

## **Popular Attitudes Towards The South African Electoral System**

### **Draft Report to the Electoral Task Team<sup>1</sup>**

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### **POPULAR ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE SOUTH AFRICAN ELECTORAL SYSTEM**

The Electoral Task Team (ETT), chaired by Dr. Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert was established by Dr. Mangosuthu. Buthelezi,, the Minister of Home Affairs, in May 2002 to review the current electoral system and recommend any reforms in time for the next general election. Any such reforms would have to be implemented in terms of Sections 4 (1) of the 1996 Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996) which states that the National Assembly shall consist of no fewer than 350 and no more than 400 members elected in terms of an electoral system that:

- (a) is prescribed by national legislation
- (b) is based on the national common voters roll;
- (c) provides for a minimum voting age of 18 years; and
- (d) results, in general, in proportional representation.

Section 4 (2) adds that an Act of Parliament must provide a formula for determining the number of members of the National Assembly.

Similar provisions (Sections 105 (1) and (2)) apply to the composition and election of the Provincial legislatures.

To inform their thinking, the ETT decided to commission a nationally representative survey of public attitudes about the qualities of the current electoral system, and how it might be improved (within the constraints of the constitution). The resultant survey was undertaken by four prominent South African research survey companies (ACNielsen, MarkData, Markinor, and Research Surveys), and coordinated and analyzed by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC).

#### **I Framework and Methodology of the Survey<sup>1</sup>**

The specific objectives of the survey were to obtain information from amongst the pool of potentially qualified voters concerning, principally, levels of political awareness and participation, knowledge of the current electoral system and political system, sources of information on politics and government, previous and potential voting behaviour, trust in the current electoral system and indications about what is popularly expected and desired from an electoral system. A recommended questionnaire was designed for the ETT by the HSRC, containing both structures and semi-structured questions. The ETT made final decisions about which question items were included in the final version.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a draft report. Due to the speed with which the Electoral Task Team required the survey results, the authors have had only one week to digest and analyze the results. A final report will address any further queries or problems identified by the ETT or other readers following a public discussion of the draft report at the ETT Workshop.

The questionnaire was administered face to face to a random, nationally representative sample of 2,760 South African citizens of voting age, between the period 16 July and 16 August 2002. This included the conduct of 60 pilot interviews to ascertain the time required to administer the questionnaire and to test the formulation of the questions.

The HSRC provided a sample of the target population with the sampling population defined as all people living in households and hostels (but excluding special institutions such as prisons and hospitals) who could be contacted and interviewed. A list of all Enumerator Areas (EA's) based on the 1996 census was used as a sampling frame. The list contained descriptive data on the number of people and number of households for each EA in the country.

The final sample was a random, disproportionate, multi-stage, stratified, cluster sample. The list of EAs was stratified into nine provincial lists, and then into four population groups within each province, and further into rural and urban lists. To obtain the required sample of 2760 individuals, 690 EAs were randomly selected from these lists with the probability of selection proportionate to population size. Finally, an implicit stratification by home language was implicitly introduced through a method known as "controlled selection." However, in the Northern Cape and amongst the three minority population groups (white, coloured and Indian respondents), strictly proportional selection would result in insufficient numbers of respondents selected to support detailed analysis. Thus, a disproportionate number of EAs was selected among these strata. These cases, however, were subsequently weighted downward so that they would have the proper influence on the final national results.

Within each of the selected EAs, four visiting points were randomly selected. At each visiting point, all eligible respondents were enumerated and one respondent was randomly selected. No substitutions were allowed. If the selected respondent was not at home at the time of the first visit (normally made after working hours), two follow up visits were made at agreed times and dates. Questionnaires were administered in the language of the interviewees' choice, with appropriate use of show cards. Interviewers reported that the questionnaire was formulated clearly and was user-friendly.

Given the time available from the point at which the ETT commissioned this survey, and the necessary time needed to design the survey and sample, conduct fieldwork, and enter and clean the data, a proportionately weighted, nationally representative data set was only available for analysis one week prior to this workshop. Inevitably, this means that whilst we are able to provide a broad overview of our findings, we are doing so cautiously, aware that more detailed analysis may be necessary.

## **II Attitudes towards the current electoral system**

South Africa's first two democratic, non-racial general elections (including elections for the nine provincial assemblies) held in 1994 and 1999 were conducted under a national list system of proportional representation (PR) with no minimum fixed proportion of the total number of votes (i.e. a threshold) required for parties to gain representation in parliament or provincial assemblies. The choice of this electoral system was an outcome of the negotiation process that produced the democratic settlement, and was dictated by the perceived characteristics of this form of PR. Notably, it had the virtues of, first, being simple to use and to explain to voters. Second, it provided for maximum representivity, thereby ensuring the inclusion rather than the exclusion of minority parties and opinions. Third, because it was inclusive, it was more likely than alternative electoral

systems to encourage reconciliation and cooperation between the competing political parties, (a quality that was enhanced in the first parliament by a constitutional requirement requiring a government of national unity consisting of all parties winning a minimum number of seats). Overall, the idea of proportionality was seen as vital to allay suspicions that the electoral system would unfairly favour one party over another (as can notoriously happen via the manipulation of the demarcation of constituency boundaries under the plurality systems used in South Africa prior to 1994, or still in use in the US, UK and most Commonwealth countries).

If the mechanics of the national list PR system were intended to provide a system that was 'fair', then the political assumption on which that intention was based was that elections held under its rubric would also be 'free.' In the post-negotiation South African context this required that parties would encounter 'a level playing field' in the sense that no party would be favoured above others by the governmental or administrative machinery. To this end the 1994 and 1999 elections were run by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), established under the 1994 constitution and charged with administering elections in a politically neutral way.

Given that these were the imperatives driving the selection of the present electoral system, we begin by reporting results to a set of question items that gauge public opinion about these very aspects of the current system. Because people may have very different levels of knowledge about the existing system, the interviewer began this set of questions by informing respondents that:

General elections are normally held every five years. In these elections, people vote for a political party. The top people from each party's list of candidates then go into parliament or the provincial assembly according to how many votes each party receives. Once parliament is elected, the Members of Parliament elect the President and the Members of Provincial Legislatures elect the Premiers.

The survey then asked respondents a series of questions about their opinions of the current electoral system. Looking across these questions, it is clear that a substantial majority feels that, overall, the present system is fair.<sup>ii</sup> Three quarters say they are "satisfied" with "the way we elect our government" (74 percent) and agree the system is "fair to all parties" (72 percent). Approximately two thirds feel that "all voters were treated equally" in the 1999 election (68 percent) and that "all parties were treated equally" in 1999 (63 percent).

**Table 1: Satisfaction with the Fairness and Equality of the Present Electoral System**

	Yes	Neutral/Don't Know	No
Are you satisfied with the way we elect our government in South Africa?	74	5	21
Is the voting system is fair to all parties?	72	11	17
Do you think that all voters were treated equally in the 1999 general election?	68	14	18
Do you think all parties were treated equally in the 1999 general election?	63	16	21

Interpreting these and all subsequent results requires that we step back and think about our criteria for evaluating responses. The typical analysis of public opinion looks carefully at issues of the balance of opinion, especially at which options are supported by a plurality or even a majority of respondents. However, readers need to consider whether

normal majority / plurality / minority considerations are adequate criteria to judge these results. We need to consider whether fundamentals of the constitutional system require broader thresholds of support than simple majorities. Or, in other words, whether electoral systems require what political scientist David Easton once called “diffuse support,” meaning a form of support for elements of a democratic regime that are almost consensual and cut across all societal cleavages?<sup>iii</sup>

With these considerations in mind, taken together these results suggest that, at least in the public eye, the system is far from “broke” and that, accordingly caution ought to be exercised in “mending it.” However, against that, it needs to be noted that fully one-fifth of respondents registered their dissatisfaction with the present system, and that around one-third were either dissatisfied or non-committal in their judgment. In other words, support for the current system is less than consensual and significantly sized minorities register dissatisfaction.

We see a similar pattern of responses to a series of questions on the breadth of representation and degree of political accountability produced by the present system (Table 2).<sup>iv</sup> Four fifths of respondents feel that the system “ensures that we include many voices in parliament” (81 percent) and that the system gives voters a chance to “change the party in power,” (78 percent). Around seven in ten say the system enables voters to “influence parliament” (71 percent), that it produces “the best possible government” (69 percent), and that it allows voters to hold political parties “accountable for their actions” (68 percent). However, we see a notable drop off in agreement when we ask whether the system helps voters “hold individual representatives of government accountable for their actions”: here, just 60 percent agree and fully one-quarter (25 percent disagree).

**Table 2: The Electoral System and Political Accountability**

	Yes	Neutral/Dk	No
Does the voting system ensure that we include many voices in parliament?	81	8	11
Does the voting system give voters a way to change the party in power?	78	9	14
Can voters influence parliament?	71	11	18
Does the voting system give us the best possible government?	69	9	22
Does the voting system help voters hold the parties accountable for their actions?	68	12	20
Does the voting system help voters hold individual representatives of government accountable for their actions?	60	15	25

All of this suggests that voters recognize that the system produces a high level of representativeness as well as provides for an opportunity of government turnover. In other words, whereas various commentators have begun to categorize the African National Congress (ANC), which won 63 percent and 67 percent of the national vote in 1994 and 1999 respectively as a “dominant” party, voters do not necessarily view its position as unassailable. Most voters also feel that the electoral system allows them the opportunity to make their voices heard in the halls of parliament and ensure that political parties “anticipate” their reactions at the next election to what they do today.<sup>v</sup>

However, these results also suggest that many voters agree with those political scientists who argue that PR’s weakest area is that it does not allow the electorate to hold individual parliamentarians and government officials accountable. This is particularly notable in the context of the task that the ETT has been given; it must take into account the widespread argument that the national list PR system weakens the political accountability of individual members of legislatures by empowering party leaderships

(who exert considerable influence in the construction of the parties' lists of candidates for election). In contrast, so it is often said, constituency or geographic representation provides a more direct link between voters and their representatives, whilst simultaneously demanding of the latter a dual loyalty (to both their party and their constituents). We will address this question at greater length below. On the whole, however, the results in Tables 1 and 2 display a relatively high level of satisfaction with the existing system.

In order to test which factors seem to structure attitudes towards the current electoral system, the survey measured a range of basic demographic characteristics (e.g. age, race, home language, education, household type, employment, province and rural-urban status). It also measured a series of attitudinal and behavioural factors such as respondents' main source of political information, their political knowledge, political interest, and their political participation in previous elections and other forms of political activity.

Statistical analysis revealed that, as in so many other areas of public opinion in South Africa, the most important demographic structuring characteristic race. Hence, for instance, if we re-visit the issue of satisfaction with the present electoral system, we find that white, coloured and Indians respondents are considerably less satisfied with various aspects of the current system. At the same time, readers should note that the overlap is far from complete.<sup>vi</sup> Between one third and one half of white voters, and just above one half to 60 percent of coloured and Indian respondents offer positive assessments of the current system. It is also notable that between 12 to 15 percent of black respondents register dissatisfaction with the system. What may be most significant for the ETT is the fact that there is greatest cross-racial agreement with the items that refer to the electoral system per se (i.e. "the way we elect our government," "the voting system is fair") than with the items that refer more to election administration ("treatment" of parties and voters). Thus, although the overall objectives of the present electoral system would seem to earn relative approval across all racial groups, the mode of its implementation appears to be in considerably greater dispute. Again, however, we refer readers to the issue of how much support is required for something such as an electoral system, and how widespread that support should be.

**Table 3: Fairness and Equality of the Present Electoral System (by Race)**

		Black	White	Coloured	Indian
Satisfaction with way we elect our government	Not satisfied	15	45	36	33
	Satisfied	81	51	56	64
	Don't Know	4	4	8	3
Treatment of parties in 1999 general elections	Not equal	15	51	38	27
	Equal	70	34	46	52
	Don't know	15	16	25	23
Treatment of voters in 1999 general Elections	Not equal	12	47	27	22
	Equal	75	37	55	57
	Don't know	12	15	19	24
Voting system is fair	Disagree	12	43	26	20
	Agree	78	48	55	68
	Don't Know	11	9	19	13

Race makes less of a difference in attitudes toward the degree of political accountability produced by the current system.<sup>vii</sup> There is cross racial agreement that the system allows people to influence parliament and produces as broadly representative a parliament as possible. Whites, in particular, are very considerably less optimistic than other voters that the system enables people to hold individual representatives and political parties

accountable or that it produces the best government possible. Meanwhile, interestingly, the fairly widespread misgivings amongst the three minority groups that the electoral system renders parties and individual politicians accountable to the voters is shared by over a fifth of blacks. As will be illustrated below, these queries about accountability are echoed in people's thinking about the relative values of alternative electoral systems.

**Table 4: View on the Electoral System and Political Accountability (by Race)**

**Table 4: View on the Electoral System and Political Accountability (by Race)**

		Black	White	Coloured	Indian
Voters can influence parliament	Agree	72	64	70	85
	Disagree	16	29	20	11
	Don't know	12	7	10	4
The voting system holds parties accountable	Agree	73	43	61	66
	Disagree	16	45	21	19
	Don't know	11	12	18	15
The voting system offers a way to change the party in power	Agree				
	Disagree				
	Don't know				
The voting system gives us the best possible government	Agree	77	37	55	59
	Disagree	15	56	31	30
	Don't know	9	8	14	11
The voting system holds representatives of government accountable	Agree	64	38	57	64
	Disagree	22	46	26	20
	Don't know	14	16	17	16
The voting system ensures we include many voices in parliament	Agree	83	70	77	82
	Disagree	9	21	11	11
	Don't know	7	9	12	7

When we examine all the possible determinants of views of the current system, (demographic, attitudinal, and behavioural), race still plays a very strong role (see Appendices A and B for actual results). Even statistically controlling for differences in rural-urban status and educational status, white, coloured and Indian respondents are more negative in their assessments of the equality and fairness of the electoral system. When it comes to assessments of the political accountability of the system, only whites are significantly less positive. Moreover, these differences remain even when we control for differences in the job approval ratings of elected officials. What this strongly suggests is that racial differences in evaluations of the current electoral system are not simply a function of their disapproval of the party in government, the ANC.

At the same time, evaluations of elected officials do have a major impact on how people see the electoral system (they are the second strongest determinant after race with regard to assessments of equality and fairness of the system, and the strongest impact on assessments of accountability). In other words, the more people approve of the job performance of their MPs, MPLs and local councilors, the more positive they are about the electoral performance. Since we know from other research that evaluations of government institutions such as parliament, provincial assemblies and local councils are heavily coloured by partisan factors, we interpret this finding as suggesting that views of the electoral system are also shaped by partisan criteria. In support of this interpretation, we also point to the fact that people who identify with a political party are more positive in their assessment of the voting system. Based on the results of virtually all other research on this matter, we know that the large majority of these identifiers support the governing party, the ANC.<sup>viii</sup> That the electoral system is viewed through a partisan lens is something that the ETT needs to take seriously.

### III The Consequences of Attitudes towards the Electoral System

Once we have seen the actual extent and distribution of positive public assessments of the current voting system, the next obvious question is whether they matter? In other words, are people who are more or less positive about the voting system any more or less likely to have positive views of the democratic process, or to take part in it? We examined the linkages of public views of the fairness and equality of the system, and of its political accountability, with regard to three key items. Do people feel that elections matter? Do they think that representative institutions are concerned with public opinion? And, finally, are they willing to vote in future elections?

Let us begin by examining the actual responses to these questions. Eight in ten South Africans say they want to vote in 2004 (33 percent) or want to do so very much (49 percent). Two thirds (67 percent) see elections as consequential and agree with the statement that "it is important who is in power because it can make a difference to our lives". In contrast, three in ten (29 percent) feel that "It doesn't really matter who is in power, because in the end things go on much the same."

Yet people are far less sanguine about the performance of the representatives and representative institutions produced by those very elections. This is a matter we shall return to at the end of this report. But for now, we note that less than one in five believe that MPs "try their best to look after the interests of people like you" (19 percent) or "to listen to what people like you have to say" (19 percent). We find almost the exact same responses when the two questions are asked about elected members of provincial government.<sup>ix</sup>

**Table 5: Desire to Vote in 2004**

	Percent
I definitely do not want to vote.	8
I do not really want to vote	5
I do not know	5
I want to vote	33
I definitely want to vote	49

*How much do you want to vote in the next general election in 2004?*

**Table 6: Importance of Elections**

	Agree	Don't know	Agree most	
It is important who is in power because it can make a difference to our lives	67	4	29	It doesn't really matter who is in power, because in the end things go on much the same.

*Which of the following statements do you agree with most?*

**Table 7: Responsiveness of Parliamentarians**

	Always	Most of the time	Some of the Time	Never	Don't Know
To look after the interests of people like you?	5	14	38	36	6
To listen to what people like you have to say?	5	14	37	38	6

*How often do you think elected representatives in Parliament try their best?*

**Table 8: Responsiveness of Members of Provincial Assemblies**

	Always	Most of the time	Some of the Time	Never	Don't Know
To look after the interests of people like you?	5	14	36	38	6
To listen to what people like you have to say?	5	14	36	39	6

*How often do you think elected representatives in Provincial Government try their best?*

To what extent do these key democratic predispositions and evaluations depend on their views of the voting system? There are strong correlations between the desire to vote in 2004 and perceptions of the responsiveness of elected representatives on one hand, and evaluations of the fairness and equality of the voting system and evaluations of its political accountability on the other. The belief that elections matter, however, is only very weakly related to views of the voting system.<sup>x</sup> With regard to their impact on future voting and perceptions of institutional responsiveness, these correlations remain strong even after we statistically control for racial differences.<sup>xi</sup> Finally, we developed an elaborated model with which to predict one's likelihood of voting in 2004 and found that even once we statistically controlled for a range of demographic, attitudinal and behavioural factors, the view of the current system exercised a significant and important impact on future voting behavior (see Appendix C). In other words, the public image enjoyed by a voting system matters: at equal levels of education, and equal levels of political interest and knowledge, the more people are dissatisfied with various aspects of the voting system, the less likely they are to come out and vote in future elections

#### **IV What do South Africans want out of an Electoral System?**

While we have recorded broadly positive popular images of the electoral system, we have also seen that political support for the system is not consensual. Significant pockets of negative and pessimistic opinions exist, located disproportionately (though clearly not wholly) amongst racial minorities and across voters of all races, located disproportionately amongst poorer respondents and amongst those who are less interested in politics and those who do not identify with a political party. If the ETT decides by these criteria or on the basis of other forms of evidence that some electoral reform is necessary, what guidance might they find from public opinion?

The ETT and the survey designers were conscious from the start that levels of public knowledge about competing electoral systems was likely to be scant at best. Thus, the survey took an alternative route and attempted to get at the kinds of broad values that people felt should be maximized in an ideal voting system. Two types of questions were used to get at these preferences. First of all, respondents were asked an open-ended question to tap what voting meant to them. Second, respondents were given a range of paired statements intended to get them to express preferences on prominent dimensions of electoral choice often identified by political scientists.

We turn first to the issue of what voting means to South Africans. The responses reveal at least three important lessons. First of all, South Africans exhibit a high degree of literacy on the subject. Just 6 percent were unable to articulate any meaning of democracy. This is probably a reflection of the vast amount of resources put into voter education by international donors, local and international NGOs and the IEC since 1993.

Second, there is little sign of cynicism about the act of voting. Just 4 percent gave comments that could be described as indifferent or negative views toward voting. Most of this four percent responded to the effect that voting made no difference. But the important point is that this opinion is held at the moment by an extremely small percentage of eligible voters. Thus, whatever the differences among South Africans about the efficacy of the present electoral system, there is widespread agreement that the act of voting – universally acknowledged as perhaps the key characteristic of democracy – is important.

This echoes the high turnout rates in the first two democratic general elections, estimated at around 87% in 1994 (when there was no voters' list). In 1999, 89 percent of some 18.2 million registered voters went to the polls. The overall turnout rate, however, differed

depending on whether you used the IEC's estimate that 81 percent of all eligible voters had registered (which puts turnout at 72 percent) or survey based estimates of registration at 76 percent (which puts actual turnout at 68 percent of all eligible voters). Whichever version is followed, it remains the fact that although the registration figure for 1999 compares unfavourably with most established democracies (except the United States), the actual turnout figure for that election was pleasingly high, not just compared to second-generation elections in the rest of Africa but to elections in established democracies in the West.

Third, we find that voting has a variety of meanings, which can be held simultaneously. Three specific understandings of voting dominate were mentioned most often. It is important to remember that respondents were allowed to offer more than one response. Their responses were written down verbatim and coded into broader categories after the fact. The most frequently mentioned meaning was to see voting in procedural terms, as a way to select representatives and government officials or leaders (42 percent of all respondents). Mentioned just as frequently, and often by the same people who offered a procedural understanding, 42 percent of all respondents have a substantive, or instrumental purpose: that is, they see voting as a tool for securing a material improvement in living conditions or a "better life." Meanwhile, one quarter (26 percent of respondents) see voting as having an important symbolic purpose, that to vote is an act of participating in a democracy and an expression of citizenship and responsibility to society. Finally, some 10 percent see voting as an act of identification with a party or person they admire, a figure which is surprisingly low given that 52 percent of respondents claimed that they felt close to a political party. This may suggest that South Africans' partisan identification is potentially more fluid than is often assumed.

**Table 9: The Meaning of Voting**

<b>Voting is about electing representatives</b>		42
Voting is about electing persons, leaders, the President	16	
Voting is about electing someone who will consider our needs and rights	13	
Voting is about choosing the right person or party	8	
Voting is about electing a government	5	
<b>Voting allows transmission of needs and demands</b>		41
Voting is about getting the things we want or need	6	
Voting is about getting help to obtain pensions, electricity, water, housing	9	
Voting is about getting help to get employment	8	
Voting is about securing a better life	13	
Voting is about transformation and improving life in the community	5	
<b>Voting symbolizes citizenship</b>		26
To vote is to vote for our country	1	
Voting is about being involved in society, being involved in South Africa, its about taking part	2	
Voting is about making a difference, contributing to society	2	
Voting is about being heard	8	
Voting is about getting equality / equal treatment for everybody	3	
Voting is about exercising our democratic rights, fighting for our needs	9	
Voting is about being recognized as a citizen	1	
<b>Voting allows identification with charisma</b>		10
Voting enables you to choose a person or party you admire	10	
<b>Other</b>	4	5
<b>Voting does not make a difference</b>		4
It makes no difference if you vote or not, voting is a waste of time	3	
Other indifference comments	1	
<b>Don't know</b>	6	6

*Can you describe what it means to you to vote?*

Importantly, with a few exceptions, responses show few important variations according to race. White (37 percent), coloured (40 percent) and Indian respondents (37 percent) are more likely to see democracy in symbolic terms than black respondents (21 percent).

Coloured respondents are far less likely to see democracy in procedural terms (22 percent) than all others. White respondents are far less likely to see democracy in substantive terms (14 percent) than all others.

But while the overwhelming majority of South Africans attach major significance to voting and signal their intent to participate in the next general election, this does not necessarily mean that they all want the same outcomes from an electoral system. In order to tap the things people want a voting system to do, we offered respondents a range of paired statements. As mentioned previously the goal was to get them to express preferences on prominent dimensions of electoral choice often identified by political scientists. We can group these questions into four major dimensions. First of all, some items tapped people's positions on the dimension of the importance of "political parties versus individuals and independent candidates." Second, a set of items examined where South Africans stand on the issue of "localised versus centralised control of political parties." Third, some questions assessed their views on the dimension of "individual autonomy versus internal discipline" in political parties. A fourth set of questions measured people's preferences on the dimension of "efficiency versus representation" in a legislature. Finally, one question item asks people about their preferences for electing the President.

Political parties and political party discipline are a fact of life in any contemporary functioning democracy, yet systems differ considerably with regard to the extent that they allow for the autonomy of individual elected representatives. Conventionally, a key factor explaining such difference is provided by the nature of the electoral system, most particularly whether or not the latter is centred around the election by voters of representatives of constituencies as opposed to whether they are based upon the election of parties, which offer voters a list or lists of candidates. Of course, in practice there are multiple ways in which constituency and list systems can be mixed, yet the major proposition is that individual representatives are more likely to exert their autonomy if they are subject to simultaneous pressures from their constituents (from below) and from the party leadership (from above). In contrast, candidates elected simply from a party list are deemed to be cut off from the voters between elections and hence subject only to the direct pressure from above of party leaders. Hence although South African political parties have sought to compensate for MPs lack of direct connection to the voters by allocating them invented "constituency" responsibilities, such "constituencies" have no formal status.

It is in this context that the survey posed a series of questions tapping public views toward the potential role of individuals and independent candidates, the particular significance of which is that constituency based systems feature individual candidates and provide opportunity for the election of independents, while list systems elections are focused on political parties (rather than individuals) and do not allow for independent candidates.

There is substantial minority support for the idea of independent candidates: 42 percent say they would like to see independent candidates elected to Parliament in 2004, and 35 percent say they would personally consider voting for one. In general, however, less than one third (28 percent) prefer to vote for an individual rather than a political party.

**Table 10: Individuals and Independent Candidates Versus Political Parties**

	Yes	Don't know	No
In the next election would you like to see independent candidates, that is, candidates who do not belong to any political party, elected to parliament?	42	12	46
Would you consider voting for a candidate who does not belong to any specific political party, that is, an independent candidate, at the next election?	35	10	56
Do you prefer to vote for an individual, or do you prefer to vote for a political party?	28	2	70

Indian respondents are slightly more likely to support the inclusion of independent candidates. White voters are particularly likely to prefer voting for an individual personality rather than a political party. While black respondents are the most enthusiastic adherents of political parties, it may surprise some to see that as many as a quarter of the latter would be prepared to vote for an individual over a party. But other than these, there is little difference between voters of different racial groups.

**Table 11: Individuals and Independent Candidates Versus Political Parties (by Race)**

		Black	White	Coloured	Indian
Would you like to see independent candidates at the next election?	Yes	41	45	39	52
	No	48	44	36	33
	DK	10	11	25	15
Would you consider voting for an independent candidate at the next election?	Yes	33	42	37	47
	No	59	49	42	37
	DK	8	9	21	15
Do you prefer to vote for an individual or a political party?	Individual	26	40	26	37
	Party	72	59	73	61
	DK	2	2	1	2

We now turn to examine questions that measure public attitudes on the dimension of "localized versus centralized control of political parties." While the previous responses reveal majority sentiment behind the concept of political parties, the results to these questions suggest that while people want parties to play a central role in elections, they also want parties that are controlled in a decentralized way, from the "grass roots."

First of all, close to three quarters (71 percent) say they want to vote for a candidate from the area in which they live. For those who said "yes," an open ended question solicited their own particular reasons: the most widely cited reply was the likelihood that local candidates "will be familiar with our needs," "will help look after us" or that "we know or trust them." This is reflected by the fact that two thirds (64 percent) agree with the statement that members of Parliament should "live close to the people they represent" so they can "express their opinions and promote their interests", (although one third (32 percent) agreed that "It does not matter" where MPs live in order for them to represent voters). Finally, a majority (53 percent) agree that all party candidates should "be chosen by members of that party" before the final election rather than by party leaders, something which can be accomplished in party caucuses or more inclusive direct primary elections. Many are the candidates in plurality systems who have had to face local resentments because they have been 'dumped' on their constituencies by national party leaderships!

**Table 12: Localized Versus Centralized Control of Political Parties**

	Yes	Don't know	No
Do you want to vote for a candidate from the area where you live?	71	1	27

**Table 13: Localised versus Centralised Control of Political Parties**

Localised	Agree	Don't Know	Agree	Centralised
Members of Parliament need to live close to the people they represent in order for them to express their opinions and promote their interests.	64	4	32	It does not matter where Members of Parliament live for them to do a good job in representing the voters.
All political party candidates for Parliament should be chosen by members of that party before they stand for election.	53	8	39	The leaders of political parties should choose their candidates, as they know which people will become good representatives.

*Which of these statements do you agree with most?*

Again, the racial profiles on this issue are remarkably similar. Contrary to what some might expect, black respondents are most likely to agree that candidates should be selected by grass roots membership rather than party leaders, and that MPs need to live close to those they represent.

**Table 14: Localised versus Centralised Control of Political Parties (by Race)**

	Black	White	Col'd	Indian
All party candidates should be chosen by party members before they stand for election	54	51	48	46
The leaders of parties should choose their candidates	38	43	37	42
MPs need to live close to the people to express their opinions and promote their interests	66	60	59	60
It does not matter where MPs live in order for them to do a good job	31	37	37	38

Now we turn to a third set of questions that tap public preferences on the degree of autonomy. The results suggest that while respondents evince strong preference for having a say in their choice of party candidates, they are more ambivalent about how much autonomy MPs should have from their party once they arrive in parliament. Fifty four percent feel that elected officials should serve out their terms, compared to 38 percent who say that party leaders should have the right to redeploy elected members to other jobs outside Parliament (as is made possible by the current electoral system). A bare majority (51 percent) agree that elected representatives should have freedom of expression to criticize their own parties, but 44 percent choose the counter option that MPs owe their loyalty to their political party. Opinion is even more divided when we come to MPs voting about legislative decisions in committees and on the floor. Forty seven percent say that MPs should be able to vote according to their own beliefs, and 44 percent think MPs should always vote according to the party whip.

**Table 15: Individual Autonomy Versus Internal Discipline in Political Parties**

Autonomy of the MP	Agree	Don't Know	Agree	Party Discipline
Once a person is elected to parliament, they should stay there until the next election	54	8	38	The party leadership should have the right to deploy Members of Parliament to another job outside Parliament
Members of Parliament should be able to criticize their own political party	51	5	44	Members of Parliament should always be loyal to their party leaders because they were elected on their party's platform
Members of Parliament should vote according to their own beliefs	47	5	44	Members of Parliament should always vote the way their party decides

*Which of these statements do you agree with most?*

Again, these feelings are spread fairly even across the racial groups. Black respondents are slightly more likely favour the "party" and whites slightly more likely to favour individual autonomy. However, what is probably the most significant finding, because of their demographic majority amongst the electorate, is that nearly 50 percent of black respondents indicate that they want MPs to be able to exercise their own judgment independently of their party. MPs, a majority of respondents seem to be saying, should not just be lobby fodder, even if – as nearly as many are arguing – they should recognize their loyalty to the party on whose platform they have been elected.

**Table 16: Individual Autonomy Versus Internal Discipline in Political Parties (by Race)**

	Black	White	Coloured	Indian
MPs should be able to criticize their own party	49	61	50	38
MPs should be loyal to their party leaders	46	35	40	58
Once elected, MPs should stay in parliament until next election	53	59	55	49
The party leadership should have the right to deploy MPs out of parliament	39	34	36	41
MPs should vote according to their own beliefs	45	61	58	58
MPs should vote the way their party decides	51	35	37	35

This ambiguity (or should we call it “debate”?) amongst our respondents is echoed by their response to a question that asked them whether local government councillors elected from party lists or those elected in ward contests represented them best. The reformed local government system, as put into practice in the Local Government Elections of 2000, has established a mixed system composed of both types of councillor. Perhaps because the system is so new, respondents were unable to offer a considered opinion. However, for what it is worth, 38 percent said ward councillors, 20 percent said list councillors, 24 percent saw no difference, and a final 17 percent did not know.

Political parties are recognized as vehicles for not only articulating and aggregating public opinion (representation) but also for enabling legislatures to work (efficiency). Representation and efficiency are both qualities which are extremely important to the health of any democracy, yet there is clearly a tension between them (as is demonstrated, for instance, by the existence of the “guillotine” in various parliaments whereby governments are able to limit the length of debate on particular issues and to thereby prevent filibustering). Meanwhile, electoral systems may impose thresholds (minimum proportions of votes) which parties must reach in order to win a seat in order to prevent the possibility of legislative paralysis brought on by too many small parties.

When posed with a choice between these two poles, most South Africans come down on the end of broad representation. Six of ten (59 percent) say that the most important purpose of parliament is to represent all parts of society, even if it requires longer and more lengthy debate and consultation. A similar 59 percent say that parliament should contain as many political parties as necessary, while a third (35 percent) agree that too many parties may make Parliament unmanageable.

**Table 17: Representation versus Efficiency in Legislatures**

Representation	Agree most	Don't know	Agree most	Efficiency
The most important thing is for Parliament to represent all parts of society, even if it takes longer to debate and make decisions	59	7	34	A Parliament that represents too many opinions will not be able to make decisions easily, so it is important to have a party with a strong majority that can pass laws and get things done
Parliament should be able to represent as many parties as possible	59	7	35	Too many parties may make Parliament unmanageable

*Which of these statements do you agree with most?*

Yet again, opinion on these issues is relatively evenly spread across the racial groups. If there is any significant nuance it would appear to be that – perhaps in contrast to their relatively stronger support for independent candidates and the autonomy of MPs – white respondents give higher priority to legislative efficiency than other voters.

**Table 18: Representation versus Efficiency in Legislatures (by Race)**

	Black	White	Coloured	Indian
Parliament should represent all parts of society, even if takes longer to take decisions	60	56	59	61
A Parliament that represents too many opinions won't be able to get things done	34	40	28	36
Parliament should represent as many parties as possible	61	49	54	57
Too many parties may make parliament unmanageable	32	46	39	34

One final question item asked people whether or not they would like to vote for the President directly. At present, South Africa's President is first elected to parliament on a party list before being elected by Parliament. In contrast to this practice, 63 percent of the public want the President to be directly elected by the voters, not by Parliament. Of those who wanted a direct vote, the survey then asked whether they wanted the President to be elected at the same time as Parliament: 85 percent said yes.

**Table 19: Direct Election of the President**

	Yes	No	Don't know
At present, the President is elected by Parliament. Would you like to vote for the President directly?	63	28	9
If Yes, would you like to vote for the President at the same time that you vote for Parliament?	85	12	2

Yet again, the racial profile on this issue is remarkably similar: direct election of the President is a majority preference amongst every group of voters.

**Table 20: Direct Election of the President (by Race)**

		Black	White	Coloured	Indian
Would you like to vote for the President directly?	Yes	63	64	58	63
	No	29	28	26	26
	DK	8	9	16	11

At the same time, it should be noted that the survey did not ask respondents whether they wanted to strengthen the Presidency relative to either parliament or his/her political party (a likely outcome of such a significant constitutional change). Given respondents' fairly strongly expressed views in favour of the relative autonomy of MPs and their favouring of local candidates, it could be that they would be cautious about any move that might weaken the legislature relative to the executive. On the other hand, they might reckon that a stronger President relative to Parliament might represent a shift in favour of stronger checks and balances. Regrettably, this is clearly one aspect of our investigation that requires more research.

Finally, the survey posed two issues about women's representation in parliament, which simply endorses respondents' desire that South Africa's legislatures should be representative. The South African parliament is now justly famous for being one of the world's legislatures with the highest proportion (30 percent) of members who are women.<sup>xii</sup> Our respondents were not reminded of this achievement, nor were they given any information concerning the number of women in either parliament or the individual legislatures. However, when asked to consider whether the existing level of female representation in parliament was sufficient, 43 percent felt that there were still "too few" women in parliament, while one quarter (28 percent) felt the number was sufficient, and 11 percent said there were "too many." Another 18 percent said they did not know.

We then asked people whether parties should be required to nominate more women as candidates, to which 63 percent responded that they should.

**Table 21: Presence of Women in Parliament**

	Too many	Sufficient	Too few	Don't know
Think about the number of women in parliament. Do you think that too few, sufficient or too many women get elected.	11	28	43	18

**Table 22: Should Parties be required to nominate more women?**

	Yes	No	Don't know
Do you think that the political parties should be required to nominate more women for election?	63	26	10

The South African parliament has only been enabled to achieve its relatively high proportion of women because the political parties have chosen to consciously nominate women to their party lists (with the ANC, for instance, having adopted the rule that one-third of its candidates' lists must be composed of women). The broader point is that the list system enables the parties to manipulate the demographic profile of the array of candidates they offer for election, so that, for instance, apart from ensuring a given proportion of women, they can also ensure (if they so desire) a given proportion of other demographic majorities (notably white, coloured or Indian candidates). In contrast, parties are far less able to influence the demographic profiles of their candidates in straightforward constituency systems, simply because constituency parties tend to insist on making their own choice of candidate. Our respondents' insistence that parties should be required to nominate more women is therefore equally an assertion that the electoral system should be able to achieve demographic proportionality.

## V Tentative Conclusions and Food for Thought

Two main sets of findings seem to be most pertinent to the ETT's task. First, the results we have reported suggest that South Africans recognize the enormous virtues which the adoption of proportional representation has had in terms of producing legislatures that are broadly representative of the population in both demographic and political terms. Against that, there is a widespread desire that the electoral system should also provide for greater elements of localized control over political parties and members of legislatures, and for greater accountability of parties to their memberships and to the voters at large.

Second, we have noted, at various places in this report, a paradox in our findings, and a paradox visible in many different indicators of political life in South Africa. To take one view of this paradox, we have seen that while the electorate has broadly positive views of the current voting system (Tables 1 and 2), they also have quite negative views about the performance of the representatives and representative institutions produced by that very system (Tables 7 and 8).

To look at this paradox from another angle, we have seen that people have participated in relatively high numbers in the electoral process, and appear willing to continue to do so. At the same time, evidence from this and other surveys show that South Africans participate in politics between elections at much lower rates than many of their neighbours in Southern Africa.<sup>xiii</sup> The ETT survey finds that just 3 percent of South Africans said they had made contact with an MP in the previous year. In contrast, 15 percent had

contacted a local government councillor (a level of government with a different form of electoral system). What is important to note is that a different survey conducted before the 2000 local government election that ushered in this new system, found little difference between reported contact rates with MPs and local councillors.<sup>xiv</sup> That same survey also found a second strong regional impact of electoral systems. In Namibia and South Africa, the two countries with proportional representations, the rate of contact with an MP or attendance at parliamentary meetings or hearings was 1 percent and less than 1 percent respectively. Among the five countries with constituency based systems, contact rates were 7 percent in Zimbabwe and Zambia and 5 percent in Malawi and Lesotho (Botswana was the "outlier" with a contact rate of just 2 percent). While all these figures may sound low, there is a huge difference between one out of very ten or 20 people in each community with contact with an elected national representative, and one out of every 100 or 200.<sup>xv</sup>

Thus, evidence from this and other surveys strongly suggests the need to increase rates of public participation and contact with formal political institutions and procedures other than voting in five-yearly elections. The implication of these two key findings would suggest that the majority of voters would react favorably to a shift towards a mixed electoral system, meaning one that provides for a stronger link between voters and elected officials than presently exists, whilst simultaneously preserving the valued benefits of overall proportionality and broad representation.

## Appendix A

### Determinants of Evaluations of the Equality and Fairness of Current Electoral System

	<i>Unstandardized Coefficients (B)</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>Standardized Coefficients (Beta)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
(Constant)					
1.788	.001		1542.914	.000	
<b>Demographics</b>					
Lives in Urban Area	5.970E-02	.000	.052	224.795	.000
Neighborhood Consists of All / Mostly Formal Housing					
-6.810E-03	.000	-.010	-41.502	.000	
Female					
-3.715E-02	.000	-.033	-158.499	.000	
Education					
9.081E-03	.000	.020	81.821	.000	
White					
-.610	.000	-.369	-1506.903	.000	
Coloured					
-.322	.000	.000	-.169	-786.095	.000
Indian					
-.262	.001	.001	-.076	-370.164	.000
<b>Political Attitudes</b>					
Political Knowledge	-8.503E-03	.000	-.006	-24.556	.000
Interested in Politics	5.999E-02	.000	.082	375.646	.000
Identifies With A Political Party	.107	.000	.095	430.308	.000
Approves of Performance of Elected Representatives					
.143	.000	.264	1272.871	.000	
<b>Political Behaviour</b>					
Belongs to a Political Party	-2.406E-02	.000	-.020	-87.765	.000
Non-Voting Political Participation	-.125	.001	-.051	-216.405	.000
Contacts Officials and Leaders					
2.044E-02	.000	.016	75.818	.000	
Voted Participation in Elections Since 1994					
8.550E-02	.000	.069	331.648	.000	
N					
Standard Error of the Regression					0.4616
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>					.329

## Appendix B

### Determinants of Evaluations of the Political Accountability Produces by the Current Electoral System

	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
(Constant)					
1.586	.001		1401.554	.000	
<b>Demographics</b>					
Lives in Urban Area Neighborhood Consists of All / Mostly Formal Housing	4.774E-02	.000	.045	184.005	.000
-7.111E-02	.000	-.114	-444.204	.000	
Female					
-5.688E-04	.000	-.001	-2.484	.051	
Education					
-3.642E-03	.000	-.009	-33.593	.000	
White					
-.302	.000	-.197	-760.840	.000	
Coloured	1.323E-02	.000	.008	33.101	.000
Indian	.152	.001	.048	219.828	.000
<b>Political Attitudes</b>					
Political Knowledge					
4.204E-02	.000	.031	124.234	.000	
Interested in Politics	5.465E-02	.000	.081	350.442	.000
Identifies With A Political Party	.137	.000	.131	562.964	.000
Approves of Performance of Elected Representatives	.139	.000	.277	1261.617	.000
<b>Political Behaviour</b>					
Belongs to a Political Party	4.724E-02	.000	.042	176.202	.000
Non-Voting Political Participation	5.422E-02	.001	.024	96.286	.000
Contacts Officials and Leaders					
-1.205E-02	.000	-.010	-45.759	.000	
Voted Participation in Elections Since 1994	7.196E-02	.000	.063	286.122	.000
N					
Standard Error of the Regression				0.4508	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>				.252	

## Appendix C

### Determinants of Likely Voting Behaviour in 2004

	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
(Constant)					
4.504E-02	.003		15.279	.000	
<b>Demographics</b>					
Female	9.107E-02	.001	.038	169.939	.000
Age	-3.868E-04	.000	-.005	-21.349	.000
Education	2.563E-03	.000	.003	9.694	.000
White	.134	.001	.038	130.972	.000
Coloured	-.134	.001	-.033	-144.888	.000
Indian	4.843E-02	.002	.007	30.039	.000
<b>Political Attitudes</b>					
Interested in Politics	.250	.000	.164	683.984	.000
Political Knowledge	-3.024E-02	.001	-.010	-38.710	.000
Identifies With A Political Party	.193	.001	.081	335.205	.000
Thinks elected officials are responsive	5.539E-02	.000	.050	217.948	.000
Thinks elections matter	6.656E-02	.000	.051	234.316	.000
<b>Thinks current voting system is fair and equal</b>	<b>.233</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>.111</b>	<b>409.484</b>	<b>.000</b>
<b>Thinks current voting system produces political accountability</b>	<b>.186</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>.082</b>	<b>318.326</b>	<b>.000</b>
<b>Political Behaviour</b>					
Member of a political party	-3.091E-02	.001	-.012	-49.911	.000
Voted regularly since 1994	.593	.001	.227	975.579	.000
Participates in non voting forms of political activities	.219	.001	.043	170.378	.000
N					
Standard Error of the Regression					1.0535
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>					.208

<sup>1</sup> Full details concerning the questionnaire and survey methodology can be obtained, on request, from the ETT, from the ETT Technical Report, Parts I, II and III.

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<sup>ii</sup> These question items are reported as a group, and separate from subsequent questions because statistical analyses known as factor analysis and reliability analysis verified that responses to them formed a valid and reliable factor that explained 63.7 percent of the common variance (Eigenvalue = 2.55) and a reliability score (Kronbach's Alpha) of .80. The item that most strongly defined the scale was equal treatment of all parties (factor loading of .82) and the weakest whether the system is fair to all parties (.58).

<sup>iii</sup> David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*, University of Chicago Press (Chicago), 1966.

<sup>iv</sup> Factor analysis and reliability analysis indicates that these items form a unique, valid and reliable factor that explains 44.7 percent of the common variance with a reliability score (Kronbach's Alpha) of .75. The item that most strongly defined the factor is whether the system holds all parties accountable (.68) and the weakest whether it enables voters to influence government (.43).

<sup>v</sup> The concept of "anticipated reactions" comes from Carl Friedrich, *On Constitutional Government*.

<sup>vi</sup> Statistically, the correlations (Eta) of race and an index of satisfaction with the fairness of the current system is .43 which means that race statistically accounts for 18 percent of the variance in attitudes toward the electoral system. Clearly there are many other things that affect how people think about politics than merely their racial categorization.

<sup>vii</sup> Eta = .30, significant at .001.

<sup>viii</sup> Unfortunately, we cannot test this interpretation directly since the ETT chose not to ask respondents for the political party with which they identified or supported.

<sup>ix</sup> While technically inconsistent with the questions about (national) parliamentarians, we used the term "members of provincial government" rather than "provincial assemblies" because pilot tests indicated many people were not familiar with the term "provincial assembly."

<sup>x</sup> Need to insert bivariate correlations here.

<sup>xi</sup> A simple model consisting only of views of the fairness and equality of the voting system, the political accountability of the system, and three dummy variables for racial minorities explains 9 percent of the variance in the desire to vote in 2004 (fairness and equality of the system, Beta = .17, and political accountability of the system, Beta = .14). The same simple model accounts for 9 percent of the variance in perceptions of the responsiveness of elected representatives (freeness and equality of the system, Beta = .13; and political accountability of the system, Beta = .09). However, the model explains just 1 percent of the variance in the belief that elections matter (fairness and equality of the voting system, Beta = .03; and political accountability, Beta = .10).

<sup>xii</sup> Only Norway, Sweden, Iceland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, New Zealand and Mozambique record higher levels of membership of women in their lower houses of parliament. See United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2002: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. Oxford University Press. New York. 2002. 'Women's Political Participation', p.239-242.

<sup>xiii</sup> See Robert Mattes, Yul Derek Davids & Cherrel Africa, *Views of Democracy in Southern Africa and the Region: Trends and Comparisons Afrobarometer Working Papers*, No. 10, Idasa (Cape Town), CDD (Accra), Michigan State University (East Lansing), 2000.

<sup>xiv</sup> Mattes, Davids & Africa, *Views of Democracy in Southern Africa and the Region*.

<sup>xv</sup> Robert Mattes, "Democracy Without the People: Economics, Governance and Representation in South Africa," *Journal of Democracy* 13/1 (January 2002): 22-36.