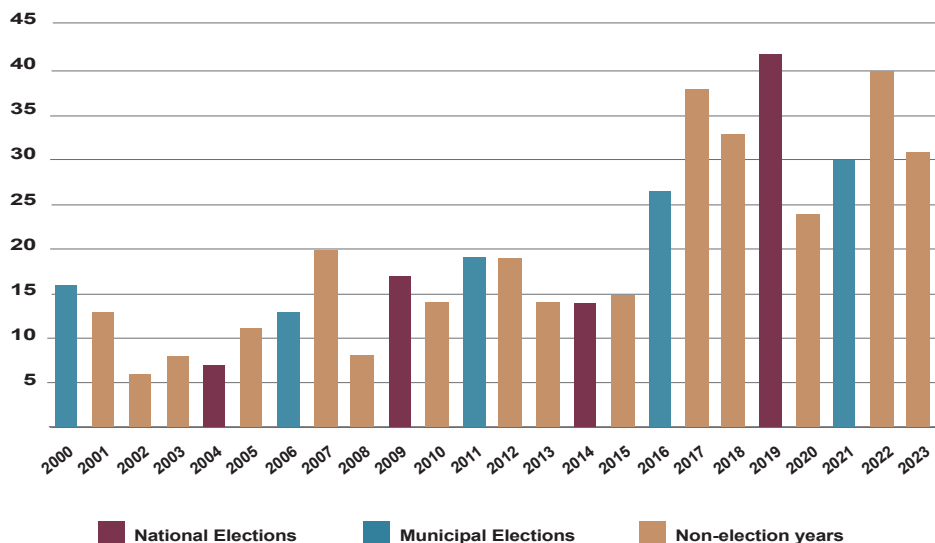


Figure 4: Political Assassinations 2000–2023

Source: Matamba & Thobela 2024

59 Comins, L 2024, <https://mg.co.za/politics/2024-05-21-sas-elections-have-been-marred-by-political-killings-report-says/>; Comins, L 2024, <https://mg.co.za/politics/2024-05-31-kwazulu-natal-police-faced-over-900-protests-and-civil-unrest-in-lead-up-to-elections/>; Matamba & Thobela [note 55]

60 Comins 2024 [note 59]

61 Comins 2024 [note 59]

62 Corruption Watch 2024, 'Politically motivated killings increase in SA in election years', <https://www.corruptionwatch.org.za/report-politically-motivated-killings-increase-in-sa-in-election-years/>

Matamba and Thobela argue that assassinations must be read ‘as part of a system of collaborative criminal governance, involving local politicians and government administrators colluding with criminal actors to eliminate rivals’.⁶³ A study by Deetleefs and Serwat on the Armed Conflict Location Event Dataset (ACLED) supports this view; the authors state that ‘increasing criminal activity and the proliferation of small arms are among the main drivers of this violence.’⁶⁴ This ‘political–criminal violence matrix’ will continue to persist in future elections if (i) political, security, and criminal actors are allowed to act with impunity; and (ii) violence is viewed as a permissible tool with which to eliminate political rivals, remove tender-contractor competitors, target municipal or government workers, and silence critics.⁶⁵ There is a strong inverse correlation between provinces and areas with high levels of political violence and low levels of state security, policing, law, and order. Everyday violence, criminal disorder, and lawlessness are thus central to the perpetuation and sustenance of political violence. This is an area that the South African government must deal with urgently in future electoral contests.

SECURITY ISSUES IN THE 2024 PROVINCIAL AND NATIONAL ELECTIONS

Successful security planning of an election is vital to the realisation of free and fair elections. Security planning, inclusive of risk, threat, and priority identification and assessment, requires significant forecasting and provisions. Two contrasting scenarios emerged vis-à-vis the likelihood of violence in the 2024 election: one of high violence, and one of no violence. Ironically, both predications hung on the repercussions and lessons learnt from the same event: July 2021. Fidelity Services Group assessed that ‘the risk for intimidation, malicious damage to property, arson, barricading of roads, looting, hijacking of trucks as well as clashes between members/supporters of the MK Party, opposing political parties and with authorities is high, should demonstrations take place’.⁶⁶ In contrast, Major General Mninimzi Sizani of the SANDF affirmed that, ‘All I can reiterate here is that we are not a country at war. We are a country that is having an enduring peace. SANDF has prepared and will be prepared to deploy when required by

63 Matamba & Thobela [note 55]

64 Deetleefs, S & Serwat, L 2023, ‘Local Government as a Battleground for Political Violence’ <https://acleddata.com/2023/06/22/special-issue-on-the-targeting-of-local-officials-south-africa/>

65 Matamba & Thobela [note 55]

66 Du Plessis C 2024, ‘South Africa elections: Concerns about riots ahead of the vote’, *The Africa Report*, <https://www.theafricareport.com/349608/south-africa-elections-concerns-about-riots-ahead-of-the-vote/>

the police'.⁶⁷ Five core security threats were identified as presenting the biggest threat to the election. These were:

1. community or service delivery protests;
2. political demonstrations and the threat of interactional violence between political parties and political party supporters centred on former president Jacob Zuma's candidacy ineligibility;
3. taxi and truck 'shutdowns';
4. 'informational manipulation'⁶⁸: disinformation, misinformation, and inflammatory rhetoric; and
5. political assassinations.

1. Community and Service Delivery Protests

Community and service delivery protests are common in South Africa (see Figure 5), some of which turn violent. These protests are driven by a complex interplay of political and socio-economic grievances, political mobilisation and instrumentalisation, and 'opportunity windows' – such as local or municipal elections, national elections, court hearings, and historical anniversaries and commemorations.⁶⁹

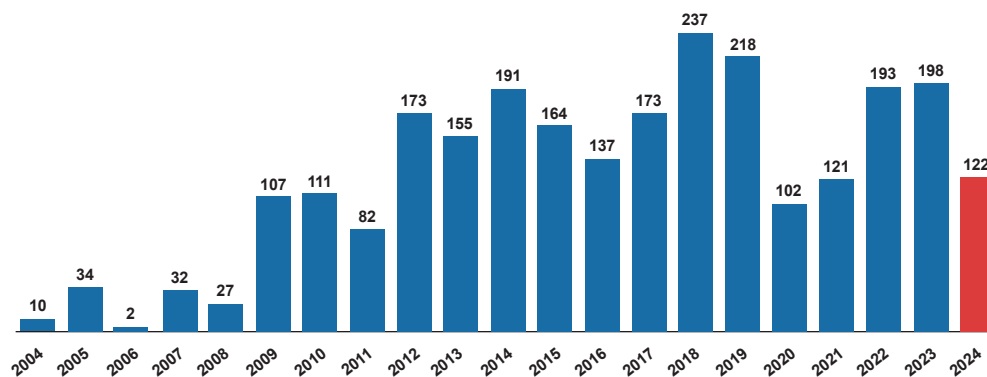


Figure 5: Service Delivery Protests, 2004–2024⁷⁰

Source: Municipal IQ, Municipal Hotspots Monitor 2024

67 Sithole H, 2024, 'NatJoints sets up 24 hours election security coordination center', <https://elections.sabc.co.za/elections2024/news/natjoints-sets-up-24-hour-election-security-coordination-centre/>

68 EU 2024 [note 10], p.4

69 Institute for Security Studies 2024, 'South Africa's polls unlikely to result in widespread public violence', <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/south-africa-s-polls-unlikely-to-result-in-widespread-public-violence>

70 Data for 2024 reflects only the first quarter (January–April).

In the runup to the 2024 elections, community protests erupted in several areas across the country and resulted in blocked roads, burning tyres, and trench-digging, all of which curtailed access to certain areas and venues. Damage to property including the burning of schools and trucks and the defacing of election posters. In KZN alone, police contended with 900 civil unrest and protest actions in the lead-up to the 2024 elections, 211 of which turned violent and 68 of which were directly tied to the poll.⁷¹ This was evident for example in Phoenix, KZN, over water service delivery issues (January 2024); in Mahikeng, North West, over public works and service delivery issues (January and April 2024); in Gqeberha, Eastern Cape, over housing and service delivery issues (May 2024); in Rustenberg, North West, over ongoing service delivery issues (lack of water and electricity, May 2024); and in various districts in Gauteng (Melusi, Soweto, Braamfontein) by communities and civil society groups over ‘crumbling infrastructure’ (April and May 2024).⁷²

The potential for community and service delivery protests to escalate into nationwide violence and become instrumentalised politically ranked high as a security concern, in light of the recent ‘marker and lesson’ event of July 2021. From 9–18 July 2021, a wave of civil unrest, riots, violence and looting spread across the country, situated in prevailing socio-economic conditions, spurred and fuelled by a politically orchestrated informational manipulation campaign. More than 350 people died as a result of the unrest.⁷³ A key lesson of the July 2021 riots was that ‘the violence and destruction were symptomatic of unresolved systemic conditions, including post-COVID-19 economic recovery, high unemployment, lawlessness, discrimination, socio-economic divides, and issues within the security sector’.⁷⁴

Worryingly, the 2021 riots revealed severe intelligence failures and significant coordination weaknesses within the Joint Intelligence and Security Agencies Bodies (e.g. JCPS, ProvJoints, NatJoints) as well as deficiencies in security

71 Comins, L 2024, ‘Kwa Zulu Natal police faced over 900 protests and civil unrest in the lead up to elections’, <https://mg.co.za/politics/2024-05-31-kwazulu-natal-police-faced-over-900-protests-and-civil-unrest-in-lead-up-to-elections/>

72 Zigebe, Y 2024, ‘Free to protest, but why are South Africans burning down the house whilst dodging rubber bullets?’ <https://udm.org.za/free-to-protest-but-why-are-south-africans-burning-down-the-house-while-dodging-rubber-bullets/>; ‘Rustenburg residents block R24 in protest against poor service delivery’, 2024, <https://www.platinumweekly.co.za/article.php?id=8267&categoryID=5>; Chaane, T 2024, ‘Motorists beware: Major Pretoria routes affected by demonstrations on Monday, police to monitor situations’, <https://www.citizen.co.za/rekord/news-headlines/2024/05/19/motorists-beware-major-pretoria-routes-affected-by-demonstrations-police-to-monitor-situations/>

73 SA Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) 2024, ‘July’s People: The National Investigative Hearing Report into the July 2021 Unrest in Gauteng and Kwa Zulu Natal’, https://www.sahrc.org.za/home/21/files/JULY%20UNREST%20REPORT%20FINAL_29%20JAN%202024.pdf

74 SAHRC 2024 [note 73]

resources, budgets, preparedness, expertise, and capacity.⁷⁵ Thus, July 2021 served as a ‘wake-up call’ to law enforcement agencies. Based on this history, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) predicted that while community and service delivery protests by ‘disgruntled communities’ was a concern for the 2024 election, July 2021 had drastically refocused and tightened policing, private security, business, community, and law enforcement communication and coordination systems. The likelihood of election violence was thus reduced by proactive preventative action and intervention.⁷⁶

2. Political Demonstrations and the Threat of Interactional Political Violence

The July 2021 riots were also, importantly, rooted in the conviction and imprisonment of former president Jacob Zuma for a contempt of court order.⁷⁷ At the time of Zuma’s imprisonment, Mzwanele Manyi, spokesperson of the Jacob Zuma Foundation, said ‘there will be no peace in South Africa as long as Zuma is jailed under conditions which are unjust’.⁷⁸ Political demonstrations centred on Zuma’s conviction turned into unrest and looting on two levels. On one level, the unrest was opportunistic, generalised, and disordered; on another, the attacks on government facilities, businesses and key infrastructure were highly orchestrated and showed strong political instrumentalisation. For example:

the blocking of the N3 and the N2, the calculated destruction of factories and warehouses, the organised disconnection of security and fire alarm systems, the attack on government communication facilities at the Durban Port, and the bombing and removal of ATM’s – together cannot be viewed as mutually distinct. These events point to a significant investment in the execution of the July unrest.⁷⁹

In the runup to the 2024 elections, a new political party – uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) – was formed with former president Jacob Zuma as its leader. The IEC and Constitutional Court ruled that Zuma was ineligible to serve as a candidate because of his conviction. On 10 May 2024, over 100 000 MK and Zuma supporters demonstrated outside of the Constitutional Court.⁸⁰ Political demonstrations centring on Zuma’s ineligibility to compete garnered fresh fears of ‘another

75 SAHRC 2024 [note 73]

76 ISS 2024 [note 69]

77 SAHRC 2024 [note 73]

78 Tau, P 2021, ‘KZN burns for Zuma’, <https://www.news24.com/citypress/politics/kzn-burns-for-zuma-20210710-2>

79 SAHRC 2024 [note 73], p. 11.

80 Goba, T 2024, ‘Some MK party supporters accuse IEC of bias in Zuma case’, <https://www.ewn.co.za/2024/05/10/some-mk-party-supporters-accuse-iec-of-bias-in-zuma-case>

2021' in the runup to or during or in the aftermath of the 2024 elections. Political protests, demonstrations, and threats, particularly from the MK Party and its supporters, received ongoing and strong attention by the JCPS, ProvJoints, and NatJoints. Related to this, the threat of factional and interactional violence between political party supporters also featured high in security and intelligence analysis and monitoring of 'hotspot' areas (i.e. areas where political contestation and violence has historically been high; Al Jazeera 2024). In this regard, the experience of July 2021 resulted in predictions of increased political violence stemming from political demonstrations and factional political violence.

3. Taxi, Transport, and Truck Shutdowns

Protests by the taxi and transport industry throughout April and May 2024 were highly disruptive and altered the security environment in which elections were to take place.⁸¹ This was particularly in the Amathole District and Buffalo City of the Eastern Cape, in relation to the non-payment of scholar transport, as well as taxi violence between Uncedo Taxi Alliance and Border Alliance in Mthatha and Maclear. In Mthatha, a city shutdown by taxi associations resulted in no movement into the city: workers could not reach their places of employment, scholars could not attend school or sit exams, and people had limited access to the airport.⁸² Given that truck drivers were linked to the start of the 2021 July riots (e.g. barricading of the N3, N2, and N7 roads),⁸³ such actions ahead of the elections were treated as a serious security incident and threat. A member of one taxi alliance threatened that there would be 'no vehicle on the road. And voting and elections won't take place'.⁸⁴

In Durban, on 24 May, a few days before the election, taxi protest action similarly brought the city to a standstill due to blockades on the N2 and N3.⁸⁵ Messaging of 'blockades' and 'shutdowns' was further amplified and spread by the African Truck Drivers Federation South Africa (ATDF-SA), who utilised social media to announce a total shutdown of major routes and highways in Gauteng, scheduled for Monday 20 May.⁸⁶ Routes identified included the R21,

81 South African Government Information Service 2024, 'Eastern Cape on suspension of protest action led by scholar transport operators', <https://www.gov.za/news/media-statements/eastern-cape-suspension-protest-action-led-scholar-transport-operators-02-may>

82 Ngcukana, L 2024, 'Eastern Cape taxi operators threaten election shutdown', <https://sundayworld.co.za/elections-2024/eastern-cape-taxi-operators-threaten-election-shutdown/>

83 Du Plessis, C 2024, 'South Africa elections concerns about riots ahead of the vote', <https://www.theafricareport.com/349608/south-africa-elections-concerns-about-riots-ahead-of-the-vote/>

84 Ngcukana 2024 [note 82]

85 Ryan, C 2024, 'A tense week for SA as riot warnings issued ahead of elections', <https://www.moneyweb.co.za/news/south-africa/a-tense-week-for-sa-as-riot-warnings-issued-ahead-of-election/>

86 Citizen 2024, 'Motorists beware: Major Pretoria routes affected by demonstrations on Monday, police to monitor situations', 2024, <https://www.citizen.co.za/rekord/news-headlines/2024/05/19/motorists-beware-major-pretoria-routes-affected-by-demonstrations-police-to-monitor-situations/>

R25, R562, M57, and M18, in addition to arterial roads. Tactics would include using bricks, stones, sticks, and burning of tyres to barricade roads. Preliminary investigations revealed that these taxi and truck protest actions were politicised and opportunistic, using the election period as a window of opportunity to link discontent to political action. Given that taxi and truck violence were already underway in the runup to election, the likelihood of it escalating nationwide and transforming into wider civil unrest was assessed as high. Minister of Police at the time, Bheki Cele, commented on this threat as follows: 'Almost everybody was very much scared it might spread and stop easy movement of elections. On the first day of elections 107 [polling] stations could not open there, but law enforcement dealt with that one quickly'.⁸⁷

The JCPS and ProvJoints responded decisively with a security crackdown against protesting taxi and truck members, resulting in the impounding of vehicles as well as the seizure of firearms.⁸⁸

4. Informational Manipulation and Inflammatory Rhetoric

Informational manipulation was rife in the runup to the election, often accompanied by inflammatory rhetoric. One prominent and ongoing campaign of disinformation was against the IEC, both Commissioner Janet Love and Chief Electoral Officer Sy Mamabolo. Disinformation centred on accusations of bribery, vote buying, and rigging, including

- So-called 'evidence' of 'vote rigging' at IEC election warehouse sites in Chesterville and Hammarsdale, KZN. MK Party supporters posted and circulated videos of election materials arriving at the IEC warehouses, overlaid with a narrative of rigging.
- Access to these sites was unauthorised and thus also represented a physical breach to election security.⁸⁹
- Social media posts of President Ramaphosa 'buying' the election from the IEC and its commissioners to the figure of R60 million.⁹⁰
- Social media posts of Janet Love showing bias and favour towards the ANC due to her being a long-standing member of the ANC.⁹¹

87 Majadibodu, S 2024, '50 arrested: Minister Cele commends the police's vigilance during three day election period', <https://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-and-courts/50-arrested-minister-cele-commends-the-polices-vigilance-during-three-day-election-period-17d4e548-5946-49f9-8f9c-d2ff42405a24>

88 Protection Web 2024. 'More than 350 private security companies enlisted to assist police', <https://www.protectionweb.co.za/election-2024/elections-2024-more-than-350-private-security-companies-enlisted-to-assist-police/>; Moffatt, C et al. 2024, South Africa 2024 elections tracker, *Good Governance Africa*, <https://gga.org/south-africa-2024-elections-tracker/>

89 Moffatt, C et al. 2024 [note 88]

90 EISA 2024, '2024 Weekly Election Brief No 2: Disinformation and election', <https://www.eisa.org/disinformation-and-elections/>

91 EISA 2024 [note 90]

- Nano-influencing to create echo chambers re-tweeting the X content and hashtag of #DontStealOurVote, which included accusations of 'hidden caches of ballots' by the DA.⁹²
- A WhatsApp monetary scam by someone impersonating the IEC chief electoral officer, Sy Mamabolo, claiming to be able to sway the election outcome.⁹³

The use of deepfake to sway public opinion also formed part of informational campaigns. This included deepfakes of former US president Donald Trump 'endorsing' the MK Party⁹⁴ and American rapper Eminem 'endorsing' the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF).⁹⁵ An incitement to violence made by MK youth leader Bonginkosi Khanyile was accompanied by disinformation, misinformation, and fake news campaigns. He claimed that

- 'there will be no elections without MK and [former president Jacob] Zuma...';⁹⁶
- 'if they remove MK and remove Zuma as the face of the campaign, there won't be elections in South Africa...';⁹⁷
- 'disqualify Zuma and you will see what is going to happen';⁹⁸ and
- 'you failed to stop the 2021 unrest, you think you can stop MK? ... Cyril has no capacity ... unleash all police officers, we will meet toe to toe'.⁹⁹

The threat of informational manipulation was consistent throughout the electoral period, and the IEC and NatJoints utilised the legal, electoral, and security frame-

92 Davis, R 2024, 'Disinformation Nation: A concerted campaign to destabilise SA post elections', <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-06-02-disinformation-nation-a-concerted-campaign-to-destabilise-sa-post-elections/>

93 South African Government Information Service 2024, 'Electoral Commission warns of impostor posing as CEO Sy Mamabolo', <https://www.gov.za/news/media-statements/electoral-commission-warns-impostor-posing-ceo-sy-mamabolo-19-may-2024>

94 Allen, K 2024, 'Elections must be strongly prepared for flurry of online influence and disinformation', <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-03-18-sas-2024-elections-must-be-strongly-prepared-for-flurry-of-online-influence-and-disinformation/>

95 Cosser, K 2024, 'Will the real Slim Shady please stand up? Eminem video endorsing South African opposition party EFF and bashing the ruling ANC is a deepfake', *Africa Check*, <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/meta-programme-fact-checks/will-real-slim-shady-please-stand-eminem-video-endorsing>

96 Tshikalange, S 2024, 'MK party's Bonginkosi Khanyile removed as youth leader', <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/politics/2024-04-10-mk-partys-bonginkosi-khanyile-removed-as-youth-leader/>

97 Kgosana, R 2024, 'Hawks arrest former MK Party youth leader Bonginkosi Khanyile for inciting public violence', *SowetanLive*, <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2024-08-17-hawks-arrest-former-mk-party-youth-leader-bonginkosi-khanyile-for-inciting-public-violence/>

98 DJ Sibu, YouTube 2024, https://www.youtube.com/shorts/PIARE_YvAJk

99 *Newslive SA*, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kXlv5FBRdQ> 13 March.

works of the country to deal with perpetrators who could be identified. Because of repeated incitement, Bonginkosi Khanyile was charged under the Riotous Assemblies Act (1956) with conspiracy to commit public violence. He had previously been tried for incitement to violence over the July 2021 riots and Fees Must Fall protests in 2018.

5. Political Assassinations

As discussed previously in the chapter, in the first four months in the runup to the 2024 provincial and national election, ten political hits were documented. By election day, 29 May 2024, 12 councillors had been killed.¹⁰⁰ Given the high incidence of political hits (42) in 2019 and the current tense electoral climate (evident in the rise of MK, the Zuma ineligibility case, taxi and transport violence, and community and protest action), political assassinations presented a significant ‘tinder threat’ throughout the electoral environment.¹⁰¹ However, given its targeted nature, it did not threaten widespread escalation into community and service delivery protests, political demonstrations, or taxi and truck violence.

In addition to the security threats discussed above, unforeseen risks unfolded in the runup to the elections. On 11 March 2024, the Information Regulator of South Africa received notification of two security compromises when an IEC election official leaked the party candidate list of the incumbent ANC and the new opposition party MK into the public domain.¹⁰² This unauthorised disclosure constituted a breach of the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) as well as an election informational breach; it risked the integrity, credibility, and impartiality of the IEC in the election.¹⁰³ While serious, the matter did not result in further security incidents and was contained and resolved speedily.

Everyday crime and violence also featured and impacted on the work of the IEC in the pre-election phase. Two IEC offices were broken into in Houghton (Gauteng) and Caledon (Western Cape), and laptops, scanners, and projectors were stolen.¹⁰⁴ These incidents revealed that while a pre-established election security framework is critical to achieving a safe and orderly electoral

100 Comins, L 2024, ‘SA’s elections have been marred by political killings report says’, <https://mg.co.za/politics/2024-05-21-sas-elections-have-been-marred-by-political-killings-report-says/>

101 Final data on the total number of targeted political killings during the 2024 election period and its aftermath was still pending at the time of writing.

102 Michalsons 2024, ‘IEC Security Compromise: a case study on notifying the regulator’, <https://www.michalsons.com/blog/iec-security-compromise-a-case-study-on-notifying-the-regulator/72847>

103 SABC News 2024, ‘Elections: IEC investigating threats of intimidation ahead of polls’, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQaA77f0tWE>

104 Matlhabe, G, 2024, ‘Natjoints to forge ahead with zero tolerance stance to elections disruptions and violence’, <https://www.msn.com/en-za/news/other/natjoints-to-forge-ahead-with-zero-tolerance-stance-to-elections-disruptions-and-violence/ar-BB1mFsHh?apiversion=v2&noservercache=1&domshim=1&renderwebcomponents=1&wcoseo=1&batchservertelemetry=1&noservertelemetry=1>

environment, this framework must also be responsive to risks and threats. The next section of the paper details how security actors executed the security plan during the election and what security incidents unfolded on election day.

ELECTION SECURITY IMPLEMENTATION ON ELECTION DAY

'This country will be turned into civil war ... there will be riots like you have never seen ... there will be anarchy.'¹⁰⁵

Based on the threat and crime patterns analysis conducted by ProvJoints and NatJoints in the security planning phase, 25 000 SANDF soldiers were deployed to hotspot areas and 500 high-risk voting stations in the runup to elections and on election day.¹⁰⁶ One specific deployment based on the threat and crime pattern analysis led to the deployment of the 14 SA Infantry Battalion to Mthatha Airport.¹⁰⁷ While threats of civil war and anarchy did not materialise on election day, a number of security incidents unfolded at the provincial and voting district level that impacted upon the electoral environment and bear consideration. These included the following events:

- Residual boycotts over service delivery issues (water and electricity, housing, poor roads, sewerage) persisted in hotspot areas such as Gqeberha in the Eastern Cape, eThekweni and uMziwabuntu in KZN, Sebokeng in Gauteng, and Shaleng and Rustenberg in the North West. In these areas, IEC officials were escorted to voting stations and static deployments were provided at voting stations.
- Protest action delayed 32 voting stations from opening in the Eastern Cape, with five stations (Buhlambo, Winnie-Madikizela, Port St Johns, Nyandeni, and Mavundleni) prevented from opening at all.¹⁰⁸

105 Threats made by MK KZN leader Visvin Reddy, 6 March 2024. Visvin Reddy was charged under the Electoral Act for incitement to violence. *NewsLive SA*, 6 March 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jNzrGz0xWY>

106 Heineken, L 2024, 'Military not a magic bullet: South Africa needs to do more for long term peace', <https://mg.co.za/thought-leader/opinion/2021-07-27-military-not-a-magic-bullet-south-africa-needs-to-do-more-for-long-term-peace/>

107 DefenceWeb, 2024, 'Soldiers and police put the lid on Eastern Cape violence ahead of election day', <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/security/civil-security/soldiers-and-police-put-the-lid-on-eastern-cape-violence-ahead-of-election-day/>

108 Zweni, Z 2024, 'Protesters keep 5 Eastern Cape voting stations closed' <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2024-05-29-protesters-keep-five-eastern-cape-voting-stations-closed/>

- Some voting stations across the country were delayed from opening due to 'glitchy' connectivity issues and malfunctioning of voter management devices (VMDs); the voters' roll not arriving on time or arriving incomplete; electricity outages; and IEC staff not being properly trained, with some reportedly receiving training on the day. This resulted in delays and long queues leading to heightened tensions and in some cases verbal abuse and assault of IEC staff as well as pushing, shoving, and scuffles within the queue.¹⁰⁹ One instance of sexual assault was reported.
- Electricity outages at voting stations generated safety issues for those queuing in the dark in the early morning and early evening, given the everyday crime and violence issues in the country. Research ICT Africa noted that 'Electricity disruptions not only hinder the operational aspects of the voting process, but also contribute to the perceived safety of the voter environment'.¹¹⁰
- On election day, 130 people were arrested for attempting to incite violence at polling stations or within communities across the country, or attempting to prevent voting from taking place.¹¹¹
- Across provinces, arrests were made for malicious damage to property, defacement of election posters, removal of election posters, possession of firearms, public disorder (e.g. playing loud music close to the voting station), publishing pictures of marked ballot papers, attempts to vote twice, and sabotage to voting stations. In one case the electricity cables feeding into the voting station had been sabotaged.¹¹²
- Of particular concern were security incidents that resulted from within electoral and security institutions, such as 'interference' of election materials by an IEC area manager and two SAPS officers

109 Mitchley, A 2004, 'From tearing down posters to taking photos of ballot papers: Almost 60 election offenders arrested', <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/from-tearing-down-posters-to-taking-photos-of-ballot-papers-almost-60-election-offenders-arrested-20240530>; and Mitchley, A et al. 2004, 'Disruptions at polling stations either thwarted or delayed voting', <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/disruptions-at-polling-stations-either-thwarted-or-delayed-voting-20240529>

110 Timcke, S & Schroder, Z, 2024 'Observing the 2024 Elections' <https://researchictafrica.net/research/observing-the-2024-elections/>

111 Seelatsa, M 2024, '2024 elections: Eastern Cape police arrest 17 suspects for blocking people from voting', <https://www.citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/elections/2024-elections-eastern-cape-police-arrest-17-suspects-for-blocking-people-from-voting/>; SABC News 2024, 'Police Minister confirms hundreds nabbed for election related crimes', <https://elections.sabc.co.za/elections2024/news/police-minister-confirms-hundreds-nabbed-for-election-related-crimes/>

112 McCain, N & Solomons, L 2024, 'Endless queues, a protest and a shooting: Cape Town voters head to the polls', <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/endless-queues-a-protest-and-a-shooting-cape-town-voters-head-to-the-polls-20240529>

as well as an off-duty police official wearing political party regalia within the voting station areas.¹¹³ Additionally, discoveries of empty ballot boxes discarded on an empty field in Limpopo demonstrated that irregularities in process posed a high risk to the security of the elections, as they undermined the normative principles of an election security framework (impartiality, transparency, legality). More importantly, they undermined voter trust and confidence in the integrity of the process and outcome.

- For the immobile, elderly, and people with disabilities (blind and deaf), personal security and integrity issues arose, such as the physical (mis)handling of their bodies by IEC staff and officials to facilitate their access into the voting station or to a voting booth.¹¹⁴ Given the frustrated climate, this physical handling and touching was at times rushed, rough, and insensitive.

No consolidated data or reporting on ‘everyday’ crime and violence on election day has been released to date, though ad-hoc SAPS reporting indicates the wider situational security environment in which elections took place. This included four murders in KZN unrelated to the election and a fatal shooting near a voting station in the Western Cape.¹¹⁵ One source of local crime and violent incident reporting on election day can be found through the incidence reports of private suburban and community security companies. Although too varied to capture here, these paint a picture of continued and unabated criminality in the country on election day. However, these security incidents were not sufficient to shape or derail the security environment of elections on election day, with observers noting that, overall, ‘the country was calm and peaceful in the pre-election, election day, and the immediate post-election period’.¹¹⁶

113 Mitchley, A 2004, ‘From tearing down posters to taking photos of ballot papers, almost 60 election offenders arrested’, <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/from-tearing-down-posters-to-taking-photos-of-ballot-papers-almost-60-election-offenders-arrested-20240530>; Kgobotlo, B 2024, ‘IEC’s KZN area manager arrested for ballot box interference’, <https://sundayworld.co.za/elections-2024/iecs-kzn-area-manager-arrested-for-ballot-box-interference/>; Tsotetsi, K 2024, ‘IEC confirms arrests for election tampering allegations’, <https://elections.sabc.co.za/elections2024/news/iec-confirms-arrests-for-election-tampering-allegations/>

114 Wits Election Observer Report 2024, ‘Final IEC Election Observer Report’, University of the Witwatersrand. [Private report not in the public domain at the time of writing; author was involved in WEOG and contributed to the report and holds a copy.]

115 McCain & Solomons 2024 [note 112] and Comins 2024 [note 100]

116 SADC/Kavindele 2024 [note 53]

ELECTION SECURITY RESULTS

'Noone must declare tomorrow. People will be provoking us.'¹¹⁷

'The machines were being done things that's wrong.'¹¹⁸

Electoral observers noted concerns about IEC competency: the lack of sustained and visible SAPS presence and crowd control, together with the malfunctioning of VMDs and shortage of voting materials and long queues, caused some voters to abandon voting. However, observers did not believe these inefficiencies were sufficient to play a role in shaping the final electoral outcome. Because of these inefficiencies, some political parties and supporters rejected the electoral outcome, arguing that there were 'too many mistakes' amounting to 'irregularity' and calling for a recount.¹¹⁹ The situation was further inflamed by IEC counting errors: some voting stations' numbers for the national ballot did not match the actual ballot, and/or where voters had voted for a specific party, no votes for that party were recorded at the voting station.¹²⁰ In one case, a party received 300 votes on the national and regional ballot but zero on the provincial ballot.¹²¹

A total of 579 objections were lodged with the IEC, including a petition signed by parties such as MK, the EFF, the United Democratic Front (UDM), Freedom Front (FF), and Build One South Africa (BOSA), calling for a recount.¹²² The most looming security threat in the post-electoral period was that of political unrest and demonstrations rooted in a growing mistrust of the electoral process, specifically in the counting and tabulation of results.¹²³ Furthermore, the threat that the unrest and violence could spiral, as per July 2021, due to political instrumentalisation by 'anti-democratic forces'¹²⁴ featured high in the post-election

117 Utterance by Zuma 2024, as cited in Haffajee, F 2024, 'Chaos in the point: Zuma threatens IEC and daughter Duduzile attacks its commissioner Janet Love', <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-06-02-chaos-is-the-point-zuma-threatens-iec-and-daughter-duduzile-attacks-its-commissioner-janet-love/>

118 Utterance by Zuma 2024, as cited in SABC News, 1 June 2024, 'Nobody must declare results tomorrow, don't rush us, Zuma', <https://elections.sabc.co.za/elections2024/live-blog/nobody-must-declare-results-tomorrow-dont-rush-us-zuma/>

119 Moichela, K 2024, 'IEC to declare election results on Sunday despite threats from Zuma' <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/live-blog-breaking-news-iec-to-declare-election-results-on-sunday-despite-threats-from-zuma-4948885d-ea76-4aca-a155-70d9efdbcd86>

120 Davis 2024 [note 92]

121 Davis 2024 [note 92]

122 Moichela 2024 [note 119]

123 Maeko, T 2024, 'KZN on high alert for post-election violence' <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/politics/2024-05-28-kzn-on-high-alert-for-post-election-violence/>; Harper, P 2024, 'More public order police deployed to Kwa Zulu Natal amid post-election tensions' <https://mg.co.za/politics/2024-06-05-more-public-order-police-deployed-to-kwazulu-natal-amid-post-election-tensions>

124 Davis 2024 [note 92]

threat analysis – particularly in hotspot areas. As a result, 300 members of the Public Order Policing Unit were deployed to KZN to bolster the ProvJoints policing operations. The Zulu king, Misuzulu kaZwelithini, played an important role alongside these units, calling for calm, peaceful conduct and for the acceptance of the election results.¹²⁵

Informational manipulation continued to grow in the post-election phase, framing inefficiency as irregularity. Julius Malema, leader of the EFF, suggested that IEC delays on voting day were deliberate and intended to shape the final electoral outcome; further, that the counting debacle by the IEC was a plot to tamper with ballot boxes.¹²⁶ Malema's allegations gained traction when the IEC results board and website crashed, going offline for over an hour.¹²⁷ The MK Party were also vocal in their rejection and boycott of the election results, claiming outright that the election had been 'rigged'.¹²⁸ MK spokesperson Nhlamulo Ndhlela stated that, 'You can't fool us. We know exactly what was happening. There is an IT entity which was appointed in Cape Town, that interfered during that two hour period. We can confirm it. They were rigging the system'.¹²⁹

A concerted fake news campaign, leveraging from rigging claims and a growing climate of distrust, purported that the Oppenheimer and Rupert families – labelled 'white monopoly capital' – had paid the ANC R150 million to form an ANC–DA coalition.¹³⁰ The story had a by-line imprimatur of the *Mail & Guardian* to lend authenticity and credibility. Though the story did not result in wide acceptance, sowing doubt was the strategy, led by the MK and Radical Economic Transformation (RET) camps, on which calls to action were built¹³¹. Ongoing attacks against the IEC continued, in particular against Janet Love, with Duduzile Zuma of the MK Party demanding that Love be arrested for vote rigging.¹³² Alongside this, posts claiming that the MK Party had won the majority of ballots from overseas voters deepened the narrative of the election being 'stolen' by the IEC. This discrediting strategy and narrative against the IEC laid

125 Harper 2024 [note 123]

126 Ngcobo, K 2024, 'Delays at polling stations may be tactic to extend voting by a day, says Malema' <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2024-05-29-delays-at-polling-stations-may-be-tactic-to-extend-voting-by-a-day-says-malema/>

127 SABC News 2024, 'Umkhonto we Sizwe party rejects poll results, vows to approach court', <https://elections.sabc.co.za/elections2024/news/umkhonto-wesizwe-party-rejects-poll-results-vows-to-approach-court/>

128 Harper, P 2024, 'MK party says it will reject election outcome without recount', <https://mg.co.za/politics/2024-06-01-mk-party-says-it-will-reject-election-outcome-without-recount/>

129 Moichela 2024 [note 119]

130 Davis 2024 [note 92]

131 Haffajee 2024 [note 117]

132 Harper 2024 [note 128]

the basis for incitement, as demonstrated when MK spokesperson Nhlamulo Ndhlela threatened: 'At the right time we will call on our people to demonstrate their dissatisfaction against all these injustices'.¹³³

A number of political parties did engage in protest action outside IEC offices, the IEC results and operations centre, regional high courts, and Parliament. Protests and demonstrations were peaceful and contained by a strong police presence.¹³⁴ The final election results were announced by the IEC on 2 June, and the final list of elected representatives was handed over on 6 June.¹³⁵ This marked the end of the 2024 electoral cycle. Despite the conclusion of the cycle, security structures remained in place and on high alert until mid-June, in line with the first sitting of Parliament and convening of the Government of National Unity (GNU) on 14 and 15 June 2024. No further security threats emanated in the post-electoral period, resulting in an overall broadly peaceful conclusion to the 2024 national and provincial elections.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

'In order for an election to be inclusive, participatory and competitive – and ultimately, to reflect the will of the people – it is essential that electoral contestants can campaign; citizens can cast informed, secret ballots without fear of retribution; officials can effectively administer the process; and civil society, media and parties can engage and observe, free from fear and harm.'¹³⁶

Election security matters. A successful election security framework can help people mitigate, manage, and confine the risks and threats posed to an election. It is helpful for predicting (security assessment), planning (security planning), and proactively acting (security implementation) in order to ensure that a safe and orderly electoral environment is delivered throughout the electoral cycle. While some security concerns are universal, structural conditions within a country strongly influence the risks and threats as well as security priorities of a

133 *Punch* 2024, 'South Africa's Zuma vows protests, says 2024 elections rigged', https://punchng.com/south-africas-zuma-vows-protests-says-2024-elections-rigged/#google_vignette

134 Crisis24, 2024, 'South Africa ongoing opposition protest in central Durban' <https://crisis24.garda.com/alerts/2024/07/south-africa-ongoing-opposition-protest-in-central-durban-july-17>

135 Electoral Commission of South Africa 2024, 'Handover of Final List of Elected Representatives for National Assembly and Provincial Legislatures - Remarks by Chairperson Mosotho Moepya', <https://www.elections.org.za/pw/News-And-Media/News-List/News/News-Article/Handover-of-Final-List-of-Elected-Representatives-for-National-Assembly-and-Provincial-Legislatures---Remarks-by-Chairperson-Mosotho-Moepya?a=AISDGvpz75ps1usOfX7oiq5kZQbN79TDVUamEckav6c=>

136 Open Election Data Initiative, n.d., <https://openelectiondata.net/en/guide/key-categories/security/>

country. South Africa's high rate of everyday violence and crime represents not only an impediment to the full democratic consolidation of the country but also shapes the security environment during elections. Political violence in the form of politically targeted hits is of particular concern, showing ascendancy during the democratic period of the country. Political hits are not an isolated phenomenon; they are embedded in the so-called everyday violence, criminality, and lawlessness of the country.

To mitigate, manage, and contain the multivariate security risks and threats posed to the country, the South African government has developed coordinated national and provincial law, order, intelligence, and security structures in the form of the JCPS, ProvJoints, and NatJoints. These structures have consistently been put to the test, showing limitations (e.g. July 2021 nationwide riots and looting) and strengths (e.g. preventing nationwide taxi and truck shutdowns in 2024).

Despite South Africa's 2024 national and provincial elections being politically charged and highly competitive,¹³⁷ the elections proceeded overwhelmingly in a non-violent manner. The strong coordination, collaboration, partnerships, and initiatives amongst state and non-state stakeholders through ProvJoints, NatJoints, E2, Real24, and Election Watch (to name a few) played a determining role in the 2024 elections being calm and peaceful. Domestic, regional, and international observer missions were unanimous in noting the inclusive, calm, and peaceful electoral environment. However, they also noted isolated and intermittent security incidents.¹³⁸ To further enable secure elections, the following recommendations are made:

Recommendations to the IEC

- (i) Incorporate and sensitise notions of consent into IEC staff training, particularly around physical touching and handling of persons who require physical assistance, those who vocalise vulnerabilities, and those who experience assault (e.g. close inappropriate proximity in queuing, sexual assault, verbal assault).
- (ii) Develop and implement gender and minority security-specific protections at voting stations and an enabling environment on voting day (e.g. separate queues for women before sunrise or after dark; mobile voting booths outside the station for those who are infirm, where access is cumbersome or difficult, and/or to prevent the physical handling of persons).
- (iii) Incorporate backup power sources as part of essential voting materials.

137 EU 2024 [note 10]

138 EU 2024 [note 10]; SADC/Kavindele 2024 [note 53]; and Wits Election Observer/WEOG 2024 [note 114]

Recommendations for the SAPS and IEC

- (iv) Increase the number of SAPS and IEC officials at voting stations inclusive of dedicated queue controllers.
- (v) Conduct ongoing sensitising training of the SAPS and IEC officials regarding consent, vulnerability, trauma, and victim support.

Recommendations for the Government, SAPS, and criminal justice system

- (vi) Mainstream the problem – and prevention – of targeted political killings by (re)establishing, building upon, and extending the work of the Moerane Inter-Ministerial Commission on Political Violence. Widen the lens to include nationwide occurrences of political killings, politicised protests, politicised violence, the politicisation of state tenders and contracts, political disinformation and misinformation, and the inter-connections of these dimensions thereof into a consolidated incident and action-orientated database.
- (vii) Draw on the findings of such a commission to identify and prosecute individuals, including politicians, who are implicated in the political-criminal violence network.

Recommendation to the Government, SAPS, criminal justice system, and IEC

- (viii) Implement the Electoral Code of Conduct vis-à-vis incitement of political violence by fining political parties in breach and cancelling the party's votes and registration in the area.

Recommendation to the Government and SAPS

- (ix) Tackle 'everyday violence', which represents a barrier not only to voter turnout and participation during elections but also to everyday democracy, democratic consolidation, and democratic participation.

Recommendation to the IEC and JCPS cluster

- (x) Reconduct 'state of readiness' audits of voting stations, accompanied by representatives from gender and minorities stakeholder entities (such as Blind SA, Disability South Africa, Sonke Gender Justice, Women for Change, and Age in Action). Incorporate security-specific protections identified by these entities.

SAME VOICES, DIFFERENT CONTESTANTS

Media and the 2024 Elections in South Africa

Admire Mare

Admire Mare is an associate professor and head of the Department of Communication and Media Studies at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa, and the Africa Editor for *Policy and Internet*
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9329-4030>

ABSTRACT

On 27 April 2024, South Africa celebrated 30 years since the dawn of its democracy. This momentous milestone coincided with the seventh national and provincial elections which took place on 29 May 2024. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data sourced and analysed by Media Monitoring Africa, this article investigates the ways in which the South African news media covered the May 2024 elections. It assesses the extent to which the news media provided fair coverage for all the political parties, independent political candidates and electoral management body. It assesses the extent to which people living with disabilities and women were factored into electoral coverage agenda. It argues that the big four political parties dominated the electoral news coverage cycle while smaller parties received less attention. Compared to their male counterparts, women's voices were grossly underrepresented throughout the electoral cycle. The coverage tended to lack depth and concentrated on personalities rather than policies. Besides elite news sources, the coverage was biased towards urban areas and urban-based news sources. In the end, the South African mainstream media failed to articulate the citizen's agenda, choosing rather to focus on politicians and political parties' agendas. This meant that the coverage paid only lip service to pressing issues like unemployment, electricity, housing, poverty, education, migration and health. The article ends with practical and policy recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

The role of the media in electoral processes has been researched for 70 years (Duncan 2014; Lloyd 2009; Kelley 1962). Extant research shows that the mainstream

media can have a crucial influence on how citizens relate to and engage with electoral politics (Altheide & Snow 1979). In order to make effective and informed electoral decisions, Delli Carpini & Keeter (1996) observe that citizens need to know at least a little about politics, parties, and candidates. In contemporary electoral politics, citizens rely on traditional and digital media for information, education and entertainment. In short, the media constitutes citizens' main source of political information (Norris 2000). As a way of living up to this expectation, the media is duty-bound to supply voters with balanced and objective information on relevant political issues and actors (Strömbäck 2008). In the context of elections, the news media act as primary disseminators of information, frontline providers of credible information, and creators of platforms for different opinions and opposing views, thereby countering the proliferation of false information, and ensuring an engaged and informed electorate.

Because of its critical importance in the constitution of modern public spheres, media platforms are expected to actualise the right to freedom of expression (Kupe 2022). Freedom of expression and political debate are recognised as being fundamental to free, fair and genuine elections (Lloyd 2009). For instance, an election can be declared free but not deemed fair when there is unequal access by political parties to public media. As vehicles of public communication, the media in diverse forms is the oxygen and lifeblood of contemporary democratic processes.

In a healthy democracy, the media is expected to perform the following critical roles: information, analysis, watchdog, open forum for debate and discussion, social representation and entertainment. As far as creating an open forum for debate and discussion, the media is expected to ensure that ordinary people are able to express themselves, relate what issues are most important to their country, region, community, or family, and why these issues matter to them. By giving people the opportunity to speak out during elections, the media brings to life the much-coveted notion of public sphere or *lekgotla*.

In their various iterations, traditional media are 'now the modern platforms from which party candidates disseminate information to voters and solicit their support to win elections' (Oboh 2016, p. 3). This dovetails with Kurfi's (2010, p. 295) assertion that '... without access to the full range of information about their world, citizens cannot fulfil their roles, and democracy will wither'. In order to play a successful role in society, the media needs to be free from all powerful forces and vested interests (Kupe 2022). These interests include ownership, government and party control, policy and regulatory constraints and the influence of funding and financing. In order to play a watchdog role, the media should enjoy editorial and programming independence from vested interests. Furthermore, the [public, commercial and community] media should always be ethical, professional and serve the public interest. The media is expected to maintain a high level of

professionalism, accuracy, and impartiality in their coverage during the elections, and different regulatory frameworks exist to guide the media's conduct in this regard (SANEF 2024). While these responsibilities are non-negotiable, there is a realisation that the performance of the media cannot be measured simply by how extensively, accurately and fairly political parties and contestants are covered, but by whether the media exposes voters to the kind of information voters need to know, and also whether the media prioritises and reflects voters and citizen concerns.

On 29 May 2024, millions of South Africans cast their votes for their chosen national, provincial, and regional representatives. These elections were held when the South African media industry was going through seismic changes occasioned by the adoption of three interrelated processes: platformisation,¹ digitisation,² and datafication.³ The environment was also clouded by financial sustainability challenges, mis- and disinformation, gendered disinformation campaigns targeting female journalists, decline in media trust, disconnection concerns between media and audiences as well as the rise of podcasting and social media influencers. Furthermore, it was the first election in which TikTok and AI-generated deep fakes took the centre stage in South African electoral politics. The advent of digital and social media platforms broadened the public sphere thereby enabling voters to access up-to-date information, engage on critical issues and educate themselves on policies and processes. However, it also exposed journalists to cases of gendered disinformation campaigns, cyberbullying, hate speech, harassment and digital surveillance. Besides these digital insecurities, the safety and security of journalists also took the form of offline threats and violence. The media has become broader and more complex. Whereas in the past the focus was on the role of public, community and commercial media, platforms like Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok and WhatsApp are reframing democracy and the way citizens engage and participate in electoral processes. Hence, focusing on the mainstream media alone can inadvertently lead to the promotion of an 'incomplete narrative' or what Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi (2009) calls the 'danger of a single story'. In this regard, traditional media is no longer the only source of information during electoral campaigns. It is increasingly being supplanted and complemented by social media, which provides faster access to various types of content. Social media has enabled politicians to express themselves, without necessarily being

1 This refers to the penetration of infrastructures, economic processes and governmental frameworks of digital platforms in different economic sectors and spheres of life, as well as the reorganisation of cultural practices and imaginations around these platforms.

2 This refers to acts of process automation, process optimisation and information processing for the purpose of business performance improvement and to generate a competitive advantage.

3 This refers to the process of transforming various aspects of our lives into data that can be quantified and analysed.

journalists' gate keepers (Mare 2018). Social media acts as an early warning indicator, source of breaking news, fact-checker and rumour-monger, and functions as a public agora, a meeting place for the expression of ideas.

The study looks at the media's coverage of the election campaigns of various parties, as well as the parties' use of media during their campaigns. It attempts to answer the following questions: How did the South African media report on the May 2024 elections? To what extent did the media assist South Africans to make informed decisions about how to relate to the general elections and the plethora of parties contesting it? Which voices were given prominence throughout the electoral cycle? Which voices were sidelined and marginalised throughout the lifecycle? Whose agenda did the media promote/demote? How did hate speech narratives manifest through mediated coverage of elections? How did the media report on emotive subjects like immigration and race relations during the electoral cycle? How did the media include/exclude people living with disabilities in their electoral coverage? The answer to these complex questions is based in part on information provided by Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) and primary data collected by the author.

This article focuses on how the South African media, broadly defined, covered the May 2024 national and provincial elections, and on media coverage of issues which were foregrounded and under-reported. It examines how different politicians and political parties were accorded media space to articulate their policies, visions and promises. It is argued that the South African media was generally fair to all the contestants in their coverage of the fiercely contested plebiscite. However, the coverage tended to lack depth and concentrated on personalities rather than policies. Mainstream media failed to articulate the citizen's agenda, choosing rather to focus on politicians and political parties' agendas. It also paid lip service to pressing issues such as unemployment, electricity, housing, poverty, education, migration and health. Similar to other mainstream media platforms, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) struggled to give sufficient coverage to smaller parties and independent candidates. Overall, the media tended to promote 'peace journalism' narratives as opposed to 'war journalism', although the 'otherisation' of foreign nationals in news reports dealing with emotive subjects like migration and unemployment was also evident. Data in the article reveals that women's voices were seriously underrepresented compared to those of their male counterparts in the South African media during the election period.

The structure of the article is as follows. First, a short literature on the nexus between media and elections is discussed, followed by an overview of the current media landscape in South Africa highlighting the decline in traditional media appeal, the rise of social media influencers and podcasters, and the shift towards

online media consumption amongst voters. This is followed by a discussion on the methodological and theoretical concerns of the article. Findings and analysis are followed by a brief forward-looking conclusion that includes recommendations on how media coverage of electoral processes can be strengthened.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Extant literature (Duncan 2014; Mathebula 2019; Dhawraj 2019; Kalyango 2011) on the nexus between media and elections tends to foreground both strong and weak effects on the formation of public opinion. On the one hand, some scholars view the media as a very powerful opinion-formation institution, whereas other scholars are not convinced of this. They see media as a weak contributor to opinion formation. The media may reinforce the choice of voters who have already decided which party to support; for the undecided, a candidate's image – including his or her media image – may influence voter behaviour in highly mediated elections (Duncan 2014). Be that as it may, the media serves as an integral link between political parties, politicians and ordinary voters. During elections, the media has the onerous role of providing information on registered parties, their programmes and candidates, that would enable the citizens to decide which party and candidates that they may wish to vote for (Oboh 2016). In one of her groundbreaking studies, Norris (1997, pp. 223-224) observed:

the primary functions of the media's coverage of the campaign is to increase information about the choices on offer, stimulating interest in public involvement in the process, . . . watching politicians debate, the major issues during the campaign may stimulate viewers to feel better informed, more aware of the choices on offer, and therefore better equipped to exercise their choice at the ballot box.

Depending on the balance of forces in a particular socio-political context, the media can be hugely influential in the shaping of perceptions and final voter decision-making (Duncan 2014). The mainstream media is expected to play an educative political role, thereby enlightening 'the masses on the appropriate electoral procedures that would enable them to shun the evils of the "money bag" politicians, and to avoid the disadvantages of voting along the lines of ethnicity and religion' (Okpoko 2003, p. 76).

Writing about Nigeria, Oboh (2016) argues that although the media gave adequate publicity to the elections, the public and the private media disagreed about the credibility of the election results. Muriungi (2006) looked at how *The Standard* and *Nation* newspapers covered Kenya's 2002 elections. She posits that the

two main newspapers tried to maintain unbiased covering although editorials had a slight angling towards some preferred candidates. Using Zimbabwe's elections as default setting, Santos and Ndhlovu (2023, p. 363) argue that polarisation can induce news media

into assuming an active partisan posture in their reportage of political issues and events by using rhetorical discursive strategies not only to persuade the audience to accept their standpoint, but subsequently, to influence their political action in the future, with consequential implications for their functional performance of received normative roles.

Behnke (2019), in analysing how international media organisations covered African elections, found that negative representations of election processes and a lack of deep analysis also frame the continent as 'the other'. The study also reveals that the continent is portrayed as hopeless and incapable of democratic elections. This is not unique. In an earlier study, Schiffrin (2009) concluded that the portrayal of elections in Africa by mainstream Western media concentrated mainly on crisis, disaster, war, famine and its oversimplification of social organisation and ethnicity.

Focusing on the SABC, Zulu (2021) argues that the public broadcaster did not represent the real image of the political parties, and that this may be regarded as unprofessional and may taint the quality of their work. The research shows that there are deep-rooted social and cultural issues in the media that need transformation. Krüger (2019) observes that South African media coverage is dominated by the speeches and activities of the national party leaders, analysts' commentaries, and opinion polls. During the 2009 elections, Media Monitoring Africa found that the South African mainstream media's coverage lacked depth and largely failed to cover issues of concern to the electorate. This is not the first time that the mainstream media has been found wanting. In her study, Duncan (2014) also observed that this coverage has tended to be event-focused and lacking in analysis. She concluded that most of the coverage is concerned with the personalisation of candidates and political parties, with very little space afforded to party policies and citizens' concerns.

Several scholars (Duncan & Seleokane 1998; Jones 2019; Duncan 2014; Jacobs 1999) have demonstrated that the mainstream media has a blind spot when it comes to the citizens' agenda. The heavy focus on the 4 Ps: political parties, politicians, policies, and promises often dominates the gaze of elite news makers in South African media. Focusing on what she calls 'competition without diversity', Duncan (2014) observes that the media is well placed to inform voters about the policies and practices of political parties so that they can make informed decisions.

Building on what Garman and Malila (2017) call a 'lack of listening', Jones (2019) finds that news sources during the South African elections (1994–2014) consisted increasingly of pundits and decreasingly of political leaders and citizens. For Wasserman (2013), the media should embrace an 'ethics of listening'. These studies underscore the fact that the South African media ignored the voices of ordinary people. Because ordinary South Africans are often not given the platform to articulate their own concerns, they frequently resort to social media platforms as invented spaces of political communication (Mare 2016). This dovetails with Garman & Wasserman's (2017) observation that listening has a transformative and even radical potential for both emerging and established democracies. The study seeks to analyse the extent to which South African media listened to voters through its media reportage.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Unlike most countries on the continent, South Africa has an advanced, well-resourced, three-tiered media system consisting of public, community and commercial media, which has been criticised for publishing what Friedman (2011) calls 'the views of the suburbs'. Instead of serving 'a broad, diverse and socio-economically highly unequal population' (Wasserman 2020, p. 453), South African media is still run by whites in their top management structures (Radebe 2022). Despite the transformation rhetoric in high sounding policies like BBEE, and although a handful of media houses are now controlled by black players, the allocative control of this media still rests with the powerful corporations interlinked with global capital (Radebe 2022). This means that the post-apartheid media system remains configured along a liberal 'consensus which emphasised the independence of the media from government and a free-market environment in which the media should conduct its business' (Wasserman & De Beer 2005, p. 37).

Ideally, the public and community media is expected to provide important counterbalances to the commercial media. However, in practice the commercial media – both print and broadcast – plays a disproportionate role in shaping public opinion and agenda setting. In many ways, the media system mirrors post-apartheid racial and class cleavages. For instance, the commercial print media [like *Business Day*, *Daily Maverick*, *News24*, *Sunday Times*, *Mail & Guardian*, *The Star*, *The Sowetan*, *Die Burger*, *The Citizen*, *Rapport*, *The Independent on Saturday*, *Cape Times*, *Beeld*, *The Continent*, *City Press*, *Sunday World*, *Sunday Tribune*, *Cape Argus*, *The Witness*, *The Mercury*, *TimesLIVE*, *Pretoria News*, *Volksblad*, *The Sunday Independent* and *Daily News*] caters for elite audiences often stratified along racial and geographical lines. The same can be said of commercial radio and television stations (such as *eNCA* and *Newzroom Afrika*).

Satellite broadcasting is controlled by DSTV trading as MultiChoice Private Limited. However, recent data shows that MultiChoice has been grappling with a steady loss of subscribers in South Africa (Madubela 2024). Their annual report published in March 2024 showed that the subscriber base of the satellite broadcaster has declined by 5%, from 8 million to 7.6 million. Most of this audience is located in urban areas and tends to be predominantly white and a few black middle-class families. These socio-demographic groups are often seen as more lucrative for advertisers, who buy advertising space on commercial media platforms. Unlike commercial media, relatively poor and rural audiences are served largely by the community media and most of this audience live in small towns and rural areas. Because of their limited disposable income, this socio-demographic group is often ignored by commercial media.

Five major companies dominate the commercial media landscape in South Africa. These are Naspers (which owns Media24), Multichoice, Independent Media, Caxton Publishers, and Arena Holdings. These companies offer media products and services ranging from print, broadcast and digital offerings. The magazine sector has experienced massive decimation in recent years, a situation that escalated during the COVID-19 pandemic, and which saw many titles folding. In 2020, the Associated Media Publishing group, which used to publish iconic consumer magazine titles, announced that it was closing its doors. This was followed by Caxton Publishers announcing that it would stop publishing at least ten magazines in its stable.

In the post-pandemic context, the print media sector remains saddled with sustainability challenges, depleting advertising revenue, juniorisation of newsrooms and stiff competition from platform companies for limited online advertising revenue. This crisis, coupled with disconnection from audiences, declining media trust and the misinformation pandemic, has left the media sector teetering on the brink of collapse. With the exception of the *Daily Maverick* which managed to launch a print version at the height of pandemic, smaller newspapers are struggling to keep the lights on and pay their staff decent salaries. In the print commercial media sector, newspapers like *Isolezwe*, *Ziwaphi*, and the *South African Jewish Report* serve very specific linguistic, geographic and ethnic communities. These are complemented by daily tabloids like the *Daily Sun* and *Die Son*, which are geared towards working class audiences across the racial divide.

South Africa has a print and broadcast community media that serves a particular geographic community or community of interest, including religious groups, students, ethnic communities and political constituencies. Despite statistics showing that internationally, most people no longer listen to the radio, evidence from South Africa suggests that it remains the most popular and pervasive medium (Bosch 2022). More people have access to radio receivers and broadcasts

than they do television sets (Bosch 2022). According to recent statistics, there are 40 commercial and public broadcast stations and 284 community stations in South Africa (Bosch 2022). These include music stations, religious stations, talk radio stations and vernacular radio stations. As far as English talk radio is concerned, *Radio 702*, *SAFM*, *Cape Talk*, *Cape Talk Radio*, *Metro FM*, *Hot 1027*, and *KFM* dominate the public talk agenda. One of the most impactful vernacular radio stations is *Ukhozi FM* which broadcasts in *isiZulu* language. Boasting approximately eight million listeners, *Ukhozi FM* has been credited with connecting with urban and rural listeners to navigate post-apartheid Zulu identity (Gunner 2019). There are also vernacular stations such as *UMhlobo Wenene FM*, *Lesedi FM*, *Phalaphala FM*, *Thobela FM*, *Motswedding FM* and many others with a significant listenership base.

In recent years, podcasts and vodcasts have entered the media landscape. Podcasting refers to the production and distribution of digital audio files to the computers of subscribed users using Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds. Vodcasts (video podcasts) have emerged as the latest trend, transforming our perception of the medium. Spurred by the widespread availability of smartphones and internet access, combined with a rise in on-demand audio content, podcasts have become a mainstream form of entertainment, information, and education for many South Africans (Manjoro 2024). According to KLA's YouGov tool, the top five podcast apps used in South Africa are YouTube at 65.83%, Spotify at 50.91%, Google Podcast at 16.27%, Deezer at 15.62%, and Amazon Music at 14.96%, with Apple Podcast ranking sixth at 12.91%. Podcasts provide an immersive experience, with listeners tuning in for specific purposes. Two types of podcasts can be distinguished: traditional and on-demand. Traditional podcasts have a focused content where listeners are there to learn or be entertained. On-demand podcasts constitute a genre where listeners catch up on missed radio content such as news, sports, or key moments. In South Africa, radio-based podcasts and solo-run podcasts (started by individuals or former DJs) dominate the sector. Some of the most popular podcasts in South Africa include *Podcast & Chill*, *Podcast South-Africa*, *Ideas that Matter Podcast*, *The Joe Rogan Experience*, *Global News Podcast*, *The Money Show*, and *On Purpose with Jay Shetty*. *Podcast & Chill* hosted by MacGyver (also known as Mac-Gee) and co-hosts Sol Phenduka and Ghost Lady is the most popular podcast with over one million subscribers on YouTube.

In order to address the historical legacies of colonialism and apartheid, the South African government established the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) in 2003 in collaboration with the commercial media sector. The rationale was to fund community print and broadcast media aimed at historically disadvantaged communities, historically diminished language and cultural groups, and inadequately served communities (MDDA 2020; Wasserman 2020). The agency was envisioned as a vehicle 'to create more plurality in the highly

concentrated and conglomerated South African media market' (Wasserman 2020, p. 454). Funded through a levy on licensed broadcast and print media, the government of South Africa has spent over R600 million on the community sector between 2002 and 2021 (Nene 2024). However, the agency has been dogged by relentless criticism over financial mismanagement throughout its existence.

Notwithstanding the challenges facing the community media sector, South Africa has a resilient public media system. This sector is anchored by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), which has transformed from being a state broadcaster under apartheid to a public entity which reports to Parliament (Wasserman 2020). The SABC has four television stations and an international broadcast channel, SABC 404 on DSTV's satellite broadcasting service. Despite rumours of editorial interference and financial maladministration, the SABC is constitutionally expected to serve the broad public interest. This means it must transform from being a propaganda mouthpiece as it was during the apartheid era and instead produce quality broadcast content for everyone. South Africans who cannot afford subscription-based satellite broadcasting (DSTV) and streaming services (such as Netflix, BritBox, eVOD, Viu, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, Apple TV+, YouTube, and Showmax) rely on free-to-air terrestrial broadcasting by SABC television stations. The broadcasting market has changed over time with the arrival of livestreaming services. Although there is no disaggregated data, it is not far-fetched to argue that platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Apple TV and Showmax have disrupted the television consumption market in South Africa. In this emerging cut-throat competition for the eyes and ears of South Africans, Netflix has the lion's share of the market. Since its launch in 2016, it has broken MultiChoice's monopoly on high-end international content. Data from JustWatch (2024) shows that Netflix has 31% of the market share, followed by Amazon Prime Video with 26%, Showmax is third with 25%, Mubi is fifth with a 7% and Apple TV Plus has 3%.

Despite the massive growth of the internet and social media platforms, radio and television are still the most widely accessed forms of media in South Africa. As discussed earlier, the SABC is the most popular channel for radio and television content despite stiff competition from *eNCA* and *Newzroom Afrika* in urban and affluent areas. Indigenous radio stations such as *Ukhozi FM*, *UMhlobo Wenene FM*, *Lesedi FM*, *Phalaphala FM*, *Thobela FM*, and *Motsweding FM* dominate the radio news market. Compared to other broadcasters, the SABC dominates the news and current affairs programming and entertainment content (Wasserman 2020). Because of its market share, it has the potential to shape political discourse and nation-building in many ways. The public broadcaster continues to face increased commercial competition from other television channels available on terrestrial and digital platforms to South African viewers.

In response to digitisation and media convergence headwinds, the South African media has made great strides in embracing digital publishing (Wasserman 2022). Cognisant of the shifts from analogue to digital publishing, South African news media has launched digital and mobile first strategies. These strategies have brought mixed results. Some publications have registered significant online subscriptions while others are still struggling with digital migration. Born digital start-ups like *Daily Maverick*, *Vrye Weekblad*, and *GroundUp* have shaken the news market in many ways. Buoyed by huge internet and social media penetration figures, platforms such as *News24*, *Moneyweb*, *Bizcommunity*, and *The South African* have dominated the online news market. *News24* is arguably the leading online newspaper in South Africa. The company launched its subscription strategy in August 2020 and is estimated to have at least 100 000 subscribers who pay to access their news. This success has been attributed to the quality of its investigative, business, political, sport and lifestyle journalism, and the world-class team and technology powering acquisition and retention of subscribers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is informed by the framing theory as originally propounded by Goffman (1958) and later revised by Entman (1993). It starts from the premise that coverage or representation of a particular issue is based on (Entman 1993, p. 52):

select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and makes them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item prescribed.

Framing involves selecting a few aspects of a perceived reality and connecting them together in a narrative that promotes a particular interpretation. It works to shape and alter audience members' interpretations and preferences through *priming* (Scheufele 2000). It has the potential to introduce or enhance the availability and apparent importance of certain ideas for evaluating a political object. In this case, media frames provide boundaries around a news story, determining what is newsworthy and what is not. According to Entman (1993), news media frames have four functions. These are to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgements and suggest remedies. News frames can also function as moral references through making judgements about people, events and issues (Entman 1993). Frames, then, *define problems* – determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; *diagnose causes* – identify the forces creating the problem; *make moral judgments* –

evaluate causal agents and their effects; and *suggest remedies* – offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects (Entman 1993, p. 52). Thus, news media offers interpretations and evaluations of events, actors (such as political parties, politicians, electoral management bodies) linked to these events (for instance, elections) and issues intrinsic to such events. In the context of elections, news frames determine what people should think about, prioritise and ignore in their voting decisions. The article, thus, examines the polysemic ways in which the South African news media framed the national and provincial elections (NPE).

Analysis of frames illuminates the precise way in which influence over human consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location – such as a speech, utterance, news report, or novel – to that consciousness (Entman 1993, pp. 51–2). It allows us to make sense of how the news media sought to ‘...guide the receiver’s thinking...’ (Entman 1993, pp. 52–3). In other words, the news media sets the election agenda. Frames highlight some pieces of information about an item that is the subject of a communication, thereby elevating them in salience. In the same vein, it also de-emphasises certain information, thereby pushing it into oblivion. This chimes with Edelman’s (1993, p. 232) view that frames exert their power through selective description and omission of the features of a situation. As a result, the frame determines whether most people notice and how they understand and remember a problem, as well as how they evaluate and choose to act upon it. Frames call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions. In this article, the focus is on what issues the South African news media amplified and obscured through its reportage.

METHODOLOGY

As far as methodology is concerned, the article is based on Media Monitoring Africa’s (MMA) monitoring tools. This methodology considers qualitative and quantitative data. Positivism is a paradigm that relies on measurement and reason, that knowledge is revealed from a neutral and measurable (quantifiable) observation of activity, action or reaction (Park et al. 2020). It puts a premium on quantitative research methods such as questionnaire and quantitative content analysis. Interpretivism assumes that reality is subjective, multiple and socially constructed. Drawing on interpretivist philosophy, this study views ‘news media not as passive chroniclers of events and issues as they play out in society, but also as generative actors whose actions are based on their interpretations of what is going on around them, and who in turn, prompt other social actors to act in specific ways’ (Santos & Ndhlovu 2023, p. 369). By privileging the social construction

of reality, interpretivists view news media 'as generative social agents, which proffer interpretations of the social world and based on these interpretations, persuade audiences to accept their interpretations and act in particular ways' (Santos & Ndhlovu 2023, p. 370). Interpretive approaches rely on questioning and observation in order to discover or generate a rich and deep understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. This study pivots on media monitoring work conducted by MMA before, during and after the elections. During this monitoring period, MMA published three separate reports analysing how the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), other news media and selected community media reported on the 2024 NPE. The interim and final reports foregrounded who and what dominated media coverage. Monitoring was conducted between 29 February and 24 June 2024. A total of 10 483 items were monitored across print, online, and broadcast media using a combination of dedicated human media monitors, especially for small community media and in an African language content, and semi-automated monitoring using MMA's media monitoring tool, Dexter (MMA 2024). Data was thematically analysed in line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) suggestion on how to code data, to search for and refine themes, and to report findings.

FINDINGS

Despite the high number of new political parties which participated in the national and provincial elections, the South African media was generally fair to all the contestants in its coverage of the fiercely contested plebiscite. However, the coverage tended to lack depth and concentrated on personalities rather than policies. In the end, the mainstream media failed to articulate the citizen's agenda, choosing rather to focus on politicians and political parties' agendas. It also paid lip service to pressing issues like unemployment, electricity, housing, poverty, education, migration and health. Overall, the South African news media provided a platform through which political parties and politicians could articulate their policies and promises to the electorate. As pointed out earlier, the media was also accused of partisanship and biased reporting, especially television broadcasting stations such as *eNCA* and *Newzroom Afrika*. *eNCA* was evidently biased towards the Democratic Alliance while *Newzroom Afrika* rooted for the MK Party. The SABC was more sympathetic to the ANC. This means that their news coverage lacked balance because they tended to favour some political positions and political actors over others. This '*ideological bias*' (Hackett 1984) meant that political parties, issues, events, and politicians were presented and discussed in an unbalanced and slanted way. Bias in political news coverage may have a profound influence on voter opinions and preferences.

The South African news media was generally fair and relatively balanced in its coverage. Data from MMA shows that community, public and commercial media covered the elections in an overwhelmingly fair manner (see Figure 1). Despite this positive turn in news coverage, the findings suggest that some newspapers like *The Star* sought to give credence to mis- and disinformation on whether the IEC could be trusted. Thus, instead of fact checking and debunking false and misleading information, newspapers like these were implicated in the conveyor belt spreading mis-and disinformation.

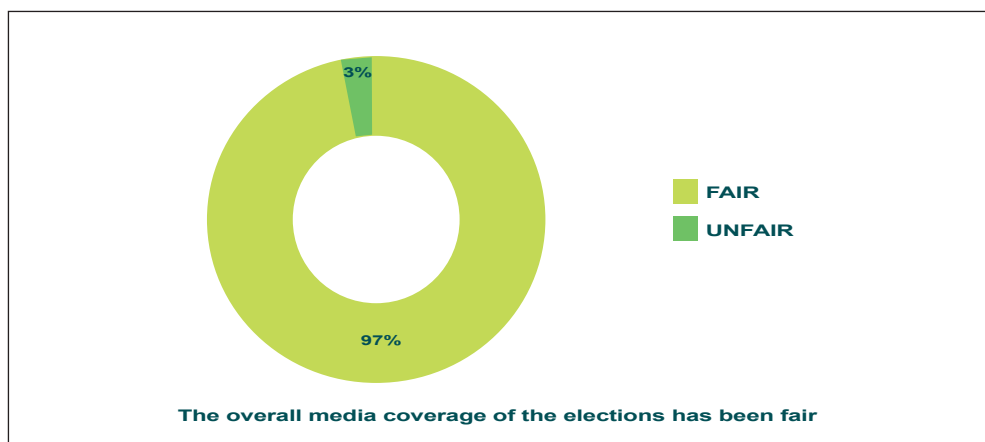


Figure 1: Fairness of coverage

Source: Media Monitoring Africa

Notwithstanding the fairness in news coverage, it was observed that journalists, interviewers and presenters seldom challenged controversial statements made by politicians and political parties. For the reputation of the profession, it is important for journalists to hold politicians accountable when they make claims that are unverified, unsupported, or patently false. Cases abound where political parties challenged the legitimacy of the constitution, and perpetuated negative stereotypes including xenophobic utterances. Some of the political parties and politicians sought to discredit the Independent Election Commission without any evidence of malfeasance.

Which Voices were Amplified During the NPE?

In their interim and final reports, the MMA examined the performance of the South African news media based on its journalistic obligations to ensure fair and balanced coverage. Despite the high number of new political parties which participated in the national and provincial elections, the South African news media was generally fair to all parties in their coverage of the elections. However,

the coverage tended to lack depth and concentrated on personalities rather than policies. Besides elite news sources, the coverage was biased towards urban areas and urban-based political analysts. In the end, the South African mainstream media failed to articulate the citizen’s agenda, choosing rather to focus on politicians and political parties’ agendas. This meant that the coverage paid lip service to pressing issues like unemployment, electricity, housing, poverty, education, migration and health. Four parties dominated the electoral news coverage cycle: the African National Congress (ANC), Democratic Alliance (DA), Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK party) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). Smaller parties like the Patriotic Alliance (PA), Rise Mzansi, Build One South Africa (BOSA), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), Freedom Front Plus, and United Independent Movement (UIM) were not afforded the same level of coverage. The mainstream media tended to take an agenda-setting approach to elections, with the focus on the coalition government which would be constituted between the ANC and DA.

Diversity of Coverage and Plurality

As far as diversity of coverage and plurality is concerned, the MMA found that between February and June 2024 most of the coverage was generally fair and balanced, maintaining a trend that was set in previous elections (Duncan 2014). The media performance analysis sought to establish the amount of coverage given to election-related issues. This was important because it has the potential to shed light on how the South African news media held political parties and politicians accountable.

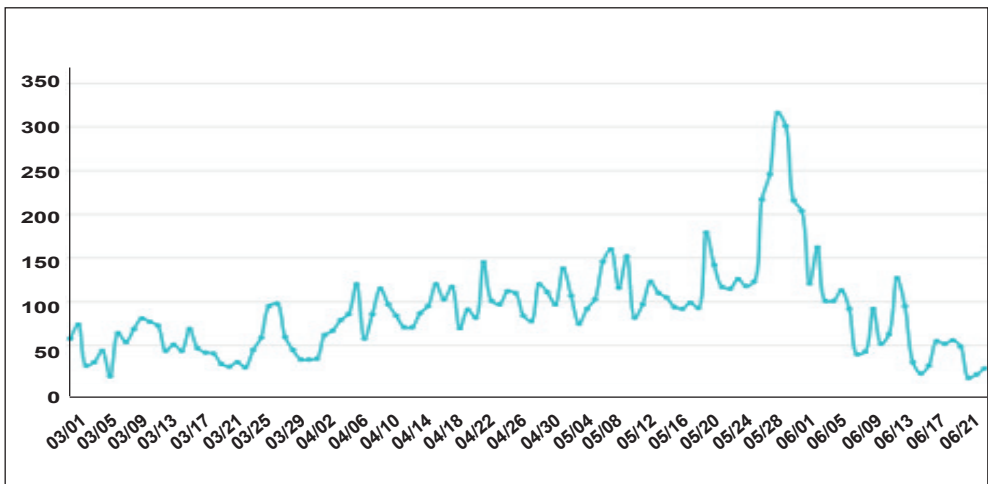


Figure 2: Number of election-related stories published by the media between February and June 2024

Source: Media Monitoring Africa (2024)

Figure 2 has three discernible peaks in election-related news coverage which were recorded on 20 May, and again on 29 and 30 May. The first peak coincided with the commencement of international voting. On that date the first ballot of the 2024 national and provincial elections was cast. Most of the coverage during the first peak focused on election logistics and reports on voting around the globe. The length of the queues, smooth voting processes and press conferences from the electoral management body dominated the news cycle. Coverage also zeroed in on the Constitutional Court ruling regarding the eligibility of former president Jacob Zuma to stand for office representing the MK Party.

The second peak happened on the official voting day in South Africa. This was on 29 May when the news media went all out to report on the biggest story of the year. Most of the news reports were about voter turnout, election logistics and the voting process. Some of the reports focused on preliminary reports by observer missions, statements by political parties and the possibility of a coalition government. The final peak period was recorded on 30 May when the media focused on what was happening at the Results Operating Centre (ROC), the results dashboard and early results from the provinces. As soon as the results started trickling in, the news focus shifted towards coverage of reports by observer missions, the functionality of the results dashboard after it briefly crashed, and the implications of the results on the consolidation of democracy in the country. This period was followed by a gradual decrease in the coverage of election-related stories.

Media Monitoring Africa also managed to assess the kinds of topics/themes on which the South African news media focused during the election period. Mapping these topics was crucial for understanding the issues that shaped the election narratives. According to MMA's interim and final reports, the top three topics covered included election logistics, political party politics and political party campaigning. Overall, they took up 52% of all coverage (see Figure 3 below). Political party campaigning focused on how both large and small parties canvassed for votes at provincial and national levels. Party politics revolved around internal wrangles within the MK party. The party battles pitting Jacob Zuma against Jabulani Khumalo in the MK party spilled into the courts. The founder of the party, Jabulani Khumalo, even went as far as requesting that the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) should remove former President Jacob Zuma as the face of the party and from its list of potential members of parliament.

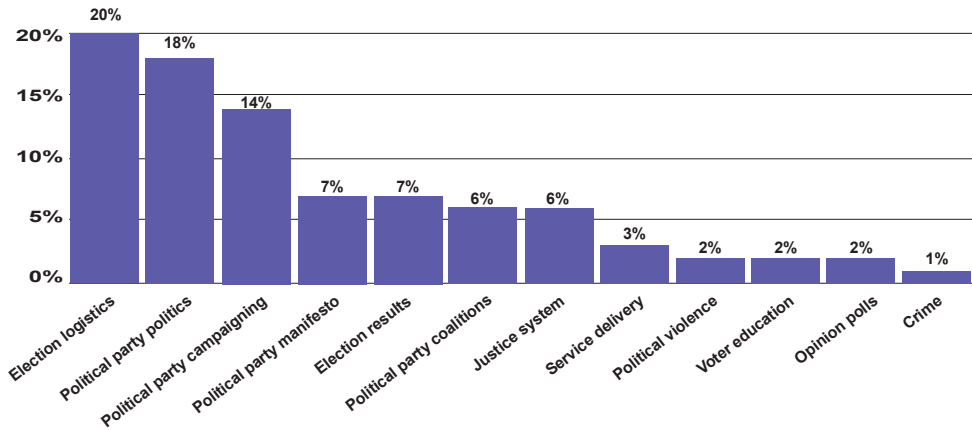


Figure 3: Topics that dominated the election media coverage

Note: N = 9258, representing 88% of all articles analysed

Source: Media Monitoring Africa (2024)

While there is nothing amiss about overemphasising electoral logistics and party mobilisation strategies, it is concerning that, as in previous elections, the news media focused on the elite agenda at the expense of issues of concern to the wider public. This elite-centric agenda during elections has been reported in the past (see Duncan 2014). The net effect of this elite bias is that South African news media paid lip service to pressing issues like unemployment, crime, land redistribution, electricity, housing, climate change, drought, poverty, education, migration and health. The media arguably allowed political parties to set the agenda, focusing on narratives driven by politicians. Issues affecting ordinary people rarely featured. Where these did feature, it was about service delivery protests, crime, illegal mining activities, drugs and illegal substance abuse and electricity cable thefts. Overall, service delivery-related issues featured in the top twelve most covered topics (at eighth place) with a 3% coverage.

As already mentioned, several pressing issues were unjustifiably left out of the news cycle throughout the electoral coverage. The topics that were ignored in the news cycle include children, climate change, gender, education, social development, and housing. These topics received less than 1% of coverage (see Figure 4). This is very concerning considering that climate change has been described by the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2024 as one of the three critical challenges facing humanity. The country has experienced floods in the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. Children were completely invisible as an election issue despite the fact that most of them are growing up

in a society riddled with digital threats such as hate speech, cyberbullying, disinformation and sexual grooming. Even though children do not vote, the decisions which are made by elected officials affect them in a myriad of ways. This was unfortunately ignored in the framing of the election story.

Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal were disproportionately overrepresented in news coverage. Whilst these are among the most economically productive provinces in the country, areas like the Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Limpopo, Free State, Mpumalanga, Northwest and the Northern Cape were not given enough media attention. Data shows that Gauteng received 23% while Kwa-Zulu Natal garnered 14% of the news coverage. This is in contrast to past elections where the Western Cape tended to come second or third after Gauteng. The change in media coverage is attributable to the unexpected rise of the MK party in KwaZulu-Natal on the eve of the national and provincial elections. Although the Western Cape is the base of the Democratic Alliance, the changing political geography of opposition politics in South Africa suggests that KwaZulu-Natal can no longer be ignored. Data indicates that the Western Cape (5%) received less coverage than the Eastern Cape (6%). The reason for the increase in focus on the Eastern Cape could be the protests around voting stations on voting day in the Eastern Cape, and protests preventing voting stations from opening. News media should strive to diversify their coverage of priority and marginalised areas during future electoral seasons.

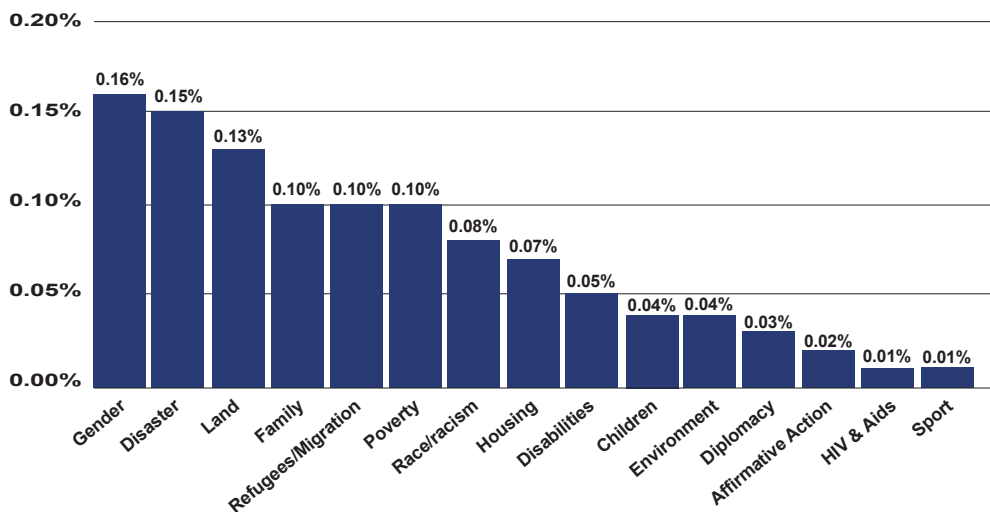


Figure 4: Stories that were ignored by the news media

Note: N = 115, representing 1.1% of all articles analysed
 Source: Media Monitoring Africa (2024)

The Gendered Nature of Election Coverage

Overall, the South African news media did not do well in terms of including women as a news source. Although gender binaries have been disrupted in mainstream sexuality studies, the MMA focused on the spread of male versus female sources. This is not new. Previous election cycles have also shown that women’s voices tend to be underrepresented. Data at hand suggest that women enjoyed only 18% of voice share, while male voices dominated at 82% (see Figure 6). While this was an increase compared to the interim report published by the MMA, there is still much that needs doing by newsrooms to ensure women’s voices are not neglected during elections. Given that the political landscape is predominantly male, with few parties being headed by women, the underrepresentation of women’s voices endorses the point that in a patriarchal context, male-centric voices are generally privileged. Furthermore, news sources tend to be male, which further marginalises women’s voices in the public sphere. In a country where women constitute the bulk of the population, where women are the ‘kingmakers’ in terms of voting population, it is unfortunate that the media is still privileging the minority as the spokespersons of the rest of society. This is even more damning in a country where gender-based violence has reached pandemic levels. Gender mainstreaming should be a deliberate exercise by newsrooms and editors if this unequal distribution of voice in the news media is to be undone.

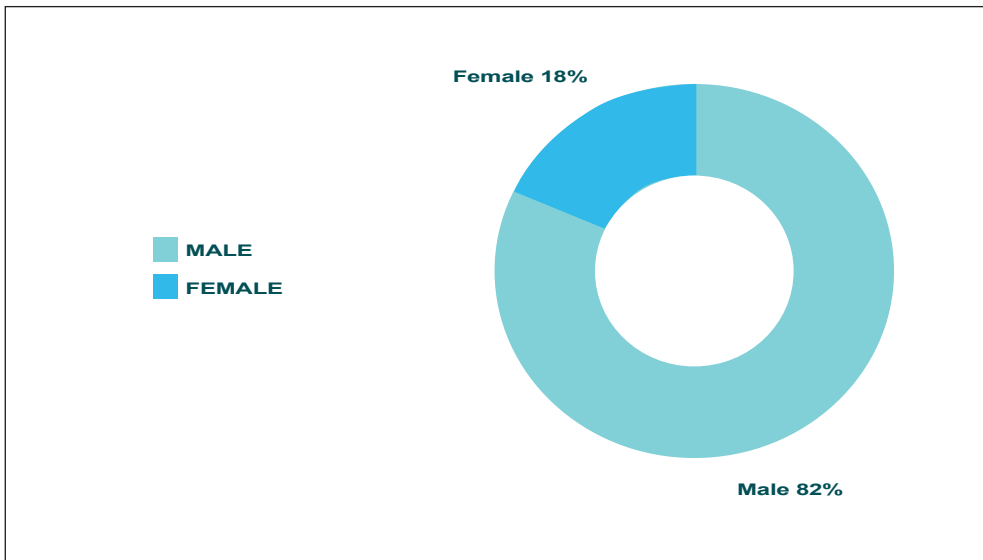


Figure 5: Loudest voices in the media

Source: Media Monitoring Africa (2024)

Media may to some degree argue that if the parties offer mainly male voices, those are the people who will be interviewed. However, gender equality is not good only for women, but generally leads to better and more balanced coverage. Media needs to be more assertive in requesting interviews with women, and if the parties fail to offer them, media could then ensure it makes every effort to give prominence to women experts and candidates in an attempt to achieve gender equality in their coverage.

Media Bias towards Large Parties and Celebrity Politicians

The four large political parties dominated the electoral news coverage cycle while smaller parties received less attention. Data collected by MMA shows that the African National Congress (ANC) received the majority share (33%) of the media coverage, followed by the Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK Party) with 20%, the Democratic Alliance (DA) garnered 14%, and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) registered around 9%. The other smaller parties such as the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) had 5%, Action SA received 4% and Rise Mzansi managed a mere 2%. Like other mainstream media platforms, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) struggled to give sufficient coverage to smaller parties and independent candidates. Overall, the media tended to promote 'peace journalism' narratives as opposed to 'war journalism', although the 'otherisation' of foreign nationals in news reports dealing with emotive subjects like migration and unemployment was also evident.

The data indicates that the ANC received the majority share of media coverage, at 33%. The assumption is that media follow equitable coverage guidelines; however, the data shows that the MK Party received the second highest amount of coverage, at about 20%. This is a significant share of the coverage, especially for a new political party not represented in Parliament. Given the controversy and public interest issues around the MK Party, and the legal challenges between MK and the IEC, it is not surprising that the party garnered significant media coverage. Other political parties that received a large portion of media coverage include the Democratic Alliance (DA) (14%), Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) (9%), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) (5%), Action SA (4%) and Rise Mzansi (2%). While the coverage can be said to be equitable, there is also little doubt that smaller, new parties and independent candidates would feel legitimately aggrieved by the minimal coverage they received across the media. Even the SABC, which tends to offer greater diversity of party coverage, struggled to give sufficient coverage to smaller parties and independent candidates. The reality is that with fewer resources in the media, some parties will miss out.

Research also suggests that party and candidate visibility is important and influential because it is a necessary condition for voters to read about candidate characteristics and party policy positions. The visibility of political actors in media coverage has the potential to increase their accessibility to audiences, influencing subsequent political judgments (Kiouisis & McCombs 2004), especially because voters tend to infer a party's political importance from its media salience (Miller & Krosnick 2000).

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Although normative democratic theory expects the news media to play an educative and informative role during elections, it is worth highlighting that 'political information is not necessarily unbiased and neutral' (Saez-Trumper, Castillo & Lalmas 2013). This is even worse in media systems characterised by concentration, fragmentation and ideological homogeneity such as South Africa. In mainstream literature, bias is often juxtaposed with objectivity (McQuail 1992). It presupposes news that is highly opinionated and slanted towards a particular worldview. It is predominantly theorised on the basis of both issues (see Takens et al. 2010) and actors (cf. Eberl, Boomgaarden & Wagner 2017). Media bias is defined as slanted news coverage or internal bias, reflected in news articles. Although the findings highlight a high degree of fairness, it is important to note that there is deep-seated ideological bias towards neo-liberal ideas.

Different scholars have theorised about the existence of various types of bias (Entman 2007; Saez-Trumper et al. 2013). For Saez-Trumper et al. (2013) there are three typologies of bias: coverage bias, gatekeeping bias, and statement bias. Coverage bias refers to the (quantitative and qualitative) visibility of topics or entities in media coverage (Saez-Trumper et al. 2013). It is related to the tendency of the media to cover some stories and not others. Gatekeeping bias, also called *selection bias* or *agenda bias*, relates to the stories that the media select or reject to report (Saez-Trumper et al. 2013). This can lead to a biased portrayal of events, as some stories may be deemed more important than others, regardless of their actual importance. This study has shown that big parties, males and urban areas in South Africa enjoy selection bias. Statement bias, also called *presentation bias*, refers to how articles choose to inform about certain entities / concepts (Saez-Trumper et al. 2013). This can be done through the use of loaded language or by presenting one side of an issue as the only side. During the recent South African elections, coverage and gatekeeping biases were more evident than *statement bias*. As framers of electoral discourse and narratives, the South African news media offered interpretations and evaluations of events, actors (such as political

parties, politicians, electoral management bodies) linked to these events (for instance, elections) and issues intrinsic to such events. These interpretations and evaluations provided voters with neural lenses that has the potential to determine how they see the world.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the empirical data presented in this article, it should come as no surprise that the South African news media is biased towards big parties, celebrity politicians, male-centric and urban-based voices at the expense of smaller parties, ordinary politicians, females and rural-based voices. It is evident that news media in South Africa promotes what scholars have categorised as three types of media bias: visibility bias, tonality bias and agenda bias. Although it was outside the remit of this study, these actor-based biases might have affected voters' party preferences during the national and provincial elections. These structural biases in media coverage '...results from the interaction of real-world developments, cultural norms, and journalistic decision rules with the sometimes proficient and other times maladroit efforts of competing elites to manage the news' (Entman 2010, p. 389). This study has shown continuities and discontinuities in the framing of the 2024 South African national and provincial elections. Although some new media organisations were explicitly pro-opposition, the public media tended to report about the ruling party in a more favourable manner. This is not unique to South Africa. In the Zimbabwean context, Chibuwe (2019) showed that the state-controlled media were pro-ruling party while private press were pro-opposition during the 2018 elections.

In order to address the issues raised above, I propose the following policy and practical steps:

- There is an urgent need for the Independent Communication Authority of South Africa (ICASA) to enforce regulations on party election broadcasts, political advertisements, the equitable treatment of political parties by broadcasting licensees and related matters during national and provincial elections.
- The mainstream media must ensure that the needs of the voters instead of politicians and political parties are the main focus of their electoral coverage. This is particularly important in ensuring that the country lives up to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights 2017 *Guidelines on Access to Information and Elections in Africa* which seeks to promote the proactive disclosure of information.

- There is also a need to ensure that journalists are trained in covering elections from the perspective of voters, so that there can be more issue-based coverage. There is also a need to ensure that the concept of equitable coverage is unpacked and understood.
- A masterclass on elections and gender should be rolled out in order to ensure that journalists include more women's voices and that political parties are also strongly encouraged to promote women's voices in public discourse.

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YOUTH INCLUSIVITY IN SOUTH AFRICA'S 2024 ELECTIONS

Jan Hofmeyr

Jan Hofmeyr is the head of research and policy at the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation

The declining participation of young voters in elections around the world is viewed by many as indicative of a global democratic recession (Carothers & Press 2022). In both industrialised and developing nations, citizens increasingly appear to have lost faith in the ability of the democratic state to effect progress and prosperity. In the context of what some term a 'polycrisis' – signifying a world facing a confluence of economic, social, technical, and environmental problems – governments, especially democratic ones, are grappling with unprecedented complexities.

These trends are apparent across Africa, with growing numbers of Africans questioning the efficacy of democratic systems to address their aspirations. In its flagship report, 'African Insights 2024: Democracy at Risk – The People's Perspective', Afrobarometer notes that although most young Africans remain committed to democratic values, there has been a notable drop in recent decades in the proportion of individuals who believe these values translate into concrete enhancements in their quality of life. The survey-based project found that young individuals are becoming less inclined to engage in democratic procedures and, alarmingly, more prone to endorse military intervention when democratic practices fail to fulfil their promises (Afrobarometer 2024).

In light of the above, this paper focuses on matters of inclusion of young people in relation to South Africa's 2024 general elections. While political participation can be measured in various ways, voting still represents the quintessential form of democratic participation. In this contribution, I focus on that dimension as an indicator of the extent to which young South Africans feel included and have confidence in the mechanisms that South Africa's democracy offer for their participation. I employ the categorisation of young people – or 'youth' – based on South Africa's National Youth Policy, which classifies this group as people aged between 14 and 35 years (Government of South Africa 2008). According to the 2024 mid-year population estimates by Statistics South Africa (2024b), 61% of South Africans are under the age of 35, and 31% fall within the designated youth category of 14–35 years.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that the granular measurement of voter participation by age category for this paper involved some challenges. No exit polls in the wake of the 2024 general elections have tracked voter participation by age group. As a result, this analysis relies on data pertaining to voting intentions prior to the 2024 election. More generally, different datasets cluster age groups in different ways. Voting registration data from the Independent Electoral Commission, for example, is not reported in categories that neatly overlap with the National Youth Policy's categorisation of youth. I thus draw on a number of sources that may give an approximate, but not perfect, picture of participation among young people in South African elections to date.

This contribution starts by locating the plight of young South Africans within the country's so-called triple challenge of poverty, inequality, and unemployment. This systemic feature of the country's socio-economic landscape continues to reinforce historically skewed patterns of resource and opportunity distribution. Whereas the vote represents political agency, such agency means little when it is ineffectual in creating the economic agency that is required for South Africans to determine their own material destiny, with limited dependence on the state.

The main focus of this paper is the scourge of unemployment, which remains the most critical impediment to overcoming intergenerational cycles of poverty and inequality. Not surprisingly, according to the Afrobarometer, employment creation has featured as the most urgent government priority in the eyes of ordinary South Africans (Afrobarometer 2024). An assumption here is that an evaluation of the government's performance in creating employment also provides a proxy measure for people's satisfaction with the broader efficacy of the country's democratic system.

The paper proceeds to evaluate the functioning of democracy in South Africa, as reflected in data from the South African rounds of the Afrobarometer Survey. The trends over time are examined, from the fifth round of the survey in 2011 until the ninth round in 2022. The discussion highlights differences in the way that people in specific age categories have responded, to gauge whether there is a generational difference between their responses.

Finally, reported voting participation in past elections is examined, together with an age breakdown of the data at hand. Again, this discussion is based on responses from public opinion surveys, which, for various reasons, do not always provide results that strictly correspond with actual historical turnout at the polls. In some instances, respondents cannot recall whether they have voted or not, while others may provide responses they deem desirable within the particular interviewing context. These responses do, however, give a sense of the extent to which respondents view voting as a worthwhile endeavour in terms of influencing the people who govern their affairs.

UNEMPLOYMENT: A TEST OF CONFIDENCE IN DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES

South Africa has a relatively young population, with more than six out of ten people being younger than 35 years. Out of its total working-age population of 41.3 million people (between the ages of 15 and 65), about 21 million (roughly 50%) fall within the 16–34 age category.¹ Typically, such a youthful population holds the prospect of an economic boon to society, given the potential productivity benefits it offers.

Yet this is not the case in South Africa. Young South Africans find it extremely difficult to get a foothold in the labour market. The current official unemployment rate for South Africans under 35 who are actively looking for employment is 55%. This figure is 24 percentage points higher than the country's already high national average of 31%, as reported in the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS, Q1) published by Statistics South Africa for the second quarter of 2024 (see Figure 1). The same survey shows that the actual labour absorption rate for people in the under-35 category is only 28%. This means that close to three-quarters of young South Africans are not in employment. Most disconcertingly, the QLFS also reports that 44% of South Africans in the 16–34 age group fall within the so-called NEET category – meaning 'not in employment, education or training' (Statistics South Africa 2024a). This figure is 6 percentage points higher today than it was when the dimension was first measured in 2012.

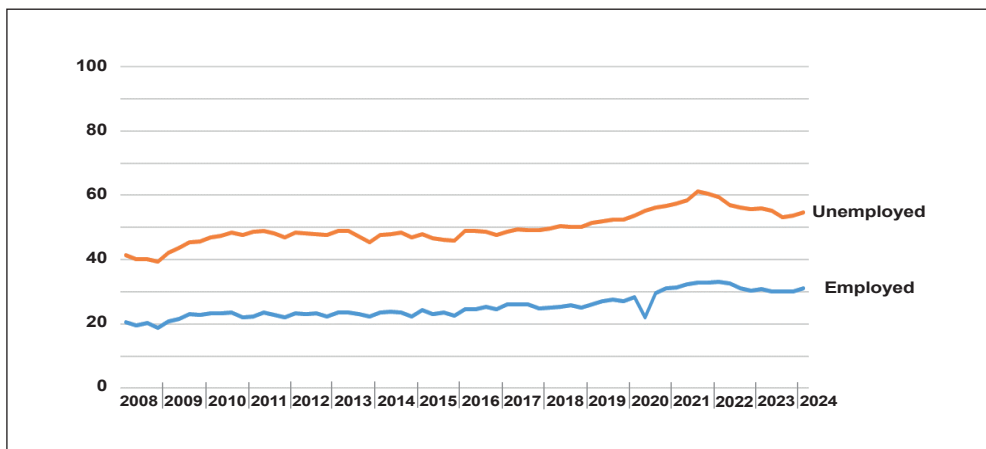


Figure 1: Unemployment in South Africa: A comparison of overall and youth unemployment

(Source: Statistics South Africa, 2024a)

1 Differences in the cutoffs for the youth category differ slightly across data sources.

In light of the above, it is not surprising that 51% of respondents in Afrobarometer's 2022 survey for South Africa (Round 9) singled out unemployment as the most urgent problem facing the country (Moosa & Mpako 2023). The long-term trajectory illustrated in Figure 1 bears testimony to a dismal track record to date. In addition, more than three-quarters of the 2022 survey respondents indicated that the government was performing very poorly in this area. The relevant item read as follows: 'How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: – Creating jobs?' The results are shown in Figure 2. Higher percentages indicate that more people agreed that the government's performance in this area was either 'bad' or 'very bad'.²

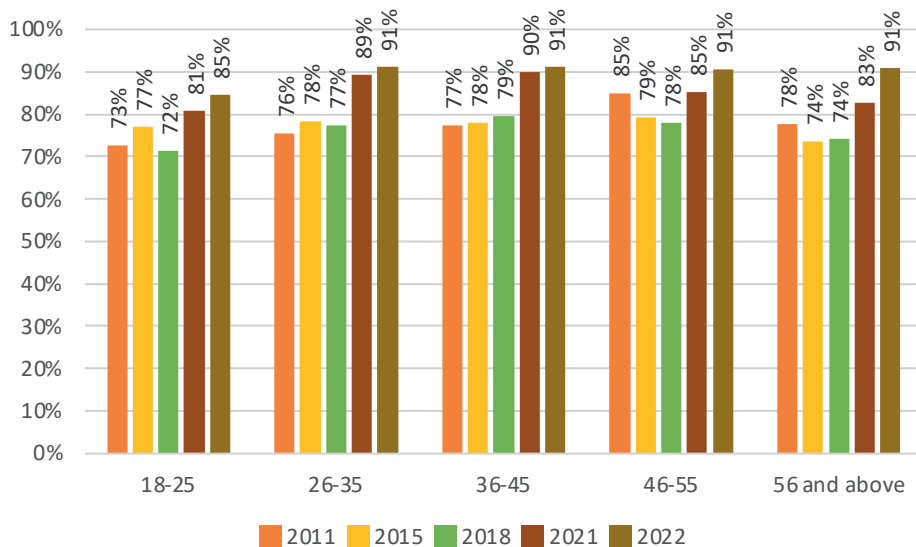


Figure 2: Public sentiment on poor government performance in job creation

(Source: Afrobarometer ODA 2024)

Figure 2 provides a breakdown of the overwhelmingly negative sentiment towards the government's effort to create employment. This sentiment cuts across all age categories and points to a deterioration in public opinion on this matter

2 All Afrobarometer graphs in this paper were sourced from the Afrobarometer online data analysis (ODA) tool, available at <https://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/> (hereafter 'Afrobarometer ODA 2024'). Afrobarometer collects and provides public survey data for the African continent, starting from 2000 and updated continually. The South African national partner is the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (ICJ), and the University of Cape Town and Michigan State University provide technical support to the network. See <https://www.afrobarometer.org/about/> for more information.

over time, particularly from 2021 onwards. Such harsh judgement of the state's failure to address the most critical obstacle to a better life for South Africans, over several administrations, arguably has a bearing on young people's evaluations of the efficacy of democratic governance as a whole and voting in particular. Bold promises about employment have been made in successive election campaigns.

DO YOUNG SOUTH AFRICANS STILL HAVE ANY FAITH IN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE?

When an issue as crucial for the economic agency of young people as that of employment remains unresolved for three decades, it raises questions about the effectiveness of governance processes in fostering prosperity. Failure in this regard inevitably has implications for intergenerational poverty and inequality. Along with unemployment, these two issues are the other dimensions of the country's triple challenge.

No recent comprehensive study has been conducted on poverty rates in South Africa. The last such research was published as 'Poverty Trends in South Africa: An Examination of Absolute Poverty in South Africa between 2006 and 2015' by Statistics South Africa (2017). The findings suggest that after initial gains in bringing down the percentage of South Africans living below the country's upper-bound poverty line between 2006 and 2011, this trend was reversed between 2011 and 2015 (Statistics South Africa, 2017). During the latter period, poverty under the upper-bound poverty line increased from 53.2% to 55.5%. In the years since that study, amid rising unemployment and the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, this figure has surely risen further.

Although an imperfect measure, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, at constant 2021 dollar prices, provides a reasonable estimate of the material situation of South African households. After following a consistent upward trajectory between 1994 and 2013, this metric declined by 4 percentage points in the following decade (The World Bank Group 2023). This decline was accompanied by a deterioration in the country's overall fiscal position over the same period, leading to rising debt service costs, which impeded the state's ability to balance social spending with investment in growth infrastructure. Afrobarometer data from 2011 to 2022 show that during that period, the percentage of South Africans who believed the country was moving in the wrong direction increased from 65% to 83% (Afrobarometer ODA 2024). One might wonder how these changing circumstances have impacted how South Africans of different generations view democracy.

Figures 3 and 4 report on the respective demand and supply of democracy in South Africa and break responses down into different age categories. Figure 3

illustrates the percentage of South Africans who indicated that they preferred democracy over any other form of government. The Y axis shows the proportion of respondents who agreed with the following statement: ‘Democracy is preferable to any other form of government.’ Responses of ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ were pooled to yield the percentages shown. The X axis provides the survey years, with a breakdown by age groups.

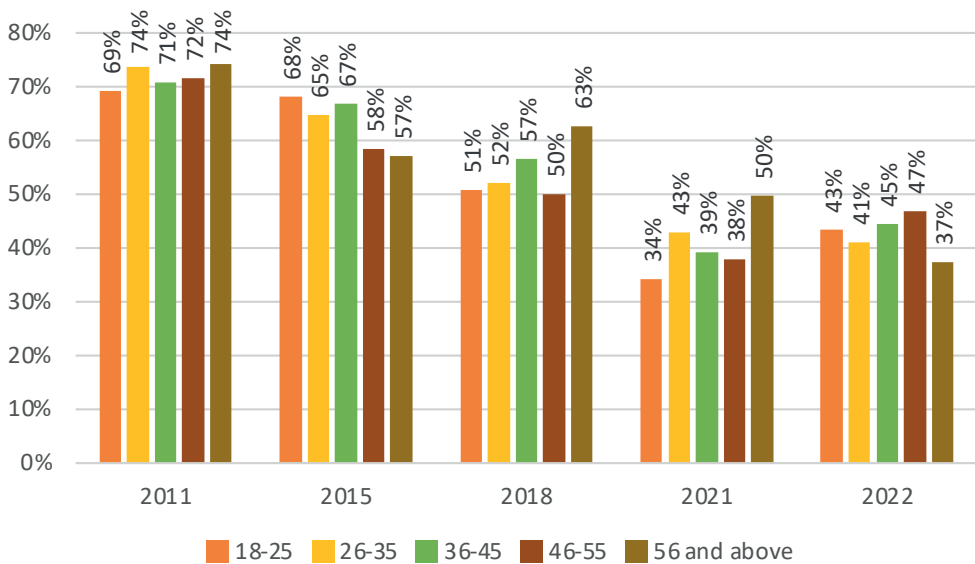


Figure 3: Demand for democracy, 2011–2022, by age group

Source: Afrobarometer ODA 2024

Figure 4 indicates the level of satisfaction that the country’s people felt regarding the functioning of democracy. The relevant survey item read, ‘Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in South Africa?’ Responses for ‘satisfied’ and ‘very satisfied’ were pooled to yield the percentages shown. Between 2011 and 2022, there was no distinct pattern differentiating the age categories, and all age groups followed a similar downward trajectory. It is, however, apparent that the demand for democracy consistently outstripped the supply during this period.

While the decline in satisfaction might not automatically translate into people’s absence at the polls, it does provide important context about their sense of inclusion and participation in electoral processes. Turning to the matter of elections as the most symbolic dimension of democratic governance, the disjuncture between supply and demand is again apparent.

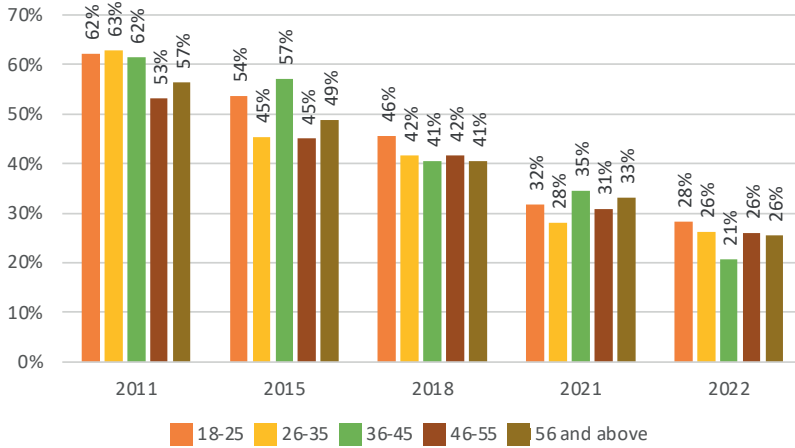


Figure 4: Supply of democracy (measured as satisfaction), 2011–2022, by age group

Source: Afrobarometer ODA 2024

Figure 5 shows that despite a slight and gradual decline in agreement with the idea that leaders should be chosen through regular elections, support for this notion has remained robust since 2011. More than 60% of respondents (all ages combined) agree or strongly agree that ‘We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open and honest elections’. In fact, there was a small increase in agreement with this statement between Round 8 (2021) and Round 9 (2022) of the survey. Overall, the demand for elections as a tool of democratic expression remains strong.

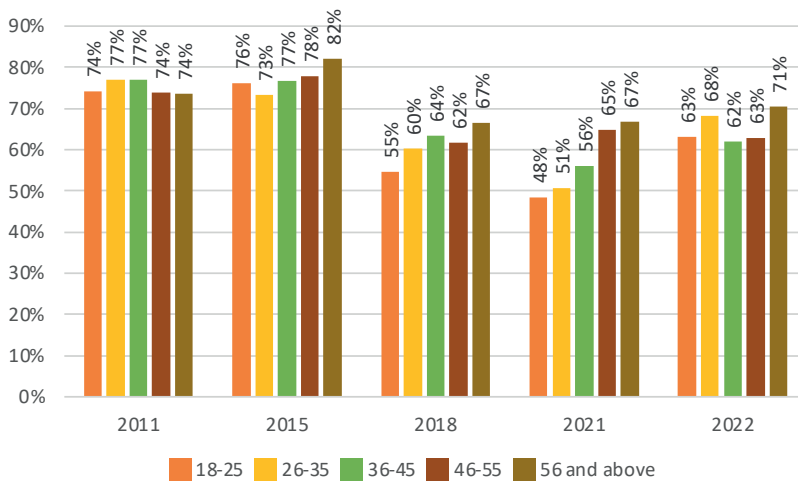


Figure 5: Leaders should be elected through regular elections, 2011–2022, by age group

Source: Afrobarometer ODA 2024

Figure 6 covers three data points, namely 2008, 2015, and 2022. The relevant survey item was ‘Thinking about how elections work in practice in this country, how well do elections: – Ensure that representatives to the National Assembly reflect the views of voters?’ The responses of ‘well’ and ‘very well’ were combined. The results indicate that the perceived return on voting, namely the extent to which elected officials reflect the will of voters, has declined substantially across all groups. For almost all categories, there have been declines in excess of 15% since 2008. The emerging picture is one of unmet democratic expectations among South Africans, across all age categories.

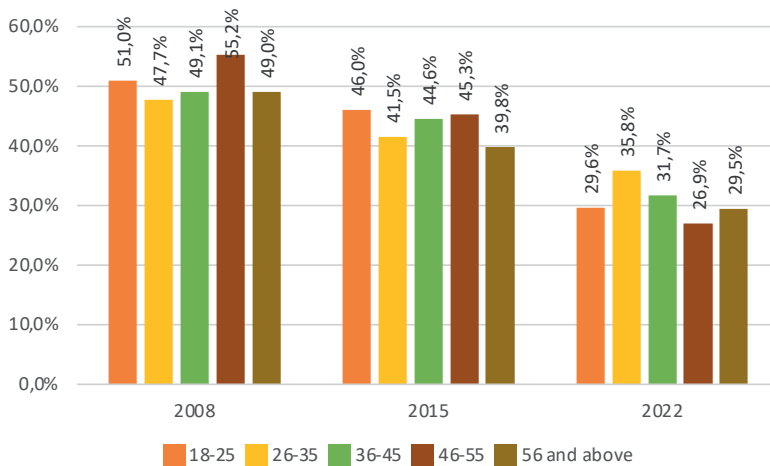


Figure 6: Responsiveness of MPs in National Assembly, 2008–2022, by age group

Source: Afrobarometer ODA 2024

CHANGES IN YOUTH PARTICIPATION

The preceding discussion focused on the relationship between governance effectiveness and the evaluation of democratic processes. I noted that both aspects may provide insight into the extent that people would feel included and motivated to participate in electoral processes.

It is clear that the 58% turnout of youth during the 2024 election has been the lowest since South Africa’s democratic transition. As noted earlier, no age-specific exit poll data was available at the time of writing, which made it challenging to evaluate whether there were distinct age differences in voter turnout. Hence, this paper relies on public opinion data from Afrobarometer surveys, which ask respondents whether they voted in the most recent national election. Such information may not be a perfect indicator in terms of clarifying the reasons behind

voter turnout (i.e. whether the process was inclusive enough), but it provides a useful pointer regarding how the elections are perceived by each age category.

Figure 7 presents the responses of survey respondents between 2011 and 2022. The relevant survey item was, 'In the last national election, held in [YEAR], did you vote, or not, or were you too young to vote?' Positive responses were pooled to yield the percentages shown in the figure.

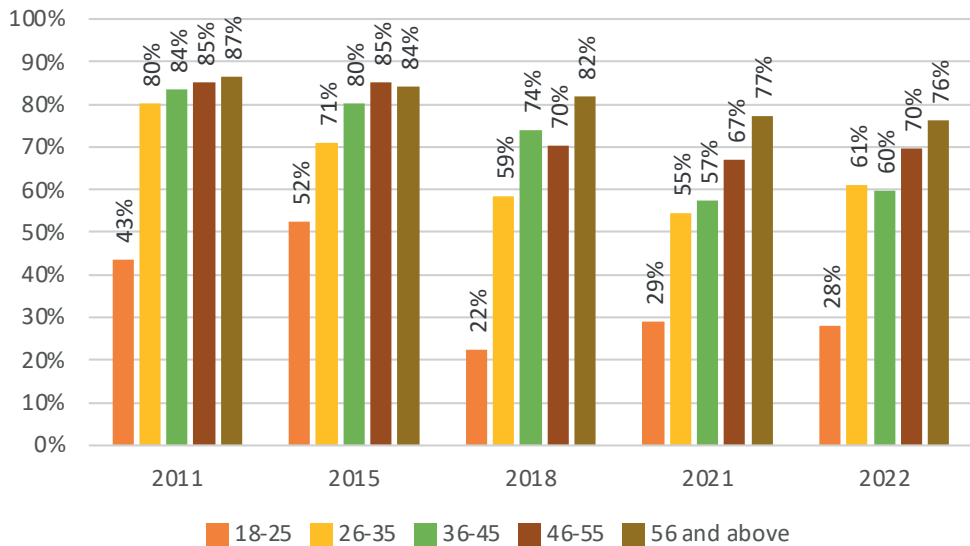


Figure 7: Proportion of South Africans who voted in a previous general election, 2011–2022, by age group

Source: Afrobarometer ODA 2024

For all age groups combined, there has been a steady downward trajectory in affirmative responses. In each year except 2022, the two youngest categories reported the lowest voting turnout among all the age groups; in 2022, marginally more 26–35-year-olds voted than those aged 36–45. It is clear that people in the very youngest (18–25) group have consistently felt less motivated to cast their votes than any other age group. Their reasons may vary, but it has been suggested in preceding sections that government performance on key issues that affect young people, such as employment, may be a significant contributing factor. In addition, data has been presented that points to a growing dissatisfaction with the return on voting, namely the representativeness of elected leaders in legislatures. More targeted research may be required to obtain data that could provide clearer findings in this regard.

CONCLUSION

This paper situates the marginal participation of young people in South Africa's electoral politics within a broader global trend of public scepticism towards democratic processes, especially among youth. While the ideals of democracy remain widely supported, the disconnect between democratic promises and tangible outcomes is particularly pronounced among young South Africans. Persistent unemployment, a critical determinant of economic agency, has exacerbated this disillusionment. Despite representing a substantial share of the electorate, young people face systemic exclusion from opportunities that could enable them to participate meaningfully in shaping the nation's future.

Analysis of voter turnout and public opinion data highlights a worrying trajectory. There is evidence of limited electoral participation among youth, rooted in their dissatisfaction with the government's performance on key issues (such as job creation) and the perceived responsiveness of elected representatives. This trend underscores a broader crisis of confidence in democratic institutions, as unmet expectations weaken the perceived value of participating in democratic processes.

Addressing this challenge requires more than rhetorical commitments during election campaigns. Concrete, sustained efforts to deliver on promises, particularly in addressing youth unemployment, are essential to restore people's trust in democracy. Furthermore, fostering a culture of meaningful engagement through inclusive policymaking and responsiveness to the needs of young people can enhance their sense of political efficacy. Ultimately, the inclusion of youth in South Africa's electoral processes is not only a test of the country's democratic resilience but also a vital step towards achieving a more equitable and sustainable future.

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MAKING SENSE OF VOTER TURNOUT IN THE 2024 SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

Sithembile Mbetse

Sithembile Mbetse is Executive Director at the Public Affairs Research Institute and a research associate at the Department of Political Sciences, University of Pretoria
ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4232-560X>

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 general elections in South Africa were highly contested. There were 52 political parties, as well as independent candidates who were allowed for the first time in both the national and provincial elections (NPEs). There was also a higher than expected growth in the voters' roll, increasing the number of registered voters to 27.8 million (SABC 2024). In addition, these were the first NPEs for which the predicted outcomes were uncertain, with conflicting predictions about whether the African National Congress (ANC) would lose its parliamentary majority for the first time since 1994.

There were hopes that the prospect of competitive elections would boost voter turnout, which had been falling since 2009. Indeed, the long queues at polling stations on 29 May created the impression of high turnout rates across the country. In reality, however, only 59% of registered voters turned out, a substantial drop from the 66% in 2019. The 16.3 million people who voted represented just 41% of the eligible voting-age population (EVAP).

Declining voter turnout in the context of a 'watershed election' has raised alarm bells about the health of South Africa's democracy (O'Regan 2024). While it is true that falling voter turnout is a problem worldwide, South Africa fell below the global average. The Global State of Democracy Report 2024 published by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) indicated that voter turnout, as a percentage of EVAP, fell from 62% in 2008 to 56% in 2023 across the 173 countries that were studied (International IDEA 2024). South Africa's EVAP turnout of 41% in 2024 was 15 percentage points below the global average.

As Schulz-Herzenberg (2020, p. 4) explains, voter turnout is a 'crucial barometer of the vitality and health of a democracy'. Elections are the 'the source of democratic legitimacy' (Dalton 2006, p. 11) and the most important activity for

citizens to undertake in a democracy. Low voter turnout erodes the legitimacy of elected governments. Indeed, Lipjhart (1997, p. 2) argues that ‘the democratic goal should be not just universal *suffrage* but universal or near universal *turnout*’ (italics in the original). When political elites are elected by a relatively small proportion of voters, they are likely to make governance decisions that serve those few active voters – at the expense of the general population (Hershey 2009).

Amid concerns of ‘democratic backsliding’ in South Africa and globally, democracy scholars and practitioners must examine why voter turnout fell in the 2024 NPEs (Human Rights Watch 2024). This paper provides an analysis of voter behaviour in these elections. It addresses the following questions:

- How has electoral participation evolved in South Africa from 1994 to 2024?
- What theoretical explanations of voter turnout fit the South African context?
- How did legislative and administrative changes in 2024 constrain or enable turnout?
- What were the consistencies and disparities in voter turnout across provinces, genders, and age groups?

The paper is divided into six sections. It begins with a note on methodology, followed by an overview of voter turnout trends since 1999. A brief discussion of the academic literature on political participation and voter behaviour is then provided. The next section discusses the political context of the 2024 elections, with a focus on the legislative and administrative changes that influenced voter registration and turnout. Thereafter, the paper presents extensive voter turnout data sourced from the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of South Africa and other sources; this section includes a discussion of several themes that emerge from the data. The last section concludes the paper with recommendations for policymakers, regulators, and researchers.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

Let us begin with a methodological note on how to calculate voter turnout. In South Africa, the IEC calculates voter turnout as a proportion of registered voters. Arguably, a more accurate measure for voter turnout is derived from the EVAP, a figure that includes all citizens aged 18 years and older (Runciman et al. 2019). However, it is notoriously difficult to find one broadly accepted figure for EVAP in South Africa. The IEC does not include EVAP figures in official voter registration data and makes only occasional mention of the EVAP in its reporting. International

IDEA's comprehensive voter turnout database uses publicly accessible Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) population data, which does not disaggregate citizens and non-citizens and thus tends to inflate the size of the EVAP.

This paper uses historical EVAP data from research by Schulz-Herzenberg (2014; 2019; 2020), a preeminent researcher on voter behaviour in South Africa. Schulz-Herzenberg's EVAP estimates include only South Africans of voting age. For the 2024 elections, the paper draws from EVAP estimates for May 2024 as provided by StatsSA and sourced from SABC News Research during the election period (SABC 2024). All historical and current election registration and results data is publicly available from the IEC website (IEC 2024f). The source of historical disaggregated voter turnout data is the evaluation reports published by the IEC after each election (IEC 1999; 2004; 2009; 2014a; 2019a).

At the time of writing, the IEC had not yet released its 2024 election evaluation report. However, the IEC granted the author access to unpublished voter participation (VP)¹ data, which is cited in this paper as 'personal communication IEC 2024'. The VP data was obtained via voter management devices (VMDs) in 22 931 of the 23 292 voting districts and represents 9 174 108 distinct ID numbers with a verified status on the voters' roll. This data is incomplete, but it does allow one to extrapolate trends in turnout across demographic groups.

TRENDS IN VOTER TURNOUT 1999–2024

South Africa has held seven NPEs since 1994. The voters' roll was first compiled for the 1999 election, which means there have been six past general elections for which one can measure and compare voter turnout. Table 1 shows that from 1999 to 2014, voter turnout as a proportion of registered voters was over 70%. Turnout reached a peak of 89% in 1999, before falling to 77% in 2004 and 2009. The turnout figure declined further in 2014, to 73%. The 2019 elections saw an even sharper drop in turnout, to 66%, and this trend of rapid decline continued in 2024, when turnout fell to 58.6%.

An analysis of voter turnout as a proportion of EVAP paints a bleak picture. In 1999, EVAP turnout in South Africa was 72%, which fell sharply to 57% in 2004. The figure rose to 60% in 2009 before declining marginally to 57% in 2014 and then dropping more steeply to 49% in 2019. In 2024, EVAP reached an historic low of 41%.

1 The IEC uses the term 'voter participation' instead of 'voter turnout' for the number of voters who cast a ballot on election day. This paper uses the two terms interchangeably.

Table 1: Comparison of voter turnout: NPEs from 1999 to 2024

Election Year	Voter Turnout (%)	Total Votes (Millions)	Registration (Millions)	EVAP Turnout (%)	EVAP (Millions)	Non-voters as a Proportion of EVAP (%)
1999	89.3	16 228 462	18 172 751	71.8	22 589 369	28.1
2004	76.7	15 863 558	20 674 926	56.9	27 865 537	43.1
2009	77.3	17 919 966	23 174 279	59.8	29 956 957	40.2
2014	73.4	18 654 771	25 390 130	57.0	32 687 600	42.9
2019	66.0	17 672 851	26 756 629	49.3	35 868 190	50.7
2024	58.6	16 291 516	27 782 477	40.9	39 753 087	59.0

Source: Calculated by the author from preliminary election reports (personal communication IEC 2024), StatsSA data (SABC 2024), and Schulz-Herzenberg's (2014; 2020) data

Within 25 years, the ranks of non-voters (unregistered voters and registered voters who did not turn out) have more than doubled: they represented 28% of eligible voters in 1999 and 59% in 2024. After thirty years of democracy, almost three-fifths of eligible South Africans abstained from the ballot. It is crucial to understand why. The next section provides a broad overview of the literature on political participation and voter behaviour. The aim is to identify possible theoretical approaches and models to explain the trend of declining voter turnout in South Africa.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND VOTER TURNOUT

Turning out to vote is the foundational activity of democratic citizenship. As Aldrich (1993, p. 246) writes, 'turning out to vote is the most common and important act citizens can take in a democracy'. Voting is the most common form of political participation. Political participation encompasses all activities that people undertake to directly or indirectly affect politics. Globally, patterns of political participation have changed over time as citizens have adopted new forms of action to influence their democracies (Dalton 2006). Conventional forms of participation – like voting and political party membership – have declined, while unconventional participation – such as protesting, political consumerism, and internet activism – has increased (Van Deth 2014; Hill & Routledge-Prior 2016).

Democracy scholars have lamented the decline of voting among established and new democracies alike, viewing it as a sign of democratic erosion and a

risk factor for the democratic backsliding that has been evident in democracies around the world (Lipjhart 1998; Macedo et al. 2005; Kostelka 2017; Olar 2023). The question 'Why do people vote?' is thus one of the primary preoccupations of democracy scholars. The academic literature provides three main explanations for voter turnout, namely, resource models, psycho-social factors, and institutional determinants.

Resource Models

Resource models of voter turnout focus on the material and social resources that inform electoral participation. Scholars argue that higher levels of education, income, and social class make it more likely that an individual will be politically interested and turn out to vote, because the person has enough money, skills, information, and time to participate (Verba et al. 1993; Lipjhart 1998; Smets & Van Ham 2013). The costs of voting discourage voters with fewer resources from participating (Lipjhart 1998). Age is a determinant of VP that is closely linked to resources. Young people generally turn out to vote at lower rates than older groups, 'primarily because the costs of voting are highest for this population group' (Schulz-Herzenberg 2019, p. 141).

Critics of the resource model argue that voting is a relatively low-cost activity that requires little skill and effort or time on the part of citizens (Dalton 2006). Indeed, in many democracies, women are more likely to vote than men, despite having fewer material and social resources. In the first decade of democracy, political participation in South Africa similarly disconfirmed the resource model. Studies of voter behaviour indicated that black Africans, who were historically the demographic with the lowest income, education, and social status, were the most likely group to register and turn out in the 1999, 2004, and 2009 elections (Lodge 1999; Hoeane 2004; McLaughlin 2007).

Lodge (1999) found that voter abstention rates in the 1999 election were highest among urban and lower-middle or working-class minorities (white, coloured, and Indian). He posited that this pattern was the result of political disengagement and lack of party identification. African voters had strong identification with the ANC and were thus more likely to turn out. Analysts began noting a growth in partisanship and participation among the middle classes during the 2004 elections (Schulz-Herzenberg 2006). By the 2014 election, VP had plummeted among lower income groups and was rising among the middle and wealthy classes (Southall 2014; Schulz-Herzenberg 2014; Everatt 2016). Everatt (2016, p. 62) cites a 'mash-up' of StatsSA income data and IEC data on VP that shows voter turnout among low-decile income households fell steeply over the 2004, 2009, and 2014 elections. By contrast, turnout increased in the upper-decile

income households. In other words, the poorest South Africans 'are disengaging from the electoral project in significant numbers, dropping from a point of near equality in 2004' to 10 percentage points below higher income voters in 2014 (Everatt 2016, p. 63).

With approximately 63% of the population living below the upper bound poverty line in 2024, a continuation of this trend risks disenfranchising the majority of South Africans (World Bank 2024). Some post-election analyses of the 2024 NPE indicate that the outcome of the election was influenced by differential turnout between high-income suburbs and low-income townships (Netshitenzhe 2024). A class analysis of voter turnout goes beyond the scope of this paper but should be prioritised for future research.

Increasing voter abstention, particularly among the youth, has been attributed to high participation costs caused by onerous institutional barriers (Kersting 2009; Runciman et al. 2019) as well as 'disillusionment and disinterest' (Oyemi & Mahlatji 2016; Ryabchuck 2017; Runciman et al. 2019). Instead, citizens favour informal activities that they feel are more effective in garnering a response from political leaders (Ajambo 2007; Malila 2016, Oyemi & Mahlatji 2016; ACCORD 2019). Tracey-Temba (2018) found that protest was the preferred mode of politics among young people who did not feel they were taken seriously in formal political platforms. In their studies on the role of protests in political participation, Booysen (2007) and Runciman (2016) view protest and voting as co-existing, as these practices are mutually reinforcing forms of participation under a dominant party system.

Psycho-sociological Theories

These theories emphasise individual motivational attitudes of voting that are shaped by both psychological or cognitive factors and the social environment. Sociological factors include the social cleavages and environment that can impact voter behaviour (Schoeman & Puttergill 2007). Psychological factors include a) political efficacy, which refers to an individual's perception of their ability to influence politics; b) party identification, which means 'psychological attachment with one preferred party that guides electoral behaviour' (Schulz-Herzenberg 2009, p. 4); and c) political interest.

Political efficacy refers to the feeling that one's actions can influence politics and the government is responsive to one's demands. The concept includes internal efficacy, which refers to an individual's sense of their own competence in understanding politics; and external efficacy, which means an individual's perception of the political system's responsiveness to citizens (Mahlangu & Schulz-Herzenberg 2022). Successive Afrobarometer and South African Social Attitudes

Survey reports have shown that South African voters have low levels of political efficacy and that this trend is associated with low levels of political participation (Mattes & Richmond 2015; HSRC 2023b).

Party identification, or partisanship, used to be a strong predictor of voter behaviour in South African elections (Ferree 2006; Habib & Naidu 2006; Kersting 2009; Habib & Schulz-Herzenberg 2011). Partisanship has declined in recent years, creating a growing proportion of ‘floating voters’ and increasing political pluralism (Schulz-Herzenberg 2019; Runciman et al. 2021; Bekker et al. 2022; Schulz-Herzenberg & Mattes 2023).

Political interest is arguably more important than resources in determining voter behaviour (Schulz-Herzenberg 2020). Family influence and home life play a strong role in shaping an individual’s interest in politics and likelihood of political participation. In addition, voting in one election increases a person’s likelihood of repeated participation. For example, De Kadt (2017) found that South African youth who voted in 1994 had positive feelings about voting and intended to continue to vote.

On the other hand, sociological factors include group identities – such as gender, race, ethnicity, social class, and religious affiliation. The psychological and sociological determinants intersect in the concept of ‘mobilisation agents’, which refers to formal and informal social networks that mobilise citizens to participate in politics. Membership of organised groups, such as political parties, community associations, and churches, shapes an individual’s political motivations.

Early scholarship on South African democracy was dominated by ‘racial census’ theories, which explained voters’ choices in the elections as being the product of racial identities rather than rational choices (Giliomee & Simkins 1999). This theory was cited to explain the ANC’s one-party dominance (Giliomee et al. 2001). However, the theory was challenged academically for being too reductive (Mattes et al. 1999; Hoeane 2004; Ferree 2006) and was refuted in reality by the growing plurality of choices among black voters (Friedman 2015; Paret 2016).

Institutional Explanations

Institutional determinants of voter turnout include electoral laws, policies, and rules that govern elections. Scholars argue that the electoral laws and systems a country adopts can influence who turns out to vote (Norris 2004; Blais 2006).

Voter registration has been characterised as ‘a substantial barrier to voting’ (Ansolabhere & Konisky 2006, p. 83), and ‘onerous’ voter registration requirements have been criticised ever since voter registration was introduced in 1999. Friedman (1999, p. 15) stated that South Africa adopted the American democratic ‘assumption that is the citizen’s responsibility to claim the vote, not the state’s

obligation to extend it'. Lodge (1999) reminds readers that voter registration was strongly supported by political elites because of concerns about widespread voter fraud in the 1994 election.

In a study on low turnout in the 2021 local government election (LGE), Runciman et al. (2021) found that most respondents cited individual and administrative barriers as reasons for not voting. These barriers included people not being present in their registered ward on voting day or not being registered to vote. Non-registration was the primary reason given by students and young people. Several scholars proposed removing the voter registration requirements to boost VP (Schulz-Herzenberg 2014; 2019). However, proponents of voter registration argue that it is a necessary measure to ensure the integrity of elections and maintain public confidence in South Africa's nascent democracy (IEC 2007, p. 16). This view was reinforced by the Constitutional Court, which stated that 'the right to vote is, of course, indispensable and empty without the right to free and fair elections, [as] the latter gives content and meaning to the former.'²

Concerns about election integrity have become widespread among the general public in the context of falling levels of trust in public institutions (HSRC 2023; IJR 2024). In the runup to the 2024 NPEs, the IEC was targeted by toxic mis- and dis-information campaigns, which were aimed at delegitimising the elections (MMA 2024). Indeed, the quality of the IEC's administration in the 29 May 2024 elections was far below the excellent standards it was known for. Overall, in the context of heightened scrutiny, there might not be much public support for loosening the registration restrictions.

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY CONTEXT

The 2024 election was held under a slightly different electoral system from that of previous general elections. This development followed the 2020 ruling by the Constitutional Court in the *New Nation Movement* matter, which stated that the Electoral Act 73 of 1998 was unconstitutional because it restricted contestation in NPEs to political parties. The Constitutional Court gave Parliament until June 2022 to amend the Electoral Act to allow independent candidates to run for elected office (Mbete 2022). The Electoral Amendment Act 1 of 2023 was then passed after a highly contested parliamentary process, which civil society characterised as lacklustre and superficial.

Parliament's delays in processing amendments to the various electoral laws, combined with successive court challenges to the legislation, created significant

2 Cited in *Kham and Others v Electoral Commission and Another* [2015] ZACC 37

legal and administrative uncertainty in the runup to the 2024 elections. The complications limited the time available to the IEC to prepare for the elections. The uncertainty also impacted logistical arrangements and affected the training of election officials and voter education about the new electoral system.

The most consequential legislative change in the 2024 elections was the amendment to section 24A (S24A) of the Electoral Act. The amendment introduced a requirement for voters to notify the IEC in advance of their intention to vote at a station other than the one where they were registered. This move was a response to media reports of people having double-voted in the 2019 elections. The amendment put an end to the practice of allowing registered voters to vote anywhere in the country as long as they completed a form at their chosen voting station on election day – a practice widely used in the previous NPEs. In the 2019 election, 1 892 139 people had cast their votes away from the voting stations where they were registered.

The amendment to S24A was passed by Parliament in March 2021, before the New Nation judgement on independent candidates (Hansard 19 March 2021). The amendment went largely unnoticed by the media and caught many people by surprise when it was applied by the IEC in the 2024 elections. On 29 May 2024, there were many reports of voters being turned away from voting stations where they were not registered because they had not notified the IEC of their intention to vote elsewhere by the stipulated date (17 May 2024). At the 191 voting stations that EISA's observer mission visited, 18% of voters were turned away, with two-thirds of them being turned away for attending the 'wrong' voting station in terms of the S24A amendment (EISA 2024).

Lack of voter education on S24A and the impact on disenfranchisement was raised by several domestic and international election observer missions (Mutsila 2024; Defend our Democracy 2024). The IEC and political parties have been criticised for not doing enough to inform voters of the new requirements (IRR 2024; Vilakazi-Alberts 2024). It is almost impossible to know exactly how many registered voters across the country were disenfranchised because of S24A and how big an impact this issue had on voter turnout.

According to the IEC (2024e), approximately 360 000 voters had received S24A approval to vote outside their voting district. That number represents only about 20% of the number of voters who had received the same approval in 2019. Hence, approximately a million voters could have been disenfranchised in 2024. The lack of voter education on S24A unnecessarily caused confusion at voting stations and led to doubts about the management of the election.

VOTER PARTICIPATION IN THE 2024 ELECTIONS

Voter Registration

Voter registration was a major election issue in the year running up to the 2024 elections. This issue arose in the context of the historically low participation during the 2021 LGEs. The voters' roll had dropped by 128 784 voters in 2021 compared to the 2016 elections, and only 46% of registered voters had turned out to vote in 2021. Low VP in the 2021 elections has been blamed on the Covid-19 pandemic (Van Onselen 2024b).

The IEC sought to make up for the lost momentum by focusing its 2024 voter registration campaign on first-time voters under the age of 30. This cohort has historically been disproportionately underrepresented in the voters' roll. To reach these voters, the Commission partnered with civil society organisations to initiate youth-centred registration drives using social media and celebrity events to make voting attractive.

The number of registered voters rose from 26.76 million in 2021 to 27.78 million in 2024, achieving the highest level since the dawn of democracy. According to the IEC, 77% of new registrations were for young people in the 18–29-year age group. Most new registrations were made in person during the two registration weekends. However, around 240 thousand people used the online registration portal, 47% of whom were under the age of 30 (Capa 2024).

Voter registration has not kept up with population growth. As Table 1 shows, between 1999 and 2024, the number of registered voters grew by 10 million people, which represents a 35% growth rate. By contrast, the EVAP grew by 17 million people (43%) over the same period. Moreover, the voters' roll represents a shrinking proportion of the EVAP. In 1999, 80% of eligible voters were registered, compared with 70% in 2024. There were 12 million eligible voters who did not register for the 2024 elections. As mentioned, one reason for the widening gap was the low level of registration among young voters. The next section examines the age and geographical distribution of registered voters.

Registration Across Age Groups

South Africa is a young country, with 70% of the total population currently aged 40 or younger. Population expansion has skewed the age distribution of the electorate towards younger voters; in 2024, there were 11.1 million voters under the age of 30. At 28% of the EVAP, people aged 18–29 years were the largest cohort of eligible voters. The second largest group was the 30–39-year cohort, at 26%. Hence, in total, 54% of the potential electorate was younger than 40 years, representing 21.3 million

individuals (Table 2). However, despite making up the largest proportion of the EVAP, youth under 30 were disproportionately underrepresented among registered voters in 2024. For the first time since 1999, this age group accounted for less than a fifth of all registered voters (18%).

Table 2: Comparison of voters' roll numbers and estimated EVAP for 2024 NPE

Age group	EVAP	Age Group as % of EVAP	Number of Registered Voters	Age Group as % of Registered Voters	% EVAP Registered
18–19	2 032 272	5.11	550 687	1.98	27.1
20–29	9 073 863	22.83	4 408 139	15.87	48.6
30–39	10 198 809	25.66	6 831 835	24.59	67.0
40–49	7 596 640	19.11	6 008 072	21.62	79.1
50–59	5 083 116	12.79	4 578 479	16.48	90.1
60–69	3 362 552	8.46	3 140 624	11.30	93.4
70–79	1 775 083	4.47	1 541 439	5.54	86.8
80+	630 750	1.59	723 202	2.64	114.7
Total	39 753 087	100	27 782 477	100	69.9

Source: SABC 2024

Just under half (48.6%) of people aged 20–29 years were registered to vote in 2024, a drop from the 53.7% that were registered in this age group for 2019 (see Table 3). Encouragingly, the proportion of registered 18–19-year-olds increased from 18.5% in 2019 to 27.1% in 2024. Nonetheless, the voters' roll is shrinking because young voters are registering at lower rates than older cohorts; registration rates are significantly higher among older people than youth.

Over 90% of voters older than 40 years are registered to vote. As the proportion of registered voters in the 18–29-year cohort has declined, so too has the overall level of registration and turnout within the EVAP.

**Table 3: Age cohort comparison of EVAP and registration for 2019 NPE
(based on StatsSA estimates)**

Age Group	Estimated EVAP (From 2018 Population Estimates)	Percentage of Total EVAP ^a	Registrations (Certified Voters' Roll)	Percentage of Total Registered Voters ^b	Registrations as a Percentage of EVAP*
18–19	1 843 831	5.1	341 186	1.3	18.5
20–29	9 871 020	27.5	5 299 144	19.8	53.7
30–39	8,990 803	25.1	6 685 439	25.0	74.4
40–49	6 081 394	17.0	5 480 336	20.5	90.1
50–59	4 361 794	12.2	4 228 558	15.8	96.9
60–69	2 818 624	7.9	2 737 553	10.2	97.1
70–79	1 355 150	3.8	1 336 946	5.0	98.7
80+	545 574	1.5	647 487	2.4	118.7**
Total	35 868,190^a	100.0	26 756 649^b	100.0	74.6

Notes:

* Calculated as column 3 (voters' roll) divided by column 1 (2018 EVAP estimates).

** For the 80+ year group, estimated EVAP was smaller than the number of registered voters, leading to an unrealistic high percentage.

Source: Schulz-Herzenberg (2020, p. 8), with modifications to captions.

Table 4: Comparison of EVAP and registration growth rates: 1999–2024

	1999	2004	2009	2014	2019	2024
Number of registered voters	18 172 751	20 674 926	23 174 279	25 390 130	26 756 649	27 782 477
Number of new voters	N/A	2 502 175	2 499 353	2 215 851	1 366 499	1 025 828
% growth of registered voters	N/A	14	12	10	5	2
EVAP total	22 589 369	27 865 537	29 956 957	32 687 600	35 868 190	39 753 087
% of registered voters	80	74	77	78	75	70
% growth of EVAP	N/A	23	7.5	9	10	11
Number of non-registered voters	4 416 618	7 190 611	6 782 678	7 297 470	9 111 541	11 970 610
% of non-registered voters	20	26	23	22	25	30

Source: Author's calculations, based on data from Schulz-Herzenberg (2009; 2014; 2019) and SABC (2024)

Table 4 shows that the rate of growth of the voters' roll has declined significantly since 2019. Before 2019, the voters' roll had double-digit percentage growth, with a high of 14% in 2004, 12% in 2009, and 10% in 2014. In 2009 and 2014, the EVAP growth rate was lower than the growth rate of the voters' roll. This pattern reversed in 2019, when the EVAP growth rate of 10% was double that of the voters' roll (5%). In 2024, the EVAP growth rate (11%) was more than five times the growth rate of registered voters (2%). Voter turnout can be expected to decline for as long as the growth of the voters' roll is outstripped by the expansion of the EVAP.

Registration Across Provinces

Geographical variations in registration rates have been a feature of the voters' roll since 1999. As in previous elections, the provinces with the most registered voters were Gauteng, with 6 541 978 (24% of the roll); KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) with 5 738 259 (21%); the Eastern Cape, with 4 061 045 (12%); and the Western Cape with 3 317 072 (12%). These are also the four provinces with the largest populations (see Table 5).

There was considerable variation in the proportion of the EVAP that was registered in each province. Provinces with large rural populations, such as Eastern Cape (85%), Limpopo (79%), KZN (78%), and Northern Cape (75%), had the largest proportions of registered eligible voters. Gauteng (59%) and Western Cape (65%) had the lowest proportions.

Interestingly, both Gauteng and Western Cape saw significant decreases in their EVAP registration from 2019 at 8.1 and 6.8 percentage points respectively. A possible explanation is that both provinces have experienced disproportionate increases in their overall populations since 2019. According to StatsSA's (2023) migration report, Gauteng and Western Cape receive the majority of internal migrants. This feature means these provinces are the most likely to have transient populations such as students and migrant workers, who maintain their voter registrations in their home provinces.

High inward migration does not account for the two other provinces with conspicuously low EVAP registration levels, namely, Mpumalanga (65%) and North West (65%). More than a third of eligible voters in these provinces were not registered, and levels of registration had dropped by 6.7 and 6 percentage points respectively. The only province that showed a slight increase in its EVAP registration since 2019 was Limpopo (which rose from 78.6% to 79.1%).

Table 5: Comparison of EVAP and voters' roll by province

	2024		2019	
Province	EVAP	% EVAP Registered	EVAP	% EVAP Registered
Eastern Cape	4 061 045	84.7	3 858 048	87.2
Free State	1 917 274	76.0	1 878 475	77.9
Gauteng	11 084 944	59.0	9 503 734	67.1
KwaZulu-Natal	7 336 980	78.2	7 031 592	78.6
Limpopo	3 513 779	79.1	3 317 455	78.6
Mpumalanga	3 115 696	65.0	2 732 851	71.7
North West	2 726 235	64.9	2 402 383	70.9
Northern Cape	872 198	75.3	778 406	80.5
Western Cape	5 124 936	64.7	4 374 246	71.5
Total	39 753 087	69.9	35 868 190	74.6

	2024		2019	
Province	Registered Voters	Province as % of Voters Roll	Registered Voters	Province as % of Voters Roll
Eastern Cape	3 439 320	12.4	3 363 161	12.6
Free State	1 456 927	5.2	1 462 508	5.5
Gauteng	6 541 978	23.5	6 381 220	23.8
KwaZulu-Natal	5 738 249	20.6	5 524 666	20.6
Limpopo	2 779 657	10	2 608 460	9.7
Mpumalanga	2 025 070	7.3	1 951 776	7.3
North West	1 768 576	6.4	1 702 728	6.4
Northern Cape	656 826	2.4	626 471	2.3
Western Cape	3 317 072	11.9	3 128 567	11.7
Out-of-country	58 802		7 092	
Total	27 782 477	100.00	26 756 649	100.00

Source: 2019 data from Schulz-Herzenberg (2020, p. 15) and 2024 data from SABC (2024)

A notable shift in geographical registration patterns has been the vast increase in registration among South Africans living abroad. Out-of-country registration has been available to all citizens living abroad since 2019, but in earlier elections this option was only available to staff at South African diplomatic missions. Other citizens wanting to vote abroad had to be registered within South Africa and notify the IEC in advance of their intention to vote outside the country. In the 2019 election, there were 7092 out-of-country registrations. In 2024, the number of voters who registered abroad increased eightfold, to 58 802. The IEC attributed the large increase to the online registration system. A special voter registration weekend for South African nationals abroad was held at the end of January 2024 and was hosted at 111 foreign missions globally.

Voter Turnout: Demographic and Geographic Trends

In the runup to the 29 May 2024 elections, there was consensus among political pollsters and analysts that voter turnout would be the main determinant of the election result. In a proportional representation system, low turnout can raise the proportional strength of each vote cast by voters at the polls. In a tightly contested race, parties that can persuade their supporters to go to the polls on election day have a significant advantage over parties whose support base does not. This advantage is referred to as differential turnout.

Experts had various opinions about how voter turnout would affect political parties' performances in the election. Polling company Ipsos (2024) projected that the ANC would benefit most in the low (41%–43%) and medium (57%–59%) voter turnout scenarios, winning a projected 46% of the vote in a low turnout scenario and 44% in a medium turnout scenario. A high turnout scenario would benefit the DA, EFF, and smaller parties. The reason was that new and undecided voters were relatively unlikely to vote for the ANC.

Others took the opposing view that a reduction in voter turnout would reduce the ANC's vote share (Schulz-Herzenberg & Mattes 2023; Van Onselen 2023b). Using data from previous elections, Van Onselen (2023b) demonstrated how the ANC's share of the vote fell from 58% of registered voters in 1999 to 37% in 2019. Voter turnout fell 13 percentage points over the same period, from 89% to 66%. This analysis indicates that voters who voted for the ANC in the past were staying away from the polls instead of voting for other parties. As Van Onselen (2023b) commented, 'this election is all about turnout... the smaller the turnout, the more it hurts the ANC'.

Overall, the big question for the 2024 election was whether disgruntled ANC supporters would abstain from the elections or switch their allegiances to new parties. Ultimately, the projections of low turnout bringing an end to the ANC's

electoral dominance were correct. Voter turnout fell below the 60% mark to 58.6%, and the ANC's share of the vote fell to 40%.

Differential turnout across provinces and social demographics was a critical determinant of the election outcomes. The VP data provided by the IEC from 22 931 of the 23 292 voting districts are used in the discussion below. I adopt a thematic approach to this analysis of voter turnout, covering the following themes:

- turnout differences between genders
- differences in turnout across provinces
- turnout differences across age groups
- voting volume by time of day.

Gender and Turnout

Women have constituted the majority of voters in South Africa since 1994, and women register at higher rates than men across all age groups. In the 2024 election, women made up 55% of registered voters. Female voters in the 30–39 age group represented the largest proportion of *all* registered voters, at 13.2% (Tolmay et al. 2024, p.4).

In line with historical trends, women accounted for the majority of voter turnout in the 2024 elections. Women made up 58% of the total voter turnout, a slight increase from the 57% of women voters who turned out in the 2019 elections. Among the 16.3 million voters who turned out, 9.5 million were women, compared with just under 7 million men. Furthermore, two-thirds (62%) of registered women turned out to vote, compared to just over half (55%) of registered men (Table 6).

At the time of writing, the IEC had not yet released precise voter turnout data disaggregated by gender and age. However, it is likely that higher turnout among women was prevalent across the age groups. It is also likely that the gender difference increased among the older groups, as women live longer than men.

Table 6: Voter participation and turnout by gender, 2024

Gender	Voters' Roll (A)	% Registered by Gender	VP – Adjusted (B)	% Vote by Gender	% Turnout by Gender (B/A)
Female	15 345 033	55	9 481 567	58	62
Male	12 437 444	45	6 809 949	42	55
Total	27 782 477	100	16 291 516		59

Source: IEC unpublished voter turnout data (personal communication IEC 2024)

Although women form the majority of the South African electorate, their voices and concerns are underrepresented in news media coverage of the elections and party manifestos. South Africa also saw a decline in women's representation in the National Assembly 2024, dropping from 46% to 43% – the same proportion as in 2009 (Tolmay et al. 2024, p. 15). The decline was particularly pronounced in provincial legislatures, where women's representation fell from 46% overall to just 38% (Tolmay et al. 2024, p. 17).

Turnout Across Provinces

Voter turnout declined in all provinces in the 2024 election compared to 2019. However, there was notable variation in the extent of the decline across the provinces. As Table 7 indicates, the sharpest decline was in Gauteng, which dropped by 10 percentage points. In the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, and North West, turnout dropped by 8 percentage points each; similarly, turnout in Limpopo and Western Cape fell by 7 points. The Free State, KZN, and Northern Cape were the least affected, with turnouts that declined by 5 percentage points.

The pattern of turnout decline across the provinces bucks the trend from previous elections. Gauteng, KZN, and Western Cape have traditionally shown the smallest decline in turnout, which some political analysts have attributed to relatively high levels of electoral competition in those provinces (Schulz-Herzenberg 2020). In KZN, the decline was again minor, but Gauteng and Western Cape showed large drops in the number of voters who turned out. The reason for this reversal may be the effect of the S24A requirement on voters to notify the IEC of their intention to vote outside of their normal voting stations. As mentioned, Gauteng and the Western Cape have very transient populations and receive the majority of the country's internal migration. Hence, these provinces have the most voters who were likely to be affected by the S24A amendment.

There was considerable variation in the pattern of voter turnout across provinces. Turnout was highest in KZN (62.3%), followed by Gauteng (61.9%) and Northern Cape (61.5%). These three provinces also produced hung legislatures, with no party winning above 50%. The North West (51.4%), Limpopo (52.1%), and Eastern Cape (53%) had the lowest turnout rates; they are also the provinces where the ANC received the highest proportion of votes in the national and provincial races. It appears that differential turnout did indeed disadvantage the ANC (see Table 7).

Table 7: Provincial voter turnout: National ballots by province, 2014–2024

	2024			2019	2014
Province	Voters' Roll	Voter Participation (VP)	% Turnout	% Turnout	% Turnout
Eastern Cape	3 439 320	1 836 398	53	61	70
Free State	1 456 927	842 989	58	63	73
Gauteng	6 541 978	4 051 809	62	72	77
KwaZulu-Natal	5 738 249	3 575 434	62	67	77
Limpopo	2 779 657	1 448 365	52	59	63
Mpumalanga	2 025 070	1 174 589	58	66	76
North West	1 768 576	909 475	51	59	69
Northern Cape	656 826	404 030	62	67	74
Western Cape	3 317 072	2 009 311	61	68	74
Out-of-country	58 802	39 116	67	N/A	N/A
Total	27 782 477	16 291 516	59	66	73

Source: Unpublished IEC data (personal communication IEC 2024) as well as 2019 data (IEC 2019b) and 2014 data (IEC 2014b)

Age and Turnout

An examination of voter turnout reveals large differences between the age groups. Expectations that the increase in new registrations among youth would result in higher turnout rates for younger demographics were not borne out by the data. As in the past three NPEs, turnout was higher among older groups (50–80+) than younger cohorts. Figure 1 shows that the highest turnout rate (82%) occurred among registered voters in the 70–79 age group. The lowest turnout rate (45%) was among the youngest voters, aged 18–19 years.

This was the first time that the turnout rate was highest among voters in the 70–79 age group. In the two previous NPEs, turnout had been highest in the 60–69 cohort. The pattern is attributable to what Schulz-Herzenberg (2020, p. 18) calls the ‘trickle-up effect’, where people continue to display their acquired voting habits as they ‘move from one cohort to the next as they grow older’. In other words, today’s 70–79-year-olds are the same people who in 2019 were in the 60–69 group, which had a turnout rate of 83%, and in 2014 they were in the 50–59 age group, with an 80% turnout. A detailed breakdown appears in Table 8. These older individuals have carried their learned habits of voting through time. However, as older people age and die, they account for a smaller proportion of the voters’ roll and have steadily less impact on the aggregate turnout, compared with the upcoming younger groups.

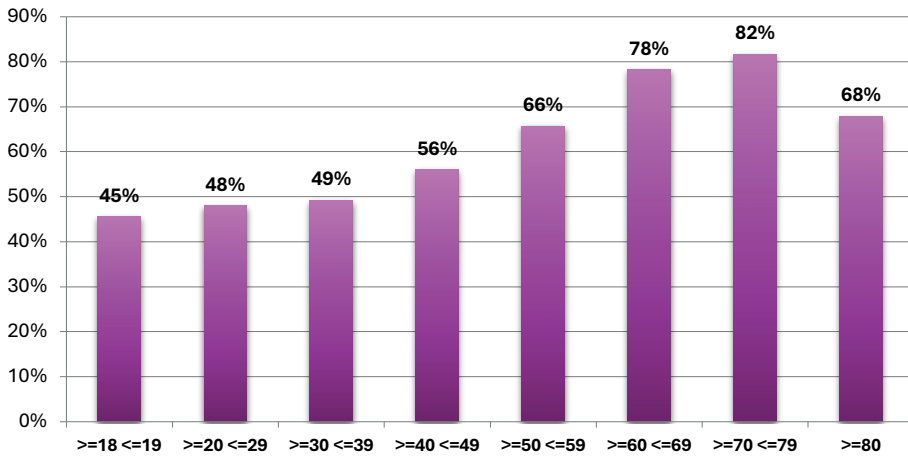


Figure 1: Percentage of turnout by age group in the 2024 national and provincial elections

Source: Unpublished IEC data (personal communication IEC 2024)

Table 8: Voter turnout by age in South African elections from 2014 to 2024

Age	2024			2019			2014
	Registered Voters	Voters	% Turnout by Age	Registered Voters	Voters	% Turnout by Age	% Turnout by Age
18–19	550 687	250 342	45	341 186	273 010	80	83
20–29	4 408 139	2 115 191	48	5 299 144	2 952 459	56	72
30–39	6 831 835	3 358 032	49	6 685 439	3 894 927	58	69
40–49	6 008 072	3 361 157	56	5 480 336	3 641 763	67	74
50–59	4 578 479	3 004 210	66	4 228 558	3 319 719	79	80
60–69	3 140 624	2 454 558	78	2 737 553	2 269 768	83	80
70–79	1 541 439	1 257 945	82	1 336 946	997 661	75	73
≥80	723 202	490 082	68	647 487	323 544	50	53
Total	27 782 477	16 291 516	59	26 756 649	17 672 851	66	73

Source: Unpublished IEC data (personal communication IEC 2024) and past IEC reports (IEC 2019a, p. 68; IEC 2014a, p. 44)

Among younger age groups, the trickle-up effect could lead to even steeper declines in aggregate voter turnout in the future. These individuals have learned the habit of *not* voting and may continue to abstain as they grow older. Combined

turnout among voters under 40 years was 47%, whereas voters aged 40 or older had a combined turnout rate of 70%. Because the under-40s constituted 54% of all registered voters in the 2024 elections, their low turnout reduced the overall turnout rate to 59%.

The picture is even more stark when calculating turnout as a percentage of EVAP. Voters under 40 had a EVAP registration rate of 55% and a EVAP turnout rate of 27%. Voters older than 40 had more than one-and-a-half times the respective EVAP registration rate, at 87%, and double the EVAP turnout rate, at 57% (see Table 9). The trickle-up effect bodes poorly for the future of voter turnout in South Africa.

Table 9: Turnout as a percentage of EVAP, broken down by age

Age Group	EVAP	Number of Registered Voters	% EVAP Registered	Voters	% Turnout of Registered Voters	% EVAP Turnout by Age
18–39	21 304 944	11 790 661	55	5 723 565	47	27
40–80+	18 448 141	15 991 816	87	10 567 952	70	57
TOTAL	39 753 087	27 782 477	69.9	16 291 516	59	41

Source: Author's calculations based on unpublished IEC data (personal communication IEC 2024)

A contrasting view is the generational theory of voter behaviour, which suggests that as people get older, they are more likely to register and turn out to vote. Therefore, there should be no alarm about the current low rate of electoral participation among youth. However, the main assumption underlying a generational explanation of turnout is that people become increasingly interested in elections as they grow older and take on individual, familial, and societal responsibility. They marry, have children, and progress in their careers.

Yet the youth unemployment rate is above 50% among people aged 15–34 years in South Africa. Unemployed youth account for 60.8% of the 15–24-year cohort and 41.7% of the 25–34-year group (StatsSA 2024). This situation means that many young people will be unable to achieve the traditional markers of adulthood that are associated with electoral participation.

Findings of the HSRC's 2023 pre-election survey of youth who planned to abstain or were uncertain about voting in the 2024 elections corroborate the above interpretation. The most widely cited reason for their planned abstention and uncertainty was 'poor government performance in addressing poverty, unemployment and corruption' (HSRC 2023). Among those youth who said poor socio-economic conditions were the most important reasons why they were

considering not voting in the 2024 NPE, 57% had voted in one or more previous elections. When asked what the IEC could do to encourage them to vote in the current election, many raised concerns that do not lie within the IEC's mandate, particularly job opportunities.

The crisis of voter turnout cannot be divorced from the crisis of unemployment and poverty. As Everatt (2024) explains, the generation born after the end of apartheid 'are the hardest-hit by unemployment and the lack of opportunities, and show high alienation... fewer young people are doing as well as their counterparts from 30 years ago; most are muddling along, searching for opportunities'. If the South African economy continues to marginalise the 'born-frees', we can expect to continue seeing their alienation reflected in their low voter turnout rates.

The Mystery of First-time Voters

In previous elections, the 18–19-year cohort had very high turnout, despite having the fewest registered voters. This trend did not continue in 2024. Table 10 compares turnout rates among the youngest voters in the elections over the years from 2009 to 2024. Voter turnout in this age group was above 70% in the previous three elections and reached a peak in 2004, at 83%, then fell slightly to 80% in 2019. In 2024, it was 45%.

Table 10: Voter metrics for the 18–19-year cohort in elections between 2009 and 2024

	Registered	Actual Voters	% Turnout
2024	550 687	250 342	45
2019	341 186	273 010	80
2014	646 313	534 065	83
2009	669 421	490 876	73

Source: IEC (2009, p. 94; 2014a, p. 44; 2019a, p. 68; personal communication IEC 2024)

Older youth, aged 20–29, have tended to show the lowest turnout rates among registered voters; only 36% of them turned out in 2019. The same pattern was observed in the 2021 LGEs, where 18–19-year-olds had a 71% turnout rate compared to the 20–29-year cohort's 35% turnout. In 2021, the 18–19 cohort had the highest turnout of all age groups, followed by 60–69-year-olds (64%) and then 70–79-year-olds (62%).

A possible explanation for previous high turnouts in the youngest cohort is that although relatively few of them register to vote, those who do so make

the effort to register because they really want to vote, and they similarly make the effort to go to the polls (Van Onselen 2023a). However, the novelty wears off in subsequent elections, which could explain the consistently low turnout rates among 20–29 year olds.

As noted, the pattern of youth turnout changed in 2024, with only 45% of 18–19-year-olds casting a ballot, a massive 35-percentage-point drop from 2019. This youngest cohort occupied the position of lowest turnout among all registered voters, with the 20–29 age group showing the second-lowest turnout rate for the first time. However, the very youngest age group had registered in considerably higher numbers than they did in the previous NPE, with 209 501 more individuals aged 18–19 registering in 2024 compared with 2019. Yet 22 668 fewer of them turned out in 2024, compared with 2019. Why did turnout drop so significantly in this age group?

One possibility is that young first-time voters were the most affected by the S24A rules. Many in this age group are students or young workers who are living away from home for the first time, and they may have been ignorant of the new rules requiring them to notify the IEC of their intention to vote at a different voting station. But the high turnout among 18–19-year-olds in the 2021 elections seems to contradict this view. Voting at the voting station where one is registered is enforced strictly in LGE rules in order to protect the integrity of ward elections. If 71% of young voters managed to vote where they were registered in 2021, one might have expected them to do the same in 2024.

While 18–19-year-olds represent only 1% of registered voters, they will be part of South Africa's electorate for the next fifty years. They represent the future of the country's democracy. It is important to understand what changed to limit their participation in 2024 if we hope to stem the tide of declining turnout.

Voting Across the Day (Hourly Volumes)

The issue of when exactly people vote on election day and how voting volumes are distributed throughout the day is not often considered in South Africa's literature on voter behaviour. However, a preliminary analysis of voting times provides insight into the possible impact of election administration on voter turnout in 2024. Figure 2 presents election turnout data for 9 174 108 voters at 22 931 voting districts, representing 56% of total voter turnout. The figure shows that on 29 May, only 2 193 890 (24%) of voters visited voting stations within the first four hours of the stations opening (07:00–11:00). Most voting activity took place between 11:00 and 17:00, with nearly half a million voters voting after the official closing time of 21:00. This pattern differs significantly from 2019, when more than half of voters had cast their ballots by 11:00 and there was 'a very small number of voters voting beyond 21:00' (IEC 2019a, p. 68).

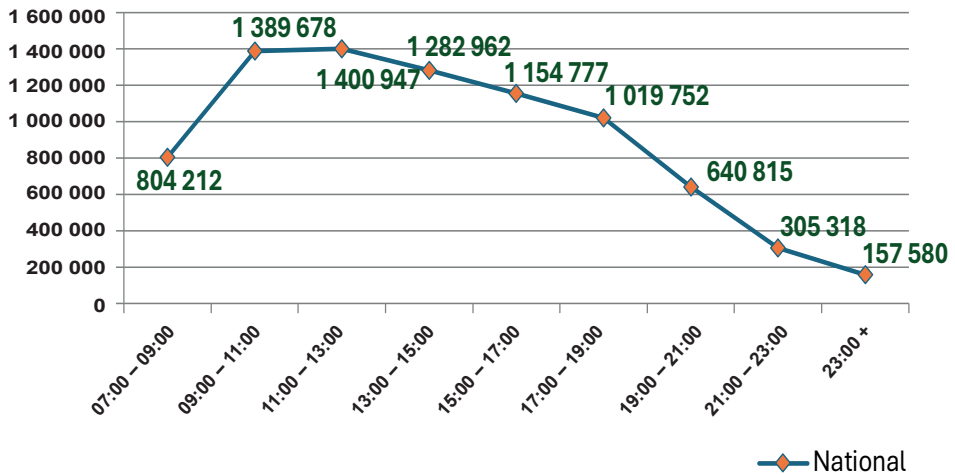


Figure 2: Volume of votes by time of day in the 2024 national and provincial elections

Source: Unpublished IEC data (personal communication IEC 2024)

Administrative Challenges

The observed trends in hourly voting volumes corroborate voters' first-hand accounts of frustrating administrative delays at voting stations across the country. The African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) observer missions flagged the following issues in election administration:

- Faulty voter management devices (VMDs) that caused delays in voter verification.
- Delays in delivery of election materials.
- Poorly trained electoral staff, particularly presiding officers: the AU and EU missions recommended that training for electoral staff must be improved to ensure consistency in implementing voting procedures. The AU recommended a revision to 'the recruitment process for polling staff to attract more qualified individuals, especially for managerial roles like Presiding Officer' (AU 2024, p. 7).
- The introduction of a third ballot, the regional ballot, which complicated the voting process.
- Funding cuts to the IEC imposed by the National Treasury, which constrained the budget for training and logistics. One of the EU mission's priority recommendations was to 'ensure adequate funding for the IEC, especially in an election year' (EU 2024, p. 40).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In spite of all the political and logistical challenges, the international and observer missions all declared the election free and fair. Three decades of one-party electoral dominance ended abruptly with the ANC's loss of majority power. There was widespread acceptance of the election results and a peaceful transition to a new form of national government. The country is now governed by a coalition government of national unity (GNU) – for the first time since 1996. The results have been interpreted as a sign of a thriving and vibrant electoral politics, with discernible shifts in voting patterns as voters abandoned traditional party loyalties to support new entrants.

However, the record low voter turnout complicates this hopeful scenario. The reality of nearly 60% of the EVAP having abstained from the election indicates that South Africa's democracy is on shaky ground. Researchers of voter behaviour over the past fifteen years have warned about the cumulative effects of declining voter turnout. Even so, the reality regarding the 60% abstention in the 2024 election was a shock. To paraphrase Ernest Hemingway's description of how a person goes bankrupt, the crash in electoral participation happened in two ways: gradually, then suddenly.

The overarching conclusion from all discussions on voter turnout is that the declining rates of voter turnout cannot be addressed or solved through policy or legislation alone. Central to restoring citizens' trust in democratic institutions is the government's ability to deliver on its constitutional responsibility, which means improving the quality of life for all citizens and responding to their needs. However, several targeted interventions can be implemented to improve participation in future elections. Mahlangu and Schulz-Herzenberg (2022) recently outlined compelling findings about the correlation between political participation and political efficacy. Civic education is critical to improve citizens' understanding of the system and to empower them to utilise the tools available to hold government accountable.

Furthermore, removing administrative barriers to participation through automatic registration gives all eligible voters the option to vote, without the additional cognitive and resource burden of people needing to remember to register. An opt-out provision can be made for those who do not want to be on the voter's roll. The biggest hurdle to this proposal is the Constitutional Court's 2015 judgment requiring the IEC to include voters' addresses in the voters' roll.³ However, this point is not inherently contradictory to the principle of automatic registration and could be managed administratively.

The Electoral Reform Consultation Panel should consider the impact on political participation in its recommendations for alternative electoral systems for

3 A big thanks to Ebrahim Fakir for this insight.

South Africa. Some of the amendments to the Electoral Act added complicated requirements to the electoral system, which undermined voter turnout. Moreover, the current closed-list proportional representation system is meant incentivise turnout, because every vote counts (Sanz 2017). Instead, it has increased voter apathy because voters feel disconnected from their political representatives (Mongae 2023). McClendon (2016) also suggests that the distance makes elected representatives less responsive to citizens. Hence, electoral system reform to improve the accountability of politicians is essential for consolidating democracy and constitutionalism.

Finally, there is an urgent need for in-depth and sustained research on voter behaviour, using diverse methodologies. Current survey questions and approaches need to be updated. The consensus from dozens of voter behaviour studies published in the past thirty years is that there is a need for more targeted research to comprehend the drivers behind ‘voting, vote choice and abstention’ among the South African electorate (Bekker et al. 2022, p. 297). For three decades, the voter behaviour literature anticipated that the end of ANC electoral dominance would be accompanied by increased VP and turnout. However, that did not occur. It is particularly concerning that electoral change appears to have come about through the abstention of the poorest South Africans (Netshithenzhe 2024; Scholtz 2024). As Everatt (2016, p. 64) presciently observed: ‘The era of ineluctability is dead; the racial census is buried; the era of substantive electoral uncertainty has arrived. The price tag seems to be the electoral participation of the poor.’

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VOTES, VOICES AND VIEWS

A Review of the Management of the South African 2024 National and Provincial Elections

Naphtaly Sekamogeng and Chinwendum Blossom Egbude

Naphtaly Sekamogeng is a senior programme officer with EISA, Johannesburg
ORCID <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3528-983X>

Chinwendum Blossom Egbude is a research assistant with EISA, Johannesburg

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 national and provincial elections in South Africa were significant in that they marked 30 years of democracy in the country. For the first time in three decades, the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party was predicted to fall below the 50 per cent mark required for it to maintain its majority control in South Africa's Parliament. In this period of heightened political tension, new electoral reforms allowing independent candidates to compete on the national and provincial ballots were implemented to allow a broadened scope of political competition and representation. This move reflects the country's evolving political landscape, in which the citizens demand a greater voice in their governance. However, the road to the elections was marked by challenges, including a series of pre-election legal disputes. These issues highlighted potential gaps in the electoral framework, raising concerns about the technical capacity of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and the overall reliability and trustworthiness of the electoral process.

For the IEC, a successful vote would reaffirm the country's democratic resilience and its ability to conduct credible elections. Failure could mean a setback to public trust in the electoral process, potential political instability, and diminished confidence in the country's democratic institutions. This would undermine both national and international perceptions of its commitment to democratic principles. The IEC faced criticism over its ability to handle complex logistical issues, such as voter registration and the timely provision of necessary materials to polling stations. Additionally, the number of court cases filed by political parties and candidates questioning electoral procedures and outcomes further strained the credibility of the process. Despite these challenges, the IEC managed to maintain public trust in its role as an impartial institution. By addressing some of the

technical issues and defending its decisions in court, the IEC was able to preserve its independence and neutrality (EU Election Expert Report 2024).

The elections presented both strengths and weaknesses in the current electoral system and in the performance of the IEC. One of the notable weaknesses was the continued decline in voter turnout, especially among young voters, with over 40% abstaining from the election. Additionally, logistical issues such as the late arrivals of voting materials, malfunctions in the deployment of the voter management devices (VMDs), discouragingly long queues, and a confusing multiple ballot paper system negatively impacted the voting process. The IEC's efforts to inform the electorate about the new system, which allowed for the participation of independent candidates, could have been more robust.

The fiscal, political, and legal developments around these elections presented a unique set of challenges for the IEC. Increased litigations, adjustments to logistics, results systems, and ballot design – including a third ballot paper – heightened these challenges.

There were also a number of positive developments. The IEC expanded voter participation through special voting mechanisms, such as creating an online registration system for diaspora voting for the first time since 2009. The introduction of special voting processes, such as home visits and voting for prisoners, further helped improve public trust in the electoral process.

This paper explores the management of the 2024 national and provincial elections, focusing on the challenges and successes faced by the IEC in ensuring a free and transparent electoral process. Using different election observer group reports, it outlines the legal and technical challenges encountered by the IEC, including litigations and disputes over electoral procedures, and how these factors influenced the credibility of the elections. The paper also evaluates the role of election observers and the overall perception of the IEC's neutrality and independence. By reviewing these elements, the paper provides insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the 2024 elections and offers recommendations for enhancing South Africa's electoral process moving forward.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

South Africa has been using a closed-list proportional representation electoral system since it transitioned from apartheid to democracy in 1994. An electoral system determines how the country's leaders are elected, and the choice of which electoral system to use should be based on what the citizens want to achieve (Phirinyane 2013). The proportional representation system was chosen because it would allow the continued representation of minority groups proportionate to their electoral support (Mhlongo 2020). The system in South Africa allows political

parties to compile candidate lists based on their own internal party rules and processes. In this system, voters consequently vote for a party with an associated candidate list determined by that party before the election.

The closed list system has resulted in some socio-political benefits related to inclusion. The ANC has long used a zebra system, alternating male and female representatives, resulting in South Africa having a relatively high number of women holding positions in the national and provincial legislatures. With the decline of support for the ANC, South Africa has also seen a decline in the number of women in Parliament, as gender parity is not a universal policy across political parties currently represented in Parliament. South Africa has declined to 22nd place globally according to IDEA's Women's Political Participation in Africa Barometer 2024.

The closed list system does, however, have its drawbacks, often criticised as contributing to the inaccessibility and impunity of government officials. Growing public perceptions of government impunity contributed to declining levels of trust in political parties and government (HSRC 2023). Two developments in the 2024 electoral cycle are associated – at least in part - with this public malaise. The first is the introduction of independent candidates, and the second is the proliferation of political parties.

On 11 June 2020, the Constitutional Court of South Africa delivered its judgement in the landmark decision of *New Nation Movement NPC and Others v President of the Republic of South Africa*. The Court ruled that the Electoral Act 73 of 1998 is unconstitutional to the extent that it prevents adult citizens from standing for and being elected to the National Assembly and provincial legislatures as independent candidates. Consequently, ahead of the 2024 elections, Parliament was required to amend the electoral system through the enactment of legislation. This was aimed at addressing the evolving needs of the country's electoral system. To achieve this, the government established the Electoral Reform Consultation Panel (ERCP), composed of experts in election administration, law, and public service, to review the electoral system and recommend amendments to the current system that would regulate elections in South Africa in terms of the Constitution.

Following a process of consultations – including the establishment of a ministerial advisory committee on the electoral system – Parliament settled on a system that retains the spirit of the electoral system used from 1994 (at least for the 2024 elections). Thereafter an electoral reform panel should advise on a future electoral system. Following these processes, the president of South Africa assented to the Electoral Amendment Bill in April 2023, and the Electoral Matters Amendment Act was gazetted on 8 May 2024, 13 months and two weeks before the 2024 elections.

In the 29 May 2024 national and provincial elections, members of the National Assembly and the nine provincial legislatures were elected based on a party-list compensatory proportional representation system, with the new act simply accommodating independent candidates within the current system. To give effect to this, the 400 seats in the National Assembly are split into two portions. One portion of 200 seats designates each province as a region or constituency, with each province or region being allocated a designated number of seats depending on its population size; and a further 200 compensatory seats are reserved for political parties to contest.

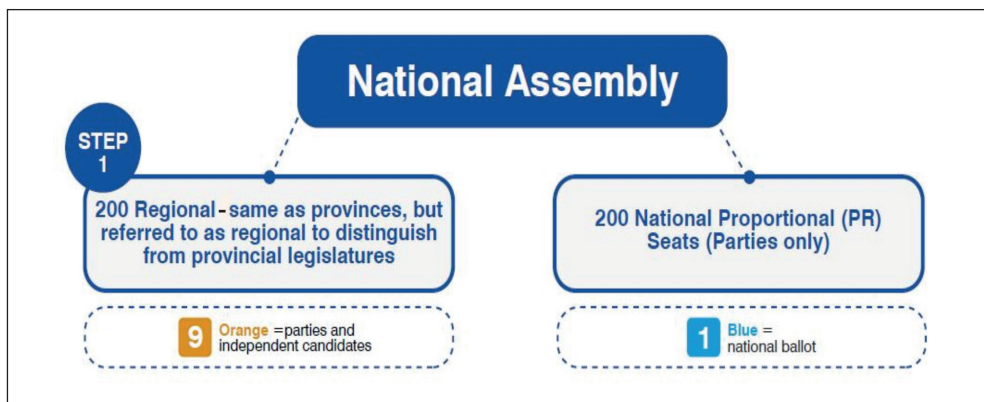


Figure 1: Seat Composition of the National Assembly

Source: Independent Electoral Commission (IEC 2024)

Figure 1 shows the dual-system seat composition of South Africa's National Assembly, which is divided equally between regional and national proportional representation systems.

The number of political parties on the national ballot paper has increased with every election cycle, from 19 in 1994 to 48 parties in 2019 and 52 in 2024. The new electoral system necessitated that voters received three ballot papers instead of the two they had in the past: two national ballots (the regional and compensatory ballots) and one provincial ballot paper. This created a significant amount of new and additional administration around the implementation of election processes for the IEC.

Additionally, the Political Party Funding Act (6 of 2018) came into operation on 1 April 2021 and was implemented for the first time in national elections. This required political parties to disclose donations exceeding R100 000, promoting transparency in party financing. Initially, the IEC conducted a number of workshops aimed at informing the political parties about their duties. Parties

not represented in Parliament or provincial legislatures argued that submitting audited financial statements every year was too onerous. After seeking legal advice, the IEC confirmed that submitting audited financial accounts was mandatory and that not doing so would be in contradiction of the law. Ahead of the 2024 elections, several political parties were ordered by the Electoral Court to pay administrative fines of R10 000 and R40 000, for failing to provide audited financial statements to the IEC. These included the African Independent Congress (AIC), African National Congress (ANC), African Transformation Movement (ATM), Congress of the People (COPE), National Freedom Party (NFP), and Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) (Allsop 2024).

THE IMPACT OF ELECTORAL REFORMS ON ELECTION PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

The nature and timing of the changes presented challenges for the IEC ahead of the 2024 elections. The Constitutional Court made its ruling in June 2020, followed by the passing of the Electoral Amendment Act in April 2023, with the elections being held in May 2024. This left limited time for an inclusive and comprehensive rollout. The impact on the IEC of this late implementation includes reduced preparation time to adapt its systems; insufficient opportunity for comprehensive voter education; operational complexities in updating ballot designs and vote-counting procedures to accommodate independent candidates; and issues with reallocating resources to manage these changes. With limited time, the IEC struggled to adapt its systems efficiently. This led to operational complexities, particularly in deciding on whether to update the ballot designs or come up with the third ballot and seat allocation formula to accommodate independent candidates.

The delay compromised the commission's ability to update voter information systems, recruit and train election staff, and streamline logistical operations which are crucial for a smooth electoral process. The time constraints resulted in insufficient comprehensive voter education. This left many voters unclear about the new voting procedures, potentially leading to confusion and an increase in invalid or spoiled ballots.

The introduction of independent candidates in the regional elections required significant updates to ballot layouts, and the IEC was pressed for time to ensure these changes were clearly communicated to electoral stakeholders. These challenges highlighted the risks of late-stage implementation and underscored the need for early reforms to mitigate disruptions and ensure the integrity of the election process.

Adding to the election management complexities were several additional court cases brought forward by parties related to the proposed timelines. In the end, however, all parties accepted the election results despite the initial court challenges, which were later withdrawn. One such case was by the Labour Party, which petitioned the Constitutional Court to adjust the IEC's election timetable after failing to meet deadlines for documentation submissions. However, the court ruled in favour of the IEC, reinforcing the institution's adherence to legal frameworks.

In terms of the timing of changes to the Elections Act, international best practice emphasises the fairness, transparency, and integrity of electoral processes, as highlighted by both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (ACDEG) (African Union 2007). While neither document specifies exact timelines for modifying electoral laws, they stress the need for equal and fair conditions in elections. Article 25 of the ICCPR guarantees citizens the right and opportunity to participate in public affairs, vote, and be elected. The ICCPR also calls for equal and fair election conditions, suggesting that changes to election legislation should not be implemented in a way that unfairly affects participants.

Regionally, Article 2 of the ACDEG emphasises the values of democracy and the rule of law, while Article 17 calls for impartial electoral organisations to ensure free and transparent elections. Abrupt changes to electoral laws, especially close to election dates, may compromise impartiality and fairness. This highlights the delicate balance between implementing necessary electoral reforms and ensuring adequate preparation time for election management bodies, voter education, and system adaptation to uphold the integrity of the democratic process and ensure full voter participation and understanding.

The Roles and Responsibilities of the Independent Electoral Commission

Chapter 9 of the Constitution of South Africa provides for state institutions supporting constitutional democracy, which include the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). Ensuring the effective separation of powers and upholding the Constitution requires vigilant oversight and robust counterbalancing institutions. Sections 190 and 191 of the Constitution establish the IEC as a permanent institution responsible for managing the elections at national, provincial, and municipal legislative levels. The commissioners, one of whom must be a judge, are appointed for a seven-year term, renewable once. The IEC as an electoral management body appears to have been designed as an independent institution that can operate without outside influence (Phirinyan 2013). The IEC is guaranteed

functional and institutional autonomy and is only subject to the Constitution and the law. It is funded by budgetary allocations approved by the National Assembly and donations from other sources.

The National Treasury's 2021 Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) proposed cutting the IEC's budget by almost R800-million between 2022 and 2025. According to the 2024 National Treasury statement:

While budget reductions were announced in the 2024 Budget to address the country's unsustainable debt burden, measures were taken to specifically ensure that requirements for the elections are adequately resourced... As part of the 2024 Budget process, the National Treasury continuously engaged with the IEC on its funding requirements for the 2024 National and Provincial Elections... The 2024 Budget Review outlined these measures: a) Reversing spending reductions to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), making an additional R250 million; b) Allowing the IEC to retain its accumulated surpluses of R1.5 billion; and c) Providing additional allocations of R350 million for the security of the election process.

The Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs expressed concerns over the impact of budget cuts on the IEC operations. The committee was particularly concerned about the effect on programmes two and three – the outreach, and the implications of this for running free and fair elections (Parliamentary Monitoring Group 2024). Specifically, the IEC faced a R128 million budget cut for the 2024 elections, despite being tasked with managing an expanded mandate due to changes in the electoral system, including the introduction of independent candidates. These new responsibilities increased the demands on the IEC's resources, particularly in terms of voter education and logistical management. However, the National Treasury clarified that despite budget cuts to help with the country's debt, the IEC received enough money for the 2024 elections. The statement asserted that the IEC received extra funds, including an additional R250 million and was allowed to keep R1.5 billion from its surplus. They also received R350 million to help secure the election process. Even though some reports said the IEC did not have enough money, the Treasury confirmed that the IEC's election costs could be managed with the resources they had. According to the EU Election Expert Report (2024), the IEC had to use the available budget to reprioritise its projects related to the elections and will need to continuously retain surplus funds to address deficits in future years.

OBSERVING THE NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS IN 2024

Election observation, both citizen and international, has gained a reputable influence globally. In highly competitive elections, the scrutiny of electoral processes increases as both political parties and the public demand higher levels of transparency and accountability to ensure the fairness of outcomes. This places the IEC under intense pressure to adhere strictly to legal frameworks while addressing operational challenges. Election observers play a critical role in alleviating these tensions by providing impartial assessments of the electoral process. They serve as credible intermediaries by documenting and reporting on potential irregularities, thereby guiding electoral commissions to address grievances effectively.

Ahead of the 2024 elections, the South African Government and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) invited election observer missions to assess the elections and offer recommendations on the process (AU 2024; EISA 202c). The IEC accredited over 150 organisations to observe the 2024 elections, including international election observation groups. The assessment of the electoral process is based on international, continental, and regional benchmarks for elections, as well as the legal framework for elections in the Republic of South Africa. The presence of international observers is important not only because of their ability to bring international legitimacy, but also because they are often perceived as non-partisan and neutral.

Most of these international organisations are signatories to the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and the Code of Conduct for International Election Observers (UN 2005). They also have norms, values, standards, and codes of conduct for election observation. The assessment of the electoral process is based on these benchmarks as well as the legal framework for elections in the Republic of South Africa.

Observation groups were deployed in all nine (9) provinces of South Africa, where they observed the final stages of the campaigns and special voting and election day procedures, including the opening of polls, voting, closing, and counting processes.

The obligation of states to provide citizens with the right to vote is also contained in international agreements and declarations adopted by international organisations such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union, and the United Nations. For example, Article 2.1 of the SADC *Principles of Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections* mandates the member states to conduct regular, free, fair, transparent, credible, and peaceful democratic elections to institutionalise the legitimate authority of representative government. Article 2 of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance provides that:

All member states must [p]romote the holding of regular free and fair elections to institutionalise legitimate authority of representative government as well as democratic change of governments.

Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the right of citizens to participate in the activities of government, while Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) further affirms this right, specifically providing for participation in the public affairs of states, which includes the right to vote.

Preparedness of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)

While the IEC performed well in some areas, such as increasing the number of voting stations and handling special voting arrangements, it faced challenges in fully meeting its mandate of voter education, a crucial part of its legal responsibility to enhance democratic participation. This paper highlights some of the areas identified as requiring strengthening by different election observation groups.

Ahead of the 2024 national and provincial elections, the IEC developed and implemented the election timetable in consultation with the political liaison committees (PLCs). They worked with the IEC to set deadlines for candidate nominations, special vote applications, and other electoral milestones. This collaboration helped ensure all stakeholders adhered to the legal framework and procedural requirements. The role PLCs play is crucial in fostering communication and coordination between the IEC and political parties during electoral processes. They operate at the national, provincial, and municipal levels and serve as platforms to discuss and resolve electoral issues.

Figure 2 indicates the trust levels in various institutions in South Africa over 20 years. The data is divided into five institutions: the national government, parliament, local government, political parties, and the electoral commission. The IEC started with relatively high trust in 2004 at 69%, peaking in 2010 at 71% (see Figure 2). While the IEC remains one of the most trusted public institutions in South Africa relative to many other public institutions, it is also in decline at 44% in 2023 (Kotzé 2023). This trend suggests a decreasing confidence in the IEC over the two decades, indicating possible challenges. However, it is argued that the IEC's decline in public trust is a result of collateral damage in an overall declining confidence in all public institutions and the political system.

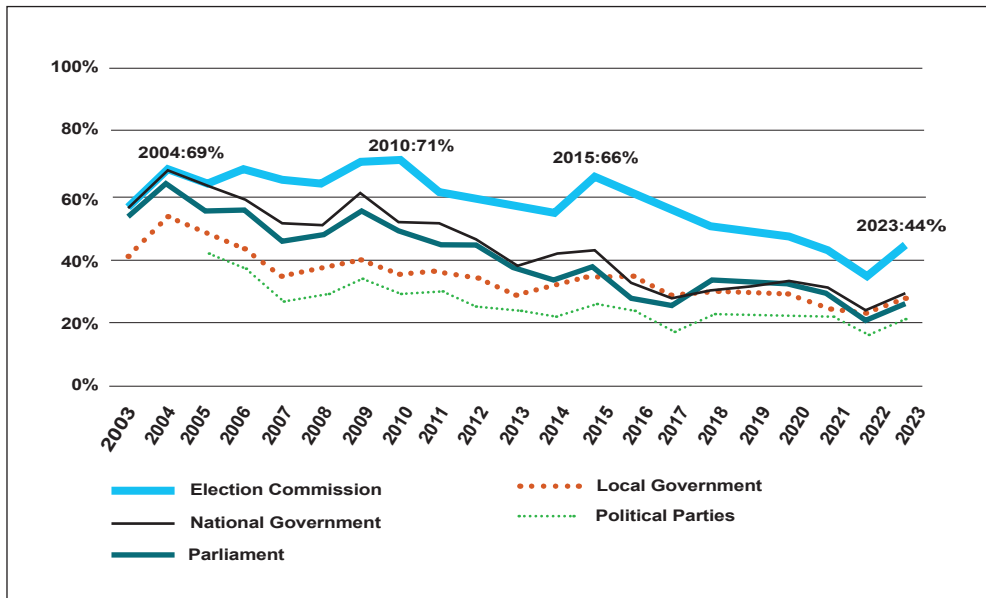


Figure 2: Institutional Trust Electoral Commission in relative perspective (2003-2023)

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2003-2023

The IEC’s financial resources available for the 2024 elections were deemed sufficient by the National Treasury. When coupled with increased operational demands, these seemed to be inadequate, particularly in areas like voter education and special voting arrangements. The IEC managed an increase in the number of registered voters, establishing 23 292 voting stations – a 1.6% increase from 22 924 in 2019. It also handled a 105.8% rise in registered special voters, significantly increasing the logistical workload for home visits and special voting arrangements. These additional pressures may have affected the IEC’s ability to fully prepare for the new electoral system.

Observation groups recommended that any major amendments to electoral legislation be made well in advance of elections to provide legal certainty, allow for adequate operational adjustments by the IEC, and promote stakeholder awareness.

Political Parties and Independent Candidates

In the 2024 elections, issues surrounding political party funding and campaigning highlighted the need for stronger regulatory frameworks. Observers noted that the lack of transparency in campaign financing created an uneven playing field, with well-resourced parties gaining significant advantages over smaller parties

and independent candidates (African Union 2024). The inclusion of independent candidates further complicated this dynamic, as the existing regulatory framework was insufficiently detailed to address their unique campaigning and funding needs. Additionally, in the absence of clear timelines for campaigning, parties with greater organisational capacity were better positioned to launch early campaigns and buy more airtime, leaving smaller parties and independent candidates at a disadvantage.

Observation groups recommended prioritising legal reforms in future elections to focus on enhancing transparency in campaign rules, including the regulation of independent candidates. Enhancing transparency in campaign rules is essential, particularly with the increased inclusion of independent candidates. This transparency would level the playing field and ensure all contestants adhere to the same accountability standards. Additionally, there should be clear timelines for campaigning. Well-defined timelines for campaigning are critical to ensuring fairness and allowing adequate preparation for all parties.

Voter Registration

Physical voter registration for the 2024 elections was complemented by online registration, which was available until 23 February 2024 when the election date was gazetted. Eligible diaspora voters were afforded the opportunity to register using the online platform for the first time during the 2024 elections, thereby expanding voter participation. The certified total number of voters for the 2024 elections was 27 782 477, marking a marginal increase of 3.9% compared to the 26 736 803 registered voters in 2019. However, the gap between eligible and registered voters has continued to increase since registration became a requirement for voting in South Africa. Observer groups reported concerns over a high number of potential voters, estimated to be around 13,7 million, who did not register to vote.

Observation groups suggested that the IEC could better leverage technology to improve its reach with potential youth voters by utilising digital platforms to engage potential voters and improving partnerships with community organisations, schools, and universities to further enhance outreach efforts and encourage a culture of active citizenship.

Special Voting

The legal framework makes provision for special voting regardless of the voter's location or status. Only registered voters who could not travel to their voting station on election day and voters who could not vote at the voting station where they were registered on election day could apply to vote earlier at the same voting

station. There was an increase in the number of registered special voters of 105.8%, from 774 094 in 2019 to 1 592 949 in 2024 (EISA 2024c). This voting took place on 27 and 28 May 2024. In cases where a voter was not able to vote on those days, they were allowed to vote on election day at the voting station where they were registered. Party agents and observers were allowed to observe the special vote.

The special vote was reported to have been effectively administered by the IEC although some concerns were raised. These included instances where the voters were not at home at the time of the visits by polling officials; some voters had provided incorrect addresses for home visits, which led to a loss of productive man hours. In several instances the secrecy of the ballot was compromised due to the proximity of the voter and staff because of the layout of the homes.

Voting on Election Day

Section 5 of the Electoral Commission Act of 1996 mandates the IEC to promote knowledge of electoral processes and ensure that elections are run smoothly. However, in the 2024 elections, many voters expressed confusion over the colour-coded triple ballot paper system, highlighting a gap in voter education. The IEC's efforts to inform the electorate about the new system, which allowed for the participation of independent candidates, could have been more robust. This shortfall in communication may have impacted voters' understanding of the changes, undermining the IEC's duty to ensure a well-informed electorate.

The reforms that came with Article 24A of the amended Electoral Act 23 brought about challenges and ambiguities on election day. It required voters who intended to vote at a different voting station than the one they were registered at to notify the IEC, indicating at which voting station they intend to vote, within the prescribed deadline. This resulted in their names being added to the special voters list.

The late electoral reforms had a financial impact on several key operation areas, such as hiring additional staff and preparing specific voter education campaigns to inform voters of the legal changes. A total of 400 000 voters applied to vote under section 24A (African Union 2024). However, some voters who had not provided notice arrived at the polling station and were expected to cast their ballots. This was another challenge faced by the IEC to inform voters timeously about the legal changes to avoid significant numbers of disenfranchised voters.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of South Africans who were aware of voter education campaigns by province in 2023. The bottom sections represent respondents who were aware of voter education campaigns, while the top sections represent those who were not. Mpumalanga has the highest awareness level, with 77% of residents indicating familiarity with voter education initiatives, followed by North West at 67% and KwaZulu-Natal at 61%.

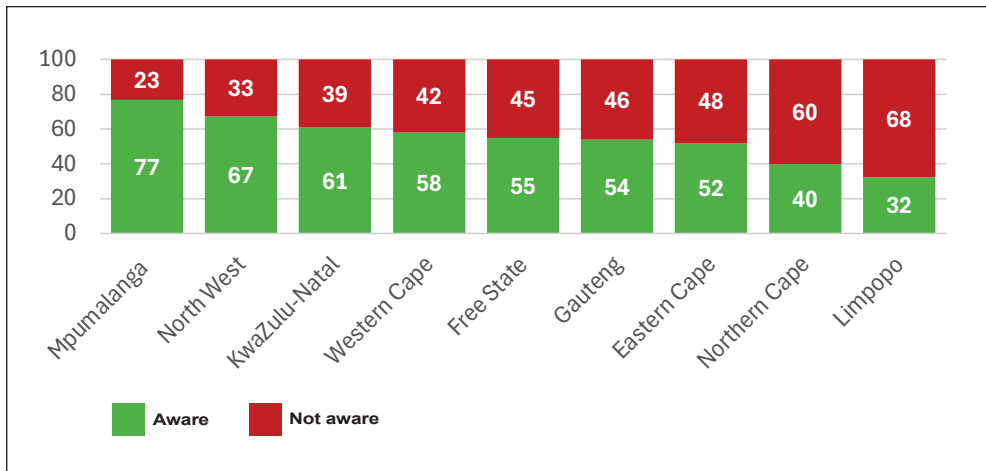


Figure 3: Percentage of South Africans who are aware of voter education campaigns by province, 2023

Source: IEC Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2023

These figures suggest that voter education campaigns in these provinces may have been more effective and visible. In contrast, provinces like Limpopo, the Northern Cape, and the Eastern Cape show lower awareness levels, with 68%, 60%, and 48% of respondents, respectively, indicating they were not aware of these campaigns. Limpopo, in particular, has low levels of awareness at only 32%, suggesting potential gaps in voter education outreach in these provinces.

The data underscores the need for targeted efforts to improve voter education efforts and reach provinces with lower awareness, especially with recent changes in the legal framework for elections. The disparities suggest that tailored strategies, considering regional demographics and communication preferences, might be necessary to enhance voter education awareness nationwide.

EISA's election observation mission (EISA 2024c) reported long, slow queues primarily caused by the VMDs malfunctioning or running out of power. In some cases, the polling staff resorted to manual voters' rolls for identification of voters, while in other stations, polling staff first attempted to resolve technical challenges with the VMDs. Some stakeholders criticised the IEC for inadequate planning and training of electoral staff. The IEC later clarified that the VMD is not for verification of voters but is only a tool to facilitate the identification of voters and accelerate the voting process; every voting station still uses a manual voters' roll.

Observer groups have recommended enhancing the reliability of VMDs to prevent delays and ensure seamless voter verification. Regular stress testing can also help to ensure their effectiveness under high voter turnout conditions.

Moreover, backup systems such as manual verification procedures should be ready to mitigate technical failures.

On election day, several voting stations reported not receiving materials on time, which delayed the opening of voting stations. Observer groups have suggested improving logistics management to ensure the timely delivery of essential materials on election days in future elections. Partnerships with logistics companies or deploying real-time tracking technologies can significantly improve the efficiency of material distribution.

Polling Staff

The IEC recruited and trained over 200 000 voting and counting staff to manage election day. At each of the polling stations there was an average of 10 polling officials. There were additional staff to complement the existing staff during vote counting. However, the polling staff demonstrated a lack of understanding of the new procedures, particularly regarding Section 24(a) where in some stations, the voters were allowed to vote; and 11 provided a national ballot only. In other stations, those voters were turned away (EISA 2024b). All voters who were in the queue at the time of closing were allowed to vote, even though some polling stations closed late because of the long queues. The results were announced publicly and posted outside the polling station, and party/candidate agents were given a copy of the results. Observers commended these measures as they contributed to the transparency of the process.

As the key implementers of election processes on the day, election staff need to have a clear and full understanding of the rules, roles, and responsibilities. Provision of adequate training of election staff to ensure the uniform application of voting procedures is essential for an efficient election process. The training may cover operational tasks, voter engagement, and conflict resolution to prepare staff for a variety of situations. The use of simulation exercises and mock elections can be used to assess readiness and ensure staff confidence.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2024 national and provincial elections in South Africa represented a pivotal moment in the evolution of the country's democratic practices, highlighting both the resilience and vulnerabilities of its electoral system. While the IEC successfully delivered a credible election despite challenges, the process underscored several areas requiring reform and improvements.

One of the most notable developments was the introduction of independent candidates into the electoral process, a significant step toward inclusivity that

addressed long-standing demands for broader representation. However, the late implementation of electoral reforms posed substantial challenges. Insufficient time for operational adjustments hindered the IEC's ability to conduct comprehensive voter education and adequately prepare for logistical demands, leading to several deficiencies. These included delays in the delivery of election materials and technical malfunctions with voter management devices, which disrupted operational efficiency.

Moreover, the elections exposed some weaknesses in the current system, including declining voter turnout and inequities in campaign financing. While the implementation of the Political Party Funding Act marked a progressive step toward financial transparency, its enforcement identified gaps that unduly affected smaller parties and independent candidates. Election observation groups emphasised the unfair advantage of well-funded parties, calling for stricter regulation and oversight of campaign financing practices.

Despite these challenges, the IEC demonstrated transparency during the electoral conduct by holding regular briefings for stakeholders and effectively managing pre-election legal disputes, thereby reinforcing its credibility. The widespread acceptance of the election results by political parties, even following initial legal challenges, reflected the robustness of South Africa's democratic institutions.

Looking ahead to improving South Africa's electoral processes, a multifaceted approach to reform is essential. Regulatory changes must be implemented well in advance of election dates to provide legal certainty and allow ample preparation time for the IEC. This would enable the IEC to refine logistical planning, improve voter education campaigns, and seamlessly integrate new systems, such as those accommodating independent candidates. Enhancing transparency in campaign financing is equally important, with enforceable rules requiring political parties and independent candidates to disclose funding sources and expenditures. Such measures would ensure fairness, level the playing field, and uphold accountability standards across all electoral participants.

Operational improvements must address the logistical inefficiencies highlighted in 2024. Ensuring timely delivery of election materials and enhancing the reliability of VMDs through regular testing and maintenance are critical steps. Furthermore, fostering voter education, particularly among younger demographics, through partnerships with educational institutions and community organisations will promote active citizenship. Robust staff training, including simulation exercises and mock elections, is necessary to ensure consistent application of election procedures and effective dispute resolution. Finally, greater collaboration with election observation groups can enhance transparency and

identify actionable recommendations for improving the electoral process, thereby reinforcing public trust in South Africa's democracy.

The general post-election outlook is filled with uncertainty but it also offers a potential turning point for reforms and growth. There is a sense of cautious optimism in the country that the new government will improve the country's social and economic status. The next five years will be interesting, and it is yet to be seen whether the government's national unity led by the ANC will be able to turn the country's political and economic fortune around and deliver on the promises made to the South African people. By implementing recommendations made by observation groups, South Africa can strengthen its democratic institutions and pave the way for a more inclusive and accountable political landscape.

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MEDIA COVERAGE OF SOUTH AFRICA'S 2024 ELECTIONS

Setting Standards for a Media Performance Review

William Bird and Thandi Smith

William Bird is director of Media Monitoring Africa, Johannesburg
Thandi Smith is head of programmes at Media Monitoring Africa, Johannesburg

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to the World Association of News Publishers (2024), the South African 2024 national and provincial elections took place in an era when news media are struggling to survive. South Africa's public broadcaster, the SABC, was facing a financial crisis (Ensor 2024) and decisions that appeared to encroach on its editorial independence during the elections. The economic climate meant that several media outlets, particularly smaller and independent commercial media, struggled to allocate adequate resources towards their election coverage. Despite this situation, news media made concerted efforts to help their audiences prepare and be aware of the various parties and news events ahead of the elections. For example, changes to the Electoral Amendment Act (2023) meant that independent candidates could stand for the national and provincial elections. This implied that there would be a third ballot, a change that highlighted the need for voter education during this period.

Furthermore, the threat of mis- and disinformation meant the media had to devote considerable effort to challenge, explain, and fact-check the various claims people were making. For example, the integrity and credibility of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) were questioned. All these factors combined to ensure that in addition to the regular anxieties, tensions, errors, and hiccups that accompany any election process, the news media environment was more constricted than ever. The media needed to cover, with limited resources, one of the most uncertain and complex elections in South Africa's three-decade democratic history.

Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) developed a framework¹ to assist by providing indicators to measure the performance of the media. The findings in this paper focus on the South African election period in 2024. The criteria in the framework are summarised below, along with the ratings and findings.

1 The Media Performance Review Framework was developed in consultation with Avani Singh.

Equitability of CoverageRATING: *Exceeded*

Most media houses demonstrated a conscious effort to provide equitable coverage of political parties. However, smaller parties and new parties, particularly under-resourced ones, may feel justly aggrieved by the lack of coverage afforded to them.

Diversity of Coverage and PluralityRATING: *Achieved*

Trends in coverage were very similar to those of previous elections, despite the context and political parties being very different. The top three issues that were covered accounted for a combined share of 56% of all election media coverage during this period.

Inclusion of WomenRATING: *Partially achieved*

The dominance of selected male politicians from the biggest parties was largely responsible for the very low number of women sources in media coverage. That said, the level of female representation was significantly below South Africa's usual average in an election period and undermined efforts towards greater gender equality.

Credibility of Information and Critical AnalysisRATING: *Exceeded*

It is a unique strength of South African media that despite differences in region, format, and ownership, there is an overarching level of fairness in coverage.

Reasonableness and ComplianceRATING: *Achieved*

Overall, it is clear that the established complaints mechanisms for the Press Council and the Complaints Compliance Committee (CCC) are fully functional and reliable. The Press Council put in place an expedited mechanism to deal with cases directly related to the elections, highlighting its commitment to credibility. Unfortunately, the slow timeframes of the CCC process meant that the impact of the outcome for urgent complaints was limited.

INTRODUCTION

A credible and pluralistic media landscape is critical to any democracy. This point has been consistently affirmed by our courts and other constitutional bodies in South Africa. In exchange for the constitutional protection afforded to the media, media houses bear constitutional obligations to act with integrity and responsibility. This requirement is heightened in the context of elections, where the news media, as primary disseminators of information, are at the frontline. They must provide credible information, create platforms for different opinions and opposing views, counter the proliferation of false information, and ensure an engaged and informed electorate.

According to McCombs (2002), mass media play a critical role in shaping public opinion. Because of this power in shaping public narratives, there is little doubt that media play a crucial role in the overall election process. Unlike social media, which has no standards for accurate and balanced reporting, news media need to ensure that they offer balanced, accurate, and fair coverage. Such information means that voters can make informed decisions about who to vote for.

As highlighted in the 'Guidelines on Access to Information and Elections in Africa' (African Commission on Human and People's Rights 2017), the media is recognised as having a central role in various human rights frameworks. These frameworks include the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa as well as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) election observer guidelines. What is not always clear is which criteria should be considered when determining the role of media in the runup to elections.

MMA developed the Media Performance Review (MPR) to create a standardised method for assessing the role the media play in the credibility and impartiality of elections, both positively and negatively. The term 'media' refers specifically to news media outlets in South Africa that comply with the codes of either the Press Council or the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA). Against this backdrop, the MPR is underpinned by two key facets:

- (i) to safeguard the media's ability to perform their duties in an enabling environment, without undue hindrance; and
- (ii) to reflect on the way these duties are conducted in accordance with legal and professional ethical standards.

Any assessment of the media landscape must be responsive and multi-faceted, given the wide range of elements that factor into this landscape. The situation also calls for different methods of data gathering, analysis, and reporting. Accordingly, the MPR is structured in two parts:

PART 1: ANALYSIS OF MEDIA COVERAGE. The first part of the report is essentially geared towards a consideration of the media's performance in the elections, based on journalistic obligations to ensure fair and balanced coverage. This assessment is guided by pre-identified indicators. The data collection that informs the indicators is quantitative in nature, relying on the data collection tools referred to below. In simple terms, this is a comparative analysis that can be graphically represented in terms of the conduct of various media organisations.

PART 2: ASSESSMENT OF THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE. The second part differs from the first in that it is geared towards the broader enabling environment in which the media operate during the elections. This part of the report is qualitative in nature, providing a narrative description and reflections on what has been experienced. Aspects that either foster or hamper the media in their work are examined. Although there are specific indicators reflecting different types of conduct, there is currently no benchmark data to allow for a comparative analysis. This aspect may be developed in future reports, once additional data has been collected.

The MPR is underpinned by certain key factors, including for instance the following:

- (i) a data-driven approach through a public interest lens;
- (ii) openness, fairness, and transparency;
- (iii) reliance on credible information and resources;
- (iv) a commitment to diversity and plurality; and
- (v) a resource that is useful for electoral stakeholders, not only for the 2024 election but also for future elections.

PART I INDICATORS AND ASSESSMENT OF MEDIA COVERAGE

An assessment of media coverage essentially analyses the conduct of media organisations and the fairness of election coverage, in line with relevant South African regulatory standards and journalism practices. The purpose of this section is to offer comprehensive data analysis and findings on the performance of South African news media during the election period (29 February to 24 June 2024). A total of 10 483 articles were monitored across print, online, and broadcast media. For this purpose, a combination of dedicated human media monitors – especially for small community media outlets and African-language content – and semi-automated monitoring was employed. The semi-automated tool, Dexter, had been developed by MMA for media monitoring.

Equitability of Coverage

RATING: *Exceeded*

Media have a responsibility to provide equitable coverage during an election period. Equitable coverage ensures diverse coverage is given to all political parties and politicians. As a result, media contribute towards potential voters’ ability to make an informed decision on voting day. Given that many new political parties were participating in the national and provincial elections, the media faced the challenge of balancing equitable coverage with public interest news. Figure 1 illustrates which of the top ten political parties were given the most media coverage during this period.

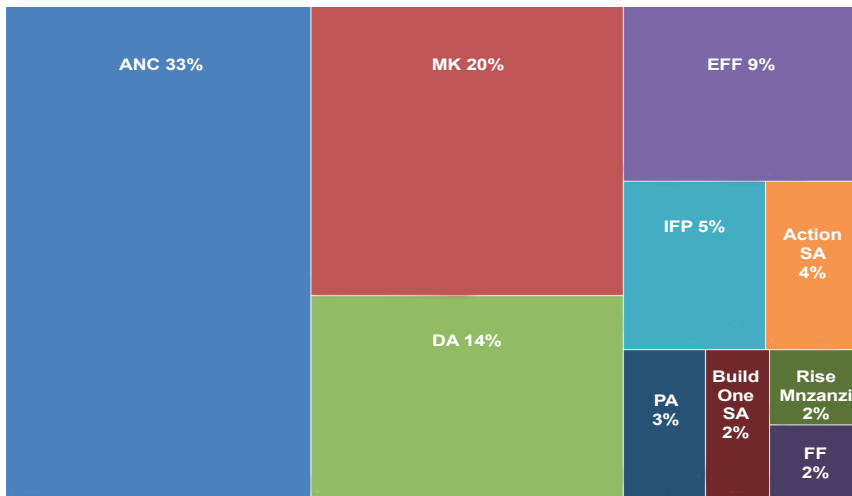


Figure 1: Coverage of top ten political parties

Note: Data included 16 199 news items, representing 93% of the analysed articles

The data indicates that the African National Congress (ANC) received the majority share, at 33%. Although media houses should follow equitable coverage guidelines, uMkhonto weSizwe (MK Party) received the second highest coverage, at about 20%. This is a significant share of the coverage, especially for a new political party not represented in parliament. Given the controversy and public interest issues around the MK Party, and the legal challenges between MK Party and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), it is not surprising that the party garnered significant media coverage. Other political parties that received a large portion of media coverage included the Democratic Alliance (DA) at 14%, Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) at 9%, Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) at 5%, Action SA at 4%, and Rise Mzansi at 2%.

Overall, while the coverage was generally equitable, there is little doubt that smaller, new parties and independent candidates would have felt legitimately aggrieved by the minimal coverage they received across the media. Even the SABC, which tends to offer great diversity of party coverage, struggled to give sufficient coverage to smaller parties and independent candidates. The reality is that limited resources in the media will mean that some parties do miss out.

Figure 2 shows the media’s coverage of all political parties mentioned in election-related coverage during the monitoring period. Generally, all parties represented in parliament received coverage that was relatively in line with party representation. However, the new parties, including Rise Mzansi, Build One SA, and MK Party, dominated the coverage beyond what would be expected given their short track records.

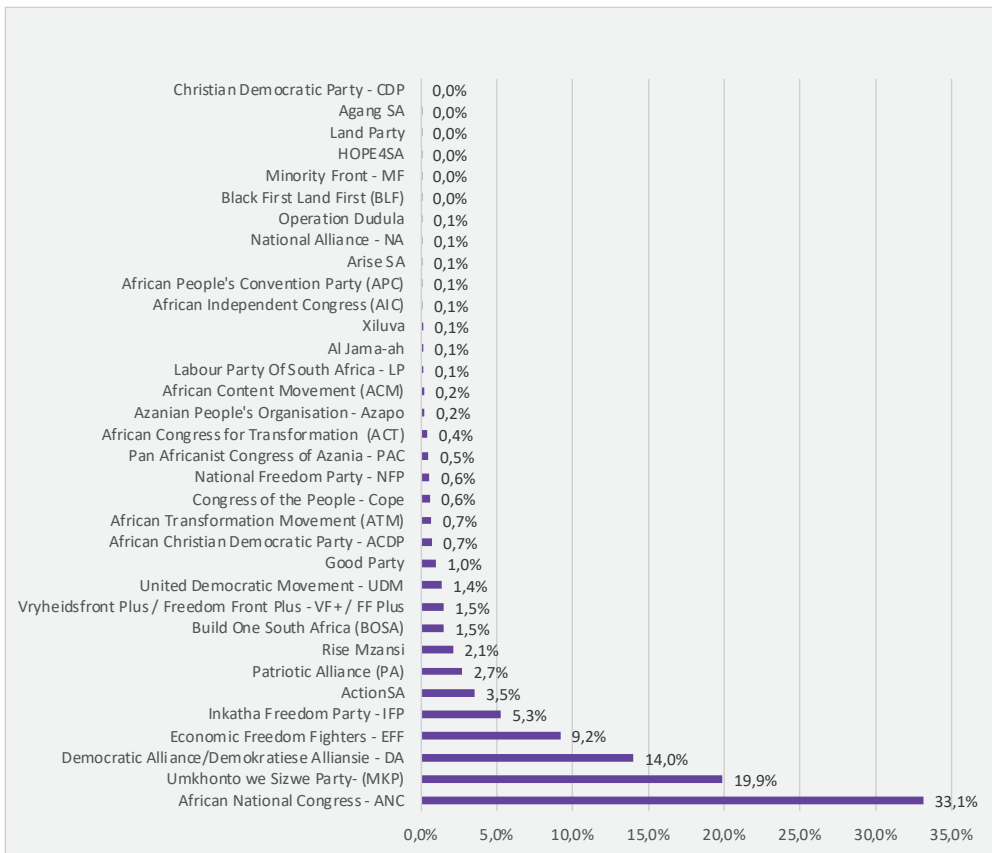


Figure 2: Political party coverage: All parties

Diversity of Coverage and Plurality

RATING: *Achieved*

During an election period, an important aspect of the media is the amount of coverage given to election-related issues. One of the critical roles of the media is to hold political parties and politicians accountable. One way to do this is to unpack issues that are important to people and assess whether these issues are given enough attention by political parties.

Figure 3 indicates the number of election-related stories that the media produced during the period. There were three clear peaks in coverage, with the first occurring on 20 May, followed by 29 and 30 May. On 20 May, international voting commenced and the first ballot of the 2024 national elections was cast. Media coverage was focused on election logistics and reported on voting around the globe. Coverage on 20 May also focused on the Constitutional Court ruling on the eligibility of former president Jacob Zuma to stand for office, representing the MK Party. Voting day was 29 May, so it was expected that news media would focus almost all their coverage on voter turnout, election logistics, and the voting process.

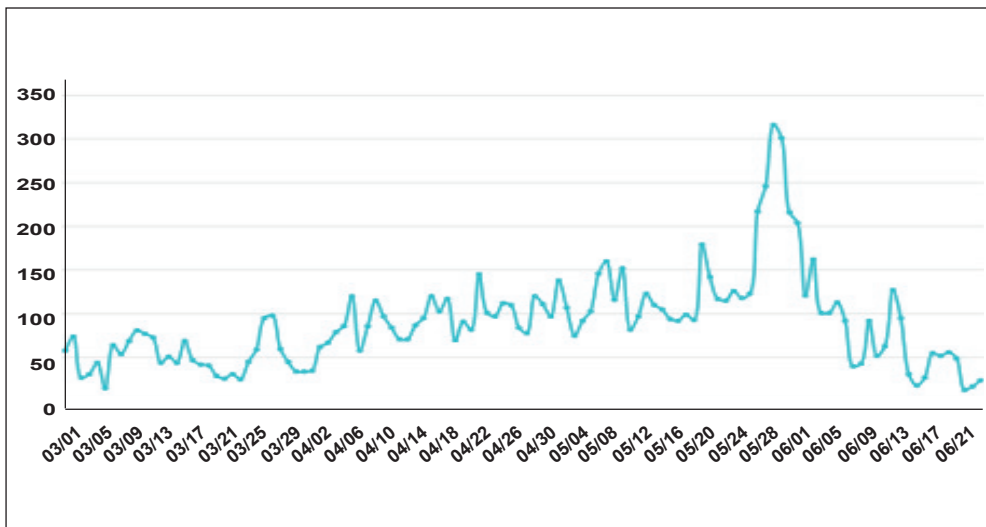


Figure 3: Count of election-related articles per day

Overall, the average number of election-related stories gradually increased over the reviewed period, as would be expected. There was a significant drop in election-related coverage within two weeks after voting day.

It is important to consider the different topics that media cover, as these issues shape the narratives of the election period. The top three topics covered were election logistics, political party politics, and political party campaigning (see Figure 4). These three topics alone accounted for 52% of all coverage. It is interesting to note that party politics was ultimately covered more extensively (18%) than political party campaigning (14%). In an earlier interim monitoring research report by MMA analysing the media's coverage of elections, party politics had received 18%, but party campaigning received slightly more coverage at 19%. These trends could be attributed to the internal conflict within the MK Party and the large amount of media coverage given to the leadership battles leading up to voting day and after it.

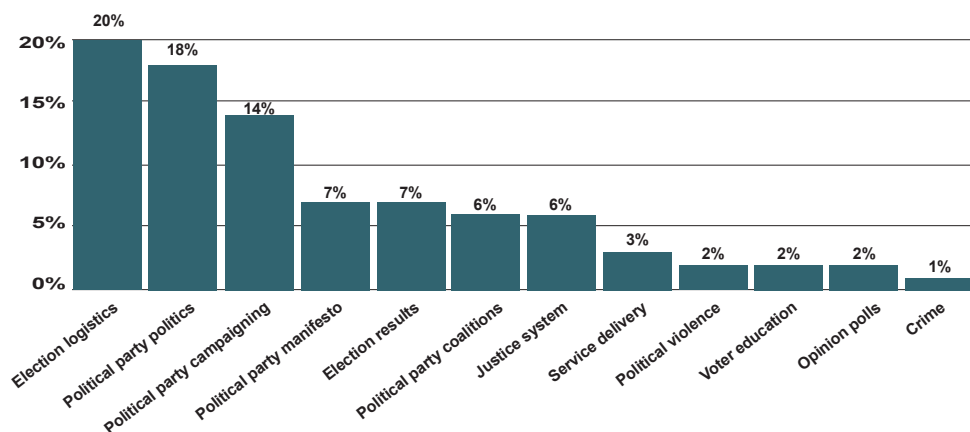


Figure 4: What was the coverage about? Breakdown of top topics (in %)

Note: N = 9258, representing 88% of all articles analysed

It is not surprising that these topics dominated the coverage; however, it is disappointing that the media did not offer more analyses on issues of concern to the public. The data shows that media outlets often allowed political parties to set the agenda, focusing on the narratives driven by politicians. Political party internal politics was a dominating topic, and this overshadowed key human rights-based issues as well as service delivery concerns. It is worth noting that service delivery issues still featured in the top ten most covered topics, in eighth place (with 3% of coverage).

Figure 5 below indicates the topics that were generally left out of the media's coverage of the elections. The result was an obvious gap in reporting on critically important issues. Topics such as children, climate change, and housing were afforded less than 1% of the coverage, even though the climate crisis is one of

the biggest global risks currently. Gender, education, and development were also largely ignored as key issues during the election period.

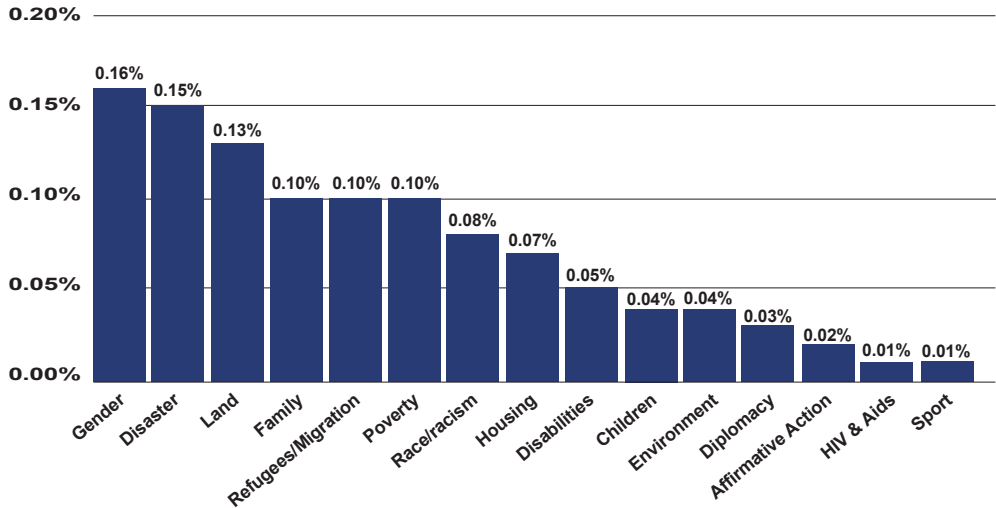


Figure 5: What was the coverage not about?

Note: N = 115, representing 1.1% of all articles analysed

The regional spread of coverage during national and provincial elections should enable the public to understand the key issues and ensure that some regions are not marginalised or left out. However, although the spread of coverage should largely represent the demographics of the country, coverage is often predictably focused mostly on the national level during national and provincial elections. The data shows that the 2024 elections coverage focused strongly on two provinces, Gauteng (23%) and Kwa-Zulu Natal (14%), as shown in Figure 6.

The Western Cape is usually the second or third most covered province. For the first time in our elections monitoring, the Western Cape received less coverage (5%) than the Eastern Cape (6%). This finding represents an important change in media coverage. The reason for the increased focus on Eastern Cape could be the protests around voting stations on voting day in that province and protests that prevented voting stations from opening.

While in line with trends observed historically, these findings indicate the need for stronger effort to provide diverse local news coverage of marginalised regions. The remaining six provinces shared only 14% of the total coverage.

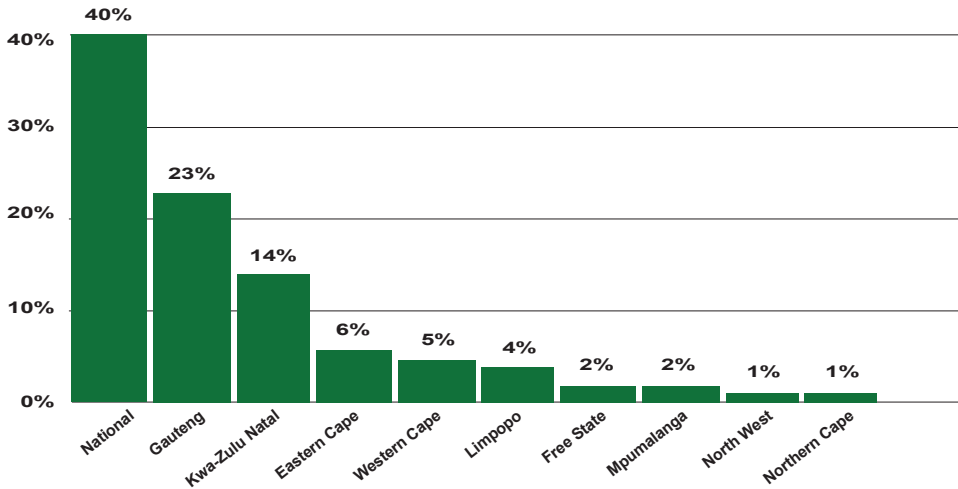


Figure 6: Breakdown of coverage for national and provincial levels

Note: N = 9522, representing 98% of all articles analysed

Inclusion of Women

RATING: *Partially achieved*

The ‘voice share’ in the media refers to who is sourced and quoted the most. To determine this aspect, MMA collected data on the spread of male versus female sources. Women’s voices were grossly underrepresented in the media during the election period, with only 18% of voice share, and male voices dominated at 82% (see Figure 7).

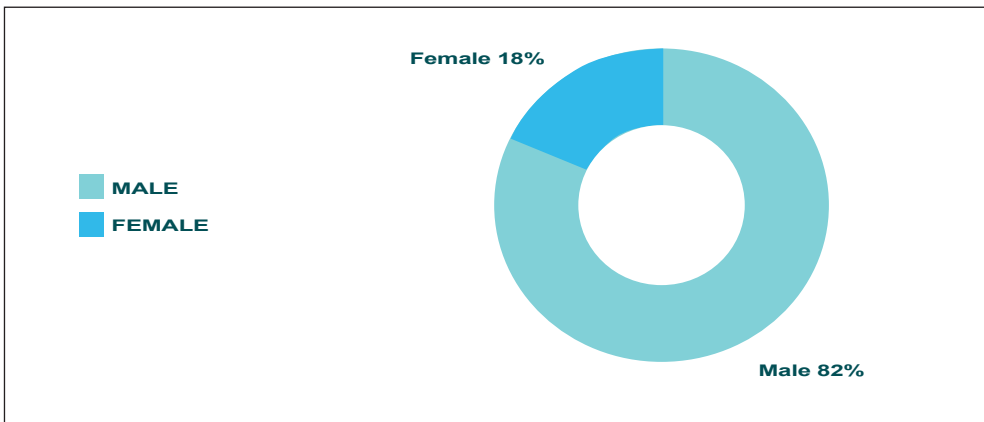


Figure 7: Share of voices: Who had the loudest voice?

It should be noted that the percentage of women's voices had increased since our interim report, the findings of which indicated a 16% share for female voices. This increase may be attributed to the engagement with journalists and editors around MMA's interim findings on voice representation. Although the underrepresentation is still highly problematic, the slight increase is a positive finding.

Given that the political landscape is predominantly male, with few parties being headed by women, the underrepresentation of women's voices might confirm the notion that the media may have allowed political parties and politicians to set the agenda. Generally, MMA's monitoring has found that women's voices are heard approximately 19–22% in the media. News media in South Africa are usually in line with the global average, currently at 24%, for women's voices in the media. However, the result for the 2024 elections was below that average. In a society where women outnumber men, more women than men vote,² and there are near-pandemic levels of gender-based violence, inequality, and patriarchy, it is essential that deliberate and consistent efforts are made to ensure that more women's voices are heard.

Media houses may to some degree argue that if the parties mainly offer male voices, that is who will be interviewed. However, we know that gender equality is not just good for women but generally leads to better and more balanced coverage. Media outlets therefore need to be assertive about requesting interviews with women. If the parties do not proactively offer these voices, media representatives can ensure they make every effort to give prominence to women experts and candidates to try and achieve gender equality in their coverage.

Credibility of Information and Critical Analysis

RATING: *Exceeded*

A critical element in determining media performance during elections is assessing whether the media's coverage was biased or generally fair. Each election-related article was analysed according to the following criteria:

- (i) Language
 - language bias by exaggeration;
 - language bias by generalisation; and
 - language bias by trivialisation.
- (ii) Presentation
 - Bias occurs when one or more parties are clearly favoured by virtue of how they are reported on.

2 See <https://elections.sabc.co.za/elections2024/news/sa-women-participation-in-the-2024-election/>

(iii) Omission

- Bias occurs where a party is not given the opportunity to respond to substantial allegations or to an issue of critical importance to that party.

The data clearly indicates that the overall media coverage of the elections was fair. Indeed, one of the strongest findings was that all media outlets, from small community organisations to large commercial houses and the public broadcaster, covered the elections in an extremely fair manner (see Figure 8). That thirty years after the start of democracy we should be in a space where media are overwhelmingly fair is a credit to South African journalism.

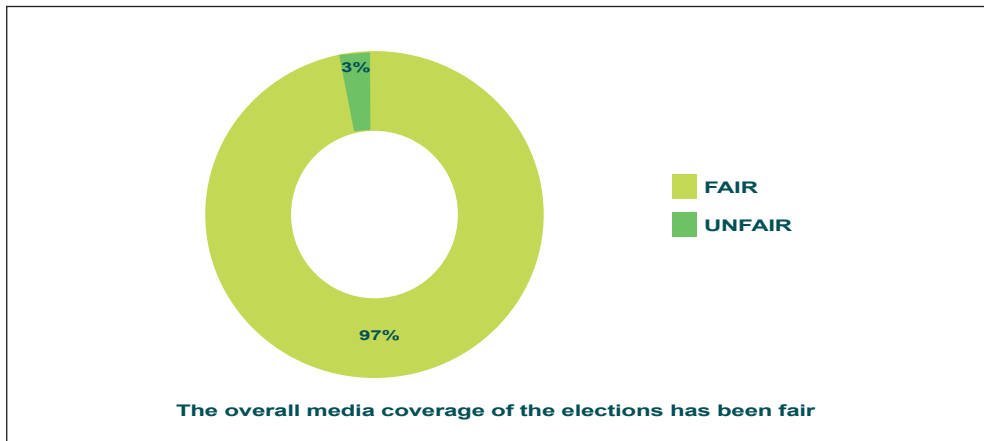


Figure 8: Fairness of media coverage

That said, it is worth noting that there were some stories, including several published in *The Star* newspaper, that actively gave credence to mis- and dis-information about whether the IEC could be trusted. Such stories undermine the integrity of all news media and should be condemned.

Another core concern that undermined the media's overall fairness and accuracy was related to journalists not challenging the people they interviewed. It was concerning how seldom journalists, interviewers, and presenters challenged certain controversial statements made by politicians. Although it is difficult to fact-check in a live role, media representatives must hold politicians accountable when they make claims that are unverified, unsupported, or patently false. Other examples occur when people challenge the legitimacy of the South African constitution, perpetuate negative stereotypes – including making xenophobic utterances – or seek to discredit key public bodies like the IEC without evidence. It is important for the media to be able to hold politicians accountable when

the latter make claims that are broadly anti-democratic and patently false or unsubstantiated. Allowing parties to get away with such statements undermines the critical role that journalism plays.

Reasonableness and Compliance

One of the elements of media performance during elections is linked directly to compliance with codes and ethical conduct, as set out in the Press Code for Print and Online Media as well as the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) election regulations and BCCSA Code³ for broadcasters. During the election period, the Press Council and ICASA's Complaints and Compliance Committee (CCC) dealt with several cases, as discussed below.

Press Council

RATING: *Exceeded*

The Press Code has a specific clause dealing with elections. All of the complaints listed here were either resolved amicably through mediation by the Press Council's Public Advocate or adjudicated by the Press Ombud, in record time, taking into consideration section 1.5 of the Press Council's Complaints Procedures:

1.5. Recognising the importance of democratic elections at national, provincial, and local levels of government, the Press Council will give top priority to finding speedy resolutions to complaints related to those elections when they are being held to secure free and fair elections.

Press Council complaints during the election period were as follows:

30735 Action SA v Rapport

The complaint was that the authors of an election poll were not identified in the article. The respondent stood by their story, as they had received the poll from a confidential source, with the request that the authors should not be identified. The Deputy Press Ombud upheld the complaint and directed the respondent to at least give some clarification about the authors of the poll, without naming them. *Outcome: The respondent's application for leave to appeal was declined by the Chair of Appeals.*

³ During election periods, the ICASA Complaints and Compliance Committee has jurisdiction to deal with election-related complaints against broadcasters, rather than the BCCSA doing so.

30738 PAC v Daily Sun

Daily Sun reported that the Pan-Africanist Congress's 'President', Narius Moloto, had claimed that the PAC had failed to meet the IEC's requirements to stand for the upcoming elections. The PAC stated in its subsequent complaint, lodged with the Press Council, that in fact the PAC president was Mr Mzwanele Nyhontso and that the PAC was indeed registered with the IEC to participate in the elections. *Outcome: The PAC accepted Daily Sun's offer to publish a retraction and an apology.*

30750 Eugene Mthethwa (EFF) v Sunday World

Sunday World published an article based on a leaked EFF 'candidates list' for the upcoming elections, stating that the complainant was not in the party's top 100. When the complainant lodged a complaint with the Press Council, the publication had already published a retraction and apology. After publishing the article, Sunday World had discovered that the published list was not the party's final list.

30751 Referendum Party v Daily Maverick

The complaint was about the publication's 'Fact Check' article, which stated that the Referendum Party's call for a referendum on Cape independence was 'selling voters pipe dreams'. The party complained inter alia that their views had not been sought. The Press Ombud dismissed the complaint as the article was an opinion piece.

Outcome: The Chair of Appeals declined the application for leave to appeal.

31811 Helen Zille (DA) v Sunday World

The complainant stated that Ms Helen Zille had been misquoted with regard to the DA's view on a possible coalition with the ANC.

Outcome: Ms Zille accepted the publication's offer to publish a retraction and an apology.

In summary, the Press Council dealt with five cases in the reviewed period, indicating that the process functioned efficiently and that redress was provided. In addition, there were several broadcast complaints during the reviewed period, which were dealt with by ICASA's committee, as discussed below.

ICASA Complaints and Compliance Committee

RATING: *Achieved*

Outside of an election period, complaints about broadcasters are heard by the BCCSA. During an election period, according to the ICASA Act 2000, such complaints are directed to the ICASA and its CCC. As a Chapter Nine body, ICASA

is mandated to address election-related complaints against broadcasters (see ICASA website). During the reviewed period, the CCC dealt with three matters, all related to the same issue. They focused on a political advert produced by the DA which contained a moving image of the South African flag being burned. The three CCC cases were as follows:

Democratic Alliance (DA) Complainant v South African Broadcasting Corporation Soc Ltd (SABC)

In this case, the DA argued that the SABC should not have banned their advert from running.

Outcome: the CCC ruled in favour of the DA, and the SABC was instructed to run the advertisement and was fined.

Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), SOS Support Public Broadcasting Coalition (SOS); and Campaign for Free Expression (CFE) v South African Broadcasting Corporation Soc Ltd (SABC)

In this case, civil society sought to raise freedom-of-expression issues regarding the decision by the SABC to ban the DA advert. The CCC ruled against the civil society bodies on the basis that civil society had no locus standi to bring a complaint. The civil society bodies are currently seeking to take the decision on review.

Bertha Kgokong v SABC SAfm

This complaint was in relation to a listener of a show on SAfm. The complaint was about the DA advert, with the complainant being of the view that SAfm afforded too much coverage of the controversial issue and as a result gave the DA unfair election-related coverage.

Outcome: The complaint was dismissed.

While only three cases were dealt with by the CCC, the outcomes highlight that the system is functioning. However, several deep concerns remain. In the case of the DA advert, the DA had lodged their complaint some two weeks before the case was heard. In the end, the delay by the CCC meant that although the finding was in favour of the DA, the SABC could no longer broadcast the advertisement. There is a clear need for the processes of the CCC to be accelerated to avoid any future incidents that would result in similar hollow victories.

PART II
ASSESSMENT OF MEDIA-ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

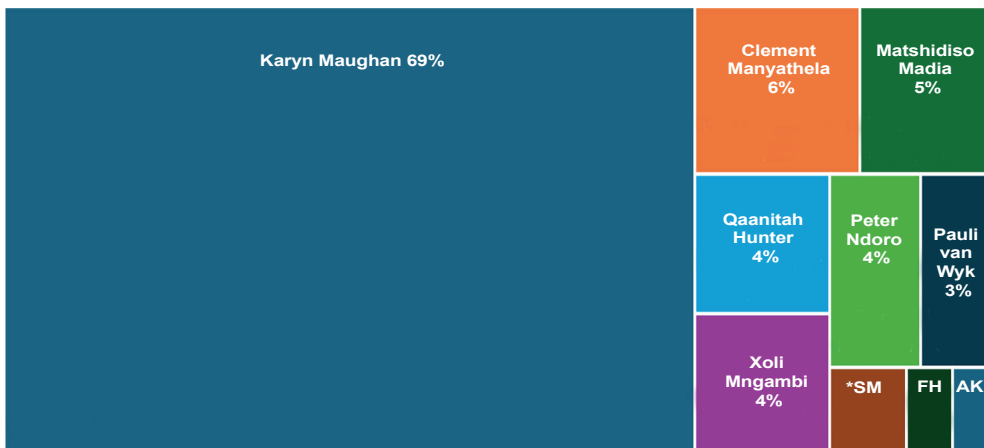
The purpose of this section is to assess whether the environment enabled the media to operate during the election period and its conduciveness to the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections. A key element for a conducive environment is whether journalists can do their jobs. Outside of that, it has become common practice for journalists to be attacked and harassed simply for being online, and this harassment can be particularly egregious for women journalists.

Reid et al. (2024) investigated case studies on the nature of attacks against journalists and highlighted potential solutions for tracking, analysing, and combating these attacks. MMA has also been working on a tool called Media Attack Reporting System (MARS) which can track attacks against journalists online. Two MMA monitors were asked to upload the records of attacks against journalists online.

Number of Recorded Incidents

A total of 1 025 online attacks against journalists were recorded on MARS during the reviewed period. This number marks an increase from the 793 attacks recorded in the interim report results. Hence, even after the initial results had been declared, attacks against journalists continued unabated.

What is clear from the chart in Figure 9 is that Karyn Maughan was consistently one of the focal points for online attacks. However, several male journalists were also subjected to attacks, particularly Clement Manyathela, Peter Ndoro, and Xoli Mngambi.



* SM = Sihle Mavuso, 1%; FH = Ferial Haffajee, 1%; AK = Amanda Khoza, 1%.

Figure 9: Top ten journalists who were attacked online in 2024

harassment. Given X's withdrawal of their Trust and Safety team from South Africa and indeed the continent, it is unsurprising that Twitter/X was the dominant platform for mis- and disinformation and attacks against journalists.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Attacks on Journalists

As the online attacks against journalists demonstrate, there is a clear need for greater and more meaningful commitment to protecting journalists. The MMA's recommendations are as follows:

- (i) The IEC could consider adopting the draft code developed by South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF), namely the Electoral Code of Conduct on Media-Related Matters (SANEF 2024), for the next local government elections.
- (ii) Additional focus and commitment should be implemented to protect journalists when political parties pledge their adherence to the legislated Electoral Code of Conduct mentioned above.

Role of News Media

People's access to accurate, verifiable, and fair coverage is an essential component of free and fair elections. All stakeholders have a positive responsibility to demonstrate what actions, processes, and concrete steps are being taken to develop, protect, and promote the role of news media in elections. The MMA recommends as follows:

- (i) In addition to including the draft code developed by SANEF, the Framework of Cooperation signed by IEC, MMA, TikTok, Google, and Meta (MMA 2023) needs to be expanded. The aim should be to encourage greater commitment among social media platforms to protect, promote, and develop the news media.

Innovation

The innovative efforts demonstrated by a range of media showed what could be done with limited resources. Examples included the SABC coverage, where they hosted social media live streaming events as well as an Elections Pop Up channel and the SABC's own election results dashboard. Other innovations were the various fact-checking initiatives and manifesto analyses, including a quiz style option through News24. Many media outlets also sought to offer summaries of party manifestos. Other bodies, such as SANEF, set up an elections portal with extensive resources. The MMA recommendation is as follows:

- (i) The IEC should recognise and commend all such efforts, in order to ensure that they can be repeated and where possible replicated and expanded.

Journalist Training

It is important that voter education covers more than just the voting process. It should also include how the IEC functions, mechanisms to ensure and protect free and fair elections, how vote counting works, and how votes are translated into representation in parliament. While such programmes have been conducted in the leadup to elections, longer term approaches are necessary to ensure broader take-up, retention, and application of the content and key issues. There were important training and briefing series that ran during the entire election period, from preparation to vote counting and the declaration of results. In this regard, the IEC, SANEF and partners should be commended for running such training leading up to the 2024 elections. Our recommendation is as follows:

- (i) As journalist resources continue to dwindle, and early career entrants join the industry, the IEC and its partners should conduct in-depth and consistent election-related and voter education, together with media organisations.

Development of Masterclasses

In addition to voter education, there is a need to ensure that journalists are trained in covering elections from the perspective of voters. Such training could improve the issue-based coverage. There is also a need to ensure that the concept of equitable coverage is unpacked and understood. The MMA recommendation is as follows:

- (i) A masterclass or course should be developed on reporting in elections and the leadup to local elections, with the target audience being producers, journalists, and editors.

Online Harms: Literacy and Skills Development

In another 'first' for 2024, MMA with the IEC and the Mandela Institute ran a masterclass on online harms. The class offered an exciting opportunity to ensure greater understanding of online harms. Our recommendation is that –

- (i) The course should be run on an ongoing basis, not just around election times, as the issues will continue to impact and undermine democratic institutions.

Supporting Media Regulators

Although the ICASA CCC is well established, there is an urgent need for issues to be dealt with more quickly. There needs to be a significant reduction in the time required to hear and adjudicate matters. Given the escalated tensions, it is essential for urgent issues to be addressed as speedily as possible, not only to ensure respect for due process but also to build public confidence in the system. It is important that the role of the CCC is highlighted, commended, and supported by all stakeholders. The Press Council system demonstrated its efficacy in the leadup to elections. The MMA recommends as follows:

- (i) The CCC's role should be acknowledged and commended and should be supported by stakeholders.

Countering Threats to Democratic Institutions

An emerging threat to democratic elections are certain efforts to undermine the credibility of critical public institutions. It is essential to distinguish legitimate, evidence-based critiques of public bodies versus attacks that seek to undermine public trust but with no evidence. Attacks against the IEC, news media, journalists, and the judiciary undermine free and fair elections. All stakeholders in elections have an essential responsibility to challenge such attacks. Stakeholders also need to explain and unpack their own roles in ensuring free, fair, and credible elations. Our recommendations in this area are as follows:

- (i) Educational material setting out the role and purpose of core democratic institutions needs to be developed and should be disseminated in the leadup to elections.
- (ii) Where institutions are subjected to unwarranted attacks, such attacks must be condemned by all stakeholders.

Mainstreaming Gender Equality

Gender equality is central to democracy. As highlighted in the MPR assessment, media contribute to perpetuating gender inequality through the patently inequitable representation of women's voices. The MMA recommendation is as follows:

- (i) The media masterclasses mentioned above, as well as initiatives that provide voter education, must address issues relating to gender. The aims are to ensure that journalists include more women's voices and to strongly encourage political parties to promote women's voices in public discourse.

The MPR is an attempt to achieve two goals. The first is to establish repeatable and scalable criteria that can be used across elections and nations to establish how the media performed. The second goal is to provide an evidence-based set of data to assess the degree to which media contributed to and /or failed to support free, fair, and credible elections. At a time when there is increasing uncertainty as to what is or is not credible, and there are claims and counterclaims about how 'mainstream media' can support or undermine democracy, the MPR can provide an informed perspective that is based in human rights and is sufficiently nuanced.

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