

# A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF THE VOTING BEHAVIOUR OF POOR PEOPLE IN THREE SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNITIES

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## ABSTRACT

*Despite the growing speculation about the electoral power of poor voters, little is known about what influences them to vote the way they do and why. Poor communities are often considered a homogeneous group, with little appreciation for their agency in making electoral choices. In this paper, comparative data are shared from a quantitative study undertaken in two selected poor communities during 2013 in Johannesburg (Riverlea and Doornkop) and a rural community in the Limpopo province in 2014. Two key factors were explored that might explain voter preferences, namely identification and loyalty on the one hand, and on the other clientelism, social grants and vote-buying. Firstly, it was found that long-term party loyalty and party performance are the main predictors of voter preferences, irrespective of geographic location. Secondly, in all three areas, it is unlikely that the majority of poor voters will be persuaded to vote for a particular party on the basis of receiving food parcels before elections. Finally, the study showed that one in six voters would consider voting for a party that provides a social grant, with this trend being most prevalent in the African communities of Doornkop and Limpopo. Therefore, it could be argued that social grants can be used as a campaign strategy of gaining (or retaining) support from grant-holders and could influence the floating vote.*

**Keywords:** social grants, food parcels, elections, party identification

## INTRODUCTION

Studies on voting behaviour across the world, and in South Africa since the first democratic elections in 1994, generally focus on the voting behaviour of the eligible voting population as a whole. However, little is known about the voting behaviour of poor people in South Africa. Understanding what motivates poor people to support a particular party after 20 years of democracy is important, as the poor and unemployed constitute a large proportion of the country's 54 million people. The official unemployment rate in 2013, when the study was conducted, was 25.6% and the expanded unemployment rate was 36.8% (South Africa Survey 2013, p. 228), while 35.9% of the population lived in relative poverty (South Africa Survey 2013, p. 343).<sup>1</sup>

In previous elections, party support, identification, and loyalty were strongly associated with electoral outcomes and reflected voting patterns along racial lines (Habib & Naidu 2006; Letsholo 2005). In the run-up to the 2014 elections, there was growing speculation in the media as to whether the receipt of social assistance – for example social grants – affects the voting behaviour of poor voters. Access to social protection has increased from 3 million in 1995 to 16.7 million in 2015, reaching over a third of the population. Not only are social grants a highly controversial topic, but there is also a great deal of speculation about the electoral power of grant beneficiaries and their role in securing electoral support for the African National Congress (ANC). The party has been accused of using the social grant system as a vote-buying mechanism to win the support of poor voters (*News24* 17 March 2011; *The Star* 26 April 2013). This issue became particularly pertinent in the 2014 general elections.<sup>2</sup> Equally controversial has been the issuing of food parcels by the government before local government by-elections in 2013 (*City Press* 3 August 2013).

The first question addressed by our study seeks to establish whether party support, identification and loyalty are likely to be less important in future elections in the three communities in which the study was conducted. Secondly, we sought to establish the influence of clientelism on voting behaviour 20 years after democracy. In this context, clientelism refers to individualised exchange

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1 Relative poverty means that the poverty line is adjusted each year according to the cost of living, and varies depending on the number of people living in a household. In 2012 this ranged from R1 450 (US\$145) per month to R5 157 (US\$515) for a household of eight. Of those living in poverty 41.9% are African, 24.5% are coloured, 11.1% are Indian and 0.8% are white (South Africa Survey 2013, p. 343). Income poverty is used for this purpose, as it captures grant beneficiaries who meet the qualifying income thresholds.

2 The importance of this issue was highlighted further by KwaZulu-Natal agriculture's MEC Meshack Radebe's statement in early April 2014 that those who received social welfare grants but voted for opposition political parties were 'stealing from government' (*The Mercury* 9 April 2014).

of goods and services, that is, social grants and the distribution of food parcels during elections as a vote-buying strategy to gain political support (Weitz-Shapiro 2012). Similarities and differences are identified between the three communities in relation to these factors. The data are drawn from a study on the voting behaviour of poor voters (Patel, Sadie, Graham, Delany & Baldry 2014).

To our knowledge, this is the first quantitative study on the voting behaviour of specifically poor communities in South Africa. Although the findings are not generalisable to the national population of poor voters, they nevertheless provide valuable insight into the voting behaviour of poor people. However, further research is needed on a national level to draw robust conclusions.

To contextualise the study, the paper starts with explanations of the voting behaviour of South Africans during the first four general elections (1994, 1999, 2004 and 2009). This is followed by a brief overview of the research method used and a description of the respondents from the three communities surveyed. Thereafter, the findings are presented in two parts: firstly, whether party support, identification and loyalty influence voting behaviour. In addition, perceptions on government performance, corruption and trust are considered, which may provide some explanation for party support or the lack thereof. The second part is devoted to the manner in which 'vote-buying' or clientelism shaped the voting behaviour of poor people in these communities. In the concluding part, the implications of the findings for future elections are considered.

## GENERAL EXPLANATIONS OF VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN SOUTH AFRICA

Voter preference in South Africa's past four democratic elections has been linked to a number of determinants. Scholars such as Lodge (1995), Guelke (1996), Johnson (1996), Davis (2003) and Ferree (2004 & 2006) have all argued that elections have been nothing more than a 'racial' census, with the majority of Africans supporting the ANC and the majority of whites supporting the Democratic Alliance (DA). Some elements of ethnic and regional voting have also been evident, especially in the 1994 and 1999 elections. An example is the support for the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), particularly among Zulus in KwaZulu-Natal (Letsholo 2005, pp. 2-3). The influence of race on the voting behaviour of the coloured and Indian populations seems, on the contrary, less significant (Ferree 2004, p. 14).

However, others contest this 'racial arithmetic', arguing that voters are not unthinking and irrational people who vote according to their skin colour (Taylor & Hoeane 1999). In this regard, Mattes et al. (1999, pp. 245-246) argue that performance and delivery, a strong election campaign, and the obstacles that opposition parties face in convincing voters to 'take them as a real alternative' also shape the choice of voters. However, voters' perceptions of performance and

campaigns are shaped by race, class, and ethnicity and the interaction among these. Party identification (and loyalty) is also often used to explain voting behaviour in South Africa (Habib & Naidu 2006). A strong sense of identification with and long-term loyalty to a party is another explanation of voting preference (the party identification model) (Miller 1991; Peele 2004).

The ANC has a dominant position in South African politics because it is perceived to be a liberation party and the historic bearer of democracy, while opposition parties such as the DA suffer from a legitimacy problem (Letsholo 2005, p. 5). Letsholo (2005, p. 5) argues that this situation is purposely maintained by the ANC because it enables the party to discredit its opponents and thus be seen as the single legitimate representative of the interests of South Africans. As a consequence, despite the fact that some voters complain about the way the ANC rules the country, they continue to vote for the party because other parties, especially the DA, are perceived as being a remnant of the apartheid regime. However, scholars increasingly argue that while party identification and affiliation are still prominent in South Africa, these are combined with issue-based voting, especially with government performance on issues such as service delivery, poverty, unemployment and health (Kersting 2009, pp. 131-132; McLaughlin 2008).

The lack of service delivery has been the cause of numerous public protests in the country over the past few years. In 2013, when the research was conducted, 155 major protests occurred at a rate of almost one every second day (Municipal IQ, Feb 2014)<sup>3</sup>. Whether the lack of government performance in terms of service delivery is a specific factor influencing the voting behaviour of poor people, in particular, is also addressed in this study.

Social protection and receipt of food parcels during election campaigns, also known as patronage or clientelism, is an acknowledged determinant of voting behaviour (Bratton & Van de Walle 1997; Van de Walle 2003). It is consistent with the expansion of a new generation of social protection policies in middle-income countries in the South (Patel, Midgley & Ulriksen 2013). Studies in Argentina and elsewhere have found that poverty predicts vote-buying and that a poor person is 65 times more likely to be influenced by vote-buying than a middle-class or wealthy person (Stokes 2005, p. 322). Also, in Brazil it was shown that social grants can influence the electoral choice of poor voters (Hall 2006, 2012; Hunter & Power 2007). The Peronist Party in Argentina and the Mexican Institutional

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3 Municipal IQ's *Hotspots Monitor* collates major protests staged by community members (who can be identified as living in a particular ward) against a municipality. Such protestors raise issues that are the responsibility or perceived responsibility of local government (such as councillor accountability, the quality and pace of basic service delivery, and in metro areas, housing). Not included are issues falling outside of local government's service delivery mandate (Municipal IQ *Municipal Hotspots Monitor*, 4 /2/2014).

Revolutionary Party have also been able to sustain electoral dominance for decades by catering to poor voters (Magaloni 2014a).

While there is growing interest in clientelism associated with the expansion of social protection in the South, it is difficult to measure and understand the variation of its use within and between countries. In this regard, Weitz-Shapiro (2012, p. 577), based on data collected in Argentina at local government level, found considerable variation among politicians who choose to use vote-buying measures. Competition from other parties and areas where there are high levels of poverty are associated with increased use of clientelist practices. Conversely, where competition is low and there is a growing middle class, politicians are less likely to use vote-buying electoral strategies. In our study, it was important to understand the perceptions of poor voters and the influence of social protection on voter preferences, and the way this varied in the three communities we surveyed.

#### METHOD AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

The study was mainly an opinion survey conducted during June 2013 in Doornkop and Riverlea in Johannesburg. These two poor urban areas have a high uptake of social grants and diverse political interests. These areas are predominantly African, and African and coloured, respectively. In the 2011 local government elections, 90% voted for the ANC in Doornkop, while 47% supported the ANC in Riverlea, and 49% voted for the official opposition the DA (Electoral Commission of South Africa 2011).

For the purpose of local government elections, Doornkop is divided into two election wards, wards 50 and 129, while Riverlea represents one ward, ward 68. Ward 129 in Doornkop was selected for the study since it closely resembles the size of the population of Riverlea. In addition, ward 129 consists of 23 365 inhabitants over 18 years of age, while Riverlea has a population of 25 230 inhabitants over the age of 18 years (Census Statistics South Africa 2011).

A systematic, multistage sampling method was used to select the respondents. The sample was drawn in three stages: first, the wards were selected, then in stage two the dwellings were selected and in stage three the respondents were randomly selected. Only South African citizens who were 18 years and over (i.e. people who are eligible to vote) were interviewed, and they were randomly selected in each of the communities surveyed. Our study design was essentially a case study approach, with purposive sampling used at the community level and randomised sampling used at the individual level.

In November 2013, an additional poor rural community was selected for the study because it was assumed that different levels of political mobilisation, organisation and politicisation might exist between urban and rural areas. The

Elias Motsoaledi local municipality in Groblersdal in the province of Limpopo was selected. Like Doornkop and Riverlea, this area is characterised by a high uptake of social grants. Wards 9 and 11 were selected for the study, with a population of 11 2070 and 4724 respectively. The ANC received 47% and 36% of votes respectively in these wards in the 2011 local election, with the Mpumalanga Party receiving 45% and 58% respectively. This is exceptional in the political landscape of Limpopo, where the ANC held a majority in the post-1994 period. Groblersdal was previously part of the Mpumalanga province, but due to new local government boundary demarcations the area was later incorporated into the Limpopo province. This was highly contested and resulted in a loss of support for the ANC.

The purposive selection of the three sites was warranted as this study sought to understand voting behaviour in different urban and rural contexts. In addition, these sites presented a variation in support for political parties and a high uptake of social grants. The sample size and sampling method was standardised across all three areas. A total of 1204 respondents were interviewed, with 402 in Riverlea, 402 in Doornkop, and 400 in Groblersdal.

The questionnaire consisted of 29 closed-ended questions and three open-ended questions, broadly covering the following aspects: demographics, access to political information, knowledge of democratic rights, perceptions of government performance, trust in institutions, perceived corruption, voting behaviour, reasons for voting, attitudes towards social grants, and access to social grants.

The nature of clientelism – that is, individualised exchanges for political support – makes it a difficult variable to measure. Proxies were used such as, among other things, perceptions of corruption and knowledge of rights, in keeping with research elsewhere (Kitschelt et al. 2009). While most studies are done at a national level, the focus here was on the sub-national level. The questionnaire was developed by the lead researchers, piloted in Riverlea and Doornkop, and amendments were made to simplify and clarify certain questions. The fieldwork was done by a team of fieldworkers under the supervision of the Centre for Social Development in Africa and the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Johannesburg. Bachelor of Arts (BA) Honours students in Politics formed part of the fieldwork team. All fieldworkers were trained to conduct the interviews. In Groblersdal, assistance with fieldwork was provided by Ndlovu Care Centre and eight fieldworkers were recruited from the Moutse area, a local community.

Data analysis was conducted by means of SPSS. Descriptive analyses were employed as well as inferential statistics, predominantly chi-squared analyses (using Pearson chi-square test).

The areas are comparable in that they are low-income areas with a high grant uptake. However, the purposive selection of the areas is a limitation in that the findings cannot be generalised to the country. Moreover, in surveys of this kind, there is always the chance that respondents will provide socially desirable responses. To address this limitation, efforts were made to ask similar questions in different ways. The research was conducted before new parties such as the Economic Freedom Fighters were registered for the 2014 national elections. Voter preferences for these parties were not recorded. Nevertheless, the findings provide an indication of what motivates people to vote in particular ways and could inform further research.

The socio-economic profile was fairly similar across the three communities, although Riverlea had a lower grant uptake (30%) than the other two areas, Doornkop (41%) and Groblersdal (42%). Riverlea also had a larger coloured population (41%) compared with Doornkop in Soweto, and Groblersdal, both of which are mainly African communities. Riverlea and Doornkop had more people in their households who were employed full-time or part-time (35% and 31%, respectively) than Groblersdal (19%). Unemployment rates were similar across the three areas. Most people lived in formal houses in Riverlea and Groblersdal, while 22% of Doornkop respondents lived in informal dwellings. All three areas had large youth populations (18–34 years) ranging between 46% and 51%. Levels of higher educational attainment were fairly low in Groblersdal (32%) and slightly higher in Soweto (40%) and Riverlea (47%). Groblersdal, a rural area, had lower educational attainment levels and part-time or full-time employment rates than the urban areas.

We now discuss the findings with reference to the factors that might explain the voting behaviour of poor people in the three communities surveyed.

#### PARTY SUPPORT, PARTY IDENTIFICATION AND LOYALTY

In establishing whether respondents strongly identify with their party and are therefore also very loyal to the party, three different sets of questions were asked. One set of questions was direct: respondents had to indicate their closeness to a range of the most important parties in the country (at national level), whether they have ever considered voting for another party, whether they thought it was acceptable to vote for different parties in the national and local elections, and lastly, which party they would support 'If an election was held tomorrow'.

A second set of questions revolved around 'Why people vote' and 'What would the considerations for respondents be in voting for a specific party?' The third set of questions tried to establish how respondents evaluated the

performance of the government and the extent to which this could be linked to party support and loyalty.

In order to link responses to some of the above questions to party support, the party electoral choice of respondents was also established. Respondents were presented with a list of the nine most prominent national parties at the time of the fieldwork. They were asked: 'If an election were held tomorrow, which party do you think you would vote for?' As shown in Table 1, the ANC received the overall majority support (56%), which was unevenly split across the three areas. Riverlea recorded lower levels of support for the ANC (47%) and had the highest support for the DA (25%). Groblersdal polled 57% support for the ANC, while in Doornkop it was 65%. The DA was the second most preferred party for voters in Doornkop (12%) and Groblersdal (13%).

A large majority of African respondents (85%) indicated that they would support the ANC, while the coloured vote was largely split between the DA (36%) and the ANC (31%), with a large percentage (25%) who were unsure or refused to answer the question.

**Table 1**  
**Party electoral choice**

Political parties	Riverlea	Doornkop	Groblersdal	Total N (%)
ANC	189 (47%)	261 (65%)	226 (57%)	676 (56%)
DA	102 (25%)	47 (12%)	52 (13%)	201 (17%)
COPE	8 (2%)	8 (2%)	5 (1%)	21 (2%)
Agang	10 (2%)	6 (1%)	1 (<1%)	17 (1%)
IFP	3 (1%)	5 (1%)	1 (<1%)	9 (1%)
PAC	2 (1%)	3 (1%)	2 (1%)	7 (1%)
FF Plus	1 (<1%)	1 (<1%)	3 (<1%)	5 (<1%)
ACDP	2 (1%)	1 (<1%)	-	3 (<1%)
AZAPO	-	-	2 (1%)	2 (<1%)
Other	7 (2%)	11 (3%)	17 (4%)	35 (3%)
Don't know	42 (10%)	25 (6%)	44 (11%)	111 (9%)
Refused	36 (9%)	34 (8%)	46 (12%)	116 (10%)
Total	402 (100%)	402 (100%)	399 (100%)	1203 (100%)

Note: The fieldwork commenced before the establishment of the Economic Freedom Front (EFF) in July 2013



### First set of questions: closeness to party

Respondents were asked to indicate how close they feel to a list of nine parties, using a scale of 1 (very distant) to 5 (very close). In all three areas the average scores for closeness to a political party were highest for the ANC (3.8). Respondents in Groblersdal, in particular, felt close to the ANC (4.1 mean score as opposed to 3.4 in Riverlea), while the average mean score for opposition parties ranged between 2 and 2.7. To use this question as a measure of party loyalty, respondents who indicated that they felt 'close' or 'very close' to only one party were regarded as having a strong party identification. Those who felt 'close' or 'very close' to more than one party, as well as those who did not know the answer to the question, were regarded as having weaker levels of party identification.

As indicated in Table 2, just more than half of the respondents indicated that they feel close to only one party, with limited variation across the three areas. Of these respondents, the largest proportion (85%) indicated that this party is the ANC, while only 16% indicated strong identification (closeness) with one of the opposition parties, most commonly the official opposition (DA).

**Table 2**  
**Identification with one political party (closeness)**

Closeness to political parties	Riverlea	Doornkop	Groblersdal	Total N %
Close to one party	210 (52%)	201 (50%)	211 (53%)	622 (52%)

A further question determined how often respondents, who have voted in the past, have considered voting for another party. The response options were 'never', 'seldom', 'often' and 'very often'.

Doornkop had the largest number of respondents (70%) who have voted before, but never considered voting for another party, followed by Groblersdal (66%) and Riverlea (60%). These voters can, therefore, be considered loyal to a single party as opposed to those respondents who had considered voting for other parties or had not given a response (see Table 3 below).

We cross-tabulated these results with party support (which party they would support if an election was held 'tomorrow'). A notable difference emerged in reported party loyalty among those who said they would vote for the ruling party (if there was an election tomorrow) and those who said they would vote for opposition parties. Significantly more respondents who intended to vote for the ruling party indicated they had never considered voting for another party.

**Table 3**  
**Frequency with which voters have considered voting for another party**

Frequency with which have considered voting for another party	Riverlea	Doornkop	Groblersdal	Total N (%)
Never	181 (60%)	208 (70%)	186 (66%)	575 (65%)
Seldom	51 (17%)	38 (13%)	17 (6%)	106 (12%)
Often	43 (14%)	31 (10%)	32 (11%)	106 (12%)
Very often	29 (10%)	20 (7%)	46 (16%)	95 (11%)
Total	304 (100%)	297 (100%)	281 (100%)	882 (100%)

In a follow up open-ended question, the two main reasons given by respondents who have never considered voting for another party are firstly, that they identify with or have a strong attachment to the ANC. Comments included: 'I believe in the party', 'the party brought democracy and freedom to us and our kids', 'comfortable with the party', 'I don't like other parties', 'I only love the party that I am with', 'I feel I belong to the party', 'trust the party', and 'have been with the party for a very long time'. Equally important were the references to Mandela, in particular, such as 'ANC for me as long as Mr Mandela is still alive we won't vote for another party because he fought for democracy'. This type of sentiment was shared by respondents in all three areas.

Secondly (though mentioned slightly less), respondents were satisfied with the party because the party 'provided the necessities', the 'party delivers', the 'party is doing well for me, even though they are not providing for all', and the 'party is doing good'.

The major reason, expressed by a large majority of those who have considered voting for another party (in all three areas unless otherwise indicated), can broadly be encapsulated as, firstly, dissatisfaction with the government's performance. This was reflected in numerous statements such as:

- ANC keeps making promises, don't deliver, don't deliver on promises, doesn't keep promises, no housing as promised, empty promises.
- No employment, high unemployment, no creation of jobs.
- No service delivery, slow service delivery, poor services.
- Conditions which I am staying, no houses for poor.
- No crime prevention, crime, poor safety and security.
- No clean water or no water (especially respondents in Groblersdal).

The second major reason provided was the prevalence of corruption. Numerous mentions were made to corruption in the ANC in particular, for example, in their leadership and then more broadly to corruption in other institutions such as the police.

A third question was asked to establish how strongly respondents identify with their party. This was measured by the extent to which they agreed with the statement, 'It is acceptable to vote for different parties in the national and local government elections' on a scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Given that 65% of respondents have never considered voting for a different party, it was rather surprising that more than two-thirds of respondents agreed with the statement (see Table 4).

**Table 4**  
**Agreement with acceptability of voting for different parties in national and local elections**

It is acceptable to...	Riverlea	Doornkop	Grobbersdal	Total
Vote for different parties in the national and local government elections	75%	64%	67%	69%

Riverlea respondents are more likely to vote for different parties in national and local elections than voters in Doornkop and Groblersdal. This might be due to the changes in the demographic profile of Riverlea since 1994, and as indicated previously, that it is more politically diverse. The low level of trust and perceptions of performance of local government, particularly ward councillors (discussed below), might provide another explanation for this deviation. Many of the problems mentioned above, as to reasons why opposition parties attracted more votes in the last elections, are issues that are mainly dealt with at local level. In other words, it seems that issues that have a direct bearing on people's quality of life or their well-being may influence voters to vote for other parties at local level.

### **Second set of questions: reasons for voting and choosing a particular party**

All respondents were asked for their opinions on why people chose to vote, even if they themselves have not voted previously. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of nine statements, using a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The majority of respondents believed that people vote to make things better, with 95% agreeing in Riverlea, 94% in Groblersdal and 89% in Doornkop. Similarly,

most agreed that it is their democratic right to do so, with Riverlea respondents holding this view most strongly (93%); and because they perceive it to be their duty as citizens to do so (84%). In all three areas, respondents understood the reasons for voting to be both a democratic right and duty. This is closely followed by ensuring that their party wins and because they trust the party. The statement with the lowest levels of agreement (66%) was that they choose to vote because their party takes care of them. There were no significant differences between respondents in the three areas surveyed in relation to the latter questions.

Overall, the responses of grant recipients and non-recipients to the series of statements were very similar. The only statistically significant difference related to agreement with the statement 'People vote because their party takes care of them'. Although both groups tended to agree with this statement, grant recipients (70%) were more likely to agree or strongly agree with this statement than those who do not receive grants (63%). There were no other significant differences between the respondents in the three areas.

In addition to asking respondents why they vote, they were also asked why they vote for a particular party. They responded to a list of nine statements using a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

**Table 5**  
**Reasons for voting for a particular party**

	Riverlea Agree	Doornkop Agree	Groblerdsdal Agree	Average Agree
You have known the party for a long time	66%	63%	64%	64%
You trust the party	86%	80%	89%	85%
They have good strong leaders	83%	76%	82%	80%
The party best represents your racial/ethnic/language group	60%	58%	49%	56%
The party brought freedom and democracy to South Africans	77%	82%	91%	84%
You would have a better life	93%	82%	91%	89%
The party provides social grants for households like yours	52%	61%	63%	59%
The party promises to look after households like yours	71%	62%	61%	65%
The party gave food parcels before elections	17%	34%	29%	27%

Table 5 shows that across the three areas, the most common reason respondents provided for voting for a particular political party was that they would vote for a party because they would have a better life: 93% in Riverlea, 91% in Groblersdal and 82% Doornkop. This was followed by trust in party leaders, with higher scores in Groblersdal (89%) and Riverlea (86%) than in Doornkop (80%). Across the three areas, close to two-thirds of respondents said they would vote for a party because they had known the party for a long time.

Although not as common as the abovementioned reasons, more than half of the sample population (59%) would vote for a party if the party provides social grants to them, while race or ethnicity could also be a motivation for more than half of the respondents (56%). In Riverlea, fewer respondents agreed with the statement (52%) that they would vote for a party that provides social grants compared with Doornkop (61%) and Groblersdal (63%). This is possibly due to Riverlea having a slightly lower uptake of social grants than the other two areas. Only 27% of respondents overall, however, would vote for a party because the party gives out food parcels before elections. Again, this was less in Riverlea, where 17% of respondents agreed with the statement, than in Doornkop (34%) and Groblersdal (29%).

Cross-tabulations were done on the above responses in terms of social grant-holders and non-grant-holders, employment (employed and unemployed / not economically active), and age (18–34 years and above 35 years). Overall, the reasons that grant recipients and non-recipients vote are very similar except that 65% of grant recipients would vote for a party because ‘the party provides social grants for households like theirs’, while only 56% of non-recipients would vote for a party for this reason. In terms of employment, 68% of those respondents who are unemployed or not economically active would vote for a party because the party promises to look after households such as theirs, as opposed to 61% who are employed. In addition, 61% of the unemployed would vote for a party because ‘the party provides social grants to households like theirs’. Just over a quarter of respondents would vote for a party that ‘gave food parcels before elections’. However, the proportion is higher among those who are unemployed than employed (29% and 23% respectively), and among grant-holders compared with non-grant-holders (29% and 26% respectively).

Little difference was found between the youth (aged 18–34 years) and adults (35 years and older) on the reasons for voting for a party, with the exception that the youth views ‘knowing the party for a long time’ as a less important reason to vote than do adults (58% versus 71%). What is important when looking at party identification, however, is that a very large proportion of both the youth (84%) and adults (85%) regard the fact that ‘the party brought freedom and democracy to South Africans’ as an important reason to vote for a party. There were no significant differences between the areas with regard to the latter findings.

### **Third set of questions: government performance, trust and corruption**

While scholars underline the importance of democratic institutions and processes, such as elections in sustaining democracies, they equally emphasise citizen support for not only democracy but also its institutions – what Linz and Stepan (1997, pp. 15-17) refer to as ‘attitudinal’ support. Bratton and Cho (2006, p. 3) underline that peoples’ perceptions in the domain of politics have a bearing on their expectations and behaviour. It matters ‘*just as much – if not more – than reality*. That which people think is true, including judgements about present conditions or past performance and expectations for the future, is a central motivation for behaviour’ (authors’ emphasis).

One of the main functions of the governing political party is to organise government institutions and implement its policies or programmes. How voters perceive the performance of these institutions, which in effect is ‘managed’ by the governing party, is an important determinant of whether voters will again support the governing party in a future election. However, it is also likely that bad performance and mistrust may, due to very strong party loyalty, have little bearing on voters’ choice and may suggest a lack of a rational choice being exercised.

Equally important is establishing respondents’ trust in their political institutions. There are many explanations, based on different theoretical rationales, as to why people trust or distrust their institutions; these include perceived institutional performance and effectiveness. Trust in political institutions is closely linked to perceptions of political performance (good governance) and government delivery (Bratton et al. 2005, p. 67). Trust is thus something that does not come naturally; it has to be earned. Trust in institutions such as the legal system, police, and civil service depends heavily on their ability to solve the problems they are designed to address (Listhaug & Wiberg 1995, p. 302).

Given the response options ‘poor’, ‘average’, ‘good’, ‘excellent’ and ‘I don’t know’, respondents were asked to rate the performance of the president as well as various public institutions. These results are presented in Table 6.

As Table 6 shows, 38% of the respondents in Riverlea, 46% Doornkop and 32% in Groblersdal thought that the performance of parliament was good or excellent. A good or excellent rating of the president’s performance was higher, with 39% in Riverlea, 55% in Doornkop and 35% in Groblersdal. Respondents in Groblersdal were most dissatisfied with the performance of local government (59%) and ward councillors (68%). Local government, police and ward councillors in particular, received a consistently poor rating across all three areas.

In a subsequent question, respondents were also asked to indicate their trust in these public institutions and the president. The results are shown in Table 7. The close link between trust and performance, alluded to by Listhaug and Wiberg (1995) above, was also evident in this survey. Distrust thus corresponds with low performance.

**Table 6**  
**Perceptions of performance**

	Riverlea				Doornkop				Groblersdal			
	Poor	Average	Good/ Excellent	Don't know	Poor	Average	Good/ Excellent	Don't know	Poor	Average	Good/ Excellent	Don't know
Parliament	18%	38%	38%	6%	23%	27%	46%	4%	25%	26%	32%	17%
The president	25%	35%	39%	1%	20%	23%	55%	1%	32%	31%	35%	3%
Local government	40%	26%	31%	3%	31%	29%	38%	1%	59%	23%	16%	3%
Ward councillor	47%	25%	21%	7%	41%	24%	32%	3%	68%	17%	13%	2%
Judiciary	14%	32%	48%	7%	16%	26%	52%	6%	15%	17%	43%	26%
Army/Defence force	7%	16%	68%	10%	10%	24%	56%	9%	13%	13%	41%	33%
Police	44%	28%	27%	1%	48%	22%	29%	1%	44%	30%	26%	1%

**Table 7**  
**Perceptions of trust**

	Riverlea			Doornkop			Groblersdal		
	Dis-trust	Trust	Don't know	Dis-trust	Trust	Don't know	Dis-trust	Trust	Don't know
Parliament	28%	70%	2%	26%	70%	5%	36%	52%	12%
The president	38%	61%	1%	27%	71%	2%	39%	59%	2%
Local government	42%	57%	1%	36%	62%	2%	61%	37%	2%
Ward councillor	55%	41%	4%	48%	50%	2%	69%	29%	2%
Judiciary	16%	79%	5%	25%	72%	4%	18%	60%	22%
Army /Defence force	10%	83%	7%	19%	75%	6%	13%	58%	30%
Police	53%	47%	1%	52%	48%	1%	50%	49%	2%
Ruling party ANC	35%	63%	1%	25%	74%	1%	38%	61%	1%
Official opposition DA	39%	50%	12%	50%	37%	13%	48%	25%	27%
Other opposition parties	46%	24%	30%	51%	30%	19%	44%	20%	37%



High levels of distrust were expressed for local government, and particularly for ward councillors and the police, which coincided with perceptions of poor performance mentioned above. More than half of the respondents in the three communities were distrustful of the police: 53% in Riverlea, 52% in Doornkop and 50% in Groblersdal. This negative evaluation of the police corresponds with the reasons given by respondents as to why the ANC lost support to other parties, with crime cited as one of the major reasons. It is also not surprising given the high crime rate in the country. During the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013, for example, there were 16 259 murders, which amounts to 45 murders a day (31 per 100 000 of the population). This is about four and a half times higher than the global average of 6.9 murders per 100 000. Similarly, 60 262 incidences of street or public robberies took place, primarily affecting poorer people. Most often such robberies occur when people are travelling to and from work or the shops, or while visiting people; and most events happen in quiet streets or overgrown areas as people make their way to and from taxi ranks (Africa Check 2013).

The perceived weak performance of local government and ward councillors, and the subsequent low levels of trust in local government, could be ascribed to services not being provided or not being adequately provided to the poor – which is a function of local government. These include prevention of crime, improving living standards for the poor, building and maintaining roads, and providing adequate toilets (established in a different question on whether the government is doing a good job in terms of a list of issues).

A specific indicator of performance, which Bratton et al. (2005) regard as ‘the overall predictor of institutional trust’, is whether the population regard state officials as being corrupt. Popular perceptions of corruption undermine trust in institutions. As Diamond (2007, p. 6) states, ‘Nothing is more toxic to public trust in government than extensive corruption.’ To gauge corruption, respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement about the involvement of various officials in corruption (Table 8), and whether there is ‘more corruption in the country than 5 years ago’.

A large majority of respondents (77%) were of the opinion that ‘there is more corruption now than five years ago’. Corresponding with perceptions of performance and trust, the police are regarded as the most corrupt (75%), followed by local government (67%).

Cross-tabulations were conducted to establish the differences between ANC supporters and opposition party supporters on the performance, trust and prevalence of corruption in the various institutions. Although a higher proportion of non-ANC supporters distrusted all the institutions evaluated, excluding their own party, respondents did not differ in their choice of the least trusted institutions, nor did they differ in their performance ratings of these institutions (the

exception again being in terms of proportion and intensity and excluding their own party). However, rather conspicuous in terms of party support and the findings on trust and corruption is the fact that 52% of ANC supporters were of the opinion that their party is involved in corruption, and 60% think the party is doing a good job. However, 85% of ANC supporters trust their party, which, together with the above findings, seems to indicate some party loyalty.

**Table 8: Perceptions of corruption**

	Riverlea	Doornkop	Grobblersdal	Average
	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
There is more corruption now than five years ago	79%	74%	78%	77%
The president is involved in corruption	49%	49%	50%	49%
Members of parliament are involved in corruption	62%	67%	62%	64%
Magistrates and judges are involved in corruption	47%	46%	39%	44%
People in local government are involved in corruption	63%	70%	69%	67%
The police are involved in corruption	78%	77%	71%	75%

### CLIENTELISM, SOCIAL GRANTS AND VOTE-BUYING

Clientelism can be a determinant in the voting behaviour of poor people, particularly with regard to 'democratic redistribution' in the form of social policies and conditional cash flows. Clientelism, as noted above, is 'the selective exchange of material resources and opportunities for votes and loyalty and is often presented as the dominant mode of interaction between parties and the urban poor.' However, clientelism involves much more than the emphasised electoral uses. As Magoloni (2014b) points out,

clientelism is an exchange relationship that entails, on the part of the patron, the delivery of material benefits including, offering privileges across government jobs and programmes, and demands on the part of the client, a variety of political behaviours, of which voting for the patron is perhaps the most consequential.

Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007, p. 76) further argue that a clientelistic exchange relation is characterised by the following features:

- the exclusion of non-participants from the exchange
- whether such exchanges become viable from the perspective of politicians – thus whether voter constituencies respond in a predictable fashion to clientelistic inducements
- apart from spontaneous and voluntary compliance by constituencies, ‘politicians can invest in organisational structures to monitor and enforce clientelistic exchanges’.

Clientelism therefore entails an ongoing relationship. Establishing this type of relationship fell beyond the scope of this study. However, Brusco et al. (2004, p. 67; also see Stokes 2007, p. 606) conceptualise a form of clientelism which they label as ‘vote-buying’. This refers to the proffering ‘of cash or more commonly minor consumption goods by political parties in office or in opposition, in exchange for the recipient’s vote’, rather than focusing on the creation of long-term relationships with poor communities (also see Resnick 2012). The specific reference was to Africa.

In determining whether the provision of social grants and the issue of (for example) food parcels close to elections shapes the voting behaviour of poor people, it was important first to establish whether respondents know their rights. In this regard, the following question was asked: ‘How much do you agree that the following are your rights in a democracy?’ Seven rights were listed and respondents had to indicate their response by selecting (1) ‘strongly disagree’ to (5) ‘strongly agree’ or ‘don’t know’ to each of these.

In all three areas, respondents demonstrated a high level of knowledge of their civil, political and socio-economic rights. Over 90% of respondents in Riverlea and Groblersdal agreed with the seven items identified, while Doornkop was slightly lower at 87%. Of particular relevance to this study was knowledge of the right to social security, and again Riverlea and Groblersdal respondents had a high level of agreement (both 94%), while Doornkop was slightly lower (87%).

To develop an overall measure of the respondents’ knowledge of their rights in a democracy, the seven statements were combined to create a ‘knowledge of rights’ scale. The inter-correlation among the seven rights was Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.77$ , indicating a relatively high level of internal reliability.

Table 9 indicates the mean scores by area; there were no statistically significant differences between grant recipients and non-grant recipients.

**Table 9**  
**Mean score of agreement with seven statements of knowledge of rights**

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Full sample	4.29	0.5
<b>Area</b>		
Riverlea	4.22	0.48
Doornkop	4.19	0.53
Groblersdal	4.46	0.46
<b>Grant status</b>		
Grant recipient	4.33	0.48
Non-recipient	4.27	0.52

A further question was then posed: 'If a party other than the ANC comes into power, how strongly do you agree or disagree that the new party would protect your rights?' Despite the fact that the majority of respondents (over 90%) know their rights in a democracy, the proportion of respondents who think these rights will be protected when another party comes to power dropped significantly (Table 10). Respondents were then asked: 'Do you think that social grants will continue if another party comes to power?' Options provided were 'Yes', 'No', 'Perhaps', and 'Don't know'.

**Table 10**  
**Continuation of grants if another party comes to power**

	Yes	No/perhaps/don't know
Full sample	606 (51%)	592 (49%)
<b>Area</b>		
Riverlea	234 (58%)	168 (42%)
Doornkop	167 (42%)	231 (58%)
Groblersdal	205 (52%)	193 (48%)
<b>Grant status</b>		
Grant recipient	191 (42%)	264 (58%)
Non-recipient	415 (56%)	328 (44%)
<b>Political affiliation</b>		
Ruling party	287 (43%)	385 (57%)
Opposition parties	194 (65%)	105 (35%)

As Table 10 indicates, 42% of Riverlea respondents, 58% of Doornkop and 48% of Groblersdal respondents thought that social grants would not continue if another political party came to power, or they were unsure, or did not know. In Riverlea, where there is stronger support for an opposition party as well as higher levels of education and income than in the other two areas, voters appeared to have greater knowledge of their rights to social grants. Despite the fact that Groblersdal is poorer than Riverlea, just under half of the respondents in Groblersdal (48%) held similar views. Here too, there was stronger support for an opposition party. Across the three areas, grant recipients (58%) were more likely than non-recipients (48%) to believe that social grants would not continue. Interestingly, supporters of opposition parties (65%) were more likely than supporters of the ruling party (43%) to believe that social grants would continue if another party came to power.

From the above results, including the fact that 59% of respondents agreed that they would vote for a party because it provides social grants for households like theirs (Table 5), it seems social grants could provide an incentive for people to vote for the ANC. The data also suggest that, where there are opposition parties and some contestation about which party to vote for, voters are inclined to have a better knowledge of their constitutional right to social assistance.

The following question arises: Do respondents perceive the provision of social grants as a form of vote-buying? Two statements in this regard are presented in Table 11.

**Table 11**  
**Perceptions on bribery and vote-buying**

	Riverlea	Doornkop	Groblersdal	Average
	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
Giving social grants to people is a form of bribery so that they support the governing party	20%	27%	23%	24%
Handing out food parcels before elections is like vote-buying	70%	67%	77%	70%

From the responses, it is evident that a very large proportion of respondents across the three areas regard the handing out of food parcels before elections as 'vote-buying', while they do not regard the provision of social grants as such. The variation among the respondents in the different communities who agreed with the statement 'giving social grants is a form of bribery by the ruling party to win votes' was small. The breakdown between the areas was as follows: Riverlea (20%), Groblersdal (23%) and Doornkop (27%). This conforms to the agreement

by 88% of respondents (to a different question) that 'Social grants help poor people to survive'.

One could, therefore, argue that it is highly unlikely that the majority of poor voters will be persuaded to vote for a particular party on the basis of receiving food parcels before elections. Nevertheless, 27% of respondents would vote for a party because they give food parcels (Table 5), which can certainly influence party support if food parcels are handed out before an election. This could be a determining factor in marginal seats (particularly in local government elections) or where ruling party support (particularly in poor areas) is not strong. Social grants, on the other hand, can be used as a successful campaign strategy by the ruling party since the majority of grant-holders (58%) do not think that they will continue receiving a grant when a new party comes to power (Table 10).

## CONCLUSION

In view of the fact that there were few differences among the three communities, some general but tentative conclusions can be drawn. After 20 years of democracy, it is evident that party identification and loyalty is still an important determinant in voting behaviour, and that the ANC, in particular, still holds a dominant position in South African politics. The majority of people in the three communities surveyed (56%) supported the ANC. This figure, however, is far lower than the support of over 65.9% received in the 2009 election and the 62% in the 2014 election. It should be remembered that a large proportion of respondents were uncertain (9%) or refused (10%) to reveal their choice of a party. Of more importance is that among the 72% of respondents who voted in the past, 65% indicated that they have never considered voting for another party, with a notable difference in reported loyalty for the ruling party. Party loyalty is further underscored by the fact that, despite the acknowledgement of the high levels of corruption in general and in various institutions (including their own party) by a majority of ANC supporters, they will still vote for the party.

However, although there are clear signs of continuous party identification and loyalty, some qualification needs to be made. Firstly, a strong party loyalty only seems to pertain to support of a party (and in particular the ANC) at national level (general elections). A large majority of respondents, across all three areas, indicated that they have no problem in voting for different parties in national and local government elections. Past election results show that in practice this has indeed been the case. This suggests that strong attachment to a party wanes when people's quality of life or living standards are directly confronted (referred to in this study as 'the poor'). This is clearly reflected in the low rating of the performance of local government and, in particular, the ward councillors in Riverlea, Doornkop

and Groblersdal. Low ratings were also evident in relation to the performance of the police. The government's performance, across all three areas, on issues such as preventing crime, improving the living standards of the poor, and providing adequate toilets (which are all local government responsibilities) was rated as 'poor' by the majority of respondents, with little difference between ANC and opposition party supporters. These ratings, together with other issues mentioned (which are also the responsibility of local government) such as lack of service delivery, poor living conditions, and a lack of clean water (especially rural respondents), point to signs of issue voting among the poor, and signify elements of rational decision-making.

Whether party loyalty among poor communities – especially to the ruling party at national level – will persist in the years to come remains to be seen. This is relevant given the present disjuncture between perceptions of the performance of the party at national level compared with the local level. An important consideration would be the argument that the 'born-free' generation is likely to be a driver of change in future elections; that is, people born after 1994 have less historical connection to the ruling party. Of further importance will be how long the 'Mandela legacy' will continue after Mandela's death, since respondents referred to him in particular as a reason for not have considered support for any other party, with some adding 'when he is alive'. Our study was undertaken before his death.

Although race has been regarded as a factor in predicting electoral choice in previous studies on voting behaviour in South Africa, one should be cautious to draw a definite conclusion based on our study. Our sample included a very small number of respondents who were white or Indian, and therefore the sample did not remotely resemble the country's actual demographics. However, in terms of black respondents, a large majority indicated support for the ruling party, while the coloured vote was split between the ANC and DA.

Finally, social grants, unlike receiving food parcels before elections, were not regarded as 'vote-buying' by a large majority of respondents. None the less, social grants can provide an incentive for people to vote for the ANC, since just under half of grant-holders who support the party did not think that they would continue to receive the grant if a new party came to power. A majority of respondents also said they would vote for a party that provides social grants. Therefore, in a situation where one party has dominated the electoral scene for such a long time, and without having the experience of other parties being in power, it is difficult for voters to know whether these benefits will continue under a different party in power, particularly if the official opposition has the legacy of being a 'white' party. We therefore conclude that social grants can effectively be used as a campaign strategy to gain (or retain) support from grant-holders, in particular.

The study has further shown that it is unlikely that the majority of poor voters will be persuaded to vote for a particular party on the basis of receiving food parcels before elections, irrespective of where they live. Nevertheless, more than a quarter of the respondents (with a higher proportion being unemployed rather than employed), would vote for a party that provided food parcels before elections. This suggests that the provision of food parcels to the poor before elections, together with propagating the distribution of social grants as a 'party initiative', can indeed influence the 'floating' vote. It is also likely that, where there is political contestation and competition between political parties in poor communities, vote-buying may to some extent inform electoral strategies.

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