

Beyond apathy

The diverse attitudes of young South Africans who plan to abstain, or are uncertain about voting, in NPE 2024



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Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that **electoral democracy is in recession**, - declining voter participation during elections globally.

The **mixed-methods study** focuses on the widespread challenge of declining voter turnout in elections

The focus of this **study is the youth who are either uncertain or intend not to vote in** the upcoming elections. This group is **under-represented in the IEC Voter Participation Survey (VPS) series.**

There **are two components** to the study:

- **Quantitate component: Focus of this presentation**
- **Qualitative:** Follow-up to the Your Voice, Your Choice (YVYC) project completed in 2019. Involves focus groups, community dialogues with the intention of fostering a sense of belonging and collective agency.



Methodology

The online survey was **conducted using the #datafree Moya Messenger App** and through links from social media.

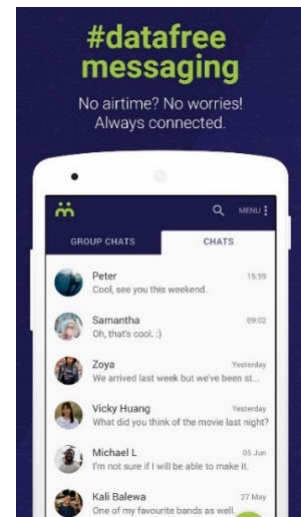
- Moya: 6 million subscribers; 800,000 users per day.
- Survey completed by 5,086 youth meeting eligibility criteria

Strengths:

- Largest survey in South Africa to date on those **aged 18-35** who are planning to **abstain in NPE 2024** or **who are uncertain** about voting in the election
- Provides crucial data into views and tendencies of this cohort, with **IEC communication strategy** and **CDE** in mind.

Limitations:

- Survey is an **opt-in convenience sample** rather than a national probability sample; the data are broadly indicative to the cohort's attitudes and behaviour rather than strictly representative



Democratic evaluations: A case of extremely critical citizens

Youth who plan to abstain in 2024 or who are uncertain about voting display...

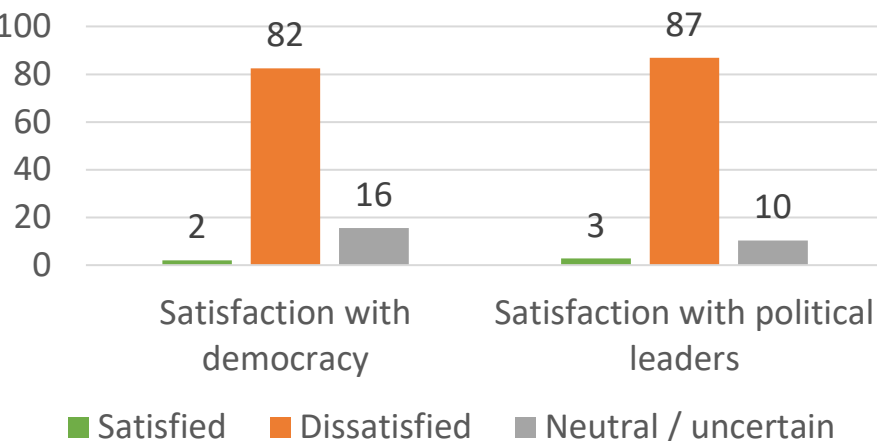
... deep discontent with democratic and leadership performance

- Only 2% are satisfied with democracy and 3% with political leaders

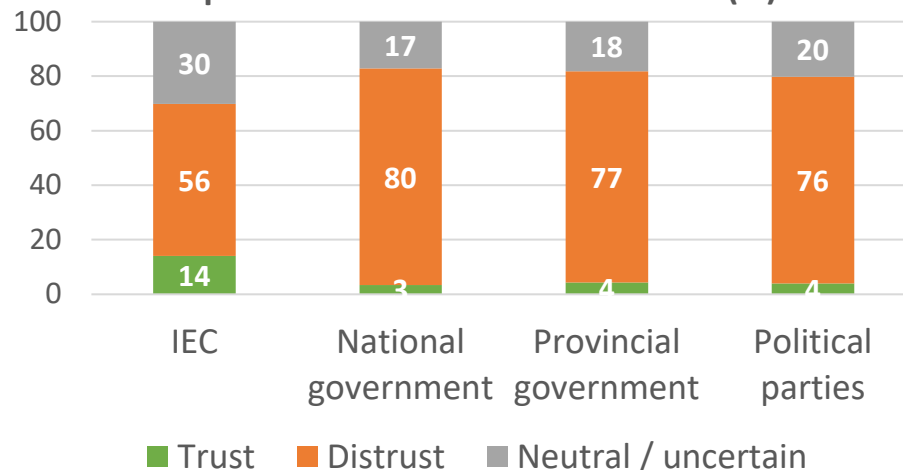
... equally harsh views of core political institutions

- Less than 5% express confidence in national government (3%), provincial government (4%) and political parties (4%)
- Electoral Commission fares relatively better, but trust is still circumscribed (14%)

Satisfaction with democracy and leaders (%)



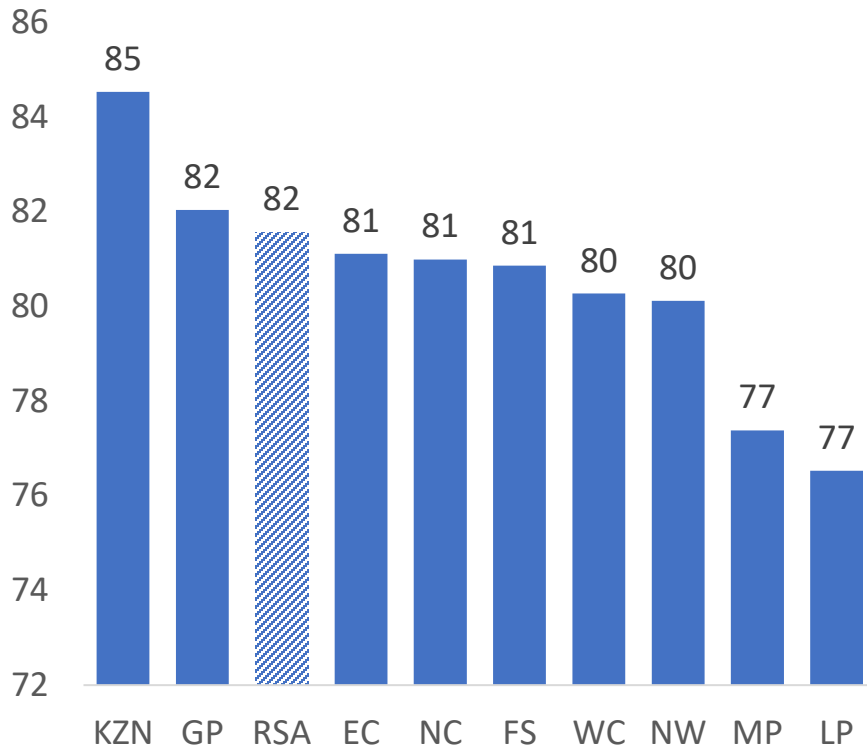
A pattern of low institutional trust (%)



Democratic evaluations: Youth in KZN AND GP especially critical

(Views of youth who plan to abstain in 2024 or who are uncertain about voting)

Dissatisfied with democracy (%)



Distrust in core political institutions (%)

	Distrust Nat. Gov.	Distrust Prov. Gov	Distrust Parties	Distrust IEC
KZN	83	80	77	55
GP	80	78	77	59
RSA	80	77	76	56
Minimum	76	66	70	52
Maximum	83	83	78	59
Rank	1	2	2	3

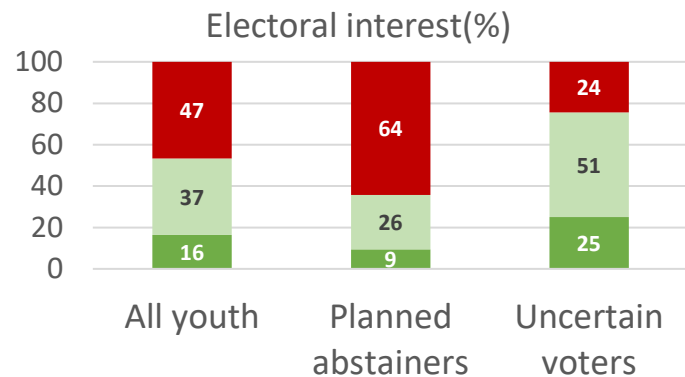
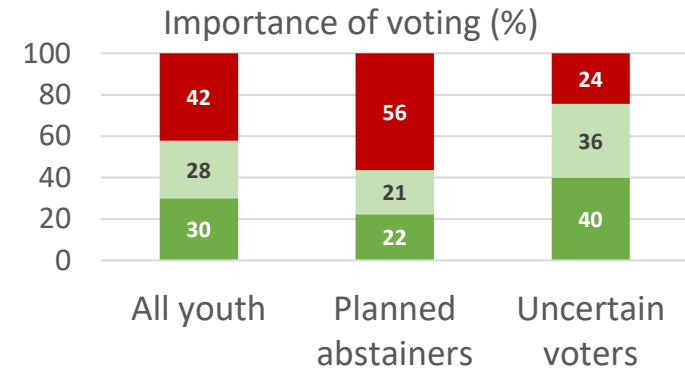
Electoral attitudes: Shattering stereotypes of apathy

Youth are divided on the importance of voting

- **42% felt voting was unimportant or were uncertain**
- **58% believed in the importance of voting** (30% very/extremely important; 28% somewhat important)
- **Planned abstainers more critical** than uncertain youth

Similar divide on interest in elections

- Close to half of this youth cohort were disinterested in elections (47%); 16% were very or quite interested, while 36% had low interest
- Similar to national tendencies
- **Planned abstainers far less interested** than uncertain youth



Electoral attitudes (2): Shattering stereotypes of apathy

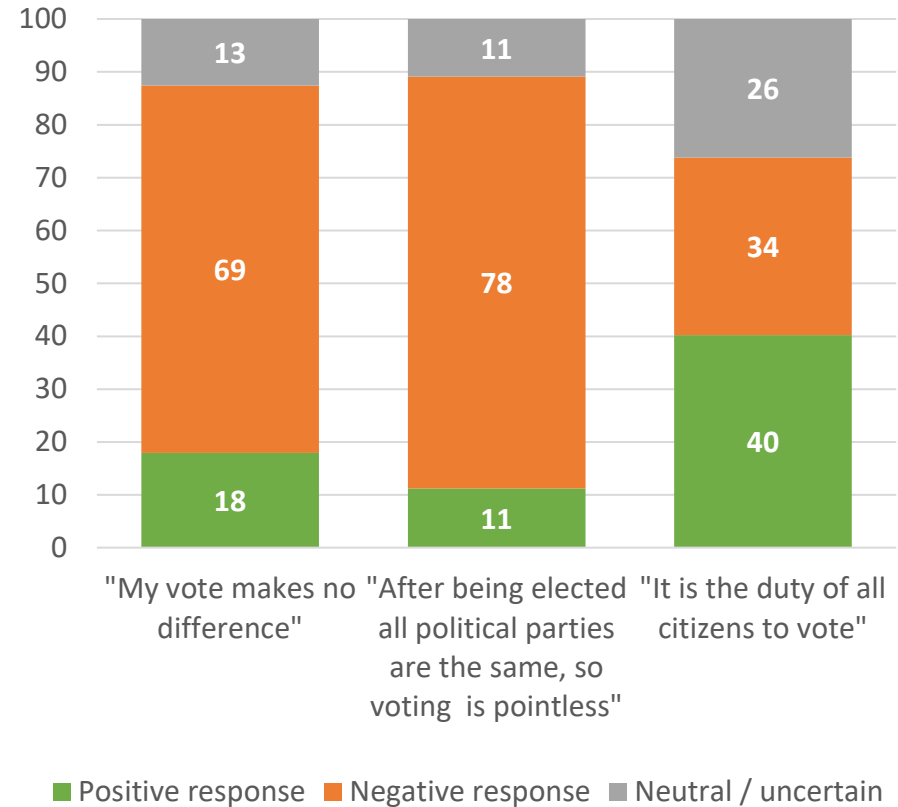
Sense of political efficacy very weak

- **Low internal efficacy: 69% believed their individual vote makes no difference** (more negative than previous slide-indicating more scepticism with regards to the individual making a difference)
- **Low external efficacy: only 11% believed parties are delivering**, rendering voting worthwhile
- Planned abstainers more critical than uncertain youth

A sizeable minority still believes in the duty to vote

- **40% agreed 'it is the duty of all citizens to vote'**
- **Planned abstainers** believe less in duty (32%) than uncertain youth (51%)

Political efficacy and duty to vote (%)



Influence of party identification, coalitions and independent candidates on turnout

Difficulty in finding a party representing needs

- **47% said they struggle** to a great extent; 39% don't struggle; 14% experience some difficulty

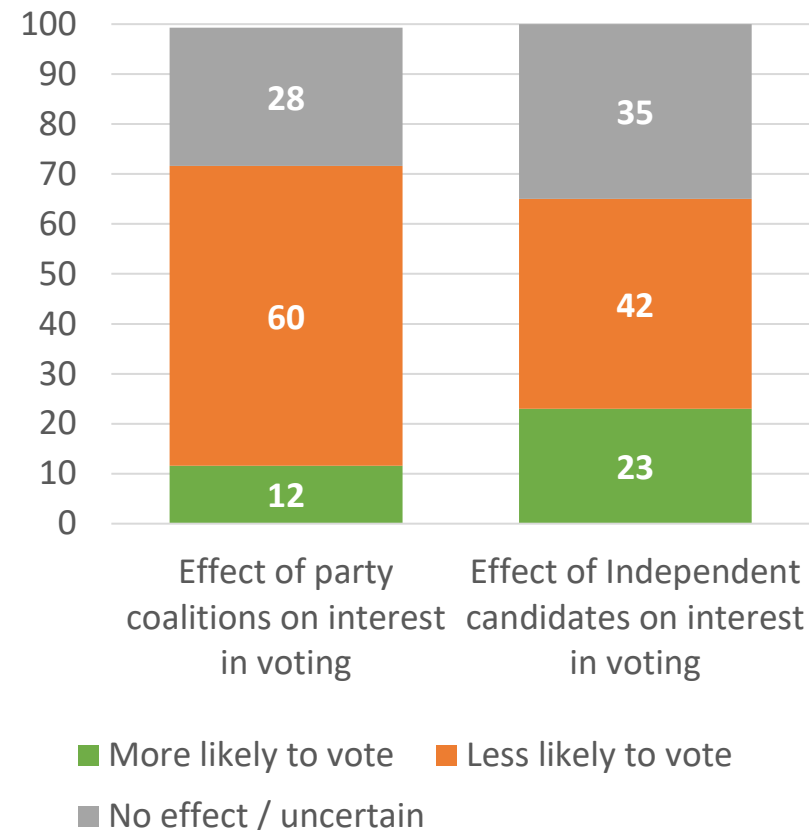
Political party coalitions have a disincentivizing effect on interest in turnout among this youth cohort

- **60%** said that party coalitions made them **less likely to want to vote**; **only 12% were positive**

Independent candidates also appear to dampen interest in turnout among this cohort

- **42%** said that the ability to vote for independent candidates in elections makes them **less likely to want to vote**; **23% were positive**

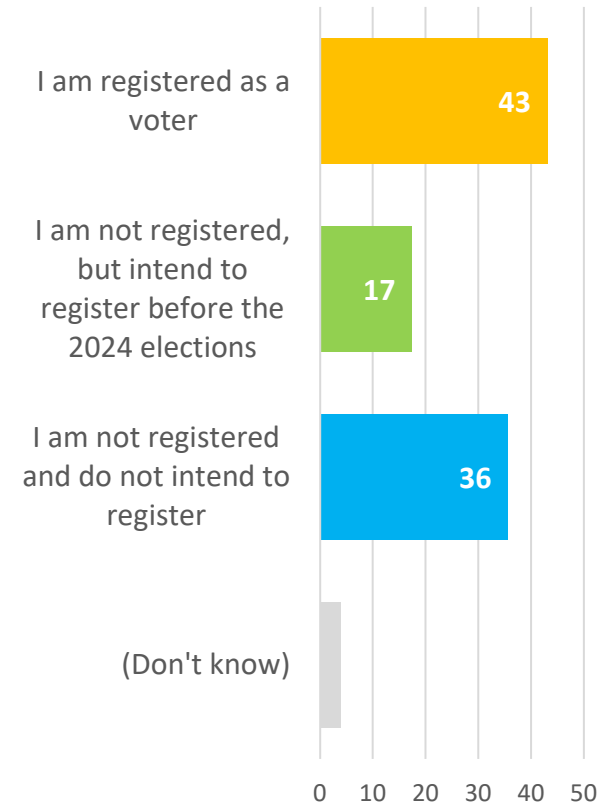
Effect of coalitions and independent candidates on interest in voting (%)



Registration

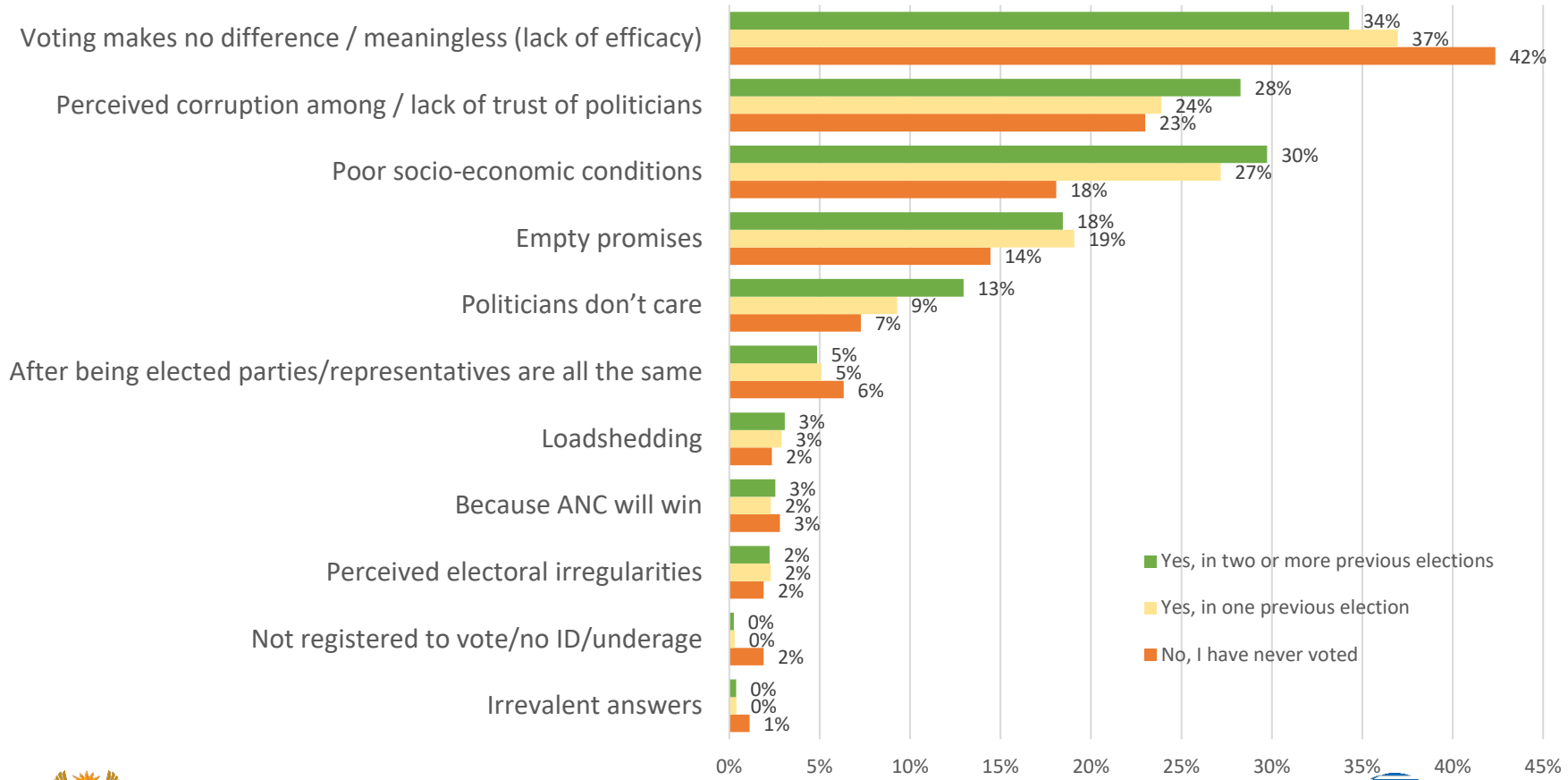
- About **two-fifths (43%)** said that they were registered to vote.
- **36%** were adamant they would not register
- 30% of the **unregistered** intended to register before the 2024 elections
- The **primary reason** given for **not intending to register** amongst the unregistered was political disillusionment.
- 60% were aware that you could **register online**; those who **intended to register** were particularly unaware of this option.
- 71% were **not willing** to use their **own data** to register to vote online; this was particularly true of the **poor**.

Which of the following registration statements best applies to you?



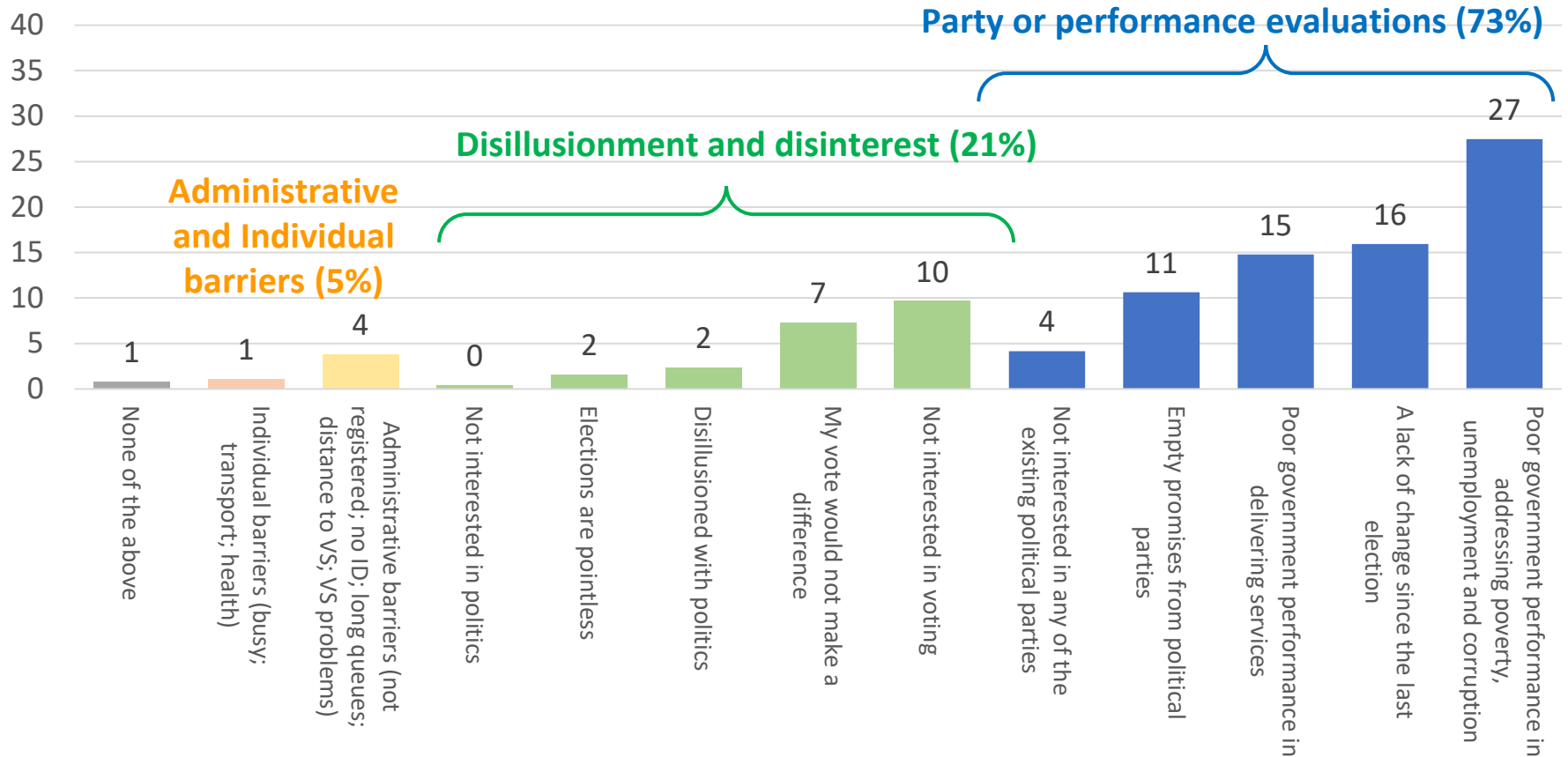
Open-ended reasons for planned abstention / uncertainty about voting in Election 2024?

MOST IMPORTANT REASONS why you are thinking of not voting in National and Provincial Elections 2024?

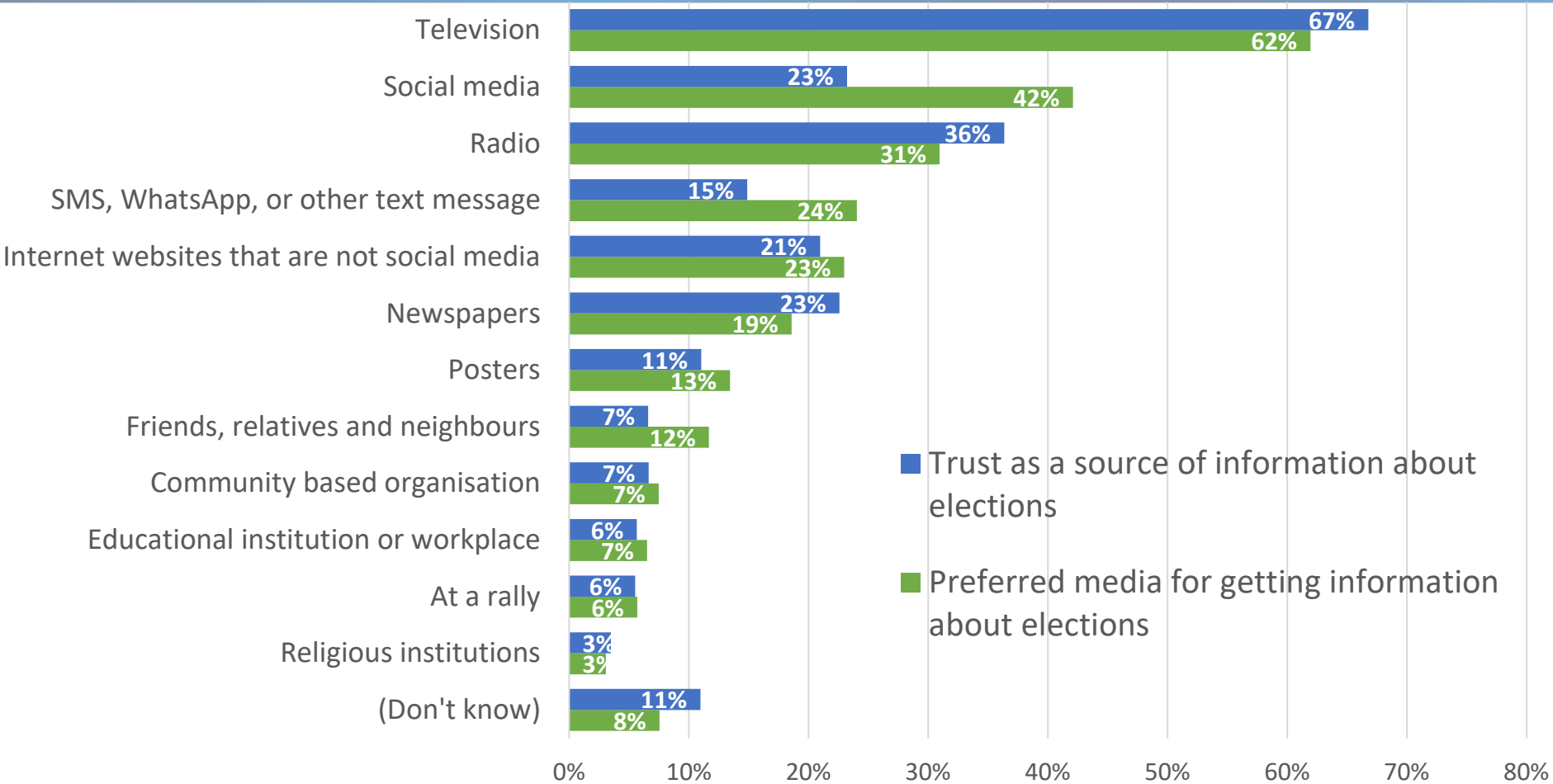


Reasons for planned abstention / uncertainty about voting in 2024: Precoded question

Reasons for planned abstention / uncertainty

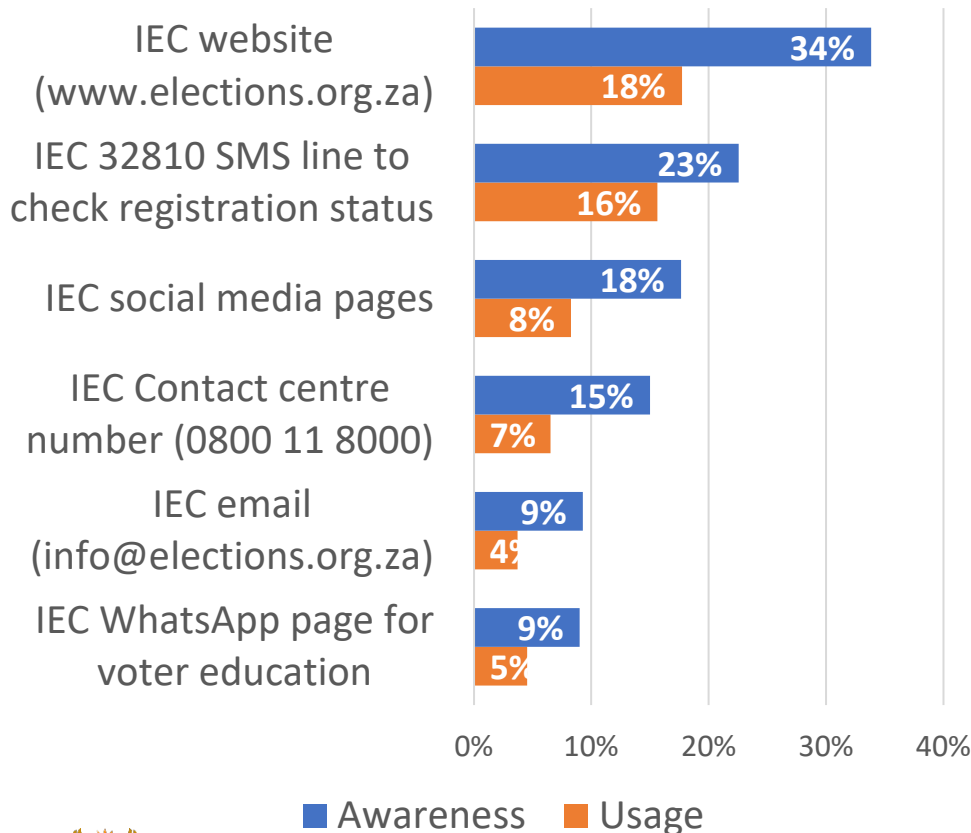


Preferred and trusted media sources relating to electoral information



Awareness and usage of Electoral Commission platforms

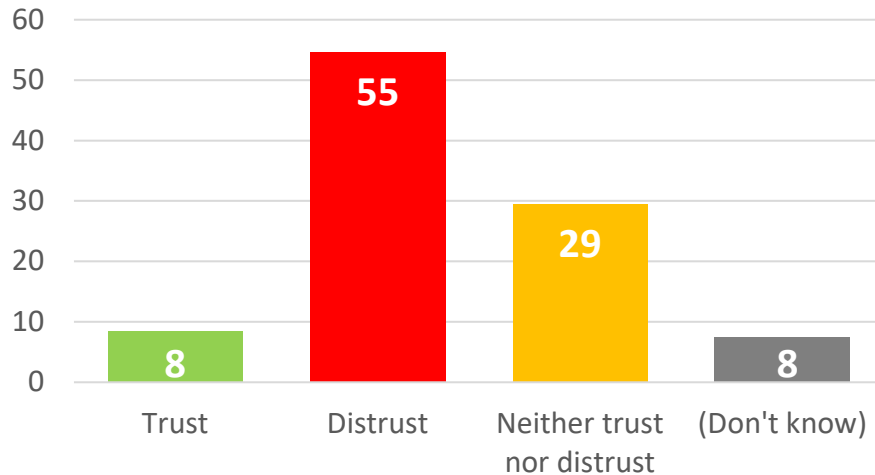
Which of the following Electoral Commission's communication platforms have you used/are aware of?



- 42% were very or extremely concerned that **FAKE NEWS** during elections is creating confusion and distrust
- **Most known and used IEC communication platforms** are IEC website and SMS line – but awareness and usage still low
- **43%** said that they would like to communicate with the Electoral Commission through **WhatsApp chat**; this was particularly true for those **concerned about FAKE NEWS**.

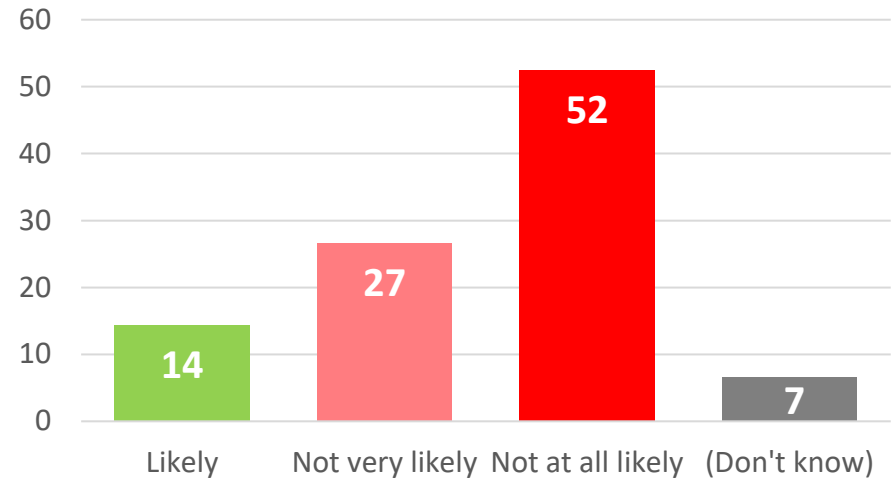
Influencers, celebrities and role models: A game changer?

To what extent do you trust or distrust famous South African people who try and influence people to vote in elections?



- Distrust is very high relative to the share that trust (55% vs 8%).
- Distrust increases with age and education.
- More males display distrust however, females are more neutral.

If your favourite celebrity, influencer or role model told you to vote in the 2024 election, how likely is it that you would follow this advice?



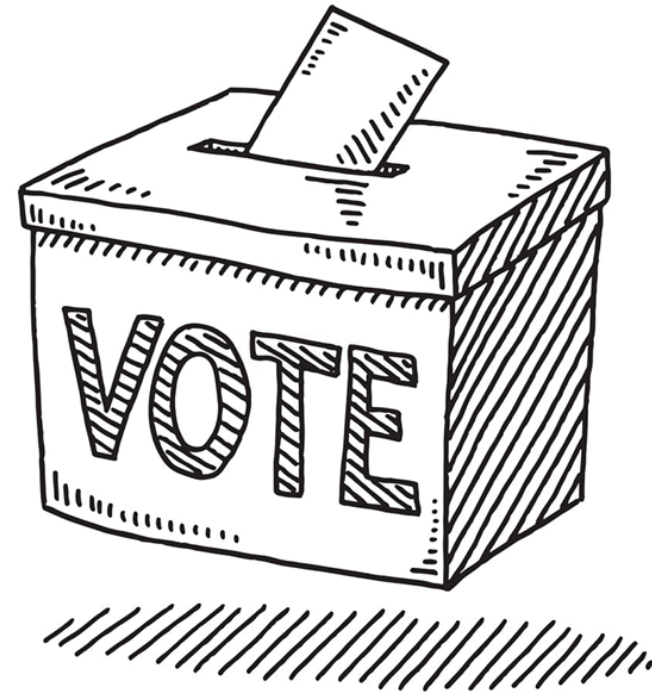
- More people are not at all likely to follow the advice of an influencer relative to those who are likely (52% vs 15%).
- Not at all likely to follow advice if you are older, male and have a post matric level of education.

What can IEC do to encourage voting in NPE 2024?

- Respondents were asked an **open-ended question**: *“In your opinion, what could the IEC do to encourage you to vote in next year’s election?”*
- **Many issues raised are not within the mandate of the IEC** (job opportunity, service delivery, addressing corruption) .
- **Of the responses relating to IEC mandate**, themes of relevance to the IEC communication strategy and messaging include:
 - A fair and honest voting experience will be ensured: *“Guarantee free and fair elections.”*
 - The voting experience will be improved: *“Voting stations to be more accessible”*
 - Safety and security will be ensured at voting stations: *“Make sure the voting stations are safe and the boxes with votes are also safe and secured”*
 - A stronger message against corruption: *“Create a system of voting in which everyone will know that no corruption can happen when counting votes”*
- Additionally, there should be:
 - More education and awareness campaigns: *“Make me understand more about elections”*
 - Improved advertising campaigns: *“Be very visible every where”*

Conclusion

- Youth are heterogenous and the characterisation of young South Africans as apathetic is problematic and unhelpful
 - **SILVER LINING (1): Persisting belief in the importance of voting (could be stronger)**
 - **SILVER LINING (2): A sizeable minority still believes in the duty to vote**
- Youth planning to abstain in 2024 or who remain undecided are deeply discontent with the functioning of democracy and political institutions.
 - From their perspective, convincing them to turnout would require responding to their material needs: decent work, quality services, and capable and ethical leadership
 - This is beyond the Electoral Commission's mandate and speaks to the accountability of the political system





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thank you

English
Afrikaans
Ndebele
Xhosa
Zulu
Sepedi
Sesotho
Setswana
Xitsonga
SiSwati
Tshivenda
Nama

Thank you
Dankie
Ngiyathokoza
Enkosi
Ngiyabonga
Ke a leboga
Ke a leboha
Ke a leboga
Ndzi khense ngopfu
Ngiyabonga
Ndi a livhuwa
Gangans

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