

Democracy's Dividend

Results from the Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

Report Prepared for



SOUTH AFRICA

The Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC)

National Office, Election House
Riverside Office Park, 1303 Heuwel Avenue, Centurion

By

Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)

Jarè Struwig, Benjamin Roberts, Steven Gordon, Samela Mtyingizane, Thobeka Radebe,
and Ngqapheli Mchunu

Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE AIM OF THE SURVEY SERIES

The Electoral Commission's Voter Participation Survey (VPS) is a nationally representative, cross-sectional survey that was conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) between October and December 2021. The study aims to inform and guide the Commission with its plans, policies, and practices by evaluating voting behaviour and interest ahead of the 2021 Local Government Elections (LGE). In this study, the broader political landscape in South Africa is examined together with factors that might impact voting behaviour (e.g., mass perceptions about the performance of government and attitudes towards democratic values). Specific issues (such as the political participation involvement of women and the youth) that have a special interest for the Commission are also examined. The report also took into consideration the challenges of holding a largescale government election during the current the Coronavirus outbreak.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this study, 500 Population Census Small Area Layers (SALs) were sampled as primary sampling units, stratified by province, geographical sub-type, and majority population group. A total of 3,119 individuals aged 16 and older were interviewed in households which are geographically spread across the country's nine provinces. The data are weighted and benchmarked to Statistics South Africa's mid-year population estimates for 2021 to ensure that the results are representative of the population older than 15 years. Adherence to ethical and quality protocols was stringent. This survey represents the views of 42,23,8431 South Africans of 16 years and older.

POLITICAL MOOD AHEAD OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

The political mood in South Africa was especially dire during the 2021 period. Compared with previous survey rounds, people have become less proud of the nation with only 67% of the adult populace indicating that they would rather be a citizen of South Africa than of any other country. A clear majority are dissatisfied with the current status quo, 76% of all adult citizens stated that the nation was going in the wrong direction. Retrospective evaluations of personal and collective wellbeing have become more negative in the five years before the VPS interview. Public confidence in core democratic institutions (e.g., national government and parliament) has fallen significantly between 2015 and 2021. In summation, a significant proportion of the adult populace believed South Africa was in state of societal deterioration in 2021.

In 2021 satisfaction with democracy was low compared with what was observed in previous survey rounds. More than half (56%) of the public voiced discontent with how South African democracy was working in the last survey round while only a small minority (25%) were satisfied. There was a significant decline in public evaluations of the freeness and fairness of government elections between 2013 and 2021. Those citizens who had never voted became more skeptical about the quality of South African elections over time. Democratic performance is rated as falling considerably short of the ideal in relation to democratic accountability. The 2021 VPS data suggest that satisfaction with democracy is closely associated with retrospective evaluations of personal and collective wellbeing. If a citizen

thought that their conditions, or those of the wider collective, were declining then they were less satisfied with democracy.

To understand electoral participation in the 2021 LGE, it was important to gain an appreciation for citizen perceptions regarding the performance of municipalities in meeting the needs of residents. Only 22% of adult citizens were satisfied with their municipality's performance in VPS 2021 while 53% registered dissatisfaction. The VPS data suggests that satisfaction with service delivery (e.g., the provision of water or sanitation) is closely associated with overall mass approval with municipal governance. Citizen satisfaction with the provision of basic services has declined significantly since VPS 2015. Three-fifths of the adult populace believed that service delivery had become worse between 2016 and 2021. One of the most pressing concerns was the provision of electricity, citizen satisfaction on this issue fell from 70% in VPS 2015 to 46% in VPS 2021.

The VPS questionnaire included statements that form the basis of the Batho Pele Index. This Index is a summated scale of responses to the nine statements relating to the Batho Pele Principles of local governance, which was subsequently transformed so that the range of values runs from 0 to 100. The composite BPI score ranges from '0' meaning lowest possible municipal performance to '100', which represents the maximum possible municipal performance. The mean average on the Batho Pele Index is 37, indicating that most people feel their municipalities are struggling to implement the Batho Pele principals. Mean index scores were found to be particularly low in the Northern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal in late 2021.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

If we look only at people who were eligible to vote at the time of the survey, we can see that slightly over a quarter (28%) said that they had never voted before in VPS 2021. About a quarter of the voting age population said that they were regular voters and 26% identified as irregular voters. Older people were less likely to report being regular voters than their younger counterparts. This partly reflects a lifecycle effect, with older citizens having been age eligible to vote in more elections. But very low levels of self-reported regular voting were recorded by age eligible Generation Z citizens, almost everyone in this cohort (98%) said that they had never voted. A significant proportion of the adult populace was not attached to any political party. Less than two-thirds (61%) of the general population felt close to a political party in the last survey round and only 24% were members of a political party.

Respondents in the VPS were asked how often they participate in different political activities. The results show that many people take part in politics in South Africa at the local level. In 2021 VPS More than half (55%) reported that they attend committee meetings and about half (47%) of the adult public attends community meetings. Other forms of political activity were less well attended with only minorities attending meetings of political parties, public marches or government imbizos. Further investigations found that many citizens are not politically active and have no interest in engaging in conventional political activities. During the last survey round, 47% of the public would never sign a petition; 58% would never take part in a demonstration; 57% would never attend a political meeting or rally; 58% would never contact a politician or civil servant; 67% would never donate money for a social or political activity; and 65% would never contact or appear in the media.

To understand public attitudes towards street protest, respondents were asked whether they agreed with the statement "protesting in the street is more effective than voting". A third of the adult public agreed with this statement in 2021 VPS, roughly two-fifths (44%) disagreed, and a quarter gave a neutral response. Those who had participated in either a demonstration or a political rally was more likely to believe in the political efficacy of street protest than non-participants. Close to a third (29%) of adults thought that protesting outside one's voting station is an acceptable means of expressing discontent with the performance of one's municipality. The mass public was, however, much more opposed to protest actions if they were violent or destructive. Only a minority stated that it was acceptable for voters to vandalise their voting stations if they are unhappy with their municipality.

VOTING ATTITUDES

Since voting orientations are likely to inform electoral turnout behaviour, the 2021 VPS examined public attitudes towards different aspects of politics and voting. The findings reveal that a duty to vote was expressed by 57% in 2021. This represents a weakening of sentiment compared with previous surveys. Three-fifths (57%) of the adult population reported that they vote because they believe it makes a difference while less than half (49%) felt that their vote is important in determining the provision of high-quality basic services. Many citizens felt that the political party that they had previously supported had let them down. A sizable segment (42%) voters in 2021 thought that the party that they supported did not protect my interests. Two-fifths (42%) of these voters believed after being elected all parties are the same, so voting is pointless. It would seem that a significant minority of past voters regretted their choice at the ballot box.

Measures of political interest can be used to identify the probability of individuals to engage not only in traditional political activity (such as voting) but in other non-electoral politics as well (protest activity and community organisation for example). It is apparent that a significant minority report an interest in politics. Slightly less than two-fifths (38%) indicated a fair or high interest in late 2021 while a clear majority (61%) claimed to be not very or not at all interested in politics. Comparing these figures with trend data on political interest, we find that this picture has remained relatively stable since 2010. Most adult citizens told fieldworkers that they were not interested in the 2021 government elections. Only about half of adult citizens thought these government elections a lot (24%) or a little (28%).

A majority (60%) of age-eligible voters expressed an intention to vote if national elections were to be held tomorrow. About a third (29%) would not vote, and 11% were uncertain. These figures are similar to those recorded in 2018. Responsive politicians and political parties were the reason most often given when citizens were asked what would encourage people to vote. South Africans were divided about whether voting should be made compulsory. Electoral responses to unfulfilled party promises were to give the party another chance (34%), vote for another party (22%), abstain from voting (23%) and wait for an explanation and then decide (10%).

Persons who did not vote in recent elections were asked to state the main reason for not participating. The results show that the main reason (by a considerable margin) for non-participation was political disillusionment in VPS 2021. It would appear that more than half of all non-participants said that they were simply not interested in voting. Only a minority (11%)

cited administrative barriers (e.g., polling station too far away) as the main reason that they did not vote in the last election. From the data analysis, it is clear that the main causes of declining voter participation are “demand side” rather than “supply side”.

REGISTRATION EXPERIENCE

In 2021, more than nine tenths (95%) of South Africans stated that they were in possession of a legitimate bar-coded ID. This finding suggests that possession of an ID document was not an obstacle to voter registration. We found that 67% of all adult citizens reported that they are registered as a voter – this represents the lowest self-reported registration ever recorded in any VPS. This is concerning but in line with the greater level of voter apathy recorded in recent years. Almost all registered voters (92%) found the registration process easy, with the average time it took to register reported at less than ten minutes on average. Comparing the ease of registration over time, it seems that the situation has improved in the last few years. For most voters, the registration process is an easy and positive experience.

Turning to the non-registered population, it was found that the main reason provided for not wanting to register as a voter was political disinterest. Administrative barriers only play a nominal role, and the possession of a legitimate bar-coded ID or Smart ID card no longer presents as a notable factor underlying registration. Concerning on-line applicability of the process, the majority of the mass public felt that online platforms made voter registration easier and more effective and should be used post-pandemic period. A sizable two fifths (44%) were however of the opinion that online registration might introduce more fraud.

MEDIA AND VOTER EDUCATION

It is important to determine how South Africans access political content and to this effect it was found that television is still the most common medium for assessing political content, followed by the radio. The share using the internet to find political news has grown from roughly a quarter (23%) in 2013 to a third of all adults in 2015. In 2018 this figure grew to 42% and in the 2021 VPS half of the general populace indicated that they used social media to gather information and get political news. Both conventional news sources and new media sources are important platforms to inform and educate both past voters and potential voters. As could be expected, social media is particularly popular among the youth.

A majority (52%) are aware that the Commission undertakes voter education programmes prior to an election in 2021 VPS. Almost a third (32%) of the general public reported they have received voter education information from the Electoral Commission. Preferred sources of receiving information about voting was television, radio, posters and social media. The vast majority (75%) of adult citizens have never attended voter education workshops. These findings demonstrate the success of the Commission’s education programmes but there is a need for more voter education programmes, especially also given the upswing in so-called fake political news in the country. More than two-fifths (46%) reported that they regularly came across political news stories in South Africa that lacked a factual basis.

WOMAN IN POLITICS

The mass public was, on the whole, quite positive about the role of women in politics. A majority (62%) of the general public believed that women need to get more involved in politics. Almost half (48%) of adult citizens also thought that female political representation

would improve their lives. There has been some positive change over time. The proportion of adult citizens, for example, who believed that men were better politicians than women declined from 36% in 2005 VPS to 29% in 2021 VPS. The data also shows that the average citizen support policies that would ensure gender equality in the country's elected offices. However, we did observe a significant increase in misogynistic attitudes towards female politicians in some parts of the country. The share of adults who reported that they would not vote for woman in Gauteng, for instance, grew from 16% in 2005 VPS to 31% in 2021 VPS. One of the most troubling trends to emerge in the last decade was growing levels of sexism amongst women themselves. In addition, we find that young people are increasingly exhibiting quite detrimental attitudes on this issue.

YOUTH AND ELECTIONS

We examined the extent to which South Africans believe the youth to be interested in electoral politics. A clear majority (71%) of the adult populace agreed that the youth should take the lead in voting. Providing a strong message about the role of civic education, two-thirds (67%) of South Africans aged 16 years and older voice support for schools to play a key role in educating young people about elections. But many people were cynical about how engaged young people were in politics. Less than half (45%) of the adult citizenry believe that the youth is interested in elections. Indeed, the general public became more afraid about the youth taking an active role in political matters in the last decade. The segment of the general populace who agreed that young people should be encouraged to participate in politics decreased from 89% in 2008 VPS to 61% in 2021 VPS. This growing level of cynicism was, quite surprisingly, evident amongst all age cohorts in South Africa.

VOTING IRREGULARITIES

About a quarter (23%) of adult citizens believed that voting irregularities had occurred since 1994 and gotten worse in VPS 2021. A third (34%) of the mass populace in that survey round thought that voting irregularities occurred during the last government elections. This is a significant increase from what was observed during the 2015 VPS. Certain groups are more likely to believe irregularities have occurred than others, notably racial minorities, KwaZulu-Natal residents and people with disabilities. The vast majority had not witnessed any form of voting irregularity in the last national election. The proportion who claimed to have witnessed violations to voting procedures, however, grew from 9% in 2018 VPS to 15% in 2021 VPS. The percentage of the general public who had heard about voting irregularities occurring also increased during this period. Voter intimidation was the most common type of irregularity that people had heard of.

Nearly half (48%) of the public believed that the vote count of the last government election was very or somewhat accurate in VPS 2021. Encouragingly, only a minority (15%) were confident enough to state that the count was inaccurate. Faith in the accuracy of the electoral outcome has declined significantly since 2015 VPS. About three-fifths of the adult populace thought that voting irregularities had undermined the freeness and fairness of South African elections. If a citizen had directly witnessed a transgression of this kind, he/she was more apt to be worried about the negative impact of irregularities. The level of public concern about the perceived impact of voting irregularities has grown by 39% between 2015 VPS and 2021 VPS. Urban residents, in particular, have become much more concerned about the damage that electoral irregularities could have for South African democracy.

ELECTRONIC VOTING

Electronic voting is an important potential tool for the Election Commission. Approximately half (49%) of the mass populace felt that electronic voting would be a good thing for South Africa in VPS 2021 and 54% thought that this technology would make voting more effective. Furthermore, about two-fifths (41%) of the general population believed that electronic voting would improve the freeness and fairness of South African elections. However, some worried that this technology would create opportunities for more electoral fraud. Many people would be more likely to participate in elections if electronic voting was introduced. About two-fifths (42%) of the adult populace indicated that this technology would make them more liable to vote. On the other hand, nearly a third (32%) of adult citizens said that the introduction of electronic voting would make them less likely to vote in the VPS 2021. We found that voters who are better versed in internet technology would be more apt to participate in elections if electronic voting was launched. A much weaker relationship between online activity and preferences for electronic voting was observed amongst non-voters.

VOTING EXPERIENCE

Voters were asked to consider their last voting experience and to rate their level of satisfaction. The vast majority of voters were satisfied with the time it takes to get to the voting station (80%), with the secrecy of their vote (82%) and with the instructions and signage about where to go and what to do (80%), with the time it takes to vote (80%), with the amount of money it costs to get to the voting station (77%), and with the conduct of political parties' representatives outside the voting stations (72%). These ratings are extremely positive, with a clear majority being satisfied with these critical elements of the electoral experience. Between 2015 and 2020 voter satisfaction in this area has decline somewhat, much of this decline was evident amongst irregular rather than regular voters.

A critical element of any election is the staffing component at voting stations. This survey found that voters at large are generally very complimentary towards the Electoral Commission officials and are mostly either "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with how officials conduct themselves and handle situations. A clear majority rated officials as helpful (86%), proficient in language (86%), friendly (84%), professional (83%), punctuality (82%) and efficient (82%). From a relative perspective, voters rated officials less well in terms of their conflict solving skills (73%), the prevention of irregularities (71%) and impartially (76%). Reviewing the data, it seems that voter satisfaction with election officials has deteriorated a bit in the last few years. A significant amount of this deterioration has occurred amongst certain groups (e.g., Limpopo, Western Cape and Northern Cape residents).

The majority of past voters were either very satisfied or at the very least satisfied with their experience at the voting station. For instance, 85% are satisfied with the secrecy of the vote, 86% with access to the voting station, 83% with safety and security, 84% with providing for the elderly, 82% with the availability of facilities, 83% with the availability of materials and equipment and 83% with the neatness and cleanliness. When compared to other issues, it was clear that a lower share (76%) was satisfied with the conduct of the observers and political party agents at the station. Voter satisfaction with the station has decreased somewhat over the last three VPS rounds.

A substantial majority of adult South Africans were found to believe that election procedures were free and fair when they last voted. A somewhat greater proportion of the voting public shared this belief in 2021 VPS (73%) when compared to 2015 VPS (87%). By contrast, less than a tenth of the voting population said that the election procedures were not free and fair. Regular electoral participation was discovered to be a good correlate of how voters think about this issue. If a citizen was satisfied with election officials or the conditions of the voting station, they were more liable to agree that elections in South Africa are free and fair. The minor negative change noted on perceived freeness and fairness corresponds with the downward shifts in voter satisfaction with voting station conditions.

PERCEPTIONS OF ELECTION COMMISSION PERFORMANCE

The VPS 2021 included several different questions on the performance of the Election Commission in South Africa. One such question asks respondents about their satisfaction levels with the Commission's performance during the last election. This question has also been asked in previous VPS rounds. In 2021, almost half (48%) of adult South Africans were found to be content with the performance of the Electoral Commission during previous elections in the country, with 20% declaring they are very pleased and 28% somewhat pleased. Public attitudes towards the elections management body experienced a decline in confidence since 2015 when 72% were satisfied with the body's performance. Since 2015, satisfaction with how the IEC deals with training of electoral officers, safety and security, communication, voting irregularities and fraud and unethical practices have deteriorated. Although this is disconcerting, it might be a function of general discontent with political structures in the country which have been spilling (and continue to spill) over to all governance affiliated bodies.

In line with its constitutional mandate to manage elections in the country and ensure that they are free and fair, the Election Commission places a strong emphasis on the participation of special groups of voters, including the youth, the elderly, women and persons with disabilities. The survey asked voters to consider the extent to which they feel that voting procedures and processes effectively take into account the needs of these special groups. More than seven in ten voters felt the needs of these groups were addressed to at least a certain extent in voting procedures or processes. However, non-voters were more likely to be skeptical on this issue overall and became more negative on it between 2015 and 2021. Young people, in particular, were found to be pessimistic about the way the Commission handled the needs of special groups. People with a disability were satisfied with how voting procedures and processes effectively consider their needs in 2021 VPS. But were much less satisfied on this issue when compared to what was observed in 2018 VPS.

COVID-19 was regarded as a salient risk associated with holding the 2021 LGE, with 30% believing it to be a high risk, 29% a moderate risk, and 36% a minimal risk to voters. This is an improvement over what was seen during the online survey in July 2021 when respondents expressed concern over Covid exposure as a reason for trepidation regarding planned turnout. Related to this, perceived confidence in the ability of the Commission in ensuring the safety of voters proved to be critical. A majority (59%) of the adult populace said that the Commission will be able to ensure the safety of voters and only a small proportion (16%) took the opposite position. There was widespread support for the Constitutional Court decision

not to postpone the 2021 LGE. The results suggests that evaluations of institutional performance, including responses to the pandemic, matter for decisions relating to electoral participation.

1. Introduction

The overall aim of the Voter Participation Survey (VPS) was to examine whether the Election Commission is achieving its primary objective, namely strengthening constitutional democracy through the delivery of free and fair elections in South Africa. In order to do this, some of the duties and functions of the Electoral Commission as stipulated in section 5 of the Electoral Commission Act, 1996 include (a) the management of elections; (b) ensuring that elections is free and fair; (c) promoting conditions conducive to free and fair elections; (d) promoting knowledge of sound and democratic electoral processes and (e) undertaking and promoting research into electoral matters.

The VPS is a project which undertakes research in order to understand electoral matters among South Africans and interrogates how well the Electoral Commission is faring in terms of providing and managing free and fair elections and promoting knowledge among South Africans in order to ensure that every voter is able to record his or her informed choice during election time. The survey therefore collected information on people's attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns on electoral and related matters in all nine provinces in South Africa.

The **primary objective** of this study is to inform and guide the Commission in its plans, policies and practices in order to assist the Commission to implement its mandate namely free and fair elections optimally.

The **secondary objectives** of the study were to evaluate voting behaviour in South Africa and to specifically determine people's participation, interest and perceptions ahead of the forthcoming local government elections.

Specifically, the Voter Participation Survey secondary objectives were to:

- Describe the socio-political landscape in South Africa, including the performance of government and the role of various institutions in promoting democracy; ·
- Assess people's attachment to democratic values.
- Investigate attitudes to electoral participation, elections and political activities in general.
- Investigate the patterns of participation of women, youth and persons with disabilities in elections and political activities.
- Measure interest in public participation.
- Determine levels of knowledge of democratic electoral processes.
- Determine the public's views on the work of the Electoral Commission as an Elections Management Body.
- Measure the level of public trust in the Election Commission; and ·
- Give a longitudinal account of electoral change in South Africa.

The implementation of VPS provides information that is collected in systematic ways. This evidence-based approach is a powerful way to measure the level of satisfaction of citizens regarding the quality of work of the Electoral Commission as an Elections Management Body. The Electoral Commission conducts surveys and studies of this nature on a regular basis, enabling it to highlight areas that have improved and/or identify areas that need improving. It is therefore envisaged that the findings from the 2021 Voter Participation Survey would

assist the Electoral Commission in deepening its understanding of electoral elections in general and more specifically its performance in managing free and fair elections.

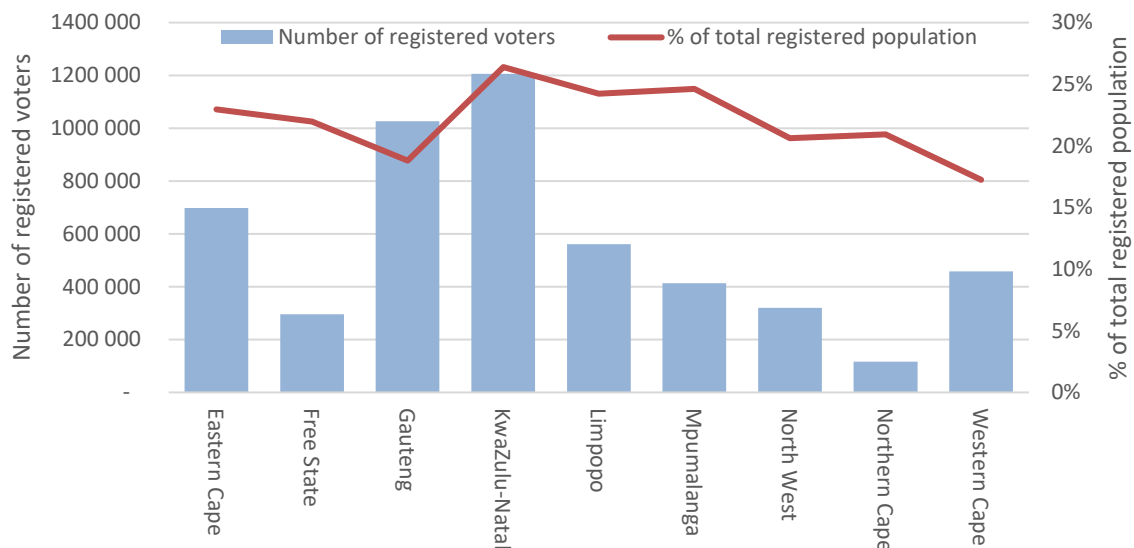
2. Context of the 2021 Local Government Elections

The 1994 Reconstruction and Development Programme advocated the decentralisation of government and encouraged the active participation of the nation's citizens in local governance. The significance of this form of government was further highlighted in the Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996). The Constitution, and subsequent legislation, provided for an autonomous level of governance with considerable powers and functions. The writers of the Constitution saw the devolution of power to local governments as a way to embolden the historically disadvantaged Black African majority. For these reasons, local governments in South Africa are a critical tier of government and the country has a long-established hierarchy of metropolitan, district and local municipalities. The 2021 Local Government Elections (LGE) was the sixth LGE since the adoption of the South African Constitution.

Understanding the public's commitment to voting in the 2021 LGE is important to the Election Commission of South Africa as it is for many policymakers and ordinary citizens. This report will provide a nuanced and comprehensive investigation of the adult population's attitudes towards voting, elections and democracy during the 2021 period. For understanding democracy, a comprehensive and systematic understanding of fluctuating public opinion is indispensable. Moreover, public opinion polls offer citizens a mechanism with which they can express their sentiment on key issues to policymakers. The report will provide data over time allowing the reader to evaluate public opinion on issues of democracy in a comprehensive and systematic manner. However, before such an analysis can be presented, this section will review the context in which the 2021 LGE took place. This important review will provide background for the report results, offering the reader key insights into the variations identified in the report.

Local governments have made significant economic and social progress in redressing poverty and underdevelopment in South Africa. There has been a noteworthy increase in access to basic services for the Black African majority under well-funded welfare programmes, and local governments provide communities with a range of different services and amenities. But despite the importance of local governments, voter turnout in LGEs tends to be lower than during NGEs. Turnout was particularly low amongst young people during these elections (Scott et al. 2012). In the 2011 LGE, the voter turnout for the young age cohorts was significantly lower than the estimated national average. This is a problem because the youth are an especially large part of the overall population of registered voters. Data from the Election Commission shows that voters aged 18 between 29 years represented 22% of all registered voters in 2013 (Figure 1). These types of voters tend to make up a particularly large proportion of the registered population in KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Mpumalanga.

Figure 1: Absolute number of registered voters aged between 18 and 29 years of age across the different South African provinces in 2013



Source: Election Commission Data.

As COVID-19 began spreading throughout the nations of the world, it was hoped that some regions (such as Africa) may be spared. It soon became clear, however, that hopes were ill placed. The virus quickly landed on the continent and began multiplying rapidly. It appeared to be spreading faster in South Africa, however, than in any of the continent's other nations. President Cyril Ramaphosa announced broad measures to combat the spread of COVID-19 on 15 March 2020. Formal regulations were published on 18 March 2020, implementing a range of different measures to mitigate the spread of the virus. The regulations were comprehensive and included closing schools and limiting public gatherings. These were later amended, ushering in a strict lockdown 'stage' system. The severity of the lockdown phase determined by the infection rate, the higher the 'stage' more the severe the restrictions issued by the state. Despite this system, by the end of 2020 the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in South Africa exceeded one million.

The South African government started roll-outing vaccinations for COVID-19 in the early months of 2021. In order to realise herd immunity, the National Department of Health was endeavouring to reach 67% coverage or about 40 million people. The goal was to achieve this number by the end of 2021. The roll-out occurred in a phased approach, with certain types of workers (e.g., healthcare and essential) receiving the vaccine first. There was a colossal effort from both the public and private sectors to secure the millions of vaccine doses necessary to reach this level of immunisation. There was extensive preparation and training so that enough personnel would be available to deliver the large number of vaccines that were needed. However, the vaccination roll out was slower than the department had hoped. Less than 19 million people had been fully vaccinated by the end of 2021. This was due primarily to vaccine hesitancy amongst a significant proportion of the adult populace.

The Constitution necessitates that an election be held within 90 days of a local government term of office. On 21 April 2021 President Cyril Ramaphosa announced 27 October 2021 as the date for the 2021 LGE. But, as the Electoral Commission of South Africa commenced

preparations for elections, some political parties raised concerns about holding elections during the COVID-19 pandemic. The right to free and fair elections required parties to campaign and the Commission to do general voter education. Both traditional campaigning and voter education efforts were difficult during the pandemic. In addition, some were concerned about the risk that the election would have to ongoing efforts to mitigate the spread of the virus. According to a January 2021 survey by the University of Johannesburg and the Human Science Research Council, a majority of adults supported the postponement of the 2021 LGE. Election Commission announced an inquiry to investigate the feasibility of the scheduled elections being free and fair amid challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Former Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke chaired the inquiry.

After receiving submission, gathering evidence and reviewing existing arguments, Dikgang Moseneke concluded the inquiry. It found that the health risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic made it unlikely that the 2021 LGE would be free and fair. Not enough citizens had received vaccines for COVID-19, and this was an impediment to the successful administration of the election. Although non-pharmaceutical interventions (e.g., social distancing) could mitigate risk of holding the elections, the health risk was still considerable. The inquiry related these health considerations to the right to life in the South African Constitution and a citizen's bodily and psychological integrity. Doubt about the safety of voting stations, in addition, could result in a very low voter turnout. The inquiry proposed that the 2021 LGE be postponed by four months to February 2022. The Constitution, however, does not permit postponement of elections beyond the 90 days' window period. As a result, the Electoral Commission referred the matter to the Constitutional Court.

When the application was submitted to the Constitutional Court, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in South Africa had reached two million. The Constitutional Court dismissed the application from the Electoral Commission of South Africa on 3 September 2021. Without detailing reasons for dismissing the application, the court ordered Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma to select a date to hold the elections. The Minister selected 1 November 2021, which provided limited time for political parties to campaign for the 2021 LGE. At this stage concerns were raised about low turnout during voter registration campaigns launched by the Electoral Commission. By 20 September 2021, only 13 million people who were eligible to vote had not registered. No doubt many people were concerned about the pandemic, by the end of September the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases had risen to nearly three million. Less than a seventh (15%) of the national population was fully vaccinated against the virus during this time.

In spite of the many challenges faced by the Election Commission, it was able to successfully manage the 2021 LGE. About twelve million citizens participated in the elections. Speaking during the results announcement, Commission Chair Glen Mashinini said: "[t]he Electoral Commission is pleased to announce that it has satisfied itself that the conditions for free and fair elections were met, and that the results for 213 councils are declared as final". The 2021 LGE was quite a contested and saw a surge by small local interest parties. These groups appeared to take votes from the more established political parties. The contest was so robust in some localities that 70 councils were left without a clear majority on election night.

The 2021 LGE witnessed the lowest turnout for democratic elections in South Africa, and less than a third of eligible voters submitted a ballot at a voting station. Turnout data from the Election Commission establishes this as part of long trajectory of declining voter turnout (Table 1). Although the 2021 LGE figure is comparable to the 2006 LGE, it is substantially lower than the 2011 LGE or 2016 LGE. Even though all provinces experienced declining turnout, the largest drop was recorded for the Western Cape. Although there is a downward trend on turnout for municipal elections, much more serious has been declining voter turnout for national and provincial government elections. Turnout in the 2019 NGE was 11 percentage points below what was seen in the 2009 NGE. The largest change was for the Eastern Cape, turnout decreased from 77% of registered voters in the 2009 NGE to 61% in 2019 NGE.

Table 1: Voter turnout between the 2004 National Government Elections to the 2021 Local Government Elections (measured as percentage of registered voters)

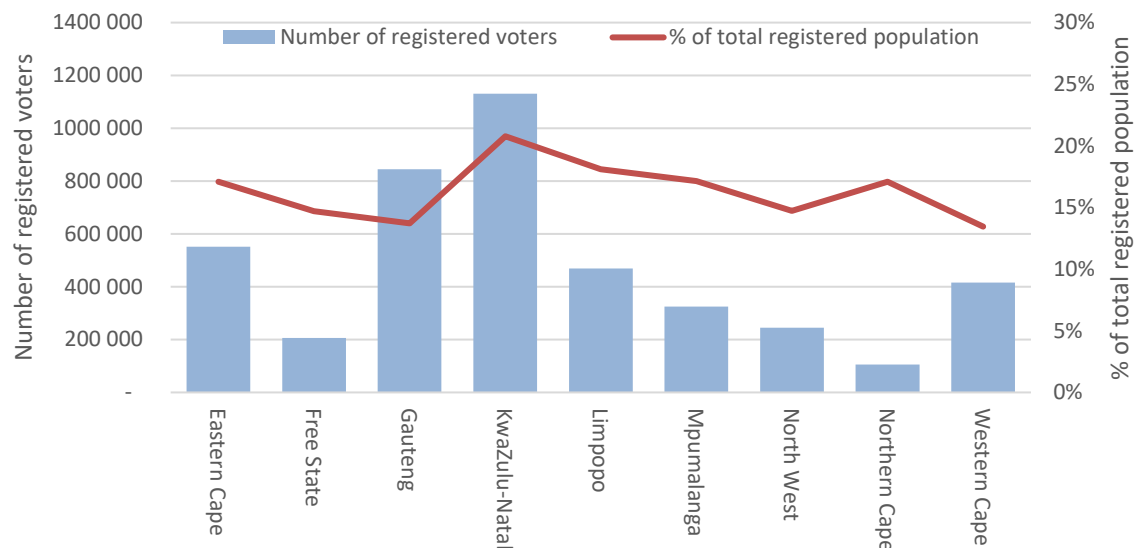
	2004 NGE	2000 LGE	2006 LGE	2009 NGE	2011 LGE	2014 NGE	2016 LGE	2019 NGE	2021 LGE
Eastern Cape	81%	56%	56%	77%	58%	70%	56%	61%	47%
Free State	79%	49%	47%	77%	55%	73%	56%	63%	45%
Gauteng	76%	43%	42%	79%	56%	77%	58%	72%	44%
KwaZulu-Natal	74%	47%	51%	80%	62%	77%	61%	67%	48%
Limpopo	77%	42%	45%	70%	50%	63%	50%	59%	44%
Mpumalanga	80%	45%	46%	80%	56%	76%	56%	66%	43%
North West	77%	45%	46%	73%	53%	69%	54%	59%	42%
Northern Cape	76%	58%	54%	76%	63%	74%	61%	67%	53%
Western Cape	73%	58%	52%	78%	64%	74%	63%	68%	49%
Total	77%	48%	48%	77%	58%	73%	58%	66%	46%

Note: Cell shaded in green indicate a figure above the national average year in a given election.

Source: Election Commission Data.

Turnout in the 2021 LGE was found to be especially low amongst the youth in South Africa. Low turnout amongst this group highlights an even more worryingly trend, declining levels of voter registration amongst young people. The absolute number of registered persons aged 18-29 years fell from 5 million in 2013 to 4.3 million in 2022. This group fell, as a proportion of the total registered population, six percentage point during the period. Given that this group constituted about a third of the adult citizenry in 2022, this is a worrying finding. The provinces that experienced the highest level of decline in terms of registered population were the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng (Figure 2). The data shows that the registered population is aging, and not enough young people, particularly those aged 18-19 years, are joining. If this trend persists, it could have a significant impact on the legitimacy and character of South African democracy.

Figure 2: Absolute number of registered voters aged between 18 and 29 years of age across the different South African provinces in 2022



Source: Election Commission Data.

Electoral turnout can be a signal of whether citizens approve or disapprove of the institution of democracy itself. Falling turnout is, therefore, a vital barometer of the vigour and strength of the post-apartheid democratic system. Many people complain that local government simply does not work. Public perceptions of broken municipalities are corroborated by the oversight reports published by the Auditor-General Tsakani Maluleke (2020). Her 2019/2020 financial year reports detail irregular expenditure of R26 billion at municipalities in the country. Only 11% (27 out of the 257) of the nation's municipalities received clean audits. What is more serious, almost a quarter of municipalities neglected to even submit the legally mandated audits. Maluleke, in her report, noted a deficiency of monitoring and supervision as well as a deficit of accountability. As a result, resources are mishandled, and services not delivered. The consequences of this mismanagement are legion and include environmental and health catastrophes have hit many municipalities, including raw sewage polluting drinking water.

3. Research Methodology

This project consisted of a quantitative and qualitative phase. The quantitative phase involved a nationally representative survey and the qualitative phase involved eight focus groups country wide. Both methods are described in this section in detail.

3.1. Research Universe

The target population for the IEC Voter Participation Survey (VPS) is individuals aged 16 and over who live in South Africa and are eligible to vote in terms of the provisions of the Electoral Act and other relevant legislation and policies. Although 16 and 17 year olds are not able to vote, they are able to register as voters and since the so called "millennials " might be appreciably different from older age cohorts this group was included in the VPS.

More specifically, the target population comprised people living in households, hostels and other structures. People living in special institutions such as hospitals and prisons were excluded from the sample. We reasoned that the inclusion of people from these institutions would compromise our random selection procedure. Also, past experience has shown that access to people in these institutions is extremely difficult since obtaining permission can be cumbersome and complex.

3.2. The sample design

The Voter Participation Survey has been designed to yield a representative sample of 3500 adult South African citizens aged 16 and older (with no upper age limit), in households geographically spread across the country's nine provinces. Unlike many national surveys, nationality or citizenship is a selection criterion for inclusion in the study, since South African citizenship is a prerequisite for eligibility to vote in South African elections.

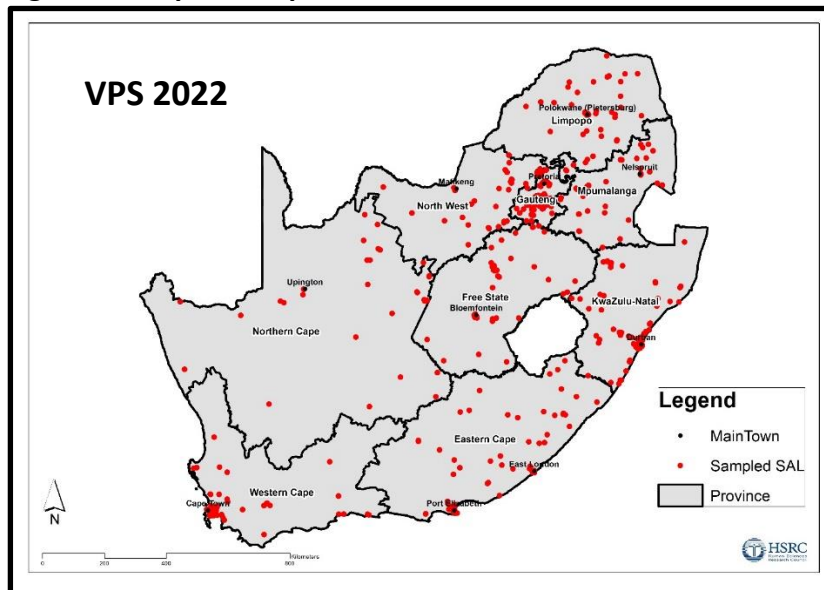
The sampling frame used for the survey is based on the 2011 census and a set of small area layers (SALs). Estimates of the population numbers for various categories of the census variables were obtained per SAL. In this sampling frame special institutions (such as hospitals, military camps, old age homes, schools and university hostels), recreational areas, industrial areas and vacant SALs were excluded prior to the drawing of the sample.

In sampling, small area layers (SALs) were used as primary sampling units and the estimated number of dwelling units (taken as visiting points) in the SALs as secondary sampling units. In the first sampling stage the primary sampling units (SALs) were drawn with probability proportional to size, using the estimated number of dwelling units in an SAL as measure of size. The dwelling units as secondary sampling units were defined as "separate (non-vacant) residential stands, addresses, structures, flats, homesteads, etc." In the second sampling stage a predetermined numbers of individual dwelling units (or visiting points) were drawn with equal probability in each of the drawn dwelling units. Finally, in the third sampling stage a person was drawn with equal probability from all 16 year and older persons in the drawn dwelling units.

Three explicit stratification variables were used, namely province, geographic type and majority population group. As stated earlier, within each stratum, the allocated number of primary sampling units (which could differ between different strata) was drawn using proportionality to size probability sampling with the estimated number of dwelling units in the primary sampling units as measure of size. In each of these drawn primary sampling units, seven dwelling units were drawn. This resulted in a sample of 3500 individuals.

A list of the 500 SALs were eventually drawn and given to geographic information specialists to map. Maps were generated for each of the 500 areas, indicating certain navigational beacons such as schools, roads churches etc.

Figure 3: Graphical representation of the 500 selected small area layers



3.3. Navigation to the selected areas

Once the sample of 500 SALs was selected, a navigational toolkit was developed to assist the field teams in finding the selected SALs. These kits assisted the supervisors and fieldworkers to locate the exact SAL where the interviews were to take place. The navigational kits included:

- Geographic co-ordinates (longitude and latitude values) of the centroids of all 500 SALs
- Maps that, using aerial photographs as a base, identified the exact geographic location of the enumerator areas to be sampled throughout the country.
- More detailed maps that identified the exact area, pinpointing street names and places of interest such as schools, clinics, hospitals etc. selected by the office-based sampling team, within the SALs where respondents would be interviewed.

Figure 4: An example of a SAL map used to assist the field teams to navigate to the correct areas



3.4. Introduction of the project to the authorities and communities

Prior to starting the actual interviewing process, supervisors were instructed to visit the local police stations, indunas, traditional leaders, or other role players in the various areas to ensure that the authorities were aware of the project and to inform the communities of their intent. Official letters describing the project and its duration and relevant ethical issues were distributed to the authorities. This was done not only as a form of research and ethical protocol, but also to ensure the safety of the field teams.

3.5. Selecting a household and individual

After driving through the SAL and introducing the project to the local authorities, supervisors had to identify the selected households. A household was selected using a random starting point and counting an interval between households. The interval was calculated using the number of households in the SAL. Once the selected household had been identified, a household member had to be selected randomly as a respondent. This household member (respondent) needed to be 16 years or older. The tablets were programmed to randomly select a respondent 16 years and older from the list of household members.

3.6. Data collection protocol

The following general protocol guidelines for data gathering were implemented:

- Fieldworkers and supervisors were required to notify the relevant local authorities that they would be working in the specific area. The purpose was to assist with their own safety and to reassure respondents, especially the elderly or suspicious, that the survey was official.
- They were advised to inform the inkosi or induna in a traditional authority area, whilst in urban formal or urban informal areas a visit to the local police and, if possible, the local councillor was to be made prior to commencing work in the area. Prior to this survey, letters were emailed to all the provincial Police commissioners informing them of the study.
- They were further advised that farms should be entered with caution and that they should report to the local Agri South Africa (Agri SA) offices before doing so. Field supervisors were issued with 'Farm letters' which contained information on the purpose of the study and contact details in case they had queries.
- The interviewer could not proceed with an interview unless consent was given by the respondent. This could be in the form of verbal or written consent. In the case of 16-17 year olds, consent from parents/ guardians or caregivers were also sought.
- Fieldworkers were issued with name tags and bibs. They also carried hard copies of letters of introduction that could be used in the field.
- Fieldworkers had to present their identity cards when introducing themselves.

3.7. Training

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, on line training took place. A one-day training session took place and all supervisors attended. The training session included sessions on selection and sampling of households; fieldwork operating procedures; research protocol and ethical

considerations. The questionnaire was discussed in detail. A training manual was also developed as part of the training toolkit. The fieldwork commenced in September 2021 and ended in January 2022. A network of locally-based fieldwork supervisors in all parts of the country assisted in data collection. Competent fieldworkers with a thorough understanding of the local areas were employed as part of this project.

3.8. Quality control

HSRC researchers conducted random visits to selected areas and worked with the fieldworkers for a certain period to ensure that they adhered to ethical research practices and that they understood the intent of the questions in the questionnaire. HSRC researchers also ensured that the correct selection protocols were followed in order to identify households and respondents in the household. The researchers also checked on procedures followed in administering the research instrument. Field back checks were also conducted in all of the nine provinces. Telephonic back checks were done on 15% of the total sample. During these routine quality checks, HSRC researchers detected dishonesty in the Eastern Cape and some of the work of these teams had to be redone under close supervision of supervisors.

3.9. Data capturing and cleaning

The data-capturing was conducted by the HSRC's Data Capturing Unit. The newly established unit has the capacity to design capturing templates and capture data fast and effectively. All questionnaires were double captured in CSPRO to ensure that no capturing errors occur. The final dataset was converted into SAS and SPSS and a data manager embarked on a data-cleaning exercise. Data was checked and edited for logical consistency, for permitted ranges, for reliability on derived variables and for filter instructions.

Table 2: Sample realisation

Province	Number of replaced SALs	Ideal sample(N Households)	Realised sample(N Households)	% Realisation
Western Cape	2	455	387	85
Eastern Cape	3	455	315	69
Northern Cape	0	259	214	83
Free State	0	266	252	95
KwaZulu-Natal	4	651	607	93
North West	0	259	230	89
Gauteng	1	581	576	99
Mpumalanga	0	266	269	100
Limpopo	0	308	269	87
Total	10	3500	3119	86

After data cleaning, the analytical team received the realisation rates of the survey. As can be seen from the table above, a realisation rate of 86% was achieved. This is a high realisation rate and partly due to the fact that communities were informed about the survey prior to the actual fieldwork. The data collection mode of face-to-face interviewing also tend to yield a higher response rate. Despite this, it should be noted that there is an increasing resistance among South Africans (especially higher income adults) to participate in any form of survey.

3.10. Data weighting

The data were weighted to take account of the fact that not all units covered in the survey had the same probability of selection. The weighting reflected the relative selection probabilities of the individual at the three main stages of selection: visiting point (address), household and individual. In order to ensure representivity of smaller groups, i.e. Northern Cape residents or Indian/Asian people, weights needed to be applied.

Table 3: Sample (Unweighted and Weighted)

	Unweighted n	Percent	Weighted N	Percent
South Africa	3119	100.0	42238431	100.0
Gender				
Male	1334	42.8	20307772	48.1
Female	1785	57.2	21930659	51.9
Age				
16-24 years	398	12.8	8618199	20.4
25-34 years	696	22.3	11109989	26.3
35-44 years	672	21.5	8799577	20.8
45-54 years	535	17.2	5818606	13.8
55-64 years	451	14.5	4124741	9.8
65 + years	367	11.8	3767320	8.9
Race				
Black African	1905	61.1	33377710,0	79.0
Coloured	533	17.1	3794768,0	9.0
Indian or Asian	330	10.6	1236074,0	2.9
White	350	11.2	3829878,0	9.1
Other	1	.0	1	.0
Subjective poverty status				
Wealthy	65	2.1	676358	1.6
Very comfortable	315	10.1	2809208	6.7
Reasonably comfortable	792	25.4	10024540	23.7
Just getting along	1213	38.9	17718629	41.9
Poor	505	16.2	7121766	16.9
Very poor	203	6.5	3697066	8.8
System missing	26	.8	190864	.5
Geotype				
Urban	2543	81.5	32488070	76.9
Rural traditional authority areas	404	13.0	8001233	18.9
Rural farms	165	5.3	1748898	4.1
System missing	7	.2	230	.0
Education				
No or primary	354	11.3	3942585	9.3
Some secondary	1003	32.2	14923494	35.3
Matric/Grade 12	1230	39.4	17213930	40.8
Tertiary	453	14.5	5399044	12.8
System missing	79	2.5	759378	1.8
Province				
Western Cape	387	12.4	5329663	12.6
Eastern Cape	315	10.1	4262186	10.1
Northern Cape	214	6.9	1005798	2.4
Free State	252	8.1	2127690	5.0
KwaZulu-Natal	607	19.5	7563915	17.9
North West	230	7.4	2806623	6.6
Gauteng	576	18.5	11970486	28.3
Mpumalanga	269	8.6	3230520	7.6
Limpopo	269	8.6	3941551	9.3

Person and household weights were benchmarked using the SAS CALMAR macro and province, population group, gender and 5 age groups (i.e. 16-24, 25-34, 35-49, 50-59 and 60 and older). These benchmark variables for persons and province and population group of the respondent in the household were selected due to their reliability and validity. The marginal totals for the benchmark variables were obtained from the 2014 mid-year population estimates as published by Statistics South Africa. The estimated South African population was therefore used as the target population. A total of 3 119 people were interviewed during this study. When weighted, this total represents 42 238 431 South Africans of 16 years and older. The final data set (unweighted and weighted) are disaggregated in Table 3 by key demographic variables.

4. Evaluations of Regime Performance

In assessing the attitudes of the citizen population towards voting, electoral experience and intended participation in elections, it is important to consider the broader political mood prevailing at the time of the survey. In order to achieve this, we will examine various attitudinal measures that evaluate mass views on the moral and material health of the nation. To structure this examination, we make use of a conceptual framework developed by Norris (2011). Indicators are clustered into a multi-dimensional framework that ranges from the most generalised to the most specific. The first component identified by Norris, namely national identities, represents the most general set of attitudes towards belonging or attachment to the state. Common survey-based measures and indicators for this dimension include national pride, patriotism and feelings of national identity. The second constitutes regime support and is conceived as the views of citizens towards the performance of the government

The first part of this section will examine public feelings of national pride, assessing changes between 2003 and 2021. This will be followed by an investigation of regime approval indicators, evaluating whether members of the adult populace think the country is heading in the right direction. Finally, the section will close with an assessment of mass opinion on public institutions. Norris (2011) views the public institutions (e.g., the government legislature, executive, the judiciary and courts, the security forces etc.) as an essential component of any democratic system. The press and trade unions can also be included here. The last level of support is the approval of incumbent officeholders, which entails public attitudes towards the president, ministers, party leaders and elected representatives. The section will identify a growing disillusionment with political status quo in South Africa during the last decade.

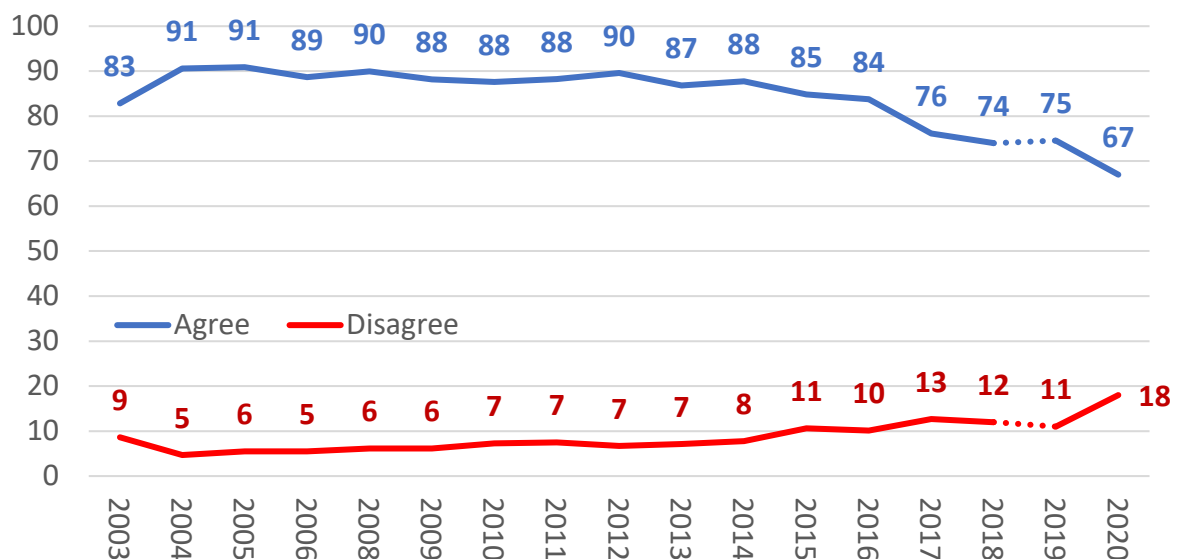
4.1. National Pride

The analysis begins with one of the most diffuse measures of support for a political system, namely national pride, which is concerned with levels of attachment to the state in its broadest possible sense (Anderson 2006). A cohesive force that helps bind a nation together, patriotism is considered very important by political and social scientists. A positive attachment that a citizen feels towards their country, national pride is frequently viewed as a beneficial societal force by South African policymakers (Chipkin 2007). The government has been quite concerned with building a strong sense of national pride amongst the public through its various social cohesion strategies and programmes. Despite these efforts, this

subsection will show that national pride in the country has fallen in the last decade as the general population has become more discontented with the societal status quo. This trend is particularly apparent amongst the youth, the less educated and the poor.

To measure patriotism, we utilise a general national pride item that is widely employed in many studies. Evidence from previous VPS rounds has demonstrated that South Africans tend to exhibit a resolute sense of pride of the country. The 2021 VPS data suggests that this pattern remains unchanged. In response to the statement ‘I would rather be a citizen of South Africa than of any other country in the world’, more than a fifth (23%) expressed strong agreement while a further 44% expressed agreement. Only a small minority (15%) were neutral and 12% said that they disagreed and 6% strongly disagreed with the statement. This represents a decline from what we observed in prior survey rounds, suggesting a general decrease in national pride in the country.

Figure 5: Public agreement and disagreement with the statement: ‘I would rather be a citizen of South Africa than of any other country in the world’, 2003-2021



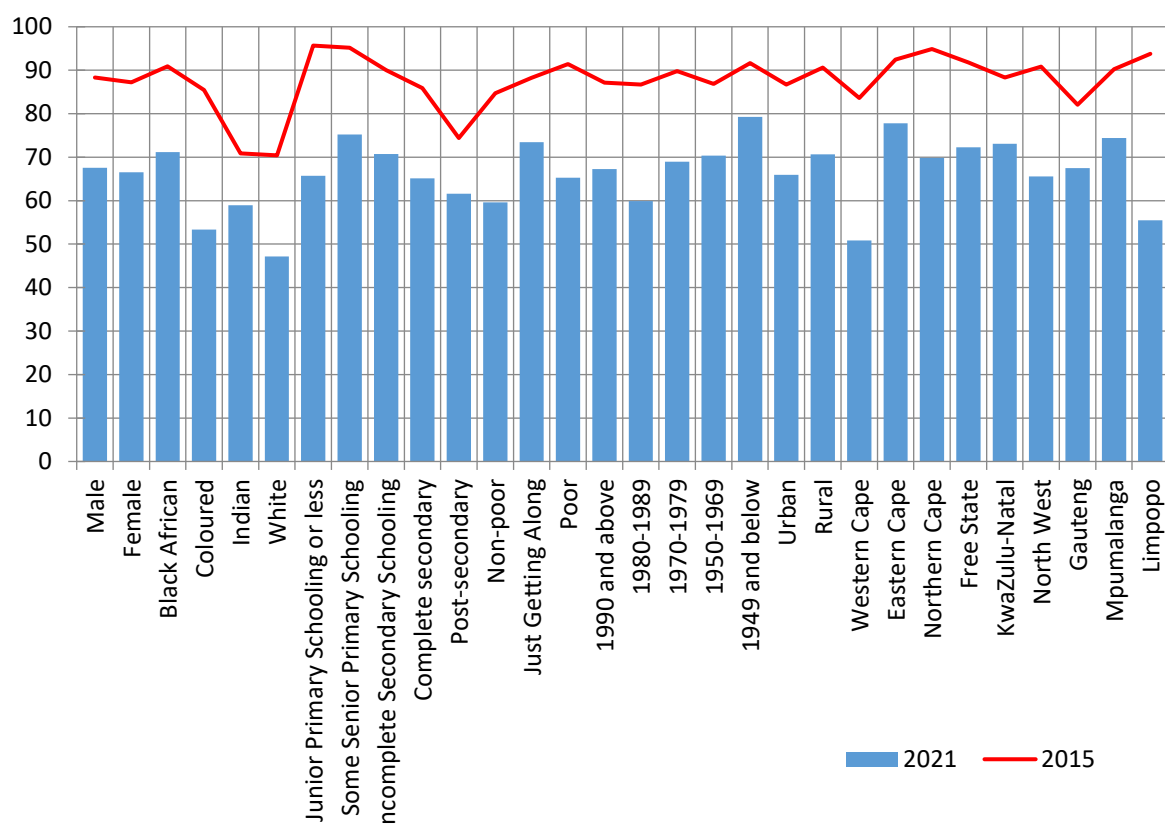
Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2003-2020; Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

Using the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) we can examine levels of pride in the country for the period 2003-2021 (**Figure 5**). More than four-fifths (83%) of the adult populace agreed with the national pride statement at the start of the period while less than a tenth (9%) disagreed. It is apparent from the data presented, that responses to the national pride question have remained high and fairly stable for most of the period 2003-2015. Between 2016 and 2021, however, we could discern a decrease in national pride. Agreement with the statement fell by 21 percentage points between SASAS 2014 and SASAS 2021. Levels of disagreement, on the other hand, grew from 8% to 18% during the same period. This result is consistent with the thesis that the mass public has become increasingly dissatisfied with the status quo in South Africa over the last decade.

In order to gain a more nuanced understanding of changing patterns of national pride in the country, a subgroup analysis was conducted. For this purpose, we examined the percentage

who agreed with the national pride statement for 2015 and 2021. As reflected in **Figure 6**, a high level of national pride is found across diverse socio-economic groups in SASAS 2015. Agreement levels ranged between 70% and 96% on average in that survey round, and national pride was fairly evenly distributed across the country's diverse economic subgroups with only a modest educational attainment effect present. Less educated adults, especially those who had not enter secondary school, tended to exhibit higher levels of pride than their more educated peers. When compared to the Black African majority, racial minorities were also, on average, less liable to state that they valued their South African citizenship in SASAS 2015. This was especially true of the white minority, less than three-quarters of this group (70%) agreed that they would rather be a citizen of South Africa than of any other country in the world.

Figure 6: Percentage who agreed and strongly agreed with the statement “I would rather be a citizen of South Africa than of any other country in the world”, 2015; 2021



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2015; Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

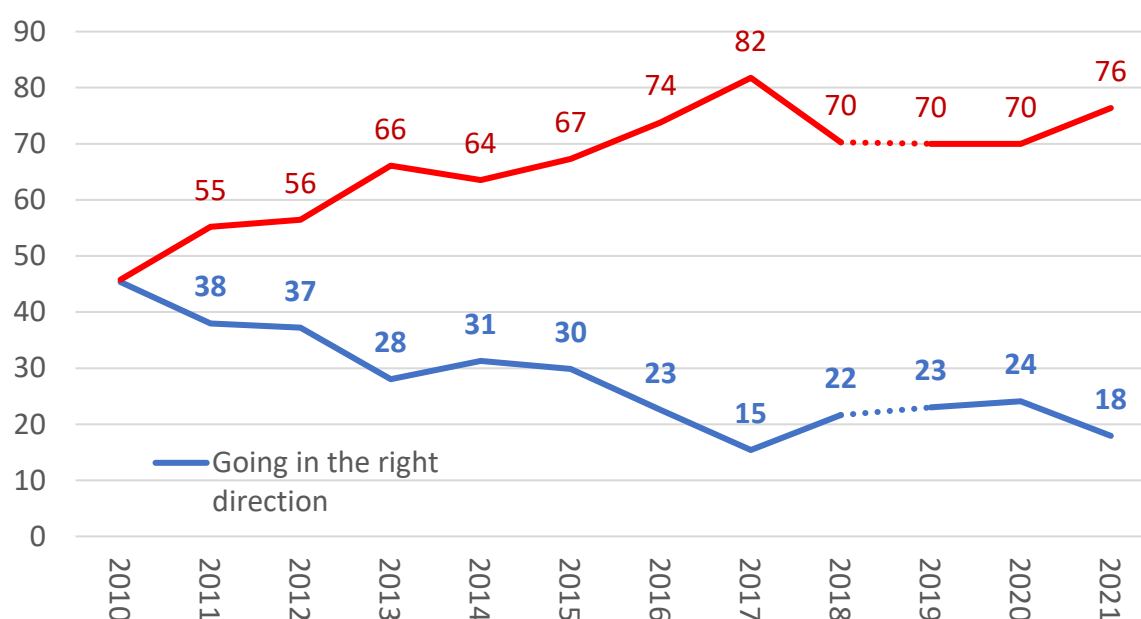
It would appear that during SASAS 2015 the socio-economic elite had the lowest level of national pride. The class effect noted in that prior survey round seems to have diminished significantly following the largescale decline in national pride that can be discerned in **Figure 5**. Although the downturn effected all the subgroups listed in **Figure 6**, it was found to be particularly pronounced amongst the less educated, the poor and the youth. We found much larger geotype disparities in pride across different socio-demographic groups in SASAS 2021 than in SASAS 2015. There was also much more provincial variation in VPS 2021 than in SASAS 2015. This change was due to particularly sweeping attitudinal shift in certain provinces. In

the Western Cape, for example, agreement with the national pride statement fell from 84% in 2015 to 51% in 2021¹. A similarly dramatic drop was observed in Limpopo, a 38 percentage point change in just six years. Levels of deterioration were much smaller in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng and Mpumalanga.

4.2. Direction the Country is Moving

Over the last decade a number of political commentators and scholars have alluded to the emergence of a global ‘crisis of democratic legitimacy’ (Dalton 2018, Diamond 2021, Norris & Inglehart 2019). References have been made to declining public trust in government, diminishing faith in democratic institutions, weakening trust in political leadership and growing public discontent (also see Inglehart & Norris 2016). These analyses of democratic decline start with popular anger against the status quo, the perception amongst the mass public that the current situation is untenable. This subsection will begin with general popular discontent, examining public perceptions of the general direction the country is heading. It will show that the adult populace started to become increasingly discontented with the status quo under the Zuma Administration with dissatisfaction reaching its zenith during the last year of the Zuma Presidency. In the most recent period, however, we can discern an increase in widespread frustration with the current status quo.

Figure 7: Public responses to the question: ‘[g]enerally speaking, do you think that things in this country are going in the right direction or going in the wrong direction?’, 2010-2021



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2010-2021

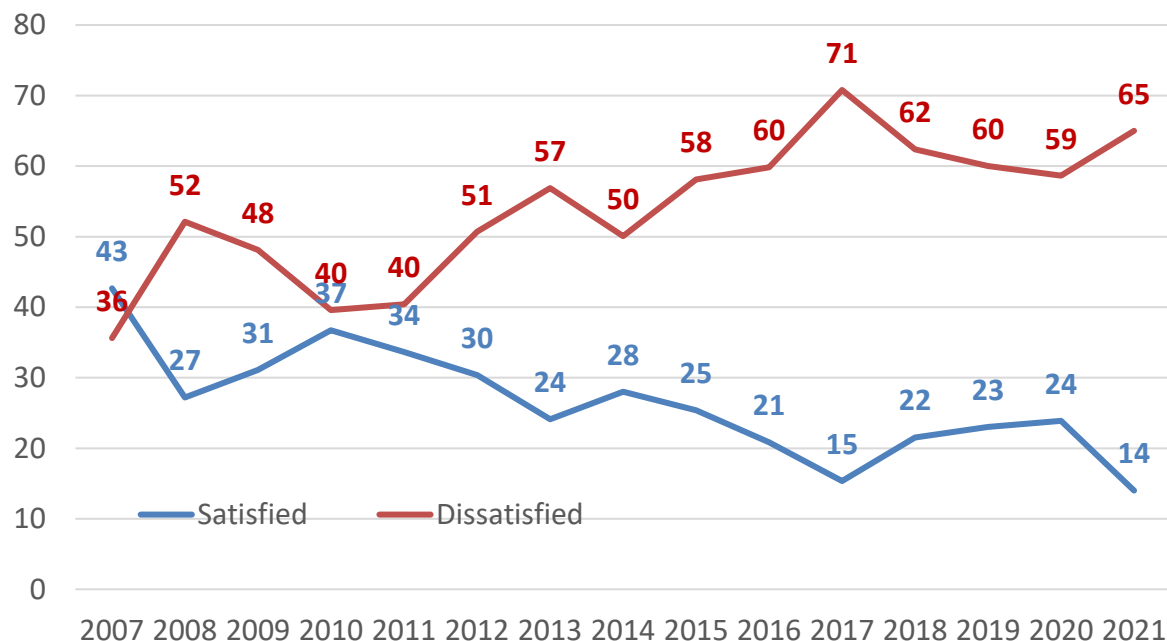
To further assess the public’s view of general regime performance, SASAS survey respondents were required to evaluate whether they felt that things in South Africa were going in the right

¹ The change was primarily driven by a largescale downturn in national pride amongst the province’s Black African population. Agreement with the national pride statement fell from 84% in 2015 to 49% in 2021. However, we also saw major decline in agreement amongst Coloured adults in the province. For this group the share who agreed with the statement fell by 35 percentage points between 2015 and 2021.

direction or the wrong direction. In late 2021, less than a fifth (18%) indicated that the nation is heading in the right direction while a clear majority (76%) expressed the view that the country is heading in the wrong direction. South Africans have shown fluctuating trends in their outlook on this subject in recent years (**Figure 7**). For instance, the SASAS 2010 found that 46% of the mass populace believed the country was going in the wrong direction. The proportion of the general population who held this view steadily increased over the next seven years, reaching 82% in SASAS 2017. Following the start of the Ramaphosa Administration, public evaluations of this issue improved moderately and remained stable between SASAS 2018 and SASAS 2020. Public sentiments worsened again in SASAS 2021 when 76% of the mass public said that the country was going in the wrong direction.

Part of the explanation for the increasingly critical stance on the country's current direction lies in the material concerns of residents. A good indication of this can be found in public views on the general economic situation over the last decade. SASAS respondents were asked the following question: "[h]ow satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the general economic situation in South Africa at present?", with responses captured on a five-point scale ranging from 'very satisfied' to 'very dissatisfied'. A person's response to this question correlated strongly with whether they believed that the nation was heading in the wrong direction. In SASAS 2021 only a small minority (12%) of those who thought the country was heading in the wrong direction said that they were satisfied with the general situation in South Africa. Public evaluations of the general state of the national economy have become quite negative over the period 2007-2021 (Figure 8). The percentage of the adult population that were satisfied with the state of the economy was 43% in 2007 –prior to the Great Recession that effected so many countries.

Figure 8: Public satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the general economic situation in South Africa at present, 2007-2021

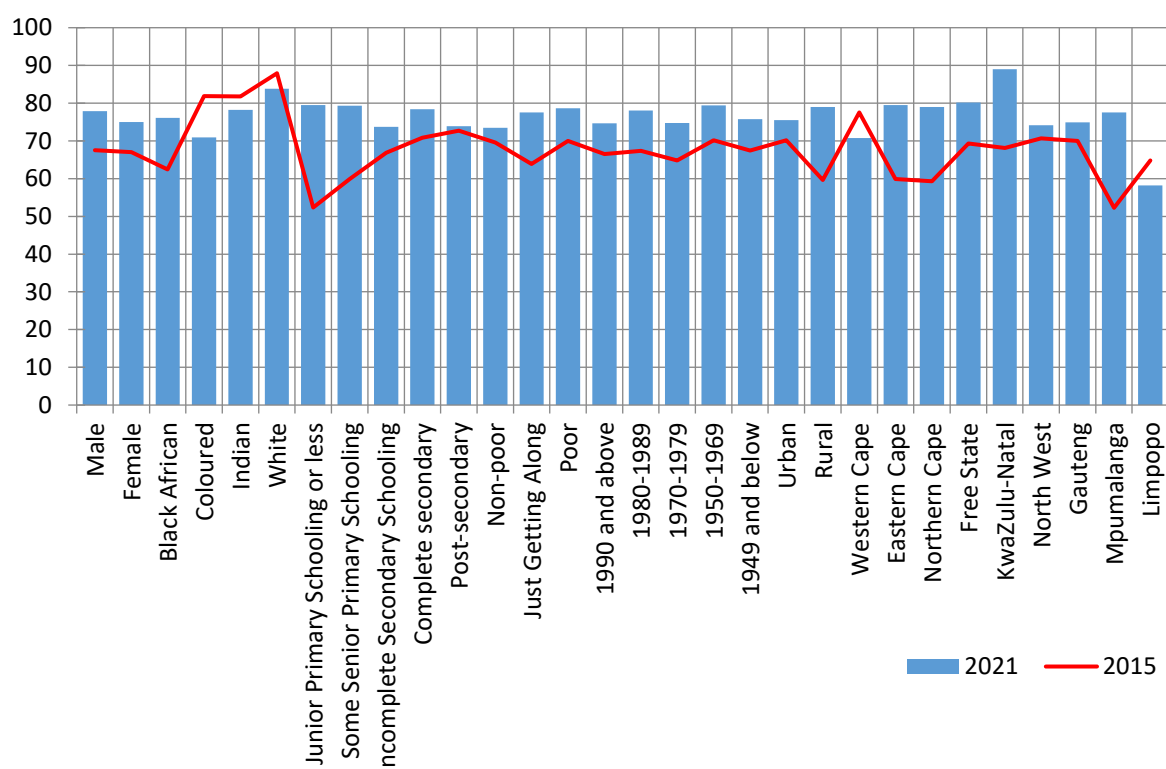


Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2007-2021

Most of the Zuma Administration was dominated by rather sobering, negative economic ratings. During the last year of the Zuma Administration only 15% of the adult populace was satisfied with the general economy. As the **Figure 8** demonstrates, there was a mild improvement in public evaluations of the general economy for the period 2018-2020. But the share indicating that they were dissatisfied exceeded the share that expressed satisfaction in all survey rounds during this three-year period. In 2021, on the other hand, there was a distinct increase in public dissatisfaction. The proportion of the mass public who were dissatisfied with the general economy increased from 59% in 2020 to 65% in 2021. This outcome is not surprising. The national economy struggled during the COVID-19 period and the economic recovery observed in 2021 was poor. It was characterised by worsening unemployment, weak bank lending to the private sector and lacklustre levels of private investment.

It is worth asking which subgroups are most likely to adopt a negative view of the current direction of South Africa. To answer this question, the percentage reporting that the country was going in the wrong direction are calculated across various socio-demographic attributes. To provide a point of comparison, data is presented for both 2015 and 2021 (Figure 9). In both survey rounds, a majority in each subgroup believed that the country was headed in the wrong direction. It was apparent that there was more variation in attitudes in SASAS 2015 than in the last survey round. The reason for this change is growing negativity amongst those groups who were comparatively positive in their evaluation of this issue between SASAS 2015 and SASAS 2021. The less educated, rural residents and members of the Black African majority have, in particular, become much more negative over time.

Figure 9: Percentage reporting that the country is going in the right or wrong direction by selected socio-demographic attributes, 2015 and 2021



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2015; 2021

From a spatial perspective, those living in certain provincial populations are less negative in their appraisals than others in SASAS 2021. Out of the nine provinces, Limpopo residents were the least negative, less than three-fifths (58%) of this group thought the country was headed in the wrong direction. Adult residents in KwaZulu-Natal were, on the other hand, the most pessimistic, 89% of these residents have a negative assessment of the country's direction. There has been significant attitudinal change in some provinces, the largest change was observed in Mpumalanga. The proportion of residents in that province who thought the country was headed in the wrong direction grew from 52% in SASAS 2015 to 78% in SASAS 2021. Similar changes were also observed in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and the Northern Cape. Of the different provincial populations, only the Western Cape and Limpopo became more positive on this issue over time.

4.3. Institutional Trust

Having provided a detailed review of citizen ratings of general regime performance, we now narrow our focus and concentrate on the levels of confidence that the public vests in the political system generally in addition to other political and social institutions. There has been a growing interest in public confidence in political institutions in advanced democracies in recent decades (Inglehart & Norris 2016, Dalton 2018, Norris & Inglehart 2019). This has been prompted by empirical evidence suggesting that there has been a general erosion of trust in politicians, political parties and essential democratic institutions (such as national parliaments) over the medium- to long-term. This downturn has raised concerns about democratic legitimacy and its implications on cooperation with political authorities, especially in relation to political and electoral participation (Tyler 2006). This subsection examines public trust in key political, legal, governmental and social institutions. It notes a general and largescale decline in public confidence in the country, suggesting growing dissatisfaction with the current status quo.

SASAS respondents were asked to rate their level of trust in a number of different institutions, with responses captured on a five-point trust scale. These questions have also been included in the annual South African Social Attitudes Survey since 2003, as well as the HSRC's Evaluation of Public Opinion (EPOP) surveys conducted between 1998 and 2001, thus allowing for an examination of trends in institutional trust over more than two decades. Let us begin our analysis with an investigation into the share of the mass public who report that they had confidence in six political and governmental institutions. These include the core institutions of the political system as well as political parties and politicians, the percentage who strongly trusted or just trusted these institutions are depicted in Table 4 for the period 1998-2021. In terms of the core political system, none of the institutions listed in the table were trusted by more than half the adult population in SASAS 2021.

Table 4: Percentage of the adult populace who strongly trust and trust in political and governmental institutions, 1998-2021

	National government	Local government	Parliament	Political parties	Politicians	Traditional Authorities
1998	47	37	..	30	..	..
1999	60	48	..	39	..	..
2000	43	32	..	29	..	..
2001	52	38	..	27	..	..
2002	...	...	...	...	...	..
2003	56	41	53	..	..	..
2004	67	53	64	..	..	..
2005	64	48	55	42	..	49
2006	59	43	56	37	32	48
2007	52	34	46	27	22	45
2008	51	38	48	28	26	44
2009	61	40	55	33	29	48
2010	52	36	49	29	24	48
2011	51	36	45	29	25	42
2012	46	34	44	25	21	40
2013	38	29	37	23	22	42
2014	41	32	33	22	18	41
2015	43	35	38	25	25	45
2016	32	34	28	23	19	43
2017	28	28	25	17	13	41
2018	30	30	33	23	19	38
2019	..	..	..	..	..	..
2020	33	29	32	22	19	38
2021	31	25	29	22	19	42

Sources: HSRC Evaluation of Public Opinion Programme survey 1998-2002; HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2003-2021.

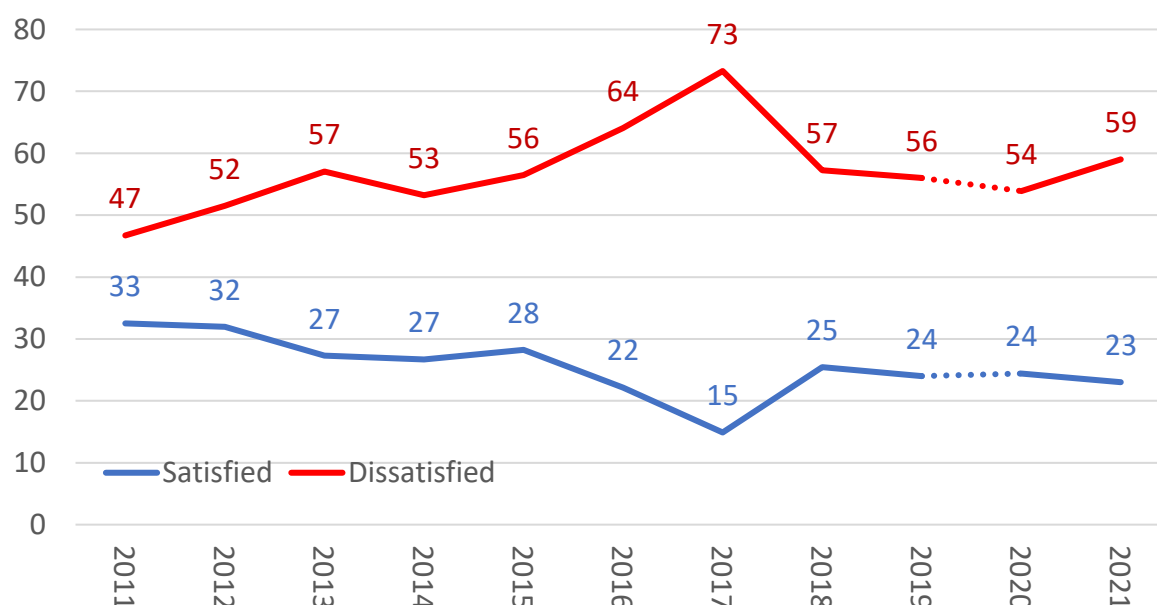
Note 1: The reported percentages correspond to the percentage of South Africans aged 16 years and older who indicated that they 'strongly trust' or 'trust' in each of the following institutions in South Africa at the time of interview. 2: Figures shaded in green indicate a figure greater than period average.

The national government was trusted by slightly more than two-fifths (47%) of the general public in EPOP 1998. The results show a demonstrable improvement in public confidence in governmental institutions between 1998 and 2004. During this period the proportion who trusted national government increased by 20 percentage points. Over the next three years trust in this institution dropped significantly, falling from 67% at the start of the period to 52% at the end. Following this period of declining confidence, SASAS 2008 brought a levelling off and even an improvement in trust in SASAS 2009. Following the beginning of the Zuma Administration, we saw a dramatic decline in public confidence in this institution. The proportion who trusted the national government fell from 61% in SASAS 2009 to 28% in SASAS 2017. Following the exit of Jacob Zuma as President we can observe a stabilisation in trust that has proved to be somewhat durable for the period 2018-2021. A similar trend can be observed if we assess public confidence in local government and parliament. Trust in these

institutions began to fall in the 2009-2017 period before stabilising at a low level between 2018 and 2021.

When compared to other government institutions, public confidence in traditional authorities was quite stable for much of the period 2005-2021. When compared to urban areas, trust tended in this institution was higher amongst rural residents. Consider, for example, that 61% of rural adults trusted traditional authorities while only 42% of their urban counterparts did so. We can observe a moderate decline in confidence with this institution between SASAS 2005 and SASAS 2011. This was primarily driven by dwindling trust in traditional authorities amongst urban. Between SASAS 2012 and SASAS 2021 public attitudes towards traditional authorities have been quite stable. Extremely low confidence was expressed in political parties and politicians, less than a quarter of the mass public gave these groups a positive evaluation. Trust in the political class appeared to fall between SASAS 2006 and SASAS 2012 before stabilising at a low level in SASAS 2013. In summation, the results depicted in suggest that the adult populace has become disillusioned with the political status quo in South Africa in the last decade.

Figure 10: Proportion of the public who are satisfaction and dissatisfaction with political leaders, 2011-2021



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2011-2021

In order to adequately capture general regime approval amongst a national citizenry, Norris (2011) draws on the work of David Easton (1979). She argues that assessing approval of incumbent officeholders allows us to understand evaluations of regime institutions (e.g., parliament). Given the results discussed above, it would be important to gauge public attitudes towards political leaders in South Africa. The data previously presented suggests that the average citizen has become more and more distrustful of the political class. The most specific aspect of political support in the conceptual framework presented by Norris (2011) relates to levels of approval for the performance of political leadership in the country. To examine this, SASAS included a single, general measure that asked respondents to indicate their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the nation's current political leaders. Public

responses to this question are depicted in **Figure 10** for the period 2011-2021, the results show that mass attitudes towards political leaders have changed significantly in the last decade.

In terms of public approval for leaders, we find that on aggregate that in SASAS 2021 only 23% of the adult population was satisfied with political leaders in the country. This figure is similar to what was found in previous SASAS rounds 2018 and 2020, when the share that was satisfied with political leaders was recorded at about a quarter of the mass public. However, this is somewhat higher in SASAS 2017 when less than a sixth of the adult populace gave the same answer. About half (53%) of the general public were dissatisfied with their political leaders in SASAS 2014 and this increased significantly during the late 2010s. In SASAS 2018 and SASAS 2020 dissatisfaction had returned to SASAS 2014 levels, suggesting a calming of political discontent. However, in SASAS 2021 we see a five percentage point increase in dissatisfaction with leaders, consistent with growing distrust in political and governmental institutions depicted in Table 4.

To put the public opinion data on political and governmental institutions in context, let us turn our attention to public confidence in a range of social and legal institutions. Data for the period 1998-2021 on mass confidence in six different non-legislative institutions are presented in **Table 5**. Religious institutions were trusted by the large share of the adult population in EPOP 1998. Despite some fluctuations, attitudes towards these organisations remained stable for most of the 2000s. However, beginning in SASAS 2015, we can observe a distinct decline in the level of trust that the general public have for this institution. Less than three-fifths (56%) of the adult populace trusted religious organisations, 22 percentage points below what it was in SASAS 2014. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) also experienced a regression in public support. The SABC elicited the trust of nearly three-quarters (71%) of the South African population in SASAS 2003. Much like religious organisations, confidence in the SABC began declining in the mid-2010s. However, the level of the deterioration was more moderate, only 11 percentage points between SASAS 2015 and SASAS 2021.

When judged against other institutions depicted in **Table 5**, public confidence in the country's legal institutions is quite poor. Less than half the mass public trusted either the police or the courts in the late 1990s. Public confidence in the courts improved between EPOP 2000 and SASAS 2004 and then stabilised for most of the next decade and a half. Beginning in SASAS 2018 we observed a significant decline in public trust in the court system, only 38% of the general public were confident in this institution in SASAS 2021. The data also shows that public trust in the South African Police Services (SAPS) has been low throughout most of the democratic period. After SASAS 2011, however, there was a drop in the level of trust ordinary people had in SAPS². Levels of public confidence in this institution fell by seven percentage points between SASAS 2011 and SASAS 2020. There was a noteworthy drop in positive evaluations of the police in the last survey round, falling six percentage points between the two survey rounds.

² This was an especially sharp decline between SASAS 2011 and SASAS 2013, following the killing by police of 34 striking miners at Marikana, North West Province, in August 2012. But confidence had almost returned to the 2011 level by SASAS 2015.

Table 5: Percentage of the adult populace who strongly trust and trust in legal and social institutions, 1998-2021

	Religious institutions	The SABC	Trade unions	Courts	The police	Defence force
1998	82	..	38	42	42	48
1999	81	..	38	45	47	..
2000	74	..	26	37	39	45
2001	81	..	38	45	40	..
2002	..	..	..	..	..	..
2003	82	71	..	47	41	62
2004	81	73	..	56	46	56
2005	79	71	..	55	43	59
2006	82	73	..	52	38	49
2007	82	70	..	49	39	..
2008	82	71	..	49	39	56
2009	83	71	..	56	40	64
2010	81	74	34	54	41	58
2011	79	65	43	50	41	57
2012	77	69	29	48	36	53
2013	76	69	30	45	28	54
2014	78	63	28	45	34	56
2015	75	69	45	54	38	61
2016	66	60	58	49	34	55
2017	70	64	53	49	35	61
2018	58	57	49	42	31	..
2019	..	..	..	..	..	..
2020	56	53	54	41	34	55
2021	56	58	30	38	28	53

Sources: HSRC Evaluation of Public Opinion Programme survey 1998-2002; HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2003-2021.

Note 1: The reported percentages correspond to the percentage of South Africans aged 16 years and older who indicated that they 'strongly trust' or 'trust' in each of the following institutions in South Africa at the time of interview. 2: Figures shaded in green indicate a figure greater than period average.

The mass public tends to express greater levels of confidence in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) than SAPS. Public trust in this institution improved between EPOP 1998 and SASAS 2003, increasing by 14 percentage points. The SASAS 2004 to SASAS 2017 period was characterised by modest fluctuations in public support for this institution. Confidence in the SANDF has fallen between 2018-2021, dropping from 61% at the start of the period to 53% at the end. Of all the institutions portrayed in **Table 5**, trade unions received the lowest positive evaluations. Consider, for instance, that less than two-fifths (38%) of the adult population trusted this institution in EPOP 1998. Confidence in trade unions was quite low in the early 2010s, only 28% of the mass public trusted these organisations in SASAS 2014. Over the next six years, however, we observed an increase in popular support for trade unions and 54% of the populace trusted this institution in SASAS 2020. But in the

last survey round, confidence in trade unions declined substantially, falling 14 percentage points in just twelve months.

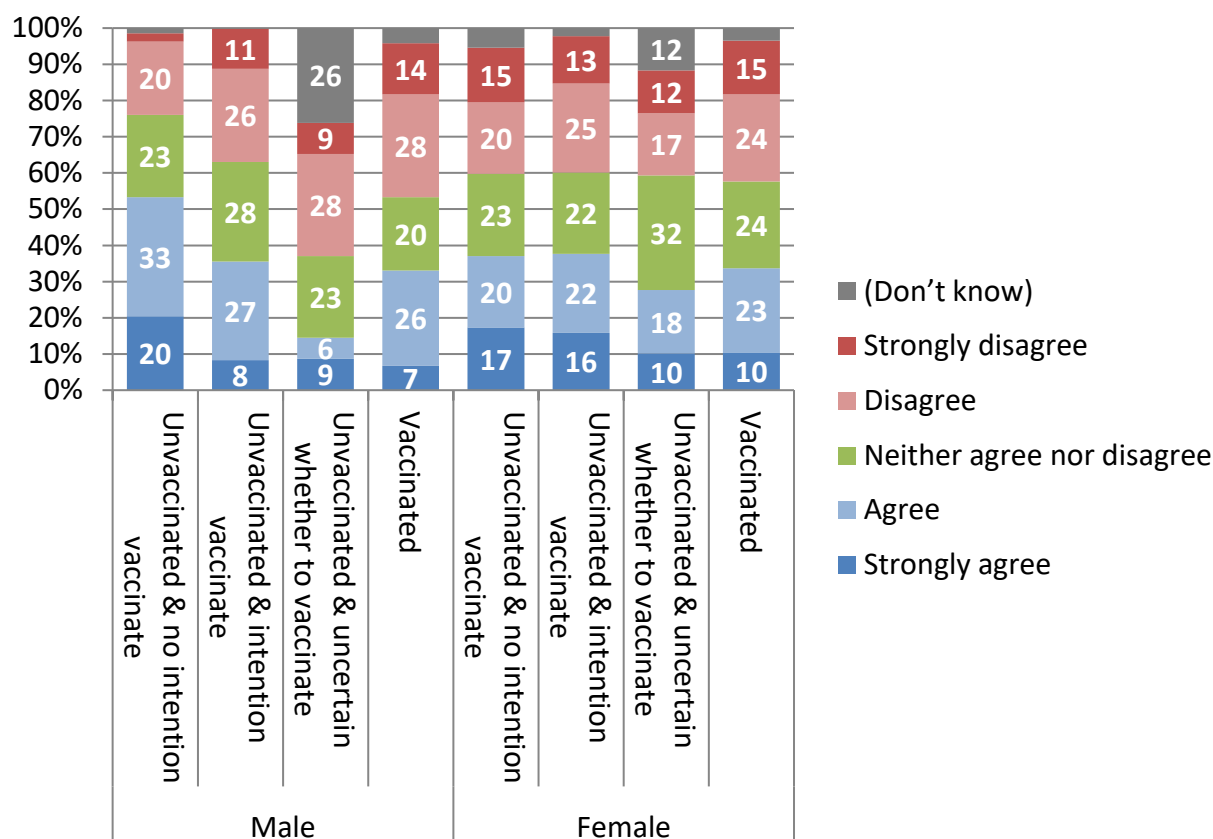
4.4. Mass Views of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching effects on South African society, and the extent of the social, economic, and psycho-social consequences have yet to be fully understood. The recommendation of the Mosenke Inquiry into Ensuring Free and Fair Elections during this period, and the subsequent court application for electoral postponement, have highlighted the complexity and enormity of this issue. There is a substantive knowledge gap relating to the impact of the pandemic on how citizens in South Africa view this issue and the societal response to the Coronavirus. This subsection will assess public attitudes towards the pandemic and whether the general public thinks the state is doing a good job responding to the Coronavirus outbreak. In view of the findings on legal-positive trust presented in Section 4.3, public evaluations of the government response to the Coronavirus were significantly more positive than may have been expected. The subsection will assess attitudes between the Online Voter Participation Survey (OVPS) completed in July 2021³ and the 2021 VPS.

The mass public has polarised views regarding the threat of that the Coronavirus poses for the national population in South Africa. Nearly two-fifths (36%) of the adult populace believed that the threats associated with Covid-19 was exaggerated in late 2021. The remainder either told fieldworkers that the threat was not exaggerated (36%), were undecided on the matter (23%) or were uncertain about how to answer (4%). The perceived threat level captured in 2021 VPS was somewhat greater than what was observed during the OVPS in July 2021. The research found that 44% of the adult population said the threat was exaggerated during that survey. This improvement could be attributed to the third 2021 COVID-19 wave, the wave occurred between June and August of that year. During this period there were 1.1 million new infections and 25,600 COVID-19 related deaths.

³ For a detailed discussion of the methodological framework of the OVPS, please see Roberts et al. (2021).

Figure 11: Public levels of agreement and disagreement with the statement: ‘I believe the threat from COVID-19 is exaggerated’ by gender and vaccination status



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

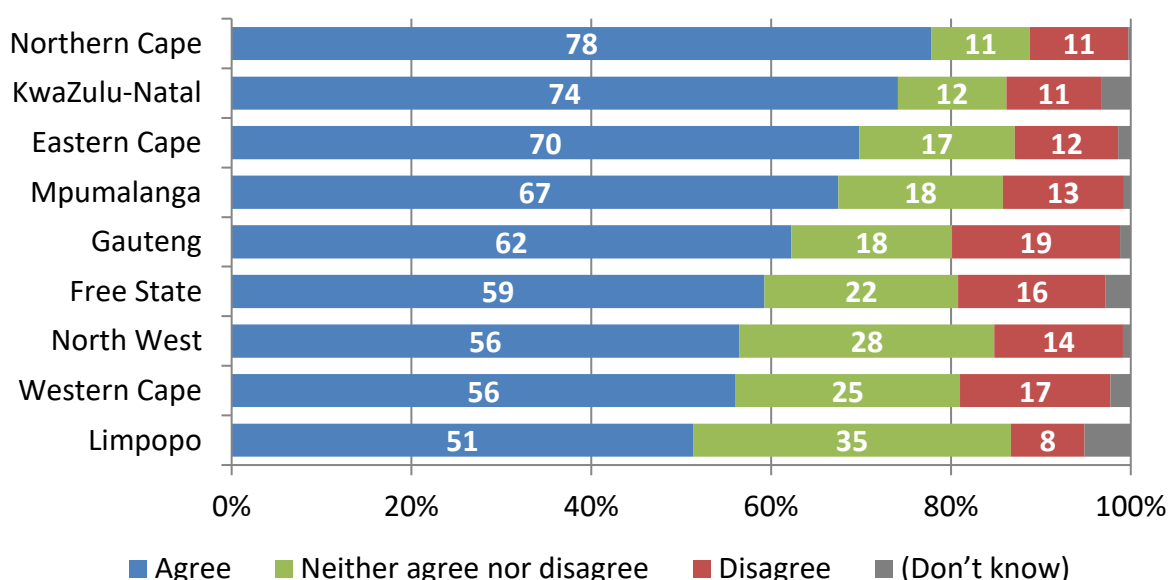
Gender appeared to be a key factor in predicting how adult citizens would answer the question on COVID-19 threat level. Men were found to be more liable to report an exaggerated threat level than women. But there was a distinct vaccination disparity to this gender differential with the unvaccinated much more likely to report that they disagreed with the statement (**Figure 11**). No gender difference was noted amongst vaccinated adults, the issue of division was not so much vaccination but the intention to vaccinate. More than half (53%) of male citizens who refused to vaccinate agreed with the statement, 17 percentage points above the national average. This can be compared to less than two-fifths (37%) of female citizens who refused to vaccinate gave the same response. This suggests that men who refused vaccination were more convinced that the COVID-19 threat was low. A significant gender difference that favoured women was also noted amongst adults who were uncertain about whether to get vaccinated.

To prevent the spread of the Coronavirus, the government mandated a series of restrictions for the general public to follow during the 2021 period. These included constraints on public gatherings, mask wearing and social distancing protocols. Data from the OVPS 2021 found that there was almost universal agreement that most people in South Africa disobeyed these restrictions. Almost nine-tenths (86%) of the mass public in July 2021 agreed with the statement that most people are not obeying the restrictions. These results are far below what was found in 2021 VPS when only 64% of the adult population gave the same response. About a twelfth (14%) of the general populace in 2021 VPS disagreed with the statement, 5

percentage points above what was seen in OVPS. This suggests popular perceptions of general compliance with COVID-19 restrictions improved between July and October 2021.

Provincial residence was a key determinant of whether adult citizens would agree with the compliance question. Greater shares of Northern Cape, Limpopo and North West residents were likely to believe people are not obeying the COVID-19 restrictions in the OVPS. We can discern a considerable change in public attitudes in some provinces between the OVPS and VPS 2021. Levels of agreement in Limpopo fell considerably between the two periods, declining from 88% in OVPS to 51% in VPS 2021. A similar, if less dramatic, decline was noted for the North West, the proportion of the provincial population who agreed with the statement falling by 33 percentage points. Those provincial populations that were most likely to agree with the compliance statement in the VPS 2021 were Northern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape (Figure 12).

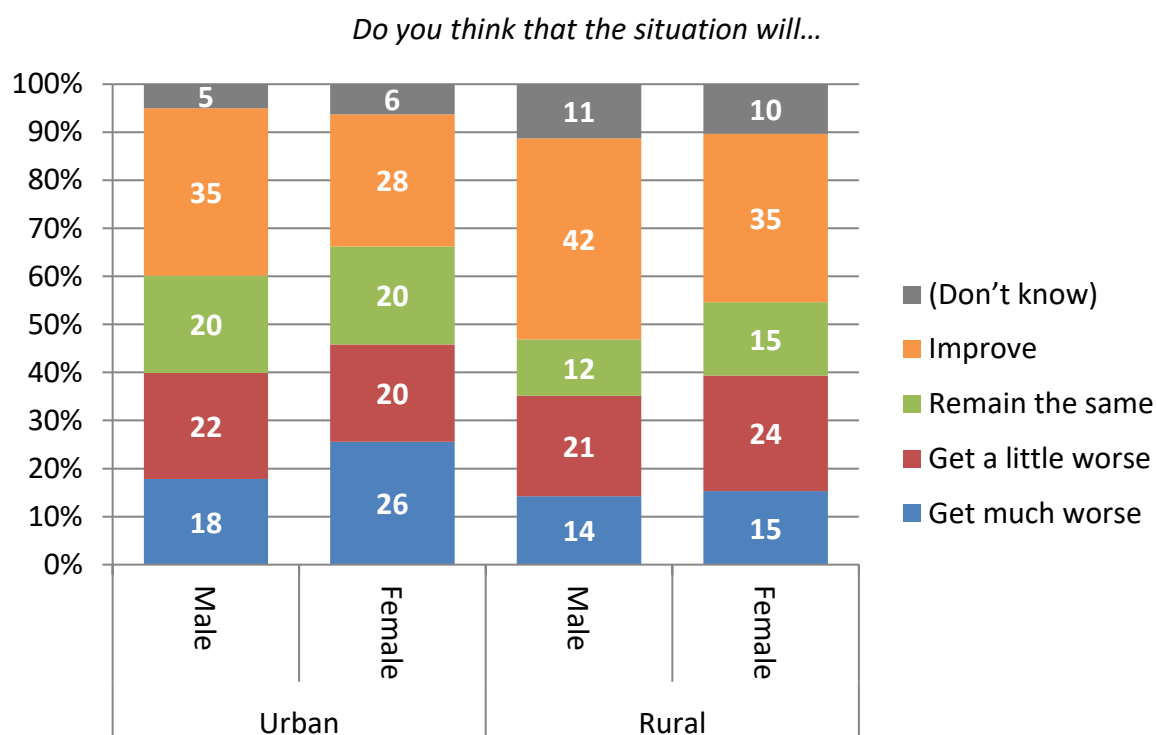
Figure 12: Public levels of agreement and disagreement with the statement: ‘[m]ost people are not obeying COVID-19 restrictions’ by provincial residence



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

How a person evaluates the future -whether they are optimistic or pessimistic regarding current trends- is an important predictor of their views about the present. During the OVPS, more than half (58%) of South Africans were of the view that the COVID-19 situation will worsen over the next few months. Only a small minority (16%) believed that we were over the worst of it, that things would begin to improve. General public optimism improved quite a lot in the three months between the OVPS and the VPS 2021. About two-fifths (42%) of the adult population thought the situation would get worse in late 2021 and 33% stated that it would improve. The upsurge in popular optimism about the future COVID-19 situation helps explain why we observed a general increase in positive appraisals of citizen compliance between the OVPS and VPS 2021.

Figure 13: Popular perceptions about whether the COVID-19 situation would worsen or improve in the next few months by geotype and gender

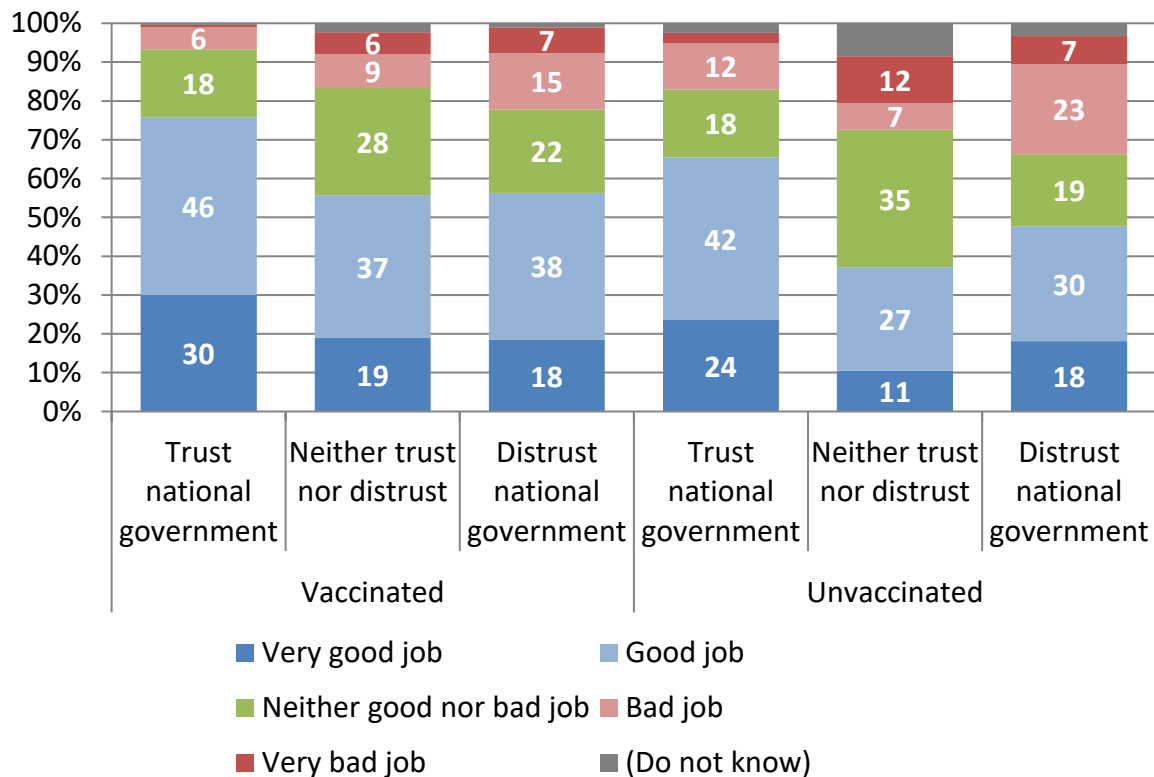


Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

Whether a person lived in an urban area appeared to be a significant factor that helped predict how citizens thought about the future. Urban adults were found to be less optimistic than their rural counterparts that the COVID-19 situation would improve in the next few months. But, as can be observed from **Figure 13**, there was a distinct gender disparity to this geotype differential. Urban women were found to be much more pessimistic about the situation than other groups. Almost half of this group either believe the situation would get much worse (26%) or just worse (20%). Rural men were, in contrast, discovered to be the most optimistic about the future. More than two-fifths (42%) of this group thought things would improve, 7 percentage points more than urban men and 14 points more than urban women. This represents a significant improvement from what was observed in the OVPS when only about a fifth (18%) of rural men thought the situation would improve.

Let us now turn our attention to mass evaluations of the government response to the COVID-19 pandemic. More than half of the adult citizenry thought that the government was either doing a very good (20%) or good (36%) job handling the pandemic. Only a fifth of the population stated that government performance on this issue was bad (14%) or very bad (6%). These results are in line with what was observed in OVPS, suggesting the durability of general evaluations of this issue. Public trust in national government was found to be a robust predictor of general evaluations of the state response to the Coronavirus. Almost three-quarters (71%) of those who trusted the national government evaluated the state response positively. But even amongst those who distrusted the national government, many evaluated the response positively. More than half (52%) of this group thought that the government was doing a good job countering to the pandemic.

Figure 14: Public evaluations of whether the government was doing a good job or a bad job in responding to the Coronavirus outbreak by vaccination status and trust in national government



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

Vaccination status acted as a powerful mediator of how public trust in national government influenced citizen assessments of the state response to the Coronavirus (**Figure 14**). Unvaccinated citizens who did not trust the government were more inclined to evaluate the response negatively than their vaccinated peers. Almost a third (30%) of unvaccinated adults who distrusted the national government were dissatisfied with the state response, 14 points above vaccinated persons who trusted the government. Vaccination intention was also an important predictor of mass attitudes towards the state response. Two-fifths of those refused vaccination and those who were uncertain about whether to vaccinate said that they were satisfied with the response. Levels of satisfaction were much higher amongst the vaccinated (62%) and those who were intended to vaccinate (63%) and those who were.

5. Evaluations of Democratic Performance

The third level in the hierarchy of political support developed by Norris (2011) turns attention from broad expressions of pride, patriotism and support for various democratic ideals and principles to more specific evaluations of the performance of democracy in the country. For analytical purposes, and in common with past VPS report, we focus on overall satisfaction with democracy, evaluations of the performance of South African democracy against the six ideals discussed in the previous section, as well as ratings of specific areas of government service performance. Also included in an examination of the national challenges that the

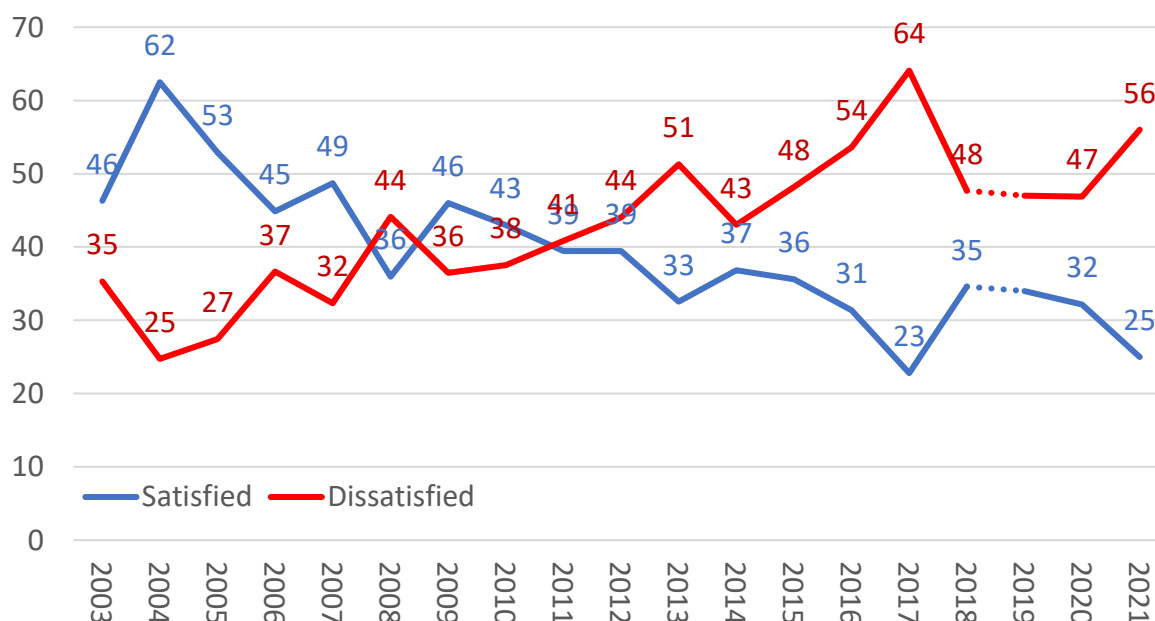
public deems most important and how consistent or variable these priorities have been over recent years.

5.1. Satisfaction with Democracy

One of the most important indicators of support for any country's political system is how satisfied its citizens are with democracy. Though conceptual concerns have been raised about the exact elements of democracy that are being assessed, Linde and Ekman (2003) point out, 'satisfaction with the way democracy works' is an effective indicator of support for the manner in which the democratic regime works in practice. Indeed, satisfaction with democracy is one of the most common indicators of political support for democracy employed in survey research (e.g., Norris 1999; Dalton 2004; Norris 2011). Given the importance of this variable as a global measure of regime performance, in this subsection we examine levels of satisfaction with democracy between 2003-2021 using the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS).

VSP respondents were asked the following question: "[h]ow satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy is working in South Africa?", with responses captured on a five-point scale ranging from 'very satisfied' to 'very dissatisfied'. The line graph in Figure 15 provides trends in the shares of the adult population that expressed satisfaction and dissatisfaction in each SASAS round of interviewing over the 2003-2021 period. At the time of the last SASAS round, only a quarter of adult citizens reported that they were satisfied with the way democracy works in South Africa, while over half (56%) voiced dissatisfaction. This represents a significant decline in the recorded level of satisfaction with democracy following on from what we saw at the start of the Ramaphosa Administration in VPS 2018. In addition, this is a much more negative appraisal than what was found in late 2015, six months ahead of the 2016 municipal elections.

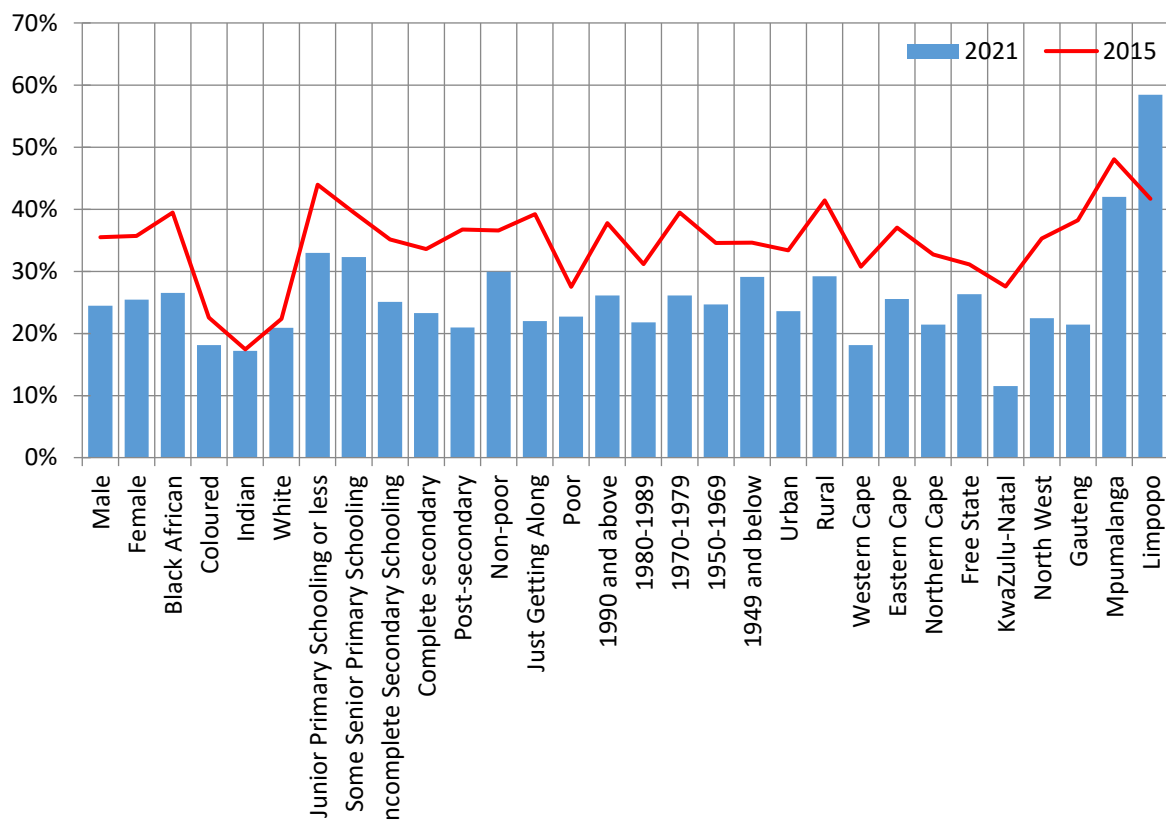
Figure 15: Public satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the way democracy is working in South Africa across survey rounds 2003-2021



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2003-2021

As the graph demonstrates, there has been a steady escalation in discontentment with the functioning of democracy in the country since 2004. In 2008, the share indicating that they were dissatisfied with democracy exceeded the share that expressed satisfaction for the first instance since 2003. There was an improvement following the 2009 national and provincial elections, though this upswing was relatively short-lived. Between 2013 and 2021, the proportion dissatisfied with democracy has been greater than the proportion who were satisfied. The highest level of dissatisfaction amongst the general populace was in VPS 2017, the final year of the Zuma Administration. On a variable such as satisfaction with democracy, it is important to look beyond national averages to determine how wide-ranging evaluations are for South Africans with different socio-demographic characteristics. In Figure 16, the 2013 and 2015 mean percentage who was satisfied with how democracy functioned are presented for different subgroups.

Figure 16: Satisfaction with democracy by socio-demographic attributes, 2015 and 2021 (percentage who are very satisfied or satisfied)



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2015; 2021

Mean satisfaction with democracy scores displayed considerable variation in both SASAS 2015 and SASAS 2021. There were no statistically significant differences in evaluations of democracy based on gender or birth cohort. There are observed racial differences, with Black African adults scoring significantly higher than other groups. However, population group variation was much lower in SASAS 2021 than in SASAS 2015. This was because satisfaction levels amongst Black African citizens fell by 13 percentage points between these two periods while no comparable change was observed for other groups. There are also signs of an inverse

class effect, with the self-rated poor demonstrating higher satisfaction with democracy levels than the non-poor or those that are just getting by. Confirming this pattern, those low levels of education reported higher scores than those with greater levels of education. This effect was more prominent in SASAS 2021 than in SASAS 2015, mostly due to a decline in satisfaction amongst those who were tertiary-educated.

Spatial variation in perceived evaluations of democracy functioning was apparent in Figure 16. Adult residents of urban settlements were less positive in their assessments than those in rural areas. The size of this disparity declined somewhat between 2015 and 2021, due to growing dissatisfaction amongst rural adults. Most provincial residents became more negative in their appraisal of democracy during the last six years under consideration. The largest downswings on democratic satisfaction were in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. Only residents of Limpopo became more positive on this issue over time, satisfaction with democracy in that province climbed from 42% in SASAS 2015 to 58% in SASAS 2021. Of all the provincial subgroups under review, evaluations of democracy were lowest in KwaZulu-Natal where only 12% of adult citizens said that they were satisfied.

5.2. Evaluations of Core Dimensions of Democracy in South Africa

Democracy is a multi-dimensional concept, and the term 'democracy' may have distinct and diverse meanings to different people. Hoping to provide an empirical assessment of democratic quality, A method for identifying the different dimensions of democracy was developed by Diamond and Morlino (2005). This approach argues that a democracy is composed of six 'democratic ideals' which can be categorised into distinct dimensions (also see Morlino, 2004). Each of these dimensions has to be fulfilled to an extent in order for a political system to qualify as a democracy in the eyes of the public. This approach allows for a great deal of variation among survey respondents and, as a result, provides an appropriate basis for the investigation of democracy and democratic principles. One of the main goals of each successive round of the VPS is to better understand the value that citizens evaluate democracy, and how this is changing over time. Using the framework developed by Diamond and Morlino, this section will examine public evaluations of different 'democratic ideals' in South Africa.

The section will begin by assessing the importance attributed to the six 'democratic ideals' by the mass public. The results will show that some ideals are more valued than others by citizens. In addition, the section will examine how these evaluations have changed over time, noting a general decline in citizen appraisals of all dimensions over the last few years. The section will then turn to assessment of whether the six ideals apply in the South African case. A clear gap was observed between the importance of an ideal and whether it applies in the country context. This gap was found to be particularly large for those dimensions that dealt with the conduct of political parties. Furthermore, a substantial and relatively recent decline was noted for public assessments of the electoral freeness and fairness dimension between 2015 and 2021. The section will investigate this dramatic degeneration in detail, unpacking how the rate of change differed amongst various socio-demographic groups in the country.

Legend Box 1: Dimensions of importance of dimensions of democracy in general

C1	Elections are free and fair
C2	Politicians listen to people before making decisions
C3	Ruling parties are punished in elections when they have done a bad job
C4	Citizens are able to take part in peaceful and legal protest action to express their dissatisfaction
C5	Everyone is free to express their political views openly, even if they are extreme
C6	Opposition parties are free to criticise the government

In common with prior VPS rounds, six questions on the democratic dimensions outlined by Diamond and Morlino (2005) were included in the 2021 survey. Respondents were asked to evaluate the importance of each to democracy in general, the legend for these dimensions are depicted in Legend Box 1. The survey required respondents to provide their responses on an 11-point end-anchored scale, ranging 0 signifying “not important at all” and 10 representing “extremely important”. Mean results on these six scales are provided in Table 6 for the period 2013-2021. South Africans generally perceived each of these six ideals as fundamentally important to democracy in general, all scoring appreciably above the scale midpoint. However, as one would expect, certain ideals were rated as more important than others for the functioning of a democracy. In each round of surveying the component that was rated most important was C1. Since it is commonly understood that free and fair elections serve as a cornerstone of democracy in any nation, this is an unsurprising result. Of the six dimensions under consideration, C6 was rated as the least important in each survey round.

Table 6: Importance attached to various democratic ideals (Mean scores, 0-10 scale), 2013-2021 (Analysis of Variance)

	Survey Round								ANOVA	
	2013		2015		2018		2021		F	Prob>F
C1	8.2	(0.070)	8.1	(0.059)	7.2	(0.087)	6.7	(0.094)	199	0.000
C2	7.5	(0.088)	7.5	(0.071)	7.0	(0.088)	6.5	(0.114)	75	0.000
C3	7.4	(0.091)	7.4	(0.071)	6.9	(0.089)	6.4	(0.111)	71	0.000
C4	7.7	(0.081)	7.5	(0.066)	7.0	(0.085)	6.4	(0.105)	117	0.000
C5	7.8	(0.074)	7.6	(0.063)	7.0	(0.080)	6.5	(0.102)	140	0.000
C6	7.1	(0.092)	7.4	(0.068)	6.8	(0.084)	6.4	(0.098)	64	0.000

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013-2021

It is immediately apparent from the pattern of results in Table 6 that the importance attached to the six democratic ideals by the general citizenry has meaningfully decreased during the period under review. This decline was first apparent in the 2018 VPS round but appeared to escalate in the 2021 round. The largest observed decline was for C1, falling from 8.3 (SE=0.070) in 2013 to 6.7 (SE=0.094) in 2021. The observed change was substantiated by a one-way ANOVA ($F(3, 11560) = 199, p = 0.000$) test which showed that there was a statistically significant difference during the period. It would appear that South Africans are becoming less cognisant of the fact that free and fair elections are crucial to democratic quality. Another substantial decline in observed importance was exhibited for C5, a deterioration of 1,3 points over the last eight years. In other words, public acceptance of free speech as a democratic principal waned during this turbulent period. The smallest degree of change between 2013

and 2021 was observed for C6, dropping from 7.1 (SE=0.092) in 2013 to 6.4 (SE=0.098) in the last survey round.

Legend Box 2: Dimensions of evaluation of dimensions of democracy in South Africa

E1	Elections in South Africa are free and fair.
E2	Politicians in South Africa listen to people before making decisions.
E3	Ruling parties in South Africa are punished in elections when they have done a bad job.
E4	Citizens in South Africa are able to take part in peaceful and legal protest action to express their dissatisfaction.
E5	In South Africa, everyone is free to express their political views openly, even if they are extreme.
E6	Opposition parties in South Africa are free to criticise the government.

Turning away from public support for the six democratic ideals in general, we now examine citizen evaluations of the performance of South African democracy against these ideals. For each of the six ideals, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they believed each applied in the country. Responses were again captured using an 11-point end-anchored scale, with 0 representing that the ideal ‘does not apply in South Africa at all’ and 10 that it ‘applies completely’. In Legend Box 2 the legend for the six evaluation dimensions is portrayed, and mean results on these six scales are provided in Table 6 for the period 2013-2021. The adult populace appears to be quite critical of South African democracy in terms of the inclusion of citizen voice in political decision-making (E2) and electoral accountability (E3). Of the six dimensions under consideration, these two consistently received the lowest evaluation from citizens. In most survey rounds, E1 clearly received the highest evaluation but began to change in VPS 2018. E6 was rated more highly than E1⁴ in the last survey round, suggesting that the general population feels that the ability of opposition parties to criticise the government remains relatively robust.

Table 7: Performance of South African democracy in relation to various democratic ideals, (Mean scores, 0-10 scale), 2013-2021 (Analysis of Variance)

	Survey Round								ANOVA	
	2013		2015		2018		2021		F	Prob>F
E1	7.3	(0.086)	7.3	(0.065)	6.6	(0.094)	5.7	(0.098)	206	0.000
E2	4.6	(0.099)	4.5	(0.081)	4.2	(0.100)	4.0	(0.097)	26	0.000
E3	4.5	(0.097)	4.5	(0.079)	4.5	(0.095)	4.0	(0.097)	17	0.000
E4	6.1	(0.090)	6.4	(0.070)	6.0	(0.088)	5.8	(0.103)	20	0.000
E5	6.2	(0.094)	6.4	(0.070)	6.1	(0.090)	5.7	(0.088)	33	0.000
E6	6.3	(0.093)	6.8	(0.071)	6.5	(0.085)	6.0	(0.100)	38	0.000

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013-2021

⁴ This change over time may be due to the fact that, of all six dimensions, E6 experienced the lowest level of decline. The mean score on this dimension declined from 6.3 (SE=0.092) to 6.0 (SE=0.100) between 2015 and 2021.

During the early part of the period under review, we noted growing public satisfaction with certain types of democratic performance. Modest increases in the performance ratings of E4, E5 and E6 were observed between 2013 and 2015. However, beginning in the VPS 2018, there has been a reversal in all dimensions in Table 7, indicating that the general mass public are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the general functioning of South African democracy. While public evaluations on all six dimensions declined during the period, the most dramatic decrease noted for E1. Citizen evaluations of this dimension were relatively high in the VPS 2013, scoring 7.3 (SE=0.086) in that survey round. However, citizen assessments of South African elections become more negative between 2015 and 2021, decreasing 1,6 points over the last six years. A series of one-way ANOVA tests demonstrate that E1 ($F(3, 11560) = 206$, $p = 0.000$) experienced the largest and most substantial decline observed in Table 7. Overall, the weakening of public evaluations noted in Table 7 essentially mirrors the much more substantial deterioration observed in Table 6. Growing societal pessimism about the political status quo in South Africa appears to be undermining public commitment to democratic principles.

Table 8: Level of importance attached to, and evaluation of the performance of, free and fair elections in South Africa (mean scores, 0-10 scale) by selected subgroups (Analysis of Variance), 2013 and 2021

Variance,, 2013 and 2021

	Importance					Diff.	Evaluation					Diff.
	2013		2021		2013		2021					
Employment Status												
Unemployed	8.1	(0.08)	6.5	(0.09)	-1.6	7.4	(0.09)	5.7	(0.09)	-1.7		
Employed	8.2	(0.09)	6.8	(0.10)	-1.4	7.0	(0.11)	5.5	(0.10)	-1.5		
Other	8.2	(0.07)	7.0	(0.09)	-1.2	7.4	(0.09)	5.9	(0.09)	-1.5		
Population Group												
Black African	8.1	(0.06)	6.8	(0.07)	-1.4	7.5	(0.07)	5.9	(0.07)	-1.6		
Coloured	8.6	(0.08)	6.5	(0.13)	-2.1	7.5	(0.12)	5.2	(0.12)	-2.3		
Indian	8.7	(0.11)	7.5	(0.18)	-1.2	6.3	(0.17)	4.2	(0.16)	-2.1		
White	8.0	(0.12)	6.4	(0.16)	-1.6	6.3	(0.15)	5.3	(0.14)	-1.0		
Voter Status												
Never voted	7.9	(0.09)	6.4	(0.11)	-1.6	7.2	(0.10)	5.1	(0.10)	-2.1		
Irregular voter	8.2	(0.08)	6.7	(0.09)	-1.5	7.3	(0.09)	5.8	(0.09)	-1.5		
Regular voter	8.4	(0.07)	7.1	(0.08)	-1.3	7.4	(0.09)	6.2	(0.09)	-1.3		
Province												
Western Cape	8.2	(0.09)	6.7	(0.14)	-1.5	7.5	(0.10)	5.7	(0.12)	-1.8		
Eastern Cape	8.7	(0.10)	6.6	(0.18)	-2.1	7.8	(0.15)	5.9	(0.18)	-1.9		
Northern Cape	8.5	(0.15)	6.5	(0.23)	-2.0	6.8	(0.22)	5.5	(0.24)	-1.3		
Free State	7.6	(0.13)	5.8	(0.20)	-1.8	6.7	(0.17)	6.0	(0.20)	-0.7		
KwaZulu-Natal	8.5	(0.09)	7.2	(0.11)	-1.3	7.2	(0.12)	5.1	(0.11)	-2.2		
North West	8.8	(0.15)	5.6	(0.18)	-3.1	6.2	(0.25)	5.7	(0.19)	-0.5		
Gauteng	7.8	(0.14)	6.9	(0.13)	-0.8	7.4	(0.15)	5.7	(0.13)	-1.7		
Mpumalanga	8.7	(0.12)	7.4	(0.15)	-1.3	7.8	(0.18)	6.7	(0.16)	-1.1		
Limpopo	7.3	(0.17)	6.0	(0.20)	-1.3	7.2	(0.17)	5.8	(0.22)	-1.4		

Note: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; and 2. Cell shaded in green indicate a mean score above the national average year in a given survey round.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013; 2021

It was apparent from the VPS data that there had been a significant decline in public evaluations of freeness and fairness of South African elections between 2013 and 2021. This was evident regardless of whether we examined the level of importance attached to the ideal or appraisals of this dimension applicability. To better understand this decline, it is essential to assess decline across the country's key socio-demographic faultlines. mean scores for C1 and E1 are provided across a range of subgroups in Table 8, to provide an appraisal of temporal change data is displayed for both VPS 2013 and VPS 2021. During this period, we found a decline in public evaluations on C1 and E1 for all subgroups depicted in the table. However, some groups exhibited a far greater decline than others. When compared to voters, those citizens who had never voted were found to have become more skeptical about the quality of South African elections over time. Non-voters evaluations on C1 fell from 7.9 (SE=0.09) at the start of the period to 6.4 (SE=0.11) at the end. The level of change was even more substantial amongst this group for E1, falling 2.1 points over the last eight years.

There was significant provincial variation in how the public evaluated election quality in South Africa. Mean scores for C1 declined in all provinces between VPS 2013 and VPS 2021. The most significant mean score decrease was observed in the North West. In that province, the level of importance attached to this principal plummeted from 8.8 (SE=0.15) in 2013 to 5.6 (SE=0.18) in 2021. A similar (if somewhat less robust) decline was detected in the Free State, the Eastern Cape and the Northern Cape. Examining provincial mean score changes for E1, the largest declines during the period were noted for citizens in KwaZulu-Natal. Public appraisals of election quality declined from 7.2 (SE=0.12) in VPS 2013 to 5.1 (SE=0.11) in VPS 2021. A comparable (if less substantial) decrease was observed for the Western Cape and the Eastern Cape. Substantial population group differences were also apparent in Table 8 with the Coloured minority displaying the largest level of change. The Coloured minority reported significant deterioration for C1 and E1 with the most substantial noted for E1, a decline of 2.3 points over the period.

Legend Box 3: Gap scales between expectations and experience of democracy in South Africa dimensions

G1	Elections are free and fair
G2	Politicians listen to people before making decisions
G3	Ruling parties are punished in elections when they have done a bad job
G4	Citizens are able to take part in peaceful and legal protest action to express their dissatisfaction
G5	Everyone is free to express their political views openly, even if they are extreme
G6	Opposition parties are free to criticise the government

We compared the disparity at the national level between the average importance attached to each of the democratic ideals and the subsequent evaluation of the extent to which the public deems them to apply in the country. The greater the discrepancy between experience and ideal, the greater the discontent with the democratic realisation in South Africa. Six discrepancy scales were produced, Legend Box 3 showcases the legend of these scales. Discrepancy is measured on each using a 21-point end-anchored scale, ranging from -10 to +10. The more negative the value, the more an individual believes that the ideal has not been

implemented adequately. The mean scores for each of these gap scales were presented for the six dimensions in Table 9 for the period 2013-2021. The discrepancy between the importance and application is lowest for G1 (M=-0.9; SE=0.091) in VPS 2013. On all six dimensions there is a negative gap between the importance attached to the democratic ideal and the evaluated reality of that ideal. Mean scores for G1 improved between 2015 and 2018, increasing by 0,4 points. The public became more negative on this indicator in the last few years, however, and G1 (M=-1.0; SE=0.106) had one of the worst scores in VPS 2021.

Table 9: Gap between democratic expectations and experience (difference in mean scores, -10 - 10 scale), 2013-2021 (Analysis of Variance)

	Survey Round								ANOVA	
	2013		2015		2018		2021		F	Prob>F
G1	-0.9	(0.091)	-0.7	(0.073)	-0.5	(0.102)	-1.0	(0.106)	13	0.000
G2	-3.0	(0.115)	-3.0	(0.107)	-2.8	(0.136)	-2.6	(0.145)	7	0.000
G3	-2.9	(0.128)	-2.9	(0.110)	-2.3	(0.128)	-2.4	(0.138)	19	0.000
G4	-1.6	(0.105)	-1.1	(0.080)	-0.9	(0.095)	-0.6	(0.097)	36	0.000
G5	-1.6	(0.097)	-1.2	(0.082)	-0.9	(0.090)	-0.8	(0.104)	36	0.000
G6	-0.9	(0.095)	-0.6	(0.080)	-0.4	(0.087)	-0.3	(0.093)	13	0.000

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013-2021

Of the six scales under review in 2013 VPS, mean scores were highest for G2 (M=-3.0; SE=0.115) and G3 (M=-2.9; SE=0.128). This demonstrates the high level of public dissatisfaction with the conduct of politicians and political parties in the mid-2010s. Mean scores for these two dimensions have remained quite negative for the entire period, although we have observed a slight improvement between 2015 and 2021. This change is, however, not due to an upturn in evaluations of the performance of elected politicians in South Africa. Instead, this improvement appears to be due to the decline in importance attributed to C2 and C3 by the general public. In addition, we observed a reduction of the discrepancy scores in G4, G5 and G6 between 2013 and 2021. The largest reduction was observed for G4 which fell from -1.6 (SE=0.097) at the start of the period to -0.6 (SE=0.097). The observed change was substantiated by a one-way ANOVA ($F(3, 11443) = 36, p = 0.000$) test which showed that there was a statistically significant difference during the period.

The results portrayed in Table 9 establish that the perceived gap between the ideal and reality was much larger for certain democratic dimensions than for others. Those gap scales that deal with politicians have, in particular, exhibited some interesting variations. With the aim of better appreciating these differences, let us assess socio-demographic differences in the discrepancy evaluations of G6, G2 and G3. The data, presented in Table 10, shows that the perceived gap on these dimensions is quite considerable for certain subgroups. In terms of geotype, urban citizens are more inclined than their rural peers to feel that expectations did not meet experience on G2 (M=-2.7; SE=0.16) and G3 (M=-2.5; SE=0.16). There were distinct racial dissimilarities underlying citizen evaluation of G2 and G3 in the country. Indian adults exhibited significantly greater level of discrepancy on these dimensions than other population groups. Of the four groups under discussion, White adults displayed lower discrepancy scores on G2 (M=-1.7; SE=0.29) and G3 (M=-1.9; SE=0.35). There appears to be an interesting subjective poverty gradient observed on G2 and G3. Those individuals who see themselves as

poor or very poor exhibited a higher gap score than their counterparts who were comfortable or just getting along⁵.

Table 10: Gap between democratic expectations and experience (difference in mean scores, -10 - 10 scale) on political parties by socio-demographic sub-groups

Table 10: Scores of political parties by socio-demographic sub-groups									
	G6			G2			G3		
Geotype									
Urban	-0.3	(0.10)	ref.	-2.7	(0.16)	ref.	-2.5	(0.16)	ref.
Rural	-0.7	(0.21)		-2.1	(0.31)	**	-2.2	(0.26)	
Population Group									
Black African	-0.4	(0.11)	ref.	-2.6	(0.17)	ref.	-2.4	(0.16)	ref.
Coloured	-0.3	(0.14)		-2.5	(0.39)		-2.6	(0.37)	
Indian	-0.6	(0.41)	***	-3.6	(0.56)	**	-3.5	(0.55)	***
White	-0.1	(0.20)		-1.7	(0.29)	*	-1.9	(0.35)	
Subjective Poverty Status									
Comfortable	-0.1	(0.09)	ref.	-1.9	(0.12)	ref.	-1.9	(0.11)	ref.
Just Getting Along	-0.5	(0.08)		-2.7	(0.13)	***	-2.4	(0.13)	*
Poor	-0.3	(0.13)		-2.7	(0.20)	**	-2.8	(0.20)	**
Very Poor	-0.5	(0.21)		-3.7	(0.32)	***	-3.3	(0.32)	***
Province									
Western Cape	-0.1	(0.15)	ref.	-2.4	(0.34)	ref.	-2.4	(0.34)	ref.
Eastern Cape	-0.4	(0.25)		-1.0	(0.32)	*	-1.4	(0.34)	
Northern Cape	-0.6	(0.32)		-1.7	(0.36)		-1.0	(0.36)	
Free State	-0.3	(0.22)		-1.4	(0.32)		-0.6	(0.28)	***
KwaZulu-Natal	-0.9	(0.20)		-3.9	(0.28)	**	-3.7	(0.30)	**
North West	-0.3	(0.29)		-0.8	(0.29)	**	-0.3	(0.27)	
Gauteng	-0.2	(0.22)		-3.4	(0.34)		-3.1	(0.33)	
Mpumalanga	-0.5	(0.20)		-2.7	(0.38)		-3.1	(0.37)	
Limpopo	0.0	(0.45)		-1.0	(0.47)	**	-0.9	(0.31)	*

Note: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; 2. Cell shaded in green indicate a figure above the national average year in a given survey round; and 3. 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.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

We did note some interesting provincial variances for the different dimensions depicted in Table 10. KwaZulu-Natal residents reported relatively high discrepancy scores for G2 ($M = -3.9$; $SE = 0.28$) and G3 (-3.7 ; $SE = 0.27$). This outcome demonstrates that residents of this province are very discontented with behaviour of politicians and political parties in South Africa. The gap between expectations and experience on all three dimensions were also quite high in Mpumalanga. Of the three dimensions the largest decline was noted for G1, scores on this dimension fell from -0.1 ($SE = 0.11$) in 2015 to -0.7 ($SE = 0.20$) in 2021. The gap between expectations and experience on all three dimensions were lowest amongst North West

⁵ The magnitude of these dissimilarities for G2 ($F(3, 2966) = 11, p = 0.000$) and G3 ($F(3, 3016) = 14, p = 0.000$) were verified by one-way ANOVA tests.

citizens. This presents a significant improvement for the province with the greatest level of improvement observed for G3. Scores on this dimension in the North West fell from -5.1 (SE=0.28) in 2013 to -0.3 (SE=0.20) in 2021. Mean scores in the table were also found to be low in the Free State and Limpopo.

Public assessments of the gap between expectations and experience on core democratic rights such as freedom of expression, assembly and electoral participation were relatively high in Table 9. To understand this level of democratic pessimism, we need to ask how much it varies across different subgroups. To answer this question, noteworthy socio-demographic differences in the mean scores of G1, G5 and G6 are presented in Table 11. It is apparent that there is much less subgroup variation for these three dimensions than there was in Table 10, suggesting that negativity on these democratic rights is much more uniform than what was observed for those dimensions that dealt with politicians and political parties. There appears to be an interesting voter frequency gradient observed on the three dimensions. Those individuals who voted before exhibited a higher gap between expectations and experience on G4 and G5 when compared with those who had not voted. However, a similar disparity was noted for G6, non-voters had the highest discrepancy average score (M=-0.6; SE=0.10) on this indicator and irregular voters had the lowest (M=-0.1; SE=0.08).

Table 11: Gap between democratic expectations and experience (difference in mean scores, -10 - 10 scale) on democratic rights by socio-demographic sub-groups

10 - 10 scale on democratic rights by socio-demographic sub-groups									
G1				G4			G5		
Geotype									
Urban	-1.0	(0.12)	ref.	-0.6	(0.11)	ref.	-0.9	(0.10)	ref.
Rural	-1.0	(0.20)		-0.7	(0.18)		-0.5	(0.30)	**
Population Group									
Black African	-0.9	(0.12)	ref.	-0.6	(0.12)	ref.	-0.9	(0.13)	ref.
Coloured	-1.2	(0.33)	*	-0.3	(0.14)		-0.5	(0.14)	
Indian	-3.3	(0.49)	**	-1.3	(0.48)	**	-1.6	(0.44)	**
White	-1.0	(0.32)		-0.7	(0.25)		-0.4	(0.21)	
Voter Status									
Never voted	-1.2	(0.12)	ref.	-0.6	(0.11)	ref.	-0.6	(0.11)	ref.
Irregular voters	-0.9	(0.10)		-0.7	(0.10)		-1.0	(0.10)	*
Regular voters	-0.9	(0.10)		-0.6	(0.09)		-0.9	(0.09)	
Province									
Western Cape	-0.9	(0.31)	ref.	-0.3	(0.14)	ref.	-0.2	(0.15)	ref.
Eastern Cape	-0.6	(0.27)		-0.7	(0.25)		-0.7	(0.24)	
Northern Cape	-0.8	(0.32)		0.2	(0.54)		-0.4	(0.58)	
Free State	0.1	(0.23)		-0.1	(0.26)		0.0	(0.26)	
KwaZulu-Natal	-2.2	(0.23)	***	-1.5	(0.20)	***	-1.8	(0.21)	***
North West	0.0	(0.23)		0.0	(0.24)		-0.6	(0.22)	
Gauteng	-1.2	(0.25)	**	-0.4	(0.24)		-1.1	(0.19)	
Mpumalanga	-0.6	(0.24)	*	-1.2	(0.26)		-1.1	(0.27)	
Limpopo	-0.3	(0.34)		-0.6	(0.31)		0.2	(0.66)	

Note: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; 2. Cell shaded in green indicate a figure above the national average year in a given survey round; and 3. 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.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 021

In a finding analogous to what was observed in Table 10, there were discrete racial variations in citizen assessments of the three dimensions under discussion. Relatively large mean scores (especially in terms of G4 and G5) were recorded for Indian adults. This finding, together with the results presented in Table 10, demonstrates how disillusioned the Indian minority is with democratisation in South Africa. There were some interesting geographic variations in Table 11, rural residents had comparatively high gap scores on G6 ($M=-0.7$; $SE=0.21$) and G5 ($M=-0.09$; $SE=0.10$). A similar geographic dissimilarity was not observed for G4. Complementing this rural-urban variation, noteworthy provincial variances were discovered in Table 11. Residents of KwaZulu-Natal exhibited a much greater G1 mean score ($M=-2.2$; $SE=0.23$) than other kinds of provincial residents in South Africa⁶. Residents of KwaZulu-Natal also exhibited high mean scores for G4 ($M=-1.5$; $SE=0.20$) and G5 ($M=-1.8$; $SE=0.21$). This outcome is consistent with the findings displayed in Table 10 and showcases how discontented KwaZulu-Natal residents are with democracy. The gap between expectations and experience on the three dimensions in the table was low in the Western Cape⁷ as well as the Free State and the North West.

5.3. Instrumental Support for Democracy in South Africa

Popular satisfaction with democratic functioning is important for regime consolidation and political legitimacy in any nation. The research team, as was observed in Section 5.1, found low (and declining) levels of public satisfaction with how democracy works in South Africa. We need to consider whether this finding reflects an instrumental calculation on the part of citizens. Could, in other words, it be that government failures to alleviate poverty and improve living standards in the country have significantly contributed to this attitudinal change? This section will consider this important question by examining levels of collective wellbeing in the country, and how they correlated with satisfaction with democracy. This investigation will be comprised of two subsections, both of which will focus on retrospective evaluations of how life has changed in the country. The first subsection will assess quality of life in South Africa with a focus on collective and relational wellbeing. The second subsection will (both retrospectively and prospectively) examine how life in South Africa has changed on five special priority areas (i.e., corruption, cost of living, crime, unemployment, and service delivery).

5.3.1. Perceived Quality of Life

The SASAS research team will now present a detailed investigation of quality of life evaluations in South Africa. But why are we interested in whether citizens are satisfied with their lives? This section will show that mass attitudes towards democratic functioning are

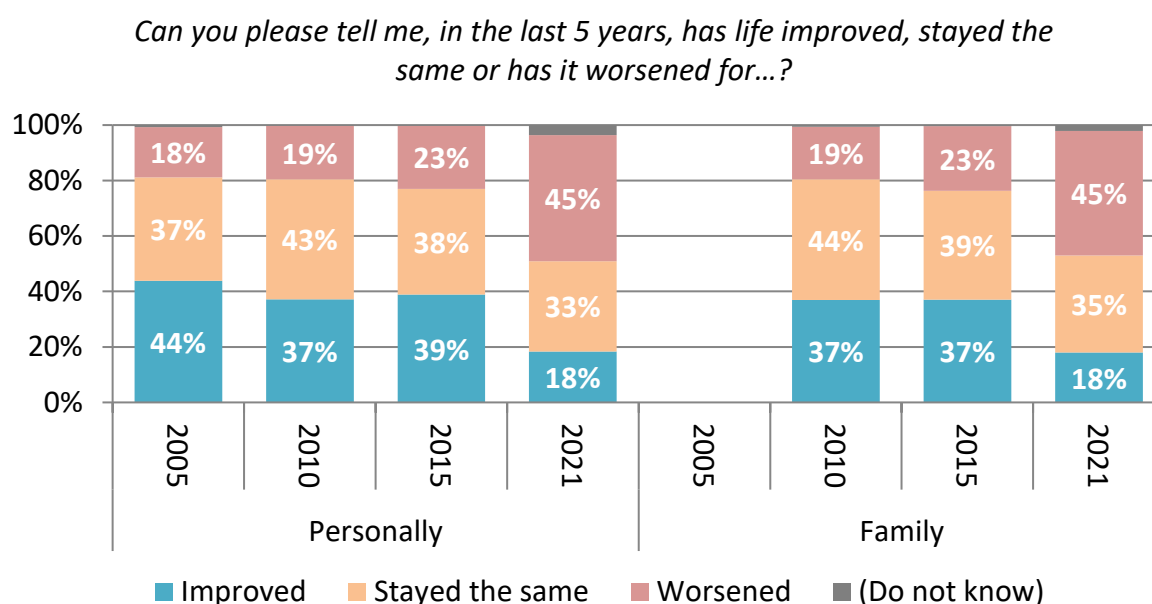
⁶ This represents a significant change from what was observed in VPS 2018 when G1 discrepancy scores for KwaZulu-Natal was -1.1 ($SE=0.15$).

⁷ This finding presents a significant improvement for the Western Cape, the province had much higher gaps scores in 2015 VPS. Of the three dimensions, the greatest level of improvement was observed for G5. Scores on this dimension in the province fell from -1.2 ($SE=0.14$) in VPS 2015 to -0.1 ($SE=0.12$) in VPS 2021.

influenced by how individuals evaluate their quality of life. We find evidence that those citizens with high subjective wellbeing levels, are more satisfied with democratic performance in South Africa than those with low wellbeing. This analysis will consider retrospective life evaluations, the retrospective period will be five years. A singular focus on 'wellbeing' as a private phenomenon (via subjective evaluations of life or individual functioning) would, of course, be erroneous. It would ignore how individuals are embedded in social structures like families, communities and polities. The evaluation of the quality of an individual's relationship to society and community will not be disregarded in this section.

During VPS 2005 respondents were asked to evaluate whether life improved, stayed the same or worsened for themselves personally in the last five years. In VPS 2005 about two-fifths (44%) of the adult populace reported that life had improved for them personally and 37% felt it had stayed the same. Only a minority (18%) believed that life had worsened for them between 2000 and 2005 (Figure 17). Retrospective life evaluations became more negative over time, and this was particularly true of the most recent period. Less than a fifth (18%) of adult citizens thought that their lives had gotten better in VPS 2021 and nearly half (45%) of the general public told fieldworkers that their life had gotten worse between 2016 and 2021. In VPS 2010 a question on retrospective evaluations of family wellbeing was introduced into the questionnaire. In that round nearly two-fifths (37%) of the populace reported improved family wellbeing and only a minority (19%) reported a decline in this kind of wellbeing between 2005 and 2010. Much like with individual wellbeing, retrospective family wellbeing evaluations became much more negative in the last decade.

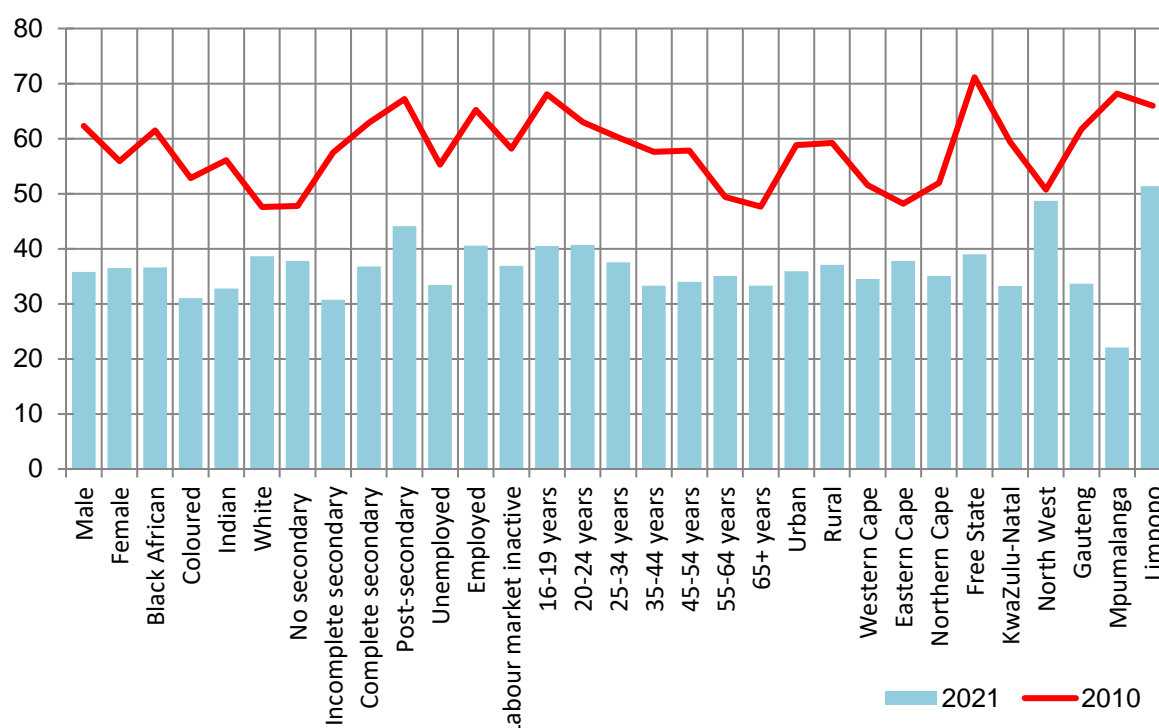
Figure 17: Retrospective evaluation of progress in individual and familial quality of life during the five years prior to the interview, 2005; 2010; 2015; 2021



Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2005; 2010, 2015; 2021

Respondent answers to the individual and familial quality of life questions were combined to produce a single scale that we labelled the Retrospective Personal Wellbeing (RPW) Scale⁸. The new metric was scaled 0 to 100 with a low score on this measure representing high levels of dissatisfaction with personal life. The mean RPW Scale score was 36 (SE=0.63) for VPS 2021, about twenty points below what was observed for VPS 2010 (M=58; SE=0.56). This result demonstrates the significant decline in wellbeing experienced by the general populace over the last decade. In order to better understand this substantial deterioration in subjective wellbeing, mean RPW scores are portrayed for a range of different subgroups in Figure 18, data is provided for both period 2021 and the 2010. It was apparent that all subgroups depicted in the figure experienced a decline in mean RPW scores during this eleven-year period.

Figure 18: Mean Retrospective Personal Wellbeing (RPW) Scale (0-100) across selected socio-demographic subgroups, 2010 and 2021



Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2010; 2021

There was a positive relationship between formal schooling and the RPW scale in 2010, the more educated a citizen the happier they were with their personal life. Although this educational attainment gradient was robust at the start of the period, over time it weakened as better educated people became more dissatisfied with their lives. Mean RPW Index scores amongst those with post-secondary education declined by 23 points between 2010 and 2021. There was a significant gender differential in Figure 18 that favoured male citizens. This gender gap has closed over the last five years due to above average life satisfaction decline amongst the male population. In addition, we could observe a significant age gradient with younger citizens more satisfied with their lives than their older peers in the 2010 VPS. Due to

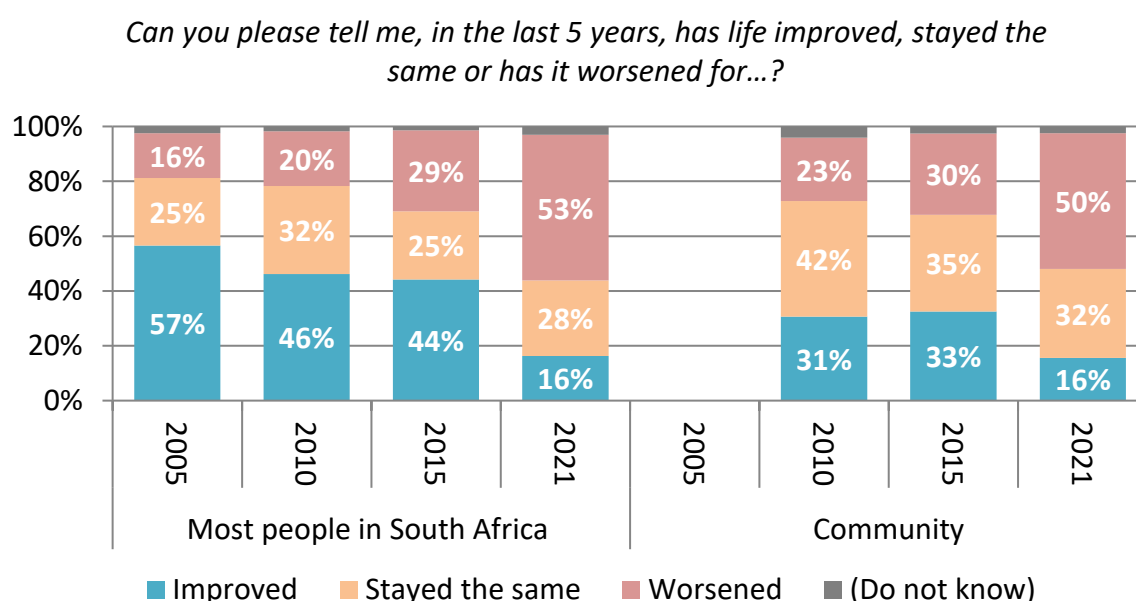
⁸ A Cronbach alpha test was completed to calculate the validity and reliability of the measure. It showed a robust result ($\alpha=0.80$).

growing life dissatisfaction amongst youth over the last decade, the depth of this gradient was much reduced by the VPS 2021. The 16-19 age cohort experienced one of the largest declines in Figure 18, falling from 68 (SE=1.92) to 41 (SE=3.28) during this eleven-year period.

During the 2010 VPS we uncovered a significant population group differential. Of the four population groups, white citizens were the least satisfied with their lives in this survey round. Between VPS 2010 and VPS 2021, RPW score declines were noted for all racial groups. Members of the white minority reported the lowest level of decline over the period, decreasing by only nine points during the decade. No significant population group difference was noted in VPS 2021. Levels of provincial variation in life satisfaction were quite high in VPS 2010. But significant declines in certain provinces reduced the level of provincial variance on the RPW Scale. The greatest decline was observed amongst Mpumalanga citizens, plummeting from a high of 68 (SE=1.98) in 2020 to 22 (SE=2.02) in 2021. Free State residents also experienced a considerable quality of life deterioration, the RPW Scale average for this group worsened by 32 points during the period. In VPS 2021 life satisfaction was highest in the North West (M=49; SE=2.23), Free State (M=39; SE=2.13) and the Eastern Cape (M=38; SE=2.04).

Turning away from personal subjective wellbeing, we now focus on collective quality of life. A question on retrospective evaluations of community wellbeing was introduced into the questionnaire in VPS 2010 (Figure 19). In that round nearly a third (31%) of the populace reported improved community wellbeing and only a minority (23%) reported a decline in this kind of wellbeing between 2005 and 2010. Retrospective community wellbeing evaluations, much like what was observed in Figure 17, worsened significantly between VPS 2010 and VPS 2021. Less than a fifth (16%) of the mass public in the last survey round said that life in their community had improved and roughly half (53%) reported that things had worsened between 2006 and 2021.

Figure 19: Retrospective evaluation of progress in national and community quality of life during the five years prior to the interview, 2005; 2010; 2015 and 2021

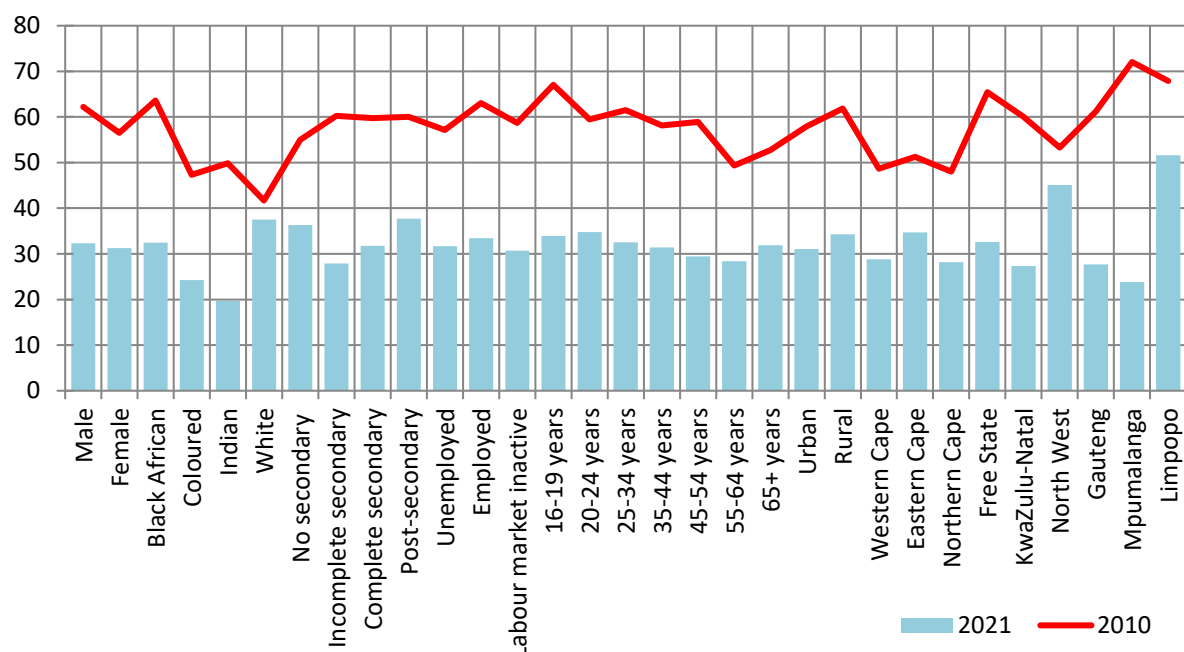


Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2005; 2010, 2015; 2021

VPS 2005 respondents were requested to estimate whether life improved, stayed the same or worsened for most people in South Africa in the last five years. In VPS 2005 about three-fifths (57%) of the adult populace reported that the lives of this group had improved and 25% felt it had stayed the same. Only a minority (16%) believed that life had worsened for most South Africans between 2000 and 2005. Retrospective collective evaluations became more negative over time and was particularly true of the most recent period. Less a fifth (16%) of citizens thought that the lives of the general populace had improved in VPS 2021 and over than half (53%) of adult public told fieldworkers that it had worsened between 2016 and 2021. This is consistent with what we observed in Section 4.2, the general population is becoming more and more dissatisfied with the direction that the country is heading.

A single scale was produced using respondent replies to the national and community quality of life questions⁹. We classified the new metric, the Retrospective Community Wellbeing (RCW) Scale, and it was ranged 0 to 100 with a high score signifying a high level of satisfaction. The mean RCW Scale score was 60 (SE=0.57) for VPS 2010 and 32 (SE=0.60) for VPS 2021, a temporal disparity of about thirty points. This result is consistent with what was observed in Figure 17 and demonstrates the significant decline in wellbeing experienced by the general populace over the last decade. With the aim of better grasping the nuances of this considerable wellbeing failure, mean RCW scores across different subgroups are showcased in Figure 20. Data is provided for both 2021 and the 2010, and it was apparent that all subgroups represented in the figure had suffered a collective wellbeing regression in the last decade. Some groups had, however, endured a much more extensive decrease in wellbeing than others.

Figure 20: Mean Retrospective Collective Wellbeing (RCW) Scale (0-100) across selected socio-demographic subgroups, 2021 and 2010



Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2010, 2021

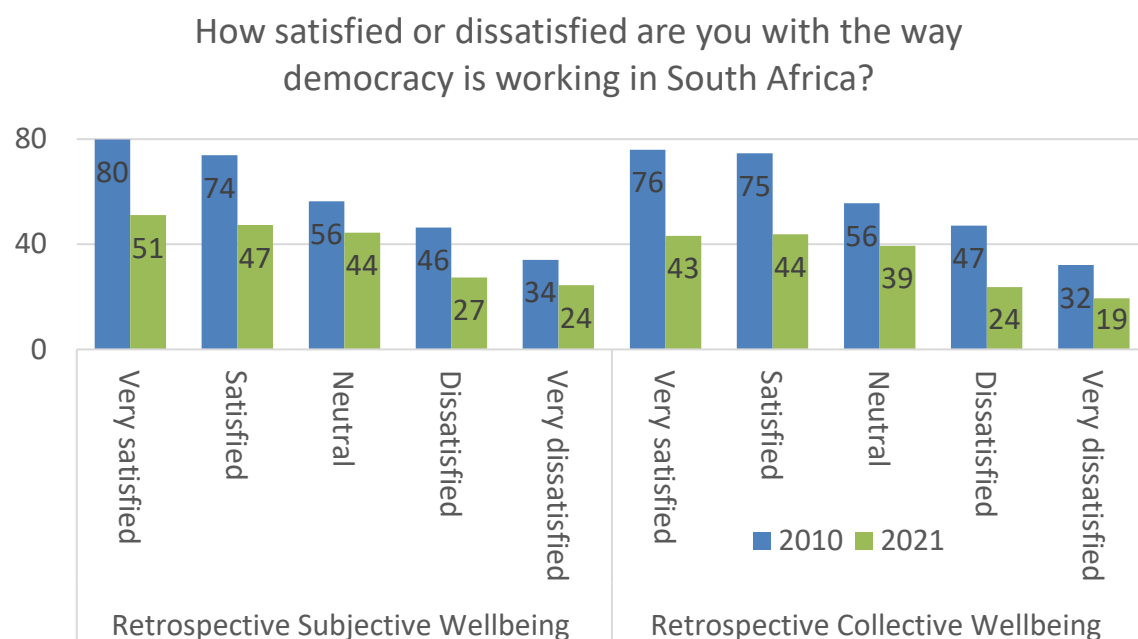
⁹ We calculated a Cronbach alpha test to estimate the validity and reliability of the proposed index. The result ($\alpha=0.77$) met existing expectations.

A significant educational attainment gradient was evident in 2010 VPS that favoured the better educated, a finding similar to what was noted in Figure 18. Over the next eleven years, mean RCW scores for the post-secondary group decreased substantially. As a result of this decline, the depth of the educational attainment gradient was much reduced in the VPS 2021. At the start of the period, we ascertained a significant age differential in Figure 20, younger citizens tended to have higher collective wellbeing than their older people. Over the last decade growing dissatisfaction with the conditions of the collective was found amongst youth. The 16-19 age cohort underwent a dramatic attitudinal change in Figure 20, falling from 67 (SE=1.86) in 2010 VPS to 34 (SE=3.15) in 2021 VPS. This outcome matches what we previously observed in Figure 18, demonstrating growing scepticism amongst young people in South Africa. We recorded a noteworthy population group differential in the 2010 VPS. This differential was, however, much less noticeable at the end of the period. This was due to striking weakening of collective wellbeing amongst the Black African, Coloured and Indian groups¹⁰.

There was a significant collective wellbeing satisfaction inequality between female and male citizens in VPS 2010 but not in VPS 2021. This is consistent with Figure 18 and shows that the male population have become more disillusioned with life in South Africa. Levels of provincial variation in life satisfaction were quite high in VPS 2010. But significant declines in certain provinces reduced the level of provincial variance on the RCW Scale. The greatest wellbeing failure was observed amongst Mpumalanga citizens, plummeting dramatically from 74 (SE=1.82) at the onset of the period to 24 (SE=1.90) at the end. Free State and KwaZulu-Natal residents also experienced a noteworthy deterioration, the RCW Scale average for each group reduced by 33 points during the period. In VPS 2021 collective wellbeing was highest in Limpopo (M=45; SE=2.16) and the North West (M=45; SE=2.29). There was a moderate collective wellbeing difference between urban and rural citizens in VPS 2010 which favoured rural residents. This gap has closed somewhat over the last ten years but was still evident in VPS 2021.

¹⁰ Of the four groups, the largest RCW scale decline was noted for the Black African majority, mean scale scores amongst this group fell 31 points during the period under review. Mean RCW scale scores for the white minority, in contrast, only decreased by four points during the same period, from 42 (SE=1.69) to 38 (SE=1.79).

Figure 21: Retrospective evaluations of changes in individual and group quality of life by level of satisfaction with democratic functioning, 2010 and 2021



Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2010, 2021

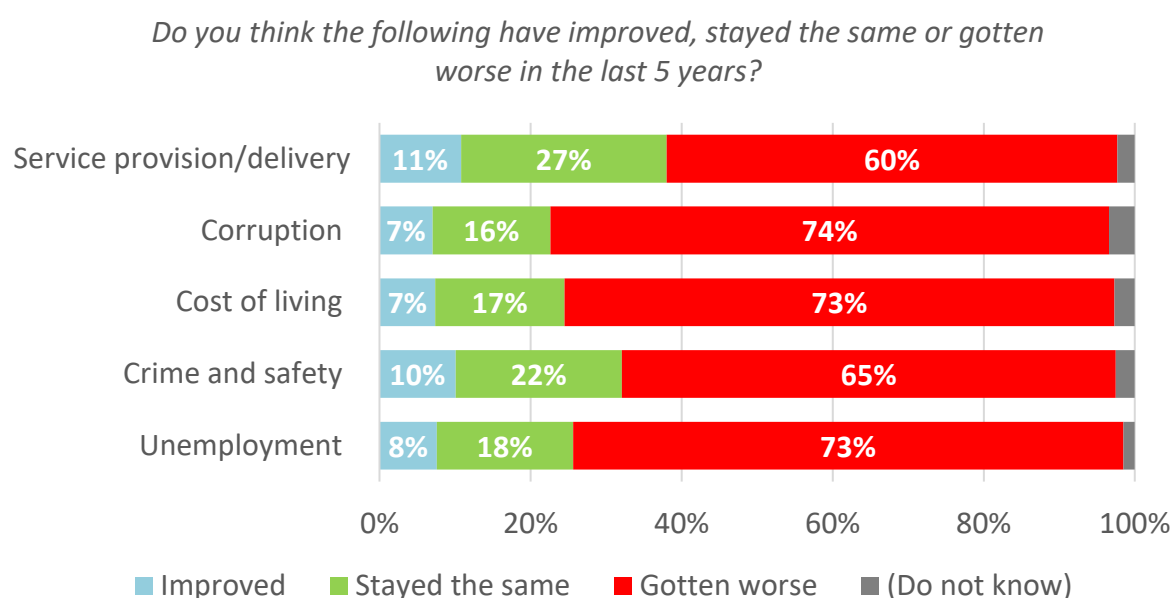
The 2021 VPS data suggest that satisfaction with democracy is closely associated with retrospective evaluations of personal and collective wellbeing. In Figure 21, we present mean RPW and RCW scale scores across of citizen satisfaction with the way democracy in South Africa was working. The trend in the figure clearly shows a correlation between quality of life and satisfaction with democracy. It would seem that the association between retrospective wellbeing and satisfaction with democracy is somewhat more robust in VPS 2010 than in VPS 2021. But in both periods, those who have positive evaluations of changes in individual and group quality of life over the last five years have higher levels of satisfaction with how democracy is functioning. This finding provides confirmation of what has been found in other world regions. Public opinion research in Eastern Europe and Latin America (Przeworski, 1991) as well as Africa (Bratton et al., 2005) has revealed that perceived change in individual or group circumstances is a factor that is intimately related to citizens' support for democracy.

5.3.2. Perceptions of Economic and Social Progress

The previous section showcased a substantial decline in collective quality of life, noting that most citizens feel that society has worsened during the period 2016-2021. So as to better comprehend this worrying regression, this subsection will assess public evaluations on five socio-economic priority areas (i.e., corruption, cost of living, crime, unemployment, and service delivery). Data will be presented that shows that a clear plurality of the adult populace feels that security and economic conditions have declined in the near term. In addition to this retrospective evaluation, the subsection will consider optimism for change in the next five years. It will demonstrate that most citizens are pessimistic about the future and feel that conditions on a range of issues will worsen. Finally, the subsection will demonstrate that the striking deterioration in public satisfaction with democracy can be partly attributed to negative retrospective and prospective evaluations on these five priority areas.

Survey respondents were asked to evaluate the level of societal progress that has been made on five critical issues over the last five years: (i) corruption; (ii) cost of living; (iii) crime and safety; (iv) unemployment; and (v) service delivery. Levels of improvement and deterioration are depicted in Figure 22, it is apparent that the retrospective evaluations on each of the five issues are relatively negative. This is consistent with what was recorded in Section 5.3.1, there is a general perceived decline in collective wellbeing in the country over the most recent period. In the cases of corruption and cost of living, approximately three-quarters of South Africans (75% and 72% respectively) perceived a general deterioration in recent years. In the cases of corruption and cost of living, approximately three-quarters of South Africans (74% and 73% respectively) perceived a general decline between 2016 and 2021. A similar proportion of the adult populace stated that unemployment had gotten worse and 65% said that the crime and safety situation had declined. Three-fifths of adult citizens told fieldworkers that provision of state services has worsened during the last five years.

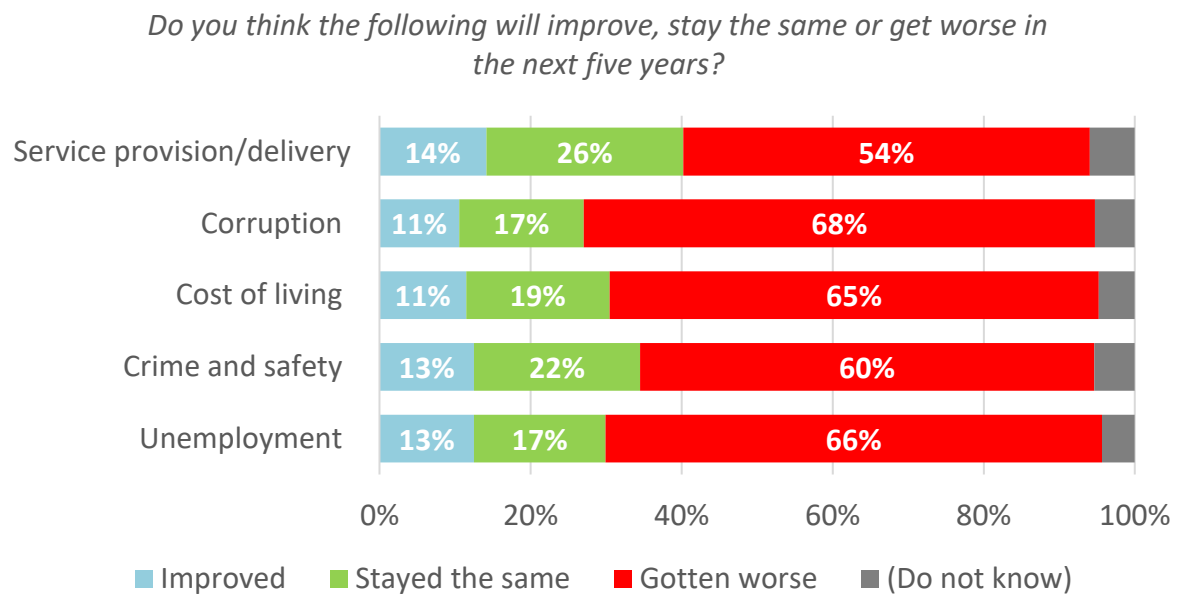
Figure 22: Retrospective evaluation on change in different types of socio-economic conditions in South Africa



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

A key question is, in spite of these critical assessments depicted in Figure 22, whether the public is optimistic about the prospects for improvement in the near future. VSP respondents were required to indicate whether the five areas would get better, stay the same or get worse over the near term. The results of these prospective questions, portrayed in Figure 23, are unfortunately also quite sombre, with a sizable majority telling us that conditions will become more dire between 2021 and 2025. Approximately two-thirds of citizens believed that levels of unemployment (66%), the cost of living and corruption (68%) will increase. Three-fifths said that crime rates will rise in the next five years and 54% thought that the quality of state services will diminish. Only about a tenth of South African citizens thought that the next five years would bring improvements in relation to these priority issues. These figures again confirm the rather solemn political mood that appears to exist among the electorate in the current period.

Figure 23: Prospective evaluation on change in different types of socio-economic conditions in South Africa

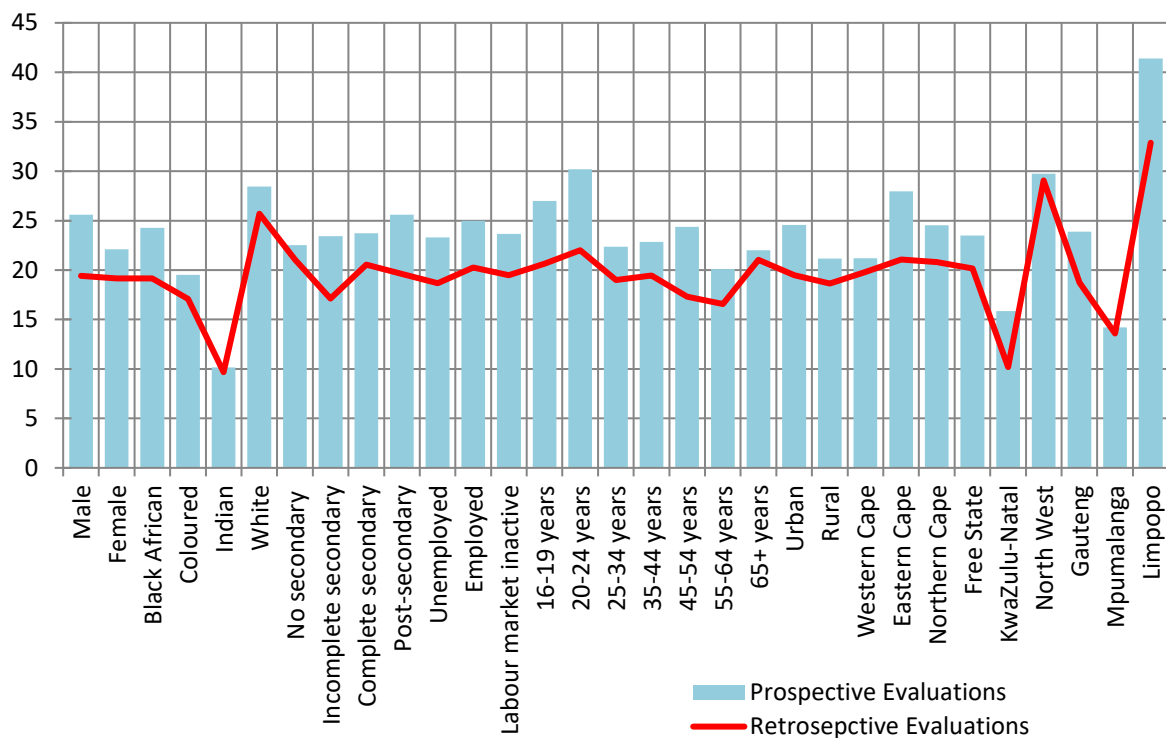


Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

The results depicted above suggest the existence of considerable cynicism concerning the ability of government to make inroads in addressing the country's most pressing societal challenges. But do all South Africans share the same dire scepticism about the country and her future? To answer this question, answers to the five retrospective questions were summed together and transformed into National Retrospective Change (NRC) Index. A similar process was followed for the five prospective questions, and a National Prospective Change (NPC) Index was created¹¹. Each index was scaled from 0 to 100, high value on these indexes denotes a positive perception of conditions. The mean score on the NRC Index was 19 (SE=0.43), a little lower than the mean of the NPC Index (M=24; SE=0.53). Mean results for both indexes are presented across a diverse range of socio-demographic groups in Figure 24. It is apparent that there was a robust correlation between the two indexes, citizens who have a favourable view of the recent past are much more likely to have a positive view of the near future.

¹¹ We performed Cronbach alpha tests to gauge the validity and reliability of these measures. The output ($\alpha=0.81$) for the first index was smaller than we observed for the second ($\alpha=0.91$).

Figure 24: Mean National Retrospective Change (NRC) (0-100) and National Prospective Change (NPC) (0-100) index scores by socio-demographic characteristics

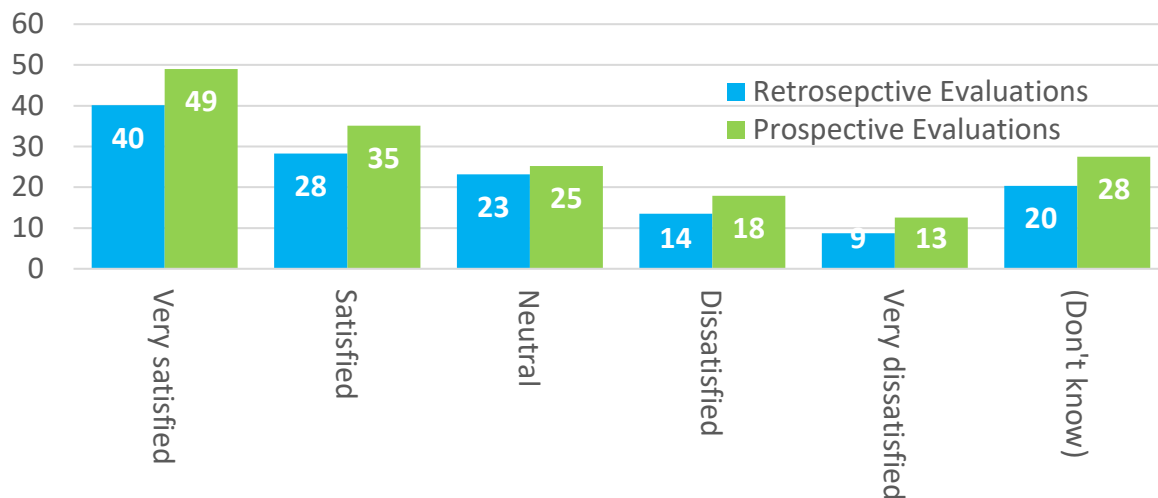


Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2021

There was less subgroup variation in Figure 24 than may have been expected, with all subgroups reporting mean scores on the indexes that are below 50. This suggests that negativity on these issues is quite uniform, and this finding is comparable with what was depicted in Figure 20 in Section 5.3.1. Some interesting subgroup variations could, nonetheless, be detected in Figure 24. When compared to other racial groups, the white minority had higher mean scores on the indexes with the disparity particularly notable in terms of retrospective evaluations. Of the four population groups, Indian citizens had the lowest mean scores on both indexes. Although both male and female citizens had similar NRC Index scores, men were somewhat more optimistic about the future. Old people were, on the whole, less liable to be optimistic about improvement in the near term than their young counterparts. The 20-24 age cohort, in particular, reported relatively high NPC Index scores ($M=30$; $SE=2.09$). A similar age group effect was not observed for the NRC Index.

Though no geotype dissimilarities were noted in for the NRC Index in Figure 24, a geotype differential was recorded for the NPC Index. Urban residents were found to be, on average, moderately more optimistic than their rural peers. Significant provincial differences in index scores were found in Figure 24. Citizens in the North West ($M= 29$; $SE=1.64$) and Limpopo ($M=33$; $SE=1.99$) had relatively high average NRC Index scores. Of the nine provinces, mean scores on this index were lowest amongst adult citizens in KwaZulu-Natal ($M=10$; $SE=0.58$). A similar pattern was noted if we looked at provincial differences for the NPC index. It was interesting to note that levels of optimism for the future were comparatively high in Limpopo ($M=41$; $SE=2.09$). The low average NPC Index score in KwaZulu-Natal represents a significant decline from what was observed in VPS 2015. Index scores in the province decreased from 20 points between 2015 and 2021.

Figure 25: Mean Retrospective Evaluations (0-100) and Prospective Evaluations (0-100) index scores by public satisfaction with how democracy in South Africa is working



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

Public satisfaction with how democracy works, as was outlined clearly in Section 5.3.1, is correlated with retrospective evaluations of collective wellbeing. As a robustness test, let us consider whether there is an association between satisfaction with democracy and the two indexes depicted in Figure 24. Mean scores for the NRC and NPC indexes are presented by level of democratic satisfaction in Figure 25. It is clear that the more negative a citizen is in their evaluations of change national conditions, the more dissatisfaction that person is with democracy. This association appears robust regardless of whether we look at retrospective and prospective evaluations. This outcome has confirmed what was found in the previous subsection and demonstrates that collective wellbeing is an important predictor of how people think about democracy.

6. Public Assessments of Municipal Government

Politics at the level of national government may play some role in determining voter choice and participation during a LGE. However, elections at this level tend to be about politics at the municipal level. Understanding voter participation and attitudes throughout a LGE require, as a result, knowledge of what the general populace thinks about municipal governance. This section will assess citizen evaluations of their municipal government with a focus on how a municipality treats its residents. Past local government elections in the past have served as de facto referenda on service delivery. Perceived municipal performance and by extension service delivery is critical in serving as both push and pull factors for people voting in elections. It is, therefore, critical to determine views on municipal performance in this section. The first part of this section will examine public assessments of the quality of municipal governance overall. Then we turn our attention to state services provided in a respondent's local area. Finally, a more in-depth assessment will be provided of the functioning of the municipal government and whether it provides satisfactory assistance to its constituents.

6.1. General Appraisal of Municipal Governance

Numerous auditor-general and media reports paint a dire picture of dysfunctional municipal government in many parts of South Africa. But what do ordinary citizens think about the quality of their municipality and how its governance has changed over time? This section will provide trend data on overall citizen evaluations of municipal government and how it functions. The period under assessment is 2010-2021 and we will show that public dissatisfaction with municipal government has grown significantly over the last decade. This finding is commensurate with what was observed in Section 4.3 which noted declining levels of citizen trust in local government over the last ten years. Growing dissatisfaction appears to have primarily occurred in urban areas, a finding that will be further examined in Sections 6.2 and 6.3.

As a general indicator of local government performance, VPS respondents were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the way their municipality is currently performing, with responses captured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “very dissatisfied” to “very satisfied”. It is important to consider how adult citizen responses to this question change over time. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction with municipal governance is displayed in Table 12 for 2010, 2015 and 2021. Only about a fifth (22%) of citizens in the 2021 VPS were satisfied with municipal performance, 25% were neutral, while more than half (53%) told fieldworkers that they were dissatisfied. Public satisfaction with municipal governance is somewhat lower than was observed in VPS 2010. Almost two-fifths (38%) of the general citizenry were satisfied with this level of governance during that period.

Table 12: Public satisfaction and dissatisfaction on the way a citizen’s municipality is performing its job at present by retrospective evaluation of progress in individual quality of life during the five years prior to the interview, 2010, 2015, 2021

		Strongly Agreed		Agreed		Neutral		Disagree d		Strongly Disagree d	
Improved											
	2010	10	(1.33)	41	(2.01)	15	(1.50)	22	(1.69)	10	(1.24)
	2015	5	(0.96)	35	(2.13)	18	(1.78)	24	(1.86)	16	(1.58)
	2021	10	(2.19)	33	(3.38)	20	(2.65)	25	(2.89)	11	(2.19)
Stayed the same											
	2010	4	(0.81)	28	(1.71)	17	(1.53)	30	(1.80)	19	(1.52)
	2015	4	(0.92)	24	(1.87)	24	(1.99)	30	(2.04)	17	(1.54)
	2021	4	(0.87)	18	(1.63)	31	(2.41)	28	(2.20)	18	(1.91)
Worsened											
	2010	3	(0.79)	26	(2.53)	12	(1.87)	29	(2.70)	28	(2.49)
	2015	2	(0.63)	16	(1.80)	17	(1.99)	34	(2.59)	30	(2.39)
	2021	3	(1.01)	12	(1.57)	16	(1.62)	36	(2.17)	32	(2.24)
Total											
	2010	6	(0.62)	32	(1.16)	15	(0.93)	27	(1.13)	17	(0.97)
	2015	4	(0.53)	26	(1.18)	20	(1.12)	29	(1.23)	20	(1.02)
	2021	4	(0.69)	17	(1.13)	23	(1.38)	30	(1.37)	23	(1.32)

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis. *Source:* Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2010; 2015; 2021

Citizen satisfaction with the performance municipal government was influenced by whether a person had experienced a worsening in their quality of life in the five years prior to the VPS interview. Citizens who thought that their lives had worsened were more likely to be dissatisfied with the functioning of their elected municipal officials. We can see that the decline in municipal satisfaction observed between 2010 and 2021 was greatest amongst those who had experienced worsening or stagnant quality of life changes. In other words, the relationship between personal retrospective wellbeing and governance evaluations was stronger in 2021 VPS when compared to 2010 VPS. The fall in comparative quality of life between 2010 and 2021, outlined in Section 5.3.1, has negatively affected how people saw their municipal government.

Have levels of satisfaction with municipal government declined for all major socio-demographic groups in South Africa or just for a few? In order to answer that question, responses to the municipal governance indicator were converted to a 0 to 100 scale. The high score on this metric indicating high satisfaction. Mean scores on this scale are provided for a range of important socio-demographic groups in Table 13, data is provided for VPS 2010, 2015 and 2021. As can be observed, there was a significant decrease in satisfaction levels for some subgroups over the period, but no real drop for others. We recorded remarkable geotype differences between 2010 and 2015, with the largest change noted for urban citizens. In each round under review, urban residents were more satisfied with municipal governance, but they became less satisfied on this issue over time. Mean satisfaction for urban citizens fell from 50 (SD=31) at the start of the period to 39 (SD=29) at the end.

We could observe a significant difference between labour market groups on municipal satisfaction in Table 13. The unemployed display low levels of satisfaction in each of the survey rounds under review. During the 2010 VPS we could observe a significant educational gradient on municipal satisfaction. However, the steepness of this gradient became somewhat more muted over time¹². Substantial levels of provincial variance in municipal satisfaction were noted in each VPS round under review. In addition, we can observe a relatively substantial level of change in certain provinces during the period. Of all the provincial subgroups in the table, the largest declines were observed for Free State citizens. Mean scores for this group dropped from 54 (SD=31) in 2010 VPS to 30 (SD=30) in 2021 VPS. A similar (if somewhat less substantial) deterioration was noted for KwaZulu-Natal residents, mean scores amongst these citizens decreased by 18 points over the last eleven years. Levels of municipal satisfaction remained relatively stable in the North West and the Eastern Cape. Citizens became more contented with their municipality in only one province, satisfaction levels in Limpopo increased by seven points over the last decade.

¹² This change was due to a reduction of satisfaction amongst educated citizens. Between 2010 and 2021, mean satisfaction for those citizens with post-secondary decreased from 54 (SD=30) to 45 (SD=29).

Table 13: Satisfaction with current municipal performance (0-100) across socio-demographic subgroups for recent local government election periods, 2010; 2015 and 2021

demographic subgroups for recent local government election periods, 2010, 2015 and 2021										
	2010			2015			2021			Diff.
	M	SD		M	SD		M	SD		
Geotype										
Urban	50	31	ref.	44	29	reg.	39	29	reg.	11
Rural	37	29	***	34	29	***	33	27	***	4
Employment Status										
Unemployed	42	31	reg.	39	30	reg.	34	28	reg.	8
Employed	50	29	***	44	29	***	41	27	***	9
Other	47	31	***	43	28	**	40	30	***	7
Educational Status										
No secondary	41	29	reg.	40	30	reg.	36	28	reg.	5
Incomplete secondary	44	30		39	30		35	30		9
Complete secondary	47	31	**	44	29		36	28	***	11
Post-secondary	54	30	***	45	29		45	29	**	9
Province										
Western Cape	56	27	reg.	53	28	reg.	41	27	reg.	15
Eastern Cape	38	29	***	37	26	***	34	29	***	4
Northern Cape	45	33	**	34	32	***	32	33	***	13
Free State	54	31		40	31	**	30	30	**	24
KwaZulu-Natal	48	31	*	43	28	**	30	26	***	18
North West	39	29	***	31	30	***	37	27	***	2
Gauteng	48	30	*	46	27		42	31	***	6
Mpumalanga	42	31	***	39	29	***	34	29	***	8
Limpopo	37	32	***	29	33	***	44	24	***	-7

Note: 1. 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.

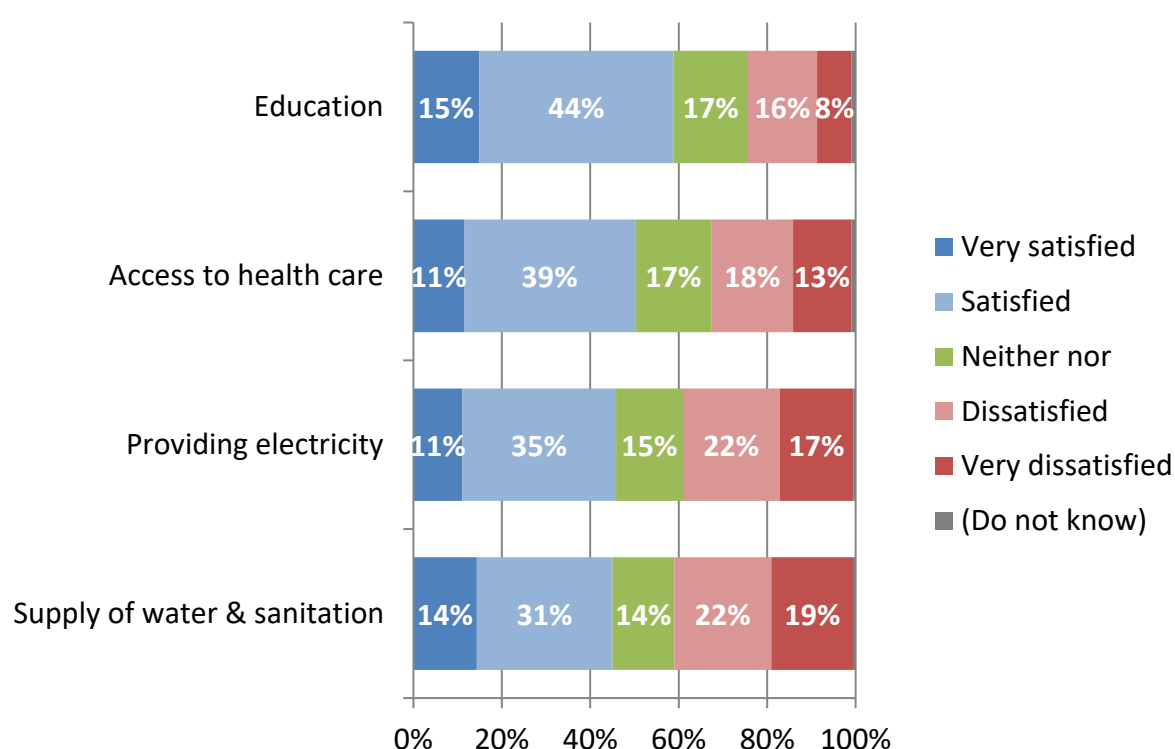
Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2010; 2015; 2021

6.2. Citizen Evaluations of Service Delivery

In order for us to understand the decline in public satisfaction with municipal governance recorded in the previous section, we need to consider individual evaluations of key types of service delivery that the state provides. This section will consider two different types of services: (i) essential; and (ii) social. The first concerns those basic services that the government has committed to provide citizens such as basic utilities (e.g., electricity and sanitation) as well as education. The second is comprised of those social services that government implements to improve citizen quality of life. This includes crime reduction, job creation, housing and social grant provision. The results of this section show a clear decline in the perceived satisfaction with the delivery of most types of services with the largest decline observed for electricity provision. Over the last decade, satisfaction with basic services have fallen significantly for urban citizens.

VPS respondents were asked how satisfied they were with specific aspects of government performance in their neighbourhood. Let us first consider public attitudes towards the following basic services: (i) education; (ii) health care; (iii) electricity; and (iv) water and sanitation. The survey results reveal a considerable pattern of variance in the way the public perceives government performance on these services in VPS 2021 (Figure 26). A majority (59%) of the general populace was satisfied with the provision of education in their local area. Only a minority (24%) of the adult public was dissatisfied with the provision of this service in their area. Citizens were found to report much lower levels of satisfaction for other services. The service that received the worst evaluation in VPS 2021 was water and sanitation. In that survey round less than half (45%) of the adult public was satisfied with how this service was managed in their neighbourhood and 41% were dissatisfied.

Figure 26: Level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the provision of basic public services (row percentages)



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

Given the findings of the previous section, a fundamental question that emerges from the data presented in Figure 26 concerns the degree to which attitudes have changed over time. How and to what degree have performance ratings for basic service delivery changed over the last decade? The responses to the service delivery satisfaction questions were combined into a single Basic Service Delivery (BSD) Index by reversing and summing together the scales¹³. The new measure was then transforming it into a 0-100 score, where '0' represents 'very dissatisfied' and '100' 'very satisfied' with services. Mean BSD Index score was 54 (SE=0.40) in 2021 VPS, a somewhat lower score than what was observed in VPS 2015 when

¹³ We appraised a Cronbach alpha test to appraise the validity and reliability of the suggested index. The result ($\alpha=0.69$) was consistent with preceding anticipations.

the index score was 61 (SE=0.41). Examining this variation more closely, the largest variance was noted for the electricity sub-component. Public satisfaction with government provision of electricity fell from 71% in VPS 2015 to 45% in VPS 2021. The BSD Index was used to examine differences between socio-economic subgroups in order to ascertain the extent and nature of differences in satisfaction with service delivery issues. Mean BSD Index scores were portrayed in Table 14 for the period 2010-2021.

Table 14: Mean Basic Service Delivery (BSD) Index (0-100) scores across socio-demographic subgroups, 2010– 2021

	2010	2013	2015	2018	2021
Geotype					
Urban	63 (0.47)	59 (0.50)	63 (0.49)	56 (0.49)	55 (0.45)
Rural	48 (0.93)	53 (0.90)	54 (0.79)	53 (0.81)	49 (0.86)
Employment Status					
Unemployed	57 (0.75)	56 (0.74)	58 (0.66)	54 (0.70)	52 (0.64)
Employed	58 (1.00)	59 (0.93)	63 (0.95)	55 (0.94)	53 (0.86)
Other	60 (0.64)	60 (0.68)	62 (0.66)	56 (0.67)	54 (0.71)
Educational Status					
No secondary	52 (1.13)	57 (1.05)	58 (0.84)	56 (0.97)	51 (1.31)
Incomplete secondary	57 (0.74)	57 (0.71)	59 (0.68)	54 (0.73)	51 (0.73)
Complete secondary	60 (0.84)	59 (0.89)	63 (0.78)	55 (0.70)	55 (0.64)
Post-secondary	65 (0.96)	58 (1.09)	64 (1.37)	57 (1.28)	53 (1.07)
Province					
Western Cape	55 (1.95)	58 (1.20)	63 (1.09)	58 (1.29)	49 (1.34)
Eastern Cape	53 (1.08)	55 (1.22)	58 (1.00)	49 (1.09)	54 (1.22)
Northern Cape	66 (1.66)	58 (1.71)	58 (1.96)	57 (1.55)	49 (1.92)
Free State	66 (1.50)	62 (1.59)	59 (1.27)	61 (1.58)	51 (1.63)
KwaZulu-Natal	58 (0.86)	54 (1.04)	59 (0.90)	55 (0.93)	51 (0.86)
North West	52 (2.02)	52 (1.64)	52 (1.51)	46 (1.68)	52 (1.46)
Gauteng	61 (0.98)	59 (1.13)	66 (1.19)	55 (1.05)	57 (0.94)
Mpumalanga	62 (1.54)	62 (1.58)	64 (1.44)	59 (1.34)	53 (1.29)
Limpopo	58 (1.27)	58 (1.28)	57 (1.17)	54 (1.25)	52 (1.37)

Note: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; and 2. Cell shaded in green indicate a figure above the national average year in a given survey round.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2010-2021

The urban population were found to exhibit more positive BSD Index scores than rural residents. The mean index score gap between urban and rural residents decreased significantly since VPS 2010. This was due to a considerable reduction in satisfaction levels amongst urban citizens between 2015 and 2021. We did not observe substantial differences in BSD Index scores in VPS 2021 by socio-economic characteristics (such as educational attainment and employment status). This can be contrasted with what was observed in VPS 2015 and VPS 2010. Sizeable levels of provincial variance were noted in Table 14. This outcome is consistent with what was observed in Table 13, showcasing inequalities in provincial satisfaction levels. During the period 2015-2021, there was a decline in the mean BSD Index scores for eight of the nine provinces. The largest declines were observed for

Gauteng residents, mean scores amongst this group dropped from 66 (SE=1.19) in 2015 to 55 (SE=1.05) in 2021¹⁴. A comparable (if somewhat less dramatic) deterioration was noted for Mpumalanga residents.

Turning away from basic services, let us now assess how South African citizens viewed the provision of social services. Much like with the BSD measures, respondents were asked how satisfied they were with specific aspects of government performance: (i) housing; (ii) crime control; (iii) job creation; and (iv) social grant delivery. Citizen responses to these questions from VPS 2021 are presented in Figure 27, the results show that while certain services are favourably evaluated by the mass public and others are not. In a clear majority (56%) of the general populace was satisfied with the provision of social grants in their local area. Only a small segment (24%) of the general adult citizenry were dissatisfied with how this service was delivered in their neighbourhood. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the issue that obtained the worst evaluation from citizens was government efforts at job creation. Only a small fraction (11%) of the adult populace said that they were pleased with these efforts while the vast majority (76%) were dissatisfied.

Figure 27: Level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the provision of social services (column percentages)



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

¹⁴ The bulk of this change in BSD Index scores observed in the Western Cape was due to declines in citizen satisfaction with the provision of the electricity. Citizen satisfaction with electricity in the province fell from 71% in VPS 2015 to 43% in VPS 2021.

To properly appreciate public attitudes towards social service provision, we need to assess how citizen evaluations changed over the last decade. To provide that assessment, and in fashion similar to the BSD index, responses to the service delivery satisfaction questions depicted in Figure 27 were amalgamated into a single metric¹⁵. The new measure was labelled the Social Service Delivery (SSD) Index; the variable was converted into a 0-100 score, where '0' signifies 'very dissatisfied' and '100' 'very satisfied'. The Mean SSD Index score was 40 (SE=0.35) in 2021 VPS, a lower mean score than what was observed in VPS 2010 when the index score was 55 (SE=0.36). Scrutinising this change in greater detail, the social grant sub-component exhibited the largest change over the period. Public satisfaction with government provision of social grant fell from 69% of adult citizens in VPS 2010 to 56% in VPS 2021. The SSD Index was used to investigate variances between socio-demographic subgroups so as to establish how satisfaction with service delivery varied during the last decade. Mean SSD Index scores were portrayed in Table 15 for the period 2010-2021, showing a decline for almost all subgroups in the table.

Table 15: Mean Social Service Delivery (SSD) Index (0-100) scores across socio-demographic subgroups, 2010– 2021

Subgroups, 2010 - 2021											
	2010			2013		2015		2018		2021	
Geotype											
Urban	46	(0.43)	41	(0.41)	43	(0.40)	39	(0.41)	40	(0.40)	
Rural	43	(0.63)	40	(0.64)	43	(0.63)	41	(0.65)	40	(0.75)	
Population Group											
Black African	45	(0.46)	41	(0.46)	44	(0.42)	39	(0.42)	39	(0.44)	
Coloured	43	(0.81)	40	(0.83)	39	(0.77)	47	(0.96)	40	(0.95)	
Indian	43	(1.09)	36	(0.90)	38	(1.16)	39	(1.10)	34	(0.88)	
White	48	(1.12)	38	(0.95)	39	(1.16)	43	(1.17)	45	(1.09)	
Educational Status											
No secondary	43	(0.80)	41	(0.80)	41	(0.74)	41	(0.85)	43	(0.92)	
Incomplete secondary	44	(0.56)	40	(0.51)	43	(0.55)	39	(0.57)	38	(0.66)	
Complete secondary	45	(0.72)	40	(0.74)	44	(0.61)	39	(0.58)	40	(0.54)	
Post-secondary	49	(0.90)	42	(0.91)	43	(1.04)	43	(1.18)	41	(0.87)	
Province											
Western Cape	46	(1.10)	39	(1.09)	42	(1.03)	40	(1.25)	42	(1.13)	
Eastern Cape	35	(0.87)	41	(0.97)	40	(0.83)	40	(0.92)	43	(1.12)	
Northern Cape	50	(1.29)	42	(1.20)	45	(1.47)	42	(1.28)	40	(1.49)	
Free State	53	(1.47)	40	(1.27)	43	(1.15)	43	(1.21)	42	(1.35)	
KwaZulu-Natal	44	(0.68)	39	(0.71)	45	(0.81)	38	(0.73)	35	(0.72)	
North West	42	(1.68)	37	(1.02)	42	(1.25)	36	(1.35)	44	(1.08)	
Gauteng	45	(0.83)	41	(0.92)	42	(0.85)	37	(0.86)	37	(0.85)	
Mpumalanga	48	(1.31)	45	(1.27)	47	(1.06)	49	(0.98)	39	(0.99)	
Limpopo	51	(1.12)	45	(1.01)	42	(0.97)	42	(0.97)	45	(0.94)	

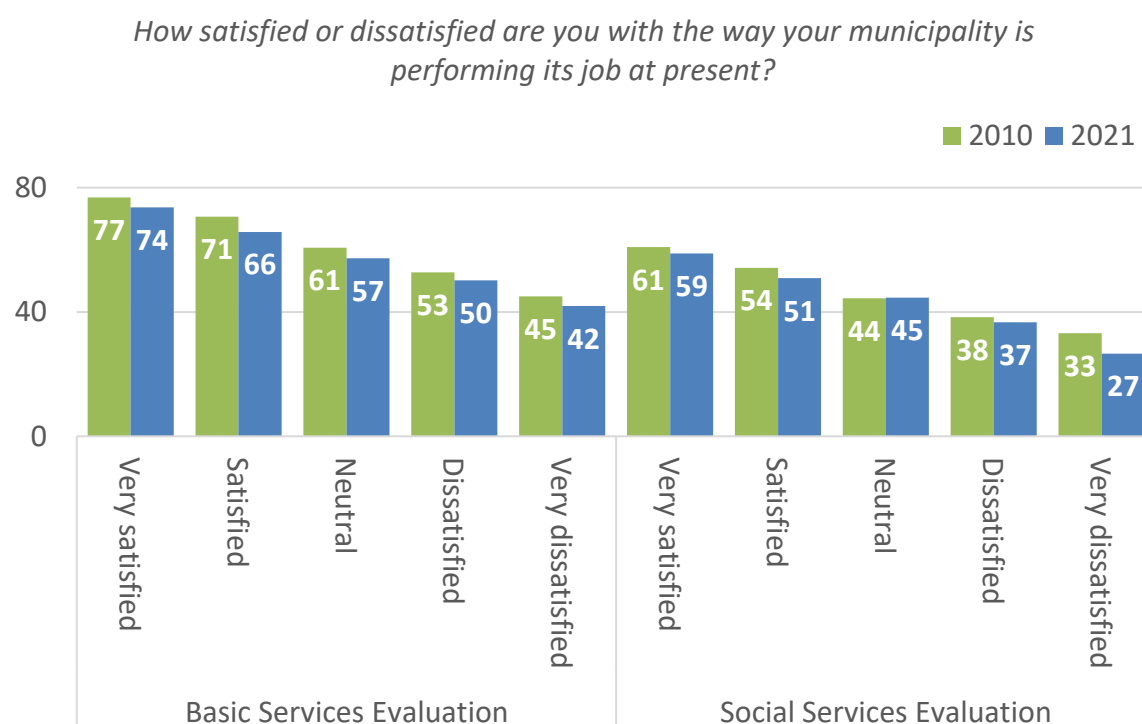
Note: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; and 2. Cell shaded in green indicate a figure above the national average year in a given survey round.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2010-2021

¹⁵ We calculated a Cronbach alpha test to estimate the validity and reliability of the intended indicator. The result ($\alpha=0.60$) was lower than we had expected.

A notable educational attainment differential was discernible at the start of the period but not in any of the subsequent survey rounds in Table 15. This finding is consistent with what recorded for Table 14, suggesting that socio-economic status is not a good predictor of service delivery satisfaction in the last ten years. The urban population did not tend to exhibit more positive SSD Index scores than rural residents. This is inconsistent with what was observed in Table 14, demonstrating the success of social service provision in rural areas. It is apparent that the evaluation gap between white and Black African citizens had changed over time. White SSD Index scores became more positive the last six years while Black African scores fell during the same period. Substantial levels of provincial variance in satisfaction levels were noted in Table. Between VPS 2010 and VPS 2021 has been a decline in SSD Index scores in seven of the nine provinces. The largest declines were observed for the Northern Cape and Free State. In the Eastern Cape we observed a significantly positive SSD Index score change, increasing from 35 (SE=0.00) in 2015 VPS to 43 (SE=0.00) in 2021 VPS¹⁶.

Figure 28: Public evaluations of basic services and social services in local areas by level of satisfaction with municipal governance, 2010 and 2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2010; 2021

The 2021 VPS data suggest that satisfaction with service delivery is closely associated with overall satisfaction with municipal governance. We present mean BSD and SSD mean index scores across levels of public satisfaction with municipal governance in South Africa in Figure 28. For a comparative perspective, data is presented for both the VPS 2010 and 2021 VPS. The bar chart provides consistent evidence that those offering positive appraisals of service

¹⁶ The bulk of this change in SSD Index scores observed in the Eastern Cape was due to increases for the housing sub-component. Citizen satisfaction with the provision of affordable housing in the province grew from 18% in VPS 2010 to 37% in VPS 2021.

delivery had higher average satisfaction with overall municipal governance than those providing neutral or negative evaluations. It is evident that the associations noted in the figure are quite consistently robust in both VPS 2010 and VPS 2021. Reviewing the data in more depth, we found that public assessments of water, housing and job creation had the most robust effect on citizen evaluations of municipal governance. It would appear that growing public dissatisfaction with service delivery, particularly social services, helps explain the decline in perceived quality of municipal governance observed in Section 6.1.

6.3. Citizen Evaluations of the Batho Pele Principles

Municipalities are, ostensibly, required to operate according to the Batho Pele (“People First”) Principles. These outline the fair and equitable manner in which municipal constituents should be treated by the municipal government. Roberts and Hemson (2008) devised a set of survey questions to evaluate municipal governments in terms of the Batho Pele Principles. Corresponding to the eight service delivery principles, these questions consisted of nine statements that a respondent could agree or disagree with. The legend for these statements is provided in Legend Box 4. Using respondent answers to these questions, researchers could assess whether the public thought that the principles are perceived as being implemented by municipalities. The questions pertaining to the Batho Pele Principles were included in VPS 2021 and will be utilised in this section. Building on the previous two subsections, here we provide a detail investigation of how citizen appraise the capacity of their municipality and whether it responds to their service delivery needs.

Legend Box 4: Components of the Batho Pele Index

BP1 – Consultation	Municipalities do consult communities enough on basic services
BP2 - Setting service standards	Government is delivering on its promises in terms of providing basic services that are of good quality
BP3 - Increasing access	Government is making progress in giving all South Africans equal access to services
BP4 – Courtesy	My municipality treats people with respect
BP5 - Providing information	My municipality provides people with good information about basic services
BP6 - Openness & transparency	My municipality provides regular information on its performance in delivering services
BP7a - Redress (rapid response)	My municipality responds quickly to complaints about problems with services
BP7b - Redress (problem fixed)	My municipality does a good job of following through and fixing problems
BP8 - Value for money	People are getting good value for the money they are charged for basic services

VPS participants were asked to respond to positive statements about services relating to each of the eight Batho Pele principles at a municipal level. For analytical purposes, responses on each of these statements was transformed onto a 0 to 100 scale, the higher the value on the scale the higher the level of agreement. If one examines mean scores for these different scales between 2010 and 2021 (Table 16), the principles that citizens feel their municipalities are struggling most to implement in the VPS 2021 was redress (i.e., BP7) and increasing access

(i.e., B3). Mean scores on eight of the nine scales have worsened over time. Mean scores for BP4 have experienced the largest fall over the last decade, declining by nine points between VPS 2010 and VPS 2021. A relatively comparable reduction in citizen satisfaction was observed for being courteous (i.e., BP4) and setting standards (i.e., BP4). The only scale to improve over time concerned consultation (i.e., BP1) which increased from 37 (SE=0.77) in VPS 2010 to 46 (SE=1.00) in VPS 2021. The significance of this change was verified by a one-way ANOVA test ($F(3, 12,191) = 51, p = 0.000$).

Table 16: Mean scores on the different Batho Pele Index components (0-100), 2010; 2013; 2015; 2021 (Analysis of Variance)

	Survey Round								ANOVA	
	2010		2013		2015		2021		F	Prob>F
BP1 – Consultation	37	(0.77)	39	(0.88)	41	(0.84)	46	(1.00)	51	0.000
BP2 - Setting service standards	44	(0.74)	41	(0.85)	40	(0.80)	37	(0.97)	35	0.000
BP3 - Increasing access	44	(0.78)	43	(0.86)	42	(0.84)	36	(0.88)	49	0.000
BP4 – Courtesy	46	(0.76)	44	(0.87)	41	(0.76)	39	(0.87)	42	0.000
BP5 - Providing information	42	(0.74)	41	(0.85)	40	(0.79)	37	(0.87)	24	0.000
BP6 - Openness & transparency	41	(0.77)	39	(0.84)	37	(0.74)	37	(0.97)	11	0.000
BP7a - Redress (rapid response)	38	(0.77)	35	(0.84)	33	(0.81)	34	(0.93)	14	0.000
BP7b - Redress (problem fixed)	40	(0.76)	37	(0.87)	38	(0.81)	35	(0.97)	16	0.000
BP8 - Value for money	40	(0.73)	37	(0.82)	36	(0.79)	37	(0.86)	10	0.000

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2010; 2013; 2015; 2021

Using the nine indicators depicted in Table 16, a Batho Pele (BP) Index has been created. This Index is a summated scale of responses to the nine statements relating to the Batho Pele principles, which was subsequently transformed so that the range of values runs from 0 to 100. The composite BP score ranges from '0' meaning lowest possible municipal performance to '100', which represents the maximum evaluation possible. The overall BP Index score in VPS 2021 was 37 (SE=0.64) and we can observe a decline of four points over the last decade. The components included as part of the BP Index are good predictors of the overall satisfaction with municipal governance indicator used in Table 13. Using multivariate ordinary least-squares (OLS) linear regression analysis, we confirmed that the BP Index explained 43% of variance in the municipal satisfaction scale used in Section 6.1. Further investigation revealed that out of the eight BP components, BP5 and BP4 have the strongest correlation with the overall indicator.

In Table 17 mean scores on the BP Index are displayed for a diverse set of subgroups for the following VPS rounds, 2010, 2015 and 2021. As can be observed, there was a significant decline in mean satisfaction levels for most subgroups over the period. We discovered surprising geotype temporal variances with the largest change noted for urban citizens. In each round under review, urban residents scored higher on the BP Index than their rural counterparts. During the last decade this group became less satisfied with municipal governance, however, and the difference between rural and urban residents on this issue shrank. In the 2010 VPS we could observe a significant population group differences on municipal satisfaction. These differences had become more muted over time as minority residents become less satisfied with their municipality. In each VPS round, we could observe

a significant difference between educational attainment groups on municipal satisfaction. When compared to their better educated peers, the less educated report relatively low index scores. But this educational dissimilarity disappeared as more educated citizens became more critical of their municipality between VPS 2010 and VPS 2021.

Table 17: Mean Batho Pele Index (0-100) scores across socio-demographic subgroups, 2010-2021

	2010			2015			2021			Diff.
	M	SD		M	SD		M	SD		
Geotype										
Urban	44	21	ref.	41	21	reg.	38	20	reg.	-6
Rural	36	20	***	33	20	***	35	19	**	-1
Population Group										
Black African	40	21	reg.	39	21	reg.	37	20	reg.	-3
Coloured	43	18	*	38	19		37	16		-6
Indian	47	22	***	36	20		35	18		-12
White	48	22	***	39	23		42	18	***	-6
Educational Status										
No secondary	37	21	reg.	39	22	reg.	38	19	reg.	1
Incomplete secondary	40	21		37	20		35	20		-5
Complete secondary	42	21	**	41	22		37	19		-5
Post-secondary	48	21	***	40	22		41	20		-7
Province										
Western Cape	48	18	reg.	45	20	reg.	41	17	reg.	-7
Eastern Cape	33	19	***	36	19	***	40	20		7
Northern Cape	42	23		33	21	***	32	21	**	-10
Free State	45	22		35	20	***	36	21		-9
KwaZulu-Natal	43	21		40	20		33	17	***	-10
North West	34	23	***	35	19	***	38	18		4
Gauteng	43	21	*	43	23		37	22		-6
Mpumalanga	40	22	**	35	19	***	35	20		-5
Limpopo	40	21	**	33	22	***	44	16		4

Note: 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.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2010; 2015; 2021

In terms of municipal satisfaction, substantial levels of provincial variance were noted in each VPS round under review. In each VPS round residents in the Western Cape reported higher BP Index scores than other provincial residents. A series of one-way ANOVA tests demonstrate that the level of provincial variation was higher in VPS 2015 ($F(8, 2952) = 21, p = 0.000$) when compared to VPS 2010 ($F(8, 3192) = 17, p = 0.000$) and VPS 2021 ($F(3, 3091) = 13, p = 0.000$). In addition, we can observe a relatively remarkable level of change in certain provinces during the period. Of all the provincial subgroups in the table, the largest declines were observed for citizens in the Northern Cape, the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal. Citizens became more contented with their municipality over the last decade in Limpopo, the North West and the Eastern Cape. The Eastern Cape reported the largest increase in BP Index score,

seven points during the period under review. Index scores in that province grew from 33 (SD=19) in 2010 to 40 (SD=20) in 2021; further analysis suggests that this change was primarily driven by improvements in BP1, BP5 and BP6.

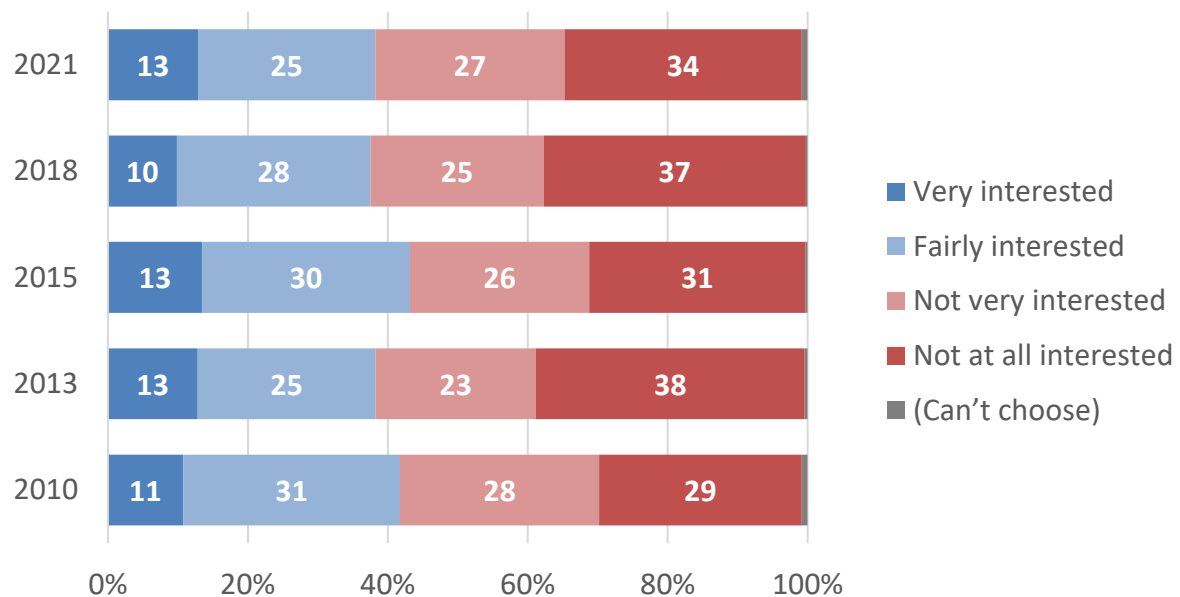
7. Public Involvement in Politics

Democracy should never be understood as a top-down process. Assessments of public participation are essential to the study and understanding of civic values in a society and are indeed equally important in an electoral context (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Active citizen participation in democratic practices is seen by scholars as a means of fostering social cohesion, consolidating representative democracy and reducing the divide between institutions of the state and citizens (also see Mutz, 2006). The National Development Plan (NDP) identifies the promotion of active citizenry as one of six core priorities for transforming South African society. The NDP recognises that citizens have a responsibility for holding elected officials accountable for their policy decisions. This section will focus on political behaviour, examining conventional forms of this behaviour (e.g., voting) as well as more unconventional forms (e.g., street protests). This section will place an emphasis on involvement in localised systems of governance, assessing mass participation in ward committees and community organisations.

7.1. Political Interest and Attention

Political scientists have been concerned about the current level of political interest in modern democracies, a concern that apathy towards politics is undermining democratic functioning. A number of studies, particularly in the United States and Western Europe, have raised this concern (e.g., Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Denny & Doyle, 2008; Verba et al., 1995). Political interest acts as a motivator to acquire political knowledge which helps people make rational choices about democratic participation. Understanding the level of attention that the general citizenry gives politics is, therefore, key to our understanding of public understandings of democracy and the electoral process. In order to capture political interest in South Africa, VPS respondents were asked, “How interested would you say you personally are in politics?”, with responses captured on a four-point scale (very interested, fairly interested, not very interested, or not at all interested). The national results for the period 2010-2021 are presented in Figure 29, showing that only a minority of the adult public are attentive to the political arena in South Africa.

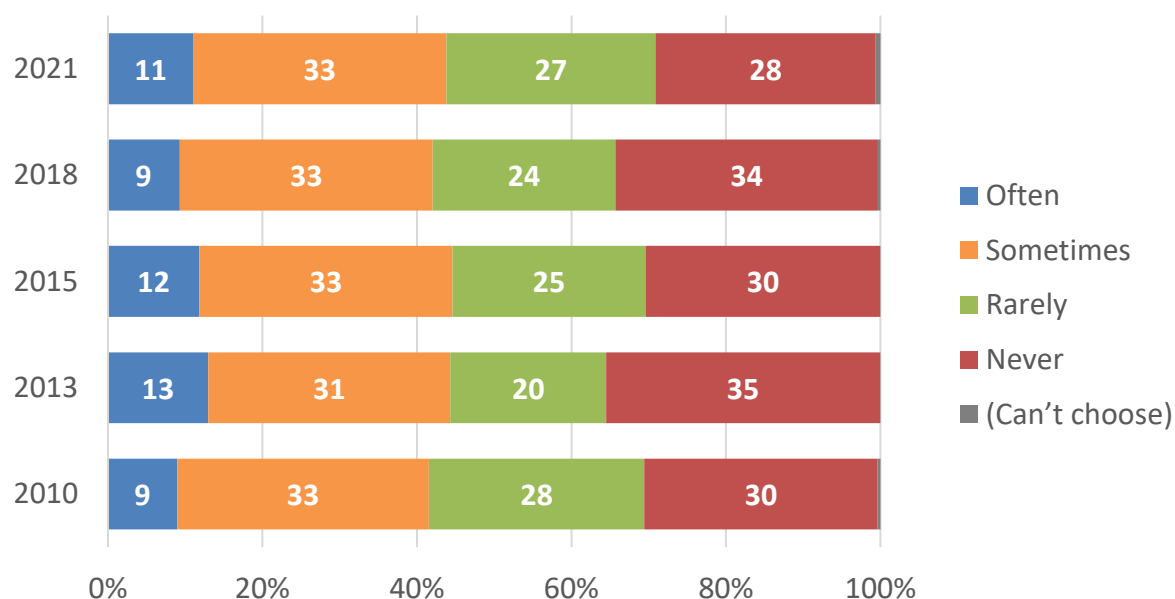
Figure 29: Public responses to the question: “[h]ow interested would you say you personally are in politics?” by survey round



Sources: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2010-2021.

From the results presented in the figure, it is apparent that only a minority of the general public had an interest in politics. Slightly less than two-fifths (38%) indicated a high or fair interest in VPS 2021 while the majority (61%) claimed to be ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ interested in politics. Comparing these figures with trend data on political interest, we find that this picture has remained relatively stable since VPS 2010. There has only been a minor downswing in interest between 2010 and 2021, a modest fall of four percentage points. A second measure with which to assess political engagement and which was included in the survey questionnaire relates to the frequency of political discussion. Specifically, respondents were asked, “When you get together with your friends, relatives or fellow workers, how often do you discuss politics?” with response categories being “often”, “sometimes”, “rarely” and “never”. Citizen answers to this question are displayed in Figure 30 for the period 2010-2021, the results are consistent with what we saw in Figure 29.

Figure 30: Public responses to the question: “[w]hen you get together with your friends, relatives or fellow workers, how often do you discuss politics?” by survey round

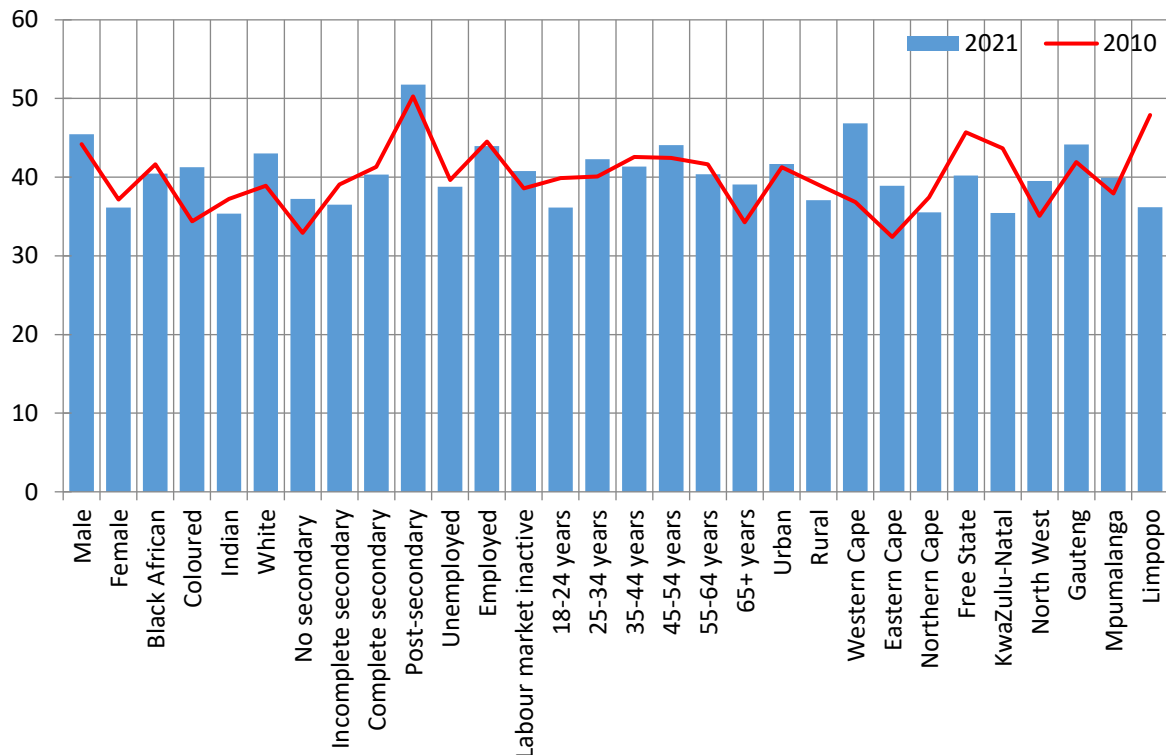


Sources: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2010-2021.

More than half (55%) of the adult population reported having never or rarely discussed political matters. Less than half of the general population claimed to get together with friends, relatives or fellow workers to discuss politics. Roughly two-fifths (44%) of the adult populace told fieldworkers that they had discussed politics either sometimes or often. This result is similar to what was observed during previous survey rounds, consistent with the finding that public interest in politics in South Africa is quite stable over time. Based on the responses to these two questions, we created a Political Attention (PA) Scale to examine the relationship between political interest and socio-demographic characteristics¹⁷. The PA Scale was converted onto a 0-100 range, the higher value on this scale indicates the higher concern about politics. The national results for the interest in politics measure are disaggregated by a number of demographic and socio-economic subgroups in Figure 31 for both VPS 2010 and VPS 2021.

¹⁷ Standardized testing learned that these two items merged in a validity and reliability manner into a single scale (Cronbach α = 0.77).

Figure 31: Political Attention (PA) Scale (0-100) across socio-demographic attributes, 2010 and 2021



Sources: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2010; 2021.

An examination of the data presented in Figure 31 indicates that subgroup differences are quite small, and we do not observe substantial change over the period. Gender differences were noted in VPS 2021 with female citizens exhibiting less interest in politics than their male counterparts. As determined by a one-way ANOVA test we can see that these differences are statistically significant ($F(1, 3109) = 74.4, p = 0.000$). The gender dissimilarities here were slightly smaller in 2010 VPS than in 2021 VPS. Given the available pertinent literature¹⁸, we were not surprised to find that educational attainment was one of the most salient drivers of political interest in the figure. In both VPS rounds we discovered that better educated individuals were moderately more concerned about politics. Young people (18-24 years) were found to be marginally less interested in politics than other age cohorts in VPS 2021. A similar trend was not seen in the 2010 VPS, and it seems that the youth have become somewhat less attentive to politics over this period.

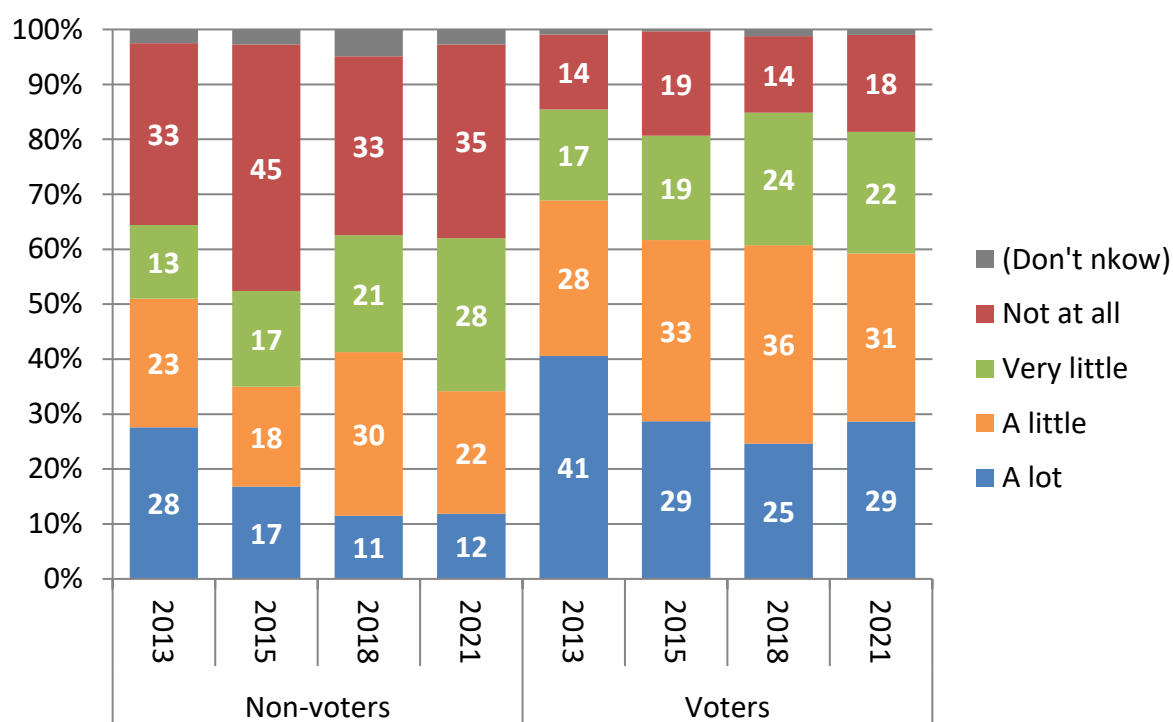
In Figure 31 important provincial differences could be discerned, the general citizenry of certain provinces were more attentive to politics than others. In both rounds, PA Scale scores were high in Gauteng which indicates that citizens in that province tend to be consistently quite interested in politics. Outside of Gauteng, we did observe a significant degree of change in mean PA Scale scores over the last decade. In the Western Cape mean scale scores increased from 37 (SE=1.33) in VPS 2010 to 47 (SE=1.56) in 2021, the largest positive period

¹⁸ To equip voters with the cognitive skills we require, McGraw (2000) argues, citizens need to make rational civic judgements. As such citizens need at least a basic level of civic and political knowledge.

change that we can observe in the figure. Part of this is driven by growing political interest amongst adult citizens of colour in the province during this period¹⁹. A significant decline in average PA Scale scores were found amongst Limpopo citizens between VPS 2010 (M=48; SE=1.94) and VPS 2021 (M=36; SE=1.66). In addition, a modest decline in mean PA Scales scores were also noted for KwaZulu-Natal and Free State citizens.

As was outlined above, popular interest in politics has not declined significantly amongst the general population in South Africa. However, from the results depicted in Section 5.2, it would seem that many citizens are losing interest in elections. To evaluate this hypothesis, let us assess responses to the following VPS question: '[h]ow much have you thought about the upcoming government elections?' About a quarter (24%) of adult citizens thought it a lot in VPS 2021 and 28% said that they thought about it a little. Less than half told fieldworkers that they thought about the upcoming elections very little (24%) or not at all (23%). The proportion who thought about it very little or not at all has increased by 12 percentage points since 2013 VPS. This outcome seems to validate the thesis that public interest in government elections in South Africa has decreased over the last decade.

Figure 32: Public responses to the question: '[h]ow much have you thought about the upcoming government elections?' by voting history, 2013-2021



Sources: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013-2021.

Voting status appeared to be a key determinant of how members of the public would answer the question on election interest. Non-voters were much more likely to report that they had thought about government elections either very little or not at all (Figure 32). But this voting

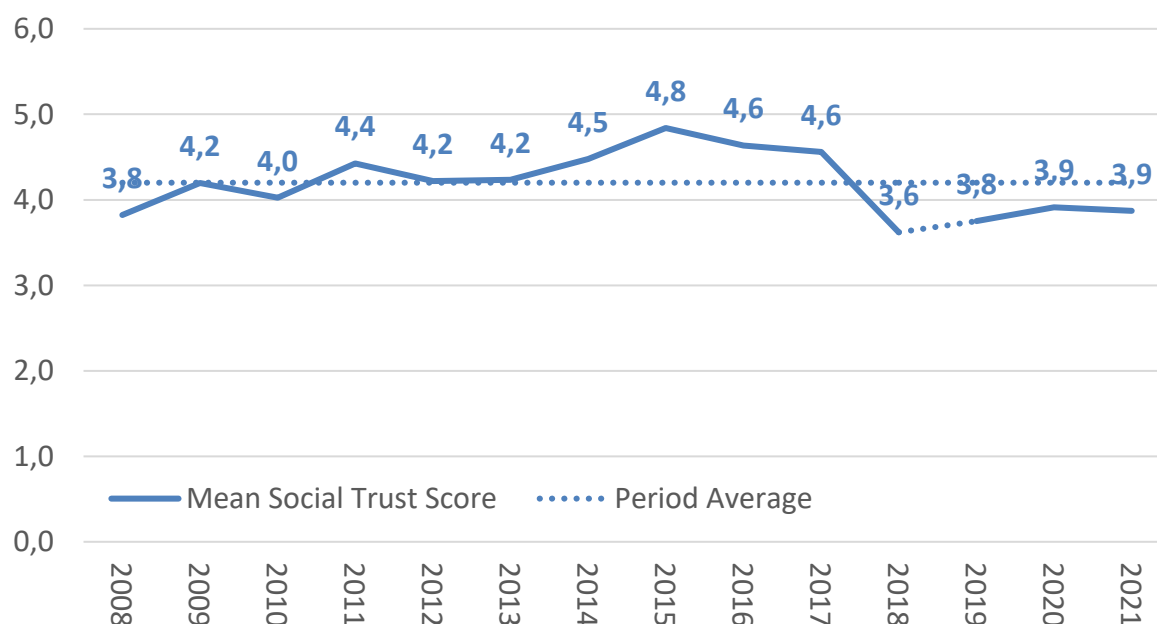
¹⁹ Mean PA Scale scores for this group increased from 34 (SE=1.45) in 2010 VPS to 47 (SE=1.62) in 2021 VPS. Of the different population groups in the province, Black African adults had the highest index score (M=50; SE=3.06) in VPS 2021.

differential improved over time as non-voters increasingly lost interest in upcoming elections. Consider, for instance, that the proportion of non-voters who thought about upcoming elections a lot decreased from 28% in VPS 2013 to 12% in VPS 2021. There was a linear relationship between the PA Scale and interest in upcoming elections. Citizens who thought about the 2021 LGE a lot had relatively high mean PA Scale score ($M=58$; $SE=2.12$). This can be compared to 43 ($SE=1.57$) of those who thought about the 2021 LGE a little, 37 ($SE=1.55$) of those who thought about it very little and 25 ($SE=1.57$) of those who did not think about it at all.

7.2. Participation in Community Organisations

In South Africa, social cohesion has been, and continues to be, an important priority for the national government. In its traditional conception, social cohesion is associated with social capital and community participation (as discussed in Barolsky, 2012). This form of capital has been defined as ‘features’ of social organisation, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions (Portes 1998). This section examines social capital in the country using two distinct measures: social trust and group membership. The inclusion of the latter is important, given that membership of groups, affiliation to networks, and participation in civil society activities generally leads to high political interest and subsequent political behaviour. This subsection will begin with an assessment of social trust before looking at various types of community involvement. A special emphasis will be placed on community development self-help associations and the effects of public participation in these kinds of organisations.

Figure 33: Mean social trust scale (0-10) across the period 2008-2021

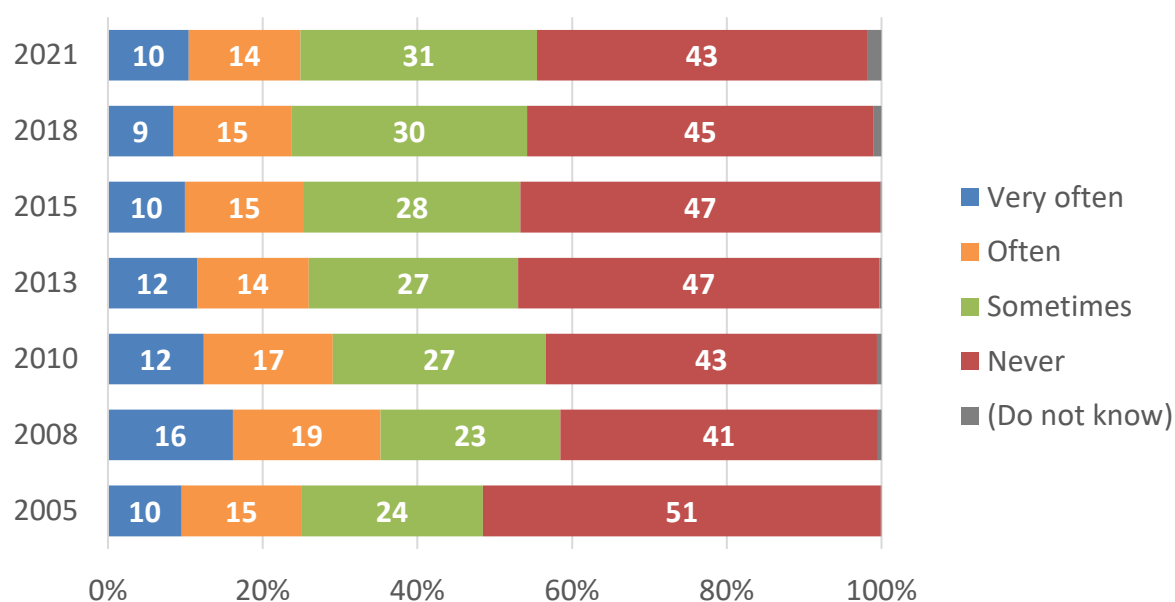


Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2003-2021

Social trust acts as a foundation for cooperation, contributes to social integration and harmony among people, leads to life satisfaction, and ultimately to democratic stability and development. This form of trust is, therefore, at the centre of issues pertaining to practical daily life, including happiness, economic prosperity and participation in community and civil

society (Putnam 2000). Since SASAS 2008, survey participants were asked the following interpersonal trust question: '[g]enerally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people?' Answers were captured on a scale ranging from 0 ('you cannot be too careful') to 10 ('most people can be trusted')²⁰. In Figure 33 mean responses to this question are represented for all adults in South Africa for the period 2008-2021. The average social trust mean score in 2021 was 3.9, which represents a decrease relative to the mid-2010s. The low levels of social trust depicted in the figure are consistent with what we see in other developing countries (Delhey & Newton, 2005).

Figure 34: Public responses to the question: '[h]ow often, if ever, do you attend community meetings?', 2005-2021

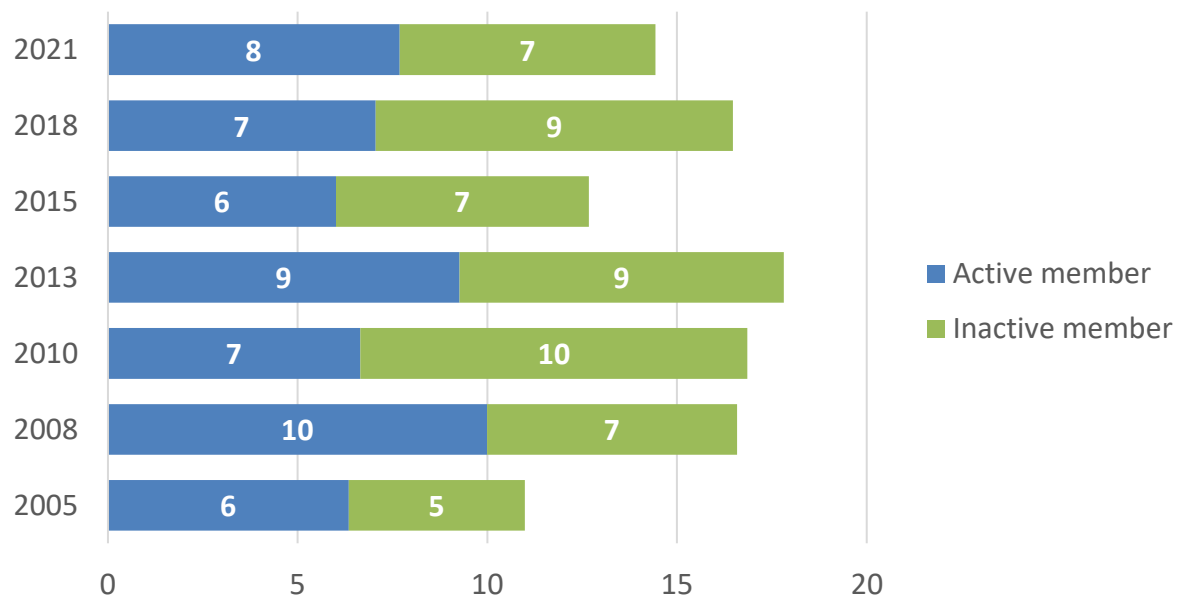


Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2005-2021

An important measure of social cohesion are community meetings, these are a powerful form of civic participation that enable communities to solve problems. AS part of the VPS questionnaire, respondents were questioned on how frequently they went to community meetings. Public answers to this question are displayed in **Figure 34** and show that about half of all adult citizens had attended meetings like this. Nearly a third (30%) of the mass public in 2021 VPS told fieldworkers that they attended sometimes, 14% said that they attended often and 10% indicated that they attend very often. These levels of participation are somewhat higher than what was observed in 2005 VPS when 51% of the adult populace said that they did not attend community meetings. Adults who believed that their community had become better in the most recent period were somewhat less motivated to attend community meetings. About a third of those who thought their community had improved between 2016 and 2021 attended meetings while 30% of this group attended sometimes.

²⁰ This common trust measure has been included in a number of cross-national studies, such as the World Values Survey, but this specific form with the 11-point scale is derived from the European Social Survey (for more information, see Reeskens & Hooghe 2008). This measure can be interpreted as an estimate of citizens of the trustworthiness of the society around them.

Figure 35: Percentage of the adult population who were members (active or inactive) of community development self-help associations, 2005-2021 (row percentages)



Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2005-2021

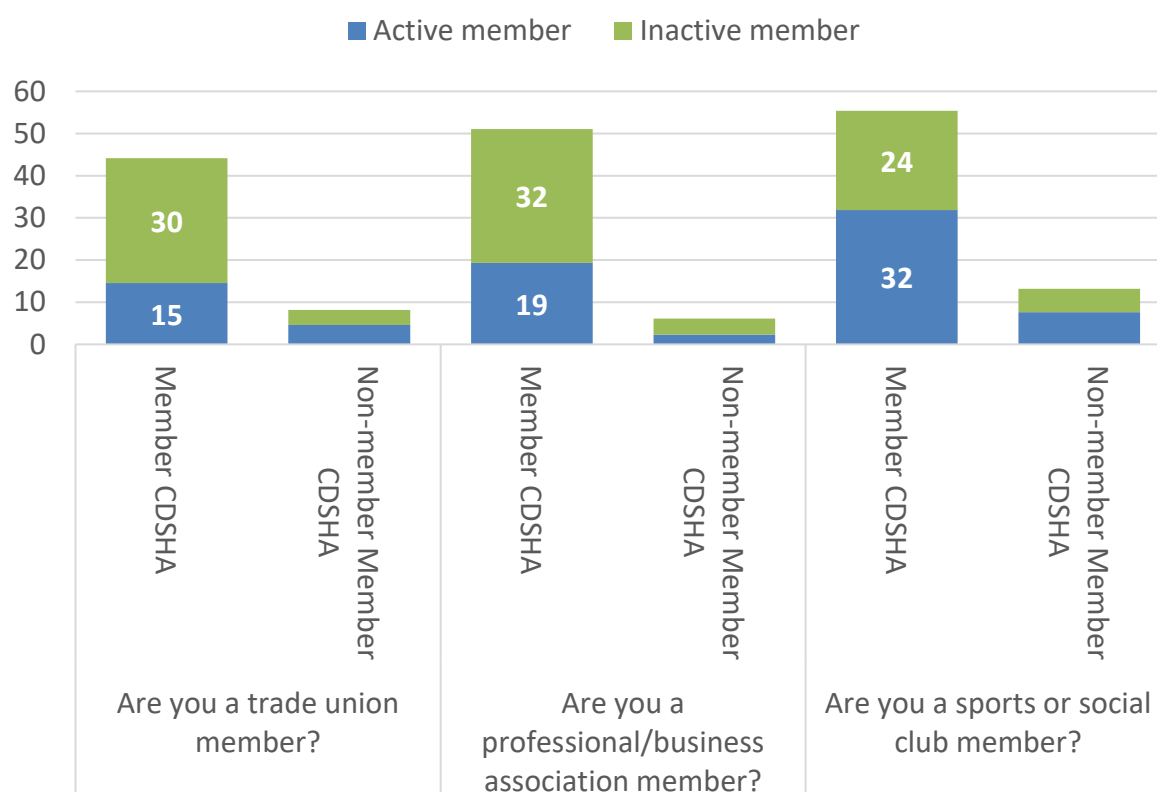
Community development self-help associations (CDSHAs) are important parts of community life in South Africa, making a positive contribution to many working class neighbourhoods. It is worth asking, therefore, how many adult citizens consider themselves to be active members of CDSHAs. Levels of self-reported membership in these organisations were depicted in **Figure 35** for the period 2005-2021. The proportion of the mass public who claimed to be a member of this kind of association fluctuated within a narrow range. In the last survey round, only a twelfth of the adult populace were either active (8%) or inactive (7%) members of organisations like this. If a person was a member of a CDSHA, perhaps unsurprisingly, then they were more liable to be involved in their local community. Consider, for instance, that more than half of active CDSHA members attended community meetings often (30%) or very often (27%). This is twice the national average and almost three times more than those who were not members of CDHSAs. A similar result was apparent if we examine the relationship between public attendance at functions held on national public holidays and CDHSA membership²¹.

It would appear from the above that participation in a CDHSA was robustly (and positively) correlated with civic behaviour in South Africa. This outcome is consistent with a longstanding tradition in political science which considers voluntary associations schools of democracy, which engage their members in politics. Participation in voluntary associations would introduce citizens to politics on a small scale and become interested in wider societal and political issues (Halpern 2005). We do find that people who were members of CDHSA had

²¹ More than a third of active CDHSA members had attended a function held on a national public holiday either often (18%) or very often (20%). This is nearly twice times the national average, and three times greater than those who were not members of a CDHSA.

higher mean Political Attention (PA) Scale²² scores than non-members. In VPS 2021 active CDHSA members were found to have much greater mean PA Scale scores (M=57; SE=3.29) than inactive (M=45; SE=2.35) members as well as people who were not members of CDHSA (M=39; SE=1.03). This outcome is consistent with prior research on how voluntary associations act as schools of democracy for its members.

Figure 36: Percentage of the adult population who were members (active or inactive) of different organisations by community development self-help associations (CDHSA) membership, (row percentages)



Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2021

Being a member of a voluntary association helps build social capital, allowing individuals to become involved in other associations in their community. To test this thesis, we examine how participation in CDHSA correlated with involvement in other local associations. We found that if an adult citizen was a member of a CDHSA than they were much more liable to be members of other community organisations. More than two-fifths (44%) of CDHSA members were part of a trade union and 51% were part of a professional/business association. A majority of CDHSA members also belonged to a sports or social club with 32% of this group describing themselves as active members and 24% as inactive members. Adult citizens were more liable to donate money or raised funds for a political activity if they belong to a CDHSA. Consider that a sixth of active CDHSA members made a donation in the twelve months prior to the 2021 VPS interview. This result can be compared unfavourably to 8% of inactive CDHSA members and 2% of adults who were not CDHSA members.

²² A description of this scale can be found in Section 7.1.

Table 18: Public participation (and intention to participate) in a donating towards social or political activities by membership in community development self-help associations, 2015-2021

		Have done it in the past year		Have done it in the more distant past		Have not done it but might do it		Have not done it and would never do it		Uncertain	
Active Member											
	2013	12	(2.82)	14	(3.12)	30	(4.28)	41	(5.03)	2	(1.41)
	2015	11	(3.81)	20	(4.55)	26	(4.70)	42	(6.31)	1	(0.60)
	2018	11	(2.78)	6	(2.10)	41	(6.05)	41	(6.19)	1	(0.38)
	2021	16	(4.60)	14	(3.65)	27	(4.66)	38	(5.16)	4	(2.01)
Inactive Member											
	2013	14	(4.08)	11	(2.64)	33	(4.77)	41	(5.33)	1	(0.44)
	2015	10	(3.79)	12	(2.81)	34	(4.87)	43	(5.23)	2	(1.61)
	2018	4	(1.60)	13	(3.95)	35	(5.55)	47	(5.42)	1	(0.68)
	2021	8	(2.25)	18	(4.24)	21	(4.32)	45	(4.88)	7	(2.37)
Non-member											
	2013	5	(0.67)	7	(0.80)	34	(1.44)	52	(1.55)	1	(0.37)
	2015	2	(0.38)	4	(0.60)	32	(1.35)	60	(1.41)	1	(0.29)
	2018	4	(0.76)	5	(0.66)	31	(1.64)	56	(1.69)	4	(0.58)
	2021	2	(0.46)	4	(0.68)	18	(1.20)	71	(1.51)	4	(0.79)

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2015-2021

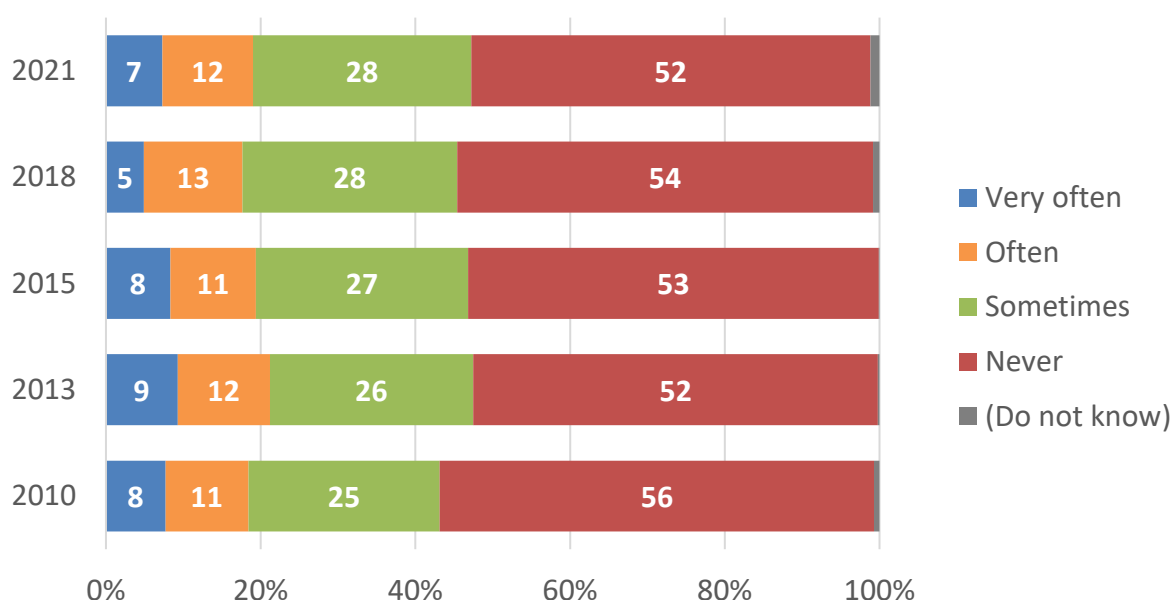
Let us now turn to the frequency with which adult citizens make donations to social or political activity. This is an essential form of civic participation in any democracy, allowing citizens to pool resources and solve local problems. Most of the general population said that they did not participate in this kind of behaviour during the period 2015-2021. During 2021 VPS round, less than a tenth of the adult populace claimed to have participated in this activity either in the last year (4%) or in the more distant past (6%). There is a relationship between CDHSA membership and donation behaviour, association members are more prone to making donations than non-members (Table 18). The proportion of the inactive CDHSA members and non-members who have claimed to have donated recently has declined over time. It is evident from the trend data that willingness to donate has declined considerably during the last few years²³. This decline has been most evident amongst adults who were not CDHSA members. The proportion of this group who would never donate increased from 56% in 2018 VPS to 71% in 2021 VPS.

²³ Between VPS 2018 and VPS 2021 the segment of non-participants who might make monetary donations in the future dropped 14 percentage points. It would seem that, on the whole, the adult populace has become less willing to engage in this important civic activity during the period.

7.3. Participation in Ward Governance

As part of the vision of developmental and participatory local governance, the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000) envisaged ward-level activities within each municipality to connect elected leaders and constituencies. This was seen as a means of addressing development challenges and improving the quality of life within communities, but also to enhance voter participation. Ward committees were designed to help local communities realise social and economic upliftment as well as help ensure universal access to affordable essential services. For the system to work, however, it is essential that a plurality of municipal residents be involved in ward-level political activities. This requires citizens to be knowledgeable about ward committees as well as their elected ward councillor. This section investigates ward committee participation in South Africa as well as public knowledge of ward committees and ward councillors in the country.

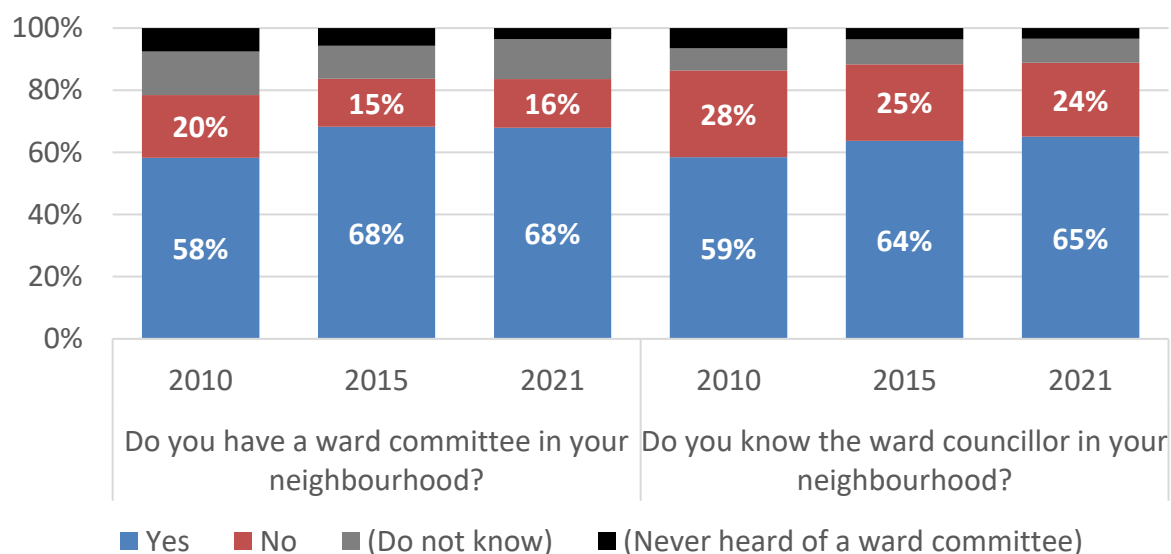
Figure 37: Public responses to the question: [h]ow often, if ever, do you attend ward committee meetings, 2010-2021



Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2010-2021

In order to understand the prevalence of ward committee meeting attendance, respondents in the VPS were asked how often they participate in this activity. Responses to this question are depicted in **Figure 37** for the period 2010-2021; it is apparent that levels of self-reported attendance have remained stable during this period. In spite of the potential for ward committees to serve as an effective tool of participatory local government across South Africa's thousands of wards, many citizens did not attend a ward meeting in their local area. Less than half of the adult public went to these kinds of meetings in VPS 2021 with 7% stating that they attended very often, 12% often and 28% sometimes. Now let us turn our attention to the following research question, how much do local communities know about this essential branch of local governance?

Figure 38: Public responses to questions about knowledge about ward committees in survey participants neighbourhoods, 2010-2021

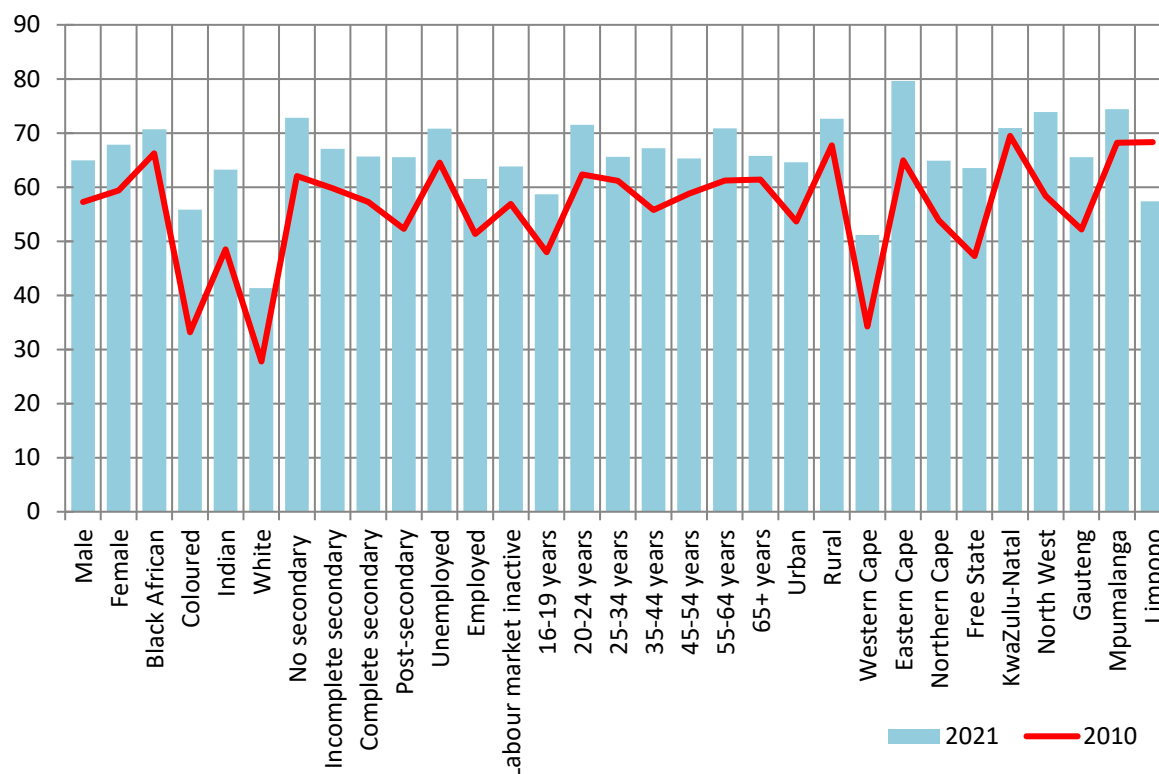


Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2010, 2015; 2021

VPS respondents were asked two questions about ward-level governance in their area. Barely five-sevenths of the adult population in VPS 2021 had heard of either a ward committee (68%) or councillor (65%). The observed level of knowledge here is consistent with the VPS 2015 results and higher than what was found in VPS 2010 (Figure 38). Although knowledge of ward committees and councillors remains lower than one would ideally require from an important mechanism of representative democracy, the reported figures represent an improvement since a similar evaluation was fielded in the 2005 round of SASAS 2005. In that survey round, 45% knew of a ward committee in their area, 22% indicated they did not, 23% were uncertain and 10% had never heard of a ward committee (Roefs & Atkinson, 2010).

In order to examine the socio-demographic differences in local government knowledge, an index was created by combining the responses to the two questions presented in Figure 38, ranging from 0 to 100, with '100' representing affirmative responses to both statements and '0' indicating that respondents answered either 'no', 'do not know' or 'never heard' of either a ward committee or ward councillor. Our mean knowledge level variable increased from 58 (SE=0.78) in VPS 2010 to 66 (SE=0.72). Mean scores on the knowledge variable are depicted in Figure 39 across a range of different socio-demographic groups. The results reveal that there are, on average, no significant differences on the basis of gender, while there is only marginal age group variation. Young people are somewhat less aware of elected local government officials than their older counterparts. However, younger citizens have experienced a significant increase in awareness between 2010 and 2021. The 16-19 age cohort, for example, underwent an eleven-point increase over the decade. This suggests that the youth are become more aware of ward-level politics in their respective communities.

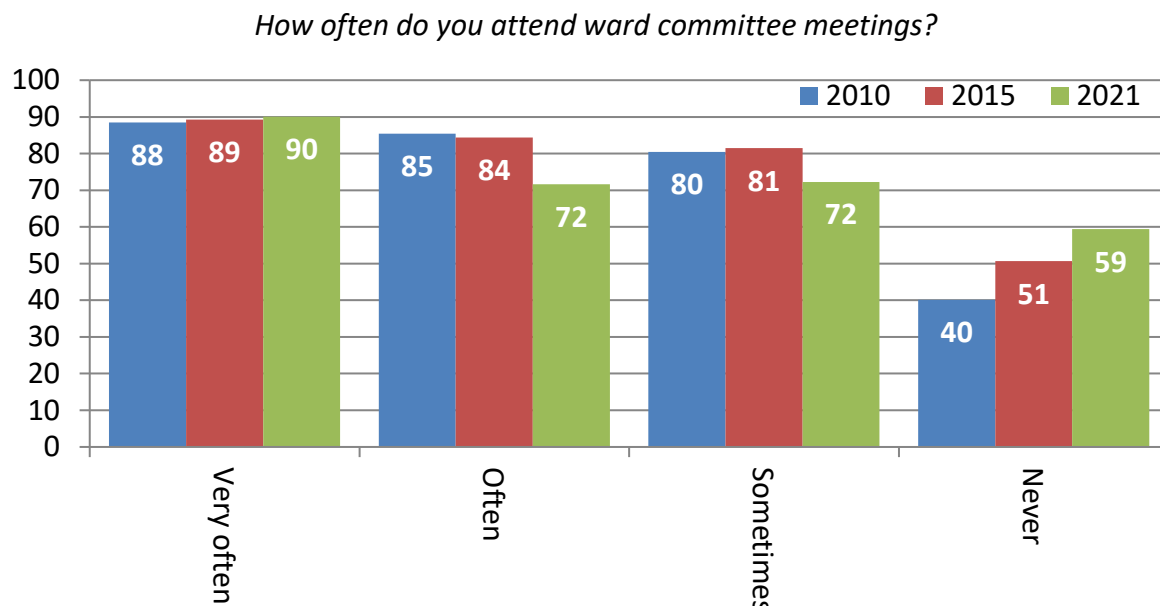
Figure 39: Mean Index of Local Knowledge (0-100) score by socio-demographic characteristics, 2010 and 2021



Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2010; 2021

Significant race group differences were apparent in Figure 39. In terms of population group differentials, Black African citizens are significantly more inclined than their minority counterparts to be familiar with elected government bodies. Of the four minority groups, white citizens are least aware and Indian citizens the most. Interestingly, awareness levels amongst the Coloured community have increased considerably in the last ten years. Mean knowledge levels grew from 33 (SE=1.80) in VPS 2010 to 56 (SE=1.76) for this group. This pattern is reflected in the social class indicators (such as formal education) included in the analysis. We have also observed substantial spatial differentials in awareness of ward-level governance. Those in urban settlements score lower on this indicator than those living in rural areas. However, the gap between urban and rural citizens has halved over the last decade, falling by six points. Western Cape residents have a lower level of knowledge than those in other provinces. Nonetheless, the level of improvement in that province has been significant, growing from 34 (SE=2.09) to 51 (SE=1.99) over the period. Significant levels of improvement have also been seen in the Free State, Eastern Cape and the North West.

Figure 40: Mean Index of Local Knowledge (0-100) score by ward committee attendance, 2010, 2015 and 2021



Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2010; 2015; 2021

There is a bivariate association between local government knowledge and political involvement. Mean knowledge scores are displayed by frequency of ward committee meeting attendance. Citizens with high levels of awareness, perhaps unsurprisingly, also attend ward committee meetings more regularly. People who are more interested in local government elections also display higher levels of awareness (**Figure 40**). A series of one-way ANOVA tests demonstrate that these observed variances are significantly different. These results are consistent with the study by Roefs and Atkinson (2010) using SASAS data from 2005. An interesting trend to emerge in the last decade is growing levels of knowledge amongst those who are less active at ward committee meetings. This is particularly evident if we look at those who never attend meetings, mean scores for this group increased from 40 (SD=43) in VPS 2010 to 59 (SD=42) in VPS 2021.

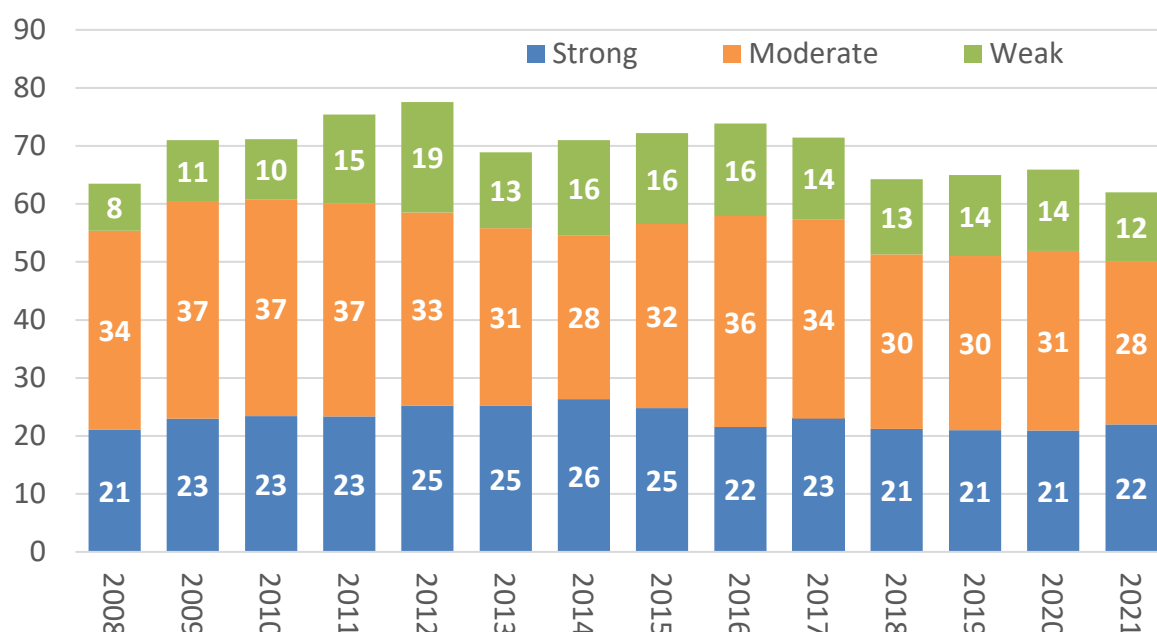
7.4. Participation in Political Party Behaviour

In democratic societies, political parties play an indispensable role in helping citizens to realise their economic and social aspirations. Participation in political party organisations is thought to be a valuable and essential part of any democracy (Stokes, 1999). Such participation allows rank and file voters influence the behaviour of these organisations and their agenda. Data presented in Section 4.3 showed that the general population was quite distrustful of political parties in South Africa. A majority of the adult population was dissatisfied with political leaders and only a small minority trusted political parties. Building on this prior work, this section examines public affiliation with political parties and how this kind of affiliation influences political behaviour. This section will begin by investigating how attached members of the mass public are to political parties and how this has changed over time. Following this trend analysis, we will look at different kinds of political party behaviour.

South Africa has seen the proliferation of different political parties since the advent of majoritarian democracy in the 1990s. In order to understand citizen affiliation to this diverse

array of parties, SASAS introduced a question on whether respondents felt close to a political party in 2008. Responses to this question are provided in **Figure 41** and show that about two-thirds (64%) of the adult population said that they were attached to a political party in SASAS 2008. The share who felt this way increased during the period 2008-2012, reaching 78% of the mass citizenry by the end of the period. Between 2013-2021 we can observe a moderate decline in political party attachment. Roughly three-fifths (61%) of the general population felt close to a political party in the last survey round. Almost a quarter (22%) of adult citizens had a strong attachment to a political party, 28% had a moderate attachment and 12% had a weak attachment.

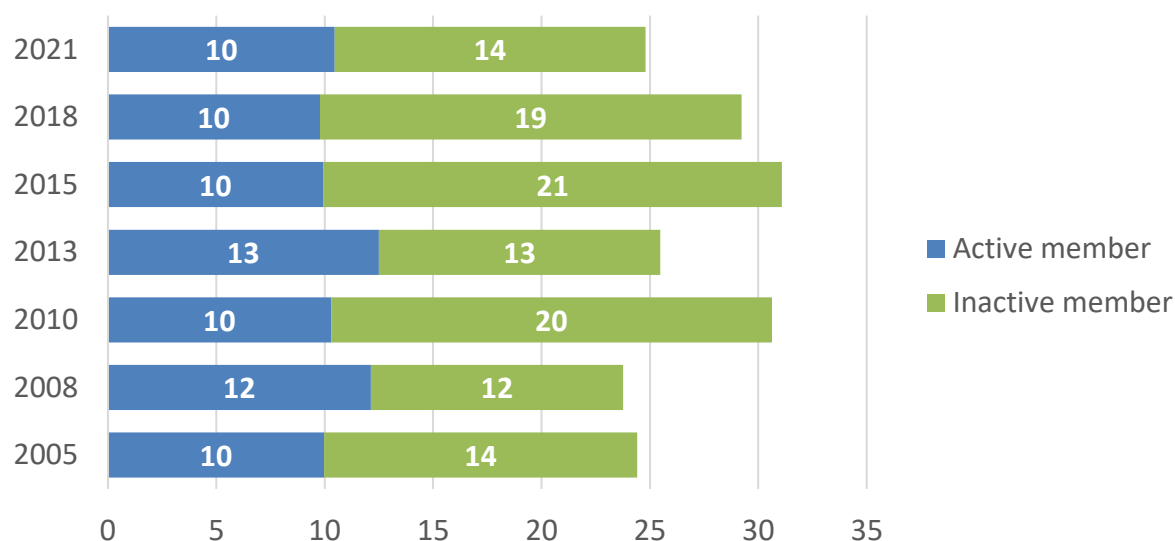
Figure 41: Percentage of the adult population who felt attachment to a political party in South Africa, 2008-2021



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2008-2020

As can be observed from the above, most adults in South Africa are affiliated (even if weakly) with a political party. It is worth asking, however, how many consider themselves to be active members of this kind of organisation. VPS participants were queried on whether they belong to a political party, self-reported levels of membership in these organisations are available for the period 2005-2021 (Figure 42). The percentage of the adult population who described themselves as a member of a political party fluctuated within a narrow range. In the last survey round, only a tenth of the adult populace were active members and 14% were inactive members. If a person was a member of a political party, then they had a greater tendency to participate in the civic life of their community. Consider, for instance, that 41% of active political party members were also members of a community development self-help association. Levels of membership in this kind of organisation was much lower (8%) amongst citizens who were not members of political parties.

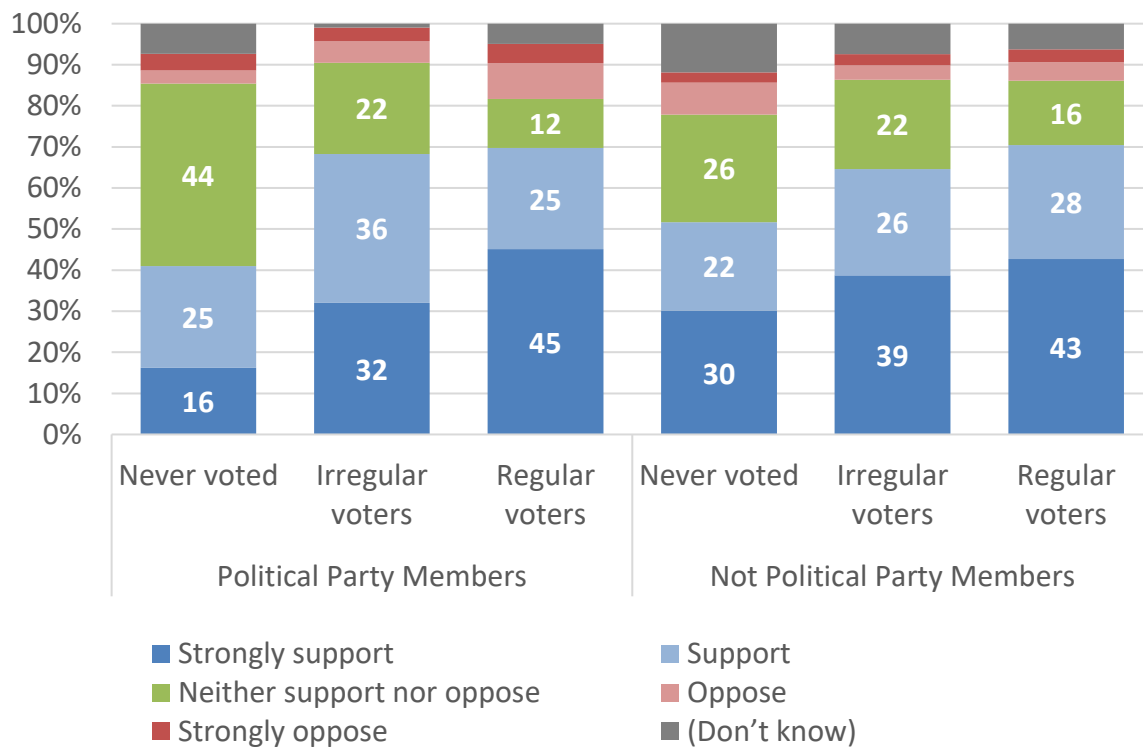
Figure 42: Percentage of the adult population who were members (active or inactive) of political parties, 2005-2021 (row percentages)



Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2005-2021

In April 2021, a new law came into effect that requires all political parties to report where their party funding comes from to the Election Commission. The Political Party Funding Act (No. 6 of 2018) was designed to fight corruption and ensure greater transparency during government elections. When asked about this law, a majority of adult citizens said that they supported the measure. Only a minority (8%) opposed the new legislation and the remainder either gave a neutral response (22%) or were uncertain of how to answer (8%). Public support for the Political Party Funding Act was not strongly determined by whether a person was a member of a political party or not. Opposition to the legislation was only slightly higher among members (11%) than non-members (8%). But there was a distinct voting history disparity to this membership differential with regular voters much more likely to support the decision (**Figure 43**). Only about two-fifths (41%) of non-voters who were party members supported this legislation, 10 percentage points below non-voter who were not members and 19 points below regular voters who were party members.

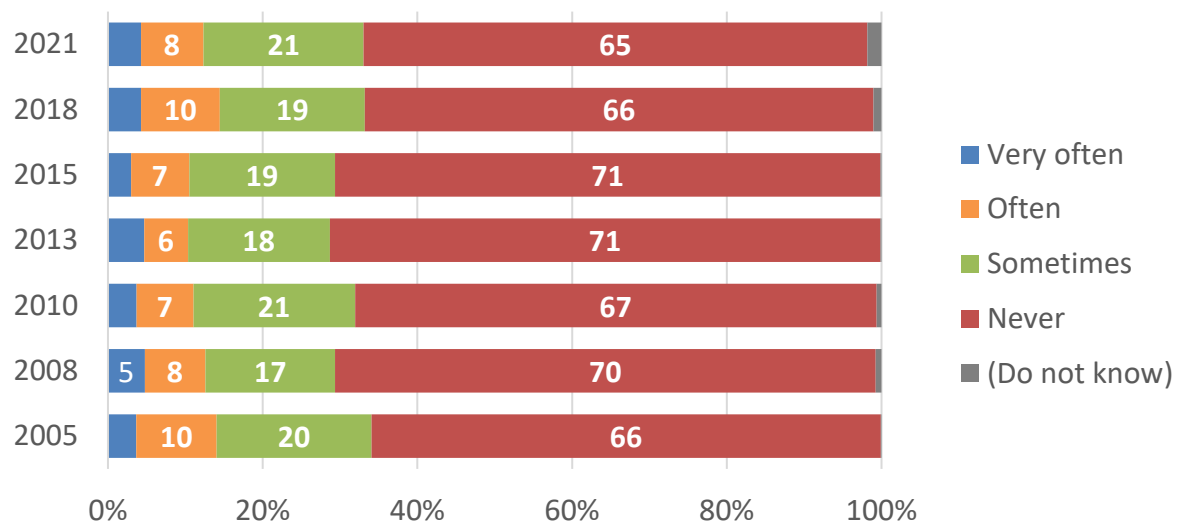
Figure 43: Public response to the question: '[t]o what extent do you support or oppose the law that requires all political parties say where their party funding comes from?' by political party membership and voting history



Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2021

One of the most essential political activities in any democracy are meetings of political parties, these allow political representatives to engage with rank-and-file voters and members of the public. Survey participants were required to indicate how often they had attended meetings of this kind, public answers to this question are displayed in **Figure 44**. A third of the mass populace attended meetings of political parties at least sometimes during the last survey round, 8% stated that they attended often and 4% specified that they attend very often. This participation rate is greater than what was seen in 2015 VPS when only 29% of the adult populace attended these kinds of meetings at least sometimes. If a citizen was a member of a political party, then they were much more likely to attend political party meetings. Nearly three-quarters of active members attended meetings while about half of inactive members went to meetings. Only a small minority (20%) of citizens who were not political party members attended political meetings.

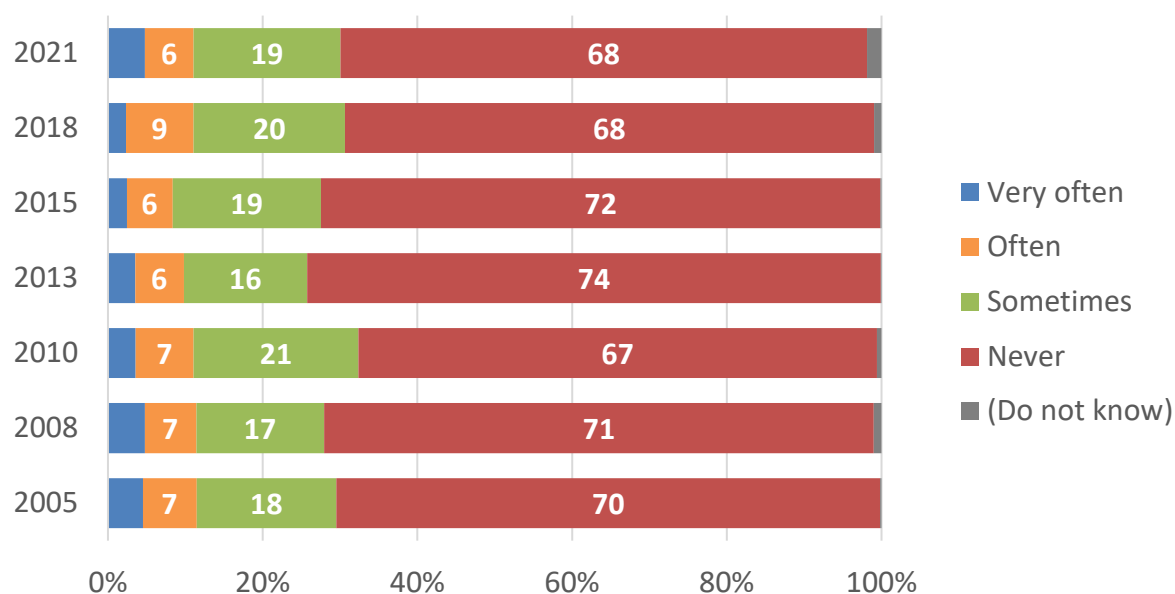
Figure 44: Public responses to the question: ‘[h]ow often, if ever, do you attend public marches?’, 2005-2021



Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2005-2021

Political parties hold election rallies to encourage citizens to vote and become involved in politics. Consequently, it is essential to track the proportion of the general public who have attended election campaign rallies. Levels of public participation at election rallies for the period 2005-2021 are displayed in **Figure 45** and show that most adult citizens had not attended events like this. Roughly a third of the mass public in 2021 VPS went to election rallies at least sometimes with 6% going often and 5% indicating that they went very often. This level of attendance is better than what was observed in the 2015 VPS when 72% of the adult populace said that they did not attend these kinds of events. If a person attended political party meetings, then they were much more likely to attend election rallies. Nearly nine-tenths of those who often attended political party meetings also showed up at election rallies often (64%) or sometimes (22%). By contrast, about a twelfth of persons who never went to political party meetings took part in election rallies often (3%) or sometimes (10%).

Figure 45: Public responses to the question: '[h]ow often, if ever, do you attend election rallies?', 2005-2021



Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2005-2021

To improve our comprehension of public participation in recent political meetings or rallies, let us assess the intention of the mass public to take part in this activity. Levels of citizen participation in political meetings or rallies were quite low for the period 2015-2021. Most of the general population said that they did not participate in this kind of political behaviour, and the level of self-reported participation has fallen since 2015 VPS. During the 2021 survey round, less than a fifth of the adult populace claimed to have participated either in the last year (9%) or in the more distant past (11%). The proportion of non-participants who wanted to attend political meetings or rallies has also dwindled somewhat over time. From the data presented in Table 19, it is apparent that this decline was most evident for non-members of political parties as well as non-members. This result is consistent with other findings in this subsection and suggests that the mass public seems to have become less interested in participating in political party organisations in the last six years.

Table 19: Public participation (and intention to participate) in a political meeting or rally by political party membership (row percentages), 2015-2021

		Have done it in the past year		Have done it in the more distant past		Have not done it but might do it		Have not done it and would never do it		Uncertain
Active Member										
2013	31	(3.58)	24	(3.74)	24	(3.47)	20	(3.17)	1	(0.80)
2015	22	(3.35)	34	(4.22)	20	(3.27)	24	(3.96)	0	(0.00)
2018	35	(4.65)	26	(4.10)	19	(3.80)	18	(2.94)	2	(0.86)
2021	35	(4.26)	22	(3.11)	16	(3.32)	26	(4.02)	1	(0.70)
Inactive Member										
2013	15	(2.76)	29	(3.24)	30	(3.53)	24	(3.45)	1	(0.48)
2015	11	(1.83)	29	(3.00)	29	(2.89)	30	(2.70)	0	(0.06)
2018	15	(2.72)	19	(3.13)	27	(3.35)	35	(3.34)	3	(1.53)
2021	13	(2.51)	21	(3.94)	19	(2.94)	42	(4.75)	5	(1.57)
Non-member										
2013	5	(0.84)	12	(1.08)	28	(1.47)	53	(1.67)	2	(0.44)
2015	4	(0.67)	9	(0.93)	27	(1.41)	58	(1.57)	1	(0.35)
2018	4	(0.69)	10	(1.08)	26	(1.73)	58	(1.83)	3	(0.49)
2021	5	(0.70)	8	(0.98)	19	(1.36)	64	(1.72)	4	(0.79)

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2015-2021

If a citizen was a member of a political party, then they were much more likely to have recently attended a political meeting or rally. Around a third of active members had attended events of this type in the twelve months prior to the interview and a smaller percentage of inactive members had also gone to a political meeting or rally during this period (Table 19). Political party members were also liable to engage in other kinds of political activity. Consider that, for example, nearly a fifth (17%) of active members had contacted a politician or a civil servant in the twelve months prior to the interview to express their views. This level of contact is three times the national average, and five times greater than those who were not members of political parties. An analogous outcome was evident if we assess public attendance at government imbizos and political party membership²⁴. In summation, it would appear that affiliation with a political party was robustly (and positively) associated with different kinds of political behaviour.

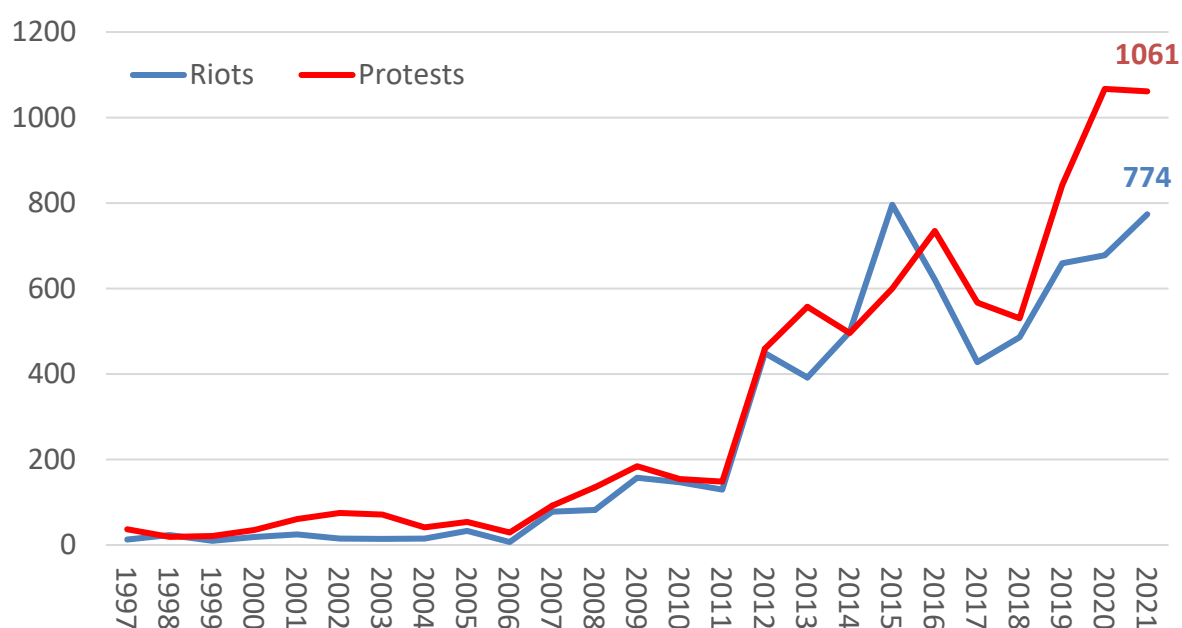
7.5. Demonstrations and Street Protests

When people are unhappy with their political leaders, they may resort to unconventional methods with the aim of influencing politicians or policy decisions. The histories of most

²⁴ More than a quarter of active political party members had attended a government imbizo either often (15%) or very often (12%). This level of attendance is 19 percentage points above the national average, and 22 percentage points greater than those who were not members of a political party.

Western democracies provide plenty of evidence of how citizens have resorted to protest actions (and other unconventional methods) to resist unpopular policies (Kaase 2011). South Africa has recorded a high number of protest actions during the post-apartheid period (Seekings & Nattrass, 2015). Protests were nearly always concentrated on local issues and focused on addressing the needs of their communities. Kotzé (2001) argues that the persistently higher level of protest among the general population under apartheid may have created a national culture of protest in South Africa. We will examine public attitudes towards protest activity in this subsection, looking at the how acceptable different types of protest actions are. In order to place this examination in context, it will also be necessary to assess past participation in public marches and demonstrations. This will allow the research team to better understand how past behaviour has influenced attitudes towards political participation in South Africa.

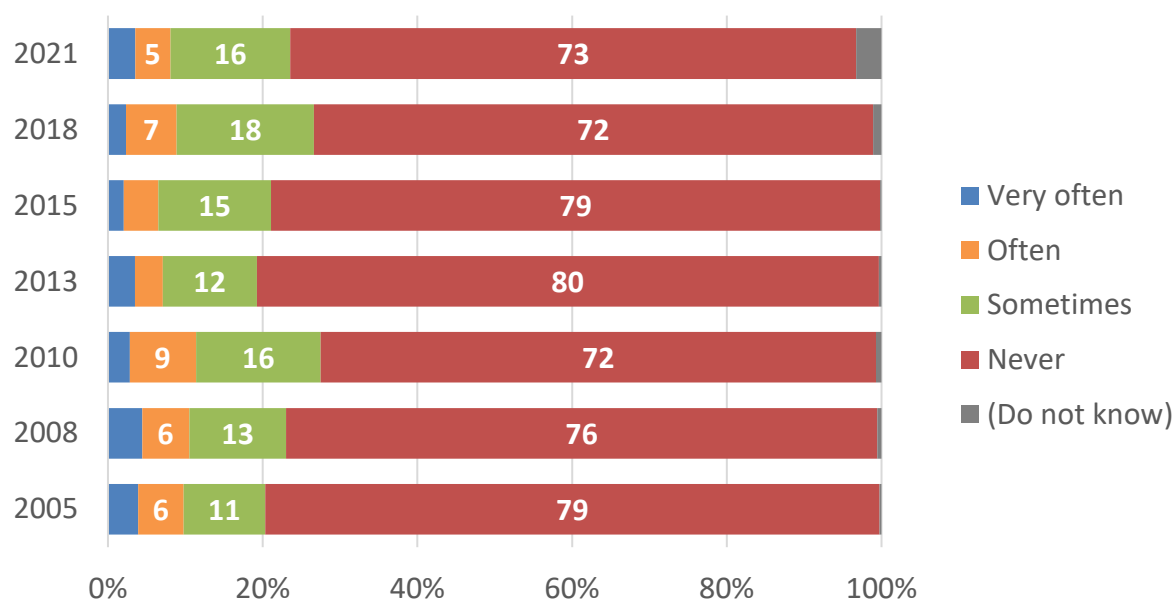
Figure 46: Number of recorded riots and protests in South Africa for the period 1997-2021



Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) 1997-2021

Since the early 2000s, scholars like Alexander (2010) have observed a growing wave of protests over service delivery, municipal demarcations, and other issues (also see Pithouse 2014). To provide context to this contention let us assess data gathered by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) on mass demonstrations and protests in South Africa during the modern period (**Figure 46**). The country has experienced 14,619 such events between 1997 and 2021, a large proportion (45%) of these events could be classified as either mob violence or a violent demonstration (i.e., riots). The bulk (86%) of the demonstrations recorded by the ACLED occurred between 2012 and 2021. Protest activity appeared to increase considerably in the COVID-19 pandemic period, increasing from an average of 1253 events per annum during the period 2015-2019 to an average of 1790 events per annum during 2020-2021. The data presented suggests that as the general population has become more dissatisfied with the political status quo in South Africa, the number of protests and riots have increased.

Figure 47: Public responses to the question: '[h]ow often, if ever, do you attend public marches?', 2005-2021



Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2005-2021

To provide an assessment of who participates in protest activities, respondents in the VPS were asked how often they took part in public marches. The frequency of citizen participation in this activity are portrayed in **Figure 47** for the period 2005-2021, results show that most do not involve themselves in this political activity. According to the VPS 2021 data, a quarter of the adult public claimed to have engaged in public marches at least sometimes. Roughly a tenth of the adult populace said that they attended public marches either very often (4%) or often (5%). It is apparent that levels of self-reported attendance in public marches have remained relatively stable during this period. Now let us turn our attention to public participation in demonstrations, assessing the tendency of the average adult citizen to take part in this activity. Self-reported participation in a demonstration (including intention to participate amongst non-participants) is displayed in Table 20 by political party membership for the period 2015-2021.

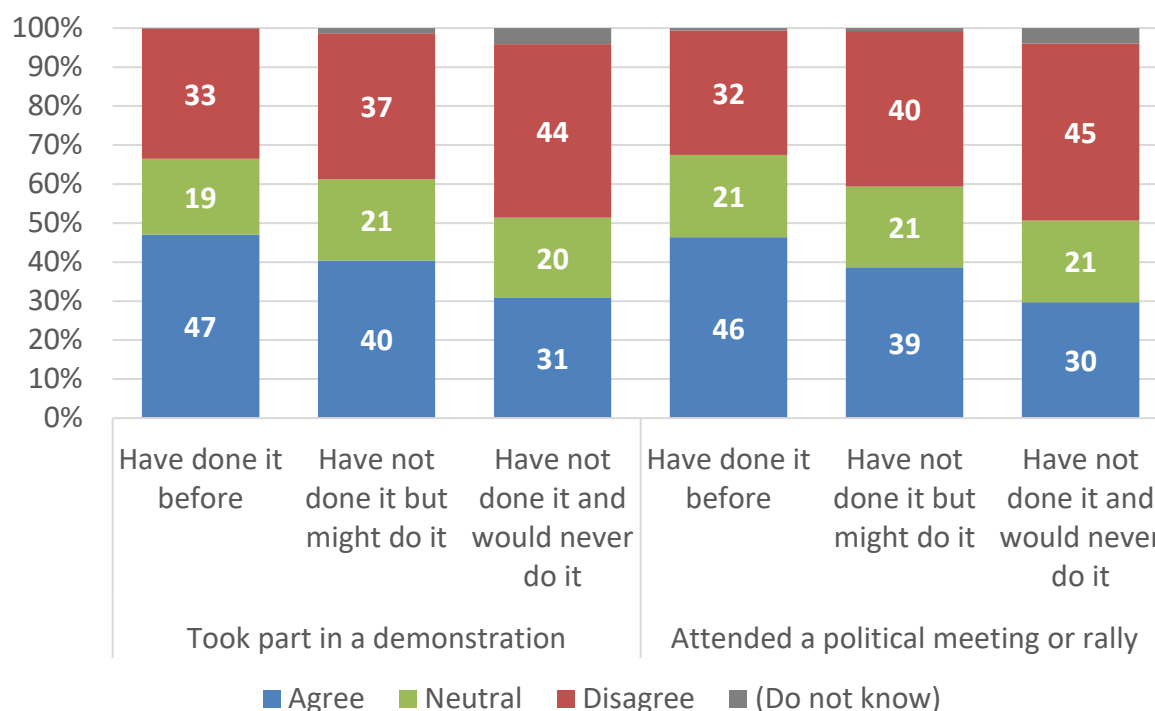
Table 20: Public participation (and intention to participate) in a demonstration by political party membership (row percentages), 2015-2021

		Have done it in the past year		Have done it in the more distant past		Have not done it but might do it		Have not done it and would never do it		Uncertain	
Active Member											
2013	16	(2.86)	15	(2.87)	35	(3.98)	34	(3.72)	1	(0.69)	
2015	11	(2.66)	21	(3.60)	35	(4.15)	32	(4.06)	1	(0.77)	
2018	13	(3.13)	14	(3.04)	33	(4.39)	35	(4.59)	5	(1.48)	
2021	15	(3.13)	20	(3.35)	24	(3.58)	36	(4.35)	5	(1.72)	
Inactive Member											
2013	5	(1.72)	21	(3.15)	38	(3.66)	36	(3.66)	1	(0.43)	
2015	4	(1.17)	20	(2.63)	33	(2.95)	42	(3.04)	0	(0.11)	
2018	12	(2.61)	12	(2.37)	33	(3.61)	42	(3.56)	1	(0.41)	
2021	6	(1.82)	19	(5.09)	22	(3.25)	46	(4.51)	7	(2.21)	
Non-member											
2013	3	(0.69)	7	(0.85)	30	(1.52)	57	(1.65)	2	(0.50)	
2015	2	(0.40)	5	(0.77)	30	(1.49)	62	(1.57)	1	(0.29)	
2018	3	(0.55)	7	(0.95)	30	(1.80)	55	(1.85)	5	(0.81)	
2021	3	(0.51)	8	(1.00)	20	(1.38)	63	(1.78)	6	(1.18)	

Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2015-2021

Most of the general population stated that they have never participated in a demonstration. During the 2021 VPS round, less than a fifth of the adult populace claimed to have participated in a demonstration in the past. A twentieth of adult citizens told fieldworkers that they had done this in the twelve months prior to the VPS interview and 11% said that they had done it in the more distant past (11%). Levels of self-reported past participation have remained fairly stable over time; this suggests that the recent upswing in protests noted in **Figure 46** is due to increased activity amongst the small minority of adult citizens who regularly participates in protests. This group appears to be politically active individuals who are members of political parties, a finding that is consistent with what was observed in Section 7.4. A significant proportion of non-participants said that they would be prepared to join a demonstration in the future. It is evident from the trend data that the percentage of non-participants who might take part in a demonstration fell from 36% in 2018 VPS to 24% in 2021. The bulk of this decline has occurred amongst people who were not members of political parties.

Figure 48: Belief that street protests are more effective than voting by past participation in demonstrations and political meetings/rallies

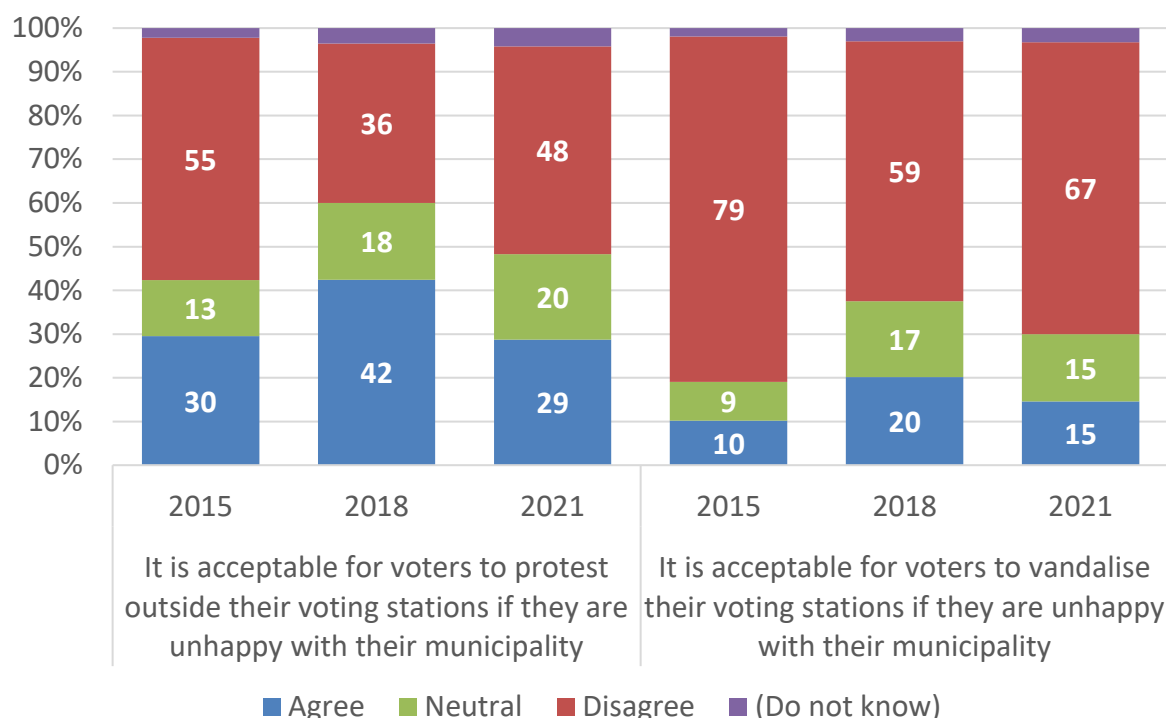


Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

But how do ordinary South Africans view street protests in South Africa? Does the public believe street protests are an effective vehicle to achieve the goals of the protestors? In order to answer these questions, respondents were asked whether they agreed with the statement "protesting in the street is more effective than voting". In late 2021, about a third (34%) of the adult public agreed with this statement while approximately two-fifths (41%) disagreed that street protests were effective. The remainder either gave a neutral response (21%) or were uncertain of how to answer (4%). These outcomes are similar to what was observed in VPS 2015 which suggests the durability of public attitudes on this issue. If an individual had participated in a demonstration, then they were more liable to agree with the statement (**Figure 48**). This shows that exposure to street activism improves perceptions of the efficacy of this kind of non-conventional politics²⁵. Intention to demonstrate amongst non-participants also had a statistically significant (albeit smaller) effect on whether a citizen believed that street protests were more effective than electoral participation. Past participation in a political meeting or rally was also found to have a robust effect on attitudes here.

²⁵ Recent participation in a demonstration had a particular strong effect on attitudes towards street protests. Consider, for example, that 61% of those who had taken part in a demonstration in the past year agreed with the statement. This can be compared, unfavourably, with only 41% of those who had taken part in the more distant past.

Figure 49: Views on the acceptability of protest directed at voting stations to register municipal discontent for the period 2015-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2015-2021

The VPS include two experimental measures related to protest action in VPS 2015, with a specific emphasis on action directed at voting stations as the basis for registering municipal discontent. The first item asked respondents to register their level of agreement with the view that “it is acceptable for voters to protest outside their voting stations if they are unhappy with their municipality”. The second measure focused on more violent protest action and asked about whether “It is acceptable for voters to vandalise their voting stations if they are unhappy with their municipality”. In both instances, respondents were provided with a five-point response scale ranging from strong agreement to strong disagreement. Mass responses to these two items are displayed for the last three rounds of the VPS in **Figure 49**. The VPS 2021 results indicate that close to a third (29%) of adults believe that protesting outside one’s voting station is an acceptable means of expressing discontent with the performance of one’s municipality. Turning to views on more violent forms of action, involving the vandalising of voting stations, there was an appreciably lower share (15%) that felt such behaviour is permissible.

7.6. Past Electoral Participation

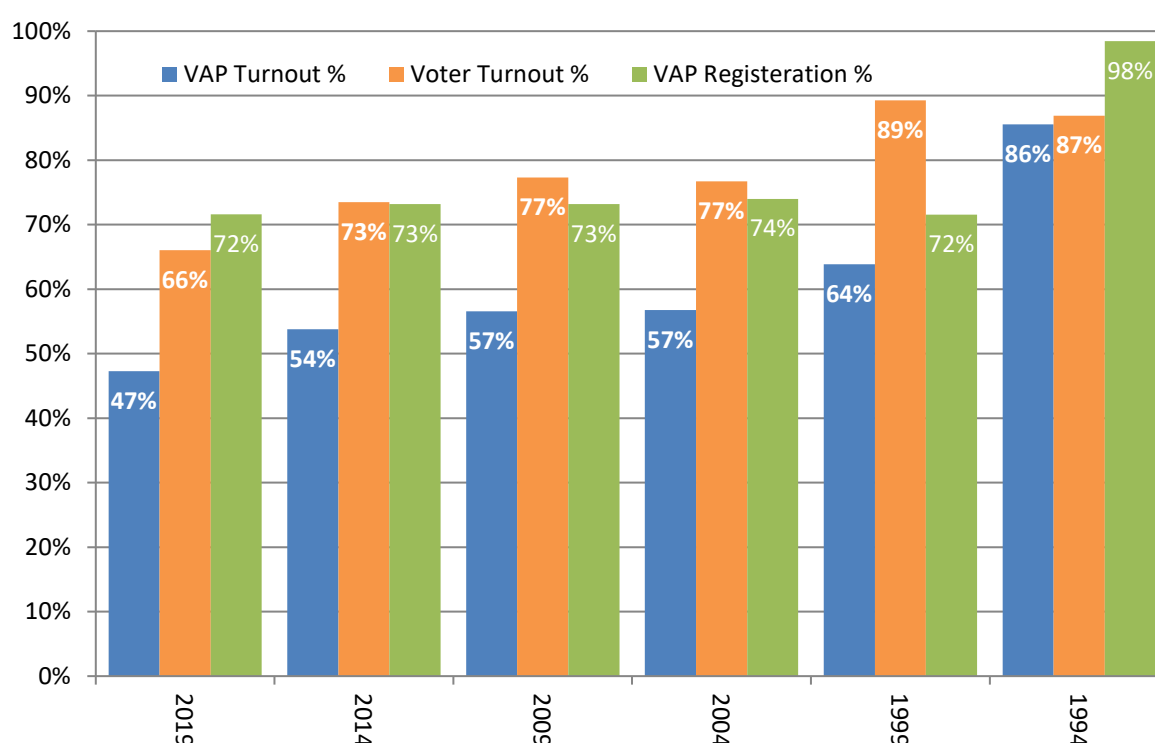
This subsection will assess public levels of self-reported election participation amongst the country’s voting age population (VAP)²⁶ for the most recent period. First, we will investigate the regularity of participation amongst the general population and how this has changed over time. Obviously, these statistics are prone to some degree of measurement error, given that they are premised on self-reported electoral participation. Elections-related literature shows

²⁶ The voting age population (VAP) includes all citizens above the legal voting age.

that respondents overreporting of voting behaviour tends to be a common occurrence²⁷. Then the subsection will turn its attention to the main reasons that respondents gave for non-participation. Special consideration will be given to political disinterest which has emerged as the main driver of non-participation amongst the VAP in previous VPS reports.

Before beginning our assessment of self-reported voting behaviour, it would be instructive to consider existing objective data on electoral turnout in South Africa. From a cross-national perspective, the country has tended to fare favourably in terms of voter turnout, particularly in the early years of our democracy. As can be seen in Figure 50, voter turn-out²⁸ was close to ninety per cent (88%) in South Africa during the first democratic elections. This kind of turnout has declined since the 1990s, falling from 89% in 1999 NPE to 66% in 2019 NPE. This is similar to what is observed in other post-colonial democracies like India. If we measured turn-out as a percentage of VAP then an even steeper decline would be observed, falling 39 percentage points since 1994. However, turnout in South Africa is still much higher than what is seen in older democracies. For example, in 2017 less than half of all registered voters participated in French parliamentary elections.

Figure 50: Voter Turnout Data on National and Provincial Elections in South Africa, 1994-2019



Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 1994-2019

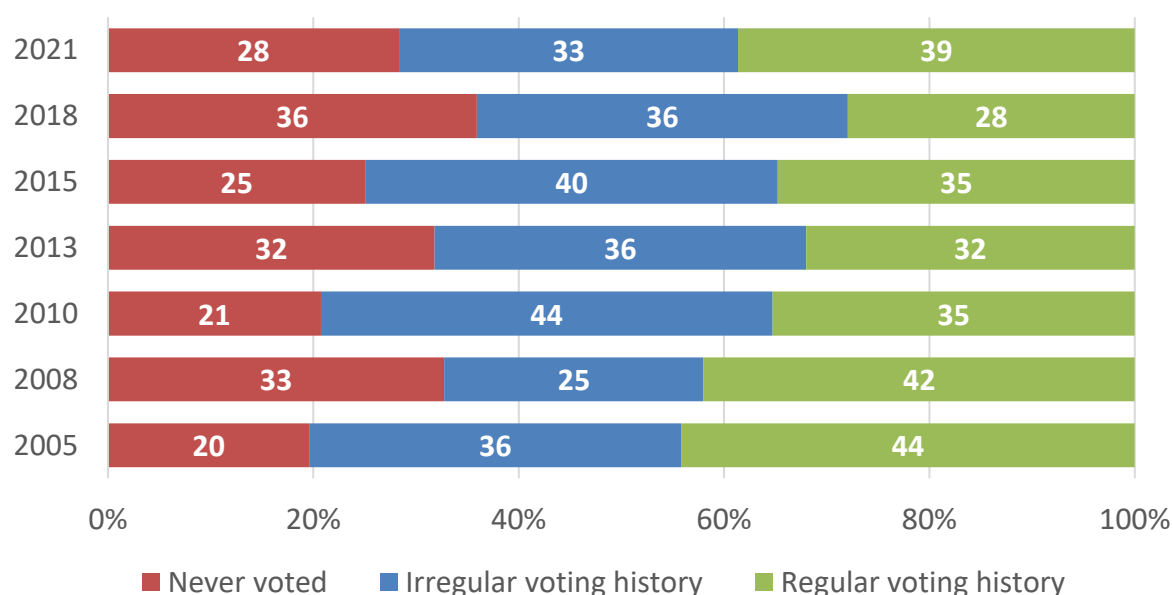
To ascertain the history of electoral participation among the South African VAP, VPS respondents were asked a series of questions regarding their voting history. Using this data, we segmented the VAP into regular and irregular voters. The former voted in almost every

²⁷ Belli et al. (1999) observe that the over-reporting of voting behaviour is one of the most frequently observed survey measurement errors.

²⁸ Voter turnout is usually defined as the percentage of registered voters who actually voted.

election (whether municipal or parliamentary) while the latter voted more infrequently. Those who did not vote were classified as ‘non-voters’. If we look only at people who were eligible to vote at the time of the survey, we can see that slightly over a quarter (28%) said that they had never voted before in VPS 2021 (Figure 51). This is an improvement over what was observed in VPS 2018 when 36% of eligible voters gave the same answer. Older people were less likely to report being regular voters than their younger counterparts. More than three-fifths (61%) of those aged 65 and above, for instance, indicated that they were regular voters in VPS 2021.

Figure 51: Voting history among the voting age population by survey round, 2005-2021 (row percentage)



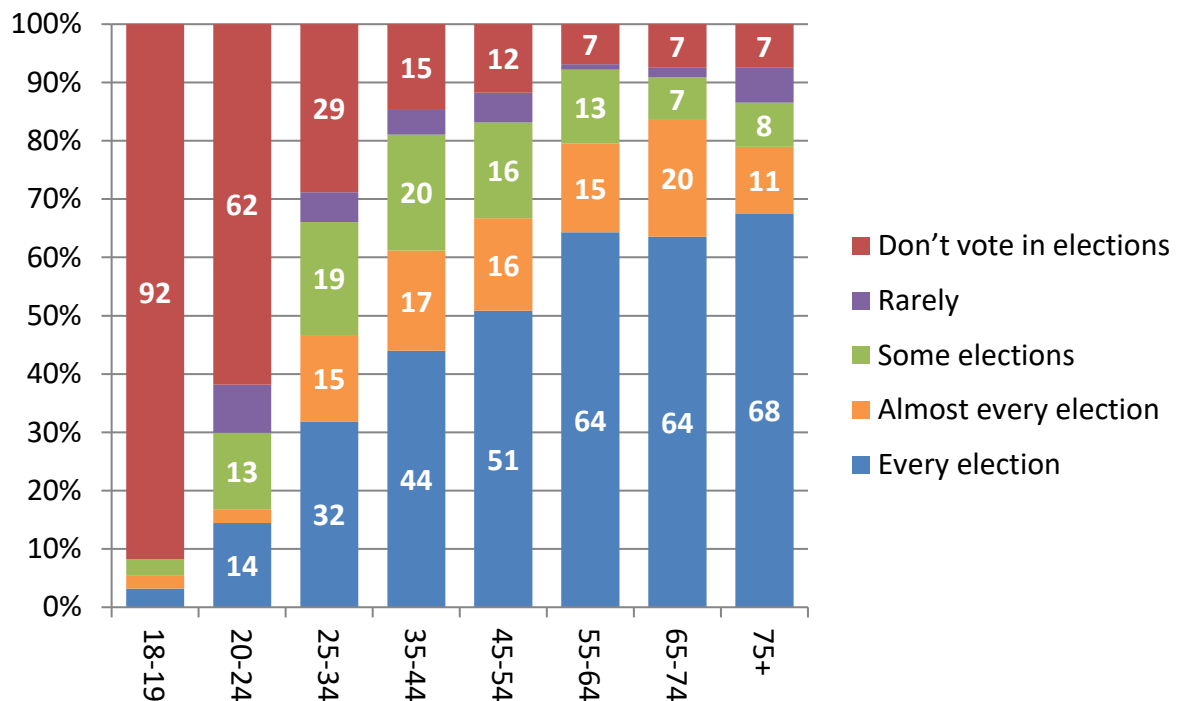
Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

Note: The graph includes only those respondents that were age eligible to vote at the time of surveying.

To better understand the relationship between age and experience of voting, we investigated self-reported voting behaviour by age group. It is apparent from the VPS 2021 data that the likelihood (and, therefore, opportunity) of being a regular voter increases with age (Figure 52). People of pensionable age are much more likely to tell fieldworkers that they vote in every election than those who are younger than 35 years of age. Consider, for example, that almost four-fifths (79%) of those older than 74 years said that they voted in either every election or almost every election. This partly reflects a lifecycle effect, with older citizens having been age eligible to vote in more elections, but it also speaks to the challenge of getting a new generation of voters registered and to the ballot box for the first time. This appears to be a particular problem for Generation Z²⁹, with very low levels of regular voting reported amongst this cohort. This reaffirms the importance of the Electoral Commission adopting a strong focus on youth turnout (especially post-millennials) in their communications campaigns.

²⁹ Persons born after 2000 and later are generally considered Generation Z and are sometime referred to as post-millennials.

Figure 52: Responses to the question: “[h]ow often do you vote in elections in South Africa?” among the voting age population by age cohort

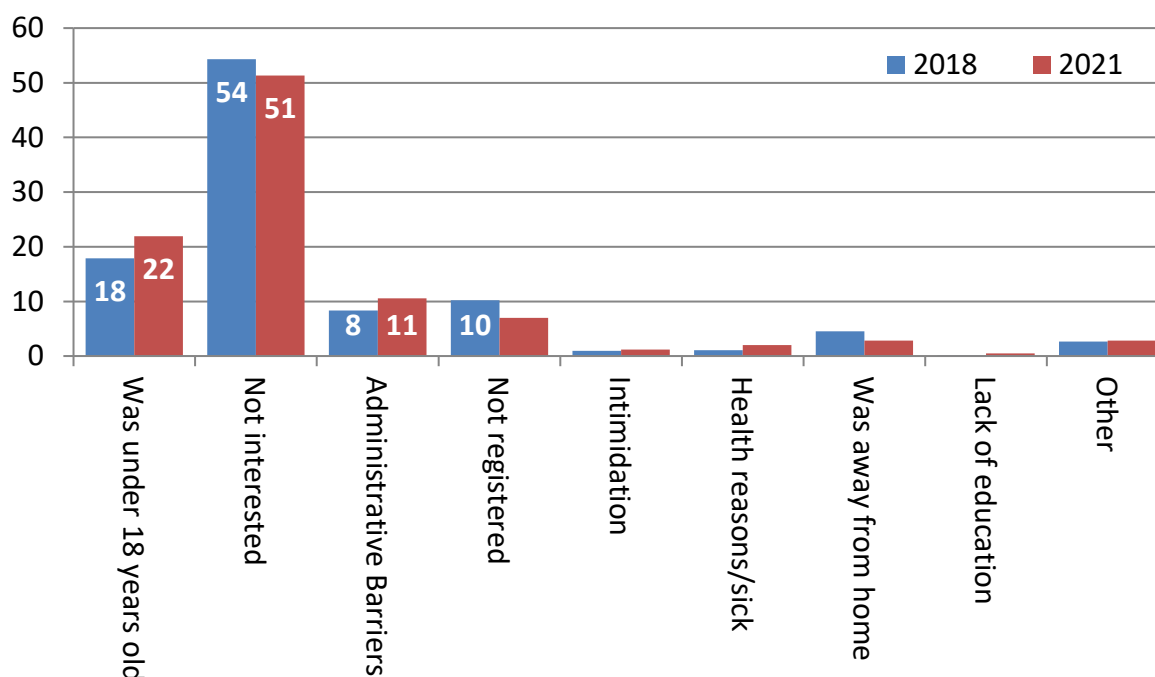


Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

Note: The graph includes only those respondents that were age eligible to vote at the time of surveying.

Persons who did not vote in recent elections were asked to state the main reason for not participating. Responses to this question for age eligible non-participants are displayed in Figure 53 for VPS 2021 as well as VPS 2018. The results show that the main reason (by a considerable margin) for non-participation was political disillusionment in VPS 2021. It would appear that more than half of all non-participants said that they were simply not interested in voting. Only a minority (11%) cited administrative barriers (e.g., polling station too far away) as the main reason that they did not in the last election. Less than a tenth (7%) said that lack of registration prevented them from voting. Intimidation of some sort also did not feature as a prominent rationale for non-participation. Similar results can be observed in VPS 2018, suggesting that public responses to this question are quite stable over time. From the data analysis, it is clear that the main causes of declining voter participation are “demand side” rather than “supply side”. This is consistent with what we discerned in Section 10.2.2 and shows that public dissatisfaction with the political status quo is impeding South African democracy.

Figure 53: Main reason for not voting in recent national elections amongst age eligible non-participants, 2018 and 2021

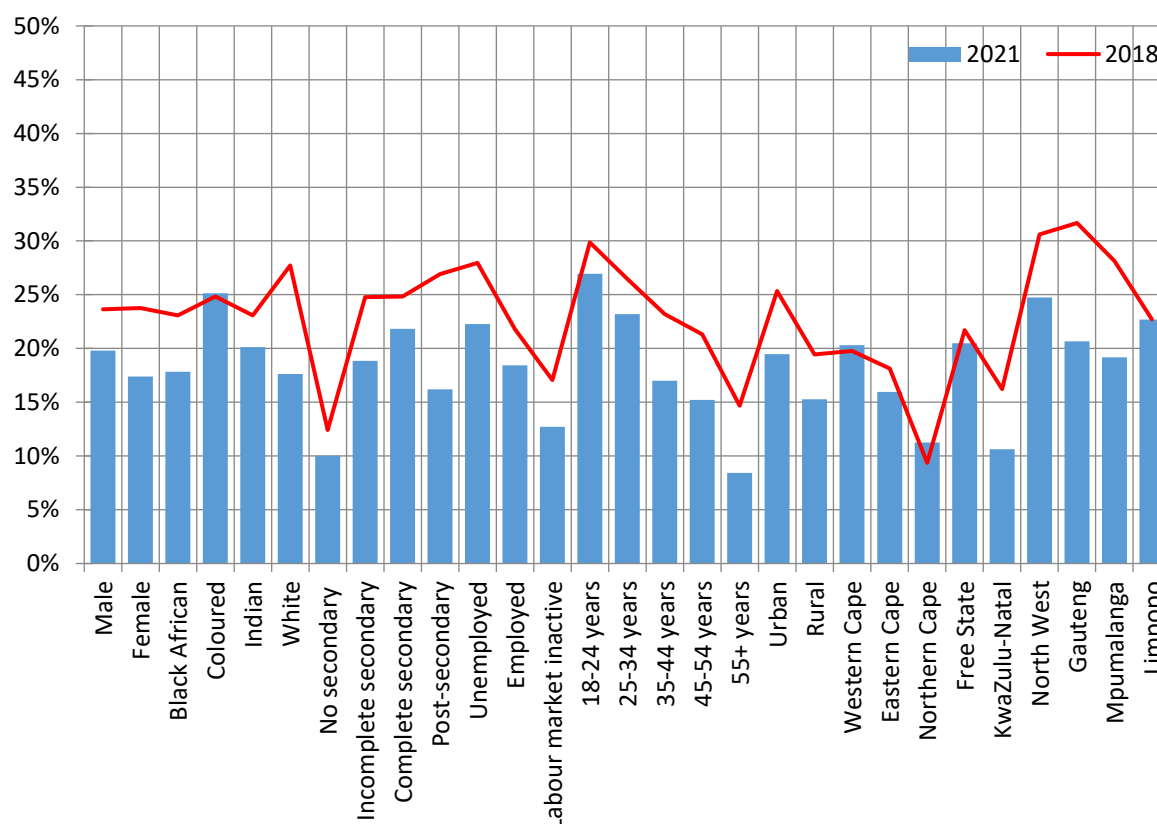


Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2018; 2021

Note: The graph includes only those respondents that were age eligible to vote at the time of surveying who did not vote in the last national election.

It is clear from the data presented in Figure 53 that the electoral body have no direct control over the main drivers of voter abstention. In view of these results, it would appear that the electoral authorities are meeting their targets and preventing 'supply side' factors from inhibiting voter intention. To greater provide an insight into how detrimental political disillusionment is for South African electoral democracy, let us assess the percentage of the VAP who are dissuaded from electoral participation by a cynicism about politicians and politics. During the VPS 2021 about a fifth (19%) of the VAP said that they did not vote in the last election because of political disinterest. This is a mild improvement over what was observed in VPS 2018 when 24% of the VAP told fieldworkers that disinterest was the main reason they did not vote. This disparity is perhaps not too surprising, as aforementioned in Section 2, voter interest tends to be higher during a NPEs than LGEs. As a result, turnout rates for the elections at the municipal level in South Africa tend to be lower than what is observed for the NPE. To properly gauge the significant effect that apathy has on the VAP, let us investigate its impact across a range of different socio-demographic groups.

Figure 54: Percentage of the voting age population who did not participate in the last election because of political disinterest across different socio-demographic subgroups, 2018 and 2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2018; 2021

Note: The graph includes only those respondents that were age eligible to vote at the time of surveying.

The proportion who did not vote because of political disinterest are presented in Figure 54, data is provided for VPS 2021 as well as VPS 2018. We found that gender did not extent a significant effect on whether an individual would be inclined to let apathy prevent them from voting. Political disinterest appeared to have the largest effect on the youth. More than a quarter of those who were aged 18-24 said that they did not vote in the last national election because of a disenchantment with politics. This result show that it is imperative that continued effort be devoted to encouraging these young citizens to cast their ballot in the coming elections. Significant population group effects can be observed in the figure, insouciance was a more substantial driver of non-participation amongst the Coloured minority than other groups. Data shows that urban areas are more disengaged from electoral participation due to indifference. We observed some provincial effects in our analysis, political disinterest was low in KwaZulu-Natal and the Northern Cape. As a reason for non-participation, disillusionment was less prominent in Gauteng and Mpumalanga in VPS 2021 than in VPS 2018. This outcome may be due to the distinct character of politics in those periods and merits further study.

8. Voting attitudes

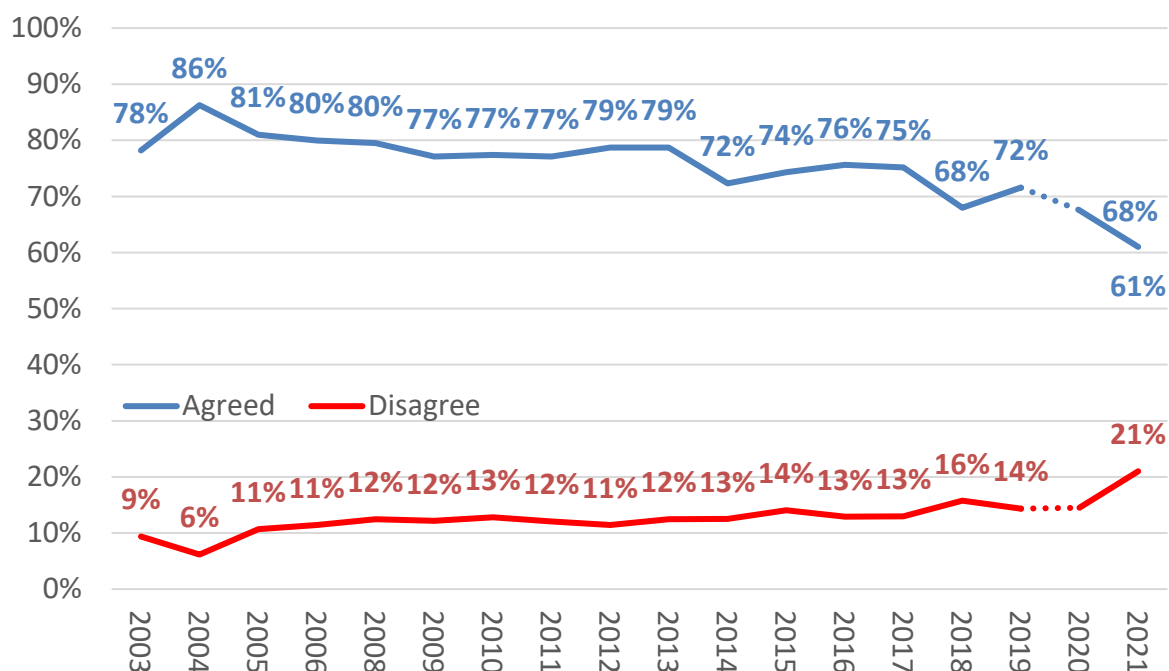
In their classic text on political participation and voting, *The American Voter*, Campbell and colleagues (1960) maintain that electoral behaviour relates to what the authors termed the 'individual's psychological involvement in politics'. Similarly in their influential book, *Civic Culture*, Almond and Verba (1989) stress that certain civic attitudes may serve to motivate political participation, especially cognitive, affective and evaluative orientations of the potential voter. The affective orientations that these scholars were most concerned with are comprised of the following: a sense of internal and external electoral efficacy, a belief in the duty to vote as well as political interest. For Almond and Verba, evaluative orientations focus on whether voting was seen as an effective action that could bring about change. Informed by the work of these scholars, this section investigates public perceptions of political participation in South Africa, focusing in particular on attitudes towards voting and elections.

8.1. The Duty to Vote

Without public involvement in the democratic process, democracy itself lacks legitimacy. Indeed, amongst political scientists, public participation in politics is widely thought to be the defining dimension of democratic citizenship. Unless citizens participate in the creation of public policy, and their choices shape government action, then democracy as a whole is hollow. Consequently, it is important that all citizens have a strong sense of civic duty to participate in elections. This subsection will examine the strength of this civic ideal in South Africa, assessing how attitudes have changed over time. It will show that the public commitment to voting as a civic ideal has weakened during the last five years. The subsection will conclude with an investigation into whether the mass public supports making election participation mandatory.

In 2003 VPS results showed that many South Africans place a high value on the right to vote. Almost four-fifths (78%) of the mass public said that they considered it the duty of all citizens to participate in elections. During the period 2003-2012 a clear majority of the public believed that this form of political activity is their most fundamental democratic right (Figure 55). However, levels of public agreement with this statement began to fall slowly in the mid-2010s. The largest drop in agreement occurred between SASAS 2017 and SASAS 2021, falling 14 percentage points over this four year period. In summation, the belief in the duty to vote among the South African public has decline in recent years and is not as robust as two decades ago. Although this finding is in line with international trends (Goldfarb & Sigelman 2010), it is important to understand voting attitudes among South Africans and how these views differ by socio-demographic subgroups.

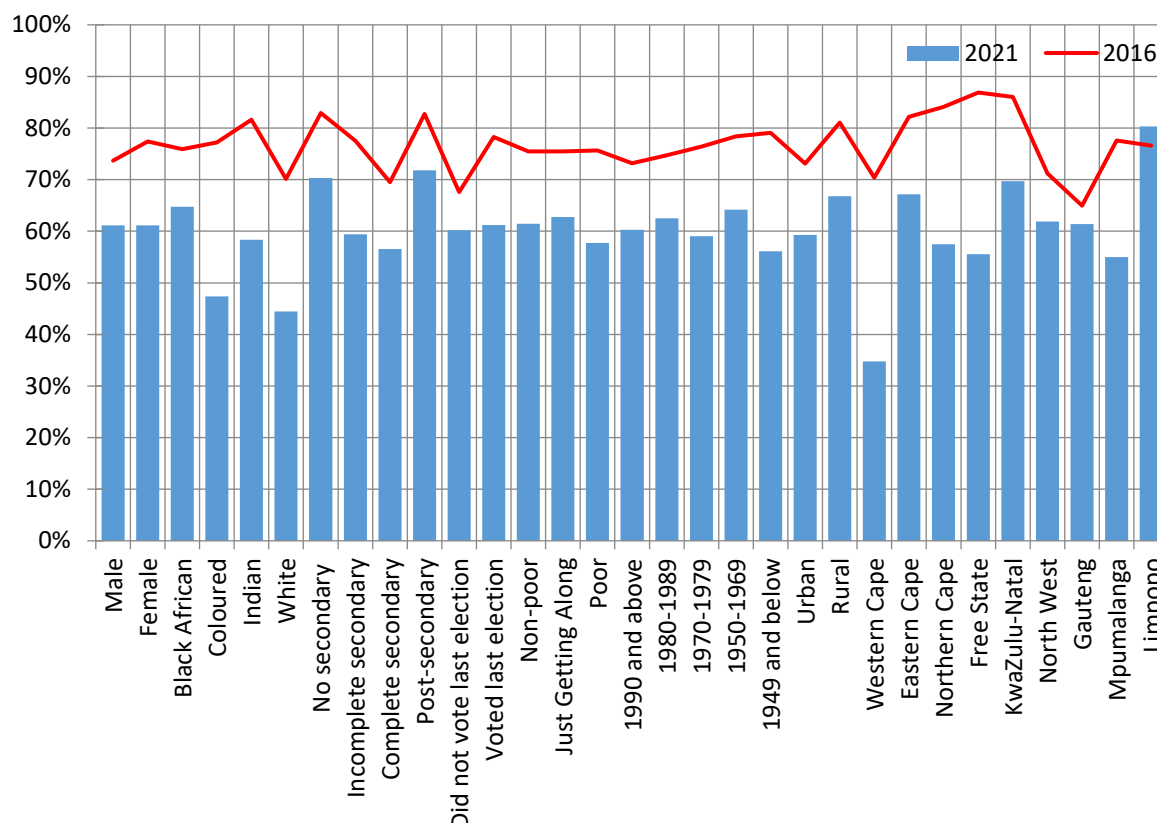
Figure 55: Public agreement and disagreement with the statement: '[i]t is the duty of all citizens to vote', 2003-2021



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2003-2021

Ahead of the 2021 LGE, almost three fifths of South Africans (57%) believed that it was their duty to vote while 22% disagreed with this statement. A fifth of the adult populace was ambivalent about the issue, stating they neither agreed nor disagreed that it was their duty to vote). In order to obtain a more nuanced appreciation of changing levels of agreement on this issue, a subgroup analysis was conducted. For this purpose, we examined the percentage who agreed with the duty statement for 2016 and 2021. As reflected in Figure 56, a high level of agreement is found across diverse socio-economic groups in SASAS 2016. Agreement levels ranged between 65% and 87% on average in that survey round, and duty to vote was relatively evenly distributed across the diverse socio-demographic subgroups listed in the figure. Levels of subgroup variation were much greater in SASAS 2021 than in SASAS 2016, suggesting high levels of uneven attitudinal change over the period.

Figure 56: Percentage who agreed and strongly agreed with the statement “[i]t is the duty of all citizens to vote”, 2016 and 2021



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2016; 2021

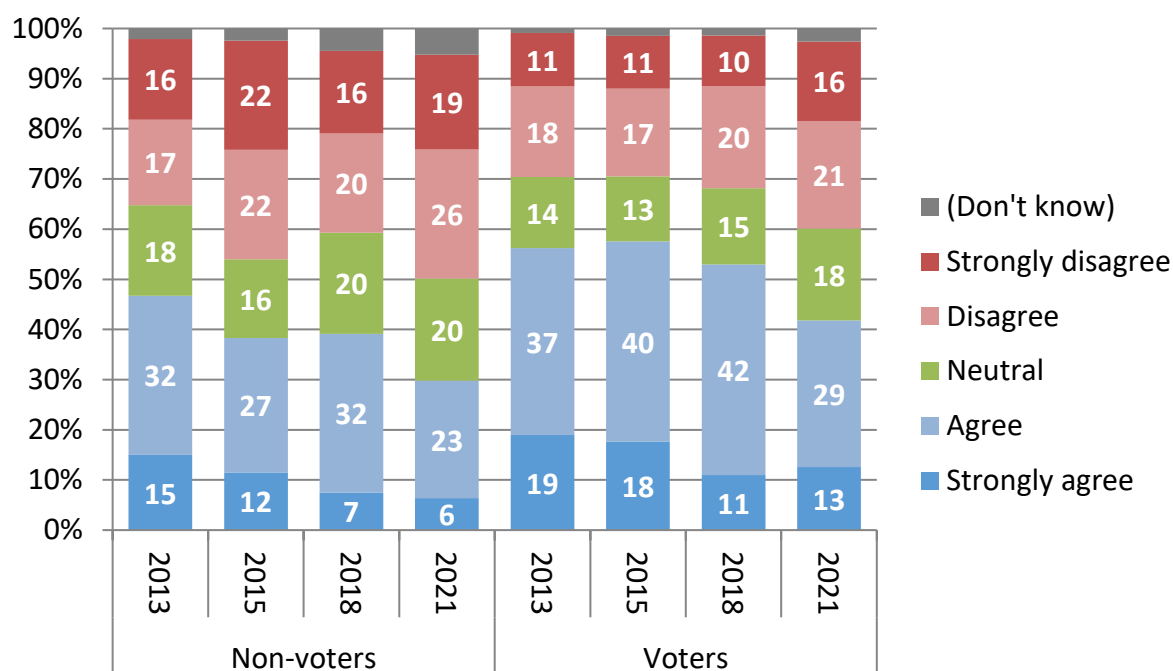
If agreement with the duty to vote statement is analysed by birth cohort, it becomes evident that agreement levels were lowest among the Born Free Generation. Birth cohort differences, however, were less apparent in SASAS 2021 than they were in SASAS 2016. The birth cohort that suffered the greatest decline in agreement level was the 1949 and before group, decreasing 23 percentage points during the five year period. This analysis points to a growing sense of disillusionment with democracy amongst the general population. If attitudes are assessed by age group in SASAS 2021 then we can see distinct differences between younger groups. About half (53%) of the 20–24 age group agreed with the statement, and this can be compared to 58% of the 25–34 group and 59% of the 16–19 group. A moderate educational attainment effect was discovered in SASAS 2021, adults who had not enter secondary school indicated higher levels of agreement than their more educated peers. Although an educational attainment differential was observed in SASAS 2016, it was not as linear as what was observed in SASAS 2021.

Substantial population group differences that favoured the Black African majority were observed in Figure 56. Due to a significant decline in agreement levels amongst minorities, this racial differential increased between SASAS 2016 and SASAS 2021. The minority group that experienced the greatest decline in agreement level was the Coloured population, falling from 77% at the start of the period to 47% at the end. Spatial variation in agreement with the duty to vote statement was also apparent in the figure. Adult residents of rural settlements were less likely to agree than those in urban areas. The size of this disparity

remained constant between 2016 and 2021. Most provincial residents became less likely to agree with the statement during the five year period under consideration. The largest downswings on democratic satisfaction were in the Western Cape and the Free State. Only residents of Limpopo became more positive on this issue over time, agreement levels in that province increased from 77% in SASAS 2016 to 80% in SASAS 2021.

One proposal to increase voter turnout amongst the South African public is to make voting compulsory. In order to test whether the general populace supported this proposal, a question was included in the VPS questionnaire which asked respondents to what extent they agreed that voting should be made compulsory. As is evident from Figure 57, on average, in 2021 just under a third felt that voting should be compulsory, with a similar share stating it should not be mandatory. A fifth (19%) was ambivalent. South Africans are therefore divided on this issue and a decision to make voting compulsory will meet some resistance. As already stated elsewhere in this subsection, the public commitment to voting has declined during the last decade. This would suggest that popular support for mandatory voting would have decreased in recent years. To test this thesis, let us examine how support for compulsory electoral participation has changed between 2013 and 2021.

Figure 57: Public agreement and disagreement about whether voting should be made compulsory by voter status (column percentages), 2013-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013-2021

More than half (53%) of the adult populace agreed with the mandatory election participation statement in 2013 VPS while only 30% disagreed and the remainder (17%) were neutral on this issue. Public support for this proposal, in other words, has fallen during the period under discussion. Voting status appeared to be a key factor in predicting how adult citizens would answer the question on compulsory voting. Voters were much more likely to agree with the statement than voters (Figure 57). Support for this proposal fell for both voters and non-voters during the period, and voting differential remained (more or less) constant.

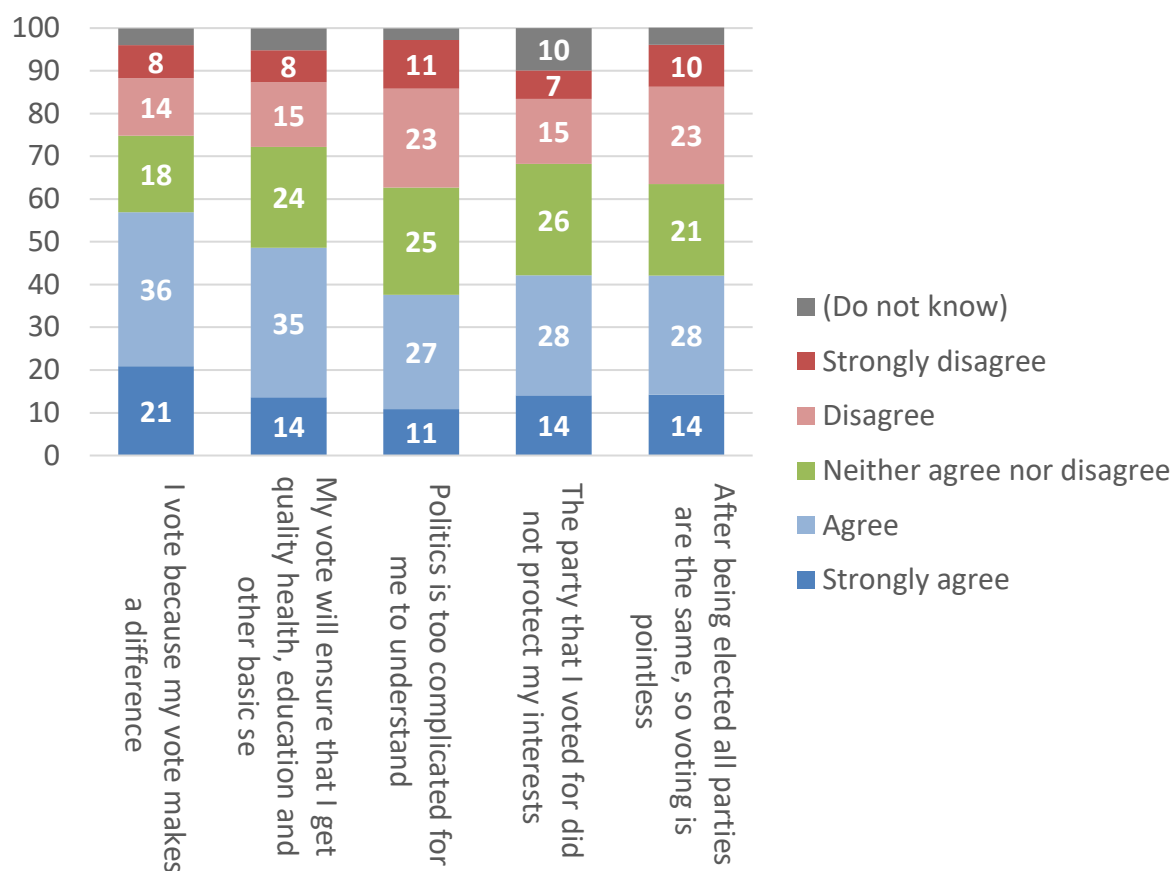
Investigating the matter further we found that political party membership played a key role in predicting attitudes here. A larger percentage (53%) of active party members agreed with the statement than inactive members (38%) or non-members (35%). Future research could allow us to better understand how this kind of voluntary association drives support for this proposal.

8.2. Internal and external efficacy

If citizens think that their electoral participation will have a meaningful influence on politics, then they are more likely to show up and vote. To better understand South Africans attitudes to election outcomes, public opinion on voting 'power' –or voter efficacy – must be examined. In this subsection, researchers will scrutinise public perceptions of voter efficacy and assess how these views have changed over time. Traditionally scholars have made a distinction between internal and external voter efficacy (Balch 1974) and this study makes a clear delineation between these two forms: (i) *internal efficacy* refers to the perception that the voter has the ability to influence and change the political system; and (ii) *external efficacy* can be defined as the perception that political elites and institutions are responsive to voter influence. This subsection will differentiate between the two forms of efficacy, examining how the general populace differs in terms of how effective they think elections are.

During the last round of the VPS, respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about the effectiveness of electoral participation (Figure 58). Let us begin with the statement: "I vote because my vote makes a difference"; just over half (57%) of South Africans agreed with this statement in VPS 2021 and 22% disagreed. It would appear that almost two-fifths of adult citizens believe that their vote either does not make a difference or they are ambivalent or unsure about the matter. This negative response is affirmed by the scepticism around the belief that voting will ensure quality health, education, or other basic services. Less than half (49%) believe that voting will ensure better quality services. Just under two fifths (38%) of the adult public believed that voting is too complicated to understand, compared to around a third (34%) that believe otherwise and nearly a fifth (25%) that are undecided. While this is not a classic internal efficacy measure in the sense that it speaks to the power of one's vote, it does address the perceived alienation from or affinity with the political process.

Figure 58: Public agreement and disagreement with different statements about the internal and external efficacy of voting (column percentages)



Sources: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021.

It is evident from the figure that approximately two fifths of South Africans are convinced that politicians and institutions are not responsive to voter influence. In 2021 VPS a significant minority (42%) stated that they felt the party they voted for did not protect their interests. A quarter of South Africans (26%) were neutral in their response to this question while a minority (22%) agreed that their party protected their interests. Similar results were found for the statement ‘after being elected all parties are the same, so voting is pointless’. If a person was a regular voter than he/she had a greater tendency to believe that voting was an effective political action than irregular or non-voters. The level of difference was particularly large on metrics of internal efficacy, suggesting that exposure to the electoral process made people believe they had the ability to influence the political system.

It was apparent from the previous subsection that the sense of duty attached to voting had declined between 2013 and 2021. Given this, it is important to consider how public attitudes towards efficacy of electoral participation could change over time. In order to compare electoral attitudes during the last decade, each of the five items in Figure 58 were transformed into 0-100 agreement scales. The higher value on each scale specifies the degree of concord with the statement. Mean scores for each scale were provided for 2005-2020 period in Table 21. Looking at the results over the period, it would appear that the share of the general public who believed in the efficacy of their vote declined during the period, growing from 75 (SE=0.61) in 2005 VPS to 62 (SE=0.93) in 2021 VPS. The share that believes

their vote will ensure quality health, education and other basic services diminished during this period, falling from 69 (SE=0.67) in 2008 VPS to 58 (SE=0.88) in 2021 VPS.

Table 21: Perceptions of the political internal and external efficacy scales (0-100), 2005-2021)

	I vote because my vote makes a difference	After being elected all parties are the same, so voting is pointless	My vote will ensure that I get quality health, education and other basic services	The party that I voted for did not protect my interests	Politics is too complicated for me to understand
2005	75 (0.612)	42 (0.656)		52 (0.624)	55 (0.642)
2008	72 (0.570)	43 (0.628)	69 (0.568)	53 (0.591)	54 (0.651)
2010	69 (0.694)	42 (0.744)	65 (0.681)	49 (0.676)	50 (0.720)
2013	69 (0.814)	44 (0.883)	65 (0.845)	54 (0.752)	50 (0.833)
2015	70 (0.774)	44 (0.834)	65 (0.760)	51 (0.669)	45 (0.718)
2018	63 (0.812)	52 (0.854)	60 (0.809)	57 (0.746)	55 (0.812)
2021	62 (0.933)	53 (0.917)	58 (0.882)	57 (0.837)	51 (0.973)

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

A large segment of the public felt that voting is pointless since “after being elected all parties are the same”. The share who felt this way has also increased from 42 (SE=0.66) to 53 (SE=0.92) between 2005 VPS to 2021 VPS. Half of people seem to think that politics is too difficult to understand but patterns of responses on this issue have not changed much over the last two decades. In summation, public scepticism about effectiveness of voting has grown during the period. This finding is analogous with the declining perception, described in the previous subsection, that it is the duty of all citizens to vote. We can conclude from the downward trend that the mass public has become increasingly disillusioned with the performance of electoral democracy. This observation is in line with what was observed in Section 5.2, and suggests growing discontentment with the current status quo in South Africa.

In order to understand how different socio-demographic groups perceive the internal efficacy dimension, each of the internal efficacy statements were disaggregated by selected subgroups (Table 22). Population group was found to be a significant predictor of voting attitudes in South Africa. Black African respondents were more likely to believe that voting makes a difference, and that electoral participation ensures quality service delivery than

other population groups. This may be related to the relationship between educational attainment and internal efficacy³⁰. The racial differential observed here became more robust between 2013 VPS and 2021 VPS. Older birth cohorts were more confident that their vote made a difference when compared with their younger peers. If weigh against earlier generations, more recent birth cohorts were less likely to agree that voting ensured quality services. Robust birth cohort differences were noted for this indicator in 2021 VPS but not 2013 VPS. This seems to suggest that young people have become more skeptical about this issue during the period under review.

Table 22: Citizen attitudes towards internal voting efficacy by select demographics, 2013 and 2021

2013 and 2021												
	I vote because my vote makes a difference					Diff.	My vote will ensure that I get quality health, education and other basic services					Diff.
	2013		2021		2013		2021					
Birth Cohort												
1990 and above	67	(1.31)	59	(0.99)	-8	66	(1.32)	56	(0.91)	-10		
1980-1989	65	(1.23)	63	(1.12)	-2	63	(1.23)	56	(1.11)	-7		
1970-1979	71	(1.20)	65	(1.24)	-7	64	(1.20)	60	(1.18)	-4		
1950-1969	70	(0.90)	64	(1.07)	-6	67	(0.88)	61	(0.99)	-6		
1949 and below	72	(1.26)	70	(2.06)	-1	64	(1.33)	65	(2.11)	0		
Population Group												
Black African	69	(0.71)	64	(0.67)	-5	66	(0.71)	60	(0.64)	-7		
Coloured	64	(1.27)	55	(1.30)	-9	56	(1.26)	48	(1.20)	-8		
Indian	67	(1.43)	59	(1.78)	-8	60	(1.34)	51	(1.46)	-9		
White	74	(1.18)	58	(1.66)	-16	63	(1.20)	56	(1.47)	-7		
Province												
Western Cape	69	(1.23)	52	(1.57)	-17	52	(1.39)	46	(1.31)	-6		
Eastern Cape	63	(1.32)	65	(1.74)	1	65	(1.33)	65	(1.59)	0		
Northern Cape	79	(2.10)	69	(1.89)	-10	69	(2.22)	65	(1.78)	-4		
Free State	73	(2.25)	65	(1.96)	-8	65	(2.19)	62	(1.83)	-3		
KwaZulu-Natal	62	(1.29)	66	(1.09)	4	66	(1.20)	60	(1.11)	-7		
North West	67	(1.84)	62	(1.72)	-6	62	(1.80)	55	(1.64)	-7		
Gauteng	69	(1.31)	64	(1.28)	-6	64	(1.33)	60	(1.20)	-4		
Mpumalanga	79	(1.32)	64	(1.78)	-15	64	(1.87)	61	(1.77)	-3		
Limpopo	74	(1.93)	57	(1.64)	-17	57	(1.80)	53	(1.50)	-4		

Source: IEC Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013; 2021

³⁰ There appears to be a u-curve in the association between educational attainment and attitudes towards voting. Those with a primary school education or less as well as those with a post matric qualification were more inclined to state that they believed that their vote makes a difference.

Note: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; and 2. The mean scores are based on a five-point scale where 1= “Strongly Disagree” to 5=“Strongly Agree”; and 3. Green shading represents values that are higher than the national average.

Substantial levels of provincial variation were observed in Table 22 for both 2013 VPS and 2021 VPS. During the last survey round, the province with the highest levels of agreement on the first indicator were the Northern Cape (M=69; SE=1.89). There were relatively large attitudinal changes on this indicator during the period with most provinces experiencing a decrease in agreement. Both the Western Cape and Limpopo underwent a drop in agreement of 17 points. Only the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal experienced positive change between 2013 VPS and 2021 VPS. As regards the second indicator, provincial levels of attitudinal change were comparatively small. Residents in KwaZulu-Natal and the North West saw the largest change, dropping 7 points over the eight year period. The provinces with the highest level of agreement on this indicator in 2021 VPS were the Eastern Cape (M=65; SE=1.59) and the Northern Cape (M=65; SE=1.78).

Table 23: Citizen attitudes towards external voting efficacy by select demographics, 2013 and 2021

	After being elected all parties are the same, so voting is pointless				Diff.	The party that I voted for did not protect my interests				Diff.
	2013		2021			2013		2021		
Birth Cohort										
1990 and above	45	(1.30)	54	(1.00)	9	50	(1.08)	54	(0.87)	4
1980-1989	47	(1.23)	55	(1.08)	8	56	(1.06)	62	(1.02)	6
1970-1979	45	(1.41)	53	(1.37)	7	54	(1.21)	57	(1.23)	3
1950-1969	43	(0.99)	52	(1.08)	10	55	(0.93)	57	(1.00)	2
1949 and below	39	(1.36)	49	(2.21)	10	53	(1.38)	55	(2.10)	3
Population Group										
Black African	46	(0.76)	54	(0.70)	8	56	(0.66)	58	(0.63)	2
Coloured	41	(1.20)	51	(1.25)	10	47	(1.05)	54	(1.13)	6
Indian	45	(1.55)	53	(1.58)	8	57	(1.21)	51	(1.26)	-6
White	36	(1.29)	54	(1.54)	17	43	(1.23)	50	(1.47)	8
Province										
Western Cape	45	(1.38)	53	(1.54)	8	51	(1.37)	49	(1.42)	-1
Eastern Cape	48	(1.43)	49	(1.77)	1	58	(1.24)	55	(1.54)	-2
Northern Cape	42	(2.32)	56	(2.12)	15	52	(2.13)	63	(1.90)	11
Free State	45	(2.38)	56	(2.03)	11	50	(1.92)	59	(1.70)	9
KwaZulu-Natal	44	(1.17)	50	(1.15)	6	55	(1.11)	59	(1.09)	4
North West	43	(1.89)	54	(1.74)	11	52	(1.78)	53	(1.62)	0
Gauteng	47	(1.49)	56	(1.30)	9	54	(1.24)	61	(1.14)	7
Mpumalanga	43	(2.09)	57	(2.00)	14	53	(1.85)	59	(1.81)	7
Limpopo	37	(1.91)	52	(1.56)	15	54	(1.66)	50	(1.37)	-4

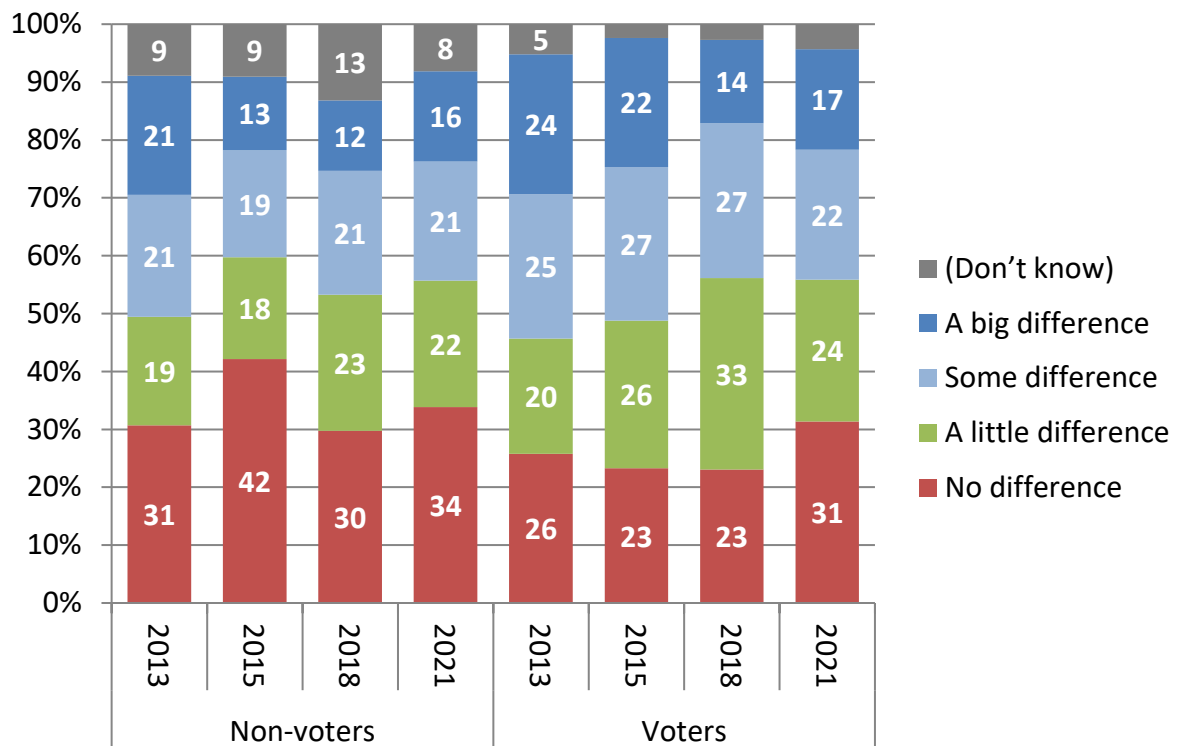
Source: IEC Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013; 2021

Note: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; and 2. The mean scores are based on a five-point scale where 1= “Strongly Disagree” to 5=“Strongly Agree”; and 3. Green shading represents values that are higher than the national average.

With the aim of appreciating how different socio-demographic groups understand external political efficacy, each of the external efficacy statements were assessed across different subgroups. Although some variations could be noted, on the whole, observed differences between subgroups were nominal (Table 23). Attitudinal variations by birth cohort were much lower on external efficacy than what was observed for internal efficacy. Population group was found to be a minor predictor of voting attitudes in South Africa. Considerable levels provincial variation could be discerned in Table 23 for 2021 VPS. This represents a significant change from 2013 VPS when levels of provincial variation were much weaker. The provinces with the highest levels of agreement on the party performance indicator were the Northern Cape (M=63; SE=1.90) and Mpumalanga (M=61; SE=1.14). As regards the first indicator in the table, there were relatively large attitudinal changes for some provinces during the period. Both the Northern Cape and Limpopo experienced an increase in agreement of 15 points. Only the Eastern Cape experienced little change between 2013 VPS and 2021 VPS.

As already highlighted elsewhere in this section, many citizens think that elected leaders do not serve the interests of citizens and have become more cynical about politics over time. It could be argued, therefore, that the general public has become quite pessimistic about the utility of election outcomes. To test this hypothesis, let us look at responses to the following VPS question: '[h]ow much of a difference do you think it makes which political party wins the government elections in this area?' Approximately a third (32%) of adult citizens thought it made no difference in VPS 2021 and 24% said that it only made a little difference. In other words, the majority thought that it made no difference which political party wins government elections in their locality. Less than two-fifths told fieldworkers that it some (22%) or a big difference (17%) in their area. The proportion who thought it made little or no difference has increased by 8 percentage points since 2013 VPS.

Figure 59: Public responses to the question: ‘[h]ow much of a difference do you think it makes which political party wins the local government elections in this area?’ by voting history, 2013-2021



Source: IEC Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013-2021

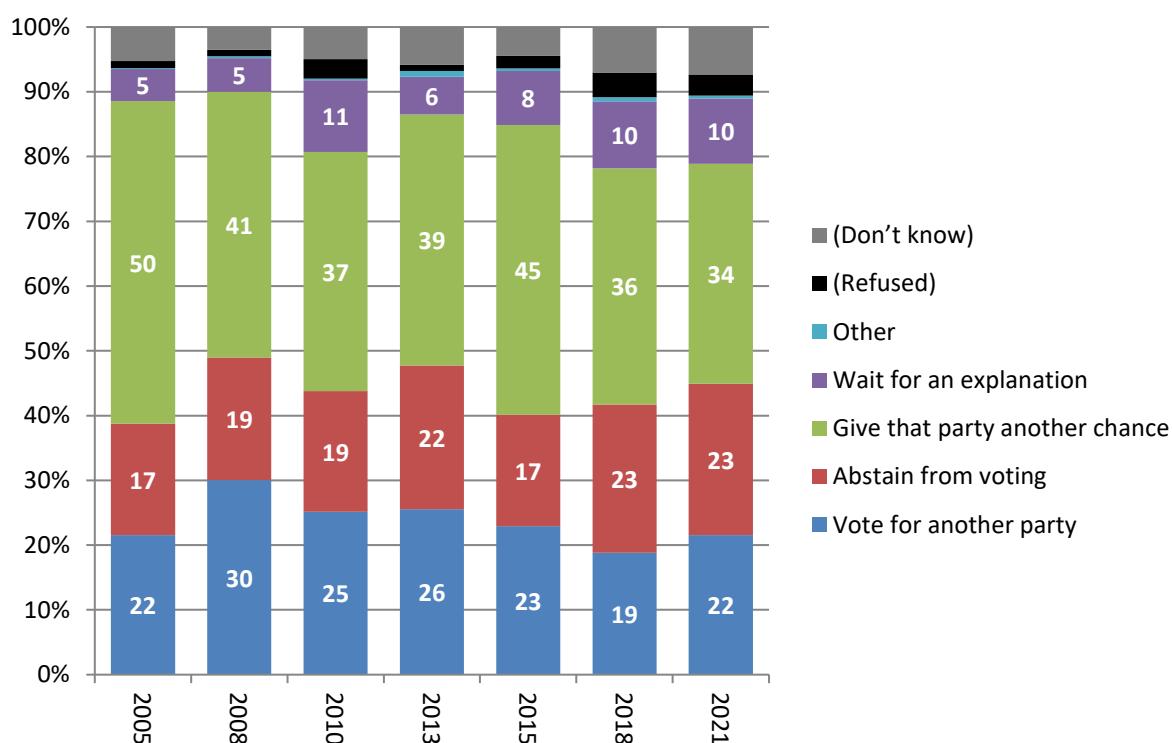
Voting status appeared to be a key factor in predicting how adult citizens would answer the question on efficacy of election outcomes. Non-voters were much more likely to report that the outcomes of elections in their area made no difference to their lives (Figure 59). But this voting differential declined over time as voters increasingly lost faith in the ability of election results to change life in their community. Past experience was one of the main drivers of attitude formation here with negative experiences undermining public assessments of the utility of election outcomes. Of those who thought elections would make no difference, 53% said that the party that they previously voted for did not protect their interests. This was 9 percentage points below the national average and 17 points less than those who thought elections made a big difference.

8.3. Electoral responses to unfulfilled expectations

Data presented in previous subsections shows that many adult citizens view voting as an ineffective way to achieve change. The basic idea of the voter participation model originally developed by Downs (1957), and later modified by Riker and Ordeshook (1968), is that people vote when the anticipated rewards are higher than the anticipated costs. In other words, experiences of, and attitudes towards, election participation appears to play a central role in influencing who votes and who abstains. To better understand how voters respond to unfulfilled expectations, let us assess how citizens would respond to a situation where their party of choice disappointed them. This subsection will examine which citizens would abstain from electoral participation under such a scenario and which would continue to participate in elections.

As a means of assessing how South African react to unfulfilled electoral expectations, respondents were read the following statement: “If the party you voted for did not meet your expectations, the next time there is an election would you: (i) vote for another party, (ii) not vote at all, (iii) give that party another chance or (iv) wait for an explanation and then decide?”. At the national level in 2021, 34% of adult citizens indicated that they would give their party another chance by voting for them again (**Figure 60**). This is lower than what was observed in 2015 VPS when 45% of the adult populace gave the same answer. This suggests that party loyalty in the country has declined somewhat during the last six years. A tenth offered contingent support to their preferred party, stating that they would first evaluate the explanation provided for non-performance against electoral promises before deciding how to respond at the ballot box. In contrast with these party loyalists, just over a fifth (22%) of the mass public stated that they would switch their vote to another political party on Election Day.

Figure 60: Electoral responses to unfulfilled party promises made during previous elections, 2005-2021 (column percentage)



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

A significant proportion (23%) of the general population would abstain from voting if they became disappointed in their political party. This represents a 4 percentage point increase from 2008 and 2010 when abstention was mentioned by 19% of South Africans. Voting history was found to be a significant determinant of attitudes here. Regular voters were more less likely to say they would abstain if confronted with a scenario where their party of choice did not meet their expectations than irregular and non-voters. When compared to other types of voters, regular voters were also more loyal to their party of choice. Consider that, in this hypothetical scenario, 44% of regular voters would remain loyal while only 31% of irregular

voters and 24% of non-voters would do so. Adult citizens were much more likely to remain loyal to their party if they were a member of a political party. If faced with political party disappointment, two-thirds of party members would either give the party another chance (47%) or wait for an explanation (13%).

From the above, it is apparent that abstention does not represent the dominant election response to political parties not delivering effectively on their manifestos and meeting the needs of constituents. With the intention of better understanding which groups are most likely to abstain from voting, abstention is disaggregated by gender, population group and province in **Table 24** for the period 2005-2021. Although significant gender differences were noted in some survey rounds (e.g., 2005 VPS and 2013 VPS), gender was not a significant predictor in 2021 VPS. During the last survey round, abstention was more common amongst the Black African majority than racial minority groups. This represents a change from 2015 VPS when minorities (especially the white and Coloured groups) were more likely to favour abstention. The largest change was observed for the white minority during this period, falling 16 percentage points between 2015 VPS and 2021 VPS.

Table 24: Abstain electoral response to unfulfilled party promises by socio-demographic characteristics (percent), 2005-2021

	2005	2008	2013	2015	2018	2021
Gender						
Male	15	19	20	16	26	23
Female	20	19	24	19	23	23
Population Group						
Black African	17	20	23	15	25	26
Coloured	17	22	23	30	26	20
Indian	23	17	25	21	30	18
White	14	13	15	26	20	10
Province						
Western Cape	18	21	24	24	25	19
Eastern Cape	14	20	14	9	22	19
Northern Cape	17	14	16	13	26	30
Free State	23	25	19	36	26	30
KwaZulu-Natal	16	16	23	13	27	19
North West	15	23	18	22	28	29
Gauteng	24	20	31	19	26	24
Mpumalanga	14	18	13	11	25	36
Limpopo	10	14	16	16	17	20

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

Note: Green shading represents values that are higher than the national average.

Large provincial subgroup differences were apparent in **Table 24**, perhaps in response to changing political circumstances in the country. For most of the survey rounds under review, Gauteng residents have been above the national average. But citizens living in Mpumalanga, the Northern Cape and the Free State were the most liable to favour abstention as an electoral response to unfulfilled party promises in 2021 VPS. During the sixteen year period under review, we can discern some largescale attitudinal fluctuations in the different

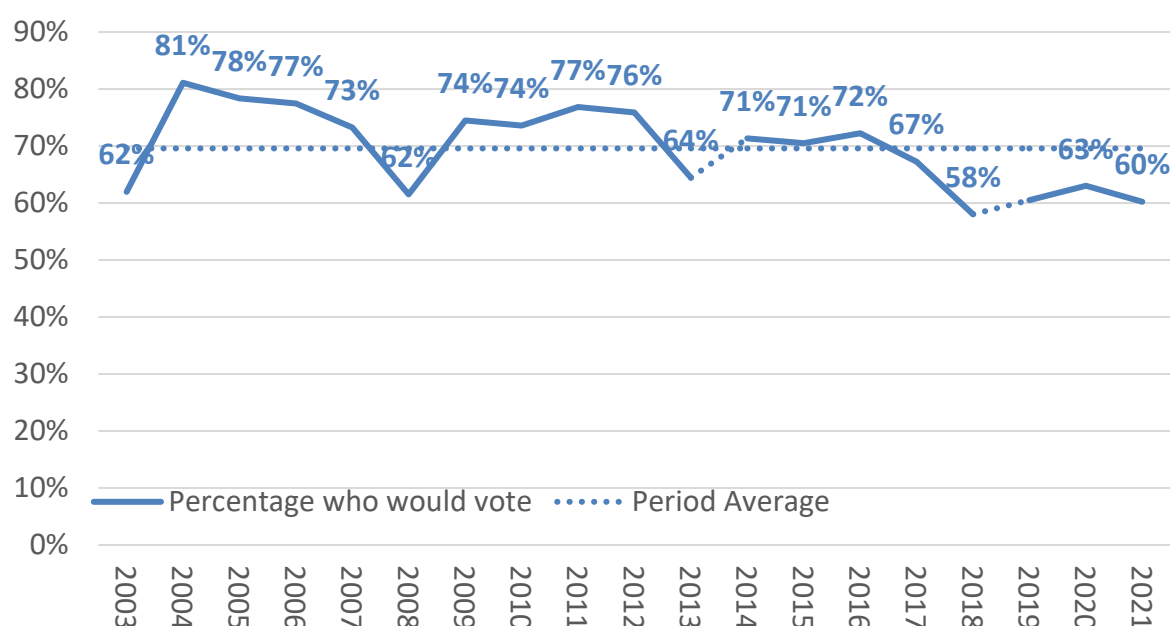
provinces. The most significant change occurred in Mpumalanga, the proportion favouring absenteeism in the province grew from 14% in 2005 VPS to 36% in 2021 VPS. Investigating the matter further we found that attitudes here were influenced significantly by past experiences. If a person had faced previous election disappointment (i.e., the party that they voted for did not protect their interests) then they were more likely to abstain from voting.

8.4. Voting Intention

SASAS respondents were asked if they would vote in a hypothetical election tomorrow. Responses are based on self-reported intention to vote in national government elections, and it is important to note that self-reported turnout in opinion surveys worldwide is consistently overestimated. A number of scholars have noted this occurrence and have theorised that survey respondents often intentionally misreport their turnout during elections because not voting might be viewed as a socially undesirable response (for a review of the existing literature on this phenomenon, see Blais et al. 2004). These responses should thus be interpreted as such. However, assessing responses to this question is still useful as it helps us understand voting intention in South Africa and what factors may be undermining turnout in the country.

Respondents were asked: “[i]f national government elections were to be held tomorrow, would you vote?” Ahead of the 2021 LGE, 60% of the voting age population (older than 17 years) stated that they would turn out to vote if such elections were to be held tomorrow (Figure 61). More than a quarter (29%) indicated that they would not vote, while a nominal share (4%) refused to declare their intentions and 7% were uncertain. Looking at how voting intent has changed over time, it is clear that this represents a decline from what was seen in previous SASAS rounds. More than three quarters of adult citizens declared an intent to vote between 2004 SASAS and 2016 SASAS. At the end of this period, 71% of the mass age eligible public intended to vote, 11% did not plan to vote, 6% were uncertain and 12% refused to answer. Between SASAS 2017 and SASAS 2021, public intention to vote decreased and reached its lowest level in SASAS 2018.

Figure 61: Percentage who would vote if there were an election tomorrow, 2003-2021

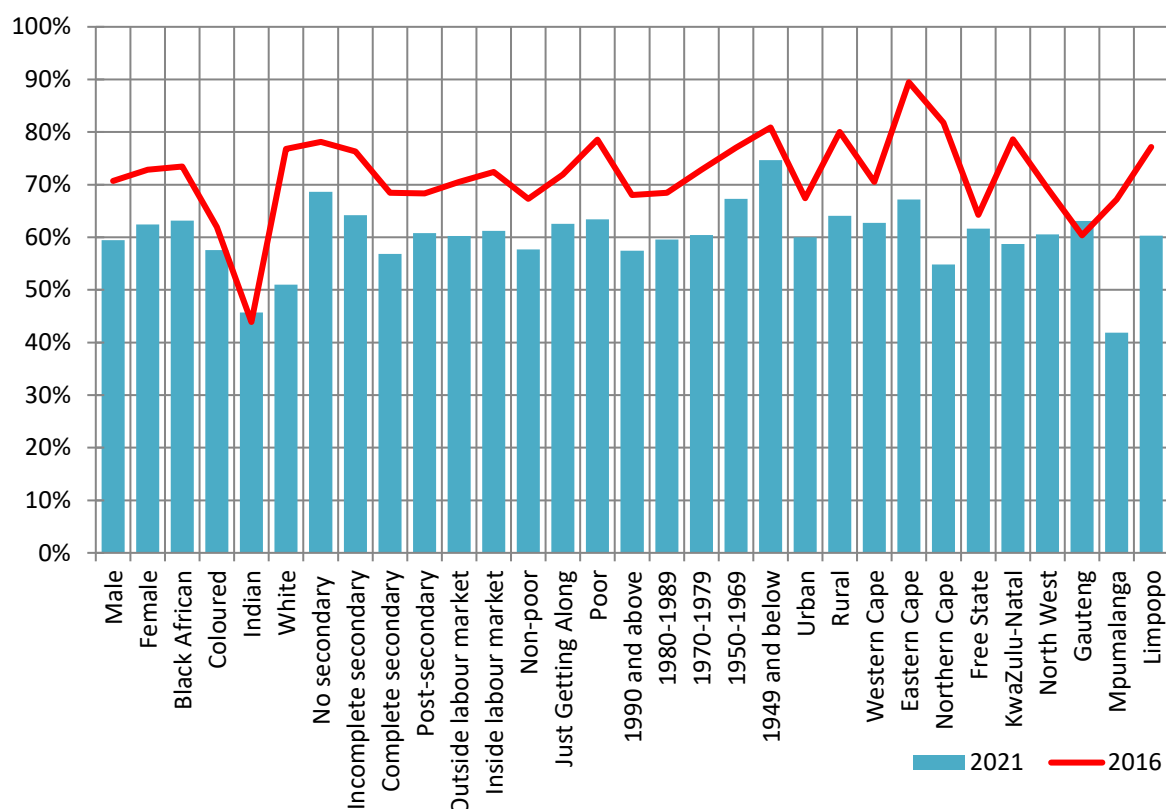


Note: Person aged 17 years or below are excluded from analysis.

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2003-2021

The result displayed in Figure 61 are in line with other findings in this section and clearly illustrate the disillusionment evident among South Africans. In order to determine who is least likely to participate in elections, voting intent by select socio demographics are shown in Figure 62. The results suggest a distinct relationship between birth cohort and voting intention. In VPS 2021 less than three-fifths (57%) of the Born Free Generation (i.e., those born 1990 and later) reported that they would vote in a hypothetical government elections. This can be compared to 60% of those born between 1989 and 1970, 67% of those in the 1950-1969 cohort and 75% of persons born 1949 and before. We would imagine that a life cycle effect would emerge amongst the Born Free Generation, as this cohort ages they should adopt more conventional habits of political behaviour. However, this group was less inclined to vote in SASAS 2021 than they were in SASAS 2016, suggesting that this cohort is becoming more disengaged from conventional politics over time.

Figure 62: Intention to vote amongst the voting age population by socio-demographic characteristics, 2016 and 2021



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2016; 2021

There appears to be a modest association between educational attainment and intention to vote. Less educated adults were found to be more liable to express an intention to vote than their more educated counterparts. Due to changes in reported voting intention amongst those with a post-matric qualification, this association was more linear in SASAS 2016 than in SASAS 2021. This group reported a lower rate of change in their intention between the two periods than other educational attainment groups. Racial minorities were significantly less inclined to express an intention to cast their vote in 2021 SASAS than the Black African majority. This represents a significant change for the white minority, intention amongst this group fell from 77% in SASAS 2016 to 51% in SASAS 2021. There was a significant subjective class gradient to intention at the beginning of the period, but this class effect was much weaker in SASAS 2021. This was due to a higher rate of change in intention amongst the non-poor over the period than other subjective wealth groups.

There was a substantial geotype differential in SASAS 2016 that favoured rural residents. Four-fifths of rural adults in that survey round said that they intended to vote in a hypothetical election. Between SASAS 2016 and SASAS 2021, the proportion of rural adults who intended to vote fell by 16 percentage points. As a result, the geotype differential was much weaker at the end of the period than it was at the start. Of all the provincial subgroups under review, residents of Mpumalanga were the least likely to vote in SASAS 2021. This represents a significant change for the province over time, the percentage of Mpumalanga residents who intended to vote fell from 67% in SASAS 2016 to 42% in SASAS 2021. An even larger attitudinal change was noted for Northern Cape residents, a decline of 27 percentage points during this

five year period. The only province where residents became more inclined to vote over time was Gauteng, intention grew by 3 percentage points.

From an electoral management perspective, it is important to examine the reasons why members of the voting age population (18 years and older) suggest they would not vote if a national government election were held tomorrow. The VPS questionnaire included a question probing the justifications for not intending to vote, enabling us to determine the consistency in the accounts provided by citizens. Public responses to this question are provided in Table 25 for the period 2008-2021, and we can see that administrative barriers are not the primary reason for intended electoral abstention in South Africa. Only a minority (15%) of non-participants gave administrative barriers as the main reason that they would not vote in VPS 2021. Of these barriers, not being registered and to a lesser extent, possessing the required documentation to register predominate. This outcome is consistent with what was observed in Section 7.6 which noted that administrative barriers only accounted for small share of the general public for not participating in past elections.

Table 25: Reasons for not intending to vote amongst those who would not vote in a hypothetical election tomorrow, 2008-2021 (column percent)

Reasons why would not vote if was an election tomorrow	2008	2010	2013	2015	2021
<i>Administrative barriers</i>	21	17	17	21	15
Not registered	14	10	13	17	9
Do not possess necessary documents to register	6	5	3	4	3
Polling station too far away	0	1	0	0	1
Very long queues	0	1	0	0	0
Lack of transport	0	0	0	0	1
No assistance is given to persons with disabilities	0	0	0	0	0
Do not know where to vote	1	0	0	0	1
<i>Disinterest and disillusionment</i>	71	65	71	72	78
Not interested	48	37	49	43	54
My vote would not make a difference	9	11	8	8	10
Disillusioned with politics	5	8	5	10	5
Not interested in any of the existing political parties	8	7	9	9	7
Too much effort required	1	1	1	0	1
Only one party could win	1	0	0	2	1
<i>Intimidation</i>	0	2	0	0	1
My employer would not allow me to vote	0	2	0	0	0
My spouse or partner would not allow me	0	0	0	0	0
Fear of intimidation or violence	0	0	0	0	1
<i>Individual barriers</i>	1	2	1	1	2
Health reasons or sick	0	1	0	0	1
I am away from home	1	1	0	0	1
I do not know how to read and write	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Other</i>	6	14	12	6	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Unweighted N	528	548	466	447	894

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2008-2021

The largest cluster of reasons offered by non-participants relate to disinterest and disillusionment. More than three-quarters of this group (78%) gave this as the primary reason for not voting in VPS 2021, a significant increase from what was seen in VPS 2010. Chief among the explanations within this cluster was a general lack of interest, the proportion giving this reason grew from 37% in VPS 2010 to 54% in VPS 2021. A lack of internal political efficacy, as captured by the view that voting would not make a difference, was mentioned by 10% of non-participants in VPS 2021 while lack of interest in politics accounts for a further 7%. Disillusionment with politics was cited by 5% during the last survey round, significantly below what was seen in VPS 2015. Other possible barriers such as intimidation or personal reasons (e.g., ill-health, absence from voting district, or illiteracy) received nominal mention.

Electoral management operations in South Africa have improved over the last decade. The Election Commission has placed considerable emphasis on improving registration processes, access to voting stations, accommodating the special needs of women, the aged and disabled, easing voting procedures, and strengthening safety and security measures. Arguably, the subsidiary position of administrative factors underlying abstention may partially reflect a history of efficient management in previous elections by the Commission as well as the laudable strides that have been forged in addressing such logistical challenges in recent elections. The results, however, do contain a cautionary note about the potential downward pressure that political disillusionment, reduced political interest and loss of a sense of internal political efficacy imposes on voter turnout in government elections.

As South African democracy enters its third decade, the relative weight that citizens attach to political disenchantment as the reason for intended abstention in national elections in contrast with administrative barriers is of particular importance. The results depicted in this subsection are in concert with what we see in other sections of this report. Repeatedly we observe a growing institutional distrust and disillusionment with the political status quo. This sense of political disaffection is not something that falls directly within the ambit of the Commission's mandate. The election management body needs to ensure continued strong messaging relating to political efficacy through voter education campaigns. But ultimately addressing the current dissatisfaction with the political status quo might be outside the control of the election management body.

9. Expanding Political Participation

In democracies, the political stage has typically been the preserve of old men and in centuries passed laws prevented women and the youth from active democratic participation. For most countries, making democracy work for everyone can be an especially difficult challenge. Participation researchers in a number of countries have tended to reveal a notable gender gap with regard to many types of political engagement (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). The youth are also said to be noticeably absent from politics in many advanced industrialised countries, a fact lamented by many scholars (such as Wattenberg, 2015). This study is interested in the participation of certain groups in politics, namely women and the youth. The South African government committed itself to encouraging these two groups to actively participate in

politics. The sections that follow will present data on mass public data on attitudes towards the involvement of women and the youth, respectively, in politics.

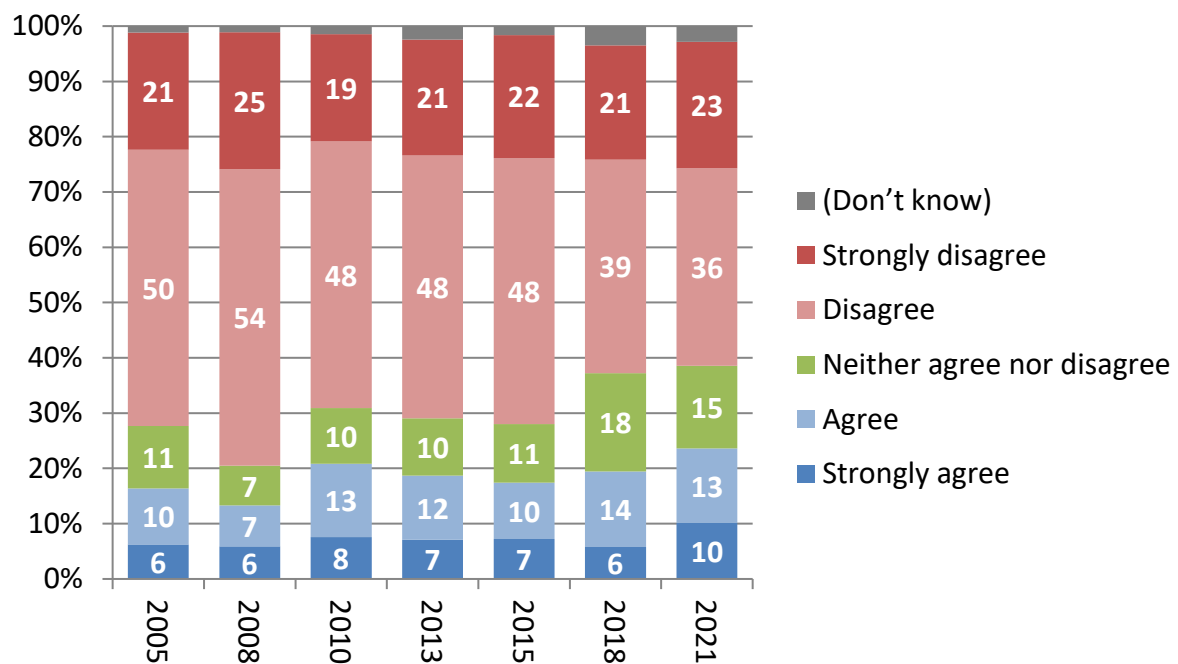
9.1. Views on Women's Political Participation

In September 2000, the governments from around the world adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) while attending the New York Millennium Summit. The third of the eight MDGs was gender equality and women's empowerment which was derived from goals established at the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The eighth MDG was wide-ranging, covering a range of different social and economic areas. But a centrepiece of goal was to increase the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments. South Africa has committed itself to this goal and has worked to promote the role of women in politics. But what do ordinary South Africans think about women's political representation in the country's national and local elections? This section explores citizen attitudes towards women in politics in two parts. The first examines patriarchal attitudes and notes an increase in certain types of misogynistic views of female politicians. The second examines level of public support for promoting female participation in political spaces.

9.1.1. Misogynist Election Attitudes

Patriarchal election attitudes in South Africa will be examined in this subsection with a focus on attitudinal change between 2005 and 2021. Three different misogynistic attitudes will be considered: (i) voter choice; (ii) voter engagement; and (iii) politician evaluation. We find that patriarchal attitudes on the first two have increased over time with the largest change noted for voter choice. However, we did observe a reduction in misogynistic stereotypes about female politicians. Using the VPS data, we identify those subgroups which tend to report the highest level of misogyny on this issue. One of the most troubling trends to emerge in the last decade was growing levels of sexism amongst women themselves. In addition, we find that young people are increasingly exhibiting quite detrimental attitudes on this issue.

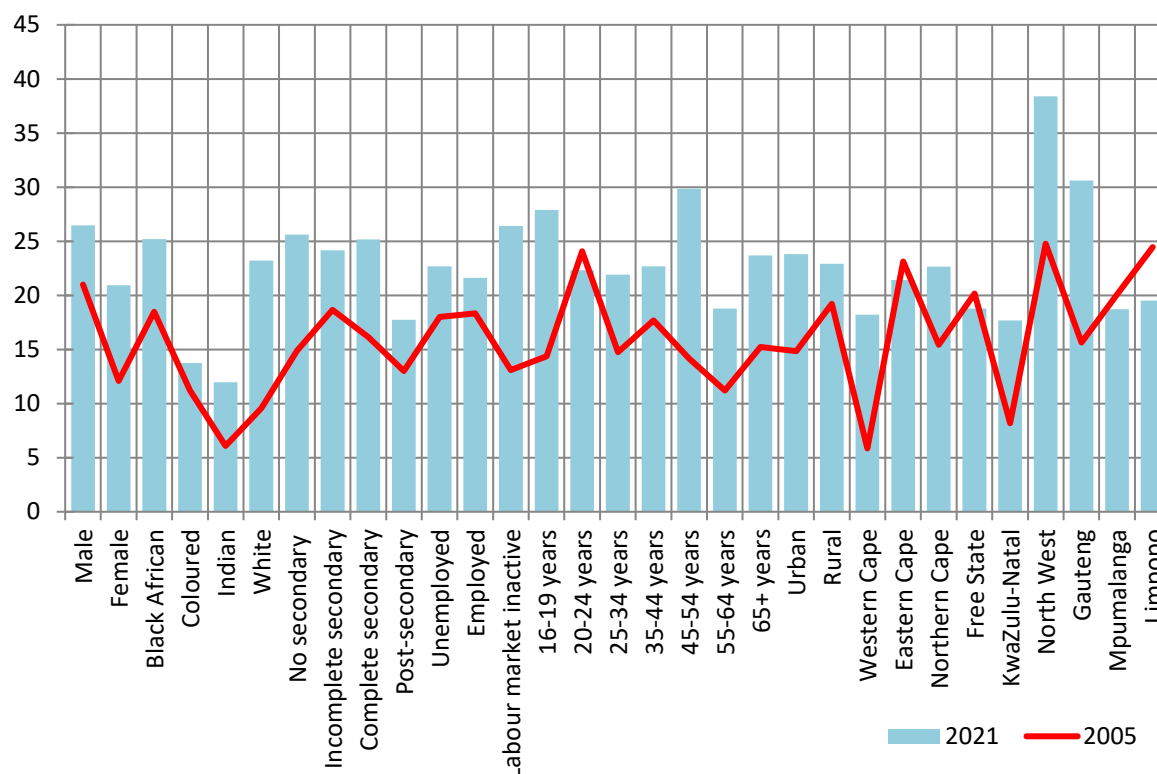
Figure 63: Public agreement and disagreement with the statement: “I will never vote for a woman”, 2005-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

Even though most politicians in South Africa are men, a significant proportion of the adult population said that they would vote for a female candidate for political office in South Africa. The share of the general adult population who agreed with the statement “I will never vote for a woman” was only 16% in VPS 2005 (Figure 63). An overwhelming majority (71%) of the populace disagreed with the statement while only a small minority (11%) were neutral on this issue. Over the last few years, however, we have seen growing levels of electoral misogyny in the country. The share who reported that they would not vote for woman grew from 13% in VPS 2008 to 23% in VPS 2021. In the last round of the VPS, only about three-fifths (58%) of the adult citizenry disagreed with this misogynistic statement. With the aim of unpacking the intricacies of this apparent rise in sexism, let us scrutinise levels of agreement with the statement across a range of selected subgroups. the percentage of those subgroups who agreed with the statement was presented in Figure 64 for the 2005 VPS and the 2021 VPS.

Figure 64: Percentage who agreed with the statement: “I will never vote for a woman” across socio-demographic subgroups, 2005 and 2021

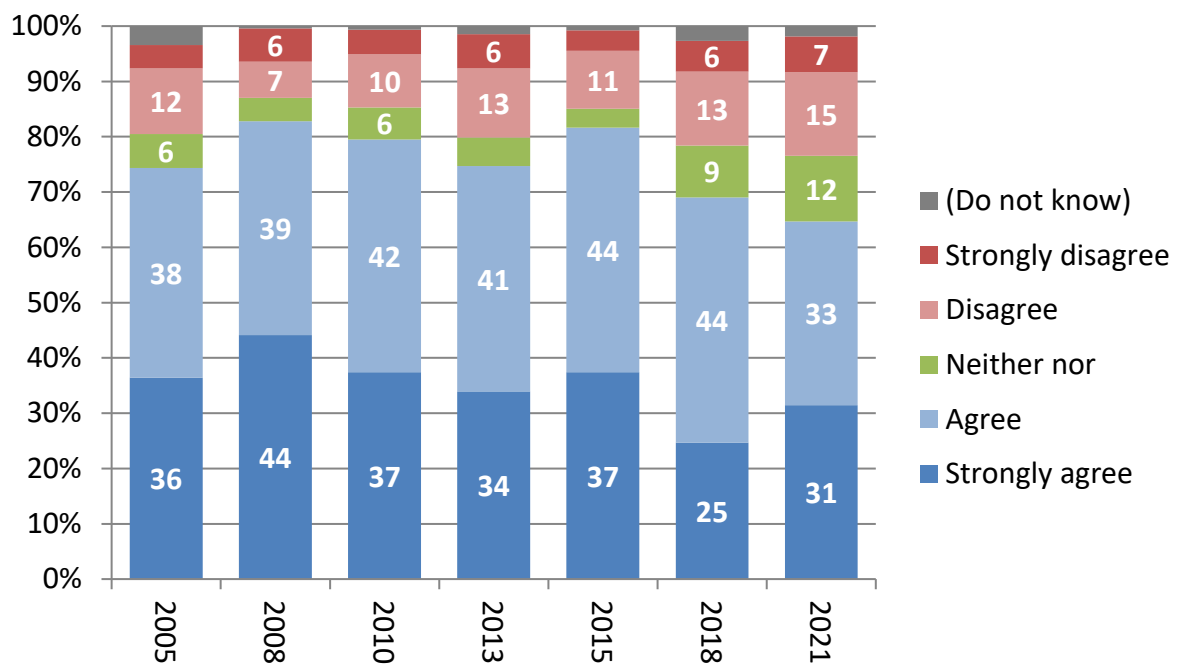


Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005; 2021

A large gender difference in agreement was noted in VPS 2005. Adult men were twice as likely as women to agree with the statement. However, this differential declined over the period as women became more opposed to voting for a female candidate. The proportion of female citizens who agreed with the statement increased from 12% in VPS 2005 to 21% in VPS 2021. There was a distinct population group differential in VPS 2005. The Black African majority tend to exhibit more misogynistic views than racial minorities and became more sexist over time. The share of this group who agreed with the statement strengthened by 7 percentage points over the sixteen year period. Of the three minority groups, the Indian group was the least prone to agree with the statement in VPS 2005. Growing misogyny was evident amongst the white minority but not amongst the other groups. In both VPS rounds we found a negative correlation between educational attainment and sexism in Figure 64.

Over the 2005-2021 period considerable geotype dissimilarities were not noted in Figure 64. Reviewing the data portrayed in the figure, it is evident that certain provincial groups were more predisposed to agree with the statement than others. Between the 2005 VPS and the 2021 VPS, there were significant changes in how different provincial population saw this issue. Citizens in Gauteng, the North West and the Western Cape became much more likely to agree with the statement. The largest change was in the North West, the share of residents who agreed with the statement in that province grew from 25% to 38% over the period. A significant increase in sexism was also noted in Gauteng, a positive change was 15 percent points over the sixteen year period. One of the few provincial adult populations to experience a significant decline in agreement was Limpopo.

Figure 65: Public agreement and disagreement with the statement: “[m]en have no right to tell women which party to vote for”, 2005-2021

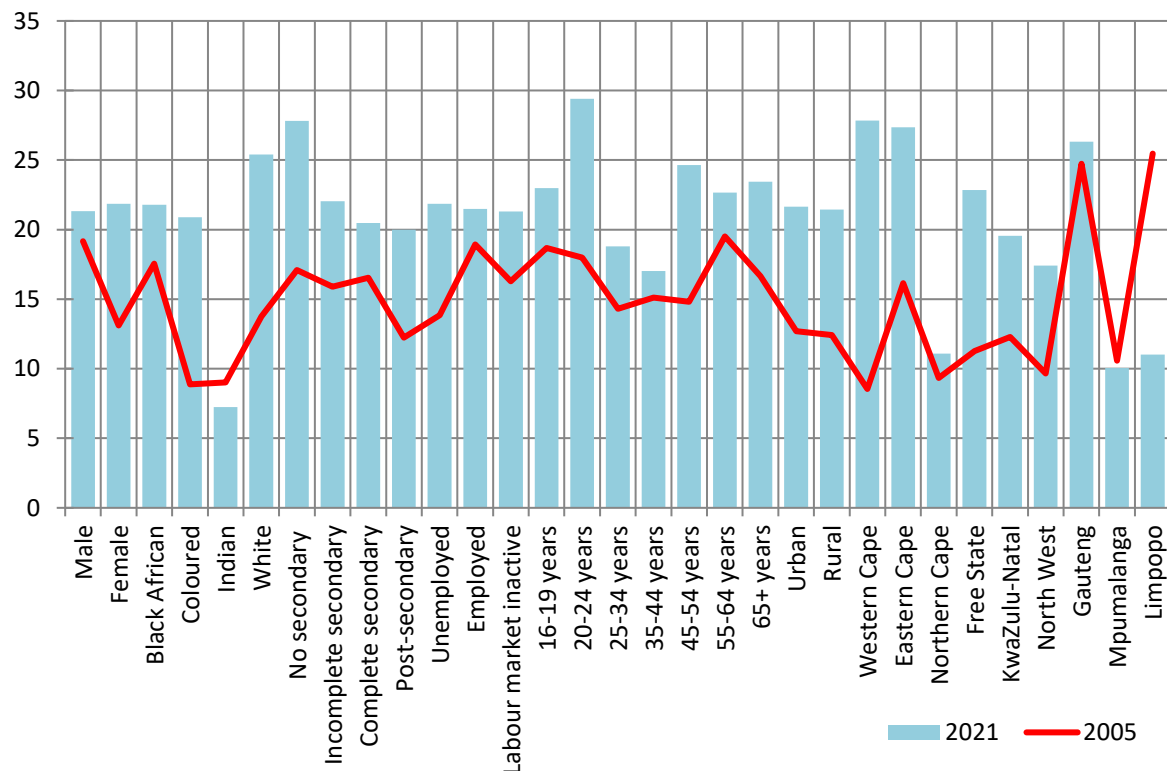


Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

It was necessary to determine whether citizens believed that men had the power to tell women who they should vote for. In order to gauge this kind of patriarchal voter engagement, respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed that men have no right to tell women which party to vote for. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of the adult public agreed that men should not dictate the electoral choices of female voters in VPS 2021. Less than a quarter of the public either strongly disagreed (7%) or just disagreed (15%) with the statement while a tenth of the populace was neutral on this issue. Public disagreement with the statement has grown between 2010 and 2021, increasing from 14% to 22% over that eleven year period (Figure 65). Voter frequency appeared to be a key factor in predicting how a citizen would answer this question. Regular voters were found to be more likely to agree with the statement than irregular or non-voters.

With the goal of offering more insight into the rise in sexist voter engagement, we explored levels of disagreement with the statement depicted in Figure 65 between the 2005 VPS and the 2021 VPS for selected socio-demographic groups. The percentage of the selected subgroups who disagreed with the statement was displayed in Figure 66 for both periods. In an outcome that was analogous to the findings in Figure 64, a distinct gender differential was apparent in VPS 2005. Female citizens were less apt to disagree with the statement than their male counterparts. However, much like with what was observed in Figure 64, this differential deteriorated over the period as women became more liable to disagree with the statement. There were discrete population group differences in both periods. Disagreement increased significantly for the white and Coloured minorities, suggesting that these groups have become more hostile to female political participation. We discovered a distinct educational attainment gradient in both VPS rounds that favoured less educated citizens. When compared to VPS 2005, this gradient was somewhat larger in VPS 2021.

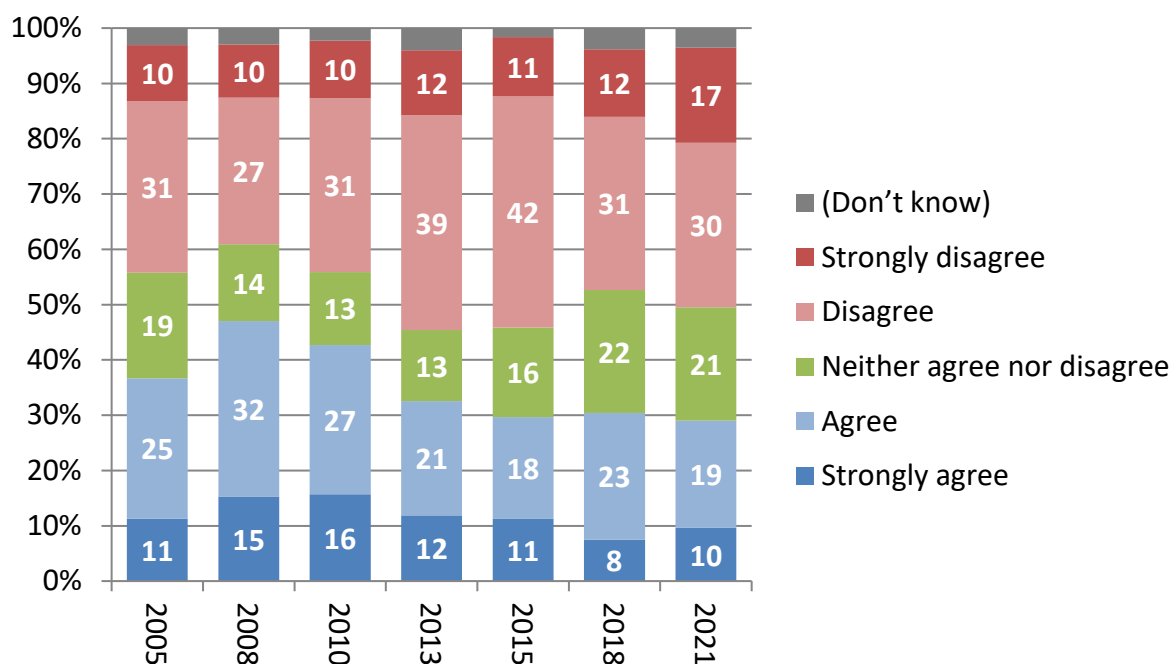
Figure 66: Percentage who disagreed with the statement: “[m]en have no right to tell women which party to vote for” across socio-demographic subgroups, 2005 and 2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005; 2021

Considerable changes occurred for certain age groups over the 2005-2021 period. The largest observed change was amongst those aged 20-24, the segment of this group who disagreed with the statement increased from 18% to 29% over the sixteen year period. A comparable change was also found for the 45-54 age cohort. Some provincial groups were discovered to be more inclined to support men controlling the votes of women than others. Citizens from the Western Cape, the Eastern Cape and Gauteng were more prone to disagree than their peers in other provinces in VPS 2021. In the case of the Western Cape and the Eastern Cape we can discern substantial attitudinal change in these provinces over the period. This form of sexism appears to have weakened amongst the Limpopo citizen population, falling from 25% in 2005 to 11% in 2021. No other provincial population experienced a similar decline, and this outcome to what was discovered in Figure 64.

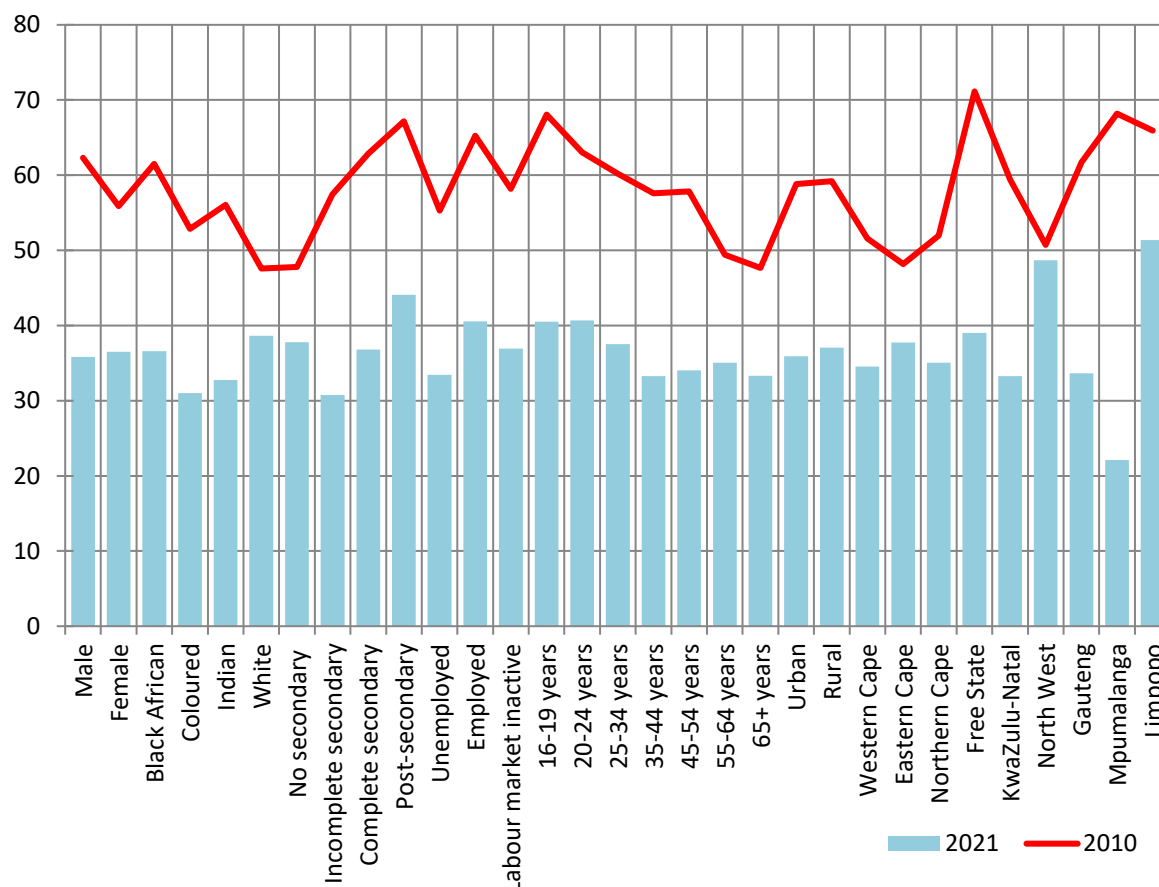
Figure 67: Public agreement and disagreement with the statement: “[m]en are generally better politicians than women”, 2005-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

Figure 63 showed that most of the general public would vote for a female politician. But our data shows that a significant proportion of the adult populace believed that men are more proficient politicians than women. Nearly two-fifths (36%) of the adult populace agreed with the statement "men are generally better politicians than women" in VPS 2005 (Figure 67). Only about two-fifths (41%) of the general public disagreed with the statement in that round, indicating that the populace was divided on this issue. Over the last few years, however, we have seen a decline in the proportion who harbour this misogynistic view. In the last round of the VPS, only about a third (29%) of the general populace agreed with this chauvinistic statement and 47% disagreed. So as to better comprehend the gradations of this moderate decline in sexism, let us scrutinise levels of agreement with the statement across a range of selected subgroups. Figure 68 portrayed the share of the subgroup who agreed with the statement for the 2005 VPS and the 2021 VPS.

Figure 68: Percentage who agreed with the statement: “[m]en are generally better politicians than women” across socio-demographic subgroups, 2005 and 2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005; 2021

Only a moderate gender disparity in agreement, perhaps surprisingly, was apparent in both survey rounds. When judged against their male counterparts, female citizens were more apt to agree with the statement in VPS 2021. A marked population group differential was evident in VPS 2005, a finding that is comparable to what was found in Figure 64. Racial minorities reported, as a whole, less sexist views than Black African citizens at the start of the period. This kind of misogyny declined substantially for the Black African majority over the sixteen year period, and our racial differential was more muted in VPS 2021. During both VPS rounds we can observe a significant age gradient that favoured younger citizens. The youth became less hostile to female politicians over the period but were still more liable to prefer male politicians at the end of the survey period. A positive association was evident between educational attainment and sexism was recorded in Figure 68. Although more educated citizens were more prone to agree with the statement than their less educated counterparts in VPS 2021, the size of this association weakened over time.

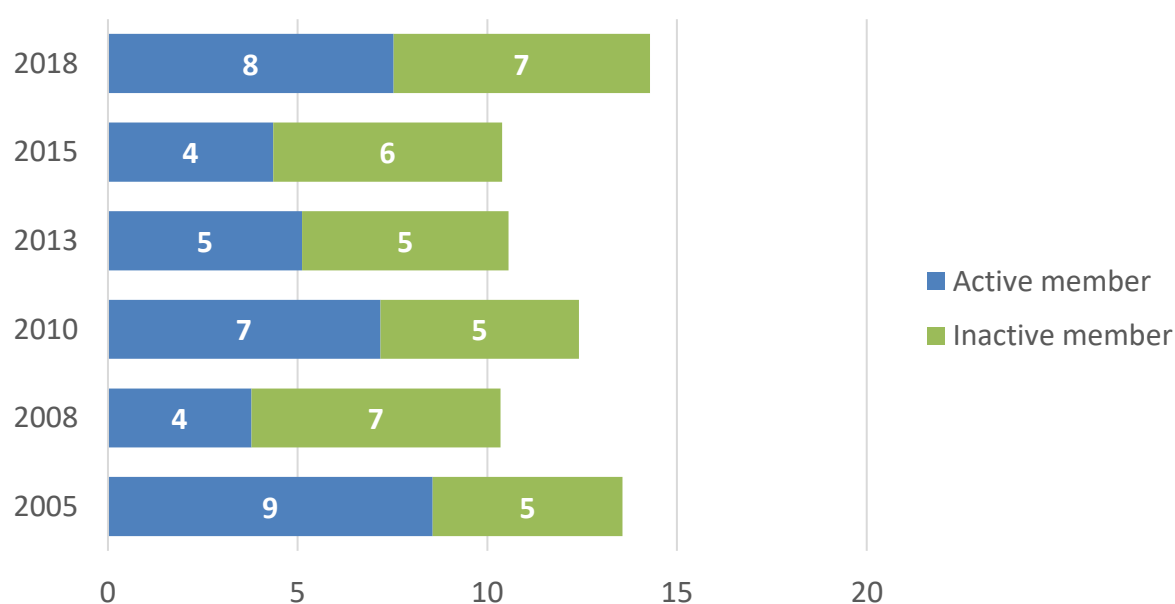
A remarkable degree of attitudinal change was recorded amongst rural residents between 2005 and 2021. The segment of the rural citizen population who agreed with the sexist statement fell from 59% to 37% during the period. Reviewing the data portrayed in Figure 68, it is evident that some provinces experienced a great deal of attitudinal change. Most provinces noted a decline in the share of the population that agreed with the statement between VPS 2005 and VPS 2021. The largest variations were noted for the Free State,

Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal. Only citizens in the Western Cape became much more likely to agree with the statement during this sixteen year period. The percentage of citizens in that province who agreed with the statement weakened considerably, falling from 44% to 31% over the period under review. In VPS 2021 certain provincial groups were more predisposed to agree with the statement than others. Residents in Limpopo, the North West and Gauteng were the most likely to agree with the statement in that round.

9.1.2. Support for Female Political Participation

In this subsection we investigate what the diverse citizen population think about women's political representation in South Africa. The emphasis in this section concerns public support for measures that would promote greater levels of female representation in political and elected government structures. Providing a comparative perspective similar to what was offered in Section 9.1.1, this section investigates attitudinal variation during the 2005-2021 period. It will demonstrate that the general populace is, on the whole, quite supportive of interventions to promote the role of women in the political arena. Indeed, it would appear that support for this position has strengthened, particularly among women, over the last sixteen years. When contrasting the results of this subsection with those in Section 9.1.1, it is apparent that attitudinal change on this issue is quite nuanced. The general populace has, on the whole, become less chauvinistic on female political empowerment but there is some evidence on growing polarisation amongst certain groups in the country.

Figure 69: Percentage of the adult population who were members (active or inactive) of women's associations, 2005-2021 (row percentages)



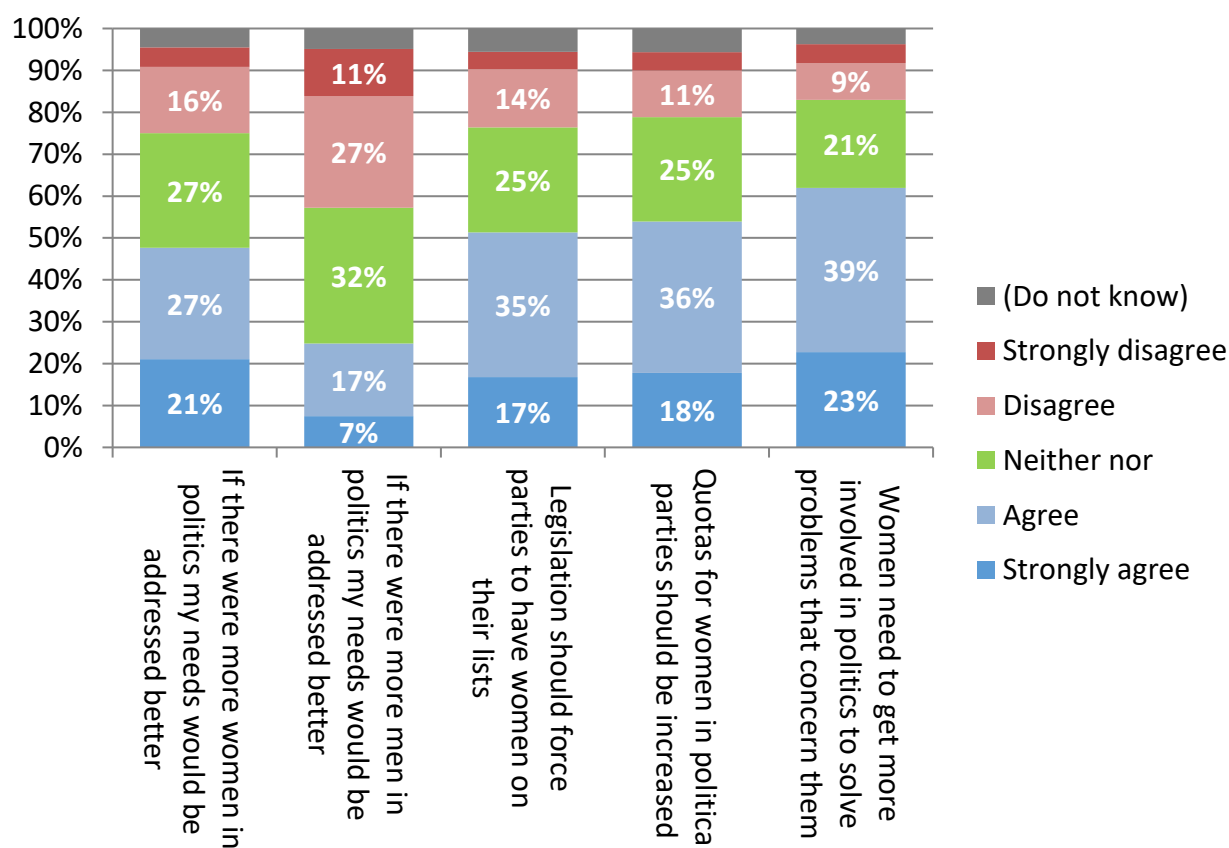
Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

A good place to start this subsection would be to assess public participation in women's organisations. Voluntary associations of this type are an important part of empowering women in South Africa and helping this group become politically active. VPS participants were requested to indicate whether they were members of a women's association. Responses to this question are provided for the period 2008-2021 (Figure 69) and show that the percentage of the mass public who belonged to this kind of association was relatively low. Only about a

tenth (8%) of the adult populace were active members in 2021 VPS and 7% were inactive members. Female citizens, perhaps unsurprisingly, were more liable to be part of a women's association than their male counterparts. A fifth of women were part of such an association in VPS 2021, twice the national average.

A set of five statements relating to the role of female participation in politics were read out to VPS respondents, who were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement on a five-point scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. The results are depicted in Figure 70 and show that, in general, citizens were positive about the role of women in politics. A majority (62%) of the general public believed that women need to get more involved in politics. Many citizens also thought that female political representation would improve their lives. The share who felt that their needs would be better addressed if more women were in politics was 48% in VPS 2021. The data also shows that the average citizen support policies that would ensure gender equality in the country’s elected offices. A majority (52%) of the adult public acknowledge the need for legislation that would force political parties to have women on the lists of candidates that parties submit for office. A significant share (54%) of the public also favoured quotas for women in political parties.

Figure 70: Public agreement and disagreement with statements about the women in politics in South Africa (column percentages)

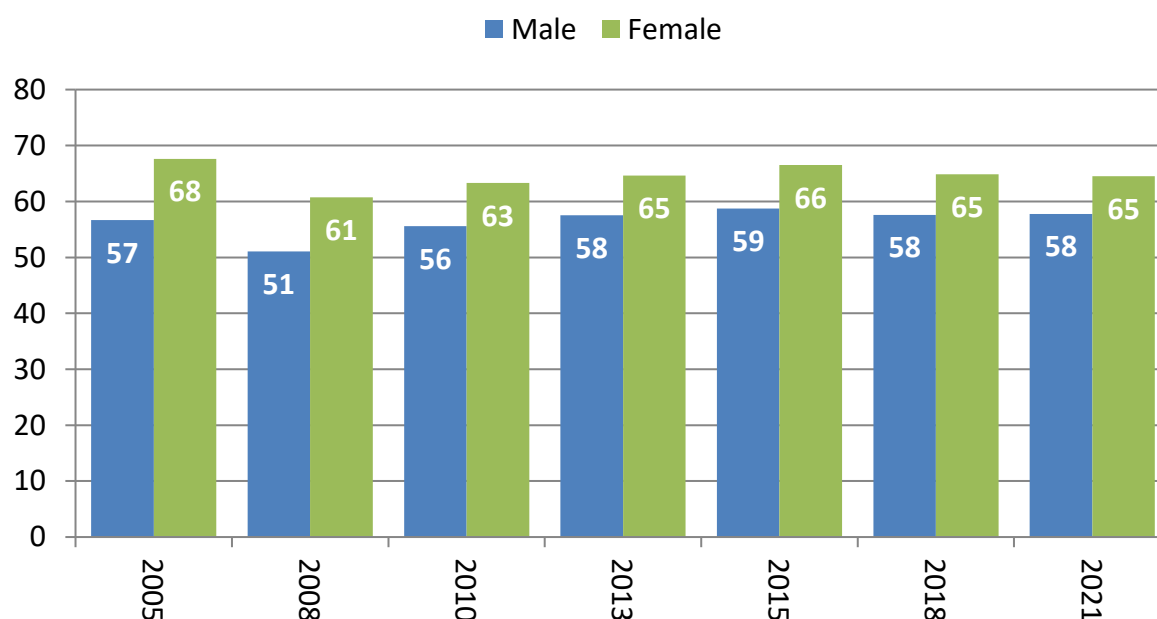


Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

On the whole, we found that the bulk of adult population supports policies that would increase the representation of women in politics. In order to better comprehend citizen assessments of women in politics, let us examine how attitudes on this topic have changed

over time. For the temporal analysis, each of the items presented in Figure 70 were pooled into a combined indicator. So that the new metric would measure public support for women in politics items were reversed where appropriate. The index was labelled the Support for Female Political Participation (SFPP) Index. The scale on the index was computed so that it ranged from 0 to 100, a high score on the multidimensional index represented a high level of support for women entering politics³¹. The mean SFPP Index score for VPS 2005 was 62 (SE=0.30) and we observe little change over the period 2005-2021 (Figure 71). There was a distinct gender divide in terms of SFPP Index scores in each survey round that favoured women. This gender gap declined marginally over time, falling from a ten point disparity in VPS 2005 to a seven point difference in VPS 2021.

Figure 71: Mean Female Political Participation Preference (0-100) Index scores, 2005-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

To gain a greater insight into the gender gap discerned in Figure 71, we scrutinised SFPP Index scores across a range of selected socio-demographic faultlines for men and women. Mean scores are presented for a selected set of subgroups in Table 26, and data is provided for VPS 2005 and 2021 VPS. During the sixteen year period, we discovered a minor but noteworthy gender variations in approval for certain groups. There was a relatively large gender variation amongst the Black African majority at the start of the period. This gap declined significantly between VPS 2005 and 2021 VPS; this was mainly due to growing SFPP Index scores amongst Black African women. Of the four population groups, the white minority was the least supportive of female politicians, and this group had the smallest gender gap on this issue. These results are consistent with the findings on sexism presented in Section 9.1.1. More educated citizens had, on the whole, lower SFPP Index scores when compared with their less educated peers during the 2005 VPS. Despite declining misogyny amongst men with high

³¹ As a robustness test, a Cronbach alpha test ($\alpha=0.73$) was performed to assess the validity and reliability of the measure.

levels of formal education, the size of this educational attainment gradient remained constant between 2005 and 2021.

Table 26: Mean Support for Female Political Participation (SFPP) (0-100) Index scores by selected socio-demographic subgroups, 2005; 2021

	VPS 2005			VPS 2021		
	Male	Female	Diff.	Male	Female	Diff.
Population Group						
Black African	57 (0.61)	69 (0.44)	12	59 (0.69)	65 (0.53)	6
Coloured	59 (1.22)	66 (0.89)	7	54 (1.00)	62 (1.07)	8
Indian	66 (1.58)	70 (1.22)	4	59 (1.09)	69 (1.21)	10
White	50 (1.29)	58 (1.00)	7	55 (1.17)	60 (1.19)	6
Voter Status						
Never voted	56 (1.08)	67 (0.81)	11	55 (0.85)	61 (0.89)	6
Irregular voter	56 (0.82)	68 (0.57)	12	58 (0.77)	66 (0.69)	8
Regular voter	57 (0.72)	67 (0.54)	10	60 (0.93)	66 (0.66)	6
Geotype						
Urban	56 (0.61)	66 (0.43)	10	58 (0.55)	65 (0.48)	8
Rural	58 (0.80)	70 (0.63)	12	58 (1.18)	62 (0.89)	4
Age Cohort						
18-24	55 (1.04)	67 (0.84)	12	58 (1.40)	64 (1.28)	6
25-34	58 (1.07)	68 (0.73)	10	59 (0.91)	65 (1.00)	7
35-44	57 (1.01)	67 (0.73)	10	59 (1.04)	66 (0.90)	7
45-54	60 (1.20)	68 (0.85)	8	56 (1.26)	65 (1.06)	9
55+	56 (1.09)	68 (0.84)	12	57 (1.11)	63 (0.71)	6
Educational Status						
No secondary	59 (0.95)	69 (0.62)	10	57 (1.53)	63 (1.07)	7
Incomplete secondary	57 (0.77)	69 (0.60)	12	59 (0.98)	65 (0.77)	6
Complete secondary	55 (0.95)	65 (0.68)	10	58 (0.78)	66 (0.69)	8
Post-secondary	54 (1.59)	63 (1.32)	8	56 (1.02)	61 (1.06)	5

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005; 2021

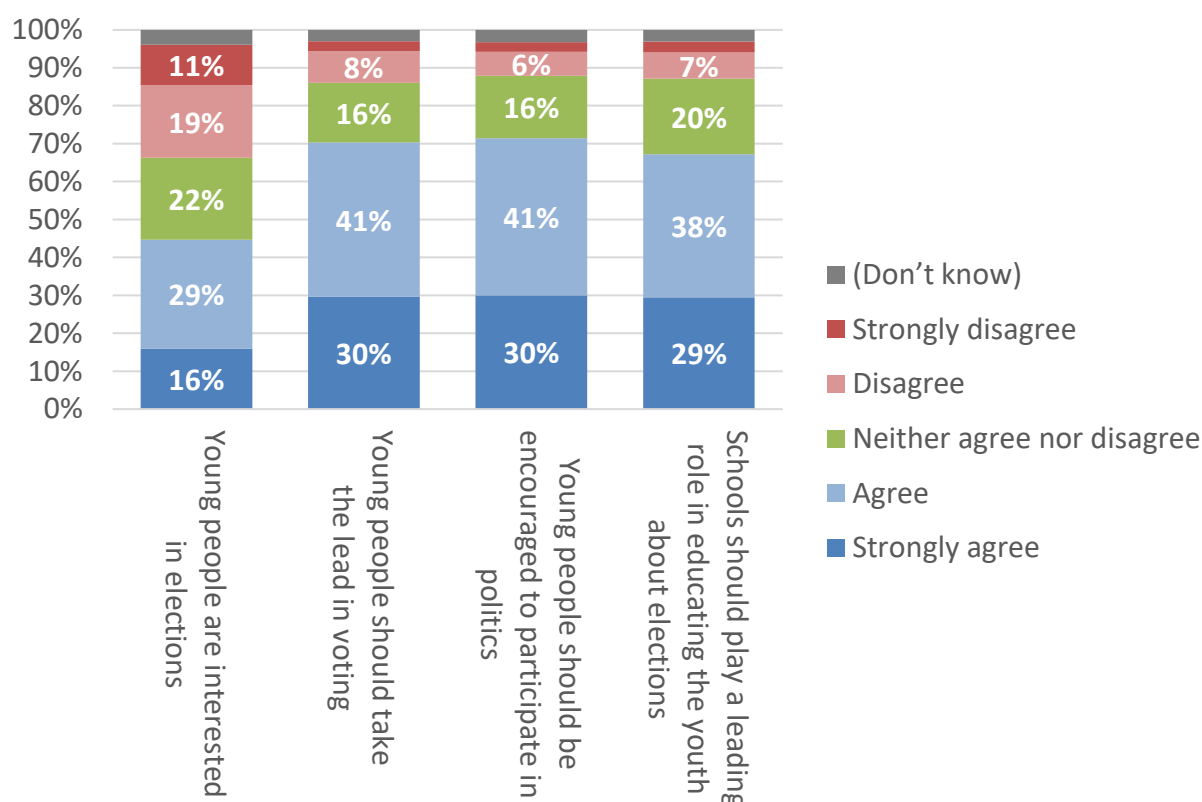
During the 2005 VPS we did observe a significant SFPP Index differences on this issue by frequency by which an individual voted. Due to declining index scores amongst non-voters, however, significant differences emerged in VPS 2021. Voters exhibited higher SFPP Index scores than non-voters in the last VPS round. The largest change was observed for female non-voters, index scores for this group fell from 67 (SE=0.81) at the start of the period to 61 (SE=0.89) at the end. During both the 2021 and the 2005 VPS we did not observe a significant age gradient in terms of SFPP Index scores. In other words, younger and older citizens tended to exhibit similar results on this issue. In Table 26 we noted interesting geotype differences over the period with the largest change noted for rural female citizens. The SFPP Index score for female rural residents declined from 70 (SE=0.63) in VPS 2005 to 62 (SE=0.89) in VPS 2021.

9.2. Youth, Politics and Electoral Participation

The “Born Frees” generation (i.e., those citizens born after 1990) have become a larger and larger proportion of the South African electorate in the last few years. However, many

commentators have become worried that this generation has forsaken traditional democratic institutions and embraced political apathy. The idea that young South Africans are increasingly abandoning traditional conventional political activities has become more salient following low voter turnout amongst this group during the 2021 LGE. In many countries, the debate about the lack of electoral participation among younger age groups has a long history (see, for example, Ake, 2001; Dahl, 2000; Putnam, 2002). This section will consider citizen attitudes towards youth participation in South Africa. It will show that the general public has become more negative on this issue over time. The largest level of negativity has emerged from non-voters, indicating the political alienation of this group.

Figure 72: Public agreement and disagreement with statements about the youth and the electoral process (column percentages)



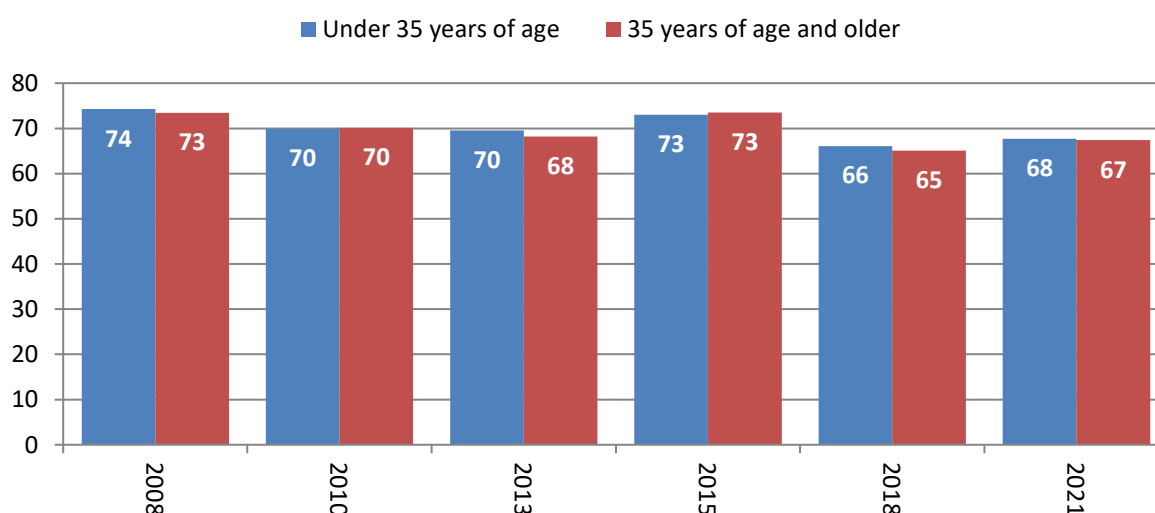
Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

VPS respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about youth involvement in politics, responses captured on a five-point Likert scale. Citizen responses to these questions are depicted in Figure 72 and demonstrate that the public supports efforts to encourage political participation amongst the youth. A clear majority (71%) of the adult populace agreed that the youth should take the lead in voting. A similar proportion believed that the youth should be encouraged to participate in politics. Most of the general public thought that schools should play a leading role in educating the youth about elections. But support for civic education has decreased over the last few years suggesting that public backing for such a policy intervention has diminished slightly. Less than half (45%) of the adult citizenry believe that the youth is interested in elections. This represents a sharp decline over the last decade in the share of the public who see young

people as politically engaged. About three-fifths of the mass public in VPS 2008 agreed that young people were interested in electoral politics.

Four scales were created based on the items included in Figure 72 and then these scales were transformed into an aggregate index. This measure was scaled on a standard 0-100 range, the higher value indicated support for a greater political participation for youth. The variable was classified as the Political Youth Engagement (PYE) Index, it assessed public support for youth involvement in politics. Mean PYE Index scores declined somewhat between 2008 and 2021, falling from 74 (SE=0.28) to 68 (SE=0.35) during this thirteen year period. Investigating the matter further, the research team found that it was the indicator on encourage youth to participate in politics that had changed the most over time³². We may have expected index scores on the PYE Index to differ distinctly by age group with young people more positive about their political role. However, regardless of which survey round we considered we did not detect a youth differential in mean PYE Index scores (Figure 73).

Figure 73: Mean Political Engagement Youth (PYE) (0-100) Index scores, 2008-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2008-2021

In order to comprehend the subtleties of the minor deterioration observed in Figure 73, let us scrutinise index scores for different socio-demographic groups for the period 2008-2021. Table 27 presents mean PYE Index scores across a range of selected subgroups for this thirteen year period. Over the last ten years we discovered some striking disparities in mean scores for certain groups. Non-voters, for example, became less positive about youth involvement in politics over time. During this twelve-year period, mean PYE Index scores for this group fell from 73 (SE=0.57) to 63 (SE=0.72). Much smaller declines were noted for voters, especially those who vote regularly. It was interesting to note that young people did not have different mean PEYI scores than their older counterparts. In most of the survey rounds under consideration, the Black African majority exhibited more positive pro-youth views than racial minorities. The Indian minority was relatively positive about youth involvement in VPS 2008 but has become more and more dissatisfied on this issue over time.

³² The segment of the general populace who agreed that young people should be encouraged to participate in politics decreased from 89% in 2008 VPS to 61% in 2021 VPS.

Table 27: Mean Political Youth Engagement (PYE) (0-100) Index scores across socio-demographic subgroups for the period 2008-2021

	2008		2010		2013		2015		2018		2021	
Voter Status												
Never voted	73	(0.57)	67	(0.78)	68	(0.67)	70	(0.77)	63	(0.63)	63	(0.72)
Irregular voter	74	(0.52)	70	(0.50)	69	(0.63)	74	(0.53)	66	(0.59)	67	(0.54)
Regular voter	75	(0.38)	72	(0.53)	69	(0.54)	76	(0.48)	69	(0.51)	71	(0.56)
Population Group												
Black African	75	(0.33)	72	(0.43)	70	(0.48)	75	(0.41)	67	(0.42)	69	(0.44)
Coloured	70	(0.73)	66	(0.71)	66	(0.69)	63	(0.84)	63	(0.84)	64	(0.97)
Indian	76	(1.01)	72	(1.09)	66	(0.98)	70	(0.92)	65	(0.78)	63	(0.89)
White	66	(0.83)	60	(0.97)	63	(0.83)	68	(1.12)	57	(1.12)	60	(0.87)
Age Cohort												
18-24	75	(0.67)	70	(0.75)	71	(0.80)	74	(0.82)	67	(0.83)	68	(1.02)
25-34	74	(0.58)	69	(0.77)	68	(0.78)	72	(0.77)	65	(0.71)	67	(0.76)
35-44	74	(0.57)	70	(0.74)	70	(0.85)	74	(0.77)	64	(0.85)	66	(0.73)
45-54	75	(0.67)	71	(0.85)	68	(0.91)	75	(0.75)	65	(1.00)	68	(0.87)
55+	72	(0.59)	69	(0.69)	67	(0.64)	71	(0.62)	66	(0.58)	69	(0.62)
Province												
Western Cape	69	(0.73)	65	(0.87)	66	(0.75)	66	(0.97)	66	(1.15)	62	(1.19)
Eastern Cape	73	(0.56)	67	(0.76)	64	(0.89)	71	(0.96)	68	(0.82)	69	(1.06)
Northern Cape	77	(1.06)	69	(1.38)	76	(1.20)	79	(1.30)	71	(1.17)	72	(1.11)
Free State	77	(1.17)	59	(1.46)	69	(1.18)	71	(1.15)	69	(1.52)	66	(1.32)
KwaZulu-Natal	75	(0.69)	72	(0.65)	64	(0.89)	77	(0.63)	65	(0.67)	74	(0.76)
North West	75	(1.02)	71	(1.71)	72	(1.17)	68	(1.48)	67	(1.40)	64	(1.11)
Gauteng	74	(0.63)	70	(0.83)	71	(0.83)	76	(0.76)	64	(0.82)	69	(0.79)
Mpumalanga	73	(1.15)	73	(1.21)	71	(1.41)	73	(0.92)	63	(1.06)	66	(1.08)
Limpopo	76	(0.97)	77	(1.05)	76	(1.23)	72	(1.29)	68	(1.15)	61	(1.01)

Note: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; and 2. Cell shaded in green indicate a figure above the national average year in a given survey round.

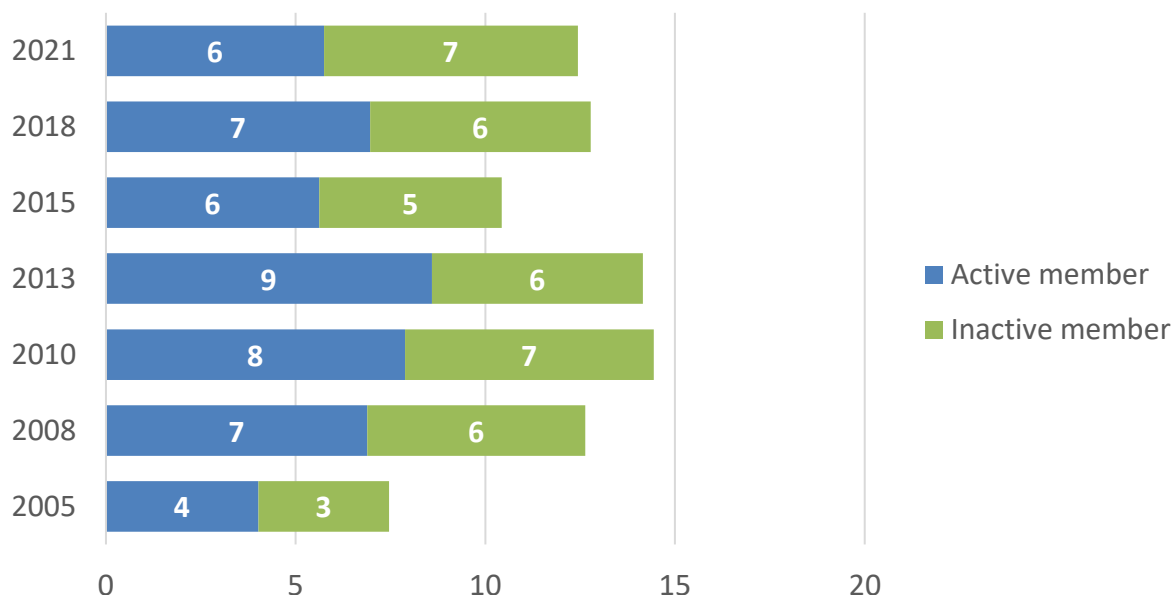
Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2008-2021

Reviewing the data portrayed in Table 27, it is evident that certain provincial groups were more predisposed to favour youth participation than others. Citizens from the Northern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal were the more positive on this issue than their counterparts in other provinces. Those living in Limpopo and the Western Cape, by contrast, were the most negative. Between the 2008 VPS and the 2021 VPS, there was a 15-point decline in the PYE Index score of Limpopo citizens. Interestingly, one of the driving factors of this decline was concerns about the role of schools in encouraging youth to become political active³³. The Free State and the North West also experienced a notable (if less robust) decline in their average PYE Index score during this period. KwaZulu-Natal was one of the few provinces that did not

³³ The percentage of the adult citizens in Limpopo who agreed that schools should play a leading role in educating the youth about elections decreased from 85% in 2008 VPS to 49% in 2021 VPS.

experience a significant decline. Indeed, PYE scores in the province increased somewhat between the 2018 VPS and 2021 VPS.

Figure 74: Percentage of the adult population who were members (active or inactive) of youth or students' associations, 2005-2021 (row percentages)



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

An interesting metric of youth involvement in politics is public participation in youth or student associations. VPS participants were queried on whether they belong to organisations of this type. Self-reported levels of membership in youth or student associations were depicted in Figure 74 for the period 2005-2021. The proportion of the mass public who claimed to be a member of this kind of association grew during this period albeit from a low base. In the last survey round, only about a twentieth (6%) of the adult populace were active members and 7% were inactive members. Given the student protests across tertiary institutions in the mid-2010s, it is interesting to note that the share of students who were part of a youth or student movement was higher in 2013 VPS (14%) than 2015 VPS (10%).

10. Identity Documentation and Voter Registration

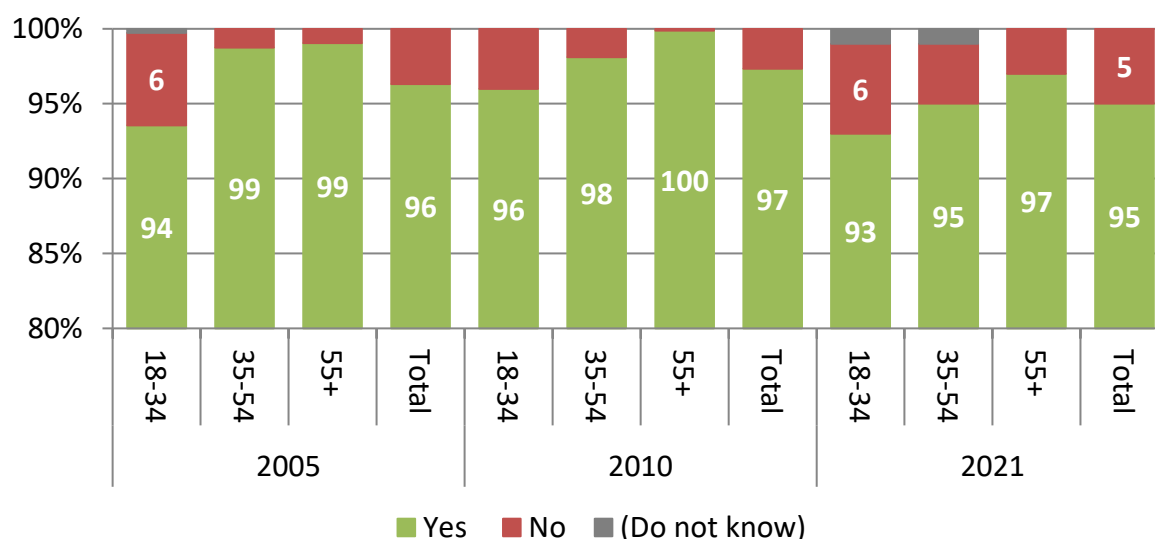
To vote in South Africa, an individual must be registered on the voters' roll and as such a prime responsibility of the electoral authority is to ensure that processes and procedures are in place which allow voters to register. If these processes do not function optimally, it poses a risk to the democratic project creating a serious barrier to electoral participation. Consequently, voter registration forms a critical part of the mandate of the Election Commission, and the election management body holds meticulous records of registered voters. In this section, we present survey findings on voter registration and the barriers individuals face when trying to register. The section is subdivided into different components. The first subdivision looks at identity documentation, followed by a section on self-reported registration behaviour, barriers to registration and lastly a section on attitudes towards on-line registration.

10.1. Identity documents

A valid bar-coded identity document (ID) or Identity Card is compulsory when registering as a voter in South African government elections. Citizens as well as permanent residents who are 16 years and older are eligible to apply for a South African ID. Questions about ID documents therefore formed part of the survey and were central in determining if the procurement of ID documents was in any way an obstacle in the voting process. Surveyed respondents were asked if they are in possession of an ID, and their responses allowed a better understanding of patterns of ID ownership in the country. Reasons to why an individual might not have an ID were also specifically determined.

We found that the vast majority of the voting aged population was in possession of a legitimate bar-coded ID. More than nine-tenths (95%) of the voting aged public held such a document in 2021 (**Figure 75**). Broken down by age group, results showed little variation between these categories with 93% of the 18–34-year-olds possessing an ID, followed by the 34–54-year-old group (95%) and the 55+ group (97%). As can be observed in the figure, data patterns in 2021 correspond with previous survey results. The results depicted are also in line with official figures from the Department of Home Affairs which confirm that the vast majority of South Africans possess ID documents. These findings show that access to ID is not a barrier to registering as a voter or to voting itself. The majority of South Africans who do not possess a valid ID are in the 16-17 age cohort. Half of this age group possessed a valid ID in 2021.

Figure 75: Possession of the Identity Document by age group (column percentage), 2005, 2010, 2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005, 2010, 2021.

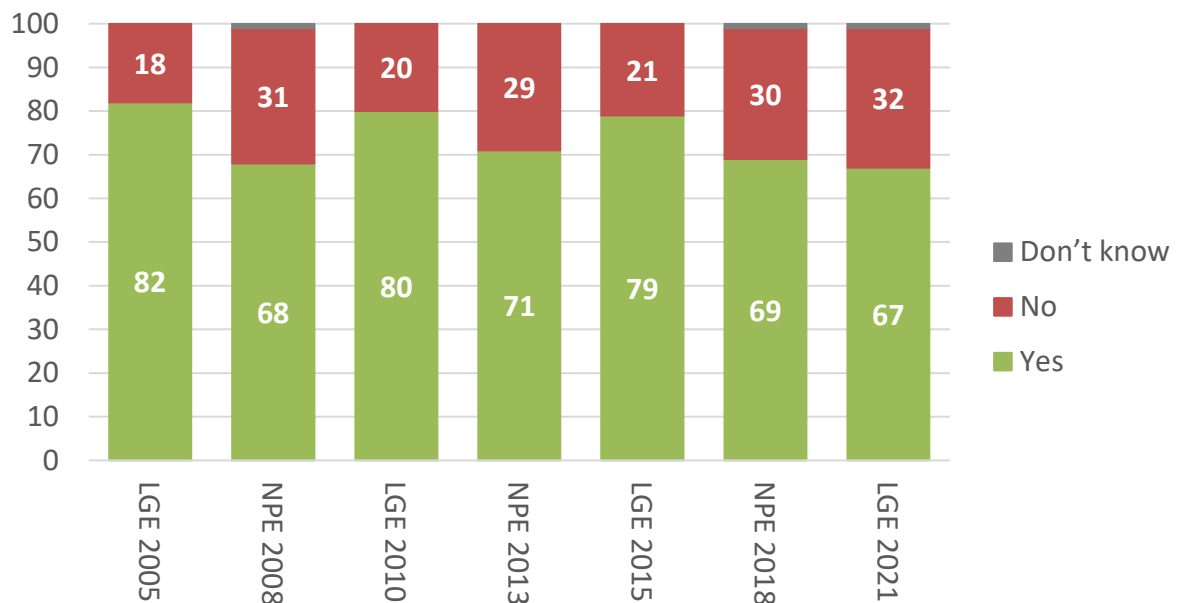
About a-fifth (19%) of those who did not hold an ID told fieldworkers that they will not seek to obtain this important form of documentation. They were asked to explain their reasoning and the most common reason provided pertained to the issue of affordability. In late 2021, this barrier was mentioned by 22% of those who did not intend to apply for an ID. Other popular reasons included attachment to the old blue ID books and a disregard of the new documentation since it does not mention race (15%), inaccessibility and negative perceptions

of home affairs (10%), insufficient knowledge of where and how to apply (8%), as well as the belief that this type of document was not needed (7%). It is clear that only a small share of the population is negatively affected by ID registration irregularities, but more must be done to address this issue.

10.2. Voter registration

For a local government election, voters need to be registered in a specific ward and can only vote if they are correctly registered in their ward. The IEC embarks on voter registration drives to encourage general voter register to vote and also specifically embarks on campaigns to educate the public about being registered in the correct wards. In Figure 76 self-reported voter registration amongst the voting aged public can be observed. The data portrayed here is not based on the official records of registered voters from the Election Commission but is based on a question in the survey posed to the respondents. Survey respondents were asked if they were registered as a voter and, if so, when they registered. Answers from the surveyed respondents will, consequently, differ from the Election Commission’s official statistics since some under-reporting, over-reporting or recall error might occur. These figures therefore do not represent official Electoral Commission voter registration data, but it does reflect trends and tendencies among voters and provides valuable information to the Election Commission in terms of voter registration campaigns.

Figure 76: Public Response to the Question: “Are you registered as a voter?” amongst adults of voting age (column percentage), 2005-2021

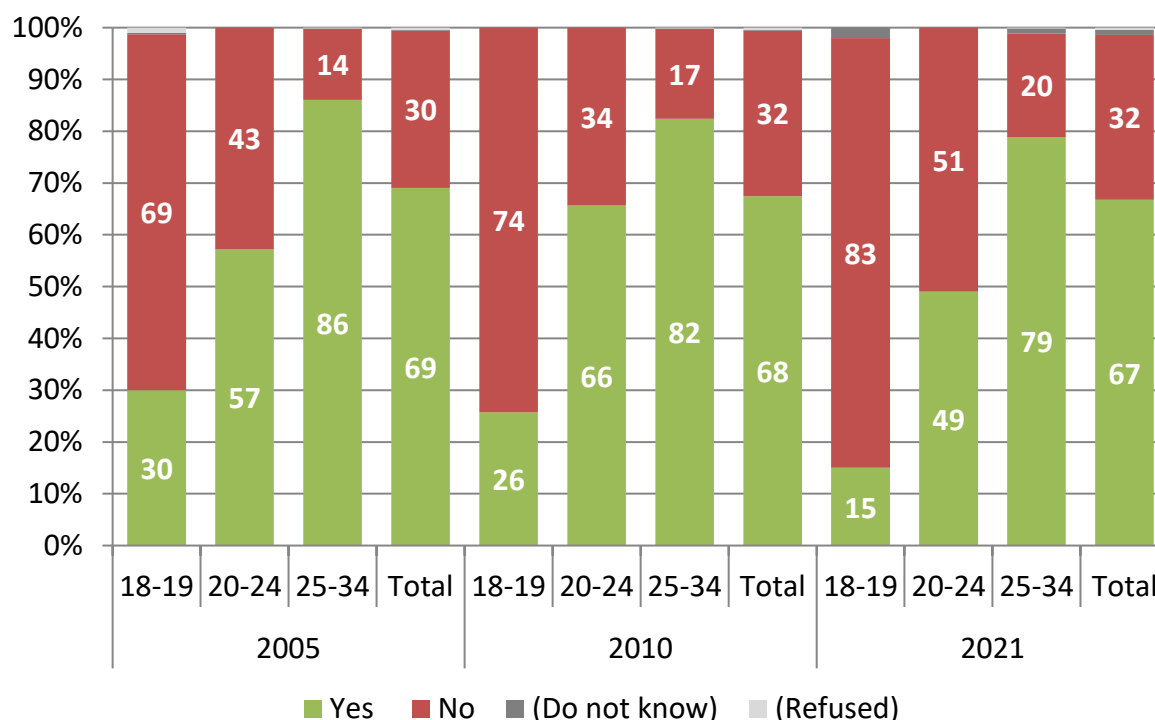


Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

According to the 2021 Voter Participation Survey, just over two thirds (67%) of citizens aged 18 years and older are registered as voters with 32% not registered. When the current 2021 results are compared to past survey rounds, we note differences from past rounds. The 2021 survey figure represents the lowest registration level ever recorded, specifically compared to previous LGE elections (82% in 2005, 80% in 2010, 79% in 2015). It is therefore safe to state that self-reported voting registration ahead of the 2021 LGE was significantly lower than what was observed during previous LGEs. This is clearly a concerning trend and in line with greater

voter apathy that has been noticed in recent years. With regard to the year of registration, most South Africans tend to register for elections prior to an NGE. Reviewing the results of our survey series, we note a trend where the majority of voters seem to register prior to a national election (such as government elections in 1999). This is in line with international trends and often as a result of the perception that national/provincial elections are more important than local government elections.

Figure 77: Voter Registration by youth age group (row percentage), 2005, 2010, 2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005, 2010, 2021

According to the mid-year estimates of 2019, the youth (aged 18–34) constitute almost a third of the population (17,84 million) in South Africa, and it is therefore understandable that the IEC has specific drives to encourage the youth to register to vote. The Election Commission is rightly concerned about registration rates amongst the South African youth and how these may have changed over time. **Figure 77** presents registration rates by youth age group for the period 2005-2021. Amongst the youth, the probability of being registered seemed positively correlated with age³⁴. The proportion of the 18-19 age cohort that was registered as a voter fell from 30% in 2005 to only 15% in 2021—a substantial drop in voting intention amongst this important cohort. Equally precipitous declines were also observed for the 20-24 and 25-34 age cohorts. Overall, amongst the 18-34 age cohort, self-reported registration rates are down from 69% in 2005 to 57% in 2021. This outcome seems to point to an escalating disenchantment with the electoral system amongst the youth.

³⁴ Using a Pearson's product-moment correlation test, we confirmed a statistically significant correlation ($r=0.327$, $p<0.000$) between age and the voter registration rate amongst this cohort.

Table 28: Voter registration (percentage) by select socio-demographic variables, 2005, 2018 and 2021

Subgroups	2005	2018	2021
Population Group	ns	***	***
Black African	82%	65%	66%
Coloured	81%	72%	67%
Indian	77%	70%	73%
White	83%	80%	71%
Educational Attainment	***	***	***
No secondary education	90%	80%	78%
Incomplete secondary	76%	63%	60%
Complete secondary	80%	65%	65%
Post-secondary	85%	76%	80%

Note: Reported levels of statistically significant are based on Chi-Square 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.

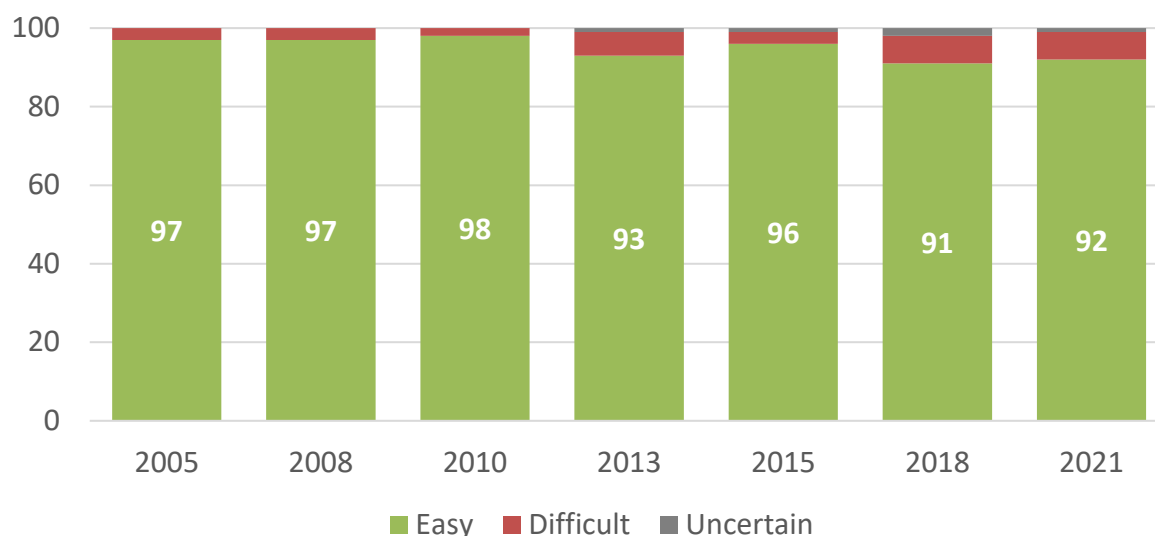
Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

In order to further determine which groups are underrepresented when it comes to voter registration, we compare results from the 2005, 2018 and 2021 survey rounds for race and educational attainment (Table 28). It is evident that members of the Indian and white minority groups are more apt to be registered than members of the Black African majority in 2021. Although self-reported registration rates have declined since 2005 among all population groups, it is apparent that non-registration has become more pronounced amongst the Black African population in the last decade. This outcome may be related to growing political disillusionment amongst this group (a trend discussed in more detail elsewhere in the report). In terms of educational attainment, a linear relationship was not found between education and voter registration. When compared to other groups, those with no education and those with a post-secondary education were the most likely to be registered. The IEC should take this into consideration when designing registration campaign messages.

10.2.1. The registration process

In each survey round, most people interviewed were found to be registered as voters. In order to ascertain their experience of the voting process, they were asked whether they found registration procedures easy or difficult. Nine out of every ten registered voters described the process as easy and the proportion giving this answer was consistent across the different survey rounds (Figure 78). These results confirm that the registration process is managed effectively and that the Election Commission is functioning optimally in fulfilling this part of its mandate. However, it would appear that the minority who found the process 'difficult' was somewhat larger in 2018 VPS and 2021 VPS than in previous survey rounds. This escalation in the number of people experiencing difficulty should be closely monitored in future.

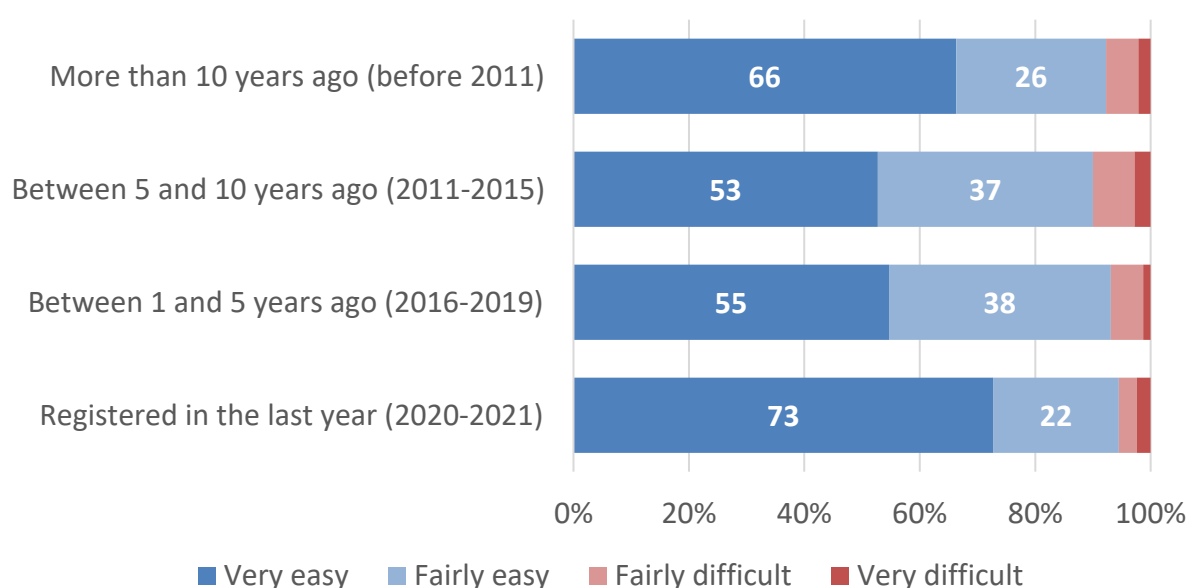
Figure 78: Public Response to the Question: “Did you find it easy or difficult did you find it to register as a voter?” (column percentage), 2005-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

In order to determine if the ease of registration has improved over time, an analysis was done looking at perceived ease of registration by when they registered (in the last year, between 1 and 5 years ago, between 5 and 10 years ago or more than ten years ago). As can be noted from **Figure 79**, the proportion that found the process to be very easy has increased significantly over time. Consider, for instance, that nearly three-quarters (73%) of those who registered in the 2020-2021 period said that the process was very easy. This can be compared to 55% who registered during the 2016-2019 period and 53% who registered in the 2011-2015 period. In summation, the data showed that the perceived ease of registration has improved over the last decade.

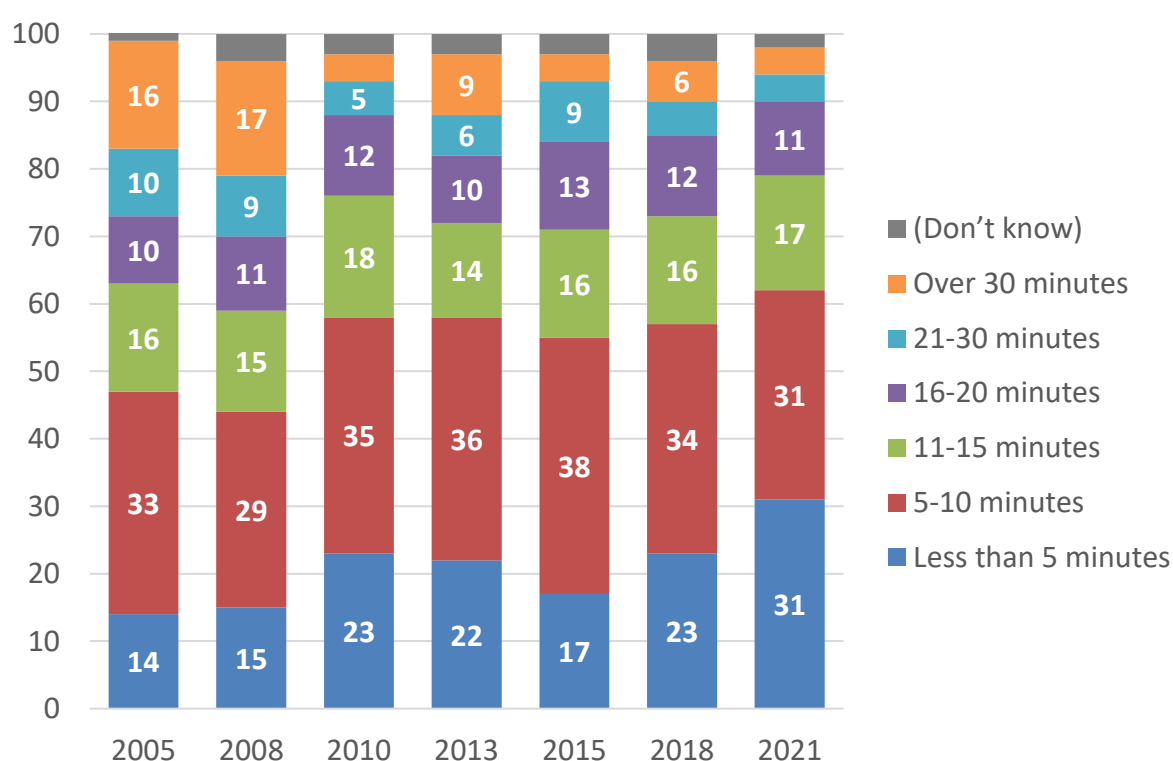
Figure 79: Perceived ease of registration by the period when the voters said that they registered to vote



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

One of the factors that may affect an individual's registration process is the time it takes to register to vote. In 2021 almost two thirds (62%) of registered voters indicated that it took them less than 10 minutes to register as a voter (Figure 80). More than a quarter (28%) stated it took between 11-20 minutes to register with a further 4% reporting it took between 21-30 minutes. A similar proportion (4%) of registered voters reported that it took more than 30 minutes to register. This result is consistent with previous rounds and demonstrates that the length of time to register has decreased over time. These results confirm that the registration process is managed effectively and that the Commission is functioning very well in fulfilling this part of its mandate.

Figure 80: Length of Time that it took Voters to Register (column percentage), 2005-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

A mean score was created to determine the length of time it took to register to vote. According to the mean calculation, on average it takes 10 minutes to register as a voter in 2021 VPS and this was lower than what was observed in 2000, 2005 and 2018. The outcome is concurrent with the general view that the registration process is fairly straightforward. Mean times are shown in Table 29 for selected socio-demographic groups for both 2005 and 2021. To help understand whether observed differences are statistically significant, ANOVA results are shown in the table. When significance testing was conducted based on average time taken to register, no significant differences were found in 2021 on the basis of gender, age group and educational attainment. Coloured registered voters took a longer period of time in 2021 (M=12; SD=7.38) as well as the Indian/Asian (M=11; SD=6.72). The white minority (M=9; SD=6.69) reported the shortest period to register in 2021.

Table 29: Time it took to register by key variables (mean minute scores), 2005 and 2021

	2005			2021		
	M	SD	Scheffe Sig.	M	SD	Scheffe Sig.
Gender						
Male	13	9.31	reg.	10	7.52	reg.
Female	12	8.99	*	10	7.53	
Population Group						
Black African	13	9.48	reg.	10	7.63	reg.
Coloured	9	6.51	***	12	7.38	***
Indian	12	9.51		11	6.72	
White	11	7.89	***	9	6.69	
Age Group						
18-24	11	8.53	reg.	10	8.16	reg.
25-34	13	9.12		11	8.68	
35-44	14	9.55	**	10	7.76	
45-54	12	9.39		11	8.57	
55+	12	8.80		11	8.62	
Educational Attainment						
No secondary	12	8.89	reg.	10	7.61	reg.
Incomplete secondary	13	9.26		10	8.11	
Complete secondary	13	9.52		10	7.24	
Post-secondary	11	8.46		9	6.82	

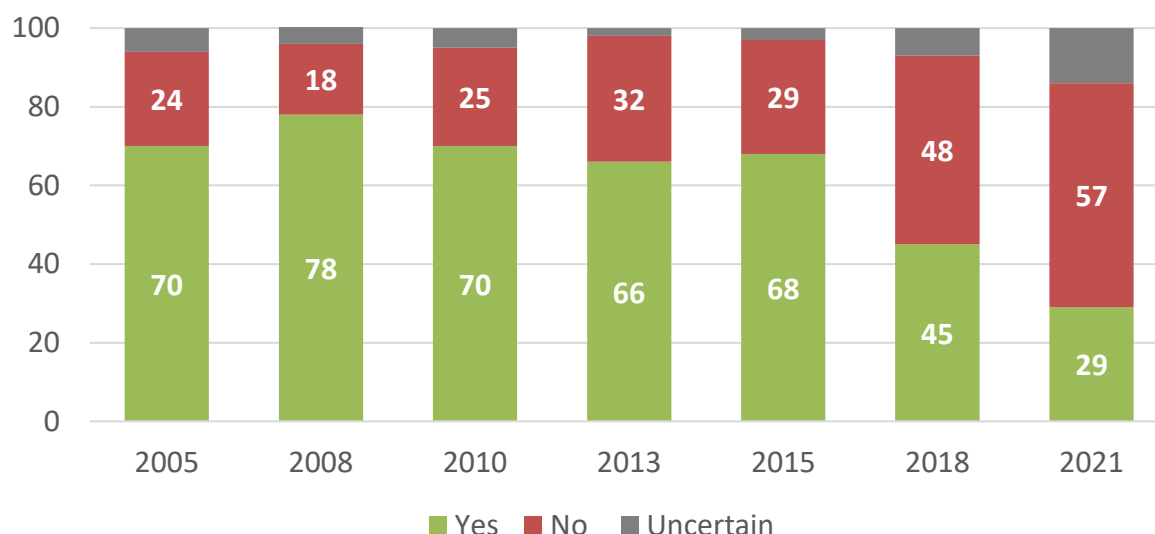
Note: Reported levels of statistically significant are based on ANOVA testing. The signs *, **, *** indicate that the differences in mean scores are significantly different at the 5 percent ($p < 0.05$), 1 percent ($p < 0.01$) and 0.5 percent ($p < 0.001$) level respectively.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005; 2018; 2021

10.2.2. Barriers to the registration process

In this section the focus turns to potential voters who have explicitly stated that they have no desire to register as a voter or are uncertain about this issue. In the current survey, this constitutes 19% of the total age eligible voters which is higher than previous surveys where this group constituted around a tenth of the voting age public (7% in both 2008 and 2010; 12% in 2013, 10% in 2015, 15% in 2018). It is therefore critical to determine reasons for not wanting to register as a voter. In the section below, non-registered voters who indicated an unwillingness to register were analysed. The data presented will show that it is political disinterest that acts as the greatest barrier to voter registration in South Africa. This is consistent with what was observed in Section 7.6.

Figure 81: Voter registration intention among non-registered adults of voting age (column percentage), 2005- 2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

Among the unregistered population results show that the share who said that they planned to register had declined over time (**Error! Reference source not found.**). 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. This outcome will no doubt have significant effects on voting intention and shows the growth of public embitterment with the electoral system in South Africa. Disaggregated by age, it is interesting to note that intention to register is highest amongst younger age cohorts. Once older and a pattern of non-voting has been established the intention to register diminishes. It is therefore critical to entice youngsters to register and the current emphasis by the Election Commission on youth is an appropriate strategy. Messages emphasising that young people can register as young as 16 years should be underscored.

The majority of citizens who do not want to register as voters cite a general lack of political interest as the main reasons for not wanting to register. This tendency has been fairly consistent since 2005 (Table 30). Administrative barriers were mentioned by a minority of South Africans (8%) as obstacles. Specific administrative barriers mentioned included response statements such as *don't know where to register*, *don't know how to register* and *facilities are inaccessible*. General apathy (have not gotten around to it) was mentioned by 6% of those not registered. Political intimidation of some sort as well as religious reasons and high crime rates scarcely featured as a rationale for not registering. The main reasons for neglecting to register as a voter therefore stems from the broader political landscape and a general tendency towards voter apathy.

Table 30: Barriers to voter registration among non-registered adults of voting age (column percentage), 2005-2021

	2005	2008	2010	2013	2015	2018	2021
Political disinterest	74	71	74	67	70	78	64
Administration barriers	5	12	3	8	5	4	8
Have not yet got round to it	14	5	5	2	3	4	6
Political intimidation		3	3	1	2	1	3
Religious reasons	1	2	2	2	1	2	2
High crime rate in my area	6		1	0	1	1	1
Other		7	10	19	17	5	9
Don't know	-	-	-	--		5	7

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis. *Source:* Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

One of the reasons that people may not be registering at the desired level could be public knowledge about when a citizen can register to vote. Very few registered voters (16%) were aware that they can register to vote from the age of 16 years. The majority (76%) believe that one can only register as a voter at the age of 18. This seems to be a message that is lost on the youth and very few citizens are registered at the age of 16 years. Only a small minority (17%) of those citizens in the Born Free Generation knew that a person could register to vote at 16 years of age. The segment aware of this fact would be even smaller (13%) if we restrict our analysis to those adults who were born after 1999 (i.e., Generation Z). Communication campaigns emphasising that young people can register at the age of 16 years as a voter should be marketed more effectively to the public.

Another area where voter education is needed is in relation to knowledge of the requirements for voter participation in local government elections. Only 71% of registered voters surveyed in 2021 VPS were aware that you needed to re-register if you moved to another voting district. When this result is compared to the 2018 round, it is noted that the proportion aware of this had decreased (from 80% to 71%). The portion who is aware of this requirement is even smaller if we restrict our inquiry to those adults who were Generation Z (i.e., those born after 1999). Only about half (53%) of those aged 16 between 21 knew that a person had to re-register in that new voting district. This is worrisome especially in the context of a local government election, where a person can only vote in a specific district. The importance of re-registering when one relocates will need to be strongly emphasised in coming voter education campaigns.

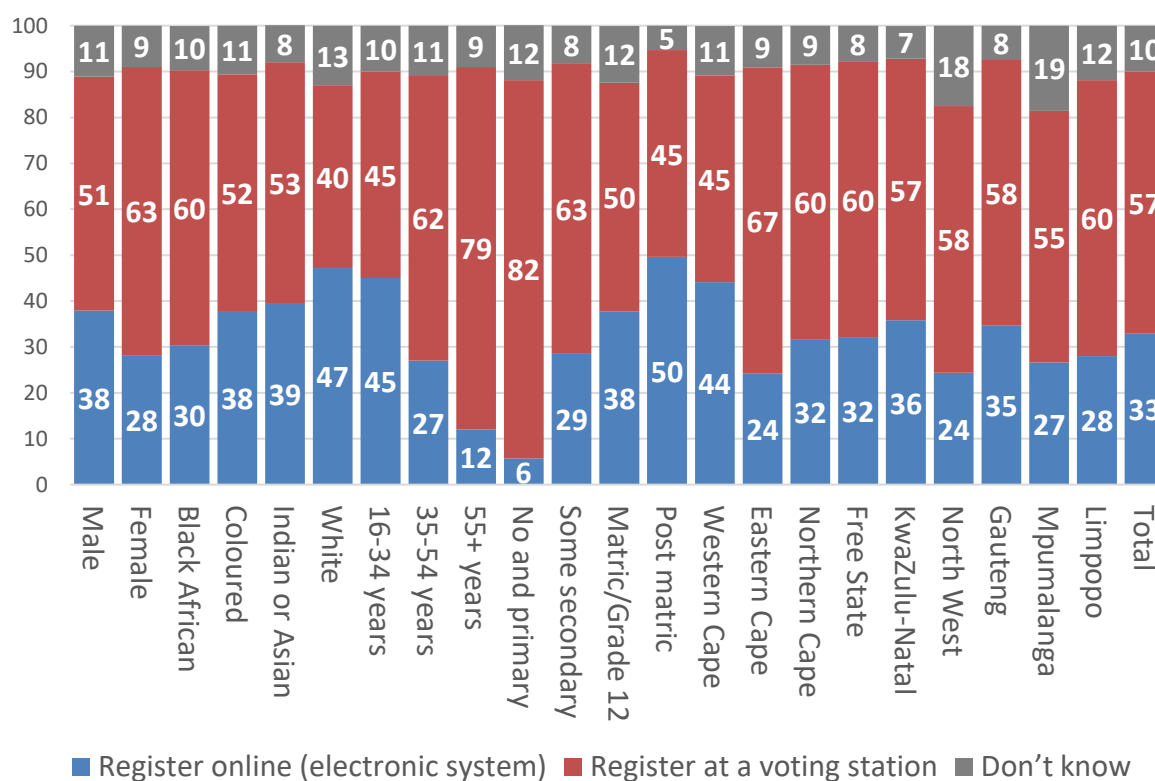
10.2.3. Online registration

On 14 July 2021, an online registration platform was launch which allows all eligible voters to register as well as update their details via a computer, smart phone or tablet. This system was launched to complement other registration options such as registering at IEC offices, school's universities and other identified registration offices. This online platform was part of the IEC's effort to keep registration going despite the COVID-19 pandemic. The launch of the online platform was successful with more than a half a million voters registering to vote on the platform prior to the 2021 elections. The IEC has indicated that the online registration facility will become a permanent feature in South Africa. It is ultimately more cost effective, and research has showed that it has the potential to increase registration rates, especially for

18-24 year olds. In order to determine support for the online voter registration method, questions were asked in the survey about attitudes towards online registration.

Eligible voters were asked if they would prefer to register online or at a voting station. Despite the success of the on-line registration system, the majority 57% stated they would prefer to register at a voting station, with a third preferring online registration. To understand how preferences differed by socio-demographic characteristics, we examined responses to this question by a range of diverse subgroups in **Figure 82**. Preference for registering were found to vary by socio-demographic factors and as could be expected, those less educated were least in favour of on-line registration whilst the wealthy, educated were most inclined to opt for the online registration. As the South African population become more literate and accustomed to modern technology, it is expected that the proportions preferring the online registration system will increase.

Figure 82: Preference for registering on-line or at a voting station by a range of socio-demographic subgroups

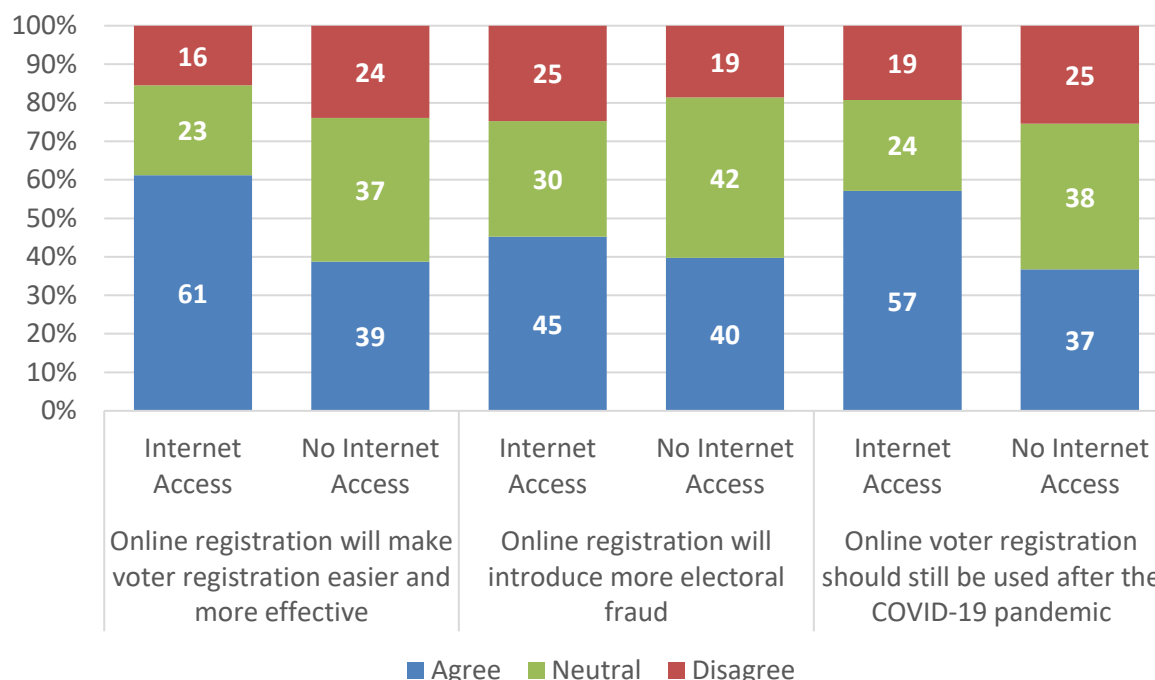


Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

Interestingly, despite the preference for registering at a voting station, the majority of South Africans (55%) believed that online registration is better than other forms of registration and over half (51%) also stated that the online registration should continue post COVID-19. Some South Africans (about a fifth) however remain very sceptical about on-line voting. One of the reasons for this scepticism is associated with the perception of the possibility of introducing more fraud. To this effect it was found that a sizeable 44% believed that online registration will increase fraud. Messages about security measures associated with online registration should therefore be a central theme when promoting online registration. Internet access was

a determinant of public attitudes towards online registration, especially for the efficacy statement and pandemic statement (**Figure 83**).

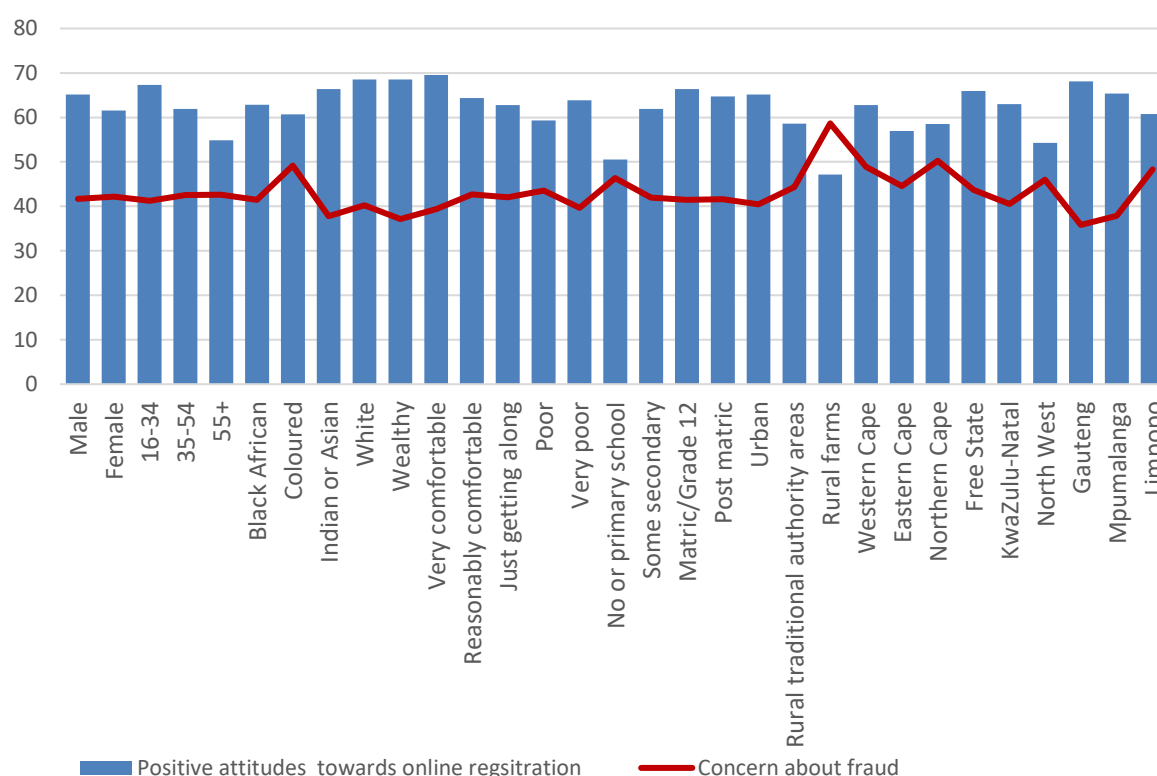
Figure 83: Public agreement and disagreement with a series of statements about online registration by internet access



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

In order to understand which groups were anti or pro-online registration, a Pro-online Registration index was created combining the question “Online registration is better” and “Online registration should be used after COVID”. Since online fraud is a reality and a concern to voters, this question was also converted to a 0-100 score and analysed by subgroups to understand who are most sceptical about online registration due to its association with possible fraud. Both these indexes are presented in **Figure 84**. The figure shows that differences exist between the select socio-demographic subgroups when considering online registration. Youngsters were found to be more positive toward online registration than older cohorts and a clear socio-economic bias was noted with regards to online registration. Wealthier and more educated voters were generally more positive towards online registration. Concern about online registration and fraud was highest among residents in the Northern Cape, KwaZulu Natal and Limpopo. Since online registration and voting might become a reality in future, it would therefore be prudent to focus on these subgroups who are most critical of online registration and to attempt to allay their fears.

Figure 84: Online registration and perceptions of fraud associated with online registration



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

Social media usage was found to improve citizen support for online registration. The more time a person spent looking at social media websites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) the more likely they were to agree with the statements in **Figure 83**. This was especially true if we examined the proportion who believe that online registration should remain permanent. More than three-fifths (61%) of adults that looked at social media often or very often agreed that online voter registration should still be used after the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of friends or followers on social media was also associated with positive attitudes towards online registration. Consider, for instance, that 72% of those who had more than a thousand followers agreed that internet technology made registering to vote easier and more effective. The report will return to the question of how technology can be used to improve the electoral process in Section 12 which provides an analysis of public attitudes towards electronic voting.

11. Voter Knowledge and Education

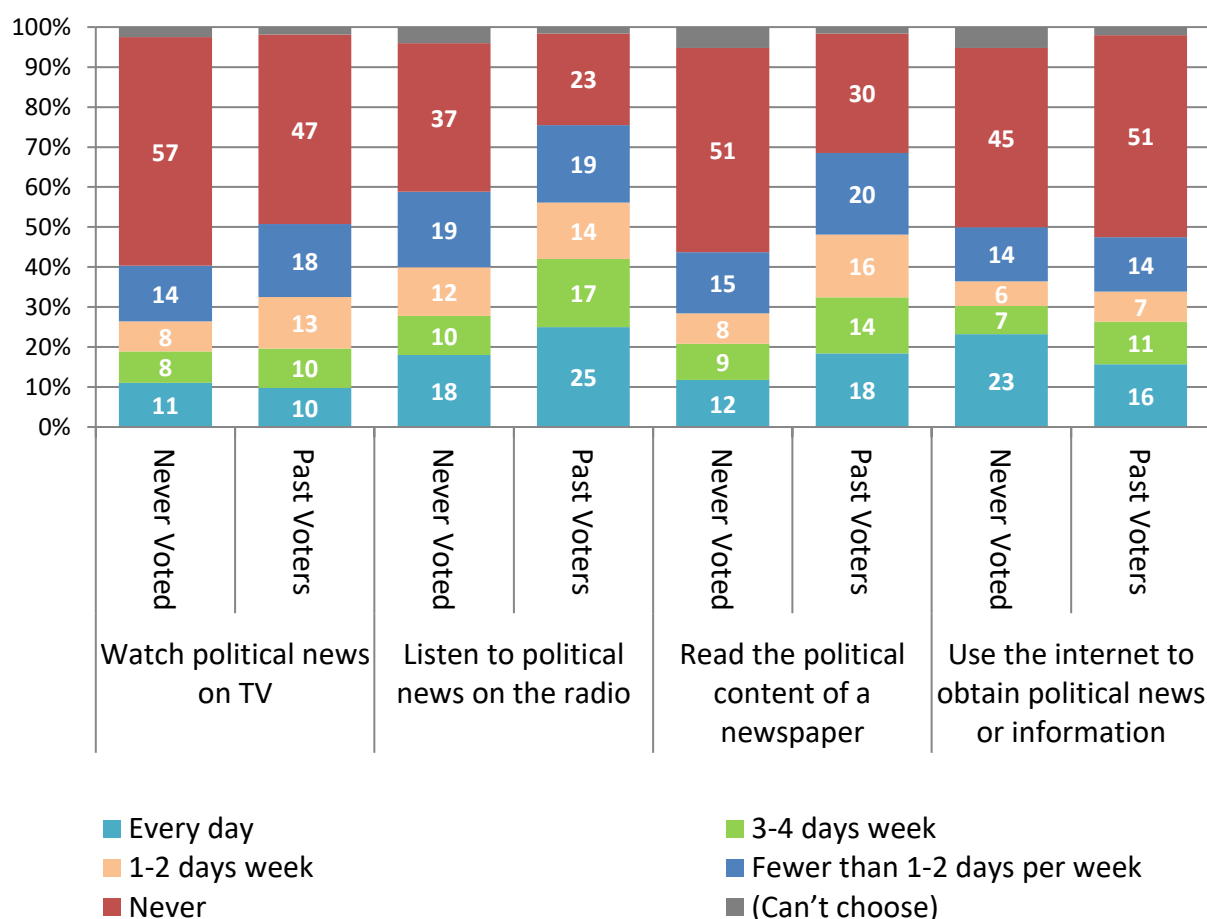
Voter education campaigning is a mechanism to improve public electoral participation and can be considered a cornerstone of constitutional democracy. As such the Electoral Commission embarks on wide-ranging voter education campaigns during every election cycle. But due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the haste of the 2021 LGE, the time and resources available for such campaigns was limited in 2021. Given these circumstances, it is important to understand levels of voter knowledge in the country and which sources people find most helpful in acquiring voter education content. This section will examine levels of self-reported electoral knowledge amongst the citizen population, identifying those groups with low stocks of knowledge. It will also investigate where people acquire their knowledge and how they

may be effectively reached by voter education campaigns. The section will demonstrate that despite the rise of new media (i.e., internet and social media), the adult populace still utilises more conventional forms of mass media to acquire information on elections and voting.

11.1. Following political content in the media

Traditional broadcast and print media (i.e., conventional media) is the main source of information about elections and voting for the general public in South Africa. For many years, broadcast and print media in South Africa has been owned and controlled by the white minority. As a result, the media industry has traditionally foregrounded the perspectives and values of this group. At this time mass the media are in the process of transforming to be more inclusive of the entire population. Old mass media is currently challenged, especially amongst younger cohorts, by the rise of new media. This shift has been accompanied by the growth in fake (or spurious) content that masquerades as legitimate journalism. This subsection will examine media consumption in the country, there will be a special emphasis on fake news content.

Figure 85: How often politics is followed via different types of media channel by voting history (column percent)



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

It is important to determine how South Africans access political content and to this effect a set of items were included in the VPS questionnaire to determine the extent to which ordinary citizens consume political media content. Respondents were asked about political content

consumption on the following platforms: (i) newspaper; (ii) television; (iii) radio; and (iv) internet and social media. For each of these four questions, the response categories were: “every day”, “3-4 days a week”, “1-2 days a week”, “fewer than 1-2 days per week” or “never”. The results suggest that television was the most common medium through which South Africans are accessing political content. This is followed by the radio, newspapers and new media. When compared to those who have never voted, being a voter makes people more likely to regularly consume political content (Figure 85). Voting history has the most robust relationship with watching political news on television. Interestingly, no relationship between voting history and consuming political content on new media was observed.

In order to provide an assessment of how political media consumption has changed over time, each of the items in **Figure 85** was converted into a 0-100 scale. The higher the value on this indicator, the more regularly an individual consumed political news on the relevant platform. Mean results for each of these indicators are provided in **Table 31** for the period 2010-2021, demonstrating significant changes in self-reported political media consumption during the period. The popularity of television news consumption has decreased over time, falling from a mean 50 (SE=1.04) in 2013 VPS to 44 (SE=1.57)³⁵ in 2021 VPS. This decline in television news consumption was observed for irregular and non-voters but not for regular voters. A similar (albeit larger) pattern of declining political news utilisation is evident for radio, this decline was observed for all three voting history groups with the largest decline noted amongst regular voters. The proportion of people who use newspapers to obtain political news has remained fairly stable over time. But we do note an above average decline in usage for irregular voters, falling from 53 (SE=1.50) to 46 (SE=2.00) between VPS 2010 and 2021 VPS.

Table 31: Mean political media consumption frequency scales (0-100) scores by voting history, 2010-2021

History, 2010-2021								
Use the internet to obtain political news or information	Read the political content of a newspaper	Listen to political news on the radio	Watch political news on TV					
Regular Voters								
2010	47	(1.60)	39	(1.64)	56	(1.64)	11	(1.15)
2013	49	(1.82)	31	(1.53)	60	(1.78)	10	(1.08)
2015	47	(1.59)	35	(1.53)	55	(1.56)	12	(1.14)
2018	46	(1.81)	32	(1.73)	47	(1.86)	18	(1.46)
2021	48	(1.71)	29	(1.69)	54	(1.89)	31	(1.86)
Irregular Voters								
2010	47	(1.52)	40	(1.50)	53	(1.50)	13	(1.14)
2013	48	(1.97)	33	(1.71)	58	(1.93)	14	(1.42)
2015	44	(1.48)	31	(1.28)	55	(1.52)	20	(1.34)
2018	42	(1.89)	29	(1.67)	45	(1.68)	26	(1.91)
2021	37	(1.90)	27	(2.02)	46	(2.00)	32	(2.26)

³⁵ In particular, the number of daily watchers of political TV news has declined in the last decade. More than a third (34%) viewed political news on TV on a daily basis in 2013 compared to only about a quarter (23%) in 2021.

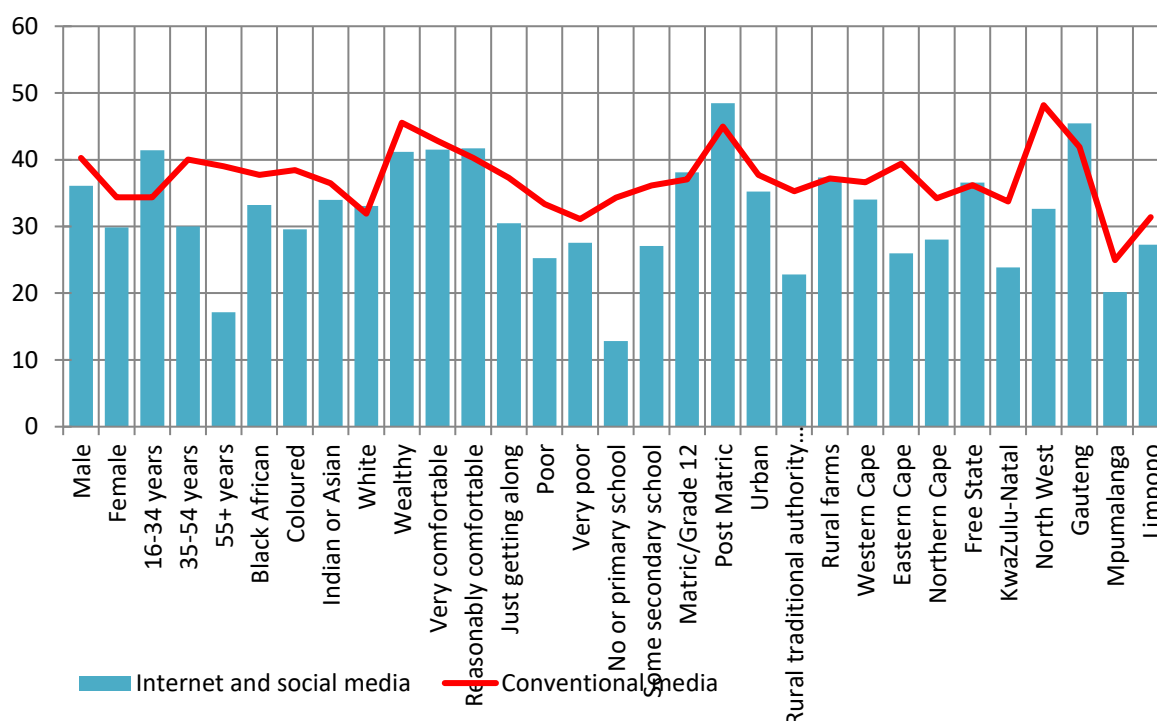
Never voted								
2010	34	(2.22)	27	(2.08)	40	(2.12)	8	(1.54)
2013	34	(2.05)	27	(1.61)	47	(2.14)	12	(1.24)
2015	36	(1.89)	27	(1.69)	50	(1.97)	23	(1.80)
2018	28	(1.65)	20	(1.54)	31	(1.79)	25	(1.74)
2021	28	(2.30)	23	(2.81)	38	(2.80)	37	(3.06)

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

The proportion of adult citizens who followed political news daily on the internet has increased incrementally since 2013. Mean new media indicator scores grew from 9 (SE=0.78) in 2010 VPS to 30 (SE=1.60), suggesting a significant change in how many citizens in the country consume political news. There was a robust correlation between the use of the various media sources, pairwise correlation tests discovered that usage of conventional media was highly intercorrelated whilst the correlation between new media and older media was much lower. In order to understand who is following political news using conventional media, responses to the three relevant items were reverse scored, summed and transformed into a 0-100 scale to represent a Conventional Media Following Index. The question on the use of internet and social media was similar reversed and transformed into a 0-100 New Media Following Scale. High scores on both measures indicate higher levels of the frequency with which respondents used media to gather information about political issues.

Figure 86: An analysis of subgroups following Conventional Media and New Media sources to gather information on political issues (mean scores)



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

Reviewing the data in **Figure 86**, it is evident that the Conventional Media Following Index scores are highest for residents from North West while the provincial population with lowest

mean index score was Mpumalanga. A socio-economic gradient was clear with the non-poor and the tertiary educated more likely to follow politics using conventional sources than their poorer and less educated counterparts. This is similar to what was observed in Section 7.1, suggesting that psychological involvement in politics has a distinct class component. Males were also much more likely than females to follow political news in conventional media, a six point gender difference. As could be expected, the youngest cohort (those between 16-34 years) were less prone than older cohorts to use conventional media sources to follow politics. There was not a great deal of differences, on the other hand, in mean index scores between those age groups that were older than 35 years of age.

The New Media Following Scale scores were highest for the tertiary educated, people residing in Gauteng and youngsters. A stark age gradient is observed, with those aged between 16-34 years significantly more likely to access political news using new media than older adults³⁶. A strong socio-economic or class effect is again noted in **Figure 86**. The non-poor are much more likely to follow politics using the internet than the poor, and a similar gradient is observed for the educational attainment groups. People from the urban formal areas were much more likely to follow politics using the internet than citizens living in rural areas. Residents from Limpopo, KwaZulu Natal and Eastern Cape are least likely to use the internet and social media to follow political news. These trends are important to guide the Electoral Commission to use the appropriate channels to distribute important voter related information.

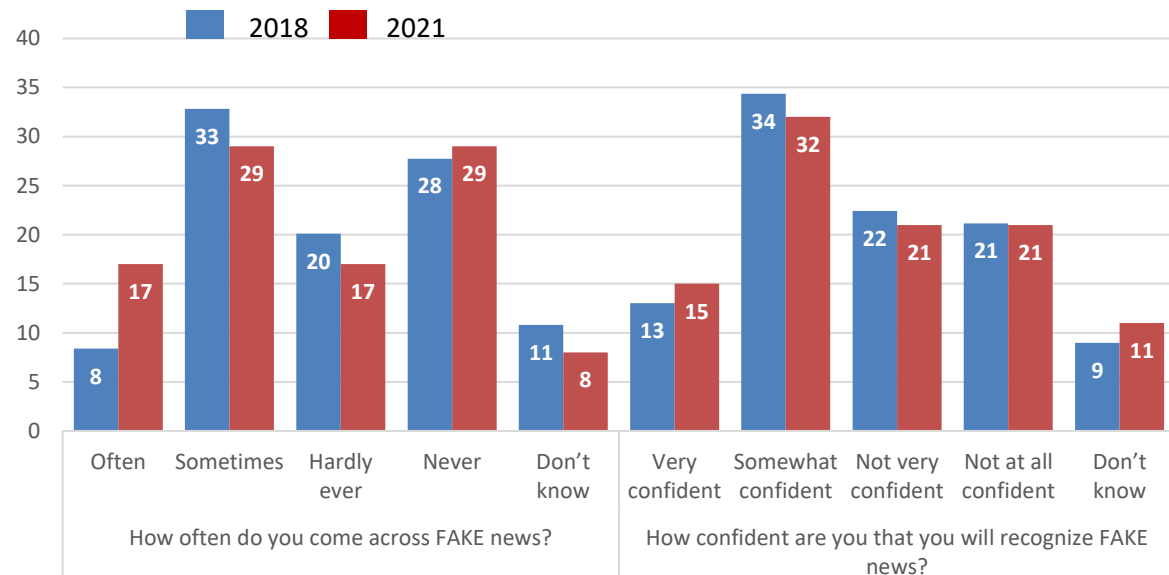
Let us turn our attention to public perceptions of ‘fake news’ (i.e., news stories that are false, fabricated, with no verifiable facts, sources or quotes). Fake news stories may be propaganda that is intentionally designed to mislead the reader/listener. The technological ease of copying, pasting, clicking and sharing content online has helped these types of articles to proliferate and often seem real and from reliable sources. This has become a threat across the world, and it was shown that in the US fake news stories during the election campaigns were more widely shared on Facebook than the most popular mainstream news stories (Tandoc, 2019). It was also found that many people who see or hear fake news stories report that they believe them.

Beginning in 2018 the research team included items on “fake news” as part of the VPS questionnaire. Respondents were requested to indicate how often they come across “fake news” and how confident they are that they would be able to recognise news content as fake or false. In 2021, a sizeable proportion of South Africans (46%) acknowledged coming across “fake news” often or sometimes. A similar share (47%) stated that they hardly ever or never came across “fake news” and just under a tenth (8%) were unsure about this issue. Comparing the results to 2018 it is evident that fake news has become more common in the past three years and people have come across it more regularly. We found a robust correlation between self-reported fake news exposure and political news consumption on new media. About two-

³⁶ Birth cohort differences on this metric are quite intriguing, especially if considered over time. The Born Free Generation (i.e., those born 1990 and after) were the most apt when adopting this new type of media consumption, mean usage scores increased from 8 (SE=1.66) at the start of the period to 37 (SE=3.20) at the end. In the last survey round, the usage score amongst those born 1949 and after were only 5 (SE=2.68), not significantly different from they were in 2010 VPS (M=4; SE=2.68).

thirds of those who consumed news on the internet and social media every day said that they gave across fake news often (41%) or sometimes (24%).

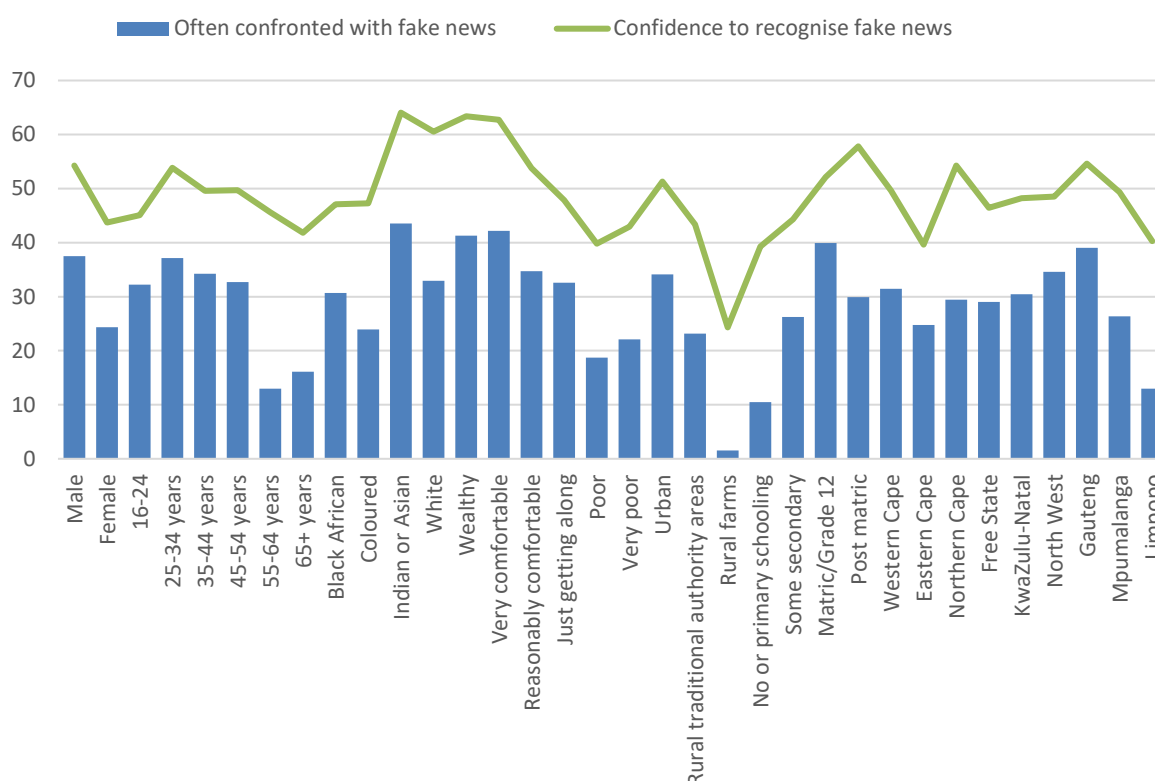
Figure 87: Frequency of coming across FAKE news and the ability to identify fake news, 2018 and 2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS), 2018, 2021

Given the increase in self-reported exposure to fake news between 2018 VPS and 2021 VPS, it is crucial to determine if people are able to identify fake news. Just over a tenth (15%) of South Africans reported that they felt very confident in their ability to identify “fake news” with a further third (32%) feeling somewhat confident. The rest of respondents were less confident that they will be able to identify “fake news” with a fifth (21%) not very confident or not confident at all. Even though exposure to fake news has grown in recent years, the self-reported ability of the mass public to detect and recognise fake news has not increased. In order to identify those that are according to their own estimation most at risk, the two questions were transformed into a 0-100 scale. High scores indicated high levels of often being confronted with fake news and the inability to recognise it. These scores are portrayed in Figure 88 by a variety of different socio-demographic groups, we can see a substantial level of subgroup variation in the figure.

Figure 88. Risk of being the recipient of fake news and the inability to identify it



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

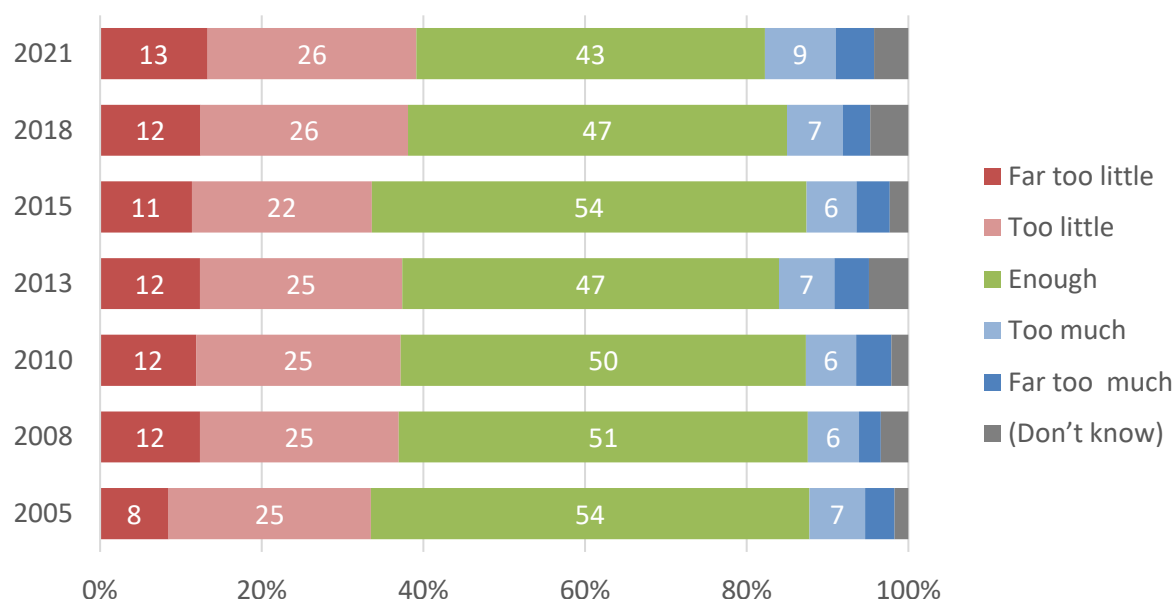
Clear differences were noted between social classes in terms of the ability to come across and identify fake news. From the data available, it is evident that there is a relationship between coming across fake news and the ability to recognize it. In most cases, where there is the realisation that there is news that is false, there is also an increased ability to distinguish that it is “fake news”. Results observed from the subgroup analysis indicate that Indian/Asian and white respondents, the wealthy and the very comfortable and those with a post matric are most likely to report being confronted with fake news and to identify and recognise fake news. Conversely, those in the 65+ years group, residing on farms and in Limpopo were least likely to state they are confronted with fake news and least able to recognise this kind of news.

11.2. Knowledge and information regarding the voting process

To successfully cast their vote, citizens require information about electoral procedures; they need to understand where to go and how to vote. If they do not comprehend these procedures, voters may be unsure about how to complete their ballot and they could make mistakes. Ineffective understanding of voting procedures can, consequently, destabilise our faith in electoral outcomes. Long-term this lack of knowledge may even reduce voter participation. We need to better comprehend whether voters know about the voting procedures and, to gain this insight, this subsection looks at self-reported knowledge of voting procedures. Under discussion will also be the sources of voter information and which sources citizens prefer to receive information from.

In order to understand how well-informed adult citizens are about voting, respondents were requested to specify the extent to which they believed they possessed adequate information about how to vote (**Figure 89**). Just over two fifths (43%) of the general adult population reported that they had sufficient information on the voting process and procedures in 2021 VPS. About a quarter (26%) of adult South Africans believed that they have ‘too little’ information and a tenth (13%) said they had ‘far too little’ information. Roughly a tenth (14%) felt they are over-informed about voting while only 4% are uncertain of their response. Comparing these findings with those from past VPS rounds, it appears that the need for information on the voting process has remained fairly consistent.

Figure 89: Self-reported level of information about how to vote (row percentages), 2005-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

To examine subgroup variation in awareness of how to vote, the five-point scale capturing knowledge about voting was transformed into a 0-100 scale, with “0” signifying far too little information about how to vote and “100” representing having too much information. Mean scores on this scale are presented in Table 12 across select respondent attributes for the period 2013-2021. Most subgroups demonstrated mean score values situated within a relatively narrow range, in the upper 30s or lower 40s. This is consistent with previous years. This suggests that most groups indicated that they had “too little” information about how to vote. The need for information about how to vote was also linked to socio-economic and educational status with those less affluent (the poor), the unemployed and with a lower educational status generally less informed. Lack of information about voting procedures was very evident in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo where the lowest average mean score was recorded. Contrary, people in Mpumalanga, Free State and KwaZulu Natal recorded higher than average levels of information about how to vote.

Table 32: Level of information about voting procedures, by select socio-demographic attributes of respondents (mean scores, 0-100 scale), 2013-2021

	2013		2015		2018		2021	
Gender								
Male	41	(0.73)	43	(0.67)	42	(0.69)	43	(0.72)
Female	41	(0.59)	41	(0.54)	39	(0.61)	40	(0.59)
Age Group								
16-24 years	32	(1.04)	32	(1.02)	33	(1.24)	34	(1.32)
25-34 years	43	(1.05)	44	(0.91)	41	(0.92)	43	(0.94)
35 to 44 years	44	(1.04)	46	(0.92)	44	(1.00)	44	(0.98)
45 to 54 years	43	(1.10)	48	(0.99)	43	(1.15)	41	(1.07)
55 to 64 years	48	(1.12)	47	(1.06)	42	(1.19)	44	(1.13)
65 + years	42	(1.12)	43	(1.13)	45	(1.25)	39	(1.31)
Population Group								
Black African	40	(0.64)	43	(0.56)	40	(0.58)	40	(0.57)
Coloured	41	(0.95)	41	(0.82)	40	(1.25)	44	(1.25)
Indian or Asian	40	(1.17)	41	(1.06)	44	(0.90)	46	(1.15)
White	46	(0.94)	41	(1.25)	47	(1.34)	45	(1.40)
Geotype								
Urban	42	(0.52)	42	(0.47)	42	(0.52)	41	(0.51)
Rural	38	(0.93)	44	(0.95)	35	(0.90)	42	(1.05)
Educational Attainment								
No secondary	40	(1.05)	43	(0.91)	38	(1.11)	41	(1.43)
Incomplete secondary	40	(0.75)	39	(0.71)	40	(0.80)	37	(0.85)
Completed secondary	41	(0.99)	44	(0.74)	40	(0.71)	42	(0.69)
Post-secondary	46	(0.95)	46	(1.29)	44	(1.43)	47	(1.10)
Provincial Residence								
Western Cape	41	(1.06)	41	(0.95)	45	(1.36)	43	(1.46)
Eastern Cape	38	(1.23)	41	(1.12)	39	(1.01)	31	(1.42)
Northern Cape	43	(2.03)	48	(1.87)	44	(1.33)	39	(2.11)
Free State	44	(1.49)	34	(1.45)	44	(1.98)	45	(1.74)
KwaZulu-Natal	46	(0.75)	48	(1.02)	38	(0.80)	44	(0.90)
North West	39	(1.68)	41	(1.55)	42	(1.80)	41	(1.67)
Gauteng	41	(1.38)	41	(0.91)	43	(1.22)	42	(0.99)
Mpumalanga	41	(1.55)	40	(1.53)	43	(1.56)	47	(1.42)
Limpopo	34	(1.69)	44	(1.86)	27	(1.41)	33	(1.66)

Note: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; and 2. Cell shaded in green indicate a figure above the national average year in a given survey round.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013-2021

It is unsurprising to observe that young adults rated their level of voting information as lower than the national average. This group has the least experience when it comes to voting and from previous VPS rounds results have shown that people tend to feel more informed as their experience of the actual voting process increases. Citizens who have never voted had much lower mean scale scores ($M=34$; $SE=0.95$) than those who were irregular ($M=43$; $SE=0.68$) or

regular ($M=45$; $SE=0.74$) voters. Persons who consumed political news regularly tend to report having high levels of information about voting. This seems to be especially true of those who consume political content on conventional media platforms. Citizens who daily consumed political news from the radio, for example, had a mean scale score of 47 ($SE=1.85$), 12 points below those who never consumed political content on the radio.

VPS participants were queried on where they usually got information about voting. Respondents who said that they had no knowledge of the Election Commission were coded as 'not applicable'. Responses to this question are presented for the period 2013-2021 in **Table 33**, and the results show the rise of television as the main source of information. The proportion who selected television as one of their usual sources of information increased from 43% ($SE=1.40$) in 2013 VPS to 59% ($SE=1.53$) in 2021 VPS. Other popular answers included radio and newspapers; this suggests that the conventional media remains the most important channel for voting information in South Africa. Posters are becoming somewhat less important as a source of information, the proportion citing posters as a usual information source dropped from 22% ($SE=1.14$) at the start of the period to 17% ($SE=1.04$) at the end. About a tenth (12%; $SE=0.95$) mentioned personal contacts while 5% ($SE=0.63$) said that rallies were an important source of voting information.

Table 33: Usual source of voting information for the period 2013-2021 (multiple responses, cell percentages)

	2013	2015	2018	2021
A television channel	43 (1.40)	48 (1.35)	57 (1.50)	59 (1.53)
Newspapers	24 (1.15)	26 (1.20)	29 (1.38)	23 (1.33)
Radio stations	30 (1.26)	31 (1.25)	39 (1.48)	33 (1.46)
Friends and family	12 (0.86)	16 (1.05)	16 (1.07)	12 (0.95)
Posters	22 (1.14)	19 (1.06)	22 (1.27)	17 (1.04)
Rallies	4 (0.55)	3 (0.45)	7 (0.79)	5 (0.63)
South African Constitution	1 (0.27)	1 (0.33)	2 (0.45)	1 (0.22)
Electoral Commission	3 (0.43)	4 (0.54)	5 (0.63)	2 (0.32)
Chapter 9 Institutions	0 (0.14)	0 (0.11)	1 (0.22)	1 (0.27)
Community based organisation	2 (0.35)	2 (0.44)	2 (0.41)	3 (0.45)
Civil Society organisation	0 (0.16)	1 (0.28)	1 (0.22)	1 (0.18)
School	2 (0.43)	2 (0.40)	2 (0.35)	1 (0.27)
Workplace	1 (0.24)	1 (0.23)	2 (0.32)	2 (0.29)
Faith Based Organization	0 (0.07)	0 (0.23)	0 (0.10)	0 (0.06)
Social media	2 (0.32)	4 (0.55)	4 (0.52)	8 (0.85)
Internet websites	0 (0.12)	3 (0.48)	1 (0.42)	7 (0.86)
Other	1 (0.41)	1 (0.28)	2 (0.52)	0 (0.07)
Not Applicable	35 (1.37)	33 (1.24)	18 (1.26)	19 (1.12)
(Don't know)	0 (0.07)	0 (0.13)	0 (0.14)	0 (0.00)

Note: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; and 2. Those who know nothing about the Election Commission are excluded from the analysis.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013-2021

As part of its voter registration drives, the Election Commission is increasingly making use of social media. Social media has a growing presence in how information about politics and

elections are spread here in South Africa and elsewhere in the world (see, for example, Rafael 2003; Kersting & Baldersheim 2004; Vitak et al. 2011). But it is apparent from **Table 33** above that most adult South Africans do not usually get their information about voting from new media sources. Just under a tenth mentioned social media (8%; SE=0.85) and internet websites (7%; SE=0.86) respectively in 2021 VPS. This does, however, represent a significant increase from what was observed in past VPS rounds. The mixed media marketing strategy that the IEC currently have of distributing information via conventional and social media is thus the correct approach to reach a variety of voters and potential voters in South Africa.

Table 34: Usual source of voting information by self-reported level of voting information (multiple response, cell percentages)

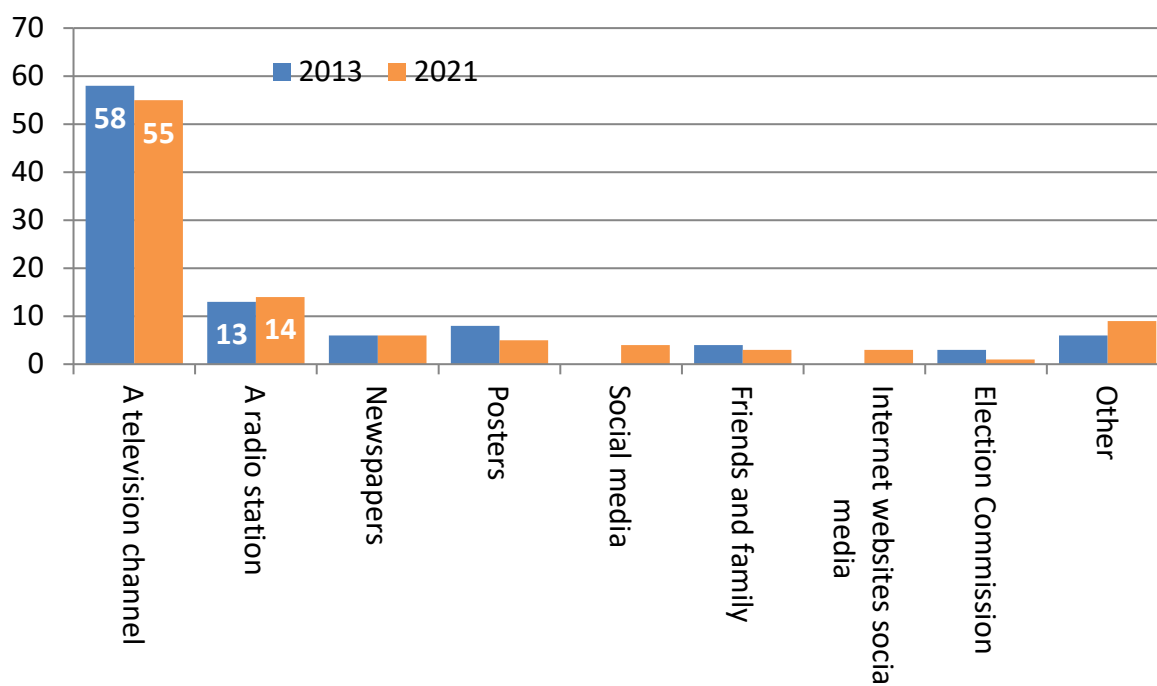
	Far Too little		Too little		Enough		Too much	
A television channel	33	(4.79)	59	(3.33)	69	(1.92)	63	(3.45)
Newspapers	12	(3.02)	22	(3.18)	26	(1.86)	32	(3.54)
Radio	16	(3.36)	31	(2.85)	38	(2.07)	41	(3.73)
Friends and family	5	(1.07)	12	(2.26)	14	(1.49)	12	(2.50)
Posters	8	(2.56)	16	(2.19)	19	(1.58)	19	(2.83)
Election Commission	0	(0.36)	0	(0.22)	1	(0.51)	6	(1.65)
Social media	4	(2.04)	9	(2.25)	7	(0.99)	13	(2.25)
Internet websites	1	(0.32)	8	(2.19)	7	(1.26)	11	(2.27)
Other	3	(0.95)	10	(1.95)	13	(1.41)	14	(2.41)
Not Applicable	53	(4.57)	18	(2.39)	12	(1.21)	10	(1.78)

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

It would be instructive to assess usual source of voting information by self-reported level of voting knowledge (**Table 34**). More than half (53%; SE=4.57) of those with far too little information said that they did not acquire voting information from any source. From this analysis, it is apparent that citizens who reported low information were less likely to cite multiple sources than those with high information. Highly informed citizens were more likely than their low information counterparts to cite newspapers, television and radio. Those with enough or too much information were not more likely to favour new media than those with low information. Of the four groups, those who said that they had too much information about voting procedures were by far the most liable to select the Election Commission as their usual source of information.

Figure 90: Public responses to the question: '[w]hat would be your preferred channel to get information about voting?, 2013 and 2021



Note: Those who know nothing about the Election Commission are excluded from the analysis.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013; 2021

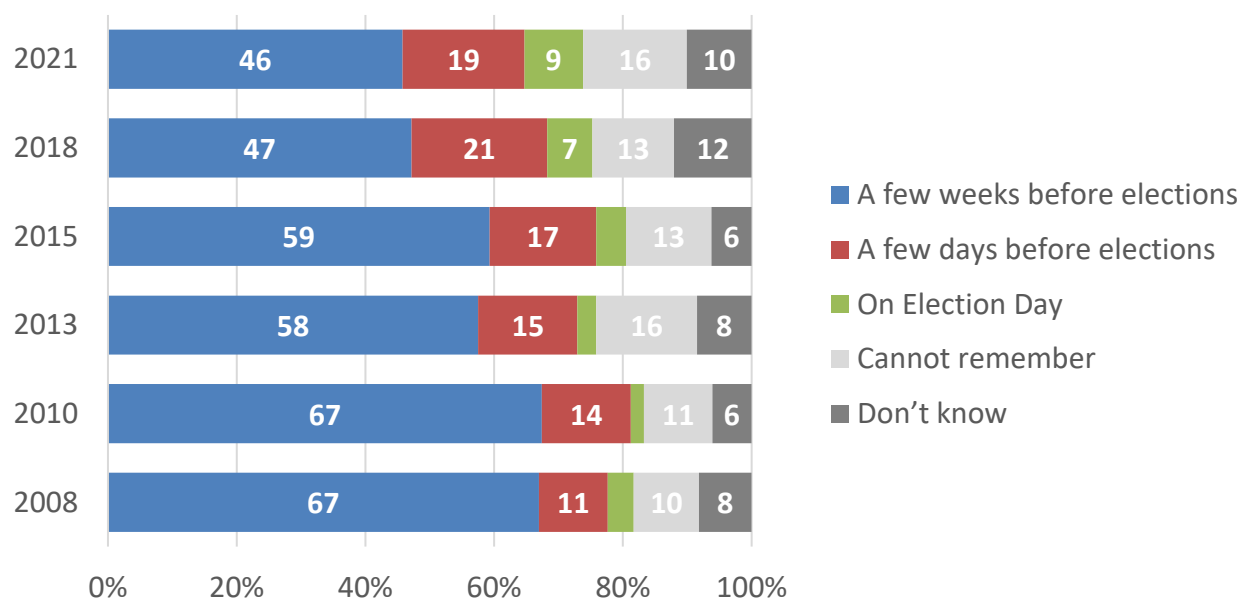
The VPS questionnaire included an item on what was respondents most preferred source of information about voting. Survey participants who said that they had no knowledge of the Election Commission were excluded from the analysis. In response, the majority (55%) in 2021 nominated television, with a further 14% opting for radio-based information (Figure 90). Only a small minority (5%) favoured posters whilst 6% of adults favoured newspapers. Social media (4%) and internet websites (3%) were the preferred form of communication about voting by only a tiny fraction of this group. These preferences have remained largely unchanged between the VPS rounds, this suggests the durability of these preferences. If we recompute our analysis by voting history, we find that television is somewhat less popular (46%) amongst non-voters than past voters (59%) in 2021 VPS. New media is, however, much more popular amongst non-voters (14%) than past voters (5%). Further investigation found that this disparity was due to how age influenced preferences here. Older citizens tended to prefer more traditional forms of communication technology (e.g., radio) than their younger counterparts.

11.3. Voter education

Voter education is one of the primary functions of the Electoral Commission and as such the Commission has adopted the following as one of its seven key strategic objectives: “[t]o plan and implement strategies to educate, inform and coordinate programme delivery of civic and democracy education to civil society through partnerships, research and knowledge management on a continuous basis”. In preparation for any election, as aforementioned, the Commission therefore undertakes vigorous and efficacious voter education campaigns using various platforms. Given the salience of this responsibility to the Electoral Commission, a set

of questions was incorporated into the VPS questionnaire in order to benchmark public attitudes to the voter education campaigns and programmes that are carried out by the institution. In this subsection, the analysis focuses on which subgroups have been reached by these campaigns as well as demand for additional campaigns.

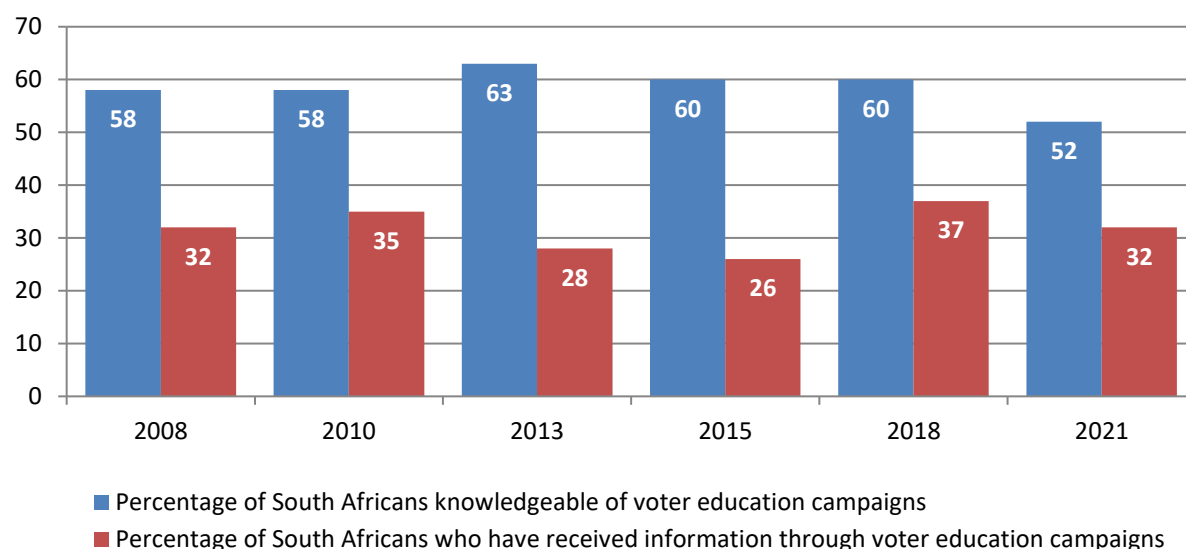
Figure 91: Public responses to the question: ‘[t]he last time South Africa had elections when did you receive information about voting procedures?’, 2008-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2008-2021

A question was included in the 2021 VPS asking adult citizens when they received information about voting procedures the last time they voted. The answer options were: (i) a week before elections, (ii) a few days before the elections, (iii) on Election Day or (iv) cannot remember. The results are portrayed in **Figure 91**, it is apparent that almost half (46%) of South Africans receive information a few weeks before an election. A fifth (19%) receive information a few days before the elections and a mere tenth receive information only on Election Day. The proportion of the citizen populace who received information on Election Day has increased significantly since 2010 VPS when only 2% of all adults said they received information on this date. A similar (if somewhat less dramatic) upswing between 2010 VPS and 2021 VPS was noted for the segment that received information a few days before the election.

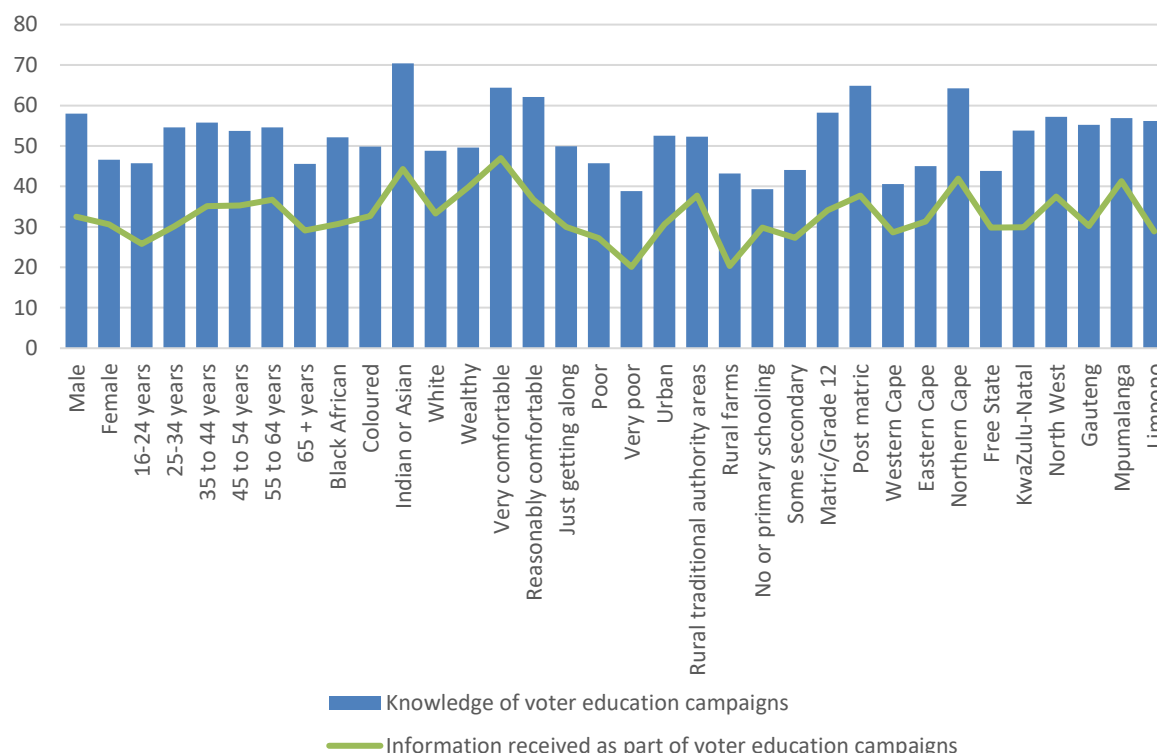
Figure 92: Knowledge of Electoral Commission voter education campaigns or programmes and reported receipt of information from this source, 2008-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2008-2021

Survey respondents were asked to comment on their level of awareness of the voter education campaigns or programmes that are conducted by the Electoral Commission through various channels prior to elections. Results from the 2021 survey show that just over half (52%) of South Africans know that the Electoral Commission undertakes voter education campaigns prior to any election (**Figure 92**). When compared to previous years, it is noticeable that the proportion knowledgeable of this dropped by 8 percentage points between 2018 and 2021. Knowledge of voter education campaigns are in fact the lowest it has ever been since monitoring started. This could possibly be ascribed to the COVID-19 situation and the fact that voter education campaigning was limited. In 2021, a third (32%) indicated that they have received information from the Electoral Commission through its voter education campaigns/programmes. This represents a noticeable decrease from the 2018 VPS when 37% indicated that they had received information from the Electoral Commission through its voter education programmes.

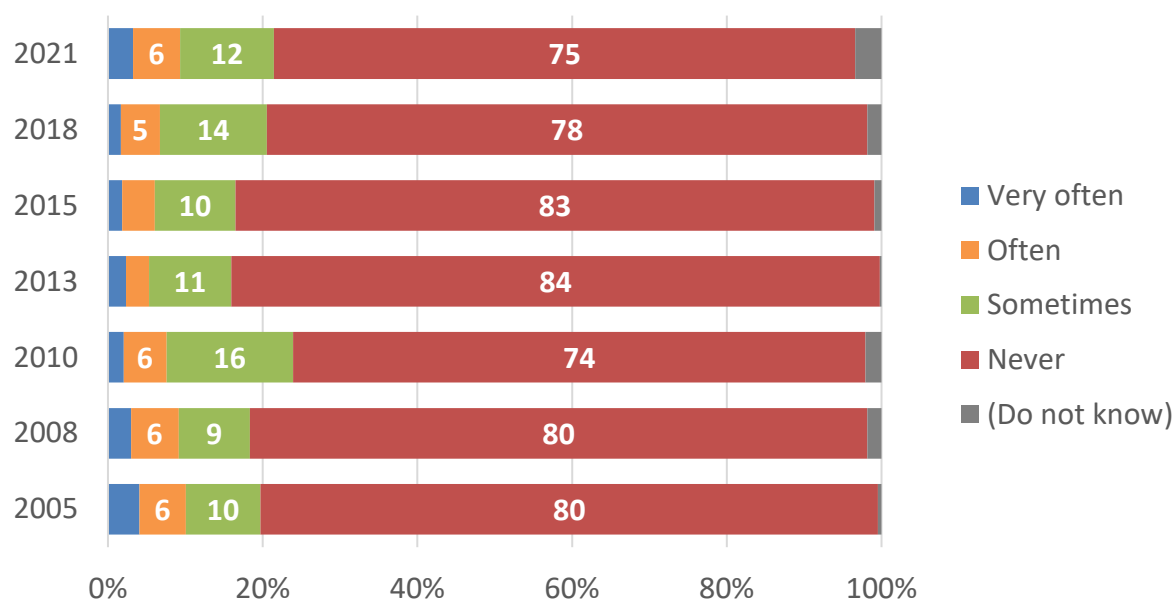
Figure 93: Percentage of socio-demographic subgroups that are knowledgeable about voter education campaigns and who have received information via these campaigns



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

The percentage of people from different socio-economic subgroups that have knowledge of voter education campaigns and have received information from these campaigns is presented in **Figure 93**. Those aged 16-24 years are less likely than older age groups to have knowledge of voter education campaigns – perhaps a function of not having voted before. This confirms the approach of the Commission in terms investing efforts in targeting the youth in voter education campaigns. Among the race groups, Indian/Asian respondents have the highest level of knowledge of voter education programmes. Knowledge of voter education programmes is higher among the tertiary educated, 65% of this group said that they were aware of these campaigns. A class effect is evident, as those who classify themselves as poor or very poor have lower levels of knowledge about voter education programmes. Significant variation is found amongst provinces with Northern Cape most aware and knowledgeable about voter education campaigns and Western Cape and Free State residents most unaware.

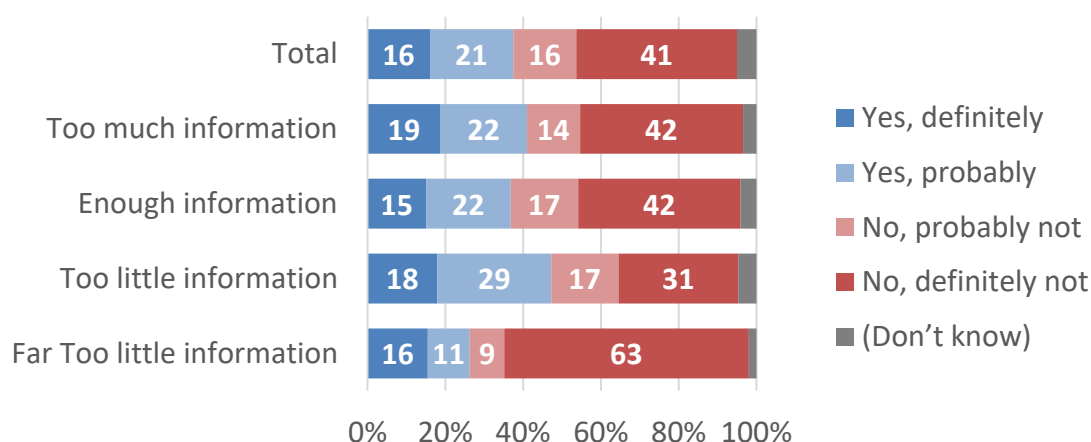
Figure 94: Public responses to the question: [h]ow often, if ever, do you attend voter education workshops, 2005-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

Voter education workshops can be informative interventions that meaningfully assist the electorate. VPS respondents were asked how often they had attended voter education workshops. Public answers to this question are displayed in **Figure 94** and show that most adult citizens had not attended workshops like this. During the last survey round, 12% of the mass public told fieldworkers that they attended these workshops sometimes, 6% said that they attended often and 3% indicated that they attend very often. These results compare favourably to the 2015 VPS when 84% of the adult populace said that they did not attend education workshops. Levels of self-reported attendance were found to be higher in certain provinces when compared to others. Living in the North West, Limpopo or the Western Cape improved the chances that an individual would have attended voter education workshops. Levels of attendance were, in contrast, found to be lowest in KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng and Mpumalanga.

Figure 95: Public responses to the question: '[w]ould you be interested in receiving any additional information or education about voting and elections?' by self-reported level of voting information



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

Now let us consider the level of demand for information about elections and voting amongst the general populace. Citizens taking part in VPS 2021 were asked to answer the following question: '[w]ould you be interested in receiving any additional information or education about voting and elections?' About two-fifths (41%) of all adult citizens said no definitely not and 16% told fieldworkers probability not. Nearly two-fifths of the populace stated that they definitely wanted additional information and 21% probably wanted more information. There is a robust correlation between self-reported voter knowledge and desire for additional information knowledge about elections (**Figure 95**). Those citizens who had far too little information about voting said that they definitely did not want more information than other knowledge groups. This result suggests that the main causes of low information amongst this group are “demand side” rather than “supply side”. Investigating the matter further we found that demand for voter information was correlated with internal voting efficacy³⁷. If an individual thought that their vote had robust internal efficacy, then they wanted more information about electoral procedures.

12. Electronic Voting

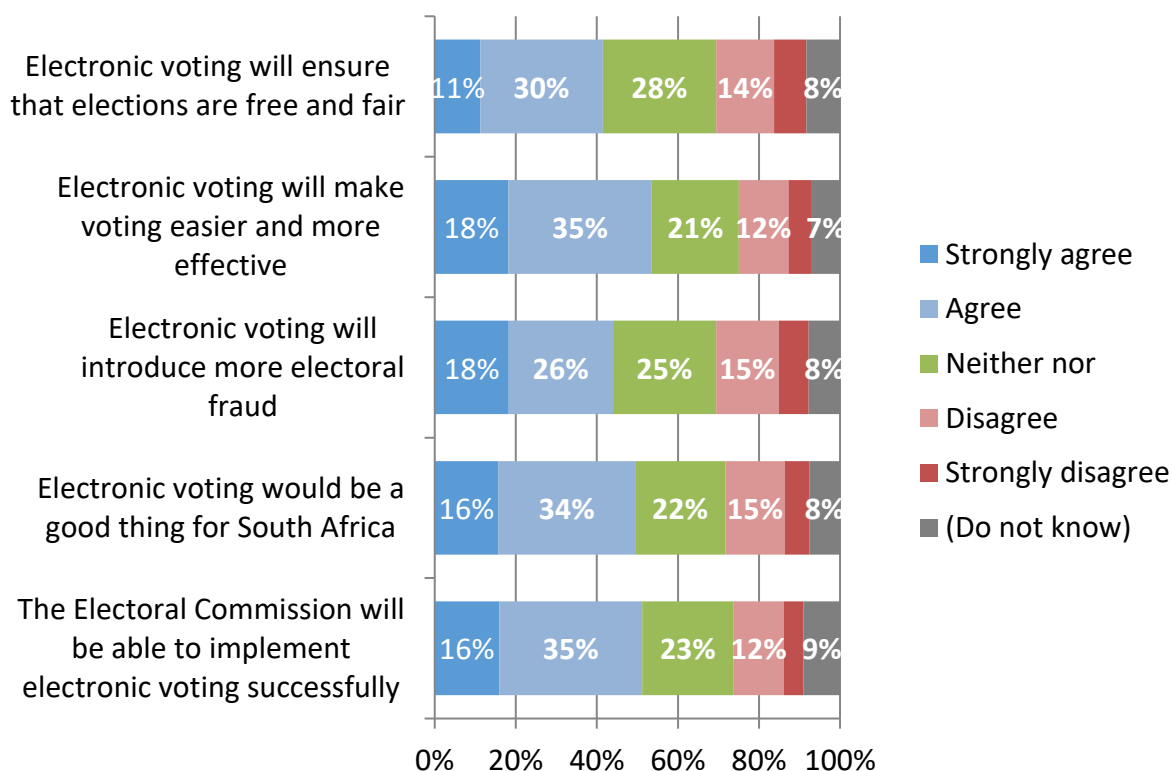
Electronic voting can refer to any form of voting that makes use of electronic mechanisms such as the internet. Many countries are interested in form of voting because of the potential benefits of this technology. Kersting and Baldersheim (2004) have argued that the benefits of electronic voting include cost reduction, increase voter turnout, fraud elimination and rapid vote capture. Brazil, India, Ireland and the Philippines have had successful experiences of

³⁷ Let us consider citizen attitudes towards internal efficacy by demand for more information. More than three-quarters (78%) of adult citizens who definitely wanted more information agreed with the statement: 'I vote because my vote makes a difference'. This is 21 percentage points above the national average and 30 points above those who definitely did not want more information. A similar disparity was observed if looked at demand for information and levels of agreement with the statement: '[m]y vote will ensure that I get quality health, education and other basic services'.

electronic voting (also see Birch et al., 2014). It is clear that electronic voting could have a beneficial impact on election management in South Africa. The attractiveness of electronic voting has only increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it may mitigate some forms of disease exposure for voters and electoral officials. But how do ordinary South Africans feel about electronic voting? Does the public worry that this type of voting creates opportunities for voter fraud and the risk of malfunction? Or is the public confident in the ability of the Commission to implement this new technology? This section will attempt to answer these important questions.

In order to examine public support for a possible electronic voting programme, the VPS included questions on public perceptions about this kind of voting in South Africa. Outside of the VPS reports on voting attitudes, there are virtually no systematic nationally representative attitudinal studies in the country that examine on this subject. In this section we will examine public attitudes towards electronic voting to discern how the general population thinks about this important issue. The first set of questions concerned the effects of electronic voting on the freeness and fairness of elections in South Africa. Respondents were required to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of different statements about this kind of voting. one of these statements focused specifically on whether the Electoral Commission will be able to implement electronic voting efficaciously. Responses to these questions are presented in Figure 96 and show that South Africans are quite positive about electronic voting.

Figure 96: Public agreement and disagreement with statements about electronic voting in South Africa (column percentages)



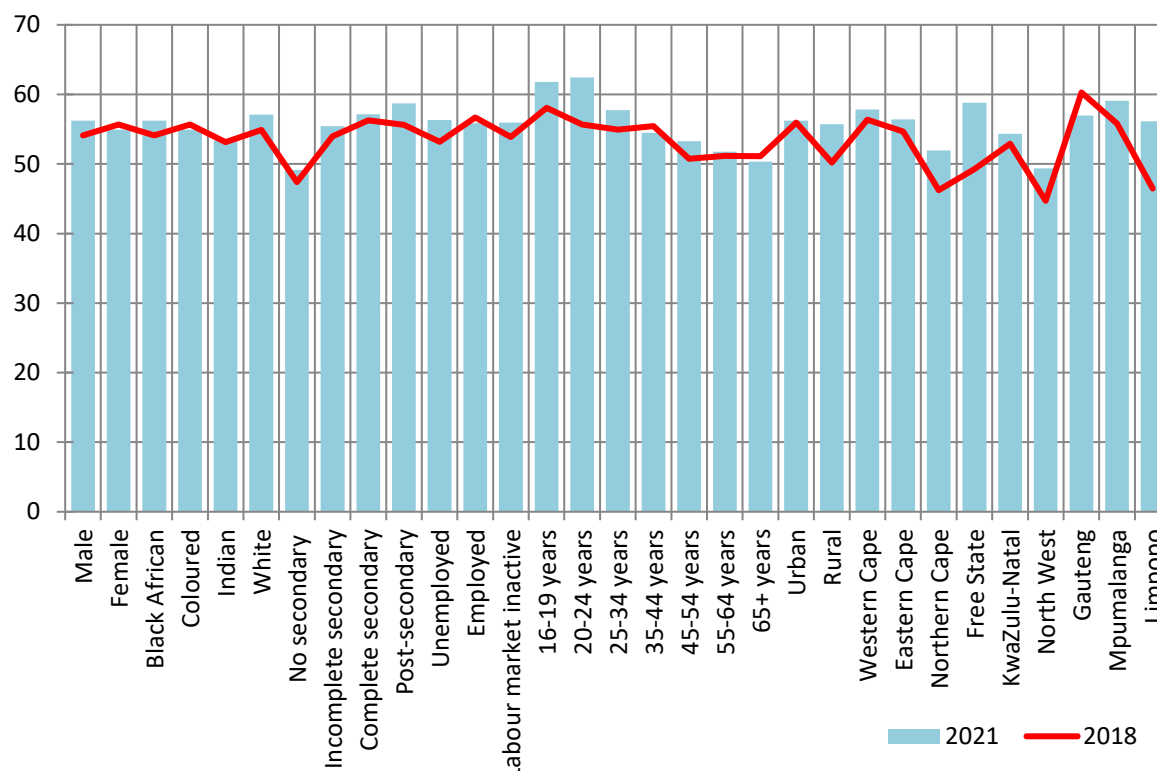
Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

Approximately half (49%) of the mass populace felt that electronic voting would be a good thing for South Africa in VPS 2021 and 54% thought that this technology would make voting more effective. Furthermore, about two-fifths (41%) of the general population believed that electronic voting would improve the freeness and fairness of our elections. However, some worried that electronic voting would create opportunities for more electoral fraud. More than two-fifths (44%) of adult citizens told fieldworkers that the introduction of this technology would increase fraud in elections. Scepticism about electronic voting may be related to how an individual feels about the Election Commission's ability to implement this technology successfully. It is disappointing to see that only around half (51%) of the adult population was confident that the Commission could effectively provide this technology for voters.

If we are to appreciate the complexities of public attitudes towards electronic voting in South Africa, we need to look at how different subgroups think about this issue. For ease of interpretation, we combined responses to the five statements in Figure 96 into a single composite index³⁸. The new measure was branded the Confidence in Electronic Voting (CEV) Index, and this indicator ranges from 0-100 with the lower value indicating a low support for electronic voting. The mean scores on the CEV Index were 56 (SE=0.57) in VPS 2021 and this is a moderate improvement over what was observed in VPS 2018 (M=54; SE=0.62). Subgroup mean scores on this index are depicted in Figure 97, to provide a temporal comparison data is presented for both VPS 2021 and VPS 2018. Regardless of which survey round you looked at, subgroup variance in mean CEV Index scores were more muted than expected. However, we were still able to discern some interesting discrepancies in the figure.

³⁸ Where appropriate the items were reverse in order to ensure comparability, and the transformed items combined well together. Standardized testing found that these five items combined in a valid and reliable fashion onto a single index (Cronbach α = 0.74).

Figure 97: Mean Confidence in Electronic Voting (CEV) Index (0-100) scores across socio-demographic subgroups, 2018 and 2021



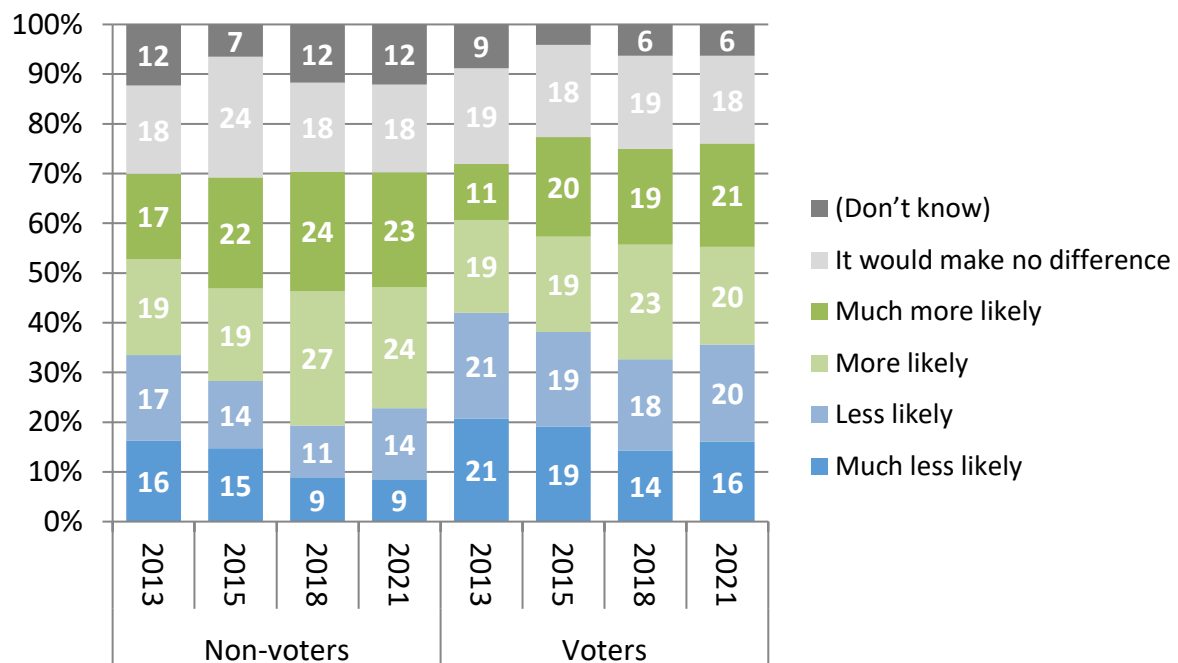
Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2018; 2021

Young citizens, as can be seen from Figure 97, tend to be favourable in their opinion of electronic voting. The observed age differential in the figure appears to have increased somewhat over the last few years. The 16-19 age cohort and the 20-24 cohort both had a CEV Index score of 62 in VPS 2021. The CEV Index mean scores for those in the 55-64 age cohort and the 65 and above cohort were, on average, about ten points lower. Examining educational attainment differences, a positive relationship was noted between the index and years of formal schooling. At the geographic level some curious mean differences were noted with certain provincial residents identified as being somewhat more negative about electronic voting than others. Of all the provincial subgroups under review, residents of the North West (M=49; SE=1.06), Northern Cape (M=52; SE=1.42) and KwaZulu-Natal (M=54; SE=0.83) had the lowest CEV Index mean scores. Residents of Mpumalanga (M=59; SE=0.81) had much greater CEV Index scores than any other provincial subgroup in Figure 97.

In order to understand which groups would be dissuaded from electoral participation by the introduction of electronic voting, an item on this issue was introduced into the VPS questionnaire. Respondents were asked: “[w]ould you be less likely or more likely to vote if South Africa introduces electronic voting?” About two-fifths (42%) of the adult populace indicated that electronic voting would make them more likely to vote. Only 32% of adult citizens said that electronic voting would make them less likely to vote in the 2021 round. This is an improvement on what was seen during VPS 2013, it would appear that attitudes on this issue have become more positive over time. Responses to the electronic voting likelihood question are displayed by voter status for the period 2013-2021 in Figure 98. Perhaps surprisingly, we only observed a weak (but positive) correlation between regularity of voting

and responses to this question. Non-voters were more likely than voters to report that electronic voting would improve their chances of voting. This voter status disparity was larger in VPS 2018 than in VPS 2021.

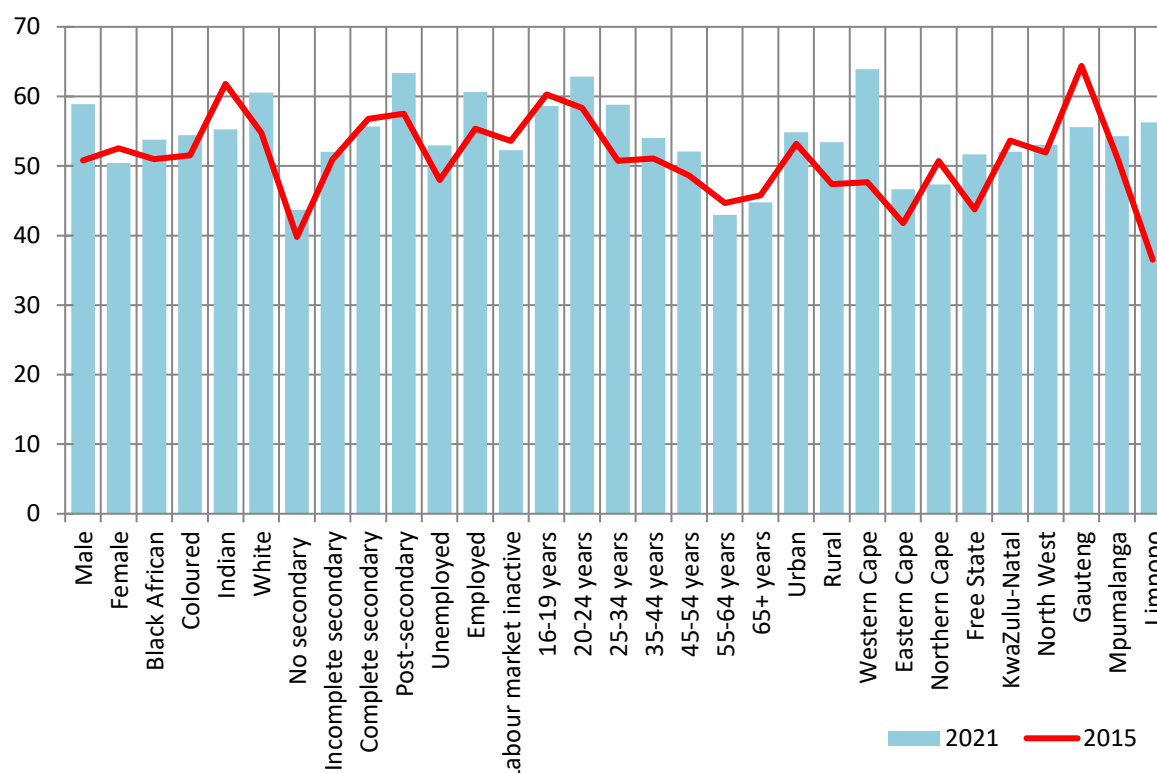
Figure 98: Public responses to the question: “[w]ould you be less likely or more likely to vote if South Africa introduces electronic voting?” by voter status, 2013-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013-2021

Which socio-demographic subgroups are most resistant to the idea of introducing electronic voting in South African elections? To answer this question, we created the Electronic Voting Scale (EVS). This scale measured willingness to vote if electronic voting was introduced and used a 0-100 scale with 0 representing the lowest readiness to vote and 100 the highest. The mean score on the EVS was 54 (SE=1.07) in VPS 2021, a modest increase in sentiment compared to what was observed in VPS 2015 (M=52; SE=0.93). A subgroup analysis was conducted and mean scores for key demographic groups are represented in Figure 99 for both VPS 2015 and 2021. It would appear that older individuals are less likely to vote if electronic voting was introduced. An analogous finding was noted in Figure 97, indicating greater levels of distrust of electronic voting amongst older citizens. The age dissimilarity on this issue widened during the period under review as young people became more positive about electronic voting.

Figure 99: Mean likelihood of voting if South Africa introduces electronic voting (0-100) scores by selected socio-demographic subgroups , 2015 and 2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2015; 2021

A geotype differential was noted in VPS 2015 that favoured urban citizens. However, due primarily to attitudinal change amongst rural residents, a similar disparity was noted in VPS 2021. More educated respondents were more liable to report that the introduction of electronic voting would improve their willingness to vote. The educational attainment differential observed in VPS 2021 appeared to be greater in VPS 2021 than VPS 2015. This change was the result of growing pro-electronic voting sentiment amongst those with a post-matric education. No gender differential was noted in VPS 2015 with male and female citizens exhibiting similar EVS scores. However, mainly owing to attitudinal change amongst men, a distinct gender dissimilarity was noted in VPS 2021. Significant differences are apparent on the basis of population group in VPS 2021. In terms of this differential, white citizens are significantly more inclined to have a high EVS score than other groups. A similar result was not observed in VPS 2015, white citizens have become more positive about electronic voting in the last few years.

At the provincial level some interesting mean differences were noted in Figure 99 with certain provincial residents quite positive about the effect of electronic voting on their behaviour. Of all the provincial subgroups under review, residents of the Western Cape became more positive on this issue over time, this represents a significant change for the province. Mean EVS scores for Western Cape citizens increased from 48 (SE=1.45) in VPS 2015 to 64 (SE=1.57) in VPS 2021. An even larger attitudinal change was noted for Limpopo residents. Mean EVS scores for citizens in that province increased from 37 (SE=2.28) at the start of the period to 56 (SE=1.89) at the end. A comparable change was noted for CEV Index in Figure 97, suggesting a growing acceptance of electronic voting in Limpopo. Citizens in Gauteng have

become less positive about the potential influence of electronic voting during the six year period. Mean EVS scores for citizens in that province fell from 64 (SE=1.43) in VPS 2015 to 56 (SE=1.42) in VPS 2021.

Table 35: Likelihood of voting if South Africa introduces electronic voting (0-100) by internet subgroups (Analysis of Variance)

	Non-voters			Voters			Diff.
	M	SD		M	SD		
Internet Status							
None	53	27	ref.	40	30	ref.	13
Home	59	30		60	34	***	-1
Other	62	31	**	57	34	***	6
Social Media Activity							
Non-active	56	27	ref.	44	32	ref.	13
Infrequently active	60	29		53	33	***	7
Frequently active	61	32		61	35	***	0
Social Media Followers							
Not applicable	57	25	ref.	41	32	ref.	17
0-4	52	28		50	30	**	3
5-99	62	30		57	35	***	5
100-499	67	31		61	34	***	6
500+	55	34		61	33	**	-6

Note: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; 2. Cell shaded in green indicate a figure above the national average year in a given survey round; and 3. 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.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

We hypothesized that individuals who are better versed in internet technology would have a more positive opinion of electronic voting. Given the results of Figure 98, we imagined that there may be a distinct voter status disparity to the internet engagement differential. Consequently, mean scores on the EVS are displayed by different kinds of internet engagement across voter status in Table 35. For both voters and non-voters, there appeared to be a relationship between the EVS and internet access. This relationship was, however, more robust for voters than non-voters. In addition, we noted a correlation between online activity and the EVS amongst the voting population. If a voter was active on social media, then they tended to have a high mean EVS score. A similar association was not observed for non-voters. The outcomes depicted in Table 35 suggest that the introduction of electronic voting will lead to greater electoral engagement amongst those voters who are more active online. However, the effect will be more muted for non-voters.

13. Electoral irregularities and misdeeds

Voting irregularities can provoke popular anger and may lead to significant political disruptions and even violence. A number of studies have shown that when voters (and citizens more broadly) perceive elections as free of irregularities, they are more likely to accept

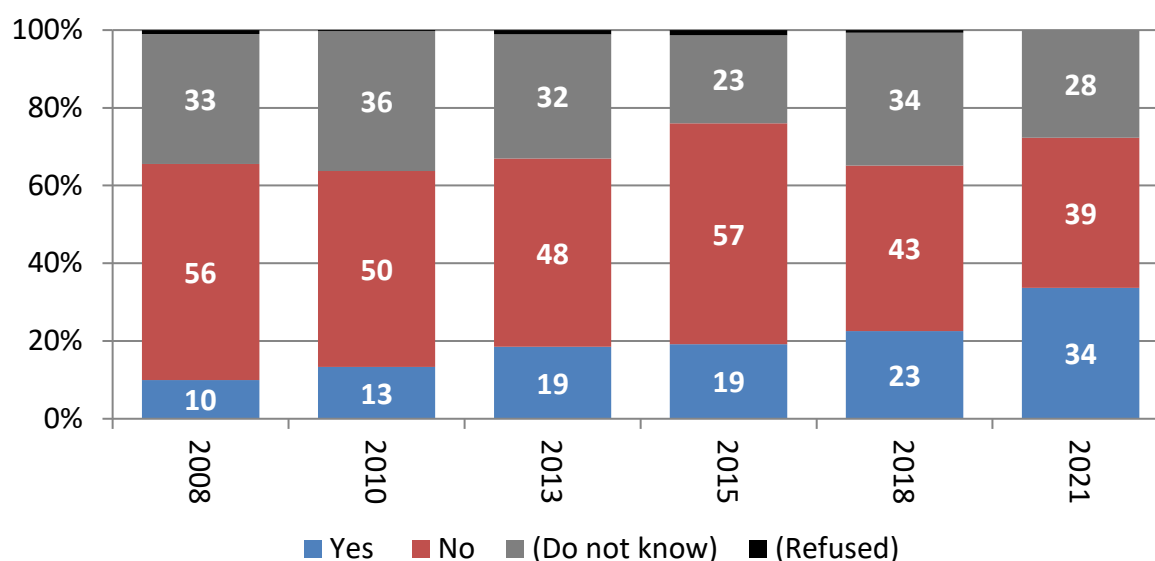
election results, support the elected government, express greater satisfaction with the functioning of their democracy, and are less willing to engage in political violence (Hafner-Burton et al., 2018; Moehler, 2009; Norris, 2004, 2011; von Borzyskowski & Kuhn, 2020). Consequently, the study of public attitudes towards, and experiences of, violations to voting protocols is very important. Monitoring to prevent irregularities and effective responses to situations where electoral indiscretions arise have become critical functions of the Election Commission in South Africa. Since 1994, the election process in the country has been free of the gross irregularities that characterise elections in some other Sub-Saharan African countries.

The following section deals specifically with mass views on voting irregularities and perceptions of electoral integrity. The aim of this section will be to provide clarity on the phenomenon and whether the public is confident in the ability of the Electoral Commission to monitor and address irregularities during the electoral process. This is an important aspect of the VPS series, since the best method by which to measure the prevalence of voting irregularities is to monitor citizens' experiences of it (Kerr, 2013). The first subsection will look at whether the public thinks that voter irregularities have occurred during government elections. The next subsection will investigate personal experiences with voting irregularities during elections. We will then transition into an assessment of public views on vote count accuracy. Then a subsection will be presented on how the public thinks voter irregularities have impacted South African democracy. The section concludes with an assessment of perceived electoral integrity in the country.

13.1. Perceived occurrence of voting irregularities during government elections

This subsection seeks to understand how widespread South Africans thought voting irregularities were in the country. Here we defined 'voting irregularities' as any breach of normal election procedures. Irregularities of this kind can be the result of deliberate wrongdoing (i.e., fraud) or incompetence. Electoral violations may also be a result of factors outside of human control –weather conditions hampering administrative procedures at polling stations for example. In this section we deal with voting irregularities using this broad definition. This type of problem was exemplified to the respondents with the following examples: intimidation, interference by political parties and tampering with ballot boxes. Then respondents were asked if they thought that such activities had occurred in the last government election. This subsection will investigate their responses with a focus on which socio-demographic groups were most liable to doubt the integrity of South African elections.

Figure 100: Public responses to the question: “[d]o you think that voting irregularities occurred during the last government elections?”, 2008-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2008-2021

It would appear that a tenth of the adult population thought voting irregularities occurred in the 2004 NGE and this can be compared unfavourably to the 2016 LGE when approximately a quarter (23%) of adult citizens gave the same answer (Figure 100). More than a third (34%) of citizens thought that these kinds of misdeeds had taken place in the 2019 NGE, a significant increase from what was observed in VPS 2018. It would seem that a growing tide of scepticism about the integrity of voting procedures has spread through the adult citizenry over the last decade. Given the unexpectedly high number of South Africans who were not confident that elections in the country were free of violations, it is important to conduct a subgroup analysis. Such an analysis will allow us to obtain a better idea of who feels that infringements to voting procedures had transpired during South African elections. The percentage that believed irregularities had *occurred* during the last elections is portrayed across key socio-demographic groups for the 2008-2021 period in Table 36.

Table 36: Percentage who believed voting irregularities had occurred during the last national elections

		2008		2010		2013		2015		2018		2021	
Voter Status													
Never voted	7	(0.77)	8	(1.06)	14	(1.21)	15	(1.35)	22	(1.43)	24	(1.50)	
Irregular voter	14	(1.12)	15	(1.01)	20	(1.28)	24	(1.30)	25	(1.48)	40	(1.49)	
Regular voter	10	(0.71)	14	(1.00)	23	(1.27)	18	(1.13)	20	(1.25)	36	(1.38)	
Population Group													
Black African	10	(0.60)	12	(0.75)	16	(0.91)	19	(0.92)	21	(0.97)	31	(1.07)	
Coloured	9	(1.24)	13	(1.39)	13	(1.46)	16	(1.62)	22	(2.14)	41	(2.13)	
Indian	11	(2.05)	16	(1.96)	38	(2.65)	23	(2.39)	29	(2.47)	46	(2.75)	
White	8	(1.26)	26	(2.09)	39	(2.45)	29	(2.43)	34	(2.97)	43	(2.65)	
Disability Status													
Disability	13	(2.33)	11	(2.04)	16	(2.69)	24	(3.01)	26	(4.11)	40	(4.66)	
No disability	10	(0.49)	14	(0.63)	19	(0.76)	19	(0.76)	23	(0.82)	33	(0.86)	

Province												
Western Cape	6	(1.00)	13	(1.70)	13	(1.74)	16	(1.95)	20	(2.58)	38	(2.47)
Eastern Cape	5	(1.00)	9	(1.40)	19	(2.05)	8	(1.52)	19	(2.10)	33	(2.65)
Northern Cape	10	(2.05)	14	(2.27)	16	(2.60)	16	(2.46)	20	(2.68)	33	(3.24)
Free State	13	(1.83)	26	(2.76)	18	(2.59)	19	(2.53)	10	(2.35)	33	(3.03)
KwaZulu-Natal	10	(1.20)	14	(1.41)	20	(1.68)	32	(1.99)	30	(1.93)	40	(1.99)
North West	2	(0.81)	15	(2.71)	13	(2.34)	18	(2.60)	22	(3.02)	25	(2.86)
Gauteng	14	(1.29)	11	(1.34)	22	(1.96)	19	(1.72)	28	(2.00)	38	(2.02)
Mpumalanga	10	(1.68)	14	(2.25)	15	(2.34)	18	(2.47)	9	(1.92)	19	(2.40)
Limpopo	18	(2.03)	13	(1.96)	23	(2.51)	18	(2.37)	18	(2.33)	23	(2.56)

Note: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; and 2. Cell shaded in green indicate a figure above the national average year in a given survey round.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2008-2021

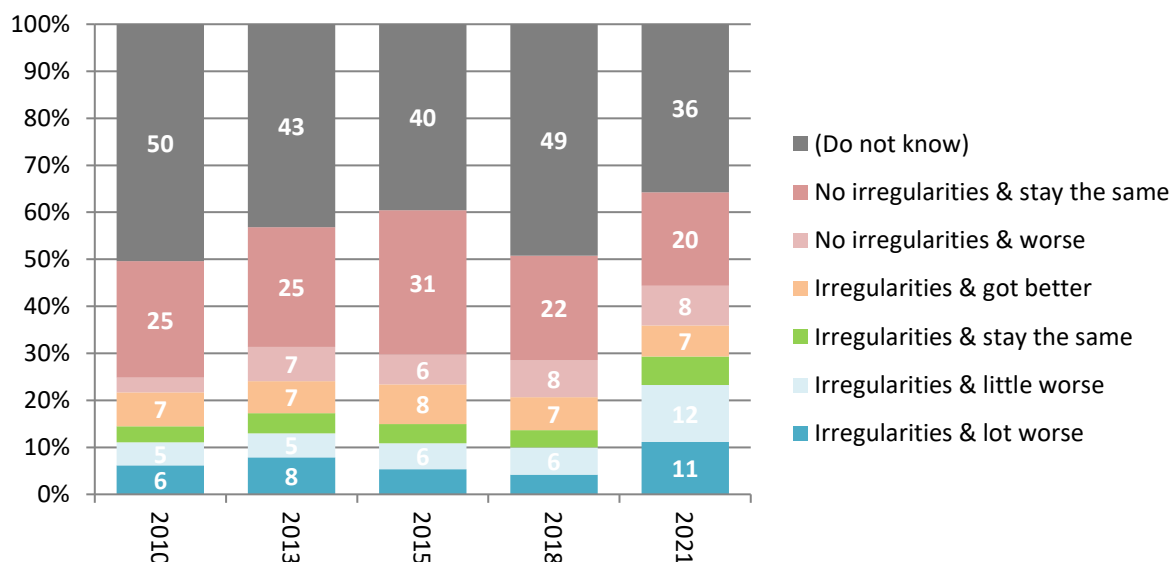
The results of the subgroup analysis indicate that certain groups are more likely to believe voting irregularities occurred in the last government elections than others. Voters, for instance, were found to be much more likely than voters to say that such misdeeds had not taken place during the elections. This voter differential was especially distinct in VPS 2021 when 40% (SE=1.49) of irregular voters and 36% (SE=1.38) of regular voters told fieldworkers that irregularities transpired during the 2019 NGE. This trend suggests that voter experience became a more important determinant of irregularity detection in the latter part of the period. Noteworthy population group disparities can be discerned in the table with racial minorities more liable to think that this transgression had occurred during the last election. Disparities of this type were evident in most survey rounds but appear to have become more pronounced towards the end of the period. Between 2008 and 2021, racial minorities experienced a comparatively high level of attitudinal change, a positive shift of more than thirty percentage points for each of the three groups.

Disabled citizens were, beginning in VPS 2015, more likely than their abled bodied peers to express a concern about voter irregularities. The dissimilarity between disabled and abled citizens on this issue grew significantly between 2015 and 2021. There was significant provincial variation in whether citizens thought that violations to electoral protocols had cropped up during government elections in Table 36. The provinces where such attitudes were most common were KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape. These two provinces also experienced a considerable level of attitudinal change over the period 2008-2021, a change of more than thirty percentage points in each case. The bulk of this occurred during the 2015-2021 period. The provincial populations that reported the lowest level of change were Mpumalanga and Limpopo. Both populations were much less likely to report irregularities when compared to their provincial peers.

Reviewing the findings presented in Figure 100, it would seem that the general populace has become more apt to report voting irregularities over time. To provide greater insight into this change, let us consider how citizen evaluated elections in comparison to the celebrated 1994 NGE. VPS respondents were asked if voting irregularities had occurred during the 1994 NGE. As a follow-up, participants were then asked if irregularities had worsened or improved since 1994. Data from these two questions was combined to produce a single categorical variable that allowed us to track attitude change over time. Citizen responses on this variable are

provided for the period 2010-2021 in Figure 101. Reviewing responses to these answers, it would seem that many adult citizens were unsure of how to answer this question. However, as attitudes towards South African democracy became more negative over time, the proportion giving a 'don't know' response declined from 49% in VPS 2018 to 36% in VPS 2021.

Figure 101: Perceived change in voting irregularities in national elections between 1994 and 2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2010-2021

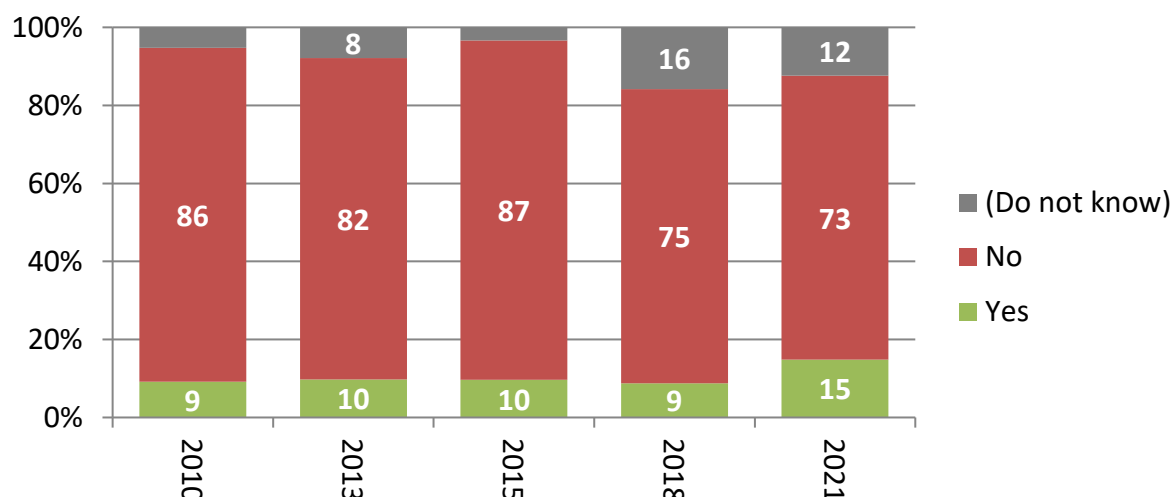
One of the most common responses in Figure 101 was that no irregularities had occurred and that things had stayed the same. This option was especially popular in VPS 2015 when 31% of the adult populace gave this answer. However, it declined in popularity by VPS 2021 as the general public became more dissatisfied with democracy in the country. In the last survey round, citizens were more liable than in previous rounds to say that transgressions to voting procedures had occurred during the 1994 NGE and that this state of affairs had worsened. About a fifth of the general public adopted this position in VPS 2021, a significant increase from VPS 2015 when only 11% shared this opinion. Only a small percentage (7%) of the population thought that irregularities had occurred in 1994 NGE but that things had improved in that survey round.

13.2. Personally experienced voting irregularities during government elections

Having examined general perceptions about violations to voting procedures, a lingering question is how many voters directly experience electoral malpractice or fraud? In other words, how many South Africans have actually encountered or observed such misconduct? To address such questions, respondents were asked whether they had personally experienced or observed any voting irregularities during elections. The vast majority of the respondents had never experienced or observed any irregularities –only a small share of those who had voted before reported experiencing an incident of irregularity. Respondents were then asked about specific incidences of irregularity experienced or witnessed by voters at a voting station during the last government elections. The following kinds of irregularities were asked about: (i) intimidation, (ii) interference of party officials/agents, (iii) lack of space in a voting station

to ensure that my vote is secret, (iv) opening of ballot boxes before voting stations closed, (v) opening of voting station late; and (vi) closing of voting station early.

Figure 102: Public responses to the question: “[h]ave you personally ever experienced or observed any voting irregularities during elections (where you voted)?”, 2005-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2010-2021

The vast majority of South Africans had not experienced or observed any form of voting irregularity in the last national election (Figure 102). However, we did find that the proportion who said that they had experienced an irregularity grew from 9% in VPS 2018 to 15% in VPS 2021. Of all the irregularities personally observed, interference of party officials was the most widespread. Lower levels were found for intimidation, late opening of voting stations, lack of space inside the station and ballot tampering. We found that nearly a third (30%) of those who had *not* personally witnessed an electoral violation said that irregularities occurred during the 2019 NGE. This is a significant increase from VPS 2010 when only 11% of those who had *not* directly witnessed an irregularity made the same claim. This suggests that many use hearsay and rumour to make judgements about infringements to electoral integrity.

To more adequately understand the upsurge in voter observations of electoral irregularities over time, we examined the percentage who reported seeing such an indiscretion across a varied set of socio-demographic groups (Table 37). In most survey rounds irregular voters tended to report more direct experiences than regular voters. Interestingly, in VPS 2021 a relatively significant proportion (16%; SE=1.61) of non-voters reported that they directly observed one or more electoral transgressions. During the last two survey rounds the Black African majority had a lower tendency to experience irregularities than racial minorities. This is a notable departure from what was observed in VPS 2013 and VPS 2015 when the Black African majority was more likely to report irregularities. A comparatively high percentage of the Coloured and white minorities reported experiencing electoral irregularities at the end of the period. This represents a significant change for both groups, but especially Coloured citizens, over the period 2018-2021.

Table 37: Percentage who personally ever experienced or observed any voting irregularities during an election, 2010-2021

During an election, 2010-2021

	2010		2013		2015		2018		2021	
Voter Status										
Non-voters	6	(1.93)	9	(1.62)	8	(1.69)	7	(1.22)	16	(1.61)
Irregular voter	10	(0.87)	10	(0.96)	11	(0.96)	10	(1.04)	17	(1.16)
Regular voter	8	(0.80)	10	(0.93)	9	(0.84)	8	(0.87)	12	(0.94)
Population Group										
Black African	10	(0.77)	12	(0.90)	11	(0.80)	9	(0.74)	14	(0.83)
Coloured	4	(0.93)	3	(0.81)	5	(1.14)	9	(1.58)	20	(1.83)
Indian	7	(1.60)	2	(0.74)	4	(1.16)	3	(0.97)	18	(2.24)
White	9	(1.49)	4	(1.00)	7	(1.48)	11	(2.07)	20	(2.27)
Employment Status										
Unemployed	12	(1.14)	11	(1.09)	13	(1.16)	10	(1.02)	16	(1.12)
Employed	8	(0.96)	10	(1.26)	5	(0.87)	6	(1.07)	15	(1.29)
Other	7	(0.80)	7	(0.87)	9	(0.89)	8	(0.98)	13	(1.09)
Province										
Western Cape	2	(0.83)	4	(1.14)	11	(1.86)	4	(1.35)	15	(1.92)
Eastern Cape	5	(1.22)	12	(1.91)	1	(0.65)	23	(2.51)	17	(2.18)
Northern Cape	9	(1.96)	12	(2.59)	5	(1.65)	8	(2.06)	26	(3.13)
Free State	14	(2.44)	11	(2.33)	7	(1.78)	9	(2.38)	18	(2.56)
KwaZulu-Natal	10	(1.31)	13	(1.50)	20	(1.84)	4	(0.91)	11	(1.34)
North West	20	(3.39)	9	(2.27)	8	(2.04)	17	(3.05)	14	(2.40)
Gauteng	8	(1.27)	9	(1.55)	6	(1.10)	8	(1.31)	13	(1.46)
Mpumalanga	14	(2.37)	10	(2.32)	17	(2.73)	6	(1.79)	11	(2.00)
Limpopo	13	(2.16)	9	(2.01)	6	(1.73)	8	(1.76)	27	(3.02)

Note: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; and 2. Cell shaded in green indicate a figure above the national average year in a given survey round.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2010-2021

Regardless of the survey round under review, employed citizens were more likely than other labour market groups to report witnessing an electoral irregularity. The unemployed became more liable to experience irregularities over the period, a change of 10 percentage points between VPS 2015 and VPS 2021. There was substantial provincial variation in whether citizens experienced irregularities during South African elections. The provinces where such attitudes were most common were the Northern Cape (26%; SE=3.13) and Limpopo (27%; SE=3.02). These two provinces also experienced a considerable deal of change on this issue in the latter half of the period. Mpumalanga reported low (and declining) levels of witnessed irregularities. Levels of experienced irregularities were also low amongst the KwaZulu-Natal adult populace. This is a surprising finding given, as outlined in Section 13.1, that a large segment of this group felt that irregularities had occurred in the 2019 NGE.

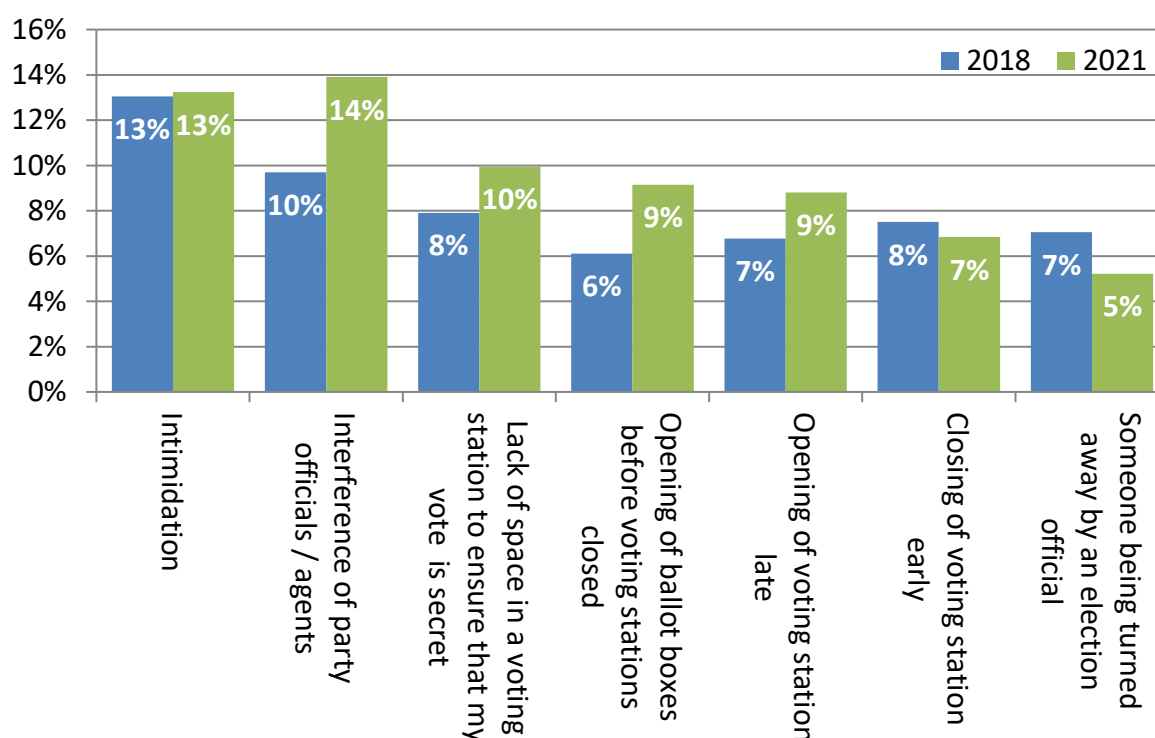
13.3. Indirect experiences of voting irregularities

Following the 2019 NGE, there were reports of ballot papers falling off trucks, missing ballot boxes and other rumours of Electoral Commission material being tampered with. Rumours of vote manipulation are serious and have destabilised electoral processes in Sub-Saharan African democracies before as work by Osborn (2008) in Kenya has shown. The media can

sometimes play a prominent role here by spreading unverified reports of voting irregularities during government elections. Taking cognisance of this, the Electoral Commission has setup a special Electoral Court dedicated to handling allegations of vote-rigging and calls on the public to use this court. This subsection will examine violations of electoral procedure that citizens had learnt about but not witnessed for themselves. Here we are talking about those specific irregularities that people had heard about occurring at voting stations but not experienced.

VPS participants were asked the following question: "[a]part from what you observed or experienced, did you hear about any of the following irregularities experienced by voters at a voting station during the last elections?" Nearly two-thirds (64%) had not heard about such an irregularity in VPS 2021. This was lower than what was discovered for VPS 2018 when 72% of the adult populace had not heard about any violation of voting procedures. This finding is consistent with what was detected in Section 13.1, suggesting a mounting wave of cynicism about the electoral integrity in the last few years. But what were the specific kinds of voting irregularities that citizens had heard about, and on which types of irregularities had we seen an increase? To answer these questions, data on this issue is presented for both VPS 2018 and VPS 2021 in Figure 103.

Figure 103: Heard about a range of different irregularities experienced by voters at a voting station during the past government elections, 2018 and 2021



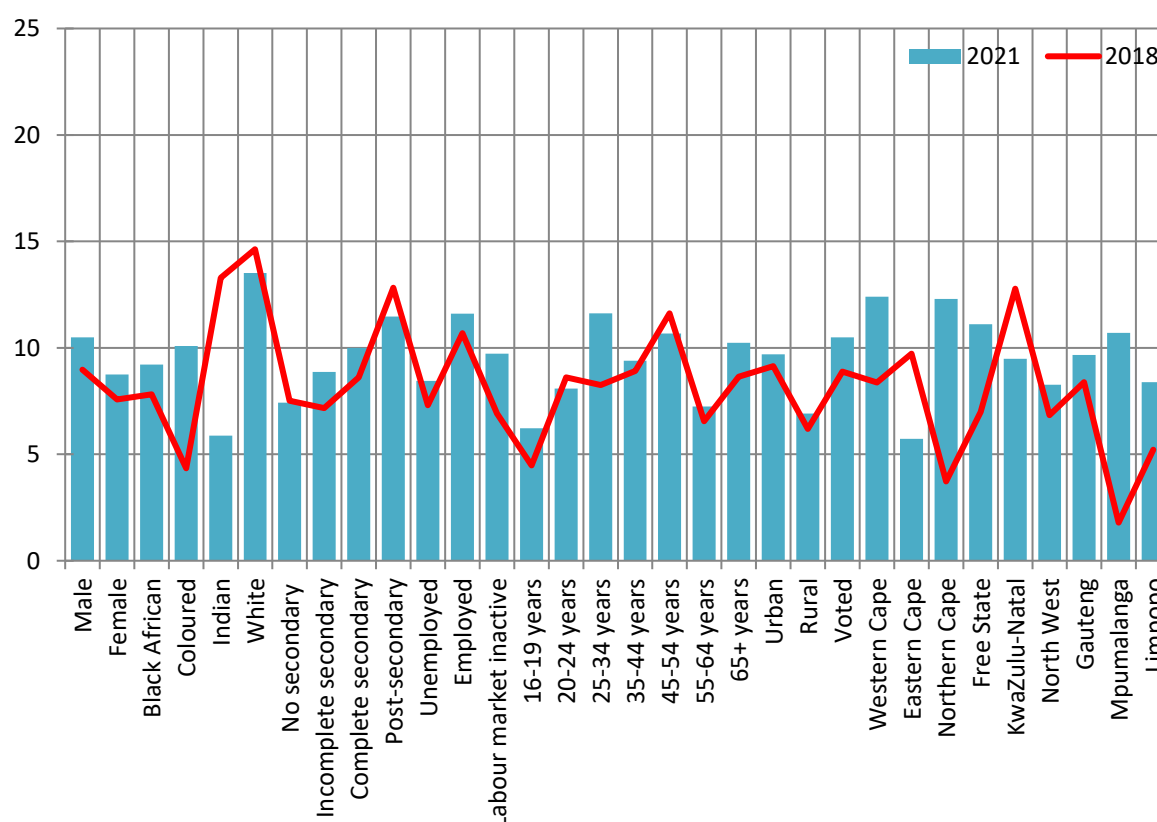
Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2018; 2021

About an eighth of the adult population, as can be seen in Figure 103, had heard of voter intimidation taking place in each survey round. This was the most common type of irregularity that people had heard of. Interference of party officials/agents had increased over the period, growing from 10% in 2018 to 14% in 2021. The following kinds of indiscretion had also gotten somewhat larger over the period: (i) improper opening of ballot boxes; (ii) improper voting

station opening times; and (iii) lack of space to ensure secrecy. In a positive development, the proportion of the populace who had heard of someone being turned away by an election official declined during the period. To better grasp the extent of popular attitudes towards voter irregularities, an index was created based on the different items included in Figure 103. The index is measured on a 0-100 scale with the high score signifying an awareness of multiple forms of voter irregularity in the last election. The new measure was branded the Voting Irregularities Awareness (VIA) Index.

We do observe a moderate difference between 2018 and 2021, the mean VIA score was 8 (SE=0.46) in the last survey round which represents a two-point increase from 2018. Mean VIA Index scores are depicted across selected socio-demographic groups in Figure 104 for both VPS 2018 and VPS 2021. Population group differences were considerable in both survey rounds under consideration. White citizens tend to have relatively high VIA index scores, moderately greater than all other groups in Figure 104. There were substantial age group differences observed in the figure with younger voters having lower mean scores than their older peers. We noted significant change between 2018 and 2021. Of all age groups, the 25-34 cohort experienced a marked increase of four points in average VIA index scores during the six year period. A positive relationship was found between formal schooling and the index. The more schooling a citizen has, the more apt they are to have heard of multiple incidents of voter irregularities.

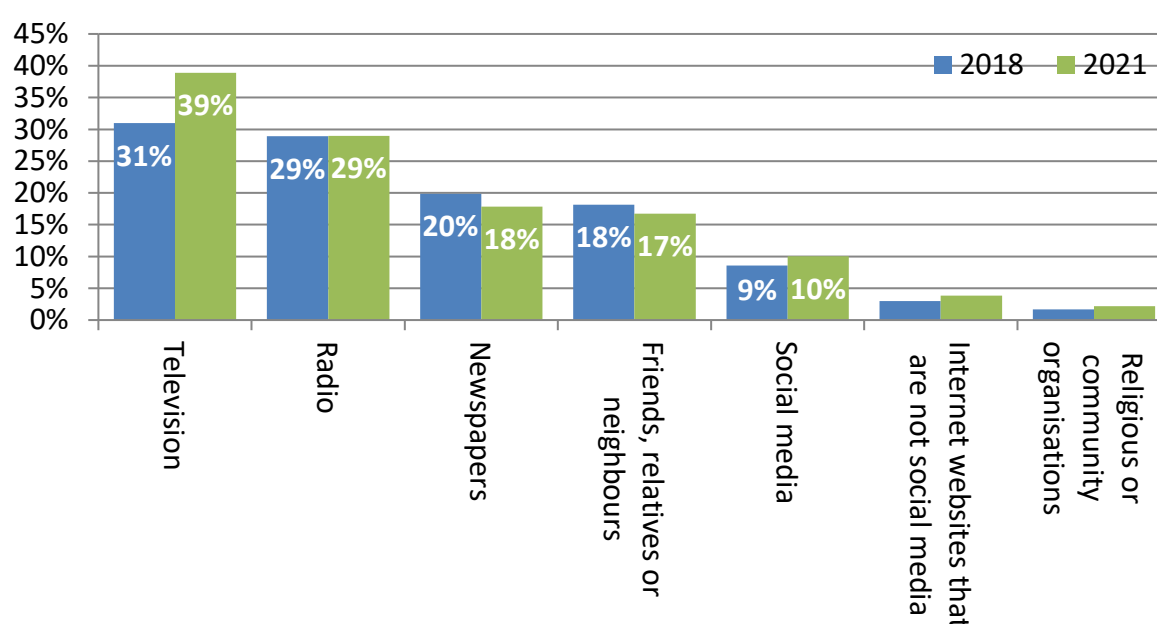
Figure 104: Mean Voting Irregularities Awareness (0-100) Index by socio-demographic characteristics, 2018 and 2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2018; 2021

There was significant provincial variation in whether citizens had heard of different kinds of procedural violations during government elections. The provinces where mean VIA scores were the highest in VPS 2021 were the Western Cape, the Northern Cape and the Free State. Mpumalanga and the Northern Cape experienced a significant index score change during the three year period. Turning away from socio-demographic differences in VIA mean index scores, let us look at the relationship between the index and direct experiences of voting irregularities. Those who direct experience had somewhat average higher index scores ($M=18$; $SE=1.10$) than those who had not ($M=9$; $SE=0.57$). This suggests that citizens who have witnessed electoral misdeeds are twice as likely to have heard about different types of irregularities than those who had no direct experience of such misdeeds.

Figure 105: Public responses to the question: “[w]here did you hear about these voting irregularities in government election?”, 2018 and 2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2018; 2021

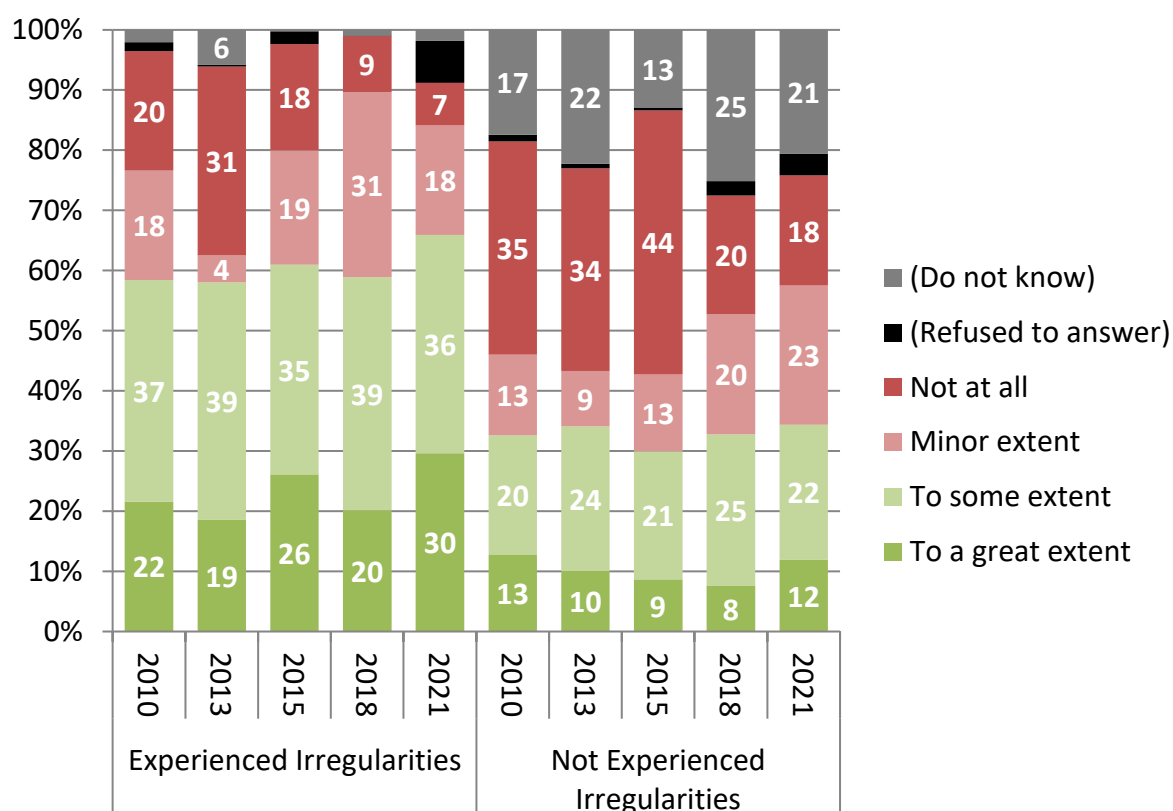
It may be that the kinds of voting irregularities that citizens hear about is influenced by the information source that they receive this news from. As a follow-up question, we asked respondents where they heard about these transgressions in the last government election. Responses to this question are depicted for VPS 2018 and VPS 2021 in Figure 105. The most common source was television followed by radio, newspapers and friends and family. These results suggest that social media played only a small role in spreading stories about voting irregularities in South African elections. Reviewing the data presented in Figure 105, it is apparent that television had become more popular between 2018 and 2021. People who heard about voting irregularities from television had much higher VIA index scores ($M=22$; $SE=2.94$) than those who did not ($M=9$; $SE=0.47$).

13.4. The Impact of Voting Irregularities on Democratic Functioning

Voting irregularities can, as a forementioned, negatively impact on the electoral process, damaging citizens ability to vote in a manner that is conducive to their democratic rights and responsibilities. This is especially important in the South African case where this ability is outlined as a fundamental right in the Constitution. Infringements to voting procedures can

also undercut the freeness and fairness of elections, removing the right of voters to make a legitimate choice at the ballot box for their preferred candidate. As a result, the entire legitimacy of election outcomes can be undermined. Finally, these kinds of violations weaken democratic principles in a country at a more basic level. As a review of the literature has made clear, perceived transgressions in voting can destabilise the functioning and the legitimacy of a democratic nation. Given the results evident in Sections 13.1 and 13.2, we can ask whether citizens in South Africa feel voting irregularities in South African elections had undermined democracy? This subsection will seek to answer this question, reviewing how attitudes on this important issue have changed over time.

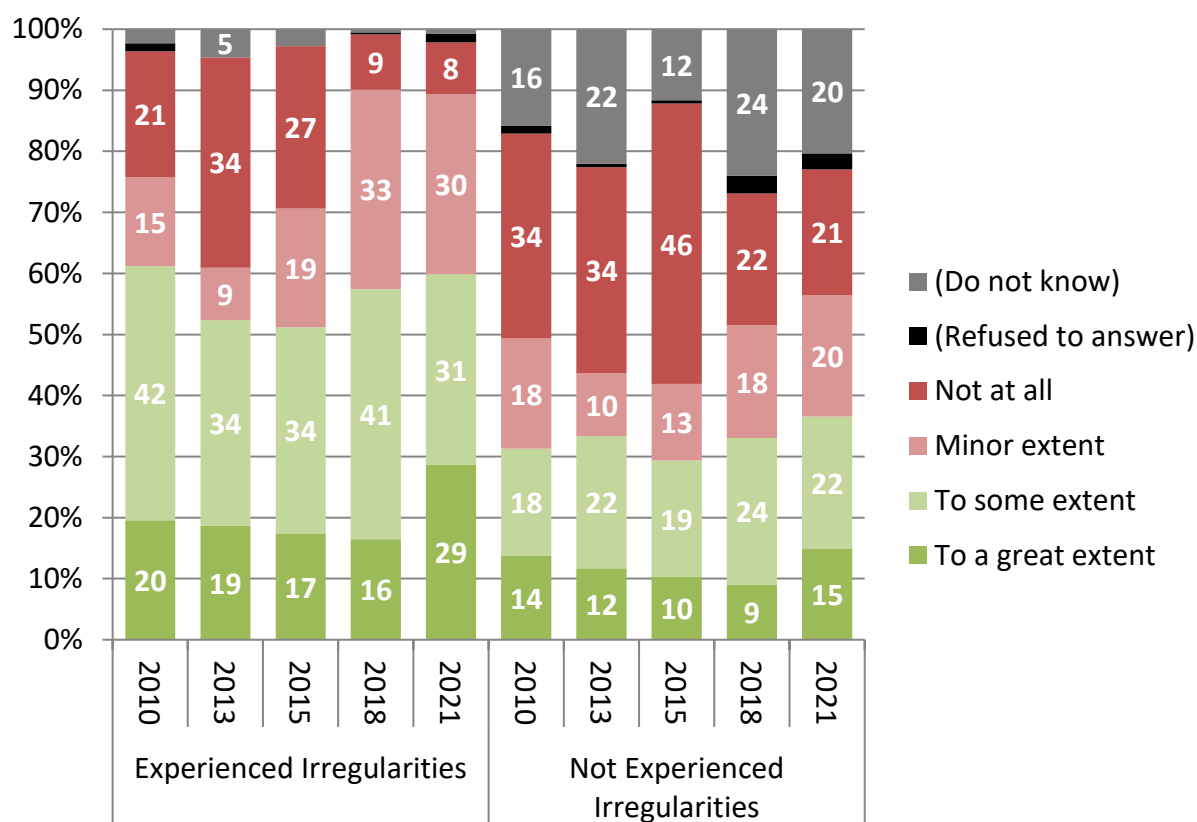
Figure 106: Extent to which people believe that voting irregularities have affected the voting process by experience by voter irregularities by experience of irregularities, 2010-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2010-2021

VPS respondents were requested to answer a series of questions regarding the impact of voting irregularities. The first concerned the voting process, the share of the general adult population who thought this had occurred was 61% in VPS 2021. This was a marked increase since VPS 2015 when only 45% of citizens gave the same answer to this question. In the last survey round, around a seventh (14%) believed irregularities had affected voting processes by a great extent, 24% by some extent and 23% by a minor extent. Whether an individual had experienced a voting irregularity was an important correlate of these attitudes (Figure 106). In VPS 2021 just about two-thirds (66%) of those with direct experience of such a transgression thought voting irregularities effected the voting process to either a great extent or some extent. Only a third (34%) of those without direct experience gave the same answer. The correlation between direct experience and attitudes here appears to have strengthened somewhat over the period 2010-2021.

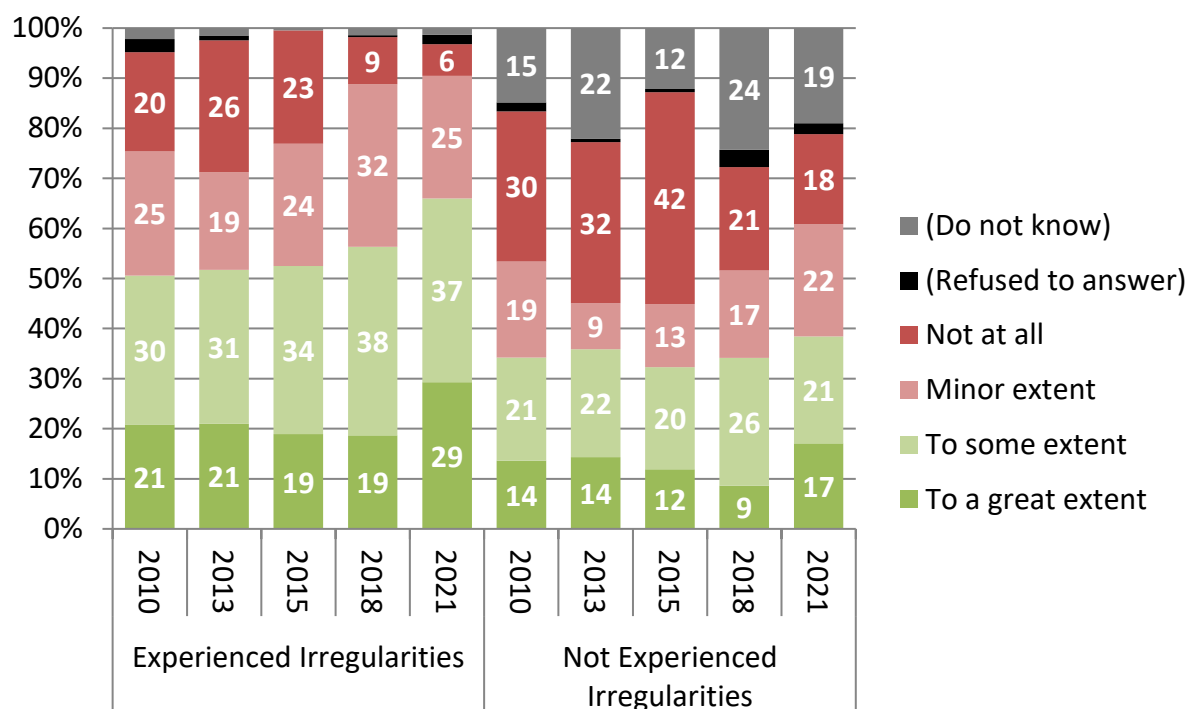
Figure 107: Extent to which people believe that voting irregularities have affected the freeness and fairness of elections by voter irregularities by experience of irregularities, 2010-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2010-2021

A sizable fraction (61%) of the adult populace thought that voting irregularities had undermined the freeness and fairness of South African elections. This is a noticeable attitudinal change from the VPS 2015 when only 44% of citizens said irregularities had influenced elections. In the last survey round, nearly a fifth (17%) thought irregularities had affected elections by a great extent, 23% by some extent and 21% by a minor extent. These findings are analogous to results presented in Section 5.2 which showed that many citizens had lost faith in how free and fair elections were in the country. Direct experience of voting irregularity seemed to be associated with perceived impact here (Figure 107). This is comparable to what was observed in Figure 106, demonstrating how damaging experiences of this kind can be to citizen perceptions of electoral integrity. During the period 2010-2021 the association between direct experience and attitudes seems to have increased slightly.

Figure 108: Extent to which people believe that voting irregularities had an impact on our democracy in South Africa by voter irregularities by experience of irregularities, 2010-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2010-2021

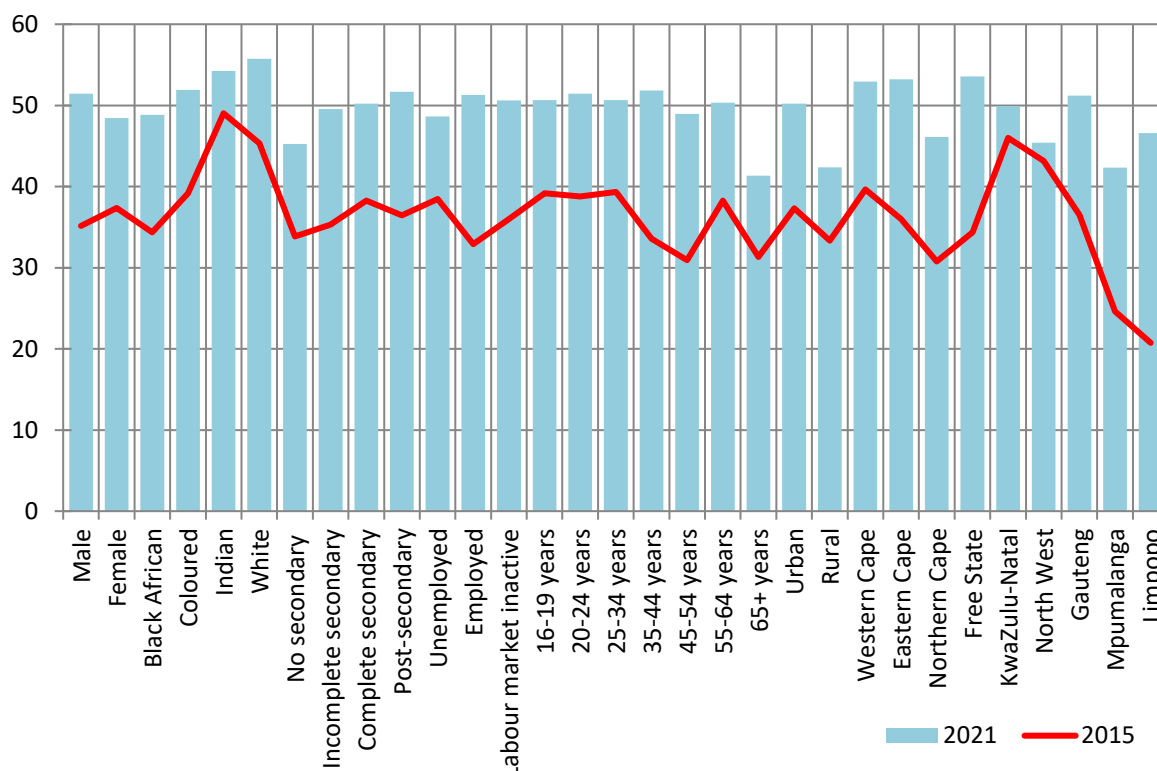
Now let us turn our attention to perceptions that voting irregularities effected democracy in general. A large proportion (65%) of the adult populace thought that they had impacted on democracy in South Africa. This is a distinct upturn since VPS 2015 when only 47% of citizens believed irregularities had this effect. In the last survey round, nearly a fifth (19%) thought irregularities had affected democracy by a great extent, 23% by some extent and 22% by a minor extent. These findings are analogous to results presented in Figure 106 and Figure 107, demonstrating how a growing concern amongst the general public about infringements of electoral procedures in the country has undermined regime legitimacy. Witnessing a voting irregularity was a significant predictor of these attitudes (Figure 108). The link between direct experience and attitudes seems to have improved a bit during the eleven year period. However, it is somewhat weaker than what was observed in the figures presented above.

A combined index was created based on the three attitudinal items outlined in this subsection³⁹. This new measure was labelled the Perceived Impact of Voting Irregularities (PIVI) Index. The metric was scaled 0 to 100 with 100 representing the highest possible impact while 0 the lowest. The national average mean scores on the PIVI Index increased from 36 (SE=0.91) in VPS 2015 to 50 (SE=0.94) in 2021 VPS. This period change indicates that South Africans have become more concerned about the effects of electoral corruption on democracy over the period. To evaluate changes in PIVI Index scores between 2015 and 2021, a subgroups analysis was completed (Figure 109). Data showed that most groups had experienced a significant (and positive) change over time. Discrete population group

³⁹ We computed a Cronbach alpha test to appraise the validity and reliability of the proposed measure. The output ($\alpha=0.88$) was higher than we would have imagined.

differences were noted in VPS 2021 with Indian and white minority adults reporting higher mean PIVI Index score than other population groups. Interestingly, Black African citizens had a significantly higher index score in 2021 than in 2015. The change suggests that this group had become more worried about the impact of electoral corruption.

Figure 109: Perceived Impact of Effect of Voting Irregularities Index (0-100) across selected socio-demographic subgroups, 2015 and 2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2015; 2021

There was a positive relationship between educational attainment and the PIVI Index in Figure 109. This relationship was more robust at the end of the period than at the start with the largest level of change detected amongst those with a post-secondary qualification. A geotype differential was discerned in VPS 2021 with urban residents being more concerned that voting irregularities damaged the democratic practices in the country. A similar differential was not recorded in VPS 2015. The provinces where index scores were the highest in VPS 2021 was the Western Cape, the Eastern Cape and the Free State. These three provinces also experienced a considerable degree of attitudinal change over the six year period. Mpumalanga and Limpopo also underwent a marked level of change. As a result of these changes, there was less provincial variation by PIVI Index scores in VPS 2021 when compared to VPS 2015.

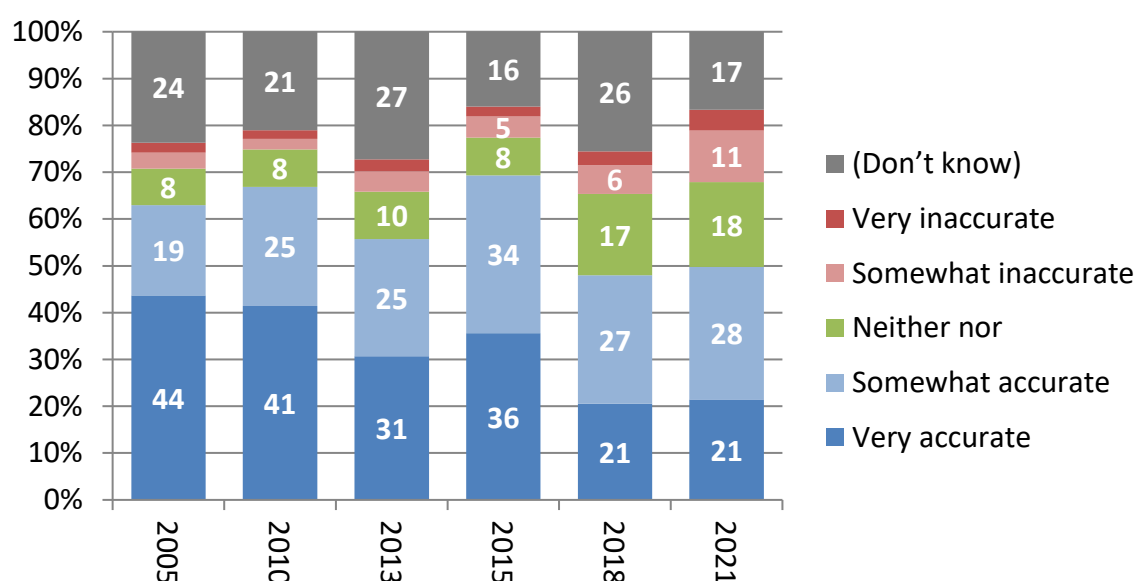
13.5. Perceived accuracy of the counting and reporting of votes in government elections

In this subsection will assess whether citizens thought that the counting of electoral vote was legitimate, and the final vote count honest. This section was included to provide a sense of how the adult public views the performance of the Electoral Commission in delivering a free and fair result. Existing research has discovered that those who perceive election results as inaccurate or biased have been found to be less willing to accept the legitimacy of the results

and may be encouraged to engage in conflict (Birch, 2020; Lehoucq, 2003; Norris, 2004). The section will show that only a minority of the populace thought the vote count was inaccurate, this outcome suggests that many doubt the legitimacy of the electoral outcome. A comprehensive subgroup analysis will show that non-voters are the most likely to distrust the correctness of the electoral vote count.

VPS included a question on whether respondents thought that the counting of ballots was accurate for government elections. Respondents were asked the following: “Thinking of the last national elections in South Africa, how accurate was the counting and reporting of voting?”. Responses were captured using a five-point scale ranging from ‘very accurate’ to ‘very inaccurate’. Public responses to this indicator are displayed in Figure 110 for the period 2005-2021 and the results show a significant scepticism about the Commission’s role here. Nearly a quarter (21%) of adult citizens believed that the counting and reporting of votes was very accurate in VPS 2021 and 27% thought it was somewhat accurate. Only a small minority (15%) stated that they felt the count was inaccurate while 18% reported that they did not know if the vote count was correct and 17% did not know how to answer the question. The percentage of citizens who felt that the count was accurate fell over the last decade. This was especially true if we consider the proportion who thought that the count was very accurate. This segment of the adult populace declined by twenty percentage points between 2010 and 2021.

Figure 110: Perceived accuracy of the counting and reporting of votes in the last government elections, 2005-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

The substantial decline observed in Figure 110 seems to be motivated by an upsurge in neutral or uncertain responses to the question of vote count accuracy. However, we also found a significant increase in the share of the mass public who thought the count was inaccurate during the 2018-2021 period. This shows that the adult citizenry has become increasingly suspicious about the competency of the Election Commission on this issue in the recent six year period. If a citizen had witnessed a voting irregularity, they were more liable to think that the vote count was incorrect. In VPS 2021 nearly a quarter (23%) of those who witnessed

an irregularity said that the count was inaccurate. We discovered an increase in perceived inaccuracy amongst those who had *not* witnessed an irregularity. The proportion of this group who thought the count was incorrect grew from 6% in VPS 2015 to 14% in VPS 2021.

In order to establish patterns of difference underlying perceptions on the accuracy of the counting of votes, the five-point accuracy scale was reversed and transformed into a 0-100 scale. On this scale 0 represents that the most pessimistic view of vote counting and reporting and 100 represents the most optimistic. We labelled this transformed measure the Perceived Accuracy of the Counting (PAC) Scale and mean PAC scores for different subgroups are displayed in **Table 38**. To allow an examination of attitudinal change over time, data is provided for the period 2005-2021. The results show index variations between subgroups and some of the largest differences were between voter frequency groups. Non-voters and irregular voters had lower mean scale scores than regular voters in each survey round. Despite the overall decline in PAC scale scores between 2010-2021, the size of this disparity remained relatively consistent during the entire period.

Table 38: Mean Perceived Accuracy of the Counting (0-100) Scale score across selected socio-demographic subgroups, 2010-2021

	2010		2013		2015		2018		2021	
<i>Voter Status</i>										
Never voted	64	(0.82)	61	(0.83)	63	(0.94)	54	(0.73)	55	(0.90)
Irregular voter	73	(0.62)	70	(0.84)	76	(0.72)	68	(0.82)	62	(0.79)
Regular voter	80	(0.53)	78	(0.70)	81	(0.65)	73	(0.76)	70	(0.78)
<i>Population Group</i>										
Black African	79	(0.44)	71	(0.62)	76	(0.55)	66	(0.58)	64	(0.62)
Coloured	66	(0.97)	66	(1.10)	70	(1.21)	61	(1.19)	57	(1.13)
Indian	54	(1.22)	60	(1.47)	56	(1.49)	60	(1.34)	50	(1.43)
White	58	(1.02)	61	(1.24)	64	(1.45)	55	(1.58)	59	(1.33)
<i>Age Cohort</i>										
18-24	71	(0.89)	64	(1.09)	71	(1.15)	58	(1.14)	59	(1.30)
25-34	78	(0.73)	69	(1.08)	72	(0.97)	66	(1.04)	61	(1.09)
35-44	76	(0.81)	72	(1.10)	75	(1.06)	64	(1.05)	66	(1.06)
45-54	74	(0.93)	73	(1.20)	77	(1.12)	67	(1.28)	59	(1.14)
55+	73	(0.85)	72	(0.88)	77	(0.89)	67	(0.87)	68	(0.87)
<i>Province</i>										
Western Cape	72	(1.11)	64	(1.52)	75	(1.31)	63	(1.42)	56	(1.35)
Eastern Cape	72	(1.11)	71	(1.24)	78	(1.27)	67	(1.16)	73	(1.44)
Northern Cape	72	(1.28)	77	(1.82)	81	(1.93)	62	(1.97)	68	(1.70)
Free State	79	(1.11)	68	(1.67)	69	(1.63)	66	(2.00)	66	(1.67)
KwaZulu-Natal	70	(0.98)	71	(1.01)	73	(0.87)	59	(0.97)	59	(1.00)
North West	79	(1.10)	73	(1.54)	70	(2.07)	59	(1.78)	63	(1.71)
Gauteng	76	(1.07)	64	(1.22)	72	(1.10)	65	(1.11)	60	(1.22)
Mpumalanga	79	(1.19)	78	(1.63)	79	(1.47)	72	(1.50)	69	(1.23)
Limpopo	80	(1.05)	71	(1.39)	74	(1.61)	68	(1.68)	69	(1.64)

Note: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; and 2. Cell shaded in green indicate a figure above the national average year in a given survey round.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2010-2021

During the last survey round the Black African majority exhibited a greater tendency to trust the results of elections than racial minorities. Adult Indian citizens had the lowest PAC Scale score of all four population groups in most survey rounds. Examining attitudinal change amongst the four population groups, the Black African majority experienced the largest decline in perceived accuracy between 2010 and 2021. Mean scale scores for this group fell from 79 (SE=0.44) to 64 (SE=0.62) during that period. We find that older citizens were less cynical about the electoral vote count than their younger peers in VPS 2021. This pattern represents a change from what was found in VPS 2015 when no age group differential was recorded. It would seem that average PAC Scale scores amongst the youth have fallen in the latter part of the period. The largest decline was noted for the 25-34 age cohort, the PAC Scale score of this group fell 15 points between 2010 and 2021.

Levels of provincial variation were relatively high in **Table 38** which suggests that citizen views on vote count accuracy is influenced by local context. In VPS 2021 the provinces where such attitudes were least common were KwaZulu-Natal (M=59; SE=1.00) and Western Cape (M=56; SE=1.35). This is similar to what was observed in Section 13.1, suggesting these provincial populations are very concerned about electoral fraud. The average PAC Scale score was also low in Gauteng (M=60; SE=1.22), this province experienced a significant attitudinal change between 2010 and 2021. The PAC Scale score of this group decreased by 16 points during this period. The provincial populations that reported the highest mean PAC Scale scores were the Eastern Cape (M=73; SE=1.44), Limpopo (M=69; SE=1.64) and Mpumalanga (M=69; SE=1.23).

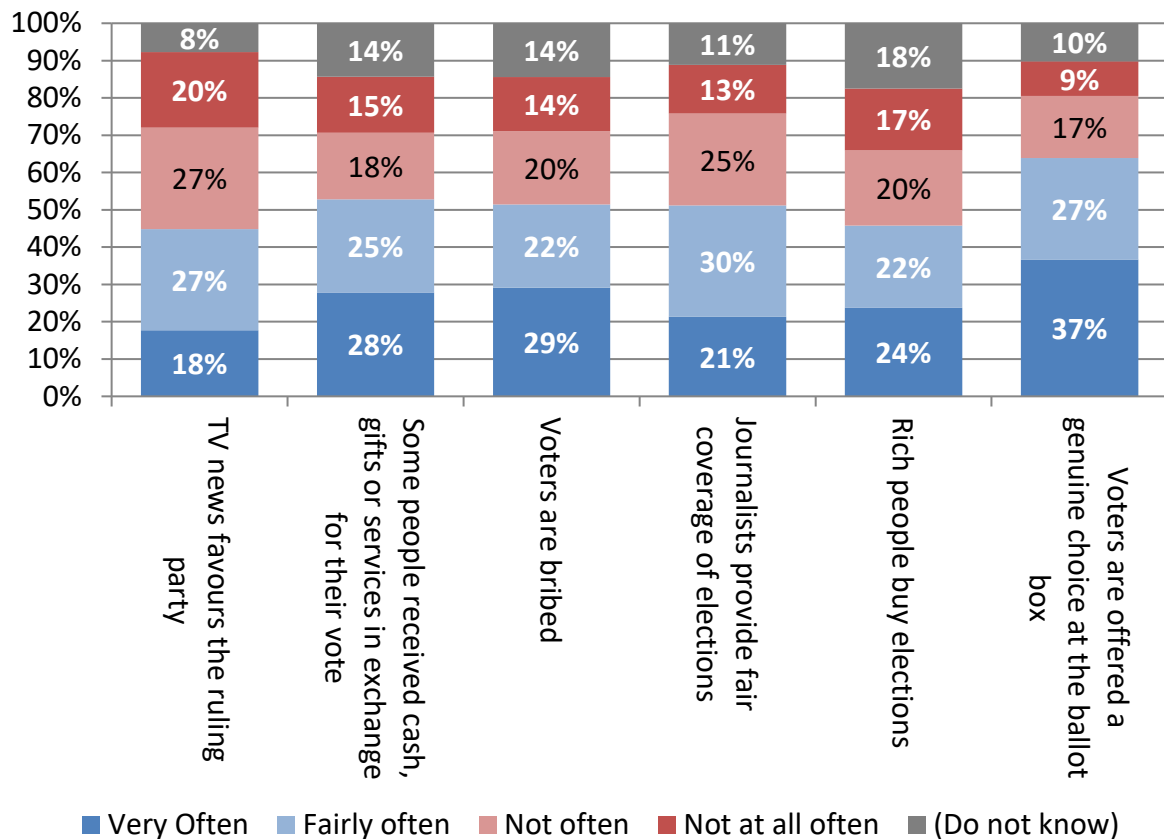
13.6. Citizen evaluations of electoral integrity

There has been a remarkable expansion of scholarly concern about electoral integrity in both developing and developed nations since the 2010s (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Oliver & Rahn, 2016). Although some of this concern has been directed at the media, the primary area of anxiety is the corruption of the electorate by wealthy elites. The VPS included a range of questions focusing on the general outlook of the voting age public towards different aspects of electoral integrity in the country. Six different indicators were selected that ranged from bribing voters to the conduct of the media. These indicators were derived from recent work by democracy theorists on what matters most to electoral integrity (Norris, 2011, 2013; Norris et al., 2014). This section will assess public evaluations on these six indicators, it will show that a significant share of the mass public is concerned about that electoral dishonesty is flawed, with many particularly worried about bribing of voters. The section will consider which subgroups were the most concerned about electoral integrity.

VPS participants were read a list of statements and then asked to tell fieldworkers how often each of these occurred. A troubling slice of the adult population appeared to believe that political parties and candidates try to purchase votes by bribing voters. A substantial segment (44%) of the general public thought that rich people buy elections in the country (Figure 111). An even larger share (53%) believed that some citizens receive cash or services in exchange for their vote and 51% told fieldworkers that voters are bribed outright. More disagreement was found on whether journalists in South Africa were impartial about elections. Nearly half (45%) of the general public stated that television news in the country often favour the ruling party while 47% said that this either happens either not often or not at all. Nearly two-fifths (37%) of adult citizens believed that journalists never or infrequently provide fair coverage of

elections. These findings demonstrate how divided the general public is on the issue of electoral malpractice in South Africa.

Figure 111: Attitudes towards electoral integrity and electoral malpractice in South Africa



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

How do attitudes towards electoral integrity vary by different subgroups in South Africa? To answer this question, we transformed the six items in Figure 111 onto a 0-100 scale –the ‘don’t know’ responses in each case were placed in the mid-point of the scale. The higher value on each indicates the frequency with which the public thought that this item occurred. Mean responses to each of these scales are presented in Table 39 across a range of geographic and demographic fault lines in South Africa. Voter status was a correlate of how the six questions on electoral integrity were answered. Citizens who voted regularly were less likely to report that voters were bribed or given enticements in exchange for their vote. There was a significant population group differential for most of the scales in the table. Population group dissimilarities were particularly evident on the first scale. Coloured (M=46; SE=2.36) and Black African (M=47; SE=1.36) adult citizens had much lower mean scale scores when compared with other groups. Indian citizens had high mean scores on all six scales with the highest score reported for the last scale (M=74; SE=3.01).

Table 39: Scale frequency (0-100) on electoral integrity and electoral malpractice in South Africa by selected socio-demographic subgroups

Aimed by selected socio-demographic subgroups												

Note: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis; and 2. Cell shaded in green indicate a figure.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

We observed minor gender differences in how people responded to the different scales, but gender was, on the whole, not a good predictor of attitudes here. When compared to other subgroup types, levels of provincial variation in the table were fairly elevated for most scales. Citizens in the Northern Cape and North West reported high mean scores on all six scales. This was particularly true of those scales that dealt with bribing voters. It would appear these groups have a very negative appraisal of electoral integrity in South Africa. Gauteng citizens also reported higher mean scores on these two scales. Limpopo citizens reported low mean scores on most scales, indicating a positive appraisal of electoral integrity amongst this group. Low mean scale scores were also evident amongst Western Cape and Eastern Cape citizens.

Table 40: Scale frequency (0-100) on electoral integrity and electoral malpractice in South Africa by selected satisfaction with democracy, 2018 and 2021

		TV news favours the ruling party	Some people received cash, gifts or services in exchange for their vote	Voters are bribed	Journalists provide fair coverage of elections	Rich people buy elections	Voters are offered a genuine choice at the ballot box
Satisfied	2018	44 (1.24)	49 (1.20)	47 (1.25)	54 (1.19)	48 (1.16)	68 (1.14)
	2021	45 (1.37)	51 (1.36)	50 (1.36)	55 (1.31)	48 (1.35)	67 (1.30)
Neutral	2018	40 (1.28)	44 (1.34)	43 (1.37)	45 (1.31)	44 (1.36)	57 (1.49)
	2021	48 (1.14)	53 (1.17)	50 (1.20)	50 (1.13)	47 (1.17)	60 (1.21)
Dissatisfied	2018	46 (0.98)	55 (0.97)	55 (0.99)	50 (0.93)	55 (0.96)	66 (0.87)
	2021	51 (0.92)	64 (0.89)	66 (0.87)	58 (0.86)	61 (0.87)	69 (0.83)
Total	2018	43 (0.66)	50 (0.66)	50 (0.68)	50 (0.64)	50 (0.66)	64 (0.64)
	2021	49 (0.64)	58 (0.64)	58 (0.61)	55 (0.61)	54 (0.64)	66 (0.61)

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2018;2021

Public satisfaction with democracy helps determine public views on different aspects of the election integrity discussed in this subsection. Mean scale scores on the six indicators were presented for satisfaction with democracy categories in Table 40. Frequency scale scores increased between 2018 and 2021, showing that perceptions of electoral integrity have declined somewhat during the most recent period. There was a correlation between public satisfaction with democracy and the six scales. This correlation was most robust for those scales that concerned bribing voters. A strong relationship was also observed for the scale on the rich buying elections. Much weaker correlations were observed for those scales concerning the role of the media. Mean scale scores for those dissatisfied with democracy increased between VPS 2018 and VPS 2021. The largest change was for bribing voters, scale scores on this indicator increased from 55 (SE=0.99) to 66 (SE=0.87) during this six year period.

14. Satisfaction with most recent voting experience

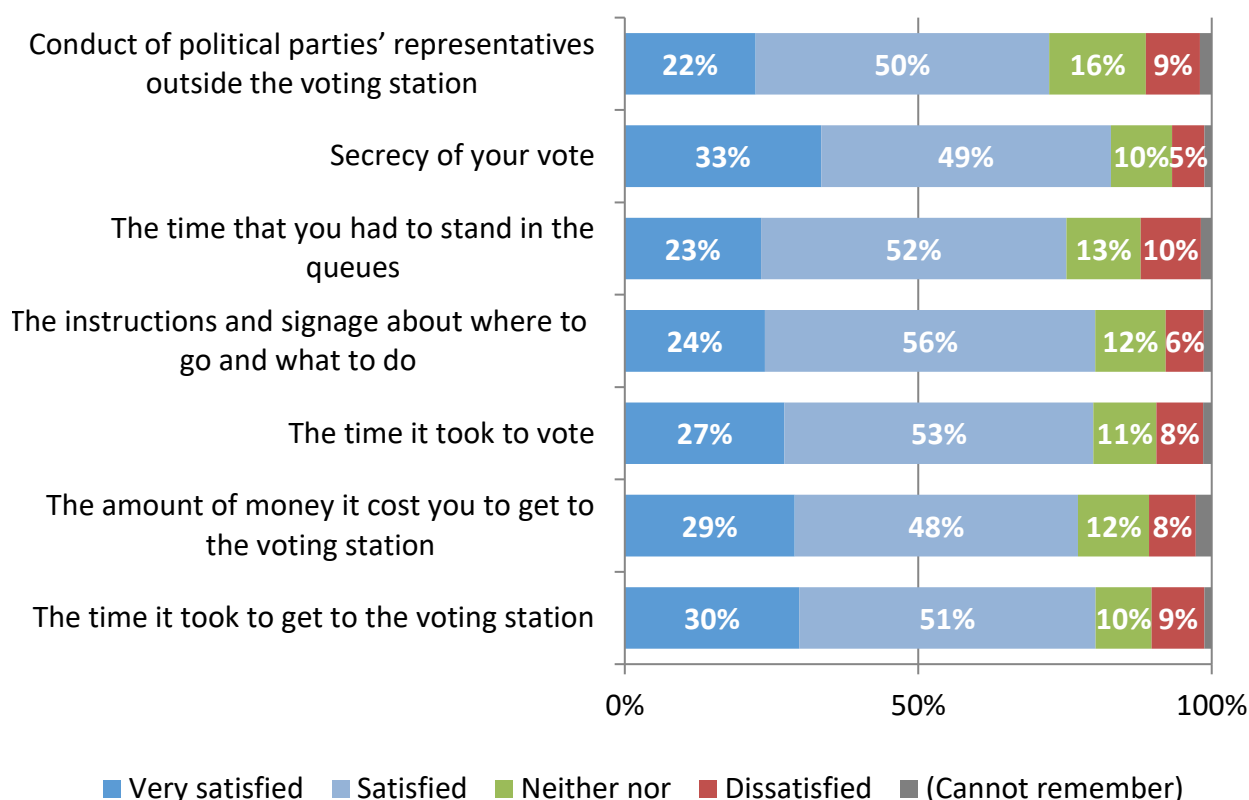
With the aim of better understanding the experience of voters during prior government elections, voters in the VPS were asked to recall their last voting experience and to rate certain elements of the voting process. The voters were asked to rate their general voting experience, the conduct of Election Commission officials and the actual voting stations, including the physical surroundings. South Africans who had never voted before were excluded from answering such questions. The first subsection will concern itself with general voting experience and then the second subsection will narrow the focus to the ballot paper. The subsections that follow deal with election officials and the voting station. The final subsection investigates whether voter believed that elections were free and fair. This section will show that the general voting population was, on the whole, largely satisfied with the work of the Election Commission. However, there were certain trends of concern that emerged from our attitudinal analysis. The research team found modest regressions in voter satisfaction across

a range of factors. These attitudinal changes appear to be especially pronounced for certain groups (e.g., the youth and the Western Cape) and the section provides a detailed investigation of which subgroups report declining levels of satisfaction.

14.1. General voting experience

The first set of questions that are examined in this section concern the general voting experience and touches on critical elements of free and fair elections. VPS participants were read a set of seven different statements about the last election that they had voted in. These encompasses issues around confidentiality, affordability (funds needed to get to the voting station), signage and instructions, the conduct of political party agents as well as the time it takes to queue and cast a vote. Voters were asked to consider their last voting experience and rate their satisfaction on each of these statements. General satisfaction with these different elements of their last election experience is portrayed in Figure 112 during the 2021 VPS. The results show that the vast majority of voters told fieldworkers that they were satisfied with their last voting experience. Voters rated the secrecy of the ballot highest, 83% of past voters said that they were satisfied with this issue. The behaviour of political representatives was rated below the others, 72% of the voting population reported being satisfied with this.

Figure 112: Satisfaction and dissatisfaction with different statements about the general voting experience

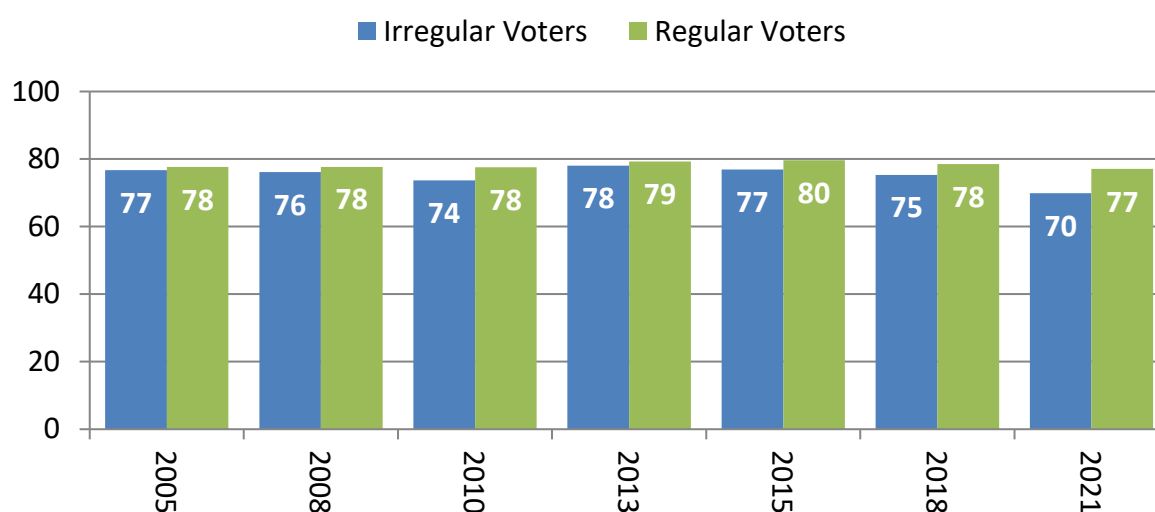


Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

In order to rate voter satisfaction of the different elements of the electoral experience outlined in Figure 112 across past VPS rounds, mean scores were calculated for the different components. The scores were calculated by reversing the initial scale, so that the scores

ranged from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). These scores were then converted to a 0-100 scale for ease of interpretation, with 0 representing 'very dissatisfied' and 100 'very satisfied'. Higher scores therefore represent more satisfied responses, calculated out of a possible 100. These scales were then summed together and combined into a single metric that we called the Voting Experience Satisfaction (VES) Index. In VPS 2005, the mean VES Index was 77 (SE=0.35) and scores remained somewhat stable until VPS 2015 when we noticed a moderate decline. Between VPS 2015 and VPS 2021, the mean VES Index score fell from 78 (SE=0.44) to 74 (SE=0.58).

Figure 113: Mean Voting Experience Satisfaction (VES) Index (0-100) by voter regularity, 2005-2021

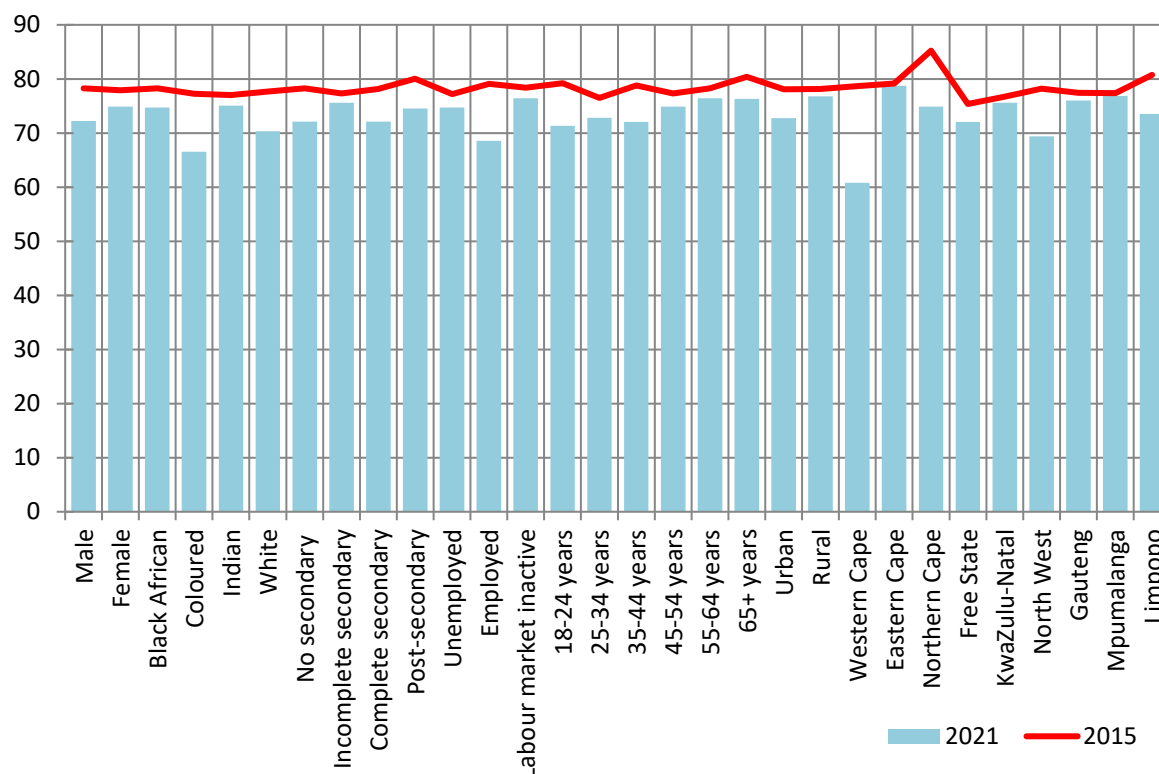


Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

Investigating the relative deterioration in average VES Index scores noted above, we examined how mean scores differed by regular and irregular voters. As can be observed in **Figure 113**, regular voters have had higher mean index scores than their irregular peers in most VPS rounds. Regular voters have had a mean index score of 78 (SE=0.74) in VPS 2015, which only declined slightly to 77 (SE=0.71) in VPS 2021. Irregular voters have become more dissatisfied with the functioning of the electoral system over time. Mean VES Index scores amongst irregular voters fell from 77 (SE=0.65) in VPS 2015 to 70 (SE=0.92) in VPS 2021⁴⁰. Does the level of satisfaction observed in **Figure 112** hold true for all the major socio-economic subgroups in South Africa? What about the decline we observed in **Figure 113**, which groups have been most effected by the decline? With the intention of interrogating VPS data on satisfaction with these elements of the general voting experience across different socio-demographic groups, we conducted a subgroup analysis.

⁴⁰ Reviewing the VPS data, we found that it was the sub-indicator that dealt with instructions and signage that experienced the largest decline amongst irregular voters over time. Overall satisfaction on this indicator dropped from 92% of all adult voters to 80% of this group between VPS 2015 and VPS 2021.

Figure 114: Mean Voting Experience Satisfaction (VES) Index (0-100) scores by socio-demographic characteristics, 2015 and 2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2015;2021

Group differences in mean satisfaction scores are displayed for VPS 2015 and VPS 2021 in **Figure 114**. Even though subgroup variations in the figure were relatively small, certain deductions can be made about how voting experiences differed by group. Firstly, it is evident that there were distinct population group differences. Racial minorities were more apt to be dissatisfied with their general voting experience. The group that experienced the largest attitudinal decline was the Coloured voting population, mean VES Index scores fell by ten points between 2015 and 2021. Employment was an interesting correlate of attitudes here. The average VES Index for the employed decreased significantly during the 2015-2021 period, falling from 79 (SE=0.59) at the start to 69 (SE=0.82) at the end. A noteworthy age differential that favoured older voters was apparent in **Figure 114** during the last survey round. Young voters reported relatively worse voting experiences than their older peers. A similar differential was not observed in VPS 2015, suggesting the voting youth is becoming critical of the Election Commission.

When judged against rural voters, urban voters had relatively lower mean VES Index scores in VPS 2021. A similar finding was not noted in VPS 2015, this points to growing dissatisfaction with how the Election Commission is managing urban voting stations. In **Figure 114** we can observe a remarkable level of provincial variation in the VES Index. During VPS 2021, Western Cape voters had, by far, the lowest mean index scores of all the provincial groups. Average VES index scores in the province fell from 79 (SE=0.80) to 61 (SE=1.56) during the six year

period under review.⁴¹ Other provinces that also experienced a decline (albeit a far less dramatic one) were Limpopo, the North West, and the Northern Cape. Of all the provinces in the figure, Eastern Cape voters (M=79; SE=1.03) reported the highest mean index scores.

14.2. Satisfaction with the Ballot Paper

In order for voters to successfully cast their vote, they need to understand how to make their mark on the ballot paper at their voting station. If they do not comprehend this important election material, voters may be unsure about how to complete their ballot and make mistakes. Public misunderstanding of the ballot paper at the station can, consequently, destabilise our faith in the reliability of electoral outcomes. Long-term this lack of knowledge may even reduce voter participation. This issue has only grown more pertinent as more and more names have been added to the ballot paper for the 2021 LGE. We need to better comprehend how voters feel about the ballot paper. To gain this insight, questions on this subject were designed for the VPS questionnaire, and answers to these questions will be explored in this subsection.

VPS respondents were queried on whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the ballot paper in the last election. The vast majority of the voting population said that they were satisfied with the ballot paper. Survey results show that 32% of voters said they were very satisfied with the ballot and 53% claimed that they were just satisfied. When compared with those who voted in the 2019 NGE, those who did not vote recently were less likely to be satisfied. The research team found that only 15% of these voters were satisfied with the ballot in their last election and 60% stated that they were only satisfied. This deterioration was consistent with the moderate decline in voter satisfaction that was noted in the previous subsection.

Table 41: Voter satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the ballot paper by voter satisfaction with different criteria about the general voting experience

With different criteria about the general voting experience										
	Very Satisfied		Satisfied		Neutral		Dissatisfied		Very dissatisfied	
Time it took to get to the voting station										
Satisfied	36	(1.96)	56	(1.97)	5	(0.73)	1	(0.38)	1	(0.24)
Neutral	14	(3.28)	32	(4.27)	45	(4.17)	5	(1.31)	5	(1.51)
Dissatisfied	9	(4.80)	43	(6.01)	15	(3.46)	21	(4.49)	12	(2.77)
Amount of money it cost to get to the voting station										
Satisfied	36	(1.93)	56	(1.96)	6	(0.77)	1	(0.48)	1	(0.23)
Neutral	20	(5.26)	39	(4.75)	33	(3.91)	3	(0.91)	6	(1.65)
Dissatisfied	10	(2.46)	41	(4.87)	15	(3.07)	22	(4.28)	11	(2.29)

⁴¹ Evaluating how the results changed for Western Cape voters, we found that it was the sub-indicator that dealt with the time it took to vote that underwent the greatest decline. Between VPS 2015 and VPS 2021, voter satisfaction on this issue plummeted from 86% to 56% amongst this group. A similar (if somewhat less extreme) regression was also noted for the sub-indicator related to the time it took to get to the voting station.

Time it took to vote										
Satisfied	37	(2.01)	56	(2.01)	5	(0.67)	1	(0.37)	1	(0.25)
Neutral	10	(2.01)	38	(4.40)	43	(4.20)	8	(2.63)	2	(0.75)
Dissatisfied	6	(1.92)	40	(4.73)	17	(3.02)	20	(3.72)	17	(3.22)
Voting station instructions and signage										
Satisfied	38	(1.97)	56	(1.97)	5	(0.72)	1	(0.28)	1	(0.26)
Neutral	8	(1.88)	47	(4.91)	35	(4.01)	7	(1.90)	3	(1.17)
Dissatisfied	3	(1.41)	23	(4.72)	28	(4.66)	28	(5.42)	18	(3.55)
Time it took to queue										
Satisfied	39	(2.08)	56	(2.08)	4	(0.67)	1	(0.33)	1	(0.26)
Neutral	11	(2.30)	40	(4.23)	40	(3.77)	7	(1.95)	2	(0.61)
Dissatisfied	8	(2.31)	44	(4.47)	17	(2.96)	17	(3.57)	13	(2.62)
Secrecy of vote										
Satisfied	37	(1.95)	57	(1.96)	4	(0.65)	1	(0.43)	1	(0.31)
Neutral	10	(2.73)	37	(4.69)	44	(4.31)	8	(2.66)	2	(0.88)
Dissatisfied	3	(1.78)	17	(4.07)	32	(5.34)	28	(4.50)	20	(3.69)
Conduct of political parties' representatives										
Satisfied	38	(2.07)	56	(2.06)	4	(0.69)	1	(0.27)	1	(0.32)
Neutral	15	(3.15)	42	(4.20)	33	(3.41)	8	(2.37)	2	(0.73)
Dissatisfied	13	(3.38)	49	(5.20)	14	(2.70)	13	(2.70)	12	(2.53)

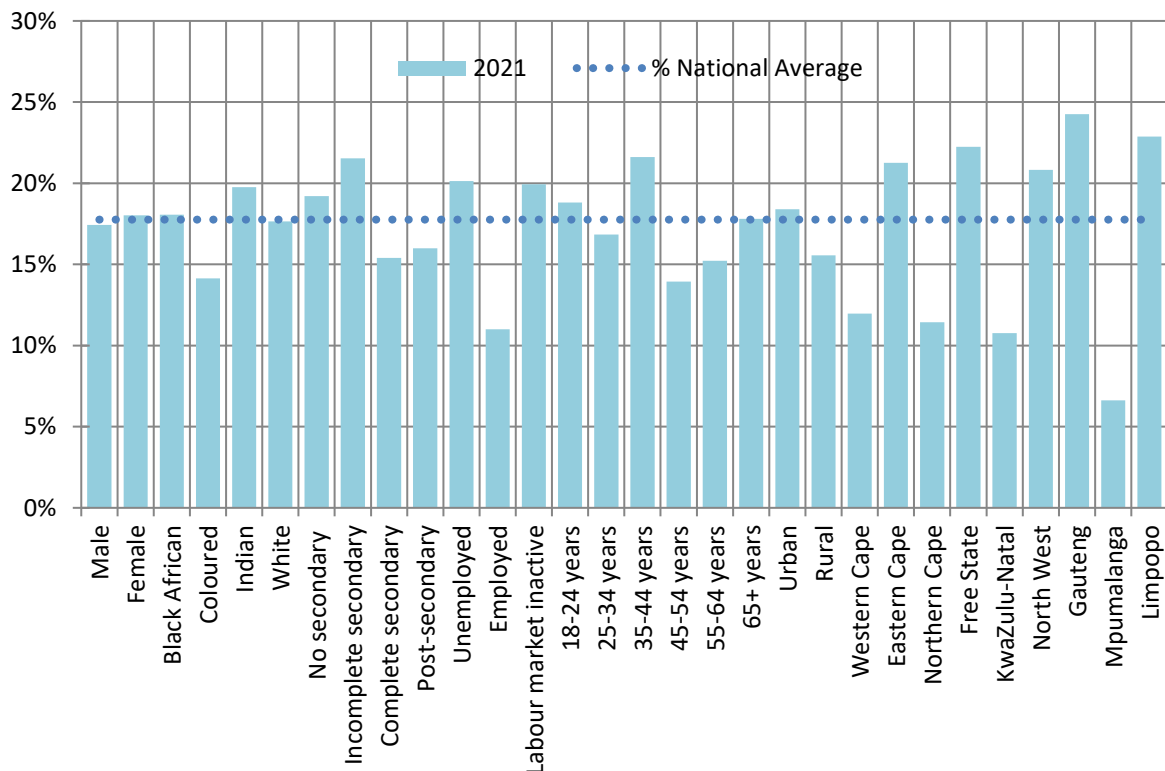
Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

Voter satisfaction with the ballot paper was correlated with how satisfied or dissatisfied citizen were with different aspects of their last voting experience. This can be observed if we assess voter satisfaction with the ballot paper by public evaluations of different criteria about the general voting experience (**Table 41**). Of seven criteria outlined in the table, voter evaluations of the ballot papers had the strongest relationship with secrecy of the vote as well as voting station signage and instructions. The correlation between general assessments of the ballot papers and evaluations of other aspects of the voting experience is clear if we look at the VES Index (outlined in Section 14.1). Those who were very satisfied ($M=96$; $SE=0.33$) or satisfied ($M=92$; $SE=0.41$) with the ballot paper had a higher mean VES Index score than those who were dissatisfied ($M=51$; $SE=2.35$) or very dissatisfied ($M=50$; $SE=3.73$).

One of the difficulties that a person may have with their ballot paper concerns finding their preferred party of choice. When asked, we find that 18% of the adult voting population said that they have trouble finding their party of choice and 75% did not. If a voter had trouble finding their party on the ballot, then they were more likely to express dissatisfaction with the ballot paper. With the aim of better comprehending the subtleties of this issues amongst the voting public, let us scrutinise levels of self-reported difficulty with finding party of choice on the ballot paper across a range of selected subgroups in 2021 VPS. Subgroup variations in **Figure 115** were comparatively small but certain attitudinal variances between groups can be discerned.

Figure 115: Percentage of different subgroups who thought that its difficult finding to find your party of choice on the ballot paper in an election since 1994 by socio-demographic characteristics



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

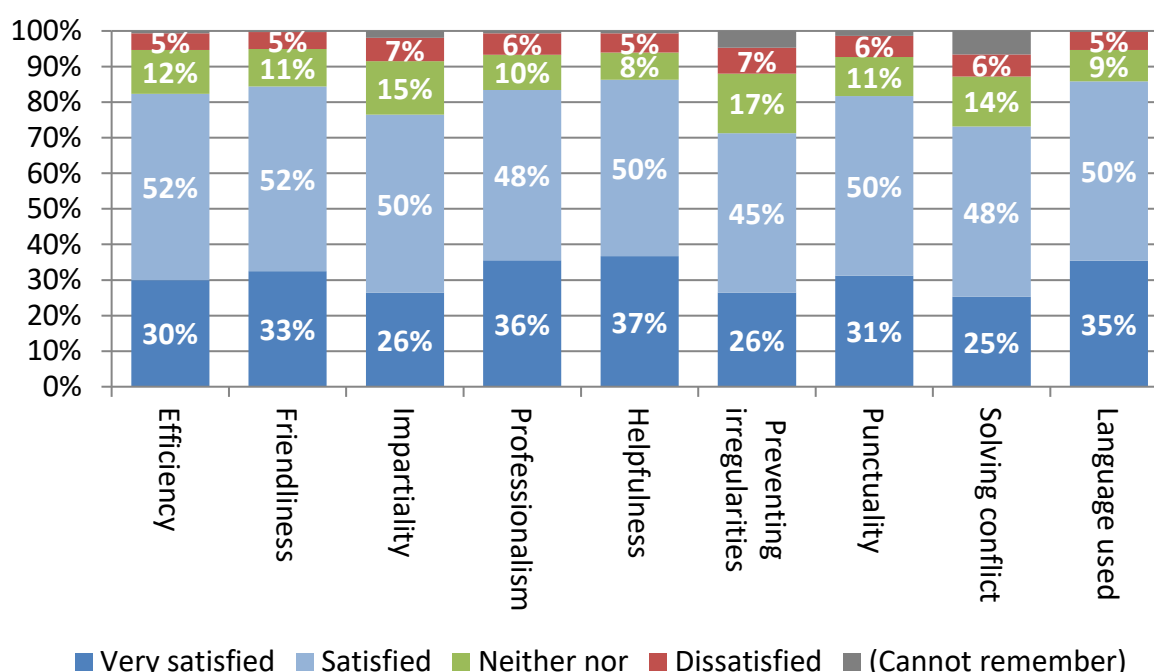
There was an educational gradient in the figure that favoured less educated voters. The more formal schooling an individual had, the less liable they were to report having a problem finding political parties on their ballot paper. Population group differences in difficulty were noted in the figure. Racial minorities had more trouble finding their party of choice on the ballot paper than the Black African majority. Of the three minority groups, Indian voters reported having the most trouble. Investigating population group more thoroughly, we found that language usage was a predictor of attitudes towards the ballot paper. More than a quarter (26%) of Sepedi speakers reported having difficulty locating their party on the ballot. Speakers of Setswana and Sesotho also reported levels of difficulty that were higher than the national average.

When compared to either the unemployed or those outside the labour market, a relatively lower proportion of employed voters reported experiencing difficulty using the ballot paper. Although a noteworthy age group differential was evident, the relationship between age and difficulty appears to be non-linear. Those in 45-54 and 55-64 age groups reported the lowest levels of trouble locating their preferred party on the ballot paper. We discovered a remarkable level of provincial variation in terms of self-reported difficulty in **Figure 115**. Gauteng voters had the highest mean level of difficulty, 24% of the voter population in that province had trouble using their ballot paper. Other provinces reported much lower levels of difficulty, Western Cape, Northern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga were all far below the national average.

14.3. Satisfaction with Electoral Commission officials

A critical element of any election management process is the staffing component. During each election thousands of electoral staff members are deployed to the various voting stations to implement the mandate of the Election Commission. In order to deploy skilled and competent electoral staff, the election management body gives specific attention to recruitment and training practices. Recruitment is done within a stringent framework that ensures the impartiality and independence of election officials. Electoral officials are recruited from all sectors of the community and care is taken to match appointments to the required skill levels of the various roles. In this subsection, data on voter evaluations of the performance and conduct of Election Commission officials will be provided.

Figure 116: Satisfaction and dissatisfaction with different statements about the conduct of electoral officials at voting stations



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

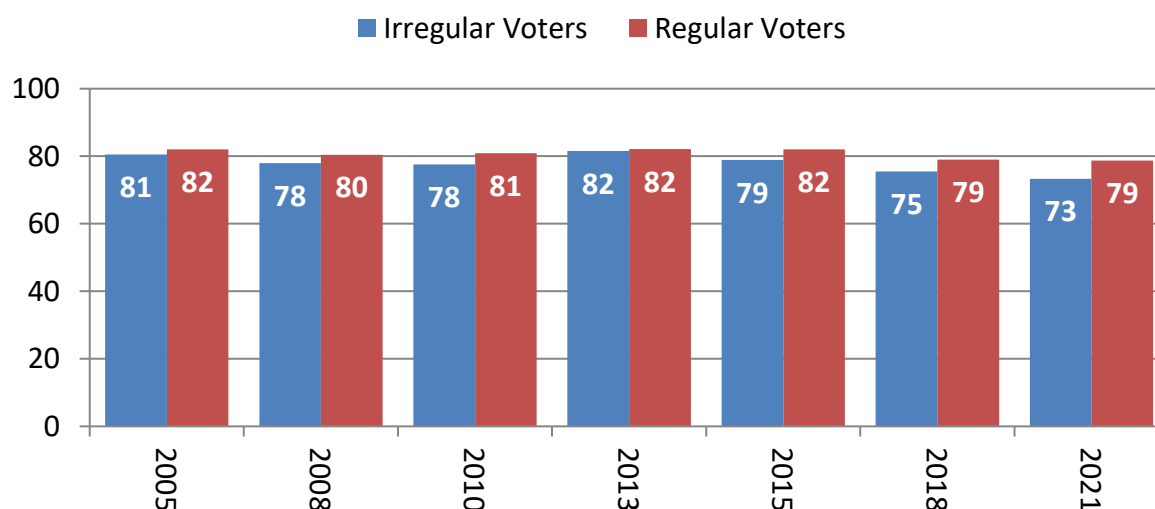
VPS participants who had voted before were provided with a list of nine different statements about electoral officials at their voting station. They were then asked to think about the last time they voted and then say how satisfied they were with the services of the electoral officials in terms of this list. Responses for the last survey round are depicted in **Figure 116**, they show that voters, at large, were generally very complimentary towards the voting station officials. Officials are rated especially highly on helpfulness (86%), proficient in language (86%), friendliness (84%), professionalism (83%), efficiency (82%) and punctuality (86%). Relatively less favourable ratings were acquired for impartiality (76%), conflict resolution skills (73%) and the prevention of irregularities (71%). These outcomes suggest that the general voting public is quite satisfied with the manner in which the officials conduct themselves and manage the voting station.

The research team wanted to compare levels of voter satisfaction with the conduct of officials over time. To achieve this, the satisfaction scales for each of the performance areas in **Figure**

116 were reversed, so that the score ranged from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). These scores were then transformed into 0-100 scales for ease of interpretation, with 0 representing 'very dissatisfied' and 100 'very satisfied'. High scores therefore represent more satisfied responses, calculated out of a possible 100. To provide greater insight into how satisfaction with Election Commission officials has altered over time, an Electoral Official Satisfaction (EOS) Index was created from these different scales. The average EOS Index score was 81 (SE=0.35) in VPS 2005 and stayed (more or less) at that figure until VPS 2015 when we detected a modest drop. The mean EOS Index score shrank from 80 (SE=0.37) to 76 (SE=0.53) between 2015 and 2021, a decline that is somewhat similar to what was noted for general voter experience in Section 14.1.

Those voters who participated in the 2019 NGE exhibited higher OES Index scores (M=77; SE=0.38) than those who had not (M=70; SE=1.06). This outcome suggests that it cannot be recent voting experience that resulted in the relative deterioration in average OES Index scores over the last few survey rounds. Investigating the matter further, we examined how mean scores differed by regular and irregular voters. In most VPS rounds, as can be observed in **Figure 117**, irregular voters have had lower mean index scores than regular voters. A mean index score of 79 (SE=0.66) was observed for regular voters in VPS 2021, a figure not much lower than what was seen in VPS 2015 (M=82; SE=0.50). Irregular voters have become more dissatisfied with the functioning of the conduct of officials over time. Mean VES Index scores amongst irregular voters fell from 82 (SE=0.54) in VPS 2015 to 73 (SE=0.85) in VPS 2021⁴². This outcome is consistent with what was found in subsection 14.1 and shows that voting irregularity is an important predictor of attitudes towards election officials in South Africa.

Figure 117: Mean Electoral Official Satisfaction (EOS) Index (0-100) scores by voter regularity, 2005-2021

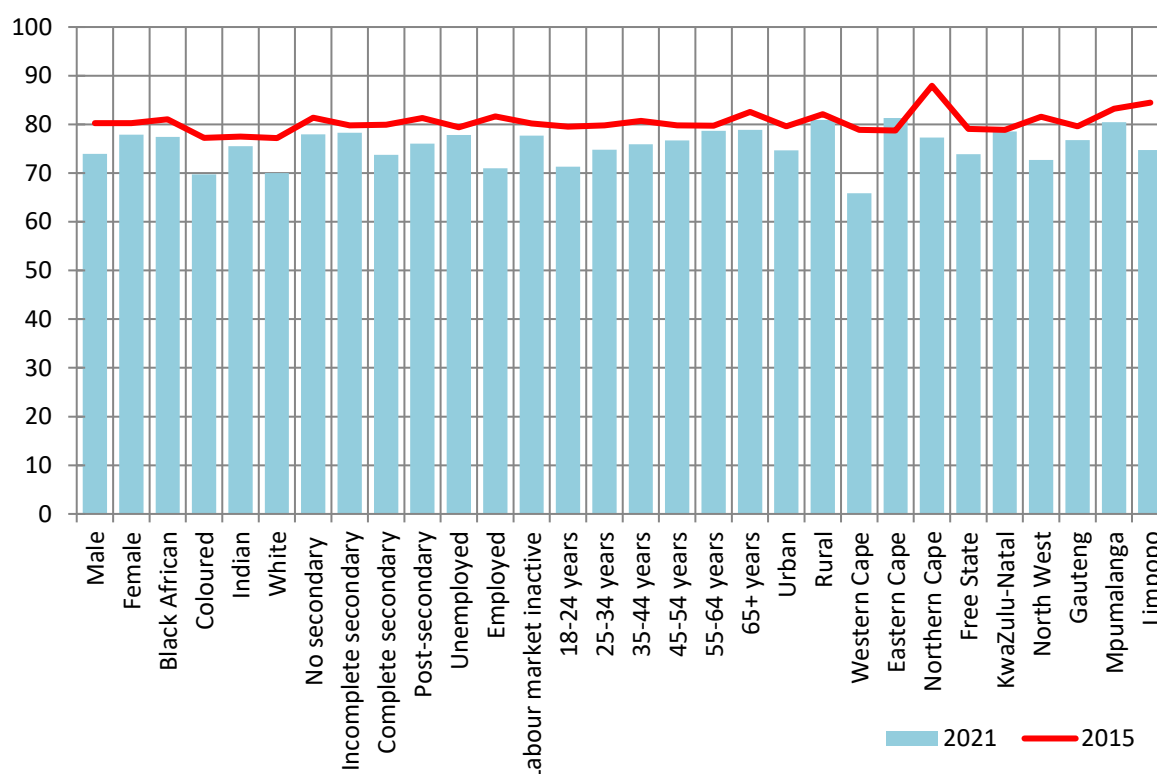


Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

⁴² Assessing how the index scores altered for irregular voters over time, we discovered that it was the sub-indicator that dealt with friendliness that suffered the greatest deterioration. On this indicator voter satisfaction amongst irregular voters plunged from 94% to 81% between 2015 and VPS 2021. A comparable, if slightly less sizeable, decrease was also recorded for the sub-indicator related to impartiality.

The mean EOS Index scores are presented for voters with different socio-demographic characteristics in **Figure 118**. It is evident from the figure, that voters from most groups are generally satisfied with the conduct of officials at their voting stations. As was the case with the VES Index, it seems that for most the EOS Index is skewed towards the positive and this implies that very few voters are dissatisfied with the conduct of officials. Although subgroup variations in the figure were comparatively minor, some interesting group variances in how officials were evaluated can be discerned. Significant racial differences are evident, with Black African voters generally more satisfied with the conduct of Election Commission officials than their minority counterparts. During the six year period under review, white and Coloured voters have become much less satisfied with conduct of the officials. Much like with the prior subsection, being employed was an important predictor of attitudes here. The average EOS Index for the employed decreased appreciably between 2015 and 2021, falling from 80 (SE=0.41) to 71 (SE=0.80).

Figure 118: Mean Electoral Official Satisfaction (EOS) Index (0-100) scores by socio-demographic characteristics, 2015 and 2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2015;2021

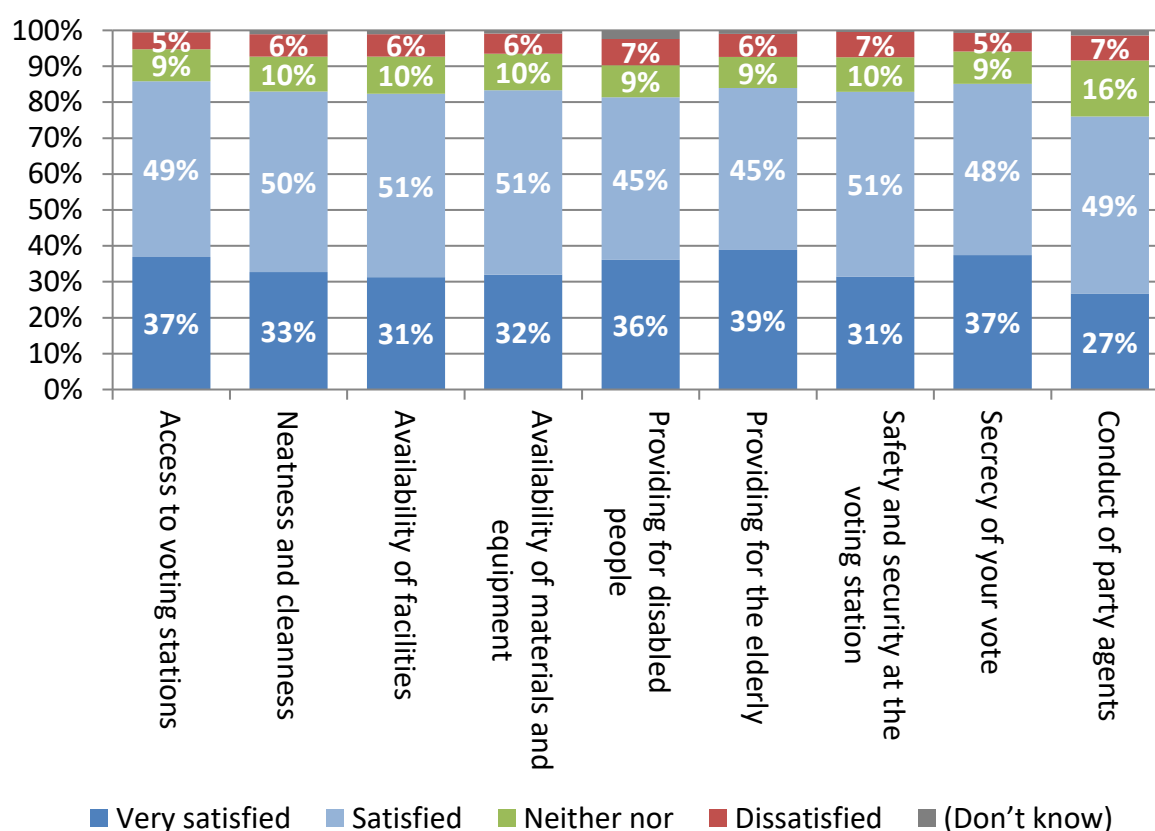
When compared to older voters, younger voters scored relatively low on the OES Index in VPS 2021. A similar age gradient was not discovered in VPS 2015, a finding that suggests that the youth have recently become discontented with officials working for the Commission. The 18-24 age cohort experienced an eight point decline in their average EOS Index score during the six year period. Satisfaction also appears to be decreasing amongst urban voters. In **Figure 118** we discovered a notable degree of provincial variation, similar to what we observed in **Figure 114** in Section 14.1. Of all the subgroups in the figure, mean index scores in the Western Cape were, by a considerable margin, the lowest. Average index scores amongst

voters in the province decreased from 79 (SE=0.73) to 66 (SE=1.61) between 2015 and 2021⁴³. Although not as sizeable as what occurred in the Western Cape, the North West, Limpopo and the Northern Cape also experienced a large decline.

14.4. Satisfaction with the voting station

Voter turnout is often linked to how satisfied a voter is with electoral conditions. If voters are dissatisfied with, for instance, the secrecy of their ballot, they might not want to turnout and vote. The previous subsections have shown that satisfaction with voting conditions is a good correlate of voting regularity. This subsection will build on that prior finding by investigating how voters feel about voting stations. It addresses questions about what voters think about the access, neatness, facilities, and safety and security at their voting stations. It also focuses on questions about whether adequate provision is made for the casting of a secret ballot at the voting station and whether the station caters for the needs of the elderly and disabled. We again find that the majority of voters are satisfied or very satisfied with most of the issues at the voting station.

Figure 119: Satisfaction and dissatisfaction with different statements about conditions at the voting stations



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

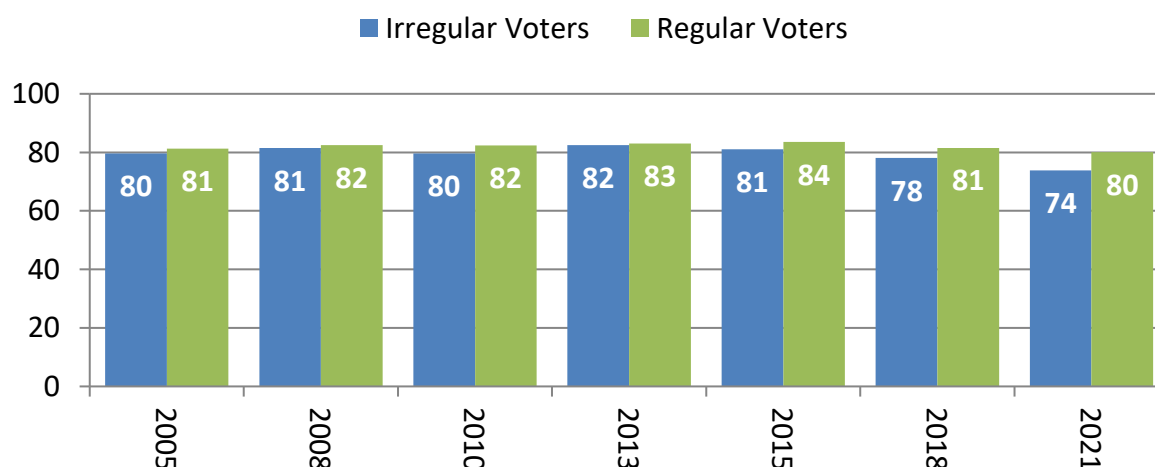
⁴³ Investigating this index change amongst Western Cape voters further, we found that it was the sub-indicator that dealt with helpfulness that endured the most regression. Voter satisfaction on this aspect of electoral officialdom crashed from 90% in VPS 2015 to 68% in VPS 2021 amongst this group.

Survey respondents who had previously voted were read a list of nine statements about the conditions at their voting station. They were then required to indicate how satisfied they were with each of these, responses for the 2021 VPS are represented in **Figure 119**. The outcomes to these questions reveal that voters are, on the whole, quite contented with how voting stations in the country are run. For instance, consider that almost all voters are satisfied with access to the voting station (86%), the secrecy of the vote (85%) as well as the safety and security of the station (83%). The questions that received the lowest evaluations were conduct of party agents (76%) and providing for disabled people (81%). Further analysis shows that disabled voters did not significantly differ from able-bodied voters in how they evaluated voting stations on providing for disabled people.

So as to enable a comparison of voter satisfaction with the voting station between the various survey rounds, mean scores were calculated for the different components outlined in **Figure 119**. For analytical purposes, the scale of each was reversed to range from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). These scores were then transformed into a 0-100 scale for ease of interpretation, with 0 representing 'very dissatisfied' and 100 'very satisfied'. Higher scores therefore represent more satisfied responses, calculated out of a possible 100. These items were then amalgamated into a new variable that was termed the Voting Station Satisfaction (VSS) Index. The VSS Index was 77 (SE=0.58) in VPS 2021, this represents a moderate decline from 2015 when the average index score was 82 (SE=0.36). This mild decrease is consistent with prior subsections and suggest that voter disillusionment with the Election Commission has grown in recent years.

The data shows that it was not recent experience of the 2019 NGE that caused the worsening in mean VSS Index scores between 2015 and 2021. Those who did not vote in the 2019 NGE had lower average VSS Index scores (M=72; SE=1.00) than those who had voted (M=78; SE=0.40). Exploring this issue in more detail, we considered how mean scores fluctuated by regular and irregular voters over time. Regular and irregular voters reported similar average index scores for most of the rounds under review (**Figure 120**). We start to see a divergence in average VSS Index scores for these two groups beginning in 2015. Although both groups experienced a decline during the period 2015-2021, VSS Index scores declined for irregular voters at a faster rate. In the last survey round, irregular voters had a mean index score of 74 (SE=0.94) and regular voters a mean score of 80 (SE=0.63). This finding corresponds with what we discovered in Section 14.3, demonstrating that voting regularity is a significant determinant of public evaluations of the voting experience.

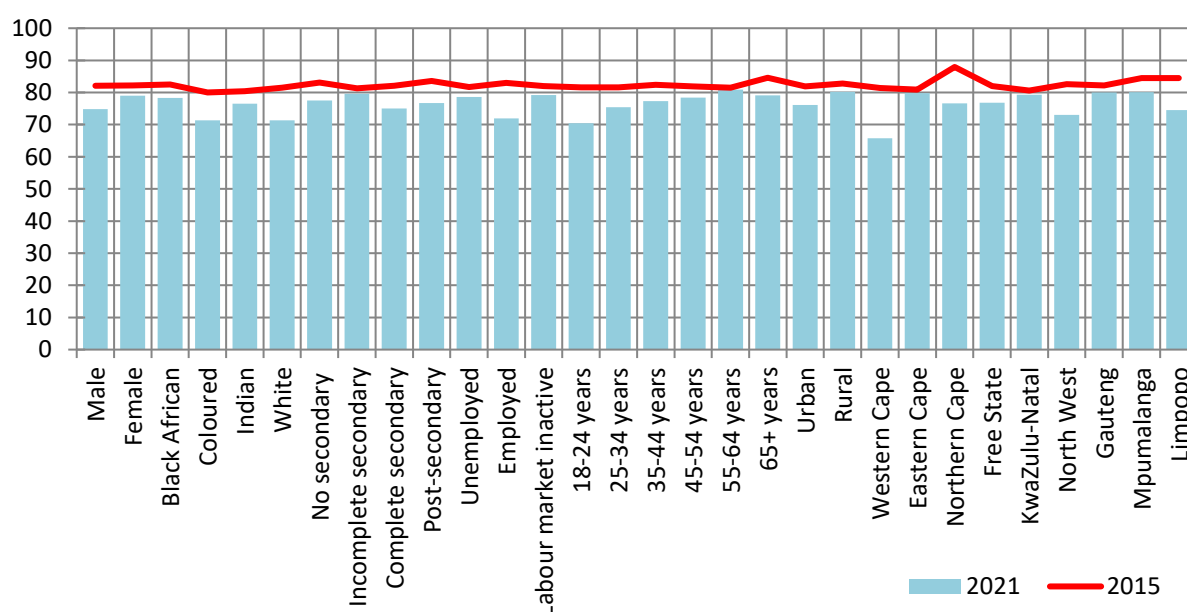
Figure 120: Mean Voting Station Satisfaction Index (VSS) Index (0-100) by voter regularity, 2005-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

The mean VSSI scores for different socio-demographic characteristics of voters are presented in **Figure 121**. It is apparent that most subgroups are generally satisfied with the voting stations, with the majority close to the national average. Average scores on the index, much like what we observed for other indexes in this section, skewed towards the positive. In other words, very few voters are dissatisfied with their voting stations and how the station functions. We detected a mild gender differential in VPS 2021 that favoured women. Mean male VSS Index scores had fell from 82 (SE=0.32) in 2015 to 75 (SE=0.47), a rate of decline twice as large as the one experienced by female voters. Significant index differences were also observed by race, these are similar to the racial differences recorded in prior subsections. It would seem that minority voters, especially those in the white and Coloured groups, are becoming more negative about the work of the Election Commission.

Figure 121: Mean Voting Station Satisfaction Index (VSS) Index (0-100) scores by socio-demographic characteristics, 2015 and 2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2015;2021

Amongst younger age groups there was a significant decrease in their mean VSS Index score between 2015 and 2011. Of the different cohorts, the 18-24 age cohort experienced the largest index score drop, an eleven point decline during the period under review. A comparable age gradient was discovered elsewhere in this section, this result implies that the youth have become more malcontent with how elections are conducted in South Africa. Voting stations satisfaction also looks as if it is shrinking during the six year period amongst employed voters, dropping from 83 (SE=0.53) to 72 (SE=0.80). A considerable amount of provincial variation can be detected in **Figure 121**. Given what was observed elsewhere in this section, it was not surprising to observe relatively low mean index scores for Western Cape voters in VPS 2021. This result, together with those in other subsections, demonstrates a serious problem of perceived electoral integrity in that province. While the rate of decline was not as substantial, index scores also decreased in the Western Cape, the North West, Limpopo and the Northern Cape.

14.5. Electoral freeness and fairness

The delivery of free and fair elections represents a central element of the Commission's constitutional mandate and is at the heart of the commission's vision and mission statement. A question was included in the VPS on whether voters thought that the election procedures were free and fair the last time they voted. In this subsection the research team will provide an assessment of how the electorate felt about this crucial issue. It will show that the vast majority of the voting population said that the procedures were free and fair. This outcome is consistent with prior survey work produced by the Commission and demonstrates the veracity of South African elections. This subsection will present a comprehensive assessment of how attitudes towards this issue changed between VPS 2015 and VPS 2021. It will highlight how some subgroups are losing faith in the freeness and fairness of government elections during this short period.

VPS Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed that the election procedures were free and fair the last time you voted. During the last VPS round the vast majority of the voter population were satisfied with the freeness and fairness of elections the last time they voted. The research team found that 26% of those voters who participated in the 2019 NGE strongly agreed and 49% of this group told fieldworkers that they just agreed with the statement. When compared with the 2015 VPS, we can discern a slight decrease in agreement on this subject. The share of the adult population who voted in the 2014 NGE strongly agree with the statement was 32% in that survey round and 55% stated that they agreed. This finding corresponds with what is evident in other parts of this section, demonstrating a rising level of voter cynicism about democracy in the country over time.

To better understand how voters rated the quality of South African elections, we need to consider how voter attitudes are influenced by experiences at the voting station. Studying the 2021 VPS data, it is apparent that regular voter participation was correlated with viewing election procedures as free and fair. The more frequently an individual participated, the greater their likelihood of agreeing with the statement. Those who told fieldworkers that they voted regularly had a higher chance of agreeing with the statement (79%) than those who voted irregularly (67%) in VPS 2021. There should be a correlation between voter evaluations of election procedures and how satisfied or dissatisfied citizens were with

different aspects of their personal voting experience. To test this thesis let us look at mean scores for the three voter satisfaction indexes outlined in this section by agreement with the statement for the period 2013-2021 in Table 42.

Table 42: Mean voter satisfaction index scores across voter agreement or disagreement with the statement: “the election procedures were free and fair the last time you voted?”, 2013-2021

Strongly Agreed			Agreed		Neutral		Disagreed		Strongly Disagreed	
Voting Station Satisfaction Index										
2013	87	(0.43)	81	(0.32)	79	(0.84)	80	(1.72)	64	(4.95)
2015	87	(0.39)	81	(0.32)	77	(0.70)	72	(1.59)	67	(5.28)
2018	92	(0.43)	77	(0.28)	68	(0.89)	60	(3.08)	66	(8.98)
2021	92	(0.50)	77	(0.34)	69	(0.81)	54	(1.82)	47	(3.88)
Electoral Official Satisfaction Index										
2013	88	(0.45)	80	(0.34)	77	(0.88)	77	(1.56)	61	(6.02)
2015	86	(0.40)	79	(0.31)	75	(0.80)	67	(2.14)	60	(6.37)
2018	87	(0.62)	75	(0.28)	65	(0.90)	61	(2.90)	51	(10.43)
2021	89	(0.54)	76	(0.33)	69	(0.77)	52	(1.75)	46	(3.24)
Voting Experience Satisfaction Index										
2013	84	(0.51)	76	(0.38)	75	(0.95)	79	(2.48)	73	(4.61)
2015	83	(0.50)	77	(0.38)	73	(0.91)	67	(2.17)	61	(6.21)
2018	87	(0.63)	75	(0.37)	66	(0.93)	60	(2.72)	62	(9.67)
2021	87	(0.62)	74	(0.39)	66	(0.74)	50	(1.85)	46	(3.33)

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013-2021

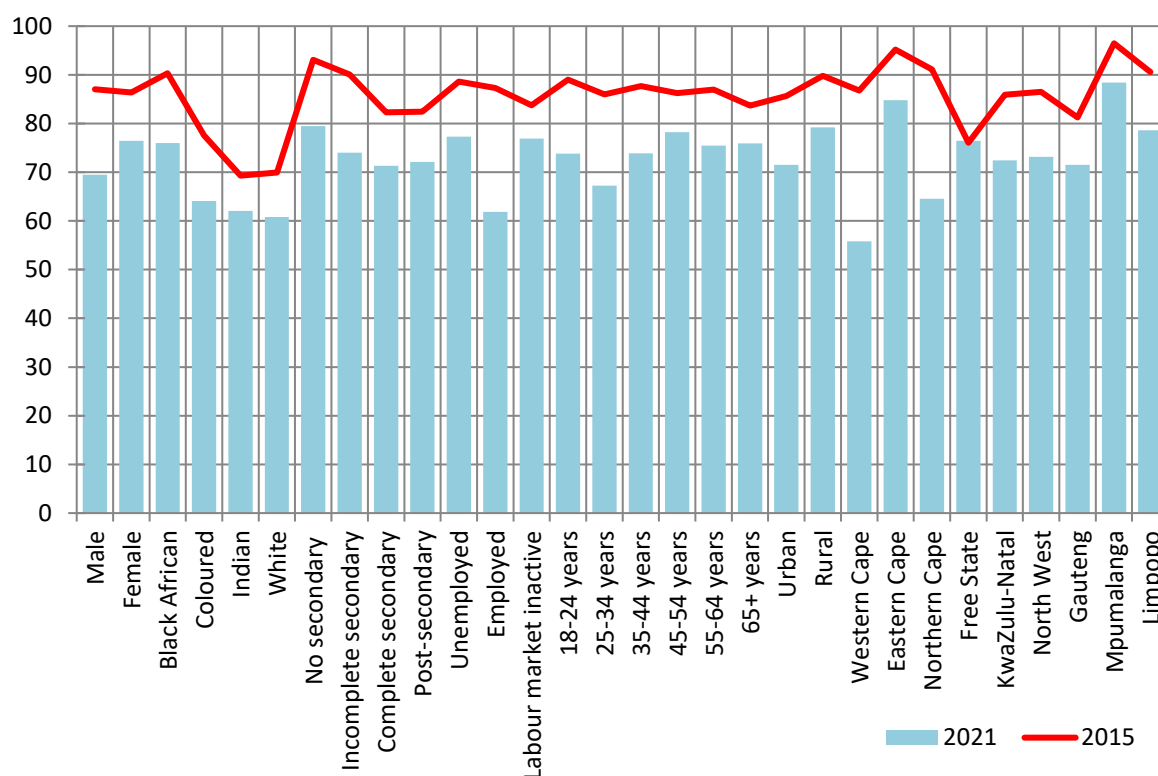
It was clear that the more satisfied a voter was with their experience during the last time they voted, the more likely they were to state that South African elections are free and fair. All the indexes tested in Table 42 had a positive correlation with whether an individual agreed that with the statement. Of the three indexes presented in the table, voter evaluations of the election procedures had the strongest relationship with the Electoral Official Satisfaction Index (outlined in Section 14.3)⁴⁴. Those who strongly agreed (M=89; SE=0.54) or agreed (M=76; SE=0.33) with the statement had a higher mean Index score than those who disagreed (M=52; SE=1.75) or very dissatisfied (M=46; SE=3.24) in 2021 VPS. The slight regression noted in perceived freeness and fairness is, therefore, comparable with the mild deteriorations in voter satisfaction noted in other subsections. However, further investigation showed that the correlation between personal experience at the polls and evaluations of the election

⁴⁴ Using multivariate logistic regression analysis, we confirmed that the different indexes explained 12% of variance in whether a voter agreed that South African elections are free and fair. Further investigation revealed that out of the three indexes, the one that deals with election officials (i.e., the EOS Index from subsection) have the most robust effect on this variable.

procedures was strongest in 2021 VPS. The strongest level of change was noted for the Voting Station Satisfaction Index (outlined in Section 14.1).

To improve our comprehension of the minor attitudinal change noted in the beginning of this subsection, let us investigate levels of agreement across a range of selected subgroups during the period under discussion. The percentage who agreed with the statement about the freeness and fairness of elections are presented for a selected set of subgroups in Figure 122. Data is provided for the 2021 VPS and the 2015 VPS, with the results showing only slight subgroup variation in both periods. Over the six year period we did notice some rather significant changes in agreement for particular groups. Male voters, for instance, became less likely to agree over time. The proportion of this group agreeing with the statement dropped by 18 percentage points over the period. In both periods racial minorities were less likely to agree with the statement, a result that is analogous with other findings presented in this section. Being employed was associated negatively with agreement in VPS 2021, not an unanticipated finding given what was recorded in the other subsections. Indeed, it demonstrates that labour market status is a consistent correlate of attitudes in this section.

Figure 122: Mean percentage who agreed that South African elections are free and fair by socio-demographic characteristics, 2015 and 2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2015;2021

There was a significant decline in voter agreement amongst the 25-34 age cohort. The level of agreement amongst this group fell from 89% in 2015 to 74% in 2021. This outcome is consistent with other findings in this section that show growing youth dissatisfaction with election procedures. Voters from the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga were more positive in their evaluation of election quality than their counterparts in other provinces. Between the 2015 VPS and the 2021 VPS, there was a decline in the share who believed that elections were

free and fair for most provincial subgroups. The only provincial subgroup that the research team did not discover an attitudinal decline for was Free State voters. The most noteworthy decline was amongst voters in the Western Cape. Provincial voters recorded a drop of 31 percentage points, twice the national rate of decline. Election assessments also seemed to have fallen significantly for Northern Cape voters, a decline of 27 percentage points.

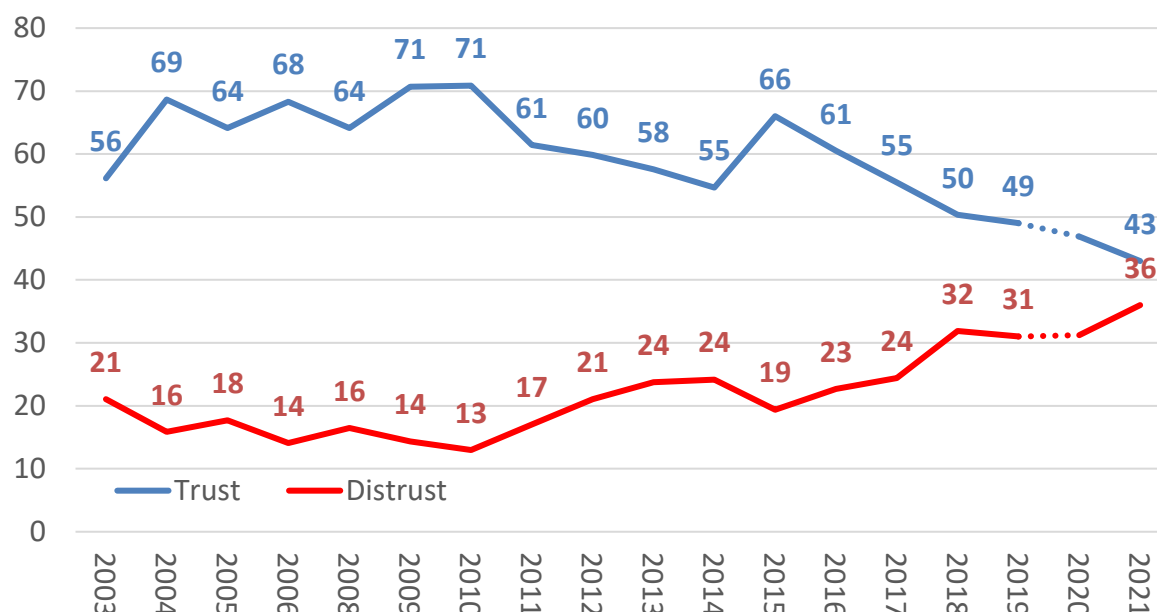
15. Election Commission Performance

Electoral management practices in Sub-Saharan African democracies are regularly disputed and election outcomes called into question. Political parties that lost elections frequently reject results and accuse election management bodies of fraud and mismanagement (Burchard, 2015). At times these accusations can lead to public violent as disgruntled take to the streets to protest election outcomes (also Norris, 2012). The recent history of Sub-Saharan African democracies showcases why a country's election commission needs to have a sterling reputation. Given how important reputation can be for election management body in the context of elections, it is crucial that public attitudes towards a nation's election commission are consistently monitored. This section will provide comprehensive data on public evaluations of the South African Election Commission. It will investigate public trust in the Election Commission as well as evaluation of how the Commission performs certain tasks. Special consideration will be given to the management of voting irregularities by the Commission.

15.1. Public Confidence in Election Commission

The Electoral Commission of South Africa is a non-profit institution which accounts to parliament but is independent of government. The legal framework of the Commission is determined by Section 181 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) which stipulates that it is one of the key institutions that strengthens constitutional democracy. In order for the Commission to function effectively it requires the general trust of the mass public, that the populace has confidence in the ability of this body to perform its work. This subsection will begin the section by investigating the degree to which the Commission is trusted by the adult citizen population. It will show that confidence in this important institution has deteriorated extensively since the mid-2010s. A key emphasis of this subsection will be how this regression in trust has been influenced by, and is influencing, attitudes towards other key aspects of the democratic process.

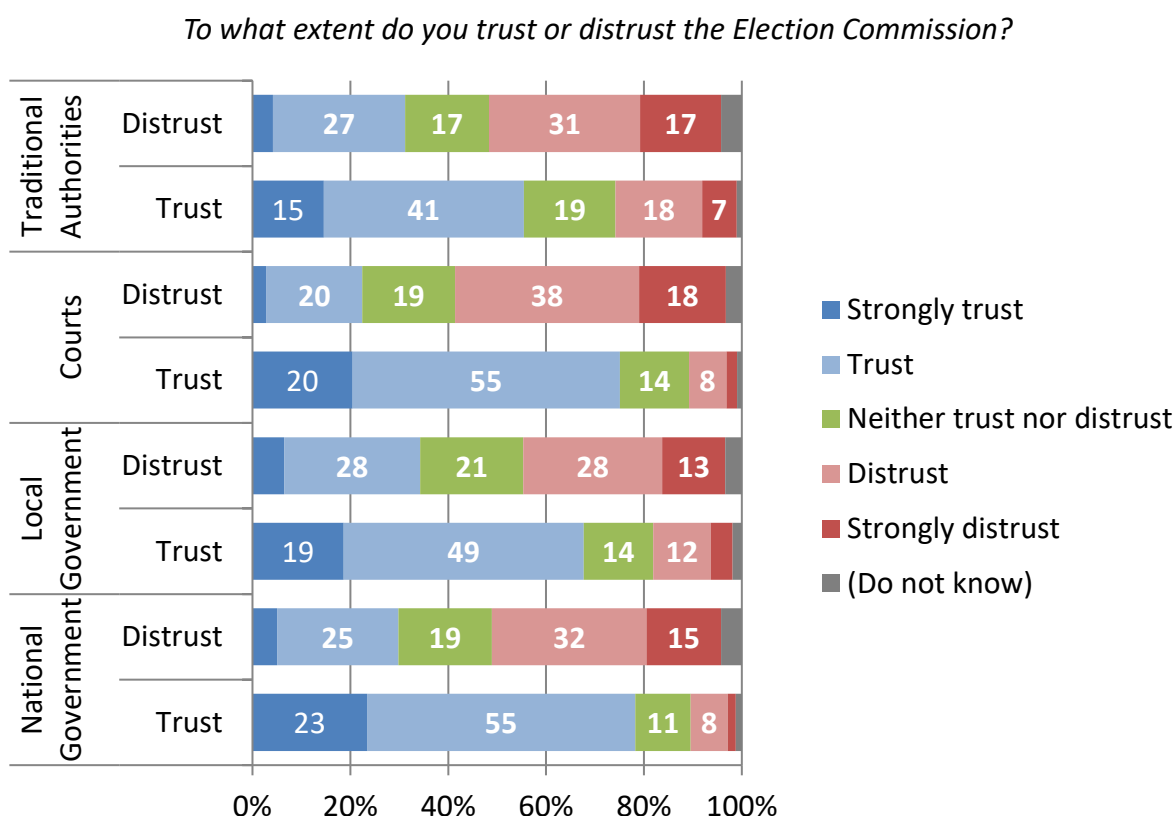
Figure 123: Proportion of the public who are trusted and distrusted the Election Commission, 2003-2021



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2003-2021

Levels of public trust and distrust in the Election Commission are depicted, using data from SASAS, in **Figure 123** for the period 2003-2021. As is apparent from the figure, nearly three-quarters (71%) of the mass public trusted the Electoral Commission in SASAS 2008. This represented an improvement over earlier survey rounds, in SASAS 2003 only 56% of the adult population stated that they trusted this institution. Public confidence in the Commission began to decline between SASAS 2010 and SASAS 2014. There was an upswing in confidence in SASAS 2015, however, when about two-thirds of the populace stated they trusted the Commission. During the last six years there has been substantial deterioration in institutional confidence, by the end of the period only 43% of the adult population told fieldworkers that they trusted the election management body. More than a third (36%) of all adult citizens in the last survey round said that they distrusted this institution.

Figure 124: Public trust and distrust in the Election Commission by whether a citizen trusted or distrusted selected legal and governmental institutions



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2021

The decline in public confidence in the Election Commission observed in **Figure 123** is part of a general trend of declining institutional trust observed in Section 4.3. Indeed, citizens who distrusted governmental institutions were found to be more distrustful of the election management body (**Figure 124**). Trust in the Commission had a particularly robust relationship with public confidence in the national government. Consider that more than three-quarters (78%) of those who trusted the national government also trusted the Commission. This can be unfavourably compared to those distrusted the national government, less than a third (30%) of this group trusted the Commission. General evaluations of the Election Commission also had a strong correlation with popular assessments of the courts. Public attitudes towards the country's traditional authorities, on the other hand, had a much weaker relationship with general evaluations of the Election Commission.

It is clear from the above that public confidence in the Electoral Commission is associated with a broader sense of disenchantment around democratic functioning, rather than exclusively performance by the election management body. Now let us investigate whether support for the Electoral Commission is affected by evaluations of democracy. Here we are specifically looking at public evaluations of democratic functioning discussed in Section 5.2. The rows of **Table 43** shows mean satisfaction scores with democratic functioning by public trust in the Electoral Commission. It is apparent that attitudes towards the election management body are shaped to some degree by attitudes towards these democratic

components. The results show a clear and linear relationship between approval of free and fair elections and confidence in the election management body. Citizens who trusted the Electoral Commission also tended to register high performance evaluations on the other components in the table. But, with the exception of freedom of expression, the size of the correlation on the others is much weaker than when compared to the first component.

Table 43: Mean performance evaluations (0-10) scores of the various components of a democracy by public trust and distrust in the Electoral Commission

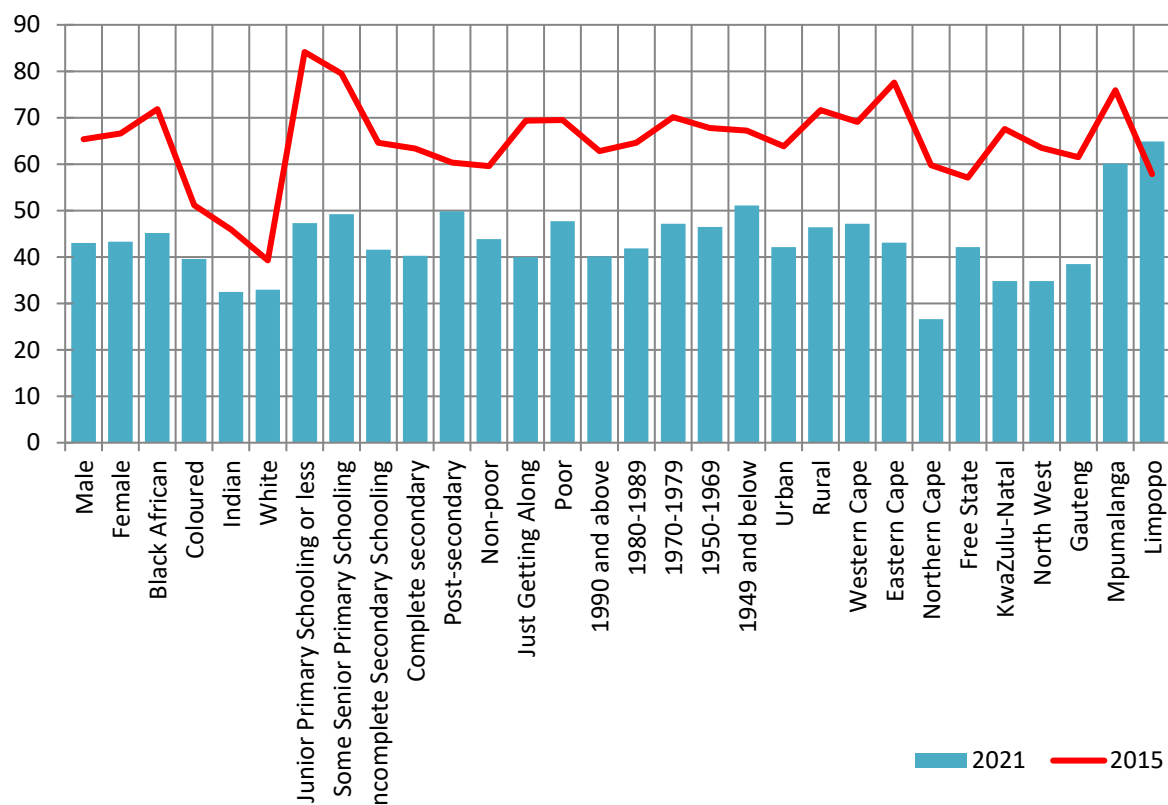
	Public Trust in the Electoral Commission			
	Trust		Distrust	
Elections are free and fair	7.0	(0.129)	4.5	(0.161)
Participatory decision-making	4.3	(0.152)	3.4	(0.176)
That ruling parties are punished in elections	4.3	(0.150)	3.7	(0.180)
Peaceful and legal protest action	6.5	(0.130)	5.0	(0.201)
Freedom of expression	6.5	(0.121)	4.9	(0.183)
Freedom of opposition parties	6.7	(0.140)	5.6	(0.186)

Note: 1. Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

To improve our understanding of observed changes in public confidence showcased **Figure 123**, data on levels of trust for a range of subgroups are displayed in **Figure 125** for SASAS 2015 and SASAS 2021. A birth cohort effect was observed in the figure, with the older birth cohorts more likely to trust the Electoral Commission than those born earlier. This generational disparity was not observed in SASAS 2015, suggesting that it has emerged in recent years. Relatively significant population group differences were noted with members of the white and Indian minorities demonstrating less trust than other race groups. Population group effects have become less pronounced between the start and the end of the period. This change was driven by a significant weakening in confidence observed amongst the Black African majority, a 27 percentage point decline between SASAS 2015 and SASAS 2021. In terms of social class, it is evident that the non-poor were less trusting of the Electoral Commission in SASAS 2015. But this class disparity became less pronounced over the six year period due to growing antipathy towards the Commission by the poor.

Figure 125: Percentage who either strongly trusted or trusted the Electoral Commission by selected socio-demographic subgroups, 2015 and 2021



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2015; 2021

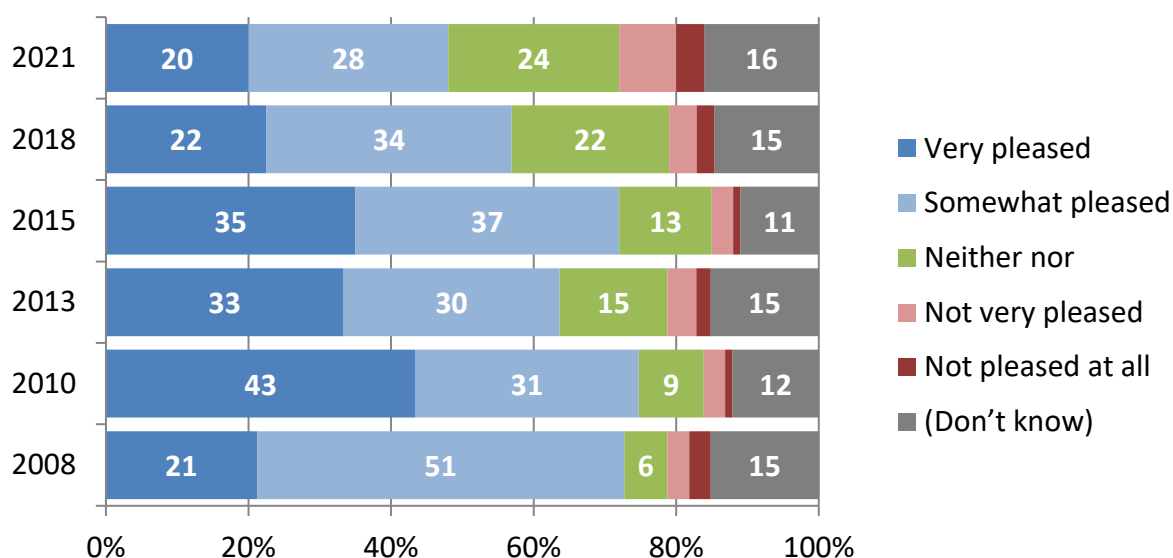
There was a negative relationship between educational attainment and confidence in the Election Commission. This relationship was more robust at the start of the period than at the end. The growing level of public dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy observed in Section 5 amongst the less educated over the last decade may partially explain this change. A noteworthy provincial differential was discerned in the figure with certain provinces exhibited very low levels of trust in the Commission in SASAS 2021. Northern Cape residents in that survey round exhibited the lowest level of trust, and this was followed by KwaZulu-Natal, North West and Gauteng. These provinces also suffered a sizeable degree of attitudinal shift over the six year period under review. But the province that experienced the largest attitudinal change was the Eastern Cape, trust amongst that provincial population fell from 78% in SASAS 2015 to 43% in SASAS 2021. The smallest degree of change was experienced by the Limpopo citizen population, the only provincial populace where confidence increased during the period under review.

15.2. Retrospective Performance Evaluations

The VPS 2021 included several different questions on the performance of the Election Commission in South Africa. One such question is a retrospective question asking respondents about their satisfaction levels with the Commission's performance during the last election. This question has also been asked in 2008, 2010, 2013, 2015 and 2018 voter participation surveys allowing us to compare 2021 results with those of previous years. In 2021, almost half (48%) of adult South Africans were found to be content with the performance of the Electoral Commission during previous elections in the country, with 20%

declaring they are very pleased and 28% somewhat pleased (Figure 126). By contrast, 24% are neutral, 12% express displeasure with regard to past performance, and 16% are unsure. Public attitudes towards the elections management body experienced a decline in confidence since 2015 when 35% of respondents recorded that they were ‘very pleased’ and 37% ‘somewhat pleased’. It is in actual fact alarming that confidence in the performance of the Election Commission is at its lowest level ever.

Figure 126: Satisfaction with Election Commission’s performance during previous elections (row percentages), 2008-2021



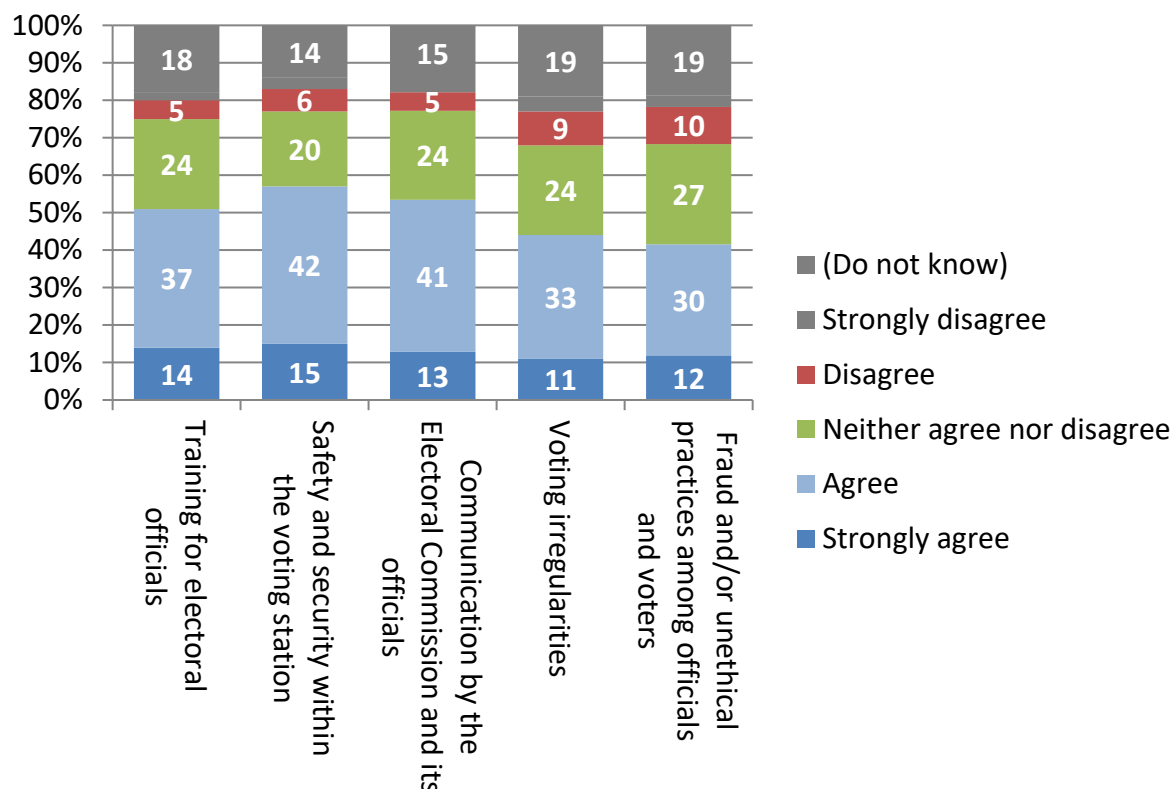
Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2008; 2010; 2013; 2015; 2018, 2021

In an effort to understand this downward trend and also to determine how the IEC can improve on its performance, a question was asked about how the Electoral Commission can improve its performance in the forthcoming elections. The majority of respondents were not necessarily unhappy with the performance of the IEC and could not offer suggestions on how to improve performance. However, some suggestions were forthcoming, some generic and other more specific. These suggestions included that more (young) people should be employed to ensure some form of job creation. Other suggested more voting stations should be erected to ensure shorter queues. Suggestions also included more and better security at voting stations and also better security to ensure that ballot boxes are safe, and that no fraud or corruption takes place. Some people also mentioned they would like more communication and information from the Electoral Commission ahead of the elections and more voter education. A large share of respondents commented on the electoral mood in the country and that promises are not kept-rather referring to the ruling party.

In an effort to further expand the understanding of the general evaluations, the 2021 VPS respondents were asked if they agreed or disagree that the Electoral Commission deals with the following issues adequately: (i) Training for electoral officials; (ii) Safety and security within the voting station; (iii) Communication by the Electoral Commission and its officials; (iv) Voting irregularities; and (v) Fraud and/or unethical practices among officials and voters. Levels of agreement were highest for safety and security, and this was followed communication by irregularities. The issue that received the lowest evaluation from the

general public concerned the ability of the Commission to deal with fraud and malpractice. These results are perhaps not surprising given what we observed in Section 13 which showed growing concern about electoral fraud and malpractice in the country.

Figure 127: Adequacy of IEC dealing with key issues (column percentages)



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

In all cases evaluations of how the Commission performs certain functions have deteriorated over the period 2013-2021 (**Table 44**). In 2015 VPS 72% (SE=0.86) of the mass public felt that the Electoral Commission deals adequately with the training of electoral officials. This percentage had dropped to 64% (SE=1.49) in 2018 VPS before reaching a low of 51% (SE=1.57) in 2021 VPS. A similar decline was observed for those that stated the Electoral Commission dealt with safety and security adequately during this period. A lower, but still substantial, drop was experienced in relation to communication by the Election Commission. Particularly worrying are questions relating to voting irregularities and fraud and/or unethical practices among officials and voters. Prior to 2021 positive evaluations exceeded the 50% threshold but in 2021 the percentage that felt the IEC adequately deals with voting irregularities had dropped to 43% (SE=1.53). Similarly, the percentage feeling that the IEC adequately addresses fraud and unethical practices among officials and voters had dropped to 42% (SE=1.51).

Table 44: Percentage of agreement with different Election Commission performance targets, 2008-2021

	Training for electoral officials	Safety and security within the voting station	Communication by the Electoral Commission and its officials	Voting irregularities	Fraud and/or unethical practices among officials and voters
2008	72 (0.92)	77 (0.86)	73 (0.91)	59 (1.00)	53 (1.02)
2010	78 (1.02)	83 (0.93)	77 (1.08)	60 (1.26)	57 (1.26)
2013	73 (1.29)	80 (1.17)	74 (1.28)	59 (1.41)	54 (1.43)
2015	78 (1.12)	82 (1.06)	77 (1.15)	64 (1.32)	61 (1.32)
2018	64 (1.49)	67 (1.48)	65 (1.50)	52 (1.54)	51 (1.53)
2021	51 (1.57)	57 (1.58)	53 (1.57)	43 (1.53)	42 (1.51)

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis

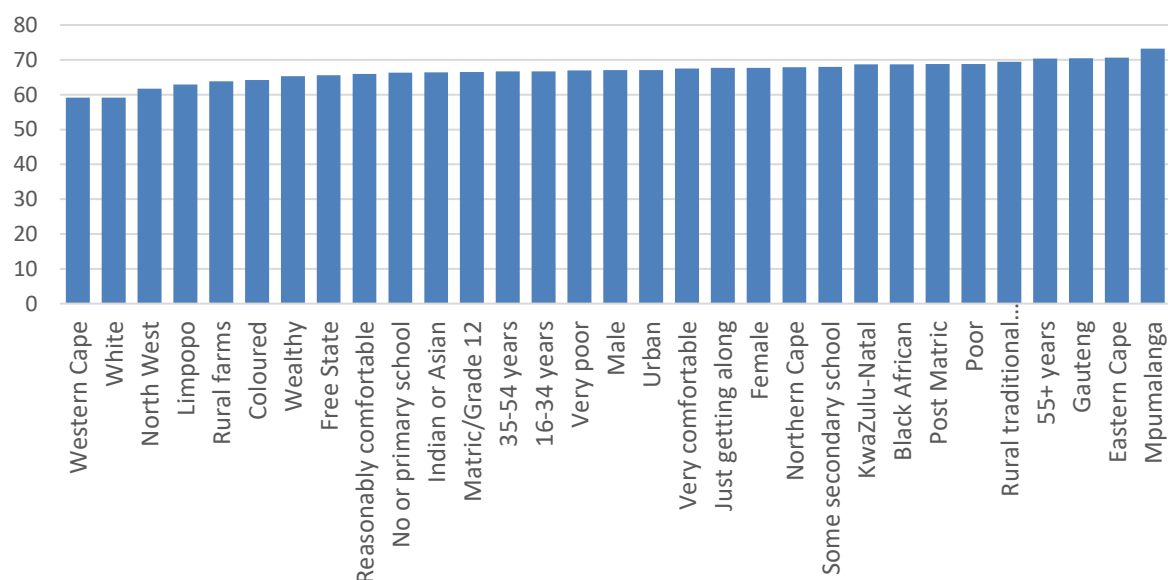
Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2008-2021

The trends observed in **Table 44** are concerning and difficult to ascribe to any particular incident or event. However, it must be stated that the IEC received fairly negative publicity in the past four years which might have impacted on the credibility of the IEC. Another explanation might also be that the general negative sentiment around government departments (and the Electoral Commission might be perceived as one of these) has influenced the overall perceived effectiveness of the Electoral Commission and its ability to deal with these issues adequately. An Election Commission Index was created based on items included in Figure 127 measuring whether they believed the Election Commission performed adequately on certain key function. The responses to the questions on the items in the figure were converted into a 0-100 scale with “0” signifying complete disagreement with the items in Figure 127 and “100” representing complete agreement. Mean scores on this scale are presented in Figure 128 by selected subgroups.

Most subgroups demonstrated mean scores situated within a relatively narrow range between 59 and 73 with the average score being 67. This suggests that most groups described the Election Commission’s performance of its key tasks as mostly adequate. Some variations were evident on the basis of gender, population group, age, socio-economic status, geotype and province. White South Africans were generally least satisfied that these services were provided adequately, followed by coloured, and Indian /Asian adults. Black African South Africans were most satisfied with the performance of the Electoral Commission in these key performance areas. Resident of rural farms tended to be less satisfied with these services whilst people residing in rural traditional areas being most satisfied. Those aged between 16

and 54 were less positive in their assessment of the Election Commission than those 55 years and older. Comparing the Election Commission Index mean scores per province in Figure 128, people living in Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape and Gauteng gave the most positive evaluation of the Election's performance⁴⁵. Wealthy South African were more negative than poor South Africans about the performance of the IEC in these key areas.

Figure 128: Performance of the Election Commission Index (0-100) mean scores by selected subgroups



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

In 2021 survey respondents were asked whether electoral officials had in any way ever influenced their voting decision or interfered with the *secrecy of their vote*. The vast majority (76%) of adult South Africans reported that they had never been influenced by officials nor had the secrecy of their vote been compromised by officials. Interestingly 14% said that it had previously happened to them, whilst another 10% was unsure about whether this had ever happened to them. These results are almost similar to the results of the 2018 VPS where 74% reported that they had never been influenced by officials nor had the secrecy of their vote been compromised by officials and 15% saying it had previously happened to them. A tenth 11% was unsure. Although these people form a minority, it is alarming that such a proportion of South Africans state that they had experienced something to this effect.

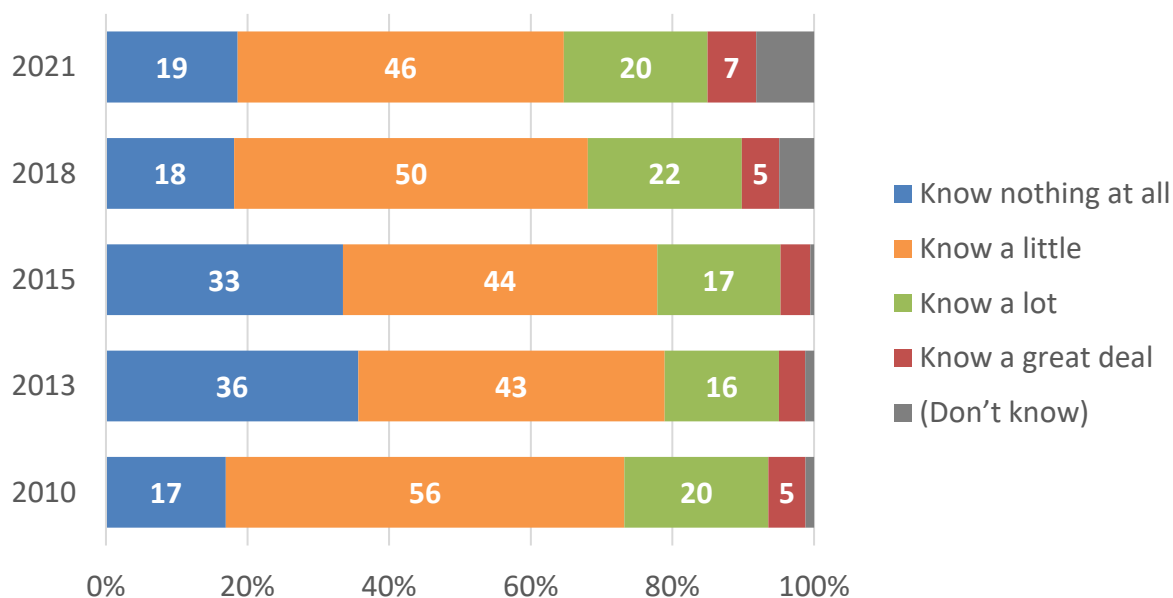
15.3. Overall awareness of the Electoral Commission

The previous subsections highlighted how public evaluations of the performance of the Election Commission have become more negative between 2015 and 2021. The observed rise in negative appraisals may be linked to how much people know about the institution, it is well-known that knowledge of an object influences attitudes towards it. This subsection will look at mass awareness of the Election Commission and how this awareness is linked to perceived performance. It will show that there is a positive correlation between favourable performance assessments and self-reported knowledge. However, the strength and direction

⁴⁵ Contrary, residents in the Western, North West, Limpopo and Free State were found to be most displeased with the performance of the Election Commission on key functions.

of this relationship has changed significantly between 2015 and 2021. In order to understand how to improve public awareness of the institution, this section also will scrutinise where people get their information about the Commission.

Figure 129: Public responses to the question: ‘[h]ow much would you say you know about the Electoral Commission?’, 2010-2013



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2010-2021

VPS respondents were asked to state how much they felt they knew about the Electoral Commission. The 2021 results show that a quarter (27%) of South Africans admitted to knowing a lot or a great deal about the election management body, while half (46%) stated that they knew a lot, and 7 per cent a little (**Figure 129**). Conversely, a fifth (19%) admitted that they knew nothing about the Election Commission and are unfamiliar with this Chapter 9 institution and its functions and operations. If public responses to this question are considered over time, it is evident that the share of South Africans who know nothing about the Election Commission has declined substantively from 36% in 2013 VPS to 19% in 2021 VPS. This increased awareness might be a result of press coverage (some negative) since 2013 or might be a results of awareness campaigns coming to fruition.

There should be a positive association between evaluations of the Election Commission and knowledge of this Chapter 9 institution. To test this thesis, let us examine the extent to which different knowledge groups agreed that the Electoral Commission deals with the following issues adequately: (i) Training for electoral officials; (ii) Safety and security within the voting station; (iii) Communication by the Electoral Commission and its officials; (iv) Voting irregularities; and (v) Fraud and/or unethical practices among officials and voters. Mean agreement levels are provided for both 2015 VPS and 2021 VPS in **Table 45**. The results show that there is a clear linear (and positive) correlation between knowledge of the institution and performance evaluations in 2013 VPS. However, this correlation is u-curved in 2021 VPS, both the low and high knowledge groups are more negative in their appraisal than the middle knowledge groups. The u-curve is most robust for the third indicator, those who knew nothing (41%; SE=3.19) and those who knew a great deal (53%; SE=5.52) had much lower

levels of agreement on this measure than those who knew a little (63%; SE=2.12) or a lot (60%; SE=3.60).

Table 45: Percentage of agreement with different Election Commission performance targets by self-reported knowledge level, 2015 and 2021

		Training for electoral officials	Safety and security within the voting station	Communication by the Electoral Commission and its officials	Voting irregularities	Fraud and/or unethical practices among officials and
Know nothing at all	2015	65 (2.16)	70 (2.08)	64 (2.18)	55 (2.26)	52 (2.25)
	2021	36 (3.06)	46 (3.21)	41 (3.19)	35 (3.06)	35 (2.96)
Know a little	2015	82 (1.68)	86 (1.56)	80 (1.73)	68 (2.00)	63 (2.02)
	2021	60 (2.15)	66 (2.13)	63 (2.12)	49 (2.20)	47 (2.18)
Know a lot	2015	93 (1.52)	92 (1.81)	90 (1.86)	72 (3.03)	72 (2.84)
	2021	60 (3.62)	65 (3.46)	60 (3.60)	49 (3.68)	48 (3.67)
Know a great deal	2013	89 (4.01)	90 (4.05)	89 (4.31)	64 (6.52)	65 (6.50)
	2021	50 (5.50)	53 (5.52)	53 (5.52)	52 (5.44)	40 (5.20)

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2015;2021

The survey contained several items on the sources from which the adult citizen population obtains information concerning the Electoral Commission. Those who indicated that they did not know anything about the Election Commission were coded as ‘not applicable’. Evaluating the data, it is apparent that the traditional broadcast and print media remain popular sources of information. This outcome is consistent with what was observed in Section 11, suggesting the continuing importance of the conventional media to the information ecosystem for the South African public. Among those who had knowledge of the Commission in late 2021, more than three-fifths (61%; SE=1.48) said they access information on the institution through a television channel (**Table 46**). This represents a significant increase from what was observed in 2013 VPS when only 51% (SE=1.42) of the adult populace selected this option. Radio was also popular but seem to decline in popularity between 2018 VPS and 2021 VPS, falling by 13 percentage points in three years. Newspapers also declined during this period, suggesting that the general public is relying less on the conventional mass media to learn about the Election Commission.

Table 46: Sources of information about the Electoral Commission for the period 2013-2021 (multiple response table, cell percentages)

	2013		2015		2018		2021	
A television channel	51	(1.42)	56	(1.32)	59	(1.50)	61	(1.48)
Newspapers	31	(1.26)	38	(1.33)	35	(1.46)	23	(1.24)
Radio stations	38	(1.34)	44	(1.34)	46	(1.52)	33	(1.41)
Friends and family	20	(1.07)	27	(1.23)	18	(1.16)	13	(1.00)
Posters	31	(1.28)	35	(1.31)	25	(1.32)	16	(1.07)
Rallies	7	(0.62)	12	(0.94)	9	(0.87)	5	(0.63)
South African Constitution	1	(0.24)	4	(0.47)	3	(0.56)	2	(0.32)
Electoral Commission	7	(0.65)	6	(0.68)	6	(0.69)	3	(0.43)
Chapter 9 Institutions	1	(0.16)	1	(0.29)	2	(0.33)	1	(0.32)
Community based organisation	2	(0.38)	3	(0.52)	3	(0.46)	2	(0.47)
Civil Society organisation	1	(0.15)	2	(0.38)	1	(0.26)	1	(0.32)
School	4	(0.64)	4	(0.55)	3	(0.55)	2	(0.30)
Workplace	1	(0.25)	2	(0.38)	3	(0.43)	2	(0.34)
Faith Based Organization	0	(0.11)	1	(0.33)	0	(0.12)	1	(0.22)
Social media	2	(0.30)	7	(0.70)	5	(0.64)	8	(0.83)
Internet websites	1	(0.16)	5	(0.59)	2	(0.45)	7	(0.84)
Other	1	(0.51)	0	(0.12)	3	(0.39)	0	(0.00)
Not Applicable	35	(1.37)	33	(1.24)	18	(1.26)	19	(1.12)
(Don't know)	0	(0.00)	1	(0.29)	0	(0.15)	0	(0.05)

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

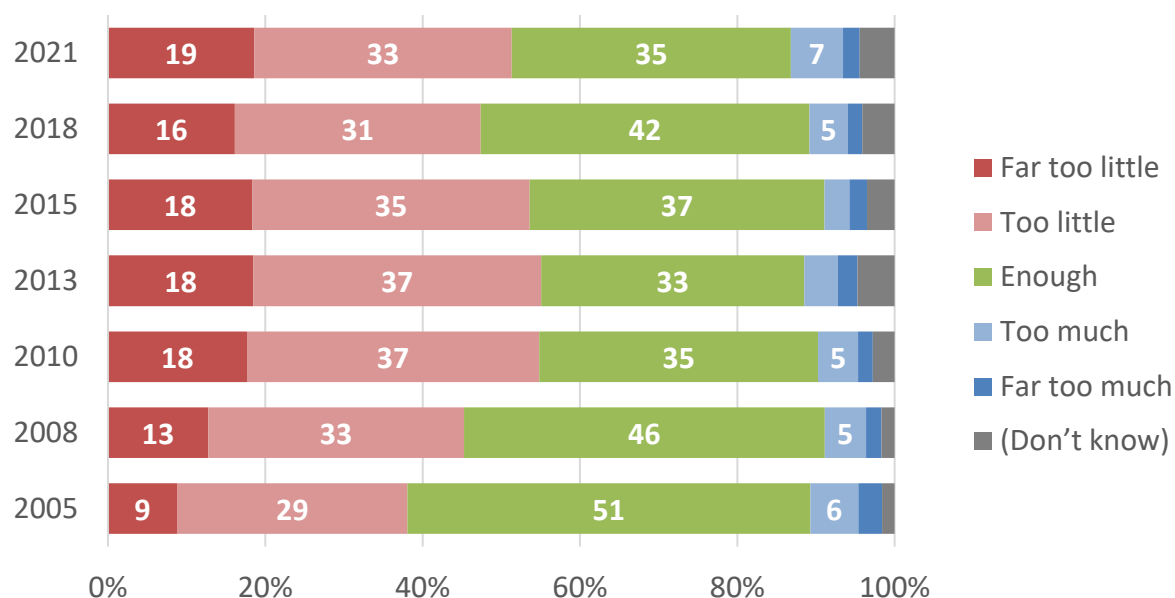
Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013-2021

Almost a fifth (16%; SE=1.07) of the citizen population usually got their information about the Election Commission from posters. This represents a decline in the popularity of this source when to 2013 VPS when 35% (SE=1.31) sourced information on the Commission from this source. About a twelfth (13%; SE=1.00) reported obtaining information via contacts (friends and relatives), lower than what was observed in previous VPS rounds. Approximately a tenth stated that they got information on social media with another 8% stating they obtained information on internet websites (such as Google and News 24). This an improvement from what was observed in 2013 VPS, and this suggests that new media is slowly becoming a more important part of the election information ecosystem. Other sources of information regarding the Election Commission are supported by relatively small shares of adult citizens. Rallies are listed as information sources in 5% of all cases, with places of employment, schools, civil society and faith-based organisations, Chapter 9 institutions as well as Electoral Commission voter education officials hardly featuring.

In order to assess the demand for information relating to the Electoral Commission, survey participants were asked: “Do you think you have too little or too much information about the services provided by the Election Commission?” Results are displayed in **Figure 130** for the period 2005-2021, showing increasing levels of ignorance about the Commission over time. In late 2021, a fifth indicated that they felt they had ‘far too little information’, with 31% stating that they had ‘too little information’. Over a third (37%) admitted having enough information. A minority (9%) confessed to fieldworkers that they had too much or far too much information. Taken together, more than half (54%) felt they knew too little about the

Election Commission and were, therefore, unfamiliar with this Chapter 9 institution and its functions and operations. This outcome can be compared unfavourably to 2005 VPS when only 38% of the adult populace said that they know too little or far too little about this Chapter 9 institution.

Figure 130: Public responses to the question: ‘[d]o you think you have too little or too much information about the services provided by the Electoral Commission?’, 2005-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2005-2021

When disaggregated by age it was found that greater proportions of young people (i.e., the 16–24 cohort) felt they had too little or far too little information about the Commission. This young cohort should rightly be targeted by information campaigns about the IEC. With regard to the patterning of knowledge of the Electoral Commission among other groups of South African adults, lower than average knowledge levels were reported for females than for males, implying that female South Africans profess to know less about the Electoral Commission than males. The poor, the unemployed and the less educated rated themselves less knowledgeable about the IEC than the non-poor, employed and educated. On average, people residing in rural farms rated themselves much less knowledgeable of the Electoral commission than residents in other geographic areas. In terms of province, average knowledge scores were much lower in Limpopo and the Eastern Cape. When comparing the level of information about the Commission since 2010 it is evident that the perceptions about information has remained stable.

There was a widespread recognition of the need for more information among those adults reporting that they possessed limited or no knowledge of the Electoral Commission. Among those stipulating that they had no knowledge of the Electoral Commission, 89% admitted that they received far too little or too little information about the electoral management body⁴⁶. By contrast, those suggesting that they know a lot about the Election Commission

⁴⁶ Half of those that “know a little about the Electoral Commission” also responded that they have insufficient information about the institution.

predominantly report (65%) that they have enough information, with a fifth expressing a desire for greater levels of knowledge. For those stating that they have “a great deal” of knowledge of the Electoral Commission, a quarter (26%) say that they have too much information⁴⁷. The sizeable proportion of this group saying they have too much information may suggest a degree of oversaturation. Irrespective of this, the overall message is a positive one, namely that that most lacking knowledge of the election management body express a resolute demand for information. This appetite for knowledge is something that the Electoral Commission should take cognisance of in future voter education campaigns.

Table 47: Usual source of information on the Election Commission by self-reported level of knowledge of the Commission (cell percentages)

	Far too little		Too little		Enough		Too much	
A television channel	26	(2.87)	64	(2.61)	79	(2.01)	69	(4.47)
Newspapers	8	(2.07)	20	(1.91)	31	(2.38)	32	(5.22)
Radio stations	13	(2.37)	38	(2.63)	43	(2.54)	29	(4.50)
Friends and family	7	(1.43)	13	(1.81)	18	(1.99)	13	(2.81)
Posters	12	(2.29)	16	(1.86)	19	(1.98)	21	(3.78)
Rallies	3	(0.92)	5	(1.17)	4	(1.04)	10	(3.34)
South African Constitution	0	(0.25)	2	(0.54)	3	(0.71)	2	(0.95)
Electoral Commission	2	(1.19)	2	(0.56)	3	(0.78)	6	(1.80)
Chapter 9 Institutions	1	(0.71)	1	(0.45)	2	(0.69)	1	(0.52)
Community based organisation	0	(0.23)	2	(0.53)	5	(1.20)	1	(0.64)
Civil Society organisation	0	(0.14)	0	(0.09)	1	(0.69)	3	(2.23)
School	3	(0.92)	1	(0.46)	1	(0.43)	3	(1.37)
Workplace	1	(0.50)	1	(0.48)	3	(0.76)	3	(1.18)
Faith Based Organization	1	(0.36)	1	(0.32)	1	(0.51)	1	(0.46)
Social media	4	(1.61)	7	(1.57)	10	(1.40)	10	(2.68)
Internet websites	2	(0.57)	6	(1.55)	10	(1.66)	10	(3.18)
Other	0	(0.00)	0	(0.00)	0	(0.00)	0	(0.00)
Not Applicable	59	(3.32)	13	(1.61)	3	(0.66)	7	(2.04)
(Don't know)	0	(0.15)	0	(0.11)	0	(0.00)	0	(0.17)

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis.

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

It would be informative to evaluate the typical source of Election Commission information by public awareness of the institution (**Table 47**). Nearly three-fifths (59%; SE=3.32) of those with far too little knowledge of the Commission said that they did not acquire information from any source. From the data provided, it is clear that adults who reported high knowledge were more prone to select multiple sources than those with less knowledge. Those with enough knowledge were also more apt to cite the traditional mass media (especially television) as a source than other knowledge groups. Although the level of difference is smaller, those with enough knowledge were also more likely to select new media than persons with low knowledge. Of the four groups, those who said that they had too much information about voting procedures were by far the most liable to select rallies as a typical source.

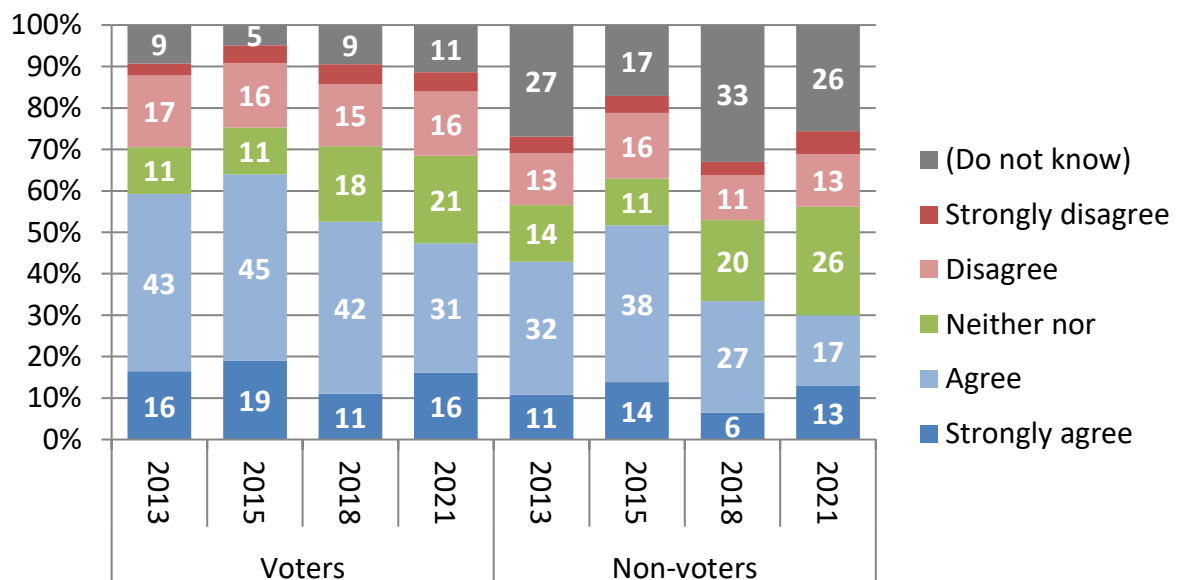
⁴⁷ Two fifths (41%) of this group said that they have sufficient information and the remaining adults (33%) indicating that they would like to further enhance their knowledge.

15.4. Perceived ability of the Electoral Commission to address irregularities adequately

Section 13 demonstrated that a significant proportion of the adult populace was concerned that voting irregularities had negatively impacted the integrity of South African elections and, more generally, democracy in the country. Section 15.2 showed that only 45% of adult citizens thought the Commission dealt adequately with this problem. The Electoral Commission has a series of protocols specially designed to deal with voting irregularities. How the Commission handles this issue speaks to the competency of the Electoral Commission as an institution. The general citizenry may feel more secure about any violations of voting protocols that do arise if they have faith in the ability of the Commission to manage this problem. This subsection will assess whether citizens feel that the Commission can satisfactorily address voting irregularities during elections.

In order to gauge the level of public confidence in the ability of the Electoral Commission to handle violations to voting procedures, respondents were asked if they agreed that the Commission alone cannot adequately address electoral irregularities. Less than half (42%) of the adult public agreed that the Electoral Commission cannot solely address this problem in VPS 2021. This represents a significant change in sentiment from what was seen in VPS 2015—approximately three-fifths (61%) of the public were found to agree with the statement in that survey round. Voting was a key correlate of attitudes here (Figure 131). If a citizen was a voter, they were much more likely to agree with the statement than non-voters. However, we saw a marked decline in the proportion of voters who agreed with the statement between 2015 and 2021. One of the reasons for this is that non-voters are more apt to tell fieldworkers that they ‘don’t know’ when asked about this issue.

Figure 131: Public agreement and disagreement with the statement: “[t]he Electoral Commission alone cannot address irregularities adequately” by voter status, 2013-2021

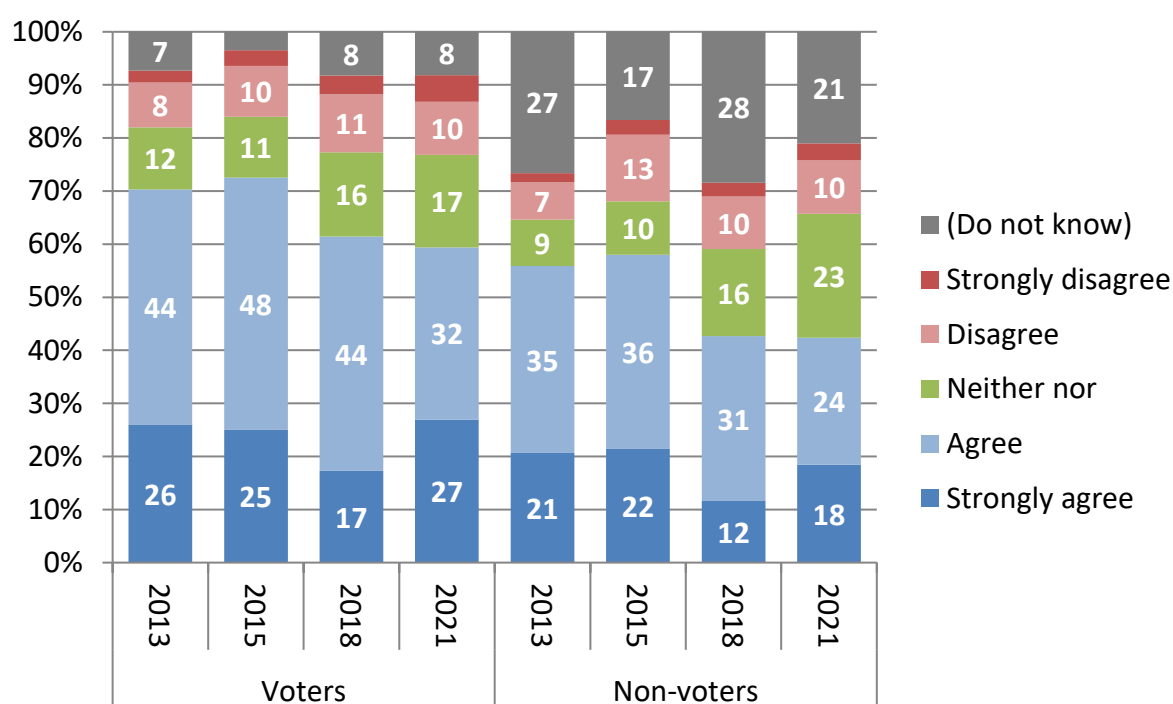


Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013-2021

VPS respondents were asked if parliament or another body must intervene whenever voting irregularities occurs. Just over half (54%) of the South African people felt that parliament or

another body should intervene in VPS 2021. This was an improvement on what was observed in 2015 when 66% of the adult population agreed with this statement. Whether a citizen had voted before influenced how they answered this question (Figure 132). About three-fifths (59%) of voters agreed with the statement in VPS 2021 and this can be compared to 42% of non-voters. The correlation between voting and attitudes towards parliamentary oversight appear to strengthen over time. This was the results of a marked decline in the proportion of non-voters who agreed with the statement between 2015 and 2021.

Figure 132: Public agreement and disagreement with the statement: “[p]arliament or another body must intervene whenever voting irregularities occur” by voter status, 2013-2021

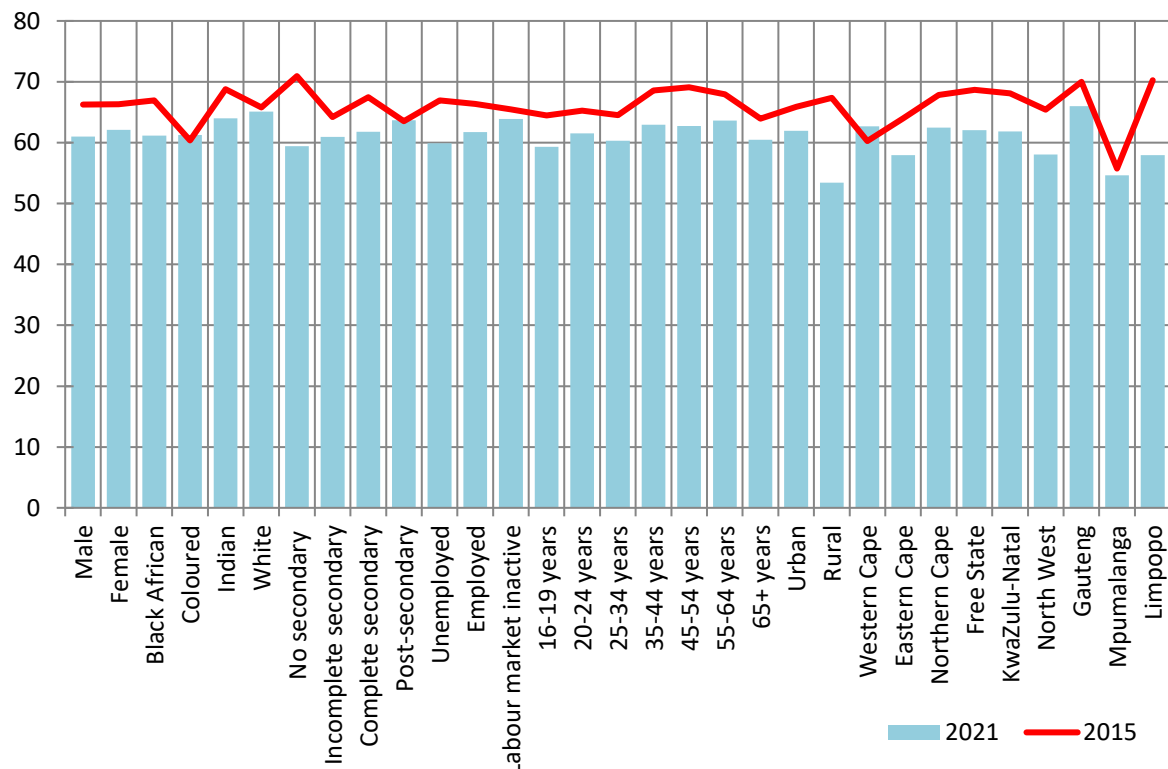


Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2013-2021

How do public evaluations of the capacity of the Electoral Commission to address violations to voting protocols differ across various socio-demographic groups? With the aim of answering this question, the research team conducted a subgroup analysis. We combined the two items discussed above into a new composite index that we labelled the Perceived Inability of the Electoral Commission to Address Voting Irregularities (PIECAVI) Index⁴⁸. The measure was placed on a 0-100 range with the higher value representing a belief that the Commission could not handle voter irregularities. The mean PIECAVI Index score for 2021 was 62 (SE=0.40) which was lower than what was observed in 2015 (M=66; SE=0.40). This shows that confidence in the Commission on this issue has improved somewhat over the period. But for which groups did this decline occur? Mean index scores are presented across different socio-demographic subgroups in Figure 133 for VPS 2015 and VPS 2021. The perception that the Commission could not effectively handle this issue fell for most groups during the six year period.

⁴⁸ A Cronbach alpha test ($\alpha=0.60$) was conducted to examine the validity and reliability of the measure. The outcome was worse with prior expectations.

Figure 133: Perceived Ability of the Electoral Commission to Address Voting Irregularities Index (0-100) by selected socio-demographic subgroups, 2015 and 2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2015; 2021

Reviewing how mean index scores varied between different groups (Figure 133), it is apparent that subgroup variation was lower than we may have imagined. Nevertheless, there were some interesting differences between groups that could be discerned. A moderate population group difference was noted with racial minorities, especially white citizens, less likely to believe that the Commission could handle voter irregularities. Urban citizens in VPS 2021 also tended to have relatively higher index scores. An analogous dissimilarity was not evident in VPS 2015, PIECAVI Index scores appear to have declined for rural residents over time. This geotype differential may explain why index scores were so low in Limpopo and Mpumalanga in VPS 2021. Adult North West citizens also exhibited low index scores in that round. In the last survey round PAECAVI Index scores were highest in Gauteng and the Western Cape. However, the level of provincial variation in the figure was quite muted in comparison to what was observed in previous subsections.

Table 48: Mean Perceived Inability of the Electoral Commission to Address Voting Irregularities (PIECAVI) Index (0-100) scores across Perceived Impact of Effect of Voting Irregularities (PIVI) Index cohorts, 2015-2021

	2015				2018				2021			
	M	95% CI			M	95% CI			M	95% CI		
Low (0-25)	66	(0.66)	65	67	58	(0.75)	56	59	53	(0.69)	51	54
Lower Middle (25-50)	62	(0.73)	60	63	58	(0.57)	56	59	58	(0.58)	56	59
Upper Middle (50-75)	69	(0.87)	67	71	65	(0.77)	63	66	64	(0.79)	63	66
High (75-100)	72	(0.90)	70	73	72	(1.32)	69	75	79	(0.93)	77	81
Total	66	(0.40)	65	67	61	(0.40)	60	62	62	(0.40)	61	62

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis

Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2015-2021

If an individual is confident in the ability of the Election Commission to manage voting irregularities, this confidence should reduce their concern that such irregularities were eroding South African democracy. Consequently, we would expect a robust association between the Perceived Impact of Voting Irregularities (PIVI) Index⁴⁹ and the PIECAVI Index. To test for this association, we displayed mean PIECAVI Index scores across different PIVI Index cohorts in Table. PIECAVI Index scores were found to be higher, on average, amongst the upper PIVI Index cohorts than the lower. As can be observed from Table 48, the relationship between these two variables became much stronger between 2015 and 2021. This validates our thesis that the perceived ability of the Commission to handle electoral violations reduces public concerns about the effect of those irregularities on South African democracy.

15.5. Due Consideration to Special Groups during Elections

In line with its constitutional mandate to manage elections in the country and ensure that they are free and fair, the Election Commission places a strong emphasis on the participation of vulnerable groups. These groups include the youth, women, the elderly and persons with disabilities. In particular, the Commission has focused on the blind and the partially sighted. But what do ordinary South Africans think about the performance of the Election Commission on this issue? Do citizens believe that the Commission has performed adequately here, and have their assessments changed over time? The survey contained a range of questions that aims to provide some insight into these questions. This section will examine citizen attitudes to the special consideration given to different groups by the Commission for the period 2008-2021. It will show that the average citizen, especially non-voters, has become increasingly negative on this issue in the last few years. This change was found to be particularly apparent amongst disabled citizens and a special focus on disability will be included here.

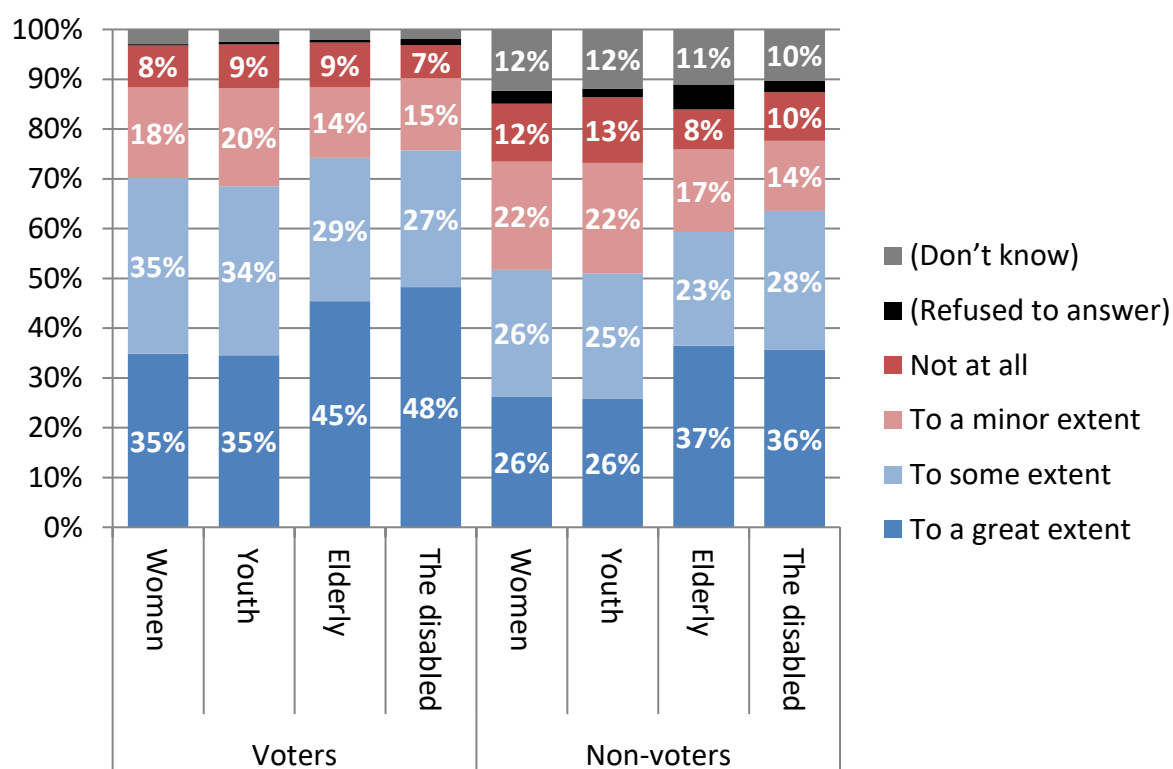
A set of questions on the special electoral needs of certain vulnerable groups was designed for the VPS questionnaire. These were introduced in VPS 2008 to allow researchers to better comprehend whether citizens think that voting procedures provided by the Commission to vulnerable groups were adequate. Respondents were queried on what they thought of accommodations made to a number of special needs groups of voters. Survey participants were asked to rate how well the procedures inside voting stations accommodated the

⁴⁹ Details on the construction of the Perceived Impact of Voting Irregularities Index are provided in subsection 13.4.

following groups: (i) the elderly; (ii) persons with disabilities; (iii) partially sighted or blind; and (iv) pregnant women. The Election Commission of South Africa considers these groups to have special needs that need to be accommodated on election day. If the accommodations made for these groups are deficient, then it may undermine their ability to participate in elections.

Studying citizens responses to the four questions on special needs groups in the VPS 2021, it was apparent to the research team that the adult populace was quite happy with how these groups were treated by election officials. Adult citizens were most contented with how the disabled were treated by officials. Three-fifths of the general public stated that the procedures accommodated this group to either a great extent (44%) or to some extent (28%). From a relative perspective, the mass public were the least contented with how youth were being treated. However, the level of observed difference between the four groups was not substantial. Voting experience appeared to be a key factor in predicting how voters would answer the questions on special groups. Examining voter and non-voters responses to this question are displayed in Figure 134, we can see that voters generally gave the Commission a more favourable evaluation on this issue than non-voters.

Figure 134: Perceived levels with consideration of the needs of special groups in electoral procedures and processes

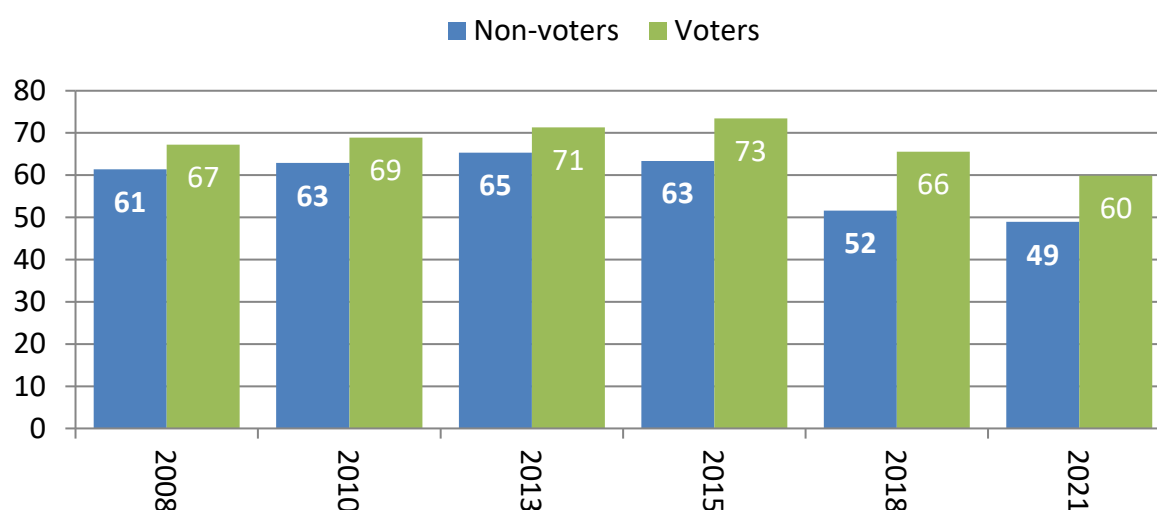


Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

Responses to the four questions presented in Figure 134 were combined to create a composite index that we labelled the Special Groups Needs Consideration (SGNC) Index. The scale on the index was computed so that it ranged from 0 to 100, a high score on this metric

represented a high level of satisfaction with how special groups were treated⁵⁰. Reviewing SGNC Index for the national citizen population, we witnessed a mean score increase between 2008 VPS and 2015 VPS. The SGNC Index grew from 65 (SE=0.53) at the start of the period to 71 (SE=0.56) at the end, suggesting growing contentment with Commission performance on this issue. Beginning in VPS 2018, however, we noted a decline in average SGNC Index scores and the VPS 2021 mean score was 57 (SE=0.66). Investigating index scores by voting regularity, it is apparent that voting experience is a determinant of attitudes here (Figure 135). The observed decline in index scores was discovered to be more prominent amongst non-voters although voters also experienced a significant level of decline over the last five years. Examining each of the SGNC sub-components, it is apparent that the ‘women’ component experienced the largest decline during this period⁵¹.

Figure 135: Mean Special Groups Needs Consideration (SGNC) Index (0-100) across the period 2008-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2008-2021

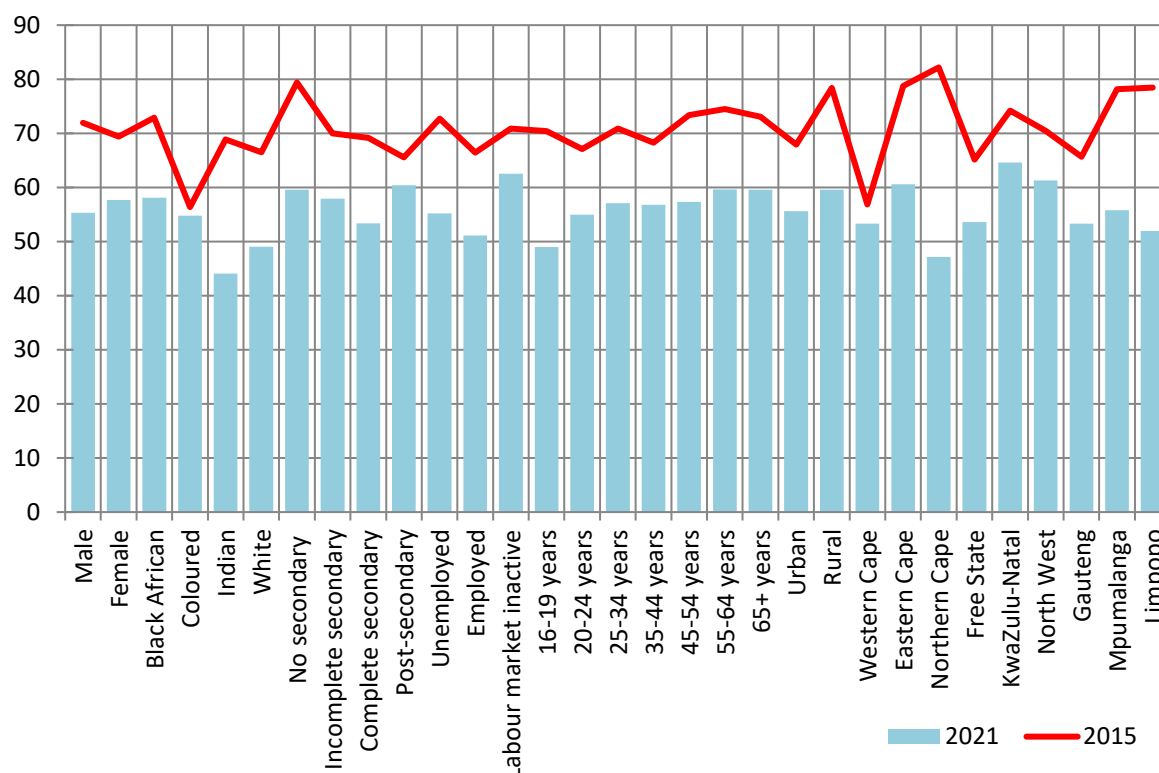
With the aim of comprehending the subtleties of the SGNC Index decline observed between the 2016 VPS and 2021 VPS, we scrutinised mean index scores across a range of selected subgroups for those two survey rounds (Figure 136). Mean scores for all groups in the figure deteriorated between these two periods. Over the last six years we discovered noteworthy variations in citizen evaluations for the different age groups. The youth were, in particular, one of the age groups that became quite disillusioned with the Election Commission on this issue over time. The mean Index score for the 16-19 age cohort fell by 21 points between 2015 and 2021. Those inside the labour market tended to have lower SGNC Index scores than those outside. This gap appears to have widen over the period with the unemployed, especially, growing more cynical about the treatment of special groups. Substantial index

⁵⁰ As a robustness check, a Cronbach alpha test ($\alpha=0.80$) was performed to assess the validity and reliability of the measure.

⁵¹ The proportion of the general public who thought that voting procedures or processes took into consideration the needs of women to a minor extent grew from in 9% VPS 2010 to in 19% VPS 2021. The fraction of citizens who did not think that the Commission took into account the needs of women at all increased from 5% to 9% during the same period.

score declines were also noted for certain racial groups during the six year period. Members of the Indian and white minorities became more dissatisfied with how special groups were treated.

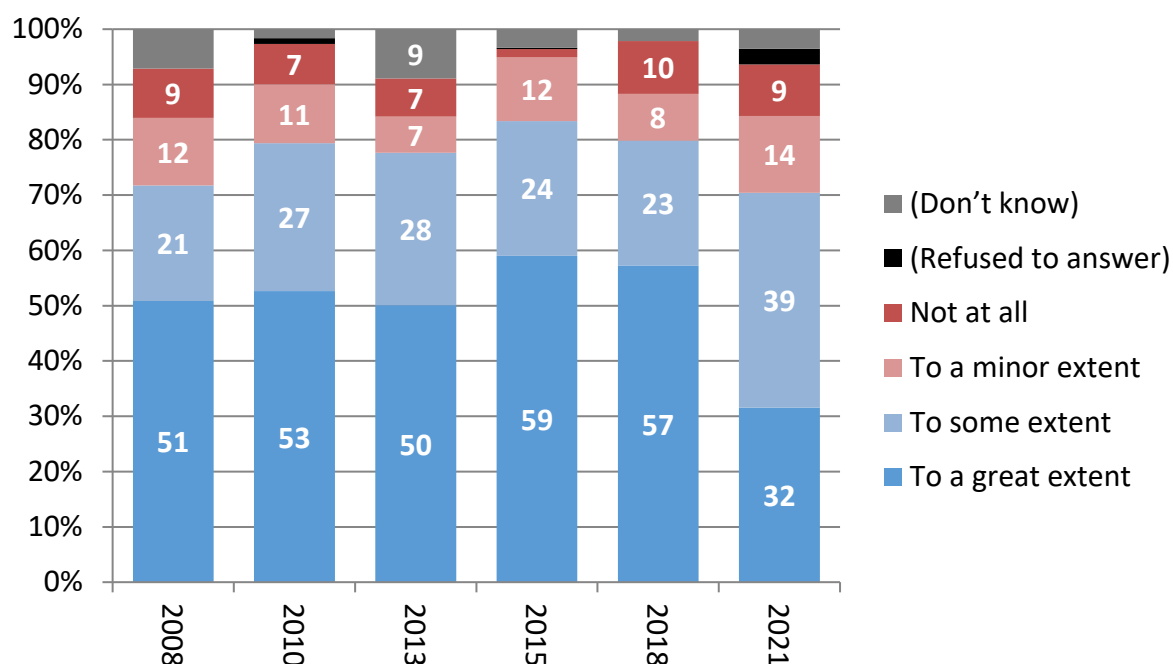
Figure 136: Mean Special Groups Needs Consideration (SGNC) Index (0-100) scores across socio-demographic subgroups, 2015 and 2021



Sources: Voter Participation Surveys (VPS) 2015; 2021

We discovered a significant educational attainment gradient in the 2016 VPS. The less educated reported, on average, lower SGNC Index scores than their more educated peers. Due to growing discontentment on this issue amongst the less educated, the depth of this gradient was much reduced by the VPS 2021. Mean SGNC Index scores for those without secondary education fell from 79 (SE=1.0) to 60 (SE=1.79) over the six year period. In contrast, mean index scores amongst the tertiary educated only declined by 5 points during the same period. There was a significant evaluation gap between rural and urban citizens which favoured those in rural areas. This urbanisation gap has closed somewhat over the last five years. In addition, voters in all provinces have become less satisfied over time. Of the different provinces, the greatest decline was observed amongst Northern Cape citizens, dropping from 82 (SE=0.09) at the beginning of the period to 47 (SE=0.11) at the end. Other large declines were noted in Limpopo and Mpumalanga, each experiencing a decline larger than twenty points.

Figure 137: Responses of disabled citizens to the question: “[t]o what extent do you think the voting procedures or processes take into consideration the needs of the disable?”, 2008-2021



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2008-2021

In closing, let us consider how much disabled individuals thought the electoral body took special groups into consideration during elections. People with a disability ($M=52$; $SE=3.39$) were found to have statistically different SGNC Index scores in VPS 2021 when compared with people without disability ($M=57$; $SD=0.67$). The disabled experienced a large index mean score decline, falling 23 points in the last five years. Looking more closely at this issue, we found that people with disabilities were less positive in their views on arrangements for the disabled in electoral processes. If we assess how the attitudes of the disabled have changed over the period (Figure 137), we find that there has been a significant deterioration between 2015 and 2021. The proportion of this group who thought the needs of the disabled were taken into consideration to a great extent decreased from 59% to 32% over the six year period. The proportion who did not think that these procedures or processes took into consideration the needs of disabled people at all increased from 1% to 9% during this period.

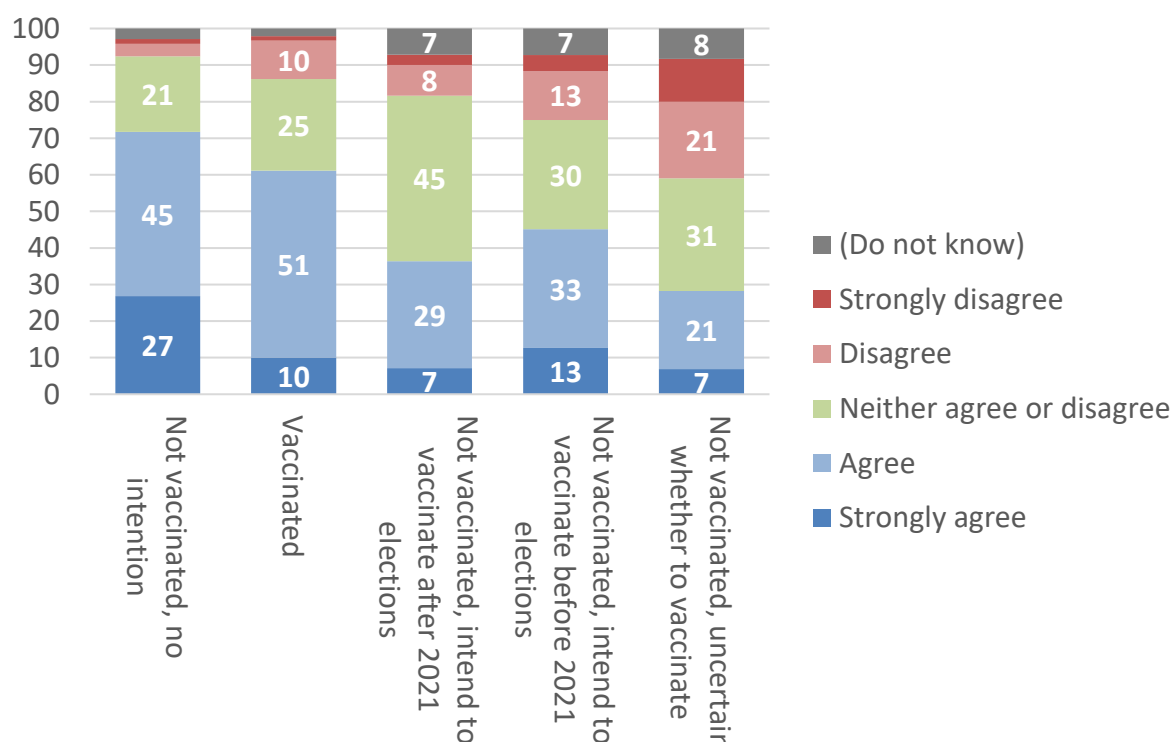
15.6. Evaluations of Election Commission efforts to keep voters safe

Apart from threatening the health of the global population and disrupting major sections of the economy, the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has also challenged democratic elections throughout the world. The fear of becoming infected with the virus have caused selective participation of voters and have resulted in certain persons (i.e., more specifically those with higher health risks, such as elderly and vulnerable voters) abstaining from voting. This type of selective participation is not optimal and may lead to the reduced legitimacy of elections and open the door to electoral controversies. Concerns about the legitimacy of electoral outcomes may even eventually trigger social and political polarization and conflicts. This subsection will look at public evaluations of whether the Election Commission could protect

voters from the Coronavirus. This will include an assessment of the perceived risk of holding local government elections during the current pandemic.

A large share of the mass public was, as was established in Section 4.4, concerned about the threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, OVPS data show that many citizens have faith that the Electoral Commission will ensure the safety of voters during the 2021 LGE⁵². Respondents in that survey were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that the Electoral Commission will do enough to ensure the safety of voters in the upcoming local government elections. A majority (59%) of the adult populace agreed with the statement and only a small proportion (16%) took the opposite position and said that the Commission will not be able to ensure the safety of voters. When the same question was asked as part of 2021 VPS, a majority (51%) of the adult populace agreed that the Commission would be able to ensure the safety of voters. The remainder either disagreed (11%), were uncertain of how to answer (9%) or gave a neutral response (29%). It would appear that public attitudes on this issue remained relatively unchanged during the short period between the OVPS and the VPS 2021.

Figure 138: Public agreement and disagreement with the statement: '[t]he Electoral Commission will do enough to ensure the safety of voters in the upcoming 2021 local government elections' by vaccination status



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

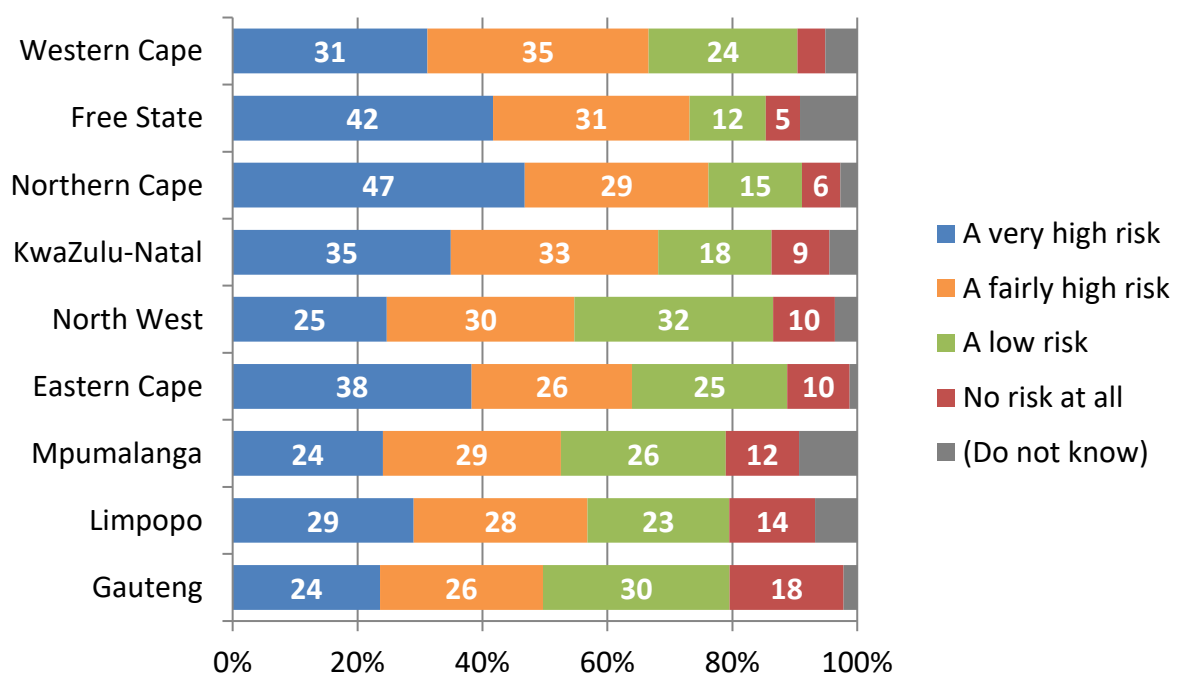
How adult citizens answered the question about election protection was influenced by their attitudes towards Coronavirus vaccinations. Levels of agreement were low amongst those

⁵² For a detailed discussion of the methodological framework of the Online Voter Participation Survey (OVPS), please see Roberts et al. (2021).

who were not vaccinated and had no intention of getting vaccinated (**Figure 138**). Less than two-fifths (38%) of this group agreed with the statement, 16 percentage points below those who were vaccinated. In addition, we found citizens who intended to vaccinate exhibited similar attitudes on this issue as those who were vaccinated. It is evident that vaccinated persons are less concerned with the risks that are posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Public perceptions of the Election Commission were influenced by whether citizens think the COVID-19 situation will improve or worsen. About a third (36%) of those who agreed that the Commission can keep voters safe felt that the situation would improve. This figure can be unfavourably compared to 21% of those who disagreed that the Commission could keep voters safe.

Respondents in the OVPS were required to answer the following question: '[t]o what extent do you think that holding local government elections during the current COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa represents a health risk to voters?' The vast majority of the mass public in July 2021 agreed that the pandemic represented either a very (56%) or a fairly (22%) high risk. A lower proportion of the general population in VPS 2021 said that running local government elections during the pandemic was either a very high (30%) or fairly high (29%) risk to voters. The period difference is consistent with what was recorded in Section 4.4, the general population became less concerned about the risk proposed by pandemic during the three months between OPVS and VPS 2021. The competency of the Election Commission to manage the Coronavirus outbreak helped predict attitudes here. More than two-thirds (69%) of those who thought the Commission could not protect voters believed that holding the 2021 LGE constituted a high risk.

Figure 139: Public responses to the question: '[t]o what extent do you think that holding local government elections during the current COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa represents a health risk to voters?' by provincial residence

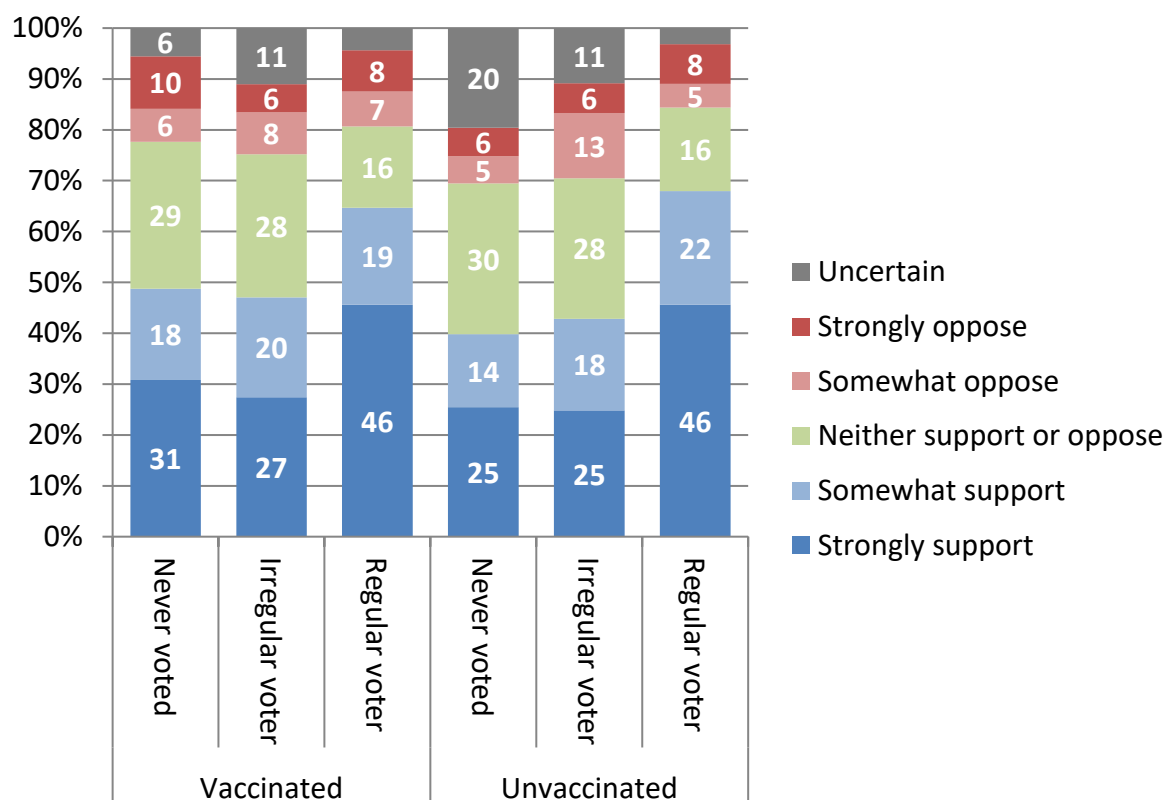


Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

It was not surprising, given the results of Section 4.4, to observe that risk perceptions varied considerably per province. Residents from Gauteng, Limpopo and Mpumalanga had especially low levels of concern about the health risk (**Figure 139**). This presents a significant change from what was observed in the OVPS when levels of perceived risk were much higher. Most provinces experienced an increase in the proportion that viewed the risk as minimal. We can, in particular, discern a considerable change in public attitudes in Gauteng during this short period. The proportion of the adult population in that province who described the risk as low or non-existent fell from 10% in OVPS to 48% in 2021 VPS. A similar reduction in perceived risk occurred in the North West with the percentage of residents who perceived minimal risk increasing by 33 percentage points. The only provinces that did not experience a downturn in risk perceptions during this period were the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal.

The South African Constitutional Court, as discussed in Section 2, disagreed with the Moseneke Inquiry and decided that the 2021 LGE would not be postponed. VPS respondents were asked if they agreed with that decision and the results show that about half of the mass public strongly agreed or agreed. The remainder either disagreed with the decision (14%), gave a neutral response (24%) or did not know how to answer (10%). There was a robust correlation between support for the Constitutional Court and public faith in the capacity of the Election Commission to keep voters safe. More than two-thirds (70%) of those who were confident that the Commission will do enough to ensure the safety of voters in the upcoming 2021 LGE supported the decision. Support for this decision was also influenced by whether citizens think the government is doing a bad job in responding to the Coronavirus outbreak. If an individual was dissatisfied with the governmental response to the pandemic, then he/she was much more likely to oppose the Constitutional Court decision.

Figure 140: Public support and opposition for the Constitutional Court decision not to postpone the 2021 Local Government Elections by voting history and vaccination status



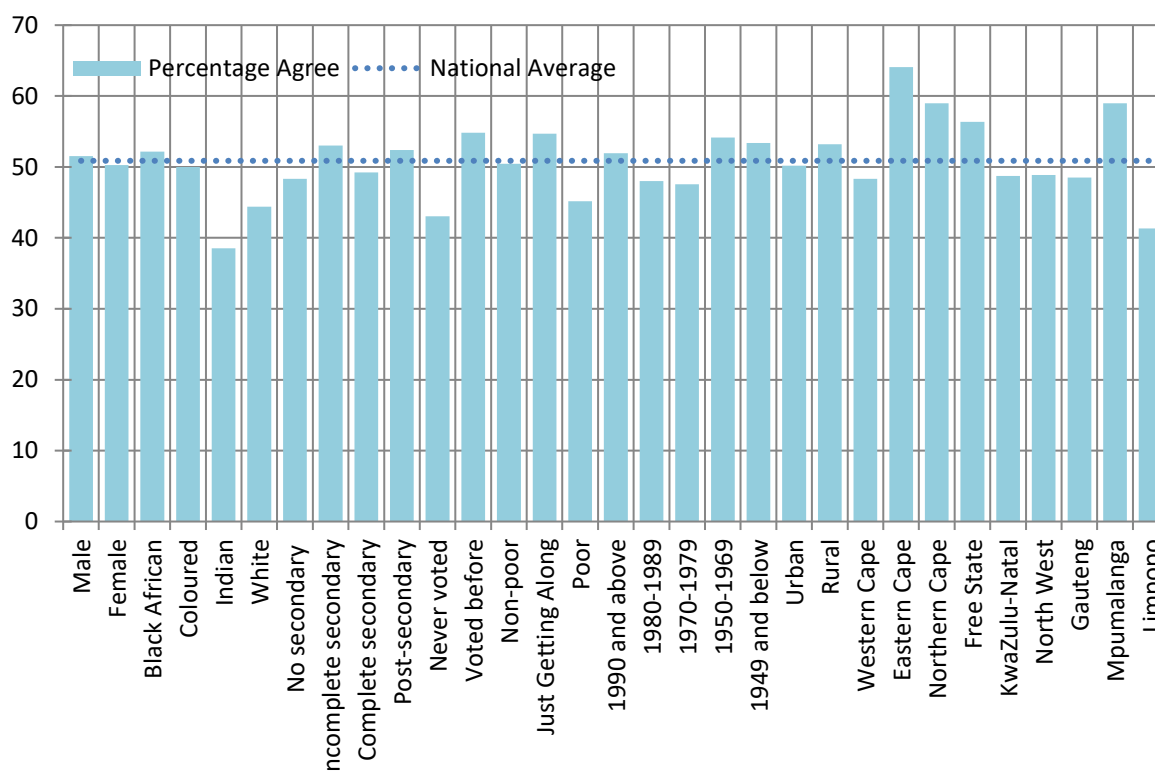
Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

Reviewing the data, we found that the regularity by which citizens voted was a major driver of how they answered the Constitutional Court decision question. About two-thirds (66%) of regular voters agreed with the decision and this can be compared to 45% of irregular voters and 43% of non-voters. But there was a distinct vaccination disparity to this voter status differential with the vaccinated much more likely to support the decision (**Figure 140**). Less than two-fifths of unvaccinated non-voters either strongly (25%) or somewhat supported (14%) the elections going ahead. This proportion was 10 percentage points above what was seen for vaccinated non-voters and 18 points above vaccinated voters. Given what was observed in **Figure 138**, this outcome is not surprising and shows that the vaccinated are less worried with the risks that are created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now let us turn our attention to how different socio-demographic groups assessed the ability of the Election Commission to ensure the safety of voters during the COVID-19 pandemic. The percentage who thought the Commission could keep voters safe are displayed in **Figure 141** across a range of subgroups. Levels of subgroup variation were lower than what was observed elsewhere in this subsection. It is apparent from the figure that those with higher levels of education were less likely to agree with the statement than those with low levels of education. In addition, racial minorities had lower reported levels of agreement when compared to Black African adults. This is consistent with what was observed in Section 15.1 which noted low trust in the Commission amongst these groups. It was apparent from the figure that older citizens were more inclined to agree that the Commission could protect voters than their younger peers. This represents a change from what was discovered in the

OVPS data. When that dataset was disaggregated by age, we found a negative correlation between age and agreement.

Figure 141: Level of agreement that the Electoral Commission will do enough to ensure the safety of voters in the upcoming 2021 local government elections by socio-demographic subgroup



Source: Voter Participation Survey (VPS) 2021

Large provincial subgroup differences in agreement on whether the Election Commission could protect voters were apparent in the figure. During the 2021 VPS adults living in the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga were the provincial groups most likely to agree with the statement. Of the nine provinces, citizens living in Limpopo were the least liable to agree with the statement in that dataset. The proportion who agreed in that province fell by 22 percentage points between the OVPS and the 2021 VPS. During this period other significant (albeit smaller) attitudinal changes were seen in KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape. There was a distinct relationship between voter history and agreement level that favoured regular voters. Only about two-fifths of non-voters agreed that the Commission could keep voters safe, 9 percentage points below irregular voters and 19 points below regular voters.

16. Conclusion

The 1994 elections were renowned worldwide for their success in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Since that historic election, voters in South Africa have participated in a number of national and municipal elections. These have been managed competently and proficiently by the country's Election Commission. These successes have been aided, in no small part, by the Commission's progressive voter education strategies.

Despite the challenges involved, the Commission has worked hard to register adult South Africans to vote and ensure that the voting experience is efficient and pleasant. Data presented in this report show that most adult voters in the country found voter registration easy, managed effectively and functioning successfully. Voters were, on average, satisfied with their experience at voting stations during previous government elections. The vast majority of voters were pleased with the secrecy of their vote, the professionalism of electoral officials and the treatment of the disabled and old people.

The efforts of the Electoral Commission to provide fair and free elections to the South African public have not occurred in a political vacuum. It is abundantly clear from data presented in this report that rising discontent with the status quo is undermining mass views of democracy in the country. The bulk of the adult citizen population are concerned about the performance of the South African democratic system. A growing number of people believe the country is heading in the wrong direction and trust in South Africa's current political leadership is low. Governments at the local level were strongly criticised and most of the adult population did not feel that local municipalities were successfully implementing the Batho Pele principles. Political dissent is having an impact on electoral participation in South Africa. Of those not intending to vote in the 2021 LGE, the vast majority gave political disinterest and disillusionment as their main reason. This trend does not represent a sudden, abrupt break from past data; throughout this report we have used cross-sectional data to show that these trends are part of a gradual incremental change.

A loss of political faith and sense of hopelessness emerged from the VPS data as key themes for political disillusionment. Between 2015 and 2021 we can observe declining confidence in presidential leadership, national government, and the Electoral Commission. There was a downswing in the proportion satisfied with the conduct of electoral management during this period. Political discontent appears to be driven by a perceived unhappiness with the instrumental returns to democracy. A large majority of the adult populace said that their lives have worsened in the last five years and there is great dissatisfaction with the general economic situation in the country. Many citizens do not believe in the duty to vote; do not believe voting makes a difference or that the elected are accountable to the electorate. Although the Electoral Commission cannot do much to change the political mood in the country, messages emphasising the importance of voting (i.e., internal efficacy) and using one's voting choice to register discontent and promote electoral accountability should continue to be a focus of its campaigns.

The culture of voting hypothesis is clearly evident from the survey data presented in this report. There was a marked disparity by voting history with regular voters more committed to democratic participation than other groups. It is therefore critical to encourage potential voters to cast their first ballot-since this predicts future voting behaviour. In this regard, the Commission should specifically focus on the Born Free Generation, registration remains low but where large shares voice a clear intention to register. Trying to identify innovative ways of ensuring that this intention is realised is crucial for the Commission in coming months and years. The Commission should specifically focus on encouraging the youth (especially those in the 18-29 age cohort) to register and vote for the first time. A large share of these cohorts voiced a clear intention to register. Given the sizable share of the voting age population that

youth represent, finding innovative ways of realising this intention is crucial for turnout in future government elections.

A number of different strategies need to be adopted to promote democratic participation amongst the youth in South Africa. The inclusion of voter education programmes in the regular school curriculum should be given attention. Such programmes could instil values of civic engagement into young people, implanting fundamental civic virtues in young minds. An essential belief in the civic virtue of electoral participation would counteract the effect that political disillusionment has on voting behaviour. Moreover, such programmes would discourage political disinterest and help participants learn about ward committees and ward councillors. Better education on this aspect of local government may undercut the angry protest rhetoric that sometimes surrounds ward-level governance. Aside from schools, education campaigns should target institutions that are trusted by the South African public (like churches). The Electoral Commission is already engaging in education campaigns, but more robust efforts are needed. If voters are better informed about how government works, they may make more judicious, sensible and thoughtful political decisions.

Political dissatisfaction is often undercut by a diverse arrange of rumours that permeate throughout South African society. The report revealed that a significant share of people believed voting irregularities had taken place during the 2021 LGE despite not witnessing any irregularities themselves. Rumours of voting irregularities can be very harmful and undermine the legitimacy of electoral outcomes. These false rumours weaken individual knowledge about democracy and elections. Without adequate levels of knowledge, people will be unable to make sensible, rational choices on how to participate in local municipal government. It is, therefore, critical for the Electoral Commission to communicate messages to the public on the systems and protocols in place to ensure that voting irregularities do not occur. This will help curb unfound rumours regarding voting irregularities. The media platforms where people in South Africa obtain most of their information about electoral malpractices was radio and television.

High levels of voter satisfaction were recorded for the conduct of the Electoral Commission, its staff, infrastructure, and the manner in which the Commission addressed the voting needs of diverse groups. However, improvements can always be made to any system. The use of new electronic technologies for voting may enhance the voting experience of many and should be considered. New technologies such as optical scan systems and specialised kiosks (including self-contained direct-recording electronic voting systems) present exciting new possibilities. Electronic voting has the potential to reduce the cost of the election, increase voter turnout, prevent fraud and streamline the vote counting. The implementation of electronic voting could, however, be undermined by distrust some people have of this technology. A large proportion of the citizen population claimed that the introduction of electronic voting would reduce their inclination to vote. Targeted education campaigns could help address this scepticism and help people understand that electronic voting represents a more effective way to vote.

The Electoral Commission has performed admirably in providing the infrastructural apparatuses through which citizens can vote. This has occurred despite the challenges provided by the COVID0-19 pandemic. However, threats to electoral participation in South

Africa remain. This final conclusion has summarised these threats and suggested some strategies that can be employed to address them. Nevertheless, the Electoral Commission must recognise that electoral participation in future government elections will be impacted by political disillusionment and discontentment. Addressing political disenchantment and anger is not within the purview of the Electoral Commission and is, ultimately, the responsibility of our elected officials. The Commission should, however, focus on the promotion of civic virtues through voter education campaigns. Instilling a culture of electoral participation by getting citizens to care passionately about civic virtue is a daunting task but a necessary one. The Commission must do all it can to prevent political antipathy from undermining the vibrancy of South African democracy.

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