What factors influence voter choice in South Africa's national general elections?

Leila Patel, Yolanda Sadie & Jaclyn de Klerk

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Why do people vote for a political party?

- As voters head to the polls on 29 May, they are **NOT spoilt for choice**
- 315 political parties are registered for the national and provincial elections
- **How will voters make their choices?**
- What factors are likely to influence their decision making?
- Today we share findings from our latest survey on voting behaviour conducted at the end of 2023 by Ipsos
- We are able to compare some of these findings with our previous surveys (2017, 2018, 2019, 2020) and identify trends over time

About the wave 5 study

- **5 surveys** have been conducted by the authors from [2017-2023](2017-2023)

- **Aim:** To determine what influences voter choices. In short, why do people make the choices that they do?

- **Field work:** Ipsos Public Affairs on behalf of the CSDA in the last quarter of 2023

- **Sample Size**: 3,600 initially but for this analysis 3,511

- **Sampling:** Nationally representative sample was drawn, stratified by province and smaller geographic areas

- **Features of the survey**: Face-to-face interviews were conducted in respondents' preferred home languages at randomly chosen households

- **Error margin** is 1.8%

Models for understanding voting behaviour

- **Rational choice theory:** Voters act in their own best interest, strategically choosing parties that align with their needs.

- **Clientelist theory:** Social grants offered by the government might be seen as a form of vote buying

- **Sociological model:** Voter choice is influenced by demographics like age, race, gender, urban/rural location and socio-economic status.

Other factors/explanations considered in our model:

- **Socio-economic factors e.g.:** jobs, services, desire for a better life
- **Governance:** Trust in institutions: presidency, parliament and ANC government
- **Party loyalty:** Voters tend to favour the party they have traditionally supported or put another way the party that brought freedom and democracy to SA
- **Party leadership:** who the leader is of the party might motivate them to vote for a particular party
- **The Ramaphosa factor:** to what extent does trust in his leadership influence their choice?

We tested these reasons for party choice in a statistical regression model – a model that identifies the relationships between these factors and the person's party choice

Participant demographic profile

3511 participants

51% women

49% men
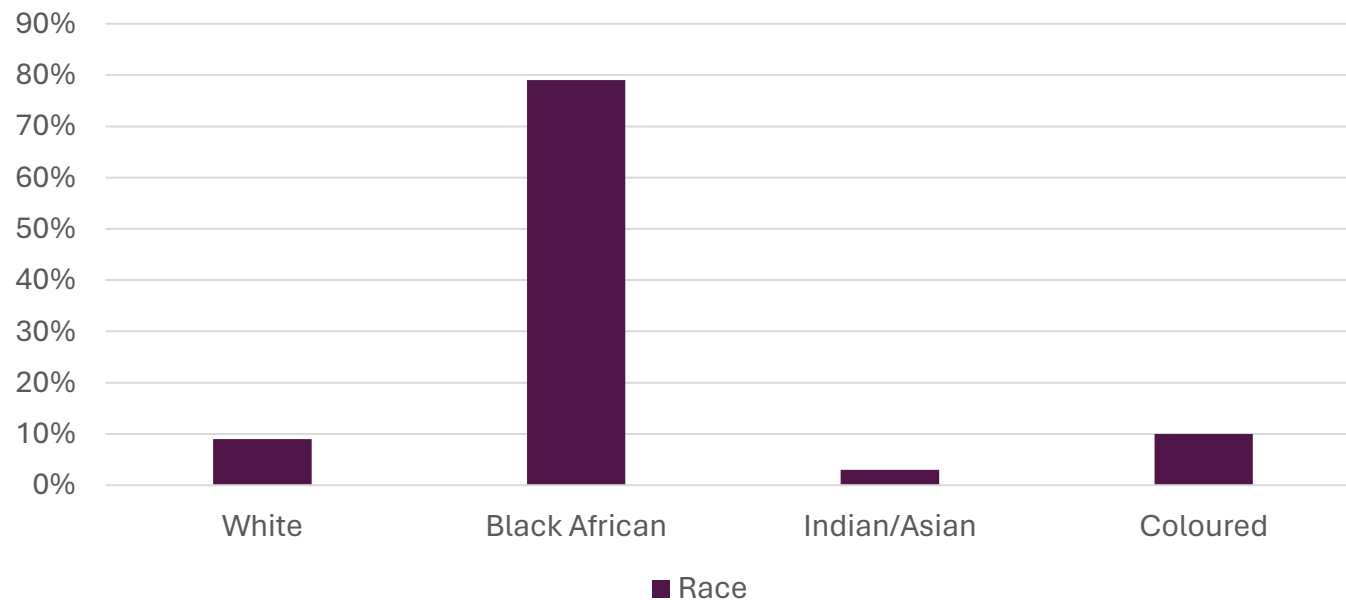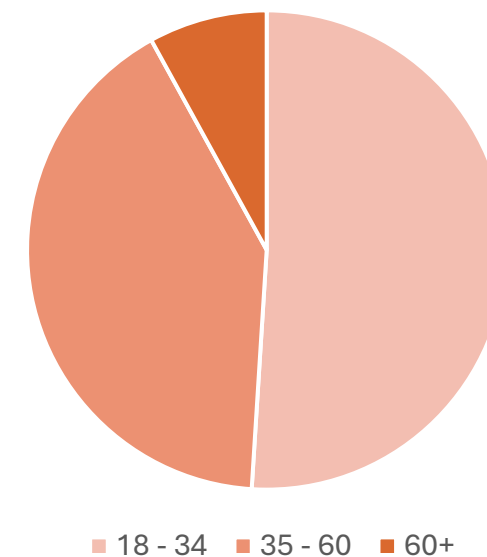
33% rural

67% urban

Race

90%	
80%	
70%	
60%	
50%	
40%	
30%	
20%	
10%	
0%	

White   Black African   Indian/Asian   Coloured

■ Race

Age

■ 18 - 34   ■ 35 - 60   ■ 60+

Participant socio-economic profile

**37%
unemployed**

**20%
economically
active**

**43%
working**

**45% of earn less
than R8000 per
month**

**43% grant
recipients**

**49,3% have
a matric certificate**

Questions in the survey

- Main research questions were:
    1. Who would you vote for in a national election?
    2. Why would you choose this party?

- 14 options were provided and respondents had to select the five most important to them.

- 21% of respondents did not answer the question and were excluded.

- Of this group, 9% were undecided or did not know.

In addition, respondents were asked to indicate if they agreed/disagreed with the following statements on a scale of 1 -5:
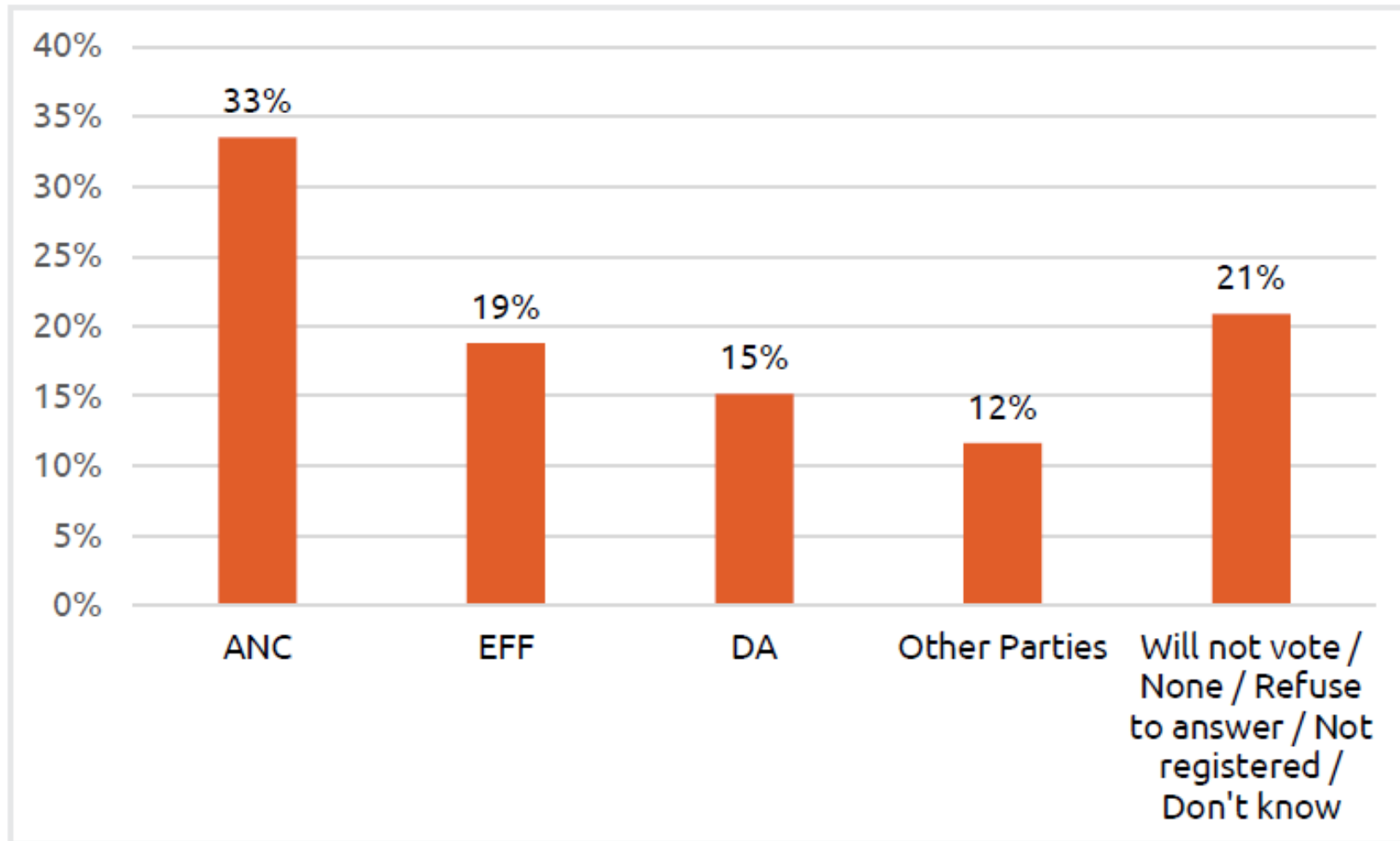
- I am afraid that if another party comes to power the paying of social grants will stop.
- I trust in the presidency of Cyril Ramaphosa
- I trust parliament
- I trust the ANC government

We also assessed participants' views on a national coalition government and their support for coalitions between difference parties.
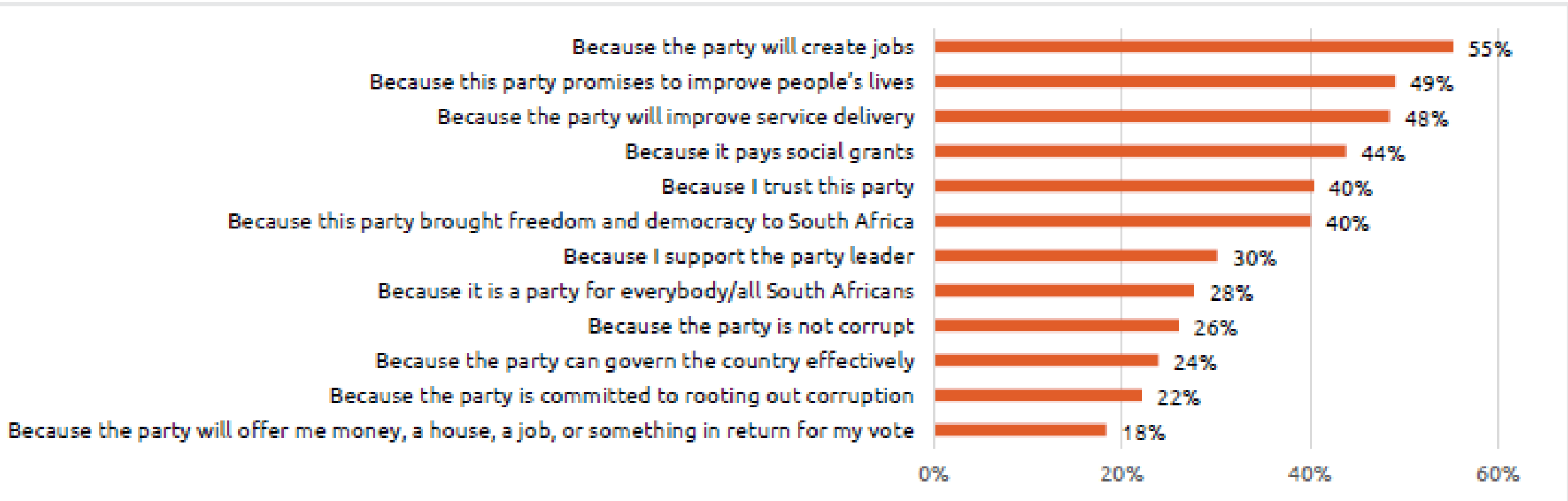
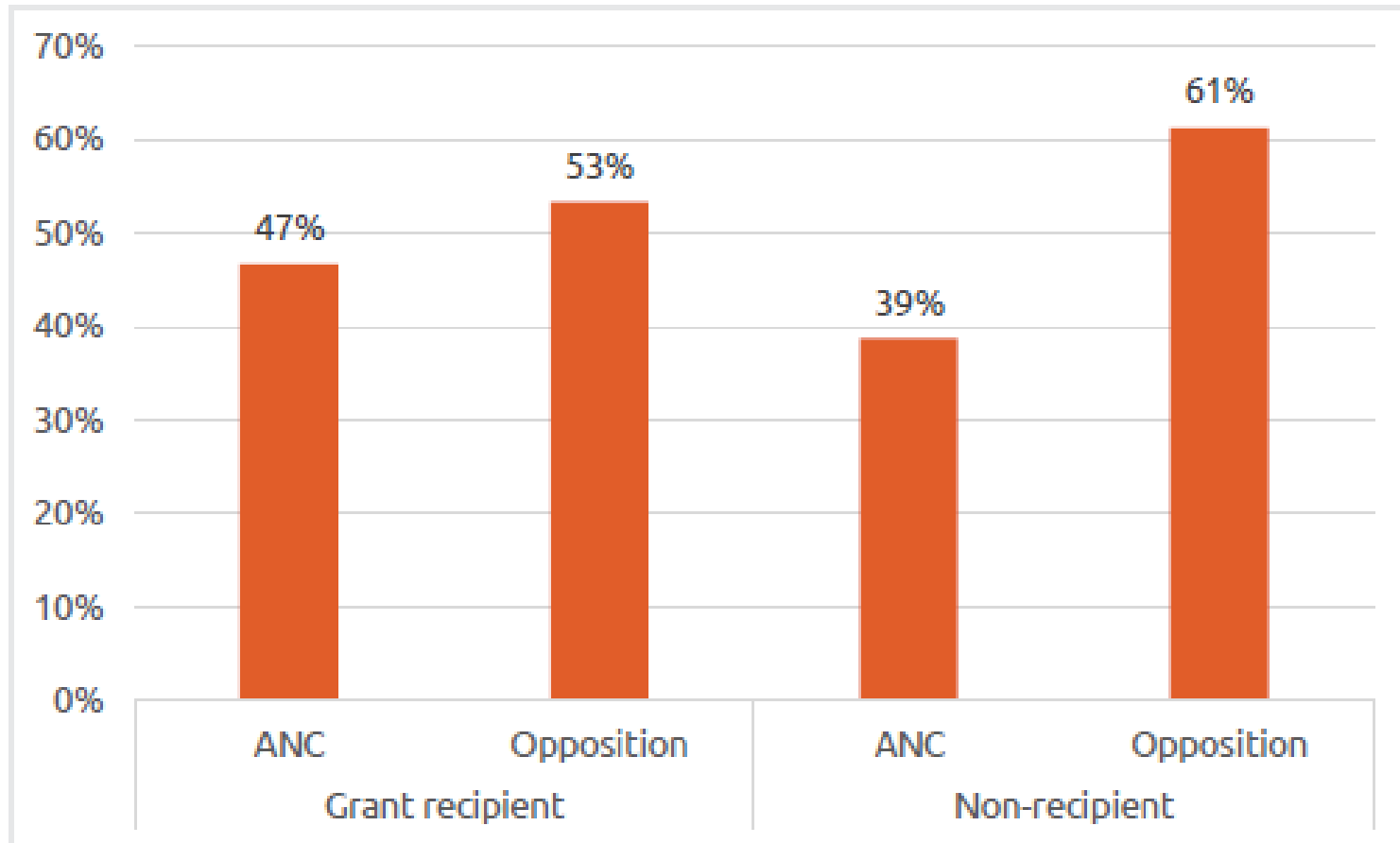# Descriptive results

Party choice at end of 2023

- ANC support dropped from 50% in 2017 to 33% at the end of 2023
- EFF support doubled since the 2020 survey
- DA remained stable around 15%
- **Ipsos 24 April 2024 poll**: ANC (40.2%), DA (21.9%); EFF (11.5%), MKP (8.4%), IFP (4.4%), Action SA (3.4%), FF+ (1.8%), other parties (8.4%)

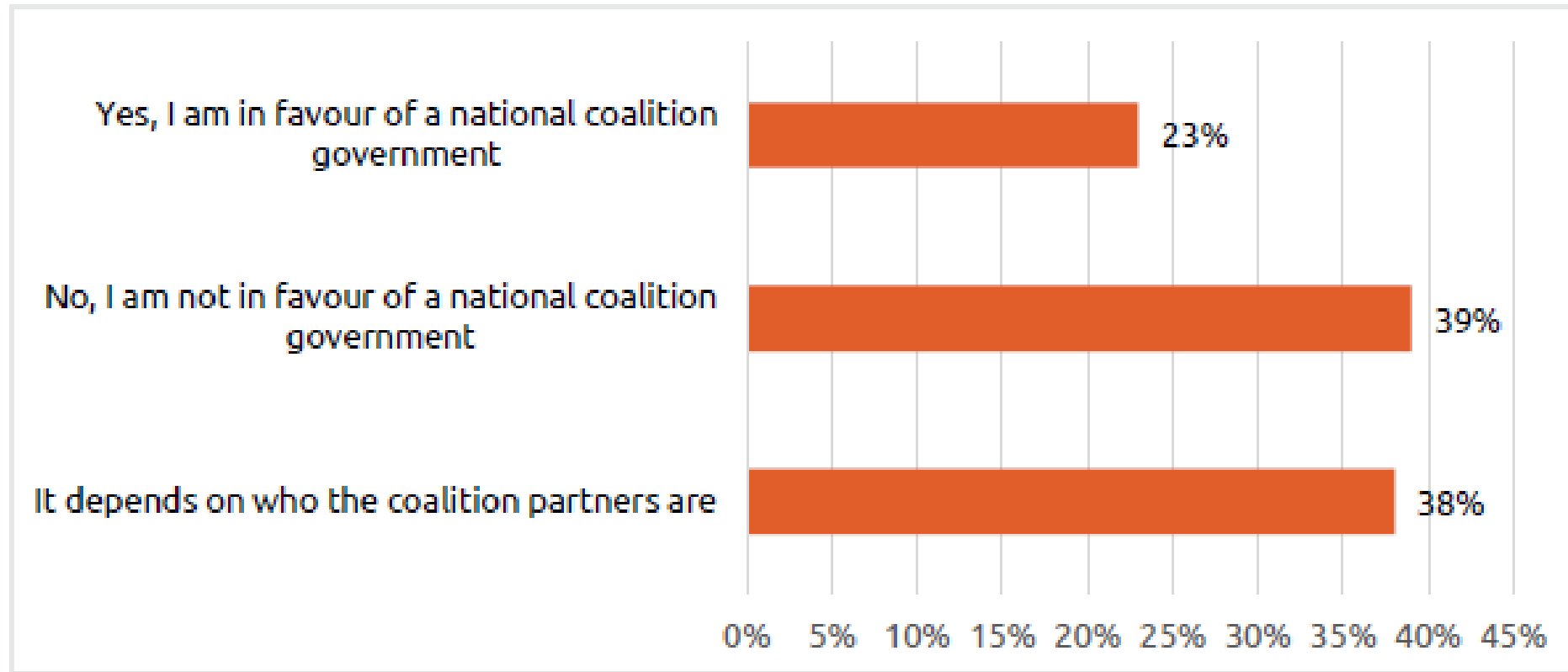# Reasons for party choice: socio-economic wellbeing prioritised

Reason	Percentage
Because the party will create jobs	55%
Because this party promises to improve people's lives	49%
Because the party will improve service delivery	48%
Because it pays social grants	44%
Because I trust this party	40%
Because this party brought freedom and democracy to South Africa	40%
Because I support the party leader	30%
Because it is a party for everybody/all South Africans	28%
Because the party is not corrupt	26%
Because the party can govern the country effectively	24%
Because the party is committed to rooting out corruption	22%
Because the party will offer me money, a house, a job, or something in return for my vote	18%

More grant recipients are now choosing an opposition party than before

- More grant recipients are now choosing to vote for an opposition party(53%) than in 2020 (26%).

- Grant recipients increased since 2020 due to the Social Relief of Distress Grant (SRD).

- Grant recipients show marginally stronger support for the ANC (8%) up 1% from 2020 with a low of 5% in 2017.

Voters are not in favour of a coalition government

ANC supporters are least enamoured (40%) with the idea of a coalition government , followed by the EFF(35%) & DA (33%). Smaller parties are also sceptical (38%).

Regression model results

1. Socio-economic wellbeing is NOT a predictor of party choice

This factor was made up of 3 questions: I am motivated to chose this party because:

- It pays grants
- Promises to improve people's lives
- It will improve service delivery

- Contrary to what one would expect, there was not a statistically significant relationship between socio-economic wellbeing and party choice

- **This does not mean that socio-economic wellbeing is unimportant to voters**

- **Rather it suggests that they anticipate that by voting for their party their lives will improve.**

- **Other factors also matter.**

2. Fear of loss of a grant is no longer a predictor of party choice

This relationship was highly significant over 4 successive surveys 2017-2020 but is not the case in this election.

Why?:

- Previously women and the elderly were the largest number of grant recipients

- Since 2020, recipients increased due to the roll out of the SRD reaching between 6 and 10 million at different times

- Now many grant recipients are young and unemployed adults – with different party loyalties

- Grant beneficiaries seem more secure in their right to social assistance

- Many opposition parties have endorsed social grants and seek to expand or increase the value of the grant.

3. The top 6 factors that influence party choice

High-level trust in governance

2020: 2x more likely to vote for the ANC

2024: 2,5x more likely to vote for the ANC

Trust in the party leader

2020: Question not asked

2024: 37% more likely to vote ANC

Value parties committed to rooting out corruption

2020: Not significant

2024: 61% more likely to vote for the opposition

Party loyalty (party that brought freedom)

2020: 26% more likely to vote for ANC

2024: 59% more likely to vote ANC

Socio-demographic factors

2020: Older people (aged 35 – 60) are 29% more likely to vote for the ANC when compared to a someone aged 18 – 34.

2024: Older people (aged 35 – 60) are 55% more likely to vote for the ANC when compared to a someone aged 18 – 34.

Ramaphosa factor

2020: 60% more likely to vote ANC over an opposition party

2024: 77% more likely to vote ANC over an opposition party

Conclusions: factors that are likely to influence voter decisions on 29 May

The top predictors in 2024: perception of governance (trust in institutions), corruption, party loyalty, trust in party leader and trust in the presidency of Cyril Ramaphosa.

Predictors are consistent over the 5 surveys but with some changes at different times.

Corruption

✓Those who are concerned about corruption are more likely to vote for an opposition party (61%).

Sociological factors

✓The youth vote will matter greatly in this election with 11.7 million registered

✓Youth are1.5 times more likely to vote for the opposition; they are less attached to the past

✓Women's vote will also matter as 34% are more likely to vote ANC. More than half of registered voters are women. Few parties target the women's vote.

✓People in rural areas are 32% more likely to vote ANC

Thank you