



Voter participation in the South African elections of 2014

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Recommendations

The Electoral Commission should consider some of the following measures to achieve greater voter participation in South African elections:

The introduction of an automatic voter registration system to address low levels of registration among the youth.

2 The calculation of the votingage population at elections using the latest Statistics South Africa population estimates.

The post-elections provision of voter turnout data by age and gender to help identify groups that are most likely to abstain from voting.

More generally, policy makers should consider the introduction of a 1% threshold into the proportional representation electoral system.

Opposition parties can help to attract abstaining voters to the polls by extending their election campaigns into rural areas.

Summary

South Africa's fifth general elections in May 2014 concluded the country's second decade of democracy. Although the African National Congress (ANC) was returned to power with a reduced majority, it still holds eight of the country's nine provinces and the opposition parties pose little threat to its hold on political power in the medium term. Government thus has little incentive to improve its accountability and responsiveness, although in more politically competitive provinces such as Gauteng, where the ANC retained power by only a small margin, voters can expect less complacency. The steady decline in electoral participation since 1994 may erode the legitimacy that is the lifeblood of democratic institutions and ultimately weaken the overall quality of South Africa's democracy. Recommendations are made to enhance the quality of future elections.

FOR THE MAY 2014 NATIONAL and provincial elections of South Africa, the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) registered 25,3 million voters.2 According to the IEC, the overall registration level increased to 81% of all eligible voters (the voting age population, or VAP, constitutes all citizens aged 18 years and over). The IEC bases its calculations on Statistics South Africa census figures, which indicated that there were 31,4 million eligible voters in 2011. However, South Africa's population has grown since 2011. The 2013 population estimates suggest that the VAP is 32,7 million people (Figure 1).3 On this basis, the overall registration level was 78% in

2014. The recalculation of the VAP using the latest census estimates makes it clear that well over 7 million people remained unregistered at the 2014 elections, instead of the 6 million suggested by IEC figures.

Registration levels at provincial level show that the largest voter populations are found in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), and the Eastern and Western Cape. The highest voter registration levels are in the Free State and the Eastern Cape, while the lowest are in Gauteng, Mpumalanga and the Western Cape. Some of the most populous provinces thus have the lowest levels of registered voters (Gauteng and Western Cape).



Figure 1: Percentage of voting age population (VAP) registered – 2011 and 2013 census population estimates by province

Provinces	Registered voters	VAP 2011 census	% voter registration	VAP 2013 estimates	% voter registration
Eastern Cape	3 240 059	3 794 352	85,4	3 915 700	82,7
Free State	1 449 488	1 685 198	86,0	1728 500	83,9
Gauteng	6 063 739	7 860 280	77,1	8 268 000	73,3
KwaZulu-Natal	5,117 131	6 096 509	83,9	6251 200	81,9
Limpopo	2 440 348	3 004 795	81,2	3 227 300	75,6
Mpumalanga	1 860 834	2 389 406	77,9	2 475 500	75,2
North West	1 669 349	2 120 381	78,7	2 193 500	76,1
Northern Cape	601 080	711, 843	84,4	733 700	81,9
Western Cape	2 941 333	3 771 271	78,0	3 894 200	75 5
Out of country	6 789				
Total	25 390 150	31 434 035	80,8	32 687 600	77,7

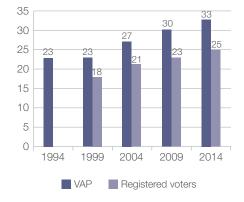
Decreases in registration levels

While the number of registered voters has increased, registration has not always increased at the same rate as population growth (see Figure 2). Eligible voters rose from 23 million in the first democratic election in 1994 to 27,4 million in 2004. Six million eligible voters did not register in that election. By 2009, the number of eligible voters had risen to 30 million, but 6,7 million citizens did not register to vote. With 25,3 million registered voters in 2014 out of a VAP of 32,7 million, 7,3 million eligible voters remained unregistered. Registration as a proportion of VAP decreased from 80% in 1999 to 75% in 2004. But it began to rise again in 2009 and continued in 2014, reaching to 77% and 78% respectively.

The gap between the eligible voter population and registered voters demands a reconsideration of the legal requirements for registration processes. The introduction of an automatic registration process, where the state takes the initiative to register eligible citizens, may lessen the costs of registration for some groups. Automatic registration procedures might also increase voter participation among

potential voters who lack the relevant identification documents to register, are migrant workers, or are based in rural areas and have difficulty completing the registration process.

Figure 2: Voting age population and registered voters in millions



Registration among young people

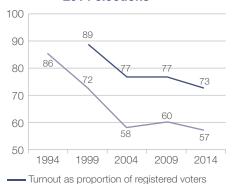
Rapid population growth in South Africa has transformed the age distribution of the eligible electorate in recent elections. As generational replacement occurs and younger voters enter the electorate in bigger proportions, turnout levels can be expected to fall. Global studies show that young voters are predisposed to lower turnout rates. South Africa's 2013 population esti-

mates indicate 10,9 million eligible voters between 18 to 29 years, comprising 34% of the voting age population. Yet, only 6,4 million are registered, accounting for a fifth of all eligible voters or a quarter of registered voters. Among the youngest age group of between 18 and 19 years, only 33% of eligible voters are registered. More-over, registration levels among 18 to 29 year-olds are noticeably lower at 59% than those of the older age groups. So, at the time of the election, many eligible young voters between 18 and 29 years remained unregistered, which inevitably decreased overall levels of registration and turnout among the eligible voter population.

Voter turnout

The turnout of registered voters in the 2014 elections was 73%. This represents a decline of 4% on the last two elections' turnouts of 77%. When turnout is examined as a proportion of the eligible voting-age population turnout over 20 years, the figures confirm a decline in participation from 86% in 1994 to 72% in 1999 and 58% in 2004. Only in 2009 was there a slight rise to 60%, but this was again followed by a drop to 57% in the 2014 elections (Figure 3). It appears that there is an increasing number of eligible South African voters who do not cast a vote.

Figure 3: Percentage voter turnout in the 1994 to 2014 elections



Turnout as proportion of voting age population

Of all the provinces, KZN recorded the highest turnout of registered voters in the 2014 elections, followed by Gauteng, Mpumalanga and the Western Cape. The lowest turnout occurred in Limpopo, the North West and the Eastern Cape. It is significant, that across the three most recent general elections, provincial turnout levels show a marked decline in every province except KZN, which had a slight increase. When all eligible voters are taken into account in the 2014 national ballot, turnout dropped to its lowest points in Limpopo at 48% and the North West at 52%. The highest level of mobilisation was found in KZN at 63% and the Free State at 61%.

An apparent shift in turnout patterns across provinces has also been detected. In the 2004 elections, provinces with the largest rural populations (the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and the Free State) had the higher rates of turnout, but by 2014 the highest turnout rates were found in the more populous provinces with the country's large urban centres, namely Gauteng, KZN and the Western Cape. It seems that the exposure of urban voters to more competitive election campaigns and a greater variety of political options has mobilised voters in the provinces with large urban populations to turn out in higher proportions than previously. As far as KZN is concerned, the reason for the shift is largely attributed to a rise in ANC support. In contrast to this there has been a general decline in the ANC's rural support base elsewhere as increasing disillusion results in higher abstention rates. In urban areas opposition parties had relatively better success in reaching and persuading undecided voters through campaigns and media coverage. Confronted with spirited campaigns, a larger proportion of voters was able to decide on a party of choice and was motivated to vote. In contrast, rural

voters appear to have withdrawn from the polls at higher rates. In rural areas, the ANC's campaign was prominent while opposition party campaigns were less visible, leading disillusioned rural ANC voters who were unable to find an alternative political home to simply abstain from voting.

Finally, an important question for the 2014 election was the extent to which younger voters would turn out and leave an indelible mark on the electoral landscape. With 6,4 million voters between the ages of 18 and 29 years registered, this group comprised a quarter (25%) of all registered voters. However, the IEC have not released timeous turnout data disaggregated by age groups making it impossible to know whether young voters turned out in similar proportions to older voters or whether turnout is in decline among this expanding group of voters.

Outcome of the national elections

In the 2014 elections the ANC won decisively with 62,2% of the national vote. The largest opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA) secured 22,2% of the vote, while the newcomer, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), made a strong showing and established itself as the third-largest political party nationally with 6,4% of the vote. The other 29 political parties that contested the national elections shared the remaining 9,2%, with no party obtaining more than 2,4%. (See Figure 4.)

The ANC's national margin of victory over its closest competitor, the DA, in 2014 was 40% and it retained all eight provinces it ruled previously. Yet its performance also highlighted significant losses. The ANC's share of the vote declined from 70% in 2004 to the lowest percentage yet. In 2014, the party also failed to match the total number

Figure 4: National election results, 2014

Party	Votes	%	Seats in National Parliament
African National Congress	11 436 921	62,15	249
Democratic Alliance	4 091 584	22,23	89
Economic Freedom Fighters	1 169 259	6,35	25
Inkatha Freedom Party	441 854	2,40	10
National Freedom Party	288 742	1,57	6
United Democratic Movement	184 636	1,00	4
Freedom Front Plus	165 715	0,90	4
Congress of the People	123 235	0,67	3
African Christian Democratic Party	104 039	0,57	3
African Independent Congress	97 642	0,53	3
Agang South Africa	52 350	0,28	2
Pan Africanist Congress	37 784	0,21	1
African People's Convention	30 676	0,17	1
United Christian Democratic Party	21 744	0,12	*
Minority Front	22 589	0,12	*
Azanian People's Organisation	20 421	0,11	*
Others	111 306	0,60	*
Total	18 402 497	100	400

^{*} Parties that did not win parliamentary seats

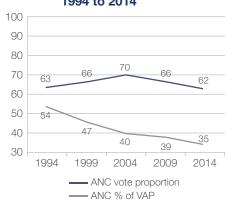
The 'Others' category includes parties that obtained a percentage of the vote but no seats.



of votes it gained in 2009, achieving 213 827 fewer voters despite the fact that the number of registered voters increased by 10% and there was a 4% increase in turnout levels. As a result, the proportion of eligible voters voting for the ANC decreased to 35%, continuing the steady decrease since its peak at 54% in 1994 (Figure 5).

In 2014 the DA improved on its previous performances, increasing its percentage

Figure 5: Percentage ANC electoral support from 1994 to 2014



of the total vote under the banner of its predecessor, the DP, from a meagre 1,7% in 1994 to 9,6% in 1999, 16,7% in 2004 and 22,2% in 2014. In 2009, the DA improved on its 2004 performance by just over 1 million votes, a 53,0% increase. In 2014, the party gained another 1,1 million votes, a 39% increase over 2009. The DA's strong showing in national support in 2014 came from the Northern Cape, the Western Cape and Gauteng. The DA also claimed to have increased its support among black South African voters. According to the party, roughly 760 000 votes, or 20% of its total support, came from this section of the community.4

It therefore attracted more black African votes than other 'African' parties, with the exception of the ANC and the EFF, and grew its support among black South Africans from 1,0% in 2009 to 6,0% in

2014. However, without individual-level data it is only possible to speculate on class, age and other characteristics common to black DA voters. It remains the only opposition party to have continuously increased its voter share since 1994. Yet, support among all eligible voters grew slowly over the 20 years and sits at just 13,0% of the VAP. The party's growth is also mainly confined to urban areas where it has greater organisational reach and is able to persuade voters with greater ease through media exposure and campaign material.

Despite the EFF's aspirations to win at least two provinces and a large share of the national vote, the party has had to settle for a far more modest share of support in its first election. Nevertheless, given that the party was less than a year old at the elections, having been formed by leader Julius Malema who was expelled from the ANC, it did reasonably well. Its largest support bases are in the North West (13,0%), Gauteng (10,0%) and Limpopo (10,0%).

The dismal performance of the smaller parties in 2014 points to their inability to remain relevant in contemporary South African politics. The vote share of most of the small parties has decreased steadily over the years. The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), once the third largest party in parliament, has seen its share of the

(COPE) suffered a dramatic loss in the 2014 elections; its support was reduced from 7,0% in 2009 to 1,0%. Agang South Africa, a new party led by the renowned anti-apartheid activist, academic and businesswoman Dr Mamphela Ramphele, performed poorly with less than 1,0% of the vote, despite early expectations that the party might pose a credible challenge to the ANC. Ramphele's flirtation with the DA, which offered her to run as its presidential candidate, damaged the newcomer's public reputation significantly.

Despite the declining fortunes of smaller parties, South Africa has witnessed a proliferation of parties registering to contest elections. Sixteen parties contested the national elections in 1994. 19 in 1999, 21 in 2004, 26 in 2009 and 29 in 2014. In a context of declining support for smaller individual parties, their swelling numbers have ensured that smaller parties as a whole have maintained a steady percentage of the national vote, namely between 9% and 10% in the past three elections. This suggests that there is still appetite for smaller, regional parties among a significant minority of the electorate.

However, there are questions about the continued relevance and role of the smallest parties in South African politics. The introduction of an explicit 1% threshold into South Africa's proportional representation (PR) electoral system,

The introduction of an explicit 1% threshold into the PR list system would discourage the proliferation of new parties and limit legislative representation

vote decline from 10,5% in 1994 to 2,4% in 2014. The voter share of the United Democratic Movement (UDM) has declined from 3,4% in 1999 to 1,0% in 2014, and that of the Freedom Front Plus (FF+) from 2,2% in 1994 to 0,9% in 2014. The Congress of the People

which currently has no explicit threshold,⁵ would discourage the proliferation of new parties and limit legislative representation. In the case of 2014, a 1% threshold would have allowed only six parties to have representation in the National Assembly, rather than

the 13 parties currently.⁶ An explicit threshold might incentivise voters to support larger parties that are likely to gain representation, thus strengthening their position to challenge a dominant ANC. However, in a country that remains socially and politically diverse, broad representation in parliament also remains an important factor.

South Africans registered to vote outside the country overwhelmingly supported the DA. Of the 18 132 overseas votes cast, 84% (15 311 voters) opted for the DA, 8% (1 508 voters) voted for the ANC, 2% (328) for Agang SA and 1% (255) for the EFF.

Outcome of the provincial elections

The ANC increased its percentage share of votes in the Eastern Cape, KZN, the Northern Cape and the Western Cape by one or two percentage points. In KZN this was most likely the result of IFP supporters moving to the ANC, while elsewhere it could be because of COPE supporters returning to the ANC (see Figure 6). The party reduced its

percentage share of votes in the Free State, Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the North West, partly as a result of a relatively lower voter turnout among its supporters, and in all likelihood because of some voters moving their support to the EFF and the DA.

The DA increased its share of the vote in all provinces and became official opposition in six. In the Western Cape, it increased its majority from 51,5% in 2009 to 59,4% in 2014. The EFF replaced

The battle for Gauteng

Perhaps the most pronounced shift at provincial level was in Gauteng where the ANC's share of the vote dropped from 64,0% to 53,6% and only retained the province with a slim majority (see Figure 6). The DA's support base grew from 21,9% to 30,8% and the EFF took 10,3% of the vote. Gauteng is South Africa's economic hub. It is the smallest of the nine provinces but is the most diverse, populous and urbanised province. It is

It is in Limpopo, the North West and Gauteng where the EFF newcomer's presence will be mostly felt

COPE as the official opposition in the provinces of Limpopo and the North West. It is in these provinces and in Gauteng that the newcomer's presence will be mostly felt. COPE lost the status of official opposition it had secured in five provinces in 2009, and was reduced to a remnant. Its best performance in 2014 was in the Northern Cape where it won 4% of the vote.

home to almost 25% of South Africa's population and 24% of all eligible/ registered voters. The party that takes Gauteng certainly holds the psychological upper hand in South African politics. While the ANC has dominated Gauteng politics since 1994, there were indications that the 2014 elections would be a closely contested match between the ANC, the DA and the EFF. The battle

Figure 6: Provincial election results, 2014

Party	Eastern	Free State	Gauteng	KZN	Limpopo	Mpuma-	North	Northern	Western
	Cape					langa	West	Cape	Cape
ANC	70,1	69,9	53,6	64,5	78,6	78,2	67,4	64,4	32,9
DA	16,2	16,2	30,8	12.8	6,5	10,4	12,7	23,9	59,4
EFF	3,5	8,2	10,3	1,9	10,7	6,3	13,2	5,0	2,1
COPE	1,2	*	*	*	0,9	*	*	3,6	*
UDM	6,2	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
IFP	*	*	0,8	10,9	*	*	*	*	*
NFP	*	*	*	7,3	*	*	*	*	*
MF	*	*	*	1,0	*	*	*	*	*
AIC	0,8	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
FF+	*	2,1	1,2	*	*	*	1,7	*	*
ACDP	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	1,0
BRA	*	*	*	*	*	1,2	*	*	*
Others	2,0	3,6	3,3	1,6	3,3	3,9	5,0	3,1	4,6
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

^{*} Parties that did not win provincial seats

The 'Others' category includes parties that obtained a percentage of the vote but no seats.



for Gauteng intensified in the months preceding the election with the two major parties showcasing their governance and service delivery track records in the province (the DA governs the key Midvaal municipality). It is possible that in the forthcoming 2016 municipal elections the ANC could see its results in several urban metropoles, such as Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth, drop to below 50%.

Representation in the fifth democratic parliament

In 2014 the ANC won 249 seats in the National Assembly. This represent a loss of 15 seats from the 264 seats won in 2009 (see Figure 7). In fact, the number of seats currently held by the ANC is close to the 252 the party won in the first democratic parliament. The DA won 89 seats in 2014, an increase of 22 seats over the 67 seats it secured in 2009. The

There is a decline in gender representation in the fifth democratic parliament

EFF attracted sufficient votes to earn itself 25 seats in the 400- seat national assembly. The IFP won 10 seats, down from 18 in 2009, indicating the continuation of the steady decline in its fortunes. The newcomer, the National Freedom Party (NFP), which has its regional support base in KZN, won six seats. Together, these five parties hold 379, or 95% of the 400 seats in parliament. The remaining 21 seats went to smaller parties with 1% or less support.

There is a decline in gender representation in the fifth democratic parliament. In 2009, women comprised 45% of all members of parliament

but in 2014 this declined to 42% (166 members). This drop is related to the decline in the number of ANC seats from 264 to 249, and the fact that no other party other than the ANC uses a gender quota to safeguard the representivity of women. However, the ANC has not increased the percentage of its internal gender representivity, which remains at 49%. There are fewer women in the top 20 names of the ANC election list than in previous years.⁷

As indicated in Figure 8, in 2014 only three political parties are represented in all nine provincial legislatures. With 279 seats, the ANC holds the majority of the 430 provincial available. The DA holds 91 seats and the EFF 30. The other nine parties have small nodes of regional support in particular provinces. COPE retained only three provincial seats, one each in the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and the Northern Cape, an astounding decrease from the 36 provincial seats it won in 2009. The African Christian Democratic Party holds one seat in the Western Cape, as does the newcomer African Independent Congress in the Eastern Cape, the Bushbuckridge Residents Association in Mpumalanga and the Minority Front in KZN.

The UDM gained an additional seat in the Eastern Cape and now has four seats, but has no seat elsewhere. The FF+ maintained its small but stable support bases with one seat each in the Free State, Gauteng and the North West provinces. The NFP gained six new seats in the KZN provincial legislature, but the IFP lost half its seats there and now holds only nine (plus one in Gauteng). Not more than 5% of votes cast in the provinces were unrepresented by seats in the respective legislatures.

Figure 7: Seat allocation in the National Assembly from 1994 to 2014

Party	1994	1999	2004	2009	2014
African National Congress	252	266	279	264	249
Democratic Alliance	7	38	50	67	89
Economic Freedom Fighters	*	*	*	*	25
Inkatha Freedom Party	43	34	28	18	10
National Freedom Party	*	*	*	*	6
United Democratic Movement	*	14	9	4	4
Freedom Front Plus	9	3	4	4	4
Congress of the People	*	*	*	30	3
African Christian Democratic Party	2	6	7	3	3
African Independent Congress	*	*	*	*	3
Agang South Africa	*	*	*	*	2
Pan Africanist Congress	5	3	3	1	1
African People's Convention	*	*	*	1	1
United Christian Democratic Party	*	3	3	2	*
Minority Front	*	1	2	1	*
Azanian People's Organisation	*	1	1	1	*
New National Party/National Party	82	28	7	*	*
Federal Alliance	*	2	*	*	*
Independent Democrats	*	*	7	4	*
Afrikaner Eenheidsbeweging	*	1	*	*	*
Others	*	*	*	*	*
Total	400	400	400	400	400

^{*} Parties that did not win national seats

Figure 8: Seat allocation in provincial legislatures, 2014

Party	Eastern	Free State	Gauteng	KZN	Limpopo	Mpuma-	North	Northern	Western	Total seats
	Cape					langa	West	Cape	Cape	
ACDP	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	1	1
AIC	1	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	1
ANC	45	22	40	52	39	24	23	20	14	279
BRA	*	*	*	*	*	1	*	*	*	1
COPE	1	*	*	*	1	*	*	1	*	3
DA	10	5	23	10	3	3	4	7	26	91
EFF	2	2	8	2	6	2	5	2	1	30
IFP	*	*	1	9	*	*	*	*	*	10
MF	*	*	*	1	*	*	*	*	*	1
NFP	*	*	*	6	*	*	*	*	*	6
UDM	4	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	4
FF+	*	1	1	*	*	*	1	*	*	3
Total	63	30	73	80	49	30	33	30	42	430

^{*} Parties that did not win provincial seats

Concluding remarks

As the population expands and the number of young eligible voters swell, comparatively lower levels of registration among the youth will eventually depress overall levels of registration and turnout in South Africa. The IEC, with the assistance of the Department of Home Affairs, should consider the introduction of an automatic registration process, where the state registers eligible citizens on the voters' roll. This should help to address low registration levels among younger voters.

Secondly, given South Africa's rapid population growth, the IEC should use the latest available population estimates to calculate the eligible voter population at each election. This should help the IEC and other stakeholders establish a more accurate number of unregistered and abstaining voters at elections. Similarly, the IEC should timeously provide voter turnout data disaggregated by age and other useful demographic data such as gender. This data can assist policymakers, civil society bodies and researchers identify and target groups that are most likely to abstain from voting. Finally, stakeholders should deliberate the merits of introducing an explicit threshold of 1% into the PR electoral system. This would require the smallest parties to gain sufficient support to overcome a threshold to gain a legislative seat. The potential benefits of consolidating larger opposition parties must be weighed against the representation of minority parties and their contribution to the legislative environment.

Notes

- Sections of this policy brief are based on chapters authored by Collette Schulz-Herzenberg in Collette Schulz-Herzenberg and Roger Southall (eds), Election 2014 South Africa: the campaigns, results and future prospects, Jacana Media & Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2014.
- 2 Registered voter figures are based on the IEC's certified voters' roll released on 5 March 2014. For 2011 VAP figures see the IEC website at www.elections.org.za.
- 3 Statistics South Africa's 2013 population estimates were sourced by the author from Stats SA's national office. The figures exclude foreign nationals.
- 4 Jonathan Moakes, CEO of the Democratic Alliance, personal communication, 28 May 2014. The DA calculates these figures using census data on community profiles for each voting district. This makes it possible to compile accurate voting district demographic profiles. To calculate support from black voters the DA examines voting districts that hold 100% black African populations. In

- addition, they use internal polling in racially homogenous voting districts to check accuracy.
- 5 South Africa's PR electoral system does have an implicit threshold of approximately 0.25%
- 6 Linda Ensor, Analysts propose votes threshold, Business Day Live, 20 November 2013, http://www.bdlive.co.za/ national/ politics/2013/11/20/analysts-propose-votesthreshold
- 7 Amanda Gouws, Women and the election: the 'not so good' story to tell, in Collette Schulz-Herzenberg and Roger Southall (eds), Elections 2014 South Africa: the campaigns, results and future prospects, Jacana Media & Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2014.



About the author

Collette Schulz-Herzenberg specialises in research on elections and voter behaviour. She holds a PhD in politics and an MSc in democratic governance from the University of Cape Town (UCT), and a BA Hons in politics from the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University. Collette is editor of a volume on the 2014 South African elections, a research associate and lecturer at Stellenbosch University and was awarded a UCT Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in 2012 to examine South African voter behaviour. She has previously worked as a senior researcher at the ISS and the Institute for Democracy in South Africa.

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