



An analysis of South African Voter Behaviour

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Abstract

Studies on voter behavior in Post-Apartheid South Africa, have been increasing since the first democratic elections in 1994. These elections demonstrate and exhibit a key feature found within a multi-party democracy, despite having had the same ruling party for the last 24 years. There are however trends that are becoming more and more evident with each consecutive election year and these trends could indicate a decline in voter favor for the ruling party. The data that was examined, comprised the election results as recorded by the Independent Electoral Commission for each election year from 1999 to 2014. It is quite evident, that even without analyzing the data, the outcome of the investigation could be determined. The main aim of the investigation was to test whether there was any significant result from withholding or spoiling one's vote during the voting process and also to determine what implications these actions held. Whilst it was not the main aim of the investigation, the effect that transparent political party funding could have, was marginally explored.

Introduction

South Africa has often been hailed as a haven for democracy. This democracy would however not have been achieved were it not for the votes of the people of South Africa. One might even say that voter behavior in the post-Apartheid South Africa has shaped the political landscape that we see today. There are many factors that affect and influence voter behavior, such as race, economic class, service delivery etc (Ayangwe, 2012). While this investigation did not specifically aim to examine the factors influencing voter behavior, the issue and role of private party funding drew keen interest and the possible effects it may have in future elections is marginally highlighted. The organization, My Vote Counts, has been actively advocating the exposure of funding of political parties since 2012. Prior to 2017, there was no legislation in place compelling political parties to disclose any of their private funding, nor regulating it. On 27 September 2017, the Western Cape High Court ruled in favor of My Vote Counts, declaring that the Promotion of Access to Information Act of 2000 is inconsistent with the Constitution, as it failed to fulfil its constitutional obligation. The Minister of Justice and Correctional Services in addition to My Vote Counts is to appear before the Constitutional Court for a conformational hearing of the High Court Judgement. The main objective of this investigation was to explore and assess some of the trends in voter behavior, mainly whether withholding or spoiling your vote has any significant impact on the outcome of the election results both provincially and nationally. The investigation follows the data presented by the results from the IEC for every national election year dating from 1999 to 2014. The following research questions were asked: Firstly, would withholding one's vote make a significant difference in changing the political landscape of the country? Secondly, if everyone had voted for one of the ruling party's top competitors, would it have caused a change in the elections big enough to topple the ruling party on a national or provincial level? And finally, what implications does the current trends in voter behavior hold for the future of the ruling party, namely the ANC in upcoming elections.

Methods & Materials:

In our analysis of the South African voting results, ranging from 1999 through to 2014, all voting data was provided by and sourced from the Independent Electoral Commission's (IEC) website (<http://www.elections.org.za/content/Elections/National-and-provincial-elections-results/>). The data was sorted, filtered and transformed in Microsoft Excel. Several .csv files were produced for each unique statistical analysis and graphical representation of the data produced in R. In R the following statistical tests were run in our analysis of the data: One-way ANOVA to test for a significant difference in the average number of votes received by the leading party (ANC) compared to those received by the opposition, assuming that all voters who withheld their vote or spoiled ballots voted for one specific opposition party, an unpaired T-test to test for a significant difference in the average number of votes received by the ANC and DA on a provincial level in the period 1999 - 2014, and finally a correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between the increasing number of votes obtained by the DA and the decreasing number of seats afforded to the ANC in parliament over the 1999 – 2014 period, as well as to test the relationship between increasing voter registration and decreasing voter turnout. The statistical test used were chosen based on the manner in which they complement the graphical representations of the data and the literature reviewed. To obtain the value for “no-votes” used in our analysis we calculated the difference in voter turnout (No. of registered voters – actual voter turnout), which was used as a proxy for actual voter turnout in the correlation analysis, and added this to the number of spoiled ballots. The value of “no-votes” was then added to the total number of votes received by each party to test whether, had any opposition party received all the “no-votes, this would significantly affect the outcome of the election results over the 1999 – 2014 period.

Figure 1: IEC Election Data (1999 - 2014)



Figure 2: ANOVA Results 1999-2014

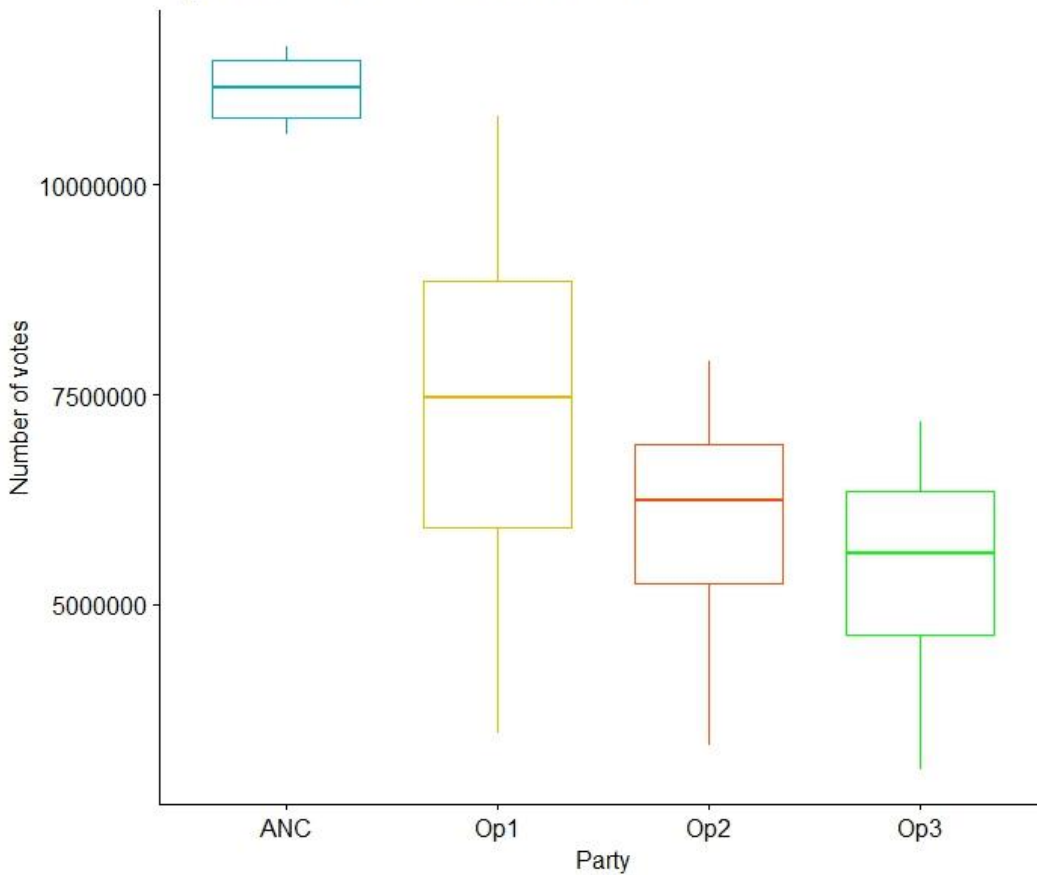


TABLE 1: Summary of national election results for the top four parties 1999 - 2014

2014		ACTUAL VOTE	NO-VOTES	TOTAL
AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS	ANC	11436921	0	11436921
DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE	DA	4091584	6733311	10824895
ECONOMIC FREEDOM FIGHTERS	EFF	1169259	6733311	7902570
CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE	COPE	123235	6733311	6856546
2009				
AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS	ANC	11650748	0	11650748
DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE/DEMOKRATIESE ALLIANSIE	DA	2945829	5262031	8207860
CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE	COPE	1311027	5262031	6573058
INKATHA FREEDOM PARTY	IFP	804260	5262031	6066291
2004				
AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS	ANC	10880915	0	10880915
DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE/DEMOKRATIESE ALLIANSIE	DA	1931201	4811365	6742566
INKATHA FREEDOM PARTY	IFP	1088664	4811365	5900029
INDEPENDENT DEMOCRATS	ID	269765	4811365	5081130
1999				
AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS	ANC	10601330	0	10601330
DEMOCRATIC PARTY	DP	1527337	1944289	3471626
INKATHA FREEDOM PARTY	IFP	1371477	1944289	3315766
NEW NATIONAL PARTY	NNP	1098215	1944289	3042504

Table 2: Parliamentary seats afforded to the leading parties of the national election (1999 - 2014)

1999	Parliamentary seats obtained (#/400)	%Total Seats	Total Vote:
African National Congress (ANC)	275	68.8	10601330
Democratic Party(DP)	38	9.5	1527337
Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)	34	8.5	1371477
New National Party (New NP)	28	7	1098215
United Democratic Movement (UDM)	14	3.5	546790
2004			
African National Congress (ANC)	279	69.8	10880915
Democratic Alliance (DA)	50	12.5	1931201
Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)	28	7	1088664
United Democratic Movement (UDM)	9	2.3	355717
Independent Democrats (ID)	7	1.8	269765
2009			
African National Congress (ANC)	262	65.5	11650748
Democratic Alliance (DA)	67	16.8	2945829
Congress of the People (COPE)	30	7.5	1311027
Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)	18	4.5	804260
Independent Democrats (ID)	4	1	162915
2014			
African National Congress (ANC)	249	62.3	11436921
Democratic Alliance (DA)	89	22.3	4091584
Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)	25	6.3	1169259
Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)	10	2.5	441854
National Freedom Party (NFP)	6	1.5	288742

Figure 3: Two Sample T-test Results

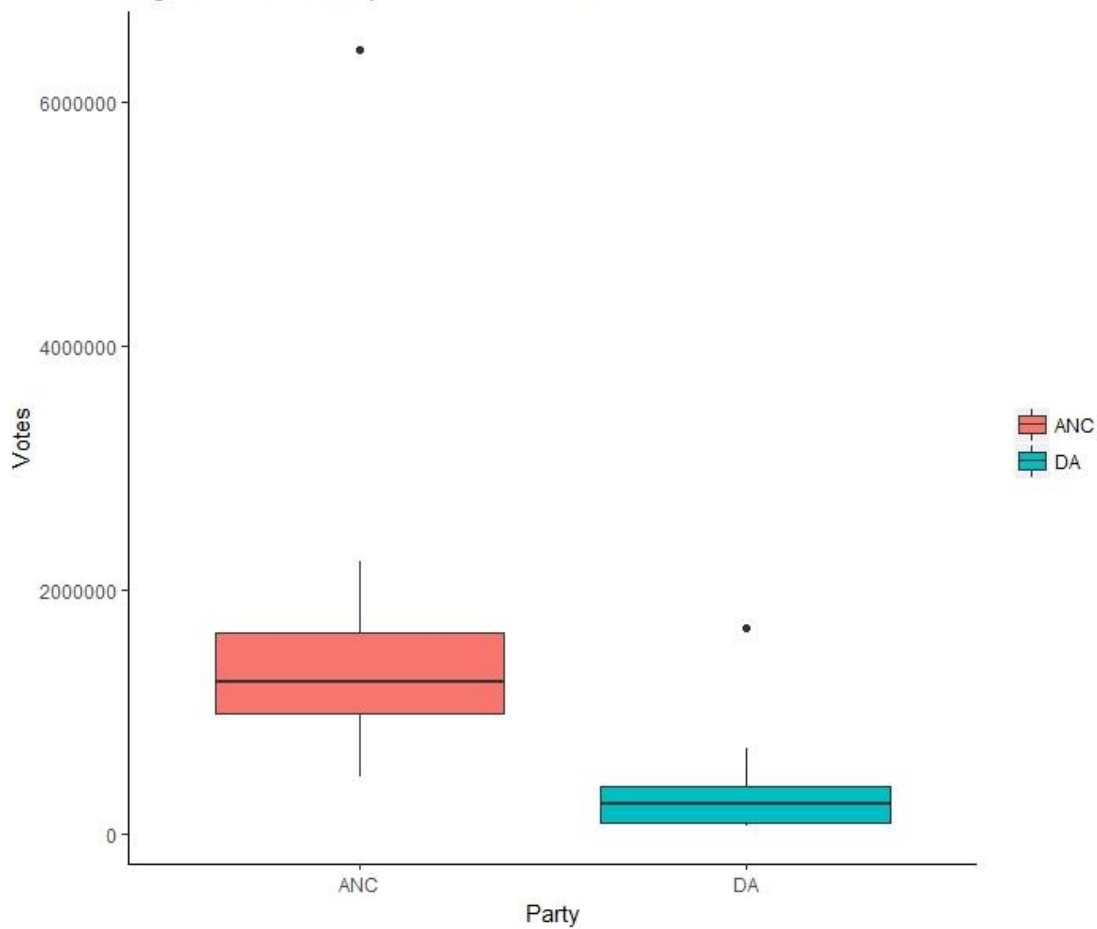


Figure 4: DA Votes vs. ANC Seats

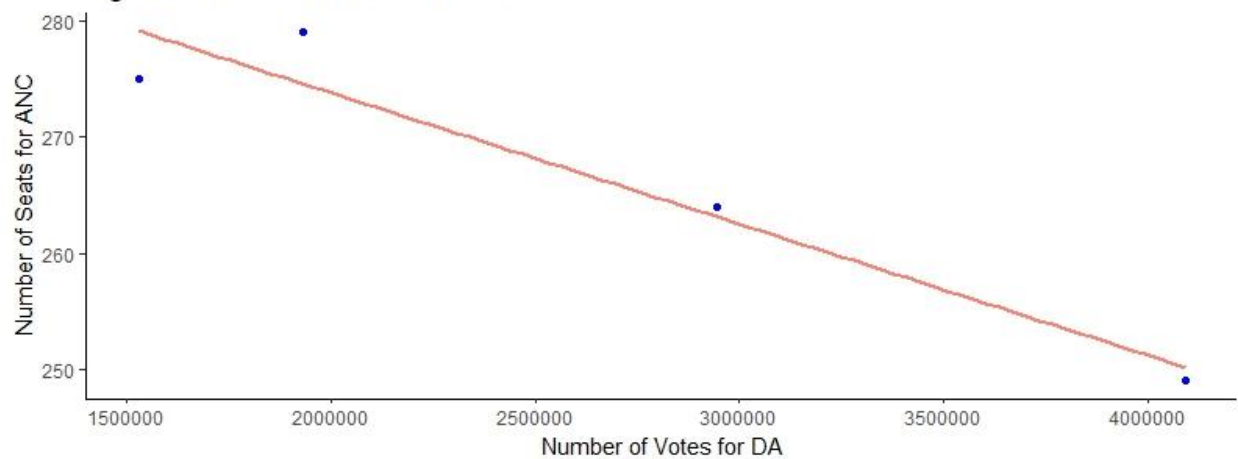


Figure 5: Correlation of Number of Registered Voters with Difference in number of actual voters

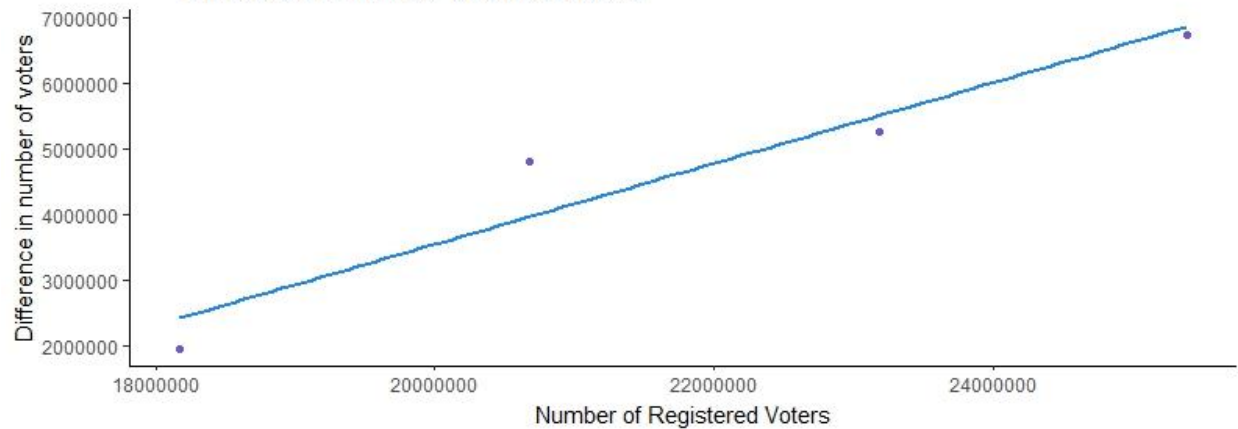
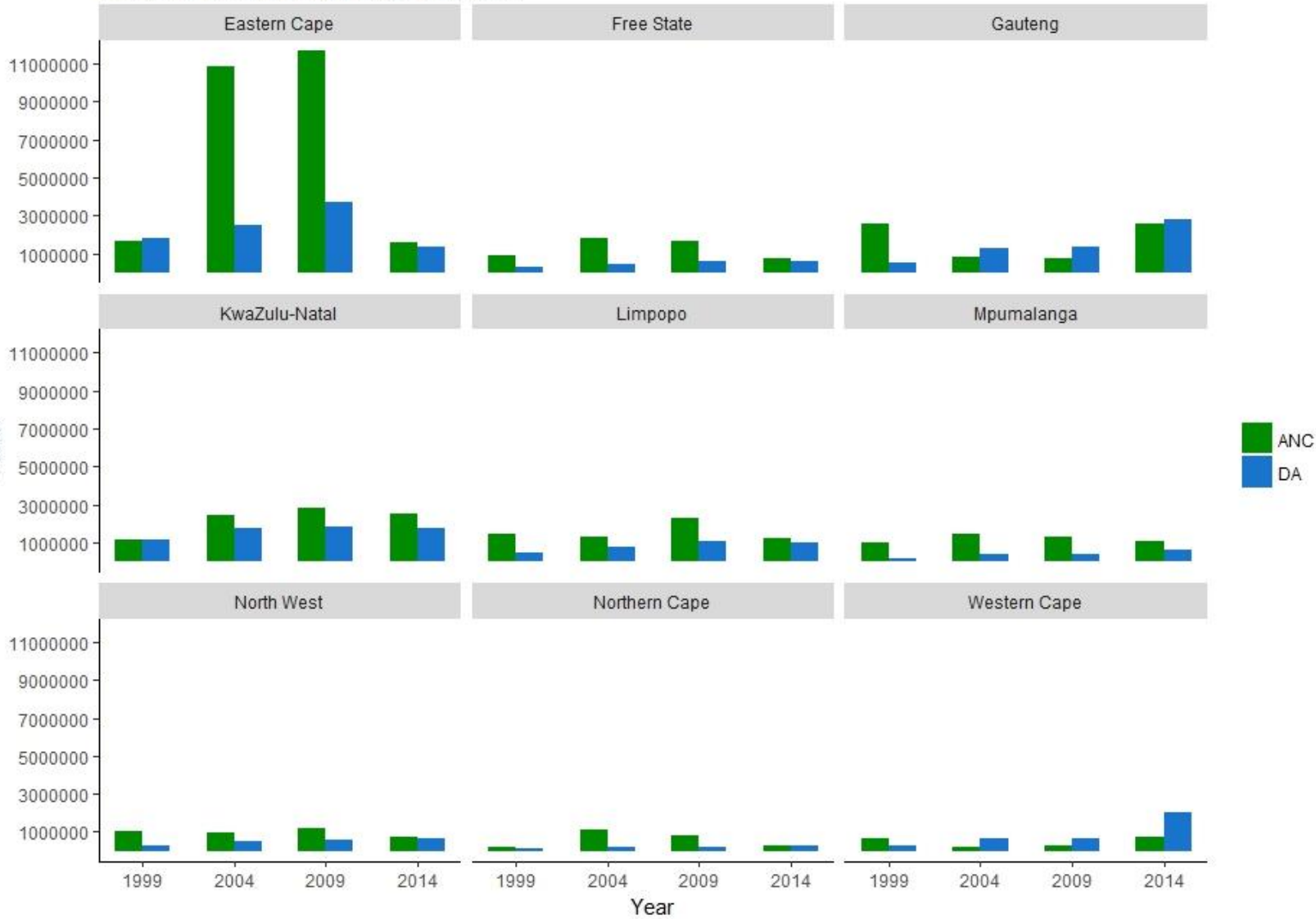


Figure 6: Provincial Election Results 1999-2014

Actual ANC Votes vs Actual Da votes + Non-votes



Results:

In our investigation we aimed to broadly explore trends within the election data received (1999-2014) and more specifically to test the hypothesis that, within the South African context, withholding your vote or spoiling ballots in protest has no significant effect on the outcome of the election. Figure 1, 2 and Table 1 provide the results of our specific investigation into whether withholding your vote has an effect on the outcome of the election results. Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the results communicated in Table 1. Here we see that at each national election (1999 – 2014), despite having assigned a “no-vote” value on top of the actual votes received by the opposition parties, the ANC still wins by anything between +/- 1million votes (2014) to an overwhelming +/- 7million votes (1999). The results obtained from the ANOVA test run, displayed in Figure 2, provide evidence to support our findings in Figure and Table 1. Across all national elections (1999 -2014), despite having assigned the “no-vote” value to the opposition parties, a significant difference ($P = 0.006$) in the average number of votes received by each party still persisted. This is to say, as seen in Figure 1, that despite having received all of the “no-votes”, the opposition still trailed behind the ANC by a significant number of votes across the last four elections.

Figure 3 and Figure 6 provide the results of our second analysis, a T-test showing that across the four most recent national elections (1999 – 2014), the average number of provincial votes received by the ANC is significantly ($P = 0.05$) higher than those received by the biggest opposition party; the DA. The results in Figure 6 provide a more detailed representation of the results communicated in Figure 3. In Figure 6 we see that across all four national elections, having received all the “no-votes” for each province, the DA would’ve managed increase its pre-existing dominance of the Western Cape, would’ve won the polls in Gauteng, and would’ve closed the gap quite nicely in provinces such as the Northern Cape, North West, and the Free State. However, despite these advances, across the last four national elections the assignment of the “no-votes” total to the opposition on both a national and provincial level had no significant influence on the overall outcome of the election.

Figure 4 and 5 provide a graphical representation of the results obtained from two Pearson’s correlation test that we ran. Figure 4 provides the results of the first test in which we explored the relationship between the increasing number of DA votes with a decrease in the number of parliamentary seats afforded to the ANC. The results show a strong negative correlation between the two (-0.96 , $P = 0.03$), which speaks to the fact that although the “no-votes” value had no significant effect on the outcome of the national elections, the “no-votes” value could significantly influence the number of parliamentary seats afforded to the opposition and lost by the ANC. This loss/gain relationship has a significant impact on the proportional party representation within parliament, and should stress the importance of NOT withholding your vote. Figure 5 explored the relationship between the increasing number of registered voters with each election to the increasing difference in the number of actual voters (Total registered voters – Total votes cast). Here the relationship had a strong positive correlation (0.96 , $P = 0.03$) and showed that although more voters are registering each year, the voter turnout for each year is decreasing. When these results (Figure 5) are interrupted in light of those displayed in Figure 4 a potentially worrisome pattern begins to emerge. If increasing opposition votes results in fewer seats afforded to the dominant party in parliament, then a continued decrease in voter-turnout would results in a far larger proportional representation of the dominant party in parliament. Both Figure 4 and 5 stand to stress the importance of NOT withholding your vote, as although it may not have an effect on

a national or provincial level, it could have a significant effect on the outcome of proportional party representation in parliament. In having more voters register and cast their vote, we stand to increase the number of opposition parties that will be afforded seats and representation within parliament, and thus promote democracy by reducing the large majority afforded to the dominant party.

Discussion:

Here we have set out to test whether withholding your vote has a significant effect on the outcome of national elections. Since their undisputed victory in the first democratic elections held in 1994 the ANC has maintained a prominent position as the country's ruling party, and is because of their undisputed victories since the 1994 election that many South Africans ask the question "why should I even bother voting?". Here we review relevant literature pertaining to each of the major national elections covered in our investigation (1999 – 2014), in an attempt to understand what drives some South African voters to withhold their vote, and others to continue voting for the ANC despite their many shortcomings. According to studies by Harder and Krosnick (2008), the decision as to whether an individual should cast or withhold their vote is strongly influenced by: Their ability to vote on voting day, their motivation to vote, the ease or difficulty with which voting information is obtainable, and the associated costs of performing the act of voting – many people simply choose to withhold their vote because there are too many hurdles to jump. Harder and Krosnick (2008) also found that the higher the overall cost (time, money, etc.) of registering to vote, the more apathy registered voters have toward the whole ordeal, resulting in a lower voter turnout on election day – Findings which were supported by our analysis of voter registration vs turnout across the last four national elections (1999 – 2014).

In studies by Newman and Seth (1985) it was found that there are various factors that influence the behaviour of the voter whilst at the polls. These factors include the voter's personal feelings regarding a particular party's policies and electoral promises, feelings of hope, patriotism, and responsibility experienced by the individual. Other factors such as the voter's perception of the candidate can also have an influence. Voters tend to identify more strongly with those candidates that share similar association with or loyalty to particular group), as well as similar views on specific socioeconomic, political and cultural issues. Anyangwe (2012) expands on this in stating that a voters preference for a particular party/candidate stems from how well the views of said party or candidate on specific issue align with those of the voter. He then goes on to state that the purpose of political marketing is to inform voters of the party's stance on given issues so as to influence voter interests and behaviour at the polls.

Anyangwe (2012) points out that although many voters do consider multiple factors before deciding on which party/candidate to vote for, sometimes voter behaviour is more emotionally driven and voters may tend to vote against a particular party as a means of enacting "vengeance" for some perceived wrongdoing by said party/candidate. In most cases voters will vote for a particular (possibly less capable) opposition party simply because they would like to see the dominant party, against which they hold the grudge, lose the election. This is often done by voters, so that even if the dominant party wins the election, they have peace of mind knowing that they didn't contribute to that victory (Bechwati and Morrin, 2007). Some voters choose to withhold their votes completely or to spoil ballots in protest. However, studies by the Institute for Social Sciences

(ISS), as well as our analysis, have shown that the ANC actually stands to benefit from a lower voter turnout in the form of a larger parliamentary representation.

Another interesting trend Anyangwe (2012) makes reference to is the increasing number of “floating voters” since the 1994 election. He defines “floating voters” as those opposition voters who have no affiliations to any one party, making it harder to predict who they will vote for or if they’ll vote at all. He suggests that an increasing number of South Africa’s “black” voters are not as unquestionably loyal to the ANC as previously believed and are prepared to declare themselves as “independents” if need be. However, these “black floating voters” appear to be rare which often results in a predictable victory by the demographic majority and making election victories by the dominant party a routine matter. Our findings support the observations of Anyangwe (2012), in that Figure 1 clearly shows that the ANC has maintained a constant majority over the last four national elections. A majority that can most certainly be attributed to loyalty votes on one side, and vengeance/protest voting on the other.

The figures reported in Tables 1 and 2 show that although the ANC has remained relatively unaffected, the opposition parties and their parliamentary representation is affected by various shifts in voter behaviour, most notably by the increasing tendency of voters to simply not vote. Table 1 and 2, and the findings of Butler (2009), show that 2009 marked the year in which the ANC lost its 2/3 majority in parliament and the beginning of increased opposition representation. This shift in voting behavior can be attributed to the instability of the ANC at the time, as this was the time when power shifted from Mbeki to Zuma. 2009 also marked the first shift of many from being ANC loyalist to declaring themselves as “independents”. However, these “independents” acted much like the “floating voters” described by Anyangwe (2012) and instead of voting wholly for the dominant opposition party, they spread their votes among the opposition or reverted back to loyalty votes on Election Day. It is through these forms of unpredictable voter behaviour that the ANC has managed to maintain its dominance despite multiple instances of party instability, accusations of corruption, and an increasing lack of confidence in the ability of the leading party. Anyangwe (2012) makes reference to a poll that was taken in 2001 in which 42% of the country felt that the country was going in the wrong direction, but by the 2004 election the ANC had won 69.7% of the vote. These findings once again highlight the tendency for voters to vote emotionally on voting day and to revert back to past loyalties.

Based on the findings presented, both our own and the literature reviewed, the outcome of the 2019 and possibly even that of 2024 seems to be one that may be predictable. Based on the graphs in Figure 1, we can infer that the DA and EFF will most certainly close the gap between themselves and the ANC, but the ANC will most likely remain the ruling party. However, recent happenings in the Western Cape High Court (2017) and Constitutional Court (2018) suggest that the outcome of the 2019 and 2024 elections will most likely see a shift in power and a new ruling party. In 2017 the non-profit company known as My Vote Counts (MVC) lobbied before the Western Cape High Court and argued that the legislation dealing with access to information, the Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2000 (PAIA), is unconstitutional, because it does not insist that political parties provide information on their private donations on a systematic basis. The Western Cape High Court ruled in favour of MVC stating that PAIA is inconsistent with the constitution and that it does not meet its constitutional obligations. In 2018 MVC appealed before the constitutional court where Chief Justice Mogoeng ruled in favour of MVC and declared that parliament has 18 months to review PAIA. This ruling by the Constitutional Court will require parties to declare and make freely available all sources of public and private funding on a regular basis, so as to allow voters to make an informed vote on voting day. By knowing which funders a party aligns itself with, voters can pay attention post-election to any favours afforded to said

fundings, voters will be able to vote for parties funded by companies or groups with which they align their own interests. The availability of this new information has the potential to drastically effect the outcome of the 2024 national election, as the current demographic majority might not be so willing to cast their vote for a party that as the interests of their funders at heart rather than their people. These recent rulings could also have potentially damaging effects for the ANC's loyalties in the 2019 election, given the most recent and ongoing Gupta allegations.

In conclusion, we have proven with statistical certainty that choosing to withhold your vote will have no effect on the overall outcome of the national election. However, our findings stress that, although voter behaviour may be unpredictable, it is essential that all registered voters go out and make the effort to vote to ensure a more democratic spread of parliamentary representation among the campaigning parties.

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