



# SRF polling: 11 interesting tidbits

South Africa

1 SEPTEMBER 2023

The Social Research Foundation (SRF) has conducted several polls on a variety of issues that concern South Africans, providing some insight into public opinion which is important especially in this period leading up to elections. These issues include loadshedding, emigration and immigration, coalitions and more.

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In this note, we zoom into some interesting findings from these surveys which typically poll registered voters. While this approach is reasonable as it is more likely to shed light on the views that will be expressed in the 2024 elections, it does not include the opinions held by those not registered to vote. Moreover, the voter registration process is ongoing and the voters' roll may look different in May next year (when elections are expected to be held) to how it looks now or when some of these polls were conducted.

## KRUTHAM 2024 BASELINE.

ANC 47 [57.5] (upside risk)  
DA 25 [20.8] (downside risk)  
EFF 12 [10.8] (downside risk)  
ACSA 4 [-] (balanced risk)  
IFP 5 [3.4] (balanced risk)  
Proto 5 [-] (downside risk)  
Other 3 [7.6] (Upside risk)

Overall, from the SRF's insights we can conclude that the DA still suffers from perceptions that it caters to the needs of a minority of citizens. As such, we should not expect a direct swing of votes from the ANC to the DA in 2024. We are also able to conclude that the EFF suffers from perceptions that it is violent and spreads hate. We therefore do not expect a dramatic improvement in the party's electoral fortunes next year. All this means that despite its evident shortcomings, the ANC should not be written off as some voters still express support for the party, even in the face of challenges such as loadshedding.

## TOPICS

Politics

## South Africa in 10 years

In July 2022, the SRF asked South Africans whether they believe that the country will be a better or worse place in 10 years' time. With a sample of 3,204 randomly selected and demographically and geographically representative registered voters, the survey was conducted telephonically and had a 1.7% margin of error.<sup>1</sup>

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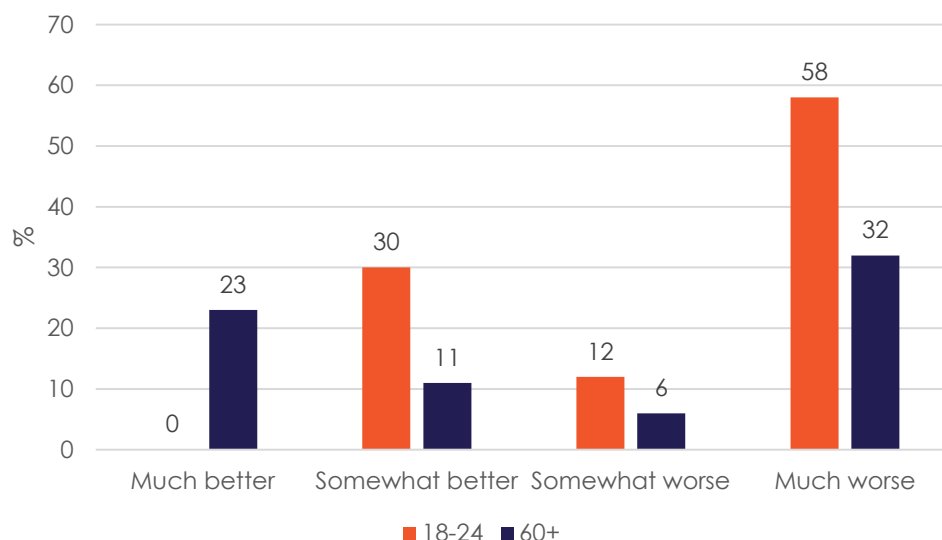
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<sup>1</sup> SRF. 2022. South Africans and their Expectations of the Next 10 years. Social Research Foundation. <https://srfreports.co.za/south-africans-and-their-expectations-of-the-next-10-years/>

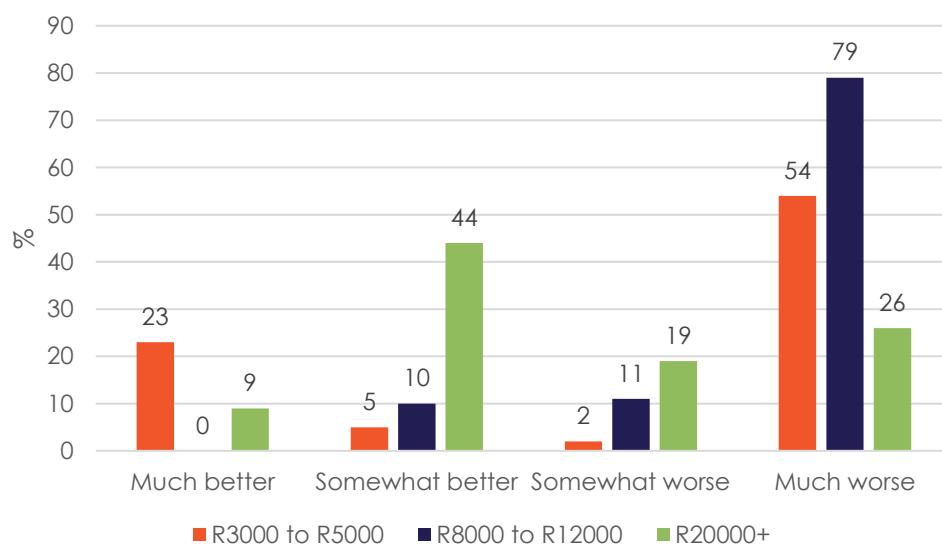
**Figure 1: Perceptions of the country in 10 years, young vs older**



Source: SRF

The age dimension is interesting because young people – the most important demographic for the future – are less optimistic about the country’s fortunes changing for the better than their older counterparts. This could be attributed to various factors. One is the reality that young people have no recollection of living in a thriving South Africa. However, the older generation experienced the period immediately after apartheid towards the late 2000s upon which it can premise its optimism.

**Figure 2: Perceptions of whether the country will be better or worse by income**



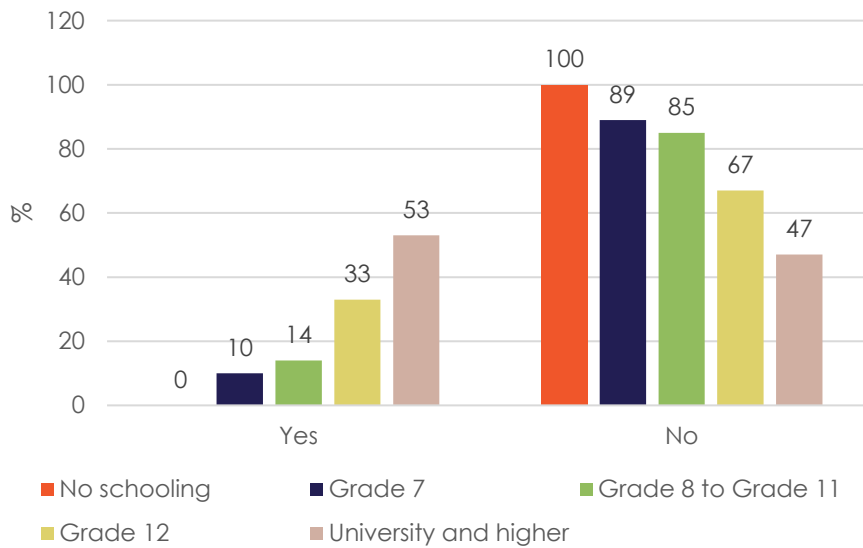
Source: SRF

The assessment of perceptions of the state the country will be in 10 years is important because these perceptions may have implications for the brain drain and therefore the country’s human capital. What is clear from the SRF’s survey is that the three income brackets have a negative outlook of the country’s future. However, it should be encouraging that 44% of South Africans earning above R20,000 believe the country will be somewhat better.

## Emigration

Interestingly, in 2022 the SRF also surveyed registered voters on their opinion of emigration. Only 23,4% reported that they were considering emigrating from South Africa, while 76,1% were not even thinking about emigrating.

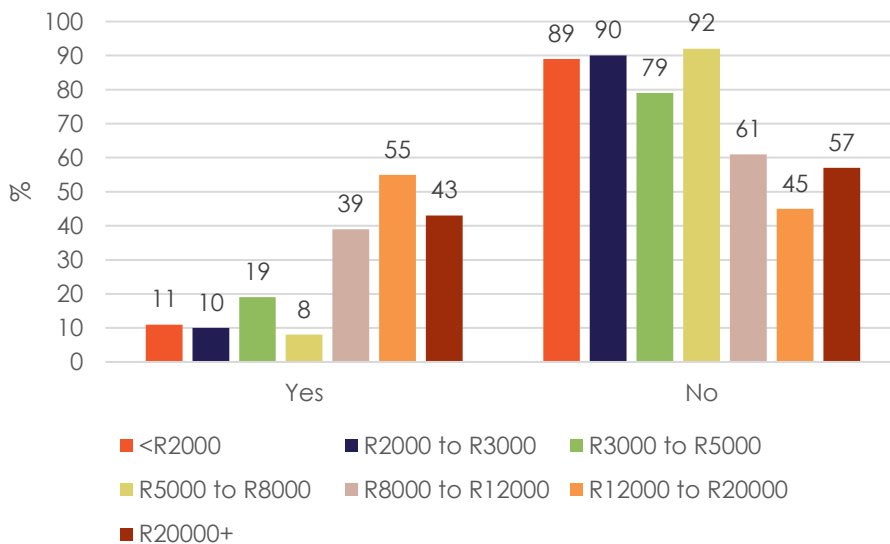
**Figure 3: Share of registered voters by highest level of education considering emigration**



Source: SRF

Given their better (social) mobility, it is unsurprising that people with higher levels of education consider emigrating the most. With better education, chances improve of people being economically active in other countries.

**Figure 4: Share of registered voters by monthly income considering emigration**



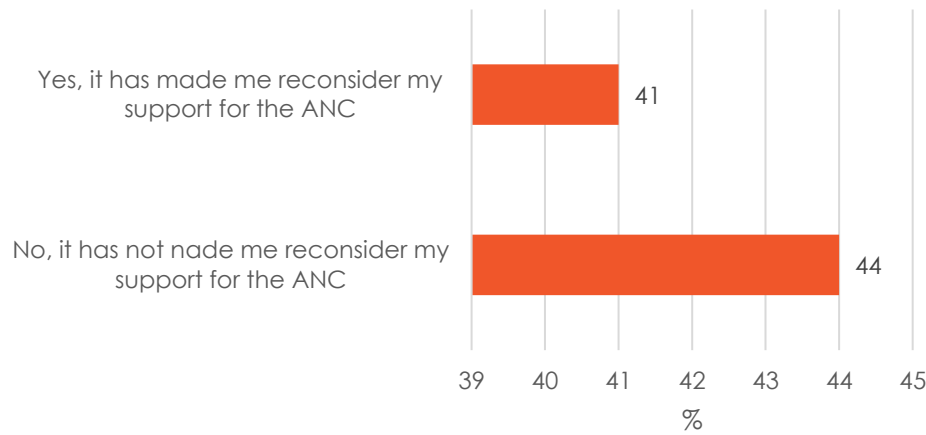
Source: SRF

That people earning between R12,000 and R20,000 are the ones considering emigrating the most is perhaps an indication of their belief that they could earn more in another economy. Overall, South Africans across income brackets prefer to remain in the country.

## Impact of loadshedding

In March 2023, the SRF surveyed 1,517 demographically and regionally representative registered ANC voters to ascertain whether the “phenomenon” of loadshedding has made them reconsider their support for the governing party. The margin of error was 4%.

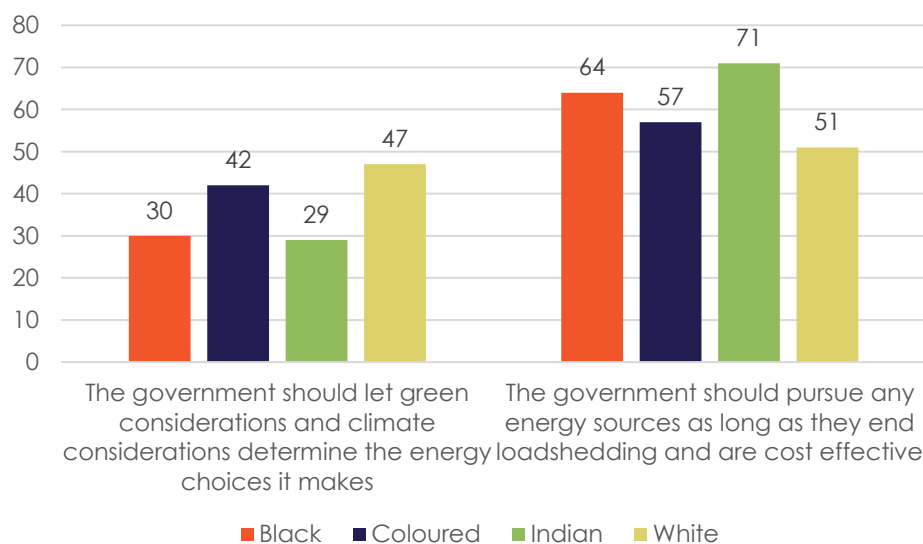
**Figure 5: Impact of loadshedding on ANC voters' support for the party**



Source: SRF

Given the intensification of loadshedding in 2022 and early 2023, this was a timely survey from the SRF. While loadshedding may have been expected to change perceptions about the governing party's ability to provide solutions to problem of such magnitude, the results demonstrate that for devout ANC voters to change their minds about voting for the party it would take much more than just the issue of loadshedding.

**Figure 6: Views on the prioritisation of the energy transition or ending loadshedding by race**

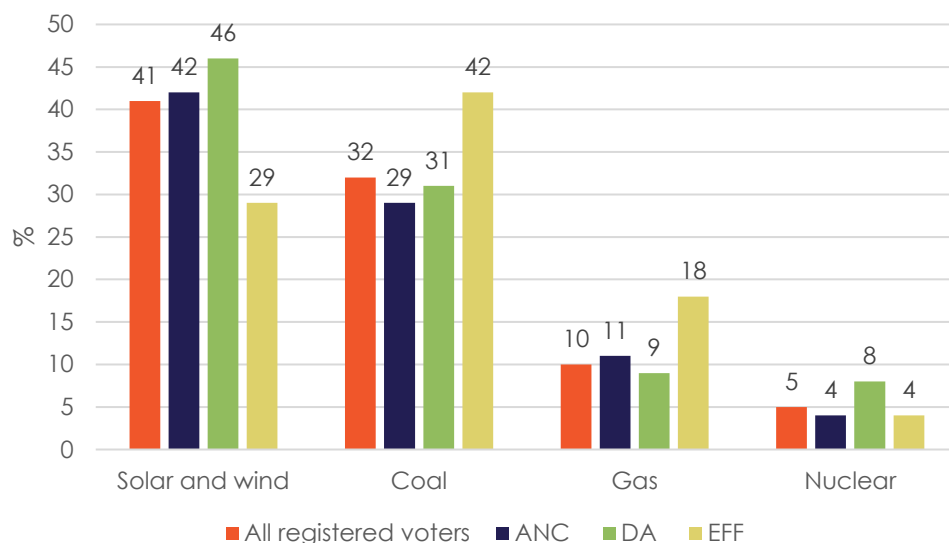


Source: SRF

According to an SRF survey conducted in March 2023, South Africans across racial lines view ending loadshedding as more of a priority than ensuring that the country transitions from its coal dependence to cleaner energy sources. This trend is observable across different demographic indicators including

level of education and political affiliation. Importantly, this is not a suggestion that the two goals are mutually exclusive.

**Figure 6: Preferred energy source by political party affiliation**



Source: SRF

Despite prioritising an end to the energy crisis above a transition to cleaner energy sources, most South Africans believe that government should invest in solar and wind energy to address the energy crisis and generate cheap and consistent energy for all.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the majority of EFF voters would rather have coal over solar and wind energy, a deviation from the common trend among supporters of the different parties. That said, the responses by voters largely reflect the energy policies of the parties they support. This signals that the polled voters take policy orientation into consideration when making the decision to vote for one party or another.

It is clear that resolving the energy crisis is viewed as a key priority by voters. This partly explains the ANC's unrealistic commitment to end loadshedding by the end of 2023. That said, the polling indicates that loadshedding alone will not result in voters shifting from the ANC to other parties.

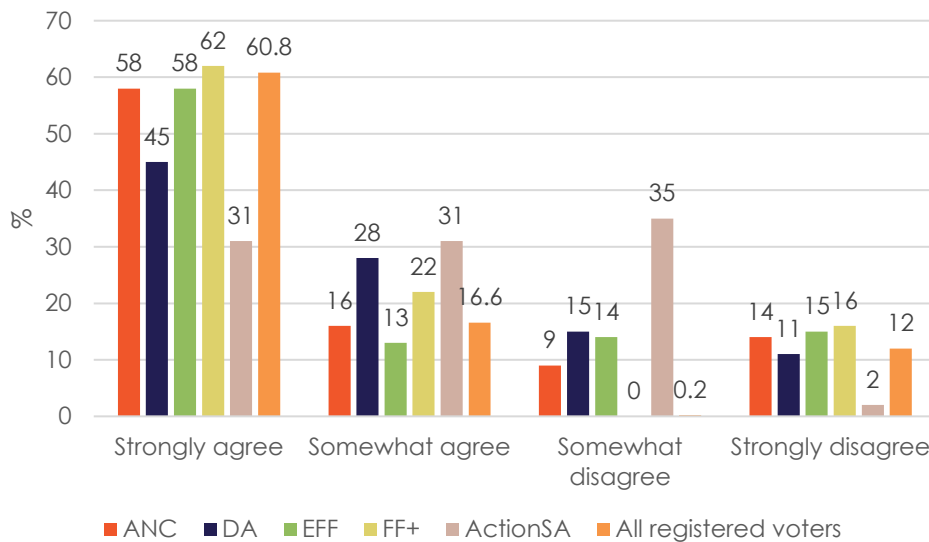
Frankly, opposition parties still have a mammoth task to convince voters to jettison the ANC in their favour and to convince current abstainers to vote for them. The ANC's shortcomings will not result in an automatic improvement in the electoral fortunes of opposition parties. Disagreements such as those seen in the Johannesburg city council among opposition parties that have already joined the Multiparty Charter for SA will not help their cause – along with the numerous failed coalitions across all metros since the local government elections.

<sup>2</sup> SRF. 2023. "Polling support for various sources of energy. Social Research Foundation. <https://srfreports.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/SRF-Report-23-support-for-various-energy-sources.pdf>

## Coalitions

In July last year, the SRF surveyed 3,204 randomly selected registered voters to solicit their views on coalitions. The public's views on coalitions are largely informed by events in coalition-governed municipalities. Since July 2022, there have been significant shifts and events in many of these municipalities. As such, the views expressed by voters may have changed by now. Nonetheless, the survey provides some valuable insight into voters' views about coalitions, especially given that the 2024 elections are on the horizon and may necessitate the formation of a coalition national government.

**Figure 7: Share of voters who agree that their party should take part in a coalition if necessary**

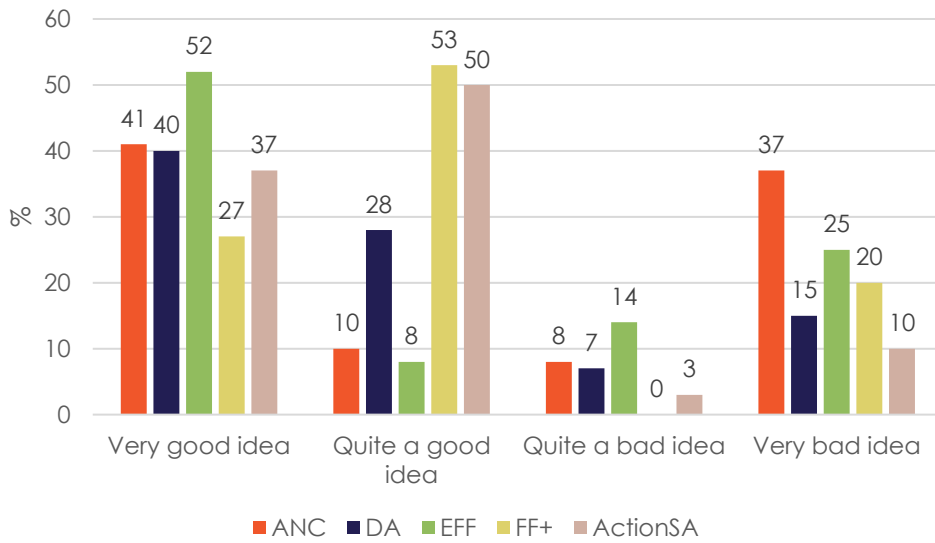


Source: SRF

With the party's support having declined in successive elections, ANC voters believe their party needs to participate in coalitions. The one interesting take away here is how ActionSA voters are not overly supportive of participating in coalitions. This may relate to the ambitions of the fairly new party, whose voters' view as an alternative to the status quo that is capable of assuming power unilaterally. For the DA, it's interesting that only 45% "strongly agree" despite the party being the driving force behind the Multi-party Charter for South Africa.

Freedom Front Plus (FF+), voters seem to have accepted that their chances of winning over 50% of the vote are slim and their realistic opportunity of assuming power lies within a coalition arrangement.

**Figure 8: Voter views on whether opposition parties like the DA, ActionSA, Cope, IFP, PA, UDM, Freedom Front Plus and others should form a grand coalition of opposition parties.**



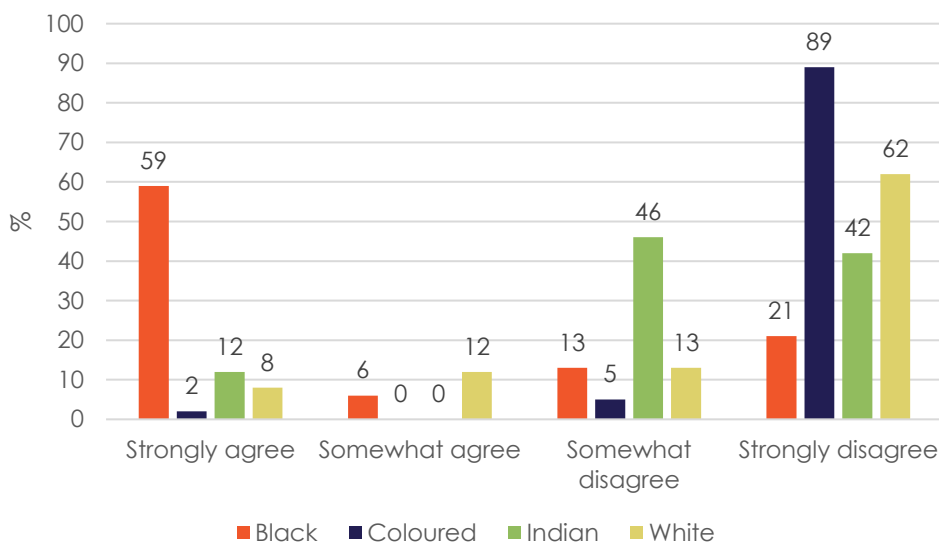
Source: SRF

Voters' views on the formation of an opposition coalition bode well for the opposition party pact, the "Multi-Party Charter for South Africa". Unsurprisingly, the majority of EFF and ANC voters do not think that the formation of such a coalition is a good idea.

## Black leadership

Another interesting poll from the SRF sought to ascertain whether voters believed that political parties needed black leaders to be successful in South Africa.

**Figure 9: Whichever party that governs South Africa must have a black leader to be successful (by race)**



Source: SRF

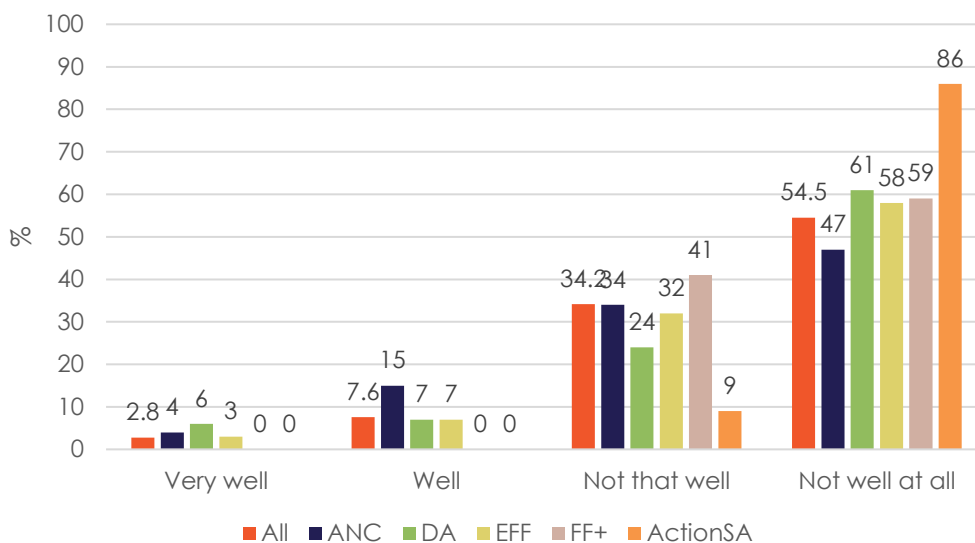
Unsurprisingly, black people support the view that political parties need black leaders to be successful in the country while other races disagree. With the ANC gradually declining, South Africa's readiness for a non-black president in particular has become part of the political discourse.

Recently, the FF+ argued that the country is not ready to have a white president. The Multi-Party Charter for South Africa has also skilfully avoided giving an impression that it will forward a white candidate for the position of president after next year's elections. The charter has left the door open for any individual from the member parties to be elected president should it garner enough votes next year. One would expect that the leader of the biggest party in the bloc would be the presidential candidate. This approach would mean that the DA's John Steenhuisen would be the candidate. Instead, the charter has reserved the position of leader of government business (or deputy president) for the biggest party that is not given the position of president.

### Illegal immigration

In 2022, the SRF conducted a survey to assess whether South Africans thought the government was handling illegal immigration well or poorly. The survey was conducted on 3,200 registered voters.

**Figure 10: How well the national government is handling illegal immigration, by party affiliation**



Source: SRF

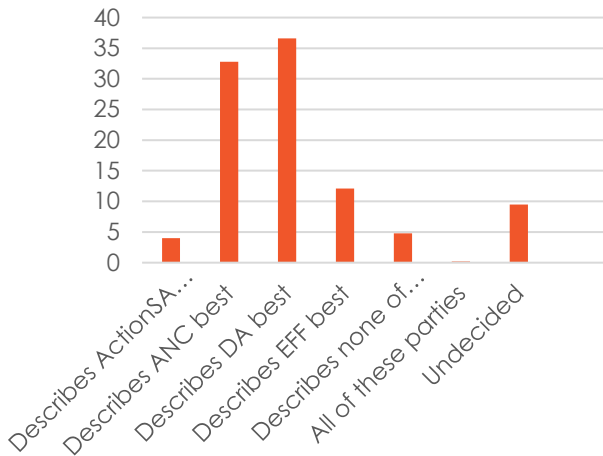
The results here are not surprising and even ANC voters do not believe that the ANC-led government is dealing with illegal immigration well. That national government is not dealing well with illegal immigration is a view shared also across different races, education levels and income levels, the SRF survey shows. Given the country's battles with xenophobic attacks, this was an important survey as it gauged one of the contributing factors to the occurrence of xenophobic attacks.



## Perceptions about some of the main parties

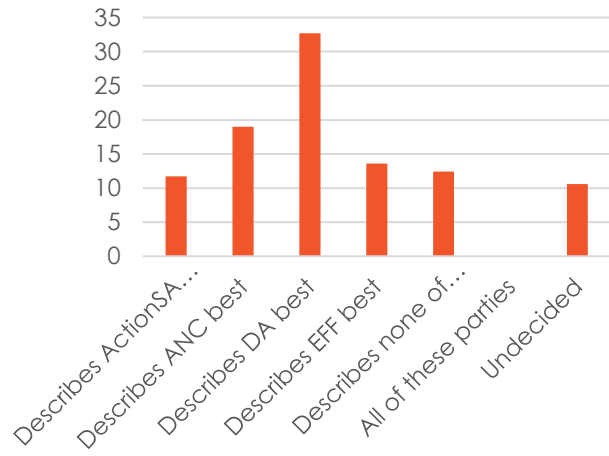
In 2022, the SRF asked registered voters to choose a party they would associate with different phrases given to them. The exercise was aimed at getting a sense of voters' perceptions about some of the bigger parties in South Africa's political landscape. The results are presented in the different graphs below.

**Figure 11: Best at providing services**



Source: SRF

**Figure 12: Best at providing clean governance**

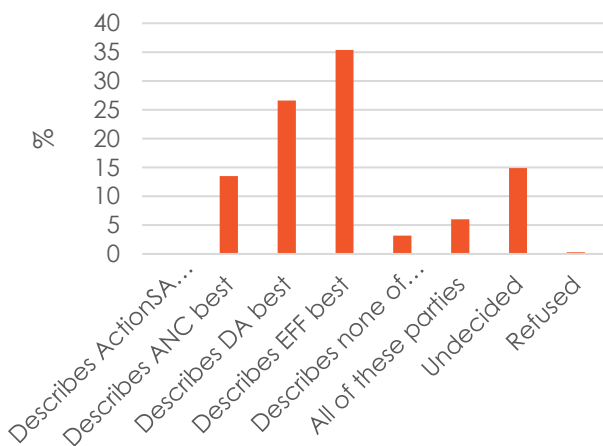


Source: SRF

The DA is ahead on both factors with the ANC getting the next highest ratings. This is partly because of all the options in the survey, these are the only two parties that unilaterally govern at different levels of government. The inclusion of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) would have added more perspective and probably underscored this point.

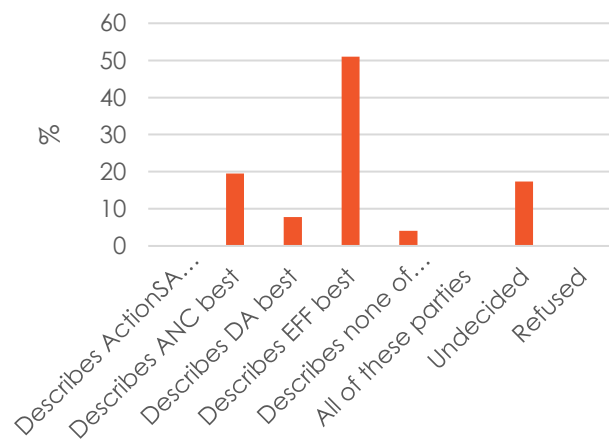
That 5% believe none of the parties surveyed could be described as being the best at providing services and 12.4% believe the same for clean governance could have implications for voter turnout. It is this state of hopelessness that creates voter apathy which results in low voter turnout. The message is clear for opposition parties: they need to convince voters they can succeed where the ANC is failing.

**Figure 13: Racist**



Source: SRF

**Figure 14: Spreads hatred**



Source: SRF

The EFF leads the pack in terms of being perceived as racist and spreading hate, according to this SRF survey.<sup>3</sup> This is undoubtedly a result of the party's megaphone, confrontational style of politics. The DA is second on both factors. The results are not surprising given the significance of race to the two parties' existence. The EFF unequivocally identifies itself as a representative of black people and is always at the forefront of challenging incidents of racism directed towards black people. The DA, in contrast, has faced allegations of racism in the past and has not dealt with the question of race in a convincing manner.

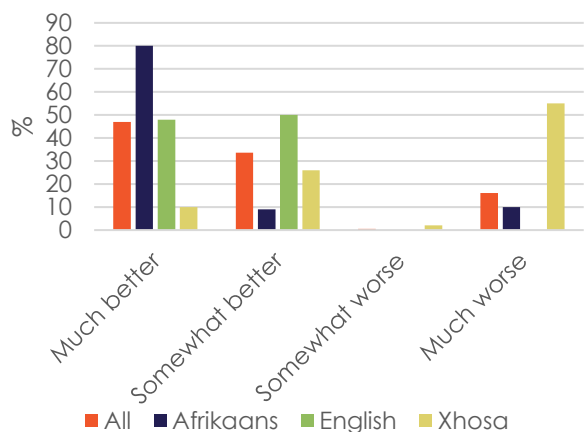
## Western Cape

The SRF recently conducted several polls among registered voters in the Western Cape. We assess the results of some of these polls.

### Governance compared to the rest of SA

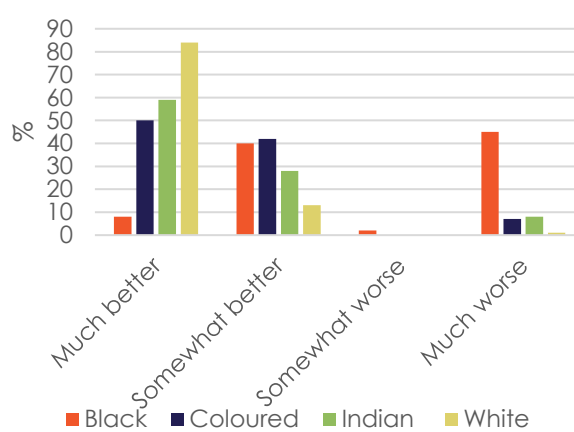
One poll queried whether voters believed that the province is governed better than the rest of South Africa.

**Figure 15: By home language**



Source: SRF

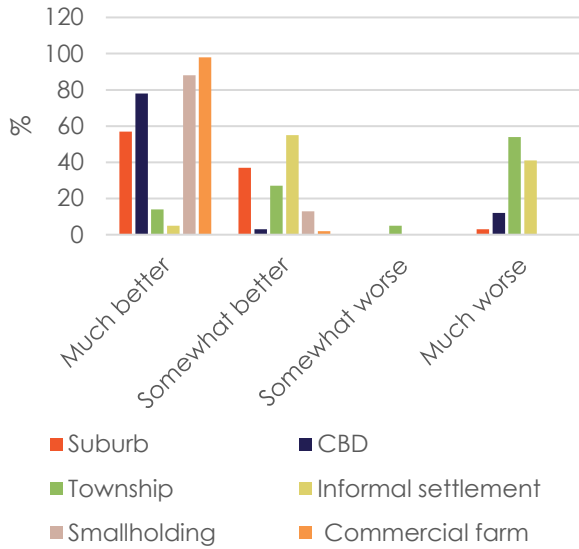
**Figure 16: By race**



Source: SRF

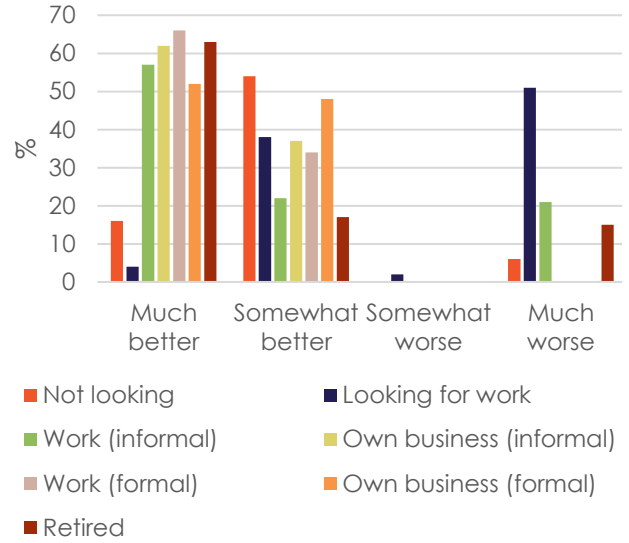
<sup>3</sup> SRF. 2022. "Perceptions of South Africa's Major Political Parties". Social Research Foundation. <http://sorefo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/22107-Perceptions-of-Major-Political-Parties-2.pdf>

**Figure 17: By residential area**



Source: SRF

**Figure 18: By employment status**



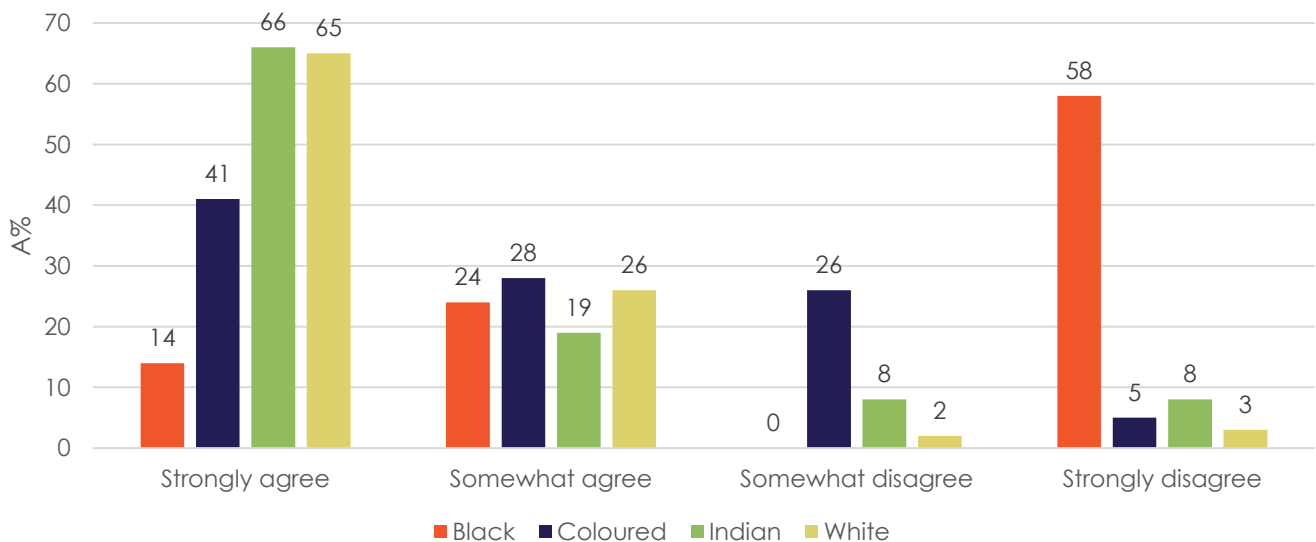
Source: SRF

The views about governance in the Western Cape differ sharply across socioeconomic lines. Like much of the rest of South Africa, the Western Cape is characterised by high levels of inequality. In the country and the Western Cape, people’s socioeconomic status tends to be linked to their race. As such, voters’ views about governance in the Western Cape also diverge across racial lines. These graphs also tend to confirm the perception that the DA does not represent the underprivileged majority.

### The future under the DA

The SRF also asked Western Cape registered voters if they believed their future would be more secure under the DA.

**Figure 19: The future is more secure under the DA, by race**

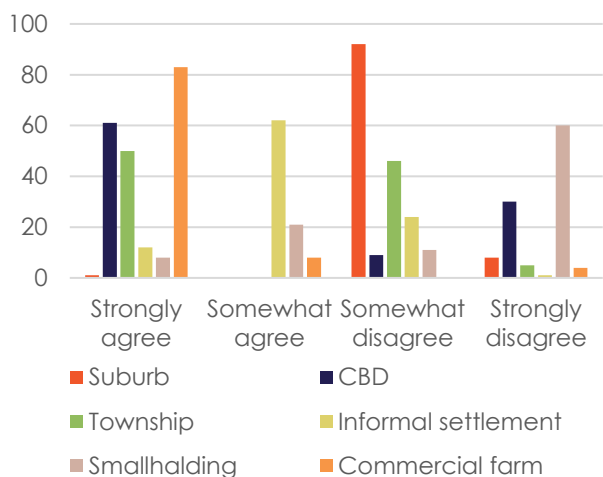


Source: SRF

### The DA's care for voters is exclusive

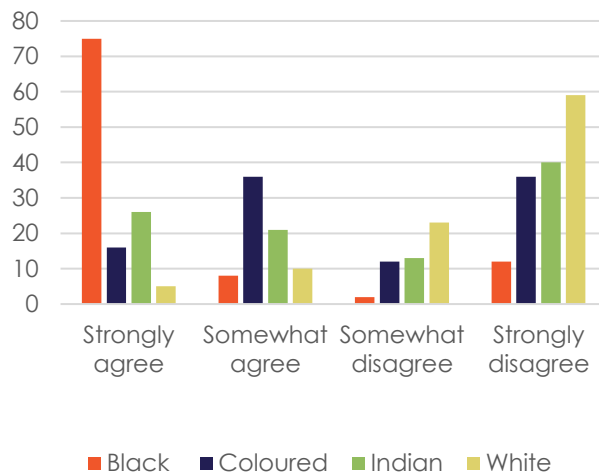
The DA has in the past faced accusations of neglecting the poor in areas where it governs. To assess the validity of this accusation, the SRF posed the following statement to registered voters in the Western Cape: "The DA only cares about some people, not others. I feel it delivers for the rich, white people, and ignores the poor and vulnerable.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

**Figure 20: By residential area**



Source: SRF

**Figure 21: By race**



Source: SRF

Whether filtered by race, employment status, residential area, education level or home language, the results tend to follow the same pattern: the less privileged do not hold favourable opinions about life under the DA. In fact, in this same poll 68% of the surveyed Xhosa speakers, 60% of the job seekers, 66% of township dwellers, and 55% of black people strongly agreed that if given a chance, another party could do better than the DA. This is an indictment on the DA's ability to rectify inequalities of the past.

The results provide further context to the Patriotic Alliance's (PA) improved performance in some parts of the Western Cape. Similar trends can be observed in another poll which asked voters if life had improved under the DA.

## Conclusion

Polling on issues that are of national significance and may influence voting patterns provides a rich basis upon which predictions of next year's election outcome can be based. The SRF therefore has collected data that can be used to gain some insights into public opinion on various issues. While voters' views on the issues we have covered vary, they tend to converge on the need to prioritise energy security ahead of a transition to cleaner sources of energy. Voters also agree that the South African government is not dealing with illegal immigration properly. The universality of this view points to the ripeness of the ground for political mobilisation based on hostility towards foreign nationals. During election season, this is something the country needs to be wary of. However, as we have already seen, some parties will exploit this unhappiness for their gain next year.

## Voter turnout

That voters believe the country will be in a worse state in 10 years' time could have implications for voter turnout. It is hope that keeps voters engaged in electoral processes. That voters still believe the country will be worse off than now despite the ANC decline indicates lack of trust in opposition parties and politics generally. Given the continued decline in voter turnout in recent elections, we will not be surprised if we witness a low turnout next year.

## The EFF

For the EFF, growth will remain low as voters continue to associate the party with violence and spreading hatred. This provides further credence to our forecast of the party growing to 12% from 10.8%. Further proof of the party's low growth can be found in by-elections where the EFF has found winning wards difficult despite contesting almost all by-elections. This serves as a reminder that despite the attention it attracts, the EFF remains a relatively small party.

## The DA

Despite a relatively good track record in government (we must emphasise that this is in comparison to only two parties, the ANC and the IFP), the DA's performance will still be determined largely by race considerations. This will be a major constraint to its growth prospects. As such, a DA victory over the ANC is out of question. Furthermore, a successful takeover of the Multi-Party Charter for South Africa from the ANC remains inconceivable. Importantly, voters' views about the DA in the Western Cape mean that the party needs to prepare itself for a battle to retain the province, especially in light of the rise of the PA and the Cape Coloured Congress. Recall that in the 2021 local government elections, the DA's majority in the province declined to 54.26% from 63.33%. In the 2019 elections, the DA in the Western Cape declined to 52.41% from 57.26%.

## The ANC

One party that would be happy with the outcomes of several SRF polls is the ANC. Despite forecasts of a significant decline, voters retain positive views about the party including its service delivery record. This is largely a benefit of incumbency. The surveys are a reminder that the ANC's decline is not going to be an event that culminates in the loss of power next year but will continue as a process. As such, there is still hope for the party in relation to the 2024 elections. The "not so outstanding" state of opposition help will help prolong the process of the ANC's decline. This is why we maintain that any coalition that takes power next year will be led by the ANC.

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