

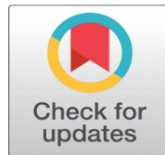


SOUTH AFRICA' S ELECTORAL PROCESS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ITS POLITICAL HISTORY, DYNAMICS AND IMPLICATIONS

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Received 02 November 2024
Accepted 21 December 2024
Published 31 December 2024

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DOI

[10.29121/ShodhSamajik.v1.i1.2024.6](https://doi.org/10.29121/ShodhSamajik.v1.i1.2024.6)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a critical analysis of South Africa's electoral process, examining its historical evolution, political dynamics, and implications for governance. Against the backdrop of the African National Congress (ANC)'s loss of its parliamentary majority for the first time since 1994, and the rise of opposition parties like the Democratic Alliance (DA), the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), and the new MK party, this paper walks through relevant literature, drawing upon conceptual frameworks, empirical studies, and theoretical perspectives to provide an informed opinion of South Africa's evolving electoral process. By synthesising past electoral trends, the 2024 election results, and emerging socio-political phenomena, it sheds light on the complexities inherent in South Africa's democracy. The paper argues that the changing political situation, marked by the decline in ANC support and the growing influence of opposition parties, pose significant challenges and opportunities for the country's future governance and democratic consolidation. It proposes specific recommendations to address these challenges and capitalise on the opportunities, aiming to inform both academic inquiry and practical policymaking.

Keywords: South Africa, Electoral Process, African National Congress (ANC), Democratic Alliance (DA), Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), Historical Evolution, Dynamics, Implications

1. INTRODUCTION

South Africa has come through a defining moment in its political history as the nation concluded its national elections in 2024. Faced with shifting voter sentiments and evolving political changes, the South African political space is undergoing profound transformations [Imray \(2024\)](#). The 2024 elections were not merely a contest for power but a reflection of the delicate relationship between historical legacies, contemporary challenges, and the aspirations of a diverse populace [Booyesen \(2014\)](#). At the heart of this electoral process lay the African National Congress (ANC), the longstanding ruling party, which found itself facing unprecedented challenges amidst declining nationwide support. With only 40.18%

of the votes projected in the 2024 elections, the ANC's traditional stronghold eroded, raising questions about the future direction of South Africa's governance [Al Jazeera. \(2024\)](#). Concurrently, opposition parties such as the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) positioned themselves to capitalize on this political flux, signalling a potential reshaping of the country's political system [Hairsine \(2024\)](#).

In a historic development, the 2024 elections also saw the successful participation of independent candidates, following a Constitutional Court ruling that the previous pure party-list system was unconstitutional [Wikipedia. \(2024\)](#). This introduced new features, with several high-profile independents winning seats and challenging the dominance of the traditional political parties. Furthermore, voter turnout continued to decline, reaching a record low of 58.64% in the 2024 elections, raising concerns about the representativeness of the electoral process [Al Jazeera. \(2024\)](#). Issues of corruption, service delivery, and economic inequality remained at the forefront of voter concerns, shaping the political discourse. In the light of the above, this seminar paper undertakes a critical analysis of South Africa's electoral process, inquiring into its historical roots, contemporary dynamics, and far-reaching implications. By examining past electoral trends, current polling data, and emerging socio-political realities, we aim to shed light on the difficulties inherent in South Africa's democracy and governance.

Furthermore, this paper seeks to contribute to the academic discourse by offering insights into the theoretical foundation of electoral politics and its manifestation in the South African context. In doing so, we review related literature, drawing upon conceptual frameworks, empirical studies, and theoretical perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of South Africa's electoral system. Through synthesizing these findings, we highlight the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, not only for South Africa but also for the broader African continent and the international community. By engaging with these key moments in South Africa's history, we endeavour to open up the electoral process and offer ideas that can inform both academic inquiry and practical policymaking. The paper proposes that the changing electoral view in South Africa poses significant challenges and opportunities for its political future.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

1) Conceptual Review

Understanding South Africa's electoral system requires digging into its historical evolution and conceptual frameworks. Shaped by colonization, apartheid, and the struggle for democracy, the country's electoral process reflects its complex political history. Additionally, exploring political party competition and coalition politics is vital in understanding South Africa's multiparty democracy. In a multicultural society where multiple parties compete for power, the variables of competition and cooperation among political entities shape electoral outcomes and governing arrangements, offering insights into the functioning of the electoral system and the broader political space. These we shall consider in depth in what follows.

Historical Overview of South Africa's Electoral System

The foundation of South Africa's electoral system can be traced back to its colonial past, characterized by discriminatory voting laws that disenfranchised the majority of the population, particularly black South Africans [Mhlongo \(2020\)](#),

[Kariuki et al. \(2021\)](#). The colonial era laid the groundwork for racial segregation and entrenched inequalities that would shape the country's electoral system for decades to come [Gani & Marshall \(2022\)](#). The apartheid regime introduced a formalized system of racial segregation and discrimination, extending to electoral practices. The implementation of apartheid laws, such as the Population Registration Act and Group Areas Act, systematically disenfranchised non-white South Africans and consolidated power in the hands of the white minority [Jenkins \(1996\)](#), [Deitle \(2021\)](#). We learn from Mandela's autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* that electoral processes during this period were heavily manipulated to maintain white supremacy and suppress opposition voices.

The 1994 democratic elections marked a watershed moment in South Africa's history, signaling the end of apartheid and the dawn of a new era of democracy. These landmark elections, which saw Nelson Mandela elected as the country's first black president, were characterized by inclusivity and the enfranchisement of all South Africans, regardless of race [Mandela \(1994\)](#), [Mngomezulu \(2019\)](#). The adoption of a proportional representation electoral system aimed to promote political representation and accommodate the diverse interests of the population became the outcome [Leemann & Mares \(2012\)](#), [Mngomezulu \(2019\)](#).

In the aftermath of apartheid, South Africa embarked on a process of electoral reform aimed at fostering democratic governance and enhancing political participation. Revisions to electoral laws, such as the Electoral Act of 1998, sought to streamline electoral processes, ensure transparency and accountability, and promote the principle of one person, one vote. These reforms represented a significant departure from the discriminatory practices of the past and laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and representative electoral system [Nupen \(2004\)](#), [Mbete \(2021\)](#).

The 2024 general elections marked another defining moment in South Africa's electoral history. The African National Congress (ANC), the ruling party since 1994, faced its greatest challenge yet, securing only 40.18% of the votes and losing its parliamentary majority for the first time [Al Jazeera. \(2024\)](#). This decline in support for the ANC was accompanied by the rise of opposition parties like the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), which capitalized on the political flux [Hairsine \(2024\)](#). A historic development in the 2024 elections was the successful participation of independent candidates, following a Constitutional Court ruling that the previous pure party-list system was unconstitutional [Wikipedia. \(2024\)](#). Several high-profile independents won seats, introducing new dynamics and challenging the dominance of traditional political parties.

Despite progress towards democratisation, South Africa's electoral system continues to face challenges and controversies. Issues such as voter intimidation, electoral fraud, and political violence have marred the integrity of elections in certain regions, raising concerns about the robustness of the electoral process [Ayshat \(2017\)](#), [Karlsson \(2021\)](#). Furthermore, debates persist regarding the effectiveness of proportional representation and the need for electoral reforms to address issues of political accountability and governance [Mbete \(2021\)](#).

The historical path of South Africa's electoral system reflects a journey of transformation and adaptation in response to changing political, social, and economic realities. As the country finds its way around the challenges of democratic consolidation and nation-building, ongoing debates and reforms will shape the future direction of its electoral system, ensuring that it remains responsive to the needs and aspirations of all South Africans [Mhlongo \(2020\)](#), [Deitle \(2021\)](#).

Figure 1

Party	1994	1999	2004	2009	2014	2019
African National Congress (ANC)	62.7	66.4	69.7	65.9	62.2	57.5
Democratic Alliance (DA)	1.7	9.6	12.4	16.7	22.2	20.8
Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)	--	--	--	--	6.4	10.8
Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)	10.5	8.6	7.0	4.6	2.4	3.4
Freedom Front Plus (FF+)	2.2	0.8	0.9	0.8	1.6	2.4
Vote share total of top 5 parties*	97.5*	94.9*	93.1*	95.4*	94.8	94.9
Number of parties competing	19	16	21	27	29	48
Turnout	86.9	89.3	76.7	77.3	73.5	66.0

Figure 1 Table Showing Historical Performance of Parties in General Elections in South Africa.
Source Aljazeera, 2024.

Political Party Competition and Coalition Politics

Political party competition in South Africa is characterized by the presence of multiple political parties representing diverse interests, ideologies, and constituencies. This pluralistic system results in vibrant competition among parties vying for electoral support and political power [Adetiba \(2017\)](#), [Vandome \(2024\)](#). Political parties in South Africa span a broad ideological spectrum, ranging from the African National Congress (ANC) with its historical roots in liberation struggle and African nationalism to the Democratic Alliance (DA) advocating for liberal democracy and free-market policies. This diversity of ideologies reflects the complex socio-political dynamics within the country [Liebenberg \(2000\)](#), [Levy et al. \(2021\)](#).

The dynamics of political party competition are shaped by the preferences and behaviors of the electorate [Rohanlall \(2014\)](#), [Adetiba \(2017\)](#). Factors such as race, class, ethnicity, and socio-economic status influence voter decisions, with parties tailoring their messages and policies to appeal to specific demographic groups [Paret & Runciman \(2023\)](#), [Dawson et al. \(2023\)](#).

South Africa's proportional representation electoral system allows for a multiplicity of parties to compete for seats in the national and provincial legislatures. This system encourages the formation of coalition governments, as no single party typically secures an outright majority [Rohanlall \(2014\)](#). The 2024 general elections marked a significant shift towards coalition politics, as the African National Congress (ANC), the ruling party since 1994, faced a decline in support, securing only 40.18% of the votes and losing its parliamentary majority for the first time [Al Jazeera. \(2024\)](#). This decline in ANC support was accompanied by the rise of opposition parties like the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), which capitalized on the political flux [Hairsine \(2024\)](#).

A historic development in the 2024 elections was the successful participation of independent candidates, following a Constitutional Court ruling that the previous pure party-list system was unconstitutional [Wikipedia. \(2024\)](#). Several high-profile

independents won seats, introducing new dynamics and challenging the dominance of traditional political parties.

Coalition politics thus become integral to the governance process, requiring parties to negotiate and compromise to form stable governing arrangements [Netswera & Khumalo \(2022\)](#). After the 2024 election results, the ANC, DA, Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), and Patriotic Alliance (PA) agreed to form a national unity government, with Cyril Ramaphosa being re-elected as President [Al Jazeera. \(2024\)](#). Coalition politics in South Africa entail the negotiation and bargaining among political parties to form government alliances [Sithole \(2023\)](#). Parties must set aside ideological differences, policy priorities, and power-sharing arrangements to construct viable coalitions capable of governing effectively. The formation of coalitions often involves trade-offs and concessions, as parties seek to balance their own interests with the broader goals of governance and stability [Levy et al. \(2021\)](#). While coalition governments can promote inclusivity and representativeness, they also present challenges in terms of decision-making, policy coherence, and accountability. Managing diverse coalition partners with competing agendas requires skillful leadership and consensus-building, often leading to tensions and disagreements within the governing coalition [Booyesen \(2014\)](#), [Sithole \(2023\)](#).

2) Empirical Studies

[Chu & Shen \(2017\)](#) researched the relationship between civic engagement, government dysfunction, government performance, and institutional trust in South Africa, using data from the 2004 Afrobarometer Round 2.5 survey. The findings show that civic engagement positively affects institutional trust, with government dysfunction and performance mediating this relationship. This affirms the importance of policies promoting civic engagement and good governance to enhance institutional trust, as South Africa advances in its democratic development. [Kariuki et al. \(2021\)](#) analysed past elections in South Africa, in a study titled "Youth Participation in Electoral Politics in South Africa: Trends, Patterns and Patterns" to understand civic engagement patterns. By examining historical data and demographic factors, they uncovered shifts in voter turnout rates over time, providing understanding into electoral participation situations and democratic governance implications.

[Kim, & Kim \(2021\)](#) studied African voters' perceptions of party platforms and their behaviour in the 2017 Kenyan presidential elections, using data from an original survey experiment conducted in Nairobi. The findings suggest that the opposition party's clearer messaging helps average voters recognize and characterize the party, compared to the incumbent's moderate policy stance. Additionally, non-partisan voters tend to support candidates advocating moderate policies, indicating an incumbency advantage. This highlights the importance of party messaging and policy positioning in shaping voter behaviour in African electoral contexts. In contrast, [Agboga \(2023\)](#) studied similar question but his findings focus on the electoral consequences of politicians switching parties in Africa, with a specific case study of Nigeria. Agboga's research indicates that party switchers in Nigeria perform worse in elections compared to non-switchers. This suggests that voters in Nigeria may be suspicious of politicians' intentions when they switch parties, leading to electoral repercussions for the switchers.

[Schakel \(2013\)](#) inquired about the increasing importance of regional elections and the challenges in interpreting their results, focusing on deviations from national election outcomes. The findings highlight the significance of territorial cleavages for spatial variation, while institutional authority and second-order election effects are

key for understanding temporal change. [Paret & Runciman \(2023\)](#) study investigated if racial identities influence voting behaviour in post-apartheid South Africa. Analysing data from 3,905 voters across five metropolitan municipalities, they find that while racial identity correlates with party preference, it's not a guaranteed predictor. Many voters abstain from voting, and there's fluidity in voting decisions between elections. Despite this, racial identity remains correlated with voting decisions overall, demonstrating 'racialized fluidity' in South African voting behaviour.











[Twala \(2014\)](#) studied the African National Congress's (ANC) pivotal role in South Africa's democratic transition from 1994 to 2014. It highlights the significance of the 1994 general elections as a symbol of liberation from apartheid and the realization of democratic aspirations. By analysing the ANC's election campaigns during this period, the study sheds light on the party's evolving strategies and their impact on South African politics, society, and culture. In the final analysis, it talks the importance of election rituals in understanding the political system and concludes by examining the ANC's changing campaigning approaches over the years.

[Mottiar \(2015\)](#) examined the Democratic Alliance's (DA) electoral gains in the 2014 South African election, analysing its increased national and provincial support, particularly in the Western Cape. The DA's rise is highlighted by over a million new national votes and its official opposition status in various provinces. The study evaluates whether these gains signal a strengthening of opposition politics in South Africa, focusing on the DA's role in providing institutional space for counter-political elites, offering a viable alternative to the ruling party, facilitating political debate, and performing an oversight role.

[Mtimka & Prevost \(2023\)](#) examines the emergence and impact of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in South African politics over the past eight years. Despite limited scholarly analysis, the authors argue that the EFF has positioned itself as a challenger to the African National Congress (ANC) by adopting leftist ideologies and policy proposals, initially stemming from the ANC Youth League under current EFF leader Julius Malema's leadership. Survey and exit polling data suggest that the EFF is gaining support, particularly among younger black voters in townships, with a focus on issues like land and job opportunities, posing a threat to the ANC's long-standing dominance in future elections. However, the party's momentum appears to have waned after the fall of former President Jacob Zuma, coupled with some tactical missteps.

The 2024 South African elections marked a critical juncture in the country's political landscape, as the long-dominant African National Congress (ANC) lost its parliamentary majority for the first time. This has ushered in an era of coalition governance, with the ANC needing to form alliances to maintain power. The analysis examines the ANC's potential coalitions with parties like the MK, EFF, and DA, and how these partnerships could reshape the political environment. Ideological congruence and the capacity for negotiated concessions will be key factors influencing the ANC's coalition choices. The findings suggest that the ANC's coalition decisions will have significant implications for governance stability, policy direction, and socioeconomic reforms in South Africa. These choices will not only determine immediate outcomes but also set precedents for the future of the country's democratic evolution and its global standing [Coetzee \(2024\)](#).

Figure 2

PARTY RESULTS				ELECTION YEAR (%)			
PARTY	VOTES	% SUPPORT	SEATS	2014	2009	2004	1999
 ANC	10 026 475	57.50 %	230	62.15 ↓	65.90 ↓	69.69 ↑	66.35 □
 DA	3 622 531	20.77 %	84	22.23 ↑	16.66 ↑	12.37 ↑	×
 EFF	1 882 480	10.80 %	44	6.35 ×	×	×	×
 IFP	588 839	3.38 %	14	2.40 ↓	4.55 ↓	6.97 ↓	8.58 □
 VF PLUS	414 864	2.38 %	10	0.90 ↑	0.83 ↓	0.89 ↑	×
 ACDP	146 262	0.84 %	4	0.57 ↓	0.81 ↓	1.60 ↑	1.43 □
 UDM	78 030	0.45 %	2	1.00 ↑	0.85 ↓	2.28 ↓	3.42 □
 NFP	61 220	0.35 %	2	1.57 ×	×	×	×
 ATM	76 830	0.44 %	2	×	×	×	×
 GOOD	70 408	0.40 %	2	×	×	×	×

[MORE](#)

Figure 2 By the Left: Showing a 2019 National Assembly Results.
Source Web (2024).

Figure 3

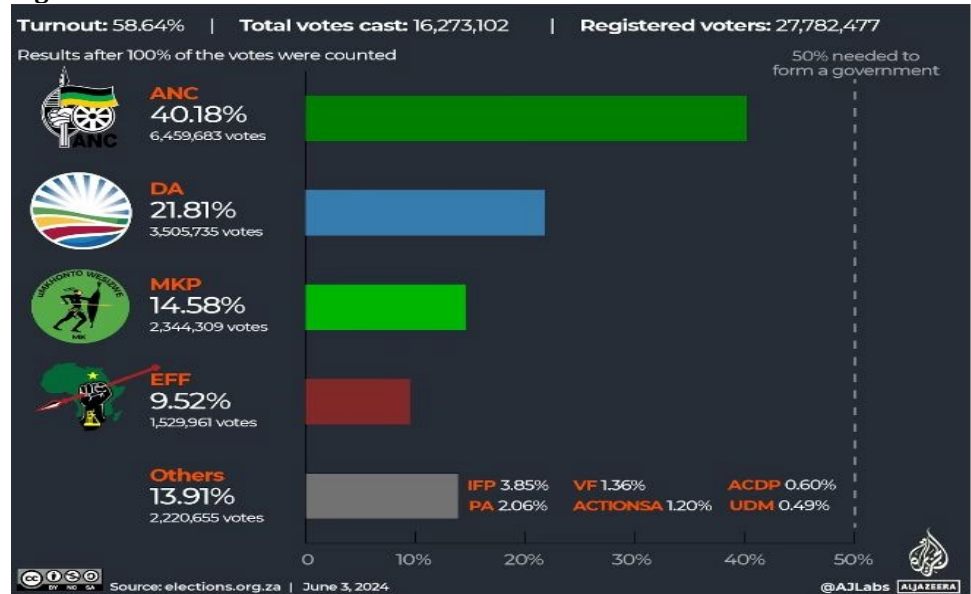


Figure 3 To the Right: Showing the 2024 General Elections Result (Aljazeera, 2024)

3) Theoretical Framework

Political Cleavages Theory is a concept in political science that describes the division of society along certain lines, such as class, ethnicity, religion, language, or region, which shape political preferences and party alignments [Zuckerman \(2009\)](#). The Political Cleavages Theory does not have a single founder, as it has evolved over time through contributions from various political scientists and scholars. However, it has been influenced by thinkers such as Seymour Martin Lipset, Stein Rokkan, and

Giovanni Sartori, among others [Smits \(2022\)](#). The theory emerged and gained prominence in the mid-20th century, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s, as scholars sought to understand the dynamics of party politics and electoral behavior in Western democracies [Zuckerman \(2009\)](#), [Smits \(2022\)](#).

According to this theory, societies are divided along certain lines, or cleavages, such as class, ethnicity, religion, language, or region. These divisions shape individuals' political preferences, attitudes, and behaviors, influencing their allegiances and voting patterns. Political parties align themselves with specific cleavages to mobilize support, adapting their policies and strategies accordingly [Deegan-Krause \(2009\)](#). Cleavages determine electoral dynamics, influencing voter behavior, party competition, and electoral outcomes. Over time, cleavages may evolve in response to social, economic, and cultural changes, impacting party politics and governance structures [Boone et al \(2022\)](#).

Figure 4

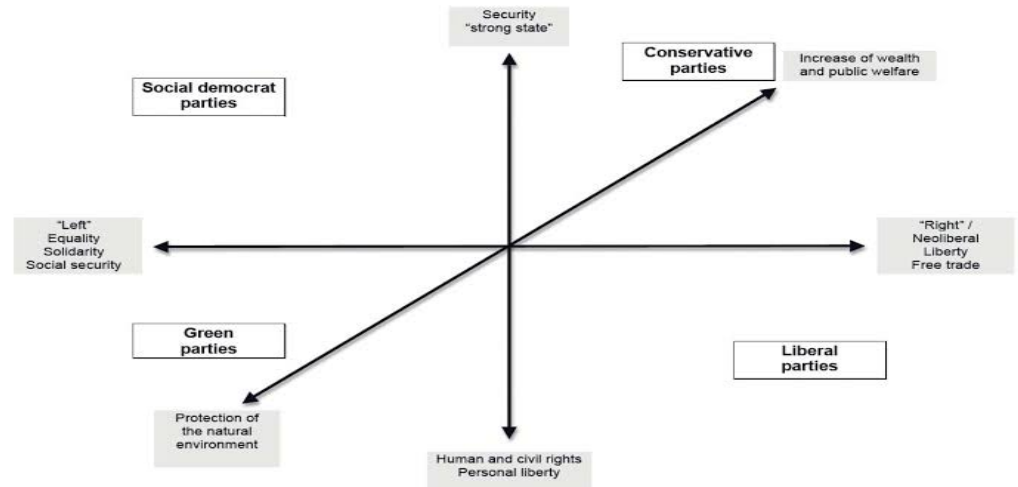


Figure 4 A Model of Political Cleavages Theory.

Source [Smits \(2022\)](#).

The Political Cleavages Theory provides a relevant lens through which to understand South Africa's electoral dynamics. This theory posits that societies are divided along distinct cleavages, such as class, ethnicity, religion, or language, which shape political preferences and party alignments. In the South African context, [Gethin \(2020\)](#) historical divisions based on race and ethnicity have been central to the country's political landscape, making the Political Cleavages Theory particularly pertinent. From the study we can discern the following:

Historically, South Africa's electoral landscape has been shaped by racial divisions, stemming from the apartheid era. These racial cleavages, encompassing black, white, colored, and Indian communities, have significantly influenced voting patterns and party allegiances. In addition to race, socio-economic disparities contribute to divergent political preferences, with parties often tailoring policies to appeal to specific socio-economic groups. Regional disparities in development further compound electoral dynamics, as voters in different provinces prioritize different issues and hold distinct expectations from political parties. Additionally, identity cleavages based on language, culture, and religion also influence political alignments, particularly in regions with significant linguistic or ethnic minorities.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research design to critically analyze South Africa's electoral process, its history, political dynamics, and implications. The data was collected through a comprehensive review of literature covering the topic from 1994 to 2024. This data was then analyzed and discussed using a thematic analysis approach, which allowed the researchers to identify recurring themes and patterns that have shaped South Africa's electoral landscape over time.

4. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1. FINDINGS

The 2024 South African elections marked a critical juncture, as the long-dominant African National Congress (ANC) lost its parliamentary majority for the first time since 1994 [Coetzee \(2024\)](#). This has ushered in an era of coalition governance, with the ANC needing to form alliances with other parties to maintain power. The ANC's potential coalition partners include the MK party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), and the Democratic Alliance (DA) [Coetzee \(2024\)](#).

Ideological congruence and the capacity for negotiated concessions will be key factors influencing the ANC's choice of coalition partners [Coetzee \(2024\)](#). The ANC's coalition decisions will have significant implications for governance stability, policy direction, and socioeconomic reforms in South Africa. These choices will not only determine immediate outcomes but also set precedents for the future of South Africa's democratic evolution and its global standing [Coetzee \(2024\)](#).

Voter turnout in the 2024 elections was the lowest ever in South Africa's 30-year democratic history at 58.64% [Al Jazeera. \(2024\)](#). The DA emerged as the second-largest party, while the MK party and the EFF also made significant gains. South Africans do not directly elect the president, but rather the members of the National Assembly, who then elect the president by a simple majority. The entire process of forming a new government, including the election of the president, is expected to be completed within a couple of weeks [Al Jazeera. \(2024\)](#).

4.2. DISCUSSION: A SYNTHESIS

1) Analysis of Current Polling Data and Electoral Projections

The 2024 South African general elections have marked a critical juncture in the country's political landscape, as the long-dominant African National Congress (ANC) lost its parliamentary majority for the first time since 1994. The ANC secured just over 40% of the votes, well short of the 50% threshold required to maintain its majority [Al Jazeera. \(2024\)](#).

This decline in ANC support has ushered in an era of coalition governance, with the party needing to form alliances with other parties to maintain power. The Democratic Alliance (DA) emerged as the second-largest party, receiving around 21% of the votes, followed by the MK party with over 14% and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) with just over 9% [Al Jazeera. \(2024\)](#).

Ideological congruence and the capacity for negotiated concessions will be key factors influencing the ANC's choice of coalition partners [Coetzee \(2024\)](#). The ANC's coalition decisions will have significant implications for governance stability, policy direction, and socioeconomic reforms in South Africa [Coetzee \(2024\)](#). These choices

will not only determine immediate outcomes but also set precedents for the future of the country's democratic evolution and its global standing [Coetzee \(2024\)](#).

Voter turnout in the 2024 elections was the lowest ever in South Africa's 30-year democratic history at 58.64%, raising concerns about the representativeness of the electoral process [Al Jazeera. \(2024\)](#). This trend of declining voter participation aligns with the findings of [Chu and Shen's \(2017\)](#) research, which emphasizes the importance of policies that encourage civic engagement and good governance to strengthen democratic institutions.

Furthermore, [Kariuki et al. \(2021\)](#) study on youth participation in South African elections suggests that the growing involvement of young black voters in townships could significantly impact future electoral outcomes. Understanding the drivers of this shift in civic engagement, as well as the evolving preferences and behaviors of the electorate, will be crucial for political parties and policymakers seeking to adapt to the changing dynamics of South African politics.

2) Identification of Key Trends and Patterns in Voter Preferences

If anything is most notable in the 30 years since democracy began in South Africa then it is how the long-dominant African National Congress (ANC) lost its parliamentary majority for the first time since 1994 as we see in the report by [Coetzee \(2024\)](#). This decline in ANC support, by way of implication, has ushered in an era of coalition governance, with the party needing to form alliances with other parties to maintain power. The Democratic Alliance (DA) has consistently been the second-largest party, while the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and the new MK party have also made significant gains in recent elections [Al Jazeera. \(2024\)](#). The DA is currently polling at around 21% of the vote, followed by the MK at 14% and the EFF at 9% [Al Jazeera. \(2024\)](#).

What we see in South Africa has precedence elsewhere. [Kim & Kim \(2021\)](#) research in Kenya suggests that clear party messaging and moderate policy positions are effective in attracting voter support, implying that negligence or defaulting in this aspect could account for the outcome being experienced. Parties that can effectively communicate their platforms and appeal to a broad range of voters are more likely to succeed electorally Kim & Kim say. [Agboga \(2023\)](#) study on Nigeria, similarly, indicates that voters are sceptical of politicians who change parties, and this can have negative electoral consequences for the switchers. Voters value political loyalty and integrity, and party switching can be seen as a betrayal of these principles.

Another trend and pattern can be seen in [Paret & Runciman \(2023\)](#) research in South Africa which reveals a correlation between racial identity and party preference, a phenomenon they term 'racialized fluidity'; here they refer to that which determine election the most. While race is not the sole determinant of voting behaviour, it remains a significant factor in the post-apartheid political system.

These trends and patterns highlight the evolving nature of South African politics and the challenges facing the ANC as it seeks to maintain its dominance in the face of growing opposition and changing voter preferences. The rise of new parties, the importance of effective communication and policy positioning, and the enduring influence of racial identity on voting behaviour all point to a more complex and competitive political environment in the years ahead.

3) Exploration of Potential Impact on South Africa's Governance and Democracy

The 2024 South African general elections have upended many of the assumptions and predictions made by scholars prior to the vote. Contrary to the expectations set forth in studies like those by [Kariuki et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Paret & Runciman \(2023\)](#), the election results have not simply reinforced existing patterns of political participation and the influence of racial identity on voting behaviour.

Instead, the African National Congress (ANC)'s loss of its parliamentary majority, securing only around 40% of the votes, has ushered in a new era of coalition governance that was not anticipated by previous research [Coetzee \(2024\)](#), [Al Jazeera. \(2024\)](#). This dramatic shift in the political landscape challenges the notion of the ANC's continued dominance and the stability of South Africa's party system.

Furthermore, the rise of opposition parties like the Democratic Alliance (DA), the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), and the new MK party has introduced new dynamics that were not fully accounted for in the scholarly analyses prior to the elections [Al Jazeera. \(2024\)](#). The ability of these parties to capitalize on the ANC's declining support and make significant gains in the 2024 vote underscores the evolving nature of South African politics.

[Mtimka and Prevost's \(2023\)](#) study on the EFF's emergence and impact has also taken on new relevance, as this party has now solidified its position as a key player in the country's political arena. The EFF's success in the 2024 elections suggests that the party's leftist ideologies and policy proposals have resonated with a growing segment of the electorate, potentially reshaping the political discourse and challenging the traditional power structures.

Likewise, the insights from [Chu and Shen's \(2017\)](#) research on the relationship between civic engagement, institutional trust, and government performance must be revisited in light of the 2024 election outcomes. The decline in voter turnout to a record low of 58.64% [Al Jazeera. \(2024\)](#) raises questions about the representativeness of the electoral process and the public's trust in political institutions - a dynamic that was not fully captured in the pre-election studies.

As South Africa weaves its way through this critical point of her history, the potential impact on the country's governance and democracy will be significantly shaped by the realities of the 2024 election results, which have upended or confirmed many of the previous scholarly assumptions. Ongoing research and analysis will be crucial in understanding the implications of this new political landscape and guiding policymakers and stakeholders as they navigate the challenges and opportunities ahead.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, South Africa has entered a new era of coalition politics at a national level. The ANC, whilst remaining a major party in any coalition, has lost its parliamentary majority and importantly its soft power hold on the country. Once again, both locally and internationally, the world will watch with interest. South Africa has a new story to tell, and only time will reveal the outcome of this next chapter in South Africa's remarkable journey [Casimjee \(2024\)](#). Through a critical analysis of historical roots, contemporary dynamics, and theoretical framework, this seminar paper contributes to our understanding of South Africa's electoral process, offering insights that can inform both academic inquiry and practical policymaking. Moving forward, policymakers must heed the insights drawn from

this analysis to navigate the challenges and opportunities inherent in South Africa's evolving democracy.

The following policy recommendations are considered germane for addressing the challenges highlighted in this study:

- 1) Implement policies and initiatives aimed at promoting civic engagement among citizens, particularly focusing on historically marginalized groups.
- 2) Take measures to address government dysfunction and improve performance to bolster institutional trust.
- 3) Political parties should prioritize clear messaging and policy positioning to better connect with voters and build trust.
- 4) Develop guidelines and regulations to address electoral repercussions for politicians switching parties, ensuring accountability and transparency in the political process.
- 5) Foster an inclusive political environment that recognizes and respects the diversity of South Africa's population.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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