

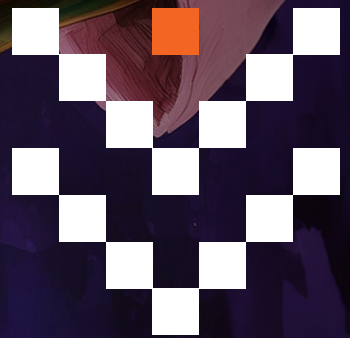
RESEARCH BRIEF

Factors determining voter choice in South Africa's 2024 national general elections



UNIVERSITY
OF
JOHANNESBURG

CENTRE FOR
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
IN AFRICA



LEILA PATEL, YOLANDA SADIE AND JACLYN DE KLERK

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PO Box 524, Auckland Park, 2006, Gauteng, South Africa

Email: Csdainfo@uj.ac.za

Website: www.uj.ac.za/faculties/humanities/csda

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About the authors: Leila Patel is a distinguished professor of Social Development Studies at CSDA, University of Johannesburg; Yolanda Sadie is a professor emerita in Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Johannesburg; and Jaclyn de Klerk is a senior statistician at Statistical Consultation Service, University of Johannesburg.

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Introduction

This research brief presents the findings of wave 5 of the study to assess what factors are likely to influence voter choice in the run up to South Africa's 2024 national and provincial elections in May 2024. Researchers used the same theoretical model that was developed and tested in the previous four waves in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020. Explanatory theories of voting behaviour – why people vote for a particular party – include the rational choice theory. This theory contends that voters make choices based on their self-interest, with a strong emphasis on prospective voters' agency (Patel et al., 2021). The clientelist theory is another widely posited explanation for voter party choice in South Africa. Some researchers and political analysts argue that the social grants system constitutes a form of patronage or vote buying (Brooks, 2023). The sociological model is also widely used to explain voting behaviour based on age, race, gender, income, employment/unemployment, geographic location and education. Other explanations of voter choice emphasise trust in government institutions, trust in the presidency and parliament, levels of corruption, and trust in the party leader as possible reasons for party choice. In our explanatory model, this is referred to as governance, which we go on to discuss in this research brief. Lastly, party loyalty has also been found to be influential in explaining voter preferences in our previous surveys (Patel et al., 2021).

In wave 5, conducted in 2023, we were particularly interested in understanding the role of social grants and concerns about socioeconomic wellbeing and the implementation of citizens' socioeconomic rights in voter choice. In previous waves we found that receiving a social grant was not a significant predictor of voter choice. But people's fear of loss of a grant was significant across all four previous waves. Since our 2020 survey, the social grants system has expanded significantly from 18 million to between 25 and 27 million recipients at different times. This was prompted by the introduction of the Social Relief of Distress Grant (SRD) in 2020 to mitigate the financial and employment impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on vulnerable individuals and their households. The Department of Social Development (DSD) estimates that 47% of the population receive one or more social grants (SASSA, 2023). The SRD resulted in the expansion of the reach of social grants and also the introduction of new groups, 'welfare outsiders' being included, such as adult unemployed persons and those who are informally employed. The SRD is a temporary grant and has been extended until the end of March 2025. The government has expressed strong commitment to the introduction of a Basic Income Grant (BIG), but no details are available of how the SRD will be reconfigured.

Against this backdrop of social grant expansion among voting adults, and especially among youth, little is known about what the potential impact the grants system on voter choice is likely to be. In the authors' previous studies, and confirmed by Seekings (2019), being a grant recipient was not a predictor of voter choice. Fear of losing one's grant if one voted for an opposition party was highly significant in previous waves. In a contested election, such as South Africa's 2024 election, where different polls show that the governing party, the African National Congress (ANC) is likely to fall below 50%, the impact of the grants system on electoral choice might be different to the previous four surveys conducted between 2017 and 2020. High unemployment rates, persistently high rates of poverty, poor service delivery, and a stagnant economy that is not creating much-needed jobs, are economic factors that might be more pertinent for voters in 2024, along with corruption and possible loss of trust in the governing party.

For wave 5, it is these questions, along with the other factors associated with voting behaviour already referred to, that we probed in the statistical regression model. The aim was to understand the relationship between voter party choice and the factors that influence these choices in the forthcoming national general elections. We also explored respondents' views about different configurations of coalition governments at national level, and respondents' party-political affiliation.

On behalf of the CSDA, Ipsos Public Affairs, a global market research company and public opinion specialist, conducted the field work between October and December 2023. A nationally representative sample of 3 600 respondents was drawn by Ipsos stratified by province and smaller geographic and settlement features. At a "small place" level probability proportionate to size (PPS) was used to determine sample points. In the vicinity of each sample point six interviews were conducted, as prescribed by Ipsos's Marketing Science team. Households were chosen at random and within a household the person to be interviewed was also chosen at random, ensuring representation by age, gender and race. Three efforts (including weekend and evening calls) were made to ensure an interview with the chosen respondent.

The sample informing the analysis for this study is 3 511. Five questions with options were included in Ipsos's Khayabus survey. See the research questions in Appendix 1. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with respondents in their preferred home languages. The error margin of the survey at a 95% confidence interval is a maximum of plus or minus 1.8% (Ipsos, 2024). The descriptive statistics and the cross tabulations were weighted to the national population. At the time the survey was conducted, the uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MK Party) was not registered, and therefore not included in party choice in the survey. Jaclyn de Klerk, senior statistician at the Statistical Consultation Service, UJ analysed the data.

A limitation of the wave 5 survey is that some of the questions changed in the model while others remained the same. This means that the wave 5 results are not strictly comparable in some respects with previous waves. However, the same

theoretical model to determine voting behaviour was used, and comparisons are made on questions that did not change over the 5 waves relating to social grants, reasons for party choice, demographic and sociological factors, party loyalty and trust in the country's presidency of Cyril Ramaphosa.

Descriptive statistics

Profile of participants

In total, the sample for this analysis included 3 511 respondents, split roughly in half by gender with 51% women and 49% men. The majority of respondents live in urban areas (67%) compared to rural (33%). Most of the sample is made up of young people, with 51% aged 18–34 years, 41% aged 35–60 years, and 8% older than 60 years. Regarding racial composition, 9% is white, 79% black African, 3% Indian/Asian and 10% coloured.

Of the total sample, 43% are working, 20% are not economically active, and 37% are unemployed – using the combined categories of both “looking for work” and “no longer looking for work”. Almost half (45%) of the respondents who disclosed their income earn less than R8 000 a month. About 14% earn more than R10 000 a month. Thirty-seven percent of respondents refused to disclose their income. In line with the number of unemployed respondents, 43% of all respondents receive a government grant. Only a small percentage have higher degrees of education: of the total, 0.9% have no schooling or only some primary schooling 2.6%, 3.4% have completed primary school, 28.2% have some high school education, and 49.3% have completed Matric (Grade 12, the last year of high school). Only 9% have a tertiary education qualification with a Technikon diploma or degree, 4.5% have a university degree, and 1.4% have some other post-matric qualification.

Party choice

We asked respondents who they would vote for in the upcoming national election in 2024: 33% said ANC, 19% said Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), and 15% said the Democratic Alliance (DA). Twelve percent said they would vote for other opposition parties, and 21% said either they would not vote, refused to say, were not registered, or did not know who they would vote for. See Figure 1. These results refer to the whole Ipsos sample regardless of whether the respondent was registered or not registered to vote.

ANC support has fallen substantively from previous waves where it hovered at just over 50%. The EFF by contrast looks to be a far more popular choice than previously seen in the survey data. It has almost doubled since our 2020 survey. Support for the DA is consistent with what we saw in previous waves.

Twenty-one percent of participants refused to say who they would vote for, or said they did not know who they would vote for, or that they would not vote, or were not registered to vote at the time of the survey in October– December 2023. But they may decide to cast their votes on election day.

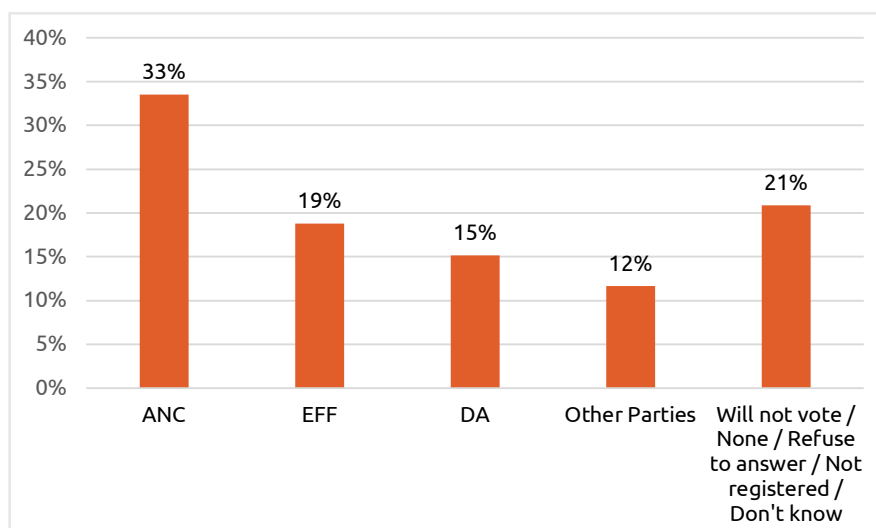


Figure 1: Participants' party choices

To note is that this survey was done before the establishment of former State President Jacob Zuma's very new MK Party which officially registered with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) in December 2023. This party could be a threat to the ANC and the EFF as indicated in an Ipsos poll released on 26 April 2024, one month before the elections. The ANC polled 40.2%, DA 21.9%, EFF 11.5%, MK Party 8.4%, IFP 4.4%, Action SA 3.4%, FF+ 1.8% and other parties 8.4% (Ipsos, 26 April, 2024).

Participants' reasons for their party choice

In the survey, when asked why a respondent would choose a specific party in the 2024 election, they could offer up to five reasons. The most frequently cited reason was that the party will create jobs (55% of respondents), followed by the party promises to improve people's lives (49%), the party will improve service delivery (48%) and it pays social grants (44%). This excludes respondents who did not know or refused to answer (9%). See Figure 2. In this wave, the top five reasons are ranked slightly differently compared to previous waves, and they are centred on improving people's lives. In previous waves, reasons for party choice were the same, such as the party will bring a better life followed by it is a party for all South Africans, trust in the party and the party brought freedom and democracy.

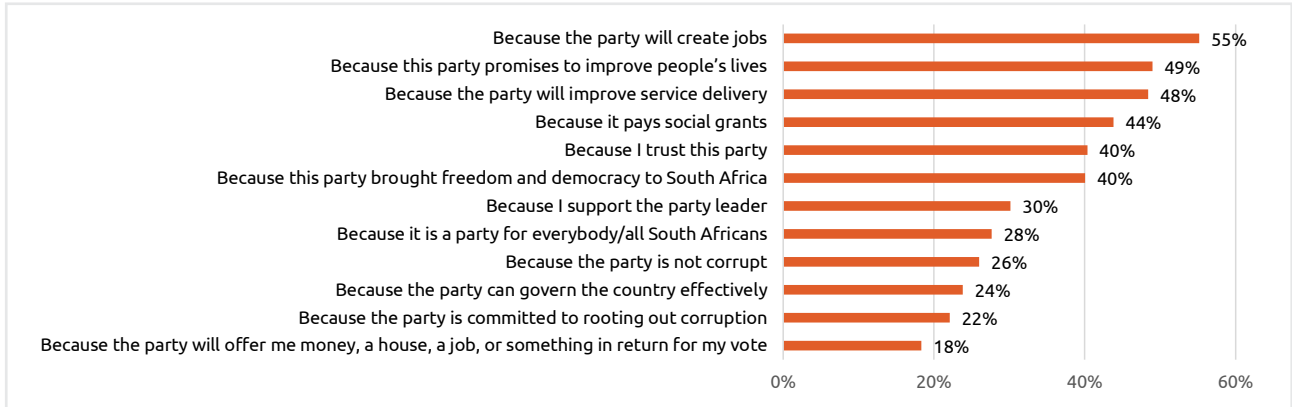


Figure 2: Participants' reasons for their party choice

Does receiving a social grant matter in voter preferences?

We compared party choice among government social grant recipients and non-recipients. We tested whether receiving a grant impacted respondents' choice of party, such as either voting for the ANC or an opposition party. Of the respondents who received a grant from the government, 47% said that they would vote ANC, and 53% would vote for an opposition party. Of the non-recipients, 39% said they would vote ANC and 61% said they would vote for an opposition party. A statistically significant difference was found by the Fisher's Exact Test (p -value < 0.001), though small ($\Phi = 0.081$), between grant recipients and non-recipients in voting preference.

In previous waves, when asked this question, almost two-thirds of respondents said they would vote ANC. Grant recipients showed stronger support (by 8%) for the ANC relative to non-recipients. This is similar to 2020 when the benefit to the ANC was 7%. Figure 3 shows that more grant recipients expressed a preference for an opposition party (53%, up from 26% in 2020) compared to the ANC (down from 74% to 47% in 2020). This suggests a significant grant beneficiaries' shift in wave 5 in their voting preferences compared to previous surveys.

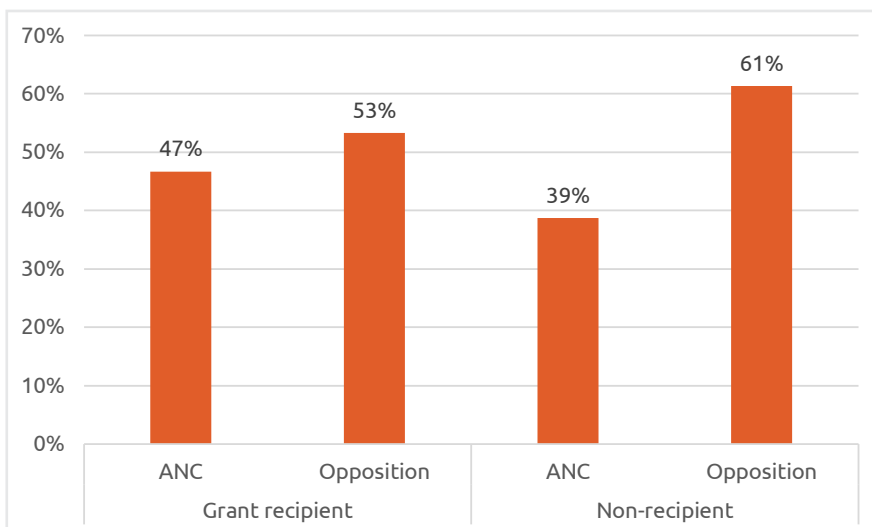


Figure 3: Comparing grant recipients with non-recipients in voting choice

It is important to note that since the SRD grant was introduced in 2020 the composition of grant recipients may differ in this wave compared to previous waves. The SRD expanded the number of grant recipients by between 7 million and

10 million at different times. This is far beyond the numbers in previous waves. This shift might be because opposition parties have increasingly come out in support of the social grant system. For example, the DA has been promising to increase the child support grant from R510 a month to R760 a month in line with the Stats SA's food poverty line. Opposition party Action SA said the R350 SRD grant is too low and that the people of SA deserve more. The Multi-Party Charter pledged to increase social grants above the poverty line (Multi-Party Charter 2024).

When disaggregated for gender, a similar picture emerged. A greater proportion of both male and female grant recipients said they would vote ANC compared to non-recipients. But among all groupings, more respondents said they would vote for an opposition party. Previously, a statistically significant difference of voting choice was found between female grant recipients and female non-recipients only. Now we see a statistically significant relationship existing for both females and males, though the difference is small. A Fisher's Exact Test was done with a p-value = 0.007 and Phi = 0.072 for the females; and a p-value = 0.002, and Phi = 0.083 for the males. The greatest proportion of ANC supporters remains amongst female grant recipients, but a similar proportion of male grant recipients said they will vote ANC. This may be because the number of men receiving grants is far greater than before – since more men became recipients of the SRD grant – and therefore a bigger sample is possible of male grant recipients.

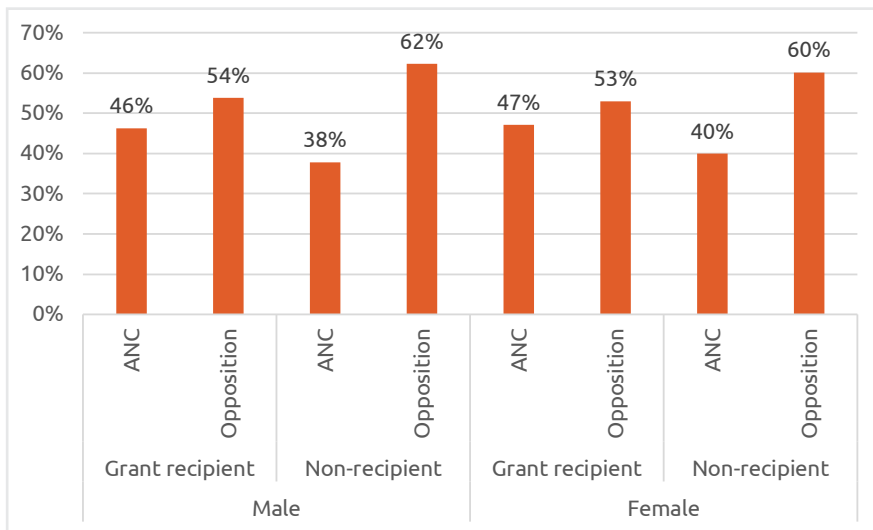


Figure 4: Comparison in voter choice between male and female grant recipients and non-recipients

Support for a national coalition government

Figure 5 reflects respondents' views on support for a national coalition government. When asked about whether they are in principle in favour of a coalition government at national level after the elections, most respondents (38.9%) said no. Of the participants, 38.1% said it depends on who the coalition partners are. Of the former, the most negative are ANC supporters (40.1%) followed by EFF supporters (34.9%) and DA supporters (32.5%). Even though other smaller opposition parties are unlikely to win the elections, 38.1% of their supporters do not support a coalition government. The negative attitude towards a coalition government at national level is unsurprising given the poor track record in service delivery, governance and corruption in coalition governments at municipal and provincial levels.

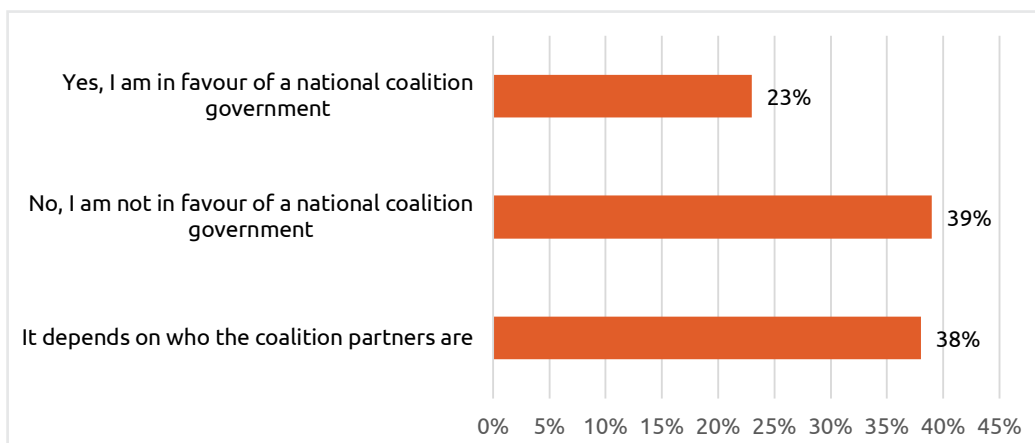


Figure 5: Respondents' support for a national coalition government

The regression model

We used a logistic regression model to test whether three independent variables are significant predictors of political party choice in elections. The model estimates the impact of three constructed independent variables on the likelihood that a respondent would vote for the ANC or an opposition party. They are participants’:

- perception of the importance of socioeconomic wellbeing;
- perception of governance; and
- perception of corruption.

The following unpacks how the independent variables were constructed.

The importance of socioeconomic wellbeing

We asked participants: What motivates you to vote for the party you indicated you would vote for in a national election in South Africa? Respondents had to select only their top five reasons out of 14 options. A value of 1 was assigned to respondents who listed one of these as their top reasons. Because the party:

- pays social grants;
- promises to improve people’s lives; or
- will improve service delivery.

A value of 0 was assigned if none of these reasons were listed.

Participants’ perception of governance

To measure participants’ perception of governance – trust in institutions – we constructed a variable by calculating the average score across three questions that measure a respondent’s trust in institutions. The three institutions included were: the Presidency (President Cyril Ramaphosa), Parliament, and the ANC government. The question was: How much [do] you trust each institution? We assigned an average score to each respondent’s answer, ranging from 1 to 5:

1. Not at all likely to trust
2. Not very likely to trust
3. Neither likely nor unlikely to trust
4. Very likely to trust
5. Extremely likely to trust

Participants’ perception of corruption

We used the question: What motivates you to vote for the party you indicated you would vote for in a national election in South Africa? Participants were asked to select their top five reasons only. A value of 1 was assigned to respondents who listed as one of their reasons: either because the party:

- is not corrupt
- is committed to rooting out corruption.

If neither of these reasons were listed, a value of 0 was assigned.

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

Control variables

We included variables to control for age, race, income level, urban/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.”

We used a scale variable ranging from 1 being ‘strongly disagree’ to 5 being ‘strongly agree’. Each unit increase represented a higher degree of agreement with the statement.

Note

We conducted statistical tests and found the regression model is satisfactory for collinearity and a good fit. 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 0,199 using the Cox & Snell test and 0,282 using the Nagelkerke test. See appendices 2 and 3 for the model summary of collinearity and goodness of fit.

Findings of the logistic regression model

The results from the logistic regression are shown in Table 1. Of the sample of 3 511 respondents, we excluded 1 843 from our analysis due to missing data.¹ The analysis was conducted on 1 668 cases.

Respondents' perception of governance and corruption are shown to be significant in determining whether a respondent voted for the ANC or an opposition party. Though the construction of variables differs from previous waves, the themes that emerge from this wave's findings echo previous themes. As in previous waves, the importance of socioeconomic wellbeing – previously categorised as socioeconomic rights' implementation – is not a significant predictor of party choice.

Age and race are statistically significant, as found previously, as are gender, and area participants were from either urban or rural. Notably, being a grant recipient is not a significant predictor, nor party choice nor the fear of loss of social grants if another party comes to power. Employment status, income and education level are not statistically significant and is therefore not a determinant of voter choice.

Three models are presented below. First, the results from our basic model, referred to as Model 1, is presented in Table 1. Model 1 includes the following variables: governance, socioeconomic wellbeing/rights, corruption, age, race (white, Indian/Asian, coloured, black African is the base reference variable for comparison), income, area, not working, unemployed, education, gender, grant receipt and fear of loss of grant. Next, the results for Model 2 are presented. This model includes two additional variables to the base model: loyalty to the party that brought freedom and democracy to South Africa and support for the leader of the party of their choice. In this case, it refers to any party that was selected. Model 3 includes two additional variables: loyalty to the party that brought freedom and democracy to South Africa and trust in presidency of Cyril Ramaphosa. In previous research, a comparison was conducted between trust in the presidency of Jacob Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa (Sadie and Patel 2020) and the Ramaphosa factor in voter choice was assessed in subsequent surveys (Patel et al., 2021).

¹ 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 example, we excluded all respondents who did not provide their income.

Model 1: Basic model of determinants of voter choice

Table 1: Basic model of determinants of voter choice

Determinants	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
Governance	0,883	0,066	178,390	1	0,000*** ²	2,418	2,124	2,752
Socioeconomic rights	0,042	0,151	0,076	1	0,783	1,042	0,775	1,402
Corruption	-0,477	0,122	15,340	1	0,000***	0,620	0,489	0,788
Age	0,436	0,103	17,951	1	0,000***	1,546	1,264	1,891
White	-2,069	0,509	16,537	1	0,000***	0,126	0,047	0,342
Indian/Asian	-2,448	0,647	14,296	1	0,000***	0,086	0,024	0,308
Coloured	-1,849	0,314	34,695	1	0,000***	0,157	0,085	0,291
Income	0,008	0,008	1,014	1	0,314	1,008	0,992	1,025
Area	0,279	0,129	4,658	1	0,031*	1,321	1,026	1,702
Not working	-0,028	0,186	0,023	1	0,879	0,972	0,676	1,399
Unemployed	-0,020	0,169	0,014	1	0,906	0,980	0,704	1,364
Education	-0,067	0,069	0,932	1	0,334	0,935	0,816	1,071
Gender	0,296	0,118	6,330	1	0,012**	1,344	1,068	1,693
Grant recipient	-0,202	0,140	2,098	1	0,147	0,817	0,621	1,074
Fear of loss of grant	0,044	0,043	1,061	1	0,303	1,045	0,961	1,136
Constant	-3,508	0,492	50,792	1	0,000***	0,030		

Governance

The higher the respondent's perception of good governance, that is, the higher their level of trust in institutions, the more likely it is that they would vote for the ANC. The odds of a respondent voting for the ANC increased by a factor of 2,418 for each additional unit of trust in institutions the respondent held, all other factors being equal. In other words, for each additional unit of trust, a respondent is two-and-a-half times more likely to vote ANC over an opposition party compared to someone exhibiting one unit less of trust on a scale from 1: very unlikely to trust in an institution to 5: very likely to trust in an institution.

Corruption

Respondents who think that corruption matters when they vote for a party are less likely to vote for the ANC over an opposition party. The odds of a respondent voting for the ANC decreased by a factor of 0,620 if their reason for party choice was either "The party is not corrupt" or "Because the party is committed to rooting out corruption". If we flip the odds ratio, we can see that those who do not give these reasons for party choice are 1.6 times or 61% more likely to support the opposition.

Age

The age variable is constructed in three categories: 18–34 years, 35–60 years and older than 60 years. Young people (18–34 years) are 55% (1.55 times) less likely to vote for the ANC over an opposition party when compared to the 35–60 year olds. The odds of a respondent voting for the ANC increased by a factor of 1,546 for each advance in age category, all other factors being equal. In other words, someone in the 35 to 60-year age group is 55% more likely to vote ANC over an opposition party when compared to someone in the 18–34 age group.

² * signifies a p-value (probability value) less than 0.05

** indicates a p-value less than 0.01

*** signifies a p-value less than 0.001

Race

The race category of black African is taken as the reference category for this research. Therefore, each other race is contrasted to the likelihood of a black African respondent supporting the ANC. We find that black African respondents are 12 times more likely than Indian/Asian respondents, six times more likely than coloured respondents, and eight times more likely than white respondents to support the ANC over an opposition party.

Area

For area, urban is coded as 0 and rural as 1. Respondents who live in rural areas are 32% more likely to vote ANC over an opposition party when compared to respondents who live in an urban area.

Gender

Male is coded as 0, and female as 1. This means that females are 34% more likely to vote ANC over an opposition party when compared to males.

Model 2: Basic model including party loyalty and support for party leader

Model 2 is presented in Table 2. It 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 to South Africa”. A variable indicating whether the reason for party choice was that the respondent “supports the party leader”. Note that this is not specific to any particular leader. The analysis was conducted on 1 668 cases. The additional model is satisfactory for collinearity and a good fit.

Perception of governance, perception of corruption, age, race and gender are statistically significant. Area is no longer significant. Both additional variables, party loyalty – the party “brought freedom and democracy to South Africa” – and support for the party leader are significant predictors of party choice.

Table 2. Basic model including party loyalty and support for party leader

Determinants	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
Governance	0,879	0,066	174,717	1	0,000***	2,407	2,113	2,742
Socioeconomic Rights/ Wellbeing	0,081	0,153	0,280	1	0,596	1,084	0,803	1,464
Corruption	-0,399	0,124	10,315	1	0,001***	0,671	0,526	0,856
Age	0,421	0,104	16,480	1	0,000***	1,523	1,243	1,867
White	-2,120	0,513	17,094	1	0,000***	0,120	0,044	0,328
Indian / Asian	-2,442	0,644	14,384	1	0,000***	0,087	0,025	0,307
Coloured	-1,850	0,317	34,130	1	0,000***	0,157	0,085	0,293
Income	0,010	0,008	1,292	1	0,256	1,010	0,993	1,026
Area	0,247	0,131	3,579	1	0,059	1,280	0,991	1,653
Not working	-0,012	0,186	0,004	1	0,950	0,988	0,686	1,424
Unemployed	0,005	0,169	0,001	1	0,977	1,005	0,721	1,400
Education	-0,046	0,070	0,437	1	0,508	0,955	0,833	1,095
Gender	0,294	0,118	6,147	1	0,013**	1,342	1,063	1,692
Grant recipient	-0,206	0,140	2,152	1	0,142	0,814	0,618	1,072
Fear of loss of grant	0,028	0,043	0,417	1	0,519	1,028	0,945	1,119
Freedom and democracy to South Africa	0,459	0,121	14,350	1	0,000***	1,583	1,248	2,007
Trust in party leader	0,315	0,131	5,727	1	0,017**	1,370	1,059	1,772
Constant	-3,858	0,503	58,757	1	0,000***	0,021		

Party brought freedom and democracy to South Africa

A respondent is 58% more likely to vote ANC over an opposition party if they listed “the party brought freedom and democracy to South Africa” as a reason for their party choice.

Trust in party leader

A respondent is 37% more likely to vote ANC over an opposition party, if they listed “support for party leader” as a reason for their party choice.

Model 3: Basic model including party loyalty and trust in President Cyril Ramaphosa

The results of Model 3 are presented in Table 3. Here the focus is specifically on the effect of support for President Cyril Ramaphosa on party choice. Trust in President Ramaphosa is added to the model as a separate variable. The governance index in the basic model is amended to exclude this variable. The analysis was conducted on 1 657 cases. As before, the additional model is satisfactory for collinearity and a good fit. As in the basic model, perception of governance, perception of corruption, age, race, area and gender are statistically significant. Both additional variables, party loyalty – the party brought freedom and democracy to South Africa – and trust in Ramaphosa are significant predictors of party choice.

Table 3: Basic model including party loyalty and trust in President Ramaphosa

Determinants	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
Governance	0,668	0,069	93,987	1	0,000***	1,949	1,703	2,231
Socioeconomic rights	0,094	0,153	0,376	1	0,540	1,098	0,814	1,482
Corruption	-0,413	0,125	10,995	1	0,001***	0,661	0,518	0,844
Age	0,447	0,104	18,462	1	0,000***	1,563	1,275	1,917
White	-2,079	0,510	16,643	1	0,000***	0,125	0,046	0,340
Indian /Asian	-2,487	0,644	14,889	1	0,000***	0,083	0,024	0,294
Coloured	-2,021	0,326	38,444	1	0,000***	0,133	0,070	0,251
Income	0,009	0,008	1,227	1	0,268	1,009	0,993	1,026
Area	0,274	0,130	4,447	1	0,035*	1,315	1,020	1,696
Not working	-0,045	0,187	0,058	1	0,809	0,956	0,663	1,378
Unemployed	-0,028	0,169	0,028	1	0,868	0,972	0,697	1,355
Education	-0,058	0,070	0,699	1	0,403	0,943	0,823	1,081
Gender	0,278	0,119	5,453	1	0,020*	1,320	1,046	1,667
Receipt of grant	-0,196	0,141	1,940	1	0,164	0,822	0,623	1,083
Fear of loss of grant	0,032	0,043	0,538	1	0,463	1,032	0,948	1,124
Freedom and democracy to South Africa	0,462	0,121	14,498	1	0,000***	1,587	1,251	2,014
Trust in President Ramaphosa	0,569	0,128	19,839	1	0,000***	1,767	1,376	2,270
Constant	-3,318	0,494	45,049	1	0,000***	0,036		

Party brought freedom and democracy to South Africa

A respondent is 59% more likely to vote ANC over an opposition party if they listed “the party brought freedom and democracy to South Africa” as a reason for their party choice.

Trust in President Ramaphosa

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 recoded this variable as a binary variable included in the model. If respondents said they were “unlikely”

or “very unlikely” or “neither likely nor unlikely” to trust in the presidency, their response was coded 0. If respondents said they were “likely” or “very likely” to trust in the presidency their response was coded 1. The odds of a respondent voting for the ANC increases by a factor of 1,767 (77% more likely to vote ANC over an opposition party) for those who trust in the presidency.

Conclusions

South Africa’s upcoming 2024 national general election is widely believed to be the most competitive election since the creation of a constitutional democracy in 1994. Various polls predict that the governing party is likely to lose its electoral majority. Limited research exists to help us understand why people vote for the parties they do. The question: “How will voters decide to cast their votes?” goes to the heart of efforts to understand individual voter’s attitudes and the social, economic and political factors that may influence their choices.

We designed a research model that tested different explanatory theories of voting behaviour between 2017 and 2020 in four waves, and again in 2023 with wave 5. Contrary to what one might expect given the declining living standards of the majority of the electorate, socioeconomic wellbeing is not a predictor of voters’ party-political choice. Neither is basic services delivery, nor fulfilment of socioeconomic rights.

The ANC has overseen the expansion of access to services for much of the population in its thirty years at the helm of the democratic government. But service delivery protests are on the rise across different municipalities led by different parties and civil society organisations. Interestingly, voter choice in this study is not determined by the receipt of social grants, or fear of losing a social grant should a new majority party come to power. The expanded base of grant recipients may be why this finding differs from previous waves – before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the largest number of grant recipients were women receiving the child support grant and the elderly receiving the old age pension. Now, many grant recipients are young and are unemployed adults who have different party loyalties to older generations.

The expansion of the social grants system, even though a large portion are temporary in nature, may have created a sense of security and comfort among social grant recipients about their right to social assistance. Since this research began, political parties, such as the official opposition the DA, the EFF and smaller parties have endorsed social grants as an important poverty reduction policy. The change in public discourse about the negative impact of social grants on dependency on the state, work seeking and childbearing towards its more positive effects on reducing poverty may be filtering through to grassroots voters, especially in a situation of extraordinary high unemployment of 32.1% in the fourth quarter of 2023 (Stats SA 2024). More telling is the finding in wave 5 that more grant recipients are now choosing opposition parties than in the four previous surveys. This is certainly an important change in trend.

However, this does not mean that socioeconomic wellbeing is unimportant to prospective voters. In fact, these issues are among the four top reasons for party choice: more than half chose their party because they believed it will create jobs (55%). This was followed by party promises to improve people’s lives (49% of respondents), improve service delivery (48% of respondents) and pay social grants (44% of respondents). It is likely that respondents anticipate that by voting for a particular party, they will achieve these social and economic outcomes. But other factors are also important predictors of party choice for them. We now turn to these.

Corruption was identified as highly significant in the first three surveys but not in the fourth. It appears government actions, such as the establishment of the Zondo Commission into state capture and corruption, were viewed positively in 2020. However, in 2023, corruption remains a significant predictor of voter choice. Those who are of the view that the government is corrupt and is not doing enough to root out corruption are more likely to vote for an opposition party than the ANC. That there are currently ongoing investigations and prosecutions might be a reason why some respondents may support the ANC.

Party loyalty, that is to the party that brought freedom and democracy to the country, is a persistent factor determining party choice. This is the case except for in 2017 during the last days of Jacob Zuma’s presidency of the ANC. In this 2023 survey, respondents were 58% more likely to choose the incumbent party – the ANC – than an opposition party if they selected party loyalty as their reason for party choice. Trust in the presidency of Cyril Ramaphosa increased gradually over the different waves. In fact, trust in the president increased from 54% in 2019 to 60% in 2020 and to 77% in 2023. Increased trust in Ramaphosa’s presidency in 2020 could be attributed to the government’s management of the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2023, the reason for this increase in trust of the president is unclear but may be attributed to him being outspoken on corruption and heralding prosecuting those who have been accused of corruption. Nevertheless, it does suggest that support for Ramaphosa is greater than that for the ANC. Furthermore, our findings confirm the importance of political party leadership as a predictor of voter choice. Four out of ten respondents selected trust in the party leader as one of their reasons for selecting their party. The new MK Party led by former ANC president and President Zuma, was not a party choice in the survey. It has, however, become prominent recently and is harnessing some support away from the ANC and the EFF, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal because of the party leader.

As has been the case in South Africa in our four past surveys, demographics are good predictors of party choice. Age, race, gender and urban/rural location are determinants of which party a person will vote for. Young people aged 18–34 years are more likely to vote for an opposition party compared to older persons aged 35–60 who are more likely to vote for the incumbent party, the ANC. Of the 27.7 million registered voters for the 2024 election, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) reported an increase in representation of young voters. They make up 42% – 11.7 million – of registered voters. Youth voter turnout in this election could have a significant impact on the outcome. For instance, a low youth voter turnout will not favour opposition parties such as the EFF whose major support come from the youth (see for example, Khambule 2021). Thus, partisanship appears to be weaker among youth which could be attributed to the absence of a generational attachment to the past.

Further, black African respondents are more likely to vote for the ANC compared to Indians/Asians, coloureds and whites. Women are 34% more likely to vote for the ANC than for an opposition party. In 2017, women's support for the ANC was not a predictor of party choice. But in subsequent surveys, including 2023, their support for the ANC was found to be a factor. Just over half (55%) of registered voters are women, according to the IEC. But few parties appear to target women voters. Income is not a predictor of party choice. This may be due to a large number of respondents declining to respond to the question of how much they earn.

If the ANC falls below the threshold to govern on its own, the country is likely to see its first national coalition government after the May 2024 national general elections. We find that the majority of South Africans (38.9%) are not in favour of a national coalition government. ANC supporters are least likely to support a coalition government at the national level (40.1%), followed by EFF supporters (34.9%), and DA supporters (32.5%). Interestingly, participants supporting the remaining smaller parties were least in favour of a coalition government at national level. For most of the parties, the question of who the coalition partners are likely to be was important to know in deciding whether to support coalitions or not. Supporters of the DA (44.5%) were most concerned about who the coalition partners might be compared to ANC supporters (33.9%), the EFF supporters (37.4%) and 43.1% for other party supporters. These findings are not a surprise given the poor track record in service delivery, governance and corruption in coalition governments at municipal and provincial levels. The lack of support for coalitions could influence undecided voters, estimated to be about 9%, to vote for the incumbent party, or any other of the larger parties to the detriment of the smaller parties. The argument could be that voters may feel it is better to have a strong party in power, whether at national or provincial levels, rather than coalition governments. The minority who supports coalitions may do so because of their positive experience of party coalitions in some municipalities, and because of South Africa's experience of a national coalition government, the Government of National Unity, in the mid-1990s.

In conclusion, voter choice, as our model suggests, may be influenced by a combination of factors. It may also be influenced by other factors not assessed in our model, such as concerns about violence and safety (Brooks 2023), and the campaign promises that parties make on socioeconomic issues such as job creation, efforts to address corruption, and what parties have achieved since the last election. Therefore, voter choice is not based on only one factor but on a combination of many complex factors. Although the relative importance of some of the factors changed over the duration of the study period between 2017 and 2023, the top level predictors remained largely unchanged, except for participants' fear of loss of a grant if another party came to power.

Appendix 1: Research questions

QUJ1	ASK ALL
	<p>READ OUT</p> <p>SHOW CARD QUJ1</p> <p>PROBE FULLY</p> <p>Earlier in this questionnaire, you were asked to indicate which party you would vote for in a national election. I do not want to know which party you are going to chose, but why did you choose the party you did for the national election? What motivates you to vote for this party to form a national government in South Africa?</p> <p>Select the top FIVE reasons only.</p>

1	Because it pays social grants	-1
2	Because this party brought freedom and democracy to South Africa	-2
3	Because this party promises to improve people's lives	-3
4	Because the party will improve service delivery	-4
5	Because the party will create jobs	-5
6	Because I support the party leader	-6
7	Because I trust this party	-7
9	Because it is a party for everybody / all South Africans	-9
11	Because the party will offer me money, a house, a job, or something in return for my vote	-11
12	Because the party is not corrupt	-12
13	Because the party is committed to rooting out corruption	-13
14	Because the party can govern the country effectively	-14
15	Don't know	-15
16	Refused to respond	-16

UJ2 SHOW CARD

I am going to read you two statements, would you please indicate your opinion on a scale of:

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neither agree nor disagree 4. Agree and 5. Strongly agree.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neiter agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
2.1 I am afraid that if another party comes to power the paying of social grants will stop	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	-99
2.2 I trust in the presidency (President Cyril Ramaphosa)	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	-99
2.3 I trust parliament	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	-99
2.4 I trust the ANC government	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	-99

UJ3 At this stage, nobody knows what the outcome of the 2024 National Election will be, but would you say that you are in principle in favour of the forming of a coalition government to rule the country on a National basis?

1. Yes, I am in favour of a national coalition government
2. No, I am not in favour of a national coalition government
3. It depends on who the coalition partners are
4. Don't Know

UJ4 Regardless of whether you are in principle in favour of a national coalition or not, would you support the following possible coalitions between different political parties? Please indicate your opinion on a scale of 1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neither agree nor disagree 4. Agree or 5. Strongly agree with such a coalition.

READ OUT EACH STATEMENT

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't Know
4.1 I will support a coalition between the ANC and the EFF						
4.2 I will support a coalition between the ANC and small parties and independents - without the EFF						
4.3 I will support a coalition between the DA and the ANC						
4.4 I will support a coalition between the DA and smaller parties and independents - without the ANC						
I will support a coalition between the DA and smaller parties and the EFF						
4.5 I will support a coalition between smaller parties, independents and the EFF						

P12.	Do you get any grant from the government?	
1	Yes	-1
2	No	-2

ASK IF YES IN QUESTION P12		
Which government grant do you receive?		
1	Social Relief of Distress grant (SRD) created to give temporary assistance to people in dire need, formed during the Covid-19 pandemic	
2	Care Dependency Grant (CDG) a social grant designed to fund a caregiver of a severely physically/ mentally disabled child	
3	Child Support Grant (CSG) was created to aid biological parent(s) or permanent caregivers who may not have the means to support their child/children	
4	Disability Grant (DG) is available to individuals who are unable to work owing to a disability	
5	Older person's grant (also known as an old age grant or old age pension) is for individuals over the age of 60	

6	Grant-In-Aid (GIA) is granted to individuals receiving Old Age, Disability, or War Veteran Grants in need of regular assistance owing to various disabilities	
7	War Veterans grant (WVG) is paid to individuals who served in the Second World War or Korean War	

For further reference, the following appendices show the summary of the models and the model fit.

Appendix 2: Model summary and goodness of fit

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	1774,986a*	0.257	0.344
2	1784,366a	0.266	0.355
3	1774,986a	0.265	0.354

In appendix 2, *a refers to an estimation terminated at iteration number 5 because parameter estimates changed by less than 0,001. 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 0,809. We are therefore satisfied that the model is a good fit.

Appendix 3: The Hosmer and Lemeshow Test

Step	Chi-square	df	Sig.
1	10.757	8	0.216

The above appendix 3 shows that the models in this study were satisfactory for collinearity and were a good fit.

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