

EXPLAINING VOTER CHOICE IN THE 2019 ELECTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

This study firstly considers the factors that influence the party choice of voters and secondly whether socio-economic well-being shapes the party choice of citizens of South Africa, an upper middle-income country with a constitutional democracy and a fairly well-developed welfare system. This report presents the findings from the third wave of data collected on voter preferences after the 2019 national general elections. The results from this study are compared to the findings of the previous waves. The overall themes emerging from the three-year, cross-sectional, nationally representative study are discussed.

This research was conducted prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, which has had significant impacts on people's everyday lives and their livelihoods. Whether and how this might influence the party-political choice of voters is not considered in this research brief.

ABOUT THE STUDY

Three national cross-sectional surveys were conducted in the period October 2017 to October 2019. The first wave of data was collected in October 2017 (Wave 1¹). The second wave of data (Wave 2²) was collected between 25 October and 24 December 2018. The final wave of data (Wave 3) was collected between October and November 2019, the findings of which are discussed in this brief. The three waves of data yield valuable results on the factors influencing voter choices over a three-year period. The findings emerge from a random and nationally representative sample. Ipsos Public Affairs, a marketing research company, collected the data on behalf of the CSDA. The sample of the 2019 survey consisted of metropolitan and rural areas stratified in terms of age, gender and race. Six survey questions supplied by the CSDA were included in Ipsos's Khayabus survey, which is annually conducted between October and November. A description of the research questions and detailed statistical notes are contained in the end notes.

The data was analysed by Jaclyn de Klerk from the Statistical Consultation Service at the University of Johannesburg.

Results: Wave 3, 2019

PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

The sample included 3462 respondents. Of the total sample, 69% reside in urban areas and 31% in rural areas. This corresponds with the national urban–rural split.³ Gender representation was split almost equally, with 52% female and 48% male respondents. Most respondents were aged between 18 and 34 years (49%), with 43% aged between 35 and 59 years, while 8% were older than 60 years. The racial composition of the sample closely resembles the country's racial profile – 77% respondents were black, 9% coloured, 11% white and 3% Indian/Asian. Most respondents were working (46%) as opposed to not working (20%) or unemployed⁴ (34%).

Respondents in the sample were largely poor and fell into the lower middle-income bands. Of all the respondents, 56% earned less than R8 000 as their total monthly income,⁵ while 27% of the respondents refused to reveal their income. About 13% of respondents earned more than R10 000 per month.

Regarding education, 47% of respondents have Grade 12 as the highest level of education; 29% have secondary school as the highest level; 4% have primary school. Regarding post-matric qualifications, 4% of respondents have an artisan's certificate; 8% have a technikon diploma and only 5% have a university degree.

1 <https://www.uj.ac.za/faculties/humanities/csda/Documents/Voter%20Preference%20Report%20A4%2002.10.%202018%20PDF.pdf>

2 <https://www.uj.ac.za/faculties/humanities/csda/Documents/Voter%20Report%20A4%20Mar%202019%20Web.pdf>

3 StatsSA, 2015. Findings of the Living Conditions Survey 2014/15. [Online] Available at <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-10-02%20Report-03-10-02%202015.pdf>

4 Includes unemployed looking for work and unemployed not looking for work.

5 Total personal monthly income before tax and deductions, including salaries, pensions, income from investments, grants etc.

Table 1: Highest level of education received

	Percent
1 - No schooling	0,9
2 - Some primary school	2,3
3 - Primary school completed	3,8
4 - Some high school	28,8
5 - Matric / Grade 12	46,5
6 - Artisan's certificate obtained	4,3
7 - Technikon diploma/degree completed	8,5
8 - University degree completed	4,9
9 - Honours	0,0
Total	100,0

REASONS FOR VOTER PREFERENCES

When asked which party they had voted for in the national election of 2019, most respondents said the African National Congress (ANC) (58% up from 56% previously in Wave 2 and 53% in Wave 1), followed by the Democratic Alliance (DA) (13% unchanged from previously and down from 22% in Wave 1) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) (7% down from 9% previously after rising from 6% in Wave 1). A fairly large number of respondents (19%) refused to answer, did not know or did not vote. Of this group, three quarters of respondents did not wish to reveal their party choice, and this was particularly marked in the Western Cape, Northern Cape and in KwaZulu-Natal.

The table below shows the party choice of respondents disaggregated into provinces.

Table 2: Party choice per province (%)

	Western Cape	Eastern Cape	Northern Cape	Free State	Kwa Zulu-Natal	North West	Gauteng	Mpumalanga	Limpopo
African National Congress	35.0	61.5	41.3	55.8	49.6	74.4	59.0	71.0	76.9
Democratic Alliance	27.1	10.8	28.0	8.2	9.4	5.6	12.7	15.9	1.6
Economic Freedom Fighters	5.7	8.3	7.8	12.0	2.3	11.5	7.2	6.9	13.0
Refuse to answer / Did not vote / Do not know	29.8	16.6	22.2	22.7	30.1	8.4	17.6	4.2	8.5

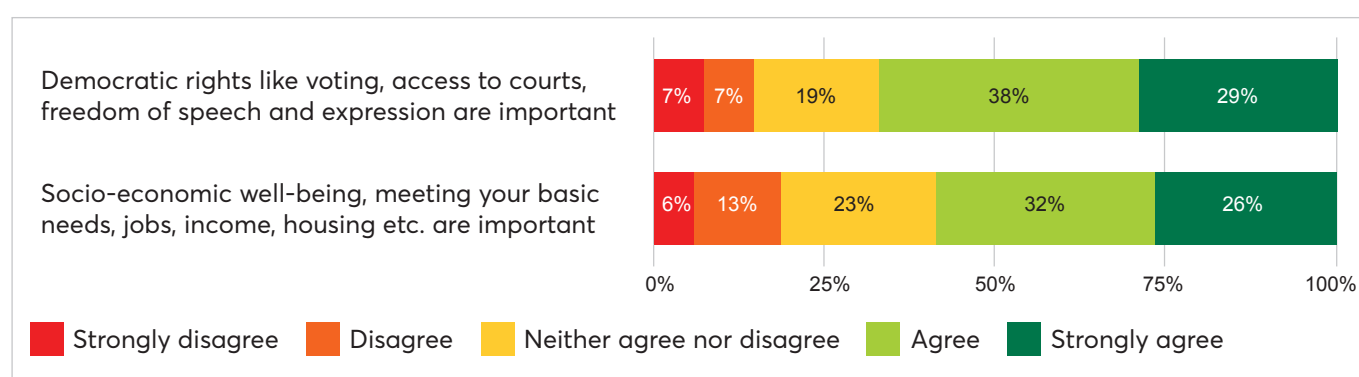
Respondents were asked the reason for their party choice, with the option to select up to five reasons. The most common reason that respondents gave for supporting a party was that they believed the party would bring a better life (58% down from 65% previously), followed by trust the party (54% down from 62% previously) and that the party brought freedom and democracy to South Africa (53% down from 62% previously). The top three reasons cited in the second wave remained the top three reasons cited in the third wave. But the measurable decline in proportions that cited each of these reasons for party choice suggests that though people are still ticking the ANC box they are appreciably more disillusioned.

Asked whether they receive any grant from the government, 30% of respondents answered, "Yes" (unchanged from previously). Interestingly, 43% of all respondents said that one of the reasons they voted for a particular party was "because it pays social grants and I am afraid that another party will stop social grants" (down from 48% previously). Of the respondents who receive a grant from government, 51% gave this as their reason for their party choice (compared to 60% in the previous wave).

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC WELL-BEING AS FACTORS SHAPING VOTER CHOICE

When asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement Democratic rights like voting, access to courts, freedom of speech and expression are important, among those who answered, 67% said they agree or strongly agree compared to 13% who disagree or strongly disagree. When asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement Socio-economic well-being, meeting your basic needs, jobs, income, housing etc. are important, among those who answered 59% said they agree or strongly agree compared to 18% who disagree or strongly disagree.⁶

Figure 1: Are democratic rights and socio-economic well-being important to you?

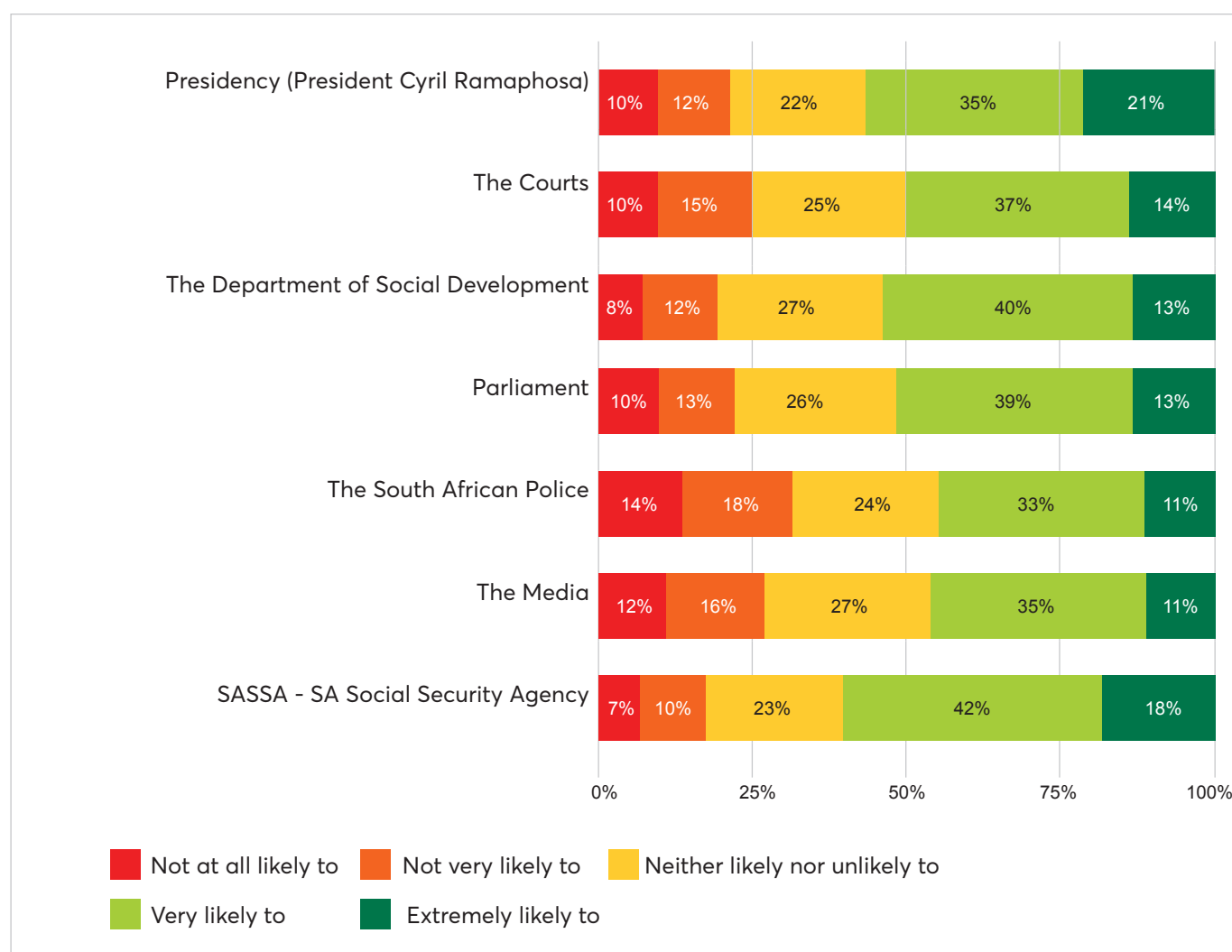


DOES TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS INFLUENCE VOTER CHOICE?

Trust in institutions is mostly favourable, with the majority of respondents saying that they are very likely or extremely likely to have trust in all institutions. Trust in President Cyril Ramaphosa increased by 1% from the previous report with 56% saying they were very likely or extremely likely to have trust in the presidency under President Cyril Ramaphosa. Under President Jacob Zuma, 26% of respondents said they were very likely or extremely likely to have trust in the presidency.

⁶ In the previous wave respondents were asked which they thought to be more important: democratic rights or socio-economic well-being.

Figure 2: How likely are you to have trust in the following institutions?

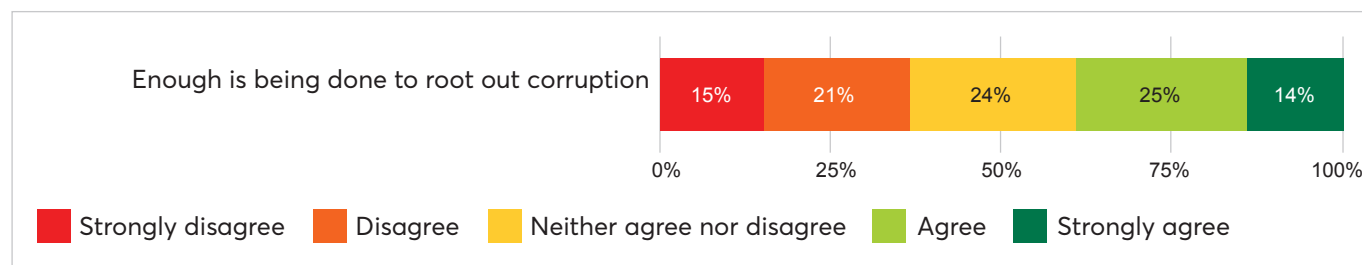


Comparing these findings to the previous report, trust in the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) has decreased from 62% to 60% of respondents who say they are very likely or extremely likely to trust the institution; those that are "very likely" or "extremely likely" to have trust in the media remained at 46%; trust in the South African Police (those that are "very likely" or "extremely likely" to trust the SAP) declined from 48% to 44%; trust in parliament increased from 48% to 51% (those that are "very likely" or "extremely likely" to trust the institution); trust in the Department of Social Development decreased from 54% to 53%; and the high likelihood of trust in the Courts has declined from 51% to 50%. All institutions, with the exception of parliament and the media, showed declining levels of trust from respondents in the run-up to the national elections.

THE PERCEPTION OF CORRUPTION AND VOTER CHOICE

Asked whether they agree with the statement Enough is being done to root out corruption respondents were closely divided with 39% "agreeing/strongly agreeing" (39%) as opposed to 37% "disagreeing/strongly disagreeing" (37%).⁷

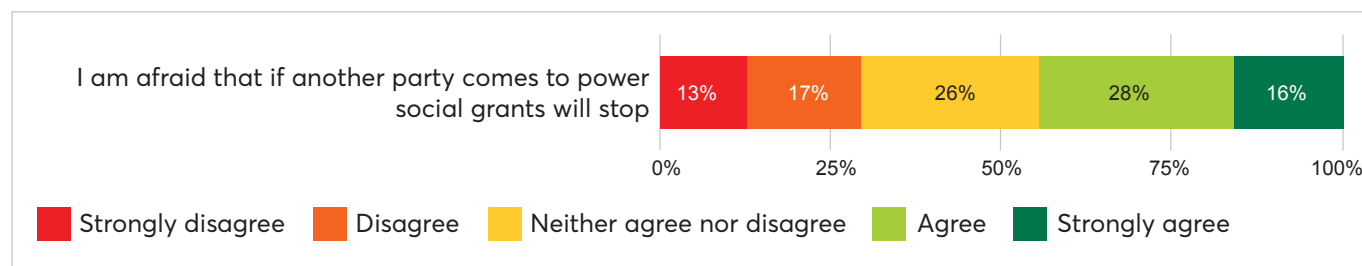
Figure 3: Is enough being done to root out corruption in SA?



PERCEPTION ON PROVISION OF SOCIAL GRANTS

Almost half (44%) of the respondents said they agree/strongly agree with the statement I am afraid that if another party comes to power social grants will stop, compared to 30% of respondents who disagreed/strongly disagreed.

Figure 4: Do you fear losing your social grant if another party comes to power?

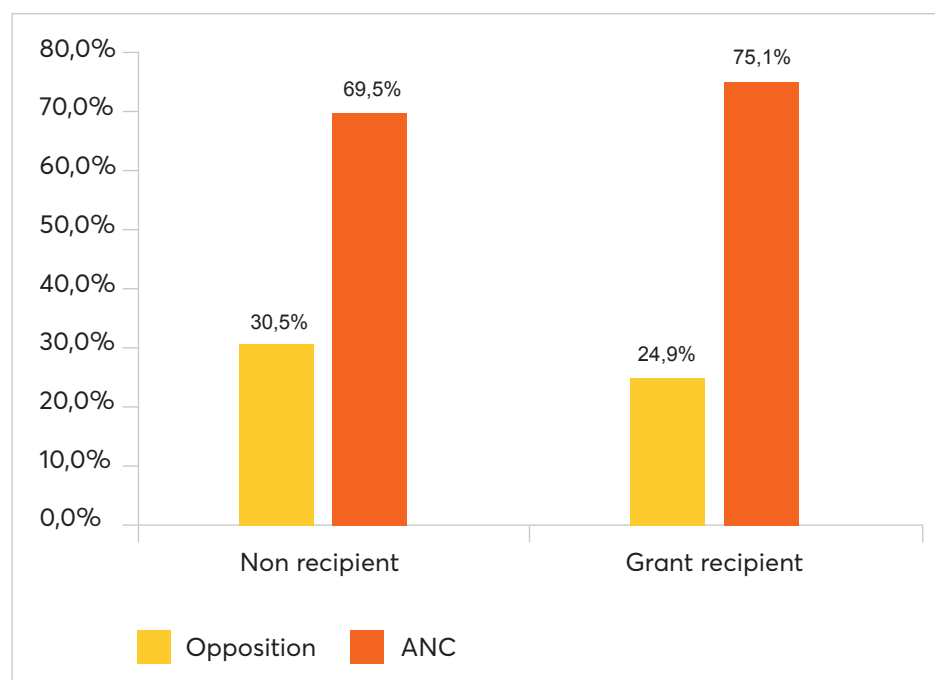


DOES SOCIAL GRANT RECEIPT MATTER IN VOTER PREFERENCES?

A comparison was drawn between respondents who received a grant from the government and those who did not. We tested whether the receipt of a grant impacted the respondents' choice of party – voting for the ANC or an opposition party. Of the respondents who received a grant from the government, 75% said that they voted ANC (up from 73% previously), while 25% said that they voted for an opposition party (down from 27% previously). Of the respondents who did not receive any government grant, 70% said they voted ANC (up from 66% prior), while 31% said that they voted for an opposition party (down from 34%). Both recipients and non-recipients were more likely to vote for the ANC than for an opposition party, but a greater proportion of grant recipients said they had voted for the ANC, compared with non-recipients of grants. A statistically significant difference was found between grant recipients and non-recipients, in terms of voting preference.

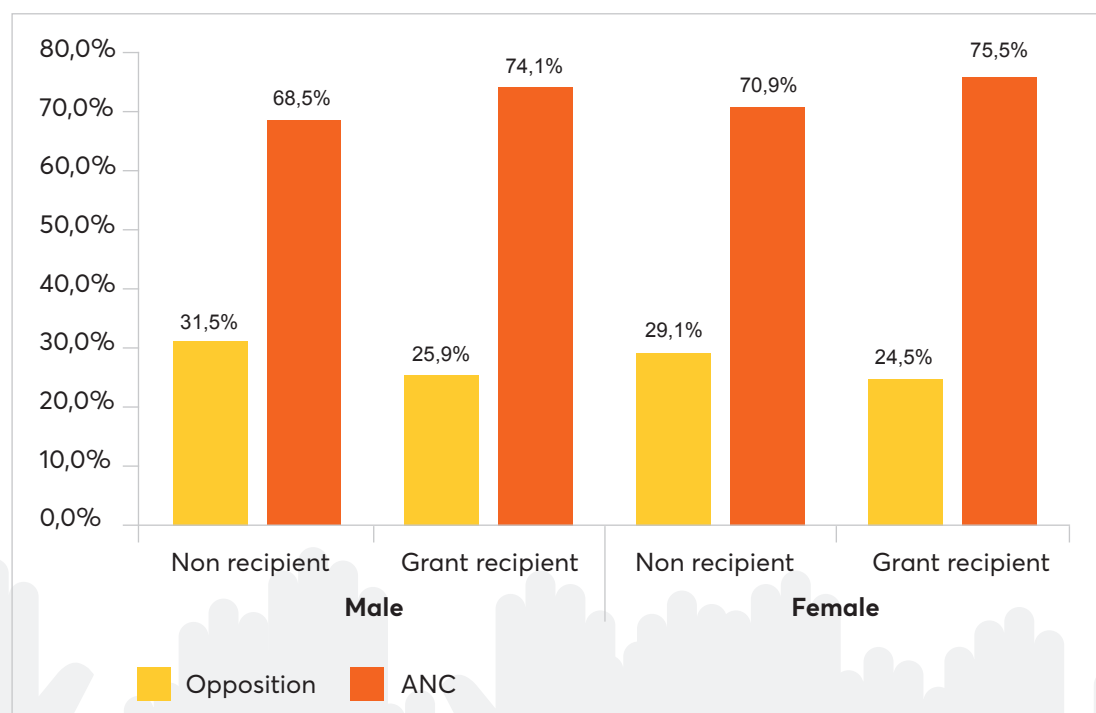
⁷ This question changed from the previous report, which instead asked whether people thought corruption had increased in South Africa in the previous year.

Figure 5: Comparison of grant recipients vs. non-recipients in voting choice



The same test was done when comparing male and female respondents, disaggregated into grant recipients and non-recipients, in terms of voting preference. Of all respondents, 220 males receive a grant (compared to 994 non-recipients) and 555 females receive a grant (compared to 731 non-recipients). For males, 69% of non-recipients vote ANC (up from 66%), whereas 74% of grant recipients vote ANC (up from 71% prior). For females, 71% of non-recipients vote ANC (up from 67% prior) compared to 76% of grant recipients (up from 74%). There was no statistically significant difference between grant recipients and non-recipients disaggregated in terms of gender and voting preference. Previously there was a statistically significant difference between female grant recipients and female non-recipients only.

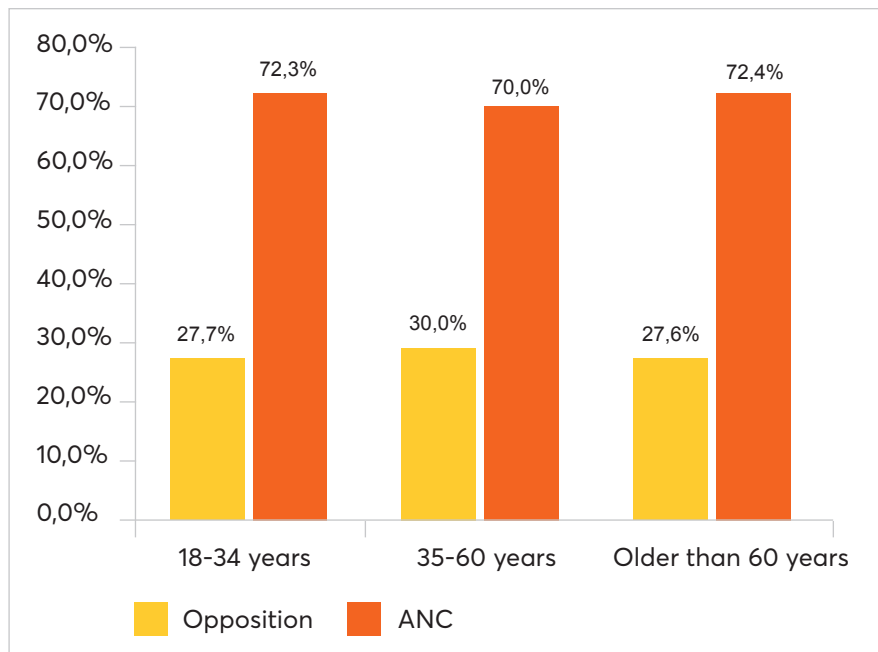
Figure 6: Comparison of male vs. female grant recipients and non-recipients, in terms of voter choice



DOES AGE MATTER IN VOTER PREFERENCES?

We also established whether there was a statistically significant difference in how the respondents of different age groups voted. We compared three age groups: 18-34 years, 35-60 years and older than 60 years. In the youngest group, 73% voted ANC (up from 67%). In the middle-aged group, 70% voted ANC (same as previously). In the oldest group, 72% voted ANC (1% down from previously). As previously seen, we found no statistically significant difference across the three age groups in terms of voting for the ANC or an opposition party.

Figure 7: Comparison of young, middle-aged and old respondents in voter choice




THE PREDICTIVE VALUE OF OUR MODEL

A logistic regression was used as a predictive analysis to test the impact of four constructed independent variables – perception of the importance of democratic rights, perception of the importance of socio-economic well-being, perception of governance, and perception of corruption – on the likelihood that a respondent would vote for the ANC or an opposition party. In other words, we tested whether our independent variables are significant predictors of political party choice. For more detailed statistical procedures followed, see Endnotes. The empirical model is also informed by theory that explain voter preferences, namely the sociological, rational choice, party identification and clientelistic models (Patel et al. 2014) as well as prior research that tested these variables in the South African context (Sadie and Patel 2020; Ismail and Ulriksen 2017; Sadie, Patel and Baldry, 2016).

The independent variables are constructed as follows:

Perception of governance: To measure perception of governance (trust in institutions) among the respondents, we constructed a variable by calculating the average score across all seven questions that measure a respondent's trust in institutions. We assigned an average score to each respondent such that scores range from 1 to 5 (*Not at all likely to Extremely likely to trust in institutions*), for the question "... how much [do] you trust each institution, would you say that you are

- 1 – Not at all likely to, 2 – Not very likely to, 3 – Neither likely nor unlikely to, 4 – Very likely to, or 5 – Extremely likely to ...
- Trust the Presidency (President Cyril Ramaphosa)
 - Trust the Courts
 - Trust the Department of Social Development
 - Trust Parliament
 - Trust the South African Police
 - Trust the Media
 - Trust SASSA (SA Social Security Agency)?"



The importance of democratic rights: We used the question "On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'strongly disagree' and 5 is 'strongly agree', please tell me your views on the following: Democratic rights like voting, access to courts, freedom of speech and expression are important". The variable ranges from 1 to 5 in value, as answered by the respondent, with each unit increase representing a higher degree of importance.

The importance of socio-economic well-being: We used the question "On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'strongly disagree' and 5 is 'strongly agree', please tell me your views on the following: Socio-economic well-being, meeting your basic needs, jobs, income, housing etc. are important". The variable ranges from 1 to 5 in value, as answered by the respondent, with each unit increase representing a higher degree of importance.

Perception of corruption: We used the question "On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'strongly disagree' and 5 is 'strongly agree', please tell me your views on the following: Enough is being done to root out corruption". The variable ranges from 1 to 5 in value, as answered by the respondent, with each unit increase representing a higher degree of perceived corruption.

The dependent variable was set as 1 if respondents said that they voted for the ANC in the 2019 national election, and 0 if they said that they voted for an opposition party. Those who refused to answer, said they did not know or indicated that they did not vote were excluded.

We included variables to control for: age, race, income level, urban versus rural, gender, work status, education level, grant recipient versus non-recipient and whether recipients agreed with the statement "I am afraid that if another party comes to power social grants will stop". The latter is a scale variable ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree", with each unit increase representing a higher degree of agreement with the statement.

We conducted statistical tests and found the model is satisfactory for collinearity and good fit (see Endnotes).

FINDINGS OF THE LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL

The results from the logistic regression are shown below in Table 2: Variables in the equation. Of the sample of 3459, we excluded 1696 cases from our analysis due to missing data.⁸ The analysis was therefore conducted on 1763 cases.

The importance of democratic rights, the perception of governance and the perception of corruption are shown to be significant in determining whether a respondent voted for the ANC or an opposition party. However, the importance of socio-economic rights is not significant, as found in the previous wave. Similar to the previous wave, race and the fear of loss of social grants if another party comes to power were shown to be statistically significant. Grant receipt is once again not significant.

Age and income (though significant in the previous wave) are not significant in the third wave model.

⁸ The analysis excludes respondents who refused to answer or said they did not know in response to any of the variables/questions included in the model. For instance, we excluded all respondents who did not provide their income.

In the first wave, variables found to be significant were: Governance, SocEcRights, Corruption, Age, Race, Education, Gender and Fear of Loss of Grant.


Table 2: Variables in the equation

							95% C.I.for EXP(B)	
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	Lower	Upper
Step 1^a Governance	0,516	0,079	42,259	1	0,000	1,676	1,434	1,958
SocEcRights	0,041	0,073	0,320	1	0,571	1,042	0,904	1,201
DemocRights	-0,164	0,075	4,816	1	0,028	0,849	0,733	0,983
Corruption	0,146	0,059	6,193	1	0,013	1,157	1,031	1,297
Age	0,196	0,121	2,626	1	0,105	1,217	0,960	1,543
White	-2,997	0,267	126,315	1	0,000	0,050	0,030	0,084
Indian/Asian	-1,995	0,291	47,132	1	0,000	0,136	0,077	0,240
Coloured	-2,617	0,210	155,338	1	0,000	0,073	0,048	0,110
Income	-0,007	0,009	0,534	1	0,465	0,993	0,975	1,012
Area	0,067	0,171	0,154	1	0,695	1,069	0,765	1,494
NotWorking	-0,336	0,215	2,443	1	0,118	0,714	0,469	1,089
Unemployed	-0,144	0,190	0,579	1	0,447	0,865	0,597	1,256
Education	-0,103	0,064	2,608	1	0,106	0,902	0,795	1,022
Gender	0,266	0,139	3,681	1	0,055	1,305	0,994	1,713
Grant	-0,139	0,164	0,715	1	0,398	0,870	0,631	1,201
Fear of Loss of Grant	0,119	0,056	4,504	1	0,034	1,127	1,009	1,258
Constant	0,028	0,532	0,003	1	0,958	1,028		

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Governance, SocEcRights, DemocRights, Corruption, Age, White, IndAsian, Coloured, Income, Area, NotWorking, Unemployed, Education, Gender, Grant, Fear of Loss of Grant.

The higher the perception of good governance (i.e. the higher the level of trust a respondent had in institutions) the more likely the respondent was to vote for the ANC. The odds of a respondent voting for the ANC increased by a factor of 1,676 for each additional unit of trust in institutions the respondent held, all other factors being equal ("ceteris paribus"). In other words, for each additional unit of trust, a respondent is 68% more likely to vote ANC over an opposition party compared to someone exhibiting one unit less of trust, on the scale from 1 (very unlikely to trust in an institution) to 5 (very likely to trust in an institution). Previously the odds of voting ANC increased by 1,840 (up from 1,398 in Wave 1) for each additional unit of Governance/Trust in institutions. We take it up below in Model 2, where we unpack trust in institutions further.

In the previous wave, socio-economic well-being as being more important than democratic rights was not significant in determining political party choice. In the third wave the importance of democratic rights is significant, though the importance of socio-economic well-being is not. The model shows that the higher the importance of democratic rights is rated (measured on scale of 1 to 5), the less likely the respondent would be to support the ANC. The odds of a respondent voting for the ANC decreased by a factor of 0,849 for each additional unit of agreement in the importance of democratic rights, *ceteris paribus*. It is easier to conceive of the likelihood if we flip the odds ratio here, which reveals that each additional unit of disagreement results in an 18% increase in the likelihood of supporting the ANC. This has a cumulative effect, so someone who strongly disagreed about the importance of democratic rights is 1.92 times (or 92%) more likely to support the ANC than someone who strongly agreed about the importance of democratic rights.



Respondents who agreed that enough is being done to root out corruption were more likely to support the ANC than those who disagreed with this sentiment, with the likelihood of supporting the ANC rising by 16% for each additional degree of agreement, on a scale of 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree", *ceteris paribus*. Again, there is a cumulative effect here, when comparing those who disagreed strongly, with those who agreed strongly with the statement. In Wave 2 we found that respondents who believed that corruption had increased in the last year were about half as likely to vote for the ANC than those who did not believe corruption had increased (similar to the finding from Wave 1).

In terms of race, black is taken as the reference category. Therefore, each other race is contrasted to the likelihood of a black respondent supporting the ANC. We find that black respondents are 7 times as likely as Indian/Asian respondents, 14 times as likely as coloured respondents and 20 times as likely as white respondents to support the ANC over an opposition party, *ceteris paribus*. In the previous study, we found that black respondents were about 6 times likelier to support the ANC than Indians/Asian respondents, almost 8 times likelier to support the ANC than coloured respondents, and almost 17 times likelier to support the ANC than white respondents.

In each of the three waves whether respondents actually received a grant or not is not significant. In contrast, the fear of losing grants matters. On a scale of 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree", a unit increase in agreement with the statement "I am afraid that if another party comes to power social grants will stop" means a respondent is 13% more likely to support the ANC over an opposition party. So, someone who strongly agrees with the statement is 61% more likely to support the ANC than someone who strongly disagrees with the statement. In the previous study we found that respondents who agreed with the statement were more than twice as likely to be ANC supporters than those who disagreed, with all other things being equal. This was found to be the case in the first wave report too, where the odds of voting for the ANC increased by a factor of 2,684 for respondents who agreed that they are "afraid that if another party comes to power social grants will stop".

ALTERNATIVE SCENARIO

In addition to the basic model we ran a second model.

The second model includes an additional variable to indicate whether recipients answered that their reason for party choice was that they believed the party "brought freedom and democracy". Furthermore, Trust in the Presidency under President Ramaphosa is added to the model as a separate variable, and the governance index is amended to exclude this variable. In the previous wave we also included an additional variable for whether respondents supported land expropriation with or without compensation, but the question was dropped from the third wave.

We include 1754 cases in the analysis, excluding 1705 cases due to missing data. As before, the two additional models were satisfactory for collinearity and good fit.

Table 3: Variables in the equation, Model 2 Trust in Ramaphosa as a separate variable

								95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
		B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp(B)	Lower	Upper
Step 1a	Governance*	-0,058	0,091	0,407	1	0,523	0,943	0,789	1,128
	SocEcRights	0,017	0,077	0,048	1	0,826	1,017	0,874	1,183
	DemocRights	-0,190	0,079	5,734	1	0,017	0,827	0,708	0,966
	Corruption	0,191	0,062	9,413	1	0,002	1,211	1,072	1,368
	Age	0,193	0,128	2,277	1	0,131	1,213	0,944	1,558
	White	-3,026	0,287	111,464	1	0,000	0,049	0,028	0,085
	Indian/Asian	-1,910	0,308	38,424	1	0,000	0,148	0,081	0,271
	Coloured	-2,734	0,226	146,904	1	0,000	0,065	0,042	0,101
	Income	-0,009	0,010	0,832	1	0,362	0,991	0,972	1,010
	Area	0,192	0,181	1,133	1	0,287	1,212	0,851	1,726
	NotWorking	-0,376	0,226	2,765	1	0,096	0,686	0,440	1,070
	Unemployed	-0,232	0,198	1,374	1	0,241	0,793	0,539	1,168
	Education	-0,053	0,068	0,613	1	0,434	0,948	0,830	1,083
	Gender	0,209	0,146	2,047	1	0,152	1,233	0,926	1,642
	Grant	-0,095	0,173	0,305	1	0,581	0,909	0,648	1,276
	Fear of Loss of Grant	0,114	0,060	3,557	1	0,059	1,121	0,996	1,262
	Freedom and Democracy to SA	0,820	0,140	34,123	1	0,000	2,271	1,725	2,990
	Trust in Ramaphosa	1,686	0,164	105,535	1	0,000	5,399	3,914	7,447
	Constant	0,443	0,571	0,600	1	0,438	1,557		

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Governance, SocEcRights, DemocRights, Corruption, Age, White, IndAsian, Coloured, Income, Area, NotWorking, Unemployed, Education, Gender, Grant, Fear of Loss of Grant, Freedom and Democracy to SA, Trust in Ramaphosa.

***Governance excludes Trust in President Ramaphosa**

In this model, governance, amended to exclude Trust in the Presidency, is not significant; nor are socio-economic rights regarded as important. The importance of democratic rights to respondents and their perception of corruption are found to be significant. Race is once again a significant predictor of party choice, but the fear of loss of social grant is no longer significant.⁹ The two additional variables included in this model – citing as a reason for party choice that the party brought freedom and democracy to South Africa, and Trust in the Presidency under President Ramaphosa – are both significant.

The magnitude of effect of perception of importance of democratic rights, perception of corruption and race are all significant in determining the likelihood of voting ANC. These factors are similar in this model compared to that of the first, explained above.

We look now at the additional variables included in Model 2. The first was whether a respondent's reason for choosing a party was because the party was perceived to have "brought freedom and democracy to the

⁹ At the 10% significance level fear of loss of grant is significant.

country" also referred to as party loyalty. In 2017 with Jacob Zuma as the president of the country, party loyalty was not a significant predictor of voter choice. This changed in 2018 following the appointment of Cyril Ramaphosa as president. Consequently, party loyalty became a predictor of voter choice. In this report, respondents who offered this reason for party choice were more than twice as likely to vote ANC over an opposition party compared to those who did not provide this reason. This suggests party loyalty is still important to voters.

Trust in the Presidency is measured on a scale of 1 "very unlikely to trust the institution" to 5 "very likely to trust the institution". We recode this variable as a binary variable included in the model, such that Trust in the Presidency = 0 if respondents said they were "unlikely" or "very unlikely" or "neither likely or unlikely" to trust in the presidency and 1 if respondents said they were "likely" or "very likely" to trust in the presidency. The odds of a respondent voting for the ANC increase by a factor of 5,399 (more than 5 times as likely) for those who trust in the Presidency (about 56% of respondents) compared to those who distrust in the presidency or felt neutral about the presidency. In the previous report, those who trusted in the presidency under Ramaphosa were 60% more likely to support the ANC over an opposition party than those who did not trust in the presidency.

COMPARISON ACROSS THREE WAVES: WHICH FACTORS MATTER MOST?

After losing significant support in 2017, the ANC gained potential voters in 2018 (Wave 2) and 2019 (Wave 3), while the DA lost support in wave 2, and this remained unchanged in Wave 3. The EFF gained support in Wave 2 and then again lost support in Wave 3. Against this backdrop, the three surveys, one conducted 14 months after the local government elections in 2016 (with President Zuma still in power), the second conducted six months before the general elections in 2019, and the third conducted six months later, provide important insights into the factors that influence voter choice of South Africans.

The view of respondents on corruption was a consistent predictor of voter choice over all three years of the study. In 2017 more than three quarters of respondents were of the view that corruption had increased over the past three years, but the proportion that felt this way reduced slightly in 2018 (72%). In response to the revised question in the third survey, 39% of respondents thought that not enough was being done to root out corruption, compared to 37% who agreed enough was being done. Those who agreed enough was being done were more likely to vote for the ANC, while those who disagreed tended to prefer an opposition party. Views on corruption were an underlying factor that influenced party choice in the run-up to the 2019 elections and also six months after the elections.

Trust in the Jacob Zuma presidency was at an all-time low (26%) in 2017 just before the ANC's electoral conference. Loss of trust in Zuma, due to allegations of corruption and state capture, resulted in the lowest support recorded for the ANC (53%) since 1994 and gains for the two opposition parties. However, ANC support has been declining since 2004, when its support peaked at 69%. In 2019, the two opposition parties, the DA and the EFF, gained support as anti-corruption campaigns gained traction and shifted support away from the ANC. During the Zuma presidency the ANC also lost significant support among women voters. Concerns about socio-economic well-being, ineffective governance and corruption, and fear of loss of a social grant if a person voted for another party were factors that began to hold sway as predictors of vote choice.

This political scenario changed significantly in the second and third surveys due to the leadership changes in the ANC. Trust in the presidency of Cyril Ramaphosa and his growing popularity helped the ANC to grow its support in 2018 and in 2019 respectively, with declining support for the opposition parties, the DA and the EFF. Trust in the Ramaphosa presidency emerged as a significant predictor of voter choice for the governing party in the second and third surveys. The leadership changes brought back supporters of the ANC, including women voters, and party loyalty emerged once again as an important predictor of voter choice in 2018 and 2019. Thus, trust in Ramaphosa and his popularity helped the ANC. For some, he represented a possible pathway out of the quagmire of the Zuma administration and a hope for a better future, which seemed to overshadow concerns about rising poverty, unemployment, inequality and poor service delivery amidst constant exposure in the media of corruption and state capture.

Despite the declining support base for the Zuma presidency in 2017, trust in institutions remained mostly favourable at this time. The lowest levels of trust recorded were in the South African Police Service and Parliament. In the second and third surveys, trust in SASSA increased in Wave 2 but declined a little in Wave 3. Trust in institutions that are crucial to the delivery capability of the state to improve human well-being, such as the Department of Social Development and SASSA, was fairly high over the three surveys. On the one hand, this is somewhat puzzling given the exposure of administrative and management challenges, tender

irregularities and political interference by the Minister of Social Development, which placed the delivery of social grants at risk. On the other hand, support for these institutions could also be interpreted as a vote of confidence in the social grants system and the agencies delivering cash transfers to over 17 million people at the time the survey was conducted.

Across the three surveys, perceptions of corruption remained a significant predictor of party choice of South Africans. Those who believed that corruption had increased and those who thought that government was doing poorly in rooting out corruption were more likely to vote for an opposition party. The converse was true for those who thought that corruption had declined or that government was addressing the challenge satisfactorily.

Turning to the relative importance of democratic rights over socio-economic well-being, voters favoured socio-economic rights, which was a significant predictor of party choice in 2017 (45%) and more so in 2018 (60%). Instead of framing these questions as a trade-off between democracy and socio-economic well-being in the third survey, respondents affirmed the importance of democratic rights (67%), followed by socio-economic rights (59%) in the 2019 survey. The regression model validated the importance of democratic rights, which was a significant predictor of party choice in 2019.

Socio-economic well-being was not a predictor of party choice of those who voted in the 2019 general elections compared to the previous two surveys, but it certainly looms large in voter choices, with almost six out of ten potential respondents citing this as their most important reason for their choice of a party. This should be interpreted against worsening poverty and unemployment rates in South Africa since 2011, when poverty rates began to rise again in the country (World Bank 2018). Unemployment rose from 25% in 2015 to 27% in 2017 and increased to 29% in 2019 when the third survey was conducted.¹⁰ It was therefore not surprising that in response to the question asked in the 2019 survey about what government should prioritise because it cannot do everything, the top priorities for Wave 3 respondents were job creation (29%), the need to increase the value of social grants and give more people social grants (14%), build more houses (9%), and provide feeding schemes for poor families (8%). Other priorities cited ranged between 5% and 6% and included the creation of safer communities, land for small farmers and improving the quality of education and the provision of better-quality basic services. This accords with the most frequently selected reason for choosing a particular party across all three waves as being the hope that the party would bring a better life.

In Wave 3, fear of loss of a grant if another party came to power was not significant, despite being a significant predictor of voter choice in the previous two surveys. The proportion of grant recipients who said they voted ANC rose from 73% in the first and second waves to 75% in the third wave. Non-recipients of grants supporting the ANC also increased from 61% in Wave 1 to 66% in Wave 2 to 70% in Wave 3. The evidence does, however, point to grant recipients being more likely to vote for the ANC than non-grant recipients. These findings are statistically significant, but the magnitude of the effect remained small across all the waves. This is contrary to public opinion expressed in the media that grant receipt is a form of clientelism and that it serves to increase electoral support for the governing party. Whether this small effect will continue into the future remains to be seen in light of the expansion of temporary social assistance to mitigate the social and economic costs of the lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. These measures are likely to continue in the short to medium term to boost economic recovery and poverty alleviation.

Finally, across all three surveys, black Africans were more likely to vote for the governing party compared to other race groups, with white and Indian respondents more likely to vote for an opposition party. Age was a predictor, with older persons being more likely to favour the governing party compared to younger respondents in Wave 1, but this was not a predictor of party choice in Wave 3. Also, while women were less likely to vote for the governing party in 2017 during the Zuma presidency, this was no longer the case in 2018 and 2019. Other demographic factors such as unemployment, which is unusually high in South Africa, was not a predictor of voter choice across all three waves, and the level of education of a potential voter was significant only in the first survey. In 2018, wealthier respondents were less likely to vote for the ANC, while those from lower-income groups were more likely to do so. Income as a predictor of voter choice was not a factor in the first and final surveys. Likewise, those with more education were less likely to vote for the ANC in 2018 compared to those with lower levels of education, and here too, education was not a predictor in the first and last survey.

¹⁰ <https://tradingeconomics.com/south-africa/unemployment-rate>



CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that multiple factors influenced voter choice over the three surveys and that voters increasingly based their decisions on rational considerations in response to a changing political landscape. What has been most telling over these dramatic three years was the importance of trust in the president of the country as a significant predictor of choice of a party. The knock-on effect of increased trust in Ramaphosa's presidency gave rise to the re-emergence of party loyalty as a second predictor of party choice in 2018 and 2019. The third predictor of party choice over the study period was the concern about either increasing levels of corruption or whether enough was being done to root out corruption. Fourthly, socio-economic well-being was a predictor of party choice in 2017 and 2018, while support for democratic rights emerged as a predictor in 2019. Fifthly, social grant receipt was not a predictor of choice of a political party, but fear of loss of a social grant if another party came to power was influential in party choice in 2017 and 2018. Finally, black Africans were more likely to choose the ANC compared to other race groups who were less likely to do so, although this occurred to varying degrees.

Each of the above factors may be influential on its own in a person's party choice, while for others a combination of factors may have greater weight. It is also evident that particular contextual factors at a particular conjuncture may hold greater sway for potential voters, such as corruption and state capture or whether there has been a concerted effort to address these issues. The political leadership of Cyril Ramaphosa was a key factor for those who chose the governing party despite its abysmal track record on corruption. His appointment as leader of the ANC and president of the country gave voters the hope of a cleaner government. Those who thought that more needed to be done to root out corruption were more likely to support an opposition party.

The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 has deepened pre-existing socio-economic challenges facing the country and has resulted in a significant contraction of the economy, loss of employment and income, and rising hunger, poverty and inequality (NIDS-CRAM 2020). Concerns about socio-economic well-being and whether enough is being done to address corruption are likely to be important factors in voter choice in future elections. Unless tangible changes are made in meeting these challenges, in ending the impunity of those involved in state capture, and in leading economic recovery, inclusive growth and employment creation, voters are likely to turn away from supporting the governing party in future elections.

Notes

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Similar research questions were asked across the three waves. These included: (1) why you supported the party you voted for on the national ballot paper in the May 2019 elections. The respondent was asked to select the top three reasons in a list of 16 options. (2). Which party did you vote for? A list of parties on the ballot was supplied. (3) On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, please tell me your view on the following statements relating to: view on democratic rights; socio-economic well-being, enough is being to root out corruption; and I am afraid that if another party comes to power social grants will stop. (4). Trust in institutions was assessed with reference to seven statements relating to trust in the President (Cyril Ramaphosa); trust in the Courts; the Department of Social Development; parliament; SA Police Service; media and the SA Social Security Agency (SASSA). In Wave 3 an additional question was asked about government priorities. It was formulated as follows: The government is not able to address all the needs of the people at the same time. Which of the following three should be prioritised from a list of 12 options such as housing, social grants, safety and the like?

TEST FOR RELIABILITIES

We constructed the Governance variable as a composite indication of level of trust in institutions, by calculating the average score of a respondent for seven questions gauging level of trust in various institutions in South Africa.

We tested the reliability of the items of the Governance factor in measuring trust in institutions using Cronbach's Alpha, which measured 0,88. According to Pavot, Diener, Colvin and Sandvik (1991) there is good internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha coefficient reported of at least 0,85. Values above 0.7 are considered to be acceptable (Pallant, 2007). This factor is therefore a reliable measure of trust in institutions (which here we term "governance").

We amended the Governance index to exclude the question on whether respondents trust in the Presidency in the second model, as this question was used as a separate predictor in the model. When the Governance index is amended to exclude Trust in the Presidency under President Ramaphosa the measure for Cronbach's Alpha is 0,86. This suggests there is still good internal consistency reliability for the index.

FISCHER'S TEST OF STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE

i. Comparison of grant recipients vs. non-recipients in voting choice

Using Fisher's Exact Test, we show that there is a statistically significant difference between grant recipients and non-recipients in terms of voter choice. The Fisher's Exact Test p-value is 0,004. Those who received a grant were more likely to vote for the ANC than those who did not. The magnitude of the effect, however, is small. The phi coefficient value is 0,057. This is considered small using Cohen's (1988) criteria of 0,10 for small effect; 0,30 for medium effect; and 0,50 for large effect.

ii. Comparison of male vs. female grant recipients and non-recipients, in terms of voter choice

We found no statistically significant difference between grant recipients and non-recipients in voter choice disaggregated by gender; Fisher's Exact Test p-value measured 0,106 for males and 0,067 for females.

iii. Comparison of young, middle-aged and old respondents in voter choice

We found no statistically significant difference between young, middle-aged and old voters in voting preference, using the Pearson chi-square goodness-of-fit test. Chi-square (2, n = 2500) = 1.635, p = 0,441.

TEST FOR COLLINEARITY AND GOODNESS OF FIT

We tested for multicollinearity to confirm that the correlation between independent variables in the model was not too high (Pallant 2007). We measured VIF (variance inflation factor) and tolerance. Tolerance measures how much variability of the specified independent variable is not explained by the other independent variables in the model. Tolerance is measured between 0 and 1, with values closer to 1 showing the absence of collinearity concerns. VIF is the inverse of the tolerance value. The VIF values examined were close to 1, which is acceptable. We were satisfied that there were no concerns of collinearity in our model and that the regression coefficients rendered below were indeed the factors that were the likely predictors of voter preferences.

We used Cox & Snell R Square and Nagelkerke R Square values to assess the amount of variation in the dependent variable that is explained by the model (Pallant, 2007). The R-square value measured 0,226 using the Cox & Snell test and 0,338 using the Nagelkerke test.

MODEL SUMMARY

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	1499.402 ^a	0,226	0,338

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 5 because parameter estimates changed by less than ,001.

The Hosmer and Lemeshow test is used to test the goodness of fit of the model, as the most reliable test of model fit said to be available in SPSS, the software package used for analysis. Poor fit is indicated by a significance value of less than 0,05. The significance value below measures 0,578. We are therefore satisfied that the model is a good fit.

HOSMER AND LEMESHOW TEST

Step	Chi-square	df	Sig.
1	6,625	8	0,578

We find the second model similarly satisfactory for collinearity and good fit.

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