



insight

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2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS

INTRODUCTION

South Africa will hold its sixth democratic national and provincial elections on 08 May 2019. These elections hold a special significance for South Africans as it marks the celebration of 25 Years of Freedom and Democracy. Since the first democratic elections held on 27 April 1994, the country has held national and provincial elections every five years.

These regular and peaceful elections are now part of the essence of our nation. Moreover, it has always been followed by the smooth transition from one administration to another, which is a clear sign of a maturing democracy.

In South Africa the right to vote remains precious as it is a culmination of years of struggle for our freedom. It came at a huge cost with countless of our country men and women sacrificing their lives.

The triumphant elections of 1994 will always remain in our hearts and minds when millions of South Africans took the first step towards freedom and building a united society. For many people, 27 April 1994 was the realisation of a long awaited dream.

Reflecting on the momentous occasion, our founding father Nelson Mandela, said: “Few of us could suppress the welling of emotion, as we were reminded of the terrible past from which we come as a nation; the great possibilities that we now have; and the bright future that beckons us”.



Source: GCIS



Twenty-five years later we have retained a thriving democracy with strong democratic institutions, however voter numbers are declining.

As our country celebrates 25 Years of Freedom, it is an opportunity for citizens to renew their commitment to exercise their democratic right and vote. Voting is also the first step in renewing our nation's fight to addressing our challenges. Each and every vote contributes to strengthening our democracy.

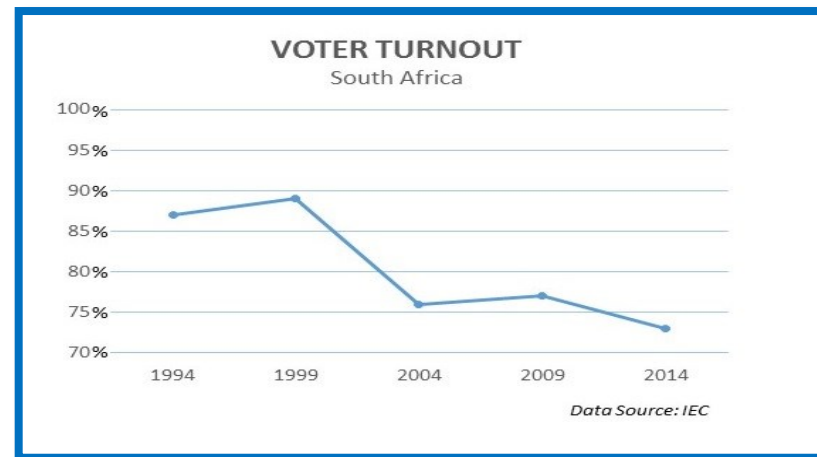
VOTER TRENDS

Statistics from the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) - as reflected in the graph to the right - on voter turnout in elections held since the start of democracy show that citizens are slowly losing interest in exercising their hard-won right to vote. While the number of registered voters have increased, the trend of voter turnout has been on the decline. It has moved from 87 per cent in the country's first democratic elections in 1994 to 73 per cent in 2014.

The situation mirrors international experience where countries, including the United States have also experienced lower voter turnout. According to US based PEW Research Centre, only 56 per cent of the US voting-age population cast ballots in the 2016.

The highest voter turnout rates among the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, a grouping of developed nations, were in Belgium (87.2%), Sweden (82.6%) and Denmark (80.3%).

One factor behind Belgium's high turnout rates is that it is one of the 24 nations around the world with some form of compulsory voting. Compulsory voting is however not a panacea as Greece, which has compulsory voting saw turnout in its parliamentary elections fall from 89 per cent in 2000 to 62 per cent in September 2015.



Data source: IEC

Election year	Registered voters	Eligible voters	Registration rate
2014	25.3 million	31.4 million	80.5%
2019	26.7 million	35.9 million	74.5%

Data source: IEC

Furthermore, the proportion of South Africans eligible to vote who have registered for the 2019 National Election has also dropped from 2014. While the number of registered voters in 2019 has increased to 26.7 million, the eligible population has increased to about 35.9 million. This puts the registration rate at 74.5 per cent in 2019, below the 80.5 per cent in 2014.

PLAY YOUR PART AND VOTE

The participation of voters is central to the success of a well-functioning democracy. It is therefore important that all citizens, in particular the youth go out in numbers to vote because their participation is critical in the development of our country.

In the upcoming elections more than 26 million eligible voters have been registered by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). All eligible voters have a responsibility to vote so that they can make South Africa the place they want it to be and build on the gains we have made over the last 25 years of democracy. The election is one way that enables voters to hold their leaders accountable for their performance.

There are some positive developments for South Africa and according to a recent Ipsos Social-Political Trends survey, the majority of South Africans, including young people indicated that they have an intention to vote. It is also extremely encouraging that 81 per cent of the 700 000 people who registered as voters for the first time in 2019 are under the age of 30.

While this is encouraging we need all registered voters on the 8 May 2019 to come out in their numbers to make their mark to build our country and in the process reverse the decline in voter trends.



Perceptions of elections & intentions to vote

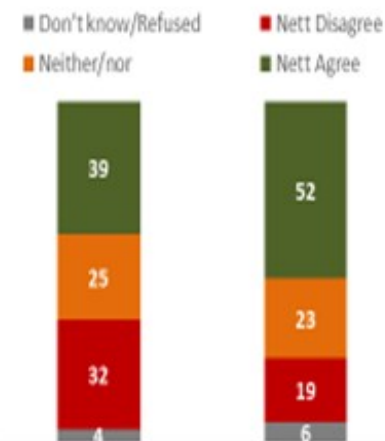
Question: If there were national elections tomorrow, which political party would you vote for?

Will not Vote total % (South Africa)		Will Vote total % (South Africa)	
Will not vote	5.3%	% of those who chose a political party they would vote for	
Don't Know	4.4%		
Not registered as a voter	1.7%		
None of these parties	1.2%		
Refuse to answer	5.3%		
Will not vote Total 18%		Will vote Total 81.6%	

Will not Vote total % (Youth)		Will Vote total % (Youth)	
Will not vote	5.1%	% of those who chose a political party they would vote for	
Don't Know	4.2%		
Not registered as a voter	3%		
None of these parties	1.1%		
Refuse to answer	4.6%		
Will not vote Total 18%		Will vote Total 81.4%	

Source: Ipsos Socio-Political Trends Nov 2018

South Africans views



There is no political party Elections are free and fair that represents your views

There is no difference in terms of South Africans views in general as compared to youth as far as voting intentions are concerned.

Government Communication and Information System (GCIS)



THE WAY FORWARD

Voting should not be seen as a once off event but encouraged as part of a citizen's ongoing democratic responsibility. Voters should be continuously reminded of the power they wield through their vote.



Source: GCIS

The vote is more than just democracy in action, it enables every eligible voter to determine their future. There needs to be a concerted effort to engage, educate and create an environment of excitement around the election. It includes:

- ⇒ A sustained voter education drive so that citizens understand their rights and responsibilities.
- ⇒ A campaign to build excitement and enthusiasm, particularly among young voters around the elections.
- ⇒ The involvement by civil society organisations in education initiatives that give South Africans sufficient knowledge about the country's election process and political system.
- ⇒ Encourage South Africans as part of being active citizens to vote in the upcoming elections.
- ⇒ The celebration of 25 Years of Freedom is an opportunity to renew the spirit of 27 April 1994 and build a better tomorrow for all.

Forward this to a colleague.

We welcome your feedback and suggestions,
which can be forwarded to insight@gcis.gov.za



**government
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