Beyond Apathy?

The diverse attitudes of young South Africans who are planning to abstain, or are uncertain about voting, in Election 2024

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Research Report

March 2024

IEC
SOUTH AFRICA

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HSRC Human Sciences Research Council

#YouthVoteMatters

IEC SOUTH AFRICA

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Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

The aim of the online youth survey

The ad hoc online survey was conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). The study aimed to inform and guide the Election Commission with its plans, policies, and practices by evaluating the attitudes of young citizens (that is, those between 18 and 35 years of age) ahead of the 2024 National and Provincial Elections. It focused on discouraged youth, that is, those people who have not committed to voting in the upcoming government elections, either due to planned abstention or uncertainty. The study examined the broader political outlook of this group, together with factors that might impact electoral behaviour (such as perceptions about the performance of government and attitudes towards democratic values). In addition, specific issues (such as the online registration platform) that have a special interest for the Commission were examined. The study also explored the challenges of communicating with this group, and assessed which communication strategies would be most effective.

Methodology

Data for this study was gathered using an online opt-in survey hosted on the Moya Messenger App. The online survey was conducted between June and July 2023 and 5 084 completed questionnaires were received. The sample was restricted to young citizens between 18 and 35 years of age who planned to abstain from, or were uncertain about participating in, the 2024 National and Provincial Elections (NPE). This kind of surveying is not without its limitations. An overriding concern is whether they can approximate the representativeness of a standard random probability household survey. Apprehensions over the accuracy of opt-in surveys are frequently due to concern over potential bias in the coverage of the sample. Undeniably, the mode of administration meant that a percentage of our target sample were ruled out as potential participants from our proposed survey due to a lack of internet access or access to a smartphone capable of handling the #datafeee Moya Messenger platform. The Moya app is widely used by citizens across the class spectrum due to it being datafree to users, thus favouring a broad class mix in the app user community. The results are regarded as broadly indicative of the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behavioural preferences of youth meeting the study criteria.

Political mood

The political mood amongst the youth interviewed for this study was negative, with the majority expressing dissatisfaction with the direction that our democracy was heading. Compared with what was observed in nationally representative surveys, satisfaction with democracy was low and confidence in political institutions was weak. Youth satisfaction with current political leaders was especially low, with only 4% of this group stating that they were satisfied. Older youth were more dissatisfied with the political status quo than their younger counterparts. Poverty was also found to be a significant determinant of whether the youth cohort were happy with the status quo. Individuals who self-identified as non-poor were much happier than those who identified as poor or very poor.

The online survey included several questions on the performance of the Electoral Commission in South Africa. One such question asks respondents if they trusted the Commission and we found that only 14% of our sample did. Data analysis revealed that low trust was a product of the general discontent that this subset of youth feels towards the country's current political structures. This discontent appears to have spilled (and continue to spill) over onto all bodies affiliated with the government. Participants were asked if they thought that the election procedures were free and fair during recent government elections. Only a small minority (7%) thought that elections were completely free and fair with the majority believing that elections had either major problems (34%) or were completely unfree and unfair (39%). One of the main reasons for this troubling finding is that a significant proportion of the sample thinks that voting irregularities occur regularly during government elections. Three-quarters (75%) of the sample thought corrupt practices (such as bribery or vote buying) happened often during elections.

Voting attitudes

Voting orientations are likely to inform electoral turnout behaviour and the online survey contained questions on different aspects of voting. More than three-fifths (69%) of the population reported that their vote would not make a difference and 78% said that voting was pointless because all political parties were the same. A significant segment (47%) of all participants found it very difficult to find a political party that represented their interests. This finding is consistent with previous HSRC research which showed that many citizens felt that the political party that they had previously supported had let them down. In summary, a majority of the youth sample believed that election participation was not an effective or worthwhile use of their time. However, many did regard voting as a civic responsibility and 40% of the sample stated that they thought that all citizens had a duty to vote in elections. This is a notable and positive finding that suggests that simple characterisations of youth as apathetic are problematic.

Measures of election interest can be used to identify the probability of individuals to engage civic activities. It is apparent that a significant minority of our sample reported an interest in elections. Slightly less than a fifth (17%) indicated a fair or high interest in elections while a clear majority (82%) claimed to be not very or not at all interested. People who were interested in elections were more likely to think that elections in South Africa are free and fair. Election interest was also found to be associated with participants' intention to register to vote. Another key finding that again defies the apathetic youth narrative is that a clear majority (58%) of the sample thought that voting during elections in South Africa was important. The poor were more likely to view voting as unimportant, a trait that is also more common among older youth. People were more likely to think voting was important if they believed that electoral participation was a civic duty. Voting efficacy evaluations had a weaker but still statistically significant effect on perceived importance.

As mentioned above, two-fifths (40%) of all respondents stated that they believed that it was the duty of citizens to vote, while 34% disagreed with this statement. A fifth was ambivalent and 5% said that they did not know how to answer. From a political efficacy perspective, more than two-thirds (69%) of the sample agreed with the statement that their vote does not make a difference. Approximately a tenth (11%) were neutral, while close to a fifth (18%) disagreed with the statement. In response to a statement: 'after being elected all political parties are

the same, so voting is pointless', approximately three-quarters (78%) of the sampled youth answered in the affirmative. This represents a worrying finding and suggests that many young South Africans who plan to abstain or remain uncertain about participating in the 2024 elections do not see voting as an effective way to change the political system.

Trust in the IEC

A majority (56%) of the sample distrusted the Commission. Less than a fifth (14%) of the participants reported that they could trust the election management body. A significant proportion (24%) of the sample gave a neutral evaluation and 6% were uncertain of how to answer the question. Clearly, youth confidence in the Electoral Commission is associated with political dissatisfaction with the government and political parties. Confidence in the Commission is strongly associated with a broad sense of disenchantment around democratic functioning in South Africa. Attitudes towards the election management body are shaped (to a considerable degree) by support for the current political system. The most robust relationship was with trust in national and provincial government.

Planned abstention

Administrative hurdles were not found to be the primary reasons for anticipated electoral abstention. Only 4% cited administrative factors as influential, primarily due to issues like registration challenges or lacking the necessary identification documentation. Problems concerning voting station accessibility, infrastructure, and operations were scarcely mentioned. Roughly a fifth (21%) attributed their planned abstention or uncertainty about voting in 2024 to a general sense of disillusionment and disinterest. Among these reasons, a lack of enthusiasm for voting was the most prevalent (10%), followed by a loss of faith in internal political efficacy ("my vote would not make a difference") (7%). Feeling generally politically disillusioned or perceiving elections as losing significance were each mentioned by 2% of the surveyed youth.

The predominant responses from the youth regarding planned abstention or uncertainty about voting in 2024 were more specifically related to political party evaluations or performance, accounting for 73% of all responses. Concerns over poor government performance in addressing critical societal issues such as poverty, unemployment, and corruption were the primary reasons within this category, cited by 27% of the youth. Another set of factors revolved around a perceived lack of change since the last election (16%), inadequate government service delivery (15%), and unfulfilled promises from political parties (11%). A small portion (4%) stated that their planned abstention or indecision about turnout stemmed from disinterest in existing political parties.

Voter registration

A majority (57%) of our sample was not registered to vote. Amongst this group, less than a third (30%) said that they intended to register to vote. The data analysis suggests that the main reason provided for not wanting to register as a voter was political disinterest. Dissatisfaction with the current political status quo reduced the desire to register and so did the perceived importance of voting. Problems of political party identification, on the other hand, were not discovered to be a dominant driver here. The bulk (60%) of the sample were aware that you could register to vote through the online IEC platform. Interestingly, less than

half (40%) of those non-registered individuals who intended to register were aware of this fact. Awareness was also found to be relatively low amongst teenagers and students.

Regarding awareness of the IEC online platforms, about a third (34%) of the sample was aware of the IEC website. Past usage of the website was even lower, only 17% of the population said that they had used the website before. Concerning the applicability of the online platform, most (71%) participants were reluctant to use their own data to register to vote through the platform. The poor, in particular, were less likely to state that they would be willing to take on this cost. A significant proportion (53%) of the population said that they would assist friends and family to register to vote or update their voters' roll address online. Individuals who used the internet more often were found to be more likely to express a willingness to assist.

Voting intention

Participants were asked if the formation of political coalitions (when political parties agree to work together and share power) made them more or less likely to vote. Roughly a tenth (12%) said that this would increase their desire to participate in elections and 60% reported that it would decrease it. A similar question was asked about the ability of independent candidates to stand during government elections in South Africa. Positively, 23% of the participants said that this development made it more likely that they would vote and 42% reported that it made them less likely to turnout. There was a notable wealth disparity in this instance, more affluent participants had a more positive response to these two scenarios than their less well-off counterparts.

Preferred and trusted media sources and communication platforms

The majority (60%) of participants nominated television as the most preferred media source of information followed by social media (41%), radio (30%), SMS, WhatsApp and text messaging (23%) and internet websites (22%). Smaller proportions opted for newspapers, posters and friends or neighbours and even smaller minorities opted for community-based organisations, educational and work institutions, rallies, or religious institutions. It was evident that a mix of conventional media such as radio and television and social media was the most preferred media sources among this group of respondents. A factor analysis showed that these media sources could be divided into three groups or factors. Factor one representing religious institutions, educational institutions, community-based organisations, a rally, posters and friends, relatives and neighbours. This cluster of media sources was found to be most appropriate to those with a low education, low income, with little or no preference on social media and living outside cities. Factor two reflects conventional media sources namely television, radio and newspapers. People with a higher or mid-level socio-economic status tend to prefer this type of media. Factor three loaded high on social media, SMS, WhatsApp, or other text messaging and internet websites. People who preferred these types of media tended to reside in cities, be young and of the upper socioeconomic class.

Looking at how people communicated with the IEC, only a minority was aware of the Commission’s SMS line (22%), social media pages (18%) and the contact centre (15%). Especially low levels of awareness were recorded for the Commission’s email and the WhatsApp pages (9%). Usage of the platforms were even lower, less than 15% used the SMS

line and this was followed by the IEC's social media pages (8%), the IEC's contact centre (6%), email and the WhatsApp pages (4%). From this analysis, awareness and usage of these platforms are circumscribed. A concerted attempt should be made to raise awareness of these different platforms given that it could empower abstainers to make more informed decisions about their participation in the electoral process, and potentially encourage participation. WhatsApp Chat was the most preferred way of communicating with the IEC supported by 43% of the participants. This was followed by preferences for in-person community meetings (18%), USSD (15%), IEC contact centre callback (15%) and IEC Webchat (7%). Evidently, WhatsApp Chat was therefore the preferred communication method.

Celebrities/influencers/role models

More than half (55%) of participants stated that they distrust famous South Africans who try and influence people to vote in elections. About a quarter were ambivalent while a tenth (8%) of the participants trusted influencers. A similar proportion stated that they “Don’t know”. A strong sense of distrust towards famous South African people are this prevalent among South Africans towards influencers. People were subsequently asked how they would respond if celebrities, influencers or role models to persuade them to vote in the upcoming election. The majority (53%) maintained they would not be persuaded by these people to vote with a quarter (26%) not very likely to be convinced to go and vote. Contrary, about 14% said it was either quite or very likely that they would go and vote. Just under a tenth (7%) was unsure. Despite the dominant notion that that people are not likely to follow the advice of an influencer relative to those who are likely, it is important to keep in mind that influencing 14% of the population to vote can amount to a significant number.

When analysing data to determine who would be most likely to be influenced to go and vote it was found that the youngest cohort (18-19 years) were significantly more likely to be convinced to go and vote by influencers than older age groups. People who have never voted before and people who are not registered but intend registering before the 2024 election were the most likely to state that influencers would play a convincing role in motivating them to go and vote. Despite the general distrust of influencers among potential voters, it is important to note that they might have a significant role to play, especially among young cohorts and first-time voters.

Slogans

The majority (40%) stated none of the slogans would encourage them to vote, a likely reflection of disillusionment with voting. Among the rest of the participants, the most popular slogans were “My Future is in My Hands” (supported by 20%) speaking to the domain of future impact and influence, “Stand Up, Speak Out, Vote for Change!” (19%) which were categorised as social engagement and change and “Vota: It’s your Right!” (18%) which had to do with civic duty and responsibility and "Vote like your future depends on it because it does!" (10%). When analysed by age, it was found that slogans that mentioned the words “future” such as “My future is in my hands”, Vote like your future depends on it because it does” and “To the future” resonated more with young voters. These slogans emphasise the idea that individuals have the power to influence their own future. Slogans that encouraged a sense of urgency namely, “Vote Like Your Future Depends on It, because it does!” and “Stand Up, Speak Out, Vote for Change!”, resonated more with those who had never voted before whilst slogans about the

right to vote (Vota: It’s your Right!) and the Power of X resonated less with those who had never voted compared to those who have voted before.

Based on the responses provided, it's evident that there were some suggestions of what the IEC could do to encourage voter participation among the youth. These areas included visible efforts to ensure fairness and honesty, improving the voting experience and safety and security at voting stations as well as ensuring the safekeeping of ballots. Other suggestions included combating corruption as well as expanding education and awareness campaigns. Overall, a comprehensive approach that addresses these key areas, coupled with clear and engaging communication strategies, was suggested by the group that could encourage voter participation and enhance public trust in the electoral process.

1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged, not only in South Africa but also globally, that electoral democracy is in recession, with declining voter participation during elections. This trend appears to be particularly prevalent amongst the youth, a group that has also seen declining levels of voter registration. With the aim of better understanding youth disenchantment with democracy, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) conducted a mixed-methods study. The goal of this study was to better understand the widespread challenge of declining voter turnout in contemporary South African elections. The research team hoped that this work would help the Electoral Commission achieve one of its primary objectives, namely strengthening voter turnout amongst special groups of concern. The study will focus on the youth who are *not* committed to participating in the 2024 National and Provincial Elections (NPE). This is a group that is frequently under-represented in many studies of election participation in South Africa.

First, the **primary objective** of this study was to inform and guide the Electoral Commission in its plans, policies, and practices. Hopefully, the data provided will assist the Commission to implement one of its mandates, which is to encourage voter participation. The **secondary objectives** of the study were to evaluate the political attitudes and behaviour of the discouraged youth ahead of the 2024 NPE. The study was planned to include a quantitative and qualitative component. The report describes both components for the reader but only the results of the quantitative component were available at the time of writing. Consequently, only the results of the quantitative component will be presented in this report.

An online survey was conducted for this ad hoc study with citizen youth (individuals aged between 18 and 35) who had *not* committed to voting in the 2024 NPE. The survey data will be used to describe the socio-political outlook of this group including their views about the performance of government and their opinion of various democratic institutions in South Africa. The study also assesses the democratic values of young citizens with a particular interest in how they think about voting. Youth attitudes towards political party, elections and electoral participation will be investigated, special attention will be given to how this group views the work of the Electoral Commission. Finally, the researchers were interested in exploring how the Commission could best communicate with the discouraged youth and assessed how young people felt about different kinds of communication strategies and platforms.

The findings presented in this study lead the research team to conclude that young people are, in fact, not as apathetic as many political analysts would lead us to believe. This is a demographic group that wants to see positive and meaningful change in their communities, many even believe that voting is important. Their participation in elections, however, depends on how satisfied they are with democracy and the performance of political leaders in addressing the country's various socioeconomic challenges they continue to face. The participants in the study sample reported feeling alienated and excluded from politics and perceived the electoral system as corrupt and dishonest. This was found to be a special area of concern for the poor and working-class youth. The study will identify strategies to address low voter turnout and increase voter registration amongst this group.

2. Background context

For a political system to be representative, all citizens must ideally be included; but, making democracy work for everyone can be an especially difficult challenge. In many democracies, the political stage has typically been the preserve of old men and the youth tend to feel disconnected from that stage. Researchers in several countries have tended to find that the youth have noticeably low levels of electoral participation (Cammaerts et al., 2014; Pruitt, 2017; Kostelka & Blais, 2021). These scholars have argued that the youth are disinterested in politics and are reluctant to view voting as a civic obligation (also see Wattenberg, 2015; Bessant, 2020; Holbein & Hillygus, 2020). Given that the South African democracy must be representative, there is need to question youth participation in the country's electoral politics.

Many people in South Africa believe that the youth should participate in elections and be an active part of our democracy. Using nationally representative public opinion data, Roberts et al. (2022) found that in 2021, a clear majority (71%) of the adult populace agreed that the youth should take the lead in voting. However, many were found to be cynical about young people's engagement in politics. Less than half (45%) of the adult citizenry believed that the youth are interested in elections (also see Struwig, et al. 2019). Generally, the public had become anxious about the youth taking an active role in political matters in the last decade (Roberts et al., 2022). The segment of the general populace who agreed that young people should be encouraged to participate in politics decreased from 89% in 2008 to 61% in 2021. This growing level of cynicism was, quite surprisingly, evident amongst all age cohorts in South Africa.

The Electoral Commission has committed itself to encouraging young people to actively participate in elections. However, turnout amongst young people has historically been low in South African elections (Scott et al., 2012). The Commission is aware of the challenge of bringing on board a new generation of voters to register and vote for the first time. During its election planning, the organisation adopts a strong focus on youth turnout (especially post-millennials[1]) in their communications campaigns. Special initiatives have been launched to reach this cohort and communication campaigns have been designed to engage with them. Yet, low engagement with the electoral process continues and appears to be a particular problem for post-millennials, with low levels of regular voting reported amongst this cohort. Although youth turnout is low, the real problem is voter registration amongst this group.

For several decades, South Africa has struggled with low youth voter registration. Data from the Electoral Commission, for example, showed that voters aged 18 between 29 years represented 22% of all registered voters in 2013. During the last major government elections, voter registration was found to be especially low amongst the youth in South Africa. The absolute number of registered persons aged 18-29 years fell from 5 million in 2013 to 4.3 million in 2022. In other words, this group fell (as a proportion of the total registered population) six percentage points during the period. Given that this group constituted about a third of the adult citizenry in 2022, this is a worrying finding. The data for the 2023 period reveals that voter registration has remained down from what it was in past periods. Only a

[1] Persons born after 2000 and later are generally considered post-millennials and are sometime referred to as Generation Z.

small percentage (16%) of registered voters were under 30 years of age. Young women were less likely to be registered than their male counterparts.

Past research has sought to understand why many youths are discontented with voting and unwilling to participate in elections. A recent report by the Institute of Security Studies (ISS) examined the voting behaviour of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 (Tracey, 2016). The findings indicate that there was a clear deficit in institutional trust within this demographic. Using one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions, the ISS found that the youth acknowledged the importance of political participation but did not feel that electoral participation was an effective way to bring about change. Young people had witnessed the loyalty that their parents and elders had placed in the current political system and had been disappointed in the results. The findings of the ISS report are similar to what was found by Bekker and Runciman (2021) in their research on youth electoral behaviour in five metropolitan municipalities. Interviewing 1 531 citizens aged between 18 and 35, the authors identified several different drivers of low youth turnout. These included election disinterest, political disillusionment, being busy on election day and not being registered.

Overall, voter turnout for the young age cohorts has been significantly lower than the estimated national average for the last few decades. However, when young people do not participate in elections or are disengaged from political life, a significant portion of the population has little or no voice in major political decisions that affect them. How then can this situation be improved? Several studies have looked at youth discontent with the democratic system, but this work has not specially targeted discouraged youth. Consequently, our knowledge of this group is quite limited, and we do not have a clear idea of how to encourage them to participate in elections. Building on past public opinion research, this study sought to bridge this knowledge gap and provide critical insight into why youth turnout is so low in South Africa.

3. Research design: Methods and techniques

The first component of the study consisted of an online survey using the Moya Messenger App. Data-free to the user, the Moya Messenger App has an active subscriber base of several million South Africans from across a broad swathe of the socioeconomic and population spectrum. The sample was restricted to citizens between 18 and 35 years of age who planned to abstain from, or were uncertain about participating in, the 2024 NPE. The survey gathered data on the factors underlying planned voter abstentions in the 2024 NPE. This was crucial in understanding the preferences and experiences of those planning to abstain from upcoming elections.

The second component will be a follow-up to the Your Voice, Your Choice (YVYC) project which was completed in 2019. The purpose of the 2019 YVYC intervention was to empower young people by increasing their voter awareness to promote civic engagement. YVYC used innovative participatory methodologies to engage young people in dialogues to capture their view of the political landscape of South Africa. In the second phase of the YVYC, the original 2019 YVYC cohort was convened for a series of reflective focus group discussions. This group was recruited to participate in social network interviews (SNIs) with community members. SNI is an emancipatory methodological research and intervention innovation.

To assess and expand our knowledge of electoral abstention amongst the youth, a mixed-method approach was adopted that draws on quantitative and qualitative methodological principles. This included a discursive media analysis as well as a systematic literature review. The following section outlines the methodology in more detail.

3.1. Online surveying

We undertook an online survey using an opt-in questionnaire for this ad hoc study. The survey was restricted to persons aged between 18 and 35 years, living in one of the country's nine provinces. Such surveys are substantially cheaper and faster to implement than traditional person-to-person household surveys. The survey used the #datafree Moya Messenger platform hosted by Datafree (formerly biNu). The Moya Messenger platform has a large active user base of 2.7 million daily active users and 4.6 million monthly active users. The current level of coverage among Moya users is broadly representative of the adult public, with all major geographic, racial, and socioeconomic groups well represented. The aim was to obtain a sample size of at least 5 000 respondents with coverage in metro and rural areas.

The Moya Messenger App is data free; as such, it enabled broad uptake and higher than average response rates from the survey respondents. Previous experience has shown that samples produced from Moya Messenger App have a good spread by geographic type, including formal urban areas, informal urban settlements, and rural areas. This is largely due to a combination of the #datafree app and the large numbers of app users. The Moya platform has extensive regular users in South Africa across a wide (although not comprehensive) range of demographic profiles, including age, gender, race, education level, economic participation (in-/formal, class), geographic location, and so forth. This reach allowed researchers to collect data from a large number of respondents. The sample size for the online surveys under discussion is provided in **Table 1**. The online survey was conducted between June and July 2023 and 5 084 completed questionnaires were received.

Table 1: Sample size for the online survey of youth who plan to abstain or are uncertain about participation in the 2024 elections

Province	N	%
Western Cape	452	9
Eastern Cape	413	8
Northern Cape	122	2
Free State	444	9
KwaZulu-Natal	9 777	19
North West	327	6
Gauteng	1 883	37
Mpumalanga	252	5
Limpopo	214	4
Total	**5084**	**100**

At this stage, it is important to acknowledge some of the limitations of the Moya platform. The platform is only accessible to a person with a feature phone or smart phone; thus, it was inaccessible to certain subsets of the youth. Regrettably, the nature of cellphone penetration in South Africa limits administration of the survey to certain youth in extreme poverty. This will include youth in remote rural areas with limited access to information and communications technologies. In addition, because the survey is self-completed, those who were illiterate were unable to participate. Furthermore, the survey is opt-in; as a result, is

subject to a certain type of self-selection bias. Individuals who were aware of, and had opinions about, South African elections may be more likely to participate in the survey. However, given the requirements of the study, these methodology limitations were unavoidable.

Despite the limitations described above, the fact that the completion of the survey via the Moya App is data free, aids with reaching across social classes in a way that would otherwise not have been feasible. The Moya app facilitates a higher level of inclusion to generate a reliable dataset. Once gathered, all data was checked and edited for logical consistency, for permitted ranges, for reliability on derived variables, and for filter instructions. All data cleaning techniques used by the HSRC are within the best international benchmarks regarding the cleaning of statistical data. The final data set was benchmarked and weighted using demographic data from Statistics South Africa.

3.2. Qualitative component

The South African National Youth Policy (NYP) 2014-2019 posits that disadvantaged youth, especially those that have fallen out of the educational, social and economic mainstream must be empowered through effective programs and other supportive measures that demand a multi-sectoral approach involving stakeholders in the public sector, civil society and the private sector working together in promoting youth development (NYP, p.11). Accordingly, the type of marginalisation faced by youth necessitates youth-targeted interventions that will enable young people's active participation and engagement in both society and the economy (NYP, p.5). These interventions must not only be youth targeted but additionally, **youth-led**.

Ahead of the 2019 national election, the pilot intervention *Your Voice, Your Choice: democratic dialogues for first-time voters* were launched. Your Voice, Your Choice (YVYC) involved recruiting a cohort of 25 young people and following them longitudinally to equip them with civic education and social-mobilisation strategies. Over the course of three months, with roughly one differently themed five-hour dialogue a week, the participant cohort would bring what they already knew from their own lived experience and the indigenous knowledge they were raised with, coupled with a structured curriculum focused on relevant issues for them as first-time voters, ahead of an election. YVYC took place in Umlazi, eThekwini situated in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The purpose of the YVYC intervention was to empower young people through increasing their voter awareness and their capacity to engage meaningfully in their communities to promote civil society engagement. YVYC used innovative participatory methodologies to engage young people in dialogues to capture young people's view of the political landscape of South Africa, including how they envision changing it. The intervention aimed to 1) Test a pilot intervention with the view to increase voter awareness and interest in civic engagement broadly; 2) Increase first time voter turnout; 3) Upskill and train young people to facilitate their own dialogues (not just about civic education but about problems troubling youth generally); and 4) Learn what processes are more likely to foster transformative dialogue. For the young people enrolled, the aim was to demonstrate individual and collective agency by hosting dialogues for and by youth in schools, in faith-based organisations and larger community structures.

In 2023, a year before the 2024 national elections, it was an opportune time to return to the YVYC cohort to do some follow-up engagement and to enroll those original participants in change making civic action. The subsequent activities below was undertaken in the follow-up to YVYC:

1. Convene the original 2019 YVYC cohort for a series of reflective focus group discussions. Share findings of the pilot phase of the intervention and give cohort the opportunity to reflect/contest these findings. Questions for further inquiry: How did the intervention impact them? What changes were they able to make after the intervention? Did they vote in the 2021 local election? Have they registered to vote for the 2024 election? What issues persist when it comes to registering, voting, the elections and civic engagement more broadly?
2. Recruit the 2019 YVYC cohort of young people to do civic engagement dialogues with other young people in their communities. Support the cohort with materials and other resources to hold the dialogues.
3. Recruit the 2019 YVYC cohort of young people to conduct social network interviews (SNIs) with community members. Social network interviewing is an emancipatory methodological research and intervention innovation. It aims to recruit participant-researchers and train them, to conduct research that has as its goal some form of social change, intervention, or emancipation for those who are participating. It is a reaction to extractive, noncollaborative, and objectifying research. It is a Southern methodology, not only because it originates in the South, but because it aims to follow the tenets of the decolonising methodologies.

Research included two focus group discussions (20 young people), five dialogues with 20 young people (100 young people reached) and 125 social network interviews with community members. In this report, some direct quotes from respondents involved in the qualitative project are shared to enrich the quantitative findings. These quotes are denoted in blue shaded boxes. A separate report on the qualitative component of the research is available and can be found on the IEC website: Your Voice Your Choice: democratic dialogues for first time voting youth (Mahali, Nchabeleng, Masinga, 2024). **ISBN: 978-0-621-51881-8**

4. Results of the online youth survey

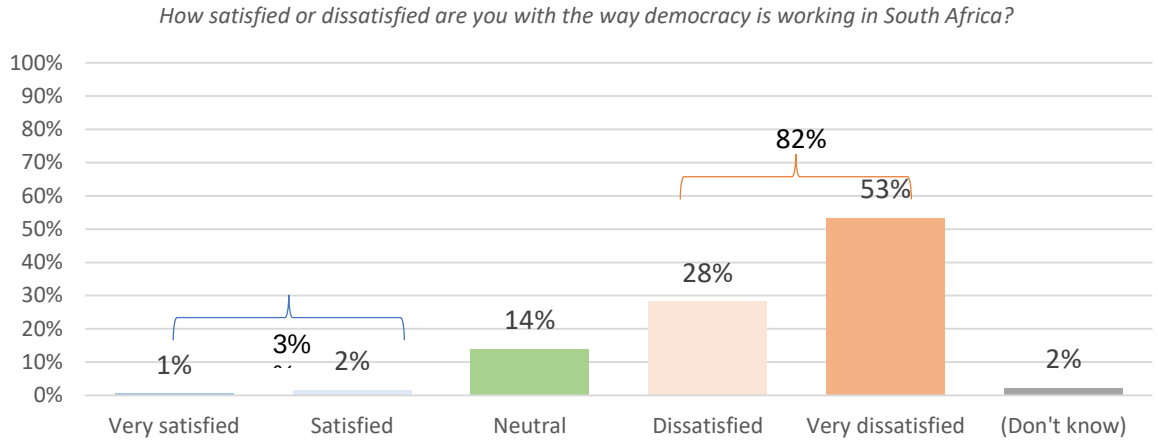
4.1. Democratic evaluations: A case of extremely critical citizens

In assessing youth's attitudes towards democratic participation, it is vital to consider the broader political mood prevailing at the time of the survey. We need, in other words, to consider how the youth evaluated the moral and material health of politics in South Africa. To achieve this, we drew inspiration from a conceptual framework developed by Norris (2011). This multi-dimensional framework helps us organise attitudes towards regime support and the performance of the government. First, we will start at a more generalised level and look at youth evaluations of democratic functioning. After that we will assess attitudes towards specific political institutions and then finally, we will investigate youth appraisals of political leaders in the country.

It is essential to understand how the youth in the study population evaluated the state of democracy in South Africa. To achieve this, we used data from the following question: "[h]ow satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy is working in South Africa?" Survey

participants were obliged to give their response on a standard very satisfied to very dissatisfied scale. This is one of the most common measures used in quantitative political science (Norris, 1999). Responses to the functioning of South African democracy question is provided in **Figure 1** and shows widespread disillusionment and disenchantment amongst the participants. We found that about four-fifths (81%) of the participants were dissatisfied with how democracy was working. Only a minor segment (3%) of the youth were satisfied with the current state of democracy and 14% stated that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Figure 1: Youth satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the current functioning of democracy in South Africa

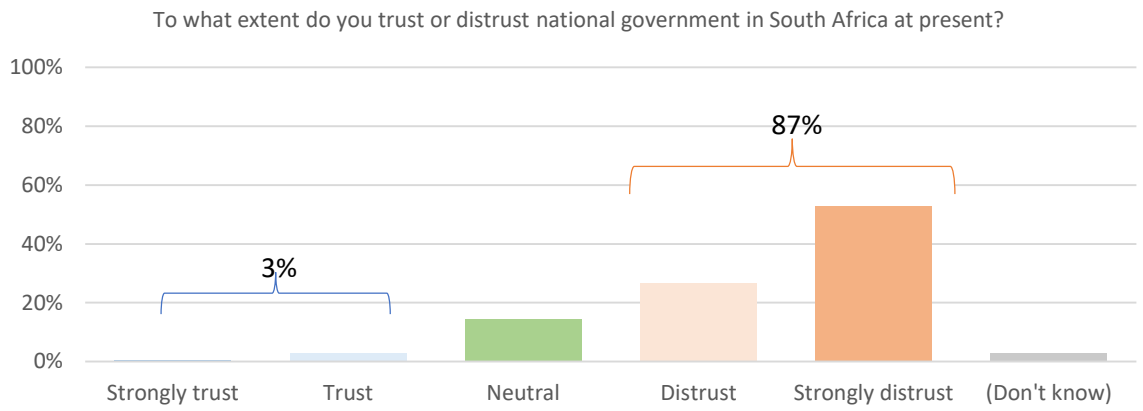


"I feel like the idea of democracy is a good thing, but I feel like the way it is implemented in our country is wrong." – Mariannridge, FGD, 2023
"...before voting they promise to build us houses or some will say we will get jobs, but they end up not keeping to their promises. I've voted 2 or 3 times already and at the end of the day I still don't see any results". – Parent, SNI, 2023
"The councillors would come and promise us a heap of different things. But one would not see any change. So, a lot of young people turn away from voting because we vote but we don't see change; we don't see anything happening." – Peer who has voted, SNI, 2023.
Responses from the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and Social Network Interviews (SNI)

Institutional trust is a crucial component of political decision-making and political behaviour (Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Dalton, 2018; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). To gauge political trust, we included questions on whether respondents trusted or distrusted three different types of political institutions in South Africa at present. The survey participants were required to place their answer on five-point categorical scales that ranged from 1'strongly trust' to 5'strongly distrust'. The institutions in question were: (i) national government, (ii) provincial government and (iii) political parties. The following will discuss whether the youth sample trusted the national government, survey responses to this question are displayed in **Figure 2**. Findings indicate that the vast majority (80%) of the sample stated that they distrusted the national government. A trivial minority (4%) said that they trusted this institution and the rest asserted that they were uncertain of how to answer the question (3%) or gave a neutral response (14%).

"What causes the youth not to have interest in voting, it is how the system is. I think people who are in certain high positions, I can say this without fear, that they are criminals. And I can say that in all departments there is corruption." – Peer who has never voted, SNI, 2023
A response from the Social Network Interviews (SNI)

Figure 2: Youth trust and distrust with the current national government in South Africa



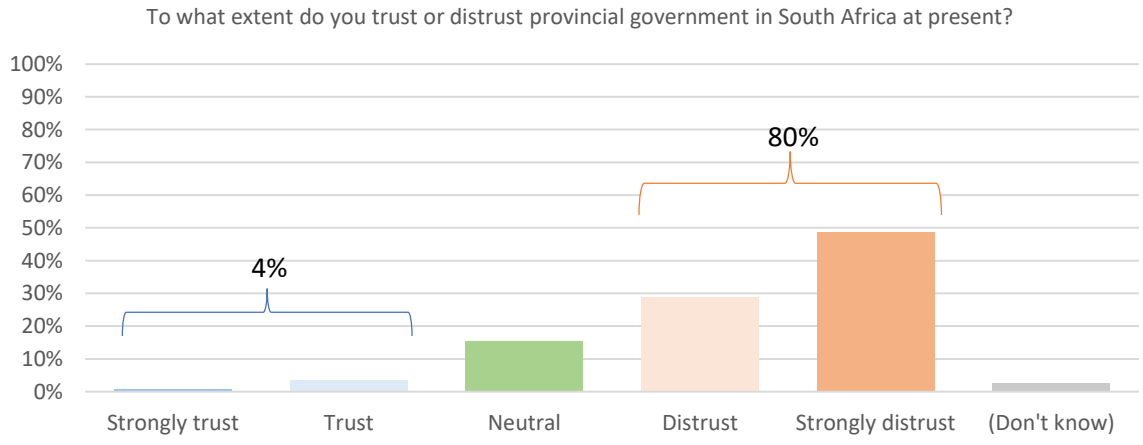
With regards to how the youth felt about their provincial government, a substantial component of the sample had a negative view of their provincial government (**Figure 3**). Roughly four-fifths (79%) asserted that they distrusted this political institution. Only a minor proportion (5%) of the population trusted their provincial government, a finding that resonates with what is presented in **Figure 2**. The remainder said that they did not know how to reply to this query (3%) or stated that they neither trusted nor distrusted the institution (16%). It would be instructive to consider how trust levels differed by province of residence. Using a simple Pearson chi-square test, we found that there was a statistically significant relationship (albeit weak) between these two variables ($chi^2(24) = 50.7$ Pr=0.001). Distrust was found to be high in all provinces and there was no province where most of the youth did not distrust their provincial government. Sample participants in the Western Cape exhibited the lowest level of distrust (66%) while residents of Limpopo had the highest (83%).

"The local government is inefficient in their work." – Umlazi, FGD, 2023

"*...other times, there is no platform to mobilise the community and hold meetings so the councillors could be known, things like that. The councillors are not known. We have been residing here [in this community] for the longest time without knowing who the councillor is*." – Peer who has voted, SNI, 2023

Responses from the qualitative Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and Social Network Interviews (SNI)

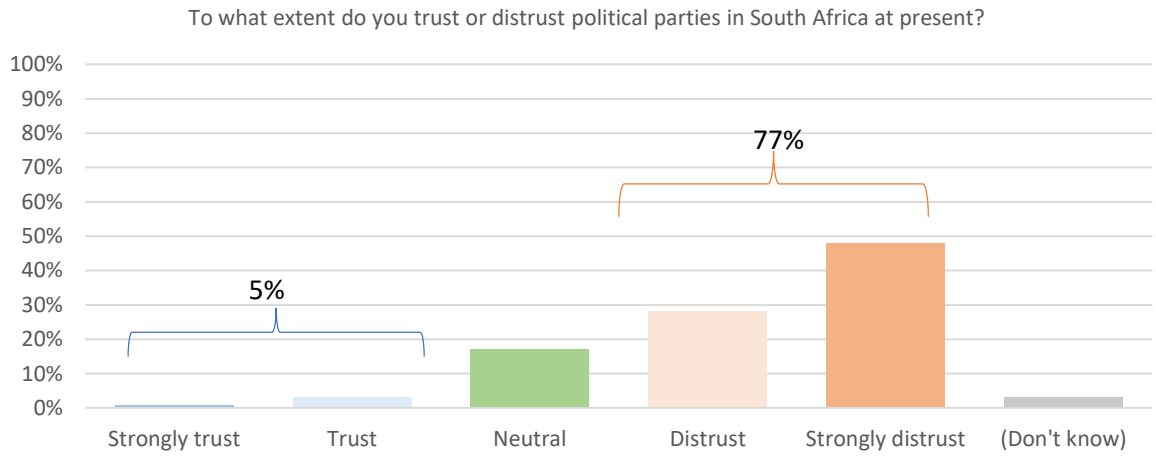
Figure 3: Youth trust and distrust with their current provincial government in South Africa



Finally, we can consider youth trust and distrust in political parties in South Africa at present. Public confidence in this kind of institution has always been low according to previous research conducted by the HSRC (Roberts et al., 2022). Consequently, it is not surprising to find that a large portion of the youth sample does not trust political parties in the country (**Figure 4**). About three-quarters (76%) of the population indicated that they distrusted this kind of institution. A slight minority (3%) reported that they either trusted or strongly trusted political parties. The rest either said that they were unsure of how to respond to the question (3%) or provided a neutral rating on the scale (17%). The pattern of results observed here is quite similar to what was observed when we asked about trust in national government and provincial government.

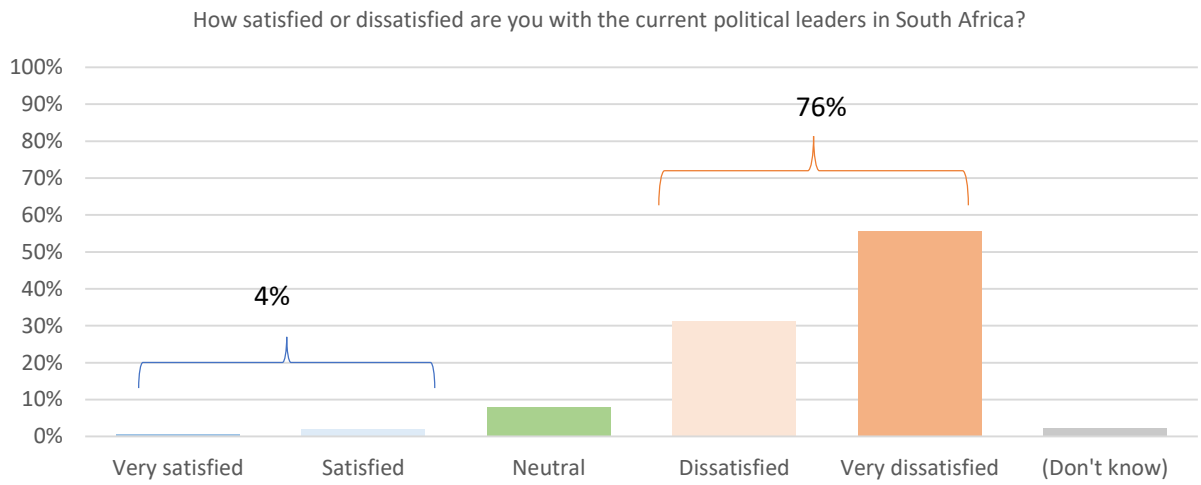
> *"Political parties don't speak the language of young people; what is the language of young people? The language of young people is innovation, is freedom, is engagement. And when political parties speak to young people, they do the same things like Town Hall, Manifesto. Those things don't speak to young people. So, political parties should innovate in terms of how they should engage young people."* – NGO Worker, SNI, 2023. Response from the Social Network Interviews (SNI)

Figure 4: Youth trust and distrust of existing political parties in South Africa



Building on the work provided above, we focus on youth evaluations of current political leaders. The following question was utilised to understand this type of attitude: "[h]ow satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the current political leaders in South Africa?" Survey participants answered on a standard satisfaction scale, similar to the one used in **Figure 1**. Data analysis showed that nearly nine-tenths (87%) of the sample said that they were dissatisfied with their political leaders (**Figure 5**). Only a minimal segment of the population (3%) expressed satisfaction with this group, an unsurprising finding given what we have already observed in this section. A tenth was not capable of answering this inquiry, providing either a neutral response (8%) or replying that they were uncertain of how to answer (2%). Seemingly, most of the participants were deeply dissatisfied with the political status quo and viewed the existing political system with mistrust and suspicion.

Figure 5: Youth satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their current political leaders in South Africa



The results depicted above suggest the existence of considerable cynicism concerning the ability of the political system to make inroads in addressing the country's most pressing societal challenges. However, is distrust of the political system distributed evenly across the different subgroups in our sample? To answer this question, a single scale was produced using respondent replies to the five questions outlined above. We classified the new metric the Political System Support (PSS) Index, and it was ranged 0 to 100 with a high score signifying a high level of support for the existing political system. To test the validity of this index, we computed interitem correlations (covariances) and Cronbach's alpha. The outcome of this test is provided in **Table *2***, showing that the different items loaded well together on a single scale. The mean PSS Index score for the sample was 18 (SD=17.20), showcasing the low level of support for the current political system amongst the participants.

Table 2: Interitem correlations (covariances) and Cronbach alpha coefficients for the sub-components of the Political System Support (PSS) Index

	Obs.	Item-test correlation	Item-rest correlation	Average interitem covariance	Alpha
Satisfied with Democracy	5075	0.743	0.597	0.426	0.829
Satisfied with Political Leaders	5081	0.787	0.666	0.412	0.812
Trust in National Government	5079	0.848	0.744	0.368	0.790
Trust in Provincial Government	5082	0.828	0.708	0.372	0.799
Trust in Political Parties	5078	0.732	0.564	0.422	0.840
Test Scale				0.400	0.846

With the aim of better grasping the nuances of youth discontent with the current political system, mean PSS Index scores across different subgroups are showcased in **Table 3**. To help identify significant differences between groups, ANOVA testing was provided. It was apparent from the analysis that all subgroups represented in the table had low levels of support for the system. However, some groups had much lower levels of support than others. Older youth had lower mean scores than their younger counterparts. Of the four age groups, the 30-35 cohort had the lowest mean score (M=16.1; SD=16.53) on the index. The significance of this difference was verified by a one-way ANOVA test ($F(3, 4933) = 32.1$, $p = 0.000$). Subjective poverty was found to be a significant determinant of whether members of the sample would score low on the PSS Index. Individuals who identified themselves as non-poor had relatively

higher mean scores (M=21.3; SD=18.63) than those who identified as poor (M=17.3; SD=16.85) or very poor (M=13.0; SD=15.74).

Table 3: Mean Political System Support (PSS) Index (0-100) across selected socio-demographic subgroups

			Scheffe Comparison		F	Prob>F
National	18.0	(17.20)				
Gender					10.3	0.001
Male	17.0	(17.02)	ref.			
Female	18.6	(17.22)	1.59	**		
Age Group					32.1	0.000
18-19	24.9	(18.63)	ref.			
20-24	20.6	(18.03)	-4.25	**		
25-29	18.0	(16.84)	-6.90	***		
30-35	16.1	(16.53)	-8.73	***		
Subjective Poverty					40.4	0.000
Non-poor	21.3	(18.69)	ref.			
Just getting by	19.8	(17.20)	-1.47			
Poor	17.3	(16.85)	-3.95	***		
Very poor	13.0	(15.74)	-8.23	***		
Work Status					5.0	0.002
Employed	18.1	(17.29)	ref.			
Unemployed	17.7	(17.14)	-0.42			
Student	21.5	(17.80)	3.33	*		
Other labour inactive	17.2	(16.13)	-0.96			
Educational Attainment					28.8	0.000
Less than Matric	21.9	(18.59)	ref.			
Complete Matric	18.3	(17.18)	-3.69	***		
Post-Matric	15.1	(15.79)	-6.80	***		
Vocational Training	17.6	(17.10)	-4.34	*		
Geotype					2.5	0.057
City	18.2	(17.62)	ref.			
Small Town	18.8	(17.67)	0.65			
Rural Area	17.3	(16.36)	-0.92			
Other	17.6	(17.78)	-0.63			

Notes: 1. Standard deviation in parenthesis; and 2. Reported levels of statistically significant are based on ANOVA testing. The signs *, **, *** indicate that the differences in mean scores are significantly different at the 5 percent ($p<0.05$), 1 percent ($p<0.01$) and 0.5 percent ($p<0.001$) level respectively.

As can be observed in **Table 3**, there appeared to be a linear relationship between system support and educational attainment. The more educated members of the youth exhibited lower index scores than their less educated peers. Those without a matric qualification, in particular, had comparatively high mean index scores (M=21.9; SD=18.59) when compared to those with post-matric (M=15.1; SD=15.79). When significance testing was conducted, no significant differences were found in the table based on geotype. We also investigated whether we could identify mean index score differences by province. The observed differences were quite minor with only marginal dissimilarities noted between provincial residence groups. This conclusion was substantiated by a one-way ANOVA ($F(8, 5075) = 2.3$, $p = 0.017$) test which showed very small disparities between province of residence groups.

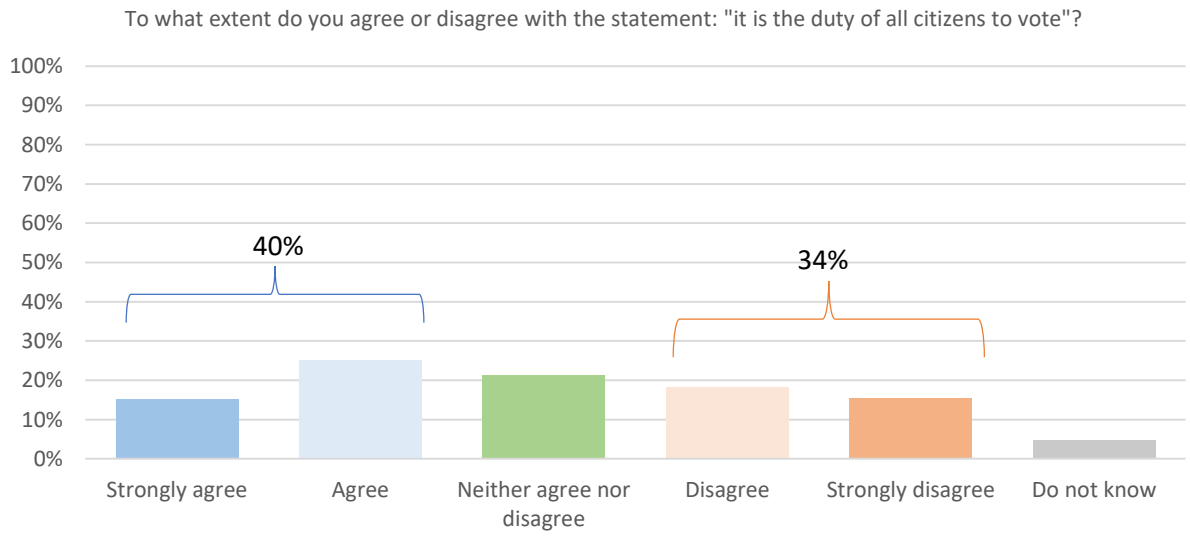
4.2. The perceived value of voting

Political scientists have long been worried about whether people in modern democracies perceived electoral participation as useful and rewarding. Various scholars, particularly those working in the United States and Western Europe (Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Norrs, 1999; Verba et al., 1995), have warned that perceptions of voting efficacy affect democratic functioning.

These scholars have traditionally divided efficacy attitudes into internal and external sub-components (also see Balch, 1974). For those readers who are unaware of the distinction, the latter refers to the perception that the voter can influence and change the political system. External efficacy, on the other hand, can be defined as the perception that political elites and institutions are responsive to voter influence. However, there are other ways to think about voting attitudes, particularly to look at citizen norms around duty. To understand youth perceptions of democracy and elections, a multi-dimensional understanding of voting is crucial. This section will look at attitudes towards voting efficacy and related citizen norms. It will show that the youth are not as apathetic about voting as is typically portrayed, but many view election participation as ineffective.

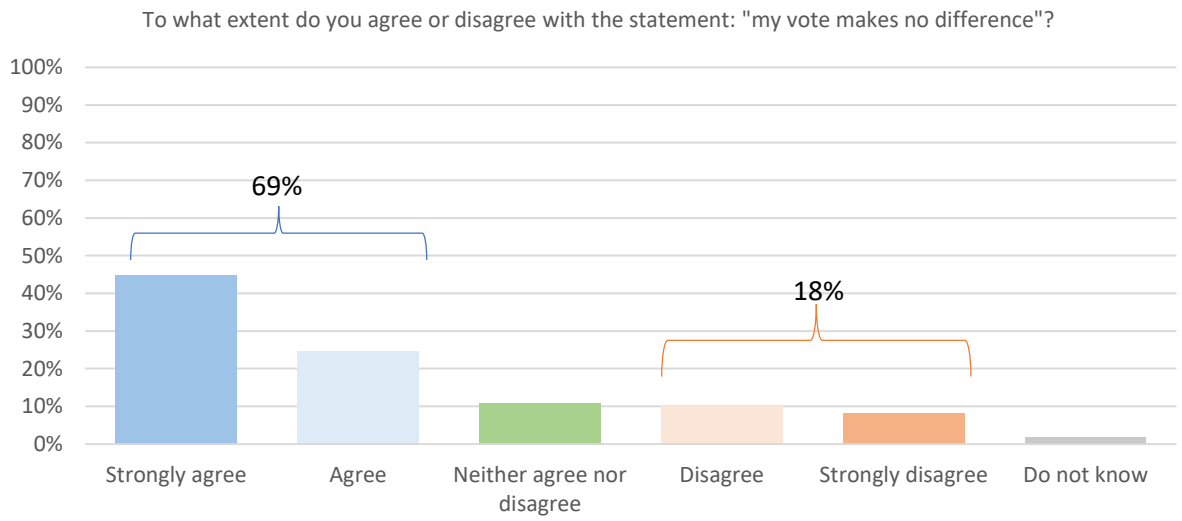
Previous HSRC research by Roberts et al. (2022) has shown that many South African citizens place a high value on the right to vote. A majority believed that this form of political activity is their most fundamental democratic right (also see Struwig et al., 2019). However, we have seen a decline in this kind of belief during the 2021 period and seemingly, the belief in the duty to vote amongst the South African public is not as robust as it was two decades ago (Roberts et al., 2022). In light of this decline, we examined how the participants responded to the following question: [t]o what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement: it is the duty of all citizens to vote?" Two-fifths of all respondents stated that they believed that it was the duty of citizens to vote while 34% disagreed with this statement (**Figure 6**). A fifth was ambivalent about the issue (stating they neither agreed or disagreed that it was their duty to vote) and 5% said that they did not know how to answer.

Figure 6: Percentage of who agreed and disagreed that it was the duty of citizens to vote



A classic method of evaluating internal voter efficacy is to ask prospective voters if they think that their vote makes a difference. Following this convention, the following question was put to the youth sample: "[t]o what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement: my vote makes no difference?" Responses to this question are portrayed in **Figure 7** and show that more than two-thirds (69%) of the sample agreed with the statement. Roughly a tenth (11%) selected a neutral response and approximately a fifth (18%) disagreed with the statement. This represents a worrying finding and suggests that many young South Africans do not see voting as an effective way to change the political system.

Figure 7: Percentage of who agreed and disagreed with the view that voting will make a difference



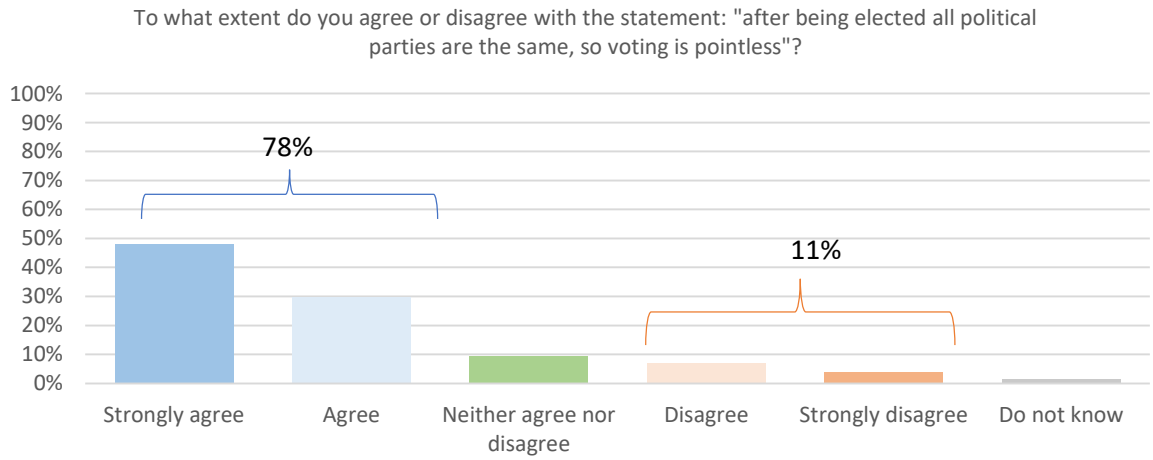
With regards to external efficacy, we examined how young people perceive the options that political parties offer to voters. The following question was put to participants in our study: "[t]o what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement: after being elected all political parties are the same, so voting is pointless?" The participants' responses are outlined in **Figure 8** ,and it is noted that most youth are convinced that political parties do not care about voters. Approximately three-quarters (78%) of the sampled youth agreed that all political parties are the same while only a small share (11%) disagreed. Given the low level of trust in political parties recorded in Section 0, this finding is unsurprising.

"…before voting they promise to build us houses or some will say we will get jobs, but they end up not keeping to their promises. I've voted 2 or 3 times already and at the end of the day I still don't see any results". – Parent, SNI, 2023

"They give us empty promises, reason why there are less people who are voting because they promise us things just to drag us to their party". – Person living with a disability, SNI, 2023

Responses from the Social Network Interviews (SNI)

Figure 8: Percentage of who agreed and disagreed that all political parties are the same



It would be informative to assess the inter-correlations between the different variables discussed above. A Pearson's product-moment correlation matrix was run to assess the relationship between these measures. There was a moderate (and positive) statistically

significant correlation between the two efficiency variables. Participants had a greater likelihood of agreeing with the internal efficacy statement if they agreed with the external efficacy statement ($r(5074) = 0.465$ $p<0.001$). Consider, for example, that 79% of those who agreed with the internal efficacy statement also agreed with the external efficacy statement. On the other hand, responses to the civic duty questions were not strongly correlated with the other two efficiency variables. This seems to suggest that youth's attitudes towards the civic duty to vote are not informed by the evaluations of the efficiency of voting.

An important aim of this study is to investigate how attitudes towards voting differ across selected subgroups within the youth sample. To compare electoral attitudes, each of the three items discussed above was transformed into 0-100 agreement scales. The higher value on each scale specifies the degree of agreement with the statement. Mean scores for each scale are provided in **Table 4** and the results indicate that little subgroup variation can be observed. This is especially true for attitudes towards voting as a civic norm. Looking at the efficacy measures, some minor variations can be detected. The largest level of variance can be noted amongst subjective poverty groups. The non-poor expressed lower levels of agreement with the efficiency statements than other groups. One-way ANOVA tests demonstrate that these observed variances are significantly different for the internal ($F(3, 5066) = 7.7$, $p = 0.000$) and external ($F(3, 5069) = 6.2$, $p = 0.000$) efficiency measures.

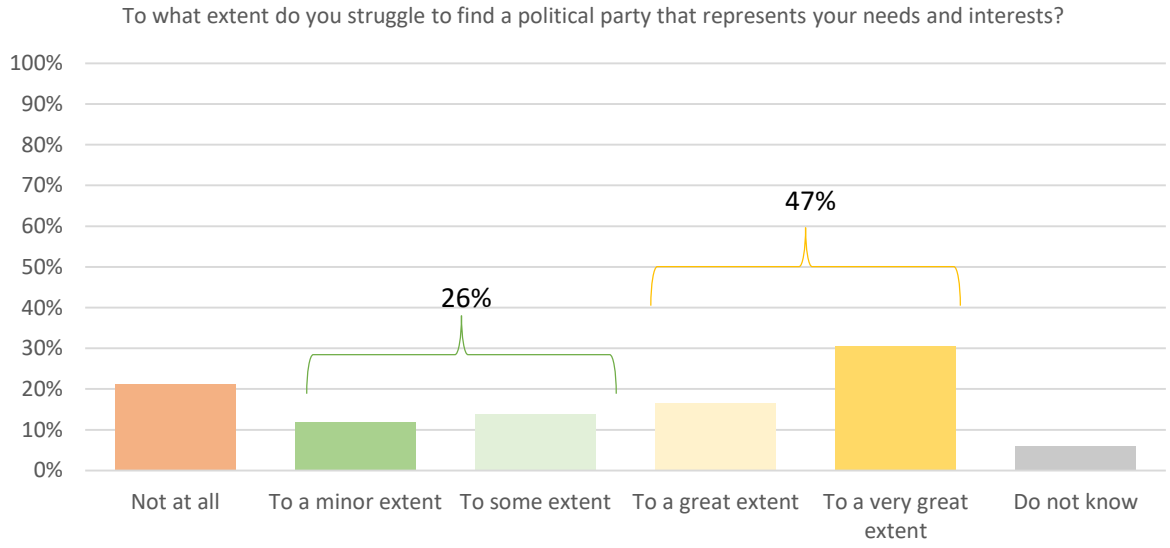
Table 4: Percentage who agreed with the voting attitudes questions across selected socio-demographic subgroups

	Voting Makes No Difference		All Political Are the Same		Voting is a Civic Duty	
National	69	(0.648)	78	(0.583)	40	(0.689)
Gender						
Male	70	(1.047)	77	(0.964)	42	(1.130)
Female	69	(0.832)	79	(0.737)	39	(0.878)
Age Group						
18-19	67	(2.783)	67	(2.768)	42	(2.914)
20-24	69	(1.488)	75	(1.389)	41	(1.581)
25-29	69	(1.229)	79	(1.078)	39	(1.293)
30-35	71	(0.964)	79	(0.856)	40	(1.039)
Subjective Poverty						
Non-poor	61	(2.179)	72	(2.014)	41	(2.200)
Just getting by	69	(1.008)	77	(0.910)	41	(1.070)
Poor	71	(1.159)	79	(1.043)	39	(1.242)
Very poor	73	(1.479)	81	(1.297)	40	(1.634)
Work Status						
Employed	68	(1.468)	77	(1.325)	45	(1.563)
Unemployed	70	(0.770)	79	(0.684)	38	(0.819)
Student	67	(2.581)	69	(2.542)	44	(2.729)
Other labour inactive	67	(3.466)	75	(3.172)	40	(3.607)
Educational Attainment						
Less than Matric	68	(1.589)	75	(1.467)	42	(1.678)
Complete Matric	71	(0.878)	78	(0.801)	40	(0.951)
Post-Matric	67	(1.265)	79	(1.096)	40	(1.315)
Vocational Training	71	(3.801)	78	(3.437)	37	(4.033)
Geotype						
City	67	(1.296)	77	(1.161)	41	(1.356)
Small town	68	(1.176)	77	(1.058)	44	(1.251)
Rural Area	72	(1.036)	80	(0.933)	37	(1.120)
Other	68	(2.672)	75	(2.485)	37	(2.768)

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Seemingly, a significant proportion of the sample did not feel that political parties were looking after their interests. At this stage, it would be informative to assess whether the participants felt that they were able to build a political identity by associating with a political party. The survey participants were asked "[t]o what extent do you struggle to find a political party that represents your needs and interests?" It was apparent to the research team that most respondents struggled to find a political party that represents their needs (**Figure 9**). Nearly half of participants stated that they experienced this problem to either a great extent (17%) or a very great extent (31%). A significant segment (26%) of the population asserted that they faced this issue to a lesser extent. Only a minority (21%) said that they did not experience this kind of struggle at all. Overall, it seems that most of the participants were unable to find a political home in the country.

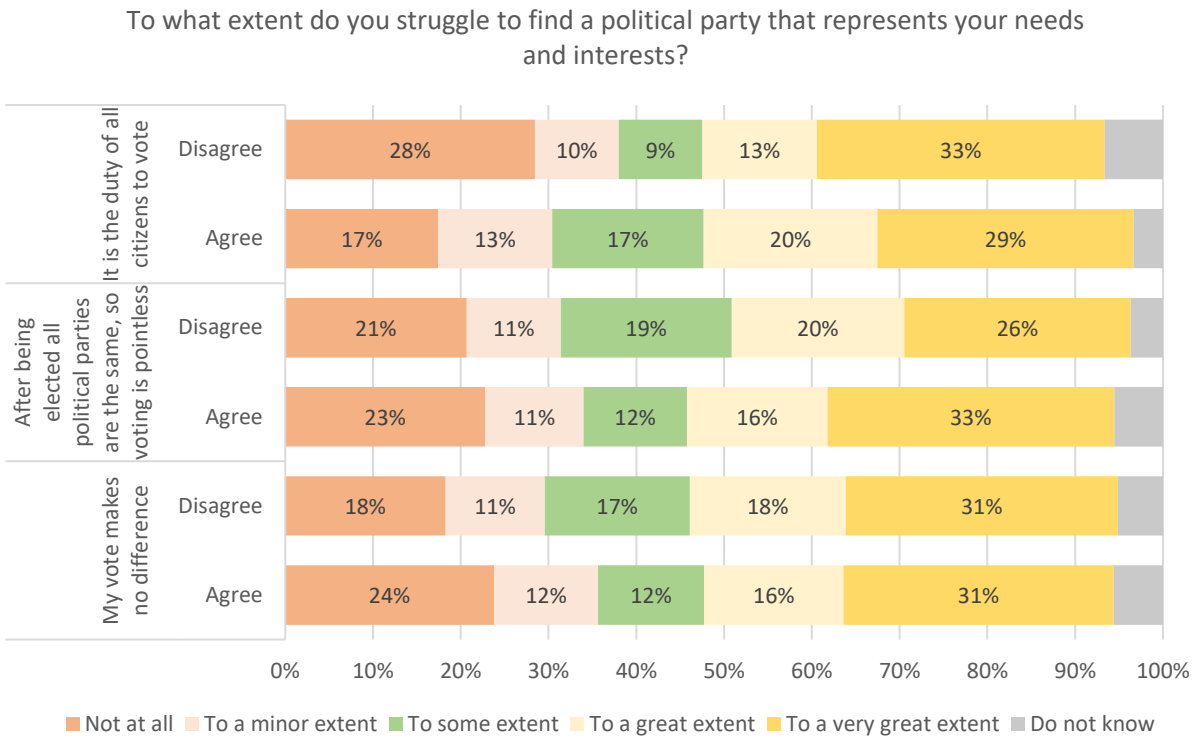
Figure 9: Percentage of who struggled to find a political party that represent their demands and requirements



When compared to those who did not think that voting was a civic duty, people who believed that electoral participation was a civic responsibility (more common among the educated and economically well off) were more likely to struggle to find a political identity (**Figure 10**). For instance, 28% of those who disagreed with the statement in **Figure 6** said that they did not struggle to find a political party to represent them. This finding can be contrasted with 17% of those who agreed with the statement in **Figure 6**. How respondents felt about their political identity was discovered to be related to how they thought about voting. If a person agreed with the statement showcased in **Figure 7**, they were also more likely to battle to find a political party to represent them. As can be observed from **Figure 10**, if a young individual thought that all political parties were the same, they were much more likely to struggle to find a political party to represent their interests. The relationship between these two variables was not that robust, however[2].

[2] Although the relationship is statistically significant, an ANOVA test showed that the size of the correlation was not substantial. The mean square is 1765.2 ($F(3,5072) = 36.0$, $p = 0.000$), the R^2 for the model was 0.021 (the adjusted R^2 was just 0.020).

Figure 10: Percentage of who struggled to find a political party that represent their needs, by value of voting statements (%)



4.3. Perceived importance of electoral participation

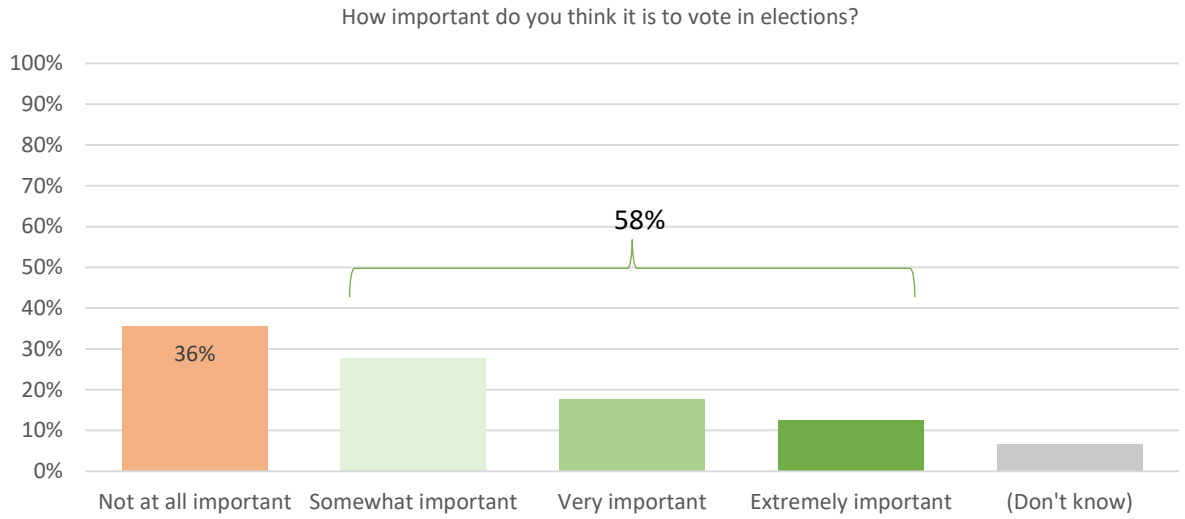
We provided a detailed analysis of youth attitudes towards the utility of voting in Section 4.2. In this section, we change our focus and concentrate on the perceived importance of electoral participation. Scholars (such as Almond & Verba, 1963, Dalton, 2018; Norris & Inglehart, 2019) consider positive attitudes towards voting as essential for the proper functioning of democracy. If people saw electoral participation as unimportant, this would undermine democratic legitimacy, weaken public cooperation with political authorities and reduce voter turnout. Consequently, it is important to investigate youth *attitudes* towards electoral participation. This section will specifically examine what is driving perceptions of the importance of electoral participation amongst the youth. It will test whether attitudes explored in the previous section impact on the perceived significance of voting in government elections.

As a general indicator of the perceived value of electoral participation, respondents were asked how important they thought voting in elections was. Responses were captured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from "extremely important" to "not at all important". Responses to this question are illustrated in **Figure 11**, and the results show that a majority thought this was a worthwhile activity. Only about a third (36%) of the respondents said that electoral participation was unimportant. However, the sample was quite divided on how much importance their ascribed to this kind of political behaviour. A significant segment (28%) of the

> *"...as people we need change. Hopefully my vote will count, and we will have another party in favour, praying so. So that's why I want to vote."* – Mariannridge, FGD, 2023
> Response from a Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

population rate it quite low while 18% said that it was very important and 13% told us that it was tremendously important.

Figure 11: Perceived importance of participation in government elections



> *"I still have hope shame, that's why every time when it is time to vote, I vote, ever since I had the right to vote. I go even if every time I get disappointed. I am always scared that what if my vote is the only one that would bring change."* – Umlazi, FGD, 2023
> Response from a Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Are levels of importance ascribed to electoral participation uniform for all major socio-demographic groups in our sample or are there significant variation between groups? To answer this question, responses to the important question are presented across different subgroups in **Table 5**. The reader should note that, for ease of interpretation, the categories 'very' and 'extremely' important have been merged. As can be observed, there are some interesting subgroup variations within the table. We can discern a substantial age group difference with young people more likely to value election participation than their older peers. When compared to the 18-19 (22%; SE=2.433) and 20-24 (30%; SE=1.467) age groups, the 30-35 age group (40%; SE=1.038) was more likely to state that voting was not important. We verified that there was a statistically significant association between these two variables using a standard Pearson chi-square test ($chi^2(9) = 75.2$ Pr=0.000).

There were some noteworthy differences by work group status in **Table 5**, those outside employment and education were discovered to be more negative on this issue than their counterparts. Individuals who were unemployed were especially less likely to view voting as important. Striking attitudinal variations were found between subjective poverty groups. Those identifying as poor were more negative about electoral participation than their more affluent counterparts. Respondents who were non-poor were somewhat less likely to view voting as unimportant (27%; SE=1.989) than those who identified themselves as poor (40%; SE=1.247) or very poor (49%; SE=1.672). It was apparent that there were only marginal differences amongst educational attainment groups in the table. Utilising a Pearson chi-square test ($chi^2(9) = 7.7$ Pr=0.564), we were able to confirm that there was a statistically significant relationship between these two variables. Minor differences were observed

between urban and rural groups with rural dwellers being somewhat more negative on the importance of voting.

Table 5: Percentage of who valued and did not value participation in government elections by selected subgroups

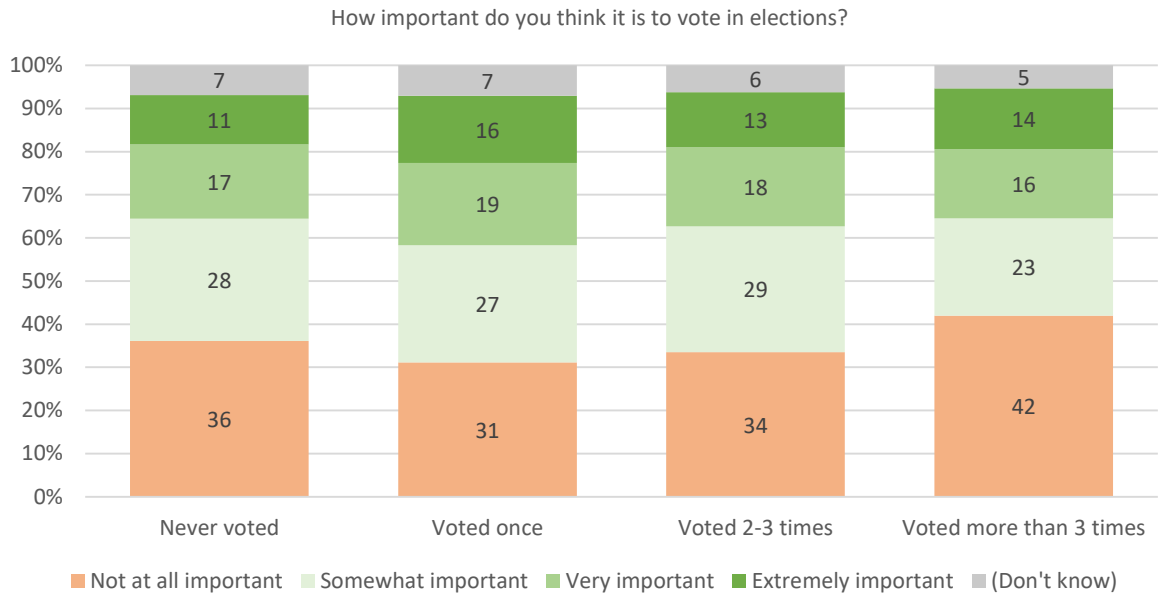
	Voting is not important		Voting is somewhat important		Voting is very/ extremely important	
National	36	(0.672)	28	(0.629)	30	(0.644)
Gender						
Male	38	(1.111)	27	(1.012)	29	(1.040)
Female	34	(0.852)	28	(0.811)	30	(0.829)
Age Group						
18-19	22	(2.433)	38	(2.865)	35	(2.824)
20-24	30	(1.467)	32	(1.497)	33	(1.507)
25-29	34	(1.254)	29	(1.205)	29	(1.204)
30-35	40	(1.038)	24	(0.906)	29	(0.961)
Subjective Poverty						
Non-poor	27	(1.989)	33	(2.108)	34	(2.127)
Just getting by	28	(0.980)	33	(1.026)	31	(1.007)
Poor	40	(1.247)	24	(1.087)	29	(1.151)
Very poor	49	(1.672)	18	(1.275)	27	(1.485)
Work Status						
Employed	32	(1.465)	28	(1.415)	34	(1.487)
Unemployed	37	(0.814)	27	(0.750)	29	(0.762)
Student	27	(2.446)	34	(2.604)	31	(2.537)
Other labour inactive	37	(3.554)	20	(2.949)	32	(3.436)
Educational Attainment						
Less than Matric	36	(1.636)	26	(1.485)	30	(1.558)
Complete Matric	35	(0.928)	28	(0.869)	30	(0.889)
Post-Matric	35	(1.281)	29	(1.218)	30	(1.231)
Vocational Training	39	(4.077)	27	(3.716)	28	(3.774)
Geographic location						
City	35	(1.316)	27	(1.224)	32	(1.284)
Small town	31	(1.165)	30	(1.153)	33	(1.187)
Rural Area	39	(1.131)	27	(1.029)	27	(1.025)
Other	39	(2.791)	25	(2.474)	27	(2.546)

Notes: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; and 2. 'Do not know' responses are not reported.

"I still have hope shame, that's why every time when it is time to vote, I vote, ever since I had the right to vote. I go even if every time I get disappointed. I am always scared that what if my vote is the only one that would bring change." – Umlazi, FGD, 2023

Does a person's past election experience shape how they feel about the importance of voting? The initial analysis of the response to this question seems to show a moderate relationship between the two variables. As can be observed from **Figure 12**, if a young individual had voted before then they were more likely to think that voting was important. But this was found to be much more applicable for people who had only voted once than those who had voted more than once. We found that 42% of those who had voted more than three times stated that election participation was not important at all. This is seven percentage points above the sample average and 11 points higher than first time voters. Indeed, statistical tests shows that the relationship between voting history and the perceived importance of voting was weak. An ANOVA test showed that the size of the correlation was statistically insignificant and the mean square was 8.1 ($F(3, 5056) = 2.5$, $p = 0.057$), the R^2 for the model was 0.001.

Figure 12: Perceived importance of participation in government elections by voting history



From what we have observed so far in this section, clearly, most of the participants were divided on whether electoral participation was important. To help understand this polarisation, we need to look at how attitudes towards voting influence perceptions of the importance of electoral participation. We singled out four voting attitude variables that were discussed in Section 4.2 to be assessed in this section. Bivariate testing would be an insufficient method to evaluate whether these four variables affected how our sample thought about the value of participating in elections. So, we utilised a multivariate analysis to identify these relationships, employing an ordered logistic regression approach to assess their predictive power. To test the four identified independent variables, five different regression models were computed.

At first, the various voting attitude variables were examined sequentially in four separate models with background controls included[3]. As a final robustness test, a model was produced that includes all four variables as well as the diverse socio-demographic background variables. All these regression models will treat as missing respondents who answered 'don't know' when asked about the importance of voting. A negative coefficient in our models signified a negative association between the independent variable and the perceived value of voting. To complete the multivariate analysis, the four voting attitude measures discussed in Section 4.2 had to be altered. Details on the formation of these variables are outlined below:

Party Struggle: Responses from the question "[t]o what extent do you struggle to find a political party that represents your needs and interests?" were used to create this variable: The scale was ranged from 1 to 5. The higher value denotes the greater frequency with which the respondent had trouble finding a political party to identify with. All 'don't know' responses were treated as missing.

[3] All models control for gender, population group, age, educational attainment, employment status, subjective poverty, political affiliation, geotype and provincial residence as well as survey wave.

Internal Efficacy: Answers to the following question were utilised to construct this measure: "[t]o what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement about voting: My vote makes no difference?" The scale was ranged from 1 to 5 with the higher value indicating the greater level of agreement with the statement. 'Don't know' responses to this question were coded as missing.

External Efficacy: Answers to the question "[t]o what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement about voting: After being elected all political parties are the same, so voting is pointless?" were employed to produce this measure. The scale was ranged from 1 to 5 with the lower value indicating the greater level of disagreement with the statement. If a respondent answered 'don't know' to this question, that answer was coded as missing.

Citizen Duty: We used the question "[t]o what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement about voting: It is the duty of all citizens to vote?" to craft this variable. The scale was ranged from 1 to 5 with the higher value representing the view that election participation was an essential duty for all citizens. As with previous variables, all 'don't know' responses were treated as missing.

We generated five models for this investigation and the outcomes of these models are depicted in **Table 6**. The efficacy measures had a statistically significant (and positive) correlation with the dependent variable. Viewing voting as effective, in other words, improved the log odds of perceiving electoral participation as important. However, of all the independent variables under review, our 'citizen duty' scale had the strongest association with the dependent variable. The observed coefficient was a little weaker in Model IV (r=0.748; SE=0.025; p=0.000) when compared to Model V (r=0.681; SE=0.027; p=0.000). The 'party struggle' variable, by contrast, was the weakest correlate of the dependent. The correlation size was similar in both Model I (r=0.123; SE=0.018; p=0.000) and Model V (r=0.122; SE=0.019; p=0.000), demonstrating its weakness as a predictor.

Table 6: Ordered logistic regression on the main predictors of sample attitudes towards the importance of voting

	Model I		**Model II**		**Model III**		**Model IV**		**Model V**	
Party Struggle	0.123	***							0.122	***
	(0.018)								(0.019)	
Internal Efficacy			0.360	***					0.203	***
			(0.021)						(0.025)	
External Efficacy					0.396	***			0.202	***
					(0.025)				(0.029)	
Citizen Duty							0.748	***	0.681	***
							(0.025)		(0.027)	
Number of obs.	4550		4834		4838		4833		4533	
LR chi^2	171	(29)	428	(25)	399	(25)	1164	(25)	1317	(28)
Prob>chi^2	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	
Pseudo R^2	0.015		0.034		0.032		0.094		0.112	

Notes: 1. Positive coefficients indicate positive evaluations of election participation; 2. Robust standard errors in parenthesis; and 3. Significance is denoted as follows: * p<0.05, **p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

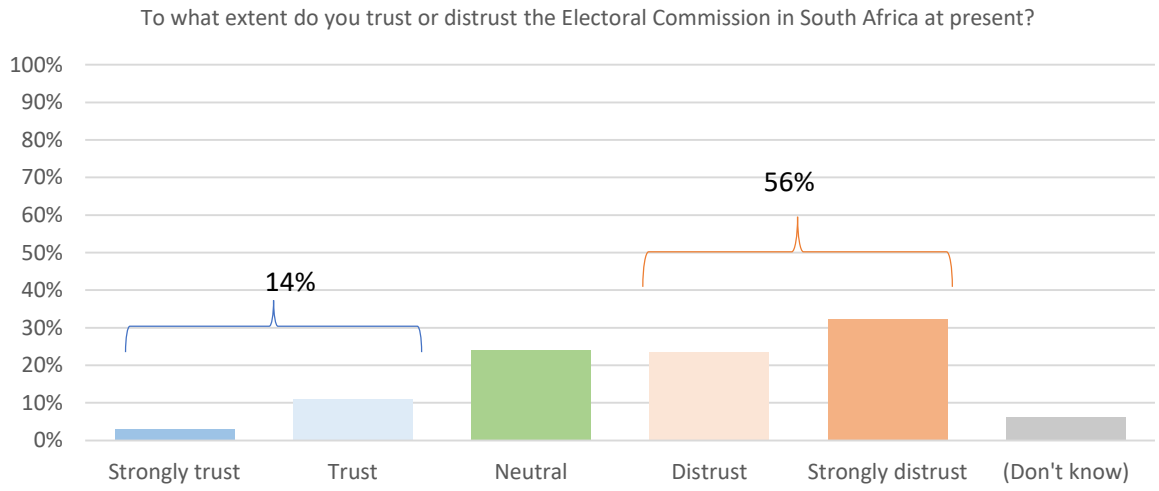
After reviewing the outcomes depicted in **Table 6**, it is apparent that perceptions about the importance of electoral participation were informed by the voting attitudes discussed in Section 4.2. Youth perceptions about political parties and efficiency of voting were found to be influential and changing these kinds of perceptions would have a positive impact.

However, it was clear that a sense of duty was, by a considerable margin, the most important correlate in our models. This suggests that young people do not *have to* have a favourable view of political parties to judge elections to be important. Strengthening the citizen norm of election duty amongst the young population should improve how this cohorts feels about democratic participation.

4.4. Trust in the Electoral Commission

Previous HSRC research has documented a decline in public trust in the South African Electoral Commission. This downward trend began in the early 2010s and seems to have accelerated after 2016 (Roberts et al., 2022). This attitudinal change coincided with a considerable decline in trust in politicians, political parties and national government amongst the masses. Widespread distrust of central democratic institutions (such as election management bodies) can undermine democracy (Dalton, 2004; Norris, 2011; Dalton & Welzel, 2014). Given this past attitudinal research, it is critical to investigate youth trust in the country's Electoral Commission. This section will examine this issue and look specifically at how this group is affected by the low level of institutional confidence noted in Section 0. It will show that dissatisfaction with the current political status quo has negatively affected youth attitudes towards the Commission.

Figure 13: Youth trust and distrust with the Electoral Commission of South Africa



Levels of trust and distrust in the Electoral Commission are depicted in **Figure 13** for the youth sample. As is apparent from the figure, a majority (56%) of the sample distrusted the Commission. Less than a fifth (14%) of the participants reported that they could trust the election management body. This was much lower than what we observed for the national population in 2021 when 43% of the adult population told fieldworkers that they trusted the election management body (Roberts et al., 2022). A significant proportion (24%) of the sample gave a neutral evaluation and 6% were uncertain of how to answer the question. Does a person's voting history influence whether they trust the Commission? The initial analysis does not seem to show a reliable and valid association between election experience and trust. Although those who had never voted were found to be more likely to trust the organisation more, the scale of this difference was quite marginal[4].

[4] An ANOVA test showed that the size of the correlation was statistically insignificant and the mean square is 4.6 ($F(3,5064) = 2.1$, $p = 0.105$), the R^2 for the model was 0.001.

To gain greater insight into youth attitudes towards the Electoral Commission, we assessed how different socio-demographic groupings within our sample felt about the Commission. This will allow us to determine which groups had more faith in the institution. The results of this subgroup analysis are portrayed in **Table 7** and show only moderate variance between groups. None of the selected groups were found to express a high level of trust in the Commission. But some interesting variations could be observed, especially in terms of age group. Of the four age groups, the 18-19 cohort had the lowest level of distrust and the 30-35 cohort the highest. As such, women were moderately more trusting of this institution than men. We confirmed the statistical significance of the relationship here using a Pearson chi-square test ($chi^2(3) = 25.9$ Pr=0.000).

> "*When we talk about IEC, I can say I trust them, and I don't trust them at the same time. I don't trust their numbers. They are snitches for the councillors.*" – Umlazi, FGD, 2023
> *"For me I am 70/30. I might say, because of the history of IEC, I can say seventy percent I trust the process but trusting the process does not mean I agree with the process."* – Umlazi, FGD, 2023
> *"I do not trust IEC 100% because it has a relationship with the government"* – Umlazi, FGD, 2023
> Responses from Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

Table 7: Percentage of who trusted and distrusted in the Electoral Commission by selected subgroups

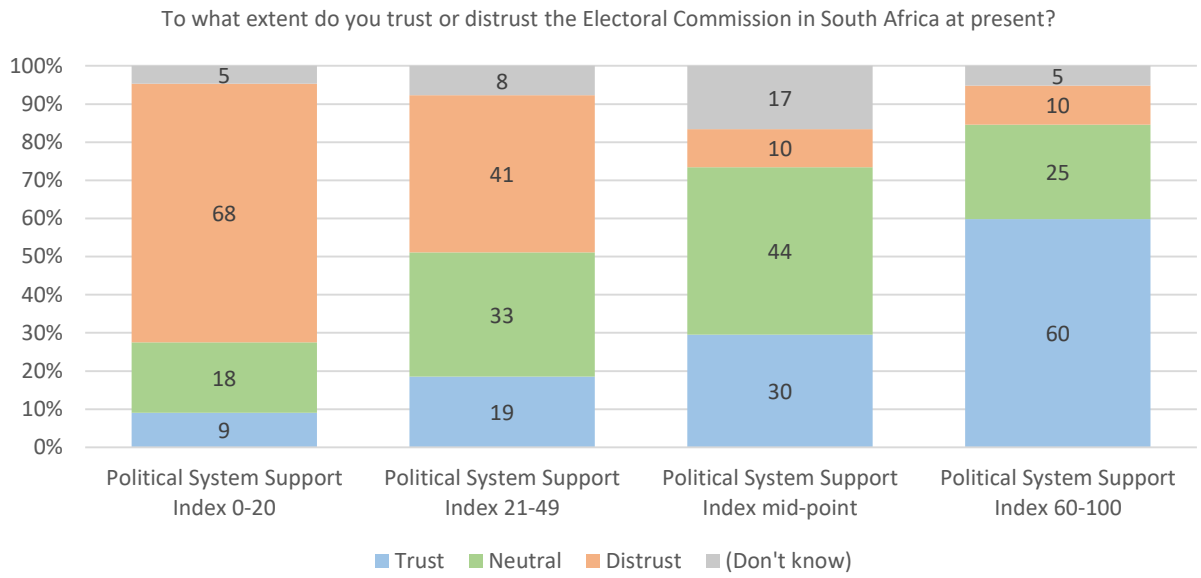
	Trust		Neutral		Distrust	
National	14	(0.488)	24	(0.600)	56	(0.697)
Gender						
Male	17	(0.858)	24	(0.981)	52	(1.140)
Female	12	(0.593)	24	(0.768)	58	(0.889)
Age Group						
18-19	14	(2.056)	30	(2.694)	49	(2.946)
20-24	15	(1.134)	25	(1.388)	53	(1.599)
25-29	15	(0.936)	23	(1.118)	56	(1.312)
30-35	14	(0.728)	23	(0.895)	57	(1.047)
Subjective Poverty						
Non-poor	17	(1.697)	28	(2.001)	50	(2.238)
Just getting by	14	(0.748)	27	(0.968)	53	(1.084)
Poor	13	(0.854)	22	(1.056)	58	(1.253)
Very poor	15	(1.185)	17	(1.268)	62	(1.621)
Work Status						
Employed	17	(1.178)	25	(1.350)	53	(1.565)
Unemployed	13	(0.572)	24	(0.719)	56	(0.834)
Student	14	(1.906)	23	(2.297)	57	(2.714)
Other labour inactive	11	(2.339)	23	(3.114)	56	(3.662)
Educational Attainment						
Less than Matric	15	(1.204)	26	(1.486)	52	(1.697)
Complete Matric	15	(0.684)	24	(0.827)	55	(0.964)
Post-Matric	13	(0.908)	23	(1.120)	59	(1.318)
Vocational Training	10	(2.555)	31	(3.852)	54	(4.167)
Geotype						
City	14	(0.964)	24	(1.182)	56	(1.365)
Small Town	15	(0.895)	25	(1.096)	54	(1.255)
Rural Area	14	(0.805)	23	(0.976)	57	(1.148)
Other	9	(1.677)	22	(2.355)	57	(2.836)

Notes: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; and 2. 'Do not know' responses are not reported.

Seemingly, there is a weak relationship between educational attainment and trust in the Electoral Commission. More educated individuals were found to be somewhat more likely to express mistrust than their less educated counterparts. Subjective poverty was also found to be a significant determinant of whether members of the youth sample distrusted the Electoral

Commission. Participants who self-identified as non-poor were less likely to distrust the organisation (50%; SE=2.238) than those who identified as poor (58%; SE=1.253) or very poor (62%; SE=1.621). Few significant differences were found based on geotype. We also investigated whether we could identify differences in institutional trust by province. Observed differences were quite minor but some interesting dissimilarities could be noted. Sample participants in the Eastern Cape (20%; SE=3.669) and Limpopo (19%; SE=2.697) were more likely to trust the Commission than other provincial residence groups.

Figure 14: Trust and distrust in the Electoral Commission by the Political System Support (PSS) Index categories



Evaluations of the Electoral Commission appear to be correlated with whether young people support the present political system. This can be observed if we examine how trust in the Commission is associated with the PSS Index (the construction of this index is presented in Section 0) in **Figure 14**. Less than a tenth (9%) of those who had a low index score (between 0 and 20) said that they trusted the Commission and 68% of this group told us that they distrusted the election management body. Youth who had a PSS Index score of 60 and above, on the other hand, were more favourably predisposed towards the organisation. Three-fifths of this group said that they trusted the Electoral Commission while only a small minority (10%) stated they distrusted the organisation[5]. By means of a Pearson chi-square test, we established that the association between these two variables both robust and statistically significant ($chi^2(24) = 779.8$ Pr=0.000).

Clearly, youth confidence in the Electoral Commission is associated with political dissatisfaction with the government and political parties. Further robustness checks confirm this finding, demonstrating that confidence in the Commission is strongly associated with a broad sense of disenchantment around democratic functioning in South Africa. An ANOVA test showed that the correlation between trust in the Commission and the PSS Index was statistically significant. The mean square is 75683.2 ($F(5,5071) = 341.9$, $p = 0.000$), the R^2 for

[5] This relationship can be clearly seen if we assessed mean differences on the continuous scale. Those respondents who said that they trusted the Commission scored 29.3 (SE=0.777) on the PSS Index, ten points above the sample average.

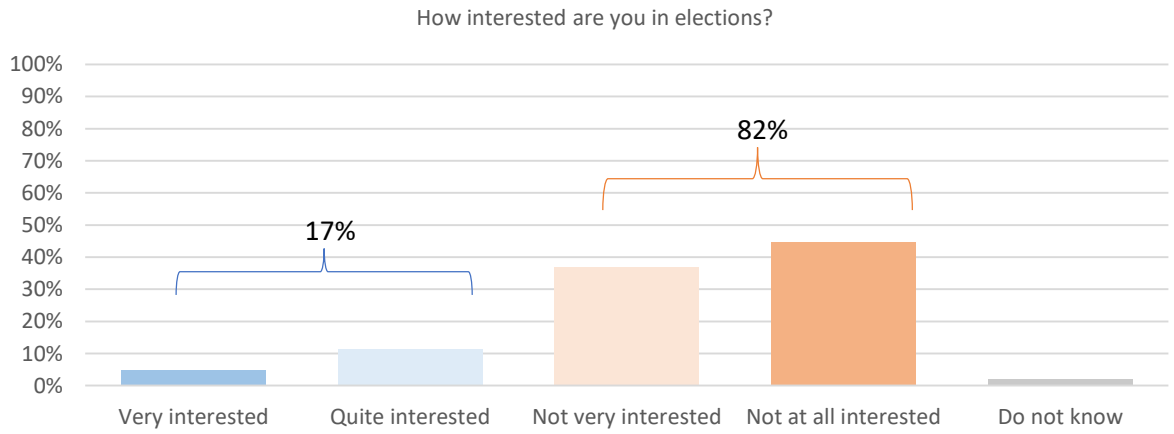
the model was 0.252. This is consistent with prior research conducted by the HSRC that shows that attitudes towards the election management body are shaped (to a considerable degree) by support for the current political system (Struwig et al., 2019). Additional testing revealed the sub-component of the PPS Index that had the strongest relationship with trust in the Commission. A Pearson's product-moment correlation matrix showed that the most robust relationship was with trust in national ($r(5070) = 0.408$ $p<0.001$) and provincial ($r(5072) = 0.414$ $p<0.001$) government. In conclusion, it is clear that attitudes towards the Commission are strongly informed by general evaluations of the country's political system.

4.5. Electoral attitudes: Shattering stereotypes of apathy

Section 4.4 shows that a majority of the youth sample did not trust the Electoral Commission of South Africa. This raises serious doubts about whether the youth in the study sample viewed elections in the country as free and fair. As a number of political scientists have attested, the elections integrity is the cornerstone of any modern democracy (Dahl, 2000). For this reason, election freeness and fairness represent the primary constitutional mandate of the South African Electoral Commission. This section will look at youth attitudes towards election integrity in the country. It will show that a majority of the sample does not believe that recent government elections in South Africa are free and fair. The section will also assess why the youth hold these views and this will require looking at other election attitudes. First, we will examine how interested the youth were in government elections. Then, perceptions about voting irregularities will be investigated.

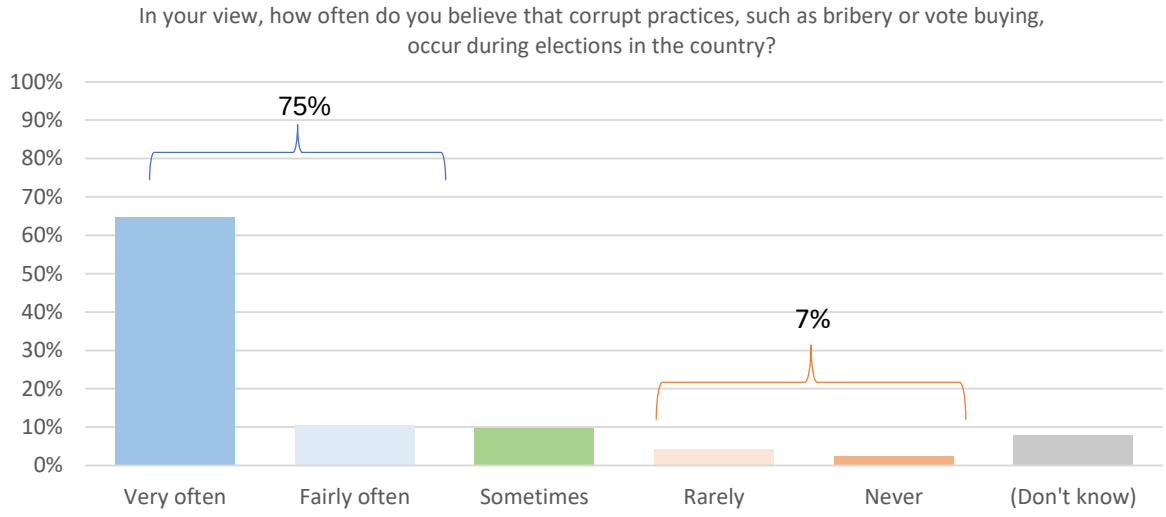
Interest in elections can act as a motivator to acquire political knowledge which helps people make rational choices about democratic participation (Wattenberg, 2015). Understanding the level of attention to which the youth give the elections is key to our comprehension of this cohort's opinions about democracy and the electoral process. To capture election interest in the sample, participants were asked, "[h]ow interested are you in elections". Responses were captured on a four-point scale which ranged from 1'very interested' to 5'not at all interested'. The results are presented in **Figure 15**, showing that only a minority of the sample was attentive to the electoral arena. Slightly less than a fifth (17%) indicated a high or fair level of interest while the majority claimed to be 'not very' (37%) or 'not at all' (45%) interested in elections.

Figure 15: Interest and disinterest in elections in South Africa among youth that plan to abstain or are uncertain about participation in NPE 2024



During the modern period, the election process in South Africa has been free of the kind of blatant irregularities[6] that characterise elections in other parts of the African continent. However, previous HSRC research has shown that a significant proportion of the citizen populations thinks that election procedure irregularities are commonplace (Roberts et al., 2022). Understanding mass attitudes towards violations to voting procedures is very important. If people perceived voting irregularities as commonplace, this will undermine election legitimacy and may lead to significant political disruptions (Hafner-Burton et al., 2018; Moehler, 2009; von Borzyskowski & Kuhn, 2020). If voters (and citizens more generally) perceive elections as free of irregularities, on the other hand, they are more likely to support election results and have a favourable view of the democratic system (also see Norris, 2004). To assess whether the study sample thought voting irregularities were common in the country, the following question was used: "[i]n your view, how often do you believe that corrupt practices, such as bribery or vote buying, occur during elections in the country?" Sample responses to this question are depicted in **Figure 16** and show that the participants thought that voting irregularities were very common.

Figure 16: Perceived frequency of voting irregularities during South African elections



Approximately two-thirds (65%) of the participants thought that irregularities like vote buying occurred very often and 10% said that it happened often. Only a small minority believed it takes place either sometimes (10%) or rarely (4%). Less than a twentieth (3%) of the sample said that this problem never occurred, and the balance (8%) responded that they did not know. Additional analysis showed that people who had not voted before were more likely to view irregularities as more common than past voters. But then the size of this voting history differential was not substantial[7]. How do the participants compare to the general populace? Prior HSRC research shows that roughly a third (34%) of adult citizens thought that voting

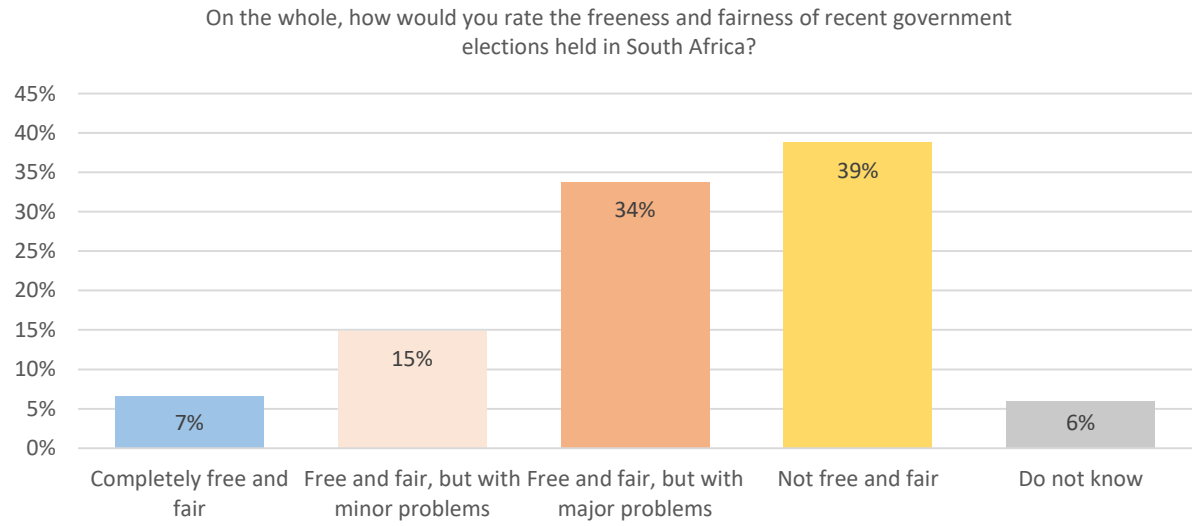
[6] Here we defined 'voting irregularities' as any violation of conventional election procedures. Such irregularities can be the result of intentional wrongdoing or unintentional incompetence. For further discussion of this issue, see Norris (2004).

[7] Consider, for instance, that 78% of non-voters thought that irregularities occurred often while 72% of voters held the same view. Amongst voters, there is a negative relationship between voting experience and the perceived frequency of irregularities. However, the size of the relationship is quite small, and an ANOVA test suggest that it is not a statistically significant association. The mean square was only 1.8 ($F(3,5068) = 1.79$, $p = 0.145$) and the R^2 for the model was 0.001.

irregularities had taken place in the 2019 NPE (Roberts et al., 2022). Seemingly, the participants are more negative about voting irregularities than the general populace.

The delivery of free and fair elections represents a central element of the Commission's constitutional mandate and is also at the heart of the electoral body's vision and mission statement. To provide an assessment of how the electorate felt about this crucial issue, survey participants were asked if they thought that elections held in South Africa were, overall, free and fair. Only a small minority (7%) of the population said that the elections were completely free and fair (**Figure 17**). Nearly half stated that they were free and fair but had problems. We found that 15% felt that the problems were minor and 34% thought that they were major. A large segment (39%) of the youth believed that elections in South Africa were not free and fair at all. Seemingly, about nine in ten respondents considered voting procedures in South Africa to be corrupt in some way.

Figure 17: Respondent assessments of whether election procedures in South Africa were free and fair



How the youth responded to the freeness and fairness question depicted above were presented across a range of different socio-demographic groups in **Table 8**. This allowed variations between relevant subgroups to identified, improving our understanding of sample attitudes towards the integrity of government elections in the country. The results evidently indicate that it was apparent that only minor dissimilarities could be detected between subgroups in the table. Although the research team discovered some attitudinal differences for certain subgroups, conclusively, negativity on this issue was quite widespread. Election evaluations differed significantly by work status with students as the group most positive about election integrity in the country. Only about a third (33%; SE=2.575) of this group viewed elections as completely unfree and fair. This outcome can be contrasted with the employed (35%; SE=1.492), the unemployed (40%; SE=0.826) and those outside the labour market (41%; SE=3.627).

Table 8: Percentage evaluations of the general integrity of election procedures in South Africa by selected subgroups

	Free and Fair		Minor Problems		Major Problems		Unfree and Unfair	
National	7	(0.347)	15	(0.500)	34	(0.664)	39	(0.684)
Gender								
Male	8	(0.607)	16	(0.846)	33	(1.070)	36	(1.096)
Female	6	(0.426)	14	(0.620)	35	(0.856)	40	(0.883)
Age Group								
18-19	7	(1.470)	23	(2.475)	31	(2.743)	34	(2.797)
20-24	6	(0.746)	16	(1.182)	35	(1.529)	37	(1.549)
25-29	6	(0.617)	14	(0.923)	36	(1.271)	37	(1.279)
30-35	7	(0.553)	14	(0.737)	32	(0.989)	41	(1.039)
Subjective Poverty								
Non-poor	9	(1.257)	19	(1.745)	36	(2.154)	31	(2.074)
Just getting by	6	(0.523)	17	(0.821)	35	(1.039)	35	(1.033)
Poor	6	(0.621)	13	(0.840)	34	(1.205)	41	(1.251)
Very poor	7	(0.834)	11	(1.064)	28	(1.495)	49	(1.669)
Work Status								
Employed	7	(0.818)	18	(1.195)	34	(1.489)	35	(1.492)
Unemployed	6	(0.411)	14	(0.584)	33	(0.794)	40	(0.826)
Student	6	(1.273)	19	(2.150)	36	(2.640)	33	(2.575)
Other labour inactive	8	(1.950)	9	(2.072)	33	(3.466)	41	(3.627)
Educational Attainment								
Less than Matric	7	(0.895)	16	(1.247)	34	(1.610)	36	(1.627)
Complete Matric	7	(0.483)	15	(0.698)	34	(0.917)	39	(0.947)
Post-Matric	6	(0.645)	14	(0.919)	34	(1.269)	40	(1.312)
Vocational Training	3	(1.531)	13	(2.766)	35	(3.999)	38	(4.063)
Geotype								
City	7	(0.709)	17	(1.029)	32	(1.283)	40	(1.347)
Small Town	7	(0.622)	17	(0.955)	36	(1.205)	35	(1.198)
Rural Area	6	(0.568)	12	(0.755)	35	(1.102)	41	(1.138)
Other	5	(1.271)	11	(1.817)	28	(2.576)	44	(2.835)

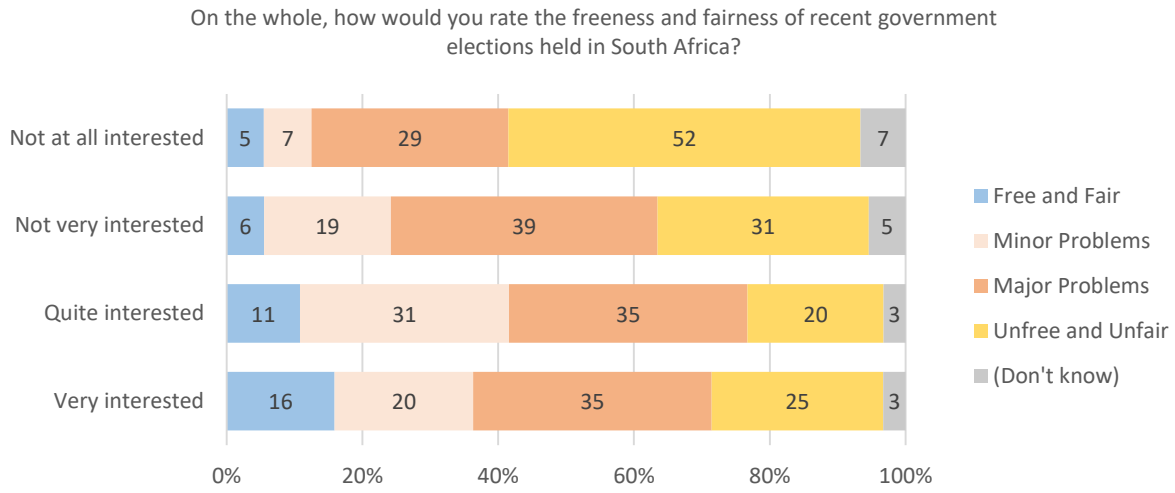
Notes: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; and 2. 'Do not know' responses are not reported.

Examining the results presented in **Table 8**, it is evident that men and women are quite polarised on the issue of election integrity. However, it appears that young women were more likely to view government elections in the country as fraudulent than their male counterparts. Relatively noteworthy differences were also found for subjective poverty groups with those identifying as poor being more negative about electoral integrity. Respondents who were non-poor were somewhat less likely to view elections as completely unfree and unfair (31%; SE=2.074) than those who stated they were poor (41%; SE=1.251) or very poor (49%; SE=1.669). The data seems to suggest that there is a relationship between educational attainment and attitudes towards election integrity. When asked about election procedures, better educated participants in our sample were discovered to be, on aggregate, more negative than their less educated counterparts.

Are youth assessments of election integrity strongly correlated with the level of interest in elections? To answer this question let us look at whether evaluations of electoral integrity were linked with interest levels in **Figure 18**. More than half (52%) of those who were not at all interested in elections said that elections were completely unfree and unfair. This finding can be judged against 31% of those who were not very interested, 20% who were quite interested and 25% who were very interested. Of those who said that they paid close attention to elections, 16% rated elections as completely free and fair, more than twice the sample average. It appears that there is a strong relationship between perceived electoral

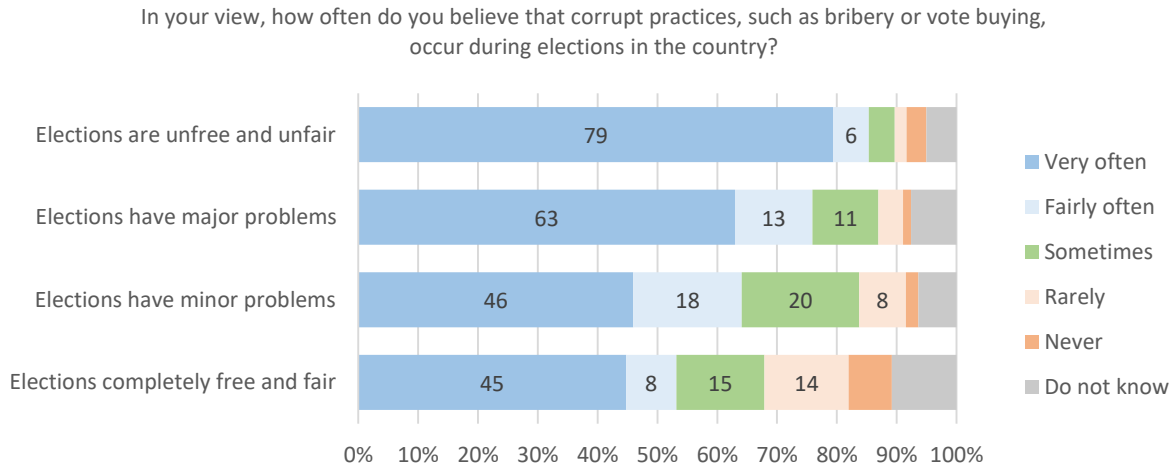
integrity and level of interest. Nonetheless an ANOVA test revealed that the size of this association was comparatively modest. The mean square is 123.0 (F(3,5066)=60.7, p=0.000), the R^2 for the model was 0.049.

Figure 18: Evaluations of election procedures in South Africa by level of interest and disinterest in elections



The perceived frequency of voting irregularities was discovered to be quite important for whether an individual evaluated South African elections as free and fair. This relationship is quite apparent if we examined perceived voting irregularity frequency by evaluations of election integrity in **Figure 19**. Of those who said that elections were free and fair, 53% thought that irregularities happened often. This finding can be weighed against 85% of persons who thought elections were completely unfree and unfair and 76% of those who said that elections had major problems. Bivariate testing appears to show a moderate but statistically significant relationship between the two variables[8]. The widespread nature of youth perceptions of irregularities may help explain why we observed so little subgroup variation in **Table 8**.

Figure 19: Perceived voting irregularity frequency by evaluations of election procedures in South Africa



[8] A Pearson chi-square test showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between these two variables ($chi^2(24) = 776.3$ Pr=0.000). But an ANOVA test showed that the size of the correlation was relatively moderate. The mean square is 309.3 (F(4,5067) = 81.3, p = 0.000), the R^2 for the model was 0.060.

So far in this section, it is evident that most of the participants had significant concerns about the general integrity of election procedures in South Africa. To explain this negativity, we identified several different attitudinal drivers, these included interest in elections and the perceived frequency of voting irregularities. Bivariate testing seems to show that these drivers will be decisive, but this kind of testing can be inconclusive. More advanced analytical tools are required to test the predictive power of these drivers. Consequently, we will now focus on a multivariate analysis to verify the determinants of sample evaluations of election integrity. Four different independent variables were identified as main drivers of such evaluations. An ordered logistic regression approach was conducted to assess the predictive power of each of these variables.

To test the four identified independent variables, five different regression models were computed. First each of the measures was tested individually and then a final model tested them all together. All models created for this section included background controls[9]. The regression models treated as missing all who responded 'don't know' when queried about the integrity of election procedures. A positive coefficient in the regression models indicated a positive correlation between the independent variable and election integrity. To perform the multivariate tests, several variables had to be created. Details on the construction of these variables are provided below:

Voting Irregularities: Responses from the question "[i]n your view, how often do you believe that corrupt practices, such as bribery or vote buying, occur during elections in the country?" were used to create this variable. The scale was ranged from 1 to 5 with the higher value representing the view that voting irregularities occurred regularly. All 'don't know' responses were coded as missing.

Election Interest: Answers to the following question were utilised to construct this measure: "[h]ow interested are you in elections?" The scale was ranged from 1 to 4 with the higher value indicating the higher level of interest that a respondent had in South African elections. 'Don't know' responses to this question were coded as missing.

Trust in the Commission: We used answers to the following question to produce this variable: "[t]o what extent do you trust or distrust the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) at present?" The scale was ranged from 1 to 5 with the higher value representing the higher level of trust. 'Don't know' answers to this item were treated as missing.

Voting History: We used answers to the following question to produce this variable: "[h]ave you ever voted in national/provincial or local government elections in South Africa?" The scale was ranged from 1 to 4 with the higher value representing the higher number of elections a person had voted in. 'Don't know' answers to this item were treated as missing.

Relevant coefficients and standard errors from the five models created for this analysis are portrayed in **Table 9**. All four variables were discovered to be statistically significant predictors of attitudes towards election integrity in South Africa. Of the four variables, trust in the

[9] All models control for gender, population group, age, educational attainment, employment status, subjective poverty, geotype and provincial residence.

Electoral Commission had the most robust impact on the dependent variable. The size of the observed coefficient was somewhat larger in Model III (r=0.721; SE=0.027; p=0.000) than in Model V (r=0.599; SE=0.029; p=0.000). When comparing the different correlates in the table, voting history had the weakest correlation with the dependent variable. The variable had a statistically significant (and positive) correlation (r=0.095; SE=0.029; p=0.001) in Model IV. But the correlation was statistically insignificant after the introduction of the attitudinal variables (r=0.037; SE=0.030; p=0.223) in the final model.

Table 9: Ordered logistic regression on the main predictors of sample attitudes towards election integrity in South Africa

	Model I		Model II		Model III		Model IV		Model V	
Voting Irregularities	-0.453	***							-0.299	***
	(0.028)								(0.028)	
Election Interest			0.621	***					0.428	***
			(0.034)						(0.036)	
Trust Commission					0.721	***			0.602	***
					(0.027)				(0.029)	
Voting History							0.095	**	0.037	
							(0.029)		(0.030)	
Number of obs.	4551		4475		4549		4547		4449	
LR chi^2	410	(29)	460	(25)	888	(25)	142	(25)	1146	(28)
Prob>chi^2	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	
Pseudo R^2	0.037		0.042		0.081		0.013		0.106	

Notes: 1. Positive coefficients indicate positive evaluations of general integrity of election procedures; 2. Robust standard errors in parenthesis; and 3. Significance is denoted as follows: * p<0.05, **p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

In sum, attitudes towards free and fair elections in South Africa appear to be driven by trust in the Electoral Commission, interest in elections and perceptions about the frequency of voting irregularities. These results suggest that strengthening public confidence in the Commission would improve perceptions of electoral integrity. In addition, it seems essential to target widespread perceptions of voting improprieties. Clearly, such perceptions are undermining how people feel about the freeness and fairness of South African elections. Previous experience with election procedures, on the other hand, was found to be quite a weak predictor of attitudes in this section. This suggests that young people are not using their personal experience of elections when making judgements about election management in the country.

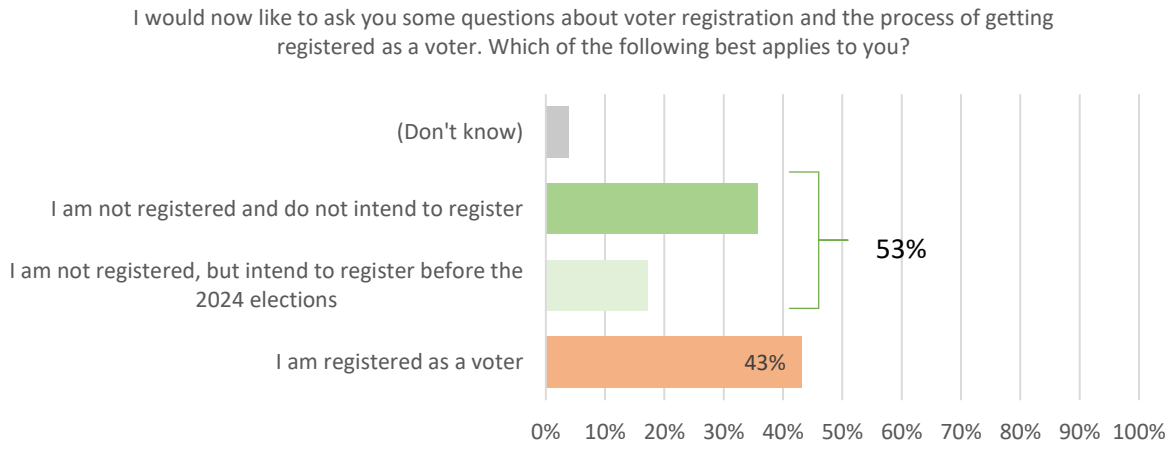
4.6. Voter registration

Voter registration forms an essential part of the mandate of the Electoral Commission. The election management body keeps thorough records of registered voters and works to make registering to vote easy. However, many young people in South Africa are not registered to vote. This poses a risk to the democratic project and can potentially create a serious legitimacy crisis for the current political system. Why are young people not interested in registering to vote? This section looks at that question, investigating the intention to register amongst the non-registered part of our sample. We will show that interest in elections as well as negative attitudes towards the political status quo act as major registration barriers.

As part of the online survey, respondents were asked about their voter registration. The majority (53%) of the participants indicated that they are *not* registered as a voter (

Figure 20). Previous HSRC research has shown that the share of the unregistered adult citizen population in South Africa who intend to register has declined over time (Roberts et al., 2022). In 2005, less than a quarter (24%) of non-registered adults of voting age intended not to register while in 2021, this group of non-registered individuals was 57% of the total. Given these findings, it is not surprising to note that only a small minority of the study sample intended to register to vote. Less than a fifth (17%) reported not being registered but intended to do so before the 2024 elections. The balance of the sample either indicated that they were not registered and did not intend to register (36%) or did not know how to answer the question (4%).

Figure 20: Self-reported registration status and registration intention for the youth sample participants



To gain a better insight into registration intentions amongst the youth, we assessed how different socio-demographic groups within our sample reported their desire to register to vote. The subgroup analysis is provided in **Table 10**, the data presented will allow us to determine the groups that were more likely to want to register. When analysed by age group, the highest share of those respondents registered was 57% (SE=1.049) among those aged 30-35 years. Those aged 18-19 years (55%; SE=2.937) and 20-24 years (52%; SE=1.600) had the largest share of respondents who were not registered and did not intend to register. Voter registration was also segregated by employment status. Interestingly, 50% (SE=1.567) of employed respondents are registered as voters whereas 50% (SE=2.744) of respondents who reported that they are students (or learners) are not registered as voters and do not intend to register. These findings correspond with the analysis on voter registration, which was segregated by age, indicating that younger respondents, who are typically students or learners, are not registered and do not intend to register.

Table 10: Self-reported registration status and registration intention percentages by selected subgroups

	Registered as a voter		Not Registered Intention		Not Registered No Intention	
National	43	(0.695)	17	(0.528)	36	(0.673)
Gender						
Male	43	(1.130)	16	(0.830)	38	(1.105)
Female	43	(0.892)	18	(0.687)	35	(0.856)
Age Group						
18-19	9	(1.662)	32	(2.744)	55	(2.937)
20-24	20	(1.290)	24	(1.367)	52	(1.600)
25-29	44	(1.310)	19	(1.035)	34	(1.247)

30-35	57	(1.049)	12	(0.675)	28	(0.952)
Subjective Poverty						
Non-poor	35	(2.141)	21	(1.810)	41	(2.202)
Just getting by	43	(1.074)	19	(0.857)	34	(1.030)
Poor	44	(1.261)	15	(0.918)	36	(1.218)
Very poor	47	(1.667)	13	(1.116)	37	(1.608)
Work Status						
Employed	50	(1.567)	17	(1.174)	31	(1.447)
Unemployed	44	(0.834)	17	(0.626)	36	(0.806)
Student	20	(2.188)	23	(2.324)	50	(2.744)
Other labour inactive	40	(3.599)	17	(2.740)	38	(3.572)
Educational Attainment						
Less than Matric	38	(1.646)	18	(1.301)	40	(1.660)
Complete Matric	42	(0.957)	18	(0.746)	36	(0.932)
Post-Matric	48	(1.338)	15	(0.958)	33	(1.258)
Vocational Training	48	(4.178)	13	(2.830)	34	(3.962)
Geotype						
City	45	(1.369)	17	(1.043)	35	(1.313)
Small Town	41	(1.237)	19	(0.979)	37	(1.213)
Rural Area	44	(1.149)	16	(0.854)	35	(1.105)
Other	42	(2.825)	14	(1.984)	38	(2.781)

Notes: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; and 2. 'Do not know' responses are not reported.

Seemingly, there was a negative linear relationship between subjective poverty and registration status. It was, in particular, interesting to note that participants who identified as non-poor (21%; SE=1.810) were more likely to say that they are unregistered but intended to register than other groups. We verified the statistical significance of this relationship using a simple Pearson chi-square test ($chi^2(9) = 32.4$ Pr=0.000). As can be discerned from **Table 10**, little substantial variations were discovered based on geotype. However, it is also important to ascertain the differentiation of voter registration by province of residence. Our data showed that voter registration intention did indeed differ by province. The lowest level of self-reported registration was observed in the Western Cape (35%; SE=2.249) and the North West (39%; SE=2.695). Likewise, these two provinces had the highest percentage of respondents who reported that they were not registered and did not intend to register.

So far, the section has demonstrated that a significant proportion of the non-registered sample did not intend to register to vote. To explain this lack of enthusiasm, several variables were identified as drivers of registration intention. These included support for the current political system, election interest and the perceived value of voting. To test the impact of these variables on intention, we utilised a multivariate approach and employed a logistic regression specification for our modelling. To investigate the predictive power of the four identified independent variables, five different regression models were calculated. First, each of the measures was tested individually and then a final model tested them all together. All models generated for this analysis contained background controls[10]. Our regression models were restricted to the non-registered proportion of the sample. A positive coefficient in the regression models indicated a positive correlation between the independent variable and intention to register. To complete these multivariate tests, some variables had to be produced. Information on these variables is provided below:

- *Party Struggle*: How this scale was constructed is described in Section 4.3.

[10] All models control for gender, population group, age, educational attainment, employment status, subjective poverty, geotype and provincial residence.

- *Election Interest*: A description of this scale can be found in Section 4.5.
- *Political System Support (PSS) Index*: The construction of this index is presented in Section 0.
- *Voting Importance*: A detailed explanation of this scale is in Section 4.3.

The coefficients and standard errors from our different multivariate logistic regression models are displayed in **Table 11**. Four out of the five independent variables were found to be correlates of the dependent variables at a statistically significant level. In both Model I (r=-0.005; SE=0.028; p=0.860) and Model V (r=-0.008; SE=0.034; p=0.807), the 'party struggle' variable was not statistically significant at the 5% level. Comparing the different correlates, election interest was found to be, by far, the most robust correlate in our various models. The more interested an unregistered youth was in elections, the more likely they were to want to register. The 'voting importance' scale was also observed to have quite a robust correlation with the dependent. The size of the correlation was somewhat greater in Model IV (r=0.663; SE=0.043; p=0.000) than in the in the final model (r=0.439; SE=0.051; p=0.000).

Table 11: Logistic regression on the main predictors of sample intention to register to vote

	Model I		Model II		Model III		Model IV		Model V	
Party Struggle	-0.005								-0.008	
	(0.028)								(0.034)	
Election Interest			1.283	***					1.034	***
			(0.063)						(0.068)	
PSS Index					0.030	***			0.018	***
					(0.002)				(0.003)	
Voting Importance							0.663	***	0.439	***
							(0.043)		(0.051)	
Number of obs.	2600		2696		2768		2760		2439	
LR chi^2	47	(29)	583	(25)	202	(25)	303	(25)	658	(28)
Prob>chi^2	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	
Pseudo R^2	0.015		0.177		0.060		0.090		0.218	

Notes: 1. Models are restricted to the non-registered population in the sample; 2. Positive coefficients indicate an intention to vote; 3. Robust standard errors in parenthesis; and 4. Significance is denoted as follows: * p<0.05, **p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

Reviewing the results presented in **Table 11**, it seems that registration intention was driven primarily by attitudes towards voting and election interest. Communication campaigns that utilised these findings could have a positive influence on youth's intention to register. The youth struggle to find a political party identity, alternatively, were not discovered to be a significant factor here. However, perceptions of the political status quo were identified as a driver in our multivariate analysis. Seemingly, the more dissatisfied the youth are with the system, the more disinclined they are to want to register. This outcome is consistent with previous HSRC research on voter registration intention among non-registered adults of voting age (Roberts et al., 2022). The findings of that study showed that the main reasons for neglecting to register stemmed from broad disillusionment with the political climate.

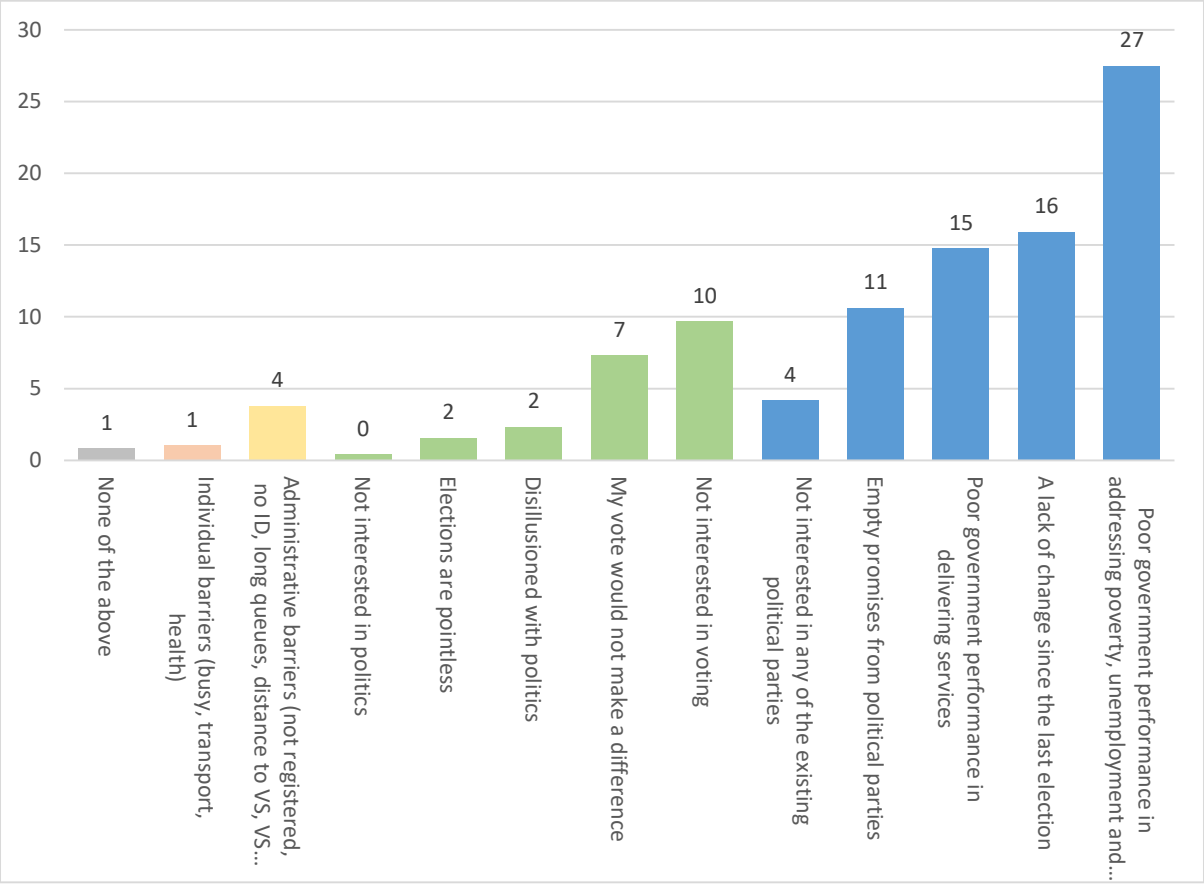
4.7. Reasons for planned abstention or uncertainty regarding electoral participation in NPE 2024

From an electoral management standpoint, it is particularly important to develop a nuanced understanding of the reasons why young members of the voting age population (18-35 years) suggest that they will not vote or remain undecided about casting their vote in the 2024

National and Provincial Elections. As such, the survey questionnaire included an open-ended question asking the main reasons for not wanting to vote. From the responses it was clear that the man reason was that "voting is meaningless, it makes no difference and therefore I just don't want to vote". These reasons accounted for about 34% of responses. Another 22% stated that they will not vote as it does not result in an improvement in their quality of life, unemployment remain high, service delivery is poor and there has been an increase in crime. Around 10% respondents also mentioned that voting only boils down to empty promises. Some of the responses are cited: " *Because nothing changes, it only gets worse". "These people do not care about the disadvantaged. They only want the votes so they can greedily divide the wealth of this country among themselves".* "*Because there is no hope that things will change or move." "For me there is nothing motivating people to go and vote -it's same old story of promising, promoting parties but not delivering".*

The online survey questionnaire included a question asking respondents to specify the main reason for their planned abstention or indecision. A set of 18 pre-coded options were developed and presented to respondents, relating to four overarching thematic dimensions, namely: (i) general disillusionment and disinterest; (ii) political party or performance evaluations; (iii) administrative barriers; and (iv) individual barriers. These coded options draw on a similar line of questioning included in the VPS series, as well as research undertaken by the University of Johannesburg's Centre for Social Change in metropolitan surveying conducted immediately post-election in recent electoral contexts. Understanding the patterning of the motivations provided by youth assists in identifying whether turnout decisions are being informed by factors falling within the remit of the Electoral Commission to directly address, and to what extent.

Figure 21: Main reason for planned abstention or uncertainty about voting in Election 2024 (%)



Source: IEC Online Youth Survey 2023.

The pattern of responses to this question are presented in **Figure 21**, and show decisively that administrative barriers are not the primary reason for intended electoral abstention or indecision among South African youth. Only 4% referred to administrative factors as an influence, and these relate mainly to not being registered or lacking the identity documentation required to register. Problems relating to voting station access, infrastructure and operations were only nominally referred to. General disillusionment and disinterest accounted for approximately a fifth (21%) of the explanations provided for planned abstention or uncertainty about voting in 2024. Of this cluster of reasons, a lack of interest in voting was most commonly mentioned (10%), followed by a loss of belief in internal political efficacy ('my vote would not make a difference') (7%). Feeling generally politically disillusioned or believing elections had lost their meaning were both mentioned by 2% of the youth surveyed.

The dominant set of responses the youth provided for planned abstention or uncertainty about voting in 2024 pertained more specifically to political party or performance evaluations, which collectively comprised 73% of all the responses provided. Concern over poor government performance in addressing pressing societal challenges, such as poverty, unemployment and corruption, was the main reason within this cluster, mentioned by 27% of the youth. A second set of factors related to a perceived lack of change since the last election (16%), poor government service delivery (15%), and empty promises from political parties (11%). A modest share (4%) stated that they the reason for planned abstention or turnout indecision related to disinterest in existing political parties.

Individual barriers to electoral participation were cited by a mere 1% of the youth that were surveyed. These included being unavailable to vote due to educational, work, care or other responsibilities, a lack of transportation, as well as ill health. Post-election surveys such as the University of Johannesburg research show that personal barriers to voting such as these tend to play more of a role on Elections Days than the pre-election surveys would suggest; it is difficult for a person to predict these being a key issue ten months or more prior to the holding of an election. However, the scale of the variation in the reporting of individual barriers in pre- versus post-election surveys is relatively modest in nature and does not detract from the core message reported that party and performance evaluations as well as more general disinterest and disillusionment are core drivers of abstention and indecision tendencies among youth, as indeed among the public more broadly.

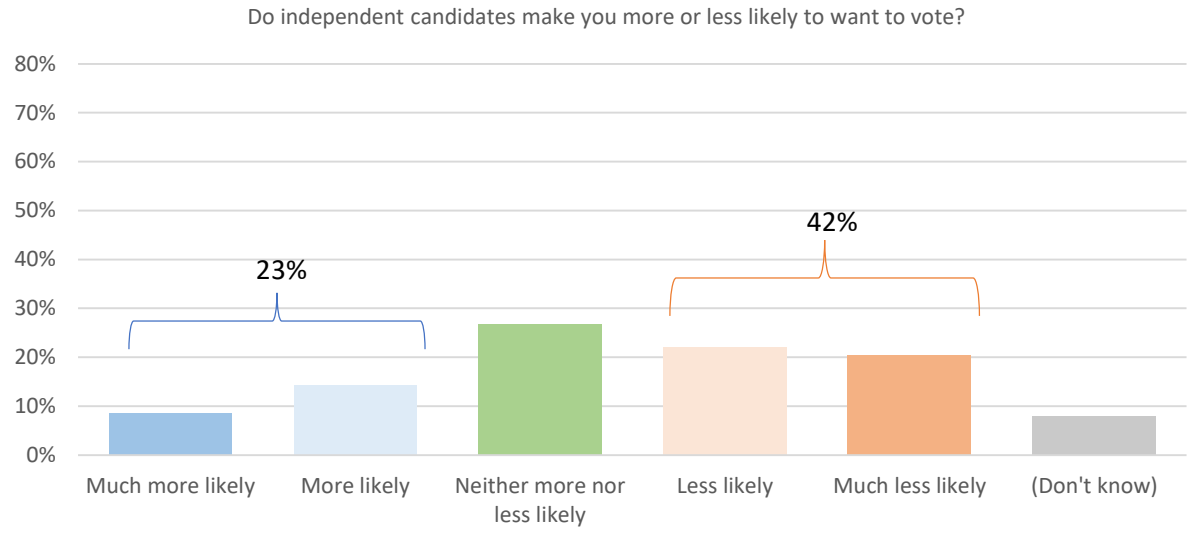
Having established the role of discontent with political parties and the perceived poor performance of government and the democratic system in questioning electoral participation among youth, it remains to be seen whether youth are uniform in the reasons provided, or alternatively whether there is distinct variation reflecting the diversity of the country's youth.

4.8. Influence of political party coalitions and independent candidates on turnout

In Section **Error! Reference source not found.** we saw that the sample was quite polarised on whether they would consider voting in the 2024 NPE. A significant proportion reported that they were uncertain about whether they will vote in the next election. Expanding on that analysis, we wanted to see if our respondents would be open to voting under two different scenarios. The first concerned independent candidates which have recently been granted permission to contest national and provincial elections in South Africa. It is a choice that some individuals may make if they feel that the major political parties do not align with their values or beliefs. The second involved political party coalitions, a new political reality in many municipalities. This section will show that under the first scenario, respondents are quite divided and there is significant variation in the responses provided. Participants are much more negative about the second and the research team will try and understand why that is.

With regards to candidates running in the 2024 NGE, respondents were asked: "[d]oes the ability to vote for independent candidates in elections make you more or less likely to want to vote in elections?" In general, the findings from the study indicate that the majority (42%) of respondents indicated that they are less likely to vote under this scenario. Less than a quarter (23%) reported that they would be more likely and 27% said that they were uncertain (**Figure 22**). When analysing the data by voting intention, remarkable differences were observed. Approximately, a third (32%) of those who said that they were uncertain about voting in the 2024 NPE said that they were likely to vote under this scenario. This can be judged against 51% of those who were certain that they would not vote in the 2024 NPE. Meaningful differences by voting intention were confirmed by a one-way ANOVA ($F(4.5063) = 48.0$, $p = 0.000$) test.

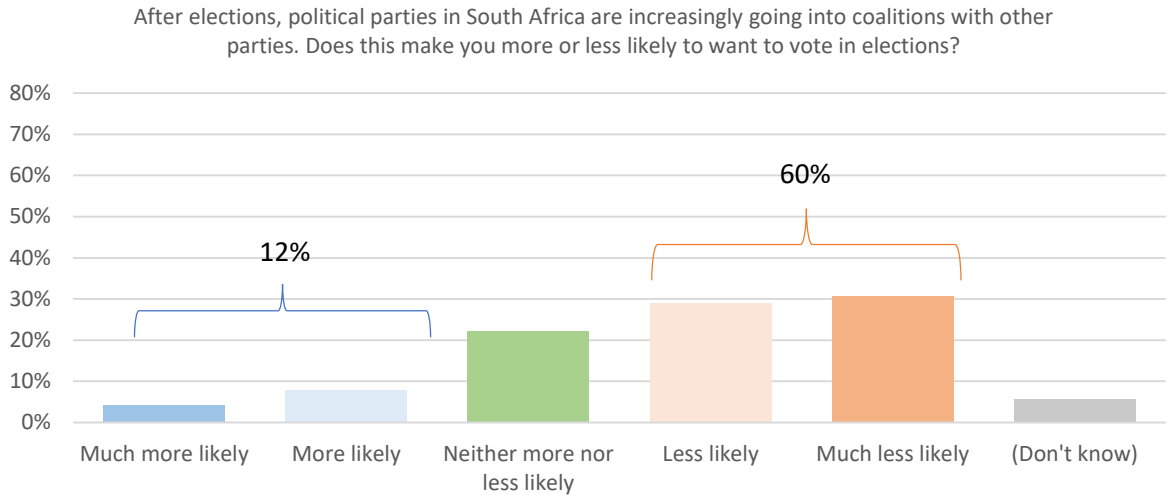
Figure 22: Perceptions about the likelihood of participation in future elections if voters had the ability to vote for independent candidates



When political parties form a coalition, they typically agree to work together and share power to achieve common goals. Respondents were asked their views on coalitions and whether political parties forming coalitions influenced their willingness to vote. The following question was put to survey participants: "[a]fter elections, political parties in South Africa are increasingly going into coalitions with other parties. Does this make you more or less likely to want to vote in elections?". In general, most respondents (60%) reported that they were less likely to want to vote in elections if political parties formed coalitions afterwards (**Figure 23**). When analysed by voting intention, sample responses to this question varied considerably. Nearly half (49%) of participants who were uncertain about participating in the 2024 NGE told us that they were unlikely to vote under this scenario. This can be weighed against 68% of respondents who were certain about their voting decision. These significant variances were verified as statistically significant by a one-way ANOVA (F(4.5072)=61.8, p=0.000) test.

"It's like you have fifty people… maybe all agreed on something and there are two people coming from a different party with a different point of view and must influence those fifty people to change. So those two people might make things better for us. I feel like a coalition is a good thing." – Mariannridge, FGD, 2023
Response from a Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Figure 23: Perceptions about the likelihood of participation in future elections if political parties formed coalitions to govern



How the youth responded to the two scenarios discussed above was presented across a range of different socio-demographic groups in **Table 12**. This allowed subgroup disparities to be detected, increasing our knowledge of sample attitudes towards the two scenarios in question. Studying the table, it was clear that distinct dissimilarities could be detected between subgroups in how they responded to the different scenarios. When confronted with the party coalitions scenario, older youth (those aged between 30 and 35 years) were more liable than their younger counterparts to indicate that they would be less likely to vote. About two-thirds (63%; SE=1.1022) of this group said that they would be less likely to vote. This finding can be contrasted with 53% (SE=2.966) of the 18-19 group, 56% (SE=1.590) of the 20-24 group and 58% (SE=1.309) of the 25-29 group. A relatively robust and positive association between subjective poverty and attitudes towards coalitions in the table was observed. The greater the level of poverty, the greater the chance that the participant would report not wanting to vote under the coalitions scenario[11].

When asked about political party coalitions, we could only detect minor differences between educational attainment groups in **Table 12**. However, it was interesting to note that those with vocational training were much more likely to be negative on this development than other groups. No significant differences were found on the basis of geotype. We also investigated whether we could identify differences by provincial residence groups. When compared to participants from other provinces, residents from the Northern Cape (6%; SE=2.131) had a much lower chance of responding positively to the scenario about political party coalitions. It is apparent from the table that attitudes towards the independent candidate's scenario differed significantly by work status. Students and those in employment were more likely than other groups to respond positively to this scenario. Employing a Pearson chi-square test, we discovered that the connection between these two variables was statistically significant ($chi^2(12) = 40.7$ Pr=0.000).

[11] The statistically significant relationship between these two variables was corroborated using a Pearson chi-square test ($chi^2(12) = 90.3$ Pr=0.000). But an ANOVA test showed that the size of the correlation was relatively small. The mean square is 14.3 ($F(4,5064) = 18.2$, $p = 0.000$), the R^2 for the model was 0.014.

Table 12: Self-reported willingness to vote under two scenarios about party coalitions and independent candidates by selected subgroups

	Party Coalitions				Independent Candidates			
	More Likely		Less Likely		More Likely		Less Likely	
National	12	(0.463)	60	(0.689)	23	(0.591)	42	(0.695)
Gender								
Male	15	(0.816)	61	(1.114)	26	(1.005)	42	(1.128)
Female	11	(0.560)	59	(0.886)	21	(0.730)	43	(0.892)
Age Group								
18-19	14	(2.068)	53	(2.966)	27	(2.643)	34	(2.819)
20-24	13	(1.088)	56	(1.590)	25	(1.383)	41	(1.577)
25-29	12	(0.859)	58	(1.309)	23	(1.113)	41	(1.302)
30-35	12	(0.695)	63	(1.022)	22	(0.876)	45	(1.053)
Subjective Poverty								
Non-poor	13	(1.504)	51	(2.245)	27	(1.997)	35	(2.136)
Just getting by	12	(0.715)	58	(1.071)	23	(0.913)	40	(1.063)
Poor	12	(0.835)	62	(1.233)	23	(1.069)	46	(1.267)
Very poor	13	(1.108)	64	(1.610)	21	(1.353)	48	(1.672)
Work Status								
Employed	14	(1.075)	58	(1.551)	27	(1.390)	38	(1.522)
Unemployed	12	(0.545)	61	(0.821)	21	(0.692)	44	(0.836)
Student	14	(1.887)	53	(2.746)	27	(2.441)	37	(2.651)
Other labour inactive	14	(2.533)	57	(3.659)	21	(3.021)	47	(3.688)
Educational Attainment								
Less than Matric	13	(1.162)	56	(1.689)	24	(1.450)	42	(1.683)
Complete Matric	12	(0.625)	61	(0.946)	22	(0.808)	44	(0.963)
Post-Matric	13	(0.911)	58	(1.326)	24	(1.143)	40	(1.311)
Vocational Training	9	(2.412)	70	(3.848)	20	(3.330)	49	(4.195)
Geotype								
City	13	(0.940)	59	(1.357)	24	(1.171)	39	(1.346)
Small Town	13	(0.850)	58	(1.245)	24	(1.072)	42	(1.244)
Rural Area	11	(0.737)	62	(1.124)	22	(0.964)	45	(1.155)
Other	11	(1.776)	57	(2.836)	20	(2.302)	42	(2.828)

Notes: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; and 2. 'Do not know' and 'neutral' responses are not reported.

When looking at the independent candidates scenario, we did not detect noteworthy attitudinal differences by gender, educational attainment or geotype. Much like what was observed for the political party coalition scenario, we find that subjective poverty has a negative correlation with attitudes towards the independent candidates scenario. The greater the self-reported level of poverty, the less willing the participant would be to vote when they were told about independent candidates. In a similar fashion to what was observed for the coalition scenario, age was also found to have a negative association with attitudes in this instance. Using simple Pearson chi-square tests, we found that age had a somewhat greater effect on attitudes towards the coalition scenario ($chi^2(12) = 50.7$ Pr=0.000) than on the independent candidates scenario ($chi^2(12) = 38.2$ Pr=0.000).

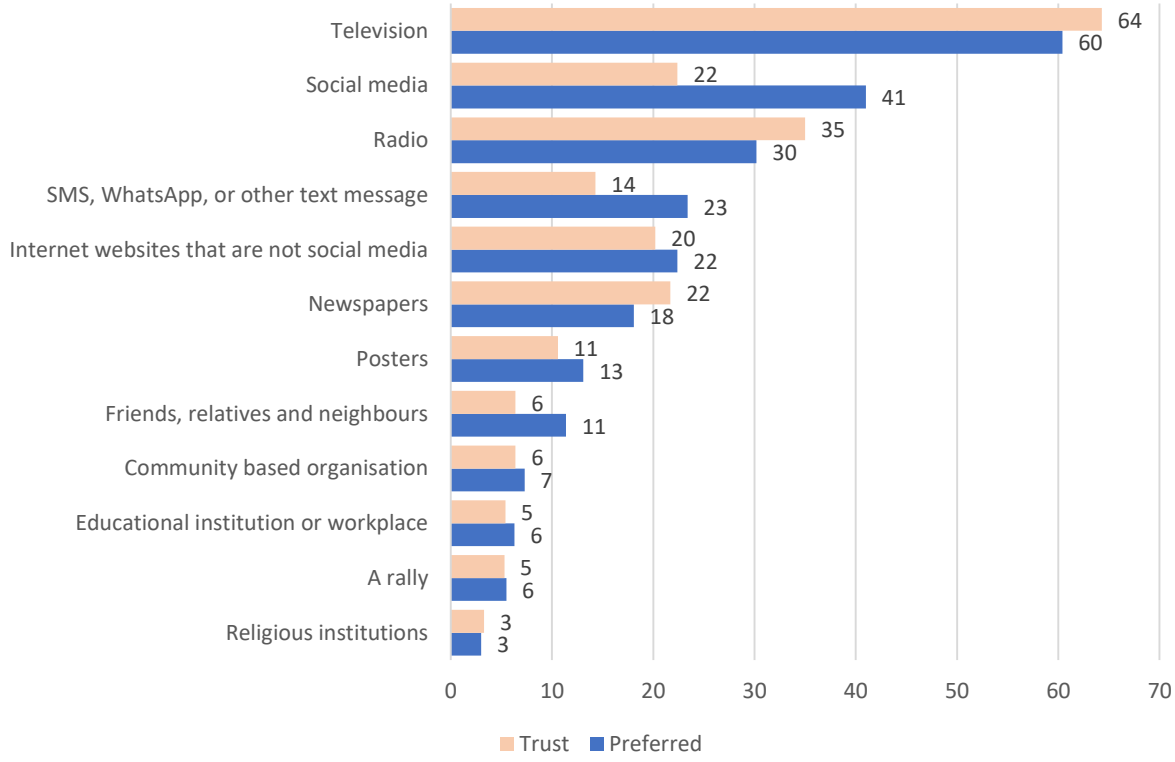
4.9. Preferred and trusted media sources relating to electoral information

Knowledge of the preferred and trusted media sources relating to electoral information is crucial for the IEC to fulfil its role in conducting free, fair, and transparent elections. It helps ensure equitable coverage, enables better education of voters, and maintain public trust in the electoral process. Understanding the preferred and trusted media sources allows the IEC to guide voters toward credible outlets and resources for electoral information. Knowing the preferred and trusted media outlets ensures that the commission can effectively disseminate important information prior and during elections, such as voter registration deadlines, polling

locations, and election results. The media landscape is continuously evolving and changing with new digital platforms and communication channels. Staying informed about trusted media sources helps the IEC adapt its strategies and regulations to reflect these changes. This section is especially important given that it will give insight into the media preference of planned abstainers. Understanding this group's media preferences will enable the Electoral Commission to target planned abstainers via media sources that are trusted and preferred by them.

The survey included items asking about which media sources were preferred and trusted as sources of information about voting. The majority (60%) of the respondents nominated television as the most preferred media source followed by social media (41%), radio (30%), SMS, WhatsApp, and text messaging (23%) and internet websites (22%). Smaller proportions opted for newspapers (18%), posters and friends or neighbours (13% and 11% respectively). Small minorities opted for community-based organisations (7%), educational and work institutions (6%), rallies (6%) or religious institutions (3%). It was evident that a mix of conventional media such as radio and television and social media was the most preferred media sources among this group of respondents.

Figure 24: Preferred and trusted media source



Interestingly, the more conventional media sources were regarded as the most trusted sources. Television was considered as the most trusted source, trusted by 64%, followed by radio (35%) and newspapers (22%). Similar shares trusted social media (22%) and internet websites (20%) whilst smaller shares trusted SMS and text messages (14%). Posters were trusted by 11% of respondents. Small minorities opted for friends or neighbours, community-based organisations (6%), educational and work institutions (5%), rallies (5%) or religious institutions (3%). Regardless of the phenomenon of untrue news, it was interesting to note that social media was considered as a trusted source of information.

To better understand media preferences, a factor analysis was undertaken to cluster preferences for different media channels. Clustering media preferences is a strategic approach that enables election campaigns to be more efficient and targeted to the diverse preferences of voters. It leverages data and insights to make the campaign more effective and competitive. Clustering preferences can also help in allocating campaign resources more efficiently. Instead of using a one-size-fits-all approach, campaigns can focus their resources on media channels that are more likely to reach their target demographics. This can save time and money. Clustering preferences also allows for consistent messaging across various media channels and therefore ensures better impact. When the same message or theme is emphasised across multiple platforms, it reinforces the campaign's overall narrative and can help create a more memorable and impactful campaign. The primary goal of this factor analysis was therefore to group the various media forms and reduce the number of media channels by identifying the underlying structure or patterns in the data.

In **Table 13**, the results of the factor analysis are shown indicating that both preferred media sources and trusted media sources group together in similar ways. Factor 1 loaded high on the following media sources: Religious institutions, educational institutions, community-based organisations, a rally, posters and friends, relatives and neighbours. This factor therefore represents preference and trust in media that can be considered as face-to-face and community-based interaction and this factor was coined *face-to-face*. Factor 2 reflects conventional popular media sources namely television, radio and newspapers. This factor was coined *conventional* media. Factor 3 loaded high on social media, SMS, WhatsApp, or other text messaging and internet websites. This factor clearly represented a preference for new media sources and was coined new media. To further interrogate media preference these groups were analysed to determine which socio-democratic groups preferred which media group.

Table 13: Factor analysis of preference and trust of different media sources

	Preferred source			Trusted source		
	Factor 1 (Face-to -face)	**Factor 2 (Conven-tional)**	**Factor 3 (New media)**	**Factor 1 (Face-to -face)**	**Factor 2 (Conventional**	**Factor 3 (New media)**
Television		.710			.689	
Newspapers	.222	.642	.260	.210	.705	.224
Radio	.166	.705	.242	.151	.751	.154
Friends, relatives and neighbours	.403	.276	.326	.496		.357
Posters	.438	.423	.213	.541	.291	.151
A rally	.593	.260		.643	.180	
Community based organisation	.679	.136		.723		
Educational institution or workplace	.692		.195	.680	.102	.135
Religious institutions	.729		.156	.694		.215
Social media		.215	.715		.139	.756
Internet websites (not social media)	.122	.269	.621	.114	.280	.577
SMS, WhatsApp, or other text message	.282	-.200	.618	.191		.673

Social media usage was a significant indicator for people who preferred face-to-face media sources. Those who almost never used social media had much higher preference for these types of media than those who often frequented social media. Preference for face-to-face media was also more prominent among the poorer segments as well as those with lower

levels of education. From this clustering it is evident that religious institutions, educational institutions, community-based organisations, rallies, posters and friends and family networks are best suited to reach voters from poorer backgrounds and lower levels of education. This is specifically important given that this group tend not to have a presence on social media.

Preference for conventional media was highest among those that classified themselves as non-poor and those just getting by whilst it was significantly lower among the poor and very poor. Frequency of social media use was again a significant predictor of preference for this type of media with those using media almost always being the most inclined to score high on preference for this media. Farm dwellers were much less inclined than people staying in rural village communities, small towns or cities to score high in terms of preference for this media. Messages on television, radio, and newspapers are therefore best suited to target potential voters that are of higher socio-economic status and resident in bigger towns and cities.

Interestingly, preference for new media was highest among the 20–24-year-olds rather than the 18–19-year-olds and lowest for those in the 30–35-year-old bracket. The poor were statistically less likely to prefer new media than those just getting by and the non-poor. Those that were never or very seldom on social media scored lowest on this factor. City dwellers were most inclined to score high in terms of a preference for new media while people on farms were less likely to prefer or trust this source. From this statistical grouping of media sources, it is evident that a diverse media approach is optimal when trying to reach voters who plan to abstain in the 2024 elections. The IEC does employ such a diverse approach and should continue to do so to reach a variety of potential voters.

4.10. Awareness and usage of Electoral Commission platforms

In an effort to promote voter education and engagement, the IEC employs various communication channels to disseminate election related information. Overall, the awareness and effective usage of Electoral Commission platforms are critical for promoting inclusivity and public trust in the electoral process, ultimately strengthening democracy. These platforms play a central role in facilitating voter engagement and ensuring that elections are more efficient. It is therefore critical for the IEC to understand awareness and usage of the different platforms especially among youngsters that plan to abstain from voting in the upcoming elections. **Figure 25** gives an overview of usage and awareness of the different channels among this group.

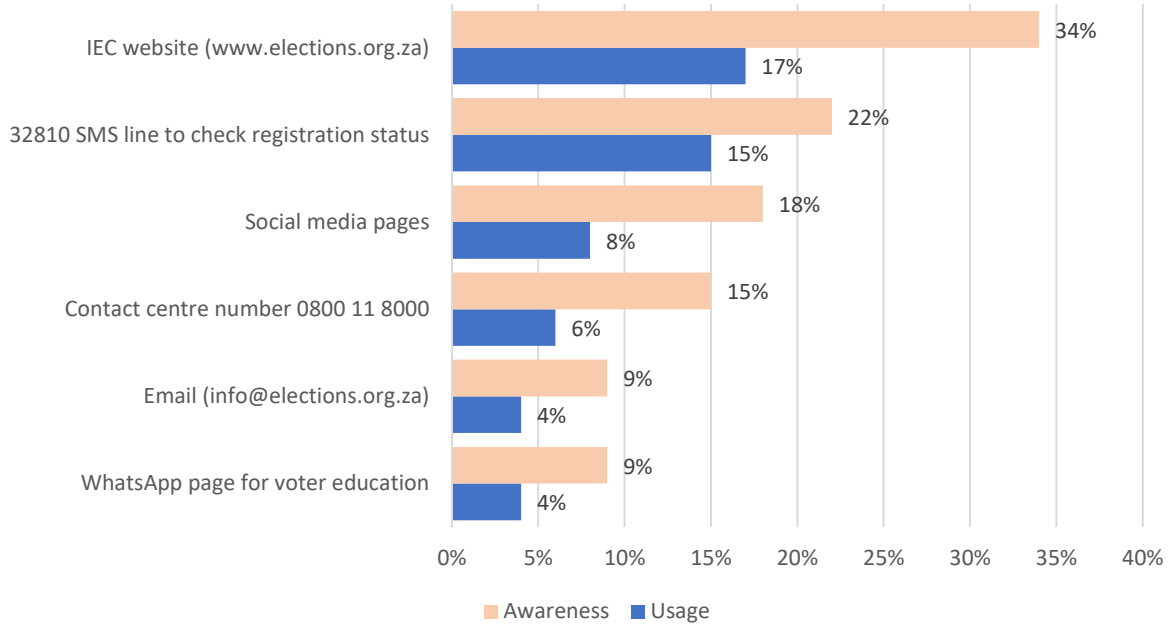
> *"Firstly, we need to make sure that the youth is informed about the value of voting… we can begin by going to schools, primary, high schools, and varsity. After that, impart to them the value of voting, what it means to vote as a young person, and the voting power they have."* – NGO Founder, SNI, 2023. Response from a social network interview (SNI)

The official IEC website (www.elections.org.za) boasts the highest usage rate among respondents at 17% and a notable awareness rate of 34%. The SMS line with the number 32810 is a popular channel for checking voter registration status, with a relatively high usage rate of 15%. Furthermore, 22% of respondents were aware of this service. Social media platforms have become increasingly important for voter engagement. The IEC's social media pages have an 8% usage rate among respondents, with 18% being aware of these platforms for election-related information. As social media becomes even more popular and prominent

this resource will become more sought after. The IEC's contact centre, reachable at 0800 11 8000, had a slightly lower usage rate at 6%, with 15% of respondents being aware of its availability. It therefore still serves as a relevant point of contact for voters. Email and the WhatsApp pages were the least popular but remains important as communication channels for the IEC, with 4% of respondents reporting usage of the email and WhatsApp page for voter education. Just under a tenth (9%) were aware of these platforms.

From this analysis, awareness and usage of these platforms are circumscribed. A concerted attempt should be made to raise awareness of these different platforms given that it could empower abstainers to make more informed decisions about their participation in the electoral process, and potentially encourage participation. Reasons for abstaining due to administrative barriers or barriers pertaining to a lack of information could potentially be addressed by raising awareness of these different platforms.

Figure 25: Awareness and usage of electoral platforms

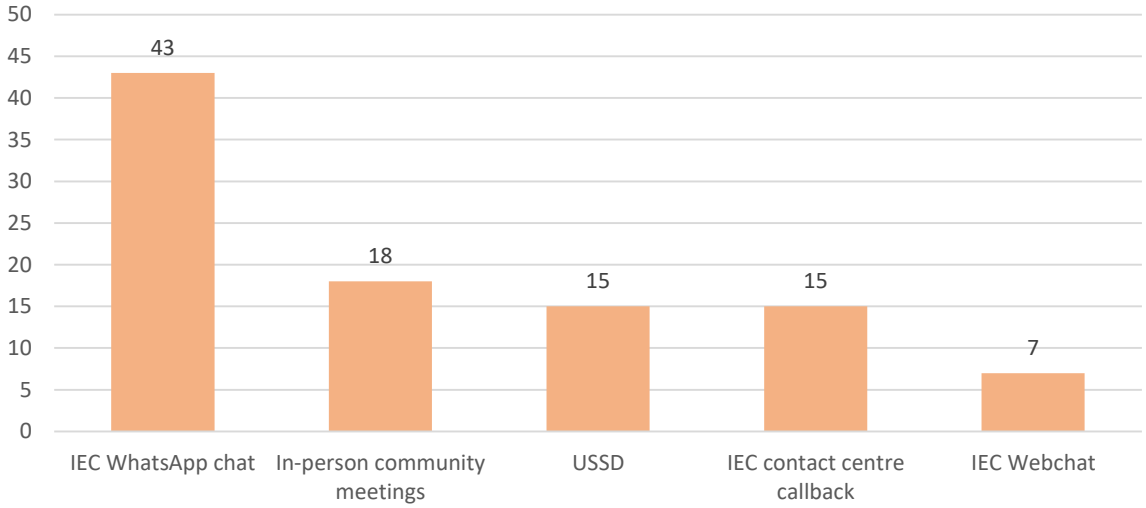


Having established the awareness and usage of different platforms, it was important to determine the preferred communication platforms. Establishing preferred communication platforms among this cohort of potential abstainers are especially important since these channels could potentially serve as conduits for communication and engagement strategies. The group of respondents were presented with five options and they could choose which platforms they would prefer to communicate with the IEC. It was a multiple-response question, and the respondents could therefore choose as many of the choices as they preferred. The options presented to them were the IEC contact centre callback, IEC WhatsApp chat, In-person community meetings, IEC Webchat or USSD (Unstructured Supplementary Service Data) which used to send text messages similar to Short Message Service (SMS).

As is evident from the figure below that the preferred channel preferred by this group of potential abstainers was WhatsApp chat preferred by almost half (43%). These results signify that WhatsApp chat is a critical platform for communication, also allowing for real-time

messaging and engagement with the electorate. In-person community meetings were also an important mode of communication. Around a fifth of respondents (18%) stated that they preferred in-person community meetings and as noted earlier, these meetings enable face-to-face interactions between the IEC and community members, fostering a personal and localised connection which is particularly important for people who are poorer, less educated and seldom on social media. USSD and IEC contact centre callback was preferred by approximately 15% of respondents. The IEC Webchat was least preferred of all the options (7%). Given these findings it was clear that the preferred means of communication among this group of potential abstainers was WhatsApp Chat. Despite this clear preference, it is important to note that a diversified approach of information distribution remains important.

Figure 26: Preferences for communication platforms



It is important to understand which communication platform resonates with specific socio-demographic groups. In an attempt to understand the popularity of these platforms among different socio-demographic subgroups, a mean score was calculated for each platform. The mean score was calculated by recoding the variables (0 or 1) into a 0-100 score. A higher score implicates more interest in the specific platform. As can be seen from the **Table 14**, the older cohort showed more interested in the IEC contact centre relative to other age groups. Females preferred IEC WhatsApp chat platform while males were much more interested in IEC contact centre call-back. The employed preferred the IEC WhatsApp chat and the non-poor were less inclined to prefer in-person online meetings. A frequent online presence was positively associated with a preference for IEC WhatsApp chat. Relative to residents from other areas, people residing in small towns and farms were much more inclined to prefer in person community meetings as a communication platform.

Table 14: Preference for different communication platforms by socio-demographics (means score)

	IEC WhatsApp chat	In-person community meetings	USSD	IEC contact centre callback	IEC Webchat
Age group					
18-19 years	38.8	15.2	12.8	9.3	6.2
20-24 years	40.6	16.6	16.2	12.1	7.2
25-29 years	45.3	20.1	14.4	13.9	7.5

30-35 years	42	18.7	14.5	16.5	6.3
Gender					
Male	39	20.5	16.5	18.3	8.1
Female	44.8	17	13.3	12.1	6.1
Educational attainment					
Less than matric	42.7	18.1	13.5	14.8	6.3
Matric	42.2	17.3	14.5	13.8	6.2
Post-matric	42.8	20	14.7	15.3	8.4
Vocational training	44.4	20.8	23.6	18.1	6.9
Work status					
Employed	46	18.2	13.2	13.1	7.7
Unemployed	41.6	18.4	15.1	15.4	6.6
Student or learner	41.9	16.8	16.2	10.2	7.8
Other labour inactive	40.3	21	10.2	12.9	4.3
Subjective poverty					
Non-poor	39.2	15.6	15.8	15	10.8
Just getting by	46.8	18.2	14.4	12.5	6.5
Poor	40.5	19.4	13.9	16.4	6
Very poor	37.3	18	15.6	15.7	7
Social media perference					
Almost all the time	46.4	19.1	15.3	15.1	7.1
1 to 3 times a day	43.9	18.5	14.5	14.6	8.2
A few times a week/month	42.3	19	14.5	15.1	6.2
Less often / never	35.5	16.6	14.7	12.8	5.8
Province					
Western Cape	40.9	17	11.1	12.2	9.1
Eastern Cape	42.1	18.2	13.1	15	6.5
Northern Cape	32.8	15.6	16.4	13.1	9
Free State	42.6	18.5	14.6	11.9	5.2
KwaZulu-Natal	43.2	18.8	13.9	15	5.3
North West	41.6	18	19.9	13.1	8.6
Gauteng	43.9	18.7	15.1	15.5	6.7
Mpumalanga	40.9	20.6	15.9	16.3	9.1
Limpopo	39.3	15	12.6	13.1	7.9
Geotype					
City	43.1	17.6	13.4	15.5	7.6
Small Town	43.7	20	16.2	14.5	7.1
Rural village	41.7	17.6	14.3	14.4	6.5
Farm	43.8	11.8	15.3	9.7	6.3
Other	37.8	19.2	13.4	13.4	4.9

4.11. Registering online

An online registration platform was launch by the Electoral Commission on 14 July 2021. The platform permits all eligible voters to register as well as update their details via a computer, smart phone, or tablet. The online platform was part of the Commission's ongoing campaign to make registration easier during the COVID-19 pandemic. Following its launch, the platform proved to be popular and a half a million people registered to vote through the platform prior to the 2021 LGE. Following this success, the IEC has indicated that the online registration facility would be a permanent feature. Research by the HSRC showed the platform was largely

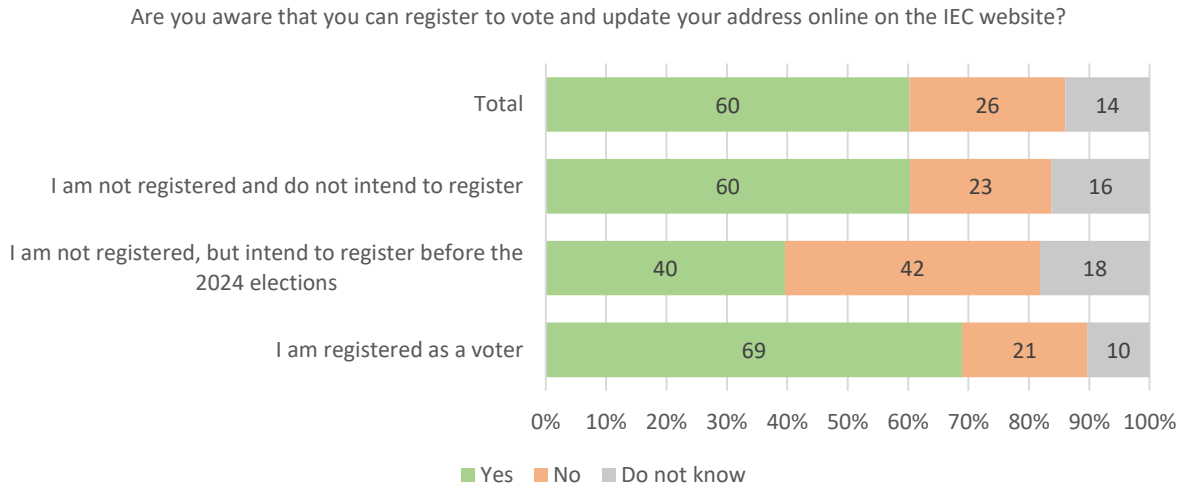
> *"For starters, us as young people, most of us we stay glued to our cell phones. So, if our engagement with the voting system can be embedded via our cell phones like register online, vote online, and extend the deadlines for registrations online and for voting online. Voting face-to-face can be two days, that can*

popular with the public (Roberts et al., 2022). We know much less about the disillusioned youth, how does this group feel about online voter registration? Are there, for example, concerns about data usage? To answer these queries, the online survey included several questions about attitudes towards online registration. Responses to these questions will be presented in this section with a focus on awareness, data usage and willingness to help others.

> *be understandable"*– Business Owner, SNI, 2023
> Response from a social network interview (SNI)

To participate in elections in South Africa, you would typically need to register as a voter and cast your vote in person at the designated polling station assigned to your voting district. The IEC has established online voter registration services which ensures that you are registered in the correct place and can vote in the next election. Respondents were asked if they were aware of this service. Most (60%) of respondents indicated that they are aware that they can register to vote and update their address online on the IEC website. Given low levels of awareness of Commission communication platforms noted from **Figure 25** in Section 4.10, this is a welcome finding. As can be observed from **Figure 27**, *responses* to this question differed significantly by voter registration status. More than two-thirds (69%) of registered participants were more likely to be aware that they had the option to register online, and this can be compared unfavourably to 54% for the unregistered. Amongst the unregistered proportion of the sample, awareness was considerably greater amongst those who did not intend to register to vote.

Figure 27: Self-reported awareness of the ability to register to vote online using the IEC website by registration status



With the aim of better grasping the nuances of youth cognisance of the option to register online, platform awareness is displayed across different subgroups in **Table 15**. To assist the reader to detect differences between groups, ANOVA testing was conducted. It was apparent from our analysis that awareness was quite high for all subgroups represented in the table. Focusing on age cohort differences, we find that awareness was lowest amongst those aged 18-19 years (47%; SD=49.97) and highest among those aged 30-35 years (64%; SD=48.12). This divide was substantiated by a one-way ANOVA ($F(3, 4924)=13.3$, $p=0.000$) test which showed distinct disparities between age groups. We also identified a gender differential in the table, men were somewhat more likely to be aware than women. However, as can be observed, the size of the differential here is quite modest.

Table 15: Percentage of who was aware that they had the ability to register to vote online using the IEC website by selected subgroups

			Scheffe Comparison		F	Prob>F
National	60.2	(48.95)				
Gender					4.1	0.043
Male	62.1	(48.53)	ref.			
Female	59.2	(49.15)	-2.87	**		
Age Group					13.3	0.000
18-19	46.5	(49.97)	ref.			
20-24	56.3	(49.63)	9.74	*		
25-29	60.2	(48.97)	13.65	***		
30-35	63.6	(48.12)	17.09	***		
Subjective Poverty					6.1	0.000
Non-poor	60.0	(49.05)	ref.			
Just getting by	57.1	(49.51)	-2.87			
Poor	63.9	(48.05)	3.91			
Very poor	61.8	(48.62)	1.80			
Work Status					2.1	0.102
Employed	60.0	(49.02)	ref.			
Unemployed	61.0	(48.78)	1.04			
Student	55.0	(49.83)	-5.01			
Other labour inactive	55.9	(49.78)	-4.05			
Educational Attainment					1.0	0.417
Less than Matric	58.6	(49.28)	ref.			
Complete Matric	59.9	(49.02)	1.29			
Post-Matric	61.5	(48.67)	2.91			
Vocational Training	63.9	(48.20)	5.28			
Geotype					2.5	0.057
City	60.2	(48.96)	ref.			
Small Town	59.7	(49.07)	-0.53			
Rural Area	61.7	(48.62)	1.49			
Other	53.6	(49.95)	-6.63			

*Note*s: 1. Standard deviation in parenthesis; and 2. Reported levels of statistically significant are based on ANOVA testing. The signs *, **, *** indicate that the differences in mean scores are significantly different at the 5 percent ($p<0.05$), 1 percent ($p<0.01$) and 0.5 percent ($p<0.001$) level respectively.

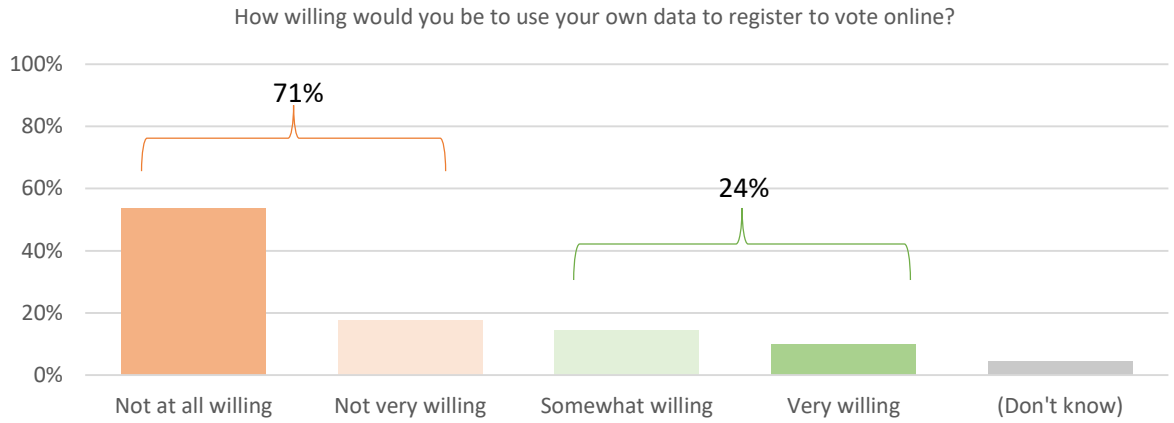
Only moderate differences could be discerned by subjective poverty or work status in **Table 15**. As a robustness check, we examined whether awareness levels differed by frequency of internet usage. No meaningful differences could be observed by internet usage and this finding was confirmed by a one-way ANOVA ($F(4, 5064) = 0.6$, $p = 0.678$) test. Does a person's voting history influence their level of awareness? Our initial analysis seems to show a reliable and valid association between the two variables. The more often a person has voted, the greater their level of self-reported awareness. Consider that 73% of those who had voted more than three times were aware of the option to register online. This can be compared to 69% of those who voted two or three times and 64% of those who voted once[12].

An online voter registration platform makes it convenient for many to complete the registration process, but using the platform will incur data costs. We wanted to see if the cost of mobile data had an influence on voting registration behaviour. The following question was presented to survey participants: "[h]ow willing would you be to use your own data to register to vote online?" Responses to this question are presented in **Figure 28** and the findings

[12] An ANOVA test showed that the size of the correlation was statistically significant and the mean square is 89590 ($F(3,5063) = 38.2$, $p = 0.00$), the R^2 for the model was 0.022.

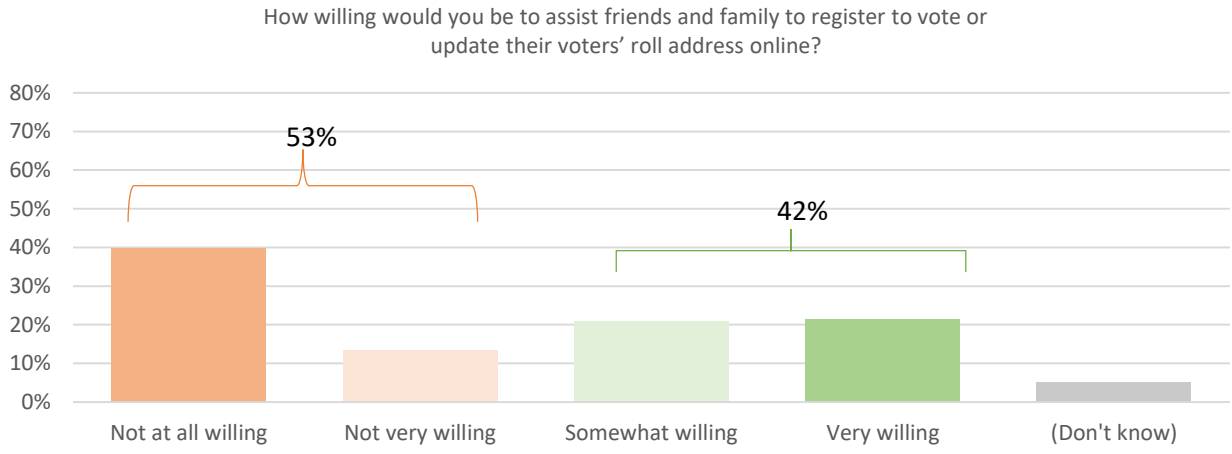
indicate that the bulk of our sample were worried about data costs. A large majority of the respondents (71%) indicated that they are not very or not at all willing to use their own data to register to vote online. Only a small minority (24%) of respondents said that they would be prepared to use their own data and 4% reported that they did not know how to answer.

Figure 28: Self-reported willingness of sample participants to use their own data to register to vote using an online IEC platform



Some people may struggle to use the online platform and we were interested in whether respondents would be willing to help their friends and family use the platform. Survey participants were queried on "[h]ow willing would you be to assist friends and family to register to vote or update their voters' roll address online?" More than half of all survey participants (53%) reported that they were not very or not at all willing to assist friends and family to register to vote or update their voters roll address online (**Figure 29**). There was a moderate association between frequency of internet usage and willingness to help friends and family in our sample. The higher the usage, the greater the self-reported willingness to help. We corroborated the strength of this observed association using a Pearson chi-square test, ($chi^2(16) = 99.6$ Pr=0.000).

Figure 29: Self-reported willingness of sample participants to assist their friends and family to use the online IEC platform



How the youth responded to the two questions outlined in **Figure 28** and **Figure 29** was presented across a diverse set of socio-demographic groups in **Table 16**. This allowed

variations in how certain subgroups responded to these questions to be identified. Reviewing the outcomes of the subgroup analysis, it was evident that there were few distinct dissimilarities between groups. With regards to participant's willingness to use their own data to access the online platform, we can discern a moderate (and positive) relationship between willingness and educational attainment. The more educated the individual, the more likely they were to express willingness. By far, the largest subgroup differences noted in the table were between dissimilar subjective poverty groups. About a third (32%; SE=2.081) of the non-poor would be willing to use their own data. This can be contrasted with 29% (SE=0.983) of those just getting by, 21% (SE=1.027) of the poor and 17% (SE=1.246) of the very poor[13].

Table 16: Self-reported willingness to use own data to register online and to hope friends and family use the online IEC platform by selected subgroups

	Use Own Data				Help Friends and Family			
	Not Willing		Willing		Not Willing		Willing	
National	71	(0.636)	24	(0.603)	41	(0.691)	30	(0.641)
Gender								
Male	72	(1.025)	24	(0.976)	43	(1.129)	29	(1.035)
Female	71	(0.820)	25	(0.776)	40	(0.882)	30	(0.825)
Age Group								
18-19	70	(2.694)	25	(2.560)	34	(2.796)	30	(2.694)
20-24	70	(1.476)	27	(1.420)	37	(1.547)	32	(1.492)
25-29	69	(1.228)	27	(1.169)	40	(1.293)	31	(1.226)
30-35	73	(0.937)	22	(0.881)	45	(1.053)	28	(0.949)
Subjective Poverty								
Non-poor	64	(2.151)	32	(2.081)	36	(2.143)	33	(2.108)
Just getting by	68	(1.016)	29	(0.983)	37	(1.047)	32	(1.015)
Poor	74	(1.111)	21	(1.027)	44	(1.261)	28	(1.145)
Very poor	78	(1.375)	17	(1.246)	50	(1.672)	23	(1.413)
Work Status								
Employed	67	(1.480)	29	(1.429)	37	(1.514)	31	(1.456)
Unemployed	73	(0.750)	23	(0.705)	43	(0.833)	29	(0.762)
Student	68	(2.551)	28	(2.464)	35	(2.614)	34	(2.587)
Other labour inactive	73	(3.280)	23	(3.100)	42	(3.628)	28	(3.300)
Educational Attainment								
Less than Matric	73	(1.514)	21	(1.394)	41	(1.669)	29	(1.535)
Complete Matric	72	(0.872)	24	(0.823)	41	(0.954)	30	(0.885)
Post-Matric	68	(1.245)	28	(1.206)	42	(1.322)	30	(1.231)
Vocational Training	76	(3.551)	20	(3.354)	41	(4.112)	30	(3.827)
Geotype								
City	70	(1.264)	26	(1.207)	41	(1.354)	29	(1.251)
Small Town	70	(1.149)	26	(1.103)	38	(1.225)	31	(1.168)
Rural Area	73	(1.030)	23	(0.970)	43	(1.147)	30	(1.057)
Other	70	(2.627)	21	(2.335)	43	(2.833)	24	(2.434)

Notes: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; and 2. 'Do not know' and 'neutral' responses are not reported.

With regards to willingness to help friends and family use the online platform, it is apparent from **Table 16** that attitudes towards this scenario differed significantly by subjective poverty status. The poorer the individual, the less likely they were to report a willingness to help. This negative association is similar to what we observed for own data usage. Using simple Pearson chi-square tests, we found that the size of the association here ($chi^2(9) = 130.4$ Pr=0.000) was similar to what was observed for self-reported poverty and willingness to use own data

[13] This wealth differential is even larger if we look at how this kind of attitude differs by self-reported income. More than two-fifths (42%; SE=4.568) of those who claim to earn more than R10,000 said that they would be willing to use their own data, 18 percentage points above the sample mean.

(chi^2(9) = 120.9 Pr=0.000). We did not detect noteworthy attitudinal differences by gender, educational attainment or geotype. However, it may be worthwhile to look at provincial residence. The results showed that people in the Northern Cape were most unwilling to help, 50% (SE=4.564) of this group said that they unwilling to assist. This can be compared unfavourably with 35% (SE=3.017) for Mpumalanga respondents and 36% (SE=2.262) of those living in the Western Cape.

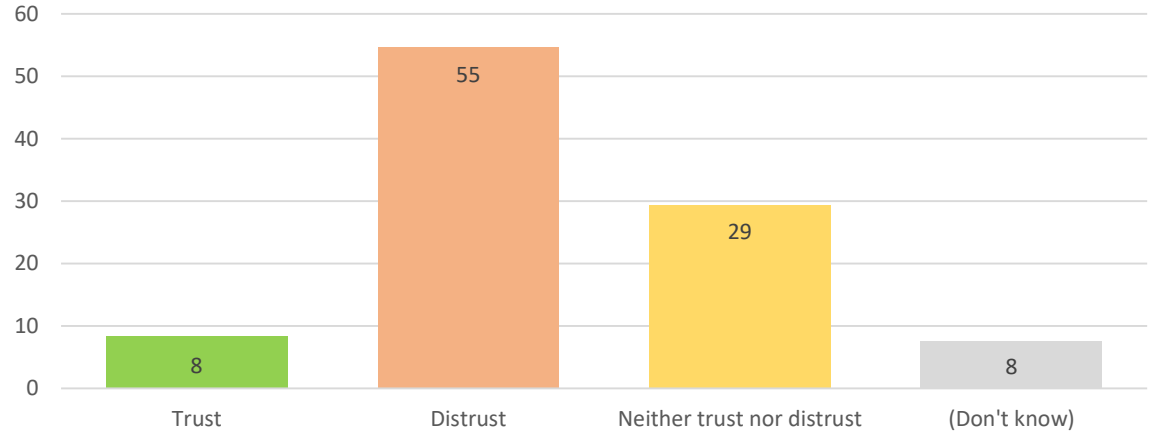
4.12. Influencers, celebrities and role models: A game changer?

Young people are highly active on social media platforms, where influencers, celebrities and role models have a strong presence. It is thus important to determine the status of influencers among potential abstainers. Politics can sometimes feel complex and intimidating, especially for first-time voters. Influencers can break down political processes, policies, and issues into more digestible and relatable content, making politics more understandable. Peer pressure and the desire to fit in can be powerful motivators for young people. When influencers advocate for voting and share their own experiences, it can create a sense of peer support and encouragement to participate. Influencers can frame voting as a civic duty and a way to actively shape the future. By emphasising the impact of voting on issues that young people care about, influencers can motivate them to engage. Some young people might have concerns or misconceptions about the voting process. Influencers can address these concerns and provide accurate information to help alleviate barriers to voting. Influencers can create excitement and buzz around voting events or registration deadlines. By making voting seem like a popular and trendy activity, influencers can increase participation. In some cases, young people might not be aware of the voter registration process or might face obstacles to registering. Influencers can share information and resources to help them navigate these challenges.

> *"Imagine if it's Kabza telling me to go vote, I'd tell him Kabza you are crazy my boy. You live in a mansion, and I live in a shack so when it rains you relax, and I must look for buckets and I'd tell him my brother I love you so much but you're talking nonsense because you don't know the life we live."* – Mariannridge, FGD, 2023
>
> *"I think they should be used just to encourage them to vote, in a neutral way not to take any side."* Umlazi, FGD, 2023.
>
> Responses from Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

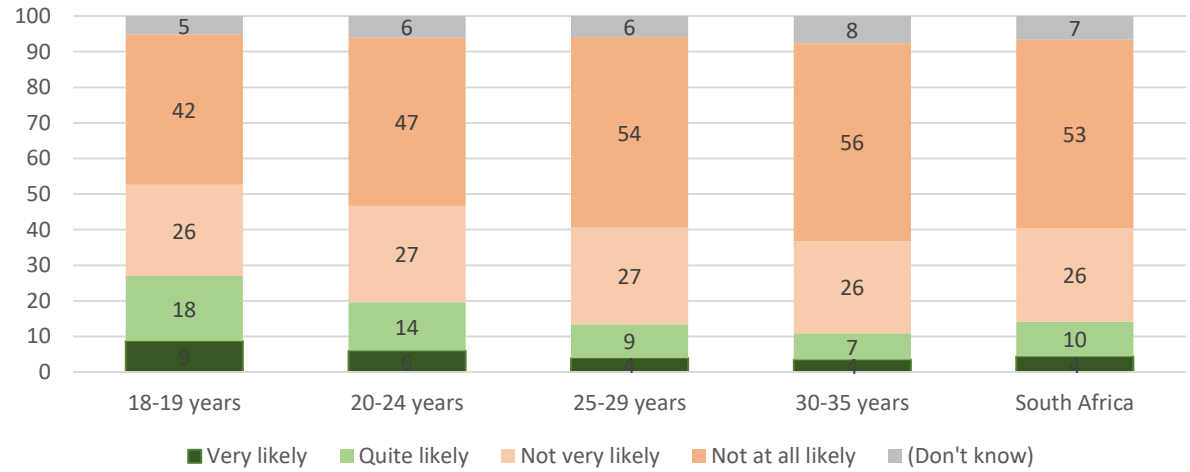
To determine the influence of influences, it was firstly important to determine if respondents would trust influencers. Young people follow influences but might not necessarily trust them. To determine the trust in these influencers, respondents were asked the extent to which they trust or distrust famous South African people (celebrities/influencers/role models) who try and influence people to vote in elections. As is evident from the graph, the majority (55%) of respondents who that took part in this survey stated that they distrust famous South Africans who try and influence people to vote in elections. About a quarter were ambivalent while about a tenth (8%) trusted influencers. A similar proportion stated "Don't know". A strong sense of distrust towards famous South African people are this prevalent among South Africans towards influencers.

Figure 30: Trust or distrust in famous South African people (celebrities/influencers/role models)



Having established that celebrities/influencers/role models are distrusted by more than half of South Africans a follow up question was asked to determine how, despite low trust levels, people would respond if their favourite celebrity, influencer or role model tried to persuade them to vote in the upcoming election. As can be seen from **Figure 31**, the majority (53%) said they would not likely be persuaded to vote in the elections. A further quarter (26%) said it was not very likely that they would be convinced to go and vote. On the contrary, about 14% said it was either quite or very likely that they would go and vote. Just under a tenth (7%) was unsure. The dominant response is therefore that young South Africans generally do not trust celebrities/influencers/role models and would not be persuaded to go and vote by influencers. Despite the dominant notion that that people are not likely to follow the advice of an influencer relative to those who are likely, it is important to be reminded that influencing 14% of the population to go and vote can amount to a significant number.

Figure 31: Likelihood of being convinced to go and vote by celebrities, influencers or role models



When analysing data to demine who would be most likely to be influenced to go and vote it was found that the youngest cohort (18-19 years) were significantly more likely to be convinced to go and vote by influencers than older age groups. A trend was also evident that incrementally older cohorts were less likely to state that influencers would convince them to go and vote. From the analysis of the voting history and voting registration variable, it was evident that people who have never voted before and people who are not registered but intend registering before the 2024 election were the most likely to state that influencers would

play a convincing role in motivating them to go and vote. Despite the general distrust of influencers among potential voters, it is important to note that they might have a significant role to play, especially among young cohorts and first-time voters. If these influencers are chosen selectively and use their influence responsibly and accurately and, encourage critical thinking about political issues and civic engagement the role of influencers in an electoral context can be critical.

Table 17: Likelihood of being convinced to go and vote by celebrities, influencers or role models by select socio-demographics

	Very likely	Quite likely	Not very likely	Not at all likely	(Don't know)	Total
Registered as a voter	3.7%	9.2%	28.0%	53.0%	6.1%	100.0%
Not registered, intend registering before 2024 elections	9.6%	18.9%	34.0%	29.3%	8.3%	100.0%
Not registered, no intention of registering	2.8%	6.0%	20.6%	64.8%	5.8%	100.0%
(Don't know)	3.5%	9.5%	27.6%	44.7%	14.6%	100.0%
No, I have never voted	5.3%	11.2%	26.4%	50.3%	6.8%	100.0%
Yes, in one previous election	3.3%	9.6%	28.0%	52.6%	6.5%	100.0%
Yes, in two or three previous elections	3.6%	8.5%	27.9%	53.2%	6.7%	100.0%
Yes, in more than three previous elections	4.7%	7.5%	21.2%	59.8%	6.9%	100.0%

4.13. Election campaign slogans: What resonates?

Election campaign slogans from the Electoral Commission play a vital role in promoting voter participation, conveying important messages, building trust, and fostering a sense of civic responsibility among citizens. Slogans serve as powerful tools for engaging the public in the democratic process and well-crafted slogans can motivate individuals to register to vote, understand the issues, and ultimately cast their ballots. Slogans help raise awareness about the upcoming elections, and is especially crucial in reaching out to segments of the population that might otherwise be less engaged or informed.

It is important to design innovative and impactful slogans which can particularly resonate with younger generations. By using language and imagery that appeal to youth, the IEC can encourage their participation in the electoral process. Catchy slogans can attract media attention and become part of public discourse. This can lead to increased coverage of the elections and the work of the IEC, further promoting civic engagement. Slogans can contribute to the development of a strong civic culture by emphasizing the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democratic society. They reinforce the idea that every vote counts and that individual participation matters.

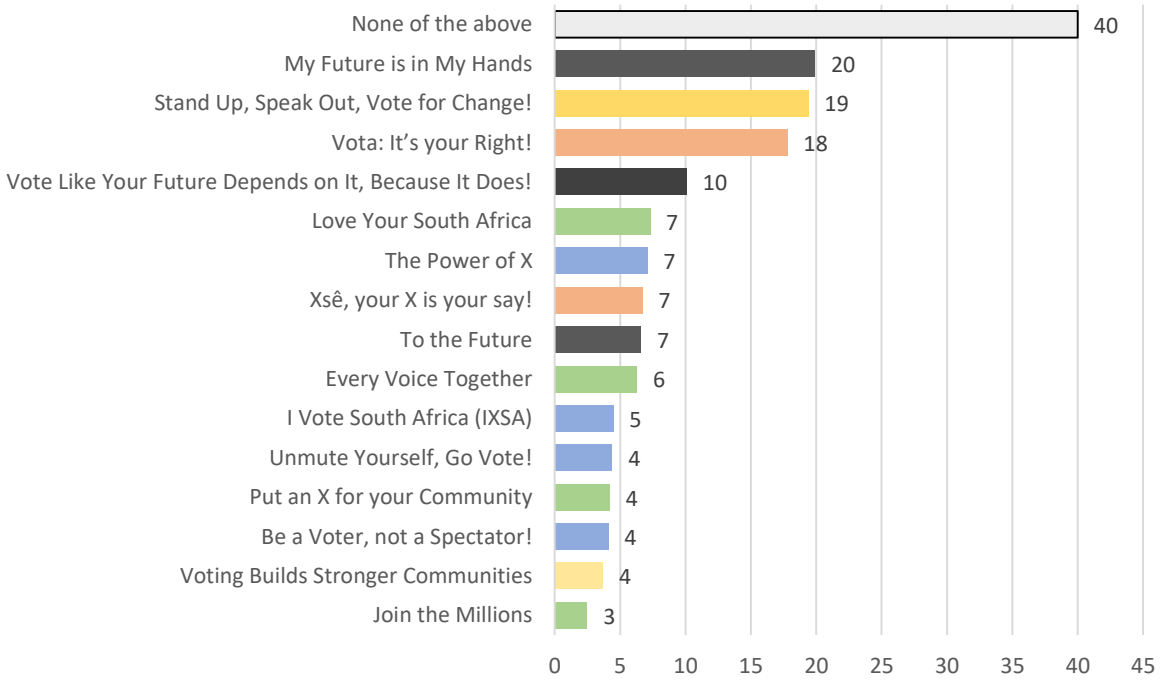
Given the importance of slogans and the fact that slogans can effectively encourage voting, the HSRC presented respondents with 15 slogans to determine how they resonate with this group of young voters who intend to abstain from voting in 2024. These slogans were designed to cover important democratic themes namely civic duty and responsibility, empowerment and participation, unity and collective action, future impact and influence, social engagement and change and future impact and influence. The different slogans and dimensions are presented in **Table 18**.

Table 18: Different slogans and the associated democratic dimension

"Vota: It's your Right!"	Civic Duty and Responsibility
"Xsê, your X is your say!"	Civic Duty and Responsibility
"The Power of X"	Empowerment and Participation
"I Vote South Africa (IXSA)"	Empowerment and Participation
"Be a Voter, not a Spectator!"	Empowerment and Participation
"Unmute Yourself, Go Vote!"	Empowerment and Participation
"Join the Millions"	Unity and Collective Action
"Love Your South Africa"	Unity and Collective Action
"Every Voice Together"	Unity and Collective Action
"Put an X for your Community"	Unity and Collective Action
"To the Future"	Future Impact and Influence
"My Future is in My Hands"	Future Impact and Influence
"Vote Like Your Future Depends on It, Because It Does!"	Future Impact and Influence
"Voting Builds Stronger Communities"	Social Engagement and Change
"Stand Up, Speak Out, Vote for Change!"	Social Engagement and Change

In responding to the question, the largest proportion of the respondents (40%) stated that no slogan resonated with them and that none of these slogans would encourage them to vote (**Figure 32**). This finding was not surprising given that this group of respondents represented potential abstainers, disillusioned with politics and not planning to vote in the 2024 elections. The 40% stating none of the slogans would encourage them to vote was therefore possibly a reflection of disillusionment and not necessarily a reflection of slogans being unacceptable and unappealing. The most popular slogans were "My Future is in My Hands" (supported by 20%) speaking to the domain of future impact and influence, "Stand Up, Speak Out, Vote for Change!" (19%) which were categorised as social engagement and change and "Vota: It's your Right!" (18%) which had to do with civic duty and responsibility. As is evident from this, the top three slogans did not represent a single theme or domain but represented three separate domains, implying that different themes were important to different voters. In the next section the different slogans and their underlying themes will be discussed.

Figure 32: Most popular slogans (%)



The slogan "My future is in my hands!" primarily speaks to the element of individual empowerment and participation in electoral democracy. The slogan emphasises the idea that every individual has the power to influence their own future. It underscores the importance of citizens taking ownership of their lives and exercising their rights, including the right to vote, to shape the trajectory of their personal and collective futures. The phrase suggests that citizens have a personal responsibility to engage in the democratic process. This slogan implies that citizens should take the initiative to participate in elections as a means of expressing their preferences and helping to determine the future direction of their nation. Beyond voting, the slogan speaks to the broader concept of civic participation. It encourages individuals to be active members of their communities, engage in public discussions, and advocate for the issues they care about. The slogan further suggests the long-term impact and suggests that the choices citizens make today will have lasting consequences for their future and the future of their country. This underscores the importance of informed decision-making and active participation in the democratic process.

“Stand Up, Speak Out, Vote for Change!” encourages citizens to actively engage in various democratic processes and dimensions to effect positive change in their society. It embodies the principles of civic engagement, political participation, and the responsiveness of government to the will of the people that are core to democratic systems. It encourages people to stand up and speak out, which is a form of political participation. The call to "speak out" underscores the importance of freedom of expression in a democracy. "Vote for Change" directly addresses the democratic dimension of electoral participation. Standing up and speaking out often involve advocacy and activism, which are essential components of democratic societies. The phrase "vote for change" specifically highlights the democratic dimension of change and reform.

The slogan "Vota, it's your right!" highlights the importance of voter education and awareness in electoral democracy. It reminds citizens of their crucial role in the democratic process and encourages them to exercise their right to vote to shape their government and society. By emphasising that voting is a right, it motivates individuals to actively engage in the democratic process and make their voices heard through the act of voting. The phrase educates the public about their fundamental right to vote. It aims to inform citizens that voting is not just a privilege but a right that they should exercise as part of their civic responsibility. The slogan serves as a call to action, combating voter apathy by reminding citizens that they have a right to influence their government. This can help counter the sentiment that individual votes do not matter. The phrase reinforces the core democratic principle that the government derives its legitimacy from the consent of the governed. When individuals are reminded that voting is their right, they may be more motivated to overcome barriers and participate in the electoral process.

The slogan "Vote like your future depends on it because it does!" emphasises the importance of civic responsibility, the consequential nature of voting, and the idea that individual participation in the democratic process has far-reaching effects on the future of individuals and the society. The slogan underscores the idea that voting is not just a personal choice, but a civic responsibility. The slogan emphasises that the act of voting has significant consequences for the future. It implies that the outcomes of elections directly impact citizens' lives, communities, and the overall direction of the nation. By stating that the future depends

on voting, the slogan empowers voters to recognize their ability to shape their own future and influence the policies and leadership that will impact their lives. The slogan serves as a motivational message to increase voter turnout. By highlighting the critical role of voting in shaping the future, it aims to inspire those who might otherwise be indifferent to participate. The slogan suggests that citizens have a stake in the decisions made by their government. By voting, they hold their elected representatives accountable for the choices they make.

The slogan "Love your South Africa!" primarily speaks to the element of national pride, identity, and civic engagement in electoral democracy. It encourages citizens to actively participate in shaping the nation's future while fostering a sense of unity, responsibility, and shared commitment to the well-being of South Africa. The phrase suggests that loving one's country goes beyond mere sentiment; it involves active engagement and participation in the democratic process. The slogan promotes a sense of unity and cohesion among citizens and it encourages citizens to rally around their shared identity. The slogan implies that citizens should think beyond short-term interests and consider the long-term well-being of the nation. This is particularly relevant in the context of elections, where decisions made today can have lasting effects on the country's future.

The slogan "The power of X!" primarily speaks to the element of voting as a fundamental democratic right and the symbol of choice in electoral democracy. It emphasises the impact that individual votes can have on the democratic process, demonstrating that even a small action like marking an "X" can wield considerable influence in shaping the future of a nation. The phrase underscores the importance of citizens' participation in the democratic process through voting. It highlights that the act of marking an "X" on a ballot is a powerful way for individuals to have their voices heard and contribute to decision-making. The slogan suggests that each citizen wields a degree of power through their vote. The use of the "X" symbol signifies making a choice. In the context of elections, this relates to citizens' ability to choose candidates or options that align with their preferences and values.

The slogan "Xse, your X is your say!" primarily speaks to the element of voter empowerment and the principle of representation in electoral democracy. It encourages citizens to recognise the power of their individual votes in shaping government decisions and reinforces the idea that voting is a fundamental means of having a direct say in the governance of their nation. The slogan emphasises that a voter's "X" mark on the ballot is a symbol of their power and influence. The slogan creates a direct link between the act of marking an "X" and having a say in the governance of the country. The phrase implies that democracy belongs to the people, and their "X" marks signify their personal stake in the system. It reinforces the principle that the legitimacy of a government derives from the consent of the governed.

The slogan "To the future!" primarily speaks to the element of hope, progress, and the aspirational nature of electoral democracy. It speaks to the aspirational and forward-looking nature of electoral democracy. It highlights the role of elections in shaping progress, positive change, and the future trajectory of a nation, appealing to citizens' hopes and desire to contribute to a better society. By focusing on the future, the slogan conveys a sense of hope and optimism. It suggests that citizens can shape a future that aligns with their values, hopes, and desires through their participation in the democratic process. The slogan can foster a

sense of unity, as it encourages citizens to collectively work toward a brighter future regardless of their individual backgrounds or differences.

The slogan "Every voice together!" speaks to the inclusive nature of participation and the collective representation in electoral democracy. It emphasises the importance of citizens coming together to contribute their perspectives, decisions, and efforts to create a more inclusive and robust democratic society. It promotes the inclusion of diverse perspectives, ensuring that no citizen's viewpoint is excluded or marginalised. The slogan fosters a sense of unity and solidarity among citizens. The slogan highlights the importance of representing the wide spectrum of opinions, backgrounds, and values present in society. It underscores the democratic principle that elected officials should reflect the diversity of the people they represent. This slogan also represents the democratic ideal of consent and active involvement of the citizenry.

The slogan "I vote South Africa (IXSA)!" speaks to the national identity, patriotism, and the act of expressing allegiance to South Africa through voting. It encourages citizens to recognise their role in the democratic process and their contribution to the growth and well-being of their nation. The slogan explicitly ties the act of voting to one's identity as a citizen of South Africa and conveys a sense of patriotism and allegiance to the country.

The slogan "Unmute yourself, go vote!" primarily speaks to the importance of citizen engagement, individual participation, and the transformative power of voting in electoral democracy. It encourages citizens to overcome apathy, express their preferences, and actively contribute to the democratic process by casting their votes. The phrase "Unmute yourself" is a call to action, urging citizens to actively engage in the democratic process. The slogan emphasises the significance of individual participation in elections. The slogan addresses voter apathy, encouraging those who might be disengaged or silent to "unmute" themselves and become active participants in the democratic process. The phrase "go vote" explicitly ties the idea of being engaged and vocal. IT expresses that voting is a way of communicating citizens' desires and priorities for the country's future.

The slogan "Put an X for your community!" speaks to the importance of local representation, community empowerment, and the impact of voting on issues that directly affect the well-being and progress of a specific community or constituency within the framework of electoral democracy. It emphasises the role of elected officials in representing the concerns and needs of the local area or constituency. The slogan suggests that marking an "X" signifies a citizen's alignment with the values and aspirations of their community. It reinforces the idea that voting is a way to uphold and express shared ideals. The phrase directly links the act of voting ("Put an X") to the potential influence on the well-being of the community. It implies that individual actions have consequences for the local area.

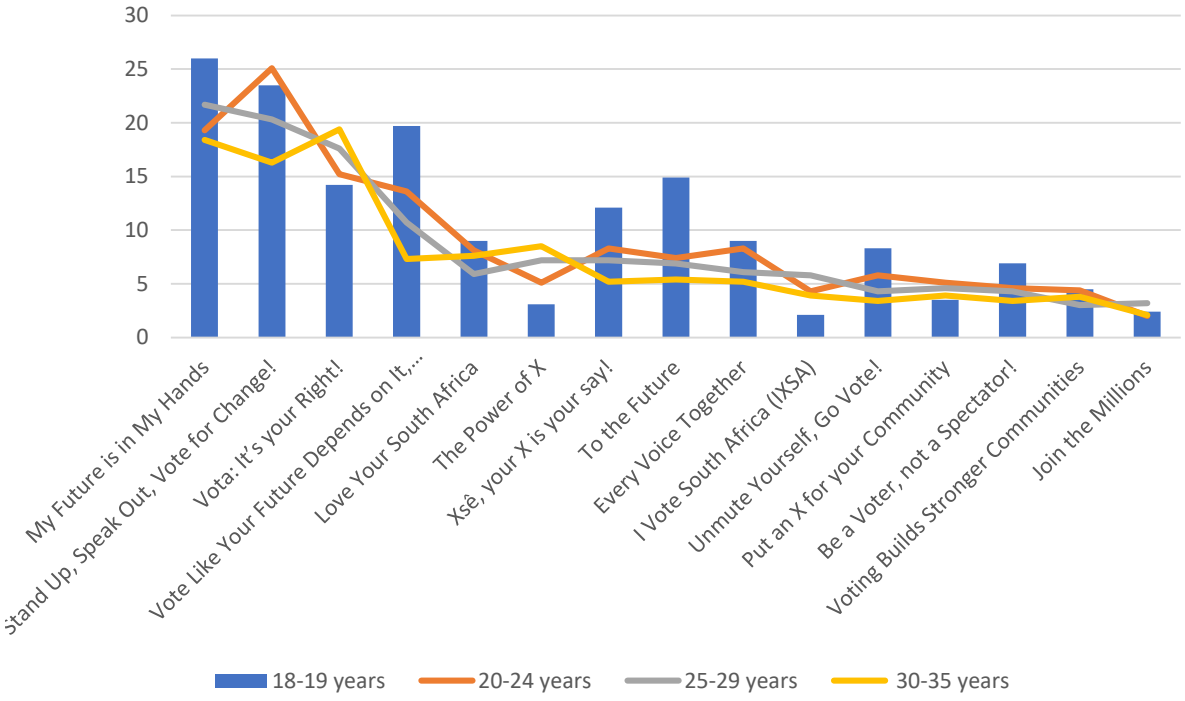
The slogan "Be a voter, not a spectator" primarily speaks to the importance of active civic engagement, the responsibility of citizens to participate, and the idea that democracy is strengthened when individuals take an active role in shaping the political process through their votes. The slogan underscores that citizens have the power to influence the outcomes of elections through their votes. The phrase contrasts being a "spectator" (someone who observes from the sidelines) with being a "voter" (someone who actively participates). It

suggests that citizens should not be passive bystanders but should engage in the decision-making process.

The slogan "Voting Builds stronger communities" speaks to the importance of community involvement, social cohesion, and the positive impact that democratic participation can have on the well-being and unity of communities within the context of electoral democracy. The slogan suggests that voting is not just an individual act but a collective one. The phrase implies that by voting, individuals have an opportunity to ensure that the concerns, needs, and priorities of their communities are represented in the political process.

The slogan "Join the millions" speaks to the importance of mass participation, the strength that comes from large numbers of engaged citizens, and the impact that collective involvement can have on shaping the outcomes of electoral democracy. It encourages individuals to become part of a larger collective by participating in the democratic process and underscores the idea that the more people who participate, the greater the influence. It embraces a notion of inclusivity and serves as a motivational call to action, encouraging individuals to recognise the significance of their involvement and the potential they hold when they align with a collective effort.

Figure 33: Most popular slogans by age group (%)

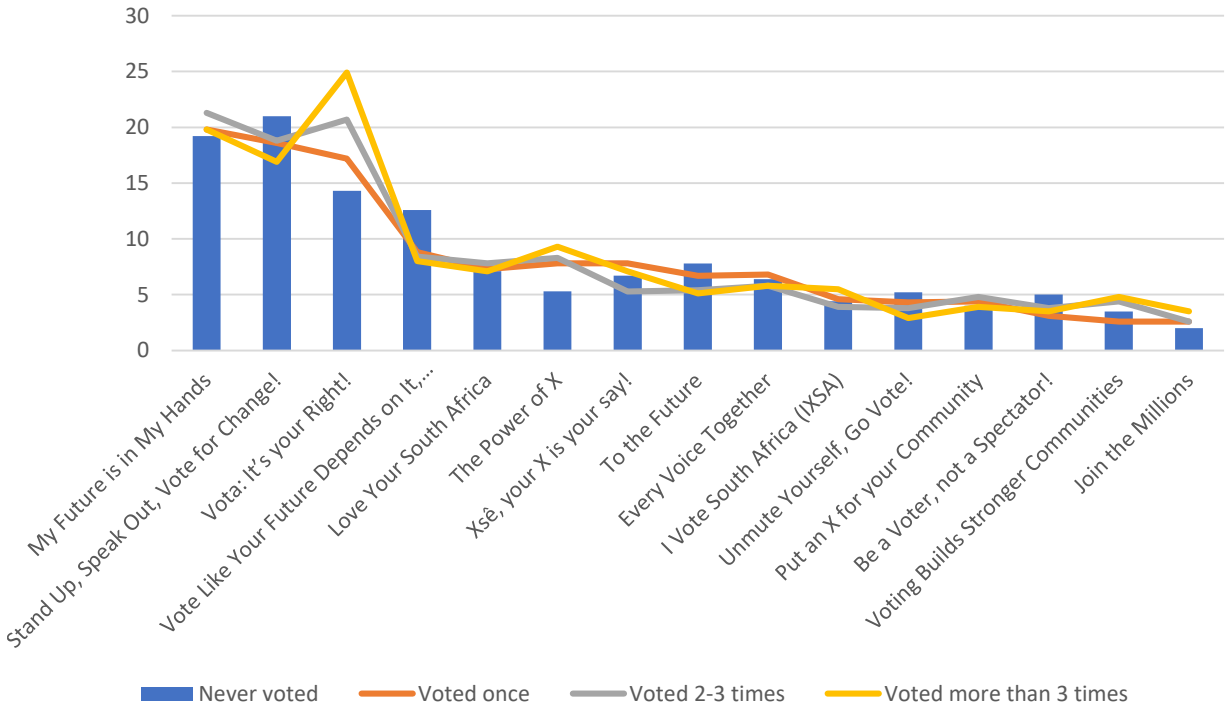


Despite the overall popularity of these slogans, it is conceivable that certain slogans would resonate more with certain socio-demographic subtypes. Understanding the nuanced variations between socio demographic subtypes and preference for slogans would enable the IEC to better target important cohorts. In **Figure 33**, popularity of slogans is analysed by age. Looking closer at age, it is clear that the youngest cohort (18-19 years) was much more inclined to respond positively to slogans that made reference to the future. Higher than average responses from this group was given to “My future is in my hands”, Vote like your future depends on it because it does” and “To the future”. These slogans emphasise that individuals

have the power to influence their own future. It underscores the importance of citizens taking ownership of their lives and exercising their rights, including the right to vote, to shape the trajectory of their personal and collective futures. The slogan further suggests the long-term impact and suggests that the choices citizens make today will have lasting consequences for their future and the future of their country. The oldest cohort preferred the slogan “Vota: It’s your Right!” that spoke to the importance of voter education and awareness in electoral democracy.

A big challenge that faces the IEC is to entice first time voters to cast a ballot and it was therefore important to determine which slogans resonated with person has voted before, attempting to determine if there is a difference in preference among those that have never voted before as opposed to those who have voted before. From **Figure 34**, it is evident that that “Stand Up, Speak Out, Vote for Change”; "My future is in my hands!" "Vota, it's your right!" and "Vote like your future depends on it because it does!" were the most popular slogans among those that have never voted before. The slogan that encouraged a sense of urgency namely “Vote Like Your Future Depends on It, because it does!” and “Stand Up, Speak Out, Vote for Change!” resonated more with those who had never voted before whilst slogans about the right to vote (“Vota: It’s your Right!”) and the “Power of X” resonated less with those who have never voted. This implies that messages with a strong message of urgency in terms of voting are best at enticing first time voters. Slogans that merely emphasis democratic principles are least enticing to first time voters.

Figure 34: Most popular slogans by voting frequency (%)



In summary, it was clear that slogans that speaks to the future and imply action were most popular among the youngest cohort (18–19-year-olds). Slogans that had the word future in such as "My future is in my hands!" "Vote like your future depends on it because it does!"; "To the future!" resonate with young people who are at a stage of life where they are considering

their futures. Slogans emphasising the importance of voting for the sake of one's future resonates with young people who feel a sense of urgency to address pressing issues and challenges. For 30-35 years olds (a more mature group) the slogan "Vota, it's your right!" highlights the importance of voter education and awareness in electoral democracy. It reminds citizens of their crucial role in the democratic process and encourages them to exercise their right to vote to shape their government and society. In terms of never voted before, “Stand Up Speak Out, Vote for Change”; "My future is in my hands!" "Vota, it's your right!" and "Vote like your future depends on it because it does!" resonated most, with first time voters. Differences between first time voters and voters who have voted before in terms of preferences for slogans was that those who have never voted before showed a preference for slogans that portrayed a sense of urgency.

4.14. What can the IEC do to encourage voting in NPE 2024?

Respondents were asked an open-ended question: “In your opinion, what could the IEC do to encourage you to vote in next year’s election?” Many of the issues that were raised by respondents fell outside the mandate of the IEC. These issues included job creation and opportunities, better service delivery and addressing corruption.

Some responses pertained to the mandate of the IEC and is summarised below. Direct online quotes are presented in italics.

(a) Implement free and fair elections.

Respondents wanted free and fair elections: “*Guarantee free and fair elections*.” In this respect the IEC can emphasize a commitment to free and fair elections through clear communication and demonstration of impartiality. The IEC can also implement measures to increase transparency in the electoral process, such as observer missions and robust monitoring systems.

(b) Improve the voting experience.

The voting experience should be improved: “*Voting stations to be more accessible*”. The IEC could enhance accessibility of voting stations, potentially by increasing the number of stations or improving their geographic distribution. Investment in infrastructure and technology can also streamline the voting process and minimize delays.

(c) Enhance safety and security voting stations.

Respondents mentioned that safety and security at voting stations is critical, as well issue of keeping the ballot boxes safe. “*Make sure the voting stations are safe and the boxes with votes are also safe and secured*”. The IEC can therefore implement more stringent security measures at voting stations to ensure the safety of voters and the integrity of ballots. The IEC should also communicate clearly about the security protocols in place to reassure voters of their safety.

(d) A strong anti-electoral corruption stance

Respondents believe a strong stance against corruption is critical. “*Create a system of voting in which everyone will know that no corruption can happen when counting votes*”. The IEC should constantly develop, promote, and upgrade mechanisms to prevent corruption in the electoral process, such as secure ballot counting procedures. The IEC should communicate

extensively about the steps taken to maintain integrity and transparency in the electoral process.

(e) Create more education and awareness campaigns.

Suggestions made by the respondents included requests for more education and awareness raising campaigns "*Make me understand more about elections*". The IEC should expand educational initiatives to increase public understanding of the electoral process, including voter registration, voting procedures, and the importance of participation. The IEC could utilize various channels such as workshops, informational materials, and social media to disseminate information effectively.

(f) Improved visibility

Some respondents requested that the IEC improve their visibility: "*Be very visible, everywhere*". The IEC could increase visibility through targeted advertising campaigns across multiple platforms, including traditional media, social media, and outdoor advertising. Tailoring messages to resonate with diverse demographics and effectively communicating these messages would encourage voter participation and enhance public trust in the electoral process.

5. Conclusion

Findings from this survey show that youth who plan to abstain or are uncertain about voting in the 2024 National and Provincial Elections are deeply discontent with socio-political performance in the country. Less than 4% of this group of young citizens is satisfied with democratic performance and political leaders and have equally harsh views of core political institutions with less than 5% trusting national government, provincial government or political parties. This negative evaluation has a huge bearing on voting intention and the majority of this group (73%) acknowledged low performance evaluations as reasons for voting abstinence. This negative evaluation therefore has a huge bearing on voting intention and should be addressed in communication or voter education strategies by clearly addressing concerns about poor government performance and the potential role of voting in these circumstances.

Voting efficacy or political efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to influence the political process through voting and other forms of political participation and encompasses both external and internal voting efficacy. In the case of this group, both internal and external efficacy is extremely low. This group was of the opinion that their vote would make no difference (low internal efficacy) and believed that once elected all parties are the same and voting therefore pointless (low external efficacy). Low voting efficacy was the second highest motive (in 21% of cases) for people not voting or not considering voting. Educational campaigns, outreach programs, and initiatives that inform citizens about the political process and the importance of continued participation should continue to be emphasised. Public awareness campaigns should focus on the importance of voting despite disillusionment and its impact on governance. Success stories and examples of positive change resulting from citizen engagements should form a part of the narratives of programmes.

Despite these forms of disillusionment, more than half of this group (58%) acknowledged the importance of voting. Furthermore, Furthermore, 40% of youth who plan to abstain or are undecided about voting in the 2024 National and Provincial Elections still recognise the civic duty to vote. These are important findings, as they provide a direct challenge to the prevailing social representation of youth as apathetic, which is a generalisation that is ultimately unhelpful to ongoing efforts to mobilise youth participation. Despite acknowledging the importance of voting and duty to vote, they admitted to struggling to find a party that represented their needs. In addition, political party coalitions did not have an incentivising effect on interest in voting. Likewise, independent candidates tended to dampen their interest in turnout. This group also tended to distrust influencers, celebrities and role models who attempted to influence people to vote in elections and the majority were not likely to be influenced by them to go and vote. However, it is noteworthy that 14% of this group (especially the youngest cohort) stated that they could potentially be influenced to go and vote by such role models. The IEC should therefore consider this strategy, since a tenth of this group would amount to significant impact. Media sources that would be well received by this group in terms of being a trusted and preferred media sources for electoral information were television, social media, and radio. A diversified approach to distributing information however important given that many of those with a lower level of education preferred face-to-face media.

Awareness of the IEC communication platforms were circumscribed. Only a third was aware of the IEC website and a fifth had used it before. The IEC SMS line to check registration status was known by about a quarter of these respondents and used by under a fifth. Less than a fifth was aware of the IEC social media pages and only a tenth had used this before. Concerted efforts should be made to inform the public of these platforms especially given that those who intended to register were particularly unaware of options to register on-line. This group also stated an unwillingness to use own data to register online and this was particularly true of the less affluent. Asked what the preferred way would be to communicate with the IEC the group stated that they would prefer WhatsApp chat, partly due to a concern about fake news.

Slogans are often used to relay messages in a concise way to voters and potential voters prior to and during elections. As such, this study tested the popularity of a few slogans and it was found that “My Future in My Hands”, “Stand Up, Speak Out, Vote for Change!” and “Vota: Its our Right!” were the most popular. Slogans that resonated most with the youngest cohort were slogans that underscored notions of the future and taking ownership of the future. The slogan that encouraged a sense of urgency namely “Vote Like Your Future Depends on It, because it does!” and “Stand Up, Speak Out, Vote for Change!” resonated more with those who had never voted before as well as with resolute abstainers.

6. Recommendations for consideration

- Communication strategies need to take the concerns of youth about poor government performance into account.
- Voter education needs to prioritise civic and democracy education amongst youth, emphasising messages of duty and responsibility alongside information about voting procedures and processes.
- Awareness of the IEC website and registration SMS line needs to be promoted.

- Social media influencers are generally not a trusted source of information; but 15% of respondents said they could be influenced to go and vote by such a person. Careful consideration should be given to this strategy.
- Online registration is popular, but ideally should be made data-free. It should also be promoted more given that first time voters were least aware of online registration.
- The communication slogans that resonate with those most disillusioned are messages of urgency and hard hitting ("Vote like your future depends on it because it does!"). Messages that emphasise the future are particularly appealing for the 18-24 age group.

In summary, taking everything together, the IEC needs to ultimately ensure that its processes and voting experience reflect free and fair elections. Election Day performance is critical and positive experiences on Election Day can potentially enable the IEC to disassociate with other political institutions which are currently distrusted and harshly evaluated. Being and remaining a trusted institution is the most critical and enduring factor that could ensure voter turnout despite other negating factors. Ensuring that elections are seen as free and fair is therefore not only critical for the IEC to remain a strong and legitimate institution but also the best strategy that the IEC can employ to ensure greater turnout.

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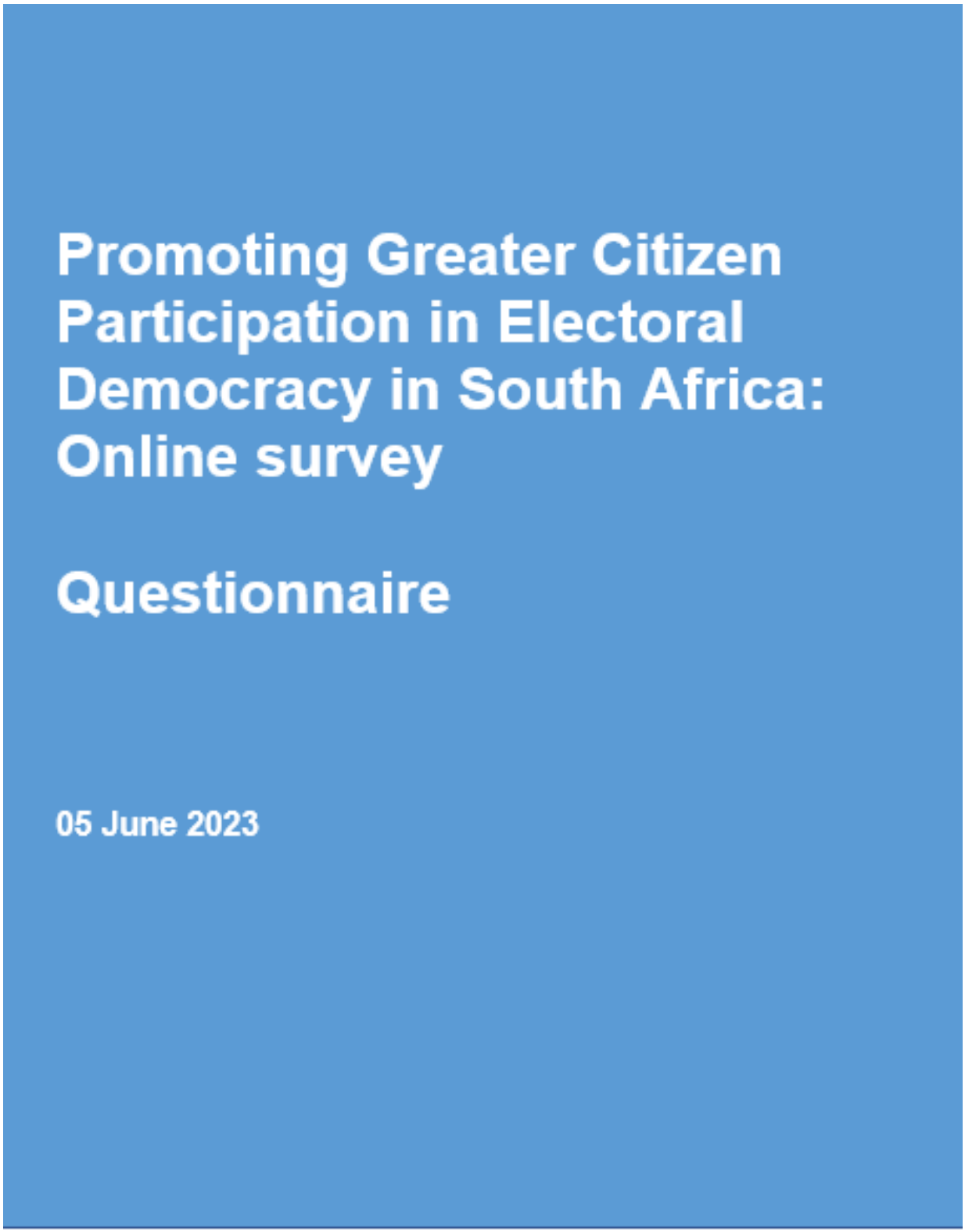
Appendix: Survey Instrument



SURVEY INTRODUCTION

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) is conducting a survey on behalf of the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC). The purpose of the survey is to better understand the reasons why people choose not to vote in elections in South Africa, and the communications messages that might encourage participation in future. We kindly ask you to complete it. Your responses could help the IEC make informed decisions regarding their communications strategy for future elections in the country.

What taking part involves

- It will take about 20 minutes to complete.
- Participating is voluntary and you are free to skip any questions or stop the survey at any time.
- Your information is anonymous and confidential. No information that identifies you will be collected or retained by the researchers, and all of the information we collect will be stored securely. However, any online interaction carries some risk of being accessed.
- There are no immediate benefits to you from participating in this study. However, this study will be helpful to determine views on elections in South Africa.

The survey has been approved by the HSRC's Research Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, you may contact Dr. Ben Roberts, Principal Investigator broberts@hsrc.ac.za or Dr. Jarè Struwig, jstruwig@hsrc.ac.za.

Alternatively, please call the HSRC's toll-free ethics hotline 0800 212 123 (when phoned from a landline from within South Africa) or contact the Human Sciences Research Council REC Administrator, on Tel 012 302 2012 or e-mail research.ethics@hsrc.ac.za.

SCREENING QUESTIONS

Do you agree to take part?		
Yes	1	
No	2	**Terminate interview**

Are you between 18 and 35 years of age?		
Yes	1	
No	2	**Terminate interview**

Are you a citizen of South Africa?		
Yes	1	
No	2	**Terminate interview**

Are you planning to vote in the upcoming 2024 national and provincial government elections in South Africa?		
Yes	1	**Terminate interview**
No	2	
Uncertain	8	
Refuse to say	9	**Terminate interview**

BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS

First, we would like to ask a few questions about you	
1. What is your age?	
18-19 years	1
20-24 years	2
25-29 years	3
30-35 years	4
Refuse to say	9

2. What population group do you belong to?	
Black African	1
Coloured	2
Indian or Asian	3
White	4
Other	5

3. What is your highest level of education?	
No formal schooling	1
Primary education	2
Some secondary schooling	3
Completed matric	4
Higher education: diploma (in progress or complete)	5
Higher education: undergraduate (in progress or complete)	6
Higher education: postgraduate (in progress or complete)	7
Vocational training	8

4. In which province are you living at the moment?	
Western Cape	1
Eastern Cape	2
Northern Cape	3
Free State	4
KwaZulu-Natal	5
North West	6
Gauteng	7
Mpumalanga	8
Limpopo	9

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

Now we want to ask a few questions about politics and government.	
5. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy is working in South Africa?	
Very satisfied	1
Satisfied	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3
Dissatisfied	4
Very dissatisfied	5
Do not know	8

6. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the current POLITICAL LEADERS in South Africa?	
Very satisfied	1
Satisfied	2
Neither nor	3
Dissatisfied	4
Very dissatisfied	5
Do not know	8

7. To what extent do you trust or distrust NATIONAL GOVERNMENT in South Africa at present?	
Strongly trust	1
Trust	2
Neither trust nor distrust	3
Distrust	4
Strongly distrust	5
Do not know	8

8. To what extent do you trust or distrust PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT in South Africa at present?	
Strongly trust	1
Trust	2
Neither trust nor distrust	3
Distrust	4
Strongly distrust	5
Do not know	8

9. To what extent do you trust or distrust the ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF SOUTH AFRICA (IEC) at present?	
Strongly trust	1
Trust	2
Neither trust nor distrust	3
Distrust	4
Strongly distrust	5
Do not know	8

10. And to what extent do you trust or distrust POLITICAL PARTIES in South Africa at present?	
Strongly trust	1
Trust	2
Neither trust nor distrust	3
Distrust	4
Strongly distrust	5
Do not know	8

VOTING ATTITUDES

11. How important do you think it is to vote in elections?	
Not at all important	1
Somewhat important	2
Very important	3
Extremely important	4
Do not know	8

12. How interested are you in elections?	
Very interested	1
Quite interested	2
Not very interested	3
Not at all interested	4
Do not know	8

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about voting?	
13. "My vote makes no difference"	
Strongly agree	1
Agree	2
Neither agree nor disagree	3
Disagree	4
Strongly disagree	5
Do not know	8

14. "After being elected all political parties are the same, so voting is pointless"	
Strongly agree	1
Agree	2
Neither agree nor disagree	3
Disagree	4
Strongly disagree	5
Do not know	8

15. "It is the duty of all citizens to vote"	
Strongly agree	1
Agree	2
Neither agree nor disagree	3
Disagree	4
Strongly disagree	5
Do not know	8

16. To what extent do you struggle to find a political party that represents your needs and interests?	
Not at all	1
To a minor extent	2
To some extent	3
To a great extent	4
To a very great extent	5
Do not know	8

17. Recently, a new law was signed that lets independent candidates participate in national and provincial elections alongside political parties. Does the ability to vote for independent candidates in elections make you more or less likely to want to vote in elections?	
Much more likely	1
More likely	2
Neither more nor less likely	3
Less likely	4
Much less likely	5
Do not know	8

18. After elections, political parties in South Africa are increasingly going into coalitions with other parties. Does this make you more or less likely to want to vote in elections?	
Much more likely	1
More likely	2
Neither more nor less likely	3
Less likely	4
Much less likely	5
Do not know	8

19. On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of recent government elections held in South Africa?	
Completely free and fair	1
Free and fair, but with minor problems	2
Free and fair, but with major problems	3
Not free and fair	4
Do not know	8

20. In your view, how often do you believe that corrupt practices, such as bribery or vote buying, occur during elections in the country?	
Very often	1
Fairly often	2
Sometimes	3
Rarely	4
Never	5
Do not know	8

VOTER REGISTRATION

I would now like to ask you some questions about voter registration and the process of getting registered as a voter.		
21. Which of the following best applies to you?		
I am registered as a voter	1	Skip to Q.23
I am not registered, but intend to register before the 2024 elections	2	Skip to Q.23
I am not registered and do not intend to register	3	Ask Q.22
Do not know	8	Ask Q.22

22. Please give the reason why you do not intend registering or are uncertain about registering? Please provide your answer in the space below.
(Open-ended)

23. Are you aware that you can register to vote and update your address online on the IEC website (https://registertovote.elections.org.za)?	
Yes	1
No	2
Do not know	8

24. How willing would you be to use your own data to register to vote online?	
Not at all willing	1
Not very willing	2
Somewhat willing	3
Very willing	4
Do not know	8

25. How willing would you be to assist friends and family to register to vote or update their voters' roll address online?	
Not at all willing	1
Not very willing	2
Somewhat willing	3
Very willing	4
Do not know	8

VOTING HISTORY AND INTENTION

26. Have you ever voted in national/provincial or local government elections in South Africa?	
No, I have never voted	1
Yes, in one previous election	2
Yes, in two or three previous elections	3
Yes, in more than three previous elections	4

<Conceptual construct: Voting history>

27. There are many reasons why people do not vote in elections. What are the MOST IMPORTANT REASONS why you are thinking of not voting in the upcoming 2024 election? Please write your answer in the space provided below.
(Open-ended)

28. Thinking about your answer above, which ONE of the following is closest to the reason you think you may not vote in the 2024 election? Please select only one option.	
Not interested in voting	1
Do not have the ID documents needed to register or vote	2
Not registered	3
Disillusioned with politics	4
Lack of transport	5
Not interested in any of the existing political parties	6
Polling station too far away	7
I am too busy (including educational, work and care responsibilities)	8
A lack of change since the last election	9
My vote would not make a difference	10
Poor government performance in delivering services	11
Health reasons/sick	12
I worry about problems at the voting station	13
Poor government performance in addressing poverty, unemployment and corruption	14
Not interested in politics	15
Very long queues	16
Empty promises from political parties	17
Elections are pointless	18
None of the above	19

COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA

29. Which of the following sources are your <u>preferred media</u> for getting information about elections? (Select all that apply)	
a. Television (e.g. SABC 1, 2 or 3, ETV, DSTV Channels)	1
b. Newspapers	2
c. Radio	3
d. Friends, relatives and neighbours	4
e. Posters	5
f. A rally	6
g. Community based organisation	7
h. Educational institution or workplace	8
i. Religious institutions (churches, temples, mosques, etc.)	9
j. Social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram etc.)	10
k. Internet websites that are not social media (Google, News24)	11
l. SMS, WhatsApp, or other text message	12
m. Other (specify)	13
n. Don't know	14

30. Which of the following <u>do you trust</u> as a source for information about elections? (Select all that apply)	
a. Television (e.g. SABC 1, 2 or 3, ETV, DSTV Channels)	1
b. Newspapers	2
c. Radio	3
d. Friends, relatives and neighbours	4
e. Posters	5
f. A rally	6
g. Community based organisation	7
h. Educational institution or workplace	8
i. Religious institutions (churches, temples, mosques, etc.)	9
j. Social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram etc.)	10
k. Internet websites that are not social media (Google, News24)	11
l. SMS, WhatsApp, or other text message	12
m. None of the above (do not trust any of these sources)	13

31. How concerned are you that fake news and misinformation about elections in South Africa is creating confusion, distrust, and a lack of interest in voting?	
Not at all concerned	1
Slightly concerned	2
Very concerned	3
Extremely concerned	4
Do not know	8

32. Which of the following Electoral Commission's communication platforms are you aware of? (Select all that apply)	
a. IEC 32810 SMS line to check registration status	1
b. IEC Contact centre number 0800 11 8000 during elections	2
c. IEC website (www.elections.org.za)	3
d. IEC social media pages on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube?	4
e. IEC WhatsApp page for voter education	5
f. IEC email (info@elections.org.za)	6
g. None of the above	7

33. Which of the following Electoral Commission's communication platforms have you used before? (Select all that apply)	
a. IEC 32810 SMS line to check registration status	1
b. IEC contact centre number 0800 11 8000 during elections	2
c. IEC website (www.elections.org.za)	3
d. IEC social media pages on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube?	4
e. IEC WhatsApp page for voter education	5
f. IEC email (info@elections.org.za)	6
g. None of the above	7

34. Which other platforms would you like to communicate with the Electoral Commission through? (Select all that apply)	
a. IEC contact centre callback	1
b. IEC WhatsApp chat	2
c. In-person community meetings	3
d. IEC Webchat	4
e. USSD	5
f. Other (Specify)	6
g. None of the above	7

35. To what extent do you trust or distrust famous South African people (celebrities/influencers/role models) who try and influence people to vote in elections?	
Strongly trust	1
Trust	2
Neither trust nor distrust	3
Distrust	4
Strongly distrust	5
Do not know	8

36. If your favourite celebrity, influencer or role model told you to vote in the 2024 election, how likely is it that you would follow this advice?	
Very likely	1
Quite likely	2
Not very likely	3
Not at all likely	4
Do not know	8

37. a. Can you remember any of the Electoral Commission's campaign messaging (slogans/adverts) during the last two elections – 2019 National and Provincial Election and the 2021 Local Government Elections?		
Yes	1	Ask Q37b
No	2	Skip to Q38
Uncertain	3	Skip to Q38

37b. Please describe what you remember? Please type in the space below.
(Open-ended)

38. Here are a few examples of different types of slogans used to encourage people to vote. Which of the following slogans do you like the best and make you feel motivated to vote? Select all that apply	
"Vota: It's your Right!"	1
"Xsê, your X is your say!"	2
"The Power of X"	3
"I Vote South Africa (IXSA)"	4
"Join the Millions"	5
"Love Your South Africa"	6
"Every Voice Together"	7
"Put an X for your Community"	8
"To the Future"	9
"My Future is in My Hands"	10
"Voting Builds Stronger Communities"	11
"Stand Up, Speak Out, Vote for Change!"	12
"Be a Voter, not a Spectator!"	13
"Unmute Yourself, Go Vote!"	14
"Vote Like Your Future Depends on It, Because It Does!"	15
None of the above	16

39. In your opinion, what could the IEC do to encourage you to vote in next year's election?
(Open-ended)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Finally, we would like to ask you about some further questions about you and your household.	
40. What is your gender?	
Male	1
Female	2
Other	3

41. Which of the following best describes what you are doing now?	
Employed full time	1
Employed part time	2
Self-employed	3
Employed in casual work or piece job	4
Unemployed, looking for work	5
Unemployed, not looking for work	6
Permanently sick or disabled	7
Student or learner	8
Pensioner	9
Looking after the household, looking after children or other persons	10
Other	11

42. Would you say that you and your family are…	
Wealthy	1
Very comfortable	2
Reasonably comfortable	3
Just getting along	4
Poor	5
Very poor	6

43. People can use the internet on different devices such as computers, tablets and cellphones. How often do you use the internet on these or any other devices, whether for work or personal use?	
Almost all the time	1
Several times a day	2
Once a day	3
Several times a week	4
Several times a month	5
Less often	6
Never	7
Do not know	9

44. Social media refers to websites and applications like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and TikTok. How often in the PAST 4 WEEKS have you spent time looking at social media websites and applications?	
Almost all the time	1
Several times a day	2
Once a day	3
Several times a week	4
Several times a month	5
Less often	6
Never	7
Do not know	9

45. What is your individual monthly income on average? Please include income from all sources, including social grants. If you are unsure, please give you best guess.	
Less than R1,000 per month	1
Between R1,001 and R2,500 per month	2
Between R2,501 and R5,000 per month	3
Between R5,001 and R10,000 per month	4
Between R10,001 and R20,000 per month	5
Between R20,001 and R40,000 per month	6
More than R40,000 per month	7
Don't know	8
Refuse to say	9

46. Which of the following best describes the kind of place where you are staying now?	
Township or RDP house	1
Backyard shack or backyard room in a township	2
In an informal settlement	3
Suburban house (including a cottage)	4
Flat, apartment or townhouse	5
Hostel or student residence	6
Rural area	7
Other	8

47. Which of the following best describes the area that you are staying in?	
Big city	1
Small city	2
Small town	3
Rural village/community	4
Farm	5
Other	6

THANK YOU
for participating in the survey
Your response is incredibly valuable, and we appreciate the time you have invested in this research.
THIS SURVEY IS COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS AND #DATAFREE.