

FreeFACTS

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Election turnout on the decline: Consequences for democracy?

It is something of a cliché, that when any South African election rolls around, there is talk of it being the ‘most important since the end of apartheid’. But every election is important, it provides a new government with a mandate, it shows us the trends of the electorate, and in some cases, leads to a change in government.

It is unlikely that much will change after this election – the only real race is in Gauteng, where it is possible that the governing African National Congress (ANC) could be brought under 50%, and a coalition could govern South Africa’s richest province after 8 May. Who participates in this coalition is the question. There are three likely options – a coalition between the ANC and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), the Democratic Alliance (DA), and the EFF, and (the least likely option) between the DA and ANC.

At a national level, the ANC is likely to win with a reduced majority, the DA is likely to remain static, while the EFF will grow, and possibly double its share of the vote.

But there are a large number of South Africans who are unrepresented by our political parties – these are people who simply do not vote or do not even register to vote. And this number is growing (as this edition of *FreeFacts* will show).

Of course, in a democracy deciding to not vote is as valid an action as deciding to vote. But it is worrying that a large proportion of South Africans do not feel that there is anybody who can represent them in Parliament. This has implications for the sustainability of democracy in this country. We have already seen how populists and radical politicians have emerged in Europe and other parts of the world, as people increasingly lose faith in traditional politics. This is also a serious threat here.

But no matter who you vote for on 8 May, enjoy your democratic right to help choose our leaders. And if you’re not voting, enjoy the day off!

— **Marius Roodt**

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The IRR is an advocacy group that fights for your right to make decisions about your life, family and business, free from unnecessary government, political, and bureaucratic interference. FreeFACTS publishes evidence that communities are better off when individuals are free to make decisions about how they want to live, be educated, work, access healthcare, think, speak, own property, and protect their communities. If you agree with the issues we stand for, welcome to the team. There are millions of people just like you who are tired of South African politicians, activists, and commentators attempting to rein in your freedom to decide. Take control and make sure your voice is heard by becoming a friend of the IRR.

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Elections 2019

The National Assembly

Seats currently held

Proportional representation and seats held by party, 1994-2014						
Party	1994		1999		2004	
	Seats	Proportion of the vote	Seats	Proportion of the vote	Seats	Proportion of the vote
ANC	252	62.7%	266	66.4%	279	69.7%
DA/DP ^a	7	1.7%	38	9.6%	50	12.4%
EFF	–	–	–	–	–	–
IFP	43	10.5%	34	8.6%	28	7.0%
UDM	–	–	14	3.4%	9	2.3%
FF+	9	2.2%	3	0.8%	4	0.9%
Cope	–	–	–	–	–	–
ACDP	2	0.5%	6	1.4%	7	1.7%
PAC	5	1.3%	3	0.7%	3	0.7%
NP/NNP ^b	82	20.4%	28	6.9%	7	1.7%
Other	–	–	8	2.2%	13	3.6%
Total^c	400	100.0%	400	100.0%	400	100.0%

Party	2009		2014	
	Seats	Proportion of the vote	Seats	Proportion of the vote
ANC	264	65.9%	249	62.2%
DA/DP ^a	67	16.7%	89	22.2%
EFF	–	–	25	6.4%
IFP	18	4.6%	10	2.4%
UDM	4	0.9%	4	1.0%
FF+	4	0.8%	4	0.9%
Cope	30	7.4%	3	0.7%
ACDP	3	0.8%	3	0.6%
PAC	1	0.3%	1	0.2%
NP/NNP ^b	–	–	–	–
Other	9	2.6%	10	3.4%
Total^c	400	100.0%	400	100.0%

Source: IEC, www.elections.org.za, accessed 6 December 2016

a In June 2000, the Democratic Party (DP) became the Democratic Alliance (DA).

b The National Party became the New National Party in 1997. It merged with the Democratic Party to become the DA in 2000, but soon left again. It finally merged with the ANC in 2005.

c Proportions may not add up vertically, owing to rounding.

This table reflects the share of the vote and parliamentary seats various parties have won since the end of apartheid.

Elections 2019

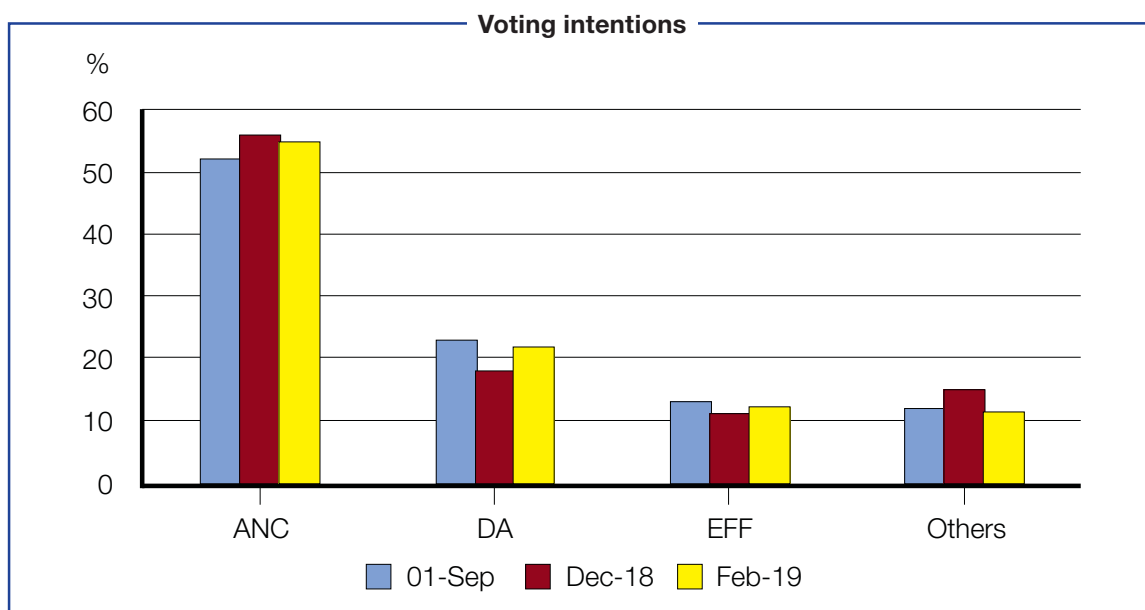
IRR polling for 2019			
Party	National polling		
	Sep-18	Dec-18	Feb-19
ANC	52.0%	56.0%	54.7%
DA	23.0%	18.0%	21.8%
EFF	13.0%	11.0%	12.2%
Others	12.0%	15.0%	11.3%

Source: Institute of Race Relations, *The Criterion Report*, Vol 2 No 1

	Gauteng (February 2019)	Western Cape (February 2019)
ANC	47.0%	30.0%
DA	37.0%	54.0%
EFF	11.0%	1.0%
Others	5.0%	15.0%

Source: Institute of Race Relations, *The Criterion Report*, Vol 2 No 1

The figures for Gauteng are modelled on a turnout scenario of 70.7%. For the Western Cape, the turnout scenario is 74.7%. These were the only provinces polling was provided for, as the samples in the other provinces were too small. It shows that the ANC is likely to lose its majority in Gauteng, and the province will be governed by a coalition. In the Western Cape the DA will still win a majority but about six percentage points lower than the 2014 election result. The DA will likely lose votes to Patricia de Lille's GOOD party, the Freedom Front Plus and the African Christian Democratic Party.



Elections 2019

Provincial legislatures: seats held over time, 1994-2009

Province	1994						Total
	ANC	NP ^a	IFP	FF+	DA/DP	Other	
Eastern Cape	48	6	–	–	1	1	56
Free State	24	4	–	2	–	–	30
Gauteng	50	21	3	5	5	2	86
KwaZulu-Natal	26	9	41	–	2	3	81
Limpopo	38	1	–	1	–	–	40
Mpumalanga	25	3	–	2	–	–	30
North West	26	3	–	1	–	–	30
Northern Cape	15	12	–	2	1	–	30
Western Cape	14	23	–	1	3	1	42
South Africa	266	82	44	14	12	7	425

Province	1999							Total
	ANC	NNP ^b	IFP	DA/DP	UDM	FF+	Other	
Eastern Cape	47	2	–	4	9	–	1	63
Free State	25	2	–	2	–	1	–	30
Gauteng	50	3	3	13	1	1	2	73
KwaZulu-Natal	32	3	34	7	1	–	3	80
Limpopo	44	1	–	1	1	–	2	49
Mpumalanga	26	1	–	1	1	1	–	30
North West	27	1	–	1	–	1	3	33
Northern Cape	20	8	–	1	–	1	–	30
Western Cape	18	17	–	5	1	–	1	42
South Africa	289	38	37	35	14	5	12	430

Province	2004								Total
	ANC	DA	IFP	UDM	ACDP	NNP ^b	ID ^c	Other	
Eastern Cape	51	5	–	6	–	–	–	1	63
Free State	25	3	–	–	1	–	–	1	30
Gauteng	51	15	2	1	1	–	1	2	73
KwaZulu-Natal	38	7	30	1	2	–	–	2	80
Limpopo	45	2	–	1	1	–	–	–	49
Mpumalanga	27	2	–	–	–	–	–	1	30
North West	27	2	–	–	–	–	–	4	33
Northern Cape	21	3	–	–	1	2	2	1	30
Western Cape	19	12	–	1	2	5	3	–	42
South Africa	304	51	32	10	8	7	6	12	430

Elections 2019

Provincial legislatures: seats held over time, 1994-2009 (continued)

Province	2009								Total
	ANC	DA	IFP	UDM	ACDP	NNP ^b	ID ^c	Other	
Eastern Cape	44	6	9	–	–	1	–	3	63
Free State	22	3	4	–	–	–	–	1	30
Gauteng	47	16	6	1	1	–	1	1	73
KwaZulu-Natal	51	7	1	18	1	–	–	2	80
Limpopo	43	2	4	–	–	–	–	–	49
Mpumalanga	27	2	1	–	–	–	–	–	30
North West	25	3	3	–	–	–	–	2	33
Northern Cape	19	4	5	–	–	–	2	–	30
Western Cape	14	22	3	–	1	–	2	–	42
South Africa	292	65	36	19	3	1	5	9	430

Province	2014								Total
	ANC	DA	EFF	IFP	ACDP	UDM	FF+	Other	
Eastern Cape	45	10	2	–	–	4	–	2	63
Free State	22	5	2	–	–	–	1	–	30
Gauteng	40	23	8	1	–	–	1	–	73
KwaZulu-Natal	52	10	2	9	–	–	–	7	80
Limpopo	39	3	6	–	–	–	–	1	49
Mpumalanga	24	3	2	–	–	–	–	1	30
North West	23	4	5	–	–	–	1	–	33
Northern Cape	20	7	2	–	–	–	–	1	30
Western Cape	14	26	1	–	1	–	–	–	42
South Africa	279	91	30	10	1	4	3	12	430

Source: IEC, www.elections.org.za, accessed 19 June 2017

a National Party.

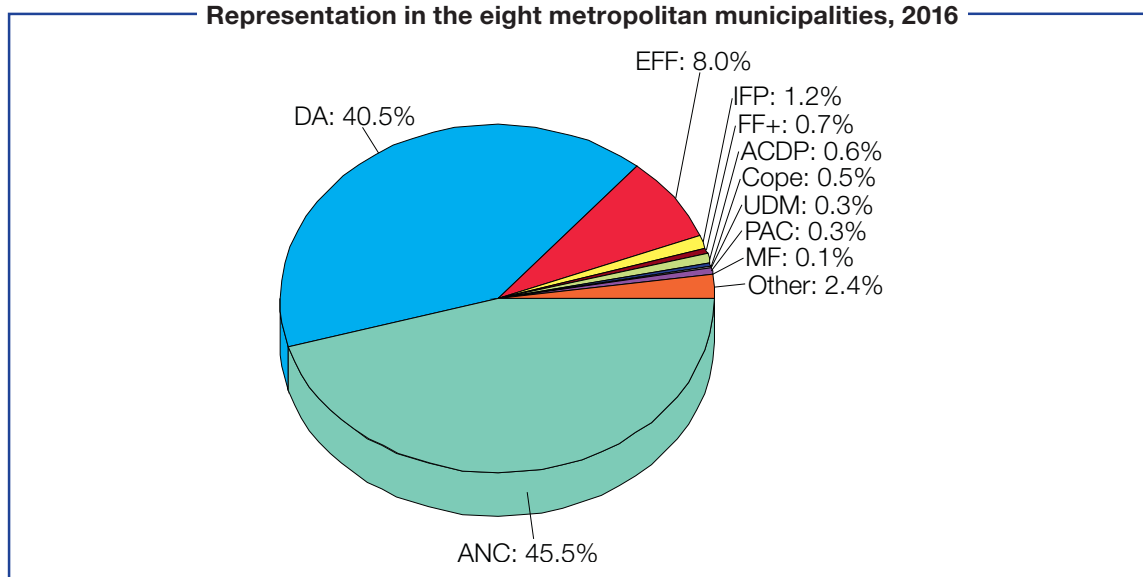
b New National Party.

c Independent Democrats.

Apart from the Western Cape (in 1994, 2009, and 2014) and KwaZulu-Natal (in 1994 and 1999), the ANC has been the biggest party in every province in every election. However, the trends do show something of a general decline in the ANC vote. The rise of the EFF also saw a decline in what were impregnable ANC strongholds, such as Mpumalanga and North West. We probably will not see much change in the governance of any of the provinces (except perhaps Gauteng), but the thing to watch will be the rise of the opposition (particularly EFF) vote around the country.

Elections 2019

Representation in the eight metropolitan municipalities, 2016



This shows the overall votes for each party in the eight metropolitan municipalities. These are Cape Town, Johannesburg, Tshwane (Pretoria), Ekurhuleni (East Rand), Nelson Mandela Bay (Port Elizabeth), Buffalo City (East London), eThekweni (Durban), and Mangaung (Bloemfontein). Just over 40% of South Africans live in these eight metropolitan areas. What this chart tells us is that urban South Africans are increasingly turning away from the ANC. And, as South Africa continues to urbanise, the ANC vote is likely to continue to decline. In the future the major fault line (similar to Zimbabwe) could be between a younger, urbanised opposition, and an ANC supported (in general) by older people in rural areas.

All voters by age, 2018

Age group	Eligible ^a	Proportion eligible by age group ^b	Registered ^c			Proportion eligible registered ^d	Proportion registered by age group ^e
			Male	Female	Total		
18-19	1 885 979	5.0%	111 337	139 667	251 004	13.3%	1.0%
20-29	10 506 112	27.8%	2 449 908	2 909 578	5 359 486	51.0%	20.4%
30-39	9 726 377	25.7%	3 093 980	3 456 011	6 549 991	67.3%	25.0%
40-49	6 341 556	16.8%	2 551 910	2 858 067	5 409 977	85.3%	20.6%
50-59	4 484 947	11.9%	1 821 703	2 304 230	4 125 933	92.0%	15.7%
60-69	2 918 715	7.7%	1 113 402	1 513 855	2 627 257	90.0%	10.0%
70-79	1 406 986	3.7%	477 694	803 763	1 281 457	91.1%	4.9%
80+ ^f	563 604	1.5%	173 978	453 123	614 988	109.1%	2.3%
Total	37 834 277	100.0%	11 793 912	14 438 294	26 232 206	69.3%	100.0%

Source: IEC, www.elections.org.za, accessed 13 April 2018; Stats SA, *Mid-year population estimates 2018*, Statistical release P0302, 23 July 2018, Table 6, p10

- a To be eligible to vote, a person must be 18 years of age or older — figures as at 18 May 2016.
- b The proportion of all eligible voters each age group represents. For example, 1.2% of all eligible voters are aged 80 or older.
- c As at 13 April 2018.
- d The proportion of people in each age group who are registered to vote. Therefore, 27.8% of all people aged between 18 and 19 are registered. A possible reason for the low registration figures for the 18-19 age group could be that they came of age in between national elections and have not yet felt it necessary to register.
- e The proportion of registered voters each age group accounts for. For example, 2.1% of all registered voters are 18-19 year-olds.
- f There are more people aged 80 and above who are registered to vote than are currently alive. Figures were obtained from the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). A possible reason for the discrepancy could relate to non-reporting of deaths of people in this age category.

Elections 2019

Voter turnout

Voter turnout in national, provincial and local government elections, 1994-2016

National and provincial elections						
Year	Eligible voters	Total registered voters	Total votes cast	Votes as a proportion of total eligible voters	Proportion of eligible voters who did not vote	Proportion of registered voters who voted
1994 ^a	22 709 152	22 709 152	19 533 498	86.0%	14.0%	86.0%
1999	22 798 845	18 177 751	16 228 462	71.2%	28.8%	89.3%
2004	27 436 898	20 674 926	15 868 558	57.8%	42.2%	76.8%
2009	27 574 414	23 181 997	17 919 966	65.0%	35.0%	77.3%
2014	31 434 035	25 318 713 ^b	18 654 771 ^c	59.3%	40.7%	73.7%
Local elections						
1995	16 590 000 ^d	12 720 000	6 200 000	37.4%	62.6%	48.7%
2000	23 532 308	18 476 516	8 882 734	37.7%	62.3%	48.1%
2006	25 364 801	21 054 957	10 186 795	40.2%	59.8%	48.4%
2011	33 702 589	23 655 046	13 664 914	40.5%	59.5%	57.8%
2016	36 198 776	26 333 353 ^e	15 296 711	42.3%	57.7%	58.1%

Source: The Presidency, Development Indicators 2012, 20 August 2013, IEC, www.elections.org.za, accessed 2 July 2014; Stats SA, Interactive data, www.interactive.statssa.gov.za, accessed 25 August 2016, p63

- a In 1994 there was no registration and permanent residents without South African citizenship were allowed to vote. This was not the case in subsequent elections.
- b As at 2 July 2014.
- c Total votes cast in 2014 include spoilt votes.
- d This figure excludes voters in KwaZulu-Natal and parts of the Western Cape.
- e As at 1 June 2016.

As can be seen from this table, voter turnout has been declining steadily, except for local elections, which have seen a slight increase. However, the proportion of voters who vote in local elections is still far below 50%. The continued decline in the proportion of people who actually vote should concern us all. It indicates that a growing number of people do not feel represented by the electoral system, and this has serious implications for social cohesion, stability, and the future of democracy.

Elections 2019

ANC and DA/DP^a share of votes cast and eligible voters in national and provincial elections, 1994-2014

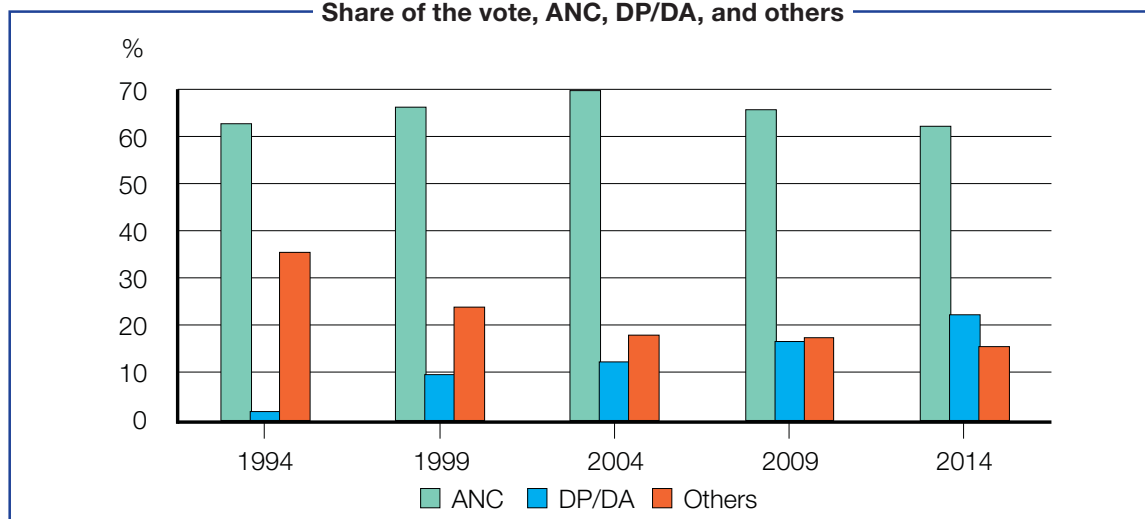
Year	ANC		DA/DP ^a		Other	
	Proportion of votes cast	Proportion of eligible voters	Proportion of votes cast	Proportion of eligible voters	Proportion of votes cast	Proportion of eligible voters
1994	62.7%	53.9%	1.7%	1.5%	35.6%	30.6%
1999	66.4%	46.5%	9.6%	6.7%	24.1%	16.9%
2004	69.7%	39.7%	12.4%	7.0%	17.9%	10.2%
2009	65.9%	38.7%	16.7%	9.8%	17.4%	10.2%
2014	62.2%	45.0%	22.2%	16.1%	15.6%	11.3%

Source: IEC, www.elections.org.za, accessed 2 July 2014

a In June 2000, the Democratic Party (DP) became the Democratic Alliance (DA).

This table shows how the support of various parties – from all eligible voters, not just those who cast their vote – has changed. In 2014, only 45% of all eligible voters supported the ANC – this number is likely to decline even further on 8 May.

Share of the vote, ANC, DP/DA, and others



Share of eligible voters, ANC, DP/DA, and others

